

**Soviet Orientalism: A New Approach to Understanding Soviet-Middle Eastern Relations in  
the Interwar Period and Beyond**

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### **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is the product of months of consultation and collaboration. I am grateful for the guidance of Professor Marwa Elshakry and thank her for her warmth, patience, and excitement about my project every step of the way. A large thank you is also due to Professor Paul Chamberlin for his valuable insights, support, and mentorship. To my classmates, who carefully read my drafts when they had their own theses to write, thank you. And finally, to my grandfather: thank you, I love you, my life is better with you in it.

**Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1: Soviet Propaganda and the “Far East”/ “Soviet East” Dichotomy.....	12
Chapter 2: <i>The Great Soviet Encyclopedia</i> and the “East”/ “West” Dichotomy.....	27
Chapter 3: The “West,” the “Soviet East,” the “Non-Soviet East,” and the KUTV.....	34
Chapter 4: The KUTV in Practice.....	44
Conclusion.....	53
Appendix.....	60
Bibliography.....	61

## Introduction

On November 14, 1918, Joseph Stalin famously asserted, “Whoever desires the triumph of socialism must not forget the East.”<sup>1</sup> Though his statement had particular resonance during the Soviet period, it drew on hundreds of years of Russian history that had placed the East at the center of Russia’s foreign policy agenda. As early as the eighteenth century, Russia had set its sights on the warm-water ports along the Turkish Straights. By the early-nineteenth century, it hoped to expand its territory into lands controlled by Iran. In the twentieth century, it attempted to wrest Manchuria and Korea from the Japanese Empire through a series of skirmishes that ultimately led to its resounding defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. Needless to say, Russia’s interest in the East began long before 1918.

As Stalin may have predicted, this Russian and later Soviet fascination with and attraction to the East persisted from his time in office to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This thesis explores Soviet conceptions of the East from 1918 to 1940, focusing on Soviet perceptions of and relations with the Middle East. I argue that this period witnessed the creation of a uniquely Soviet form of Orientalism, which consisted of three somewhat conflicting frameworks that were used by the Soviets to understand the East. This Soviet form of Orientalism, referred to in this paper as “Soviet Orientalism,” resulted in various inconsistencies in the Soviet Union’s approach to the various countries and peoples of the East, and may explain the lack of receptiveness on the part of Middle Eastern communists and socialists to Soviet efforts at establishing a global, communist community.

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<sup>1</sup> Stalin, “Don’t Forget the East,” *Works*.

Despite Stalin's warning, many scholars seem to have forgotten the Soviet-Middle Eastern relationship that existed from 1918 to 1940. Much has been written about the Russian Empire's various entanglements with the Ottoman Empire, as well as the Bolsheviks' policies towards the Middle East during the Russian Civil War. Even more has been written about the Soviet Union's involvement in the region opposite the United States during the Cold War, with countless pages dedicated to discussing the Soviet Union's role in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, the Arab Cold War, and the Soviet-Afghan War. The time period between the First and Second World Wars, however, receives little attention, with many works omitting it entirely from their discussions of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations.

There are a handful of notable exceptions to this general trend. In his influential work *The Soviet Union and Its Neighbors*, Mikhail Volodarsky explores the earliest period of Soviet Middle East policy, focusing on the Soviet Union's relationship with Iran and Afghanistan. He argues that, in the 1920s, when Moscow's foreign policy was dictated by the Comintern and the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs (Narkomindel), the Soviet Union's Middle East policy conformed with the principles of equal rights, non-interference, and mutual beneficial cooperation. However, by the time Stalin had managed to consolidate power in the late 1930s, the Soviet Union's stance towards the region had started to reverse course. Rather than aspire to uphold antiimperialist ideals, the Soviet Union increasingly sought to "turn... Iran and Afghanistan into bridgeheads for a breakthrough to India" and to "undermin[e] the power of the British [in the region]."<sup>2</sup> His work provides an excellent historical overview of Russian and Soviet relations with Iran and Afghanistan and a useful explanation for why Soviet relations with

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<sup>2</sup> Volodarsky, *The Soviet Union and Its Southern Neighbors: Iran and Afghanistan 1917-1933*, xi.

other countries in the Middle East in the late 1930s may have differed from its relations with those same countries in the previous decade.

More recent scholarship focuses on the experiences of Russian Jews in Palestine. Ziva Galili's *Exile to Palestine*, for example, explores the role of Russian Jews in the development of left-wing parties and trade unions there. In her autobiography *Between Tel Aviv and Moscow*, Leah Trachtman-Palchan, a Russian Jew who immigrated to Palestine in the 1920s, digs deeper, detailing clashes between the Palestine Communist Party (PCP) (of which she was an active member) and the British authorities, police, and Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine). However, though both works provide fascinating accounts of life in Palestine, drawing on numerous Soviet, Israeli, and British archival sources, they do little to explain the Soviet Union's perceptions of and policies towards the Middle East during the interwar period.

It seems likely that the interwar period receives relatively less attention than other time periods because the Soviet Union was simply less active in the region at that time. Rashid Khalidi explains:

Although [the] great powers (including tsarist Russia) had throughout their modern history regarded [the "Middle East"] as being of considerable strategic importance... neither the foreign policy of the Soviet Union nor that of the United States laid particular stress on the region. This was the case at least until the two were drawn into World War II by surprise attacks... Before that leaders of both countries appeared far more concerned with events in Europe and East Asia, notably the frightening military rise of Nazi Germany and the growth of expansionist Japanese militarism. For both the Middle East was by comparison a foreign-policy backwater through the end of the 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

Peter Hahn agrees, arguing that Stalin "considered the Middle East less important than Europe or East Asia in his ideological quest to promote socialism and in his preparations for conflict with the capitalist world." He adds that Stalin "remained cold to Arab leaders, whom he considered

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<sup>3</sup> Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*, 42.

reactionary pawns of British imperialism” because the Soviet Union “lack[ed] the strength to contest Anglo-American dominance” in the region.<sup>4</sup> Tobias Rupperecht takes a slightly different approach, ultimately coming to the same conclusion. He hints that though the Kremlin believed that diplomatic and economic relations with the Middle East had the potential to be “extensive and fruitful for the Soviet State,”<sup>5</sup> it was unable to form contacts with leftist movements in the region throughout the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the young Soviet state could not establish an active presence there.

Though scholars are correct to argue that the Soviet Union’s involvement in the region declined during the interwar period and then returned with renewed vigor following the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, a careful consideration of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations during the interwar period offers valuable insights into the development of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations. In fact, no history of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations can be considered complete without an understanding of the development of Soviet Orientalism, which emerged during the interwar period. In order to understand what is meant by “Soviet Orientalism,” it is necessary to begin with a brief survey of Edward Said’s groundbreaking work, *Orientalism*, with which the reader is likely already familiar. According to Said, Orientalism is a large and multifaceted discourse that operates on a binary logic: East vs. West, Europeans vs. Others, Barbaric vs. Civilized, Us vs. Them. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this discourse was central to European self-representations, as well as European efforts at representing and engaging with their colonies. Countless scholars have since used Said’s

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<sup>4</sup> Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Rupperecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin*, 287.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

formulation of Orientalism to conduct analyses of colonial and post-colonial power dynamics between Europe and its colonies.

However, as various other scholars have suggested, the Orientalist paradigm is not always applicable to studies of non-European powers and their interactions with imperial subjects. Melani McAlister, for example, argues that Said's classic formulation of Orientalism is not applicable to the United States because the United States consistently disregarded Said's binary logic. Instead of viewing the East as a homogenous entity, the United States often allowed certain regions, like the Middle East, to emerge as distinct entities. According to McAlister, the United States continued to disrupt the traditional Orientalist binary by seeking to separate itself from Western Europe.<sup>7</sup> In this way, her study illustrates the need to challenge and revise various aspects of Said's original argument when studying Orientalism in new contexts.

One such context is the Soviet space. As I argue throughout this paper, the Soviet Union, like the United States, did not conceive of the East as a homogenous entity and sought to distance itself from Western Europe in its relations with non-Western countries. The need for an updated Orientalist framework for the Soviet Union is thus clear. It is somewhat surprising, then, that existing scholarship on Soviet Orientalism is limited in its scope. Rather than provide an overarching framework within which to understand Soviet behavior, most works involving Soviet Orientalism tend to focus on Soviet relations with one particular region or country. Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen's *Central Asia in Art*, for example, discusses Soviet Orientalism in terms of Soviet relations with Central Asia. Austin Jersild's *Orientalism and Empire* centers on power dynamics between the Soviet Union and the North Caucasus. Stephanie Cronin's recent article "Edward Said, Russian Orientalism, and Soviet Iranology" focuses on the Soviet Union's

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<sup>7</sup> McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 10-12.



relationship with Iran. My thesis seeks to develop a broader understanding of Soviet Orientalism that can be used both to assess Soviet policy in a general sense and to analyze specific cases, like the Soviet-Middle Eastern relationship of the interwar period and beyond.

To that end, I argue that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) struggled to form a coherent conception of the “East,” constructing three different Orientalist frameworks. The first framework contrasted the “Soviet East,” which represented the Soviet Union’s “Eastern” republics, against an Asian “Far East.” The second framework resembled Said’s original articulation of Orientalism, establishing an “East”/ “West” binary. The third framework collapsed the first two frameworks into one. Rather than abide by Said’s strict binary logic, it functioned as a three-dimensional hierarchy between the “West,” the “Soviet East,” and the “non-Soviet East,” which consisted not only of the “Far East,” but also the Middle East, Africa, and everything in between. Importantly, these three Orientalist frameworks do not merely represent three different interpretations of a given set of facts and data pertaining to the Soviet Union and the East, but rather three distinct strains of discourse actively employed by the CPSU in order to advance Soviet interests in relation to the Soviet Union’s Eastern neighbors, allies, and rivals.

Before continuing, it is important to note that the “East” (“*Vostok*”) does not, of course, refer to a fixed geographic entity. Indeed, from the European, American, Russian, and Soviet perspectives, there were many “Easts,” including: Persia, Turkey, China, and India. For this reason, the term “East” seems to convey the most meaning for the purposes of this paper when it is used to signify something non-“Western” or, at the very least, non-Russian or non-Soviet – an attempt at achieving clarity that seems to introduce even more ambiguity. In an effort to emphasize, analyze, and deconstruct the arbitrary nature of this term, it will appear in quotations

throughout this paper from now on. Its numerous subsidiaries (“Middle East,”<sup>8</sup> “Far East,” “Central Asia,” etc.) will as well.

To demonstrate the existence of the three Soviet Orientalist frameworks, I incorporate a variety of Russian-language source material produced directly and indirectly by the CPSU as propaganda between 1918 and 1940. As propaganda, these materials serve as a sort of window into the Soviet psyche, allowing me to determine what the CPSU may have thought or wanted its subjects to think about the “East.” In Chapter 1, I examine several Imperial and Soviet propaganda posters depicting the “East,” teasing out the “Far East”/ “Soviet East” binary discussed above. Chapter 2 focuses on a different form of Soviet propaganda: entries from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. In doing so, it reveals the CPSU’s partial reliance on the classic “East”/ “West” binary. Chapter 3, which identifies and discusses the three-dimensional hierarchy between the “West,” the “Soviet East,” and the “non-Soviet East,” takes a slightly different approach. Rather than rely on a single type or source of documents as the earlier chapters do, it attempts to reconstruct the experiences of students studying at Moscow’s Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) through an analysis of speeches delivered by Stalin at the university, as well as secondary source material. Engaging with sources pertaining to three different Soviet propaganda initiatives (posters, encyclopedia entries, and education), my thesis accounts for a wide range of Soviet activity concerning the “East” that is not typically included in discussions of Soviet Orientalism.

The final chapter of my thesis builds upon and extends past the third chapter’s analysis of KUTV by demonstrating how the CPSU’s use of the three-dimensional hierarchy there may have soured its relationships with “Middle Eastern” communists and socialists, undermining its

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<sup>8</sup> The “Middle East” is taken here, and for the rest of this essay, to mean the region encompassing modern-day Iran Turkey, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Levant.

foreign policy goals in their home countries. In doing so, it begins to demonstrate how knowledge of the three Soviet Orientalist frameworks can be used to explain Soviet-“Middle Eastern” relations after the Second World War. I conclude on this same thread, drawing a nexus between the three Soviet Orientalist frameworks and future Soviet relationships with the various countries and peoples of the “Middle East.” By drawing attention to a time period that many historians often overlook, bringing new translations and interpretations of Russian primary-source materials to the study of “Middle Eastern” history, and reformulating Soviet Orientalism through an analysis of the CPSU’s three “Eastern” frameworks, I hope to shed new light on the history of Soviet-“Middle Eastern” relations.

## Chapter 1: Soviet Propaganda and the “Far East”/ “Soviet East” Dichotomy

From the very beginning, the CPSU recognized the important role that propaganda would play not only as an instrument of State power, but also as a useful means of engaging in international relations. Though the Russian Civil War prevented the CPSU from focusing its efforts on propaganda production, it managed to establish the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (ArtProp) in the late months of 1920. After six full months in operation, ArtProp still had just seventeen members on its staff. However, as the CPSU transferred more and more of the Governmental Press Bureau’s functions to its central propaganda organ, ArtProp was able to increase the size of its staff and the scope of its influence. Responsible for processing directives issued by the Politburo and turning them into propaganda policy, ArtProp was led by Party members appointed directly by the CPSU. Other agencies monitored by ArtProp, including the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), Novosti, the Committees on the Press, on Radio Broadcasting and Television, and on Cinematography, produced Soviet propaganda in accordance with those policies.<sup>9</sup>

These various governmental agencies printed thousands of propaganda posters during the interwar period. Most of their posters were intended to incite mass campaigns in industry and agriculture in the Soviet Union, drawing on Marxist-Leninist tropes and featuring images of women workers and peasants.<sup>10</sup> Only a select handful of them include references to the “East.”<sup>11</sup> A careful analysis of those particular posters reveals that the CPSU of the interwar period conceived of the “East” as consisting of two distinct parts: a “Far East” and a “Soviet East.” The

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<sup>9</sup> Hazan, *Soviet Propaganda: A Case Study of the Middle East Conflict*, 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> After sorting through the Harold M. Fleming Papers at the New York Public Library, the Russian and Ukrainian Collection at the New York Public Library, the He Болтай Collection, and the Hoover Institution’s Digital Archive, this researcher was only able to find two documents containing vague references the Middle East from the interwar period. The “East” in general and “Far East” in particular appeared in numerous posters.

“Far East” was thought to contain China and, to a lesser extent, Japan, while the “Soviet East” was thought to contain various Central Asian territories. Though both categories fell under the larger umbrella of the “East,” they were treated differently by the Soviet propaganda apparatus. While the non-Soviet “Far East” was characterized as both an enemy aggressor and a backwards region in need of guidance and material assistance, the “Soviet East” was consistently depicted as a friendly ally that had successfully incorporated Soviet policies and ideologies into its own political and social structures. Representations of the “Middle East,” meanwhile, were notably absent from posters produced during this period.

A poster produced in 1938, titled “Well, Who Else Wants to Attack the USSR?” begins to shed light on Soviet conceptions of the “Far East”:



Figure 1: “Well, Who Else Wants to Attack the USSR?” Boris Efimov, 1938



Figure 2: “Well Who Else Wants to Attack the USSR?” Boris Efimov, 1938

The image of a Soviet soldier standing in front of the Soviet flag dominates the poster, but the greatest area of interest for the purposes of this project is the cluster of figures to his right. Artistic renderings of various Imperial Army officers, including Lavr Kornilov, Pyotr Wrangel, Nikolai Yudenich, Alexander Kolchak, and Anton Denikin, appear in the background. Depicted as skeletons and surrounded by cobwebs, they collectively represent the old enemies of the Soviet Union who have already suffered resounding defeats. A more diverse cast of characters appears at the foreground of the poster: “Kiev,” “Ukraine,” and the “Far East.” Unlike those heaped behind them, the figures in the foreground are still alive. That being said, they are visibly injured, nursing wounds sustained from altercations with the Soviet Union whose dates appear in red on the bandages wrapped around their heads. The poster seems to suggest that Kiev, Ukraine, and the Far East, though perhaps weakened by these previous altercations, represent current enemies of the Soviet Union. “Ukraine” and the “Far East” appear particularly menacing, glowering at the Soviet soldier with disproportionately large, clenched fists. Both “Ukraine” and

the “Far East” also appear to be holding puppets modelled after Pavlo Skoropadsky and Grigory Semyonov, respectively. Both Skoropadsky and Semyonov enjoyed successful careers in the Imperial Army before joining the White Army and fighting on behalf of Ukraine, in Skoropadsky’s case, and Japan, in Semyonov’s case, against the Red Army in the Russian Civil War. It is not surprising, then, that the Efimov, who produced this poster on behalf of the CPSU, chooses to cast them in a negative light.

The conception of the “Far East” as the enemy was not unique to the Bolsheviks. In fact, Imperial forces often cast the “Far East” as the enemy in their own propaganda posters in order to dissuade the Russian people from joining the revolutionaries. Published between 1917 and 1922, before the Bolsheviks had managed to put in place the formal infrastructure of their central propaganda organ, the following poster clearly demonstrates the anti-“Eastern” tilt of the Czar’s propaganda campaigns:

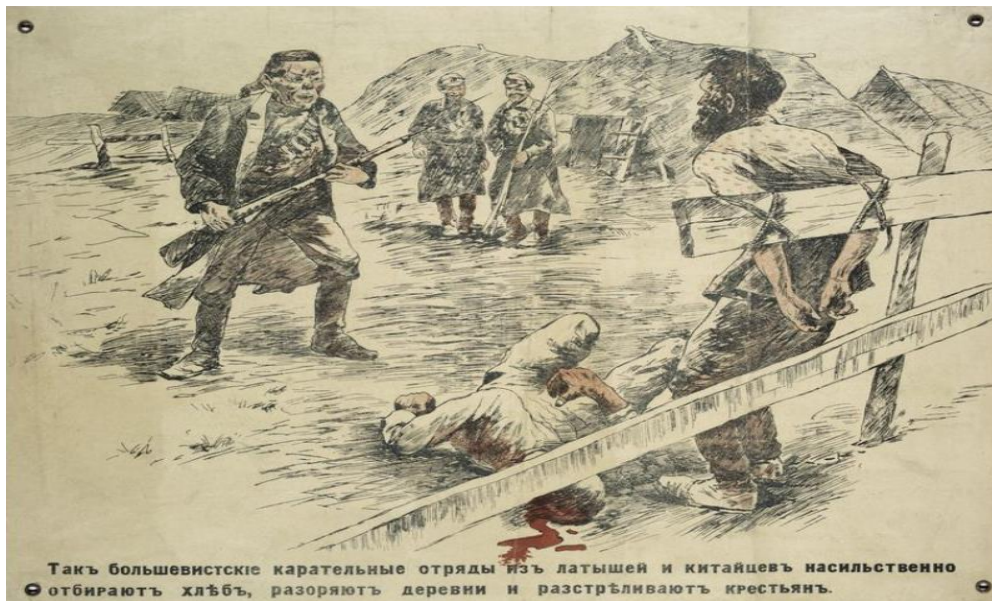


Figure 3: “How the Punitive Bolshevik Regiment of Latvians and Chinese Forcibly Seize Bread, Destroy Villages, and Shoot Peasants,” 1918-1922



In this poster, a Chinese Bolshevik appears to have just shot a Russian peasant and to be preparing to fire his weapon at second peasant who is tied to a fence. The Chinese Bolshevik and his comrades appear on the left side of the poster, while the Russian peasants appear on the right. The artistic decision to create this distinct, spatial divide between the Chinese and the Russians creates the impression that there is also a divide between the two sides' political and moral values. The fact that the Chinese Bolsheviks are dressed in black and that the Russian peasants are dressed in white reinforces this idea, subtly conveying that the Chinese are inherently evil and that the Russians are fundamentally good. Other posters appear to place “Eastern” or Asian Bolsheviks in direct opposition to Orthodox Christianity, a unifying element of traditional Russian culture:



Figure 4: “Asiatic Bolsheviks Shooting a Priest,” 1918-1922

Russian sailors look on with horror as Asian soldiers take aim at a priest standing in front of a church. The description at the bottom of the poster reads: “Even the sailors, these hooligans and



robbers, feared the honest and life-giving Cross of the Lord, then the commissars summoned the Chinese and, without flinching, executed the priest. This happened in Moscow.” Yet again, the Chinese, who appear to be coordinating with the Bolsheviks, are the enemy. This time, their conduct is particularly repugnant because it involves a direct attack on Russian Orthodoxy in the heart of the Russian state. Another poster titled “To the Victim of the International” reiterates these same ideas:



Figure 5: “To the Victim of the International,” 1918-1922

Here, various revolutionary figures, including Alexander Kerensky, Leon Trotsky, and Vladimir Lenin, are seen sacrificing an Orthodox priest in front of an altar dedicated to Karl Marx. The word “international” that appears on the side of altar is a reference to the Communist International, which the Bolsheviks established immediately following their victory in the Russian Revolution in November of 1917. Echoing the motifs featured in the previous poster, a Russian sailor and two highly-caricatured Asian soldiers appear in front of the revolutionary

figures. Though they do not participate in the violent ritual taking place behind them, they observe it with obvious delight. Just like the soldiers in the previous poster, these soldiers appear to play a role in the revolutionaries' campaign against Russian Orthodoxy.

It would appear, then, that both the Czar and the CPSU good had reason to cast Asia and the “Far East” as the enemy. Other “Eastern” territories, meanwhile, receive different treatment. Take, for example, the following poster produced by the early vestiges of the CPSU at the end of the First World War:



Figure 6: “Cooperation – Open to All,” Wasyl Masjutyn, 1918

In this poster, figures representing various parts of the world, many of which would later join the Soviet Union, are seen holding hands under a slogan that reads “Cooperation – Open to All.”

Their facial features and clothing render their symbolic significances somewhat ambiguous, which may have been exactly the effect that the propaganda agency hoped to create. After all, it would seem to help the CPSU achieve its ultimate goal, the unification of the territories of the former Russian Empire and beyond under the Bolsheviks' unique socialist framework, if any viewer looking at the poster was able to personally identify with at least one of the figures that she saw there. Still, one can speculate as to what particular ethnic, regional, or socioeconomic group each figure was intended to represent. Following the chain of linked hands from left to right, the viewer can identify: a woman from Russia's eastern provinces, a man from either Central Asia or the "Middle East," a man in Western dress (perhaps a Russian diplomat),<sup>12</sup> a Russian peasant, an industrial worker, and – surprisingly – a member of the bourgeoisie. It is important to note that the woman from Russia's eastern provinces and the Central Asian or "Middle Eastern" man immediately to her right are depicted in a drastically different way in this poster from the Chinese soldiers in the previous posters. Rather than stand in opposition to the Soviet Union, they appear to be integral parts of a global, socialist network founded on the principle of "cooperation." Though their exact origins are ambiguous, one could argue that this is because they are understood by the CPSU to represent a different part of the "East."

A second poster produced a decade later further demonstrates the Soviet Union's sympathetic posture towards "Central Asia" and, to a certain extent and for a particular purpose, the "Far East":

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<sup>12</sup> In other Soviet propaganda posters produced during this period, Russian diplomats are often depicted in Western dress. To see an example, please refer to the poster "Every day is not Sunday, Lent will come!" that is included in the Appendix. In this poster, each figure is labelled according to their social class. Diplomats appear on the far left and far right in Western dress.



Figure 7: “Long Live the Communist International Women’s Day,” 1925-1929

This poster was produced in celebration of International Women’s Day in the late 1920s. The red banner between the two women in the center reads: “March 8<sup>th</sup> – Our heartfelt greetings to the working women of the oppressed East!” Though the use of the term “East” may seem ambiguous at first, the text at the bottom of the poster indicates which “East” the poster is referring to. This text can be translated as: “Working women from the East! Under the banner of the Comintern, follow the path of female workers and peasants of the Soviet Union. Against the imperialists – strong union of workers of the USSR with the workers and peasants from foreign countries and the oppressed peoples of the colonies.” It becomes clear, then, that the poster is intended to convince non-Soviet, “Far East” women to model themselves after women from the “Soviet East.”



A comparison of “Far East Women” and “Soviet Women” as depicted in the poster indicates why the Soviet Union thinks that it is in “Far Eastern” women’s best interests to do this. Women from the “Soviet East” are characterized as progressive and, more importantly, happy. Always smiling, they are shown studying in classrooms, working with modern technology, caring for children in a hospital, and even organizing a “women’s club.” Their Westernized universe appears to lack male supervision, as not a single man appears on the left side of the poster.



Figure 8: “Long Live the Communist International Women’s Day,” 1925-1929 (zoomed in on “Soviet East” half)

Women from the “Far East” appear to lead very different lives. Never smiling, they look out at the viewer with pained expressions. Their children, poorly-clothed and malnourished, cry out in

desperation. A caption on the right side of the poster reads, “No torture, no prison – the revolutionary spirit will not be killed,” implying that female revolutionaries in the “Far East” risk torture and imprisonment for expressing communist beliefs. Importantly, images of men appear to dominate the right side of the poster. While men are shown protesting in the top left corner, women appear alone or with their children.



Figure 9: “Long Live the Communist International Women’s Day,” 1925-1929 (zoomed in on “Foreign/Far East” half)

It becomes clear, then, that the CPSU believed that the “Soviet East” had successfully incorporated Soviet policies and ideologies, and felt that the “Far East” was lagging behind. The Soviet Union’s treatment of the “Far East” in this poster is somewhat surprising, given its antagonist portrayal of the “Far East” in other propaganda posters. The tension between these seemingly-contradictory approaches to the “Far East” could indicate that the Soviet Union

sought to exert its socialist soft power over the “Far East,” thus bringing it under the Soviet sphere of influence, precisely because the “Far East” was thought to pose a military threat. If successful, this effort might have consolidated the “Far East” and “Soviet East” into a single entity, simplifying international relations for the CPSU. Regardless, this poster highlights the perceived differences between the “Far East” and the “Soviet East” from the Soviet perspective

The question then becomes: Where does the “Middle East” fall? Does it belong to the “Far East,” the “Soviet East,” or another category altogether? Though the “Middle East” does not feature in many, if any, Soviet propaganda posters produced during the interwar period, Israel is often depicted in Soviet propaganda posters during the 1970s. During this period, the CPSU made abundant use of its central propaganda organ to convey its position vis-à-vis the Lebanon War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Dozens of posters clearly demonstrate the Soviet Union’s animosity towards Israel and the special U.S.-Israel relationship. Take, for example, the following poster created in response to the Lebanon War whose description reads:

The material basis of the bloody [and] shady enterprise in Lebanon was the enormous American aid to Israel – 2.5 billion dollars per year. The former Israel minister of defense, general Sharon said, “We have started a war in Lebanon, we have captured Jerusalem, we have crossed the Suez Canal... We want to conquer Turkey, Iran, Pakistan or even the whole of Africa.

If the description were not enough to indicate the Soviet Union’s position on the Lebanon War and the relationship between the United States and Israel, the gruesome image of dead bodies lying behind a barbed-wire fence in the shape of the Star of David makes its stance abundantly clear.



Figure 10: “Bloody Robbery Committed by the Hands of Israeli Supporters,” 1970-1979

Additional posters produced around this time convey similar degrees of anti-Israel bias, such as those titled “We Sell Weapons Only to Those Who Observe Human Rights” and “Enjoying Time with My Lovely Darling in the Hut.”





Figure 11: “We Sell Weapons Only to Those Who Observe Human Rights,” 1979



Figure 12: Enjoying Time with My Lovely Darling in the Hut,” 1970

In both of these posters, Israel is depicted as a full-bodied woman wearing earrings and a necklace. Figure 11 shows her purchasing weapons from United States beside a caption that highlights the United States' hypocrisy in supplying countries with "police – and prison – like as well as racist regimes," like Israel, while simultaneously championing democracy and human rights abroad. Figure 12 shows Israel cozying up to another ally, South Africa. The caption in the top right corner says, "Israel and South Africa are planning a joint development of an atomic bomb," indicating that the large "A" that forms the "hut" the two share stands for "atomic bomb."

The sudden emergence and rapid production of posters like these, and the lack of posters depicting the "Far East" in the 1970s would seem to reflect a shift in Soviet interests and priorities from the interwar period to the Cold War. Though the "Far East" may have at one time been seen as a legitimate threat (perhaps due to lingering cultural memories after the Russo-Japanese War) or simply been used to shore up the Soviet state's sense of its own progressiveness and superiority, changing geopolitical circumstances eventually necessitated the creation of a new Other, Israel. However, in order to fully understand how the Soviet Union conceptualized the "Middle East" during the interwar period and to determine how those conceptions informed its interactions with the region in the decades that followed, it is necessary to turn to a different type of source material: entries from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.

## Chapter 2: *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* and the “East”/ “West” Dichotomy

On February 13, 1925, in accordance with a decree issued by the Central Committee of the CPSU and Central Executive Committee of the USSR, a joint stock company named the State Scientific Publishing House was founded for the preparation and publication of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* for Soviet audiences.<sup>13</sup> At first, the new publishing company sought to initiate a joint project with a Brockhaus, well-known German publishing company that had been publishing encyclopedias for over one hundred years. Rather than create all of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*'s (“*Encyclopedia*”) entries from scratch, the Soviet publishers hoped to translate the highly-respected thirteenth edition of the German encyclopedia *Brockhaus Konversations-Lexikon*, which had been published in sixteen volumes between 1882 and 1887. However, as the project got underway, the State Scientific Publishing House “soon abandoned [the] simplistic cultural translation as would be involved in the direct translation of a general encyclopedia from a foreign language” and instead “opted for a completely revised, augmented reference tool more suitable to [Soviet] needs.”<sup>14</sup>

Scholars have rightly argued that the contents of the resulting volumes reflect a certain degree of Soviet bias. Jay Daily, Allen Kent, and Harold Lancour explain:

Although international in scope, when judged according to the checkpoints used for evaluating encyclopedias – authority, scope, arrangement, treatment, format, and special features – the [*Encyclopedia*] is considered a biased source, favoring information that emphasizes communist achievements throughout the world... bias or point of view is apparent on almost every subject consulted.<sup>15</sup>

Any number of examples from any edition of the *Encyclopedia* seem to support this argument.

Daily, Kent, and Lancour draw their readers' attention to an entry on “*avtomobily monapoli*”

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<sup>13</sup> Russian Presidential Library Website, article titled “Положено начало изданию Большой Советской Энциклопедии,” last accessed February 2, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Grimsted, “Détente on the Reference Shelves? *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in English,” 77-78.

<sup>15</sup> Daily, Kent, and Lancour, *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science*, Volume 25, 171.

(“automobile monopolies”), which says simply: “The overwhelming proportion of the production and sale of automobiles is in the hands of a few monopolies in the USA, West Germany, France, Italy and Britain.”<sup>16</sup> In this case, the entry does little to define what the term actually means and instead seeks to cast the Soviet Union’s rivals as corrupt capitalists. Other entries appear to give overwhelmingly positive renderings of the Soviet Union. Take, for example, the entry for “*Vely’kaya Otchestven’aya vay’na 1941-1945*” (“Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945), which ends with the lines:

In destroying the fascist aggressors, the Soviet Union not only defended its freedom and the independence but played the decisive role in the liberation of the peoples of Europe and Asia from the threat of fascist enslavement. World civilization was saved. Therein lies the world historic contribution of the Soviet people to mankind.<sup>17</sup>

Various historians extend Daily, Kent, and Lancour’s argument further, writing that evidence of Soviet bias is especially apparent in entries dealing with historical events. Katherine Starzyk, Craig Blatz, and Mike Ross argue that “perceptions of the past are flexible” and that “succeeding generations rewrite history to reflect their own beliefs and achieve their current goals.”<sup>18</sup> Adlai Stevenson even goes so far as to say:

Rejecting Western scholars’ ideas of impartiality and suspended judgement (“bourgeois objectivism” in the Soviet newspeak), the Soviet historian portrayed himself as a scientist, and as an engineer of public attitudes. For him the laws governing man’s past and future actions have been scientifically explained and explicitly forecast, largely by Engels, Marx, and Lenin. He is not inhibited by considerations of the sociological, psychological, or even the theological aspects of human behavior which often perplexes Western historians.<sup>19</sup>

The Western bias evident in Stevenson’s own argument about Soviet bias seems to only reinforce his point. Even when academics like himself strive to render their subjects thoroughly

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>18</sup> Starzyk, Blatz, Ross, “Acknowledging and Redressing Social Injustices,” 465.

<sup>19</sup> Stevenson, “A Soviet View of the American Past: An Annotated Translation of the Section on American History in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia,” 3.

and accurately, it is difficult – if not impossible – to circumvent internal biases. Other academics, like the writers responsible for the “*avtomobily monapoli*” and “*Vely’kaya Otchestven’aya voy’na 1941-1945*” entries, appear to embrace their biases and willingly incorporate them into the texts they produce. So, though the presence of Soviet bias, intentional or not, in individual *Encyclopedia* entries may limit the volumes’ usefulness as objective resources for studying world history or, indeed, any other subject, the *Encyclopedia* does seem to be a particularly useful resource for projects, like this one, that seek to understand the Soviet perspective. With this in mind, careful considerations of various entries from the *Encyclopedia* serve to show that the CPSU of the interwar period conceived of the “Middle East” as something totally different from both the “Far East” and the “Soviet East.” Rather than try to fit the “Middle East” into the “Far East/Soviet East” framework, which does not appear in any entries that refer to the “Middle East,” the writers of the *Encyclopedia* seem more intent on determining the “Middle East’s” proper place within the “East”/ “West” dichotomy.

Definitions of “*Vostok*” (“East”) and “*Zapad*” (“West”), which might have been expected to help tease out the Soviet Union’s views on the “Middle East,” lack any political or cultural aspects. The entry on “*Vostochny Vopros*” (“Eastern Questions”) does, however, provide some useful clues. Unlike many of the *Encyclopedia*’s entries, which span one or two pages at most, the “*Vostochny Vopros*” entry is twenty pages long, a fact that demonstrates just how important the issue was to the Soviet Union in 1938, when the volume containing the entry was published. It also demonstrates how the CPSU’s use of language in the *Encyclopedia* enforced a divide between the “East” and the “West,” with the “Middle East” falling firmly within the “Eastern camp” and the Soviet Union falling firmly within the “Western” camp.

The entry begins with a lengthy description of the history of the Eastern Question. Though most scholars tend to refer to the Eastern Question when speaking about the period spanning from the late-eighteenth to the early-twentieth century, the *Encyclopedia* traces the debate back to the writings of Cicero and Homer. The entry then goes on to explain that the Eastern question “opens naturally” at the first “appearance of the Turks in Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century.” By drawing connections between ancient and contemporary debates surrounding the status of the Ottoman Empire, the *Encyclopedia* begins to cast the Eastern Question as a clash between two fundamentally different civilizations.

The historic inevitability of this clash is further emphasized by the language used to describe Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. When encounters between the Ottoman Empire and Europe are described in any detail, Turkey is characterized as an aggressor that stands in opposition to what is explicitly referred to as the “West.” For example, during the initial fourteenth-century encounter, the Ottoman Empire is said to “stand in the place of the destroyed Western-European [Christian] crusaders.”<sup>20</sup> Given Russia’s history with Mongol invaders from the East, it is not necessarily surprising that the Soviet Union chooses to approach the Eastern Question in this way in its *Encyclopedia*. However, it is important to note that this sort of characterization of the Ottoman Empire, and the East in general, would seem to stand in direct contradiction with the Soviet Union’s desire to ease tensions between the two global poles and create a single communist community.

Particularly divisive language appears towards the end of the entry, when the *Encyclopedia* finally explains the contemporary relevance of the Eastern Question. Turkey is no longer referred to merely as “*Tyritsi 'ya*” (Turkey), but “*Aziatska 'ya Tyritsi 'ya*” (“Asian Turkey”). For example,

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<sup>20</sup> *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, First Edition, Volume 13, 309 (my translation).

“*Aziatska 'ya Tyritsi 'ya*” is said to represent the “true center of force in the region,” further solidifying the divide between Asia and Europe, East and West. However, though “*Aziatska 'ya Tyritsi 'ya*” is said to be a center of power in the “Middle East,” it is still portrayed as weaker than the Western powers in general and the Soviet Union in particular. In a dramatic ending, the entry concludes that “Asian Turkey, despite its dense population, still contains a dense set of Muslim fantasy in order to inspire in whomever the desire to conquer it.”<sup>21</sup> Readers will note that “whomever” does not appear to exclude the Soviet Union. In this way, the Soviet Union assumes the mantle of imperialism in order to differentiate itself, a Western power, from the Eastern Ottoman Empire.

While various entries contain useful information about the Soviet Union’s perspective on the “Middle East” during the interwar period, the photographs and sketches that appear alongside them often reveal equally valuable insights. Take, for example, a map that appears at the end of the “*Vostochny Vopros*” entry:



Figure 13: “*Ottamansk'aya Emperii*,” *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, Edition 1, Volume 13, 311

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 345 (my translation)

Though the title of the map is “*Ottamansk’aya Emperii 1683-1914*” (“Ottoman Empire”), the artists’ use of color draws the reader’s attention to the Balkan Peninsula. Shown in bright red, the region is described on the key as “Independent States Formed from the Possessions of Turkey.” Each of the countries in that region is then listed by name: Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, Albania, and Montenegro. Regions in the Arab World, like Algeria, Egypt, and Syria, appear on the key in terms of the European powers that occupied them in 1914: Austria, Russia, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. No explanation is given in the corresponding text as to why the artist has chosen to highlight the countries in the Balkans in this way, nor does the text seem to emphasize the region in any particular way. It is impossible to ignore that the acceptably-Western territories of the former Ottoman Empire are brought to the forefront of the image, while the quintessentially-Eastern regions are allowed to fade into the background. The East-West divide is thus conveyed – sometimes subtly and unintentionally, other times boldly and with purpose – through the Soviet Union’s visual renderings of the region in its *Encyclopedia*.

Though the “Middle East” may not have belonged to the “Far East” or “Soviet East,” it was still seen as “Eastern” in the eyes of the CPSU. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, was distinctly “Western.” As was the case with the propaganda posters, it is unclear whether the CPSU genuinely considered its “Eastern” Other, this time the Ottoman Empire, a legitimate threat or whether the it merely hoped to garner more prestige for the Soviet Union on the international stage by aligning itself against the “East” and towards the “West.” In fact, one could argue that both explanations applied to the CPSU of the 1930s. What is clear, however, is the CPSU’s conception of the “Middle East” as something distinct from the Soviet Union. Statements made by CPSU members in relation to KUTV build upon this idea, deepening the divide between



“East” and “West.” Going a step further, these statements collapse the “Far East”/ “Soviet East” framework in order to create a new conceptual model that includes the “Middle East.” Rather than fixate on two-dimensional differences between the “East” and the “West” or the “Far East” and the “Soviet East,” this new model establishes a sort of three-dimensional plane consisting of the “West” (referring to Europe and the Soviet Union) on one end and the “Soviet East” (referring to Central Asia and the Caucasus) and “non-Soviet East” (referring to the “Far East,” “Middle East,” and everything in between) on the other.

### Chapter 3: The “West,” the “Soviet East,” the “non-Soviet East,” and the KUTV

The CPSU’s propaganda apparatus relied not only on posters and *Encyclopedia* entries, but also educational initiatives. As early as 1911, the Bolsheviks had started opening communist schools in Petrograd and Moscow in order to train Russian party cadres in preparation for the creation of a new state. Over time, these schools began to attract increasing numbers of students from the outskirts of the former empire and beyond who lacked the Russian language skills and educational background needed to study their curriculums. Though the Civil War delayed the Bolsheviks’ efforts to establish more schools in the first decade of the twentieth century, it was clear that a new school based on a non-Russo-centric model was needed to cater to a diverse student body encompassing students from around the world.<sup>22</sup> Founded in the center of Moscow in 1921, the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) sought to meet this growing demand for socialist education and to disseminate the Soviet Union’s unique communist vision to Africa, Asia, and the “Middle East.”

KUTV alumni often went on to lead communist or socialist movements and governments in their home countries. Take, for example, Deng Xiaoping, the paramount leader of the People’s Republic of China from 1978 to 1989. Other notable alumni include: Chiang Ching-kuo (President of the Republic of China), Tran Phu (first General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam), and Harry Haywood (leading African-American member of the Communist Party USA). KUTV students from the “Middle East,” of which there were many, were no exception to this general trend. Masha Kirasirova notes that they even played a “disproportionate role in determining the cultures of “Middle Eastern” communist parties and later Soviet relations with

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<sup>22</sup> Ravandi-Fadai, “Red Mecca – The Communist University of the Laborers of the East (KUTV): Iranian Scholars and Students in Moscow in the 1920s and 1930s,” 714-715.

[the region].”<sup>23</sup> Her assessment is not surprising, given that the list of KUTV alumni from the “Middle East” includes figures like Mahmud Moghrabi, Radwan al-Hilu, Taher Moghrabi, Najati Sidqi, Ahmad Sidqi, Nazim Hikmet Ran, Yusuf Salman Yusuf (better known by his nom de guerre “Comrade Fahd”), Khalid Bakdash, and various other SCP members.<sup>24</sup>

Though KUTV may have attracted students from around the world,<sup>25</sup> the Soviet Union did not have diplomatic or economic relations with most members of the international community during the Civil War and interwar period when the KUTV was in operation. In regards to the “Middle East” specifically, the Soviet Union did not manage to establish formal relations with any region outside of the Hijaz and Yemen until KUTV had already closed its doors in 1939. For this reason, KUTV served not only as an institution of higher learning, but also as a valuable foreign policy tool. Kirasirova explains that:

the KUTV... [was] all the more important as the primary link... between the revolutionary party-state and its left-leaning sympathizers in strategically important territories under British and French [and later American] control. This [university] would serve as the foundation for a broader and much more robust Soviet engagement with the Arab Middle East in the postwar period.<sup>26</sup>

Documents produced by KUTV and its students would thus be expected to shed light on how the Soviet Union sought to define its position vis-à-vis the “Middle East” during the interwar period and beyond.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to study KUTV directly. Most documents produced by the university, including individual student files, remain classified, with only a select portion of remaining records available to Russian researchers. Foreign researchers are able to see even less,

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<sup>23</sup> Kirasirova, “The East as a Category of Bolshevik Ideology and Comintern Administration: The Arab Section of the Communist University of the Toilers of the East,” 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> KUTV’s student body was composed of individuals from various parts of the Soviet East, including Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Volga Region. It also attracted students from India, Iran, and China, as well as other parts of Asia and Africa. For more on this, see Kirasirova’s article.

<sup>26</sup> Kirasirova, 18.

rendering them largely unable to “discern [anything other than] certain patterns and trajectories.”<sup>27</sup> Historians hoping to conduct research on KUTV outside of Russia will be frustrated to discover that many archives located in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq that were known to be in possession of KUTV documents at one time were destroyed both by the communists themselves and their enemies following the Second World War.<sup>28</sup> To complicate matters further, the majority of KUTV students who returned to their home countries in the “Middle East” in the 1920s, including those who eventually chose to leave their country’s communist or socialist party, were either imprisoned or killed in a series of anticommunist purges that swept across Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq during the same period.<sup>29</sup> For obvious reasons, those who managed to escape persecution made a habit of keeping the experiences they had while living in the communist capital of the world and studying socialist state construction to themselves. As a result, “surviving KUTV graduates’ memoirs either completely omit...their experiences in the Soviet Union, or relegate... them to a kind of black hole noting only the dates of their arrivals and departures.”<sup>30</sup> Historians are thus forced to rely on limited materials when determining how, if at all, the Soviet Union’s operation of KUTV reflected its foreign policy interests in the “Middle East” and what effects, if any, the university had on the Soviet Union’s relationship with the various peoples of the region.

Under these constraints, an additional entry included in the first edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* on “*Komvyzi*” (“Communist Universities”) can provide valuable insights into the Soviet Union’s intentions regarding KUTV. Published while KUTV was still in operation in 1937, the entry defines “*Komvyzi*” as “communist higher educational institutions

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 12.

[responsible for] training cadres of qualified workers.” It goes on to describe the general history of communist universities in the Soviet Union, including KUTV, and outlines their vital role in the construction and maintenance of socialist states. The entry states that prominent members of the CPSU, including none other than Lenin and Stalin, “paid great attention” to the universities and demanded that “further attention... be paid to the development of party schools” after their initial establishment. An unnamed representative speaking at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party is quoted as saying, “It is necessary to oblige all of the Party’s responsible workers to be lecturers [at] the Party schools and to view this work as one of their most crucial duties.” In a painfully transparent effort to encourage readers to involve themselves with the *komvyzi* the entry describes how both Lenin and Stalin, two ideal models of “responsible workers,” delivered their own lectures to various *komvyzi* on subjects like state development and theoretical approaches communism. These lectures are said to have laid the “foundation of the theory and tactics of proletarian revolution” with “certain clarity” and to have “played a major role in the development of Marxist-Leninism.” The special emphasis placed on the *komvyzi* in this entry, both through explicit calls for workers to lecture at them and repeated appeals to Lenin’s and Stalin’s authority, indicates just how important they were to the CPSU’s efforts to define and disseminate its version of communism.

On the surface, the entry would seem to suggest that all *komvyzi* were created equal to serve this noble purpose. However, information dealing specifically with KUTV in the entry highlights how the Soviet Union used the university to separate the “East” from the “West” in practice. The entry indicates that KUTV was established in tandem with another university, the Communist University of the National Minorities of the West (KUNMZ). Additional information on KUNMZ is limited to just one sentence, which explains that it was founded in 1921 “for the

preparation of party workers amongst national minorities in the West.” Though this information is easily gleaned from the university’s name, the following sentence reveals less obvious information about KUTV. Readers learn that KUTV was established “in the same year, by Stalin’s initiative, based on the Eastern-focused courses” that were being offered at other institutions at the time. In this way, the East-West divide discussed in the previous chapter appears not only in the pages of the state’s encyclopedia, but also in real life in the designation of one university as “Eastern” and the other as “Western.”

Though the wording in the original Russian is somewhat vague, the sentence referring specifically to KUTV seems to add an additional dimension to this East-West divide. The use of the words “*na baze*” (“based on”) suggest that the reason why Stalin wanted to create an entirely-separate university like KUTV was because “Eastern-focused courses” were being taught at other institutions, not because the “Eastern-focused courses” had laid the foundation for other, similar courses at other universities. A new university was thus needed to house the “Eastern-focused courses” because they were not suitable for or needed by students at KUNMZ or other Western institutions. The fact that the Soviet Union may not have had the same expectations of its Eastern and Western students, and that it may not have encouraged its Western students to learn about their Eastern counterparts, seems to undermine its mission to assimilate Eastern and Western communists into a single, international community.

KUTV is further differentiated from other “komvyzi” in the final paragraphs of the entry. These paragraphs detail a series of reforms that the “komvyzi” underwent following the issuance of a decree that was written during the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party in 1932. When the “komvyzi” were first established, they were responsible for a curriculum that covered three broad areas of study: (1) “party work and political education,” (2) “trade union movement,” and

(3) “economic and administrative law.” After the Ninth Party Congress, “komvyzi” were “assigned... the task of training skilled workers for collective and state farms.” The new goal was to ensure that workers had “sufficient specialized knowledge both in the field of agricultural machinery... and animal husbandry.”<sup>31</sup> This shift in emphasis from theoretical to practical knowledge likely reflected Stalin’s enforcement of collectivization, which had begun two years earlier in 1928.

However, the *Encyclopedia* notes that KUTV was deliberately excluded from the terms of the decree. Its exclusion may have been due to the fact that Stalin could not initiate or enforce collectivization outside of the Soviet Union, in the countries many of KUTV’s students called home; however, it could also be argued that the Soviet Union’s decision to change the curriculum administered to its own, Western, Russian-speaking students indicates that it believed they already had a solid understanding of the basic principles underlying socialism and were thus prepared to begin actively working towards the construction of their new state. Non-Western, so-called Eastern students, meanwhile, needed to be brought up to speed with their Western counterparts before tackling the practical problems associated with socialist state building. The prevalence of this perception of students from the “Middle East” among Soviet staff and faculty members working at KUTV, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, would drive a larger wedge between Eastern and Western communists. For this reason, this small detail in the encyclopedia entry for “*komvyzi*” can be said to serve as yet another potential source of tension between the East and West in the Soviet space.

More examples of this sort of divisive language surrounding KUTV can be seen in speeches delivered by Stalin at KUTV. Stalin begins a speech titled “On the Political Tasks of

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<sup>31</sup> *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, First Edition, Volume 33, 575-576 (my translation).

the University of the Peoples of the East,” which was published in the state-sponsored newspaper *Pravda* on May 22, 1925 to commemorate the four-year anniversary of the KUTV’s opening, by dividing KUTV’s “Eastern” student body into two groups. He begins the speech by saying, “Before us are two Easts, living a different life and developing in different conditions.” The first of the two “Easts” that Stalin describes is said to encompass students from the “Soviet East, from countries where the power of the bourgeoisie no longer exists, the imperialist oppression has been overthrown, and the workers are in power,” while the “second East” is said to contain students from “colonial and dependent countries, from those countries where capitalism still reigns, where the yoke of imperialism has retained all of its strength, and where it is still necessary to gain independence, driving out imperialists.” “Far Eastern” and “Middle Eastern” students attending KUTV would have fallen into this second group. This discussion of the “two Easts” is reminiscent of CPSU propaganda differentiating the “Far East” from the “Soviet East.” In this speech, however, Stalin appears to create slightly different framework for understanding the “East.” Rather than contrast the “Soviet East” against the “Far East,” a model that excluded the “Middle East,” Stalin contrasts the “Soviet East” against the “non-Soviet East,” which includes territories from both the “Far East” and the “Middle East” that would have been represented within KUTV’s student body.

It is worth noting here that, though his language creates an explicit divide between the “two Easts,” it also perpetuates the implicit divide between the East and the West. Though students in the first group (“Soviet East”) may not be considered fully-Western in Stalin’s mind, they are still considered more Western than the second group (“non-Soviet East”). This is what allows them to exist within their own, separate category of “Easternness.” Stalin is merely putting a new spin on the classic “East”/ “West” divide by creating new categories on the “Eastern” side.



Listeners and readers are thus immediately aware of which “East” they belong to and where that places them in the international Soviet hierarchy.

After describing these two groups, Stalin says that “this dual character and composition of [students]... is precisely why the university stands on Soviet soil with one foot, and the other on the basis of colonies and dependent countries.” His words seem to imply that the “two Easts” need to be brought together. One could argue that some of the language that he uses in the rest of the speech resembles an effort to bridge the gap that he has created between them. For example, as one might expect, he refers to students in both groups as “comrades” (“товарищи”) in equal respects and states that “the university has *united* representatives from at least fifty nations several times throughout the speech. Towards the middle of the address, he also launches into a discussion of a uniquely-proletariat culture that all KUTV students are said to share. He explains that:

We are building proletarian culture... the proletarian culture, socialist in its content, takes various forms and ways of expression among the various people involved in socialist construction, depending on the difference of language, way of life, and so on. Proletarian in its content, national in form, is that general human culture to which socialism is heading.

Glossing over the major cultural differences between students of the “West,” “Soviet East” and “non-Soviet East,” not to mention the various countries that would be expected to be found in each of those arbitrary categories, Stalin uses this discussion of “proletarian culture” to create the impression that KUTV has managed to unify a diverse group of communists. The implications of that impression cannot be understated. After all, the successful integration of non-Soviet and Soviet communists and socialists from the East at KUTV would seem to bode well for the integration of non-Soviet and Soviet communists and socialists the world over.

However, when delineating the distinct roles that the “two Easts” are supposed to fill in the fight for a global, communist revolution, Stalin appears to – intentionally or unintentionally – drive them further apart. While individual students hailing from eastern Soviet republics appear to be described in such a way as to imply their readiness to lead a revolution on a global scale, individual students from eastern colonies and dependents seem to be characterized as being less knowledgeable and less prepared to study KUTV’s curriculum. Stalin says that “everyone knows that these comrades crave for light and knowledge,” when speaking about the KUTV’s students from colonized countries. He then adds that it is the “task of the University of the Peoples of the East...to forge out of them real revolutionaries armed with the theory of Leninism, equipped with practical experience of Leninism and capable of carrying out the next tasks of the liberation movement of the colonies and dependent countries.” The subtleties of Stalin’s word choice are somewhat lost in the English translations, but convey the sense that a newly-arrived student from the “Middle East” would not have the knowledge base or skillset required to contribute to the global revolution in a meaningful way and would be incapable of acquiring them in his home country. Another excerpt following his description of tasks for students of the eastern Soviet republics seems relevant here as well. Stalin says that the methods he described earlier will be “quite understandable and applicable in...the Soviet Union,” but may be oversimplified by communists living and working elsewhere. He warns Soviet communists to “educate [others] in the spirit of the irreconcilable struggle against this simplification.”<sup>32</sup> Yet again, Western, Soviet communists are differentiated from Eastern, non-Soviet communists.

The second and last speech Stalin ever delivered at or concerning the KUTV was published in *Pravda* in 1927. Titled “To the Students of the Communist University of the Toilers

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<sup>32</sup> Stalin, “О политических задачах университета народов Востока,” (my translation).

of the East,” it updates listeners and readers on the progress that had been made during the two-year period between Stalin’s visits to the university. Much shorter in length, encompassing just 137 words compared to over three thousand in the previous speech, it includes none of the divisive language featured in “On the Political Tasks of the University of the Peoples of the East.” Most notably, no mention is made of the “two Easts.” Instead all students are described as “new fighters” (“новые кадры борцов”), “comrades” (“товарищи”), and students “armed with the mighty weapons of Leninism” (“вооружённых могучим оружием ленинизма”).<sup>33</sup> Stalin’s failure to mention the “two Easts,” assimilation or any related topic should not, however, be taken to mean that communists and socialists from the “Middle East” had seamlessly integrated with their Soviet counterparts in the two-year period between the first and second speech. Rather, readers might consider the possibility that Stalin deliberately chose not to probe topics involving identity to present his constituents, and indeed anyone else who may have been listening or reading later on, with the image of a united front.

In this way, the CPSU established a third Soviet Orientalist framework. Unlike the “Soviet East”/ “Far East” or “East”/ “West” dichotomies that explicitly cast the Other as the enemy, this third framework Otherized by assigning students relative positions on an “East”/ “West” scale that indicated their level of preparedness to take up the communist mantle. As the next chapter will demonstrate, this subtler method of Otherization could be just as damaging to Soviet-Middle Eastern relations.

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<sup>33</sup> Stalin, “Студентам Коммунистического Трудящихся Востока,” (my translation).

#### Chapter 4: The KUTV in Practice

The above analysis of the Soviet Union's public statements on KUTV has demonstrated that the language used to describe the university and its student body reinforced the idea that the West was separate from and superior to the East, and that the "Soviet East" was separate from and superior to the "non-Soviet East." To better understand how this linguistic and conceptual framework may have affected Soviet relations with the "Middle East," it is helpful to turn now to the experiences of students at KUTV. This chapter will demonstrate that while the Soviet Union seems to have succeeded in integrating a handful of its "Middle Eastern" students into Soviet culture, far more students appear to have been alienated both by the Soviet Union's persistent Otherization of "Eastern" peoples and failure to recognize important differences between Soviet and "Middle Eastern" politics and culture.

Though primary sources regarding student life may be difficult to find, significant research projects undertaken by Kirasirova, Lana Ravandi-Fadai, and others have begun to shed light on the lives of KUTV students. Much, for example, is known about KUTV's curriculum. Unsurprisingly, it was crafted to promote the Soviet Union's brand of socialism. Though it was originally intended to be just seven months in length, the curriculum was extended to encompass three years of study after the university's first year in operation so that students would have ample time to learn about the various political and social problems associated with the construction of socialist states and societies from the Soviet perspective.<sup>34</sup> Courses covered the three areas of study described in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* and included theoretical and practical matters, including formal Marxist-Leninist theory, economics, party and trade union organization, propaganda, tactics of revolution, espionage, and even guerilla warfare. Though

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<sup>34</sup> Ravandi-Fadai, 716.

most courses were conducted in students' native languages, students were expected to undertake intensive instruction in the Russian language as well.<sup>35</sup>

KUTV faculty and staff organized various extracurricular excursions and activities to further immerse their students in Soviet society. For example, over the course of three years, students were required to attend around one hundred field trips to sites such as telegraph, telephone and radio stations, electric power stations, botanical gardens and zoos, museums, factories, and the state bank. Students were also expected to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution and to attend party congresses, plenary sessions of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party, and congresses of the Communist International. Members of the Soviet Union's political and cultural elite, including Joseph Stalin, Maxim Gorky, and Vladimir Mayakovski, were regularly invited to KUTV's campus to deliver speeches on various aspects of traditional Russian culture. In an effort to keep students occupied and engaged during the summer months when courses and extracurricular activities were not offered, KUTV encouraged them to perform communal farm work in Russian villages along the Volga, in the Caucasus mountains, and in Central Asia instead of returning home.<sup>36</sup> Needless to say, KUTV students were given little, if any, time to contemplate, discuss or implement models of socialist construction that deviated from the one they were provided with by the Soviet Union inside and outside the classroom.

These exhaustive efforts to incorporate "Middle Eastern" students into Soviet society produced modest, albeit not totally insignificant, results. Though incorporation and assimilation may be difficult to assess in an objective manner, the CPSU was glad to report that many

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<sup>35</sup> Illarionovna and Valerievich, "Коммунистические Университеты для Национальных Меньшинств в Советской России: 1920-1930-е гг.," 155.

<sup>36</sup> Ravandi-Fadai, 720.

students chose to stay and work in the Soviet Union on its behalf after graduation. Kirasirova highlights the experiences of a handful of such students, including Taha Selim of the SCP (referred to by his party name, Sawaf) who settled in Moscow permanently following their three years of study at KUTV. Working as an Arabic translator and editor for the Arabic Section of the Central State Radio Commission, Sawaf “became a communist toiler of the East in the sense of professionally fulfilling the needs and furthering the interests of the Soviet Union and the Arab world.”<sup>37</sup> Other KUTV students and alumni assisted the CPSU directly by translating communist and Marxist literature, as well as various texts prepared and published by the CPSU itself, into their native languages. Those materials were then distributed to their home countries. Students and alumni also translated summaries of “Middle Eastern” newspapers into Russian. In this way, KUTV students and alumni “served as information channels between the research and political apparatus in the Soviet capital and the distant East considered so crucial to the communist project.”<sup>38</sup> Top KUTV students were even offered coveted positions in the bureaucracy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Comintern in Moscow, which would have allowed them to play a substantial role in “defin[ing] Soviet interests in the “Middle East” through academic research, translation, propaganda, party administration, and other types of work.”<sup>39</sup>

Evidence of the successful assimilation of “Middle Eastern” communists into the Soviet Union’s global communist framework can also be found when examining choices made by KUTV alumni in their personal lives. For example, those who chose to return to their home countries often stayed in contact with other communists they had met at KUTV. There are even

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Ravandi-Fadai, 718.

<sup>39</sup> Kirasirova., 721.

reports of prominent KUTV alumni who married and raised children with Slavic women while living in Moscow. Take, for example, Sidiq who married an unnamed Ukrainian communist and Comrade Fahd who married a Russian woman named Irina Georgivna.<sup>40</sup> Though many KUTV graduates were required to take an oath promising to nullify their marriages and leave their wives behind in order to devote themselves to the “selfless service of the [worldwide] Revolution,”<sup>41</sup> which would admittedly seem to run counter to the CPSU’s cultural objectives, some continued to write them letters in secret, demonstrating the importance of those relationships to them.<sup>42</sup> Still others chose to adopt Russian-sounding pseudonyms as their revolutionary noms-de-guerre or to Russify their surnames in official paperwork.<sup>43</sup> It would appear then, at first glance, that the Soviet experiences of KUTV students facilitated the sort of assimilation that the Soviet Union hoped to achieve.

However, not all or even most student experiences appear to have been so positive. In fact, KUTV students from the “Middle East” seem to have clashed with KUTV administrators over issues of identity on a somewhat regular basis. Kirasirova explains:

In 1925, Soviet policy toward ‘the East’ was still grappling with questions unanswered by Marxist-Leninist theory. There remained no consensus about whether ‘the East’ was something external to Soviet ideological space that could be approached, or if it was internal and therefore Easternization could be understood as another form of Sovietization... As KUTV evolved... these tensions and ambiguities had to be resolved in practice.<sup>44</sup>

These “tensions and ambiguities” are evident in the way that KUTV administrators chose to refer to their students. KUTV students were uniformly designated as “*vostochniki*” (“Easterners”).

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<sup>40</sup> Kirasirova, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 492.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, *Justice Interrupted* (Boston, Harvard University Press: 2015), 187.

<sup>43</sup> Ravandi-Fadai, 716.

<sup>44</sup> Kirasirova, 18.

Though the use of this term would initially appear to place KUTV's student body outside of the Soviet space, it carried important connotations, which indicate that it may have been intended to convey the opposite meaning. The confusion surrounding the meaning of "*vostochniki*" stems from the fact that it was first used by Slavophiles of the late nineteenth century who believed that Russia's future lay not in Europe, but in Asia.<sup>45</sup> To that end, the Slavophiles believed that Russia would ultimately embrace its "Eastern" neighbors, as well as its own inner "Easternness." It seems possible, then, that "*vostochniki*" was meant not to distinguish "Eastern" communists from "Western" communists in such a way as to establish a hierarchy between them (as Stalin's speeches seem to do), but to simultaneously emphasize (1) the special role that "Eastern" communists would play in the future maintenance and development of an expanded Soviet Union and (2) the "Eastern" essence that the "Eastern" communists shared with their Soviet equivalents. This particular interpretation of "*vostochniki*" would seem to dissolve the tension surrounding its use in reference to KUTV students, though it remains possible that KUTV administrators appropriated it for their own purposes.

The meaning behind the university's official slogan, "First Sovietize the student, then Easternize him" is less ambiguous. Kirasirova notes that the slogan recalls a political agitation formula used by the Red Army during the Russian Civil War: "First you de-peasantize a Red Army soldier, then only in the last three months re-peasantize him."<sup>46</sup> According to this formula, an individual peasant is forced to relinquish their autonomy and cultural ties and then assimilate into the dominant, Soviet culture. When the process of assimilation is complete, the peasant is reintroduced to peasant culture so that she will be prepared to install Soviet practices and norms

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 16.



in her village on behalf of the government.<sup>47</sup> This would seem to imply, then, that the KUTV administration believed that its task was to rid its students of their native cultures, indoctrinate them with Soviet ideology, and then re-expose them to their native cultures before sending them off to carry out the global, communist revolution in their home countries. In just seven words, the slogan managed to sequester that which was “Eastern” from that which was “Soviet,” construct a new balance of power between the “East” and the Soviet Union that favored the Soviet Union, disregard the cultural differences that existed between the various “Eastern” peoples who chose to attend KUTV, and advocate for the instrumentalization of “Eastern” culture. Though KUTV administrators may not have intended to alienate their student body and likely believed that their approach to education would benefit their students and the mission of the CPSU, many found the slogan offensive.<sup>48</sup>

Official KUTV policies tended to reflect the sentiments expressed in this slogan. Students often failed that the university failed to understand or respect their national, ethnic, and religious identities. In fact, one of the students’ chief complaints was that “social, political, and linguistic complexities of their identities were flattened” as part of the CPSU’s efforts to assimilate them into Soviet culture. Upon arrival, all students were divided by national subgroup into various “sectors.” “Middle Eastern” students, meanwhile could be expected to be sorted into one of three sectors: Arab, Turkish or Iranian. These sectors did not even begin to account for the degree of diversity of KUTV’s student body. A report issued in 1936 indicates that “Middle Eastern” students hailed from Syria, Algeria, Tunis, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq. The placement of students into the Arab sector appears to have been a particularly confusing process for

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<sup>47</sup> Von Hagen, Mark, *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship: The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917-1930* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press: 1990), 235-239.

<sup>48</sup> Kirasirova, 16.

KUTV's administration, given that non-Arab minorities – Armenians, Kurds, Russians, Poles, and Ukrainians – dominated the sector throughout the 1920s. Though these non-Arab may have “reflected the composition of early communist parties in Palestine, Egypt, and Syria/Lebanon,” Arab students were understandably bewildered and upset to find themselves a minority in their own, already arbitrary sector.<sup>49</sup>

Others expressed frustrations about the KUTV's efforts to instill its students with an understanding of Soviet cultural norms or “appropriate and inappropriate everyday behaviors.”<sup>50</sup> Regular group meetings held by a student council named the “court of comrades” required students to publicly criticize each other for deviating from “distinctly Soviet standard[s] of masculinity modeled on [Soviet] revolutionary heroes... which tended to ignore students' national diversity and cultural differences.”<sup>51</sup> As the Soviet Union's campaign to rid Central Asia and the Caucasus of Islamic influences continued into the mid-1930s, cultural differences between Muslim students from the “Middle East” and their Soviet counterparts became less and less excusable. Though KUTV never went as far as banning Islam from public discourse, students were discouraged from practicing their faith in public. Records indicate that at least one student was even arrested and tried in court for bringing an Islamic prayer rug to Moscow from Palestine.<sup>52</sup> Still other students complained that they felt pressured to affirm their own “backwardness” in relation to their Soviet peers.<sup>53</sup> By persecuting students for their diverse identities, the KUTV estranged the very people it had been established to attract and incorporate into the Soviet space.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 24.

Students lodged complaints against various other KUTV policies as well. Many were frustrated about the university's insufficient language translation resources, as well as a lack of attention on the part of the KUTV administration to address their individual needs. Others criticized the administration for a lack of employment opportunities, arguing that many positions were "accessible to [only] some KUTV students [and] never systematized."<sup>54</sup> Still others complained that the administration was deliberately limiting their access to phones, preventing them from organizing meetings, and subjecting them to "childish treatment."<sup>55</sup> These sorts of experiences, in addition to those described in the previous paragraphs, can hardly be said to foster the sort of cross-cultural assimilation and goodwill that the Soviet Union hoped to create between the "East" and the "West/Soviet."

The reader should not, then, be surprised to learn that "intragroup conflicts result[ing] from top-down and often heavy-handed efforts to get students to set aside identity politics and uphold party discipline collaboratively... plagued KUTV administrators throughout the 1920 and only escalated in the 1930s."<sup>56</sup> While some students chose to turn against the CPSU and leave the Soviet Union, others were expelled and even, in rare cases, sent to labor camps.<sup>57</sup> Though KUTV was established and maintained by the CPSU to initiate a constructive relationship between the Soviet Union and the "Middle East" through the assimilation of "Middle Eastern" students into Soviet life, many students felt that their needs were not being met and that the uniqueness of their identities made them targets for public ridicule and persecution. It becomes clear, then, that the Soviet Union's use of divisive language surrounding the creation and

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>57</sup> Ravandi-Fadai, 723.

operation of KUTV and subsequent failure to acknowledge or appreciate the diversity of KUTV's student body undermined its mission to assimilate the "Middle East" in particular and the "non-Soviet East" in general into its global communist network.

### Conclusion

Taken together or considered separately, the three Soviet Orientalist frameworks – (1) “Far East”/ “Soviet East,” (2) “East”/ “West,” and (3) “West,”/ “Soviet East”/ “Non-Soviet East” – can be used to explain Soviet policy towards and relations with the “East” during and after the Second World War. That is not to say that one particular framework is preferable to another or even that the three frameworks discussed in this paper were the only frameworks employed by the CPSU during the interwar period, rather that knowledge of them can help historians understand just how difficult it was for the Soviets to conceptualize the “East” and to develop coherent and consistent policies that advanced their interests in the various regions and countries contained within it.

An analysis of the full extent of the impacts of those frameworks remains beyond the scope of this paper, however, two relevant examples pertinent to Soviet-Middle East relations quickly demonstrate their usefulness. Throughout the 1920s and 1930, the CPSU implemented numerous policies directed towards minority groups living and working in the Soviet Union. At the time, about half of the Soviet population consisted of ethnic Russians. Belorussians and Ukrainians formed another quarter. The remaining quarter was composed of a dizzying number of ethnic groups, ranging from groups with “long national histories and strong national identities,”<sup>58</sup> like the Armenians and Georgians, and countless tribes from Siberia and the “Soviet East.” Despite the CPSU’s prohibition on religion, these various ethnic groups were thought to practice multiple different religions, including: Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and shamanism. All in all, they also spoke almost two hundred different languages.

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<sup>58</sup> Rianovsky, *A History of Russia*, 599.

KUTV students from the “non-Soviet East” would have represented a small fraction of the Soviet population of the interwar period. However, the CPSU appears to have pursued the “Sovietization” of its students from the “non-Soviet East” to a greater extent than it did students and workers from the “Soviet East.” Soviet authorities may not have “allowed...independence in ideological, political, economic, and social matters, discouraged... religious practice, [and] settled large numbers of ethnic Russians in the national republics and autonomous regions,” but did “promote... education... [and] the creation of local intelligentsias, create... opportunities for individuals from local nationalities to hold positions of local influence, and allow... the languages and cultures of local peoples to be preserved and taught.”<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky argues that the Soviet Union adopted this approach because “as long as the system was stable and the economy strong... local privileges nurtured support for the [Soviet] system and even a certain ‘Soviet’ identity.”<sup>60</sup> While Soviet policy “kept alive [and] sometimes helped create”<sup>61</sup> national and ethnic identities in the “Soviet East,” KUTV students from the “non-Soviet East” were aggressively “Sovietized.” Readers will remember that these students were bombarded with activities and excursions emphasizing traditional Russian culture, subjected to the “court of comrades,” forced to affirm their own “backwardness,” and even arrested for practicing their religions.

With the “Eastern” frameworks in mind, it appears that the CPSU may have been more willing to tolerate cultural diversity within the “Soviet East” than the “Non-Soviet East.” The application and combination of different “Eastern” frameworks can be used to generate several theories as to why this might have been the case. Chapter 1, which highlighted distinctions

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 599.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 600.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 600.

between the “Far East” and the “Soviet East,” demonstrated that the CPSU considered the “Soviet East” to be a friendly ally that had successfully incorporated Soviet policies and ideologies into its own political and social structures. As a result, cultures of the “Soviet East” may have been deemed non-threatening by the CPSU. Incorporating the “East”/ “West” dichotomy exhibited in Chapter 2 and the “Eastern” trichotomy explored in Chapter 3 into this discussion, one could argue that the Soviet Union, which considered itself firmly stationed in the “Western” camp, saw “Eastern” cultures as manifestations of an “Eastern” enemy set on a collision course with the Soviet Union. While the cultures of the “Soviet East” may have been considered non-threatening and thought to contribute to a “Soviet identity,” the specter of the “non-Soviet East” may have been perceived as standing in opposition to Soviet efforts to spread communism to the “Middle East” and beyond.

Restricting one’s frame of reference to just the trichotomy discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 introduces still more possibilities. For example, in light of the KUTV’s official slogan (“First Sovietize the student, then Easternize him), the CPSU may have thought that the “Soviet East” was already “Sovietized” and thus ready to embrace its inner “Easternness” to the benefit of the Soviet Union. Because of their relative position on the “East”- “West” spectrum, peoples of the “Soviet East” could be trusted to enjoy their own cultures. The frameworks themselves do not point to a definitive answer or answers as to why the Soviet Union decided to treat cultures of the “Soviet East” differently from cultures of the “non-Soviet East,” but do begin to organize the relevant issues into a coherent structure that can aid the historian in their inquiry.

The Soviet Union’s own use of these frameworks may also indicate why “Middle Eastern” communists and socialists were reluctant to cooperate with the CPSU after the interwar period. Numerous communist and socialist movements gained traction throughout the “Middle

East” at this time,<sup>62</sup> but the relationship between both the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) and the CPSU suggest that the Soviet Union’s otherizing approach to the “East” during the interwar period may have undermined its efforts in the “Middle East” in the years that followed.

Both the ICP and SCP were founded and led for many years by KUTV alumni, Comrade Fahd in the case of the ICP and Bakdash in the case of Syria. The formation and subsequent growth of both parties caught the immediate attention of the CPSU, which was more than willing to provide its former students with moral and material support. Beginning in the interwar period and continuing during the duration of the Second World War, the CPSU sent piles of communist books and stationary to ICP and SCP leaders and invited them to attend various conventions of the Comintern. Some scholarship suggests that, in return, the CPSU was allowed to play at least a nominal role in the formation and early development of both the ICP and SCP. Thompson notes that actions taken by the ICP in the years following its separation from the Association against Imperialism suggest that it shared a close relationship with the CPSU. For example, when the ICP published its first newspaper in the first year of its activism, a hammer and sickle in the classic Soviet style adorned the masthead next to the Soviet slogan: “Workers of the World Unite!”<sup>63</sup> Batatu observes that, years later, the second charter of the ICP called for greater cooperation with the Soviet Union. He notes that the ICP’s decision to collaborate more with the

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the origins of communism the Middle East, see Ervand Abrahamian’s *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Suliman Bashear’s *Communism in the Arab East: 1918-1928*, Joel Beinin’s *Was the Red Flag Flying There?: Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel*, Selma Botman’s *The Rise of Egyptian Communism, 1939-1970*, and Musa Budeiri’s *The Palestine Communist Party: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism*.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, 185.



Soviet Union at that time was even considered by its leadership to be an “ideologically necessary adaption to the international Communist line.”<sup>64</sup>

However, though it seems difficult, if not impossible, to make categorical judgements of independence in their cases, most historians tend to agree that Moscow was unable to wield any meaningful degree of control over the parties’ activities in the long run and was thus severely limited in its abilities to exert its influence over Iraq, Syria, and the “Middle East” as a whole.

Tareq Ismael argues that the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943:

released the [ICP] from nominal control of the CPSU, which had overtaken the international communist movement, giving the ICP more room to maneuver within Iraq’s national and regional contexts and allowing local organizers to set the foundation for a new theoretical and organizational direction for the ICP.<sup>65</sup>

According to Ismael, the ICP was chose to work more closely with democratic and popular forces in Iraq, as opposed to Soviet bureaucrats, from then on.<sup>66</sup> Proponents of the view that the ICP was in fact independent from the CPSU also emphasize that, contrary to popular belief, the ICP never accepted any funding from the Soviet Union, further weakening any link that other scholars might seek to draw between the numerous forms of support the CPSU provided and the political outcomes it hoped to achieve in exchange.

Similar arguments are used to establish the independence of the SCP from the CPSU, with historians tending to pay special attention to decisions made by Bakdash. It is no secret that Bakdash went to great lengths to publicly distinguish the SCP from the CPSU, frequently telling his supporters that his party did not take orders from Moscow and that the interests of the SCP

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<sup>64</sup> Batatu, 671-672.

<sup>65</sup> Ismael, Tareq Y., *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*, 28.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

centered on local issues, rather than international ones. Though this may have been merely a ploy to attract followers who would have otherwise been alienated by the organization's close ties to a foreign power, historians also tend to interpret the fact that the SCP's national charter did not require SCP members to adhere to Marxist-Leninist thought as further evidence that the two parties did not share a particularly close relationship. Batatu, seems especially convinced of this point. He describes Bakdash as a "very unorthodox Communist" who "intended to flood [the SCP] with elements alien to [the CPSU's] basic point of view."<sup>67</sup> Batatu appears to argue that though Bakdash identified as a communist, his ideas were often out of line with the mainstream ideology propagated by the CPSU, indicating that the SCP and CPSU did not enjoy a close relationship.

Given that both Comrade Fahd and Bakdash attended KUTV in the late 1930s when, as discussed in Chapter 4, clashes between KUTV students and administrators had reached their peak, it is possible that their reluctance to align their parties with the CPSU stemmed from experiences that they had at KUTV. In this way, the CPSU's use of otherizing linguistic and conceptual frameworks and policies vis-à-vis its "Middle Eastern" students during the interwar period may have hindered its ability to form meaningful connections with "Middle Eastern" communist and socialist groups in later years. More research into the experiences of Comrade Fahd and Bakdash is needed to determine the validity of this theory, but the importance of the various "Eastern" frameworks to explaining the Soviet-"Middle Eastern" relationship is clear.

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Though the Soviet Union may not have been as directly involved in the "Middle East" during the interwar period as it would be immediately following the Second World War and into

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<sup>67</sup> Batatu, 581-583.

the Cold War, the emergence of Soviet Orientalism during that period would have a profound effect on the future of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations. By drawing attention to this overlooked time period, bringing new translations and interpretations of Russian primary-source materials to the study of “Middle Eastern” history, and providing evidence of the three “Eastern” frameworks, this thesis has demonstrated the usefulness of Soviet Orientalism and – hopefully – prompted future analysis of events in the history of Soviet-Middle Eastern relations that will rely on it.

Appendix

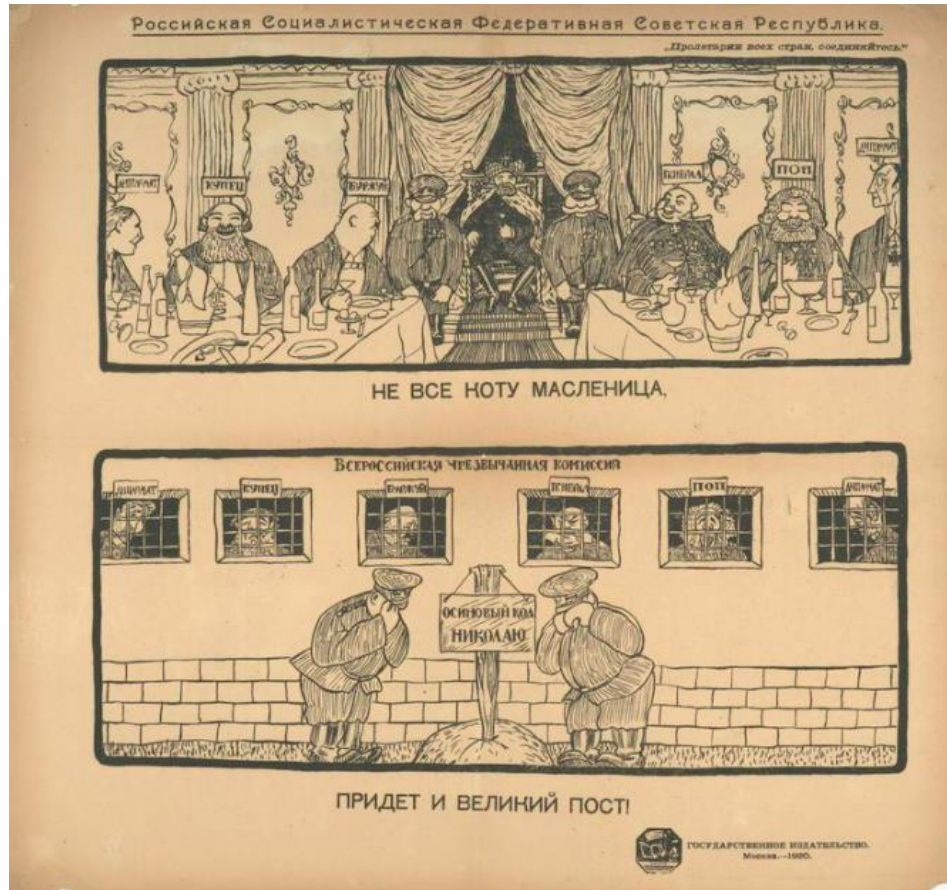


Figure 14: “Every day is not Sunday, Lent will come!” 1917-1921

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