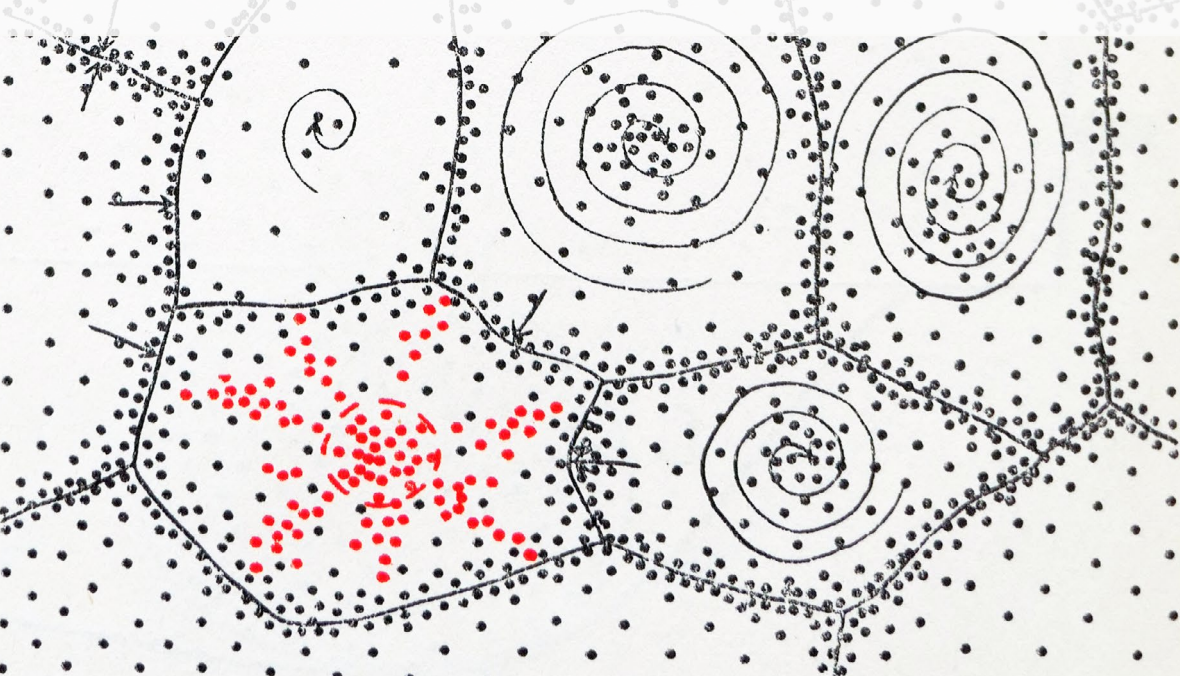


Life Histories of *Etnos* Theory in Russia and Beyond

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David G. Anderson, Dmitry V. Arzyutov and Sergei S. Alymov (eds.), *Life Histories of Ethnos Theory in Russia and Beyond*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0150>

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-78374-544-9

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-78374-545-6

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-78374-546-3

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-78374-547-0

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-78374-548-7

ISBN Digital (XML): 978-1-78374-685-9

<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0150>

Cover image: S. M. Shirokogoroff, *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (London: Kegan Paul, 1935), p. 36. Cover design: Corin Throsby.

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2. *Etnos* Thinking in the Long Twentieth Century

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

In *The Age of Extremes*, the historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995) argued that “the short twentieth century” ended with the breakup of the Soviet Union. This epoch-defining event cast into doubt major ideologies such as the Soviet-led communist movement, as well as *laissez-faire* free-market capitalism — but it also called into question the effectiveness of expert knowledge. Unprecedented nationalist unrest preceded the fragmenting of the Soviet Union into a collage of new European and Eurasian republics. Another historian dubbed this fragmentation “the revenge of the past” (Suny 1993), as if long-term pre-existing ethnic identities had somehow outlived and triumphed over a centralized and technocratic state. In the mid-1990s it seemed impossible to gain a long-term perspective over this explosive part-century, but it now seems self-evident that ethnic and national identities have held, and continue to exercise a hold, on social order in this region, if not elsewhere. 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 of the use of *etnos* categories within the Soviet/Russian academy, the government, and finally throughout civil society.

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the development of *etnos* thinking from the end of the nineteenth century, through its various incarnations in the Soviet period, to the present day.¹ A difficult and to some degree clumsy part of this story has been the uneven valences of the *etnos* term itself. Aside from the fact that *etnos* was always the defining prefix in words like *ètnografia*, there were periods of time when the use of the substantive term was discouraged, if not banned outright. Unlike other investigators, such as the cultural historian Han Vermeulen (2015; 1995), we do not place primacy on the prefix itself. Instead, we locate *etnos* thinking in the contexts where expert observers attribute to themselves the ability to discern long-term yet flexible biosocial identities within the matrix of everyday life. In certain periods of time, most significantly in the late nineteenth century, and during the Stalinist academy, the *etnos* term was completely absent — but *etnos* thinking was tangible in the way that terms like *narodnost* (nationality) or *narod* (people) were used. As outlined in the introduction, we concur that Iulian Bromleĭ led a “minor revolution” in reintroducing the term in the late Soviet period. 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.

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” (Hirsch 2005: 35–36). 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. We argue that talk about nations and about *etnoses* are often two sides of the same coin — where one face is an unrooted scientific discourse while the other is its complement of engaged ethnographic action in building or rebuilding ethnic communities.

Etnos thinking, therefore, is obvious when it is overtly discussed, as in Bromleĭ’s multiple monographs in the 1970s and 1980s. It is also implicit in the way that expert ethnographers in the late 1880s and the early Soviet period assumed the existence of discrete nations and

1 An earlier draft of this chapter was published in *Ab Imperio* 19 (1) 2018 as “Life Histories of the *Etnos* Concept in Eurasia”.

nationalities. However, there are very few pithy definitions of the term. In the introduction to this volume we specified five key qualities of *etnos* thinking that one can extract from a variety of different definitions of the term, and here we provide a map of how *etnos* thinking has developed in the Russian academy. The structure of this chapter is therefore formally chronological, conveying, perhaps, a misleading impression that *etnos* thinking unfolded logically and inevitably within several Eurasian states. However, our intention here is simply to provide a set of guideposts to the development of Eurasian anthropology. In the sections that follow, which on the whole focus on the biographies of particular individuals and the life histories of their concepts, we hope to convey the contingency of the development of this sometimes controversial concept.

What's in a Term?: The *Etnos* Term and the Institutionalization of Ethnography in Russia

Anthropology has had a complicated and entangled history, which is evident in the variety of terms by which different regional traditions describe the ways that they study peoples, cultures, and societies. 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 the French and Scottish Enlightenments containing within it a strong interest in environmental determinism (Stocking 1992: 347). Eurasian anthropological traditions draw generally on the same trinity for inspiration.

The reasons for this shared history are understandable. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many local scholars in St Petersburg, Moscow, Tōkyō, and Běijīng often received their training in one of the capitals of early anthropological thinking within western Europe or North America. Nevertheless, local idioms of identity also pull and reshape this common foundation in different ways. One of the most distinctive qualities of Eurasian anthropological thinking is that many competing strands of thought are bound into a single compact term. For example, as mentioned in the introduction, a single

character — *mínzú* — is said to fuse together European notions of “race”, *ethnie* and nation (Weiner 1997). In Russia, the Greek-inflected neologism *ethnos* is commonly said to represent a *sovokupnost'* (a single totality of many parts). In this section we will explore how different biological, geographical, and humanitarian arguments came to be bound together into a single toolkit represented by one word. This word, in turn, structured the way that ethnographic description was incorporated into Russian universities and museums, and in so doing created several generations of academics skilled in employing it.

The institutionalization of Russian ethnography is commonly associated with the establishment of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGO) in 1845, which at its very outset included a subdivision of ethnography (Knight 1995: 8; Semënov 1896: 37–40; Raïkov 1961: 343–48). Imperial Russian practice did not diverge substantially from that in Europe at the time, with the Société Ethnologique being founded in Paris in 1839, and the Ethnological Society being established in London in 1842 (Vermeulen 1995: 39–40). Justin Stagl (1995) argues that, up until that time, travellers and other reporters demonstrated a “curiosity” about cultural difference without establishing a coherent methodology for documenting it. Vermeulen (2015; 2008), in his masterly overviews of the history of Eurasian anthropologies, links the ethnographic intuition to the very first published appearances of what he calls “ethnos-terms” (or, perhaps more accurately, ethnos prefixes) within the words *ethnologie*, *ethnologia*, and *ethnographie* between 1770 and 1780. A key actor in this late eighteenth-century movement was August Ludwig Schlözer (1735–1809), whose work was influenced by the descriptive “folk typologies” of Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783), which built heavily on reports from Russia, Siberia and Mongolia.

It is our contention that with the founding of the Ethnographic Division of the IRGO in 1845, Russian ethnographic practice took a slightly different trajectory than the other European societies. Struggling to place itself within the visions of two influential individuals, and thereby define itself as the study of Slavic peoples, or non-Slavic peoples, Russian ethnographers gradually adopted what we describe as a biosocial quality, which distinguished their work from the then-developing European and North American traditions. To be clear, we do not read into this biosocial turn a conviction that biophysically-defined

racess of people were forever propelled (or limited) by their mental capacity, or physical stamina. Instead, we argue that several generations of scholars distilled an *etnos* concept that mixed together biophysical and humanitarian arguments to create a vision of human communities that were enduring, internally consistent, and yet open to change.

Much as Stocking (1971) tells the story of the founding of the Royal Anthropological Society as the struggle between two men, the Ethnographical Division of the IRGO also structured its work around two individuals (Knight 1995; Tokarev 1966): the anatomist and embryologist Karl Ernst von Baer (1792–1876) and the philosopher Nikolai I. Nadezhdin (1804–1856). Following Nathaniel Knight, we will argue that their approaches can be distinguished by their “imperial” and “nationalistic” interests.

Von Baer’s imperialistic vision can be read in his original application to the emperor to establish an ethnographic section within the IRGO. His appeal emphasized the importance of “preserving” historical information, of discovering “ethnographic laws”, and of updating imperial knowledge of all of the peoples inhabiting this vast continental empire (Knight 1995: 22). Von Baer’s vision of ethnography was inspired by the need to link race and geography to human diversity, and this naturalistic vision steadily gathered adherents. As early as 1852, Timofei I. Granovskii (1813–1855) — a historian known as the “leader of the Westernizers” — argued the need to make an alliance between history and the natural sciences in order to specify the effect of geography on the human form (Levandovskii 1989: 211–12). Meanwhile the most prominent Russian historian of the mid-nineteenth century, Sergei M. Solov’ev (1820–1879), embraced the geographical determinism of German geographer Carl Ritter (1779–1859) and the positivistic “organismic metaphor”, i.e. a view of societies as “biological organisms” (Bassin 1993).

Granovskii and Solov’ev were among the first Russian scholars inspired by naturalistic approaches to history and society, an enthusiasm that was connected to the growing popularity of the concept of race. By the 1860s, famous Russian historians and thinkers, such as Ivan S. Aksakov (1823–1886), Nikolai I. Kareev (1850–1931), and many others, experimented with the concept, although using it rather unsystematically to denote “linguistic races”, tribes and “breeds” of people. Vera Tol’fs

argues that even Nadezhdin mentioned the importance of studying the physical characteristics of human “breeds”, although she notes that the popularity of the concept increased only in the 1880–1890s (Kholl 2012; Tol’fs 2012).

Nadezhdin is credited with developing the first published research programme to document Eastern Slavic/Russian identity (Nadezhdin 1847). He was strongly influenced by the German romantic historians Johann Herder and Friedrich Schelling as he strove to define “a unique and immutable essence which revealed itself first and foremost in the creative expression of the common folk” (Knight 1998: 120). His work centred around the category *narodnost’* — a word introduced into Russian at the beginning of the nineteenth century to translate the French term *nationalité* (Miller 2015). In Nadezhdin’s usage, however, the term came to mean the qualities of what make up the Russian people “a totality” (*sovokupnost’*) of “what makes a Russian Russian” (Knight 1998: 118).

This term eventually took on a rich set of meanings that extended well beyond its original usage. At the height of its influence in the mid-nineteenth century, *narodnost’* became incorporated as one of the three central pillars that defined autocracy — a gloss often described as “official nationality” (Riasanovsky 1959; Zorin 2004). Nadezhdin and his colleagues searched for national essences broadly in the oral traditions, folklore, and songs of Russian peasants. The victory of the “Russian faction” at the IRGO inspired local citizen-scientists to collect vast amounts of material on local lifeways and folklore through responding to questionnaires. The search for *narodnost’* at the IRGO resulted in such publications as Vladimir Dal’s *Dictionary of the Great Russian Language* and Aleksandr N. Afanas’ev’s collection of Russian folktales, which were fundamental for the Russian nation-building project (Tokarev 1966: 233–42).

The fault lines that initially ran through the institutionalization of ethnography within the IRGO are to some extent familiar to historians of western European anthropology. The division of effort between the study of one’s own nation and the traditions of foreigners duplicates the German-language division between *Volkskunde* and *Völkernkunde* (Fischer 1970; Vermeulen 2015; Stagl 1998). However, unlike in western Europe, these branches of ethnography did not sit as two solitudes. As Knight

points out, von Baer's wide-ranging, survey-generated positivism was an artefact of the imperial imagination of Russian ethnography:

[...] the Russia [von Baer] had in mind was a vast and largely unexplored territory populated by a multitude of diverse nationalities some of whom were in danger of disappearing off the face of the earth. [...] He viewed it as the representative of general European civilization bringing 'enlightenment' to the primitive peoples under its domain. Ethnography, Baer suggested, could play an important role in ameliorating [...] destructive processes. By studying the natural processes of development at work among primitive peoples, scientists could determine the proper level of outside intervention [...] (Knight 1995: 90–91).

Thus, from the outset, scientific, imperial ethnography had an applied edge that would only become accentuated in Soviet times. The hierarchical and applied ethnography of von Baer falls "within the boundaries of Western European ethnology" with its interest in developing so-called savage peoples (Knight 1995: 99).

Similarly, the "nationalist" and philological approach of Nadezhdin and his followers can be understood to be inward looking only at first glance. It must be remembered that Nadezhdin also proposed that ethnographers study a wide variety of "Russians", including Slavic peoples whom we today divide off as separate nations such as Belorussians and Malorussians (Ukrainians). He also stressed the importance of studying Russians beyond the Russian Empire in Galicia and Hungary (Nadezhdin 1847). In so doing, his nationalist project shaded into a transnational, imperial project. As Steven Seegel argues:

Essentially, the society was an intelligence-gathering colonial institution and "think tank" for Russian empire building. Under the auspices of tsarist rule through the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Russian state scientists such as Pyotr Keppen and Pyotr Semyonov adopted German geographic and ethnographic models and found professional positions as academic and bureaucratic proponents of state modernization and empire building (Seegel 2012: 19).

One of the key functions of the IRGO was producing maps and cartographic knowledge of the borderlands and peripheries of the empire. The western border was especially important because of the need to legitimate the European periphery as an inseparable part of the imperial state and to neutralize the possibility of Polish and Malorussian

demands for autonomy. The founding member of the IRGO, Pëtr Keppen, produced an Ethnographic Map of European Russia (1851) that implemented Germanic ideals of cultural nationalism. The map united Malorussians, Belarusians, and Russians by linguistic kinship and initiated a long series of maps that classified borderland identities according to languages, “tribes”, and confessions. Thus, Russian imperial science actively opened the gates to the “floods of ethnographic maps, in which nationalities were postulated to hold a delicate imperial balance or make national-territorial claims by language, confession, culture, and history itself” (Seegel 2012: 134).

Despite these differences in constituency, and in methodology, both imperial and nationalist ethnologists each argued that ethnography should be much more closely integrated with the state than would have been the case in Europe or the Americas. This search for an imperial toolkit — still without a unifying term — would strongly influence the flavour of Russian ethnography. Arguably, it was the initial “organicistic” curiosity of Russian ethnographic science that opened an intellectual space where biologists, geographers, and linguists could agree. The “races” of Granovskii, Solov’ev, and arguably von Baer (Knight 2017) were never the stiff biophysical containers of early twentieth-century racism, but instead were complex and coherent assemblages of perception, geographical condition and physical possibilities. Knight describes this constellation as a “particularistic strain within the Russian human sciences [that arose] out of a cluster of interrelated postulates concerning the sources of human diversity and the place of humanity in relation to the natural world” (Knight 2017: 115).

The next stage in the distillation of this concept came through the institutionalization of the discipline within Russian universities and museums. The government University Charter of 1884 included provision for “geography and ethnography”. At the beginning, this dual-discipline sat within either the Faculty of History or the Faculty of Philology — somewhat reflecting the earlier ambivalent debates within the IRGO. In 1888, however, at the request of Moscow University, ethnography was reframed as a natural science within the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics (Alekseeva 1983). A key figure in this new development was the highly influential polymath scientist Dmitrii N. Anuchin (1843–1923), who taught ethnography alongside

geography and physical anthropology at Moscow University. He wrote an important programme defining anthropology (as opposed to ethnography) as a broad discipline that incorporated ethnology among a range of topics, including the comparative anatomical and psychological study of human types, anthropogenesis, and an account of diversity (Anuchin 1889; Alymov 2004: 18–20). Anuchin's vision was reinforced in St Petersburg through the work of its first lecturer in geography and anthropology, Édouard H. Petri (1854–1899). Petri, whose life and work is described in more detail in chapter 3 of this volume, believed in a strong link between physiognomy and ethnography.

Nikolai N. Kharuzin (1865–1900) provided an important counterbalance to the dominance of the naturalist outlook within the universities. Lecturing both at Moscow University and the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages, he distinguished ethnography as a science that “studies the way-of-life (*byt*) of tribes and peoples and strives to ascertain the laws of the development of humanity on the lowest stages of culture” (Kharuzin 1901: 37). He was a widely experienced fieldworker publishing ethnographic studies on Sámis (*Lopari*) and the Finno-Ugric peoples of Siberia. Kharuzin's approach staked out a middle ground between the nationalist focus on Slavic peoples and a more general interest in non-Russian peoples. This was reflected in the way that he packaged his ideas using the *etnos* term, written out using Greek letters, which he explained should be “understood not as a people in general, but in the sense of uncivilized, primitive nationalities, who constituted the subject of ethnography” (Ibid: 27). After his untimely death at the age of thirty-four, his lecture course at Moscow University was published by his sister and students in a four-volume set (Kerimova 2011: 143–315).

It is significant that those scholars who were inspired by Nadezhdin's humanist investigation of national spirit also organized within museums. Of particular importance was Lev A. Shternberg (1861–1927), based in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St Petersburg, who was enthusiastic about the “humanistic” potential of ethnography, which he considered “the best teacher of civic consciousness” (Kan 2009: 177–80). As was the fashion of the time, he set out his vision in a long and heavily referenced encyclopaedia article (Shternberg 1904). This article, aside from decrying the terminological “chaos” caused by the

continual renaming of ethnographic research across Europe, also made a strong case for a division of labour between physical anthropologists, archaeologists, and ethnographers. The latter he distinguished by their methods, using a rather modern description of what we would today call participant observation combined with what could be described as a unique interest in the “cultural production” (*dukhovnoe tvorchestvo*) of primitive peoples. It is an interesting footnote that Shternberg, following Kharuzin, also cited the Greek language roots of ethnography in his 1904 encyclopaedia article; however unlike Kharuzin, he put the emphasis on the descriptive (*-graphiā*) portion of this key term.

It is important to mention that the naturalists fought their corner within the museum sector as well. Nikolaï M. Mogil'anskii (1871–1933), who is often cited as the first to distinguish *ethnos* as a standard object of scientific research, raised his objections to the humanist programme while working as curator in the Russian Museum. In a lecture read out at a meeting of the Anthropological Society of St Petersburg University in 1902 (published later in 1908), he reviewed Kharuzin's posthumous volume *Ėtnografiā* with an eye to defining ethnography as a distinct science subsumed within (physical) anthropology. He saw ethnography as documenting the intellectual and spiritual achievements of distinct races and peoples, which were adapted to a defined geographical space (Mogil'anskii 1908: 12). Later, as he became the head of ethnography at the museum, he reworked his earlier review into a broad outline of concepts of ethnology. Here we have an early formulation of the now ubiquitous definition of *ethnos* (spelled with Greek letters [ἔθνος]) as

[...] a group of individuals united together as a single whole [*odno tseloe*] by [...] common physical (anthropological) characteristics; a common historical fate, and finally a common language. These are the foundations upon which, in turn, [an *ethnos*] can build a common worldview [and] folk-psychology — in short, an entire spiritual culture (Mogil'anskii 1916: 11).

A particularly strong statement in the title of this article distinguishes *ethnos* as the “object” of ethnography. Given Mogil'anskii'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.

After 1916, the five core elements of Mogil'anskii's diffuse, prosaic definition (a single collective identity; a physical foundation; a common language; a common set of traditions or destiny; and a common worldview) would appear in successive descriptions of Russian and Eurasian *etnos* theory for the next 100 years. In particular, the pamphlets and book-length monograph published by Sergei Shirokogoroff in China and the Russian Far East (described in more detail in chapter 5) would be built around these same five elements (Shirokogorov 1922a, 1923).

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 N. Ignatiev (1870–1945), initiated a fresh debate on the institutionalization of ethnography with his unsuccessful attempt to standardize university education (Dmitriev 2010). A revealing set of memoranda in the Archive of the Russian Geographical Society (NA RGO 109-1-15) gives an insight into the range of the debate. Elements of this debate can also be tracked in a published summary of a meeting of the Society (*Zhurnal zasedaniia* 1916).

Shternberg, representing the humanists, 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 (Kan 2009: 232–37). As Sergei Kan writes in his detailed biography of Shternberg, the war years were the period when Shternberg was able to articulate his long-standing ideas publicly. Thus, 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 (NA RGO 109-1-15: 3).

It was not the first time that Shternberg called for an improvement in the organization of Russian ethnography. The same problem had

been discussed during the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Natural Scientists, held in Moscow from December 1909 until January 1910. In his presentation at the Section of Geography, Ethnography, and Anthropology, Shternberg suggested establishing a centralised ethnographic bureau and chairs of ethnography in historical-philological divisions of major universities. Even as he presented his proposals at that meeting, other members of the Ethnographic Division of the IRGO challenged his ideas. As Kan summarizes the results of the discussions, “there was no agreement on the question of which department — a scientific or a humanistic one — such *kafedras* should be affiliated with, nor was there much consensus on their curriculum” (Kan 2009: 185).

The disagreement was resumed in 1915–1916. Our erstwhile inventor of *etnos* theory, Mogilʹanskii, countered Shternberg’s claim and defended the role of the naturalism in ethnography:

A naturalist should in no way refuse to study the everyday life [*byt*] [of people]. He cannot limit his task to the morphology of the brain. He must trace its functions to their ends (psycho-physiology) and to their final results be they articulate speech, [or] the experience of the sacred [*kult*] stemming from a worldview and religious consciousness. [He must study] clothing as a material object and as the final result of complex intellectual and physical labour (NA RGO 109-1-15: 11).

In Mogilʹanskii’s view, every ethnographer needs a solid training in the natural sciences, including training in morphology, physiology, and psychophysiology, as well as geodynamics, geomorphology and paleontology (NA RGO 109-1-15: 12).

Mogilʹanskii’s view was buttressed by the elderly statesman of physical anthropology and ethnography in St Petersburg, Fëdor Volkov (Vovk), whose work is discussed in detail in chapter 3. 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” (NA RGO 109-1-15: 5). He continued to make sarcastic remarks about the mistakes that historians make when they try to do archaeological and ethnographic research by applying an “elastic” concept of the history of culture that included “not only ethnography, but astronomy, canonical law, veterinary and what not” (Ibid: 8). In their arguments both Volkov and Mogilʹanskii relied on the model of the Société d’anthropologie de

Paris, established by Paul Broca in 1859. Broca's "general anthropology", which he defined as "the biology of human species", was divided into six subfields, which included demography, ethnology, and linguistic anthropology, and thus "subsumed the cultural study of man within the physical study of man" (Vermeulen 2015: 7–8; Conklin 2013).

This debate led to no conclusive result. The 1917 revolution shifted the agenda, if not the opponents. Volkov and Mogil'anskii, who strictly opposed the Bolsheviks, moved to Kiev in 1918. Volkov died the same year. Mogil'anskii soon found himself as an émigré in Paris. 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 the Leningrad school of ethnography (Gagen-Torn 1971; Ratner-Shternberg 1935). Although at first glance it would seem that the evolutionist and humanist view of the discipline prevailed over the naturalists, it should be remembered that Volkov's students, Sergei Rudenko, David Zolotar'ev (1885–1935), and arguably Sergei Shirokogoroff, occupied prominent positions in Russian anthropology and ethnography until the late 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 1840–1920 there was an ongoing debate as to the extent to which ethnographers should document little-known, non-industrial societies, and the extent to which they should uncover the hidden psychological spirit of their own people. Scholars also diverged on the extent to which physiognomy and physical geography could be credited in the production of culture. However, perhaps in a manner that diverged from the early ethnographic debates in western Europe and in the Americas, early Russian ethnographers produced programmes 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 Mogil'anskii had already baptised

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 Biosocial Science in Russia

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was marked disagreement among Russian scholars about the extent to which geography and biology should be seen to structure the science of man. However, there was a remarkable agreement that ethnographers should study *etnoses*, and that therefore *etnoses* were to some extent tangible units. There remained considerable variety over the types of data that practitioners collected. Volkov and his students placed their energy on documenting anthropological types, but as chapter 3 shows, they felt that linguistic and cultural data gave important clues as to how physical forms changed. Shternberg and his students placed their emphasis on documenting language and material culture, but they felt that cultural patterns were grounded in organic national psychologies that could be linked to specific regions. There was broad agreement that social agency was packaged biologically.

What we identify as a biosocial synthesis is not simply a compromise between warring schools, but instead reflects a particular epistemic constellation in Russia at this time that asserted that advances in biology and the life sciences could promote social and spiritual progress. As Mark B. Adams (1990) has argued, the period of 1900–1930 in Russia was characterized by “an almost unparalleled profusion of new interdisciplinary theories and fields”, including Vladimir I. Vernadskii’s “biogeochemistry”, Pëtr P. Lasarev’s “biological physics”, Nikolaï I. Vavilov’s “science of selection”, and even a proposal for the creation of a “plant sociology” (Adams 1990: 158). Daniel Beer (2008), who studied the development of Russian psychiatry and life sciences from 1880–1930, describes this development as follows:

Building on the traditional association between the body and society in Christianity, the life sciences were particularly well equipped to offer indirect commentaries on the nature of Russia’s social relations and its evolution as a state. The two paradigms — biological and social — merged, and the object of medical science and the object of social science were defined in the course of mutual projection (Beer 2008: 29).

Beer also shows that in fin-de-siècle Russia the biosocial alliance also led to theories of degeneration, criminal anthropology, and crowd psychology. Neo-Lamarckian theories of heredity flourished instead of Darwinian analyses of struggles for existence (Graham 2016). Anthropology was among the disciplines that found itself right at the epicentre of this movement.

The debates surrounding the foundation of the Russian Anthropological Society of St Petersburg University in 1888 nicely illustrate this dialogue. One of the society's first meetings was devoted to the discussion of Pëtr F. Lesgaft's presentation "On the Methods of Anthropological Research". He criticized the inaccuracy and fruitlessness of craniological and other anthropological measurements and offered instead a complex social model wherein the physical environment and a child's upbringing created certain "character types" (Russkoe Antropologicheskoe Obshchestvo 1889: 13). Although this project was criticized by Anuchin, and ultimately abandoned, the themes of "degeneration" and "criminal types" continued to be discussed during the early years of the society's existence.

These debates were carried out as part of the process of the institutionalization of physical anthropology — perhaps the most biological of the "biosocial" sciences. The first professional Russian physical anthropologists like Anuchin, Anatolii P. Bogdanov, and Petri made their careers within learned societies (such as Moscow's Society for Enthusiasts (*lūbiteli*) of Natural Sciences, Anthropology, and Ethnography, established in 1863) and in universities (the first chair of anthropology was established in Moscow in 1879). In her recent cultural history of Russian physical anthropology, Marina Mogilner defines this science as a "hybrid field of knowledge that exemplified the highest ambitions of modern natural and social sciences to uncover objective laws governing both nature and societal organisms and to influence both" (Mogilner 2013: 3).

Mogilner's study suggests an ambiguous position of race and race science in the Russian Empire. On the one hand, race was more widespread as a category than has been observed by the research paradigm that stressed the empire's uniqueness or backwardness. On the other hand, "this empire was reluctant to offer its anthropologists unambiguous political support and to make physical anthropology an official science

of imperialism” (Mogilner 2013: 5). Russian physical anthropologists, meanwhile, demonstrated a variety of approaches to conceptualizing race. Mogilner distinguishes the dominant liberal approach, with its central category of mixed racial type and clear distinction between race and culture (led by Anuchin, the dean of Russian anthropology); the anthropology of the Russian imperial nationalism of Ivan A. Sikorskii (1842–1919), who tried to equate the “Russian race” and nation; and the anthropology of various non-Russian national projects, which tended to connect a “physical type” to a “nation”, exemplified, among others, by Volkov’s anthropology of Ukrainians (Mogilner 2013: 202).

Another source of biosocial ideas lay in ethnography’s close alliance with geography. As outlined above, ethnography was often combined with geography within a single department — and the section was distinguished within the IRGO. The German geographer and anthropologist Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) was widely read and appreciated in turn-of-the-century Russia. Ratzel was an honorary member of the Russian Anthropological Society and corresponded with Russian anthropologists through his student Bruno Adler (1874–1942). One of Ratzel’s most notorious concepts, which informed *etnos* thinking, was that of the *lebensraum* (living space), which he applied equally to plants, animals, and peoples (*Volker*). As the historian of German science Woodruff D. Smith (1980: 54) puts it: “the Lebensraum concept, [...] was the idea that, like a plant, a *Volk* had to grow and expand its *Lebensraum* or die”. As outlined in chapter 5, the territorial quality of cultural adaptation was a motif that attracted many *etnos* pioneers such as Sergei Shirokogoroff.

Another powerful source of geographical thinking came from several early proto-Eurasianist thinkers. Slavophile philosophers like Nikolai ĪA. Danilevskii (1822–1885) and Vladimir Lamanskii (1833–1914) fought with modernizers who felt that Russia should adopt European institutions. Instead, they argued that culturally, and racially, Russia gained its social and political strength from its deep roots in the unbroken continental landmass of Asia flowing into Europe and thereby held a separate destiny (Bassin 2003). The anthropological study of Siberian peoples was an important part of their argument (Bassin 1991). The historian and philologist Lamanskii was an especially important actor in this movement, since he served as the head of the Ethnographic

Division of the IRGO and edited its flagship ethnographic journal *Zhivaiâ starina*. Among other things he was also active in stabilising the regional classification of the Russian Empire for the authoritative ethnographic expositions in the Russian Museum (Cvetkovski 2014).

The most ardent proponent of Ratzel's anthropogeography was prominent statistician and geographer Veniamin Semënov-Tiān'-Shanskiĭ (1870–1942). In a widely cited paper entitled "The Power of Russia's Territorial Possessions" he mapped out a programme for documenting all botanical, zoological and social phenomena (Semënov-Tiān'-Shanskiĭ 1915). Perhaps sensing the power and evocativeness of Mogilānskiĭ's distillation of the *etnos* concept, he presented a detailed criticism of Mogilānskiĭ's published paper "The Object and Tasks of Ethnography", arguing that the ethnographic division of the IRGO should be renamed the Anthropogeographical Division (*Zhurnal zasedaniâ* 1916: 4).

Etnos and Soviet Marxism

There can be no clean break between the imperial-era reflections on biosocial science and Soviet social theory. Marxist and Proudhon-influenced socialist thinking was a strong feature of debates within intellectual circles throughout the turn of the century. Of particular interest — especially in Soviet-era histories of science — was the way in which Marx and Engels themselves used ethnography from the Russian Empire to think through examples of "primitive communism". In terms of this volume, it is interesting that these reflections were drawn from the very same regions that inspired *etnos* theorists — from descriptions of the Russian peasant commune (*mir*) (Watters 1968; Mironov 1985) or from Shternberg's writing on the Nivkh fishing and hunting society from the far east of Siberia (Grant 1999). A key concern of both the naturalist and philological strains within imperial ethnography was to understand 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 Marxist-Leninism.

The Bolshevik faction within the first post-revolutionary state Duma (parliament) was primarily focussed on taking state power in order to better distribute land and capital for the benefit of the peasants and

the then small urban proletariat in cities. Their thinking was strategic, and they invested a great deal of effort in trying to understand how different nations within the empire could be co-opted into supporting the revolution. Their key term was not *ethnos* but nation (*natsiia*).

The Russian Bolshevik notion of the nation was heavily influenced by European debates, and defined itself in opposition to the ideas of Austrian political thinkers Otto Bauer (1881–1938) and Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) in particular. 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 (Bottomore and Goode 1978). Their argument based itself around an understanding of the nation that stressed the “personality principle”, wherein the nation is constituted “not as a territorial corporation, but as an association of persons” (Bauer 2000 [1907]: 281). The Bolshevik’s objection to this voluntaristic vision was sketched out in Iosif Stalin’s famous pamphlet “Marxism and the National Question” (Stalin 1946 [1913]). 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, Stalin re-employed many of the key ideas of the imperial biosocial compromise — an awareness of a common language, culture, and psychological character — as well as a passing reference to the physiognomy of the nation. A little-noticed but significant turn of phrase was Stalin’s reference to a type of “stable collectivity” (*obshchnost’*) (literally “the quality of being the same”). For almost sixty years *obshchnost’* would come to serve as a circumlocutory expression for all ethnic qualities which were persistent but could never really be called by their proper name. To a great extent, *ethnos* thinking found a refuge for itself within this term for the many decades at the start of the Soviet period when it was officially discouraged.

It is important to remember that Stalin’s 1913 intervention at first was just one minor voice in a symphony of discussion about ethnic identity. Mogil’anskii first published his *ethnos* concept in 1908 (Mogil’anskii 1908) (see chapter 3). 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 (Shirokogorov 1922a, 1922b) (see chapter 6). However, by the late 1920s, as the Soviet state achieved hegemony, there was a movement to standardize thinking about the nation although even then there was more than one Marxist position. “Mechanists”, like the naturalists before them, believed that the natural sciences can explain all social and geophysical phenomena. The “Bolshevisers” favoured the philosophical conviction that science should not measure nature but change it — perhaps staking out a position that was much more radical than that of the philological faction in imperial times (Bakhurst 1991: 28–47).

This relative pluralism ended with what Stalin himself labelled “the great break” (*velikiĭ perelom*) in an article in 1929 (Joravsky 1960). 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 being linked to biological processes. As Adams has observed, this was epitomised by 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” (Adams 1990: 184). The sudden ideological turn of the late 1920s and early 1930s led 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 (Alymov 2014; Slezkine 1991; Solovei 2001).

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 (*soveshchanie*) of Ethnographers of Leningrad and Moscow (held in Leningrad in April 1929) (K[oshkin] and M[atorin] 1929; Arzūtov, Alymov and Anderson 2014), and the All-Russian Archaeological-Ethnographic Colloquium (held in Leningrad in May 1932) (Rezolfūsiĭa 1932). The resolutions of the first meeting signalled a determination to build a materialist Marxist ethnography on the basis of classical evolutionism and the notion of social-economic formations. The conclusion of the second meeting proclaimed that

ethnography and archaeology could no longer exist as independent disciplines and subsumed both within the discipline of history — or to be more specific, the Marxist-Leninist study of the succession of socio-economic stages. The need to subsume ethnography under history was stated in particularly militant terms:

[The proposal] that there exists a special “Marxist” ethnography is not only theoretically unjustified, but is deeply harmful, disorientating, and uses a leftist expression to cover up its rightist essence — that it is a type of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois adaptability and eclecticism (Rezoliūsiā 1932: 13).

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

Each of these meetings sent a chill over biosocial research in the Soviet Union, and in particular, the overt use of the term *ethnos*, which came to be associated with émigré and presumed anti-Soviet intellectuals. By this time both Mogilānskiĭ and Shirokogoroff had fled the Soviet Union and could be easily classified as “bourgeois” scholars. An Koshkin, a Tungus linguist and ethnographer, specifically singled out Shirokogoroff’s book on *ethnos* during the Leningrad symposium as “antischolarly” (Arzūtov, Alymov, and Anderson 2014: 411). The young Sergei Tolstov, who would later head the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences, declared that:

It is unfortunate that there is a tendency to associate with an *ethnos* some sort of special meaning or to define ethnography as the science of the *ethnos*. This is [a] harmful tendency and one we should fight. “Ethnos” as a classless — or perhaps un-classlike (*vneklassovoe*) — formation is exactly what could serve as a banner [uniting] bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologists (Arzūtov, Alymov, and Anderson 2014: 142).

Nevertheless, even within these authoritative settings the transcripts show that others contradicted Tolstov and promoted opposing views. Some were recorded as stating that *ethnos* and “ethnic culture” could be usefully confined to a particular historical stage of development, and that they therefore still remained the proper subject of ethnographers (Arzūtov, Alymov, and Anderson 2014: 149, 196, 199).

These sharp methodological strictures 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 against racist “anthroposociology” and, in particular, against fascist theories that ignored the social essence of humans by transferring “biological laws to human society” (Za sovetSKU 1932: 2–3). A significant marker of the restructuring of physical anthropology came in an article in the same issue by Arkadiĭ I. ĖArkho (1903–1935) who placed considerable distance between Soviet physical anthropologists and foreign racialists and eugenicists. Here, he explained that the development of the human form followed a different path than that of animals, wherein the importance of biological factors and “racial instincts” became muted and replaced by the influence of social formations (ĖArkho 1932: 11–14).

Despite these proscriptions, *etnos* thinking incubated itself within applied studies of “stable collectivities”. There are several clear examples of these holistic studies. During this period, work began on a four-volume encyclopaedia sketching out the qualities of the component peoples of the Soviet Union (Struve 1938; Anderson and Arzyutov 2016). In the surviving drafts of the unpublished volume there was a heavy emphasis on durable cultural traits that spilled over from one historical stage to another. There were also numerous single-author ethnographies published at this time on Siberian ethnography, folklore, and material culture — many of which are still respected today (Popov 1937; Okladnikov 1937; Vasilevich 1936; Vasil’ev 1936; Anisimov 1936; Vasilevich 1934; Terlefskiĭ 1934; Meshchaninov 1934; Dolgikh 1934). The focus of these works was on defining the qualities of smaller, “less-developed” peoples with an eye to improving their lives. The newly appointed director of the Institute of Ethnography, Vasilĭ V. Struve (1889–1965), justified the applied work on specific peoples using Stalin’s dictum that research on the “tribe” was work on “an ethnographic category”, while work on the nation was an historical one (Struve 1939: 5). Struve felt that ethnographers should document not only primitive rituals but also the process of transformation of peoples into socialist nationalities (Struve 1939: 8). Ethnographic work thereby

went hand-in-hand with the crafting of new territorial divisions that accentuated national differences between peoples (Terlefskiĭ 1930). Mark Bassin, in his survey of Eurasianism and biopolitics, attributes “equivocal essentialism” to the Stalinist thinking on identity (Bassin 2016: 146ff). He notes that though, in principle, Stalin insisted that human nature (as physical nature) was infinitely malleable, the centralized rural developmental initiatives were nested within regional political and territorial units defined by one “leading” nationality. The pragmatic and applied reality of wielding state power opened a space where biosocial thought could continue — even if it could not name itself as such.

The outbreak of World War II provided a further impetus to the development of an applied ethnography that rooted coherent groups of people in time and place. In 1942 Moscow-based geographers and ethnographers received an order from the General Headquarters of the Red Army to prepare maps of all of the nationalities of the USSR — as well as maps of nationalities living within Germany and its occupied territories. Following this directive, 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 South-Eastern 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 became once again a top priority, and older models of biosocial continuity were dusted off and re-launched to aid in the war effort.

One of the key actors of this new movement was Pavel I. Kushner (Knyshev) (1889–1968). In March 1944, he became head of the Department of Ethnic Statistics and Cartography at the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow. He defended his dissertation entitled *The Western Part of the Lithuanian Ethnographic Territory* in 1945 and published parts of his doctoral work, as well as his wartime work, in an influential book entitled *Ethnic Territories and Ethnic Borders* (Kushner [Knyshev] 1951). Significantly, Kushner reintroduced the term *etnos* into post-war

Soviet ethnography, although in his reintroduction he acknowledged both history and geography — and ignored physical form. In his view, “ethnic phenomena”:

distinguish the everyday life [*byt*] of one people from another. The set of such special markers include differences in language, material culture, customs, beliefs, etc. The sum-total [*sovokupnost'*] of such specific differences in everyday lives of peoples, preconditioned by the history of those peoples, and the effect of the geographical environment upon them is called “etnos” (Ibid: 6).

In his book he placed great stress on the theme of stable and long-term continuities. He saw cultural judgements about beauty, and “proper form” as markers of ethnic traditions which had been “formed over centuries” (Kushner [Knyshev] 1949: 7).

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 “all-sided assistance” by the socialist state it was felt that these people could “skip” all historical stages of development and progress directly to communism. This programme, which was standardized by Mikhail A. Sergeev (1888–1965) as the “non-capitalist path to socialism” (Sergeev 1955), was significant since it became a model for international developmental assistance in Africa and southeast Asia (Graf 1987; Thomas 1978). Within the conditions of the Cold War, the Soviet state felt compelled to show that it could modernize rural societies more efficiently than the United States. The first step to modernization was often the standardization and 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 (Mullaney 2010).

These territorial and political involutions, apart from playing on Cold War anxieties, also built upon the “ethnogenetic turn” of Soviet ethnography (Anderson and Arzyutov 2016). Perhaps influenced by their forced cohabitation with historians, ethnographers became interested in tracing the path by which modern nations were formed (Shnirel'man 1993). Ethnogenetic theorists squared their interest in long-term, seemingly ahistorical stability with Marxist-Leninist thought by

treating the term *ethnos* as a generic category for Stalin's triad of the tribe, nationality, and nation. For example, an early theoretical work of this time argued that even though *ethnos* should be the main subject matter of ethnography, "there are no special 'ethnoses' as eternal unchanging categories, which are so dear to bourgeois science" (Tokarev and Cheboksarov 1951: 12).

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 represented the consensus view of groups of scholars and were not used to present minority opinions or debates. However, there was room for non-standardized terms to be discussed verbally during seminars or privately in the corridors between official meetings. For example, the ethnographer Vladimir V. Pimenov (1930–2012) recalls that he was introduced to the work of Shirokogoroff and the concepts of *ethnos* during a course of lectures on China by Nikolaï N. Cheboksarov (1907–1980) at Moscow State University in 1952–1953. Pimenov directly cites the cautious and hushed manner that Cheboksarov spoke about the concept (Pimenov 2015: 115). Our own interviews with elderly and retired ethnographers in the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology confirm 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. In 1955, the Department of Historical Sciences of the Academy was already debating Kushner's memo about types of ethnic communities. Sergei A. Tokarev (1899–1985), one of the most authoritative and prolific ethnographers of the Soviet period, spoke up against Kushner (Kozlov and Puchkov 1995: 225). He himself began toying with non-standard models of national identity. According to his diary, Tokarev sketched out an outline for a future paper that suggested that different vectors of kinship and language formed the foundation for identity at different stages of history (Tokarev 1964; Kozlov and Puchkov 1995: 252–63). These tentative debates in the corridors were the main point of reference for a generation of students who were to change the face of Russian ethnography.

Among those post-war students was Viktor I. Kozlov (1924–2012), who was to become one of the most important *etnos* theorists in the 1970–1980s. Having acquired some experience in cartography during the war, he became a professional cartographer in the 1950s. He finished his postgraduate studies in ethnic statistics and cartography at the Institute of Ethnography in 1956 with his dissertation “On the Settlement of the Mordovan people in the mid-19th — beginning of the 20th centuries” (Kozlov 1956). Despite this narrow title, Kozlov followed Kushner’s methodology closely, attempting to outline the continuity in Mordva’s occupation from the beginning of the second millennium to the present day. Nevertheless, Kozlov was eager to contribute somewhat heretical ideas to theoretical discussions of the day. In 1960 the party cell of the Institute of Ethnography lambasted one of his papers as revisionist and accused him of reviving Kautsky’s idea that personal national affiliations constitute the only characteristic of nationhood. It is significant that the archival transcript of the discussion notes that high-status luminaries of the Institute, such as Georgii F. Debef’s (1905–1969) and Tokarev, spoke in defence of his views (TsGAM P7349-1-13: 10–11).

Despite earlier criticisms of eclecticism in bourgeois science, late Stalinist ethnographers and physical anthropologists began to argue strongly for multidisciplinary studies of identity. Debef’s and his co-authors argued that physical anthropological measurements could ascertain degrees of homogeneity and diversity among speakers of certain linguistic groups as a sort of independent measure of ethnogenetic progress (Debef’s, Levin, and Trofimova 1952: 28–29). Although there was no citation to this effect, this idea describes very well the older methodology espoused by Volkov and by his students Rudenko and Shirokogoroff (see chapters 4 and 5). Valerii P. Alekseev (1929–1991) epitomized this resumption of a multidisciplinary approach by the new generation. He started his post-doctoral studies at the Institute of Ethnography in 1952 as a student of Debef’s, but was also influenced by other prominent anthropologists of the Institute such as Bunak, Cheborsarov, and Levin. His doctoral dissertation, defended in 1967, was published a few years later as *The Origins of the Peoples of the Eastern Europe* (Alekseev 1969). He used craniological research to balance arguments about ethnogenesis. In particular, in his review of physical anthropological research among Eastern Slavic populations since the

1930s, he noticed that the tendency to deny distinct anthropological types among these peoples was an ideological reaction to previous studies (Alekseev 1979: 49–52). He supported the idea that Great and White Russians displayed evidence of a significant Baltic and Finnish “substrate” while Ukrainians displayed a different anthropological type (Alekseev 1969: 208; Alekseeva 1973). It is interesting that his book partially “rehabilitated” Volkov’s earlier views on the distinctiveness of Ukrainians (Alekseev 1969: 164). Later in his career Alekseev invoked the idea of “ethnogeneseology” (*ëtnogenezologiiā*) as a field in itself that combines the approaches of history, anthropology, ethnography, linguistics, and geography (Alekseev 1986: 6–7).

The death of Stalin and the reconstitution of Soviet science under Nikita Khrushchëv created an unusual opportunity for *ethnos* entrepreneurs. Contrary to the assumptions of adherents of the totalitarian hypothesis, the relaxing of a possible threat to one’s career and wellbeing 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 between two men: Bromleĭ and Lev N. Gumilëv. Looking at their work is like staring through both ends of the same telescope. Each vehemently differentiated his work from that of the other, despite the fact that their conclusions and examples were broadly similar. Even their formal educational backgrounds were similar. Both were strangers to ethnography, each arriving to the discipline through ethnography’s “parent” discipline of history. Untangling the theoretical work of the two men is next to impossible since it was determined by the tenor of the times.

It is not often recognized that de-Stalinization was a planned process led by the state. In 1963, the Soviet Academy of Sciences reflecting an instruction from the Plenary Meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in June of that year, mandated a wide-ranging debate on methodological experimentation in the humanities and social sciences

(Markwick 2001: 156). Academicians Pëtr N. Fedoseev (1908–1990) and Īŭriĭ P. Frantsev (1903–1969) wrote a sort of instruction manual for de-Stalinization, which encouraged social scientists, including ethnographers, to rewrite sociological and historical laws and to embark on interdisciplinary research (Akademiĭa nauk SSSR 1964: 16, 37). As with all centrally planned and managed initiatives, academies had to report on their progress. Thus in 1966, the leading journal *Voprosy istorii* proudly reported that they had published 34 methodological papers since the instruction had been issued (ARAN 457-1 (1953–2002)-527: 5).

Of those papers, a seminal publication by the philosopher Īŭriĭ I. Semënov (b. 1929) had far-reaching impacts on Soviet ethnography. Semënov argued for the need for a new bridging concept, which he called the “social organism”, that would allow scientists to elevate a single society as the leading force of history. Ernest Gellner, who was enthralled by Semënov’s work, dubbed this chosen society a “torch-bearer” in a “torch-relay vision of history” (Gellner 1980b: 114; Skalnĭk 2007). Semënov’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 above and alongside ethnographic facts (Semënov 1966).

The mandated methodological discussion also touched upon the definition of the “nation” and in particular Stalin’s authoritative formula. This special debate was no doubt spurred on by the new Program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, accepted in 1961, which spoke about “erasing national differences” and contained a further directive to create “a new multinational collectivity (*obshchnost’*)” (Shnirel’man 2011: 251). The editors of the journal *Voprosy istorii* encouraged a brave revision of the Stalinist definition of a nation (without, however, putting their weight behind any one suggestion). In 1966 they wrote:

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

“ethnic collectivity”, nation and nationality are discussed (ARAN 457-1 (1953–2002)-527: 18).

This discussion prompted a parallel set of meetings among ethnographers. At least three meetings of the theoretical seminar of the Institute of Ethnography in 1965 were devoted to the concept of ethnic group and nation. A number of positions were presented and argued. One influential paper by Kozlov, which was published two years later, linked Semënov’s social organism to the concept of an ethnic collectivity (*obschnost’*):

An ethnic collectivity is a social organism which forms on a certain territory out of groups of people who possessed or developed a common language, common cultural characteristics, social values and traditions, and a mixture of radically varied racial components (Kozlov 1967: 111).

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 — Tokarev, one of the most prolific and authoritative writers among Soviet ethnographers — summed up the mood of the meeting positively:

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

- 1) the theory of ethnic collectivity [*obschchnost’*] is in need of revision;
- 2) there is a need for further [field] research — and not only within Europe;
- 3) ethnic communities are real, but we lack a definition of them;
- 4) it is still not clear what types [of ethnic communities] exist;
- 5) is there law governing the transformation from one to another type?
It is not clear what type of law this would be. It is [further] unclear if social-economic formations also follow the same law (ARAN 142-10-522: 29–30).

These new terms, ranging from the “social organism” to the “ethnic community” to the “ethnic group”, did not wander far from the biosocial

consensus that had been built up in Russia for over eighty years. Viktor A. Shnirel'man also observed two characteristic trends that emerged out of the discussions of the 1960s–1970s. On the one hand, there was a wide consensus among Soviet intellectuals that such things as a “national character” or “national psychological make-up” (*sklad*) existed. On the other hand, there was a renewed interest in and enthusiasm for linking human behaviour to genetic heredity (Howell 2010; Shnirel'man 2011: 252–80). The search for a new synthesis between the social and natural sciences was proclaimed by no other than the president of the Academy of Sciences, Mstislav V. Keldysh (1911–1978). In his speech at the general meeting of the Academy in October 1962 he declared:

We cannot leave the social sciences with the task of developing themselves [in isolation]. There is no clear-cut division between the social, natural, and technical sciences. [...] The interrelation between the social and natural sciences plays a key role in [the expression of] ideology [and] in the strengthening of a materialist worldview (Keldysh 1962: 6).

It was in this newly “thawed” yet strangely familiar landscape that both Bromleĭ and Gumil'ev sought to make careers for themselves.

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

We need a common set of tools [*instrumentarii*]. We must speak in a language using one and the same understanding. And at some stage, we need [to stop and] agree what is our working [*sovremennyĭ*] definition of the nation (ARAN 457-1(1953–2002)-529: 50).

Upon becoming the institute's director, Bromleĭ set about the task of producing a common definition. To compensate for his lack of training, he surrounded himself with a group of talented contemporaries such as Kozlov, Valerĭi P. Alekseev, and Sergeĭ A. Arut'ūnov. 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 (Kozlov 2001: 5–6).

Bromleĭ chose to write his maiden article together with one of his hand-picked comrades on the topic of ethnogenesis. In the article, entitled “On the Role of Migration in the Formation of New Ethnic Communities”, they pondered the role of indigenous populations and newcomers in the formation of new *etnoses* in the first millennium AD across Eurasia (Alekseev and Bromleĭ 1968). A distinctive feature of this article was the use of the term *etnos* when describing tribal and early-state societies. The *etnos* term was (re-)used casually without a formal definition. Nevertheless, its sudden appearance in print was unusual. Likely, the lack of citations and a definition signalled that the term was already in broad circulation.

Gumilëv followed a different path than Bromleĭ in making a name for himself during this time of experimentation. His chequered record as a political prisoner — he had served over thirteen years in various Stalin-era prisons — made it difficult for him to be fully accepted by Soviet academic institutions (Bassin 2016: 10–11). Gumilëv was never appointed as a professor and was officially employed throughout his life as a research associate in the Faculty of Geography at Leningrad State University. However, as Mark Bassin notes, Gumilëv also deliberately cultivated his image as an independent-thinking dissident — a move that made his unorthodox ideas highly popular among the intelligentsia (Bassin 2016: 17). Needless to say, he was much less constrained by official doctrines of Soviet Marxist-Leninism than Bromleĭ, who headed an official governmental research institute.

Of the two men, Gumilëv was the first to place the stamp of *etnos* upon his broad vision of the interdependence of peoples, “passions”, and landscape. In a likely little-read journal with a low print-run, published by the Institute of Geography in Leningrad, he wrote a short article, “About the Object of Historical Geography”, in 1965 — a full two years before Bromleĭ’s first published intervention (Gumilëv 1965). It is an interesting footnote that this early contribution was almost immediately translated into English in one of the Cold War journals of translation (Gumilëv 1966). Two much more detailed articles were to follow in 1967 (Gumilëv 1967c, 1967b). Later, a set of high profile articles in the

mass-circulation periodical *Priroda* (Gumilëv 1970) cemented his name as a charismatic Soviet public intellectual. While official ethnographers gingerly felt their way towards making connections with geography and physical anthropology, Gumilëv drew inspiration from a wide range of disciplines, including ecology and earth sciences, genetics, biophysics, and Vernadskii's holistic vision of the biosphere.

It is difficult to write the history of the development of Gumilëv's thought, both because of the severe hiatus imposed by his long prison sentences and because of his own tendency to create a myth out of his own life. In an interview given 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 (Bassin 2016: 43). Shnirel'man speculated that Gumilëv may have been influenced by "antisemitic and Nazi sentiments" which were often present in the camps, as well as a "neonazi racist ideology" promoted by several underground right-wing thinkers with whom he was allegedly acquainted in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Shnirel'man 2011: 281–82). He may have been introduced to Eurasianism by Pëtr N. Savitskiĭ (1895–1968), with whom he established an intellectual friendship and correspondence in the late 1950s–1960s (Beisswenger 2013). However, scattered unpublished documents suggest that his self-styled arcane ideas were part of a broader contemporary interest in enduring, biophysical identities. Rudenko, a student of Volkov and fellow sufferer of the Stalinist repressions, helped Gumilëv re-establish his career in Leningrad (pers. comm. ĪA. A. Sher 2016) (Bassin 2016: 160). Rudenko wrote a little-known unpublished manuscript entitled "*Etnos* and Ethnogenesis" at some point in the mid-1960s where he alluded to his discussions with the young historian. The archivists at the St Petersburg Filial of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences assert that Gumilëv's handwriting can be identified in the margins of the typescript — suggesting that he was familiar with the text (SPF ARAN 1004–1-118: 8–14). Rudenko's thinking and fieldwork is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

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

reintroduced the theme of what Bassin identifies as an “ethnic hierarchy” (Bassin 2016: 62–67) by describing sub-regional and super-regional units known as the *subetnos* and the *superetnos*. A unique element of his vision of *etnos* was his insistence that ethnic phenomena manifested themselves according to the laws of the natural sciences, while the history of human societies followed a different set of laws within the social sciences. Thus, like Semënov, he was able to speak in the characteristic dual voice of the era, accepting a formal Stalinist progression from tribe to nation within social history while documenting eternal, passionate, and stable ethnic forms within natural history. In a formal sense his *etnos* theory was not biosocial since he insisted that it was profoundly biological and *not* social (Bassin 2016: ch. 6). Several of the millennial *superetnoses* that he identified conveniently tended to overlap with the boundaries of the Soviet Union (Bassin 2016: 70–71). Unlike Bromleĭ, Gumilëv appealed to wider audiences through his historical monographs about various historical and ancient Turkic peoples such as *The Unveiling of Khazariĭā* (Gumilëv 1967d) or *The Ancient Turks* (Gumilëv 1967a). These popular-scientific works on exotic peoples were published before his key theoretical works and served to illustrate the evocativeness of his *etnos* perspective.

Bromleĭ also followed up his early interest in the socio-genetic origins of identity in his now infamous article “*Etnos* and Endogamy” (Bromleĭ 1969). 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 trouble. The head of the Department of the Near and Middle East, Mikhail S. Ivanov (1909–1986) started a campaign of attacks against Bromleĭ. Ivanov claimed that if *etnoses* are “stabilized” by endogamy this not only negated the Marxist formations of Bromleĭ’s thinking, but made *etnos* a biological category (Bromleĭ 1970: 89; Tumarkin 2003). This debate was perhaps a defining moment of this period of experimentation. The records show that all other members of the institute, with one exception, rose to speak in support of the new director. On the one hand, a moment of liberal experimentation was preserved — on the other hand, a new orthodoxy of *etnos*-talk was imposed from this time onwards, at least within ethnographic circles.

Perhaps over conscious of the popularity of Gumilëv's work, Bromleĭ followed Gumilëv along a similar Byzantine path of devising increasingly complex systems and subsystems by which to describe *etnos*. In his mature works, Bromleĭ introduced his own notion of a *subetnos*, as well as the super-regional "metaethnic community" (*metaètnicheskaĭa obshchnost'*). Unlike with Gumilëv, his sub-regional or meta-regional units were defined by classical ethnological parameters such as language or material culture, and not energy or "passions". Nevertheless the 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 towards Euro-American thinking about ethnicity, Bromleĭ also introduced the adjectival form of the Greek word *etnos* — *etnikos* — in order to refer to a subjective quality of belonging. It is difficult to draw sharp lines between Bromleĭ's *subetnos* and Gumilëv's *subetnos*, let alone the pantheon of their parallel sets of concepts. What does seem clear from this inflationary expansion of the *etnos* enterprise 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 (Banks 1996: 22).

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 (Banks 1996: 23). As Gellner (1988: 118) wrote, in his pithy and economical prose, *etnos* theory was "*relatively synchronist*" (emphasis in the original), opening the door to applied fieldwork within a tradition that had been obsessed with formal, off-the-shelf models. As strange as it may sound, in the late 1960s the theory sounded innovative

and radical. The unique nature of the approach was probably never appreciated by North American and European anthropologists who, in the 1960s, were preoccupied by different issues. As Gellner (1980a: x) again observes, “It is ironic that at the very moment at which anthropology in the west is finding its way back to history, not without difficulty, Soviet anthropology is in part practicing a mild detachment from it”. Bassin goes one step further. He sees in Gumilëv’s rendition of *etnos* a radical reassertion of Stalinist national essences, which he describes as “the Stalinist accommodation”. Within the fog created by Gumilëv’s invisible eternal energies, levels and sublevels of ethnicity, he reads an impassioned defence of local communities against the assimilatory force of the post-war Soviet industrial state (Bassin 2016: 163–71). He associates this impassioned voice for ethnic difference with the near-hero status that Gumilëv achieved amongst non-Russian nationalities in the Soviet Union and within the Russian Federation today (Bassin 2016: ch. 10). Bromleĭ in this respect continued to serve as an ideologist advocating assimilation, intermarriage, and the creation of seamless, political-territorial communities. During perestroika, Gumilëv controversially linked the strained ethnic tensions in the crumbling Soviet federation to Bromleĭ’s misguided theories. Bromleĭ retaliated by labelling Gumilëv’s distinction of “passionate” and “sub-passionate” peoples as covert racism (Vaĭnshteĭn 2004: 624–27).

The revival of *etnos* theory during the early Brezhnev period 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. One proof of this loyalty might be the failed attempt by Valerĭi A. Tishkov (b. 1941) — the first post-Soviet director of the Institute of Ethnography — to entomb *etnos* theory through his book *A Requiem to Etnos* (Tishkov 2003). This wide-ranging summary of theories of ethnicity and a call to reinvent sociocultural anthropology in Russia made a strong argument that the Russian academy should reject collectivist and essentialist theories of belonging in favour of a relational definition that is juggled and negotiated by individuals. To underscore the point, he changed the name of the Institute of Ethnography to the

Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology. In a recent retrospective on his *Requiem*, he takes credit for introducing North American cultural anthropology to Russia and loosening the hold of *etnos* theory on the academy (Tishkov 2016: 6).

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

Etnos in the Long Twentieth Century and Beyond

Hobsbawn'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 that era. Our overview of the origins of *etnos* thinking suggest that 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, was rooted in a biosocial compromise between competing camps. We thereby run the risk of suggesting (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 flavour of which is clearly visible in the following chapters in this book. 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 (1986) "case of the missing term".

If the height of the Soviet period was marked by Bromleĭ's "minor revolution", the beginning of the post-Soviet period is marked by

Tishkov's counter-revolution. He highlighted his transformation by identifying a "crisis" in Soviet ethnography in a prominent article in the American journal *Current Anthropology* (Tishkov 1992). Like his predecessor Bromleĭ, Tishkov was trained 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 on Native Americans, he came to the Institute of Ethnography in 1981 to lead its Department of the Peoples of America. After briefly serving as Bromleĭ's deputy, he took over the institute in 1989 and led it up until 2015. In his numerous publications, 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 criticised the ossified nature of Soviet ethnography's hierarchy of *etnoses*, *sub-etnoses*, *etnikos*, and *superetnoses*, as well as what he described as the "étatisation" of ethnicity by the Soviet state. In one of our interviews, he dismissed Bromleĭ as "building forts and barricades" (*gorodushki gorodit'*) out of his Byzantine ethnic superstructures — a reference to the modern Russian adolescent practice of wreaking havoc on long 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 *ethnos* theory had never existed, people would never have been inscribed as parts of the collective torso [*telo*] known as an "*ethnos*". [...] And, if there had never been a long-standing Soviet practice of registering a single nationality in one's passport — a nationality which necessarily had to correspond to that of one's parents, then people might have realized and have been able to publically declare [that they held multiple identities]. A person could be at any one time a Russian and a Kazakh, a Russian and a Jew, or they [might have been able to express] a "vertical" stack of various senses of belonging [*prinadlezhnosti*] such as being an Andiets and a Avarets, a Digorets and an Osetian, an Erzarian and a Mordovan [...] a Pomor and a Russian [...] etc. (Tishkov 2005: 167).

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" (Tishkov 1997: 56). As an academic, and a public

intellectual, for several decades Tishkov 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* (Tishkov 2010, 2013).

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) (Tishkov 2016: 5–6).

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 Bromlei's *etnos* can be widely found in state-sanctioned textbooks used in introductory level cultural studies courses (Pimenov 2007; Sadokhin 2006; Arut'ūnov and Ryzhakova 2004).

The *etnos* term also lives on, quietly, in the pages of ethnographic encyclopaedias. One of the best illustrations is the series entitled *Peoples and Cultures*, which is currently running at 25 volumes. This series does not use *etnos* in its title, but the term appears within its pages quite regularly. Being a rebranding of the well-known Soviet-era series *Peoples of the World* (Anderson and Arzyutov 2016), the new series presents ethnographic snapshots from across Russian regions, such as the “northeast”, and documents former Soviet republics. Occasionally it features volumes on single peoples such as the Tatars or Buriāts. The volumes' internal structure 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 the series a focal point for ethnonationalist reflection. The volume *The ĬAkuts (Sakhas)* (Alekseev 2012) was issued in conjunction with a national festival in Moscow organized by the ĬAkut national intelligentsia. The same strategy was repeated in St Petersburg with the publication of the volume *The Ingushes* (Albogachieva, Martazanov, and Solov'eva 2013). In our interviews, one of the editors confessed that they hoped that the volume itself would calm the tension between Ingush and Chechen scholars in these republics (pers. comm. M. S.-G. Albogachieva, 2014). The example of Altaians is perhaps one of the best for illustrating the way that the *etnos* term has been appropriated to defend local identity claims. In the volume published within the central series, entitled *The Turkic Peoples of Siberia* (Funk and Tomilov 2006), the Altaians were treated in a series of *chapters* among many other peoples. This troubled the local Altaian intelligentsia, who rushed to prepare their own competing volume, entitled *The Altaians* (Ekeev 2014), where they presented the complex and detailed history of the many identity groups in the region as a single history of a single *etnos* formed under the influence of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.

The passion with which regional scholars have taken up the cause of essentialist and enduring identities is likely the most tangible artefact of the reincarnation of *etnos* theory today. These works have a distinctive quality that one might identify as a type of indigenous-rights discourse. The *etnos* term itself appears directly in the title of a number of regional collections in order to emphasize their sense of pride and their expectation of respect for their nationality. Volumes such as *The Reality of the Etnos* (Goncharov, Gashilova and Bal'āsnikova 2012) or *The Etnoses of Siberia* (Makarov 2004a; 2004b) emphasise the longevity, energy, and persistence of cultural minorities. These works have manifesto-like qualities in that they insist on the vibrancy of cultural difference. Even Tishkov, in his retrospective review of his *Requiem*, was forced to acknowledge that "etno-" identities are characteristic of Russia now, and likely "forever" (*navsegda*) (Tishkov 2016: 17–18). The role of regional elites in developing *etnos* theory was a major theme in the analysis of Bassin (Bassin 2016). 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 posited him at one time as a sort of philosopher or central ideologist of the Putin administration (Shlapentokh 2017; Umland 2016; Laruelle 2006). One of his bestselling books, *The Foundations of Geopolitics* (Dugin 1997), excited concern about its declaration that it is the fate of Russia to annex and incorporate most of the former Soviet republics as well as significant parts of Manchuria and Inner Asia. In 2001 he established the political movement “Eurasia”, thus making his murky geopolitical ideas visible beyond the subculture of right-wing radicals (Umland 2009). It is not well known amongst these political scientists that he also used ethnographic arguments to underpin his political arguments. His interests in *etnos* theory began in 2002 when he participated in a conference dedicated to the memory of Gumilëv (Dugin 2002). He then presented a series of lectures, published online in 2009, on the “sociology of the *etnos*” which drew heavily from Shirokogoroff’s and Gumilëv’s work (Dugin 2009). These were assembled together and published as a textbook in 2011 (Dugin 2011). Here he redefines *etnos* as an organic unit: “a simple society, organically (naturally) connected to the territory and bound by common morality, rites and semantic system” (Dugin 2011: 8). Drawing on a selective reading of anthropological literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he decorates this definition with evocative examples of mythological thinking, shamanism, standardized “personas”, and cyclical time. Shirokogoroff’s ethnographic work among Manchurian Tunguses even plays a cameo role in Dugin’s description of Eurasian societies. Some nationalist commentators have taken his vision even further. While Dugin rejects overt biological or racial interpretations of the *etnos*, the historian and political commentator Valerii D. Solovei uses genetics and Jungian psychology to define *etnos* as “a group of people, differentiated from other groups by hereditary biological characteristics and archetypes” (Solovei 2008: 68). This type of racist essentialist

appropriation of *etnos* is characteristic not only of the Russian far right, but also of a wide range of post-Soviet intellectuals of various nationalities (Shnirel'man 2011: 328–60).

As Serguei A. Oushakine (2009; 2010) has shown, *etnos* was used extensively by Russian nationalists to create the peculiar genre of “The Tragedy of the Russian People”, popular in the 1990s–2000s. In his analysis of a series of texts of this kind, he describes the common theme of suffering, demographical decline, and the erosion of the national values of the Russian people both during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. According to Oushakine, by deploying the *etnos* concept these authors “were able to introduce a clear-cut split between the Russian ‘*etnos* proper’ and institutions of the Soviet and post-Soviet state whose politics was deemed to be non-Russian or even anti-Russian” (Oushakine 2009: 81). He claims that the theories of Bromlei and Gumilëv were instrumental in this regard as they had already distilled *etnos* away from the socio-political realm where constructivist terms of identity were widely used (Oushakine 2009: 86–95). Extracting an essentialist “bio-psycho-social ethnic body” from history, theories of *etnos* produced a post-Soviet “patriotism of despair”, but they also generated a resource for reinventing a sense of national vitality such as the Altai “school of vital forces” (Oushakine 2009: 127).

The demographic health of the Russian *etnos* is also one of the main concerns of the Russian nationalists. For example, a demographic chart depicting the increase in the death rate and the declining birthrate is commonly dubbed the “Russian cross” in the mass media. In the conclusion to his volume *A History of the Tragedy of a Great People* (Kozlov 1996), 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 (Kozlov 1996: 274). Although he was an old opponent of Gumilëv’s theories, he was forced to admit that his pessimistic picture strongly reminded him of the 1200-year life cycles of an *etnos* hypothesized by Gumilëv (Kozlov 1996: 283).

These demographic disaster narratives contrast strongly with the position of Tishkov, who repeatedly criticized not only “demographic myths” of this kind, but also 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” (Tishkov 2005: 174). 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 (Tishkov 2005: 189–207). If Tishkov’s optimism could be reduced to a headline, it would be “We have all begun to live better” — a slogan which served as a title of one of his many public outreach articles in the daily newspaper *Nezavisimāi Gazeta* (Tishkov 2000).

The nostalgia for essentialist and enduring identities has led to a renewed interest in the works of the pioneers 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 (Kuznefsov and Reshetov 2001–2002). Recently, the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology has (re)launched an early Soviet project to translate and publish Shirokogoroff’s *Social Organization of the Tungus* in Russian (Sirina et al. 2015), correcting the historical oddity that translations of this work have long been available in Japanese and Chinese. Dugin supported this movement by writing the forward to the Moscow edition of Shirokogoroff’s *Etnos* (Dugin 2010).

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 Buriāts: Notes on their Ethnic History* (Pavlinskaia 2008) was based on several decades of fieldwork in the same East Siberian landscape that inspired Sergei and Elizaveta Shirokogoroff. Sharing perhaps the puzzlement the Shirokogoroffs experienced in the multilingual and multicultural diversity of these communities (see chapter 5 and 7), she tracked the process by which diverse groups split and merged into a single *etnos*. The volume quotes extensively from Shirokogoroff’s newly republished texts, in part advocating for and explaining his biosocial theory of the *etnos* for those who may not have read this émigré’s work (Pavlinskaia 2008: 53–6). She then moves on to merge Shirokogoroff’s interest in leading *etnoses* with

Gumilëv's description of the "persistent behavioural models" that fuel ethnogenetic progression. The book covers a wide expanse of time from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and includes significant archival examples. For example, she cites the case of the Russian *voevoda* Īakov Khripunov, whose predatory military campaign of 1629 she interprets (via Gumilëv) as "the result of the work of an individual who [had been excited into] a higher nervous state triggered by a certain stage of ethnogenesis" (Pavlinskaiā 2008: 106). Pavlinskaiā 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*) (Pavlinskaiā 2008: 57), which, once activated in an individual's DNA, has a ripple effect on the people around that individual, gradually transforming a collage of local groups into a single *etnos*. This frames Shirokogoroff's interest in mixed-blood Tungus individuals, as discussed in chapter 5, in a completely new light:

The metisification (*metisatsiia*) of the Russian and aboriginal population is one of the mainstays of new etno-formation processes (*etnoobrazovatel'nye profsessy*) in Siberia, and particularly in the Baikal region. It has been repeatedly noted in the [academic] literature that the majority of the Russian population [in Siberia] were men. [This was the case] not only in the 16th century but also in the 17th and 18th centuries. One should point out that these men were [likely] the most "passionary" representatives of the Russian *etnos*. They settled on new lands in Siberia and temporarily or permanently married members of the native peoples. [They therefore] passed on this quality — the passionary gene — thus initiating ethnic development among the local population. These individuals, [in turn,] played an important role in the formation of today's 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 (Pavlinskaiā 2008: 160).

Through works like Pavlinskaiā'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 observe a subtle transformation of the word *etnos* from a somewhat scholastic scientific

term used primarily by experts to a widely quoted expression in the public sphere that touches upon the destiny of peoples. Of particular interest to political actors, be they neo-Eurasianists or members of the regional intelligentsia, is the way that a single compact term can denote a vibrant and biologically anchored quality. According to Shnirel'man, "during the last 15–20 years, an appeal to genetics has firmly entered the popular discourse, [leading] some authors [to begin] to abuse the term" (Shnirel'man 2011: 354). This process can be followed right up to the office of the president. Just before the 2012 presidential election, Vladimir Putin published an article devoted to the "national question" (Putin 2012). 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 self-determination of the Russian people [hinges] on a poly-ethnic civilization strengthened with Russian culture as its foundation". In this article he coined the phrase a "single cultural code" (*edinyĭ kul'turn'yĭ 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. Tishkov's earlier argument for a *Rossiiskiiĭ narod* undoubtedly echoed this proposal (Tishkov 2010). This idea revived the discussion among some lawmakers of resurrecting Soviet-era nationality registers that tracked the *etnos* identity held by each individual — although in the abovementioned article Putin then distanced himself from that decisive step. More recently, Putin argued that his ethnocultural definition of the *Rossiiskiiĭ narod* should be militarized. In his speech at the 9 May 2017 celebrations, he spoke of the need to deploy military strength to protect the "very existence of the Russian people (*Rossiiskiiĭ narod*) as an *etnos*" (*Pravda.ru* 2017). Here we witness a slippage from the use of *etnos* to denote non-Russian migrants, to the use of *etnos* to diagnose a possible life-threat to the biological vibrancy of a state-protected people. This led to a further controversy in October 2017 when Putin expressed concern about foreign scholars collecting genetic samples from "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 (Zyrĭanova 2017).

By stressing an accommodation that we describe as a “biosocial synthesis”, we try to express that there remains a wide range of debate within the academy and within 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 following chapters will show, much of this peculiar Eurasian accommodation was in constant dialogue with traditions overseas, and should really be viewed as a sibling to north Atlantic theories of identity (and not an orphan). Although we have demonstrated that *ethnos*-talk is always somewhere near the corridors of power, we have tried to show that it still cannot be equated with a single state ideology. Its persistence well into the twenty-first century clearly shows that *ethnos* 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.

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