

Ethnic Issues and Border Delineations in Soviet Central Asia: The Role of Ethnography

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Abstract: During the history of ethnography, the cooperation between ethnographers and the political sphere was traditionally linked to the establishment and maintenance of rule and influence over peoples and smaller communities which were considered to be ‘backwards’. Experts contributed to the exertion of power over these communities by subtle means through scientific investigations into their lives, customs and other characteristics – however, as an exchange, these experts rarely gained much appreciation either from the side of their state employers or from other members of the academic community. The aim of my research was to analyse one of the extraordinary periods in the history of ethnography, when the discipline and the political authorities engaged in a wide cooperation in order to establish the foundations of a radically new type of state – the Soviet Union. This special period of time was the broad decade between 1917 and 1930, when ethnographers worked very closely with the emerging central government based on the Bolshevik party. Their significant influence was the most obvious in the field of ethnic issues and border delineations, especially in Soviet Central Asia, where they contributed to the establishment of Soviet rule and order in an area inhabited by multi-ethnic communities.

Keywords: ethnography, border delineations, nationality, Soviet Union, Central Asia

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Özet: Etnografya tarihi boyunca, etnograflar ile siyaset alanı arasındaki ilişkinin genellikle kanunun düzenlenmesi ve sürdürülmesi ile “geri kalmış” olarak değerlendirilen halklar ve küçük toplulukların üzerindeki etki ile bağlantı olduğu düşünülmüştür. Uzmanlar bu topluluklar üzerinde güç elde etme çabasına, üstü kapalı yollarla, söz konusu toplulukların hayatları, gelenekleri ve diğer özelliklerine yaptıkları bilimsel araştırmalar aracılığıyla katkıda bulunmuşlar; ancak karşılığında işverenlerinden de akademik çevreden de nadiren takdir görebilmişlerdir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, tamamıyla yeni bir tür devleti, Sovyetler Birliğini kurma amacıyla akademik ve siyasi yetkililerinin büyük bir iş birliği içinde bir araya geldiği etnografya tarihindeki en sıra dışı dönemlerden birini incelemektir. Bu özel dönem, 1917-1930 yılları arasında, etnografların Bolşevik partisi temelli yeni merkezî hükümet ile birlikte çalıştığı yaklaşık 10 yıllık süreye denk düşmektedir. Etnografların kayda değer etkisi en çok, çok etnikli toplulukların yaşadığı bir bölgede, Sovyet Orta Asya’sında, Sovyet hâkimiyetinin ve düzeninin kurulmasına yaptıkları katkılarla, etnik sorunlar ve sınır çizimi alanında görünür olmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Etnografya, sınır çizimi, milliyet. Sovyetler Birliği, Orta Asya

The ethical questions of ethnography induce constant debates within the community of ethnographers. The history of this discipline is in itself perceived to be contradictory in terms of the basic ethical norms, as the cooperation between ethnographers and the political sphere is traditionally linked to the establishment and maintenance of rule and influence over peoples and smaller communities which were considered to be ‘backwards’. Experts contributed to the exertion of power over these communities by subtle and indirect means through the investigation and description of their life, customs and other characteristics. However, as an exchange, these experts rarely gained much appreciation either from the side of their state employers or from other members of the academic community.

The aim of my research is to analyse one of the extraordinary periods in the history of ethnography, when the discipline and the political authorities engaged in a wide cooperation in order to establish the foundations of a radically new type of state – the Soviet Union. This special period of time was the broad decade between 1917 and 1930, when ethnographers worked very closely with the emerging central government

based on the Bolshevik party. Their significant influence was most obvious in the field of ethnic issues and border delineations, especially in Soviet Central Asia, where they contributed to the establishment of Soviet rule and order in an area inhabited by multi-ethnic communities, which were traditionally organised on the basis of tribes and kinship. In this situation, Soviet ethnographers played a much greater role in the engineering of the new societies, than the majority of their European or American counterparts could ever hope for, deciding over the fate of long-existing communities and drawing the borders of future states.

It is a common belief that the delineation of the inner borders of the Soviet Union took place according to the mere interests of the central government, following the principle of 'divide and rule', absolutely without a scientific ground.¹ Although the interests of the political sphere were certainly not delegated to the background, and the use of violent tools was rather frequent, the delineations in fact were preceded by a widespread theoretical and methodological debate, with the significant involvement of ethnographers.² As imperialism was widely condemned in Marxism-Leninism, using incentives to raise the willingness of nations and nationalities to remain within the boundaries of the Soviet Union was an important element during this debate.³

The relationship between the practical implementation and the theoretical guidelines conceptualised by ethnographers is also a debated issue. A certain group of experts believe that the ethnographers of the Soviet Union followed the ethical and professional criteria during their activities in the examined period of time. The political distortions, serving the principle of 'divide and rule,' appeared only in the phase of practical implementation. Other experts argue that ethnographers must have been aware of the fact that their work could only be realised in a distorted and compromised form, as the research processes and their outcomes themselves were already manipulated by the political sphere. The two

¹ Refuted by Hirsch, F.: *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2005. 2-3.

² Pipes, R.: *Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1968. 45.

³ Pipes, 45.

groups, however, mostly agree that the central government based applied the outcomes of ethnographic research as long as they were not contradicting with its political aims, and they supported the establishment, the maintaining and the legitimation of cultural methods exerting power.⁴

This research assumes that ethnographers did their best during the examined time to follow the ethical and professional criteria of the field, however, the cooperation with the central government indeed influenced their research, both from the aspect of the funder and the executive. The focus of this research is directed towards the analysis of the activities of ethnographers, their cooperation with the central government and towards the application of the cultural methods of exerting power.

The nationality question in the Russian Empire

The question of nationalities and smaller ethnic communities was already present in the Tsarist Russian Empire. The 1897 census registered that this question was a substantial challenge for the Empire of 125 million people. The ratio of Russians namely did not reach the 50% of the population that time, while small nationalities which in themselves did not count for even 1%, together made up 13% of the population.⁵ The difficulties stemming from this situation were inherited by the Provisional Government and then the Leninist Bolshevik party – which had considerably weaker tools to deal with the situation.

During the turbulent times following the first WW and the revolution, several nationalities established their own governments and claimed autonomy or total independence, especially those near the borders like Central Asia. The nationality question proved to be a complex challenge for the internationalist and antiimperialist Bolshevik ideology, especially in the light of the practical questions of losing the borderlands, which would have meant a serious loss for the forming Soviet economy. To solve these contradictions, Lenin's theoretical guidelines were applied

⁴ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 5-7.

⁵ Heleniak, T.: Migration of the Russian Diaspora after the Breakup of the Soviet Union. *Journal of International Affairs* 57, 2004. 100.; Pipes, R.: *Formation of the Soviet Union. Communism and Nationalism 1917-1923*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1968. 2.

to the situation. According to him, self-determination is unalienable from the peoples of the former Russian Empire,⁶ therefore the new central government has to legally guarantee them the right of separation. Nevertheless, Lenin treated nationalism as a phenomenon which is unambiguously linked to capitalism, hence he argued that 'insofar as the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation stands for its own bourgeois nationalism, we stand against'⁷ – which practically meant taking back the promised rights. Lenin assumed that the theoretical right of separation was eligible for winning the support and the loyalty of the nationalities for the Soviet system, and that being part of the Soviet Union carried so many benefits that actual separatist initiatives would not become manifest.⁸ The Leninist conceptualisation of nationalism, furthermore, made it possible to understand the nationality question according to the changing interests of the central government.

According to the Marxist ideology, historical periods follow each other in a definite order, based on the changes of the modes of production. Lenin claimed that the peoples of the newly established Soviet Union stood on different levels in this model of evolution. In order to reach communism and internationalism, it is necessary for all these peoples to go through the successive stages. Departing from this idea, the areas which were considered as still premodern and feudal needed to develop first into the period characterised by capitalism and nationalism. As soon as the premodern and feudal communities reach this stage, they could further evolve towards the new, socialist type of nation.⁹ For Soviet Central Asia, this ideology necessitated the construction of nations on the basis of existing communities connected by tribal and kinship ties. The cooperation of the central government and ethnographers manifested itself in this civilizational mission, in which territorial nations and states were intertwinedly developed.

⁶ Lenin, V. I.: *A nemzetek önrendelkezési jogáról*. In: Tóthné Szendrényi Jolán (ed.): *Vlagyimir Iljics Lenin összes művei*, 25. kötet. Kossuth, Budapest, 1978. 270.

⁷ Lenin: *A nemzetek...*, 273.

⁸ Lenin: *A nemzetek...*, 273.

⁹ Pipes, 42.

The cooperation between ethnographers and the central government

On one side of the cooperation, there was the central government based on the Bolshevik party, which aimed to establish the foundations of a radically new type of state. Its ideology was dominated by teleological thoughts about the political-economic and social development of mankind, which initiated the aim to 'civilise' the so-called 'backward' peoples of the former Russian Empire. However, it did not dispose over the necessary means, as it did not have an exact knowledge about these communities and their level of development. On the other side of the cooperation, there were those experts who gained their qualifications in the former Russian Empire, and several of whom visited the West. They disposed over a significant amount of knowledge and academic skills – which were indispensable for the realisation of the aims of the central government. Both sides believed in the power of knowledge and development, and intended to find eligibly working patterns and best practices for these in the history of the West – which, though, they intended to apply for their own special circumstances. The idea of a state-led teleological evolution united the two sides in the cooperation, which at the end determined the fate of the peoples and established new states in Soviet Central Asia.¹⁰

Ethnographers provided an ample contribution to this through their research projects, including data collection, map edition, tables, statistics and genealogies. They also coined the definitions and concepts on which their research itself was based. They organised the first All-Union Census of the Soviet Union in 1926, which did not only aim at the description of the existing communities and nationalities, but unambiguously aided the political will to construct them as solidly delimited social entities with recognisable exclusive characteristics. Ethnographers also contributed to the formation of national consciousness through the organisation of cultural programs such as exhibitions and performances, and they also used the means of education to reach this aim.

The predecessor of the organisations of Soviet ethnographers was the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (*Imperatorskoje Russkoje*

¹⁰ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 59-61.

geografičeskoje obščestvo), the IRGO, which played a great role in the qualification of experts emerging in the beginning of Soviet times.¹¹ These experts established two important associations, the Commission for the Study of the Natural Productive Forces of Russia (*Komissija po izučeniju jestestvennyh proizvoditel'nyh sil Rossiji*), KEPS in 1915 and the Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of the Borderlands of Russia, (*Komissija po izučeniju plemennogo sostava naselenija Rossiji i sopedelnyh stran*), KIPS in 1917. The KEPS contributed to the efficient utilization of the new state's natural and human resources, while the KIPS supplied the central government with maps and detailed information on the population of the borderlands, such as Central Asia.

Ethnographers were present at the peace negotiations which closed WWI, supported the Bolshevik side in the civil war and catalysed the spread of revolution in the whole area of the Soviet Union.¹² Later, they contributed to the work of Narkomnats, the People's Commissariat of Nationalities, and Gosplan, the State Planning Committee, through which they again had a great influence on the delineation of the inner borders and on the administrative reforms.¹³ The Central Ethnographic Office of Narkomnats, among others, served the propaganda machine of the Soviet Union among the multi-ethnic population, also fostering modern agricultural techniques, healthcare and education in the underdeveloped areas. The Goskolonit Committee, that is, the Soviet State Colonization Research Institute of Gosplan, on the other hand, dealt with the theoretical foundations of Soviet colonisation, and carried out research on geography and demography.¹⁴

Ethnography and cultural methods of exerting power

During the Soviet nation-building processes, the use of ethnographic knowledge first appeared in the categorisation of ethnic groups, where the

¹¹ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 22.

¹² Hirsch: *Empire...*, 47, 59-61.

¹³ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 65.

¹⁴ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 85-88.

interests of the political sphere were clearly present as well. Experts defined the formerly existing but contradictingly and interchangeably used notions of *natsiya*, *narod*, *narodnost*’ and *natsional’nost*’ in cooperation with the central government.

The concept of *natsiya*, ‘nation’ was defined by Stalin himself in his book *Marxism and the national question*. According to him, ‘[a] nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.’¹⁵ In this book, the main principles of the Soviet Union concerning nations were already reflected. Stalin refused the commonly shared idea that only nation-states are able to maintain their stability, and he also refused that nations would have their foundations in mere tribal or ethnic belongings. He highlighted that the big European nations were also formed from several different groups and that the peoples comprised by huge empires cannot be considered as unified nations.¹⁶

The concept of *narod*, ‘people’, in contrast, referred to a group of people living in a certain territory. Both *narodnost*’ and *natsional’nost*’ could be translated into English as nationalities, and their conceptual delineation took a long time also in the Soviet Union. As a consequence, *narodnost*’ was rather understood as a premodern nation-like community, defined by the loose ties of language, culture and kinship. *Natsional’nost*’ was defined for the aims of the 1920 and 1923 partial censuses as ‘a population group united into a nationally self-conscious community.’¹⁷ In this period, ethnographers still applied *narodnost*’ and *natsional’nost*’ interchangeably in several cases. For the 1926 First All-Union Census of the Soviet Union, though, it was necessary to clear the specific content of the notions. According to KIPS ethnographers, it made no sense to talk about *natsional’nost*’ in the case of those societies where national self-

¹⁵ Sztálin, J. V.: *Marxizmus és nemzeti kérdés*. Szikra, Budapest, 1948. 11. I. V. Stalin, *Marxizmus i natsional’nyi vopros* (Moscow, 1950), 51.

¹⁶ Sztálin, 51.

¹⁷ Hirsch, F.: The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses. *Slavic Review* 56, 1997. 260.

consciousness had still not developed. In this context, the use of the two notions as expressing different levels of development became more and more widespread, the concept of *narodnost* referring to groups without national self-consciousness. In certain fields of research, the concept of *plemya*, 'tribe' had also prevailed.¹⁸

Although this debate might seem to be a specific academic dispute on the theoretical use of concepts, it significantly influenced the outcomes of the 1926 All-Union Census. The choice between the categories of *narodnost* and *natsional'nost* in several cases meant a political standpoint. Even if the different peoples were not aware of the long-term effects of the census on their future, many of them tried to persuade the representatives of the central government to be registered as *natsional'nost*. Ukraine is a good example for this behaviour, as the often used 'little Russian' label had such strong negative connotations that the elites tried everything possible to avoid being categorized as a sub-group of the Russian *natsional'nost*.¹⁹ After long debates, the First All-Union Census in 1926 used the notion of *narodnost* as the main frame for ethnic/national belonging. During the census, ethnographers aimed to describe the prevailing ethnic/national relations as properly as it was possible, not only for the sake of academic research, but also for providing practical knowledge for the central government. The collected data contributed to the ability of the government to exert power over the peoples of the Soviet Union. The influence of political interests is clearly visible in the change introduced during the All-Union Census of 1936, where the notion of *narodnost* was replaced by that of *natsional'nost* as the main frame of ethnic/national belonging. In this case, the aim was not to gain knowledge about the peoples of the Soviet Union anymore, but rather to comprise them into more easily controllable units.

Through such processes, the coining of definitions by members of academia determined the future of the peoples of the Soviet Union. In line with Stalin's 1913 approach, there were no manifest initiatives to turn the Soviet Union into a Russian nation-state. Instead of this, the artificial

¹⁸ Hirsch: The Soviet..., 260-261.

¹⁹ Hirsch: The Soviet..., 261.

creation of nations and nationalities from already existing peoples came to the fore. In the process of nation-building, beside planning and carrying out censuses, ethnographers were also responsible for drawing the inner borders of the Soviet Union. For this delineation, it was necessary to use the outcomes of censuses in practice, and comprise ethnic and national groups into a state-organized framework. It was especially difficult in the case of the peoples living in the Southern borderlands of the Soviet Union, among which tribal relations played an important role. Ethnic and territorial delineations were carried out intertwinedly, but this did not always mean the concurrence of ethnic and territorial borders. To guarantee authority over territorial units, ethnic divisions were often used as a tool.

The new borders divided the territories of the peoples of the Soviet Union into four categories, each having a different level of autonomy and a different institutional organization. On the top of the hierarchy stood the Soviet Socialist Republics, each bearing the name of a nation. The SSRs had a certain extent of sovereignty, defined in the Constitution of the Soviet Union, including the right of separation, maintaining independent foreign relations, and exerting exclusive administrative power over their territories. Although these principles were treated as empty phrases in several time periods in the history of the Soviet Union, they played a significant role in state- and nation-building. The nations and nationalities which were institutionalized in territorial frameworks got the opportunity to preserve or establish their own national culture, with the help of the national elites and the new intelligentsia, supported by the Soviet Union.²⁰ This latter support, though, also meant a strict control over the elites and the intelligentsia – the central government even tried to transform these groups from time to time. Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics, autonomous *oblasts* and autonomous *okrugs* had a similar importance for several peoples of the Soviet Union, however, with their weaker level of

²⁰ Brubaker, R. [1994]: Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account. *Theory and Society* 23, 1994. 52-53.

institutionalization, they were less efficient frameworks for representing their interests.

Beside territorial national identities, personal ethnic identities also prevailed and were institutionalized in the Soviet Union. Regardless of the place of residence, each citizen of the Soviet Union had an official ethnic belonging, which did not only have its importance during censuses, but also became part of the individual's political identity. It also appeared in state administrative processes and was used in each personal documents as a tool for identification.²¹ The duality of territorial and ethnic identities contributed to the stabilization of the Soviet rule. On the one hand, this dual system was a source of fulfilling the claim for providing national rights according to the Leninist ideology, which was expected to serve the maintaining of the unity of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the differences between territorial and ethnic borders divided the interests of the peoples of the Soviet Union. During the delineation process, a so-called titular nation was distinct in the majority of the established territorial units, marked also by the naming of the unit. Beside the titular nation, a significant part of the population was comprised of other nationalities, and in several cases, these nationalities were present as titular nations in other territorial units. Thus, certain groups of ethnic nations could not be a part of their titular territories, while the large number of minorities had a balancing effect on the power of titular nations. Although these divisions indeed contributed to the stability of the Soviet power, the differences between ethnic and territorial borders resulted in contradictory effects in several cases, and led to the rivalry of titular nations. The minority groups had their own individual ethnic and cultural identities, nevertheless, they could not establish institutions to represent these and the related interests, as both the central power and the titular territorial administration objected such initiatives. This phenomenon was also a source of severe tensions.²²

²¹ Brubaker, 53.

²² Martin, T.: Borders and Ethnic Conflict: The Soviet Experiment in Ethno-Territorial Proliferation. *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47, 1999. 538-539.

To summarize, the establishment process of the Soviet Union resulted in a political-administrative-cultural system in which territorial-political and ethnic-individual national identities lived side by side, but independently from each other.²³ Although the concept of the 'unified Soviet nation' existed in principle, its realization was only a long-term goal in the examined period of time. At the same time, initiatives to create a Russian nation-state were not present at all, not even in principle, even if the Russian nation was unquestionably dominant in the governance of the Soviet Union, and the official language of the common institutions of the Union was Russian as well.²⁴ The territorial nations of the Soviet Union in fact developed as institutions, defining the administrative units of the federation. Belonging to a territorial unit meant a legitimate framework for its residents to represent their interests and identity. However, at the same time, the system guaranteed priority to All-Soviet interests, enhanced the stability of the federation and neutralized national or religious opposition forces. Supporting local elites in the frames of the so-called *korenizatsiya* process contributed to these aims. In creating new elites, loyalty was the most important factor, which mostly became manifest in the proper use of the institutionalized processes related to the new territorial structures.²⁵

The Soviet Union accepted and institutionalized the presence of nations and nationalities, contributed to the establishment of their geographical and administrative frameworks, and with the help of the new elites, established a tight connection between the central government and the new territorial units. Determining the form of these new territorial units, though, led to the cease of the elements of historical community and ethnic belonging from the notion of territorial nations. Therefore, the well-known Stalinist principle of 'national in form, socialist in content' was applied in these cases as well. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Soviet Union, with the significant help of ethnographers, was institutionalized as a multi-ethnic state and supported the development of

²³ Brubaker, 47.

²⁴ Brubaker, 51.

²⁵ Brubaker, 58.

national self-consciousness among its minorities – but mostly for the sake of the cultural exertion of power.

The end of cooperation between ethnographers and the central government

All in all, it is visible that this was an era when ethnographers appeared in close cooperation with the central government in all questions concerning ethnic issues and border delineations. They were employed as experts, their researches enjoyed a significant support from the state, and the outcomes were applied in practice as well. Their work led to a double assimilation process in Soviet Central Asia, during which the multi-ethnic population was organised into a more and more explicit national framework, while these modern kinds of nations and nationalities gradually became adapted to the system of the Soviet state and society.²⁶

After the 1926 census, the list of the nationalities of the Soviet Union contained 172 entries. The data of the census was used in several processes, not only during the delineation of the inner borders of the Soviet Union, but also in land distribution, in the establishment of schools and in other fields of economy and culture. Nevertheless, several communities did not reach the threshold to be mentioned on the list. As a consequence, these communities did not have a chance to appear in the documents, rules and regulations of the state authorities as meaningful separate entities with specific characteristics and entitled rights, which, most unfortunately, gradually led to the elimination of them.²⁷ The enforced measures intended to apply the centrally defined ‘common good’ met with resistance, especially when they concerned identities, and the implementation required violent means in several cases. The central government suppressed separatist and nationalist movements, the ‘civilisational mission’ influenced traditional culture and religion in a significant extent, and the imprisonment or execution of former leaders was common.

²⁶ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 14.

²⁷ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 137-139.

This fact is already a sign of that although the examined cooperation between ethnographers and the central government was almost unique, in itself it did not mean the realisation of Lenin's dream about an ideal union and the voluntary assimilation of peoples. On the other hand, even if the intentions of ethnographers fulfilled the ethical and professional criteria of academia, the practical implementation went against the most basic rules of ethics and sciences. The cooperation between ethnographers and the central government was also fragile in other areas, especially as the long-term aims and substantial values of the two parties were extremely difficult to reconcile.

In the end of the 1920s, the most important part of ethnographic mapping and the data collection about the peoples of the Soviet Union was already conducted. Stalin decided that the 'civilizational mission' in Central Asia had to enter in its next stage: to engineer new, socialist kinds of nations.²⁸ The inevitable consequence of this initiative was the disappearance of whole languages, cultures, tribes and nationalities, which did not fit in the idealistic concepts of Stalin. Under these circumstances, scientific knowledge and ethnography was not necessary or useful anymore – the establishment of the new nations did not lie on academic foundations anymore.

Ethnographers found themselves in a difficult situation, as the case of the next, 1937 All-Union Census shows. The already compiled polls contained a list of nationalities comprised of 109 entries. In the meantime, towards the end of 1936, Stalin declared that 'as is well-known there are about sixty nations, national groups, and *narodnosti* in the Soviet Union.'²⁹ The polls were not modified accordingly, and the outcomes of the conducted census were far from what the central government expected, therefore Stalin forbade the publication of the census. The Census Bureau was accused with sabotage, several members were arrested, some of whom were even executed. The new census was scheduled to 1939. Those ethnographers, who were able to maintain their positions, had learnt from the past failures, and did everything to comply with Stalin's expectations.

²⁸ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 283-284.

²⁹ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 283.

After long methodological debates, calculations and compiled rankings, in 1939 they accepted the new list of the Soviet Union's nationalities – which contained 62 nations, national groups, and *narodnosti*.³⁰

After 1937, the period in which the Soviet authorities decided to consolidate their rule and power with the help of ethnography was ended, the cooperation ceased to exist. Moreover, those experts who decided to publish pieces of research which did not meet the requirements of the central government had to face losing their academic positions – and in some cases, even their lives.

However, the decade-long work of ethnographers did not simply cease. The political, economic and social evolution which was conducted by them could not be erased, not to mention the inner borders of the Soviet Union. The contribution of ethnographers defined many areas of life for the population of Central Asia. The remaining nations and nationalities turned into meaningful administrative units, establishing a basic framework for representing interests and identities. The constitution containing the right to maintain independent foreign relations, the creation of new elites and a new intelligentsia also contributed to the formation of the nations of the Soviet Union and later to their abilities to act as independent states.

In the meantime, the building of the Soviet empire also continued. The controversial process of Sovietisation, the nominal national and nationality rights, the tensions between the concepts of territorial and ethnic nationhood, and the forceful military and economic strive for being a global power had their mark on the relationship between the central government and the federal units of the Soviet Union. At the end of the day, the 'civilisational mission' ironically established a structure where the once civilisatory power and its constructed system themselves became the obstacles of the development of nations and nationalities. The process of state-building, once forwarded by ethnographers, transgressed the borders of Soviet planning, and peaked in the establishment of new states.

After 1991, the Southern borderlands of the Soviet Union became independent among the borders which were delineated in the 1920s and

³⁰ Hirsch: *Empire...*, 302.

the 1930s. The foundation for the newly independent Central Asian Republics was settled by the work of ethnographers and their cooperation with the central government. However, ethnic divisions were also inherited by the new republics, resulting in significant tensions, which are becoming more and more obvious with the development of nation-states.

To summarize, the outcomes of the cooperation between ethnography and the central government based on the Bolshevik party outlived the Soviet Union and are of core importance in Central Asia nowadays as well. The history of the examined period illustrates well, how influential the cooperation of the academic and the political sphere can be, how it could determine the history of certain regions and how it can contribute to the formation and development of national identities.