

## The Soviet *Etnos* Theory and its Parallel in South Africa under Apartheid

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POUR CITER CET ARTICLE

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- **A historical note:** This article appears as it was written in English in the 1980s while I was on the staff of the University of Cape Town. Only minor corrections and the use of the past tense when referring to the Soviet Union and to South Africa under Apartheid have been made. First I offered the article for publication in *Current Anthropology*. Adam Kuper, then editor, considered it too controversial and decided not to publish it. Subsequently Jean-Loup Amselle accepted it for publication in *Cahiers d'études africaines* and the French translation appeared under the title "Union soviétique – Afrique du Sud: les 'théories' de l'etnos" in 1988, No. 110, vol. XXVIII-2, pp. 157–176. In 2006, a Russian translation, "Sovietskaya, teoriya' etnosa i eio iuzhnoafrikanskaia parallel", appeared in *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* 3: 72-85. On 23 April 2022, Petr Skalník wrote to Adam Kuper and Tamara Dragadze: "BEROSE encyclopaedia showed interest in publishing my text from the mid-1980s which I offered to CA during Adam's editorship and if I remember well, Adam declined to proceed with publication because he was advised against publishing by Tamara who argued that publication would negatively influence Bromley's position. The text was then accepted by *Cahiers d'études africaines*, translated into French by the editor, Jean-Loup Amselle (see No. 110, 1988). Not many people read French these days and so the article was not able to receive audience which to my mind it deserved. As BEROSE would like to provide the publication of the original English text with a historical note, I would greatly appreciate your comments". The same day, Adam Kuper answered: "I certainly agree that this should be published". And Tamara Dragadze

wrote: “Of course we live in completely different times, and it would be fine to publish whatever you want. At the time, since Bromley himself had protected so many of his Soviet colleagues from persecution, it was important to protect him at that time. I am very glad that you both understood what was at stake. Now, although Russia is a living hell, the publication will harm nobody personally. Good luck Peter”.

## Introduction

“Without a common identity, individuals cannot form a collective agent ... The identity of a group makes political action possible ... Each one in the collective has some myth about what the collective is and how it appears to certain others. This is the identity of the collective.”  
(Peter Du Preez 1980)

The proliferation of mutually exclusive ethnic identities ranks among the most conspicuous phenomena of the contemporary world. [1] Some writers on what has become popularised under the name of ethnicity try to make us believe that it is merely a new wave of emancipation of underprivileged groups, and thus an inevitable, objective and progressive development (cf. Smith 1981). Others attribute it to the fundamental social transformations spreading from the centres of Western industrial capitalism all over the world. Ethnic identity can be a reaction to traumatic experiences with westernisation; however, it can also be the result of orchestration by powerful, totalitarian regimes which exploit ethnic oppositions and mergers to achieve their own minority goals. [2]

Ethnicity has been discussed extensively, and not only in anthropological literature, where it has taken the place of the previous preoccupations with the question of ‘tribe’ (Cohen 1978: 384). References to ethnicity and ethnic factors also pervade disciplines such as psychology, political science, historiography, education, and social work, amongst others. Terms like ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ are used and abused in speeches by politicians and have become household words in many countries. At the same time there is little, if any, consensus about what the words ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ mean and whether there are objective human groups which can exclusively be labelled as ethnic.

The vast literature on ethnicity and ethnic identity offers a host of definitions and it is impossible to analyse even a limited number of them here. It is sufficient to say that ‘ethnic’, as such, is not satisfactorily explained by any of these definitions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the sociologist Max Weber used the term ‘ethnic group’ (Weber 1968: 389), which he defined as:

“those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation and migrations.”

When Weber (*ibid.*, p. 390) refers to a “powerful sense of ethnic identity” he sees it as being

determined by “shared political memories”, “persistent ties with the old cult”, “the strengthening of kinship or other groups”, or “other persistent relationships”. Weber (ibid., p.389) concludes characteristically:

“Ethnic membership (*Gemeinsamkeit*) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.”

In the same vein, in recent literature, the usage of the terms ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ is considered to be strongly informed by politics. For example, Abner Cohen (1974:xi) writes that ‘Ethnicity is essentially a form of interaction between culture groups operating within common social contexts’. He is thinking particularly of cities in modern nation states which are comprised of various interacting ethnic groups (minorities). My Cape Town colleague Emile Boonzaier (pers. comm.) asserts straightforwardly that “Ethnicity is the process whereby people utilise cultural symbols for political ends”.

It seems to me that whatever the definition of ‘cultural’ or for that matter ‘traditional’, anything which does not fit into the category of modern economic political or ideological phenomena is all too easily labelled ‘ethnic’ or ‘ethnicity’. Nevertheless the main question remains of whether one can, following Weber, view ‘ethnicity’ as a non-group ‘presumed identity’ within political, economic or ideological processes, or whether some specific groups endowed primarily with ethnic characteristics and studied as specific acting entities can be objectively identified. While American, British and other Western literature deals with ethnicity as a minor, though important, ingredient in social processes, in the latter part of the 20th century in South Africa and the Soviet Union (including their satellites), ethnicity was believed to be vested in groups which were given a seemingly learned name, *ethnos*, and were seen as objective phenomena acting in a real world. Let us now take a look at this joint world of *ethnos*, a peculiar chapter in the history of anthropology.

## *Ethnos* and its Etiology

In this paper I examine the ways that specific concepts designed to denote group carriers of what is termed ‘ethnicity’ emerge as responses to changing political and ideological demand. I try to show that such concepts like *ethnos* play a prime role in state ideologies, whether aiming for unification or separation. They facilitate more efficient rule with less threat for the state-cum-party system. More specifically, the paper is about the seemingly paradoxical and almost sacrilegious parallel between Soviet and South African scholarship and state. My point of view in this paper reflects both my intimate knowledge of Soviet *etnografiia* (I received my MA degree from Leningrad State University in 1967) and an intensive experience of working within the paradigms of western social and cultural anthropology (e.g. my teaching at University of Leiden, 1977-1981). Since 1982, my acquaintance with South African *volkekunde* has been facilitated by my ability to read Afrikaans and by direct contacts with

some *volkekundiges*.

Unlike the rest of the world, both South African *volkekundiges* (sing. *volkekundige*) and Soviet *etnografy* (sing. *etnograf*) have, in the decades from 1960s up to 1980s, worked within one and the same paradigm – that of *etnos*. (Incidentally, both the Russian and Afrikaans spelling of this word is identical; but note – plural Russian *etnosy* and Afrikaans *etnieë*. Is this a coincidental parallel or is it more significant? I reject the possibility of coincidence by showing that in both a historical and instrumental sense within the respective social context, the two disciplines, *volkekunde* and *etnografiia* have logically arrived at the same basic concept. That does not, however, mean that the two disciplines collaborated or even were fully aware of the parallel. Officially, Soviet *etnografiia* showed no awareness of the usage of *etnos* in South Africa (for a monothematic treatment of Soviet *etnos* theory, see Skalník 1986a, 1986b).

In South Africa, another of my Cape Town colleagues, John Sharp, has called international attention to the existence of the parallel (1980a) as well as showing the idiosyncrasy of the ideational world of anthropology of the British genre, which is cultivated at English-speaking liberal universities (Sharp 1980b). Sharp has written from the perspective of a young, left-wing South African social anthropologist (he took his PhD at the University of Cambridge in 1978) who questions the possibility of studying ethnicity in South Africa and attacks 'the South African obsession with primordial ethnicity' (Sharp 1980c:14), both in *volkekunde* and in social anthropology. He suggests that at best one can study what he calls 'ethnic fragments of the people who are dominated' (1980b:35). His first paper (Sharp 1980a) provoked reactions from two Potchefstroom University *volkekundiges* (Johan Booyens and Jansen van Rensburg 1980) and Tamara Dragadze, a British specialist on Soviet *etnografiia*.

Dragadze (1980b) rebuked Sharp for even suggesting the parallel. Dragadze's motivation for rejecting the parallel is to be sought in her fear that the position of the main protagonist of the *etnos* 'theory', Professor Y. Bromley, an *etnograf* trained as a historian, would be endangered. The revelation that pronounced enemies like South Africa and the Soviet Union both cherish the same, or very similar, concepts and 'theories' for explaining social processes in their own countries and elsewhere in the world was evidently very discomfoting. Dragadze apparently views Bromley's *etnos* as a welcome innovation, useful for some kind of intellectual exchange between Soviet *etnografiia* and Western anthropology (cf. Dragadze 1980b; Dragadze 1980a; Dunn 1974; and Zil'berman 1975). This is why she suggested that pointing out the parallel between South Africa and Soviet Union *etnos* 'theories' might one day, in the climate of the 'demise of detente', lead to 'witchhunts against anthropology colleagues in the Soviet Union' (Dragadze 1980b: 4). I do not share Dragadze's worry for it is my sincere conviction that true scholarship should not stop short of discussing matters which are perhaps shocking but might lead towards the revelation of truth. I am going to show that the political establishment pursues goals far beyond academic *etnos* research strategy. At any rate, Bromley's services were rewarded by the conferment upon him of the title of 'Academician of the USSR Academic of Sciences' which was the highest possible award

in the academic world of the Soviet Union, and had never been achieved by any *etnograf* before him. In 1966 he became the director of the large Miklukho-Maclay Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and started to attend all important international meetings of anthropologists, ethnologists and sociologists from then on. At these forums he tried forcefully to get his *etnos* 'theory' accepted. He also fulfilled various responsible offices in the bureaucratic hierarchy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences which, in itself, illustrates his power and the indisputable trust that he enjoyed from the Soviet Communist party state leadership.



Fig. 1

Yulian Vladimirovich Bromley (1921-1990).

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The Greek word ἔθνος 'ethnos' means people. The names of scholarly disciplines, like ethnography and ethnology (in translation also *volkekunde* and German *Völkerkunde*) derive from this word. That *etnos* was adopted in both the Soviet Union and South Africa as a fundamental 'scientific' concept encompassing various groups with 'ethnic' characteristics, is surprising only at first glance. A closer look reveals that both South Africa *volkekunde* and Soviet Union *etnografiia* followed the same scholarly tradition. The common source is the *etnos* theory of the Russian ethnologist Sergey M. Shirokogorov (1887–1939) who worked until the Russian October 1917 Revolution among the Tunguz (or Tungus, called the Evenki in official Soviet ethnic nomenclature) of Siberia, as a staff member of the St. Petersburg Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Most of his publications, including three large monographs in English (1924a, 1929, 1935), were published in China after he had to leave Soviet Russia. A special monograph on *etnos* was published in Russian and never translated in full (Shirokogorov 1923) but the author made abstracts available in English (1924b), French (1936) and German (1937). Although Shirokogorov's works were taboo in the Soviet Union, they were known to some extent in the West, mostly as specialist treatments of shamanism and detailed monographs of the Tunguz and Manchu. His theory of *etnos* was known only within *Völkerkunde* thanks mainly to the then Heidelberg professor Wilhelm Mühlmann (1938, 1948, 1964). Through the German cultural influence on

Afrikaners in general and Afrikaner social science in particular, [3] Mühlmann's theoretical ideas, informed by the German romanticism of Herder and Bastian's *Völkergedanke*, became highly acclaimed by leading *volkekundiges* such as P.J. Coertze and J.H. Coetzee. [4] These professors subsequently developed their own styles of *etnos*. Meanwhile in the Soviet Union, the Stalinist *etnografiia* of the 1930s through the 1950s became an auxiliary historical discipline searching for 'facts' to support the claimed validity of the five-stage model of history (the period of 'varnishing reality' – cf. Zil'berman 1976:145). Stalin's evolutionistic triad *plemia–narodnost'–natsiia* (tribe–nationality–nation) was used within *etnografiia* by the current 'theorists' of the day who were expected by the regime to submit evidence that each human group passed through these three stages, inevitably culminating in the formation of socialist nations and supranational communities.

The de-Stalinisation process which started after 1956 was a very slow process in Soviet social sciences and it was never fully completed. *Etnografiia* was by no means at the centre of this process. Only in the 1960s could a very cautious return to theoretical though Marxist thinking, so typical for the 1920s, be observed (see Skalník 1981). With the honourable exception of Kushner (1949, 1959) no one wrote theoretically on ethnic phenomena until 1964 when Tokarev's article on the typology of ethnic communities appeared. Later Kozlov (1967) and Cheboksarov (1967, in English 1970–71) published their articles on ethnic communities and units respectively. Cheboksarov (1970–71: 133-34) defined *etnografiia* for the first time as 'the science of peoples', equally as 'the science of their cultures' and was the first since Shirokogorov to use the term 'etnos'.

The *etnos* turnover came only after Bromley was appointed by the Communist party to head Soviet *etnografiia*. From the beginning, Bromley, as a new 'administrator of science' and also motivated by his personal ambition to become a leading theory maker, was trying to establish prestige for *etnografiia* within the system of Marxist-Leninist *sovetskaia nauka* (Soviet science). First he decided to define the boundaries of *etnografiia* as opposed to other social and natural disciplines. He also supported controlled discussions about the relation of Soviet *etnografiia* to social anthropology, cultural anthropology and ethnology in the West (among others see Averkieva 1971; Veselkin 1977; Gellner 1980; Bromley 1974; *Etnologicheskie* 1973; *Kontseptsii* 1976; *Issledovaniia* 1979).

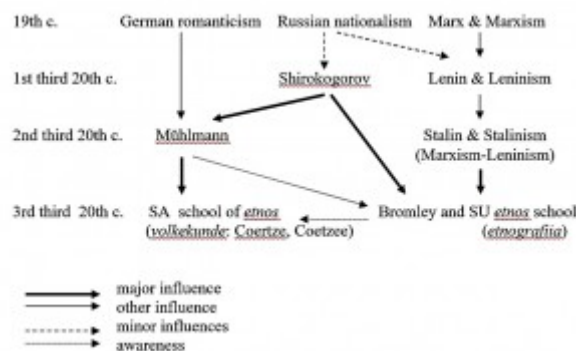
His main thrust, however, was directed toward the redefinition of the subject matter and 'object' of study (cf. Bromley in Gellner 1980) and here the establishment of the cardinal concept of *etnos* received priority. Characteristically, the first article on *etnos* published by Bromley in 1968 was "Etnos i endogamiia" (Bromley 1969, in English 1976). It proved to be very controversial and brought forth an enlivened discussion on the pages of *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, the official organ of Soviet *etnografy*. This article, along with other texts which followed, indicated that Bromley almost instantly achieved a relatively high level of sophistication with his *etnos* 'theory'. It will be documented below that he must have been deeply influenced far more than he acknowledges by studying Shirokogorov's writings in Russian. This study of an émigré's taboo works kept in the Soviet Union among banned

literature was the opportunity of a lifetime for Bromley. Undoubtedly aware of his privilege as the new director, and enjoying the trust of the party, he mentions in a footnote (Bromley 1971, in English 1974: 55) that:

“One of the first Russian works specially devoted to ‘ethnos’ was written by S. Shirokogorov and published in Shanghai in 1923. The work remained unknown to Soviet readership for a long time, and that is why it could not have contributed to the introduction of ‘ethnos’ in ethnographic literature in the Russian language.”

Later in his influential book *Etnos i etnografiia* (Ethnos and ethnography), published in Russian in 1973 and translated subsequently into German, Hungarian and Slovak, Bromley introduces Shirokogorov, but only very cautiously and with a hypocritical patriotic note (1973:22): “It is not a coincidence that the introduction of the term ‘*etnos*’ into scholarly use is usually connected with Russian science, specifically with the name of S.M. Shirokogorov...”. A few pages later he even quotes one of Shirokogorov’s definitions of *etnos* but expresses surprise at the latter’s alleged classification of *etnos* among biological communities (Bromley 1973:26). However, Bromley avoids acknowledging any direct influence by Shirokogorov. As we will see, this omission is unjustified.

It seems that Bromley is not, or does not wish to be, aware of the South African variant of *etnos* ‘theory’, whereas J.H. Coetzee of Potchefstroom University in the Transvaal quotes 16 lines from the 1978 article by Arutiunov and Bromley and finds it ‘interesting that the modern Russian ethnologists still work in the tradition of Shirokogoroff’ (Coetzee 1980: 16). Also Myburgh (1981: 12) mentions Bromley’s *etnos* concept but chooses to stick to the concept of *volk* instead. Schematically, the pedigree of *etnos* ‘theory’ can be represented as follows:



It is very tempting to trace the development of ideas about ethnicity and the ‘national question’ in the writings of Marx, Engels, Russian *narodniki*, and Marxists, including Lenin. In this article I shall limit myself only to Stalin’s influence on Bromley. The influence of Russian nationalism on Shirokogorov, Lenin and Stalin is obvious from their writings and I will not dwell on them here.

## *Etnos* as concept and 'theory'

First let us look at some definitions of *etnos* as they were formulated by Shirokogorov, Bromley and Soviet Union *etnografy*, and South African *volkekundiges*.

Shirokogorov defines *etnos* as:

“a group of people speaking the same language, recognising a common origin, who have a system of customs and a mode of life preserved and sanctioned by tradition and differing from other similar groups” (1923: 13)

or

“a unit in which all processes of cultural and somatological variations of man as species (or genus) operate and which is understood by itself as a group of people united by the idea of unity of origin, customs, language and technical culture.” (1924b: 27)

The second definition is in accord with his programmatic suggestion that (1936:86):

“The essential problem of ethnography and anthropology is the fixation of the unit in which the mental culture and physical type of any population evolve simultaneously as well as the hereditary transmission of this culture and this type.”

Shirokogorov rejects a static definition of *etnos*. His definition is 'essentially dynamic, because it concerns a real process of incessant variations' (1936:90). This idea is supported by Mühlmann, who studied Shirokogorov's publications in English in the 1930s (1938: 229). Bromley never defines *etnos* unequivocally and always makes some reservations. One of his earliest definitions (1971: 49–50) is clear enough to be quoted here:

“*etnos* in the narrow meaning of the word and in the most general form can be defined as a historically formed community of people possessing common, relatively stable specific features of culture, as well as being aware of their unity and difference from other similar communities.”

In their introduction to an edited volume on *Ethnocultural Processes and National Problems in the Modern World*, Grigulevich and Kozlov (1981: 14) quoted Bromley as explaining the use of the term *etnos* as follows:

“Use of the term 'ethnos', by helping to avoid the ambiguities of the term 'people', makes it possible to express unambiguously everything that the concepts 'nation', 'ethnic national group' ('narodnost'), 'nationality', and 'tribe' have in common.”

In another article (1978: 16) Bromley further explains that: 'ethnoses-peoples ... emerge as a result of the natural historical process and not as a result of the given people's will'. P.J. Coertze, a retired professor of *volkekunde* at the University of Pretoria, defines *etnos* in these words (1980:79): “An *etnos* is a reasonably independent and self-sufficient human social unit which is not organised *ad hoc* but has emerged from a process of growth...” and explains in



the same place that:

“Because human life and formation of human life-units is submitted to the work of forces over which one has no power, one can correctly say that human social-organic life-units were called to existence by the Lord himself ...”

Professor Coetzee of the Potchefstroom University also asserts that: “the division of humanity into ethnic units is historically given in accordance with God’s plan for the world. God is also the creator and leader (*bestuurder*) of peoples” (1980: 48). Further Coetzee (*ibid*: 12–17) goes through titles of literature (Mühlmann, Dittmer, Shirokogorov, Kuyper, Duvenage) and while recognising various traits of *ethnos* proposed by these authors adds his own idea to it (1980: 15):

“From a socio-genetical standpoint the ethnic units with which *volkekunde* deals can be designated pre-*volk* communities [*voor-volkse gemeenskappe*]. Probably every Eskimo horde, every Melanesian clan, etc. can be described as *ethnos* in the sense of a clearly defined collectivity which bounds itself from neighbouring groups and which is further strengthened by the hypothesis concerning origin from a common forefather, by common dialect, common experiences and certain social boundaries and distinctive signs such as costume, tattoo marks, etc. Characteristic of these ethnic groups is the open consciousness that they are better than all neighbours and the presence of an insular ethnocentric world-view.”

Anyone who compares these quotations can easily discern their common denominators. They are: (1) *ethnos* is an objectively existing group of people; (2) *ethnos* emerges in a process of formation or growth caused by the objective forces of history and/or God; (3) *ethnos* is aware of its distinctiveness; (4) *ethnos* includes various communities defined in evolutionary terms; (5) *ethnos* is characterised by its own, distinct culture; and (6) *ethnos* has its specific origin and physical (somatological) type.

Not all these features are equally stressed by the authors quoted above. Bromley does not lay much stress upon the physical (racial) type (cf. 1978: 17) although he views it, amongst other things, as a biological unit (1976: 32); however, he does stress the stability of *ethnos* (1973: 31):

“Analysing ethnic communities in a genetical sense, let us underline especially that they represent dynamic, historically formed systems. No *ethnos* is eternal, unchangeable. However, changeability of ethnic systems, of course, by no means contradicts that fact often observed by us, namely that stability is one of their characteristic traits.”

All writers on *ethnos* emphasise the link between *ethnos* and culture. For example, Cheboksarov states unambiguously (1970–71: 133): “If a people loses its cultural specificity, it ceases to exist as a separate and independent *ethnos*”. Coetzee equally categorically states that (1980: 71):

“It must be also clear that an *ethnos* and its culture cannot be divorced from each other ... Culture as a general human phenomenon consists thus in

principle only in a great diversity of cultures as products and life expressions of so many *etnieë*.”

Also Bromley's collaborator Kozlov (1979: 71) supports the essentiality of the link between culture (including language) and *etnos*:

“The concept of ‘culture’ plays a very important role in the definition of the very concept of ‘*etnos*’ ... In many ethnographic works an idea emerges that *etnoses* are the basic creators and consumers of culture, that culture exists mainly in an ethnic husk, i.e. in an ethnic or national form of culture. As far as inter-ethnic or international culture is concerned, it is often analysed in ‘dialectical unity’ with national culture,”

and he concludes: ‘culture is predominantly an ethnic phenomenon’.

Coertze (1983: 4) in his book titled *Die Afrikanervolk en die Kleurlinge* [The Afrikanervolk and the Coloured] would agree with Kozlov:

“Every *volk* thus has its own culture. True, it is the possession of a common culture that makes a group of people a *volk* (‘a separate people’). A *volk* and culture emerge together through the process of growth and for this reason we consider a *volk* as a special sort of organic unit.”

The natural processes in *etnos* are equally recognised by Shirokogorov, *etnografy* and *volkekundiges*. All of these scholars recognise the role of endogamy, demography, environment and biological (including racial) factors in *etnos*, but they differ in the role that they ascribe to each factor.

For example Shirokogorov is very outspoken when he stresses ‘hereditary conditions’, ‘biological adaptation’, ‘power of the *etnos*’, and the contrast between ‘degenerating’ and ‘dominant’ *etnosy*. Therefore he is convinced that “An *etnos*, like all biological species, has as a principal purpose to maintain its position among other animal species and *etnosy*, to maintain its right to existence.” (1924b: 7)

The ‘right to existence’ is, according to Shirokogorov, achieved through (1924b: 8) ‘resistibility to the pressure of other *ethnoses*’, often by war which ‘is a natural phenomenon for a growing *ethnos* which manifests by this means its biological power’ (1924b: 22). Also “colonizing activity of highly developed *ethnoses*” can be counted among those expressing the ‘power of *ethnos*’.

The *volkekundiges* in South Africa have learned a lot from Shirokogorov. If one looks at Coertze for instance, the link between biology and mentality is clear (1983: 4):

“A *volk* is a biologically growing unit but simultaneously a spiritually growing unit. The biological growth and spiritual growth of a *volk* are both of great importance for its survival and are in fact inseparable. An *etnos* can disappear as a biological phenomenon and also as a spiritual-cultural unit.”

Bromley is more careful and does not speak of any 'biological power' of *ethnos*. He does however admit, for example, that racial differences play an ethno-distinctive role in cases of 'ethnoses whose neighbours belong to other major or small races' (1978:17) which might apply to the South African situation, especially when he introduces the concept of 'ethnoracial communities' (1973:150). Bromley is, however, more outspoken in the case of endogamy which both he and Shirokogorov (1935:12 and 14) equally consider as essential for the existence of *ethnos*. He concedes that endogamy is not only a social but also a biological phenomenon. As such it plays the role of a distinctive genetic barrier of the endogamy of an *ethnos* and he recognises that "breaking of endogamy of an *ethnos* is a prelude to its destruction' (1973:118).

Coertze wrote a whole book (1983) to explain how and why, by sticking to (racial) endogamy, the Afrikaner *volk* was able to emerge, while the Coloureds 'cannot yet be called a *volk* although they formed a distinct ethnic entity' with its own identity (1983:138).

Although South African *volkekundiges* were more explicit about the correlation of natural/cultural in *ethnos* (and thus adhere closely to Shirokogorov ideas), the Soviet Union *etnografii* was not too distinct, only more careful in the formulation of this ratio (cf. Bromley 1978:17).

Two final aspects of the *ethnos* 'theory' are perhaps the most important ones: self-awareness and psychological identity. These aspects fall more adequately into the scope of social psychology, or as our authors would put it, ethnopsychology. Shirokogorov (e.g. 1935:12) mentions the consciousness of the existence of *ethnos* as one of its dominant characteristics. Among his criteria of *ethnos*, Kozlov refers not only to 'ethnic self-awareness' and 'ethnic self-designation' but also 'features of psychological make-up'. Bromley (1983: 5), when characterising ethnicity, mentions among the crucial traits: 'peculiarities of psychic composition', 'features of value orientations' and 'self-awareness'. He stresses (ibid.) that: "there is no people-*ethnos* which would not have its self-awareness, and as it happens, also ethnic, national self-awareness". Elsewhere he writes (1978:17) on 'specific ethnic features' and 'so-called ethnic (national) character'. 'Ethnic self-awareness', writes Bromley (197:49), 'is a peculiar but at the same time a very substantial ethnic feature'.

South African *volkekundige* Coertze, when discussing the ethnogenesis (*etnogenez* is also a favourite topic among Soviet *etnografy*) of the Afrikaner *volk*, considers the self-consciousness of being Afrikaner (1983: 79) important, as well as Afrikaners' common religion, Calvinist Protestantism. As for Coetzee (1980: 41-43), he stresses the model of 'volk of God' which is not only of specific physical (Caucasoid) origin but possesses its own *volkskap* (quality of being the *volk*) and a mission of which Afrikaners are well aware. Coetzee compares the Afrikaners with the people of biblical Israel who were also chosen, a 'holy *volk*'.

The overlappings and similarities apparent in comparing the South African and the Soviet *ethnos* schools have emerged irrespective of the differences in socio-economic orders in these two countries and their ideological oppositions. There are of course also analogies disguised in contrasting rhetoric like the usage of God in South Africa and Marxism-Leninism in the

Soviet Union, all pointing to the practical importance of both 'theories' of *ethnos*.

## *Ethnos* as a political myth

When one realises the practical purposes for which the *ethnos* 'theory' was used, the parallel between South Africa and the Soviet Union becomes even more apparent. For example, Bromley introduced the term *etnikos* for the set of features in *ethnos* which are relatively stable and conservative (1978: 18–19). This is very clearly overshadowed by his other concept of the ethno-social organism (ESO) which he defines as a 'synthetic formation' (1978: 19–20; see also Bromley 1971 and 1976). As well as ethnic features proper (i.e. *etnikos*), ESO also includes socio-economic factors arranged in the well-known class stages of history, the so-called socio-economic formations. Thus there are particular ESOs belonging to primitive, slave-holding, feudal, capitalist and socialist socio-economic formations (1978:19).

The Stalinist five-member schema is back in Bromley's sequence. ESO types are tribe, slave-holding nationality, feudal nationality, bourgeois nation and socialist nation. In this context, *ethnos* is no more than a mere decoration of an eschatological ESO series. Indeed if we fully realise the 'power' relation between *ethnos* and ESO, the latter easily comes out victorious. That evidently is Bromley's goal – via the tactical detour of *ethnos* to corroborate the crushing, unchallengeable force of state-orchestrated ESOs with their processes of ethnic consolidation, assimilation and integration. In Bromley's interpretation, these last processes are by definition reactionary if they are happening in capitalist countries (1973: 150) and automatically progressive when going on in a socialist country, as was the Soviet Union. As Bromley put it (1971: 53):

'Soviet experience shows that the abolition of antagonistic classes in socialist society sharply intensifies the processes of the so-called ethnic consolidation, that is the rapid growth of the ethnic homogeneity of nations.'

*Ethnos* is after all only one of the "types of human communities' that exist beside 'social class, professional, religious, party-political, state and other kinds of human communities' (Kozlov 1979:81). Nevertheless, *ethnos* does exist, and though subordinated to ESO, forms a part of an inevitable historical process. Thus *ethnos* in the Soviet understanding is not unlike the South African *ethnos* concept – which is subject to God's will – only it is built into a dogmatic Marxist-Leninist or rather Marxist-Stalinist framework. The question asked by some (Dunn 1975; Scheffel 1982), namely whether Soviet *ethnos* 'theory' represented a deviation from Marxism-Leninism (Stalinism) is to be answered by an emphatic 'no'. Under the political conditions in which Bromley worked, this finding could only enhance his commanding position and certainly did not undermine it. Scheffel (1982:4) adds another idea which confirms that Bromley's distinction of *etnikos* (*ethnos* proper) and the ESO as a parallel to the old Stalinist complementary opposition of 'socialist in content' (= ESO) and national in form (= *ethnos*) when Stalin discussed the 'national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat' (Stalin 1935:260). [5]

In the South African context as viewed by the Soviets, the same processes of nation building along separate lines were taking place but manifested themselves in struggle and opposition. Two Soviet Africanists (Andrianov and Ismagilova 1979:23) wrote about this as follows:

“In South Africa ethnic development of African peoples is deformed by the reactionary race policy of the ruling circles of the RSA ... However, even there, in class and anti-racist battles, the processes of formation of major ethnic communities (nationalities and nations) among the majority Bantu peoples and closely allied to them 'coloured' (mestizo) population go on.”

South African *volkekundiges*, as is well known, see equally the development of separate *etnieë* among the 'tribes' (the Soviet Union *etnografy* would distinguish here between tribes and 'nationalities' according to which pigeon-hole each ethnic group would be allocated) of the Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, Sotho, and the special not-yet-ethnos of the Coloured [6]. What a contrast to Sharp's categorical rejection of the study of ethnicity in the *etnos* (*volkekunde*) style: 'One cannot use .... the fact of common classification to hypothesize about the growth of a 'Coloured ethnos' '(Sharp 1980c:13). Even more explicitly: 'The future of South African anthropology depends on the recognition that no community is a closed community' (Sharp 1980c:14).

Soviet *etnografii*'s service to the party and state establishment was mainly directed for domestic consumption and thus to study ethnic processes in the Soviet Union itself. The same was even more valid for South African *volkekundiges* who, according to Sharp, 'have long directed their professional expertise to the service of South African state power' (1980b: 36). The main logic of the *etnos* studies by Bromley and his collaborators was to offer a 'theoretical' justification for the emergence of a supra-*etnos* category of 'Soviet people' (*sovetskii narod*) growing out of one social and political system, one ethno-social organism. Bromley et al. mythicized the Soviet communist state which through Stalin is, in fact, mainly responsible for declaring the existence of *sovetskii narod*. In Bromley's ideological 'theory', a 'new historical community – the Soviet people – is met, which represents the first international (interethnic) formation on the basis of socialism in the history of humanity' (Bromley 1983:11). Cheboksarov also regards 'the Soviet people as the highest type of multinational community in history' (1970–71: 147). In their edited volume (published in Moscow), Grigulevich and Kozlov wrote that the Soviet people:

“is characterised in particular by such factors as the socio-political and economic integration of all the peoples of the country within a single state, the USSR, a common Soviet culture, and the consciousness of all citizens of the USSR of belonging to the Soviet people (together with consciousness, of course, of belonging to a definite ethnos). This community – a phenomenon without precedent in world history – is international in its essence, but in no way unnational in character and content; it has arisen and is developing on the basis of the constructive, multiform interaction of all Soviet nations and nationalities and their cultures.” (Grigulevich and Kozlov 1981:7)

As is apparent from the quotation, Soviet *etnografy* distinguished between more advanced

*natsii* (nations) and stadially less developed *narodnosti* (nationalities). This Stalinist classification was never removed from Soviet state and scientific terminology and meant that more developed nations like the Russians had an historical mission to lead less advanced nations and nationalities towards Communism. Russian was deemed to be the natural language vehicle of this process and was adopted as the second (and sometimes first) language. This resembled the paternalism of the Afrikaners in South Africa who, according to Coertze, had a duty to help the Coloureds to 'get the opportunity to grow into a *waardige etnos* [dignified, real *etnos*] along with other *etnieë* in South Africa' (1983: 138). Ironically, Shirokogorov, whose *etnos* theory is an attempt at a genuine theory although it has many problems, reappeared here with his idea of a leading and powerful *ethnos*. The Soviet Union and South Africa 'theorists' took from it what they needed but left out what was not of practical application.

## Conclusion

This brings me to the conclusion that the Soviet Union and South African *etnos* specialists were mythmakers in the service of their respective state (and party) machines. Some South African radicals might object to the parallel by saying that whereas in the Soviet Union they wanted to distinguish among various peoples, in South Africa the trend was the opposite. I consider this a weak argument. Firstly government policy is one thing, whereas what scholars and other people think is another. There were many Soviet colleagues who considered that the passport practice where *natsional'nost'* (nationality in the sense of ethnic membership) is written on a special page was outmoded. Both the Soviet Union and South Africa obliged all citizens to carry internal passports where distinctions of race (and colour) (South Africa) and *etnos* (Soviet Union) were registered. Moreover, one might determine to which colour classification one belonged from the ethnic category, and vice versa. Unofficially, in the Soviet Union many used the derogatory term 'chuchmek' for the Mongoloid groups as they used 'kaffir' for indigenous Africans in South Africa.

*Etnografy* and *volkekundiges* have wittingly or unwittingly helped in establishing criteria for such distinctions which had social consequences in terms of racial and ethnic discrimination in both countries. So-called 'theories' like *etnos* can be used for the justification of any state policy, whether leading to the unification or separation of the *etnosy* or *etnieë*. We have seen how the myth of the 'Soviet people' was fabricated. In South Africa a similar turn was possible from 'apartheid' ideology toward a unification (integration) ideology. Coertze, in his 1983 book on the Afrikaner *volk* and the Coloureds, provided a sort of ideological cannonade for the inclusion of Coloureds into the future multiracial 'South African nation' (Coertze 1983). Similarly Coetzee, when he discusses the '*een plus deelvolkige*' (one plus part) composition of the white 'South African nation' admits that (1980:64): "If the Coloureds and Asians obtain full citizenship which means that they will be recognised as a part of the nation, the situation will be even more complex". With the new constitution of 1983 this situation arrived, announcing that the composition of the South African nation would change and with it also the conceptions of the *volkekundiges*.

One can indeed say that every statement and action is in some way political, but there is a difference between the politics of the discovery of truth and inventing 'theories' to serve the politics of unjust domination. I hope I have shown that both the Soviet Union and South African *ethnos* 'theories' were unscientific, ideological instruments that the states of the RSA and USSR used for the continuation of the status quo.

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[3] Before 1939, Afrikaans-speaking academics used to study or spend their sabbatical years in Germany. Outstanding among these was Werner W.M. Eiselen, professor of *volkekunde* in Stellenbosch who was for six years a member of the South African government as secretary for Bantu administration and development. Along with Hendrik Verwoerd, professor of sociology at Stellenbosch in the same period and later prime minister, he is considered the architect of apartheid. See the governmental journal *baNtu* VII (8) 1960: 441-477 devoted almost exclusively to the evaluation of the work of Eiselen.

[4] Two disciples of Coetzee wrote as late as 1980 that: 'it is a real pity that political prejudice and ignorance have so far possibly prevented the translation of Mühlmann's work of 1938 into English. Within the perspective of history and judged without prejudice, it can be regarded as an anthropological classic' (Booyens and Jansen van Rensburg 1980:4).

[5] I am thankful to David Scheffel for ideas concerning the relations between *etnos*, *etnikos* and ethno-social organism (ESO) in Soviet *etnografiia* (Bromley) and implications for social and political practice.

[6] *Volkekundiges* operated with the Coloured as *etnos-to-be* (=a future *etnos*).