

Intellectual and political contexts of the theory of "ethnos" in Russian and Ukrainian ethnography in the 1880s-1920s

The aim of this paper is to contextualize the first appearance of 'ethnos' as a principal subject matter in ethnography as a discipline in Russia. This idea was suggested for the first time by ethnographer Nikolai Mikhailovich Mogilianskii in his article "Ethnography and its tasks (apropos one book)" (1908). In 1916 Mogilianskii published an essay "The Object and Tasks of Ethnography" with his definition of ethnos: "The concept of ethnos is a complex notion: it is a collection of individuals, united in one entity by common physical (anthropological) characteristics, as well as by common historical fate, and finally – by common language, this basis, out of which a common worldview and popular psychology take their root; in a word – [united] by all of spiritual culture". Soon a full-fledged "theory of ethnos" was developed by the Russian émigré ethnographer Sergei Shirokogoroff who came from the same intellectual milieu of Saint-Petersburg academics. All this urges us to look at the appearance of the term 'ethnos' and its theory as a product of activity of a group of intellectuals.

The intellectual tradition that produced or contributed to this theory was formed around such institutions as the department of geography and ethnography of the Saint-Petersburg University, Russian Anthropological Society of the Saint-Petersburg University, the Russian Museum and the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera) of the Academy of sciences. The main features that characterized their thinking were: 1) all of them were trained in natural sciences and to an extent shared a positivistic idea of biosocial laws that govern society as a "natural" phenomenon; 2) all of them were physical (biological) anthropologist or were trained in this discipline; 3) they were also closely connected to the discipline of geography and many were inclined towards "geographical determinism"; 4) they actively borrowed concepts from contemporary French and German anthropology; 5) they followed the vision of anthropology as an "umbrella" natural science of 'man'. Ethnography was considered one of its sub-disciplines. Apart from these common traits there was one that Mogilianskii shared with his older friend and teacher Fedor Kondratievich Volkov (Vovk) – that is their Small-Russian or Ukrainian origin and active involvement in the Ukrainian national movement. In this presentation I will deal mainly with this "source" of the ethnos theory. I will argue that this involvement in a movement whose main point was formulating and defending its program in ethnic/national terms made anthropologists like Volkov and Mogilianskii particularly mindful of

ethnic divisions while their scientific anthropological outlook contributed to the way they naturalized these differences.

Nikolai Mogilianskii was born in 1871 in Chernigov in Malorossia. In 1889 he entered the natural sciences division of the Saint-Petersburg University where listened, among others to the lectures of anthropologist and geographer E. Petri and anatomist P. Lesgaft. In 1894 he went abroad to continue his education in Paris. During his stay there he studied anthropology at l'Ecole d'Anthropologie under P. Broca's disciple G. Manouvrier, Gabriel de Mortillet, Charles Létourneau and others. In Paris he became close friends with Fedor Volkov who also influenced him as a more experienced anthropologist and compatriot. Upon returning to Saint-Petersburg Mogilianskii became a professional anthropologist and ethnographer. He worked in the Russian museum until 1918. He also lectured in anthropology and geography in several educational institutions. After the Bolshevik revolution Mogilianskii moved to Kiev where he held high posts in the government of independent Ukraine under getman Pavlo Skoropadskii. In 1920 he immigrated to Paris. In 1923 he moved to Prague where he resumed his teaching and research. Mogilianskii died in Prague in 1933.

Anthropologist, archaeologist and ethnographer Fedor Kondrat'evich Volkov (1847-1918) he was educated at the departments of natural sciences of the faculty of physics and mathematics at the universities of Odessa and Kiev. As a result of increasing persecutions of the Ukrainian movement, in which he took an active part, Vovk left the Russian Empire. In 1887 he finally settled in Paris where he attended lectures of leading French anthropologists Manuvrie, Topinard etc. and was on editing board of the journal "L'Anthropologie". After the 1905 Revolution Vovk returned to Russia, and in 1907 due to the efforts of Mogilianskii was appointed a curator at the Russian Museum and started teaching at the Saint-Petersburg University.

Two main sources of ethnos theory: the Ukrainian national movement and SPb professional anthropology

In the next part of my presentation I would like to argue that the theory of ethnos had two major sources: the Ukrainian national movement and SPb professional anthropology. A paradigm which saw ethnography as a sub-discipline of the natural science of man was predicated upon its institutional position in the university curriculum. The chair in geography and ethnography was opened at the Saint-Petersburg University in 1887 at the faculty of physics and mathematics, division of natural sciences. The first professor was a Baltic German Eduard Petri (1854-1899). Petri was skeptical about dividing human race into neat categories based only

on physical basis. He claimed that nationalities were basically smaller subdivisions of races that could be grouped together on the basis of all “anthropological data” about them. Thus the paradigm of seeing ethnic differences in biological terms while at the same time rejecting epistemological validity of the idea of race was in place in Perti’s writings. Petri’s immediate successor, Dmitrii Andreevich Koropchevskii (1842-1903). Fridrich Ratzel exercised the formative influence on Koropchevskii’s thinking. Apart from editing Ratzel’s Russian translations he published “The Introduction to Political Geography” which popularized Ratzel’s “Anthropogeography” and outlined “the newest geographical ideas about the significance of surrounding nature for the physical, mental and social development of humanity” (Koropchevskii, 1901: vii). In his dissertation “The significance of “geographical” provinces in ethno-genetic process” he argues that ethnic groups or types should be studied in connection with the geographical milieu that gives birth to them. He saw the ethnogenetic process (the term he seems to have coined) in naturalistic terms as defined by Ratzel and the German naturalist Moritz Wagner who discovered the main evolutionary mechanism in migration and isolation of species. Volkov succeeded Koropchevskii as lecturer in anthropology at Saint-Petersburg University and held this chair from 1907 till his death in 1918.

#### Ukrainian national movement and the definition of nationality

Turning to the Ukrainian national movement we can cite the preeminent Ukrainian historian M. Hrushevskii who called Ukrainian ethnography “a martial science” which dominated the Ukrainian studies throughout the XIX century. The first semi-organized nationalist movement with clear political aims - Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood (1845-1847) - appeared on the eve of the European “spring of nations” and was harshly put down by the Tsarist government. Its leader historian and ethnographer Nikolai Kostomarov adhered to the Romantic idea of national soul or primordial “spiritual essence” to explain the differences between Great and Small Russians. In the 1880-90s these arguments were to be supported by more “solid” and “objective” evidence with the advent of positive science in the lectures by Kiev-based historian Volodimir Antonovich. Craniological data he provided attested to significant differences in craniological indexes of Great Russians, Ukrainians and Poles. The people’s characters, in Antonovich interpretation, not only exhibited differences similar to those described by Kostomarov, they also had a natural basis in what he called the “functioning of the nervous system of a people”.

In the yearly period of his life Volkov was influenced by Antonovich, Chubinskii and Kostomarov as well as contemporary socialist populist theories. When he returned to the Russian

Empire after the First Russian Revolution in 1905-7 he encountered a thriving Ukrainian community in Saint-Petersburg and Moscow. They published several journals, had their representatives in the First State Duma (parliament) and vividly discussed the question of national determination and autonomy. In 1905 Volkov published an article “Ukrainians from the anthropological point of view”. The major characteristics that he considered were the height, head index and the color of hair and eyes, all of which he labeled “ethnic indicators”. They all showed a similar pattern of geographic variation in the direction from North-East to West-South - from a comparatively short, blonde, long-headed type to the brachycephalic population with tall stature, dark hair and eyes and a straight and narrow nose that he believed to be “the main Ukrainian type”.

The final classic version of Volkov’s studies of the Ukraine were published in the second volume of a rich and well-illustrated edition “The Ukrainian People in the Past and Present”, published in Saint-Petersburg in 1914 and 1916. The editorial board of this collection included many liberal professors from Saint-Petersburg who were sympathetic to the Ukrainian cause, and the leading Ukrainian historian Mihailo Grushevskii. These volumes were a proper Ukrainian encyclopedia and contained articles about her geography, history, language, demography, ethnography and anthropology (the latter two written by Volkov). The conclusions of the ethnographic chapter about the distinctiveness of cultural traits of Ukrainians, their affinity with Western Slavs and their relative “purity” (compared to other Eastern Slavs) closely paralleled the conclusions of the anthropological one, thus establishing a paradigm of many-sided description of an “ethnos” that ethnographers and anthropologists in the USSR would continue to pursue.

#### The concept of ethnos and the teaching of anthropology

There are many contexts which help us understand the formation and significance of the concept of ethnos, but I would like to concentrate here on the problem of positioning ethnography and anthropology in the university. The beginning of the First World War stimulated the authorities to look for alliance with scientists who, from their side, were also willing to cooperate in the war effort. Under the newly appointed liberal minister of popular enlightenment Pavel Ignatiev a draft of a new University Charter was sent to university councils for discussion in 1915. This discussion and other bureaucratic procedures continued until the Revolution, and the charted was never approved. Nevertheless, it triggered a round of debates about university teaching of anthropology/ethnography and its status of natural or humanitarian science. In fact, Mogilianskii’s paper which contained a definition of ethnos was his motion in this debate.

Mogilianskii was emphatic about the distinction between the history of culture that has as its subject matter human culture in general, and ethnography that deals with “ethnos” and its specific features. He suggested establishing two departments – anthropology and ethnography – at the faculty of natural sciences, and a department of history of culture at the faculty of history and philology. Here Mogilianskii followed the opinion of Volkov who suggested the establishment of an Anthropological institute with departments of physical anthropology, prehistoric anthropology and ethnography. The model for this institute was L’Ecole d’Anthropologie in Paris, the only place, where, according to Volkov, anthropological sciences were taught “in full volume”. This plan did not materialized, and the department of ethnography appeared in Petrograd University after the Revolution under evolutionist ethnographers Lev Shternberg and Vladimir Bogoraz, who insisted on humanitarian nature of ethnography.

Mogilianskii taught anthropology in various institutes in Saint-Petersburg, and – after his final emigration to the Western Europe in 1920 – in Paris and Prague. Tribes and peoples were defined in his lectures as “lesser units” within a few large racial groups that “differ from each other by secondary characteristics”. As an example he cited visible physical differences between a tall blonde and blue-eyed Norwegian and a brown, dark-eyed and dark-haired Portuguese within a single “white race”. Ethnography, for Mogilianskii, was a “science that has as its subject matter the evolution of human thought (culture) within the limits of ethnic groups, defined by ethnology”, ethnology being in his scheme identical to racial anthropology which belonged squarely to the domain of natural sciences.

Although this kind of conceptualization of ethnic differences were quite common in the European anthropology of the period, it did not go unchallenged in Russia. Dmitrii Anuchin, the professor of geography and anthropology in Moscow University published in 1918 a rather devastating critique of Volkov’s “Anthropological characteristics of the Ukrainian people”. Ukrainians, according to Anuchin, were no more dark-haired, straight-nosed and brachycephalic than their neighbors. Using only average numbers, Volkov ignored any geographical variation and explained all features that did not fit his ideal type as ethnic admixtures on the borders of Ukrainian territory with Great Russians, Poles, Germans or even Mongols. In this context Anuchin formulated his own understanding of ethnos: «Mister Volkov constantly speaks about “ethnic” influences, “ethnic” admixtures etc., but the Greek word ethnos – the people (narod) has to do with a spiritual essence of the people, and not with its bodily features. Ethnic influence can be felt in language, way of life (byt), folklore, customs, costume, ornaments etc., but not in the height, the length of legs or the shape of noses». Thus, Anuchin strongly protested Volkov’s claims about homogeneity of Ukrainians, their principal difference from neighboring peoples

and claims to some “pure” Slavic type that other linguistically Slavic peoples had lost due to mixing with non-Slavs.

#### Mogilianskii as political activist

We must not forget that these debates were waged during the most turbulent period of the Revolution and the collapse of the Russian Empire. While Volkov died in 1918 on his way to Kiev, Mogilianskii made it there the same year and became a politician. After a failed Bolshevik coup in Kiev in January 1918 the Central Rada proclaimed full independence and invited the German army to protect her from the Bolshevik invasion. In several months the Germans occupied the country, disbanded the Rada, and on April 29 Pavlo Skoropadskii was elected the getman of the National State of Ukraine or “The Hetmanat” which survived until December 1918. Mogilianskii was appointed deputy state secretary. From May till November he was present at the meetings of the cabinet and assisted Pablo Skoropadaskii. Surprisingly, Both Skoropadskii and Mogiliskii advocated “Russian orientation” in Ukrainian politics. Skoropadskii saw himself both Russian and Ukrainian: he was a descendant of the Ukrainian getman on the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but spent all his life in service in the imperial army, he and his family spoke Russian. Mogilianskii characterized Skoropadskii as “a devoted nationalist Ukrainian who considers national feeling to be healthy, believes in the future of national idea without being a separatist at all” – a characteristics that could be perfectly applied to Mogilianskii’s own political views (Ibid, 574). It should be added, though, that this government was also emphatically anti-socialist and very skeptical in relation to so called “Ukrainization”. Mogilianskii claimed that the main pillar of this policy was Ukrainian well-to-do peasants – those who “elected” Skoropadskii and whose well-being was threatened by the pending “socialization” of land (Ibid, 614). By the end of the hetman’s rule there was a sharp opposition in the government between the Ukrainian nationalists and Russians. Getman’s failure to include the former into the government let to their open rebellion.

The political position of Skoropadskii and Mogilianskii failed with the defeat of the Germany and the uprising of Ukrainian separatists and leftists lead by Simon Petlyura. They ceased power in Kiev on December 14 in 1918. Skoropadskii had to flee to Germany. A month before he had sent Mogilianskii to Paris as his representative and a potential representative of the Ukraine on the peace conference. Mogilianskii did not hide his “anti-separatist” position. A few years of Mogilianskii’s life following the departure from Kiev were very turbulent and full of political and literary activity. He organized a Ukrainian national committee in Paris, went to the Crimea to have talks with the general P. Vrangell, edited journal “La Jeune Ukraine” and, most

importantly for our subject, wrote several long essays that summarized his ideas about the Ukraine, her ethnography, history, political life and future prospects. He predicted that the liberation of Russia from the Bolsheviks should start with the Ukraine. The ethnographer used his psychological characteristics of Ukrainians to argue that “Ukrainian peasantry <...> have not accepted the socialization of land, and by its deeply congenial individualism it will never accept socialism in any form”. In Paris Mogilianskii wrote his most ambitious work “The Ukraine and Ukrainians”: “The Ukrainian people on the whole its ethnic territory is characterized by a range of common for all its members ethnographic features, which do not leave any doubt about the fact that it constitutes one ethnographic whole that definitely stands out among other Slavic peoples». On the other hand, he emphatically stressed the point of Ukrainians’ affinity with other Eastern Slavs, the point that, in his opinion, should preclude them from appealing to Turkey or Germany for support and protection (Ibid, 36). Mogilianskii described the activity of Ukrainian “separatists” without any sympathy, portraying them as traitors who “presented themselves at the German headquarters right with the beginning of warfare much earlier than Lenin and co. did ».

#### The development of Volkov’s methodology by Sergei Rudenko

While Mogilianskii’s ideas about freeing Russia from Bolsheviks did not come to any fruition, and another prominent ethnographer who theorized etnos, Shirokogorov, also left Russia – for China - the idea of etnos and Volkov’s methodology of complex investigation and mapping data of physical anthropology, material and spiritual culture was followed by the generation of his pupils who stayed in the Soviet Union. The most prominent among them was Sergei Rudenko, an ethnic Ukrainian born in Kharkov in 1885. In the 1900s he studied in Saint-Petersburg with Volkov, but also spent a year studying anthropology in Paris. His main yearly work was a monograph about the Bashkir, a Turkish people of the Southern Ural region. Volkov distinguished three groups of Ukrainians: Northern, middle, and Southern Ukrainians whose dialectal and cultural borders roughly coincided with those of anthropological types. The correlation between “types”, ascertained on the basis of physical anthropology, linguistics, and cultural traits was the issue that intrigued Rudenko. He ascertained three major cultural types of Bashkirs (eastern, south-western and northern) and concluded that they retained their most ancient “pure” Turkish cultural forms in the eastern type, while the other two underwent strong influence from neighboring Finns and Slavs. To his satisfaction these cultural types generally coincided with the physical anthropology types he had delimited.

In 1926 Rudenko made his most ambitious theoretical statement “The Current State and Nearest Tasks of the Ethnographic Study of Turkish Tribes”. This was marked by the usual

ambivalence characteristic for Volkov's and Mogilianskii's thinking about ethnic types. Beginning with the statement that "language, culture and physical type live separate lives", he smoothly proceeded to claim that "nevertheless we can speak about characteristically Turkish physical type". He also outlined a generalized Turkish cultural type of cattle-breeding nomads. His statement of research tasks was as following: «It is absolutely necessary to find out geographical distribution of certain everyday-life (cultural) elements and their combinations in biologically closed entities that we call ethnic groups».

#### Marxism and the abrupt end of biosocial studies in the Soviet Union

Rudenko's grandiose program was doomed. At the very moment this program was formulated, a campaign against "biologising" was already on the horizon. The sweeping Marxist takeover of the academy during the Cultural Revolution of the late 1920- early 1930s "involved the ideological proscription of any attempt at theoretical links between the biological and the social" which was epitomized in the emergence of a new pejorative term "biologizirovat'" (to biologize). As historian Mark B. Adams has observed, "no field that linked the biological and the social survived the Great Break".

Severing any ties between culture and biology became a part of Marxist critique of *ethnos*. It was used by a fervent proponent of Marxism, academician N.Ya. Marr's student Valerian Aptekar', who started a campaign against ethnology as a science and Vladimir Bogoraz as its most authoritative representative of the older generation. Aptekar' claimed that "culture" and "ethnos" – two central concepts of ethnology – are considered as natural, metaphysical or biological substances with their own immanent forces. Cultures and *ethnoses* in ethnological discourse are endowed with biological, chemical and physical characteristics, thus portraying social processes as analogous with those in organic and even non-organic nature. He also insisted that *ethnos* in ethnological discourse stood for a thinly disguised race. Although Aptekar's critique of Bogoraz was to an extent justified, his accusations of ethnographers in racism were hardly adequate given the distinction that they made between two concepts since the times of Eduard Petri. Nevertheless, the huge ideological turn of the late 1920s – early 1930s led to a devastating critique of "bourgeois" science, purges of many prominent ethnographers, and creation of Marxist ethnographic literature that used only "sociological" or historical concepts.

Rudenko's suggestions about correlations between cultural and physical types as well as formulations like "biology of human societies" became ideological anathema. Rudenko's arrest in 1930 was a part of the repressions against so called "All-People's Union for Fighting for Revival of Free Russia" or the case of academicians. Any further development of the theory of

ethnos with its biosocial implications became impossible in the Soviet Union during Stalinism. Ironically, “ethnos” became a catchword for the new generation of theoreticians that came to professional maturity in the 1960s, and late Soviet ethnography from this point on was strongly associated with the theory of ethnos as developed by Yulian Bromley. At the same period the repressed biosocial implications and geographical determinism came to full fruition in the works of another famous and highly controversial thinker of the late Soviet period, Lev Gumilev, who was influenced by Rudenko.