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Identity Politics and Indigeneity Construction in the Russian Census 2002¹

Sergei V. Sokolovski²

Abstract

This paper presents the arguments in the development of new lists of ethnic categories and languages in the Russian population census of 2002, describes the related census technology, and within this framework elaborates on the topic of indigeneity construction. It also comments on legal definitions of indigenous peoples in Russia and provides an interpretation of the numerical threshold employed in several federal laws on indigenous peoples.

To be an officially recognised ethnic group in Russia has always entailed political visibility and often a special status with an associated set of legal and administrative provisions. In addition to *'titular peoples'* of the republics, the Russian legal system has several legal categories based on ethnicity, such as *indigenous peoples* and *national minorities*, whose members claim and attain special status and associated rights. In order to ensure these rights, the state administration needs to periodically collect reliable information on the numbers of people in such categories. Population census is considered the best means for obtaining such information. The paper is a case study of the emergence and construction of politically salient social classifications that underpin such phenomena as ethnicity and nationalism in contemporary Russia.

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Yoshiko M. Herrera, Associate Professor of the Department of Government (Harvard University), who invited me to collaborate on the project "State Appraisal: Transformations in Statistical Institutions and the Russian State". Within the framework of the research project implemented in September – November 2003 we visited and conducted interviews with regional State Statistical Committee officers in Vladivostok, Yakutsk, Irkutsk, Ust'-Ordynsk, Ekaterinburg, Krasnodar, Maikop, St. Petersburg, Cheboksary, and Riazan'. I have also used for this paper some of the data accumulated during the period of July 2000 to June 2002 at which time I worked on the project "Fin-de-Siècle History of Russian Anthropology and Nationality Policy", sponsored by the Research Support Scheme (grant No. 1005/2000). The bulk of the data used in the paper, however, was collected during my involvement in the work of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (IEA) census commission (2001-2003) and within the project "Identity and Language in the Russian Population Census of 2002", conducted by a team of researchers from IEA and Brown University (Providence) and sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation (New York). I owe special thanks to the directors of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Chris Hann and Günther Schlee, who kindly invited me to spend a month in Halle, and my colleagues at the Siberian Studies Centre – Joachim Otto Habeck, Brian Donahoe, Virginie Vaté, and Agnieszka Halemba, who made my stay at the MPI for Social Anthropology both enjoyable and productive. Finally, I would like to acknowledge that I have greatly benefited from thoughtful commentaries made by my reviewers Johan Rasanayagam and Tanya Richardson.

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Introduction

Census-taking is a favoured modern state technology for population construction and monitoring, as well as a tool of group and individual identity politics. The last Russian census of October 2002, conducted in a period that could be viewed as the aftermath of nationalist revival of the 1990s, has attracted an unusual degree of political attention. Ethnic revival after *perestroika* and identity politics stemming from the constitutional right of persons to proclaim their own ethnic identity have brought legitimacy, autonomy, and official recognition to various ethnic groups, which were previously considered part of larger entities. The struggle for official recognition, however, has not been easy for many of them, and the preparation of the census has been viewed by many leaders of such groups as a chance to strengthen their positions in the political struggle for visibility, legitimacy and associated access to resources.

To trace the on-going construction of indigeneity and the reproduction of the discourse that supports, ramifies or obfuscates it is a challenging task, for both conceptual construction and associated discourse occur simultaneously at many sites, in academia and in government offices, at the grass-root and the elite levels. One should engage in what George Marcus termed 'a multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995) in order to get a sense of underlying processes. I have been privileged in that my position as a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (hereafter IEA) provided me with access to many central sites where this construction happens: the Russian State Duma and the Congress of Indigenous Peoples, the IEA population census committee and summer schools for indigenous peoples activists, and finally academia. Through these and other institutions I had numerous discussions with colleagues, and conducted fieldwork in several regions of Siberia and the Ural, where my informants shared their experiences in conducting the census and answering the census questionnaire. I will focus first on the background of the census and on the work of the IEA census committee.

An explanation might be required why Russia registers ethnic and linguistic affiliation or identity in the census at all, as many contemporary states do not do so and survive without this 'vital information'. This issue was raised well before the current census as there is a provision in the Russian constitution that every person has the right to proclaim their own identity but nobody was obligated to share this information (Art. 26(1)). This issue was raised by the head of the State Statistical Committee Vladimir Sokolin, who stated that to include the question on 'nationality' (ethnic group affiliation) in the new census would violate the right of a person to abstain from proclaiming one's own ethnic identity. His legal advisers, however, indicated that census-taking would not violate this right as a person may or may not answer

the census question on nationality. This public debate was preceded by a debate on the issue of abolishing ethnic affiliation information from the new internal passports, and many representatives of republics within the Russian Federation looked at it as a step towards the assimilation of non-Russian minorities. The debate resulted in the decision to allow republican governments to use additional forms attached to passports where nationality and republic citizenship could be indicated. The position of the elites in the republics on issues of official registration of ethnic affiliation could have been a factor in the government's decision to introduce the question on ethnic affiliation (*natsionalnost'*) into the questionnaire of the first post-Soviet census.

What was at stake in the public debate on the new passports, and why did republic elites oppose abolishing ethnic identity information in various forms of state registration, including passports? To be an officially recognised ethnic group in Russia has always entailed political visibility and more often than not a special status with an associated set of legal and administrative provisions. In addition to 'titular peoples' of the republics, the Russian legal system has several legal categories based on ethnicity, such as indigenous peoples and national minorities, whose members claim and attain a special status, associated rights and privileges. In order to ensure these rights (including, for example, earlier retirement and exemption from military service, as in the case of northern indigenous minorities) the state administration needs reliable information on the numbers of people in such categories. Russia also has a system of schools where minority languages are taught as a separate subject or are used as media of instruction. School authorities use the census information in education system planning; one is able to tell more accurately how many teachers and textbooks are needed for the teaching of a particular language. Thus an attempt by federal authorities to stop the state's interference into what came to be considered a form of private identity and withdraw the state's regulation of ethnic affiliation had been viewed by some nationalist leaders as an infringement on their political and cultural rights.

One more factor in favour of putting the 'nationality question' into the census questionnaire was the demographers' concern over the comparability of the census results with previous census data; it had been used in seven Soviet census questionnaires since the census of 1920.

Pre-Census Deliberations

In 1999 the Russian government issued a decree³, according to which the census was to take place in the period from October 9 to October 16, 2002; the population count time was

³ Decree No. 1064 'On the all-Russian population census of 2002', September 22, 1999.

scheduled for 0:00 hours, October 9, 2002. Initially, the census was to take place in January 1999, ten years after the Soviet census of 1989. However, the currency default of August 1998 left the government without the necessary resources and the census was postponed indefinitely. A year later the rise of the oil price brought revenue and stabilised the Russian Rouble. Consequently, the government put the issue of the census back on its agenda. In summer of 2000, the former Russian State Statistical Committee (*Goskomstat*, recently renamed the Federal Statistical Service) announced an open competition for the preparation of dictionaries of nationalities and languages to be used in the future census. As a result, in August 2000 the IEA signed a state contract to prepare four dictionaries (lists of nationalities, ethnic self-designations and languages and a comprehensive dictionary of nationalities with explanatory notes) to be used in coding the completed questionnaires before the census count. The Academic Council of the IEA appointed three members to its census commission with the institute's director Valery Tishkov as its chair⁴.

The commission had to carry out the painstaking task of reviewing the state of ethnic group research among over two hundred ethnic groups and linguistic communities within a year and provide details on existing ethnonyms (ethnic self-designations) and their geographical distribution in terms of regions and districts where they were expected to be used (geographical distribution was later used in the process of verification of the census counts). Hence the commission members had to review previous knowledge of settlement patterns of various groups and the ethnic processes these groups were involved in (and, especially, migration, which has been a considerable factor in post-Soviet Russia, as it substantially altered ethnic compositions of entire regions). Current demands for separate group status on the part of various ethnic elites were to be taken into account as well. In short, we had to grasp the ethnic composition of a vast territory of the country, comprising over 17 million km² and stretching from the west to the east for more than 9,000 km. We dealt with this vast space in great 'chunks', cutting this territory into traditional ethnographic areas: North-West, Volga-Urals, Northern Caucasus, European North, Siberia and the Far East. The rationale for confronting this huge puzzle (as we had to anticipate what people would answer on the questions of ethnic and linguistic affiliation in various parts of the country) was predicated on modern census-

⁴ The commission included a specialist on ethnic demography and cartography who took part in similar projects for the Soviet censuses of 1959, 1979 and 1989 (Prof. Pavel Puchkov), a specialist on Siberian and northern peoples who was also an expert of the State Duma and had been involved in the preparation of several laws on the peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East (Prof. Zoya Sokolova) and the author of this paper, who had been involved in a critical assessment of the previous census of 1989. All these dictionaries according to the contract terms, were to be prepared by three deadlines: the list of nationalities and two alphabetic lists of nationalities and of languages were to be forwarded to *Goskomstat* by November 30, 2000, a systematic dictionary of nationalities with an index of the regions where their members predominantly resided by March 30, 2001 and explanatory notes with clarification of principles used for the preparation of the dictionaries by August 30, 2001.

taking technology where the census questionnaires filled in by census-takers are subjected afterwards to coding, and the computer-readable codes are then scanned by scanners⁵ (see Appendix, Graph 1). In order to make the census answers computer readable we had to provide an exhaustive category lists of ethnic and linguistic self-designations.

Since the last Soviet census of 1989 I had been an advocate of the ‘open list’ approach⁶, which however, would have required a complete revision of the census-taking technology. With the open list no guess-work on who, where and what answer might be made on questions of nationality and language would be needed, as the requisite lists are compiled *a posteriori*, after the census, on the basis of the completed questionnaires. Technically this procedure is more time-consuming, since in order to make the lists, one would have to look through a substantial number of completed questionnaires in every region as presumably every region might have some unique ethnic and linguistic categories. To solve this problem I suggested coding letters of the Russian alphabet instead of coding names of categories, and then using the first five or six letters of self-designations which would produce unique 10 or 12 digit codes for every such designation. Unfortunately, the *Goskomstat* officers were not ready to so radically change the technology they had been using for several decades. Moreover, the software designed for counting and checking the census results had already been written, and they were unable or reluctant to pay for the new software.

In compiling the new lists of ethnic self-designations, official ethnic group names, names of languages and the list of districts where these self-designations might be found, we could not use the classifications of the previous Soviet censuses of 1989, 1979, 1970 etc. or could only use them with caution. Why should the lists for the census 2002 have been constructed anew? What was the motivation behind such a decision? In order to understand what classification principles had been revised or discarded, it is instructive to look more closely at those used in the construction of the list of nationalities in the last Soviet census. In *Perechen’ natsional’nostei* of the 1989 census (the official list, enumerating all officially recognised nationalities) the nationalities were not listed in alphabetical order but rather according to a principle that could be designated ‘nested hierarchy’. Several general groupings of the list, both named and unnamed, reflected the complex ethno-political organisation of the country and mirrored the federative structure of the Soviet Union. The two named groups were ‘nationalities of the USSR’ and ‘nationalities residing predominantly outside of the borders of

⁵ We used Russian (DC-300) and Japanese (Fujitsu) scanners; the former were more productive as they could be used by three coders simultaneously, but less reliable than the latter (interview with the head of St. Petersburg Statistical Committee Oleg N. Nikiforov, taken by Yoshiko Herrera and Sergei Sokolovski on October 16, 2003).

⁶ For detailed description of the approach see Sokolovski 1994 (some tables from this book summarising ethnic categories used in several Soviet censuses are reproduced in English in Tishkov 1997: 15-21).

the USSR'. Russians opened the list, and fourteen so-called 'titular nations' of the former Soviet republics followed. They were not in alphabetical order either, but rather in the same order they were listed in the Soviet constitution. The principles of ordering within this small subgroup changed several times during Soviet census-taking history. Initially the 'nations' were listed in the order in which they had joined the Union. Then a criterion of numerical size was introduced. During the preparation of the 1989 census, it was pointed out that the Uzbeks had become more numerous than the Byelorussians. As a result, a new principle of listing in the same order as in the relevant article of the Constitution was suggested to solve the problem of re-ordering in the case of other possible changes in the numerical order.

The 'titular nations' subgroup was followed by a subgroup of the main (titular) nationalities of autonomous republics, which had lower administrative status than the Soviet republics. The names of nationalities within this subgroup were listed alphabetically, but, again, with some inconsistencies, as there were more 'titular groups' than republics (several autonomous republics were named after two peoples, such as Kabardino-Balkarskaia ASSR). Others, such as Dagestan, had more peoples who were considered 'titular' and twice as many who were indigenous to the region but who were included in larger categories rather than being counted separately.⁷ Out of more than 30 ethnic groups from Dagestan in the 1989 census, only the ten most numerous ethnic categories were named in the subgroup of the 'autonomous republics' peoples.⁸ Together with 'titular autonomous peoples' from other autonomies this subgroup contained 29 categories.

Another smaller subgroup was formed from the 'titular peoples of autonomous regions' (*oblast* and *okrug*). It contained only seven ethnic categories⁹, since most of the indigenous peoples of the northern autonomous territories (*okrug*) were listed within the next subgroup, called 'nationalities of the North.' The latter well-known category comprised 26 peoples of the North.¹⁰ The group was subdivided into two parts. The first contained 'northerners' who had their own autonomous districts¹¹. The second comprised all the other small groups, scattered over the vast territory of Siberia and the Far East. Then a residual subgroup of peoples without 'their own ethnic territories' followed, comprising 16 ethnic categories. The

⁷ A group of the so-called 'Andi-Dido peoples' of 12 minority peoples was counted previously among Avars; and two additional minorities were counted as Dargins in 1989 and in all prior Soviet censuses with the exception of the census of 1926.

⁸ In alphabetical order: Agul, Avars (Maarulal), Darghins (Dargwa), Kumyk (Qumuq), Lak (Laq), Nogai (Noghali), Lezgin, Rutul, Tabasaran and Tsakhur (Tsakhighali).

⁹ Adygei (Adyge), Altaians, Circassian (Cherkess, Adyge), Jews, Karachai (Qarachaily), Khakass (Khaas) and Komi-Permyak.

¹⁰ For more information on the construction of the group of 'northern indigenous peoples,' see Slezkine 1994.

¹¹ Chukchi, Dolgan, Evenk, Khant, Koriak, Mansi and Nenets.

list was concluded by the category colloquially known as ‘foreigners’ and two residual categories: ‘other nationalities’ and ‘nationality not given.’

All these 1989 census groupings (except the last two) lost their legitimacy for reasons mentioned below, and the commission members decided from the start that the status subdivisions of ethnic categories into more or less ‘indigenous’ or more and less ‘titular’ were not to be maintained in the new census. The main point was that a rank ordering connotes a hierarchy of peoples, which ought to be abolished in a democracy. All the major categories were to be listed in alphabetical order, while subcategories (such as alternative self-designations in different languages, local phonetic variants and local group names etc.) were to be listed immediately after the main category in which they were included.

The argument against the rank ordering of the 1989 census was not of a purely political nature. In some cases the Soviet rank ordering was based on erroneous or politically biased data (e.g. both *Tajiks* and *Azeris*, ‘titular nations’ of their respective Soviet republics, were more numerous or, in census terms ‘resided predominantly’ in neighbouring Afghanistan and Iran, hence should have been listed not in the first but in the last cluster of nationalities among ‘foreigners’). The same was true of *Jews*, *Gypsies*, *Saami*, *Aleut* and *Eskimo*¹² (in the case of *Yupik*), each of them more numerous abroad than within the country. Thus, the subdivision into ‘residents’ and ‘foreigners’ was the first object of criticism and involved a series of further innovations. The division of census categories into ‘titular’ and ‘non-titular’ nationalities seemed irrelevant and incorrect both on political and legal grounds and was abolished as well. We shall later see how this logic, banned from the front door, returned through the back door in the construction of a group of ‘proper members’ in the unofficial category ‘the peoples of Russia’.

All this does not explain the necessity of changing the list by adding or removing new categories, which was governed by other considerations. The main considerations were the following:

1) It should be kept in mind that the census of 2002 was the first post-Soviet census, which was to be conducted in the diminished and reconfigured territory of the new country. The categorisation of the country’s population was also to be tailored to the new circumstances and expected changes in population composition. Thus many small-numbered ethnic categories predominantly residing in other post-Soviet countries¹³ were removed from the list, as their numbers within the territory of the Russian Federation were expected to be insignificant. There was additional reasoning to exclude such ethnonyms because members of

¹² Siberian Yupik and related groups speaking Eskimo languages are called in Russian *Eskimosy*.

¹³ Such as, for example, most of the mountainous peoples of Pamir, Tajikistan or some groups speaking Iranian and Caucasus languages in Azerbaijan.

the relevant minority groups, when far from their homeland, tend to identify themselves in official situations with larger categories (e.g. *Shugnoni* name themselves *Tadjik*, and *Talysh* tend to name themselves *Azeri* etc.).

2) The information on geographic distribution of various ethnic groups had also to be substantially revised. Not only had recent migratory flows changed the spatial distribution of many groups, but official designations of many administrative units, and in some cases, their boundaries were altered as well. As the lists of nationalities in previous censuses usually contained information of geographic distribution of various ethnic categories in terms of large administrative regions (*oblast, krai, autonomous region* etc.) there was a need to up-date it.

3) Further, as I have already mentioned, the ethnic revival of the end of 1980s to early 1990s had institutionalised many ethnic groups previously recognised only by ethnographers and linguists. As most of these groups claimed separate identities, new dictionaries were to introduce them into the future census ethnic categorisation.

The Elaboration of Census Instruments

The commission compiled new lists of nationalities and languages that ended up being significantly longer than the lists of the last Soviet census of 1989. Thus, instead of 128 census categories in the list of nationalities, the first draft had more than 220 categories, and the latest version contained over 198 categories; and 143 instead of 113 languages (for the comparison of different censuses in this respect, see Appendix, Table 1). At the same time over 30 ethnic categories and 12 languages mentioned in 1989 census were removed from the 2002 census lists. The exact criteria of inclusion/exclusion varied depending on the case under consideration and do not easily lend themselves to generalisation.

The largest group of the categories excluded from the list of nationalities for the census of 2002 was the group that in 1989 was designated 'nationalities, residing predominantly outside of the borders of the USSR'. This group had 35 categories, some of which were pure statistical constructs, such as 'peoples of India and Pakistan'. All these categories were excluded at the suggestion of Prof. Valery Tishkov at a late stage in the implementation of the project in November 2001. In support of his position, Valery Tishkov put forward three arguments: 1) many of the categories from this group are essentially country-of-origin designations and do not refer to ethnic identity (such designations as Americans, French,

Italians, Spaniards and Cubans)¹⁴; 2) many have left the country since 1989 (among them Albanians, Cubans, Croats, Serbs, Czechs and Slovaks); 3) some categories were expected to be so numerically small, that they could be relegated without much concern to the residual category ‘other nationalities’ (Austrians, Albanians, Amhara, Baluch, Czechs, Croats, Dutch, Italians, Japanese, Montenegrins, Portuguese, Punjabi, Serbs, Slovaks and Swedes)¹⁵. The reduction of the draft list of nationalities coincided with the first hearings on the Census Law in the State Duma during which some members of the Russian parliament voiced their concern over “splitting the country’s population into too many groups”¹⁶ and over attempts “to divide nations into artificial entities”¹⁷.

However, not all of the ‘foreigners’ were excluded from the list of nationalities. The groups that had expectedly large population counts remained. Bulgarians, Finns, Greeks, Pushtuns (who replaced, together with Uzbeks and Tadjiks, the former composite category of Afghans) as well as Chinese and Vietnamese were among them. The latter two composite categories remained on the list although they are essentially country-of-origin designations, comprising not only the dominant Han and Viet peoples, but also all the minority groups originating from China and Vietnam. The justification for preserving these designations was that in Russia they usually name themselves Chinese and Vietnamese, or, rather, designate themselves with their Russian-language names *kitaitsy* and *vietnamtsy*, even when they belong to other ethnic groups. Hungarians, Koreans, Kurds, Mongols, Poles, Romanians, Turks and Uighurs were not excluded from the list as we expected that considerable numbers of them reside in the country.

Initially I perceived the reduction of the list as an infringement of an individual’s right to proclaim one’s identity (as well as loss of important information for an anthropologist) and opposed such reductions on these grounds as more and more categories were relegated to the residual category of ‘others’. Only at a later stage, and well after the end of the census, I was able to relate this reduction to the process of constructing indigeneity, the construction of the new country’s population with some intriguing underlying patterns unaccounted for by its practitioners. I will now turn to the analysis of how the category ‘we’ versus ‘others’ was negotiated within the framework of the census.

¹⁴ It has been pointed out that these designations refer in most cases to citizenship and not to ethnic identity, as the country of origin of such population categories is characterised by a complex ethnic composition (e.g. in Spain there are Galicians, Catalonians, Basques, Roma etc.; in France – Corsicans, Bretons, Alsations etc.; in Italy – Sardinians, Friulians, Ladinians, Germans, and Slovenes, besides many other ethnic groups).

¹⁵ In the 1989 census there were registered on the territory of the Russian Federation 295 Austrians, 298 Albanians, 98 Amhara, 297 Baluch, 1375 Czechs, 479 Croats, 451 Dutch, 591 Japanese, 1580 Serbs and Montenegrins and 711 Slovaks.

¹⁶ Voiced by the speaker of the Duma G. Seleznyov.

¹⁷ Voiced by an MP from Tatarstan, former leader of TOTs (Tatar Public Centre) Fandas Safiullin.

The ‘Others’ a Residual Classification Category

The category of ‘others’ (*prochie natsional’nosti*) turned out to be by far the most fascinating category for analysis despite its residual nature. It also has a very intangible character as its contents have never been documented, commented on or published in previous census publications, and they are not easy to reconstruct. The category conceals the strategies of ‘owning’ and ‘othering,’ which, by remaining unscrutinised and intrinsic to classification procedures, contribute to the creation of *peculiar classificatory optics*. However, before I discuss the optics, I will further elaborate on the rationale for the nationalities list reduction in the compilation of census dictionaries.

Every anthropologist with some fieldwork experience in local communities knows that there exist far more self-designations, including those that might be viewed as ‘ethnic,’ than census instruments ever mention. In the case of Russia, the list of such self-designations could probably be extended to tens of thousands instead of the several hundreds that were included in the alphabetic list of ethnic self-designations for the 2002 census. A reductionist tradition influenced the preparation of the 2002 census instruments. As I mentioned above, the main sources for the lists of nationalities were, besides the nationalities dictionaries from several previous censuses (mostly 1989 and 1979), various academic publications, and, to some degree (especially with the newly introduced categories) unpublished fieldwork data drawn from interviews with anthropologists (mostly based at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, but also colleagues from St. Petersburg and Omsk). Most official publications, particularly those of encyclopaedic nature, were reductionist in their nature as well, as their authors tended to register either the most frequent or officially known self-designations of the groups. The underlining ideology of the main portion of this literature was primordialist, constrained by the logic that an ethnic term (self-designation) is a reflection of ‘ethnic consciousness’ (or ethnic identity), which in turn is a reflection of an ethnic group’s separate existence. At first glance, this logic should favour a non-reductionist approach to the construction of the list of nationalities. In practice the operative logic was heavily nominalistic; if there is no officially acknowledged ethnonym, there is no independent group. Such names of categories were treated mostly as local variations of an official self-designation. Although such considerations and constraints were substantially weakened with the general crisis of legitimisation of all former theoretical constructions, they were not completely overcome and resurfaced each time a ‘new’ ethnic term was introduced as a possible candidate for inclusion into the census instruments. Hence, the conceptual

construction of a ‘novel’ ethnic term operated, unreflectively and surreptitiously, throughout the preparation of the new census instruments.¹⁸

The construction of the country’s population in terms of ‘belonging to the population of Russia’ could be analytically identified *post hoc* as based on the following unarticulated principles¹⁹:

1. A group belongs to the country’s population (and thus constitutes ‘a proper population category’) if it is considered to have a homeland on the territory of Russia. This is a remnant of primordialist thinking, the evident case of the so called *territorialised ethnicity*, based on the presumptive linkage of an ethnic group to the region of its ‘*ethnogenesis*’, the link, of which nationalists are so fond of in securing their territorial power base.
2. A group belongs to the country’s population if it has a homeland in one of the former Soviet Republics and if it is expected that it has a significant number of its members on Russian territory.
3. The group belongs to the country’s population if it is expected that it has a significant number of its members on the territory of Russia (its number in Russia as reflected in the last Soviet the census of 1989 was fairly large; there was no significant emigration). As already mentioned a result of this dubious procedure was that more than 30 groups were excluded as ‘foreign’ (read *atypical* for the population of Russia) and relegated to the residual category of ‘others’.

Clan and tribal self-designations of the groups that constitute ‘titular nations’ of the new Central Asian and Transcaucasus states in many cases were also omitted from the list.

Other hidden factors influencing the results of the sorting procedure of a multitude of ethnic terms come to the forefront if one analyses both the degree of the ‘classificatory depth’ and

¹⁸ In a letter dated November 21, 2001 (No. 8-0-14/834) addressed to Valery Tishkov, Director of the IEA, the head of the *Goskomstat* Census and Demographic Statistics Department, Irina Zbarskaia, asked the Institute’s census commission members to correct minor differences between the lists of nationalities in the drafts of alphabetical and comprehensive dictionaries and ‘if possible, to reduce the list of nationalities and ethnic groups.’ There were a number of suggested reductions in the attachment to the letter. Based on the results of a discussion with the IEA commission, which took place at *Goskomstat* on October 22, 2001, the Census Department suggested to withdraw from the lists *Bengali*, *Cherkessogai* (a subcategory of Armenians, speaking the Circassian language), *Romei* and *Urum* (subcategories of Greeks, using vernaculars of the Turkic linguistic family), *Adjar* and *Ingiloi* (subcategories of Georgians), *Sart-Kalmak* (a subcategory of Kalmyk, residing mainly in Kyrgyzstan) and *Hinalug* (a group, speaking their own language, which is close to Lezgin, and resides mainly in Azerbaijan). Separate categories of *Laz*, *Megrel* and *Svan* were to be treated as subcategories of Georgians. Using that letter as a justification for reductions, Valery Tishkov suggested shortening the nationalities list, which at the time appeared drastic. From more than 190 main categories (with additional 26 subcategories) of the drafts, Valery Tishkov took out 33 categories, mainly of ‘foreign origin,’ so that after *Goskomstat* and his own reductions, only 158 main categories were left on the list. Shortly afterwards, on December 6, 2001 the list was reduced to 152 main categories (*Bartangi*, *Vakhi*, *Batsbii*, *Rusyn*, *Yagnobi*, and *Yazgulami* were taken out by Valery Tishkov). At a much later stage, the *Goskomstat* Census Department changed its decision to reduce the lists as the department’s deputy director Liudmila Yeroshina became concerned that the residual category of ‘others’ would be too large and decided to reintroduce most of the ‘foreigners’ back into the lists. As a result, the number of the main categories reached 195 again (with alternative designations the alphabetical list contained 879 ethnonyms; the linguistic dictionary listed 170 languages and three times as many alternative designations of languages).

¹⁹ The principles were not formulated during the work of the census commission and in many cases were not reflected but simply brought forward as substantive arguments for making a particular decision.

the hidden stock of ethnic terms relegated to the residual category of ‘others.’ Here the metaphor of optics, or classificatory lens mentioned above helps to reveal the peculiarities of the ethnonyms selection procedure. As in photography, where the brighter the light and the smaller the lens aperture, the more enhanced the visual field and richness of detail is, the classificatory gaze scrutinising the ethnic composition of the country was intentionally myopic. It produced greater detail in looking at the so-called ‘peoples of Russia,’ but was much less intense in distinguishing the subcategories of the peoples who were considered to belong to what came to be called ‘the near abroad’ (independent countries created from the former Soviet Republics), and was progressively sketchy with ethnic terms and ethnic group composition of those from the ‘far abroad.’ This might look natural, as the analogous census instruments in many countries are more detailed in respect to what is perceived as ‘indigenous groups,’ than to recent immigrants or the temporary population from other countries of origin, especially remote ones. This classificatory myopia is based on the colonial or imperial imagination and on unconscious strategies of ‘othering’ that deserve attention.

The notion of ethnic territorialisation was therefore covertly operative throughout the procedures of compiling lists of ethnonyms, remaining an unintentional principle of categorisation. A good example of ‘progressive myopia’ in detailing the ethnic composition of the ‘indigenous’ (‘belonging to Russia’) and ‘less and lesser indigenous’ categories is the comparison of approaches to the reflection of the ethnic subdivisions within Altaians, Kazakh and Turkmen in the census. Every tribal group within the category of the Altaians was given a separate code, and many of the so-called ‘tribes’ were further decomposed into clans with clan self-designations registered in the alphabetical dictionary of nationalities. The Altaian people were treated as an undisputable member of the unacknowledged category of ‘the peoples of Russia’. In contrast, in the case of Kazakhs only those tribal groups, whose members live along the border of Kazakhstan and Russia were included in the list.²⁰ None of the tribal groups of Turkmen were included into the lists, as Turkmenistan has no common border with Russia. The rationalisation for the principle of sorting and inclusion/exclusion was the expectation that people in their homelands, or residing close to them would be more prone to give their local self-designations (including tribal and clan), than those whose places of origin are not located within the territory of Russia or on its borders.²¹ There was a reversal

²⁰ For example, nomadic tribal self-designations such as *Aday*, *Argyn*, *Bersh*, *Zhanpas*, *Zhagaybayly*, *Kerey*, *Kypchak*, *Nayman*, *Nogai*, *Tabyn*, *Tama*, *Torkara*, *Wak* and *Shekty*. There is practically no mention of the tribes from the *Ulu Zhuz* (the Great Horde), including such numerous and politically prominent tribes as *Dulat* and *Jalair*. The list enumerates mostly the tribes of the *Orta Zhuz* (the Middle Horde) from northern Kazakhstan along the border with Russia, and some of the tribes of the *Kishi Zhuz* (the Lesser Horde) from western Kazakhstan, as well as the Turatinsk Kazakhs from the Ust’-Kan district of the Altay Republic.

²¹ Thus, a Turkmen was expected to give as the answer to the question on ethnic identity ‘*Turkmen*’, but not *Tekin*, *Goklen*, *Iomud*, *Salor* or any other tribal designation.

of this logic in detailing the ethnic composition at the level of tribal self-designations: whereas large ‘peoples’ (whose ‘homeland’ was thought to be within the territory of Russia) were provided with a series of local/regional self-designations, as it had been expected that people could use them during the census, the clan decomposition of the ethnic groups and tribal categories usually stopped at the most numerous clan groups. The commission members, bearing in mind that the list could not be ‘too long’, tried to work out a consensus over the inclusion/exclusion of every such clan designation.²² So the clan composition of the tribal groups was less detailed than it could have been had all the clan self-designations been included. Clan and tribal self-designations (as well as those that were used in the past to designate estate groups and other socially distinct categories) cross-cut established ethnic boundaries, as many of them could be found in several linguistically or otherwise different ethnic groups.²³

If we attempt to trace the underlying tropes of the imperial imagination by mapping ethnic identities onto contemporary political boundaries, sorting them into ‘ethnic’ and ‘tribal’ or ‘foreign’ and ‘domestic’ and relegating the ‘most foreign’ to the category of ‘others’, or if we try to visualise the boundaries of ‘homelands’ which were reconstructed each time such a sorting occurred, we reveal the ethnic map of Petrine Russia and its imperial successors. It is astounding to realise how the Russian academic imagination, even among its most advanced constructivist practitioners, resurrects (and is still based on) these practices of imperial territorialisation. To sum up the metaphor of the myopic classificatory gaze, I should once more underline its optics, which holds in sharp focus ‘our own’ homelands and peoples and becomes progressively opaque when it turns to ‘aliens.’ This gaze applies to settled

²² As a rule, those members of the commission who shared the primordialist vision of ethnicity tended to rule out clan designations as ‘they do not constitute ethnic groups’. The logic of census technology, though, made them aware that people could use these self-designations during the census-taking, and thus clan names should be included so that the group’s number could be assessed correctly. Otherwise all such self-designations would have been classified as ‘other nationalities’ and received one and the same code.

²³ I.e., the self-designation *Adyge* was expected to be met among Adygei, Kabarda and Circassians (all groups from the Northern Caucasus). It turned out that 98 Adygei, 23 Kabarda and 31 Circassian used this name during the census; according to the specially designed software, they were ‘sorted’ into the three mentioned official categories on the basis of their native language and places of birth and residence. However, in each such case, the algorithm was unique, as the ‘traits’ used for classifying people with the same self-designation into various groups were variable in each of the ‘clusters’. Other examples include *Beslenei* (by Adygs and Circassians), *Kamchadal* (19 with Itelmen language and 2293 with Russian); *Komi* (270660 among Komi-Zyrians and 2898 by Komi-Permiaks; sorted by place of residence and language); *Komi mort* (119 by Zyrians and 161 by Permiaks); *Kypchak* (2 by Altaians and 4 by Kazakhs); *Litvin* (19 by Bielorusians and 66 by Lithuanians); *Luudilaine* (1 by Veps and 3 by Karels); *Naiman* (1 Altaian and 1 Kazakh); *Nani* (4 by Oroch, the rest by Nanai); *Nogai* (29 by Kazakh, the rest by Nogai); *Oroch* (37 by Uilta, 43 by Evenk, the rest by Oroch); *Orochion* (34 by Oroch, 148 by Uilta, 5 by Evenk, and 3 by Even); *Ostiak* (164 by Ket, 18 by Mansi, 134 by Selqup, 30 by Khant); *Sakha* (43 by Dolgan, the rest by Sakha/Yakut); *Soyot* (2 by Tuvins, 2767 with Buriat language); *Tadar-Kizhi* (5 by Kumanda, 1 Khakass); *Tat* (281 with Crimean Turkish language, Moslems; 1875 with Tat of Iranian linguistic family, Jewish); *Teptyar* (136 by Tatars, 26 by Bashkir); *Tungus* (198 by Evenk, 41 by Even); *Turk* (63 by Azeri; 26 by Turkmen; 55 by Uzbek; the rest by Turks); *Ude* (5 by Taz, the rest by Udege), and *Ulcha* (5 by Uilta, the rest by Ulcha).

communities as well, as it incarcerates nomads within their circumscribed ‘homelands’ and attempts to territorialise every community residing within the political boundaries of the state. In this view, the census remains an efficient tool for re-inscribing and re-instating the state. It is also an efficient instrument for dealing with otherness, employed for sorting various ‘others’ into more and less ‘domestic’ ones, by domesticating the first and rejecting the latter. The implicit classification into ‘us’ and ‘others’ bears a direct relevance to the topic of indigeneity construction, to which I now turn.

Indigenous/Exogenous – Rooted/Uprooted: the construction of indigeneity in Russia

Indigeneity in Russia²⁴ is not only a qualitative characteristic of particular categories of ethnic communities and individual persons; it also has a quantitative property and thus might be thought of as having gradations in intensity and multiple levels. Due to this peculiarity, the question of who is the most indigenous among various inhabitants of a certain region has relevance and political salience and often serves as a battleground for competing claimants. Internationally known examples from the former Soviet Union include Karabakh (contested by Armenians and Azeris), Southern Ossetia (contested by Georgians and Ossetians), Galskiy district in Abkhazia (contested by Georgians and Abkhazians), the Prigorodnyi district in Northern Ossetia (contested by Ossetians and Ingush) and literally hundreds other less familiar cases from the Caucasus, Central Asia, Volga-Urals, Southern Siberia and the Far East. These are mutual territorial claims of neighbouring ethnic groups supported by the discourse of indigeneity to the region and heated debates of who was there first and who came later.²⁵

In conceptual and theoretical terms the quantitative character of indigeneity is not new. One might argue that we are all indigenous to this planet; many may legitimately claim that they are indigenous to the continents they still inhabit. Most Europeans, Asians and Africans might successfully go through the test of verification of such a claim, though it is less obvious in the

²⁴ I analyse indigeneity as the category abstracted from such Russian terms as *korennye narody* (indigenous peoples), *korennaia natsia* (indigenous nation), *koremoe naselenie* (indigenous population), *korennoi etnos* (indigenous ethnic group), *korenizatsia* (indigenisation) etc. In terms of lexicology there is no noun derived from a Russian root that denotes indigeneity (the word ‘*korennoi/-aia/-oe*’ is an adjective). Two Russian nouns for indigeneity have Latin and Greek roots: *aborigennost’* (from Latin ‘ab origine’) and *avtokhtonnost’* (from Old Greek *αυτος* – auto, own, and *χθωνος* – land). The Russian derivation *tuzemnost’* (from ‘*tuzemets*’ – the native) is rarely used and considered obsolete. However, semantically *tuzemnost’* seems to be the closest correlate of the English ‘indigeneity’. The analysis of the historical evolution of the Russian terms for indigeneity is provided in Sokolovski 2000; 2001: 41-82, 207-234.

²⁵ A number of such competing claims in the case of the Caucasus are analysed in Shnirelman 2001.

cases of North and South Americas and Australia.²⁶ It seems that the smaller the region, the less historically sustainable becomes a claim to ‘genealogical indigeneity’, unless we want to restrict the concept to several last generations or substantiate it by using the always biased sources of written history.²⁷

Russia is still a very large country and most of its inhabitants are ‘indigenous’ in the technical sense of the term. That is, they and their ancestors were born within the boundaries of this vast landmass. This technical sense of indigeneity, however, becomes problematic if we take into consideration other basic qualifications of indigenous groups such as being marginalised, powerless and endangered. Powerlessness and marginality have their own scales and their own spectrum of relativity and are relational as well. Indeed, some groups and categories within groups are less integrated into the lifestyle of the dominant society than others. Does this make relatively more integrated groups less indigenous? If we try to compare the contemporary rates of integration of various indigenous groups into mainstream society values in Russia, we shall soon find out that the levels of integration decrease from the south to the north and from the west to the east. This ‘south-west’-‘north-east’ axis seems to reflect the age-old expansion of a market economy and associated values from the centres of ancient civilisations to the vast steppe, taiga and tundra spaces of Northern Eurasia and the more recent expansion of the Russian state. As for the comparison of ‘genealogical indigeneity’ with the marginality scale, it seems to me that both of these parameters vary independently, so being more ‘endemic’ to the region than other claimants does not automatically entail being more marginalised or endangered, and in practice this is often the case (see Appendix, Table 3, providing indirect assessment of integration and showing that up to one-fourth of populations categorised as indigenous live in central and southern regions of Russia where they do not practice any kind of traditional subsistence economy). In fact, in contemporary post-Soviet Russia the reverse relation between marginality and territorial indigeneity is characteristic of several republics in which national eponymous elites (or, as they are called in Russia ‘titular nations’ – *‘titul’nye natsii’*) established ethnocratic regimes

²⁶ This haphazard classification of continents implies that the ‘Old World’ cases of indigeneity construction are in most cases more complex and more often contested, whereas the relevant ‘New World’ cases seem to be more clear-cut and are challenged less often. They are also contested on different grounds, which have to do mostly with ‘blood’ or genealogy, but not with ‘soil’ or historically constructed ‘homelands’. This situation reflects the assumption that in the Old World states, most of their ethnic groups are more or less ‘indigenous’ or that there is no clear-cut difference between colonists and ‘original inhabitants’ of various regions within these countries.

²⁷ Other ways of documenting the presence of a particular group on a territory such as by usage of bio-anthropological, linguistic and archeological data, though of an undeniable value in the construction of the factual account of regional population succession and genealogy, have the innate drawback of being unable to conclusively document the fluid nature of identity of past generations and more often than not are politically laden as they are used instrumentally by competing claimants to particular territory.

which have split the republican populations into minorities and titular groups (among such are the republics of Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Tuva and Sakha)²⁸.

Contemporary research on ethnicity and nationalism in Russia by historians and anthropologists demonstrates that the Russian state has not only used cultural and linguistic differences for its own purposes, but in certain periods of its history it has actively imposed ethnicity and endorsed nationalism among its various regional populations.²⁹ Early Soviet nationalities policy could be taken as a particularly salient case in point. Among state initiatives promoting and supporting ethno-linguistic diversity was the policy of *korenizatsia* (indigenisation) of the 1920s-30s during which the Russian administration in regions with predominant non-Russian population was replaced by locally trained personnel. Other institutions included preferential treatment of indigenous minorities in high school enrolment; alphabetisation of a number of languages without their own system of writing; establishment of minority schools where local languages were used as a media of instruction; passport registration of ethnic identity; a body of legal provisions supporting non-Russian languages and cultures; and, most importantly, various forms of self-determination, including territorial autonomies and Soviet and autonomous republics, resulting in the creation of ethnically-based political elites. As we have seen, census classifications are also instrumentalised in political strife between ethnic entrepreneurs in their search for visibility and resources.

Various groups of hunters, herders and gatherers of the Russian Subarctic and the Far East were the target group of the government's affirmative action preserving their privileged status throughout various stages of Soviet and post-Soviet nationalities policy. Among different groups claiming to be indigenous to the region they consider their homeland, there was a category that was viewed as indisputably autochthonous. This category formed the core level of the indigeneity concept in Russian discourse. The reasons for this undisputable preferential treatment are both historical and ideological, as Marxists treated 'natives' as 'primordial communists' within the framework of social evolution theory with its idea of economic formations perceived as stages of development. The relatively small size of native groups, the harsh environments they inhabit and drinking habits brought by settlers often put such groups on the brink of extinction. All these circumstances contributed to the prevalent treatment of native peoples as 'dying out' (*vymeraiuschie*) or almost extinct. The threat of extinction together with the communist version of the noble savage ideal with its views on his presumably unselfconscious, unselfish and naïve economic behaviour formed the main

²⁸ By ethnocracy I mean a system of social promotion that is based on ethnic affiliation, leading to effective control of political power.

²⁹ For extensive treatment of the history of policies towards indigenous peoples, see Slezkine 1994; Forsyth 1992; the changes of policy on minorities and 'titular peoples' in the early Soviet period are covered in Martin 2001.

rationale for government's targeting of northern native groups for preferential treatment. The logic of historical construction of the legal category of the peoples of the North in the case of Russia has been often explored³⁰. I will not go further into this here, as some of the topics relevant to the subject of indigeneity construction within the framework of the census have already been mentioned above.

The logic of the legal category construction is comparatively more straightforward and less obscure than the logic that underpins the multilayered concept of indigeneity in the census nationality list construction, although it also has hidden paradoxes and inconsistencies. As it has been mentioned above, there are several levels of indigeneity in the census, starting with 'peoples of Russia' – the unofficial category, which has been used in deliberations associated with the inclusion of ethnic self-designations into the lists. The second level was operative in the claims of many groups to be included into the category of the small-numbered indigenous peoples. One example is the Dagestani State Council list of indigenous peoples of Dagestan.³¹ It included all the major ethnic categories of the republic's population – Avars, Azeri, Darghins, Nogai and Russians among them, each numbering hundreds of thousands. However, it failed to mention 16 small-numbered mountain ethnic groups who claimed separate census registration from Avars and Darghins.³² The third level, which might be viewed as the core level of indigeneity, is the group of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East. Their numbers have been growing gradually since 1993 as more and more small-numbered categories (and, I should say, less and less indigenous in terms of their lifestyle and degree of the integration to mainstream culture) are added to the official lists of peoples and territories.

For methodological reasons this strategy of linking peoples to territories and via territories to rights is worth noting as an effective strategy of emplacement, or as what Arjun Appadurai termed 'incarceration' of indigenous people to the territories they inhabit. The explicit linkage of peoples and territories is found in the law 'On the State Guarantees and Compensations for the Persons Who Work and Reside in the Districts of the Far North and Equivalent Areas' of

³⁰ I have discussed this in Sokolovski 2000; 2001.

³¹ State Council of Dagestan of October 18, 2000 'O korennykh malochislennykh narodakh Respubliki Dagestan' (On the small-numbered indigenous peoples of Dagestan).

³² The *Andi (Quannal)*, the *Akhvakhs*, the *Bagulal (Kwantl Hekwa, Kwanadi)*, the *Bezhetta (Kapuchias Suko, Bezhtlas Suko)*, the *Chamalal*, the *Ginukh*, the *Godoberi*, the *Karata (Kirtle)*, the *Gunzeb (Khunzal)*, the *Khwarshi (Kedaes Hikwa)*, the *Tindi (Idaraw Hekwa, Tindal)* and the *Tsez (Dido, Quanal)*, comprising the group of the so-called Andi-Dido peoples and closely related to them the *Archi (Arishishuw)*, were counted as Avars; the *Kaitak (Qaidaqlan)* and the *Kubachi (Ughbug)* – with the Dargins (*Dargwa*). All these groups were included in census dictionaries among Avars and Darghins due to the pressure exerted by the Dagestan State Council on the minister of nationalities' affairs Vladimir Zorin.

February 19, 1993.³³ The law did not enumerate either ethnic categories or territories of residence. It stipulated in Art. 27 the general norm according to which preferences in retirement go to “citizens, belonging to the small-numbered peoples of the North”, as well as “reindeer herders, fishermen and hunters permanently resident in the districts of the Far North and equivalent areas” (Art. 26). It was the official regulation of the Ministry of Social Services on retirement allowances for the persons residing in the districts of the Far North of August 4, 1994 that provided the enumeration of those peoples who receive special treatment. It stipulated that “the designated peoples include *Nenets, Evenk, Khant, Even, Chukchi, Nanai, Koryak, Mansi, Dolgan, Nivkh, Sel’qup, Ulcha, Itelmen, Udege, Saami, Eskimo, Chuvan, Nganasan, Yukagir, Ket, Oroch, Tofa, Aleut, Neghidal, Enets, Orok, Shor, Teleut, Kumanda.*”³⁴ This official commentary mentions for the first time three new members of this group: *Shors, Teleut, and Kumanda* were added to the previous standard Soviet list of 26 peoples. All three new groups were highly urbanised (at a level of 50-70%), in terms of integration into the mainstream urban culture ‘less indigenous’ than the rest of the group, except Oroks (Uilta) of Sakhalin and Nanai of the Far East, who by that time had similar urbanisation levels. In March 2000 in the governmental decree No. 255 ‘On the uniform registration of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation’ several new ethnic categories were added to the list³⁵ and the number of officially recognised ‘small-numbered indigenous peoples of Russia’ has reached 45. Most of the groups added do not practice hunting, herding or fishing as subsistence economic activities and their special cultural and linguistic interests could have been similarly protected under minority rights provisions in Russian legislation. The list of territories (a set of circumscribed ‘homelands’ is always accompanied by a set of circumscribed communities of membership), established by the government decree No. 22 of January 1993, was supplemented by the enumeration of the territories of the Shors, Kumanda, Nagaibak and several other peoples.

The linkage of peoples to territories is supported along with indigeneity discourse by a complementary discourse on diaspora. For the Russian academia and journalists, every group that migrates beyond the (often imagined) boundaries of ‘a homeland’ becomes ‘a diaspora’ and is subject to the protection of the law on national-cultural autonomy (June 1996). As the

³³ ‘*O gosudarstvennykh garantiïakh i kompensatsiïakh dlia lits, rabotaiushchikh i prozhivaiushchikh v raionakh Krainego Severa i priravnennykh k nim mestnostiakh*’ of February 19, 1993.

³⁴ Art. 4 of the decree ‘*O naznachenii pensii litsam, rabotaiushchim i prozhivaiushchim v raionakh Krainego Severa*’ (On retirement payments for the persons, who work and reside in the regions of the Far North) Ministry for Social Protection Decree No. 657, August 04, 1994; registered at the Ministry of Justice by No. 651 on the same date.

³⁵ Including well integrated groups into the mainstream economy such as *Bessermian* from Udmurt Republic and Kirov region, *Nagaibak* from Cheliabinsk region, *Shapsug* and *Abaza* from the North Caucasus, and *Veps* and *Izhora* from the North-West (Leningrad and Vologda oblasts and Karelian Republic).

boundaries of ‘homelands’ are more often imagined than drawn on administrative maps, in real situations it is often not clear whether a certain indigenous person by changing her/his residence becomes a member of a diaspora.³⁶

On Numerical Threshold

To solve the problem of the allocation of resources aimed specifically at the protection of ‘small-numbered indigenous peoples’ (the underlying rationale was that more numerous people do not need such protection as they are not threatened by extinction and are protected by the governments in ‘their own’ titular republics³⁷) the Russian government has adopted a special law with specific numerical threshold. According to the most cited definition introduced in the mid-1990s in the Art. 1 of the Federal Law “Basic principles of legal status of indigenous small-numbered peoples of Russia”:

The indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North are the peoples who inhabit the traditional territories of their ancestors, preserve an original life style, number less than fifty thousand people in Russia and recognise themselves as separate ethnic communities.³⁸

The same definition (except that it specifically referred to peoples who ‘traditionally reside in the territories of the North, Siberia, and the Far East’) is repeated in Art.1 of the Federal Law ‘On the guarantees of the rights of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation’ adopted on April 30, 1999 and Art. 1 of the Federal Law ‘On the general principles of small-numbered indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East communities organisation’ adopted in July 2000.

How did this numerical threshold appear? Why is it 50,000 and not any other number? In order to better grasp the procedures that led to the adoption of this definition, one should take

³⁶ I have a postgraduate student who chose to research the ‘Buriat Diaspora in Moscow’ for her PhD thesis. I asked her whether Buriats would constitute a diaspora in Irkutsk (a city in Eastern Siberia, where many Buriats live). She said: “No, in Irkutsk they are local Buriats (*mestnye buriaty*)” and added that probably one should not speak of a ‘Buriat diaspora’ on the territory of Siberia; the term applies only to Buriats in the European part of Russia. This anecdotal evidence illustrates well the force of the territorial component in the construction of indigeneity in Russia.

³⁷ Part of the institutional set-up which forms the backbone of the nationalities policy is so called ethno-territorial federalism. Along with territorially defined regions, Russia has regions singled out for preferential treatment, whose territory is viewed as the ‘home’ of some ethnic group. Out of 88 regions, more than one third is defined on ethnic criteria. Thus, along with the so called *krai* and *oblast* with predominant Russian population, there are 21 republics, 9 autonomous districts (*okrug*) and one autonomous region defined according to ethnic criteria. This arrangement contributes to the reification of ethnicity and ethnic boundaries.

³⁸ Art.1 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation of June 19, 1996 ‘*Ob osnovakh gosudarstvennogo regulirovaniia sotsial’no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Severa Rossiiskoi Federatsii*’ (On the basis of the state regulation of the social economic development of the North of the Russian Federation); Art. 1 of the Federal Law of the Russian Federation of April 30, 1999 ‘*O garantiakh prav korennykh malochislennykh narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii*’ (On the guarantees of the rights of indigenous numerically small peoples of the Russian Federation).

into consideration at least two external factors relevant for the discussion. Firstly, it took place within the context of previous legislation on minorities and numerically small peoples of the North and largely derived its logic from this legislation, ideologically based on early Marxists views on social evolution and the discourse of ‘extinction’. It seemed only natural for scholars to look for some scientific criteria for extinction threatened, and small population size was one evident criterion of such a danger. An important change in terminology took place in the period of *perestroika*. The previous term *malye narodnosti* (small nationalities) used in reference to indigenous peoples of the North disappeared from official use. It was replaced by the term *malochilennye narody* (small-numbered peoples). It is worth mentioning that before 1993 the expression *korennye narody* (indigenous peoples) appeared in Russian government official documents only twice, and both times in presidential decrees (decree No. 118 of February 5, 1992 proposed ratification of ILO Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, and decree No. 397 of April 22, 1992 contained instructions to prepare before the end of 1992, and propose for the consideration by Russian Federation Supreme Soviet draft laws ‘On the legal status of indigenous peoples of the North’ and ‘On the legal status of national district, national rural and village councils, clan and commune councils of indigenous peoples of the North’).

The sixty-year-long taboo of using the term ‘indigenous peoples’ and its replacement with the expression ‘small’ or ‘small-numbered’ peoples (nationalities) was not accidental. It was clarified by the official position expressed by the USSR representative at a session of a UN Indigenous Population Working Group. According to this position, the use of the ‘indigenous peoples’ term was considered appropriate only in a colonial context. It was declared that the USSR had no legally defined ‘indigenous peoples’ within its territory (Barsh 1986: 375).

Secondly, the atmosphere of hearings within committees, when lay and unprofessional opinions of politicians and activists clashed with those of experts often led to the simplification of arguments and adoption of decisions on the basis of these simplified criteria. The numerical threshold has in this respect an immediate appeal of being a simple and ‘graspable’ criterion which could be used at all levels of administrative decision-making without further need for clarification.

Back in 1993 each of the peoples on a list of 29 (except *Nenets* and *Evenk*) was numerically well beneath the threshold of 30,000 (Appendix, Graph 1). On the other hand, all other officially recognised peoples within the numerical range of 50 to 100,000 (such as Karelians, Nogai, Khakass, Altaians and Circassians) had ‘their own’ titular republics³⁹ and thus were presumed to be protected by ‘their own’ governments and republican legislation (see

³⁹ *Nogai* were considered one of the titular peoples of Dagestan.

Appendix, Graphs 3-8). By juxtaposing indigeneity to the region, numerical strength and regional access to power, the administrative or bureaucratic logic led to the adoption of the initial 35,000 numerical threshold.

In 1995 the Russian anthropological journal '*Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*' (Ethnographic Review) published in several successive issues a draft law on indigenous peoples and a discussion title 'Ethnographers write a law' (Sokolova et al. 1995; Kriazhkov et al. 1995; Arutiunov et al. 1995; Bogoslovskaja et al. 1995). The publication illustrates the development of legislation for the protection of indigenous populations in the early 1990s. The readers of the journal were informed that in 1991-92, various expert groups under the auspices of the State Committee of the North and the Assembly of the deputies of the peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East were drafting a law on the small-numbered indigenous peoples.⁴⁰ The published draft was initially (in 1991) prepared by three specialists in Arctic and Siberian anthropology (Yuri Simchenko, Zoya Sokolova and Natalia Novikova) and edited by Valery Tishkov, to then be re-drafted by a slightly different expert team (Z. Sokolova, N. Novikova and N. Bogdanova). Both drafts contained the following definition of the small-numbered indigenous people:

Art.1. The main concepts

This law applies to the indigenous peoples of the North the peoples whose origin and development as an ethnos is connected to a particular territory.

The criteria for recognition of indigenous people are:

The development of the people on the territory and the permanent residence of its members on the territory of its ancestors or in the neighbouring regions.

The small-numbered peoples of the North are the peoples who are recognised by their small numbers (not more than 35,000 persons), by the practice of traditional economy and by a complete dependency on the environment.

They need a special protection by this law, because they preserve as the basis of their culture the traditional subsistence economy in the form of reindeer herding and subsistence [*promyslovoe*] economy (hunting, fishing, sea mammal hunting, wild plant gathering).

The scope of this law embraces ethnic groups of distinct peoples, residing in the North and practicing reindeer herding and subsistence economy (the list of the groups is attached).⁴¹

⁴⁰ There were several drafts: draft law 'On the small-numbered peoples of the USSR'; a different draft of the same law 'On the development of the small-numbered peoples of the USSR' (1990), prepared by a group of experts, including two anthropologists (Pavel I. Puchkov and Zoya P. Sokolova from the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences); draft law 'The legal status basis of the small-numbered peoples of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic' (1991) with the former member of the IEA RAS research staff Leokadia M. Drobizheva among the expert group; draft law 'On the guarantees of the revival and development of the small-numbered indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East', initiated by the Supreme Soviet commission for autonomous regions in 1990.

⁴¹ A draft law 'The legal status basis of the indigenous peoples of the North', dated March 01, 1993 and published as an attachment to Sokolova et al. 1995: 80.

The definition proves that the idea of a numerical threshold had already been discussed at the start of the 1990s, when the relevant legislation was drafted. The 35,000 threshold was raised to 50,000 at one of the discussions of the IEA Academic Council in 1992, where the argument of the possible demographic growth of several peoples within the legal group of northern indigenous minorities was brought into consideration.

However, several important points have eluded the logic of this approach: 1) it is based on a primordialist and essentialist treatment of ethnicity and could not take into account the fluid nature of ethnic identity; ethnic mobilisation of the early and mid-1990s led to the formation of various ‘splinter groups’ from larger entities within the official classification of ethnic categories; 2) it is built on a rigid treatment of indigeneity and territorialised ethnicity, as well as on crude ethnic geography, all of which marginalised a number of potential claimants who were viewed as ‘foreigners’ or ‘non-indigenous minorities.’ The new Russian legislation of the turn of the century contributed to the identity change of many people with mixed ancestry, a fact that was documented by the Russian population census of 2002. On the other hand, new ‘splinter groups’ claimed official recognition as indigenous, basing their demands on the broadly viewed concept of indigeneity and the numerical threshold.

It is characteristic of primordialist or essentialist treatment of ethnicity still predominant in the case of Russia that the processes of an ethnic group and ethnicity formation are viewed as anchored in some particular political space, hence ‘belonging’ to some particular country. Only within this paradigm does it become possible to speak of ‘ethnic homelands’ and – by locating these ‘homelands’ within the territory of a particular state – of ‘aboriginal’ or ‘autochthonous’ peoples with their ‘historic homelands’ within the territory of a country. According to one estimate, in 1989 there were “more than 90 distinct ethnic groups with their historic homelands within the Soviet Union” (Anderson and Silver 1989: 610). This view clearly demonstrates the political mechanisms of the concept of indigeneity construction. This broad category of indigenous or autochthonous populations is further subdivided by political categorisation, at least in the case of Russia, into those politically viable or protected and politically vulnerable or endangered. The first category comprises all ethnic groups with political autonomy (republics within the contemporary Russian Federation), the second with or without administrative autonomy (autonomous *okrug* [districts], and ‘national *raions*’ and settlements, enumerated in special legislation defining the territories of small-numbered indigenous peoples’ residence). Though the conceptual construction of the second smaller category of indigenous peoples is supported by internal and international legal norms, it derives part of its political legitimacy and logic from the first conceptually broader category of autochthonous ethnic groups. Only this latter logic made it possible for Russian legislators

to list some peoples from the Caucasus and Southern Siberia within the law on indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation.

The interplay of meanings between, on the one hand ‘autochthonous’, the broader, or more inclusive in terms of population groups (groups with homelands within the state borders) and on the other hand ‘indigenous’, the narrower legal concept (autochthonous groups who practice subsistence economy) is blurred, at least in the case of the Russian terminological system, since both terms are translated into Russian by the same word *korennoi*. The dividing line between the international legal category of indigenous peoples and all the other autochthonous groups comprehended as native to the country disappears⁴². This is by no means an exception, as many other contemporary states in the Old World demonstrate a similar predicament in their attempts to draw the dividing line between the autochthonous population of the cultural mainstream and marginalised indigenous cultures and peoples⁴³.

Although the ideological tropes underpinning the construction of indigeneity in Russia share some of their traits with international (post)colonial discourse (e.g. the linkage of peoples to territories; salvage ideology etc.), at the same time they downplay one of the most important characteristics of indigeneity as a legal construct of international law – a special link to land. Though criticised by such eminent anthropologists as Arjun Appadurai (1988), Andre Beteille (1998), and Tim Ingold (2000) as a trope ‘incarcerating’ peoples in their territories, this link has intrinsic qualities of spirituality and sacredness that go beyond ordinary peasants’ loyalty to the land or urban sentiments of regionalism and patriotism. I would venture to put forward a hypothesis that this spiritual link stems from animistic⁴⁴ beliefs of indigenous peoples throughout the world. Positing this link as indispensable for the international legal construct of indigeneity throws a new light on the contemporary discussions of indigenous peoples’ land rights and helps to identify new threats to indigenous identity. These threats come not only from oligarchic encroachment on their lands and the danger of assimilation, but also from the new charismatic religious movements successfully converting the younger generations among indigenous groups throughout the world and eliminating the distinctive

⁴² The Russian census of 2002 implicitly and explicitly preserved this conceptual vagueness as demonstrated by the sorting of ethnic groups at the stage of the nationalities list construction into those belonging to the unofficial category of the ‘peoples of Russia’ (autochthonous groups) and migrant or minority groups. At a later stage the narrower ‘indigenous proper’ category was singled out for publication in a separate volume titled ‘*Korennye malochislennye narody Rossiiskoi Federatsii*’ (Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian Federation, Vol. 14 of the census results, Moscow 2005).

⁴³ Notable examples are India and China: the governments of both countries reject the applicability of the international legal category of indigenous peoples to their population groups and at the same time single out such groups for special treatment, using their own terminology (scheduled tribes or *adivasi* in the case of India and minority nationalities in the case of China. For details, see: Bates 1995; Tapp 1995).

⁴⁴ Here I use the term in its broadest sense as some form of belief in spirits and attribution of divinity to natural phenomena. Thus animistic beliefs would in this sense be characteristic of totemism, fetishism, shamanism and neo-paganism.

character of the links to land that served as fundamental rationale for the creation of a special international regime for the protection of indigenous rights.

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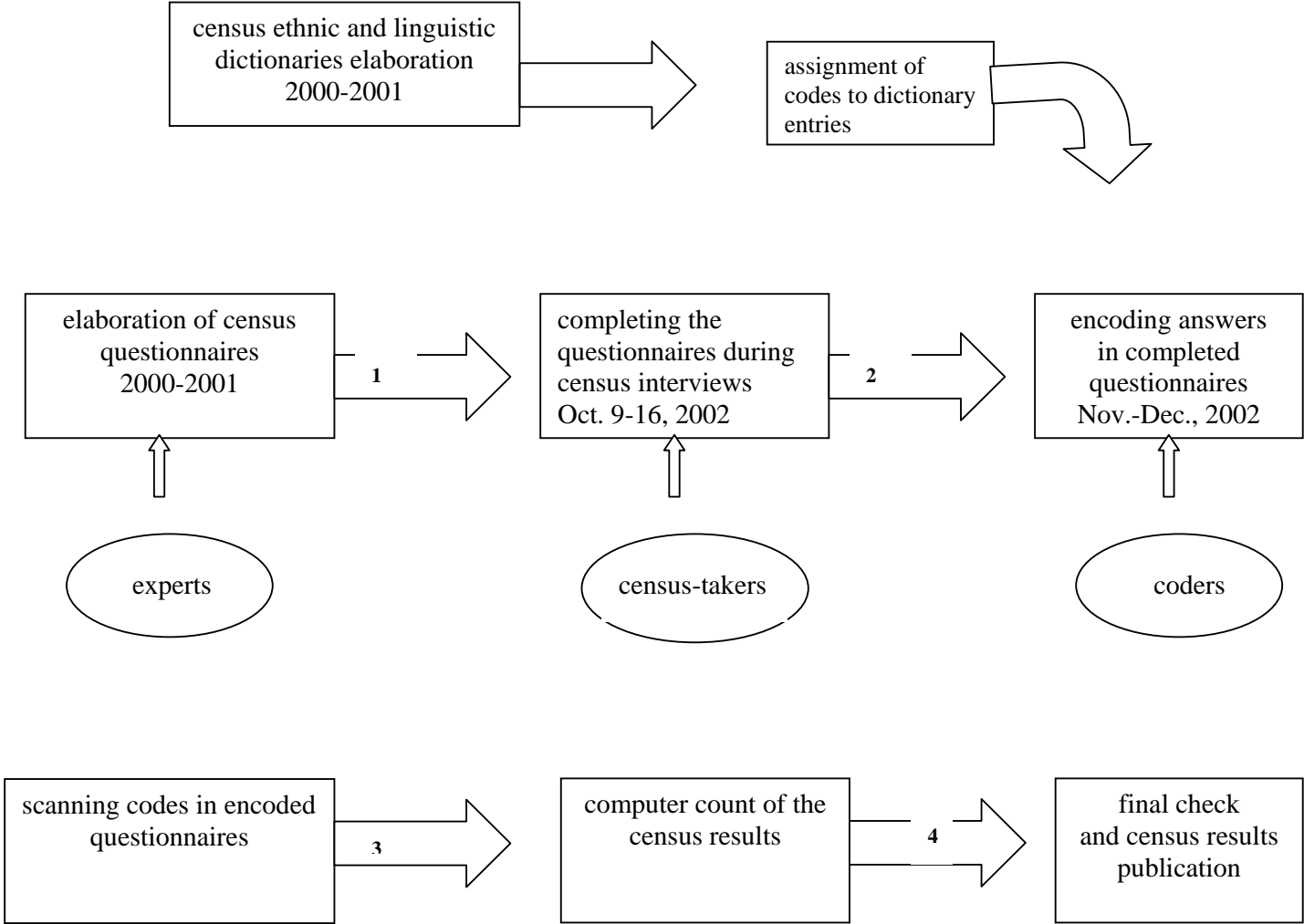
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APPENDIX

Graph 1. Flow-chart of the Census Technology



Graph 2. Demographic Changes in the Group of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples, 1979-2002 (based on official census results published by Goskomstat for the population censuses 1979, 1989, 2002)

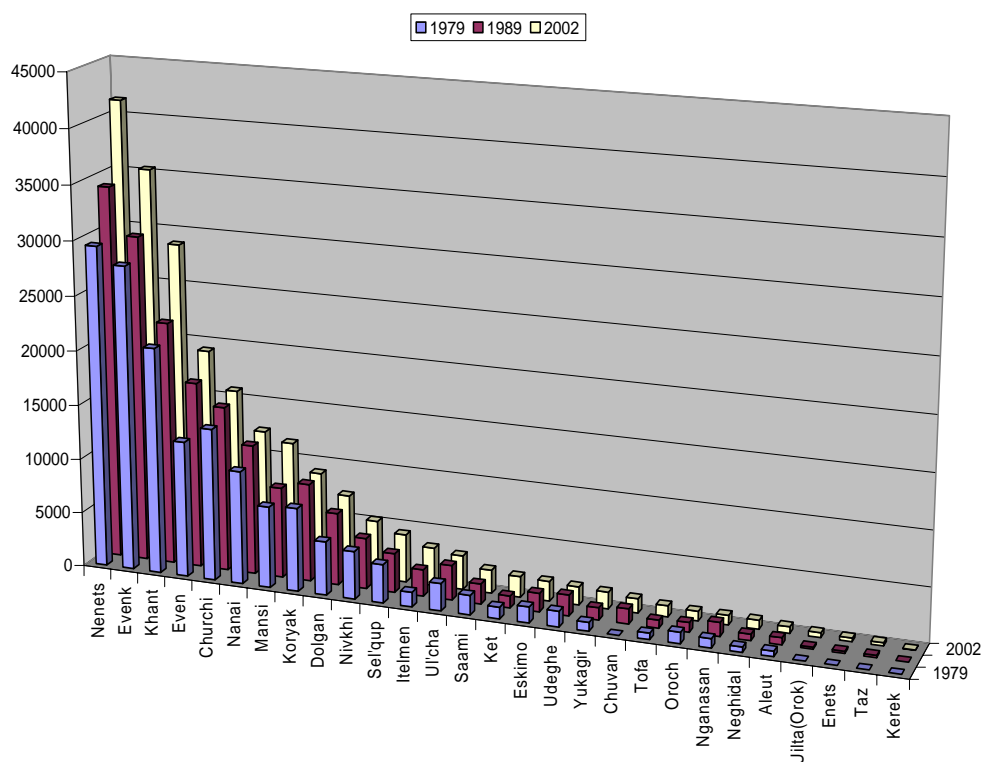


Table 1. Number of Ethnic Categories in Soviet Censuses

<i>Census year</i>	<i>Number of categories (nationalities)</i>
1926	190 (530 ethnonyms)
1937	168 (769 ethnonyms)
1939	62 (101 categories in unpublished census data; 759 ethnonyms)
1959	109
1970	122
1979	125 (886 ethnonyms)
1989	128
1994	176
2002	198* (879 coded ethnonyms – 776 in published census data)

* Initially there were 220 categories suggested by IEA Census Commission.

Table 2. Population Numbers of Indigenous Peoples in Soviet Censuses and Estimates, 1926-1989

Ethnic Categories	Census Data				
	1926	1959	1970	1979	1989
<i>'Peoples of the North'</i>	132549	131665	153246	159324	184510
Nenets	17566	23007	28705	29894	34665
Evenk	38746	24151	25149	27531	30163
Khant	22306	19410	21138	20984	22521
Even	2044	9121	12029	12286	17199
Chukchi	12332	11727	13597	14000	15184
Nanai	5860	8026	10005	10516	12023
Koryak	7439	6287	7487	7879	9242
Mansi	5774	6449	7710	7563	8474
Dolgan	650	3925	4877	5053	6945
Nivkh	4076	3717	4420	4397	4673
Sel'qup	1630	3768	4282	3565	3612
Ulcha	723	2055	2448	2552	3233
Itelmen	899 (3704*)	1109	1301	1370	2481
Udege	1357	1444	1469	1551	2011
Saami	1720	1792	1884	1888	1890
Eskimo	1293	1118	1308	1510	1719
Chuvan	707	(534)	1	1	1511
Nganasan	(831)	748	953	867	1278
Yukaghir	443	442	615	835	1142
Ket	1428	1019	1182	1122	1113
Oroch	647	782**	1089**	1198**	915
Tofa	415	586	620	763	731
Aleut	353 (449)	421	441	546	702
Neghidal	683	(350)	537	504	622
Enets	(476)	?	?	(300)	209
Uilta (Orok)	162***	(300)	?	(317)	190 (341)
Abaza	13825	19591	25448	29000	
Veps	32785	16374	8281	8094	12142
Izhora	16137	1062	781	748	449
Kamchadal	2997 (3704)*	?	?	?	?
Shor	12600	15300	16500	16033	15745
Altay	39062	44654	54614	58879	69409
Kumanda	6327	(7000)	?	?	?
Teleut	(1000)	?	?	?	2594

Chelkan	(1000)	?	?	?	(700-800)
Khakass	45600	56800	66700	70800	78500
Chulym	?	?	?	?	(560)

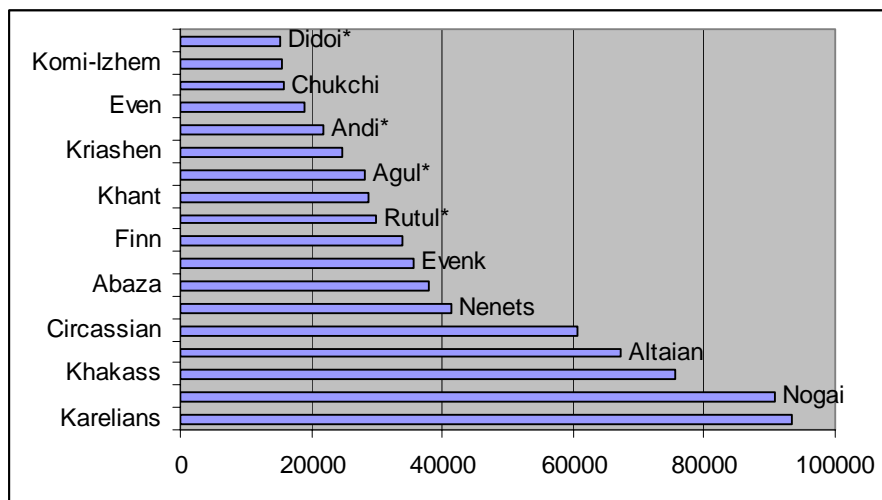
* the number of Itelmen for 1926-27 includes some of Kamchadal as well (according to the data of the Circumpolar economic census of 1927 there were 899 Itelmen and 2997 Kamchadal (Source: Murashko 1999: 63); according to the Census of 1926 their total number was 4217).

** the number of Oroch is assessed wrongly, as it included Uilta of Sakhalin as well.

*** the number of Uilta of Sakhalin for 1926-27 indicates their number in Northern Sakhalin only.

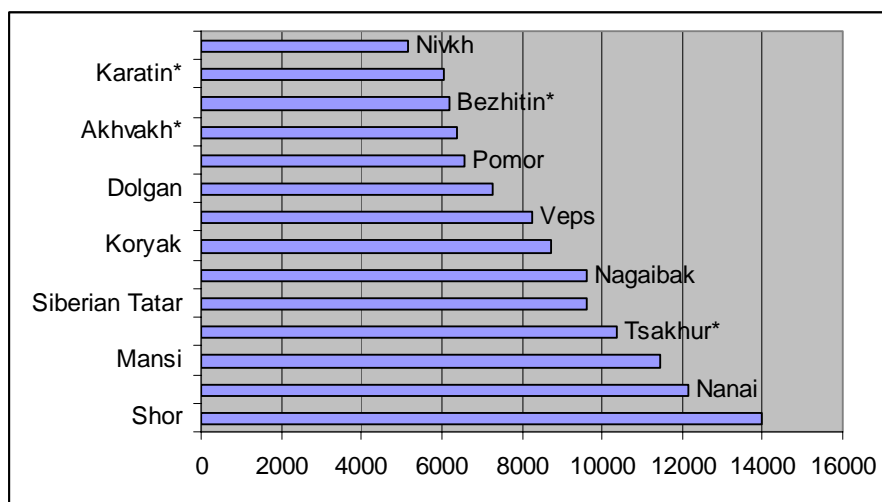
Numbers in brackets show assessments of various researchers: Nivkh for 1959 from the data of Anna Smolyak; Chelkans at the end of 1990s from the data of Dmitry Funk (2000: 3); Nagaibak at the end of 1990s by the data of I. Atmagulov (1998: 29); Chuvans from the linguistic assessments of Ilya Gurchich and Elena Batyanova (1999: 10); Aleut in the column of 1926 is an assessment by R. Lyapunova for 1917 (1999: 31); Chulym for the end of 1980s from the data of Eleonora L'vova and Vladimir Dremov (1991: 3); for Ket in 1926 from the data of Boris Dolghikh (1982: 85-86); the count for Enets in the column of 1926 is based on the assessment of the number of Yenisei Samoed for 1897, as in the period from 1926 to 1979 there were counted as Nenets (the same holds for Nganasan, which in the Census of 1926 were counted as Nenets).

Graph 3. Census 2002, 'Indigenous Peoples', Numerical Size Range 15,000-100,000⁴⁵



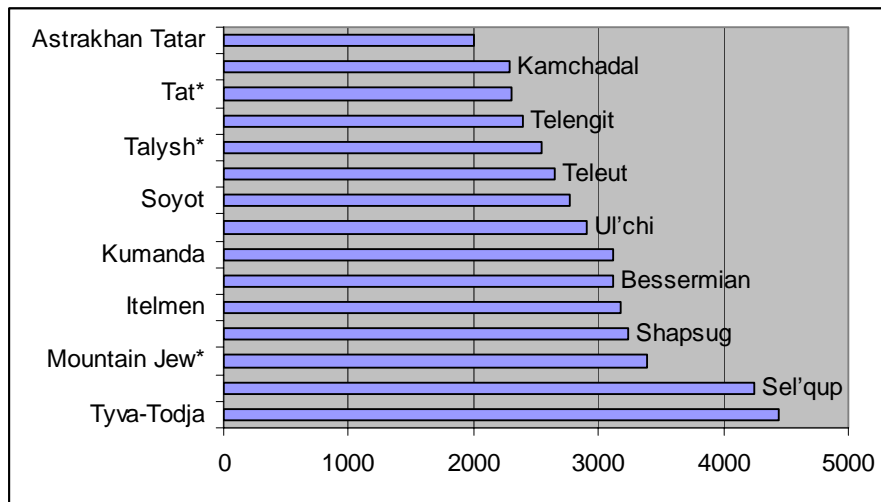
* peoples of Dagestan

Graph 4. Census 2002, 'Indigenous Peoples', Numerical Size Range 5,000-15,000

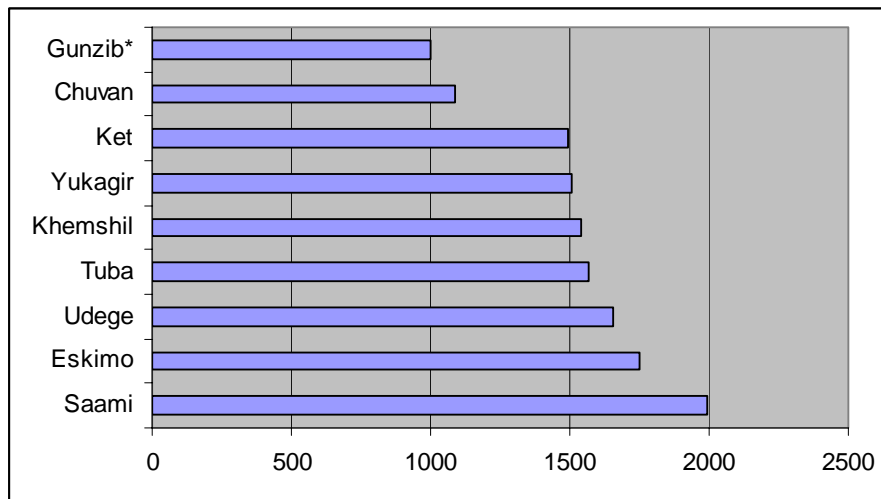


⁴⁵ The graphs 3 to 8 are based on official census results for the population census of 2002 (www.perepis2002.ru)

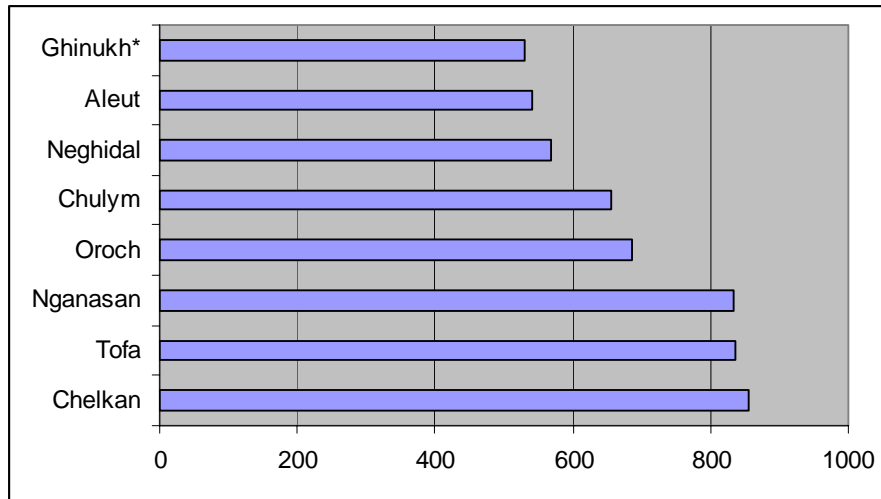
Graph 5. Census 2002, 'Indigenous Peoples', Numerical Size Range 2,000-5,000



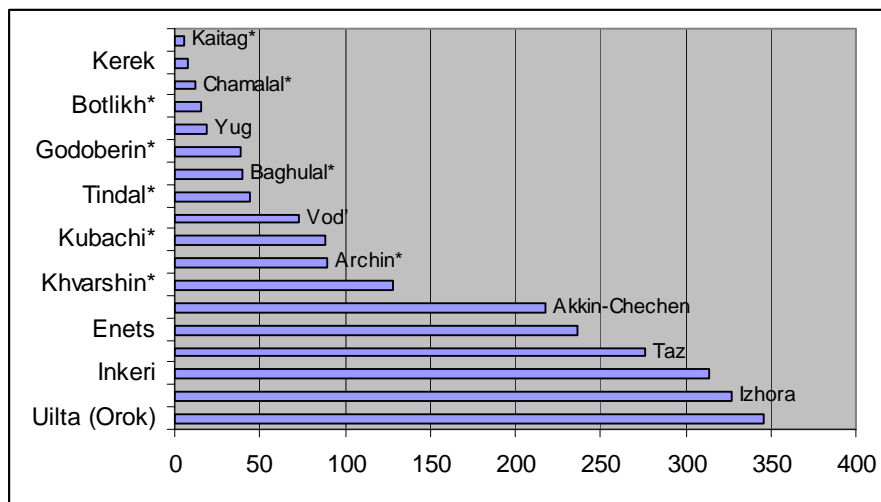
Graph 6. Census 2002, 'Indigenous Peoples', Numerical Size Range 1,000-2,000



Graph 7. Census 2002, 'Indigenous Peoples', Numerical Size Range 500-1,000



Graph 8. Census 2002, 'Indigenous Peoples', Numerical Size Range 0-500



Bessermian	3122	13	10	8	3028	50	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Izhora	327	20	280	8	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nagaibak	9600	36	28	32	73	9329	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	56	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shapsug	3231	4	3227	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sum Total	612912	4044	48982	74996	8578	156438	5592	10218	8994	2278	3822	33308	10374	7893	4610	28864	404	166	6834	3074	33519	2000	17825	1636	15364	8819	4978	806	16855	