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IN SIBERIA:

A RESEARCH
PROGRAMME

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Conditions and Limitations of Lifestyle Plurality in Siberia: A research programme¹

Joachim Otto Habeck²

Abstract

This paper presents the research programme of the MPI's Siberian Studies Centre for 2008-2012. The aim of the programme is to describe: the preconditions and processes that lead to the differentiation of lifestyles; the scope and dimensions of social recognition, indifference or intolerance towards different models of behaviour; and the factors that facilitate the mainstreaming of such models and/or limit the diversity of lifestyle choices. With the overall improvement of the economic situation in Russia, free time and levels of consumption have increased. So has their significance for people's sense of self, even though work as a frame of reference continues to be important. On the one hand, there are many signs of growing diversity of lifestyles in Siberia (and Russia in general); on the other, the State's current emphasis on patriotism, family values, and proper moral education indicates a normative, mainstreaming tendency, with the likely result that space for alternative lifestyles and projects will be limited.

After presenting a short rationale for conducting this research at this very time in this very region, I shall introduce the concept of lifestyle and then outline the research questions. In the next parts I briefly comment on two central concepts in anthropological research on Siberia: ethnos and modernisation. Highlighting the reflexivity of actors and the element of choice, the subsequent sections are devoted to divergent, often contested, frames of identification and the performative, even playful character of representation. The final part charts the scope for collaboration with other research units at the MPI. It is hoped that the paper will induce readers to contribute to the future research agenda of the Siberian Studies Centre through their comments and ideas.

¹ I acknowledge the numerous valuable comments I received at various development states of this programme from Bettina Mann, Günther Schlee, Chris Hann, Julia Eckert, John Eidson, Felix Girke, Brian Donahoe, Agnieszka Halemba, Katherine Metzko, Virginie Vaté, Melissa Caldwell, the current members of the Siberian Studies Centre, and the many colleagues who commented on the draft of this paper when I first presented it at the "Werkstatt Ethnologie" in Halle on 23 October 2007.

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“Russia in particular continues to evoke overwhelmingly negative reporting and imagery in much of the mass media which informs popular understanding in the west. (...) There is, it seems, no good news to come out of Russia and less still to come out of Siberia.” (Kay 2006: 213)

Siberia is commonly perceived and described by outsiders as a desolate, cheerless and uncultured part of the world (Habeck 2005b). Notwithstanding occasional accounts more complex in their judgement, connotations with icy confines, unpopulated expanses, forced labour camps, unsustainable resource extraction, and environmental degradation are very widespread popular images of the region. To be sure, climatic conditions in Siberia are difficult, the technical infrastructure is insufficient in many regions, and for this and other reasons one may conclude that the conditions of everyday life are harder here than in other regions. This does not necessarily mean, however, that people in Siberia suffer more privation and misery than in other parts of the world.

Many inhabitants of the Russian Federation do live under precarious circumstances, and the description and analysis of their life conditions definitely belong to the most relevant tasks of social-science research. However, this commitment can easily distort the realities of everyday life in Siberia in all its manifestations. Since 2001, Russia has witnessed considerable economic growth, for the most part on the basis of oil and gas exports. It is unclear (and deserves to be studied) whether and to what extent rural inhabitants and urban lower income groups have benefited from the oil and gas revenues.³ One may presume that overall economic growth has generally led to higher and more stable monetary income, but the effect is probably experienced very differentially by the various population segments. Thus, on the one hand, the spending power and possibilities for consumption have increased noticeably in some Siberian communities; for many people the economic situation is no longer as grave as it was five or ten years ago. On the other hand, new patterns of social inequality are manifest in the non-participation and exclusion of less affluent groups from public spaces and facilities. On these grounds, research on consumer practices, lifestyles, and forms of representation of individual and collective identity is of growing topicality and deserves more attention in social-science scholarship on Siberia.

Most inhabitants of Siberia (and of Russia, in general) usually associate the 1990s with chaos and wildness, whereas the 2000s can be characterised as a period of economic, cultural, and societal consolidation, with a marked tendency towards conservatism and restrengthening of religious organisations, notably the Orthodox Church. We are witnessing, on the one hand, many signs of growing diversity of lifestyles in this region; on the other hand, the state’s current concern with and emphasis on patriotism, family values, and proper moral education indicates a normative, mainstreaming tendency, with the possible result that spaces for alternative lifestyles and projects will be limited.

³ To the best of my knowledge, studies directly addressing this question do not exist as of yet. Some trends can be deduced *indirectly* from local social-economic reports (e.g. Laboratoriia 2006 for the oil town Usinsk in the north of the Komi Republic) and regional statistics, taking into account data on employment, average household income, and other indicators.

Against this backcloth, the MPI's Siberian Studies Centre is starting a new research programme titled "Conditions and Limitations of Lifestyle Plurality in Siberia". From 2008 to 2012, two teams of researchers will conduct individual research projects in the framework of this programme. In general terms, the team of researchers will seek to describe

- the preconditions and processes that lead to the differentiation of lifestyles;
- the scope and dimensions of social recognition, indifference, or intolerance towards different models of behaviour; and
- the factors that facilitate the mainstreaming of such models and/or limit the diversity of lifestyle choices.

The Concept of Lifestyle

"Lifestyle" commonly carries connotations of certain choices and consumer practices, in particular with various forms of conspicuous consumption, advertisements in glossy magazines and big money. However, the concept of "lifestyle" will be applied here in a much wider sense, informed by the genealogy of the term in sociological writings.⁴ Of central importance for our research programme is Bourdieu's (1984 [1979]) study on "Distinction", which exposes lifestyles as concomitant to different positions in a stratified society. Parallel to the struggles about economic capital in what Bourdieu calls social space (in the French original: *espace social*), social actors are engaged in struggles about symbolic capital in the space of lifestyles (*espace des styles des vie*). Taste, seemingly a domain of individual decision-making, follows socially established patterns. The individual does not usually reflect on his/her dispositions that condition such choices. "Distinction" of social groups is perpetuated by the enactment of taste.

Stronger even than Bourdieu, Giddens (1991) argues that one *cannot* have *no* lifestyle, and he connects this claim with the characteristics of life in the times of high modernity (a claim to be discussed below). In contrast to Bourdieu, Giddens puts strong emphasis on the individuals' need to select consciously from many existing options: he conceptualises the self as a reflexive project. Taking this into account, our investigation of lifestyles should explicitly address the norms, predilections, orientations, and convictions upon which a person takes decisions on how to get on in life, whom to bond with, and how to present him-/herself in public. His notion of lifestyle bears generally positive connotations in the sense that people are satisfied with (or at least, have arranged themselves) with the goals and activities that shape their everyday lives. This aspect of assenting emotions is complementary to the aspect of negative emotions, represented by such terms as "crisis" and "survival", which thus far appear to be the dominant rationale for anthropological and ethnographic research in Siberia. Not only suffering but also affirmative emotions and expressions are needed to sustain a sense of collective identity.

Elaborating the theoretical frame for this research programme, it will be necessary to address the crucial difference between Giddens's notion of lifestyle as expression of individual *self-reflection* and Bourdieu's emphasis on the mostly *unreflected* character of consumption practices and social distinction. Respondents' assertions that important changes and turning points in their lives' course

⁴ Among the first to reflect on the idea of lifestyle is Weber (1980 [1922]: 537). He connects the stylisation of life (*Stilisierung des Lebens*) with the perpetuation of conventions within the different status groups (*Stände*) of society and their respective ideas of honour (Ehre). This argument implies that ethos is expressed through a certain style, a way of doing things.

“just happened” (*prosto poluchilos’ tak*) cast doubt upon Giddens’s idea of the self as a reflexive project. On the other hand, the rapid economic and symbolic shifts in post-Soviet society prevented most people from simply “carrying on” and induced them to compare now and then, to “rethink” their situation and aspirations. Giddens may well over-emphasise the individual’s possibilities for inducing change, whereas Bourdieu tends to under-estimate this potential. His work depicts individuals as unavoidably inserted in a social hierarchy, leading a lifestyle they have never chosen but instead appropriated and learnt to like. What transpires from Bourdieu’s writings is the idea that lifestyles reproduce themselves through the people that enact and re-enact them. Change of lifestyle is tied to class affiliation and hence a question of the individual or family ascending or descending on the social ladder. For Bourdieu it is not a question of choice by necessity, as Giddens would have it, or of choice as eclectic combination, as is claimed by postmodern sociologists. This point will be further developed below; prior to that, however, it is apposite to outline what questions about lifestyle can and should be examined in Siberia.

Research Questions

In what follows, I shall present the research questions, offer some perspectives from which to address them, and refer to existing scholarship with particular focus on Russia/Siberia.

1. How do we apply the term “lifestyle” in field research in Siberia? How does it relate to similar terms such as obraz zhizni (“way of life”)?

“Lifestyle” (*stil’ zhizni*) is applied infrequently yet increasingly in social-science research in Russia. There are few sociologists who use the concept in a systematic manner. Osadchaia (2002: 89) and Omel’chenko (2003: 152) provide brief definitions of the term in their studies of social differentiation among urban youths. Voz’mitel’ (2002) treats lifestyles as sub-categories of (occupationally defined) ways of life (*sposob zhizni*), such as entrepreneurship or public-sector employment. Lifestyles, he writes, are dependent on “characteristics of motivation and activity” (*motivatsionno-deiatel’nostnye kharakteristiki*), notably on attitudes to risk-taking. Roshchina (2007) provides a comparatively comprehensive discussion of the concept of lifestyle, taking into account the works of Weber and Bourdieu and postmodern writings on consumption.

More seldom still is lifestyle discussed in social anthropological (ethnographic) scholarship in Russia (one of the few examples I know of is Ostroukh’s (2006) description of metrosexuals). Much more common is the term *obraz zhizni*, usually translated as “way of life”. It recurred frequently in late Soviet and then post-Soviet social-science research to describe the combination of material, technological, and cultural aspects of how people live their lives. However, it is somewhat problematic for our purposes because of its implicit focus on macro processes (long-term social change, large-scale phenomena, e.g. transition from a nomadic to a settled way of life), with the result that micro processes, i.e. personal choices and behaviour in small groups, remain out of sight. In other words, research on *obraz zhizni* does not yield a satisfactory answer as to why somebody might *want* to live a certain kind of life or *want* to pursue certain activities. *Obraz zhizni* might continue to be a useful concept in the study of Siberian peoples, yet it can benefit from a closer analysis of how people come to accept and assert certain way(s) of life, or reject and substitute them by other.

2. *How can we develop a systematic, cross-cultural approach to lifestyle? How can we create a methodological basis for studying it in a comparative manner?*

Rather than just singling out “old” and “new” lifestyles, the aim of the research programme is to discern the processes and spheres of integration, separation, and reconfiguration of groups of people that share the same preferences and conventions and (more or less reflectedly) believe in their validity. Those spheres of integration, separation, and reconfiguration are regionally specific, as our case studies from different parts of Siberia will be likely to expose. Some lifestyle-related aspects offer themselves to quantitative research methods, e.g. levels of consumption of different goods (cf. Bourdieu 1984 [1979]) or the amount of time people allocate to certain activities. Such methods may help to complement respondents’ accounts of how they (want to) live with the practical aspects of their day-to-day existence.

Instead of further exploring the potential utility of specific methods – a task to be pursued jointly by the team of researchers – I wish to address one specific aspect: the necessity to embrace both work and leisure. In anthropological research on Siberia there has thus far been a tendency to pay much attention to the domain of work (production), whereas the domain of consumption, leisure, and popular culture has been widely neglected. Since the 1990s, work as the most dominant frame of identification has lost some of its clout, whereas leisure has grown in importance. Russia and the other post-socialist countries have witnessed a diversification of leisure activities and venues. Just about the entire leisure sector has undergone commercialisation. In other words, today one has to pay in order to participate in most, though not all, leisure activities. Along with the stratification of household income occurs a stratification of consumption and leisure. The space wherein struggles for symbolic capital are taking place is changing and there are new arenas where social distinction comes into play.⁵

3. *How do lifestyles emerge and what are the conditions of their differentiation?*

Some of the factors, which lead to the differentiation of lifestyles, are obvious, e.g. economic capital, notably in the form of household income, since it sets the frame for consumption. Symbolic capital is bestowed on the individual through familial background, upbringing, and education; and there is a certain tendency to reproduction of lifestyles across generations (as seems to be the case with *intelligentsiia* families). An individual’s profession, mobility, and place of residence are very influential too, as are gender roles and arrangements, membership of a certain generation, family status, and the combination of people living together in the same household. Ethnic identity also plays an important role, yet the research proposed here will go beyond the simple juxtaposition of “traditional” and “contemporary” ways of life (which has become a commonplace theme in

⁵ “In between” work and leisure is the field of recreational work, embracing such activities as gardening, mushrooming, etc. which in its turn overlaps with subsistence and domestic labour (childcare, housework, etc.). Obviously, it is highly difficult to establish borders between paid work, subsistence, domestic labour, recreational work and relaxation. Interestingly, we find that many of the activities “in between” have been documented and analysed quite well in ethnographic and anthropological scholarship on Siberia and Russia (e.g. in anthropological writings about the informal economy), possibly because they were so crucial during the times of economic hardship in the 1990s but also in earlier decades. Some forms of recreational work, notably gardening, are highly valued. Gardening is the source of healthy, self-grown food; the summer cottage (*dacha*) is a place of personal freedom. Caldwell reports from a *dacha* settlement in the vicinity of Moscow (2007: 7): “As one woman put it, it was at her *dacha* that she could ignore the conventions of life in the city. At the *dacha* she felt free to dress as she wanted, to eat what she wanted, and to do what she wanted when she wanted. It was here, where she was relaxed, that she felt most fully human and alive.”

ethnographic research on the peoples of Siberia, see below). Rather, the team shall consider how people with an “ethnic” background live their lives and see their identities in the context of ethnicity as a legal and political issue (Donahoe et al. forthcoming a) and of public expectations and stereotypes constructed by the media and circulating as “public opinion”.

To considerable extent, research on the conditions and limitations of lifestyle plurality can draw conceptually on the seminal work of the erstwhile Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), University of Birmingham, with its focus on the development of youth cultures and “subcultures”.⁶ Urban lifestyles, youth cultures and “subcultures” in Russia have been explored in the 1990s and 2000s by sociologists (notably, Pilkington 1994; Omel’chenko 2003); these studies are usually confined to the European part of Russia. Anthropological studies on the situation of youths in Siberia are still rare (Anderson 2004; Glendinning, Pak and Popkov 2004; see also Habeck 2004). Urban lifestyles and youth culture are commonly considered as counter-concepts of “ethnic” ways of life, and for this reason some indigenous youths pursue them as alternative identifications.⁷ Another, very different, option is the movement of “neo-traditionalism”, which has emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s. It provides a new, explicitly local, frame of belonging and a sceptical response by the individual to state-imposed projects of modernisation (in Soviet times) and transformation (in post-Soviet times). Concerning the emergence and differentiation of lifestyles, we thus also need to look at ideological factors, in particular the transition to market economy and growth of consumerism in the Russia of the 1990s, and the emphasis on conservative values in the current decade.

All the factors mentioned above come to exert their influence only at certain times and certain places. Personal interests and activities, most importantly leisure activities, may bring people together in completely different contexts, forming groups that exist independently from conventional frames of belonging – groups with new identifications and demands for distinction.

4. What are the forces that work against the diversification of lifestyles? What are the mechanisms of habituation of certain patterns of behaviour and reasoning over several generations? What are the causes of social recognition, indifference, or intolerance? How do people negotiate, propagate, and sanction social norms and values on societal as well as group level?

Among the forces that lead to the legitimisation of some forms of behaviour and limit the practicability of others, we may discern economic ones (the local job market situation, entitlement to social benefits, etc.), social ones (obligations due to kinship ties, peer-group pressure at school, etc.), and political ones, on which I shall focus here.

Topics for examination in this regard would be the state’s and society’s refreshed emphasis on patriotism and familial values and the reinvigorated alliance between the state and the church, both leading to the creation and maintenance of a strong sense of “us”. This sense of collectivity promotes and supports certain life projects (army service for men, maternity for women, and marriage for both). Simultaneously, it bears the potential to foster intolerance towards alternative

⁶ For a brief discussion of recent critiques of “subculture” and the application of this term in the context of Russia, see Habeck and Ventsel forthcoming.

⁷ To prevent misunderstandings, it is not my aim to correlate lifestyles with supposedly more or less “traditional” or “modern” ways of life, nor do I see any theoretical use in this differentiation, though it is pervasive in academic literature and public debate. See my remark on the influence of modernisation theory in public discourse in Russia, below in the main text.

life projects and lifestyles. Careful analysis can reveal how local officials, public organisations (including NGOs), different hierarchies within the clergy, and lay religious movements participate in the negotiation of social norms.

Changing notions of deviant behaviour (*deviantnoe povedenie*) and measures to prevent such behaviour show the boundaries of what is publicly tolerated. In-depth fieldwork gives the opportunity for assessing to what extent officially established boundaries coincide with informal demarcations between permitted and refuted practices and choices. Research on the processes of maintenance of collectivity and social exclusion will also require us to reassess the old debate on collectivism *versus* individualism, on “the collective and the individual” (Kharkhordin 1999).

5. *What is the relation between lifestyles and identities/ identifications? More practically, how does lifestyle plurality relate to social cohesion within a community?*

Individuals identify with a certain lifestyle, yet they do not live it consistently, nor do they live it continuously. Giddens (1991: 83) mentions that individuals switch between different “milieux of action”, with the result that their lifestyle choices and activities are segmental (in other words, they are attuned to the social situation). A *style* as such, then, obviously represents a generalised, classified, and idealised notion of the way that people actually live. Lifestyle can be seen as the ideal of preferred activities; collective identity can be seen as the ideal of group affiliation and sameness (i.e. the absence of difference, Schlee 2002: 8). Different lifestyles probably correspond to identifications of different intensity and valuation.

Under collective identity I also subsume communal identity, i.e. the identity of a place as a local community (*Gemeinschaft*), the way that the inhabitants of a place think of its image, and the way that they “work” on it and present it to outsiders. How do the people want to arrange their place, what do they aspire to, what do they want to express, and by what means? How do they create and maintain social cohesion? How do they express mutual acceptance and recognition and how do they withhold it?

In the following I shall describe the current status of ethnographic/anthropological research in and on Siberia, which thus far has been largely concerned with ethnos and ethnic identity, whereas other aspects of identification have received much less attention (Habeck 2005a). I continue with articulating my reservations against an evolutionist interpretation of social change. I then return to the discussion of identity with special emphasis on those aspects of identity that result from the person’s decision to participate in collective activities. The next section is devoted to the performative and often playful character of social interaction. Finally, I shall outline how this research programme resonates with the research activities of the three departments of the MPI.

The Study of Identity beyond Ethnicity

For the scholarly tradition of *Völkerbeschreibung* (ethnography) and *Völkerkunde* (ethnology) (Vermeulen 2006), ethnic affiliation served as the prime classificatory criterion since the inception of the discipline. In different scholarly traditions, notably anthropology of the Anglo-American brand in contrast to *Ethnologie* in the Continental European and *etnografiia* in the Russian

tradition, the concept of the “ethnic” has been treated very differentially. The relation between ethnography and anthropology has been complex and at times uneasy (Hann et al. 2007). In the Soviet Union, *ethnos* (*etnos*) was the central concept of the discipline during the 1970s and 1980s (Gellner 1980) and identity was usually discussed as ethnic identity. Anglo-American scholars seldom employed *ethnos* as a theoretical concept but they too emphasised ethnic identity, cultural survival, and ethnic revival very prominently in their research on Siberia. Over the last ten or fifteen years, there has been a growing tendency to describe how ethnic identity, language, and religion, or more exactly, their representations in the public debate, can be used as political resources (e.g. Gray 2005).

Ethnicity, language, and religion are, no doubt, important aspects of identity; but they are definitely not the only ones. Even though *ethnos* has long been considered a main feature of Soviet/Russian scholarship (and may be expected to remain a distinct feature also in the future of this school), a temporary turn away from *ethnos* towards other aspects of social organisation is likely to have a fruitful and revitalising effect (cf. Tishkov 2003: 7).

Modernisation Theory and Siberia

Before carrying on with the discussion of various aspects of identity, I have to dwell on the complexities of the use of old and new variations of social evolutionism and the idea of progress in the study of Siberia. A unilinear version of social evolutionism provided the theoretical underpinning for *etnografiia*, which, in Soviet times, was understood as an ancillary discipline of history. Part of the ethnographic business was to discern and describe the different developmental stages of the peoples of Siberia along the evolutionary continuum, starting from primitive society and ultimately leading to the stages of socialism and communism. *Etnografiia*'s commitment to the study of “traditional” societies almost entirely precluded systematic investigation of the contemporary situation of Siberian communities: the general assumption was that the peoples of Siberia were more or less quickly transiting to “modern”, Soviet-type society, in which the old ways and distinctions, the prime topic of *etnografiia*, came to be blurred and insignificant. The late Soviet condition of ethnic groups in Siberia remained largely outside the field of vision of *etnografiia*.

However, social (or cultural) evolutionism has had its imprint on social sciences not only in the (post-) Soviet domain but much more widely. My colleague John Eidson speaks of a “revival of cultural evolutionism in the guise of modernization theory” since the mid-20th century (Eidson 2006: 31). He commented on an earlier version of my paper with the remark that, on the one hand, the research programme aims at overcoming the conceptual dichotomy of “traditional” and “modern”; on the other hand, it unintentionally reinforces this dichotomy, as it appears to be formulated in the very framework of modernisation theory, and is based, in part at least, upon the arguments of some of its key proponents.⁸

⁸ Giddens's idea of the self as a reflexive project is firmly bound to the concept of reflexive modernisation (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1996) and a periodisation of history into pre-modern, modern, and late modern. Giddens ascribes reflexivity and choice to the “late modern” individual exclusively and denies their role in “traditional cultures, where people are the prisoners of events and preconstructed settings rather than able to subject their lives to the sway of their own self-understanding” (1991: 72-73). This highly questionable position strongly reminds one of the paternalist conception of the peoples of Siberia as noble savages in need of support and developmental assistance, a view widely held in 19th and 20th century Russian society (Slezkine 1994).

Indeed, the comparison of identities “now” and “then” in the next section of this paper can be seen in this light. However, the study of social change – mid-term and long-term – does not equate to the automatic acceptance of one or another grand narrative of progress or *telos* in history, it can rather contribute to a well-founded critique of such narratives. To put forward this point more concretely, when discussing processes of change, I do not imply that they are irreversible. The 1990s in Russia in particular have shown that changes in the technological infrastructure, extension of networks of production and distribution, and more generally, the growing complexity of social and economic interdependency can be annihilated within a few years or even months, much to the distress of people in remote communities. (Taking a different angle, the establishment of civic organisations and the development of a diversified media landscape are not necessarily irreversible either.) The relation between processes of social change and “the onward march of history” should not be taken for granted but problematised. The question is not whether Russian (Buriat, Chukchi, etc.) society is more or less “modern” or “traditional” than others. Rather, the question is how individuals and collectives embrace, instigate, and deal with social change, and how social change is discussed in the public. What is important about modernisation theory, then, is the omnipresence of the modernisation paradigm in public discourse. Many individuals portray their own situation and that of their community, their country, in terms of progress or backwardness, high or low levels of culturedness, and other scales of “development”, seemingly rooted in some popular interpretation of modernisation theory.

Ascribed and Acquired Identities in the Light of Social Change

After having sketched out my reservations against an evolutionist interpretation of social change, I shall now return to the theme of identity and identification. As mentioned before, apart from the individual’s belonging to an ethnic group, there are many more aspects (criteria, markers) of his/her personal identity. Jenkins reminds us of the well-known distinction between *ascribed* and *acquired* identities (1996: 142), which is of particular interest here.⁹ Among the ascribed aspects we find ethnicity, mother tongue, and also gender, inasmuch as these traits have been conferred by birth or during early childhood. They turn out to be highly persistent: should a certain aspect be valued negatively, the individual is likely to experience great difficulties when trying to get rid of or hide this aspect or change its valuation to a more positive one. Acquired aspects of identity are those that the person discovers, develops, and supports during later stages of his/her life. Such aspects are often, though not always, acquired by choice and can be cast off relatively easily, i.e. they are reversible. Both ascribed and acquired aspects of identity are developed, negotiated, and maintained in collective activity with other individuals, yet this is even more clearly the case when we look at acquired aspects, as can be seen, for example, in professional and leisure activities, participation in sports, games, and artistic performances, as well as in people’s finding a partner and starting a family.

⁹ The juxtaposition of achievement and ascription is already employed in American sociology in the post-WWII period. Parsons applies the pair in his scheme of pattern alternatives, which informs his distinction of traditional and modern societies. At the risk of over-simplification, Parsons’ view of this difference may be summarised as follows: in traditional societies, the ascribed properties (attributes) of a person are typically emphasised as a criterion for social interaction, whereas the achievements (performance) of a person are more emphasised as criterion for social interaction in modern societies. Parsons himself credits the differentiation between ascribed and achieved status to sociologist Ralph Linton (Parsons 1991 [1951]: 64).

Postmodern sociologists (namely Bennett 1999; Maffesoli 1996 [1988]) have pointed to the fluidity and flexibility of identifications, i.e. definitions of the self, which seem to be characteristic for the contemporary period.¹⁰ Group affiliations can change quickly, identity is event-related (Bennett 1999). Maffesoli (1996 [1988]) points to the importance of such situative communities as a particular form of social bonding, describing them by the term *tribus*. “Typical examples of *tribus* are not only fashion victims or youth subcultures. The term can be extended to interest-based collectivities hobbyists sports enthusiasts and more important – environmental movements, user-groups of state services and consumer lobbies” (Shields 1996: x–xi).

From these authors’ point of view it appears that nowadays, *acquired* aspects of identity are gaining in relevance as criteria of social organisation and differentiation, whereas some *ascribed* aspects have lost their relevance to a noticeable degree. Some scholars have identified the “detraditionalisation of the social” (*Enttraditionalisierung des Sozialen*, Klein & Friedrich 2003: 184) and the dwindling significance of family, schools, associations (*Vereine*), and religious congregations when it comes to the definition and delineation of childhood, youth, and adulthood in Western societies.

Part of our task will be to ascertain in which spheres of society one can actually discern such tendencies of “detraditionalisation”. The strong emphasis on fluid and flexible identifications seems justified, but there is no evidence that they signal the advent of a new epoch. Divergent frames of identification and guidelines (*orientiry*) exist simultaneously, often they are publicly contested. The emergence of new leisure activities, youth cultures, and lifestyles has not led to the fading of conventional patterns of social organisation. Notably, the family is an important, if not the most important, frame of reference in Russia, not just for the older generations but also for youths (Anderson 2004). With the introduction of capitalism and propagation of conservative values, the family has largely replaced the work unit (*kollektiv*) as the prime site for the socialisation of the individual. These observations will form the basis for research on the current significance of the family as an important sub-theme of the research programme.

Representation, Role and Play

Both ascribed and acquired aspects of identity become most evident at the margins of groups, i.e. in contact and confrontation with another group (Barth 1998 [1969]). This leads us back to the point that group affiliations and identifications are situational, they emerge out of the relation with the other that the self is temporarily confronted with. Whether someone identifies as Buryat, baker, biker, or Buddhist depends on the person he/she communicates with. For this reason, identity is never perfect or complete; rather, it unfolds “along” the biography of a person (Jenkins 1996). It can be described as a more or less coherent “trajectory” (Giddens 1991: 75), as a personal strategy of *bricolage* (de Certeau 1984 [1974]), and to some extent as an art of living.

Acquired aspects of identity and the activities connected with them have differentiating power not only “outwards”, i.e. in contact with other groups, but also “inwards”. The same processes that create solidarity within the group also create competitiveness among its members. We can observe such competition in professional life (for example, Habeck et al. 2005 about solidarity and

¹⁰ Again, this claim is complex and brings up the intricacies of modernisation theory: postmodernity is postulated as some advanced stage or even the end of modernity, yet by the same token its tenets are cast in the same rhetoric of progress that characterises modernisation theory.

competitiveness among young reindeer herders) as well as in leisure activities, notably in sports, in pop culture (Klein and Friedrich 2003: 38–52), in other spheres of music (Urban 2004: 114–116), in role-playing games communities (Barchunova and Beletskaja 2004), and generally, in almost every form of playful activity.

A person can earn the respect of other group members as a result of a “successful” appearance, through an effective *mise en scène* or performance, the vigour of which lies in the fulfilment of the basic rules of the genre, on the one hand, and in the creative interpretation or variation, on the other. “Successful” appearance of the individual is acknowledged by the collective through ritualised expression of recognition and gratitude. Usage of the terms *mise en scène* or performance does not imply that by necessity, there is some “truer”, more authentic self behind the “mask” of representation. In many cases, this may actually be a valid point: to speak with Goffman, the actor’s front stage presentation conceals his/her backstage existence. However, “Goffman speaks more about the constraints on than the chances for human behaviour” (Dahrendorf 1969: viii, translation JOH) – it seems that individuals in their daily interaction with others are *forced* to put on a show. The intentional aspects, i.e. the forms of *chosen* social identity, are not sufficiently addressed by Goffman’s approach. To be sure, any one role comes along with specific rules and obligations; yet the emphasis here is on the roles people take on voluntarily with the aim to develop their own personality, to present their skills or talents, to gain recognition, and – in some cases – to adapt a certain lifestyle for themselves.

Folk ensembles – a phenomenon quite ubiquitous in Siberia – may serve as an example. These collectives present highly formalised and stylised performances of ethnic identity. In the eye of the beholder trained in the social sciences they are quite “synthetic” and anything but “authentic”; yet nonetheless, those who are on the stage do not simply play an ethnic affiliation. Rather, they profess their membership to a certain group and/or demonstrate that this group deserves social recognition. For these actors, the performance is more than just “putting on a show” – it is important, both in terms of form and content, for their expression of self, for their identity. The role itself is already part of the identity, or is becoming part of it. The form is set, the participants did not define the rules of the game, yet they are playing with some satisfaction and, as has been said before, with a certain virtuosity and creativity that shows their personal commitment beyond simple technical mastery. The importance of such *mise en scène* for one’s own personality and social position is illustrated well in Olson’s book (2004) on Russian folk singers and dancers and King’s observations (2005) on indigenous folk groups in the Russian Far East.

Links with Other Research Themes and Projects at the Institute

The research programme outlined above deals with identity and identification in many ways applicable to other research units of the Max Planck Institute, notably Department I, *Identity and Conflict* (e.g. Schlee 2002). The latter has put forward a theoretical framework for the analysis of identity variables and processes of identification (Donahoe et al. forthcoming b). The work of this group has been stimulating for the ideas presented here. This group in turn will benefit from the case studies of the Siberian Studies Centre in 2008–2012 as well as from the Siberianists’ theoretical input.

Department II is in the process of completing its research on *Religion and Civil Society* (Hann et al. 2006), which will allow researchers of the Siberian Studies Centre to compare their own findings about the interplay of the Orthodox Church, the state, and “civil” organisations with findings on pertinent issues in other post-socialist states. *Norms and Values*, the new research focus of Department II, will resonate with the Siberian Studies Centre’s research on the “conservative turn” towards the state, the fatherland, and the family in contemporary Russia, but also with alternative interpretations of “what really matters” in life.

In connection with both *Norms and Values* and *Identity and Conflict* and also with the thematic focus of the incipient Department III (until recently Project Group *Legal Pluralism*), there is much potential in the Siberian Studies Centre’s contribution to studying the mechanisms of social recognition, indifference, and intolerance. Ultimately, we shall examine how the new emphasis on conservative values (*Wertekonservativismus*) has an impact on the overall degree of tolerance towards the existing diversity of lifestyles within a community, and within a society at large.

To conclude: the research programme presented here aims at trying out the applicability of sociological theories on lifestyle in our several fieldwork sites in Siberia. The study of social change in Siberia has a long history, yet for many years it subscribed to the grand narrative of progress, describing how long-term social-economic and cultural change afflicted particular ethnic communities or ethnic groups *in toto*. Only recently have scholars begun to investigate how these people actually deal with (resist, accept, induce) such processes of change and to widen their scope for anthropological investigation, going beyond the study of ethnic groups and ethnically defined phenomena. The research programme, it is hoped, will help to advance our understanding of how identities and lifestyles are expressed and negotiated in the public and how these negotiations inform, and are informed by, social change.

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