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Lost for Words

Effects of Soviet Language Policies on the Self-Identification of Buryats in Post-Soviet Buryatia

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Abstract

Throughout the Soviet rule Buryats have been subjected to interventionist legislation that affected not only their daily lives but also the internal cohesion of the Buryat group as a collective itself. As a result of these measures many Buryats today claim that they feel a certain degree of disconnection with their own ethnic self-perception. This ethnic estrangement appears to be partially caused by many people’s inability to speak and understand the Buryat language, thus obstructing their connection to ancient traditions, knowledge and history. This work will investigate the extent to which Soviet linguistic policies have contributed to the disconnection of Buryats with their own language and offer possible effects of ethnic language loss on the self-perception of modern day Buryats.

Declaration

I, Maria Mikulcova, declare that this MA thesis titled, 'Lost for Words - Effects of Soviet Language Policies on the Self-Identification of Buryats in Post-Soviet Buryatia' and the work presented in it are entirely my own.

I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly while in candidature for a degree at this University.
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Date: Signature:

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Declaration iv

Table of Contents vi

Glossary viii

Note on Transliteration and Translation x

1. Introduction 2

2. Literature review 4

3. Identity and Self-Identification 8

   3.1 Definition 8

   3.2 Formation and Development 11

   3.3 Collective Identification 12

   3.4 National Identity 13

      3.4.1 Ethnic Identity 14

      3.4.2 Linguistic Identity 15

4. The Buryat People 18

   4.1 First Contact 19

   4.2 Administration 20

   4.3 Economic Organisation 21

   4.4 Language 21

   4.5 Cultural Traditions 22

   4.6 Religion 24

   4.7 Education 25

   4.8 Soviet Rule 27

5. Soviet Language Policies 29

   5.1 Korenizatsiia 29

   5.2 The Stalin Era (1924-1953) 31

   5.3 The Khrushchev Era (1953-1964) 35

   5.4 The Brezhnev Era (1964-1982) 36

   5.5 The Gorbachev Era and Beyond (1982-) 37

6. Language and Self-Identification of Buryats 39
  6.1 Modern Development of the Buryat Language 39
    6.1.1 Governmental censuses 39
    6.1.2 Independent Language Data 41
  6.2 Modern pillars of Buryat identity 44
    6.2.1 Ethnic Vantage Point of Modern Buryats 51
  6.3 (Linguistic) Identity Development Disruption 54
    6.3.1 Buryat and Russian identities of Buryats 57
7. Conclusion 60
References 62

Glossary

Cisbaikal – The area east of the lake Baikal

Datsan – Tibetan Buddhist monastery

Glasnost – Politics of openness during Gorbachev's era

Karym – Population that arose from intermarriages between Russians and Buryats

Korenizatsia – Policy of indigenisation or nativisation. The focus of the policy was on promoting the importance of the state, economic and educational institutions to the native ethnic groups.

Krai – An administrative territory in Russia

Lama – A Tibetan or Mongolian Buddhist monk

Noyon – Buryat aristocracy

Oblast – A province or district. A geographical concept used to determinate political administrative regions in the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation

Okrug – A territorial division for administrative and other purposes

Shulenge – Buryat clan leader's assistant

Surkharbaan – A festival consisting of three ritualised contests, namely archery, wrestling and horse trotting-racing

Tailgan – A shamanist ceremony where animals are sacrificed

Taisha – Buryat tribal leader

Tarasum – Vodka made from distilled milk

Transbaikal – The area east of the lake Baikal

Tsagaalgan – A celebration of a lunar New Year that usually takes place in February

Uligers – Traditional Buryat poems that could reach up to 25,000 lines

Yasak – Tribute usually paid in furs and skins

Yokhor – A traditional Buryat folk dance

Zaisan – Buryat clan leader

Note on Transliteration and Translation

Throughout this dissertation, I have used the Library of Congress system of transliteration from Russian and Buryat into English, with the exception of terms that already have well-known English spellings (e.g., ‘Buryat and Buryatia instead of Buriat and Buriatiia).

I have decided to use several native terms in transliterated form in the text as they are culturally specific and a mere translation would not be sufficient to express their meaning. These terms, and all other Russian and Buryat terms, are written in italics. Furthermore, I decided to render the transliterated terms plural by adding an –s at the end of words in order to facilitate legibility for an English readership, for example, *datsan* (sing.), *datsans* (pl.).

1. Introduction

The Buryats are an indigenous group of Mongolian-descent whose majority lives in the Buryat Republic, an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation. With approximately 460.000 people the Buryats represent the largest indigenous Siberian group and also sizable minorities in neighbouring Mongolia and China (Vserosiiskaia perepis naseleniia 2010). The Buryat language is of Mongolic origin and the official language of the Buryat Republic. However, despite the fact that it has more than 300.000 speakers the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (2010) lists the vitality of the Buryat language as “[d]efinitely endangered”, meaning that “children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home”. This means that unless current trends are reversed and more young people learn the language Buryat is likely to become extinct in the near future as the use of Russian within the Buryat society is taking over both the public and private language spheres of everyday lives. However, it is important to note that the predominant status of Russian among Buryats did not evolve naturally over time but was rather the result of specifically aimed political measures. During the Soviet reign so-called “sovietisation” policies were directed at unifying the nation and altered the Buryat social cohesion significantly. This has led to a situation where today many Buryats report that they feel disconnected from their linguistic and cultural ethnic background, as they inhabit a Russian-speaking world and often live along Russian social parameters, while their Mongol ethnic background visually and socially distances them from native Russians.

The aim of this research is to investigate this ethnic disconnection and establish a link between interventionist Soviet policies and their repercussions in issues of modern-day Buryat self-perception. In order to build a clear foundational structure for my analysis of the nature of the relationship between governmental policies and contemporary sociological issues of self-identification, I will begin this work by outlining different theories and notions of identity and identity formation processes. As my focus within the analysis of Soviet interventionist legislation lies specifically on language policies imposed on the Buryats, a special emphasis within this chapter will be put on the role of language as an identity marker. Once the interplay of the self-determined individual with various collective identity roles has been established, I will provide an account of the social organisation and cultural history of the Buryat people themselves. The purpose of this particular progression is to give the reader an insight into the rich cultural past of the Buryats and establish a socio-cultural reference point for markers of collective Buryat self-identification, before and during their contact with Russian influences. The nature of this contact will be further outlined in the following chapter, which offers an account of the specific Soviet policies that resulted in an undermining of the ethnic language and manifested Russian within the Buryat society. The investigation of the Soviet language policies and their effects on the linguistic identity of Buryats will then form the basis of my analysis of the disconnection of many modern-day Buryats with their ethnic identity. In order to establish this relationship I will present case studies from both primary research collected on contemporary social media forums and secondary fieldwork research focussing on Buryats and the conflicted relationship between their Russian and Buryat identities. In order to accurately capture post-Soviet notions of Buryat self-identification, all the statistical data presented in this work has been elicited after the fall of the Soviet Union and aims to represent largely notions of a generation of Buryats that grew up in post-Soviet Buryatia.

I want to clarify that the data presented in this work should not be seen as representative for all Buryats and cannot express the full spectrum of the complexity of an ethnic collective group. This material is mainly composed for scholars who want to gain an insight into the possible effects of interventionist policies exerted by a hegemonial power on an indigenous ethnic group, its collective history and sense of self-identification.

2. Literature review

The modernization policies during the Soviet era had an impact on all the people in the Soviet Union. As the small nations of Siberia were considered as particularly backward and primitive by the Soviet authorities, they were arguably the most affected by them. Officials wanted Siberians to abandon their traditional ways of life in order to integrate them in the quickly industrialising modern world (Chakars 2014, 4). To achieve this, they made an effort to change the social cohesion of native societies and rewrite the narratives of their pasts, which ultimately led to an alteration of people's identities that has become a part of the lives of Siberians to this day (Chakars 2014, 262). Even though the precise roots of this change in self-perception are admittedly difficult to localise and will diverge in each individual case, based on the cross-referencing between historical events and socio-cultural scientific findings, I assume that certain specific policies during the Soviet reign were specifically targeted and can be appointed as strong influencing factors of alterations to the natives' ethnic identities. While a number of research papers have been previously written that are concerned with markers and aspects of the self-identification of the Buryat population, these works mainly focus on the importance of religion, language and the relationship to the environment in the Buryat identity formation process (e.g. Bahbahani 1998; Hamayon 1998; Sartor 2014). Even though most of these works accurately identify the impact that Soviet policies have had on the native population, there is often a missing link from the shifts in Buryat self-identification to concrete policies that could provide a potential origin of the change. This work is aimed at investigating such a link through the exploration of Soviet legislation targeting ethnic reformation of the Buryat society.

Looking at the history of Soviet efforts of social and ethnic unification it becomes apparent that the realm of language was given a lot of significance as a means to tie the individual republics in the Soviet Union closer to each other. As a large number of subjects in case studies that report on identification struggles of modern-day Buryats list language loss as a crucial factor of their decreasing Buryat self-identification, my focus in this paper will be on Soviet laws aimed at favouring the Russian majority language and shifting the linguistic balance within the Buryat population. Within this discussion it will be important to allocate an appropriate role to language within the concept of ethnic identity composition. While most scholars agree on the fact that language takes up a central position in the composition of an ethnic group's identity, many warn to not attribute it the role as the sole crucial aspect of a collective's identity (e.g. Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov 2004; Schmidt 2008). Although Dagbaev (2010, 136) considers an ethnic language to be the most important ethnic identity marker, adding that none of the ethnic identity markers is an absolute one and that if an ethnic language is lost but other identity markers remain present then the ethnic identity does not disappear. Other authors are more pessimistic about the survival of the Buryat identity once the Buryat language ceases to be an identity marker of Buryats. Agreeing with Boronova**,** Khabudaeva voices concern that if the number of Buryats who communicate mainly in Russian keeps increasing it would pose "a threat of marginalisation to the Buryat society, as the loss of the native language entails forgetting of national traditions, customs [and] the historical memory of the nation"[1] (Boronova quoted in Khabudaeva 2013, 101). Similarly, Osinkii believes that "language keeps and retransmits spiritual values, expresses the mentality and deepens a sense of belonging of speakers to an ethnic group" (Osinkii in Khabudaeva 2013, 100). According to Alpatov "a mother tongue is linked with instrumental and sentimental functions of a language" (Alpatov quoted in Khabudaeva 2013, 100) where the instrumental function refers to the theory that language is used as means of communication while the sentimental function is linked with ethnic feelings of a nation (Khabudaeva 2013, 100). Within the debate of the importance of language in ethnic identification, Schmidt (2008, 1) makes a very compelling case in a briefing paper of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI), stating that many discussions about ethnic identities nowadays are strongly connected to a group's language, which can endanger ethnic groups that no longer speak their indigenous language of being marginalised. Therefore, she calls for the protection of such groups on the basis of other identity markers.

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[1] All quotations of Khabudaeva are my own translations unless stated otherwise.

In fact, when debating about the significance of the Buryat language in general, many authors agree that the Buryat language has lost its function as a major ethnic identity marker for the Buryats (e.g. Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov 2004; 97, Mikhailov quoted in Skrynnikova 2003, 128; Yelaeva quoted in Skrynnikova 2003, 128). Chakars connects this to Soviet intervention, stating that while at the beginning of the Soviet rule a language was considered as "a crucial ingredient of nationhood" (2014, 264) it eventually became a more symbolic marker rather than a language of everyday communication. Ochirov and Tsybikova argue that "the Buryat language is no longer an ethnic identity marker, and the ethnic identity of Buryats is mainly shaped through customs traditions and national holidays"[2] (2012, 141). Similarly, ethno-psychologist Yelaeva, who conducted a number of sociological interviews, claims that language is not the most important identification marker for Buryats. Rather, she states that Buryats conceive their identity according to their "culture, nature and soil" (Yelaeva quoted in Skrynnikova 2003, 128). In accordance with this, Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov state that "an ethnic group in general and every single person can maintain their ethnic identity when the original cultural base and conception of unity with their ancestors who spoke the same language is preserved" (2004, 97). This view is supported by Buryat ethnographer Mikhailov (in Skrynnikova 2003, 128), who considers "ethnic self-consciousness" as the most important source for Buryats' ethnic identity and supports this claim by referring to Buryats who live outside the Buryat Republic, do not speak the Buryat language and still consider themselves as Buryats. Even more so, Traast (2006, 61), who conducted research on self-identification of Buryats in early 2000s, states that several of her informants consider language as an identification marker regardless of their ability to speak the language. Ortiz-Echevarria (2010, 76), who did fieldwork in Buryatia in the post-Soviet era, also noted that there is a significant gap in perception of the Buryat language as an identity marker between urban and rural Buryats. While in the rural areas it is considered as the most important marker of the Buryat ethnic identity, in urban areas it was considered significantly less important.

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[2] The translation is my own.

When debating about the significance of an ethnic language, it will be crucial to also investigate modes of language acquisition. Nowadays, the Buryat language is often not passed on by children's' parents but is instead taught at school as a second language (Ochirov and Tsybikova 2012, 139). As a result, Buryat children learn Russian as their first language and are only afterwards educated in their ethnic language through Russian. Here, Ochirov and Tsybikova (2012, 139) argue that learning about Buryat culture in the Russian language hardly poses any obstacle when enculturating children. They claim that in the process of learning the Buryat language Buryat children will eventually adjust to the language and the culture of their ethnic group after an initial "culture shock". They use the 'U-Curve Hypothesis' to explain the sequence of adjustment of Buryat children to the Buryat language and culture, from excitement, through a culture shock and frustration to a stage of adjustment and assimilation. However, utilising Skutnabb-Kangas' (1999, 42) theory of language goals I will illustrate the long Russian tradition of applying 'weak models' or 'nonmodels' to Buryat language teaching, leaving the children with insufficient language proficiency of their own ethnic language, thus causing complications in self-identification with their linguistic ethnic identity.

3. Identity and Self-Identification

The exploration of idiosyncrasies within the self-identification of Buryat people poses the need to first establish a theoretical understanding of the concept of identity formation and development, both on a personal and collective level. Efforts to understand one's identity, the differences and similarities between the self and others, certainly takes up a central position within humanist scientific endeavours. Especially within modern societies where people are no longer regularly confronted with existential fears, such as the need for water, food or safety, the effort of making sense of the *self* is of great importance to many. However, it is crucial to understand that the field of identity studies touches on a multitude of complex psychological, philosophical and political topics. In this chapter I want to briefly outline a theoretical foundation of how identity can be defined, the distinctions between different forms of identity and proposed stages of identity development. As my analysis puts a focus on the role of imposed language policies and their potential effects on people's identity development, I will also outline the potential of language as a vessel that carries identity markers.

3.1 Definition

The word "identity" comes from the Latin word "identitas" that is derived from a word "idem" meaning 'the same'. Thus the term "identitas" is being used to express the notion of oneness and sameness (Online Etymology Dictionary 2017). The Oxford Dictionaries (2017a) define the term 'identity' as "[t]he fact of being who or what a person or thing is" and "[t]he characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is". The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus (2017a) defines 'identity' as "who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others".

What these different contemporary dictionary definitions show is that the concept of *identity* in its core is defining the characteristic nature of someone, and the interplay of both sameness and otherness between the subject and its environment. In their theory of Simplified Theory of Identity Formation (SIFT) Coté and Levine (2016, 5) propose "three enduring principles of human identity that transcend time and place", namely *integration*, *differentiation* and *continuity*.

The first principle of human identity, *integration,* plays a vital part in establishing any form of human cooperation. The ability of humans to come together and form groups provides safety and stability and enabled them to survive throughout their evolutionary history (Coté and Levine 2016, 5). Also, next to the physical advantage for survival that the membership with a group brings, humans also require psychological social inclusion, meaning that they need to feel connected to others in their lives. The principle of *integration* thus exemplifies that the concept of *identity* cannot exist in a vacuum and is only created within a certain relationality.

In stark contrast to *integration* stands *differentiation*, the SIFT's second principle of human identity. As groups are formed and humans cooperate, a conflict is created between the cohesive powers of the group and the individuality of its members. While the relationship with others also define the individual, its physiological and psychological experiences and needs still are unique and private (Coté and Levine 2016, 7). Is it important to note that the notion of the individual, coherent and responsible self is a relatively modern Western perspective, whose roots can be found in the 17th century theory of individualism by Rene Descartes (Woodward 2002, 6-7). Until people started placing individual human experience at the epicentre of their self-identification the social emphasis on individuals in the Western world was not very common, with people being mostly categorised through their kinship, class affiliation or trade collectives (Woodward 2002, 6). Brewer (in Cote and Levine 2016, 7-8) proposes an *optimal distinctiveness theory* to better understand the equilibrium between *integration* and *differentiation*. She bases this theory on the assumption that humans innately want to have functional group relationships and that increased group size results in increased personal satisfaction. Once the sense of inclusion becomes too strong, however, a group member will start focussing on their differentiation from the collective in order to regulate the process of assimilation. Once the need for differentiation has been fulfilled again, the resulting decreased inclusion will trigger a counter-reaction and therefore cause another process of assimilation (Brewer in Cote and Levine 2016, 7-8). Brewer's *optimal distinctiveness theory* thus illustrates how members in a group are constantly striving for an optimal balance between being a part while at the same time remaining an independent entity of the collective, contributing to it with both their individual skill sets and collective loyalty.

Lastly, the principle of *continuity* expresses the need to foster ones role and merits within a group through prolonged experience over time. A sense of security and continuity within a subject's role in a collective is achieved through memories from the past that give meaning to the present and provide purpose to the future. Traditionally, this sense of continuity has been created through persistent memberships with a group, in which individuals each fulfil their roles, pass on traditions and values and thus create a stable and predictable foundation (Coté and Levine 2016, 8).

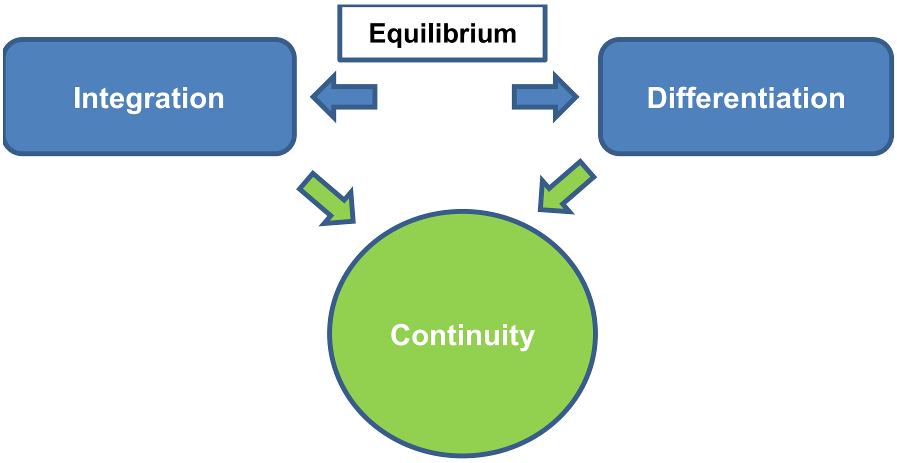

Figure 1. (Coté and Levine 2016, 9)

Above diagram illustrates how a well-functioning equilibrium between the need for integration and differentiation can foster the feeling of continuity in the individual members of a group. However, it is important to note that the nature and balance of the equilibrium can vary significantly between different collectives (Coté and Levine 2016, 8). While some cultural groups live their lives along very inclusive social parameters, e.g. based on sharing economies, traditional scheduled social gatherings and close personal contact to one another, others emphasize differentiation and the values of the individual, resulting in increased personal spaces, stricter forms of personal ownership and relative social seclusion from the collective. Regardless of the nature of the group, the *Simplified Theory of Identity Formation* captures an individual’s need to be a part of a group, developing their personal role in it, thereby creating affirmative memories and the prospect of a present and future purpose.

3.2 Formation and Development

It is important to note that a person’s identity is in no way a static element or predisposition, but exposed to constant progression and change. Throughout the various stages of their lives people continuously have to rediscover and redefine the nature of integration and differentiation within a collective. Erik Erikson (Erikson in McLeod 2017) put forward a theory that captures eight stages of psychosocial development, which a person has to go through progressively from early childhood to late adulthood. In each of these stages an individual has to resolve a conflict between two oppositional forces in order to overcome a challenge and acquire a certain virtue or skill. The eight stages are:

1. 0-1.5 years: trust vs. mistrust
   virtue: hope
2. 1.5-3 years: autonomy vs. shame and doubt
   virtue: will
3. 3-5 years: initiative vs. guilt
   virtue: purpose
4. 5-12 years: industry (productivity) vs. inferiority
   virtue: competence
5. 12-18 years: identity vs. role confusion
   virtue: fidelity
6. 18-40 years: intimacy vs. isolation
   virtue: love
7. 40-65 years: generativity vs. stagnation
   virtue: care
8. 65-death: ego integrity vs. despair
   virtue: wisdom (Erikson in McLeod 2017)

Whereas the first four stages of Erikson's model are mostly concerned with an individual making sense of themselves, their abilities, limitations and exploration of their environment, the fifth stage is of special importance to my research, as it is the phase where a person starts asking themselves who they are and what their role in the world could be. It is in these years of adolescence that the formation of someone's personal identity becomes a central question and teenagers will try out a multitude of different roles and behaviours in order to arrive at an identity within their social group that they feel satisfied and accepted in. In this stage of identification development choices are made about career paths and the affiliation to a social, religious, political or ethnic group. The required time for an individual to explore their possible paths in life will ideally be provided in the form of a "moratorium" phase. In this process *role confusion* can occur due to diverging expectations between oneself and society and the struggle to find a place within a collective. Therefore, this fifth stage in psychosocial development can be seen as a decisive moment in life, in which important future decisions have to be made, based on values and experiences of the past. Should someone successfully manage both the integration and differentiation within a collective, the reward of this stage will be a sense of fidelity - the ability to accept and commit to others and forge loyal relationships with them, in spite of possible ideological differences (Erikson in McLeod 2017). As the conflict between identity and role confusions throughout the years of adolescence forms the foundation for how people will perceive themselves and their social surroundings throughout their life, it plays a vital role in my analysis of the pillars of self-identification of modern-day Buryats and its interplay with foreign interventionist forces.

3.3 Collective Identification

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, an important aspect of identity formation is that the process does not only take place on a personal level but also happens through the affiliation and distinction from collectives. Once members of a group form an internal cohesion that connects them to each other while distinguishing them from other groups, the group itself develops its collective group identity, with each of its members carrying the collective identity together with their personal identity. Once collective identities have been formed, the groups and their members are generally clustered and categorised according to their distinguishing attributes, be it political borders, genders, physical characteristics, language, beliefs or traditions. For the next part of this paper I want to look at national, ethnic and linguistic identity, three prominent forms of collective identification which together are home to most people in the world and can both offer a source of great internal cohesion and also strong differentiation from external groups. It is the understanding of the tension field between these collective identities that will help to provide insight into the conflicted relationship between the collective identities of Buryats and group members of the Russian Federation.

3.4 National Identity

Strictly speaking, in today's world every person is born with a national identity. This is simply because most parts of the world have been organised and categorised into different nations, states or territories. The basic concept of national identity is that people born in a certain political territory are involuntarily grouped by the locality of their birthplace. As such, national identity has to be viewed as a socially constructed categorisation, rather than an innate group affiliation (Anderson 1991, 133). The internal cohesion of a nation is established and maintained through vehicles such as shared political governance, language, symbols or traditions. These cultural values have usually been established over many generations and fostered by shared memories of the past and historical events (such as wars, natural disasters or collective achievement). It is up to each individual member of a nation to decide to what extent they become a part of the national identity and incorporate it in their personal sphere or whether not to associate with it and reject it (Kelman 1997, 171-73). As most nations naturally strive for continued existence, stability or expansion, the internal cohesion and unity of a nation can be seen as a crucial factor to the governing institutions and people. Therefore, it is important for the upholding of a nation that its citizens can associate with it and feel connected to it. In order to increase the internal cohesion of a nation, lawmakers must execute measures to sustain the stability and unity among their people. However, these attempts of homogenisation are often challenged by the existence of sub-groups within a nation, which follow different agendas or value systems. Through territorial expansion over centuries, many nations are today home to ethnic groups that have been integrated into a national superstructure. Ideological differences and power struggles between a nation and its ethnic groups can lead to so-called "ethno-national conflicts" (Woods, Schertzer and Kaufmann 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand that personal and collective national identities within a state can be contested by ethnic identities of the members of ethnic sub-groups.

3.4.1 Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity describes the collective identity of an ethnic group and its individual members' affiliation with it. The underlying concept of *ethnicity* denotes a group which is formed on the basis of similarities with regards to (not strictly or exclusively) common descent, common language, similar spiritual and material cultural practices, geographic location and territorial continuity (Wicherkiewicz 2014). While these defining parameters are very similar to the aforementioned definition of a *nation* and many authors use the two terms almost identical, what can be used to differentiate the two is that an ethnic group is not limited to an existing political organisational structure. Fishman (in Schmidt 2008, 5) categorises *ethnicity* into three elements, namely:

- paternity – the perception of intergenerational continuity
- patrimony – linguistic and cultural substance of what is passed on and gives material expression to this continuity
- phenomenology – the self-perceived character of ethnicity.

This means that the membership in an ethnic group is partly self-assigned, such as through the belief in common descent, participation in cultural symbolism or phenomenology, and also partly non-elective through e.g. descent, a mother tongue or cultural norms and idiosyncrasies internalised during childhood (Grin in Schmidt 2008, 5). Schmidt here suggests an alternative, "more practical/operational concept of (self-) assignation" (Schmidt 2008, 5) where a distinction is made between aspects of how an ethnic group views itself and how outsiders see it.

External	Internal
▪ speaking a language ▪ practicing traditions ▪ participating in ethnic networks, institutions, associations, functions sponsored by ethnic organisations	cognitive (subjective knowledge of group values) ▪ heritage and history ▪ moral (obligation and commitment to group) ▪ affective (attachment to particular group)

Figure 2. (Schmidt 2008, 6)

This model illustrates that there is a significant difference in how outsiders and insiders portray ethnicity. While externals focus on more graspable and apparent attributes of ethnic groups, such as language or traditional rituals, internals put a higher value on more abstract concepts of identification (Schmidt 2008, 5).

Among these different aspects of collective affiliation, an individual of an ethnic group has to find a balanced equilibrium between interaction and differentiation in order to arrive at a state of continuity with their ethnic identity. Similar to *national identity,* a member of an ethnic group can also choose not to participate in the self-assigned practise of their ethnic identity and not integrate the elective parts of it into their personal identity.

3.4.2 Linguistic Identity

Lastly in this chapter I want to take a closer look at the role of language within the formation and development of identity. Next to physical attributes, language is probably the most distinguishable and most crucial identity marker for people to form collectives and distinguish one group from another. A shared language within a group has to be seen as an elementary attribute, as it serves as a carrier to pass on shared group values, practices and traditions. Practically from birth on a child learns to conceptualise the world around it in its mother tongue, it uses speech to interact with its environment and forms group relationships through language. As Fishman states, “a traditionally associated language is more than just a tool of communication for its culture [...] [it] is often viewed as a very specific gift, a marker of identity and a specific responsibility vis-à-vis future generations” (2001, 5). However, despite this obvious crucial role of language within self-identification, it is important to note that it can be dangerous to put language too much in the centre of attention, as it only represents one cultural marker of identity and can otherwise be used as a means to marginalise non-speakers of a group language. According to Lamy (in Batibo 2015, 1) and Pool (in Batibo 2015, 1), linguistic identity is but one of four distinctive features of ethnic identity, next to cultural (including socio-economic) identity, autonymic identity and ethnonymic identity. It is interesting that identity loss of an ethnic group through pressure or attraction from a major or dominant ethnic group often appears to follow a certain progression. Batibo (2015, 1) proposes that ethnic identity loss starts with the loss of linguistic identity, followed by cultural identity, autonymic identity (personal affiliation) and finally a group's entire ethnonymic identity. This theory thus promotes the notion that while language is only one part of a collective identity, a decrease in linguistic abilities within an ethnic group can trigger the following stages of the loss of the group's identity. Naturally traditions, cultural values and a sense of shared heritage and history can still be carried out without the use of an ethnic language, but it appears only logical to me that the process of passing on of specific ethnic knowledge will be impeded or altered through the use of an external language, which itself is rooted in a distinct ethnic or national group and thus carries a different set of values.

The acquisition of a fully-formed linguistic identity within a group is largely connected to the language education and linguistic environment of a child. According to Skutnabb-Kangas, a specialist in 'linguistic human rights', "a good educational program accomplishes the following goals from a language(s) and identity point of view" (1999, 42):

- high levels of multilingualism
- a fair chance of achieving academically at school
- strong, positive multilingual and multicultural identity and positive attitudes toward self and others

Whereas this process is usually carried out along regulated parameters in established and "strong" societies, ethnic minority children are often confronted with problems in language education caused by the influence of a dominant majority language. This is reflected in the type of language education within ethnic minority groups, where Skutnabb-Kangas (1999, 42) distinguishes between 'strong models', 'weak models' and so-called ‘nonmodels’. In ‘nonmodels’ there is a strong dominance of the majority language and children will not reach any of the three goals mentioned above. ‘Weak models’ give students slim, yet slightly better chances of school achievement, while only ‘strong models’ of language education can provide a good enough foundation to potentially fulfil all three goals of multicultural language education and identity formation (Skutnabb-Kangas 1999, 42-43). The application of these models in the case of the Buryat people and their relationship of language contact with external Russian forces will be discussed in chapter six. This brief outline illustrates that interference of an external language through imposed policies or social agendas in the process of ethnic language acquisition can cause severe disruptions in the formation of a child’s linguistic identity, which, as mentioned above, can be seen as one of the main pillars of ethnic identity.

4. The Buryat People

The Buryats are an indigenous group of people that live around the lake Baikal in south-east Siberia, northern Mongolia and in China. They are of Mongolian descent and carry Mongol physical and cultural features (Humphrey 1998, 23). I need to specify that in this work I will focus solely on the Russian Buryats, as they form the majority of the group and I am concerned with the contact between the indigenous population and the national Russian suprastructure. The Buryat people are at present the largest Siberian indigenous group. According to the most recent census from 2010, 461,389 Buryat nationals were living in the Russian Federation (Vserosiiskaia perepis naselenia 2010). Within Russia, a majority of these Buryats resided in the Republic of Buryatia, numbering 286,839 people, which is about 30% of the Republic's population (Vserosiiskaia perepis naselenia 2010). Significant numbers of Buryats reside also in Irkutsk Oblast and Ust-Orda Buryat Okrug (77,667 persons) and in Zabaikalskii Krai (73,941 persons) (Vserosiiskaia perepis naselenia 2010). The Buryats have been located around Lake Baikal in south-east Siberia and north of Mongolia since medieval times (Humphrey 1990, 290). In the 17th century they nomadised not only on both sides of Baikal but they also on Yenisei, Angara, Lena, Selenga and Argun rivers and in the Tunka mountains (Hundley 1984, 6). The ancestors of Buryats moved to the grasslands and meadow-steppe surrounding the lake Baikal from the area of the present-day Mongolia between fifth and thirteenth century, however, new Mongol tribes kept migrating from Mongolia to this area until 18th century (Hundley 1984, 5-6). The incoming Mongol tribes lived interspersed among with the local Turkic and Tungus tribes who they also intermarried with. The exposure to other ways of life and language groups together with being cut off from the main Mongol groups resulted in development of dialects that differed from the ones spoken in Mongolia and also in changes in legal practices and cultural traditions. This ultimately led to the creation of a distinct group of people. This group formation was further affirmed in the early 18th century when a border between Siberia and Mongolia was established, thus bringing the groups further apart from each other (Hundley 1984, 23).

4.1 First Contact

The Russians had heard about Buryats at the beginning of the 17th century from other Siberian nations. However, it took them a few more decades to make first contact with them due to the challenging terrain in which they resided. At that time the Buryats had large numbers compared to other Siberian groups, they were exerting domination over other indigenous nations in the area and they were skilled in military operations and the organization of resistance against Russian invaders. In the first half of the 17th century this resulted in many conflicts and raids in which many Buryats, Russians and members of other surrounding Siberian nationalities died. However, eventually the Russian forces were able to subdue the Buryats, as they were equipped with more effective arms and driven to extract *yasak* (tribute) from the native Siberian tribes in the form of furs and skins (Forsyth 1992, 89-92.

Over time the pre-existing social and cultural differences between the Buryats living on the west (Cisbaikal) and east (Transbaikal) sides of the Baikal were deepened by the Russian conquest of Siberia. The incoming European settlers penetrated the western shore of the lake Baikal faster and inhabited the area in larger numbers than in Transbaikal. The proximity of the incomers to the native population had a big impact on the traditional culture, religion and economy of the western Buryats (Chakars 2014, 27; Vyatkina 1964, 210). Similarly, the eastern Buryats who were living close to Mongolians and other Asian populations were affected by Lamaism and aspects of the Asian way of life (Chakars 2014, 27). Before the Russian conquest the Buryats in Transbaikal pursued the traditional Mongol way of life as cattle and horse herders that spent their lives migrating between pastures. Groups of immediate families and the families of their close relatives nomadised together, using felt-covered tents as their living structures (Hundley 1984, 6; Forsyth 1992, 84). This way of life of the western Buryats became increasingly sedentary when they started living in wooden octagonal huts and they learnt how to cultivate hay grass and some crops (Forsyth 1992, 84-85). Eventually, these dwellings were replaced by Russian-style wooden houses, Buryats started using Russian furniture and utensils and the traditional Buryat clothing was replaced by Russian counterparts. In addition to cultural changes, the Buryat language was also affected by the arrival of the Russian peasants, as some Buryats who came into contact with the incomers learned to speak the Russian language and incorporated many Russian words into Buryat. The contact between Buryats and Russians sometimes lead to marital bonds between people of the two nations. The population that arose from intermarriages was called *karym* (Vyatkina 1964, 210).

4.2 Administration

Traditionally, Buryats were divided into groups that were led by *taishas*. The groups consisted of clans and their leaders were *zaisans* (a hereditary function). Each *zaisan* had an assistant, the *shulenge*, who was subordinate to a tribal leader called *taisha.* The Buryat aristocratic class that consisted of *taishas, zaisans, shulenges*, their families and other important Buryat families was called *noyon* (Chakars 2014, 28; Montgomery 1994, 68). The *noyon* owned larger herds than the ordinary Buryats and gained wealth by receiving tribute from other Siberian tribes and from the commoners (Chakars 2014, 28). The *noyon* also engaged in trade with Mongolia and China (Chakars 2014, 28). However, because the ordinary Buryats and the nobility were sharing grazing lands, their economic activity was very similar and the *noyons* supported the poorer Buryats there were no major class differences within the Buryat society, despite Soviet writers later on claiming otherwise (Montgomery 1994, 68). The traditional Buryat governance was partially altered by the Speranskii reforms in 1822, when Speranskii introduced steppe dumas, an administrative body that was partly based on the traditional Buryat administration which gave Buryats a significant autonomy (Chakars 2014, 35; Hundley 1984, 39; Montgomery 1994, 102; Slezkine 1994, 86; Vyatkina 1964, 208). The steppe dumas representatives were elected among Buryats, they had to be approved by Russian authorities and Buryats were able to use their native language in these institutions (Slezkine 1994, 86; Montgomery 1994, 150). Speranskii wanted the natives to preserve as much traditional culture as possible, therefore the nomads were supposed to use the traditional laws and customs when ministering justice. The natives would be facing Russian courts only if they were involved in major crimes, such as rape, premeditated murder and rebellion. Less serious crimes were tried within tribal jurisdiction (Chakars 2014, 35-36; Hundley 1984, 39; Slezkine 1994, 86). Eventually, administrative Russification policies that had already been implemented in other parts of the Russian empire reached the Buryats in April 1901 (Montgomery 1994, 151). This year the Buryat self-governance ended, when a decree was issued that replaced the native administration with the Russian one and the Russian language became mandatory in recordkeeping and official business (Montgomery 1994, 151).

4.3 Economic Organisation

The Russian presence in the region also strongly influenced the traditional Buryat economy, as the Buryats that lived on the west side of the lake Baikal and were more exposed to the Russian influence became predominantly engaged in agriculture (Vyatkina 1964, 211-12). The eastern Buryats were mainly pastoralists, with some being engaged in semi-settled pastoral agricultural economy. They reared cattle, horses, sheep, and some Buryats even reared camels. It is important to note that over the time the Buryat migration lessened. While at the beginning of the 18th century the eastern Buryats moved over huge areas throughout the year, in the first half of the 19th century a cyclic form of migration became more common. This meant that the eastern Buryats stayed within a certain territory during different seasons of the year. In comparison, the western Buryats had developed the cyclic form of migration significantly earlier than their eastern counterparts. By the end of the 19th century Buryats migrated only twice a year between their summer and winter camps (Vyatkina 1964, 210). In addition, hunting played a big role in the economical organisation of both groups and at times Buryats organised hunts where several clans were involved. Before the close contact with Russians, Buryats were also active fishermen, they knew how to work with iron and silver and were able to create weapons, kitchen utensils, harnesses and ornaments (Forsyth 1992, 85; Hundley 1984, 6; Vyatkina 1964, 211-12).

4.4 Language

The Buryat language belongs to the Mongolic language group. While some researchers (e.g. Montgomery 1994, 52) classify it as a member of the Altaic language family, together with Turkish, Tungusic and possibly even Japanese and Korean, the existence of this group is debated among academics as the common linguistic features among its members might also be attributed to their close historical contact, rather than shared ancestry. The Buryat language is divided to many dialects: Khor, Selenga, Tsongol, Kabano-Barguzinti, Tunka, Oka, Lower Uda, Unga, Alar, Bokhan, Ekhirit and Bulgat (Vyatkina 1964, 203). The dialects vary in mutual intelligibility as there are distinctions in vocabulary and to some extent in the phonetics structure; the grammatical structure does not vary significantly. It is not known how many speakers use each dialect due to a lack of Buryat dialect atlas (Montgomery 1994, 61; Vyatkina 1963, 203). According to Montgomery, Altaic languages are characterized by

> "agglutination, that is, the adding of auxilliary morphemes in a fixed order and form to the stem of a noun, verb, or adverb; vowel harmony (the existence of a set of phonetic rules stipulating that some vowels, but not others, can follow a given vowel within any word); the presence of a fairly rigid word order, with the finite verb falling at the end of the sentence and the modifier preceding the modified; and the use of postpositions rather than prepositions" (1994, 53).

Over time the Buryat language incorporated words of Siberian Turkic and Tungusic languages as Buryats lived among their speakers. Furthermore, the Buryat language also adopted words from the Tibetan language, most of them being related to rituals, concepts and miscellaneous objects used in Tibetan Buddhism (or Lamaism) that was brought to eastern Buryats by nomads from Tibet. Also, the Buryat language features many borrowed words from Russian, such as various names of items used in daily lives (new types of crops, household items e.g. *xapuusta* (cabbage) and also other words in connection with political and administrative terms, e.g. *politika* (politics), *bol'niiso* (hospital). Some of the Russian loan words were adapted to correspond with the vowel harmony of Buryat; however, many of the Russian terms were not altered according to the phonetic rules and vowel harmony of the Buryat language (Montgomery 1994, 55-59).

4.5 Cultural Traditions

It is important to note that rituals and festivals are an important pillar of the Buryat's cultural sphere, with some of them having been preserved to this day. *Tsagaalgan* is a multi-day celebration of the lunar New Year that usually takes place in February. It is related to the end of the winter season, when young animals are being born and milk becomes available again. For the Buddhist Buryats it is a celebration of the victory of the ‘true belief’ against ‘heretical teachings’ and there are services carried out for fifteen days in the New Year. Another part of the festival is a celebration of kinship, where young Buryats honour their parents and other relatives (strictly starting from the oldest ones) by bringing them ‘white foods’ (milk products) (Humphrey 1998, 379-80). Another festival, *Surkharbaan* is a celebration that each Buryat group celebrated differently, as in Transbaikal it was linked with Lamaism, whereas in Cisbaikal it was just a local celebration. It is usually held in summer and consisted of three ritualised contests: archery, wrestling and horse trotting-racing. In the western parts *surkharbaan* was historically a small event but in the Buddhist areas it marked a larger affair, often partially sponsored by the Buddhist church. In the past, all Buryat men were allowed to be present at the festival, together with only unmarried women and young girls (Humphrey 1998, 381-82; Vyatkina 1964, 228-29). Another important festival for Buryats is a tradition called *tailgan*, a shamanist ceremony which starts with prayers and the sacrificing of animals to local deities and ends in a feast and sports activities, like jumping, wrestling and archery. Furthermore, *Yokhor*, a traditional Buryat folk dance, was a part of nearly every Buryat festivity in the past and has been preserved in a modified form until now. Next to its primary recreational function, this dance also bears religious importance as it is considered a symbolic gift or offering to gods and spirits (Krist 2009, 137; Vyatkina 1964, 229).

As the writing ability of Buryats before the October revolution was very limited, Buryat literature did not have a chance to develop. However, oral folklore was spread extensively. A significant part of the oral folklore consisted of epics that were transmitted throughout generations, such as *Geser*, the most famous Buryat epic (Vyatkina 1964, 229). Another important part of the oral tradition were *uligers*, poems that could reach up to 25,000 lines in length and usually depicted the struggle of heroes against hostile forces (Vyatkina 1964, 229).

4.6 Religion

The traditional religion of the Buryats on both sides of lake Baikal was Tengrism, a religion from Central Asia that worships ancestors and spirits of nature (mountains, rocks, fire, forests and sky; the sky god Tengri was of particular importance) and is often labelled as shamanistic (Chakars 2014, 29; Vyatkina 1964, 226-27). It is important to note that Buryat shamanism has developed an atypical feature, polytheism, meaning that there was a developed hierarchy between spirits and deities (Yelaeva 2015, 138). Disciples of this religion believe that all geographical features have their own spirits, souls or masters and depending on how humans behave around them, they would react accordingly (Vyatkina 1964, 227). Male and female shamans would then act as intermediaries between this world and the worlds of spirits, ancestors and gods (Chakars 2014, 29). On the eastern side of the Baikal, shamanist practices over time became slowly replaced by, mixed with and incorporated in Tibetan Buddhism (or Lamaism), that was brought there by nomadic Mongols and Tibetans (Forsyth 1992, 171; Sartor 2014, 27). This process started in the 1600s and by the middle of the 17th century there were 11 *datsans* (Buryat Lamaist temples) with 150 lamas (Buddhist priests) (Montgomery 1994, 79-80).

In 1741, Russian empress Elizabeth issued a decree that officially recognised the Buddhist religion, lifted taxes from Buddhist clergy, officially permitted Buddhist sermons and gave the head of the Tsongol *Datsan* the title of the highest ranking lama (Bahbahani 1998, 27; Chakars 2014, 29; Vyatkina 1964, 227). This changed in 1764 when the residence of the supreme lama was changed to Gusinoozerskii *Datsan* (Vyatkina 1964, 227). The creation of a Buddhist centre in Russia was not a sign of goodwill or a religious tolerance but had political reasons. The aim of these measures was to detach the Buryat Buddhists from foreign influence, as the two other centres of Lamaism located in Tibet and Mongolia were under Chinese suzerainty (Montgomery 1994, 81; Vyatkina 1964, 227). Buddhism among Buryats spread over time and by the middle of the 19th century there were 34 *datsans*, around 5,000 lamas and 125,000 Buddhist believers (Montgomery 1994, 83; Vyatkina 1964, 227-28). This enormous expansion of Buddhism led to legislation by Nicholas I that prohibited construction of further *datsans* and limited the number of lamas to 285. The Buryats, however, did not respect the new law and by the time the October

Revolution took a place, the number of monasteries had grown to 36 and there were 15,000 monks (Chakars 2014, 31; Montgomery 1994, 83-84).

While in the 17th and 18th century the tsarist government had dissuaded missionaries from converting more Buryats to the Orthodox Church as the baptised natives would become exempt from paying *yasak,* attempts of religious Russification became intensified after 1825, as the government disliked the constantly growing number of lamas (Forsyth 1992, 170-71). However, at first Russian Orthodox missionaries were not very successful in converting the Buryat natives, despite a variety of bribes they offered them (Forsyth 1992, 154-155). These initial attempts at religious confirmation were aimed at the western Buryats, who practiced shamanism, had less religious infrastructure and were therefore more vulnerable (Forsyth 1994, 171). Nevertheless, eventually the measures bore fruits. While during the 1840s around 20,000 western Buryats were baptised in the Orthodox Church, by the beginning of the 20th century the number had grown to 85,000. However, in the majority of cases Buryats accepted Orthodoxy only formally and kept their old practices nevertheless (Forsyth 1992, 154-55, 171; Humphrey 1998, 30).

4.7 Education

The first educational efforts of Buryats are linked with the spread of the Tibetan Buddhism around the 18th century. At this time, the newly built Buddhist *datsans* and temples not only served as institutions where religion was professed but also as centres of education. Within these institutions the Classical Mongolian and Tibetan literacy was promoted, teachers taught students religious studies and also subjects such as medicine, art and astronomy, with the larger monasteries being home to 900 male students at a time (Chakars 2014, 17-18; Sartor 2014, 30).

During the tsarist era, many political exiles, particularly the Decembrists, were sent to Buryatia. The presence of these educated Russians and their propagation of the old Russian culture led to the development of an aspiration for education within the Buryats (Humphrey 1990, 291-92; Vyatkina 1964, 210). In addition, Russian language schools were established by the Orthodox Church and Buryat Cossack communities during the 19th century. As a result of this trend, there were also Buryat schools set up on the east shore of the lake Baikal (Chakars 2014, 18; Vyatkina 1964, 230). However, the tsarist government itself did not put much effort into education of the Buryats, which resulted in recurring shortages of educational establishments, teachers and study materials. In addition, Buryats became a target of linguistic Russification through the Tsarist government's interference in local schooling during the late 19th century (Montgomery 1994, 85-86). Another reason for the low numbers of educated Buryats can be found in the fact that until the beginning of the First World War, the autocratic administration required students of post-primary educational institutions to be Orthodox Christians (Vyatkina 1964, 230). According to data from 1908, Buryat male literacy was 5.2% in western Buryatia and 8.4% in Eastern Buryatia, while, according to a census in 1897, the vast majority of women was illiterate, with only 0.8% of western Buryat women and 0.6% of eastern Buryat women being able to read and write (Montgomery 1994, 139; Vyatkina 1964, 230). However, it is important to add that these numbers might not be representative of the true levels of Buryat literacy, as the officials at that time perceived the Mongolian script as a "manifestation of an 'alien' culture and religion" (Montgomery 1994, 140) and therefore many Buryats did not admit that they were literate out of fear of possible consequences.

Despite all obstacles, the schools established by Buddhists, the Orthodox Church and Buryat Cossack communities led to the emergence of educated Buryat elites. These intellectual elites were influenced by the educational work of politically exiled people such as the Decembrists, who had been sent to Siberia, and helped educated Buryats to establish contacts with liberal circles in Russia (Humphrey 190, 291-92). According to Humphrey "[t]he independent-minded, radical Buryat intelligentsia, accustomed to acting as intermediaries between the Russian and Mongolians, was determined to preserve and enhance the Buryat language and culture" (1990, 292). This attitude of cultural revival was also present in the years during and after the Russian Civil War, when Buryat intelligentsia was hoping to establish a pan-Mongolian state in the east that would be independent from the Chinese and Russians. However, this idea was never realised as over the course of the revolution and its military events these elites were replaced by a faction of the Buryat intelligentsia who had socialist inclinations. These new elites aimed at establishing a socialist state that would allow them to keep their national culture and religion, which resulted in the formation of the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) in 1923 (Humphrey 1990, 292).

4.8 Soviet Rule

Starting from the 1920s the Soviet government became strongly involved in the lives of civilians, including Buryats, prescribing them “certain criteria of identity of the Soviet Man” (Traast 2006, 40) that had to be met by everyone; any deviation from the norm meant that the person would be exiled. In this way, the Soviet rule initiated a new wave of Russification in which indigenous groups were expected to accept the Russian culture and concomitant values as their own. This process of Russification was continued in the 1930s, when Russians from other parts of the Soviet Union were brought into the region and new towns and industries were established in Buryatia. Around the same time, Buryats from rural parts of the region entered mass education programmes and many young Buryats were brought to towns to attend boarding schools where they were trained to become leaders in communist organisations (Humphrey 1990, 293). This ultimately meant that in addition to an increasing number of Russians entering Buryatia, young Buryats ventured out into larger towns, they were exposed to the Russian culture and encouraged to lead Russian lives.

During the following years of the Soviet rule, preservation efforts of Buryat culture and traditions suffered further setbacks. Since the Marxist communist tradition considered religions as dangerous ideologies, the Soviets destroyed monasteries and religious leaders and elites were murdered, sent to Gulags or exiled. The ones that managed to escape went into hiding and many Buryats emigrated to China and Mongolia (Humphrey 1990, 292-93; Traast 2006, 40-41). Furthermore, the Stalin administration introduced a new version of Buryat history, according to which Western Buryats did not have Mongol but Turkic descent and Mongolians had colonized them (Humphrey 1990, 293-94; Traast 2006, 41). This measure was yet another one of a series of attempts of the communist administration to detach Buryats from Mongolia, which started shortly after the establishment of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR. As a result of further Soviet impositions, by the 1960s the collective and state farms took over the traditional pastoral economy, yurts were replaced with wooden houses, the Buryat national clothing was scarce and most of the natives spoke Russian fluently (Humphrey 1990, 295). According to Ortiz Echevarria, by the 1980s, years of foreign interference had taken their toll on native Buryat people, who “felt estranged from their culture, language, and religion” and often saw themselves as the “lost generation” (2010, 27).

5. Soviet Language Policies

Having outlined the history and traditional pillars of the Buryat society and cultural values, the following chapter will provide an account of Soviet interventionist policies that significantly impacted people's indigenous way of life. As my later analysis will view Buryat's issues of self-perception through the lens of an endangered language, the policies discussed in this part exemplify Soviet attempts at unifying the Soviet Union through the imposition of a majority language, while interfering with national and ethnic languages within its republics.

5.1 Korenizatsiia

In the early 1800s the French language was used by the Russian aristocracy while Russian was used by ordinary Russian people. Russian became the official language of the empire, with some exceptions, in the second half of the 19th century. At that time the autocratic government had begun their attempts of Russification of the native population, meaning that the authorities were trying to make them more Russian in character, language and culture in order to strengthen the internal cohesion of the Russian Empire (Torgersen 2009, 13). This early Russification policy was changed when the USSR was formed and the new Soviet government designed a policy of *korenizatsiia*, or indigenisation. The main aim of *korenizatsiia* was to "promote national languages and cultures along with training and advancing native elites in the society" (Chakars 2014, 54) and provide an educated work force for a society that was becoming rapidly industrialised (Grenoble 2003, 44). Lenin believed that all languages were equal and that all nationalities should be able to use their native language in all spheres of their lives; therefore, the development of people's native languages was encouraged (Boltokova 2009, 19; Grenoble 2003, 36). This approach was even incorporated in the Constitution of 1936, when Soviet citizens were given a right that guaranteed them instruction in educational institutions in their native tongues (Grenoble 2003, 36). While these measures might seem contradictory to the aims of the Soviets in unifying the nations, Lenin saw this as "only an intermediary stage" (Grenoble 2003, 35) which would lead to a "higher Communist Stage of development" (Grenoble 2003, 35). Also, for Lenin, the active promotion of the many Soviet nationalities served as a precaution against Russian "chauvinism", or excessive patriotism (Grenoble 2003, 35-36).

According to Mikhei Nikolaevich Erbanov, one of the Buryat Bolsheviks at that time and head of the Mongol-Buryat ASSR between 1929-1937, the development of the Buryat language was one of the main priorities in the 1920s in Buryatia (Chakars 2014, 54). Throughout this decade real efforts were made to develop the Buryat language and even Russian officials in the republic were encouraged to learn Buryat. As a result, many Buryat children who had previously not gone to school could receive education and in the 1930s elementary education from the age of eight became mandatory (Chakars 2014, 55). Despite many obstacles in the implementation of this law, such as a lack of trained native Buryat teachers and teaching materials, these measures resulted in a decline in illiteracy from 78% in 1923 to 56% in 1931 and even only 2% after 1949 (Leisse and Leisse 2007, 778). What these figures show is that even though the quality of teaching in the newly established primary and secondary schools was low and all higher education was still exclusive to speakers of the Russian language, the educational efforts had a positive influence on the literacy of the native population (Leisse and Leisse 2007, 778).

In general, it can be said that Bolsheviks saw language as an important instrument that could be used to build a "Soviet-Communist State" (Grenoble 2003, 26). From the beginning, the Russian language was promoted as a lingua franca for the communication between all the nationalities in the Soviet Union, which, together with the national languages of the Soviet republics, would form bi- or multi-lingual systems. Seeing, however, how in the following years other languages were continuously marginalised and suppressed, it would appear that the Bolsheviks' aim was to create a "monolingual superpower" (Grenoble 2003, 26) rather than a multilingual country. This notion is affirmed by the fact that if a Soviet citizen wanted to work or study at higher institutions or join the Communist party they had no other choice but to accept and immerse themselves into a cultural Russian sphere that often stood in stark contrast to their own national culture (Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov 2004, 87-88).

5.2 The Stalin Era (1924-1953)

Although the beginning of the Stalin era saw an initial continuation of Lenin's policies to promote native languages, the attitude towards linguistic sovereignty in the Soviet republics soon changed profoundly. In the late 1920s the Soviet nationality policies shifted towards Russification when the Russian language and culture "were officially promoted as the best means to a Soviet society" (Grenoble 2003, 44) and the policy of *korenizatsiia* was first reduced significantly and later abandoned altogether (Grenoble 2003, 44-45). This break with Lenin's ideology was made clear in 1934, when during the XVII Party Congress Stalin stated that small-nation nationalism is a greater threat than the Russian chauvinism (Grenoble 2003, 45, 54).

The increased prioritisation of the Russian language under Stalin resulted in severe legislative changes for individual ethnic languages in the Soviet republics. As the Bolsheviks "viewed language to be the main criterion for 'nationality' [and] linguistic identification was equated with ethnic identification" (Grenoble 2003, 45), only a collective that spoke an officially recognised language would be recognised as a distinct ethnic group (Grenoble 2003, 45). In turn, each official language was required to have a written form as Soviets aimed at developing a system with "a single, codified and standardised norm for each developing literary language", based on "one dialect, or on a composite of features from a number of dialects" (Grenoble 2003, 47). This was, however, a very difficult task as many of the languages in the USSR had many dialectal variations that were often not even mutually intelligible. Furthermore, there was often not one dialect that all speakers of a language would understand, which in some cases led to the development of a literary language that some speakers had to newly acquire as if it was a foreign language (Grenoble 2003, 47). Further obstacles in creating unified literary languages were differences in written traditions of some of the languages and also non-existing orthography for others. For many speakers of ethnic languages these policies thus meant that the legitimacy of their group identity was linked to them altering or abandoning their native vernacular altogether. As Grenoble puts it,

> "the Soviet planners clearly knew, indigenous self-identity was directly affected by language policy. One of the goals of the government was to rid

> the North of the clan system, which dominated native relationships and identities. The lack of a commonly accepted ethnonym for many groups had initially created confusion, but it provided the Soviets with an opportunity to invent identities where previously none had been perceived. Although the ultimate goal was the creation of a Soviet nation, a supracultural group constituted by Soviet people […], what happened instead was that the clan system was replaced by an awareness of identity drawn along ethnolinguistic lines" (2003, 162).

In the 1920s, increasing efforts of linguistic Russification forced speakers of several languages with non-Cyrillic alphabets to adopt Cyrillic equivalents. However, only a few years later, in the early 1930s, Latin-based scripts were introduced throughout most parts of the Soviet Union. This latinisation policy resulted in a situation where some of the languages that had only previously been converted to Cyrillic were all of a sudden forced to use the Roman alphabet (Chakars 2014, 80; Grenoble 2003, 49-50; Humphrey 1990, 293). The official justification for this switch to a Latin orthography was a turn towards internationalism; however, for the Bolsheviks it served as a tool that would help them diminish the pan-Islamic identity of the Soviet nationalities using Arabic-based scripts. Similarly, it also managed to distance nationalities of Mongol origin that used Mongolian-based scripts and bring them closer to the Soviets (Chakars 2014, 80; Grenoble 2003, 49-50). The Buryat people, who were traditionally using Classical Mongolian as a literary language and Mongolian-based orthography, were also affected by these changes. The switch of the Buryat orthography into Latin started in 1929 and the need for the development of a standardised Latin writing system meant that scholars had to choose one specific dialect that they would base the Latin orthography on. They eventually agreed on a Selenga dialect that was the same as the standard Mongolian dialect called Khalkha and in 1937 the newly created Latin Buryat alphabet was adopted (Chakars 2014, 80-81; Grenoble 2003, 49-50; Humphrey 1990, 293). However, this change would not be in effect for very long, as Soviet officials decided to switch all Latin alphabets into Cyrillic in 1939, during the peak of the Stalinist regime. By then, the idea of internationalism was put in the background and the importance of Russian was further emphasised instead. The Soviet authorities justified this step by arguing that the use of Cyrillic in non-Russian languages would make it easier for the speakers of these languages to learn Russian and also serve to bring the many languages of the Soviet Union closer to each other (Chakars 2014, 81). Chakars sees the alphabet shift also as “part of the policies aimed at border nationalities whose loyalties were suspect simply because they lived on the edges of the empire” (2014, 81).

The linguistic efforts to estrange Buryats from their Mongol roots, in combination with the imposed altered version of Buryat ethnic history (as mentioned in chapter 4.8), eventually caused parts of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR to break off in 1937 and merge with neighbouring regions, resulting in the republic’s loss of about 40% of its territory. What was left of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR was renamed Buryat ASSR in 1958 (Chakars 2014, 81; Humphrey 1990, 294). Furthermore, the Selenga dialect on which the ‘official’ Buryat language had been based was changed to the Khori dialect, which was much more difficult to understand for many Buryats and further disconnected them from their Mongol heritage. In addition, changes were made to the vocabulary of the language as Soviet terms were promoted to replace the traditional Buryat ones (Chakars 2014, 81; Grenoble 2003, 181; Humphrey 1990, 293). These measures, which started shortly after the establishment of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR, illustrate how language was used as a strategic weapon to both unify the Buryat nation with the Soviet Union, while disconnecting Buryats from their non-Russian heritage.

As the next step in further the Russification of indigenous minorities, the decree “About Compulsory Russian Language Learning in Schools in National Republics and Districts” from March, 13 1938 made the Russian language obligatory in all schools across the USSR (Chakars 2014, 82-83; Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov 2004, 88). This measure was justified by 1) the need for a common language in a multinational country that aims to develop culturally and economically; 2) the importance of the Russian language for non-Russians that seek to attend higher education and 3) the requirement of a common language in the impending war (Blitstein 2001, 258). Also the war itself further manifested the Russian language in the Buryat people, due to the fact that Buryats in military service were constantly exposed to Russian (many of them came home as fluent Russian speakers) and Russian people were evacuated from Western parts of the Soviet Union to live with Buryats, which also improved the natives' Russian (Chakars 2014, 86). It is important to note that the primary aim of the decree was not to suppress or limit the native languages but that Russian was mainly "to be a subject of study, not a medium of instruction" (Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii 77/1/857/1 quoted in Blitstein 2001, 258). The implementation of the decree was, however, slow as the financial resources were insufficient, textbooks were scarce and there was a lack of qualified teachers. In addition, the execution of the new policy was further complicated by the alphabet switch from Latin to Cyrillic, as there was no coordination between the two measures. In practise this meant that many schools continued using books with the Latin script, while the newly arriving books were hastily prepared and inconsistent in spelling. As a result, many non-Russian schools experienced delays in Russian teaching, which was even further prolonged by the Second World War (Blitstein 2001, 258-59, 263).

During 1930s in Buryatia, national schools offered instruction in Buryat up to the fourth grade, with Russian being taught as a subject. In later grades the situation reversed and Russian became the language of instruction and Buryat was degraded to the level of a subject. In 1948 the instruction in Buryat was expanded until the seventh grade because local authorities claimed that instruction in the native language will help students to better understand subjects and therefore achieve better academic results (Chakars 2014, 117, 125). Despite the fact that this reform helped to improve the number of Buryat graduates, many parents, teachers and officials did not support it as they feared that the lack of Russian language instruction might hinder Buryat students in higher education and worker training programs (Chakars 2014, 126-27). As a matter of fact, at that time the contact of Buryat students with the Buryat language in national schools was so extensive that they spent only half of the time learning Russian language and literature as their counterparts in the Russian schools. In addition, the quality of Russian teaching was insufficient in many national schools. However, the Buryats were aware that a good command of Russian would be necessary in order to enter into universities and worker training programs and they therefore considered Russian language skills as prestigious. This notion was supported by the fact that Russians living in the republic did not have a command of Buryat and Russian was used as a majority language of the country. As a result of the strong status of Buryat in national schools in this period, some Buryat parents started sending their children to schools with Russian language instruction (Chakars 2014, 128-29).

In general, it can be said that although Stalin broke with many of Lenin's traditions and attitudes with regards to the status of ethnic languages within the Soviet regime, real radical forms of Russification within the sector of education were not enforced during Stalin's era and it was not until Krushchev's educational reforms that the levels of Russification in schools increased (Blitstein 2001, 266-67).

5.3 The Khrushchev Era (1953-1964)

The late 1950s saw a major change in the attitudes of the Soviet leadership towards language policies. After Stalin's death, Nikita Kruschev criticised his predecessor for neglecting Russian and promoting native languages (Chakars 2014, 129). Khrushchev then announced Russian as the state language of the Soviet Union and it was given the status of the "second national language" (Grenoble 2003, 57) of all Soviet citizens. While authorities continued to promote bilingualism throughout this period, what changed was the stress on "the absolute need for fluency in Russian" (Chakars 2014, 129). At the same time the need for other languages than Russian spoken in the USSR was questioned and it "became officially acceptable to view some languages as less viable than others" (Grenoble 2003, 57).

In 1958-1959 new educational laws were enacted which gave parents of ethnic minority children the options to choose whether their children would receive education in their native language or in Russian, which meant that they could completely opt out from providing native language education for them (Boltokova 2004, 19, Chakars 2014, 129, Grenoble 2003, 57). Also, the newly instated instruction in Russian was to begin from the earliest grades and many national schools changed their language of instruction to Russian altogether (Grenoble 2003, 57). Due to the belief that Russian would give children better chances of getting into a university, many parents of ethnic minority children therefore decided against education in their indigenous languages (Boltokova 2004, 20). Even though some native parents had been sending their children to Russian schools already, the new law caused a significant drop in the number of children enrolling into national schools (Chakars 2014, 129). In addition, national schools where the native languages continued to be the language of instruction were pressured to introduce Russian as a compulsory subject from the first grade on (Kreindler 1990, 50). For the Buryats this new educational policy marked “the beginning of the end of widespread Buryat language education” (Chakars 2014, 130).

5.4 The Brezhnev Era (1964-1982)

The Brezhnev era saw a move towards total Russification. Unlike Khrushchev, who saw Russian pragmatically as a tool for communication, scientific advancements and “as the key to Russian and world culture,” (Kreindler 1990, 51) Brezhnev and his rule glorified Russian and the Russian people and viewed the Russian language as “the language of October, of Lenin, of the Communist future” (Kreindler 1990, 53). As a result of this ideology, in the 1977 constitution the instruction of native languages for ethnic minorities was no longer regarded as a right, but merely an “opportunity” for ethnic educational institutions. This effectively marked a shift from Lenin’s original anti-chauvinist (as mentioned in chapter 5.1) stance that was anchored in the 1936 constitution and guaranteed a right for ethnic minorities to receive instructions in native languages, replacing it merely with the possibility of access to this education. In addition, a decree “On Measures for Further Improving the Study and Teaching of the Russian Language in the Union republics” was issued in October 1978 that “mandated concrete, extensive measures for improving Russian-language instruction” (Grenoble 2003, 57). With the help of this decree Russian gained the status of a language “inherently superior to all other languages” (Kreindler 1990, 53) and the first language in the Soviet Union, which meant that it was no longer to be taught as a foreign language (Chakars 2014, 132). As Boltokova puts it, these changes “subsequently diminished not only the prestige of the non-Russian languages but had negative implications on self-perception of the speakers of those languages” (2004, 20). As a result of the emphasis on the importance of the Russian language, instruction in native languages was significantly decreased. While in the 1960s 47 different languages were used as the media of instruction in the Russian republics, in the last year of Brezhnev’s rule, in 1982, the number had dropped to only 16 languages (Kreindler 1990, 54). One of

Brezhnev’s aims was to establish “a single Soviet ethnic group” (Grenoble 2003, 58) that would be created by “fusion of the various nationalities into a supra-nationality” (Grenoble 2003, 59) and the Russian language served him as a tool in order to achieve this. During his rule Russian became the lingua franca of the Soviet Union as it spread beyond the walls of the educational institutions into many levels of administration. At the 1981 Party Congress Brezhnev, who must have been aware of the results of his Russification policies, declared “the triumph of the creation of a united Soviet people (Grenoble 2003, 59).

Whereas in some ASSRs education in native languages continued in early grades and in some middle schools and high schools, this was not the case in Buryatia. The first secretary of the Buryat ASSR between 1962-1984, Andrei Urupkheevich Modogoev (who was ethnic Buryat), the republic’s officials, teachers and parents collectively preferred the stress on Russian even if it meant a decline in the Buryat language education. Because of this the Buryat language significantly suffered as it was then only taught as a subject at some schools in rural areas of Buryatia (Chakars 2014, 133-134). Eventually, the decline of the use of the Buryat language became a serious concern which resulted in the issuing of a decree on December 30, 1981 that aimed to “strengthen the study of Buryat language and literature in general educational schools” (Chakars 2014, 137). In spite of this effort, the Buryat language found itself in serious decline by the second half of the 1980s, when Buryat language courses were only offered in small numbers of hours per week by less than 50% of schools with a large body of Buryat students (Chakars 2014, 138).

5.5 The Gorbachev Era and Beyond (1982-)

This downwards spiral of the Buryat language only began to change course under Gorbachov’s policy of *glasnost*. Although the central government during that time paid hardly any attention to both language and nationality policies due to economic rebuilding and legislation remained practically unchanged until 1989, the Union Republics were not oblivious to “large-scale language shift” (Grenoble 2003, 62) of their citizens and started to protect and revive individual national languages. Due to this movement, for the first time in its history there was no unified language policy encompassing the whole of the USSR (Grenoble 2003, 63). The central government in

Moscow responded to these ”separatist-nationalist tendencies” (Grenoble 2003, 63) by issuing “The law of the languages of the peoples of the USSR” in April 1990, which remained in place until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and proclaimed Russian as the official state language (Grenoble 2003, 63).

In Buryatia, the linguistic situation had not changed throughout the years of *glasnost* and the Buryat language was still in dangerous decline, particularly in urban areas. This triggered a public discussion on how to improve Buryat language education and revitalise the language (Chakars 2014, 138-39). After the fall of the Soviet Union this lead to the “Law on the Languages of the Peoples of the Buryat Republic”, which was passed in 1992 and proclaimed both Russian and Buryat as state languages. Furthermore, this law also commanded the instruction in Buryat in all schools, regardless of the number of Buryat students (Dyrkheeva 2004, 32; Grenoble 2003, 182). However, Dyrkheeva, one of the law’s authors (Boltokova 2004, 31), recognised that despite its introduction the situation of the Buryat language still remained critical as the natives’ assimilation to Russian continued (Dyrkheeva 2004, 33). To this effect, Dyrkheeva conducted a research in 1989-1990 and 1999-2000 in order to assess the ethnographic situation in Buryatia. Her findings unanimously stated that “modern Buryats know Russian better than they know the Buryat language” (Dyrkheeva 2003, 2). Presently, the Buryat government is trying to strengthen the Buryat language under the “Preservation and Development of the Buryat Language in the Republic of Buryatia for 2014 - 2020” act, which aims to promote the teaching of Buryat in order to revitalise the language (Inform Polis Online, 2014).

6. Language and Self-Identification of Buryats

Having outlined the socio-political changes that Soviet language Russification measures have brought to the Buryat nation, I will now turn to the possible causality between these interventionist policies and their repercussions and effects on the ethnic self-perception of Buryat people in the post-Soviet era.

6.1 Modern Development of the Buryat Language

As a first step to my analysis, I want to take a look at data regarding the status of the Buryat language in order to determine its current vitality and usage. My reasoning here is that by determining the extent of the alteration of people’s ability to speak their own ethnic language throughout more than 400 years of contact with Russians, a factual basis can be established on which peoples’ linguistic self-perception with regards to their ethnic heritage can be analysed.

6.1.1 Governmental censuses

As outlined in chapter 4, even though small-scale efforts were made by tsarists to establish the Russian language among the native Buryat population, these early attempts stayed mostly fruitless throughout the 18th and 19th century and the Buryat language was spoken by Buryats in and around the Republic of Buryatia. However, the 20th century and rule of the Soviets marked both the successful establishment of the Russian language in the Buryat nation and the concomitant decline of the indigenous language.

Mother tongue of Buryats based on censuses (in %)						
	1926	1970	1979	1989	2002	2010
Buryat language as mother tongue	98.6	95.1	93.1	89.4	-	81.8
Russian language as mother tongue	0.6	4.9	6.9	10.55	-	18.2
fluent in Russian (2nd language)	-	64.97	72.8	73.6	-	-

Figure 3. (Dyrkheeva 2015, 161)[3]

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[3] The translation is my own.

In 1926, the First All-Union Census of the Soviet Union was carried out, in which 98.6% of Buryats listed Buryat as their mother tongue, while 0.6% stated that they spoke Russian as their first language (Dyrkheeva 2015, 161). 44 years later, after Stalin had prescribed the change of Buryat tribe languages and dialectal systems into one literary language, imposed the Cyrillic script on Buryats and together with Khrushchev established Russian as a language of education in schools, a census was carried out in 1970, in which 95.1% of Buryats listed Buryat as their mother tongue, while the share of Buryats stating Russian as a mother tongue rose to 4,9%. Roughly a decade later, just a year after Brezhnev had issued the decree "On Measures for Further Improving the Study and Teaching of the Russian Language in the Union republics", the census of 1979 showed a further decline of mother tongue Buryat speakers to 93.1%, with almost 7% of Buryat Russian native speakers. The results of the increasingly dominant status of Russian within the Buryat education and society under the Brezhnev rule is also reflected in the following census of 1989, in which the number of Buryat native speakers dropped to 89,4%, while 73,6% of Buryats considered Russian their second language and 1.6% listed Buryat as their second language (Dyrkheeva 2015, 165). This survey also showed that in the capital, Ulan Ude, only 78,3% spoke Buryat as a first language, showing that the sphere of Russian was stronger in urban environments where people participated in higher education and were in closer contact with the modern Russian society (Dorzhieva 2004, 70). The impact of this urban Russian sphere on the Buryat language was increasing throughout the Soviet rule, as a growing number of Buryats moved to cities. While in 1926 only 1% of Buryats lived in urban environments, the number gradually increased to 16% in 1959, 36% in 1979 and 44.5% in 1989 (Chakars 2009, 81, 81n24). Although language revitalisation efforts already commenced during *glasnost* and after the fall of the Soviet Union in order to counteract the dominant status of Russian, the census of 2002 (in which the question regarding a person's mother tongue was omitted) showed these results for all Buryats across Russia (not just the Buryat Republic) with regards to "population by nationalities and knowledge of Russian"[4] (Federalnaia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki, 2002):

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[4] All quotations of Federalnaia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki are my own translations

Russian census 2002					
Urban and rural population		**Urban population**		**Rural population**	
Number of persons of the corresponding nationality	of which know Russian	Number of persons of the corresponding nationality	of which know Russian	Number of persons of the corresponding nationality	of which know Russian
445.175	428.845	194.562	192.171	250.613	236.674

Figure 4. (Federalnaia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki, 2002)

This shows that in 2002 96,3% of all Buryats (98,8% of urban and 94,4% of rural Buryats) in the Russian Federation spoke Russian. When asked about the specific command of a language 98,6% of all the (Buryat and non-Buryat) citizens of the Republic of Buryatia (of which 27,7% are Buryats) answered that they had a command of Russian; the Buryat language, which is the second official language of the Republic, was spoken by 23,6% of citizens (Dyrkheeva 2015, 164). Finally, the most recent census of 2010 confirmed the previous degenerative progression of the Buryat language, showing that the number of Buryat native speakers had dropped to 81,8%, while 18,2% listed Russian as their mother tongue (Federalnaia sluzhba gosudarstvennoi statistiki, 2010).

6.1.2 Independent Language Data

What the above statistics make clear is that there has been a steady direction in the development of the Buryat language since the beginning of the 20th century, namely that the usage of the Buryat language has been declining both in urban and rural areas, as Russian has been taking over the public and private spheres of Buryats lives through governmental imposition. However, considering the gravity of the language policies imposed on indigenous ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union it does not appear that the unanimously proclaimed severely endangered status of the Buryat language is fully represented by these relatively high numbers of Buryat mother tongue speakers. In order to make sense of this missing correlation it is important to point out that these governmental statistics exhibit one very central flaw, which is that they presuppose one common understanding of the terminology used in them.

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unless stated otherwise.

However, a closer look at independent statistics about the Buryat language reveals that, depending on the interpretation of concepts such as a *mother tongue*, the answers to the questions in these censuses might not reflect the actual language levels of speakers. In 2004 Dorzhieva (2004) published a paper for which she interviewed 950 Buryats (of which 70% were between 15-39 years old) regarding their knowledge and usage of the Buryat language.

Describe your knowledge level of the Buryat language (in %)			
	Buryats living in cities	city-born Buryats	Buryats living in rural areas
I speak it fluently	34.7	6.1	71.8
I speak it at home	35.1	38.4	21.4
I understand, but do not speak it or speak with difficulties	21.1	37.4	5.6
I practically do not speak it	6.8	13.1	0.9
I do not speak it at all	2.3	5.0	0.3

Figure 5.[5] (Dorzhieva 2004, 75)

Looking at this table and comparing it with the results of the state census of just two years earlier, it becomes obvious that there must be a severe cultural interpretative dissonance between the concepts of ‘being affiliated with a language’ and ‘speaking a language’, where someone would call a language they do not speak fluently their *mother tongue*. Meanwhile, in the generally established Western conception, a *mother tongue* is clearly defined as “[t]he language which a person has grown up speaking from early childhood” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017b) and “the first language that you learn when you are a baby, rather than a language learned at school or as an adult” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2017b). Buryats, however, appear to use the term rather in relationship to their ethnic heritage, with relative disregard to the fluency levels of the language. This fact, of course, alters the foundation on which data collected by the state regarding Buryat language affiliation and skills is based on. For example, in 2004 only roughly 45% of the Buryats born in an urban environment stated that they can speak their ethnic language fluently or use it as a domestic language (Dorzhieva 2004, 75). According to Western definitions this would mean that at least 55% of Buryats born in cities have Russian or another language as their mother tongue. However, around that time still 80-90% of Buryats named Buryat as their mother tongue. Similarly, Osinskii and Khabudaeva (2014) conducted a survey between 2012-2013 among 426 young Buryats (no age specified), focussing on the Buryat language and culture.

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[5] All quotations of Dorzhieva are my own translations unless stated otherwise.

	Buryats living in the city (in %)	**Buryats from rural areas (in %)**
I speak it fluently (I speak, read and write)	23.1	42
I know it sufficiently	16.5	11.2
I understand but do not speak it, or speak it with difficulties	22.9	17.3
I practically do not speak it	18.3	5.0
I do not speak it at all	24.5	19.3

Figure 6.[6] (Osinskii and Khabudaeva 2014, 70)

They add that 75.1% of the people questioned consider Buryat, 34.5% Russian and 9.6% both as their mother tongue (Osinskii and Khabudaeva 2014, 69-70). Also, their results showed that older youth (no age specified) considers the Buryat language more often as their mother tongue than the younger Buryats and 85.9% of all informants consider knowledge of the Buryat language necessary as it preserves the identity and culture of a nation. These results confirm Dorzhieva's findings in displaying a large discrepancy between Buryat ethnic language skills and their interpretation and self-attribution of the status 'mother tongue', which, however, appears to decrease with younger generations. Furthermore, Osinskii and Khabudaeva (2014, 73) also bring attention to the interesting fact that while a large percentage of both urban and rural Buryat informants do not speak the language, almost all of them consider Buryat as a foundational pillar of their ethnic identity. This seems to correspond to the notion mentioned earlier in this thesis that Buryat is seen as culturally important, yet unproductive in a modern society in which opportunities and prosperity are strongly connected to someone's command of the Russian language. This interpretation is further confirmed by a survey of Dorzhieva (2004, 82) in which she confronted Buryats with the question of what type of school they would want their children to be taught in, with regards to language of instruction and education in Buryat.

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[6] The translation is my own.

	urban Buryats (in %)	rural Buryats (in %)
in a school with Russian instruction, with Buryat as a subject	70.4	55.3
in a school with Buryat instruction, with Russian as a subject	16.3	32.3
in a school with Russian instruction only	3.4	2.1
in a school with Buryat instruction only	0.7	0.9
I have difficulties to answer	9.2	9.4

Figure 7. (Dorzhieva 2004, 82)

Although, just as in the previous results, there is a noticeable difference between rural and urban Buryats, a majority of both groups generally agrees that their children should be educated in their native language through Russian, thereby placing the productivity of Russian above the ethnic heritage value of Buryat.

6.2 Modern pillars of Buryat identity

With the Buryat language in a steady decline and its speakers living their lives increasingly in Russian private and social spheres, the fact that most Buryats consider the Buryat language as their mother tongue suggests that their ethnic self-identification must still be entrenched in their Buryat heritage. In order to determine the level of involvement of Buryats within their own ethnic culture, I now want to investigate non-linguistic attributes of Buryat ethnicity in this chapter and take a look at the extent to which they still play a role in the modern self-perception of the Buryat people.

In this regard, Khabudaeva (2015, 71) asked both young Buryat and Russian respondents what they consider to be the most distinctive characteristics that determine their nationality (in her paper, she clarifies that she views the concepts of 'nation' and 'ethnicity' as identical) (Khabudaeva 2015, 69).

	Buryats (in %)	Rank	Russians (in %)	Rank
Language	72.8	1	67	1
Traditions	64.3	2	41.5	3
Visual features	48.6	3	59.9	2
Religion	24.9	4	23.4	6
National character, behaviour (national psychology)	24.7	5	27.9	4
Self-identification[7]	21.9	6	23.8	5
Common history	12.2	7	12.5	7

Figure 8. (Khabudaeva 2015, 71)

What I find highly interesting about this self-assessment is that the Buryat language is listed by a clear majority of young Buryats as the most important attribute in determining their own collective affiliation. Moreover, when asked about what national traditions should be maintained and revived, 88% listed language as a priority, next to national traditions (75.4%), traditional folk festivals (39%), folklore, songs, dances (37.3%), national cuisine (32.2%), national sports (28.2%), national clothing (17.1%) and national craftsmanship (12.2%) (Osinskii and Khabudaeva 2014, 73). Keeping in mind that only roughly 50% of respondents in Osinskii and Khabudaeva's survey claimed that they could speak the language, it is at first sight hard to grasp where the apparent appreciation of Buryats' of their national language stems from. In combination with the common attitude that Russian is seen as a gateway to a successful integration into a modern world, it appears that the valuing of Russian is based on a mostly factual basis, whereas the appreciation of the Buryat language is emotional. In this regard, Sartor, who conducted a survey among Buryat children from Russia, studying in Inner Mongolia (China), notes that at times the Buryat parents of these children "seemed unaware that they had internalized hegemonic thinking that served the dominant powers instead of their own Indigenous culture" (Sartor 2014, 443), and that "none of the parents ever told me they were concerned that their children would lose their fluency in the Buriat language. The adults seemed to equate [the] Russian language and culture as a way of being modern and educated" (442-443).

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[7] Khabudaeva does not elaborate on what this question relates to, which is why I cannot utilise it for my analysis.

As the second most important ethnic characteristic the Buryats in question listed *traditions*. It is important to know that while the linguistic skills of Buryats are declining, their participation in upholding cultural traditions is still quite active. Dorzhieva (2004, 103) conducted a survey, asking Buryats about which holidays they usually celebrate and the results showed that many people still put their emphasis on traditional ethnic cultural celebrations. 94.7% of urban Buryats and 98.5% of rural Buryat respondents chose the lunar New Year's celebration *Tsagaalgan* (as mentioned in chapter 4) as an important and much celebrated holiday. However, it is important to note that 98.3% of Buryats in cities and 92.8% of rural Buryats also celebrate Russian New Year's Eve, which does not correspond to the calendar of their Mongol ancestors (Dorzhieva 2004, 103). The second most celebrated traditional Buryat holiday, *Surkharbaan* (see chapter 4 for more information), is still commemorated by 54% of Buryats in cities and 65% of Buryats in villages. Furthermore, Buryats appear to also still strongly uphold their ethnic traditions with regards to cultural events such as burial ceremonies (urban 90.4%, village 92.8%) and weddings (urban 89.5%, village 88.2%) (Dorzhieva 2004, 95). Batueva (2010, 62-63) conducted a survey with regards to the knowledge of customs and rituals among the rural Buryat youth, from which she elicited that (1) 47.2% of the Buryat youth participate in organising and executing *Tsagaalgan* as it is a pre-established family tradition, 30% of respondents consider their knowledge of this traditional holiday as 'complete' and 20% acknowledge the importance to participate in the public holiday, as it provides them with a sense of belonging and unity with the people involved in it. This study shows that while basically all Buryats participate in *Tsagaalgan*, the reasons for younger generations of Buryats are often anchored in habit and tradition, rather than pro-active exertion and maintenance of their ethnic heritage. However, Krist (2009, 134) also gives an example of a successful adoption of a traditional Buryat holiday into modern times, by noting that in today's *Surkharbaan* celebrations women, who were traditionally restricted from entering in the triadic sports games (featuring archery, wrestling and horse trotting-racing), are well-represented, most significantly in archery, with a female participation of 42%. Furthermore, the decision was made to extend the field of traditionally three disciplines and incorporate many new modern competitions, such as volleyball or football. Instead of seeing the newly added facets as threatening to the Buryat tradition, they are perceived as enriching by all people involved (Krist 2009, 132). It is thus interesting to see that while one central cultural ethnic event is upheld largely through customs and tradition, the example of *Surkharbaan* shows that Buryat traditions can be more than just remnants of their ancestry and also make the transition into modernity, thereby standing better chances of persisting also in the future. Confirming how well Buryats are informed and aware of their cultural traditions in general, Dorzhieva (2004, 99) shows (see Figure 9) that roughly 90% of Buryats questioned are familiar with their national songs, stories, games and dances. Just as with Buryat language levels, the familiarity with ethnic traditions is higher in rural areas and lower among Buryats living in cities.

	I saw others perform and I can perform it myself (in %)		I saw others perform but I cannot perform it myself (in %)		I do not know it at all (in %)	
	urban	rural	urban	rural	urban	rural
national songs	49.0	46.8	44.5	45.6	6.5	7.6
national fairy tales, stories, legends	25.3	36.4	56.8	52.8	17.8	10.8
national games	35.3	42.2	43.5	48.1	21.2	9.7
national dances	37.8	35.1	53.3	58.2	8.9	6.7

Figure 9 (Dorzhieva 2004, 99)

Interestingly, the third most important distinctive characteristic for young Buryats in Khabudaeva’s (2015) survey is *visual features*, meaning that these Buryats perceive themselves and their Buryat identity partially along their physical Buryat features. As Mongol descendants, Buryats’ Asian features physically set them apart from the Russian population, which, as the data suggests, results in them being more aware of their ethnic features. Furthermore, this high level of self-awareness of their own physical characteristics also indicates that Buryats must be reminded of this separation on a regular basis, thus becoming self-conscious about it. Confirming this notion, Ortiz-Echevarria gives an account of an interview with a young Buryat woman from Ulan-Ude who speaks about her situation of people focussing on her Asian facial features. She complains that people would be asking her about her ‘real’ cultural heritage after she had first answered them by explaining Russian and Soviet history, marking her as an indigenous person even though she says Buryat is not “her culture”. At the same time, she states that she does not speak ”her native language” and expresses frustration that “although she is a successful young woman with a lucrative job, […] she is still judged by a lack of knowledge of her *real* ancestry” (Ortiz-Echevarria 2010, 45). This example shows how their visual features can directly connect some Buryats to an ethnic group that they are only partially a part of or do not perceive as their main source of identification. This visual connection to their ethnic background, in combination with the inability to speak Buryat, can thus also serve to make Buryats aware of their weak connection with their own ethnicity/nation, especially since most Buryats surveyed name the command of a language as the main characteristic of nationality/ethnicity.

Next, I want to take a brief look at the very low numbers of interviewed Buryats (both 12% of respondents from rural area and cities) who think that common history is an important characteristic in determining their nationality/ethnicity. Considering the turbulent history throughout decades of external influence in the Republic of Buryatia, one might be led to believe that modern Buryats would be united in their awareness of their shared history, ancestors and the struggles they had to undergo. However, it appears that this awareness is not valued very highly among the young Buryats that were questioned and does not constitute a strong source of their ethnic self-identification. This notion is confirmed in Dorzhieva (2004, 161) where Buryats were asked whether they know the history of their nation. 55.0% of urban and 50.1% of rural Buryats answered this question, saying that their knowledge is insufficient but that they would like to learn more about it and 1,7% of urban and 1.5% of rural Buryats claimed that they have no knowledge and do not find it necessary to learn about it either. Osinskii and Khabudaeva (2014, 70) further confirm the decline in historical knowledge, stating that also the Buryat knowledge of their genealogy is losing its significance. While in the past it used to be common for Buryats to know nine generations of the paternal line (Humphrey 1998, 53-54), their research data shows that most respondents claimed they knew three generations. A survey carried out by Dorzhieva (2004, 163) confirms this result, with 23.8% of Buryat respondents living in cities and 20.1% of rural Buryats stating that they know three generations of their paternal line.

Finally, one more Buryat attribute of self-identification that I want to discuss is the Buryat link to nature, land and the soil. Bahbahani describes how Buryats traditionally live in an interconnected system with their environment, they “see very strong links between all parts of nature, with the components existing in a proper balance” (1998, 97). As one of her informants puts it:

> “[My Russian friend] doesn’t feel the sun, she doesn’t feel the mountains, she doesn’t feel the land. She just lives and sees what she sees. I also do the same, but I also feel the land, I also feel the sun, I feel the mountains, I feel the weather, I feel space … well, you know, I feel nature” (Bahbahani 1998, 99).

As mentioned earlier, Yelaeva supports this notion, stating that Buryats conceive their identity according to their “culture, nature and soil” (Yelaeva quoted in Skrynnikova 2003, 128). The source of the Buryat appreciation of their natural environment can be found in their religious background, with most of them being either Buddhists, Shamanists, or a mix of the two (as outlined in chapter 4) (Bahbahani 1998, 84; Dorzhieva 2004, 90; Khabudaeva 2013, 117). Out of this belief system several customs and appreciative rituals of nature, natural deities and spirits are derived, which are still practised by Buryats today. A common Buryat ritual is presenting offerings to the ‘master of fire’, in which the first portion of a meat or milk dish is sacrificed to the fire (Osinksii and Khabudaeva 2014, 71). According to Osinksii and Khabudaeva (2014, 71), half of the Buryat youth is currently participating in this practice. Another traditional ritual is ‘splashing’, a practice traditionally involving flicking milk (or in more recent years vodka) in all directions before using it, as an appreciation to the gods (Bahbahani 1998, 113). As one young informant in Bahbahani elucidates:

> “[y]ou take a bottle and there will be water. The fourth finger on the right hand is considered by Buryats to be the most clean. You put your

> finger in the water or vodka and flick it in every direction. First to the sky, then to the air, then to the earth. And then you can drink" (1998, 113).

Seeing that Buryat belief systems and rituals are still known and practised also among the Buryat youth, it appears that the special ancient link between Buryats and their natural environment also persists in modern times and represents a characteristic attribute of the Buryats' collective identification.

To briefly summarise the data in this chapter, it appears that there are noticeable trends in the self-perception of ethnicity among Buryats living in post-soviet Buryatia. In practically all bodies of academic documentation that I could find which deal with Buryat ethnic and national characteristics, the Buryat language takes up a prime role as an identity marker and attribute that upholds the Buryat culture and values. While most informants agree that it is vital for this language to be upheld and maintained, they acknowledge that the language levels are generally low and that as a mostly domestic language, speaking Buryat is not seen as a productive skill in a Russian speaking modern world. Next, it can be said that both Buryats living in cities and rural areas still today value their traditional holidays and cultural traditions. While the reasons for their participation in them are found in a mix of active practice, habitual maintenance and strengthening of group cohesion, some historical Buryat traditions are not only upheld but also updated and transformed into contemporary versions of their ancient versions. Similarly to this, modern-day Buryats still also participate in customs and rituals that are connected to their ancient spiritual and religious beliefs. Furthermore, young Buryats appear to place their visual features high up on their list of self-perceived attributes of 'Buryatness', displaying a level of awareness of looking different than others in their social surroundings. The presented research suggests that one reason for this self-consciousness can be found in individuals' lack of Buryat knowledge and the shame of being visually connected to an ethnic group of which they feel insufficiently entrenched in. What strikes me as a very interesting detail is that although Buryats are still actively participating in traditional celebrations and uphold ancient Buryat rituals, only 12% of young respondents in Khabudaeva (2015) claimed that they feel that common history is a distinctive characteristic determining their nationality and many respondents in Dorzhieva (2004) admitted that they do not know enough about their own ethnic history and have decreased knowledge of their genealogy.

6.2.1 Ethnic Vantage Point of Modern Buryats

The little contemporary interest in a shared historical background by young Buryats leads me to believe that the decades of Soviet intervention and attempts at altering the historical narrative of Buryats could have changed the reference point from which Buryats view their own ethnicity. What I mean by this is that the disconnection of many Buryats from their ethnic roots could have led to them, viewing and interpreting their own collective ethnic identity along different criteria than fully entrenched members of an ethnic group. To exemplify this theory, I want to return to Schmidt's model from chapter three, in which she proposes a distinction between external and internal viewpoints of an ethnic group (Schmidt 2008, 6).

External	**Internal**
▪ speaking a language	cognitive (subjective knowledge of group values)
▪ practicing traditions	▪ heritage and history
▪ participating in ethnic networks, institutions, associations, functions sponsored by ethnic organisations	▪ moral (obligation and commitment to group) ▪ affective (attachment to particular group)

Figure 2. (Schmidt 2008, 6)

According to this theory, which suggests that there are noticeable differences in how 'insiders' and 'outsiders' view an ethnic group, I propose that the ethnic self-perception of post-Soviet Buryats outlined in this chapter would place them rather at an external than internal vantage point. I base this proposition on the fact that the Buryat language and traditions were listed as the two most important characteristics by the Buryats in question, while the data shows that the awareness of common heritage and history among young Buryats are in decline. This fully corresponds to Schmidt's suggested model, in which an external viewpoint takes into consideration mostly tangible and apparent attributes of ethnicity, whereas internal group members classify their own ethnicity along more abstract conceptual nuances that developed throughout generations. One of these more abstract ‘internal’ ethnic concepts, *moral*, the obligation and commitment to a group, is very interesting with regards to the Buryat example, as I perceive it to be the source of much internal conflict among individual Buryats that do not speak their ethnic language. As an example, take the aforementioned Buryat women in Ortiz-Echevarria (2010), who wants to be perceived as a young, successful woman but is instead categorised by people around her as ‘Buryat’ only. As her environment expects her to have a Buryat identity, she is confronted with the moral obligation and commitment to her ethnic heritage, to which she has no distinct connection. As Ortiz-Echevarria puts it, rather than being perceived in the way she sees herself, “she is marked as an indigenous person rather than as a modern person and her life choices are seen as a rejection of her real heritage” (2010, 45). It is thus the lack of moral connection and commitment to her ethnic group which leaves her feeling ashamed. This notion of shame or guilt could also account for the low statistical numbers regarding Buryat identification with their heritage. During research on social media channels I was able to observe a similar practice of shaming also among Buryats themselves, who were proud to be Buryats but still displayed shame in not (fully) speaking their ethnic language or assigned guilt to Buryats without a command of Buryat. Here are just a few excerpts of the statements by Buryats I collected with regards to the Buryat disconnection with their language and heritage:

> Our native Buryat language, like our religion, traditions, and unique mentality of the Buryats was passed on to me with the mother’s milk and was firmly instilled [in me] from an early age. And I think that this is something that makes us representatives of our small nation from the very beginning. And, of course, I perfectly think, speak and understand the mother tongue [Buryat] [8] (VK).

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[8] The translation is my own. The original post can be found on https://vk.com/topic-32980255_25703179?post=1067.

> I am proud that I am a Buryat woman and I speak Buryat. If we forget our mother tongue, than who are we? A nation without language, traditions and culture[9] (VK).

> [it is a] shame … no language, no nation. I wish they didn't laugh when I'm speaking [in Buryat]. This way the will disappears[10] (VK).

> any person of any nation simply must know their language[11] (VK).

> […] I do not speak Buryat, I can understand phrases and not even that always, and I cannot at all speak like that. Before, I was always ashamed to speak in Buryat, I do not know why. Now, I am studying in Vladivostok and I really miss the Buryat language. I really want to learn it and be fluent in it, but I do not know how to do it. Here, the Tuvans and Yakuts always talk in their own [language] and that is so cool and it makes me feel ashamed that I do not know how to say anything in my native Buryat. But now I decided that I will definitely learn it and teach it to [my] children[12] (VK).

> […] Since my childhood I do not know my native language (unfortunately). [My] parents rarely spoke in Buryat, at school the Buryat language was cancelled before they started teaching, I didn't have my own initiative to study the Buryat language and I never spent vacations on the countryside, these are the main aspects why I do not speak my native language. Of course this is not an excuse, but these are the reasons why many [people] do not know the language of our ancestors. When people ask me where I am from, I am proud to answer "I am from the Republic of Buryatia", but I am ashamed to answer the next question

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[9] The translation is my own. The original post can be found on https://vk.com/topic-32980255_25703179?post=912.

[10] The translation is my own. The original post can be found on https://vk.com/topic-32980255_25703179?post=17746.

[11] The translation is my own. The original post can be found on https://vk.com/topic-45275322_28580569?post=2252.

[12] The translation is my own. The original post can be found on https://vk.com/topic-32980255_25703179?post=3982.

> because the same question always follows – "do you know the Buryat language?' and 'why not? – this is your native language"[13] (VK).

What we can see from most of these examples is that several of the VK users list the ability to speak the Buryat language as almost a prerequisite in order to be able to create affiliation with their ethnic group. At the same time, the users express shame if they do not possess these language skills. Having said this, the command of a language is of course in no way a requirement in order to be able to participate in the collective identification of a group. As Cheung puts it, "[a] positive identity with an ethnic group or ethnic heritage can develop without much knowledge, or without practising much, of the ethnic culture" (1993, 1215). Based on the statements listed above, I propose the theory that the strong emphasis on language as the central attribute of identification of 'Buryatness' could be interpreted as another external, rather than internal ethnic viewpoint, illustrating the advanced level of estrangement of certain Buryats from their ethnic background.

6.3 (Linguistic) Identity Development Disruption

Having outlined both interventionist Soviet policies and the low levels of language skills among Buryats recorded after the fall of the Soviet Union, I now want to turn to the possible causal relationship between the two and investigate reasons for this drastic drop in fluent Buryat speakers. As outlined earlier in this chapter, while the levels of fluency among Buryats are decreasing rapidly, the interpretation of the term *mother tongue* (*rodnoi iazyk*) as a language connected to its speakers through heritage rather than proficiency results in unrepresentatively high numbers of Buryat mother tongue speakers in public censuses. These high numbers can, in turn, overshadow the fact that next to active attempts of severing Buryats from their ancestral ties (such as through alterations to their historical and cultural narratives), the years of Soviet rule also led to an 'ethnic detachment' through undermining the teaching of the Buryat language to young generations.

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[13] The translation is my own. The original post can be found on https://vk.com/topic-32980255_25703179?post=16781.

Even though Buryat national schools were formed shortly after the establishment of the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR in 1923, the expansion of the Buryat schools throughout the 1920's and 1930's was slow (Chakars 2009, 204). In general, Buryat national schools were struggling due to a lack of resources, as textbooks in schools were often scarce and had to be changed several times throughout the years of Soviet political intervention (Blitstein 2001, 259). As mentioned in chapter 5, within only 10 years the Buryat script was first changed from the traditional Mongol script into Latin in 1928 and then to Cyrillic. This, of course, meant that all Buryat school children needed new class materials and had to adapt to a completely new writing and reading system. Furthermore, the Soviet government's prescription of the change from Selenga to Khori as the officially accepted version of Buryat, again, caused a forced re-working of all school literature (Chakars 2009, 204). This complicated situation in Buryat educational institutions also carried on throughout the 1950's, during which schools suffered a shortage of qualified Buryat teachers, resulting in uneven levels of Buryat language education (Chakars 2009, 208). In addition, the growing influence of Russian throughout the Soviet rule resulted in many curriculum changes for pupils, in which Russian was first taught as a subject, later became the main language of instruction, while the native Buryat language was first degraded to a subject and in later years merely regarded as a subject that was taught for a limited number of years in schools (as discussed in chapter 5). Rather than opposing this trend, parents were aware that the Buryat language was mainly spoken in a domestic sphere and that Russian could be the gateway to a brighter future for their children and thus often reinforced the dominant status of the Russian language (Boltokova 2004, 20; Chakars 2014, 133-134).

Here, I want to revisit Skutnabb-Kangas' (1999) models of bilingual/multilingual education for ethnic minorities, in which she describes the impact of different educational methods on children of a minority language. The model shows that only 'strong models', where children are attributed with (1) "high levels of multilingualism," (2) receive "a fair chance of achieving academically at school" and (3) develop "a strong, positive multilingual and multicultural identity and positive attitudes towards the self and others" (1999, 42) can be seen as successful educational methods. In opposition to this stand 'weak models', which do not achieve all of the 3 goals listed above and ‘nonmodels’, resulting in the achievement of none of the 3 goals, while instead often leading to monolingualism or a strong dominance of the majority language. Both ‘weak models’ and ‘nonmodels’ are seen as human rights violations and viewed as methods for ‘linguistic genocide’ of an ethnic language by the United Nations (Skutnabb-Kangas 1999, 42-43). Considering the statistics presented in this chapter, showing that many young Buryats do not speak their native language at all or only at an insufficient level, it becomes apparent that their education throughout the Soviet years did not equip them with the skills required to develop a healthy multilingual language basis. The lack of depth in the education of Buryat is visible in this statement of a Buryat informant in Echevskaia and Radnaeva, saying that “[m]y mother and I can talk about everyday affairs, but I cannot reason in the Buryat language”[14] (2016, 42). Rather, the requirement of a fluent command of Russian in order to participate in any form of higher education established a clear hierarchy and presented parents of school children with the choice between their linguistic heritage and the possible future success for their children. Furthermore, through constant curricula changes Buryat children lacked the stability required to develop a positive relationship with their ethnic language, which, according to Skutnabb-Kangas, would need:

> “[s]upport by using as the main medium of education, at least during the first eight years, that language (of the two that the child is supposed to become bilingual in initially) which is least likely to develop to a high formal level. For all minority children, this is their own mother tongue“ (1999, 51).

Rather, Soviets executed educational methods that exerted a strong dominance over the Buryat language, obstructed higher education in the Buryat language and left many Buryats with a negative attitude towards the insufficient connection with their ethnic background. All of these factors comply with the characteristics of ‘nonmodels’ and (not-exclusively) account for the insufficient language skills of modern Buryats.

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[14] The translation is my own.

6.3.1 Buryat and Russian identities of Buryats

For this next part, I want to discuss the effects of the Soviet educational reforms on the formation of Buryats' multilingual and multicultural identities. Besides sufficient language skills, a successful multilingual education should also provide the learner with a distinct feeling of collective membership (Skutnabb-Kangas 1999). Having already investigated the insufficient connection that many Buryats express with their ethnic heritage, I believe I have already illustrated that the Soviet intervention has caused quantifiable changes in the self-perception of Buryats. Revisiting Fishman's (Fishman in Schmidt 2008, 5) categorisation of the concept of *ethnicity,* we can see that Buryat's sense of paternity (the perception of intergenerational continuity), patrimony (linguistic and cultural substance of what is passed on and gives material expression to this continuity) and phenomenology (the self-perceived character of ethnicity) have all been subjected to change throughout the Soviet years. With regards to paternity, my research has shown that there is a decreased knowledge among Buryats of their heritage (e.g. as seen in the fact that today Buryats know less about their paternal line as in the past), the linguistic substance has decreased dramatically (while the cultural substance appears to still be upheld more actively) and the characterisation of Buryats as 'indigenous people' by their social environment can clash with an individual's inability to identify as such themselves and trigger a sense of shame about the lack of entrenchment into their own ethnicity. Although basically all Buryats that I encountered through my online research and came across in secondary literature have expressed no doubt that their mother tongue and ethnicity are 'Buryat', it is visible that years of Russian influence have left an imprint on the ethnic composition of Buryats. As Skutnabb-Kangas puts it,

> "[y]ou are born into a specific ethnic group, and this circumstance decides what your mother tongue (or tongues, if your parents speak different languages) will initially be. But what happens later to your ethnicity, your identity, and your language(s) and how they are shaped and actualized is influenced by economic and political concerns and by your social circumstances and later life. These things also influence to

> what extent you are aware of the importance of your ethnicity and your mother tongue(s) and the connection between them" (1999, 55)

In accordance with this notion, I propose that Buryats who have been educated in Russian and live their lives in private and public Russian spheres must have to some extent adopted Russian identities alongside their ethnic Buryat identification. The foundation for this assumption is based on a rather simple thought pattern, namely that every human defines itself both on an individual level and through its relationships to collectives (as outlined in chapter 3). If the collective affiliation with someone's ethnic group is not very distinctive, they will most likely form bonds with another group and integrate it in their self-perception. If we assume, for example, that a Buryat child grew up in the city, in a Russian-speaking environment, received education in Russian, with the Buryat language being only a subject at school for a few years, it will certainly be equipped with a Russian linguistic identity. From there, it is not hard to imagine that this person will also form a Russian cultural identity, next to their Buryat ethnic identity. Looking back at one of the statistics in Osinskii and Khabudaeva (2014, 69), we see that 9.6% of Buryats questioned considered both Russian and Buryat as their mother tongues. This really exemplifies the complicated and multi-layered nature of the problem, namely that it must be difficult for someone to not consider the language they grew up with and speak on a daily basis in both their private and professional life as their *mother* tongue. Equally, it appears almost impossible for a member of a distinctive indigenous group to not call this groups' language their mother tongue. In Traast, a Buryat girl confirms this notion, saying that "[…] she is Buryat, but since she grew up in the city and she hardly speaks Buryat, she questions herself whether this should not mean that she is Russian. She sees herself as being Russian from the language perspective, Sima explained how this sometimes causes an identity-conflict" (2006, 61). This example illustrates how the two colliding identities among the Buryat youth can cause what Erikson refers to as 'role confusion' (as discussed in chapter 3), where, on the path towards adulthood (12-18 years), many different identities are tested out in order to arrive at a suitable place in the world. 'Role confusion' then occurs when societal expectations meet divergent personal attitudes. Due to Buryats' non-European facial characteristics and concomitant societal classification as “Buryats”, a clear reference point is being established, with often no regard to how the person perceives their own identity. This also means that if a Buryat chose to adopt a Russian identity, this choice would be constantly challenged, questioned and judged by their social environment.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to present a compelling case which shows that the interventionist policies imposed by Soviet rulers on the Buryat nation can be directly linked to a growing disconnection among many post-Soviet Buryats with their ethnic language and identity. As a last step I now want to briefly sum up the main analytical points that I raised in this work and offer possible means of conceptualising the current challenges that Buryats seem to face with regards to their self-identification. For this matter, I believe it is best to return to one question from the very beginning of this thesis: "what is identity"? According to the Simplified Theory of Identity Formation (SIFT) by Coté and Levine it is possible to condense the highly complex subject of human identity into three foundational principles, namely 'integration', 'differentiation' and 'continuity'. In the example of Buryats, their ethnic roots are entrenched in an indigenous group with a long and rich cultural history, including their own language, religion and traditions. As members of the collective identity, the Buryat people would define themselves through their integration into the group, their individual differentiation from it, and achieve a sense of continuity through the reinforcement of their group roles within the society over time, providing them with security, stability and purpose for the future. However, the political intervention throughout the years of Soviet rule brought this Buryat group stability out of balance. In addition to previous alterations in the general economical organisation and group roles of the Buryat society through the contact with Russian forces (e.g. forced settlement, changed administration, religious confirmation, etc.), the Soviet rulers made active attempts at severing the group's historical ties in an effort to unify the Soviet nation. Here, newly introduced versions of Buryat history served to disconnect Buryats from their ancestry, while at the same time extensive language laws and linguistic educational reforms undermined the Buryat ethnic language. By partially removing language as a means of bridging knowledge between generations, these linguistic policies resulted in the decreased internal cohesion of the Buryat collective, thus breaking the continuity for individual members of the group. Having lost the continuity with their group affiliation, the self-identification of individual Buryats was thrown out of its regular equilibrium. As a result of the close contact with the

Russian language and culture that many Buryats were exposed to from an early age, I find it only logical to assume that the existence of a distinct linguistic Russian identity within ethnically disconnected Buryats also stimulated their desire for the creation of a Russian cultural identity. However, while many Buryats speak fluent Russian and have immersed themselves in a Russian society and culture, their physical features as Mongol descendants distance them from the native Russian population, marking them as indigenous people living outside their ethnic group. Unable to establish their stable group roles within a Russian society, no sense of continuity in their self-perception can be achieved. It is the combination of the increasing disconnection from a Buryat ‘origin identity’ and the persistent exclusion from a Russian ‘target identity’ that results in what I view as an ‘identity vacuum’ in ethnically disconnected Buryats. This proposed ‘identity vacuum’ is a state in which two unstable forces of integration and differentiation cannot establish continuity and Buryats are left with either wanting to be ‘more Buryat’ in order to classify as entrenched members of their ethnic group or ‘less Buryat’ so as to not be excluded anymore from a Russian collective identity.

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