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LIFE HISTORIES OF THE *ETNOS* CONCEPT IN EURASIA: AN INTRODUCTION

This is an abridged and adapted version of the first chapter from the book *A Theory for Empire Written on Its Margins: Life Histories of the Etnos Concept in Eurasia*, edited by David G. Anderson, Dmitry V. Arzyutov, and Sergei S. Alymov.¹ The volume reimagines the way that ethnicity and national identity theory can be understood in Eurasia by consulting the fieldwork practices of the intellectuals who drafted its key concepts. Today theories of ethnicity, rooted in assumptions of liberal individualism, stand in distinct contrast to collectivist concepts of *etnos* and *minzu* as understood across a range of Eurasian states. The contributors to the volume problematize the assumption that Eurasian primordialist theories are mere anachronisms cut off from globalized discussions of liberal thought. Citing detailed archival accounts ranging from letters, to field notes, to photographic collections, the authors demonstrate how both individualist and corporatist forms of identity management arose in various regional theaters from Southern Russia and

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¹ Currently under consideration by Open Book Publishers, Cambridge.

Ukraine to the Manchurian steppes of what is now China. This radically international backdrop to the life history of these concepts is illustrated through the embodied lives of key theorists from Fedor Volkov (Fedir Vovk), Nikolai Mogilianskii, Sergei Shirokogoroff, and Sergei Rudenko. The volume concludes with contemporary case studies that illustrate the vibrancy and contradictions of these concepts today. It presents an understanding of how concepts arise through field practice and also serves as a guide to the biographies and fieldwork of these key theorists. It introduces a set of recently discovered manuscripts and photographs that bring these field experiences to life. The book is illustrated with high-quality reproductions of images from several archives.

The volume contains an introduction and seven chapters, divided into three parts. The first chapter is a highly contextualized essay on the history of etnos theory from roughly the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. Part 1, "Fieldwork and Life Histories," contains two chapters. Chapter 2, "Ukrainian Roots of the Theory of Etnos: St. Petersburg Anthropology and the Ukrainian National Movement in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," contextualizes the first appearance of etnos as a principal object of research of ethnography as a discipline in Russia. The chapter examines the influence of Fedor Volkov and Nikolai Mogilianskii and in particular their solidarity with the Southern Russian/Ukrainian independence movement. Chapter 3, "Mapping Etnos: The Geographic Imagination of Fedor Volkov and His Students," considers the role of ethnographic and anthropologic cartography in constructing the etnos theory. It shows that the identification of ethnographic/anthropological types on the basis of geographical correlation of anthropological, ethnographical, and linguistic data lay at the root of the methodology of Fedor Volkov and his students. Part 2, "Etnos Theory in the Field," focuses on the anthropological and political activities of the principal theorist of etnos, Sergei M. Shirokogoroff. Chapter 4, "Notes from his 'Snail's Shell': The Siberian Fieldwork of S. M. Shirokogoroff and the Groundwork for Etnos-thinking," surveys the fieldwork of Shirokogoroff and his wife Elizabeta in northeastern Transbaikalia in 1912 and 1913 to document the people whom he identified as Orochens. This first encounter with Orochen hunters and shamans would form the kernel of his theory of cultural resilience and degradation, which would be a constant theme in his life's work. Chapter 5, "Order Out of Chaos: Political History and the Anthropological Theory of Sergei M. Shirokogoroff (1920–1930s)," analyzes the political pamphlets of Shirokogoroff published and distributed during the turbulent time of the Russian Civil War, which

help situate an ethnography of identity at the start of the twentieth century. Part 3 is titled “Etnos and Contemporary Identity Movements.” Chapter 6, “Chasing Shadows: Sharing Photographs from Former Northwest Manchuria,” explores the evocative effect of photographic images, collected by Ethel Lindgren and Sergei Shirokogoroff, on national communities investigating their identities. Chapter 7, “The Sea Is Our Field”: Pomor Identity in Russian Ethnography,” surveys the identity of a group of Northern Slavs often distinguished in the Russian-language literature as *pomor*. The example of Pomor identity illustrates the power of etnos-thinking today and the hold it has had on the imagination of intellectuals in the Northern region.

* * *

In *The Age of Extremes*, the historian Eric Hobsbawm argues that “the short twentieth century” ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union.² 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,”³ as if long-term preexisting ethnic identities had somehow outlived and triumphed over the 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 exercised a hold, on social order in this region, if not elsewhere, and this hold continues today. An account of the “long twentieth 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 more than 150 years of what we identify as “etnos-thinking” – the attempt to use positivistic and rational scientific methodologies to describe, encapsulate, evaluate, and rank “etnoses” across Eurasia. Our central argument is that the work of professional ethnographers created a powerful language parallel to the political vocabulary of “tribes,” “nationalities,” and “nations,” which were hitherto thought to have structured the Eurasian

² Eric Hobsbawm. *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*. London, 1995.

³ Ronald Grigor Suny. *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford, 1993.

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 etnos-thinking within the academy, the government, and finally throughout civil society.

The term around which this volume revolves – “etnos” – is likely not familiar to most readers. Incorrectly glossed as “ethnicity,” the term refers to a somewhat transhistorical collective identity held by people speaking a common language and sharing a common set of traditions, and who are 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 because it diverts from the standard, post-war North Atlantic definition of ethnicity,⁴ which stresses that an individual might choose to belong to one or many social, linguistic, or confessional groups. Peter Skalník, an expert observer of the history of Soviet ethnography, distinguishes etnos as “a reified substance” distinct from “relational” understandings of ethnicity.⁵ In other words, if modern European and North American analysts see ethnicity as a bundle of qualities – any one of which an individual might cite to describe his or her identity – to a Russian or Kazakh ethnographer, an *etnos* exists as a coherent and enduring set of traits that only knowledgeable experts can see. Circulating around this single term are a number of strong assumptions about the durability of identities over time; the role of the expert eye in assigning identity; and the importance of physical bodies in stabilizing and reproducing identities. All three of these assumptions are crucial 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 Bromley (1921–1990). Bromley promoted his theory internationally as a nonracial, anticolonialist identity theory for anthropology.⁶ The concept was (re)introduced prominently, if not theatrically, to a Western European

⁴ Susanne Lachenicht. *Ethnicity* // Oxford Bibliographies Online. Oxford, 2011.

⁵ Peter Skalník. Gellner vs. Marxism: A Major Concern or a Fleeting Affair // Siniša Malešević and Mark Haugaard (Eds.). *Ernest Gellner and Contemporary Social Thought*. Cambridge, 2007. P. 116.

⁶ Yulian V. Bromley. *Major Trends in Ethnographic Research in the USSR* // *Soviet Anthropology and Archeology*. 1969. Vol. 8. No. 1. Pp. 3–42; Idem. *The Term Ethnos and Its Definition* // *Soviet Ethnology and Anthropology Today*. Berlin, 1974. Pp. 55–72; Idem. *Subject Matter and Main Trends of Investigation of Culture by Soviet Ethnographers* // *Arctic Anthropology*. 1979. Vol. 16. No. 1. Pp. 46–61.

audience in 1964 during the Seventh International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held in Moscow.⁷ Following this event, the term was queried, and to some extent, promoted by three British scholars – Ernest Gellner,⁸ Teodor Shanin,⁹ and Marcus Banks.¹⁰ All three drew attention to the fact that it was a “nonrelativistic” theory of identity. Their curiosity about the term stemmed from a certain dissatisfaction with poststructuralist 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 Bromley’s *ethnos*-thinking as a “minor revolution” that advocated fieldwork in order to document and understand living conditions in the present instead of resting on the armchair evolutionary models for which Marxism had been famous.¹¹ We will discuss Bromley’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 nineteenth century, and in some accounts to the seventeenth century. There is a misunderstanding that the essentialist excesses of *ethnos* theory served the late Soviet state’s passion for ethnoterritorial stability. It has been surprising to many, including ourselves, that with the fall of the Soviet state, 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

⁷ David George Anderson and Dmitry Arzyutov. *The Etnos Archipelago: Sergei M. Shirokogoroff and the Life History of a Controversial Anthropological Concept* // *Current Anthropology* (under review).

⁸ Ernest Gellner. *The Soviet and the Savage* // *Current Anthropology*. 1975. Vol. 16. No. 4. Pp. 595–617; Idem. *A Russian Marxist Philosophy of History* // Ernest Gellner (Ed.) *Soviet and Western Anthropology*. London, 1980. Pp. 59–82; Ernest Gellner. *Modern Ethnicity* // Idem. *State and Society in Soviet Thought*. Oxford, 1988.

⁹ Teodor Shanin. *Ethnicity in the Soviet Union: Analytical Perceptions and Political Strategies* // *Comparative Study of Society and History*. 1989. No. 31. Pp. 409–38; Idem. *Soviet Theories of Ethnicity: The Case of a Missing Term* // *New Left Review*. 1986. No. 158. Pp. 113–22.

¹⁰ Marcus Banks. *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*. New York, 1996.

¹¹ Gellner. *Modern Ethnicity*. P. 116.

today.¹² Together these essentialist and deeply rooted concepts of identity structure the space of two continents.

The purpose of this volume is to “ground” etnos theory by giving a long-overdue and detailed account of the social conditions that 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 flavor of the seminars where these ideas were discussed. Further, we have strongly emphasized the fieldwork of many seminal etnos-thinkers (Volkov, Rudenko, Shirokogoroff) in order to understand their reasoning about cultural persistence and biosocial identity in the field.

A difficult and somewhat awkward part of our project has been the uneven valences of the term “etnos” itself. Aside from the fact that it was always the defining prefix in words like “etnografiia” during some periods the use of the substantive term was discouraged, if not banned outright. Unlike other scholars, such as the cultural historian Han Vermeulen,¹³ we do not place primacy on the term itself. Instead, we locate etnos-thinking in the situations where expert observers credit themselves with the ability to discern long-term biosocial identities within the matrix of everyday life. At certain times, most significantly in the late nineteenth century and during the Stalinist academy, the term “etnos” was completely absent – but etnos-thinking was tangible in the way that terms like “narodnost” (nationality) or “narod” (people) were used. Therefore, we make a strong argument that if Yulian Bromley’s late intervention was a “minor revolution,” it was built on a wide Eurasian intellectual movement. In short, etnos-thinking is not only present when then the term is used overtly. It is also recognizable when more familiar terms such as “tribe,” “nationality,” or “nation” are applied by experts essentialistically. Therefore, we argue that talk about nations and about etnoses are often two sides of the same coin – where one side is an unrooted scientific discourse while the other is the necessary complement of engaged ethnographic action in building or rebuilding ethnic communities.

¹² 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. Pp. 62–77; Anderson and Arzyutov. *The Construction of Soviet Ethnography*.

¹³ Han Frederik Vermeulen. *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment*. Lincoln, 2015; Idem. *Origins and Institutionalization of Ethnography and Ethnology in Europe and the USA, 1771–1845 // Han F. Vermeulen and Arturo Alvarez Roldan (Eds.). Fieldwork and Footnotes: Studies in the History of European Anthropology*. London, 1995. Pp. 39–59.

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, which gives the impression that the concept appeared out of thin air.

Etnos-Thinking: A Short Course

Before we begin 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 seem at first. In contemporary Russia the term is so pervasive and considered so self-evident that it sometimes seems to be part of the air one breathes. Some scholars, such as Bromley, have written entire monographs on how the concept could be applied to Soviet society, but have 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 seventeenth century, the first scholar to employ the term as a stand-alone, compact concept was Nikolai N. Mogilianskii (1871–1933), a curator at the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg. His 1916 published definition reads as follows:

The ἔθνος (*etnos*) concept – is a complex idea. It refers to a number of qualities united together in an individual as a single whole (*odnotseloe*). [These are:] common physical (anthropological) characteristics; a common historical fate, and finally a common language. These are the foundations upon which, in turn, [an *etnos*] can build a common worldview [and] folk psychology – in short, an entire spiritual culture.¹⁴

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

¹⁴ Nikolai M. Mogilianskii. Predmet i zadachi etnografii // Zhivaia starina. 1916. No. 1. P. 11.

Shirokogoroff,¹⁵ an émigré ethnographer, widely credited as the first to publish a book-length monograph in Shanghai on the topic of etnos, captures many of the same attributes in his definition:

[An] *etnos* is a group of people, speaking a common language who recognize 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.¹⁶

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

Bromley tended to shy away from a formal definition of the term. Instead, he preferred to describe it 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 Today*, in which he almost accidentally defines the concept by noting that his lifelong competitor Lev N. Gumilev ignores it:

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

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

¹⁵ 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 (Широкоторов), Chirokogoroff, Širokogorov, Shì lù guó (史禄国) and Shokogorov (シロコゴロフ).

¹⁶ S. M. Shirokogorov. *Etnos – issledovanie osnovnykh printsipov izmeneniia etnicheskikh i etnograficheskikh iavlenii*. Shanghai, 1923. P. 13.

* L. N. Gumilev. O termine “etnos” // *Doklady otdelenii komissii Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR* / Ed. V. A. Beliaevskii. Leningrad, 1967. P. 5.

¹⁷ Bromley. *The Term Ethnos and Its Definition*. P. 66. Emphasis added.

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

Bromley's sparring partner, the Leningrad-based geographer Lev N. Gumilev (1912–1992), made a career of promoting and distinguishing his own theory of *etnos* in a series of historical monographs many of which became best sellers in the late Soviet period. Substantively, however, his definition of *etnos* did not differ greatly from that of Bromley.¹⁹ In an early article, he argued that *etnos* was not the subject of ethnography but of historical geography. In his view the concept featured the components of language, habits (*obychai*) and culture, ideology, and an account of a commonality of origin.²⁰ Over time his vision would become more intricate wherein no one of these qualities was sufficient. Instead he pointed to the strong link of an *etnos* to a specific landscape and a biocultural life course rising and falling in 1,500-year cycles.²¹ Mark Bassin, in his authoritative overview of Gumilev's work, identifies Gumilev's unique contribution to *etnos* theory with his description of "persistent behavioral models" (*stereotypy povedeniia*) and ethnic "passions" (*passionnarnost'*), which he saw remaining constant over time.²² Characteristically for this entire school, only experts could accurately identify these archetypes or emotions.

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

- A collective identity
- A common physical anthropological foundation
- A common language
- A common set of traditions or "historical fate"
- A common worldview, "folk psychology," or behavioral archetype.

¹⁸ Yu.V. Bromley. *Teoriia etnosa // Svod etnograficheskikh poniatii i terminov*. Vol. 2: *Etnografiia i smezhnye distsipliny* / Ed. Yu.V. Bromley. Moscow, 1988. Pp. 41–53.

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 etnos): III // Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta*. 1965. No. 18. Ser. 3. Pp. 112–120.

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

²² Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique*. Pp. 24–26, 55–59.

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 specialized *scientific* term for expert use and not necessarily captured in popular definitions of nation or people (*narod*).

In the early twentieth century this bundle of five etnos qualities had the important characteristic of being able to express itself in a variety of contexts. If professional ethnographers insisted that these elements determined a scientific vision of collective human identities, professional politicians within Russia often argued the same. There is little to differentiate the scientific definition of etnos from I. V. Stalin's 1913 definition of a nation (*natsiia*):

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

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

In perhaps the most authoritative study of the cultural technologies of rule at the beginning of the Soviet period, Francine Hirsch describes how the "vocabulary of nationality" allowed two different groups to use "the same words to talk about different things."²⁴ In 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 etnoses created a major problem for Marxist thinkers. All proponents of etnos-thinking (or, those using "the vocabulary of nationality") protested that their ideas should never be misunderstood as an ahistorical or racial theory of belonging. Nevertheless, these protests had to be made repeatedly. The clearest examples of continuity through change came when asking adherents to think backward in time – such is in Yulian Bromley's often reiterated examples about Poles and Ukrainians living in different times and places but preserving the core of their identities at all

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

²⁴ Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, 2005. Pp. 35–6.

times.²⁵ 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 forward into the future such as when trying to imagine how hundreds of smaller nationalities could productively merge into a future nation. Francine Hirsch 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 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 Bromley and Gumilev had a tendency to bolt on extra elements to their theories such as “subethnoses” or “ethnosocial organisms.” This Byzantine involution will be discussed in more detail below.

Peter Skalník is not reassured by Bromley’s assertions that his theory is not biologically founded. He points out that Bromley 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 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 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

²⁵ Yu. V. Bromley. *Sovremennnye problemy etnografii: ocherki teorii i istorii*. Moscow, 1981. Pp. 28–9; Idem. *Ocherki teorii etnosa*. Moscow, 1983. P. 63.

²⁶ Hirsch. *Empire of Nations*. 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.*

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 antirelativist, antiracist 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 etnos theory is irrevocably rooted in biology or is a subtle attempt to describe long-term cultural continuities amid social structural change. The wide bookshelf of late Soviet field research, with its tireless documentation of “merging,” “splitting,” and “intermarriage” tends to speak against a more open-ended and voluntaristic approach to identity. However, lesser known strands in the unpublished work, and less well-known publications of the etnos pioneers Mogilianskii and Shirokogoroff display glimpses of what we might identify as a modern theory of ethnicity. For example, in Shirokogoroff’s late magnum opus *The Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* – a work that remains untranslated and largely inaccessible in Russia – it is striking that in the prefatory chapters he develops a very late twentieth-century definition of ethnos as a “process.” He also triangulates etnos within the combined fields of ethnology, with sociology, political science, psychologists, geographers, and philosophers.

All the above indicated units [populations, nations, regional groups, social groups, religious groups and cultural groups] result from a similar process, in so far, as we can see from its final manifestations: more or less similar cultural complexes, speaking the same language, believing into a common origin, possessing group consciousness, and practising endogamy. This is a definition which corresponds to our definition of *ethnical unit*. However, not all of them are “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 ethnical units, and this process I have called ETHNOS*.³¹

This fully unwrapped definition, which consults studies from a wide range of disciplines, filters out all social and biological research that does not lead

²⁹ Shanin. *Ethnicity in the Soviet Union*. Pp. 415–6.

³⁰ Idem. *Soviet Theories of Ethnicity*.

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

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 characterizes a set of approaches, hypotheses, and behaviors that distinguish 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 differently and might continue to develop, in so doing capturing the continued evocativeness of the term.

***What Is In a Term? The Term “Etnos”
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 endeavor might best be known as sociocultural anthropology. In another part of the world, it may be described as ethnography or ethnology.³² Far from being accidental, these terminological variations reflect fundamental differences in research programs or even paradigms, associated with diverse intellectual traditions. George Stocking, in his survey of Western European traditions, identified three discourses that contributed to the formation of anthropology: biological discourse or “natural history,” humanitarian discourse rooted in philology, and a social science that drew on the philosophical thought of French and Scottish Enlightenment.³³ Eurasian anthropological traditions draw on the same general trinity of inspiration. The reasons for this shared history are understandable. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many local scholars in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tokyo, and 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 draw on and reshape this common foundation in different ways. One of the most distinctive qualities of Russian anthropological thinking – in line with many other Eurasian scholars – tends to bundle its thinking into a single compact term, “etnos.” A common turn of phrase is that etnos represents a “a single totality of many parts” (*sovokupnost'*). To a great extent the purpose of this book is to try to make Russian and Eurasian etnos-thinking more legible to English-language

³² George W. Stocking. What's in a Name? The Origins of the Royal Anthropological Institute // *Man*. 1971. No. 7 (n.s.). Pp. 369–90.

³³ George W. Stocking, Jr. The Ethnographer's Magic. Fieldwork in British Anthropology from Tylor to Malinowski // George W. Stocking, Jr. (Ed.) *Observers Observed: Essays on Ethnographic Fieldwork*. London, 1983. P. 347.

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. Nikolai M. Mogilianskii, whose name is often cited as being the first to distinguish etnos as a standard object of scientific research, raised his objections to the humanist program while working as curator of the Russian Museum. In a lecture read at a meeting of the Anthropological Society of St. Petersburg University in 1902 (published in 1908), he reviewed Nikolai 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 space.³⁴ Later, he became the head of ethnography at the museum, and he reworked and republished the same review giving us a first glimpse at the now ubiquitous definition of etnos. The term, spelled with Greek letters (ἔθνος), is defined as “a single totality (*odno tseloe*) of physical (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 of this article distinguishes etnos as the “object” of ethnography. Given Mogilianskii'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 onward, the five core elements of Mogilianskii's wandering, prosaic definition (a single collective identity; a physical foundation; a common language; a common set of traditions or destiny; and a common worldview) would appear in successive descriptions of Russian and Eurasian etnos theory for the next 100 years. In particular the pamphlets and book-length monograph published by Shirokogoroff in China and the Russian Far East (described in more detail in chapter 4) would be built around these five elements.³⁶

³⁴ Nikolai M. Mogilianskii. *Etnografiia i ee zadachi* // *Ezhegodnik Russkogo antropologicheskogo obshchestva*. 1908. Vol. 3. P. 12.

³⁵ *Predmet i zadachi etnografii* // *Zhivaia starina*. 1916. No. 25. P. 11.

³⁶ S. M. Shirokogorov. *Mesto etnografii sredi nauk i klassifikatsiia etnosov*. Vladivostok, 1922; Idem. *Etnos – issledovanie osnovnykh printsipov izmeneniia etnicheskikh i etnograficheskikh iavlenii*.

It would not be entirely accurate to say that the nationalists and the imperialists reached a rapprochement through their common search for a single toolkit to describe both Slavic and non-Slavic peoples within the empire. From the start of World War I, 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 university education.³⁷ A revealing set of memoranda in the Archive of the Russian Geographical Society offers insight into the range of the debate.³⁸ Elements of this debate can also be traced in a published summary.³⁹

Lev Shternberg, representing the humanities, called for a 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. Shternberg 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, Nikolai Mogilianskii countered Shternberg's claim defending the role of 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 (psychophysiology) and to their final results – whether they articulate speech [or] the experience of the sacred (*kult*) stemming from a worldview and religious consciousness.

³⁷ A. N. Dmitriev. Po tu storu “universitetskogo voprosa”: pravitel'stvennaia politika i sotsial'naia zhizn' rossiiskoi vysshei shkoly (1900–1917 gody) // T. Maurer and A. N. Dmitriev (Eds.) *Universitet i gorod v Rossii v nachale XX veka*. Moscow, 2010. Pp. 105–204.

³⁸ Zapiski L. Ia. Shternberga, V. F. Volkova i N. M. Mogilianskogo ob etnografii i antropologii // Archive of the Russian Geographical Society (henceforth ARGO). F. 109. Op. 1 D. 15.

³⁹ Zhurnal zasedaniia Otdeleniia etnografii IRGO 4 marta 1916 goda // Zhivaia starina. 1916. No. 2–3. Pp. 1–11.

⁴⁰ ARGO F. 109. Op. 1. D. 15. L. 3.

[He must study] clothing as a material object and as the final result of complex intellectual and physical labor.⁴¹

In his view, every ethnographer needs solid training in the natural sciences including training in morphology, physiology, psychophysiology as well as geodynamics, geomorphology, and paleontology.⁴²

Mogilianskii'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 made by historians 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 Mogilianskii relied in their arguments 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 Mogilianskii, who strictly opposed the Bolsheviks moved to Kiev in 1918. Volkov died the same year. Mogilianskii soon found himself in emigration in Paris. Lev Shternberg and Vladimir Bogoraz, who supported the 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 ethnography.⁴⁶ Although at first glance it would seem that the evolutionist

⁴¹ Ibid. L. 11.

⁴² Ibid. L. 12.

⁴³ Ibid. L. 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid. L. 8.

⁴⁵ Vermeulen. Before Boas. Pp. 7–8; Alice L. Conklin. In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850–1950. Ithaca, NY, 2013.

⁴⁶ N. I. Gagen-Torn. Leningradskaia etnograficheskaia shkola v dvadtsatye gody (u istokov sovetskoi etnografii) // Sovetskaia etnografiia. 1971. No. 2. Pp. 134–145; S. A. Ratner-Shternberg. L. Ia. Shternberg i Leningradskaia etnograficheskaia shkola 1904–1927 (po

and humanist view of the discipline prevailed over the naturalists, it should be remembered that Volkov's students Sergei 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 nineteenth century rehearsed several themes common to the history of ethnographic and ethnological thought across Europe and North America. From 1840 to 1920 there was an ongoing debate regarding the extent to which ethnographers should document little known, nonindustrial 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 the Americas, early Russian ethnographers produced programs that fed into state-controlled projects for improving the lives of non-Russian nationalities and for defining the imperial state. This political pressure, which only increased after the revolution, created an imperative to come up with a single term – a single object of ethnographic analysis – which Mogilianskii had already christened as “*etnos*.” Although debates continued, this single compact term began to unite diverging opinions into what can be identified as a biosocial synthesis.

Etnos and Soviet Marxism

There can be no clean break between imperial-era reflections on biosocial science and Soviet social theory. Socialist thinking influenced by Marxist and Proudhon was a strong quality in debate among intellectual circles throughout the turn of the century. Of particular interest – especially in Soviet-era histories of science – was the way in which Marx and Engels themselves used ethnography from the Russian Empire to think through examples of “primitive communism.” In terms of this volume, it is interesting that these reflections were drawn from the very same regions that inspired *etnos* theorists – such as from descriptions of the Russian peasant commune (*mir*),⁴⁷ or from Lev

lichnym vospominaniyam i arkhivnym dannym) // Sovetskaia Etnografiia. 1935. No. 2. Pp. 134–154.

⁴⁷ Francis M. Watters. *The Peasant and the Village Commune* // Wayne S. Vucinich (Ed.). *The Peasant in Nineteenth Century Russia*. Stanford, 1968. Pp. 133–57; Boris Mironov. *The Russian Peasant Commune After the Reforms of the 1860s* // *Slavic Review*. 1985. Vol. 44. No. 3. Pp. 438–67.

Shternberg's writing on the Nivkh fishing and hunting society from the far east of Siberia.⁴⁸ 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.

The Bolshevik fraction within the first postrevolutionary state Duma (parliament) was primarily focused 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 thus they invested great effort in trying to understand how different nations within the empire could be co-opted into supporting the revolution. Their key term was not "etnos" but "nation" (*natsiia*).

The Russian Bolshevik notion of the nation was heavily influenced by European debates, and in particular defined itself in opposition to the ideas of Austrian political thinkers Otto Bauer (1881–1928) and Karl Kautsky (1854–1938). The Austrian Social Democrats and the Jewish Socialist Party were among the first to realize the importance of "cultural-national autonomy." They argued for the recognition of a cultural autonomy for minorities regardless of the fact that they may not live in compact or easily defined territories.⁴⁹ Their argument based itself on 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 reemployed 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 noticed but significant turn of phrase was Stalin's reference to a type of "stable collectivity" (*obshchnost'*) (literally,

⁴⁸ Bruce Grant. Foreword // L. Ia. Shternberg. *The Social Organization of the Gilyak*. New York, 1999. Pp. xxiii–lvi.

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

⁵⁰ Otto Bauer. *The Question of Nationalities and Social Democracy*. Minneapolis, 2000 [1907]. P. 281.

⁵¹ Stalin. *Marksizm i natsionalnyi vopros*.

“the quality of being the one”). For almost sixty years *obshchnost'* would come to serve as a circumlocutory expression for all ethnic qualities that 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 at first Stalin's 1913 intervention was just one minor voice in a symphony of discussion about ethnic identity. Mogilianskii initially published his ethnos concept in 1908.⁵² Shirokogoroff started developing his ethnos concept between 1912 and 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 the Soviet state gained hegemony, there was a movement to standardize thinking about the nation. But, 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 “Bolshevizers” favored the philosophical conviction that science should not measure Nature but change it – perhaps highlighting 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 labeled “the great break” (*velikii perelom*) in a 1929 speech.⁵⁵ Among other disruptions, such as the restructuring of the Academy of Sciences and the acceleration of the 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 taboo on any direct reference to the social structures as being linked to biological processes. Mark B. Adams has observed that 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 to early 1930s led

⁵² Mogilianskii. *Etnografiia i ee zadachi*.

⁵³ Shirokogorov. *Mesto etnografii sredi nauk i klassifikatsiia etnosov*; Idem. *Zadachi Nesotsialisticheskogo dvizheniia: doklad pročitannyi na otkrytom zasedanii Soveta S"ezda Predstavitelei nesotsialisticheskogo naseleniia Dalniago 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. Pp. 562–80.

⁵⁶ Adams. *The Wellborn Science*. P. 184.

to a devastating critique of “bourgeois” science, purges of many prominent ethnographers, and the creation of a new Marxist ethnographic literature that used only “sociological” or historical concepts.⁵⁷

The standardization, or purging, of bourgeois science occurred within prominent public meetings that 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 signaled 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 be more specific – the Marxist-Leninist study of the succession of socioeconomic 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, disorienting, and uses a leftist expression to cover up its rightist essence – that it is a type of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois adaptability and eclecticism.⁶⁰

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

Each of these meetings cast a chill over biosocial research in the Soviet Union. In particular, the overt use of the term “ethnos” came to be associated with émigré and presumed anti-Soviet intellectuals. By this time both

⁵⁷ Sergei S. Alymov. *Ethnography, Marxism and Soviet Ideology* // Roland Cvetkovski and Alexis Hofmeister (Eds.). *An Empire of Others*. Budapest and New York, 2014. Pp. 121–43; Yuri Slezkine. *The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928–38* // *Current Anthropology*. 1991. Vol. 32. No. 4. Pp. 476–84; T. D. Solov'ev. “Korennoi perelom” v otechestvennoi etnografii (diskussiiia o predmete etnologich. nauki k. 1920-kh – n. 1930-kh gg.) // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2001. No. 3. Pp. 101–20.

⁵⁸ Ia. K[oshkin] and N. M[atortin]. *Soveshchanie etnografov Leningrada i Moskvy (5/IV – 11/IV 1929 g.)* // *Etnografiia*. 1929. No. 2. Pp. 110–114; Dmitry V. Arzyutov, Sergei S. Alymov, and David Dzh. Anderson (Eds.). *Ot klassikov k marksizmu: soveshchanie etnografov Moskvy i Leningrada (5–11 apreliia 1929 g.)*. St. Petersburg, 2014.

⁵⁹ *Rezoliutsiia Vserossiiskogo arkhologo-etnograficheskogo soveshchaniia 7–11 maia 1932 g. po dokladam S. N. Bykovskogo i N. M. Matorina* // *Sovetskaia etnografiia*. 1932. No. 3. Pp. 4–14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* P. 13.

Nikolai Mogilianskii and Sergei Shirokogoroff had fled the Soviet Union and could easily be classified as “bourgeois” scholars. During the Leningrad symposium, Ian Koshkin, a Tungus linguist and ethnographer, specifically singled out Shirokogoroff’s book on *ethnos* as “antischolarly.”⁶¹ The young Sergei Tolstov, who would later head the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences, declared:

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 a 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 petit-bourgeois ideologists.⁶²

Nevertheless, even within this authoritative setting, 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 of development, and that therefore they still belonged to the proper study of ethnographers.⁶³

This sharp methodological stricture on biosocial thought had a very profound effect on physical anthropologists, whose discipline, by definition, sat on the border between the social and the biological. The editorial of the first issue of the new *Anthropological Journal* noted that the years 1930–1932 were “a time of intensive reorganization,” and of “the revaluation of values.” It called for a fight with racist “anthroposociology” and in particular with fascist theories that 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 Arkadii I. Iarkho (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 path different from that of animals, wherein the importance of biological factors and “racial instincts” became muted and replaced by the influence of social formations.⁶⁵

Despite these proscriptions, *ethnos*-thinking developed within applied studies of “stable collectivities.” There are several clear examples of these

⁶¹ Arziutov, Alymov, and Anderson (Eds.). *Ot klassikov k marksizmu*. P. 411.

⁶² *Ibid.* P. 142.

⁶³ *Ibid.* Pp. 149, 196, 199.

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

⁶⁵ A. I. Iarkho. *Protiv idealisticheskikh techenii v rasovedenii SSSR* // *Ibid.* Pp. 11–14.

holistic studies. During this period work began on a four-volume encyclopedia outlining the qualities of the component peoples of the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ In the surviving drafts of the unpublished text there was a heavy emphasis on durable cultural traits that spilled over from one historical stage to another. Numerous single-people ethnographies were published at this time on Siberian ethnography, folklore, and material culture – many of which are still respected today.⁶⁷ These works focused 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, Vasily Struve justified the applied work on concrete peoples in Stalin’s dictum that research on the “tribe” was work on “an ethnographic category” whereas work on the nation was a historical category.⁶⁸ He felt that ethnographers should document not only primitive rituals but also the process of transformation of peoples into socialist nationalities.⁶⁹ Ethnographic work thereby went hand in hand with the crafting of new territorial divisions that accentuated national divisions between peoples.⁷⁰ Mark Bassin, in his survey of Eurasianism and biopolitics, attributes “equivocal essentialism” to the Stalinist thinking on identity.⁷¹ 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

⁶⁶ Vasilii Vasil’evich Struve. Cheterekhtomnik “Narody SSSR” // Leningradskaia Pravda. 1938. No. 22. January 28; David George Anderson and Dmitry Arzyutov. The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples of Siberia” // History and Anthropology. 2016. Vol. 27. No. 2. Pp. 183–209.

⁶⁷ Andrei Aleksanrovich Popov. Dolganskii folklor. Leningrad, 1937; Aleksei Pavlovich Okladnikov. Ocherki iz istorii zapadnykh buriat-mongolov (17–18 vv.). Leningrad, 1937; Glafira Makar’evna Vasilevich. Sbornik materialov po Evenkiiskomu (Tungusskomu) folkloru. Leningrad, 1936; Iu. A. Vasil’ev. Transportnoe sobakovodstvo Severa // Sovetskaia Arktika. 1936. No. 4. Pp. 78–88; Arkadii Fedorovich Anisimov. Rodovoe obshchestvo Evenkov. Leningrad, 1936; Glafira Makar’evna Vasilevich. Evenkiiskie skazki. Leningrad, 1934; P. E. Terletskii. K voprosu o pamyakh Nenetskogo okruga // Sovetskii Sever. 1935. No. 5. Pp. 35–44; I. I. Meshchaninov. Iazyk i myshlenie v doklassovom obshchestve // Problemy istorii dokapitalisticheskikh obshchestv. 1934. No. 9–10. Pp. 18–44; Boris Osipovich Dolgikh. Kety. Irkutsk, 1934.

⁶⁸ Vasilii V. Struve. Sovetskaia etnografiia i ee perspektivy // Sovetskaia etnografiia. Sbornik statei. Moscow; Leningrad, 1939. P. 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 8.

⁷⁰ P. E. Terletskii. Natsionalnoe raionirovane Krainego Severa // Sovetskii Sever. 1930. No. 7–8. Pp. 5–29.

⁷¹ Bassin. The Gumilev Mystique. P. 146ff.

state power opened a space where biosocial thought could continue – even if it could not name itself as such.

The outbreak of World War II 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 the nationalities of the USSR – as well as maps of nationalities living in 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 thirty 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 Central and Southeastern Europe.” The work was never published, and the original documents are probably kept to this day in the army’s archives. The principal aim of this wartime 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 once again became a top priority, and older models of biosocial continuity were dusted off and relaunched 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 of the Department of Ethnic Statistics and Cartography at the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow. He defended his dissertation, “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 “*etnos*” into the postwar Soviet ethnography, although in his reintroduction he acknowledged both history and geography and ignored physical form. In his view “ethnic phenomena”:

distinguish the everyday life (*byt*) of one people from another. The set of such special markers include differences in language, material culture, customs, beliefs, etc. The sum total (*sovokupnost'*) of such specific differences in everyday lives of peoples, preconditioned by the history of those peoples, and the effect of the geographical environment upon them is called “*etnos*.”⁷³

⁷² P. I. Kushner (Knyshev). *Etnicheskie territorii i etnicheskie granitsy*. Moscow, 1951.

⁷³ *Ibid.* P. 6.

In his book he placed a great stress on the theme of stable and long-term continuities. He saw cultural judgments about beauty and “proper form” as markers of ethnic traditions that 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 whom were often thought to subsist at the stage of primitive communism. With the application of “comprehensive assistance” by the socialist state it was felt that these people could “skip” all historical stages of development and progress directly to communism. This program, which was standardized by Mikhail A. Sergeev as the “noncapitalist path to socialism,”⁷⁵ was significant because it became a model for international developmental assistance in Africa and Southeast Asia.⁷⁶ In 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 rationalization of identities. The science of ethnic classification was one of the main exports of the mature Soviet state to China following the second Chinese revolution.⁷⁷

These territorial and political involutions, apart from playing on Cold War anxieties, also built on the “ethnogenetic turn” of Soviet ethnography.⁷⁸ Perhaps influenced by their forced cohabitation with historians, ethnographers became interested in tracing the path by which modern nations were formed.⁷⁹ Ethnogenetic theorists squared their interest in long-term seemingly ahistorical stability with Marxist-Leninist thought by treating the term “etnos” as a generic category for Stalin’s triad of the tribe, nationality, and nation. For example, an early theoretical work of this time now argued that

⁷⁴ P. I. Kushner (Knyshev). *Uchenie Stalina o natsii i natsionalnoi kulture i ego znachenie dlia etnografii // Sovetskaia etnografiia*. 1949. No. 4. P. 7.

⁷⁵ M. A. Sergeev. *Nekapitalisticheskii put’ razvitiia malykh narodov Severa*. Moscow; Lenngrad, 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. Pp. 10–28.

⁷⁷ Mullaney. *Coming to Terms with the Nation*.

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

⁷⁹ Viktor A. Shnirelman. *Zlokliuchenii odnoi nauki: etnogeneticheskie issledovaniia i stalinskaia natsionalnaia politika // Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 1993. No. 3. Pp. 52–68.

even though “*etnos*” should be the main subject matter of ethnography, “there are no special ‘*etnoses*’ as eternal unchanging categories, which are so dear to bourgeois science.”⁸⁰

It is perhaps important to emphasize at this point the very special way that print culture worked during the height of Stalinist science. Printed scientific works on the whole represented the consensus of groups of scholars and were not used to present minority opinions or debates. However, there was room for nonstandardized 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 concept of *etnos* during a course of lectures on China by Nikolai Cheboksarov at Moscow State University in 1952–1953. Pimenov directly cites the cautious and hushed manner in which Cheboksarov spoke about the concept.⁸¹ Our own interviews with elderly and retired ethnographers at 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. As early as 1955, the Department of Historical Sciences of the Academy debated Kushner’s memo about types of ethnic communities. Sergei Tokarev (1899–1985), one of the most authoritative and prolific ethnographers of the Soviet period, spoke out against Kushner.⁸² He himself began fiddling with nonstandard models of national identity. According to his diary, Tokarev drafted an outline for a future paper suggesting that different vectors of kinship and language formed the foundation of identity at different stages of history.⁸³ These tentative debates in the corridors were the main point of reference for a generation of students who were to change the face of Russian ethnography.

⁸⁰ S. A. Tokarev and N. N. Cheboksarov. *Metodologiya etnogeneticheskikh issledovaniy na materiale etnografii v svete rabot I. V. Stalina po voprosam iazykoznaniiya* // *Sovetskaya etnografiya*. 1951. No. 4. P. 12.

⁸¹ V. V. Pimenov. *Moia professiya – etnograf*. Moscow, 2015. P. 115.

⁸² S. Ia. Kozlov and P. I. Puchkov (Eds.). *Blagodarim sud’bu za vstrechu s nim: O Sergee Aleksandroviche Tokareve – uchenom i cheloveke*. Moscow, 1995. P. 225.

⁸³ S. A. Tokarev. *Problema tipov etnicheskoi obshchnosti (k metodologicheskimi problemami etnografii)* // *Voprosy filosofii*. 1964. No. 11. Pp. 43–53; Kozlov and Puchkov (Eds.). *Blagodarim sud’bu za vstrechu s nim*. Pp. 252–63.

Among those postwar students was Viktor I. Kozlov (1924–2012), who was to become one of the most important etnos theorists in the 1970s–1980s. Having acquired some experience in cartography during the war, he became a professional cartographer in 1950. He finished his postgraduate studies at the Institute of Ethnography in the sector for ethnic statistics and cartography in 1956 with his dissertation “On the Settlement of the Mordovan People in the Mid-Nineteenth–Beginning of the Twentieth Centuries.”⁸⁴ Despite this narrow title, Kozlov followed Kushner’s methodology closely, attempting to outline the continuity in Mordovan occupation from the beginning of the second millennium to the present. Nevertheless, Kozlov was eager to contribute somewhat heretical ideas to theoretical discussions of the day. In 1960 the party cell of the Institute of Ethnography lambasted one of his papers as revisionist and accused him of reviving Kautsky’s idea that personal national affiliations constitute the only characteristic of nation. It is significant that the archival transcript of the discussion notes that high-status luminaries of the institute, such as Georgii F. Debets (1905–1969) and Sergei A. Tokarev spoke in defense 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. Debets and his coauthors 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 progress.⁸⁶ Although there was no citation to this effect, the idea very well describes the older methodology espoused by Volkov and his students, Rudenko and Shirokogoroff (see chapters 2 and 4). A scholar who epitomized the restart of a multidisciplinary approach in the new generation was Valerii P. Alekseev (1929–1991). He began his graduate studies at the Institute of Ethnography in 1952 as a student of Debets, but was also influenced by other prominent anthropologists of the institute such as Viktor Bunak, Nikolai Cheboksarov, and Maxim Levin. His doctoral dissertation, defended in 1967, was published a few years later as *The Origins of the Peoples of Eastern Europe*.⁸⁷ He used craniological

⁸⁴ V. I. Kozlov. *Rasselenie mordovskogo naroda v seredine XIX – nachale XX vv.* / Avtoreferat dissertatsii. Moscow, 1956.

⁸⁵ Central Historical Archive of Moscow (henceforth TsGAM). F. P-7349. Op. 1. D. 13. *Protokoly zasedanii partiinoi organizatsii Instituta etnografii*, 1960 g. L. 10–11.

⁸⁶ G. F. Debets, M. G. Levin, and T. A. Trofimova. *Antropologicheskii material kak istochnik izucheniiia voprosov etnogeneza // Sovetskaia etnografiia*. 1952. No. 1. Pp. 28–29.

⁸⁷ V. P. Alekseev. *Proiskhozhdenie narodov Vostochnoi Evropy*. Moscow, 1969.

research to balance arguments about ethnogenesis. In particular, in his review of physical anthropological research among Eastern Slavic populations since the 1930s, he noted that the tendency to deny distinct anthropological types among these peoples was an ideological reaction to previous studies.⁸⁸ He supported the idea that Great and White Russians displayed evidence of a significant Baltic and Finnish “substrate” whereas Ukrainians displayed a different anthropological type.⁸⁹ It is interesting that his book partially “rehabilitated” Volkov’s earlier views on the distinctiveness of Ukrainians.⁹⁰ Later in his career Alekseev invoked the idea of “ethnogeneseology” as a field in itself that combines the approaches of history, anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, and geography.⁹¹

The death of Stalin, and the reconstitution of Soviet science under Nikita Khrushchev created an unusual opportunity for *ethnos-entrepreneurs*. In contrast to the common assumption of 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 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: Bromley and Gumilev. Looking at their work is like peering through the eyepiece 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 at 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

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

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* P. 208; T. I. Alekseeva. *Etnogenez vostochnykh slavian po dannym antropologii*. Moscow, 1973.

⁹⁰ V. P. Alekseev. *Proiskhozhdenie narodov Vostochnoi Evropy*. P. 164.

⁹¹ V. P. Alekseev. *Etnogenez*. Moscow, 1986. Pp. 6–7.

Party in June of that year, mandated a wide-ranging debate on methodological experimentation in the humanities and social sciences.⁹² Academicians P. N. Fedoseev and Yu. P. Frantsev wrote a type of instruction manual for “the Thaw,” which encouraged social scientists, including ethnographers, to rewrite sociological and historical laws and to embark on interdisciplinary research.⁹³ 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 thirty-four methodological papers since the instruction had been issued.⁹⁴ Of those papers, a seminal paper by the philosopher Yurii I. Semenov (b. 1929) had a far-reaching influence on Soviet ethnography. Semenov argued the need for a new bridging concept, which he called the “social organism,” that would allow scientists to elevate a single concrete society as the leading force of history. Ernest Gellner, who was enthralled with Semenov’s work, dubbed this chosen society as a “torch-bearer” in a “torch-relay vision of history.”⁹⁵ Semenov’s innovation allowed ethnographers to map the broad utopian vision of Marxist evolutionary theory onto a particular point in 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 atop and alongside ethnographic facts.⁹⁶

The mandated methodological discussion also touched on the definition of “nation” and in particular Stalin’s authoritative formula. This special debate was no doubt spurred on by the new Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, adopted in 1961, which spoke about “erasing national differences” and a further directive to create “a new multinational 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:

⁹² Roger D. Markwick. *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia: The Politics of Revisionist Historiography, 1956–1974*. Basingstoke, 2001. P. 156.

⁹³ *Istoriia i sotsiologiia*. Moscow, 1964. Pp. 16, 37.

⁹⁴ Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (henceforth ARAN). F. 457. Op. 1 (1953–2002). D. 527. Protokoly Nos. 1–19 zasedanii Biuro otdeleniia istorii AN SSSR. 1967 g. L. 5.

⁹⁵ Gellner. *A Russian Marxist Philosophy of History*. P. 114; Skalnik. *Gellner vs. Marxism*.

⁹⁶ Yurii Ivanovich Semenov. *Kategoriiia “sotsialnyi organizm” i ee znachenie dlia istoricheskoi nauki // Voprosy istorii*. 1966. No. 8. Pp. 88–106.

⁹⁷ Viktor A. Shnirelman. “Porog tolerantnosti”. *Ideologiia i praktika novogo razizma*. Vol. 1. Moscow, 2011. P. 251.

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 makeup,” “national statesmanship,” and different views were pronounced about the types of nations. The relations between concepts such as “nation” and “ethnic collectivity,” nation and nationality are discussed.⁹⁸

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. Several positions were presented and argued. One influential paper by Viktor I. Kozlov, which was published two years later, linked Semenov’s social organism to the concept of an ethnic collectivity (*obshchnost’*):

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

Participants at the seminar questioned many of Kozlov’s arguments, but the majority supported his challenge of Stalin’s “simplified schemes.” His paper inspired enthusiasm from a younger generation of scholars. Even a spokesperson of the older generation, Sergei A. Tokarev, one of the most prolific and authoritative writers among Soviet ethnographers, summed up the mood of the meeting:

The debate has shown that there are many [different] opinions, but I have compiled several conclusions (*tezisy*) that [I believe] everyone can sign on to:

1. the theory of ethnic collectivity (*obshchnost’*) 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; and
5. is there a 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

⁹⁸ ARAN F. 457. Op. 1. D. 527. L. 18.

⁹⁹ V. I. Kozlov. O poniatii etnicheskoi obshchnosti // Sovetskaia Etnografiia. 1967. No. 2. P. 111.

¹⁰⁰ ARAN F. 142. Op. 10. D. 522. Protokoly i stenogrammy zasedanii gruppy obshchei etnografii IE AN SSSR. 1965 g. L. 29–30.

These new terms, ranging from “social organism” to “ethnic community” to “ethnic group,” did not wander far from the biosocial consensus that had been built up in Russia for over eighty years. Viktor A. Shnirelman has 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 ideas such as a “national character” or “national psychological makeup (*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 Bromley and Gumilev sought to make careers for themselves.

Bromley, 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 above-mentioned 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 on what our working (*sovremennyi*) definition of the nation is.¹⁰²

Upon becoming the director of the institute, Bromley set about the task of producing a common definition. To compensate for his lack of training, he surrounded himself with a group of talented age-mates such as Viktor Kozlov, Valerii Alekseev, and Sergei 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 night.¹⁰³

Bromley chose to write his maiden article together with one of his hand-picked comrades on the topic of ethnogenesis. In “On the Role of Migration

¹⁰¹ Y. Howell. The Liberal Gene: Sociobiology as Emancipatory Discourse in the Late Soviet Union // *Slavic Review*. 2010. Vol. 69. No. 2. Pp. 356–76; Shnirelman. “Porog tolerantnosti”. Vol. 1. Pp. 252–80.

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

¹⁰³ V. I. Kozlov. Ob akademike Yuliane Vladimiroviche Bromlee – uchenom i cheloveke // *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*. 2001. No. 4. Pp. 5–6.

in the Formation of New Ethnic Communities,” the authors pondered the role of indigenous populations and newcomers in the formation of new “ethnoses” in the first millennium AD across Eurasia.¹⁰⁴ A distinctive feature of this article was the use of the term “ethnos” when describing tribal and early state societies. The term was (re)used casually without a formal definition. Nevertheless, its sudden appearance in print was unusual. Likely, the lack of citations and a definition signaled that the term was already in broad circulation.

Gumilev followed a path different from Bromley’s in making a name for himself in this time of experimentation. His checkered record as a political prisoner – having served for over thirteen years in various Stalin-era prisons – made it difficult for him to be fully accepted by Soviet academic institutions.¹⁰⁵ Gumilev was never appointed as a professor and was officially employed throughout his life as a research associate in the Faculty of Geography at Leningrad State University. However, as Mark Bassin notes, Gumilev also deliberately cultivated his image as an independently thinking dissident – a move that made his unorthodox ideas highly popular among the intelligentsia.¹⁰⁶ Needless to say, he was much less constrained by official doctrines of Soviet Marxism-Leninism than Bromley who headed an official governmental research institute.

Of the two men, Gumilev was the first to place the stamp of ethnos on his broad vision of the interdependence of peoples, “passions,” and landscape. In a small print-run 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 Bromley’s first published intervention.¹⁰⁷ It is an interesting footnote that this early contribution was almost immediately translated into English in one of the Cold War journals of translation.¹⁰⁸ Two much more detailed articles were to follow in 1967.¹⁰⁹ Later, a set of high-profile articles in the mass-circulation periodical *Priroda* cemented his name as a charismatic Soviet public intellectual.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ V. P. Alekseev and Yu. V. Bromley. K izucheniiu roli pereselenii narodov v formirovanii novykh etnicheskikh obshchestv // *Sovetskaiia Etnografiia*. 1968. No. 2. Pp. 35–45.

¹⁰⁵ Bassin. The Gumilev Mystique. Pp. 10–11.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. P. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Gumilev. Po povodu predmeta istoricheskoi geografii.

¹⁰⁸ L. N. Gumilev. On the Subject of Historical Geography (Landscape and Ethnos, III) // *Soviet Geography*. 1966. Vol. 7. No. 2. Pp. 27–36.

¹⁰⁹ Gumilev. O termine “ethnos”; Idem. Ethnos kak iavlenie // *Doklady otdelenii komissii Geograficheskogo obshchestva SSSR* / Ed. V. A. Beliauskii. Leningrad, 1967. Pp. 90–107.

¹¹⁰ L. N. Gumilev. Etnogenez i etnosfera // *Priroda*. 1970. No. 1. Pp. 46–53.

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

It is difficult to write the history of the development of Gumilev's thought both because of the severe hiatus imposed by his long prison sentences and because of his own tendency to create a myth out of his own life. In an interview shortly before his death he rooted his unique etnos theory in a vision that he had while in a prison cell in Leningrad in 1939.¹¹¹ Shnirelman speculated that Gumilev may be influenced by "anti-Semitic and Nazi sentiments," which were often present in the camps, as well as a "neo-Nazi racist ideology" promoted by several underground right-wing thinkers with whom he was allegedly acquainted in late 1960s–early 1970s.¹¹² However, scattered unpublished documents suggest that his self-styled arcane ideas were part of a broader interest in enduring, biophysical identities of the time. Sergei I. Rudenko, a student of Fedor Volkov and fellow sufferer of the Stalinist repressions, helped Gumilev reestablish his career in Leningrad.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 Gumilev's handwriting can be indentified in the margins of the typescript – suggesting that he was familiar with the text.¹¹⁴

At the heart of Gumilev's theory of etnos was a traditional definition connected to language, traditions, and biology. However, he also sketched the careers of world-historical etnoses into millennial cycles powered by an undefined cosmic energy. If, like Bromley, he made a symbolic break with the Stalinist theory of nations, he nevertheless reintroduced the theme of what Mark Bassin identifies as an "ethnic hierarchy" through describing subregional and superregional units known as the "subetnos" and the "superetnos."¹¹⁵ A key quirk in his vision of etnos was his insistence that

¹¹¹ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique*. P. 43.

¹¹² Shnirel'man. "Porog tolerantnosti". Vol. 1. Pp. 281–2.

¹¹³ Personal communication with Ia. A. Sher, 2016; Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique*. P. 160.

¹¹⁴ Sergei I. Rudenko. *Etnos i etnogenez: po povodu odnoi diskussii v otdelenii etnografii VGO* / Typescript with the handwritten annotations of Lev Gumilev // Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg Branch (henceforth SPF ARAN). F. 1004. Op. 1. D. 118. L. 8–14.

¹¹⁵ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique*. Pp. 62–7.

ethnic phenomena acted within the laws of the natural sciences, whereas 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 that accepted 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 ethnos theory was not biosocial since he insisted that it was profoundly biological and *not* social.¹¹⁶ Several of the millennial superethnoses that he identified conveniently tended to overlap with the boundaries of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ Unlike Bromley, Gumilev appealed to wider audiences through his historical monographs of various historical and ancient Turkic peoples such as *The Unveiling of Khazaria* or *The Ancient Turks*.¹¹⁸ These popular-scientific works on exotic peoples were published before his key theoretical works and served to illustrate the evokativeness of his ethnos-perspective.

Bromley also followed up his early interest in the sociogenetic origins of identity in his now infamous article “Etnos and Endogamy.”¹¹⁹ 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 campaign of attacks against Bromley. Ivanov claimed that if ethnoses are “stabilized” by endogamy this not only negated the Marxist formations of Bromley’s thinking, but made ethnos a biological category.¹²⁰ This debate was perhaps a defining moment in 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 onward, at least within ethnographic circles.

Perhaps overconscious of the popularity of Gumilev’s work, Bromley followed Gumilev along a similar Byzantine path of devising increasingly

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Ch. 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Pp. 70–71.

¹¹⁸ L. N. Gumilev. *Otkrytie Khazarii: Istoriko-geograficheskie etudi*. Moscow, 1967; Idem. *Drevnie Tiurki*. Moscow, 1967.

¹¹⁹ Yu. V. Bromley. *Etnos i endogamiia* // *Sovetskaia etnografiia*. 1969. No. 6. Pp. 84–91.

¹²⁰ *Obsuzhdenie stat’i* Iu.V. Bromleya “Etnos i endogamiia” // *Sovetskaia Etnografiia*. 1970. No. 3. P. 89; D. D. Tumarkin. Yu. V. Bromley i zhurnal “Sovetskaia etnografiia” // *Akademik Yu.V. Bromley i otechestvennaia etnologiya. 1960–1990-e gody* / Ed. S. Ia. Kozlov. Moscow, 2003. Pp. 212–227.

complex systems and subsystems by which to describe etnos. In his mature works, Bromley introduced his own notion of a subetnos as well as the hyperregional “metaethnic community” (*metaetnicheskaia obshchnost’*). Unlike with Gumilev, his subregional or metaregional units were defined by classical ethnological parameters such as language or material culture, and not energy or “passions.” Nevertheless the geopolitical effect was the same through the deliberate rationalization of existing blocks of political affinity at the height of the Cold War. In a nod toward Euro-American thinking about ethnicity, Bromley also introduced the adjectival form of the Greek word “etnos” – “etnikos” – in order to refer to a specific historical manifestation of etnos in a particular place and time. It is difficult to draw sharp lines between Bromley’s subetnos and Gumilev’s subetnos, let alone the pantheon of their parallel sets of concepts. What does seem clear from this inflationary expansion of the etnos-enterprise is that this forest of terms created a rich plantation for a new generation of ethnographers and social geographers, while ironically not really threatening the geoterritorial foundation of state power within the former Soviet Union.

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

Etnos theory provides a bridging mechanism, by positing a stable core which runs through all the historical stages any society will undergo. It therefore acts as a tool for diachronic analysis.¹²¹

In the same work he is one of the first to label the theory as being an important example of “primordial ethnicity” – but one that nonetheless admits that there are scattered elements of transactional and relational historical factors that give every concrete ethnographic case its particular shape.¹²² As Gellner wrote, in his pithy and economical prose, etnos-theory was “*relatively* synchronist,” opening the door to applied fieldwork within a tradition that had been obsessed with formal, off-the-shelf models.¹²³ 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 preoccupied with different issues. As Gellner again observes, “It is ironic that

¹²¹ Banks. *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions*. P. 22.

¹²² *Ibid.* P. 23.

¹²³ Gellner. *Modern Ethnicity*. P. 118.

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.”¹²⁴ Mark Bassin goes one step further. He sees in Gumilev’s rendition of *ethnos* a radical reassertion of Stalinist national essences, which he describes as “the Stalinist accommodation.” Within the fog created by Gumilev’s invisible eternal energies, levels and sublevels of ethnicity, he reads an impassioned defense of local communities against the assimilatory force of the postwar Soviet industrial state.¹²⁵ He associates this impassioned voice for ethnic difference with the near hero-like status that Gumilev achieved among non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union and within the Russian Federation today.¹²⁶ Bromley in this respect continued to serve as an ideologist advocating assimilation, intermarriage, and the creation of seamless, political-territorial communities. During perestroika, Gumilev controversially linked the strained ethnic tensions in the crumbling Soviet federation to Bromley’s misguided theories. Bromley retaliated by labeling Gumilev’s distinction of “passionate” and “subpassionate” peoples as covert racism.¹²⁷

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 accommodations 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 Valerii A. Tishkov (b. 1941), the first post-Soviet director of the Institute of Ethnography, to entomb *ethnos* theory through his book *A Requiem to Ethnos*.¹²⁸ This wide-ranging summary of North American theories of ethnicity made a strong argument that the Russian Academy should reject collectivist and essentialist theories of belonging in favor of a relational definition that is juggled and negotiated by individuals. To underscore the point, he renamed the institute as the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology. In a recent retrospective on his *Requiem*, he takes credit with introducing

¹²⁴ Idem. Preface. P. x.

¹²⁵ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique*. Pp. 163–71.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Ch.10.

¹²⁷ Sev’ian I. Vainshtein. Yulian Vladimirovich Bromley: chelovek, grazhdanin, uchenyi // *Vydaiushchiesia otechestvennye etnologi i antropologi* / Ed. V. A. Tishkov and D. D. Tumarkin. Moscow, 2004. Pp. 624–7.

¹²⁸ Valerii A. Tishkov. *Rekviem po etnosu*. Moscow, 2003.

North American cultural anthropology to Russia and loosening the hold of etnos-theory on the academy.¹²⁹

The surprise of the epoch was the fact that even if the *Requiem* was perhaps acclaimed by a handful central ethnographers, it by and large went unheeded across Eurasia within regional colleges, newspapers, and the programs 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 twentieth century and beyond

Eric Hobsbawm's "short twentieth century" was strongly associated with a single world-historical state promoting a vision of emancipation and modernity that served to inspire several generations. His somewhat nostalgic account mourns the waning of the ideological certainties that defined the era. Our overview of the origins of etnos-thinking suggests that the Soviet state was perhaps not so exceptional, but instead drew upon very widely held convictions that collective identities were durable – and perhaps was eventually entangled by them. Our argument is that etnos-thinking and its brief association with Soviet modernity were rooted in a biosocial compromise between competing camps. This runs the risk of asserting (alongside many etnos-entrepreneurs) that persistent identities are somehow mystically natural or fixed. That would misrepresent the debates, the lack of agreement, and the general untidiness of this story – a sense of which we have tried to suggest in this introduction and the substance of which is clearly visible in the following chapters. The moral of this story is that collective identities seem to enjoy their own histories much like individual biographies. The story of etnos-thinking is that there needs to be a way of speaking about contextualized identities – and to some extent etnos-talk addresses, if not solves, Shanin's "case of the missing term."¹³⁰

If the height of the Soviet period was marked by Bromley's "minor revolution," the beginning of the post-Soviet period is marked by Tishkov's counterrevolution. He highlighted his transformation by identifying a "crisis" in Soviet ethnography through a prominent article in the American journal *Current Anthropology*.¹³¹ Like his predecessor Bromley, Tishkov was trained

¹²⁹ Idem. Ot etnosa k etnichnosti i posle // Etnograficheskoe obozrenie. 2016. No. 5. P. 6.

¹³⁰ Shanin. Soviet Theories of Ethnicity.

¹³¹ Valery A. Tishkov. The Crisis in Soviet Ethnography // *Current Anthropology*. 1992. Vol. 33. No. 4. Pp. 371–94.

as a historian – only in this case not of the Balkans but of the 1837–1838 “revolutions” in British North America. Having written several books on the history of Canada, American historiography, and Native Americans, he came to the Institute of Ethnography in 1981 to lead its Department of the Peoples of America. After briefly serving as Bromley’s deputy, he took over the institute in 1989 and led it until 2015. In his numerous publications throughout the 1990s, including the *Requiem*, Tishkov propagated an individual-oriented approach to the study of ethnic identity, stressing the 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 criticized ossified Soviet ethnography’s hierarchy of *etnoses*, *subetnoses*, *etnikos*, and *superetnoses*, as well as what he described as the “etatization” of ethnicity by the Soviet state. In one of our interviews, he dismissed Bromley 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 summer nights. In his work, Tishkov stressed the way that state actors used narrow classificatory state practices to construct ethnicity, which he insisted might present itself in multiple forms.

If Soviet *etnos* theory had never existed, people would never have been inscribed as parts of the collective torso (*telo*) known as an “*etnos*”. ... And, if there had never been a long-standing Soviet practice of registering a single nationality in one’s passport – a nationality that necessarily had to correspond to that of one’s parents, then people might have realized and have been able to publicly 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 [might have been able to express] a “vertical” stack of various senses of belonging (*prinadlezhnosti*) such as being an Andiets and an Avarets, a Digorets and an Ossetian, an Erzarian and a Mordovan ... a Pomor and a Russian ... etc.¹³²

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.”¹³³ As an academic and 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 *Rossiiskii narod*.¹³⁴

¹³² Valerii A. Tishkov. *Etnologii i politika. Stat’i 1989–2004 godov*. Moscow, 2005. P. 167.

¹³³ Idem. *Ocherki teorii i politiki etnichnosti v Rossii*. Moscow, 1997. P. 56.

¹³⁴ Idem. *Rossiiskii narod. Kniga dlia uchitel’ia*. Moscow, 2010.

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

Indeed today in the Russian public sphere the idea of “etnos” is very much alive, probably due to the fact that it wandered (*perekochevalo*) from ethnology to different spheres of social and humanitarian research. ... *Etnos* and *etnichnost*, which had until recently been notably absent from the work of Russian humanists has now appeared in multiple variants such as with historians of the “ethnocultural history of Ancient Rus” or [the debate on] “etnoses in the early Middle Ages,” or among the pseudophilosophers with their concept of the “philosophy of the *etnos*”. ... *Etnos* has been abandoned by the language of ethnologists (that is, if we exclude the few researchers teaching in colleges who do not keep up with contemporary developments).¹³⁵

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

While it might be true that etnos is no longer used widely by state ethnographers within the Academy of Sciences, an unreconstructed vision of Bromley’s etnos can be widely found in state-sanctioned textbooks used in introductory-level cultural studies courses.¹³⁶

The term “etnos” also lives on quietly in the pages of ethnographic encyclopedias. One of the best illustrations is the current series entitled *Peoples and Cultures*, presently up to twenty-five volumes. The series does not use “etnos” in its title, but the term appears within its pages quite regularly. Being a rebranding of the well-known Soviet-era series *Peoples of the World*,¹³⁷ the new series presents ethnographic snapshots across Russian regions, such as the “Northeast,” and documents former Soviet republics. Occasionally it features volumes on single peoples such as Tatars or Buriats. The internal structure of the volumes is hauntingly familiar, dissecting etnoses by their “folklore,” “occupations,” “ethnogenesis,” and “technology.” An important new feature of this series is the respect and encouragement afforded to members of the regional intelligentsia outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Many volumes include chapters by local authors, which immediately made

¹³⁵ Ot etnosa k etnichnosti i posle. Pp. 5–6.

¹³⁶ Vladimir V. Pimenov (Ed.). *Osnovy etnologii: Uchebnoe posobie*. Moscow, 2007; Aleksandr P. Sadokhin. *Etnologiya: Uchebnik*. Moscow, 2006; Sergei A. Arutiunov and Svetlana I. Ryzhakova. *Kul’turnaia Antropologiya*. Moscow, 2004.

¹³⁷ Anderson and Arzyutov. The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples of Siberia”.

the series a focal point for ethnonationalist reflection. The volume *The Sakha Yakuts* was issued in conjunction with a national festival in Moscow organized by the Yakut national intelligentsia.¹³⁸ The same strategy was repeated in St. Petersburg with the publication of the volume *The Ingushes*.¹³⁹ In our interviews one of the editors confessed that they hoped the volume itself would calm the tension between Ingush and Chechen scholars in these republics.¹⁴⁰ The example of Altaians is perhaps one of the best for illustrating the way that the term “ethnos” has been appropriated to defend local identity claims. In the volume published within the central series, entitled *The Turkic Peoples of Siberia*, the Altaians were treated, among many other peoples, in a series of chapters.¹⁴¹ This troubled the local Altaian intelligentsia who rushed to prepare their own competing volume, entitled *The Altaians*, in which 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.¹⁴²

The passion with which regional scholars have taken up the cause of essentialist and enduring identities is likely the most tangible artifact of the reincarnation of ethnos theory today. These have a strong quality that one might identify as a type of indigenous-rights discourse. The term “ethnos” 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* or *Etnosy Sibiri* emphasize the longevity, energy, and persistence of cultural minorities. They have manifesto-like qualities in that they insist on the vibrancy of cultural difference.¹⁴³ Even Tishkov in a retrospective review of his *Requiem* was forced to acknowledge that “ethno”-identities are characteristic of Russia now, and likely “forever” (*navsegda*).¹⁴⁴ The passion with which regional elites have been attracted to ethnos theory is a major theme in the analysis

¹³⁸ N. A. Alekseev, E. N. Romanova, Z. P. Sokolova (Eds.). *Iakuty Sakha*. Moscow, 2012.

¹³⁹ M. S.-G. Albogachieva, A. M. Martazanov, and L. T. Solov'eva (Eds.). *Ingushi*. Moscow, 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Personal communication with M. S.-G. Albogachieva, 2014.

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

¹⁴² Nikolai V. Ekeev (Ed.). *Altaiy: Etnicheskaia istoriia. Traditsionnaia kultura. Sovremennoe razvitie*. Gorno-Altaiisk, 2014.

¹⁴³ S. A. Goncharov, L. B. Gashilova, and L. A. Baliasnikova (Eds.). *Realnost' etnosa: obrazovanie i etnosotsializatsiia molodezhi v sovremennoi Rossii*. St. Petersburg, 2012; Nikolai P. Makarov (Ed.). *Etnosy Sibiri. Proshloe. Nastoiashchee. Budushchee*. Krasnoiarsk, 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Tishkov. *Ot etnosa k etnichnosti i posle*. Pp. 17–18.

of Mark Bassin.¹⁴⁵ Ranging from the nostalgia for Stalinist essentialism to the Eurasian geopolitics of the twenty-first 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 that has attracted contemporary enthusiasts of etnos-thinking. Perhaps the most startling appropriation of etnos is by the neo-Eurasianist political philosopher, Aleksandr Dugin. Dugin has become the focus of a plethora of European and American studies who identified him at one time as a sort of philosopher or central ideologist of the Putin administration.¹⁴⁶ One of his best-selling books, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, raised concerns because of 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.¹⁴⁷ In 2001 he established the political movement Eurasia, thus making his murky geopolitical ideas visible beyond the subculture of right-wing radicals.¹⁴⁸ It is not well-known among these political scientists that he also used ethnographic arguments to underpin his political arguments. His interests in etnos theory began in 2002 when he participated at a conference dedicated to the memory of Lev Gumilev.¹⁴⁹ He then presented a series of lectures, published online in 2009, on the “sociology of the etnos,” which drew heavily from the work of Shirokogoroff and Gumilev.¹⁵⁰ These

¹⁴⁵ Bassin. *The Gumilev Mystique*.

¹⁴⁶ Dmitry Shlapentokh. Alexander Dugin’s Views of Russian History: Collapse and Revival // *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*. 2017. Vol. 25. No. 3. Pp. 331–43; 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. Pp. 7–31; Marlene Laruelle. Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right // *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers*. Washington, 2006.

¹⁴⁷ A. G. Dugin. *Osnovy geopolitiki (geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii)*. Moscow, 1997.

¹⁴⁸ Andreas Umland. *Formirovanie pravoradikalnogo “neoevraziiskogo” intellektualnogo dvizheniia v Rossii (1989–2001 gg.)* // *Forum noveishei vostochnoevropeiskoi istorii i kultury*. 2009. No. 1. Pp. 93–104.

¹⁴⁹ A. G. Dugin. *Evoliutsiia Natsional’noi idei Rusi (Rossii) na raznykh istoricheskikh etapakh* // *Teoriia etnogeneza i istoricheskie sud’by Evrazii: Materialy konferentsii, posveshchennoi 90-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia vydaushchegosia evraziitsa XX v.* – L.N. Gumileva / Ed. L. R. Pavlinskaia. St. Petersburg, 2002. Pp. 9–36.

¹⁵⁰ *Strukturnaia sotsiologiya* (16.11.2009) // *Tsentr konservativnykh issledovaniy sotsiologicheskogo fakulteta MGU*. <http://konservativizm.org/161109164821.xhtml>.

were assembled and published as a textbook in 2011.¹⁵¹ 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.”¹⁵² Drawing on a selective reading of anthropological literature of the nineteenth–twentieth centuries, he enhances this definition with evocative examples of mythological thinking, shamanism, standardized “personas,” and cyclical time. Shirokogoroff’s ethnographic work among Manchurian Tungus even play a cameo role in his description of Eurasian-type societies. Some nationalist commentators have taken his vision even further. While Dugin rejects overt biological or racial interpretations of the *ethnos*, the historian and political commentator Valerii D. Solovei uses genetics and Jungian psychology to define *ethnos* as “a group of people, differentiated from other groups by hereditary biological characteristics and archetypes.”¹⁵³ 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 nationalities.¹⁵⁴

As Sergei A. Oushakine 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.¹⁵⁵ In his analysis of a series of texts of this kind, he describes the common theme of suffering, demographic decline, and the erosion of national values of the Russian people during both 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.”¹⁵⁶ He claims that the theories of Bromley and Gumilev were instrumental in this regard as they had already distilled *ethnos* away from the social/political realm, where constructivist terms of identity were widely used.¹⁵⁷ Extracting an essentialist “bio-psycho-social ethnic body” from history, theories of *ethnos* produced a post-Soviet “patriotism of despair,” but

¹⁵¹ A. G. Dugin. *Etnosotsiologiya*. Moscow, 2011.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* P. 8.

¹⁵³ Valerii D. Solovei. *Krov’ i pochva russkoi istorii*. Moscow, 2008. P. 68.

¹⁵⁴ Shnirelman. “Porog tolerantnosti”. Vol. 1. Pp. 328–60.

¹⁵⁵ Sergei A. Oushakine. *The Patriotism of Despair: Nation, War, and Loss in Russia*. Ithaca, 2009; Idem. *Somatic Nationalism: Theorizing Post-Soviet Ethnicity in Russia* // C. Brădăţan and S. Oushakine (Eds.). In *Marx’s Shadow: Knowledge, Power, and Intellectuals in Eastern Europe and Russia*. Plymouth, 2010. Pp. 155–74.

¹⁵⁶ Oushakine. *The Patriotism of Despair*. P. 81.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Pp. 86–95.

they also generated a resource for reinventing a sense of national vitality such as the Altai “school of vital forces.”¹⁵⁸

The demographic health of the Russian etnos is also one of the main concerns of the Russian nationalists. For example, a demographic chart depicting the increase in the death rate and the declining birthrate is commonly dubbed the “Russian cross” in the mass media. In the conclusion to his volume *A History of the Tragedy of a Great People*,¹⁵⁹ Viktor I. Kozlov determined that the Russian etnos had lost its vitality by the end of the twentieth century. Among the reasons for its decline he listed Soviet ethnic policy and the market reforms of the 1990s, which led to the degeneration and “de-ethnization” of Russians.¹⁶⁰ Although he was an old opponent of Gumilev’s theories, he was forced to admit that his pessimistic picture strongly reminded him of the 1,200-year life cycles of an etnos hypothesized by Gumilev.¹⁶¹

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.”¹⁶² Tishkov’s optimism extended to his evaluation of the role of civic experts and of state power. If etnos-nationalists like Kozlov asserted that the Russian state often acted against the interests of the Russian people, Tishkov praised the post-Soviet state for promoting civic nationalism and market reforms.¹⁶³ If Tishkov’s optimism could be reduced to a headline, it would be, “We have all begun to live better,” a slogan that served as a title of one of his many public outreach articles in the daily newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.¹⁶⁴

The nostalgia for essentialist and enduring identities has led to a renewed interest in the works of the pioneer theorists of etnos theory. Sergei Shirokogoroff’s few Russian-language studies were republished for the very first time within Russia by a scientific collective based in Vladivostok.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. P. 127.

¹⁵⁹ V. I. Kozlov. *Istoriia tragedii velikogo naroda*. Moscow, 1996.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. P. 274.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. P. 283.

¹⁶² Tishkov. *Etnologiiia i politika*. P. 174.

¹⁶³ Ibid. Pp. 189–207.

¹⁶⁴ *My stali zhit' luchshe. Vvedenie v obshchepartiinuiu izbiratel'nuiu programmu // Nezavisimaya gazeta*. 2000. January 12. No. 3.

¹⁶⁵ A. M. Kuznetsov and A. M. Reshetov (Eds.). S. M. Shirokogorov. *Etnograficheskie issledovaniia; Izbrannye raboty i materialy*. Vladivostok, 2001–2002.

Recently, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology has (re)launched an early Soviet project to translate and publish Shirokogoroff's *Social Organization* in Russian, 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*.¹⁶⁶

Larisa R. Pavlinskaia, former head of the Siberian Department in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, wrote one of the first book-length ethnographies to redeploy etnos-theory overtly. Her richly detailed ethnography entitled *The Buriats: Notes on Their Ethnic History* was based on several decades of fieldwork in the same East Siberian landscape that inspired Sergei and Elizabeta Shirokogoroff.¹⁶⁷ Sharing perhaps the puzzle-moment the Shirokogoroffs experienced because of the multilanguage and multicultural diversity of these communities (see chapter 4), she tracked the process by which different groups split and merged into a single etnos. The volume quotes extensively from Shirokogoroff's newly republished texts, in part advocating and explaining his biosocial theory of the etnos for those who may not have read this émigré's work.¹⁶⁸ She then moves on to merge Shirokogoroff's interest in leading etnoses to Gumilev's description of the "persistent behavioural models" that fuel ethnogenetic progression. The book covers a wide expanse of time from the seventeenth until the nineteenth century and includes significant archival examples. For example, she cites the example of the Russian *voevoda* Iakov Khripunov whose predatory military campaign of 1629 she interprets through Gumilev 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."¹⁶⁹ Pavlinskaia perhaps goes further than Shirokogoroff himself by stressing the biological component of ethnogenesis. She postulates that there must exist a genetic "passionarity mutation" (*mutatsiia passionarnosti*),¹⁷⁰ which once activated in an individual's DNA, has a ripple effect on the people around that the individual gradually transforms a collage of local groups into a single etnos.

¹⁶⁶ Aleksandr G. Dugin. Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogorov: vozvrashchenie zabytogo klassika // S. M. Shirokogorov. Etnos. Issledovanie osnovnykh printsipov izmeneniia etnicheskikh i etnograficheskikh iavlenii / Ed. N. V. Melenteva. Moscow, 2010.

¹⁶⁷ Larisa R. Pavlinskaia. Buriaty. Ocherki etnicheskoi istorii (17–19 vv.). St. Petersburg, 2008.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. Pp. 53–6.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. P. 106.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 57.

This frames Shirokogoroff's interest in mixed-blood Tungus individuals, as discussed in chapter 4, in a completely new light:

The miscegenation (*metisatsiia*) of the Russian and aboriginal population is one of the mainstays of new etno-formation processes (*ètnoobrazovatel'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 sixteenth century but also in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One should point out that these men were [likely] the most "passionarity" representatives of the Russian *etnos*. They settled on new lands in Siberia and temporarily or permanently married members of the native peoples. [They therefore] passed on this quality – the passionarity gene – thus initiating ethnic development among the local population. These individuals, [in turn,] played an important role in the formation of today's Siberian *etnoses*. This is especially the case in the forested areas where the Russian population was particularly numerous. It follows that the impact of Russians on the native people of Siberia even led to a change in the gene pool, which is the most important element within any etno-formation process.¹⁷¹

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

At the start of the twenty-first century we can notice a subtle transformation of the term "etnos" from a somewhat scholarly scientific term used primarily by experts, to a widely quoted term in the public sphere that touches on the destiny of peoples. Of particular interest to political actors, whether they are 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 Shnirelman, "During the past fifteen to twenty years, an appeal to generics has firmly entered the popular discourse, [leading] some authors to begin to abuse the term 'genetic.'"¹⁷² 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."¹⁷³ There he used the term "etnos" as a category for understanding how post-Soviet migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus were guided by the leading vision of the Russian people. He noted, "The

¹⁷¹ Ibid. P. 160.

¹⁷² Shnirelman. "Porog tolerantnosti". Vol. 1. P. 354.

¹⁷³ Vladimir Putin. *Rossia: natsionalnyi vopros* // *Nezavisimaia gazeta*. 2012. January 23.

self-determination of the Russian people [hinges] on a polyethnic 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 multiculturalism wherein Russia is seen as a multinational society acting as a single people (*narod*). Originally, his ideas seem to have been aimed at creating a law that would protect the identity of this single people by reviving Soviet-era nationality registers, which tracked the *etnos* identity held by each individual. Tishkov’s earlier argument for a *Rossiiskii narod* undoubtedly echoed this proposal.¹⁷⁴ Most recently, Putin maintained that his ethnocultural definition of the *Rossiiskii narod* should be militarized. In his speech at the May 9 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 *etnos*.”¹⁷⁵ Here we witness a slippage from the use of *etnos* to denote non-Russian migrants, to its use 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 *etnoses*” across Russia. Spokespersons from the Kremlin further speculated that by holding this “genetic code” foreign interests might be able to build a biological weapon.¹⁷⁶

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

By stressing an accommodation that we describe as a “biosocial synthesis,” we try to express that there was, and remains, a wide range of debate within the academy and in the public sphere on the relative role of biological heritage in producing stable collective identities. We have indicated that the particular synthesis that stabilized within Russia as well as other Eurasian states seems “primordialist” when compared to a slightly different weighting of factors that one might find in Europe or America. As the chapters that

¹⁷⁴ Tishkov. *Rossiiskii narod*. *Kniga dlia uchitelia*.

¹⁷⁵ Putin predlozhl tost v chest’ Dnia Pobedy: “Za pobeditelei, za mir na nashei zemle, za velikuiu Rossiui!” // *Pravda.ru*. 2017. May 9. <https://www.pravda.ru/news/society/09-05-2017/1333337-putin-0/>.

¹⁷⁶ Anastasiia Zyrianova. “Utechka biodannykh”: kto i zachem sobiraet biomaterialy rossiian // BBC. Russian Service. 2017. September 11. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-41816699>.

follow will show, much of this peculiar Eurasian accommodation was at all times in constant dialogue with traditions overseas, and should really be viewed as a sibling of North Atlantic theories of identity (and not an orphan).

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

SUMMARY

The article is an abridged version of the first chapter in the edited volume *A Theory for Empire Written on Its Margins*. It presents an account of more than 150 years of what the authors identify as “etnos-thinking” – the attempt to use positivistic and rational scientific methodologies to describe, encapsulate, evaluate, and rank “etnoses” across Eurasia. Its central argument is that the work of professional ethnographers created a powerful language parallel to the political vocabulary of “tribes,” “nationalities,” and “nations.” The essay surveys the definitions of etnos offered by scholars during the twentieth century, and argues that historically etnos-thinking emerged and developed in the multidisciplinary scientific environment of “biosocial” science – an approach to identity heavily influenced by physical anthropology and natural sciences. The biosocial synthesis – and etnos-thinking – was incompatible with Soviet Marxism of the 1930s, but had a piecemeal revival in the 1960s. The article claims that etnos-thinking acquired new dynamism in post-Soviet Russia. Although leading academic anthropologists criticize the concept, it remains high on the agenda for many intellectuals and ethnic activists in the twenty-first century.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Данная статья является сокращенной версией вводной главы готовящейся к публикации книги “Теория для империи, написанная на полях: судьбы концепции этноса на Евразийском пространстве”. Она представляет собой историю “этнос-мышления”, определяемого

авторами как стремление описывать и классифицировать этносы на евразийском пространстве, используя позитивистские и естественнонаучные подходы. Авторы утверждают, что профессиональные этнографы создали влиятельный язык для описания культурного многообразия, параллельный политическому языку с его племенами, нациями и национальностями. В статье дается обзор дефиниций этноса. Авторы делают вывод, что “этнос-мышление” возникло в рамках “биосоциального” подхода под значительным влиянием естественных наук и физической антропологии. Этот подход был неприемлем для советского марксизма 1930-х гг., однако возродился в рамках частичной реабилитации биосоциальных поисков в 1960-е гг. В постсоветское время понятие этноса обрело новый динамизм и, несмотря на критику со стороны ведущих антропологов, остается актуальным для широкого круга интеллектуалов и этнических активистов.