

## **PhD Studentship Proposal: 'Emergent Indigeneities in the Russian North'**

**DTC Pathway:** Scottish Doctoral Training Centre – Social Anthropology.

**Supervisors:** Professor David Anderson and Dr Tatiana Argounova-Low

**Studentship type:** +3 F/T

**Schedule:** *Months 1-12:* Generic and discipline-specific research training under M.Res. programme, preparation of dissertation/research proposal (including review of relevant theoretical and comparative literature); *Months 13-24:* fieldwork, library and archival research, collection of oral histories; *Months 25-36:* analysis and writing up)

**Start date:** ~~1 February 2013~~ 1 October 2013

### **Research objectives**

The claim of indigeneity is often thought to be confined to settler states overseas. However, many scholars have been astounded by the growth of indigenous claims where they 'should not' exist. Rather than being trapped in time, limited to strictly enumerated groups, or being spatially encapsulated in 'salt-water' post-colonies overseas, vibrant claims to indigenous status can be found today among 'recent' African pastoralists, urban *mestizo* populations, and in heavily urbanized areas such as the Russian North. This studentship will investigate emergent indigeneities in the urban Russian North, with special reference to how these new movements articulate new collective identities transcending traditional national narratives. The PhD candidate will work closely with community organizations that are lobbying for the recognition of their status, and will similarly ground the fieldwork in a reading of published historical and unpublished archival texts. The project will work parallel to the established team working on the history of *ethnos* theory on a special example of *ethnos* theorising – the indigenous case.

### **Background**

Indigeneity is arguably the most recalcitrant of identities within the humanities. Despite the fact that every comparative historical or philosophical study describes the indigenous condition as 'flexible' (Niezen 2003), it has nevertheless been canonised through international covenants, legal coda, and even the mapping of genetic haplotypes. Indigenous identities tend to be recognised through an extremely strong chronotopic lens confining them in time, space, and enumeration. Indigenous status tends to be 'given' with little attention to how gender and parenthood are implicated in nation-building or 'minority-building' projects. Students of indigeneity were often forced to choose between 'emic' or 'low' strategies of studying how indigenous entitlements are felt and 'etic' or 'high' strategies of documenting or criticising how they are defined.

This neat sociological divide came to be blurred in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Analysts were surprised by the claim of African pastoralists to special rights within post-colonial states already thought to enjoy home majority rule (Sylvain 2002). This was quickly followed by the appearance of aboriginal claims in regions of Latin America where livelihood came to be more evocative than pedigree (Gordillo 2004). Since that time, the debate on the qualities of indigeneity has been invigorated by studies from India (Karlsson 2003) and Southeast Asia (Li 2000). As indigeneity became globalised, critical historical studies began to chip away at the naturalness of 'salt-water' indigeneities. Critical historians such as Stocking (1991) and White (1991) described an indigenous 'situation' where both the colony and the Metropole co-authored collective identities. Pedigrees sketched at the colonial frontier often introduced greater contrast into portraits of national identity at home. Soon it became impossible to imagine European identities without the image of the 'native' or the 'noble savage' (Ellingson 2001). Arguably this process culminates today with the intimate overlap between aboriginality and the ecological rights movements sweeping Europe (Graham & Conklin 1995, Krech 1999).

Given the radical globalised nature of this identity, it should not be surprising that indigenous movements should be set directly within European heartlands. What is surprising is the extent to which these movements are undertheorised. European indigeneity is strongly associated with the vibrant movement for Sami rights. Although the history of the construction of a transnational identity of a Sami Sapmi homeland is well-known (Thuen 1995), what is less well-understood are the histories of recognition of 'quasi-indigenous identities' in Northern Europe (including the Russian North) such as 'sea Sami' [Norway] (Paine 1957), Lappalaiset [Finland] (Forrest 2006), Filman [Finland, Norway & Russia] (Alymov 1929) Pomor, [Russia – Kola] (Watts 2002; Sidsner 2007),

Komi [Russia – Kola] (Vladimorova 2006). In some cases, these unexpected indigenous identities were ‘formed’ and invigorated through overly strict state codices which limited recognition to certain cultural practices (such as reindeer Sami vs. sea Sami vs. settled ‘land-owning’ Sami). In other cases, distinct rural groups were thought to be too ‘populous’ to be indigenous (such as with Komi on Russia’s Kola peninsula). In all cases the codification of time, space and enumeration provides a sharp contrast to local feelings of entitlement.

### **Research sites**

The PhD candidate will focus their fieldwork and archival work on a Northern Russian or cross-border group that is lobbying for claims to have their identity recognized. Depending on the skills and the interest of the student the possible research sites could include:

- a. **Kola Komis** who are defined as an ‘immigrant’ indigenous group having relocated to this peninsula in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century partly displacing Sami groups. Within the Kola orbit, the student could also investigate tensions on the definition of Sami-ness which has shifted from a complex economy involving fishing, hunting, and herding to a mono-profile identity revolving around reindeer.
- b. **Arkhangelsk Pomors** have been traditionally been classified as a Russian ‘sub-ethnos’ but have recently (2011) been considered a candidate for an official list of indigenous peoples. Their claim is strengthened by a vibrant civil society organization and a research institute at the local federal university devoted to their claim. They provide a strong case of the ‘instrumental’ use of ethnos.
- c. **Diaspora Iakuts**. Much like Komis, Iakuts have traditionally been defined as a demographically numerous *ethnos* and thereby separate from smaller ‘indigenous’ groups. This however is not the case of Iakut-speaking minorities living outside of the Iakut homeland in Taimyr, Evenkiia and Irkutsk *oblast’*. Playing on their display of traditional skills and language, Iakuts outside of a territorial unit play with the legal regimes that define indigenous identity.

### **Methods**

The PhD candidate will gather evidence from (a) participant observation (b) newspapers and internet texts in the public domain (c) oral history (d) archives. S/he will be encouraged to analyse the claims made by the groups in question to the parameters set for the group by professional ethnographers and state administrators. Fieldwork in Northern Russia is difficult but not impossible to arrange. The PI for this application has successfully trained many PhD students and has on-going projects and/or memoranda of collaboration with the regional institutions and universities which could provide support for a visa. Further, the two post-doctoral fellows work in institutions with rich archival collections and can negotiate access to these sources which might be difficult for an independent researcher to reach.

### **Independence and added value**

This PhD project complements *Ethnos* by providing an in-depth study of one important quality of contemporary forms of identity management in Russia, and a third comparative site. While based on independent fieldwork, it will be placed in the same theoretical context and guided by the same overall questions concerning the way that identity is compartmentalized and activated in a concrete political circumstance. The added value to the project lies in this additional comparative perspective, along with the focus upon the specific theme of indigeneity through the analysis of documents and interviews.

### **Breakdown of Costs**

Overseas fieldwork within the Russian Federation **£5,756**

The maximum allowable ESRC fieldwork stipend in Russia is calculated as a Front End element + (weekly rate x number of weeks) £500 + £146 x 36 weeks = £5756. This is budgeted to cover airfare (£1500 [3x90 day return ABZ-MOW@£500]) visas (£250) subsistence (£45x40days urban; £22x100days rural). We will be relying on our Russian partners to provide accommodation free of charge.

EU-UK basic stipend **£13590**

Annual fee **£3600**

RTSG **£750**

**Total Cost for 3 years = £59577**