

The Conceptual History of Ethnogenesis: A Brief Overview

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Abstract

This paper seeks to contribute to the theoretical understandings of ethnicity, ethnic membership formations and (de-)ethnization processes. It presents an overview of the use of an early, constructivist process category that has nearly been forgotten: ethnogenesis. It was employed in international scholarship across disciplines already before the “ethnic revival” in American discourse in the 1970s and/or the emergence of the discourse on “urban ethnicities”.

Accordingly to the manifold of perspectives on – and definitions of – ethnicity, tracing the conceptual history of the term ethnogenesis from the late 19th century up to the present day leads to insights into diverse scholarly traditions. It also illuminates the ways the concept was used, which is dependent on the very specific historic (and political) context of research. The study’s empirical findings were found using the search engine JSTOR as it provided going deeper into the academic exchange between US and Soviet scholars.

Keywords: Ethnogenesis, ethnicity, ethnization, social change, cultural change, ethnoheterogenesis

One of the most important tasks confronting Soviet historians is that of opposing the fascist falsification of history, especially in the field of ethnogenesis.

Aleksandr Dmitrievich Udaltsov, *The Main Tasks of Soviet Historical Science*, 1946: 243

The study of ethnic relations has been a common pursuit in Sociology and Anthropology, both in the past and in the present, especially though not exclusively in historical contexts marked by heightened migration. This paper seeks to make a contribution to the refining of theoretical understandings of ethnicity, respectively, ethnic membership formations and (de-)ethnization processes, through merging perspectives from both disciplines.

Since scholarship is taking an analytic view on the processes of modern nation-building, ethnic claims and ethnic othering (however constructed) and their objective consequences are being examined as well; they are seen as partly

in line and partly in contrast to claims of race as they developed in most dramatic ways under fascism and Nazism. Processes of (de-)ethnization matter to different degrees and in different ways in various social and historical contexts. This is why studying the genesis and continuously shifting social forms of ethnicities is heuristically important in that it can help us clarify processes of socio-, cultural- and political change in society at large.

On the one hand, “ethnicity” often appears as an unsettled and ill-defined field of inquiry. On the other, there is rich scholarly work on the question regarding how ethnicities emerge and what processes are at work. The latter takes a

constructivist approach and introduces certain analytical criteria that specify the development, for example, of the emergence of ethnicity through institutional framework, meaning making, social classifications, power relations, etc.¹

Emphasis lies on the genesis and changes of ethnic framing and multiplicity of ethnic memberships. This contribution moves further back into the history of such conceptual debates that refer to the emergence of ethnicities. More specifically, it presents a brief overview of the use of an early (to my account, the earliest) process category that was in use in international scholarship across disciplines before the “ethnic revival” in American discourse in the 1970s (e.g. Yancy et al 1976) and/or the emergence of the discourse on “urban ethnicities” (Cohen 1974), at roughly the same time: ethnogenesis.

According to the manifold perspectives on and definitions of ethnicity, tracing the conceptual history of the term ethnogenesis from the late 19th century up to the present day leads to insights into diverse scholarly traditions. It also illuminates the ways the concept is employed, which is dependent on very specific historic (and political) research contexts. Looking at the overview of a scholarly debate that spans over centuries, and in order to systematize distinct usages of the term and (at least some) general findings, it was necessary to choose one narrow window to look into a huge discursive field. In comparing different journal archives that one can use to such an end, one criterion was the quantitative content of digitized back issues; another was the quantity of entries when feeding their search engines with the word “ethnogenesis”. In accordance with these two criteria, the study’s empirical findings were found using the search engine JSTOR.² Naturally, using only one journal archive

has its limitations, and any decision to use a specific one remains debatable. Using JSTOR as a proxy for this mission had an advantage. In comparison to other databases and archives, it provided much more opportunity to go deeper into one important aspect of the conceptual history of ethnogenesis that is at the same time crucial and less widely known: the Soviet history, a specific context that, as other multi-“national” federal states, generated broad discussions on “ethnic groups” that show drastic shifts accordingly to political change (most notably for academia after World War II, and, in general, in the historical turning point 1989-1991). Nominally a union of multiple national Soviet republics, in practice its government and economy were highly centralized. Interestingly, international academic exchange was very vivid already in the 1950s, especially between Soviet scholars (in their setting of a multi-national, one-party state) and their American colleagues (in their setting of an immigrant society, in plain McCarthyism).³

The Origins of Ethnogenesis in a War Poem – A selected quantitative overview

The most recent monograph on ethnogenesis, by Barbara Voss, was published in 2008 by the University of California Press, entitled: *The Archaeology of Ethnogenesis: Race and Sexuality in Colonial San Francisco* (Voss 2008). “How

archive; its content comes from more than 900 publishers and provides full-text searches of almost 2,000 journals in more than fifty disciplines.

³ The quality of this academic exchange between Soviet and American scholars on ethnogenesis during the Cold War was extraordinarily notable. As Kremontsov (1996) put it, „during the 1940s, Soviet foreign policy evolved from wartime cooperation to Cold War confrontation with Western countries, and this evolution had a profound effect on both the international and the domestic aspects of Soviet science policy. During the war, Soviet leaders used the international relations of Soviet science to improve the alliance with Western countries. With the war’s victorious end, science was engaged in a fierce competition with the West, most of all in the field of atomic and other weaponry. During the short period from 1945 to mid-1947, cooperation and competition coexisted and even stimulated each other“ (Kremontsov 1996: 229).

¹ This is done, inter alia, by in recent articles by Zolberg and Woon (1999), Brubaker and Cooper 2000, and Alba (2005) or Wimmer (2004).

² JSTOR (short for Journal Storage) is a digital library founded in 1995. Originally containing digitized back issues of academic journals, it now encompasses books and other primary sources as well as current issues of journals. It is known as a reputable journal

did diverse groups of people, who previously had little knowledge of each other, navigate the challenges and opportunities of abrupt and sustained interactions caused by colonialism, conflict, and migration?" is one of the key questions approached by the author, who also aims to generate a productive dialogue between queer studies and archaeology, and develop rigorous methodologies that support the study of sexuality and gender through archaeological evidence.

While several research fields of current relevance merge in this recent book, the study of processes which, at different times, disciplinary traditions and, henceforth, differing meanings, were called "ethnogenesis". This concept has a long tradition in Historical Archaeology (with the first publications using the term appearing in JSTOR in 1945, see Table 1.), Anthropology (1942) and Area Studies, especially Latin American Studies, account for its early usage (1931), with the first entry in the Sociology category only appearing in 1962.

Bibliographical research via JSTOR in November 2015 revealed 3.997 search results for books, book chapters, journal papers, pamphlets, reviews, and other miscellaneous documents in all disciplines which use the term "ethnogenesis" in their full text.⁴ The most recent contribution was published in November 2015; a book review on Neo-Indians, and the oldest was published as early as April 1873 in the US American literature journal *The Aldine* (Thomas J. Watson Library 1873). This piece refers to a new and enlarged edition of Henry Timrod's (1829-1867) famous poems, edited by Paul H. Hayne, who, according to the text, "had written a touching memoir of his brother poet [...] whose life was a hard one but happily for him it was not a long one" (Thomas J. Watson Library 1873: 88). Often called the "Poet Laureate of the Confederacy," Henry Timrod is considered by many scholars to be the most gifted of the Southern poets writing in this era (Barret and Miller 2005). The earliest works

⁴ The same pattern of search for the notion "ethnicity" revealed 135.626 results, with the earliest publication listed at JSTOR from the year 1935.

Ethnogenesis

By Henry Timrod (1861)

Hath not the morning dawned with
added light?
And shall not evening call another
star
Out of the infinite regions of the
night
To mark this day in Heaven? At last
we are
A nation among nations. And the
world
Shall soon behold in many a distant
port
Another flag unfurled!

found at JSTOR which mention the notion ethnogenesis are from Literature Studies, as Timrod's poem *Ethnogenesis* (1861) drew many young men to enlist in the service of the Confederacy.⁵ In fact, with the outbreak of American Civil War, in a state of fervent patriotism Timrod returned to Charleston to begin publishing his war poems. His first poem of this period is "Ethnogenesis", written in February 1861, during the meeting of the first Confederate Congress at Montgomery, Alabama. Part of the poem (see textbox) was read aloud at this meeting (Barret and Miller 2005: 311-315).

The number of bibliographical references at JSTOR decreases significantly to 166 when limiting the search to contributions to journals and books (excluding reviews, pamphlets, and so forth) which carry the notion "ethnogenesis" not only in their full text, but in their title.⁶ Archaeology leads with thirty titles, published between the years 1945 and 2014, followed by Anthropol-

⁵ Born in Charleston, South Carolina, to a family of German descent, Henry Timrod was descended on both sides of his family from military men. His grandfather Heinrich Dimroth migrated to the United States in 1765 and anglicized his name. His father, William Henry Timrod, was an officer in the Seminole Wars and a poet himself.

⁶ Specifying the search for abstracts is not recommended, as JSTOR only provides abstracts on 10 per cent of all items when including books and book chapters.

ogy with twenty-nine titles between 1962 and 2014, and Sociology with twenty contributions published between 1962 and 2015. The next disciplines in this ranking are Area Studies (an umbrella category) and History (Table 1). While Archaeology leads in terms of publications with “ethnogenesis” in their title among the single disciplines (that is to say, not in terms of broad, inclusive umbrella categories such as Social Science, Humanities or Area Studies), Anthropology leads the ranking of publications which make reference to the term in their full text, accounting for 684 titles published between 1942 and 2015. Sociology comes second with 417 titles (1962-2015), Archaeology third (409 items), followed by History with 339 contributions, and Asian

Studies coming fifth with 180 titles published between 1950 and 2008.

With the exception of the area of Language and Literature Studies, which reference Henry Timrod’s ode for “the nation among the nations”, the earliest academic works are from Latin American Studies. A cryptic reference in German from 1927 (*Avis. Anthropos*, 22(1/2), 338-346) gives a hint on a new publication by J. Imbelloni, entitled, “Investigaciones para la Ethnogenesis Americana, No. 1, Buenos Aires 1926”.

Another early contribution (in German) was by Hermann Trimborn, full professor of American Studies and Ethnology at University of Bonn until 1968, on the Chibcha High Culture. In accordance with the normative for the time practice

Table 1: Publications with ‘Ethnogenesis’ (EG) in Title or Full Text

Journals, Books & Book Chapters in [discipline]	No. of listed journals	No. of papers & books with EG in TITLE	Published between [years]	No. of papers & books with EG in FULL TEXT	Published between [years]
Archaeology	133	30	1992-2013	409	1945-2014
Social Sciences	1089	29	1962-2009	1.015	1942-2015
Anthropology	124	25	1962-2014	684	1942-2015
Sociology	198	20	1962-2015	417	1962-2015
Area Studies	245	18	1978-2011	649	1931-2015
History	484	13	1984-2003	339	1958-2015
African Studies	72	5	1990-2001	122	1968-2011
American Studies	137	5	1999-2011	162	1976-2015
Asian Studies	166	5	1978-2008	180	1950-2008
Latin American Studies	74	3	2000-2007	74	1931-2012
Language & Literature Studies	431	3	1984-2005	128	1899-2015
Linguistics	63	2	1991-1998	47	1966-2014
Political Science	229	2	1962-2007	141	1962-2015
Humanities	848	2	1984-2003	222	1899-2015
Urban Studies	8	1	2004	3	2004-2010
American Indian Studies	10	1	2001	26	1979-2015
Population Studies	63	1	1999	15	1993-2014
Religion	156	1	2014	109	1958-2015
ALL	4.530	166	1962-2015	4.742	1899-2015

(Source: own research at JSTOR)

of racial (and predominantly racist) categorization of peoples, the author expresses his concern about the lack of a “genetic explanation of the here blossomed high cultures” which, in his eyes, had been the “key issue to be determined in the general framework of American Ethnogenesis” (Trimborn 1931).

Many scholars who contributed to the early (Latin) American Studies were anthropologists, ethnologists and ethnographers. Historically, Anthropology as such has grown out of the interest in exotic peoples and has had at its core ethnogenesis and the classification of races. For instance, still in the year of 1962, the journal *Current Anthropology* (University of Chicago Press) published a paper on “Racial Analysis of Human Populations in Relation to Their Ethnogenesis” (Wiercinski and Bielicki 1962). According to the bibliographical search (Table 1), this is the oldest paper among the 25 found in 124 journals in Anthropology which carry “Ethnogenesis” in their title. The authors, at that time both lecturers in Anthropology at the University of Warsaw, were concerned with the considerable lack of agreement about the general concept of race, on which any racial classification must depend:

“The present unsatisfactory state of human racial classification, and especially the application of racial data to ethnogenesis, may be attributed to four factors: (1) lack of agreement about the general concept of race; (2) the use of different methods for the typological analysis of populations; (3) lack of information about the genetic transmission of racial characters; (4) difficulties interposed by the political implications of racist concepts.” Wiercinski and Bielicki 1962: 2.

In 1963, during the Seventh International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, the section “Ethnic Anthropology” met to discuss the “Application of Anthropology to the Problems of Ethnogenesis”, together with topics such as “principles and methods of anthropological taxonomy, factors in racial differentiation, the variability of racial characters”, and so forth.⁷

⁷ *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Feb., 1964), pp. 44-45.

The Online Etymology Dictionary confirms that “Ethnogenesis” was the “title of an 1861 poem celebrating the birth of the Confederacy by U.S. Southern poet Henry Timrod” and provides a short entry: “1957 in modern usage, from ethno- + -genesis ‘birth, origin, creation’.”⁸ As the first example of its usage displayed here appears the fragment “attempts to reconstruct the ethnogenesis of the peoples of Siberia” (no source indicated), a hint which puts the testimony regarding the “modern usage” from the year 1957 onwards into question. Indeed, with the exception the earliest references in Latin American Studies and the rather later sociological contributions on ethnogenesis, the majority of publications across all disciplines until the late 1960s referred to “Soviet Studies in Ethnogenesis”, especially in the American journals. The earliest entry in journals of Archaeology was by Luce et al (1945), who in the section “Archaeological News and Discussions” reported on research of Soviet colleagues from 1941, e.g. on the history of the tribes of the upper Volga during the first millennium A.D. and on the ethnogenesis of the Slavs. As for Anthropology, Henry Field and Eugene Prostov presented “Results of Soviet Investigations in Siberia”, 1940-1941, in the journal *American Anthropologist* (Field and Prostov 1942). The authors explain that for the study of ethnogenesis, the discovery of great territorial groups of monuments with their corresponding four local cultures was of particular interest, namely the Baikalian, the Amur, the Ob, and the Arctic (Field and Prostov 1942: 392). Obviously, developing a theory of ethnogenesis was of utmost importance for Soviet academia. This need was met by the late Academician Marr’s⁹ theories of ethnogenesis, which were generally accepted and regarded as “the Soviet theory of ethnogenesis” (Schlesinger 1950: 9).

⁸ The entry in the Oxford Dictionary reads: “Ethnogenesis: the formation or emergence of an ethnic group”.

⁹ Marr Institute for the History of Material Culture, Moscow.

The Soviet Approach: Political Implications and Reception at International Scale

Ethnogenesis originally served as a Soviet approach concerned with the National Question in the new context *after* the October Revolution in 1917. In 1913, Lenin wrote his “Theses on the National Question” in opposition to the tsarist monarchy of the Great Russians. He argued for the self-determination of nations and their right to secede and form a separate state.¹⁰ In 1922, when the new Marxist-Leninist state on the Eurasian continent, the Soviet Union, integrated multiple subnational Soviet republics, the National Question took a new turn. Ethnogenesis was developed and employed to acknowledge and preserve sub-national entities. But it also served to place them on an evolutionary scale towards an idealized concept of “civilization”. This theory not only helped to construct separate ethnic units, later, it became the platform for independence movements during perestroika (Slezkine 1994).

During tsarist times, the antecedents of ethnogenesis as they were known in Great Russia, were still in the work of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814). In his “Addresses to the German Nation”, Fichte outlined an idea for the construction of the German nation through education. He argued that not only would people see themselves as a separate ethnic social entity, but through education, they would train future generations to act in defence of this collective.¹¹

¹⁰ “[...] this a) for the sake of the basic principles of democracy in general; b) also because there are, within the frontiers of Russia and, what is more, in her frontier areas, a number of nations with sharply distinctive economic, social and other conditions; furthermore, these nations (like all the nations of Russia except the Great Russians) are unbelievably oppressed by the tsarist monarchy” (excerpt from the second thesis). Lenin wrote 10 theses for his lectures on the national question delivered on July 9-13, 1913 in the Swiss towns of Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne and Berne. Lenin, (Lenin Collected Works, Progress Publishers, 1977, Moscow, Volume 19, pages 243-251.)

¹¹ His views were no doubt influenced by the French occupation of parts of Germany in 1808 when he delivered these lectures in Berlin. Furthermore, he gained the support of a large segment of the public who were also tired of the occupation and energised

The education reforms introduced in Russia in the 1820s, reflecting Fichte’s argument, sought to train people’s minds and bodies in order to create a coherent nation (Shnirelman 1996).

From the 1930s onwards, ethnogenesis was the predominant theory in much Soviet research. “Ethnogenetic studies” focused on demonstrating the existence and stable development of “nations” through language, customs, territory and economic life throughout history. Censuses in the 1920s and 1930s helped establish rigid concepts of ethnic groups and the development of peoples into nations through these categories (Hirsch 1997). In his famous “Marxism and the National Question”, Stalin (1973) formally outlines these characteristics of a “nation,” providing a framework for much research (Shanin 1989). Stalin’s piece on the National Question is a short work of Marxist theory, written in January 1913 while living in Vienna.¹² Although it did not appear in the various English-language collections of Stalin’s Selected Works which began to appear in 1928, “Marxism and the National Question” was widely republished from 1935 as part of the topical collection *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*¹³. However, Victor Shnirelman (1996: 10), a social scientist, explains, as “Soviet patriotism” or nationalism grew, scholars were encouraged “to study the formation and evolution of peoples living in the

by this patriotism. As Fichte argued: “it is only by means of the common characteristic of being German that we can avert the downfall of our nation which is threatened by its fusion with foreign peoples, and win back again an individuality that is self-supporting and quite incapable of any dependence upon others” (Fichte 1968: 3).

¹² First published as a pamphlet and frequently reprinted, the essay by the ethnic Georgian Stalin was regarded as a seminal contribution to Marxist analysis of the nature of nationality and helped to establish his reputation as an expert on the topic. Indeed, Stalin would later become the first People’s Commissar of Nationalities following the victory of the Bolshevik Party in the October Revolution of 1917.

¹³ Eager to denigrate his nemesis, in his 1941 biography of Stalin, exiled Soviet leader Leon Trotsky intimated that primary credit for all that was worthy about Marxism and the National Question actually belonged to V.I. Lenin and party theoretician Nikolai Bukharin.

USSR". Here, the most pressing problem for the Russians was obviously the origin of the Slavs in ancient history, and a considerable amount of work is devoted to the subject (Schlesinger 1950). Following Rudolph Schlesinger, the influence exercised on the development of historiography among Slavs by the absence of political independence, and the prolonged struggle for it, was well known.

In the struggle for political independence and the mobilization of society for its purposes, a very important part was intended to be played, and was actually played, by the reproduction of a distant past when independent Slav states existed.

"From the point of view of those who made such statements the fact of the existence of those states was regarded as a guarantee for future 'capacity of independent state-hood' and as a foundation of the claim to it. Naturally such an application of the distant past could be successful only if the latter was idealized. This was the origin of the numerous 'golden ages' to be found in the works of Polish, Czech, Croat and other historians. In fighting this approach, Soviet historians were motivated by the fact that Marxist theory demands an application, to however diverse conditions, of 'fundamental laws of historical development valid for all human society'" (Schlesinger 1950: 9).

The chauvinist application frequently made (often by Polish historians against the Eastern Slavs) of the migration theories cultivated by the nationalist schools of German history, made it necessary to give a fundamental counter-argument to all theories operating on a racial stratum, thus encouraging claims to racial superiority. This is the very specific historical context in which the Soviet Theory of Ethnogenesis gained popularity, as developed by the late Marr's scholars, second to none by Aleksandr Dmitrievich Udaltsov.¹⁴ It is an anti-racist conceptualization of ethnogenesis which emerged earlier than

¹⁴ Udaltsov was a Soviet historian and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1939). From 1946 to 1956 he was director of the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

Udaltsov, A.. (1946). The Main Tasks of Soviet Historical Science. *Synthese*, 5(5/6), 243-244.

RUSSIAN SECTION

THE MAIN TASKS OF SOVIET HISTORICAL SCIENCE

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Soviet historians are engaged in creating a science of history according to the Marxist-Leninist method and are studying the specific features characterising the progressive development of all peoples of the world. The history of the broad masses of working people, which constitutes the most important aspect of this process, is the subject of particular attention on the part of Soviet historians. In this field of history they are following the lofty traditions of pre-Soviet Russian historical science which won universal recognition through the works of Luchitsky, Kareyev, Kovalevsky, Vinogradov, Petrushevsky and many others.

One of the most important tasks confronting Soviet historians is that of opposing the fascist falsification of history, especially in the field of **ethnogenesis**, with objective scientific truth based on a critical study of source materials.

Problems connected with the origin and social development of the Slavonic Russian people are first on the list of immediate tasks of Soviet historians. A study of the history of their native land, its heroic struggle for independence, the development of its culture, the main stages in its history – Kiev Russ, the Muscovy State, the Russian Empire and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and, lastly, the study of the history of the many peoples comprising this Union constitute the most important problems awaiting thorough research by Soviet historians. [...]

The Online Etymology Dictionary notes, as "since 1957 in modern usage, from ethno- + -genesis 'birth, origin, creation'." Accordingly to Udaltsov et al., national characteristics, especially language, are comparatively late formations resulting from common material conditions of life, and by implication, common forms of social thought. It follows that the current explanation of the geographical distribution of certain nationalities by migrations, though not quite without foundation, "can be reduced to a very secondary place in the explanation of archaeological evidence on changes in social life, and replacements of one

‘culture’ by another. The traditional concepts of the ‘original home’ of certain nations or of an ‘ancestral nation’ belong to the realm of nationalist mythology.”¹⁵

Schlesinger sums up that in this concept there is no longer any room for autochthony in any other sense; that migrations in prehistoric times become irrelevant for the formation of the present nations. By that time, the need for verification of the “Soviet theory of ethnogenesis” by concrete application to archaeological and linguistic material was generally recognized (Schlesinger 1950: 10). As a consequence, Soviet ethnologists started exploring ethnogenesis outside the Soviet Union. This connects back to our bibliographical research on ethnogenesis, where the very first contribution on the topic from journals of African Studies, published in 1968, reported on the “Explosion of African Studies in the Soviet Union” (Desai 1968). Desai reviews works of Soviet scholars from the 1950s and 1960s who engaged in understanding the origin of the peoples of the Guinea coast, or were concerned with the origin of the people of the Central Sudan; “and some others which display a new approach to the very intricate problems of the ethnogenesis and cultural histories of Africa” (Desai 1968: 250).

It was not only the first appearance in African Studies that referred to the Soviet Theory of Ethnogenesis. This same holds true for the majority of early contributions to journals *American Archaeology*, *American History*, and even the *English Historical Review*, which refer, above all, to the works of Udaltsov.

Apart from its ideological use to classify the diverse national entities, the weakness of the Soviet concept of ethnogenesis lies in the assumption (or political programme) that ethnic groups are stable and continuously transmit their social structures from one generation to the next. The reforms introduced by Gorbachev in the 1980s, however, permitted Soviet schol-

ars to reconsider the theoretical basis of their disciplines (Gullette 2008: 264f). The purpose and intention of nationalist ideologies in the post-Soviet period were hotly debated. In 1990, Anatoly Khazanov, an anthropologist, remarked that “Soviet anthropology is at present at the crossroads [...] connected with the general theory of ethnicities and particularly in its application to the ethnic situation in the USSR” (Khazanov 1990: 220; cited by Gullette 2008: 264). But this did not, accordingly to Khazanov— and like the situation in Bosnia at roughly the same time (Claussen 2000)— explain or moderate the rising ethnic tensions visible in various parts of the Soviet Union. Following Gullette, Soviet scholars concerned with ethnic studies were hoping that the social sciences would move beyond this impasse and adopt a multiplicity of views. A few years later, Valéry Tishkov, director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in the Russian Academy of Sciences, lamented that ethnos – a term describing a community consciously aware of its distinctiveness and particular interests – and ethnogenesis were still the most “[...] powerful and sacred categories in post-Soviet Anthropology and in public discourse” (Tishkov 1994: 88). Tishkov, who was writing not long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, reported that ethnogenesis was regarded as “sacred”, because it supported ethno-nationalist ideologies. While ethnogenesis had been a Soviet tool to authenticate different “peoples” and to chart their position on a scale of civilisation, it was now used to demonstrate the independence of new countries and separatist movements (Gullette 2008: 265).

In his work on *The Use of Ethnogenesis in Kyrgyzstan*, Gullette explains that while ethnogenesis supported independence movements, its proponents also used it to express chauvinism and xenophobia:

“Scholars, such as Viktor Shnirelman and Sergei Panarin, criticised this view, specifically targeting the work of Lev Gumilev, one of the most popular ethnogenetic theorists since the 1960s. They claimed that nationalist leaders could easily use his work to create biased images for independent movements. Viktor Shnirelman and Sergei Panarin,

¹⁵ Schlesinger (1950: 9) citing Udaltsov’s report at the Anniversary Session of the Institute for the History of Material Culture, in S.I.F., 1949/3.

two Russian social scientists, have summarised Gumilev's formulation of ethnogenesis as: [...] the birth of an ethnos [is formed] by [the] appearance of a small group of people, united by common sympathy and a great feeling of patriotism, who are prepared to sacrifice personal prosperity and even their lives for the achieving of their projected goal. In its name they are ready to break with their usual norms of behaviours, i.e. with the existing stereotype (Shnirelman and Panarin 2001:10)" (Gullette 2008: 265).

We conclude by highlighting that the first references to the term ethnogenesis are to be found in Literature Studies. A descriptive use of the concept, on the other hand, was first implemented in Latin American Studies, circa 1930s, followed by its use in the fields of Anthropology and Archaeology in different regions and scholarly traditions in the 1940s. While the term "ethnic group" had been established long before, the novelty of the notion of ethnogenesis was in its explicit emphasis on the genesis, on a formative process of ethnic groups and entities, thus acknowledging, implicitly at least, that ethnic groups are not natural, given entities, but instead result out of historical processes.

Ethnology and Anthropology from the 1940s up to Present Times

Conceptualization and theoretical considerations appear from the mid-1940s onwards in Latin American Studies (works by ethnologists and anthropologists) and in Soviet (Archeological) History and Ethnology. In both strands it was used to differentiate between – and often with the intention to classify and categorize – social entities and populations along constructs of common history and cultural markers. As for Latin American Studies, the early use of the concept in colonial times was marked by racial classification. This might explain why works mentioning ethnogenesis in their full text, despite first emerging in 1931, from this pioneering stage through to 2007, only constitute seventy-four contributions to Latin American Studies, with just three of these contributions having made reference to the term

in their titles; and these contributions have also come more recently, between 2000 and 2007. The critical reflection on the categorizing works of colonial scholars has revealed that these scholars were to what Steven Thompson coined "ethnic entrepreneurs" engaged in "ethnic strategizing" (Thompson 2011: 99). The constructivist critique of ethnicity by Ranger (1983), Fardon (1987), and Vail (1989) argues that often the very categories under debate – and most certainly their reification – were the outcome of the colonial encounter. For African Studies in particular – but broadly recognized among anthropologists and beyond – the flexibility of precolonial social networks and the ways that colonial administrators, missionaries, chiefs and elders, and educated elites created increasingly fixed ethnic categories and identification through systematic miscommunication, misconstrual, and manipulation, has been particularly emphasized. Although the structural forces of power relations and "ethnic change" are today recognized as intrinsic to processes of ethnogenesis, ethnic strategizing "from above" might have caused the concept itself to go out of fashion in Latin American Studies for a prolonged time period, this before getting discharged altogether by constructivist scholarly tradition (e.g. Gabbert 2011, 2014).

From the 1940 to the 1960s, most academic reference to ethnogenesis at international level turned to the Soviet theory of ethnogenesis. The decisive context here had been the National Question, with eminent Marxist historians and ethnographers partly taking up the role of motivating actors of "ethnic strategizing". It is no coincidence that the central issue was called the "National" and not the "Ethnic Question". Nations were seen as historically formative, and ethnic classification seen as not to be based on racist categories. The mission was "opposing the fascist falsification of history, especially in the field of ethnogenesis", pointing out that "national characteristics, especially language, are comparatively late formations resulting from common material conditions of life, and by implication, common forms of social thought", and that

the traditional concept of an “ancestral nation belong to the realm of nationalist mythology” (Udaltsov 1946).

Ethnogenesis was seen as the result of historical processes and worked as a materialist counterpoint to idealist, spiritualist, and supremacist claims of race as they developed in most dramatic ways under fascism and Nazism. The Soviet concept of ethnogenesis has its weaknesses, as stressed above. It did not consider what is today commonly referred to as “ethnic change”.

Considering Ethnic Change at the Heart of Ethnization Processes

“Ethnic change” was probably most visibly introduced by the “instrumentalist analyses”, as pioneered by the Manchester School Anthropologists, a perspective based on the observation of migrant workers that placed ethnic markers on highly circumstantial performances within new urban political configurations (as opposed to positions deriving from cultural complexities of rural origin) (see Epstein 1958; Mitchell 1956). While successfully challenging the earlier fixed ideas about “tribalism,” these models had relatively little to say about the specific content of ethnic models, in particular, the affective elements that could become powerful political motivators. These and innumerable other works on processes of “ethnic change” and formation of ethnic groups and entities, from the 1950s onward, did not necessarily refer to these formative processes “ethnogenesis”.

The instrumentalist perspective has offered quite complete explanations for the process whereby an individual, family, or community reassigns itself from one ethnic category to another without fundamentally transforming the system at hand. Fredrik Barth (1969:21) coined this phenomenon “ethnic osmosis”. In current use, ethnogenesis, the creation of an ethnic category, can be seen as the constructivist’s logical counterpart to the idea of “ethnic osmosis”.

Following Steve Thomson, an American scholar of Political Anthropology, the Anthropol-

ogy of Religion, and Development Studies, ethnogenesis can include both the “genesis”, proper of an ethnic category, and also the historical processes of “regeneration,” whereby major definitions of key boundary markers are renegotiated:

“The creation, definition, and redefinition of ethnic categories, in other words, constitute an on-going process. [...] As with all cultural phenomena, ethnicity is never truly a given but must be continually recreated. [...] We can identify periods of active ethnogenesis and periods of relative stability in ethnic group categories. The corollary of this argument is that ethnogenesis is never an instantaneous event. By definition there is some period of time during which an ethnic category is “proposed,” progressively claimed by individuals, and eventually recognized more broadly. Likewise, ethno(re)genesis, the significant redefinition of an ethnic category and its boundaries, does not occur instantaneously but proceeds over a period of time during which it is tested and contested, and either succumbs to the status quo or becomes generally recognized.” (Thomson 2011: 98)

Ethnogenesis from a Sociological Perspective

In Sociology, the term has only gained momentum in the 1960s, during the phase of the so-called “ethnic revival” in American Sociology, with the first paper by Lester C. Singer, entitled “Ethnogenesis and Negro-Americans Today”, published in *Social Research* (Singer 1962).

In looking at all journal papers, books and book chapters across disciplines that appear in JSTOR carrying “Ethnogenesis” in their titles, Singer’s paper comes in 42th place. The “Top Ten” are all single chapters within the same book (the recent monograph by Voss, 2008), with the exception of an anthology of Southern Poems (including Henry Timrod’s war poem *Ethnogenesis*) edited by Barrett and Miller (2005), fourth. The overwhelming majority of the fifty most relevant contributions were published from the year 2000 onwards. Among this fifty, Lester Singer’s paper is the oldest and only one published prior to the 1990s. When limiting the search to particular umbrella and single disciplines, Singer’s paper comes sixth in Social Sciences, first in Political Science, and sixth in Sociology, here follow-

ing five single chapters in different edited book. In short, until the present day, it is the most relevant paper in sociological journals.

Typical for sociological foci, the analysis of the relationship between the individual and social structure in formative processes of social entities is key for Singer. The author makes clear the notions that underlie the use of the term “social entity” as contrasted with the term “social category”. Social categories refer “to numbers of people who constitute an aggregate because they have a common characteristic(s) about which society expresses some views and which therefore influences their life chances”:

“The ‘members’ of a social category are not necessarily involved in any relationship among themselves. Thus the terms ‘men’, ‘women’, ‘immigrants’, and ‘divorcees’ stand for social categories. The term ‘social entity’, on the other hand, refers to a number of people manifesting such qualities as patterned relationships, shared values, and self-recognition. Thus a team, a gang, a community, an ethnic group, and a society all constitute recognizable social entities.” (Singer 1962: 420)

For Singer, and importantly for our understanding of “ethnic groups”, the central point of the contrast between the two terms is the “presence or absence of internal structure and the accompanying cultural, or ideological, element”. He further suggests calling the formative process of ethnically defined social entities “ethnogenesis, meaning by this term the process whereby a people, that is an ethnic group, comes into existence” (Singer 1962: 423). He also reminds us that this process is only one of several kinds of group-forming processes, of which socio-genesis is the generic term.¹⁶

While there are a multiplicity of causal factors at work in processes of ethnogenesis, Singer suggests specifically looking at the context of power relations, that is, “the specific character of the relationship with the other segment(s) of the

population”. This relates to a common social scientific sense, namely that internal group development and external (inter-group) relationships influence one another. In short: the characteristics of an emergent ethnic group are the consequences of factors outside themselves as well as their response to these factors. The bases may be ideological differences, imputed intrinsic differences, particular functions in the division of labor, etc. – this to be taken into account when describing a particular case of ethnogenesis. For a general outline of the process, however, the particulars are not important (Singer 1962: 423-428).

There is a parallel to Max Weber’s very argument that highlights the difference between a kinship group and ethnic membership (as a “believed-in membership”), precisely where Singer underlines that the ancestors of the people in question do not necessarily show any kind of “ethnic group characteristics” (Weber 1968, 2007). Rather, it might only been possible to conceptualize former generations as a social category, not as a social entity.

Singer developed his concept of the formative process of ethnogenesis in response to a lack of adequate ways of conceptualizing “Negroes in Negro-white relations in the United States”, criticizing the fact that earlier attempts were based on static category concepts and, as such, appeared not to do justice to the phenomenon. In his eyes, the available data seemed to “require an entity concept that will allow the developmental factors to be taken into account”. Singer connects with the kind of process which E.K. Francis referred to:

“Yet even on the ground of our limited knowledge it becomes clear that, generally speaking, the stages of development traversed by ethnic groups are: expansion - fission - new combination.” (Francis 1947: 398, note 11; cited by Singer).

“What we have here called ethnogenesis is related to Francis’ sequence at two points. It is, on the one hand, temporally prior in that ethnic groups must have formed before they could expand. On the other hand, the last stage of the sequence is eth-

¹⁶ Socio-genesis is a term describing the origins of certain problems within a society; specifically, the fact that many problems originate due to specific attitudes (or activities) within a society.

nogenesis. Consequently, the expanded sequence should be: ethnogenesis - expansion - fission - new combination (that is, ethnogenesis)." (Singer 1962: 429-430)

Concluding Outlook

The first references to the term ethnogenesis are to be found in Literature Studies. A descriptive use of the concept, on the other hand, was first implemented in Latin American Studies, circa 1930s, followed by its use in Anthropology and Archaeology in different regions and scholarly traditions in the 1940s. While the term "ethnic group" had been established long before, the novelty of the notion of ethnogenesis was, in its explicit emphasis on the genesis, in a formative process of ethnic groups and entities, thus acknowledging, implicitly at least, that ethnic groups are not natural, given entities, but are instead the result of historical processes. Conceptualisation and theoretical considerations appear from the mid-1940s onwards in Latin American Studies (works by ethnologists and anthropologists) and in Soviet (Archeological) History and Ethnology. In both strands, it was used to differentiate between – and often with the intention to classify and categorise – social entities and populations along constructs of common history and cultural markers. Although the structural forces of power relations and "ethnic change" are today recognised as intrinsic to processes of ethnogenesis, ethnic strategising "from above" might have caused the concept itself to go out of fashion in Latin American Studies for a prolonged time period, this before getting discharged altogether by constructivist scholarly tradition (Gabbert 2011, 2014). From the 1940s to the 1960s, most academic references to ethnogenesis at international level were to the Soviet theory of the subject. The decisive context here had been the National Question, with eminent Marxist historians and ethnographers partly taking on the role of motivating actors of "ethnic strategising". While ethnogenesis was seen as the result of historical processes, the Soviet concept of ethnogenesis still considered ethnic groups as being

Lester C. Singer, *Ethnogenesis and Negro-Americans Today*, 1962: 424

This process appears to have the following form,

- 1) A portion of a population becomes distinguished, on some basis or bases, in the context of a power relationship.
- 2) The members of this distinguished population segment are "assigned" to a particular social role and fate; that is, the division of labor becomes reorganized.
- 3) As these people react to the situation in which they find themselves, they become involved with one another, if the situation permits. In other words, social structures develop among them; it is at this point that entity characteristics first become apparent.
- 4) Then these people become aware of their commonality of fate. The growth of such corporate self-awareness reinforces the structuring tendencies.
- 5) The further development of the emerging ethnic group will then depend, in part, on the nature of the structures that develop the content of the group's "self-image", and the shared conception of its destiny. This, of course, emphasizes internal development, which is our present concern.

rather stable, social entities that would continuously transmit their social structures from one generation to the next. It did not consider what is today commonly referred to as "ethnic change".

Although the term genesis carries the connotation of "birth" or "creation", non-Soviet discourses actually started employing ethnogenesis also to describe what was later called "ethnic change" or "ethnic osmosis" (Barth 1969). In introducing the ethnogenesis of African-Americans as starting *ab initio* (unlike all other inquiries up until that date in which ethnogenesis was used to conceptualize the transformation of some ethnic groups into other ethnic groups), Singer's contribution added decisively to the works of his time because traditional perspectives had nearly exclusively focused on the survival and transformation of European-derived "ethnic cultures" in the USA.

It was later argued – e.g. by Fredrik Barth (1969) and Anthony Greeley (1974) – that the process whereby ethnic groups come into being had been largely ignored. Similarly, as criticized by Pierre van den Berge (1967) as well as William Yancey et al. (1976), the emphasis on culture as an explanatory variable had tended to obscure the contribution of structural conditions to the emergence and persistence of ethnicity. During the same period, several scholars (e.g., Cohen 1969, Doornbos 1972, Hechter 1974, and slightly later Taylor 1979) suggested that while ethnicity may involve cultural referents, its development and persistence would depend on certain structural conditions. This is to say, the expectation that class or functional cleavages should become predominant over ascriptive solidarities in modern society seemed to be unjustified in view of the persistence of these structural factors (Mayhew 1968, Bell 1975). Here, the awareness and need to differentiate between social category and social entity, as stressed by Singer, is at the core. And still, Singer's expanded sequence appears too linear to grasp the formative process of either hyphenated or pan-ethnic conceptions of ethnic membership. This supports the argument that differing processes described as ethnogenesis can more tellingly be conceptualized as Ethnoheterogenesis (Tiesler 2018), as the latter concept highlights the dialectic of hetero- and homogenization at work. In order to further develop Ethnoheterogenesis as an analytical process category, an awareness of the differing strands in the conceptual history of the term ethnogenesis appears essential.

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