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**APPLIED ETHNOLOGY AND ETHNOECOLOGY IN
COMBINING ABORIGINAL LAND RIGHTS
WITH THE PRESERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN RUSSIA.**

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Discussing approaches to the aboriginal land rights in contemporary Russia, I shall focus on the arguments that have been presented in favor of three major policy options. These options are often labelled as "pro-aboriginal," "anti-aboriginal" and a "compromise" position. Ethnologists who have been deeply involved in the attempts to define legally aboriginal land rights ever since 1991 have themselves been split into the same three interest groups. Thus the controversies over aboriginal land rights and of the so called "traditional economy" (i.e., hunting, fishing, food gathering and reindeer herding in the taiga and tundra) provide excellent illustrations of developments in applied ethnology in post-Soviet Russia.

Like all other commentators on aboriginal land rights, Russian ethnologists usually back up their positions with both ethical and rational arguments. In fact, individual political and ideological preferences strongly shape the former. As for the latter, ecological and cultural issues are the most commonly used justifications for the positions, taken by any given scholar.

It is interesting to note that the term "ethnic ecology" is often used in such discussions. Many experts working in the field of aboriginal land rights and traditional occupations and having ethnological, geographical, ecological (biological) and sociological training, now prefer to call themselves "ethnoecologists." In some cases of proposed draft regional legislation even the prevailing term "territories of the traditional nature resource use" (TTUs), or territories reserved for the exclusive use by aboriginal and other indigenous hunters and reindeer herders, is changed into "ethnoecological territories," thus stressing the combined function of such territories--preserving both the wildlife and the traditional cultures and subsistence economies.

The issue of aboriginal land rights has really become a serious political and economic problem for the Russian North. The Federal Law on the Status of Aboriginal Peoples has been heatedly debated since 1991, while many regional laws have already been passed. Nevertheless, the lack of national legislation and existing uncertainties about the future scope of aboriginal land rights have become serious factors preventing foreign and private investments in the development of the logging industry and extraction of mineral resources in the vast territories with the aboriginal populations.

Aboriginal and Other Groups in the Russian North

Populations permanently residing in the Far North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation ("the North" in short), may be divided into the following three major sociocultural groups, subsuming earlier categories into each of the subsequent types. This typology has been common to academic studies, political discourse, and legal documents of the USSR and Russia:

- * "Aboriginal peoples," also known as "indigenous minority peoples of the North"; in Russian they are called "small-in-numbers peoples of the North";
- * "Indigenous peoples of the North," also known as "native peoples of the North";
- * "Local population of the North."

Local population is the most general category, identical to "Russian citizens, permanently residing in a given locality." It includes the first two categories as well. Indigenous peoples of the North include all the aboriginal peoples and numerically large ethnic groups like Yakuts, Khakas, Altays, Buryats, and also groups of Siberian Tatars, Komi, Karels, and Russian "Old Settlers." This category is not defined in federal laws, but many scholars insist it should be defined legally when regulating the traditional use of natural resources. It is widely used in public discussions and political documents of some parties and ethnic movements in Yakutia and Komi Republic, both to nominate the titular ethnic groups (Yakuts, Komi) and to differentiate the local, ethnic Russian population into the somewhat privileged Old Settler and non-privileged transient groups. Provisional laws of Yakutia and the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area, regulating traditional land use, grant

Yakuts, Russian Old Settlers, and Komi the same rights to land, and plants and animals as to the members of the aboriginal communities, provided the latter are the first to take the land and that they do not need more. The proportion of the Russian Old Settlers (i.e., descendants of the first colonists of the 17th - 18th centuries), is quite large among ethnic Russians in many regions of the Asian part of Russia.

Aboriginal peoples have a legally defined and privileged status. First, this recognizes traditional occupations, and corresponding land rights and rights to use biological resources when hunting and fishing (special enlarged or free licenses for some species of fish, birds and mammals). Traditional occupations are also defined by law, making up the "traditional sector of economy"-- hunting and sea hunting, fishing, gathering food plants and herbs, reindeer herding. Preparing ethnic foods, clothes, and souvenirs are also considered within traditional occupations. The first official List of Aboriginal Peoples was prepared in 1926, when "small" or "little nationalities" and "tribes" of the North with a "nomadic and seminomadic way of life" were granted some special forms of self-government in areas where they were a minority. In the last Soviet decades the List included twenty-six peoples (totally 181,500 in 1989). The List or extracts from the List were usually presented in all population statistics dealing with the ethnic composition of population of the country or of its regions in the North. Another four aboriginal peoples were added to the List in 1993, thus increasing the total population of this category to around 200,000.

In Russia there are two overlapping legal definitions of the North:

* Areas of the North and territories with the same status cover 11 million square kilometers and provide 76% of oil, 76% of gas, 26% of timber produced in the country; the population is 9.9 millions and the local population has certain privileges, such as lower age of retirement, higher salaries due to northern bonuses, etc., compared to residents of the other areas of Russia.

* Areas of residence of the small-in-numbers peoples of the North provide 52% of furs, 58% of meat of wild animals, 8% of fish, produced in the country, and 96% of the domestic reindeer population. The total population is 1,600,000, and around 9% of that consists of aboriginal (small-in-numbers) peoples. These 140,000 aboriginals enjoy preferential legal rights on these territories, mostly in the use of biological resources, but also in lower payments for state housing and communal services, lower age of retirement, special educational opportunities, etc.

Hunting, fishing, reindeer herding, and food gathering are practiced by members of all the previously mentioned sociocultural categories, but there are marked differences in the relative

importance of these occupations to the groups. Traditional occupations form the basis for the distinct, cultural identity of aboriginal peoples; their total dependence on traditional occupations in the 1920s was the main reason for their differentiation from the other ethnic communities in the North. Though now probably only a smaller number of them still work in the traditional sector, it is this part that really retains ethnic culture, language, and identity. Aboriginals who live in large multiethnic rural settlements and who work in other sectors of economy are usually strongly assimilated culturally and linguistically by Russians or Yakuts, and only their privileged status prevents them from final ethnic assimilation and change of ethnic identity. Thus, for members of the aboriginal ethnic groups, practicing traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, and reindeer pastoralism, access to natural forest and tundra ecosystems is a basis for employment, unique ways of life, and ethnic and cultural survival. Statistics do not give us exact figures on the size of this occupational group among the aboriginals. Some estimates put it at 14,900 persons (out of some 140,700 aboriginal persons residing in rural areas), or at 30,000 persons, or 55% of those aboriginals who are employed, while another 15% of the total adult aboriginal population are not employed at all and do not want to work.

Members of the indigenous communities of Yakuts, Russian Old Settlers, etc., being originally nomadic pastoralists (Yakuts, Buryats) or farmer/peasants (Russians, Komi), had to abandon their subsistence economies only when they moved too far North. In general, Russian Old Settlers also practice fishing and hunting as the main occupations in areas where farming is not possible or not productive, and where industrial occupations are not available. Northern groups of Yakuts and Komi started to practice nomadic reindeer pastoralism in addition to hunting and fishing. Some recently arrived migrants also became professional hunters. Statistics do not provide data on traditional sector employment, but, in the Khabarovsk region, ethnic Russians make up a majority of the professional hunters. Some 66.5% of aboriginals think that non-aboriginals are pushing them away from the traditional sector occupations, according to a 1991 sociological survey (Sokolova, Z.P. Peoples of the North of Russia in the Situation of Economic Reforming and Democratic Transformation. In: *Peoples of the North and Siberia under Conditions of Economic Reforms and Democratic Transformations*". Pp. 16-49. Moscow. Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology. 1994).

Major Approaches to Aboriginal Land Rights

Academic and government-employed ethnologists, playing a key role in discussions on the future aboriginal land rights and development of traditional sector of economy, are split into

supporters of the three major options. Each option is justified by ethical, political-ideological, and rational

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arguments, while its rationality is usually supported by ecological, cultural and social-economic findings. The options can be briefly characterized as:

1. *Pro-aboriginal*, i.e., granting aboriginal communities the full rights of ownership to their lands with all natural resources (including plants, animals, minerals, oil and gas, etc.);
2. *Compromise position*, i.e. granting aboriginal communities the rights of exclusive, free and inheritable use of their lands, that is rights for the traditional use of renewable (biological) resources only (fishing and hunting grounds, reindeer pastures) or for compensations in case the territories and/or biological resources are taken away due to industrial development or pollution;
3. *Anti-aboriginal*, i.e. denying any group rights for, and/or special legal status of, the aboriginal communities.

I will outline these options from ethical and political-ideological perspectives, and later discuss ecological, economic and cultural issues, using the materials of recently held conferences, supplemented by many reports on legal aspects of natural resources use.

Ethical or moral reasons are also used to justify each position. The key concept here is "justice," serving to define the "undeniable rights" of a social group. Consequently, the first option presumes that the aboriginals should have in their possession the same lands and resources that their ancestors had, at least in areas where they still are living. The second approach stresses the fact that the Aboriginals who are practicing, or want to practice, the traditional occupations should enjoy the right to use the same resources as their ancestors did. The third option is based on the idea that all human beings, as citizens of one democratic state, should enjoy equal rights, including the rights to natural resource use, and that for no one should his/her ethnic origins be the means of getting privileges or suffering from discrimination. Closely related is the idea of moral/ethnic foundations of scholarly activities. The first option focuses exclusively on the moral duty of a scholar to act in the interests of the population he or she is studying, while the second and the third ones put more emphasis on the principle that all social, ethnic, racial, cultural and other socially defined population groups should enjoy equal treatment from a social scientist.

Political and ideological considerations also play an important part in shaping the scholar's attitudes towards the desired scope of aboriginal land rights. The first approach is based on

adopting the notion of contemporary aboriginal land rights that is generally accepted in the continental U.S.A., Canada, and Australia. The second view develops further the traditions held by Imperial Russia and tends to take the modern examples of Scandinavia (Saami reindeer herders) or Alaska Natives as a model. Both make a choice in favor of the historical experience of the so-called "democratic and civilized nations" and thus can be identified as moderately "democratic" but promoting some "positive discrimination" for the socially and economically disadvantaged ethnic communities or occupational-based social groups, as well as for communal or collective rights. The third approach surprisingly unites adherents of the opposite (in the context of the contemporary Russian politics) political ideologies of liberalism and nationalism.

A radically "democratic" one denies any kind of communal (i.e. collective) land rights or legally accepted and state-sponsored differentiation of population on the basis of its ethnic origins or social status. The other called "post-Soviet nationalistic" denies any forms of legally accepted symbolic or other specific links between particular ethnic groups and territories they inhabit (except for Russian citizens and Russian territory as a whole), and promotes the equal rights for, and safeguards the interests of, the Russian-speaking majority population in most of the republics and in all the autonomous areas of the Russian Federation.

Rational reasons for ecological, economic and social order are also always used by the supporters of the above mentioned approaches. Scholars, taking the third "anti-aboriginal" option, usually promote the idea of general social-economic development of the territories as the only real way of helping all groups of the local population. They include aboriginals, most of whom also use or need modern housing, well-paid employment, medical and educational services, etc.. They stress the fact that even futile attempts to allocate special land rights to aboriginal groups would, in fact, block investments and economic development for the territories with the aboriginal populations. In contrast to the other two, this approach does not address at all the cultural problem of growing assimilation (by ethnic Russians or Yakuts) of those aboriginals who are living in larger settlements and working outside the traditional sector of economy.

On the other hand, supporters of the first "pro-aboriginal" approach pay attention to few economic or social issues. Some exceptions include the obvious point that the communal ownership rights would enable aboriginal communities to exploit (or to allow the exploitation by outsiders in exchange for a fair portion of the profits) the natural resources on their lands (oil and gas, minerals, timber, wildlife, reindeer pastures). They could direct themselves the social and economic development of their communities, using profits from the natural resources toward independence from the state or other social groups. Ecological reasons, presumably backing up this option, are always presented in the writings and speeches of the scholars expressing such

ideas. Speculations about "special sensitivity of aboriginals towards the wildlife" and their "spiritual links with Nature," "remarkable care for all living

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creatures" and "innate ecological sustainability of traditional economies" of aboriginal peoples can be often found in these works. They also remind us of the fact that aboriginal communities have survived for centuries, practicing traditional occupations while not depleting the natural resources they were using. This was breached with the decline of fur animals -- caused by intruders after the emergence of fur hunting for taxation or sale.

Finally, let me say a few words about the compromise position taken by myself. The strategic interests of the aboriginal populations fully coincide with the need to preserve biodiversity in the coniferous boreal forest (taiga) and tundra zones on the both the species and ecosystem levels. These goals of conservation form the basis for survival of traditional economy and cultures, and thus for survival as distinct ethnic communities of hunters, fishermen, and reindeer pastoralists. Preserving forests from clear cutting, fires, and pests means providing an opportunity for these people to survive and to retain their unique economies, cultures, and ways of life. So, the close cooperation between the forest service, nature conservation specialists, ecological activists and representatives of aboriginal peoples, practicing traditional occupations, is feasible and necessary to find tactically compromise solutions, in which even their strategic goals may be identical.

It looks like the notion of *multi-functionality* for the territories of the traditional natural resource use (TTU) may help greatly in getting nationwide public support for the proposed Federal laws on the land rights of the aboriginal ethnic groups. This is provided the "compromise" approach is taken by the lawmakers. The TTUs functions, as defined by some provisional regional and the draft Federal legislation, can be analyzed from the several points of view:

1. ***Ecological perspective:*** If the existing regional legislation is to be strictly implemented, the TTUs should preserve the forest cover (in spite of some limited, and ecologically sound cuttings by the users) and ecosystems, as well as the total amount of species and the population of each of the species (at least in respect to the animals, plants, and fishes that are used by the people, practicing traditional occupations). Thus the TTUs should function as one of the types of the specially protected territories, and the management of the TTUs should be financed through the State Committee on Ecology and other ecological state agencies and NGOs as well. At the same time, the federal controlling agencies (forest service, game service, fishing service, land

use service, ecological monitoring) should have adequate rights to monitor and regulate the use of biological resources on the TTUs by all users, including aboriginals. These state agencies should also take the responsibility for, and financial costs of, fighting poaching, forest fires and pests on the TTUs, as well as illegal industrial exploitation of timber or mineral resources. The Federal services should also allocate portions of the TTUs for industrial development when indigenous communities, practicing traditional occupations, agree with the compensations and/or allocation of the TTUs for them in the adjacent new areas.

2. ***Social-economic perspective:*** The TTUs are prerequisites for the existence and further development of the traditional sector. The latter, as any other sector of economy, should be officially defined because of the unique (and very hard) conditions of life and work of its employees. It has been historically a sphere of employment for many ethnic and cultural groups of Russia, and not only for the aboriginal population, and still provides subsistence to a considerable amount of people in the most remote areas of the country. The traditional sector should have a fair share of the state subsidies in a country where agricultural and coal-mining sectors have already been strongly subsidized for decades, even during the recent years of market reforms. No one should discriminate against employees of the traditional sector according to their ethnic origins. Like any other citizens of Russia, they should have a right to employment or to unemployment allowances when they have no regular salaries (because the state agencies stopped buying their products), or to the resettlement and free professional training for other jobs.

3. ***Ethno-cultural perspective:*** Small-in-numbers peoples of the North fully qualify to the status and rights of aboriginal populations. As such, they have the special (preferential) land rights, accepted in many countries, as well as in Russia. So the special status and priority rights to the TTUs, which should be granted to the aboriginal ethnic groups in Russia by federal legislation, are in fact nothing more but the duty of the state.

In short, the preservation of TTUs is vital for keeping traditional occupations alive. The latter make up a cornerstone of the unique cultures of aboriginals, being a major barrier against their social marginalization and ethnic assimilation. The TTUs are also an important category of the specially protected areas, ensuring biodiversity conservation on both the ecosystem and species levels on the vast territories. For example, in the Khabarovsk region the total area of the restricted natural reserves (zapovednik) is only 1.3 millions of hectares, compared to the 36,600,000 hectares of the TTUs. Thus, the state should combine efforts of preserving biodiversity on TTUs and help to resolve social and economic problems of all workers in the traditional sector,

preventing its final collapse through developing infrastructure (roads and other seasonal transportation links via water/ice or air), organizing regular supplies and

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subsidized purchases of the traditional products, and paying unemployment allowances to those hunters and reindeer herders who reside in the totally inaccessible areas.

Conclusions: Applied Ethnology in Contemporary Russia

This brief review of the approaches taken by Russian ethnologists in order to influence aboriginal legislation in the country gives a good opportunity to characterize contemporary Russian applied ethnology in general.

First, we can see that the most popular "pro-aboriginal" position taken by the vast majority of Russian ethnologists is that of open advocacy in favor aboriginal rights. These scholars usually justify their position by ethical considerations and they see their mandate as helping the communities they study as much as possible, including the promotion of the "full aboriginal land rights" in the field of legislation. Whatever the ethical arguments may be, from the rational point of view this position is certainly one-sided and it corresponds more to "action anthropology" than to applied anthropology. As a result, these scholars act as promoters (or substitutes) for aboriginal activists, and their works (publications, written reports, public talks) are often not regarded as objective by the public in general or by government officials or managers of industrial enterprises. It means they are, in fact, influencing mostly aboriginals. Surprisingly enough, practically the same conclusions can be made about the opposite (and the least popular among the Russian ethnologists) the so-called "anti-aboriginal" approach, guided by explicit political and/or ideological considerations. Here, the scholars' positions are perceived mainly as political statements, not as "scientific expertise" informing particular social, ecological and economic problems. Again, it means that such scholars limit their actual influence on legislation and/or policies of government bodies or enterprises. Right at the start of their actions, they lose the aura of being objective experts.

Thus Russian applied ethnology in the field of aboriginal land rights is still in the process of development. It is often openly biased and/or politicized, which consequently severely limits its actual influence. We can compare this field of applied research with another (and far more popular) one -- ethnopolitics (studies of ethnic tensions, conflicts, and migrations), where Russian social scientists have already moved away from the same situation and where now everyone draws

sharp distinctions between presumably neutral "experts" and "supporters" of the conflicting parties. Probably, the period of "action /supportive/ ethnology" takes place as an initial stage, later giving rise to the more or less unbiased "applied ethnology" but never disappearing altogether.

We also have to raise the general question of ethics in applied anthropology. It looks like the only chance for a social scientist to have a role in designing actual policies of the governments and/or enterprises is to pretend to be objective and unbiased. In turn, support for a certain population group or certain ideological and/or political principles should be abandoned. But ethics, or, perhaps we should say professional standards for applied social research, on the contrary, mean that the scholar have always to include in his evaluations the interests and rights of all local social and ethnic (cultural) groups of population, and also the ecological and economic context of the social issues he/she is studying. Ethical, or moral issues, as well as political or ideological considerations in applied social research are certainly unavoidable, and surface when a scholar decides to join (or publicly oppose) the proposed project, when he or she is projecting probable impacts on the affected populations.

We can point to a paradox, again being a sign of the very early stage of development of applied ethnology in the field of aboriginal land rights in Russia. On the one hand, ecological issues are always used to rationalize scholars' positions, and many prefer to speak about "ethnoecological" aspects of aboriginal cultures or to call themselves "ethnoecologists." On the other hand, these aspects and "ethnoecological arguments" are often naive and romantic assumptions about the aboriginal subsistence economies and practices of using biological resources, pretending the latter have always been absolutely rational and environmentally safe. Obviously, this situation can not last for long. The currently very popular, so-called "ethnoecological discourse" has to be changed into the more accurate and unromantic appraisal of the actual environmental consequences of the modern aboriginal economic activities while practicing "traditional occupations." This can be accomplished through scholars' exposure to the existing body of knowledge, produced by Russian "ethnic ecology" or American ecological anthropology. Otherwise it gives way to the open promotion of aboriginal economic rights in using biological resources regardless of the likely short- and long-term environmental results of such activities.

Finally, we can conclude that the Russian applied ethnology, engaged in the field of defining the scope and nature of the aboriginal land rights, is still a work in progress, open to methodological influences from the other national schools of applied social research. There is a lot to be learned and absorbed, but even at this early stage Russian applied ethnologists are

actively developing their discipline and they already play an important role in shaping state policies towards aboriginal population and nature conservation in the Russian North.

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