Identities in Soviet History

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Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Studies in the History of Society and Culture (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 406 pp., £40.00 (hb), ISBN 0-520-21604.

Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler, eds., *Self and Story in Russian History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 363 pp., $52.50 (hb), ISBN 0-8014-3791-1.

Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, eds., *A State of Nations – Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 307 pp., $45.00 (hb), ISBN 0-19-514422-8.

The collective

'The subject of identity, both personal and collective, is on the agenda in the West, as well as in post-Soviet Russia . . . The current intellectual climate encourages us to regard every expression of meaning and every assertion of identity as susceptible to reinterpretation' (Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler, *Self and Story in Russian History*, p. 4). And indeed, identity has become the focus of a great deal of theorising in contemporary social science. Whereas formerly the individual was characterised chiefly by his membership of a social class or group whose history could be reconstructed by a social historian, nowadays we prefer to stress the multiplicity, and especially the fluidity, of such groupings. A recent article by Rogers Brubaker acknowledges the importance of this concept of identity, while trying to show that it covers a multiplicity of uses and tends to blur the boundaries between a number of different notions.[1] Brubaker criticises this over-use and proposes its replacement by multiple concepts. It is true enough that social scientists have used the term somewhat indiscriminately: 'attributed identity', 'acknowledged identity', 'group identity', 'individual identity', and so on. On the other hand, David Kertzer and Dominique Arel are more positive: 'The past decade has seen a great outpouring of interest in the nature of collective identities of various kinds.' They see a close

[1] Rogers Brubaker, 'Au delà de l'"identité"', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 139 (September 2001), 66–85. See also Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond Identity', *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000), 1–47.

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relationship between 'state modernity and the impetus to categorize', and hence stress the importance of 'the official state certification of collective identities'.[2] They argue for the usefulness of a concept which may be broad, but does make it possible to group together various ways in which individuals and community relate to each other, or individuals to communities and states, or individuals to their own history. And indeed, this constant interaction between self and state, a relationship created through a multiplicity of categories constructed by administrators, individual perceptions and political authorities, builds up a multiplicity of collective and individual identities.

The usefulness of identity as a conceptual framework emerges from a number of recently published works on Soviet history which focus precisely on questions of identity, whether collective or personal, and on the allocation or ascribing of identity. Since all these works make use of the same concept, they all raise the same general question of how relationships functioned between individuals and various levels of power, and offer a view on the continual reconstruction of collective modes of thought.[3] Soviet voluntarist policies, struggling to cope with a Revolution which had proclaimed its intention of building a new man, cutting itself off from all previous historical constructions, were very often based on precise descriptions of the 'individual' whose attributes had varied in the course of history. Membership of particular social groups was, of course, at the heart of revolutionary action and of measures passed after the Bolshevik seizure of power, but it was national identity that rapidly acquired the heaviest conceptual load. More generally, political action to restrict access to food, housing, free medical care and civil rights produced a multiplicity of signs which would mark and identify each person through both his present and his past situation. Hence the question of identity is central to the historiography of the Soviet Union, and so is the dichotomy which the Soviets created between collective and personal identity.

Oleg Kharkhordin's work provides one of the best overviews of this question. It is entirely devoted to the question of individual versus collective in Russia, and the nature of identity in the Soviet era. He approaches it through a 'genealogy of practices',[4] meaning, more precisely, any practice that contributes to constructing either the self or the collective: rules issued by various institutions; public confessions, show trials and other appurtenances of the purges; and any other collective action featuring repression or propaganda. The result is a dynamic history of the nature and positioning of the two key concepts – self and collective.

Kharkhordin argues that the process did not involve the imposition of an exclusive model of the collective that was hostile to the self; rather, it was a series of

[2] David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, eds., *Census and Identity. The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[3] Sheila Fitzpatrick was the first to conceptualise the ascription of identity in Soviet history: Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'L'usage bolchevique de la "classe". Marxisme et construction de l'identité individuelle', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 85 (1990), 70–80. Earlier, Moshe Lewin had taken a similar line when studying social stratification in rural areas: Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: The New Press, 1994).

[4] Kharkhordin refers explicitly to Michel Foucault in a (rather too lengthy) display of his debt to that authority.

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contradictory processes that changed over time. The first stage was to construct the collective (*kollektiv*); the second was to theorise it. Kharkhordin traces this process through a series of measures to extend social control, policies of repression and educational policy. He draws support for his thesis chiefly from the decisions and working rules of the Central Control Commission (Tsentral'naya Kontrol'naya Komissiya or TsKK), the chief instrument of control used by the Soviet administration and the Party. The TsKK was nominally independent, having been given the status of a People's Commissariat from its inception; it started life as the People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (Narodnyj kommissariya Rabotche-Krest'yankoy inspektsii – NK RKI). In fact it was a favourite tool of the Politburo, and soon of Stalin himself, and was used by both to establish a rigid control over the whole administrative apparatus. Kharkhordin sets out to explain how this kind of control was conceived, and what concept of the collective it reflected.

Academic theories to fit the collective facts did not arise until later; their chief exponent was Anton Makarenko in the 1930s. While running an orphanage he came up with a theory of collective education which fitted well with Stalin's vision of the 'new man'. This put him in the vanguard of the new theory of education and upbringing. This brief mention of Makarenko and his theory can help us to a clearer understanding of how it was possible to create and establish such an approach to, and practice of, the collective in the Soviet Union. Makarenko argued that it was impossible to reduce the collectivity to the sum of its individual parts: it existed in its own right, like a living organism. His favourite expression, quoted by Karkhordin, referred to 'relations of responsible dependency' as the cornerstone of collective autonomy. Kharkhordin sees this as an important element in the construction of socialism, since the Soviet collective was not just a cluster of individuals but was governed by the law of socialist society, a collective whole which was sovereign over the individual.

Kharkhordin also discusses other interpretations of the collective. He interprets certain patterns of behaviour during the Soviet era, which might seem at first sight like the outcome of feminist thinking, as another offshoot of collectivist theory. Thus when he deals with Sofia Smidovitch, a former chairwoman of the Zhenotdel, the section of the Party's Central Committee that was specifically set up to deal with problems of women's liberation, and in 1926 one of the co-chairs of the Central Control Commission: 'Consequently, what Smidovich is trying to cure is not the way men treat women, but the way *kollektivy* cohere and act. What she primarily seeks is the installation of mutual enforcement and collective action' (p. 125). This interpretation is not far removed from metaphor, and at times social theory did move into the territory of literary metaphor, which was developing at the same time. Kharkhordin does not take that line, but if we compare his work with Eric Naiman's study of the representation of sexuality in the early Soviet Union[5] we can see how fuzzy the boundary was between sociopolitical analysis and literary construction.

[5] Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public. The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

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Though based principally on literary texts, Naiman's work belongs in the domain of intellectual and cultural history; but it is also a contribution to the social and political history of the USSR. He sets out to trace the relationship between the generalised forms of emergent Soviet rhetoric and the representation of sexuality. The concept of a sort of collective body led to a new discourse of sexuality, but also to a metaphorical, anthropomorphic interpretation of the changes the Soviet Union went through in its early years. Alternating between the interpretation of the collective in terms of the individual and the interpretation of the individual in terms of sexuality, the Soviets ended by interpreting society as a collective body, so that events could be described metaphorically as sexual acts: some of the Revolution's acts of collective violence were restated as acts of sexual violence, such as rape. This metaphor – for so it is, rather than an interpretation – makes no real distinction between the collective and the individual, since as a 'body' the collective itself acts *as* an individual.

The self

Kharkhordin argues that this development of the *kollektiv* came up against a counter-tendency featuring a complex and varied praxis of the 'self'. One of his hypotheses is that this practice of selfhood was actually encouraged, and even developed, by Stalin (see his sections 'Revealing the self' and 'Working on oneself'). This allowed Stalin to escape from a contradiction: while the collective was at the core of Soviet thinking, the individual 'deed' had to be encouraged and foregrounded. Thus every person had to reveal his true (but frequently disguised) nature before the most obvious traits which were stigmatised or denounced in the Stalinist era had had time to manifest themselves. Social origin, in particular, could easily be disguised once all the marks of social distinction had been swept away:

> The main enemy now, stated Stalin, was a double-dealer with clean Party documents – formal controls would not reveal him or her. This enemy replaced the previous enemies who were easily located by their social origin or by their former participation in factions and opposition groups. The new type of enemy was 'one of us' who defected and became a spy working to destroy the Socialist Motherland.' (p. 158)

Hence, to unmask the enemy was to put the self back on centre stage: the collective had to be reconceived as the sum of its individual personalities. The individual had to be understood and revealed and/or denounced through his deeds:

> this mechanism of revelation by deeds that contributed to the frantic pace of mass terror was not challenged even when the terror abated ... After 1939 it was imposed on the whole populace rather than on the Communists alone, and institutionalized in such familiar and widespread rites as discussions of each individual's *kharaketeristika* by the collective. (p. 174)

This rationalist interpretation of Stalinist thinking as creating a new form of identity seems rather simplistic, as is shown by comparison with studies of other forms of collective identity. A lot of work has now been done on 'national' identity, and this has greatly increased our understanding of its complexities: national identities are formed through negotiation and construction. The use of ethnic categories in censuses has led

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to innumerable discussions, among statisticians, ethnographers and local and national politicians, on the best way to ask questions about ethnicity and the list of acceptable categories, that is, those that can be accepted as denoting nationalities or ethnic groups. This has proved a battleground for numerous contrasting interpretations or modes of recognising the identity of others and of oneself, with particularly intense discussion of how the Soviet population was divided into groups recognised by the political authorities and by individuals themselves.[6]

The main aim of the essays brought together by Suny and Martin is to show how national identities were constructed in the Tsarist, and subsequently the Soviet, era by first imperial and then colonial representations of national territory. But the most interesting feature of this book is the way in which it presents the different ways in which nations were negotiated and constructed in Russia, and subsequently in the USSR: these were in no sense predetermined but were the outcome of a complex process of interaction between civil societies – heterogeneous in themselves – and power at all levels. On the one hand, the 'affirmative action empire', as it has been dubbed by Terry Martin,[7] was presented unambiguously as a construct of nations – a complex and often contradictory process, shifting and discontinuous. The process of negotiation and intervention from the centre, clearly an interactive one, demonstrates that collective identities were based not on a single, clearly defined concept but on interaction among various individual representations.

Those representations led to the creation of 'affirmative action' policies as described by Terry Martin in *The Affirmative Action Empire.* Collective national identities were always changing, being created, in part, by the political process itself, but also based partly on identities already strongly established in the Tsarist period, and renegotiated over the first twenty years of Soviet history.[8] As Daniel Schafer points out in *A State of Nations*, 'Soviet national policy [at the beginning] was a great act of improvisation', and 'decisions were not always carefully planned out in Moscow but were shaped in critical ways by local actors and conditions' ('Local Politics and the Birth of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 1919–1920'). Thus the definition of collective identities was sometimes a genuine interaction between differing modes of thought and differing representations both popular and scientific,

[6] Alain Blum and Martine Mespoulet, *L'anarchie bureaucratique. Statistique et pouvoir sous Staline* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003); Alain Blum and Catherine Gousseff, 'Nationalité, groupes ethniques, peuples: la représentation des nationalités en Russie', in Jean-Louis Rallu, Youssef Courbage and Victor Piché, *Anciennes et nouvelles minorités* (*Old and New Minorities*) (Paris: John Libbey/Ined – Congresses & Colloquia, 17, 1996), 49–72; Francine Hirsch, 'Empire of Nations; Colonial Technologies and the Making of the Soviet Union, 1917–1939', doctoral dissertation, Princeton University (1998); Juliette Cadiot, 'La constitution des catégories nationales dans l'Empire de Russie et dans l'Union des Républiques Socialistes Soviétiques (1897–1939): Statisticiens, ethnographes et administrateurs', doctoral thesis, EHESS, Paris (2001); *eadem*, 'Organiser la diversité: la fixation des catégories nationales dans l'Empire de Russie et en URSS (1897–1939)', *Revue d'Etudes Comparatives Est/Ouest*, 3 (2000), 127–49.

[7] See also his important book *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[8] On this see Juliette Cadiot, 'Les relations entre le centre et les régions en URSS à travers les débats sur les nationalités dans le recensement de 1926', *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, 38, 4 (October–December 1997), 601–16.

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and between pragmatic approaches from the centre and the demands of local organisations.[9]

However complex the transformations, the self was ever-present, being formed in relation to the collective, but was continually being reinterpreted. Jochen Hellbeck, among other historians, has used private diaries to re-examine the positioning and construction of the self in Soviet history: see, for example, his 'Writing the Self in the Time of Terror: Alexander Afinogenov's Diary of 1937' in *Self and Story*, and his chapter 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul. The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931–39' in a collection of essays edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick.[10] Hellbeck also shows how the terror of 1937–8 forced his hero, Alexander Afinogenov, to turn his eyes inward and unburden himself in his diary. The interrelationship between a collective event which affected whole groups, often merely because their members belonged to a stigmatised category, and a reflection on one's own identity reveals how Stalinism made its mark on each individual personality. Hellbeck takes this further: as he says in the conclusion of his chapter on Stepan Podlubnyi, 'an individual living in the Stalinist system could not conceivably formulate a notion of himself independently of the program promulgated by the Bolshevik state.'[11] But he also stresses, based on Afinogenov's diary, how impossible it was for any individual to conceptualise the collective without recourse to self: 'The focal point of Afinogenov's diary in 1937 was himself. Thus, to the extent to which the Stalinist regime increased its demands for the unmasking of Trotskyist enemies and called upon citizens to lay bare their inner stance toward the socialist system in public, Afinogenov by means of his diary proceeded to scrutinize and cleanse his soul.'[12]

However, Sheila Fitzpatrick has elsewhere highlighted the risk of assuming a seamless link between self and collective, and also the difficulty of tracing the history of any particular individual.[13] She argues that individual biography may at any moment break its own thread. Any set of individual circumstances was ephemeral, maybe illusory, and could change drastically at any moment from wealth to poverty, a rapid social rise conferring numerous rights and material advantages or a brusque withdrawal of privilege and stigmatisation in the wake of repression. It is hard to fathom the impact of such abrupt change on concepts of self, on a person's own

[9] The question of representation, and especially the role of racial representation in the process of building national categories, is extensively discussed in *Slavic Review*, 61, 2 (2002), which includes articles by Eric Weitz, ('Racial Politics Without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges', 1–29), Francine Hirsch ('Race Without the Practice of Racial Politics', 30–43), Amir Weiner ('Nothing but Certainty', 44–53), Alaina Lemon ('Without a "Concept"? Race as Discursive Practice', 54–61) and Eric D. Weitz ('On Certainties and Ambivalencies: Reply to My Critics', 62–5).

[10] Jochen Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul. The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931–9', in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism, New Directions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 77–116. The first book devoted to diaries, and using this approach, was Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya and Thomas Lahusen, *Intimacy and Terror. Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

[11] Hellbeck, 'Fashioning the Stalinist Soul', 111.

[12] Hellbeck, 'Writing the Self', 75.

[13] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism, Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

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representation of his career, or on his whole identity at any given moment, as well as his feeling of belonging to a collective. This hovering uncertainty must be one of the most important things to bear in mind when studying either individual or collective identity. It is true that the violence of the 1937–8 purges was quite unexpected, so that before them the feeling of uncertainty was less prevalent than historians, with the benefit of hindsight, have assumed; nonetheless the sense of uncertainty was very strong, even at the beginning of the 1920s.

Continuities?

Another important question, raised in all the works mentioned here, is how far the transition from Tsarist to Soviet Russia either prompted the forging of new identities, or encouraged the continuation of old ones. Many authors have argued for continuity, among them those represented in the contributory volume edited by Engelstein and Sandler, in which chapters on the self in Soviet and imperial Russian history are juxtaposed as part of the same intellectual history. Kharkhordin's remarks on this subject are probably the weakest in his book. He argues for a direct link between manifestations of individual identity in Orthodox and in communist Russia. Thus the Stalinist practice of purges intended to 'unmask the enemy' were a mere adaptation of public confession as practised in the Orthodox Church in order to lay bare the self. This, Kharkhordin points out, is a difference between eastern and western European practice, but constitutes a link between pre- and post-revolutionary Russia. He compares public denunciations in the workplace, which began in the early years of Soviet Russia and were intended to force the guilty into self-revelation, to similar practices in the Orthodox Church: 'this self-revelation as proposed by the Bolsheviks was predicated on an age-old Russian practice. This was the practice of *oblichenie*, a practice of the Orthodox Christian Church for publicizing sins and accusing the sinners' (p. 212). He explicitly relates this interpretation to a Russian philosophical view of communism which appears in the writings of (for example) Berdiaev, who emigrated after the Revolution and advocated a religious interpretation of it in which Bolshevism was the expression of a religious impulse. Unfortunately, while Kharkhordin establishes some parallels between pre- and post-revolutionary practices of confession and public acknowledgement of wrongdoing, he does not really prove a direct link or 'genealogy of praxis'.

The comparison between the decisions and actions of the TsKK and the church courts is certainly a tempting one. Kharkhordin emphasises that public confession was normal in the Orthodox Church – in sharp contrast to the Roman Catholic Church – in order to interpret the confessions during the purges as being rooted in Orthodox practice. This would mean that traditional forms of behaviour, traditional outlooks and traditional practice survived the Revolution and re-emerged in the rules for political control developed after 1917 and codified under Stalin. Attractive as the suggestion may be, however, it is rather simplistic. One has the feeling that Kharkhordin has reached this conclusion simply by selecting the practices that support

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it. Moreover, why should it be *religious* practices and outlooks which underlay post-revolutionary rules? Why should more general social practices and imperial rules, or rules applicable to rural communities, not have acted, and continued to act, independently of religion?

Despite Kharkhordin's repeated invocations of a Foucaultian epistemology which assumes a genealogy of praxis, he himself does not present that genealogy as a process. He compares forms of thought, attitudes and rules, but does not show how such forms could have been passed on. Another, serious drawback to Kharkhordin's argument, it appears to me, lies in the sources on which it is based. By grounding his argument in the decisions, and above all the regulations, of the TsKK, he fails to distinguish among various levels of decision-making, and among the levels at which the theory and practice which directed methods of denunciation, judgement or surveillance were decided. In particular, he has a great deal more to say about the instructions (*instruktsii*) themselves than about how they were implemented. Nor has he delved into the archives in search of possible contradictions between everyday surveillance and the rules governing the *instruktsii*.

Other authors have made similar attempts to establish continuity and construct a genealogy of praxis. Peter Holquist's attempt is bolder, but also more convincing. His chapter in Suny and Martin's book uses ethnic statistics to show that Soviet attempts to assign collective national identities were rooted in militaristic colonialism and the development of colonial statistics in the Russian empire ('To Count, to Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia', pp. 111–44). He shows conclusively that the tsarist administration was already contemplating the deportation of whole populations at a time when statistics were providing encouragement to think in terms of homogeneous national groups. Holquist argues that the idea of the wholesale repression of a national group was already clearly in evidence in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This allows him to give a clear presentation of thinking about national groups and of how that way of thinking was passed on from tsarist to Soviet Russia. A similar approach, which seeks to establish a strong line of continuity between two ways of thinking equally grounded in statistics, has been adopted by several authors investigating the use and administration of statistics and the development of descriptive categories, particularly national ones. Thus Mespoulet lays the foundation of a genealogy of Soviet statistical administration through a history of the *zemstva* statistical system.[14] Mespoulet brings out the continuities, tracing the roots of Soviet statistical representations back to the Russian statisticians of the *zemstva*. A good many recent studies on the history of national categories and how they appear in statistics, particularly censuses, provide encouragement to follow similar lines in search of elements of continuity and transference.[15]

[14] Martine Mespoulet, *Statistique et révolution en Russie. Un compromis impossible (1880–1930)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001).

[15] See n. 6.

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Ascribing identity

The variety of subjects treated in these works, and their differing approaches, indicate the danger of over-simplified discussion about the ascribing of identities. Fitzpatrick's approach does not explicitly describe the exact mechanism used for ascribing identity; instead, it demonstrates the practice of ascription based on the descriptions that were used by the state or by individuals. Osokina's research into differences among consumer models and the advantages enjoyed by certain Soviet groups when it came to distribution of goods supplies examples showing the complexity of this process of ascription, and in particular how multiple the identities were, how liable to change over time:[16] the groups which enjoyed various advantages or restrictions in the acquisition of (most importantly) goods and food were unstable. A similar trend is perceptible in Nathalie Moine's work on the granting of passports, and hence on the categories appertaining to them, the withdrawal of civil rights and the creation of a specific category of 'citizens'.[17]

Jeffrey Brooks's work[18] on the public culture 'created' by the Soviet state offers an example of how the systematic repetition of slogans and arguments in articles, propaganda and so on helped to create a new world picture and so induce people to define themselves in the way in which the state wished them to be defined.[19] Brooks argues, in fact, that the power of words was one tool for exercising power over a society. Eric Naiman follows the same line when he argues, with lengthy reference to Foucault, that a consideration of the importance of naming – using words to construct representations and actions – is one way of approaching the ascribing of identity, although it is in itself only part of that process.

The very fact that there were so many ways to ascribe identity, however, makes it hard to argue that there existed any really powerful and effective process for doing so. It can be seen that each organisation set up its own template for describing and segregating the population, based on its own culture – administrative, politic, scientific or whatever. Thus there was no one process that led to a definition of new

[16] Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread. Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927–1941* (Armonk; New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), translation of *Za fasadom 'Stalinskogo izbiliia'; Raspredelenie i rynok v snabzhenii naseleniia v gody industrializatsii 1927–1941* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999).

[17] Nathalie Moine, 'Passeportisation, statistique des migrations et contrôle de l'identité sociale', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 38, 4 (1997), 587-600; eadem, 'Le système des passeports à l'époque stalinienne. De la purge des grandes villes au morcellement du territoire', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, forthcoming, 2003; see also *eadem*, 'Le pouvoir bolchevique face au petit peuple urbain: clivages sociaux, assignation des identités et acculturation à Moscou dans les années 1930', doctoral dissertation, Université Lumière-Lyon II (2000); eadem, 'Pouvoir bolchevique et classes populaires: la mesure de privation de droits civiques à Moscou au tournant des années 1930', in Nicolas Werth, *Pour une nouvelle historiographie de l'URSS*, Cahiers de l'IHTP 35 (Paris: Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent/CNRS, 1996), 141–60; Gijs Kessler, 'The Passport System and State Control over Population Flows in the Soviet Union, 1932–1940', *Cahiers du monde russe*, 42, 2–4 (2001), 477–504.

[18] Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[19] Here I would draw attention to the seminal study by Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), which explores the notion of a profound Stalinist culture.

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identities. There are consistencies, but tracing all the different threads is a long and sometimes impossible task, since they do not all lead to the same representations. My reading of the substantial literature on the subject has shown how each author strives to detect a single, coherent process for the ascribing of identity; but when we try to put all these studies together, we realise that each is a discussion of a single process closely integrated into the cultural dimension which was the focus of that particular author's interest.

Ascribing identity means merging – sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly – identification with identity, categories of social practice with categories of social analysis (a distinction drawn by Brubaker[20]), and categories of analysis with political action. This is a play on words – on identification and collective recognition. If we accept Fitzpatrick's line of argument, identity is assigned when the categories of action or political praxis are so sharply defined that every individual can recognise himself in them and use them as categories of perception and action. This requires a degree of continuity in political action and modes of political representation, and unanimity of thought among the administrators and the ruling class which produce those categories. But these two prerequisites are precisely what we do not observe. Each administration had its own culture, and, as we have seen, even national categories themselves were developed by various administrations with quite incompatible cultures – statistical, ethnographic, even cultures of repression.[21] The second prerequisite is also limited by the complexity of the identifications proposed during this period, and in particular their instability and the fact that identity did not depend solely on the status of individuals. Indeed, the individual in the 1930s was not defined as much by his exact status (professional, national, etc.) as by a compromise based on his successive statuses – a *biographical* identity – and by all his present and previous relationships with others – a *relational* identity. Moreover, this succession of statuses and relationships was continually redefined and reinterpreted to suit the exact context in which they were expressed, whether this context was temporal (the exact time), institutional (depending on the administration and situation with which the individual was faced) or individual, depending on his reactions as conditioned by his own personal history and that of his relatives or colleagues. The importance of this network of relationships with friends, family and professional colleagues is obvious if we look at the procedures employed in interrogations and trials in the 1930s: its result was to define the individual as much through others as by himself. The 'others' were all those who had formed some kind of relationship with him at some stage in his life. Sabine Dullin's research on diplomats shows how far such networks, bound inextricably with the fate of every individual, are crucial to an understanding of political reactions and administrative practice.[22] Her book is a study of the senior staff of the Commissary (Ministry) of Foreign Affairs, with particular reference to its

[20] Rogers Brubaker, 'Au delà de l'"identité"'.

[21] Blum and Mespoulet, *L'anarchie bureaucratique*.

[22] Sabine Dullin, *Des hommes d'influences. Les ambassadeurs de Staline en Europe, 1930–1939* (Paris: Payot, 2001).

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Commissar in the 1930s, Maxim Litvinov. She convincingly brings out the relevance of the life stories of each of these diplomats and administrators to show how they shaped the Commissary's understanding of the international situation. She also shows how their viewpoint was influenced by their network of personal relationships, and so how far they, and their personal status, were defined by that network.

All this explains my decision to discuss identity in terms of biography and relationships, since this seems to me more central than an opposition between the self and the collective. Identities were not simply the object of representations used, for example, by the machinery of repression; they also helped to define policies, conflicts and actions. This also explains the contradiction apparently inherent in Stalinism: the way it used the collective body as the cornerstone for constructing communist social thinking while stigmatising the individual through trials, self-revealing public confessions, a determination to unmask the enemy – in fact a whole process geared to stripping bare the self *as* self and not as a member of the collective. These final questions are not treated explicitly in any of the works discussed in this essay. They are often implicit, but the dominant representation, foregrounding the collective, has often tended to sideline the multiple dynamics of individual identity.

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