Life Histories of the *Etnos* Concept in Eurasia: An Introduction

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In *The Age of Extremes*, the historian Eric Hobsbawm ¹ argued that “the short twentieth century” ended with the break-up of the Soviet Union. This epoch-defining event cast into doubt major ideologies such as the Soviet-led communist movement, as well as *laissez-faire* free-market capitalism - but it also called into question the effectiveness of expert knowledge. Unprecedented nationalist unrest preceded the fragmenting of the Soviet Union into a collage of new European and Eurasian republics. Another historian dubbed this fragmentation “the revenge of the past” ², as if long-term pre-existing ethnic identities had somehow outlived and triumphed over power of a centralized and technocratic state. In the mid-1990s, it seemed impossible to gain a long-term perspective over this explosive part-century. It now seems self-evident that ethnic and national identities have held, and continue to exercise a hold, on social order in this region if not elsewhere. An account of the “long 20th Century” requires an understanding of how these technocratic Eurasian states engaged with national identities. This book, based on extensive archival research for over a decade, presents an account of over 150-years of what we identify as the “etnos-thinking” – the attempt to use positivistic and rational scientific

methodologies to describe, encapsulate, evaluate, and rank “etnoses” across Eurasia. Our central argument is that the work of professional ethnographers created a powerful parallel language to the political vocabulary of “tribes”, “nationalities”, and “nations” which were hitherto thought to have structured Eurasian space. If the end of the short twentieth century is marked by the collapse of the Soviet national project, the long twentieth century can be associated with the uneven and discontinuous growth in ethnos-thinking within the Academy, the Government, and finally throughout civil society.

The term around which this volume revolves – etnos – is likely not a familiar term to most readers. Incorrectly glossed as “ethnicity”, the term refers to a somewhat transhistorical collective identity held by people speaking a common language, sharing a common set of traditions, and often said to hold a “common psychology” and share certain key physiognomic attributes. At first glance, the term is a biologically-anchored definition of collective identity. It is distinctive since it diverts itself from the standard, post-war North Atlantic definition of ethnicity\(^3\), which stresses that an individual might choose to belong to one or many social, linguistic, or confessional groups. Peter Skalník, an expert observer of the history of Soviet ethnography, distinguishes etnos as “a reified substance” distinct from “relational” understandings of ethnicity\(^4\). In other words, if modern European and North American analysts see ethnicity as a bundle of qualities - any one of which an individual might cite to describe his or her identity, to a Russian or Kazakh ethnographer, an etnos exists as a coherent and enduring set of traits which only knowledgeable experts can see. Circulating around this single term are a number of

strong assumptions about the durability of identities over time; the role the expert-eye in assigning identity; and the importance of physical bodies to stabilize and reproduce identities. All three of these assumptions are key in trying to understand how state and society have interacted in Eurasia across the long twentieth Century.

Etnos theory is often associated with the stodgy and essentialist school of ethnography of the former Director of the Institute of Ethnography, Iľulian Bromlei (1921-1990). Bromlei, promoted his theory internationally as a non-racial, anti-colonialist identity theory for anthropology. The concept was (re-)introduced prominently, if not theatrically, to a Western European audience in 1964 during the VII International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held in Moscow. Following this event, the term was queried, and to some extent, promoted by three British scholars – Ernest Gellner, Teodor Shanin and Marcus Banks. In all three cases, they drew attention to the fact that it was “non-relativistic” theory of identity. Their curiosity for the term was guided upon a certain dissatisfaction with post-structuralist arguments in the humanities suggesting that all identities could be freely made-up independent of historic or cultural circumstances.

Ernest Gellner was by far the most enthusiastic of the trio. He described Bromlei’s etnos-thinking as a “minor revolution” which advocated fieldwork in order to

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document and understand living conditions in-the-present instead of resting upon the armchair evolutionary models for which Marxism had been famous. We will discuss Bromleī’s version of etnos theory in some detail below. Readers should be alerted that this discussion about physically-anchored, persistent identities did not originate with him, but is in fact very old - extending back to at least the middle of the 19th century – and in some accounts to the 17th Century. There is a misunderstanding that the essentialist excesses of etnos theory served the late Soviet state’s passion for ethno-territorial stability. It has been the surprise of many, including ourselves, that with the fall of the Soviet state the interest in etnos theory has increased and not subsided. Therefore, this scholastic concept, once confined to the corridors of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has now become one of the key-terms by which president Putin or neo-Eurasian enthusiasts frame their sense of the historical destinies of the component peoples of the Russian Federation. A parallel term- minzu - which was partly built on the work and teaching of the émigré etnos-pioneer Sergei M. Shirokogoroff (1887-1939) also guides Chinese state nationality policy today11. Together these essentialist and deeply rooted concepts of identity structure the space of two continents.

The purpose of this volume is to “ground” etnos theory by giving a long-overdue and detailed account of the social conditions which encouraged the growth of this idea. Inspired by the sociology of science, we have conducted interviews with senior ethnographers, as well as consulted previously unknown archival collections, in order to reconstruct the flavour of the seminars where these ideas were discussed. Further, we have put a great emphasis on the fieldwork of many seminal etnos-

thinkers (Volkov, Rudenko, Shirokogoroff) in order to understand how they reasoned about cultural persistence and biosocial identity in the field.

A difficult and to some degree clumsy part of our project has been the uneven valences of the etnos term itself. Aside from the fact that it was always the defining prefix in words like ėtnografiia, there were periods of time when the use of the substantive term was discouraged, if not banned outright. Unlike other investigators, such as the cultural historian Han Vermeulen\textsuperscript{12}, we do not place primacy on the term itself. Instead, we locate etnos-thinking in the situations where expert observers credit to themselves the ability to discern long-term biosocial identities within the matrix of everyday life. In certain periods of time, most significantly in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and during the Stalinist academy, the etnos term was completely absent - but etnos-thinking was tangible in the way that terms like narodnost’ [nationality’] or narod [people] were used. Therefore, we make a strong argument that if I\textsuperscript{i}Ulian Bromleĭ’s late intervention was “minor revolution”, it was built upon a wide Eurasian intellectual movement. In short, etnos-thinking is not only present when then the term is used overtly. It is also recognizable when more familiar terms such as ‘tribe’, ‘nationality’, or ‘nation’ are applied by experts essentially. Therefore, we argue that talk about nations and about etnoses are often two sides of the same coin – where one face is an unrooted scientific discourse while the other face is the necessary complement of engaged ethnographic action in building or re-building ethnic communities.

The first fieldwork of Sergei and Elizabeta Shirokogoroff in the Lake Baikal region of Eastern Siberia, and later in Russian-controlled Manchuria, not only led to substantive examples of etnos formation but contributed to the development of a like-minded school of minzu studies in China. Looking back to the life-histories of these founders of etnos theory we can see that the concept itself balanced central and peripheral experiences and in its own way lent a sense of unity to the Empire. The role of these Siberian and pan-Slavic conversations has never been documented in existing accounts giving the impression that the concept appeared out of thin air.

**Etnos-thinking: A Short Course**

Before we start out on our overview of etnos-thinking, it would be helpful to have a crisp and clear definition of what an etnos is. This is not as easy a task as it might first seem. In contemporary Russia, the term is so pervasive, and considered to be so self-evident that it sometimes seems to be part of the air one breathes. Some scholars, such as Ùliian Bromleï, wrote entire monographs on how the concept could be applied to Soviet society, but struggled to give a concise definition of the term. For many it seems that one belongs to an etnos as self-evidently as one has a defined gender or a specified profession.

Although strands of etnos-thinking can be traced to the 17th century, the first scholar to employ the term as a stand-alone, compact concept was Nikolaï N. Mogïianskiï (1871-1933) – a curator at the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg. His 1916 published definition reads as follows:

The ἔθνος [etnos] concept — is a complex idea. It refers to a number of qualities united together in an individual as a single whole [одно целое]. [These are:] common physical
(anthropological) characteristics; a common historical fate, and finally a common language. These are the foundations upon which, in turn, [an etnos] can build a common worldview [and] folk-psychology – in short, an entire spiritual culture13.

His off-the-cuff definition was published in the context of a wide-ranging debate on the institutionalization of ethnography within Russia and in particular stressed the role of expert scientists in investigating and setting public policy.

An émigré ethnographer, Sergei M. Shirokogoroff (1887-1939)14, who is widely credited for being the first to publish a book-length monograph in Shanghai on the topic of etnos, captures many of the same attributes:

[An] etnos is a group of people, speaking a common language who recognise their common origin, and who display a coherent set [kompleks] of habits [obychay], lifestyle [uklad zhizni], and a set of traditions that they protect and worship. [They further] distinguish these [qualities] from those of other groups. This, in fact, is the ethnic unit – the object of scientific ethnography [emphasis in the original]15.

Shirokogoroff’s fieldwork, academic and political writings are examined in considerable detail in chapters 3 and 4 of this volume.

Bromleî tended to shy away from formally defining the term. Instead, he favoured describing the term in contraposition to competing terms, and as an illustration of the practical and applied work that ethnographers could provide the state. However here and there, parts of a definition have appeared. In English, his most concise formulation is in his edited book Soviet Ethnology and Anthropology

14 Sergei Shirokogoroff’s name is known by a large variety of transcriptions. In the text of this volume we use the transcription that he himself chose for his English language publications. The majority of his work was published in English. Transcriptions of his name in citations to his work follow the language of the original publication. He is also known as Shirokogoroff (Широкогоров), Chirokogoroff, Śirokogorov, Shǐ lù guó (史禄国) and Shokogorov (シロコゴロフ)
Today where he almost accidently defines the concept by noticing that his life-long competitor Lev N. Gumilëv ignores them:

Attention has long been drawn to the fact that none of the elements of ethnos such language, customs, religion, etc. can be regarded as an indispensable differentiating feature. This is sometimes used as a reason for ignoring these elements as expressions of the essence of ethnos 16 [emphasis added]17.

In a much later wide-ranging Russian-language encyclopaedia article on etnos theory, he also stressed that etnoses have a concept of a common descent, a self-appellation, and a geographical range with the following definition:

An Etnos ...is [made up of] the totality [sovokupnost'] of individuals [living] on a defined territory, who demonstrate common and relatively stable linguistic, cultural and psychic qualities. [This people] also recognizes their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from other similar groups (self-identity) and represent this [recognition] through a self-appellation (an ethnonym) 18.

Bromlei’s sparring partner, the Leningrad- based geographer Lev N. Gumilëv (1912-1992), made a career out of promoting and distinguishing his own theory of etnos in a series of historical monographs many of which became best-sellers in the late Soviet period. Substantively, however his definition of the etnos did not differ greatly from that of Bromlei19. In an early article, he argued that etnos was not the subject of ethnography but of historical geography. In his view the concept featured the components of language, habits [obichai] and culture, ideology, and a an account of a common of origin20. Over time his vision would become more intricate wherein no

17 Bromley. The term ethnos and its definition. P. 66.
one of these qualities was sufficient. Instead he pointed to the strong link of an *etnos* to a specific landscape and a biocultural life-course rising and falling in 1500 year cycles\(^{21}\). Mark Bassin, in his authoritative overview of Gumilev’s work, identifies Gumilev’s unique contribution to *etnos* theory with his description of “persistent behavioural models” [*stereotypy povedenii*] and ethnic “passions” [*passionnarnost’*] which he saw remaining constant over time\(^{22}\). Characteristically for this entire school, only experts could accurately identify these archetypes or emotions.

Building on these four definitions, each from different corners of the Empire, and from different times, we can identify the following five qualities, which are associated with *etnoses*.

- A collective identity
- A common physical anthropological foundation
- A common language
- A common set of traditions or “historical fate”
- A common worldview, “folk psychology”, or behavioural archetype

Perhaps the most influential part of the definition, implied rather than stated, was the use of a Greek neologism [*étnoς*] emphasizing that this was a specialised *scientific* term for expert use and not necessary caught up in popular definitions of nation or people *narod*.

In the early 20\(^{th}\) Century this bundle of five *etnos* qualities had the important peculiarity of being able to express itself in a variety of contexts. If professional ethnographers insisted that these elements determined a scientific vision of


collective human identities, professional politicians within Russia often argued the same. There is little to differentiate the scientific definition of etnos from I.V. Stalin’s 1913 definition of a nation [natsiia]

A nation is a historically-descended, stable collectivity [obshchnost’] of people, which has come about as the result of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological character – recognizable by its common culture.23

Absent in Stalin’s definition is a reference to a biosocial foundation to a nation, but on the same page he, like others, notes that “the national character … leaves its mark on the physiognomy of a nation”.

In perhaps the most authoritative study of the cultural technologies of rule at the beginning of the Soviet period, Francine Hirsch describes how the “vocabulary of nationality” allowed two different groups to use “the same words to talk about different things”.24 In Hirsh’s view, this shared paradigm permitted Tsarist intellectuals to negotiate an alliance with the rising Soviet state, allowing them to launch long-sought-after projects such as a modern census or a Union-wide mapping project.

Despite the elastic and somewhat uncritical way that commonalities of identity served both scientific ethnography and the developing Bolshevik state, the stability and longevity of etnoses created a major problem for Marxist thinkers. All proponents of etnos-thinking (or, those using “the vocabulary of nationality”) protested that their ideas should never be misunderstood as an ahistorical or racial theory of belonging. Nevertheless, these protests had to be made repeatedly. The clearest examples of continuity-through-change came when asking adherents to

think backwards in time – such is in Ì½lian Bromleî’s often re-iterated examples about Poles and Ukrainians living in different times and places but preserving the core of their identities at all times. Through examples such as these, identities seemed to be both timeless and unrooted from particular landscapes. The argument did not seem to work as well when thinking forwards into the future such as when trying to imagine how hundreds of smaller nationalities could productively merge into a future nation. Francine Hirsh dubs this future-oriented policy of directed assimilation “state-sponsored evolutionism”. This element of whether or not linguistic or cultural qualities were self-evidently robust or stable, or if they were forced to become standardized, haunted etnos theorists for 100 years, and continues to trouble proponents of this outlook today. In order to fend-off charges of essentialism, the authors of major schools of etnos-thinking such as Bromleî and Gumilëv had a tendency to bolt-on extra elements to their theories such as “sub-etnoses” or “etno-social organismis”. This Byzantine involution will be discussed in more detail below.

Peter Skalník is not re-assured with Bromleî’s assertions that his theory is not biologically founded. He points out that Bromleî often returns to the theme of ethnic intermarriage (endogamy) or even sketches out rare instances of “ethno-racial communities”. Skalník concludes “[as] a matter of fact he whole theory rests … on presuppositions of a biological and psychological nature”. Nevertheless a few key patriots of Soviet-era etnos-thinking point to the fact that its emphasis on the

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28 Ibid.
detailed, empirical study of ethnic processes pushes the theory beyond mere essentialism. They struggle, nevertheless, to describe the term in a language that conveys the paradox that long-term, historically stable collective identities might nevertheless be open to change. The tireless translator of Soviet thought Teodor Shanin (1930- ) perhaps gave the best assessment of the evocativeness of the term:

Soviet perceptions of ethnicity and their expression within the social sciences differ in emphasis and in angle of vision from their Western counterparts. They follow a different tradition, which has led to different readings so far and stimulated different patterns of data-gathering and analysis. While rejecting racialist ahistoricity, they did not accept as its alternative a fully relativist treatment of ethnicity. They accorded ethnic phenomena greater substance, consistency, and autonomous casual power and focussed attention on the ethnicity of majorities as well as minorities. Compared to main-stream Western studies, theirs have been more historical in the way they treated ethnic data … ²⁹

Characteristically, Shanin nevertheless struggled to describe this anti-relativist, anti-racialist theory in his English-language analyses. In one evocative rendering, he called it the “case of the missing term”³⁰.

It is difficult to weigh the case of whether ethos theory is irrevocably rooted in biology, or if it is a subtle attempt to describe long-term cultural continuities amidst social structural change. The wide bookshelf of late-Soviet field research, with its tireless documentation of “merging”, “splitting”, and “inter-marriage” tends to speak against a more open-ended and voluntaristic approach to identity. However lesser known strands in the unpublished work, and less-known publications of the etnos pioneers Mogilianskii and Shirokogoroff display glimpses of what we might identify as a modern theory of ethnicity. For example, in Shirokogoroff’s late magnum opus

The Psychomental Complex of the Tungus - a work that remains untranslated and largely inaccessible in Russia - it is striking that in the prefatory chapters he develops a very late-20th century definition of ethnos as a “process”. He also triangulates etnos within the combined fields of ethnology, with sociology, political science, psychologists, geographers, and philosophers.

All the above indicated units [populations, nations, regional groups, social groups, religious groups and cultural groups] result from a similar process, in so far, as we can see from its final manifestations: more or less similar cultural complexes, speaking the same language, believing into a common origin, possessing group consciousness, and practising endogamy. This is a definition which corresponds to our definition of ethnical unit. However, not all of them are «ethnical units». In fact, we have seen that such a crystallization may occur in any group: groups implied by the environment, economic activity, psychomental complex, and especially peculiar conditions of interethnical milieu about which I shall speak later. Yet, such a crystallized state is not always observed and in some groups it rarely occurs, as for instance, in groups based upon religious and economic differentiation. This is a PROCESS which only may result in the formation of ethnical units, and this process I have called ETHNOS. 

This fully unwrapped definition, which consults studies from a wide range of disciplines, sieves-out all social and biological research, which does not lead to the formation of “ethnical units”. It further draws attention to the “complex” – meaning here not a collection of traits but a type of mentality - that characterises a set of approaches, hypotheses, and behaviours that characterize an ethnic unit. It is our conviction that a careful reading of the fieldwork and original texts of these early thinkers can yield certain insights into the way that the term might have developed

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differently, might continue to develop, and in so doing can capture the continued evocativeness of the term.

What is in a term? The etnos-term and the institutionalization of ethnography in Russia

Anthropology has had a complicated and entangled history, which is evident in the variety of terms by which different national traditions describe the way that they study peoples, cultures and societies. In one part of the world, this endeavour might best known as sociocultural anthropology. In another part of the world, it may be described as ethnography or ethnology\textsuperscript{32}. Far from being accidental, these terminological variations reflect fundamental differences in research programs or even paradigms, associated with diverse intellectual traditions. George Stocking, in his survey of Western European traditions, identified three discourses that contributed to the formation of anthropology: biological discourse or “natural history”, humanitarian discourse rooted in philology, and a social science that drew on the philosophical thought of French and Scottish Enlightenment\textsuperscript{33}. Eurasian anthropological traditions pull on the same general trinity of inspiration. The reasons for this shared history are understandable. In the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, many local scholars in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tokyo or Peking often received their training in one of the capitals of early anthropological thinking within Western Europe or North America. Nevertheless, local idioms of identity also pull

\textsuperscript{32} George W. Stocking. What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute // Man. 1971. 7 (n.s.).

and reshape this common foundation in different ways. One of the most distinctive
qualities of Russian anthropological thinking – in line with many other Eurasian –
tends to bundle its thinking into a single compact term – etnos. A common turn of
phrase is that etnos represents a ‘a single totality of many parts’ [sovokupnost’]. To
a great extent the purpose of this book is to try to make Russian and Eurasian etnos-
thinking more legible to English-language readers. In this section we explore how
this Greek-inflected neologism, which helped to bundle a set of assumptions into a
single toolkit, came to structure the way that ethnographic description became
incorporated into Russian universities and museums.

It is important to mention that the naturalists also fought their corner within the
museum sector as well. Nikolaï M. Mogilianskiî (1871-1933), whose name is often
cited as being the first to distinguish etnos as a standard object of scientific research,
raised his objections to the humanist programme while working as curator in the
Russian Museum. In a lecture read-out at a meeting of the Anthropological Society of St. Petersburg University in 1902 (published later in 1908), he reviewed
Kharuzin’s posthumous volume Ėtnografiia with an eye to defining ethnography, as a
distinct science subsumed within [physical] anthropology. He saw ethnography as
documenting the intellectual and spiritual achievement of distinct races and peoples
adapted to a defined geographical space34. Later, as he became the Head of
Ethnography at the Museum, he re-worked and republished the same review giving
us a first glimpse at the now ubiquitous definition of etnos. The term, spelled with
Greek letters [ἔθνος], is defined as “a single totality [одно ἔσελος] of physical

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(anthropological) qualities ... historical destinies, and finally, a drawing-together
(obshchnost') of language ... worldview, national psychology [and] spiritual
culture". A particularly strong statement in the title this article distinguishes etnos
as the "object" of ethnography. Given Mogilianski's career as a museum
ethnographer, and his fieldwork as a collector of evocative items that represent the
heart of a nation, it is tempting to read his bookish definition as a statement that
ethnography can be read through objects.

From 1916 onwards, the five core elements of Mogilianski's wandering, prosaic
definition (a single collective identity; a physical foundation; a common language, a
common set of traditions or destiny, and a common worldview) would appear in
successive descriptions of Russian and Eurasian etnos theory for the next 100
years. In particular the pamphlets and book-length monograph published by Sergei
Shirokogoroff in China and the Russian Far East (described in more detail in chapter
4) would be built around these five elements.

It would not be entirely accurate to say that the nationalists and the imperialists
reached a rapprochement through their common search for a single tool-kit to
describe both Slavic and non-Slavic peoples within the Empire. From the start of the
First World War, and then during the two Russian Revolutions, one can only
describe a discordant collage of competing techniques. During the War, the newly
appointed liberal minister of education Pavel Ignatiev initiated a fresh debate on the
institutionalization of ethnography with his unsuccessful attempt to standardize

36 S. M. Shirokogorov. Mesto ėtnografii sredi nauk i klassifikatsii etnosov. Vladivostok, 1922; Idem. Ėtnos -
issledovanie osnovnykh printsinov izmeneniia ėtnicheskikh i ėtnograficheskikh iavlenii.
university education. A revealing set of memoranda in the Archive of the Russian Geographical Society gives an insight into the range of the debate. Elements of this debate can also be tracked in a published summary.

Lev Sternberg, representing the humanists, called for clear division between anthropologists, who should study the science of the human body, and ethnographers, whom he saw as studying the history of the human spirit and culture. Sternberg expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that ethnography was still taught in some institutions by naturalists, and described this as:

… a survival of the distant past when anthropologists, educated mostly as zoologists, followed their lead in studying the way of life of species … [They] considered ethnography to be the description of the way of life of primitive peoples which was supposed to be an appendix to anthropological morphology of human varieties.

Our erstwhile inventor of etnos theory, Nikolaĭ Mogilianskii countered Shternberg’s claim defended the role of the naturalism in ethnography:

A naturalist should in no way refuse to study the everyday life [byt] of people. He cannot limit his task to the morphology of the brain. He must trace its functions to their ends (psycho-physiology) and to their final results be they articulate speech, the experience of the sacred [kul’t] stemming from a worldview and religious consciousness. [He must study] clothing as a material object and as the final result of complex intellectual and physical labour.

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41 Ibid. L. 11.
In his view, every ethnographer needs a solid training in natural sciences including training in morphology, physiology, psycho-physiology as well as geodynamics, geomorphology and paleontology.42

Mogilińskii’s view was buttressed by the elderly statesman of St. Petersburg physical anthropology and ethnography Fedor Volkov (Vovk). In his own memo, Volkov concluded in a somewhat irritated manner that “there has been no doubt, so far, that ethnography belongs to the anthropological and, hence, natural sciences both [in Russia] and in Western Europe”.43 He continued to make sarcastic remarks about the mistakes that historians make when they try to do archaeological and ethnographic research by applying an “elastic” concept of the history of culture that included “not only ethnography, but astronomy, canonical law, veterinary and what not”.44 Both Volkov and Mogilńskii in their arguments relied on the model of the Société d’Anthropologie de Paris, established by Paul Broca in 1859. Broca’s “general anthropology”, which he defined as “the biology of human species”, was divided into six subfields which included demography, ethnology and linguistic anthropology, and thus “subsumed the cultural study of man within the physical study of man”45.

This debate led to no conclusive result. The 1917 Revolution shifted the agenda, if not the opponents. Volkov and Mogilińskii, who strictly opposed the Bolsheviks moved to Kiev in 1918. Volkov died the same year. Mogilińskii soon found himself in emigration in Paris. Lev Shternberg and Vladimir Bogoraz, who supported the

42 Ibid. L. 12.
43 Ibid. L. 5.
44 Ibid. L. 8.
Revolution, opened a historically and philologically minded faculty of ethnography within the State Institute of Geography in December 1918. It a few years’ time, the Institute became the Faculty of Geography of Leningrad State University, wherein Shternberg and Bogoraz established what has been donned the Leningrad school of ethnography. Although at first glance it would seem that the evolutionist and humanist view of the discipline prevailed over the naturalists, it should be remembered that Volkov’s students Sergei Rudenko, David Zolotorev, and arguably Sergei Shirokogoroff occupied prominent positions in Russian anthropology/ethnography until 1920s when a new cultural revolution moved the goalposts once again.

The institutionalization of ethnography in Russia in the second half of the 19th century rehearsed several themes common to the history of ethnographic and ethnological thought across Europe and North America. From 1840-1920 there was an on-going debate as to the extent to which ethnographers should document little known, non-industrial societies and the extent to which they should uncover the hidden psychological spirit of their own people. Scholars also diverged on the extent to which physiognomy and physical geography could be credited in the production of culture. However, perhaps in a manner that diverged from the early ethnographic debates in Western Europe and in the Americas, early Russian ethnographers produced programmes which fed into State-controlled projects for improving the lives of non-Russian nationalities and for defining the Imperial state. This political pressure, which only increased after the Revolution, created an imperative to come

up with a single term - a single object of ethnographic analysis- which Mogilianskiï had already baptised as *etnos*. Although debates continued, this single compact term begin to unite diverging opinions into what can be identified as a biosocial synthesis.

**Etnos and Soviet Marxism**

There can be no clean break between the Imperial-era reflections on biosocial science and Soviet social theory. Marxist and Proudhon-influenced socialist thinking was a strong quality of debate within intellectual circles throughout the turn of the century. Of particular interest – especially in Soviet-era histories of science – was the way in which Marx and Engels themselves used ethnography from the Russian Empire to think through examples of “primitive communism”. In terms of this volume, it is interesting that these reflections were drawn from the very same regions that inspired *etnos* theorists - such as from descriptions the Russian peasant commune [*mir*] 47 or from Lev Shternberg’s writing on the Nivkh fishing and hunting society from the far east of Siberia48. A main current of both the nationalist and philological strains within Imperial ethnography was a concern for understanding how historical laws, destinies and social evolution could be harnessed to improve the lives of impoverished peoples along the edges of Empire. This liberal conviction folded easily into Soviet Marxism-Leninism.

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The Bolshevik fraction within the first post-revolutionary state Duma [parliament] was primarily focussed on taking state power in order to better distribute land and capital for the benefit of the peasants and the then small urban proletariat in cities. Their thinking was strategic, and in so doing they invested great effort in trying to understand how different nations within the Empire could be co-opted into supporting the Revolution. Their key term was not *etnos* but nation (*natsiia*).

The Russian Bolshevik notion of the nation was heavily influenced by European debates, and in particular defined itself in opposition to the ideas of Austrian political thinkers Otto Bauer (1881-1328) and Karl Kautsky (1854-1938). The Austrian Social Democrats and the Jewish Socialist Party were among the first to realize the importance of “cultural-national autonomy”. They argued for the recognition of a cultural autonomy for minorities regardless of the fact that they may not live in compact or easily defined territories. Their argument based itself around an understanding of the nation, which stressed the “personality principle” wherein the nation is constituted “not as a territorial corporation, but as an association of persons”.[50] The Bolshevik’s objection to this voluntaristic vision was sketched out in Josef Stalin’s famous pamphlet “Marxism and the National Question”.[51]

Characteristically, Stalin outlined a much more holistic and territorially anchored definition of a nation than the Austrians, wherein a nation was seen as inhabiting a defined region [*oblaster*]. Although he used the same Austrian lexica of nation and nationality, he re-employed many of the key ideas of the Imperial biosocial compromise: an awareness of a common language, culture and psychological character – as well as a passing reference to the physiognomy of the nation. A little

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51 Stalin.
noticed but significant turn of phrase was Stalin’s reference to a type of “stable collectivity” \([\text{obshchnost'}]\) (literally ‘the quality of being the same’). For almost 60 years obshchnost’ would come to serve as a circumlocutory expression for all ethnic qualities which were persistent but could never really be called by their proper name. To a great extent “etnos-thinking” found a refuge for itself within this term for the many decades at the start of the Soviet period when the term itself was officially discouraged.

It is important to remember that Stalin’s 1913 intervention at first was just one minor voice in a symphony of discussion about ethnic identity. Mogilianskiĭ first published his etnos concept in 1908.\(^{52}\) Shirokogoroff started developing his etnos concept between 1912-1914 - before first publishing it in a pamphlet form in 1922 (alongside his parallel pamphlet on the nation)\(^{53}\). However by the late-1920s, as Soviet state gained hegemony, there was a movement to standardize thinking about the nation. However, even then, there was more than one Marxist position. “Mechanists”, like the nationalists before them, believed that the natural sciences can explain all social and geophysical phenomena. The “Bolshevisers” favoured the philosophical conviction that science should not measure Nature but change it – perhaps striking out a position that was much more radical than that of the philological faction in Imperial times.\(^{54}\). This relative pluralism ended with what Stalin himself labelled “the great break” \([\text{velikii perelom}]\) in a speech in 1929.\(^{55}\). Among other disruptions, such as the restructuring of the Academy of Sciences, and the acceleration of the

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\(^{52}\) Mogilianskiĭ. Ėtnografiia i ee zadachi.


collectivization of rural communities, there came a firm philosophical dictate that
social laws should be shown to work independently of natural laws. Within
ethnography, and the description of national policy, this placed a tabu on any direct
reference to the social structures being linked to biological processes. As Mark B.
Adams has observed, this was epitomized in the emergence of a new pejorative
term biologizirovat’ [to biologize]. He further reflected that “no field that linked the
biological and the social survived the Great Break intact”\textsuperscript{56}. The sudden ideological
turn of the late 1920s – early 1930s led to a devastating critique of “bourgeois”
science, purges of many prominent ethnographers, and creation of a new Marxist
ethnographic literature that used only “sociological” or historical concepts\textsuperscript{57}.
The standardization, or purging, of bourgeois science occurred within prominent
public meetings which were often thickly documented with sheaves of stenographic
typescripts. For ethnographers, the two most important events were the Colloquium
(soveshchaniia) of Ethnographers of Leningrad and Moscow (held in Leningrad in
April 1929)\textsuperscript{58}, and the All-Russian Archaeological-Ethnographic Colloquium (held in
Leningrad in May 1932)\textsuperscript{59}. The resolutions of the first meeting signalled a
determination to build a materialist Marxist ethnography on the basis of classical
evolutionism and the notion of social-economic formations. The conclusion of the
second meeting proclaimed that ethnography and archaeology could no longer exist
as independent disciplines and subsumed both within the discipline of history – or to

\textsuperscript{56} Adams. P. 184.
\textsuperscript{57} Sergei S. Aylmov. Ethnography, Marxism and Soviet ideology // Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister
Anthropology. 1991. Vol. 32, No. 4; T. D. Solovej, ""Korennoi perelom" v otechestvennoi etnografii (diskussiia
\textsuperscript{58} T.A. Koshkin and N. Matorin, "Soveschchani etnografov Leningrada i Moskvy (5/IV – 11/IV 1929 g.). //
Etnografiiia. 1929. No. 2; Dmitry V. Arzutov, Sergei S. Aylmov, and Devid Dzh. Anderson (Ed.). Ot klassikov k
marksizmu: soveschchani etnografov Moskvy i Leningrada (5–11 apreliia 1929 g.). Sankt-Peterburg, 2014.
\textsuperscript{59} Rezoliutsiia Vserossiiskogo arkeologo-etiograficheskogo soveshchaniia 7-11 maiia 1932 g. po dokladam S.
N. Bykovskogo i N. M. Matorina // Sovetskaiia etnografiiia. 1932. No. 3.
be more specific – the Marxist-Leninist study of the succession of socio-economic stages. The need to subsume ethnography under history was stated in particularly militant terms:

[The proposal] that there exists a special “Marxist” ethnography is not only theoretically unjustified, but is deeply harmful, disorientating, and uses a leftish expression to cover up its rightist essence – that it is a type of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois adaptability and eclecticism.  

Ethnographers were now to study the “social laws” of pre-capitalist formations and create histories for the numerous nationalities of the USSR.

Each of these meetings set a chill over biosocial research in the Soviet Union. In particular, the overt use of the term etnos which came to be associated with émigré and presumed anti-Soviet intellectuals. By this time both Nikolaï Mogilianskiï and Sergei Shirokogoroff had fled the Soviet Union and could be easily classified as “bourgeois” scholars. İAn Koshkin, a Tungus linguist and ethnographer specifically singled out Shirokogoroff’s book on etnos during the Leningrad symposium as “antischolarly”. The young Sergeĭ Tolstov, who would later head the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences, declared that:

It is unfortunate that there is a tendency to associate with an etnos some sort of special meaning or to define ethnography as the science of the etnos. This is harmful tendency and one we should fight. “Etnos” as a classless – or perhaps un-classlike (vneklassovoe) – formation is exactly what could serve as a banner [uniting] bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologists.

Nevertheless even within this authoritative settings the transcripts show that others contradicted Tolstov and promoted opposing views. Some were recorded as stating that etnos and “ethnic culture” can be usefully confined to a particular historical stage.

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60 Ibid. P. 13.
61 Arzıutov, Alymov, and Anderson. P. 411.
62 Ibid. P. 142.
of development, and that therefore they still belonged as the proper study of ethnographers\textsuperscript{63}.

This sharp methodological stricture on biosocial thought had a very profound effect on physical anthropologists, whose discipline, by definition, sat on the border between the social and the biological. The editorial of the first issue of the new \textit{Anthropological Journal} noted that the years 1930-1932 was “a time of intensive reorganization, and of “the revaluation of values”. It called for the fight with racist “anthroposophiology” and in particular with fascist theories which ignored the social essence of humans by transferring “biological laws to human society”\textsuperscript{64}. A significant marker of the restructuring of physical anthropology came in an article in the same issue by Arkadiĭ I. ĪArkho (1903-1935) who placed considerable distance between Soviet physical anthropologists and foreign racialists and eugenicists. Here, he explained that the development of the human form followed a different path than that of animals, wherein the importance of biological factors and “racial instincts” became muted and replaced by the influence of social formations\textsuperscript{65}.

Despite these proscriptions, \textit{etnos}-thinking incubated itself within applied studies of “stable collectivities”. There are several clear examples of these holistic studies. During this period work began on a 4-volume encyclopaedia sketching-out the qualities of the component peoples of the Soviet Union\textsuperscript{66}. In the surviving drafts of the unpublished volume there was a heavy emphasis on durable cultural traits that spilled over from one historical stage to another. There were numerous single-

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. Pp. 149, 96, 99.
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Za sovetskuı̆ antropol`olog`ii} // \textit{Antropol`ogicheskiı̆ zhurnal}. 1932. No. 1. Pp. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{65} A.I ĪArkho. Protiv idealisticheskikh techenii v rasovedenii SSSR // Ibid. Pp. 11-14.
people ethnographies published at this time on Siberian ethnography, folklore, and material culture – many of which are still respected today. The focus of these works was on defining the qualities of smaller, “less-developed” peoples with an eye to improving their lives. The newly appointed director of the Institute of Ethnography Vasiliĭ Struve justified the applied work on concrete peoples in Stalin’s dictum that research on the “tribe” was work on “an ethnographic category” while work on the nation as a historical one. He felt that ethnographers should document not only primitive rituals but also the process of transformation of peoples into socialist nationalities. Ethnographic work thereby went hand-in-hand with the crafting of new territorial divisions which accentuated national divisions between peoples.

Mark Bassin, in his survey of Eurasianism and biopolitics, attributes “equivocal essentialism” to the Stalinist thinking on identity. He notes that though in principle Stalin insisted that human nature (as physical nature) was infinitely malleable, the centralized rural developmental initiatives were nested within regional political and territorial units defined by one “leading” nationality. The pragmatic and applied reality of wielding state power opened a space where biosocial thought could continue – even if it could not name itself as such.

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69 Ibid. P. 8.


The outbreak of the Second World War provided a further impetus to the
development of an applied ethnography that rooted coherent peoples in time and
place. In 1942 Moscow-based geographers and ethnographers received an order
from the General Headquarters of the Red Army to prepare maps of all of the
nationalities of the USSR – as well as maps of nationalities living within Germany
and its occupied territories. Under this command, intense work in the Moscow
branch of the Institute of Ethnography led to the production of more than 30 large-
scale maps as well as historical, ethnographical and statistical memos and reviews.
The result of three years of work was entitled “A Study of Ethnic Composition of the
Central and South-Eastern Europe.” The work was never published, and the original
documents are probably kept to this day by the Army’s archives. The principal aim of
this war-time project was to provide diplomats with arguments about the “ethnic
composition” of European territories to aid them in the redrawing of state borders.
The issue of how to define ethnic differences became once again a top priority, and
older models of biosocial continuity were dusted off and re-launched to aid in the war
effort.

One of the key actors of this new movement was Pavel I. Kushner (Knyshev) (1889-
1968). In March 1944 he became head the Department of Ethnic Statistics and
Cartography at the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow. He defended his dissertation
entitled “The Western Part of the Lithuanian Ethnographic Territory” in 1945 and
published parts of his doctoral work, as well as his wartime work in an influential
book entitled Ethnic Territories and Ethnic Borders. Kushner prominently
reintroduced the term etnos into the post-war Soviet ethnography, although in his

reintroduction he acknowledged both history and geography – and ignored physical form. In his view “ethnic phenomena”:

distinguish the everyday life [byt] of one people from another. The set of such special markers include differences in language, material culture, customs, beliefs, etc. The sum-total (sovokupnost’) of such specific differences in everyday lives of peoples, preconditioned by the history of those peoples, and the effect of the geographical environment upon them is called “etnos”.

In his book he placed a great stress on the theme of stable and long-term continuities. He saw cultural judgements about beauty, and “proper form” as markers of ethnic traditions which had been “formed over centuries”.

The geographical reinvention of national identity played itself out in a number of other venues. Ethnographers were recruited to aid in the rapid modernization and development of Siberian peoples – many of who were often thought to subsist at the stage of primitive communism. With the application of “all-sided assistance” by the socialist state it was felt that these people could “skip” all historical stages of development and progress directly to communism. This programme, which was standardized by Mikhail A. Sergeev as the “non-capitalist path to socialism”, was significant since it became a model for international developmental assistance in Africa and Southeast Asia. Within the conditions of the Cold War, the Soviet state felt compelled to show that it could modernize rural societies more efficiently than the United States. The first step to modernization was often the standardization and

73 Ibid. P. 6.
74 Uchenie Stalina o nat͡sii i nat͡sional’noї kul’ture i ego znachenie dли͡a ėtnografii // Sovetskaı͡a ėtnografiı͡a. 1949. No. 4. P. 7.
rationalization of identities. The export of the science of ethnic classification was one of the main exports of the mature Soviet state to China following the second Chinese revolution\(^{77}\).

These territorial and political involutions, apart from playing on Cold War anxieties, also built upon the "ethnogenetic turn" of Soviet ethnography\(^{78}\). Perhaps influenced by their forced cohabitation with historians, ethnographers became interested in tracing the path by which modern nations were formed \(^{79}\). Ethnogenetic theorists squared their interest in long-term seemingly ahistorical stability with Marxist-Leninist thought by treating the term etnos as a generic category for Stalin’s triad of the tribe, nationality, and nation. For example, an early theoretical work of this time now argued that even though “etnos” should be the main subject matter of ethnography, “there are no special “etnoses” as eternal unchanging categories, which are so dear to bourgeois science”\(^{80}\).

It is perhaps important to emphasize at this point the very special way that print culture worked during the height of Stalinist science. Printed scientific works on the whole represented the consensus of groups of scholars and were not used to present minority opinions or debates. However, there was room for non-standardarized terms to be discussed verbally during seminars or privately in the corridors between official meetings. For example, the ethnographer Vladimir Pimenov recalls that he was introduced to the work of Shirokogoroff and the concepts of etnos during a course of lectures on China by Nikolaï Cheborsarov at

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\(^{77}\) Mullaney.

\(^{78}\) Anderson and Arzyutov. The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples Of Siberia”.


\(^{80}\) S.A. Tokarev and N.N. Cheboksarov. Metodologiiia etnogeneticheskikh issledovaniii na materiale ètnografii v svete rabot I.V. Stalina po voprosam ızykoznaniia // Sovetskaia ètnografiia. 1951. No. 4. P. 12.
Moscow State University in 1952-53. Pimenov directly cites the cautious and hushed manner that Cheboksarev spoke about the concept\textsuperscript{81}. Our own interviews with elderly and retired ethnographers in the Institute of Ethnography and Anthropology confirms that in the 1950s there was a wide discussion of biosocial and ethnogenetic ideas in the corridors despite the fact that Stalin’s text on nationalities might be the only required reading for a particular course.

An oblique marker of the spaces of freedom within the late Stalinist academy is the fact that Stalin’s definition of nation barely survived the dictator’s death. Already in 1955 the Department of Historical Sciences of the Academy debated Kushner’s memo about types of ethnic communities. Sergei Tokarev, one of the most authoritative and prolific ethnographers of the Soviet period, spoke up against Kushner\textsuperscript{82}. He himself began fiddling with non-standard models of national identity. According to his diary, Tokarev sketched out an outline for a future paper which suggested that different vectors of kinship and language formed the foundation for identity at different stages of history\textsuperscript{83}. These tentative debates in the corridors were the main point of reference for a generation of students who were to change the face of Russian ethnography.

Among those post-war students was Viktor I. Kozlov (1924-2012), who was to become one of the most important etnos theorists in the 1970-80s. Having acquired some experience in cartography during the war, he became a professional cartographer in 1950. He finished his postgraduate studies at the Institute of Ethnography in the sector for ethnic statistics and cartography in 1956 with his

dissertation “On the Settlement of the Mordovan people in the mid-19th – beginning of the 20th centuries”\textsuperscript{84}. Despite this narrow title, Kozlov followed Kushner’s methodology closely attempting to outline the continuity in Mordva occupation from the beginning of the second millennium to the present day. Nevertheless, Kozlov was eager to contribute somewhat heretical ideas to theoretical discussions of the day. In 1960 the party cell of the Institute of Ethnography lambasted one of his papers as revisionist and accused him of reviving Kautsky’s idea that personal national affiliations constitute the only characteristic of nation. It is significant that the archival transcript of the discussion notes that high-status luminaries of the Institute, such as Georgii F. Debets (1905-1969) and Sergei A. Tokarev (1899-1985) spoke in defence of his views.\textsuperscript{85}

Despite earlier criticisms of eclecticism in bourgeois science, late Stalinist ethnographers and physical anthropologists began to argue strongly for multidisciplinary studies of identity. Georgii Debets, and his co-authors, argued that physical anthropological measurements could ascertain degrees of homogeneity and diversity among speakers of certain linguistic groups as a sort of independent measure of ethnogenetic progresses\textsuperscript{86}. Although there was no citation to this effect, this idea describes very well older methodology espoused by Volkov and by his students Rudenko and Shirokogoroff (see chapters 2 and 4). A scholar who epitomized the restart of multidisciplinary approach in the new generation was Valeriĭ P. Alekseev (1929-1991). He started his post-doctoral studies at the Institute of Ethnography in 1952 as a student of Debets, but was also influenced by other


prominent anthropologists of the institute such as Bunak, Cheborsarov and Levin.

His doctoral dissertation, defended in 1967 was published a few years later as *The Origins of the Peoples of the Eastern Europe*87. He used craniological research to balance arguments about ethnogenesis. In particular, in his review of physical anthropological research among Eastern Slavic populations since the 1930s, he noticed that the tendency to deny distinct anthropological types among these peoples was an ideological reaction to previous studies88. He supported the idea that Great and White Russians displayed evidence of a significant Baltic and Finnish “substrate” while Ukrainians displayed a different anthropological type89. It is interesting that his book partially “rehabilitated” Volkov’s earlier views on the distinctiveness of Ukrainians90. Later in his career Alekseev invoked the idea of “ethnogeneseology” as a field in itself which combines the approaches of history, anthropology, ethnography, linguistics and geography91.

The death of Stalin, and the reconstitution of Soviet science under Nikita Khrushchëv created an unusual opportunity for etnos-entrepreneurs. Unlike as is often assumed by adherents of the totalitarian hypothesis, the relaxing of a possible threat to one’s career and well-being did not simply open a window onto what people “really” believed. It also created an opportunity for imaginative and aggressive intellectual actors to pose new theories and inevitably to create a new orthodoxy – or in our case orthodoxies. The post-Stalinist “thaw” opened a space for the expansion of multiple theories of identity, many of which had for a long time been implicit in the way that

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scientists and government agents interacted with society. In a strange recapitulation of the 1840s, the revitalization of etnos theory was to a great extent the story of the competition of two men: И. В. Bromleï and Lev N. Gumilëv. Looking at their work is like staring through the ends of the same telescope. Both vehemently distinguished their work from one another, despite the fact that their conclusions and examples were broadly similar. Even their formal educational backgrounds were similar. Both were strangers to ethnography, each arriving to the discipline through ethnography’s “parent” discipline of history. Untangling the two is next to impossible since their theoretical work was determined by the tenor of the times.

It is not often recognized that de-Stalinization was a planned process led by the State. In 1963, the Soviet Academy of Sciences, reflecting an instruction from the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in June of that year, mandated a wide-ranging debate on methodological experimentation in the humanities and social sciences. Academicians P.N. Fedoseev and И.П. Frantsev, wrote a type of instruction manual to “the Thaw”, which encouraged social scientists, including ethnographers, to rewrite sociological and historical laws and to embark on interdisciplinary research. As with all centrally-planned and managed initiatives, academies had to report on their progress. Thus in 1966, the leading journal Voprosy istorii proudly reported that they had published 34 methodological papers since the instruction had been issued. Of those papers, a seminal paper by the philosopher И.И. Semënov (1929 - ) had far-reaching impact on Soviet ethnography. Semënov argued the need for a new bridging concept, which he called

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the “social organism” which would allow scientists to elevate a single concrete society as the leading force of history. Ernest Gellner, who was enthralled with Semënov’s work, dubbed this chosen society as a “torch-bearer” in a “torch-relay vision of history”\textsuperscript{95}. Semënov’s innovation allowed ethnographers to map the broad utopian vision of Marxist evolutionary theory onto a particular point of time without having to fudge the details of their expeditionary field findings. In the theoretical spirit of Hirsch’s “vocabularies of identity” he uncovered a way to allow teleological categories such as tribe – nationality, and nation – to sit overtop and alongside ethnographic facts\textsuperscript{96}.

The mandated methodological discussion also touched upon the definition of the “nation” and in particular Stalin’s authoritative formula. This special debate was no doubt spurred on by the new Program of the CPSU, accepted in 1961, which spoke about “erasing national differences” in 1961 and a further directive to create “a new multi-national collectivity (obshchnost’)”\textsuperscript{97}. The editors of the journal Voprosy istorii encouraged a brave revision of the Stalinist definition of a nation (without, however, putting their weight behind any one suggestion). In 1966 they wrote:

In the course of the discussion, there were many suggestions concerning refining and modification of the definition of nation. Participants argued for or against such attributes of nation as “common psychic make-up”, “national statesmanship”, different views were pronounced about the types of nations. The relations between such concepts as “nation” and “ethnic collectivity”, nation and nationality are discussed”\textsuperscript{98}.

\textsuperscript{95} Gellner. A Russian Marxist Philosophy of History. P. 114; Skalnik. Gellner vs Marxism: A major concern or a fleeting affair.
\textsuperscript{96}Ири́й Ива́нович Семёнов. Кате́гории “соци́альный организм” и ee значение для исторической науки // Voprosy istorii. 1966. No. 8.
This discussion prompted a parallel set of meetings among ethnographers. At least three meetings of the theoretical seminar of the Institute of Ethnography in 1965 were devoted to the concept of ethnic group and nation. A number of positions were presented and argued. One influential paper by Viktor I. Kozlov, which was published two years later, linked Semënov’s social organism to the concept of an ethnic collectivity [obschnost’]

An ethnic collectivity is a social organism which forms on a certain territory out of groups of people who possessed or developed a common language, common cultural characteristics, social values and traditions, and a mixture of radically varied racial components.99

Participants at the seminar questioned many of Kozlov’s arguments but the majority supported his challenge of Stalin’s “simplified schemes”. His paper inspired enthusiasm from a younger generation of scholars. Even a spokesperson of the older generation - Sergeï A. Tokarev (1899-1985), one of the most prolific and authoritative writers among Soviet ethnographers - summed up the mood of the meeting that the debate has shown that there are many [different] opinions, but have compiled several conclusions [tezisy] which [I believe] everyone can sign-up to:

1) the theory of ethnic collectivity [obschchnost’] is in need of revision;
2) there is a need for further [field] research – and not only within Europe;
3) ethnic communities are real, but we lack a definition of them;
4) it is still not clear what types [of ethnic communities] exist;
5) is there law governing the transformation from one to another type? It is not clear what type of law this would be. It is [further] unclear if social-economic formations also follow the same law.100

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These new terms, ranging from the “social organism” to the “ethnic community” to the “ethnic group”, did not wander far from the biosocial consensus that had been built up in Russia for over eighty years. Viktor A. Shnirel’man also observed two characteristic trends that emerged out of the discussions of the 1960s-1970s. One the one hand there was a wide consensus among Soviet intellectuals that such things as a “national character” or “national psychological make-up (sklad)” existed. On the other hand there was a renewed interest in and enthusiasm for linking human behavior to genetic heredity.\textsuperscript{101} It was into this newly “thawed” yet strangely familiar landscape that both I." V. Bromle"i and Lev N. Gumlêv sought to make careers for themselves.

Bromle"i, who was appointed director of the Institute of Ethnography in January 1966, was trained as a historian of Medieval Croatia. He had served as a secretary of the Department of History of the Academy of Sciences since 1958. Here he would have silently watched or participated in all of the abovementioned theoretical developments. After his appointment, he found himself in a position where he was forced to adjudicate the raging theoretical debates in order to earn respect among his peers. His authoritative reaction to the 1965 debate was telling. Capturing the spirit of this directed debate he declared:

\begin{quote}
We need a common set of tools [\textit{instrumentarii}]. We must speak in a language using one and the same understandings. And at some stages, we need [to stop and] agree what is our working [\textit{sovermennyi}] definition of the nation.\textsuperscript{102}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
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Upon becoming the director of the Institute, Bromlei set about the task of producing a common definition. To compensate for his lack of training, he encircled himself with a group of talented age mates such as Viktor Kozlov, Valeriĭ Alekseev, and Sergeĭ Arutunov. According to a posthumous biography by one of his circle, he also took care to distance himself from the old “masters” Cheboksarov and Tokarev so as not to appear to be taking on the role of a pupil. He also read ethnography avidly after work at night.103

Bromlei chose to write his maiden article together with one of his hand-picked comrades on the topic of ethnogenesis. Entitled “On the Role of Migration in the Formation of New Ethnic Communities” they pondered the role of indigenous populations and new-comers in the formation of new “etnoses” in the first millennium AD across Eurasia.104 A distinctive feature of this article was the use of the term “etnos” when describing of tribal and early-state societies. The etnos term was (re-)used casually without a formal definition. Nevertheless, its sudden appearance in print was unusual. Likely, the lack of citations and a definitions signalled that the term was already in broad circulation.

Lev N. Gumilev followed a different path than Bromlei in making a name for himself in this time of experimentation. His checkered record as a political prisoner – having served for over thirteen years in various Stalin-era prisons – made it difficult for him to be fully accepted by Soviet academic institutions.105 Gumilev was never appointed as a professor and was officially employed throughout his life as a...
research associate in the Faculty of Geography at Leningrad State University.

However as Mark Bassin notes, Gumilëv also deliberately cultivated his image as an independently thinking dissident – a move which made his unorthodox ideas highly popular among the intelligentsia. Needless to say, he was much less constrained by official doctrines of Soviet Marxism-Leninism than Bromleï who headed an official governmental research institute.

Of the two men, Gumilëv was the first to place the stamp of etnos upon his broad vision of the interdependence of peoples, “passions” and landscape. In a small-print and likely little-read journal published by the Institute of Geography in Leningrad, he published a short article “About the Object of Historical Geography” in 1965 – a full two years before Bromleï’s first published intervention. It is an interesting footnote that this early contribution was almost immediately translated into English in one of the Cold War journals of translation. Two much more detailed articles were to follow in 1967. Later, a set of high-profile articles in the mass-circulation periodical Priroda, cemented his name as a charismatic Soviet public intellectual.

While official ethnographers gingerly felt their way to make connections to geography and physical anthropology, Gumilëv drew inspiration from a wide range disciplines, including ecology and earth sciences, genetics, biophysics, and Vernadskii’s holistic vision of the biosphere.

It is difficult to write the history of the development of Gumilëv’s thought both because of the severe hiatus imposed by his long prison sentences and because of

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106 Ibid. P. 17.
107 Gumilev.
110 Ėtnogenes i ētnosfera // Priroda. 1970. No. 1; ibid.
his own tendency to create a myth out of his own life. In an interview shortly before
his death he rooted his unique *etnos* theory in a vision that he had while in a prison
cell in Leningrad in 1939\textsuperscript{111}. Shnirel’man speculated that Gumilëv may be influenced
by “antisemitic and Nazi sentiments” which was often present in the camps, as well
as a “neonazi racist ideology” promoted by several underground right-wing thinkers
with whom he was allegedly acquainted in late 1960s – early 1970s\textsuperscript{112}. However
scattered unpublished documents suggest that his self-styled arcane ideas were part
of a broader interest in enduring, biophysical identities of the time. Sergeï I.
Rudenko, a student of Feodor Volkov and fellow sufferer of the Stalinist repressions,
helped Gumilëv re-establish his career in Leningrad (per.comm. ᾿I.A. Sher, 2016)\textsuperscript{113}.
Rudenko wrote a little-known unpublished manuscript entitled “*Etnos and
Ethnogenesis*” at some point in the mid 1960s where he alluded to his discussions
with the young historian. The archivists at the St. Petersbourg Filial of the Archive of
the Russian Academy of Sciences assert that Gumilëv’s handwriting can be
identified in the margins of the typescript – suggesting that he was familiar with the
text.\textsuperscript{114}

At the heart of Gumilëv’s theory of *etnos* was a traditional definition connected to
language, traditions, and biology. However, he also sketched out the careers of
world-historical *etnoses* into millenial cycles powered by an undefined cosmic
energy. If, like Bromleï, he made a symbolic break with the Stalinist theory of
nations, he nevertheless re-introduced the theme of what Mark Bassin identifies as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia.* P. 43.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia.* P. 160.
\end{itemize}
an “ethnic hierarchy” through describing sub-regional and super-regional units known as the subetnos and the superetnos. A key quirk in his vision of etnos was his insistence that ethnic phenomena acted themselves out within the laws of the natural sciences, while the history of human societies followed a different set of laws within the social sciences. Thus, like Semenov, he was able to speak in the characteristic dual-voice of the era of accepting a formal Stalinist progression from tribe to nation within social history while documenting eternal, passionate, and stable ethnic forms within natural history. In a formal sense his etnos theory was not biosocial since he insisted that it was profoundly biological and not social. Several of the millennial superetnoses that he identified conveniently tended to overlap with the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Unlike Bromleï, Gumilëv appealed to wider audiences through his historical monographs of various historical and ancient Turkic peoples such as The Unveiling of Khazariia or The Ancient Turks. These popular-scientific works on exotic peoples were published before his key theoretical works and served to illustrate the evokativeness of his etnos-perspective.

Bromleï also followed up his early interest in the socio-genetic origins of identity in his now infamous article “Etnos and endogamy”. There he claimed that endogamy – the tendency for members of one group to prefer to marry partners of their own group - was a “mechanism of ethnic integration”. This direct reference to a biological foundation to ethnicity quickly got the new director into troubles. The head of the Department of the Near and Middle East, Mikhail S. Ivanov (1909-1986) started a

116 Bassin. Ch.6.
117 Ibid. Pp. 70-1.
campaign of attacks against Bromleï. Ivanov claimed that if etnoses are “stabilized” by endogamy this not only negated the Marxist formations of Bromleï’s thinking, but made etnos a biological category\textsuperscript{121}. This debate was perhaps a defining moment of this period of experimentation. The records show that all other members of the Institute, with one exception, rose to speak in support of the new director. On the one hand, a moment of liberal experimentation was preserved – on the other hand a new orthodoxy of etnos-talk was imposed from this time onwards at least within ethnographic circles.

Perhaps overconscious of the popularity of Gumilëv’s work, Bromleï followed Gumilëv along a similar Byzantine path of devising increasingly complex systems and subsystems by which to describe etnos. In his mature works, Bromleï introduced his own notion of a subetnos as well as the hyper-regional “metaethnical community” \textit{metaetnicheskai\'a obsnosť’}. Unlike with Gumilëv, his sub-regional or meta-regional units were defined by classical ethnological parameters such as language or material culture, and not energy or “passions”. Nevertheless the geo-political effect was the same through the deliberate rationalization of existing blocks of political affinity at the height of the Cold War. In a nod towards Euro-American thinking about ethnicity, Bromleï also introduced the adjectival form of the Greek word etnos – etnikos – in order to refer to a specific historical manifestation of etnos at a particular place and time. It is difficult to draw sharp lines between Bromleï’s subetnos and Gumilëv’s subetnos, let alone the pantheon of their parallel sets of concepts. What does seem clear from this inflationary expansion of the etnos-enterprise that this forest of terms created a rich plantation for a new generation of ethnographers and social

geographers, while ironically not really threatening the geoterritorial foundation of state power within the former Soviet Union.

Marcus Banks, in his overview of etnos theory wonders “how can [it] be made into a virtue”? He posits a widely held view that the late 1960s search for a pillar of identity helped scientists avoid the “trap” of orthodox Marxist five-stage evolutionary theory. In his view:

Etnos theory provides a bridging mechanism, by positing a stable core which runs through all the historical stages any society will undergo. It therefore acts as a tool for diachronic analysis.122

In the same work he is one of the first to label the theory as being an important example “primordial ethnicity” - but one which nonetheless admits that there are scattered elements of transactional and relational historical factors which give every concrete ethnographic case its particular shape123. As Gellner124 wrote, in his pithy and economical prose, etnos-theory was “relatively synchronist” [emphasis in the original] opening the door to applied fieldwork within a tradition that had been obsessed with formal, off-the-shelf models. As strange as it may sound, in the late 1960s the theory sounded innovative and radical. The uniqueness of the approach was likely never appreciated by North American and European anthropologists who, in the 1960s, were caught up with different issues. As Gellner125 again observes; “It is ironic that at the very moment at which anthropology in the West is finding its way back to history, not without difficulty, Soviet anthropology is in part practicing a mild detachment from it”. Mark Bassin goes one step further. He sees in Gumilëv’s rendition of etnos a radical re-assertion of Stalinist national essences which he

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122 Banks. P. 22.
123 Ibid. P. 23.
124 Gellner. Modern Ethnicity. P. 118.
125 Idem. Preface. P. X.
describes as “the Stalinist accommodation”. Within the fog created by Gumilëv’s invisible eternal energies, levels and sub-levels of ethnicity, he reads an impassioned defence of local communities against the assimilatory force of the post-War Soviet industrial state126. He associates this impassioned voice for ethnic difference with the near-hero like status that Gumilëv achieved amongst non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union and within the Russian Federation today127. Bromleï in this respect continued to serve as an ideologist advocating assimilation, intermarriage, and the creation of seamless, political-territorial communities. During Perestroika, Gumilëv controversially linked the strained ethnic tensions in the crumbling Soviet federation to Bromleï’s misguided theories. Bromleï retaliated by labelling Gumilëv’s distinction of “passionate” and “sub-passionate” peoples as covert racism128.

The revival of etnos theory during the Khruschev “thaw” reveals several things. The first is that this “relatively” primordialist theory could support multiple variants and multipleacommodations with the late Soviet state. Further, despite surface expressions of “revolution” and “dissidence”, the theory in all its variants remained steadfastly loyal to the vision of a hierarchy of nations led by the world-historical Russian state. A proof of this loyalty might be the failed attempt by Valeriĭ A. Tishkov (1941-) – the first post-Soviet director of the Institute of Ethnography - to entomb etnos theory through his book A Requiem to Etnos129. This wide-ranging summary of North American theories of ethnicity made a strong argument that the

127 Ibid. Ch.10.
Russian Academy should reject collectivist and essentialist theories of belonging in favour of a relational definition which is juggled and negotiated by individuals. To underscore the point he renamed the Institute to the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology. In a recent retrospective on his Requiem, he takes credit with introducing North American cultural anthropology to Russia and loosening the hold of etnos-theory on the Academy 130

The surprise of the epoch was the fact that even if the Requiem was perhaps sung by a handful central ethnographers, it by and large went unheeded across Eurasia within regional colleges, newspapers, and the programmes of various regional nationalist political parties. In the tumultuous post-Soviet present local intellectuals and political actors alike reject liberal individual models of ethnic management and instead turned once again to powerful and very old models of biosocial identity.

Etnos in the long 20th Century and Beyond

Eric Hobsbawn’s “short 20th Century” was strongly associated with a single world-historical state promoting a vision of emancipation and modernity which served to inspire several generations. His somewhat nostalgic account mourns the waning of the ideological certainties which defined that era. Our overview of the origins of etnos-thinking suggest that that the Soviet state was perhaps not so exceptional, but instead pulled upon very widely held convictions that collective identities were durable – and perhaps was eventually entangled by them. Our argument is that etnos-thinking, and its brief association with Soviet modernity, was rooted in a biosocial compromise between competing camps. This runs the risk of asserting

(alongside many etnos-entrepreneurs) that persistent identities are somehow mystically natural or fixed. That would mispresent the debates, the lack of agreement, and the general untidiness of this story – a flavour of which we have tried suggest in this introduction and the substance of which is clearly visible in the following chapters. The moral of this story is that collective identities seem to enjoy their own histories much like individual biographies. The story of etnos-thinking is that there needs to be a way of speaking about contextualized identities – and to some extent etnos-talk addresses, if not solves, Shanin’s 131 “case of the missing term”.

If the height of Soviet period was marked by Bromlei’s “minor revolution”, the beginning of the post-Soviet period is marked by Tishkov’s counter-revolution. He highlighted his transformation by identifying a “crisis” in Soviet ethnography through a prominent article in the American journal Current Anthropology132. Like his predecessor Bromlei, Valeriĭ A. Tishkov was trained as a historian – only in this case not of the Balkans but of the 1837-8 “revolutions” in British North America. Having written several books on the history of Canada, American historiography, and on Native Americans, he came to the Institute of Ethnography in 1981 to lead its Department of the Peoples of America. After briefly serving as Bromlei’s deputy, he took over Institute in 1989 and led it up until 2015. In his numerous publications throughout the 1990s, including the Requim, Tishkov propagated an individual-oriented approach to the study of ethnic identity, stressing situational and processual character of ethnic identification. He relied almost exclusively on North American and European sources, hoping to invigorate the field with new perspectives. He harshly

criticised ossified Soviet ethnography’s hierarchy of etnoses, sub-etnoses, etnikos, and superetnoses, as well as what he described as the “étatisation” of ethnicity by the Soviet state. In one of our interviews, he dismissed Bromleï as “building forts and barricades” (gorodushki gorodit’) out of his Byzantine ethnic superstructures – a reference to the modern Russian adolescent practice of wreaking havoc on long summers’ nights. In his work, Tishkov stressed the way that state actors used narrow classificatory state practices to construct ethnicity, which he insisted might present itself in multiple forms.

If Soviet etnos theory had never existed, people would never have been inscribed as parts of the collective torso [telo] known as an “etnos”. … And, if there had never been a long-standing Soviet practice of registering a single nationality in one’s passport – a nationality which necessarily had to correspond to that of one’s parents, then people might have realized and have been able to publically declare [that they held multiple identities]. A person could be at any one time a Russian and a Kazakh, a Russian and a Jew, or they [might have been able to express] a “vertical” stack of various senses of belonging [prinadlezhnosti] such as being an Andiets and a Avarjets, a Digorets and an Osetian, an Erzarian and a Mordovan … a Pomor and a Russian … etc.

In another book he criticized the way that state policies ironed out the diversity of a region he described as the “Russian-Ukrainian-Belorussian cultural borderland”134. As an academic, and a public intellectual, Tishkov for several decades has been the most vocal proponent of the idea that there is a Russian Federative civic identity that transcends the Russian ethnic identity as a Rossiĭskii narod135.

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Although Tishkov takes credit with steering Soviet ethnography out of its crisis by encouraging professional ethnographers to abandon etnos, he admits that the etnos concept is very much alive and well outside of the Academy.

Indeed today in Russian public sphere the idea of “etnos” is very much alive, probably due to the fact that it wandered [perekochevalo] from ethnology to different spheres of social and humanitarian research. … Etnos and etnichnost’ which had until recently been notably absent from the work of Russian humanists has now appeared in multiple variants such as with historians of the “ethnocultural history of Ancient Rus” or [the debate on] “etnoses in the early Middle Ages”, or among the pseudophilosophers with their concept of the “philosophy of the etnos”. … Etnos has been abandoned by the language of ethnologists (that is, if we exclude the few researchers teaching in colleges who do not keep up with contemporary developments) 136

In our view he underestimates the broad influence of the term within the public sphere today.

While it might be true that etnos is no longer used widely by state ethnographers within the Academy of Sciences, an unreconstructed vision of Bromleĭ’s etnos can be widely found in state-sanctioned textbooks used in introductory level cultural studies course137.

The etnos term also lives on, quietly, in the pages of ethnographic encyclopaedias. One of the best illustrations is the series entitled Peoples and Cultures, which is currently running at 25 volumes. This series does not use etnos in its title, but the term appears within its pages quite regularly. Being a rebranding of the well-known Soviet-era series Peoples of the World138, the new series presents ethnographic snapshots across Russian regions, such as the “Northeast”, and documents former

136 Ot étnosa k étnichnosti i posle. P. 5-6.
138 Anderson and Arzyutov. The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples Of Siberia”.
Soviet republics. Occasionally it features volumes on single peoples such as Tatars or Buriats. The internal structure of the volumes are hauntingly familiar, dissecting *etnoses* by their ‘folklore’, ‘occupations’ ‘ethnogenesis’ and ‘technology’. An important new feature of this series is the respect and encouragement afforded to members of the regional intelligentsia outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Many volumes include chapters by local authors, which immediately made the series a focal point for ethnonationalist reflection. The volume *The Sakha IÅkuts* 139 was issued in conjunction with a national festival in Moscow organized by the IÅkut national intelligentsia. The same strategy was repeated in St. Petersburg with the publication of the volume *The Ingushes* 140. In our interviews one of the editors confessed that they hoped that the volume itself would calm the tension between Ingush and Chechen scholars in these Republics (per.comm. M.S.-G. Albogachieva, 2014). The example of Altaians is perhaps one of the best for illustrating the way that the *etnos* term has been appropriated to defend local identity claims. In the volume published within the central series, entitled *The Turkic Peoples of Siberia* 141, the Altaians were treated in a series of *chapters* among many other peoples. This troubled the local Altaian intelligentsia who rushed to prepare their own competing volume, entitled *The Altaians* 142 where they presented the complex and detailed history of the many identity groups in the region as a single history of a single *etnos* formed under the influence of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.

The passion with which regional scholars have taken up the cause of essentialist and enduring identities is likely the most tangible artefact of the reincarnation of

etnos theory today. There is a strong quality to these works which one might identify as a type of indigenous-rights discourse. The etnos term itself appears directly in the title of a number of regional collections in order to emphasize their sense of pride and their expectation of respect for their nationality. Volumes such as *The Reality of the Etnos* ¹⁴³ or *Etnosy Sibiri* ¹⁴⁴ place their emphasis on the longevity, energy and persistence of cultural minorities. They have manifesto-like qualities in that they insist on the vibrancy of cultural difference. Even Valeriĭ Tishkov in his retrospective review of his *Requiem* was forced to acknowledged that “etno-“ identities are characteristic of Russia now, and likely “forever” [navsegda]¹⁴⁵. The passion with which regional elites have been attracted to etnos theory was a major theme in the analysis of Mark Bassin¹⁴⁶. Ranging from the nostalgia for Stalinist essentialism to the Eurasian geopolitics of the 21st Century, he sees this “biopolitical” term being able to stand in for concerns about modernization and environmentalism, cultural survival, and the strengthening of the newly independent Turkic states.

Regional nationalism is not the only magnetic pole which has attracted contemporary enthusiasts of etnos-thinking. Perhaps the most startling appropriation of etnos is by the neo-Eurasianist political philosopher, Aleksandr Dugin. Dugin has become the focus of a plethora of European and American studies who posited him at one time as a sort of philosopher or central ideologist of the Putin administration¹⁴⁷. One of

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¹⁴⁶ Bassin. The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia.
his best-selling books *The Foundations of Geopolitics* 148 excited concern for its declaration that it is the fate of Russia to annex and incorporate most of the former Soviet republics as well as significant parts of Manchuria and Inner Asia. In 2001 he established the political movement “Eurasia”, thus making his murky geopolitical ideas visible beyond the subculture of right-wing radicals149. It is not well known amongst these political scientists that he also used ethnographic arguments to underpin his political arguments. His interests in *etnos* theory began in 2002 when he participated at a conference dedicated to the memory of Lev Gumilëv150. He then presented a series of lectures, published online in 2009, on the “sociology of the *etnos*” which drew heavily from Shirokogoroff’s and Gumilëv’s work151. These were assembled together and published as a textbook in 2011152. Here he redefines *etnos* as an organic unit: “a simple society, organically (naturally) connected to the territory and bound by common morality, rites and semantic system”153. Drawing on a selective reading of anthropological literature of the 19-20th centuries, he decorates this definition with evocative examples of mythological thinking, shamanism, standardized “personas”, and cyclical time. Shirokogorov’s ethnographic work among Manchurian Tunguses even play a cameo role in his description of Eurasian type societies. Some Eurasianist commentators have taken his vision even further.

While Dugin rejects overt biological or racial interpretations of the *etnos*, the historian

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153 Ibid. P. 8.
and political commentator Valeriĭ D. Soloveĭ uses genetics and Jungian psychology to define *etnos* as “a group of people, differentiated from other groups by hereditary biological characteristics and archetypes”. This type of racist essentialist appropriation of *etnos* is characteristic not only for the Russian far-right, but for a wide range of post-Soviet intellectuals of various nationalities.

As Sergei A. Oushakine has shown, *etnos* was used extensively by Russian nationalists to create the peculiar genre of “The Tragedy of the Russian People”, popular in the 1990s-2000s. In his analysis of a series of texts of this kind, he describes the common theme of suffering, demographical decline, and the erosion of national values of the Russian people both during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. According to Oushakine, by deploying the *etnos* concept these authors “were able to introduce a clear-cut split between the Russian “etnos proper” and institutions of the Soviet and post-Soviet state whose politics was deemed to be non-Russian or even anti-Russian”. He claims that the theories of Bromlei and Gumilëv were instrumental in this regard as they had already distilled *etnos* away from the social/political realm where constructivist terms of identity were widely used. Extracting an essentialist “bio-psycho-social ethnic body” from history, theories of *etnos* produced a post-Soviet “patriotism of despair”, but they also generated a resource for reinventing a sense of national vitality such as the Altai “school of vital forces”.

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155 Shnirel’man, *Porog tolerantnosti*. Ideologiia i praktika novogo rasizma, 1, 328-60.
158 Ibid. P. 86-95.
159 Ibid. P. 127.
The demographic health of the Russian etnos is also one of the main concerns of the Russian nationalists. For example, a demographic chart depicting the increase in the death rate and the declining birthrate is commonly dubbed the “Russian cross” in the mass media. In the conclusion to his volume *A History of the Tragedy of a Great People*¹⁶⁰, Viktor I. Kozlov determined that the Russian etnos had lost its vitality by the end of the 20th century. Among the reasons for its decline he listed as Soviet ethnic policy and the market reforms of the 1990s which led to the degeneration and “de-ethnization” of Russians¹⁶¹. Although he was an old opponent of Gumilëv’s theories, he was forced to admit that his pessimistic picture strongly reminded him of the 1200-year life cycles of an etnos hypothesized by Gumilëv¹⁶². These demographic disaster narratives contrast strongly with the position of Tishkov, who not only repeatedly criticized “demographic myths” of this kind, but the “crisis paradigm” in general. He asserted that Russian population figures would stabilize due to immigration and the “drift of identity” through “a free choice [of identity] and the ability to shift from one ethnic group to another”¹⁶³. Tishkov’s optimism extended to his evaluation of the role of civic experts, and of state power. If etnos-nationalists like Kozlov asserted that the the Russian state often acted against the interests of the Russian people, Tishkov praised the post-Soviet state for promoting civic nationalism and market reforms¹⁶⁴. If Tishkov’s optimism could be reduced to a headline, it would be “We have all begun to live better” – a slogan which served as a

¹⁶¹ Ibid. P. 274.
¹⁶² Ibid. P. 283.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 189-207.
title of one of his many public outreach articles in the daily newspaper Nezavisimai͡a Gazeta\textsuperscript{165}.

The nostalgia for essentialist and enduring identities has led to a renewed interest in the works of the pioneer theorists of ethos theory. Sergei Shirokogoroff’s few Russian language studies were re-published for the very first time within Russia by a scientific collective based in Vladivostok\textsuperscript{166}. Recently, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology has (re-)launched an early Soviet project to translate and publish Shirokogoroff’s Social Organization in Russian (Sirina et al. 2015) correcting the historical oddity that translations of this work have long been available in Japanese and Chinese. Aleksandr Dugin supported this movement by writing the forward to Moscow edition of Shirokogoroff’s Etnos\textsuperscript{167}.

Larisa R. Pavlinskaïa, former head of Siberian Department in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, wrote one of the first book-length ethnographies to redeploy etnos-theory overtly. Her richly detailed ethnography entitled The Buriats: Notes on their Ethnic History\textsuperscript{168} was based on several decades of fieldwork in the same East Siberian landscape which inspired Sergei and Elizabeta Shirokogoroff. Sharing perhaps the puzzlement the Shirokogoroffs experienced by the multilanguage and multicultural diversity of these communities (see chapter 4), she tracked the process by which diverse groups split and merged into a single etnos.

The volume quotes extensively from Shirokogoroff’s newly republished texts, in part


advocating and explaining his biosocial theory of the etnos for those who may not have read this émigré’s work\textsuperscript{169}. She then moves on to merge Shirokogoroff’s interest in leading etnoses to Lev Gumilëv’s description of the “persistent behavioural models” which fuel ethnogenetic progression. The book covers a wide expanse of time from the 17th until 19th century and includes significant archival examples. For example, she cites the example of the Russian voevod I͡ Akov Khripunov whose predatory military campaign of 1629 she interprets through Gumilëv as “the result of the work of an individual who [had been excited into] a higher nervous state triggered by a certain stage of ethnogenesis”\textsuperscript{170}. Pavlinskaïa perhaps goes further than Shirokogoroff himself by stressing the biological component ethnogenesis. She postulates that there must exist a genetic “passionarity mutation” (mutatsiia passionarnosti)\textsuperscript{171}, which once activated in an individual’s DNA, has a ripple effect on the people around that individual gradually transforming a collage of local groups into a single etnos. This frames Shirokogoroff’s interest in mixed-blood Tungus individuals, as discussed in chapter 4, in a completely new light:

\begin{quote}
The metisification (metisatsiia) of the Russian and aboriginal population is one of the mainstays of new etno-formation processes (ëtnoobrazovatel’nye protsessy) in Siberia, and in particularly in the Baikal region. It has been repeatedly noted in the [academic] literature that the majority of the Russian population [in Siberia] were men. [This was the case] not only in the 16th century but also in the 17th and 18th centuries. One should point out that these men were [likely] the most “passionary” representatives of the Russian etnos. They settled on new lands in Siberia and temporarily or permanently married members of the native peoples. [They therefore] passed on this quality – the passionary gene – thus initiating ethnic development among the local population. These individuals, [in turn,] played an important role in the formation of today’s
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid. P. 53-6.  
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 106.  
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 57.
Siberian etnoses. This is especially the case in the forested areas where the Russian population was particularly numerous. It follows that the impact of Russians on the native people of Siberia even led to a change in the gene pool, which is the most important element within any etno-formation process.\(^{172}\)

Through works like Pavlinskaia’s ethnography we can follow the transformation of over a century of etnos-thinking from an interest in persistent identity types to a fully molecular genetic theory of identity.

At the start of the 21st Century we can notice a subtle transformation of the etnos term from a somewhat scholastic scientific term used primarily by experts, to a widely quoted term in the public sphere which touches upon the destiny of peoples. Of particular interest to political actors, be they neo-Eurasiansists or members of the regional intelligentsia, is the way that a single compact term can denote a vibrant and biologically-anchored quality to peoples. According to Shnirel’man, “during the last 15-20 years, an appeal to generics has firmly entered the popular discourse, [leading] some authors began to abuse the term “genetic”\(^{173}\). This process can be followed right up to the president’s office. Just before the 2012 presidential election, Vladimir Putin published an article devoted to the “national question”\(^{174}\). There he used the term etnos as a category for understanding how post-Soviet migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasuses were guided by the leading vision of the Russian people. He noted, “The self-determination of the Russian people [hinges] on a poly-ethnic civilization strengthened with Russian culture as its foundation”. In this article he coined the phrase a “single cultural code” (edinyi kulturn’yi kod) which elaborates a sort of centralized version of multi-culturalism wherein Russia is seen as a multi-

\(^{172}\) Ibid., 160.


national society acting as a single people (narod). Originally, his ideas seem to have been aimed at creating a law which would protect the identity of this single people by reviving Soviet-era nationality registers which tracked the etnos identity held by each individual. Tishkov's earlier argument for a Rossiĭskii narod undoubtedly echoed this proposal\textsuperscript{175}. Most recently, Putin argued that his ethnocultural definition of the Rossiiskii narod should be militarized. At his speech at the 9 May celebrations in 2017, he spoke of the need to deploy military strength to protect the “very existence of the Russian people (Rossiĭskiĭ narod) as an etnos”\textsuperscript{176}. Here we witness a slippage from the use of etnos to denote non-Russian migrants, to the use of etnos to diagnose a possible life-threat to the biological vibrancy of a state-protected people. This lead to a further controversy in October 2017 when Putin expressed worry about foreign scholars collecting genetic data on “various etnoses” across Russia. Spokespersons from the Kremlin further speculated that by holding this “genetic code” foreign interests might be able to build a biological weapon\textsuperscript{177}.

The research presented in this volume does not confine itself to a history of the use of the concept etnos. Although we place a strong emphasis on tracking the use of the word, and we follow small changes in its meaning, we hope that this introduction has revealed the theoretical assumptions and modes of identity with which this concept is associated.

By stressing an accommodation which we describe as a “bio-social synthesis”, we try to express that there was, and remains, a wide range of debate within the Academy and within the public sphere on the relative role of biological heritage in

\textsuperscript{175} Tishkov. Rossiĭskii narod. Kniga dla uchitelii.
producing stable collective identities. We have indicated that the particular synthesis which stabilized within Russia, as well as other Eurasian states, seems “primordialist” when compared to a slightly different weighting of factors which one might find in Europe or America. As our chapters which follow will show, much of this peculiar Eurasian accommodation was all of the time in constant dialogue with traditions overseas, and should really be viewed as sibling to North Atlantic theories of identity (and not an orphan).

Although we have demonstrated that etnos-talk is always somewhere near the corridors of power, we have tried to show that it still cannot be equated with a single state ideology. Its persistence well into the 21st century clearly show that etnos theory was not a monster sewn together and animated by Soviet-era apparatchiki, but an intellectual movement which has been relatively stable over 150 years. Being a product of a peculiar knowledge space, etnos-thinkers often displayed the quality of being “ahead of their time”.
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