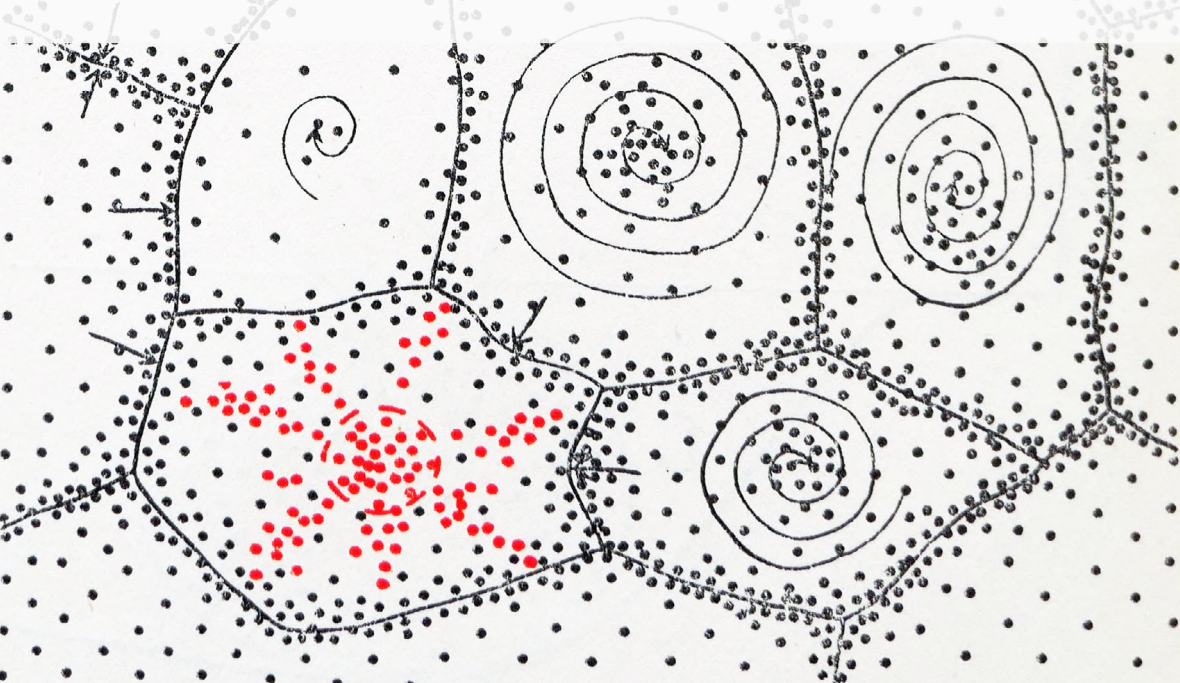


Life Histories of *Etnos* Theory in Russia and Beyond

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I. Grounding *Etnos* Theory: An Introduction

David G. Anderson, Sergei S. Alymov and
Dmitry V. Arzyutov

This book, based both on extensive archival research and on field research in Russia and China, presents an account of *etnos* thinking — the attempt to use positivistic and rational scientific methodologies to describe, encapsulate, evaluate, and rank *etnoses*¹ across Eurasia. Our central argument is that the work of professional ethnographers created a powerful parallel language to the political vocabulary of “tribes”, “nationalities”, and “nations” that was hitherto thought to have structured Eurasian space. We develop an understanding of how these technocratic Eurasian states engaged with national identities.

The *etnos* concept, with its radical primordialism, has been associated strongly with Soviet state-building, creating the unspoken assumption that the theory crumbled along with Soviet institutions. It has been one of the surprises of the post-Soviet transition that *etnos*-style arguments not only persist, but are a vibrant part of regional anthropological traditions in Russia, Central Asia, and China. Given that European and North American anthropologists have traditionally interpreted *etnos* theory as a sort of deserted island, isolated from the main currents of

1 The plural of the Russian term would be *etnosy*, but we have chosen to use the more intelligible (to an English ear) *etnoses*, and italicised the term so it is consistent with its singular form.

the discipline, this volume aims to rewrite the concept in an active mood demonstrating its evocativeness both to contemporary Russian society and to the discipline as a whole.

The book has three main themes that run throughout the volume, but they are concentrated in several key chapters. First, we give a chronological historical development of *etnos* thinking from the mid-nineteenth century up until the present day. Chapter 2 provides the majority of the evidence for this theme. Second, we develop the idea of a “life history” of *etnos* theory through biographies and through an examination of the fieldwork of several of its key proponents. The life histories of the *etnos* concept are developed primarily in chapters 3 through 6. Finally, we present our contemporary ethnographic research in two opposing corners of Eurasia — the Russian north and the Manchurian south — to illustrate the way that the archives of the early *etnos* pioneers continue to structure the lives of people across the region.

Defining *Etnos*

The term around which this volume revolves — *etnos* — is likely not familiar to most readers. Incorrectly glossed as “ethnicity”, it refers to a somewhat transhistorical collective identity shared by people speaking a common language and sharing a set of traditions, and often said to possess a “common psychology” and certain key physiognomic attributes.

Etnos theory is often associated with the stodgy and essentialist school of ethnography led by the former Director of the Institute of Ethnography, Īulian Bromleĭ [Yulian Bromley] (1921–1990). Bromleĭ promoted his theory internationally as a non-racial, anti-colonialist identity theory for anthropology (Bromley 1969, 1974, 1979). The concept was (re-)introduced prominently, if not theatrically, to a western European audience in 1964 during the VII International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held in Moscow (Anderson and Arzyutov forthcoming). Following this event, the term was queried and to some extent promoted by three British scholars — Ernest Gellner (1975, 1980, 1988), Teodor Shanin (1986, 1989) and Marcus Banks (1996). In all three cases, they drew attention to the fact that this was “non-relativistic” theory of identity. Their enthusiasm

was fuelled by a certain dissatisfaction with post-structuralist arguments suggesting that ethnic identities could be freely invented independently of historic or cultural circumstances. In Shanin's intriguing turn of phrase, *ethnos* was the "missing term" that lent depth, context and coherence to an identity marker that was sometimes employed loosely (Shanin 1986).

At first glance, the term reads as a biologically anchored definition of collective identity. It is distinctive since it diverges from the standard, post-war north Atlantic definition of ethnicity (Lachenicht 2011), which stresses that an individual might choose to belong to one or many social, linguistic, or confessional groups. Peter Skalník, an expert observer of the history of Soviet ethnography, distinguishes *ethnos* as "a reified substance" distinct from "relational" north Atlantic understandings of ethnicity (Skalník 2007: 116). In other words, if modern European and North American analysts see ethnicity as a bundle of qualities any one of which an individual might cite to describe his or her identity, to a Russian or Kazakh ethnographer an *ethnos* exists as a coherent and enduring set of traits that only knowledgeable experts can see. Circulating around this single term are a number of powerful assumptions about the durability of identities over time; the role of the expert in assigning identity; and the importance of physical bodies to stabilize and reproduce identities over the short term.

The fact that almost all proponents of *ethnos* theory understand it to be embodied means it often seems to be a biological or even a racially inflected theory. This quality is perhaps best caught by Serguei Oushakine's (2010) observation that the term reflects a type of "somatic nationalism". This interpretation is one of the greatest stumbling blocks that every student, or experienced researcher, confronts when trying to understand what Eurasian ethnographers mean when they use the term. While it is true that the main *ethnos* theorists each took a great interest in physical form, it is also true that each at different times made strong statements against the conviction that physical form could determine human behaviour. Thus, on the one hand, prominent *ethnos* theorists are comfortable discussing "behavioural stereotypes" (Gumilëv), group identity built upon group intermarriage (Bromleĭ), or the prevalence of certain "physical types" among a specific ethnolinguistic group (Shirokogoroff). On the other hand, the same theorists will also chart

how one *ethnos* replaces another over long historical epochs (Gumilëv), how intermarriage promotes the “coming together” of nations (Bromleĭ), or how ecological conditions promote the “growth and decline” of *ethnoses* (Shirokogoroff). *Ethnos* identities may be stable and coherent, but they are never eternal. They may be embodied, but they also merge, change, evolve and “degrade”. The craftsmen of this concept wield the organic metaphor not to imply that *ethnoses* are pre-programmed to react to their environment, but instead to emphasise that they are functional and coherent forms of social life. One objective of this volume is to try to illustrate, through citations from archival sources and ethnographic examples, the way that physiological arguments are combined with symbolic arguments within each *ethnos* school. In so doing, we hope to “ground” *ethnos* theory by giving a long overdue and detailed account of the social conditions that encouraged the growth of this idea.

Before we start out on our overview of the history of *ethnos* thinking in chapter 2, it would be helpful to have a crisp and clear definition of what an *ethnos* is. This is not as easy a task as it might first seem. In contemporary Russia, the term is so pervasive, and considered to be so self-evident that it sometimes seems to be part of the air one breathes. Some scholars, such as Bromleĭ, wrote entire monographs on how the concept could be applied to Soviet society, but struggled to give a concise definition of the term. For many, it seems that one belongs to an *ethnos* as self-evidently as one has a defined gender or belongs to 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 M. Mogilĭanskii (1871–1933), a curator at the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St Petersburg. His life and fieldwork is analysed in great detail in chapter 3 of this volume. His 1916 published definition reads as follows:

The ἔθνος [*ethnos*] concept — is a complex idea. It is a group of individuals united together as a single whole [*odno tseloe*] by several general characteristics. [These are:] common physical (anthropological) characteristics; a common historical fate, and finally a common language — which is the foundation upon which, in turn, [an *ethnos*] can build a common worldview [and] folk-psychology — in short, an entire spiritual culture (Mogilĭanskii 1916: 11).

His off-the-cuff rendering was published in the context of a wide-ranging debate on the institutionalization of ethnography within Russia, which in particular stressed the role of expert scientists in investigating and setting public policy. The role of experts in identifying *ethnoses* is one of the theory's defining features.

An émigré ethnographer, Sergei M. Shirokogoroff (1887–1939), who is widely credited for being the first to publish a book-length monograph on the topic of *ethnos*, captures many of the same attributes in one of his published definitions:

[An] *ethnos* is a group of people, speaking a common language who recognise their common origin, and who display a coherent set [*kompleks*] of habits [*obychai*], lifestyle [*uklad zhizni*], and a set of traditions that they protect and worship. [They further] distinguish these [qualities] from those of other groups. This, in fact, is *the ethnic unit* — the object of scientific ethnography (Shirokogorov 1923: 13) (emphasis in the original).

Shirokogoroff's fieldwork, academic and political writings are examined in considerable detail in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this volume. Here we will show that while in his fieldwork he was to a certain degree obsessed with measuring skulls, or even harvesting skulls from Evenki burials, his conclusions were much more focussed on cultural potentialities and what one might define today as a form of resilience of indigenous societies against those of settlers. His engagement with *ethnos* theory is of a particularly unusual kind — that of an iconoclastic émigré who befriended Siberian minorities living at the frontiers of two crumbling empires. This is reflected in his definition of *ethnos*, with its references to a protected or cherished lifestyle.

Bromleĭ, who is most closely associated with *ethnos* theory today, struggled to define the term, instead preferring to signal his interest by placing the term in the titles of his books and articles. His authoritative monograph, *Ėtnos i étnografīa* (1973) arrives at a prosaic definition over several pages, in comparison to competing denominations (Bromleĭ 1973: 37–39). He first employed the term in 1968 without defining it whatsoever — presumably relying on the fact that everybody already understood it implicitly (Alekseev and Bromleĭ 1968). In English, his most concise formulation is in his edited book *Soviet Ethnology and Anthropology Today* where he almost accidentally defines the concept

by noticing that his life-long competitor Lev N. Gumilëv (1912–1992) 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 feature. This is sometimes used as a reason for ignoring these elements as expressions of the essence of *ethnos* (Gumilëv 1967: 5, emphasis added) (Bromley 1974: 66).

In a much later wide-ranging Russian-language encyclopaedia article on *ethnos* theory, he stressed that *ethnos* includes the concepts of common descent, self-appellation, and a shared region with the following definition:

An *Etnos* [...] is [made up of] the totality [*sovokupnost'*] of individuals [living] on a defined territory, who demonstrate common and relatively stable linguistic, cultural and psychic qualities. [This group] also recognizes their uniqueness and distinguish themselves from other similar groups (self-identity) and represent this [recognition] through a self-appellation (an ethnonym) (Bromleĭ 1988).

Bromleĭ's reference to an all-inclusive, integral "totality" (*sovokupnost'*) is a third important defining feature of the term — and one that points to the way that embodied organic terms are used. His evocation of "totality" builds upon Mogilĭanskiĭ's "single whole" (*odno tseloe*) and Shirokogoroff's "coherent set" (*kompleks*).

Bromleĭ's sparring partner, the Leningrad-based geographer Gumilëv, made a career out of promoting and distinguishing his own theory of *ethnos* in a series of historical monographs, many of which became bestsellers in the late Soviet period. Substantively, however his definition of *ethnos* did not differ greatly from that of Bromleĭ (Bassin 2016: 171–76). In an early article, he argued that *ethnos* should not belong to ethnography but to historical geography. In his view the concept was composed of language, habits (*obychai*) and culture, ideology, and an account of a common of origin (Gumilëv 1965). Albeit a geographer, his examples of *ethnos* were often the most ethnographic — he saw *ethnos* evident in the small bodily actions or reactions which he described as "persistent behavioural models" (*stereotipy povedeniĭa*) when they manifested on a small scale, or as ethnic "passions" (*passionnarnost'*) on a large scale (Bassin 2016: 24–26; 55–59). As is characteristic of this

entire school, only experts would be able to identify these archetypes or emotions.

Building on these four definitions, each based on fieldwork from different corners of Eurasia, we can identify the following five qualities, which are associated with *etnos*:

- a collective identity;
- a common physical anthropological foundation;
- a common language;
- a cherished set of traditions or “historical fate”; and
- a common worldview, “folk psychology”, or behavioural archetype.

Perhaps the most influential part of the definition, implied rather than stated, was that this was a specialised *scientific* term for expert use and not necessary caught up in popular definitions of nations or people (*narod*).

Empires, Scientific Traditions, and *Etnos*

The relationship between science and identity politics is a classic long-running issue, and never more so than in the history of the Eurasian states. This particular space is hampered by a general stereotype that scientists and citizens alike respond to authoritarian directives, and that there is little variety or subtlety in scientific thought. In grounding *etnos* theory, we would like to draw attention to the political and environmental controversies that went into the building of this theory. As chapter 2 shows, we see the theory as a “biosocial compromise” between humanistic and positivistic modes of discovery, as well as between inward and outward looking social research.

As will become abundantly clear in this volume, the most significant influence on the development of *etnos* theory was the Russian Empire, or more accurately the Russian Empire at the point of its dissolution. As with many empires in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the Russian Empire struggled with the challenge of modernization. If, in western Europe, modern nation-states arose out of the toil of capitalist industry, conscripted armies, bureaucracy, and the development of

mass education and publishing, the Russian Empire famously lagged behind in all these respects (Lieven 2006). The formation of a single Russian nation out of a “core” population of various Slavic-speaking local communities was hindered by the dynastic and autocratic nature of the regime and the notorious gap between educated elites and peasant masses (Hosking 1997). As Vera Tolz pointed out, “in the prerevolutionary period, intellectuals were virtually the sole nation-builders” among Russians (Tolz 2001: 8). This gave historians and ethnographers a remarkable amount of social influence.

During the late-nineteenth century, the empire faced the development of numerous nationalist movements, especially on its western periphery. Following its painful defeat in the Crimean War (1856), the Polish uprising (1863), and the liberal reforms of Alexander II (1861–1881) the imperial state sought to unify the government of its territories and enhance their integration. This led to a series of measures to bring about the “Russification” of the populations of the western provinces, including the ban on publishing in Ukrainian and Belorussian, the discrimination against the Catholic Church, and state support for Orthodoxy and Russian-language education. The “forced integration” of Ukrainians drew on a perception that they could easily form part of a large Russian nation (Kappeler 2001: ch. 7). This political assimilative pressure, as we show in chapter 3, played an important role in the upbringing of early *ethnos* thinkers who were motivated to identify difference among the southern and northern Slavic peripheries. The diversity of points of view over ethnic consolidation was made visible during the revolution of 1905–1907, which was, according to Andreas Kappeler, the Russian Empire’s “spring of nations”. The first state Duma or parliament, elected in 1906, included numerous regional, confessional and national parties, such as the Polish *Kolo*, Ukrainian *Hromada*, Estonian, Armenian, and other groups. This motley composition of the Duma inspired one politician to characterize it as a “live ethnographic map of Russia” (Semyonov 2009). The contradictions generated by ethno-national consolidation and separatism to a large degree set the stage for the two subsequent revolutions, and the eventual founding of the Soviet Union.

The Russian Empire was not the only empire driving the development of this theory. As chapters 5 and 6 show, much of the promotion and

lobbying for the definition of a state-led policy on ethnic consolidation was launched within a series of modernizing fragments of former empires along the Pacific Rim. To a large degree, *ethnos* thinking cannot be understood in isolation from the breakaway Far Eastern Republic, the nationalist Chinese state created in the wake of the first Chinese revolution, or the paradoxical and ill-fated Manchukuo republic in Manchuria. Although not the focus of this volume, early *ethnos* pioneers took inspiration from Russian and Soviet state building “on the edge of Empire” in the Caucasus and in Central Asia (Mühlfried and Sokolovskiy 2011; Gullette 2008; Abashin 2014).

It was within this ethno-political maelstrom that key thinkers such as Fëdor Volkov (1847–1918), Sergeĭ Rudenko (1885–1969), Mogilĭanskiĭ and Shirokogoroff tried to advance a scientific account of the growth and decline of ethnic units. To better understand how these thinkers reasoned during the conflicts of the *fin-de-siècle* period, we have placed an emphasis in this volume on examining their day-to-day work in their amateur societies, their museum collections, and their efforts in the field collecting artefacts and measurements among the population of the Russian Empire. In this volume, we make a strong argument that the biosocial quality of *ethnos* thinking can be read through the “paleoethnographic” collecting practice of Volkov and Mogilĭanskiĭ (chapter 3), the applied physiognomic programmes of Rudenko and Shirokogoroff (chapters 4 and 5), the questionnaires and ethnographic “index” of Dmitriĭ Zelenin (1878–1954) (chapter 4), and the ethnographic mapping of Pavel Kushner (1889–1968) (chapter 2).

The far-eastern legacy of *ethnos* thinking underpins the biography of Sergei Shirokogoroff — arguably one of Volkov’s students in St Petersburg — who, for a variety of reasons, decided to emigrate from Russia to the Russian Far East, and then to a variety of locations in China. Although Shirokogoroff is thought of as a Russian scholar, from 1923 until his death in 1939 he lived and worked in China. All of his mature works were published there. He participated in setting the foundation for anthropology in China, and likely the worldview and attitudes of the Far East also influenced him and his thinking. After a brief association with the Far Eastern University in Vladivostok, Shirokogoroff found several academic homes for himself within nationalist China in both Amoy [Xiàmén] and Canton [Guǎngzhōu]. The

new nationalist administration began to build a new cohort of scholars, educated overseas, who worked under the supervision of a remarkable collective of intellectuals from around the world (Yen 2012; Glover et al. 2012; Guldin 1994). In reaction to the administrative dominance of Manchus during the Qing Empire, local intellectuals began indigenizing foreign concepts of identity such as *ethnie* or nation. They countered Manchu ethnic hegemony with the idea that China hosted a number of independent, hierarchically-organized nationalities. These were described through varying inclusive definitions of *mínzú* (民族) — a pair of characters imported from Japanese, which signified a type of “nation-lineage” (Leibold 2007). In Weiner’s (1997) account, these characters fused together the European notions of “race”, “ethnie”, and “nation”, creating a truly biosocial way of ascribing group membership.

Shirokogoroff wrote many of his mature works on *etnos* during this time, but it is not clear if he imported his Siberian-based ideas of *etnos* to China, or if he became one of the most prominent exporters of early biosocial *mínzú*-talk to Russia and western Europe. One of Shirokogoroff’s lasting legacies was his role as a teacher to Fèi Xiàotōng (1910–2005) and Yáng Chéngzhì — two scholars who had an extraordinary impact on the formation of anthropology in China (Anderson and Arzyutov forthcoming). Given Shirokogoroff’s prominent role in developing anthropology across several modernizing Eurasian states, chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 examine his work in some detail.

Life Histories, and Field Histories, of *Etnos* Thinking

Although the precepts of *etnos* theory make it sound like any other abstract system derived from first principles, it is a little-known fact that the first *etnos* pioneers devoted years, and sometimes their entire lives, to testing and tinkering with their theory in field conditions. When Gellner first (re-)directed the attention of north Atlantic scholars to *etnos* theory he described the work of Bromleĭ as a “minor revolution” (Gellner 1988: 116) which stood in defiant contrast to the dry and scholarly evolutionary models for which Marxism had been famous. A key platform of this revolution was the use of fieldwork to specify and elucidate the details of particular *etnoses* — a feature that defined

ethnos thinking across Eurasia. Rather than compressing ethnocultural diversity into one set of pre-determined moulds, *ethnos* investigation explored the local practices that revealed the growth and decline of group identities. Researchers travelled long distances and brought back stacks of glass plate negatives, tables of measurements, and shelves full of artefacts to demonstrate incremental differences between neighbouring communities.

It may not be insignificant that much of the work of *ethnos* exploration was done at the frontiers of the Russian and Qing empires. A heavy debt is owed by Sergei Shirokogoroff to Evenkis, Orochens, and Manchus living on the borderlands along the Amur [Hēilóng Jiāng] River (chapters 5 and 7). Further insights were generated by Sergei Rudenko in Bashkiria at the frontier of Slavic and Turkic settlements (chapter 4). Few *ethnos* studies were done in the Russian heartlands. Instead, Volkov, Mogilanskii, and their students developed most of their theories along the Slavic borderlands in contemporary Ukraine and the Russian north (chapters 3 and 8). These ideas were forged at the frontiers of empires.

It is possible to sketch out a continental map of how fieldwork influenced central *ethnos* precepts. The mapping of the border between “Great Russians” and “Small Russians” (Ukrainians) in the southern reaches of the empire provided important evidence for what a proper *ethnos* should be. Similarly, the charting of the northern boundary of Slavic identity on the coasts of the frigid White Sea fuelled a debate in the Soviet period about the existence of so-called *subethnos*es — a type of evolving or consolidating identity, which was distinct but not yet complete in itself. In contrast, many of the classic examples of ethnic resilience and assimilation came from Russian-occupied territories far to the east. In examining the fieldwork that went into these influential cases, we can see that the *ethnos* and *subethnos* concepts themselves balanced central and peripheral experiences and in its own way lent a sense of unity to the empire. The role of these Siberian and pan-Slavic conversations has never been documented in existing accounts, giving the impression that the *ethnos* concept appeared out of thin air.

In drawing attention to the scholarly networks and the concrete fieldwork that led to *ethnos* theory, we are making a heavy investment in what Nathaniel Knight (2017) describes as “academic particularism” within the Russian Empire. His broad definition focusses on the roles

of geographical factors and interpersonal contacts in the formation of a uniquely Russian perspective on the nature of mankind. While historians of science often nest their analysis in “styles” or even “ecologies” of knowledge, our research tends to support the idea that the encounter between Siberian indigenous peoples and the foreign-trained scholars working for the Russian Academy of Sciences generated a special type of ethnographic and political thinking that became refined as *ethnos* thinking. We suggest that the investment these expatriate scholars made in exploring the frontiers of empire spurred them to develop this essentialist theory.

One of the major contributions of this volume is to elucidate the various life histories of the *ethnos* concept. With this turn of phrase, we have made use of our own ethnographic skills to try to reconstruct the stories and biographies of some of the key figures in the development of *ethnos* theory. Further, we have done our own fieldwork among the peoples in the same borderlands that gave rise to this ethnographic dialogue. The crafting of life histories is a common method in the ecological and health sciences and is used to understand the everyday practices that lead to resilience (or illness) in communities of all types. Our method arguably goes one step further, by touching on the personal and interpersonal dynamics that influence the careers of a group of scholars. Our inspiration comes from the movement in science studies that tries to contextualize the history of ideas in the local interpersonal and environmental conditions in which people worked and interacted.

With the term “life history” we risk implying that *ethnos* thinking was the work of erudite pioneers lighting out on horseback for the territory. We have been careful to contextualize the fieldwork of *ethnos* thinkers within their institutions. As described in the previous section, the institutional academic configurations of the crumbling Romanov and Qing empires left few official spaces for academic action. The polymath scientists who conducted physiognomic measurements, ethnographic cartography, and who organized public exhibits all worked within the embrace of a small face-to-face community of intellectuals. Institutional affiliations often overlapped. The work done in informal amateur societies was also injected into the minutes of formal academic structures. Chapter 2 places a heavy emphasis on the institutionalization of ethnography in the late imperial period and the start of the Soviet period. The success

of *etnos* theory — and its remarkable resilience — is largely due to the way that classic proofs from the field, such as the physical types of Bashkirs and Zabaikal Orochens, shaped the curriculum of future generations of scholars. The heavy interpenetration of Russian scholars in nationalist — and communist — China also lent a stabilizing role, as *etnos* and *mínzú* came to represent one another and a continent-wide paradigm of identity governance was thus created.

Our life-history method leads to some untraditional ways of illustrating the development of this case. In a purely chronological and institutional frame, *etnos* thinking can be rooted in the geographic particularism of the research of Karl von Baer (1792–1876) — also based in the Russian North — in the middle of the nineteenth century (Knight 2017) as well as in the paleoethnographic work of Fëdor Volkov, which bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (chapter 3). Both scholars had one foot in and one foot out of Russian scholarly networks, and each was a key figure in the institutionalization of ethnography within the Academy of Science and the universities respectively. However, the relatively marginal and contentious émigré scholar Sergei Shirokogoroff likely did the most to popularize and distribute the *etnos* concept. Aside from conducting ambitious and to some extent unrivalled fieldwork in Zabaikal'e and Manchuria with his wife and intellectual partner Elizaveta Shirokogoroff (née Robinson), the Shirokogoroffs implemented a wide programme of correspondence, circulating (often self-published) copies of their work internationally in several European languages. Indeed, until recently, very little of Shirokogoroff's work was available in Russian. This, however, did not stop several generations of Soviet scholars from incorporating many of his ideas into their own works, sometimes unattributed, relying on unpublished translations or precis passed down orally from colleague to colleague. Due to the wide influence of his thinking, and to some degree the paucity of any reliable information about his life, three of the chapters in this volume focus on the legacy of this remarkable ethnographic couple (chapters 5, 6, and 7).

The use of life histories also helps us to resolve a long-standing controversy about how to classify *etnos* theory. Marcus Banks captures the consensus of many north Atlantic anthropologists that *etnos* theory is a “most strongly primordialist” theory (Banks 1996: 17). In using this pejorative term Banks was referencing an argument common in

the late 1980s and early 1990s that theories of identity can be placed on a continuum between “romantic, essentialist, and primordialist” on the one hand, and “modernist, constructivist and instrumentalist” on the other.² Yet at the same time *etnos* commentators, including Banks, are quick to note that ethnographic fieldwork done using *etnos* theory seems to be “relatively synchronist” (Gellner 1988: 118) or harbouring elements of transactionalism (Banks 1996: 23). The paradox of the theory is best captured by the fact that Soviet Marxist theorists understood *etnos* identities to persist across historical stages, and yet they felt that the term was not essentialist or romantic but materialist. The best example was the often quoted example of Bromleĭ that Ukrainians remained Ukrainians under feudalism, capitalism and socialism (qtd. in Gellner 1977: 213). By examining the fieldwork of *etnos* pioneers in detail, we can see how some of these paradoxes unfold in practice — although admittedly some of their field methods seem today to be unusual or non-standard.

Thus we learn in chapter 5 that Shirokogoroff employed physiometry in order to map cultural resilience, or in chapters 3 and 4, that Volkov used linguistic data to understand how physical types were formed. To capture this ambiguity we have employed the term “biosocial” — a term that admittedly for some might imply that *etnos* thinking was more racial than constructivist. With this term we are trying to capture a recent change in Euro-American science, which is exploring new ways of melding the biological and social. These range from the realm of “nature-culture” in Haraway (1991), to “biosociality” (Rabinow 2010), and “biosocial becomings” (Ingold and Palsson 2013). From this point of view, the unique geographically-inflected way that early Russian scholars approached physical and cultural identities appears to be ahead of its time. By “biosocial” we refer to an approach that understands that group identity embodies the landscapes, languages and material technical objects around it. This is the reverse of a racial hypothesis, which would assume that certain physical traits set limits on how individuals can cope with their environment.

2 In Russian-language translations of English-language research in history and political science, the term *ethnie* championed by Anthony Smith (1986) is overwhelmingly translated as *etnos*. Smith’s *ethnie* is often cited as a hallmark case of primordialism. See for example Kappeler (2000: 11) and Khosking (2001).

Etnos and Contemporary Identity Movements

Although this book is primarily based on archival and historical research, it has been motivated to a great extent by our awareness that *etnos* thinking plays an important role in Eurasian societies today. Each of the co-editors have conducted fieldwork across Russia — sometimes in the same communities where Shirokogoroff, Mogil'anskii, and Rudenko worked (Anderson 2000; Anderson 2011; Alymov 2011; Arzyutov 2017; Arzyutov 2018). To signal the contemporary importance of this biosocial theory we have included two ethnographic case studies to conclude the volume.

In chapter 7, Jocelyne Dudding describes her experiences, and those of our group, in sharing the fieldwork images collected both by the Shirokogoroffs and the British-trained social anthropologist Ethel Lindgren in the former Manchurian highlands of what is now China. The descendants of the contemporary Evenkis and Orochens who once spoke with Shirokogoroff and Lindgren have been resettled several times since then, and now live in communities quite far from the larch forests of the “Three Rivers Region”. Given the tumultuous modern history of the People’s Republic, these black and white images provide a rare and tangible insight into a proud past. The Shirokogoroffs, and Lindgren, selected the subjects for their portraits based on the cultural evolutionary assumptions of their fieldwork projects, which aimed on the whole to document types of adaptation and levels of culture. One hundred years later, as Dudding notes, these images have become “reanimated” both with remembered stories and new narratives of community resilience. Likely neither Lindgren nor Shirokogoroff anticipated that their fieldwork tools would come alive for future generations. This remarkable example demonstrates how this fieldwork-driven science of mapping *etnoses* has created an archive that enlivens and recreates those same identities.

In the final substantive chapter to the volume, chapter 8, Masha Shaw and Nathalie Wahnsiedler return to one of the imperial frontiers where the definition of concrete *etnoses* was never clear. Working among modern Pomors, a newly “indigenous” Russian-speaking group along the coasts of the White Sea, Shaw and Wahnsiedler document how *etnos* thinking is mobilized by contemporary political activists to defend the

subsistence rights of local Pomors. The chapter examines how Pomor identity has always been a challenge for imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet scholars. In different contexts, the unique dialect and ways of life of this maritime people have been described as being, variously, a “most authentic”, example of Russian-ness, a creole mixture of indigenous “Chud” and Finno-ugric people, a *subetnos*, which never seems to achieve the status of being a “big” *etnos*, or the markers of an indigenous people in their own right. This concluding chapter demonstrates how Pomors have served as an important limiting case to illustrate *etnos* thinking. When read together with southern Russian or Ukrainian examples, this northern outlier helps to frame the identity of Russians living in the central regions of the Russian Federation.

This volume presents 150 years of *etnos* thinking in a variety of contexts. The chapters take us between urban seminar rooms to nomadic camps, from dusty archives to remote villages. Despite being at times a controversial theory with its insistence on a bodily coherence to cultural identity, *etnos* theory has proven to be remarkably resilient. During the early Soviet period — when it was officially discouraged — *etnos* thinking lived a hidden life in discussions of nationality. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept took root outside of the walls of the Academy, and has become one of the key terms of public debate over identity governance in Russia and in China. Using a variety of sources, from the archival to the ethnographic, this volume tries to build an alternative history of a relatively unknown and sometimes unloved concept, which plays an important role today in revitalizing societies throughout Eurasia.

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