

# Strategies of cultural assimilation and the politics of naming

David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation*.  
(Cornell University Press, 1998). pp. 243-  
299.

# Assimilation and political culture

Laitin focuses on the circumstances in which people will opt for a shift in their identity

Identity choices are heavily conditioned by the perception of what choices are others making

# Assimilation cascade

- Economic opportunities are greater for those who are fluent in the language of the state
- The minority community is itself divided and exert little social pressure on individuals to remain part of the group

# Assimilation cascade

- Members of the dominant group are willing to welcome such changes in newcomers' identity

# Assimilation and culture

Economic factors - material interests -  
not account for the behaviour of  
minority/immigrant identity choices

Rational choices model have to be  
supplemented status variables and the  
theory of cultural construction of  
reality

# Rational calculation and culture

1. Material benefits
2. In-group status
3. Out-group acceptance



# Collective memory

What people of different ages and social backgrounds know as they discuss, debate and negotiate the past and through this process define the future.

# Memories of events

Two primary sources of knowledge of past public events:

- cohort experience - directly experienced
- education - learned about from others



# Laitin: possible strategies

- Loyalty: passive integration
- Exit: returning to a putative Homeland
- Voice: political organization
- Fight: violent confrontation
- Redefinition: inventing a new identity

# Laitin: identity crisis

- The basic identity categories that guided nontitular persons in the past become eroded.
- „Soviet“ is no longer a socially acceptable category – even if many still think that this is what they really are.

# **Laitin: Russian as conglomerate identity**

- „My mother is Tatar, my father is Greek, and I am Russian.“
- „What sort of Russians are they? They are not pure Russians!“
- In Ukraine where many Ukrainians rely on Russian language for communication, ethnic difference is conceived as primarily religious.