

22. Theories from the Field? Siberian Ethnography of Hunter-Gatherers and Anthropological Theory

16214 - Reindeer in the structure of social relationship of Nenets and Evenks reindeer-herding communities in the 20-21 centuries

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Volzhanina, Elena (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)

I suggest to develop a comparative anthropological study of two indigenous peoples (Nenetses and Evenkis) who live in two Siberian regions and traditionally kept separate.

This proposal focuses solving the fundamental problems that have arisen within traditional indigenous households and communities of indigenous peoples living in the circumpolar region of the Russian Federation. The object of the study are reindeer herding peoples – Nenetses and Evenkis, who are the most numerous among the indigenous peoples of the Russian North and the leading reindeer herders of the country. The project will draw on expertise to describe and theorize the ethnoecological aspects of these societies making a break with a long tradition of describing them in ethnogenetic terms. This will include modeling the social relationships between herders (humans), reindeer and territory (non-human persons and landscape); and the dynamics of so-called traditional occupations (practices). The comparative analysis of two local communities has not been the subject of any studies. It will be done for the first time. Russian traditions, have focused on relationships between peoples and territory – perhaps best described as an ethnogenetic tradition. Another aspect of the work is analysis of the role of reindeer in the social relations within two ethnic groups: Nenetses and Evenks. Domestic reindeer and pastures are the main values in these communities, different kind of meaningful relationships and contacts are built around them (sacred, marriage, friendly, mutual aid, neighbourly, family). Preservation of reindeer husbandry among Nenetses and Evenks supposes the retention and function of the traditional relations within them in the 21 century.

I will examine the traditional and new ways of obtaining of reindeer and increase private reindeer herds practicing among lamal Nenets reindeer herders. They are taking deer for temporary use (poderpo) system of donation suggesting a return gift (tynda), receiving dowry, exchange of production of fishery and hunting for deer, buying and stealing deer. Another aspect dealing with in the paper is an association of households for joint herding, joint nomadism poor reindeer herders with wealthy herders, the hiring as herdsmen. These measures allow many households without or little deer to lead a nomad's life. So they do not lose hope to increase his herd reindeer again and become independent. In addition, the paper provides examples of ways to obtain reindeer among another reindeer herding peoples.

16180 - Silent People in the Forests of Western Siberia: History of the Concept

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Leete, Art (*University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia / Estland*)

Before the 19th century, the image of an aggressive savage clearly dominated in ethnographic textual production. Since then, scholars have described indigenous peoples of Western Siberia (the Khanty, Mansi and Nenets) as modest, submissive and quiet. By nowadays, this understanding has turned into common knowledge among academics, popular writers and adopted also by these groups themselves. In the 19th century there was an intriguing period in the long history of textual representation of the Siberian indigenous groups. During a few decades, hunting people, depicted earlier as aggressive and violent, were textually modified into silent inhabitants of the woods.

I aim to explore the ways how these images were produced in different times and what sources were used for textual construction of the Western Siberian indigenes. I intend to concentrate on connections between philosophical-theoretical background of researchers, their possible field impressions and respected modes of textual production. I also discuss the indigenous component of the discourse, the way in which local scholars and writers describe culture-specific rules of behavior and position of humans in the indigenous world perception.

I will argue that both basic ideas (about violent or submissive pattern of behavior) were derived from time-specific philosophical and textual traditions. At the same time, historical developments and particular social events also supported different impressions concerning Siberian indigenous peoples in different periods. Besides, scholarly approach to research in general and fieldwork methodology in particular influenced the textual outcome of academic efforts.

In general, theory has dominated descriptions of the Western Siberian indigenous peoples throughout the whole history of studies. Anyhow, it is also true that scholars have been always convinced that their conceptual discussions concerning basic patterns of native culture are strongly based on field experience and real life facts. During recent decades, indigenous scholars have published articles and monographs that enable to contextualize earlier research and discuss relationship between field concepts and autochthonic understanding of Western Siberian cultural traditions. Also non-indigenous researchers have started to pay more attention to culture-specific categories that enable to analyze the old ethnographic concept (for example, the one about quiet indigenes) from fresh perspectives.

16117 - The "Tungus Hypothesis": Relativism and Primordialism in the Psychomental Complex

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Arzyutov, Dmitryi (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.); ANDERSON, DAVID (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)*

In the history of Siberian ethnography Tungus/Evenki field studies have occupied a prominent role in the development of theory. The travel diaries and geographic studies of Prince Kropotkin led both to the development of the concept of "mutual aid" and to the tradition of landscape modelling that we now recognize as the topographical map. The roots of these ideas can be found in the words of his Tungus field guides. The primary field diaries and photographs of S.M Shirokogoroff, recently re-discovered and digitized, reveal a concern for what he called the 'Tungus hypothesis' which anticipates or parallels theories of the body by Mauss, ideas of stasis and change in Freud, and biosocial theories of engagement with the landscape. Finally the fieldwork of Ethel Lindgren shows an early concern with Bateson and systems theory which can be rooted in her field experiences. This paper traces the 'silent history' of field experience in the concepts which later came to structure Siberian anthropology

16115 - 'Etnos' as a fieldwork concept

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Alymov, Sergei (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.); Arzyutov, Dmitryi (University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)*

For many generations, Siberian fieldwork has been guided by holistic and somewhat organic concepts of 'etnos'. This biosocial theory of being was strongly pronounced in the English language work of Shirokogoroff, but was developed as a standard tool in the 1960s and applied to all Russian nationalities with a special eye to Siberian peoples. It is well-known that etnos theory was very analytical and highly structured, but it is a little known fact that it was also designed as a field theory. Building on older 19th century traditions of paleoethnology and museum studies, early researchers felt that ethnic boundaries could be mapped onto objects. This paper examines the logical material grid of what kinds of objects speak to etnos.

16074 - The field work of Varvara Kuznetsova: a case of participant observation in Soviet ethnography

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Davydova, Elena (*Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint-Petersbourg, Russian Fed. / Rus Föd.*)

This paper explores the fieldwork of a soviet ethnographer – Varvara Kuznetsova. Being a post-graduate student in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography she went to the Amguema tundra in Chukotka to carry out her field work. This should have enabled her to complete her thesis. V. Kuznetsova spent almost three years (1948-1951) with reindeer Chukchi despite experiencing many difficulties during her stay. Unfortunately she started suffer of mental illness upon her return to Saint-Petersburg. The ethnographer only managed to write a single article devoted to feasts of Amguema Chukchi (Kuznetsova, 1957).

My presentation is based on the analysis of V. Kuznetsova's field diaries. These texts present her strong aspiration to understand the way of life of Amguema Chukchi. The soviet ethnographer achieved this goal through the set of research techniques which she developed in the field. Firstly, V. Kuznetsova tried to understand social life in Chukchi camps not by employing interviews or questionnaires, but through an active involvement in the environment and everyday actions. At the beginning they were made as a mimetic imitation of local people that was necessary for mere survival and then appeared as constantly and automatically repeated acts. Secondly, emotional involvement was an important part for understanding Amguema Chukchi. Thirdly, thinking of bodily senses and writing about this experience were the means of her interpretations of peoples' social life. All these observations could be made by the analysis of Kuznetsova's way of making field notes in which the descriptions of people, their actions and conversations, landscape, and her own experiences and feelings are presented as a whole and inseparable picture.

I argue that in spite of her own professional failure V. Kuznetsova's materials have a great theoretical value and provoke theoretical thinking. A modern researcher reading her diaries can see what the Amguema Chukchi's life was alike and how they were living together with the ethnographer in the middle of the XXth century. I am planning to demonstrate this argument through the analysis of power relations among Amguema herders, fishers, hunters, and gatherers.