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'Imparting' Traditions: How the National Past was Written into the Narrative of the Soviet People

This article, based on materials from the archive of the State Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, presents an analysis of the representation in museums of those items of Soviet culture which are described in museum discourse as 'traditional'. More broadly speaking, one can attribute the problem of representation in museums to the self-reflexive nature of museum ethnography, which has in recent years turned its attention to what curators actually do, addressing the extent to which the systems, methods and forms of the representation of the peoples are appropriate to the task in hand, and the extent to which the institutional boundaries of the museum are permeable or impermeable. This view turns the museum itself into an object of anthropological interest, subjecting the methodological foundations of ethnography itself to criticism. Despite the fact that anthropology has always tried to go 'above and beyond boundaries' [Platt 2010], be that into the world of exotic 'others' or of the researcher's 'own' past, its disciplinary nature nonetheless introduces ontological limitations: indeed anthropologists themselves are an inextricable part of human culture, but an 'appropriate' presentation of the latter requires distancing, a view from the outside, a departure from the framework of that culture.

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There is still a need in the anthropology of the museum for distancing oneself from the object of study, but the potential for this is greatly reduced since the terms in which this opposition is to be established are not clear. How am I, an ethnographer who has worked in an ethnographic museum for more than 20 years, and who is consequently deeply ingrained into this structure, to subject it to the reflexivity required in normal research procedures? In fact, one of the ways of distancing oneself is to look at the museum as a set of defined social practices performed in broad historical, cultural and disciplinary contexts, the characterisation of which even in the broadest and most approximate terms demands a temporal distancing and retrospective viewpoint. At the foundation of that same retrospective viewpoint on history lies an intractable shortcoming related to the advantage, so to speak, of having the 'last word' in a discussion which makes a claim on truth. A fundamentally subjective approach to the research topic marks out the position of the anthropologist and, consequently, outlines the limits of his or her social / academic identity. To this end, the most rational position is to recognise the limited nature of one's assessments and interpretations through the framework of personal and academic experience, and to remember that it is impossible to ignore the impact of the researcher's identity on his or her method, as well as on the primary source material which has been collected and structured in a hierarchy.

Keeping these limitations in mind, I shall now turn to the analysis of those problems which museum ethnography faced in the second half of the twentieth century. A. S. Bezhkovich, a scholar at the State Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, neatly expressed the essence of these issues in relation to putting contemporary Soviet everyday life on display, 'What do you put on display, how do you put it on display and in what manner?' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1157. L. 1. Report by A. S. Bezhkovich, 'The Basic Principles of Creating Exhibitions in Ethnographic Museums', 1950].

I shall examine below how curators, when introducing an understanding of tradition into different interpretational models, tried to resolve a conflict of interests: on the one hand lies museum ethnography, which is above all concerned with demonstrating the ethnic diversity of cultures, but on the other hand lies the ideological demand that the museum demonstrate the cultural achievement of the Soviet nation as a single and unified whole. The main sources used for my discussion are materials from the Archive of the Russian Ethnographic Museum such as training aids, tour guides, exhibition plans and so on, which lay bare this ideological dilemma with particular sharpness.

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Almost all of the exhibitions of the mid-twentieth century which were built upon the juxtaposition of the pre-revolutionary and

contemporary lives of the peoples had, from the point of view of the curators, two obvious failings: the monotony and 'unethnographic quality' of the 'Soviet part' of the exhibitions dedicated to the various peoples of the USSR, and their over-use of so-called auxiliary materials such as photographs, models, drawings, quotations and so on. In accordance with the 1956 General Plan, contemporary material was removed from almost all the different national sections of the permanent collection, and brought together in rooms designed to demonstrate the general Soviet culture of the peoples of the USSR. In this vein, the temporary and permanent exhibitions 'The Art of the Peoples of the RFSFR' (1957), 'The Art of the Union Republics' (1960), 'The USSR: A Fraternal Union of Equal Peoples' (1964), 'Modern Ethnic Art of the USSR' (1966), 'The New and Traditional in Contemporary Ethnic Dwellings and Dress' (1972) became the museum's expression of the essence of the new community, the Soviet people.

'Propaganda through the language of exhibitions about the Soviet way of life' was declared as one of the main tasks of the displays, a task, one has to admit, which undermines the disciplinary foundations of museum ethnography. The main problem was how to make the display of Soviet culture consonant with ethnographic representation, the essence of which is in the articulation of the ethnic variety of culture which is manifest in the first instance in national traditions. The issue was that, as a rule, traditions, especially as far as beliefs and ritual practices were concerned, were regarded with a critical eye in the years between the 1950s and 1970s. There are abundant instances of this in the archival materials, for example, the 1979 'Tour Manual for "The Role of Religion in the Life of the Peoples of the USSR"': 'The hunter (an Evenk) was powerless, helpless before the elemental powers of nature which gave rise to the belief in supernatural beings'; 'The forgotten, unenlightened peasant mass saw embarking on their magical rituals as the most effective means of battling with the arduous conditions of life' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1944. L. 10, l. 14]. This no doubt explains why the 'spiritual culture' of the Soviet people should have been bottom of the list in the creation of exhibitions about contemporary times. 'Contemporary Rituals and Festivals of the Peoples of the USSR' was opened only in 1988.

At first glance this does not seem to fit the widespread conviction amongst Soviet ethnographers in the 1960s and 1970s that spiritual culture remained the final bastion of the distinguishing features of ethnicity [Bromlei 1977: 6–7]. Indeed, at this time the 'ethnos' was declared the main object of ethnographic study and, correspondingly, ethnography was in the first instance orientated around the study of the ethnically marked features of the culture and the way of life of the peoples. Since this way of life was subject to ever more stan-

dardisation and unification, ethnographers were generally expected to look for the distinguishing features of ethnicity in non-material culture [Alymov 2010]. But as long as ethnic peculiarities were associated with ethnic tradition, and tradition with antiquity (which at this time had extremely negative connotations), the study, and by extension the museum representation, of contemporary spiritual culture were constrained by the overall ideological framework, and by the stigmatisation of 'backwardness'. In this sense, the choosing of a museum as the place for the exhibition of contemporary material culture (which was more easily given to positive interpretation) was entirely natural, for all the outward claims that, in the Soviet period, everyday life 'had fundamentally changed [...] in the majority of cases distinguishing national features in terms of clothes and dwellings were little preserved' [Kryukova, Studenetskaya 1971: 68]. There was thus a hiatus between scholarly interpretation of 'the cultures of the peoples of the USSR' and their didactic representation to a mass audience.

One of the explanatory models which allowed for the inclusion of traditional elements of culture into exhibitions about contemporary times saw tradition as a mechanism or result of adapting to geographical conditions or as a reply to the 'summons' of nature. This interpretation allowed for the application of a wide spectrum of evaluative assessments. Within this framework, the preservation of traditions in Soviet culture, especially material ones, was explained by adaptation to natural conditions, i.e. the emphasis was put on the rational, practical basis of tradition.

The idea that tradition is rational was nothing new; it can be traced back as far as Montesquieu and Rousseau and is based upon the idea of the initial harmony and rationality of relations between Man and Nature [Gofman 2008: 337]. Somewhat later, this idea was emotively enriched by German Romanticism and influenced Slavophile ideology, and consequently became a part of contemporary patriotic rhetoric which, at first, was focused upon the Russian people. In the Soviet period, a rational explanation of tradition was frequently appealed to when describing the contemporary culture of the peoples of Siberia, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The obvious special nature of the natural conditions of these regions allowed the preservation of traditional elements in culture to be explained in a completely neutral manner: it was a result of the adaptation of the peoples to their harsh environment. Thus, in the 1963 plan for the exhibition 'Contemporary Ethnic Dwellings', the preservation of traditional forms of housing was explained through the influence of geographic surroundings and economic activity. Moreover, certain traditional skills were justified by being presented as exceptionally useful. For example, a recognition of the rational features of traditional dwellings amongst the peoples of Siberia occurred after unsuccessful attempts

to replace the Siberian choom with the canvas tent, the *balk* (a small mobile house), the 'Kalmyk wagon', and the polystyrene house ('Shaposhnikov's design'): 'The choom, which is found across Siberia, has an array of worthwhile qualities thanks to which it has maintained its significance in the lives of the Northern peoples to this day. First, the simplicity of the construction ensures its relatively easy and swift erection and dismantling; second, the conical shape allows the choom to withstand a wind of any strength; third, it is relatively light and easy to transit on sledges; fourth, the choom has good ventilation' [Faiko 1960: 144].

Similar arguments were used to justify the existence of traditional dress: 'The preservation [of traditional dress] in some places is justified by specific natural conditions [...] or by the preservation of traditional occupations [...] which demand a particular form of clothing developed over the course of a long period of time as a result of the people's experience' [Komplektovanie 1979: 8]; 'national dress prevails where it is linked to natural conditions, forms of economic enterprise and everyday life' ['Exhibition Plan for "Contemporary National Dress"', 1963. AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 2.]. If one considers concrete cases then one cannot help but notice the consistent vocabulary used in the description of traditional costume, which legitimises its existence amongst the contemporary population: clothing is characterised as 'convenient', 'unrestrictive, 'practical' and 'efficient'. Thus the preservation of old female clothing on the Estonian island of Kihnu is explained by the fact that 'homespun woollen skirts which are heavy and warm [...] are very useful and practical in the chilly climate of the island and even more so during journeys across the sea' [Kalits 1961: 27]; in Central Asia Uzbek cotton growers wear short light gowns because the 'southern heat is more easily endured in loose, baggy clothing [...] than in that which is tight fitting' [Studenetskaya 1963: 53]; for sheep herders 'clothing [...] should be warm, suitable, unrestrictive and adapted for long crossings and overnight stays in the open air. Such clothing was developed as a result of a semi-nomadic way of life and maintains its national form to this day' [Borozna 1963: 33]. E. G. Torchinskaya, a curator at the GME, describes the situation in Azerbaijan in a similar way, 'To this day the pleated skirt and jacket are preferred in almost all villages. These items today turn out to be very suited to work in the field and at home and they do not restrict movement. One can even see today that many women in the villages, even when there are chairs in the house, prefer to sit cross-legged on a carpet on the floor. Here one can see the strength of habit. While seated they bake bread in the *tandoor* and do the washing. In this case a wide skirt is especially suitable. Thus it is clear that the skirt and jacket in present conditions have preserved their usefulness and necessity and are even responsible for women's contemporary taste' [AREM. F. 2.

Op. 2. D. 341. L. 94–5]. The preservation of baggy, loose clothing amongst the peoples of Central Asia is explained by the everyday habits and the nature of their movements, in particular the custom of sitting on a carpet or pillow [Studenetskaya 1963: 53].

Nevertheless, the consistency of the rhetoric aimed at criticising traditions was so powerful that at meetings of the museum guide policy committees the guides had to be warned to avoid negative assessments of the traditional constants of material culture in their work with visitors. For example, in reference to the traditional dress still in use amongst the Siberian peoples, it was noted in the minutes of a meeting that 'it is not worth constantly underscoring the primitive nature of their dress since this was suitable for the given conditions and was adopted by Russian settlers as well' ['Minutes of the Meetings of the Policy Committee of the State Ethnographic Museum of the Peoples of the USSR for 1966'. AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1563]. Moreover, even the most glaring examples of 'negative vestiges of the past' — for example the *chador*, a symbol of the 'servile position' of women — enjoyed completely justified grounds for their display at exhibitions dedicated to Soviet culture after rational reconsideration. E. G. Torchinskaya, a curator, in describing her impressions from a trip to Azerbaijan in 1965 noted, 'I had the opportunity to observe women wearing the *chador* a number of times and their face remained uncovered. Many women in the town of Nakhichevan told me that the lightly-coloured *chador* made from cloth saved them from the burning sun ("just like you have parasols in Leningrad")' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 2. D. 341. L. 93].

This 'de-ideologising' of cultural features and ascribing them adaptive functions in reference to the surrounding environment provided a basis for the attempt to give 'ethnic variations' a geographical dimension. Here, one could describe the level of variation across Soviet culture in relatively neutral ideological terms. Indeed, ethnic symbols were recoded as geographic ones: in Siberia the *malitsa* and *unt* became widespread, as the *galife*, the 'Caucasian' shirt, boots and *papakha* in the North Caucasus, the silken women's Uzbek dress in Central Asia — 'attractive, light and good for the hot summer weather [...] Kyrgyz women, Kazakh women and Russian women living in Central Asia started to wear them in many areas' [Komplektovanie 1979: 8] — whilst the brightly-coloured Russian print headscarves decorated with flowers and garlands from Pavlovskii Posad entered into Central Asian female dress almost everywhere. In this respect, the role of the deportation of the peoples during the late Stalin era in generating a reinterpretation of the ethnic as the regional and vice versa — to which practically no attention has been given in the scholarly literature — is an extremely interesting feature that is obliquely evoked in the archival documentation. For example E. N. Studenetskaya, the Director of the Department for the Peoples

of the Caucasus, turned her attention in 1995 to how the Caucasian peoples deported to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan adopted many features of Central Asian dwelling interiors such as the low circular Kazakh table with four legs, the Uzbek *siuzani*, Kazakh and Kyrgyz carpets, *palasy* and patterned felt cloths, Central Asian *kumgany*, Uzbek trunks traced with multi-coloured tin and so on. Moreover, in certain situations, for example with the Turkic-speaking Karachays, this was aided by the proximity of their language to Kyrgyz and Kazakh which allowed them to communicate without needing the Russian language [AREM. F. 2. Op. 2. D. 340. L. 16, l. 18]. After the deportees returned to their homelands, the acquired traditions became 'theirs' and, it would seem, in some instances they even began to be seen as an ethnic marker of the peoples which had been deported.

However, if some 'traditional' customs could be seen as 'rational' (and hence communicable to other ethnic groups inhabiting the same environment), the locating of 'tradition' in a natural or geographical context also presented abundant space for negative assessments of its place in contemporary life. Looking at traditions from 'progressive' points of view could transform all the features that were recognised as qualities into deficiencies. Rationality turned into irrationality, expediency into superfluity, convenience into awkwardness, usefulness into harmfulness. For example, as noted in a tour text from the middle of the 1960s, 'despite its adaptiveness, the *choom* possessed an array of negative qualities (smoke from the hearth, unhygienic conditions etc.). All this led to illness in a significant part of the population' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1944. L. 11]. Central Asian sandals, wall fireplaces and open hearths were characterised as unhealthy [Vasilyev, Kislyakov 1963: 7], North Caucasian traditional female dress was unhygienic [Studenetskaya 1968: 172]; the battle with aprons and belts in the North Caucasus was motivated by 'unhealthiness and by the fact that in obtaining these expensive items women often denied themselves that which was more essential' [Studenetskaya 1968: 151–2]. Considerations regarding the unsuitableness of traditional dress also motivated the need for the Tuvans to change to an urban style of dress: 'Old, long-tailed gowns and fur-coats adapted for a nomadic way of life and riding horses are wholly unsuitable for walking about on foot [...] the youth of both sexes [...] does not wish to wear awkward and clumsy footwear and the restrictive long-tailed gown or fur-coat' [Potapov 1953: 94]. Museum ethnographers suggested the 'using of effective propaganda against outmoded and even at times dangerous items of clothing and headdresses which led to balding or trichoma' [Studenetskaya 1963: 59].

A more substantive consequence of interpreting tradition as a result of adaptation to the environment is that it begins to be seen as an

indicator of the independence of humans from their external surroundings. In other words, the abundance / preservation of traditions, particularly material ones, becomes evidence not of a rich cultural heritage, but rather of the opposite — of backwardness, a 'lack of culture' or, at the very least, a low level of cultural development, the subjugation of Man to Nature. Moreover, a kind of 'naturalisation' of culture takes place, i.e. it becomes in a certain sense an innate, geographically determined attribute. It is extremely telling that in exhibitions dedicated to the traditional culture of the peoples of, for instance, Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia and the North Caucasus, the emphasis was frequently put on demonstrating natural conditions (with the help of picturesque panel pictures and photo compilations). All this, of course, was entirely alien to the concept of Soviet culture obtaining at the time. The struggle with Nature and the 'final victory' over it became one of the ways of eradicating traditions. It was not at all by chance that in the museum narrative dealing with the modern life of the peoples of the USSR (as expressed in tours, exhibition guidelines, lectures, annotations etc.), the theme of the conquest and transformation of nature should have occurred so frequently. Even in a pre-war travel book, one can find the following boast: 'The working people of the USSR are studying and overcoming Nature and already do not have recourse to the various magic tricks which were widespread in the old Tsarist Russia and which priests did their best to preserve amongst the people even after the October Socialist Revolution' ['Travel Book for the Exhibition "The Black Earth Regions"'. AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 687. L. 55]. For his part, A. S. Bezhkovich recommended that one should, in constructing an exhibition, 'show, on the one hand, the independence of the Man of primitive culture from natural and geographic conditions, but, on the other hand, the overcoming of these conditions by the Man of modern, Soviet high culture. One could vividly demonstrate the process of overcoming natural conditions by Soviet Man by using the example of the planting of forest shelter belts in the parts of the country covered by steppe. In this respect one could demonstrate, for example, how helpless the peasant was under capitalism when dealing with drought with the help of all sorts of prayer services, primitive cults and rituals' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1157. L. 13–14]. These interpretive considerations had real analogies in the politics of the time, of course. One of the consequences of grandiose projects to 'improve' nature (developing the virgin lands, reclaiming land, digging irrigation canals) was a certain deterritorialisation of part of the population and, as a result, in certain circumstances the weakening of the traditional foundations of life. In addition special projects were even carried out to 'resettle people from the mountains and inconvenient places in the valleys (in the Transcaucasus and North Caucasus)' and transitional types of

settlements and fixed permanent settlements for the nomads of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, the North, the Altai and the Far East were created [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 5]. In this sense both the change in environment and the change of habitation served as a weapon in the fight against tradition.

The process of Sovietisation allowed museum ethnographers to reinterpret the concept of the border. At exhibitions, the borders of local regions and republics were presented as being completely permeable. Thus, in the tour text of the exhibition 'The USSR — A Fraternal Union of Equal Peoples' from 1956, the consolidating function of borders is underlined: 'On the map we also see other borders — the borders of our union and autonomous republics and regions. These boundaries are visible only on a map. Many of us in the course of our lives have crossed these borders many times without even noticing them [...] These borders do not force people apart but rather they bring together the peoples into one family' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1230. L. 8]. Articulating the permeability of ethnic boundaries *de facto* meant their deletion and recoding, which was essential to the formulation and representation of the concept of a 'Soviet people'. In order to show 'ethnic convergence on a federal scale' [Komplektovanie 1979: 19], and the collapse of a sense of a supraethnic community, various rhetorical strategies were employed. In accordance with one of these, the culture of the Soviet people was described as a culture without an ethnic character. Thus, above all typical types of dwelling, dress, factory-made appliances and 'new socialist tools and machines which ease the labour of a collective farm worker' were to be on display at exhibitions [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1157. L. 16]. The results of the modernisation of life, it was understood, are shared by all: the house on the collective farm, the technology of everyday life, the modern appliance and urban dress were all termed 'Soviet'. Traditional (ethnographic) items of culture were 'non-Soviet' and were to be displayed only in a limited way since, from the point of view of the museum management, 'there is a danger of exaggerating the role of national traditions in the life of the peoples today which is completely unacceptable in a museum exhibition intended for the general public. The museum is obliged to give the right impression about the extent to which traditional everyday culture is widespread and its relationship with modern culture' [Baranova 1981: 30]. Therefore, when putting contemporary everyday life on exhibition, it was planned to display 'all its features which have already become completely socialist and, in contrast, to limit the display of those features of everyday life which preserved not only the particularities but also the details of the old way of life' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1157. L. 5]. This meant that, for instance, activities had to become more prominent in the displays, and types of

dwelling, and to a certain extent clothing, which had not been so strongly subject to change, less prominent.

A significant part of the traditional elements of types of dwelling, appliances, dress and so on were outside the remit of Soviet culture, and hence potentially subversive. Besides, as already noted, the preservation of traditional features in culture was seen as a sign of the 'unculturedness' of a population: 'Rearing deer is still associated with a nomadic way of life which is negatively manifested in the development of culture and in living well. Even under the conditions of socialism the nomadic way of life retards the development of culture' [Potapov 1960: 26]. In contrast, one can see from the training manual for compiling contemporary ethnographic materials that 'using new materials and furniture along with traditional items to decorate reflects a general rise in prosperity and the heightening of the cultural level of a people' [Komplektovanie 1979: 19]. Electric lighting, heating, the everyday use of factory-made furniture, radios, milk separators, electric irons, and the simultaneous disappearance of traditional domestic tools from use all served as evidence of the high cultural attainment of the Soviet people [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 28; Maslova, Saburova 1960: 125]. The proliferation in the Northern Caucasus of women's underwear, shop-bought footwear, and stockings instead of traditional costume ought to have facilitated the development of a culture of personal hygiene [Studenetskaya 1968: 172]. In this way, improved housing and 'rationalised' clothing became visual symbols of the 'culturedness' of the peoples as well as at the same time symbolising their departure from traditional foundations of everyday life.

Some ethnographic objects which came to be representative of certain cultural traditions acquired persistently negative connotations in museum discourse, which to a significant degree perpetuated the progressivist, evolutionary perceptions that had emerged at the start of the twentieth century. Thus the *lapot* [woven bast sandal], which had become an ethnographic metonym for Russian village culture, became a symbol of backwardness and 'unculturedness'. Hence a resounding criticism in the museum comments book regarding the presence, in the 'Soviet' part of the exhibition, of 'unseemly' footwear besmirching the feet of a collective farmworker. In this respect, Sergei Alymov has cited comparable attitudes emerging in the criticism directed by the Academic Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party at the work of the journal 'Soviet Ethnography': 'Instead of trying to show new relationships amongst people in the context of socialist production, the journal publishes articles in which it is said that the collective farmworkers still go about in bast sandals which allegedly is evidence of the "persistence of national traditions" and the "preservation of a national element"' [Alymov 2010]. Even less

'fortunate' were the elements of dress which could serve as ethnocultural symbols — the *chachvan* [face veil] and *parandja* [outer veil] with the Uzbeks, *beryka* [burqa] with the Turkmens, the *chador* with the Azeris and the Adzhars, the *yashmak* among the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Turkmens, the *shimakshi* [embroidered headdress] among the Mari, *lasnik* [veiled headdress] with the Mordvins-Moksha and the *pulai* [embroidered girdle] with the Mordvins-Erzya. A tough battle was waged against the wearing of such garments, the nature of which even found its expression at the exhibition: there were, for example, photographs of the public burning of traditional headdresses before the village council [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 6].

In general, the preservation of so-called national dress was associated with representatives of low-prestige professions such as shepherds, hunters, fishermen, deer herders, with the older generation and with 'old-fashioned everyday religious items and prohibited items (the *parandzha, chachvan, chador, yashmak* et al.) which is proof of the need to fight against them' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. Ll. 1–15]. It is important to note here the tendency to 'temporalise' traditions, i.e. traditions are located on a timeline and are linked the past and to the obsolete.

Thus, there arises a dichotomy of values: tradition is pitted against modernisation where the latter acts as the active ingredient in the struggle with old traditions. By extension, electrification will aid the destruction of 'superstition, ignorance and filthiness' amongst the Siberian peoples [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1230. L. 20]; the engagement in new forms of agricultural labour by 'settled' herdsmen will force them to abandon their 'inconvenient' long-tailed gowns and fur-coats [Potapov 1953: 94]; the establishment of permanent settlements as a result of the post-war campaign to resettle the nomads of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan and to resettle the hunters and deer herders of Siberia in permanent dwellings will allow for the eradication of the 'cultural backwardness' of the nomads and for the inclusion into their everyday life of a more 'progressive' stove instead of an open or log fire which will have a positive impact upon their health [Vasilev, Kislyakov 1962: 7]. In 1932, L. I. Faiko recalled in 1960, it had been suggested by I. V. Vinogradov that the Siberian *choom* be replaced by the 'Kalmyk waggon' and towards the end of the 1950s Faiko himself constructed a *choom* on a base made out of an aluminium *tordokh*. These and other 'improvements' were introduced with varying degrees of success into the day-to-day experience of the population of Siberia since 'all of this was needed to develop deer husbandry' [Faiko 1960: 148]. This was accompanied by the inculcation of the deer herders with 'culturedness', seen as essential because 'they have to acquire many new basic skills and techniques for running their lives in a short

period of time. It was not that easy, for instance, to teach them how to feed the stove correctly, to maintain cleanliness and good order indoors, or to establish an appropriately cosy home' [Vdovin 1963: 45].

The changes which were demonstrated at exhibitions as evidence of modernisation or Sovietisation also concerned the way in which the interior of the home was decorated: 'In the central regions and in Siberia in the majority of cases the walls of both urban and village apartments are covered by wallpaper. In the South in Central Asia they are usually stencilled or whitewashed. House plants are very widespread in homes, even in those of former nomads — the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz — under the influence of the Russian and Ukrainian population; there are also curtains on the windows, paintings and posters, lots of books, tablecloths and carpets, radios, televisions and phonographs' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 30]. The display of traditional interior items in modern dwellings, especially those of herdsmen (bags, *chuvaly*, sacks, *tuskiizy*) presupposed that exclusively their aesthetic functions (i.e. as ornaments) would be emphasised [Morozova 1963: 46]. This approach to exhibiting was used even for traditional dress — either there was an emphasis on its utilitarian functions, as in the case of the representation of the *chador* as a kind of parasol (see above), or the folkloric associations of the item were highlighted, for example, its function at weddings. Changes in a person's material surroundings, according to the exhibition organisers, exercised an influence on his day-to-day behaviour. The guide to the exhibition 'Contemporary Dwellings of the Peoples' (1963) states that with the onset of new surroundings and tools amongst the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia 'their old customs have partially changed too (eating at a table, the use of spoons, younger members of the family sleeping on beds etc.)' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 29].

Yet the very obsession in this 'modernising' discourse with the need to struggle with traditions in turn evidenced the persistence of the latter, a feature that was obvious at this time to many observers in any case. Thus, the famous scholar of Siberia, L. P. Potapov, noted in 1960 that 'attention has already been paid to the fact that one can see amidst our collective farm peasantry the preservation of traditional forms of material culture (various household appliances, certain types of clothing, types of food, ways of preparing food etc.)' [Potapov 1960: 26]. In time, the preservation, and in certain cases (e.g. war, deportation) the actualisation of, traditional mores required a revision of the way they were evaluated too. Such an evaluation was also necessary given the persistent headaches over how to display the contemporary in a museum, and the concern that displaying only 'typical' components of Soviet culture undercut the orthodoxy of display hitherto institutionalised by museum tradition, with its

primary focus on ethnic culture. It was extremely important to represent the ethnographic side to displaying Soviet *realia*. The concept of 'progressive traditions' was helpful in this respect. Assessments of tradition were differentiated: there are good, rational ethnic traditions which one must support, and there are harmful, irrational 'relics of the past' and of 'superstition'. Besides, one must not only support the use of 'useful' traditional everyday items, but also develop them 'by means of their production and sale to the population' [Potapov 1960: 26]. In this respect Soviet culture acquired an ethnic dimension — this was a culture of progressive national traditions which were selected, supported and developed by state policies [Suny].

In order to include examples of the traditional way of life in an exhibition about modernity, it was necessary to 'simplify' these, since, as noted above, complexity and inconvenience were reckoned to be features of traditional dress, appliances and dwellings (an opinion that, contradictorily enough, co-existed with the view that tradition was the result of the adaptation of Man to his surrounding natural conditions). These carefully inculcated changes that were highlighted in the museum's discourse were primarily those affecting everyday life: they included the propaganda of urban forms of dress, the founding of groups and courses for sewing clothes, the organising of the campaign 'Coats for Mountain Women' in the North Caucasus as a means of overcoming the traditional ban on warm clothing for girls and young women [Studenetskaya 1968: 70], and the reforms of traditional dress amongst the Mordvins and Mari in favour of 'simplification and rationalisation' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 5]. In the notes accompanying the exhibition of modern forms of dress, rationalisation blends with aestheticisation: 'The introduction of the traditional into modern types of dress mixes aesthetic demands (the desire to preserve and in certain instances to enrich national character) with rational demands. There is a tendency to simplify complex and old-fashioned forms of dress and to add factory-made items to them. In this way a new type of dress is created' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1461. L. 16].

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Clearly, the concept of tradition was greatly problematized in Russian and Soviet ethnography by its reorientation around 'socialist everyday life', a shift in perception which, at the end of the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s was reflected in the contents of the journal 'Soviet Ethnography'. In museum discourse, the focus of ethnographers upon 'living traditions' was shaped by the question of their ethnographic representation. A limited inclusion of traditional components in an exhibition was essential, since ethnographic displays presuppose an outline of the ethnic differences which are

most strongly expressed in so-called traditional culture. Curators were forced to make a difficult choice: they had to decide which components of traditional material culture they could display and which they were forced to leave out. This choice was difficult, because preference in both study and display was traditionally given to exotic antiquities. Bezhkovich spoke freely of this: 'It is well known that ethnographers nurture a weakness for the primitive and for old items. This is understandable. This is a natural weakness because primitive things are the relics of everyday life' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1157. L. 54]. Even when creating classic ethnographic exhibitions, one had to act with caution, since all culture was subject to retrospective analysis, i.e. an analysis from the point of view of the Soviet present. Thus themes of shamanism were almost excluded, since 'anti-Soviet propaganda was used in carrying out the shamanistic ritual and an attempt was made to revive old family traditions which were used as a means of anti-Soviet activity' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 2. D. 343. L. 7]. The Russian exhibition suffered especially; above all the ritualistic sphere of culture was displayed in a severely reduced form, prompting visitors to write the following in the comments book: 'I was struck by the poverty of the Russian nation. Looking around the museum and comparing all the sections I saw that the Buryats, Chuchki and all the other peoples who populate the former "Russian Empire" were richer in their history and culture of production and possessed different modes of belief to the Russians; besides the hemp shirt the Russians evidently had nothing' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1638. L. 19. Comments Book, 1968–1969]; 'I was very surprised by the fact that the life of the Russian people was presented in such exclusively dark colours. The shirts which were presented as the dress of peasants or workers were evidently taken from a rubbish heap [...] those misshapen figures do not create an impression of the greatness of the Russian people [...] under the Tsars the Russians were a neat and hard-working people and even in conditions of great poverty they dressed tastefully, albeit cheaply. The section concerning those who used to be oppressed and the colonial peoples was significantly better presented and is of great interest' [AREM. F. 2. Op. 1. D. 1353. L. 15 ob. Comments Book, 1959–1960].

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the past was partially eroded in the name of the Soviet present and future (since the idea of breaking with past was key, and the handling of exhibitions tried to fulfil the demands of the official ideology that the differences amongst the cultures of the peoples of the USSR should be eroded), the museum — by virtue of its very nature — always remained a legitimate refuge for the traditional. Moreover, it was not merely a refuge, but a place where traditions were studied, (re)constructed, and represented. The existence of opposing interpretations of tradition does not necessarily evidence their fusion with one or another ideological paradigm or their subjugation to the resolution of contemporary populist issues.

Rather, it may point to the amorphous quality and the fluidity of boundaries in defining traditions, conditioned by the fact that the life experience of researchers includes exposure to these traditions too, and, consequently, the emotional register, the 'sweet sensation of nostalgia' [Gofman 2008: 334] becomes an important factor in their attitude to traditions, and to the study and interpretation of these.

Ideological pressure led museum ethnographers to rethink the conceptual framework of the category of tradition, but the museum never abandoned its interest in traditions, not merely 'taking stock' of all their variety, but also making traditions — through their visualisation upon museum walls — a part of the public sphere.

Abbreviations

AREM — Arkhiv Russkogo etnograficheskogo muzeya [Archive of the Russian Ethnographic Museum]

NLO — *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* [New Literary Observer]

SE — *Sovetskaya etnografiya* [Soviet Ethnography]

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