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Russia's Minority Institutions, Ethnic Boundaries, and Social-Humanitarian Work: A Case of Collective Responsibility?

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ABSTRACT
This article analyzes the interconnection of ethnic boundary-making and collective responsibility, with reference to the social-humanitarian work of Russia's ethnic minority organizations. Employing data from interviews with minority representatives, it shows that the notion of collective responsibility has played a role in reproducing (symbolic) ethnic boundaries, through the interplay of three factors: ethnic institutions, social networks and power distribution. These processes unfold in a sociopolitical context that places an emphasis on stability and security. Meanwhile, *macro-level* dynamics (state-endorsed discourses and structural conditions) interact with *micro-level* processes (minority representatives' experiences and actions) – both impacting upon Russia's nationalities policy.

Introduction

This article analyzes the nexus between ethnic boundary-making and collective responsibility with reference to the social-humanitarian work of Russia's ethnic minority organizations. Using data from interviews with respondents from minority organizations, particularly national cultural autonomies, it shows that perceptions of ethnic boundaries continue to be reproduced in Russian society, and have come to be intertwined with the notion of collective responsibility. Ethnic boundaries as constructs are consolidated by the Russian state and (to varying degrees) by ethnic leaders; meanwhile, the actions of ethnic leaders also reflect their individual "struggles" within social fields. Thus, I consider both macro-level dynamics (structural conditions created by the state) and micro-level processes (experiences and actions of persons belonging to national minorities).

This article draws on literature on ethnic boundaries, particularly Wimmer's (2013) work on boundary-making, as well as a range of Bourdieu's concepts applied to the analysis of ethnicity (Bentley 1987; Wimmer 2013). The article makes a contribution to this literature by examining the role of collective responsibility as a potential factor in consolidating boundaries. Applied to the case study of social-humanitarian work of Russia's minority organizations, the chosen conceptual framework helps us unpack the intricacies inherent in the relationship between the individual, the state and one's minority community. As such, it advances our understanding of the ways in which ethnic leaders in Russia operate in the context of existing mechanisms for diversity management. The article further contributes to the literature on Russia's civil society: while numerous studies exist (among many: Gilbert 2016; Crotty, Hall, and Ljubownikow 2014; Cheskin and March 2015; Robertson 2009; Stuvøy 2020), including on socially oriented organizations (Bindman 2015;

Ljubownikow and Crotty 2017; Toepler and Frölich 2020; Kulmala 2016), the literature has yet to explore the implications of (narratives of) collective responsibility on minority institutions, or state-civil society relations more broadly.

Ethnic Boundary-Making

Much has been written on social and symbolic boundaries in the context of ethnicity (Bentley 1987; Cornell 1996; Lyman and Douglass 1973; Vermeulen and Govers 1994; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Jackson and Molokotos-Liederman 2015; Tilly 2016; Wimmer 2013). Authors have drawn on Barth's work on the social construction of boundaries and boundary maintenance, whose starting point has been "the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth 1998, 15). This article similarly focuses on boundaries, and perceptions of culture enclosed in boundaries, rather than minority cultures themselves. In addition, the article looks at the meaning and reproduction of boundaries, rather than their exact "location."

I treat boundary-making and boundary preservation as processes and as relational (Lamont 2000; Tilly 2004, 2016; Wimmer 2013). Boundaries are constructed through interaction and are subject to change; relations are responsible for group identification and the reproduction (or shifting) of boundaries (Brubaker 2002; Cohen 1986; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Jenkins 2008; Lamont and Molnár 2002). This does not imply the infinite fluidity of boundaries and endless renegotiation of ethnic identity: while identity is clearly not fixed, social constraints substantially limit the malleability of ethnic categories. Moreover, one must acknowledge nonethnic processes unfolding alongside ethnicity-based ones. One

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should be mindful, then, of reductionist approaches that assume ethnicity to be the primary force behind tie formation (Wimmer 2013, 94).

Following Wimmer (2013), himself drawing on Bourdieu, I link ethnic boundary-making to a range of factors, focusing on three: institutions, social networks, and power distribution. I treat boundary-making as a dynamic process that may unfold through the internalization and reproduction of cognitive frames on the one hand, *and* rational choice and utilitarian considerations on the other.

The boundaries considered here are symbolic, described as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space," which "separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership" (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). They are instrumental to people in acquiring status and resources. Symbolic boundaries differ from social boundaries inasmuch as the latter result in unequal access to resources and social opportunities (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168–69).

This article subscribes to the view that the state possesses the symbolic power to consolidate social categories: individuals are immersed in – and influenced by – such structures. Structures such as, say, objective conditions characteristic of a class, produce habitus, or "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977, 72), which, Bentley (1987) argues, can also be applied to ethnicity. Habitus creates practices and symbolic representations which tend to replicate themselves, in line with principles unconsciously internalized (Bourdieu 1977, 72; 77–8, 91). At the same time, individuals, while affected by structures, also "struggle" within social fields, interacting with a constellation of ever-shifting forces (Bourdieu 1986). Individuals act strategically to gain benefits, which may be material or nonmaterial (Bourdieu 1986): benefits may be linked to tangible resources or recognition for the individual or the community ("symbolic capital" in Bourdieusian terms). Thus, despite the focus on habitus and unconscious dispositions, the approach outlined here is not deterministic: different social contexts lead to varied manifestations of habitus, which is itself multidimensional, enabling individuals to construe a unique experience of it (Bentley 1987, 35). In fact, authors such as Lyman and Douglass (1973) have stressed the strategic nature of individual actions. Individuals' priorities may diverge from those promoted more widely by the community, and individuals may claim various sub-ethnic identities (shifting between them, or replacing one identity with another), depending on circumstances.

The emphasis on processes that involve both structures and individual action ("struggles") imply a form of boundary-making that is simultaneously collective and individual, external and internal (both "sides" of a boundary being important (Barth 1994)). In considering symbolic boundaries I do not look at cultural mechanisms in the production of boundaries. I also leave aside considerations on social inequality linked to social boundaries (Tilly 2004). While such instances are not uncommon in Russian society,[1] I focus on (symbolic) boundaries primarily based on Soviet ethnic classification, and how they are perceived and employed by actors to access various benefits, particularly in relation to collective responsibility.

Methodology and Research Focus

This article is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted between June 2015 and June 2016 in six cities of the Russian Federation: in four ethnic republics – Saransk (Republic of Mordovia), Petrozavodsk (Karelia), Kazan (Tatarstan) and Ufa (Bashkortostan) – as well as in Moscow and St Petersburg. In total 76 people were interviewed, 54 men and 22 women. The respondents were from a range of ethnic backgrounds: Tatar (24), Finno-Ugric (16 – among these Mordovian (8), Karelian (2) and other (6)), Jewish (5), Ukrainian (5), German (3) and Lithuanian (1). Other respondents belonged to communities originating from one of the Central Asian countries (7) and the (North and South) Caucasus (4), while the remaining (10) were ethnic Russians or did not identify with any ethnic group. Twenty-one respondents were interviewed in Kazan, 17 in Moscow, 12 in Ufa, 11 in St Petersburg, 8 in Saransk and 7 in Petrozavodsk.

Respondents were mostly from civil society: national cultural autonomies (NCAs) (30), minority NGOs (22) and peoples' congresses (13).[2] Moreover, 21 respondents were academics and 9 public officials,[3] some of whom were also active in minority organizations, resulting in an overlap of categories. When respondents fitted into more than one category (e.g. NCA and academia) the main affiliation used (see Table 1) is that which the respondent indicated as the most significant.

The respondents were asked a range of questions relating to the preservation of ethnocultural identity, public participation, and relations with the authorities. Interviews were transcribed, uploaded to NVivo and analyzed using thematic analysis. Prior to the interviews an ethics application for the study was approved by the College Research Ethics Committee of the College of the Social Sciences of the University of Glasgow.[4] All respondents gave verbal or written consent to being interviewed and for the data to be used for the study.

Interviews were part of a larger study on "National Minority Rights and Democratic Political Community: Practices of Non-Territorial Autonomy in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe."[5] The study primarily concerned itself with the institution of National Cultural Autonomy (NCA) as a possible vehicle to autonomy for national minorities in managing cultural matters. Three national minorities were initially selected as focus case studies: Tatars, Mordovians, and Karelians. The case studies – and "their" ethnic republics for the fieldwork – were chosen to encompass communities and regions with a range of characteristics in terms of: population density of the titular group; levels of ethnic consciousness and resources; levels of ethnic diversity in the republic; and both Turkic (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) and Finno-Ugric (Mordovia and Karelia) primary ethnic affiliation for the titular group. The Republic of Tatarstan is in the strongest position in terms of population density of the titular group,[6] and resources for the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity for Tatars and other ethnic communities residing in the republic.[7] Karelia is in the least favorable position in terms of retention of its ethnic character and resources.[8] Mordovia[9] and Bashkortostan (the latter chosen primarily

Table 1. Respondents

Category	Code	Ethnicity (if given)	M/F	Location	Interview Date
1. NCA	**1.1**	Uzbek	M	KAZ	17/5/2016
	1.2	Mordovian	M	SAR	15/6/2015
	1.3	Tatar	M	KAZ	24/6/2015
	1.4	Jewish	M	SAR	16/6/2015
	1.5	Ukrainian	F	SAR	17/6/2015
	1.6	Azerbaijani	F	MOS	23/10/2015
	1.7	Jewish	M	W	25/4/2016
	1.8	Jewish	M	UFA	24/5/2016
	1.9	Jewish	F	STPB	29/10/2015
	1.10	Tatar	M	UFA	26/5/2016
	1.11	Jewish	F	MOS	21/10/2015
	1.12	German	M	MOS	27/5/2016
	1.13	Tajik	M	KAZ	18/05/2016
	1.14	Tatar	M	KAZ	22/06/2015
	1.15	Tatar	F	UFA	16/6/2015
	1.16	Tatar	M	UFA	25/05/2016
	1.17	Kazakh	M	KAZ	22/06/2015
	1.18	Lithuanian	F	W	25/4/2016
	1.19	Azerbaijani	M	STPB	28/10/2015
	1.20	Finnish	M	STPB	26/10/2015
	1.21	German	M	W	21/5/2016
	1.22	Mordovian	M	KAZ	20/5/2016
2. Minority NGO	**2.1**	Tatar	F	UFA	25/5/2016
	2.2	Tajik	M	MOS	22/4/2016
	2.3	Finnish	M	STPB	29/4/2016
	2.4	W	F	STPB	29/10/2015
	2.5	N/A	M	MOS	30/05/2016
	2.6	W	F	PETR	25/4/2016
	2.7	W	M	STPB	27/10/2015
	2.8	W	M	MOS	19/10/2015
	2.9	Tatar	M	KAZ	20/05/2016
	2.10	Karelian	M	PETR	16/06/2016
3. Academia	**3.1**	N/A	F	KAZ	24/6/2015
	3.2	N/A	M	MOS	21/10/2015
	3.3	N/A	F	STPB	30/10/2015
	3.4	N/A	M	MOS	22/10/2015
	3.5	N/A	F	MOS	21/10/2015
	3.6	Tatar	M	KAZ	24/6/2015

Locations
KAZ – Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan
SAR – Saransk, Republic of Mordovia
PETR – Petrozavodsk, Republic of Karelia
UFA – Ufa, Republic of Bashkortostan
MOS – Moscow
STPB – St Petersburg
W – Withheld to protect anonymity

for its large Tatar population[10]) are in an intermediate position. All republics had ethnic institutions (NCAs as well as others). Moscow and St Petersburg were visited in order to access representatives of minority organizations operating in multi-ethnic environments, and with high levels of migration, as well as prominent scholars on interethnic relations.

As the interviews progressed, a number of cross-cutting themes emerged that concerned non-Russian communities generally, beyond the case studies, with regard to social-humanitarian work (explored in this article), public participation, and relations with the authorities (through (inter-)ethnic institutions). To examine these themes, interviews were held with minority representatives from a range of ethnic backgrounds, active in ethnic institutions. For example, in Kazan, most organizations participating in activities of the Assembly of Peoples of Tatarstan[11] were invited for an interview. The questions that guided the data analysis for this article were: what kind of nexus, if any, exists between the notion of collective responsibility and the consolidation of ethnic boundaries? What are the implications for minority actors?

The respondents from ethnicity-based civil society were not "average citizens," but persons who had chosen to establish or join their organizations. Thus, a complication of this study is that the noted micro-level dynamics relate, in fact, to ethnic minority communities' *elites*. Moreover, several persons were invited to give an interview but declined to do so, partially due to suspicions that a foreign researcher seemed to evoke. This made the reliance on contacts vital, with the downside that the snowball sampling might have contributed to a selection bias. Consequently, interview data have to be treated with caution, and not taken to represent the views of Russia's ethnic communities more broadly.

The circumstances surrounding different minority communities, and persons belonging to them, vary substantially in Russia. This article acknowledges such variations but does not analyze them in detail: rather, it looks for commonalities and differences in perceptions of ethnic boundaries among a range of respondents.

As noted, the broader study primarily concerned itself with the institution of NCA as a form of diversity management, as per the 1996 Law "On National Cultural Autonomy" (NCA Law).[12] The NCA Law resulted in the establishment of ad hoc organizations (NCAs), which follow a pyramidal structure, being founded at the local, regional and, in some cases, federal level: local organizations can join forces to establish a regional organization, and regional organizations may establish a federal-level institution. NCAs are part of the state-designed institutional framework for the management of interethnic relations, and maintain close relations with state authorities. At the same time, some activists have chosen not to register an NCA and to establish a "regular" NGO instead.[13] For this reason, the study included interviews with leaders of minority NGOs. The two types of organizations often engage in similar activities; in most instances examined in this article, minority NGOs sought at least some cooperation with the state authorities, rather than positioning themselves as political opponents.

I classify NCA organizations as "civil society" despite their close links with government structures: thus, I adopt a broad interpretation of civil society, to encompass institutions that are not fully autonomous or separate from the state, and whose role in advancing democratization is not assumed (see Cheskin and March 2015, 264).

All ethnic groups referred to in this article are "national minorities" in Russia, in line with the use of the expression in international law.[14] The expression "nationality" – the Russian *natsional'nost'*, which is close to the meaning of "ethnicity"[15] – has been more commonly used in Russia than "minority" (Malakhov and Osipov 2006). The Russian government has, however, also employed the expression "national minorities," and defined "rights of national minorities" as "the rights of ethnic communities in general and the rights of an individual citizen of the Russian Federation claiming to belong to a national minority in the territory of the Russian Federation."[16] In some cases, there is an overlap between national minorities and migrant communities. For example, Uzbeks have a traditional presence in Russia and are regarded as a national minority;[17] at the same time, numerous co-ethnics have migrated to post-Soviet Russia from Uzbekistan as labor migrants. Uzbek organizations referred to in this article cater for both settled (sub-) communities of Uzbek ethnic background and migrants.

The majority of interviews were conducted in Russian. The excerpts from interviews in Russian that are reported in the article were translated by the author or a transcriber.

Ethnic Boundary-Making: The Case of Russia

Employing the notion of boundary as a conceptual tool, interethnic relations in Russia can be best described through a neoinstitutionalist account of "thick" ethnic identity stemming from Soviet legacies, and seen through a Bourdieusian lens. Ethnic boundaries drawn during the Soviet period have played a role in shaping ethnic classifications that have a contemporary resonance despite post-Soviet sociopolitical transformation. While acknowledging the presence of other (nonethnicity-based) processes – as per Wimmer above – it is argued that existing narratives continue to construe Russian society as made up of separate ethnic communities "interacting" with one another, akin to boundary-making.

Soviet Nationalities Policy and Ethnic Boundaries

The saliency of ethnicity in Russian society has been linked to Soviet ethnic institutions. and their role in crystallizing ethnic consciousness on the basis of rigidly defined categories (Brubaker 1994; Bunce 1999; Gorenburg 2003; Suny 1993).[18] Brubaker (1994) refers to the "institutionalization of nationhood," at two levels: the territorial level (ethnoterritorial federalism, which created administrative units on the basis of ethnicity, from Union republics to smaller entities); and the personal level (an individual's ethnic background). The Soviet taxonomy of nationalities envisaged ethnic identity as exclusive, each individual possessing one ethnicity, reinforced by recording ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*) in Soviet internal passports (Gorenburg 2003). The ensuing societal structure is well-represented by the idea of ethnic boundaries, drawing imaginary lines around distinct ethnic communities. These constructs were consolidated through Soviet rhetoric, that routinely referred to peoples as possessing a "right of development"[19] and to self-determination, contributing to perceptions of ethnic groups as social units (Osipov 2013, 15).

Two additional factors played a role in Soviet-era boundary-making: social networks and power distribution. Ethnicity-based social networks were reinforced through the articulation of state narratives based on an essentialist approach to ethnicity, as each ethnic community was depicted as sharing a system of values and a unique culture. Ethnic boundaries thus conceived reflected a presumption of "internally homogenous and externally bounded" groups – what Brubaker (2002, 164) calls "groupism." The idea of a cultural "core" is captured in Stalin's (1950, 239) definition of a nation as a "historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and *psychological make-up*[20] manifested in a community of culture" (italics added). In line with this, Soviet ethnographers sought to map the "essence" of the country's various nationalities (in terms of language, traditions and customs), constructing or redefining boundaries, and indoctrinating the population on ethnic classifications (Hirsch 2005). Traditional clothing, routinely displayed in exhibitions and festivals, acted as a form of visual representation of each group's cultural uniqueness, akin to *diacritica*, or "symbols of identity" (Barth 1994, 16).

Lastly, boundary-making molded around patterns of power distribution. The Soviet state's direct intervention and manipulation of identity is well rendered by the expression "ethnic engineering" with reference to the organization of Soviet society, including its ethnoterritorial federalism. The state's role in shaping social structures and constructs derives from its symbolic power, in line with Bourdieu's theorizing; "imposition", Tilly (2004, 218) writes, is among the social mechanisms for boundary-making by which "[a]uthorities draw lines where they did not previously exist." In the Soviet Union, political actors entrenched social categories through power networks that reached down to the regions and localities, absorbing ethnic communities into these structures. Soviet nationalities policy encompassed the recruitment of ethnic

leaders into the Soviet administration on the basis of their ethnicity (through *korenizatsiya* policies, or "indigenization"). This contributed to the "hardening" of boundaries, and (particularly important in the context of this article) formed a vertical of representation for co-ethnics with the regional ethnic intelligentsia at its apex. These processes, in turn, implicitly created a link of responsibility of the ethnic elite for the community as a whole.

Another aspect of power distribution consisted in resource allocation on the basis of ethnicity, for example for schools operating in minority languages in regions densely populated by particular communities. Ethnic leaders received benefits on the basis of ethnicity, whether personal (e.g. scholarships and positions in the state administration), or for the collectivity (e.g. funding for minority-language education) (Martin 2001). Similar dynamics are – at least in part – reproduced in today's Russia.

Russia's Nationalities Policy Today: Change and Continuity

Ethnic institutions, social networks and power distribution continue to play a role in post-Soviet Russia's reproduction of boundaries. Ethnic institutions continue to exist, in the shape of ethnic federalism, organizations such as NCAs, and various bodies at the local, regional and federal levels designed to manage interethnic relations. These include the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs (*Federal'noe Agenstvo po Delam Natsional'nostei*),[21] ministries on nationality issues at the level of the federation's subjects, and various ad hoc consultative and coordination bodies in regional or city governments.

Ethnic institutions have been preserved despite the fact that, since the Soviet Union's collapse, a number of practices that sustained perceptions of defined ethnic boundaries – such as the recording of one's ethnicity in internal passports – have been discontinued. The reduced emphasis on ethnicity could have made ethnic boundaries more tenuous, if not obsolete. And, following an ethnic renaissance in several of Russia's regions in the 1990s (Derluguian 2005; Gorenburg 2003), ethnicity has, overall, had an "underwhelming" effect on Russian politics (Giuliano and Gorenburg 2012). Political parties on the basis of ethnicity have been banned[22] against the backdrop of a "policy of de-ethnization" of the domestic sphere.[23] At the same time, in more recent years a renewed emphasis has been placed on the Russian language and culture: Blakkisrud (2016) refers to an "ethnic turn" in official nation-building narratives, to coincide with the 2014 annexation of Crimea, with a greater emphasis on ethnic Russian (*russkii*) identity. The social significance of "Russianness" has further been foregrounded through 2020 constitutional amendments: they define the Russian language as "the language of the state-forming nation" (*gosudarstvoobrazuiushchii narod*)[24] of the federation, thereby assigning to ethnic Russians the role of "state-forming" community – which may be seen a new incarnation of the Soviet-era expression "first among equals." At the same time, the constitution goes on to say that the "state-forming nation" is included in the "multi-ethnic union of equal nations of the Russian Federation," thereby continuing to present the federation as "multi-ethnic." This seems to be another case of what Blakkisrud (2016, 249) calls a "blurring [of the] the boundaries between civic and ethnic," rather than a clear articulation of an ethnic (*russkii*) vision of Russia that demands assimilation.

Narratives of Russia's multi-ethnicity, albeit with a dominant ("state-forming") nation, are in line with the image of a society made up of ethnic communities, and reinforce related social networks. Especially significant in boundary maintenance has been the resilience of ethnic essentialism in post-Soviet Russia (Tishkov 1997): discourses infused with a culturally deterministic vision of ethnicity, and a "group-centric logic," have been reproduced by politicians and academics (Malakhov and Osipov 2006, 529). Contemporary discourses, Osipov (2013, 15), argues, reinforce groupist tendencies, with the recognition of ethnic groups acting as "collective individuals." Legal and policy documents reflect Soviet group-rights rhetoric (Osipov 2013, 13–14) and reconfirm the need for institutions organized around ethnic lines (Osipov 2012, 249). Similarly, the vigorous promotion of narratives around national unity is not incompatible with the idea of symbolic boundaries enfolding ethnic groups. Perceptions of ethnic boundaries might, in fact, have become more pronounced since the end of the Soviet Union. A contributing factor might be the racialization of certain groups, particularly migrants from Central Asia (Kosygina 2010), following the dislodging of an overarching Soviet identity. Besides official narratives, ethnic boundaries are symbolically expressed through cultural (re)production in folkloristic events, organized by ethnicity-based organizations such as NCAs, which act to consolidate social networks around ethnicity.

With reference to power distribution, some regional autonomy is afforded through ethnic federalism: ethnic republics have some advantages over nonethnic regions, benefiting from de jure bilingualism,[25] (some) bilingual education as well as cultural institutions and projects. These favorable conditions have, however, been undermined by centralizing dynamics, causing regional autonomy to be substantially reduced since the 2000s, including in the education sphere,[26] while increasing prominence has been placed on national unity. Despite the oscillation between centralization and regional autonomy, state narratives on a multi-ethnic federation tend to reproduce perceptions of ethnic boundaries. Moreover, resources are, at least in part, disbursed to reflect patterns of ethnic belonging, ethnoterritorial structures and patronal networks.[27] Thus, aspects of Soviet legacies, including ethnic institutions, as well as patterns of social networks and power distribution, transitioned to post-Soviet Russia, where a group-centric logic persists alongside efforts to promote national unity.

Ethnic Boundaries and Collective Responsibility

The notion of collective responsibility has played a significant role in reproducing the idea of bounded ethnic communities. Collective responsibility is often considered in the context of past actions (e.g. Miller 2001), including with respect to reparations for wrongdoings. In the cases described in this article, collective responsibility is understood primarily in the sense of present or (possible) future acts, particularly with reference to (real or

perceived) threats posed by minority communities. It implies a presumption of a priori responsibility by a community's representative (usually an individual regarded as its leader) vis-à-vis the community itself.

Two aspects of collective responsibility need to be taken into consideration in Russia's case. First, the idea of responsibility to the community has been associated with social responsibility more generally, in the sense of a citizen's duty toward the state and society, reflecting official narratives on morality and patriotism.[28] Civil society (often state-endorsed) organizations have been prompted to contribute to societal welfare by promoting these social norms. Besides the benefits to society itself, a socially engaged organization reproducing state narratives facilitates the alignment of goals between state and civil society.[29]

The second aspect relates to security concerns perceived to be posed by Russia's ethnic diversity as potentially destabilizing, and as a "possible source of conflict."[30] This results in perceptions of threats to be "managed," primarily by confining minority organizations to the cultural sphere, stripping them of avenues to articulate political claims (Prina 2018, 2021). Collective responsibility for the community, then, results in a concerted effort to contain the threat, by controlling its explosive potential.

Social responsibility and security converge in the 2021 Russian National Security Strategy. The Strategy fuses state security with patriotism and morality (along with "collectivism," and "mutual assistance"), under the notion of "traditional Russian spiritual-moral values."[31] Once again, these macro-narratives unfold alongside individual "struggles." Indeed, boundary-making, whether resulting from Soviet legacies or recently adopted state policies, does not imply a passivity of individuals. Even in the presence of constraining structural conditions, there remains some room for individual maneuver.

In the remainder of this article, I outline empirical findings with reference to perceptions of ethnic boundaries, subsequently linking them to social-humanitarian work and collective responsibility.

Boundary-Making in Russia and Collective Responsibility

Most respondents retained a view of Russian society as characterized by imaginary ethnic boundaries separating the "in-group" from the "out-group." Significantly, no respondents spoke about plural ethnic identities, even when they reported a mixed ethnic background, reflecting a perception of exclusionary ethnic identification. There were certainly references to cooperation with people belonging to different communities, but not to a possible "fusion" or coexistence of cultures. The idea of a unique culture was often mentioned, linked to a particular language and tradition, and construed as creating an ethnic "core." A respondent from a Tatar organization in Ufa said:

> A nation [*natsiya*] is defined by language, culture, history. [. . .] What differentiates one nation from the other? Its essence (*samobytnost'*), its language, its traditions, its history. [. . .] I'm a Tatar.

A Bashkir is a Bashkir. A Russian (*russkii*) is a Russian. [. . .] We are different from one another. (2.1)

Respondents noted the importance of passing on their culture to the next generation, but also to "share it" with others, including through ethnic festivals. These events provided an opportunity to "show one's culture" (an expression often used), in the sense of presenting a symbolic cultural "core" captured through the performance of traditional songs and dances.

Expressions evoking community belonging used by respondents included: "ours" (*nashi*) or "compatriots" (*sootechestvenniki*), to designate co-ethnics regardless of citizenship; and "homeland" (*rodina*) to indicate a kin-state (also regardless of citizenship). Some respondents used the expression "mentality," to indicate a mind-set shared by members of a community (reminiscent of "psychological make-up" in Stalin's definition of a nation)[32] – and, as one interviewee stressed (1.1), distinct from the "Russian mentality."

In some cases, respondents referred to boundary crossing, for example in relation to co-ethnics of Mordovian (1.2) or Tatar (1.3) background opting to identify as (ethnic) Russians in the census, and sometimes subsequently reverting to the "original" ethnic identification. Boundary crossing can derive from assimilation into the majority through habituation, or stem from pragmatic considerations on what forms of identification offer greater benefits (see also Gorenburg 1999). In fact, boundary crossing consolidates perceptions of ethnic boundaries by negating "in-between" categories (Wimmer 2013, 58–59): people shift positions (unless social closure prevents it), but the existence of ethnic boundaries themselves remains uncontested.

Group dynamics do not preclude the existence of individual struggles, the two processes unfolding simultaneously. In fact, many representatives of national minorities in Russia find themselves in a condition of in-betweenness, for example, in the case of mixed families. Some may refrain from identifying with a particular minority community and elect to identify instead with the Russian majority: as noted, some have made individual decisions on boundary crossing. Moreover, among respondents, motivations for becoming leaders of ethnicity-based organizations varied. Individual struggles similarly varied: they could relate to a partial resistance to macronarratives, nonalignment with state policies on diversity management,[33] as well variations in modalities of social engagement and of interaction with power structures (Prina 2020).

Meanwhile, ethnic ties are situated within an intricate web of networks, shaped by political connections and financial resources, which may at times crisscross ethnic boundaries, at times coincide with them. Such networks may be utilized in exchanges of favors for personal gain, through informal practices (Ledeneva 1998, 2006). Thus, a range of mechanisms (both ethnicity- and nonethnicity-based) are at play, and solidarity networks do not exclusively shape around ethnic lines (Wimmer 2013, 95–96). Academics interviewed, working in the sphere of interethnic relations, noted that ethnic leaders did not always make a conscious effort to retain contacts with co-ethnics outside the elite (3.1). Others believed that leaders of minority organizations with labor migrants among co-

ethnics at times sought to distance themselves from newcomers (3.2; 33) (so as to occupy a more desirable social space – that of integrated citizens). Nevertheless, interview data revealed perceptions of bounded ethnic groups: their members tended to be conceived as connected to one another through invisible ties, pointing to a construct of bounded groups rather than their being "real," and akin to Anderson's (1983) notion of "imagined community." Even in the presence of "struggles" that ran counter to regime priorities – for example, calls for more autonomy for the regions in the sphere of minority-language education – individuals interviewed often replicated state-endorsed narratives. They referred to or implied an ethnic community's cultural "core," and rehearsed the language employed in state policies. These practices extend to the sphere of social-humanitarian work, thereby consolidating these narratives "from below" and reproducing a social imaginary comprising ethnic communities with exclusive identities.

Boundaries and Ethnic Institutions: The System of Representation

Ethnic boundaries are reinforced primarily through ethnic institutions' system of representation introduced by the 1996 NCA Law.[34] As noted, NCAs are established as organizations under Russian law according to a pyramidal structure, at the local, regional and federal level. Following a 2004 judgment of the Russian Constitutional Court, there may be only one NCA per ethnicity per locality.[35]

An academic – and policy-maker in the sphere of interethnic relations at the time of the NCA Law's adoption – stated in an interview:

> This [NCA] Law [. . .] is built on the bureaucratization of national cultural autonomy. It stipulates that at the federal level there can only be one NCA per nationality; in my view there's no real explanation for this, except that for the authorities it's easier to interact with *one* main Jew, *one* main Armenian, *one* main Russian German. (3.4)

As the respondent suggests, the rule of one NCA per ethnic community per locality reflects the state's drive to streamline interethnic relations by interacting exclusively with an ethnic community's "core." The respondent added that the system envisages each community as a "collective body," and speaking with one voice: NCAs, he argued, thus became "closed corporations" where one person claimed to represent the entire community (*narod*), despite the fact that most community members did not know the name of the leader, or even what an NCA was (3.4).

If we use Pitkin's (1967) classification of representation as descriptive (i.e. the representative resembles the represented, for example by sharing the same ethnic background or gender) and substantive (i.e. the representative actively seeks to address the needs of the represented), the NCA system provides only the former. Yet, if one assumes that ethnic groups are internally homogeneous, descriptive representation can well be seen to fully coincide with substantive representation, and create an expectation that ethnic leaders will take responsibility for the entire community's welfare.

In practice, there may be multiple organizations for the same community (NCAs and others), whether cooperating, working alongside one another, or competing (another aspect of individual "struggles"). In some cases, the same community had a cluster of organizations in the same locality, one of which registered as an NCA, fulfilling different functions.[36] Despite this, the NCA system has continued to be seen as the principal representative institution for national minorities, given the aura of officialdom created by the NCA Law, and the fact that NCAs are represented at the federal – and thereby the highest – level. The rule of one NCA per ethnicity per locality has been generally applied.

A respondent, leader of a Tajik organization in Moscow, objected to the establishment of federal-level institutions along ethnic lines, and the creation of "ethnic groupings." He observed:

> For example, here [in Russia] there is the Union of Armenians, [and] the Congress of Azerbaijani people. [. . .] At the same time, members of these two organizations are citizens of Russia, and they are against each other; they divide Russian citizens through their organizations. (2.2)

The respondent suggested a more inclusive, collaborative way of meeting the needs of ethnic groups with common interests, through poli-ethnic organizations. This way symbolic ethnic boundaries would not necessarily dissolve, but rather be contained in multi-ethnic structures. Interestingly, the respondent objected to (what he considered) the divisive nature of the system of representation, rather than ethnic boundaries per se.

Boundaries and Social Networks: Stability through Social Engagement

One of minority organizations' primary functions is the preservation of minority cultures, with the consolidation of in-group networks through cultural activities. Such activities have provided an outlet for aspirations of belonging, particularly for groups with a homeland outside Russia (1.5; 1.6). At the same time, minority organizations, including NCAs, have also engaged in activities in the social sphere, with most respondents from NCAs and minority NGOs mentioning some forms of social and civic engagement. They noted various types of social-humanitarian work supporting co-ethnics, such as assistance to the disabled, the elderly, and persons suffering from illnesses. Thus, organizations stepped in to fulfil social functions not performed (or inadequately performed) by the state. Activities mentioned included providing financial assistance to buy medicines, support to families with children with autism (1.7), and even the establishment of care homes for the elderly or disabled (1.8; 2.3), as well as nurseries (1.9). In the case of large projects, such as the (partial) running of care homes, more than one organization were generally involved.

Organizations performing both cultural and humanitarian functions were, in some cases, run by religious institutions (Muslim and Jewish among those interviewed) (1.8; 1.10). Some organizations sought to involve young people in charitable activities (1.11), or organized cultural activities specifically for the elderly (2.4). Other forms of assistance involved disparate tasks: for example, the leader of a Jewish NCA had

been contacted with requests of "consultations" on advice on emigrating to Israel.[37]

A second type of social-humanitarian work described by respondents concerned assistance to labor migrants, through projects aiming at facilitating their settlement and integration in Russian society, including through Russian-language tuition. For example, the leader of an Azerbaijani NCA noted that migrant co-ethnics – who frequently worked (or sought to work) for construction companies – faced "very difficult conditions," often finding themselves in conditions of illegality (1.6). Primarily they were in need of assistance in navigating the Russian legal system, particularly as many had little knowledge of the Russian language. The respondent believed that co-ethnics approached their NCA – often via contacts – not only because they could access information in their native language, but also as they found mutual understanding through a shared culture ("we understand each other better") (1.6). The leader of an Uzbek NCA referred to assistance with lost or stolen passports, immigration issues concerning migrants' children, and advice on finding employment (1.1).

While NCAs' original raison d'être was the regulation of cultural matters, subsequently their social role acquired prominence. A turning point came with the 2014 amendments to the NCA Law, which added to the objectives of NCAs "the realization of activities directed at the social and cultural adaptation and integration of migrants."[38] Some respondents with migrant co-ethnics stated that, when they first established their organizations, their work had been confined to cultural projects, but they had later widened their field of activity to address migration-related issues, prompted by demand, by co-ethnics or state actors.[39] An academic based in Moscow observed that the Russian authorities had incentivized NCAs to provide assistance in managing social challenges associated with inflows of migrants (3.5). NCAs without migrant co-ethnics among their members, or located in regions with negligible migrant populations, continued to be principally concerned with cultural and linguistic heritage (1.12).

Levels of engagement appeared to vary from organization to organization – and it would be hardly possible to determine to what extent those respondents who claimed to provide assistance to migrants truly did so. One may expect NGOs devoted to improving the plight of migrants to carry out more targeted activities, while NCA respondents generally treated migrants' integration as a secondary objective, coming after aspirations in the cultural sphere. Financial matters were also a factor: as a respondent from an NGO in Moscow suggested, "only rich communities" could afford to establish a well-functioning organization (2.5).

As noted, official narratives on citizens' social responsibility have been infused with morality and patriotism. This might be the reason why, in some cases, interview data pointed to assistance made available not only to co-ethnics, but to people in need more widely (1.8; 1.9), when resources allowed it. In some cases, co-ethnics were said to be in fact a minority among beneficiaries (1.8). At the same time, there was generally a link between ethnic belonging and requests for and provision of assistance, which seemed to reflect a belief in "looking after

your own." These activities contributed to societal welfare and, arguably, stability.

The promotion of stability is also behind sustained efforts to manage possible interethnic tensions. The aforementioned Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs has placed a clear emphasis on conflict prevention and security (Bowring 2015; Prina 2021). In interviews, respondents made countless references to the paramount importance of harmonious interethnic relations. They noted high levels of interethnic tolerance in Russia – particularly in "ethnic regions" such as Tatarstan (1.13; 1.14), Bashkortostan (1.8) and Mordovia (1.15; 1.16) – with the caveat that interethnic relations remained, as a respondent put it, "delicate" (1.16), due to underlying tensions. The head of a Tajik NCA spoke about reaching out to migrant co-ethnics to ensure they complied with Russian legislation, and integrated without disadvantaging the receiving society:

> We explain that we have come to the Russian Federation and we have to respect the law. [...] And we tell them that they must respect all traditions, customs and culture of the place where they live, and respect the law. (1.13)

Several respondents with migrant co-ethnics also referred to "preventive action" (*profilakticheskaya rabota*), by which they monitored potential cases of tensions, intervening if and when frictions materialized. For example, the leader of an Uzbek NCA said:

> If a conflict appears, you have to suffocate it at an early stage. [...] When you speak to your own people in your own language, [and] you explain the situation, this works out a lot faster than using law and order. (1.1)

Conflict prevention was not confined to activities with migrants: the leader of a regional NCA, who also headed a Muslim institution, referred to seminars that cautioned against religious extremism (1.10).

The predominant view that emerged from interviews was that ethnic leaders ought to "supervise" their co-ethnics. Concurrently, respondents representing communities originating from Central Asia reported alerting the authorities of possible threats to security through early warning systems. For example, respondents mentioned notifying the authorities when a law or practice could "offend or insult our way of thinking," recommending ways to defuse tensions (1.1), or intervening in cases of rough handling of migrants by the local police (1.1; 1.17). Academics interviewed agreed that "conflict management" and "peacekeeping" were among the aims of NCAs (3.4; 3.5), including by mediating between the authorities and minorities in case of friction (3.2).

One last form of social engagement outlined by respondents related to a range of practical and administrative issues involving co-ethnics. For example, the leader of a Lithuanian NCA explained:

> One day, I received a call from the Migration Service. They told me that two Lithuanians staying in Russia without a permit had problems: one man [was] in hospital, since he had just had a stroke, a woman [was] in prison for being in Russia illegally; she also need[ed] medical treatment. I went there, took care of this couple, we raised money for them, etc. (1.18)

In another case, the same respondent was asked by the local authorities to intervene after a Lithuanian citizen who had committed an offense was released from prison, as the co-ethnic had no place to stay and no funds. Ultimately, the respondent said, the person stayed at the NCA leader's own apartment for two weeks. This prompted the respondent to observe that "sometimes, I deal more with consular issues" (than cultural ones). She noted that, as the head of the Lithuanian NCA, she was regarded as the official representative of Lithuanians in the region: when contacted, the local authorities referred to a Lithuanian citizen as "*your* citizen," even though the respondent was exclusively a citizen of the Russian Federation.

Another respondent, from an Azerbaijani NCA, went as far as stating that "we actually perform the functions of a state institution." If, he said, an Azerbaijani citizen had an injury while in Russia, "where should he go? Either to the consulate or to us. [. . .] It even happens, God forbid, that people die here, get hit by a car. We even send coffins to Azerbaijan" (1.19). A case he mentioned as ongoing at the time of the interview concerned a Russian woman whose husband, a citizen of Azerbaijan, had been deported. The woman had reportedly asked the NCA to assist in locating her husband.

These examples show individuals intervening, in lieu of state actors, to address (potentially destabilizing) social issues. Arguably, ethnic festivals might themselves act to promote stability. Shown in the Russian media, these events reinforce the perception of ethnic communities as apolitical and harmless, thereby contributing to defuse possible anxieties associated with migration and interethnic strife. Ethnic leaders, then, assume the responsibility of representing the community by (re)producing a vision of Russia's multi-ethnicity characterized by interethnic harmony. In turn, respondents often viewed festivals positively, as symbolic acceptance and respect for diversity. For example, the representative of a Ukrainian NCA noted that during events "[a]ll representatives of different cultures show respect for [our] culture" (1.5). A small number of respondents, however, considered festivals performative, and detracting attention from more pressing issues relating to loss of cultural and linguistic heritage (1.20; 2.6; 2.7). One respondent stated that, in some cases, they denoted a lack of respect, as organizers imposed their choices on the festivals' format on performers, while community members felt an obligation to take part (2.7).

This criticism notwithstanding, overall existing institutions and practices, as well as nationalities and migration policies, have favored the channeling of social support along ethnic lines. This is despite the fact that a Russian citizen of, say, Uzbek ethnic background, born and bred in Russia, will, in all likelihood, have a greater cultural affinity to ethnic Russians than to migrants from Uzbekistan. Moreover, assistance to co-ethnics is not necessarily guided by in-group solidarity: ethnic leaders might also act on the basis of a desire to maintain (or improve) their social standing, by demonstrating that they fulfil a socially significant role. Regardless of individual motivations, an assumption of in-group solidarity tends to be consolidated, translating into social norms (i.e. ethnic leaders will help their co-ethnics) and expectations that such norms will be complied with. This way, members of a community can be perceived as connected to each other by invisible links of mutual responsibility. This may be seen as a modern version of *krugovaya poruka*, variously translated as "collective responsibility," but also (more literally) as "circular control" (Ledeneva 2004, 86). The system was used by peasant communes of prerevolutionary Russia[40] to jointly manage common affairs: joint responsibility acted as a safeguard to reduce the vulnerability of individual members of these communities. Individuals benefitted, but were also bound by, networks of mutual assistance and obligations. Ledeneva (2004, 87) argues that these unwritten rules created "a form of 'policing' in which the members of the group [were] pressured or sanctioned in the event of deviations." These practices extended, albeit in modified versions, into the Soviet and post-Soviet period.[41] Thus, contemporary minority organizations facilitate both the promotion of discourses on social responsibility and a security-centered logic.

Boundaries and Power Distribution

Russian civil society, including NCAs, are generally deprived of means to advance their interests and influence policy-making.[42] Thus, one cannot speak of "power distribution" per se. At the same time, power relations play a role in consolidating boundaries. First, informal practices are relied upon to partially obviate civil society's disempowerment: public organizations can only operate within the confines of patronal politics (Flikke 2018; Gel'man 2016; Ledeneva 2006). Second, a parallel can be traced between the NCA system (and state-endorsed ethnicity-based organizations more broadly) and Soviet *korenizatsiya* policies. Soviet-era ethnic leaders accessed benefits as members of an ethnic community and also effectively acquired responsibility for it. In contemporary Russia, ethnic leaders pursue their objectives in line with existing rules of behavior in state-civil society engagement (Prina 2020), including by accepting (or acquiescing in) responsibility for the group. There are compelling reasons for adjusting to these practices, not least the constraints placed around the work of Russia's civil society (Gilbert 2016; Horvath 2011; Lipman 2016; Robertson 2009): it is counterproductive – as well as risky – for an organization to position itself antagonistically to the state. The head of an NCA interviewed, for example, noted that his criticism of the authorities had led to accusations of "extremist positions" (1.21). He added that, in his circle of NCA representatives, most avoided criticism to preempt negative repercussions.

The head of another NCA expressed the view that registering an NCA (rather than a "regular" NGO) demonstrated that the organization "played by the rules," by adjusting to a regulatory framework created by the state. Winning the authorities' trust could translate into opportunities for effective action to meet the organization's objectives (1.20). Another respondent noted that her NCA had been registered not because of a "major need" (as other similar institutions were already operating in the region) but as "there was a feeling that this would be the right way to interact with the state" (1.9). Cooperation with the authorities also meant that, in case of bureaucratic impediments, such as missing documentation for a particular project,

NCA leaders could informally access power networks to resolve these issues speedily and efficiently. These practices could benefit individual leaders and the broader community alike: for example, respondents referred to informal practices being utilized to iron out administrative issues relating to nurseries and care homes for their communities (1.8; 1.11). At the same time, some respondents had chosen not to register an NCA, due to concerns that they might be scrutinized more closely (2.7), or constrained in their choice of activities (2.6).

Other respondents regretted the security-centered logic that prevailed in contemporary approaches to nationalities policy, and the repercussions on their work. Some respondents believed it led to the securitization of organizations and their activities, and of diversity itself.[43] The head of a minority NGO in Moscow (for a community originating from the North Caucasus) complained of the need to demonstrate that the organization was "not dangerous" (2.8), while Tatar activists pointed to instances of abuse of extremism legislation to curtail minority activism that went beyond (narrowly-interpreted) cultural projects (2.9; 3.6). There were references to the importance of presenting a moderate position so as not to "scare off the authorities" (1.16), and of being "partners of the state" rather than "opponents" (2.8). Other respondents believed that the emphasis on stability could only result in the marginalization of aspects of minority issues that were not linked to insecurity, such as the revitalization of minority languages (1.22), and to neglecting communities that were not seen as security threats - such as the Mordovians, Karelians, and Finns, as respondents from these communities argued (1.22; 2.10; 2.3). The opposite was also seen to be true: a respondent from an NGO in Moscow believed that minority organizations were consulted by the local authorities only when their input was deemed necessary to defuse specific tensions (2.5). Finally, a respondent complained of the instrumentalization of ethnic communities by power networks: he referred to an ethnic festival he had attended, held shortly before gubernatorial elections for the region and that, in his opinion, was used as "advertising for the governor," transforming participants into "decoration" for a political event (2.7). In these cases, individuals "struggled" in an environment that severely constrained their activities.

Despite these difficulties, (some) opportunities were found to trickle down to minority organizations if they fulfilled certain predetermined social responsibilities. So as to retain the benefits of cooperation with the authorities, ethnic leaders have seemingly sought to demonstrate the value of their social function, including through support networks along ethnic lines. Meanwhile, the fact that the authorities generally treat ethnic leaders as representatives of their communities reconfirms them as such (see also Prina 2016, 188).

Last, as in the Soviet period, ethnicity is one means to access some – albeit limited – resources. These have been allocated to minority institutions as small grants for cultural events and festivals, seminars and publications, as well as, in some cases, office space. Thus, ethnic leaders have claimed resources in the name of the community: persons identifying with a particular ethnicity may coalesce on the basis of joint financial or cultural objectives, which may overlap (or not) with individual struggles in terms of goals, motivations, forms of identification with the community, and their (re)negotiation.

Conclusion

The article has analyzed boundary-making in Russia in relation to three factors: (ethnic) institutions, social networks and power distribution. In examining ethnic institutions' social-humanitarian work, it revealed a nexus between collective responsibility and ethnic boundary-making, as well as highlighting extant implications for Russia's minority actors and institutions (and, indirectly, minority communities more broadly). Unpacking these dynamics contributes to elucidating some of the complexities of state-civil society relations in contemporary Russia.

Soviet legacies continue to play a role in reproducing ethnic boundaries. Soviet-era ethnic classifications brought about a relative stability of such constructs, largely converging with contemporary perceptions of boundaries. While ethnicity might have lost some of its salience since the Soviet period, Russian society continues to be depicted in official narratives as multi-ethnic. From this, it is only a short step to an expectation of groupness, and the perception of ethnic communities "interacting" with one other. These processes may be likened to habitus, or "durable" and "transposable" dispositions (Bourdieu 1977, 72). The actions of both the state and ethnic communities' members contribute to these dispositions.

Meanwhile, a combination of sociopolitical structural factors and personal inclinations guide minority actors' choices in their positioning of themselves within social fields: they may cluster along group boundaries when this makes sense in terms of material and nonmaterial resources, including recognition and status. Individuals may then take up social functions to meet existing expectations, including by acting as mediators between state organs and the community, contributing to the reification of imaginary boundaries. Preexisting frames may then be reproduced with little question, not only in the case of state-endorsed narratives, but also with respect to social constructs (e.g. the perception of a society made up of ethnic groups with exclusive identities) and expectations (e.g. the view of ethnic leaders as repositories of a social responsibility vis-à-vis co-ethnics).

At the same time, this article has acknowledged the internal complexity of ethnic communities, highlighting micro-level dynamics by drawing on Bourdieu's idea of individual struggles. This approach can accommodate considerations on social conditioning and the state's symbolic power without however implying individual passivity. In fact, even when a general consensus on macronarratives is present (and interviewees for the most part adhered to essentialist notions of ethnicity), a myriad of struggles may manifest themselves, creating multiple variations of dominant discourses.

To conclude, Russia's sociopolitical reality – along with a relentless articulation of narratives on stability and security, national unity and patriotism – have tended to consolidate symbolic ethnic boundaries. Evolving sociopolitical and economic circumstances may forge new dynamics, ultimately altering patterns of boundary-making, including by decoupling them from notions of collective responsibility. Yet Russia's mounting authoritarianism makes imminent change

unlikely: in fact, while not fully obliterating opportunities to engage in individual "struggles," it has continued to restrict their scope, rendering structural constraints increasingly intractable.

Notes

1. There have been reports of social exclusion and marginalization of individuals or communities, linked to ethnic discrimination (see Osipov (2010)). See also reports of the Council of Europe, for example: European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), *ECRI Report on the Russian Federation (fifth monitoring cycle)*, December 4, 2018 CRI(2019)2, at https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-the-russian-federation/1680934a91.
2. Peoples' congresses are structures established by minorities themselves, mostly for their internal management (e.g. the Congress of Karelians and the World Congress of Tatars) (see Osipov 2011). Peoples' congresses have operated alongside (and at times jointly with) national cultural autonomies.
3. In some cases, former public officials.
4. Ethical approval No. 400130165.
5. The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, in the years 2014–2017. The data have been deposited with the UK Data Service Data, Collection Number 852,375.
6. 53.6% of the republic's population according to the 2021 census, vis-à-vis 40.3% identifying as ethnic Russians.
7. On Tatar-language education, see, for example, Zamyatin (2012) and Prina (2016, chap. 6). See also below (n. 26) on the centralization of the education system.
8. The Karelian population is a small minority in the republic: only 5.5% of the republic's population identified as ethnic Karelian in the 2021 census, down from 7.5% in 2010 and 9.2% in 2002. The teaching of the Karelian language in schools has had very limited reach. See Prina (2016, chap. 6).
9. 38.7% identified as Mordovians in 2021, while more than half of the population (54%) as ethnic Russians.
10. Approximately a quarter of the population according to the 2021 census, while 31.5% identified as Bashkirs and 37.5% as ethnic Russians.
11. *Assemblea Narodov Tatarstana*, a consultative body gathering ethnic communities in the republic.
12. June 17, 1996, No. 74-FZ.
13. Osipov (2010) argues that NCAs in fact are disadvantaged compared to regular NGOs.
14. See, for example, the Council of Europe's 1995 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), and the Opinions of the Advisory Committee on Russia. The FCNM was ratified by Russia in 1998 (however, following its withdrawal from the Councof of Europe in March 2022, Russia declared it would also withdraw from the FCNM).
15. I use the expression "nationality" interchangeably with "ethnicity", "ethnic group" and "(ethnic) community".
16. *Fifth Report submitted by the Russian Federation pursuant to Article 25(1) of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, April 13, 2021, ACFC/SR/V(2021)002, p.8, at https://rm.coe.int/5th-sr-russian-federation-en/1680a2234b.
17. See, for example, *Third Report submitted by the Russian Federation pursuant to Article 25(1) of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, April 9, 2010. ACFC/SR/III(2010)005, Annexes 2-6, https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008b7c5; and Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC), *Fourth Opinion on the Russian Federation*, February 20, 2018, ACFC/OP/IV(2018)001, at https://rm.coe.int/4th-advisory-committee-opinion-on-the-russian-federation-english-langu/1680908982.
18. Gorenburg (2003, 3, n.2) defines "ethnic institutions" as:
    "[T]hose institutions that are established to oversee a state's interaction with ethnic groups living on its territory. They include territorial administrative units for ethnic minorities, separate educational systems, language laws, official ethnic categories for censuses and identity papers, affirmative action programs for ethnic minorities, etc."
19. The notion of ethnic groups' development was included in the USSR constitutions of 1924 and 1977, as well as numerous Communist Party documents (Osipov 2013, 16).
20. *Psikhicheskii sklad*, also translated as "mental disposition".
21. Official website (English version) at http://government.ru/en/department/311/.
22. The constitutionality of this restriction was confirmed by the Russian Constitutional Court (Judgment of December 15, 2004, No. 18-P) on the grounds that ethnic parties could exacerbate ethnic or religious tensions.
23. In 2006 the Russian government stated that it was seeking to "follow the principle of de-ethnization of [the] domestic political scene", justified by the view that "national and ethnocultural issues blend perfectly in the concept of basic civil rights". *Comments of the Government of the Russian Federation on the Second Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Russian Federation*, October 11, 2006, GVT/COM/II(2006)006, p.2, https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168008f54b.
24. Article 68(1). The Constitution of the Russian Federation, December 12, 1993, with amendments approved by national vote on July 1, 2020. The amendments took effect on July 4, 2020 following an executive order. In the 1993 version of the constitution there was no reference to a "state-forming nation."
25. Article 68(2) of the Russian constitution states that the republics "have the right to establish their state languages".
26. This is particularly evident in the centralization of the education system, and the dilution of the use of minority languages in schools (Prina 2016, 124–53; Zamyatin 2012, 2015; Arutyunova and Zamyatin 2021). These processes have unfolded in tandem with a movement of political centralization of the federation, reducing the autonomy of the regions (Prina 2016, 95–123; Ross 2010; Zalyaev 2019).
27. See, "Boundaries and Power Distribution".
28. Laruelle (2016) refers to "conservatism" as a "state posture" from 2012 onwards, encompassing: patriotism (including love for the motherland, self-sacrifice and the duty of citizens toward the state) (see also Goode 2017, 2021; Sanina 2017); morality ((Russian) traditional values; and "national culture" (primarily Russian culture)).
29. See also below on the constraints placed around the work of civil society organizations ("Boundaries and Power Distribution").
30. See ACFC (2018), n.17, §5.
31. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 2, 2021, No. 400 "On the Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation", §91, http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_389271/ (in Russian). Similar wording was contained in the 2015 version of the Strategy of National Security.
32. See, "Soviet Nationalities Policy and Ethnic Boundaries".
33. Such as objecting to the securitization of minorities. See, "Boundaries and Power Distribution".
34. See n. 12.
35. Russian Constitutional Court, Judgment of March 3, 2004, No. 5 "On the Constitutionality of Article 5(3) of the Federal Law on National Cultural Autonomy with regard to the Complaint submitted by A.H. Ditsa i O.A. Shumacher".
36. See the next section.
37. The respondent added that most people who approached the organization did so for practical reasons and seemed uninterested in Jewish traditions.
38. Added to Article 1 through Federal Law "On Introducing Amendments to Articles 1 and 4 of the Federal Law "On National Cultural Autonomy," November 4, 2014, No. 336-FZ.

Another objective added was "the strengthening of the unity of the civic Russian nation" (*rossiiskaya natsiya*).

39. Others continued with predominantly cultural activities, whether because there was no demand for social work, or because they were unwilling or unable to provide it.
40. Although its origins date back to even earlier periods.
41. In the Soviet Union they led to practices such as mutual denunciations. In both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods the expression *krugovaya poruka* has often been employed in the sense of "cover up" – reciprocal obligations to hide unsanctioned, illegal, or even criminal, activities (Ledeneva 2004).
42. This is not to say that Russian civil society has been unable to play a role in Russian politics and society (e.g. Petrov, Lipman, and Hale 2014). At the same time, public engagement that opposes government priorities is fraught with difficulties and has become more arduous with Russia's authoritarian turn.
43. A Tatar academic and activist in Kazan, said: "In Moscow people think that the more nationalists we have, the more problems we will have. If all people become Russians, we will live happily." (3.4)

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