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Russian regionalism in the XXI century: Siberian and Pomor cases

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Abstract. This article examines the role and significance of regional identities in modern Russia, as well as their relationship to ethnic identities. In contrast to the activities and political programs of ethnic and ethnopolitical organizations and their political programs, regionalist movements in Russia, as well as the evolution of their ideological frameworks, have been poorly studied; this also concerns the the history of regionalist movements. At the same time, regionalism in Russia has deep historical roots and can be an important political resource. Therefore, studying it and analyzing its evolutionary paths allows for a more complete picture of the country's modern political history. The analysis presented here is based on a variety of materials: documents from regional and ethnic organizations and their forums, interviews with their leaders, press publications, and online resources. We demonstrate that regional identities came to the forefront in Russia during the 1990s. This coincided with the "parade of sovereignties" and the formation of regionalist movements, particularly in the former "autonomous" republics, that actively advocated for the expansion of the political power of federal units inside Russia. Regional identity in Russia took on an ethnic form, as ethnicity became a political resource during the "ethnic renaissance" of the 1990s. However, regionalist movements and regional ideology failed to gain a significant place in the spectrum of political forces in Russia, as they failed to gain either mass popular support or the backing of regional elites. Only the Cossack movement of southern Russia achieved this, and therefore it remains the only successful example of ethnic regionalism. The Siberian and Pomor movements, which initially had great political potential, failed to realize it and are now in decline. The paper summarizes the results of many years of research related to the study of ethnopolitical processes in various regions of Russia, but primarily in the European north of the Russian Federation and Western Siberia. A significant part of these studies was of an interregional nature and included mass surveys of the population and mainly young people, as well as expert surveys, analysis of statistical information, publications in the media and analysis of Internet resources. In the course of these studies, information was collected about the ethnopolitical and ethnocultural orientations of Russians, including their perception of ethnic and civic identities, trends and dynamics of ethnic and ethnopolitical processes, and the depth of cultural transformations were assessed. The main method used by the author is the comparative method.
Keywords: ethnicity; regionalism; identity; Pomor identity; Siberian identity; territorial inequality

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XXI ғасырдағы орыс регионализмі: Сібір және Померания жағдайлары

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада қазіргі Ресейдегі аймақтық сәйкестіктердің рөлі мен маңызы және олардың этникалық сәйкестіктермен байланысы қарастырылады. Этникалық және этносаяси ұйымдардың қызметінен және олардың саяси бағдарламаларынан айырмашылығы, Ресейдегі рационалистік қозғалыстар және олардың идеологиялық көзқарастарының эволюциясы нашар зерттелген, оның ішінде рационалистік қозғалыстардың тарихы да бар. Сонымен қатар, Ресейдегі регионализмнің терең тарихи тамыры бар және маңызды саяси ресурс бола алады. Сондықтан оны зерттеу және эволюция жолдарын талдау елдің қазіргі саяси тарихының толық бейнесін алуға мүмкіндік береді. Талдау әртүрлі материалдарға негізделген: аймақтық және этноөңірлік ұйымдар мен олардың форумдарының құжаттары, басшылармен сұхбаттар, баспасөздегі жарияланымдар және интернет-ресурстар. Ресей Федерациясындағы аймақтық сәйкестендірулердің өзектілігі 1990 жылдары "егемендік шеруі" болған кезде және федерация субъектілерінің, әсіресе республикалардың саяси өкілеттіктерін кеңейтуді белсенді қолдайтын рационалистік қозғалыстардың қалыптасуы болған кезде болғандығы көрсетілген. Ресей облыстарындағы аймақтық сәйкестілік этникалық формаға ие болды, өйткені 1990 жылдардағы "этникалық қайта өрлеу дәуіріндегі" этникалық саяси ресурстың маңыздылығына ие болды. Бірақ рационалистік қозғалыстар мен аймақтық идеология Ресейдің саяси күштерінің спектрінде маңызды орын ала алмады, өйткені олар халықты жаппай қолдауға да, аймақтық элиталардың қолдауына да ие болмады. Бұған Ресейдің оңтүстігіндегі казак қозғалысы ғана қол жеткізе алды, сондықтан ол этноаймақшылдықтың жалғыз сәтті үлгісі болып қала береді. Бастапқыда үлкен саяси әлеуетке ие болған Сібір және Померания қозғалыстары оны жүзеге асыра алмады және бүгінде құлдырауда. Жұмыста Ресейдің әртүрлі аймақтарындағы, бірақ ең алдымен Ресей Федерациясының еуропалық солтүстігі мен Батыс Сібірдегі этносаяси процестерді зерттеуге байланысты көпжылдық зерттеулердің нәтижелері жинақталған. Бұл зерттеулердің едәуір бөлігі аймақаралық сипатта болды және халықтың, бірақ негізінен жастардың жаппай сауалнамаларын, сондай-ақ сараптамалық сауалнамаларды, статистикалық ақпаратты талдауды, бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарында жариялауды және интернет-ресурстарды талдауды қамтыды. Осы зерттеулер барысында ресейліктердің этносаяси және этномәдени бағыттары, оның ішінде этникалық және азаматтық сәйкестікті қабылдау туралы ақпарат жиналды, этникалық және этносаяси процестердің тенденциялары мен динамикасы, мәдени өзгерістердің тереңдігі бағаланды. Автордың негізгі әдісі-компаративист.

Түйін сөздер: этникалық; регионализм; сәйкестік; померандық сәйкестік; Сібір сәйкестігі; аумақтық теңсіздік

Сілтеме жасау үшін: Шаблей Ю. XVII-XVIII ғасырлардағы Қазақ хандығының сыртқы саясаты тарихының заманауи отандық тарихнамасы. *Gumilyov Journal of History. 2*026. Т.156, no.3, б.81-95. https://doi.org/10.32523/3080-129X-2026-156-3-81-95

Қаржыландыру: зерттеу Ресей Ғылым академиясының 126021217118-0 "Коми және көрші халықтардың этнологиясы: этномәдени трансформацияларды салыстырмалы талдау"тақырыбындағы мемлекеттік тапсырмасы аясында жүргізілді.

Российский регионализм в XXI веке: сибирский и поморский случаи

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается роль и значение региональных идентичностей в современной России и их связь с идентичностями этническими. В отличие от деятельности этнических и этнополитических организаций и их политических программ, рационалистские движения в России и эволюция их идейных установок изучена слабо, включая и историю рационалистских движений. Между тем регионализм в России имеет глубокие исторические корни и может быть важным политическим ресурсом. Поэтому его изучение и анализ путей эволюции позволяет получить более полную картину современной политической истории страны. В основу анализа положены различные материалы: документы региональных и этнорегиональных организаций и их форумов, интервью с руководителями, публикации в прессе и интернет-ресурсы. Показано, что актуализация региональных идентичностей в Российской Федерации произошла в 1990-е гг., когда имел место "парад суверенитетов" и происходило формирование рационалистских движений, активно выступавших за расширение политических полномочий субъектов федерации, особенно республик. Региональная идентичность в российских областях приобретала форму этнической, поскольку этничность в эпоху "этнического ренессанса" 1990-х гг. приобрела значение политического ресурса. Но рационалистские движения и региональная идеология не смогли занять заметное место в спектре политических сил России, поскольку не получили ни массовой поддержки населения, ни поддержки со стороны региональных элит. Этого смогло добиться только казачье движение юга России, а потому оно остается единственным удачным примером этнорегионализма. Сибирское и поморское движения, которые первоначально имели большой политический потенциал, не смогли его реализовать и сегодня находятся в упадке. В работе обобщены результаты многолетних исследований, связанных с изучением этнополитических процессов в различных регионах России, но в первую очередь на европейском севере РФ и в Западной Сибири. Значительная часть этих исследований носила межрегиональный характер и включала массовые опросы населения, но преимущественно молодежи, а также экспертные опросы, анализ статистической информации, публикации в средствах массовой информации и анализ интернет-ресурсов. В ходе этих исследований собирались сведения об этнополитических и этнокультурных ориентациях россиян, включая их восприятие этнической и гражданской идентичностей, оценивались тенденции и динамика этнических и этнополитических процессов, глубина культурных трансформаций. Основным методом, на который опирается автор является компаративистский.

Ключевые слова: этничность; регионализм; идентичность; поморская идентичность; сибирская идентичность; территориальное неравенство

Introduction

Ethnicity, ethnic identity, the ethnic traditions of different peoples, intercultural interaction, and ethno-confessional processes and phenomena receive considerable academic attention in Russia. The Russian school of ethnology and anthropology is rather advanced despite its theory and methods differing significantly from the fundamental principles of Western cultural and social anthropology. Still, several important thematic areas remain unaddressed or understudied by Russian researchers, despite the presence of numerous research institutes and laboratories conducting a broad range of research in the country. Among these areas is the topic of actualizing ethnic identity and the complex processes of cultural identification in general. To be sure, numerous ethnological studies have been done on these subjects recently. However, most of these studies fail to address the relationship between regionalism and ethnicity, or ethnic and regional identities as the most significant forms of cultural positioning.

It is worth noting that, since cultures are always local, regional cultural identities historically served as the basis on which broader ethnic identities formed. This is evidenced by the developmental trajectory of cultural spaces in the Middle Ages (Gurevich 1984).

Regionalism and ethnicity are closely intertwined in Russian cultural, political, and ethnopolitical practices. However, this topic has not yet been the subject of in-depth and comprehensive analysis: We are aware of not more than two works where the relationship between regionalism and ethnicity in modern Russia and/or in its history is analyzed extensively (Drobizheva et al. 1996; Shabaev, Omarov 2021).

It would seem that, in the modern circumstances, there remain very serious reasons for the revitalization of regionalist movements in Russia. Indeed, as many Russian economists point out, the problem of territorial inequality based on objective grounds is becoming increasingly pressing. At the same time, movements aimed at defending regional interests were active only in the 1990s and later quickly exhausted themselves both ideologically and organizationally. Today, there are no signs of their revival, although the topic of regionalism itself remains highly relevant.

Methods and Materials

We believe that the most illustrative modern examples of this relationship are the contemporary Pomor and Siberian identities. Indeed, recent research on the topic has focused primarily on the Cossack movement in southern Russia. However, the complex nature of the new Cossack identity in regions that were once the territories of various Cossack hosts (Don, Kuban, Terek, Orenburg, etc.) has not been seriously analyzed. Moreover, the issue of Cossack revival as part of regional political and ethnopolitical processes has not received adequate attention from researchers. We rely on the results of many years of research related to the study of ethnopolitical processes in various regions of Russia, but primarily in the European north of the Russian Federation and in Western Siberia. A significant part of these studies was inter-regional in nature and included mass surveys of the population and mainly of young people. In the course of these studies, information was collected about the ethnopolitical and ethnocultural orientations of Russians, including their perception of ethnic and civic identities. In this regard, the main method of analysis is comparative.

Literature Review

Russian regionalism has deep historical roots, yet it has received insufficient attention. The historical roots of Siberian regionalism have been examined in several works, among which the most thorough and comprehensive is that of the Czech scholar Harbulova (Harbulova 2010). The connection between nationalism and regionalism in Siberia and the Far East during the Civil War is analyzed in the interesting work by Ivan Sablin, a researcher at Heidelberg University (Sablin 2018).

A comprehensive comparative analysis of forms of regionalism and regionalization has been presented in only one monograph (Shabaev and Omarov 2021). Regionalism is closely linked to nationalism, and nationalism in Russia has recently become an object of intensive study by both Western (Kolsto and Blakkisrud 2016; Laruelle 2018, et al.) and Russian (Shnirelman 2012) researchers. However, in their analysis of the origins of modern nationalism, these scholars often overlook that, during the imperial period, the idea of an imperial nation built on an ethno-confessional foundation dominated (Razmolodin 2011), while the ethno-nationalism had neither a political nor a social basis, because the country was unitary, and all minorities, according to the "Charter on the Management of Inorodtsy" of 1822 (Ethnopolicy 1998), were lumped together into a single legal category of inorodtsy. Under this label, they were effectively granted cultural autonomy (Shabaev 2023). The only exceptions were the national movements of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland.

Nevertheless, it is true and must be kept in mind that the ideological foundations for ethnonationalism and political regionalization were laid precisely in the imperial period of Russian history, namely at the end of the 19th century. At that time, conceptual foundations for the symbolic construction of broad cultural worlds uniting linguistically related communities began to emerge on the Russian periphery. In the late 20th century, these concepts, gave rise to the notions of the Finno-Ugric and Turkic worlds (Omarov, Shabaev 2025). However, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these ideas were not dominant, and therefore, the collapse of the Russian Empire occurred due to a social crisis, not the activities of separatists.

However, after the Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, the new authorities adopted the doctrine of ethnic nationalism, initiated the process of "demarcation of peoples" within the former Russian Empire, and created the unique ethnic federation (Tishkov and Shabaev 2019), which some Western scholars call the "empire of positive activity" (Terry 2011). It was the Bolsheviks' ethnopolitics that created the conditions for ethnonational movements to emerge as influential political forces. Many Russian scholars argue in their studies that these movements led to the collapse of the USSR. In fact, it was the escalation of regional factors and the "parade of sovereignties" in Russia's regions, initiated by regional elites and supported by the leadership of the Russian Federation, that ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, as convincingly demonstrated in the classic work on this topic by the Russian ethnologist Cheshko (Cheshko 1996). The famous American historian Stephen Kotkin, who sees the reason for the collapse of the USSR in its unreformable economic and political system, largely agrees with Cheshko.

The crisis of contemporary ethno-national movements in Russia, which began in the late 20th century and continues to this day, resulted from these movements' rejection of an alliance with regionalists as well as from their failure to embrace the idea of regional solidarity as an ideological and political principle. Unfortunately, however, this problem has never become a subject of active research.

Results

Russia is the largest country in the world, and the transformation of the Muscovite kingdom into a Eurasian power and a multicultural political community inevitably involved a search for acceptable forms of organizing local communities and the nature of their interactions with the central government. Such forms were found, but in modern Russia, regionalist movements and regional ideologies have failed to gain a significant place in the spectrum of political forces, lacking either mass popular support or the backing of regional elites. Only the Cossack movement in southern Russia achieved this, and therefore it remains the only successful example of ethnoregionalism. The Siberian and Pomor movements, which initially had great political potential, failed to realize it and are now in decline.

Case of Pomor identity

One of the first Russian ethnographic groups to develop a cultural distinctiveness and a specific local self-consciousness was the Pomors, or Pomortsy. They live along the coasts of the White and Barents Seas, which were settled by Russians very early on. Scholars believe that the group's formation began as early as the 12th century and was completed by the 18th century, when the ethnonym "Pomors" emerged (previously, only the geographical designation "Pomortsy" existed). People from Novgorod played a major role in the group's formation, but in later stages (in the 13th-15th centuries), migrations from the Upper Volga and other regions also played a significant role. The local Finno-Ugric population also played a certain role in the ethnogenesis of the Pomors.

The Pomors have long been engaged in sea hunting, merchant shipping, and shipbuilding. From the late 17th century onward, the proportion of schismatics among them increased significantly due to the influx of Old Believers, who were forced to leave the central regions of the country due to persecution. In 1695, the first local priestless sect, the so-called Pomorian, Pomorsky, or Danilov Tolk (named after the abbot of the Vygovsky or Danilovsky Skete, Daniil Vikulich) emerged in the Vyg Hermitage.

The name "Pomors" itself derives from the general designation of the geographical region – Pomorye. In the 15th and 17th centuries, this name referred (at least in the north of Russia) to the southwestern and southeastern shores of the White Sea, the so-called Pomorsky and Letny shores. Later, it came to refer to the larger territories of the Arkhangelsk and Vologda Governorates, sometimes even to the entire north of the European part of Russia up to the Urals. The term "Pomors" first appears in Russian chronicles in 1526. In late 17th-century sources, it is used to designate the inhabitants of the coastal region and the lower reaches of the Onega, Northern Dvina, and Mezen rivers, who were engaged in sea hunting. The construction of the city of Arkhangelsk at the mouth of the Northern Dvina played a major role in the formation of the Pomor identity. The fishermen, who came to this city to trade fish and seal products, became known as Pomors. Arkhangelsk facilitated the consolidation of the group, fostering its awareness of its cultural unity and cultural distinctiveness from other groups.

The maritime component of the Pomors' economy generated a need for literate people. Furthermore, the frequent contacts of Pomors with government officials and foreigners contributed to the development of literacy among a significant portion of the male and even female population, as observed as early as the 18th century. The Schism played a significant role in this process, exerting a powerful influence on all aspects of the Pomors' lives and their self-

awareness. Even the incomplete official data of 1782 reveals a significant (for that time) number of literate people among the Pomor peasantry, especially when compared with the agricultural regions of central Russia. For example, in the Varzuzhskaya and Umba volosts, virtually every family had one or two literate men. Almost every Pomor knew local sailing directions by heart, and their shared maritime experience was summarized in the "Seafaring Book," which became a monument to pan-Russian and even northern European maritime culture. This book represented an account of the Pomors' collective experience in maritime affairs. The economy based on fishing and sea hunting meant that village assemblies in Pomorye were irregular, and their decisions were very flexible. Therefore, among Pomors, individuals enjoyed considerable autonomy and independence, further enhanced by the fact that they were state peasants rather than serfs.

Since the most labor-intensive spring and summer periods in the non-agricultural Pomorye did not feature any agricultural festivals or rituals, the festive cycle here consisted of patronal (temple) festivals, youth festivities, and specifically Pomor holidays. Large games and festivities were typically held on St. Nicholas, Trinity, and St. John Day, with each village performing its own songs for these holidays, although a common layer of Pomor folklore also existed. Linguistically, there was no single Pomor dialect; instead, researchers identify a group of Pomor dialects in the Arkhangelsk province and the northern parts of the Olonetsk and Vologda provinces. Due to significant economic and social changes in the 19th century, the word “Pomor” gradually began to lose its meaning and to fall out of use. In the 20th century, especially in its second half, the ethnonym became generally unimportant.

It was only in the 1990s, marked by a sharp increase in the political role of the regions and regional elites, who entered into political competition with the federal center to redistribute power and authority, that the Pomor identity gained momentum again. At that time, the republics elevated their status by adopting declarations of sovereignty, a process dubbed the "parade of sovereignties," while okrugs and provinces sought to increase their influence by seeking to transform themselves into republics. To achieve this, they employed historical and cultural arguments, and, most importantly, attempted to construct new ethnic identities - Pomor and Siberian.

Initially, the Pomor movement was a purely regional political project aimed at expanding the region's political power vis-à-vis the federal center and at politicizing regional issues. It was considered a prerequisite for the formation of a regional political ideology and for transforming the Arkhangelsk region into a Pomor republic. As the previous discussion suggests, these ideas were indeed grounded in historical realities. However, they were initially viewed by federal authorities as regional separatism. Be it as it may, it was Arkhangelsk regionalism as a political movement that created the foundation for the revitalization of Pomor cultural identity.

The 2002 census showed that the ethnonym had not died out completely and was once again being revived, as a portion of the Arkhangelsk region's population consciously identified themselves as "Pomors." Among those who identified themselves as "Pomors" was Arkhangelsk Governor A. Efremov. He was one of 6,524 Pomors registered by the census. In 2003, the Pomor National Cultural Autonomy was registered in the city of Arkhangelsk. In early 2004, it was followed by the establishment of the Pomor Community of Indigenous Peoples of the North. Current Pomor leaders assert that the Pomors are neither an ethnographic group nor a subethnic group within the Russian people, but an independent ethnic group. Furthermore, they insist that they are not Slavs, but a Finno-Ugric people, referring to the Finno-Ugric tribes that inhabited the European north before the arrival of Russian colonists as their predecessors. The Pomors' revival is largely explained by political and economic interests, rather than a desire

for cultural distinctiveness and the preservation of traditions. Pomor identity is heterogeneous, meaning that different individuals who call themselves Pomors assign different meanings to the term. Indeed, Pomor should be considered a regional rather than an ethnic identity, and, as such, it is actively embraced by the population of the Arkhangelsk region, particularly in the Pomor villages along the White Sea coast. However, leaders of the Pomor movement insist on granting the Pomors the status of an Indigenous People of the North and on including them in the official list of these peoples, approved by the Russian government in 2000. At the Pomor congress held in Arkhangelsk in September 2007, this issue was at the forefront of delegates' consideration, and the demand for "indigenous people" status was included in the final resolution.

The second congress, held in 2009 in the village of Umba, the Murmansk province, reaffirmed this demand. The authorities' refusal to recognize the Pomors as an "indigenous minority people of the north," the active "anti-Pomor campaign" in the media, the pressure on Pomor leaders, and the poor conduct of the 2010 census resulted in a sharp decrease in the total Pomor population. According to the 2010 census, there were only 3,113 Pomors in the country, which is about half of those registered in 2002. Nevertheless, it is clear that Pomor identity is not purely situational, but rather reflects the relatively stable cultural orientations of the population of the Arkhangelsk Region and several adjacent territories. Given that a significant portion of adherents to the Pomor idea and Pomor identity call themselves "Russian Pomors" and also because many do not renounce their Pomor identity in principle but call themselves Russian (choosing the dominant form of cultural identification), it is quite difficult to determine the total number of Pomors.

The 2020 census (conducted in the fall of 2021) recorded 2,232 people who identified themselves as Pomors, but local experts believe that Pomor identity is more widespread and, more importantly, that it is closely correlated with regional and pan-Russian identities. Therefore, it is difficult to accurately estimate the number of people who identify as Pomors to any degree. This identity is not currently used as a political resource, although the possibility of such use remains.

The case of Siberian regionalism

Russian political practices have undergone significant changes over the last 20 years. However, they largely retain the traditions of political hierarchy and corporativism, in which the principle of separation of powers is conditional and more ritualistic. At the same time, it is impossible to speak of full unification and ritualization of political life in the country, because the mobilization of regionalist and ethnopolitical ideas for achieving both current and long-term political aims remains its essential feature, whatever form this mobilization may take.

The fact that regionalism appears to be in the focus of our attention here is not accidental, for, as P. Sorokin (who was born in the Komi region) noted in his “Sociology System”, the relations based on the common place of residence represent the strongest among social relations:

“The grouping by place of residence has been one of the most important throughout history. It forms the basis of the state grouping, dividing the state territory into districts, provinces, volosts, and determining the phenomena of jurisdiction, possession, or deprivation of the rights of self-government (places deprived of zemstvo representation), etc. In a word, among many solidarities there is a special solidarity by place of residence, giving grounds for a special grouping not coinciding with the basic one and being one of the most important social co-ordinates, defining the behavior and experiences of individuals living together” (Sorokin 1992: 120-121).

Nevertheless, in the public discourse, there is an opinion that “regionalism (as a movement)

is at an infantile stage of development in Russia" (Krylov 2018). Despite holding some truth, this opinion is not entirely correct, because ethnonational movements, which can be considered part of regional movements, have become an integral part of the modern Russian political landscape, and their ideology has been adequately formed (Shabaev, Sadokhin 2014; Aitamurto 2016). Thus, speaking about the history of the Russian regionalism, the idea of a separate Siberian republic was expressed for the first time in the 1820-s, that is 200 years ago. In the late 19th century, Siberian regionalism reappeared in the form of so-called "Siberian autonomism", the mouthpiece of which were the so-called "oblastniki" (Harbulova 2010). It is worth mentioning in this relation that regional ethnonational movements, for example, among the Finno-Ugric peoples (excluding Finns), began to be formed in the early 20th century (Shabaev, Charina 2010; Shabaev, Zherebtsov, Alexander 1997; The Finno-Ugric World 2004). This suggests that both regionalistic and ethnoregionalistic political associations are not new to Russia.

A question inevitably arises: Do regionalism and ethnicity, as instruments of political mobilization, contradict each other or represent complementary political resources? The political practice suggests that they are not only closely related, but also that the ideology of regionalism and regionalistic movements can be transformed (and, furthermore, transform itself) into the ideology of ethnic nationalism and ethnic movements.

However, it is still necessary to distinguish regionalism as a political practice and regionalism as an ideology. In post-Soviet Russia, it is possible to name, perhaps, only two regional political projects that have been realized in practice, but whose destiny essentially differs. The first project is the creation of the Ural Republic, and the second is the reorganization of the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic into Tatarstan, which involves the formation of a Tatar regional identity and ideology of Tatar regionalism (Shabaev, Zherebtsov 2016).

On the other hand, the best example of a successful articulation of regional ideology in that period was in the Arkhangelsk region (see above). Importantly, historical memory and ethnicity formed the basis of the regional ideology there (Shabaev, Zherebtsov, Zhuravev 2012; Zherebtsov 2016; Fauzer 2026), and this ideology itself successfully shifted from the politicization of historical memory to the construction of ethnicity. The idea of wide regional integration is rather popular in the circles of Archangelsk's political and intellectual elite, and, according to our surveys, it is actively supported by the population of northern regions (Shabaev 2011; Shabaev, Zherebtsov, Kim Hye Jin, Kim Hyun Taek 2016). Nevertheless, the Popmor movement could not achieve its aims and become an appreciable political force in the European north of Russia, for, as a result of two anti-Pomor campaigns, it had in fact been crushed.

The case of Siberian regionalism is interesting for comparison because it has the deepest historical roots in Russia. The modern population of Siberia was formed through various multi-phase migratory processes, which are well-documented in the scientific literature (Zherebtsov 2010; Zherebtsov & Isupov 2013a; Zherebtsov & Isupov 2013b; Fauzer 2026). In the Soviet years, quite understandably, Siberian autonomism was impossible. However, even in the post-Soviet epoch, no large-scale revival of the idea of Siberian regionalism/autonomism occurred. A few attempts to revive this idea did take place: In 1997, the creation of a certain "Siberian party" professing ideas of regionalism was declared. This party, however, did not have broad support and quickly disappeared from political horizon. In 1998, the Liberation Army of Siberia numbering 15 people, was created.

Since the turn of the century, ideas of Siberian autonomism or something close to them have started to appear somewhat more often, particularly in regional Internet resources. In 2005, a certain "Siberian movement" emerged in LiveJournal. It was followed by equally enigmatic

"Regional Alternative of Siberia", "State of Siberia", etc. In 2006, the Baikal peoples' front, comprising approximately 30 members, was established (Modern Siberian). Just like their ideological predecessors, the oblastniki, supporters of modern Siberian regionalism promote rather rational ideas of expanding the power of Russian regions vis-à-vis the federal center. However, the shy attempts to revive the Siberian movement as a regional political association have not been successful so far and neither have been the attempts to establish Siberian regionalism as a popular and widely discussed ideological concept.

However, this does not mean that the idea of Siberian regionalism is dead. Rather, it takes a different form, namely the construction of Siberian identity and cultural distinctiveness, which, in some cases, acquires an ethnic coloring. In some basic regional textbooks, it is said that the territorial determinant "Siberian" should be considered an ethnonym, and the Siberians as a separate ethnic group (Polyanichkina 2007). This allowed some supporters of Siberian regionalism to assert that the named ethnonym is not merely real, but also very widespread, and that the Siberian identity is realized not only in it, but also in other symbolic forms. So, Semen Kaigorodov wrote in March 2012 on the Novosibirsk news site "Tape of regional news":

"The last population census was noticeable by the fact that in the column 'nationality', many of our fellow citizens (informal figure – about 4 million) wrote – 'Siberian'. Ethnographers hardly recognize the Siberian subethnos apparently exists. Enthusiasts of the "Siberians" invented "the Siberian language" on the basis of old-timers' Yenisei dialect, began to develop concepts of the development of Siberia, and even argued on where the future Siberian capital should be. Sayan Andrianov, a Novosibirsk musician and leader of the group "Bugotak" playing ethnic rock music, composed the Siberian hymn "I am a Siberian" (Kaigorodov 2012).

The most radical supporters of the Siberian movement not only promote recognition of the Siberians as an independent ethnic group, but also argue for the "formation of the strong Siberian nation" (Sovremennyi).

However, the words that 4 million people have defined their ethnic belonging with the ethnonym "Siberian", are an obvious exaggeration: in fact, there were only few thousand such people and most of them (4 thousand people) were from Novosibirsk, which, together with Tomsk, Irkutsk and Surgut, is considered one of the main centers of Siberian autonomism. In 2012, the new oblastniki tried to create a national-cultural autonomy of the Siberians in Novosibirsk, but, as officially the Siberians are not recognized either as an ethnographic group of the Russians, or as an independent ethnic community, they failed to achieve this.

Today, there are no grounds to speak about the formation of a wide-scale Siberian movement or a socially significant "Siberian project." However, it is obvious that in Siberian regions, the cultural basis for strengthening Siberian identity as a possible foundation for future social movements is being formed. This formation proceeds, as it seems, in two distinct directions: the transformation of Siberian distinctiveness into some brand and its use in the consumer market, and the intellectualization of the idea of "Siberianism".

A number of the enterprises located in cities of Siberia mark their production either as "Made in Siberia" or "Product of Siberia". One can find vests, T-shirts, labels on suitcases, and even passport covers with the words "I am a Siberian". They are on sale in Novosibirsk and have gained popularity, which means that Siberian distinctiveness gets visualized and sells as a special consumer quality. Furthermore, as Internet sites inform, "some local residents prefer to be represented to foreigners as 'From Siberia": this not only causes less negative associations (with corruption, authoritarianism, etc.) than "From Russia", but is perceived as romantic and exotic (I am Siberian).

However, the aspiration to exotization should not be thought about only as some reaction to unification and globalization or as a form of cultural protest against social ills of the Russian society. The aspiration to exotization often has quite a rational basis, as can be seen in the example of Kalmykia (Guchinova 2012: 171-190). At the same time, Siberian distinctiveness can indeed take the form of cultural protest, as testifies the demonstration in Novosibirsk on May 1, 2016 (a cultural parody of a classical demonstration) under the slogan "Here is not Moscow for you". Approximately 2,000 people took part in it.

The intellectualization of the idea of Siberian distinctiveness is promoted by the activities of scientific organizations and universities, where the study of Siberian cultural heritage is conducted. In 2014, the scientific conference "Man in the varying world. Identity and social adaptation problem in the history and the present: methodology, technique and research practice" was held in Tomsk. There, the problems of formation of the Russian identity were discussed, and special attention was given to the discussion of the concept "Siberian". Philologists of the Tomsk University, in turn, issued "The Dictionary of figurative units of the Siberian dialect," etc.

Therefore, the cultural basis of Siberian distinctiveness is gradually formed. It can lay the groundwork for the development of regional ideology, but it can hardly be transformed into any form of regional political movement. First, in Russia, great fears of separatist moods exist among officials, and these fears are not without grounds. These fears have led to the defeat of the Pomor movement in Archangelsk. Secondly, in Russia, the creation of regional parties and parties based on ethnic principles is prohibited. Thirdly, Siberian regionalism lacks widespread public support today; it will be very difficult, if at all possible, to change public opinion.

What can feed the regionalism today? Evidently, any regional movements should express the interests of the local population. These interests are many-sided, but economic interests are most significant. For an ordinary citizen or businessman, of importance are the condition of the labor market, the level of prices and incomes, the system of taxation and tariffs, business dealing conditions, etc. Here, quite obvious disproportions are observed, as the majority of industrial potential is concentrated in regions, while almost all financial capital is concentrated in Moscow. While the largest part of national wealth is produced outside the capital, Moscow is the largest taxpayer, as the headquarters of the largest corporations are located there. They pay a considerable share of taxes not to local budgets, but to the capital budget. This produces a very essential difference in the incomes of inhabitants of regions and the capital.

Furthermore, the recent obsession with the "vertical of power" has led to the fact that, besides the concentration of capital, almost all power potential is also concentrated in Moscow, as the role of local political elites and the political influence of the regions is extremely limited. This cannot help but cause discontent. The aspiration to eradicate separatist moods among regional leaders was the primary purpose of such concentration, but this purpose had been achieved only partially. Besides, the would-be regionalist is born and nurtured appreciably in view of the fact that the policy of civil integration has not become a significant component in the political practice of both federal and regional political managers.

Furthermore, aside from the economic and political reasons inevitably generating regionalistic ideas, the cultural peculiarities of the regions, their cultural distinctiveness, are also of great importance. For anyone interested in developing and strengthening local nationalism and separatism, it is important to rely not only on economic egoism and healthy economic interests of the local population, but also to form an ideology which convincingly would prove that inhabitants of the given concrete region are an independent cultural community with its own cultural, economic and political interests which are not considered or are insufficiently considered by the federal authorities. It is necessary for this ideology to be apprehended by

various strata of society.

Today, there is no one to form such an ideology, but the isolated ideas of Siberian distinctiveness persist and are constantly replicated in virtual space.

Conclusion

Territorial inequality, which is quite evident in Russia today, has a significant impact on public sentiment. It was precisely this inequality that fueled the emergence of regionalist movements in the 1990s and their subsequent evolution into ethnopolitical and ethnocultural movements. Differences in economic development among the constituent entities of the Russian Federation are extremely large, and the gross regional product per capita varies by dozens of times across regions (for example, if we compare the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Ingushetia). Regarding citizens' income and expenses, thanks to government regulation and social support, the differences are less significant. However, the average gross salary still varies significantly, and the poverty rate, i.e., the proportion of citizens with incomes below the subsistence minimum, differs by a factor of four to five. This is, of course, due to differences in the economic potential of the regions and their levels of socioeconomic development. However, even high wage figures do not necessarily indicate well-being in particular regions, as the expenses of families living in the southern regions and in the north also differ significantly. Today, residents of the European north generally fare worse than the average Russian, based on a combination of well-being indicators. An additional indicator of regional well-being is territorial connectivity, including the accessibility of transportation for residents and the availability of year-round roads. In this regard, vast territories and many regions of the North, Siberia, and the Far East still find themselves in a disadvantaged position. The recently adopted "Strategy for Territorial Development of the Russian Federation" aims to address territorial inequality; however, since this inequality is inherent in the nature of territories, it will not be possible to completely eliminate it.

Nevertheless, the policy of mitigating territorial differences must be proactive: if territorial differences continue to deepen, this will inevitably spur the politicization of the issue and the use of both ethnic and regional identities as resources for political mobilization.

Currently, attempts to politicize and galvanize regionalist and ethnoregionalist movements and initiatives are blocked by federal authorities and the key idea of the "Strategy for State Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation," which is the need for civic integration and the intensification of nation-building processes, i.e., strengthening the foundations of the Russian civic nation and pan-Russian identity. However, in the regions, and especially in the republics of the Russian Federation, civic integration policies are often ineffective and sometimes encounter hidden resistance. Therefore, the persistent and deepening territorial inequality and the lack of integration policy in Russian regions could give rise to a new surge of regionalism and regional separatism, comparable to that of the 1990s. On the other hand, the implementation of such an ethnopolitical scenario will only be possible in the context of a political and economic crisis, which the Russian authorities will likely attempt to prevent.

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