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The Construction of Soviet Ethnography and “The Peoples of Siberia”

David G. Anderson  & Dmitry V. Arzyutov

The multi-generation book project “The Peoples of Siberia” enabled a group of Leningrad-based scholars to reshape their museum into a Soviet ethnographic community. This article analyses the face-to-face performances, the legalistic stenographic documentation, the collective crafting of a single authoritative style, and a unique temporal frame as an important background to understand a hallmark volume in Siberian studies. The authors argue that the published volume indexes nearly thirty years of scholarly debates as much as it indexes the peoples it represents. The article concludes with a critical discussion of how this volume was translated and received by a Euro-American readership influencing the perception of Siberian peoples internationally. It also links the volume to contemporary post-Soviet publication projects which seem to retrace the same path. The article is based on extensive archival work and references collections recently discovered and which are presented for publication here for the first time.

Keywords: History of Anthropology; Soviet Ethnography; Politics of Identity; Russian Federation; Siberia

Introduction

In this article we trace the social life of a modest reference volume *Narody Sibiri*, selectively translated and published in English as *The Peoples of Siberia* (Levin and Potapov 1956a, 1964). This collective work was an artefact in the re-tooling of Russian

Correspondence to: David G. Anderson, Anthropology, University of Aberdeen, Edward Wright Building, Dunbar Street, Aberdeen AB24 4QY, UK. Email: david.anderson@abdn.ac.uk

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ethnography under the Soviet state. We argue that the twenty-five years of debate invested in this book helped to define the status of ethnography as a socialist science and played an important role in the representation of Siberian peoples themselves both during the Soviet period and up to the present. The volume in question was not a monograph in a traditional sense, but a collective volume pointing to a large archive of public memory, archived transcripts and museum objects. It represented not only the direct experience of specific ethnographers undertaking fieldwork, but also an acceptable distillation of dozens of collective meetings (*zasedaniia*), colloquia (*soveshchaniia*) and hundreds of folios of transcripts (*stenogrammy*) between 1929 and 1956. The practice of constructing the volume transformed the way that personal experience—fieldwork—was “brought back”, represented, edited and painstakingly assembled into an institutional resource. The printed volume itself indexes an arrangement of people, institutions, transcripts, artefacts, and a strictly defined fieldwork space that came to be known as Soviet ethnography.

The early Soviet period had its own peculiar “ecology of knowledge” (Rosenberg 1976) which, like other nationalizing contexts, had a peculiar way of emplacing ethnographic knowledge institutionally, but perhaps unlike other places was driven to fold expert knowledge into authoritative texts, evocative artefacts, and a distinctive temporal frame. A classical nexus of ethnographic emplacement was the museum, which Nikolai Mogilianskiĭ (1916, 318) described as a “vibrant laboratory”—a charmed place where representative objects such as costumes, cradles, and tools revealed what Jacques Revel (1991) termed the “knowledge of the territory” out and beyond. In Ophir and Shapin’s (1991, 13) terms, building on Michel Foucault, an early Soviet ethnographic cabinet built of desks, transcripts, and evocative artefacts was a “heterogeneous topos, a relatively segregated place in which several spatial settings coexist, each being both concrete and symbolically loaded”. The condensing quality of museums, maps and censuses has been widely documented for Soviet science (Anderson 2011; Campbell 2014; Hirsch 2005). Here we focus on the “vibrant” quality of a key volume, which concretely listed sets of culture traits but symbolically represented an ethnographic community. If the “dreamtime” of British social anthropology was the naïve and isolated “lonely witness” gently mocked by Stocking (1991), the Soviet heterotopos was a place to perform papers before peers, to painstakingly prune them, before authorizing them for print in a small run for specialized audiences. Much as Shapin and Schaffer (1985) traced the birth of early positivist science to the way that closed societies witnessed the motions of a hand-crafted instrument, we demonstrate that urban-based scholars organized closed readings of typescript texts perhaps about a costume, or a folkloric trope, which would be transcribed to form an internally held yet consultable legalistic record.

Perhaps unlike other projects, the Soviet ethnographic gaze was aimed at specifying the historic relation to peoples to the state. In this light, Siberia became a “living laboratory” (Tilley 2011) where ethnographic intuition could be applied to build a better society. This inward-looking scientific interest coveted Siberia as a resource frontier, but also a human frontier, where experts and local indigenous elites were exhorted to take an active role improving the continent. As Grant (1995, 77) cites Eurakhim (ĪŪrii) Kreinovich from his manuscript archive:

We are not doing ethnography in the old sense of the word. All words that end in “-logy” or “-graphy” are bound up in that process or activity, call it what you like, that divides subject from object, “us” (the scholar or researcher) from “them” (the studied, our wards), who in the best instance we “feel for”. We want to *erase* this line between subject and object, between us and them. ... The objects of study must become subjects (emphasis in the original).

Early Soviet ethnography self-consciously distinguished itself from Imperial or bourgeois ethnography by making Siberia an accessible, manipulable and most importantly a needful corner for scientific activism. Later, as Soviet ethnography began to look outward after the War, Siberia was promoted internationally as a progressive ethnographic region in its own right—a classic case set high as a model to emulate. Here we suggest that this model was painstakingly constructed by decades of debate.

Ethnographic performances took place within a defined set of institutions. The central institution was the “Siberian Cabinet” of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Leningrad—one of the oldest bastions of Tsarist science.¹ In this period we can read its members working hard to reconfigure themselves as the avant-garde of a Soviet scientific empire. The Cabinet was supported by a small number of “local” institutions located across Russia staffed often by members of the new Soviet indigenous intelligentsia.² Members of the cabinet also could summon the effort of external agencies such as the ethnographic map-makers in the Committee for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the USSR (KIPS) (Hirsch 2005) and the photographers in the news agency Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS).

In between the familiar institutional structure of the Academy of Sciences, and the local scholarly diaspora, was the system of meetings and colloquia which defined public scientific discourse. These fora tested the boundaries of what could be said—and in our opinion this narrative ecology is an under-researched topic. Ethnographers working within each museum Cabinet would meet on a weekly basis to review, line-by-line, chapters on particular peoples or the content of museum exhibits. The meetings would generate minutes (*protokoly*) which would in turn circulate at the Academic Council of the Institute. Periodically, all ethnographers from Moscow and Leningrad, and often from the affiliated field institutions, would be gathered together at a colloquium to settle a specific question of ethnographic practice. The product of a colloquium was often an internal stenogramme and a set of published “resolutions” which could be widely circulated. A *soveshchanie* was the place where the work of a cabinet *zasedanie* was authorized. The dense documentation of all these meetings we argue contributed to the unique sense of time, or even destiny, that motivated Soviet ethnographers. The legalistic stenogrammes were a kind of oracle which could be referred back to in order to glimpse evidence of “biosocial becomings” (Ingold and Palsson 2013)—traits of life-ways giving evidence of a socialist future.

In an early article on ethnographic methodology, the colloquium is described as a forum for choosing a theoretical direction:

Henceforth, the decisions of a colloquium are obligatory for every ethnographer who would like to participate actively in the socialist construction of the USSR and to turn

his/her research in a materialistic direction. Nothing in history is won without labour. In the same difficult way was Soviet materialistic ethnography born of specific misunderstandings and accompanied with arguments. Now Soviet ethnography, having been convinced of its insufficient attention to theory, must devote all its energy to fill this gap. (K[oshkin] and M[atorin] 1929, 114)

This call to theorize notwithstanding, the often voluminous transcripts from the early Soviet period are remarkably devoid of any theoretical guiding posts. With the possibly significant exception of appeals to ethnogenesis, the theoretical assumptions are often implicit. For example, as Sokolovskii (2011, 214) notes, Soviet ethnographers intuitively naturalized identity categories. We would add that the component parts of these constructed entities were further materialized as an ahistorical jigsaw of suggestive components—dwellings, ornaments, tools—so much so that alluding to a single artefact was often enough to signal an ethnogenetic argument. This rather low-level consensus about the ontological status of ethnic being seems to lie in stark contrast to the dramatic appeals to “socialist transformation”. However even here ethnographers performed important work in dividing out spheres of human action—occupations (*zaniatiia*), life-ways (*byt*) and adaptations (*khoziaistvennyye tipy*)—which without their critical eye would forever lie invisible or “undifferentiated” in Siberian societies. It is our theoretical ambition to examine the mechanics by which a reference work was constructed in order to better understand how this low-level consensus came to be, and why it has enjoyed such success over the decades, across regimes, and eventually internationally.

Towards a Soviet “Library of Peoples”

In the spring of 1929 a unique colloquium was held in Leningrad gathering together the leading figures of Soviet ethnography in order to calibrate the subject of a Soviet ethnography (K[oshkin] and M[atorin] 1929). The meeting, held over seven days in the State Academy of the History of Material Culture brought together over 100 delegates. Unlike some meetings, which are documented by a short set of “resolutions” unanimously approved, this colloquium was documented with a full verbatim typescript stenographic account of 582 folios (AMAE KI-3-7) (Arziutov, Alymov, and Anderson 2014). The meeting has already attracted the attention of some historians who see it as a time of “rupture” between traditions (Bertrand 2002, 2003) or as the “fall” of Russian ethnography (Slezkine 1991) or a “great break” (Solovei 2001). The proceedings were wide-ranging and indeed it is difficult to characterize the colloquium either as a meeting of minds or the imposition of a central agenda. It was more of a platform where various competing agendas could be tested-out. One early impassioned project from the then secretary of KIPS, and specialist on the peoples of Northwestern Russia, David Zolotorev, called out for a Soviet “library of peoples”:

... I would like to emphasize yet another task which I think is nonetheless substantial and important for our work on socialist transformation [*sov. stroitel'stvom*]. We still do not have any well compiled publications that represent the separate peoples [*narodnosti*] of our Union. We speak all the time of the peoples of the Union. We are building our

state taking into account the peculiarities of these people. Yet there are no books that allow us to get to know these peoples properly. We have to leaf back to [the book] *Russia* by Semenov [Semenov-Tian-Shanskiĭ 1899–1914] or read surrogate accounts published in the popular press. These are certainly insufficient. I suggest that we need to make a state priority of publishing a “Library of the Peoples of the USSR”. This would be compiled through the collaboration between representatives of relevant sciences which study the population of the Union, libraries which serve not only school children and people who wish to improve themselves, but also workers who have the right background and knowledge. This task has a colossal importance. We would not be doing our duty if we did not underscore the need for a good, well-thought out programme and well-published edition of “The Peoples of the USSR” [6 April 1929] (AMAE KI-3-7: 106). (Arziūtov, Alymov, and Anderson 2014, 168–169)

The emphasis here was on creating a *Soviet* library of peoples since, as Zolotarev ironically observes, the idea of a catalogue of peoples was already a well-worn one in Tsarist science.³ Knight (1995) draws attention to the description of “everyday life” (*byt*) which distinguished Russian Imperial ethnography from the cultural evolutionist accounts then common in Western Europe. Many of these accounts were built upon questionnaires issued to travellers and missionaries by the Imperial Academy of Sciences (Miller 2009; Russow 1900). Stagl (1995) and Vermeulen (2015) read into this travelling, collecting tradition the very origins of ethnography itself through the classificatory impulse of grouping of people into cohesive units based on the objects that they used. We would however place our emphasis on how collecting and classifying in the Imperial Russian tradition put its emphasis on specifying what was eternally unique—“vibrant”—in a particular group of people across time. To borrow Etkind’s (2011) evocative phrase, Russia looked inwards colonizing and classifying the habits of its own people, rather than appealing to an abstract universalist idea of human nature.

What David Zolotarev dreamt of as a “Soviet” library of peoples grew to be a complex institution-building project, although the Imperial predilection for identifying what was peculiar would continue throughout Soviet times and even into post-Soviet Russian ethnography. According to Zolotarev, particularizing description would help Soviet peoples to design their future.⁴ His dream of a comprehensive library would eventually branch out, or perhaps more accurately, be serially repeated into several successive increasingly ambitious publication projects, the majority of which remain unpublished or partially published.

Work on assembling “the library” began at once. The Leningrad-based professor of ethnography Kagarov (1931) published a thin pamphlet entitled *The Peoples of the USSR* which pulled together information from the recent 1926 All-Union census to give a descriptive and statistical overview of ten ethno-linguistic groups of people living within the borders of the USSR. The most widely documented albeit unpublished book project between 1932 and 1939 was for a “multi-volume” edition *Peoples of the USSR*, within which Siberian or sometimes Arctic peoples would form one discrete volume. The multi-volume work is also shadowed in the archives by fragments of discussion concerning plans to produce a similarly titled one-volume edition, also unpublished.⁵ The work of the specialists in the Siberian cabinet played a leading role in both.

The archived discussions demonstrate the rough parameters of how a “Soviet” library might differ from reference works which came before. In a late reflection to the Academic Senate of the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow in 1940, the then head of the Siberian “Cabinet” Sergeï V. Ivanov looks back over a decade of work on the two incomplete editions:

It seems to me that work on the “single volume” [*odnotomnik*] has been much more difficult than on the “four-volume work”. The main reason was that work on the “single volume” started before that of the “four-volume”. This was an annoying fact and had a [negative] impact on the factual content of the “single volume”. The “single volume” was based on published literature, which lowered its value. We did not have the means to document [real] facts by having visited the places where these peoples lived. Therefore we were left in a weak position. In addition there was the problem that [the single volume] was designed as teaching work ... Our country needs this [four volume] edition. Ethnographers need this publication. A large number of people have already written to us with requests to issue formal documentation [*spravki*] [about the peoples of the North] and this proves the necessity for this edition. (AMAE KI-3-13: 248–249 28 Jan 1940)

Lacking a complete manuscript draft of the “one-volume” edition, it is difficult for us to specify on how scale and value were related. It seems that plans for the one-volume edition were more closely linked to what we might describe today as a reference work—a critical summary of the already existing literature. The various proposals for a “many-volume” work differed in that they were to report on how socialist relations were changing traditional societies and were based on a type of collectively edited fieldwork. This, in our view, is an important distinction and may come as a surprise to some who might be inclined to dismiss these volumes as an attempt to “totalize and canonize” anthropological knowledge (Vitebsky and Alekseyev 2015, 443). It is true that Siberian anthropologists today enjoy the luxury of doing their fieldwork differently (Schweitzer 2000). However in the uneasy time preceding the War, Soviet ethnographers did not feel the need to merely to parrot and copy their results but to travel out to experience directly either “what remained” of an already-documented traditional society, or to “fill gaps” neglected by a cynical Tsarist academy (Levin and Potapov 1956b, 7).⁶ Their reports often began with a concern to confirm certain ethnographic basics, such as “whether families were nuclear [or not], or [if] they were monogamous”, what “survivals” might have continued into the Soviet period (AMAE KI-3-13: 240), or building a repository of representative material artefacts (Hirsch 2003). Bearing witness gave an ethnographer a right to speak. In a confiding letter between M.A. Sergeev and the later director of the Institute S.P. Tolstov in March 1944, Sergeev disqualified both G.N. Vasilevich and N.N. Stepanov from giving opinions on the Siberian volume since they were “not ethnographic enough” (*maloëtnografichen*) (RNB 1109-93: 5). One surviving report plots out 10 expeditions across Siberia covering 64 man-months of travel and costing 164,100 roubles for the explicit goal of gathering data for the Siberian volume.⁷ Struve (1938) speaking as director of the Institute described the work on the series *The Peoples of the USSR* and expeditionary fieldwork for this series, as the main focus of the Institute. Ethnographic facts had a value in this rapidly modernizing society where they would be assembled into official legal descriptions (*spravki*) of the



Figure 1. Debates surrounding the unpublished series *The Peoples of the USSR* in 1938. Notes: These two satirical cartoons (AMAE—Siberian Cabinet) were drawn for a New Year’s Party of the members of the Institute of Ethnography at the dawn of 1939. The first panel shows a group of scholars around a table, smoking copiously, and drinking tea and *kvas* with the observations that there have been “already seven meetings of the editorial committee [of *The Peoples of the USSR*]. The second panel displays the nine documents with the caption “and here are the first results”. The documents are all bureaucratic in nature “The Final Programme; The Plan; The List of Editors; The Stenogrammes; The Plan for Expeditions” suggesting that nothing in fact had been produced except plans. Satire was still permitted even under high Stalinism.

relevant qualities of different peoples needed to deliver programmes. This is an ideal of fieldwork that is different than which we hold today, but it still holds an empiricist twist which, we will argue below, does document life-ways and did provide a service for Siberian peoples re-imagining their past today.

The applied nature of early Soviet ethnographic inquiry led to a density of documentation that could only be compared to legal inquiry. All members of each component department, from secretarial staff to field ethnographers, would be involved in framing the description of peoples (Figure 1). At the same Academic Senate meeting in January 1940 the then leader of the “Peoples of Siberia” project Georgi N. Prokofiev recalled

The entire *kollektiv* of the [Siberian] Department [*kabinet*] was pulled into this project. Young scientific workers worked beside experienced, older workers. Each played an equal role. It of course was the case since work on this volume was a collective project that we organized discussions of all the articles. This discussion was valuable not only for the young researchers but to the experienced generation. I discovered that the young scholars shared the opinion that the collective editing of this material increased the level of qualifications of each member of the Department ... [Nevertheless] we ran up against purely technical problems. The Institute had run out of paper and the [steno-graphic] typists could not type at night. We are still struggling with this problem. (AMAE KI-3-13: 238–239 28 Jan 1940)

In this discussion Prokofiev specifically blamed the delay in completion of the project on the technical limitations of the exacting documentation of these discussions.⁸ Here

we have a very clear representation of scale and value. The surviving stenographic archive of the Siberian volume(s) alone tallies up to over 4000 folios.⁹

The Ethnogenetic Turn

At some difficult-to-identify point near the beginning of the 1940s, the dream for the still unpublished Library of the Peoples of the USSR grew into a Library of the Peoples of the World.¹⁰ Global events now influenced both the scope of the series and of the discipline. With this expansion of range came a new form of scholarly emplacement—the placing of ethnographers and their peoples in timeline for survival. If up until this time Soviet ethnography looked inward to a strictly defined set of internal spaces, the prelude to Second World War led a geographically inflected ethnography to become “historicized” (Alymov 2014, 138ff). In May 1938, a joint colloquium on ethnography and [physical] anthropology was held in Leningrad where ethnogenetic topics were raised for the first time (AMAE KI-3-10).¹¹ This was followed by a similar colloquium of historians focussing on Slavic ethnogenesis in September 1938 (Īsova 2008). These meeting culminated in an important second meeting in Moscow in May 1940, now crowned as a “Commission” (*komissiia*) on Ethnogenesis,¹² wherein a special one-day meeting (*zasedanie*) was held on the Ethnogenesis of Siberian Peoples (ARAN 457-1-(1940)-38) (Bibikov 1941).¹³ The question of ethnogenesis—the attribution of a common identity based on a geographical origin point in the deep past—would become one of the most deeply defining traits of Soviet social science by the end of the War. These early meetings tasked the assembled scholars to come up with a conception of the evolution and origin of peoples which contradicted Nazi racialist theories (Īsova 2008, 42) (ARAN 2-1[1939]-84: 1, 3). Up until this time, the for the most part unpublished representations of Soviet peoples gave thumbnail descriptions of ethnonyms, linguistic affiliation, and perhaps speculation about their origins based on linguistic criteria. By the time that the Soviet Union was occupied by Nazi Germany, these drafts were qualitatively different for their heavy emphasis on stories of migrations, affiliations, and national belonging. If Imperial Russian ethnography gave Soviet ethnography its hallmark interest in material culture, the Second World War gave it its unmistakable interest in accounting for origins.

This ethnogenetic turn was facilitated by the remarkable spatial re-deployment of most ethnographers to Tashkent following the attack on the Soviet Union by Germany. For an extended period of time they were housed in the same lodgings, worked beside each other at the same desks, smoked and ate together in the same places, and were tasked with the same objectives. Substantively, the army asked ethnographers to draft ethnographic maps of areas under occupation or in threat of occupation (Alymov 2006) (ARAN 200-1 [1941-1944]-9: 2–5). A further meeting of the Committee on Ethnogenesis was organized in Tashkent in 1942 (Sessiia 1947). Blomkvist in her letters of her years in evacuation captures the atmosphere of an ethnography mobilized for war (6 March 1943):

Saul [Abramzon] arrived back from Moscow and brought a new plan, designed together with Tolstov. The Moscow group is working primarily on a Special Instruction (*spetszadanie*) such as a “set of maps of peoples” and a “reference guide for an Agitator” for each country of the world. . . . [In] the second section of the Plan [one reads]—“A Holistic Description of Countries and the Peoples of Regions Which are Important for the Post-War Period” (I cannot recall the exact title). The first section of the Plan was “The Study of the Ethnic Composition of Regions”. Within this there are [separate] sections on the “Western Ethnographic Boundaries of the USSR” (Zelenin and Grinblat), and then a “Reference work on the Peoples of the World” (this we are supposed to write here [in Tashkent]). Moscow is putting a great emphasis (on the last). It has to be completed in the shortest possible time. (Blomkvist 2013, 194)

The weight of day-to-day life, and the almost kinship-like relations between evacuated ethnographers, archaeologists, historians and folklorists, created a potent interdisciplinary atmosphere which ensured that ethnogenetization was a common paradigm across Soviet social science. In a speech devoted to the theme of the *Peoples of the World* series, Sergei Tolstov described its purpose as to overturn “the theoretical evangelism of Fascist interpretations of cultural relationships and on the cult of the evolution of the peoples of the globe” (ARAN 457-1a[1944]-41: 78). In his view, the volumes would stand in opposite to the “so-called bourgeois theories of cultural circles” (ARAN 457-1a[1944]-41: 83). Reading these pages today it is interesting that this liberating purpose was nevertheless set within its own hierarchies:

We of course are not able to give each people its own section (*ocherk*), especially when the discussion turns to more backward people—for example the African peoples (and others). Here we will try to ensure that each more or less important people is given a special ethnographic section. As for the peoples of Asia and Europe, people who are more interesting for us, and with whom our territory is tightly linked, each people be they big or small will have a separate article. (ARAN 457-1a[1944]-41: 84)

The new global edition of this series was first officially mentioned in the general plan for the Institute for 1944 (ARAN 458-1a (1944) 18: 5). This time, the series was in fact published in eighteen volumes between 1954 and 1966. The volume on Siberia was one of the first (following *The Peoples of Africa* [1954]). Not unlike the Soviet war effort, the reputation of the series was partly branded by the lifeblood of the authors, many of whom either died in prison during the Stalinist purges or during the war. The paragraphs of the dead, much like the weapons of the fallen, were to be taken over and further revised by the next generation of authors. Some volumes, such as those for the Caucasus, and that for Siberia, featured long lists of acknowledged and unacknowledged authors lending a quality of attribution that one would normally associate with “hard” laboratory science combined with that of a memorial.

The galvanizing effect of war on the temporal imagination of Soviet scientists stands in contrast to that documented for the post-Civil War USA Owens’ (1985) describes a post-War setting where scholars were stripped of their faith in universal truths. The best, he argued, that scholars could provide was a physical setting—“the moral and spatial boundaries of the school”—where the methodological “integrity of the search” could be guaranteed. In contrast to the Soviet example, where scholars placed their emphasis on trying to sketch out a certain future, post-Civil War American

scholars focussed upon the spatial structure of their laboratories where they could sift and document many alternate presents.

The series was eventually nominated for a state prize (although not awarded one). In his presentation to the Lenin and State Prize Committee, the new director of the Institute of Ethnography, the historian Iŭlian Bromleĭ stressed the comprehensiveness of the collection, and its world-historical importance

All of the volumes of the series ... have been prepared for publication over more than a decade with a hallmark quality stemming from common methodological principles. One of these is the obligatory representation of the modern lives, cultures, and *byt* of all peoples irrespective of what stage of social and ethnic development they have reached. In this the series differs greatly from other foreign ethnographic works which usually report on backward peoples and concentrate their attention on survivals (*perezhitochnye iavleniia*). For the first time, we have presented the ethnographic qualities of the great socialist nations and also the highly developed capitalist countries. The authors of the series start from the premise of identifying ethnic communities¹⁴ (*etnicheskie obshchnosti*) as a historical categories.

...

The series *Peoples of the World* has attracted wide and supportive attention from across many countries of the World and across the Soviet Union [due to two key principles]: the principle of humanism—the caring attention to the history and cultures of people, and especially of backward peoples and our insistence on the principal of equality of all peoples irrespective of their racial, national, caste status or religion. (January 1967 ARAN 142-10-658: 5–6)

Distinctive in this late period, after the Khrushchev reforms, is an anxious concern for attracting international attention to Soviet ethnography. As Kassof (2005) remarks in his account of the design and publication of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* the “Sovietness” of this reference work often came more in contrast to capitalist analogues than in its own substantive design. In his presentation to the Lenin and State Prize Committee, while lambasting foreign ethnography, Bromleĭ proudly lists the international reception of the series focussing on the translation and publication of volume 1 (Africa) into German (Ol’derogge and Potekhin 1964), the translation of volume 2 (Siberia) into English (Levin and Potapov 1964)¹⁵ and the published reviews of each views of the series. The series was also highlighted during the Seventh International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) congress held in Moscow in 1964 where Soviet ethnography was put on stage to an international audience. Gonionskiĭ (1963, 15) issued a clarion call to ethnographers in the central journal *Soviet Ethnography* to prepare for this international event:

The upcoming Congress will be a test of the political maturity and our preparedness [to fight] scientific wars (*boesposobnost’*) of a large platoon of Soviet ethnographers and anthropologists. It is the duty of Soviet scholars to properly prepare for the VII International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnographic Sciences

The “fighting capability” of Soviet ethnography was represented by the series “The Peoples of the World” which in the journal *Sovetskaia Ėtnografiia* was held up to be

a sign “of international co-operation among the countries of the socialist camp” (Gonionskii 1963, 10) Copies of the volumes displayed proudly at the international congress. According to the official published report of the congress, the series *Peoples of the World* represented the general methodological principles of the Soviet Ethnographic School (Tolstov 1968, 74). That School, formed through ethnographic reflection based on fieldwork, and reformed through repeated performances in meetings and colloquia, created a model where one expert spoke for one people, and represented that people through a selection of evocative artefacts and authorized texts.

“Siberians” Among the Peoples of the World

The construction of Siberia as a living laboratory was one of the more successful struggles in the history Russian ethnography, and to some degree it can also be measured through the discussions surrounding the structure of the Siberian volume. The concept of Siberia itself is a geopolitical construct. The region distinguishes itself as being an imperial hinterland to Kievan, Moscovite, and Novgorod expansion and not by definite climatic or natural geographic boundaries. While Euro-American scholars often assume that High Arctic peoples share a cultural and ecological commonality, Soviet scholars tended to divorce North European Saamis or Komis from kinship with Siberian peoples. The Southern boundary of Siberia, overlapping nervously with Mongolia and China, also led Soviet scholars to draw another much more arbitrary line separating their peoples with very closely related peoples further South. Over the lifetime of this quarter-century publication project, the regional division of Eurasia into Siberia and the Far-East was the most-often repeated frame within which these Eurasian peoples were organized. However in every period, and under every editor, there were doubts—and these doubts spoke to the low-level consensus of how an ethnohistorical nation was assembled.

A major theme in the transcripts was whether or not it was possible to capture both Southern peoples and Northern peoples into a single narrative—a rather fundamental issue masqueraded usually as one to do with the limitations of printing technology. Mikhail Sergeev, one of the late editors of the Siberian volume within the unpublished “multivolume” series *Peoples of the USSR* argued that the collective authors had to reconcile “vertical” [North-South] and “horizontal” [West-East] forms of representation. He doubted whether it was possible to discuss Northern Nenetses in the same introductory article as Southern Oirots [Altaians], and therefore recommended that an introductory essay on Northern Peoples be composed separately from Southern Peoples. He further thought that the troublesome Yakuts, who seemed to mix Southern origins with a Northern homeland, should be left out of the introduction altogether (ARAN 394-9-37: 102; AMAE KI-4-6: 63). In a set of minutes of a “special” departmental meeting of the Siberian Cabinet of 20 October 1938, eleven co-authors discussed an early proposal of Prokofev to split the volume “horizontally”.

c[omrade]. Shnakenburg. The division of the volume is necessary because of its great length. The part on the “Small Peoples [*narodnostei*] of Siberia” should be prepared first.

c. Dyrenkova thinks we should publish one volume.

c. Abramzon One should be more careful using the term “Small Peoples”

a[cademic]. Struve The division of the Siberian volume into two parts is only possible if there is a technical problem with the printing but substantively the contents of the volume should not be divided. The volume on Caucasian peoples is possible to divide into two parts, but the Siberian one is impossible to divide.

... .

c. Prokofev If we divide the volume, we first have to respect the territorial division as it stands at the present time. The articles should be detailed, although obviously not to an infinite degree. Up until now we don't have any general articles on the peoples of Siberia and we must encourage work on them, especially since they could serve as foundation for writing separate monographs. We will have to divide the volume into two parts. We need to add sections on Nganasans. It is not right to combine *ostiaki* and *volguly* into one article.

...

I. Decisions

1. [*That we will try to*] publish as one volume.

... . (AMAE—Siberian Cabinet—Protokol 2—20 October 1938)

Despite this authoritative decision, doubts on the appropriate region of analysis continued to surface. In an official publication of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, a full table of contents for a volume entitled *The Peoples of Northern Asia* within the “multivolume” series of *Peoples of the USSR* was announced in 1949 along with the overly optimistic news its twenty-five chapters were already in press (Institut Ėtnografii AN SSSR 1949, 91).¹⁶ Complementing these anomalies were occasional references to a Southern-facing volume entitled *The Peoples of Southern Siberia, Altai, and Buriat Mongolia* (SPbF ARAN 142-1(1934)-26: 6). There is evidence of this debate structuring the final published work which is divided into two sections with 8 chapters on the “Peoples of Southern Siberia” and 22 chapters on “Peoples of Siberia and the [Soviet] Far East”. Even after publication two reviewers criticized the unclear “vertical” division of Siberian peoples in the case of Nenetses and Yakuts (Vdovin and Chernetsov 1958, 186).

Debates on structure were also wrapped into broader debates on representation. Although there existed centrally published guidelines on the correct ethnonyms to be used for all Soviet nationalities in order to distinguish their new history from the degradation and neglect of the Tsarist past, it is striking that many ethnographers continued often to use “old” names. Ethnonyms such as *Ostiak* [Khanti] and *Lamut* [Eveny] would enjoy a long life well until the 1950s within the unpublished documents of the Institute.

Early Soviet ethnographers reserved for themselves a certain artistic license to create descriptors for people. In 1928 the respected ethnographer Vladimir Bogoraz-Tan, founder of the “Leningrad school”, and a member of the “Committee of the North” first raised the question of renaming peoples.

We should call *Ostiāki* only Ugor Ostiaks, Finnish Ostiaks, or Finnified Ostiaks. The Enisei [River] Ostiaks have nothing in common with the Ugor Ostiaks. But since they, as I outline below, differ greatly from the Northern Samoeds (*Ūraki*) we need to create for them some kind of different name. (Bogoraz-Tan 1928, 236)

For contemporary readers, this mix of aesthetics and freedom of choice make this type of ethnography look less positivistic and much more constructed. It was this workshop-like quality that Mogiliānskiĭ (1916) referred to when thinking about museums as “vibrant laboratories”. Over twenty years, ethnonyms for some of the forty “peoples” were eventually published in thirty chapters over twenty years. The overall tendency was towards the merging of some Northern Asian peoples, the separation of Far-Eastern peoples, and the forgetting of peoples who transgressed the Chinese or Mongolian border.

Neenetses, and to some degree their neighbours, became a test-case for the power of ethnonyms to not only indicate difference but to tie people together. The chapter on “northern” Neenetses distinguishes itself from others in the book for being an anchoring point for an ethno-linguistic theory: that of the “Samodeic” group.¹⁷ This linguistic anchor allows this single long chapter to support the later chapters on Enetses, Ngansans and even Sel’kups; each which are shorter by a third. The attraction of the Samodeic identity, was that it provided a way to tie this Northern constellation of reindeer-herding people to an origin point in the Saian Mountains of Southern Siberia. Georgiĭ Prokof’ev argued:

The comparative (ethnographic and linguistic) study of the peoples of the Far North known as *Nentsy*, *Nganasany*, *Ėntsy*, and *Sel’kupi* requires a decision on the question of how to refer to them as a group. [This group appellation] would link the names of the [current] peoples to their ancestors who at one time lived in the Saian mountains . . . (AMAE—Siberian Cabinet—Protokol 2—8 February 1939)

The argument nevertheless had to be made subtly as colleagues reminded Verbov when he first proposed the idea in an earlier draft of the chapter in 1936 (AMAE 2-1-121):

The “historical overview” section should relax the much too categorical assertion that the ancestors of the Neenetses moved North under pressure from Turkic tribes. (AMAE KI-4-2: 24, 14 Aug 1936).

This debate, which is camouflaged as a discussion on style, shows scholars testing out different positions on how best to represent identities.

The question of ethnogenesis would be one of the most of the most controversial theoretical points in the volume. Here we have to distinguish between the theoretical proposition that all peoples, and especially illiterate or “backward” peoples, must have a place of origin in time and space, from the proposition that ethnogenetic pedigrees must be “appropriate”. The first it seems was taken as self-evident and was rarely questioned. In the minutes of one Departmental meeting of the Siberian Cabinet of 8 December 1938 Prokof’ev strongly defended the principal of obligatory ethnogenesis:

Well fine. The Yakuts then did not come-into-being (*slozhit’sia*) in the Lena River basin as a people (*narodnost’*). So what? The Yakuts had to consolidate themselves as a people in some other place, and then move [to the Lena basin] as proto-Yakuts. There is no other choice. Either one or the other. (AMAE—Siberian Cabinet—Protokol 9—8 December 1938)

The question of the “appropriate” place of origin for a socialist people, however, was widely debated. In one of the numerous stenographic accounts of debate on the content of the Siberian volume, Nikulshin read a harsh review on the draft of an article by Grafira Vasilevich which then combined Evenkis and Evens together for the Siberian volume in the “multi-volume” edition (AMAE KI-1-323). He notes:

The historical overview of the author is composed with her guesses on the ethnogenesis of Evenkis, for which there is no historical evidence. All of the guesses of the author are founded on the theory that [Evenkis] migrated to Siberia from Northern Manchuria. Such a position is not acceptable for an article in the Siberian volume. First, it is not supported by the facts ... Soviet scholars who have studied this question have come to a different conclusion. Thus comrade Okladnikov reports that he holds archaeological data that unambiguously show that Evenkis lived in Pribaikal’e on the river basins of the Angara and Podkamennaia Tunguska before the present era. ... Comrade Zalkind, who is also concerned with this question, speaks of the autochthonous origin of Evenkis, while agreeing that for some space of time they lived in Northern Manchuria. Second, this theory of the migration of Evenkis from Manchuria to Siberia ... is being exploited by Japanese imperialists in their plans to occupy Soviet territories in Far Eastern Territory and Siberia. Therefore, the theory is politically harmful. Therefore it is our opinion that the author’s position about the ethnogenesis of the Evenkis should be completely rejected. (AMAE KI-1-4: 108–109, 1 December 1938).

In this review it became quite clear that documenting some origin points which might threaten the crisp regional division of Eurasia into a Soviet sphere of influence was dangerous, although finding one origin point was nevertheless obligatory.¹⁸ It is likely that this particular unfortunate draft would contribute to Vasilevich’s arrest and imprisonment between 1952 and 1955 (Ermolova 2003)—an unfortunate experiment in testing discursive boundaries.

Sergei Tokarev and his student Iliia Gurvich, directly noted that “the question of the origin of the Yakuts is one of the most difficult in the history of the peoples of Siberia” (1956, 256, 1964, 224). The published volume puts forward as authoritative Tokarev’s earlier argument, first published in 1930, that contemporary Yakuts living in the Lena river basin and originated from “the Turkic language-speaking (and partly Mongol-language speaking) populations of the steppes of Southern Siberia and Central Asia” (1956, 269, 1964, 245). Their theory linked together an earlier Imperial-era theory of an Yakut origin point west of Lake Baikal (*pribaikal’ia*) to some archaeological findings which link contemporary Yakuts to ancient Neolithic cultures living in contemporary Iakutiia. Tokarev presented the theory prominently at the 1940 meeting of the Commission on Ethnogenesis (ARAN 457-1(1940)-40). What might be more correctly described as their “Central Asian” ethnogenetic theory hangs entirely on linguistic criteria—on Turkic language elements—and a strong and perhaps untenable statement of ethnographic difference (“All Yakut linguistic and cultural elements sharply differ from those taiga peoples who surround them” (1956, 269, 1964, 245)). Further, there is unreferenced mention to an origin myth in Yakut oral history which links them to the “South”. Substantially, the “Far Southern” origin ethnogenetic account outlined by Tokarev and Gurvich is founded about a list of material objects which are cited to prove their distant origins. These are telegraphically listed as gourds (leather

beverage containers) (1956, 277, 1964, 257); the preparation of *kumys*—a ritually important drink made of horse mare’s milk (1956, 289, 1964, 267); the preparation of butter (1956, 290, 1964, 268); and the use of specialized saddles for both riding and for carrying goods (1956, 281, 1964, 259). This strategic citation of key terms would indeed evoke in the imagination of a Soviet reader the image of Central Asian steppes rather than boreal forests. The citations are buttressed by plates where the containers or saddles are illustrated (1954, 273#3, 278#1, 283, 1964, 249#3, 256#1, 261). The Russian edition has coloured plates of a birch bark container, embroidered with horse hair (1956, 277), a beaded saddle cover (1956, 281), as well as a mammoth ivory carving of a Yakut spring mares milk festival (1956, 304)—artefacts which not only reinforce the implicit argument of a Southern origin but point to aspects of handicraft knowledge which readers would recognize as “high culture”.

One of the most unique qualities of the *Peoples of Siberia* volume, and indeed the most aesthetically pleasing, were sets of collages of line-drawings drawn by artists on staff in the museum usually illustrating evocative artefacts in use in everyday life (Figure 2). Thus, for example, Andrei Popov’s chapter on Dolgans featured a twelve-part collage of “hunting technology” where various stages of the weaving or whittling of the tools were illustrated (1964, 658). The chapter by V.V. Antropova and V.G. Kuznetsova on Chukchis was illustrated by a seven-part series on skin-processing illustrating various stages of drying, stretching and tanning various skins (1964, 807). These montages, repeated in some other volumes, are highly engaging visual ethnographies displaying artefacts illustrating the very old Imperial Russian idea of *byt*—material life-ways—as a defining axis of identity. The montages were often assembled by drawing artefacts in the collections of various museums in Leningrad, including of course the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, and sometimes by redrawing and simplifying ethnographic photographs.¹⁹

The renaming of peoples, the grouping of peoples, and speculation about their origins in time and space, were wrapped together in these manuscripts with a perhaps undertheorized set of assumptions about their “backwardness” (*ostalost’*). At first glance, the quality of “being-left-behind”, as the term translates literally, seems itself to be an unreflective survival of Imperial chauvinism. However it also folded within it an aspect of historical entitlement wherein peoples who were self-provisioning, who maintained a modest division of labour, and who were poorly integrated into industrial network were seen as needing a helping hand. Thus references to “primitive” or even “Neolithic” practices were simultaneously a judgement on the “cultural level” of a particular people as well as an index of the amount of state attention that they deserved. Despite occasional snipes at “bourgeois objectivism”, the right of ethnographers to make this judgement was not seen as paternalist but as an objective reading of their material culture, social relations, and linguistic particles. In a strange daguerreotype, the space/time origins of a concrete people—their primalness—could be overlaid with their socio-economic status—their primitiveness. On the one hand, this creolism allowed very old cultural historic judgements to be spliced in with dominant state ideologies. The quality of “being left behind” was not said to be one of a lack of racial intelligence but of an unfortunate history, which could be remedied by a

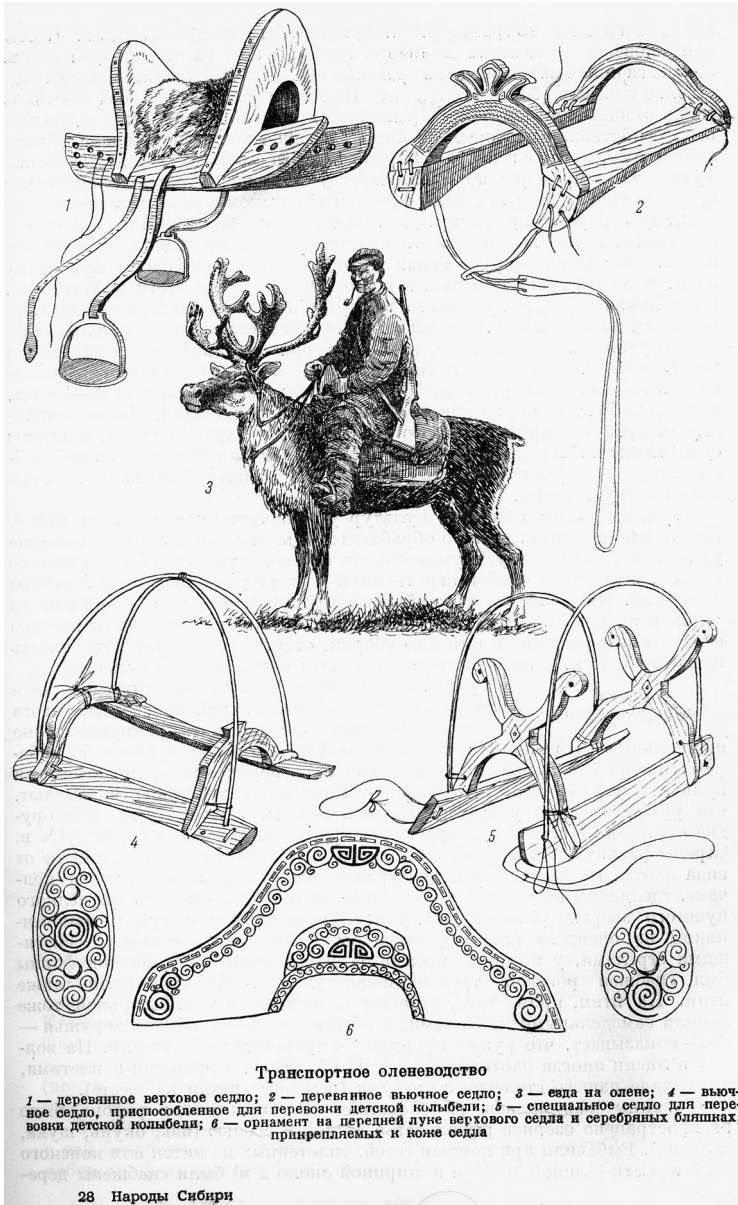


Figure 2. Tuvan [Todza] transport reindeer husbandry.

Notes: This plate is from Leonid Potapov's (1956, 433) chapter on Tuvans. The line drawing of the herder was sketched from a photograph in the collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. The details of different saddles were all drawn from artefacts in the Museum's collection. The provenience of the artefacts is on page 1028. The saddles are associated with a cultural-historical argument of the origin of the Tuvans where a reindeer-herding people today known as the Todzas are seen were seen to be relic of an earlier stage of evolution of contemporary Tuvans.

historically conscious state. On the other hand, the intimate peculiarities of a particular people—especially their dwellings, ornaments, sleds, saddles and clothing—preserve a picture of the past/present that we all share. Siberian peoples provide a measure of “how far we have come” and thereby lend Soviet modernity its tender value. An expert eye was needed to catch these subtleties of dialect and material culture, and therefore ethnographers could “objectively” justify their claims to be *Soviet* scientists who could interpret the historical meaning of artefacts. This powerful justification partly explains the heavy reliance on artefacts that the ethnographer/museum workers put into all their works and in this particular volume.

There are many possible examples of this approach. One very clear example lies in the analysis of dwellings, which played a prominent role in the classification of most peoples. The director of the Institute, Leonid P. Potapov, observed that reindeer-herding Todzha dwellings were a “still more archaic type” (1956a, 440, 1964, 398)—stressing their primalness. However in his view “[t]he most primitive were the dwellings of the poor Tubalars and Chelkans” (1956b, 338, 1964, 314)—where he placed the accent on their economic poverty. In the matrix that he constructed, Todzas and Tubalars/Chelkans were both poorer and more ancient than Tuvans and Altaians.

There are also ambiguities in the published text regarding the quality of primalness. In the section on means of transport, after a long discussion of Yakut wagons, which the authors interpret as Central Asian-looking, the authors briefly admit that boats used by rural Yakuts for fishing do not differ substantially from other taiga peoples (1956, 281). This quick admission of this fact sits oddly with a long archaeological section at the beginning of the volume where Okladnikov (1956, 46, 1964, 40) presents links his hallmark theory of the importance of fishing in general as one of the first stages in Yakut cultural evolution. The narrative on Central Asian forms of animal husbandry (horses) uncomfortably is presented with the admission that the so-called “Northern” Yakuts herd reindeer (1956, 272). To balance these ambiguities, Tokarev and Gurchich single out “the fact that [Yakuts] prepared ceramics singles them out from the people around them. They evidently retained pottery as a relic of the Neolithic stage. Nevertheless, it was very primitive” (1956, 280, 1964, 257). An illustration was provided (1956, 284, 1964, 255#1). Their overt insistence on a theory of “southern origins” also sits strangely with the Evenki case, flatly, if not violently, rejected. Perhaps the most significant para-textual oddity is that despite the fact that Yakuts today, as then, and for many hundreds of years before, live in a sub-Arctic environment, the published chapter of their history and identity was included in the section on “Southern” Siberian peoples. From this, it is not entirely clear when, if ever, a people’s northwards migration is done and dusted.

The Peoples of Siberia from Afar

Up until now we have demonstrated how a multi-generational book project served to define a scientific community through the days that Soviet power was consolidated, the repressions of the Stalinist period, and the tragedy of the Second World War. Carefully performed, meticulously documented stenographically, a single volume of field reports

came to define Siberia as a field, and Siberian ethnography as an expert science which could make generalizations about primalness, primitiveness, and thereby the meaning of Soviet modernity. Soviet scholars demonstrated both “knowledge of the territory” (Revel 1991) but also their knowledge of the relevant future. Through internal performances, and eventual publication, of their analysis of ethnonyms, artefacts, occupations and lifestyles, Siberian ethnographers sitting in their “vibrant laboratory” crafted a vision of a “living laboratory” to be emulated first in territories close to home, and later abroad.

However this was only the start of the life history of this particular book. The volume came to the attention of a group of American scholars almost immediately,²⁰ and an abridged translation was edited by Stephan Dunn and published by the University of Chicago Press. The English translation was widely reviewed, and for the most part praised.²¹

There is a large box of correspondence (over 150 folios) regarding the translation and publication of the volume at the University of Chicago (UCP 292/1). The correspondence makes clear that the impetus for the volume came from Sol Tax. Tax performed the role of a “broker” arranging the publication subsidy (NSF G-23630), writing a letter of recommendation, and troubleshooting problems with the delivery date and the quality of the translation (Tax to Bowen 31 August 1961). The Russian text came to be handled by many hands (Laurence Krader, Dmitry Shimkin, Igor Kopytoff, Olga Titelbaum, Stephen Dunn).²² It would be safe to say that for at least one generation this book became a canonical reference work for Arctic specialists in Europe and North America and especially for archaeologists searching for circumpolar case studies with which to compare their collections²³. It is interesting that overseas “Siberia” was universally read as “Arctic” then, as today, despite the energy invested by the original team in constructing it as a North Asian concept.

It is important to note that the warm reception of the book as an authoritative representation of the material culture of “traditional” taiga and tundra peoples was in part a product of its selective translation. In his preface, Dunn (1964) casually mentions that “certain categories of passages have been omitted” from the translation. The light abridgement was justified on the grounds that some “standard ideological” passages were repetitive and could be easily brushed-up on in some works already translated in the then new journals *Arctic Anthropology* and *Soviet Anthropology and Archaeology*. It is perhaps not widely appreciated how severe the annotations were, and indeed it came to a surprise to each of us when we began a line-to-line comparison. Most chapters in the volume have a section on the “post-revolutionary period” [*posleoktiabrskii period*]. This was the section where the Leningrad-based team presented their fieldwork—the fieldwork which they felt made the Russian-language volume unique. Abridgements to this section were not light, nor editorially consistent. It is true that phrases indicating hostility to certain economic classes were dropped, but also were paragraphs which could reasonably be argued to be representative of contemporary taiga life. As a rule of thumb, the sections on Soviet construction were between eight and nine pages in the original and were thickly illustrated with photographs. The translation of this section, at least for the second part of the volume, was confined to two

pages, it would seem, as a matter of policy.²⁴ Aside from simplifying or eliminating histories of collectivization, details on everyday life were also cut. From the chapter by Vaselivch and Smoliak on Evenkis, for example, Dunn removed mention of residential schools (1956, 733), “red tent” literacy brigades (736), the organization of community festivals such as “day of the reindeer herder” (733), the description of female state hunters (734), the names and roles of members of the Evenki intelligentsia holding higher degrees (738)—in short aspects of everyday life that are valued as part and parcel of community life today. From the chapter by Prof’opieva, Verbov, and Prokofiev on Nenetses the cuts were much more wide-ranging. In addition to shortening the section on post-revolutionary life from eighteen pages to four, unmarked cuts were made to the history of the Tsarist period. It is puzzling that the American editor would cut the account of the pre-revolutionary Nenets Neniang uprising (1956, 613) as much as it is impressive that the Soviet editors left it in. The section describing attempts to improve or devise a local pedigree reindeer breed was omitted (1956, 630). With hindsight it is easy today to poke at these abridgements. It is unlikely that in the late 1950s anyone could imagine how accepted and indeed admired many Soviet reforms in higher education and full-employment would become (Bartels and Bartels 1995). However it is somehow sad and deeply ironic that a translation project, perhaps motivated by Sol Tax’ “action anthropology” (Smith 2010) and the Dunns’ quiet Marxism, would eliminate that aspect of the book which was based on first-hand community experience and thereby accentuating an account of timeless, traditional (and compliant) societies. That being said, it is also interesting that Stephen Dunn made an editorial decision to prominently print the names of the authors of each chapter thereby recasting the members of this collective team into the American image of “lonely witnesses”. In the Russian edition the individual identities of the authors, and even not of all of them, were buried in the small print.

Despite some perhaps significant omissions, the English translation successfully communicated the main implicit theoretical agenda of what came to be known as Soviet ethnography. Readers in Europe and North America became familiar with the “new” ethnonyms of Soviet Siberian peoples and began to treat the sometimes arbitrary boundaries between groups as natural and authoritative. Although the thumbnail contemporary ethnographies were mistrusted, the translation nevertheless communicated that the life of Siberian peoples was different after the Revolution than before, perhaps creating a greater curiosity to the difficult-to-access region. It would be fair to say that the focus on material culture as the defining feature of Siberian identities was heartily consumed. Similarly most investigators came to expect identity to be communicated through language, costume, ritual, and technology rather than through worldview or kinship. Finally, when European and North American researchers began their fieldwork in the 1970s, they already expected to find reindeer husbandry “differentiated” as an occupation and an industry, and not a skill-set somewhat similar in kind to other taiga skills. What perhaps is underappreciated, and was certainly not indicated in any of the published review of the volume, is the great collective momentum, all stenographically documented, which lent its weight to a single, smooth narrative for Siberian identities.

The “Library of the Peoples” in the New Millenium

What is striking looking back on the soon-to-come ninetieth anniversary of this “library” project is the longevity of the genre and its ability to lend stability to both central and now indigenous intellectual communities. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian ethnographers and local peoples found themselves in a new crisis often compared in scale to the dislocations of the Second World War. It is perhaps not a coincidence that beginning in 1990, a fresh series of colloquia²⁵ took place in the now Moscow-based Institute of Anthropology and Ethnography to redesign and reissue the portion of the *Peoples of the World* series corresponding to the territories of the former USSR. The new series, still in production today, is entitled *Peoples and Cultures* and has grown to twenty-five volumes. It is interesting to note that during the recent election of the new Director of the Institute of Ethnography in June 2015 both candidates for the new post praised this series as the “calling card” of the Institute.

The format of the new volumes, as with the old series, was standardized with sections on “occupations”, “ethnogenesis”, and “technolog”. The explicit difference was that the new series was to attract “local voices”. Thus many of the contributions were written by members of the same indigenous intelligentsia who were held up as the proof of Soviet modernity in the concluding paragraphs of the chapters in the old series (that is, the paragraphs which were more often than not redacted in the English translation). While the original series bolstered the authority and status of urban ethnographic elites reporting on indigenous societies, the new book project consolidates a constellation of indigenous elites. The other explicit difference was the scale of the series. It was no longer welcome to represent each Siberian nationality as a chapter. Most of the peoples in the Southern Siberia section struggled for and won their own titular volume. The so-called “small-numbered” peoples in the second part of the old volume now found themselves a home in substantial sections in a set of regional or linguistically defined monographs.²⁶ Although there is a thin archive documenting the construction of the new series, it pales in comparison to that of the founding volume and the original series. The slight weight of documentation points silently to the fact that this ethnographic style has become a genre. Sokolova (1989), in a *fin-de-siècle* overview of Soviet ethnography, observed that all ethnographic monographs of Siberian peoples were cast in the image of *The Peoples of Siberia*.

Russian ethnographers over the short twentieth century successfully re-fashioned their skills to both address the worries of a rising socialist state over inequality and identity, while at the same time preserving a very old concern for both specifying the historic uniqueness of groups of people and how this particularity spoke to incipient futures through the day-to-day life-ways of people (*byt*). They did this in a collective manner by harbouring their communities behind the breakwater of an ambitious, strategic writing project. A laboratory book project, which for some commentators, such as Latour and Woolgar (1979), might at first look like any other commercial vehicle for circulating factual “factory-made” information (Kochan 2010, 586; Stewart 1982) in this Soviet Russian case was something quite different. It was a point of reference around which a field, a professional society, and social-political position was

defined. For some of those who perished during the time that it was assembled it literally became a monument. For others in the community it was a guiding-post for a rather thicker layer of debate, social memory and professional performance which today can be read in the substantial manuscript archive left behind. Today, in an epoch when Russian science has now opened itself to different global forces, the Siberian Cabinet perhaps no longer performs such a definitive role in shaping the style of a discipline and the lives of the people in it. But the genre of a collective authoritative monograph continues to inspire indigenous elites across Eurasia and serve as a point of reference and a breakwater for national communities now under threat of fragmentation by those same global market forces.

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ORCID

David G. Anderson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9624-5867>

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Notes

- [1] The Museum since 1934 had a dualistic organization of “cabinets” (*kabinety*) organizing the production of scientific texts and “divisions” (*otdely*) which curated the Museum’s vast depository of objects.
- [2] “Local” captures the difficult-to-translate term *kraeved*—an educated amateur amassing objects and stories in local museums. Some sections of the Siberian volume were drafted and reviewed by colleagues in Iakutsk and Ulan-Ude. The role of Yakut and Buriat indigenous scholars is reviewed in Vitebsky and Alekseyev (2015).
- [3] One of the first such attempts dates back to 1776 with Johann Gottlieb Georgi’s *Description of all the Peoples Resident in the Russian State* (Georgi 1775, 1776). Georgi, who was a student of Carl Linnaeus, brought a naturalist’s eye to the classification of people which would continue to characterize such publications for almost two hundred years and arguably still today. The Imperial lineage arguably concluded with one volume encyclopaedia on Siberia *Asiatic Russia* (Kruber 1910). Within this book people were grouped together by their beliefs, rituals, dwellings, clothing and diets.
- [4] Zolotorev himself was not able to see this project out as he was arrested in 1930 and died in exile in 1935.
- [5] The most comprehensive programme was outlined in a letter from the Institute of Ethnography to the Academic Secretary A.M. Deborin of the Academy of Sciences in early 1938 (ARAN 394-9-6: 92–96). Here the work is described as four volumes, with volume 4 devoted to the peoples of Siberia and the Far East. However in other documents the series is sometimes dreamt of as having six volumes, as some of the longer volumes (including the Siberia volume) were sometimes planned to be divided into two parts (*vypuski*).
- [6] It is important to note here that “gap-filling” was not aimed at creating a truly comprehensive account. Jews, Gypsies, and Chinese, among others were left-out of the survey presumably because they were either not thought to be rooted in Soviet Siberia territorially or they were anchored to a foreign state.
- [7] The report lists expeditions primarily to Southern Siberia and the Far East to cover the Amur region peoples, Zabaikal Evenkis, and southern Siberian Karagasses [Tofolars], Khakasses and Siberian Tatars. Three expeditions were sketched out for “Selkups, Kety, and Nenetses”, “Koriaks, Kamchadals, Lamuts [Evens], and Itelmens” and “Iukagirs, Chavntsyes and Omolon Lamuts”. The report features a rather late mixture of “out-dated” Tsarist appellations and new Soviet ones (ARAN 394- 9-37: 112).
- [8] Delays in publication were also linked to other uncontrollable events. Although perhaps not directly linked to editing the book series, two chief editors of the series were arrested and executed (Reshetov 2003a, 33). Nikolai Mikailovich Matorin (1898–1936) was arrested 3 January 1935 and sentenced for five years for counter-revolutionary activities. He continued to write articles from his prison in Tashkent until 11 October 1936 when he was sentenced to death and executed for participating in the murder of S.M. Kirov. (Reshetov 2003b). Ian Petrovich Koshkin (Al’kor) (1900–1938) was arrested on 22 May 1937 and executed on 14 April 1938 after an appeal on his sentence was rejected. The original charge the “loss of class diligence” (Vasil’kov 2003). The next major delay was, of course, the outbreak of Second World War.
- [9] It is almost impossible to separate drafts of the Siberian sections within the “single-volume” from the single volume within the “multi volume” series, and the eventual single volume within the *Peoples of the World* series. There are 3674 folios of specific draft articles, 553 folios of peer-review of the volume(s), 1 full manuscript draft of the Siberian volume (AMAE KI-1-81) and even 2 typeset unpublished galleys of chapters on Barabintsyes [Siberian Tatars] and Shors (21 folios) (AMAE 3-1-232; AMAE 3-1-260) for the earlier multivolume edition on Soviet Peoples.
- [10] Although the majority of the discussions happened between 1943 and 1949, there are earlier references In one handwritten letter dated 5 November 1937, the East Asian specialist N.V. Kiuner reported that work had begun on an “small reference work on the peoples of the

- world” and a “big reference work on the peoples of the world” with publication deadlines in 1939 and 1942 respectively (AMAE 8-1-476: 20).
- [11] The types of presentations at this Colloquium included a paper by Prof. Kiuner on Japanese and Chinese historical sources on Siberian peoples and by Debet̃s on the use of physical anthropological records as a historical object (ARAN 457-1-(1940)-38: Part 1 63–68) and perhaps the first paper by Prokofev on the ethnogenesis of what became known Samodeic Peoples ARAN 457-1-(1940)-38: Part 2 148-153)
- [12] The 1940 Commission was officially organized by the “Division of History and Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences” (ARAN 457-1(1940)-38: 40). It included a large number of historians, physical anthropologists, as well as ethnographers. This Commission marked also marked the beginning of a long-standing alliance between historians and ethnographers culminating in the appointment of Ūlian Bromleĭ, a historian, as the director of the Institute in 1966.
- [13] A marked quality of this meeting was a series of papers speculating on the Eurasian origins of American indigenous peoples. The key papers were by the archaeologists A.M. Zolotarev, A.P. Okladnikov, and V.N. Chernet̃sov, the physical anthropologists G.F. Debet̃s, N.N. Chebokarserv, and the ethnographers S.A. Tokarev, V.V. Struve, and G.N. Prokofev.
- [14] Ūlian Bromleĭ centred his career around reviving the early 20th century biosocial concept of *ĕtnos* (Skalnik 1986). Up until he used the term in 1969 (Bromleĭ 1969), biosocial unities were often referred to elliptically by this clumsy phrase. The term *ĕtnos* was conspicuously absent from the first volumes of *Peoples of the World* appearing suddenly in volume 8 on the Caucasus (1962) and then peppered once or twice in some of the succeeding volumes until appearing confidently, albeit sparingly, in the last two volumes.
- [15] Tolstov was unaware that Aleksei Okladnikov’s (1956) chapter Siberian archaeology was also translated and published in English (Okladnikov and Maurin 1959), and Popov’s and Dolgikh’s (1956) chapter on Kets was translated in manuscript form by the Smithsonian Institute (UCP 291/1 [Hoffman to Richer 6 November 1961]).
- [16] In the same year as this table of contents was published, the director of the Institute of Ethnography Tolstov cited this volume as it was finally named *The Peoples of Siberia* (although in his dream-line it is represented as a two-part work with the first part already in press) (Zhdanko 1949, 165).
- [17] The Siberian volume to some degree pioneers the concept of a Samodeic group over the far more common idea of there being a “Samoedic” group. To a Russian ear, the two words *sam* and *ed* together translate as “self-eater”. This widespread misinterpretation was criticized in the final published version of the chapter on Nenetses (Prokofeva et al. 1956, 608, 1963, 557).
- [18] In the final published version of the volume, Vasilevich and Smoliak (1956, 703–704, 1964, 622–623) criticize Shirokogoroff’s theory of “southern origin” of Evenkis (Shirokogoroff 1923). However even this verdict is not absolute. Vasilevich and Smoliak reproduce two of Shirokogoroff’s field photographs, albeit unattributed (1956, 723, 718#4, 1964, 643#4, 638). Neither was the “far-Southern” theory completely tabu since M.V. Kriukov and N.N. Chebokarsarov (1965, 72) confidently and calmly present these same theories in one of the last volumes (vol. 17) of the series.
- [19] The extensive list of attributions to the illustrations was not included in the English-language edition and can only be found in the Russian language edition.
- [20] The “bridge” between Soviet ethnographers and their American counterparts was first laid during the Fifth IUAES in Philadelphia in 1956. At that meeting Sol Tax arranged an informal dinner with the Soviet delegation (ARAN 142-2-784). An account of that meeting reported the Americans “want to work either in the Far North [the Soviet Arctic] or Central Asia” (ARAN 142-2-784: 56). Two years later Sol Tax made a visit to Moscow offering collaboration and advertising participation in his publication *Current Anthropology*. In the stenogramme of this high-profile meeting Maksim Levin predictably argued for publishing a series of methodological articles to unify methods thereby to develop a single international ethnographic voice (ARAN 142-1-985: 31–32).

- [21] The only English language review of the Russian-language Siberian volume distinguished it “in quality and significance its counterparts” and as representing “the rebirth of a proud ethnographic tradition”. In particular it praised the sections on the post-revolutionary context (Friedrich 1961). Armstrong (1965) described the translation as being “most authoritative” and Chard (1965) called for the remaining volumes in the series to be translated.
- [22] A subcontract was eventually signed with small firm Scripta Technica to supply all services including the final print run for the University of Chicago Press—the quality of which they protested [Geotz to Gakner 30 June 1964]. The cost of the translation was a major issue. It is interesting for historians of science that the names of translators and publishing houses—all of whom seemed to specialize in US government contracts—clearly circulated by word-of-mouth to such a degree that an editor at the Press described it as “collusion”. It is also of note that this translation was one of a number being juggled at the same time by Tax and by the Press, including volumes 7 and 8 of the *Peoples of the World* series on the Caucasus [Winston to Richters 4 November 1963].
- [23] The Google Scholar metrics for show 195 citations in June 2015 for the volume as a whole, and a total of 161 citations for the sum of the individual chapters. The most popular chapters are those on Yakuts, Evenkis, and Chukchi.
- [24] No cuts, it would seem, were applied to Part 1 of the book on the Peoples of Southern Siberia, nor to the introductory essays. Indeed in these sections one finds Dunn adding more detail. Abridgement on the whole was signalled with the use of square brackets in the second part of the book, but not always. The impression is created that the editors, much like their colleagues in the Soviet Union, only realized half-way through the editing process the epic length of this single volume and started applying drastic measures as their publishing deadline encroached. In the correspondence archive there is no discussion at all of the abridgement of the volume, only anxiety over the “quality” of the translation and the engagement of Stephen Dunn at the very last instance to finish the text after the deadline for the NSF publication grant was extended a second time.
- [25] As with the earlier series, there were regular published reports on the development of this series through a series of *soveshaniia* (Missonova 1990, 1991, 1992). The editors of the new series even published a guide where they set out the standardized structure of each article and the terminology to be used (Missonova 1990). The Russian language internet site for the new series can be found at <http://iea-ras.ru/index.php?go=Pages&in=view&id=6>. The site gives a short introduction to the new series directly linking it as the successor series to the older *Peoples of the World* project.
- [26] Siberia in this series is represented by the volume “Buriats”, “The Peoples of Western Siberia”, “The Turkic Peoples of Siberia”, “The Turkic Peoples of Eastern Siberia”, “The Peoples of North Eastern Siberia”, and “The Yakut-Sakhas”.
- [27] All Russian language sources are transliterated using the Library of Congress system. Archival references are organized by archive and represented with a simplified notation wherein the first acronym identifies the Archive, the first number (or letter-number) represents the *fond*, the second number (or number-date) represents the *opis*, and the third number represents the *delo* or *edinits khraneniia*. The number range following the colon represents the folio where the document is to be found. Full references to the documents are available online as a supplementary document to this article. The supplement also contains a full list of the volumes of the Russian-language series “Peoples of the World”.

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*Archival sources*²⁷

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AMAE—Archive of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg.
 ARAN—Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.
 RNB—Manuscript Collection, Russian National Library, St. Petersburg.
 SPbF ARAN—St. Petersburg Division of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences.
 UCP—University of Chicago Archives, University of Chicago Press.

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