

## The Current State of Ethnography and Anthropology in Russia

### Participants:

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## The Current State of Ethnography and Anthropology in Russia

In order to mark the Sixth Congress of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists, held in St Petersburg from 28 June to 2 July 2005, the Editorial Board of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* decided to canvas members of the profession in Russia about their views on the state of things in the discipline, and the condition of the scholarly community. In the hope of discovering how our colleagues are getting through from day to day, what their concerns are, and how they think that ethnography and anthropology will develop, we asked scholars from a large number of different academic and educational institutions across the country to give detailed responses to the following questionnaire:<sup>1</sup>

**1** *How would you assess the current state of Russian ethnography and/or anthropology?*

**2** *In your view, to what extent do Western specialists cite and draw upon work by Russian ethnogra-*

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<sup>1</sup> The first circulation of the questionnaire went out to provincial centres, including both more and less remote ones. Scholars from Moscow and St Petersburg were not included. 150 people were contacted, but by the deadline, only two had replied. When the questionnaire was recirculated, including Moscow and St Petersburg this time, we received 45 replies. This information alone, one might think, says something about the state of the ethnographical community in Russia.

*phers and anthropologists? And conversely, how far do Russian specialists make use of the work of their Western colleagues? Are Western ethnographers even aware of what is going on in Russia, and vice versa?*

**3** *Which conceptual or practical issues in the field do you consider are currently most significant or rewarding (or, conversely, insignificant and unrewarding)? Which directions of investigation seem most (and conversely, least) likely to lead to insights of importance?*

**4** *In your view, to what extent do Western specialists cite and draw upon work by Russian ethnographers and anthropologists? And conversely, how far do Russian specialists make use of the work of their Western colleagues? Are Western ethnographers even aware of what is going on in Russia, and vice versa?*

**5** *Where, in your view, do the main obstacles to the production of academic work of merit lie (financial difficulties aside)?*

**6** *What issues should be discussed, in your view, at forums like the upcoming Congress?*

**7** *Is it possible to speak of the existence of a 'community of Russian ethnographers and anthropologists'? If so, how is this expressed, and how important is it for your own work and attitudes? If there is no such community, what should be done to bring it into existence?*

## SERGEI ABASHIN

1

I would describe myself as a pessimist. And my pessimism stems from my experience as a member of the editorial board of *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, on the one hand, and from my experience as ‘executive director’ of the Association of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists, on the other. In my view, Russian ethnography is in a thoroughly depressing condition. Long obsolete theories and approaches continue to dominate the field. Empirical work with a single straightforward end in view — the generation of grant income — is increasingly forcing path-breaking scholarly work out of sight. The few young people brave enough to dedicate their lives to ethnography have often had a less than adequate training, and their ideas about the discipline and its aims are often thoroughly bizarre. The rigid academic hierarchy stifles healthy competition and proper career development.

One of the fundamental symptoms of decline is the near-absence of public debate. The reason for this is not only fear of being seen to ‘squabble’ with one’s colleagues, but the complete dearth of serious ideas worthy of discussion in the first place. And if something resembling a

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discussion does take place, then the tone is closer to a brawl or a stand-up fight than to an academic exchange of opinion. Maybe I'm laying it on too thick, but I have to say that not much of what I've seen recently has given me any cause for optimism.

**2** In a word — nothing. Russian ethnography continues to exist in a condition of agonisingly slow decay. Of course, I wouldn't want to suggest that there is nothing innovative or promising in sight. It's only fair to acknowledge that fieldwork has taken on a new lease of life, and that a greater quantity of scholarly literature has started being published, including some interesting individual studies. I admired, for instance, Nikolai Vakhtin, Evgeny Golovko, and Peter Schweitzer's book *Russian Settlers in Siberia*<sup>1</sup> and Ilya Utekhin's *Studies of Communal Life*<sup>2</sup> (the second edition — the first having come out in 2001). I was glad to see translations appearing of such classic writers as Benedict Anderson, Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu, Bronislaw Malinowski, and others. Then there was the founding of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*; and now *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* is looking to move in a new direction. Other journals publishing material of interest to ethnographers that strike me as worthy of a mention include *Ab Imperio*, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*,<sup>3</sup> and *Vestnik Evrazii*. Two academic centres of particular merit are, to my mind, the Faculty of Ethnology in the European University, St Petersburg, and the Centre for Pontic and Caucasian Studies in Krasnodar.

It might seem as though all this contradicted the comments I made earlier about 'decline'. The point is, though, that everything, or almost everything, of interest is happening outside the so-called 'ethnographical community', and hence often isn't regarded by those involved in it as 'ethnography' to begin with. 'Ethnography' itself, on the other hand, is becoming provincial and marginal, in the worst sense of those terms.

**3** The answer to this might seem obvious, on the face of it. Ethnographers should address the problems that are currently preoccupying Russian society itself — migrancy, social anxieties of different kinds, the gulf between rich and poor, survival strategies, political extremism, political authoritarianism and the mechanisms of social con-

<sup>1</sup> *Russkie starozhily Sibiri*. Moscow, 2004. The book (its title translates literally as 'The Russian Long-Established Settlers of Siberia') is an ethnolinguistic study of the communities established from the seventeenth century onwards by the Russians in north-eastern Siberia. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> *Ocherki kommunalnogo byta*. Moscow, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> NLO [*Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, New Literary Review] and *Neprikosnovennyi zapas* [Inalienable Store] are inter-disciplinary journals with a strong leaning to what in the West would be called 'cultural studies', and aimed at a broad intellectual readership rather than at specialists in any particular discipline. [Editor].

trol, sport, geopolitical and cultural borders, ‘Soviet identity’, and so on. Yet Russian scholars continue — with a persistence worthy of a better object — to study ‘ethnos’ and ‘tradition’. One might think the amount of criticism and cogent arguments directed at established methods and approaches would have been sufficient to demonstrate the fallibility of these. But the ‘ethnographic community’ continues to mess around with topics that are long past their ‘sell-by date’, unreflectively consigning the most topical and interesting issues to competitors from other disciplines — culturologists<sup>1</sup>, sociologists, sometimes even philosophers.

4

Recently, contacts between Western and Russian ethnographers have increased, at least in some respects. For instance, Western specialists have started doing fieldwork in areas long familiar to their Russian colleagues, and hence taking an interest in the studies produced by the latter. In turn, Russian ethnographers have needed to take account of the studies produced by Westerners, at least so far as linguistic abilities and access to foreign-published books permit. At the same time, the rapprochement has not so far led to real changes of attitude. Why? In the West, the old sovietological<sup>2</sup> disdain for Russian ethnography has not yet been fully overcome. In Russia, on the other hand, the established conviction that ‘our achievements’<sup>3</sup> have a self-explanatory and unassailable value lives on.

5

The Great Intellectual Depression.<sup>4</sup> And poor-quality education and training.

6

I find it both strange and indicative that space is not found at such congresses for debates on issues such as professional ethics, the relationship between academics and the political establishment, how to come to terms with the Soviet experience, the fight with xenophobia, the relationship between academic work and ideology, and so on. I recall that the organisers of the Fifth Congress of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists [Omsk, 2003] tried to fix up a series of panels dealing with methods and practices in fieldwork.

<sup>1</sup> *kulturologi*: in recent times, the term — which in Soviet days was applied to the authors of generalising studies of culture, often of a popularising kind — has been applied to specialists in what would be known in the West as ‘cultural studies’. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> What would be known in the West as ‘Cold War attitudes’: i.e., the assumption that because Russian scholars were subject to formidable institutional censorship, they could produce nothing of merit, so the only work that truly represented the situation within the country had to be produced by outsiders. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> ‘Our achievements’ was a phrase with a loud ring of Soviet triumphalism: it was, for example, the title of a glossy 1930s propaganda journal founded by Maxim Gorky. [Editor].

<sup>4</sup> The original, *razrukha v golovakh*, a phrase made famous by Bulgakov’s *Heart of a Dog*, would translate literally as ‘economic collapse in our heads’. *Razrukha* was a term in official circulation to describe the socio-economic collapse in which Soviet Russia found itself after the end of the Civil War in 1921. Bulgakov’s term suggested that the reasons for malaise were as much intellectual as material. [Editor].

You'd think everyone would recognise that these are crucial issues, needing discussion at every important ethnographical forum. But at most half a dozen people signed up — when series with the most vague and pretentious titles immediately attracted up to forty proposals. To be honest, I'm at a loss: I just can't see a way out of the situation.

7

There is no community of Russian ethnographers in a real sense, for all that certain pre-conditions of its existence — regular national congresses, recognised journals, and so on — may be observed. I think the main obstacle is that there is no shared understanding of what the many specialists who call themselves 'ethnographers' actually have in common. What problems are they investigating? What are their interests? How should general strategies for developing the discipline be evolved? How might and should this community influence its members, and how might and should it interact with the wider world of ethnography? The point isn't simply that there are no direct answers to these questions: they're not even being discussed to begin with. And that is the most reliable indication that the Russian ethnographical community is moribund, or maybe even completely dead.

### EVGENY GOLOVKO

In these answers, I shall not follow the sequence in which the questions were posed: I see them all as closely connected.

When one reflects on *the current state of Russian anthropology/ethnography*, a whole nexus of problems can be identified. First of all, what should we understand by 'ethnography/anthropology'? This question is intimately connected with the last one in the questionnaire: on the *anthropological community*. On the whole, it would seem that this phenomenon is more likely not to exist in Russia. True, people come from all over the place to attend big anthropological congresses, but these people are split up into dozens of small groups which, in the view of those who form them, have little prospect, even in theory, of fusing into a larger whole. Each group is quite capable of looking at any other and wondering, 'What on earth is that lot doing here? Their work hasn't the first thing to do with

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*real* anthropology (ethnography, whatever).’ And indeed, conferences do bring together people who publish in *NLO*,<sup>1</sup> *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, and other new journals, on the one hand, and on the other, those whose work comes out in ‘straight ethnography’ collections dedicated to well-established topics such as the ethnographical description of material culture. I don’t want to say that one of these approaches should be identified with a ‘genuine’ area of academic enquiry (whatever we choose to call it), while the other isn’t. They both should be — let a thousand flowers bloom! But the point is that the representatives of these opposing sides wouldn’t themselves be so permissive. And in fact they try to set down boundaries by insisting on different names for what they do — so that when you meet someone for the first time you have to behave like a secret agent, dropping cautious questions and waiting for the person to let out what it is they actually do. It may be cultural anthropology, social anthropology, simply anthropology, culturology, cultural studies, ethnography, ethnology, cultural history, simply history, folklore studies, sociology, literary history or a host of other things. And it’s not just labels that are at issue: it often turns out that the most unexpected realities may lurk behind the terms used. Thus, in one institute that I can think of, members of the faculty of culturology, asked how culturology differed from cultural anthropology, gave the straightforward reply that culturology is concerned with more global problems. Meaning, presumably, that one should see globalisation, say, as ‘our problem, a culturological problem’, it’s an issue of large enough dimensions — as would also be the case with the history of civilisation, say, while small potatoes like reindeer-herding in the tundra among people X or the funeral rite as practised by people Y can safely be left to cultural anthropologists. No doubt this urge to put up barbed-wire fences and warning notices saying *Guard Dogs on Patrol* is a sign of novelty, an indication that we’re going through a period of reorientation. So let’s just hope for a quick shift to the next period — where people start explaining what’s going on or, at the very least, treating one another with respect, recognising that all the activities (terms) that I’ve mentioned (and many others) are interconnected, that they unite together people whose subject is human culture. And in this context, it turns out, it’s not all that important who works in which department with which name, what concrete subjects they study and what methodology they use. ‘Fellow spirits’ will always be able to find each other by such tokens within the huge area that we all study (indeed, they already have).

The issue of the extent to which *Western specialists cite and draw upon work by Russian ethnographers and anthropologists (or are even aware of this)* has been discussed more than once in Russian academic

<sup>1</sup> *NLO* (*Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*). See above.

journals and has always provoked a touchy response from participants in such discussions (see e.g. *NLO*). Maybe all this should be seen as part of a larger set of ‘all-Russian’ psychological complexes — I have in mind all the wails about how undervalued we all are, we geniuses and representatives of a great nation. It’s not only academic achievements that excite complaints of this kind — they’re just as common with reference to literature, film, and so on. Of course, within Russian anthropology (I’ll stick with that term for now), some kind of shift is taking place, and some interesting publications are coming out. But at the same time, one has to acknowledge that much of what we term ‘contemporary Russian ethnography’ has a secondary character. Many interesting comments have already been made about traditional ethnography and its heritage of problems from the Soviet period — in the first issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* (see the ‘Forum’ section), for instance, and in many other places as well — so I won’t go through the issues again. And as for the material that didn’t get included in the concept ‘ethnography’ during Soviet times, and which, therefore, was shoved to the margins (indeed, generally didn’t get mentioned at all, since it wasn’t considered a proper object of study), this is currently the subject of quite a lot of very interesting work, but no matter how much one admires this, one has to acknowledge that it consists of attempts (often very successful, indeed brilliant) to catch up with what was being done abroad much earlier. I can’t myself see a problem with this ‘secondariness’, and in time everything will settle down. OK: there isn’t much interest in work coming out of Russia right now. But there’s no evil plan behind this. Once work of real interest starts appearing, i.e. when the discussion goes beyond setting out fairly unfamiliar Russian material according to well-worn paradigms, when really new ideas and approaches emerge, the rest of the world will sit up and take notice. It’s like trying to make the rouble convertible: one can’t set a fixed date for this, since the rouble will only become convertible in a real sense when foreign banks start accepting it. But there are some perfectly obvious, practical things one can do to hurry the process along: write at least some of your articles in English and publish them in widely-read Western journals; take part in international conferences on a regular basis, not just every now and then — get yourself plugged into the international anthropological community, in a word.

A slightly different question is *how far Russian specialists make use of the work of their Western colleagues*. I mentioned earlier that there’s now a whole new generation of ‘new Russian anthropologists’ who (at least at the moment) are making successful efforts to catch up with ‘the West’ (a term that ought always to be used in inverted commas, since it’s recently come to include, say, India). In order to ‘keep step’, it’s essential to have a grasp of recent Western

scholarly literature — i.e. to be able to read English and to use the language. And just as important — to *want* to read Western publications. Yet even students, including graduate ones, who you'd think ought to be there for reading books and articles by the dozen, are often strangely reluctant to do this. Well, they have their reasons. The level of anthropology teaching in Russian universities is, I'm afraid, far from brilliant (here I'm judging by what I see of the graduates from such courses when they apply to do MAs). There's not a single (and I do mean that — not one!) adequate textbook of cultural anthropology in the Russian language. OK, every so often student guides of some kind do swim across one's horizon, but on closer inspection they often turn out to be 'specialised', for which read neutered, and deadly dreary. Or else they are so impressionistic you couldn't possibly use them, or they don't reflect the range of possible approaches, concentrating exclusively on a few favourite texts of the author him- or herself, and without much reason given for the selection either. But no-one seems to use Western textbooks (of which there are dozens) — and not because you can't get hold of them: you can: you can buy them abroad and bring them in, you can ask your Western friends to send them, you can Xerox materials, you can 'surf the Net'. But for the most part students themselves don't make much effort, and teachers keep going on their old resources, using outdated textbooks alongside the dodgy new student guides, or (at best) paraphrasing the classics of anthropology. Incidentally, it's a matter for rejoicing that recently — thanks to the efforts of a few publishers — some Western classics have been translated into Russian, though the quality of the versions is sometimes eyebrow-raisingly bad. So now we just have to overcome our own passivity: make use of recent literature, write our own new textbooks (or at the very least, translate some Western ones into Russian). If we don't, we're going to end up in the dismal role of 'local scholars' (no doubt, many of us have come across the phenomenon by which room is found, at some brilliant international conference, for a group of lacklustre talks — these will be the efforts of the 'local scholars', who've been included by the organisers 'for the sake of balance').

All this returns us to the question of the *anthropological community*. Of course it's vital to encourage the formation of a community of Russian anthropologists, but it's no less important that Russian scholars should be able to participate in the international community on equal terms. We must overcome our isolation, which currently is nothing more or less than self-imposed isolation, the result of our own inertia. It is this that most of all constitutes *the obstacle to the production of academic work of merit (financial difficulties aside)*. But if one is to touch on the latter, and on problems of status as well, then the situation that Russian anthropologists (and Russian special-

ists in the humanities generally) are in is by no means unique: it closely resembles the situation our colleagues in many other countries have to deal with as well. As an anthropologist contact from one perfectly prosperous European country told me, when he was working as an independent scholar, he got treated like some amiable eccentric: his desire to get a post in a university stuck out like a sore thumb, and his work depended exclusively on his grant-writing abilities and personal enthusiasm. It was only when he moved to the USA that he realised anthropology could be a profession and one in which, if you worked very hard, you might even earn enough to live on (though whether US anthropologists themselves would agree with this last assessment is another question).

So far as *significant events over the last two years* are concerned, I think the most important is definitely the appearance of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. I'm sure it wouldn't be hard to think of productive conferences and interesting publications. But at this precise moment, the appearance of a new periodical with the aim of setting a new standard of general discussion is more important than any monographs or conferences. In the first issue, the 'Forum' is, I think, of particular interest. I warmly recommend it to students and graduate students, the more so since — if I may mention the subject again — there are no decent Russian-language textbooks around.

Finally, let me respond quickly to questions six and three. As for the *issues that should be discussed at forums like the upcoming Congress*, I'll note just one thing: the list of proposed sessions makes me hope that the process I discussed when talking about *the current state of Russian anthropology and ethnography* above has indeed begun.

As for *the conceptual or practical issues in the field that are currently most significant or rewarding*, any comment would be risky — it's all too easy to get things wrong. The current situation in Russia might prompt some to say that anthropology should be taking a strong interest in the pressing social problems of the moment (extremist political movements, migrancy, the wealth divide, and so on). But I don't think that's the case. Or to put it better: it's fine if anthropology does concern itself with such things, but there's no reason why it should *have* to. An academic researcher isn't a bureaucrat, and shouldn't be driven by practical considerations, but by the question of what he or she finds interesting and of where he or she can create new knowledge.

## EKATERINA MELNIKOVA

1

It's hard to assess the current state of Russian ethnography/anthropology, since neither, so far as I can see, actually exists at the present time. This is a subjective conclusion, and I don't mean it pessimistically, but rather the other way round: I'd see the disappearance of ethnography and anthropology from the disciplinary map in Russia as the sign of a qualitative transformation in the general paradigm of the Russian humanities in recent years.

The opening of the floodgates between Western and Russian scholarship has led, as often happens in such cases, to the borrowing of terminology and sometimes ideas on a mass scale. Russian scholars are trying to enter the world market of research on social issues and hence trying to fit their own experience, interpretive models, and attitudes to Western market forces. The results of this process are, unfortunately, often not very impressive. The efforts to fit in, to share a single discourse with Western colleagues have led to a sharp shift in the language of scholarly discussion — but not always to a shift in the underlying approaches. Western scholars usually have a conceptual base in common which they began to absorb back in the days of their university education — just as Russian ones do, but the two bases have, at least until very recently, been very different. Which is why, when they sense the need to have recourse to the treasure-house of Western knowledge, much though they may sense its appeal, Russian scholars have tended to stumble by accident on a haphazard set of concepts, interpretative schema, and ideas, and to absorb these into their own set of views of what is necessary and appropriate.

Or at least, that was what often happened in the 1990s: I think that is now beginning to recede into the past. You can now find university programmes in Russia that include surveys of Western historiography, and the international scholarly community includes a significant proportion of specialists from Russia who are pre-

pared to pass on experience and knowledge to their compatriots. Many famous names have meaning for Russians and Westerners now, and what's more, the same meaning.

But I'd still like to return to what I said earlier and note that the 'curious' history of the humanities in the 1990s had lasting effects. In their desire to fit in, different scholars, depending on local academic traditions and often for completely fortuitous reasons, have selected a particular way to go. Cultural studies, social anthropology, sociolinguistics, sociology and the whole variety of approaches that each of these directions implies when practised by Western scholars, are being mined by Russians. As a result, everyone has found a niche of his or her own, while retaining their previous academic position, and the traditional manner of introduction: 'Glad to meet you, I am ethnographer from Russia'.

The term 'anthropology' is, of course, considerably broader than 'ethnography' and embraces a significant range of contemporary approaches to the study of society, but at the same time it is losing part of its meaning. Anthropology in the broadest sense is, of course, developing here in Russia, but to begin with it's got no institutional base (so far as I can see, there's nowhere in Russia where they're actually training anthropologist), and secondly the word 'anthropologist' is still essentially a 'brand name' — it reflects the pro-Western views of the person using the word, rather than his or her methodological orientation.

2

The past two years signify for me above all a huge boom in humanities publishing. The series 'Kulturologiya: XX vek' [Twentieth-Century Culturology] has been revived. Classics of anthropology, sociology, and the history of science and scholarship have been published and republished in Russian: Geertz, Schutz, Malinowski, Kluckhohn, Leach, Evans-Pritchard, Lévy-Bruhl and many, many others. There have also been translations of fairly recent work by Eve Levin, Carlo Ginzburg, Peter Brown. In any decent bookshop, you'll find the latest volumes in the Indrik series of annotated monographs. There are dozens of studies dealing with the most varied problems in ethnography, anthropology, folklore studies, history, and sociology. Fieldwork studies are coming hot off the press, and classic work from the nineteenth century is being republished. I can still remember my almost religious feeling of awe when I saw the two-volume edition of Novombergsky in the shop at the Public Library in St Petersburg.<sup>1</sup> I'd like to hope that this publishing boom isn't just a flash in the pan.

3

I think that the anthropology of religion is still a very promising area. It's only recently that we saw interest in the subject flare up, but now

<sup>1</sup> now the Russian National Library, the leading research library in the city. [Editor].

it seems to have ebbed down. All of this is to do with market forces in the humanities, which keep on producing a different set of priorities. Here I'd like to make an observation which may seem rather self-evident. Western scholars, like Russian ones, are susceptible to the politics of grant awards. But unlike Russian scholars, they don't depend purely on those. A professor or lecturer in a Western European or American university who works on some really narrow and not at all 'topical' subject will still have the chance to get on with his or her research, and won't have to worry about how to make the history of some fourteenth-century Croatian town look as though it could qualify for support under 'the development of the rule of law in post-socialist Eastern Europe'. Russian specialists, by contrast, probably ought to be considered world leaders in the art of adapting scholarly projects to the 'practical' demands of today's academic market. Which is why Russian academic society these days sometimes looks like a fleet of trading vessels following the wind of grant sponsorship. Be that as it may, I think that the anthropology of religion is an area where one can look forward to many interesting further insights.

The anthropology of the everyday is far from exhausted. Indeed, the everyday generally is an inexhaustibly rich source of inquiry that shows no signs of drying up.

The theme of 'border studies', opened up in Russia and the former Soviet Union in the late 1990s, has put down long roots in the West as well. But the subject of the inter-relationship between the 'new' border zones formed after the Soviet Union collapsed has been left entirely to post-Soviet scholars. Yet this would offer fantastic opportunities for international co-operation.

One of the new themes in Western anthropology — the anthropology of biotechnology — does not seem to have been developed at all in Russia, and equally, no interest has yet been taken in 'science studies', as inspired above all by Bruno Latour.

I'd also like to mention oral history, which has found an echo in Russia as well. I think the most productive approach here is not to see this as an area of research or as a methodological problem, but as a specific way of dealing with source material of a kind that has long been familiar to folklorists, sociologists, and historians. Somewhere at the cusp of the three disciplines, one might indeed expect new insights, of a kind expressed in the exchange of questions rather than of answers.

4

The question about demand in the West for work by ethnographers and anthropologists from Russia has no single answer. After all, there are many Russian specialists, and their work is very different. Some are now well-known in the West, and their work is widely read and cited,

and exercises influence. There is also a significant number of Russian specialists in the humanities who now spend most of their time abroad, presenting conference papers and taking part in different intellectual projects, but in many cases these people are known only to their immediate colleagues and friends. A huge quantity of work by Russians vanishes without trace into the bowels of Russian libraries, and of Western ones too, assuming they ever get even that far.

The situation in what is termed ‘Slavic studies’ — a scholarly domain embracing all the different subjects and approaches relating to Russia and the former USSR<sup>1</sup> — is rather different. The community of Slavists has enviably close ties. I think it wouldn’t be mistaken to assert that all Western Slavists know one another personally.<sup>2</sup> Russian scholars who happen into the community also have the chance to settle down and find their own niche.

Most of the work about Russian and Soviet society and culture written in English has a bibliographical base that includes Russian-language material as well as material in English. The major universities in Europe and America are able to provide their professors with all the literature they need, so that the library of a Cambridge Slavist, say, will include all the Soviet publications that might be of interest to him or her, and the majority of those being published in post-Soviet Russia too.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, works on Russian history and the history of literature and language are, as a rule, known to our Western colleagues.

All in all, I feel quite optimistic about the state of Russian scholarship. I think that drawing on Western-published work is as natural for most Russian scholars these days as is drawing on Russian-published work. Many of them have now got access to the international arena: they can and do work in the best Western libraries. Unfortunately, though, the resources of Russian libraries are still not up to scratch when it comes to Western books. It’s often easier to find new publications in colleagues’ home libraries than it is in the Public Library or the Academy of Sciences Library.

**7** There certainly does exist a community of Russian ethnographers and anthropologists, but the term is only really applicable to Moscow and St Petersburg. The majority of specialists in the two Russian capitals

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, the usual term for this in the West would be ‘Russian studies’, or, if post-Soviet space east of the Urals were also in question, ‘Russian and Eurasian studies’. ‘Slavic studies’, in the US at least, usually signifies the study of language and literature. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> Western Slavists themselves might not go quite that far, but it is fair to say that one will have heard of, if not necessarily met, most established specialists in the subject. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> This might be a little over-generous, certainly if one moves beyond so-called ‘major works’ (*fundamentalnye trudy*), but major research libraries in the West are certainly as responsive to readers’ needs as their financial base allows. [Editor].

know each other or at least know about each other. But things are quite different when it comes to the rest of Russia — this really is *terra incognita* for metropolitan academia. Of course, there are personal connections and individual contacts that bridge the divide, and even a scholarly community of a sort, but this is a separate community or indeed a set of communities, each living its own life.

Some work by researchers from the regions does get published in the major journals and academic collections, but I suspect that most of them have recourse to local publications that are little known in the ‘epicentres’ of scholarship. The problem here is the well-known one of the centralisation, or to be more accurate the decentralisation of scholarly endeavours, and to be honest I’ve got no idea of how to solve it.

#### ALEXANDER RESHETOV<sup>1</sup>

1

I would say that Russian ethnography is sinking further and further into deep crisis. Ethnography as an autonomous branch of the historical sciences is undergoing progressive devaluation, and its boundaries and its specific features are being washed away. Great efforts are being made to replace the discipline by ethnology, by anthropology, by cultural anthropology, social anthropology, political anthropology, and economic anthropology. Can the originators of these substitute terms really not know that the Western words *anthropology*, *cultural anthropology*, *social anthropology*<sup>2</sup> mean exactly the same as the Russian word *etnografiya* in any case? But no: the term *anthropology* is being forced upon us instead of the traditional, historically established term *etnografiya*, when in fact the former term already has its own accepted meaning in Russian academic tradition.<sup>3</sup> A craze for new, borrowed ‘brand names’ and jargon words borrowed uncritically from the West has seized hold (this happened in the 1990s especially) of certain circles in Russian academia, whose mem-

#### Alexander Reshetov

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<sup>1</sup> The author did not respond to an invitation to review the translation of his text.

<sup>2</sup> In English in the original. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> i.e. physical anthropology. [Editor].

bers were first and foremost inspired by thoughts of setting themselves up nicely in terms of career and employment. There are now tens and hundreds of academic and teaching institutions where such fashionable terms are in use, employing thousands of people. So who trained them all, the specialists working in these institutions, and not least their directors? Who sanctioned the organisation of all these departments, schools, institutes, universities, academies? It is much to be regretted that this problem, so far as one can see, is of no interest to the management of the leading academic ethnographical institution in the Russian Federation — the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

2 Here I would like to mention a few conferences, including the regular Saint Petersburg meetings, ‘Ethnographical Source Material’, and the seminar in the series ‘The Integration of Archaeological and Ethnographical Study’ held under the direction of N. A. Tomilov in Alma-Ata,<sup>1</sup> and a number of regional conferences in Kazan, Krasnoyarsk, and other Russian cities.

I consider the efforts of the various directors of ethnographical institutions who are trying to unify Russian scholars in the framework of the academic events they organise to be of great significance.

I would also have liked to name some significant publications here, but what more often strikes me is the amazing rise in the levels of ethnographical illiteracy, even in books published by the leading ethnographical centres of Russia. Publishers’ readers and the general editors of collections and series often take a frankly frivolous view of their responsibilities. Yet the books published in Moscow and St Petersburg are assumed in the provinces to represent a kind of academic gold standard.

3 I know very little about the kind of projects that are getting support — even at the level of their names, let alone the substance of what is being done.

I would give my unquestioning support to projects that are aimed at studying key problems in ethnography. These should be considered those likely to lead to insights of importance. There are certain *directions of enquiry* (I’m not talking about individual work here), without which one cannot imagine ethnography as a discipline. These include the theoretical problems of primitive society, of ethnogenesis, of the history of different ethnic groups, of traditional culture, of survivals of the past, and so on. On the other hand, I am saddened by the unmeasurable quantity of work on areas such as ethnopolitics, conflict studies, and so on, based on a source-base of the most dubious kind. The fashion for such topics has attracted

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. Almaty. [Editor].

people who often have no idea about the subject in hand or the correct methodology for studying it, or of what sources can be considered reliable. But people studying subjects of this kind have only to snap their fingers and they get a grant. If only traditional ethnography were the subject of such generosity!

4

To be honest, I couldn't much care about the extent to which Western specialists know and cite our work (or are even aware of it). I think that's their problem. I've never seen or heard anything to suggest that Western specialists are bothered by whether their work is known abroad, including in Russia. In Soviet times, efforts were made to publish collections of Russian scholarly work in translation, for propaganda purposes (to show off the achievements of scholars working on Marxist-Leninist principles to the West). I think that publishing an abstract of a given article or book in one or other foreign language ought to be enough. We can leave the rest to our Western colleagues: it's up to them.

Long ago, Friedrich Engels, working not as a Marxist theoretician but as a scholar concerned with the problems of primitive society, found in an issue of the newspaper *The Russian Gazette* (Russkie vedomosti) for 14 October 1892 a report by L. Ya. Shternberg about the daily life and social structure of the Gilyaks (Nivkhs), based on material that he had collected when Shternberg was in exile on Sakhalin Island. Conversely, for Russian ethnographers who were studying foreign ethnography and had no opportunities to carry out fieldwork among the peoples of interest to them, knowledge of Western literature was essential to scholarly survival.

These days, I am extremely concerned by the problems created by Russian scholars' insufficient knowledge of work not just by scholars from the West, but from the East as well. We receive a woefully small amount of literature from abroad through official channels. If it weren't for personal contacts, things would be even worse.

But an even bigger issue, in my view, is the absence in the largest Russian libraries, such as the Russian Academy of Sciences Library and the Russian National Library<sup>1</sup> of scholarly literature published in the Russian regions. These are copyright libraries, yet these days publishers often violate the deposit rules. I gather that this gives the responsible organs the right to impose severe sanctions, right up to the level of stripping publishing houses of their licences to print. But no measures are taken, and science and scholarship are the losers.

5

Why *'financial difficulties aside'*? After all, financial support is crucial to scholarly work. I'm not talking about salaries, but about

<sup>1</sup> Formerly the Saltykov-Shchedrin Public Library, in St Petersburg, which is also the home of the Academy of Sciences Library. [Editor].

the capacity to collect material in the field, to get acquainted with new work relating to one's subject, and so on. It would appear that the current, centralised system of grant allocation is far from perfect. And yet fieldwork, the collection of material from informants, the supplementation of collections in ethnographical museums, the filling of gaps in information generally, are all essential at the moment, perhaps more so than ever before.

6 Since congresses have started to be held every two years on a regular basis, it would be appropriate for the Association of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists, as the representative body for the scholarly community, in the first place to hold sessions summing up work done over the previous two years, including papers relating to theoretical work on the key questions of ethnography as an autonomous discipline within the humanities. It is helpful to recall here the 'survey and report meetings' (*otchetnye sessii*) that were held by the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, also biennially, in different cities across the nation up to 1990. I should mention here that for a long time their organiser was the Institute's Deputy Director, Lyudmila Nikolaevna Terentyeva. It was she who determined the scholarly direction to be taken in the meeting, the number of section headings it should consist of, their titles, and who was to chair the sections. The rest of the organisation — practical questions and so on — was left to colleagues in the regions. The governing body of the Association should take an active role in preparing the Congress, which should include selecting the subjects to be covered by the sections. A discussion of the current state of Russian ethnography is long overdue.

7 In Alma-Ata<sup>1</sup> in 1990, I happened to take part in the first ever conference of the Association of Soviet Ethnographers and Anthropologists, which was conceived as an active body of Soviet academics. However, for a number of different reasons, the new Association could not develop its work any further. It seemed at first that the new Association of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists, which held its first Congress in Ryazan in 1995, would take over the role of organising the scholarly community of ethnographers. But, as time was to show, the Association's activities were more or less limited to the organisation of congresses. Now five congresses have been held, a certain amount of experience has been clocked up, and it's time to review what that experience tells us. From 1995, I carried out two tours of duty as a member of the Association's Governing Body, and took part in all the congresses held, and this gives me certain views about organisational and procedural views to do with the organisation of the congresses.

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<sup>1</sup> Now Almaty. [Editor].

So far as I am aware, only one president of the Association, R. G. Kuzeev (Ufa), a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, has ever made any attempt to organise activities on the part of the Association other than holding conferences. This took the form of publishing newsletters about the work of the Governing Body and the Association's activities in the regions, about work on the Bio-Bibliographical Dictionary of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists, and so on. Regular meetings of the Governing Body were held, and the directors of different provincial centres were members of this Body. It met not only in Moscow — I can recall one meeting being held in Orenburg, for instance. R. G. Kuzeev's vision was that the Association should function precisely as a community, and he and the Governing Body took many practical steps, in the time between the Congresses, to make sure that this happened. The Executive Director of the Association, N. A. Dubova, was also very active in this direction.

With regard to the issue of *'bringing a community of Russian ethnographers and anthropologists into existence'*, then, I would say, on the basis of much experience of organising meetings of this kind, that is essential to break the custom according to which presidents of the Association assume that their duties are limited to organising the next Congress. The experience of the International Association is also valuable, and should be put to creative use.

I would like to end by giving my very best wishes to the organisers of, and participants in, the St Petersburg Congress. I sincerely hope that it will be a productive and fruitful occasion.

## MARIA STANYUKOVICH

**1** A considerable number of our former colleagues, people who used to work in academic institutes, museums and universities, have now left ethnography. Some have emigrated, gone where the money is, or died. A young generation is only now starting to appear, after fifteen years. Even within a single institute or museum, the members of different generations lined up on either side of the gulf hardly know each other. And as for people in different cities...

### Maria Stanyukovich

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences/St. Petersburg State University

At the same time, the 'roll' of Russian ethnographers/anthropologists has got a lot longer. New educational centres have come into being. The best of those I myself know about are the

European University in St Petersburg and the Russian State Humanities University in Moscow. The ethnographers, philologists, and specialists in Oriental studies teaching in them are senior (in terms of intellectual reputation, not age) and they have an excellent knowledge of the home traditions of ethnography, even if they choose to move away from these.

Departments of social and cultural anthropology have been set up at the sociology and philosophy faculties of various Russian universities. In Soviet days, there was no philosophy and sociology in a real sense. If you read the textbooks that these new departments put out, you get the impression there was no ethnography either. Such textbooks remind me overwhelmingly of ones in the Philippines some years back. The slogan *ignolante kami* — ‘we’re ignorant’ (as my informants from the Ifugao, the highlanders of the Philippines, say, though unlike the lowlanders of the early twentieth century, don’t actually believe) is a direct route into the colonial mindset.

There are other forms of life as well. Since anthropology got fashionable, a huge number of mutant new growths in the way of ideas have emerged. ‘Anthropological analyses’ are cooked up like pies, out of whatever comes to hand. What is most likely to come to hand is the ‘national idea’, with the magic ingredient ‘genofond’ mixed in. The former practitioners of social science, Soviet style, are setting up anthropology departments in technical colleges, applying the principle advocated by Napoleon: get stuck in first, and work out what’s going on later. No-one has the time or the interest to sort out the details of what anthropology or ethnography mean as a discipline. Instead, you get interminable moaning about the ‘destruction of the genofond’ (the Russian genofond for instance, though that’s by no means the only option), you get witch-hunts and political crusades. Another variant of the same orientation is based on a postulate that knowledge can be genetically transmitted. For instance, ‘the peoples of Siberia carry information about shamanic trances in their genes’. The logic behind this reminds one of those experiments whose purpose was to establish what language a child spoke if no-one ever addressed a word to it.

## 2

Conferences of interest:

2003: The international seminar ‘Sakralnoe v traditsionnoi kulture’ [*Ideas of the Sacred in Traditional Culture*] organised by the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology, Moscow and the Institute of Philology and Linguistics, Altai; the ‘Readings in Honour of D. K. Zelenin’, organised by The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography and the European University, St Petersburg.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* 1 (2004).

2004: N. N. Miklukho-Maklai Readings ‘The Language and Culture of the Malay Peoples and their Neighbours’, Festschrift for Elena V. Revunenokova and Alexander K. Ogloblin, MAE RAN, St. Petersburg; The Seventh International Conference of Philippinists, ‘Changing Landscapes, Humanscapes, and Mindscapes in a Globalizing World’, Leiden, Netherlands; The Third International Conference, ‘Ierarkhiya i vlast’ v istorii mirovykh tsivilizatsii’ [Hierarchy and Power in the History of World Civilisations], Russian State Humanities University, Moscow; the ‘Readings in Honour of Blagodatov’, Institute of History of Art, Department of Musical Instruments and Folklore, St Petersburg.

2005: Sector,<sup>1</sup> ‘Antropologiya emotsii’ [‘The Anthropology of Emotion’], Readings in Honour of Radlov, MAE RAN, St Petersburg.

Publications of interest:

The discussion of living epic traditions in *Oral Tradition Journal*. 2003. Vol. 18. No. 2. (Center for Studies in Oral Tradition (CSOT), University of Missouri-Columbia, USA); Victor T. King and William D. Wilder (eds.), *The Modern Anthropology of South-East Asia: An Introduction*. New York, 2003; *Problemy etnografii i istorii kulturny narodov Aziatsko-Tikhookeanskogo regiona* [Issues in the Ethnography and Cultural History of the Peoples of the Asian-Pacific Region]. St Petersburg, 2004; Albert Baiburin, Leonid Belovinsky, Francis Conte, *Poluzabytye slova i znacheniya: Slovar russkoi kulturny XVIII-XIX vv.* [Nearly Forgotten Words and Meanings: A Dictionary of Russian Culture of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries]. St Petersburg, 2004; Yu. P. Tretyakov, N. A. Aleksandrova, *Russian-American Links: 300 Years of Co-operation*. St Petersburg 2004; N. A. Speshnev, *Pekin — strana moego detstva* [Peking — the Country of My Youth]. St Petersburg, 2004; Patricia Okubo Afafe (ed.), *Japanese Pioneers in the Northern Philippine Highlands*. Baguio City, 2004. Also, among translated works: M. Bloch, *Feodalnoe obshchestvo* [Feudal Society: La société féodale, 1939–1940], Moscow, 2003.

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Works that are to be considered significant and rewarding are those that have honest scholarly aims (not dictated by market forces) and which can actually achieve these. If the first criterion is complied with, the second is always realised in an individual way. If a person is not inclined to carry out fieldwork, then he or she won’t do this, even if the ‘field’ is just outside their own front door. If fieldwork is essential, then they’ll find a way of getting to the ends of the earth, despite all the calls along the lines ‘*more work must be done on north-*

<sup>1</sup> i.e. a thematically-linked set of papers at a conference. The standard way of running conferences in Russia is for the organising committee to accept bids for themes to be addressed; individual speakers then apply to the sector organisers with their paper titles. See also Albert Baiburin’s comments below. [Editor].

eastern Russia' or 'the future of Russian anthropology lies in local studies' (to quote David Anderson). Any one of us can name world-famous anthropologists or leaders of Russian scholarly tradition who have never, or hardly ever, done fieldwork. For other people, though (and me among them), a lengthy gap between expeditions is sheer torture: my theoretical constructions seem ephemeral until I can test them out in the field. But there are other ways of testing ideas out too, such as working with texts, dictionaries, archives, museum collections.

Work at the cusp of different disciplines — ethnolinguistics, ethno-botanics — is extremely rewarding. One can carry this out in the field or at home. There is only one limitation: if someone doesn't find their own work interesting, then it certainly won't be interesting to read it. And this is what makes it unlikely that anything worthwhile will come out of projects along the lines 'democratisation in Russia', such as grant-awarding bodies, alas, bully us into.

4

(a) It's not difficult to answer this question, but it gives one no pleasure either. Try opening any bio-bibliographical dictionary of South-East Asian specialists (for instance Robert O. Tilman. *International Biographical Dictionary of Southeast Asian Specialists* [1969]), which has entries organised according to nationality. You'll find entries for all the Western European countries, the USA, Australia, China, Japan, everywhere in South-East Asia. But... no Russians. It reminds me of those foreign atlases of the history of civilisation, where you've got civilisations shown everywhere, including Australasia and Oceania, but the place where Russia should be is occupied by the key to the map. Let's try looking at the index of the King and Wilder book that I mentioned above (2). This lists all the names of the major (and even some minor) western researchers of South-East Asia from the 1900s to 2003. There's a considerably larger number of Japanese and Philippino scholars, but not a single Russian name has been added — be it Lyudmila A. Mervart who worked in the early twentieth century, or distinguished scholars of the present day such as Dega Deopik, Elena Revunenkovna, or Sergei Kullanda. Gérard Gaillard's *Dictionnaire des ethnologues et des anthropologies* (1997) mostly lists French and Anglophone scholars, but there is a representative of every other national school as well. Except Russia.

A few years ago, I was talking about this with the brilliant Indonesianist Vladimir Braginsky, who has been working for years at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London). I said that Russian Orientalists tended to get known in the West, if they were lucky, only when they reached the end of their lives. He corrected me: 'It's not their work that gets known, simply the fact that it exists.' It's some consolation that we're better known among our

colleagues in Asia — Indonesianists in Indonesia, Philippinists in the Philippines.

Of course, ethnographers and anthropologists who work on the peoples of Russia and the former Soviet Union have more Western readers, but for the most part these are Western colleagues who know Russian and rely on what they read for source material, rather than for analytical insights. One cannot expect all our foreign colleagues to learn Russian in order to read our works. It would be nice though if the international research community would realise that the problem does exist and is getting worse in some respects.<sup>1</sup>

(b) In the area of ‘foreign anthropology’, {Russian scholars keep up} so long as they have access to literature. As a specialist in the anthropology of the Philippines, I have no close colleagues in Russia. Our libraries don’t acquire literature on the Philippines. My closest colleagues are in the first instance former students from Harold Conklin’s group at Yale, from the Philippines, from France, Canada, and Japan; and Philippinists from Britain (Mark Johnson and especially Fenella Cannell), the Netherlands, the USA, Australia, and linguists and lexicographers from the Philippine branch of Summer Institute of Linguistics).

Some work gets sent to me by my Western colleagues, bless their hearts; some I buy myself (one book costs a month’s salary). I subscribe to the major journals on the Philippines. Of course, my contacts and financial resources limit me to the essentials — everything relating to ‘my own’ people (the Ifugao), everything I can manage on epic tradition in the Philippines, dictionaries of Philippine languages, the most important anthropological works on the Philippines, and on South-East Asian anthropology generally. The greater the distance from the Philippines, the less I can keep up — I have only a tiny percentage of the works of Benedict Anderson, Marilyn Strathern, Clifford Geertz, Shelly Errington, Rodney Needham, Piers Vitebsky, Richard Lee, James Woodburn, Megan Biesele, and Jane Monnig Atkinson in my library. I try to catch up with reading when I’m abroad. Another way of getting hold of books is

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<sup>1</sup> To cite a recent example: I have just had to cancel my trip to a EUROSeas (The European Organisation of South-East Asian Studies) Board meeting in Paris. Until this year EUROSeas had one Board meeting a year and a travel budget for one Russian representative (there are two on the Board, one from St.Petersburg and another from Moscow). From this year, Board meetings have begun being held every 2 or 3 months, yet the financial support for Russian representatives has been stopped completely. I tried to solve the problem by shifting the dates when I was scheduled to lecture in Paris (which would pay for my trip) to fit with the dates of the Board meeting. We spent four months exchanging letters with Dr.Masina, the Secretary of the EUROSeas Board secretary, trying to sort the situation out. However, all efforts were in vain: because of not having allocated funding, EUROSeas could not issue an invitation which will fulfil the requirements of the French Consulate. Rather a sad way of marking the 150 year anniversary of Oriental Studies in St Petersburg University, which we celebrate this year.

by writing reviews. Fortunately, the classics of Western anthropology (Victor Turner and so on) are held in Russian libraries. It's very hard to keep up with the development of ethnography given that we practically don't get Western journals, and access to data-bases is a problem (for financial reasons once more). I think this is quite typical for a Russian specialist in 'foreign' anthropology.

5 Financial problems aside, the only obstacle to anthropological work is lack of time. Sure, my family isn't too happy when I go off on field trips or conferences abroad, but I think that's an international problem, especially for women ethnographers.

6 We need to set up an all-Russian site where ethnographers and anthropologists who had just published books, including those issued in small print-runs by local publishing houses, could post information.

7 We don't have a community of this kind. I doubt that there's one abroad either. This is a result of the general dehumanisation of society, the disappearance of the cultural sphere, the move to narrow specialisation — in a word, the lack of *sobornost* (in Vladimir Solovyov's meaning of the word).<sup>1</sup> We hardly read each other's work, and we don't talk to each other at all. The practice of holding conferences with simultaneous sessions and the discussion left to a round-up session at the end suppresses discussion altogether. 'Round tables' are meant to make people talk to each other, but they too tend to end up in the same format of talks without much in the way of questions and answers.

So what should we do to set up dialogue? We should have regular seminars where we listen to talks, and more important, *discuss* them, taking one or at most two at a time. We used to have seminars like that in our institute/museum: 'Folklore and Ethnography', convened by my teacher Boris Putilov, 'Ethnography and Sexology', convened by Igor Kon. But now there are no issue-based seminars, though fortunately we have some thematic and regional ones: E. G. Tsareva's 'Textiles' in the MAE, particularly, all praise to her for her energy and determination. There's the 'Nusantara' society for specialists on insular South-East Asia. Despite all the difficulties, Indonesianists and Philippinists of St. Petersburg and Moscow do meet up a few times a year to listen to what each other have to say.

We need more seminars on folklore and ethnography, on ethnolin-

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<sup>1</sup> *Sobornost* refers to a particular sense of mystical, harmonious collectivity, which was the social ideal of the Russian Slavophiles (the religious philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900) being the most prominent late nineteenth-century thinker in this tradition). A fuller discussion of the term's meaning and history can be found in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (eds.), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution*. Oxford, 1998. [Editor].

guistics, ‘young scholars’ workshops’ in ethnography and anthropology, where students and graduate students from different cities could meet up.

We must talk to each other, listen to each other. The process has already started — thanks to *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. So let’s be sure to keep it going.

### VIKTOR VIKTORIN<sup>1</sup>

**1** Ethnography is at a turning point: a difficult search for new paradigms, approaches, methods (or a turn towards the ‘future in the past’ of the discipline).

Objective ethnogenesis, ethnic history and the history of ethnography and ethnology, ethnop-sychology — the link of external (oblique) ethnic analyses with self-consciousness in a real sense, a sociology that explores connections between the masses and the elite in a given ethnic group, ethnostatistics in the run up to the next census (2010?) and the need to explore the best methodology for this.

**2** It is possible to achieve unexpected results in the study of such subjects as ‘atypical ethnicity’ (by expeditions into the field), concentrating on specific population centres (not just the most remote and isolated ones!) and on small areas of big cities.<sup>2</sup>

**3** Our Western colleagues have a very poor knowledge of the achievements of the Russian ethnographers, especially with regard to the precise terminology used for the description of particular ethnic phenomena

The knowledge among Russian ethnographers of Western ethnographers’ achievements is far from unsatisfactory and is steadily mounting — indeed, sometimes uncritical adoption of Western ideas is the result.

#### Viktor Viktorin

Local Government  
of Archangel Province

<sup>1</sup> The author did not respond to an invitation to review the translation of his text. The translation preserves the fragmentary style of the Russian original. [Editor].

<sup>2</sup> *mikroraiony*: subdivisions of administrative districts (*raiony*) in an urban area. [Editor].

**4** Non-financial obstacles to the development of scholarship and to productive work in the field include:

— the fuzzy contrast that is drawn between ‘ethnology’ and ‘ethnography’, the loss of methodological orientation points, the lack of awareness or forgetfulness (among young people, for instance) of the traditions of the ‘heroic contribution of ethnographical activity’ with regard to the service of society, of Russia, and the harmonious co-existence of its peoples-ethnoi and the exchange of culture between them.

— the retreat from active and ‘elite’ positions in society, the lack of effective propaganda and popularisation work done on behalf of scholarly initiatives and the scholarly community, the alienation from the work of educating young people in a sensible way.

— the lack of co-ordination between different kinds of initiative, the ‘computer-generated’ crisis in the style of scholarly exposition, the surge in the numbers of dilettante ethnographers and the low levels of ethnographical expertise among those working in the media, the juridical system, and the parliamentary system at different levels.

**5** At the coming congress and other large and potentially useful forums, it would be worth moving away from the customary format of ‘hypotheses — talk illustrating hypotheses’. More informal exchanges would be valuable, as would meetings taking the form ‘general discussion’, ‘brain-storming session’, ‘round table’, ‘memoir evening’.

Exchange of opinion should be maximised, and groups of the most experienced participants should be got together to form ‘committees for generating creative ideas and fostering the growth of scholarship’.

Subjects for lively discussion might include: the ethnographer in society and his function, role, and responsibility; the educational role of our discipline and its part in fostering social harmony; the heterosis of cultures and the (global) cultural standard; the ethnos beyond politics and the civic position of the academic commentator; ethno-information — how it circulates and how to pin it down; tradition in the primary sense and in the ‘educated’ sense; ethnography and the new possibilities offered by electronics; the bearer of tradition and the pretender to such a status; ethnos seen from inside and from the outside; ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnised’ phenomena; ethnic groups and their representatives in the unstable, rapidly changing society; state support for academic activities; academic life and private sponsorship; poly-ethnicity at the personal level — and many other things

**6** Here the field of discussion should be expanded to include the ethnographic community in the Commonwealth of Independent

States and across the former USSR. This community *does* already exist as a brotherhood of fellow-spirits united by education and the perception of a common cause — one can easily recognise someone as a colleague by clear, though hard to specify, tokens, even if one sees him or her in the distance at a big meeting. But such a community *withers and dies* in the conditions of ‘savage’ capitalism, selfishness and political engagement, of academic fragmentation (cf. the ethnographers standing on the barricades during different ethnic conflicts — see my as yet unpublished review for *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*).

All this is so important for me and for those I am longing to see ‘on the banks of the Neva (where the origins of everything were!) — that’s our whole life! Or the main thing that life is centred on...

## ALBERT BAIBURIN

### Editor’s Afterword

The participants in our survey included forty-five ethnographers and anthropologists from twenty-one different academic and educational institutions in different parts of the Russian Federation. The participants belong to different scholarly traditions and come from different generations; their intellectual attitudes are different, and so their answers were inevitably also very varied. At the same time, their answers to the questions formulated by the editorial board of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* displayed general disquiet about the state of our discipline and the status of the ethnographer/anthropologist in academia and society. Accordingly, it makes sense to comment on the answers by means of a round-up of the topics addressed, rather than question by question.

### Who Are We?

All the answers touch on this question, one way or another. And indeed, we can’t even agree about what to call ourselves. Ethnographers? Ethnologists? Anthropologists? Not one of these terms (for different reasons) is to everyone’s taste. Qualifications along the lines ‘physical...’ ‘cultural...’ or ‘social..’ anthropologist are arti-

### Albert Baiburin

Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (Kunstkamera), Russian Academy of Sciences/European University at St Petersburg

ficial, and redundant before they begin. In any case, some people do linguistic, political, or philosophical anthropology. Listing all the fine distinctions would hardly be possible. And besides, one has the impression that ‘anthropologist’ has become a fashionable name whatever a particular person does, so long as they happen to be interested in the study of humanity. And given that humanity can be studied in any number of different ways, you end up exactly where we are: with a plethora of different ‘anthropologies’. As Vladimir Popov rightly remarks, the word ‘anthropologist’ is losing its original meaning and coming to signify someone who specialises in the humanities generally. The muddle extends to the question of which other disciplines we are associated with. At the moment, ethnography and ethnology are firmly compartmentalised as ‘historical sciences’, but anthropology is torn in two directions: ‘history’ on the one hand, ‘social sciences’ in the other.

Behind this chaos of definitions lies a sense of identity that has been seriously eroded, and concepts of the nature of the subject that have become vague. It is time to talk of a serious crisis not just in ethnography or anthropology, but in all the humanities (or anthropological sciences, if you prefer). Of course, each of us will pick a particular term as it suits the situation, but the need for choice in itself indicates that our sense of self is far from unified. And even if someone always calls himself or herself an ‘ethnographer’, say, then the question still arises of how she or he sees their relations with the people who call themselves ethnologists or anthropologists. One can put this question differently: what do we have in common? The answer is at one level obvious: we’re members of a single professional culture, a single domain of scholarly knowledge. But there’s no unity at all about what that domain in fact represents.

Many answers refer directly or indirectly to this crisis of professional identity.<sup>1</sup> It’s clear that the sense of crisis depends above all on the fact that the level of uncertainty about the content of the subject (let’s call it ‘ethnography’ for convenience’s sake) is growing, rather than shrinking. From this point of view, Valery Tishkov’s study *Rekviem po etnosu* [Requiem for ‘Ethnos’] was also a requiem for the many ethnographers continuing to work according to the traditions of Soviet academic study.<sup>2</sup> The shift to the study of the modern world was for them the last shift towards total intellectual helplessness. Yet, while we were fussing round with ‘ethnos’ and ‘traditional culture’, it turned out that the field of contemporary culture (which we might term ‘anthropological’) was being taken over by our neighbours —

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<sup>1</sup> See especially E. L. Lvova’s piece. The word *crisis* itself is one of the commonest ways of describing the current situation, and I will return to it below.

<sup>2</sup> According to which the term *ethnos* was treated not as a construct, but as an objective reality. [Editor]

sociologists and culturologists of various hues. And even ethnic problems as such (including ethnicity, nationalism, xenophobia and the rest) are now being worked on less by ethnographers than by political scientists and ‘specialists in federal studies’.

A natural result of this delay in our intellectual evolution was that the state and society no longer had a use for ethnographical work. The sense that one is of no use to the world at large expressed in many answers is far from fortuitous, and it is particularly sharply felt by members of the older generation. They can remember the close interest taken by the former regime in ethnographers, who were seen as participants in a grand design constructed by the state under the name of ‘Soviet national politics’.<sup>1</sup> The feeling of superfluity is exacerbated by the miserable living conditions to which those who have not yet acquired the ‘art’ of making grant proposals and have nothing to do with market-driven research<sup>2</sup> are condemned.

It is significant that many people are much more worried by all this than by the issue of integration into the international academic scene. To judge by many of the answers we received, the basic mood with regard to the international scholarly community is often one of confrontation. Some people apparently seriously believe that the Russian academic tradition is of such extraordinary importance that ‘we’ll get along fine without them’; others make a big show of not caring, as is the case with Aleksandr Reshetov, for instance: *‘To be honest, I couldn’t much care to what extent Western specialists know and cite our work (or are even aware of it). I think that’s their problem.’*<sup>3</sup> But on the other hand, there are plenty of people around now who think it’s not ‘their’ problem, but ours. Russian ethnographers and anthropologists cannot help feeling concerned by how the international scholarly community regards their work, by how much is

<sup>1</sup> Meaning that funds were poured by the Soviet state into the study of the so-called ‘titular nationalities’, or those that made up the dominant populations in republics and autonomous republics, in order to draw upon and simultaneously harness national feeling, promoting individual national identities that were at the same time part of a larger Soviet whole. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> market-driven research: *prikladnoe issledovanie* (literally ‘applied research’, as opposed to *fundamentalnoe issledovanie*, ‘scholarly research’ or ‘blue skies research’): a derogatory term for work done to commission in order to earn money, often outside the researcher’s own area of specialisation. Carrying out such intellectually questionable projects has become a main means of survival for post-Soviet scholars. See further below. [Editor].

<sup>3</sup> He continues: *‘I’ve never seen or heard anything to suggest that Western specialists are bothered by whether their work is known abroad, including in Russia.’* Here he is misinformed: Western specialists are extremely concerned about this issue, which has official as well as personal implications. For example, the Research Assessment Exercise (the government-sponsored research audit to which all British universities are subject) awards top marks only to those departments whose work is considered of ‘international significance’. The marks have impact on funding levels, and there have been several recent cases where a low grade has been used by a university administration to make a case for closing the department (as happened, for example, with Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in 2003).

know about this work, and by how much it figures in international publications and forums. As Serguei Oushakine points out, the picture is not encouraging: *‘To judge by the work published in international journals (I have in mind primarily those in the Anglophone world), Russian ethnography/anthropology effectively doesn’t exist. The same applies to conferences. In the USA, for instance, there are two major forums at which Russian anthropology might potentially be represented, but where it practically doesn’t figure at all. One is the annual congress of the American Anthropological Association, the second is “Soyuz”, an annual symposium of post-Soviet studies. Fair enough, financial and linguistic problems do present pretty formidable obstacles. But unless it overcomes them, Russian anthropology will not really be able to pretend to a place in the international scholarly community.’*

As for our knowledge of anthropological writing produced outside Russia, the difficulties that we all know about (the language barrier and the non-acquisition of books and journals by libraries) are the main obstacles; translations, personal contacts, and the Internet are only a partial help. And all this is happening against the background of a marked rise abroad in publishing output of a kind likely to interest anthropologists — cultural studies is one of the most popular areas in Western academic work, especially among younger scholars.

Of course, Western specialists (above all those interested in Russia) do try to keep up with what we do. But it’s not easy to keep track even when you’re in Russia, given the lack of systematic information about new publications and upcoming conferences. And it’s not only in Russia where there are language barriers. As is well known, the last few years have seen Russian-language programmes and Slavic departments shut down in Western universities. In some universities, particularly in the USA, Russian literature is now taught wholly or largely in translation, and Russian history is studied on the basis of translated source materials. Studies of Russia (and of post-Soviet space generally) have lost the geo-political topicality they had in the past. There are even worries that in ten years or so it will be hard to find any native speakers of English competent to translate from Russian into English at a high level. In addition, the majority of Western universities are now looking for ways to reduce their library budgets, and in this context the sharp rises in book prices and postage charges associated with purchasing materials from Russia are very damaging.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I can confirm the accuracy of this with regard to my own university, which has also suffered badly because of the collapse of the old exchange programmes, according to which unwanted copyright volumes were matched with unwanted volumes in Russia and changed hands free of charge. Now that Russian libraries often do not receive the copies to which they are legally entitled, this scheme has fallen by the wayside. [Editor].

The few people who think that we really are way behind international levels of scholarship see one of the main causes of this in the low levels of ethnographical education. On the one hand, you'd think there was cause for optimism: the rigidity of the old system of education has vanished, and there is much more opportunity for international contacts. In the best Russian institutions, the education offered is far more varied than it used to be. But at the same time, the general context of education, in the conditions of a highly specific market economy, has altered for the worse. Hence, education naturally occupies a central place in most of the answers. The problem is not the existence of a younger generation ready to take over in due course (such a generation has indeed come into being), but the fact that many academics formerly holding positions in academic institutes and museums have needed to turn to teaching (which is one of the commonest ways of earning a living).<sup>1</sup> The erosion of former standards that has come with a rising deluge of translated literature and home-produced textbooks of extremely low quality has had a double effect on ethnographical education. On the one hand, some programmes are gripped by reactionary conservatism, and institutes continue turning out ethnographers whose training consists of 'the theory of ethnos' and 'traditional culture' (this is characteristic of ethnographic faculties that have been existence for a long time). On the other hand (this happens in new institutions), students get force-fed a badly-prepared 'anthropological mish-mash' of poorly understood and sometimes eccentrically selected Western literature in translation. It's hard to say which is worse. What one can say for certain is that issues to do with education should be a subject of particular concern to everyone involved in the educational process. In one of the next issues of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, we will hold the first in a series of discussions devoted to education and training.

A comparison with 'international levels' is invisibly present both in the answers written by people who feel a sense of pride in Russian ethnography, and in the answers written by people who feel embarrassed about concepts and approaches they consider outmoded. So what is there to feel proud about? As it turns out, the distant past. If one judges by what's set out here, the golden age of ethnography is associated above all with names like L. Ya. Shternberg, V. G. Bogoraz, S. M. Shirokogorov, A. M. Zolotarev, and so on. It's striking that the list doesn't include a single ethnographer from the second half of the twentieth century, let alone from the present day. Ethnographers also feel proud about the treasure-house of fieldwork

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike British or American scholars, too, Russian scholars do not get regular sabbatical leave; naturally, with high teaching loads and only the vacations left for research, research productivity is likely to plummet. [Editor].

materials collected in the past, and still being collected in the present day. That seems to be it. At the same time, that's already plenty, or at least enough for 'real ethnographers' (for which read — scholars doing fieldwork and following the traditions set down in the work of the classic figures just listed) to feel superior to 'theorists', whose constructions, in their view, are ephemeral and certain to be forgotten soon. As a matter of fact, just as 'theorists' don't see any reason why they should feel dependent on ethnographers doing fieldwork, so the latter declare a lack of interest in theoretical analyses. There's no dialogue at all. No points in common. These will appear only when the two sides — in their own different ways, of course — start to study the same cultural phenomena. But at the moment, 'theory' and 'empiricism' are inhabiting different domains.

Another traditional division — between the centre and the regions — has only deepened in recent years. Differences in access to information and to financial and administrative resources have built up, and this situation has many other consequences in its turn. Apart from the rise in psychological stress, one might mention the atomisation of the scholarly community. It's inevitable that local groups of ethnographers emerge who are condemned to stew in their own juice, and who may even prefer to live that way. Such local groups have their own sets of intellectual concerns, their own authority figures and their own scholarly standards. In the event, they may often feel totally independent from everyone else (call themselves 'schools', prefer to cite people from their own 'inner circle', and so on).

One shouldn't suppose that closed communities like this kind exist only in the distant provinces. The ethnographical communities in Moscow and St Petersburg are also heterogeneous. After all, alongside the academic institutes themselves and their various offshoots, there are also museums, university departments, and so on. The lack of an active forum for discussion (and where is there such a forum?) inevitably means that small groups form here too, who make contact sporadically and at a purely personal level. This leads to the emergence of a phenomenon that has been described on the Russian Internet as 'Perm scholarship'. As the person who thought up the term puts it, *'no offence to the city of Perm! Perm scholarship is alive and well in Moscow, Petersburg, and Novosibirsk as well.'*<sup>1</sup> In other words, something inevitably turns into 'Perm scholarship' if it isn't part of the wider, international academic world. I'm certain one gets plenty of 'Perm scholarship' in the American Mid-West and in Middle England as well. It's not just a Russian phenomenon, but a world-wide one. But all the same, it's much easier to produce 'Perm scholarship' in the provinces than in a capital city. And it is here

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<sup>1</sup> N. Kirillov, 'O Permskoi nauke'. [www.researcher-at.ru/index.php?option+content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=58](http://www.researcher-at.ru/index.php?option+content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=58)

where the organisational capacities of the Association of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists should come in — trying to mitigate the differences between the centre and the regions. The Internet and email are a great help here. *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* is prepared to do anything in its powers to help give Russian and foreign scholars a space for discussion. I'm sure other ethnographical (anthropological) journals would be happy to do the same.

If one judges by the answers that have come in, the established distinctions between 'field workers' and 'theorists', 'centre' and 'regions', have now been joined by another — 'romantics' versus 'pragmatists'. 'Pragmatists', it would seem, include everyone who puts efforts into getting grants or 'market-driven' projects (i.e. ones done to order)<sup>1</sup> financed by various sources. Those who don't have access to such funding consider themselves 'romantics' and no doubt have a right to. As a matter of fact, the surge in 'market-driven' projects (one can't call them 'studies') is, I think, more or less limited to Moscow and doesn't much threaten St Petersburg or the rest of the provincial world (though I could be wrong here). But the fact that a proportion of ethnographers are concerned exclusively with earning money with the help of projects constructed to order inevitably provokes an adverse reaction among everyone else, and now we're starting to here criticism from ethnographical centres in different places about the incursion of this infection and its ill effects on the younger generation of ethnographers. Of course, people choose their own paths, but it can often happen the other way round too.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, then, we're all very different, and the differences are getting more marked (which is fine in itself, but not beyond the point at which all solidarity starts to fall to pieces). At the same time, we're all devoted to our profession and worried about its fate. A lot of us are feeling very mixed-up. That's not a nice condition to be in, but it is inevitable that things get worse before they get better. However, judging by the answers, we've yet to get to grips with the fact that we don't so much have to change our orientation points, as we have to change ourselves — from the inside out.

### What Do We Do?

I hardly need to say that there are many different views of this too. For some, it's ethnography, for others anthropology (with all the various nuances of the term). The assessments of what state our

<sup>1</sup> On this term, see above.

<sup>2</sup> This suspicion of grant-funded projects might sound strange to a Western reader, given that much excellent research gets funded through educational charities and grant agencies in the West, but one needs to bear in mind the point made by Ekaterina Melnikova above: Western academics are not, for the most part, wholly dependent on grant income, and hence are not usually forced into the kind of crazed contortions that Russian scholars have to go through when trying to fit 'blue skies' research to short-time-results paradigms. [Editor].

discipline is in are varied as well, though hospital metaphors tend to dominate the descriptions. Some of us consider that the crisis is past and that Russian ethnography is on the mend. Others say that its condition is extremely unstable. Others again say that ethnography is sinking further and further into crisis. To be fair one has to acknowledge that not everyone espouses hospital terminology. Valery Tishkov, for instance, thinks that *from the point of view of the academic work being produced, Russian ethnography is in a highly satisfactory condition*.

Any serious discussion of what we do inevitably leads up to the subjects that we study. And here one of the most widespread motifs in ethnographical discussions crops up — the motif of ‘plundered scholarship’, as one might put it. It would seem the sociologists are most to blame. They haven’t just started working on ethnographical subjects: they’ve also helped themselves to our own-brand ethnographical (qualitative) methodology, and made off with the *appellation contrôlée* for social anthropology as well.<sup>1</sup> I’ve already mentioned the political scientists. Historians interested in the everyday — in what has long been termed *byt* by ethnographers — haven’t left us alone either. Foreign scholars exploit the material we collect in the field, but ignore our interpretations, and home-bred culturologists grab whatever they can get with both hands.

But if we want to fend off invaders from our territory, we have to decide what it covers and where its boundaries lie. However, no-one is bothering about this. Some people (probably the majority) are still working on ethnic specificity and traditional ethnic cultures, others have rushed into studying contemporary society, a third group have plunged into theory, and a fourth group won’t have the first thing to do with theory. There are fifth and sixth groups, and so on, as well. Getting the complete picture is almost impossible. We say, ‘Hands off our material!’ but we’ve no idea what ‘our’ material is.<sup>2</sup> It emerges that ‘our’ material is — everything connected with humanity (well, that’s why the name ‘anthropology’ suits us, yes?) We’ve made our bed, and now we’d better lie in it...

So what are we to do? Get snarled up in yet more endless discussions about the object of study so we can make more boundaries and divisions? I think a much more sensible solution is the one set out by Nikolai Vakhtin: stop playing border-guards and customs officers.

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<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the sociologists are panicking about how this *appellation* may be falling into the hands of historians. They think (and maybe with some reason) that this would be a disaster for the development of their subject. (See the answers by Pavel Romanov and Elena Yarskaya-Simonova).

<sup>2</sup> This is only natural, of course. In his well-known writings on ethnic groups and boundaries, Frederick Barth long ago pointed out that any community is better at defending its boundaries than deciding what is inside them.

We ought gradually to realise that all of us (ethnographers, anthropologists of all kinds, archaeologists, historians, sociologists, folklorists, socio-linguists and others) share the same intellectual and interpretive domain, which is united by certain key concepts: humanity, society, culture. The boundaries between our disciplines have an accidental and artificial character. It's in everyone's interests that they should become as transparent and porous as possible. We should call in on each other as much as possible. The benefit would be immense.

There are countless interesting and important themes around already, and the more inter-disciplinary contacts build up, the more such themes will emerge. But even if one sticks to the kind of topics that are established territory for ethnography, it turns out that there are huge gaps in what is being done so far. For instance, the transformation of rural culture in contemporary Russia is simply being ignored. And that despite the fact that here is where the sharpest social changes are taking place: the Russian rural population is rapidly turning into an 'deprived minority', as a result of the current economic and social downturn, of the collapse of the (admittedly rudimentary) infrastructure that existed in the Soviet period, and of rising alcoholism, unemployment, etc. We could still do with more studies of contemporary urban culture too, despite the fact that some solid work has been done by Russian ethnographers in this area over recent years. For instance, there is still not enough professional work on xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. Ethnographers and anthropologists could make an important contribution also to the study of the development of a socially aware ecology. One could go on for some time in this vein.

Incidentally, one of the answers quite justifiably, in my opinion, raises the question of ethnographers' responsibility for disseminating the mythology of a 'golden age' of ethnic culture, associated with the time when traditions were at their height. As Vadim Turaev writes, *'I'm convinced that the tragic situation that overtook the "small peoples" of the North in the 1990s was our, the ethnographers', responsibility. Ten years of their life were shamefully wasted on so-called "resurrection", which was everywhere taken to signify a return to the ethnographical norm so dear to our hearts — traditional culture. It's now clear that no "resurrection" ever took place. And the point isn't that there was no political will in the government for such a resurrection, but that it could never have taken place in any case. Because you can't step twice into the same river.'* No doubt these comments might be controversial with some; however, it is vital to raise the question of the extent to which ethnographers are responsible for the after-effects of their analyses.

Maybe the most important thing now is to stop limiting ourselves to

ethnic themes. Perhaps we should move the stress from ethno- to anthropo- and feel freer in our choice of subjects to look at. It's striking that a good part of some answers is devoted to pointing out areas of life that for one or another reason (most often, because no-one was used to thinking that way) have been ignored by ethnographers. Here I cite just one of these 'shopping lists' of ethnographical topics, as formulated by Serguei Oushakine. *'The Russian experience of the last decade, in my view (the view of a socio-cultural anthropologist), has the potential to be an extremely productive field for re-thinking a whole range of traditional anthropological questions. For instance, the sharp alteration in the forms of economic organisation of society, the radical shift to monetarisation of social processes, give one the opportunity to reconsider the role of the practices and forms of exchange in social life. For instance, what are the social and symbolic ramifications of the post-Soviet barter system? How does the absence of a universal denominator (in the form of money) impact upon people's conception of their social milieu and of the post-Soviet context in general? To what extent does the protest against the conversion of non-monetary welfare benefits to cash equivalents<sup>1</sup> reflect a sense of exclusion from the process of social circulation? The issues of transition and of transitional identity/subjectivity might become another sphere where classical anthropological theory could be developed in a meaningful way. What happens to the "liminal" identity in cases where the 'end point' of transition is not yet in view? The collapse of the Soviet Union has also provided the opportunity of tracing yet another important tendency: how does the self-organisation of society take place in a vacuum of social norms? Along which axes (symbolic, social, psychological, etc.) are new social configurations set out? One can easily proliferate such examples. But their essence is obvious, by and large: the peculiarities of the current state of Russian society are not interesting just because they are unique, but because they have profound implications. The extreme "blatancy" of certain tendencies (for instance, "social stratification" or "corruption") makes it easier to perceive the means by which these are formed in a symbolic sense, on the one hand, and the degree of their impact on the means by which life is organised on the other.'* The final message here is that we aren't taking an interest in what society expects us to find interesting (I won't say anything about the state here, since the interests of the state and society are currently often at variance). And yet we complain that no-one looks after us.

At the same time, the paradoxicality of the situation lies in the fact

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<sup>1</sup> This happened at the beginning of 2005: benefits such as free travel for pensioners were converted to notional cash equivalents, which were, in addition, means-tested. The move has been exceptionally unpopular, and has provoked demonstrations by pensioner groups. In some regions, local administrations have gone over to funding non-cash benefits themselves in the attempt to avoid social catastrophe. [Editor].

that it is precisely society, rather than the state, as previously, that takes an interest in ethnography. One can see this in the fact, for instance, that these days anthropological work is more familiar to the general public (among the intelligentsia, it goes without saying) than in the past, since it is now being published in general literature and history journals such as *NLO* and *Ab Imperio*, while monographs get published not just by academic presses, but by general publishers as well.

But not everything is simple in the choice of subject and interpretive direction. One might think that if we move towards a broad approach to the subject of contemporary cultural forms, our discipline will surge into a dominant position. Up to a point, this may be so (it would be good if our fageyish image got swapped for something more upbeat), but only up to a point. It is probably as well not to rush too far in this direction. I'm certain that, for instance, without reconstructions of the past, ethnography and anthropology would lose depth and substance.<sup>1</sup> And in general, it's not the era and the subject that a person studies that matters, but the way that he or she studies this. Startling and interesting results can be obtained if one looks at apparently banal subjects in a new light. It's precisely studies of this kind that generate shifts in scholarly practices, since they make the familiar seem unfamiliar. Both material from the present day and from the past may be employed. The effects do not depend on diachronic systematisation. The work of the *Annales* school of historians was mostly devoted to the Middle Ages, but it brought about a decisive transformation in the views, tastes, and preferences of several generations of historians and anthropologists working on the modern age. There are few studies of this kind, but there could never be many. And the thing that matters is not whether one adopts a synchronic or diachronic approach, or even the way that one presents a problem, but the personality of the scholar him- or herself: the thing that gets less attention than any other factor in Russia.<sup>2</sup> But if we do have a serious deficit of anything, then it's a deficit of scholars whose work provides orientation points for others.

<sup>1</sup> The 'divorce' now taking place between ethnography and history is a natural result of the long dominance of history. Yet the effects of that dominance should not always be seen in a negative light. This is perhaps most clearly grasped by observers 'from outside'. Take Bruce Grant's remarks in the discussion of current tendencies in the study of anthropology and culture that we organised in the first number of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*: 'Whatever one may think of the ideological motives, the Soviet academy made history a keystone of its consciousness in ways that Western anthropology only came to much later in its development [...] Historical consciousness has perhaps now reached a peak across British, American, German, and French anthropologies. Is Russian scholarship poised to relinquish these longer held strengths?' (*Forum for Anthropology and Culture*. 2004. No. 1. P. 48. Cf. the comments of Susan Gal in the same discussion).

<sup>2</sup> It's notable that only one set of answers (by Mikhail Rodionov) discusses the scholar's personality.

When one reads or hears about how many books there are being published in our discipline, it's easy to feel a bit queasy. Of course, it's good that you no longer have to wait years for a book or article to emerge. But the rapid rise in book production is not happening through an expansion of quality work. The amount of this that gets published is reliably negligible, and the area that has grown is the issuing of scrabbled-together collections and anthologies, and shoddily-written monographs. Over the two years that have passed since the last congress took place, dozens, no, hundreds of books in the area of ethnography and anthropology have hit the shelves. But how many of them are rated as outstanding in the comments here? A handful at most. It's much the same with conferences. There are lots more of them, which is fine, but the number of really interesting, worthwhile, and useful ones has almost certainly not increased.

Let me go back to the complaints about how unnecessary our work is. In Galina Komarova's answers, there are some pertinent observations on how the former (Soviet) functions of ethnography (ideological, prestige-related, expository)<sup>1</sup> have lost their *raison d'être* in the new (post-Soviet) context. The new social demands are related to the new political situation, and hence there has been a steep rise in the importance of ethno-political studies and in the currency of expert opinion from ethnographers on topics such as ethnic conflict. These tendencies can be evaluated in a variety of different ways, not necessarily negative; the main problem is that the bulk of the work being carried out is not being done to a high professional level. But these are so far the only clearly formulated social demands, and the way in which they are satisfied will dictate whether other demands for the expertise of anthropologists and ethnographers emerge. Of course, in the foreseeable future we can hardly hope for a status like that enjoyed by anthropologists in the USA, who are members of a large and prestigious profession. But we might at least make efforts to go in that direction.

### Communities, Associations

So is there a community of ethnographers and anthropologists or not? As one would expect, given that the answers to this question lie in the domain of personal impressions and emotions, everyone has his or her own answer. Some people (the majority) think there is such a community, others that it doesn't exist and never could (this is a minority, but a large one, including, say, Yuri Berezkin). It's clear, whichever way, that artificially creating a *community*, particularly in a country such as Russia, would be a very difficult act to pull off. On the other hand, one can create an *active organisation* and thus offer

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<sup>1</sup> The dictionary translation of the original term, *poznatelnyy*, is 'cognitive', but the meaning here is closer to 'discovering/creating knowledge', hence the rendition. [Editor].

support to the community that some people consider does exist. Formally speaking, a professional association is already in being, of course, but, as many participants in our exchange argue, it's so well camouflaged that it's hard to find out anything about it.<sup>1</sup> Or to be more exact, it does emerge from hiding every now and then, but only once every two years, when it's time for the next Congress to take place. It's perfectly natural that some people (Aleksandr Reshetov, Daniil Tumarkin, and others) think that the Association should be active not just while congresses are being organised, but in between as well. In addition, there is some feeling that the Association should work as a *'corporative institution, which would solve corporative problems by lobbying the state'* (Liliya Savitova), that is, become an intermediary between us and the institutions of state power. The Association, in the view of our participants, should serve our corporate interests and solve our shared problems. As Mikhail Turov puts it, in the meantime *'the Association "exists", but it hasn't become an "instrument" like the British Association of Anthropologists'*.<sup>2</sup>

It's clear that the governing body of the Association should start addressing the questions that have been set out here by its Executive Director, Sergei Abashin: *'I think the main obstacle [to the formation of a community] is that there is no shared understanding of what the many specialists who call themselves "ethnographers" actually have in common. What problems are they investigating? What are their interests? How should general strategies for developing the discipline be evolved? How might and should this community influence its members, and how might and should it interact with the wider world of ethnography?'* Of course, judging by the responses we have had, answering these questions will be far from easy, but the 'sore points' are set out in them with admirable clarity.

An active Association will need to keep track of the subjects being studied by its members, the projects they have underway, indeed of the members themselves (which would mean, just to begin with, completing the long-planned project for a *Who's Who of Russian Ethnography*). In order for membership to have any rational significance, it is essential to introduce subscription payments. The Association should play the role of a co-ordinator and centre of information (it should issue a newsletter or bulletin, have its own website, set up a data-base of ethnographical publications and thesis abstracts); it should organise summer schools on topics of current

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the existence of the Association is such a well-kept secret that some of our participants had obviously never heard of it and questions are raised about the possibility of *'resurrecting the Russian Geographical Society with its system of regional groups, correspondents, with regular print and electronic publications, with joint expeditions and cross-cultural investigations'* (Mariya Ivshina).

<sup>2</sup> Sic.: the contributor presumably has in mind the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth, or the Royal Anthropological Institution. [Editor].

interest in anthropology for young researchers (as suggested by Elza-Bair Guchinova).

In addition, as Viktor Shnirelman points out, the composition of a 'code of ethical norms' that would govern the behaviour of anthropologists is long overdue. In fact, any society only functions properly when its members are governed by a specific set of rules. In this connection, it is striking that several participants suggest introducing prizes for the best books, essays, textbooks, or as a reward for a person's general contribution to the field of ethnography and anthropology. As Serguei Oushakine puts it: *'What's important is not so much the encouragement given to particular individuals (that's also important, but it's a different issue), but the social effect that prizes and rewards can bring about. By "discovering" new tendencies, new names, new issues of interest, professional prizes of this kind give a "boost" on each occasion to the intellectual life of the discipline, make it possible to grasp what's of interest. In addition, prizes give one a sense of a certain professional framework; they formulate a kind of "canon" of research topics and approaches. The level of significance that such prizes actually represent depends on the mechanisms of professional self-regulation, that is, on the mechanisms generating the professional hierarchy, the system of ethical principles in the field, and of professional taboos, etc.'*

### Congresses

Congresses aren't simply great big conferences. They are where questions of interest to the whole scholarly community should be discussed. Organising a congress that is devoted to a particular theme<sup>1</sup> means alienating entire groups of researchers, or turning them into second-class participants. In any case, themes can be discussed only at plenary sessions; the individual panels don't address them. On the other hand, organising panels in the way that this is done at present (when anyone, independent of his or her actual contribution to the field, has the right to apply to organise a session of his or her own) generates what can only be described as a bonfire of the vanities. It seems clear that panels should not just be organised on the basis of individual suggestions. Perhaps the conference should be organised as round tables and symposiums, so there would be space for discussion? (This is Vladimir Popov's suggestion). But Mariya Stanyukovich's experience of this kind of format shows that people have learned to turn even these into banal sessions where talks are droned out.

So far as the content of the congresses is concerned, and particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Which is what happens at the moment with the Congresses of Russian Ethnographers and Anthropologists. The Fifth Congress in 2003 was devoted to 'the problem of space' and the official theme of the Sixth is 'ethnic processes in Eurasia'. [Editor].

the issues that should be discussed at them, it seems appropriate to cite a few ideas put forward by some of our participants:

**Sergei Abashin:** *'I find it both strange and indicative that space is not found at such congresses for debates on issues such as professional ethics, the relationship between academics and the political establishment, how to come to terms with the Soviet experience, the fight with xenophobia, the relationship between academic work and ideology, and so on.'*

**Viktor Shnirelman:** *'I think congresses are necessary in the first place to discuss new theoretical approaches that would facilitate a deeper understanding of the materials that we collect, no matter what our area of specialisation in a regional sense is. Secondly, they are needed as a platform for the exchange of opinion, which is especially important for young people, who have a unique opportunity to hear leading scholars speak, and even to form personal contacts with them (at Western anthropological congresses, such scholars are invited to give plenary lectures). Thirdly, central moral and ethical issues should be discussed: how to collect and publish data without impairing the human rights of the informants and putting undue pressure on them, how to respond to the challenge of chauvinism and racism, and how to deal with colleagues who give their support to chauvinism and racism.'*

**Vadim Turaev:** *'At congresses, the most topical and pressing problems should be discussed, of a kind that are interesting beyond the professional community of ethnographers. Congresses shouldn't just be academic events; they should be an event in the life of the entire country. The resolutions, public statements, and other documents put out should contribute to solving crucial problems in social development; they should be essential reading for political administrators, have practical effects. There is a huge range of such problems: the xenophobia that's spreading across Russia like a cancer; the state of the Russian ethnos itself; the fate of aboriginal "small peoples" in the current political and social conditions; ethnic minority issues; the situation in the North Caucasus; the place and role of ethnology (anthropology) in the formation of civil society in Russia, and so on.'*

As we can see, a large number of sensible and interesting suggestions has been made (and I've only been able to cite a few of them). Will such issues be discussed? One would dare to think that the debate has already started.

In conclusion, I would like, on behalf of the Editorial Board of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, to thank warmly everyone who responded to our call, and answered the questionnaire that we circulated.

*Translated by Catriona Kelly*