By the end of the Soviet period, hundreds of books had been published on the topic of ethnogenesis. Gaining legitimacy from Stalin’s famous intervention in the social sciences in 1950, ethnogenesis quickly became the hegemonic paradigm within the Soviet social sciences and anthropology. With its focus on the long historical development of individual ethnos that often encroached on the ancient past, Soviet ethnogenesis worked to make “ruly subjects” by ordering history through a unifying theoretical and methodological framework that spanned all disciplines of the social sciences and incorporated all regions of the Soviet Union. Yet, in several examples, ethnogenesis seems to have supported the very nationalism that contributed to the political unrest of the late and post-Soviet periods. Upon the disintegration of the Soviet state apparatus, many scholars turned away from ethnogenesis toward other approaches, yet others have chosen to continue to work within this framework.

Indeed, recent discussions of Soviet ethnogenesis by both Russian and American scholars have highlighted several reasons why ethnogenesis had such a broad and long lasting influence on anthropology, including its “co-option” by the state and top-down implementation; its role in identity politics both within the Soviet state and in relation to nationalism; and its emphasis on primordialism in contrast to Western social constructivism.1 Ostensibly, the Soviet approach to ethnogenesis treated all human remains the same in terms of measurement and reporting, thus giving all peoples equal consideration in the past; however, in doing so, it also provided the grounds for comparison and singularity, to highlight the characteristics that made each people unique. These factors created links with the past that often translated to political claims in the present, giving ethnogenesis a particular political potency. However, I suggest that equally relevant to understanding the phenomenon of Soviet ethnogenesis in the case of physical anthropology is its epistemological move away from late 19th-century hierarchies of fixed racial types. The history of physical anthropology during the Soviet period has become a sensitive topic.

in present day Russia as evidenced by Kozintzev and Melnikova’s recent debate over Mogilner’s 2008 publication, *Homo Imperii*, on the history of physical anthropology in Russia. In this chapter, my goal is not to critique ethnogenesis, but to elucidate the ways that it was adopted into physical anthropology in the South Caucasus and understand how it effected interpretations of Late Bronze Age peoples in the South Caucasus.

In this chapter, I examine the shift to the ethnogenesis framework within the physical anthropology of Late Bronze and Iron Age human remains from the South Caucasus. I suggest that while ethnogenesis was ostensibly formulated against previous approaches based on racial typologies, it was incorporated in articulation with existing arguments about the historiography of Armenians. Long before Stalin published his famous critique of Marr’s Japhetic theory in *Pravda*, setting into motion the reformulation of the social sciences in favor of ethnogenesis, arguments rooted in cranial morphology already existed that linked modern Armenians to the Bronze and Iron Age inhabitants of the South Caucasus and the Near East. Yet, the ways that late 19th-century and Soviet anthropologists imagined Bronze and Iron Age peoples are quite distinct. I argue that it is this interpretive shift that reformulated past subjects and is consequently key to understanding the arguments that were made according to ethnogenesis. Examining Soviet ethnogenesis in this way is “good to think with” in that it throws into relief how scholars know past subjects from skeletal remains and, concomitantly, how we represent and imagine them as subjects in the past. While skeletal bodies have material qualities, understanding their materiality depends not only on the theoretical frameworks in which we situate them, but also on the epistemologies and temporalities which underlie our interpretations and the seemingly very mundane ways in which we represent past peoples as “data”.

**Ethnogenesis and Physical Anthropology in the South Caucasus**

*The Emergence of Ethnogenesis and Physical Anthropology*

In 1950, Stalin published a critique of Marr’s Japhetic linguistic theory in *Pravda*, setting the various branches of Soviet social sciences to reformulating the position of their fields, typically rejecting Marrism in favor of ethnogenesis. His critique followed on the heels of the long “clash between science and power” throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The condemnation of genetics as a