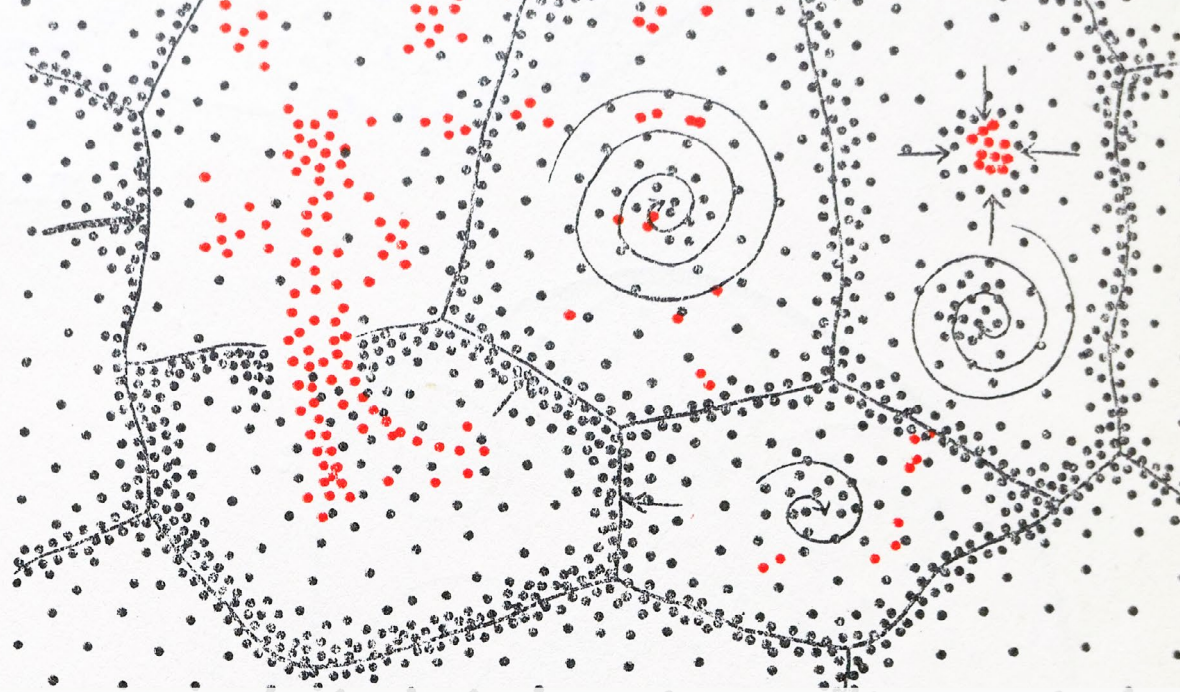
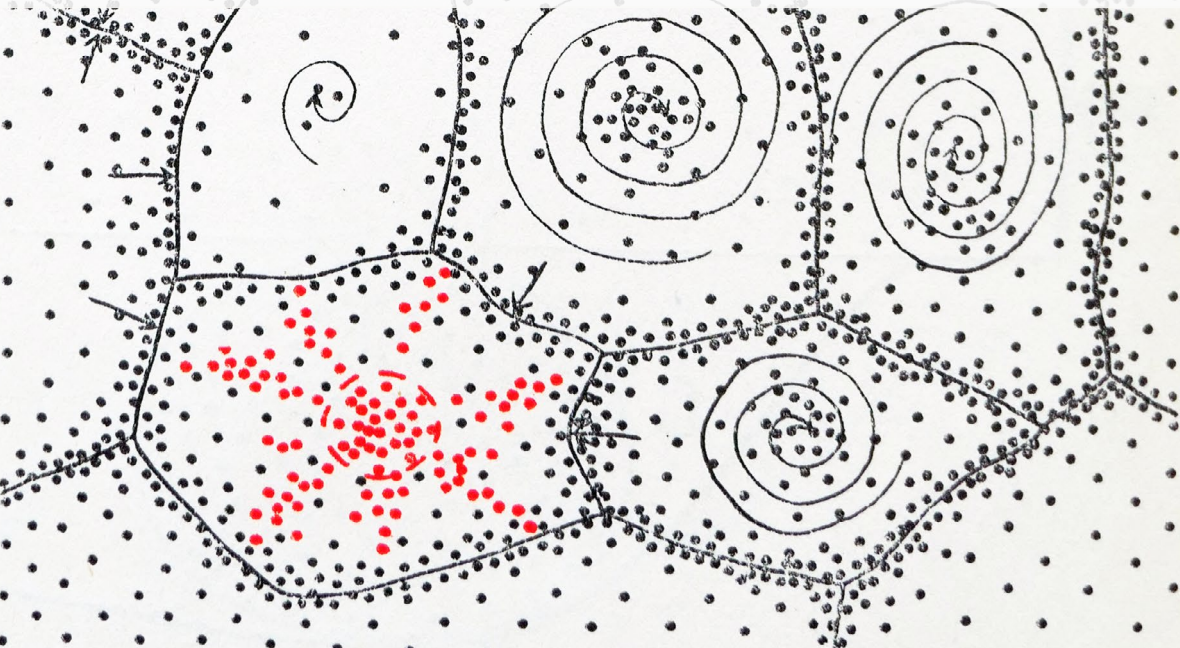


Life Histories of *Etnos* Theory in Russia and Beyond

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



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8. "The Sea is Our Field": Pomor Identity in Russian Ethnography

Masha Shaw and Natalie Wahnsiedler[1]

"The sea is our field" is a popular old saying among a group of northern Russians who became known as Pomors. "If God gives us fish, he will give us bread, too", the saying continues (Maksimov 1857: 247). This saying captures one of the key axes around which identity is expressed in this far northern extreme of Russian settlement. Russian identity is traditionally linked to cereal agriculture and to steppe landscapes. The term Pomors, by contrast, derives from the Russian words *po morîu*, meaning "by sea". It indirectly indexes the fact that the people living along the White and Barents Seas have traditionally thrived on fishing and hunting of sea mammals — a subsistence strategy which would grow to have great importance for Pomor identity movements in the late twenthieth and early twenty-first centuries.

In this chapter we explore how material, linguistic and ecological factors underscore the way identity is expressed along the northern

1 We are grateful to the chairmen of several fishing collective farms who provided a great administrative support and shared their knowledge wherever possible. The people of Arkhangelsk oblast' were very generous and hospitable and shared with us their time and many cups of tea. Scholars of the Northern (Arctic) Federal University gave us valuable advice especially upon our arrival to the field and facilitated our further research in Arkhangelsk oblast'.

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boundary of European Russian settlement. These narratives, both historical and contemporary, illustrate the way that an *etnos* can be seen to derive its identity from an evocative landscape. As we shall see, the ecological conditions of Pomor identity provide a strong pull which contemporary activists use to defend Pomor resilience. This ethnographic example, from the far north of Russia, illustrates the "biosocial" component to *etnos* thinking as outlined in chapters 1 and 2. Although relatively small in population, Pomors have played a significant role in thinking about identity and Russian ethnography, in particular its unique *etnos* theory. Pomors have been described as the "most authentic Russians", as an ambiguous sub-group or *subetnos* of Great Russians, and as a "less-numerous indigenous minority".

It is interesting, and perhaps not insignificant, that examples of the distinctive quality of Pomor lifeways go back to the very foundation of Russian ethnography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — a curious case where ethnographic examples have played a role in forming the discipline that documents them. Further, it is remarkable that the status of identity at this very northern extreme of Russian settlements tends to mirror similar arguments made about the status of southern Slav settlements in the region now known as Ukraine. In this chapter, we identify some general themes in the description of Pomor life which reflect back upon the way that Great Russians are identified as a nation.

The Pomor example has a further ironic twist to it, which has been part and parcel of recent political movements. The intimate familiarity that Pomor seafarers had with sea-going technology gave them a special role in facilitating the expansion of the Novgorod state first along the White Sea coast, then to the Arctic islands of the Barents Sea, and finally across Siberia. The sea-going quality of Russian expansion across Eurasia gives Pomors a unique status as a people hosting a special type of indigenous political and ecological adaptation, while at the same time playing a key role in colonization across Eurasia. This double-bind in the definition of Pomor identity, as we will show, plays an important role in how Pomors today are perceived as being part of the Great Russian identity project and simultaneously different from it.

The chapter is based upon fieldwork in Pomor villages and interviews with representatives of the Pomor intelligentsia in 2014–2016 in the city of Arkhangelsk and several villages in Mezenskiĭ, Primorskiĭ

and Onezhskiĭ raions of Arkhangelsk oblast'. Fieldwork included taking part in informal activities, such as fishing and berry picking, as well as participating in various festive events in the city and official celebrations of fishing collective farms in several villages.

Pomor Landscapes and the History of Slavic Ethnography

Pomors have inspired the curiosity of travellers and ethnographers since the late eighteenth century. Early ethnographic accounts of Pomors belong to scholars who worked in a holistic tradition with no clear boundaries between disciplines. The earliest ethnographic accounts of the Russian north were written by natural scientists or scholars who worked across several subject areas. Their descriptions of Pomor'e and its inhabitants were interspersed with descriptions of animals and plants, and geology (Chelishchev 1886; Fomin 1797; Lepekhin 1805). Imperial ethnography tended to distinguish northern Russians in terms of their distinct livelihood, dialect, material culture, and relationship to the state. Soviet ethnographers continued to treat Pomors either heroically, as pioneers of Russia's northern frontier, or as exceptions embedded into a hierarchical classification of identities. Perhaps unique to the Pomor case is that through the process of thinking and writing about Pomor society, Russian ethnography came to define itself.

Pomor landscapes, or rather seascapes, appeared quite early as a marker of identity. Afanasiĭ Shchapov — himself a famous liberal Siberian regionalist who argued for the autonomy and self-government of regional groups — cited Pomor lifeways in an influential essay on the affordances of oceans and mountains to shape peoples:

> In Northern Pomor'e, in severe polar climate, on dull barren polar soil, nature has designed its great economy in such a way, so that to harmonize the polar cold, the polar accelerated and heavy inhaling of oxygen with the demand for, and quantity and quality of polar food; it harmonized the demand for and intensity of polar movement with the intensity and movement of life. […] What was available there for a stable and reliable provision for Pomor colonization and life? What could support the dominant population, dominant physiological and ethnographic development and a dominant people? The sea, only the ocean-sea, with its inexhaustible vital content. […] The sea became a vital

> element for them, the sea is everything for them. Ancient biographies of Pomor saints tell almost exclusively about maritime life and activities, sea fishing and hunting, Novgorodian Pomor settlers and sea storms. These tales are full of legends about sea wonders performed by Pomor saints, who are portrayed as some sort of sea heroes and half-gods. The sea was the most poetic and spiritual subject for Pomor writers (Shchapov 1864: 112–14).[2]

It is a curiosity of Pomor ethnography that this group is further subdivided according to the qualities of the coasts (*berega*) on which they live. Thus, for example, there are seven named "coasts" on the White Sea coastline: Zimniĭ, Letniĭ, Onezhskiĭ, Pomorskiĭ, Karel'skiĭ, Kandalakshskiĭ, and Terskiĭ *berega.* Some names reflect local climatic conditions — such as Zimniĭ (Winter) and Letniĭ (Summer) *berega* — while others are named after local geographical objects such as rivers or settlements. The names are still largely in use. Bernshtam (1978) differentiated the White Sea coasts according to the degree of Pomor self-identification among local population. She argued that by the beginning of the twenthieth century, people on Pomorskiĭ coast had the strongest Pomor identity, as they connected Pomor identity to Murmansk sea fisheries (which gave rise to the very name *Pomor*) and considered only themselves as true Pomors. By contrast, the weakest Pomor identity was to be found among the population of Karel'skiĭ, Terskiĭ, Kandalakshskiĭ, and Onezhskiĭ coasts, as they were only called Pomors by people from neighbouring regions located far away from the sea. Such differences between the coasts are less pronounced today. However, it is still possible to come across an opinion that populations of some coasts are more Pomor than of the others.

This geographically-grounded curiosity in northern Russians in the early nineteenth century would continue to reverberate through the Imperial period and into the Soviet period itself. Thus, in the sixth volume of the authoritative Soviet-era ethnographic encyclopaedia *Peoples of the World*, Pomors were represented as a "historical-cultural group of the Russian people" differing from other northern Russians mainly in their subsistence as "brave seafarers, sea hunters and fishers" (Tolstov 1964: 145). The key theoretical term in this volume — the "historical-cultural group" — was further described as being "more geographical than ethnographical" and was applied exclusively to the

2 All translations from Russian to English are by Masha Shaw.

dwellers of the northern seashore. Similarly, in Tokarev's textbook *The Ethnography of the Peoples of the USSR*, Pomors were represented as a "cultural-geographic type" of the Russian population who displayed a unique "cultural and economic (*khozi͡aĭstvennyĭ*) type" based on fishing and sea hunting (Tokarev 1958: 31).

As we shall see, important elements of this geographically-defined identity structure would flow into the concept of Pomor indigeneity at the end of the Soviet period. These geographical examples also illustrate what Nathaniel Knight noticed as a strong geographical turn to thinking about identity within the Russian academy in general (Knight 2017). It is perhaps not insignificant that Karl von Baer, the founder of the ethnographic section of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, came to respect geographical influences on identity after his travels with Pomors (Ibid).

Between these two sets of descriptions in the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twenthieth century, many generations of ethnographers added specific observations on the uniqueness of Pomor culture and its link to their northern homeland. That uniqueness usually was transformed into the interpretative schemes of ethnographers involved in "*etnos* thinking" which underlay the *etnos* theory (see chapter 2). Thus, material culture and language as categories were not only especially important for theoretical thinking but also conjoined with field ethnographic data.

Material Culture

> Generally, Pomors are hospitable, sturdy, healthy people. Their faces are broad and always red since they spend most of the year outside, at sea. Men wear caps [*kartuzy*], jackets [*pidzhaki*] and leather boots in the summer; boot covers [*bakhily*] and Norwegian jersey-jackets [*kutrki-fufaĭki*] for fishing and hunting, and in winter they wear felt boots and sheepskin coats [*tulupy*]. Women wear bright colorful sarafans. Their houses are mostly spacious and rather clean. Every house has a samovar, and tea- and tableware. The main fishery that feeds Pomors is Murmansk fisheries (Ėngel'gardt 2009 [1897]: 52–3).

By the late nineteenth century, the study of material culture was a significant research focus in Russian ethnography through which it was thought that peoples (*narody*) could be distinguished. These early

studies focussed on rural populations and in particular on Russian peasant communities. It was thought that rural peasants preserved in their lifeways ancient customs and beliefs (Leskinen 2012: 250).

The analysis of clothing and traditional dress was a classic method for distinguishing local populations. There was a particular emphasis on women's clothing as a marker of identity similar in style to other Slavic regions. Sluchevskiĭ (2009) described Pomor women as well dressed regardless of their social and economic status, wearing long colourful *sarafany*, and beautifully decorated headwear called *kokoshnik* and *povoĭnik*, as well as extensive neck decorations. Sluchevskiĭ noted the absence of an otherwise typical *kokoshnik* in women's clothing in Mezen' region, which neighboured the reindeer-herding Nenets population. Instead, Mezen' women wore kerchiefs "with two ends tied above the forehead like two little horns which dangled in the most peculiar way" (Sluchevskiĭ 2009: 156). A distinctive feature of women's clothing in some parts of Pomor'e was an extensive use of pearls extracted from local rivers. Sluchevskiĭ was particularly impressed by the light and skilful movements of Pomor women in their long and richly decorated dresses as they steered their boats in rough and roaring waters. In the authoritative Soviet-era volume *Peoples of the European Part of the USSR*, the Pomor women's *sarafan* of the late nineteenth century was distinguished from those in all other regions for being made of silk (Aleksandrov et al. 1964: 372) (Fig. 8.1).

However, in line with the emphasis on landscape, Pomor winter outerwear also created a special arena to explore difference. Scholars often noted peculiar types of clothing among the White Sea coast population. They also stressed that this clothing was conditioned by the harsh environment and the wearers' ways of life. Many studies have emphasised the Norwegian and Nenets influences on Pomor clothing; Maslova, for instance, writes that the so called *zi͡ŭidvestka* was a typical hat of Pomor fishermen (Maslova 1956: 557). This Norwegian style of hat was made of leather or textile and had flaps to protect the ears. Other characteristic types of clothing for Pomors were the *malit͡sa* and *sovik* made of reindeer skin (Maslova 1956: 712). This clothing came from Nenets culture where it is known as *mal'cha*/*mal'tsa* and *săvăk* respectively (Fig. 8.2).

Fig. 8.1 Pomor women's clothing illustrating three types of headwear (from left to right): *povoĭnik* (under the scarf), *kokoshnik*, and kerchief with "dangling horns". Photo by Nikolaĭ A. Shabunin (MAĖ 974-54). © Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg

Again, in the same Soviet-era encyclopaedia that summarized classifications of the peoples of the European part of the USSR, the traditional Pomor peasant dress was contrasted with those of the central regions of Russia because of its incorporation of designs from neighbouring reindeer-herding peoples (Aleksandrov et al. 1964: 377) (Fig. 8.3). These two types of parkas are generally characteristic of the reindeer-herding Nenets people. These examples of creole forms of clothing — outerwear which blends Slavic and indigenous styles — foreshadow the late twentieth century debate on the status of Pomors as perhaps an indigenous people.

Fig. 8.2 A group of peasants in Arkhangelsk province at the turn of the twentieth century. Nearly all men and two younger boys wear a type of parka made of reindeer skin: either *malitsa* (fur facing inwards) or *sovik* (fur facing outwards). One man (far left) and a younger boy at the back wear other types of coats made of cloth. Photo by Nikolaĭ A. Shabunin (MAĖ 974-41). © Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg

Although Pomors from the very beginning were associated with the ocean, it was only late in the Imperial period that scholars cast a glance to the way that they set out to sea. Sluchevskiĭ conducted a detailed description of the *shnîâka* — a shallow and narrow sailboat with wide sails designed for ocean fishing in the season just after the ice on the White Sea breaks up (Sluchevskiĭ 1886: 51). In comparison to later accounts, Sluchevskiĭ's observations on the *shnîâka* read ironic if not paternalistic where the word "brave" is used as a synonym for "foolhardy" to describe sailors using such a dangerous and unstable boat.

Nikolaĭ Zagoskin gave the first comparative description of northern sea-faring knowledge in his encyclopaedia of Russian river and sea routes. Zagoskin's description of Pomor sea-faring is summarised within a section on the expansion of Novgorod colonizers across the White Sea (Zagoskin 1910: 153ff). His idea of sea-knowledge as

Fig. 8.3 Comparative illustration of peasant costumes distinguishing Pomor costumes (far right) from that of other central Russian peasants (Aleksandrov 1964: 377)

colonization-knowledge would be evocatively encapsulated in the Soviet period in Mikhail Belov's ethno-archaeological reconstruction of a Pomor *koch* — reconstructed on the basis of archaeological remains in the former fur-trade fort of Mangazei in north-central Siberia (Belov 1951). This peculiar round, keel-less sailboat was especially designed to be dragged overland to allow fishermen or explorers to move from one watershed to another overland.

Belov, in contrast to others, is one of the first to associate Pomor sea knowledge with a heroic set of qualities that give credit both to the ingenuity of the people and their place in the history of Russian imperialism. The *koch* in his account was an ingenious sort of vessel

that allowed the Russian nation to expand overland across Eurasia. His nationalist reconstruction is spectacular with its detailed drawings of the vessels and quotations from diaries of those who sailed upon them (Fig. 8.4). It is striking that this technological and geographic interest in the *koch* does not seem to have captured the imagination of imperial ethnographers.

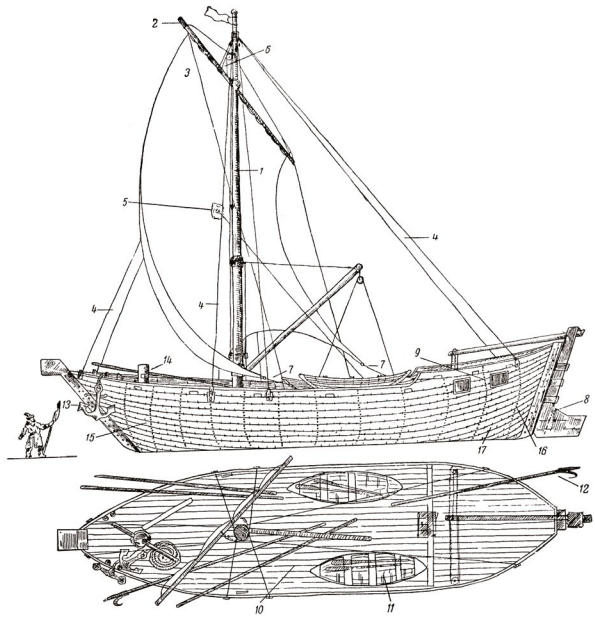

Рис. 2. Схема коча (выполнена Н. Д. Травиным).
1 — шегла (мачта); *2* — райна (рея); *3* — подъемный волчок; *4* — ноги (киты); *5* — бугляни; *6* — дрог (фал); *7* — вожжи (шкоты); *8* — сопец (руль); *9* — казенка; *10* — шкуба; *11* — карбасы; *12* — багор; *13* — якорь; *14* — кочка (ворот); *15* — обшивка со скобами; *16* — деревянные гвозди (нагели); *17* — скобы.

Fig. 8.4 Schematic drawing of a Pomor *koch* (Belov 1951: 75)

Traditional Pomor vessels, such as the *koch*, continue to exercise a hold on the imaginations of contemporary intellectuals living in Arkhangelsk. For example, in our interviews, an Arkhangelsk museum worker and historian asserted that Pomor traditional boats should be restored in order for Pomor identity to be truly preserved. In the late 1980s, in Petrozavodsk, a city in the Republic of Karelia, a group of enthusiasts recreated the historical *koch*, which they called "Pomor". This vessel was used for several navigation trips from Arkhangelsk to the Solovki Islands and up to the Kanin Peninsula. Another navigation expedition that intended to repeat the ancient route of Russian explorers

using historically reconstructed vessels took place in 2011 and 2012. Its members aimed to follow the routes of Russian pioneers along the Arctic Ocean and down the Lena River.

A final area of intensive research was on the architecture of dwellings, which gave ethnographers an overview of large-scale differences between northern and southern regions. For instance, scholars argued that smaller villages were common in the north, while larger villages prevailed in the south (Tolstov 1964: 144). The way that space was structured and enclosed was another significant topic, with many ethnographers noting that southern communities tended to fence off private land while Russians in the central region tended to use land communally. From this angle, Pomor Russians were unique again. For example, in 1970, ethnographers of the Moscow Academy of Sciences published the volume *Russians* (Kushner 1970) which presented individual sections on the architecture of peasant dwellings and their internal design. Chizhikova (1970) argued that the dwellings in the north of the European part of Russia distinguished themselves by large building structures that included in one complex rooms for humans but also containing under one roof spaces for animals and for storage (Fig. 8.5).

Fig. 8.5 Example of a peasant's house. Photo by Nikolaĭ A. Shabunin (MAĖ 974–88). © Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg

These large, multi-functional constructions differed sharply from peasant yards in central and southern regions where separate outhouses would be built for animals and storage. As discussed in chapter 3, a major theme in the pan-Slavic typologies of Nikolaĭ Mogilĭânskiĭ was the built structure of the village. Mogilĭânskiĭ distinguished between the southern Slavic village of neatly constructed courtyards (*dvor*) and fences dividing extended families from one another, and the open and somewhat messy structure of a Great Russian village, which lacked fences and courtyards.

Tat'iana Bernshtam — one of the most well-known ethnographers of Pomors — was one of the first to draw attention to the distinctive outbuildings of Pomor fishing spots. For instance, she outlined that some Pomor dwelling structures distinguished themselves from other houses of northern Russians by having extra facilities for fishing and seal hunting equipment (Bernshtam 2009: 47–8). In addition, wealthier families had their own icehouses (*ledniki*, i.e. places for storing fish and the fat of animals, mostly built as pits) and fish-drying racks nearby the house. These observations have come together as a description of a unique architectural ensemble known as the *tonĭâ* — again, a geographic-technical object which, while mentioned by imperial observers, would gain a special importance in the post-Soviet period. According to a recent account, *tonĭâs*:

> were specially outfitted for fishing and the initial processing of fish (and sea mammals). A *tonĭâ* would be built of a hut (in which fishers and sea mammal hunters would live during the fishing and hunting seasons), a steam-bath, storage shelters for provisions, fishing equipment and salt, ice houses for the preservation of fresh fish, hanging structures to untangle and dry nets, a special windvane (*flĭûger*) to determine the direction of the wind, and special equipment (*lebedki*, *vorota*) for hauling boats and nets onto the beach. Many *tonĭâs* would have large wooden crosses. Larger *tonĭâs* might even have their own chapels (Laĭus and Laĭus 2010: 24–5).

An important aspect of the *tonĭâ*, aside from its economic significance, was its role in consolidating cultural transmission during the intense periods of fishing of the high season.

Material culture, ranging from clothing to architectural ensembles, have been markers of Pomor identity for over 150 years and continue

to structure the way that Pomors see themselves. This is an important illustration of the way that material artefacts have been used to define *etnos* starting from the first work of Fëdor Volkov at the end of the nineteenth century (see chapter 3).

Northern Russian folklore and *Pomor'ska govorîa*

> I could barely understand my companion's speech, due to its many provincialisms. Yet, it was not as obscure and confusing for me as was, for example, the speech of distant Pomors. The lasher's dialect must have been influenced by the proximity of the province's capital and by the communication with travellers. In a distant part of Pomor'e, especially in places far away from towns, I often found myself at a dead end while trying to understand a Russian person speaking in my native tongue. Listening later to the language of Pomors, I came across words — alongside Karelian and old Slavic words — that were astonishing in their striking accuracy of expression. Take for example, the word "undead" (*nezhit'*), which is a collective noun for all spirits of folk superstition: water, house and forest spirits, mermaids and everything that does not live a human life (Maksimov 1871: 43–4).

The Russian north also attracted the attention of ethnographers, folklorists and linguists keen to discover ancient epic songs called *byliny* and to document the special dialect spoken in the region. Ethnographic expeditions to the Russian north in the second half of the nineteenth century discovered a rich repertoire of *byliny*.

Byliny were at first regarded as part of a wider range of texts, not necessarily related to heroic epics, called *stariny* ("old songs" or "songs about ancient times") (Panchenko 2012: 430). This folklore genre was thought to represent a form which started to become extinct in the middle and southern parts of Russia already in the twelfth century (Kozhinov 1999). In line with its severe landscape, the north has since been viewed as a "natural preserve" of the epic. The Russian north was therefore the place where most *byliny* have been recorded. Scholars assumed that *byliny* and *stariny* have preserved the "voice of medieval Russian people" (Panchenko 2012: 430). This discovery defined the nature of ethnographic interest in the area for many decades to come. Until now, the White Sea coast attracts numerous folklore expeditions. Villagers see almost any ethnographer who comes to their place as first

and foremost a folklorist and immediately direct them to village elders who can still remember old tales.

One of the folklorists to travel to the north with the aim of recording *byliny* was Alekseĭ Markov. In 1898, he spent several weeks in the village Zimnía Zolotitsa where he especially worked with storytellers (*skaziteli*) Kriukovy (Markov 1901: 1). Markov believed that the remarkable survival of *byliny* on Zimniĭ Bereg (Winter Coast) was directly linked to the particular *byt* (lifestyle) of the locals (Ibid: 8–9). The scholar concluded that peasants in Zolotitsa learned the old songs as they spent extended periods far away from their homes in distant fishing huts while fishing for salmon in summer, and during their hunting trips for sea mammals or shorter hunting trips in the forests (Ibid). Geography and isolation played a big role in framing these traditional skills. As Markov wrote:

> Even now, with the improvement of communication ways in the introduction of mail services and telegraphs to a large degree […] Even now, it takes a long time for the Russian news to arrive on the White Sea coast, and these news do not impress the peasants (Ibid: 11).

The assumption that the Russian north was isolated would come to be challenged late in the Soviet period by the ethnographer Svetlana Dmitrieva who pointed out that the area had intensive trade and cultural connections with Scandinavia (Dmitrieva 1972: 70–2). She further argued that a look at biographies of *skaziteli* (tellers) of *byliny* reveals that many of them were literate and had lived and worked in cities like St Petersburg and Novgorod. Narrators from the White Sea coast, Mezen' and Pechora travelled as far as Scandinavia.

Another characteristic of the region was its special dialect. The different Russian dialects became a focus of ethnographic and linguistic research with a general interest in Russian culture in the nineteenth century. Nadezhdin, for instance, criticised linguists for having so far focused on the official Russian *rossiĭskiĭ* (language), while local spoken languages remained unstudied. He drew attention to different types of the Russian language: the Great-Russians' language, the Small-Russian, and Belorussian (Anuchin 1889: 14–5). Mid-twentieth century ethnographers usually differentiated between southern and northern dialects, with the distinctive feature being the phonetic peculiarity of vowels [o] and [a]. They argued that in the northern regions the

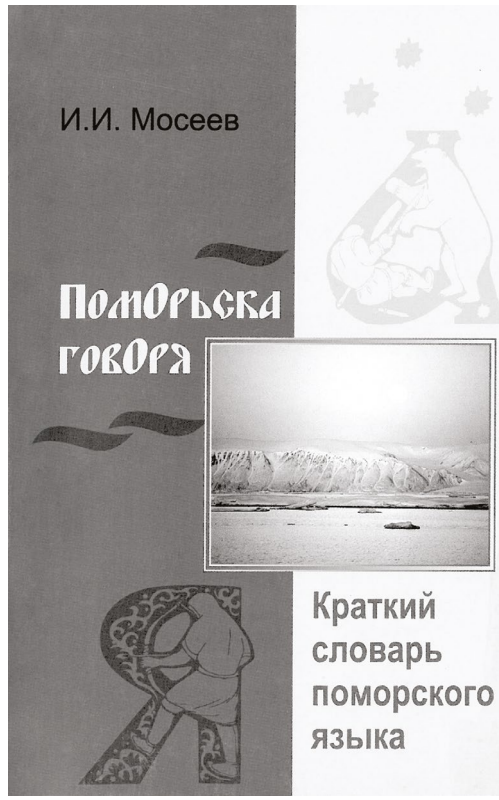

Fig. 8.6 Front cover of the dictionary *Pomor'ska govorĭa* (Moseev 2005)

okaĭushchiĭ dialect prevailed, while in the south the *akaĭushchiĭ* dialect was more common (Aleksandrov et al. 1964: 153, 155). Moreover, in the 1964 Soviet-era encyclopaedia ethnographers published very few scattered examples of Pomor distinctiveness, but the sections on the Pomor dialect were uncharacteristically prosaic in distinguishing not only vowels but also sets of lexica that were unique to the region. In terms of ethno-national representation, the group was sketched out on a map of northern Europe according to the extent of its dialect (Ibid).

The northern dialect, with its unique pronunciation, as well as peculiar vocabulary related to environmental knowledge also attracted the attention of scholars. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century, the ethnographer and historian Aleksandr Podvysot͡skiĭ composed a dictionary of Arkhangelsk province's local dialect (Podvysot͡skiĭ 1885). This work was continued by Kseniĭa Gemp (2004)

and I. M. Durov (2011) among others. In the 2000s, these descriptions gave ground for Arkhangelsk activists to outline the northern dialect as a separate language. Together with other activists, Ivan Moseev published a dictionary called *Pomor'ska govorîâ* (Moseev 2005) (Fig. 8.6). Words and phrases presented in the dictionary were collected in Arkhangelsk region mostly by non-linguists. In an interview with Anna Pyzhova, Moseev emphasised the role of Pomor language: "Today, I am among the few northerners who are relatively fluent in their language — Pomorskaîâ govorîâ. This is my first language, the language of my childhood, the language of my parents, relatives, neighbours, and therefore my native language" (qtd. in Pyzhova 2011). While Arkhangelsk scholars criticised Moseev's dictionary as non-scientific and a work of an amateur, it turned out to be quite popular among Arkhangelsk townspeople and even inspired similar projects in other parts of Arkhangelsk oblast.

Pomor Distinctiveness in a Pan-Slavic Frame

Russian ethnography in the Imperial period, and throughout the Soviet period, placed differing emphases on the distinctness of Pomors from other Slavic groups. This discourse of difference reflects a certain awkwardness within which Pomors fit into standard genealogies and typologies of Slavic people. As we have seen in chapter 3, the way that Great Russians were defined to a large extent was calibrated on how the northern and southern frontiers of Slavic settlements were described. The reports of travellers and ethnographers tend to alternately fit Pomors sometimes close to Great Russians, sometimes with the traditions of northern indigenous peoples, and sometimes as part of a distinct northern European or Fennoscandian culture. This ambiguity is also reflected in some minority opinions.

For example, Dmitriĭ Zelenin, in his *East Slavic Ethnography* (published in German in 1927 and translated into Russian for the first time in 1991) classified the "Pomor dialect" as a sub-group within north Russian dialects (Zelenin 1991). He also put forward a controversial theory of there being "two peoples" (*narodnost'*) within the Great Russians. He distinguished north and south Great Russians on the basis of their dialects, and demoted the central Russian groups to a sort of interstitial group. Further, following the acclaimed linguist A. Shakhmatov,

Zelenin considered northern Russian dialect groups to be descendants of the ancient Slavic tribes of Slovene and Krivichi — giving northern Russians (and Pomors in particular) a genealogy of being the purest type of Great Russians. This linguistically-driven theory sits in contrast to another widely held view that the Pomors were descendants of the Novgorod Slavs mixed with Finnish Karelians (Leskinen 2016: 528–29).

This powerful ambiguity as to whether or not northern Russians represented one pole of Slavic cultural difference as compared to southern Russians, or if they were "pure" or "mixtures", would prepare the ground for Pomors to become a controversial example in Soviet ethnography. Since Pomors distinguished themselves from other Russians by their way of speaking, material culture, and way of life, ethnographers had to find a special place for them in ethnographic theory. However, they struggled to represent the unique quality of Pomors as being somehow the most pure, original or distinctive representatives of the Great Russians. This clumsiness is similar to that faced by the Shirokogoroffs during their Zabaĭkal' fieldwork in 1912–1913 (see chapter 5). The Shirokogoroffs were puzzled by creole categories they recorded instead of pure ethnic categories their mentors had told them to expect. This general discomfort with hybridity came to haunt Soviet etnnographers generation after generation. Their unease led to the evolution of the discrete category of the "subetnos" with its marked continuities with earlier imperial studies of material culture.

Pomors as *Subetnos*

As several chapters in this volume attest, *etnos* theory became an important arena for weighing identity claims in the late Imperial period and the height of the Soviet period. *Etnos* theory differs from its cognates in American and European anthropology for its distinct interest in ethnic origins (*etnogenez*) — a quality often linked to its purported primordialism (Banks 1996: 17). The unique way that Pomor lifestyles have been documented produced odd anomalies within Soviet *etnos* theory. If other nations were pure *etnoses*, Pomors in some sources became a primary example of a *subetnos*.

A key feature of *etnos* theory was the idea of a hierarchical classification of ethnic communities. The head of the ethnographic department

of the Russian Academy of Sciences and Director of the Institute of Ethnography, I͡Ulian Bromleĭ was one of the scholars who excelled in sketching out hierarchical distinctions. His somewhat baroque classification system laid-out a set of "meta-ethnic communities" at the top of this taxonomy (Bromleĭ 1983). At the bottom, he sketched out a smaller unit, which he described as a *subetnos*. Within the hierarchical taxonomy of *etnos* theory, Bromleĭ placed Pomors as a classic example of the *subetnos* of Russians.

Bromleĭ's classification was intended to replace what we noted above as Tolstov's "historical-cultural group" (Tolstov 1964: 145) and Tokarev's "cultural-geographic type" (Tokarev 1958: 31). Bromleĭ argued that one person could simultaneously belong to several ethnic groups of different orders. For example, one person could consider themselves to be Russian (main ethnic unit), a Pomor (*subetnos*), and a Slav (*meta-ethnic community*) (Bromleĭ 1983: 84). The idea of larger groups comprising smaller groups gained increasing popularity in Soviet ethnography, especially from the 1980s. This model reminds one of the Russian *matreshka* dolls, a set of wooden nesting dolls of different sizes that can be placed one inside another.

Alongside Bromleĭ, charismatic geographer and historian Lev Gumilëv developed an independent theory of *etnos* and *subetnos*, where Pomors also served as a prime example. His work, although initially very controversial, later gained popularity in Russian post-Soviet scholarship as well as in the wider community. Gumilëv's writings have become especially popular among local Pomor historians in the late Soviet period, and arguably Pomor activists borrowed more widely from Gumilëv's vibrant prose than from Bromleĭ. Gumilëv regarded *etnos* as a living organism that like any other organism is born, matures, grows old, and dies (Shnirel'man 2006). This basic assumption allows one to calculate different stages and their characteristics of an *etnos*. In Gumilëv's theory, an *etnos* is closely connected to the environment where it develops — which again is a strong theme in Pomor scholarship.

Moreover, Gumilëv believed in a hierarchy of *etnoses*. Like Bromleĭ, he developed a hierarchical taxonomy where he distinguished between a "superetnos", "etnos", and "sub-etnos". Gumilëv argued that an *etnos* possesses a mechanism of self-regulation. For instance, an *etnos* is able to increase its own complexity to defend itself from external impacts.

Therefore, according to Gumilëv, the Great Russian *etnos* itself started to produce subethnic divisions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that sometimes took the form of estates (Gumilëv 1989). This resulted in the segregations of Cossacks in the south and Pomors in the north.

Scholarly discussions and definitions of *etnos* and *subetnos* have been incorporated into public narratives on Pomors, often with a degree of terminological confusion. The following quote and a subsequent paragraph show how a discussion about Pomors' status can go full circle from Pomors being seen as a separate *etnos* within the Russian people to them actually being Russian:

> What do you mean [Pomors] are not recognised. How shall I put it — not recognised. So, the Pomor *etnos*, i.e. a special people among the Russians, the Pomor *etnos*, the *etnos is* recognised. […] [Pomors are] called *etnos* everywhere now. […] *Etnos* is such a special characteristic. […] Cultural, economic, all sorts. Let's have a look [in an encyclopaedia] what *etnos* is (Male, 75 years old, Arkhangelsk, Russia, 2014).

Another example of the same circular thinking was provided by a discussion surrounding an encyclopaedia entry for the term *etnos*. This entry referred the reader to another term — *ėtnicheskai͡a obshchnost'* (ethnic community) instead. The definition described *ėtnicheskai͡a obshchnost'* as a "historically developed type of a stable social group of people, represented by a tribe, *narodnost'* (nationality/people), nation" (Bol'shoi ėntsiklopedicheskiĭ slovar' 2000). It continued to say that the term *ėtnicheskai͡a obshchnost'* is ethnographically close to the notion *narod* (people). The subsequent discussion about how this applies to Pomors made the interviewee say that "a separate people does not sound very nice. They [Pomors] are Russian, that's the thing" (Male, 75 years old, Arkhangelsk, Russia, 2014).

Local Ideas

Among the classic Pomor ethnographers, it is arguably Tat'ïana Bernstham who most closely engaged with the hierarchical themes outlined by Bromleĭ and Gumilëv, even though she did not use the term *subetnos*. She promoted the idea of "local groups" as an alternative approach to the study of *etnos* in her later work. In the introduction to a collective volume on the Russian north (Bernshtam 1995), she

suggested developing new approaches to the theory of *etnos*. According to Bernstham, ethnographers have so far engaged in the development of theories regarding ethnogenesis and scales of hierarchies of ethnic groups. However, she notes that ethnographers have also realised that the reality of ethnic borders, languages, and other elements of culture do not necessarily correspond with these theories. Bernshtam suggested that studying "local groups" could contribute to finding new approaches for the theory of *etnos* (Bernshtam 1995: 5). While her "local groups" approach does not contradict *etnos* theory, it seems to encourage a new methodology. Instead of trying to match theory and empirical findings, Bernshtam argued for inductive methodologies, whereby scholars should document people's local ideas (*narodnye lokal'nye predstavleniia*) and gradually assemble them to identify groupings. These local ideas, according to her, would reflect the entire array of a group's sacred and mundane connections to the surrounding universe (Bernshtam 1995: 208). This methodological shift brought Bernshtam to highlight the importance of studying people's religious beliefs and practices, and the perception of space and place.

Bernshtam studied local ideas among the rural population of Arkhangelsk and Vologda oblasts in the Russian north (Bernshtam 1995). She structured her analysis of the ethnographic data using categories that she saw as key for the study of local groups: endonyms and exonyms of people and places; intra- and inter-group differences; culture and economy; wedding rituals; folk legends about first settlers and sacred places. Bernshtam paid particular attention to topoethnonyms — groups' names derived from a geographical object — because a topoethnonym "unites a group and locus into a secular-sacred nature-culture unit — one's own world" (Bernshtam 1995: 308–9). She then attempted to trace ethnogenetic and cosmological origins of main local ideas, which she saw grounded in the social and Orthodox history of the region. She argued that the stability of local forms of Orthodox beliefs played an important role in preserving socio-cultural and spiritual specificity of local groups.

Bernshtam's cosmological approach to studying local groups led her to explore people's ideas about space, "us-them", the ancestral home, and destiny. Without such reconstruction of people's worldview, she

argued, the very ethnographic project of studying local groups is futile (Bernshtam 1995: 208).

Within this range of writing on the hierarchical way that Pomor lifeways fit with those of other Slavic peoples, the topic of Pomor ethnogenesis deserves a special focus.

Theories of Pomor Origin

Pomors are commonly believed to have originated from the territory of Novgorod Republic — a separate unit within the Russian state during the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Novgorod city was located at the crossroads of major trading routes as trade played an important role in Novgorod Republic's prosperity. The nineteenth-century travel accounts often trace Pomors' origin back to Novgorod by highlighting their distinct disposition: "Descendants of freedom-loving Novgorodians, Pomors have still preserved the spirit of enterprise, unrestraint and courage of their ancestors" (Ėngel'gardt 2009: 48). As mentioned above, a lineage of descent to the Novogorod state also linked Pomors to the role of sea-faring colonizers who extended Russian influence eastwards across Eurasia.

Bernshtam and other scholars have advocated for a more complex picture of Pomor origin and argued that there were two colonization waves, from Novgorod and the Upper Volga region. Descendants from Novgorod colonized mainly the western part of the Russian north, whereas settlers from the Volga region colonized primarily the eastern part (Bernshtam 1978: 31). Contemporary popular representations of Pomors, however, continue to portray them as courageous, enterprising and independent people, thus contributing towards creating a timeless image of a people with a unified Novgorodian origin.

Referring to the settlement of Slavic people in the north, Russian scholars often use the term "colonization" (*osvoenie*). It is commonly assumed that when moving north, the Slavs encountered other nations; but scholars dispute the extent to which the groups have mixed with the local Finno-Ugric groups. There has therefore been difficulty in specifying the role of the Finno-Ugric groups in the formation of northern Russians. Bernshtam argued that the population settling the territories of the Russian north from Novgorod and Upper Volga

areas was already ethnically heterogeneous, and that the new settlers did mix with the local Finno-Ugric groups (Bernshtam 2009: 220). In Soviet ethnography, scholars usually argued that the colonisation of the Russian north took place without conflicts and was characterised by a peaceful relationship between Slavs and Finno-Ugric groups "contributing to mutual influence and mutual enrichment of cultures" (Vlasova 2015: 16). However, scholars also assumed that Slavs became the dominant ethnic group and often assimilated the local population. By the seventeenth century, migration and the colonization of the north decreased and the composition of the population became more constant. By this time, according to Vlasova, the northern Russian population had developed into an ethnic-territorial community with particular cultural-economic features (Ibid: 36–7).

The question of miscegenation (*metisatsiia*) was often discussed when it came to explanations of how different branches of Russians emerged. In the case of Great Russians, scholars were concerned with the influence of Finno-Ugric heritage on their physical appearance (Leskinen 2012: 249).

In the Russian north, beliefs about mythical ancestors called "Chud'" have been widespread. For example, Pëtr Efimenko noted that the village Zolotitsa on the Winter Coast was originally founded by a tribe called Chud'. According to Efimenko, locals used to talk about a place nearby the village called "Chudskaia pit" where this tribe had settled originally, and it was believed that the Chud' merged with the Slavic people who arrived from the south (Efimenko 1877: 10–1). Today, scholars assume that the term Chud was a collective term for native groups such as Meria, Ves' and others that Slavic people encountered while moving north (Vlasova 2015: 30–1).

The Russian natural scientist Nikolaĭ Zograf wrote an account of people inhabiting European Russia. He noted that, across the north, Russian settlements are located in forests, tundra, and along the shores. Zograf called the Russians the "rulers" of these lands (Zograf 1894: 8), and argued that there are two types of Russian people inhabiting the north. The first group, which is the minority, settled along the rivers of Sukhon, northern Dvina, Onega and near the mouth of Mezen', as well as along the seashore. He described them as tall, strong, and beautiful, with dark blond to brown hair, and blond bushy beards. These Russians

were mostly sailors, fishermen and traders, or navigators. Many of them considered themselves descendants of the first inhabitants of the region — the first settlers from Novgorod (Ibid: 9). The other group, according to Zograf, were the peasants living in Arkhangelsk and Vologda province in the places along smaller rivers, or far away from the large waterways. These Russians were of lower stature; their eyes narrower compared to the other group, their facial features less proportional, and their hair colour darker. According to Zograf, all this suggests that these peasants were not the pure descendants of Novgorod Russians, but a mixed-blood people with a tribe called Chud'. This tribe is believed to have disappeared; however, it is mentioned in chronicles, epics and legends (Ibid: 9).

Academic works on Pomors' ethnogenesis found a strong resonance in recent claims about Pomor indigeneity. Drawing on the concepts of *etnos* and *subetnos* and arguments about Pomors' descent from mixed populations of Russian and Finno-Ugric groups, activists from the city of Arkhangelsk promoted the idea of Pomors as a separate indigenous group that deserves a protected status and special rights to natural resources. To further support their claims, they quoted the results of a research on a gene pool of Russians, which was carried out by the Institute of Molecular Genetics and the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences in cooperation with British and Estonian scholars (Balanovsky et al. 2008). The activists referred to results of this investigation as proof that Pomors are not incomers from southern parts of Russia, but an indigenous population of the north. In particular, they referred to the fact that the gene pool of Pomors is more related to Finno-Ugric than to the Russian people.

Other supporters of Pomor indigeneity declared to us during informal conversations that Pomors have a number of physiological features that distinguish them from the Russian people: for example, that the Pomor skull is of a different shape and their arms are longer. Although it would be difficult to find academic literature to support these generalizations today, this discourse of physical difference builds on a set of old stereotypes of the distinct physical form of the Pomor population. Leskinen in her monograph on the "construction" of the idea of the Great Russians writes that several decades of description of Pomors can be summarized as a play of contrasts between an ideal

of what an ancient Slavic type should be (tall, strong, light-haired) intermixed with the cardinal opposite of the stereotype of a Finnish type (short, gnarled, dark haired) (Leskinen 2016: 533). She links this play of opposites to a not-so-subtle construction of regional ethnic hierarchies.

A leader of a Pomor organization in Arkhangelsk appealed to the concept of Chud' as a proof of Pomors' distinctiveness and mixed origin:

> Since Chud' tribes used to live here, where would pure blood Slavs come from? […] It is not surprising that people here are different according to some anthropological [*antropologicheskim*] parameters too. There are darker people here, and with narrower eyes. […] Chud' tribes are indigenous proto-Pomor tribes. The ones that gave birth to the Pomors, […] Saami, Karels, Vepses […] and other Finno-Ugric peoples. Later, Slavic people came here, and assimilation, inter-marriages and mixture of cultures occurred. The Pomors probably emerged at the interface of all this. They are a mixed people. Therefore, to bang one's chest and shout that we are pure Russians, is not quite correct (Male, 40 years old, Arkhangelsk, Russia, 2014).

Pomor indigeneity claims caused a lot of controversy among the scholarly community and wider Russian society, as they seemed to challenge the established concept of ethnogenesis and the very integrity of the Great Russian identity project.

Recent Pomor Identity Movements

Over 150 years of debate on the identity of Pomors, and the northern Slavic zone, has had a powerful effect on local communities. With the reforms of perestroika, and the fall of the Soviet Union, ethnic identity movements came to be one of the major vectors by which local people expressed their sense of belonging and rights. These movements have taken a number of forms, ranging from very localized initiatives — often led by a single individual — to document and preserve artefacts and items of clothing in local museums, to the vociferous and sometimes surprising attempts to have Pomors recognized as an indigenous people.

A Museified Approach to Culture

Pomor material culture is still appreciated in villages, which is often manifested in local museums run by a group of people or a single

person. Such museums exist in many villages on the White and Barents Sea coasts. Some of them are curated with the help of official institutions such as the Houses of Culture or larger museums; others are run by local people who usually have no professional background. These museum collections are aimed at preserving the Pomor heritage. Collectors consider the conservation of material culture as significant for preserving the memory of those Pomors who used to go on extensive fishing and sea mammal hunting trips at the sea.

This preservation of material culture is all the more important as local people often feel that Pomor culture has undergone significant changes that mean Pomors of today are not the same as their ancestors:

> We used to have Pomors — those who used to go to the Kanin [Peninsula] to fish. To Morzhovet͡s [Island, for seal hunting], to Novai͡a Zemli͡a. Those used to be Pomors. Previous old men. I almost do not remember true Pomors. Although I do remember some old men. They always […] went to hunt seals (Female, 75 years old, Arkhangelsk oblast, Russia, 2014).

The professionalisation of fishing and sea mammal hunting, which began with the collectivisation of work in the countryside in the 1920s–1930s, might explain a wide spread opinion among villagers today that there are "no Pomors left", since locally-run collective farms (*kolkhozy*) do not run seal hunting anymore, and their coastal fisheries are only a fraction of what they used to be. Some *kolkhozes* still run salmon fisheries at *toni͡as* — often at a loss, because fishing quotas are very low and income from the catch does not cover the costs (Figs. 8.7 and 8.8). *Kolkhozes* maintain these fisheries mainly for social reasons, as they provide local people with access to employment and traditional food (as they sell part of the catch in village shops). When people in the village say that there are few fishermen left, they often refer to those who work at *toni͡as*. *Toni͡as*, therefore, remain a key material expression of fishing as a livelihood and source of identity.

Through the creation of museums and the collection of historical material artefacts, some locals establish a connection to Pomor heritage. For instance, there is a rather extensive collection of various Pomor objects and clothing in a village on the Winter Coast, gathered by a woman who is originally from the village but has now lived in the city for many years. The woman keeps the collection in her village house which she visits once a year for a couple of months in the summer.

Fig. 8.7 *Tonîa* Kedy. Photo by Natalie Wahnsiedler

Fig. 8.8 Salmon fisheries at *tonîa* Kedy. Photo by Natalie Wahnsiedler

She has been collecting the items for many years and arranged them in groups in the uninhabited part of her old wooden house (*povet'*).[3] According to the general museum practice, she labelled the items with short texts. Her large collection comprises clothing, fishing nets, various kinds of old dishes, spinning wheels, and other artefacts. Other local museum collections have a more specific focus according to the collector's interests, such as, for example, a collection of Pomor seafaring instruments in a barn.

The "museified" approach to Pomor identity stands in contrast with a more hands-on view of Pomorness widely held in villages. Village dwellers connect Pomor identity to fishing as an active practice — often as part of an official profession — as the following quote from fieldwork interviews suggests:

> I used to be [Pomor], until I got married. I then became a housewife and stopped fishing (Female, 60 years old, Arkhangelsk oblast, Russia, 2014).

The "museified" approach is often held among people who have come to the village from elsewhere, or among former permanent residents who now live in the city and visit their home village occasionally. Permanent dwellers, on the other hand, often have a practice-based approach to Pomorness. Masha Shaw looks at a similar distinction between permanent residents, seasonal in-migrants and casual incomers in a different part of the White Sea coast. She argues that for incomers, the activity of collecting and formalizing historical data about the village serves as a compensation for their separation from their home place. It allows them to reengage and reconnect with their home village. In contrast, people who live in the village permanently "do not have a need to reify the village's history and culture, because they are in the place, and this constantly keeps them busy with various everyday concerns" (Nakhshina 2013: 219). Fishing is still a vital everyday activity for many villagers on the White Sea coast, although some practices have been long gone. This is reflected in the wide array of opinions on Pomorness held among villagers, from "there are no true Pomors left anymore" to "everyone here is a Pomor".

3 A *povet'* is the non-residential part of a typical northern peasant house which was used for the storage of household items, fishing equipment, carts, etc.

Pomor crosses

While few attempts are made to reconstruct the fishing *tonîâs*, more recently a new movement of reconstructing old and constructing new Pomor wooden crosses emerged. The wooden crosses are a widespread phenomenon along the White Sea coast in northwest Russia. Although often referred to as "votive", these wooden crosses had multiple functions. Russian scholars emphasize that the tradition of wooden crosses must be conceptualized within the maritime culture of the region. Along the seashores, the crosses functioned as navigation marks (Okorokov 2005). Often, they were placed at important places along the roads — at the crossroads or river crossings — and were constructed on visible spots, on hills, and high riverbanks and seashores (Fig. 8.9). The votive crosses were built following a promise to God, a sign of gratitude for something good, or for deliverance from something evil. The vows were given on some special occasion, usually associated with hardships such as illness, death, or disappearance of a family member, famine or crop failure (Shchepanskaîà 2003). Although, the wooden crosses can be found throughout the territory of the Russian north, they are more frequent and visible along the Mezen' River and northeast coast of the White Sea.

Locals build new crosses nearby their outdoor cabins in a way that echoes the former tradition of erecting crosses near a *tonîâ*. They consider it to be a way to show respect to their ancestors. Old crosses are carefully maintained. One such cross is located between the villages of Koĭda and Dolgoshchel'e. According to a local story, this cross was erected by a group of fishermen who were returning home from fishing and got lost on the way. However, when they reached this location on the hill, they were able to find the direction to their village. Therefore, they made a promise to build a cross. Travellers who pass this way usually stop by the cross and leave some coins or other little things like empty bullet casings.

A group of Pomor artists and intellectuals, supported by *kolkhoz* chairmen, committed themselves to build a cross in the Norwegian municipality of Vardø. The cooperation between Arkhangelsk and Vardø had begun already in the late 1980s and early 1990s with cultural exchanges that resulted in the opening of a Pomor museum in Vardø. The cross was constructed by a local artist in Arkhangelsk and then

Fig. 8.9 Old Pomor cross at *tonîâ* Kedy. Photo by Masha Shaw

brought to Norway by car. It was erected nearby the place of an old Pomor cemetery.

The movement of (re)constructing Pomor wooden crosses points towards the wider identity claims on behalf of Pomor activists. Although the crosses point literally to the importance of Russian Orthodox Christianity to Pomor traditions — and in particular to those parts of their traditions that link them to the wider Russian nation — the crosses symbolically point to their reverence for the places and seascapes where Pomors traditionally reside. Thus while serving as a religious and to some extent nationalist monument, the crosses perform a double function of pointing to Pomor rootedness. This quality would come to play an important role in recent years.

Indigeneity Claims

In the 2000s, a group of activists from the city of Arkhangelsk claimed that Pomors should be recognised as a less-numerous minority (*korennoĭ malochislennyĭ narod*). The term *korennye malochislennye narody*

(KMN), usually translated as "less-numerous indigenous peoples", was introduced into the Federal Law in 1999. Within Russia today, 47 peoples are officially recognised as KMNs of the Russian Federation (Pravitel'stvo 2015) who "qualify for the rights, privileges, and state support earmarked for indigenous peoples" (Donahoe et al. 2008: 993).

The concept of KMN goes back to imperial understandings of ethnic diversity and is related to the expansion of the Russian state and the acquisition (*osvoenie*) of new territories (Sokolovskiĭ 2001: 76). In the Imperial period, the term *inorodt͡sy* was frequently used in the administrative practices of the Russian Empire (Ibid: 86). In the Russian language, the term semantically means to "be born of another kind". Therefore, it implements the notion of a division between "the own people" and "the others" (Ibid: 89). In the early Soviet period, the imperial legacy merged with "the paternalistic idea of there being 'small peoples' [*malye narody*], diminutive in *both* world-historical importance and population" (Anderson 2000: 79). This fracture between being part of a majority group, and being a peculiar or special population deserving of paternalistic support, seems to be a constant theme in how northern Slavic populations have been described. However, this particular term has an additional twist in that it has been historically applied to (Siberian) hunter-gatherer societies — a group of people who in the minds of many urban intellectuals might be thought to be the antithesis of urban Russians. Hence it is with great irony that this term was employed by a group of activists for a population that has been considered as Russian, and sometimes even as "the most authentic Russians".

While the idea to officially recognise Pomors as an indigenous group was rather new, an increasing interest in Pomor culture and heritage emerged already in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Perestroika and the dissolution of the Soviet Union opened up new possibilities for civil engagement. A new interest in ethnicity and indigeneity developed, sometimes leading to the formation of ethno-political organizations (Shabaev and Sharapov 2011: 107). In Arkhangelsk oblast, one such organization, called "Pomor Revival" (*Pomorskoe vozrozhdenie*), was founded in 1987. In the early 2000s, the national-cultural organization "Pomor Autonomy" was formed at about the same time with the "Pomor Obshchina". The interest in Pomor culture developed along

with the interest in international projects and cooperation, especially with Norway. The awareness of historical connections between Russia and Norway in the sphere of fishing and trade played an important role.

As Russia transited from the planned state economy to market economy and liberalism, most *kolkhozes* in Arkhangelsk oblast collapsed. The remaining fishing *kolkhozes* on the White Sea Coast are not able to provide the same employment opportunities and social support as before. Therefore, many villagers have to rely on subsistence economies of which fishing is the most important. However, strict restrictions apply, especially to fishing salmon, which is the most valuable species. Since Atlantic salmon spawns in several rivers of Arkhangelsk oblast, fishing with nets is entirely forbidden both in rivers and the White Sea to avoid salmon bycatch. Some restrictions are lifted for recreational fishing on a few officially organized fishing grounds. However, in rural areas, obtaining licenses is considered too costly. In addition, coastal residents often have their traditional inherited fishing grounds and they do not wish to fish in other places.

Locals do not consider fishing as a leisure activity, but as a source of livelihood. Activists argue that the situation is different in the neighbouring Nenets Autonomous District where Nenets people are recognized as an indigenous less-numerous minority and are therefore entitled to traditional fishing rights. Activists highlight the unfairness of the situation when Pomors and Nenetses live in similar climatic and socio-economic conditions, and yet do not have the same access to resources. They argue that the recognition of Pomors as a small-numbered indigenous people would allow Pomor fishermen to conduct their traditional economies and improve their living conditions.

Activists' persistent appeals for Pomors' recognition resulted in a response at a state level when the federal government held a meeting in 2007 that looked into the social and economic support of Pomors. The government also requested an expert opinion on Pomor identity from several prominent Russian anthropologists. Scholars responded by not advising the government to support activists' claims for Pomors to be recognised as a separate ethnic group. They argued that Pomors are a regional subgroup of Russian people, since they do not speak a separate language and their material and spiritual culture has always been very close to that of the majority of the Russian people (Nakhshina 2016: 313).

The main resolution of the 2007 meeting was the federal government's recommendation to regional governments of those administrative units where Pomors live to take measures to improve Pomors' social and economic conditions. It also proposed changes to the federal law on fisheries that would allow Pomors to conduct their traditional way of life. Since the resolution was merely a recommendation, regional governments did not act on it. Pomor activists made further appeals to the government but did not manage to achieve any formal recognition of Pomors as a separate indigenous group of the Russian Federation (Nakhshina 2016).

Fieldwork research in Arkhangelsk oblast in 2014–2016 revealed a coexistence of highly contested views on Pomor identity. One position was represented by Pomor activists who claimed that Pomors are an indigenous group and thus a separate *etnos* within the Russian Federation. Activists pointed out the distinctiveness of the Pomor group, basing their arguments on the scholarly understanding of what characterises an *etnos*, i.e. a distinctive language, culture and identity. The identity factor allowed for some of them to have a very broad and inclusive approach to Pomorness, as in the following view held by a Pomor organisation's leader:

> [Pomors] are those who care for this culture, this way of life. […] However, we should not confuse Pomors with fishermen. The same way that we should not confuse Nenetses with reindeer herders. Nenetses now work in prosecution, and in other sections of governance. They do not have to be herders. Everyone here for some reason sees a Pomor with a fishing net over the shoulder. […] But historically this is not the dominant way of subsistence anymore. […] Those who know ornament patterns, singing culture, Pomor fairy tales and other stuff. All this comes together if you care about it. […] People tell me, I myself come from Ukraine, came here twenty years ago. But I don't feel myself as a Ukrainian. I feel myself as a Pomor. May I? Why not? I always give this example: Pushkin, the dearest writer for the Russian reader. But he is so Ethiopian. But if you have done more for the Russian people, then you are probably a Russian. If you feel yourself good in Pomor'e, it probably means you are a Pomor. At least we do not measure skulls here and do not take blood tests (Male, 40 years old, Arkhangelsk, Russia, 2014).

The approach to Pomors as a separate indigenous group was on the rise until one of the most prominent Pomor activists, Ivan

Moseev, underwent a court trial where he was charged with "the incitment of national hatred". The accusation was based on an online comment — allegedly made by Moseev — which singled out Pomors as an ethnic group and implied their superiority over the Russians. Moseev denied the accusations and subsequently withdrew from public activities. His case was widely covered in local newspapers and even in the international *Barents Observer* and left behind a degree of uncertainty among urban intellectuals and artists who supported the claim that Pomors are a separate *etnos* and not just a sub-group of Russians. Many started to classify Pomors in less "separatist" terms and switched to more academically sanctioned and officially recognised concepts such as *subetnos* or ethnic community (*ėtnicheskai͡a obshchnost'*).

Some Arkhangelsk intellectuals who sympathised with the idea of Pomor indigeneity simultaneously insisted on the uniqueness of Pomors in their Russianness. According to one local thinker and a dedicated Orthodox believer, Pomors and the Russian north more widely have preserved certain spiritual qualities, and therefore could serve as a gene pool for true Russian values. This apparent incongruity whereby Pomors are indigenous and Russian at the same time, often emerged during conversations with people in Arkhangelsk, perhaps pointing towards some inherent contradictions within the *etnos* concept itself.

Claims about Pomor indigeneity were confronted by other Arkhangelsk scholars and intellectuals, who argued that Pomors are a historically developed identity of the White Sea coastal dwellers. They saw Pomors' specificity in their economy and some even found the factor of ethnicity altogether insignificant:

> It seems that Pomors have an economic rather than ethnic foundation. In other words, it is not important whether it were Finno-Ugric or Slavic people who settled here, but their traditional way of life based on […] sea fishing and hunting, salt making and subsidiary crop farming and animal husbandry — in other words, agriculture — because just fishing and hunting was not enough. It was a natural phenomenon, this Pomor complex economy. […] These Pomors, their status had never been marked as that of a separate ethnic group, neither before the revolution, nor during the Soviet period. […] All this national underpinning of the current Pomor question is mainly connected to contemporary events (Male, 45 years old, Arkhangelsk, Russia, 2014).

In villages along the White Sea coast, many people have never heard of Pomor organisations in Arkhangelsk fighting for their rights to resources. Most interviewees considered Pomors to be Russian people; yet, many of them supported the idea of granting Pomors a status of a less-numerous minority, in order for them to obtain official access to their traditional fishing grounds.

The turmoil caused by Pomor activists in Arkhangelsk was hardly noticed in the village for two main reasons: firstly because Pomor activists failed to establish connections with rural residents; and secondly because villagers have a profoundly different understanding from the activists of what it means to be a Pomor. For the majority of people in the coastal villages of Arkhangelsk oblast, being Pomor means to be actively engaged in activities connected to the sea. Many people take pride in being descendants of the historical seafarers and *promyshlenniki* (fishers and hunters) that have been so vividly described in ethnographic and fictional literature.

Conclusion

Pomor identity has proven to be a challenge for both imperial and Soviet scholars. Pomors have been cited as the "most authentic Russians", as an ambiguous sub-group (*subetnos*) of Great Russians and an indigenous minority. This ambiguity and uncertainty regarding Pomor identity seems to have its origins in Pomors' unique settlement at the borders of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as well as their historical portrayal as explorers and pioneers and their unique ways of livelihood.

While folklorists considered the territory of Pomor'e as an isolated region, its history shows its importance in both geopolitical and ethnographic discussions. In political and historical narratives, Pomor'e was regarded as the "window to Europe" due to the importance of Pomor seafaring and trading relations. At the same time, Pomors' historical connections to the Novgorod Republic facilitated the idea of Pomors as "authentic Russian people". Pomors' ability to travel the sea and rivers gave them a special role in the expansion of the Slavic population not only along the White Sea coast but also across Siberia. Pomors' movement to the east was the first wave of Russian colonisation and resulted in the formation of mixed settler communities

along the Arctic sea cost such as tundra peasant settlements in Taymyr (*zatundrennye krest'i͡ane*), a creole community in Yakutia (*russkoust'inf͡sy*) and others. Along with this west-east dichotomy, the Pomors were also looked at from the perspective of an academic construction of the north-south dichotomy, an attempt to categorise the Slavic population by ethnographers (see chapter 3). Both views shaped a central-peripheral flexibility of Pomors in public discourses.

Soviet historians and ethnographers enthusiastically employed these historical and geopolitical ambiguities to develop a comprehensive ethnic theory. In these academic discussions, Pomors appeared as an important example of ethnic hierarchies. As the editors of this volume show in their introduction, the core of those debates was the theory of *etnos* which flourished as part of Soviet identity politics during the Cold War. Trying to make the theory practical for ideologically biased reconstructions of history and ethnographic classifications, Soviet ethnographers coined a number of alternative terms related to *etnos*. One of them was the term *subetnos*, which was applied to Pomors. In ethnographic volumes, Pomors were introduced along borderland groups such as Cossack and, ironically, Siberian communities, whose descent has been drawn from Pomors. Such subentry in official identity classifications facilitated indigeneity claims of Pomor activists in the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Russian scholars and policy makers based their classifications on a set of identity characteristics such as material culture, language, and physical appearance which varied in different periods and knowledge ecologies. In recent debates about Pomor indigeneity, these identity characteristics have been incorporated and "naturalised" in making claims about Pomors' distinctiveness from Russians. This shift from academic descriptions and constructions to the knowledge appropriated by local intelligentsi͡a allows us to see the fluidity of historical anthropological ideas and their social life within local communities. The Pomor case — taken from the margins of the former empire — introduces us to a field of northern studies where one can account for no border between academic constructions and local knowledge.

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