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Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology**

Workshop

“Gender Shift in Northern Communities of Russia”

2 – 6 May 2008

ABSTRACTS

(sorted by authors' last names)

Tatiana Barchunova, Oksana Parfenova (Novosibirsk State University, Russia)

Shift F2: Female-to-female sexual relations in Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk

The subject of our research is young women sexually involved with other young women.

The discursive means to describe sexual practices seem to be asymmetrical. In English there is a term “Men having sex with men” (MSM). This term has also a Russian analogue widely used by AIDS-service centers consultants. The closest term referring to the corresponding female practices is “Women loving Women” which is less “straightforwardly” related to sex but stresses love.

The methodological means to describe current intimate practices are also limited. And even when we face interviewees with extremely developed narrative abilities we still miss language to describe the melodramas we have heard.

The classical definitions of gender (gender as a social structure centered on reproduction (Connell) or gender as a social structure being the primary way of signifying of relations of power (Scott), also seem to need some specifications in terms of practices we are doing a research on. The matters of power and reproduction are present in our cases but they might not be the primary focus of our F2 partnerships and casual or persistent relations.

The evaluation of the gender shift is also dubious since in the communities we began our research nobody did anything similar before. We can proceed from our social instincts, our primary knowledge of the experts of the first order.

However, we consider that sexual inter-action between young women in Siberia constitutes an important aspect of their social interaction in general. We consider it to be one of the interaction rituals (to use the concept of R. Collins) based on mutual trust and solidarity. The feeling of trust might not surpass the borders of the dyad or triad (which can also encompass a male friend). Most of our interviewees do not care about any safety in sex and consider mutual trust and fidelity the major protection mechanism.

Our interviewees have a dramatic life. In the dozen of biographical in-depth interviews we have been told about cases of date rape, family battery, loneliness, jealousy, deceit, shame, infidelity. Many of our interviewees are currently college students or received their high education earlier. Their studies do not seem to be an inspiring experience. They are bored, the majors they are receiving are not interesting for them, it is more their parents than they themselves who are interested in their studies.



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Sexual relations with other women seem to them the area of personal life which opens up the world of a perfect human body, tenderness, excitement. Most of them went through heterosexual relations (casual or long-term) and don't exclude them in the future. Some of them consider to have children and look at their former sexual partners as at potential fathers of their children.

We assume that intimate relations between women existed in the area before. What makes the situation different now is eroticization and gender differentiation of the public space – the existence of the so-called *topical* discos, clubs and cafes. However, the perception of the *topical* (*temnye*) clubs and discos by our interviewees is mostly negative. They do not identify these public places as the ideal places of relaxation and communication. They understand them as sexual networks where everybody slept with everybody, places “to get drunk and on the next morning to prove oneself in somebody else's bed”. When a *freshwoman* comes everybody “attacks her as fresh meat”.

In our F2 interviewees the lesbian identification is either totally rejected or is preferred to a bi-sexual identity.

Meri Kulmala (University of Helsinki , Finland)

Russian village women – agents of better quality of everyday life for the local community. The case of rural villages within the Sortavala Municipal District (Russian Karelia)

I will discuss agency, civic activeness and local community building in the small villages of the contemporary Russian Karelia. Drawing on the ethnographic data collected by the intensive fieldwork in four settlements of the Sortavala district (i.e. the villages of Хаапалampi, Helyld, Kaalamo and Vдrtsilд), I will show that women carry a remarkable role in providing activities and services for the fellow. Who are these women and what do they do?

These women represent usually certain ‘*intelligentsia* professions’, such as teachers, cultural workers etc. Usually they work on the voluntary basis but after the recent reform of the local self-government the number of women has increased in the municipal governance. Sometimes, they are also involved in the trans-national projects. Often, there are only a handful of active women: the very same activists are involved with numerous positions and their roles are overlapping. The activism might take the form of the women's associations but it also takes more informal forms.

The activeness of these ‘power women’ is targeted at various groups of the local community for improving the quality of life in the villages that face a huge number of social problems. The feminine nature of the civic activeness is explained by essentialist gender roles: women are by nature eager to help others and carry responsibility over them. Often the explanations follow the line that during the *perestroika* life got worse and women were more successful to cope with the social transformation, while men losing their position as bread winners tumbled into many personal problems.



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Elena Liarskaya (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany)

Гендерный сдвиг на Ямале?

В первой половине 20 века практически все ненцы и ханты, обитавшие на Ямале, жили в тундре. На данный момент продолжает вести традиционный образ жизни примерно половина коренного населения Ямала. Главная особенность ситуации, сложившейся сегодня в регионе, – это сохранение бытового кочевания (то есть кочевания семьями), при котором в тундре постоянно находятся не только мужчины-пастухи, как это происходит в других регионах, но и женщины, старики и дети. Другая половина коренного населения при этом проживает в поселках и городах. Подобное положение дел, безусловно, не могло не изменить гендерный режим, существовавший на Ямале в первой половине 20 века. В докладе предполагается затронуть вопросы о том, каковы именно происходящие изменения, можно ли их описывать как гендерный сдвиг, и если можно, то каковы его особенности в этом регионе.

Natalia Pushkareva (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia)

Методы и подходы к изучению изменений гендерной системы в регионе Север - Северо-Запад РФ

Медленная трансформация гендерной системы в РФ в целом – факт неоспоримый. Какую роль в ней играет северный и северо-западный регион? Какую оценку можно дать наблюдаемым там трансформациям? Сравнения возможны при наличии и признании существования некой идеал-типической модели, приближение или удаление от которой дает возможность оценить наблюдаемое. В качестве такой идеал-типической модели в данном выступлении принимается политика «государственного феминизма» в странах Северной Европы. Что – в сравнении с нею – может быть повторено в регионе Север и Северо-Запад РФ? Особенности демографической истории региона (традиционно низкий возраст брачности и рождения первого ребенка), его «женской истории» (высокий уровень образованности русских женщин в XIX-XX вв., их активная жизненная позиция) и др. оказались благодатной почвой для реализации тех проектов и программ, которые были нацелены на осуществление «гендерного сдвига» в регионе. От теоретической ангажированности аналитика зависят его оценки: любой исследовательский проект не бывает свободен от предпонятий и того теоретического багажа, который заложен в аналитике условиями социализации, образованием и профессиональным становлением. Сбор материала с позиций историка и фольклориста традиционного научного воспитания может вести к утверждению и укреплению стереотипов – как этнических, так и гендерных. Их преодоление ориентация на программу подлинного равенства возможностей мужчин и женщин – моральный императив современного этнолога.



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Petra Rethmann (Mc Master University, Hamilton ON, Canada)

The gender of the collective and the collective of the future

In northern Russia research, living in the tundra or on the land has frequently been described as unambiguously good. Yet why is it that people, especially women and men, experience “being on the land” frequently in different ways, and what about the intra-communal tensions and violence that emerge while they are “on the land”? Taking as its analytical optic the Koriak reindeer brigade number four of Tymlat, a village at Kamchatka’s northeastern shore, I am especially interested in gender formations that existed and continue to exist in the collective – be it the collective of a Soviet brigade or a more tradition-oriented *obshchina* (loosely translated as “community”). The analysis here begins with a critical investigation of both the metaphor and lived reality of “the land” to carry the examination into the diagnostic realms of domesticity, colonialism, and collectivization. In examining how the Soviet project, especially ideals and ideas of socialist modernity and domesticity, inserted themselves into the Koriak life-world and began to change rather habitual communal and gender formations, I trace the production of violence “on the land” while placing the investigation into a larger discussion of Soviet colonialism and collectivization. I ask how Soviet visions of modernity made the production of particular gendered positions possible, and how these positions are presently a source of both pleasure but also violence and constraint. The ethnographic description of the number four reindeer brigade is as vital to my analysis as the analysis of more tradition-oriented gender constellations (marriage, wife barter, polygamy) and Soviet productions of collectivity that resulted in specific constellations of masculinity and femininity.

Tatiana Safonova (Centre for Independent Sociological Research / European University at St Petersburg, Russia)

Siberian *Patsanki*: The study of autonomy of Evenki women

Evenki society poses a typical problem for an anthropologist: whether there is a crucial gender distinction in prestige and labor division among hunter-gatherers. In the frames of this presentation I plan to touch several points, important to answer this question using Evenki materials. These are the form of socialization, images of femininity and patterns of relations between genders. I am going to describe the social position of *patsanka*, a woman that behaves in many ways as a man though does not contest her female identity. The materials for this study were collected during the fieldwork in Burytia Republic in the spring of 2006.



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István Sóntha (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, Hungary)

Aggression and flirting with strangers among Evenki hunter-gatherers of Baikal region

Evenki are one of the most significant hunter-gatherer peoples of the Siberian taiga. They live in small groups far away from each other between Yenisei River and Pacific Ocean. These communities become more and more isolated from each other, because of the mass of migration of strangers into the region searching for their economic profits on taiga-forest exploitation. Traditionally the main activities of Evenki happen in the taiga environment. My research focuses on the Evenki communities living in the borderland of taiga and steppe, where Evenki minority for more than 300 years have been living in contact with cattle breeding Buryats.

In my presentation I am going like to analyze the logic of that type of social events such as aggression and flirting, when the Evenki social organization practically accomplished by males and females in the relations with strangers. Aggression and violence is quite common among Evenki. Contrary to Russian and Buryat interpretations, Evenki see aggression not as a danger, but rather as a sign of personal autonomy, and as a risky situation during which their behaviour could be changed. There is certain logic of these events. For example during drinking after a quiet and friendly phase aggression seems to be always related to competition among equals. Next morning everybody is happy, because aggression did not lead to tragedy. This common experience is the basis of the social cohesion in Durkheimian sense and being ready to participate in the next event organized in the Evenki way.

Flirting is the parallel event to aggression. Both flirting and aggression expose competitiveness for the same reason, to show the independency of the individuals. Both flirting and aggression can be means to involve an outsider into a situation whereby there are equals and in which the outsider's understanding of hierarchy no longer counts. Aggression and flirting provide possibilities for equalizing out social relations with outsiders, who stand higher in the local hierarchy. These activities are gendered: aggression is a male, whereas flirting is a female expression of autonomy. Both, when expressed simultaneously, can also balance each other.

Kirill Shakhovtsov (Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia)

Муж-селькуп и русская жена: семья руководителя общины как экстремальный случай

При анализе гендерной (и любой другой) проблематики у современных южных селькупов необходимо принимать во внимание специфику формирования данной группы, а именно происхождение почти всех ее членов, родившихся в течение последних семи-десяти лет, из смешанных селькупско-русских (селькупско-украинских, селькупско-немецких и т.д.) семей, и, соответственно, вовлеченность в «околоселькупский дискурс» членов семей и родственников из числа неселькупов. В такой ситуации современные южные селькупы воспринимают представления о гендерных ролях как от своих селькупских родителей и родственников, так и от иноэтничного (русскоязычного) большинства, причем в процессе смены поколений представления о



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типично селькупском в женском и мужском поведении все более опосредуются иноэтничными родственниками и окружением. Представления о селькупском мужском поведении артикулируются более отчетливо, чем о женском, и в первую очередь связаны с восприятием мужчины как добытчика (рыбака и охотника), даже если он преуспел в профессии далекой от занятий, считающихся традиционно селькупскими (например, преподаватель, тракторист, глава сельской администрации, коммерсант).

Известные мне руководители селькупских общин и ассоциаций являются выходцами из смешанных семей и сами состоят либо состояли в смешанных браках (руководители-мужчины живут в зарегистрированном браке с русскими женами, а руководители-женщины разведены и/или живут в незарегистрированном втором браке с русскими мужчинами). Семье главы одной из селькупских общин (в терминах ФЗ «Об общинах КМНС») и будет посвящена моя презентация.

В этой семье формальное разграничение на публичную и приватную сферы деятельности совпадает с этнической границей: традиционно мужская публичная роль главы общины исполняется мужем-селькупом. Однако значительная часть организационной деятельности и вся бумажная работа, связанная с этой ролью, выполняется его русской женой, также включенной в публичную сферу (медсестра).

Lilia Vinokurova (Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Yakutsk, Russia)

Мужчины Якутии сегодня: «оставляющие вдов» и стремящиеся жить?

В последние годы по статистике Республика Саха (Якутия) выглядит регионом вполне благополучной демографии. Но это – внешняя хрупкая оболочка текущих социальных проблем, включая гендерные. В Якутии очевидны трудности в реализации социального идентитета мужчин, что связано, прежде всего, с безработицей, состоянием физического здоровья, продолжительностью жизни, способностью создать и сохранять полноценную семью.

Индекс безработицы у мужчин Якутии выше, чем в среднем по России (10,2 против 7,1). Мужчины составляют около половины безработных, численно они преобладают они в пожилых возрастных группах. Это по официальным данным, в реальности в этнических селах очень низка трудовая занятость молодых мужчин.

В начале 1980-х гг. в республике на 1 тысячу населения приходилось 10 свадеб и 4 развода, а в 2007-м – те же 4 развода уже только на 7 свадеб. Недостатка невест нет, в возрастной группе от 20 до 30 лет – примерно равное количество юношей и девушек. Ответы на вопрос о причинах неожиданного безбрачия мужчин – православных и язычников – нужно искать в социальной сфере.

Мужчины Якутии продолжают занимать ведущие позиции в экономике, в финансах, в политике, в региональной и местной власти. Но они платят высокую цену за свое внешнее лидерство – уровень смертности мужчин в Якутии почти в два раза превышает женскую. Много мужчин, болеющих туберкулезом, онкологическими заболеваниями. Как следствие – в республике слишком много вдов. Интересно наблюдать самоорганизацию мужчин Якутии, стремящихся решать эти проблемы. Часто они обращаются к этническим традициям культуры Семьи и Отцов.



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Aimar Ventsel (Estonian Literature Museum, Tartu University, Estonia)

Hidden sex, promiscuity and ordinary youth: Dolgan way of maintaining good family reputation

In my article I discuss the multiple levels of sexuality among the Dolgan in the Anabarski district, NW Republic of Sakha. Dolgan extended families are extremely conservative when it comes to the sexual moral of the youth. Not only girls but also boys are expected to maintain sexual purity until the marriage age. According to the vernacular view, non-registered marriages are not tolerated. The marriage is very much connected to the clan policy and ancient norms, and needs the blessing of elders. However, young people have developed series of strategies to overcome these regulations. Hypersexuality is very much a sign of virility and respected among the peers. To be sexually active, young people use empty (or uncontrolled) physical and social spaces in the village. The "sexual space" of the village is seen as the territory of native youths and keenly protected from outsiders. At the same time, young people do not openly offend common rules and become "normal" community members when married. All these levels will be analysed in my talk as different parts of complex social practices to maintain locally accepted morality.

Piers Vitebsky (Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, United Kingdom)

The rise, fall and rise of the *chumrabortnitsa* in northern Sakha-Yakutia

The *chumrabortnitsa* (tent-worker and dinner-lady) was a central figure in the Soviet rationalisation of reindeer herding. By paying a small number of women to live officially on the landscape, the regime was able to bring all other women into the villages and sedentarise them. The consequence was to masculinise the landscape, break up the family, and bring reindeer herding almost to a demographic dead-end.

This paper examines ways in which some women – and families – try to subvert this process in order to re-create viable herding groups, and ways in which small shifts of official policy may influence the presence and role of women in herding camps.

Elena Zdravomyslova (European University at St Petersburg, Russia)

Nannies and mothers: Paid domestic work and changes in the gender contract

The paper focuses on the organization of the commercial domestic care for small children which is a mass phenomenon in urban Russia. The first agencies for domestic personnel were organized in 1993; the rapid growth of demand is visible esp. in 2000s with the economic growth, stratification, growing middle class. Mass paid domestic care signifies structural changes in the Russian gender order. The demand for commercial nannies grows when the public care is in deficit, 'working mother' is a core model of the gender contract and the men's and women's share to parental chores is far from being equal. I categorize commercialized caring work in terms of dialectics of control when both sides contribute to the flexible rules of informal labour contract. Under certain conditions paid care can be



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conceptualized as gendered exploitation, combining personalized pre-modern idiom of power (exercised in private realm) and capitalist idiom of power (exercised in labour contract) (Patterson) (Anderson). The presentation is based on the research data of the project carried out in St.Petersburg. I analyze data from the field research in St.Petersburg carried out with the colleagues from CISR and EUSPb (with collaboration with Finish Academy, part of the REFER group, project coordinator from the Finnish side – Anna Rotkirch)

John P. Ziker (Department of Anthropology, Boise State University, USA)

Gender and kinship on the Taimyr Peninsula

This presentation explores the extent to which relations between men and women in Northern communities in Russia have changed from pre-Soviet to post-Soviet time periods. A related question has to do with historical changes in kinship and family structures and how these affect male/female relationships. I will begin with information gleaned from the 1926/27 Polar Census materials from the Taimyr Peninsula. The census was one of the most detailed enumerations of indigenous people in Siberia with over 400 data points for each household. The material has become an important historical source of data on aboriginal demographics, economics, settlement pattern, and life during a critical period. The pre-Soviet historical analysis will focus on womens' and mens' work, along with other indicators of household and larger-scale economic activity. The Soviet period saw increasing integration of the native population with the large economy and society. As permanent settlements were constructed on the basis of single-family housing and salaried employment in vertically-integrated and state-owned organizations, changes in gender roles and kinship structures occurred. The Soviet period changes will be briefly discussed in light of oral history interviews conducted with native people on the Taimyr. The post-Soviet period saw a breakdown of state-owned organizations, high levels of unemployment, alcoholism, and unnatural death. Recent changes may be affecting gender roles and kinship structures further. These recent changes will be discussed in light of demographic studies of the contemporary population of one community on the Taimyr, as well as ethnographic interviews and participant observation there.