

Indigenous Heraldry: Transferring ethnic imagery from the mundane to the canonical

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European heraldry presents itself as an intriguing collection of symbols that trace their roots to a number of sources, some of which are obvious to spot, while others still lay in obscurity. When talking about heraldry, it is safe bet to assume that, for instance, the symbols that are collected from the animal kingdom underwent a process which transferred them a series of anthropomorphic qualities. The situation was no different for elements that were inspired by vegetation and celestial entities. Heraldry, as it is presented in academic environments, primarily traces its roots to the Old World – as a result, most heraldic symbols are directly linked to key-features, both cultural and environmental, that are native to the land. This turned into a major obstacle in the dawn of the early days of post-colonialism, marked by strong movement that aimed at restoring indigenous symbolism on coat of arms and flags of territories that earned their right to self-governance, or independence. This paper is focusing on giving an interpretation regarding the selection of heraldic symbols and vexillological chromatic schemes that were adopted by Russia's federal subjects with a significant indigenous population. This will include an autonomous okrug, and autonomous republic, and a district from within a kray. We aim at determining if the used symbols reflect, or not, local indigenous identities, if the symbols that are used are entirely of European extraction, or if specific indigenous symbols made their way into the coat of arms of the featured territories. The research that was made concluded that the territories that are situated east of the Urals managed to customize their heraldic design through inserting element extracted from vernacular folklore, while the European territories have a more orthodox approach, using traditional heraldic motifs.

Keywords: A coat of arms, indigenous territory, vexiology, socialist realism

Indigenous Studies: Transitioning from a knowledge-oriented curricula to obscure agendas fueled by propaganda and hatred

Numerous theories aimed at determining the exact communication channels that were capable of producing positive changes when it came to creating a stable platform for the integration of indigenous cultures into modern societies (Aydin, 2012). It is extremely difficult to have a general talk regarding indigenous issues without ignoring an overall shallowness, this is a direct result of the fact that even though we could build a few discussions on a general theoretic framework, that was mainly engineered by academia, we cannot ignore a series of basic characteristics that particularize the struggle for integration, and acknowledgement, for each indigenous/tribal community from around the world (Ozfidan & Ugurlu, 2015). This paper is focusing at brining into discussion a new collection of issues that were probably left out of indigenous studies literature due to a lack of scholars that were willing to see the positive contributions that their analysis could bring. Until now, most indigenous studies research initiatives were way too preoccupied with analyzing aspect of the mundane, or media, and especially of pop culture, in determining the self-created, or postcolonial, image that was inherited by various indigenous groups (Kaya & Aydin, 2013).

This direction was understandable, up to a certain point, as result of the fact that many scholars that are active within this field of research have a background in literature, their interpretation of culture being rooted in their ability to conduct critical studies on literature works singed by indigenous authors, or on works singed by non-indigenous authors which feature indigenous elements, characters or motifs. Few studies were conducted by scholars that are more active in the fields connected to the more factual humanities, those that still retained a form of *Factual Puritanism*, in the post-factual epoch that the

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humanities are slowly emerging themselves into (Yurtseven & Altun, 2015). The study of image, and its deep under-layers, cannot be labeled as a exotic appearance on the landscape of indigenous studies, but the variety of images that made the subject of various studies were usually lacking diversity. Image, as is it mainly interpreted today within this field, is either the subject of an outdated exoticism, or is entirely linked to various products of pop culture. This situation is a direct of result of years of demonizing the sole concept of state authority, also linked with the supremacy of law which is imposed through institutions, and various other structures, that have their power and expertise regulated by law (Kolcak, 2015).

Pop culture, and the variety of images that were associated with it, became a sincere expression of thoughts, emotions, and of a naturally following social dynamic (Aydin, 2015; Kaya, 2015; Ozfidan, 2014). State authority was repeatedly presented as morally corrupt, due to an alleged biased toward indigenous peoples, and all the issues that interfered with them. This gradually led to the appearance of major doubts regarding the reliability of the studies that were published by scholars that were affiliated with indigenous studies departments. The perception of many outsiders was quite clear, accuses of shallowness and cherry picking were not uncommon, and insiders usually did not respond well to criticism (Augustus, 2015).

We can attribute the numerous dysfunctions that are plaguing nowadays various indigenous studies programs, especially those that available in North-American universities, to a primary genetic anomaly that characterized this scholarship since the very beginning: activism. There is a general misconception, which is quite understandable to certain degree, among outsiders, that indigenous studies may actually be an annex, or marginal discipline, or classical anthropology. This is not the case for many reasons, first of all, anthropology, in its classic form, predates the coming-into-being of indigenous studies programs (Fiona, 2015). There are several academic fields that are basically an offshoot of the Civil Rights Movement, this point in time set the foundation for the emergence of the Ethnic Studies programs, which have similarities when it came to their object of study with classic anthropology, but more than often the preferred approach positioned itself in direct contradiction with some basic research ethics. To be even more frank, the activism-filled social climate that defined the '60s and '70s left a permanent mark on Ethnic Studies (McGloin & Carlson, 2013). Activism and scholarly knowledge should not be mixed, and they are merely compatible, to say the least. First of all, activism isn't interested, or doesn't make a goal out of the critical exercise that is so cherished in academia, mainly due to the fact that once you start being an activist for a particular cause, you are already convinced that your efforts are directed toward an objective that is both morally valid, and doesn't present sings of corruption (Ermine & Sinclair, 2004). You cannot apply the same framework in academic research, but this seems to be the key-doctrine which operates in numerous Ethnic Studies departments. Another easy-to-notice weakness of this field comes as a direct consequence of its closed-circle policy. Even though you won't see this highlighted on any official website that is linked to an Ethnic Studies department, or journal, there is a unhealthy tendency to reject any outside criticism for the studies that are conducted by scholars associated with the field, and secondly there are self-imposed limitations when it comes to the variety of resources that are used in studies. These are characteristics that most notably apply to ES programs from American Universities, and to a lesser extent to those that you will find in Canada. Agency and the *native experience* hold a central position within this scholarship, and it is understandable to a certain extent, but we should also point out that one's belonging to a certain ethnic group doesn't makes of his/her claims in matters related to it valid. The remarks of those that do not fit within *the native category*, a projection of native ethnicity's identity deeply distorted through the actions of identity policies, even if they descend from native parents, is regarded as invalid. Through the lens of ES scholars, every depiction of natives made by non-natives is lack the possibility of projecting any sort of reality without distortions, this mindset latter branched in some other few sectors too. The flags, and coat of arms, that were adopted by native nations and tribes throughout the world as official symbols rejected bluntly the rules of traditional vexillology, being assumed that they were Eurocentric standards (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008).

This was also the case with the design of many indigenous coats of arms. Things were slightly different for the indigenous of Russia, one crucial aspect that sets them apart from the North-American indigenous, is that there was no initiative of creative study programs dedicated solely to indigenous culture in national and regional universities during the period of ethnic revival that marked the end of the USSR, and its successor, the Russian Federation. Unlike in the case of the indigenous of the US, the Russian state, through the various forms that it existed throughout history, there was no single policy that was applied for all the indigenous that lived on Russian-administered territories. This is mainly due to the fact that there are huge differences between indigenous groups throughout Russia, these differences range from mobility, economic development, language, religion, and degree of assimilation. As a result, the research that was

directed toward indigenous issues was conducted by both Russian and indigenous scholars, but to a greater extent by Russians. A major center for research and events dedicated to indigenous cultures is Sankt Petersburg, during the Soviet era it hosted a center which was dedicated to the research of indigenous groups. Major differences are linked to the fact that the research that was conducted followed the rigors of traditional anthropology, collecting data from a variety of sources, and usually the results were not influenced so much by the goals of a political agenda. On the other hand, we can also point out that a disadvantage in the case of Russia is that there are fewer indigenous scholars involved in research, this can add up in time to the crystallization of an one-perspective approach, which can prove harmful in time when it comes to maintaining a balance. Across Eastern Europe, anthropology was used to study the physical/racial traits of various peoples, while history, and later folklore and sociology were put in use to analyze the soft aspects of culture.

Approaching indigenous studies through the lens of the canonical humanities: Heraldry and Vexillology

The current paper aims at proving that the more conservative fields of the humanities can also make a significant contribution to the study of indigenous groups, making a direct reference to heraldry and vexillology. It should be clarified why they are termed as conservative academic fields within this paper, this mainly dictate by a few key-characteristics that are associated research methodologies and ethics that operate within these fields. We can begin with pointing out that heraldry is a deeply canonical discipline, meaning that it profoundly restricts arbitrary interpretation, and it operates more on standardized interpretations which are usually linked to a tradition that spreads across centuries.

Heraldry was strongly connected with both religious and military institutions, it is deeply philosophical, its vocabulary is highly unique, and cannot be easily understood at first sight. Unlike the humanities that started to emerge in the XX century, heraldry still strongly relies terms borrowed from Old French, making its work hard to popularize among the general public. Its pursuit of knowledge is quite different, knowledge is to be acknowledged, and assimilated, it does not present itself as a subject of personal interpretation. Knowledge is more authority-based, it is linked to ancestral power, it does not derive from the will of the commoners. It can be easily noticed that, unlike the humanities of the XX century, it was strongly influenced by elitism, heraldry, and the afferent knowledge, was familiar to those of a higher social status, leaning clearly more towards a right-wind view of society. The images, and the afferent symbolism, are highly stereotypical in nature, masculinity is associated with bravery, while femininity is linked to nurture, and reconciliation. The same principles are applied when dealing with symbols that are rooted in the animal kingdom, massive animals are associated with acts of bravery, strength, and resistance in the face of danger, while insects, such as bees, are representatives of diligence. As a result, the more massive creatures are associated, usually, with physical strength, while smaller creatures are associated with the strength of the mind that can counteract the many dangers that are posed by more physically strong opponents.

Vexillology shares a similar mindset with heraldry, this comes as no surprise taking into consideration that emerged and evolved in a similar context. There were numerous debates over the last few decades over the choices that numerous indigenous peoples made when it came to the design of the nation's/tribe's flags, coat of arms and emblems. If we take look at the flags of some of the native peoples of the United States we can see that the designs violate some of the most basic rules. One of the most outstanding examples is the flag of Najavo Nation, an Indian reservation that has its territory stretches across New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona and Utah. The fag uses more than three colors, its overall design is fragmented, hard to reproduce, its elements, and details, cannot be seen clearly from a distance (Bainbridge, McCalman, Clifford & Tsey, 2015). Indigenous flag designs usually tend to be bolder, as they want to make a strong statement regarding the core values of their nation, in the same time they want to be very distinctive from the flags of their former rulers. Even so, the flags of the indigenous-inhabited territories of the Russian Federation usually tend to follow a different design pattern. It should be noticed if these flags tend to follow the conventional rules of flag design, or they totally diverge from them, thus emphasizing more of the uniqueness of vernacular elements.

Western Siberian vernacular symbolism contrasted with the European affinities of the lands beyond the Urals

The flag of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District is a bicolor design with a narrow vertical rectangle positioned on its right end, a stylized pair of reindeer horns are positioned on the upper left

corner. The upper band is of a light blue color, while the lower one is light green with a bluish undertone. The vertical rectangle and the reindeer are white. The overall layout of the flag is quite clean, even though it is quite unique due to the presence of the rectangle on the right end, several nations have a design which include two horizontal stripes with an additional vertical stripe on the hoist side. The used colors don't fall in to the standard category, meaning that the blue and green are not what we would call *true green* and *true blue*. The coat of arms diverges even more from the layout used in traditional European heraldry, featuring two overlaid shields of different size, the back shield just features a gules (red) field, the front shield has a thick or (gold) border, two ordinaries are present within the shield, the right one is vert, while the left one is azure. A single charge is featured on the shield, but it is positioned in the middle, spreading on both of the two divisions. On top of the shields stands a crown, or stylized reindeer horns, similar to the one from the flag, it is outlined by a thick red contour which blends it in with the back shield (Wolf, 2001). Two crossed conifer branches are positioned on the outer part of the overlaid shields, a blue ribbon with an inscription is found on the bottom half of the two branches. The style surely follows the aesthetic that was popularize by the socialist regimes, the only more European-style elements are the two shields, even so, the way in which they are positioned contradicts the rules of traditional heraldry. Another aspect that violates the rules of traditional heraldry is the way in which the charge is positioned, it practically overlaps the two ordinaries, not being fully enclosed in neither one.

The general layout is derived from what is generally referred to as socialist heraldry, unlike the traditional heraldry, it features a number of elements that symbolize the struggle of the working class, industrialism and agriculture. Even though the coat of arms of the District does not contain any actual socialist symbolism, its layout is reminiscent from a not so distant past. On a positive note, the coat of arms mainly uses the same color scheme as the flag, with the addition of red and gold, and the white of the charge is interpreted as argent (silver). As a general rule, the flag and coat of arms should share a similar range of colors, in order to forward the idea that both entities express, through different forms and aesthetics, the same national ideals. Even so, the color used can be easily correlated with aspects of the traditional beliefs and lifestyle followed by the Khanty and Mansi people that were deeply influenced by the environmental characteristics of the land on which they dwelled (Leete, 1999). The Khanty traditional faith tells stories which involve sky gods, the vernacular pantheon is quite hierarchical in nature, stories which concern the lower Ob basin are an integral part of folklore – this region being blessed with fertility, vegetation and fauna, that can sustain human life, while the regions that laid in proximity of the river's estuary were considered to be the land of the dead due to their frozen unfertile soil that could hardly sustain human life (Fondahi, 2014). The official interpretation of the colors of the District's flag is that the blue symbolizes the rich water resources of the territory which is given by presence of numerous rivers, the Ob being the largest. The green symbolizes the boreal forests which cover a big part of the territory, while the white symbolizes, as it is officially stated, *the harsh winters*. The charge that sits in the upper left corner is referred to as the *Siberian Crown*, taking the shape of two highly stylized reindeer horns (Appleton, 2002). As a general note, we can acknowledge that in comparison to the federal subject that lay within Europe, the ones from Asia are more inclined toward using symbols that are not linked to the Byzantine Orthodox tradition. It is a safe bet to say that the territories that lay east of the Urals emphasize the use of vernacular vegetation and motifs from ethnic folklore as primary inspiration for the design of the coat of arms and emblems, while the territories from the European side are more conservative in their approach towards the usage of heraldic symbols.

Orthodox symbols can be found through the region, being depicted under the form of religious objects, scenes, or figures. Two great examples are the coat of arms of Moscow and of Murmansk Oblast, the first consists of the iconic scene of Saint George and the Dragon on a shield with a burgundy field, the second consists of a modern shield with a per chief division, the upper quarter consists of an azure field, while the lower one is dominated by a gules tincture. In the lower quarter we find three charges, a gold anchor, with a crossed argent sword and pickaxe. The upper quarter is dominated by a sun rays crown, these are the elements that make up the coat of arms of Murmansk Oblast. The sun rays crown is the most distinctive element, the other charges that are featured are more widely used. In comparison to Moscow's coat of arms, Murmansk's deviates a little from the norms of traditional heraldry, mainly doing so through its choice of tincture, the used red isn't a *true gules*, the same thing can be said about the azure. Also, the overlap between or and argent charges is not something that is encouraged by the traditionalist branch of heraldry. Even so, Murmansk's coat of arms generally follows a general European aesthetic.

Achieving perfection: A unique take on indigenous symbolism mastered by the peoples of the Komi Republic and the Arctic coastal lands

The territory of the Republic of Komi represents the motherland of the Komi peoples, those Permian tribes that inhabit the territories that are situated north of Udmurtia, and south of Nenetsia. The Zyrians are the most numerous group today, which are equally distributed across the Republic's territory, while the Komi of the Upper Kama river, which inhabit the Republic's southern extremity, are almost entirely assimilated by the non-indigenous Russians. The coat of arms of the Republic of Komi features a modern shield with a gold hybrid creature from the Permian mythology centered on a gules field. The charge features a depiction from the vernacular Permian folklore, a prey bird that with the face of the goddess Zarni An placed on her chest. The head of the goddess is joined by six un-horned elk heads both right and left (Kuznetsov, 2005). Such images were encountered for the first time by the non-indigenous during the expansion of what was known as Muscovy Russia, the state gradually expanded to the east, thus concurring and incorporating numerous territories along the way. Items on which gods and goddesses were found in burial grounds, many of which were removed by Russian soldiers.

Depictions of hybrid beings can also be found burial grounds belonging to other indigenous groups, this being the case with some Samoyedic peoples – the headstones are shaped as a Russian cross with reindeer horns, being interpreted as a depiction of Christ riding a reindeer and carrying in his arms the soul of the deceased, thus making their way to the afterlife. It was acknowledged that similar depictions of gods are present in the vernacular folklore of the Ob-Ugric peoples, which populate the heartland of Western Siberia, inhabiting the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug-Yugra. Even so, we can notice that the Ob-Ugrian folklore inherited some specific Siberian nuances, the bear as a motif is more present among these people in contrast to the Komi that inhabit the lands just west of the Urals. The flag of the Republic is quite interesting, but not in reference to its actual design, which is a basic triband, but more to the fact that it doesn't share any colors with the coat of arms. This is quite uncommon in Russia, the coat of arms and flag associated with a federal subject usually share a few elements, many times a similar selection of colors, this states that both objects express through different graphic representation a common set of ideas and values. When discussing the indigenous peoples of Russia, and their national and tribal symbols, we should not dismiss the fact that not all the indigenous groups that live within this nation's borders are organized in to autonomous, or semiautonomous territorial entities. Some of the least numerous groups were organized into subdivisions of bigger federal subjects, most commonly in districts.

This is also the case of the Dulgan and Nenets peoples which inhabit the Taymyr Peninsula which is administered by Krasnoyarsk Krai. Both groups, along with several others, are collectively referred to in official documents as *Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East*, or simply *the Indigenous Peoples of the North* (IWGIA, 2011). Local identities are expressed in various manners, one of them being through the display of flags and coat of arms. The District's flag and coat of arms are highly unique, and are very easy to distinct from the symbols of other districts, and federal subjects. The flag features a Siberian Goose, on a white disc, which can represent the midnight sun of the Arctic lands, the disc is surrounded by four rays of sun which are positioned in such a way to indicate the geographic north, south, east and west. All of these lay on a pale azure field. The coat of arms is quite similar, it also features the Siberian Goose on a modern shield with an azure field, with the midnight sun above its spread wings. This set of symbols in particular is not very ethnic-oriented, but more puts more stress on the natural features of the territory. Even though it doesn't make any direct reference to the indigenous groups that dwell there, it should be taken into consideration that the history, and cultural heritage, of these peoples is strongly connected with the land they inhabited for generations.

As peoples that still practice to a certain extent a nomadic lifestyle, the Nenets and Dulgans are not groups that are characterized by a very rich material culture, this aspect was also influence by the lack of resources of the lands that they lived on. The symbols, flag and coat of arms, honor the stunning features of the Arctic. By doing this, they are inclusive of the people that lived, and still live, in one the world's most inhospitable regions. Other federal subjects that host titular indigenous nations also display an interesting range of symbols, often mixing elements extracted from local tradition, or they also feature elements inherited from the socialist heraldry used in the Soviet era. Chukotka Autonomous Okrug features on its coat of arms several socialist elements, as displaying a map, and a more traditional element in the form of a polar bear, while others, like the Republic of Tuva, totally diverge from the traditional norms of heraldry (Saarniit, 2011).

A pattern when it comes to the design of both the flags and coats of arms of Russia's territories cannot be denied, and is strongly connected with a territory's history prior to the creation of Modern

Russia. It is worth noticing the fact that there is a consensus when it comes to determining the distribution of ideas, and resources, that are responsible for the patterns that we see today in the distribution of heraldic symbols across the territory of the Russian Federation. An obvious remark would be that, as we get close to the ancestral heartland, or the territory that roughly coincides with what was once Muscovy Russia, we encounter a stronger affinity towards the usage of symbolism of European extraction. This comes as a natural consequence of the fact that Muscovy Russia, due to its geographical position, there were strong cultural and economic ties with the neighboring states to the west. The East European Plain, which dominates the whole of European Russia, and merges with the North European Plain – unit which dominates a significant portion of the territory of Poland and Germany, made possible the creation of trade routes, thus Muscovy Russia was always influenced to a certain degree by the social trends and technological advancements that were booming in other places from Europe. The Byzantines were the trade partners that didn't send only goods usable in everyday life, they left a significant mark on the cultural environment of Kiev Rus' (Perrie, 2006).

The Byzantine heritage of Kiev Rus was later transferred to its successor, Muscovy Russia. This explains the presence of a higher density of Byzantine-rooted symbols in the coat of arms of the territories situated west of the Urals. We should also keep in mind that, regardless of the cultural environment that we are analyzing, we will see some general patterns in using certain symbols throughout the world. Birds, especially, are widely used throughout the world, in various cultures, as symbols for groups, tribes, peoples etc (Subtelny, 2005). This has mainly to do with the fact that, as humans, we have very similar perceptions of our immediate environment, and we also are equipped with a similar way of reasoning. As mentioned, birds are used throughout the world as symbols, and they are often identified as messenger of the divine power, or as being noble beings themselves. This mainly has to do with the fact that the sky was for most of human history an unknown realm, totally inaccessible with the technology that was in use. As a result, those beings that could fly were regarded as holders of mystical knowledge, resulting from the fact that men could travel on land and sea, but yet could not travel by air. The same logic can be applied when analyzing when talking about other animals used as heraldic symbols, their behavioral characteristics was strongly anthropomorphized, as the bear's strength in battle became a symbol of bravery and fearlessness, in reality animals display certain behaviors in correlation to their needs for survival and reproduction.

Conclusion

It should be acknowledged from the beginning that is hard to determine a specific set of tools that we can use to analyze the victory, or the supposed fail, of integrating indigenous peoples into mainstream cultures. On the other hand, it would be a blunt lie to state, that overall, the current state of indigenous peoples worldwide did not improve significantly over the last decades. The adoption of tribal/territorial flags, along with coat of arms and emblems represents a crucial step toward a better future for the indigenous peoples of Russia, and not only. Through the data that was collected for this study, I am tempted to affirm that, in the case of Russia, the flags and coats of arms/emblems were conceived in such a way that they could represent in a graphic form the values and ideals of various indigenous groups, while not producing a rift within the heraldic tradition that got crystallized within the nation's borders over the decades and centuries. To a certain extent, the design of the symbols of the indigenous territories became the subject of a necessary compromise, which is highlighted in sociological texts as a crucial step toward the integration of a group. More precisely, the flags/coat of arms contain both colors and symbols that are vernacular to certain territories, but they also take into consideration the regulations that are put in place by the traditional heraldic tradition of Russia.

As a result, we usually have two distinct situations: the flag will follow a general European-based structure, and the colors and the symbols will mainly be extracted from local folklore; or to a lesser extent, the indigenous elements are more dominants, but are still framed in such a way that will link them to an already existent heraldic pattern. It should also be taken into consideration that every state, and this applies even more to those that are multinational, should always find a middle ground between giving the needed free space to smaller groups in order to affirm their identities, but in the same time not letting this interfere with the nation's unity. In comparison to the Russian Federation, the US failed at creating a middle ground when it came to the design of reservation flags. The lack of involvement is also rooted to the somewhat usual statues of these territories, being originally intended to be a sanctuary-like land which will facilitate the preservation of tribal identities, but they ended up being more as territories prone becoming black holes.

This mainly derives from their peculiar status, which doesn't match that of a state, or to be close in some manner to that of the incorporated/unincorporated US territories. The reservation design reflect the identity of their titular tribes, but they are totally oblivious to the general aesthetic of American heraldic and vexillologic design. The situation of the Russian indigenous can also be explained by the fact that a part of them had interacted with their conquerors for a longer time, in comparison to the Indians and the Whites, this facilitating cultural exchange to a greater extent. This means that already some indigenous nations had assimilated elements belonging to Russian culture, thus having a greater degree of comfort.

A successful integration of indigenous peoples is a two way street, it should come with the willingness of the majority to desegregate them, but it also needs to come with the willingness of the indigenous to respect the state that administers their homelands. This applies very well when it comes to choosing the official symbols of an indigenous territory, it should reflect the common ideal shared between the indigenous nations and the nation that they are part of.

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