

OP #272: STRUCTURES OF RUSSIAN POLITICAL  
DISCOURSE ON NATIONALITY PROBLEMS:  
ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES  
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**Minority Rights Monitoring in the  
Russian Federation**

It is not an easy task to review the vast field of minority rights research in Russia and sketch a state-of-the-art summary. There are several circumstances that contribute to this difficulty. The first is *conceptual*. The relevance of the concept of "minority" in the analysis of various groups' situations in contemporary Russia and ex-Soviet states is a matter of debate. Even if it could be proved that such a concept is relevant, it is still not clear whether the relevance holds for different periods of Russian history. This conceptual predicament has to do first and foremost with Russia's and other NIS countries' claims to democracy. The gist of the matter is simple: if we believe (or can prove) that Russia is a democratic country, then the term "minority" is applied appropriately. The underlying reasoning is straightforward: the term implies the idea of *distributional justice*, according to which a minority is deficient in only one aspect of its ability to participate fully and equally in political and social/cultural processes, namely, in its numerical strength. Without this deficiency, free individuals can protect their interests through voting and other democratic procedures. Minority groups, lacking such a powerful resource as the necessary numerical strength to guarantee the protection of their interests through voting, need special additional measures from the state, which is controlled by the majority. Hence "minority" is a term that presupposes a democratic context. In non-democracies (proto-democratic or transitional societies, as well as autocracies and totalitarian regimes) the

numerical size of a group does not constitute a political resource. What counts as a political resource is the group's access to power, wealth, arms, and similar things. In the case of totalitarian societies, therefore, it is more appropriate to refer to ruling and deprived groups or societal strata, of elites and disenfranchised masses, or of victimized populations. If used to analyze the situation in these countries, the concept "minority" would be misapplied. As for contemporary Russia, it is still an open question whether we can legitimately use the term "minority." It should be used cautiously, since the numerical strength of a group in any particular case, or even its position within a power hierarchy does not automatically imply the democratic dimension. In many regions, local decision-making still bears a traditional autocratic stamp that precludes the sociologically correct usage of the minority-majority type of analysis.

Secondly, even if we presume that the term "holds," at least generally and on the large-scale level of international relations, given that Russia is a party to many international treaties and agreements, then we are confronted with one more obstacle, which could be named *terminological*. Incidentally, this aspect has a wider, if not a universal character. In many countries the term "minority" is either *unknown*, or *not used*, or, to make matters still more complicated, is used along with many *rival terms*, with partially or substantially overlapping meanings. It could also be used with many limiting and *particularizing attributes*, stretching the signified concept far beyond its normative or internationally accepted scope.

The last two cases—parallel usage of terms with overlapping meanings and usage of the term “minority” with many specifications—are typical for academic and political discourse in both Russia and most of the NIS.

A dilemma for someone attempting to review minority rights research is: should he/she include *all the indigenous terms* and related concepts, or pursue a limiting strategy and take into consideration only “focal” cases with explicit usage of the term “minority”? Of course, this choice does not solve all the reviewers’ problems. In many cases the term “minority,” when used by representatives of different disciplines, academic schools, and sub-fields, or by journalists and politicians, or leaders of various nationalist movements and ethnic entrepreneurs, means different things. In this case I prefer to speak of different paradigms, or world views, which could not be reduced to merely professional “schisms” and which divide both academia and the general public and further contribute to the babel of discourse on minority issues.

Making matters still worse is the huge *variety of minority groups*, which came into existence by a myriad of ways and which do not easily lend themselves to the classifying and typifying will of academics. In this respect the whole history of Russian ethnography and anthropology could be described as a history of minority research, and all the conflicting views, theories, and conceptualizations of ethnicity or “ethnic reality” have a direct bearing on minority research and relevant discursive formations.

Having in mind all these obstacles, I must clarify my own position and the choices I made when preparing this review. In the case of the first problem, that is, deciding whether an analysis in “minority-majority” terms could be

applied to contemporary Russia, I chose to answer in the affirmative, with certain reservations. In essence my argument is this: whether we speak of Russia in general, or of any of its territories and historical periods in particular, there are a number of situations and contexts which permit themselves be analyzed productively in these terms. So we could speak *meaningfully* of minorities in Russia, though not *always* and not for *every* place, and we must be cautious not to over-generalize the analytical power of this approach.

Secondly, on the level of terminology, I opt for being open towards “native” or “indigenous” terminology in minority discourse, as very often the local (in this particular case, the Russian language) terms “fix” conceptual linkages or represent tropes which become formative for and influence this discourse and, when ignored, can create misunderstandings in intercultural communication. The latter problem very often arises in diplomatic and international politics, and international law types of communication, when partners in a dialogue presume that by using the same terms they are guaranteeing the clarity and transparency of meaning. I will speak specifically on this type of error, which could be provisionally labeled as *terminological homonymy*<sup>1</sup>, later, when I analyze the usage of the term “national minority” in the documents of the OSCE and the Council of Europe and its interpretations in Russia.

Thirdly, I restrict myself here to a brief overview of academic discourse with short excursions into the juridical and political spheres, thus leaving out important parts of discourse on minorities such as mass media debates, public usage, etc. This enables me to be more inclusive in the analysis on the “ontic plane,” that is, to include in my

review various types of minorities, minority peoples, migrant and settled groups, ethnographic groups, etc.

My approach to the analysis of academic discourse will be inclusive also, as I attempt to cover the general trends in the history of minority research, putting it into the context of ethnological research in general. I have chosen this strategy because I perceive the particular field of minority research to be strongly influenced by predispositions of a paradigmatic nature within the broader academic research of ethnicity.

### **History of Minority Research in Russia**

Russian<sup>2</sup> ethnography goes back to the seventeenth century—the time of extensive colonization and formation of a centralized Russian state. Early descriptions and atlases of Siberia included information on local tribal groups. In those times ethnic differences were not depicted as such, and the local (Russian language) terms for non-Russian groups were *yasachnye* (paying special tribute in furs), *tuzentsy* (literally meaning “living in another land”), *imratsy* (meaning, “being born into an alien, foreign, non-Russian, or non-Russian group”), or *invertsy* and *yazychniki* (meaning pagans, non-Orthodox, non-Christian, or belonging to another faith). The differentiating features, thus, were fiscal status, land (or region), and faith, but not the totalizing concept of culture, which had not as yet been formed as a part of nationalistic ideology. For this reason the terms *plamya* (tribe) and *narod* (people), though used in respect to different groups, had different meanings from those implied in the current Russian ethnographical discourse.

In 1845 the Russian Geographical Society, with its Ethnographic Division, was founded in Saint Petersburg

The Society published materials on different regions, including studies of ethnography and languages in Central Asia, Siberia and the Far East (M.Kastren, A.Middendorf, V.Radlov). This early association of ethnography with geography, typical not only for Russia, but for many European countries as well, probably served as a contributing factor in the territorialization of ethnicity, which later became one of the essentials of the naturalistic paradigm in ethnicity research.

In the 1880–90’s a strong evolutionist school was formed, introducing methods of historical reconstruction on archaeological, physical anthropological, and ethnographic materials (M. Kovalevsky, D. Anuchin, L. Stenberg). This was at a time when the first ethnographic journals had appeared, as well as many popular works on the cultures of the world. With the establishment of evolutionism in the field of ethnographical research, the later reification of ethnicity and culture and ethnic groups and the appropriation of history by future nationalistic leaders became conceptually possible. Needless to say, both reification and appropriation of history became part-and-parcel of the naturalistic interpretation of ethnic reality that was taking shape. Evolutionism helped to establish the concepts of “developed” and “less developed” peoples which are still used in some normative texts in Russia today.<sup>3</sup>

The Bolsheviks subsequently used these established conceptual linkages between ethnic groups and territories in organizing the Russian Federation and, later, the USSR. The concepts of evolutionism were operative in establishing a hierarchy of administrative-political units, from national *sel’sovet* (ethnic minority village Soviet) to Union republics. The Bolshevik revolution (1917) and formation of the Soviet

state with *territorial autonomies* based on ethnic principles, as well as the rise of ethnic periphery movements, led to very extensive studies among all groups, especially as a basis for designing borders between *ethno-territorial* units. Ethnographers were also deeply involved in developing written alphabets and school systems for many small groups.

In 1933 the Institute of Anthropology, Archaeology, and Ethnography was established in Leningrad, and in 1937—the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow. This was at a time when Marxist-Leninist doctrine (with its focus on social evolution levels and class struggle as the major force in historical change) started to dominate theoretical disciplinary knowledge in every field of social and humanitarian sciences. Ethnology was proclaimed a “bourgeois science,” many scholars were persecuted and the department of ethnology at Moscow University had been closed (1931) [Slezkin 1991, 476–84]. In the 1950–70’s the major priorities were still the studies of ethnogenesis, material cultures, ethnic histories, and cartography, initiated mainly by the central institutions in Moscow and Leningrad with active training and participation of scholars from regional and republican academic centers. This resulted in prestigious projects such as historical-ethnographic atlases (*Peoples of Siberia*, 1961; *Russians*, 1967–70; *Peoples of the World*, 1964) and a multi-volume series (*The Peoples of the World*). In the 1970–80’s there was a strong shift of interest to contemporary ethnic issues, together with a reorientation to the use of sociological survey methods. Extensive research was carried out in Central Asia, the Baltic republics, and the Volga-Ural region (Y. Arutunian, L. Drobizheva, V. Pimenov, M. Guboglo). Academician Yu. Bromley and other

ethnologists (N. Cheboksarov, V. Kozlov, P. Puchkov, S. Arutiunov) were developing a theory of ethnos based on a primordial vision of ethnicity. Along with this theory a distinct interpretation of ethnos as a “socio-biological organism” (L. Gumilev) acquired a growing popularity.

Political liberalization since the late 1980’s and the rise of ethnic nationalism and conflict have brought radical changes to the field of Russian anthropology. The subjects of research and debate shifted to identity studies, ethnonationalism and ethnic conflicts, status and rights of minorities, ethnicity and power, and a number of other issues. Ethnonationalistic engagement and the use of ethnic studies as a resource for political mobilization have become a serious challenge for the academic community. In response, anthropology is demonstrating a growing interest in problems of “new minorities” like Russians, Russian nationalism, and identity. Along with the rest of society, Russian anthropology is going through a process of deep transformation and crisis [Tishkov 1997, 494].

### Paradigms of Ethnicity Research

The basic ways of interpreting ethnic phenomena are usually grouped into three main approaches, which could be designated as *primordial* (objectivist, positivist, or naturalistic), *instrumentalist*, and *constructivist* (subjectivist or relativistic). The first of these scholarly traditions is usually traced to the ideas of nineteenth-century German romanticism and to the positivist tradition of social science. Its adherents view ethnicity as an objective given, a sort of primordial characteristic of humanity. For primordialists, there exist objective entities with inherent characteristics such as *territory*, *language*, *recognizable*

*membership, and a common mentality.* In its extreme form, this approach conceives of ethnicity in socio-biological terms as a "comprehensive form of natural selection and kinship connections," a primordial instinctive impulse [Van den Berghe 1981]. Some primordialists even hypothesize that recognition of group affiliation is *genetically encoded* and this code is the product of early human evolution, when the ability to recognize the members of one's family group was essential for survival.

Contemporary political discourse on ethnicity and nationalism in Russia belongs conceptually to the primordialist school and is influenced to a substantial degree by anthropological theories prevalent in the history of Russian ethnology and anthropology since the disciplines' formation. Explicit primordialism has played a major role in both Russian and Soviet anthropology. Originating in Herder's neo-romantic concept of *Volk* as a unity of *blood* and *soil*, it was developed into a positivist program for ethnographic research in the work of S.M. Shirokogorov, who defined ethnos as:

"a group of people speaking one and the same language and admitting common origin, characterized by a set of customs and a lifestyle, preserved and sanctified by tradition, which distinguishes it from other [groups] of the same kind [Shirokogorov 1923, 122]."

This approach was later developed in the works of Yu. Bromley, who gave a very similar definition of ethnos (1981), and L. Gumilev. The latter believed in the existence of ethnos as a "biosocial organism" and proposed a framework for the study of ethnogenesis as a *geographically determined* process, in which the formation of an ethnos was depicted as a con-

joined effect of cosmic energies and landscape [Gumilev 1989, 1990]. As the works of Gumilev are still very popular in Russia and exert influence on the perception of ethnic reality, especially at public and political levels, I will briefly mention the constitutive characteristics of his theory. For Gumilev, ethnos is analogous to an organism in many respects, but one of the fundamentals is the similarity of its life cycle to the life cycle of an organism. Like an organism, ethnos is born, then experiences periods of growth and maturity, followed by inertia, breakdown, and death. He has even given an estimate of ethnic life cycle duration of about 1200-1500 years. Perhaps more important, interethnic relations and their coexistence are believed to depend upon mutual compatibility of contacting ethnoses. According to Gumilev there are three types of interethnic coexistence: symbiosis, xenia, and chimera. In symbiosis ethnoses peacefully coexist, using different ecological niches of the same landscape. Xenia is also a harmless way of coexistence, when one ethnos is living "inside" another as an impregnated foreign particle. But when the isolation between the guest and host ethnoses breaks down, it may give rise to chimera, which is characterized by negative complementarity. Then bloody conflicts, leading to extermination of one or of both of the contacting ethnoses, are inevitable. The danger of such pseudo-theoretical constructions becomes evident when they are employed to legitimize violence or to view ethnic conflicts as inevitable consequences of "natural laws."

Skeptical of the bio-geographical approach, Bromley and most Soviet social scientists adhered to historical-primordial theories. For them, ethnos and ethno-social organism, understood as objective linguo-cultural entities,

were the basic categories [Bromley 1983]. As a director of the Institute of Ethnography, USSR Academy of Sciences in the 1970's and 1980's, Bromley published four theoretical monographs [Bromley 1973, 1981, 1983, 1987], which formed the backbone of academic discourse on ethnicity theory in those years. Bromley defined ethnos as:

"a stable intergenerational community of people, historically formed on a certain territory, possessing common relatively stable features of culture (including language) and psyche, as well as a consciousness of their unity and of their difference from other similar entities (self-awareness), reflected in a self-name (ethnonym) [Bromley 1983, 57-58]."

This theory goes back to S. Shirokogorov's writings of the 1920's and corresponds to the so-called Leninist theory of national question, defining "nation" as the highest type of ethnic community (ethnos), where ethnos is viewed as an archetype and major form of social grouping, legitimizing the state with its economy and culture [Sokolovski, Tishkov 1997, 190-193].

The term "nation" itself (*natsiya*) is understood and interpreted in Russian academic, political, and public realms exclusively as ethnic nation, or ethnonation (though the latter two terms are practically not used in Russia). The concept still bears the stamp of Stalin's definition of a nation as a community of people with objective characteristics (common territory, economy, language, and psychic organization). In its third edition [1974, vol.17:375-76] the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* defines nation in very similar terms as:

"a historical community of people created by the forming communal-

ity of their territory, economic ties, literary language, some specific features of their culture and character, which make up its constitutive attributes."

Most Soviet and contemporary Russian scholars basically share this understanding, with the addition of one defining element—the so-called "national self-consciousness," that is, self-awareness or a feeling of common identity. This understanding of the nation has important implications for the interpretation of the concept of *rational minority*, about which I will speak further. The definition of a nation in exclusively ethno-cultural terms (versus citizenship terms) is still dominant, if not the only one in Russian political and academic discourse. Common history, culture, and language, as well as "ethnic homeland" or territory are mentioned or implied in every usage of the term. As mentioned above, the nation is understood as the highest stage of development of an ethnos in the Soviet theory of ethnos, the other stages being *plenyā* (a tribe) and *narodnost'* (a nationality, that is an ethnic group). The notions of political or civil nations are virtually no longer used in contemporary political and public discourses. This explains the fact that nationalism in Russia is understood exclusively as ethnonationalism and is usually perceived as a sort of deviation, improper behavior, or misdemeanor. It is very often associated with separatism as well. As ethnonationalism is an ideology based on the theory that ethno-nations constitute the basic human forms of "normal" collectivities, it becomes evident that it is based on a naturalistic approach to ethnic reality, on primordialist versions of ethnicity interpretation. Ethnonationalism is the ruling ideology in most of the NIS,

including the Baltic states, and in practically all the republics of the Russian Federation.

The naturalistic explanations of ethnicity and of nationalism in Russia are still deeply entrenched, institutionalized in state policy, scholarly thought, education, and, most important, in public opinion and the administrative-political structure of the federation. This is also true for all post-Soviet states. The reasons for this institutionalization are various; among the most important being the disciplinary tradition of Russian ethnography/ethnology, close political control and censure of academic research during the Soviet period, popularization of academic discourse through the education system and media, and, to a certain extent, the "fusion" of political and academic elites in post-Soviet times. Another important reason that needs to be mentioned is the basic similarity and convergence between popular views on ethnic phenomena and naturalistic treatments of ethnic reality, which are sometimes so striking that I am inclined not only to speak of mutual reinforcement of lay and scholarly opinions in this respect, but also to suspect that the context of naturalistic theories' formation was formed, in the first place, under the strong influence of nationalistic ideas. Here the German romantic treatment of ethnic reality should be mentioned once again, as not only did Russian ethnology and anthropology inherit many of its ideological biases, but even the interdisciplinary boundaries and understanding of the discipline's subject in Russia was modeled in a way similar to the divide between *Völkskunde* and *Völkerkunde* of the German academic tradition.

It would be incorrect to argue that there were no other strains of theoretical thought existing side by side the

dominant primordialist tradition in Soviet ethnology. Political liberalization since the late 1980's and the rise of ethnic nationalism and conflict have brought radical changes for Russian anthropology. But even by the end of the 1970's a number of approaches which could be viewed as different forms of instrumentalism had appeared. Some authors, influenced by system and informational approaches, tried to use the concept of information in the analysis of ethnic phenomena, combining primordialist views on *ethnos* as an objective entity (ethno-social organism) with instrumentalist perspectives on the intergenerational transfer of ethnic culture [Arutiunov, Cheboksarov 1977, Arutiunov 1989]. Others experimented with information patterns or "models" of particular "ethnoses" [Pimenov 1977]. Still others began suggesting that ethnic differentiation could be adequately described as an information process, reducing behavioral expectations in a multicultural environment to a set of typologically neat ethnic stereotypes [Susokolov 1990].

Another instrumentalist approach developed in the sub-discipline of economic anthropology, where the analysis of ethnic competition in labor markets was based implicitly on ethnic mobilization theories [Shkaratan 1986; Perepiolkin, Shkaratan 1989]. Nevertheless, though these approaches, which could be labeled as instrumentalist, were considered fresh and exerted a certain influence, they were a sort of side show at the time they appeared and were not viewed as significantly distinct from the predominant naturalistic approaches, particularly since their authors were using the same terminology (*ethnos*, ethno-social organism and similar terms) and shared many presuppositions of the "naturalistic school."

While the instrumentalist approach

to ethnic phenomena had been in use since the end of the 1970's, the constructivist approach remained outside domestic social science and was never seriously tested until the start of the 1990's, that is, almost a generation later. With the emergence of ethnic revival and the growth of separatism over the last decade in the post-Soviet area, scholars started to pay more attention to ethnicity construction in both theoretical and practical research. As a result ethnicity began to be seen as part of the repertoire that is "chosen" or "indoctrinated" by an individual or a group to achieve certain interests and goals, or as a *representation* actively constructed by ethnic entrepreneurs. This approach has never attained predominance, though some studies have been published by sociologists [Filippov 1991, 1992; Voronkov 1995], ethnologists and anthropologists [Tishkov 1989, 1992; Sokolovski 1993, 1994 a-c; Sokolovski, Tishkov 1997; Ssorin-Chaikov 1991], and social psychologists [Soldatova 1996]. Though post-communist societies contain many examples of constructed and mobilized ethnicity, the instrumentalist and constructivist approaches to ethnic phenomena have not really been actively applied in the policy realm, remaining known principally within academia, and even there being met with skepticism and opposition. They have failed to become more widely used due to their inherent complexity and deviance from popularized versions of ethnic reality models. For obvious reasons, nationalist leaders oppose them as well and support primordialist views of ethnic reality. The ethno-territorial nature of Soviet federalism as it was engineered and employed by the Bolsheviks, has greatly contributed to and still influences the tailoring of various conflicts as ethno-territorial, for such a tailoring

exploits an apparent legitimacy to territorial claims on the side of "titular" ethnic groups<sup>4</sup>, or makes people think that this or that piece of land "belongs to" a locally dominant ethnic group.

Part of the difficulty in explaining a subject like "territorialized ethnicity" is that it is often so deeply embedded in, as to be indistinguishable from, the fundamental assumptions of nationalistic discourse. As a *topos*, moreover, it is inherent in many conceptual systems and disciplinary lexicons. Nonetheless, we may approach this subject through the available and much discussed topic of "national minorities," which potentially contains both the idea of place ("national") and of ethnos ("minority"). The notion of "national minority" is a cornerstone of European policies in minority issues, setting the terms for the current approaches of OSCE and the Council of Europe. Interestingly enough, though, even here neither the field of social science, nor the documentation of intergovernmental organizations contains a comprehensive and broadly agreed upon definition. I will discuss two of the term's meanings, one designated for convenience sake as "broad," the other as "narrow." Both meanings contain the *topos*, or conceptual linkage "ethnicity-territory," but the respective interpretations of this linkage differ substantially.

Let us consider first the broad meaning, exemplified by the usage of the term in such documents as the "Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report" of 1994 (Council of Europe) and the Copenhagen Conference for Human Dimension document of 1990 (CSCE). Both documents interpret the term "national" as referring to "nation" in its technical and legal meaning of "citizenship-



bestowing," thus excluding such potential beneficiaries as migrant workers, stateless persons or apatrids, non-nationals, and refugees whose protection is attended to by other international agreements. The phrasing of the documents supports the understanding that the notion "national minority" is extended to cover citizens who are members of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious minorities. This breadth of categories is the reason why I defined this usage of the term as "broad." This interpretation of the term is also more liberal than the narrow understanding, which I will discuss below. Nevertheless, this understanding unequivocally links the concepts of "minority" and "state," and the documents explicitly mention such characteristics of the state as sovereignty and territorial integrity, thus dividing nationalities into two distinct categories: groups with "their own" states and stateless groups. The linkage of ethnicity and territory is mediated in this interpretation by an overarching state.

The second, "narrow" meaning of the term is more conservative. This understanding is standard and widespread in Central and Eastern European literature, though not limited to these regions. "National" in this second interpretation of the term implies "having its own state or polity" or "having a homeland," which is always different, as in the case of "national minorities," from the country or region of residence. In Russia the term is applied to all minority groups living "outside" their respective lands of origin, be it a state or a political administrative unit within the Russian Federation. Examples include Kazakhs and Ukrainians living in Russia, or Tatars and Mordvinians residing outside Tatarstan and Mordovia respectively. Here the idea of a territo-

rialized ethnicity is manifested more vividly, as this concept implies the existence of a "host state" and a "state of origin," "titular groups" (dominant ethnic majorities who gave their name to the polity) and kin groups "abroad," and ethnic "homelands" and "otherlands." It is well documented that this territorializing trend led to massive population exchanges immediately after World War I, followed by ethnic cleansing campaigns and deportations.

In most of the Soviet Union's successor states the criteria of minority status are ambiguous at best and substantially deviate from the standard usage of international law. I will try to clarify below the peculiarities of the minority concept understanding in political and academic discourse in Russia and more generally in ex-Soviet states. Though the disputes over the definition of the term "minority" seem never to come to an end, most experts would agree that there are at least two basic elements essential for this concept, namely, numerical inferiority of the group and its non-dominant, or subordinate position within the power structure of the country or region in question. Both elements are retained in the Russian understanding of the concept, but the practices involved in their interpretation and measurement differ significantly from their western analogues.

### **Numerical Inferiority Principle**

Numerical inferiority of minorities, as has been argued earlier, serves as one of the distinctive features of the concept. It is named in both of the widely cited UN working definitions, those of J. Deschenes and F. Capotorti ("a group of citizens of a State, constituting ... a numerical minority in that State" and "a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State," respectively). In the USSR and Russia this

feature was extended also to indigenous peoples, who during most of their Soviet history had been officially designated as "minor" or "small" peoples<sup>5</sup>. But in most of the ex-Soviet states, especially those which are based on the principle of so-called ethno-federalism, or which have ethno-territorial autonomies, the numerical inferiority principle has taken on further complications and ramifications which need to be mentioned.

If applied to the Russian Federation formally, the numerical inferiority feature would mean that all non-Russians belong to minorities, as Russians constitute more than 80 percent of the country's population. As the Russian Federation is based on the so-called ethno-territorial principle, the *relational* aspect of numerical inferiority of minorities "to the rest of the population" becomes dubious. The republics and autonomous regions within the Russian Federation with territories comprising approximately 60 percent of the entire territory of the state and having various degrees of sovereignty and self-government, are often viewed and portray themselves as "ethnic homelands" for the minority groups after which they are named (Tatarstan for the Tatars, Bashkortostan for the Bashkir, etc.), thus dividing their populations into "titular" and "non-titular" groups. Their dominant positions within the republics turn them politically and sociologically into national elites, rather than minorities in the standard sense of the term. This is one of the reasons that Russian legislators, politicians, and social scientists often use two referential planes at once while assessing the numerical strength of ethnic minorities-ethno-territorial and state. Most of the so-called "titular groups" (often termed as "nations" or "peoples," though remaining numerically inferior

to the state population) are not included in federal and local minority rights protection norms. Moreover, some political scientists and sociologists argue that Russians turn into effective minorities in political, legal, and sociological terms on the territories of some republics (e.g., Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, and Tuva republics).

Besides, some groups of Russians, mainly Old Believers and former religious dissenters, are considered by anthropologists to be minorities on cultural, economic, and religious grounds (Doukhobors, Molokans, and various "old-settler" groups in Siberia and the Far East). Most of the Siberian groups in this list were recommended for inclusion in the group of indigenous peoples, as they have a subsistence economy similar to the neighboring indigenous peoples [Table 1].

The dilemma on what scale to measure the group ratio in population (on state or regional scales) becomes further aggravated when regional boundaries are challenged. As experts specializing in Eastern Europe and Russia are aware, much of the system of territorial-administrative division lacks legitimacy in the opinion of the leaders of ethnic movements. Mutual territorial claims of Tatars and Bashkirs, Ingushes and Ossetians, Chechens, and Cossacks are well-known cases. The overall number of ethno-territorial claims in ex-Soviet states has been estimated as exceeding four hundred [Kolossoff e.a. 1992]. When territorial boundaries become an element in the construction processes of ethnic status, and when, at least for some groups, the administrative division seems to be crucial in their claims to be either a minority or a majority, that is a people with the right to self-determination, the claims to

**Table 1.** Ethnic Russian Cultural and Religious Minorities\*

No.	Name of the group	Location (regions)	Number (thousands)
1	Doukhobors	Tambov, Rostov, Krasnodar	50
2	Indighirs	Sakha (Yakutia)	?
3	Kamchadals	Kamchatskaya	25-28
4	Kanin Pomors	Arkhangelsk	?
5	Kolymchans	Sakha (Yakutia)	6**
6	Markovtsy	Chukotka	?
7	Mezentsy	Arkhangelsk	10-15
8	Molokans	Orenburg, Tambov, North Caucasus	50
9	Lentsy (Yakutiane)	Sakha (Yakutia)	?
10.	Ob' old-settlers	Khanty-Mansiisk	?
11.	Seldiuks	Krasnoyarsk	5-6
12.	Zatundrenye	Taimyr	?

\* Compiled from: *Narody Rossii* [The Peoples of Russia]. *Encyclopedia*. (Moscow, 1994), 47-48; *Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: WWF Statement of Principles*, (Moscow, 1997), 37-38.

\*\* Together with Indighirs and Markovtsy.

territory and status become inevitably enmeshed in a power struggle.

The relational aspect of a minority group's numerical strength in ethno-territorial federations such as Russia brings into conflict two distinct classifications closely controlled by the state—an ethnic classification (an officially approved and established list of minority categories) and the administrative territorial classification (a list of regions with legitimate boundaries). In the long history of Russian expansion both classifications have been contested from both sides—the state and the ethnonational movements—many times with varying results. Often two or more distinct peoples and/or minority categories have been arbitrarily “lumped” together for official purposes and considered one people with one official name (e.g., the Avars, the Altai, and the Khakass) and one territorial unit. At other times a single people has been administratively divided into several units bearing its name (e.g., the Buryats and the Nenets); or two and more “minor peoples” have been given one autonomous ethno-territorial formation (the

Karachai and the Circassians; the Kabardins and the Balkars; the Chechens and the Ingush).

Primordialist conceptualizations of ethnicity have also contributed to the complexity of assessing a minority group's numerical strength. One of the aspects of primordialist theories of ethnicity in Russia is the belief in the “objective reality” of ethnic groups, which usually means reification of the group boundaries. “Ethnoses” in these conceptualizations (be it the psychological version of Sergei Shirokogoroff, the bio-geographical version of Lev Gumilev, or the cultural-historical version of Yulian Bromley) were regarded as special sorts of “things,” “bodies,” or “organisms,” with the result that most of the ethnographic community-based studies were not depicted as community-based, but as characterizing the ethnos under study as a whole. As the primordialist view of ethnicity has been institutionalized in many state practices (passport registration, ethno-territorial federalism, the policy of *korenizatsia*, etc.), the reality has begun to conform to theo-

retical expectations. For example, the primordialist theory, popularized and deeply entrenched in the public opinion of the educated strata, has been operative in creating particular social practices, including census procedures, political decision-making on nationality policy issues, particular brands of ethnonationalism, etc. As a result, the census and state population statistics, incorporating the official list of minority groups, have been and remain biased in favor of officially recognized groups, whose numbers are exaggerated at the expense of partially recognized or unprivileged groups. For example, the Chulymtsy, who have been counted among the Siberian Tatars even by experts in anthropological publications. Siberian Tatars, in turn, have been arbitrarily included in the group of Tatars (that is, Volga Tatars) in census registration. Consequently the children of Siberian Tatars have to learn a "native language" at school which they perceive as foreign, because the authorities in the education system prepare teachers of the Tatars only in the Volga Tatar idiom.

Locally, that is within the republics, there is a tendency to exaggerate the number of a titular group at the expense of all others residing in the region, but especially at the expense of those groups which are considered to be a "threat." Well-known examples are the policies of Bashkir and Tatar authorities to reduce the numbers of Tatars and Bashkirs respectively within the territories of their republics by registering them as belonging ethnically to the titular group [e.g., Korostelev 1994]. Both academic and public primordialism and local policies in census campaigns have made community-based population statistics far less accessible than statistics on the regional and state levels, which makes it challenging to assess a group's

numerical strength. It is much easier to assess the numbers of an ethnic category (say, Tatars in Russia, or Germans in Omsk region) than to obtain reliable data at the local level, where the group's size may and should play a role in forming particular cultural, linguistic, or educational policy.

My brief commentaries on the numerical aspect of minority definition with a focus on Russia's peculiar approach seem to support the view that:

Assessment of a group's numerical strength in this country is a complex affair, as the relevant statistical and research procedures are situated in a highly politicized milieu, involving the group's struggle for official status and recognition;

Numerical strength of a group, though important, is not a decisive factor in determining the group's position in power relations and its political influence.

### **Non-Dominant Position**

The double-scale dilemma inherent in the assessment of ethnic group numerical strength is expressed also in the assessment of a group's situation in the local system of power sharing. This sociologically routine task was strictly excluded from the research agenda during Soviet times, with the result that we have no relevant research tradition and statistical monitoring tradition on which to rely. The state statistics institutions measured a lot of economic and social parameters, but these were measured relative to the economic sectors or regional populations in general. For this reason, the task of reconstructing a particular minority group's dynamics in terms of its position within the local power hierarchy (in relation to other similar

groups) still appears Herculean. Due to the lack of direct statistical data, measuring the position of a group in the local employment, housing, and educational spheres; its political involvement; its representation in the judiciary system; in local government; the militia; etc.; is a costly, time-consuming, and sometimes dangerous task. This is why many important aspects of the minority situation in terms of power relations have never been the object of research or systematic monitoring, either by state statistics bodies or in sociological and anthropological surveys. The information on the position of "titular" and "non-titular" minority groups in the most important public spheres such as political representation, or its situation in housing and labor markets is scarce and unsystematic, which further aggravates the difficulties of minority rights monitoring in Russia. To make things worse, restrictions on access to local archives that were standard in Soviet times are once again being imposed, as more researchers report on their arrival from the field.<sup>6</sup> If we acknowledge that even the collected and published data, incomplete as they are, remain due to their political relevance either distorted or misrepresented, then we have to conclude that the official assessments of a group's situation within local systems of power relations in Russia remain tendentious at best.

Recently some Russian anthropologists, challenging the primordialism and essentialism of their opponents and reification of minority groups, have proposed that minorities be understood as a "situation" and have rejected the idea of minority lists published in various directories, encyclopedias, and dictionaries of minority groups. Although such a position could be justified in the

context of debates between primordialists and constructivists that have gained momentum in Russian anthropology, the definition of a minority as a situation is too vague to locate its authors' position. Does it mean that the ethnic composition of a state or region is changing so fast (which is true for some of the constituent "subjects" of the Russian Federation due to migration flows), that the present majorities may lose their position? Or, alternatively, does it mean that the situation of a minority's being at the bottom of the power hierarchy might change overnight and its present vulnerability, underprivilege, and lower position turn the next day into privileged and elitist group status (which was true in several cases during the demise of the Soviet Union)? Finally, is there a subjective feeling of being a minority group which might evaporate, or be suddenly considered irrelevant (as was the case with several of the "titular" nations within Russia, whose leaders rejected minority status, proclaiming the sovereignty of their republics)?

I will agree that in all of these senses the minority position or status is a situation (after all, a situation and a position are synonymous in many contexts). But this logic seems to be better suited for times of rapid and revolutionary change, which, sadly, are times also of minority rights neglect. If on the basis of supposed or expected changes the minority status of a group is viewed as spurious or ephemeral, why should legislators and politicians bother to take special measures of protection for these groups? I think that the minority rights regulations and protection mechanisms are devised for structurally defined and stable situations, when no sudden changes in demographic or power distribution structures are expected.

The situation in which a minority gets to the top position and becomes an effective majority or elite, as I have argued earlier, is better analyzed within other conceptual frameworks than the framework of "majority-minority" relations (due to the non-democratic nature of the political and social environment where such changes are deemed possible).

I have discussed so far two basic elements of minority definition and the complications of their usage in the context of ex-Soviet political regimes. With these two elements of the minority conceptual definition (its numerical strength and its position on the scale of domination) being dubious, the official list of Russian national minority groups becomes questionable as well. This explains why there is no single officially recognized list of minority groups in Russia, and why legislators in the field of minority rights in this country have to devise new criteria of inclusion and exclusion to accommodate the interests and needs of various groups striving for the status. I shall try to illustrate this thesis with several examples.

The concept of minority proves to be very sensitive to minute ideological and political changes in state and regional policies. Speaking generally and from a terminological point of view, the appearance of any new concept in the conceptual field of "majority-minority" relations analysis produces a shift and changes all the concepts in the field. Thus, the existence of such terms as "nation," "people," "titular people," or "indigenous nation" in the minority discourse in Russia not only entails the existence of a unique set of concepts, but makes one understand that all the concepts in this set acquire either new meanings or new shades of meaning. A complex and intricate system of ethnic

categories exists in practically all ex-Soviet states; every such system is unique and resists generalization. That is why an analysis couched in terms of "minority-majority" relations is always an over-simplification, suited for international law and similar types of discourse. In Russia every constituent republic has its own ethnic group hierarchy, which finds its expression in local legislation. As is evident, with the growing number of ethnic groups considered "local," "titular," or "indigenous," the hierarchy becomes more complex and elaborate. Daghestan, with its population divided into more than thirty "indigenous peoples," provides a good example.

As in many other regions with complex ethnic structures, some of the smaller local ethnic groups of Daghestan have been arbitrarily united and registered together with numerically superior neighbors in Soviet censuses since 1926. Thus twelve or more indigenous peoples of the Ando-Cesian linguistic group were arbitrarily joined with the Avars, and the Kaitags and the Kubachins with the second largest group of the republic, the Darghins. The rest of the peoples were unofficially sorted into "state-forming" or the "main" and "non-state-forming." In political analysis, the local experts often employ linguistic-religious classifications, as well as such considerations as length of residence, often counted not in years or even generations, but in centuries, as in the case of the Nogai, who have resided in Daghestan since the 15th-17th centuries. Implicitly all these classifications serve as a basis for sorting the ethnic groups into "more" and "less native." "More native" are the groups speaking in local (non-Turkic and non-Slavic) languages, who are Sunni Muslims of Shafiit mashab (not Shiites, as are Azeris), and who

have resided on the territory of the republic "since time immemorial."

Since July 1994, according to the Dagestan Constitution, sixty-five constituencies with multiethnic population have been proportionally distributed among the "main" ethnic groups: in 12 of them, only the Avars could be elected to the parliament; in 12, the Kumyks; in 10, the Russians; in 7, the Darghins; in 5, the Tabasarans; in another 5, the Azeris; the Lezghins and the Chechens had 4 electoral districts each; the Laks, 3; the Tats, 2; and the Tsakhurs, 1. The State Council could be formed from the representatives of the fourteen "main peoples" (one representative from each of the "state-forming groups"). Though the groups who were considered "state-forming" were also the most numerous, as many ethnic groups were not officially considered "separate," the resulting classification principles are not easily interpreted in terms of a group's numbers.

An interesting case of conceptual struggles involving language and educational policies, nationalizing states, and diaspora is presented by Latvia. Besides the splitting of the population into titular nation and minorities, there is a detailed classification of minorities into "an ancient indigenous group" (the Livs), traditional or historical minorities (Germans, Jews, Poles, and Gypsies), and migrant minorities (Russians, Ukrainians, etc.). In the law on cultural autonomy adopted by the Supreme Council of the Latvian Republic in March 1991, the preamble enumerates the ethnic population categories:

"In the Latvian Republic there live the Lett nation, the ancient indigenous group of the Livs, as well as national and ethnic groups."

There are no official explanations or commentaries on the difference

between the concepts of national and ethnic groups, but unofficially the legislators explained that they designated as "national" the groups with a statehood beyond the boundaries of Latvia (such as Ukrainians), and as "ethnic" the groups that lacked such a statehood (such as Gypsies) [Antane, Tsilevich 1997:26].

Along with their citizenship, the new passports of Latvian citizens register an ethnic origin or *nationality*. A child from an ethnically mixed marriage may choose an ethnic affiliation of one of his/her parents. In all other cases where a citizen wishes to change a passport nationality entry, he/she must prove ethnic affiliation by producing evidence of genealogical or *blood* relations with the group, but not *self-identification* evidence.

In July 1994 the naturalization schedule was adopted as a part of the citizenship law, and with it, a more sophisticated classification of population categories. According to this schedule, ethnic Letts and Livs could apply for citizenship immediately after publication of the law. Among other privileged categories were "citizens' spouses," who had lived in marriage with Latvian citizens for ten years or more; persons of other ethnic groups who had legally entered Latvia prior to 1940; former citizens of Lithuania and Estonia, and schoolchildren finishing schools in which Lettish was a language of instruction. By 1996 another category of residents, young people aged 16-20 of all ethnic origins who had been born in Latvia were given the right to apply for citizenship, provided they complied with the Lettish knowledge requirements. As these requirements were strict, only slightly more than 400 out of a population of 28,000 eligible youngsters had applied by the end of 1996. Though for ethnic Letts naturalization procedures have been

replaced by a simplified registration procedure, about 17 thousand failed to meet the deadline of March 1996 due to various difficulties in collecting the evidence of their ethnic origin [Antane, Tsilevich 1997:57-58]. By the end of February 1996, 99 percent of the titular groups (Letts and Livs) had been granted citizen status. Among the "traditional minority" groups the percentage varied from 80 (Gypsies) to 60 (Poles). The migrant "non-traditional" minorities constituted the bulk of the population of non-citizens: only 38 percent of Russians, 19 percent of Belorussians, and 6 percent of Ukrainians were granted the status of a Latvian citizen [Antane, Tsilevich 1997:58].

### **Resource Scarcity in Russian Political Discourse and Legitimization of Ethnic Conflicts**

"Resource scarcity" rhetoric is often employed in Russian domestic and foreign policy debates. The classic texts of geopolitics of the early-twentieth century placed resource and conservation strategies solidly within the notion of national interest. Similarly, contemporary Russian politicians, as well as political elites of other newly independent states, are themselves working out notions of national interests and in so doing often link the notion of national interest to that of natural resources. This is especially true of right- and left-wing Russian nationalists, though so-called "neo-Eurasian" ideologists employ this line of argument as well.

What can be made of the natural resource-national interest discussion? What are the claims and how are they justified? This paper analyzes, first of all, when and why this linkage has proven compelling in the political sphere. That it is compelling is undeniable, and attested to by the fact of

hundreds of disputes over rights to resources that have arisen in post-Soviet states. It argues that this entire question is best understood by considering two basic competing paradigms by which natural resources are understood to be "available" and "consumed": the naturalistic paradigm and the instrumental/functionalist paradigm. Secondly, it analyzes how these paradigms have figured in Russian academic discourse. Thirdly, it looks at the concrete interactions between a specific kind of natural resource (namely, *territory*) and a specific case of national interest (namely, the *rights and claims of ethnically distinct groups*). Finally, it returns to the subject of discourse, to consider how current streams of Russian political analytical argument treat resources and national interest, and how a particular and somewhat arbitrary and malign perspective about this linkage is becoming institutionalized in the public sphere

### **Introduction: Conceptual Issues**

Any kind of human activity (if not any activity in general) involves and demands resource "usage," "consumption," "waste," or "exploitation." It is a truism, but one worth articulating, that different types of activity demand different resources. Any development or security program turns to wishful thinking without adequate material, financial, human, and ideational resources. This straightforward way of thinking about resources belongs to the naturalistic paradigm, which at present dominates much of political and ecological theorizing. After all, it is self-evident to construe "natural resources" as inherent in the natural environment. Within this prevailing paradigm a resource is something *objective*; that exists "naturally," before and beyond the framework of human activity—something that should be



"involved in," or used in this activity to maintain its ongoing operation, either in the form of "raw" materials, or as an essential component of human action.

A naturalistic approach is widely used by scientists, who apply the concept of resources to cell and plant growth and other non-human types of activity and who build detailed classifications of resources, basing them on "natural" or naturalized foundations, a "natural order" of things, etc. Classificatory *characteristics* are attributed to objects of classification as "essential," that is conceptually transformed into *properties* of the classified things.

*Attributions* thus are often not differentiated from the *analytically* isolated "parts." This fusion of properties and attributes enables proponents of the naturalistic approach to classify resources into general and species, for example, into food and energy resources, energy resources into oil, gas, and coal resources; oil resources into light and heavy oils; coal into brown and black, etc.

Alternative to the naturalistic approach, is the *functional* or *activity oriented* paradigm, according to which resources are not viewed as objects of some naturalized classification, but as functional units. Here, the concept of resources exists entirely *within* the framework of human activity, where resources are understood as a composite artificial-natural entity. In this approach, therefore, something is viewed as a resource only when and where there appear possibilities and the means to use it in human activity. In this ontology, it makes no sense to employ the concept of resources with respect to natural processes such as plant growth or volcano eruption. In short, the functional paradigm challenges the naturalistic paradigm's assumption that resources are universal and primordial. Even the term "natural

resources" becomes awkward, for human history documents many cases of "useless" things being turned into resources (for example, minerals which were always at hand, but which could not be used as resources proper, such as ore, oil, uranium, etc.).

An activity-oriented or functional approach to resources implies and demands the usage of typologies (not classifications, as in the naturalistic approach), that is, it aims to consider the variety of the *means of usage*, not the variety of the *objects used*. A typology, as it is understood here, is always *representational*, that is, it attempts to sort and order human representations of the world, but not the objects represented. As people of different cultures and professions have different representations of the world, they would understand differently what a resource could be; what would be waste and garbage for one, could be a resource for another, what might be fantasies and shallow ideas for one, could be used as a precious resource by another. Thus, the functional approach to resources is not only *representational*, but also *relational*, or *relativistic*.

As human action and its goals vary, one and the same "natural resource" could be employed and understood differently in different action perspectives. In the naturalistic approach a resource (oil, money, labor) is consumed "naturally," whereas in the functional approach there is a variety of consumption forms of one and the same "material:" oil could be used as an energy resource, as raw material for the chemical industry, as a commodity, or as a political resource (i.e., means of political pressure).

All this is no news, but it is interesting to note here that within the ideology of stable development a naturalistic approach which is being used there creates several paradoxes.

Proponents of stable development argue that several kinds of natural resources which are essential for a contemporary economy are running thin, becoming scarcer or exhausted; so humanity, they claim, should, in the name of coming generations, economize or use only renewable resources. It is evident here that the stable development theoreticians employ a naturalistic concept of resources as they link a particular resource to a particular type of its consumption (thus linking contemporary economy consumption modes and particular resources in a rigid manner). As the succession of future generations could be thought of as practically infinite, so the prescribed "economy of natural resources" is not a way to stability, but an inadequate or purely ideological way to a frozen state, *stasis*, in which all kinds of human activity are reproduced and there is no production *per se*. In the naturalistic perspective, resources are always juxtaposed to activity and the usage of non-renewable resources always creates one and the same problem: either you stop activity to save resources, or you use resources to run eventually into activity bypass due to resource exhaustion. In the functional approach—which is often unreflectively and intuitively used by politicians and experienced businessmen—the diversification of resources in their practice is reached by manipulation of goals and activity means.

### **Ethnicity and Territory**

A naturalistic paradigm in the treatment of resources is perfectly tailored to a naturalistic understanding of ethnicity, which is common in all post-Soviet states and probably in all of Eastern and Central Europe. One of the reasons, perhaps, why instrumentalist-constructivist frameworks have

failed to resonate in the public's imagination is that they do not assign any automatic significance to *territory*. In both strains of primordialist thought in Russian anthropology, territory is definitive. Landscape plays a crucial role in the process of *ethnogenesis* as described by Lev Gumilev, whose books are as widely read as they are well written (in a manner reminiscent of historical novels, travel books, or adventure stories) and appeal to a nationalistically oriented audience. Yulian Bronley includes territory in his definition of *ethnos* as well, listing it among the most important ethnic attributes.

"Naturalistic" ethnicity is often-if not always-territorialized. Territory becomes an ethnic homeland, an *ethnos's* inalienable property, *Lebensraum* for a living ethnic "organism." *Blut* (which is camouflaged in some contemporary writings as "ethnic heritage," "primordial givens," or some sort of "intergenerational reproduction") in this perspective is always intrinsically connected to *Boden* (that is, territory, landscape, geographical *locus*). This ideational linkage of *ethnos* to *territory* would seem to prime its advocates for ethnoterritorial conflict. And, indeed, there were almost 300 territorial claims made on behalf of ethnic groups or movements and parties in the CIS between 1988 and 1996. Almost half of these are still active and ongoing. "Territorial claims," "contested territories" and "territorial interests" are the most frequent terms that are employed in the current neo-geopolitical discourse. It is worth mentioning here that in various ethnoterritorial conflicts there are different "objects" that are contested: very often the "object" is territory itself, that is land. In this case it might be treated and is often actually treated as a resource. In other cases, the

right of a particular ethnic group or category to live on the territory is contested. Sometimes only property rights or managerial aspects of territory usage on the side of one or another ethnic group are contested.

Territorial claims on behalf of an ethnic group usually seek corroborative legitimization. Ethnic leaders and politicians in ethnic mobilization campaigns often resort to what might be called *appropriation of history*, by which history itself becomes an important political resource. The appropriation of time, thus, is a strategy employed in the service of appropriating space. Here academic reconstructions of an ethnic group's history play a crucial role. These reconstructions are usually based on a certain conception of time, in which it is treated as a homogenous flow, characterized by the absence of any gap, rupture, schism, or fracture (or what Heidegger might have called *der Riss*). This conception of a homogenous, continuous, and uninterrupted flow of time enables them to lend their time concept a quality of transparency, supported on a linguistic level by optical metaphors of *looking at the past*, *viewing it*, etc. Russian historiography, archaeology, and ethnography are very often based on this reduction of the past to the present, and represent a projection of the modern state of things and a contemporary understanding of time, based on the concepts of continuity and homogeneity in the historical process [Sokolovski 1994a: 6-7].

Examples of an instrumental use of cultural history are numerous. One such example is the case of the Azeri historians whose nationalistic interpretation of the history of Caucasian Albania claims the territory of ancient Albania as the "grand-fatherland of the Azeris" (the same territories, incidentally, are viewed by Armenian

historians as "historical Armenia"). This construction of a "rich and ancient" history of the Azeri people has as a necessary component a description of the Karabakh territory as the "heart of Azerbaijan." Similarly, Georgian intellectuals declare Shida Kartli or Somachablo (Southern Ossetia) "the heartland of Georgia"; Ingush leaders consider the village of Angusht, located in a disputed area, as the "fatherland of the Ingush"; and Ossetian intellectuals claim that the bones of the Alans, cultural predecessors of the Ossetians, "are scattered throughout the Northern Caucasus." Many of the so-called national histories, encyclopedias, and cultural studies often bear little resemblance to the balanced, unprejudiced, and historiographically-attentive accounts by which a people's actual history and ethnography might be learned.

While objectivist interpretations of ethnic group histories aim at linking archaeological artifacts and cranial measurements with contemporary cultures, instrumentalists and constructivists pay attention to the role of cultural repertoires and language as symbols around which a perception of ethnic distinctiveness crystallizes. For the latter, historical reconstructions are merely ideological means used to justify the authenticity and the continuity of one or another ethnic identity.

In addition to claims for an ethnic "Ur-homeland," I would mention here two additional types of cases in which the inseparability of ethnos and territory in the public consciousness and in political discourse sets the stage for conflict. The first is the case of territorially constructed *ethnoses* such as Altai, Shor, or Khakass in southwestern Siberia, where central authorities arbitrarily united diverse tribal groups into one nationality on a territorial basis. Though the constructed "na-

tions" acquired arbitrary conceptual and territorial borders (which are however, partially undermined by the attempts of some constitutive groups to have their own identity, as with the Kumanda or Telat, currently categorized as constituents of the "Altai nation"), this fact has not prevented the national elite from striving for higher status and sovereignty, including control over regional resources.

The other type of case is the host of ethno-territorial conflicts arising wherever pastoralist and farming groups come into close and prolonged contact. The classical example here is the cohabitation of farmers and pastoralists in the Transcaucasus (Azeri seminomads and Armenian settled farmers in Karabakh) and Northern Caucasus (transhumant Avars, Laks, or other "Highlanders" and Kumyk farmers in Daghestan) [Yamskov 1993].

### **Ethnic Conflicts over Territory and Resources**

As mentioned above, a naturalistic discourse on ethnicity is reinforced by a naturalistic treatment of resources. The Soviet and post-Soviet "political unconscious" binds the notion of *ethnos* with territory and its resources, thus creating a predisposition to see territorial claims by ethnic groups as legitimate. Contemporary research on ethnic conflicts in post-Soviet space contains numerous examples of such claims.

Contemporary ethnoterritorial conflicts could be grouped geographically into six large areas: the Caucasus and Transcaucasus, Central Asia, the Baltic states, Moldova and Ukraine, the Volga-Urals region, and southern Siberia [Stepanov 1994]. Although ethno-territorial conflicts are characteristic of all the regions mentioned, conflicts over scarce resources are

endemic only to the first two—the Caucasus and Central Asia. Rural overpopulation and co-residence of former nomads and settled farming groups also characterize these regions. In pre-Soviet times, when the now prevalent naturalistic paradigm of ethnic reality was limited to academia and to some extent the political elite, there were no claims to symbolic rights over territories as "ethnic homelands." As long as the pastoralists maintained their traditional way of life, it was not feasible for them to settle down in the areas of their seasonal pastures in summer—as in the case of the Azeris in the alpine meadows of Karabakh—or winter (as in the case of the Avars and Laks in lowland dry steppe areas among the Kumyks). It was not feasible for several reasons: the dietary needs of their animals; their own cultural and psychological stereotypes (e.g., the high prestige of nomadism or of settled life in ancient villages in the upper mountain zone); or traditional social and state regulations regarding land use. For neighboring farming communities in valleys, these alpine or steppe pastures, not suited for cultivation, were lands used by certain groups of pastoralists for centuries and so in some way belonging to them. Both by local state authorities predating Russian rule and by the Russian empire itself, these pastures were officially considered to be state-owned lands, traditionally rented by certain pastoral ethnic groups ("tribes" or "clans") which normally—without open war—could not be denied access to them [Yamskov 1993].

Soviet agrarian policies of the late 1920's—early 1930's were designed to reconstruct the life of "underdeveloped" ethnic groups, including pastoralists. They aimed at the cultural modernization of all ethnic groups, and attempted to make them all

equally "advanced" settled farming communities. The results can be seen in numerous communities of Azeri semi-nomads which were compulsorily settled in lowlands (winter pastures) and in the mountains (summer pastures) around the present-day Nagorno-Karabakh republic. The state policy of resettling "highlanders" from their ancient overpopulated villages in the mountains to the new villages on winter pastures in Kumykia, irrigated by newly-built canals, lasted well into the 1970's. All these former pastoral communities, resettled in the "new" places, were to a large extent really transformed into farmers, with the State contributing considerable resources to this project. From now on only professional shepherds (and their families, in cases of former nomads) were allowed to migrate all year round between seasonal mountain and lowland pastures with state-owned animals. In this case, settlement patterns were changed drastically and deliberately by the State, but ethnic populations involved still clearly remember the "traditional" situation prevailing in the early 1920's and before. Rising ethnonationalism has aggravated the situation, and ideas of "the land," traditionally used by and thus belonging to "us," are widespread in both conflicting ethnic populations. For example, there are still many Azeris, born in the alpine zone of Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1920's who now live in adjacent lowland areas of Azerbaijan. Many "highlanders" now reside in new villages, constructed on the same pieces of land that they personally used as winter lowland pastures for sheep in the 1920's, when they were boys helping their fathers [Yamskov 1991]. On the other hand, inhabitants of neighboring old farming settlements (Armenians, Kumyks) look upon them as recent (in the steppes of

Daghestan) or potential (in the mountains of Karabakh) invaders of their historical homelands. All these conflicting claims give little cause for optimism about peaceful solutions to these conflicts. War in Nagorno-Karabakh is ongoing and a tense situation is reported in Kumykia, where there have been clashes between armed Kumyks, on the one side, and Laks and Avars, on the other [Yamskov 1993].

The problem of ethnic conflicts over territories, caused by the imposed cultural modernization of one or more of the claimant ethnic groups, is prominent not only in the Caucasus, but also in many Central Asian regions. A serious and prolonged inter-ethnic conflict over scarce resources (land and water) is found in the conflict between Tajiks of the Isfara region and Kyrgyz of the neighboring Batken' region in 1989-90. Conflicts over water and pastures have long been endemic in the region; recent violent clashes include those which occurred in the villages of Vorukh-Tangi in 1982, and in Matcha and Aktatyr in 1988. Previously, before the transition to settled life, Kyrgyz semi-nomads of the Isfara valley and Tajik farmers occupied different ecological niches. A market existed in Vorukh, based on natural goods exchange between the groups. In the 1930's a policy of compulsory settlement for Kyrgyz semi-nomads reached the Isfara valley. A shortage of water and scarcity of arable lands in the valley forced the new permanent settlers to concentrate around winter pastures and settle on the lands which were considered by local Tajiks as their property (they had been using the lands in summer). Re-orientation of the settled Kyrgyz economy towards husbandry and crop-growing agriculture, which had been introduced to their villages in the 1950's, changed the

Kyrgyz from former (nomadic) neighbors into (farming) competitors. Growing demographic pressure (from the 1960's to the 1990's the population of the valley grew by 2.5 times and reached 60 thousand inhabitants) exacerbated the situation, and led to increasing claims on the part of the Tajiks to the lands occupied by Kyrgyz settlers. Though since 1989 several measures have been taken to alleviate the tension (land tenure, small business support, melioration of some undeveloped land plots, etc.), the coming land privatization campaign in Kyrgyzstan is feared by Tajiks as a possible conflict trigger.

This interpretation of events is widely held and shared in many details by both Tajik and Kyrgyz social scientists<sup>7</sup>. It is interesting to note here how naturalistic concepts of ethnicity and legitimization of land claims through constructed ethnic histories and nationalistic discourse operate. It is worth noting as well, that conceptually the "moral" position of *permanently* settled groups is considered to be more "legitimate" compared to the claims of groups who were using the land seasonally. This understanding springs from the coupled notions of *ethnos* and *territory* in the naturalistic paradigm of ethnic reality perception. Nomads evidently deviate from this standard concept of a people, for their links to territory are different. That is why it was considered possible and even just to claim the return of lands which are used by settled nomads (Kyrgyz in Batken', or Avars and Laks in Kumykia), while the reverse (demands to return pastures previously used by pastoralists and turned later into crop-growing plantations) never happened. That is, claims by settled farmers seem to be automatically attributed more weight and legitimacy than those by nomadic groups would

be. This helps explain why former nomads feel the need for "surplus measures" (e.g., the planned land privatization) to further legitimize their rights to lands.

Part of the difficulty in explaining a subject like "territorialized ethnicity" is that it is often so deeply embedded in-as to be indistinguishable from—the fundamental assumptions of nationalistic discourse. As a *topos*, moreover, it is inherent in many conceptual systems and disciplinary lexicons. We may approach this subject, nonetheless, through the available and much discussed topic of "national minorities," which potentially contains both the idea of place ("national") and of ethnos ("minority"). As has been argued above, the concept of "national minority" as it is employed in Russia and most of the ex-Soviet states, substantially deviates from the standard international understanding. The theoretical issues concerning the interrelationships of national minorities, nationalizing states, and external national homelands have been brilliantly analyzed in the works of Roger Brubaker (see, for example, Brubaker 1994). He demonstrated the relational character and conceptual as well as "essentialist" interdependence of ethnicity, state, and territory (with its resources) in the political discourses of modern European history. The hypothesis put forward above—that the naturalistic paradigm applied to both resources and ethnicity subtly contributes to the production and reproduction of conflictual relationships between territorialized ethnic groups—is supported by the analysis of ethno-territorial conflicts. In Russia the *topos* (ethnicity-territory), or to be more exact, *ethnos-territory* is further reinforced by a proliferation of geopolitical publications and the influence they exert on foreign and domestic

policies, especially on such an aspect of these policies as the so-called "nationalities policy." Geopolitical jargon pervades official and semi-official documents of various parties, political speeches, and discourses on ethnic, cultural, and security issues, etc.

The current geopolitical works in Russia might be categorized into several "brands" or "streams," ranging from conservative nationalism (some communist theoreticians and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy), to mystical (A. Dugin) and realist (mostly academic discourse in research centers for security and strategic studies, international relations, etc.). I mention geopolitics in the context of this discussion of ethnic conflicts and scarce resources not only because it is an essential element in reproduction of the naturalistic paradigm in the treatment of ethnicity, but also due to the fact that the notion of resources is so frequently invoked in contemporary geopolitical writings, that "geopolitics" springs up as an associate whenever "resources" are mentioned.

As for the treatment of resources, various strains of geopolitical thought differ in their assessments of what actually happens to the resources of Russia and in Russia. Often one and the same author in one and the same book or article claims that a particular kind of resource in Russia is "unlimited," "rich," "vast," etc., and, at the same time, "depleted," "becoming scarce," etc. Resource rhetoric is present in journalistic speculations on Russia's future and academic ruminations on Russia's past and present. I will illustrate the way geopolitics influences and is influenced by nationalistic discourse by citing some current Russian geopolitical publications.

The magazine *Elementy* represents mystical, metaphysical, or esoteric geopolitics. E. Morozov, in his article

"Russian-German Relations: Geostrategic Aspects" on the pages of "Geopolitical Notebooks" in A. Dugin's journal *Elementy: Eurasian Review*, is constantly comparing the economic, demographic, and military power (in terms of natural population and financial resources) of the world centers of power (U.S.A., Japan, and Western Europe), linking it to the history of the "Arian *ethnos*" – Germans and Slavs [Morozov 1994:26–27]. He explicitly mentions the work of L. Gumilev and reasons about "restoration of bio-potentials of the Russian and German *ethnos*", which, according to his estimation, will demand not a score, but hundreds of years.

A. Dugin, in a series of articles "Metaphysics of Continents" in the same journal (later published as an essay "The Great War of Continents" in the book *Conspirology*) [Dugin 1994], describes the world system as a tripartite structure: the Rich North, the Poor South (Third World), and the Poor North (the former second world and Russia). According to him, the Poor North should not strive to become rich and support the "mondialistic" projects of development, progress, and modernization of the Rich North. It should evade as well the "archaization of its own traditions and reducing them to the folklore level of ethno-confessional reservation." It should be spiritual, intellectual, active, and aggressive. The term "The Third World," coined by representatives of the Rich North, bears a pejorative sense of "nobody's territory," "nobody's source of natural and human resources," which are meant to be subordinated, exploited, and used by the rich countries.

Zhirinovskiy and his party experts have published prolifically on geopolitical topics, but Zhirinovskiy's main geopolitical ideals are discussed in two books, *A Thrust to the South* and *Spit to*

*the West*. One of his basic ideas is reorientation of Russia's partnership ties from the West to the South, and a degree of autarky for Russia, non-interference in Western politics, which could save a lot of natural resources [Zhirinovski 1995:9].

Like metaphysical or esoteric geostrategists, he claims that the West ("the Rich North" of A. Dugin) is plundering the rest of the world. He specifically mentions that Americans are very interested in Russia's resources, and even more, in its territory as a potential site for dangerous waste inhumations (including radioactive waste) and ecologically dangerous industries [Zhirinovski 1995:28].

His second book contains pages on resource rhetoric, analysis of resource depletion politics in the colonies [Zhirinovski 1995:22-30], discussion of renewable resources consumption strategies, etc. All these discussions are embedded in nationalistic reasoning and the analysis is permeated by the names of ethnic groups and peoples.

Academic writings on geopolitics are more balanced and neutral in their treatment of "ethnic/national adversaries," and some disclaim the nationalistic discourse of neo-Slavophiles as outdated. In the analysis, they put stress on resources, and usually in the opposition "national interest-state interest" opt for the state interests [Sorokin 1996: 22-30]. Natural resources and territory are viewed as "traditional geopolitical values," and "the main factors of Russia's geopolitical might."

They revise the classical geopolitical thought of the early-twentieth century and add new dimensions to the geostrategic analysis of the post-war period. The concept of resources is treated broadly as a rule: they include in their discussions economic, financial, human (demography, quality of

population, including its educational level, etc.), and even moral (ideological, confessional) and political (stability of regime, societal solidarity, leadership legitimacy, etc.) resources. Their analyses closely resemble and mirror strategic and global processes modeling studies and are basically similar to their western analogues [*Global Resources*, 1986].

Unlike the classical or traditional geopolitical struggle for "living space," in current geopolitics the behavior of three different types of agents is analyzed: states, polities of different levels (unrecognized and self-proclaimed states such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Transdnestria, Chechnya etc.; Russian Federation subjects, etc.), and stateless ethnoses [Razuvaev 1993:12-13]. The geopolitical analysis of ethno-separatistic movements within Russia forms an important part of this academic "brand" of geopolitics [Razuvaev 1993:39-48].

Unfortunately, these discussions of geopolitics, whether in political or academic discourse essentially reinforce the linkage that this paper analyzes and attempts to deconstruct—the linkage between ethnos and resources formed along the lines of the naturalistic paradigm. This paper has tried to demonstrate that the "ethnos-resources" *topos* primes its adherents for conflict, which may be based on *substantiated* or on *artificial/mythical* claims and claimants. Furthermore, the citations noted above represent just a small sample of what is in fact a massive presence in the Russian intellectual arena. The "ethnos-resources" link has become, ominously, an *assumption* of influential public figures and the mass public. It has become part of the conceptual or linguistic landscapes of the Russian and other NIS contemporary reality



and begun to experience a degree of institutionalization in the practices and planning strategies of analysts and policymakers. The critical analysis put forth by this paper and its attempt to de-couple, or at least reexamine the naturalistic version of a linkage be-

tween ethnos and resources could be viewed as a step towards reversing its incipient institutionalization—a prophylactic vaccine against the onslaught of an unexamined, and conflict-enhancing, idea.

## Notes

1. "Provisionally" because we speak here of the so-called international terms, such as "minority," which are present in the same graphic and very similar phonemic forms in many European languages, but may have different meanings; if it were one and the same language, then it would be homonymy in the standard use of the term.
2. The difference between "Russian" (*russky*) and "Rossian" (*rossiiskiy*) remains largely ignored in the West; "Rossian" refers to the state and empire and applies to citizens of all nationalities comprising the polity's population, whereas "Russian" is an ethnic category designation. Thus the term "Russian state" (*russkoe gosudarstvo*) would refer to Russian polity of the feudal period, while "Rossian state" (*rossiiskoe gosudarstvo*) means the multiethnic polity of the new and newest history, that is Russian empire (*Rossiskaya imperia*) and Russian Federation (*Rossiskaya Federatsia*).
3. I will cite one recent example: a law project "On the Legal Status of Ethno-cultural Associations, Representing Linguistic, Ethno-confessional, and Ethnic Minorities", discussed in the Committee of Public Associations and Religious Organizations of the State Duma on March 18, 1997, contains the following definition of "people, leading a traditional way of life (minority indigenous, or aboriginal peoples): [these are] peoples (minorities) of the Russian Federation, at a less advanced phase of socio-economic development than that of the majority, whose way of life fully or to a large degree depends on the natural environment of their place of residence and whose legal status is partially or fully regulated by their own customs, traditions, or a special jurisdiction" [emphasis added - S.S.].
4. A "titular group" in the Soviet and post Soviet contexts means a group which has given its name to the respective administrative and political unit, or state, such as Kazakhs and Latvians in Kazakhstan and Latvia; Bashkirs, Karelians and Tatars in Bashkortostan, Karelia, and Tatarstan etc. A titular group, being often a numerical minority within the state-or, as in the case of some republics in the Russian Federation, even on the territory of a respective republic, could at the same time make use of its top positions in the regional power hierarchy and effectively be a majority (or power elite) with political behavior patterns appropriate for a majority.
5. In Russian, the term *malye narody* was changed at the end of the 1980's for reasons of political correctness to *malochislennye narody* ("small-numbered"), as the word *malyi* can have the meaning not of "numerically small," but also that of "smallness" as opposed to "greatness."
6. See recent discussion in *Current Anthropology*, especially the remarks made by S. Arutiunov [1998 Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 8].
7. Unpublished reports from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan of the members of the Network of Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflicts in Post-Soviet States (Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences).

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Notes from the Author:

The idea for this research originated in 1996, when I was a Research Fellow at John Olin's Harvard Russian Institute of International Affairs in Moscow. The Institute's Director at the time, Amy Crutchfield, sustained a creative atmosphere and provided help as a consistently interested and supportive editor of my research in Russian geopolitical discourse. I am grateful also to the staff of the J. and K. MacArthur Foundation in Moscow, who provided me with the opportunity to carry out research on the subject of "Violence and Minority Problems in Post-Totalitarian States." Earlier drafts of both papers included in this publication were presented as reports at the International Studies Association Congress in Toronto (April 1997), UNESCO MOST seminar in Dubrovnik (November 1997) and ASN Convention at the Harriman Institute in New York (April 1998).

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the staff of the Kennan Institute in both Washington, D.C. and Moscow; particularly to Atiq Sarwari, who, through his ongoing support, made my research term at the Institute pass so smoothly and delightfully, as well as to my research assistant, Sarah Shields, for her relentless assistance in my roaming of D.C. libraries and for her infinite patience with my never-ending research demands.

Research for this working paper was supported in part by a grant from the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, with funds provided by the United States Information Agency and administered through the Regional Scholar Exchange Program. None of these organizations are responsible for the views expressed.