

Presentation Summary

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The Fall of Ideology, the Rise of Etnos

National Historiographies among non-Russian Peoples of the Volga-Urals Region during the 1960s - 1970s

Considerations on national historiographies occupy a major place in the studies of Nation-building processes in post-Soviet countries. Search for prestigious ancestors, nationalization of the past, territorial rivalries and incommunicability between academic actors of neighbour republics: all these features characterize the “historicity regime” of most of these newly independent states. Two patterns are generally used to analyse these historiographies. On the one hand, they are based on the primordialist approach of Soviet ethnogenetics. Guided by the ideological promotion of nations, the reification of ethnic boundaries was a common practice in Soviet times. To some extent, with Soviet ethnographers, current ethno-centred discourses are doomed to disappear with the next generational change. On the other hand, as ethno-federalism created new states from Soviet republics, national histories were built on former official narratives propagated by Soviet institutional legacy. State institutions and policies lead to a general rewriting of the past to legitimate the formation of new ethnic groups. Taking into account the crucial role played by the state in the development of contemporary ethnic discourses, our intention is to enlarge the institutionalist approach by considering two hypotheses on national historiographies. First, we can trace their apparition before the Perestroika during the Sixties. Secondly, the rise of multiple *etnos* through ethno-centred discourses is due not to central injunctions from Moscow, but to local conditions. Stating that history cannot be limited to administrative regulations, we favour a regional approach and focus on several republics inside the RSFSR (Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, Mordvia, Marii-El and Tatarstan) to analyse the emergence and construction of national historiographies during the 1960s-1970s in a comparative perspective. Based on oral, bibliographical and archival sources, our study follows paradigms, research institutions, publications and the most visible national scholars involved in history writing. To understand how the tension between the intention to constitute a Soviet nation and the need to recognize the existing nations created conditions favourable to a generalized nationalization, we study academic practices and those social contexts in which these practices took place. Having being spread during the 1930s, national categories were appropriated during the Brezhnev era by local, urban, non-Russian but Russian-speaking elites. Extending the reflections on the historical conditions of current ethno-nationalism by a research on the turning period of the 1960s-1970s, our study also participates in the current renewal of the history of the Soviet social sciences, i.e. to analyse scholars’ activities embedded in the local space of their professional environment, in a social space, which provides practical experience, and in a political space, that is a world of signals and information, but also of repression and censorship.