

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

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. London, 1995.

² Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, 1993.

methodologies to describe, encapsulate, evaluate, and rank “ethnoses” 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 – *ethnos* – 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 ethnicity³, 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 *ethnos* as “a reified substance” distinct from “relational” understandings of ethnicity⁴. 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 *ethnos* exists as a coherent and enduring set of traits which only knowledgeable experts can see. Circulating around this single term are a number of

³ Susanne Lachenicht, "Ethnicity," // *Oxford Bibliographies Online*. Oxford, 2011).

⁴ Peter Skalník. Gellner vs Marxism: A major concern or a fleeting affair // S. Malešević and M. Haugaard (Ed.) *Ernest Gellner and contemporary social thought*. Cambridge, 2007. P. 116.

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, Yulian Bromleĭ (1921-1990). Bromleĭ, promoted his theory internationally as a non-racial, anti-colonialist identity theory for anthropology⁵. 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 Moscow⁶. Following this event, the term was queried, and to some extent, promoted by three British scholars – Ernest Gellner⁷, Teodor Shanin⁸ and Marcus Banks⁹. 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 Bromleĭ’s etnos-thinking as a “minor revolution”¹⁰ which advocated fieldwork in order to

⁵ Yulian V. Bromleĭ. Major Trends in Ethnographic Research in the USSR // *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*. 1969. Vol. 8, №. 1; Idem. The term ethnos and its definition. // *Soviet ethnology and anthropology today*. Walter de Gruyter, 1974; Idem. Subject matter and main trends of investigation of culture by Soviet ethnographers // *Arctic Anthropology*. 1979. Vol. 16, no. 1.

⁶ David George Anderson and Dmitry Arzyutov. The Etnos Archipelago: Sergeĭ M. Shirokogoroff and the Life History of a Controversial Anthropological Concept. *Current Anthropology* (Under Revision).

⁷ Ernest Gellner. The Soviet and the Savage. *Current anthropology*. 1975. Vol. 16, no. 4; A Russian Marxist Philosophy of History // Ernest Gellner (Ed.) *Soviet and Western Anthropology*. London, 1980); Ernest Gellner. Modern Ethnicity // Idem. *State and Society in Soviet Thought*. Oxford, 1988.

⁸ Teodor Shanin. Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies. *Comparative Study of Society and History*. 1989. No. 31; Idem. Soviet theories of ethnicity: the case of a missing term. *New Left Review*. 1986. No. 158.

⁹ Marcus Banks. *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*. New York, 1996.

¹⁰ Gellner. Modern Ethnicity. P. 116.

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 Bromleř's version of *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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 ethnos-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” *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*-

¹¹ Thomas S. Mullaney. *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. Berkeley, 2010; Wang Mingming. *The Intermediate Circle // Chinese Sociology & Anthropology*. 2010. Vol. 42, No. 4; Anderson and Arzyutov.

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 *ethnos* term itself. Aside from the fact that it was always the defining prefix in words like *étnografîia*, 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 Vermeulen¹², we do not place primacy on the term itself. Instead, we locate *ethnos*-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 19th century, and during the Stalinist academy, the *ethnos* term was completely absent - but *ethnos*-thinking was tangible in the way that terms like *narodnost'* [nationality] or *narod* [people] were used. Therefore, we make a strong argument that if Iulian Bromleï's late intervention was "minor revolution", it was built upon a wide Eurasian intellectual movement. In short, *ethnos*-thinking is not only present when 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 *ethnoses* 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.

¹² Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment. Lincoln, 2015; Han Frederik Vermeulen. Origins and institutionalization of ethnography and ethnology in Europe and the USA, 1771-1845 // Han F. Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Roldan (Ed.) Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the history of European Anthropology. London, 1995.

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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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.

***Ethnos*-thinking: A Short Course**

Before we start out on our overview of *ethnos*-thinking, it would be helpful to have a crisp and clear definition of what an *ethnos* 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 Iulian Bromleĭ, 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 *ethnos* as self-evidently as one has a defined gender or a specified profession.

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

The ἔθνος [*ethnos*] concept — is a complex idea. It refers to a number of qualities united together in an individual as a single whole [*odno tseloe*]. [These are:] common physical

(anthropological) characteristics; a common historical fate, and finally a common language. These are the foundations upon which, in turn, [an *ethnos*] 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 *ethnos*, captures many of the same attributes:

[An] *ethnos* is a group of people, speaking a common language who recognise their common origin, and who display a coherent set [*kompleks*] of habits [*obychai*] , 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.

Bromleĭ 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*

¹³ Nikolaĭ M Mogiliĭanskiĭ, *Predmet i zadachi etnografii* // *Zhivaia starina* 1916. 1. P. 11.

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 Shirokogorov (Широкороров), Chirokogoroff, Śirokogorov, Shǐ lù guó (史禄国) and Shokogorov (シロコゴロフ)

¹⁵ S.M. Shirokogorov. *Ētnos - issledovanie osnovnykh printsiipov izmeneniia étnicheskikh i étnograficheskikh iavlēniĭ*. Shanghai, 1923. P. 13.

Today where he almost accidentally 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 *ethnos* theory, he also stressed that *ethnoses* have a concept of a common descent, a self-appellation, and a geographical range with the following definition:

An *Ethnos* ...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.

Bromleï's sparring partner, the Leningrad- based geographer Lev N. Gumilëv (1912-1992), made a career out of promoting and distinguishing his own theory of *ethnos* in a series of historical monographs many of which became best-sellers in the late Soviet period. Substantively, however his definition of the *ethnos* did not differ greatly from that of Bromleï¹⁹. In an early article, he argued that *ethnos* 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

¹⁶ L.N. Gumilëv. O termine "ètnos" // *Doklady otdeleniï komissii Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR*, ed. V. A. Beliaevskii. Leningrad, 1967. P. 5.

¹⁷ Bromley. The term ethnos and its definition. P. 66.

¹⁸ I. V. Bromleï. Teoriia ètnosa // *Svod ètnograficheskikh poniatiï i terminov. Vyp.2: Ètnografiia i smezhnye distsipliny*, ed. I. V. Bromleï. Moscow, 1988.

¹⁹ Mark Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. Ithaca, 2016. Pp. 171-6.

²⁰ L. N. Gumilev. Po povodu predmeta istoricheskoi geografii: (Landshaft i ètnos): III // *Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta*. 1965. No. 18, Vyp. 3.

one of these qualities was sufficient. Instead he pointed to the strong link of an *ethnos* to a specific landscape and a biocultural life-course rising and falling in 1500 year cycles²¹. Mark Bassin, in his authoritative overview of Gumilev's work, identifies Gumilev's unique contribution to *ethnos* theory with his description of "persistent behavioural models" [*stereotypy povedeniia*] and ethnic "passions" [*passionnarnost*] which he saw remaining constant over time²². 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 *ethnoses*.

- 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 [ἔθνος] 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 20th Century this bundle of five *ethnos* 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

²¹ L.N.Gumilëv. *Etnogenez i biosfera Zemli*. Leningrad, 1989.

²² Bassin. Pp. 24-6; 55-9.

collective human identities, professional politicians within Russia often argued the same. There is little to differentiate the scientific definition of *ethnos* 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 Hirsch'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 *ethnoses* created a major problem for Marxist thinkers. All proponents of *ethnos*-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

²³ I. V. Stalin. "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros // *Sochineniia*. Vol. 2 (1907-1913). Moskva, 1946 [1913]. P. 296.

²⁴ Francine Hirsch. *Empire of nations ethnographic knowledge and the making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, 2005. Pp. 35-6.

think backwards in time – such is in Iulian Bromleï’s often re-iterated examples about Poles and Ukrainians living in different times and places but preserving the core of their identities at all times²⁵. 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”²⁶. 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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*-thinking such as Bromleï and Gumilëv had a tendency to bolt-on extra elements to their theories such as “sub-ethnoses” or “ethno-social organismis”. This Byzantine involution will be discussed in more detail below.

Peter Skalník is not re-assured with Bromleï’s assertions that his theory is not biologically founded. He points out that Bromleï often returns to the theme of ethnic intermarriage (endogamy) or even sketches out rare instances of “ethno-racial communities”²⁷. Skalník concludes “[as] a matter of fact the whole theory rests ... on presuppositions of a biological and psychological nature”²⁸. Nevertheless a few key patriots of Soviet-era *ethnos*-thinking point to the fact that its emphasis on the

²⁵ I.V. Bromleï. *Sovremennye problemy étnografii: ocherki teorii i istorii*. Moskva, 1981. Pp. 28-9; Idem. *Ocherki teorii etnosa*. Moskva, 1983. P. 63.

²⁶ Hirsch. Pp. 7-9.

²⁷ Peter Skalník. *Towards an understanding of Soviet ethnos theory // South African Journal of Ethnology*. 1986. Vol. 9, no. 4. P. 160.

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 racist ahistoricity, they did not accept as its alternative a fully relativist treatment of ethnicity. They accorded ethnic phenomena greater substance, consistency, and autonomous causal 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-racist 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 *ethnos* pioneers Mogilianskiĭ and Shirokogoroff display glimpses of what we might identify as a modern theory of ethnicity. For example, in Shirokogoroff's late *magnum opus*

²⁹ Shanin. *Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies*. Pp. 415-6.

³⁰ Idem. *Soviet theories of ethnicity: the case of a missing term*.

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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnic unit*. However, not all of them are «ethnic 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 interethnic 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 ethnic units, and this process I have called ETHNOS*.³¹[emphasis in the original]

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 “ethnic 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

³¹ S. M. Shirokogoroff. *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*. London, 1935. P. 14.

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

What is in a term? The ethnos-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 be known as sociocultural anthropology. In another part of the world, it may be described as ethnography or ethnology³². 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 Enlightenment³³. Eurasian anthropological traditions pull on the same general trinity of inspiration. The reasons for this shared history are understandable. In the late 19th century and early 20th 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

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

³³ The ethnographer's magic. Fieldwork in British anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski // G.W. Stocking (Ed.) *Observers observed: essays on ethnographic fieldwork*. London, 1983. P. 347.

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 – *ethnos*. A common turn of phrase is that *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*-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. Mogilianskiï (1871-1933), whose name is often cited as being the first to distinguish *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*. The term, spelled with Greek letters [ἔθνος], is defined as “a single totality [*odno tseloe*] of physical

³⁴ Nikolaï M. Mogilianskiï. *Ėtnografiia i ee zadachi* // *Ezhegodnik Russkogo antropologicheskogo obshchestva*. 1908. Vol. 3. P. 12.

(anthropological) qualities ... historical destinies, and finally, a drawing-together (*obshchnost'*) of language ... worldview, national psychology [and] spiritual culture"³⁵. A particularly strong statement in the title this article distinguishes *ethnos* as the "object" of ethnography. Given Mogilianskiĭ'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 Mogilianskiĭ'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 *ethnos* 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 elements³⁶.

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

³⁵ Predmet i zadachi étnografii // *Zhivaiá starina*. 1916. Vyp. 25. P. 11.

³⁶ S. M. Shirokogorov. Mesto étnografii sredi nauk i klassifikatsiia étnosov. Vladivostok, 1922; Idem. Étnos - issledovanie osnovnykh printsipov izmeneniia étnicheskikh i étnograficheskikh iavleniĭ.

university education³⁷. A revealing set of memoranda in the Archive of the Russian Geographical Society³⁸ gives an insight into the range of the debate. Elements of this debate can also be tracked in a published summary³⁹.

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.⁴⁰

Our erstwhile inventor of ethnos theory, Nikolaï Mogilianskiĭ 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 [*kult'*] 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.⁴¹

³⁷ A. N. Dmitriev. Po tu storo "universitetskogo voprosa": pravitel'stvennaia politika i sotsial'naia zhizn' rossiĭskoi vyssheĭ shkoly (1900-1917 gody) // T. Maurer and A. N. Dmitriev (Ed.) Universitet i gorod v Rossii v nachale XX veka. Moskva, 2010.

³⁸ Zapiski L.Ā. Shternberga, V.F. Volkova i N.M. Mogilianskogo ob étnografii i antropologii // ARGO F. 109. Op.1 D. 15.

³⁹ Zhurnal zasedaniia Otdeleniia étnografii IRGO 4 marta 1916 goda // Zhivaia starina. 1916. No. 2-3.

⁴⁰ ARGO F. 109. Op. 1. D. 15. L. 3.

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

Mogilianskiĭ'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 Mogilianskiĭ 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 Mogilianskiĭ, who strictly opposed the Bolsheviks moved to Kiev in 1918. Volkov died the same year. Mogilianskiĭ 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.

⁴⁵ Vermeulen. Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment. Pp. 7-8; Alice L. Conklin. In the museum of man : race, anthropology, and empire in France, 1850-1950. Ithaca, NY, 2013.

Revolution, opened a historically and philologically minded faculty of ethnography within the State Institute of Geography in December 1918. In a few years' time, the Institute became the Faculty of Geography of Leningrad State University, wherein Shternberg and Bogoraz established what has been dubbed the Leningrad school of ethnography⁴⁶. 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 Sergeĭ Rudenko, David Zolotarev, and arguably Sergei Shirokogoroff occupied prominent positions in Russian anthropology/ethnography until the 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

⁴⁶ N.I. Gagen-Torn. Leningradskaia étnograficheskaia shkola v dvadtsatye gody (u istokov sovetskoĭ étnografii) // Sovetskaia étnografiia. 1971. No. 2; S.A. Ratner-Shternberg. L.Ia. Shternberg i Leningradskaia étnograficheskaia shkola 1904-1927 (po lichny vospominaniiam i arkhivnym dannym) // Sovetskaia Étnografiia. 1935. Vyp. 2.

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

***Ethnos* 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 *ethnos* theorists - such as from descriptions of 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.

⁴⁷ Francis M. Watters. *The Peasant and the Village Commune* // Wayne S. Vucinich (Ed.) *The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia*. Stanford, 1968; Boris Mironov. *The Russian Peasant Commune After the Reforms of the 1860's* // *Slavic Review*. 1985. Vol. 44. No. 3.

⁴⁸ Bruce Grant. *Foreword* // L.Ia. Shternberg. *The social organization of the Gilyak*. New York, 1999.

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 *ethnos* 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 (1881-1938) 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 territories⁴⁹. 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 [*oblast*]. 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

⁴⁹ T.B. Bottomore and P. Goode, *Austro-Marxism*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978.

⁵⁰ Otto Bauer. *The question of nationalities and social democracy*. Minneapolis, 2000 [1907]. P. 281.

⁵¹ Stalin.

noticed but significant turn of phrase was Stalin's reference to a type of "stable collectivity" [*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 "ethnos-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 ethnos concept in 1908.⁵² Shirokogoroff started developing his ethnos 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 "Bolshevists" 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" [*velikiĭ perelom*] in a speech in 1929⁵⁵. Among other disruptions, such as the restructuring of the Academy of Sciences, and the acceleration of the

⁵² Mogilianskiĭ. *Étnografiia i ee zadachi*.

⁵³ Shirokogorov. *Mesto étnografii sredi nauk i klassifikatsiia étnosov*; Idem. *Zadachi Nesotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia: doklad pročitannyi na otkrytom zasedanii Soveta S"ezda Predstavitelei nesotsialisticheskago naseleniia Dal'niago Vostoka 26 marta 1922 goda* (Vladivostok, 1922).

⁵⁴ David Bakhurst. *Consciousness and revolution in Soviet philosophy: from the Bolsheviks to Evald Ilyenkov* (Cambridge, 1991. Pp. 28-47).

⁵⁵ David Joravsky. *Soviet Scientists and the Great Break*. Daedalus. 1960. Vol. 89. No. 3.

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”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 concepts⁵⁷.

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)⁵⁸, and the All-Russian Archaeological-Ethnographic Colloquium (held in Leningrad in May 1932)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

⁵⁶ Adams. P. 184.

⁵⁷ Sergeĭ S. Alymov. *Ethnography, Marxism and Soviet ideology* // Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister (Ed.). *An Empire of Others*. Budapest, NY, 2014; Yuri Slezkine. *The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928-38*. *Current Anthropology*. 1991. Vol. 32, No. 4; T. D. Soloveĭ, ""Korennoĭ perelom" v otechestvennoĭ étnografii (diskussiiã o predmete étnologich. nauki k. 1920-kh - n. 1930-kh gg.) // Étnograficheskoe obozrenie. 2001. No. 3.

⁵⁸ Iã. K[oshkin] and N. M[atorin], "Soveshchanie étnografov Leningrada i Moskvy (5/IV – 11/IV 1929 g.). // Étnografiã. 1929. No. 2; Dmitry V. Arziutov, Sergeĭ S. Alymov, and Dévid Dzh. Anderson (Ed.). *Ot klassikov k marksizmu: soveshchanie étnografov Moskvy i Leningrada (5–11 apreliã 1929 g.)*. Sankt-Peterburg, 2014.

⁵⁹ Reziútsiã Vserossiĭskogo arkheologo-étnograficheskogo soveshchaniã 7-11 maã 1932 g. po dokladam S. N. Bykovskogo i N. M. Matorina // *Sovetskaia étnografiã*. 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 eclecticism⁶⁰

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 *ethnos* which came to be associated with émigré and presumed anti-Soviet intellectuals. By this time both Nikolaï Mogilianskiĭ and Sergei Shirokogoroff had fled the Soviet Union and could be easily classified as “bourgeois” scholars. An Koshkin, a Tungus linguist and ethnographer specifically singled out Shirokogoroff’s book on *ethnos* during the Leningrad symposium as “antischolarly”⁶¹. 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 *ethnos* some sort of special meaning or to define ethnography as the science of the *ethnos*. 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 ideologists⁶².

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

⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 13.

⁶¹ Arziutov, Alymov, and Anderson. P. 411.

⁶² Ibid. P. 142.

of development, and that therefore they still belonged as the proper study of ethnographers⁶³.

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 *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 “anthroposociology” and in particular with fascist theories which ignored the social essence of humans by transferring “biological laws to human society”⁶⁴. A significant marker of the restructuring of physical anthropology came in an article in the same issue by Arkadiĭ I. Ārkho (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 formations⁶⁵.

Despite these proscriptions, *ethnos*-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 Union⁶⁶. 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-

⁶³ Ibid. Pp. 149, 96, 99.

⁶⁴ Za sovetskuiu antropologiu // Antropologicheskii zhurnal. 1932. No. 1. Pp. 2-3.

⁶⁵ A.Ī Ārkho. Protiv idealisticheskikh techenii v rasovedenii SSSR // Ibid. Pp. 11-14.

⁶⁶ Vasilii Vasil'evich Struve. Cheterekhtomnik "Narody SSSR" // Leningradskaiā Pravda. 1938. No. 22. 28 Yanvaria; David George Anderson and Dmitry Arzyutov. The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples Of Siberia”. History and Anthropology. 2016. Vol. 27, No. 2.

people ethnographies published at this time on Siberian ethnography, folklore, and material culture – many of which are still respected today⁶⁷. 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 Vasilii 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 one⁶⁸. He felt that ethnographers should document not only primitive rituals but also the process of transformation of peoples into socialist nationalities⁶⁹. Ethnographic work thereby went hand-in-hand with the crafting of new territorial divisions which accentuated national divisions between peoples⁷⁰. Mark Bassin, in his survey of Eurasianism and biopolitics, attributes “equivocal essentialism” to the Stalinist thinking on identity⁷¹. 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.

⁶⁷ Andrei Aleksanrovich Popov. *Dolganskii fol'klor*. Leningrad, 1937; Aleksei Pavlovich Okladnikov. *Ocherki iz istorii zapadnykh buriat-mongolov (17-18 vv)*. Leningrad, 1937); Grafira Makar'evna Vasilevich. *Sbornik materialov po Evenkiiskomu (Tunguskomu) fol'kloru*. Leningrad, 1936; Iu. A. Vasil'ev, "Transportnoe sobakovodstvo Severa // *Sovetskaia Arktika*. 1936. No. 4; Arkadii Fedorovich Anisimov, *Rodovoe obshchestvo Evenkov*. Leningrad, 1936; Grafira Makar'evna Vasilevich, *Evenkiiskie skazki*. Leningrad, 1934; P. E. Terletskii. *K voprosu o pamyatnikakh Nenetskogo okruga // Sovetskii Sever*. 1935. No. 5; I.I. Meshchaninov, "Azyk i myshlenie v doklassovom obshchestve // *Problemy istorii dokapitalisticheskikh obshchestv*. 1934. No. 9-10; Boris Osipovich Dolgikh, *Kety (Irkutsk, 1934)*.

⁶⁸ Vasilii V. Struve. *Sovetskaia ètnografiia i ee perspektivy // Sovetskaia ètnografiia*. Sbornik statei. Moskva; Leningrad, 1939. P. 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* P. 8.

⁷⁰ P. E. Terletskii, "Natsional'noe raionirovane Krainego Severa // *Sovetskii Sever*. 1930. No. 7-8.

⁷¹ Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. P. 146ff.

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*⁷². Kushner prominently reintroduced the term *ethnos* into the post-war Soviet ethnography, although in his

⁷² P.I. Kushner (Knyshev). *Étnicheskie territorii i étnicheskie granitsy*. Moskva, 1951.

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

distinguish the everyday life [*bytʹ*] of one people from another. The set of such special markers include differences in language, material culture, customs, beliefs, etc. The sum-total (*sovokupnostʹ*) 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 “ethnos”⁷³

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”⁷⁴.

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”⁷⁵, was significant since it became a model for international developmental assistance in Africa and Southeast Asia⁷⁶. 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 natsii i natsional'noĭ kul'ture i ego znachenie dlĭa ètnografii // Sovetskaĭa ètnografiia. 1949. No. 4. P. 7.

⁷⁵ M.A. Sergeev. Nekapitalisticheskii put' razvitiia malykh narodov Severa. M-L, 1955.

⁷⁶ William Graf. The 'Non-Capitalist Road' to Development: Soviet and Eastern European Prescriptions for Overcoming Underdevelopment in the Third World // Miljan Toiva (Ed.) *The Political Economy of North/South Relations*. Peterborough, 1987; Clive Y. Thomas. The Non-Capitalist Path As Theory and Practice of Decolonization and Socialist Transformation. Latin American Perspectives. 1978. Vol. 5. No. 2.

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 revolution⁷⁷.

These territorial and political involutions, apart from playing on Cold War anxieties, also built upon the “ethnogenetic turn” of Soviet ethnography⁷⁸. Perhaps influenced by their forced cohabitation with historians, ethnographers became interested in tracing the path by which modern nations were formed⁷⁹. Ethnogenetic theorists squared their interest in long-term seemingly ahistorical stability with Marxist-Leninist thought by treating the term *ethnos* 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 “ethnos” should be the main subject matter of ethnography, “there are no special “ethnoses” 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-standardized 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 *ethnos* during a course of lectures on China by Nikolai Cheborsarov at

⁷⁷ Mullaney.

⁷⁸ Anderson and Arzyutov. The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples Of Siberia”.

⁷⁹ Viktor A. Shnirel'man. Zlokliuchenii odnoi nauki: etnogeneticheskie issledovaniia i stalinskaia natsional'naiia politika. Etnograficheskoe obozrenie. 1993. No. 3.

⁸⁰ S.A. Tokarev and N.N. Cheboksarov. Metodologiia etnogeneticheskikh issledovaniï na materiale etnografii v svete rabot I.V. Stalina po voprosam iazykoznaniiia // Sovetskaia etnografiia. 1951. No. 4. P. 12.

Moscow State University in 1952-53. Pimenov directly cites the cautious and hushed manner that Cheboksarev spoke about the concept⁸¹. 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 Kushner⁸². 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 history⁸³. 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 *ethnos* 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

⁸¹ V.V. Pimenov. *Moia professiia — étnograf*. Moskva, 2015. P. 115.

⁸² S.Ā. Kozlov and P.I. Puchkov. (Eds.) *Blгодарim sud'bu za vstrechu s nim: O Sergee Aleksandroviche Tokareve - uchenom i cheloveke*. Moskva, 1995. P. 225.

⁸³ S.A. Tokarev. *Problema tipov étnicheskoi obshchnosti (k metodologicheskim problemam étnografii) // Voprosy filosofii*. 1964. No. 11; Kozlov and Puchkov. Pp. 252-63.

dissertation “On the Settlement of the Mordovan people in the mid-19th – beginning of the 20th centuries”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 Georgiĭ F. Debets (1905-1969) and Sergei A. Tokarev (1899-1985) spoke in defence of his views.⁸⁵

Despite earlier criticisms of eclecticism in bourgeois science, late Stalinist ethnographers and physical anthropologists began to argue strongly for multidisciplinary studies of identity. Georgiĭ 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 progresses⁸⁶. 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

⁸⁴ V.I. Kozlov. *Rasselenie mordovskogo naroda v seredine XIX — nachale XX vv. Avtoreferat dissertatsii*. Moskva, 1956.

⁸⁵ TsGAM F. P-7349. Op. 1. D. 13 Protokoly zasedaniĭ partiĭnoĭ organizatsii Instituta ètnografii, 1960 g. L. 10-11.

⁸⁶ G. F. Debets, M. G. Levin, and T. A. Trofimova. *Antropologicheskii material kak istochnik izuchenĭa voprosov ètnogeneza // Sovetskaia ètnografiia*. 1952. No. 1. Pp. 28-29.

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 ethnos-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

⁸⁷ V.P. Alekseev. *Proiskhozhdenie narodov Vostochnoï Evropy*. Moskva, 1969.

⁸⁸ V. P. Alekseev. *Antropologicheskie dannye o proiskhozhdenii narodov SSSR // Rasy i narody*. Moskva, 1979. Pp. 49-52.

⁸⁹ V. P. Alekseev. *Antropologicheskie dannye o proiskhozhdenii narodov SSSR // Rasy i narody*. Moskva, 1979. P. 208; T.I. Alekseeva. *Ėtnogenez vostochnykh slavīan po dannym antropologii*. Moskva, 1973.

⁹⁰ V.P. Alekseev. *Proiskhozhdenie narodov Vostochnoï Evropy*. Moskva, 1969. P. 164.

⁹¹ Idem. *Ėtnogenez*. Moskva, 1986. Pp. 6-7.

scientists and government agents interacted with society. In a strange recapitulation of the 1840s, the revitalization of ethnos theory was to a great extent the story of the competition of two men: IŪ. V. Bromleĭ 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 sciences⁹². Academicians P.N. Fedoseev and IŪ.P. 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 research⁹³. 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 issued⁹⁴. Of those papers, a seminal paper by the philosopher IŪriĭ I. Semënov (1929 -) had far-reaching impact on Soviet ethnography. Semënov argued the need for a new bridging concept, which he called

⁹² Roger D. Markwick. *Rewriting history in Soviet Russia : The politics of revisionist historiography, 1956-1974*. Basingstoke, 2001. P. 156.

⁹³ *Istoriia i soĭsiologiia*. Moskva, 1964). Pp. 16, 37.

⁹⁴ ARAN F. 457. Op. 1 (1953-2002). D. 527. Protokoly № 1-19 zasedaniiĭ Biuro otdeleniia istorii AN SSSR. 1967 g. L. 5.

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”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 facts⁹⁶.

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’*)”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”⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ Gellner. A Russian Marxist Philosophy of History. P. 114; Skalník. Gellner vs Marxism: A major concern or a fleeting affair.

⁹⁶ Urii Ivanovich Semënov. Kategoriiia "sotsial'nyi organizm" i ee znachenie dlia istoricheskoi nauki // Voprosy istorii. 1966. No. 8.

⁹⁷ Viktor A. Shnirel'man. "Porog tolerantnosti". Ideologiiia i praktika novogo rasizma. Vol. 1. Moskva, 2011. P. 251.

⁹⁸ ARAN F. 457. Op. 1 (1953-2002). D. 527. Protokoly № 1-19 zasedanii Biuro otdeleniia istorii AN SSSR. 1967 g. L. 18.

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 components⁹⁹.

Participants at the seminar questioned many of Kozlov's arguments of 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 - Sergeĭ 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 [*obschnost'*] 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

⁹⁹ V.I. Kozlov. O poniatii ètnicheskoi obschnosti // Sovetskaia Ètnografiia. 1967. No. 2. P. 111.

¹⁰⁰ ARAN F. 142. Op. 10. D. 522. Protokoly i stenogrammy zasedaniĭ gruppy obscheĭ ètnografii IÉ AN SSSR. 1965 g. L. 29-30.

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. On 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.¹⁰¹ It was into this newly “thawed” yet strangely familiar landscape that both IŪ. V. Bromleĭ and Lev N. Gumilëv sought to make careers for themselves.

Bromleĭ, 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:

We need a common set of tools [*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 [*sovermennyi*] definition of the nation.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Y. Howell. The liberal gene: sociobiology as emancipatory discourse in the Late Soviet Union // *Slavic Review*. 2010. Vol. 69. No. 2; Shnirel'man, "Porog tolerantnosti". *Ideologiia i praktika novogo rasizma*. Vol. 1. Pp. 252-80.

¹⁰² Stenogramma komissii po problemam natsional'nykh otnoshenii. 13 dekabriia 1967 g. // ARAN. F. 457. Op. 1 (1953-2002). D. 529. L. 50.

Upon becoming the director of the Institute, Bromleĭ 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 Arutiunov. 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 night¹⁰³.

Bromleĭ 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 “ethnoses” in the first millennium AD across Eurasia¹⁰⁴. A distinctive feature of this article was the use of the term “ethnos” when describing of tribal and early-state societies. The ethnos 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. Gumilĕv followed a different path than Bromleĭ 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 institutions¹⁰⁵. Gumilĕv was never appointed as a professor and was officially employed throughout his life as a

¹⁰³ V.I. Kozlov. Ob akademike Īuliane Vladimiroviche Bromlee - uchenom i cheloveke // Ėtnograficheskoe obozrenie. 2001. No. 4. P. 5-6.

¹⁰⁴ V.P. Alekseev and Ī.V. Bromleĭ. K izuchenĭiu roli pereselenĭiĭ narodov v formirovanii novykh ětnicheskikh obshchnostei // Sovetskaĭa Ėtnografiia. 1968. No. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Bassin. The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia. Pp. 10-1.

research associate in the Faculty of Geography at Leningrad State University. However as Mark Bassin ¹⁰⁶ 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 Bromleĭ who headed an official governmental research institute.

Of the two men, Gumilëv was the first to place the stamp of *ethnos* 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 Bromleĭ’s first published intervention¹⁰⁷. It is an interesting footnote that this early contribution was almost immediately translated into English in one of the Cold War journals of translation¹⁰⁸. Two much more detailed articles were to follow in 1967¹⁰⁹. Later, a set of high-profile articles in the mass-circulation periodical *Priroda*¹¹⁰, 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

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Gumilev.

¹⁰⁸ L. N. Gumilëv. On the Subject of Historical Geography (Landscape and Ethnos, III) // Soviet Geography. 1966. Vol. 7. No. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Gumilëv. O termine “ètnos”; Idem. “Ètnos kak ĭavlenie,” in Doklady otdeleniĭ komissiiĭ Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR, ed. V. A. Belĭavskiiĭ. Leningrad, 1967.

¹¹⁰ Ètnogenez i ètnosfera // 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 *ethnos* theory in a vision that he had while in a prison cell in Leningrad in 1939¹¹¹. 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 1970s¹¹². However scattered unpublished documents suggest that his self-styled arcane ideas were part of a broader interest in enduring, biophysical identities of the time. Sergeĭ I.

Rudenko, a student of Feodor Volkov and fellow sufferer of the Stalinist repressions, helped Gumilëv re-establish his career in Leningrad (per.comm. IĀ.A. Sher, 2016)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. Petersburg Filial of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences assert that Gumilëv's handwriting can be indentified in the margins of the typescript – suggesting that he was familiar with the text.¹¹⁴

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

¹¹¹ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. P. 43.

¹¹² Shnirel'man. "Porog tolerantnosti". *Ideologĭia i praktika novogo rasizma*. Vol. 1. Pp. 281-2.

¹¹³ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. P. 160.

¹¹⁴ Sergeĭ I. Rudenko. *Ētnos i ětnogenez: po povodu odnoĭ diskussii v otdelenii ětnografii VGO*. Typescript with the handwritten annotations of Lev Gumilëv // SPF ARAN F. 1004. Op. 1. D. 118. L. 8-14.

an “ethnic hierarchy”¹¹⁵ 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* social¹¹⁶. Several of the millennial *superetnos*es that he identified conveniently tended to overlap with the boundaries of the Soviet Union¹¹⁷. Unlike Bromleĭ, Gumilëv appealed to wider audiences through his historical monographs of various historical and ancient Turkic peoples such as *The Unveiling of Khazariia*¹¹⁸ or *The Ancient Turks*¹¹⁹. These popular-scientific works on exotic peoples were published before his key theoretical works and served to illustrate the evokativeness of his *etnos*-perspective.

Bromleĭ also followed up his early interest in the socio-genetic origins of identity in his now infamous article “Etnos and endogamy”¹²⁰. 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

¹¹⁵ Bassin. Pp. 62-7.

¹¹⁶ Bassin. Ch.6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Pp. 70-1.

¹¹⁸ L.N. Gumilëv. Otkrytie Khazarii: Istoriko-geograficheskiĭ ètiud. Moskva, 1967.

¹¹⁹ Drevnie T'urki. Moskva, 1967.

¹²⁰ IŪ.V. Bromleĭ. Ètnos i èndogamiia // Sovetskaia ètnografiia. 1969. No. 6.

campaign of attacks against Bromleĭ. Ivanov claimed that if *ethnos* are “stabilized” by endogamy this not only negated the Marxist formations of Bromleĭ’s thinking, but made *ethnos* a biological category¹²¹. 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 *ethnos*-talk was imposed from this time onwards at least within ethnographic circles.

Perhaps overconscious of the popularity of Gumilëv’s work, Bromleĭ followed Gumilëv along a similar Byzantine path of devising increasingly complex systems and subsystems by which to describe *ethnos*. In his mature works, Bromleĭ introduced his own notion of a *subethnos* as well as the hyper-regional “metaethnic community” [*metaetnicheskaiâ obshnost’*]. 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, Bromleĭ also introduced the adjectival form of the Greek word *ethnos* – *etnikos* – in order to refer to a specific historical manifestation of *ethnos* at a particular place and time. It is difficult to draw sharp lines between Bromleĭ’s *subethnos* and Gumilëv’s *subethnos*, let alone the pantheon of their parallel sets of concepts. What does seem clear from this inflationary expansion of the *ethnos*-enterprise that this forest of terms created a rich plantation for a new generation of ethnographers and social

¹²¹ Obsuzhdenie stat’i Iu.V. Bromleia Etnos i endogamiia // Sovetskaia Ètnografiia. 1970. No. 3. P. 89; D.D. Tumarkin, Iu.V. Bromleĭ i zhurnal "Sovetskaia ètnografiia" // Akademik Iu.V. Bromleĭ i otechestvennaia ètnografiia. 1960-1990-e gody. Ed. S.I.A. Kozlov. Moskva, 2003.

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

Marcus Banks, in his overview of *ethnos* 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, *ethnos*-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 *ethnos* a radical re-assertion of Stalinist national essences which he

¹²² Banks. P. 22.

¹²³ Ibid. P. 23.

¹²⁴ Gellner. Modern Ethnicity. P. 118.

¹²⁵ Idem. Preface. P. X.

describes as “the Stalinist accomodation”. 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 *ethnos* theory during the Khrushchev “thaw” reveals several things. The first is that this “relatively” primordialist theory could support multiple variants and multiple accomodations 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 Valeriï A. Tishkov (1941-) – the first post-Soviet director of the Institute of Ethnography - to entomb *ethnos* theory through his book *A Requiem to Ethnos*¹²⁹. This wide-ranging summary of North American theories of ethnicity made a strong argument that the

¹²⁶ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. Pp. 163-71.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Ch.10.

¹²⁸ Sev'ian I. Vainshtein, “Iulian Vladimirovich Bromleï: chelovek, grazhdanin, uchenyi // *Vydaïushchieïa otechestvennye ètnologi i antropologi*. Ed. V.A. Tishkov and D.D. Tumarkin. Moskva, 2004. Pp. 624-7.

¹²⁹ Valeriï A. Tishkov. *Rekviem po etnosu*. Moskva, 2003.

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 *Requim*, he takes credit with introducing North American cultural anthropology to Russia and loosening the hold of *ethnos*-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 Hobsbawm'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 *ethnos*-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 *ethnos*-thinking, and its brief association with Soviet modernity, was rooted in a biosocial compromise between competing camps. This runs the risk of asserting

¹³⁰ Idem. Ot étnosa k étnichnosti i posle // Étnograficheskoe obozrenie. 2016. No. 5. P. 6.

(alongside many *ethnos*-entrepreneurs) that persistent identities are somehow mystically natural or fixed. That would misrepresent 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 *ethnos*-thinking is that there needs to be a way of speaking about contextualized identities – and to some extent *ethnos*-talk addresses, if not solves, Shanin's ¹³¹ "case of the missing term".

If the height of Soviet period was marked by Bromleï'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 Anthropology*¹³². Like his predecessor Bromleï, Valeriï 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 Bromleï'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

¹³¹ Shanin. "Soviet theories of ethnicity: the case of a missing term.

¹³² Valery A. Tishkov. The Crisis in Soviet Ethnography // *Current Anthropology*. 1992. Vol. 33. No. 4.

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 Bromleĭ 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 ethnos theory had never existed, people would never have been inscribed as parts of the collective torso [*telō*] known as an "ethnos". ... 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 Avarets, a Digorets and an Osetian, an Erzarian and a Mordovan ...a Pomor and a Russian ... etc.

133.

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 *Rossiĭskĭĭ narod*¹³⁵.

¹³³ Valeriĭ A. Tishkov. *Ėtnologiā i politika. Stat'i 1989-2004 godov*. Moskva, 2005. P. 167.

¹³⁴ Idem. *Ocherki teorii i politiki ėtnichnosti v Rossii*. Moskva, 1997. P. 56.

¹³⁵ Idem. *Rossiĭskĭĭ narod. Kniga dliā uchitelĭa*. Moskva, 2010.

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

Indeed today in Russian public sphere the idea of “ethnos” is very much alive, probably due to the fact that it wandered [*perekochevalo*] from ethnology to different spheres of social and humanitarian research. ... *Ethnos* 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] “ethnoses in the early Middle Ages”, or among the pseudophilosophers with their concept of the “philosophy of the *ethnos*”. ... *Ethnos* 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 *ethnos* is no longer used widely by state ethnographers within the Academy of Sciences, an unreconstructed vision of Bromleĭ's *ethnos* can be widely found in state-sanctioned textbooks used in introductory level cultural studies course¹³⁷.

The *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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 World*¹³⁸, 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.

¹³⁷ Vladimir V. Pimenov. (Ed.) *Osnovy Étnologii: Uchebnoe Posobie*. Moscow, 2007); Aleksandr P. Sadokhin, *Étnologĭiā: Uchebnik*. Moscow, 2006); Sergeĭ A. Arutiunov and Svetlana I. Ryzhakova. *Kul'turnaĭa Antropologĭiā*. Moskva, 2004.

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 *ethnoses* 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 ĪAkuts*¹³⁹ was issued in conjunction with a national festival in Moscow organized by the ĪAkut 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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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

¹³⁹ N. A. Alekseev, E.N. Romanova, Sokolova, Z. P. (Ed.) ĪAkuty Sakha. Moskva, 2012.

¹⁴⁰ M.S.-G. Albogachieva, A.M. Martazanov, and L.T. Solov'eva. (Eds.). Ingushi. Moskva, 2013.

¹⁴¹ Dmitry A. Funk and Nikolai A. Tomilov. (Eds.) ĪTurkskie narody Sibiri. Moscow, 2006.

¹⁴² Nikolaï V. Ekeev. (Ed.) Altaïtsy: Ėtnicheskaïa istoriïa. Traditsionnaïa kul'tura. Sovremennoe razvitie. Gorno- Altaïsk, 2014.

ethnos theory today. There is a strong quality to these works which one might identify as a type of indigenous-rights discourse. The *ethnos* 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 Ethnos*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 Valerii Tishkov in his retrospective review of his *Requiem* was forced to acknowledge that “etno-“ identities are characteristic of Russia now, and likely “forever” [*navsegda*]¹⁴⁵. The passion with which regional elites have been attracted to *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*-thinking. Perhaps the most startling appropriation of *ethnos* 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

¹⁴³ S. A. Goncharov, L. B. Gashilova, and L. A. Baliasnikova (Eds.) *Real'nost' étnosa : obrazovanie i étnosotsializatsiia molodezhi v sovremennoi Rossii*. St Petersburg, 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Nikolai P. Makarov. (Ed.) *Etnosy Sibiri. Proshloe. Nastoiashchee. Budushchee*. Krasnoiarsk, 2004.

¹⁴⁵ Tishkov. *Ot étnosa k étnichnosti i posle*. P. 17-8.

¹⁴⁶ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique : Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*.

¹⁴⁷ Dmitry Shlapentokh. Alexander Dugin's views of Russian history: collapse and revival. *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*. 2017. Vol. 25. No. 3; Andreas Umland. Alexander Dugin and Moscow's New Right Radical Intellectual Circles at the Start Of Putin's Third Presidential Term 2012-2013: The Anti-Orange Committee, The Izborsk Club And The Florian Geyer Club In Their Political Context. *Europolity—Continuity and Change in European Governance—New Series*. 2016. Vol. 10. No. 2; Marlene Laruelle. Aleksandr

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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*” which drew heavily from Shirokogoroff’s and Gumilëv’s work¹⁵¹. These were assembled together and published as a textbook in 2011¹⁵². Here he redefines *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*, the historian

Dugin: a Russian version of the European radical right // Kennan Institute Occasional Papers. Washington, 2006).

¹⁴⁸ A.G. Dugin. *Osnovy geopolitiki (geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii)*. Moskva, 1997.

¹⁴⁹ Andreas Umland. Formirovanie pravoradikal'nogo "neoevraziiskogo" intellektual'nogo dvizheniia v Rossii (1989-2001 gg.) // Forum noveisheĭ vostochnoevropeskoĭ istorii i kul'tury. 2009. No. 1.

¹⁵⁰ A.G. Dugin. Ėvoliutsiia Naĭsional'noiĭ idei Rusi (Rossii) na raznykh istoricheskikh ėtapakh // *Teoriia ėtnogeneza i istoricheskie sud'by Evrazii: Materialy konferentsii, posveshchennoiĭ 90-letiiu so dniia rozhdeniia vydaiushchegosia evraziitsa XX v. – L.N. Gumileva*. Ed. L.R. Pavlinskaia. Sankt-Peterburg, 2002.

¹⁵¹ *Strukturnaia soĭsiologiia* (16.11.2009) // *TSentr konservativnykh issledovaniĭ soĭsiologicheskogo fakul'teta MGU*. <http://konservatizm.org/161109164821.xhtml>.

¹⁵² Dugin A.G. *Ėtnosotsiologiia*. Moskva, 2011.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* P. 8.

and political commentator Valeriĭ D. Soloveĭ uses genetics and Jungian psychology to define *ethnos* as “a group of people, differentiated from other groups by hereditary biological characteristics and archetypes”,¹⁵⁴. This type of racist essentialist appropriation of *ethnos* is characteristic not only for the Russian far-right, but for a wide range of post-Soviet intellectuals of various nationalities¹⁵⁵.

As Sergei A. Oushakine¹⁵⁶ has shown, *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* concept these authors “were able to introduce a clear-cut split between the Russian “*ethnos* proper” and institutions of the Soviet and post-Soviet state whose politics was deemed to be non-Russian or even anti-Russian”¹⁵⁷. He claims that the theories of Bromleĭ and Gumilëv were instrumental in this regard as they had already distilled *ethnos* away from the social/political realm where constructivist terms of identity were widely used¹⁵⁸. Extracting an essentialist “bio-psycho-social ethnic body” from history, theories of *ethnos* 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”¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁴ Valeriĭ D. Soloveĭ. *Krov' i pochva russkoĭ istorii*. Moscow, 2008. P. 68.

¹⁵⁵ Shnirel'man, “*Porog toleranĭnosti*”. *Ideologĭiā i praktika novogo rasizma*, 1, 328-60.

¹⁵⁶ Sergei A. Oushakine. *The patriotism of despair : nation, war, and loss in Russia*. Ithaca, 2009. Idem. *Somatic Nationalism: Theorizing Post-Soviet Ethnicity in Russia // In Marx's shadow: knowledge, power, and intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Ed. C. Brădăţan and S. Oushakine. Plymouth, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Sergei A. Oushakine. *The patriotism of despair*. P. 81.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* P. 86-95.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* P. 127.

The demographic health of the Russian *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos*-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

¹⁶⁰ V.I. Kozlov. *Istoriia tragedii velikogo naroda*. Moskva, 1996.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* P. 274.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* P. 283.

¹⁶³ Tishkov. *Ėtnologīia i politika. Stat'i 1989-2004 godov*. P. 174.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* P. 189-207.

title of one of his many public outreach articles in the daily newspaper *Nezavisimáia Gazeta*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 Vladivostok¹⁶⁶. 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*¹⁶⁷.

Larisa R. Pavlinskaia, former head of Siberian Department in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, wrote one of the first book-length ethnographies to redeploy *ethnos*-theory overtly. Her richly detailed ethnography entitled *The Buriats: Notes on their Ethnic History*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 *ethnos*. The volume quotes extensively from Shirokogoroff's newly republished texts, in part

¹⁶⁵ "My stali zhit' luchshe. Vvedenie v obshchepartiinuiu izbiratel'nyiu programmú // *Nezavisimáia gazeta*. 2000. No. 3 (2065). 12.01.2000.

¹⁶⁶ A. M. Kuznetsov and A. M. Reshetov. (Eds.) S.M. Shirokogorov. *Etnograficheskie issledovaniia; Izbrannye raboty i materialy*. Vladivostok, 2001-2002.

¹⁶⁷ Aleksandr G. Dugin. *Sergei Mikhaïlovich Shirokogorov: vozvrashchenie zabytogo klassika* // S.M. Shirokogorov. *Étnos. Issledovanie osnovnykh printsipov izmeneniia étnicheskikh i étnograficheskikh iavlenii*. Ed. N.V. Melenteva. Moskva, 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Larisa R. Pavlinskaia. *Buriaty. Ocherki étnicheskoi istorii (17 - 19 vv.)*. Saint Petersburg, 2008.

advocating and explaining his biosocial theory of the *ethnos* for those who may not have read this émigré's work¹⁶⁹. She then moves on to merge Shirokogoroff's interest in leading ethnos 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* Ākov 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"¹⁷⁰. Pavlinskaĭa perhaps goes further than Shirokogoroff himself by stressing the biological component ethnogenesis. She postulates that there must exist a genetic "passionarity mutation" (*mutatsiĭa passionarnosti*)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 *ethnos*. This frames Shirokogoroff's interest in mixed-blood Tungus individuals, as discussed in chapter 4, in a completely new light:

The metisification (*metisatsiĭa*) of the Russian and aboriginal population is one of the mainstays of new etno-formation processes (*étnoobrazovatel'nye protsessy*) in Siberia, and in particular 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 *ethnos*. 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

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 53-6.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 57.

Siberian ethnos. 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 ethno-formation process.¹⁷².

Through works like Pavlinskaiā's ethnography we can follow the transformation of over a century of *ethnos*-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 *ethnos* 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 *ethnos* as a category for understanding how post-Soviet migrants from Central Asia and the Caucases 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.

¹⁷³ Shnirel'man. "Porog tolerantnosti". *Ideologiā i praktika novogo rasizma*. Vol. 1. P. 354.

¹⁷⁴ Vladimir Putin. "Rossiā: natsional'nyi vopros // *Nezavisimāia gazeta*. 2012. January 23.

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 *ethnos* identity held by each individual. Tishkov's earlier argument for a *Rossiiskii narod* undoubtedly echoed this proposal¹⁷⁵. 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 (*Rossiiskii narod*) as an *ethnos*"¹⁷⁶. Here we witness a slippage from the use of *ethnos* to denote non-Russian migrants, to the use of *ethnos* to diagnose a possible life-threat to the biological vibrancy of a state-protected people. This led to a further controversy in October 2017 when Putin expressed worry about foreign scholars collecting genetic data on "various *ethnos*es" across Russia. Spokespersons from the Kremlin further speculated that by holding this "genetic code" foreign interests might be able to build a biological weapon¹⁷⁷.

The research presented in this volume does not confine itself to a history of the use of the concept *ethnos*. 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

¹⁷⁵ Tishkov. *Rossiiskii narod. Kniga dlia uchitelia*.

¹⁷⁶ Pravda.ru. Putin predlozhl tost v chest' Dnia Pobedy: "Za pobediteleĭ, za mir na nasheĭ zemle, za velikuĭ Rossiĭu!". *Pravda.ru*. 2017. May 9. <https://www.pravda.ru/news/society/09-05-2017/1333337-putin-0/>

¹⁷⁷ Anastasiia Zyrianova. "Utechka biodannykh": kto i zachem sobiraet biomaterialy rossiian. *Russkaia sluzhba Bi-Bi-Si*. 11.09.2017. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-41816699>.

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 *ethnos*-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 *ethnos* 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, *ethnos*-thinkers often displayed the quality of being “ahead of their time”.

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