What Exactly is Studied When Ethnicity is Researched? A Descriptive Model for Constructivist Studies of Ethnicity in the Context of the Cognitive Turn

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Abstract

The paper presents a descriptive theoretical and methodological model, developed on the basis of modern constructivist approaches to ethnicity research. The model is placed in the context of the cognitive turn in social science as a whole and specifically ethnicity research. The model attempts to give an answer to the question of what is studied when ethnicity is researched. In the model, ethnicity is defined as a special type of differentiating collective representations. The key elements of the model are the ethnic categories and their interrelations. These categories are associated with a variety of attributes (the second type of elements of the model). The third type of elements are general representations of ethnicity, characterizing the construction of ethnicity as a whole. The construction of ethnicity constitutes the entire set of interconnected categories, attributes, and general representations. The construction of ethnicity and its elements are the focus of empirical ethnicity research. The paper additionally presents ways to operationalize ethnicity in various empirical studies carried out by the author. The paper, thus, by means of accumulating modern approaches and "departing from" the other constructivist models (Rogers Brubaker, Kanchan Chandra, Andreas Wimmer and Richard Jenkins), offers a transparent conceptualization of ethnicity, as well as specific solutions for empirical research and is addressed primarily to researchers who in one way or another work with ethnicity in their research.

Keywords

ethnicity, constructivism, cognitive turn, construction of ethnicity, categories, Brubaker

Introduction

It won't be a mistake to say that ethnicity studies are in a permanent crisis due to the uncertainty of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Having moved away from naive "groupism", researchers in the field have not yet come to a consensus regarding the main conceptual focus of their work. As such they partly use metaphors of limited applicability, like "ethnic boundaries" (Sanders, 2002; Chai, 1996; Ingelaere, & Paviotti, 2023), and partly apply concepts the meanings of which turn out to be vague and contradictory, like "identity" (Nagel, 1994; McDermott, & Samson, 2005; Modood, 2004). As a result, even empirical researchers who do not claim to understand the broad picture, find themselves disoriented, because it is unclear what exactly needs to be studied, what to observe and what to ask about. Several important projects have been undertaken to reduce the degree of theoretical and methodological uncertainty (Wimmer, 2013; Chandra, 2012a; Jenkins,

1994; Brubaker, 2006), but they—each for their own reasons which will be discussed later—have not fully accomplished the task, which has only deepened the confusion.

This paper will attempt to solve a limited but, it seems, key task within the framework of building a sustainable research program. This task consists of creating a descriptive theoretical and methodological model for the study of ethnicity, within the framework of which an answer should be given to the question of what exactly should be studied when ethnicity is researched. It should be noted right away that giving a definition of ethnicity makes up only a small portion of this task. And while such a working definition will be given in the paper, it is important that, firstly, its limitations and theoretical problems that it encounters are indicated, and secondly, it serves only as a framework for the subsequent selection of concepts that are in the immediate focus of ethnicity research, as well as various methodological steps that allow ethnicity to be studied empirically. It is this work, the purpose of which is *the conceptualization of ethnicity for empirical research*, that is central to this paper.

This paper begins by clarifying the theoretical foundations of the proposed model—specifically, constructivist approaches to ethnicity and the cognitive turn in ethnicity research. It then defines the theoretical object of ethnicity research in a broad sociological sense, outlining the general phenomena addressed when ethnicity is studied. A brief overview of how ethnicity has been defined historically follows, leading to the introduction of a working definition. The core of the paper presents a descriptive theoretical and methodological model that specifies which phenomena fall within the immediate focus of ethnicity research. This is followed by a number of empirical examples that concentrate on particular components of the model. The concluding section compares the model with its predecessors, discusses its distinctive contribution and limitations, and considers its potential applications, including in interdisciplinary contexts.

In general, therefore—starting from the uncertainty of the object area of ethnicity research and focusing on modern developments in the field of social sciences, as well as on the author's many years of empirical research, this paper is intended to create a solid foundation for ethnicity research, especially where researchers move on from theoretical concepts to empirical research. The created model is descriptive in nature, in fact being an extended description of a set of conceptual variables that together form the concept of "ethnicity". Incorporating this model into explanations is a task for the future, which, however, cannot be solved without a clear understanding of what exactly is being studied when ethnicity is researched. Moreover, it is important to note that despite the fact that, in all likelihood, the model describes most phenomena related to ethnicity, it is of a broad, framework nature and rather outlines paths than presents a final solution. With these limitations, we can move on to its description, starting with the theoretical foundations.

Constructivism and the cognitive turn in ethnicity studies: theoretical foundations of the model

The described model lies in the realm of constructivist sociology. Without attempting to reconstruct the process of the formation of the constructivist paradigm[1], it is important, however, to express the basic idea underlying constructivist thinking. According to this idea, social phenomena are collective representations created and reproduced in the course of interpersonal communication. These representations are transmitted in the process of socialization and form people's understanding of reality. Additionally, these representations exist and manifest themselves within the framework of institutions. There are different versions of constructivism, as well as different, important supplements to it (one of which is the "cognitive turn", which will be discussed below), but the described concepts are its common denominator.

Constructivism was introduced into the study of ethnicity in the second half of the 20th century and its introduction is usually associated (not entirely fairly in relation to its predecessors, such as the Manchester School of Anthropology, for example) with the works of Fredrik Barth (Barth, 1998). At the same time, related fields were also influenced by constructivism, and, in particular, studies of nationalism (Gellner, 2008; Hobsbawm, & Ranger, 2012; Anderson, 1991), which inevitably influenced studies of ethnicity. Key contemporary constructivist authors (Wimmer, 2013; Chandra, 2012a) point to the total victory of constructivism over its imaginary "rivals" and the need to create competing constructivist frameworks for the development of the field. However, as far as a paradigm shift is involved, this process is stretched out in time and space, and while there are no non-constructivists (at least self-defined) left in the areas in which these authors work, they can still exist on the periphery of the scholarly 'oikumene'. The constructivist view is "applied" to ethnicity in such a way that ethnic phenomena (defined whichever way) are the product of constant "production" in the course of communication, and it is precisely the focus on the "production" or "making" of ethnic phenomena that is the defining feature of constructivist studies of ethnicity.

It is important, however, to note that constructivism, contrary to popular belief, does not assert the instability of ethnic phenomena, but only points to their communicative nature. And although the contexts in which both ethnic categories and membership in them are dynamic have been the "face" of constructivism since the time of Barth, "rigid", "stable" contexts are no less amenable to constructivist description—it is just that in them ethnic phenomena are "reassembled" each time in approximately the same form as they existed before. Nor constructivism asserts the

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[1] Some important aspects of the development and penetration of constructivist ideas are described in (Andrews, 2012; Pfadenhauer, & Knoblauch, 2018).

obligatory "superficiality of ethnic identities". On the contrary, within its framework, we distinguish instrumentalism, which draws attention to cases of rational navigation between ethnic contexts and categories, and primordialism (sic!), which focuses, among other things, on the question of why, despite the constructed nature of ethnicity, it turns out to be critically important for people[2].

Within constructivist studies of ethnicity there is no consensus on the main phenomenon under scrutiny. There is a tradition that goes back to Barth and in recent years continued by Andreas Wimmer (2013), which studies ethnic boundaries; other researchers (for example, another contemporary theorist Kanchan Chandra (2012a)) put identity at the forefront; some, like Richard Jenkins (1994) suggest focusing on ethnicity as a whole, detailing what is meant by it afterwards. This paper takes on the same approach. All the authors mentioned, however, will probably agree that the leading role in ethnicity and their research belongs to ethnic categories and the process of categorization. Placing these objects in the focus of the study, however, should be attributed to the second important theoretical basis of the created model—the cognitive turn in the study of ethnicity.

The cognitive turn refers to the reception of orientations and methodology of cognitive sciences in the social sciences (Ignatow, 2007; Raphael, 2017; Fuller et al., 1989). In general, the cognitive turn began after the Second World War and affected both sociological theory in general and particular research areas, but, surprisingly, ethnicity research was less affected by this turn. With perhaps one exception (that being Van Dijk (1984, 2009)) until recently there were no large programs that would imply any form of interdisciplinarity, and the empirical studies of ethnicity that would be conducted by social scientists using cognitive approaches and methods could be counted on the fingers of one hand. This is even more surprising if we consider the fact that the disciplines related to cognitive science deal with the issues of ethnicity deeply and fundamentally. Theory of contact, developed by Allport (1979) and his followers, Tajfel's minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, & Turner, 1979; Diehl, 1990), neurophysiological studies of "racial" stimuli (Pyasik et al., 2023; Kubota et al., 2012), developments in the studies of 'face-space' (Sporer, 2001; Valentine et al., 2016), evolutionary psychology and anthropology of ethnicity (Moya, & Boyd, 2015; Cosmides et al.,

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[2]The delineation of the field of ethnic studies, like much else in ethnic studies, is an area of great theoretical uncertainty. In another paper, the author has proposed his own version of this delineation, which is briefly described in this text, and its main idea is that constructivism opposes the pre-scientific and non-scientific ideas about ethnicity on the basis of which anthropology was formed, and the meaning of which was to single out variously named groups of people. Among such ideas are ideas about the innateness of ethnicity and the "eternity" of ethnic groups, which can be labelled "primordialism", however this term itself entered ethnicity studies with the works of Clifford Geertz, who, while researching new African states, was surprised to find that their inhabitants were in no hurry to identify with them, remaining faithful to tribal, "primordial" identities, and it is the question of the stability of some and the fluidity of others that constitutes legitimate "primordialism" in the constructivist paradigm. There are other such questions. More on this in (Varshaver, 2024).

2003) and many more form an essential resource, partly for an interdisciplinary understanding of ethnicity, and partly for enriching programs that remain "in the realm" of the social sciences.

Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker et al., 2004; Brubaker, 2006), one of the most important contemporary figures in the constructivist sociology of ethnicity, drew attention to this and linked it to the tendency of contemporary social sciences to gravitate to humanistic ideas and the "fear" of psychological reductionism. At the same time, he notes, to the extent that social sciences, and in particular ethnic studies, are "disaggregated" in terms of their theoretical object of research, and the focus of their methodological attention drifts towards the individuals and their perception of reality, this turn is already taking place; moreover, in some fragments it constitutes the core of contemporary constructivist thinking and is inseparable from constructivism. The main "commandment" of the cognitive turn, which was partly diagnosed, partly proclaimed by Brubaker as an important potential agenda in the study of ethnicity, is the transition from studying ethnicity as a thing in the world to studying it as a view of the world, or, in other words, the ways of perceiving and interpreting information that, when transformed into action, create ethnic phenomena. The most important theoretical consequence of this idea for constructivist research was the rejection of ethnic groups as an object of study. From the point of view of the cognitive turn, groups turn out to be not an element of external reality, but a cognitive tool for imagining differences and should be studied as such.

It is precisely this radical anti-groupism as an element of the cognitive turn and, at the same time, as a building block of modern constructivist studies of ethnicity that has become the "brand" associated with Brubaker's name. But what exactly—if not groups—should be the focus of cognitivized studies of ethnicity? "The processes of classification and categorization, formal and informal <…>; <…> the categories and frames in terms of which social comparison and social explanation are organized; the schemas, scripts, and cultural models that allow one to perceive, experience, or interpret situations and sequences of action <…>; the cognitive biases in the retrieval and processing of information that lead us to evaluate evidence in selective ways <…>" (Brubaker et al., 2004: 48–49). According to Brubaker, the cognitive turn can and should be explicated, and the interaction between the social sciences and cognitive science should be intensified, because modern constructivism is already, to some extent, cognitive science, but does not have access to its methodologies and results.

The theoretical and methodological model described in this paper owes much to the cognitive turn, and above all to the following: (1) an anti-groupist ontology and a focus on categories as the main operator of perception and interpretation of reality, (2) anti-elitism and a focus on the ways of perception and interpretation of reality by "commoners", (3) methodological approaches more characteristic of the cognitive sciences (in particular, elicitation, orientation toward categories and

the process of categorization), and others. It is, however, only one element of the cognitive turn, the work on the theoretical, methodological and empirical implementation of which should be continued.

It should also be noted that the model draws, either explicitly or implicitly, on other concepts and ideas from the social sciences and ethnicity research. For example, to the extent that, according to constructivism, ethnicity "happens" in communication, and communication is often verbal, the model lies in the realm of the linguistic turn in the social sciences (Searle, 1979; Surkis, 2012; Sacks et al., 1978), and in particular draws on the textual analysis methods developed within its framework (Hutchby, & Wooffitt, 2008; Gee, 2014; Tannen et al., 2015). Insofar as ethnicity is an element of the "social fabric", empirically hardly separable from other phenomena, and the construction of ethnicity occurs, among other things, through different types of material objects (including those playing the role of symbols), the contextual basis of the model is the actor-network theory and the "turn to things" (Latour, 2007). Methodologically, the model is oriented towards the ideas of Clifford Geertz's "thick description" (Geertz, 2017), as well as Anselm Strauss's grounded theory (Glaser, & Strauss, 2017a, 2017b). One can also list a number of concepts of ethnicity studies, which include Benedict Anderson's imaginaries (Anderson, 1991), Anthony Smith's "mytho-symbolic complexes" (Smith, 2009) and others, that lay the groundwork for the model, it is unlikely, however, that it is possible to track all the significant influences and grounds for it, and thus it seems appropriate to move on to the description of the model.

What is studied when ethnicity is researched: defining the object

In order to give a direct and detailed description of the model, however, two more framing issues must be resolved. Firstly, what kind of phenomena are being studied when ethnicity is researched, and what form does ethnicity take on, and second, what is ethnicity and how can it be distinguished from other phenomena. To start with, constructivist sociological research rarely reflects on the research object in a broad sense. It seems that object in question is "social constructs", however, despite the paradigmatic nature of constructivism, surprisingly few attempts have been made to clarify this concept, and it seems that this term is used primarily to indicate the social nature of phenomena that at first glance seem natural, rather than as guidance for empirical research.

There are, however, other concepts that claim the role of such an umbrella term. In particular, these are Emile Durkheim's "social facts" (Durkheim, 1982), which are in a vaguely defined relationship with another term he introduced, that being "collective representations". The latter term is then borrowed in the form of "social representations" by the French social psychologist and sociologist Serge Moscovici (1981, 2001), who made an important attempt to cognitivize sociological research in the 1980s. An analysis of this and other concepts, as well as their

applications in specific studies, however, indicates that, with slightly different semantics and theoretical contexts, constructs, facts, or ideas can be taken with equal success as a general object, of which ethnicity is a special case. Within the framework of the model, a decision was made to use the classical term "collective representations", from which representations of a special kind, related to ethnicity, are then distinguished.

Collective representations are facts of social, intersubjective reality external to each person, which are internalized by each individual in the course of socialization. Moreover (and this is an important step within the theoretical agenda of integrating constructivism and the cognitive turn), these representations then become a template that organizes the perception of other facts of reality and its interpretations, and function as cognitive schemas. Representations and schemas in the theoretical sense are not identical to each other; there are schemas that are not expressed as representations, and vice versa, representations that are not used to interpret reality. The question of their relationship is important and, despite attempts (Augustinos, & Innes, 1990), has not yet been resolved; however, in a framework, we can say that collective representations and schemas overlap empirically, and the study of collective representations inevitably entails the study of cognitive schemas—in the "place" where representations "collide" with reality.

Thus, within the generalized framework of the created model, ethnicity research focuses on collective representations and how they organize the perception of reality. Now we need to outline the field of ethnicity research. This is also not an easy task. Ethnicity research in a broad sense has experienced three "definitional eras"—periods when one or another definition of ethnicity dominated. These periods overlap in time, but in general are related chronologically. At the first stage, to the extent that the object of the study was ethnic groups referred to in different ways, it was their definition, within which the features uniting its participants (culture, territory, economy, self-determination, etc.) were usually identified, that was the definition of ethnicity (Hutchinson, & Smith, 2008; Charsley, 1974). At the next stage—under the influence of Barth and the idea of an ethnic boundary—definitions of ethnicity began to focus not on groups, but on interactions during which differentiation occurs and, in particular, Abner Cohen (not very successfully, but characteristic of the movement) defines ethnicity as a "strife between <…> ethnic groups, in the course of which people stress their identity and exclusiveness" (Cohen, 2013: 4). Neither the first nor the second type of definitions, however, solved the "problem of attributes"—what characteristics indicate the ethnic essence of groups (the first "era") or boundaries (the second "era")? People can speak the same language (or make social distinctions based on language), but not have a common economy, or define themselves in a similar way, but not speak the same language. In response to this problem, so-called "minimalist definitions" began to appear, marking the third "definitional era" and arguing

that ethnic differentiations are distinguished from all others by the fact that—in the general case—it is the so-called descent classificatory rule, within the framework of which membership in an ethnic category is inherited from parents (Fearon, 2000; Chandra, 2012b), that is central to ethnicity research. Such a definition also has its problems: in particular, it does not allow us to seriously separate ethnic phenomena from class differentiations, on the one hand, and clan/family differentiations, on the other. Theoretically, this problem could be solved by the idea of vernacular essentialization, developed in cognitive psychology and the anthropology of ethnicity (Gil-White, 2001; Gelman, 2003): according to it, those categories are ethnic in relation to which people "apply" essentialist, holistic thinking to them. However, cognitive sciences are gradually moving away from the idea of essentialization (Moya, & Boyd, 2015), which means that this approach can hardly be used effectively. In general, if we were to give a formal definition that would succinctly accumulate the advances in this area, it would turn out that *ethnicity is a social organization of differences realized through categories, membership in which is predominantly inherited,* but it must be understood that, in all likelihood, a clear distinction between ethnic phenomena among others is a problem that cannot be resolved at this point in time. However, without trying to separate ethnic phenomena from non-ethnic ones, we can essentially and briefly describe what cognitivist constructivist studies of ethnicity do. They are concerned with social categorizations realized "from above" and "from below", collective representations that are formed on the basis of and in connection with these categorizations, as well as how these representations and categorizations organize the behavior of individuals and—more broadly—social reality. Or, even more briefly, when we are talking about ethnicity, we are talking about a set of differentiating representations that organize social interactions. But what representations are we talking about? What elements are distinguished within the framework of these representations, how are they organized? And what exactly—regardless of the specific theoretical logic (which may differ from one study to another), method, or type of collected information—should be paid attention to in empirical studies of ethnicity? These questions are answered by the model, which is described in the next segment.

The construction of ethnicity and its components

So, ethnicity is a type of differentiating collective representations. These representations are organized around categories, and it is precisely the categories that are in the conceptual core of the model (the model in the form of a diagram is shown in Figure 1). The categories within these representations, however, exist in connection with each other, being in some type of relationship. Such a relationship can be categorization—a semi-structured set of categories that are loosely connected to each other, classification—a structured non-hierarchical set of categories, or

taxonomy—a structured set of categories within which some categories constitute others. Vernacular representations often exist in the form of categorizations, while formalized ones exist in the form of classifications (a typical example of those is the list of "peoples"/"nationalities"/"races" in censuses), and both the first and second representations can be taxonomized (the vernacular category of the Balts, which "includes" Latvians, Lithuanians, or Estonians, or the Cossacks and Pomors as subcategories of Russians in the procedures of the Russian census). Categories are organized in relation to each other in different ways—via clusters or networks. Clusters can be based on vernacular ideas of cultural similarities or "historical kinship", as well as a discursive context (categories are often mentioned in the context of each other), while networks can describe "interethnic relations": alliances, enmity, etc. Another type of relationship between categories can be hierarchy—the idea that, according to certain criteria, some categories are "higher" than others. The actual ways in which ethnic categories are organized, however, are an empirical, under-researched, but nevertheless key question for ethnicity research.

Each category may be associated with attributes of several types. Firstly, these are characteristics—generalized, stereotyped qualities of category representatives (for example, Chechens are strong, their men are confrontational). Secondly, these are indicators—features by which category representatives can be defined or identified (Chechens wear beards, they have a characteristic accent in Russian, their birth certificates state that they are Chechens). The relationship between characteristics and indicators is a separate theoretical question: perhaps indicators are a subtype of characteristics, or perhaps they are attributes that function mostly spontaneously, which is why they are more an element of the corresponding cognitive schema rather than sociological discourse. Within the framework of the model, however, it is important that indicators are associated with specific categories and allow for differentiation. Thirdly, these are norms—representations of correct behavior "in connection" with the category. These can be ideas of how to appropriately behave when interacting with representatives of a category (not to flirt with a Chechen woman) or how to behave as a representative of a category (a good Chechen should be ready to fight back against anyone). In essence, categories with such attributes are already capable of organizing and actually do organize social interactions. In this regard, let us call these attributes level-one attributes.

But the representations by which social reality is "stitched together" are subtler, and some phenomena from a wide variety, which can also be associated in collective representations with ethnic categories, we define as the level-two attributes. These can be places and territories (Chechnya in Russia, the "Chechen" Aukhovsky area in Dagestan, the "Evropeisky" shopping center and "Chechen" cafes in Moscow), literary works and folklore (Lermontov's "Valerik", the Cossack song

"Stood Shamil on the Mountain"[3]) or even less formalized narrativized representations (one neighbor telling another that they "saw two Chechens with rebar the other day"), these can be occupations (Chechens are athletes or bandits), these can be specific people (the leader of Checnya Ramzan Kadyrov), etc. Level-two attributes are an open list and it includes everything that is actually associated with the categories. It is important that this bunch—categories and their attributes—is, firstly, an interface and membrane that organizes specific social interactions, and secondly, it and its elements are connected with other representations that are not ethnic, and all these representations determine human behavior.

There is, however, another type of representation. These representations are general and relate to the entire set of categories and attributes or some significant part of it, being the "key" for their perception and understanding. Such representations can be split into two large, interconnected types: folk sociologies of ethnicity and key-metacategories. Folk sociology of ethnicity includes representations concerning the nature of ethnicity, rules of membership in categories, the determinacy of behavior by an ethnic category, etc. Key-metacategories are general names for various ethnic categories, such as races, nations, tribes or ethnic groups. Often, key-metacategories imply a certain folk sociology of ethnicity (for example, a nation or tribe may be perceived as more formal categories in terms of the "entry" procedure in comparison with, say, a race or ethnic group), however, in general, the relationship between different types of general representations is also an unresolved theoretical question, just as the "list" of these types is open to addition.

All three types of collective representations, categories, attributes and general representations, in interconnection form the construction of ethnicity. The construction of ethnicity is both a theoretical concept that unites different types of representations into a related conceptual set and a term that denotes the entire set of collective representations related to ethnicity that exist in a certain context. Thus, it is the construction of ethnicity (and not ethnic groups or ethnic boundaries) that turns out to be the mode of existence of ethnic phenomena and, at the same time, the object of description—in whole or in terms of its individual elements (categories, attributes, general representations). In reality, however, we are not talking about a single construction of ethnicity, but about the distribution of constructions of ethnicity by people, territories, social circles and time periods, and an empirical description of the construction of ethnicity is a description of the variability

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[3] Mikhail Lermontov's poem "Valerik" is dedicated to and narrates the poet's experience of the Battle of the Valerik River, which took place near the fortress located on the premises of modern capital of the Republic of Chechnya, Grozny. The battle, as well as the poem, is associated with the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, and specifically the area of modern Chechnya.

Shamil, a historical figure, leader of the resistance during the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, is widely associated with various ethnic categories of Northern Caucasus, including Chechens. The lyrics of the song differ from version to version, but are quite often interpreted to be referring to Chechens, as well.

(and relationship) of collective representations in the context identified for research purposes. This context, in turn, can be arbitrarily narrow (one person at a certain point in life) or broad (all of humanity over the past several millennia). But how exactly is the construction of ethnicity distributed among people and what are the consequences? This will be discussed in the last fragment—before moving on to operationalizations and empirical designs.

Construction of ethnicity

Categories	Categorizations Classifications Taxonomies	Hierarchies Closeness Relationship
Attributes	Level 1: Characteristics Indicators Norms	
	Level 2: Places Stories Actions People Other	
General representations	Folk sociology of ethnicity Metacategories	

Figure 1—Theoretical model

Interiorization, category of identification, variability and relevance

Thus, the construction of ethnicity is a collective representation, initially external to a person, but, as follows from the general constructivist sociological theory, internalized by a person in the course of socialization, as a result of which these representations become an object of beliefs and practice, as well as a basis for action. A person internalizes not only the representation of who they are (as this basically follows from research, centered around the concept of identity), but also social reality, or more precisely its local and contextual variations, in the fullness of social categories and their attributes. Their personal position in this reality, however, is not arbitrary and is determined by such elements of the construction of ethnicity as indicators and rules of membership in ethnic categories. The category by which a person is defined (by themselves and by other people) in the case of internalization of the construction of ethnicity is called the category of identification. If we attempt to describe the variability of "individual versions" of the constructions of ethnicity, it turns out that to a significant extent it is explained by the category of identification. As such, people defined in the construction of ethnicity via a certain category are most likely attribute positive

qualities to this category, and this distinguishes them from other people who are more "variable" in this respect[4]. Moreover, the set of categories by means of which people are described and the relationships between them also vary based on this. Thus, for people assigned to a certain category, this category often turns out to be more "fractional", taxonomically including other categories, as well as the representations of similarity, closeness, friendship and hostility between different categories will also differ among people with different categories of identification. Simply put, the category of identification essentially sets the view of ethnicity and determines the form in which the construction of ethnicity appears at the individual level.

But, as has already been said, in addition to the fact that the construction of ethnicity differs at the individual level, it also differs between spatial and social contexts. Categories, attributes, and general representations may differ as well. As a result, a person has access to two or more constructions of ethnicity[5]. This can create a certain cognitive distance between a person and each of the constructions, which, in turn, has two important consequences. Firstly, it allows for some space for situational rational navigation between constructions of ethnicity, that is, the choice of elements of the construction of ethnicity (for example, categories of identification) from a certain variety. This is the focus of instrumental theories of ethnicity. Secondly, it creates a theoretical opportunity for realizing the irrelevance of the variants of the construction of ethnicity altogether: when interpretations of the world contradict each other, it is easier to lose faith in such a modality of describing the world as a whole. In this vein, the described connection between the construction of ethnicity and individual representations, which takes into account the variability of constructions of ethnicity (associated, among other things, with the category of identification, but also spatial and contextual) as well as the effects of individual access to different constructions of ethnicity, creates space for further theoretical work, the purpose of which may be the creation of not descriptive, but analytical models, in particular, explaining the change in the construction of ethnicity, as well as the degree of its (or its elements') relevance for individuals, etc. Another direction for complicating and clarifying this model is the inclusion of institutions—the "carriers" of the construction of ethnicity and differentiating actors—in it.

It is also important to note that the construction of ethnicity is not the only set of collective representations in which and by which people live, and although in this paper the construction of ethnicity is isolated analytically, in people's actual perceptions the elements of the construction of

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[4] These issues are covered in the psychological theory of social identity (Tajfel, & Turner, 1979; Hogg, 2016).

[5] Due to this, the classical problem of ethnicity research, the "situational" nature of ethnicity, is resolved differently. It is not ethnicity or identity that are situational, as is sometimes stated in literature (Okamura, 1981; Pyzhova, 2012), but rather the constructions of ethnicity differ from each other in different territorial and social contexts. These constructions of ethnicity are internalized by individuals, due to which they are "assigned" to different categories, but they internalize the entire construction of ethnicity as a whole, and not just the category of identification.

ethnicity are tightly fused with other phenomena. This must be taken into account both for further theorizing and in developing empirical designs, the transition to which from the theoretical model will be made in the following fragment.

Empirical Designs and Decision

The model described above is fundamentally synthetic in nature. While it is not an operationalization of a specific theory (but is the embodiment of a certain theoretical perspective), it is called upon to answer the question of what exactly—in the theoretical sense—is fundamentally being studied when ethnicity is researched. And the answer to this question is as follows: differentiating collective representations are being studied. These representations are detailed in the form of a scheme and contextualized by considerations of their relationship with individuals and other social phenomena. The importance of this scheme among other things, however, lies in the fact that it is a direct exit to operationalization within the framework of empirical research. In fact, it represents a set of concepts that can be studied "in the field". Below, a number of decisions and solutions will be presented, once applied by the author of the paper and serving as examples of field studies of ethnicity, carried out in the context of the given model. These examples are not completely comparable to each other; moreover, some of them are important due to being an operationalization of the greater part of the model, while others highlight its individual elements. Moreover, these examples, of course, do not exhaust the possibilities of empirical research (the program of potential empirical research is described in the last section of the paper). However, they allow us to form an idea of how and by means of what specific tools, methods and designs—according to this model—ethnicity can be studied/described within the framework of field research.

Constructions of Ethnicity: From Interviews to General Description

While talking about specific methods of studying ethnicity within the framework of the described model, it seems appropriate to start with an interview. While a conversation may be organized differently depending on the specific type of interview, in it the informant gradually explicates his life and worldview and—along with it—the construction of ethnicity. Then the only thing left to do is to carefully, based on one of the appropriate analysis techniques (discourse analysis, conversation analysis, etc.), analyze the interview and, starting from the components of the model, identify the network of categories and attributes, as well as general representations. Here are excerpts from two interviews taken in 2016 in one of the villages on the shore of Lake Sevan in

Armenia during a study of the connection between the construction of ethnicity in villages and the migration strategies of villagers[6].

> **Informant, "Armenian":** *George Brown said that the Armenian language is intended for speaking with God. Because it has [all] the letters that human language has.*
> **Interviewer:** *So, Armenian language is a human language, in fact?*
> **Informant, "Armenian":** *Yes. It has all the letters that a human can pronounce. For example, in English, if you want to make a "ʃ"-sound, you write "S", then "H". But Armenians don't have that. They have all the letters. Our alphabet was made in year 405. <…>*

> **Interviewer:** *And I also know that there are Yezidis. No one can explain to me the difference between Kurds and Yezidis.*
> **Informant, "Yezidi":** *They are, you know, they just have Armenian family names. That's the difference. But otherwise—Kurds, Yesidis—one language. There is no difference. They just changed their family names a little. There is no difference.*
> **Interviewer:** *And I also heard that they are a slightly different religion, so to speak?*
> **Informant, "Yezidi":** *I don't know about that. I don't... I don't know anything like that. My family lives well, everything else doesn't matter to me.*

The analysis of the interviews consists of "distilling" the ethnicity construct from the text. And, according to such an analysis, in the first excerpt the category "Armenian" is attributed with "language" (level-two attribute), due to which the category "Armenian" is also attributed with "antiquity" and "culture" as characteristics (level-one attributes). In the second, the difference between the categories "Yezidis" and "Kurds" is described (the relationship between the categories), as well as a set of indicators (language, family names) that indicate belonging to these categories. It is important that this is exactly what the "raw material" for analysis looks like, on the basis of which the construction of ethnicity is then explicated, and the analysis is carried out in this vein. In order for the construct "shared" by the participants in the context to be explicated in full, it is also necessary to collect a sufficient array of interviews while paying attention to the informant selection procedure. And the interviews excerpted above are among 26 other interviews conducted in the same village. At the point where, in accordance with the procedures for creating grounded theory, firstly,

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[6]Some results of this research were covered in (Varshaver, 2022b, 2025).

categories and their attributes begin to repeat themselves, and, secondly, all theoretical possibilities for increasing variability are exhausted (Thomson, 2010; Glaser, Strauss, 2017b)—informants differ in gender, place of birth, ethnic category of identification and other characteristics that presumably provide variability—it becomes possible to create a generalized description of the construction of ethnicity at hand. Here is the description that was "distilled" for this village:

The villagers categorize each other based on the categories of "Armenians" and "Kurds"; the "Armenians" also categorize each other as "Khovets", "Sighets" and "Vanets" based on their ancestral places of origin in Turkey (the village was founded in the 1920s by re-settlers from there). Various stereotyped characteristics are associated with these categories. Thus, the category "Vanets" is attributed with characteristics, which becomes apparent through various jokes[7]. As for the category "Kurds", there are two main characteristics associated with this category in the circles of "Armenians": (1) their women are promiscuous and (2) although they seem to profess their religion, they are in fact secretly Muslim (this opinion is based on the fact that posters with a Meccan mosque have been seen in their homes). Based on that, there exists the norm "not to communicate" with them. The "Kurds" speak of Armenians as "good neighbors", but we can assume the presence of the norm "not to speak ill of the category "Armenians" to non-Kurds"[8]. In interviews with "Armenians", the category "Azerbaijani" also appears. The latter exist in two qualities—as "good neighbors" (before the war, Armenian villages in the region neighbored Azerbaijani ones) and as "enemies". These two attributes (and the characteristics and normativity associated with them) are not linked into a single narrative. "Azerbaijani-ness" as a quality is also attributed to Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan (the category "pahstakan", Armenian word for "refugee"), who replaced Azerbaijanis in abandoned villages and bears the meaning of "callousness", which is revealed in the reproducing story about how the narrator or their acquaintance knocked on the door of the "pahstakan" and asked for a glass of water, but was refused. The eagerness of attributing the notion "enemy" to Azerbaijanis

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[7]Two Vanets are walking with their wives. They see each other. One to the other: "Barev!" ("Greetings!"—Armenian). The other one replies: "Khazar barev!" ("A thousand greetings!"—Armenian). The wife takes the second one aside and says: "What do you mean a thousand? A hundred at most!"

[8]The ideas of the informants who identified with the category of "Armenians" were researched in more detail during the fieldwork, the informants felt less restrained and (with exception of the attributes of the category "Russians" with which the researchers were associated) the construction of ethnicity was explicated without significant shifts. The unwillingness of the informant from the second excerpt to comment on the Armenians' ideas about secret Islamism, on the one hand, indicates a lack of trust in the interviewer, on the other—some characteristics of the construction of ethnicity that do not allow "Kurds" to speak freely about "Armenians" and other categories. Such observations are also considered a result.

varies among informants, and these differences can be linked, among other things, to the extent to which the speaker is involved in migration to Russia, where this connection is weaker as a result of regular interactions between representatives of the categories "Armenian" and "Azerbaijani".

This description, as was said, in general terms presents a listing of categories in conjunction with attributes, comments on the distribution of the corresponding "view of the world" among people, identification of the common and the different, as well as considerations on how the differences are structured (in this case—by the category of identification and by involvement in migration to Russia). Such a description, in addition, can be visualized within the framework of the schema presented in Figure 2. Before that, such schemas are "painted" for each informant separately, compared with other schemas, resulting in a generalized schema. It is important, however, that it hardly provides an opportunity to describe the entire variety of perspectives and is rather used as a tool for creating a verbal description, as well as an illustration to it, and not as an alienable result of analysis.
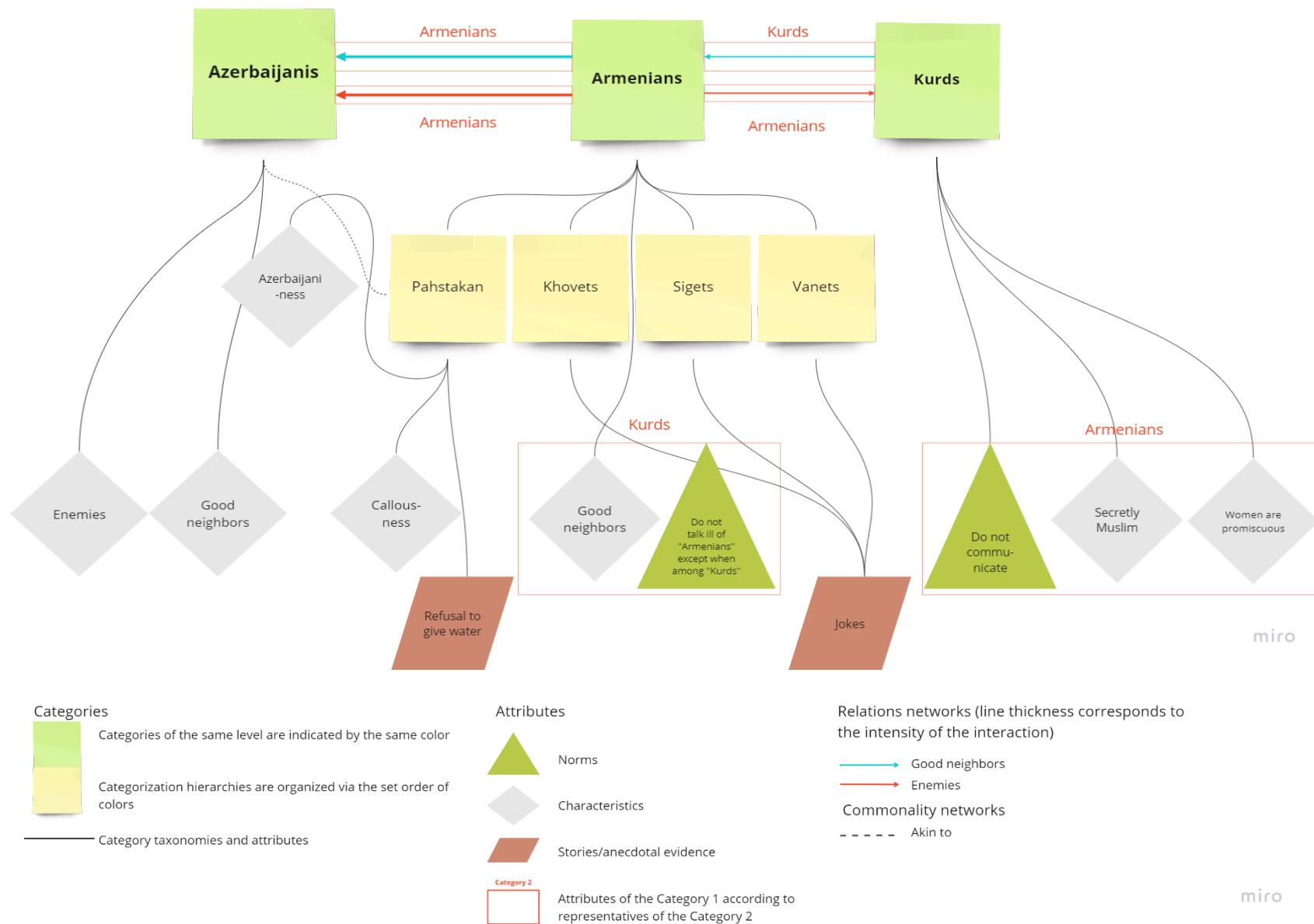
Figure 2—Schematic visualization of the construction of ethnicity for the village in the Gegharkunik region of Armenia

Research of spontaneous categorizations using the elicitation interview method

Is the way people talk about ethnicity a real explication of their internalized construction of ethnicity, and should we (or should we not) separate the discourse on ethnicity from the real spontaneous differentiating perception? This question became the starting point for another study, which was conducted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan[9]. In this study, the method of video elicitation interviews was used, which is not very widespread in itself (the more widely known version of this methodology is its predecessor—photo elicitation (Gold, 1991; Roth, 2015), compared to which the video version has significant advantages) and, as far as we know, has never been used for ethnicity research. The method entails showing the informants video recordings shot in different locations of the respective cities, and asking them to elaborate on "which ethnic groups" the people in the video belong to. The interaction was recorded on video and then analyzed. Figure 3 shows a screenshot of the recording (in the middle of the frame is a fragment of the video stimulus, on the right in a small square are the interviewer and the interviewee), then the corresponding fragment of the conversation:
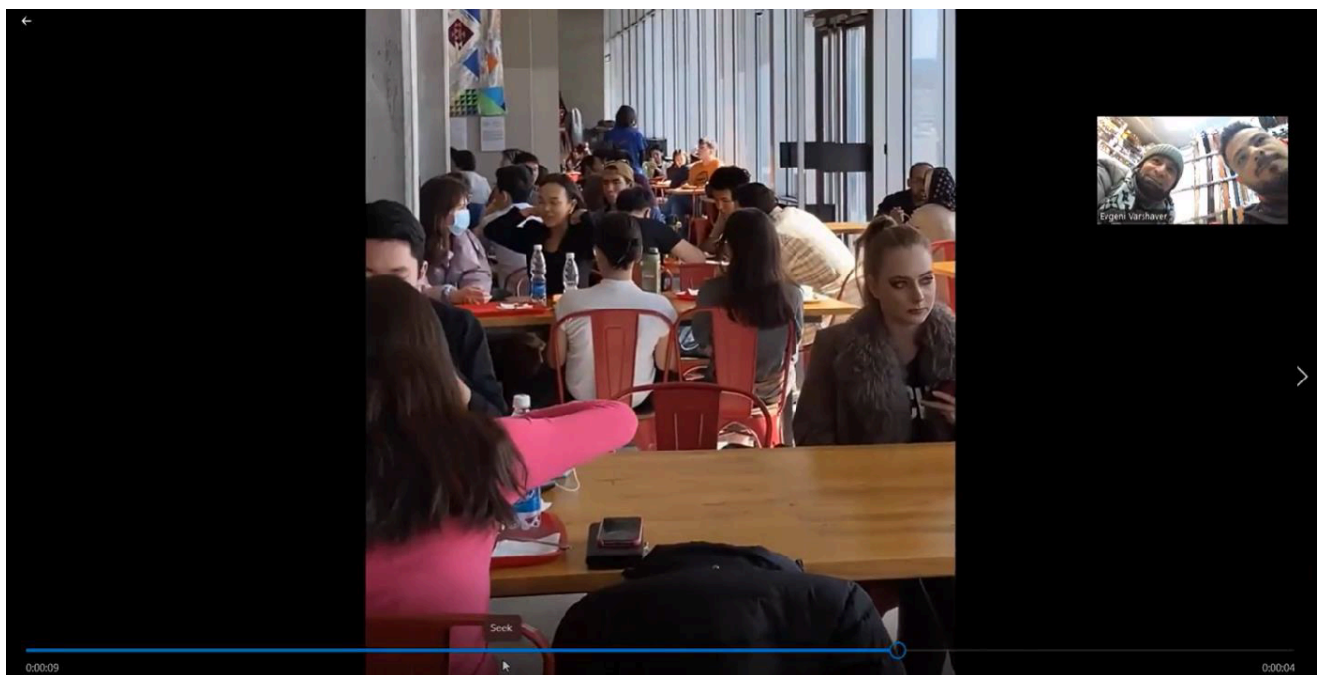

Figure 3 — Videoelicitation research process

Informant: *This girl is Russian, she aligns her style towards the Caucasus, but it doesn't work. And this girl is Kyrgyz, it's hard to tell the difference between Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.*
Interviewer: *Alright. By the way, what are the criteria?*

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[9] During the preparation of this paper, a study using a similar methodology was conducted in Moscow, and its results are described in (Varshaver et al., 2024a).

Informant: *Yes. Their face is slightly different. You can tell by the face, you can tell by the figure.*

Interviewer: *And this girl?*

Informant: *Also local.*

Interviewer: *And this guy? The one eating.*

Informant: *He is also a Metis[10] with Chinese, an Uyghur, I think...*

Informant: *What do you mean, maybe an Uyghur? A Kyrgyz, Chinese or Uyghur, are they the Kyrgyz, or Chinese or what?*

Informant: *No. Uyghurs are different, they are closer to China. Because he has Chinese eyes. And Uyghurs have small eyes.*

This method is focused on empirical work primarily with two elements of the grid—ethnic categories, set as close as possible to their "spontaneous" form and presented in the form in which they are used in the process of categorizing people in everyday life, as well as indicators, that is, the specific features that allow for classification in such situations. This method has its limitations—in particular, firstly, classification "in real life" is carried out via not only visual, but also auditory and other cues, which are not "captured" by video optimally, and, secondly, classification is most often carried out in familiar, reproducible contexts and appearance indicators are subtly connected with contextual ones. In any case, to the extent that sociological research is often oriented toward the analysis of interview texts, which, in essence, explicate the discourse, and the cognitive turn declares the additional importance of the extra-discursive field of constructing ethnicity, such a method (supplemented by other methods of the corresponding "line", for example, the method of joint walks) is an important tool for accessing the corresponding phenomena.

Ethnicity in Museums

The construction of ethnicity reproduces itself not only in texts and exists not only in spontaneous classifications. Ethnicity is also "contained" in visual imagery and, more broadly, in various kinds of institutionalized spaces, which, however, are being approached in modern sociological studies of culture as a set of symbols—intentionally or unintentionally located in a certain way. Based on these approaches and their tools, taking into account the limitations, which primarily include (rather) arbitrary nature of visual data interpretation, it is possible to "distill" the construction of ethnicity from, for example, museum exhibitions and museums per se. In 2019, a study was conducted in the museums

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[10] A common way to refer to people, who are categorized as belonging to two or more categories, among many Russian-speaking informants, is via the use of the category "Metis". More considerations on the topic of the category and its prevalence among Russian-speaking informants in (Varshaver et al., 2024b).

of Russian republics of Karelia and Kalmykia, and in 2021—in the museums of Dagestan[11]. A detailed methodology was created to enable this "distillation" to be carried out, within the framework of which images and their context were analyzed (for example, the location of the museum in the locality, the differences between the script of the museum tour and the "text" of the exhibition, the mutual correlation of the halls and the exhibits in them, the exhibits themselves, etc.) and a description was created. Here are excerpts from such a description of the local history museum in the town of Lagan (Kalmykia), photographs of the materials from which are presented in Figure 4:

Figure 4 — Lagan Town Museum of Local History: exterior view, plan, elements of the exhibition

The museum text features two main ethnic categories: "Russians" and "Kalmyks". They are present in the context of each other, their equality and equivalence in the emergence of the town are emphasized. This representation turns out to be associated with a complication: the town was founded by Russian settlers. But this complication is resolved through the symbolic juxtaposition of two halls: the hall dedicated to the life of the first settlers, which is also a hall dedicated to Russian culture, and the hall dedicated to the life of the Kalmyks, who are described by the exhibition as being nomads in the area at the time of the emergence of the settlement, and later becoming town dwellers. There are approximately the

same number of exhibits in these halls; visually, neither hall dominates. Discursively, this equality is emphasized both in the museum tour and in the captions to the exhibits: it is not the Kalmyks fighting Russians, but "the Russians <...> and the Kalmyks of this neighborhood against the Russians <...> and the Kalmyks of that neighborhood" and the fishermen went and still go out to sea in mixed teams. The installation dedicated to the deportation of the Kalmyks stands out from the narrative of the "friendship of peoples". It is a boxcar with a mannequin dressed in a quilted jacket and lying on a bunk with its back to the museum visitor. The installation is accompanied by the caption "Deportation of 1943: a fragment of a freight car," as well as a stand with the title "The Pain of the Kalmyk Land" and copies of documents presented. The installation is located in the hall dedicated to the Great Patriotic War, where the exhibition is standard for the previously studied museums—the course of the war in general and the participation of the town's natives in it, while the deportation is not explained or interpreted in any way. The construction of ethnicity, to the extent that it can be distinguished from the exhibition, thus simultaneously contains a reference to the "good relations" between the "Kalmyks" and the "Russians", as well as the fact of deportation as an element of Kalmyk history (an attribute of the category "Kalmyk"—the person or their ancestors survived the deportation) not connected with the "Russians".

This approach (with its theoretical and methodological foundations) can be used to describe the construction of ethnicity in any, not only museum, spaces (festival, street, cafe, etc.). But in this and the previous examples, the focus was almost exclusively on categories and their attributes, while in the next example we will talk about the third "large" component of the model—general representations of ethnicity, and, in particular, folk sociology.

Folk-Sociologies of Ethnicity

As indicated above, general representations of the nature of ethnicity are also an element of the construction of ethnicity. They rarely become an object of reflection, and most often seem self-evident and natural to people. This is one of the reasons why they rarely fall into the focus of research. In international scope of sociological literature, however, there are a number of works that are in line with the research of the so-called "folk-sociologies" (the way ordinary people imagine social phenomena) and are devoted to ethnicity. A number of questions were borrowed from these studies, which were then used during a field research project in Dagestan in 2022[12]. These questions were presented in the form of "vignettes"—imaginary situations about which informants had to decide on their behavior or

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[12]The results of this study were reflected in (Varshaver et al., 2023; Varshaver et al., 2024b).

assessment, as a result of which conclusions could be drawn about some elements of their picture of the world. In the case of this study, the so-called "switch at birth" task (SaBT) vignette was used. The task in question is to determine the nationality of a child born into a "monoethnic" family whose parents died in a car accident shortly after the child's birth, while the child was transferred to a family of a different nationality. Here is the wording of this question:

> *Imagine a situation. A child was born into a family where the father is an Avar and the mother is an Avar, but immediately after the baby's birth, their parents were in an accident and died, and the child was taken in by the family of the father's best friend, a Dargin by nationality. In this family, the child was treated as a family member, given everything that the friend's own children were given. They learned the Dargin language just like the other children, but do not know Avar. What nationality do you think this child is? What if the accident happened not immediately after the child's birth, but when they were six or seven years old? What if the deceased parents were Russian? What if the nationality of the parents is unknown?*

Another question asked of informants was a request to determine the nationality of a person whose parents belong to two different nationalities. In each case, the informants were asked to elaborate on the reasoning behind their decision. The study showed that in Dagestan, various "folk-sociologies of ethnicity" coexist. An analysis of the responses to the first vignette revealed that in addition to the expected response options, which—in the context of the existing literature—allowed the research team to identify the respondent as a "primordialist" (a child's nationality is the nationality of their biological parents, "because nationality is blood (nature)") and a "constructivist" (a child's nationality is the nationality of their adoptive family, "because nationality is culture (nurture)"), a third response option was also reproduced, according to which nationality is "just a line in a passport," (which, should be mentioned, no longer exists in modern documents). It was found that this last idea is widespread in those communities that have been officially re-categorized in personal documents or in the census over the past 100 years. On this basis, an interpretation was proposed according to which such—administrative—re-categorization was the reason why entire communities began to perceive nationalities not as "natural" categories, but as external and artificial categories. Stemming from that a general theoretical conclusion was made according to which inconsistent categorization policy of the state can discredit the entire set of categories in the eyes of people. Besides that, using the distribution of responses to another vignette, where the informants were asked to categorize a child in a "mixed" family, it was possible to demonstrate that in Dagestan two main rules of membership in nationalities coexist—"from father" and "from both parents", with the first being widespread mainly in the

mountains, the second—in the cities on the plains. Assumptions were made about the genesis of these rules ("from father" rule follows from classification of tukhums (clans), and "from both parents" is a consequence of the influence of the genetic framework taught in Soviet schools) and predictions were made about the future of the categorization by nationalities being eroded. Importantly, however, these conclusions and assumptions are based on the third element of the schema—general collective representations about ethnicity, its nature and mechanisms of transmission, and this is how they can be studied empirically.

Migrants as an object of empirical research on ethnicity

The model presented in the paper can be effectively applied not only to categories and phenomena that are traditionally considered ethnic (for example, "nationalities" in the Russian context), but also to other categories included in the sphere of ethnic, according to the definition given above. And in particular—to the category of "migrants". The empirical focus of this kind of research can be both the inscription of this category in the network of other categories, and indicators signaling "migrant-ness" in everyday life and in the course of formal interactions, and much more. Below, two research designs will be described, implemented using the model, in which migrants were in focus.

The first study focused on Russian ethnic (called "National" in Russian context) policy—its documents and events[13]. Ethnic policy, according to the theoretical approach underlying the study, is the embodiment of an implicit, never clearly articulated construction of ethnicity, and an empirical study of this policy is a way to understand what construction of ethnicity is implemented in national policy and what role migrants play in it. For this purpose, documents (the National Policy Strategy, its regional variations, etc.) and events (festivals and ceremonies, as well as websites and books—the word "event" in this case was used in a way Russian administrative discourse uses it) were analyzed separately. Fieldwork was conducted in St. Petersburg and the Republic of Bashkortostan and involved observation of events, as well as interviews with their developers and participants. For each document or event, a description of the construction of ethnicity was created with a focus on the category "migrant" and similar categories. It was shown that migrants and migration are gradually included in the construction of ethnicity, transmitted by politics, there are ethnic categories that are associated with the category of "migrants", however, both in texts and in events this position remains marginal. This marginality and the instruments of its "production" were described in detail.

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[13]The results of this study have not yet been published.

Figure 5 — Progress of the study of representations of migrants in national policy

The second study[14] focused on how non-migrants imagine the integration of migrants, and the theoretical approach that formed the basis of this study was that these representations are an implicit rule of membership in a national category associated with Russian society as a whole (i.e. a classificatory rule), but at the same time are an element of the global construction of ethnicity, within the framework of which the world is divided into nations, each person is "assigned" to one of them, and—according to certain rules—this "assignation" can be changed. Based on the material of 40 focus groups and 100 interviews in 5 regions of Russia, it was shown that such—stable—representations do indeed exist, that they are not limited to the issue of "passport" and "citizenship", but also involve "loyalty" and "cultural similarity", and that—along with the "standard procedure" there are ways of head-starting "joining the nation", namely an "act of heroism". Based on this research—which was primarily devoted to representations of migrants and their integration—representations of the Russian nation were also reconstructed, which in this logic is an element of the imagination of global ethnic diversity.

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These examples do not exhaust the variability of field methods, techniques and designs within which the proposed model can be operationalized. In particular, it can be used in quantitative studies, where the intensity of certain representations can be measured and thereby their expressiveness

[14]The results of this study are published in (Varshaver et al., 2024c; Ivanova et al., 2024).

determined (the degree of agreement with the statement that representatives of a certain ethnic category are, say, greedy). Another quantitative strategy is the demonstration of photographs that depict a certain everyday situation and which respondents must describe in one sentence, after which the responses are coded, ethnicization is identified (whether the informant has utilized an ethnic category in their description) and—via statistical analysis, it is revealed how those who ethnicize photographs differ from those who do not. Collective differentiating representations can be just as successfully studied in the course of ethnographic fieldwork, as well as via autoethnography, within the framework of which, for example, reflection can be carried out on the construction of ethnicity in which the researcher was socialized or in which they found themselves at certain stages of life. The model can also be used to study formal normativity—for this, say, quotas for admission to higher education institutions are re-described as norms associated with certain categories. The model can also be used to study the diversity of social categories that are traditionally not related to ethnic ones ("migrants", "Muslims") and much more. It should also be noted that the model is not suitable only for studies devoted to the present. To the extent that constructions of ethnicity existed before, the model can describe constructions of ethnicity of the past, "distilled" on the basis of historical methods. Having been tested in a variety of studies carried out in different methodologies, the model has shown its effectiveness as a common denominator of empirical descriptions of ethnicity. What is important, however, is that it is precisely descriptive—it is a way of communicating that ethnicity is a certain way, and why it is so or how it explains phenomena external to representations of differences between people—this question is decided in the next step, which, however, cannot be done without a proper description. It is precisely to create such an optimal description that the model was developed.

Final considerations

The previous sections present a theoretical and methodological model. This model is part of a larger research program. The program is currently just being developed, but—to the extent that a good program should be based on a solid theoretical and methodological framework—this framework is presented and its "core" is the described model, which provides a clear and transparent operationalization of the theoretical edifice of cognitivist constructivist studies of ethnicity. This model answers the question of what exactly is studied when ethnicity is researched in this framework, and from there it is easy to take the next step and propose specific steps for specific empirical studies as an "open list". This is also done in the paper. In its final fragment, we intend to dwell on several important issues and, in particular, point out the differences between this model and the program associated with it and other constructivist and, to an extent, cognitivized research programs created for the study of ethnicity within the social sciences, as well as to outline steps for the implementation of this program.

So, as already indicated, the model is the basis for a program within the context of a number of other research programs, borrowing certain logics and approaches from each of them. The authors of these programs are Andreas Wimmer, Kanchan Chandra, Rogers Brubaker and Richard Jenkins. Each of these programs, however, also has its own gaps, which it was important to identify in order to avoid their reproduction. In other author's works (Varshaver, 2022a) these programs are described and reviewed in detail, here it is possible only to touch on them briefly in order to contextualize the program being created. As such, firstly, this program builds on the work of Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker, 2006; Brubaker et al., 2006). Being not only a theorist but also a field ethnographer, he developed his concepts within the framework of empirical research; however, his theoretical constructions were not methodologized and universalized, and, while warning against groupism and declaring a cognitive turn, Brubaker generally does not offer specific, alienable research steps for its implementation. This gap is compensated for in this work. Andreas Wimmer's program (Wimmer, 2013), in general, lay within the context of Brubaker's works, and within its framework many important things have been realized—a taxonomy of strategies for everyday "work" with ethnic boundaries has been developed, the interaction between the different levels at which this "work" occurs has been described (Wimmer, 2008), specific empirical designs are described (Wimmer, 2004), however, a rare weak element of Wimmer's project is the very concept around which this project is built. Boundaries, being a productive metaphor in the times of Fredrik Barth, who introduced this metaphor into wide circulation, have exhausted their resource, and the spatial semantics built into them practically ceases to work in contexts that are not limited to two categories, whose representatives live in different, albeit overlapping, neighboring territories. Wimmer tried to "patch the hole" by strengthening the interactive component and moving from the borders themselves to their production, but this did not solve the problem, and a productive solution, it seems, is a conceptual reprogramming of the field while preserving most of Wimmer's theoretical and methodological innovations. Kanchan Chandra (2012) does important work within the framework of the instrumentalist approach, breaking the connection between people and categories (identities, as she phrases it), but is some parts her language is narrowly specific, while in the others her theory touches on only one aspect of ethnicity (in the language presented in the current paper—the connection between categories and indicators), without claiming universality. Her theory, with some reservations, "doubles up" with the more universal language presented in this paper. Important in the development of this language are the constructions of Richard Jenkins (1994), who also focuses on ethnic categories, and, in addition, develops a sociological theory of identity (Jenkins, 2014), focusing on the phenomenological sociological tradition. Jenkins, however, is primarily a theoretical sociologist and hardly deals with the issue of operationalization, using empirical reality as a reservoir of examples. The program and model presented in this paper, in contrast to the described programs taken as a whole, is, firstly, conceptually unloaded, secondly, field-based, thirdly, methodologically multi-vectored,

fourthly, universal and—based on this—and can be useful as a link between the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of ethnicity and the multidisciplinary empirical designs developed and implemented within the framework of its study.

Despite the fact that the model is currently presented as if it were complete, both it and the program are primarily a theoretical and methodological framework, which should be further developed upon, including with theoretical findings and revisions applied to certain phenomena. In particular, the often-mentioned cognitive turn in ethnicity research, as already mentioned, is only in its initial stage, and further work should be carried out to assess the possibility (and necessity) of "cognitivization" of the described model. For this, however, more empirical research should be conducted at the intersection of sociology and cognitive science, based on which the model should be refined. At present, it is more oriented toward the description of collective representations that are interconnected with cognitive schemas, but are not reduced to them (and vice versa, collective representations are not a simple common denominator of individual representations). The same applies to more targeted work with cognitive methods from a sociological perspective. It is also important that this approach can become an interdisciplinary bridge between cognitive and historical research of ethnicity—studying how people perceived and understood differences in the past is an ambitious and still difficult to achieve (due to the lack of both tools and corresponding understandings) goal. On the other hand—in order for the theoretical 'building' to be more solid—the sociological foundations of the created approach itself can become the object of a more detailed study. For now, they are of a framing nature. The tools for visualization and schematization of results definitely require further development. It is important, however, that all this is a clarification and adaptation of the theoretical and methodological framework already created and presented in this paper. In addition to the refinements, however, it is important to begin to implement further steps, in order for this created ethnic variable to be included in explanatory models. A legitimate question within the framework of such explanations, for example, may be the patterns associated with changes in the construction of ethnicity or its individual parts (how and why the characteristics of categories or the categories themselves change, or entire classifications arise and disappear) and here—if all the "requirements of interdisciplinary safety" are fulfilled—such interdisciplinary explanations will be advantageous, in which, on the one hand, sociological instrumentalist ideas are used, and on the other—the idea of the "explanatory power" of categories and categorizations, taken from cognitive science is also applied. These explanatory models, in addition, can be "extrapolated" onto the past. However, as has already been said, this requires a "firmly built" "ethnic" variable, which was proposed in this work.

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