



Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire

Erik R. Scott

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Familiar Strangers tells the story of a remarkably successful group of ethnic outsiders at the heart of Soviet empire and, in so doing, reinterprets the course of modern Russian and Soviet history. While past scholars have portrayed the Soviet Union as a Russian-led empire composed of separate national republics, Erik R. Scott draws on untapped archival documents in multiple languages to make the case that it was actually an empire of diasporas, forged through the mixing of a diverse array of nationalities. Concealed behind external Soviet borders, internal diasporas from the Soviet republics migrated throughout the socialist empire, leaving their mark on its politics, culture, and economics.

Among the Soviet Union's internal diasporas, the Georgians were arguably the most prominent group. The roles they played in the Soviet empire's evolution illuminate the opportunities as well as the limitations of the Bolshevik Revolution for ethnic minorities. Georgian revolutionaries accompanied Stalin in his rise to power and helped build the socialist state; Georgian culinary specialists contributed the dishes and rituals that defined Soviet dining habits; Georgian cultural entrepreneurs perfected a flamboyant repertoire that spoke for a multiethnic society on stage and screen; Georgian traders thrived in the Soviet Union's burgeoning informal economy; and Georgian intellectuals explored the furthest limits of allowable expression, ultimately calling into question the legitimacy of Soviet power.

Looking at the rise and fall of the Soviet Union from a Georgian perspective, this book moves past the typical divide between center and periphery, and colonizer and colonized, that guides most scholarship on empire. Arguing for a new theory of diaspora, it offers a new way of thinking about the experience of minorities in multiethnic states, with implications far beyond the imperial borders of Russia and Eurasia.

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