



Edited by
JOHN P. ZIKER,
JENANNE FERGUSON,
AND VLADIMIR DAVYDOV

THE SIBERIAN WORLD



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The Siberian World provides a window into the expansive and diverse world of Siberian society, offering valuable insights into how local populations view their environments, adapt to change, promote traditions, and maintain infrastructure.

Siberian society comprises more than 30 Indigenous groups, old Russian settlers, and more recent newcomers and their descendants from all over the former Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. The chapters examine a variety of interconnected themes, including language revitalization, legal pluralism, ecology, trade, religion, climate change, and co-creation of practices and identities with state programs and policies. The book's ethnographically rich contributions highlight Indigenous voices, important theoretical concepts, and practices. The material connects with wider discussions of perception of the environment, climate change, cultural and linguistic change, urbanization, Indigenous rights, Arctic politics, globalization, and sustainability/resilience.

The Siberian World will be of interest to scholars from many disciplines, including Indigenous studies, anthropology, archaeology, geography, environmental history, political science, and sociology.

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CONTENTS



<i>List of tables</i>	x
<i>List of contributors</i>	xi
Introduction	1
<i>John P. Ziker, Jenanne Ferguson, and Vladimir Davydov</i>	

PART I: INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVIVAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE 29

1	Language vitality and sustainability: Minority Indigenous languages in the Sakha Republic	31
	<i>Lenore A. Grenoble, Antonina A. Vinokurova, and Elena V. Nesterova</i>	
2	(Socio)linguistic outcomes of social reorganization in Chukotka	47
	<i>Jessica Kantarovich</i>	
3	Kŋaloz'a'n Ujeret'i'n Detelkila'n—Keepers of the Native Hearth: The social life of the Itelmen language—documentation and revitalization	64
	<i>Tatiana Degai, David Koester, Jonathan David Bobaljik, and Chikako Ono</i>	
4	The phenomenology of riverine names and hydrological maps among Siberian Evenki	79
	<i>Nadezhda Mamontova, Thomas F. Thornton, and Elena Klyachko</i>	
5	The tundra Nenets' fire rites, or what is hidden inside of the Nenets female needlework bag <i>tutsya</i> ?	96
	<i>Roza Laptander</i>	

- 6 Transformations of cooking technologies, spatial displacement, and food nostalgia in Chukotka 110
Elena A. Davydova

PART II: LAND, LAW, AND ECOLOGY 121

- 7 Customary law today: Mechanisms of sustainable development of Indigenous peoples 123
Natalya Novikova
- 8 Indigenous land rights and land use in Siberia: Neighboring jurisdictions, varied approaches 139
Viktoriya Filippova, Gail Fondahl, and Antonina Savvinova
- 9 Evenki “false” accounts: Supplies and reindeer in an Indigenous enterprise 156
Tatiana Safonova and Istvan Sántha
- 10 Climate change through the eyes of Yamal reindeer herders 166
Alexandra Terekhina and Alexander Volkovitskiy
- 11 Nature-on-the-move: Boreal forest, permafrost, and pastoral strategies of Sakha people 179
Hiroki Takakura
- 12 Fluctuating human-animal relations: Soiot herder-hunters of South-Central Siberia 192
Alex C. Oehler
- 13 Ecology and culture: Two case studies of empirical knowledge among Katanga Evenkis of Eastern Siberia 205
Karl Mertens

PART III: CO-CREATION OF PEOPLE AND THE STATE 217

- 14 Dancing with cranes, singing to gods: The Sakha Yhyakh and post-Soviet national revival 219
Eleanor Peers
- 15 Double-edged publicity: The youth movement in Buryatia in the 2000s 232
Hibi Y. Watanabe
- 16 Soviet Debris: Failure and the poetics of unfinished construction in Northern Siberia 246
Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov

17	Local gender contracts and the production of traditionality in Siberian Old Believer places <i>Danila Rygovskiy</i>	261
18	Arctic LNG production and the state (the case of Yamal Peninsula) <i>Ksenia Gavrilova</i>	273
19	Biography of alcohol in the Arctic village <i>Anastasiia A. Yarzutkina</i>	285
20	Sanctioned and unsanctioned trade <i>Aimar Ventsel</i>	298
21	Longitudinal ethnography and changing social networks <i>Susan Crate</i>	310

PART IV: FORMAL AND GRASSROOTS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SIBERIAN MOBILITY 323

22	Evenki hunters' and reindeer herders' mobility: Transformation of autonomy regimes <i>Vladimir Davydov</i>	325
23	The infrastructure of food distribution: Translocal Dagestani migrants in Western Siberia <i>Ekaterina Kapustina</i>	340
24	Development cycles of cities in the Siberian North <i>Nadezhda Zamyatina</i>	352
25	What difference does a railroad make?: Transportation and settlement in the BAM region in historical perspective <i>Olga Povoroznyuk and Peter Schweitzer</i>	364
26	Stuck in between: Transportation infrastructure, corporate social responsibility, and the state in a small Siberian oil town <i>Gertrude Saxinger, Natalia Krasnoshtanova, and Gertraud Illmeier</i>	378
27	Hidden dimensions of clandestine fishery: A misfortune topology based on scenarios of failures <i>Lidia Rakhmanova</i>	393
28	Infrastructural brokers in a logistical cul-de-sac: Taimyr's <i>wild</i> winter road drivers <i>Valeria Vasilyeva</i>	405

- 29 Ice roads and floating shops: The seasonal variations and landscape of mobility in Northwest Siberia 416
Mikhail G. Agapov

PART V: RELIGIOUS MOSAICS IN SIBERIA 429

- 30 Contemporary shamanic and spiritual practices in the city of Yakutsk 431
Lena A. Sidorova
- 31 The making of Altaian nationalism: Indigenous intelligentsia, Oirot prophecy, and socialist autonomy, 1904–1922 446
Andrei Znamenski
- 32 Missionaries in the Russian Arctic: Religious and ideological changes among Nenets reindeer herders 461
Laur Vallikivi
- 33 Nanai post-Soviet Shamanism: “True” shamans among the “neo-shamans” 475
Tatiana Bulgakova
- 34 Feeding the gi’rgir at Kilvei: An exploration of human-reindeer-ancestor relations among the Siberian Chukchi 488
Jeanette Lykkegård
- 35 Feasts and festivals among contemporary Siberian communities 501
Stephan Dudeck
- 36 Animals as a reflection of the universe structure in the culture of Oka Buryats and Sojots 517
Veronika Beliaeva-Sachuk

PART VI: CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORY 529

- 37 Economics of the *Santan* trade: Profit of the Nivkh and Ul’chi traders in Northeast Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries 531
Shiro Sasaki
- 38 Power, ritual, and art in the Siberian Ice Age: The collection of ornamented artifacts as evidence of prestige technology 549
Liudmila Lbova and Tatyana Rostyazhenko
- 39 Archaeology of shamanism in Siberian prehistory 563
Feng Qu

— Contents —

40	Rock art research in Southeast Siberia: A history of ideas and ethnographic interpretations <i>Donatas Brandišauskas</i>	575
41	A history of Siberian ethnography <i>Anna Sirina</i>	587
42	Cycles of change: Seasonality in the environmental history of Siberia <i>Spencer Abbe and Ryan Tucker Jones</i>	607
	<i>Index</i>	623

TABLES



1.1	Indigenous minority populations, 2010 and 2002	32
1.2	Definitions of Arctic social indicators by domain	34
1.3	Speakers of Indigenous minority languages and percentage of ethnic population	39
4.1	Categories of Evenki riverine names: continuity and change	89
8.1	Interviewees	144
8.2	Obshchina size	146
15.1	The basic orientations of the activities of youth organizations in Buryatia ($N=75$)	235
15.2	Some details about <i>Istok</i> 's staff members	237
15.3	Migration balance in Buriatiia between 2002 and 2011	239
37.1	Price list of commodities determined by D. Matsuda in 1812 (Matsuda, 1972, pp. 219–225) (Prices are estimated by pieces of Sakhalin sable fur.)	537
37.2	The numbers of boats and crews and quantity of silk garments, silk cloth, and cotton cloth from 1853 to 1867	539
37.3	List of commodities of the trade in 1853 (Kaiho, 1991, pp. 7–8)	540
37.4	Price list of the commodities of the Nivkh (Schrenck, 1899, pp. 281–283) (Items that can be compared with prices of the Japanese side)	542

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INTRODUCTION



*John P. Ziker, Jenanne Ferguson, and
Vladimir Davydov*

THE CHALLENGE OF SIBERIA

Spanning eight time zones and thirteen million square kilometers, Siberia is home to Indigenous Siberians—the so-called “small-numbered native peoples of the North” (*korennyye malochislennyye narody Severa*), more populous Indigenous Siberian ethnic minorities, Russian old settlers, and newcomers and their descendants from all across the former Soviet Union and east Asia. Siberia as a region has been geographically defined in slightly different ways throughout history and different regimes; at its broadest delineation (which we take here) it encompasses all of northern Asia from the Ural Mountains in the west to the sea of Okhotsk and Pacific Ocean in the east, the Arctic Ocean in the north and the borders of central-east Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China to the south. Around 37 million people call this vast space home as of 2022, according to estimates made in late 2021 (Goskomstat, 2022).

Siberia consists of seemingly endless boreal forests (taiga), large rivers that empty into the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, and vast wetlands critical for migratory birds. The region contains a variety of ecological zones from temperate grasslands, savannas, and shrublands to Arctic marine biomes and polar desert (tundra). Much of Siberia is underlain with permafrost—ground that is permanently frozen for two or more years—although with global warming trends differentially affecting the north, the extent of permafrost and its depth is changing quickly. With its population living in remote communities across the tundra and taiga, towns and regional centers, areas of intense industrial development, and large cities mainly along the trans-Siberian highway, the Siberian world is a human mosaic as well as environmental mosaic—one that is as dynamic as it is expansive.

This is not the first attempt at capturing the cultural diversity of the region. One of the inaugural English-language volumes on the ethnography of Siberia was Maksim G. Levin and Leonid P. Potapov’s (eds.) *Peoples of Siberia* (1964), first published in Russian in 1956 (Levin & Potapov, 1956). Dedicating a chapter to each of 30 Siberian Indigenous groups, and also touching on the Russian population of Siberia, the archaeology of the region, and physical anthropological characteristics, the Levin and Potapov volume is a comprehensive descriptive account leveraging Russian (Soviet) ethnography of the region at that point in time. It is organized in a very straightforward, descriptive manner, with each chapter covering

livelihoods, dress, dwellings, food, religion, social organization, etc. for a specific group. However, *Peoples of Siberia* does not engage with anthropological theory or provide much cross-cultural comparison outside of the region. This volume is not meant to be an update of Levin and Potapov, but rather, our authors have contextualized their work in respect to theoretical discussions in anthropology and history, and they engage in deeper, multivocal ethnographic description rather than a stock summaries of the ethnographic present.

This book traverses socio-cultural diversity and human-environment systems across Siberia along six major research themes, each discussed in detail below. Thus, instead of trying to capture each and every corner of this vast social and geographic space, this book is organized along contemporary themes of anthropological research in Siberia, providing rich case studies within each thematic cluster. By focusing on these themes emerging in the current research, we can go beyond a collection of encyclopedic entries in order to learn more about the dynamics of change and perceptions of local peoples.

A region of such diversity deserves to be discussed by an inclusive set of researchers. This volume has a diverse mix of contributors, representing an international group of authors from locations such as North America, Europe, Russia, Japan, and China, among them Indigenous anthropologists. We also present young scholars alongside established researchers who have been working in Siberia since the 1990s or earlier. This varied set of contributors provides more variation in methodological approach and theoretical orientation than one might find otherwise; having this diverse methodological and theoretical background is a benefit for interpreting the complex and varied social-cultural processes in the region and assessing new shifts and developments from multiple angles and perspectives. By bringing together this international group of scholars of Siberia, we hope to contribute an enduring reference volume on current research. By examining these research themes and identifying the linkages between them, we also have some insights into research questions and applied research problems that we think will be relevant for the near future.

In this introduction we will first review the topics covered in this book, highlighting significant points of the contributions within each section. Next, we draw out and highlight overarching themes that cut across many of the case study contributions. At the conclusion we present some insights drawn from these materials and contextualize them in light of the future of Siberian studies.

RESEARCH THEMES

This volume is organized around six research themes: Indigenous language revival and cultural change; land, law, and ecology; co-creation of people and the state; formal and grassroots infrastructure and Siberian mobility; religious mosaics in Siberia; and conceptions of history. As mentioned above, we have attempted to capture some of the major areas of research and theorization within the field of Siberian studies. These themes came about through a variant of grounded theory (Inaba & Kakai, 2019). We started out with a research question: how can we best represent the Siberian world today? With the original proposal for this book, we had divided up the chapters into more than double the number of themes based on author abstracts. However, as the chapters started to arrive, we realized that some themes were failing to produce relevant case studies. Also, in a number of cases, the chapters originally

planned for two separate themes ended up being closer than expected, so the themes were combined. We had an initial theory of how we might answer our question. As we collected our data (the chapters), we pulled out the relevant concepts and grouped the chapters into our research themes. This process also helped us to identify the relationship between themes.

In the sections that follow, we provide a short introduction to each theme and highlight the major points of our contributors. While these themes are separated out, the reader will notice numerous spaces of overlap and interconnection throughout as these divisions are more for ease of organization than definitive categorization. For example, it is difficult to talk about land and ecology without also talking about relations with the state, as well as religion and worldview. Relations with the state are also tied up in issues of infrastructure and mobility, for instance, or due to state influences at various points in history, communities may be now initiating processes and programs that aim to revitalize language and culture. Our aim in providing these categories is to give the reader a place to begin their exploration. When reading chapters from different sections, we hope that the salience of these interconnected themes will clearly emerge and shine through.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE REVIVAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

We begin the book by addressing the region's linguistic and cultural diversity and revitalization movements. Current trends in Siberian language documentation and activism, coupled with the importance of not only research on language, but also cultural knowledge, rituals, and practices are discussed in this section. While relatively sparsely populated, Siberia is actually quite linguistically diverse. Aside from the ubiquitous Russian language, approximately 30 languages (not counting their numerous dialects) from at least 7 language families (and four language isolates) are spoken across the region. While many of these languages share certain areal features common to other parts of inner Asia, a number of these languages—particularly the Paleo-Siberian languages and some of the isolates—have unique typological features rarely seen in the area or the rest of the world (see Vajda, 2009, for more linguistic details). Taking both linguistic and anthropological approaches into consideration, the chapters of this section investigate both language contact and resulting change, as well as efforts for revitalization and maintenance. While some languages spoken in Siberia—notably Sakha, with up to ~450,000 speakers, Tuvan with ~280,000 and Buryat with ~265,000 speakers (Goskomstat, 2010)—are considered to be in a more stable position, we also find others (e.g., Itelmen, discussed by Degai et al., this volume) which are much less widely spoken at present, with just dozens of speakers. Language endangerment and revival, a highly relevant issue and phenomenon worldwide, is considered in light of social and political shifts in Siberian history as well as contemporary phenomena such as globalization. In this section we see both the echoes of language loss as well as linguistic transformation. The variety of situations that set these processes in motion are considered in light of theorizing what language vitality might look like for speakers of these languages.

After the first three chapters (Grenoble et al.; Kantarovich; Degai et al.) dealing more closely with language change, documentation, and revival, the following three chapters (Mamontova et al.; Laptander; Davydova) in this section engage with

notions of cultural preservation and change. Increasing globalization and connection to other parts of the Russian Federation, and the world, which have only accelerated more and more swiftly in the last few decades are leading to shifts in how people travel, engage in subsistence activities, and otherwise make a living. However, as we will see, knowing the land—how to navigate within it, how to gather sustenance, and engage with its various fellow beings—still remains important for many Siberian communities. Amidst new and transforming practices, old ones do persist, and the cultural knowledge related to these activities remain valuable, and valued.

To begin this section of the book, the chapter by Grenoble, Vinokurova, and Nesterova discusses the situation of minority Indigenous languages in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Using the Language Vitality Network Model (Grenoble & Whaley, 2021), the authors show how disruption in one part of the network can lead to language shift and language loss. The authors consider stressors, protective factors, and their interactions, and how these factors play into the vitality and sustainability of Indigenous languages. As a specific example, the status of the Even language and culture is discussed as an illustration of how these factors come together. The authors discuss ways to increase protective factors to offset the impacts of ongoing cultural and linguistic disruption.

Next, Kantarovich discusses linguistic features used by speakers of Modern Chukchi revealing the changes occurring in this polysynthetic language in recent years. After reviewing the sociohistorical context and presenting a discussion of the social positioning of contemporary Chukchi speakers, Kantarovich outlines the reasons for the linguistic changes in the structure of Chukchi. Some of the linguistic impacts turn out to be the result of contact among ethnic groups, while other changes are due to shifts in social life (from small, tightly knit communities to urbanized spaces increasingly connected to a globalizing world).

Degai, Koester, Bobaljik, and Ono provide a rich case study of language revival in their discussion of a years-long effort at language documentation and revitalization among Itelmen communities in Kamchatka. While the language is still spoken, active speakers are few and far between. The chapter reviews the history of Itelmen language documentation, showing how it has intensified significantly since the 1980s. In particular, the chapter highlights the collaborative efforts of the authors with Itelmen scholars and enthusiasts. In addition to field research by Ono and Bobaljik, a gathering of speakers and cultural knowledge bearers from across Kamchatka was organized in 2012. The chapter presents a snapshot of these efforts and the meanings created by such revitalization events.

The next chapter reveals the interplay between language and understandings of the land and water. The river as a landscape feature is a core concept in Evenki culture, among many other Indigenous and non-Indigenous Siberians. Rivers have long served as the reliable water routes helping Evenki to travel, orient, organize, and make sense of space. Mamontova, Thornton, and Klyachko describe the naming principles and toponymic affixes for riverine names in two Indigenous Evenki communities—one in Khabarovskii Krai and the other in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)—in their chapter on the phenomenology of riverine names and hydrological maps. The chapter contributes to understanding how hydrological networks contribute to navigation, migration, ontology, and subsistence among Siberian Indigenous peoples, and what can be revealed by language.

We then move into intersections of language and culture by examining a case of humans communicating with an other-than-human force—in this case, fire. Laptander focuses on Nenets women’s fire rituals which she knows intimately as a Nenets woman and anthropologist. Laptander shows how women interpret the language of fire that brings omens to their family and community life and hunting luck. Fires are a paradoxical force in tundra life: a domestic fire can be protective, but without human control, fire is destructive and dangerous. In Nenets culture, the hearth is physically and symbolically associated with women, family wealth, cooking, heating, needlework, and childbearing. Thus, it follows that women are responsible for making the fire, along with all rites connected to the fire and smoke. The Nenets regard and respect for fire is reflected in folklore, cosmology, and many religious rites; parallel rites are also found in numerous other Indigenous groups in Siberia.

Another key realm of cultural change and revitalization involves food. Research on the consumption of food across the region reveals how “modern” technologies, the loss of collectivization and social structures collide with a desire for nostalgic food, creating new intersections for the revival and recreation of foods associated with the past. In our final chapter in the section, Davydova describes the transformations of gathering practices, cooking, and food preservation technology among reindeer herders of Chukotka. Davydova’s chapter begins with an analysis of how local people employ refrigerators, sugar, and salt in food conservation in the village of Amguema and in the surrounding Amguema tundra in Iul’tinskii raion. The appearance and distribution of these consumer goods has led to a change in both the technology of cooking and the composition of products gathered in the tundra. The chapter examines how these changes, which are rapid, significant, visual, and lived by the people on a daily basis during the mealtime, are reflected upon by the local people, and which role the food memory plays in their present life.

The chapters in this section all point to the increasing importance of both ethnographic and applied projects geared to document and revitalize Indigenous languages and related cultural practices. Identifying the pressures that endanger—as well as the conditions that bolster—the maintenance of such traditions is also deeply intertwined with social and ecological sustainability in these communities. As we will cover in the next section of the book, Siberia, like the rest of the world’s Arctic and Subarctic region, is already being intensively affected by processes of climate change; urbanization and industrialization happening concurrently continue to exacerbate processes of change on the land. Siberian communities are actively dealing with these impacts as they affect both the practical aspects of their daily lives and the ways that they engage with and relate to the land.

LAND, LAW, AND ECOLOGY

In this section we have a selection of chapters that present the diverse ways that people interact with ecosystems in Siberia. The relationship between human populations and the environment is now conditioned by formal legal rights (Fillipova et al.) and administrative processes (Safonova and Sántha), whereas in the distant past (Takakura) resource distributions were largely determinant. Traditional systems that regulate access to resources and social relationships in society are pluralistic in nature and often involve non-human actors facilitating individual action and community

well-being (Novikova). Resource distributions are still important today, and the changing climate also changes available resource distributions and the perception of these changes, even within one region and one Indigenous population (Terekhina and Volkovitskiy). Different strategies can develop over time depending on the climatic and legal-political environment (Oehler). Finally, the type of knowledge ecology that develops is likely dependent on the type of resource being discussed (Mertens). In all, the land, legal, and ecological relationships are an important element to success in Siberia. The nuances of these studies show that traditional knowledge systems play important roles in regulating social and environmental interactions.

Traditional subsistence activities tie local peoples to the land and the dynamics of reproduction of its flora and fauna. Rather than seeing the natural and human systems as semi-autonomous but interconnected systems, Indigenous peoples in Siberia widely view the world as a multitude of inter-relationships and connections. Ingold (2002) and Anderson (2000) first developed this relational perspective between human and non-human persons in the cosmos, environment, and home based on materials in the Eurasian Arctic, and many researchers in this section follow in this tradition.

This characteristic holistic worldview is no less apparent than in Indigenous Siberian customary law. Customary law is commonly thought of as a set of traditions and rules that regulates natural resource use and social relations in a population. With decades of research in the arena of legal anthropology, Novikova (this volume) discusses examples of customary law across several Indigenous groups in Siberia where she has conducted both basic ethnographic work and applied research. Novikova argues that customary law is relevant to Indigenous status, regulation of social relations, equality, and justice in natural resource management, and sustainable development. Furthermore, Novikova suggests that customary law can be successfully incorporated into a pluralistic legal framework within Russia in order to ensure cultural continuity among Siberian Indigenous people.

Turning to a more formal aspect of the Russian legal system that impacts Indigenous people trying to maintain traditional lifeways—the creation and registration of Indigenous enterprises—Filippova, Fondahl, and Savvinova (this volume) examine specific Russian federal and regional laws relevant to land rights for Indigenous Siberians. Such enterprises, known as *obshchinas*, depend on legal rights to traditional lands for their traditional economic activities, such as reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing. As it turns out, the implementation and experience of these laws varies across jurisdictional spaces as discussed in the chapter. Some regions have been more amenable to Indigenous land rights whereas in others, Indigenous peoples have no choice but to make concessions to industrial developers. Both chapters are relevant to understanding the sustainability of traditional economic strategies in light of ongoing industrialization in Siberia.

Continuing our glimpse into the impacts and shifts stemming from industrialization, Safonova and Sántha deliver a case study of a now-defunct Indigenous Evenki jade-mining enterprise in eastern Siberia. Traditional activities such as reindeer herding allowed the enterprise to access mines in remote areas and sell their semi-precious stone to buyers in China. The focus of the chapter is how the manipulation of the enterprise's accounting became a unifying element for members of the enterprise.

We then confront the impacts of climate change on Indigenous perceptions and trace the way that different communities are responding to its ecological impacts.

Climate change in Siberia is having immediate and often devastating effects on local livelihoods and subsistence; many of the impacts and scenarios seen in the Arctic parts of the world are providing a prophetic glimpse of what may occur if decisive steps are not taken to stall warming processes. Rising summer high temperatures are driving the rapid melting of permafrost which covers most of Siberia; the melt releases formerly sequestered carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases, contributing to a cycle of even warmer temperatures (for a recent study on sites on Lena river delta, see Melchert et al., 2022). Hot temperatures combined with drier weather in the summers also spur on the development of vast fires which destroy the taiga forests and further exacerbate permafrost melting. Melting destroys grazing area for reindeer and horses, turning it into swamplands dotted with sinkholes—herders must then adapt quickly to these often unpredictable shifts. The next several chapters engage with the dynamic accumulated bodies of knowledge that herders possess and how they apply and modify their practices in accordance with changing ecological conditions—both those related to climate change as well as industrialization and other kinds of environmental degradation.

Terekhina and Volkovitskiy find that Nenets views on environmental change emphasize the temporality of crucial climate and weather events as these events impact reindeer herding. As Nenets reindeer herders' success is closely tied to their reindeers' success and environmental variations, their understanding of the timing of the seasons as well as the increasing frequency of extreme weather events is something they pay close attention to for decisions around migrations.

Takakura examines ecology from a long-term perspective. He discusses how a particular constellation of environmental variables in eastern Siberia provided opportunities for ancestral Sakha to migrate northward while maintaining their horse and cattle breeding economic strategy. Introducing the concept of nature on the move, Takakura explains how people modify their economic strategies depending on the underlying ecological process.

Oehler's work in the Altai-Sayan region in southern Siberia with Oka-Soiot herders provides another example of the modification of economic strategies depending on changing environmental conditions. Oehler argues that such transitions are carried out through a process of experimentation in a diverse landscape. The result is that subsistence strategies can change over environmental gradients.

Moving from modification of economic strategies to ecological knowledge, Mertens (this volume) looks at the relationship between traditional ecological knowledge and two aspects of ecology among Evenki of the northern Irkutsk region: sable hunting and snow conditions. Mertens finds that there is a lot more variation in the explanation of sable behavior and the traditions associated with it than with the traditions of dealing with various snow conditions. Mertens looks at the individual variation in learned behaviors for specific topics, rather than simply attributing them to the "group" or "culture."

Thus, in periods of accelerating change—whether due to climate change or the push toward industrialization fueled by ever-intensifying globalization in the region—understanding the ways that people (and communities) adapt is vitally important. These adaptations never happen in a vacuum, but are influenced by forces beyond the communities themselves, such as those of the governing state (seen particularly in Filippova et al.'s chapter). We move next into an examination of relationships

between Indigenous Siberians and the state and how this has shaped and transformed group identities and practices over (and at various points in) time.

CO-CREATION OF PEOPLE AND THE STATE

Despite the popular outsider's image of Siberia as a remote, disconnected expanse of the globe, Siberian Indigenous groups have always lived in places with varying degrees of cultural interactions and contacts. Since the 1600s, these interactions have been dominated by the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and Russian Federation. Prior to those times, however, extended trade networks connected Siberians to populations from the Greek colonies as well as states farther afield in southern Asia.

For the last 500 years especially, there were practically no places where Indigenous peoples would stay in isolation, without relations with their neighbors and the administrative bodies created by the state. In many respects the state institutions initiated specific developmental policies which gradually changed local people's way of life. The chapters in this section analyze complex interactions occurring in the context of different intentions, some of which people manifest due to the presence of the state. They are focused on the process of construction and failure of the Soviet project, qualitative changes in the public sphere, and local people's publicity and institutionalization of religious practices. A distinctive feature of these changes is the emergence of the events serving as the displays of ethnic identity. Official feasts and institutionalized ritual practices at public events are co-created by local people and the state institutions, gradually transforming social relations at different levels. In this section we highlight eight studies that examine co-creation of contemporary identity and economy as a result of interactions of Siberia peoples and the Russian state.

During the Soviet Union, the state sought to control and influence social relationships at all levels and phases of the life cycle. In the shadows of the formal economy people could often pursue their own economic interests via what authorities termed the black market. As the Soviet Union ended the black market essentially transformed into the free market across urban centers in Russia. In remote regions the economy faltered and the (likely) unintended consequence was increased reliance on informal social relations, such as Ventsel's food sharing networks and Crate's "cows-and-kin" strategy described in this volume became paramount for achieving economic aims, especially in the remote regions of Siberia. Locally, the provisioning families and communities with locally procured foods and other products from the taiga and tundra was paramount (cf. Ziker, 2003; Ziker, Nolin, & Rasmussen, 2016), alongside the distribution or sharing of consumer products and equipment. In this section we highlighted researchers working on the opportunities provided by state integration, as well as the pressures and effects of state development policies. State regulation of civil society still provides avenues for individual and collective expression such as in Watanabe's study of Buryatia and Peers study of the *yhyakh* ritual. Reification of hunting-and-gathering (Ssorin-Chaikov), gender differentiation (Rygovskiy), use of alcohol (Yarzutkina) are unintended consequences of Soviet and post-Soviet development.

Peers's chapter initiates this section through an examination of the interplay between state influences and spirituality, revealing how spiritual revitalization often intersects with national revival. The Sakha ritual *yhyakh*, a festival that formed a key

part of the Sakha yearly calendar in pre-Soviet times. Peers discusses how late-Soviet activists in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) revitalized this local and regional ritual which has now become a large, unifying event for the Sakha people. In addition, the revitalization of this ritual has gone alongside the revitalization of shamanic and spiritual practices overall, and Peers discusses the relationship between post-Soviet revitalization of spirituality and the revival and mobilization of Sakha national identity and ideas of belonging.

We then move on to a case study examining the interface between state-approved youth movements and individual self-realization. In the Russian Federation, youth organizations are managed by the authorities, and this results in sometimes ambivalent connotations for civil society. Watanabe's chapter examines publicity of a youth movement in the Republic of Buryatia in eastern Siberia. Considering both policies in the republic and the patterns of fragmentation of NGOs across Russia, Watanabe shows how even these administratively-mediated civil society movements can deliver ways to empower the self-realization of local citizens.

Gavrilova's chapter provides unique insights into the Russian petro-state. Gavrilova contributes to the theme of co-creation through a case study of Yamal LNG—a corporate state within a state—centered in the town of Sabetta on the Yamal Peninsula. Despite heavy restrictions on her work, Gavrilova's fieldwork at Yamal LNG (which engages in natural gas production, liquefaction and then shipping/transport) explores how it behaves as a sovereign actor governing its territory, including the spatial isolation of the site, infrastructural independence of the enterprise, a strict labor routine for shift-workers, and corporate gifts for nearby Yamal Indigenous communities. Nevertheless, this regime exists only through its participation in a symbolic competition with other sovereign actors that manifest their power over Sabetta, including the other national and regional actors.

While the first chapters in this section highlight how the state creates and facilitates ethnic identity, local communities, and organizations, the remaining chapters in the section focus on how local communities incorporate the dynamics of the state into their lifeways. Yarzutkina takes a biographical approach to alcohol and its consumption in an Indigenous community in Chukotka. Through her in-depth ethnography, Yarzutkina shows how alcohol is an actor—an actor that has become an indispensable element within mediations of the human-animal-spirit world relationships in this community. While not viewed as the most virtuous element in this Indigenous worldview, this “biography” of alcohol allows us to investigate the social environment surrounding its use and how the state helped make it so.

Ssorin-Chaikov then examines the role of failure in understanding Soviet and Russian developmental policies in Indigenous Siberia based on ethnographic and historical work with an Evenki community in central Siberia. The goal of state development policies was to turn Indigenous Evenki lifeways from “primitive” to “scientific” communism. As it turns out, however, the failure of development resulted in the creation of an Indigenous underclass and new forms of hunting and gathering, including hunting Soviet welfare and gathering from the infrastructure of these projects. Ssorin-Chaikov's study identifies the ways that the failure of state-sponsored development co-creates the conditions among contemporary Indigenous groups.

Ventsel examines the effects of increasing regulation of big-game hunting in northern Sakha in a Dolgan-Evenki community. Since the early 2000s the state has

increasingly regulated hunting activities through requiring the purchase of hunting licenses. Thus hunting has moved from an informally-managed, common pool resource to a specialized activity among just a few hunters operating on a commercial basis. The remaining hunters have turned their pooling efforts to fishing. This is a common story across the Arctic and other regions around the world as well, as fishing can be a low risk activity even in harsh climates (Dombrowsky et al., 2020). Ventsel's longitudinal insights in this Indigenous community illustrate the flexibility of local subsistence and food sharing strategies given the changing dynamics of state intervention.

Similarly, Rygovskiy examines gender relations in an Old Believer Chasovennoe community, asking how “traditionality” is produced and transformed through interactions with the state. Siberian Old Believers are now more restricted than during Soviet times, and more closed as a group than prior to the Revolution of 1917. Rygovskiy shows how the growth of informal economic relations in Old Believer communities paralleled the building of official Soviet society. The so-called traditional gender division of labor in taiga villages—where women were supposed to keep the household while men were providing resources (e.g., furs, fish, etc.)—constituted a part of that informal, horizontal economy.

Crate rounds out this section of the book with her longitudinal work on changing social networks in a Sakha community. In the 1990s Viliui Sakha adapted to the dissolution of the state farms and disruptions in the local food supply by developing intra-household food production strategies that Crate famously called “cows-and-kin” (Crate, 2006). As the Russian economy became more globalized in the 2010s and climate change made access to pastures more difficult, parents were encouraging their children to leave rural areas and explore opportunities for education and employment in urban centers. The Viliui Sakha have changed from a risk-minimizing buffering subsistence strategy to investment in embodied capital. It remains to be seen how this strategy of urbanization will develop with the Russian state's military actions in Ukraine and resulting isolation from the global economy.

FORMAL AND GRASSROOTS INFRASTRUCTURE AND SIBERIAN MOBILITY

Contemporary energy problems in Siberia acquired a systemic character in connection with the processes of globalization. As will be demonstrated in the chapters in this section, the problems of choosing a direction of modernization and finding new resources are questions that remain unresolved. This makes the study of changes in the local communities, resources, their utilization and conservation, as well as the adaptation of the local people to the socio-economic and environmental changes, especially timely and relevant. In this section of the volume, we have collected texts reflecting different kinds of infrastructural innovations in Siberian context. It aims to consider the exploitation of resources in Siberia in the context of the functioning of industrial development projects, the rationalization of local economic practices, and the effects of the introduction of new technologies and equipment. Some authors cover the history of huge development projects, urbanization, the use of infrastructure and how it changes mobility patterns, whereas others provide fine-grained case studies of locally generated infrastructural systems. The chapters dealing with large

scale infrastructures (Davydov; Povorznyuk & Schweitzer; Zamyatina; Saxinger et al., this volume) reflect on how people adapt to infrastructure development or the meanings these developments have for their lives. The chapters that focus on grassroots infrastructure (Kapustina; Rakhmanova; Vasilieva; and Agapov, this volume) illustrate the ways that people come together to form infrastructure even where formal infrastructure exists in one form or another. This is reminiscent of informal distribution strategies that developed alongside market reforms following the collapse of the Soviet Union in Siberia (Ziker, 2006).

How do local people deal with the development of large infrastructure projects and how does it affect their mobility? Davydov starts off this section of the book with a case study in changing autonomies of Evenki hunters and reindeer herders. Autonomy regimes have changed over time due to a complex interaction between different infrastructures, new ways of organizing and timing human activities on the landscape, and interactions with the state. Reminiscent of chapters in the section on co-creation, this chapter delves deeper into what changing mobility strategies means for Evenki autonomy. Utilizing the concept of temporality Davydov shows how the use of certain key locations for reindeer herding and hunting have intensified over time.

Infrastructure development provides opportunities and constraints on local populations and thus becomes an agent of change. Taking a combined historical and ethnographic approach, Povorznyuk and Schweitzer explore the social, demographic, and ecological effects of the construction of the Baikal-Amur-Mainline (BAM) railroad that passes through north of Lake Baikal, a region traditionally inhabited by semi-nomadic Evenki reindeer herders and hunters. The authors ask crucial questions about what difference a railroad makes in the lives of the local population. While the social costs and benefits are difficult to ascertain, one thing for certain is that the world as people there know it today would not exist without the BAM.

Kapustina develops the concept of translocal infrastructure with a case study of the grassroots infrastructure of Caucasian migrants to Western Siberian oil towns. Migrants from southwestern Russia's Republic of Dagestan, have established an extensive system for transportation of resources and persons. The chapter focuses on food, covering both the supply of specialty food items from originating communities as well as the establishment of cafes and stores in the destination that have become integrated into the wider lifeways of these oil towns. Translocal infrastructure helps to break down stereotypes of Caucasian peoples as militants and recipients of social welfare and establishes Dagestan as a source of healthy and environmentally-friendly food options.

How do urban infrastructures rise and fall in Siberia? And what are the conditions under which a transition from services focused mainly on resource extraction to new kinds of services prevent the fall of an urban development? Zamyatina's chapter describes the development cycles of Siberian urban centers with different resource exploitation histories. She examines the potential for a "Jack London effect" in development cycles in four different regions of oil and gas extraction (Khanty-Mansiyskii autonomous okrug "Ugra," the Yamal Peninsula, the northern reaches of the Yenisei, and Dickson on the northern coast). Zamyatina reveals how they are transitioning away from resource extraction to new services, such as new technology development.

Verkhne-markovo is a small Siberian town located on an oil field in Russia's Irkutskaya oblast' that has long been plagued by bad roads and limited mobility. The chapter by Saxinger, Krasnoshtanova, and Illmeier describes how this community is stuck in between promises made by the oil companies and promises from the state. While the oil company should be making investments under the banner of corporate social responsibility as in other regions, the authors find that the degree to which they do is highly dependent on oblast'-level expectations and relationships. The result is that the community of Verkhne-markovo has neither investment from the oil company or the state, and their transportation infrastructure is decrepit. The authors introduce the concept of "infrastructural violence" to describe the living conditions there.

We next move explorations of grassroots infrastructure and the varying kinds of quotidian interactions that locals have with these structures and processes. Examining what happens when things go wrong in an illegal fishing community, Rakhmanova describes how fishermen attract luck and enter into a partnership with it through rather counterintuitive means. Like Davydov, she employs concepts of temporality to discuss how these fishers on the Ob River anticipate the future, and essentially live "in the past of their future" through their planning for possible failures in their activities. In the process the fishermen create an infrastructure consisting of hierarchies of places and acceptable actions and practices that are employed in order to anticipate failure and maximize success at the same time. Rakhmanova's chapter is also a reflection on the role of the researcher and how they may also contribute to events of success—or failure—in the course of their fieldwork, and how that may lead to unexpected insights.

Vasilyeva develops the concept of "infrastructure brokers" in the context of the wild winter roads of the Taimyr region. She reveals how these "wild winter roads"—informally maintained ice-roads used for transportation in winter time—are a prime example of grassroots infrastructure that stand in contrast to official winter roads that are maintained by the state or private sector. Wild winter road drivers have a background for this kind of work, have mastered the technique of driving and maintaining an automobile, have wayfinding skills, and also have the social connections necessary to support the stable functioning of the infrastructure. Thus, these drivers are brokers of this informally organized infrastructure that facilitates mobility across the tundra.

Finally Agapov discusses another case of grassroots infrastructure, this time in northwestern Siberia's Yamal region with a look at the transport infrastructure on floating shops and winter roads. Agapov focuses on the role of the landscape in organizing channels for the flows of goods, money, and raw materials, and finds that the mobile commercial infrastructure is highly adaptive to the local environment.

In our next section, we move from physical infrastructures to a more metaphorical one—that of religion and worldview. In those chapters, we examine how religious revival intersects with broader sociopolitical concerns as well as the precarities of everyday life, creating another kind of "infrastructure" for living.

RELIGIOUS MOSAICS IN SIBERIA

The post-Soviet era in Siberia within diverse religious domains has been one of revival, recreation, and transformation; these chapters examine continuity and

change within different religious faiths, and the intersections of the macro (social and political forces and concerns) with the micro (everyday practices and activities) spheres of life in the region. While often strongly discouraged from public observance under Soviet rule, many practitioners and adherents maintained their various spiritual practices in private settings—despite threats of exile or even death in the case of many shamanic practitioners, for example. Contemporary religious revitalization often involves the public acknowledgement or performance of rituals and practices related to Indigenous Siberian shamanic or animistic belief systems, in which they are adapted under conditions of urbanization, or after years of dormancy (Sidorova; Bulgakova; Lykkegård). We also see the results of contact between faiths, both from the historic period (between Siberian Indigenous religions and Russian Orthodoxy or Tibetan Buddhism, the latter in Znamenski's and Beliaeva-Sachuk's chapters) as well as the contemporary era, which evinces the increasing contact with global religious movements (such as Evangelical or Pentecostal Christianity, as in Vallikivi's chapter).

To begin the section, Sidorova investigates a new generation of shamanic practitioners in the city of Yakutsk, in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), focusing on the way that many new (often youthful) ritual specialists incorporate varying attributes from historic Sakha shamanic traditions. Using five brief case studies of the practitioners, Sidorova examines the impacts of both urbanization and globalized influences on the public and private practices within contemporary shamanism in a growing Siberian city. In all cases, even the innovative and “imported” aspects of the traditions all seek to reconnect urban Sakha with what is conceptualized as their spiritual roots, including features such as the connection to (home)land, to ancestors, and to an animate and ever-transforming world.

Znamenski's chapter focuses on the historical development of Altai nationalism in the early part of the 20th century where an ethnic self-awareness emerged. Located in the Mountain Altai region (an area nestled at the point where the Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese borders meet in southwestern Siberia), Indigenous Altaians wove together the narratives and identities of their “Oïrot” past. Three strands were integrated: the activities of the local intelligentsia who worked to record folklore and other ethnographic material; the emergence of a prophetic, proto-nationalist religious movement (Ak-Jang or Burkhanism); and the development of Indigenous socialist forms (Bolshevism) combined with local iterations of nationalism.

Vallikivi then examines the encounters of Nenets reindeer herders with Christian missionaries along the Arctic coast. Examining the past and present transformations in language and faith brought by Evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries, this chapter looks at how ideas and ideologies about language, personhood, and relations with the state shift among Nenets who convert to these forms of Christianity.

Bulgakova has been conducting ethnographic research among the Nanai peoples in Khabarovskii Krai in the Russian Far East for 35 years. Complementing Sidorova's chapter by focusing on another regional context, she presents an overview of what Nanai shamans say about the changes that have occurred in their practices over the past few decades in a discussion of post-Soviet Nanai shamanism. Many modern Nanai shamans strongly object to being called “neo-shamans”—a term appearing in Russia in the post-Soviet period. Based on Bulgakova's rich ethnographic materials, the relevant contrast is revealed to be not one that contrasts “traditional shamans” and “neo-shamans,” but between the “real, true” shamans and “fake” ones.

Lykkegård also presents rich ethnographic material, in this case on human-reindeer-ancestor relations among Siberian Chukchi communities. She focuses here on feeding *gi'rgir*—the spirit owners of the reindeer herd and ancestors—in the *kilvei* ritual. As with many traditional belief systems, sacrificial acts among the Chukchi have the goal of directing action in a desired way. The Chukchi she worked with are concerned with sustaining themselves and their reindeer, and Lykkegård skillfully demonstrates how the *gi'rgir* play a necessary role in the cultural and economic regeneration of the Chukchi.

Contemporary religious and secular festivals in Siberia originated in diverse Indigenous religious practices, institutionalized religion, and the secularized rituals of Soviet times. Public festivals, such as the Sakha *yhyakh* (see also Peers, this volume) and the ubiquitous Day of the Reindeer Herder serve as displays of ethnic identity. Feasting also includes intimate, local ritual practices sacrificial rituals, such as described by Lykkegård, or the widespread Siberian reference of the bear are part and parcel of celebrating and negotiating relations with supernatural, non-human agents. Dudeck shows how Siberian feasts and ritual practices represent, perform, and transform social relations in local communities and society at large.

To finish the section, Beliaeva-Sachuk delivers an ethnographic case study of Okinskii raion (Oka), Republic of Buryatia—one of the most remote and hard-to-reach regions of Buryatia, located southwest of Lake Baikal on the border with Mongolia. Domestic and wild animals play important roles in Oka religious practices which are a syncretic mix of Buryat and Soiot shamanic cults with Tibetan Buddhism. Domestic animals serve as ethnic markers, and Beliaeva-Sachuk argues that the treatment of domestic and wild animals and their place in the socio-cultural space of people is a reflection of the culture and social structure of Oka Buryats and Soiets.

The post-Soviet era has seen the revival of many social and spiritual practices and rituals that had been suppressed or secularized during the Communist period, as well as the continuing observation or reinvention of new holidays that arose during the time of the U.S.S.R. as replacements for religious festivals. These celebrations may be expressions of spiritual transformation and religious renewal or resilience and community solidarity; however, many displays of sociality also serve to reinscribe and reiterate distinct ethnic identities in multicultural spaces. Increasing access to the internet even in the more territorially remote regions of Siberia has meant that displays of social, political, linguistic, national, and ethnic belonging may be expressed multimodally in new ways, and Siberians may now perform these identities through new media across space and time for very different audiences across Russia and beyond.

CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORY

Previously well-known English-language works on the history of Siberia include James Forsyth's *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony 1581–1990* (1994), which comprehensively portrays 400 years of history in the region, and Yuri Slezkine's popular book entitled *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (1994), which is a historical account that sheds light on the contacts and interactions between the Russian state and Indigenous peoples

of Siberia and the North. While a comprehensive and illuminating history of these relationships, these authors do not engage with contemporary ethnographic material; therefore, in this volume, we stayed away from trying to replicate Forsyth's and Slezkine's histories comprehensive focus, and have instead honed in on more specific elements.

In this final section, we highlight scholars working on thematic issues in Siberia's history including environment, economics, art, and Indigenous social relations. Each chapter deals with interpretations of Siberian history or prehistory, and reinterpretations based on new information or new theoretical lenses. Contemporary approaches to history in Siberia are also shifting to incorporate both international perspectives and Indigenous voices. At the same time, historical work is moving from coverage of historical periods to an approach based on themes recurring across history. Sirina provides a comprehensive and updated history of ethnography in Siberia, while in the chapters by Sasaki and Qu, we see the reinterpretation of previous assumptions about hunter-gatherer and herder lifeways and religion, focusing on trade in the former case and religious practitioners in the latter. Lbova and Rostyazhenko reveal the deep roots of prestige economies in Siberia through material culture, while Abbe and Jones, focusing on seasonality, and Brandišauskas, on rock art, use these frames as lenses to explore trends in environmental history and historical trends in Siberian ethnography, respectively.

We begin this section with Sasaki's reexamination of the *santan* trade in the Amur River basin in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sasaki demonstrates that ancestors of the Indigenous people of this region benefited from trading goods originating in China and ending up in the Japanese-controlled Sakhalin. Some of these traders were quite well-off in fact, and Sasaki thus challenges Russia's image of the Far Eastern Indigenous peoples as "primitive" hunter-gatherers.

Lbova and Rostyazhenko take us into much earlier human history in the region with their examination of paleolithic objects from Siberia. They argue that a growing prestige economy was characteristic of egalitarian societies at that time. More than a mere system of signs, certain ritualistic artifacts reflected a growing power differentiation in ancient Siberian communities. This finding is similar to Sasaki's although with a much deeper time-frame.

Qu then looks at how the archaeological record can be used to trace the origins of shamanism in Siberia. Much of the literature debates various prehistoric elements that can be used to define shamanism, but rather than focusing on these definitional debates Qu takes the perspective of animist ontology. He argues that artifacts reflect the animist ontology of the population in general and hunters in particular, rather than the existence of shamanic religious leaders specifically.

Brandišauskas's chapter reviews the history of ideas, perceptions, and interpretations linked to ancient rock art in East Siberia. His chapter describes how Siberian rock art inspired generations of scholars who made inferences about the peoples that created these sites. Various analytical schemes fed into differing interpretations about the history of the region and activities of past inhabitants. Brandišauskas shows that these sites are continuing a source of ritual and cosmological inspiration for Siberian Indigenous people.

Sirina's chapter dives into the history of Siberian ethnography from the 18th through 20th centuries. Sirina discusses the influence of prominent ethnographic

expeditions, methodological and ethical considerations, and various theoretical and political influences on Siberian research. Sirina concludes by pointing out the enrichment of ideas that have occurred through international collaboration and exchange in the realm of Siberian studies.

To conclude this section, Abbe and Jones use the metaphor of the seasons to review the environmental history of Siberia. Their chapter examines climatic fluctuations alongside disruptive human events. Indigenous Siberian and imperial Russian colonization are viewed as mutual shapers of the region's environmental history being involved in the introduction of new animal species, infectious diseases, and decimation of fur-bearing animal populations. Abbe and Jones also look at how energy-intensive technologies including urban housing and central heating influence perception of the Siberian environment and how some people are looking to the Siberian past to reengineer the ecology.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Relating to the environment

A number of chapters including those by Rakhmanova, Laptander, and Mamontova, Thornton, and Klyachko, demonstrate the importance of perceptions of the environment as relational meaning systems that incorporate unseen forces. Ecologists and conservationists tend to view human action on the landscape as a separate system that interacts with and obtains benefits from the environment (Mace, 2014). Ingold (2002) argues that this separation is characteristic of a Western “Cartesian” perspective which is also at the root of humanity's contemporary environmental dilemmas. Our case studies emphasize the social relationships expressed through language of place (cf. Krupnik et al. 2004). Elaboration of such Indigenous viewpoints is important to understanding the sustainability and flexibility of Indigenous Siberian socio-ecological systems.

Often described in binaries of “traditional” or “authentic” versus “modern,” several chapters deal with ecological knowledge or traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in more nuanced ways, including those by Crate, Laptander, Lykkegård, Mertens, Novikova, and Oehler. These chapters reveal more complex approaches to the ways that resources are accessed and how such practices are re-negotiated in contemporary communities. These chapters connect the themes of perception of the environment, traditional ecological knowledge, kinship, cosmology, and social control.

A recent meta-analysis (FAO & FILAC, 2021) shows that real environmental outcomes, such as forest cover, for example, are better in Indigenous protected areas. The 2022 IPCC report states, “cooperation, and inclusive decision making, with local communities and Indigenous Peoples, as well as recognition of inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, is integral to successful forest adaptation in many areas.” A US Forest Service report (Vinyeta & Lin, 2013) recommends incorporating Indigenous TEK into climate change adaptation planning, albeit with concerns for protecting sensitive or proprietary information and existing cultural preservation efforts. Excluding people from areas to protect wilderness is problematic almost everywhere, especially where Indigenous people have lived in interaction with the land for millennia (Fletcher, Hamilton, Dressler, & Palmer, 2021).

Looking more closely at the component concepts of TEK, the first, a tradition, is something learned and copied from ancestors. It's handed down. Ecological refers to relationships between living organisms and their environment, from ancient Greek οἶκος house, dwelling. It's the earlier meaning—dwelling—that inspired Tim Ingold's (2002) dwelling perspective that has had a lot of influence in the field as evidenced by many chapters in this volume, including those by Agapov, Davydova, Novikova, Peers, and Rakhmanova. Finally, the earliest uses of the term knowledge refer to acknowledging or owning something, confessing something, and sometimes recognizing a person's position or title. These now-obsolete meanings emphasize relationships—an important aspect of knowledge that modern usage often overlooks but that is especially important in the context of tradition and ecology. Combining these three definitions helps to generate a hypothesis for Indigenous TEK: deference for ancestral ways of dwelling (Ziker, 2022). As a way of promoting deference in communities, TEK is operationalized as a discourse, not an insurance policy for sustainability. People discuss the connections between dwelling in a place and their behavior and the behavior of the people they are connected to. While careful and insightful observations of the environment are necessary, more than that TEK helps define and promote virtuous behavior relative to that environment (Ziker, 2015).

These and other aspects of life in the North depend on an environmental ethic founded on TEK, specifically, the idea that the real owners of the resources (i.e., spirits and deceased ancestors) are watching and reacting to the behaviors of the living (Steadman & Palmer, 2008). These spirit owners both punish and reward. These ideas are expressed by elders and leaders within maxims, aphorisms, and discourse about events and others' behaviors. Examples can be found in chapters by Laptander, Bulgakova, Brandišauskas, Dudeck, Lykkegård, Sidorova, Novikova, and Oehler in this volume, as well as in Anderson (2000), Ziker (2002), Wiget and Balalaeva (2011). Such discourses commend virtuous and prosocial behavior while connecting negative outcomes with selfishness. The ability of the real owners to take action makes sense because of the invisible connections that people maintain with everything they touch. These connections can be traced in the spirit world. This ties together concepts of kinship, social relationships, religion, and environment. Inter-related concepts like these are not isolated to Siberia. Much work has been done examining the parallels between ancestral systems of deference in Siberia, Amazonia, North America, and other regions inhabited by Indigenous people (Brightman, Grotti, & Ulturgasheva, 2012).

Mobility and connection

Geographically it is not surprising that issues of mobility and movement are at the forefront of thematic focus when it comes to a region like Siberia; the vastness of the region combined with the challenging terrains and a history of nomadic lifestyles among many of the Indigenous peoples of the region make it a central theme that many researchers have tackled in recent years. The routes and paths of reindeer herders and their approaches to wayfinding in various parts of the region have long been an object of inquiry (see Dudeck, 2012; Istomin, 2020; Istomin & Dwyer, 2008, 2009; Leete, 1997; Safonova & Sántha, 2011; among others); rivers as connective routes too have been a focus as we will also see in chapters by Agapov,

Mamontova et al., and Vasilyeva in this volume. Work by Argounova-Low on the state of roads and roadlessness (in Russian—*bezdorozh'e*) in Sakha-Yakutia has covered their intersections with narratives (2012a) and driving (2012b, 2021), as well as the “autobiographies” of roads (Argounova-Low & Prisyazhnyi, 2016). Roads, as Siegelbaum (2008) has discussed in examining infrastructure construction in the Stalin era, are also an inherently political project; the inability to travel on roads, too, may provide locals with both frustration and a powerful sense of connection, as Orlova (2021) notes in her discussions of “affective infrastructure” (see also Knox, 2017).

These themes are most overt in the section on infrastructure and mobility, and an in-depth overview is provided above. Davydov’s chapter as well as that by Povoroznyuk and Schweitzer explore the impacts of new infrastructural projects on local communities’ existing patterns of mobility, and their everyday lives and abilities to be mobile in ways that they choose; reindeer herders (and their reindeer), for instance, may have very different requirements and preferences for mobility than a town dweller or oil and gas worker. It is also worth highlighting, again, the connections of mobility and politics; Saxinger et al.’s chapter reveals how “infrastructural violence” through the lack of attention from both politicians and corporations, impacts both physical and metaphorical kinds of mobility for the inhabitants of a small Siberian town; the inability to move—or have agency over one’s mobility—has profound impacts on quality of life. Winter travel is much different than that in summer, as Agapov’s chapter shows how the same river is both a winter ice-road and a venue for floating shops in summer; the ice-road phenomenon is a key focus for Vasilyeva who also reveals the dynamics of “infrastructural brokering” and access to these spaces.

Themes of connection—both in terms of literal connections created over vast distances, as well as more abstract senses of connection and belonging—also weave their way through many of the chapters that ask questions about what it is that brings people together. For instance, food as a source of connection arises in Davydova’s work—the convivial aspects of food are nearly always imbued with some amount of memory or nostalgia (Holtzman, 2006), and remembrances of how food “used to be” versus how it is now bring people together. In Kapustina’s chapter, foods “migrate” along with people from Dagestan as they arrive in Western Siberian oil towns, and lead to changes in the local food culture as well.

Language is perhaps the most fundamental domain of connection, being that it is literally the medium through which we can communicate our connections to others. Language revitalization projects, such as those discussed in Degai et al.’s chapter on Itelmen revitalization gatherings, create spaces in which participants work on central goals together: not only to revive but to reclaim language, and through these spaces often recreate and reify senses of cultural, ethnic or community belonging. In Grenoble et al.’s and Kantarovich’s chapters, language as a source of both individual and community well-being and connection is highlighted, even as language changes through the process of revitalization and reclamation. Language as vehicle of connection to the other-than-human world is revealed in Laptander’s work on women’s communication with fire in Nenets communities, and what language and naming tells us about the connection to land and water comes through in Mamontova et al.’s chapter discussing of hydronyms and movement on rivers in Evenki communities.

Religious practices connect people to each other, as well as to other beings and forces in the universe. Work on animist ontologies and the ways in which people and spirits interact in Siberia has been a central theoretical area of focus (see, among others, Brandišauskas, 2017; Vitebsky, 2005; Willerslev, 2007). Extensive work on Siberian shamanic traditions in particular has been conducted since the earliest ethnographers arrived in the region; some English-language volumes from the last 30 years that provide some overview include Balzer (1997), and Znamenski (2003). This volume engages with a multiplicity of kinds of connection with the spiritual world. Immediate connections between humans, and other-than-humans, as produced through rites, rituals and festivals are illuminated in the chapters by Dudeck on a variety of Siberian rituals and celebrations and Lykkegård on a rite in the Chukchi context; the strategies and methods for spiritual revival and connection—to ancestors, places, and spirits—emerge in the chapter by Sidorova on urban Sakha practices. The role of spirituality both ideologically and practically in creating a sense of national or ethnic connection and belonging emerges in Peers’ and Znamenski’s chapters as well (see also Balzer, 2012), linking as well to themes of change and adaptation that are explored in the following section.

Adaptation and change

Colonization first under the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union (continuing through its successor state, the Russian Federation) has had immeasurable impacts on the lives of Indigenous peoples in Siberia, in every possible way: from language and religion, to political, legal and economic systems and subsistence strategies. It is the ability to adapt to changing conditions—be they environmental, political, or cultural—that helps ensure both community and individual survival; themes of adaptation are found in nearly all of the chapters, to a greater or lesser degree. Many of the pieces also engage with the efforts of many communities to revitalize cultural traditions that have been lost (or pushed underground) over the Soviet period (or earlier), revealing the dynamism and intentional action present in across the region to reclaim and reconfigure these elements to better serve their communities into a future that may often appear uncertain.

However, in the face of change, we also often find that there are also tensions that surface between desires to “return” to a past versus engage in cultural transformation; there is always a complex relationship between sameness and difference, the old and the new within cultural domains. This arises even in cultural forms like language where dynamism and change are also acknowledged as normal, characteristic processes; however, linguistic ideological debates are always present among speakers. We see this, for instance, in Kantarovich’s examination of the use of Modern Chukchi in contemporary use; concerted efforts to revitalize the language, combined with contact-induced change via Russian, have led to a new form of the language becoming prevalent. As noted in other linguistic ethnographies in Siberia—e.g., Ferguson (2019) on Sakha, Graber (2020) on Buryat—new, “mixed” varieties sometimes may be officially critiqued for their changes and departures from older, “more authentic” forms. Nevertheless these new varieties or registers of a language are vital to continued use of the language. Grenoble et al.’s and Degai et al.’s also engage with themes of change more indirectly as they focus on the importance of revitalization

movements to cultural continuity and community well-being, themes also echoed in King's (2011) ethnography of Koryak negotiations of language and cultural revitalization in Kamchatka.

Many of these facets related to change arise within the section on Religious Mosaics. Contributing to Siberia-focused literature on religious dynamism, conversions, revitalization and change in the post-Soviet era in English (see also Balzer, 2012, 2022a; Bulgakova, 2009, 2013; Halemba, 2006, 2008, 2014; Peers, 2015, 2016; Peers & Kolodeznikova, 2015; Vagramenko, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Vallikivi, 2009, 2014; among many others) are those chapters by Brandišauskas, Bulgakova, Peers, Qu, Sidorova, and Vallikivi. One key theme that recurs in cultural revitalization generally (not only in spiritual movements) is the attempt to capture what is “authentic” about the past practice and imbue that authenticity into the current and future iterations; while not always a central question, it often hovers around many such attempts. Bulgakova too addresses the tensions in the changing shamanic practices in a Nanai community, showing that it is less of a contrast between the “neo” and the “traditional,” but between those considered “real” and “fake,” thus complicating the expected dichotomies of the “new” being less authentic. Religious change also has ripples in other societal spheres; Vallikivi's chapter on Nenets conversions to Evangelical Christianity shows how changes in spirituality do not only involve religious practices, but can also transform interlinking cultural practices like language and political relations with a state.

Sidorova's and Peers' chapters both bring us case studies from Sakha religious revitalization movements, revealing different aspects of the intersections between spiritual revival and post-Soviet politics as well. And, like Balzer, who has written on various spiritual and political movements in Buryatia, Sakha-Yakutia, and Tyva, Peers' examination of the Sakha Yhyakh festival weaves together the dynamics of revitalization of national identity via the reclamation and reinvention of spiritual and cultural practices. Updating Humphrey's (1999) work on Buryatia with a case study from another region, Sidorova's ethnographic piece profiles how several citizens of Yakutsk, the capital of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) are bringing diverse spiritual practices to other urbanites as they strive to reinvigorate and interpret the shamanic practices of rural ancestors.

Two other chapters also provide more “archaeological” approaches to spiritual persistence and changes over time; Brandišauskas's paper on changing interpretations of ancient rock reveal how ostensibly spiritual objects created hundreds or thousands of years ago remain cosmologically and ritually relevant (even if their original purposes may remain speculative). In examining the archaeological materials for elements of shamanism, Qu argues that despite centuries of change, much stays the same—we can find traces of animist ontologies existing in Siberia throughout the archaeological record.

Moving into the domain of ecology and cultural change, Abbe and Jones, Crate, Davydova, Oehler, Takakura, Terekhina and Volkovitskiy, and Ventsel all examine aspects of change and adaptation in light of how humans relate to their environments, in ways that range from environmental histories to ethnographic case studies. In two of the chapters, we have a long-view and a more compressed-view of Sakha herding for comparison; Takakura reveals a view of ecological adaptation through the migrations and adaptations of Sakha people over centuries, while Crate examines more rapid

changes due to increasing urbanization in the post-Soviet years. Flexibility has been a key survival strategy for communities in Siberia throughout history. As Takakura reveals, Sakha pastoralism shifted from being horse-dominant to cow-dominant as Sakha moved into their current locations and became more settled (as opposed to nomadic); another comparison can be viewed in Oehler's ethnographic work, which reveals similar adaptations among Soiot communities, who herd different animals depending on terrain and altitude. Abbe and Jones provide a broad environmental history of changes due to both climate shifts and sociopolitical events and policies, while Ventsel looks at intersections of economics and subsistence hunting within an ethnographic case study, looking at shifts to how changes to big-game hunting legislation have led to fewer hunters and more fishing in a Dolgan-Evenki community. Related to subsistence methods are the food practices of Davydova's chapter, as she details the food nostalgia as well as food transformations in a Chukotka community.

As we have noted in the section above detailing the chapters in the section Land, Law and Ecology, numerous parts of Siberia are experiencing an acceleration of climatic changes connected with the melting of permafrost and its impacts on the atmosphere. This has led many communities to reconsider the ways in which they engage with the environment, whether through hunting, fishing, gathering, and/or herding, and work to both anticipate and mitigate the kinds of drastic changes that they are experiencing. Terekhina and Volkovitskiy highlight how discourses around climate change also shape how Nenets herders describe their experiences with environments and landscapes, and how their comments reveal differing ideological explanations for the changes—this is an important contribution to worldwide Indigenous-focused research on climate change and ideology (see also Marino and Schweitzer, 2015, and Marino, 2015 for work in Alaska), and how connections to place may influence how climate change is viewed and discussed (cf. Devine-Wright et al., 2015 on Australian attitudes).

THE FUTURE OF SIBERIAN STUDIES (SIBERIAN ETHNOGRAPHY)

Ethnographic studies in Siberia are shifting to incorporate multiple perspectives and Indigenous voices following trends across the field of Anthropology. Incorporating Indigenous voices is the entry level for knowledge co-production. More authentic and deeper knowledge collaborations in which Indigenous peoples are involved in the design, data collection, and dissemination of findings are on the horizon. At least one of the contributions to this volume (Mamontova et al.) demonstrates a relatively high level of co-production of knowledge. Degai et al.'s chapter (this volume) on Itelmen community language planning in Kamchatka also shows similar integration. The lead author, Degai, is a community member and works with fellow members as well as linguists and anthropologists from multiple institutions on such projects. Knowledge co-production is enriching and necessary for scholarly disciplines as it allows for more relevant application of methods and theory to problems faced by local populations, especially as they face climate change and industrial development. There is demand for applied anthropological work in Russia already. Russian ethnographers are often hired to produce "ethnographic expertise" studies that are required alongside proposals for industrial development projects that provide assessments of impacts on local cultures and ways of life. Knowledge co-production can help in

efforts to sustain and revitalize Indigenous and other small-scale cultures across the Siberian World.

Another trend we identified is that scholarship in Siberia is moving away from periods to themes across periods. Ethnography in Russia developed as a subdiscipline of History, and the legacy of that has been a focus on practices in the past. Now, scholars in Russia are moving to integrate ethnography with anthropology, sociology and history with a focus on thematic issues such as infrastructure and mobility, social networks, language revitalization, interactions with the state.

Anthropological and ethnographic studies of Siberia are currently undergoing significant disciplinary transformations (Vakhtin, 2020: 60). Modern science requires new methods of research, as well as ways of making the results public and publishing the data obtained given human subjects considerations. Ethnography itself, which used to be associated more with the past, is becoming more and more clearly the science of the future (Golovnev, 2021). At present, the visualization and popularization of knowledge has great importance. Contemporary projects devoted to the study of heritage of the Indigenous peoples of Siberia are increasingly “revisiting” classical forms, such as atlases and encyclopedias (Davydov & Yarzutkina, 2021). These platforms are being made in an interactive way, designed to interact with audiences and consumers of these products. Key to the success of such interactive projects is the reaction of representatives of the Siberian Indigenous communities and the integration of their vision into the process of production and publication of knowledge about the studied groups. An example is the recent project launched in 2021 to create an interactive atlas of Indigenous peoples of Siberia, which is supposed to be a multi-level database on their life and culture (Rector of the Russian State University for the Humanities, 2021). Atlases and encyclopedias played a significant place in the history of Siberian studies (see Levin & Potapov, 1956, 1961, 1964). However, encyclopedic works, dictionaries, and generalizing publications require new forms. Anthropological science itself is very adaptive, and due to social, technological, and methodological shifts, it is regularly updated within the framework of different concepts and schools (Golovnev, 2021). Contemporary projects concentrate more on a dynamic, not static perspective.

In terms of specific themes, further work on interaction between Indigenous and minority groups and the state will continue to be relevant as policies change at the national level. For instance, regarding Indigenous and regional minority languages, policy changes recently occurred at the constitutional level that impacted the ability to include mandatory language classes in languages other than Russian. Building on already declining federal support for linguistic diversity in education (Zamyatin, 2012), the Federal Law No. FZ-273 “On Education in the Russian Federation” reduced the number of hours the languages are taught in schools, and forbid Republics from making minority language courses mandatory even if they are co-official languages; they must remain “voluntary.” This makes it very easy to eliminate these courses altogether. Concern arose in many of the Republics of the Federation, with many feeling that this restriction on minority language instruction was merely a first step in further cultural assimilation of non-Russian ethnic groups after a period of relatively greater self-determination (see Zamyatin, 2018).

The increasing prevalence of federal ethnonationalism (see Kolstø, 2016) permeating the discursive sphere in Russia’s current political situation brings up questions on

the status of Indigenous and minority peoples that is highly relevant to the Siberian context. Concerns about expressing self-determination and critiquing federal power have surfaced more and more often in recent years. Many scholars are troubled with the current political situation in Russia and openly criticize the actions of Russia in the Ukraine. Questions about working in Siberia for international scholars, even those with ongoing projects, remain open for the near future. Balzer (2022b) (also see Arakchaa to appear) has pointed to the repression of protesters, like the Sakha “warrior-shaman” Alexander Gabyshev. A major challenge for the future development of the Siberian studies would be the lack of collaboration between Russian and Western scholars, as well as the lack of international public events in Russia leading to politicization of science and a split within the academic community. In this context, the research of social networks and web-ethnography will be one of the possible options.

As discussed in chapters in this volume (Fondahl et al.; Novikova), customary laws and culturally-specific social norms—often termed “legal orders” by Canadian Cree Indigenous scholar Val Napoleon (2007)—continue to be important in the sustainable livelihoods in Siberia. Formal laws continue to be negotiated and invoked to protect traditional lands and activities but in some contexts they are used in a different way. More research is needed on how customary laws can be worked into existing formal laws at the local, regional, and federal levels, and how the Russian legal system is open to these key changes. Further to this, work on decision making within communities who seek opportunities for industrial development is also crucial, and likely to be increasingly relevant, alongside assessments of changing patterns in demographics and modes of sustenance as Siberians respond to the ongoing challenges both in rural and urban settings. Change to sustenance and livelihoods are of course intertwined with climate change, and must be assessed holistically and in light of unprecedented and unpredictable environmental impacts and changes.

In terms of everyday life and livelihoods, continued research on this ever-changing sphere will be relevant as infrastructure develops and new technologies are introduced that shift the kinds of mobility and connections Siberians have access to. Zuev and Habeck (2019: 80) note that access to many kinds of transport as well as technological infrastructure is not equally available across Siberia, and of course not comparable between larger regional centers and small villages in any given region: “These disparities not only affect the daily running of people’s lives, but also strongly influence the ways in which communities and individuals frame their past, their current existence, and their aspirations.” Many of the themes in this volume, noted in previous sections, will need further longitudinal study. For instance, informal social relations and economic ties are going to continue to be important for Indigenous peoples living in remote settings as well as their relatives and friends living in urban areas. How does an increased ability to travel physically—as well as community by mobile phone or online—shape these relationships and ties? How do these ties operate both between locations in Siberia, as well as beyond to other parts of Russia and the world, as more and more migration happens to industrialized areas of this region (as Kapustina’s chapter in this volume reveals)? Alongside increased mobility and connection there is the development of tourism in Siberia, both geared toward Siberians themselves traveling as well as outsiders from other parts of Russia coming to explore for themselves; the role of leisure and travel in contemporary Siberia is a productive space for further work, building on discussions such as those by Broz

and Habeck (2019) and Zuev (2012, 2013), the latter of whom looks at online-based networks and practices such as Couchsurfing.

Another theme for further exploration is the role of local and national museums, archives, and private collections. Beginning in the 18th century, Siberian collections became an integral part of national museum collections, such as the *Kunstkamera* and The Russian Museum of Ethnography in St. Petersburg. Numerous explorers of Siberia brought valuable notes, maps, drawings, photographs to Russian cities, and these later became partly redistributed back to central and local museums and archives. In addition, village-level and regional museums had their own programs of museification of traditional Siberian cultures (Stammmler, 2005; Turin, 2011). There is a rich opportunity for future scholarship on the way different kinds of Siberian materials were collected, redistributed and represented in museums and archives at different administrative levels. These collections also played a role in the elaboration of the scientific concepts for Siberian ethnography and anthropology as well as government programs (Anderson, 2011; Anderson et al., 2013). These materials are being integrated into a process of Indigenous representation and revitalization today. In this sense, future investigations could examine the process by which material objects and documents, brought from Siberia, became the main source for building ideas and discourses.

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PART I

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE
REVIVAL AND CULTURAL
CHANGE





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CHAPTER 1

LANGUAGE VITALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Minority Indigenous languages in the Sakha Republic



*Lenore A. Grenoble, Antonina A. Vinokurova,
and Elena V. Nesterova*

INTRODUCTION: THE REPUBLIC OF SAKHA (YAKUTIA)

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is the largest subnational governing region in the world, encompassing some 3,083,523 km², making it approximately 6 times the size of France. Occupying about 18% of the Russian Federation, it covers 3 time zones and climatic zones: Arctic, Subarctic, tundra, and taiga, with long winters and short summers. The Republic is known for some of the coldest recorded temperatures, and almost the entire territory is located in permafrost. Approximately 40% of its territory is located around the Arctic Circle.

The Sakha Republic is the largest of the 85 official federal subjects/regions/administrative units of the Russian Federation, but is relatively sparsely populated. Population density is low, not quite 0.32 people/km², with a total population of 971,996 as of January 1, 2020 (984,703 in 2021), and a full two-thirds of the population is urban (*Federal State Statistics*, 2020). The population dropped drastically after the break-up of the Soviet Union but has been increasing annually since 2000, with increasing numbers of people—including immigrants, in particular from Central Asia and the Caucasus, and natives of the Republic—moving into the cities. It is a dynamic demographic situation. There is high migration from Arctic regions to more urban settings due to a combination of factors, including the harsh Arctic climate, low standard of living, and relative poverty, with low wages and high unemployment rates, poor access to medical care, and an overall weaker educational system (Ignat'eva, 2020).

Sakha as a multilingual, multi-ethnic region

Data on the ethnic make-up of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) (RS(Y)) is somewhat outdated, as the last census data comes from the 2010 all-Russia census; the scheduled 2020 census was postponed to September 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Drawing from the 2010 census then, the Republic is home to 126 different ethnic groups. The largest group by far is Sakha (48.67% or 49.1%), followed by Russian (36.9%); these two comprise 85% of the total population of the Republic. Then there is a significant drop in relative size, where the third largest group, Evenki, constitutes

Table 1.1 Indigenous minority populations, 2010 and 2002

	2010	2010	2002
	Population RF	Percentage RS(Y)	Percentage RS(Y)
Russian	118,581,514	37.8	41.2
Sakha	450,000	49.1	45.6
Evenki	37,131	2.25	1.90
Even	21,830	1.57	1.20
Dolgan	7885	0.20	0.10
Yukaghir	1597	0.14	0.12
Chukchi	15,908	0.07	0.06

Source: Adapted from Ignat'eva (2020: 23) and All-Russia Census (2010)

2.19% of the population. The population can be classified into four groups: (1) the regional majority Sakha; (2) the national majority but local minoritized Russian; (3) minority Indigenous; and (4) immigrant and migrant groups. While 15% of the population is thus neither Sakha nor Russian, the local minority Indigenous groups still comprise only a relatively small percentage. Table 1.1 provides the numbers of the Indigenous minorities in the Russian Federation (RF) according to the 2010 census, with figures for the percentage of the total population in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in 2010 and 2002.

As Table 1.1 indicates, there has been a decrease in the percentage of Russians in the Republic and a general trend in growth of the Indigenous groups, Sakha, and the local minorities. The growth can be attributed to a number of factors, including the continuing loss of ethnic Russians due to out-migration to other parts of Russia and continuing increase in the population size of ethnic Sakha. In addition, the increase in the percentage of the population constituted by Indigenous minorities comes thanks to a combination of factors, including not only an increase in birth rate and longer life expectancy, a small level of immigration to the Republic from other parts of Russia, and, critically for our arguments here, a positive change in a sense of ethnic identity (Ivanova, 2020). There are a number of factors that make the Republic attractive for relocation, such as higher rates of employment in Yakutsk, which serves to attract laborers, both temporary seasonal and permanent immigrants. The relatively high density of Indigenous minorities, as opposed to many other parts of the Russian Federation, and education and language policies that are supportive of non-Russians, make the Republic of Sakha an appealing place for relocation for these groups. In particular the “Language Law of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)” grants official status to the Sakha language throughout the Republic and to local Indigenous languages (Chukchi, Dolgan, Even, Evenki, and Yukaghir) in those regions where the ethnic populations live densely. This official recognition of the rights of languages other than Russian makes the Republic one of the more hospitable regions in the Russian Federation for minorities.

THE SAKHA LANGUAGE: A MINORITIZED MAJORITY LANGUAGE?

The Sakha language and people are a strong presence in the Republic and form an essential component of the sociolinguistic ecology, both at the level of the Republic

and at more local levels (in cities, towns, and villages). That is, Sakha culture is part of the fabric of life for all residents, Russians, immigrants, and Indigenous minorities, even for those living in Indigenous-dominant villages. Historically, the Sakha language was a lingua franca for the region, where not only minority peoples learned the language but also Russians. Imperial Russia had a relatively lax language policy, not paying much attention to the language situation in locations so distant from Moscow. This changed radically in the Soviet period, which began with focused attention on “developing” the languages and peoples of the Russian Far East and North, and changed over time to be largely Russocentric. By the late Soviet period, use of Sakha was actively repressed and Russian promoted to the exclusion of all other languages (Grenoble, 2003; Wurm, 1996). These policies led to language shift and to lower prestige for the language even among ethnic Sakha. The post-Soviet years have been characterized by changes in language attitudes to be more positive and embracing of Sakha language and identity, bringing about renewed interest in cultural and linguistic revival (Ferguson, 2016, 2019; Ivanova, 2020). Nonetheless, recent years see a downward trend in language proficiency among youth, with a shift to Russian. A pilot study conducted in 2017 showed that from a sample of 30 first- and second-year university students, all of whom identified as ethnic Sakha, 4 could not produce texts, and one-third produced texts with errors, as assessed by fully proficient Sakha speakers (Grenoble et al., 2019). A sociolinguistic questionnaire that asked them to assess their own abilities in Sakha showed their self-assessments to be fairly accurate: Those who reported weaker abilities could not produce texts and showed more errors in simple production tasks where they were provided the lexical items need to formulate sentences. Anecdotally, local faculty report an ongoing decline in language knowledge and proficiency among entering students since the study was conducted.

In many of the Soviet successor states, such as Belarus, the national majority language has been labeled a *minoritized majority language* because it is marginalized and perceived as underdeveloped, without prestige and inferior to Russian (Ozolins, 2003; Pavlenko, 2008). These attitudes reflect a power differential—social, economic, and political. This is a carryover from Soviet language policies that promoted asymmetric bilingualism, favoring Russian over all other languages.

Can Sakha be construed as a minoritized minority language? Arguably yes. Within the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), it enjoys official status and is the regional majority. But it stands in juxtaposition to Russian and is overshadowed by the political and economic power of Russian, with its dominance in educational institutions and the media. Russian has the status of being the sole national language and lingua franca of the country, and it carries prestige as the majority language. Russian has so many more speakers, even L2 speakers of Russian outnumber L1 Sakha speakers by more than 40 times: In 2010 there were 18.9 million L2 speakers of Russian in the Russian Federation (versus 450,000 speakers of Sakha). Thus, Russian dominates at every level except where there is strong resistance by Sakha people who make a strong commitment to using the Sakha language in all domains where they have control over the language choice.

THE MODEL

In this chapter we use the Language Vitality Network Model (LVNM) proposed in Grenoble and Whaley (2020) as a theoretical approach to the study of the language

ecologies in the Sakha Republic. The model proposes that language practices are embedded social practices, a claim that is not controversial in much of social science but is rarely operationalized in linguistics. The LVNM is dynamic in nature, recognizing and attempting to model the fluidity of language practices. This is an obvious outcome of multilingual societies, where different speakers have different linguistic repertoires and invoke them in varying ways, depending on a complex set of factors, including their interlocutors, the domain, social setting, and the topic of conversation. Thus, language practices are tied to social practices; a social practice is represented in the model as a higher order node. Critically, for our purposes here, these nodes are interconnected, and disruption in one part of the model can cause disruption in other nodes, or domains. That is, changes in social practices can have an impact on language use, and vice versa.

A useful heuristic for identifying nodes in the context of the Republic of Sakha is to turn to

the framework developed in the Arctic Social Indicators Reports (Larsen et al., 2010, 2014). This project builds upon the preliminary work by the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR I) and the United Nations Human Development Index (UN HDI), which identified a core set of indicators to evaluate Arctic well-being across six domains: 1) cultural vitality; 2) contact with nature; 3) fate control; 4) material well-being; 5) education; and 6) health/population. A summary of the technical definitions for each of these indicators is given in ASI-II (Larsen et al., 2014: 36), adapted in Table 1.2.

The indicators serve as diagnostic, representative measures for a given domain that can be used to gauge the overall strength of that domain. For example, infant mortality serves as one diagnostic for the overall health of a community; per capita income is a useful measure to gauge overall economic and material well-being. The domains and indicators here derive from surveys conducted in Arctic populations that show that *contact with nature* and *fate control* are core values held by Arctic Indigenous peoples.

Language is a core indicator that cuts across several different indicators, including not only cultural vitality but control over knowledge construction, and it is an integral part of education. Contact with nature is considered to be an indicator of well-being and, concomitantly, maintaining a traditional lifestyle is a factor that supports

Table 1.2 Definitions of Arctic social indicators by domain

<i>Cultural vitality</i> : language retention: percentage of a population that speaks ancestral language
<i>Contact with nature</i> : consumption of traditional food as a per capita intake of traditional food harvest (total weight harvested in given period)
<i>Fate control</i> : political control: percentage of Indigenous/local peoples in governing bodies; control over land/resources: percentage of surface lands legally controlled by Indigenous/local inhabitants; economic control: percentage of public expenses generated within the region raised locally; control over knowledge construction (= language retention rate): percentage of a population that speaks its ancestral language
<i>Material well-being</i> : per capita household income
<i>Education</i> : post-secondary completion rate
<i>Health</i> : infant mortality: number of deaths under one year of age per 1000 live births; net migration: difference between in-migration and out-migration

use of Indigenous languages. Moreover, for many Indigenous people, language and place (land, or sea in coastal communities) are deeply intertwined and cannot be separated; language is part of place, and together they form the core of Indigenous identity (Perley, 2020; Zenker, 2018).

Thus, the identification of core domains and values here relies on broad analysis of Arctic populations. The list of relevant domains could be expanded considerably and along multiple dimensions in a full implementation of the LVNM. Here we confine the use of the model to consider the balance of stressors and protective factors with specific regard to language vitality and usage in the Sakha Republic. The LVNM presupposes that disruption in one part of the network results in disruptions elsewhere. If we adapt these indicators to serve as major nodes in the LVNM and consider the impact of modern stressors on speaker communities, we can see disruption across all arenas. In the next section of this chapter, we show that these stressors are pervasive throughout the Sakha Republic. Where language (and culture) are robustly maintained, we postulate that vitality is supported by a set of protective factors. These are each dealt with within the next section.

STRESS FACTORS IN THE RUSSIAN NORTH AND THE SAKHA REPUBLIC

A number of stressors have been identified for Arctic communities (Carson & Peterson, 2016; Larsen et al., 2014). Here we focus on those stressors which seem to be most salient today for Indigenous communities, based on the stories and accounts we hear during fieldwork. We hear similar themes in different places and have chosen to focus on these particular themes. These differ from some other parts of the Arctic. For example, in Alaska and Canada, many people speak of colonization but few discuss the impact of World War II, and the opposite is true in Russia. In the same vein, in some parts of the Sakha Republic, we are more likely to hear stories about the labor camps, in other regions only sporadically, whereas the stressors listed here were repeatedly brought up in different regions and by different ethnic groups, including Sakha.

We divide the stressors into two categories, *historical trauma* and *modern stressors*, although the labels are somewhat misleading inasmuch as historical trauma has ongoing, continuing effects and is relevant in modern times.

Historical trauma

The factors listed here are well-known stressors throughout the Arctic. Particulars vary throughout the circumpolar region: Sami in Norway experienced significant displacement during WWII, and Nazi scorched-earth policies left continuing reminders in the landscape of their settlements today, something that Alaskan Indigenous peoples did not experience, as just one example (Grenoble, 2018).

WORLD WAR II

World War II had a profound and lasting impact on the Indigenous peoples of north-eastern Russia; Turaev (2015) argues that its detrimental effect was far greater than

the Bolshevik Revolution or the political repressions of the 1930s and 1960s–1970s. Many Indigenous men were conscripted to fight in the Soviet army. There was a particular need for literacy in Russian, and so areas in the southern part of the Sakha region and beyond the region to the south were more deeply affected, where education rates and acquisition of Russian (written and spoken) were higher than in the Far North (such as Chukotka).

The conscription of Indigenous men had a major negative impact on the demographics of what were already small populations, which became even smaller as the males left to join the military. Conditions for those who stayed behind were grim, as the Soviet government was engaged in war, and it essentially left the far northern communities to fend for themselves, with medical personnel being sent to the war effort (Turaev, 2015). The people we encountered living in villages in the Sakha Republic told many stories of efforts to help the war effort (such as knitting mittens that were shipped to the front) and many more stories of hardships and hunger. Food in far northern regions is scarce to begin with, and people had stories of how meat and fish were confiscated by local (Soviet) officials who ostensibly shipped it off to feed the army. What is striking is the long-term effects of the war and how it is still fresh in the minds of people living some six time zones away from Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), which was directly under siege.

There are no exact figures, as ethnicity was by and large not recorded in conscription lists, although some approximations can be extrapolated from what we do know. These measures indicate that more than 8% of the total population of Nanai and Ul'ch joined the army, and the percentage of Even, Evenki, Nivkh, Oroch, and Udihe was not far behind. This left these communities without working-aged men, and of course a significant number did not return from the war. One major change was in gender balance. Prior to the war, the ratio of men to women was 100 to 97 in Indigenous communities, which subsequently flipped, so that by 1959 adult women outnumbered men, especially in the age range of 34–44, with a ratio of 100 men to 107 women across Indigenous peoples in the northeast. The net result occurred due to drops in birth rates and further decreases in population size. Beyond the devastating social implications, this had a major impact on the languages spoken by these people. Beyond the simple reduction of the speaker population, the gender imbalance fostered more intermarriage and the ensuing language shift.

BOARDING SCHOOLS

Part of the historical fabric of the experience of many Indigenous groups throughout the Russian North is the boarding, or residential, school system. As was the case with Indigenous communities in North America and other parts of the world, children were forcibly taken from their parents and put into schools. By the post-WWII period, if not sooner, the schools were actively repressing use of Indigenous languages; see Liarskaya (2013) for a succinct overview of the chronology of boarding schools in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In addition, the children who attended the schools were Russified, linguistically and culturally, and isolated from their homes and families. We have heard many stories about these experiences, from people who were punished and mocked for using their language and who never quite fit in anywhere, assimilating to the majority language and culture but not becoming Russian,

and feeling out of place when they returned to their homes, no longer Chukchi or Evenki. But we also know people who maintained their language and strong family ties despite the boarding school experience. And others told us that the school system helped support families more than many know, as the children received stipends and rations that they were able to send home to support their families.

Modern stressors

CLIMATE CHANGE

Changes in climate and weather have created serious difficulties for residents in the Sakha Republic and are one of the main drivers of urbanization as life in the villages or living off the land (hunting, fishing, herding) becomes less viable and increasingly stressful (Crate, 2013; Dets, 2020; Dybbroe et al., 2010). Studies conducted over a 50-year period from 1996 to 2016 show an increase of annual temperature of 0.3–0.6 °C every ten years, due primarily to higher temperatures in winter months. At the same time, changes in annual precipitation show an increase in approximately 70% of Sakha territory, with the greatest increases in southern regions, and a decrease in precipitation of about –15 mm/year in the tundra regions (Gorokhov & Fedorov, 2018).

These average changes mask the unevenness of the changes, so that in the western part of the tundra zones, the mean temperature in January increased by 5 °C. Taken as a whole, these changes have had a serious impact on the state of permafrost in the Sakha Republic. And they have significantly affected the people living there, who point to cold storage in the permafrost that is now dripping, melting of solid ice, and flooding, with standing water for weeks on end. People also remark on rising temperatures, even in the winter. One woman reported that in January it typically got down to –59 °C and stayed there for weeks, but in recent years the cold snap lasted only a few days, and it warmed up to –53 °C, as just one concrete example. People did not embrace this warming, because it came together with a number of troubles. The unpredictable weather has resulted in floods, summer fires, and major snowfalls. In conducting fieldwork in the Srednekolymsk region in Spring 2019, we heard many stories and woes about extremely large snowfall in the winter of the previous year. Even in the village of Berezovka reported how herds of elk and reindeer had perished in the snow, and in the Sakha-dominant village of Nalimsk people told many horror stories of horses drowning in the snow. Flooding was a major theme in 2019 as well.

URBANIZATION

Urbanization is a global trend and is proceeding rapidly in the Republic of Sakha, serving at once as a solution to, or escape from, the problems that plague small, isolated villages in the Republic, as well as being a major stress factor. Over the course of the last 20 years, the local language ecologies in the Republic of Sakha have changed significantly. Urbanization is a key factor in these changes. Yakutsk is the fastest growing city in the Russian North (Heleniak, 2016), with a population increase from 229,951 in 2002 to 311,760 in 2018. Urbanization has had some

positive effects on Sakha language usage in Yakutsk, as Sakha-dominant speakers have moved from more remote areas to Yakutsk, increasing the number of L1 speakers in the city (Ivanova, 2020), but at the same time there has been massive migration to Yakutsk by speakers of other languages from other parts of the country, drastically changing the local language ecology. Moreover, simply living in a city can be a stressor for Indigenous people (Grenoble, 2020).

A number of other stressors could be added to this list, including health issues, substance abuse, food security, and reliable and predictable employment. Recent years have seen an increase in catastrophic fires during summer months in the Sakha Republic, which cause immediate damage in terms of air quality but have longer lasting consequences in melting permafrost and carbon emissions (Pohl et al., 2020). And concomitant to changes in climate and fires has been a marked decrease in reindeer and elk populations. This represents a major stressor for those Indigenous peoples who live a subsistence or semi-subsistence lifestyle and rely on herding and hunting to eat.

Industrialization and resource extraction have taken a major toll on Indigenous communities, and those communities living in industrial areas are often assimilated to the point where they understand this assimilation to be a natural and inevitable process. Diamonds, gold, and oil are all found in parts of the region in abundance. Development of these resources is such a fundamental part of life in the Sakha Republic as a whole that it is rarely presented to us as a stressor but rather is presupposed as part of the social setting, and an unavoidable cause of language shift.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS AND THE LVNM

In this section we examine protective factors in order to understand the means by which minority Indigenous communities have continued to survive. One key factor is isolation. While isolation can make access to goods, medical care, and other services problematic and unreliable, it has also served (historically and to the present day) as a buffer against assimilation and external influences.

Working again from the core set of indicators identified in Table 1.2, we see a number of potential protective factors for Indigenous language vitality within our framework, including cultural vitality and ethnic identity. Although it may appear circular, the two are deeply intertwined, and strong cultural vitality fosters a strong and positive sense of ethnic identity, and vice versa.

There is a clear connection between the protective factors and the stressors, and where the balance between the two lies (or does not). Contact with nature is a core value of Indigenous communities; the loss of opportunities to have close or frequent contact with nature is a natural result of industrialization and urbanization, which are stressors in and of themselves. So, the presence of stressors can increase stressors in other areas, while protective factors can promote other protective factors. These interconnections may have mixed results. Isolation can provide a community with greater independence and less contact with outsiders, but can also make communities more vulnerable to changes in climate, as an example, where sudden changes can be nearly impossible to plan for and can result in extremely dangerous situations (fires, flooding, and loss of herds mean a direct loss of the food supply).

MINORITY INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Use of one's native language is guaranteed in the Sakha Republic. Its language law of October 16, 1992, N 1170-XII "On the languages of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)" recognizes the status of Russian as a national language and as an official language of inter-ethnic communication alongside the Sakha language which is an official state language (Articles 2 and 3). In addition, a number of minority Indigenous languages have special status in the Republic: Chukchi, Dolgan, Even, Evenki, and Yukaghir (classified here as one language) have a status on par with Sakha in those areas where the populations live densely, or compactly (Article 5). This status gives them certain rights and a certain visibility in society, and serves as a protective factor, in principle at least. The position of the Indigenous language changes in those places where the people do *not* live in high density, namely, in cities. Thus, urbanization has this additional consequence on language vitality by removing (or annulling) the protected status of the language. Nonetheless, these groups still enjoy recognition throughout the Republic and an elevated prestige for that reason.

Case study: Even

As a case study to illustrate the situation in detail, we take the case of Even (ISO 639-3 *eve*), a Tungusic language that is one of the five Indigenous minority languages with official status in the Sakha Republic. Seventy-two percent of all Even live in the Republic; it is their homeland. Although Even is under serious pressure from both the Russian and Sakha languages, one of the big questions is why the language is so robustly maintained compared to other minority Indigenous languages. We can make a quick comparison with the other minority Indigenous languages in the Republic in terms of percentage of the total population which speaks the language, given in Table 1.3.

The numbers of speakers are quite certainly inflated, depending on how one defines a speaker. Field linguists put the total numbers much lower; specialists estimate only 20 or so speakers of the Yukaghir languages combined, for example. But these are the official census data and provide a snapshot picture of what people reported at that time. Putting aside Chukchi, which is primarily spoken in the Chukotka autonomous okrug and quite remote, we see that Even language retention is relatively high. There is not an absolute correlation between language retention and urbanization, in

Table 1.3 Speakers of Indigenous minority languages and percentage of ethnic population

<i>Group</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Percentage (speakers in ethnic pop.)</i>	<i>Number in SR(Y)</i>	<i>Percentage in cities SR(Y)</i>
Chukchi	5095	32.0	670	26.1
Dolgan	1054	13.4	1906	13.6
Even	5656	26.1	15,071	33.7
Evenki	4802	12.5	21,008	39.1
Yukaghir	370	23.1	1281	43.6

Source: 2010 All-Russia Census, 2010

part because the problem is further complicated by the speaker population size. The smaller groups are more vulnerable. And yet Even stands out in terms of population size and overall retention, and it is striking that in the 2010 census more people self-reported as Even speakers than Evenki, despite the significantly larger Evenki population. Why is Even retention higher? What factors support Even vitality? What is the role of language in the daily lives of the Even people?

One preliminary answer is basic isolation. Even live, by and large, further north than Evenki. The village of Berezovka, where language retention has been high, is renowned for its near complete isolation into the 1950s. This is one factor that has helped them maintain language and cultural vitality longer than Even living in other regions (Robbek, 2005). Yet Even today, even in Berezovka, are leaving their villages in high numbers, for a variety of reasons. These include a desire for improved living conditions and economic advancement, and access to education, goals directly in line with the needs identified in the Arctic Social Indicators report. Another motivation is to unite with family members who have already moved to a city for these reasons. And in the last decade or so, extensive flooding has made many homes uninhabitable, forcing people to relocate. This is particularly true in Berezovka, which has been experiencing destructive flooding since 2002 (Filippova, 2017). In 2017, a massive flood destroyed 37 homes, the childcare center, the local hospital, and administrative buildings. Whereas some families moved to higher ground in the village, many left for the city.

The stressors given previously all apply to the Even situation. They are currently undergoing radical cultural and social disruption. Although the Even people have been living for centuries in multilingual communities, urbanization brings different kinds of language contact—historically contact with other Indigenous groups, often Chukchi, Evenki, and/or Yukaghir, and these neighbors generally had some command of Even. Now Russian has replaced these local languages and serves as a *lingua franca* for different groups, including Sakha. In 1989, 22% of Even lived in urban areas; by 2010 this number had grown to 33.7%, and there is every reason to believe it has significantly increased since then (All-Russia Census, 2010; Burtseva et al., 2014). In cities and large towns, Russian and Sakha dominate, as do other (non-local) languages. In particular, immigrants to the Republic of Sakha have brought their languages with them, and in a city like Yakutsk (home to approximately one-third of the Republic's total population), there are significant numbers of immigrants from other parts of Russia and Soviet successor states. There are currently more Kyrgyz and Buryats in the Republic than Even.

It is not just the languages involved in contact but the nature of multilingualism that has changed radically. Whereas previously language contact took place in face-to-face, person-to-person encounters, now the domains have changed, and much is over the Internet, television, cell phones, and social media, which have all transformed how people engage in multilingual practices (Aronin & Singleton, 2008; Cenoz, 2013). Input can be unidirectional, not bidirectional as in face-to-face conversation, and participation in these practices can be quite passive, such as watching a YouTube video or other online entertainment. This means that languages can easily enter the home even when they are not spoken in the vicinity of the recipient, i.e., not spoken in an individual's neighborhood in the Sakha Republic. A prime example is English, which can easily enter homes of Indigenous communities in the Far North.

A survey we conducted in 2017 found that English is the prime language for young people in Yakutsk when playing online video games.

These practices can thus facilitate language shift, but they can also support the use of local minority languages. They enable more people to participate in more languages even when they are not in the same location, and even when not all interlocutors understand them. Consider the context of ongoing conversations that span months from a WhatsApp group with approximately 30 people, a group that communicates in connection to a major research project. The participants write sporadically, at times intensely with multiple people writing in one thread, while at times a single individual posts information. The participants all use Russian as the primary language, but content (and especially greetings) is often in Sakha, sometimes Even, sometimes English, depending on the user and indexicality, regardless of whether the recipients can understand the specific language. An illustrative example is the WhatsApp message in (1), which uses four languages in a single message. The group is multilingual and multi-ethnic, and the research project that unites them focuses on building language and cultural vitality. Thus it is a set of users who view multilingualism favorably, and in that sense is a space for multilingual practices. The original text in the message is given in italics; note the use of two scripts and non-standard orthography for Even:

(1a)	Even	<i>Tөөнкэриуу А.В.! Дуус мэргэндук уй балдача инэнгидис эскэрэм! Tööngkëriuvu A.V.! Duus mërgëndukuï baldacha inëngidis ëskërem</i>	“Dear A.V.! Deep from the heart I celebrate your birthday!”
(1b)		<i>Абгар, несэлкэн били! Abgar, nesëlkën bili!</i>	“Be healthy and happy!”
(1c)		<i>Дьулэски аит бинив дьулиттэм, мээни одьаникан биддэс ньан. D’ulëski ait biniv d’ulittëm, mëeni od’aninkan biddës n’an.</i>	“Wishing you a good life in the future, and that you will take care of yourself.”
(1d)	Russian	<i>Уважаемая А.В., от всей души поздравляю Вас с днем рождения! Uvazhaemaia A.V., ot vseï dushi podravliaiu Vas s dnev rozhdeniia!</i>	“Dear A.V., congratulations on your birthday from my whole heart!”
(1e)	French	<i>Joyeux anniversaire!</i>	“Happy birthday!”
(1f)	English	<i>Happy birthday!</i>	“Happy birthday!”

The intended recipient, A. V., does not speak Even, but Sakha and Russian. The use of Even in lines (1a)–(1c) indexes the author’s identity as an Even user. The switch to Russian in (1c) provides a translation of the first line of the message (1a), but not lines (1b)–(1c), which the writer could not hope that A. V. would understand. The lack of Sakha in the message suggests that the writer is not proficient in it. However, she does switch to French in (1e), which at least indexes the addressee’s identity as a specialist in the French language. It is unclear from the text whether the conclusion in English is to index the recipient’s location at the time the message was sent, when she was in Montreal, a bilingual French/English city, or as a nod to the Anglophone members of

the list. Or perhaps it is just an enthusiastic flair, concluding the multilingual posting with yet another language, the global lingua franca.

Subsequently in the same thread, after several more greetings in Russian, another writer submits the following message in (2) to accompany the picture and (3) (Figure 1.1):

- (2)

Дорогая	А.В.,	примите поздравление на татарском языке ☺
Dorogaia	A.V.,	primite pozdravlenie na tatarskom iazyke

Dear A.B., accept [my] congratulations in Tatar ☺

- (3)

Туган	көн	белэн!
Tugan	kñn	belèn!

“Happy birthday!”

The context of the birthday greeting makes the content understandable, even if the exact wording is not. This is particularly true in the Even text in (1), but here the exact sentiment is not as important as the length of the text, which signals that the author is a proficient user of the language. Both messages are visible to the entire group, who are listeners but not the intended recipients in this instance, and the author most certainly knows that some of them are proficient in Even. Her writing here is not standard, and does not follow standard orthographic conventions for Even, which would be visible and legible to anyone proficient in Even on the list. The unconventional (vis-à-vis the standard) writing suggests that the writer may come from a western Even dialect zone, where people are known to use non-standard writing; its usage indexes a western Even identity.

These are simple examples to illustrate how multilingual spaces are created in new domains. These spaces, and practices, are dynamic and fluid, changing with the topic and across individual users. They provide a partial solution of how to create domains for language usage when the speakers no longer see one another on a regular basis, when speakers are no longer neighbors and have minimal opportunities



Figure 1.1 Scanned image of a birthday card with a greeting written in Tatar.

for unplanned face-to-face communication and when they are embedded in a larger community dominated by the use of other languages.

DISCUSSION

Language cannot be extracted from the sociolinguistic ecology of its users. The LVNM provides a theoretical apparatus for modeling this interconnected system of cultural practices and how the different parts of the systems affect one another. In examining the stressors which Indigenous people in the Sakha Republic face on a daily basis, we find populations undergoing sustained stress. These populations are not positioned to eliminate the stressors themselves. Concretely, climate change has a direct and immediate impact on their lives and well-being; people can only react to its effects, they cannot stop it. In the LVNM model, disruption in one part of the model causes disruption in another. Indigenous people in the Sakha Republic are living under a constant barrage of stressors, and the resulting disruption is massive.

The situation of Even indicates the critical importance of features such as a strong sense of ethnic identity and value of one's ethnic heritage and culture as protective factors to offset the effects of these stressors. Positive language attitudes reflect a sense of positive self-worth, and these are essential indicators of cultural well-being. Bolstering positive attitudes becomes all the more important in urban settings, where they do not have access to some of the critical components that they independently identified as important for well-being (such as contact with nature and the ability to engage in traditional activities like hunting, fishing, and herding). Increasing pressure from climate change means that every year, more Even move to the city. Many migrate to Yakutsk, the capital and home to approximately one-third of the population of the Sakha Republic, where they must work deliberately to maintain a sense of community in a multi-ethnic city that is the epicenter and crossroads for migration and international travelers to the region. Social networks, in-person and virtual, gatherings, and celebrations of Even festivals are critical to maintaining a sense of self. WhatsApp groups are very popular, uniting Even from all regions, facilitating a virtual social network that creates unity across great distances. Even enthusiasts take advantage of social networks to come together; people use these spaces in particular to connect with elders to learn about language and culture.

There is a strong commitment to creating and maintaining sustainable spaces for Even language usage even in Yakutsk. The musical ensemble *Dolghuncha* ("the Wave") provides the opportunity to participate in Even culture as performer or audience, and recent years have seen a surge of young artists who dance and sing in Even. There is a local society of Even from Berezovka, a far northern, Even-dominant village known for strong language usage. As climate and economic factors have uprooted people from Berezovka to Yakutsk, they continue as a community in the city thanks in part to this group. Critically, researchers at the Yakutsk branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences¹ are focused on activities that promote language and cultural vitality, including the creation of textbooks and other pedagogical materials and the creation of a digital archive of audio and visual materials. They support a folklore school *Mengnen toren* ("the Golden Word"), among other activities that foster the use of the language, culture, and folklore.

Such measures highlight the need for creativity and commitment to maintain robust language usage and cultural identity. To support the sustainable development of Indigenous languages of the Russian North in an urbanized setting, we need to work systematically to preserve a sense of ethnic identity; to teach and use the mother tongue beginning at an early age, preferably at home from birth, with further support in childcare and educational institutions; and to create the linguistic and cultural conditions for vitality. Language vitality is part of overall social and cultural vitality, and is deeply tied to well-being.

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NOTE

- 1 The Institute for Humanitarian Research and North Indigenous Peoples Problems of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

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CHAPTER 2

(SOCIO)LINGUISTIC OUTCOMES OF SOCIAL REORGANIZATION IN CHUKOTKA



Jessica Kantarovich

Although we often speak of “languages” as discrete entities that can be adopted and abandoned, they are more than just neutral tools that speakers pragmatically apply to different situations. Language is also not merely a constellation of grammatical features shaped by the constraints on human cognition and articulation. There is a demonstrable, intrinsic link between language and culture: languages do not exist without their speakers and are shaped by their speakers’ lifeways in manners great and small. The ways that linguistic practices change in response to the circumstances of linguistic users have been well-explored in linguistic anthropology and studies of language contact, especially in cases of intense historical change and social upheaval. One of the outcomes of contact between speakers of different languages, especially when one group has greater political or economic capital, is *language shift*: the process by which a group ceases to speak their heritage language in favor of another language, whether due to explicit or tacit prohibition of the continued use of the heritage language or simply due to the favorability of the new language for participation in society. The implementation of measures to discourage or outlaw existing language use is a powerful strategy seen often in the initial colonial context that forms the backdrop of many cases of language endangerment. Throughout Siberia, the initial official position of the Soviet government was one of stewardship of the Indigenous languages and promotion of literacy in these languages (Forsyth, 1992, p. 283), and efforts were undertaken to train Indigenous Siberians to become educators in their own languages (Grenoble, 2003, Chapter 7). Language policy throughout the mid-20th century, however, tells a more complicated story. Russian language instruction was made obligatory in schools in 1938; in 1959, this policy was modified to allow parents to choose instruction in Russian or the Indigenous language (Forsyth, 1992, pp. 406–407). By this point, however, the devaluation and stigmatization of Indigenous languages were well underway, with most parents opting for Russian instruction over Indigenous instruction anyway. Thus, although Indigenous languages were not prohibited outright, they were edged out by language policy that favored Russian, on the one hand, and by practices on the ground at boarding schools where speakers were ridiculed or punished for using their Indigenous languages, on the other.

In the modern era, globalization has been a powerful force in accelerating the pace of language shift worldwide: estimates of language endangerment vary, but an oft-quoted forecast by Austin and Sallabank (2011) predicts that at least 50% (and as many as 90%) of the world's languages will become extinct by the end of this century. Most of this loss is no longer driven by active efforts to extinguish the languages or their speakers, but by the sociopolitical ecologies in which speakers find themselves in a rapidly changing world. Access to social mobility, education, and even information can depend on the acquisition of the locally-dominant language; in many cases, there is still a third, super-dominant language (often, English) that speakers are pressured to master. Although bi- and even trilingualism exist stably in various parts of the world (and once existed throughout Chukotka, see Pupynina & Koryakov, 2019), it is precisely the social conditions of language shift that preclude balanced multilingualism. The political or cultural cachet associated with the speakers of the dominant language comes at the expense of the language being lost: on the one hand, the heritage language loses value for its speakers as it is relegated to a smaller set of domains and on the other, use of the heritage language can become associated with, or can *index* (Labov, 1972; Silverstein, 2003) pejorative stereotypes about the minority group, which further disincentivizes use of the language.

Nowhere are the pernicious cultural effects of the push towards globalization and modernization more apparent than among the Indigenous peoples of Siberia, who have had to contend with a two-fold threat to their ways of life: social turmoil over the last 100 years as well as a rapidly changing climate. For millennia, the autochthonous peoples of Chukotka (Chukchi, Koryaks, Itelmens, Evens, Yukaghirs, and Siberian Yupiks) had maintained stable subsistence living in the harsh tundra climate, practicing nomadic reindeer-herding, hunting, and fishing (in the case of Chukchi people, all of the above). While relations among these groups were not always amicable and there is evidence of population shifts, with Chukchi groups absorbing conquered Yukaghir, Koryak, and Yupik populations, these shifts were not profound enough to result in wholesale linguistic or cultural loss. The arrival of Russian colonists in the 17th century upended this ecosystem and initiated a reconfiguration of these traditional lifeways, culminating in the forced reorganization and settlement of Indigenous groups and active Russification efforts by the 20th century.

In this chapter, I focus on Chukchi people and the ways that this social ecology has contributed to a reduction in language use and transmission (language shift) as well as changes to the grammatical structure and domains of use of Chukchi. This chapter illustrates that although the Chukchi language is presently moribund, it is neither linguistically decaying nor interactionally dormant. Rather, speakers of Chukchi have adapted the language, in terms of structure and practice, to their modern social surroundings.

CHUKCHI IN ITS SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

Archaeological and paleontological findings place the origins of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan ethnic group (which would ultimately splinter into the Chukchi, Koryaks, Kereks, Alutors, and Itelmens) along the Sea of Okhotsk on the Kamchatka

Peninsula (Levin, 1963). Originally subsistence hunters, Chukchis have always shown an aptitude for adapting to new lifestyles as they migrated throughout north-eastern Siberia, initially adopting reindeer-herding from Tungusic-speaking peoples (de Reuse, 1994, p. 296). Archaeological evidence shows that the Chukchi reached the Anadyr River basin in the 4th to 5th centuries A.D., motivated by the search for additional pastures; some Chukchi further migrated to the Bering coast by the 16th to 17th centuries, adopting a maritime economy that largely resembled that of the Siberian Yupiks they displaced or assimilated around the same time (Ackerman, 1984, pp. 115, 118).

Sources (Vakhtin, 1998; Dunn, 1999; de Reuse, 1994, 1996) largely agree that the Chukchi were regarded as the most politically and economically dominant group in northeastern Siberia at the time of initial Russian contact in the 17th century, a fact that was reflected in their linguistic practices at the time: Chukchi conducted all commerce with members of other ethnic groups in Chukchi and refused to learn other Indigenous languages (de Reuse, 1994, p. 296). One strategy they employed was to use a simplified Chukchi “jargon” with their foreign interlocutors, though the restricted contexts of these jargons (between Chukchi and non-Chukchi speakers) meant that they did not survive for long and did not produce any identifiable changes in the language at large. Many Chukchi were in a position to employ these practices not only with other Indigenous groups but also western colonists, traders, and explorers well into the 19th century. These included early waves of Russian colonists, with whom the Chukchi were happy to trade, although they refused to pay tribute to the Russian tsars (Forsyth, 1992, p. 80; Sverdrup, 1978, pp. 213–215)—a fact that sets them apart from other Siberian Indigenous groups, all of whom ultimately succumbed to the practice, and of which many Chukchi remain markedly proud. Later expeditions by Americans and Swedes encountered similar linguistic ideologies. An American member of an Arctic expedition in Plover Bay (1848–1849) reported that the Chukchi “did not learn English nearly so quickly as many of us acquired their tongue” (Hooper, 1853, p. 33). Similarly, a Swedish explorer in the Vega expedition (1878–1879) explicitly described the Chukchi tendency “to adopt the mistakes, in the pronunciation or meaning of words [in Chukchi] that were made on the Vega” (Nordenskiöld, 1882, p. 369). Members of the expedition made note of several example sentences in the jargon, many of which take the form of an initial descriptive particle word plus the noun to which it applies, with no copula verb and minimal inflection (Parkvall & Dunn, 2019, from an example recorded by Nordenskiöld):

(1)	<i>ouinga</i>	<i>mouri</i>	<i>kauka</i>
	NEG	1PL	food
	‘I have no food’ (Note the use of a plural pronoun for ‘I’.)		

In this way, this jargon was typical of contact varieties that emerge out of communicative necessity and grammatically resembles other pidgins elsewhere in the world (Bakker, 1994). We can compare this construction with a native Chukchi equivalent, which requires first-person agreement marking on a nominalized negation particle as well as privative case marking on the word ‘food’:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(2) <i>ujjə-lʰə-muri</i>
 NEG-NMLZ-1PL
 ‘I have no food (I am one who is without food)’</p> | <p><i>a-kawkaw-ka</i>
 PRIV-food-PRIV</p> |
|--|---|

Beyond these jargons, there is minimal linguistic evidence that the Chukchi language (as spoken by the Chukchi people) underwent significant contact-induced change prior to the 20th century. Changes during the period prior to and in the early phases of Russian colonization is of the kind we expect in situations of stable multilingualism (Thomason, 2001): borrowing of lexical terminology for items and concepts new to the Chukchi people. Examples include fishing and whaling terms borrowed from Yupik, such as *kupren* ‘net’ (from Siberian Yupik *kuuvragh-*) and *menemen* ‘bait, lure’ (from Yupik *managh-*). There are also some older Russian borrowings in Chukchi which likely predate intensive Russian influence, which is evident from the fact that the loanwords have been adapted to Chukchi phonology. These include *caqar* ‘sugar’ (Russian *saxar*), *caj* ‘tea’ (Russian *čaj*), and *konekon* ‘horse’ (Russian *kon*) (Comrie, 1996, p. 36). Today, some of the more transparent borrowings, such as ‘tea’, are pronounced with unambiguously Russian phonology. It is also clear that, at the turn of the 20th century, Chukchi was spoken robustly enough that speakers still maintained a process for coining terms for new technology using existing resources in the language. Examples include the word *rije-nej* ‘airplane’ (literally ‘fly-thing’) and *tij-uqqem* ‘bottle’ (literally ‘ice-deep-vessel’) (Comrie, 1996, p. 35). Thus, up until around the 1930s, we can observe that speakers of Chukchi were adapting both the structure of their language and their linguistic behavior (e.g., avoidance of bilingualism in favor of the use of jargonized Chukchi) in a way that was neither markedly affecting the grammar of the language nor prompting changes to the settings where Chukchi was used or its transmission to future generations.

The advent of language shift can be seen in the mid-20th century, following the implementation of several highly disruptive policies by the Soviet government. These policies, which culminated in the rupturing of traditional Chukchi social and cultural ties, had three targets: (i) the economic dominance of Chukchi people, (ii) Chukchi culture, and (iii) Chukchi clan structure. The first goal was achieved through the collectivization of reindeer-herding in the 1930s (Dikov, 1989; Forsyth, 1992): individual reindeer-herders (some of whom were quite wealthy) had their reindeer seized and reorganized in *sovkhozy* (state-owned farms). As had been their tendency all along, some Chukchi herders violently resisted surrendering their reindeer; a number of Chukchi (and Russian authorities) lost their lives during this period (Demuth, 2019).

Meanwhile, Chukchi culture was disrupted in several ways; these included the prohibition of shamanic rites (and the capture and extermination of the shamans themselves) as well as educational and linguistic policies aimed at increasing knowledge of Russian and providing access to education more generally. To achieve this, Chukchi children were rounded up and housed at boarding schools (*internat*) for most of the year, except in rare cases where they hid in the tundra when the helicopters came in September, or in cases where they were already residing in settled villages and were permitted to return to their parents on weekends. The latter scenario was no less traumatic for some of the Chukchi I have spoken with, who describe being able to physically see their families on the other side of the fence during the

school week, but not communicate with them. While the atmosphere in different *internaty* varied, many of them prohibited the use of the Chukchi language, wearing of traditional Chukchi attire, and even the eating of Chukchi foods, which could be (and often was) enforced with corporal punishment. The result of the *internat* program was interrupted Chukchi language transmission for several generations of speakers, who (at best) spoke Chukchi at home until they were sent to school around the age of 7 or 8. As the *internat* generations grew up and had children of their own, many of them made a deliberate decision not to transmit Chukchi to their children in any capacity, to avoid the stigma and potential abuse for speaking the language.

Finally, the 1950s onward were characterized by a dedicated effort on the part of the Soviet government to “civilize” the nomadic peoples of Siberia, whose lifestyles they viewed as barbaric and untenable within the framework of a modern, collective society (see Kantarovich, 2020b for further discussion). This was addressed through the forced settlement and resettlement of Siberian peoples between 1953 and 1967, without regard for existing ethnic or clan ties. Conditions in these settlements, many of which were makeshift and not set up for long-term residence, were horrific, with Chukchi living in cramped squalor (and in an obvious departure from the traditional dwellings, or *yarangas*, they could erect on-the-go) (Demuth, 2019; Forsyth, 1992, pp. 398–400).

It is not difficult to imagine how these conditions contributed not only to the decline of the Chukchi language and traditional Chukchi culture, but also to the rise of social ills such as unemployment, alcoholism, and general listlessness among a once prestigious ethnic group. These societal changes only affirmed the opinions of the Russian majority that the Siberian peoples were “uncivilized,” which in turn served as additional motivation for ethnic Chukchi to place distance between them and their language and culture, by avoiding use of the language in public and ceasing transmission to their children.

THE POSITION OF MODERN CHUKCHI

Although the language called Chukchi, as it is used today, is very much the same language it was before the onset of shift, it is impossible not to observe changes to its linguistic structure and positionality in the local linguistic ecology. Such changes are especially pronounced among urban dwellers, whose behavior is the main subject of the following sections.

Today, Chukchi is spoken by no more than (roughly) 1,000 speakers (Pupynina & Koryakov, 2019). This number contrasts starkly with the official statistic listed in the (now outdated) 2010 All-Russian Census, which counted 5,095 speakers. It is not the case that 4,000 speakers have been lost in the intervening decade; rather, the number was highly inflated at the time of reporting, and likely includes many ethnic Chukchi with virtually no linguistic knowledge who felt that they should report their ancestral ethnic language as their “mother tongue” (*rodnoj jazyk*). The language is considered moribund—that is, likely to disappear within a few generations—as it is no longer being transmitted to children, and second-language learners are few and far between.

The state of education is also not promising: although many proficient Chukchi speakers are actively involved in the creation of educational materials, such as

dictionaries and textbooks, the availability and the demand for serious, functional Chukchi instruction is lacking. Where available, Chukchi classes in primary or secondary school meet no more than a couple of hours a week. Chukchi teachers report that they focus on imparting lexical knowledge: greetings, food terms, flora and fauna. No students graduate from these courses with a workable command of Chukchi grammar or conversation. Some especially plucky instructors have taken to offering courses online or through WhatsApp; here, they face additional technological challenges, which include no Wi-Fi service whatsoever throughout Chukotka (although fiber optic internet has been in the works for years now) and slow cell phone data speeds that inhibit the sharing of videos or video conferencing. These courses are not stratified by proficiency level; thus, most instructors are forced to regularly reteach the well-trodden concepts of greetings and traditional lexical items to bring less-experienced participants up to speed. Chukchi learners looking for grammatical (rather than token) linguistic knowledge report being disappointed and leaving these educational groups and conversation circles.

Based on self-reporting and the author's own ethnographic work with Chukchi in Anadyr (in Chukotka) and Yakutsk (in the Sakha Republic), modern urban speakers fall into the following three categories:

- i. Conservative older speakers, typically in their 60s and older, who acquired the language in childhood and continued to maintain it into adulthood. Some of these speakers participated in post-secondary education in Chukchi at the Herzen State Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg and are presently involved in education and research.
- ii. Attriting speakers, typically in their 30s-60s, who acquired Chukchi in childhood but ceased to speak it regularly when they began attending school (typically the *internat*) or in adulthood, especially if they married non-Chukchi.
- iii. Heritage speakers or second-language (L2) learners, in their 30s or younger, who have made a proactive effort to study Chukchi on their own or in consultation with older speakers. While these learners are ethnic Chukchi and may have grown up hearing the language occasionally, their parents either explicitly declined to use it with them or the learners themselves refused to learn it as children and have only recently developed an interest in their heritage.

For this research, I interviewed Chukchi speakers from a variety of northeast Siberian cities and villages (Anadyr, Uelen, Pevek, and Bilibino in Chukotka, Ayanka in Kamchatka, and Yakutsk and Chersky-Kolymskoe in the Republic of Sakha). While there are exceptions to the groups laid out above, especially in rural areas or where reindeer-herding is still practiced, the extent of language maintenance is roughly the same throughout the Chukchi-speaking communities in Siberia (Pupynina & Koryakov, 2019).

LINGUISTIC PECULIARITIES OF MODERN CHUKCHI

All languages change over time. It is not surprising that modern Chukchi speech should differ from the earliest available documentation (Bogoras, 1922) or even more

heritage speakers of languages with smaller morpheme-to-word ratios (such as Arabic, Russian, and Spanish) display a tendency to preserve analytic constructions over synthetic ones (Polinsky, 2018, sec. 5.1). This is possibly a result of the fact that morphology, especially derivational morphology like modification or noun incorporation, is acquired progressively with time. Even studies of first language acquisition in English have shown that adolescents have greater command of the distribution, interpretation, and production of derivational morphemes than do elementary school children, who are still more proficient than kindergarteners (Tyler & Nagy, 1989; Tilstra & McMaster, 2007). It therefore stands to reason that speakers who have had their acquisition disrupted may not have acquired the full range of morphological strategies that are available to more proficient speakers. These speakers may compensate by imposing grammatical strategies from their dominant language (in this case, Russian, which is more analytic than Chukchi) or by innovating their own practices, or perhaps a combination of both.

Another non-trivial explanation for the shift towards more analytic morphosyntax is the prestigious status of the artificial written or literary language, which was developed by linguists in the mid-20th century and which is the basis for instruction in Chukchi. The literary language is primarily based on eastern, maritime varieties of Chukchi and is regarded as inauthentic by speakers of other dialects, especially those without formal schooling in the language. Perhaps due to the nature of the written word—or unintended Russification on the part of its architects—it also tends to be more analytic, with limited use of incorporation and greater (often redundant) use of unattached pronouns (Dunn, 1999). Despite these unnatural features, however, it is nevertheless regarded by most speakers as the authoritative version of the language and even highly proficient speakers of vernacular varieties express self-consciousness about their lack of command of the literary language.

There is still another possible explanation for the move away from polysynthetic word building, which is a sociological one: the urban, less close-knit communities that modern Chukchi find themselves in are less conducive to a polysynthetic configuration. This type of explanation has been proposed for the development of polysynthetic languages in the first place: that they emerge in “societies of intimates” (Trudgill, 2017). Trudgill notes that virtually all polysynthetic languages—which exist in all parts of the world and represent a range of otherwise diverse language families—have certain social phenomena in common. They are characteristic of small, isolated communities with dense social networks and relatively little in- and out-migration, which allows for the development of tightly constrained, interdependent morphological patterns that are easily learned and maintained within the shared knowledge of the intimate group. (They represent the opposite of linguistic varieties that emerge in urban or high-contact environments, such as pidgins and creoles and other contact varieties, which tend to have limited inflection not unlike the Vega pidgin examples above.) While Trudgill’s proposal regarding the “simplicity” of urban varieties is overstated and not without its detractors (e.g., Haspelmath, 2018), this account is in part echoed by elder Chukchi speakers themselves. All conservative Chukchi speakers, including those with formal education in the literary language, describe analytic constructions with multiple free-standing words as stilted. These speakers describe their intuitions about these differences in similar ways. In the following example, a proficient vernacular speaker explains why she would not use an indirect object in forming a sentence.

- (9) ‘We were constantly on the move. For this reason it was necessary to say things quickly, quickly, but in a way that was understood... Here it would just be [a single word], we didn’t talk much, you know.’

That is, the lives of Chukchi herders were so intertwined and so focused on a singular goal—tending the reindeer—that single-word utterances were not only well-understood, but were also the norm. Thus, it is to be expected that the loss of the traditional Chukchi lifestyle has produced changes in the frequency of certain types of constructions, especially those that rely heavily on a certain extralinguistic context to be understood.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC INDEXICAL CHANGES IN MODERN CHUKCHI

The development of Chukchi stereotypes

The changes to the Chukchi way of life have not only impacted linguistic structure but also language use. The modern sociolinguistic practices of Chukchi speakers can best be understood via the notions of *indexicality* and *enregisterment*. Labov (1972) first described the ways that certain patterns in language, such as sounds, words, or phrases, can become associated with non-linguistic characteristics of the people that use them, a process called *enregisterment* (Agha, 2005). When this has occurred, use of these linguistic patterns by anyone calls up, or *indexes*, these associations, resulting in the development of linguistic *stereotypes*.

It is these stereotypic invocations of Chukchi linguistic practices—which may not accurately represent the way Chukchi presently speak or have ever spoken—that are particularly salient to Chukchi and ethnic Russians, and are most on display in cities such as Anadyr. Gift shops throughout the city and the airport sell paraphernalia depicting Chukchi (or *Chukcha*) caricatures speaking Russian in a stereotypically “Chukchi” way, which is mainly signaled by their overuse of the Russian adverb *odnako* ‘however, yet’. Souvenirs with actual instances of the Chukchi language are non-existent.

The Chukcha character is also featured prominently in Russian jokebooks and is a salient figure to ethnic Russians throughout the Russian-speaking world, many of whom are unaware that the character is based on a real ethnic group. The Chukcha is typically depicted in Russian jokes as simple-minded and happy-go-lucky (Burykin, 2002), not unlike the “dumb blonde” archetype in the United States. The character often uses the stereotypic *odnako* or is otherwise portrayed as having bad Russian grammar or pronunciation, always in the context of being tricked or misunderstanding a situation:

- (10) *Odnazhdy, Chukcha prines v redaktsiiu svoi roman. Redaktor prochital i govorit:*
- *Ponimaete li, slabovato ... Vy Turgeneva čitali? A Tolstogo? A Dostoevskogo?*
- *Odnako, net. Chukcha ne čital’el’, Chukcha – pisatel’.*
‘Once, Chukcha brought his novel to a publisher. The publisher read it and said:
- You see, it’s a little weak. Have you read Turgenev? What about Tolstoy? Or Dostoevsky?
- However, no. Chukcha is not a reader, Chukcha is a writer.’

As Burykin notes, this punchline—‘Chukcha is not a reader, Chukcha is a writer’—is so well-known in Russian circles that use of the phrase indexes the entire joke, as well as the broader stereotypic simple-minded attitude it is tapping into.

Given the history of the storied Chukchi resistance to Russian colonization, it is not surprising (and does not escape the notice of Chukchis themselves) that their people were selected to be an especial butt of Russian jokes. In fact, it was one of the first topics brought to my attention when I arrived in Anadyr, when a new acquaintance said, “You’ve probably heard of us from jokes and think we all say *odnako*; I don’t know where that came from.” That said, there is no question that this depiction of Chukchi people in the broader Russian imagination is harmful to the status of both Chukchi language and culture and does little to motivate new generations to connect with their heritage.

There are other less insulting—but no less tokenizing—instances of Chukchi language on display throughout Anadyr, which is the capital of the Chukotka autonomous okrug and what is supposed to be the “Chukchi region.” Perhaps hearteningly, there are a handful of restaurants and shops with Chukchi names, although their signage tends not to use Cyrillic orthography that is specific to Chukchi, such that the velar nasal (ɲ) is always written as alveolar (н). Examples include a convenience store called *Unpener* ‘North Star’ (actually *unpeŋer* in Chukchi) and a restaurant called *Ener* ‘Star’ (actually *eŋer*). Note that this is not merely a matter of spelling, as these two nasal sounds are treated completely independently by Chukchi’s phonological system. This orthographic substitution may exist as a matter of convenience when it comes to signage, to allow for easier legibility (and online searchability) among non-speakers. It is worth noting, however, that such considerations are not generally at play in less-marginalized Siberian languages, such as Sakha, which is used ubiquitously on signage throughout the city of Yakutsk, even though the population there is only about 50% Sakha (2010 All-Russian Census).

There are also several large posters of Chukotkan animals posted throughout Anadyr, along with their names in Chukchi and Russian (Figure 2.1), and posters touting the progress of development in the Chukotka region, which include both Russian and Chukchi sentences (Figure 2.2). Note that in both images, the Chukchi text is considerably smaller than the Russian.

Both uses of the Chukchi language in these posters are problematic, though in different ways. The first, the word *qoraŋə* ‘reindeer’, has been misspelled as *qorənə* (much like the business names mentioned above). The second provides an example of the redundant use of separate pronominal words even though the subject is already marked on the verb (*Muri nəmejŋən-muri* ‘We grow-we’), indicating a preference for the literary language in creating signage, even if the resulting sentence would be judged bizarre by many speakers. Thus, we see here how the Chukchi language is virtually invisible in the capital, while an unflattering portrayal of the people has been commercialized and is sold to tourists.

Modern linguistic practices among the Chukchi in Anadyr

This backdrop provides additional context for the setting of modern Chukchi linguistic practices. For social-indexical reasons, many ethnic Chukchi do not want to learn the language and decline to speak it if they do know it, so as to avoid association with



Figure 2.1 Posters in Anadyr with names of animals in Russian and Chukchi.



Figure 2.2 Large poster in Anadyr with text reading “We are growing!” in Russian, with Chukchi beneath it.

an Indigenous (or specifically Chukchi) identity. Indeed, there is a noticeable pan-Russian identity at work throughout Siberia, which promotes the notion of many cultures and languages united within one motherland; thus, many ethnic Chukchi see themselves as Russian first and Chukchi second, regardless of what is indicated in their passports. In 2019, I attended a festival in Anadyr commemorating Russia Day, a patriotic holiday celebrated throughout the Russian Federation annually in June. The Anadyr festival featured Siberian Yupik and Chukchi traditional dancing interspersed with Russian ballads and poetry singing the praises of Russia and its vast diversity. Neither Chukchi nor Yupik were spoken during the festival.

Other young Chukchi may not have such a traumatic association with their heritage, but they describe their lack of interest in Chukchi as pragmatic: they must devote their efforts first to mastering Russian, and second to mastering English so that they can be competitive for jobs in Moscow and Petersburg (and possibly outside Russia). It is common for Indigenous Siberians to treat language learning as a zero-sum game, where mastering multiple additional languages is not feasible. This view is shared by some older speakers: one Chukchi teacher told me that she believed there was no point in learning Chukchi just to speak it poorly, and that students should concentrate their efforts on fully mastering Russian instead. This sentiment is remarkably prevalent among speakers of several distinct Indigenous languages in Siberia with whom I have spoken, which suggests that it stems from a common pan-Russian source. The Russian education system places an extreme emphasis on full fluency in the Russian standard language; multilingual language use in the home is generally viewed as a hindrance in this effort.

Nevertheless, there is a visible community of younger Chukchis who participate in the maintenance of their heritage, whether through the arts or through language learning and scholarship. In Anadyr, Chukchi continues to be spoken regularly by older conservative speakers, who use it among themselves and occasionally with their children and other younger speakers. To a lesser extent, it is also used by attriting and heritage speakers. One heritage speaker is involved in producing local radio broadcasts in Chukchi and engages in Chukchi translation in her spare time. In addition, there is a cultural meeting group called *Eek* ‘Lamp’, which hosts lectures and discussions at the Museum Center in Anadyr. These meetings are typically closed with tea and conversation in Russian and Chukchi. At one of these tea gatherings that I attended, speakers of different backgrounds briefly shared autobiographical information in Chukchi, but most of the conversation took place in Russian (largely for my benefit, but also for that of the other attendees with limited Chukchi proficiency). It is also worth noting that the frame of the interaction—where each attendee formally introduces him or herself and quickly cedes the floor—resembles a Russian one more than a Siberian one, where turn-taking was not so constrained in traditional discourse.

Heritage learners are in an especially delicate position with respect to language maintenance. The older conservative speakers guide Chukchi language ideologies by example and with overt linguistic prescriptivism. Older speakers view any departure from the language of their childhoods as incorrect and are not shy about conveying this to learners. As a result, new speakers and younger attriting speakers find themselves trying to reconcile a tension between being encouraged to carry on Chukchi culture, but having their speech be strongly stigmatized for not conforming to an ideal that

is difficult to acquire via pedagogical materials. Some heritage learners approach this tension by focusing their linguistic efforts on cultural outputs: learning and writing poetry and songs and engaging in translation. In this way, they maintain a positive indexical use of Chukchi—in order to signal their heritage and membership in the Chukchi community—but are able to confine their language use to carefully curated, non-spontaneous contexts where they can avoid errors.

OVERUSE OF EXOTIC FEATURES

Some of these social-indexical efforts to signal Chukchi heritage are done linguistically. Some attriting speakers, who have acquired the traditional language to some extent, tend to overuse certain features that are “exotic” in the Russian context, such as incorporation and other types of productive derivation. Some of these patterns are attested among conservative speakers and in older descriptions of Chukchi, but they are not necessarily frequently used. For example, one of the younger attriting speakers, who is a very adept and eloquent storyteller, made frequent use of the derivational morpheme *-lqəl*, which means ‘equivalent to X’, ‘used for X’, or ‘necessary to X’ when applied to nouns. She used this derivation in cases where it is not entirely felicitous and where a simple participle would be more appropriate, to mean ‘appearing like one who Vs’:

- (11) *kejŋ-e* *ləyi* *n-ine-lʔə-qin* *eytelə-lʔə-lqəl*
 bear-ERG know HAB-INV-be-3sg remain.alive-NMLZ-EQUIV
oʔrawetlʔən
 person.ABS.SG
 ‘A bear knows how much life is left to a person (=a person is **like one who remains**
 alive)’
- (12) *ewə* *petle* *wʔi-lʔə-lqəl* *ləyen* *re-piri-γ-nin*
 if soon die-NMLZ-EQUIV just FUT-take-FUT-3sgA.3sgO
re-nu-γ-nin
 FUT-eat-FUT-3sgA.3sgO
 ‘If (he) is **like one who is about to die**, (the bear) will just take (him) and eat (him)’

Such linguistic practices serve to underscore the creative potential and continued viability that persists even in moribund languages such as Chukchi. As its social setting has changed, the Chukchi language has been adapted by its speakers to serve their needs, whether they are communicative (in the case of the move from polysynthesis) or indexical (used to signal their participation in the Chukchi community). While the Chukchi case serves as an example of “language loss,” it is also an example of the resilience of a language and its speakers and the important role minority languages play in identity construction in society.

CONCLUSION

The case of Chukchi (as well as other languages in the Russian North) serves as a stark illustration of the tight link between a language—its structure and its use—and

its social context. The available information about the Chukchi language across time reveals how language is adapted by its speakers to suit their needs, whatever those needs may be at distinct points throughout history. For much of Chukchi's history, the language enjoyed an elevated status in the local social ecology: it was a *lingua franca* used in trade throughout the Russian Far Northeast, with Chukchi speakers developing simplified jargons for use with trading partners and reserving the “real” language for use with other Chukchi interlocutors. Evidence of the other ethnic groups the Chukchis lived among (or absorbed) is also written into the structure and lexicon of the language; examples include the borrowing of words for maritime flora and fauna from the Siberian Yupiks living along the Bering coast when the Chukchis arrived there in the 17th century.

Some of the effects of social context on linguistic structure are more subtle and not merely a reflection of different ethnic groups interacting, but stem from the very nature of social life. In Chukchi, the impact of social structure on language is extremely visible following the onset of language shift. As Chukchi has gone from being used primarily among small, tightly-knit communities organized around a shared goal—herding and tending reindeer—towards being a minority language in an increasingly global world, used primarily for symbolic reasons, the structure of the language has unsurprisingly changed to fit its new domain. For Chukchi speakers who can still recall when the language was used for broader communication, such changes are unwelcome or even unacceptable, and the overall sentiment is one of lamenting the loss of the language. Nevertheless, the case of Chukchi can also be seen as an example of a language's continued adaptability in the face of language shift: despite facing staunch competition from dominant languages such as Russian and English, the presence of the Chukchi language and culture continues to be felt throughout Chukotka and interested learners continue to engage with the language on their own terms.

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CHAPTER 3

KNĀLOZ'A'N UJERET'I'N NETEĹKILA'N—KEEPERS OF THE NATIVE HEARTH

The social life of the Itelmen language—
documentation and revitalization



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INTRODUCTION

As the field of language documentation has evolved to become ever more inclusive of social and cultural linkages to language and speech, Himmelmann (1998) proposed to recognize documentary linguistics as a distinctive field of linguistic inquiry. This approach records not only traditional aspects of linguistic description—lexicon, grammar, and phonology—but also a full range of social and cultural aspects of language use. It implies a comprehensive and holistic approach to the study of any given language. Its foci include such important aspects as prosody, poetics, turn-taking and dialogic obligation, registers, formation of “folk” taxonomies, humor, and the entire layer of metalinguistic knowledge.

In this chapter we present how a group of researchers and community members collaborated in using fundamental principles of language documentation and developed tools and materials to contribute to an urgent community language revitalization effort. Decades of work of linguists, anthropologists, first-language speakers, language activists, and language teachers converged with language revitalization efforts through an international, interdisciplinary, and community-engaged partnership. The goal of this collective effort has been and continues to be to document and revitalize the highly endangered Itelmen language spoken on Kamchatka Peninsula on the Pacific coast of Russia.

In practice, our efforts have aligned with the vision of fieldwork suggested by Nathan & Csató (2006):

- fieldwork *on* a language
- fieldwork *for* the language community
- fieldwork *with* the speakers of the language community

- fieldwork *by* speakers of the language community
- fieldwork delivered *to* a language community

THE DICTIONARY AND AUDIO-VISUAL PROJECTS

Project goals

The long-term collaboration among linguists, anthropologists, and community members has been built over the course of multiple fieldwork projects, in different time periods (1960s, 1990s, 2000s), with diverse groups of Itelmen knowledge holders. With a feeling that the language is being lost, the community and especially language speakers have been open and responsive to the researchers expressing the need for more documentation. While language documentation was the core of the project, the research team wanted to approach this task in a holistic manner that would allow collecting comprehensive data with the broad potential to serve language revitalization purposes.

The primary goal of our partnership was to compile multimedia (audio and video) documentation support in conjunction with the production of a comprehensive dictionary of all Itelmen languages and dialects that were recorded throughout the written history of Itelmens. The project also aimed at recording as many materials as possible with the remaining speakers, supplementing small existing collections, and making annotated audio and video recordings available for future learners of Itelmen with digital archives in both Russia and the US. Itelmen has many rare typological features, which make these recordings of interest to linguistic scholarship, both narrowly (shedding light on the structure and history of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan language family) and broadly, to the field of linguistics as a whole (especially in the areas of morphology, phonology and typology), as well as related areas such as linguistic anthropology.

To achieve this goal, an interdisciplinary team of scholars and experts decided to join forces in this project: linguists Chikako Ono (Chiba University/now Hokkaido, Japan), Alexandr P. Volodin (Institute of Linguistic Research, St. Petersburg), Jonathan David Bobaljik (University of Connecticut/now Harvard), and Victor Ryzhkov (a teacher of the Itelmen language, Kamchatka); cultural anthropologists David Koester (University of Alaska Fairbanks, USA), Victoria Petrasheva (community liaison, Kamchatka Branch of the Pacific Institute of Geography, Kamchatka), and Tatiana Degai (community liaison, University of Arizona, USA/now University of Victoria, BC, Canada); and visual anthropologist Liivo Niglas (University of Tartu, Estonia). In addition to these primary researchers there were many more specialists who were and continue to help this project, providing their expertise on questions of technology, design of the dictionary web-page and dictionary smartphone application, logistics of organizing the gathering of Itelmen speakers, and many other questions that have arisen as the project has developed.

Project objectives

Above all, the primary objectives were to gather and work with the known materials documenting the Itelmen language, including texts and audio and visual recordings. The aim was to engage the collective expertise of speakers in interpreting and understanding texts and recordings, document features of the language, including dialects,

lexical, and grammatical subtleties. These efforts have, at the same time, contributed to the compilation and collaborative editing of a comprehensive dictionary of the Itelmen language. All of this to create a “[l]asting multipurpose record of a language” (Himmelman, 2006, p. 1).

Project activities included working with the speakers to assess existing word lists recorded by the scholars of the 18–20th centuries, and to refine and elaborate the extended word card archive of Dr. Volodin, and to create audio recordings to supplement the written documentation. The project also included a gathering of speakers of Itelmen to give speakers of the language the opportunity to converse with a variety of other speakers, and to document conversational speech, as well as an opportunity to listen to historical recordings and the reading of early texts. Targeted sessions also included a variety of topical discussions, such as fish, plants, dialects; inter-dialectal conversations, infant-directed speech. These activities contributed in addition to a project to compile a comprehensive digital dictionary of all recorded Itelmen languages and dialects with links to audio-visual examples and texts. Last but not least, the project fostered discussions with the community of the expected outcomes that could be most useful for language revitalization and where possible provide needed tools for language revitalization initiatives.

Methods and ethics

Language revitalization and documentation efforts are typically faced with a lack of audio-visual materials. In contexts in which the language is not being taught in the home, such materials are crucial for providing a holistic multidimensional introduction to the language. In outlining the project, the research team considered what actual, effective outputs would have a meaningful impact on Itelmen language learning. The team’s diverse academic and community backgrounds led to the deployment of a combination of linguistic, ethnographic, and Indigenous research methodologies, including recording informal speech, recording in formally structured situations, transcribing spoken data, document analysis, building corpora, semi-structured interviews, life histories, talking circles, storytelling, preparation and carrying out of traditional celebrations, and participant observation.

The ethics of this research interconnects with a range of responsibilities of the researchers to the language speakers and the community, to the discipline, and to the general body of knowledge. While language documentation is more about language and less about people who speak it, we tried to merge the two together and avoid treating the language community—as Macri has warned against—“as if it were a commodity” (Macri, 2010, p. 40). As elders are for many Indigenous peoples, Itelmen elders are important knowledge holders, and they were therefore the main authority during project development and the gathering. At the same time, passive speakers of the language, learners and activists were invited to join our initiative as active members of the organizing committee of the project.

THE ITELMEN LANGUAGE

The Itelmen language (formerly also known as Kamchadal) constitutes the Kamchatkan branch of the Chukotko-Kamchatkan language family, once spoken by perhaps as

many as 25,000 people over the Kamchatka Peninsula and the northern Kuril Islands. The Itelmen language is especially distinctive, when compared with more widely known languages, in its phonological and morphological complexity. For example, words in Itelmen (in sharp distinction to the other Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages) often contain intricately complex clusters of consonants, as in the following:

- (1) čkpəč “spoon”
 tɸsčɲin “you are carrying it”
 klqzukeɲn “they were”
 mskčeɲn “I will make them”
 sitlɣpkʷel “with embers”
 kʷənsɪxč “boil it!”

One noteworthy aspect of Itelmen’s morphological complexity is the system of verbal agreement, largely cognate with that of the other Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages. To a first approximation, verbs show a prefix that expresses the person and number of the subject, regardless of transitivity, while the suffixes express the person and number of the subject of an intransitive verb, but the object of a transitive verb. The examples below illustrate: (2a) vs. (2c) are transitive verbs differing only in the person of the subject, and thus only the prefix changes, while (2c) vs. (2d) show that only the suffix changes with the person of the object. The pair in (3) shows the alternation in an intransitive verb, where both prefix and suffix change with the person and number of the subject.

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|-------------------|------------------|----|----------------------|-----|
| (2) | a. | Kma | tʰ-əlčqu-[ɣ]in | b. | q-əlčqu-βum | kma |
| | | I | 1sg-see-2sg.obj | | 2.irr-see-1sg.obj | me |
| | | “I saw you.” | | | “Look at me!” | |
| | c. | n-əlčqu-[ɣ]in | | d. | n-əlčqu-z-um | |
| | | 3pl-see-2sg.obj | | | 3pl-see-pres-1sg.obj | |
| | | “They saw you.” | | | “They see me.” | |
| (3) | a. | kma | t-kʷol-kičen | b. | q-kʷol-xč | |
| | | I | 1sg-come-1sg.sub | | 2.irr-come-2sg.sub | |
| | | “I came/arrived.” | | | “Come!” | |

While various pieces of this pattern are widely attested across unrelated languages, the particular combination of these pieces results in a system that defines a possibly unique Chukotko-Kamchatkan type. This type is noteworthy on the one hand in terms of the apparent combination of a subject-versus-object contrast in the prefixes with an “absolutive” alignment in the suffixes (see Volodin & Vakhtin, 1986; Bobaljik & Wurmbrand, 2002 for critical discussion). On the other, the analysis of this pattern plays a role in the question of whether the anomalous third person transitive prefix *n-* constitutes a special type of “inverse” marker, unique to these languages (Comrie, 1980, but see Bobaljik, 2019 for a contrasting view).

As the divergent member of a small language family with no known external relations, the Itelmen language provides a wealth of evidence for linguistic typology and comparative linguistics, bearing substantially on questions of the range and limits of linguistic diversity.

We should also note that the relationship of Itelmen to the other Chukotko-Kamchaktan languages, and, thus, of the linguistic prehistory of Itelmen, is itself

a matter of some debate. The late Russian linguist and Itelmen expert Alexander Volodin maintained the view that Itelmen was historically an isolate, and acquired the many grammatical features and lexical similarities it shares with Chukotko-Kamchatkan via extended contact (Volodin, 1976). The alternative viewpoint is that the Chukotkan and Kamchatkan languages shared a common ancestor, and that Itelmen diverged, perhaps by intermixture with speakers of some non-Chukotko-Kamchatkan language in Southern Kamchatka, of which no linguistic traces remain except for those that make Itelmen distinct within its family.

Archaeological and ethnographic research has led a number of scholars to conclude that ancestors of present-day Itelmens were the first people in Kamchatka and they inhabited most of the Kamchatka Peninsula before Russian contact (Krasheninnikov, 1755 [1972]; Dikov, 2003; Orlova, [1927] 1999). In the earliest documentation of Itelmen, Krasheninnikov (1755) identified three distinct and mutually unintelligible varieties of Itelmen: Western, Southern, and Eastern. The Southern and Eastern Itelmen languages did not survive into the 20th century and were not extensively documented (Jochelson, n.d.). In the 1920s, Russian scholar Elizaveta Orlova further differentiated Western Itelmen into three dialect groups which have survived into the 20th century: Southern (Sopochnoe, Moroshechnoe villages), Northern (Kovran, Utkholok, Napana), and North-Eastern (Sedanka) (Orlova, 1999). These dialects differ significantly from each other. Nevertheless, they are mutually understood.

Currently, the majority of those who speak or comprehend Itelmen live on the Western coast of Kamchatka in the villages of Kovran and Tigil. There are also a number of Itelmens who moved from these villages into Kamchatka's capital city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. Some are taking active part in language learning and revitalization. When Kamchatka was first opened to foreign researchers and international collaborations began, Koester and Bobaljik (1994) reported approximately 80 speakers of Itelmen, of varying degrees of fluency. When the current project started in 2011, there were approximately 8 fluent speakers and approximately 10–15 middle-aged Itelmens who grew up hearing the language and, therefore, were passive language holders. They did not consider themselves as speakers.

BRIEF HISTORY OF DOCUMENTATION OF ITELMEN AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PROJECT

There is a long history of Itelmen language documentation by visiting scholars and explorers going back to the early 18th century. Ethnographic writers Stepan Krasheninnikov and Georg Wilhelm Steller gathered lexical materials and short example texts, including songs. Subsequent documentation by explorers and particularly doctors (Benedikt Dybowski and V. N. Tiushov) added to lexical data gathered before the end of the 19th century. Vladimir Bogoras did a brief but intensive round of fieldwork gathering lexical materials and grammatical information at the end of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1903), incorporated primarily as contrastive commentary in his seminal grammatical sketch of Chukchi (Bogoras, 1922). Vladimir Jochelson on the Riabushinsky expedition collected grammatical and lexical data and a body of texts in 1910–1911. In the Boasian tradition, he worked with an Itelmen, A. N. Danilov, who learned to write Itelmen and was probably the first Itelmen to document the Itelmen language himself (Bobaljik & Koester, 1999).

The most comprehensive research was conducted by Aleksandr P. Volodin, a linguist from St. Petersburg who began his work in 1960. He conducted extensive fieldwork among the Itelmen of the Western coast and collected lexical data that he transferred to 12,281 word cards. Each card contains information about the word and many contain examples of its use in a sentence or phrase. These cards were safely kept by Volodin in the archives of the Institute of Linguistics Studies in St. Petersburg, and they became the core of the comprehensive dictionary that has been compiled under our project.

In the course of our project it was also critically important to look into the research of Itelmen scholars. Nadezhda Starokova was the first Itelmen ethnographer and Itelmen was her first language. This allowed her to conduct linguistically precise and deeply informed research on the material culture of the Itelmens (Starkova, 1976). Language investigation was not her main focus, but she left some recordings of the language and an unpublished draft of a dictionary and a lexical card file of 11,656 cards. These data were also incorporated into the FLEx database for the dictionary.

Native Itelmen Speaker Klavdiia N. Khaloimova, first as a school teacher and then as a professor of pedagogy, dedicated her life to the revitalization of the Itelmen language. Khaloimova worked closely with Volodin and other linguists on language data, which resulted in developing a Cyrillic alphabet for Itelmen. For a long time Khaloimova was a curriculum development specialist in the Institute of the Improvement of Qualification of Teachers in Kamchatka, where she published textbooks for schools and methodological papers for teachers of the Itelmen language (over 60 publications). Her most prominent work is the Russian-Itelmen, Itelmen-Russian dictionary co-authored with Volodin (Volodin & Khaloimova, 1989). Khaloimova also worked with German ethnographer Erich Kasten, linguist Michael Dürr, and artist Sergei Longinov to produce an exemplary, illustrated *Historical-ethnographic textbook for the Itelmen language* (1997). Khaloimova, Kasten and Dürr also produced a thematic dictionary, and edited and retranscribed the stories gathered by W. Jochelson into the modern, Cyrillic script (2014). Her work with these scholars has contributed greatly to both documentation and revitalization efforts. Most of the material produced with Kasten and Dürr, along with a wealth of other publications, have been made freely available on the website of the Foundation for Siberian Cultures: <https://dh-north.org/themen/kulturstiftung-sibirien/en>.

The Comprehensive Dictionary of Itelmen is based on historical sources from the 18th to the 20th century and the data collected by scholars mentioned above. It is also supplemented by the data collected by the authors of this article during their linguistic and ethnographic field research starting from the 1990s and continuing into the 21st century.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Despite Itelmen being relatively well documented, with this project it was important to gather more recorded audio and video data of the language, of culturally contextualized informal conversations and everyday activities. We decided to organize a summer workshop, a gathering of Itelmens that would bring together the remaining speakers, language researchers, teachers, learners, and activists. We called it *Kʰaloz'a'n Ujeret'i'n Țetelkila'n* or “Keepers of the Native Hearth” 2012. This

gathering was meant to provide a way to remediate the lack of opportunity to converse in the language (at least for a short period of time) and to record such conversational interactions. It was an eight-day event the goal of which was to create an all-day, continuously present Itelmen language environment and record as many live conversations in Itelmen as possible.

PARTICIPANTS

Speakers—confident and passive

Participants were selected by putting together the collective knowledge of the organizers and querying potential participants about who the key knowledgeable people of the language were. In the 1930s to 1950s, when the current generation of speakers were growing up, the Itelmen language was spoken in the villages of Sopochnoe, Moroshechnoe, Belogolovoe, Khairiuzovo, Kovran, Utkholok, Napana, Sedanka Osedlaia, and Tigil. Of those villages only Kovran, Khairiuzovo, and Tigil remain. The Soviet government closed the others and relocated the people. All of the speakers were either in those villages or the former capital of the region, Palana. At the gathering there were seven more-or-less confident speakers of Itelmen, individuals who were willing to engage in conversation in Itelmen and who felt confident of their ability to construct comprehensible and what they consider to be correct constructions. Of these, three were originally from the village of Moroshechnoe, one was from Sopochnoe, and all spoke the Southern dialect. Three were from the village of Sedanka and spoke the Northern dialect. The Moroshechnoe speakers lived dispersed in Khairiuzovo, Kovran, and Palana. The Sedanka speakers lived in the regional capital Tigil. The possibilities for extended conversation existed only within this group and a small number of somewhat less confident speakers who understood and could speak under the right circumstances.

In addition to the confident speakers and knowledgeable passive speakers, there were numerous community members who participated as observers and learners. A small group of enthusiasts arrived from the city of Elizovo and stayed for several days. We hosted opening and closing events and many people interested in cultural revitalization came to hear the language spoken and see old friends.

MALKI—THE PLACE OF GATHERING

While preparing for the gathering, it was important to find a place that would be able to host everyone in the same location, provide quality meals, health services to the elders, be surrounded by nature but at the same time have all the needed conveniences. The Malki resort proved a good option. It is a hot spring resort that offers cozy wooden housing, outdoor thermal water swimming pool, dining services, and room options for gatherings. Malki is famous for its health-giving, naturally carbonated spring water. It is located less than a three-hour drive from the airport and the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, the capital city of Kamchatka, which is home to many relatives of the invited participants. Grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and other family and friends had a chance to come for small family reunions. Malki is also in traditional Itelmen territory that with the arrival of the Cossacks in the 18th century, became the site of a Cossack village. This place became our home for the days of the gathering.

STRUCTURE OF THE EVENT

The workshop program began on June 3rd and ended on June 8th. General conversations about the event began well before the start date, when participants flew in advance on scheduled weekly flights from their remote villages. Once at the gathering site at Malki, the housing units brimmed with the chattering of reunions and revival of Itelmen discussions. It was the first time in a long period when speakers of Itelmen had a chance to meet. Some of them were classmates, some were from the same village, some were in the same boarding school, and some used to be in a relationship. All of these connections started to come to life as the speakers settled in their rooms and became familiar with the surroundings. In everyday life the participants had very little opportunity to speak Itelmen. It was difficult, during the first days of the gathering, for the elders to adjust to the possibility of conversing only in Itelmen. But after a few days they were comfortably back to Itelmen-only conversations and were able to create a language environment throughout the entire day. After having the consent forms signed, the research team tried to audio and video record every communicative event that we witnessed. We recorded spontaneous conversations during lunch, walks in the forest, swimming in the pool, or in the evenings when the elders met to remember the old times. We also constructed some situations in which the speakers would converse on given topics.

There were numerous interesting exchanges about who should be the authority on the language. Some Itelmen speakers deferred to the linguists (who had historical knowledge from working with elders). The linguists contended that ultimately the speakers (who had native knowledge) were the authorities.

The afternoons and then mornings after the first two days were busy with more focused work. We divided participants into small groups and occasionally conducted individual interviews. The groups worked on projects that included recording dialogue in Itelmen, elicitation of environmental terminology, recording of playing with an Itelmen infant, thematic elicitation exercises, some based on suggestions from the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics' field manuals and stimulus materials (Bowerman & Pederson, 1992), and work on transcribing and translating songs.

Individually, speakers recorded words for the planned audio dictionary, helped to check words and expressions marked for field follow-up in previous linguistic work. We also interviewed participants about their own lives to have a record of how they came to be among the few remaining speakers and their aspirations for the language. In the evenings we met communally and shared stories, watched films from the villages in the early 1990s and worked on preparations for the festivities of the closing ceremony.

RESULTS

Audio-visual documentation

Over the course of the gathering we recorded 730 words with examples with a total recording time of five and a half hours for three days. Three Itelmen speakers took part in the recording.

Video recording for educational material on Itelmen pronunciation

Two Itelmen speakers took part in the recording.

Dialogue and conversation recording

We recorded seven dialogues or conversations in Itelmen. Two of the recordings are in Northern dialect, and three are in Southern dialect. The other two were recorded as mixed-dialect dialogues, with one speaker of the Northern dialect and the other speaking the Southern dialect. The two speakers talked in their own dialect, and we found that they understood each other well.

Lexical work

Dr. Alexander Volodin examined the Itelmen lexicon that he had collected in the 1960s. During the gathering, he worked diligently with language speakers reviewing the word cards he had written over the course of his study of Itelmen. These included reviewing the meaning of the words, and their use in sentences and conversations.

The Volodin and Khaloimova Itelmen-Russian and Russian-Itelmen Dictionary (2001) was also reviewed by knowledgeable participants. Several speakers were asked to pronounce words from the dictionary and to provide examples of the use of the words in sentences.

“Pokhod” activity—going out for plants

The very first day of the gathering the elders were invited to go out to the nearby forest to record Itelmen knowledge about plants. This, at the same time, was intended to be an opportunity to record conversation in Itelmen about the plant world, as well as to record specific terminology, plant and environmental lexicon, explanations on how to collect, and use of local flora. Estonian ethnographic filmmaker Liivo Niglas filmed the interactions, while Ono and Koester recorded side conversations. These recordings are included in the audio-visual archive.

BowPed exercise

To better comprehend and understand the use of the locatives in Itelmen, the elicitation exercise known as “BowPed” was employed (Bowerman & Pederson, 1992). Elders were shown pictures on screen illustrating topological relations and asked to form sentences in Itelmen. (For example: A spider is on the ceiling. The hat is on the head.) The goal of the eliciting linguist was to help the speakers make sentences through asking them questions in Itelmen, such as: what is this? Where is the spider? Where is the hat? Soon after the exercise started we all understood that pictures were not appropriate for the Itelmen language context. Speakers found it difficult to relate images of houses with picket fences and flower gardens, fruit trees, and other commonly known, but foreign, items to their language. Since the Itelmen language has not been developing over the last 60–70 years, the pictures portraying a stamp on an envelope or an apple on a tree proved to be obstacles for speakers attempting to translate what they saw into Itelmen. They knew what an apple was, but apples have never grown on Itelmen lands, therefore there was no reason to translate that into the language. Even though the focus of this exercise was on the morphological structure of the language, it was the lexical semantics that played a crucial role in the success

of this task. Nevertheless, the elders in many cases managed to find ways to translate sentences describing contemporary realities. This was an important achievement that suggested ways that Itelmen language can be adapted and applied to the realities of the 21st century.

Lessons in Itelmen

Itelmen language teacher Klavdiia N. Khaloimova offered language lessons for non-speakers who were interested in learning more. Klavdiia Nikolaevna used a standard Soviet method of teaching a second language, which implies long explanations of grammar and words, writing, reading, and little practicing. She described Itelmen phonology and color terms. She also gave a little history and explained some of the difficulties they encountered when creating the Cyrillic orthography in the 1980s. Khaloimova admitted that if she had had a chance she would have changed some of the characters that did not fit well for writing in Itelmen.

Though Khaloimova taught in Soviet one-way lecture style, the lessons were still priceless to the learners, many of whom heard Itelmen from a live speaker for the first time. Being a native language speaker Khaloimova was also one of the few teachers who could explain details about the use of words that the dictionaries did not include.

Singing and storytelling

Music and song have been known to be integral to Itelmen life since the earliest ethnographic reports (Steller, 1774, pp. 332–339; Krasheninnikov, 1755, pp. 113–116), and during the gathering it was important to document singing and storytelling traditions. Some elders were especially interested in having their songs recorded, as well as the poems that they had translated from Russian into Itelmen. One of the elders' favorite exercises was listening to and transcribing songs. The speakers were specifically asked to transcribe and translate the recordings of songs that were collected in the 1960s–1980s by Volodin during his fieldwork among the Itelmens.

Although not part of the planned program, every evening the elders would get together and sing the songs they remembered from their childhood or songs they translated themselves from Russian. Singing was followed by dancing and accompanied by jokes, humorous stories, and memories. These were the nights where language documentation and ethnographic fieldwork merged with Indigenous methodologies that appeal to talking/storytelling and singing circles as the main sources of collecting data. It was through these informal ways of communication and gathering data that the linguistic research acquired a more holistic character eliciting the language from diverse situations, angles, and usage contexts.

Listening to folktales and Jochelson recordings

Waldemar Jochelson recorded Itelmen narratives and songs on wax cylinders in 1910–1911. They were subsequently rerecorded on magnetic tape and then digitized. The sound quality of the recordings was extremely low, and when elderly speakers were asked to listen to, interpret, and transcribe the recordings the task proved too foreign and strange. Fortunately, there was someone with younger ears who

could help. Second-language trained Itelmen speaker, Viktor Ryzhkov worked diligently over several years with Itelmen elders to learn the language. He learned it so well that he was able to comprehend and transcribe from the scratchy recordings of century-old Itelmen speech. He then worked with elders who, recognizing what he had comprehended, were able to help with correcting and refining the transcriptions. Ryzhkov is a talented language learner and gifted teacher who now teaches Itelmen language classes in his spare time.

One of the evenings was also dedicated to reading aloud stories transcribed by Jochelson in 1910–1911. That was an interesting exercise for the elders. They had a chance to listen to the Itelmen language of the early 1900s and discuss the stories. Volodin also read from a collection of narratives that he transcribed with Itelmen elders in the 1960s–1980s. Volodin published these stories in 2012, just before the gathering.

Speaking with a baby—infant-directed speech in Itelmen

One of the objectives of the gathering was to record live Itelmen language in different situations. It was important to see how the language can be used by contemporary Itelmens in everyday settings and in different life situations. One such situation was “motherese,” that is, the style of baby-language used in infant-directed speech in Itelmen. For this exercise three grandmothers, speakers of the Northern dialect, were left with an 11-month-old child to play in Itelmen. It turned out to be quite a challenging task. The elders were no longer used to speaking Itelmen with children. It was difficult for them to overcome the idea that Itelmen was the language of the elders and conversations in Itelmen could occur only between fluent speakers. It took the elders a few minutes of being with the baby before they were able to switch into Itelmen-only conversations. The speakers were not able to remember Itelmen lullabies or chants. However, they started to translate common Russian baby songs and poems into Itelmen.

CULTURAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION

During the gathering simultaneously with language documentation, we conducted ethnographic work aimed at collecting life histories of the participants. These were memories about life in relocated villages, the role of school and boarding school in the life of the language, the processes that caused language loss in the families of the participants, and their visions of how to move forward with language revitalization. The elders also remembered and wrote down several family trees. The program also was filled with book presentations and thematic discussions.

Life history

One of the questions, about which we hoped to learn more during the gathering, was the personal stories of participants’ knowledge and history of using the language. Where did they grow up and did the whole community speak the language or just their family? How big were their families? Was Russian spoken in the community and for what purposes? When was it that they encountered hindrances to speaking

the language? Did their whole family speak the language and how far into adulthood were they able to continue speaking regularly? Was there a specific time in their life or life situation when they stopped speaking the language on a regular basis? Do they ever read or write in Itelmen?

Participants' answers to these questions were illuminating and surprisingly varied. While for most, schooling in Russian was the predominant reason for diminishing or cessation of speaking Itelmen, there were a variety of other contributing factors that gave them opportunities to speak or conspired to make speaking less useful or desirable.

Festival of the first salmon

The gathering took place in early June, during the time of the first salmon run. Therefore, it was a great opportunity to remember and celebrate an ancient Itelmen festival dedicated to the greeting of the first salmon of the season. Elders remembered the ritual of meeting the first salmon, which usually occurred at the beginning of the fishing season and was celebrated by each Itelmen family when they caught their first salmon of the year. A scenario for this celebration was written down in Itelmen and the ritual performance was recorded. During preparation for this celebration elders spent time meeting each evening, remembering old songs and stories to prepare for performance during the festival program.

Participants discussed the details of the festival, scenario, and language used. Guests from the city were also invited, and the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii City Administration generously provided a big tourist bus for the people who wanted to come to Malki resort to celebrate this event with the participants of the gathering. The Petropavlovsk City Association of Indigenous Peoples delivered salmon for native cuisine. This turned into a true celebration of the First Salmon and recognition and remembrance of an Itelmen traditional gathering.

TRANSFORMING LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION DATA INTO A USER-FRIENDLY LEARNING AID

The Comprehensive Itelmen Dictionary and the related online Itelmen Audio-Video Dictionary are the major products of this joint long-term work. The dictionary includes lexical entries from different Itelmen languages, collected by the early researchers of Kamchatka beginning in the 17th century and the remaining two dialects through the 20th and 21st centuries. While this is still a work in progress, recordings and data collected during the gathering of 2012 provide a platform to create educational materials for the language learning community. Over the last several years a number of resultant publications have been developed and disseminated among the language learning community, teachers, schools, libraries, and language activists.

Țnič'e'n ansxa'n—fish parts

During the gathering the researchers were responsible for documenting their own sections. A separate section was dedicated to salmon. It is historically recognized as the primary dietary resource for Itelmens, therefore it was important to record

salmon-related lexicon. Collecting different words for salmon parts had its own challenges. Each elder remembered different Itelmen words for the parts. As a result of this discussion, a poster of salmon parts in two Itelmen dialects Northern and Southern was published and distributed among the language community. Following this example, based on the template of this poster, it was later published in other Indigenous languages of Kamchatka including Aleut, Koryak, and Even languages.

Xalč mənčaqalkiče'n—let's sing!

Another practical outcome of the gathering was the development of a DVD of Itelmen songs with videos with subtitles. This DVD includes songs that were recorded or transcribed during the gathering. Each song is presented in the form of a short video movie with the introduction of the singer and credits to the transcriber, translator, and editor. Photographers and others are given credit right from the outset to avoid copyright issues in the future. Since there are no video recordings of the singers, the songs are accompanied by scenes of nature from Itelmen lands or archival and contemporary photographs of Itelmen life. These videos also include the lyrics of the songs and translations.

Sometimes this DVD is called Itelmen karaoke. However, it offers more than simple song learning. Many of the singers, whose songs are presented in the DVD, are gone, especially singers of traditional songs called *khodilas*. Nevertheless, through this tool, their descendants gain access to this ancient tradition and an opportunity to learn a form of singing known by their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandmothers. While these songs were retained mostly in the archives of linguists, they now have become accessible to the wider community not only to hear, but also to learn.

CONCLUSIONS

“Our Itelmen language is beautiful. It depicts the sounds of the tundra, sea, wind, birds and animals. It informs us about our environment, our traditions, true way of life.” This, and similar statements were often heard from speakers and learners of Itelmen. Some have little hope in seeing the language revitalized. Some, on the contrary, are trying to reverse the language shift that has taken place and to be proactive even with limited knowledge of the language. In this reality every new piece of educational material, every game, publication, event, or language gathering is highly valued by the community. Our project was meant to be part of this movement and contribute to the language revitalization on the ground.

This research presents a model of effective collaboration between different academic disciplines and the language community that goes beyond language documentation towards strengthening language revitalization spirit and initiatives. It was developed *for* the language community, *with* and *by* the speakers and *delivered to* the language community.

The gathering of Itelmen speakers of 2012 was the last meeting of its kind. Within just the two following years, half of the speakers—participants in the gathering—had passed away. The full range of hoped-for outcomes of this meeting have yet to be realized and much documented data needs to be analyzed. These materials are both

a record of living histories of Itelmen in the 20th century and invaluable language resources for language activists.

Looking back over the years of this research, at meetings that occurred along the way, and at priceless moments with the native speakers and knowledge holders it is especially inspiring to see newly evolving language initiatives, and newly engaged language activists who are slowly but surely moving language revitalization forward. While some might say that the Itelmen language is nearly extinct, others strongly believe that the Itelmen language is reviving through their everyday practice and sharing of their newly acquired knowledge.

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CHAPTER 4

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RIVERINE NAMES AND HYDROLOGICAL MAPS AMONG SIBERIAN EVENKI



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INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines riverine names, naming principles, and hydrological maps among hunting, reindeer herding and fishing Evenki people living in the vast, mountainous Siberian taiga. Despite the great importance of hydrological networks for navigation, migration, and subsistence among Evenki and other Siberian Indigenous peoples, little research has been done on how knowledge of these networks is transmitted from one generation to the next. Here, we fill this gap by providing an analysis of the Evenki archival and contemporary hydrological maps, documenting more than a thousand riverine names, in tandem with ethno-geographic field data collected in two regions inhabited by Evenki, the Tuguro-Chumikanskii district of Khabarovsk Territory (Chumikan, Torom, and Algazeya settlements) and the Neriungri district of the Republic of Sakha-Yakutia (Iengra village). The archival maps were obtained among the Evenki by prominent Soviet scholar Glafira Vasilevich from the 1920s to the mid-1960s and are stored in the archive of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, Russian Academy of Sciences (MAE RAN, fonds 22-2-74, 75).

In our previous research (Mamontova 2020; Mamontova & Thornton, 2022), we focused on conceptualizations of the river-as-corridor for mobility and examined hydrological networks in terms of the distribution of particular names in different Evenki-speaking areas and their links with seasonal activities and relationships with non-human beings. We have established that understanding networks of related rivers helped Evenki navigate long distances and meaningfully organize local surroundings in cognitive space by using specific conceptual domains and naming principles.

Here we examine these naming principles and toponymical affixes vis-à-vis the phenomenology of the names and their conceptual categories. We show that these affixes, being highly variable, help Evenki speakers highlight the unique properties of the named places as experienced in their seasonal movements over time. This phenomenon derives from the performative nature of Evenki place name knowledge, or what sociolinguists Scollon and Scollon (2003, p. 202) define as semiotic aggregates which provide resources for toponymic performances as speech acts (p. 76). The performative nature of Evenki place names can be seen in the way people

use toponymical affixes, which form numerous assemblages with place names and help to highlight the unique and nuanced relations between humans and their geographies. We also discuss the ethnography of place naming through participatory mapping and interviews with Evenki interlocutors in communities in two diverse geographical regions. Analysis of these ethno-geographic data demonstrates that Evenki use different strategies of naming depending on the category of rivers they are navigating, suggesting that Evenki utilize flexible naming strategies allowing people to name, rename, and modify riverine names with toponymical affixes as needed to describe their perceptions of and interactions with these geographic features.

BACKGROUND: WHY EVENKI HYDROLOGICAL MAPS?

Rivers, as reliable and convenient travel routes, have played a crucial role in the exploration, inhabitation, and colonization of Siberia. Evenki cartographic skills were not limited to sketch maps shared with explorers but also included maps on shamanic drums and pendants, as well as maps drawn in coal on larch trees which communicated information important for hunting or other purposes (see Anisimov, 1958; Okladnikova, 1998). Being especially impressed by Evenki's excellent knowledge of the local river systems, explorers often hired them as guides while traveling in Siberia. By the end of the nineteenth century Evenki map-making skills and geographical knowledge started attracting the attention of scholars (see Kropotkin, 1899; Ostrovskikh, 1904; Adler, 1910; Podgorbunsky, 1924). As a result, a significant variety of Indigenous maps have been archived, many of which were later published by Bruno Adler (1910) in his book on Indigenous cartography. These maps depict river systems and contain a huge number of riverine names. From this, Adler concludes that, unlike Indigenous people living in the tundra or steppe, for the Evenki it is more important to descry (Rus. "raspoznavat") the country rather than to set the direction (p. 98; see also Pekarsky & Tsvetkov, 1913, p. 26).

The unique time-space perspective of geospatial relationships was highlighted by Sergey Shirokogoroff (1935, p. 66), who compares Evenki mapping principles with the railway schedule. He further compared Evenki and other Tungus peoples with professional topographers. Vasilevich (1963) continued to examine Evenki hydrological maps and place names through participatory mapping. Her research comprises the only vernacular cartographic project using long-term community-based mapping in Soviet Russia. As a result, she collected an archive of Evenki maps valuable to both outside scholarship and Indigenous communities.

Evenki's knowledge of the rivers was—and still is—largely based on their nomadic practices and wide circles of taiga migration. The river (*bira*) as a core landscape feature binds together many aspects of their spatial cognition, ontology, and mobility (see Shirokogoroff, 1926, 1929, 1935; Vasilevich, 1963, 1969, p. 182, 1971; Vasilevich & Smolyak, 1964; Campbell, 2003; Ermolova, 2007; Lavrillier, 2010; Sirina, 2012; Oeterlaar et al., 2013; Brandišauskas, 2017 and others). Siberian anthropologist Nadezhda Ermolova (2007) argues that in the areas with "smooth" mountainous ranges the landscape cannot be observed with a human eye, and thus the rivers turn out to be the only reliable reference points for human orientation (see also Oeterlaar et al., 2013), and concludes that this factor lies at the heart of the Evenki orientation system which is largely based on hydrographical networks. By naming rivers people

make sense of new places and establish informal ownership rights. Names also serve as communicative signs (Mamontova & Thornton, 2022). Vasilevich (1965) pointed out that in many cases Evenki imposed their own terminology for river tributaries once they occupied a new territory previously inhabited by other Indigenous groups. Re-naming territory according to new human-hydrological patterns helped people to establish a set of interconnected places bound together by river systems. Some geographical terms became toponyms widely distributed over the territory Evenki groups came to inhabit. Previous toponyms might still be in use, especially in language contact zones. In places vacated by Evenki inhabitants, their geographic names often became assimilated by newcomers. Vasilevich found that small rivers in such areas were often “preserved” Evenki names, or they received secondary names in other Indigenous languages.

The significance of rivers is further highlighted in Evenki cosmology. The mythological river *engdekit* connects different shamanic worlds, inhabited by humans and other-than-human beings, and serves as the corridor for migration from one world to another, representing “real” migration routes. Hydrological systems were associated with some shamanic rivers in Evenki shamanic worlds (Vasilevich, 1969, 1975). Vasilevich (1966) even suggested that it might have been the shaman who was responsible for the transmission of geographic knowledge in the community, based on his journeying into other-than-human worlds via special riverine portals. Accordingly, the shaman was expected to memorize comprehensive details about the nature of local hydrological systems. Shirokogoroff (1926, p. 178) points out that, whereas the people living in the steppes used navigation skills based on the idea of orientation according to cardinal points, for the Northern Tungus, including Evenki, it was more important to identify landmarks, the direction of the main water arteries and well-known geographical places. Hence, the idea of “river-as-the-corridor” is embedded in the Evenki people’s perception of space and place and can help to explain their patterns of movement in relation to non-human beings and other aspects of the environment. In the absence of shamans, this role has been taken up by elders and experienced hunters and reindeer herders who are responsible for the transmission of geographical knowledge, including place names.

Only a few Evenki mythological stories explain the origin of riverine names. According to one, it was Fox-trickster who bestowed the names. Fox possesses detailed knowledge of the taiga and occasionally names places from its experience in the same way as Evenki do (Vasilevich, 1936, pp. 11–12), as the following narrative exemplifies.¹

Two women set off to go roaming in a large boat having loaded reindeer covers for their *dyu* (tipi), belongings and food. The women’s boat drifted down the river. Fox cried out to them from the riverbank, “Hey, you women! Take me along with you!” “No, we won’t!” they said. “Take me, take me! I will tell you all the names of the rivers and lands as you do not know their names.” “Very well, come on, come onto the boat.” The women moored up and Fox sat down. Fox sat up close to their belongings and said, “I am afraid of the river. I am dizzy. I will cover myself with the *dyu*’s cover.” The women’s boat began drifting again. They came upon a river on the left side. “Fox, what is the river?” “This is the Lace river.” The women kept floating further downstream. Fox opened

their suede bag, a *potakui*, and started eating their dried meat. <...> Another river appeared, on the right side this time. “Fox, what is the river?” “Upper, it’s the Upper river!” Next the women kept further downriver. Fox was eating from their suede bag. While they were passing by yet another river [the women] asked, “Fox, what is the river?” “Middle, the Middle river.” <...> The next river they arrived at appeared on the left side. “Fox, what is the river?” “End, this is the End river. Can you women drop me off here? I will go home to the Taiga. Drop me off here, at the End river.”

This story illustrates not only the important role of mythological other-than-human beings as place-namers, but, more importantly for our purposes, the Evenki travelers’ deep desire to know river names in order to navigate their world. Considering the importance of riverine names for Evenki orientation and geography, we examine how Evenki identify key arteries and name them in specific dwelling and mobility contexts. To ascertain this, we asked our Evenki interlocutors to map the most significant rivers in their experience, and to discuss the names in their cultural-geographic context.

FIELD DATA: ARCHIVAL AND CONTEMPORARY HYDROLOGICAL MAPS

The data for this research includes archival and contemporary sketch maps collected over the past hundred years. In addition to 30 maps from Vasilevich’s archive, we obtained 10 maps from Tugur-Chumikan and 2 maps from Neriungri Evenki communities with more than 200 toponyms in 2017 and 2018 respectively (N. Mamontova’s personal archive). Vernacular mapping allows us to capture Indigenous knowledge better than through map-making sessions where Indigenous people work together with cartographers or by using alternative community-based map-making techniques (see Sletto, 2009). We were primarily interested in how Evenki participants would represent river systems and other landmarks on sketch maps almost a hundred years ago after Vasilevich’s project. The process of drawing gave us an opportunity to observe how people arranged the rivers on the sheet of paper in terms of their spatial order and what kind of geographic information they chose to put on their maps. The observed process of drawing turned out to be like that documented by Shirokogoroff (1935) and Vasilevich (1963) in the 1920s and 1940s respectively. As a rule, people begin by depicting core river arteries in a social-ecological system and then add smaller tributaries later. The scale and orientation are not critically important. However, the order of the rivers is carefully observed. Two drawings from the Tuguro-Chumikanskii district were distinct and revealing in this regard. One female participant first drew the sea (*lam* in Evenki) in the form of a circle and then depicted the rivers flowing into the sea; another woman asked the researcher to draw a coastline and after that she added the rivers). This suggests the significance of relational navigational features—the sea, the coast—in the context of memory and specification.

Despite the importance of elevations, Evenki rarely depict them on maps. Thus, in the 1920s, Russian scholar Vasiliy Podgorbunsky (1924, p. 148) noted that, although his Evenki interlocutor indicated some mountains on his sketch map, he did not

draw all of them to leave more room for the rivers. He further highlighted that the Evenki used the mountains as observation points: people “mentally divided” the homogenous mountainous landscape into a number of sections to better highlight and delineate the hydrography. Each section with its unique picture of the interconnected rivers was easier to memorize and recognize than a solid mass of completely similar elevations. Elevations used by hunters to travel to another river system normally receive names (see Sirina, 2012), and these toponyms may indicate the affordance, or phenomenological possibility or impossibility, of traversing the mountain in order to cross from one river to another.

As a rule, Evenki include on maps such information as the location of burial sites by using the Russian cross, a variation of a Christian cross with two crossbeams. In some Evenki communities, burial places were located on high riverbanks and are connected with the idea of observation from a high point. This connection is still reflected in riverine names and narratives. Evenki occasionally name rivers after prominent hunters or reindeer herders who used to dwell nearby. These exceptional people are considered to be the spiritual guardians of the territory (*bugadi*, *singe:n* / *hingke:n*, *seveki*;) and should be greeted with offerings when passing by. These rivers may be renamed later when memory of the luminary has faded, or may be renamed with Evenki kinship terms (e.g., *Ehekend'a* “respected grandfather” river) to reflect generalized ancestral relations to the place. In the latter case the rivers keep their names, but are “filled in” with new meanings and memories, which can be renewed by linking it to a real person within the contemporary generation.

Presently, Evenki do not identify reindeer tracks and nomadic camps on sketch maps, though such data is present on archival maps, along with named forest patches and *huli* (Evenki), outcrops raised by the river of coastal ramparts covered with pine trees (see Figure 4.1). Evenki do occasionally name patches and places in the taiga which represent cultural, spiritual or subsistence significance for them, or are connected to particular past events which may continue to influence or haunt the present. The taiga constitutes the primary habitat for Evenki, with named rivers and a set of culturally significant places and areas, and is the key concept to understanding almost every aspect of Evenki social life, including cosmology and story-telling. Another means of highlighting the nuanced properties of the place is the novel use of toponymical affixes with the same names. In the following section we consider the use of toponymical affixes in place names and what they reveal about Evenki place name phenomenology of Evenki.

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF TOPONYMICAL AFFIXES

In a separate study of Evenki maps, we demonstrated that most Evenki place names are highly variable in morphological structure and show minimum repetition in terms of content (see Mamontova 2020). Simultaneously, names can be united into several major conceptual categories which are rather stable cross-regionally. This suggests that, despite a great number of unreplicative names, similar conceptual categories adhere across Evenki cultural and linguistic areas. Thus, most of the names from Vasilevich’s collection, regardless of their location, represent the following conceptual categories: “landscape terminology,” “fauna,” “objects,” and “flora.” This section discusses the purpose of affixes in Evenki place names which help to specify the



Figure 4.1 A fragment of a sketch map (on the left) representing the place name system of the Yenisei River, collected by Vasilevich (MAE RAN, fonds 22-2-75: 6), from an Evenki toponymic platform (toponymics-live.net).

meaning of the place in both salient and flexible ways; they may be easily changed to highlight the changing nature of a place.

Unlike many other languages, including Indigenous languages of Siberia, Evenki place names are rarely formed as a combination of *specific* + *generic*, where the former is a place name and the latter refers to a landscape type. As a rule, Evenki place names represent a stem, normally a noun, combined with one or several affixes. These affixes are easily attached to place names and can be varied to identify different properties of the place. Even those place names which are passed across the generations may be used with different affixes. Vasilevich (1965, 1971) defines nine major categories of affixes which can be found in most of the Evenki riverine names. We review these categories with examples of how these affixes work phenomenologically.

1. The first category is represented by toponymical affix *-ngdA*, *-ngrA*, *-ngnA* (dialectal variations), commonly used with names of rivers, lakes, and mountains and normally signifying an abundance of certain species. Most reference fish species: *Nirungda* “grayling,” *Delinngne* “taimen,” *Gutkengde* “pike” but also *Goringda* “molting wetlands,” *Iengra* “reindeer horns,” among others. The latter names also point out, phenomenologically, the area and the season when the species can be found. Thus, at the river *Goringda* “molting wetlands” people usually hunt for geese.
2. The second category is locale. Such affixes as *-k*, *-kit*, and *-mAkit* define a place of habitual action, whereas *-dAk*, *-dzhAk* refer to places of past action (Nedjalkov, 1997, p. 56). These affixes appear in the place names related to key subsistence activities: e.g., *Gutkemekit* “the place where people fish for pike” or “pike place,” *Kungkujmukit* “the place where people hunt for bears,” *Mulemekit* “the place where people collect water.” This category also includes names which potentially help people to find the safest route and make sense of the locale: e.g., *Alanmakit* “the place where people pass over the mountain.” Since this category of affixes signifies habitual behavior based on experience, the names serve to either warn against, or give assent to, a certain pathway or action. Thus, being equipped with the knowledge of the local toponyms, a hunter may decide for or against passing over a mountain or through a narrow river passage. Finally, some of the names in this category reference annual activities that structure the nomadic calendar: *Ikond’okit* “the place for *ikonipke*” (summer festivities devoted to “catching” hunting luck accompanied by singing, dancing, and other performances), *Nengnekit* “the place where people spend the springtime.” The affix *-dAk* has the same meaning as *-kit* and *-mAkit* but refers to the past actions: *Tuledek* “the place where people would set a trap.” Rarely, both affixes are used in the same word: *Ampardakmakit* “the place for erecting a house.”
3. The affix *-k* can also mean a place of action like *-kit* and *-mAkit*. like in *Ivek* “the place where people chop the firewood.” However, there is another possible interpretation: it can be used to form a collective noun with the meaning of a huge number of similar objects located in one area. This may be the case of the place names derived from landscape terms (ecotopes) and those with the meaning of substances: *Bugarik* “burnt place,” *Burgak* “drifty place,” *Ingak* “sandbar,” but also *Irenek* “a place abundant in ants” which actually refers to a place where birds dwell abundantly. If this interpretation is correct, then this

category of names should be considered along with those ending with affix *-ktA*. The affix *-li /-gli* also signifies the spread of certain objects or phenomena across a wide area, for example, *Sivegliken* “equisetum.” However, in contrast to *-k* and *-ktA*, this affix more often accompanies abstract nouns: *Urgeli* “heaviness,” *Hanguli* “chill,” “cold” (cold river).

4. *-bA* (*-mbA*) presents in such river names as *Chirembeken* “hair braided with a strap” (a tributary of the Sym River) and *Yorabo* “the place with migratory fish.” Vasilevich (1971) writes that *-bA* (*-mbA*) is an ancient toponymical affix which can be found in some official river names of Evenki origin such as *Urum*, *Aim*, and *Tym*. In most cases, the etymology is unclear. Vasilevich also classifies affix *-r /-ra* in the group of ancient toponymical affixes, e.g., *Tajmura*. However, some of her examples can be questioned. For example, she includes the riverine name *Kalar* “pots” in this category. Since the stem of the word *kalan* “pot” ends in *-n*, the plural form is formed by means of suffix *-r* instead of common *-l*. Plural forms can be found in other riverine names, like *Tarbaki-l* “gloves,” *Hoi-l* “tundras,” *Buruch-il* “grindstones,” etc. These examples clearly suggest that the usage of plural affixes is common and should not be confused with the toponymical affix *-r* (*-ra*).
5. The category of diminutive affixes (mostly commonly, *-kAn*) constitutes a huge number of Evenki place names. If there are two rivers with the same name located in proximity to each other, then one of them may have the affix *-kAn*, and the other an augmentative affix: *Delinda* “taimen” and *Delindakan* “small taimen,” *Kipchikan* “small gorge” and *Kipchind’a* “big gorge.” This affix can mean either a small object located nearby the river or a small-sized river, or a tributary of a river with the same name, and is widely used together with other affixes.
6. The possessive category is represented by comitative affix *-chi*, meaning “the river with.” For example, *Chopkochi* “the river with holes,” *Burichi* “the river with an island,” *Dzjur Daptychi* “the river with two mouths,” etc.
7. The affix *-ktA* expresses the agglomeration of small items, objects, or geographical phenomena distributed within an area. It is also commonly added to verbs of motion and, thus, signifies the dispersive meaning of an action, namely expansive movement in different directions (see Nedjalkov, 1997, p. 251). In place names, *-ktA* is usually found in the names derived from ecotopes: *Kovikta* “open and wide place covered with moss,” *Buarikta* “burnt place,” *Detikte* “tundra,” *Kudukta* “salt lick.”
8. The affix *-mA* is an adjectival ending, used to emphasize a quality of an object in terms of color, material, or other specificities: *Kurgama* “dried out,” *Talama* “salty” (from *tala* “salt lick”), *Birgama* “bad.”
9. The final category of affixes is related to so-called clan names (*-gir*) and those with the meaning of “resident”: *Mamugat* “the residents of the Mamu River,” *Davagan* “the resident of the mountain pass” (from *davan* “mountain pass”), and in such a clan name as *Ullegirind’a*.

We argue that toponymical affixes in place names play the role of assemblages, which are generally defined as “coming together” and are characterized by relations of exteriority. This implies that a component part of an assemblage may be detached from

the whole and attached to a different assemblage, in which its interaction is different. Assemblages can be rearranged to form new patterns. DeLanda (2006, p. 10), a founder of assemblage theory, distinguishes the properties (what an entity is) of assemblages from their capacities (what it can do). Unlike properties, capacities are not constant; they code the components of an assemblage relationally, according to context. When it comes to place, the difference between properties and capacities can be understood as a duality of a material existence (locale or landscape) and an expressive existence (cultural entities) (Cresswell, 2015, pp. 53–54). In place names the same can be stated in relation to the stem and the affix; the latter defines the capacities of the former. Yet in Evenki topography, the properties or the names themselves are not always constant. Next, we examine different categories of rivers in accordance with the Evenki ontological possibilities of shifting geographic properties and assigning new names.

HOW RIVERS ARE NAMED: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF NAMING

In many regions with Evenki populations most of the official cartographic riverine names are of Evenki origin. It remains unexamined how these names were collected and incorporated into official topography. It is likely that most of the names were put on maps in the Soviet period. Like their pre-revolutionary colleagues, Soviet scholars continued to examine Indigenous geographic knowledge and map-making. This data was used by the authorities and policy makers in order to carry out administrative organization and reforms in Siberia (Mamontova, 2016). These reforms also facilitated the incorporation of Indigenous place names into official gazetteers, maps and geographic terminology. The first instruction on mapping Evenki place names was published in 1966 (Rozova, 1966). It determined the rules of spelling and provided the list of the basic landscape nomenclature. As our field data suggest, Evenki widely use these official terms both when they talk to outsiders and to residents of different settlements. However, people usually highlight the fact that most of these names only sound like Evenki, being in fact significantly misspelled, mis-translated, mis-located, or from a different dialect. Even when the toponyms are correct, the rivers which bear their names may be confused.

In addition to official names, each hunting and herding community has its own network of rivers along which people hunt and, hence, a linked set of riverine names (Mamontova & Thornton, 2022). These names are helpful in providing a compact orientation to the location of a winter dwelling or any other place in the taiga. In this regard, Evenki in the Tuguro-Chumikanskii district make a clear distinction between *bira* “large river” (not always in terms of its size but rather its cultural status as a key artery) and *yukta* or *birakan* “smaller river,” “glen,” “spring,” sometimes “tributary” of the main river. Whereas key river names remain the same and are passed from one generation to the next, the names of *yukta* type of rivers can be easily changed or even abandoned.

Overall, Evenki riverine names can be roughly divided into three groups. The first and largest category constitutes names of Evenki origin which are passed on generationally without change, including official riverine names of Evenki origin, typically the key rivers for navigation and movement. The second category of names is represented by key rivers in the area and their tributaries which are used for various

purposes, including navigation and structuring space. The names of these rivers are known mainly among the members of a particular community, such as a village, but are rarely utilized by other Evenki living in proximity. These names are also passed down the generations, but in some rare cases can be changed or modified if they do not correspond to the surroundings anymore or the previous semantic connotations have been forgotten. Finally, the smallest and the most variable names are those used among a group of hunters of a specific area or nomadic reindeer herders traveling together. As a rule, these ingroup toponyms are not transmitted to the next generation and are in use only as people visit the named rivers. Table 4.1 shows these categories of place names.

In the next section, we discuss the difference between what we call “communal” and “private” names in more detail, as well as name-giving practices in the surveyed communities.

COMMUNAL AND PRIVATE NAMES: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Despite the common understanding of Indigenous place names as conservative and durable, our field data show that Evenki place names may be easily changed even within a generation. This may happen, for example, if the circumstances under which the river was named have changed, and the previous name no longer fits the environment, or human experience is no longer attuned to the name (the previous name perhaps being retained in memory but not transmitted unless it is embedded in a story; in the latter case the name may develop several interpretations). To overcome this contradiction between the name and the place, Evenki sometimes generate new names to substitute for old ones or to mark previously nameless rivers. These names, if they sound attractive and suitable, may become community property, and the original names can be forgotten. For example, in Algazeya village, there is a small river called *Tepked’ak* “the place where someone yelled” in the hunting area informally belonging to community members. Although the residents depicted and identified this river on a hand-made map, they were unable to explain the origin and meaning of its name until a female reindeer herder from this village recognized her authorship over this name. This is her story: “A bear roared there. Then I gave this name. I said, ‘There was someone yelling.’ They [people] said, ‘Let it be tepked’ak.’ This is a small river. Probably, there was a bear with its cubs.” This story shows that the meaning of riverine names is hard to comprehend without knowledge of the context in which they were produced as the names may generate multiple connotations.

This example also reveals a group of names which reflect someone’s personal experience or contemporary feelings (cf. Basso, 1996). These names refer neither to affordances nor to the qualities of a landscape, as do most others do. Instead, many Evenki respondents tended to explain the meaning of these names through experiential stories. Some of them are humorous and, hence, the suggestions concerning the naming are entertaining. For example, the Nyuman River in the same region means “bad mood.” According to an interlocutor, someone was in a bad mood while passing by the river. The name also has another connotation due to word

Table 4.1 Categories of Evenki riverine names: continuity and change

<i>Category</i>	<i>Official</i>	<i>Local (Evenki)</i>		
Sub-category Members	Russian All	Indigenous All	Collective All	Private/individual A group of people (family) hunting or herding together
Authorship/source	Officials (scholars, state bodies, cartographers, etc.)		Community members; authorship is usually unknown	Individual hunters or herders who produce and share the names
Rivers named	All	All	Key rivers with tributaries	Only smaller rivers and glens
Changeability	Hard to change	Hard to change	Hard to change	Possible when circumstances change
Possibility of production	Impossible/hard	Impossible/hard	Possible but rare	Possible
Transmission to next generation	Yes	Yes	Yes	No/limited
			abandoned or changed	

play between the words of *nyuman* and *uman*, where *uman* means “bone marrow,” signifying good hunting in this place. The following dialogue with two middle-aged male Evenki hunters and reindeer herders illustrates the reason of generating new names:

A.: For example, [a river is given a person’s name] if there stayed hunters or reindeer herders at that place, or they [people] wanted to show respect to someone.

O.: Or they left something there. For example, a guitar is hanging there, then the river is called Guitar.

A.: Or something else, a cooking pot. Then you name the river in Evenki.

O.: If you forget a glove there, you will call the river Glove.

N. M. [Interviewer]: Can this river be renamed later?

A.: If there’s another person [that] stays, one who does not know the name you have given to this river, then he may give another name.

N. M.: As for these names which you have put onto the map, do you all know them [in the community]?

A.: These are the names of the huge rivers. They are known to everybody. You give your own names only to the smaller rivers [recorded from Ayal Kondakov and Aleksey Ermolin, Iengra, 2018].

In contrast to “common” or communal names, private names are not supposed to be known beyond an inner circle of relatives who hunt and travel together. These intimate names usually serve as communicative signs among “insiders” who know each other and the country they inhabit well, and are easy to change or modify. People do not need to retain them in memory as such names correspond to their direct experience of the place, suit it phenomenologically, and are connected to its local affordances. Such private names are not bound to event narratives and are generated in both Evenki and Russian. They are usually geographically specific in terms of their content, which helps hunters describe the place in more detail (see Figure 4.2). The following dialogue exemplifies how these private names are generated.

N. M.: What do you call these rivers?

P.: They were nameless. I named them by myself. *D’oke birakan* is located in front of my hut. It means “a small spring.” This is *Cheremshanka* (Rus. “wild garlic”), the place where wild garlic grows. We go there to collect wild garlic. Then, this place I also named in my own way, it is called *D’otyh birakan*. This is a rocky place. Reindeer trample it over well. When there is just a little snow, then moss grows well there and reindeer eat the moss well. They are constantly there. <...> This glen I call *Topoliny* (Rus. “poplar tree”). Poplar trees grow there. This is *Yukte*, a small spring.

N. M.: Why did you choose these rivers to name?

P.: Because I hunted there. If I had hunted there (he shows the area on the map—N. M.) I would have named those rivers as well. I just did not have time to get there because this [area] was enough for me. I was hunting there on my own. I did not have time to set traps beyond that area. If I had built a hut, say, here or there, where I wanted, then I would have hunted there as well and given names to those rivers [recorded from Yakov Porotov, Torom, 2017].

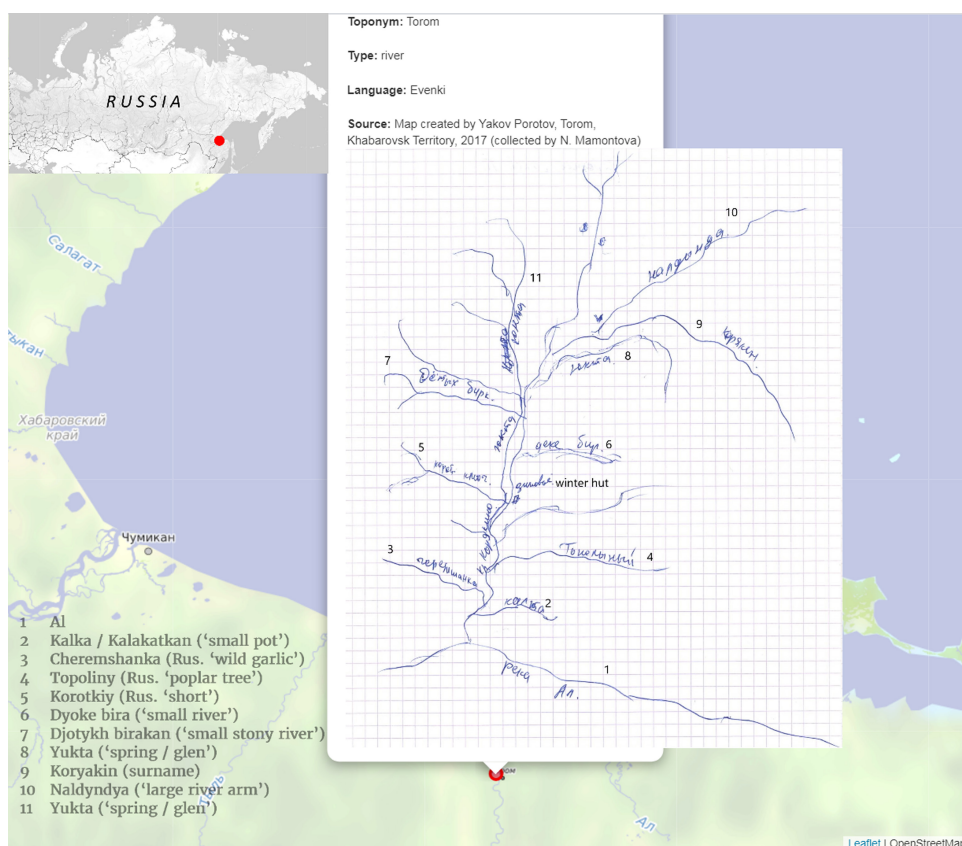


Figure 4.2 The map represents an individual hunting territory informally belonging to the Porotovs. All these “insider” names are used only among family members. Created by Y. Porotov, collected by N. Mamontova. Torom, 2017.

To conclude, a semiotic and assemblage approach to the study of place names is requisite to fully comprehend the complex relationships between names and different categories of rivers, rivers and seasonal activities, as well as riverine names and their affixes, among a group of people who share experiences. In the case of Evenki toponymy, then, we must consider each name in the multiple contexts of its use. We discuss this issue in detail in a separate article (Mamontova & Thornton, 2022).

CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING “KNOWN PLACES”

To conclude, we turn to Shirokogoroff's (1926) concept of “known places.” This concept appears central for understanding how people perceive the landscape and construct their cognitive maps, and for transmitting geographical knowledge and explaining routes to those who have never encountered these places. Phenomenologically, “known places” constitute a relational network of salient sites in Evenki experience, which help people not only to navigate between destinations, but also to successfully inhabit hydronymic regions (cf. Kari, 2011). Thornton (2008)

has emphasized the important role of language and place naming traditions to both enliven and restrict geographic knowledge, identity, and sense of place among the Tlingit. He posits that “place is not only a cultural system but the cultural system on which all key cultural structures are built” (Ibid., p. 4), including social organization, subsistence economies, and ritual exchange. The Evenki hydrological arteries form a network of known and named places which similarly organize their existence, helping them to orient, move, dwell, and communicate in and about their environs. Riverine names are the foundational spatial cognitive dimension for making sense of places as configurations of salient features, constituent beings, and events that can be concisely, yet mnemonically, semiotically, and flexibly, transmitted across generations and even modified, changed, or abandoned altogether. Significantly, it is not a universal system, but rather one attuned to ever-evolving cultural and geographic patterns and particulars of place.

Our research demonstrates that Evenki use several categories of place names which we label as official, collective, communal, and private or intimate. They differ in terms of the choice of the rivers to be named, the motivation for naming and the transmission of the names to the next generation. Despite the common understanding of Indigenous names as stable, we demonstrate that Evenki may voluntarily subordinate, and even abandon, their place names if the particular names no longer correspond to the contemporary reality of people’s experiences or the local surroundings. Yet names for the key rivers in the area, which are usually large in size and central for navigation, or have a special cultural meaning, are durable and resistant to change, while names for smaller rivers, especially *birakan* or *yukte* (Eng. *glen*, Rus. *raspadok*, narrow rivers with sloped sides in the mountainous taiga) are designed to be easily assigned, changed, and vacated if needed. Similarly, people may use a variety of toponymical affixes to form numerous assemblages to highlight different properties of places and complex relations between places and their names. This finding suggests we must reconsider our understanding of Indigenous place names as fundamentally conservative and enduring; geographic “forgetting,” like remembering, is an important and culturally specific process of sensing places. The Evenki flexibly adjust their place names to the exigencies of the environment and perform them in response to local affordances, the phenomenal possibilities of the environment (à la James Gibson; see Ingold, 2011), and environmental potentialities (see discussion in Mamontova and Thornton, 2022), especially the evolving relations between different beings and the unique, enduring, and ever-changing landscape.

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NOTE

- 1 Narrated by Valentina Khristoforovna Yoldogir, recorded in Evenki, transcribed and translated into Russian by Olga Kazakevich. Evenkiiskii district, Krasnoyarskii krai, 2007. The text is available at <http://siberian-lang.srcc.msu.ru/ru/text/lisa-i-zhenshchiny-v-h-eldogir>. Riverine names vary in different versions of this narrative.

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CHAPTER 5

THE TUNDRA NENETS' FIRE RITES, OR WHAT IS HIDDEN INSIDE OF THE NENETS FEMALE NEEDLEWORK BAG *TUTSYA*?



Roza Laptander

INTRODUCTION

A Nenets woman is responsible for making the fire inside of her *chum* (a reindeer-hide tent used by many nomadic peoples in Siberia) for cooking and heating. She cleans the hearth and disposes of the ashes in the tundra. It is also the woman who conducts all rituals connected to the domestic fire in all aspects of her family life. This part of Nenets culture is still not well described in the ethnographic literature. However, ritual uses of fire are better described. The very first descriptions about fumigation rites are dated to late 1920s, when a Russian traveler, Vladimir Evladov, spent the night in a Nenets tent and observed that every night before going to bed their Nenets hostess performed a smoke ritual over the hearth and the sacred tent pole:

During the ritual the woman makes some kind of deep, throaty sounds resembling a reindeer's "khork." These sounds are barely audible. This sound (more like "kkhu" made by reindeer in the throat) can be heard today during purification rituals. Such rituals, called *nibtara* [R. L.—*nibtarawa*], are conducted by Nenets women when new grass appears in the spring. When the reindeer shed their winter coats, after birthing and death, before long trips (especially to sacred places), after touching any "impure" object, and after visiting villages. During the ritual, a smoke is passed over each object and person of the camp.

(Evladov, 1992, p. 166)

This description of the fumigation ceremony is very detailed and correct. Even today this rite is very common in the life of Yamal tundra nomads. In a little pan, Nenets women burn the inner fat of a reindeer together with beaver fur. The smoke from it is used for cleansing people and their important objects, making them safe from the dangerous spirits of the tundra. The sounds the women make during this fumigation rite are still the same which were described by Evladov, and it provides us with the notion that this is the way the tundra people talk to the fire (Figure 5.1). But then another question arises: can the fire also talk to people?



Figure 5.1 Photo of a women listening to the hearth fire. Photo by R. Laptander

TALKING TO THE FIRE

The Nenets represent the largest community of Indigenous northern people in the Russian Federation. According to the Russian national census, as of 2010, 44,640 people recognized themselves as Nenets. The name Nenets means people. The Nenets live along the coastal area of the Barents and Kara Seas from the Kola Peninsula up to the Taimyr Peninsula. They represent the official titular nation of the Nenetskii autonomous okrug (district) of the Arkhangel'sk oblast' (province), and the Yamalo-Nenetskii autonomous okrug. Many of them live in Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug of Tyumen' oblast', the Komi Republic and Krasnoyarskii krai. The Nenets language belongs to the Northern Samoyedic branch of the Uralic language family. It has two variations: Tundra and Forest Nenets. The Nenets traditional economy is based on reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing (Golovnev et al. 2016; Laptander, 2020a, p. 13).

In the Nenets language, the word for fire is *tu* (Nen. *ty*). There are many other Nenets words which are connected to the fire: *tum' pyatasy* [to light the fire], *tu' yesya* [fire striker], *tu' pe* [flint (stone) or firestone], *tu' yesya* [the fireplace], *tu' syibya* [ashes], *tu' ȳo"ma* [bonfire site], *tu' leyo* [flame], and *tu' pya* [firewood]. Wildfire does not have any special name, though lightning in Nenets is called *khækhe' tu* [sacred fire]. Besides that, there are words with *tu* which are used for naming contemporary means of communication and transport, which run on oil for fuel: *tu' ȳano* [steamship] and *tu' khan* [a train]. An electric light is called *lampa' tu'*. Interestingly, the verb *tabtsdasy* [to kindle the fire, firewood] which indicates the beginning of the fire, also denotes the action of turning on electric lighting and any electric types of equipment: TV, electric devices, and electronic generators. The verb *khabtasy* is used in the same way. *Tum' khabtasy* is to put out the fire or to turn off electric devices. Following this, the sentence *Telefonamda khabtada* can be translated as “She/he turns off her/his mobile telephone.”

At the same time, *tum' pyatasy* means not only kindling a hearth, but it also means making the sacrificial fire in sacred places or near any family cemetery places. The verb *todasy* has several additional meanings: 1) to heat at the fire; 2) stoke (an oven); 3) to kindle the sacrificial fire (Tereshchenko, 2008). In many world languages, the concept of sacrificial implies offering up something as a sacrifice, as a gift. However, in Nenets culture making a sacrifice does not always mean giving, but can also include the act of sharing something. For example, a bonfire, made in a cemetery or near the sacred place, is used for cooking a meal which living people share with the Nenets gods and the spirits of ancestors. As a token of gratitude, these spirits protect people from possible danger and harm.

In whatever way people distribute themselves indoors, they are still sitting or lying “around the fire.” It is the woman who gathers the firewood, sets it out to dry near the door, splits it with an axe, and lights the fire. In legends a woman talks with the fire, listens to its crackle, and announces (or conceals) the news it has brought. A fire that crackles or flares up means that enemies are approaching or that guests from other worlds are about to appear.

(Golovnev & Osherenko, 1999)

People can communicate with each other in many different ways: by words, through silence, and also by doing common rites. Also, when humans live and work together with animals, they use special working terminology based on a complex of special sounds and orders to understand and control animals. In the tundra, the reindeer, dogs, and people understand each other perfectly and can even predict what the others are going to do next and how. At the same time, Nenets people think that any sound made by animals in any particular situation can be predictive. It is not surprising that similar beliefs are held about their domestic fire and any unusual sound made by the hearth.

The characteristics of fire as an important fortune-teller is well known among many Arctic cultures: the Evenki, Even, and Khanty (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2001; Vitebsky, 2005; Ziker, 2013; Karchina, 2020). The Evenki, have special customs and ritual beliefs connected to the fire and its symbolism (Brandišauskas, 2007). Moreover, among the Khanty, the fire is believed to be a living being which can talk to people and protect them from the danger of the outside world (Syazi, 2014).

A practice of listening to the fire and understanding its language was observed by Piers Vitebsky among the Even reindeer herders in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia):

The fire would use its knowledge to forewarn you of the future. If the fire said “Tssss!” or a piece of ash fell out of the stove, it means that a quest would be coming from afar. If something bad was about to happen the stove warned you by saying “Tssss!” or “Tsk!” in a particular way. If the fire did this persistently, it meant that someone was going to die. But the fire also said “Tssss!” if the hunter would be successful. How could one tell the difference between all these warnings? Some people explained it to me by making a series of noises which I thought sounded the same but which they insisted were different.

(Vitebsky, 2005, p. 88)

The Nenets are no exception. They also believe that the fire in the hearth can give warnings. Therefore, before hunting or moving to a new place or in case of illness,

tundra people pay special attention to any sound made by the fire. Thus, any unusual sound of the fire in the hearth is always interpreted as an omen which warns people about possible danger in the future which can be caused by spirits of the tundra or even by other humans. This can be an epistemological background to explain why Nenets people believe that their well-being, life, and successful work can be protected by following the customary norms and special rules of communication with the fire.

If the fire makes a soft sound, and a big spark bounced off it, it meant that hunting or fishing will be successful. When the fire makes other certain sounds, the old people say that hit warns of the danger: If the fire “cries” or “squeaks”—it predicts something bad. In such divinations, the fire performed a protective and preventive function. The fire is also credited with a communicative role in communicating the living with the souls of the dead ancestors.

(Lar & Vanuito, 2011, p. 97)

Moreover, in Nenets culture there is the belief that the fire not only unites people with their ancestors, but it can also unite people with the landscape where they live, its inhabitants and land spirits.

The Yukaghir people have a ritual feeding the fire before hunting to connect them to the world of the wild animals they hunt.

It seems to be a truism that fire is the prototypical means of converting natural substance into cultural use. Cookery is the most obvious example. However, for the Yukaghirs fire also transforms people, who through exposure to the camp-fire's smoke can change from one species of person to another.

(Willerslev, 2007, p. 83)

Such tradition of feeding the fire in Nenets culture is not as visible or not as widely practiced nowadays in the Western Siberian tundra (Laptander, 2020b). However, one can assume that in the past it could have been well developed like among the Yukaghirs and other Siberian cultures since there is evidence that in the past Nenets people would sacrifice to the fire a domestic or ritual reindeer (Lar & Vanuito, 2011).

At the same time, these different functions of the fire show that the symbolical power of the fire is much more beyond measure, because fire can transform from one substance into another. For example, it does not only transform raw meat into warm cooked food. However, the most significant role of the fire is based on the power to replace, connect, and change the nature of the living people and the dead, animals and even the human beings.

SPACE OF THE FIRE AND THE HEARTH

In Nenets culture fire is an important feature of various sacred-ceremonial rites. This too is reflected in folklore, in which the fire usually is described as an old woman who is responsible for the well-being of the family. This female deity is called *Tu' khada* [the fire-grandmother] or [the old woman-fire.] *Tu khada* can also test the heroes by the fire (Khomich, 1995; Pushkareva, 2007; Pushkareva 1992; Pushkareva and Burykon 2011; Laptander, 2020a). Therefore, she is sometimes also known as *Yaderta pukhutsya* [the old woman-blacksmith].

According to Nenets rules, a hearth should not be made on the remains of an old hearth. It is believed that each hearth has its individuality. A hearth is different from every other fire that exists or has existed, and should have a new place and new life. Therefore, no one can make a new fire on the *tuso* "ma [remains of old hearth] in the *myadyrma* or [an old chum place]. The fire inside of a family hearth is characterized as the center of the family circle. People might be rich or poor, but inside of every chum in the tundra there is a hearth which provides living people with important energy from their domestic fire. The fire possesses many functions which are not only limited by the space of a hearth as a source of warmth and place where people cook.

The Nenets idiom *tusipoy ilesy* [to live without fire] denotes extreme poverty, when there is not only no food, but no firewood to ignite the fire in the hearth. When the Nenets say that the fire in the hearth is extinguished, *tu khabtyosy* [extinct bon-fire], literally this means the end of the lineage. From this idiom we also find the saying *tudo' khabty* [their genus has ceased]. There is the eastern Nenets family name Tusyada which is translated as no fire people or people without kin. This probably means that this family lost their relatives in the past due to the epidemics in the tundra.

The Nenets entreaty *tumi neya khabtyu* " [let my family not stop] is widely used in Nenets epic songs. For example, when enemies kill all the inhabitants of a Nenets camp, there is always someone who asks to leave at least one baby alive, so that the hearth of these people does not go out (Golovnev, 2004). During the battle, the antagonist pleads with the hero:

Please, don't kill me, my family fire will die out [my family line will stop]. I will give you my entire reindeer herd. I will give you my daughter. Leave my hot breath, please, alive.

(Kupriyanova, 1965, p. 88)

The fire unites not only living people but keeps ancestors and family protective spirits together. When relatives visit the cemeteries of their deceased family members, they make an open fire there for cooking reindeer meat. The Nenets call all their kinspeople *ngyob tu ter* " or *ngopoi myad tu ter* " which can be translated "as members of the same family" (Laptander, 2020b). In Leonid Lar's book (2001) there is a story about a man who talked to his domestic fire:

*Тадхав мяканда тэвы. Пон ядэрмыкы,сян
яугувыкы. Нисяхаюда,небяхаюда та х
адавэхэюду. Намгэхэрт няхар" ю" ты
яугува. Не няда нани' яугувы. Мядырма
мале салмы. Ту' sibя хулю. Тукуцяко
вахаль: «Си"ийда намгэ хада, си"йда
си"ив ервом тавы саю пняив. Си"ив ервом
тавы вадам нэртяду мянэ Туугусева».
Ма, мат хоракомда тикан мойда. Ту sibяку
нани вахаль: «Тикыд тарси юканю,
пыдар цока цавар цортан нин ца, намгэ
таруси минреугуд».
«Тарем нэе».
Тадхав Мандо Вэсако ню цэванда сэр яда
хая.*

Mando's son comes to his chum. He was away for a long time. His father and mother were killed. The reindeer were stolen. His sister is absent. His chum was snowbound. Mando's son dug up the fire and saw only a small fire flickering. This little fire said "Your family was killed by Tungus. Their chief's name is myang Tungusewa."

Mando's son left six reindeer as food for the fire. The little fire burst in: "It is too much for me!"
"It is OK."

Then the Mando's son went to the tundra (looking for the Tungus, or the Evenki).

Lar, 2001, p. 87

[Translation from the Nenets by R. L.]

In this story, the fire talks to a hero and told him who killed his family. This man managed to find his enemies and kill them. Then he returned to his family hearth. The little fire in his hearth nearly went out but remained alive and turned into a stone. This became his family's protective idol which was transported in a sacred sledge. This story about the domestic hearth proves that the Nenets family spirits and their idols could originate from the family fire. This is also quite similar to other Siberian cultures. The Evenki researcher Alekseyev (2003) writes:

Almost in all groups of Evenki the term *Iinken* (Ев. Ёи́нкэ́н) is for any sounds of crackling from the fire. That is why the Evenki call the spirit of fire also *Iinken*: *Tew Iinkatni* means “fire speaks, reports, warns” with its crackling sounds hunters and reindeer herders, a mistress of the chum of discontent or about a dangerous spirit of the place. It turns out that the spirit of the area and the spirit of the domestic fire in Evenki language have the same term *Iinken*.”

(Alekseyev, 2003, pp. 34–35)

THE FEMALE BAG TUTSYA

Both needlework and making the fire are under the control of a woman. This also indicates a deeper connection between female work and the fire which is both practical and linked to religious beliefs and rules. I propose that this symbolic linkage between the fire and women also reflects a kind of collaborative teamwork. Women use their control of fire and sewing skills which animal hides are transformed into materials that are physically protective and good for staying outside in the Arctic tundra. It is also a part of feminine magic to domesticate the skins of the animals to make them suitable for use by humans.¹

The Nenets tutsya female needlework bag can be also connected to the verb *tutsy*, “to kindle.” The bag is made from the forehead skin of the reindeer and red reindeer skin fringes that imitate the form of the fire's flames. We can also note that the word *tutsya* could also refer to the face of the domestic fire, derived from *tu'(n) (t)sya* (*tu* GenSg ‘fire’, *sya* ‘face’). The female bag is directly connected to the belief that the women are responsible for the transformation of the animal's skins into human clothes and that fire plays a leading role in this work. The fire provides women with light and warmth when they are making clothes for their family members in the dark and cold conditions of the Arctic winter. The fire smokes the hides, making them waterproof and strong (Chaussonnet, 1988, pp. 209–227). The tutsya can be made by mothers for their daughters or a young girl can make it to show off her good needlework skills (Figure 5.2). A needlework bag follows her owner throughout her life, and they are buried together when a woman passes away.

In the tutsya next to needles and threads, a woman keeps her amulets and items for cleansing and fumigating, including *lidyang* [beaver fur] and *nyibtarabts* [reindeer fat]. For *torabt* [the cleaning smoke fumigation], women usually put burning charcoals from the hearth into a special bowl, adding inner fat from reindeer and pieces of beaver fur to smolder and smoke. This smoke, accompanied by a very deep throaty sound *kkhyw-kkhyw*, will cleanse everything from bad spiritual influences and powers both inside and outside of the chum.



Figure 5.2 A freehand drawing a Nenets woman's needlework bag by Roza Laptander.

In her tutsya a Nenets mother also hides her children's umbilical cords. Even though a woman gives birth to children, she is also a source of danger which can make human lives shorter. This is all the more remarkable given that, in most cases, a woman has to conduct a fumigation for herself, or over anyone who needs purification, because she is responsible for the danger of her unpredictable power but also for controlling it. In local metaphor she can weaken the sacred force of the chum pole but also strengthen it because her blood is considered to be warm and cold at the same time. A similar analogy is that while domestic fire can be warm, it can also become a part of a wild natural forest fire. Golovnev and Osherenko (1999) write that giving birth and taking life are both accompanied by blood. This means that menstruation blood is closely associated with both birth and death, and also the wild primordial forces of nature. What is hidden inside of the Nenets tutsya among many handiworks is the warmth of the hearth, protection power from the cold fire, and connection to the world of ancestors and descendants²(Figure 5.3).

Following these beliefs, Nenets women should control their every movement of being outside and inside of their chums. There is a rule which prohibits her from across the space between the hearth and the sacred pole, even though a woman is responsible for both the hearth and the fire in it. Thus, a woman as a mistress of the chum may place herself on any side of the fireplace, except behind the hearth (Golovnev & Osherenko, 1999).

The Nenets word *sya* "mey describes something which is not clean, cold, and dangerous for people. For example, a man returning from a cemetery may not take part in everyday activities until he has undergone a rite of cleansing in exactly the same way as a woman who has just finished menstruating (Kharyuchi, 2001, p. 159),



Figure 5.3 A photo of a Nenets woman near the hearth. Photo by Roza Laptander

and a newborn child may not be put in a cradle, otherwise, the cradle will be defiled (Liarskaya, 2012, p. 54). This again underlines the possible comparisons of the system of prohibitions and rules concerning female periods as a system of protection from their danger. Here the menstruation blood is compared to the dangerous and killing power of the wildfire.

It is interesting, that similar to Nenets culture, among the Bemba in Zambia the family hearth's fire can be also weakened by its mistress:

The most constant danger to the family fire is in fact the touch of the housewife herself, when she is passing through her periods. Then she must be careful not to touch the family fire that her husband or her children use. She has her own small fire separate from the main fire, and if it goes out, she can only borrow from a woman past child-bearing or a girl who has not reached puberty. Intercourse with her husband would be almost unthinkable for her these days and there are heavy penalties attached to the showing of the menstrual blood by accident. A girl who allowed a drop of blood to fall on her husband's bed or who washed in the stream where others washed is thought to threaten illness to those near her. I was told she would be punished by her fellows by being made to sit over a fireplace till her flesh was scorched.

(Richards, 1992, p. 32)

For Nenets women it is important to conduct fumigation rituals inside of their chum every time after monthly periods. Even after giving birth in the hospital, a Nenets mother performs this ritual for her newborn child at home. Nowadays people even

fumigate their apartments in the settlements, especially after visiting a cemetery or after a funeral.

In multiple Northern cultures the description of uncontrolled female emotionality, bad words and curses can be also associated with the wildfire. Such emotionality is often not accepted in Arctic societies. Jean Briggs describes her personal experience of being excluded from the Inuit family because she expressed her emotional feelings:

So, when we say of someone that (usually she) is an “emotional” person, or that (s)he “acts emotionally,” we are not paying a compliment. But to use the word “emotion” in this way is like using the word “fire” only in connection to the forest fires; it relegates emotion to the world of nature-out-of-control, focuses attention on its equally immense usefulness in social contexts.

(Briggs, 2000, p. 159)

Therefore, it seems to be quite a common attitude across the north that any words said in anger can have dangerous, harmful agency, which is difficult to control because they can be destructive like the wild forest fire.

THE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD FIRE

In the Arctic the wild forest and tundra fires are opposed to the domestic fire. The former are dangerous and destructive, therefore they are said to be cold and silent. By the term cold fire, it is understood that the fire can kill all living beings and destroy everything around it. This cold fire is connected to the underworld and the dead. In Nenets folklore there is a huge fire, placed between the space of the underworld and the middle world of living people. It is called *Syudbyako todabts* [a huge bonfire placed] (Pushkareva, 2001, p. 95). While Ludmila Khomich writes that there is not enough information about the ancient view of the Nenets about the world of the dead people, we do find in some folkloric texts that the world of the dead is on the ground within the horizontal space of the middle world. It is thus situated on the same level as living people, but in the most abandoned parts of the tundra. According to Elena Pushkareva (2007), the place of the dead people can be located in both the middle world and underground. The dead people live there just as the living do: working with reindeer and fishing near the lakes and rivers, but everything there is opposite to what living people experience, like in a mirror's reflection. The dead sit on the sledge on the right side, while the living people sit from the left side. When living people work during the daylight in the middle world, in the world of the dead the night is time for work. Both dead people and living people cannot see each other, but their fires can inform them about the presence of one another by hissing and flashing of flames in the hearth (cf. Ziker, 2013). In Nenets folklore texts, the fire warns the living people about the presence of the dead people, in the same way it tells dead people about the presence of the living. Like living people in relation to the dead, dead people recognize the living souls to be bad and dangerous spirits, whom they cannot see but only sense their presence. Pushkareva (ibid.) writes that Nganasans believe that the fire of dead people is small and blue, and can exist in the unlighted firewood. Direct communication between dead and living people is limited, usually, to when Nenets people try to visit their ancestors in their family graveyards or with

the help of special rank shamans who can travel between the Universes through the corridors of the domestic fire.³

In the Enets story, *The Lost Man* (Labanauskas, 2002), a son of the Enets reindeer herder did not listen to his father's lessons. As a punishment, he was relocated to the underworld. The dead people could not see him there, though he saw them and tried to speak with them. His mediator and translator was the fire.

The man entered the chum. As soon as he entered, the fire flared up.

He said, "Hey, can't you see me, or what? I'm here. Give me some food!"

The fire was puffing again. People did not pay any attention to the person who came, neither of them said anything.

One person said: "Why is the fire so fidgety today? Yesterday it was so calm, now it even puffed twice. Maybe the fire sees something."

Another man, probably his son, said: "Well, the fire always puffs. What are we going to look at?"

The man who came asked again: "Feed me, please! I got lost, I walked a long time on the empty tundra, I am very exhausted."

The fire was puffing again, even stronger than before. However, the inhabitants of the chum did not see or hear the person who came.

The man once again said: "Give me something to eat! Or do you feel sorry for a piece of meat? I'm so hungry, I feel bad in my heart."

And the fire had puffed twice. Again, no one looked at the man. Only the old woman said, looking at the old man: "What happened in our chum? Why is the fire worried? Perhaps the evil spirit sat on the ends of the poles of our chum?"

But what about a man who came? He sees and hears the inhabitants of the chum, but can't tell them anything. He can't see them for a day. The man thought for a long time and spoke again. He said: "What kind of people are you? Why don't you hear what I'm saying?"

Again, the fire was puffed twice. Then the old woman could not stand it and said to the old man: "Go to another chum and ask the shaman to come, let him come and look at our fire. Why does the fire puff all the time?"

The shaman came. He was dressed in a shaman parka, but he didn't bring with him any drum. He didn't say anything when he entered. He went to the place behind the hearth, sat down there and began to look at the fire. At that time the man who came once again said: "Who lives here? Why can't they see me and hear me?"

As soon as he said these words, the fire puffed three times.

The shaman said: "I see that there is a spirit from the Middle World in your chum. How did he get here? Previously, there have never been such spirits in our chums.

I'll try to talk to him."

Then the shaman said to the old man: "There is a man from another world in your chum. He is like a spirit, but if we burn him on the fire, he will become like us."

(Labanauskas, 2002, pp. 168–170)

At the beginning of this story, the fire informed the dead people about the presence of the living being in their chum. Whenever this man wanted to talk to the dead people,



Figure 5.4 The hearth in a Nenets chum. Photo by Roza Laptander

the fire worked as an interpreter, making both for the living man and the dead people visible and audible signs. Later, with the help of a shaman, the fire transformed the living man and made him visible for the dead people and let him live in the underworld. However, this movement from the world of living beings to the world of the dead is not usual and there are not so many stories which describe this. In this story, the domestic fire plays many crucial roles, which help the hero not only to survive in the world of death but also to return to his family. This story is based mostly on the traditional belief that the family fire can give life, it can protect living beings, but at the same time, it can be connected to the deceased in the same way as for the living people and their family hearth (Figure 5.4).

CONCLUSION

The Nenets understanding of the fire and its symbolic language is common to many other Arctic Siberian cultures like the Evenki, Even, Dolgan, Yukaghir, and Enets. People observe and interpret any sounds of the fire as omens of their working and hunting good luck. The fire makes omens not only to the members of the family circle but to any person who is present in the chum. The Nenets consider their domestic fire to be the heart of their family circle, which not only unites family members but also can provide them with wealth, good luck, and connections with their ancestors.

With examples of the Tundra Nenets traditions and fumigation rites, we can see how the female role in making fire is essential, and women's connection to the hearth fire is very significant and strong. Both women and the fire are connected to the Nenets female spirits of the family hearth. In the tundra women perform all work connected to the fire, the hearth, cooking, and heating of the chum. The women

conduct all fumigation rites during which they speak special sounds of the fire. They believe that this helps them to protect their families, their nomadic culture and their work with reindeer from the dangerous primordial forces of both the middle world and the underworld.

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NOTES

- 1 In a story collected by Georgii Menovshchikov, a boy managed to stop a fire for a while by throwing dog-fur mittens, and when the fire touched them they turned back into a dog (Menovshchikov, 1985). This means that the fire can not only destroy but also transform human-made things back into their original form.
- 2 The Nenets traditional universe has three levels: the upper world, the middle world (the space for living and dead humans), and the underworld. In Nenets culture the upper world has vertical levels in which three skys and seven heavens are placed. The middle world is horizontal but divided into parallel worlds of the living and dead people. The underground world has seven levels of the permafrost, where on the first upper-level live the underground people known as *sikhirtya* (Khomich, 1995) as well as dead people. Shamans can travel to the upper and the underground worlds with their spirit-helpers. At the same time living beings can cross the horizontal borders of their middle world inside of world of living people and also make one-way communication with dead people. The Nenets mythological people *sikhirtya*, live underground, more precisely inside of the tundra hills. Below them there are the *nyleka* “a malicious creature, an evil spirit.” The translation of their name is related to the verb *nyl* “the bottom.” There are some reasons to suppose their connection with the dead and the spirits of the dead (). However, the recent changes in the funeral ceremonies when the Nenets nowadays bury their dead people has also influenced their traditional view about the world of the dead people *hal'mer*. However, they still may say that somebody who passed away became a *nyleka*.
- 3 The Nenets traditional Universe has three levels: the Upper world, the Middle World (the space for living and dead humans), and the Underworld. In Nenets culture the Upper world has vertical levels in which three skys and seven heavens are placed. The Middle world is horizontal, but divided into parallel worlds of the living and dead people. The Underground world has seven levels of the permafrost, where on the first upper level live the underground people known as *sikhirtya* as well as dead people. Shamans can travel to the Upper and the Underground worlds with their spirit-helpers. At the same time living beings can cross the horizontal borders of their Middle World inside of world of living people and also make one-way communication with dead people. The Nenets mythological people *sikhirtya*, live underground, more precisely inside of the tundra hills. Below them there are the *nyleka* (Nen. *нылека*) ‘a malicious creature, an evil spirit’. The translation of their name is related to the verb *nyl* (Nen. *ныл*) ‘the bottom.’ There are some reasons to suppose their connection with the dead and the spirits of the dead (Khomich, 1995). However, the recent changes in the funeral ceremonies when the Nenets nowadays often bury their dead people has also influenced their traditional view about the world of the dead people,

whom they call halmer (Nen. хальмер). However, they still may say that somebody who passed away became a nyleka.

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CHAPTER 6

TRANSFORMATIONS OF COOKING TECHNOLOGIES, SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT, AND FOOD NOSTALGIA IN CHUKOTKA



Elena A. Davydova

INTRODUCTION

The chapter examines the transformations in the practices of gathering and technologies of cooking and preserving food that were spread among the reindeer herders of Chukotka in the second half of the 20th to the early 21st centuries. It focuses on the food preparation paying special attention to certain material components of these practices and methods. In the anthropology of food there are numerous studies that regard food products as agents influencing various spheres of social life. The work of S. Mintz (Mintz, 1985) may be considered a typical example of such research: step by step the author conclusively proved that sugar had shaped the modern world, changed eating habits and diets, gender, and social relations as well as working patterns, caused migrations, and created modern consumerism (1985). S. Yamin-Pasternak and her co-authors, using ethnographic data collected in the Bering Strait Region, concluded that introduction of tea and coffee into the diet had led to a more intensive interaction with water sources and, consequently, with the natural landscape people live in (Yamin-Pasternak et al., 2017, pp. 117–136). The present research considers certain consequences of food product distribution (such as sugar and salt) and the use of everyday items (such as refrigerators, chest-type freezers, and blenders) in food practices. I argue that the use of these material objects that became popular during the Soviet period, changes not only food practices, i.e. methods of cooking and preserving food, but also interactions with the environment and relations with the past. The appearance and distribution of these material objects led to a change in both the technology of cooking and the composition of products gathered in the tundra. In this regard, the chapter first pays attention to food processing and then moves on to discuss gathering in the tundra. It examines how these changes, which are rapid, significant, visual, and lived by the people on a daily basis during the mealtime, are reflected upon by local people, and which role the food memory plays in their present life.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The research is based on the field data collected in Iul'tinskii raion of Chukotskii autonomous okrug—in the settlement of Egvenkinot, the village of Amguema, and in Amguema tundra—from 2017 to 2019. In addition to these data, I employed archival documents, such as field diaries of V. G. Kuznetsova, an ethnographer from Leningrad, who had spent three years moving with Amguema reindeer herders from 1948 till 1951.

Amguema is a Chukchi reindeer herders' village located by the Iul'tinskaia highway; it takes about two hours to get to this settlement from the regional center of Egvenkinot by car. The village population is about 560 people. People live in blocks of flats and cottages which have electricity and water supply, central heating systems, and connection to sewerage. The population of Amguema includes elderly people, children, and employees working in the public utility company, the Administration, the boarding school and kindergarten, shops, the House of Culture, the Art School, and the "Amguema" Municipal Reindeer-breeding Enterprise (managers, accountants, veterinary physicians, car drivers, and other specialists), as well as reindeer herders who periodically return from tundra to the village.

The main occupation of local residents is reindeer breeding. The "Amguema" Municipal Unitary Enterprise is considered to be one of the most successful reindeer breeding enterprises in Chukotka. For example, in 2015 it was awarded the third prize at the Russia's Enterprise of the Year competition in the Far Eastern Federal District. It is also remarkable that most informants in Anadyr prefer to buy venison from Amguema, because, as they believe, it tastes best. The "Amguema" Enterprise is a successor of the "Poliarnik" Sovkhoz which existed here during the Soviet time.

It should be mentioned that Amguema reindeer herders were among the last indigenous communities collectivized by the Soviet government—as late as in the early 1950s (Andronov, 2008, pp. 102–126). That is why there are still some elderly people who remember the life they used to lead in tundra before numerous innovations were introduced as a result of tundra Sovietization, farms collectivization and reindeer breeding mechanization. In the second half of the 20th century everyday life started changing increasingly fast, and the next two or three generations saw a dramatic restructuring of eating habits—European food products as well as new methods of food processing became widespread, and aesthetic perception of food changed as well.

During the Soviet period eating habits became divided into tundra habits and village habits. People constantly move from tundra to the village and back, but the ways of foraging, storing, cooking, and eating food are different in the two locations. I am not trying to construct a tundra community and a village community. I just want to emphasize that the place where a person is staying at the moment partially determines his or her eating habits. This research is mostly focused on the eating habits of the Amguema village, because in tundra there are no refrigerators, and salting and sugaring are not so common in reindeer brigades as in the village.

Reindeer herding and nomadic life along with the specific climate conditions of the region made people develop a number of methods to preserve food, to accumulate its nourishing properties and produce diverse tastes. In the pre-Soviet period, the most common methods of food preservation and cooking were freezing, dry-curing,

smoking, boiling, and fermentation. Combinations of these methods allowed not only to preserve food but also to make various dishes with enjoyable tastes. In other words, in the situation when the number of ingredients was limited (most dishes were made from different parts of the reindeer) combinations of various cooking techniques made the dishes and tastes more diversified.

I am not going to describe the traditional diet in detail (cf. Afanas'eva & Simchenko, 1993, pp. 56–100; Bogoraz, 1991, pp. 126–142; Golbtseva, 2017, pp. 249–270), but I would like to point out that all the above-mentioned techniques of food preservation and preparation, which were popular in the pre-Soviet period, are still used by local people both in tundra and in the village. However, the Soviet time cuisine provided new methods that were adopted by people in Chukotka. Moreover, though some traditional techniques became more popular with time, others lost their popularity. Among new methods of food preservation there were sugaring and salting. Also due to the introduction of refrigerators and chest-type freezers people in the village began to freeze food all year round so the freezing method became even more wide-spread than before.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN COOKING “CHUKCHI” FOOD

The short Chukotka summer is the time of procuring food for the upcoming year. People try to make the most of this season. As they say: “In summer everyone goes to tundra.” People gather mushrooms, berries, herbs, and roots as well as go fishing. The “harvest” may be frozen, and my field materials show that it is the most popular method of food preservation. Almost every household has a refrigerator and a chest-type freezer (sometimes several freezers). When winter frosts come, some frozen food is moved to a cottage entryway, a balcony, or a “Chukotka refrigerator” (a structure for storing food outside the window), to a shed or a container installed outside. All the products mentioned above can be frozen.

In pre-Soviet times women and sometimes even men gathered large amounts of tundra herbs and tree leaves, which were used in food preservation for the winter. In early summer they gathered young willow leaves—*jomrottyt*—and dried them or soaked them in water. Later the contents of a reindeer stomach were mixed with the leaves in a ratio of one to one and put into a sealskin bag turned inside out so that the fur side would be inside. This dish—*kèmějyryn*—was left to ferment in a yaranga or in a pit next to it until autumn. People ate it frozen almost every day in the autumn, winter, and spring.

Nowadays *kèmějyryn* is still cooked in some households but in much lesser amounts. Women of Amguema tundra complained to V. G. Kuznetsova how tiring it was to gather leaves for many hours, day after day (AMAE. Archive fund K-1. Inventory 2. File 395. Page 13-verso). Today people gather the necessary amount of leaves during one or two trips to tundra. They can even afford to spend a year without such food if they had no opportunity to procure leaves, e.g. they were away on holidays. Speaking of the differences between pre-Soviet and modern times, it should also be mentioned that nowadays some women in the village do not leave *kèmějyryn* to ferment, but put it into a refrigerator and freeze it right away. Other people in Amguema prefer the taste they remember from their childhood and do their best to follow the old “traditional” recipe. For this purpose, they use yarangas

installed in the summer along the bank of the Amguema River near the village. Each yaranga is used in a unique way depending on the composition and habits of the family. In particular, some people dig out pits near their yarangas to ferment traditional Chukchi food, make use of yaranga poles and the hearth to dry herbs, roots, meat and fish, and occupy the yaranga's space to cook *kèmjyryn* and other dishes, for example *vytyt*.

In order to cook *vytyt* Amguema dwellers gathered large amount of sorrel in the middle of summer. V. G. Kuznetsova described the process as follows:

sorrel leaves are put into a large pot filled with water and are boiled, almost steamed, over the fire. They are boiled thoroughly several times and then the pot is removed from the fire and left in the *čottagyn* (a space inside a yaranga between the entrance and the *polog*—a sleeping space—comment by E. D.) The cooking process continues while sorrel is left in hot water. Later, when the water gets cold, the sorrel is taken out and the water is thoroughly squeezed out of it with both hands. Then the sorrel is placed on a *kèmjèny* (a wooden plate—comment by E. D.) and ground and kneaded by hand until it turns into a dough-like substance. The ground sorrel is put into a sealskin bag and rammed down by hand. <...> Boiled and ground sorrel is called *vytyt*.

(AMAE. Archive fund K-1. Inventory 2. File 349. Page 7)

It was also used as an ingredient for the *vytrilk'yryl* holiday dish—ground sorrel was mixed with blood and fat until it became a liquid substance.

The data I collected during my fieldwork indicate that nowadays some women, firstly, use blenders to grind sorrel and, secondly, do not leave the substance to ferment till cold weather comes but put it into a freezer right away (just like in the case of cooking *kèmjyryn*). Some local women gather roots (for example, *k''uchet* and *pop''okylgyn*) that can be served with meat and blood, and sometimes they dry such roots in yarangas. However, they often put the roots into a freezer along with leaves and herbs—this method is considered less time-consuming.

Roots and herbs cooked according to old recipes with the use of “correct,” people perceive traditional methods as more authentic and making food tastier. The same way, fish and meat dried in a yaranga are considered genuine “Chukotka” food and a real delicacy as compared to fish and meat dried in a flat, a shed, or in the porch of a cottage. As A. Appadurai mentioned, authentic food cannot have any bad qualities (Appadurai, 1986, p. 25). Fish dried in a yaranga is delicious and can be served without any seasonings, because it has absorbed the smells of tundra; it has become saturated with the smoke of yaranga fire and thus acquired its necessary properties and taste. Fish dried at home needs to be additionally seasoned, usually with salt, otherwise, according to informants, it is tasteless and bland.

At the same time, the amount of fish and meat being dried in yarangas of Amguema is rather small, especially when compared to the amount of food being preserved in tundra. I believe that this fact can be accounted for not only by much smaller amount of foraged food (which is true for venison) but also by different ways of using yarangas in the village and in tundra. As a matter of fact, in Amguema people only stay in yarangas occasionally and spend there much less time than reindeer breeding teams

working in tundra. The process of cooking is incorporated in everyday activities determined by permanent life in yarangas. For this reason, food processing in village yarangas is not always possible. As a result, most of the meat and fish products in Amguema are frozen even in the summer, though people still emphasize how unusual it is to eat slices of frozen fish or meat during the warm season. Informants say that previously they could not even imagine anything like that. Yet reindeer herders in tundra still cannot eat such food in the summer.

Thus, people have to choose between traditional cooking methods and new techniques (based on the use of modern devices) almost every time they cook and preserve various types of food products. Every person determines for themselves how strictly they want to follow the traditions and how much they want to experiment. The possibility of choosing one or another technique prompts people to reflect on their previous lifestyle in tundra (or the lifestyle of their ancestors) and their current life in the village, sharpens their sense of taste, and makes them compare tastes, smells, and textures, i.e. all food sensory experiences of the past and the present. The food turns into a kind of time machine which transfers people to the past—the source of their notions of the Chukchi lifestyle. At the same time, food as a “vibrant” and “disappearing matter” (Bennet, 2010; Baranov & Guliaeva, 2017, pp. 46–65) keeps the eating person in the present moment motivating them to reflect on their current lifestyle.

THE LONGING FOR TASTES

In anthropology there is no doubt about the strong connection between food and memory (Holtzman, 2006, p. 362; Seremetakis, 1994; Sutton, 2000, pp. 209–223). Food experience is sensory by its nature; it involves various senses and feelings such as smell, taste, visual imagery, tactile sensation, and even emotions, as it is a form of body memory. Within the framework of the current research, I tried to find out how food memories effect eating practices of Amguema villagers.

Some local people during their lives changed their diet from the one typical for a reindeer herder or sea mammal hunter to the modern diet which includes numerous European products. Such a drastic change of eating patterns, which took place in their childhood or youth, created a sense of loss and craving for the old times. Everyday eating practices evoke in many elderly people the nostalgia for the past, which is associated with their family, childhood, and youth. Trying to revive that time, they may cook dishes they used to eat in their childhood. However, sometimes they get disappointed because the taste is not the same as in their memories. For example, one woman explained that she had been missing the calf brain porridge her mother used to cook. Once she managed to procure all the necessary ingredients and decided to cook the porridge herself despite the fact that she had always been apprehensive about cooking traditional dishes, perhaps, because she could foresee possible disappointment. Indeed, the porridge was a failure, and she had to give it to the dogs. Yet even such disappointments may get people closer to their past and may be considered as a practice of recollecting, because, when cooking the “disappointing” porridge, the woman brought back to life various images of her own childhood, including the actions of her mother as well as the taste, look, and smell of food cooked in a yaranga.

Some Amguema dwellers used to live in tundra and cook traditional Chukchi dishes. After they settled in the village, it became very important for many of them to continue cooking and eating Chukchi food thus retaining physical connection to their past and closing the gap between the tundra lifestyle and village life. The cooking itself is a method of recollecting. Grinding sorrel on a *kèmény* (wooden plate), squeezing liquid out of a reindeer stomach's contents, mixing them with willow leaves, hanging out meat, fish, and roots above the hearth, people expand the limits of modern (village) context of their everyday lives. Physical actions related to cooking become a practice of creating one's own lifestyle and a way to revive nostalgic feelings and memories of the former life in tundra. Thus, for many local dwellers who possess a refrigerator, chest-type freezer, blender, and salt, the process of digging out a pit or grinding herbs by hand becomes an important action that allows them to keep some desirable elements of their previous experience in contemporary context.

At the same time, when using refrigerators, chest-type freezers, and blenders, people also reflect on their actions and recollect their past. For example, food freezing can be "justified" in various ways—some people say that this method preserves vitamins, some insist that it is impossible to store food in pits in the village because of dogs, while some people believe that it is absolutely impossible to make food with an authentic "Chukchi" taste when you are away from tundra and do not live in a yaranga. Moreover, new technologies sometimes help people bring back the past. So, one woman admitted that she used blender to cook the *vytvyt* the taste of which resembled her grandmother's cooking. As I have already mentioned, most women used to grind boiled sorrel by hand. However, some "connoisseurs" (including the grandmother of the mentioned woman) preferred to grind raw sorrel leaves. This method was much more time-consuming, but it allowed to achieve a completely different taste of *vytvyt*. The woman explained that she had tried to grind raw sorrel by hand before, but, lacking patience, she often failed and resorted to boiling it instead. But the blender allowed her to grind raw leaves and achieve the desired taste—the one she remembered from her childhood.

In Chukotka some people of a younger generation feel nostalgic about things they have never experienced themselves. Though they were born in a village or a town and spent all their life there, they acquired knowledge about the lost Chukchi lifestyle listening to the stories of their parents and other older relatives, visiting reindeer herding teams, and consuming images of the Chukchi culture from the media sources. A. Appadurai regarded this kind of nostalgia as a part of late capitalism consumerism, emphasizing the role of advertising which makes general public long for things they never lost (Appadurai, 1996, p. 77). In Chukotka it is not the advertising but rather the media (newspapers, Internet, TV) that aim to preserve traditional culture, and family narratives that help younger people to form the image of the lost past. For example, local people actively use the WhatsApp messenger to transfer this kind of knowledge—they send each other photos and videos demonstrating traditional food, different celebrations and public events. Food, its preparation and consumption allow to materialize stories told by other people and images seen on the Internet, and to make other people's experiences your own. Creating utopian images of traditional reindeer herders' life in tundra on the basis of such narratives, people born in villages and towns feel the need for authentic Chukchi food, just like elderly people

who used to live in tundra. The younger generation is also very particular about finer aspects of recipes, taste, smell, and other qualities of food.

Eating practices combine “a living memory/experience and cultural memory” (Assmann, 2014, p. 222). As A. Assmann explained, “an individual’s memory is always included into larger structures, to which it belongs and with which it interacts: into a social group of one’s family or generation, ethnic or national group, a cultural semiotic system” (ibid, p. 223). Cooking and eating allow to switch from a personal-event memory to collective memory and back. The boundary between one’s personal memory and another person’s memory turns out to be permeable.

According to my field observations Chukchi dishes are usually consumed in a group—the meal is shared with several family members and sometimes with guests (friends and relatives). Quite often during the meal people recollect their families, childhood, and former life in tundra and reflect on the traditional lifestyle. It is remarkable that in tundra, where there is no need to close the gap between the past and the present, during traditional meals people discuss their immediate impressions, pressing tasks, and their solutions (e.g. when the reindeer herders will come, where the animals are now, what was transmitted via radio, etc.). Reindeer herders eat traditional dishes every day so cooking and eating such dishes is a part of their everyday life, but for village people traditional dishes are associated with special events, and they are only served once or twice a week or even less frequently.

During such meals younger family members are introduced to personal experiences of the people who used to live in tundra—they can cook tundra food, eat it, and listen to stories (real or mythological). Thus, for some people the memory of the lost reindeer herders’ past “comes only from the cultural memory” and for others, results from the synthesis of personal experience and cultural (family) memory (Assmann, 2014, p. 228). A. Assmann proved that newsreels make the past accessible for “visitors” (ibid, pp. 227–230). Similarly, preparation and consumption of traditional dishes opens the nomadic past of reindeer herders for visitors, provides information about it and makes it accessible for many individual memories. However, due to the bodily participation in the process such past once again becomes a personal experience. In order to transfer it to other people, it should be reopened again and demonstrated through eating practices.

RECOLLECTING THE PAST THROUGH PICKING PLANTS

In this section of the chapter the focus shifts from food preparation methods to foraging. I believe that introduction of refrigerators, salt, and sugar has changed not only food preservation techniques but also the types and quantity of products acquired through interaction with the environment. I will demonstrate that foraging, just as cooking skills and food consumption, can also become a practice of recollection. Here I will focus on gathering which, as was mentioned above, is very wide-spread among Amguema villagers.

Nowadays the most popular and highly-demanded wild crops are not herbs and roots but berries and mushrooms. Foraging, preservation and consumption of these products may at first glance seem to be an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2000). At the pre-Soviet time berries were rarely preserved, they were consumed fresh in the summer (Bogoras, 1904, p. 198). According to informants, few

women preserved crowberries keeping them in bags with blood. Attitude towards mushrooms changed during the Soviet period from “disgust” to “desire” (Yamin-Pasternak, 2008, pp. 214–222). Yet picking mushrooms and berries is sometimes represented as traditional “Chukotka” activity both by officials and by local people. I will give two examples confirming this statement. In 2017 the district authorities of Chukotskii autonomous okrug allocated funds for development of mushroom and berry preservation. The funds were to be used to buy berries from the population and to acquire equipment necessary to store and preserve the products. The media emphasized that the program was “aimed to enable the development of one of the traditional activities of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities of Chukotka” (Prochukotku.ru news portal). Local people are perfectly aware that previously Chukchis did not preserve mushrooms or berries. Nevertheless, knowing that my ethnographic research is concerned with food, Amguema villagers were eager to help me and, for example, treat me to Chukchi dishes and invite me to take part in foraging and cooking. Particularly, in the winter I was treated to preserved berries and mushrooms and in the summer I was invited to go to tundra to gather them.

Today people freeze and sugar berries and dry, salt, and freeze mushrooms in large amounts. I argue that picking mushrooms and berries is not so much an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 2000), but “a skill <...> that is flexibly responsive to ever-variable environmental conditions” (Ingold, 2002, p. 147). The shift to the consumption of the above-mentioned products is a result of several overlapping processes. Introduction of such material objects as sugar, salt, and freezers encouraged wholesale preservation of mushrooms and berries. At the same time local people started to incorporate elements of the Soviet time cuisine into their diet. Due to the wide spread of European products (bread, cereals, vegetables, sweets, etc.), preservation of herbs lost its vital role both for people living in tundra or for those who settled in a village. For example, in the middle of the 20th century the old man Tymnenentyn, who let V. G. Kuznetsova stay in his yaranga, reprimanded his family members for eating *kèmějyr̄yn* and *vilmutlimul* (fermented blood with herbs and fat) without restraint and not saving the food (AMAE. Archive fund K-1. Inventory 2. File 375. Page 4). However today reindeer herders generally feed the ingredients for such dishes (blood and reindeer stomach contents) to the dogs or just throw them away. Moreover, when trying to cook traditional dishes in the village, people may stumble onto some difficulties they couldn’t have expected. For example, to cook *kèmějyr̄yn* one needs not only willow leaves but also contents of a reindeer stomach. One can get them from relatives or friends who work as reindeer herders, but it is not always possible and mostly depend on the herders’ good will. As a result of all the described processes people started gathering smaller amounts of herbs and roots. In other words, the need for gathering large amounts of wild plants considerably decreased. Yet I believe that the need for interaction with tundra environment and its living beings is still pressing for villagers. Mushroom and berry gathering became an additional (though, of course, not the only one) way for villagers to save their connection with tundra and interact with its non-human inhabitants.

In the summer of 2018 because of large-scale maintenance works the public utility company had to cut off water and electricity supply in blocks of flats and cottages of Amguema several times. Since drinking water is rarely sold in the village shops and stoves in the houses are electric, such cut-offs caused considerable inconveniences.

Local people often discussed this problem hoping that the works would be over soon. One day our acquaintance came to the house where I was staying with my family. She was in a good mood and announced that water and electricity had been cut off again. At the first moment her high spirits seemed inappropriate for the situation. But then she informed us that we had to go to the river bank again and cook dinner in tundra (as we had done during previous cut-offs). Indeed, since my husband and I came to Chukotka with a two-year-old child, the water and electricity cut-offs meant that we had to go to tundra, though not far from the village, in order to eat and feed our son. I soon understood that the local woman's good mood could be explained by her anticipation of the trip to tundra.

It should be mentioned, that in the summer of 2018 people rarely went to tundra, because the “harvest” was not good that year. According to the villagers, the summer was abnormally cold, so there were almost no mushrooms, and berries had been bitten with frost and practically crushed instantly when you touched them. It seemed that this woman had missed her visits to tundra, which increased her joy from our joint “Chukotka” dinner on the bank of the Amguema River. She was born and grew up in tundra in a family of reindeer herders. Now living in the village she was eager to spent time in tundra at any opportunity, such as gathering wild plants, mushrooms and berries, fishing, meeting reindeer herder teams upon occasion or cooking dinner on the river bank with visiting ethnographers at the time of water and electricity cut-offs.

E. Kohn claims that food establishes close relations between people living in the Amazon rainforest with many other non-human beings (Kohn, 2018, p. 31). Similarly, in Chukotka gathering helps people to connect with the environment inhabited by various beings. The skill of gathering berries and mushrooms implies the knowledge of good spots for blueberries, lingonberries, cloudberry, and mushrooms. Moreover, people have to consider the temporality of various plants so as not to miss the best time for gathering. Informants insist that it is better to pick berries in the same order they ripen, for example you should first procure and preserve blueberry and then turn your attention to cloudberry. However, the periods of ripening and their order may change and they may even overlap. It depends on many prerequisites, such as the number and ratio of sunny and rainy days, snow and summer frosts. That is why it is extremely important to determine the right time for picking berries and mushrooms.

Foraging food in tundra, even though it is not hunting (which is relatively rarely practiced by local people), implies interaction with animals. For example, every trip to tundra may result in a meeting with a bear, especially since the number of bears has been increasing significantly in the Iul'tinskii raion during the last decades. People either meet bears or see their tracks or they are at least prepared for a possible meeting—they use binoculars, look around, and listen attentively to any sounds. Some bears become well known to them—people observe their tracks and movements and learn where and when they stay for the night and which routes they use when looking for food. This kind of information helps to lower the risk of unexpected encounters.

Apart from animals, plants, and fish, the tundra is inhabited by spirits. Moving along the tundra landscape, one is supposed to build relationships with such beings who can either protect a human, bring him luck, or curse him. For example, my informants were always very careful in arranging the process of food and tea preparation, when they went to tundra to pick berries or mushrooms. One woman made a circle of “beautiful” (as she called them) stones around the fire. Before leaving

the place she always put a stone in the middle of the fire place. These actions were supposed to protect us from possible troubles that could be caused by spirits.

For Amguema dwellers, their visits to tundra is “a practice of recollecting, which is included into their perception of the environment” (Ingold, 2002, p. 148). Thus, making a fire with local wood in order to make tea, a person recollects how it should be done outdoors with the wind blowing. It is remarkable that moving around tundra, observing the landscape, and carrying out various tasks, people tell stories about the past. For example, seeing willows growing thickly, a man may remark that previously there was a corral for reindeer which were slaughtered here. Filling a kettle with water from the Amguema, a woman may recollect her father who warned her against taking water from big rivers.

Thus, gathering berries, mushrooms, and plants, people of Amguema get involved in the life of tundra, which used to be a part of their former lifestyle (and the lifestyle of their ancestors) and still remains a part of the lifestyle of people who work in reindeer herding brigades. In this respect gathering may be regarded as a way to overcome the spatial displacement which is caused by the life in a village and which makes people lose touch with their past (Ingold, 2002, p. 147).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to return to the topics mentioned at the beginning of the chapter and which served as a starting point of this line of reasoning. Refrigerators, chest-type freezers, sugar, and salt allowed people to use new methods of preserving food procured in tundra: mushrooms, herbs, roots, berries, and fish. These new things changed the techniques of food preservation—made freezing more popular, introduced sugaring and salting and at the same time reduced amounts of fermented, cured, and dried food. These changes are considerable and easily observable, they have been taking place extremely fast, and people who are still adapting to them can clearly reflect them. Eating practices provide people with a way to intertwine a certain part of their life (in a yaranga in tundra), which often (though not always) belongs to their past, with their modern life in a cottage or a block of flats. Sometimes people try to recreate their previous experience refusing to use modern amenities. Sometimes they eagerly embrace innovations because they give new opportunities for people including the opportunity to recollect the past. People can maintain connection with their past through such actions as cooking and eating Chukchi food and through various activities in tundra including gathering plants, roots, mushrooms, and berries or dining with visiting scholars.

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PART II

LAND, LAW, AND ECOLOGY





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CHAPTER 7

CUSTOMARY LAW TODAY

Mechanisms of sustainable development of Indigenous peoples



Natalya Novikova

The current legal status of Indigenous peoples of the Russian North¹ depends, to a large degree, on their self-identification and the way this status is defined by the state. The situation is complicated by the fact that cultural and socio-economic criteria that existed before the early twentieth century have changed significantly, making it harder to justify the necessity of considering these peoples' special rights today. Yet, some Indigenous Siberian peoples do retain elements of natural resource use and management, as well as social relations that require special regulation. For the theoretical framing of research relevant here, particularly important are international legal norms and the theory of legal pluralism, which allow for different legal regimes to coexist in one social space. The study of customary law within legal anthropology is an interdisciplinary enterprise that includes ethnographic research methods and anthropological critique of legislation; it aims to combine traditional knowledge and scientific analysis and to incorporate Indigenous voices in academic and public (legal) discourse. In this chapter, customary law is defined as a set of rules that regulate traditional natural resource use and the lifestyle associated with it. These are rules that facilitate conflict resolution within a given Indigenous society.

Today, the legal potential of such rules and norms can be utilized in the broad realm of state legislation and law implementation, in establishing social dialogue with industrial companies and conducting anthropological research. Customary law lies at the heart of aboriginal cultures; it exists and is passed down from generation to generation in the form of oral traditions. This law is a syncretic phenomenon wherein legal, religious, and ethical norms intertwine. The binding character of customary law is conditioned by social sanctions for violating the norms and by fear of losing social relationships and support as a result; it is also associated with the appeal to the "law of ancestors" and to the will of gods.

Legal anthropology studies the possibility of law existing without authorization by the state, and bases its analyses on long and extensive field research among different Indigenous peoples, with legal pluralism being the underlying methodology (Griffiths, 1986; Moore, 1973). Possible approaches here include postcolonial, nation-state, and global perspectives, as well as those of development, self-governance, control over territory, and practical application for the acknowledgment and protection of

Indigenous peoples' rights (Benda-Beckmann, and Bertram 2018; International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2010; Pirie, 2013). Important in the context of studying legal pluralism in Indigenous peoples is the thesis that within this framework people can choose sub-legal systems. I consider legal pluralism from a legal anthropology perspective and in line with the views of K. and F. Benda-Beckmann:

Legal pluralism in the anthropological sense therefore is a sensitizing concept for situations in which people draw upon several legal systems, irrespective of their status within the state legal system. It endorses anthropological findings indicating that, in their social and economic interactions, people resort to customary, religious law or an unnamed new law, often mixed with parts of state law, even when the state explicitly denies the validity of these other kinds of law.

(Benda-Beckmann, and Bertram 2018, pp. 262–264)

An important novelty in the study of customary law in Russia has become its analysis as a possible mechanism of interaction between Indigenous populations and industrial companies specifically (Novikova, 2014, 2016; Turi, 2016). At present, looking into the coexistence and mutual influence of state legal norms and customary law norms can be regarded as key to improving legislation and its implementation. In this respect, not only does legal anthropology employ legal pluralism as a research method, it also pays close attention to the current situation of Indigenous peoples:

It is far easier to acknowledge a special political position and self-determination for some groups who live far from the market economy and from the dominant culture than it is to come to an arrangement with indigenous people who live in close contact with other people and whose way of life may in many ways seems similar to that of the dominant groups.

(Benda-Beckmann, 1997, p. 29)

Often, boundaries between the sides involved are not just porous—they are non-existent.

In this chapter, I consider customary law of Indigenous peoples in accordance with the libertarian-legal theory of V. S. Nersesyants (Nersesyants, 2001). Nersesyants emphasized formal equality in freedom, revealed through the trinity of equal measure, freedom, and justice (Lapaeva, 2018). In many ways, this abstract idea coming from the philosophy of law proves most adequate for the analysis of Indigenous customary law.

Nersesyants' perspective corresponds with identification in the Indigenous worldview of equal participants in legal relations. United Nations documents (e.g., "The Study on the Need to Recognize and Respect the Rights of Mother Earth") state that nature—"Mother Earth"—has its own rights as well (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010). The concept of legal pluralism, thus, broadens to encompass more actors and subjects of law, for example, nature and animals. Guiding our analysis here could be the emic approach in anthropology that explains specific cultural meanings projected by the people onto the world around them. Thanks to this approach, it becomes clear that what science calls "cosmology" is in fact ordinary

life that the people live (Ingold, 2000). It is an understanding that the whole world, and not only that of humans, is filled with agency and intentionality (Ingold, 2000).

The research methods I use to analyze these complex interactions are participant observation and discussions, which I have had with my informants over the years about certain norms of customary law. In this analysis, I draw on their practices of lawmaking revealed, for example, during Great Sacrifices in sacred places or in calm evening conversations at their camps. The most significant achievement of Indigenous customary law is inclusion of nature, earth, animals, etc., in the system of legal relations and ascription of subjectivity to them.

In Russia, customary law remains largely understudied. Indigenous peoples themselves do not define it in legal terms here, and so any analysis of this law starts with ascertaining its justiciability and identifying legal features in Indigenous norms (Karboń'e, 1986). In many countries, attempts have been made to define procedural mechanisms of customary law. Suggested by anthropologists, the work on such mechanisms in Russia is not yet fully completed. In the chapter, I investigate how customary law is defined by international law and in the Russian legislation, how it regulates natural resource use and social relations, and what new practices associated with Indigenous entrepreneurship and illegal fishing have introduced customary law into current academic and public discourse in the country.

CUSTOMARY LAW AS INDICATOR OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' STATUS

Two main areas of customary law consist of personal and territorial law. Personal law regulates issues of property, family, and inheritance. Territorial law concerns territories and natural resources (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010). In previous Russian scholarship, the main focus has been on territorial law, or Indigenous peoples' ecological culture (Adaev, 2007; Kazannik, 1999). However, field studies show that personal law principles are important regulating social relations, family, and other social institutions. Here, it is worth noting how Indigenous peoples themselves understand customary law—they consider it as a general order in life, and as the main rules by which both entire Indigenous communities and individuals should obey. Social sanctions account for the effectiveness of customary law often perceived to be enhanced by retaliation of supernatural forces. The legal core of customary law is expressed in equality of participants in relations or conflict and in perception about fairness in conflict resolution.

Indigenous customs and traditions have become part of the legal system of the Russian state, which adds to the importance of studying them today. The Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993 ensures that the Russian state is to adhere to the principles and norms of international law. Fundamental international principles and norms regarding Indigenous populations are contained in documents such as “Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169” of the International Labour Organization and the “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” Article 1 of the ILO Convention states that the Convention applies to Indigenous peoples “whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations” (International Labour

Organization, 1989). Article 8 of the Convention features two important paragraphs reading that:

1) [i]n applying national laws and regulations to the peoples concerned [that is, indigenous and tribal peoples], due regard shall be had to their customs or customary laws [and] 2) [t]hese peoples shall have the right to retain their own customs and institutions, where these are not incompatible with fundamental rights defined by the national legal system and with internationally recognised human rights. Procedures shall be established, whenever necessary, to resolve conflicts which may arise in the application of this principle.

(International Labour Organization, 1989)

Although this Convention has not been ratified by the Russian Federation, Russian lawmakers, drawing on these principles, did guarantee the abovementioned right to Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Russian North. Their customs and traditions have entered the national legal system, meaning that these peoples' rights can be defended in the realm of law.

In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the “Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,” where provisions are given on general norms to be followed by member states that have Indigenous populations. Several articles of the Declaration stress the importance of traditions and customs of Indigenous peoples. More specifically, Article 26 sets out the rights of Indigenous peoples to the lands that traditionally belonged to them or were used by them and prescribes “due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems” of Indigenous peoples (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). This respect is also to be ensured during negotiations between Indigenous peoples and nation-states and in situations of conflict resolution. Of particular relevance to the present study is Article 34, stating that Indigenous peoples “have the right to promote, develop and maintain ... [their] juridical systems and customs, in accordance with international human rights standards” (United Nations General Assembly, 2007).

In 1992, the “United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity”² was adopted; it describes duties of member states in terms of protecting and maintaining traditional knowledge and practices of Indigenous peoples as part of biodiversity preservation efforts. Further, adopted was “Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment regarding Developments Proposed to Take Place on, or which are Likely to Impact on, Sacred Sites and on Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local Communities” (known as “The Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2011))—the document which underscores the need to protect and apply Indigenous customary law. In addition, the Kirkenes “Declaration on the 20th Anniversary of the Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation,” signed by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council member states in 2013 (Barents Euro-Arctic Council, 2013), directly relates the development of Indigenous peoples to adherence to their customs. More specific guiding principles concerning customary law were presented in the “Study on the Need to Recognize and Respect the Rights of Mother Earth,” which states that Mother Earth has its own rights, and these rights have to be acknowledged and upheld at all levels of governance, not only in the internal

life of communities, but also nationally and internationally (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Rights, 2010).

Within the Russian legal system, three federal laws underlie state policy on Indigenous populations: “On Guarantees of Rights of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation” of 1999, “On General Principles of Organizing Communities of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation” of 2000, and “On Territories of Traditional Land Use among Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation” of 2001. Each of the documents contains articles that enable adherence to Indigenous customs and traditions.

Field research on Indigenous peoples’ law in Russia indicate that the norms in customary law differ from those determined by formal legal systems, for example, as regards land use. At the core of their traditional land use practices is not land ownership as understood in civil law, but the right to access resources, the degree to which a given territory has already been used, the need to look after one’s *rodina* (Rus., homeland), permeability of borders, as well as higher environmental standards. Stricter environmental protection requirements followed by the country’s Indigenous peoples can be explained by their awareness of the particular fragility of Northern ecology. Northern Indigenous peoples typically depend on biological resources to a greater degree than non-Indigenous people, and these resources are particularly vulnerable to environmental pollution. Consumption of raw fish and raw meat is nutritionally and traditionally important, and people in Indigenous communities drink water directly from natural sources. Today, customary legal norms are indeed crucial for the Indigenous peoples, and many uphold them in an attempt to protect their homeland. Alongside the Russian national legislation, customary law regulates resource use on the country’s Indigenous territories in a complementary yet importantly distinct manner, given the current threats to biological resources here.

There are a multitude of Indigenous norms that prescribe moderation in using natural resources. For example, there are direct limits as to the amount of resources that can be used, types of resources, terms of use, etc. (see, e.g., Adaev, 2007; Evladov, 1992; Kreinovich, 2001; Pivneva, 2000; Sirina, 2012). It should be noted that when the need arises to violate one of such limits, it is done strictly in accordance with Indigenous tradition (Novikova, 2014)—and it is this adaptability of customary law that sustains its regulating role in different times. Analysis of field materials reveals that this adaptability does not mean absence of clear-cut definitions, as it might seem at first sight. The adaptability of customary law rests on the priority of humanitarian values and actual protection of human rights associated with defending the life of an individual, their relatives, and with the need to supply resources to families. This adaptability is, thus, much greater than that found in formal environmental protection regulations.

In the Russian legislation, these norms, formulated broadly, are found in the federal law “On Territories of Traditional Land Use among Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation.” Article 2 of the document states that legal regulation of relations in the organization, protection, and use of such territories is to be based on, among other things, customs of the peoples inhabiting them, provided these customs do not conflict with the national legislation. Furthermore, Indigenous customs can regulate natural resource

use in such territories alongside federal legislation, according to Article 13 of the law. With regard to resource use, customary law prioritizes not ecological but, rather, humanitarian considerations—environmental protection norms are to be adhered to by the people for as long as their living and well-being is not under threat. The principle of not taking from nature more than is actually needed implies that, when dealing with natural resources, Indigenous peoples are guided by their traditions, constantly assessing current conditions and searching for a balance between what nature can give and what humans have to use in order to survive.

CUSTOMS AS REGULATOR OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

The federal law “On General Principles of Organizing Communities of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation” introduced the possibility of regulating issues of Indigenous communities’ internal organization and development through customs and traditions. This norm of federal law was broadly formulated so as to allow it to enter into federal law. The development of Indigenous communities and other associations of Indigenous peoples and of Indigenous families is aimed at strengthening their resilience against conflicts and possible material loss. Sometimes norms of this kind are not articulated as such, yet they exist and prove even more stable with support from the federal law.

Specifically, it is noteworthy how the Nenets create relationships inside their communities via reindeer and children. In the Nenets family, it is customary to give one of the children away to their grandmother and grandfather. This child is, thus, brought up by the grandparents, who can pass on more of their knowledge and skills to him/her, including the language, behavior, and culture more broadly, along with fundamental skills such as housekeeping. Nenets boys typically look after reindeer and go fishing and hunting, whereas Nenets girls typically learn from their grandmothers how to process animal fur and make shoes and clothing. As the grandparents age, the child starts to take care of them and help them. I once observed a situation where a Nenets girl called her grandmother mother and was even jealous of her own mother, trying to draw the grandmother’s attention all to herself. It was obvious that the grandmother and the granddaughter had a very close relationship.

Another custom of interest here has to do with reindeer. The role these animals play in strengthening Indigenous family ties consists in that they form the basis and equivalent of all relationships. Reindeer are given as dowry, as a gift for the bride’s father, and as the father’s and other relatives’ gift to women throughout the course of women’s life (Golovnev, 2005; Susoi, 1994). From their reindeer herds, fathers select some specific animals for their children. Relatives present reindeer as gifts when a child is born. Each person, thus, starts to collect their own herd from early childhood. All these traditions are still alive among the nomad population of the Yamal-Nenets autonomous region. These practices create the conditions necessary for maintaining marriage and families, for providing for children and for the elderly. Customs, such as gift-giving and helping each other, play a special role as they make people feel sure that they will not be left alone in a difficult situation, and that help will come from their children, other relatives, or neighbors. These customs contribute to stronger relationships within a given community, and are crucial elements in Nenets’ lives. Failing to follow the customs leads to exclusion from the community, which equals

exclusion from life itself, given the people's nomad lifestyle in the tundra. Reindeer husbandry, and traditions and norms of customary law associated with it, continue to be the very basis of Nenets lifeways, and are a distinctive feature of these people, enabling them to preserve their culture, language, and identity (Novikova, 2010).

EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN CUSTOMARY LAW

I would like to bring attention to an important aspect of the human-nature relationship, though—when nature becomes an equal participant in society, and is seen as an independent actor. During my fieldwork among the Khanty and the Nenets, I documented the following norm of their customary law: “Land will find its master.” One person explained the norm this way:

People do not choose where to live and farm. Their connection to a particular territory is their destiny, their share. Land is more self-contained than humans are. And if there is oil in this land, this is also the land's choice. There are pieces of such land, for example, in Vat'egan. The land [there] is such that it had to be drilled.

These contemplations reveal one of the features of an Indigenous worldview—the idea of partnership with the surrounding environment and receiving feedback from it. In this case, humans can only look after the land, and, when necessary, help it, for example, when it comes to relations with oil extraction companies and the state.

Indigenous economic activities include relations between not only humans but between them and animals. Another norm can be recalled in this regard: if a fox enters the camp, it cannot be killed. Hunting is a competition whereby the hunter and the animal have to compete in the forest, on the territory they share. A hunter is expected to face the animal as an equal, and either win or lose. The camp is the human's house, where the fox is a guest. Also, the fox signifies luck and embodies the hunter's happiness—thus, it must not be harmed. The polyfunctionality of this norm does not exclude, rather, emphasizes its legal nature and the core of aboriginal culture, where the supernatural partakes in the resolution of everyday issues. Such norms are spread across the whole of the Russian North and beyond. Sirina (2012), in her extensive research on the Evenks, notes that “animals are perceived as subjects, although of a sort different from that of human beings. Economic needs and living on the same territory necessitate [people's] knowledge of animals” (p. 496).

The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has stated that:

[t]he indigenous peoples who hold the view that nature is Mother Earth, endowed with rights, are committed to promoting that world view in all aspects of their internal administration. They also have the right to promote it at relevant national and international forums in order to promote it as a form of relationship between mankind and nature... The most widespread prejudice views the concept of nature as Mother Earth endowed with her own rights as a religious creed the promotion of which would impinge upon freedoms such as the freedom of conscience. Even if that were the case, indigenous peoples have the right to uphold it as a cultural value.

(Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2010)

This statement determines the right of Indigenous peoples to implement “the rights of Mother Earth.”

CUSTOMARY LAW, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND THE ISSUE OF ILLEGAL FISHING

Today, Indigenous peoples propose a new strategy for developing traditional resource use practices—entrepreneurship. I explore this economic strategy through the case of the Indigenous population of Sakhalin (see also Novikova, 2014, 2019). Prevailing in the Russian legal system is the discourse of traditionalism. Therefore, in defining Indigenous entrepreneurship, I instead, draw on how business that is Indigenous is interpreted in international documents: “Indigenous peoples’ ways of understanding business do not necessarily define success by the amount of profit made, but rather by the benefits that a business can provide to their families and communities” (Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2017). Legal regulation of business activities based on Indigenous practices of natural resource use cannot be inflexible and strictly defined, as such regulation combines state law and customary law, as well as moral norms and principles of socially responsible entrepreneurship (Wilson, 2002). Units such as clan enterprises were created as part of the new Indigenous economy, and customary law played a defining role in their development. A specific example of how this worked in practice can be the case of the Poronaisk district in Sakhalin in the early 1990s. The enterprises established here are largely family enterprises which hire workers only during the fishing season. The charters these enterprises had initially featured elements of Indigenous understandings of law, emphasizing customs and morals in relationships of personnel and management (Novikova, 2006). Later on, the charters became more formalized, though retaining the initial pluralism. Customary law continues to be used here today because it forms the “normative basis for legal solutions to life issues” (Alekseev, 2000, p. 107).

Originally, clan enterprises had to meet four requirements to be allowed to fish and, thus, operate on the island: a) pay taxes, b) hire Indigenous staff, c) make payments to the shared fund, and d) to not have more than three violations of fishing regulations. This scheme was implemented under the local governance regulations helped to ensure quite high income for the people and to counter criminal activities, in particular, illegal fishing in the Poronaisk district. Currently, the scheme does not work as well as it used to, due to the worsening socio-economic and political situation of the local Indigenous population. In fact, only some of its elements have been retained. Clan enterprises continue to share responsibilities in different public events. They also take responsibility for fishing for those Indigenous community members who are not able to fish themselves (primarily, the elderly and women who are not part of any clan enterprise).

Clan enterprises in Sakhalin are legal entities, but in their everyday activities they rely on personal contacts and connections. Their economic relations are based on far-reaching cultural ties formed through traditions and customs, norms, and values, as well as specific labor ethics. The structure of these enterprises is not clearly defined and is built largely on interpersonal, often verbal, arrangements. Business networks function thanks to contractual relations being supported by quite a well-developed

system of mutually-provided informal services, and business relations are ordinarily mixed with personal matters.

Over the past years, a trend has become clear whereby fisheries are switching from the traditional economy to commercial activities in ever increasing numbers. In parallel, some traditional forms of social support are being maintained, allowing for provisioning of the elderly and sustaining cultural and educational institutions, as well as organizing cultural events and celebrations. The senior generation of clan enterprise members still adheres to collegial management principles, which, however, are becoming more and more corporate.

Indigenous entrepreneurship reveals how customary law norms develop, and how local and corporate law form on their basis. For the majority of my informants, fishing is the foundation of their lives, defined by an awareness of this activity's moral and justice. They believe they should have priority access to resources and use them throughout the year and everywhere, except spawning places or where such use is prohibited for other ecological reasons. It is thanks to the local aquatic biological resources that these people can feed themselves and their families, as they do not have any other resources or sources of income at their disposal.

Analysis of relevant legislation and existing practices of fishing quota allocations indicates that the situation in Sakhalin is critical—it has become conducive to illegal fishing, particularly among young people, as newly established enterprises cannot get legal access to the limited number of fishing areas. Customary law regulating the allocation of fishing quotas is under enormous pressure from the non-Indigenous population and criminal groups in the region, a topic that has already been covered in a number of publications over the past years (Messhtyb, 2006; Simonov & Davydov, 2016).

The issue of illegal fishing among the Indigenous population is difficult to analyze. If fishing is the only way these people can feed themselves, work, and indeed live, how can fishing be considered illegal in their case? Fishing and using aquatic biological resources are defined as traditional economic activities of Indigenous peoples, meaning that their right to these activities needs to be guaranteed. It should be noted that, according to Indigenous fishermen, the amount of fish they need as food is regulated by their moral norms (Wilson, 2002); moreover, law-abiding Indigenous entrepreneurs pay taxes, ensure employment (including of non-Indigenous people), and sales. What drives many of them is the opportunity to sell, but traditional exchange is also involved. Some of my informants say: “I do not like to sell fish—I like to salt it and share it”; “We sell [fish] to Russians, we share [it] with our people.” My field research materials indicate that what is called illegal Indigenous fishing is often violation or non-acceptance by the local fishermen of the fishing limits put in place by the state for the reasons these people do not understand. The terms of fishing and fishing limits are set every year, but many of the local experienced fishermen do not agree with these. They disagree because they seek to have more fish and they do not have trust in the scientific research conducted to set limits. Indigenous fishermen think research data should be made available to the population at large and that specialized scientific research institutions should be required to monitor the quantity of fish and, depending on the situation, set limits that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge.

In addition, over the last five years, the quantity of fish on the island has diminished. Along with storms that disrupt fishing activities, all this deprives the local Indigenous people of their source of life that is fish. The Nivkh people, for example, believe that fishing is their legal right, although some of them are not well versed in the nuances of state restrictions and understand the law precisely this way. Undoubtedly, more awareness of the legal aspects of fishing would be beneficial, but the issue of raising such awareness is hardly dealt with on the island. And so, these people have to read legal documents themselves and act in accordance with their understanding of those and at their own risk. Many vulnerable groups of Indigenous people here depend on local enterprises, and heads of enterprises have to take care of them. In fact, they see it as their social responsibility and obligation to respect Indigenous tradition. Illustrative in this regard are my informants' comments such as "To me, a human being is above anything else. I could break the law for the sake of a person in need." "We do not strive to be rich, we have what we need." "A rich person never feeds others, the one who just has what they need will share. We have always had exchange."

The conflict between legislation and customary law can be explored from the perspective of legal libertarianism such as that of V. S. Nersesyants. He differentiates between law and legislation. From his point of view law ought to follow the criteria of justice, freedom, and equality, while a given act of legislation can be contrary to this understanding, and in this sense "illegal" (Nersesyants, 2001, pp. 36–38). In my view, this distinction is useful for understanding Indigenous fishing that is defined as poaching by the Russian legislation.

Kreinovich (2001) documented some Nivkh legends that I suggest be interpreted as the "mythological legal order" of the fishing activity (Rulan, 1999). Kreinovich (2001) described these stories as guidelines on using resources with care, catching fish and other sea animals in a humane manner, and seeking new resources only when the previously stored ones are exhausted. The key notion in customary law such as this is moderation. Principles such as the ones found in the Nivkh legends are generally characteristic of the contemporary Indigenous entrepreneurship in Sakhalin. It is the violation of the moderation principle that causes most negative reaction on the part of the island's entire fishing community. All of my informants here point to the need to counter illegal fishing, and the Indigenous population is ready to help fight it, provided their safety is ensured. The ecological awareness and sustainability, characteristic of the local Indigenous enterprises, is what distinguishes them from big businesses, and manifests itself in the amount of fish that can be caught and sold, as well as in the moral right to provide for the basic needs, as the Indigenous enterprises do not make extensive profits but, rather, fight poverty (United Nations Development Programme, 2008).

Analysis of the Indigenous entrepreneurship in Sakhalin shows how customs are applied to regulate economic relations and activities, and how customs create and break norms, thus making development possible. Such entrepreneurship is rooted in traditional natural resource use practices, and Indigenous enterprises are set up, incorporating reciprocity relations and exchange. This may seem to indicate the death of tradition, but the Indigenous economy in Russia proves the opposite, turning into social entrepreneurship and aiming to guarantee sustainable development.

CUSTOMARY LAW IN COURTS

In the Russian legislation currently in place, notions of “customs and traditions of Indigenous small-numbered peoples” were first introduced by the federal law “On Guarantees of Rights of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation.” Here, these notions are presented in a particularly important context of judicial protection. Article 14 of the law states that:

in cases where the claimant or the defendant, the victim or the accused comes from an indigenous small-numbered people, traditions and customs of this people should be considered where these do not contradict federal and regional laws of the Russian Federation.

(The law “On Guarantees of Rights of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation” of 1999)

The commentary on the same law (Krylov, 1999) states that the law specifies the norms set out in Article 46 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, according to which every Russian citizen is entitled to judicial protection of their rights and freedoms. To be enabled to defend their rights is of great importance for Indigenous peoples, as their ways of seeing the world, using natural resources, creating families and living *per se* are constantly challenged by the contemporary world. According to the commentary, to actually defend Indigenous rights in legal terms is problematic as customs are not found in written sources. Yet this does not make customs less worthy of legal consideration in due manner. The norm set out in Article 14, paragraph 2 of the federal law of 1999 allows courts of law to take into account specific features of Indigenous peoples’ behavior in the court. The significance of this norm for understanding these features and legal defense of Indigenous rights is best illustrated through the first case involving an Indigenous party that was decided by the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.

The claimant in this case was Gennadii K. Shchukin, chair of the Dolgan clan community “Amiaksin” and president of a public organization in the Taimyr Dolgan-Nenets area of the region of Krasnoyarsk. He submitted a formal complaint to the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation in order to defend his rights and those of other hunters. Shchukin’s statement reads as follows:

Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, being convinced that Article 69 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation will protect them and allow them to hunt freely, in accordance with Article 19 of the law on hunting and with their customs, find themselves unprotected. Where they live, they continue to experience situations, in which state officials and courts interpret behavior natural for hunters seeking to feed their families and communities as an offense, they are prosecuted and issued heavy fines as a result, and can be imprisoned.

(Shchukin, 2019, p. 218)

The reason for appealing to the Court was the criminal prosecution of Schukin. Local courts in the Krasnoyarskii krai pronounced that the transfer of powers related to fishing activities from Indigenous community members to hunters is illegal. (And this

was despite the fact that the fishing limit in the specific case had not been exceeded by the hunters³). The Constitutional Court ruled that, in regulating Indigenous rights, the distinctness of Indigenous ways of life, economic activities, and social organization crucial for the preservation of Indigenous culture has to be given due consideration. Thus, the Court's decision could act as an important precedent enabling protection of the right of Indigenous peoples to traditional resource use practices (Kriazhkov, 2019).

In this specific case, the Court considered Indigenous customs, such as the need to share the caught animals, provide for all of the community and family members who cannot hunt on their own, etc. As already noted above, customary laws of Indigenous peoples aims to ensure justice in society and is socially oriented. Shchukin's complaint points to the need to unequivocally consider Indigenous customs and ways as part of implementing the right of Indigenous peoples to judicial protection guaranteed by Article 46 of the Constitution (Constitution of the Russian Federation of 1993) and Article 14 of the federal law guaranteeing Indigenous rights (The law "On Guarantees of Rights of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the Russian Federation" of 1999). This case and the Court's positive ruling are a brilliant acknowledgment of the significance of Indigenous peoples' customs and traditions. The ruling is a confirmation of customary law application being indicative of Indigenous peoples' status within the state. Despite the legal victory, the Russian state does not seem to have fully realized the implications of the Constitutional Court's decision in as far as certain burdensome restrictions on Indigenous hunting and fishing in Taimyr are still in place.

CONCLUSION

Interactions between Indigenous peoples and the state are an important aspect of customary law, and some observations from a legal anthropology perspective can help reveal more about it. Russian state reforms are often negatively seen by the country's Indigenous population. This is because reforms have resulted in, among other things, loss of Indigenous pastures, abandonment of settlements, and removal of children to boarding schools. Most importantly, state reforms (or lack thereof) shatter the very foundations of Indigenous culture and worldview, and weaken traditional ties. During the Soviet period, the Nenets feared that the nationalization of land would destroy traditional exchanges vital for supporting the poor, widows, and orphans (Evladov, 1992). Today, with readiness and ability to change proving to be *the Nenets tradition* (Golovnev, 1997), the socio-normative culture they managed to preserve helps them resist industrial impact. The flexibility, variability, and adaptability of Indigenous cultures allowed the country's Indigenous population to maintain and develop customary law as an important basis for their lifeways.

It is notable that the need to consider customs and traditions within the legal system of contemporary Russia is usually articulated as part of discourse around tradition, oriented toward the past. Yet, the Indigenous people themselves think that customary law effectively regulates their life today and indeed helps them move forward. The fluid nature of customary law, its variability and high adaptability defines essential elements of Indigenous worldview. Customary law creates order and stability within local communities. Taking into account libertarian-legal theory of V. S. Nersesyants could allow a better incorporation of Indigenous customary

norms, which are socially accepted and perceived as just, into the state legal system and its enforcement. Indigenous fishing and hunting practices, as a particular case of customary law, could appeal to law in the sense of Nersesyants that ought to be, but not always is, the source of legislation. Existing state legislation have little credibility in the eyes of the Indigenous population of North precisely because it does not take into account their vital interests and time-tested ways of living with nature.

Customary law and legal recognition of it is an additional means for protecting the rights of Indigenous small-numbered peoples. It encompasses all aspects of Indigenous life—from natural resource use and entrepreneurship to family relations. In addition to helping us to understand their economy, culture and social organization, Indigenous norms and principles reveal Indigenous ways of thinking, whereby norms are easily created and replaced by other norms. This adaptability enables the Indigenous population of the Russian North and the Arctic to introduce and maintain a system of living that is in line with the latest sustainable development standards adopted by the UN. Different nation-states deal with customary law differently, but today protection of Indigenous rights and, by extension, of human rights, is impossible without incorporating customary law into national legislation and judicial practice.

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NOTES

- 1 The term “indigenous small-numbered peoples” is a legal term used in Russia; in this chapter, it is used synonymously with terms such as Indigenous people(s) and Indigenous population.
- 2 The Convention is ratified by the Russian Federation.
- 3 The limit is calculated per community member.

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CHAPTER 8

INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS AND LAND USE IN SIBERIA

Neighboring jurisdictions, varied approaches



*Viktoriya Filippova, Gail Fondahl,
and Antonina Savvinova*

INTRODUCTION

In Russia two key spatio-legal approaches exist by which Indigenous peoples in Siberia can access land on which to pursue their traditional activities: the *obshchina* (clan community) and the Territory of Traditional Nature Use (TTP).¹ Obshchinas—collectives of Indigenous persons joining to pursue traditional activities, such as reindeer herding or hunting—may petition for and receive tracts of land on which to pursue such activities. Indigenous persons may also petition a local, regional, or the federal government to establish TTPs, which provide some protection against industrial encroachment. Obshchina lands may be located within TTPs or the whole area of an obshchina may be designated as a TTP.

The federal legislation² which sanctions obshchinas (and allocation of lands to these) and TTPs finds legal counterparts in many of Russia's 28 federal subjects that are home to its 40 (legally recognized) Indigenous peoples of the North.³ According to Russia's Constitution (RF, 1993, Article 72), Indigenous peoples' ancestral lands [*iskonnaia sreda obitaniia*] and traditional ways of life are the joint responsibility of the federal government and the governments of the federal subjects⁴ (henceforth referred to as *regions*). While regional legislation must not contradict federal legislation, it can provide greater levels of protection and/or more detail regarding procedures and processes. Regional legislation has often predated its federal counterpart, sometimes by several years.

In this chapter, we consider the varied legal approaches taken by Russia's regions to these two key spatio-legal formations, via the passage of regional legislation. To concretize this, we appraise the situation in three neighboring regions: Sakha Republic (Iakutiia), Zabaikal'skii krai,⁵ and Amurskaia oblast'. This area is the homeland of the Evenki, an Indigenous people whose ancestral lands stretch from central Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, and from the edge of the tundra in the North to beyond Russia's southern border with China. We describe relevant regional legislation, noting differences in content and timing. We then consider how the legislation "works" in place: how it has been implemented (and sometimes ignored) in manifold ways and from

where the laws were produced to generate a varied geography of Indigenous land access.

OBSHCHINAS AND TERRITORIES OF TRADITIONAL NATURE USE: TWO KEY FORMS OF INDIGENOUS ACCESS TO LAND⁶

Not long after the establishment of the Russian Federation, a Presidential Edict (Yel'tsin, 1992) addressed the importance of Indigenous land, directing the federal government “to determine, in places of [Indigenous peoples’] habitation and economic activities, territories of traditional nature use which are the inalienable property of these peoples and without their consent are not subject to alienation for industrial development...” It called for transferring “reindeer pasture, hunting, fishing and other lands” free of charge to Indigenous obshchinas and families “for use in perpetuity or for lease,” for providing them with priority use of natural resource, and for the government to adopt rules of use for land and natural resources on territories of traditional nature use.

Federal legislation on Indigenous land rights took time to develop, but in 1999–2001, the federal government adopted three key laws: “On the Guarantee of Rights of the Indigenous Numerically-Small Peoples of the Russian Federation” (RF, 1999; henceforth 1999 Law on Guarantees), “On General Principles of the Organization of Obshchinas of the Indigenous Numerically-Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation” (RF, 2000b; henceforth 2000 Law on Obshchinas), and “On Territories of Traditional Nature Use of the Indigenous Numerically-Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and Far East of the Russian Federation” (RF, 2001a; henceforth 2001 Law on TTPs’). The 1999 Law on Guarantees recognized the rights of Indigenous peoples to form obshchinas and enabled Indigenous peoples and their associations (including obshchinas) to receive lands *free of charge* for their traditional activities (RF, 1999, Article 8, 12). It also called for the limitation of non-traditional activities on federal property in places traditionally inhabited by Indigenous persons, and for resolving issues related to compensation for losses Indigenous peoples experienced due to their damage to their ancestral lands (Article 5). The 2000 Law on Obshchinas offered more guidance on the formation of Indigenous obshchinas (but was silent on issues related to land). It is important to note that obshchinas do not receive title to lands allotted to them, but rather use rights to the resources (faunal, floral, etc.) needed for traditional activities.

The 2001 Law on TTPs provided for the creation of territories that would support the extensive areal needs of traditional activities and their (partial) defense against industrial encroachment. While limited in its efficacy, the TTP is considered by many Indigenous leaders the best means of protecting Indigenous lands. Obshchina lands may be located within TTP boundaries (or the two areas may coincide): such obshchinas may enjoy a heightened level of protection from exogenous activities.

The three federal laws noted above, however, are framework law, with few details on the specifics of implementation: further legislative acts (by-laws, decrees, orders, etc.) are needed to provide the mechanisms by which they can be realized (Kryazhkov, 2010). Such details could theoretically be provided by further federal legislation on Indigenous rights, including to territory, but this has been negligible. Most elaboration is found in regional laws.

Other federal legislation has addressed Indigenous land use, if in a limited fashion. For instance, Russia's Land Codex (RF, 2001b) allows for special regimes of land use to be set up in those area of traditional habitation and economic activities of Indigenous northerners (Article 7.3), and stipulates that when land allocated for traditional uses is under risk of alienation for another purpose, a referendum can be convened to consider prohibiting this (Article 31). While Article 78 notes that agricultural lands may be used by *obshchinas* (*inter alia*) "for the purpose of preserving and developing their traditional way of life, economy and trades," Article 82 notes that the allocation of land to Indigenous *obshchinas* "shall be established by the federal law on the turnover of agricultural lands."

Changes to federal laws, adoption of new federal laws, and interpretations of laws have eroded the protection offered by the troika of federal laws on Indigenous rights, and introduced contradictions and conflicts yet to be legally resolved. In terms of *obshchina* lands, they have removed the ability to receive land free of charge (RF, 2002) and in perpetuity (RF, 2006a, in contradiction to the 1999 Law on Guarantees). They have also complicated receiving and using lands: *obshchinas* must register lands, a process involving expensive cadastral work, and for lands used for hunting, they must submit management plans (RF, 2009).

Two major challenges face TTPs: 1) the removal of this category of land in 2013 from having the status of Specially Protected Nature Territory (*osobo okhraniamye prirodnye territorii*, henceforth OOPT) and 2) proposed revisions to the 2001 Law on TTPs that would restrict TTPs to federal level formations. In terms of the first challenge, well before the 2001 Federal Law on TTPs was adopted, TTPs were mentioned as one form of OOPT in the Federal Law on OOPTs (RF, 1995). However, revisions to this law in 2013 removed TTPs from the category of OOPT (RF, 2013). This change alarmed Indigenous leaders, as it means that TTPs are now no longer protected under Article 27 of the Land Code, which forbids OOPT lands becoming private lands or objects of economic transactions (Yakel', 2014). The second challenge remains hypothetical: proposed changes to the 2001 Law would dispense with regional and local TTPs, only allowing federal level TTPs. To date no federal level TTPs have been created, despite numerous attempts to do so by Indigenous activists. Whether such a change would abolish all lower-level (regional and local) TTPs is unclear, and a source of great trepidation among Indigenous leaders.

STUDY AREA

To look at how the legislated rights to land provided by *obshchinas* and TTPs differ across space, we examine four neighboring *ulusy/raiony*⁷: Olekminskii *ulus* and Neriunginskii *raions* of Sakha Republic (Iakutiia), Kalarskii *raion* of Zabaikal'skii *krai*, and Tyndinskii *raion* of Amurskaia *oblast'* (Figure 8.2). These regions are homelands to Evenki, for whom the (occasionally redrawn) administrative borders meant relatively little until the Soviet period and have remained quite permeable. Especially strong relations existed between families in southwest Olekminskii *ulus*, Kalarskii *raion*, and northwestern Amurskaia *oblast'*. Satisfaction, frustration, opportunities, and constraints related to rights to lands and resources continue to motivate movement across these (and neighboring) regional borders.

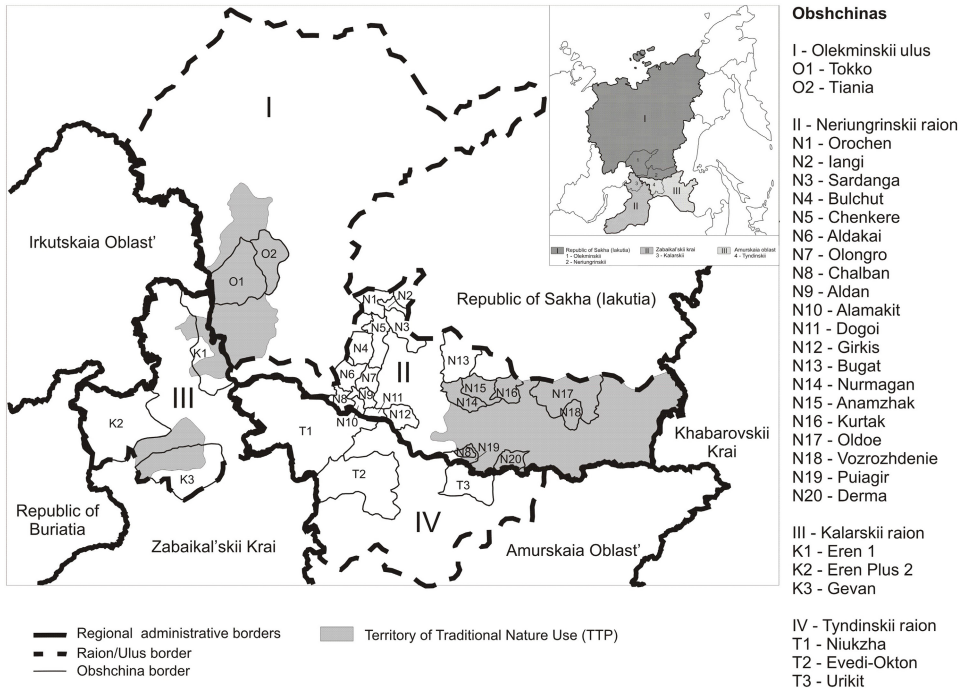


Figure 8.1 Study Area: obshchina lands and territories of traditional nature use (TTPs).

Olekminskii ulus in southwest Sakha Republic is relatively lightly developed compared to the rest of southern Yakutiia. Evenki constitute about 4% of the population and live predominantly in the southern part of the ulus, in four national (Evenki) naslegs.⁷ We focus on the Tianskii National Evenki nasleg. The nasleg center, Tiania, is some 280 km from the ulus administrative center, Olekminsk. Tiania is poorly connected to Olekminsk, in summer by boat, after freeze-up by a winter road. By the late 2010s its airport received few flights. The nasleg's economy is based on hunting and reindeer herding; a gold mining complex has developed in its remote southwest reaches over the past two decades.

Neriunginskii raion, Sakha Republic's southernmost region, houses the Republic's second largest city, Neriungri. Less than 1% of the raion's population identify as Evenki. It has undergone increasing industrial development, especially coal mining, but also gold, iron, and molybdenum mining. The AYAM (Amur-Yakutskaya Mainline) railway and a parallel highway run through the raion. Recently, the Eastern Siberian-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline and the Force of Siberia gas pipeline have transected it. We focus especially on the Iengrinskii Evenki National nasleg, the hub of the raion's Evenki population. Its central village, Iengra, lies about 50 km south of Neriungri, and is connected by road, with regular bus service.

Kalarskii raion is Zabaikal'skii krai's most northerly raion. The Baykal Amur Mainline (BAM) railway's construction in the 1970s altered the raion significantly by ending its remoteness. Mineral resources have long inspired interest, but to date development has been minor due to costs. The predominantly Russian administrative

center, Novaia Chara, is surrounded by smaller Evenki settlements (Staraia Chara, Kiust'-Kemda, Chapo-Ologo). Kalarskii raion is connected to the rest of Zabaikal'skii krai by air, and, indirectly (2.5-day trip) by rail.

During part of the Soviet period, a portion of Tyndinskii raion belonged to Chitinskaia oblast'. Many reindeer herding families of this raion have relatives living in the neighboring regions; at the time of this research some were working in Kalarskii raion. Gold-mining and forestry predominate Tyndinskii raion's economy. The BAM railroad runs through the raion, and the AYAM railway heads north from its administrative center, Tynda, to Sakha Republic. The ESPO and Force of Siberia pipelines also transect this raion.

METHODS

Our findings are based on a reading of federal and regional legislation (laws and sub-legal acts), and on interviews carried out in 1994, 1999, and 2016–2018 (Table 8.1). Using a semi-structured approach, we interviewed Indigenous leaders at federal, regional and local (raion/ulus and village) levels; Indigenous persons pursuing traditional activities; government officials and staff at the regional and local levels; and academic colleagues with expertise on the laws, in Moscow, Yakutsk and Chita.

We did not carry out fieldwork in Tyndinskii raion/Amurskaia oblast' but include this area in our discussion of similarities and differences in approaches to legislating and creating obshchinas and TTPs. We talked with Evenki from Tyndinskii raion who were present in Kalarskii raion in 2018. Local newspaper articles augmented information on local concerns about land issues, as did a number of articles written by academics and others.

REGIONAL LEGISLATIVE APPROACHES TO INDIGENOUS LAND RIGHTS: OSHCHINAS AND TTPS

As noted, a federal law on obshchinas, called for by a 1992 Presidential Edict, was eventually adopted in 2000. Sakha Republic responded much more quickly to the 1992 Edict, passing its own law on obshchinas that same year (SR, 1992), which allowed "land, renewable natural resources, agricultural, hunting and fishing grounds [to be] transferred to the obshchinas in accordance with federal legislation and the legislation of the Republic of Sakha (Iakutiia)" (Article 14). While obshchinas formation predated this law, its early adoption provided greater assurance for these entities.

Obshchinas also began to form in what is now Zabaikal'skii krai in the early 1990s. However, this region only adopted specific legislation on obshchinas in 2010 (ZK, 2010b). Indeed, until 2002 it adopted no legislation whatsoever on Indigenous peoples. The 2010 law offered little beyond technical details regarding registering and liquidating obshchinas.

The approach of Amurskaia oblast' fell between these two extremes: a 2003 law, while not specifically on obshchinas, spoke to their creation, and recognized their right to receive land (for free) for pursuing traditional activities, as well as their right to be compensated for losses due to environmental damage (AO, 2003a,

Table 8.1 Interviewees^a

	<i>Indigenous obschina members; other Indigenous persons</i>	<i>Indigenous leaders</i>	<i>Government officials, staff</i>	<i>Academic colleagues</i>
Sakha Republic (Iakutia)				
Olekminskii ulus, 2016 (Olekminsk, Tiana & Environs) (Filippova, Fondahl, Savvinova)	20	3	7	0
Olekminskii ulus, 1999 (Olekminsk, Tiana, Cheroda-Bikit) (Fondahl, Savvinova)	11	1	5	0
Nerjunginskii raion, 2017 (Nerjungri, Iengra) (Filippova, Fondahl, Savvinova)	8	3	6	0
Iakutsk, 2016, 2017, 2019 (Filippova, Fondahl, Savvinova)	1	7	1	3
Iakutsk, 1999 (Fondahl, Savvinova)	0	2	1	0
Zabaikal'skii krai				
Kalarskii raion, 2018 (Novaia Chara, Staraia Chara, Chapo-Ologo, Kiust-Kemda, Ikabia) (Filippova, Fondahl, Savvinova)	13	1	3	0
Kalarskii raion, 1994 (Novaia Chara, Staraia Chara, Chapo-Ologo) (Fondahl)	6	2	5	0
Chita, 2018 (Filippova, Fondahl, Savvinova)	0	2	0	1
Chita, 1994 (Fondahl)	0	3	1	2
Moscow, 2017, 2019 (Fondahl)	0	5	1	4

^a Individuals were assigned to a single category for the purpose of this table (so as to not inflate numbers), although some of those interviewed fit more than one category.

Articles 11, 12). Amurskaia oblast' also adopted a law specifically on TTPs in 2003 (AO, 2003b).⁸ Of interest in that law is an explicit assertion that TTPs "are not subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples" (Article 1.4). We also note that the TTP law of Amurskaia oblast' sets out regulations for industrial development within the boundaries of TTPs (Article 6), even prior to enumerating the rights of Indigenous people to use the TTPs (Article 8). The law also elaborates on the conditions under which protection for traditional Indigenous activities can be constrained. This seems all the more perplexing in that TTPs' status as OOPTs in Amurskaia oblast' was underscored in a 2005 Decree of the Governor of the oblast' (AO, 2005, Appendix 1.2). In 2009, the Legislative Assembly of the oblast' adopted a further decree, recognizing five TTPs of regional (i.e., oblast') significance, and one of local significance (AO, 2009). However, these TTPs were short-lived; they were subsequently abolished three years later (AO, 2012); see also ITP Grad, 2018).

Sakha Republic's Law on TTPs (SR, 2006) followed, rather than preceded, the federal law—a situation uncharacteristic for a region that regularly produces legislation on various aspects of Indigenous rights laws well in advance of federal counterparts. The Sakha TTP law underscores TTPs' role in conservation. In discussing alienation of land for any uses other than those defined as "traditional" for Indigenous peoples, the law stresses consultation and agreement with those affected, and the replacement of lost territory with lands of at least similar worth. When federal law removed TTPs from the category of Specially Protected Nature Territories in 2013, Sakha's law had to be updated, but its emphasis on conservation remained. In 2010, Sakha Republic adopted a Law on Ethnological Expertise (comparable to a socio-cultural impact assessment) which mandated that an industrial development projected for places of traditional residence and traditional economic activity of the Indigenous peoples of the North must undergo socio-cultural impact (as well as environmental) assessment. This guaranteed a higher level of protection land officially designated as TTPs than in other regions of Russia, and as noted below, provided a major stimulus to the formation of TTPs in the Republic after its passage. To date, Sakha Republic remains the only region with a Law on Ethnological Expertise (SR, 2010), although both the 1992 Presidential Edict and the 1999 Law on Guarantees call for such a process to be instituted nationally.

Although one of the earliest regions to create TTPs, Zabaikal'skii krai only adopted a law on TTPs in 2011 (ZK, 2011). A 1994 Decree provided "temporary rules for TTPs" (Chitinskaia oblast', 1994). Those behind the creation of TTPs in the region stressed their role in protecting the environment for *all* traditional users, underscoring the prevalence of non-Indigenous persons involved in traditional activities (including reindeer herding as well as hunting) (Zadorozhnyi et al. 1995)—analogous to the later underscoring by Amurskaia oblast' of TTPs role in serving a broader population of traditional users. Only later did a greater legislative focus on the role of TTPs in protecting *Indigenous* rights emerge. A broader 2010 law, "On State Support of Traditional Types of Economic Activities and Traditional Trades of Indigenous Numerically-Small Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East in Zabaikal'skii krai," stipulates by whose authority regional- and local-level TTPs can be established (ZK, 2010a). The 2011 TTP law (modified in 2014, ZK, 2014) notes that Indigenous people can demand that their interests be taken into account when local

and territorial governments are considering use of the TTP lands for other purposes. This law is briefer than its other regional counterparts, with only 6 articles (compared to 10 in the Amurskaia oblast’ law, and 19 in the Sakha Republic law). It seems neither to accede to erosion of TTPs for industrial development (as in Amurskaia oblast’) nor underscore their conservation role (as in Sakha Republic).

EXPERIENCES IN PLACE: OBSHCHINAS

The regional legislation on obshchinas and TTPs thus varies over space in both timing and emphasis. It provides latitude for interpretation and gives rise to a variety of practices in place. Discussing obshchinas and then TTPs in turn, we describe the different forms which they manifest across the study areas, then address some of the territorial challenges that each faces, as highlighted by Indigenous obshchina members and local administrators.

Size

Limited legislative prescription provides flexibility in the way obshchinas are formed across Siberia, including across our study area, which includes both relatively small obshchinas, based on family and extended family units, and larger obshchinas that involve multiple families. The former characterizes Iengrinskii nasleg and Kalarskii raion, the latter Tianskii nasleg and Tyndinskii raion (Table 8.2).

Hunting land allocations to the obshchinas throughout the study area are often based on historical use by families of the same territory, for hunting and/or herding. Even during the Soviet period, the allocation of ancestral hunting lands to state hunters continued to a degree (cf. Fondahl, 1998). One interviewee noted that taiga law persists regarding rights to hunting and fishing grounds (Fieldnotes, Tiana, 15 Aug 2016); another noted that obshchinas mostly petitioned for and received the land of their members’ ancestors: “it’s done by customary law” (Fieldnotes, Staraia Chara, March 9, 2018).

Yet struggles over land allocation among obshchinas has ensued. In Tianskii nasleg, five obshchinas initially formed, in the early 1990s. The first, “Cheroda,” involved up to 60 persons, and thus received a substantial amount of land—the ancestral lands of several of its members (Fieldnotes, Tiana, August 2, 1999). Later, it began to lose members (including to other obshchinas). Legislation made no provisions

Table 8.2 Obshchina size

	<i>Tianskii nasleg</i>	<i>Neriungrinskii raion</i>	<i>Kalarskii raion</i>	<i>Tyndinskii raion</i>
Size of nasleg/raion (000 km ²)	22	99	57	83
No. of obshchinas	3	20	10	2
Average size of hunting land allocated to obshchina (000 hectares)*	578	162	1400	449
Range of hunting land allocated to obshchina (000 hectares)	0–580	35–505	0–1910	401–497

• Not including those obshchinas that have received no hunting lands.

regarding redistribution of land in such cases. Cheroda Obshchina had failed to complete the registration of its land; the raion administration thus addressed the problem by annulling its land allocation, requiring all five obshchinas to create an association, and re-allocating obshchina lands to that association for redistribution. Later, three of the initial obshchinas, including Cheroda, folded.

Currently two large obshchinas, Tiana and Tokko, share the territory of the nasleg.⁹ Tiana obshchina in 2016 had 56 “economically active” members; Tokko had 42. Both pursue reindeer husbandry and hunting on their allotted lands (Fieldnotes, Tiana, 19 Aug 2016). Both obshchinas have received long-term use rights to their territories, extending until 2035. All of the nasleg’s hunting lands fall under the jurisdiction of one of the two obshchinas: in response to the passage of a new federal hunting law in 2009 (RF, 2009), the obshchinas obtained the hunting rights to their entire allocated lands, to protect these from outsiders. A hunter who is not a member of one of the two obshchinas may apply to either to hunt on obshchina lands (Fieldnotes, Tianskii nasleg, August 19, 2016). A third obshchina, Tiana Ravnina, formed after most of the nasleg’s territory had already been granted to the other two obshchinas, and exists without a land base. Its 18 members hunt on the lands of the other obshchinas by agreement (Fieldnotes, Tiana, August 2016).

Neriungrinskii raion’s obshchinas formed along (extended) family lines, with membership significantly smaller than in Tianskii nasleg, usually of less than a dozen persons. Similarly, obshchinas in Kalarskii raion formed along smaller, nuclear and extended family lines. In Kalarskii raion, only two obshchinas have received and fully registered hunting lands. The others practice reindeer herding on their hunting lands, or on lands that are not officially allocated to them, as the category of reindeer pasture does not currently exist as a category in the Russian Federation.

Obshchina registration

Registration of obshchinas has presented an ongoing problem. Contradictions in federal laws caused many obshchinas to reregister as agricultural cooperatives, then again as obshchinas. While registration is not expensive financially other than the requisite cadastral component, it is time-consuming, requiring paperwork and sometimes a visit to a regional center to submit such (which can be very expensive). Many obshchinas throughout the study area initially failed to complete registration, especially the cadastral work, endangering their continued existence. Reporting requirements have increased over time, and those obshchinas which fail to fully register, pay land rental fees, or to complete required paperwork can be abolished. Tianskii nasleg’s larger obshchinas have eased this requirement for many members.

Cadastral work can be prohibitively expensive, depending on the size of the obshchina territory and its distance from major settlements. Until 2014, the state subsidized 80% of cost for cadastral work, a practice which has now ended. These expenses have hindered some obshchinas from completing registration of their hunting lands (Fieldnotes, Staraia Chara, March 9, 2018). In Neriungrinskii raion, a Union of Obshchinas facilitated the process, collecting the necessary documents from the individual obshchinas and centrally registering the lands.

Rent

Rent for lands is a continuing sore-point among Indigenous persons. While the 1999 Law on Guarantees stipulated free-of-charge use of land for Indigenous persons and their obshchinas, the 2001 Land Codex limited free-of-charge land allocation to obshchinas to only plots necessary for the construction of buildings and structures. Rent for federal land used for reindeer pasture is nominal (3 kopeks [US \$0.0004] per hectare); however, rent for hunting land is 5 rubles (US \$0.068) per hectare. Since both pastures and hunting lands can cover tens or hundreds of thousands of hectares, the costs do add up, especially for hunting lands. Some Evenki (and some non-Evenki) opined the injustice of having to pay to use their ancestral lands; Indigenous leaders have also argued that charging a land-use fee contradicts Indigenous land reciprocal relations.

Competition over land for traditional activities

Despite federal and regional laws providing for priority access for Indigenous users for subsistence purposes, hunting and fishing grounds have proven sites of competition between Indigenous person and others, especially in light of legal changes to the federal hunting law that introduced the auctioning of hunting lands (RF, 2009). In Tianskii nasleg, allocating all hunting lands to one of two obshchinas allowed control over access by others: “as soon as the hunting law passed, obshchinas got the [hunting] license, so no outsiders could get this land” (Fieldnotes, Tiania, 19 Aug 2016).

This contrasted with the situation in Tyndinskii raion:

Russians are squeezing Evenki out, they are chasing us out of our ancestral places, the places where our grandfathers and great grandfathers hunted and kept their herds since time immemorial. Now they [the government] are requiring that agreements are signed. The [local] Russians are taking all the territory. Land for hunting, for fishing, is being diminished, the Evenki are being squeezed out from all sides.

(Fieldnotes, Staraia Chara, March 10, 2018)

Evenki in Kalarskii raion also reported conflicts over non-Indigenous hunters vying for, and receiving especially rich, hunting lands and Evenki being squeezed out from both hunting and herding on these lands (Fieldnotes, Kalarskii raion, March 2018).

Obshchina lands and protected areas

Many lamented the loss of status of “specially protected nature territories” for TTPs in 2013. Yet protected area status can also present challenges to Indigenous land use. In Iengrinskii nasleg the member of one obshchina complained about the need to ask for permission from regional authorities for every trip between the village and their lands, as their route passed through a protected area (Fieldnotes, Iengra, May 12, 2017). The Charouda Nature Reserve, established with the participation of World Wildlife Fund in the late 1990s in southern Tianskii nasleg, overlapped obshchina

lands, but supposedly allowed for Evenki to continue to pursue traditional activities within its bounds. However, the warden stationed at its border allegedly regularly prevented Evenki from entering to do so (Fieldnotes, Tianskii nasleg, August 1999). A long-discussed national park (Kodar NP) was in the process of being established in Kalarskii raion in 2018; its boundaries enclose the reindeer pasture of one obshchina. Community leaders reported significant consultation about the park has occurred, but community members remain skeptical. Evenki express concern that not only will they the right to hunt on park territory (though not to pasture reindeer), but that the park will serve as a breeding ground for wolves, which predate upon their reindeer (Fieldnotes, Kalarskii raion, March 2018).

Finally, Evenki voice concern that legislation, in its requirements to bound, register boundaries, and pay rent on lands, is giving rise to new relations with land, and new behaviors that some Evenki express as culturally inappropriate. In Kalarskii raion, arguments have sprung up over obshchinas using other obshchinas' pasture, when the latter obshchina has few or no deer. Those justifying this use assert that Evenki customary law expects such flexibility and sharing, while others noted that the effort and expense involved in registering one's obshchina lands promotes a feeling of proprietary (and exclusionary) rights (Fieldnotes, Kalarskii raion, March 9, 2018). Evenki in Tianskii nasleg voiced similar concerns:

People sometimes say, “you are on my land”—but we always hunted across a large territory. People now say, “this is my fishing land, why are you on it?” But this is wrong. Previously, no one bothered anyone else—you went wherever you wanted. As soon as the laws came out, people started thinking this way, saying “you are on my land.”

(Fieldnotes, Tiania, 19 Aug 2016).

EXPERIENCES IN PLACE: TTPS

The creation of TTPs in the neighboring jurisdictions have differed markedly in timing, underlying rationale and configuration. Chitinskaia oblast' established TTPs early on, in 1994 in its three northern raions. The Chita Institute of Natural Resources assumed the task of designing the TTPs, at the behest of the regional government. That is, TTP establishment was not driven by a bottom-up demand from Indigenous persons, but rather by top-down, regional initiative. The TTPs' boundaries follow natural boundaries (e.g., watersheds), and consist mostly of higher alpine areas. In designing them known mineral deposits were explicitly avoided, as well as were the part of the region that might be flooded due to a potential a hydro-electric project (Zadorozhnyi et al., 1995). Some Evenki opined that only land useless to most users were protected under this designation:

The entire territory is mountain taiga zone is, 1500 m and above—it is there that they created the TTP, on the top of the stones, where nothing grows. The main productive zone, with biodiversity, are in the lower parts; that is where the TTP should be. Don't just designate these stony areas as TTP. Excuse me, create a TTP where there are productive sites for plants, for reindeer husbandry. The Evenki were expelled from these areas. The lower part is for Chita, for Moscow.

(Fieldnotes, Chita, March 15, 2018; see also Fondahl, 1998)

For the most part, almost a quarter century after their creation, Evenki in Kalarskii raion expressed few strong feelings, positive or negative, about the TTPs, including those obshchina members whose reindeer pasture fell within the boundaries of the TTPs.

In the Tyndinskii raion, three TTPs of regional (oblast') significance were established by a 2009 (AO, 2009), each covering the territory of a former state farm (Granitsi nd). In an initiative supported by World Wildlife Foundation and IWGIA, obshchinas petitioned the governor of the Amurskaia oblast' to create such TTPs (Illarionov, 2007). Here we see a ground-up approach motivated by outside players. As noted above, the TTPs apparently subsequently were liquidated in 2012. At present Evenki activists are attempting to form TTPs anew.

TTP boundaries coincide with current administrative boundaries In Tianskii and Iengrinskii naslegs, encapsulating the whole nasleg. It appears that the adoption of Sakha Republic's Ethnological Expertise law (SR, 2010) gave rise to Iengrinskii nasleg's seeking TTP status, which it received in 2013. Creating a TTP confirmed the land of the nasleg as "traditionally inhabited and used" by Indigenous people, which would necessitate a socio-cultural assessment for any major development projects (after 2010). However, local administration officials note that only larger companies carry out such assessments; the law is poorly enforced. Meanwhile, the Iengrinskii nasleg administration has provided training to reindeer herders as "public ecologists," so that while out on the land, they can report any discovered environmental violations perpetrated by companies on TTP lands (Fieldnotes, Iengra, May 2017).

A different law impelled the administration to finalize the registration of the TTP in Tianskii nasleg. While the idea of designating the TTP was agreed upon in 2009, the cadastral work required to complete registration occurred only in 2015/2016 (Fieldnotes, Olekminsk, August 22, 2016). This happened as part of a Republic-wide response to the threat of a new federal law promoting the give-away of land in the Far East Federal District to any citizen of Russia, under the so-called "Far East Hectare" program. After Sakha Republic's government had successfully lobbied to have the federal law preclude the allocation of lands designated as TTPs, it then launched an intensive effort to help local administrations complete cadastral registration of (and thus protect) TTPs (Fondahl et al., 2019). Many Evenki with whom we spoke credited the Republic's actions to helping protect their ancestral lands.

The status of TTP has failed to provide protection lands from industrial development throughout the study area. Gold mining, coal mining, and/or pipeline construction have occurred on TTPs. In Tianskii nasleg, Tiania Obshchina's lands encompass the site of a gold mining operation. While its operations predated the establishment of the TTP (beginning in 2000), the creation of the TTP have not precluded recent expansion plans to new mining sites within its territory, although the potential of the expansion was noted as one reason for finalizing the TTP (Fieldnotes, Tiania, August 15, 2016; Olekminsk, August 22, 2016). In Neriungrinsky raion, parallel oil and gas pipelines have recently been constructed through the Iengra TTP (Fieldnotes, Iengra, May 12–14, 2017). Locals in all the areas identified poaching as a problem, blaming both the industrial transport infrastructure (roads) that provided easy access to the areas and the miners themselves.

CONCLUSION

Regional legislation, while required to cohere with federal legislation, can attempt to address geographical specificities. It can also reveal political motivations, both through its content and through its implementation. Laws shape and constrain the possibility for realizing territorial rights. In reviewing the content of regional laws on obshchinas and TTPs in three jurisdictions, and their implementation across these areas, we note both the reflection of regional visions regarding Indigenous territorial rights and the diversity of forms assumed by these spatio-legal units. Regional laws on obshchinas and TTPs in Amurskaia oblast' have essentially downplayed the protection of Indigenous rights, and facilitated industrial development and Indigenous de-territorialization; the legal liquidation of TTPs in 2012 underscores this region's approach. In Sakha Republic, regional law has emphasized protection of Indigenous rights as closely linked to environmental conservation. Within national naslegs of Sakha Republic, obshchinas have adopted different forms, as supported by accommodating regional legislation. And the Republic has stimulated and facilitated the production of TTPs that encompass entire naslegs. In Zabaikal'skii krai we see the early adoption of TTPs, but with a focus on conservation rather than Indigenous rights, and designed to avoid areas of future industrial interest, including those of importance to Indigenous activities. We also identify the failure to facilitate receiving and registration of obshchina hunting lands in the Kalarskii raion. The different emphases of the regional laws, and their implementation, shape the ways Indigenous persons experience the obshchina and TTPs.

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NOTES

- 1 *Obshchina* is translated as clan community, tribal community, clan commune, *inter alia*. Here we maintain the Russian word (but form the plural as per English language protocol). We use the Russian abbreviation for Territory of Traditional Nature Use (*Territoriia traditsionnogo prirodopol'zovaniia*).
- 2 Legislation refers here to the gamut of legal acts adopted by the government (laws [*zakony*], decrees [*postanovleniia*], orders [*rasporiazheniia*], regulations [*polozheniia*]), as well as presidential edicts [*ukazy*].
- 3 Russian legislation established Indigenous, numerically small peoples as a specific legal category (RF 1999). Criteria for inclusion include "living on the territory of traditional settlement of their ancestors; maintaining a traditional way of life, economy and trades; numbering fewer than 50,000 persons in the Russia Federation; and considering themselves a distinct ethnic community." (RF 1999, Article 1). The Russian Government recognizes

- 47 peoples of its nearly 200 “nationalities” (ethnic groups) as meeting these criteria (RF 2000a). Of these, most (40) are further recognized as Indigenous numerically small peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East (RF 2006b). It is these 40 peoples’ rights and access to land with which this chapter is concerned.
- 4 Federal subjects include republics, krais [territories], oblast’s [provinces], and autonomous oblast’s and okrugs [districts].
 - 5 The Zabaikal’skii krai was formed in 2008 from a merging of Chitinskaia oblast’ and Aginskii-Buriatskii autonomous okrug; thus, we refer to relevant pre-2008 legislation of the Chitinskaia oblast’.
 - 6 A more detailed account of the issues discussed in this section can be found in Fondahl et al. (2021).
 - 7 A *raion* or *ulus* (the latter specific to Sakha Republic) is the administrative unit below a region (republic, krai, or oblast’) and roughly akin to a district or county. A *nasleg* (also specific to Sakha Republic) is an administrative unit below a raion/ulus, roughly akin to a township. We maintain the Russian terminology (but anglicize the plural: raions, uluses, naslegs).
 - 8 This law has been amended seven times since its adoption, a situation not uncommon, as regional laws need to be brought into coherence with federal laws, when the latter are modified.
 - 9 A third obshchina, “Tiana Ravnina,” formed after most of the nasleg’s territory had been granted to the two obshchinas and exists without a land base. Its 18 members hunt on the lands of the other obshchinas by agreement (Fieldnotes, Olekminsk, August 22, 2016).

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CHAPTER 9

EVENKI “FALSE” ACCOUNTS

Supplies and reindeer in an Indigenous enterprise



Tatiana Safonova and Istvan Sántha

During our fieldwork among the Evenki people in 2008 and 2009, we had an opportunity to see how a comparatively highly successful Indigenous business organization operated in Russia.¹ The company we studied was an Evenki family-based community called “Sunshine,” it gained its main profits from jade mining. Its exclusive clients were Chinese buyers who preferred the white sort of jade, although “Sunshine” acquired subsoil licenses for several deposits of both green and white jade. To maintain its status as an Indigenous company, the Evenki also supported reindeer herding and hunting. These activities helped to control territories around the mines situated deep in the taiga in places without roads and cell phone coverage. We stayed at the reindeer farm that also operated as a canteen for jade caravans formed by five all-terrain military vehicles that commuted between the logistic station on the edge of the taiga and the mine weekly. We also lived in the home village of the heads of the company, a remote settlement (approximately 250 km from the regional center) without asphalted road and proper bridges connecting it to main roads (Safonova & Sántha, 2020). Several times we met them personally in the regional center as well. What we recognized was a persistent misrepresentation of the activities of the company in its internal accounts. We witnessed how in various reports about the internal operations of jade mining and logistics workers often provided incorrect data, very approximate numbers, and simplified and partial accounts of their actions. Nevertheless, the company operated smoothly without any evident distraction, as if these partial reports and misinformation could not affect the internal communication and coordination of the enterprise’s operations.

This unaccountability toward oneself—both on the level of a corporate body and of human persons—bewildered us because the last thing that it seemed to bring was efficiency. Yet still, the Evenki gained enormous profits (\$10 million—their best year’s declared income) and paid taxes (6%, i.e., more than \$7 hundred thousand per year). Eventually the office of regional public prosecution accused the company of fraud and of attempting to mine jade outside the licensed territories. The enterprise was closed and liquidated through the court in 2012–2014 (details of this process were presented in Sántha et al., 2018). After the court decision, members of the company opened a website and put all the documents on display as proof that they were accountable, and that all documentation was clear and in order. The media was

full of articles pro and contra the case, with arguments that it was not “Sunshine” that was unaccountable but that the whole liquidation had been paid for and fostered by corrupt bureaucrats. A new company appeared out of the blue and won a tender for the license for jade extraction, following which the region attracted poachers and illegal miners. But after a while rumors spread that ex-heads of “Sunshine” had bought this company and “Sunshine” re-entered the territory, now under a new name without any open reference to its Indigenous background. The new company bought the reindeer herd previously belonging to “Sunshine,” and this gesture brought rumors that this was an Evenki initiative, although officially the Evenki people were never mentioned as affiliated to the company. In the long term, it became clear that previous enterprise’s heads lost all control over the situation and had left Russia. All these transformations pose a range of questions, in particular: what was the role played by unaccountability in the success, and failure of the company? This question leads us to the debate that exists around the topic of accountability in the social anthropology. This debate currently has a profound influence on anthropological thinking because it shows that anthropologists require problematizing their own activities in terms of accountability, both the ability to create a plausible account of their fieldwork experience and to be responsible for their ethnographic description (Strathern, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

This research was principally inspired by *Audit Cultures*, a collective volume edited by Strathern (2000). We wanted to study the way in which accounts exist in the field and also to stay reflexive about our own accounting practices as ethnographers. At the same time, we felt the need to address more openly the questions of the limits of accountability and unaccountability. Following Butler, we supposed that relations of accountability are complex and entangled, so that self cannot be claimed for a full account of one’s actions, because of the inevitable opacity of oneself. This opacity is the result of the embeddedness of the self into relations with others, and as a result is part of the ethical engagement of the self with the world (Butler, 2005: 20). Local transparency is unaccountable, because it presumes the total avoidance of contact and distraction, and this reminds us of the “god-trick” of objectivity of science criticized by Haraway (1991). The situated knowledge that Haraway advocates presupposes that those who collected such knowledge did not pretend to obtain the whole picture, and thus it stays accountable for the chosen perspective and the relationships this perspective reproduces. Our ethnography was an attempt to create an account of the “Sunshine” company on the shop floor level that would not conflict with their own way of doing accounts. That is why the materials we have collected would never help to construct an overall picture of the company.

The other important dilemma for our methodology was generated by the fact that we dealt with an Indigenous company (or as it was called officially commune, obshchina)—and the questions as to whether Indigenous people have to provide accounts at all to the state which has occupied their territory or whether these accounts could ever be intelligible to bureaucrats who have had no experience of Evenki life, stayed open at every moment of our research. Here we had helpful material to address and compare provided by such anthropologists as Comaroff and

Comaroff (Bafokeng people, 2009), Cattelino (Seminole people, 2008), and Nadasdy (Canadian First Nations, 2003).

The research was conducted in 2008–2009, when we spent almost ten months in the field. These core materials were supplemented with materials from our previous expeditions in the region conducted in 2004 and 2006. It is very difficult to say whether this was a multi-sited ethnography or a classical one, because we stayed for extended periods at various sites, all of which were connected to “Sunshine” activities in one way or another. So, we suppose that we can call it a hybrid case of field methodology, in which the researcher moves across a very fluctuating field and at the same time stays in the same milieu for the prolonged periods of time. We also had access to the “Sunshine” documents for the whole period of our study. However, it was only after its liquidation, and the full publication of the archive on the web, that we gained the possibility to study these documents thoroughly without fear of imposing a superficial and unauthentic accountability regime through our analysis.

COUNTING REINDEER: FAKED NUMBERS AND AGREEMENTS

In summer 2009 we were staying at a reindeer farm, which was led by Evenki people and belonged to an Evenki family-based enterprise. This enterprise supported such traditional Evenki occupations as hunting and reindeer herding, but the main profit was gained from extraction of jade and trade with its Chinese buyers. This trade brought an unprecedented flow of capital through the region, and some Evenki got extraordinary access to it. Poverty and hunger was an ordinary condition for this region, and only several years before the expansion of “Sunshine’s” operations the reindeer camp that one of us visited first in 2004 was on the brink of despair. Istvan remembers how he and his informants struggled without food for several weeks. The taste of berries that constituted their main diet still reminds him of those uneasy days of his fieldwork. Everything changed dramatically by 2008, when we conducted our fieldwork here together. This time, generous supplies arrived at the camp on a regular basis, and the camp was constantly upgraded and renovated.

The mine was situated deep in the taiga on the territory officially leased from the state as Indigenous Evenki land for hunting and reindeer herding. The enterprise obtained a license to extract jade by the open-cast method. Jade was transported by all-terrain military vehicles, then loaded up on trucks and sent to the capital city of the region, where it was stored in a warehouse. The vehicles originally were bought from the distributors of machinery written off from army bases. Slowly “Sunshine” got enough capital to acquire new all-terrain vehicles produced in Poland based on Soviet military models. The conditions of jade mining and transportation in the taiga were so harsh that only military technology was reliable enough.

Chinese buyers usually came to this place, and all contracts and negotiations were conducted there. Because there was no tradition (or knowledge) connected with jade in the region (and generally in Russia), nobody knew exactly how to price it. Prices were negotiated on the basis of competition between several (independent) Chinese buyers.² Officially jade was not even acknowledged as a semi-precious stone, and in documents it frequently appeared just as “stone.” Although reindeer herding and selling reindeer meat were not in any way profitable, they played an important role

for the status of the enterprise as Indigenous organization that supported traditions, and the enterprise was exempted from some burdensome taxes.³

The reindeer farm was in the taiga, halfway between the open-cast jade mine and the operational station, where commune workers escorted by paramilitary guards reloaded jade from all-terrain vehicles adjusted to riding through taiga onto trucks suitable for ordinary asphalt roads. Vehicles with jade passed by the farm and stopped at it for the drivers and security guards to have a snack and rest. There were several Evenki who lived at the farm during the summer season, among them Anna. She was officially hired both as a cook to make snacks for the drivers and as a reindeer herder. Her husband was the head of the farm (brigade). There were usually two more people who worked as herders.

All members of the farm were Evenki. Once a year the camp was audited by the head of the branch responsible for hunting and reindeer herding activities. That autumn they came with a vet not only to prepare a report about the herd and operation of the farm but also to vaccinate animals. Reindeer were driven into a pen situated at the premises of the winter camp. A fence split the pen into two halves. Animals were resting in one half of the pen, and the brigade including the head of the hunting and reindeer herding department, the veterinary, reindeer herders, and Anna entered this sector of the pen. Men caught animals one by one, and while they were trying to keep the struggling animals still, the vet injected vaccines and took blood samples. After that the animals were let into the other part of the pen. The work took more than five hours and was physically exhausting. To grab an animal, one man caught it with a rope and then three men pulled it by a rope tied to the antlers. Anna watched the whole procedure, and every time an animal got its vaccine, she made a mark on a piece of paper opposite the category of the animal—a young calf, a male, or a female.

The head who was in charge of the audit and counting was himself involved in pulling the rope and counted not animals but the marks that Anna made on the paper at the end of the whole procedure. We saw how he counted these marks several times. He then crossed out one mark, counted again, and wrote the number 70. We asked whether he had counted other animals that were known to stay in the forest and that did not come out this time. He confirmed that he had. He also counted one bull who was sent to the city to participate in the ethno-national festival (as a matter of fact, the bull did not return from the festival). So, in the end the number 70 did not correlate directly with the number of animals pulled from one part of the pen into the other, as the initial form of the procedure would suggest. But nobody objected and everybody seemed to be satisfied with the whole procedure and the result. The number was not an artefact of objective procedure but neither was it plucked from thin air. At least something was done to count the reindeer. This ambiguity fascinated us as outsiders—why not count strictly just those animals that passed through the counting procedure or why count at all, if the accuracy was not so important? These questions led us to the literature devoted to the problem of faked numbers in accounting documents and counting as a process of categorization and membership assumption.

Calculation of things and people is a complex process that consists of several stages and includes such decisions as how to make objects counted discrete, visible, and countable, but it also includes moral judgments concerning when to count, in

what situation, for what reasons, when to start and when to end (Martin & Lynch, 2009). Counting reindeer was not an easy proposition. Firstly, reindeer do not always stay with the herd. Sometimes parts of a herd go away and then reunite with others. Secondly, animals showed a will to resist and were reluctant to follow commands; they were frightened and resisted being caught and fixed to the fence. The number of animals in the herd changes constantly. We also tried to count them afterwards during our stay at the farm, and every time we got a different result. What became obvious during these attempts is that counting is not an independent distinct practice but is always embedded into some other practice that carries a form of categorization and construction of membership (contain a membership categorization device in terms of Harvey Sacks 1972). During the audit, the counting of reindeer was actually a kind of parasitic practice (in sense proposed by Michel Serres [1980] 2007) that used the situation constructed and framed by another more influential practice—the vaccination. The initial number of marks on the paper, which was afterwards corrected, showed the number of animals that were driven from one part of the pen into the other after vaccination. This number was then calibrated with the knowledge that two were left in the forest, one refused to enter the pen at all, and one reindeer had been eaten during the festival earlier. That calibration was based on additional data which was provided by reindeer herders themselves, and so the head of the branch had to trust and rely on it. If he had preferred to actually count the animals in the herd, perhaps he would have had to choose a different basic practice in frames of which to count—not vaccination, but probably the seasonal moving of the herd from summer to winter camp. This practice has the advantage of covering and involving all animals of the herd without exclusion, because the number of animals that successfully reach the winter camp is the number that constitutes the herd itself. It is doubtful that animals that got lost at summer camp would someday turn up and reunite with the herd at the winter camp. Relocation is a situation that carries a very strong potential for accountability, because this practice constitutes a group with practically experienced boundaries. This is a statement of membership and a process of defining a whole.

In this respect, we can remember that the word “method” originates from Greek *meta-hodos*, meaning before (or after) the road, preparations for traveling or resting after it. In Evenki life, preparing before traveling is the moment of an explosion of accountancy, measurements, weighing, and accuracy. People have to allocate all transported goods and chattels between their reindeer or horses in accordance with the strength of animals. Things should be packed into load-packs that consist of two parts that hang on either side of the animal (on packing as an ontological practice see Safonova and Sántha, 2019). These should be of equal weight, so that the animal will not suffer from uneven distribution of mass and will not be injured. The amount of food is connected to the destination that can be covered. Packing is the practice that can reveal almost everything about the route, the time scale of journey, its aims, wealth of the person, physical strength, season, and prospective outcomes.⁴ The fact that the counting of reindeer was not embedded into such an accountable situation shows that the counting has little to do with the exact number of animals. Life in the taiga may seem to be chaotic and spontaneous, but there are some highly accountable moments during which transparency is not the result of the additional effort but an integral and essential part of life. It should not be forgotten that important things

can save lives in situations of emergency during the trip. In summary it is possible to count the exact number, but actually it seems that there is just no need for the exact number of reindeer. People needed a number that was easier to obtain, but not the truth at all costs.⁵

Inaccurate numbers can paradoxically unite people and become artefacts of mutual understanding and agreement. Calibration and correction can be an endless collective process. New perspectives, new technologies, new circumstances that bring changes to parties’ strategies and interests can all become an agenda for recalculation and dispute over the resulting numbers. The number that is acknowledged by all participants involved in counting as not quite adequate but enough to prevent needless calculations is the result of agreement, and as such it has a power to mark a point in time as the end of a relationship developed around calculation and manipulation of a result.

Parties create a new temporality in their relationships: Anna, other herders, and the head of the branch who audited them came to an agreement that in this situation the number 70 was fine. By fabricating the procedures of precision, they had the opportunity to ignore the inaccuracy of their input and output data. Counting gave the possibility for precision. Although nobody checked how Anna wrote these marks and nobody contested why one of the marks was erased by the auditor: it was important that the number of counted marks and the number 70 would correspond with each other in a precise way. This tautology in the heart of the process generated the whole impression of order and verifiability. The fact that the initial procedure of counting reindeer was substituted by the counting of marks on paper was unrecognized, partly because the counting of marks was a repeatable process, unlike the counting of reindeer. Nobody would agree to go through the whole process of catching and pulling reindeer one by one again and again in case somebody had a doubt and suspected a mistake. In contrast everybody could again and again, as many times as they wish, count the marks on paper. Marks did not resist, they did not butt and did not run away.

As Richard Harper said, “people understand numbers better if they handle those numbers themselves” (Harper, 2000, p. 49). Agreement can be reached if parties feel that they control numbers, that they are involved in the investigations about them. Falsified numbers are easier to investigate, because they never appear out of a mathematically objective coincidence of factors, but generated on the basis of empathy,⁶ a mutual observance, and an attempt to reconstruct the human logic that lies beside the falsification of numbers. Anna knew that from her point of view the head of the branch would like to see the number slightly larger than 70 to report on the growth of the herd to the heads of the enterprise, however the auditor himself anticipated that Evenki wanted to conceal the real number and show less, so to have the possibility of reducing the scale of reported loss in case of wolf attacks or injuries. These mutual attempts to imagine the intentions of others were steps to understanding each other and to agreeing with each other. The counting of reindeer did not help to manage the herd, but it helped the herders and the auditor to understand and agree with each other. But this situated understanding did not contribute to the transparency of the enterprise, did not bring order, and neither was it a case of corruption. To understand what it was, we need to move to our second case of counting supplies.

During our stay at the farm, we several times attempted to count the reindeer ourselves, and although we never got the same result, it was clear that the number of reindeer did not exceed 63. Thus, the error in its minimal estimation was 10%.⁷ However, that was not relevant for others, because accurate numbers seemed much more dangerous than approximations and mistakes. The danger of accuracy is two-fold: gaining accuracy is an arbitrary endless process that swallows resources and time, and accuracy in one place can lead to the unfolding accuracy in another connected place, where you perhaps prefer to keep things looking messy. When you are trying to control something very strictly, you invest your resources and attention in this and you expose yourself to the control of others.

DELIVERY OF FOOD SUPPLIES: AFFLUENCE AND UNACCOUNTABILITY

At the reindeer farm, we witnessed several times how the supplies of food were delivered. Every time the taking over of the supplies was accepted with very high spirits, an almost hysterical fuss was created in which boxes with food were taken into different storage places without coordination or being checked. At the end of the unloading, Anna, as a responsible person, had to sign off the lists of supplies she received. However, because she could not stay in one place during the whole process of unloading, and was enthusiastically running all over the camp sharing her excitement with other people, neither she, nor the other Evenki really knew what products and how many of them they had received. Therefore, Anna signed papers without strict knowledge of their accuracy. As a result, Anna was never quite sure how many supplies they had and always ordered as much as she could in advance; amazingly, her abundant orders were usually fulfilled, and supplies kept on arriving.

Sometimes we felt that we were living in a community of hunter-gatherers from classical anthropological accounts who do not have to count their supplies but just take whatever they wanted. In this particular case, there are at least two origins of this affluence. The Evenki are hunters who live in an environment which gives what they need although in a very constrained fashion, what Bird-David called “the giving environment” (1990). Poverty and hunger are not rare, and moments of hunting luck punctuate the misery as outbursts of happiness and comfort. After chasing a large wild animal, such as an elk, people do not store the meat for themselves, but share it and consume as much (and as quickly) as they can. This logic of “all or nothing” is frequently associated with the hunter-gathering ethos, which we studied elsewhere (Safonova & Sántha, 2013).

The abundance of food in the form of delivery is always so amazing that the Evenki simply cannot remain disinterested observers. They emotionally experience it as a major stroke of luck. Indeed, after some rather uncomfortable experiences that we shared with them, being stuck far away without food for uncertain periods of time waiting for somebody to come, neither could we stay calm in these situations. Delivery was a big occasion with a joyous feast after it. Partly because it was always appreciated as a stroke of luck, the Evenki and we under their influence were never quite sure that delivery would always and regularly arrive. For example, everybody knew that after the season of jade extraction was over in October, no delivery would come at all until the following April. Every order contains this anticipation of future

uncertainty, and no delivery however abundant could cover these future uncertainties. Anna simply collected whatever came without calculating and categorizing; she allocated food for the future knowing very well that hunger would come anyway. Hunger was the price of isolation and life in the taiga. But in summer, we were living in a kind of paradise, with storage rooms packed with unaccountable food.

CONCLUSIONS

There are several conclusions that we reached in our research. Firstly, accountability in Russian companies is not only a vehicle for powerful discourses and subjugation, it is also a symptom of liveliness and the potential of the company to survive and maintain its assets, but in quite a peculiar way. Contrary to the Western “myth of transparency” (Strathern, 2000, p. 2), numbers in a company’s accounts do not designate a potential fraud but show the ability of the company to have a façade. And this façade should be aesthetically appealing. The aesthetic system does not presuppose that numbers should be neat and harmoniously balanced but that they should contain drama and thresholds which are appropriate and meaningful. Due to the same aesthetic principle, accounts should never depict the whole picture; there should always be a mystery. Secondly, accounts can be freely accessed only after the corporate body is officially dead (liquidated). At this point, accounts become fully aesthetic objects, and their recipients can fully appreciate their beauty and style. The accounts of “Sunshine” became aesthetical and not only documentary proofs of the company’s grace. To make them public was the important step to create a reputation for future Evenki companies, albeit that it could not help “Sunshine” to restore its reputation. Thirdly, boundaries between different levels of accounts are blurred, a condition that we connect with the phenomenon of “unaccountability.” Even false numbers in the accounts always speak too much truth about the company, which can be dangerous because it is never clear whether it is better to show more than you really have or to show less (Humphrey, 2002; Ledeneva, 2006). We can say that accounts in Russia are based not on the principle of accuracy (like in the West, described by Poovey, 1998) but on the principle of intensity. They show how much the accounting body is trying to be accountable.

So, returning to the starting point of this article, what can this study tell us about capitalism, its Russian specifics, and its effect on Indigenous people? On the one hand, the results of this research support the thesis proposed by Gibson-Graham that firms and companies participating in accounts are not unified cores but multiple conglomerates of conflicting interests (1996). Simultaneously, “Sunshine” was immersed in conflicting accounting procedures and had to deal with the paradoxes and hybrids of the “audit culture” (Strathern, 2000). Our own account of “Sunshine” is methodologically constructed as partial and situated (Haraway, 1991). But does this mean that being cautious and self-reflexive prevents the ability to study grand topics and discover conflicts? Mollona has criticized the new economic anthropology (among others Zaloom (2003), Guyer (2007), Maurer (2008), and Miyazaki (2006) etc.) for its interest in financial elites and fast capitalism, and its misrecognition of old industrial struggles (Mollona et al., 2009, p. xv). In this respect our research tries to stay on the shop floor level with “ordinary” people, whose suffering and poverty are graphically obvious and dramatic: this research is about Indigenous people in Russia.

But at the same time, we suppose that we need to shift our attention from the moral debates to focus upon the aesthetic properties of everyday practices. This does not mean that we are attempting to become unaccountable for our research agenda, but on the contrary, we propose to study what unaccountability is, if it is thought in neutral terms, such as aesthetic principle. Like money-laundering schemes that depict the beauty of a hieroglyph (Maurer & Martin, 2012), frenzied numbers in the accounts of Russian firms subordinate to the internal harmony of the aesthetic system. To understand how corporate bodies in Russia work, we need to understand this level of their existence and not only simplify it through the denouncing meta-narratives of corruption and fraud. Our research aims to suggest an ethnographic sketch of a previously overlooked aspect of capitalism.

NOTES

- 1 The fieldwork for this research was supported by a Wenner-Gren International Collaborative Grant (2008–2009); the analysis was conducted during a two-year Marie Curie Intra-European Research Scholarship at Cambridge University, UK (2012–2014).
- 2 The analogous mechanism is used during auctions (Heath & Luff, 2007).
- 3 In this respect hunting also was not economically efficient but helped to document land rights. A more detailed account about the enterprise can be found in Safonova & Sántha (2013).
- 4 Fredrik Barth describes the emotional intensity compared with the experience of ritual associated with the preparations before the road (Barth, 1961).
- 5 Anneberg, Bubandt, and Vaarst investigating the accounting practice of pigs in Denmark came to a similar point.
- 6 The role of empathy in the process of production of faked documents is well studied by Bubandt (2009).
- 7 Since the growth of the herd rarely exceeds 15, from the point of view of accuracy the error seemed rather large. Furthermore, seven reindeers could constitute a small independent herd.

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CHAPTER 10

CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH THE EYES OF YAMAL REINDEER HERDERS



Alexandra Terekhina and Alexander Volkovitskiy

“Since the land was born it started to change”

Ivan Petrovich Vanuito, Nenets herder and fisherman

Climate change is the most significant problem among the other global challenges facing humanity. Different scientific issues related to the new climatic trends have been examined in scientific literature, and the number of publications concerning climate change is increasing extensively. These changes are manifested with particular force in the Arctic, which is warming at more than twice the average rate as the rest of the globe (Przybylak & Wyszynski, 2020). The cascading effect of temperature rise affecting natural systems also directly impacts the Indigenous populations of the Arctic, which depend primarily on the utilization of these natural systems (ACIA, 2005; AHDR, 2004; AHDR II, 2015; Pachunari, Meyer, & Core Writing Team, 2015).

Global processes associated with new climate trends have been in the focus of anthropology for several decades (Crate, 2011; Crate & Nuttall, 2009). Regarding the Arctic, scientists elaborate both global and theoretical issues as well as regional and local practices of adaptation, problems of sustainability and resilience of socio-ecological systems, and scientific and traditional/local knowledge within case studies.

Our research focuses on the Yamal Peninsula (Russia), which coincides with the territory of the *Iamal'skii raion* (district) of the Yamalo-Nenetskii autonomous okrug (YNAO). It has maintained the image of a unique region where family nomadism of the local people, the Nenets, has persevered, in close proximity to intensive industrial development associated with hydrocarbon production over recent decades. Currently, in *Iamal'skii raion*, ca. 1,000 families (ca. 5,500 people) continue to lead a nomadic lifestyle and graze ca. 225 thousand reindeer.¹

As in other regions of Siberia during the Soviet period, previously isolated households of the Yamal Nenets were united into large state enterprises after the confiscation of private herds. State reindeer were grazed by herders of *brigade* (single unit of state farm formed by five to seven herders and several *chum* (nomadic tent) workers) who received salaries but preserved their own family herds limited in numbers by the authorities. The grazing was carried out on the basis of scientifically calculated grazing capacity of pastures, with obligatory seasonal rotation. After the collapse

of the USSR, significantly-reduced former socialist reindeer enterprises were transformed according to the new economic conditions, but the principle of their brigades' migration patterns has not changed. At the same time, since the 1990s, the dominant group of tundra nomads (in terms of population and number of reindeer owned) are private owners (so-called *chastniki*), possessing up to ca. 80% of the Yamal reindeer (Golovnev & Osherenko, 1999; Stammer, 2005). It should be emphasized that the results of the transformation of Soviet reindeer herding in Yamal were utterly different than in other regions of the Russian Arctic, where reindeer herding declined in the 1990s. In the YNAO, until the 2010s, there had been steady growth in the numbers of reindeer, especially those connected with private households.

In recent years the wide range of issues concerning reactions of the Yamal Nenets to climate change has attracted growing interest. Crucial events in Yamal that caused the widest resonance—the mass mortality of reindeer because of the icing in 2013 and the outbreak of anthrax in 2016 (Forbes et al., 2016; Golovnev, 2017; Hueffer, Drown, Romanovsky, & Hennessy, 2020; Sokolov, Sokolova, Ims, Brucker, & Ehrich, 2016)—have crystallized interest in this research area. Even so, climate change discourse in Russia has its own specifics, as Forbes and Stammer (2009) noted. Perceiving climate issues as a manifestation of the Western political agenda, many Russian politicians and scientists were skeptical about the problem until recently, at least in the public sphere, and the official media often portray climate activists in an ironic style. In parallel to propaganda influencing the nation, quite an opposite rhetoric is also present on the official level (Katsov et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the population is much more familiar with the skeptical attitude, and any field study related to climate change in Russia hears the echo of this attitude of authorities.

Based on our long-term fieldwork in Yamal in 2008–2020, we would like to consider the global issues of climate change within the framework of local cases demonstrating the perceptions of people and their reactions (psychological and behavioral) to these changes.

Reflecting on our observations of nomadic daily life over a number of years, our continuing conversations in *chums* (nomadic tents) on environmental changes and analyzing the results of interviews, we decided to group the views of the Yamal tundra people into two types. One type includes several cases related to the temporality of climate change as observed by Indigenous people. The other type is spatial and includes the Nenets' responses to adverse events, as seen in changes in migration patterns and tundra mobility.

METHODS

A micro-regional approach

While conducting research in different parts of the Yamal peninsula, we adopted a micro-regional approach to model differences in areas on Yamal. Local peoples often refer to smaller regions on the peninsula as a “tundra” associated with a place name. In our opinion each tundra has specifically observable characteristics, such as landscape features, access to natural resources, structure and history of local Indigenous groups, migratory patterns, local economy of reindeer herding and fishing, and

modern infrastructural development. One of the important parameters of a micro-region is the common identity of the people inhabiting it. Local people living in one micro-region create a social network consisting of nomadic camps and people, and have a certain pattern of migration including the same infrastructural points of attraction, such as villages, trading posts, industrial villages, and roads. We must emphasize that allocation of micro-regions to a great extent is a subjective and situational process, since it strongly depends on the trajectory of a researcher's fieldwork. Nevertheless, thinking within territorial case studies gives a possibility to avoid broad generalizations referring to all the Yamal Nenets, which may be erroneous, and also provides data for better understanding and comparing the socio-ecological processes taking place across the district.

In this chapter, we will use the data of our field studies carried out in three micro-regions: *Mordy-Iakha*, *Erkuta*, and *Sabetta* as we defined them (Figure 10.1). We do not have the opportunity to give a detailed description for each territory, so we will present brief characteristics.

The people of the *Mordy-Iakha* micro-region identify themselves as *mordy'ter* (Nenets, Mordy River people), since their summer pastures are located on the left bank of the Mordy-Iakha River across from the village of Bovanenkovo, the center of one of the largest natural-gas production facilities in Russia in the western part of the peninsula. Another informal name for this territory among the Nenets is the Left North. The local people (about 30 families) administratively belong to the Iarsalinskaia tundra and are registered in Yar-Sale, the regional center of the Iamal'skii raion, far to the south near the mouth of the Ob River. *Mordy-Iakha* families are consisted of various tundra collectives: brigades of the Iarsalinskoe reindeer herding enterprise, private reindeer herders ranging from big owners with 1.5–2.5 thousand reindeer to small owners with 50–100 reindeer, and sedentary fishermen.

Erkuta (in Nenets, Iorkuta) is located on the border of Priural'skii and Iamal'skii raions of YNAO in the southern tundra of Yamal. It covers the lower Iorkuta-Iakha River, which flows into the Baidaratskaia Bay of the Kara Sea, and its tributaries. Its western border stretches along the western coast of the bay to the north of the Polar Urals. The borderline character of the territory is expressed in a number of administrative collisions, since the Nenets (19 families) identifying themselves as *Ierkutintsy* are registered in Priural'skii raion, but “their” land belongs to the Iamal'skii raion. In the Soviet period, the *Erkuta* Nenets worked as hunters procuring Arctic fox furs, and now they are mostly private reindeer herders with small herds (150–200 reindeer). In addition, several reindeer herders from the neighboring Iamal'skii raion transit through this territory in summer, and until recent years have had winter pastures.

The *Sabetta* micro-region was named after another large industrial hub—the Sabetta working village camp and seaport, located in the northeastern part of the Yamal Peninsula on the bank of the Ob Bay. This territory is part of Iamal'skii raion and belongs to the Seiakha tundra with the administrative center in the northernmost Yamal village of Seiakha, where all local tundra people are registered. The reindeer herders living within a distance of 100 km from Sabetta village (almost 50 families) identify themselves as residents of the Sabetta and Tambei tundras. All of them migrate relatively close to the gas production facilities, so they interact with



Figure 10.1 Micro-regions *Mordy-Iakha*, *Erkuta*, and *Sabetta* on the Yamal Peninsula.

the industrial enclave with varying degrees of intensity. In Soviet times, hunters lived here and owned small personal herds as in *Erkuta*. *Sabetta* was used as a transition area for two brigades of the Iamalskoe reindeer herding enterprise which was liquidated in 2018.

Fieldwork

Our main research method was participant observation. Living with reindeer herders and participating in economic practices allows us to see and literally feel the climatic events in the Arctic along with the Yamal nomads' responses. In 2015–2016, throughout the whole year, we migrated together with *Mordy-Iakha* reindeer herders, with whom we later spent the winter seasons of 2018–2019 and 2019–2020, so we could observe the adaptation strategies of the same collectives over a number of years.

Fieldwork in *Erkuta* and *Sabetta* micro-regions was carried out as a parallel track to the long-term ecological monitoring of these sites by the team of Arctic Research Station (Labytnangi). In the spring-summer of 2019, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the *Sabetta* and *Erkuta* Nenets, recording their migratory routes and key loci of cultural landscapes. Questions about climate change were compiled in collaboration with our biologist and ecologist colleagues. Questions were divided into several thematic blocks. Our interviews, focusing specifically on reindeer herders' perceptions, overlap with several similar studies conducted in the Arctic, including the Sami in Sweden (Furberg, Evengård, & Nilsson, 2011) and on Yamal and Taimyr Peninsulas in Russia (Makeev et al., 2014). Lavrillier's (2013) study of perception of climate change by Evenkis specifically avoided the term "climate change" in order not to influence Indigenous narratives. Crate (2014) extended a pure climatic agenda and discussed with her informants the "complexity of changes, including the local effects of global climate change, the economic forces of globalization, and the demographic change as youth are increasingly leaving the rural areas." We, on the contrary, primarily were interested in how the external discourses of climate change affect the views of the tundra people. In this context the first question was: have you heard about climate change? If so, how did you know such a term, what is your source of information? How do you feel about this problem? The answers to these questions implicitly provide data on how much reindeer herders watch TV, use the Internet, and communicate with people producing climate change discussions. We must point out that all the answers to these questions showed that the concept of climate change originated somewhere outside the reindeer herding community.

Then we left aside the unfamiliar word "climate" (even the Nenets word *Num* refers to the major deity and to weather, but not to a climate) and discussed various environmental changes in recent years and in comparison with the earlier periods of the informants' lives. After Nenets shared their personal observations, we asked additional questions based on scientific assessments concerning the emergence of new species in tundra, the dynamics of common species expansion, and changes in weather and hydro-regimes. The timing of the seasons and their characteristics as well as changes in the timing of periods important for reindeer herding and nomadic lifestyle (calving, rut, mosquito month, etc.) were discussed separately. People responded with the characteristics of a "normal" year and "normal" seasonal deviations, and explained what they considered "abnormal." A particular block of questions referred to the weather events crucial for reindeer, such as rain-on-snow, sudden thaws, long-lasting snow blizzards, and extreme heat or frost. For this chapter, we do not present a full analysis of the survey results but focus on several prominent issues.

“THE CLIMATE IS NOT CHANGING, THE WEATHER DOES”: THE TEMPORALITY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Answering the questions about the conception of climate change and private perception of these changes, our informants presented a complicated view. Most of them claimed that they “believe” in climate change (as an external concept) and “see” such changes. This position was most actively expressed by a young group, under 40. They explained that they had heard about it on TV and read about it on the Internet. At the same time, older people less inclined to use information technologies, either denied global changes, were not aware with the term itself, or mentioned that they had heard about it on TV, but “do not believe.”

Describing the environment, reindeer herders often use temporal categories important to them: “this happened already” or “this has never happened before” / “I have never seen such [a thing]”. Nenets “climate change dissidents” refer to a cyclical character of natural changes in the tundra and assert that the global climate issue is a far-fetched problem. Some people, reacting to a non-native and poorly understood word “climate”—pronounced in Russian and lacking a Nenets analog—claimed that “the climate is not changing, the weather does,” and then they started to talk about the abnormal weather events they observed, trying to remember as much as possible. These remembrances resemble the perceptions of the Sami reindeer herders of Scandinavia described by Ingold and Kurtila (2000). Another reaction concerned various environmental changes in tundra, observed by nomads in recent years or over many years (usually put as “the last five to ten years”). The narratives describing these changes were often the same for both age groups. For example, they talked about the movement of boreal species northwards and the increasing area occupied by shrubs. Both factors are considered to be the consequence of climate change in scientific literature (Mod & Luoto, 2016; Sokolov et al., 2016).

Discussion of seasonal shifts lacked consistency about earlier onsets of spring and later onsets of autumn as expected with climate change. This seemed strange given our experience migrating with the Nenets during the very “early” 2015 and 2020 springs and the “short” autumn of 2015 compared to the “long” one of 2019. However, recollections of the past few years indicated fluctuating timing of seasons shifts. Autumn and spring are the periods of intensive migrations between seasonal pastures, so the success of crossing wide watersheds is essential. Changes in the timing of breakups and freezing of rivers can make the migration of nomads and their herds seriously more difficult. Among such crucial barriers are the Gulf of Ob, which is crossed twice a year by all the brigades of the Iarsalinskoe and Panaevskii reindeer enterprises and private herders (Makeev et al., 2014: 52), the coastal zone of Baidaratskaia Bay (Stammler, 2008), and Iuribei and Mordy-Iakha, as well as the inner rivers of the Yamal Peninsula. Hydrological problems related to climate changes and weather affect Scandinavian Sami reindeer herders in a similar way. New conditions are blamed for forcing them to implement new migratory and slaughter timing (Furberg et al., 2011). In Kanin tundra in European Russia, changing hydro-regimes has reduced the availability of medical care for reindeer herders (Amstislavski et al., 2013).

Our respondents argued that issues described above are of more concern for the brigades of reindeer herding enterprises, who have to migrate according to a clear

established schedule, while private households can vary the time of their movements more flexibly. Many herders in the spirit of natural scientists claimed that earlier spring and late autumn are beneficial for reindeer, for such shifts increase the length of time when animals can forage green vegetation.

When discussing significant changes in the timing of periods crucial for reindeer herding, almost all the Nenets pointed to the lengthening of the “insect time.” Statements included “there are more mosquitoes now,” “mosquitoes used to end in August, but now they fly until September,” “we used to escape from mosquitoes on a sea coast, but now there are many of them even there.” One expression about these insects being harmful to reindeer is indicative. “That year mosquitoes, midges, and gadflies started to fly at the same time, and earlier in different times”; it’s not for nothing that Nenets have traditional names for summer months *Nenjang iry* (Nenets, mosquito month) and *Pilu iry* (Nenets, gadfly month).

In the larger climate change discourse, the theme of global warming is most vivid (at least in Russia until recent times), and so it was not a surprise that Nenets started talking about summer temperatures first. Older herders confidently stated that the extreme (as it seemed) heat of the several last summers (2013 and 2016) occurred before, so such peaks should not be treated as something new. Despite the fact that hot and dry summers negatively affect the health of reindeer, especially calves, critical events during winter, historically eight or nine months a year, are more significant for reindeer herding. Once again, we witnessed that any abnormality was judged from the perspective of reindeer.

One of the most dangerous climate events for reindeer in winter is the development of ice crusts that block access to forage. Reindeer herders describe a detailed hierarchy of icy conditions, which have various causes and consequences for tundra households. The strongest crust is caused by the rain-on-snow phenomenon, which typically occurs in autumn and early winter (Forbes et al., 2016). Ice crusts can be exacerbated by further combinations of thaws and frosts, leading to reindeer mass mortality throughout the whole winter season. According to reindeer herders’ claims, strong ice happens once in ten years; extremely strong ice, leading to a massive death of weakened reindeer as it was in 2012–2013 winter, happens once every 30–50 years (Golovnev, 2017). The structure of a snow surface covered with a sudden autumn rain is of significant importance. If an ice crust is formed “between the snow,” then reindeer can punch through it with their hooves and get to forage. We witnessed an immediate appearance of solid local ice crust in the Iarsalinskaia tundra in the winter of 2018–2019 caused by *iba had* (Nenets, warm snow blizzard), as well as sharp temperature fluctuations from +2 °C to –35 °C in December and January.

The most threatening conditions arise when rain falls on clear snowless ground followed by a frost. When this happens, lichen and other vegetation remain under a layer of ice, which then gets covered with snow. Thus, it is more relevant to speak of rain-on-ground in autumn as a major danger. It is also important to note that icing events cause reindeer to starve and also, as a Nenets described, “the reindeer’s stomach deteriorates like ulcer,” which dooms an animal to death after a while. The formation of ice crust is also facilitated by the proximity of open water, therefore it occurs, as scholars believe, more often along the western coast of Yamal, where the sea freezes later than the Gulf of Ob (Makeev et al., 2014). At the same time, the Nenets living on both coasts believe that the coastal climate is milder, without severe

frosts, so it is easier for reindeer to dig snow for forage there in the second half of a winter. In the northernmost tundra of the peninsula, with the *Sabetta* micro-region in its southern border, ice crusts usually form wide strips of land, leaving some areas free of ice (Makeev et al., 2014: 56). Moreover, in 2018–2019, reindeer mortality in this area which was a consequence of the icing at the end of the snow season, which is considered by local Nenets as more common than icing in the beginning of a winter.²

In addition to the icing problems, Nenets herders argued that strong snow blizzards have become more frequent making it impossible to hold a herd or migrate to a new location. In 2018 while migrating to the forest zone from the peninsula, the household with whom we lived was stopped in the middle of the peninsula by a blizzard that lasted for three weeks. Such weather made the planned migration impossible, and the family's 90-year-old patriarch stated that he had "never seen such weather."

Residents of *Sabetta* also point to an increase in duration of severe frosts, which, in their opinion, was not typical for Yamal in the past. Frosts occurring in ice crust conditions and limited reindeer pastures also have a detrimental effect on the health of the herds.

Although tundra reindeer herding is accompanied by regular risks of weather fluctuations, the Nenets' local knowledge includes ways of responding to these risks (Golovnev, 2016). The Yamal nomads expressed great concern mainly over changes in recent winters. Temporal patterns are the core of concern. All our interlocutors emphasize, firstly, the frequency of climate crisis events (or in other words unfavorable weather conditions), and secondly, their duration. According to very emotional statements of some Nenets, local ice crusts are now occurring every year, which adds to a general mood of despair and impending disaster in reindeer herding.

Discussing climate problems led many of our informants to reasoning about their causes. Natural changes and anomalies in their opinions of many were associated with the intensive industrial development of Yamal, especially among the nomads living in the vicinity of large industrial facilities. A widespread cause identified in interviews was the influence of icebreakers, providing winter navigation via the Gulf of Ob for the Yamal LNG project in *Sabetta* and the oil terminal in Mys Kamennyi on the Yamal's west coast in the mid-2010s. "Icebreakers open the bay, steam rises from water, and wind carries this humidity and steam to the shore, so the fogs happen" or "because of steam from water, the air gets warmer, and then ice is happening," as Nenets claim.

SPATIALITY OF CLIMATE CHANGE FOR NOMADS

Rethinking the perceptions of climatic changes by the Yamal reindeer herders and their reactions to these phenomena, we can consider them not only in the temporal categories but also with a spatial perspective. Spatiality refers to the ability of reindeer herders to react to weather events. The cruciality of such events which are framed in the conception of climate change in natural science is manifested for Nenets through their frequency. Golovnev (2019) asserts that in the mentality of nomads, space and time are inseparable, in contrast with the sedentary world view where they are separated. Here, we consider Golovnev's metaphor regarding the inseparable perceptions

of the people from three micro-regions of any environmental changes and their spatial and temporal responses to such changes.

Nenets households in the three micro-regions described above have different and unequal opportunities for spatial responses to emerging environmental changes. Some cases of maneuvering in tundra have been described elsewhere (Golovnev, 2017; Perevalova, 2015). These studies describe the tactical actions of several nomadic families in the 2013 anomalous ice year. We discuss the possibilities for strategic long-term spatial solutions under new climate conditions.

Mordy-Iakha. The households associated with this micro-region have demonstrated for many years the classic meridional route of Yamal nomadism, staying all the year on the territory of the peninsula. There are two exceptions—the brigade of a reindeer herding enterprise and the family of a wealthy private herder—both of which winter on the right bank of the Ob River. Recent climate events have only strengthened these remaining Mordy-Iakha collectives in their reluctance to migrate across the southern tundra of Yamal, as they fear moving over the ice-covered pastures in cases of possible rain-on-snow. As a result, they are forced to intensively change scarce winter lichen pastures in the tundra from year to year in order to ensure the survival of their herds. At the same time, they retain the ability to completely change their strategy and to start southward winter migrations to the forest zone in case of total depletion of tundra lichen pastures. In recent years, some of these nomads and their neighbors have switched to this migratory pattern, acknowledging all the risks of moving southward but considering them acceptable.

Erkuta. A small group of *Erkuta* reindeer herders moves westward in summers beyond the Ural Mountains, but their winter is spatially restricted by the unusual status of being non-residents in Iamal'skii raion. Regarding the perspective of migrating to forest lichens as a new possible response to worsening conditions in tundra, they suspect problems in arranging the new routes which require special negotiations with potentially new neighbors. They also admit personal lack of skills to migrate in unfamiliar environments and still are doomed to stay in the depleted tundra winter pastures with limited spatiality. Lack of strategic mobility has forced them to rearrange their winter grazing practices to so-called “free grazing” under conditions of lack of forage for reindeer and frequent ice crusts. They try to place their winter chums along the perimeter of a relatively large zone, where reindeer belonging to different households are kept. Control of the herd is carried out on snowmobiles, while the animals are left to disperse over a large area, copying in a sense the ecology of wild reindeer foraging and reducing intensive pressure on poor lichen pastures.

Sabetta. Local herders in comparison with the first two regions are faced with the highest degree of spatial constraints, limiting their possible responses to climate changes along with deteriorating pasture conditions. The annual routes of Sabetta herders look like short eight-form loops, often intersecting with neighboring migratory corridors. At the same time, the character of the local threats differs from the other two micro-regions. The *Sabetta* tundra is rarely covered with a solid crust at the beginning of winter. Ice here usually forms locally and, as a rule, at the end of the snow period. In recent years, some local reindeer herders have developed new nomadic patterns. In the second half of winter, they move directly to the coast of the Ob Bay, since they believe that warmer weather creates better grazing possibilities regarding the conditions of snow.

In this section, we did not specifically discuss the problem of overgrazing—the key concept of the discussion concerning the prospects for the Yamal reindeer herding in general—as it requires a special approach. For some ecologists, botanists, and lichenologists, the degradation of lichen tundra in Yamal is directly associated with intensive reindeer grazing (Ektova & Morozova, 2015). For the others, mainly social scientists, overgrazing is a political instrument of influence by the authorities over Nenets nomads. This influence is especially relevant for Yamal, where the problem of land exclusion for the purpose of industrial development is acute (Dwyer & Istomin, 2006; Forbes & Stammler, 2009).

We claim that at least for our informants—in contrast to the state designers of reindeer herding—the grazing capacity of pastures is dynamic, subjectively perceived (by reindeer and respectively by herder), and closely related to climatic conditions. The spatial responses of different groups of reindeer herders described above are associated with their perception of climate change merged with their assessment of pasture capacity.

Also, in the context of spatiality, we did not raise the issue of increasing pressure by industrial infrastructure on the Yamal Peninsula. Hydrocarbon production undoubtedly removes grazing area, but it also restricts the opportunities for spatial responses of reindeer herders (Degteva & Nellemann, 2013; Golovnev et al., 2014; Kumpula, Forbes, & Stammler, 2010). The reaction of reindeer herders to an emerging industry is reminiscent to some extent of nomadic perceptions of crucial climatic conditions. The flexibility of Nenets households demonstrates the potential for adaptation to a limited and gradual spread of gas production facilities, but this impact turns out to be critical when the rate of development outstrips the possibility of inventing a spatial response. Finally, as in the case of the response to climate change, different tundras with different industrial pressures have initially unequal opportunities to respond, which is highly determined by a complex of local specifics.

CONCLUSION

The concept of climate change, catalyzed by the media, Internet, and communication with village relatives and incoming scientists is now a part of discourse among the tundra-dwelling Nenets reindeer herders. People who have more access to gadgets and are more “tech-savvy” formulate the regional case in the global rhetoric style. However, the concept of global environmental change, as Ingold and Kurttila wrote (Ingold & Kurttila, 2000: 187), most often boils down to a discussion of weather events. Our research shows that “believers” and “non-believers” in climate change often make similar observations of the environmental changes. Nevertheless, the skeptics in Yamal, mostly older people, are confident in the cyclical character of natural phenomena in the tundra. However, both younger and older people rather emotionally discuss an increase in the frequency of critical events, thereby emphasizing temporality in climate change.

Speaking about adverse weather cases, Nenets herders make assessments primarily from the perspective of reindeer well-being, because “a human can be patient, but not reindeer.” The increasing frequency and duration of critical conditions is thrust upon a background of depleting pastures and industrial advancement, forcing tundra households to change grazing patterns or to vary migratory routes. In other words, the

tactical response to single events is replaced by long-term strategic decisions. However, the opportunities for such variation are far from present throughout the entire territory of Yamal, which can be seen in the examples of the three micro-regions.

It is notable that while the national Russian political agenda often excludes, at least publicly, the human influence on global processes, some Yamal Nenets perceive climate change as a direct consequence of local industrial development because “if gas is drilled, then something must be disturbed in nature.” The anthropogenic influences which are so actively debated in some circles are involuntarily expressed in the views of Nenets reindeer herders, although with a slightly different interpretation.

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NOTES

- 1 Data from January 1, 2020 were provided by the Department of Agriculture of YNAO and by the Department of the Indigenous Peoples of the North issues of YNAO.
- 2 While this chapter was being edited, a huge icing event occurred in the northern Yamal in the 2020–2021 winter, after December rain-on-snow followed by hard and prolonged frosts. This icing not only has become the cause of mortality among reindeer but also forced them to disperse in all the tundra far from their herders in search for areas with accessible forage.

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CHAPTER 11

NATURE-ON-THE-MOVE

Boreal forest, permafrost, and pastoral strategies of Sakha people



Hiroki Takakura

INTRODUCTION

Recent climate change research illustrates how vulnerable and sensitive the natural environment is to human action. Nature is dynamic; this reality means that researchers in the humanities and social sciences must revise conventional assumptions that culture and society are dynamic while nature acts as a stable background. The idea of “nature-on-the-move” in this paper emphasizes the contrary phase of this view. The concept includes non-biotic elements and emphasizes the autonomy of phenology and geological-climatic processes with or without human existence. With human intervention in the environment or without it, nature is always dynamic both in larger (macro) and local (micro) environments, which has implications for cultural diversity.

Anthropologists should seriously recognize how easily the natural environment, historically taken for granted, changes. We must consider the relationship between humans and their natural environments, consider climate change research, and make actionable contributions to vulnerable populations to assist with their climate change adaptation efforts. Conventional ecological anthropology examines how a given group uses its natural environment or biotic sphere to secure and produce food (Townsend, 2000). The approach also focuses on the technologies used, as well as social organizations and population size. Along with describing elaborate environmental perceptions and Indigenous knowledge, anthropologists elucidate adaptive group formation principles employed to secure food, and the social ethics found within these processes (Ellen, 1994; Moran, 1990). While this type of knowledge is important in itself, there is a need to go beyond viewing nature as the source of materials that humans unilaterally use and symbolically manipulate.

The conventional ecological anthropological approach conducts analysis in a synchronous fashion. This makes it difficult to investigate and describe changing strategies that correspond to changes in the natural and social environments. One source of the difficulty is that some changes only become visible during emergencies, such as natural disasters and environmental destruction (Oliver-Smith & Hoffmann, 2002), or through the long-term perspective of archaeology (Reycraft & Bawden, 2000). Therefore, awareness of how human strategies change as nature changes is limited. One of few exceptions is Krupnik’s (1993) model of Arctic adaptation.

Krupnik describes the divergence of subsistence strategies centering on coastal sedentarism and inland nomadism corresponding to environmental and social changes over the past 2000 years. Following Krupnik's example, in this chapter I consider a dynamic natural perspective amidst the history of the Sakha people by tracing the local environmental history and human responses to it over the long run.

SAKHA PEOPLE IN CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS

The Sakha are a large Turkic-language-speaking ethnic group in eastern Siberia. Described as having a Mongol-Central Asian pastoral culture, anthropologists hypothesize that Sakha were originally herders of sheep, goats, cows, horses, and camels on the steppes around Lake Baikal (Gogolev, 1993; Okladnikov, 1970). In the 10th–15th centuries, they began to migrate north to the vicinity of the Lena River in the boreal forest. Due to the cold environment, they only kept their cows and horses. A livelihood emerged that combined hunting and fishing with the raising of horses and cows; such a livelihood was a relative exception given the subsistence of the surrounding Indigenous peoples, which was based on reindeer herding and hunting. In particular, cows require hay for wintering, thus a greater degree of inland sedentarization was beneficial for the Sakha people (Tokarev & Gurvich, 1964).

As they became established in eastern Siberia, the Sakha people utilized the “alaas” as a unique resource. An alaas is a feature of terrain formed in larch and birch forests that develops on permafrost. If a number of trees are cut down or downed for any reason, a significant amount of radiant heat reaches the ground. As a result, water from the permafrost transpires to the surface, which triggers the sinking of the soil. In turn, some of the water forms lakes in the sunken areas. The remaining depressed areas become grasslands that are extremely important for Sakha maintaining domestic cattle and horses. Ethnologists and anthropologists have regarded this natural environment as a given feature. Although they discuss the ethnic-origin and cultural changes (Crate, 2006; Gogolev, 1993; Okladnikov, 1970; Takakura, 2015; Tokarev & Gurvich, 1964), almost nobody discusses the “origin” of this environment related to Sakha ethnic history (Crate et al., 2017).

Current climate change research suggests that the forests, permafrost, and alaas in eastern Siberia are vulnerable to global changes. For example, modeling indicates that if temperatures rise more than two degrees, larch trees, which are predominant in eastern Siberia, will die. In their place, pine and other sub-northern species will spread extensively. Forests and permafrost will be partially destroyed, and overall biomass will decrease (Zhang et al., 2011).

Observational studies have pointed out that frequent droughts and forest fires have an adverse impact on the permafrost and boreal forests of Alaska. However, in contrast, climate change in eastern Siberia has increased precipitation and soil moisture, because the active layer (which thaws in the summer) near the soil surface expands and deepens, eroding the permafrost. As a result, thermokarst strengthens, alaases expand, and larch clusters die (Crate et al., 2014; Ohta et al., 2008; Iijima et al., 2010; Iijima et al., 2014). The increase in humidity has been observed in the alaas landscape over a short 20-year timespan, and this change has deteriorated the grasslands. For example, in one alaas region a lake expanded by a factor of roughly 100, from 33.7 square meters to 3,508 square meters. This expansion was caused by the thawing of

frozen soil moisture appearing on the ground surface, which results in soil collapse as the ice supporting the surface disappears (Fedorov et al., 2014; Saito et al., 2018).

It is crucial for social scientists to understand that ecosystems and soil can undergo drastic changes. Recent studies suggest that local Arctic environments form amidst the contingencies of natural history (Romanovsky et al., 2010). Climate change is already leading to drastic changes in the tundra and the boreal forest environment in the Lena River middle basin, a phenomenon which will only accelerate in the future.

River terraces, formed along the Lena River with a vast floodplain extending for tens of kilometers on either side, provide grass resources similar to tundra. The origin of these terraces goes back to the middle Pleistocene period (Saito, 1995). Recent studies have found the annual ice jams that cause flooding on the Lena River in May play an important role in the sustainable use of pastureland on these river terraces renewing water and soils for hay (Takakura, 2016, 2017). There is a Sakha terminology describing the process of the spring floods related to snow melt and ice-thaw as Indigenous knowledge that helped guide behavior in past environments (Takakura, 2017). However, recent climate change has increased spring and summer precipitation in this region with a concurrent increase of flooding (Gautier et al., 2018), leading to decreased grass production in the terraces and endangering pastoral production (Takakura, 2016; Crate et al., 2017).

Historical and ethnological literature depict horse-cattle pastoralism of the Sakha people as a relatively stable adaptation between the 16th and 20th centuries (Tokarev & Gurvich, 1964). This lasting pastoralism depended on a relatively stable climate—a fortunate meeting between human culture and environmental conditions in this harsh northern environment. But it is not the only strategy Sakha ancestors developed. Multiple groups of Sakha moved further north to avoid Russian colonization in the 17th century. At these higher latitudes some kept their cows and horses. Others, who migrated to the Olenok River basin could no longer keep their cows and horses, and began to engage in reindeer herding (Gurvich, 1977).

Similarly, when environmental conditions dramatically change even for a short-term period, we can anticipate that people practicing subsistence livelihoods will respond to these new conditions. Although particular human livelihood strategies are not directly controlled by environmental conditions, there are limits to the adaptive capacity of any given strategy.

ECOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS TO SIBERIA

Human history in Siberia

Archaeology and physical anthropology studies show that *Homo sapiens* started to adapt to the cold climate in the region above 50 degrees northern latitude, and they subsequently spread across the entirety of Siberia between 30,000 and 15,000 BP (Kimura, 1997). A significant event in the cultural history in Siberia was reindeer domestication, which dates to the first millennium AD in southern Siberia (Vainshtein, 1980; Røed et al., 2020). This practice drastically provided greater mobility and emergency food likely providing additional adaptive capacity to local foraging economies until Russian colonization. However, even though the domestication of livestock was widely introduced during this era, most societies depended on undomesticated food

sources since the livestock was mainly used for transportation. The exception, adaptation of reindeer herding for food production, appeared in the tundra regions of western and eastern Siberia in the 19th century. Ethnological research focused on the early 20th century uncovered more than 20 ethnic groups with either subsistence foraging, foraging with reindeer, or large-scale reindeer pastoralism (Krupnik, 1993). It is important that the population of all these ethnic groups were small in number, thousands to tens of thousands, regardless of the diversity in subsistence patterns.

The Sakha people of eastern Siberia were an exception even in the early 20th century with a population of approximately 230,000 people and a traditional livelihood based on cattle and horse herding. Previous research has explained the reasons for this economic livelihood from either a Marxist approach or as an historical stage of heightened development compared to hunter-gatherers or reindeer nomads (Tokarev & Gurvich, 1964).

The forest-permafrost combination is particularly well developed in eastern Siberia compared to other areas of the world and is spread across a wide latitudinal range. This phenomenon can be explained by the natural history of the paleoenvironment more than by the current climate or physical mechanisms (Fukuda, 1996). I examine the long-term interaction between people and the environment using the case of Sakha economic livelihood, and then reconsider the previous argument of ecological adaptation in Siberian peoples from the perspective of “nature-on-the-move.”

Environmental determinism

I revisit the economic and cultural typology of Siberian peoples that was proposed in the 1950s by Soviet anthropologists. While this is an antiquated and problematic framework, it presents a general view of Siberian traditional subsistence patterns before the 1920s (before the socialist modernization) and still acts as a good starting point for discussion. The typology lists (1) hunting and fishing in forests, (2) hunting sea animals in the extreme North, (3) fishing in large rivers, (4) forest hunting and reindeer herding, (5) tundra reindeer herding, and (6) steppe pastoralism (Levin & Cheboksarov, 1955; Levin, 1958).

This typology is based on environmental determinism, the idea that ecosystems have a decisive impact on human culture and societies. In the above typology, tundra, forests, coasts, and river basins are given environments, which provide different food resources existing in different ecosystems; this is considered to be the foundation of how subsistence strategies are formed. The exception here is reindeer herding, because (1) hunting and fishing and (4) forest hunting and reindeer herding are assumed both to be forest-based foraging adaptations. Reindeer herding concerns the improvement of the efficiency of foraging through breeding of labor animals. Reindeer herding is also conducted in the tundra. This herding concerns not only raising labor animals but also their production for food. The subsistence pattern from (1) to (4) represents a strategy of securing the high protein foods necessary for human survival in high-latitudes, while the population with tundra reindeer herding changes from depending on wild animals to domesticated ones. Tundra, forests, coasts, and river basins lead to strategies that depend on animal (fish) sources. Steppe pastoralism, in comparison, depends on the grassland, its ecosystem, and is therefore a strategy dependent on milk and meat.

The populations of the hunting and fishing peoples in (1) to (3) are extremely small, ranging from hundreds to thousands (with some exceptions). The reindeer-grazing groups in (4) and (5) range in population from 10,000 to tens of thousands; and the steppe livestock-grazing peoples in (6) constitute a society of hundreds of thousands of people (Levin & Potapov, 1964). Of these groups, the Buryats lived on the steppes around Lake Baikal, as other Siberian Indigenous peoples, at the start of the 20th century. However, the Sakha were distributed around the taiga in eastern Siberia. Therefore, while the Sakha originated in the steppes, in reality, they must be considered in the context of adapting to the forests.

In the early 20th century before socialist policy implementation, the Sakha in the taiga formed a society of hundreds of thousands of people, which greatly differed from other neighboring groups. In this context, population scale is an important indicator of whether environmental adaptation has been successful. My question is, how could we explain the horse-cattle pastoralism of the Sakha people in the forests of Siberia? Why did their adaptation succeed in a forest environment that was so different from that of the steppe of their former homeland, and what meaning does this success have in the history of human adaptability?

THE HISTORIC FORMATION OF ALAAS AND GRASSLAND RESOURCING

The origin of permafrost and the two forest types in the taiga

Permafrost develops in high latitude areas of the Eurasian landmass and the Americas. However, in the North American continent and western Eurasia, permafrost is limited to the vicinity of the extreme north coastal areas. In comparison, eastern Siberian permafrost is latitudinally widespread with some regions in Mongolia as its southern limit. Past climatic and environmental conditions are responsible for the geographic expansion. During the Last Glacial Stage, Scandinavian ice sheets developed in Northwestern Europe and Western Siberia, and the surface of the land was covered by ice. However, the ice did not extend to Eastern Siberia. As a result, permafrost formed when cold air permeated the ground surface and froze the water in the soil. In western Eurasia the ice sheets acted as an insulator that shut cold air out into the atmosphere (Fukuda, 1996; Grosswald, 1998; Svendsen et al., 1999). This historical coincidence resulted in conditions that allowed the later formation of the alaas landscape in Siberian boreal forests.

Ecologically speaking, the forests of Siberia can be divided into two regions. In western Siberia, dark evergreen conifers, specifically spruce and fir, are predominant. In comparison, Eastern Siberia has bright, deciduous conifers, and Dahurian larch and birch predominate. While in terms of climate classification, Siberia is entirely in a frigid zone, the dissimilarity in vegetation arises from the difference in soil composition. In the east, permafrost runs from the Arctic coast to subarctic Lake Baikal, whereas in the west, it is found only at around 70 degrees north latitude with no permafrost further south. A general condition for forest formation must also be considered—a threshold at 300 mm of annual rainfall during the warm season. Annual rainfall in western Siberia is 400–500 mm, and this volume is sufficient for forest formation. On the other hand, eastern Siberia is extremely dry. There, annual

rainfall is only around 200–300 mm—the same rainfall level as that of the climate of the steppes. For example, in 2009, the city of Yakutsk had 236.9 mm of rainfall, while Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia had 217 mm. That is to say, if we only look at rainfall amounts, it is unusual that forests form in eastern Siberia (Fukuda, 1996; Sugimoto, 2015).

The explanation for the presence of forests in eastern Siberia lies in the permafrost, in which the water in the ground is frozen year-round. In the three-month long summers, the soil near the ground surface—the active layer—thaws due to solar heat. The water supplied by the active layer enables formation of the forests (French, 2007). We should additionally note that forest formation is also supported by traces of material cycles that have been stored in the past. The predominance of Dahurian larch can be explained by the evolution of vegetation in the environment; it is extremely resistant to cold and can withstand temperatures reaching minus 70 degrees Celsius. The leaves that fall in the autumn provide a cover that prevents transpiration from the soil and retains moisture in an otherwise dry climate (Sakai & Saito, 1974).

Recent natural science deepens the understanding of this mechanism. During the summer permafrost-thaw period, larch roots gain moisture from rhizomes in the active layer near the ground surface and deeper underground. Just as vegetation responds to differences in rainfall, plants use moisture from the active level near the surface as well as from the deeper frozen ground. Permafrost impacts the water balance (the total amount of precipitation (snow) and evapotranspiration in local ecosystems. Furthermore, since 2004 the active layer has been observed to become thicker and deeper every year, meaning moisture from a deeper level is mixed with the moisture composition from the ground surface (Ohta et al., 2008).

Alaases

Alaases are grasslands with saucer-shaped depressions that usually contain lakes. The depressions vary in size from 15 to 50 km in diameter, and their depths are from meters to tens of meters. Seen from the air, these landforms appear as countless holes in a carpet of green trees (Sakai & Kinoshita, 1974). There are approximately 16,000 alaases across the region (Bosikov 1991).

Past climate change has contributed to the formation of these alaases. The development of alaases in Central Yakutia dates back to the early Holocene, about 10,000–8,000 years ago (Katamura et al., 2006). Since the late Ice Age, the once-dominant grassland landscape called mammoth steppes was replaced by a forest ecosystem dominated by larch and pine, as permafrost began to thaw due to global warming during this same period. The current alaas landform is a result of high temperatures and inadequacy of the drainage from the soil (Crate et al., 2017; Katamura et al., 2009). Here the precipitation accumulates in permafrost, and it delays contributing to the local topography and flora both in short and long term.

Reasons for permafrost development and grassland resourcing

Archaeological and oral tradition analysis shows that the Sakha people first migrated northward and reached a river terrace in the Lena River middle basin. Then they advanced further inland and their territory spread across the almost entirety of

eastern Siberia. This successful expansion depended on grassland resources from both *alaases* and the river terraces.

The traditional livelihood of Sakha requires hay for their livestock for wintering. *Alaases* and river terraces provide it, therefore, these lands are a key means for its pastoral production. Historians have reported the land tenure of these grounds and its conflicts and trades among Sakha people in the tsarist Russian regime (Borisov, 2003; Ivanov, 1992). An anthropologist has properly paid attention to the local perception of *alaases* as an interaction space for people and animals, and also an object for ownership with its place name. It is a place with benevolent gods and spirits encouraging the subsistence activities, which sharply contrasts with the local perception of forest (Meszaros, 2012). This could be seen also in the river terrace. Another anthropologist has also examined the grassland as a ritual space. He recorded the local term *sir-uot* referring to ancestral land in *alaases* or river terraces. It is a compound word meaning land and fire, or stove (Takakura, 2015). It is critical to note that people have developed special perceptions of the space resourcing hay. Even today, the Sakha use the terms *khocho oghoto* (child of the terrace) and *alaas oghoto* (child of the *alaas*) to describe one's region of origin.

HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION

The concept of nature-on-the-move

I have examined the relationship between the ecological adaptations of the Sakha people and natural history from both short- and long-term viewpoints. To consider this issue theoretically, below I use the perspective of human-environment interaction in human ecology.

Currently, in most social sciences, the environment is only recognized as a background or as a physical space for people to create unilaterally usable and manipulatable resources. Malthusian thinking represents the mainstream of anti-environmental determinism; it states that population size will exponentially increase for any group with sufficient food supply. However, agricultural production increasing at only an arithmetic rate will not impact population growth. As a result, factors such as sickness, war, and hunger, which serve to check the population size, reduce pressure on resources. The thinking here is that while the environment is regarded as a limiting factor on human society, “how environment molds culture” or the reverse question are out of scope (Moran, 2000: 39). This approach lacks the perspective on the possibility of societies creating new resources or raising carrying capacity. The Malthusian mindset has challenges in explaining the cultural diversity of human ecological adaptations.

Alternatively, Easter Boserup argues that population growth or nutrition stress is an independent variable that leads to innovation of subsistence strategies in a given environment (Boserup, 1981; Ellen, 1994). Population pressure invents the possibility of societies creating new resources as a way of subsistence. Boserup's approach helps explain cultural diversity in the same environment according to the population size. A related view is the concept of historical possibilism which can address why human organizations simultaneously form different livelihood adaptations in a same/similar

geographic environment. According to this theory, while nature defines human potential, it is historical and cultural elements that explain what possibility is chosen.

The concept of human-environment interaction concerns the interaction of people and environment as a dialectical and diachronic process. It originates from Darwin's evolutionary theory and includes cultural ecology, ecosystem ecology, historical ecology, and social-ecological systems. Research focuses on the technology for local resource acquisition, homeostasis functioning between environment and society, historical modification in ecosystems, and relations between local and global environment change (Moran & Brondizio, 2013). My idea of the nature-on-the-move focuses on human-environment interactions, as a diachronic analysis of living ecological systems similar to historical ecology. The perspective stresses the inextricable link of human actions and physical environment, understanding the mutual influence of culture and biological process, or arguing the conventional distinction between wild and domesticated (Rival, 2006: 580). The nature-on-the-move includes the diachronic analysis of human and non-human interaction as well as the historical ecology, although the concept highlights non-biotic elements and its material circulation linking to climate and topography. It also implies physical environmental change without human actions.

Arctic environment adaptation in macro viewpoint

The Arctic environment is characterized by extremely cold weather, low biological production in land-based ecosystems, drastic shifts in daylight length according to the season, and dangers of working in an environment of snow and ice. For example, due to the low land-based biological production environment in tundra, "the Inuit turn(s) to ocean resources...and to animals that migrate between the Arctic tundra and the subarctic taiga." Their lifestyle can be seen as the result of ecological adaptation to "either land or coastal resources" (Moran, 2000: 113, 116). This adaptation is also similar to that of Indigenous cultures represented by the Chukchi people of Northeast Siberia. A characteristic of the Chukchi subsistence complex is the continuum between the extremes of land-based reindeer herding and coastal hunting and fishing. These regionally distributed groups change the ratio of this combination depending on various factors such as climate and social events (Krupnik, 1993).

Arctic biomass indicates the potential for land-based hunting and reindeer herding (as presented above, reindeer herding was conducted for meat, not for milk) as well as coastal hunting and fishing. A macro-environment defines habitat conditions for both flora and fauna, which are primary resources for livelihood cultures. The first human group in Siberia ca. 30,000 years ago never had domesticated plants or animals. Amidst these conditions, groups that were regionally distributed in Siberia adapted in their own ways according to resource conditions that the environment provided. The hunting-fishing complex must have been observed between the land and the coast. Supposedly a given pattern among the livelihood complexes was selection according to the environmental resources and historical process of the group. The result would be a precondition of the Siberian economic and cultural typology introduced above (Levin & Cheboksarov, 1955). However, in this typology there is a macro-level understanding of the natural environment under consideration, and this understanding is premised on there being no changes in the environment. Yet, as we

have seen, the harsh cold Siberian environment changes with great dynamism in both the short and long-term.

Immediate and delayed hydrological effects

With this in mind, I will reconsider Sakha cattle and horse livestock pastoralism based on nature-on-the-move. Natural scientists indicate thermokarst depressions spread in the northern forests of Eastern Siberia during the early Holocene. As a result, an ecosystem of *alaas* topography, grasslands, and lakes spread in the forests. This environment produced an ecosystem which created the conditions for hay production from its grasslands and fishing from its lakes. These environmental conditions are not present across Siberia in its entirety. If we look at Eastern Siberia from a micro-viewpoint, we can discern differences in the ecosystems.

In human cultural history, sheep, goats, and cattle were domesticated in the Middle East, 6,000 to 7,000 years ago, and this domestication was followed by milk pastoralism. Then the reindeer domestication occurred in Southern Siberia in the first millennium AD, and a herding culture centered on breeding of service animals was soon established (Vainstein, 1980). Reindeer herding was subsequently incorporated into the subsistence of many Siberian ethnic groups. Theoretically speaking, the *alaases* could have been useful as pasture land for raising reindeer, and it would not be surprising to find that people who herded reindeer for meat used the *alaases* where a large amount of grass/hay was available. However, historically speaking, this did not happen because reindeer do not prefer hay. The culture (the domesticated animal) did not interact with the thermokarst topography (*alaas*) as a local environment.

In contrast, only the Sakha migrating from the south recognized the *alaases* as a new resource and began to actively use them. They began using the *alaas* grassland for grazing or harvesting to raise the livestock of horse and cattle. In particular, cattle and some pregnant mares needed to be housed for wintering, and hay was an essential resource. The Sakha were the first to make a sedentary adaptation inland. They lived a transhumant life between summer (*sailyk*) and winter settlements (*kystyk*) in the early 20th century. A family, or several, lived together in *alaas* settlement and changed to a different *alaas* once during a year. The traditional residence is equipped with the human dwelling (*balagan*) and barn (*khoton*) for cattle. Their horses were divided by horse band (*tabun*), which is a single male unit (harem) composed of 10–20 mares and one stallion. These horse bands were managed by the year-long grazing or leaving from human control in remote *alaases* as pasture. The *alaas* is a key topography for their residence and livestock breeding. The foundation of this unique Sakha strategy was the resources that adapted to micro-environments.

The recent impact of global warming in this region has caused an unprecedented increase in seasonal rainfall, which adversely impacts the productivity of these grasslands. Therefore, cattle and horse breeding established in the “cycle of ecosystem services” are now in crisis because of reduced production of hay (Crate, 2017; Stammler-Gossman, 2012). Correspondingly, the local authorities bought the hay from unaffected nearby or distant regions and delivered it by truck to where it was required. In the course of current climate change, Sakha’s pastoral adaptation in the *alaas* will increase the dependency of the transportation infrastructure or social-economic institutions rather than the interaction of local environment (Takakura,

2016). In this sense, the nature-on-the-move both in short and long terms opens up the possibility of diversity in human ecological adaptation and also conditions their limitations. The key phenomena of the nature-on-the-move for this chapter is the hydrologic cycle in the local environment. Precipitation causes an immediate effect in tropical, dry, temperate environments. Precipitation behaves differently in colder regions, since snow and ice generate both immediate and delayed effects in the environment. Permafrost strongly delays precipitation effects in the local hydrology, generating plural water circulations with different speeds through the ground. These circulations result in contrasting effects in the local environment, which have various short- and long-term results. These complex nature-on-the-move conditions support human versatility or maladaptation. While the delayed hydrological effects in the past were benevolent for adaptation, the immediate hydrological effect at the present is a disaster for the Sakha people.

CONCLUSION

Unraveling the cultural history of cattle and horse herding of the Sakha, who appeared in the forests of Eastern Siberia, has shown that humans adapt to a certain degree of environmental change; as a result, a variety of livelihood complexes are formed, which contributes to human cultural diversity. While I do not deny the importance of cultural relativism for explaining cultural diversity, I would like to emphasize the understanding of this relationship from the stance of the evolution of culture responding to changes in the natural environment.

Analysis from the perspective of the nature-on-the-move, which keeps in mind natural changes in the environment, enables an understanding of the more dynamic interaction between an environment and a culture. It is important to understand this environment from the viewpoint of changing nature. Furthermore, in addition to understanding the macro-environment from a broad perspective, it is also important to account for the perspective of a micro-environment where a given human group lives. In particular, this paper has raised the importance not only of ecosystems of plants and animals but also of the environmental history of human groups, with the geological feature of permafrost and its related material cycle being a key factor.

I emphasize the importance of the premise that the environment is constantly and continuously subject to change with or without human intervention. I call this phenomenon nature-on-the-move in this chapter. While this may be obvious for natural scientists, they even named the Anthropocene—or the geological time of human-beings in the modern era (from the 17th and 18th centuries until now)—as the time showing significant anthropogenic impacts on Earth (Crutzen, 2002; Lewis & Maslin, 2015). Social scientists should disregard the idea of a culture-dynamic and nature-stable backyard regardless of the entry of the Anthropocene. This chapter premised that nature is ever-changing both in biotic and non-biotic systems, which is a decisive perspective to explain both the formations of human subsistence and cultural diversity. While the natural environment is on the move, human groups can select hunting and gathering or livestock and agriculture as a livelihood with the influence of historic-cultural continuity. Human subsistence adaptations are formed in a variable and plastic manner by both environmental and historical factors that change in unison. These adaptations always occur according to a variety of situations, and they are not irreversible processes.

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CHAPTER 12

FLUCTUATING HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONS

Soiot herder-hunters of South-Central Siberia



Alex C. Oehler

The Sayan-Altai region has been an influential melting pot of cultures from where important cultural and linguistic trends dispersed in all directions, most prominently into northern Eurasia. Famously, the region has been hailed as birthplace of shamanism (Devlet, 2001; Devlet & Devlet, 2002), as *urheimat* of Turkic languages (Golden, 2006; Menges, 1995), and as “cradle of Eurasian reindeer domestication” (Vitebsky, 2006: 25; Ingold, 1980: 84). In particular, reindeer have dominated scholarly attention in the study of small-scale societies occupying the heartland of this “cradle” situated between the Inner Asian steppe and Eurasian taiga. What is often lost on the reader are the deep connections that exist between taiga and steppe dwellers, both historically and at present. It takes only a little scratching at the surface of the region’s ethnohistory to reveal the flexibility with which people have transitioned between modes of subsistence and landscapes in this unique part of the world.

In this chapter I examine the interconnectedness of reindeer breeding with the breeding of other species in Soiot communities where I have been conducting fieldwork since 2012 (Oehler 2020a). I interrogate some of the ongoing connections between diverse but related landscapes, small-scale societies, and species to highlight how local households experiment with species composition. Openness to experimentation, I believe, lies at the heart of the resilience that allows communities to maintain a sustainable existence in this mountain region. Furthermore, I argue fluctuations in species emphasis and subsistence should not only be interpreted in light of cataclysmic events—be they climatic, settler-, or state-related—but also in terms of larger recurring patterns of occupational fluctuation throughout the history and prehistory of the region. The chapter begins with some historical background, pointing to the pastoral ties of Soiot taiga dwellers. It then takes a closer look at their historical transition from reindeer to cattle before looking at examples of past and ongoing experimentation with species combinations in households.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Okinskii District, locally also known as “Oka,” is the westernmost district of the Republic of Buryatia in South-Central Siberia.¹ It is located in the isolated Eastern Saian Mountains, wedged between the Tunka Peaks north of Mongolia, the Tozhu

District of the Republic of Tyva, and Irkutskaiia oblast'. As the republic's fourth largest district (26,594 square kilometers), Oka's terrain is marked by a relief fluctuating between 700 and 3,400 meters elevation. It is Buryatia's most sparsely populated district, with 3,880 of its 5,894 residents self-identifying as Oka Soiets (Okinskii raion, 2020 [2017]). The remaining population consists largely of Oka-Buriats, descendants of pastoralists who came to support new border posts that were installed following the establishment of the boundary between Manchuria and the Russian Empire in 1727 (Sharastepanov, 2008: 9).

Russian ethnographer Larisa Pavlinskaia (2002), identifies the earliest Russian mention of an Indigenous population in Oka in a Tsarist document of 1636, which references "Kasais"—a term later used for Soiets of southeast Oka. Previous mention of people living here comes from Chinese documents mentioning Uighur taxation. In 1651, Sevast'ian Samsonov of Nizhneudinsk is the first Russian colonizer to enter Oka to collect sable pelt taxes (Rus. *iasak*). In 1658, the cruelties of another colonizer, Ivan Pokhabov of Bratsk (northeast of Nizhneudinsk), result in a mass migration of Buriats from Prebaikalia to the steppes of Mongolia. Passing through the Eastern Saians, members of the Onkhot clan assimilate into Soiot society. Four years later, a pogrom by Russian tax collectors on Khaasut residents marks the end of Russian-Indigenous contact for several years. Pavlinskaia thinks most residents had fled to Mongolia with their cattle or otherwise hid with their reindeer in the taiga.

Aside from early tax and pogrom-related encounters, Oka managed to evade the attention of explorers and ethnographers for a long time.² In part, this may be due to its inaccessibility. A gravel road was built only in 1993 (Varfolomeeva, 2020). During Tsarist times, a 165-kilometer long horse track had been the only link to the outside world, and during the Soviet era a drivable winter route (Rus. *zimnik*) was added, which operated from late December to late March (Ivanov, 2020). Yet, even late into the Soviet years, local medical personnel regularly rode the old track on horseback to reach patients between the settlements of Orlik and Sorok. There also survives an infrequently used network of taiga routes for horses and reindeer, connecting Oka to its neighboring and similarly isolated regions. Many of these routes strategically accommodate the needs of different transport animals (see Oehler & Rassadin, 2020). This network predates the regional and international boundaries that now divide the formerly nomadic residents of the Eastern Saians.

During the late 17th and early 18th centuries, Oka Soiets commonly intermarried with clans of eastern Tyva, the Tunka Valley, and Tofalaria (Petri, 1927; Pavlinskaia, 2002). Following Soviet ethnographer Boris Osipovich Dolgikh (1960: 259), Pavlinskaia writes (2002: 42):

in 1658 the Ukhar *ulus* (Mon. people, nation) were known to reside in the Sayan territory (today's Todzhinskii district of eastern Tyva), and a little later they migrated first to Tofalaria, then appeared in Kaisot territory (southeastern Oka, bordering the Tunka Valley), before finally migrating to Pre-Khubsugul (Khövsgöl aimag), where they are now considered part of the Darkhad clans.

Interregional marriages had formed an interconnected populace across today's bounded administrative districts.³ As Pavlinskaia's (2002) account suggests, new administrative boundaries and later Soviet division into collective farms and villages

reduced contact, fostering a growing sense of ethnic differentiation between Tozhus, Tofas, Dukhas, Darkhads, and Soiets (see Figure 12.1).

Pavlinkaia (2002) argues, contemporary Soiets constitute a new ethnos, albeit with deep regional roots. She points to the early 17th century, when Irkit, Khaasut, Soiot, and Eudints—all medieval Inner Asian ethnic minorities—settled in both Tunka and Oka. Irkits were hunters who bred reindeer as a means of transportation, and they had settled at higher elevations on upper Oka, Gargan, Tustuk, Sorok, Kitoi, Onot, and Urik Rivers, as well as on Lakes Il'chir, Tunku-nur, and Khara-nur. Khaasuts were transhumant pastoralists who had settled along Khor, Dibi, Balykta, and Tisyn-gol Rivers. A small number of reindeer-herding Khaasuts also had joined Irkits in higher terrain to the southeast, but the majority were at home in northern and western Khubsugul (Mongolia). Reindeer-herding Soiets occupied upper Irkit and Kitoi Rivers, while cattle raising Soiets migrated through the Tunka Valley and eastern Pre-Khubsugul. Eudint cattle pastoralists lived in northwestern Oka, along Oka and Sense-gol Rivers, and down to Khoito-Oka River. As we shall see, the roots of this diverse occupancy reach into an ethnically tumultuous period.

Some of the earliest evidence of Stone Age hunters and fishers inhabiting Oka (25,000–15,000 BCE) is found on the banks of Bulag-Shebei River near the village of Khuzhir. The majority of these sites belong to later Neolithic and Bronze Age Proto-Samoyedic sites on Zhombolok River (Dashibalov, 2000; Vainshtein, 1980a). These people would have spoken a Samoyedic dialect belonging to the Uralic language family (Chernetsov, 1973) of present-day Nenets, Enets, Nganasans, and Selkups. In fact, Tundra Enets of the “Soita” sub-clan have claimed the name of the Saian Range to be of their origin (Vasil'ev, 1979: 38–39). After the year 758, these people likely became tax subjects of Turkic-speaking Uighur neighbors who pushed Samoyedic speakers northward, setting in motion a regional language shift to the Uighur group of Turkic languages, a process that lasted until the 17th century (Pavlinkaia, 2002; Rassadin, 1971). Then, following the arrival of Buryat settlers to Oka in the early 18th century, a second language shift began.

Buryat settlers had been practicing shamanism, and many followed a regional mountain cult (Galdanova, 2000). Beginning in the late 19th century, a large section of these settlers converted from shamanism to Buddhism, which spread regionally until the repression of religious activities under Stalin (ca. 1926–1931) (Sharastepanov, 2008). From ca. 1890–1926, Buryat lamas forbade Turkic Soiot shamanic chants at most ancestral sites of worship throughout Oka (Rassadin, 2012; Sharastepanov, 2008). This marginalization was followed by Soviet attempts to eradicate a distinct Soiot identity. Combined with ongoing intermarriage with Buryat families in the new-formed settlements of collective farms, the second Soiot language shift—this time from Turkic Soiot to Buryat—was complete by the 1970s (Rassadin, 2012). The state now identified Soiets as a subgroup of the larger Buryat nationality, effectively eradicating Soiets, along with several other minorities across the Soviet Union, from the census register (Sokolova & Stepanov, 2008).

Responding to decades of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic repression in 1993, Oka Soiets formed an association to lobby for their own “Soiot national” administrative sub-district, which they were granted the following year. The 1995 Oka census reported 1,973 residents declaring Soiot nationality, and by 1999, 2,039 (43.7% of the total population) identified as Soiot (Pavlinkaia, 2002: 65). In March

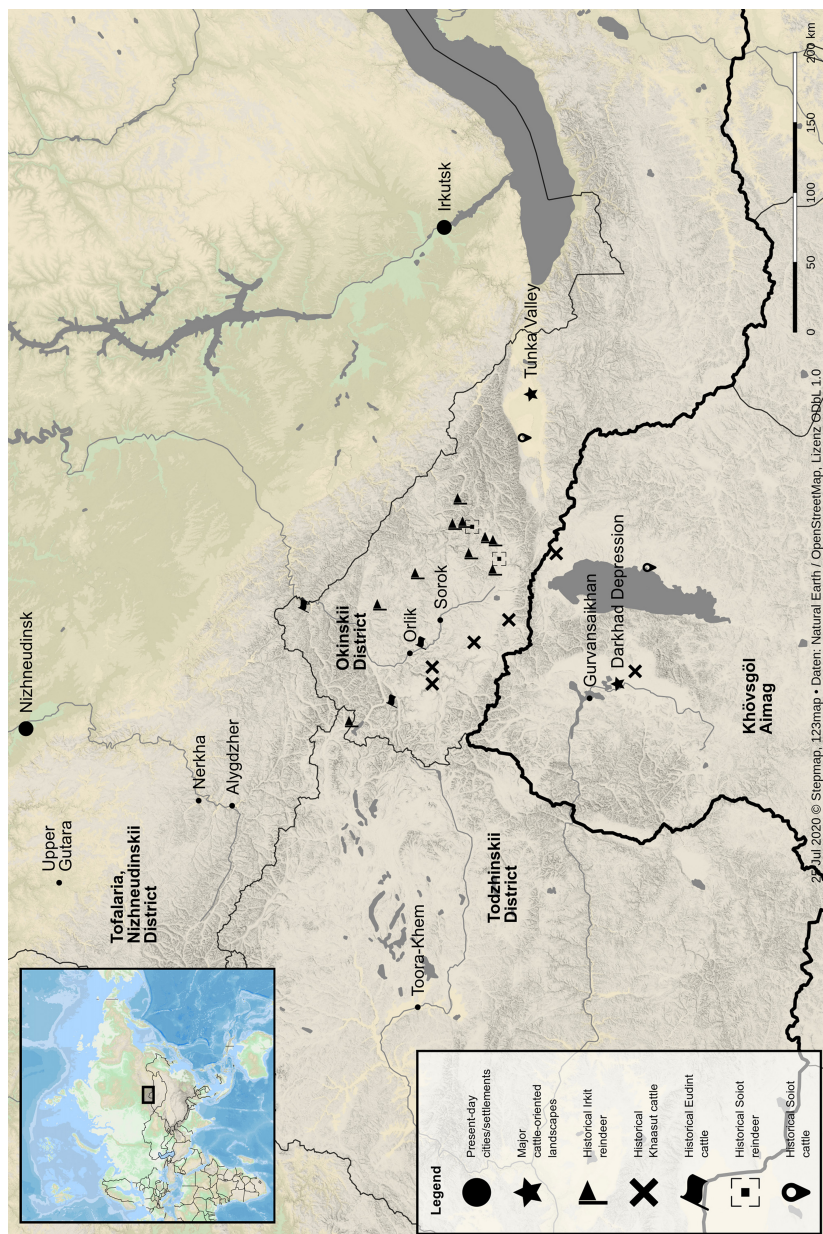


Figure 12.1 Map of the Eastern Saian mountain region with approximate locations of 17th century Soiot occupation. By author, based on Pavlinskaia 2002.

of 2000 the federal government officially recognized Soiot as one of the Small-Numbering Peoples of the Russian Federation. Turkic Soiot began to be taught at the local school in Sorok, and attempts were made to reintroduce reindeer husbandry (Rassadin, 2012; Oehler, 2018). Soiot status has since become a politically charged topic with much of the contention relying on the notion that “true” Soiot were Turkic-speaking descendants of Samoyedic reindeer herders, and that by assimilating into Buryat society contemporary Soiot lost their right to self-determination. I wish to dispel such narrow understandings of ethnicity, calling into question a single “authentic” Soiot mode of subsistence.

PAST AND PRESENT TRANSITIONS

One of the first ethnographers who seriously inquired into Soiot life was Swiss-Russian scholar Bernhard E. Petri (1927) from Irkutsk University.⁴ Although the bulk of his findings were lost as a result of state repression (Sirina, 1999; Manushkina & Sirina, 2009), the surviving materials from his visits with Soiot and Tofas bear evidence of a keen awareness of the nuanced and fluctuating role of animals in these peoples’ lives. His Soiot expedition was funded by the Northern Committee (1924–1934) and the Siberian Red Cross Society.⁵ Following their mandates, Petri sought demographic, statistical, and medical information (Petri, 1927), coinciding with the aims of the 1926/27 Soviet Polar Census Expeditions, which were being conducted all across the Soviet North in the same year (see Anderson, 2011). Only six photographs—taken by Petri and his colleague Poltoradnev—survive from the expedition (Manushkina & Sirina, 2009). One of the photographs, shown below (Figure 12.2),



Figure 12.2 Photograph, orig. caption: “Soiot expedition of Professor B. E. Petri 1926. Soiot elder. Well expressed Turkic face type. Il’chir encampment.” Irkutsk Regional Museum Archives, F477 (F6934).

depicts a Soiot elder near Lake Il'chir, which was one of the last encampments of the reindeer breeding Irkit clan.

Even at Lake Il'chir, Soiots soon adopted a lifestyle of cattle-based alpine transhumance.⁶ In spite of its Buryat flavor, Petri saw this transition as a self-determined choice—one that was Soiot-initiated, rather than state-imposed. Nonetheless, he painted this transition as deeply profound. At present, a similarly dramatic transition is witnessed in Dukha reindeer-herding households, who have been prohibited by the Mongolian state to engage in subsistence hunting on their lands (Rasiulis, 2020; Endres, 2015). Turkish anthropologist Selcen Küçüküstel (2021: x) states: “Unfortunately, I have witnessed those tragic moments while I was in the field and have had the chance to observe how those changes have been affecting the community.” Since Dukha reindeer herding is contingent on a subsistence hunting economy, it will be interesting to see how people respond to the challenge. Like their Soiot neighbors of 120 years ago, many Dukha families transitioned to cattle pastoralism long before the ban was in place, leading to the question: what is a Dukha way of life?

Fittingly, Petri's 1926 research was guided by two main research questions: 1) is it possible to identify a specifically Soiot subsistence strategy? 2) What are the positive and negative effects of Soiot transitioning from mobile reindeer breeding to transhumant cattle pastoralism? In his preliminary findings, Petri describes this transition, attributing it primarily to intermarriages with Buryat pastoralist settlers (Petri, 1927). However, he may also have seen it as natural progression, being a cultural evolutionist influenced by the ideas of Pierre P. Brok (1824–1880), Edward B. Taylor (1832–1917), and Friedrich W. Radlov (1837–1918) (Sirina, 1999). From the standpoint of a unilinear trajectory of cultural progress, Soiot transition from hunting and gathering to pastoralism may have seemed inevitable. Rather than protecting pre-settler livelihoods, Petri thus sought to defend new-found Soiot pastoralism by lobbying for the creation of a protected cultural subsistence zone (Rus. *kul'tbaza*). We are left wondering whether he did not also see these developments as part of a larger and recursive regional heritage.

In his preliminary report Petri (1927: 13–14) writes:

For several generations, Soiots have gained life experience, having experienced on themselves all the consequences of the transition from one form of subsistence to another. The account of this experience, made by the expedition, provided valuable material for the development of an exemplary project of a protected cultural subsistence zone [*kul'tbaza*]. At the same time, this material warns the organizers of protected cultural zones about fatal errors that will seriously affect the weakly resistant organisms of the last representatives of the ancient aborigines of Siberia.⁷

Given centuries of adaptation and innovation, perhaps Petri's styling of Soiots as “last representatives” with “weakly resistant organisms” is an attempt to mobilize outside support for Soiot self-determination. The idea of a “protected cultural zone,” after all, referred to an area in which Indigenous residents could carry out their own subsistence activities, rather than having to adopt new economic practices, such as intensive agriculture, which in many places was being pushed on people (Ivanov et al., 2008; Petri, 1928). For Petri it was important that Soiots would be able to continue to practice a combination of pastoral transhumance along with seasonal taiga hunting, a regime to which they had transitioned on their own.⁸

WHY SOIOT HOUSEHOLDS NO LONGER HOLD DEER

Petri's observations of a transition from small-scale reindeer breeding to alpine yak and cattle pastoralism resonate to this day. There are good ecological, logistical, and social reasons for Soiot having initially been split into reindeer and yak breeding groups. As I have shown elsewhere (Oehler, 2020b), alpine yak herding, dairy cattle breeding, and reindeer keeping—in spite of some overlap in terms of required landscapes—have their cardinal differences. Yak and reindeer both seek higher elevation in summer, but require different feed and move in different patterns. Reindeer spread out as they forage for lichens above the tree line and on steep and thickly forested slopes. Yak stay together as they feed on shrubs and grasses located on steep and exposed hillsides. Dairy cows (locally referred to as “Mongolian cows,” Rus. *mongolki*) were adopted by Soiot at the turn of the century (Petri, 1927).⁹ They are moved between seasonally rotated pastures found in sheltered valleys, which helps explain early Khaasut and Eudint occupational territories (see map).

Because of their broad dispersal in the forest, reindeer are more difficult to round up at the end of the day when they are driven back to the protection of a corral. Locating all animals often requires the assistance of multiple herders. Yak, on the other hand, thanks to their tendency to stay together in groups, are much easier to locate and drive back to camp.¹⁰ Because they are rarely obstructed by trees in their grazing, it is easier to spot them from afar, saving herders much time and energy as they can perform head counts from the bottom of a valley. Mongolian dairy cattle are kept in close range to human encampments in summer and winter valleys. While this eases regular milking and provides shelter from predators, it also demands regular pasture rotation, fertilization, irrigation, and scheduled hay making for the winter. Particularly hay making calls for a large number of people to work together over a short but intensive period of time.¹¹ This task is especially difficult to accomplish if adult household members are tied up in remote locations tending to reindeer.

Although there existed a strong desire among many Soiot of the early 1990s to bring back their ancestral language, along with the practice of reindeer keeping and extensive winter hunting, much of the knowledge of this way of life had been lost. Since there had been no reindeer in Oka since 1963, a new herd had to be acquired from Tofalaria. When the herd had arrived in Oka, only a handful of elders had limited experience with the species. Several of them had spent their childhood summers observing relatives tend to reindeer owned by the collective farm in the 1950s. Having been raised around dairy cattle, sheep, and horses, the younger generation tried out different ways of reconciling reindeer husbandry with other species of the Soiot household. Not only had reindeer been absent for nearly 30 years, Soiot households themselves were only beginning to reorganize into family-based units after the privatization of collective farms. Under these conditions of drastic societal change, including the establishment of family homes in pasture lands where kolkhoz cattle had previously grazed, new Soiot reindeer herders experienced many setbacks.

Historically, Soiot had resided in the upper reaches of Sorok, Tustuk, and Kitoi rivers. From here they had been resettled into centralized villages in the late 1920s, and into the early 1940s. Following privatization of collective farms in the 1990s, many families left the villages to set up summer and winter herding camps in the back-country. Establishing their new homes, they had not anticipated reindeer. When the

reindeer herd arrived in Oka, it was not divided among individual households. Instead, the herd was to be owned collectively, and after a few herders had been trained by a Tofa instructor, it became the responsibility of a single family who were paid for their additional labour. To everyone's surprise, the deer peacefully bedded down alongside horses, cows, sheep, and dogs in a shared valley, and during the day they foraged for lichen in the surrounding mountains. Very soon, however, it became clear that the deer were contracting cattle borne diseases in such a setting. Additionally, thin snow cover in the sheltered valleys exposed the deer to countless wolf attacks.

Petri reports observing Sojots of the 1920s tasking a chosen household with herding deer from multiple households, thus setting their owners free to tend to an increasing number of yak and dairy cattle. In the case of sheep, this form of collective herding is still practiced by Sojots today. Sheep-owning households will drive their flock to a neighbor who will look after multiple flocks over the summer. In principle, this is the same mechanism used by early 19th century Sojot households, many of which owned only a few transport reindeer for the winter hunt. However, due to their confinement in valleys, sheep are much less work intensive than reindeer. It is primarily for this reason, I believe, that the cost of re-introducing reindeer to individual households was too high. Consequently, either a single family had to take responsibility, or the population would have to split into cattle and reindeer-herding groups again. At the time of writing, the reindeer are kept on upper Onot River in traditional Irkit/Sojot territory by the Shasnur family.¹²

ON THE ROOTS OF SOJOT MULTISPECIES EXPERIMENTATION

At the time of agreeing to herd reindeer, the Shasnurs already owned many other species, including horses. Unlike most other Sojot householders, Iumzhap and Tserigma Shasnur were soon riding their horses alongside newly trained reindeer in dog assisted fall and winter hunts. Interestingly, people did not always ride deer in the Saians. Samoyedic taiga dwellers of the Eastern Saians are thought to have followed the seasonal migrations of their reindeer herds, using them as pack animals in the hunt long before attempting to ride them on a regular basis. Russian archaeologist Sevan I. Vainshtein (1980b) believes, consistent riding and dairying of reindeer emerged only with the arrival of Turkic horse-herding tribes, who, over the course of their settlement of Eastern Tyva, adopted many of the Samoyedic deer herding practices that had preceded their arrival.

Drawing on an early report by Russian ambassador Vasily Tumenets, Vainshtein and Dolgikh (1963) surmise domesticated reindeer were held by the ancestors of modern Tyvinians, the Kamasin (Koibal and Motor) ancestors of modern Tofas, and by the ancestors of Beltirs, as early as the early 17th century (Vainshtein, 1980b). By the second half of the 19th century, domesticated reindeer are reported among Tofas, Kamasins, Oka Sojots, and Darkhads (Petri, 1929; Tugarinov, 1926; Kropotkin, 1867; Badamkhatan, 1962; all in Vainshtein, 1980b), suggesting adoption of the practice by speakers of Turkic languages. These people used a reindeer muzzle design akin to horse tack, while their reindeer castration methods point to cattle castration techniques (Vainshtein, 1980b: 124, 126). Tozhus, many of whom also owned smaller numbers of horses, adapted lightened Buriat horse saddles to fit their deer, which they mounted like horses, from the left, while Tungus reindeer herders always

mounted from the right (Vainshtein, 1980b). Although Saian reindeer domestication may be ancient, with evidence of bridling for pack carrying going as far back as 2000 years, saddling reindeer for the purpose of riding may have come about only by the 14th century (Vainshtein, 1980b).

The application of equestrian practices (e.g. dairying and riding) to reindeer, serves as an example of a monumental feat in regional experimentation. In my own fieldwork, I have witnessed a number of less significant examples of experimentation. In 2014, a woman in the village of Sorok had begun milking goats, aimed at producing cheese for retail. People were debating the feasibility and benefits of such a practice in their own valleys. Meanwhile, a merchant from Irkutsk had been coming to Oka in spring, selling chickens. Poultry had never been part of the Soiot household, but people were open to trying something new. At first only a few households could justify the investment. This changed when it became apparent that hens survived the winter and continued to lay eggs the following year. In winter the chickens perched atop sheep inside winter stables, picking ticks off their backs. Other experiments were more challenging and less successful—a case in point being the reconciliation of migratory rhythms in cattle and deer.

Having been raised in yak and dairy cattle breeding households, Iumzhap and Tserigma Shasnur had to familiarize themselves with the feeding, mating, and migratory behavior of reindeer when they began caring for the reindeer herd. As one of the first young Soiot reindeer herders to receive training in the 1990s, Iumzhap decided in 2004 to experiment with a long-distance migratory style more akin to that of his ancestors. His aim had been to escape wolf predation, and to prevent cattle borne disease. From 2004 to 2010, he and members of his family annually moved the herd from a camp on Onot River in southeast Oka to his summer pasture on Upper Tustuk River in central Oka. This allowed him to check in on his own household during the summer. The 180-kilometer trek also secured several weeks of uninterrupted hunting and fishing, making use of the riding and transport abilities of trained horses and reindeer. Because the reindeer were still falling prey to wolves in 2010, Iumzhap and Tserigma decided to stop migrating the herd. Since then, Iumzhap has routinely been traveling to the herd on Onot River, where he keeps up with their training, taking the large males on hunting excursions in alpine terrain.

CONCLUSION

Thanks to Oka's landscape being at the crossroads of steppe and mountainous taiga, and due to repeated movement of people back and forth between these two distinct types of terrain, it is logical that Soiot herders would have been familiar with more than one domestic species, borrowing species-specific practices from both environments and cross-applying aspects of them to other species. In fact, the archaeological record tells us that Samoyedic people were established in both taiga and steppe environments as early as 2000 BCE (Chernetsov, 1963; Vainshtein, 1980b). This is not at all unlike contemporary Oka Soiets, some of whom have told me about their visits to cattle herding relatives in Darkhad Valley. An ancient relationship between taiga reindeer breeding and steppe pastoralism is further hinted at by the Great Boyar Engravings (Devlet, 1976) in the Minusinsk Depression. These rock carvings depict herds of cattle, sheep, goats, and deer, all held side by side.¹³ Several linguistic

survivals seem to confirm such interregional knowledge transfer. The Tozhu term for a riding deer is *kuudai*, meaning “gray horse,” and the Tofa term for doe is *ingen*, which in Mongolian stands for “female camel” (Vainshtein, 1980b). The latter example is not surprising, given the Darkhad Valley is the only location in the world where reindeer and camel routes still intersect (see Dashdorzh et al., 1989).

Interregional exchanges make sense in Oka, a territory that combines sheltered pastures with high elevation boreal and alpine lichen and shrubs. The diversity of this landscape lends itself to experimentation with animal compatibility. In spite of their ancient connections to cattle pastoralists outside Oka, cattle breeding has often been identified by outsiders as a settler practice to which Soiets gradually assimilated at the cost of their own cultural and ethnic identity. This view misses out on an older alpine yak pastoralism that predates the adoption of Mongolian dairy cattle. While intermarriage with Buriat settlers may have affected broad scale adoption of Mongolian cows in the early 19th century, mobile yak herding is thought by locals to have much deeper cultural roots.¹⁴ In my own fieldwork, Soiot elders often modelled yak and reindeer as equally emblematic of Soiot heritage—a heritage that was repeatedly threatened by Soviet attempts at eradicating both species.

Soiets seem to be the only of the four Indigenous Saian groups to have kept sizable yak herds. Like reindeer, domestic yak are highly self-sufficient, requiring no feed subsidy in most years. Unlike reindeer, they have no wild counterpart in Oka, freeing herders from the trouble of having to prevent unwanted cross breeding with a wild population. And, like reindeer, they are bred to retain a maximum of non-domestic features to secure their self-sufficiency and resilience. Since the introduction of Mongolian dairy cattle, hybrid offspring of yak have become a coveted combination of backcountry resilience with exceptional dairy productivity. The diversity of these species attests not only to the many directions in which Soiets trace their heritage, but also to their ongoing willingness to experiment with various life ways in a shared landscape. As Soiot identity continues to be debated, future research is needed to throw more light on the heritage of Soiot alpine yak pastoralism.

NOTES

- 1 Oka is referred to as Ахын аймаг (Akhyn aimag) in Buriat.
- 2 Excepting cursory investigations by the likes of Radde (1863), Kropotkin (1867), and Alibert (1865).
- 3 These districts are Todzhinskii district of the Republic of Tyva, Tofalariiia in Nizhneudinskii district of Irkutskaiia oblast', Okinskii district of the Republic of Buriatiiia, and Khövsgöl aimag in northern Mongolia.
- 4 Some of his colleagues also worked with Oka Soiets (e.g. Poltoradnev 1929; Nefed'ev & Gerasov 1929).
- 5 The Northern Committee was a Soviet public organization that influenced government policy for Indigenous peoples of the North. It had been developing principles and methods for land management in their territories and gave rise to ethnographic study of the nation's remote regions (Danileiko 2009:88). B. E. Petri was an active member of the organization.
- 6 In 2013, I was part of an expedition that also involved an archaeologist and two palynologists to search for the remains of late Irkit reindeer corrals at Lake Il'chir. Sadly, our surface survey was unsuccessful.

- 7 All translations into English, unless otherwise marked, were made by the author.
- 8 It never came to the formation of such a protected zone in the years following Petri's 1926 expedition, and until recently, various outside voices were lobbying for the formation of a TTP (territoriia traditsionnogo pol'zovania [territory of traditional use]) for Soioti conducting reindeer, cattle, and horse breeding, while also engaging in hunting, fishing, and gathering (e.g. Gulgenova 2009:25). In 2017 the Directorate for Traditional Soiot Land Use (direktsiia territorii traditsionnogo prirodo-pol'zovania soiotov) was formed as an autonomous municipal entity, tasked with the "social, economic, and cultural development of Soioti, the development, safe keeping, and revival of their language, the protection of their ancestral lands, traditional life ways, and subsistence economy, as well as the protection of their use, and assistance in their own protection, of lands and other natural resources." Source: <https://egov-buryatia.ru/oka/direktsiya-ttp/>.
- 9 The other two most common species are horses and sheep. Horses feed in surrounding forests and in remote valleys, but they are not driven home at night. Those selected for transportation are hobbled and kept within range when not in use. Sheep graze steep hills during the day, but are corralled at night.
- 10 In Oka, not all families drive their yak herds back to camp every night. Some allow their herds to roam for extended periods of time, with herders regularly visiting for head counts.
- 11 Recently introduced hand operated power sickle bar mowers have accelerated hay making, sometimes requiring fewer individuals.
- 12 Names have been changed throughout this chapter to secure the anonymity of my Soiot friends.
- 13 We cannot be certain the Boyar scenes depict an actual scenario witnessed by the artist (they may also represent illustrations of a metaphorical nature); at the very least they attest to a knowledge transfer between divergent regional life ways.
- 14 It should be pointed out that the arrival of Mongolian dairy cattle was likely a leading cause for a transition in the way people related to land, as the maintenance of relatively scarce hay producing pastures became a hereditary matter that would tie people to specific tracts of land (usually valleys).

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CHAPTER 13

ECOLOGY AND CULTURE

Two case studies of empirical knowledge among Katanga Evenkis of Eastern Siberia



Karl Mertens

INTRODUCTION

The Katanga Evenkis live in the boreal forest of northern Irkutskaja oblast', where they depend on the productivity of their ancestral homelands for their sustenance and cultural vitality (Landerer, 2009; Mertens, 2015, 2016; Sirina, 2006; Turov, Weber, & Maryniak, 2010). Their connection with the land extends across the cycles of seasons and the regeneration of fish, animals, and forests (Landerer, 2009; Sirina & Anderson, 2006; Turov et al., 2010). Their connection with the land also extends across their own lives, as they learn the patterns of nature through experience and teachings passed down from ancestors to elders and to children. Like all Indigenous peoples who maintain a connection with their ancestral land, how they conceive of the connections between their culture, their ancestors, and themselves is individually variable.

Living Evenkis and their ancestors have had lifetimes to accumulate observations and knowledge of the climate, habitat, and animals that surround them and to share this wisdom with their children and neighbors (Brandišauskas, 2009; Lavrillier & Gabyshev, 2017). However, during brief but intense fieldwork with Evenki families in Kochëma and Khamakar, two regions in the north of Irkutskaja oblast', Russian Federation, I investigated variation in subsistence patterns and decision-making processes with members of these two communities (Mertens, 2015). The Khamakar research participants divided their living time between hunting territories and villages, while the Kochëma research participants were nomadic reindeer herders, migrating across their territories during all seasons.

I found significant variation in the kinds and degree of knowledge and skill to which individuals laid claim. By that I mean, as an outsider with much less experience of the taiga than any of the Evenkis with whom I spoke, I am in no place to judge their acumen, but simply could ask questions and attempt to understand what people told me. Research participants would often tell me what they thought the state of their own knowledge or skill was compared to others. However, that is not the central question of this chapter. Instead, the question is *why, given the Evenkis' interconnectedness with the natural world, their personal observations, and learned knowledge, are their individual accounts of ecology (weather, animal behavior, etc.) so variable between individuals?*

One would think that individual learning and transmitted knowledge of the natural world would converge, that transmitted knowledge in particular would be a cohesive and reliable guide to ecology. In addressing this question, I will take two particular cases—sable ecology and snow properties—to illustrate the convergence and variety of perspectives that Evenkis communicated. The individuals mentioned below are referred to using pseudonyms.

SABLE ECOLOGY

Sable (*Martes zibellina*) is a medium-sized member of the mustelid family, harvested for its highly valuable fur. Interviewee comments indicated sables are usually solitary but sometimes found in pairs. During the fall hunting season, when sables are hunted with dogs, sometimes two sables will be found on the same or neighboring trees. This is an infrequent but not extraordinary occurrence. Sables eat a wide variety of food, such as birds, hares, carrion, berries, fish, squirrels, and muskrat. Evenkis characterized sables as being one of two kinds: local and migratory. They explained that local sables are mature and live within a territory, while juveniles cross the landscape and may cover long distances. They also said that the intensity of sables' movement varies by season: in mid-winter they move very little; into February and March they begin to be more active. Some identified late winter as the mating season, while others said it is in the fall months. Some suspect berry crops play a large role in affecting local sable populations. Depending on the availability of this food source, sable may be plentiful or locally disappear because they have migrated to other areas. Interestingly, in years when the berry crop is very good, sable neglect other resources, and Evenkis stated this makes the fur weak and prone to breakage. The Evenkis sell all marketable sable furs they harvest. Some individuals use sable carcasses as dog food, while others dispose of the carcasses in a culturally appropriate manner.

Methods for harvesting sable include hunting and trapping. Trapping is a passive method, allowing the individual to bait and check traps where and when desired. Hunting is an active method, taking time and effort only at the days and times allocated. Hunting can be more productive but is also more demanding in equipment, energy, and depends on having a good dog for this purpose.

Sable trapping is a simple process, but there are a number of nuances that reflect individual methods, knowledge of the environment, and animal behavior. Traps are laid out along a system of trails throughout the individual's territory. Sable traps are left in the taiga year-round and are rarely moved. To the point about individual variation in ecological knowledge, Evenkis gave differing answers regarding when and how traps are relocated. Some said traps are moved when they feel like it, or when they see that sables are no longer coming into the trap. Others said that if after a year or two sable does not fall into the trap it is relocated. None of the hunters were able to say who originally placed the traps on the territories they hunt, and it is likely that lands have changed hands many times since steel traps were introduced.

There are a number of reasons why traps are usually left in the same place year after year. First, sables have regular routes within their own territories along which they move and traps are located on these trails. Insofar as sables move along paths it makes sense to leave traps in the same places. Hunters described sable paths as passing through areas of cover from raptors that prey on sable and many of the same

species that sable hunt. Some areas in the environment provide fairly homogeneous cover, such as a stand of spruce or pine. Other areas have broken cover or no cover, such as a water body, tundra, marsh, or ridge line. In these and other locations there are pinch points where sable trails become more regular because of environmental configuration. Another example of concentration of paths is on the banks of a river or stream, where sables hunt many species that come near the water. Second, Evenkis said that it is largely younger sables that fall into traps. Mature sables generally have been caught and escaped, and so know how to avoid traps. Evenkis said that, like wolves, sable learn the smell of metal and avoid it. One of my interlocutors, Dima, said that along streams can be very good places to set traps and these traps give higher than average catches, once the right places are found. Third, leaving the traps in the taiga saves the trouble of placing them every year. This saves both labor and contamination of traps with human odor. Dima used a particular pair of mittens for handling traps.

During the fall 2011 season, three days over two trips were spent checking the trap lines and trails around Roma's territory. Roma and I went out for one day and Kesha, Roma, and I went out for an additional two days. Checking traps consists of putting the trap set in order, marking or remarking any trails and removing brush as necessary. One afternoon, Kesha took approximately ten traps off a shorter line trail and brought them back to the cabin for placement on the main trails, where some traps had been lost or for new sets. Some traps are lost due to sable being taken away along with the trap by predators or sets being destroyed by wolverines or bears. A few sable traps had wolf traps positioned to the side to catch the head of the potential robber. The Evenkis said that bears will sometimes smash trap sets and drag traps away. Sometimes they can be found a few meters away from the set. They said that bears are "masters of the forest and do as they please," just as a man sets his household in the order he chooses.

Trap sets vary slightly in configuration. The trap itself is a typical single spring leg hold trap with a chain fastened to the leaf spring. The chain is wired to the end of a pole about two and a half meters long and the trap rests on the top surface of the pole, which has been flattened. The pole is leaned up against a tree trunk about a meter off the ground. This pole is held up by wood and brush piled alongside the pole for reinforcement against melting snow, small branches, and animals tugging at the pole and the trap attached to it. Sometimes, traps are set on stumps, crooks, or other convenient locations. Bait is suspended above the trap, such as a fish or muskrat head, a bird wing—anything that looks and smells like food (Sirina & Anderson, 2006, p. 68). When a sable sees or smells the bait it runs up the pole and steps into the trap. Once it springs the trap, the trap usually dangles by a chain from the pole. This keeps the sable suspended above the ground relatively safe from mice, minimizing struggle and damage to the fur. If the trap were fastened to the pole the sable would have traction and leverage to push against the jaws of the trap. Usually, the suspended sable is less exposed to sunlight but is not touching the snow, both of which can damage the fur. To keep the snow from building up under the set, the trapper sweeps a depression in the powdery snow with his foot. Roma's trap sets were largely out in the open with little tree cover above, in part because the area was burned in the past and an upper canopy had not yet developed. Many of Dima's trap sets have a small roof of pine branches to keep snow from covering the trap or caught

sable. He said this helps to hide the bait and caught sable from birds, such as jays, ravens and birds of prey. Other Evenkis did not use roofs over their sets. Pëtr claims to use a secret method of attaching traps to the set so that the sable hangs free and does minimal fur damage.

The schedule or rules of thumb for checking traps varied among Evenkis. Some said they should be checked every few weeks, others said two to three times during the season. Another rule mentioned was to check after a snowfall. Sable activity can briefly spike after a snowfall and traps spring less reliably if snow is allowed to collect on them. Pëtr pointed out that checking traps too often could depress catch rates because humans leave a scent trail, and it takes time for this to dissipate.

The Evenkis' ideas about the sable populations have largely to do with regional variations because of migration. No one I spoke with mentioned that sable populations were in decline. They acknowledged that sable populations fluctuate from year to year, and in their hunting territory sable numbers might be lower than usual, but the cause of this is migration not population change. Several Evenkis asserted that sable travel long distances to take advantage of berry crops, to feed both on the berries and on other species, such as mice and grouse that also are attracted to this resource. Only Dima said he sees a positive trend in the sable population in his territory. Others acknowledged that there were good and bad years, luck and food-supply-related migration, rather than overall trends in population. Evenkis also discussed migration and behavior when distinguishing adolescent from mature sables. Some Evenkis said that adolescent sables fall into traps more frequently because they are hungry and naive. These sable search for their own territories, and often have to travel long distances to find an area they can defend or push out the current occupant. A local sable is usually mature, has an established territory, and knows to avoid traps and the smell of steel because of previous encounters. Both mature and adolescent sable can be taken by hunting.

There are a large number of factors that can affect sable hunting and trapping success. Hunters discuss and speculate about causes of variability such as weather, migration, food resources, and other factors in relation to their sable catch. Evenki hunters observe many of these variables, think about and discuss them among themselves. While they are keen observers of the environment, their ability to predict or explain sable behavior and their harvest is incomplete.

The Evenkis descriptions of sable ecology varied greatly. I found this interesting because I was simultaneously learning to ask informed questions and to elicit similar information across interviews, and also because I had an underlying assumption that shared culture and shared environment would lead to a convergent account of ecology. Individuals varied greatly as well in the detail of description, even when posed a similar question. Their discussions of migration in particular varied between individuals, some emphasizing the age of sable being a factor in migration, others describing migration as a phenomenon where sable leave a region entirely and reside in another for a time.

SNOW ECOLOGY

Winter traveling conditions vary greatly due to the complicated properties of water at different temperatures. These conditions can be observed, investigated, and partially

predicted. There are three basic factors that affect the quality and safety of winter travel: temperature, snow compaction, and overflow.

Temperature primarily affects the comfort and safety of travel for humans. For snow vehicles, travel is feasible at any temperature around to far below freezing. In conditions when the temperature fluctuates below and above freezing, snow behaves very differently than when the temperatures are consistently below freezing. The properties of snow under varying temperatures are very complex (Mellor, 1975). These properties differ based on the conditions during formation and after ground accumulation. What follows is a description of some of the properties that are easily described and have practical consequences for travel.

There are two basic states where the properties of snow are strongly contrasting: around freezing, and well below freezing. At warmer than 0° C temperatures snow is saturated with water and is very dense and slushy. This is typically in the spring and fall, when daytime temperatures are above freezing, and nighttime temperatures are below freezing and the most pronounced conditions tend to occur in the spring as the accumulated snow melts. After waterlogged snow freezes it becomes hard and very slippery. When snow is considerably below freezing (< 15° C) it has very low density and very high volume. However, when it is disturbed by wind or compressed by a vehicle or foot, it hardens depending on the area and force. Areas where people or reindeer pass frequently or in large numbers become packed into a very hard surface, while undisturbed surfaces remain powdery. Snow hardening begins from the moment of disturbance up to several days and low temperatures slow down the speed of hardening. For vehicle travel this means that in powdery conditions the snow must be displaced and compressed. Since the density of powdery snow is so low, it is fairly light and easy to move, but it is quite deep for most of the winter and the cumulative loading of displacing it by mobility (walking, skiing, etc.) consumes a lot of energy. When snow is water saturated at just below freezing temperatures or at low temperatures, but has been disturbed and hardened, travel becomes less taxing on vehicles with sufficient floatation. Generally, snow has low friction against vehicles that rely on sliding across the surface. While the Evenkis almost certainly recognize the changing friction levels of snow with temperature, this was not a topic of discussion outside of some brief comments regarding steel vs. aluminum sled characteristics.

Frozen waterways covered with snow can be dangerous to travel on even in the coldest months of winter. When the surface of a water body freezes over it essentially becomes sealed. This results in a condition known as overflow. If snow cover is present, this forms a slushy layer on top of the ice that is not visible from the surface of the snow. Unless the snow is shallow and water saturates up to the surface, overflow remains hidden. Since snow is a good insulator, Evenkis said overflow can persist for a day or so. Under the snow, the temperature is near freezing, but once the slush is uncovered or compressed it is exposed to air temperature, rather than insulated by the snow. As a snowmobile or other vehicle enter the overflow area, water and slush stick to the underside and freeze. While traveling with the Evenkis in the winter, we encountered overflow on a river a few times, sometimes shallow slush, other times already frozen over. Although it did not give us any trouble, when meeting other travelers in the taiga a frequent topic of conversation was encounter of overflow.

Overflow is a problem whether encountered on reindeer, skis, or snowmobile. With snowmobiles overflow can be particularly difficult because their weight causes them to sink in the slush and water.

Since the ice is usually tens of centimeters thick, overflow only causes it to break up into large chunks, sinking into the water is not usually a problem since the chunks of ice are buoyant and wedged against one another. The issue with overflow is that the slush is both very dense and slippery, and so does not provide enough friction for the snowmobile to gain traction. Additionally, slush, water, and snow fill the track of the snowmobile and freeze. If the track and drive system are run at high enough speed the moving parts will tend to fling ice away or fracture it as it freezes, however if the temperature is low enough or the snowmobile is not kept moving it can potentially disable the machine until the ice is chipped out.

In the high latitude environment where the Evenkis live, snow facilitates and complicates livelihood tasks for much of the year. The means of winter mobility that research participants had access to include one or all of: skis, snowmobiles, and reindeer sleds. This section describes the decision-making process and my observations of their vehicle choices for different purposes.

During the field season, one of the tasks that Dima wanted to complete was closing up some of his cabins for the winter and collecting trapped sable in a part of his territory. He had planned to take about a week to complete these tasks, but his snowmobile was out on loan. The snowmobile was far past due for return, and it became apparent that the time of return could not be predicted. Since the snowmobile was unavailable, Dima discussed using reindeer instead. He planned to take about ten reindeer. Some of these would be needed for remounts, others for company. In practical terms, he only needed maybe four or six deer. This would allow for several spare teams if he needed or wanted to move fast. The purpose of taking more deer than needed is because as herd animals, reindeer feel most comfortable in a group. If he only took as many reindeer as were needed for transportation, there was a good chance that they would run back to the main herd at night, but if he took a small group they would feed together at night and probably stay nearby. Some days went by, but Dima did not prepare to leave. In the meantime, Kolia and his family moved to a cabin about 9 km away. Dima asked Kolia if he could borrow the snowmobile for a few days. Since Kolia had no plans to move and was a bit under the weather, he borrowed Dima the snowmobile. After Dima and I completed the trip, he stayed with Kolia for a few days, helping us cut wood and making technical repairs and adjustments to the snowmobile.

In asking Dima about the comparative advantages of snowmobiles, he gave a number of interesting responses. I asked: why not just take the snowmobile when hunting? It takes time to round up reindeer, hitch them, and then they stand tied up for several hours while out hunting. Dima replied that this is not quite true. Unlike a snowmobile, reindeer are quiet. Many times, when he is traveling, he approaches quite close before game is spooked near the trail. This is because to a moose the sound of reindeer trotting is not particularly alarming and the radius from which the sound of reindeer and sled can be heard is small. When he finds a promising track, he simply turns the sled around and ties the reindeer to a branch while he goes hunting. When he returns, he unties the deer and jumps on the sled to return home. Reindeer do not start hard or have mechanical problems like snowmobiles.

For cargo hauling reindeer also have their peculiarities. During much of the firewood cutting we did, Dima chose to use a snowmobile. However, while Dima's snowmobile was absent, we hauled wood back to the cabin using reindeer. Although, the distance from the cabin was comparable to other instances when we used a snowmobile, we used a different work process for hauling wood with reindeer. We walked to the cutting site and stacked the rounds next to the trail. The next day Dima fetched the reindeer and locked most of the herd inside the corral around the cabin. He harnessed two reindeer each to two sleds and led them on foot to the cutting site as I waited at the corral. While unloading wood near the cabin inside the corral, the herd milled about, and when letting the harnessed deer and sleds out of the gate, the herd would attempt to follow. I manned the gate to keep the herd from rushing out of the corral while Dima passed in and out.

While discussing with Dima the considerations of using reindeer and snowmobiles, it was my impression that he did not think of them as two interchangeable options, but rather two means of transport, each with their own complications and advantages. From my observation, the snowmobile was the first option both Kolia and Dima used for chores, such as hauling cargo or people and making long distance trips or short errands. While little hunting was done during the field season, reindeer and skis were the means of transportation chosen to scan for tracks. Looking for reindeer was almost exclusively done on foot.

From my observations, Evenkis travel usually travel in the daylight during most seasons. An exception is snowmobile travel. While snowmobile travel is usually done during the day, my impression is that night travel is not particularly dangerous and, in fact, it may be easier in some respects. Both the Kochëma and Khamakar Evenkis traveled by snowmobile at night. One informant who has vision problems said that he very much prefers night travel. The reasons why night travel by snowmobile can be done have to do with the direction and properties of light. In contrast to some other forms of transportation, snowmobiles have headlights and often travel on established trails. Foot travel on established snowmobile trails was the only other instance of night travel. In the wintertime sunlight is reflected off the snow, and when it is overcast the light is diffuse and gives very little definition to the snow making it hard to perceive depth. In bright conditions when the sky is clear snow reflects light into the eyes, and while definition might be high, the sheer volume of light can be blinding. Snowmobile travel at night provides good visibility conditions because the headlight casts a beam out on to the trail and the rider's head position is higher than the headlight, providing contrast. When traveling at night the shapes of the snow and trail are defined by light or shadow, rather than diffuse, uniform white or overwhelmingly intense light conditions that often occur during the day. In my experience a higher angle relative to the headlight gives better visibility, so standing is better than sitting for driving a snowmobile in some conditions. Visibility is one potential advantage of night travel by snowmobile. Some of its disadvantages are lower temperatures than daytime, slightly greater potential for navigational errors and more difficulties if forced to stop. Temperature differences are variable, potentially negligible, and not specific to night travel. Regardless of the time of day, you simply dress to temperature conditions. The potential for nighttime navigational errors is largely hypothetical. All the travel I did with Evenkis was on their own territories or on routes they regularly travel. The

headlight gives good visibility at night, and during discussions with Evenkis, night travel was regarded as normal.

The influence of daylight and temperature on travel conditions change during the snow season. In mid-winter, there are fewer daylight hours and temperatures are generally low. Travel is preferentially, although not exclusively done during the day to take advantage of light and slightly higher daytime temperatures. In the late winter and early spring, above daytime freezing temperatures and intense sunlight conditions make nighttime travel preferable, when temperatures are below freezing and so that trails are firm rather than slushy and navigation is done by headlight. These comments apply mainly to logistical travel and are not in any way categorical. For other kinds of mobility, such as hunting or searching for reindeer, it is necessary to travel during the day. For these kinds of mobility, close observation of the environment and seeing long distances are critical, whereas for logistical travel—movement from one point to another, daylight and wide field of view are less important.

Snowfall and trail conditions can also shape time of travel. During mid-winter, snowfall is usually minimal and infrequent. However, in one instance the wind came up slightly and snow began to fall, threatening to bury the packed snowmobile trail. Since travel is much more difficult on powdery snow than a packed trail we left earlier than planned in order to travel on the packed trail, while it was still visible.

During the winter, cold temperatures did have an effect on travel. Roma said that he prefers not to travel when it is below -30°C if it can be avoided and that certainly at -50°C people generally do not travel. Not only is it difficult to keep warm and avoid frostbite at these temperatures, but also should anything go wrong one quickly loses the ability to perform the motor skills needed for building a fire or fixing an engine. Should travel in the deep cold or high winds become necessary, Evenkis have discovered an interesting trick for keeping the face warm—diapers. Roma claims that a diaper covering the nose and mouth does an excellent job. I never tried it or saw it demonstrated, but I was assured of its effectiveness and observed that they pack diapers when traveling in the winter. Perhaps ironically, the material's properties of absorbance and breathability make it suitable for more than one application.

Choices of winter vehicles could be viewed as an interaction of preference and purpose as well as a response to ecological conditions. There were many similarities between individuals in winter mobility. Snowmobiles were generally chosen for long distance trips or short distance cargo hauling (firewood). For shorter movements, there was more variation. For trips of similar distance, some individuals habitually chose skis, while others just used boots. The choices of winter vehicles were significantly constrained by wealth and lifestyle. Reindeer herders have a commitment to year-round tending of the heard and migrating. Individuals based in villages had more flexibility in how often and how far to travel.

Another component of snow ecology is tracking game. The snow provides a dynamic record of tracks of animal species, movement, age, sex, and time since passage. The Evenkis explained abstractly that it was possible to tell many details from snow tracks, for general understanding of animal ecology, but also to find fresh tracks, pursue an animal, and age tracks during hunting to respond with appropriate movement and stalking techniques. While all were familiar with the abstract possibilities of tracking and claimed ability to differentiate species and crudely age tracks, only Dima and Kolia claimed to use stalking as a method of hunting. Others

said they knew of this method but did not use it because it was too difficult. Stalking involves following a track, usually of moose or wild reindeer, interpreting its age and predicting the behavior of the animal. From the way Evenkis talked about stalking, it is a culturally valued and traditional method of hunting and is distinct from others that are more common or are associated with Russian methods of take.

KNOWING THE ENVIRONMENT, SHARED IMPERATIVES, AND NESTED RELATIONSHIPS

Common conceptions implicate a “group” property to knowledge (Berkes, 2012; Turner, Ignace, & Ignace, 2000), which leads to confusion of empirical claims with socio-political claims (La Duke, 1994; Usher, 2016). Conventional explanations for varying accounts across individuals include the vagaries of communication and interpretation, and observation of the same phenomena segregated by sampling processes. These explanations are no doubt partially valid. However, here I have advanced a somewhat novel explanation that some of the variance is due to properties of the natural phenomena that Evenkis observe, that is *continuously observable and physical phenomena, such as the properties of snow, result in more consistent explanations across individuals than fragmentarily observable and biological phenomena, such as sable ecology, result in less consistent explanations across individuals* (Boyd & Richerson, 1985). Snow is a *continuous, static* phenomenon in that its properties can be observed across time and that it changes in response to disturbance of behavior and atmospheric processes. Sable ecology is *fragmented* in that it is discontinuous across the landscape, and evidence of scat, trails, feeding patterns, and the animals themselves is subject to encounter in the environment and perception error of the individual. The total time that an individual can learn about snow is winter. The total time that an individual can learn about sable is whenever indirect or direct evidence is observed.

Academics make an error when ascribing “group” status to knowledge and ignoring or simplifying generative processes. The examples above show variation across individuals in how they understood and communicated about biota and climate, indicating that there is not group-level knowledge across these individuals (Koster, Bruno, & Burns, 2016; Pretelli, Borgerhoff Mulder, & McElreath, 2021). If there is an identifiable spectrum across which individuals vary, this spectrum and all the information it contains will inform any number of questions, but ascribing homogeneity by group status ignores individual variation. A second purpose of the examples was to draw attention to the empirical conditions where knowledge is drawn from and to speculate about how conditions shape what individuals can observe (Ingold, 2011). Notions of group level or cultural knowledge place a strong emphasis on the social transmission of information, while deemphasizing the integration of individual people within social relationships and physical environments. Academics can know why individuals vary within a society or environment, if we frame questions and methods well.

Culturally-transmitted information can orient and condition individuals to what they should pay attention to (Boyd & Richerson, 1985; Richerson et al., 2016; Steadman & Palmer, 2008; Ziker, 2015). Perception is a first step in transforming information into knowledge. Gathering information about the natural world may

occur in a social context (Salali et al., 2016), but the individual perceives and integrates information cognitively (Arbilly, Motro, Feldman, & Lotem, 2010; Kerr, 2008; Tamarit, Cuesta, Dunbar, & Sánchez, 2018). The problem of cultural knowledge vs. individual knowledge is that individuals are acquiring culturally-transmitted knowledge, such as about sable behavior, and contextualizing it on the basis of different observations of the natural world. “Cultural” or “individual” as modifiers of knowledge or learning draw attention to the pathways or context of exposure to information. However, these descriptors are not informative about the utility or accuracy of knowledge. Foraging may be a good example. Foraging activity has two basic components: perception of resources or their proxies and generating a behavioral response. Social foraging involves an additional component of individuals coordinating search and pursuit behavior. An individual learning to hunt with projectile weapons in particular involves moving through nature, perhaps prepared by verbal advice from a parent or mentor about what behaviors to engage in or what to look for, but it is an individual awareness and practice task. Telling stories about observations made during foraging occurs in a social context (Salali et al., 2016), but in my observation of Evenkis’ discussions, individuals do not come to a complete consensus about information and sometimes withhold information. These factors cast doubt on the probability of “group” knowledge.

Discussions of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) sometimes incorporate distinctions between group-level knowledge (cultural, traditional) and individual-level knowledge (Polfus, Heinemeyer, & Hebblewhite, 2014; Polfus et al., 2016; Whyte, Brewer, & Johnson, 2016; Ziker, 2015). However, the relationship between these forms of knowledge is unclear. Social discourse can function to spread information across individuals, but it is the interaction of subsistence goals and observation of the natural world that ratifies the utility of socially transmitted ecological knowledge. At the level of imperative, a society whose subsistence depends on foraging has a shared interest in transmitting valuable information between individuals. In that sense, it is traditional, valuable, and imperative *to know about* ecology. The tradition component encourages individuals to share information, but the information is synthesized and communicated by individuals from observations of nature. Thus, the shared, cultural component is not knowledge per se, but the imperative for individuals to seek and share knowledge. This view nests persons within social and ecological relationships (Fuentes, 2016) that can be observed and measured.

CONCLUSION

Through the course of working with Katanga Evenkis in their homes and territories I attempted to document their understandings on a variety of ecological processes (Mertens, 2015). Through this chapter I have advanced a few speculative ideas about why there is variation in what individuals explain about ecological patterns. Individual knowledge about ecology varies in ways that are not easily attributable solely to social or ecological variation. My tentative explanations are that 1) ecological patterns vary in how easily they are observable, 2) the cultural component is not knowledge but imperative, 3) the variation across individuals is a result of what they observe and integrate, and 4) a smaller point—individuals distinguish the routes whereby they acquire information. The attributions of “group” properties has a long history in

scholarship, law, and in everyday life. Generalizations function to simplify, which inevitably decreases the costs of communication and increases misunderstanding of what “cultural knowledge” could mean. The perspectives advanced here identify functional paths for nested relationships between people and ecology.

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PART III

CO-CREATION OF PEOPLE
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CHAPTER 14

DANCING WITH CRANES, SINGING TO GODS

The Sakha *Yhyakh* and post-Soviet national revival



Eleanor Peers

INTRODUCTION

The Tuimaada *Yhyakh* has become a key event in the yearly diary of Yakutsk, capital of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). It takes place over the last weekend of June, running over two days and a night; hundreds of thousands of people attend it, some of them camping at the *Yhyakh* site. Most of these people belong to the Indigenous Siberian Sakha community—but many are Russian or even from outside the Russian Federation. The Tuimaada *Yhyakh* kicks off with a long and elaborate open-air ceremony on the first morning. A prayer to the upper deities—an *algys*—is interspersed with dances, theatrical performances, and speeches from Sakha (Yakutia)'s political leaders. This ceremony always includes the Dance of the Cranes (see Figure 14.1). A burst of joyful pre-recorded music incorporating the Siberian crane's call accompanies a flutter of white cloth wings, as a troop of female dancers runs gracefully onto the wide, grassy arena. Their balletic movements are reminiscent of a Siberian crane's flight and mating dance, as the announcer informs the audience over the music that the Siberian crane—*kytalyk* in Sakha, *sterkh* in Russian—is traditionally a sacred bird for the Sakha, a symbol of fertility and luck.

The Tuimaada *Yhyakh* is the largest of all the *Yhyakhs* held throughout Sakha (Yakutia) over the latter part of June. These events are the most recent incarnation of a centuries-old Sakha practice, as this chapter will show. And, as the announcer's helpful comments about the cranes indicate, larger *Yhyakhs* often combine pedagogy with entertainment: audiences, whether Sakha or non-Sakha, are informed about the Sakha tradition, as they witness the artistic genres it has produced. The *Yhyakh*'s pedagogic dimension reflects the transformation in Sakha life that occurred over the 20th century, and its culmination in the Sakha cultural revival of the 1990s. The revitalization of the *Yhyakh* was in fact a centerpiece of this cultural revival. A group of activists used a combination of pre-20th century ethnographic literature, existing practice, and the Soviet performance tradition to design *Yhyakhs* on a scale that had not been seen before. In doing so, they were hoping to unite the Sakha people around a renewed sense of national identity and pride, as they presented Sakha people with the practices that had apparently been lost as a result first of Tsarist Christianization, and then



Figure 14.1 The Dance of the Cranes at Suntar region's Yhyakh, June 2015.

Soviet secularization. The Dance of the Cranes is a good example of the performative genres that resulted from this initiative, even if accounts of pre-Soviet *Yhyakhs* do not describe dances dedicated to the crane. It presents audiences with a relationship between humans and cranes that appears in pre-Soviet transcriptions of Sakha epic songs, in the form of a Soviet-style folk ballet. Sakha people are being invited to enjoy the beauty of their national heritage, as they discover its riches—while non-Sakha people are introduced to a complex and ancient Siberian national tradition.

The Tuimaada *Yhyakh*, then, is a refined, multifaceted political intervention, within the shifting currents of post-Soviet identity politics. Its organizers are carefully projecting a specific experience and understanding of Sakha history, culture and identity, as part of a broader promotion and affirmation of the Sakha people within the Russian Federation and the wider world. And yet, as its organizers also point out, the *Yhyakh* is much more than a sophisticated political strategy. Ekaterina Romanova, the historian and ethnographer who has become the present *Yhyakh*'s key academic consultant, writes that the *Yhyakh* festival “symbols” were “internal texts for everyone who attended *Ysyakh*”: they carried information from the ancestors and thus served as a channel of communication between generations (Romanova, 2012, pp. 187–188; Romanova and Ignat'eva, 2012, p. 49). In reviving the *Yhyakh*, these organizers were also hoping to revitalize a much older spiritual practice, which had just about survived within the activities that had come to be regarded as “Sakha tradition,” like the *Yhyakh*. As this chapter describes, this practice has its roots in ways of life and experience that preceded the first encounter between Sakha communities and Russian incomers in the early 17th century. It emerges from a profoundly different perception of action, communication, and personhood from the configuration of understandings that has formed the basis of secularist policy, economy, and education in Europe,

Russia, and now the wider world. I suggest here that the contemporary *Yhyakh* continues to exhibit this dimension. It is both a carefully orchestrated affirmation of Sakha national identity, and a celebration of the living natural environment, as its organizers intended. The Dance of the Cranes is simultaneously a folk ballet in the best Soviet tradition, and a manifestation of light, beautiful beings in the landscape and weather.

In the following section I describe the interrelation of people with their environmental setting visible in pre-Soviet Sakha practice, through a discussion of the Sakha epic tradition, the *Olonkho*. In doing so I set out the most consistent features of pre-Soviet *Yhyakhs*. The second section shows how the *Yhyakh* was co-opted into Soviet policy, while retaining its pre-Soviet resonance in some areas. The conclusion suggests that Sakha revivalists are making a good use of the multiple significances the *Yhyakh* acquired over the 20th century, as they develop it into a call for the Sakha people to remember both their identity politics, and the deities in their land.

CRANES CALLING THROUGH A LAYERED UNIVERSE: THE *YHYAKH* AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

The breed of crane in question (*Leucogeranus leucogeranus*) migrates from southern Asia to nest in the tundra of northern Siberia during the summer, and unfortunately now is very rare. The most widely read ethnographic accounts of pre-Soviet *Yhyakhs* do not describe dances that represent cranes (e.g., Khudiakov, 2016; Sieroszewski, 1993; Jochelson, 1933). These birds do however make regular appearances in the Sakha epic tradition, the *Olonkho*—either within descriptive metaphors, or as characters in their own right. *Olonkho* recital is another Sakha practice that pre-dates the arrival of the Russians. It is closely linked to the *Yhyakh*: *Olonkho* narrations frequently describe *Yhyakh* festivals, while *Yhyakh* festivals could incorporate *Olonkho* performances (e.g., Oiunskii, 2014, p. 446; Ergis, 2008, p. 189). Like the *Yhyakh*, it arises out of and therefore demonstrates the experience of a close entanglement of human and non-human persons within a layered universe, in which discrete human beings cannot quite be separated from the ecology they inhabit. This section uses the well-known *Olonkho* text *Nurgun Bootur the Swift* to indicate the difference between Sakha ways of experiencing, knowing and acting within their setting, and the European assumptions that lay behind the Tsarist policy and education of the 19th century.²

Historical sources on pre-Soviet Sakha life consist mainly of ethnographic accounts written by European, Russian, or American scholars, political exiles, missionaries, and government officials, during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries (e.g., Khudiakov, 2016; Sieroszewski, 1993; von Middendorff, 1878; Lindenau, 1983; Yastremskii, 1897; Popov, 1910; Maak, 1994; Jochelson, 1933; see Ergis 2008, pp. 30–40; Romanova 1994). These writers were few, and they covered a vast and varied territory over several centuries. Their body of work can be treated as a series of fragments or snapshots of particular places and times, concentrated towards the end of the 19th century, as Sakha territories became increasingly accessible to Europeans. Further, these snapshots are framed within the assumptions about being and knowledge characteristic to both the post-Enlightenment tradition of scholarship, and these scholars' political setting (Slezkine, 1997). My own impressions of the *Yhyakh* have come from my regular visits to Sakha (Yakutia) since 2004. I started

attending *Yhyakhs* in 2009, and have seen *Yhyakhs* in a variety of settings every year since then, with the exception of 2014 and 2020; some of these *Yhyakhs* took place in Suntar region (*ulus*), which I visited in 2011, 2015, and 2016. I have been speaking to *Yhyakh* organizers, performers, ritual specialists, and participants since 2009; I have also spoken to contemporary Olonkho performers (*Olonkhosut*), and to practitioners of traditional Sakha healing. All of my consultants have been extremely generous, and have used a variety of methods to help me start to understand their perspective.

A closer look at the Olonkho indicates the incompatibility of pre-Soviet Sakha perspectives with the assumptions that became conventional in Tsarist Russian academia, education and government. The Olonkho is an ancient tradition of sung storytelling, similar to epic traditions found in other parts of Asia (Reshetnikova, 2005; Illarionov, 2006; Harris, 2017; von Middendorff, 1878, p. 792). Explorers and ethnographers have been transcribing Olonkho recitations since the 19th century. They describe the Olonkho as myth, legend, or fairy tale—a cultural artifact that may have symbolic reference and aesthetic value, but which does not directly describe experience (e.g., Khudiakov, 2016; Sieroszewski, 1993; Ergis 2008). As Sakha people of the 20th century remember, individual Olonkho singers would sing and chant lengthy stories to the families they visited, in performances that could last for whole days and nights (Illarionov, 2006; Ergis, 2008). Singers would improvise their tales out of narrative and performative tropes they had learned over time (Illarionov, 2006; Reshetnikova, 2005). The prominent trope is the account of the life and adventures of male and female heroes (Ergis, 2008; Reshetnikova, 2005). The practice of Olonkho recitation has declined sharply since the Second World War, as Sovietization has changed taste, recreation and language (c.f. Harris, 2017; Ferguson, 2019).

A passage from the longest Olonkho text, *Nurgun Bootur the Swift*, written by the Sakha poet and scholar Platon Oiunskii between 1930 and 1932, serves as an example. Aiynga Sier Toion is ordered by the father of all the gods, Ürüŋ Aar Toion, to send two of his children from the higher heaven to live in the Middle World (Oiunskii, 2014, pp. 67–75). He and his wife Aiyy Noralijn Khotun hold an *Yhyakh* to bless his children as they go, kissing them “until/Three bowls of blood/Were drawn to their upper lips/Six bowls of blood/Were drawn to their lower lips” (Oiunskii, 2014, p. 70). The brother and sister descend on a dark cloud to the Kyladyky Khotun valley, to a giant Sakha house containing a hearth “As wide as a valley”, knives and axes “Hungry for violence”, and three-pronged forks “Like a white she-crane’s/Jawbone with the tongue/That came threatening” (Oiunskii 2014, p. 74). Their elder sister, Aiyy Umsur *udaghan*, turns into a crane and flies away, singing, and their elder brother sends down a whirlwind, clouds and fog (Oiunskii 2014, p. 77).

Within Olonkho narratives, the boundaries between god, human being, bird, cooking utensil, and the weather, are continuously shifting. There are spatial layers or divisions within the universe, from the beautiful, light Upper World or heaven, to the precious and yet fragile Middle World, down to the disgusting and dark Lower World. These layers roughly correspond in quality to the beings that issue from them—the loving deities of the Upper World, the volatile humans, animals and natural features of the Middle World, and the rapacious demons of the Lower World. However the Olonkho characters constantly cross these boundaries, sometimes changing their form in the process, as Aiyy Umsur *udaghan* turns into a crane. If

anything, the presence of divisions in space or form within the Olonkho's universe serve to emphasize the power of particular characters to traverse them (c.f. Ingold, 2000, pp. 89–110). The emotional charge of intention embedded within a relationship is the most constant feature of the Olonkho, as the hyperbolic description of Aiynga Sier Toion and Aiyy Noralijn Khotun's parting from their children indicates. All the characters—whether hero, deity, cooking utensil, or narrative voice—are in a flux of feeling intermingled with intention, whether this is joy and love, fear, hatred, misery, or rage. This emotional intention is always relational. Its intensity is rooted in the intensity of the relationships between the characters, as exemplified by Aiynga Sier Toion and Aiyy Noralijn Khotun's love for their children. It moves the Olonkho narrative along through impassioned speeches and songs, such as the numerous blessings spoken by Aiynga Sier Toion and Aiyy Noralijn Khotun over their children as they part, or the song with which Ürüŋ Aar Toion decrees that these children should be sent away (Oiunskii, 2014, pp. 70–71; 62–64). In fact, the different characters constantly emerge and disappear within the flow of highly charged words: the crane appears briefly within the description of the forks, and again within Aiyy Umsur *udaghan's* flight.

Olonkho narratives, then, present a world within which the assumptions about the nature of people and their environment that form the basis of post-Enlightenment traditions of education and governance do not apply—assumptions that entail inherent distinctions between mental and material, human and environment, and natural and cultural (c.f. Ingold, 2000; Latour, 1993). Olonkho narratives are not predicated on stable categories of entity: they do not describe the thoughts and actions of discrete human beings, who are clearly distinguished from the natural environment, material objects, and the beings that might be called “supernatural.” They invoke a universe of beings that are primarily interconnected, rather than self-sufficient: the foregrounding of hyperbolic emotion in Olonkho narrative makes it impossible to separate characters and their actions from their interrelation within the text itself, without distorting their nature. Olonkho narratives do not resemble the texts writers in the Enlightenment tradition recognize as authoritative knowledge—and still more so when they are sung and chanted as an Olonkho recital. It was only to be expected that ethnographers working in the post-Enlightenment tradition, who from the 18th century understood their task to be the recording of Sakha activity within predetermined categories such as “clothing,” “ornament,” or “myths,” would assume that Olonkho recital belonged to the latter category.

However, Sakha people have continued to assert that the Olonkho itself is knowledge, with a direct relevance to lived experience (Ergis, 2008; Khudiakov, 2016). In fact, the Olonkho describes in exaggerated terms characters and activities that were part of everyday life, as it was recorded by pre-Soviet ethnographers, and remembered by older Sakha people. For example, sung or chanted blessings, like Aiynga Sier Toion and Aiyy Noralijn Khotun's incantation over their children, are a feature of all the *Yhyakhs* recorded in the ethnographic literature; these are the *algys* blessings mentioned in this chapter. These *algystar* were addressed to the extensive pantheon of deities and demons that features in the Olonkho, who were felt to be as active in the course of daily life as they were in Olonkho narratives: pre-Soviet authors refer to “clans” of beings who lived and acted in parallel to Sakha communities, even if their presence was sometimes difficult to discern (Popov, 1879; Lindenau, 1983). For

example, Ürüŋ Aar Toion could be addressed during the *algys* spoken at *Yhyakhs*, as the benevolent but distant creator god (e.g., Khudiakov, 2016; Lindenau, 1983).

Chanted *algys* prayers were felt to be as powerful in daily life as they were in the Olonkho, because, as pre-Soviet ethnographies demonstrate, Sakha people perceived their lives to be conditioned by the very interrelation between human beings, demons, deities, and spirit-guardians the Olonkho depicts. It was possible to offend a deity and lose his or her patronage, so that livestock or children would become vulnerable to malevolent demons, and the homestead would suffer (e.g., Popov, 1910; Popov, 1879; Sieroszewski, 1993). *Algys* prayers were part of a wide and intricate array of spoken, sung, crafted, or acted techniques, used to alter the course of a given set of relationships into a harmonious direction. There were particular people who had an unusual capacity to mediate or intervene within these relationships, called in Sakha *oyuun* if they were men, or *udaghan* if they were women, like Aiyy Umsur *udaghan*; these people were identified by European explorers as shamans. Thus, the early 20th century ethnographer A. A. Popov describes an occasion in which an *oyuun* flew up to speak to the goddess Ajyysyt on behalf of a childless couple, using a combination of song, poetry, dress, and a wooden model (Popov, 2008, pp. 69–95). Olonkho texts and their performances therefore were experienced as integral to lives conducted in relationship with clans of shadowy and yet powerful presences, rather than as detached, symbolic representations.

The *Yhyakh*, like the Olonkho, was a practice rooted in the experience and knowledge of a layered universe, inhabited by a multitude of beings in constant, intimate and emotional interrelationship. It could occur in different forms and at different times, as the various ethnographic accounts show—although most accounts indicate that *Yhyakhs* took place in May or June (Popov, 1910; Khudiakov, 2016; Sieroszewski, 1993; von Middendorff, 1878; Lindenau, 1983). *Yhyakhs* could be large and elaborate, incorporating suites of young men and women in addition to several prayer leaders, or they could be small, intimate celebrations conducted in a house (c.f. Khudiakov, 2016; Jochelson, 1933). They often were organized and paid for by rich men, as opportunities for their communities to enjoy food, drink, entertainment, and each other's company after a long and exhausting winter (Lindenau, 1983; Khudiakov, 2016). As the passage from *Nurgun Bootur the Swift* suggests, *Yhyakhs* could also be part of a larger transition, such as the building of a house (Yastremskii, 1897).

Within this multiplicity of form and purpose, the activity that remains constant through all the accounts is the address to higher, benevolent persons, intended to reaffirm a kind, loving interrelation through prayer, worship intermingled with rejoicing, and the offering of *kymys*. The relationship between Sakha communities and these beings was felt to be so intimate that the protective higher beings themselves bestowed the *kymys*, rich food and beautiful words that were used in their praise. For example, one *algys* recorded by Ivan Khudiakov in Verkhoyansk in the middle of the 19th century contains the following words: “Lord God, arising and living behind the third heaven, you determine everything! Their fate is made by you. Because of that you have made us to give prayers. ... Will we say your prayers successfully?” (Khudiakov, 2016, p. 243). The event manifested and celebrated the loving generosity of these deities, and in doing so assured the future flourishing of Sakha communities and their livestock. The *Algys* prayers at *Yhyakhs* were addressed to the throng of

deities, guardians (*ichchi*), natural features and animals that appears in the Olonkho; the *algys* recorded by Khudiakov continues,

Our fostering Eiiekhsit, our creating Aiyysyt ... return to us and suddenly give us
a long grace and unmeasurably wide riches! ... Flowering grass and tree guardian
[*ichchi*], stand, having eaten your fill! Eight-sided mother universe guardian,
stand, having eaten your fill!

(Khudiakov, 2016, pp. 243–244)

Cranes were part of this universe, even if they were not offered their own special dance at the *Yhyakh*. According to Alexander von Middendorff (1878, p. 801), a round-dance song at an *Yhyakh* mentioned cranes, as it listed the different birds that were celebrating the occasion, each in their own way.

The *Yhyakh* and the Olonkho are closely interlinked, as testimonies to an experience of person and environment rooted in a North Asian tradition pre-dating the establishment of the Russian Empire. Sakha people continued to participate in *Yhyakh* festivals and Olonkho recitals, even though their lives and economies were changing rapidly, under the Russianizing influence of the Tsarist state. From the 17th century the Tsarist state attempted increasingly to draw Sakha populations into its institutions, through censuses, taxation, and Christianization (Forsyth, 1992; Wood, 1991; Dmytryshyn, 1991). Sakha populations had to negotiate shifting constrictions and their concomitant opportunities, as Tsarist policy developed. Over the 19th century in particular large numbers of Sakha people began to grow wheat and vegetables, like the Russians; their increasingly settled lifestyle favored dairy farming over horse-herding; Sakha people joined gold prospectors, or became merchants on a par with Russians (Nogovitsyna, 2017; Popov, 1910). The Tsarist state did not necessarily forbid *Yhyakhs* or Olonkho recitals, as it forced *oyuuns* and *udaghans* to give up their practice. The *Yhyakh* however changed radically, and even appeared to be dying out at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g., see Jochelson, 1933, 198; Sieroszewski, 1993, 446). This was partly the consequence of changes to Sakha economies—and in particular the reduction in horse herds, which made *kumys* increasingly scarce—but also because Sakha interests and preoccupations seem to have been changing, as Waclaw Sieroszewski's unflattering description of an *Yhyakh* that took place in 1887 might indicate (Sieroszewski, 1993, p. 446). He claimed that the participants of this *Yhyakh* were most interested in vodka and tea. As the next section describes, the Soviet administration changed life in Sakha (Yakutia) still further, transforming the *Yhyakh* in its turn.

THE YHYAKH RE-FORMED

The Soviet administration claimed to be the antithesis of the Tsarist regime—and yet there were many continuities between Tsarist and Soviet policies and institutions. Among non-Russian communities such as the Sakha, the Soviet state brought about the acceleration of many transformations that had started during the Tsarist era. The *Yhyakh* was co-opted into Soviet policy, and as a consequence was transformed into an occasion conditioned by dominant Soviet-era convictions. However, within some

communities the *Yhyakh* retained vestiges of its older significance, as this section describes.

Since the transformation of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Nationalities Policy and its impact has become the subject of intensive study (e.g., see Hirsch, 2005; Slezkine, 1994, 2000; Anderson and Arzyutov, 2016). The Soviet Nationalities Policy was directed towards non-Russian communities like the Sakha, who had retained distinctive ways of life and thought despite centuries of Tsarist administration. Although it inevitably varied over time and in its application and impact, its consistent aim was to co-opt non-Russian populations into building a communist society, by changing fundamentally their beliefs, aspirations, and values. Within this aim lay both the intention to “develop” non-Russian peoples by affording them education, biomedicine, Europeanized cultural production, and industry—and the need to retain political control over the Soviet Union’s more distant territories, especially during the early years of the Soviet administration. The Soviet Nationalist Policy therefore shared the Tsarist intention to change Sakha understandings of the world, as it drew them into its institutions and economy.

The fortunes of the *Yhyakh* varied according to the successive iterations of the Soviet Nationalities Policy, along with the currents of repression and the Second World War. The idea of co-opting the *Yhyakh* into state policy occurred to government officials as early as the 1920s (c.f. Romanova and Ignat’eva, 2012). Although *Yhyakhs* seemed to be dying out at the turn of the 20th century, they were still being held by some communities during the 1920s, as a letter from the councils of physical culture and political enlightenment written in 1927 to the regional administrations of Yakutia shows (Donskaia and Afanasiev, 2005, pp. 103–110). This letter calls regional administrations to take over the organization of local *Yhyakhs*, and provides detailed instructions on their purpose and content. These instructions included timetables and plans for *Yhyakhs* that would educate the Sakha population about the need to practice Soviet forms of sport, to improve their health; the positive benefits of collectivization; and the importance of cleanliness and sanitation (Donskaya and Afanasiev 2005, pp. 103–110). Although these *Yhyakhs* were to incorporate Sakha performance genres such as the *ohuokhai* circle dance, no form of prayer or ritual is mentioned anywhere: they were to open with the playing of Soviet Russia’s hymn, and reports on the internal situation of the Soviet Union. *Yhyakhs* conducted according to these instructions were occasions for education and healthy recreation; the Sakha pantheon had no place in them whatsoever, because according to the atheist Marxist-Leninist worldview such beings did not exist.

In the decades following the Second World War, the *Yhyakh* took its place within Yakutia’s calendar of yearly holidays (*prazdniki*, in Russian), alongside similar regional holidays in other parts of the Soviet Union (e.g., *Novruz* in Azerbaijan) and Union-wide celebrations like New Year (Lane, 1981, p. 136). These public holidays were designed to foster loyalty to the Soviet state and its endeavors, through a combination of education, recreation, and performance (Lane, 1981). They were one element within the Soviet Union’s extensive and carefully curated cultural production, which itself incorporated a network of institutions, training colleges, and cultural workers (Donohoe and Habeck, 2011). The letter of instruction mentioned above was an early example of a burgeoning methodological literature on how to conduct such festivals, produced for regional cultural workers (Lane, 1981, pp. 45–55). The

system was designed to create a consistent set of conventions governing the staging of popular, secularist holidays across the Soviet Union. The Soviet *Yhyakhs* that people remember now had a great deal in common with other Soviet holidays: in particular, people refer to speeches delivered by leaders of the local administration at the village *tribuna* (Russian), a wooden stage built for making public speeches.

During the 1960s it became increasingly acceptable for Sakha people to express an overt interest in their national tradition. It was perhaps in connection with this that the village of Elgei in the remote Suntar' region organized several large yearly *Yhyakhs* from 1968 onwards (Utkin, 1994). One of Elgei's most famous inhabitants, the Sakha singer and choreographer Sergei Zverev, was instrumental in organizing the program of songs and dances at these *Yhyakhs*. Several ethnographers attended the 1968 *Yhyakh*—in addition to a television crew from the Soviet Union's Geographical Society, who were making a documentary about Yakutia and its peoples. This documentary is emphatically a display of “folk” cultural production, as it was understood in Soviet terms.³ The *Yhyakh* appears as an occasion for Sakha people to enjoy these traditional activities; no reference whatsoever is made to deities, and hence the *Yhyakh* is divorced from its roots in pre-Soviet Sakha experience. As this example shows, Soviet public representation would re-frame non-Russian practices and artistic genres according to its own understandings of ethnicity and cultural production, thus conforming them to atheist Marxist-Leninism. And, correspondingly, the *Yhyakhs* themselves came to resemble typical Soviet folk-dancing exhibitions and sports tournaments: they were an opportunity for local cultural and sports organizations, like Zverev's troupe of folk dancers, to show off their work.

And indeed, the preoccupations and demands of living in a modernized, atheist society left little room for the consideration of deities—even if the person concerned felt they existed. Sakha people increasingly came to regard the *Yhyakh* according to Soviet terms, as an example of their traditional ethnic cultural production. One indication of the change in Sakha peoples' experiences of life was the sharp decline of Olonkho performance, after the Second World War. The Olonkho and the onto-epistemology it articulated had become irrelevant; younger Sakha generations could not understand its words or narrative forms (Illarionov 2006). And yet the transition to an atheist mindset was not as complete as it might appear at first sight. A handful of practicing *oyuuns* and *udaghans* continued to live in remote parts of Yakutia; many villages contained an inhabitant who practiced traditional forms of healing, even if they were not a full-blown *oyuun*. Hunters continued to feed the guardian of the forest, and villagers continued to offer gifts of cigarettes, tea, or ribbons to sacred trees, deep in the forest. As people recount now, Sakha people would hide these practices from strangers; they were deeply unfashionable, but individual people and communities pursued them nonetheless.

Hence, it was quite possible for the leaders of an *Yhyakh* to embed short *algys* prayers into toasts or speeches, or for individual Sakha people to make their own unobtrusive offerings (c.f. Balzer, 1993). In fact, Zverev had practiced as an *oyuun* for a short time in his youth. The people who remember him now emphasize his connection with nature, which gave his songs and dances their beauty and power. For some local attendees, then, the *algys* Zverev sang at the opening ceremonies of the Suntar *Yhyakhs* were more than a skilled and pleasant example of traditional ethnic sung poetry. They provided a connection with beautiful, creative forces in

the natural world, which could bring life, energy and healing; in doing so they gave voice to venerable relationships that had not quite disappeared. The people of Elgei were putting on attractive festivals of Sakha ethnic culture for the ethnographers, camera operators, and the populations of Suntar and Yakutia at large, but these festivals had a dimension that was imperceptible to those who could not recognize the universe within which it applied. People from Suntar now remember that the “true” *Yhyakh*, as distinct from the *Yhyakh* that was only a Soviet holiday, survived in Elgei thanks to Zverev (c.f. Crate, 2006). The *Yhyakh* had become an extremely ambivalent occasion, incorporating a variety of mutually contradicting activities. For some it was an opportunity to relax in front of folk dancing or horse races; for some it was a chance to “re-charge” themselves through addressing the deities—and for many it was both.

CONCLUSION: THE *YHYAKH* IN DISTANCED FORMAT

This ambivalence within the *Yhyakh* made it an effective means simultaneously to assert Sakha claims as a nation, according to Soviet paradigms—and to revitalize a sacred practice among the Sakha population. A number of factors led to a surge of calls for the revival of non-Russian cultural practice in the late 1980s, along with increased autonomy for the Soviet Union’s non-Russian peoples. In Sakha (Yakutia) there was lasting resentment over the repression of certain well-known Sakha intellectuals during the 1930s and 1950s (Alekseev, 2007; Vinokurova, 1994). More and more Sakha people were moving to Yakutsk to work or study—and yet they were criticized for speaking Sakha in public places (c.f. Ferguson, 2019). By the late 1980s a group consisting mainly of academics, journalists, and cultural workers had decided to mobilize the Sakha people into a drive for greater political and cultural autonomy—and, in doing so, to re-awaken Sakha people to the worldview of previous generations and the practices and art forms it had generated (Balzer, 1999).

Sakha activists saw that they needed a distinct and recognizable cultural practice, which could form the focus of the cultural revival (Romanova and Ignat’eva, 2012). Their disadvantage was the fact that the Sakha tradition was associated with shamanism—a category with undesirable connotations of backwardness and ignorance—rather than a world religion like Buddhism or Islam. And so they fixed on the *Yhyakh*, as an attractive and enjoyable holiday not primarily associated with shamanism. In this they were adopting strategies from both the Soviet administration, and older members of the Sakha population who had succeeded in subverting it, like Zverev. They were using a public holiday to teach and persuade, as had become common during the Soviet period—but, like Zverev, they were using conventional Soviet forms of recreation and performance as vehicles for activities that addressed an entirely different set of relationships. Activists started to reconstruct the *Yhyakh* festivals described in the pre-Soviet ethnographic literature, while the Sakha people who had unobtrusively been continuing to say *algys* prayers or recite the *Olonkho* became authoritative consultants or practitioners.

Thus, a new generation of *Yhyakh* leader—now called an *Algyschyt*, or *algys* speaker—came to the fore. Their practice combines a considerable personal effort to foster their connection with a living natural world, with skill and sometimes formal training in the performative arts. The *Yhyakh* organizers have often mentioned the

need to offer audiences a pleasant show, especially at the start of the *Yhyakh* revival; hence they created a range of performances such as the Dance of the Cranes, to be offered alongside the *algys* at the opening ceremony. The Dance of the Cranes is beautiful, familiar to a Soviet-educated audience, and evokes an equally attractive and familiar vision of Indigenous Siberian belief: the crane has been invoked in other events connected to Siberian cultural revival (e.g., Vaschenko and Clayton Smith, 2010). And yet cranes were significant personalities in the pre-Soviet Sakha setting; they were brought into *Yhyakh* celebrations, as von Middendorff's text shows. Like Zverev's folk songs and dances, the Dance of the Cranes contains an elliptical reference to the relational setting—a symbol that is also a channel of communication from the ancestors, as Romanova writes. For the increasing number of *Yhyakh* participants who now seek and experience a connection with a live, energized natural world, the Dance of the Cranes at the *Yhyakh* opening is indeed an encounter of sorts with the benevolent inhabitants of the earth and sky.

The Tuimaada *Yhyakh* was not canceled in 2020, the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, even though the necessity for mass quarantine precluded public attendance. Instead, the *algys* and numerous pop concerts were recorded and posted on YouTube; this was the Tuimaada *Yhyakh* in distanced format (*distantsionnyi format*, in Russian).⁴ This medium enabled the insertion of beautiful panorama shots of the *Yhyakh* site and the surrounding countryside, even if there could be no Dance of the Cranes. The pop concerts combined friendly interviews with performers, amidst the grass and trees of the *Yhyakh* site rather than onstage. Through this combination of videos viewers were offered a reminder of their own experiences at the *Yhyakh*; the certain knowledge that an *algys* had taken place, even if they couldn't attend; and finally, a reassurance that the landscape along with its beautiful, bright beings still existed. Thus, the *Yhyakh* and the relational beings it addresses remain as protean as they were in the 19th century. They continue to touch the lives of many, as they reappear through the performative and technological conventions and possibilities of the time. In doing so, they put into question the secularist paradigms of person, environment and being that dominate the current era, both in Russia and the wider world.

NOTES

- 1 The festival's name can be pronounced either as "Ysyakh," or "Yhyakh." "Yhyakh" is regarded as a more authentic Sakha pronunciation, hence my use of this name.
- 2 Unfortunately, I have not been able to access the original Sakha text while writing this piece (Oiunskii, 2003). Instead, I am using an English translation by a team from the North Eastern Federal University (Oiunskii, 2014). Zoia Tarasova translated the passage I quote here.
- 3 I am grateful to Sakha (Yakutia)'s film archive for sharing this footage with me in 2011. Footage of several *Yhyakhs* at Suntar can now be found here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnGLj3MHq_E&t=1842s.
- 4 The *algys* can be found here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_b99oNvceXc.

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CHAPTER 15

DOUBLE-EDGED PUBLICITY

The youth movement in Buryatia in the 2000s



Hibi Y. Watanabe

A front-page article dated August 30, 2003, in the newspaper *Izvestiia* informed the readers of an affair that occurred in a relatively small city in Siberia. In Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia, a city map for people with disabilities was published for the first time in Russia, with much information on the shops, post-offices, and other communal facilities that have been set up with wheelchair accessibility. No doubt the construction of step-free environments should have been a principal activity undertaken by the city municipality; however, civil initiatives, involving the Foundation for the Creation of Barrier-Free Environments and the Siberian Center for the Support of Social Initiatives (*Sibirskii tsentr podderzhki obshchestvennykh initsiativ*; hereafter, SCSSI), were pivotal to ensuring publicity for the project. The article entitled “Freedom of Movement” showered praise on the move, touting Ulan-Ude as “one of the most civilized Russian cities from the viewpoint of the attitude to people with disabilities.”

This chapter takes the cited episode as a starting point to attain a two-fold objective. First, it aims to ethnographically outline certain aspects of civic voluntary-associated movements, specifically youth-driven ones, based on my fieldwork in Ulan-Ude in the early 2000s,¹ unpublished official materials, as well as the pamphlets, booklets, and activity reports issued by movement organizations.² Second, it intends to theoretically advance the argument on the problem of publicity,³ especially with respect to the question of how publicity may be discussed in the political, social, and cultural contexts of the post-socialist bloc for which it has long been considered to be non-existent or if it does exist, as fragile. My goal is to introduce a geographical dimension reflecting the contemporary space of Siberia in Russia into political anthropology.

PROBLEMATIZING PUBLICITY IN POST-SOCIALISM AND IN SIBERIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Vacuums suffused the vast territory of Northern Eurasia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The ideological void, Gellner (1992) lamented, was immediately filled by nationalism, which manifested in varied ways. Ethnonational conflicts and wars in hot-spots were the more visible expressions. Of course, nationalism is a complex

phenomenon that is underpinned by political, economic, ideological, and other social factors.

The ideological vacuity must itself have comprised several layers. The most distinct particularity of the disorganization of socialism in the former Soviet bloc was notable in the precipitant subsidence of almost all the socio-cultural spheres and subsystems (Holmes, 1997, p. 19). One domain specifically resulted in several consequences: the dissolution of educational infrastructures, morality, future-oriented consciousness, and other phenomena indispensable for a fulfilling personal and social existence. A vacuum, of course, was a temporary occurrence, and previous institutions were gradually replaced by new, “Western-like” and “democratic” entities.

Unfortunately, anthropological studies in English on Siberia have thus far been limited. As I elucidated (Watanabe, 2016), there exist around 126 volumes⁴ of ethnographies published in English and relating to post-socialism in Northern Eurasia. Approximately 38.9% of these works constitute scholarship on Eastern Europe, and the rest concern the former Soviet Union. The Russian proportion of the anthropological inquiries on the Soviet-Union-world comprises about 87%, and 63% of this proportion of the literature concerns Siberia. While the English-speaking anthropologists on Siberia have never been a minority in the post-socialist anthropology industry, they have covered a relatively limited range of theoretical topics such as ethnicity, ecology (especially reindeer husbandry in the Arctic regions), and land property. Missing in their work is a political anthropology of Siberia.⁵ This chapter will attempt to bridge this gap with special emphasis on the problem of publicity. I admit to being profoundly inspired in this endeavor by Hann and Anderson (Hann & Dunn, 1996) and to being partly motivated by specific situations that transpired in the 2000s and that may be labeled “after-post-socialism” (e.g. Sasaki & Watanabe, 2016).

Cohen and Arato (1992) posited a powerful and persuasive theoretical model on publicity of post-Soviet socialism, explaining its dual character. According to this model, publicity concurrently functions in two aspects. The first one constitutes as an institutional and rationalizing base for lifeworld through social differentiation enacted by the state and market (e.g. schooling and literacy potentially contribute to upward socio-cultural mobility); the second one serves as a mediated basecamp for the colonization of this lifeworld by the state and market (e.g. the world history has a massive dose of the use of minority languages being prohibited in school) (1992, p. 481). The polyvalent facets of Russian publicity have provoked varied arguments, pro and con, in the extant scholarship. Yet, anthropological thinking, resonant with the above-mentioned dualist model, continues to endeavor to grasp the ambiguities and contradictions of publicity, and even to apprehend the potentialities for social change and ordinary resistance (Hann, 1990, pp. 12, 19). Simply put, I believe that anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists inclined toward qualitative methodologies have attempted to elucidate the potential for some types of empowerment of the lifeworld even in Russian “state-sponsored” civic organizations or GONGOs (government-organized NGOs) (Hemment, 2012).⁶

The Janus-faced character of publicity in contemporary Russia⁷ actually explains how local authorities encourage and at the same time mobilize (even restrict) the activities of citizens and voluntary organizations, in particular how they manage to achieve their own goals, playing a functional role in the realizations of officially

defined, policy-based social empowerment. This dualist argument, however, does overlook a simple fact: Russia is too sprawling a country to observe publicity in a single site. The model of dual functionality of publicity would be inadequate without any geographical imagination: there is a possibility that a future-oriented person grows into an officially expected citizen in a place under the local policy, and later develops her/his career in a different place—to the disappointment of those around her/him and municipal authorities. A spatial-geographical-socioeconomically heterogeneous and asymmetrical dissemination of publicity over the vast territory needs to be taken in consideration, especially from the viewpoint of such a periphery as Buryatia.

ACTIVATING THE YOUTH MOVEMENT IN BURYATIA

Buryatia's taskforce for youth publicity

The attitude of the Russian citizens toward the socialist regime was complicated in general. In all probability, no one totally rejected all the institutions of the Soviet era within even the most critical social strata. A Buryat school director asserted:

perestroika in the educational sphere should have broken out much earlier. I had long suspected; why can we do what we want? We were long spoiled. We need to select the subjects to be learned in school for our own, but the authorities did order them. However, pupils' organizations may be desirable.

As elsewhere in Russia, the Republican government has particularly deemed it quite desirable to constitute a middle societal universe of the rising generation in the cut-throat environment of "savage capitalism." Against the backdrop of growing apathy, high unemployment, alcoholism, and deviancies in post-socialist settings, it aimed to fill the youth population with hope and public-mindedness through abundant training interventions.

The National Committee of the Republic of Buryatia on Youth Affairs, Tourism, Physical Culture and Sport (*Gosudarstvennyi komitet Respubliki Buriatiia po delam molodezhi, turizmu, fizicheskoi kul'ture i sportu*; hereafter, the Youth Committee⁸) was founded in 1992 to continue activities akin to those undertaken by the *kom-somol* and was incorporated into the Republic's Ministry of Education. The Youth Committee's primary purposes are to generate the fundamental legal and socio-economic conditions for the realization of the interests of the younger generations and to support and expand the youth policies of the government. In 2000, its objectives were four-fold: 1) to arrange youth-related activities in districts to effectuate the national youth policy of the Republic of Buryatia; 2) to actualize a regular Republican cultural program labeled Youth of Buryatia, which is repeated every few years to organically integrate the young population into the membership of the Republic through the promotion of the symbolic Buryat culture of a titular nation that encompasses varied ethnonationalities; 3) to promote the socially-meaningful actions of Russian youth and children's associations; and 4) to collaborate with both Russian and foreign organizations that share similar goals. The Youth Committee comprises ten members and is intricately and inextricably linked with five social centers: an international

youth cooperation center, a social center *the Telephone Counseling Hotline for the Youth*, a medical and psychological information center also known as *The Hopes of Baikal*, a job counseling center for the youth, and an information center for the youth.

Despite the time lag, it is quite suggestive that the 11th Article of the Federal Law on the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation (April 20, 2014; No 82-F3) prohibits any consolidations of members based on ethnicity, religion, and region (Endo, 2017, p. 29). In the present context, the youth policy merely targets the *civic* residents, with religion and ethnicity being de facto *decolored* in the official publicity of Russia including Buryatia. Outside their administratively defined and performed registers that are typically observable in regular events (*meropriiatiia*), religion and ethnicity seem to be purged from the public space. It simultaneously remains true that such neutralization does not completely exclude any ethnonational representations, for civic issues (for example, ecological problems) can be recontextualized to ethnonational ones (“our Buriat culture has been traditionally sensitive to the surrounding natural environment”) (Watanabe, 1998).

To recount the number and types of organizations enrolled in Buryatia, approximately 1,400 social groups are listed but only around 15% of these do still work. I was able to identify 75 youth associations, of which 65 (87%) are based in Ulan-Ude. Table 15.1 shows the basic orientations of these youth organizations. It would, perhaps, be pertinent to confine this article’s attention to youth organizations oriented toward local and national cultures (8%). However, I have no data on such associations except for a few modest attempts to initiate courses in the Buryat language. In these endeavors, also, there is no doubt of the decolorization of religion and ethnicity in the sense mentioned above.

However, Table 15.1 only offers a rough idea of the predominant issues handled by individual organizations. I may thus mislead inferences because there is, in reality, no organization that deals solely with a single issue. The more active and energetic an organization, the broader and more compounded are its activities. The next section deals with one such circle in Ulan-Ude.

Table 15.1 The basic orientations of the activities of youth organizations in Buryatia (N=75)

<i>Oriented to</i>	<i>Number of the organizations</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
State	6	8
Public hygiene, crime prevention	6	8
Student, school	3	4%
Charity, support	5	
Ecology	13	17%
Local and national cultures	6	8
Business skills	5	
Sports	8	11
Arts	6	8
Information	4	5
Sciences and education	2	3
Events	6	8
Networking	4	5

Istok: A case description

Istok was founded in 1993 as an organization for the promotion of non-profit sectors to resolve social, economic, and ecological problems in the Republic of Buryatia. Since 1997, it has served as the Republic's representative to an inter-regional social center called SCSSI. In 1999, it became an Ulan-Ude-based affiliate of the Agency of Social Information, a nationwide all-Russian organization. Istok is one of the largest and most active integrative youth organizations in Buryatia.

The activities of Istok are multifaceted. Istok offers entrepreneurial-training, publishes magazines and pamphlets, cooperates with mass media and the government, influences the industrial arena, and organizes ecotours. This list evinces the characteristics of Istok. The organization functions as a donor of knowledge, including technical and specialized know-how, skills, funds, and other desirable qualities to clients fostering their success, regardless of whether they are individuals or groups. This "project approach" by Russian voluntary associations complete with contests for grants is well-documented (Sätre & Granberg, 2017).

A second facet of the organization must be explained in more detail. Istok functions as a meta-body, a networking hub that arches over other organizations in Buryatia and beyond. It is both organizer and the organized and is both the giver and the taker of the grants. The gratitude toward Istok expressed by the Eurasia's Foundation, an Ulan-Ude-based association for the support of children with cerebral palsy, is an example. The Eurasia's Foundation was instituted in 2000 when it was immediately acquainted with Istok. The would-be members of the Foundation acquired vital information from Istok about how to establish a non-commercial organization. Additionally, they received a grant-in-aid of 6,000 US-dollars from SCSSI for the assistance of 180 families with infants afflicted with cerebral palsy. The Foundation was tasked with the difficult aim of making children with cerebral palsy coexist harmoniously with "troubled teens (*trudnye podrostki*)."⁹ It organized various kinds of events including a summer camp where the children lived together for 18 days with only two exceptions (two children with cerebral palsy returned home). It has, for long, maintained a close-knit interrelationship with Istok. In addition, the Foundation members traveled to Novosibirsk in 2001 to participate in a seminar and avail itself of the opportunity to discover similar organizations with which it could create horizontal networks, ones that contrast with the vertical relation to Istok.

The third feature involves an event Istok plans, arranges, and performs on its own as a responsible leader. This aspect is half-secretly but tightly interlocked with the issue of ecology, the ultimate sphere of the decolorization of components such as religion and ethnicity from the viewpoint of republican nation-building. It is also bound to the issue of ethnonationality, at least in the connotations applied to the term by vernacular, Buryat, and Russian-Soviet federative standards. The Buryat-ethnonational is as defined and represented by the Buryats, and the Buryat-Republican as one of the constitutive units of Soviet/Russian federalism. During an interview, Sesegma, a young Buryat woman and an Istok activist, vividly narrated her trip to Japan. She visited the city of Ohmihachiman in Shiga Prefecture to attend an international conference as a delegate of Russia, aiming to discuss ecological problems with representatives from various nations. Sesegma then carried in her mind an inter-regional and global comparison between Lake Baikal, almost her symbolic

Table 15.2 Some details about *Istok*'s staff members

<i>Informants</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Nationality</i>	<i>Year of birth</i>	<i>Educational background</i>
#1	Female	Buriat	1985	In college
#2	Female	Ethnic Russian	1973	College-educated
#3	Female	Buriat	1971	College-educated
#4	Male	Ethnic Russian	1977	In college
#5	Male	Ethnic Russian	1982	College-educated
#6	Female	Buriat	1960	College-educated
#7	Male	Ethnic Russian	1979	College-educated
#8	Male	Buriat	1974	College-educated
#9	Female	Buriat	1974	College-educated
#10	Female	Buriat	1980	College-educated
#11	Male	Ethnic Russian	1969	College-educated
#12	Female	Buriat	1965	College-educated

homeland (*toonto*)¹⁰ as a Buryat, and my mother's homeland Lake Biwa side, which is believed to have overcome its severe water pollution problems through an ecological movement conducted by citizens living in its vicinity. This tenuous connection strengthened her desire to continue our conversation. Obviously, she wanted more details about the success story of Lake Biwa, a symbol of Shiga Prefecture's victory, so she could apply the methods and strategies of that grass roots movement in Japan to her native homeland. Thus, global, ecological, and ethnonational concerns can coexist with the super-ethnic or de-ethnicized nationness imposed on Russian-type publicity.

Table 15.2 lists some details about *Istok*'s staff. Almost all the members hold (or will receive) a tertiary degree. The civic association tends to encompass high educational attainment which, albeit indirectly, implies an ethnic affinity: urban Buryats have been more inclined and involved in administrative and educational jobs in Republican institutions.¹¹ It is thus natural that a high percentage (58%) of the organization's members are Buryats. For comparison, the percentage of Buryats in the population of Buryatia was 29% in 2002). This ethnic proclivity toward education and acquisitive mind, however, has a negative consequence for the homeland, which I will discuss later.¹²

ANOTHER FACE OF MOVEMENT: MIGRATION TRENDS TO THE WEST

A line in a pamphlet published by *Istok* reads, "our mission: through support of civic initiatives towards a better life in Buryatia." This natural and even naïve phrasing encloses within itself a challenging real and theoretical conundrum. Where will "a better life" be? Where will this publicity be realized through youth movements?

In the strict sense, some of the people mentioned in the table are non-active members: #1 continues to study in the Czech Republic, #2 lives in Germany and is attaining training on ecological issues, #5 works virtually not in Ulan-Ude, but in Omsk, and #6, a senior Buryat woman and one of the founders of *Istok*, has left Ulan-Ude for Moscow to advance her career. *Istok* is, on one hand, a typical (meta-)organization in

its activity orientations and content. On the other hand, it is an atypical association insofar as its most influential leader is not involved in its day-to-day functioning. As I was told in my interview with the Youth Committee, and as Chebankova rightly points out (2013, p. 143), the functioning of an organization for civic movements in Russia is greatly dependent on its leader (the individual character, the wide range of interpersonal networks, communication and transaction competences, and the other abilities)—this phenomenon was quite observable in the management of the collective farms. Conversely, it may be asserted in this context that the current head, #11, exercises so much of his leadership in Istok's thriving management that Istok could be termed typical.

A seminar titled The First Legal Enlightenment Republican Seminar for High Schoolers was held in Ulan-Ude in November 2001. The participants of this six-day seminar included 42 school-going youngsters from Ulan-Ude and 12 other districts. Supported in particular by the specialists and volunteers of The Hopes of Baikal, this seminar is an illustrative exemplar both in its officially and publicly authorized contents and its means of organization.

Natasha, a Russian woman who participated in this seminar when she was 16 years old, later told me: "It was super-duper fun! I have learned so much, and it was helpful!" Natasha had an interrelationship with Eurasia's Foundation, and her mother also had prior connections to Istok. Thus, she experienced the "manager" role in an event organized by Istok, and was also engaged in researching ecological problems including the dumping of waste in rivers. On a fine day in Ulan-Ude, Natasha whispered to me with a toothy smile: "These days, I have been seeking a job, and want to utilize my specialty in marketing. If I find a good workplace, I shall leave the city [Ulan-Ude]."

The demographic processes of Buryatia deserve due attention in this perspective. First, the ethnonational composition has changed: the proportion of the Ethnic Russians decreased from 69.9% in 1989 to 67.8% in 2002. The population of Buryats increased from 24% to 27.8%.¹³ This trend of an increasing Buryat population in Buryatia is considered a positive development by the Buryats, to whom it reflects the stability and strength of "their own" state-republic. Additionally, the increase in the Buryat population may be attributed to the relatively high birth rates of this ethnonationality, which is deemed significant, desirable, and welcome according to Buryat cosmological symbolism. Second, the time of the ethnographic present for this chapter was the worst in terms of the natural growth rate of the population in Buryatia, which had turned negative in the mid-1990s before it became positive in 2006 (Pisareva et al, 2015, p. 24). Several scholars in the Republic share an optimism about the future growth of the Buryat population even though some indicate the demographic and socio-economic downtick in the northern districts in the 1990s (Ubeeva, 2020).

The optimism toward population growth is, however, just one side of a coin. Another facet becomes apparent if one scrutinizes the migration pattern, a principal factor underlying population trend. The general "brain drain" from Russia to foreign countries has been well discussed. *Nature* reported the exodus of scientists from Novosibirsk, the local branch of the Russian Academy, in the late 1990s (Levitin, 1999; Spencer, 2004, pp. 140–141). The scenario in Buryatia is almost the same. According to the local media, "In the last ten years the number of youths in the

15–29-year-old category in the Republic has decreased by 74.3 thousand persons. This number approximates the population in three average cities like Severobaikal'sk" ("Utechka Mozgov," 2020). The out-migratory tendency from Buryatia became fragile in the early 2010s ("Migratsionnyi ottok," 2012); however, as Table 15.3 shows, the outflow of actively working and highly-educated people does not seem to have ceased (cf. Kal'mina, 2007).

Whether or not ethnonational differences exist in the outflow patterns from Buryatia is debatable. Manzanova observes distinctions in the attitudes of Ethnic Russians and Buryats toward migration: for the former, "one of the main channels to success, when there is such competition for employment in depressed provincial towns, is to migrate to more prosperous Siberian regions." For the latter, "the main channel is higher education" that will bring to them "a stronger position in the labor market" (2007, p. 132). However, these distinctions do not seem cogent when better positions, higher regular payments, and housing allowance are not guaranteed. Sooner or later, the "dignified and forward-looking" (Hemment, 2012, p. 251) Buryats will opt out of their native Republic to drift to more alluring and attractive-looking cities to fulfill their career aspirations.

A seminar participant recalled in one page of the activity report:

Lectures and various meetings were very interesting. What I have learned will help me much in the future. (...) The meeting with the members of the Republican Parliament [*Narodnyi khural*] and the Government was also so useful. (...) I appreciate so much your organizing such a seminar. I would like to give great thanks to the organizers of the seminar and the leader. (...) I shall try to get together with the leaders. Here has my light turned on, so I have just understood that I want to do exactly what our leaders do too. I want to help the youth to organize various young events.

I do not consider this report a hollow expression of gratitude, although it semi-ceremoniously reflects the Republican government's intended activities for the young generation in Buryatia. Several participants do wish to seek and follow role models in

Table 15.3 Migration balance in Buriatiia between 2002 and 2011

Years	Migration balance (person)	In working age	(%)	With highly-educated background	(%)
2002	-4309	-3258	76	-771	18
2003	-3536	-2629	74	-503	14
2004	-3652	-2856	78	-690	19
2005	-4279	-3457	81	-924	22
2006	-3553	-2819	79	-663	19
2007	-2751	-2097	76	-426	15
2008	-2573	-2162	84	-344	13
2009	-1513	-1297	86	-126	8
2010	-3235	-2626	81	-684	21
2011	-4355	-3397	78	-1010	23

Source: <http://burstat.old.gks.ru> (Accessed January 31, 2021)

the forging of their own futures in the uncertain post-socialist atmosphere. It is highly possible that the very strata of leaders of youth associations tasked with the handling of youth affairs as the candidates of publicity desire and act exactly as “good” senior citizens would: migrate out from Buryatia—which is a societal nightmare for the Republican makers of public policies. This factor is obviously a major force for the outward flow, because role models can serve as a nexus of interpersonal reticulations that is indispensable for the push and pull mechanism of migration. Petonov (2007, p. 3) points to the existence of Buryat communities (*zemliachestva*) in Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

SIPHONING THE YOUTH TO PUBLICITY AS FLOW SPACE

From Buryatia’s view, publicity looms as a flow space to which reflexive citizens have been siphoned from local and Republic territories. This space denotes an “upper” layer of Russia, where the balance between the high-pressure area of the western cities (Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and Novosibirsk¹⁴) and the low one to the east has remained.¹⁵ The flow space is not homogenous and is viewed by many nationalities in various ways, but the upward and western mobility—“the western drift (*zapadnyi дрейф*)” (Mrktchian, 2005)—is undeniable (Breslavskii, 2010, p. 153; Humphrey, 2007, p. 186). It is not clear to what extent the Republican government foresaw the siphon effects of creating future-oriented and prospective citizens through lots of organizing movements and associations, but to export its promising “seeds” for central parts of Russia is definitely not its aim of policy-making for the youth.

The darkest facet of these siphoning processes may be detected more clearly in the less economically stable countryside. As reported by Breslavsky (2009), some strata of the youth in the “criminal villages (*blatnye poselki*)” of Buryatia become gangsters under the pressures of severe unemployment and psychological disillusionment whose underlying worldview approximates “a more authentic sub-culture” for them. Quite ironically, their self-appellation is “the movement (*dvizhenie*),” a variety of “wrong” or “broken” social movements as the sociologists would call them.

The siphoning effects are observable in other Siberian regions as well as in other meanings. A mother became the first activist for disability rights in the Republic of Altai. She then began to distinguish herself as a leader in a civic organization and was finally elected as a candidate to the Republic Duma (Javeline & Lindemann-Komarova, 2010, p. 183). Some observers may assert that even as she remained in Siberia, she broke away from the public sphere, and reached the other shore represented by the state apparatus.

Ivashinenko and Varyzgina aptly conclude (2017, p. 100) that many NGOs in Russia employ “a customer-oriented approach” and “become more like social services providers.” Thus, “[t]o a certain extent, many of the existing NGOs are separated from the local community where they were originally established; therefore, NGOs are to a large degree perceived as being quasi-governmental structures providing social services.” Building on this observation, this chapter contends that many NGOs in Siberia can potentially become separated from the local community in the sense stressed by Ivashinenko and Varyzgina as well as in the sense that pivotal individuals native to the spaces to which they devote themselves as civic activists become highly likely to leave their homeland to adopt careers in other cities, regions, or even states.¹⁶

I am thus led to design a concept: the *double-edged geography of publicity*. Public space cannot be imagined any longer as homogeneous in its spread across a nation-state. It stands as a spotted expansion, an extension that is notable for its hierarchically situated spots (dense in the west and scattered in the east). It is a spatial flow that most often permits one-way traffic (from the east to the west). In this light, Ulan-Ude may just be a gateway¹⁷ to the other prosperous cities of Russia, which has produced a *kinked* structure of publicity. The Russian government would see no deficiency in this mechanism of siphoning because it can concentrate the human “capitals” and “resources” spreading over the Russian territory on its capital and adjacent regions. Even though it is highly unpredictable how long the siphoning effect can be expected to continue without undesirable repercussions, large cities or centers with centripetal forces would welcome the trend. On the other hand, siphoning is undoubtedly a great loss for the Republican government of Buryatia. It also remains unclear whether the Youth Committee could have predicted this conceivable byproduct of its policy of encouraging their youth to participate in seminars and other events.

Wendel, Shore, Feldman, and Lathrop have illuminated the methodological efficacy of analyzing social networks in postulating their “anthropology of public policy.” This perspective seems to assert that network analysis can reveal “how the local or regional level is connected with the national level” (2005, p. 40), which is, in consonance with the framework of this chapter, another expression of how the latter swallows the former by siphoning away the talented and conscious actors linked in those networks or visible in networking. Moreover, Swedish political scientist Uhlin observes that “networking with other NGOs is a very common activity” in Russia. It thus creates a ground for the defragmentation of “isolated NGOs” or the consolidation of weak civil society (2006, p. 74). Yet, this horizontal networking can have another aspect: *mobility within the publicity in the whole of Russia*. The organizational structures of civic associations and their meta-organizations resemble the constructs of the Russian Federation, an umbrella-type federal and even hierarchical composition that may function to siphon talented professional citizens.

In this brief chapter, I have emphasized that while the activities of administratively-mediated civic movements can potentially yield some routes to empowerment, self-realization, and the achievement of various aims of citizens, it is necessary to critically contemplate the latent ambiguities and paradoxes observed in them, especially at the layer of spatial reality. This vector of discussion is even more permissible because Russia is a vast and immensely diverse country in politics as well as in geography.

POSTSCRIPT

Russia encompasses a multitude of NGOs and civic associations. Hence, it is impossible to offer a generalized understanding of how they work, especially from the perspective of the ethnographically descriptive methodology adopted in this chapter. In addition, I add hesitantly that I do not think that only people with high academic qualifications can constitute publicity.¹⁸ I must also admit that I have intentionally framed discrete nationalities (for example, Sesegma and Natasha) in a single scope, deeming social stratification as well as ethnicity as a target of description and analysis of Siberian ethnography.

The fuller theoretical and empirical study of publicity in Russia/Siberia is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I have emphasized two points. First, Greene supposes “in the study of civil society, it is crucial not to confuse the means with the ends” (2014, p. 17); agreeing on this, I believe it is also pivotal not to confuse the central (Moscow) ends with the local (Buryatia) ends. Second, to echo Salman and Assies, I have described and discussed “the doubts, aspirations, motivations, and even ‘improper’ considerations of” (2007, p. 258) the participants in movements, reflecting on for whom and where the distinction of proper/improper makes sense.

In a review article on anthropology and public policy, Okongwu and Mencher conclude: “the crisis situations created by capitalism today require a real reinventing of anthropology” (2000, p. 119). This chapter is my modest response in the realm of Siberian studies to their appeal.

NOTES

- 1 I conducted my long-term fieldwork in Buryatia (mainly in the Selenga District) in 1996–1998 intermittently with short trips in the 2000s (Watanabe, 2010).
- 2 To protect the privacy of informants, all names of persons and organizations are pseudonyms except those belonging to administrative sectors and those who have already been mentioned in the local media I cite. For the same reason, I do not indicate sources when citing the xeroxed materials circulated to event participants and the magazines published by voluntary associations. All the data without any mentions are sourced from my field notes and other such materials.
- 3 In this context, I am obliged not to analytically distinguish the concept of publicity or public sphere from the notion of civil society.
- 4 I have added a slight modification on the original data.
- 5 Actually, ethnicity and land property bear sundry political aspects. Here, I emphasize that few anthropologists have dealt with politics in other settings. Caldwell (2004) and Rivkin-Fish (2005) are precious deviations.
- 6 As for a case study on such more voluntary movements as a grass roots activism on flat management problems, see Clément (2015). The multiformity and variegation of social movements make the discussion on publicity quite demanding, while indicating the vexed point of the articulation of the social.
- 7 The ethnographic exposition of this chapter primarily encompasses the early 2000s, the period before the Public Chamber (*Obshchestvennaia palata*) of the Russian Federation was established in 2005 as a state institution for the regulation of civic initiatives through administrative bodies. Aside from the increase of civic initiatives since 2005 (Chebankova, 2013, p. 40), I do not believe that any fundamental changes have occurred in the political and social domains of Russia since its creation. Put differently, “managed-pluralism” (Balzer, 2003) continues. The assessments on this topic range from affirmative inferences (Javeline & Lindmann-Komarova, 2010; Chebankova, 2013) to slightly neutral claims (Richter, 2009), to skeptical accounts (model of the “crackdown” on NGOs) (“Russian Green Group,” 2016).
- 8 The Republican law (the second Article of the Youth Policy) defines youth as the population aged between 14 and 30.
- 9 It is no accident that Eurasia’s Foundation focuses on including troubled teens in its activities. A member of the Youth Committee told me that there no longer exists a large labor market in Buryatia; thus, many young people remain unemployed or under-employed, which tends to lead them to smoke marijuana and develop further delinquent behaviors. This result is the most undesirable for the Youth Committee. “To prevent the delinquency

- of the young and children” was the most repeated phrase in my interviews with Youth Committee members and the activists of related associations.
- 10 For more nuanced interpretations of the meanings of *toonto* for the Buryats, including their temporal plasticity, hierarchical structuredness, and the other complexities, see Watanabe (2010, esp., Ch. 7 [in the contexts of the rituals of *oboo*]) and Namsaraeva (2012, pp. 141–144).
 - 11 Manzanova states (2007, p. 128) that the Buryats “preferred” and continue to prefer “to work in rural occupations, especially livestock herding, and also in culture and education.”
 - 12 The point on gender in the Russian climate of social movement is beyond the scope of this chapter, and may be left to Caiazza (2002), Riabov and Riabova (2014).
 - 13 The original data on the Buryatia’s population are sourced mainly from <https://burstat.gks.ru> and <http://burstat.old.gks.ru>.
 - 14 Kashnitsky, Mkrtchyan, and Leshukov (2016) examine cities in Russia that are attractive to young migrants. On Novosibirsk as a (quasi-)globalized city, see Spencer (2004).
 - 15 My discussion here is partially inspired by Humphrey (2016) on the Buryat semiotics of space, yet I focus on another aspect. And I omit the so-called north-south problem (the north as sequestered “islands” and the south as “a continent”) in Siberia and the Russian North (Mkrtchian, 2003).
 - 16 This argument de facto does not contradict Anderson’s claim (2004) on the “irony” as observed in Siberian youth, for this chapter deals entirely with both their “interests in migration” (p. 23) and the related sociological “facts.”
 - 17 Buyanova (2009) reports on the difficulties that young rural Buryats face when they move to urban settings for higher education.
 - 18 I discussed the publicity from the angle of bilingual education in Buryatia (Watanabe, 2007).

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CHAPTER 16

SOVIET DEBRIS

Failure and the poetics of unfinished construction in Northern Siberia



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“The first sign of civilization is the dirt of your boots,” said Vas’ka, an Evenki hunter and reindeer herder in his late 20s. We were traveling from a forest camp to a northern Siberian village that I call Katonga in July of 1994. He pointed to wheel tracks that were visible on an otherwise impeccably green pathway. Dirt appears when a truck breaks the grass and the moss. If you are traveling by foot from an area where trucks don’t go and nomadic camps are interconnected through reindeer passes, this gradually appearing dirt means that you have entered truck territory and that “civilization”—that is, the village—is within a day’s walk. The road widened and slowly became solid as soft moss gave way to wheel tracks. “The second sign [of civilization] is drops of gasoline in a road puddle,” Vas’ka noted. It was no longer possible to drink from puddles where they contained fresh and clean ice water originating in permafrost underneath the moss. As we continued to walk, occasional garbage dumps appeared along the road, multiplying into huge piles and endless rows in the last 15 or so kilometers from the village. The roadsides are the village’s dumping ground and sewer. Rusting food cans and broken glass bottles were found in and between the dumps. The newest deposits were sawdust from the collective-farm sawmill, some still emanating the smell of fresh wood, mixed with the rot of household and office waste. The sound of the sawmill greeted us once the village came within sight. Puddles became knee-deep and swampy as the road turned into a village street. Some of these streets had wooden sidewalks, but most did not. Older huts intermingled with new houses and a couple of half-finished three-story apartment blocks. All was wooden, and the village was littered with the leftovers of construction. The school building was surrounded by scaffolding. Vas’ka laughed: “It’s amazing, just 300 people—and what a dump!”

Imperial debris, as Stoler (2013) has argued, are not merely ruins as evidence of the past. “Ruination” is a continuous process through which imperial power occupies the present. Katonga has accumulated the debris of multiple Soviet projects as it grew from a tiny trading post of imperial Russia. It is located on the banks of the Podkamennaia Tunguska, the “Stony River of the Tungus,” the northern tributary of the Yenisei River, in the Krasnoyarskii krai. “Tungus” is the Russian colonial name of the Evenki, and “Stony” refers of the rapids that make most villages on

the upper part of this river inaccessible by cargo boat for most of the short summer. Katonga was part of a rarified network of outposts where a “better future” for Siberian Indigenous peoples was to be built and where the socialist organization of work, as well as schools, hospitals, veterinary science, hygiene, and other marks of “civilization” were brought to the “backward” and “non-modern” inhabitants. This is what I elsewhere call the gift of modernity (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017), a Soviet civilizing mission that was abruptly abandoned after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The focus of this chapter is not the material afterlife of Soviet socialism. I am interested instead in the residue that was continuously and abundantly accumulated *during* Soviet construction. In those parts of northern Siberia which were spared from oil and gas resourcing, this construction included collectivization and sedentarization of nomadic hunters and herders, Indigenous schooling and development. As Vas’ka’s father Vladimir said to me once, describing his long Soviet career: “We are always busy building something and always live as if in an unfinished building. Who knows, however, what we build, and where we live!” It is not clear whether such an unfinished building was a construction that is not yet completed or already a ruin: in Vas’ka’s words, “just 300 people—and what a dump!”

In this chapter, we find ourselves at a construction site where the end is constantly deferred (“who knows what we build”) and where the most stable matter are not what was being built, but the scaffolding—the structures that are supposed to be mere tools of construction—as well as the dump and debris that surround the construction site. This Soviet debris reveals a particular state of time. It is quite possible to radically change “what we build”—for instance, to shift, as happened in the 1990s, from constructing communism to neoliberal capitalism—or embrace, as in the 2000s, imperial nostalgia as the future. In the debris, we can see socialist, capitalist, and imperial formations mixed and coming into a mutual imagination as each other’s past and future. But the enduring presence of this very construction site has a temporality of its own that is different from one that can be described by the vector from its origin to the endpoint.

In what follows below, debris appears as a tracing of this temporality. The road to an Indigenous “better future” was paved with failures. If the village was a “dump” of their material remains—byproducts of inefficiencies and poor planning—it is also a monument to abandoned projects in social constructivism. The accumulative goal of these various projects was to achieve progress from “primitive” to “scientific” communism or at least to approximate a standard Soviet economy and society. But the result was the Indigenous underclass and new hunting-gathering—itself a Soviet debris of sorts—that included Soviet welfare and the infrastructure of these very developmental projects as targets of foraging.

THE BEGINNING

Mikhail Sergeev’s monumental book, *The Non-Capitalist Path of Development of the Small Peoples of the North* (1955), argues after Lenin that social evolution is not linear but punctuated. It is possible and in fact politically desirable to avoid moving toward Soviet socialism through the capitalist socio-economic formation if this alternative, non-capitalist path of development is “guided” by the working class and the communist party. The book starts with a crisp overview of Indigenous

societies within the Russian empire, approaching them from a political-economy perspective and stressing Indigenous hardships and impoverishment. It was this colonial exploitation, and not just the evolutionary gap between Siberian kin-based societies and Soviet modernity, that Soviet reforms were to address. In a clearly spelled chronology of these reforms to date, it traces “steps” of these Soviet reforms such as distributing the initial aid to alleviate hunger in the north caused by this isolation of the Civil War (1918–1921), then “Sovietizing” the Indigenous north by creating “clan,” “nomadic,” and “native” [*tuzemnye*] soviets in mid-1920s, and then setting up, in the late 1920s, “primitive production units,” that is, “elementary” forms of cooperation before moving to collectivization.

But consider, however, how most of my elderly informants thought about this history. For them it had a specific date: the summer of 1938, when the regional People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) purged the rich reindeer herders and shamans. Collectivization happened for them that year—marked by the nationalization of reindeer seized from the purged, and their organization into four “brigades.” By the same token, this was for them the year of the de facto beginning of Soviet power. I questioned about this to an Evenki elder. Nikolai, a man in his 70s at the time of my fieldwork, became one of my main informants. I inquired about earlier Soviet institutions such as the primitive production unit and Katonga Clan Soviet, which was headed by his relative. He replied that “this was trade, not Soviet power.” Purges were not mentioned in Sergeev's 1955 narrative of non-capitalist development. Here and elsewhere in the fabric of Soviet society, the great terror of 1937–1938 was simultaneously the blind spot of Soviet narrative and its foundational event.

Also, consider the conviction of the Russian wife of a regional official who settled in this area in the 1950s. For her, Evenki “did not know any Soviet power before” (*ran'she nikakoi sovetskoi vlasti ne znali*). This is the “before” of her generation of reformers came to the north—i.e., before the 1950s. In the 1990s, she worked part-time as a cloakroom attendant at the District Area Studies Museum in Tura. I researched in this museum's archives the early Soviet reforms and shared with her my findings on early Soviet history. She was surprised that in fact Evenki shared much of the same history as the Russians. She had thought that the Soviet order started in this area 20 years after the purges because she took another event to be the “point zero.” In 1954, a steamer sailed over the Podkamennaia Tunguska rapids on the high water of spring floods, proving that this area was accessible by boat and that supplies could be brought here on a new scale. This triggered town and village construction, followed by collective-farm enlargement—all overseen by the new generation of state officials and reformers.

For both old Nikolai and this cloakroom attendant, these beginnings covered the previous Soviet activities not as debris of the earlier Soviet projects but as Soviet prehistory—as something not Soviet at all. These different perspectives highlight different ways in which the history of Soviet order is written or spoken about. Sergeev's 1955 book highlights modernist historical chronology, while old Nikolai and the cloakroom attendant breaks it down into a foundational binary distinction of “before” and “after” (temporal B-Series of Gell 1992). This distinction is drawn differently at different points of the complex social space of Soviet reforms. Yet it also prompts questions of what exactly this “before” is and what exactly it situates on the other side of the “now.” What makes it something other than Soviet? Exactly

what constitutes this otherness? In order to look into this more closely, let me go back to 1921.

INSCRIBING THE OLD REGIME

In 1921, Lydia Dobrova-Iadrinsteva, an ethnographer and economist, took a steamer down the Yenisei river from the city of Krasnoyarsk. The steamer was to supply the Indigenous population of the lower part of this river basin with flour, sugar, and hunting equipment—all badly needed after the Revolution and the Russian Civil War shut down most of the northern trade. This expedition was part of the emergency food supply campaign that Sergeev (1955) celebrated. Dobrova-Iadrinsteva also used the trip to “conduct a complete population census and collect data on indigenous economic life” (Dobrova-Iadrinsteva, 1925, p. 1).

This perspective was also very openly a part of early Soviet power/knowledge relations. Dobrova-Iadrinsteva included her questionnaire with the accounting books of the trade cooperatives that kept the financial balances of Indigenous families and also channeled the aid. As nomadic hunters and herders turned up in trading posts to collect food rations, these questionnaires added to information about each family, including the trade balance with local cooperatives. In short, they provided data “about the native’s family members, his economic well-being, the migration routes” (*ibid.*, p. 3). It was thus not only an act of aid but also of data collection, and additionally, an act of Sovietization of the north. Hunger was the *raison d’être* and the way of forging new forms of governance through knowledge relations and, simultaneously, Soviet-style redistributive power relations (*cf.* Verdery, 1991).

But here comes an important paradox. The book that Dobrova-Iadrinsteva published in 1925 was not about these new knowledge/power relations but their “other side,” the old-regime colonial and trade inequalities that her project tried to address. Yet there were similar surveys conducted earlier and in similar ways (*cf.* Tugarinov, 1918). They revealed the presence of the Soviet state in a form that, however fragmented at the time of the Civil War, was nonetheless of trade cooperatives that were also institutions of occasional aid and instruments of data collection. What is important to realize is that these very same institutions were the cause of the crisis and the hunger. In 1923, Anatolii Skachko, the head of the Commission for Minorities of the Soviet Commissariat for Nationalities, noted, precisely about these institutions, that “never before [did] ... the exploitation” of Indigenous peoples “grow to such a shameless scope and form as under the Soviet power.” The agents of this exploitation were “the institutions of the Russian Federation,” the politics of which could be called nothing but “state capitalism.” The establishment of Soviet co-ops led to monopolization of trade. Citing the report of the Yeniseisk Provincial Executive Committee, Skachko described exactly how this happened. The trade competitors were “withdrawn from business” as “speculators and exploiters.” As a result, Soviet co-ops and consumer unions were “seeking maximum profit in the shortest period of time” and in doing so “killed the goose that laid golden eggs.” Hunger was caused by high prices for flour and gun supplies so that “a single shot costs a native more than a fur pelt” (GARF, f. 3977, op. I, d. 2, ll. 2–3). Dobrova-Iadrinsteva’s trip was an attempt to alleviate the hunger, yet it perpetuated the centralized distributive system that, in the archives and in people’s accounts of this time, was referred to

as “ration years [*norma-gody*]” or hunger years; these were based on the system of Soviet monopoly trade, the institutions of which were remembered as “ration trade stalls [*norma-lavka*]” (GARF, f. 3977, op. I, d. 35, l. 18; GAKK, f. 769, op. I, d. 416, ll. 105–106).

In other words, the very first Soviet reforms created plenty of debris. But it is important that the next steps in these reforms were discursively phrased as “the first beginning” of Soviet order which, by the mid-1920s, already had history. Both the monopolization of trade in 1918 and 1921, and its demonopolization in 1923–1924, were Soviet interventions. Each marked itself as a “beginning.” Each identified the previous debris as “capitalism”—as Skachko’s “state capitalism” or the Soviet trade co-ops’ “speculators and exploiters.” The otherness that this debris plentifully reveals is that of predatory colonial capitalism. Equally important, this otherness was not so much eliminated as transformed between the mid-1920s and late 1930s.

These documents increasingly conflated the local wealthy, and frequently the simply well-off, as Indigenous *kulaki* (“the fists” or “the economically strong”) and, eventually, Stalinist “enemies of the people.” If this was a construction road, “the path of non-capitalist development,” it was both paved with, and enabled by, this debris of otherness, which descriptions followed often a Marxist political-economy interpretations of local situations. These identified “hostile elements,” including Russian co-op traders, descendants of the former Indigenous elite, religious leaders, and those whose wealth stood out. A 1918 survey notes that a “propensity to trade [*torgovaia zhilka*] is not alien to every Tungus. If opportunity arises, he tries to buy extra commodities in order to resell. It is a rare Tungus that is [thus] not bound by monetary obligations with other Tungus” (Tugarinov, 1918, p. 7). This is particularly true of the wealthy ones. As a 1930 report put it, “each wealthy reindeer herder is a trading post in miniature” (Tarasenzov, 1930, p. 140).

Coextensive ethnographic production charted ways in which each “trading post in miniature” worked through a mixture of trade and sharing, and a local accumulation of material on the same issue. The ethnographic literature on the Evenki (Anisimov, 1936; Nikul’shin, 1939) and Siberian comparative materials (Bogoraz, 1930; Maslov, 1934) do not engage with Marcel Mauss’s gift theory that appeared around the same time but nonetheless makes an important counterargument to the gift theory’s structural distinctions of market and non-market exchanges and the modern and “archaic” social forms (Mauss, 2002). But the locally accumulated data on this perspective was also a part of the expanding Soviet modality of knowledge and power relations. It is important to keep in mind that this was not a Foucauldian constant and consistent observation/domination that had its subjects under a continuous gaze (Foucault 1977), but sporadic interventions that produced documents with sometimes obvious political implication and often also as yet-to-be-used instruments. The NKVD files of the late 1930s on the local rich integrate earlier materials that were collected on occasions of depriving the wealthy and shamanizing Evenki of voting rights in 1934—and all the way back to the Polar Census of mid-1920s and even Dobrova-Iadrinsteva’s 1921 trip (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003, pp. 75–80, 98–105). They show, on the one hand, continuous failure to eliminate older socio-economic inequalities, and, on the other, the use of this failure in Soviet governance. To give just one example from a substantial amount of material, a file on one Katonga Soviet resident provides a record of his trade activities:

In addition to the facts that were uncovered by the [Soviet] election committee, this is to record that [the accused]

- (a) in 1927 sold a male reindeer to P. T. Iastrikov for 48 squirrels ...;
- (b) in autumn [of the same year] loaned one reindeer to the same named person;
- (v) in 1929 sold a young male reindeer to A. T. Iastrikov for 40 squirrels ...;
- (g) that he rented reindeer to the following [two] households [names attached]
- (d) in August, 1931, when there was a general shortage of flour, he ... loaned flour to the following natives [the list of names and the amount of flour attached].

(EA, f. 2, op. 1, d. 4, l. 24)

One can query the meaning of “selling” in such contexts. But the issue is not the ethnographic accuracy of these depictions. Rather, it is the use of “capitalism” in the expansion of the Soviet state that is not dissimilar to the uses of “Orientalism” in modern colonial expansion. These depictions deploy the images of the “other” that are, however, not orientalist but classist. It was this imagination that was both the object of distancing and followed a distinct logic of Marxist political economy. It was accusatory and “ascriptive,” that is, marking personal identity in relations with the state (cf. Fitzpatrick, 2000) and re-inscribing the capitalist “old regime” within the Soviet order.

DEBRIS OF DISCIPLINE

In the spring of 1994, I stayed in the forest camps of Vas’ka, his father Vladimir, and old Nikolai. If for Vas’ka the village was a dump, for old Nikolai it was the forest that appeared as a dump, albeit for social rather than material debris:

Soon the rivers will fall [i.e., the flood will be over], and the boys will start wandering. In the village, the food is scarce and expensive. Once, twice they are fed, but then the people start driving them away. So they go to the forest and visit one camp after another ... I don’t drive them out as long as they are helpful. I am getting old, Vas’ka needs help. But most of these boys don’t want to work. They know only how to work with a spoon. It’s all boarding school. If you have free meals for eight [school] years, you would get used to it, won’t you?

For old Nikolai, “boys” was a social category of unmarried Indigenous men. “Boris is already 38,” he gave as an example. The frame of this remark is generational relations, and, in particular, old Nikolai’s paternalistic concern about the young, whom he cared about but was also highly critical of. His paternalism is complex, as he had a very successful Soviet career as head of a reindeer-herding brigade and was decorated as an accomplished hunter, and as a veteran of the Second World War. This concern was part of his Soviet role, and his critique included the narrative of failure of Soviet institutions. In his view, the boys were a waste of Soviet order, as the school had neither taught them to make careers in the village nor passed on the skills and work attitudes necessary to survive in the forest. The central theme of these remarks was disintegration, with the forest camps being on the receiving

end of “these not-here-not-theres.” In saying this he asserted his own authority as a “traditional” elder, although more often than other elders he tended to conflate his traditional attitude with Stalinist discipline: “Oh if there was Stalin for them” (*Stalina na nikh net*), he added. As an outsider I was a good audience for this mixture of traditionalism and Soviet nostalgia. But by 1994, I had known him already long enough to notice that these idioms of disorder were highly repetitive. Being “not here, not there,” able to “work only with a spoon,” and “lacking discipline” were recurrent motifs in his near-constant complaining. But if in the 1990s these complaints were about ruination, in 1989 when I first spent a summer in his camp, he used virtually the same idioms to state that “it is not possible to build communism with *these* [boys].” The order then was not yet achieved, rather than already collapsed. Furthermore, in the regional archive that contained minutes of the Katonga Soviet meetings, I found a record of a 1971 speech by old Nikolai at one such meeting where he spoke in his capacity as head of a reindeer-herding brigade:

The main reason [there is a lack of discipline] is that some herders still [*vse esche*] don’t carry out their work conscientiously [*dobrosovestno*]*—they linger in the village for too long, engage in drinking activity [zanimaiutsia p’iankoï], do not collect reindeer on time, do not treat the slaughtering for meat seriously. We should pay more attention to discipline, particularly among the young. The party organization should work more with the youth.*

(EA, f. 58, op. 1, d. 4, Protocol 7)

Old Nikolai is thus positioned at a crossing point of ruination and incomplete construction of the Soviet order. And so are the subjects of his paternalistic concern: “the boys,” “some herders,” and the lack of discipline. But this lack is one of the most constant motifs in Katonga Soviet meetings. The 1940 minutes gave a similar picture:

Reindeer herds are practically neglected ... herders don’t watch the herds; they completely forgot about their responsibility ... that was entrusted to them by the board of the primitive production unit and by all Soviet people ... Reindeer escape the fences; the fish is sold on the side.

(EA, f. 58, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 10–12, 25)

If secular disciplinary power is one of the foundational mechanisms of modernity (Foucault 1977), what is the place and the role in it of such a systematic discourse on the lack of discipline? What is the place of the undisciplined, the irresponsible, and the indocile in this disciplinary gaze? In the 1940 document cited above, irresponsibility is mentioned alongside the illegal trade (“the fish is sold on the side”). In the previous section I described trade as an enduring and incriminating evidence of “capitalism,” ultimately linked with the old regime. But trade is not really evidence of a lack of discipline. The latter, I will argue below, assumes a different kind of internal “other.” But let me point out first that it has a similar property of both the product and the debris, as discussed regarding trade. At a 1966 meeting of the Katonga Soviet, the head of the kindergarten complained that the collective farm’s gigantic tractor smashed the kindergarten’s fence every time it delivered a load of firewood:

And I request that the fence of the kindergarten be fixed. I feel indignant that this “nobody of a man” like “just” a tractor driver [*liuboi traktorist*] completely lacks any responsibility. Because of these drivers we have to repair the fence every year ... It should be repaired because we cannot let children play on the street, there are cows everywhere, a bull given to fighting, and horses.

(EA, f. 58, op. 1, d. 31, l. 14)

The fence here is ruined by the construction effort—that is, by an attempt to deliver firewood more efficiently. This is a perfect example of construction ruination in the same move. No wonder that this complaint comes after a discussion about the village itself being an “utter dump” with empty cans and other “garbage everywhere” (EA, f. 58, op. 1, d. 34, l. 1).

The economy of labor shortage

The minutes of the 1974–1975 Katonga Soviet meetings carry a note: “Now, there is no shortage of supplies, only willingness to work and discipline is lacking ... Herders must go seek out reindeer” (EA f 58, Op. I, d. 50, Protokol 1–3). There is a brief reference to shortages, which was a huge problem for the Soviet economy and became a token of failure of a socialist, centrally planned economy. In following this remark, let me consider the lack of discipline as a shortage. Katherine Verdery (1991) draws on the school of the “economics of shortage” (Kornai, 1980) to make the following two points that are of relevance here. First, shortages of consumer goods were merely the tip of the iceberg of resource shortages in Soviet-style industry and agriculture. They characterized the state-socialist organization of production, not just consumption. Second, shortages illuminate how the Soviet system operated, rather than merely being evidence of its failures. Shortages were a means in an essentially political process of accumulating power to allocate these resources. This power hinged on the system’s agents’ *capacity* to allocate, which, as Verdery acutely points out, is not the same as actual allocation (Verdery, 1991).

Allocative power, rather than simply being at the top of the system, can be seen here as widely distributed through the social body. Those in charge of reindeer herding “brigades” or forest households experience problems similar to those of a collective-farm director’s factory managers. There are grounds to think about the recursive character of relatedness across different scales of this system. But forms of “political uses of labor” (Humphrey, 1983, p. 304) include not merely bargaining over what collective-farm duties one should perform but also possibilities of spending labor power on something other than these duties. Archival materials indicate difficulties of collective-farm performances right from the time of “fixed plans” (*tverdye zadaniia*) of production output in 1935. Minutes of Soviet meetings record various reasons for the failure to fulfill these plans—from blaming weather (“winter was cold”) to lack of supplies like butter, flour, tea, and salt (EA, f. 2, op. 1, d. 554, l. 115; d. 552, l. 44–45). In 1965, “hunters sat idle ... because the reindeer blankets were not sewed” in the collective farm (EA, f. 2, op. 1, d. 28, l. 12). Drinking comes up constantly as one of the roots of the problem, but so do observance of Soviet holidays like Revolution Day.

Amid these recurrent issues, the shortage of discipline highlight some of the productive historical changes. People “lack discipline” to seek reindeer, but instead they did a lot of hunting for themselves (sable hunting paid well) and often treated the state reindeer herds as one of the resources for subsistence. Vas’ka’s adopted brother, Bagdaka, conveyed this attitude with a riddle:

- Nikolai, what does a state collective-farm reindeer do when it comes [to our camp] for a visit?
- It goes straight into the soup pot.

Katonga collective farm (*kolkhoz*) was enlarged in the late 1950s and transformed into the state collective farm (*sovkhos*) in 1967. Within it hunting and herding became a salaried state occupation, and reindeer herding a new an economic priority. It was classed as a “group A industry”—a category of the state sector concerned with production of the means of production, as opposed to a “group B industry” that focused on consumer goods. From late 1960s onwards, hunters and herders started to take the state resources such as reindeer as salaries as merely givens. What was not a given was localized and inventive “lack of discipline,” de-territorialized counter-topographies of seasonal migration between the village and the forest and between herding and hunting camps. Despite or perhaps indeed because reindeer herding was classed as a part of priority “group A industry,” the state collective’s valuable reindeer stock started a steady decline from the 1960s onward, from which it never recovered. This was a broader trend across Indigenous Siberia, except in tundra large-scale reindeer herding that underwent expansion over the same period of time. This reindeer morphology of Indigenous development was a mark of decay of the lifestyles that state reforms were aiming to develop. But I suggest this is a mark of a politico-economic transformation of the Indigenous Subarctic into an internal foraging enclave of the state-farm order.

To conclude this section, let me point out that time was at stake in this internal foraging enclave of the state-farm order. When “the boys” do not perform their duties in a well-disciplined manner, this does not simply mean that they drag their feet when they do collective-farm reindeer herding. They do something else instead *when* they were supposed to perform these duties: hunting, fishing, foraging, even “working with a spoon”—as opposed to “responsible” and “conscientious” reindeer herding. I will argue now that both time as a marker of discipline and time spent on subsistence evoke a different kind of imaginary: that of primitive wilderness rather than colonial capitalism.

FIRST CONTACT, AGAIN

When Vas’ka in the summer of 1994 commented en route from the forest to Katonga that the village was “just 300 people—and what a dump,” his voice and intonation conveyed no surprise or irritation. It had been so since his childhood. His irony had a finality of judgment. But I was struck once by a very different narrative of arrival in Katonga.

In June of 1989, I was traveling there by river from the regional center Baikit. A Russian district inspector offered me a motorboat ride with him after we had a long conversation in Baikit about Indigenous development. “It is amazing that Evenki still shelter in tents,” he remarked when he learned that I intended to do fieldwork in the forest, and added: “We really should do something about this.” He marveled at the spectacular rocky bed of the “Stony River of the Tungus.” “What primordial beauty” (*pervozdannaiia krasota*), he exclaimed. Then we arrived and saw half-built houses, dirty unpaved roads, garbage, and mounds of sawdust. It became apparent from his remarks that these features of the village were not new to him. But his reaction was that, however long-lasting, these were signs of a *beginning*: “the first furrow of civilization,” he said with a smile.

While Vas’ka articulated a *spatial* perspective on Siberian Soviet debris, this inspector’s comments were temporal. This disorder of half-constructed villages was temporary, a beginning of civilization on the “river of the Tungus,” with many of these Tungus “still” living in tents. This disorder marked the aesthetics of the Soviet order as not-fully-yet there. This was the permanent starting point of what, hence, seemed to be a permanently “primordial” natural beauty and the “uncivilized” social landscape: the spectacular river’s rocky bed and the Tungus “still” living in tents. Despite a long and dynamic history of the presence of the state, both Soviet and imperial, in this area, the inspector’s statements transferred the temporality of the quite permanent Soviet disorder into a temporality of “the first contact.”

DEBRIS OF PAPERWORK

Katonga as a dump or as a construction site could be productively explored through what has been termed as anthropology’s material turn (Miller, 1998; Buchli, 2004; Fortun & Fortun, 2015). But what exactly is the material in question? So far, I have mentioned how Vas’ka and a Russian inspector *talked* about this materiality. Buildings, dirt, and dumps are metaphors that evoke an architectural image of construction or ruin. But this construction, and more generally Soviet socialism as a construction site, is an analytical idiom. Above (the “Debris of Discipline” section) I used the example of a 1966 complaint about a tractor smashing a kindergarten fence while delivering firewood as the one of identity of construction and ruination. This episode as an entanglement of people and things (Hodder, 2016)—of children, the head of the kindergarten, the driver, the tractor, the fence, and “garbage everywhere,” let alone cows, “a bull given to fighting,” and horses. But this assemblage appears only once in the Soviet meeting’s minutes. Most other historical material that I have sited in this chapter is of a similarly fragmented character.

My point is that that the debris in question include these historical documents. Most of them are based on a bureaucratic model, “problem stated, problem resolved.” But they do not lead to a solution in any evident ways—even if, and in fact particularly when, the meeting takes a “resolution” to address and solve a given problem. It is not often that a subsequent meeting returns to the issue. It is *textually* that they are unfinished constructions. Just as a history of reforms could be seen as constituting Katonga’s layers of residue, these papers make up layers in piles that are also forms of discard. It seems that they are just to be filed, archived, and likely not looked into again. Unlike the early Soviet reform archives (see the section “Inscribing the Old

Regime” above), they have never been used for purging. If so, exactly how are they “not dead matter” (Stoler 2009, 3)?

Firstly, they are not dead matter inasmuch as they are a means of proliferating developmental discourse. If they rarely invite more meetings to resolve problems they raise, what these statements about inefficiencies and failures do is perform is “texts acts,” to paraphrase J. L. Austin (1962). They produce more paperwork by virtue of being repetitive and having the narrative cyclicity of a closed event or singularity. They raise an issue as if for the first time—and in doing so they mirror the “first contact” in the vision of the above-mentioned inspector. They list ways to resolve it yet rarely back to evaluate the results of the resolution. It is this fragmented singularity of a case in minutes and general lack of closure that proliferated the discourse, as problems were likely to remain unresolved and thus recur on other occasions, prompting discussion from scratch at other meetings. But I wonder if anyone involved is surprised by this recurrence. These documents also indicate a plane of obviousness that is also visible in Vas’ka’s and the inspector’s comments. In fact, I read some of these documents out loud a few times to Vas’ka and the inspector, whom I interviewed repeatedly in 1989 and 1993–1995. Their reactions were both similar and different. Both reacted with laughter, though what each found funny was different. Vas’ka’s reaction was “I told you so—what a dump!” For him, this was a confirmation of particular social and material properties of the village life that he viewed from the distance of a forest hunter. The inspector was also unsurprised to find that the firstness of the “first furrow of civilization” had a much longer life. His reaction was also “what did you expect” (*nu, chto vy khotite*), but it was followed with what was for me a surprising turn: a shrug of shoulders and a line from Alexander Pushkin, “the presently wild Tungus,” (*i nyne dikoi, tungus*).

MAKING OF WILDERNESS

This line comes from Pushkin’s 1836 poem “The Monument” where Horace’s “Ode to Melpomene” is evoked. Horace speaks of poetic civilizing mission: “I have erected a monument that is stronger than bronze” (*Exegi monumentum aere perennius*) because he was the “first to bring Aeolian verse to Italian measures,” where “Aufidus roars and where ... Daunus ruled his rustic people.” Paraphrasing this, Pushkin claims that

Talk about me will go through all of great Russia
And each language existing in it will name me
The proud grandchild of the Slavs,
And the Finn, the presently wild Tungus
And the Kalmyk, the fiend of the steppe.

Yet Pushkin identifies the source of his fame very differently:

I will be favored by the people for a long time
Because I urged kind feelings with my Lyre,
Because in our cruel age I glorified freedom,
And asked for mercy to the fallen.

The poem was not published during Pushkin's life but subsequently became one of the core Soviet texts uniting Soviet imagined community. This was because not of its imperial gaze but anti-imperial sentiment. The poem was to be learned by heart at Soviet schools (I did that, and so did Vas'ka, his father and the inspector) because of its glorifying freedom during the Czarist "cruel age." "The mercy to the fallen" referred to the Decembrists failed rebellion of 1825, which was celebrated as the first revolutionary action that eventually, according to Soviet history books, led to the Soviet state. Some of its courageous leaders were executed, and many exiled to Siberia.

This anti-imperial sentiment, foundational for the Soviet ideology, is the same anti-imperial ethnographic sentiment that was foundational for the early Soviet reforms in the Indigenous north. Under late socialism, however, the strength of this sentiment was worn out, and it became as performative as Soviet ideology was more generally (Yurchak, 2006). But for the inspector the fragments of this imagination—such as the line about "the presently wild Tungus"—rang true and fresh, rather than performative and stagnant. And this was not at all because they marked the territory of hope for freedom during the imperial cruel age, but because the Tungus were truly "wild."

Here, "wild Tungus" was not something to feel for, as in late-Soviet "return of the savage" in fiction and cinema (Slezkine, 1994; Diment and Slezkine, 1993), but rather an obstacle or problem. The Katonga collective-farm director told me in 1989:

if I created an Evenki construction team, they would not show up for work, no matter how much I pay them. They will tell me: "I went hunting," or "I went to pick berries instead." Or they would not show up on time. They lack discipline [*im ne khvataet discipliny*]. But what do you expect? No matter how long you feed the wolf, it still looks back to the forest.

His last remark cites a Russian proverb about the inner qualities of people, rather than wolves. These idioms of wildness recast the poetics of the unfinished construction as a state of nature in which failure highlights the limits of the state but also the necessity for its civilizing mission.

FAILURE AND THE REGIMES OF TRUTH

I have argued in this chapter that debris and failures name otherness. I indicated two modalities of this otherness—the old regime of the early Soviet period and the incorrigible wilderness of the late one. This transformation of "otherness" also indexes permutations of the Soviet "selfness" from anti-imperial to imperial. The state as the old regime is increasingly visible in Soviet debris. What is being eliminated becomes reproduced. Is it possible to think of the truth regime of these transformations? The early Soviet debris of colonial capitalism are visible because the reforms and reformers "speak Bolshevik" that in other contexts have invited a Foucauldian reading of truth and power relations in early Soviet studies (Kotkin, 1995; Hellbeck, 2000; Halfin, 2003). Under late socialism, "speaking Bolshevik" ceases to be a constative matter of Marxist truth claims that control difference to the point of purging, as happened in Katonga in 1938. Alexei Yurchak argues that late

socialism constitutes a performative shift within the Soviet languages of description. What seems as a stagnantly reiterative means something entirely different than stagnation. It engenders, rather than impedes, social change and new cultural forms, including complex borrowings of western music and commodities. While decline of Marxist modernism is evident in this transformation, this is no failure, strictly speaking. Rather, this is performative transformation of constative (truth-judgment based) state-socialist language (Yurchak, 2006).

But the concept of performative shift overlooks the constative aspects of Soviet discourses that endure. That “reindeer escape the fences; the fish is sold on the side” in the 1940s and “willingness to work and discipline is lacking” in the 1970s (see above) may or may not mean that this is just a bureaucratic convention (*proforma*: Yurchak, 2006, p. 93) for people who write this. But these text acts mark failures that in both cases indicate constative truth. In the late-Soviet period, they are a background for the wondering “boys” of old Nikolai’s remarks as the inspector’s “presently wild Tungus” and the director’s wolves “who look back to the forest.” In these acts of identification the Soviet order ceased to be Soviet but became “simply” civilization, while wilderness seems to be outgrowing the Soviet debris. The debris of Soviet paperwork of the 1960s–1980s could be performative as far as the Soviet meetings were concerned. But the Indigenous “incorrigible” wilderness as well as long-term civilizing mission of the Russian state in Siberia were the constatives, though aesthetic rather than descriptive. Unlike the early Soviet documents, they are not data on otherness. A shrug of shoulders, a smile, and saying “the Tungus, presently wild” are not accusatory reports that a certain “comrade” is no comrade because he “in 1929 sold a young male reindeer to A. T. Iastrikov for 40 squirrels” and “rented reindeer to the following [two] households [names attached]” (see above). The late-Soviet abbreviated and crisp invocations of difference are aesthetic constatives—the “distributions of the sensible” (Rancière, 2004)—that both work through ruination and are fragments if not ruins themselves.

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ARCHIVAL REFERENCES

This chapter uses the Russian abbreviations for archival references, such as “f.” for *fond* (“collection”), “op” for *opis*’ (“inventory”), “d” for *delo* (“file”), and “l” or “ll” for *list* or *listy* (“page” or “pages”).

EA: *Evenkiiskii Arkhiv* (Evenki Archive).

GAKK: *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Krasnoiarskogo Kraia* (The State Archive of the Krasnoiarskii krai).

GARF: *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (The State Archive of the Russian Federation).

CHAPTER 17

LOCAL GENDER CONTRACTS AND THE PRODUCTION OF TRADITIONAILITY IN SIBERIAN OLD BELIEVER PLACES



Danila Rygovskiy

INTRODUCTION

The general idea of this chapter is that “traditionality” exists due to things more complicated than mere perseverance, even though Old Believer settlements are usually portrayed as sites where tradition has been protected by the inhabitants in its highest expression possible. However, this expression has developed as the sum of multiple social and economic factors, which affected, first of all, local gender order. Employing gender theory—namely, a concept of local gender contracts—I observe how “traditionality” is produced and transformed. In more specific terms, Siberian Old Believers have become more restricted than during Soviet times, and more closed as a group than prior to the Revolution of 1917. This happened due to the growth of informal economic relations that paralleled the building of official Soviet society. The so-called traditional gender division of labor in taiga villages, where women were supposed to keep the household while men were providing resources (e.g., furs, fish, etc.), was a major part of that informal, horizontal economy. It was mostly shadowed by Soviet ideology, but, in fact, even the official economy needed those resources. Those informal relations also met the demands of the Old Believers, to whom it corresponded with both to their religious commitments and to their normal working routine.

Russian Old Belief split off from the major Russian Orthodox Church in the mid-17th century. The reason for the schism was a serial revision of liturgical books implied by patriarch Nikon. Mainly, Old Believers were against changes in rules for the recitation of prayers and the performance of ritual signs (like the sign of cross), for which they have been nicknamed “Old Ritualists.” Old Believers do not represent a single unified movement. On the contrary, from the very beginning they have been divided into several factions based on variations in the performance of rituals and understandings of Orthodox dogmas and regulations. The faction that is centered in the narrative in this chapter is called the *Chasovennye*¹ Old Believers. Namely, this research is focused on several territorial groups of *Chasovennye* of Siberia, in Mountain Altai, in the Republic of Tuva, in Krasnoyarskii krai,² and in Mountain Shoria. Apart from my own interviews with the Old Believers and field diaries, I extensively rely on the accounts of earlier authors who also wrote about Siberian Old Believers. Among them, I primarily use the work of D. N. Belikov, an Orthodox

missionary in Siberia of the Russian Empire, and A. F. Emel'ianov, a Soviet ideology worker in Tuva.

Since the way in which I address the concept of gender contract is connected to the specifics of local economies, I will first describe them briefly. Among the above-mentioned communities of *Chasovennye*, the one in Mountain Altai is the oldest one. *Chasovennye* settled there in the 18th century³ as *kamenshchiki*,⁴ a word that could be roughly translated as “highlanders.” *Chasovennye* were living across the whole Altai region, including two prominent sites in the Bukhtarma and Uimon valleys. Both sites were suitable for agriculture and cattle-breeding, and these industries remained at the forefront of their livelihoods in Soviet and Post-Soviet times. In this chapter, I am analyzing materials from Uimon, where I conducted fieldwork.

Beginning in the 1860s, *Chasovennye* founded several settlements in Tuva (many of them were moving from Altai) (Tatarintseva & Storozhenko, 2015, pp. 25–27). It was during the period of Russian colonization of the region, and Old Believers used this as an opportunity to set themselves free from the pressure of Imperial administration, and, on the other hand, to improve their wealth at the cost of the appropriation of lands. Mostly, *Chasovennye* were concentrated in the region of Kaa-Khem, which means “Little Yenisei” in Tuvan. They still live here, and this region became another site of my fieldwork. However, at least two subregions emerged in Kaa-Khem in Soviet times. One of them is more conservative, with several villages where almost only Old Believers live. This subregion is called Upper Reaches (Verkhovia) and the journalists I mentioned in the vignette above filmed the representatives of the group. The second subregion does not bear a specific vernacular name. Its difference from Upper Reaches is that *Chasovennye* population is negligible here, although most of the settlements in the subregion were also founded and previously inhabited by Old Believers.⁵

From among the numerous *Chasovennye* communities in Krasnoyarskii krai I will focus on the settlements on the Dubches River, a tributary of Podkamennaia Tunguska, which is itself a tributary of Yenisei. This area is famous for a group of *Chasovennye* monasteries scattered across a huge territory in taiga. They were founded quite recently in the late 1930s by *Chasovennye* monks from the Urals, Western, and Southern Siberia, who were trying to escape persecutions from Soviet power (Pokrovskii & Zol'nikova, 2002, pp. 31–49). There are several villages of lay people centered around the Dubches monasteries, or *sketes* in the vernacular language. Besides, I mention *Chasovennye* settlements in Mountain Shoria that were also founded in the 1920s–1930s.

GENDER CONTRACTS

In this chapter, I address the concept of gender contract that describes established principles of gendered divisions in spheres of labor and social reproduction.⁶ Needless to say, gender contracts have a conventional nature, which presumes that expectations for women and men exist on a grassroots level. Ivonnie Hirdman calls this set of principles “irrefutabilities” or “obvious statements” about the order of things (1991, pp. 190–191). Gender contracts can result not only as a convention within a society but can also be sufficiently influenced by the state. It is in this sense that Zdravomyslova and Temkina speak about Soviet etacratc gender order (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2007).

Why was it the Soviet modernization project that sufficiently influenced the contemporary distribution of gender contracts in Old Believer settlements? It is true that the gender order was reshaped after the collapse of the USSR. Temkina and Rotkirkh posit that the dominant Soviet contract of “working mother” spawned a variety of contracts after the collapse of the state. The authors also posit that contemporary gender order in Russia is massively successive to the Soviet one, although the succession should not be perceived as straightforward (Temkina & Rotkirkh 2002, pp. 11–13).

Regarding the Siberian Old Believers, there are at least two reasons for putting an emphasis on the Soviet gender order. The first one is generational. Post-Soviet active believers were socialized in Soviet times. From this point of view, post-Soviet means a continuation of Soviet models after the collapse of the whole construction. This is a sophisticated move, but the existing traditionality in gender relations emerged out of late Soviet demand that developed as a semi-formal type of social relations. The second reason involves the drastic social and economic changes that were caused by Soviet modernization. Indirectly, this influenced the distribution of gender contracts in the Old Believer population.

Soviet ideologists pitched the idea that participation of women in the “construction of socialism” was a great achievement of the country in ensuring gender equality. Nevertheless, the actual reasons for women to be employed were different. Svetlana Aivazova emphasizes that the Soviet economy could not meet the needs of an average family, so both members of a married couple had to work to provide for themselves, regardless of the existence of small children. It is this need that made women opt for waged jobs, rather than an abstract opportunity created by the state. At the same time, women had to look after children and provide domestic labor, what significantly increased their burden (Aivazova, 2001, pp. 298–299). Following this argument, Aivazova concludes that gender relations in Soviet Russia were defined by the “contract of a working mother.” However, Anna Temkina and Anna Rotkirkh distinguish between official, routine, and illegitimate Soviet gender contracts (Temkina & Rotkirkh, 2002, pp. 8–11). According to them, the gender contract of a working mother belonged to the official sphere (while in Aivazova’s logic it should rather be placed in the semi-official, shadow zone of the Soviet gender order). At the same time, a routine gender order, i.e., in families and in private life, resembled a traditional one, where women were more engaged in social reproduction, caregiving, and motherhood, as Temkina and Rotkirkh put it. This situation was prompted by housing improvements and consequent privatization of family life in late Soviet period, and by necessity to overcome the underdevelopment of the service sector (Ibid., p. 9).

Gender contracts can be addressed on a local level too (see, among others, Caretta & Börjeson, 2015; Kalabamu, 2005). Going back to the territorial groups of the *Chasovennye*, we may observe small but significant differences in the distribution of gender contracts that eventually came to define local lifeways. For example, in Altai Chasovennye and in the Kaa-Khem “mainland” subregion in Tuva, communities are mostly represented by older women.⁷ This means that they are active practitioners of the religion, while younger generations dedicate their time to work and family. Interestingly, younger generations in these territories may be very familiar with the religious tradition and actively support the older ones to provide them with

everything they need to practice the Old Belief. Therefore, the younger generation is deeply engaged in production and family matters and perceive its seniors as the only true representatives of local tradition. The age of active community members also explains the gender distribution because it hews the average distribution of age and gender in Russia.

Other places, which I here mostly define as taiga and mountain settlements, such as Mountain Shoria and Upper Reaches in Tuva, represent a completely different picture. Here all the generations are actively involved in the religious life of the community, although there are still elders⁸ who control it. As in the previous case, women in the taiga villages engage in kitchen gardening and housekeeping, but to them having a waged job takes a significantly smaller place in their everyday lives. Another nuance that defines the women's contract here is a deeper involvement in religious practices in all ages, which includes not only serving as singers, reciters, or just mere participants in masses, but following the Old Believer conduct in everyday life. In Russian, this conduct is referred to as *zakon*, i.e., "law." Regarding women, it mostly means wearing a certain type of clothes (long skirts and, for married women, a special head cover called *shashmur*) and following the rules of religious purity.⁹ These small differences in local gender contracts produce two rather contrasting pictures: in the first case tradition seems to be in decline, while in the second it appears to be in its prime. In the following sections, I will call them a modernized and a traditional gender contract respectively.

FRONTIER MARRIAGES AND GROUP BOUNDARIES

The Russian Old Belief is commonly known as a closed community, which—with only a few exceptions—forbids its members to pray and share food with strangers, as well as marry outside the community. Although those features constitute a seemingly irrevocable image of "authenticity," I argue that group boundaries have not always been so strict and impermeable but have been constantly fluctuating from openness to restrictiveness and back. The history of marriages in these communities may provide some material to prove this claim.

As I have already mentioned, Old Believers marry only from their own faction. If there is a match in the other community, one of the partners must be converted. The declared rule implies that men do not change their faith, while women should follow their husbands, but of course in reality it depends on numerous factors and circumstances. Nowadays, *Chasovennye* marry mostly within their community, claiming that outsiders will not be able to adjust to numerous religious rules. As *Chasovennye* commonly think, one must be born in a practicing *Chasovennye* family to become a full member. On the other hand, those who dare to join are still perceived as strangers for *Chasovennye* are sure that no one would really be attracted to such a difficult faith. Similar logic is applied in terms of choice of marriage partners. One of the Tuva Old Believers told me that he married a girl from a city. "But—he emphasized—she was from our own, she just lived in a city. So, when I proposed to her, I asked beforehand if she would agree to do everything '*po zakonu*.'"¹⁰ It was okay for her, so we got married."

The expression "by law" in this example refers to the religious set of rules of Old Believers. In terms of marriage, this primarily concerns the fulfillment of a traditional

gender contract in its local implications. In the case of my interlocutor, who married a city girl, this meant her moving to a village and being ready to keep the household, especially at times when her husband would go away for months to hunt in taiga. However, the idea that marriages can be performed only within the community has not always been the same. In past times, and here I mean *before the Revolution of 1917*, the Old Believers used to take wives from the official Orthodox Church. This topic was vastly explored by a Siberian Orthodox missionary Belikov. Belikov was a prominent opponent of Old Belief and concurrently a prolific Siberian writer who was active from the end of the 19th until the beginning of the 20th century.

In tsarist Russia, an interfaith marriage between an Orthodox and an Old Believer partner was strictly prohibited, unless the latter would join the official church. Despite the law, Old Believer families often found brides and grooms from Orthodox communities in Siberia. Mostly, these were Old Believer men who were marrying Orthodox women. The missionary Belikov addressed this issue in one of his works, which was based on criminal cases mounted against Old Believers. Belikov considered in detail six cases from the second half of the 19th century that involved interfaith marriage, all of which ended badly, because they related to the deception, kidnapping, and the ensuing battery of young women. Belikov selected cases where Orthodox women were deceived by Old Believers who would not reveal their religious identity or would make a false promise to get married in an Orthodox church. These actions attempted to make a young woman—who could probably refuse to become an Old Believer and, therefore, reject the wedding proposal—join the family. They were expected to convert *de facto*, since marriage to a patriarchal family obviously would reduce their freedom of choice. However, further attempts to persuade daughters-in-law only led to severe punishment of the latter, including physical assault. These materials mention different factions of Old Belief in the region, but I am not narrowing them to Chasovennye for they capture the situation in general and allow to explain the background of further historical trends.

Belikov's account is just the tip of the iceberg of marriage history in Siberia before the Revolution of 1917. He himself reports that interfaith matrimonial relations were rather rich in the region (Belikov, 1894, p. 21). Of course, not all interfaith marriages developed this dramatically. It is curious that despite the evident difficulties connected with this form of marriage, Old Believers would not refuse an Orthodox bride. Presumably, this reveals the problem of lack of women on the Siberian frontier, which existed in the late 19th century too. It is highly likely that the gender imbalance appeared due to specializations in different religious communities, i.e., Old Believers tended to be colonizers of Siberian frontier, and were also a greater part of the peasant runaway movement (cf. Mamsik, 1978).

Belikov's choice of materials and phrasing was attributable to the idea that Old Believers hated the Orthodox. He was convinced that Orthodox members would be dehumanized unless they were converted to Old Belief. Belikov referred to the interfaith marriages as *sovrashtchenie v raskol*, a term widely used in the official language, which literally meant "seduction to a schism." Even if conversion to Old Belief was consensual, it was still a crime of "seduction." Marriages performed by Old Believers outside the official church used to be called *svodnye*. This term, *svodnyi* marriage, can be translated as "civil," but it also bears negative connotations of pimping. However, the Old Believers did not feel guilty.

In the context of *svodnye* marriages, I should mention that marriage was not only a practical matter for the Old Believers. Pressured by local administration and Orthodox officials, Siberian Old Believers mainly opted for their own, i.e., persecuted rituals, although they required official records to avoid problems with inheritance. Setting themselves against the repressive state, the Old Believers could only forge a sincere devotion to *svodnye* marriages, which were considered as much stronger and faithful than the church ones. In Siberia, there were also actively circulating rumors that such marriages were in fact legalized and authorized by the Tsar himself. The idea of the *svodnye* marriages remained so strong at the frontier that in some regions like Altai *svodnyi* marriage is still used as a vernacular term. Local Old Believers are even sure that there is a special book called *Svody*, which contains prayers and psalms for the ceremony (in fact this book is called *Potrebnik*, the Book of Needs).

In the 19th century, one of the circumstances that allowed the Old Believers to take non-Old Believers wives was that they were all sharing the same peasant background. Basically, gender contracts in the Old Believer and in the Orthodox communities were the same. These women were brought up to take care of the household, they were used to working on farms and doing all related physical labor. Then, the Soviet modernization project brought drastic changes in available gender contracts and those qualities of a peasant woman moved to another level, from being common average skills to becoming the moral virtues of a particular religious group. In the following section I will elaborate on how this transformation happened under the development of Soviet modernization.

TRADITIONAL LOCAL GENDER CONTRACT

The development of vast Siberian territories and, especially, the extraction of its resources, constantly demanded a sufficient labor force. Mining regions turned out to be attractive for Old Believers who were eager to escape collectivization of agriculture. Mountain Shoria, which provided ore for KMK, or the Kuznetsk Iron and Steel Plant, (one of the giants of the first five-year plan), became one of those regions. Furthermore, Shoria appeared to be a gold bearing zone. As Litvina reports, at first, goldmining was based on manual labor. *Chasovennye* started moving to the region from Altai beginning in the late 1920s. Litvina mentions that the production increased in the 1970s, when developers installed several dredges (Litvina, 2016, p. 60). *Chasovennye* settled in Shoria mainly around gold mining sites, which later would become prominent Old Believer villages. Although goldmining is currently undergoing a major decline in Shoria, its remnants are still visible. These places of Soviet production ended up as perfect settings for exercising Old Believer traditionality.

Other sites were even more closely connected to the Old Believer ways of living in taiga. This refers to the former Soviet fur outpost Sandakches, situated in the vicinity of the Dubches sketes, the main spiritual center of the *Chasovennye* in Siberia. The sketes were founded by the end of the 1930s. Zol'nikova indicates that along with migrating monks, a lot of lay people were also moving to Dubches (Zol'nikova, 2014, pp. 380–381). Eventually, these lay Old Believers settled in the fur outpost.

So, it was not just a coincidence, such places remained in the shadow of ongoing modernization.

Therefore, we can speak about geographical division between the sites of Soviet modernization and sites of Soviet “wilderness” associated with extraction of natural resources or exploitation of traditional industries. In this sense, the Old Believer Upper Reaches, one of the centers for fur hunting in Tuva, was juxtaposed with the rest of the region of Kaa-Khem, situated between Kyzyl, a Tuvan capital, and Upper Reaches, which also used to be a settler Old Believer territory. This territorial division is reflected in the Soviet documentary novel on *Chasovenmye* of Tuva *Ot mira ne uiti* (One Cannot Escape from the World) by Emel’ianov, first published in 1978. Publication of Emel’ianov’s novel had a bombshell effect on local public and reached out to audiences in cities elsewhere in the country. Emel’ianov was not just a writer: for many years he was responsible for the so-called awareness-building in Upper Reaches of Yenisei, disseminating atheism among Old Believers of the region. He had access to classified data on the criminal prosecution of these people (Tatarintseva & Storozhenko, 2015, pp. 117–118). On top of that, Emel’ianov actively exploited the personal data he was gathering during his propaganda journeys around the country. This means that Emel’ianov based his novel on stories of real people, used their real names, and characters, but interpreted them in his favor. He also employed the stories of several Old Believer women who were stuck between requirements of religion (often depicted by the demands of husbands and close relatives) and manifold opportunities of the new era.

Soviet industrialization, and the collectivization of agriculture “undermined the traditional peasant household as an institution in which ownership of land enhanced the power of the family as a social unit” (Lapidus, 1978, p. 248). This shift is reflected in the story of Agrippina Shaburova, also published by Emel’ianov. Agrippina married Grigorii Shaburov, a Sizim Old Believer, when she was 16. Many years ago, she became interested in the new culture introduced in the Kaa-Khem region by the Soviet power: books, cinema, education. She also was willing to explore new economic opportunities, i.e., having a waged job. Unfortunately, she was met with the objections of her husband who preferred to lead a more traditional lifestyle. He was constantly beating his wife, even after they eventually moved from Sizim to the village of Saryg-Sep, a regional center of Kaa-Khem (Emel’ianov, 1984, pp. 119–129). It is quite remarkable that one of the principal requests of Agrippina in her pursuit of a new life was to move to Saryg-Sep. Among the two villages located just around 35 km from each other, Saryg-Sep’s access to better schools, medicine, the opportunity for waged work, and closer proximity to the Tuvan capital Kyzyl could reshape a person’s entire lifestyle.¹¹

What is important in this story is this geographical distinction between developed and outdated places and the following fluctuations of gender contract. Gender order was not stable even within one part of the Kaa-Khem region. On the contrary, it was divided into an “island” of a more traditional mode of life, associated with farming and the exploitation of taiga resources, and the modernized “mainland,” which was based on the professionalization in agriculture or other labor spheres. Sizim, the place that Agrippina left, was located on the boundary of the two. At the time of Agrippina’s attempt to escape the patriarchal networks, Sizim belonged to the former, while nowadays it has become more of the latter.

MODERNIZED LOCAL GENDER CONTRACT

Soviet time brought another change into the lives of Siberian Old Believers. Contrary to the previous order of things, exogamic marriage partners were not considered to be appropriate anymore as it had been in Imperial times. A Tuvan case, as it was reported by Kol'tsov,¹² provides examples of domestic violence towards a newly married non-Old Believer woman, whose name was not mentioned by the author. This time, however, no attempts to convert her were taken. Moreover, the man who married her also suffered from physical assault. Presumably, this woman was lacking suitable background and therefore, considered a breaker of a local order rather than as a potential community member:

An Old Believer Aleksei Mamaev fell in love with a “worldly”¹³ girl and married her. His mother and elder brother were against it. “Why did you get yourself caught up with her, an atheist,” said his mother, reasoning into getting rid of her. The elder Aleksei’s brother, Gennadii was fist-fighting him, “You defiled us ... I’ll kick you out of here as a dog.” Intimidations worked and the pregnant young woman was expelled, and Len’ka¹⁴ didn’t even say a word.

(Kol'tsov, 1964, p. 27)

In actuality, mixed marriages between Old Believers and atheists were quite common in Soviet Tuva outside the region of Upper Reaches, i.e., in Kyzyl and the “mainland” Kaa-Khem. Several small communities consisting mainly of older women remain there at present. They are not recognized by Upper Reaches, although currently those women are trying to follow the necessary regulations and perform religious services. This demarche of Upper Reaches is particularly motivated by the fact of mixed marriages, in which some of those women remained until their husbands passed away. However, the status of widow is not an excuse for the harsh taiga Old Believers of Upper Reaches, unless the deceased managed to get baptized. Interestingly, one of those women, whose father was an elder in Soviet times, appeared to be the most appropriate current candidate to lead the mass. Nonetheless, since she used to be married improperly, she was only allowed to correct others who were performing a service.

It seems that in regions of modernized gender contracts, biographies of women are divided into two contradicting parts. First, women are distanced from religious activities, then they, on the contrary, join them. Presumably, this collision should have been exposed at its utmost expression in the Soviet time when pressure to abandon religious practices and thinking was higher than ever before. However, I reckon that the contradiction is partially eliminated when women’s biographies are perceived in terms of labor ethics. In other words, Soviet ideology was very particular in praising labor and working people; this ethical system was in line with Old Believer values. From this point of view, subsequent reconnection with religion was a continuation of the preceding ethical repertoire,¹⁵ where labor discipline was held in high esteem.

For example, this follows from the memories about one late woman, named *babushka* (grandmother) Monia, who served as an eldress in one Altai village and had a rich Soviet labor biography. Her granddaughter, with whom I was talking about the local Old Believer tradition, mentioned that *babushka* Monia used to be

an active person who, being a cowherd, was sent once as a “deputy” to VDNKh¹⁶ in Soviet times before she became a leader of her community. I would not take it as a coincidence that the two greatest achievements of hers, vibrant working life, and faithful service for her religious community, are aligned in one sentence. The granddaughter’s story depicts Monia as an iconic type of woman responsible for religious services in the priestless community. The most remarkable part of her description was that she baptized many local children. As the granddaughter put it,

She has not been studying this [i.e., how to conduct services and perform rituals—D. R.], she learned everything on her own <...> A lot of children were baptized. People speak warmly about her; she didn’t turn away anyone. Of course, it was a hard job, she had to pray for everyone being baptized for a great while.

Besides that, being a pensioner, Babushka Monia refused taking any payments from the state, as well as taking any medications despite being seriously ill. Both practices are common in Siberian *Chasovennye* but mostly associated with the traditional local gender contract.

Modernized gender contracts were already developed in late Soviet times. Ideologists emphasized that most Old Believers were older women (Braslavskii, 1984, p. 19; Milovidov, 1979, p. 56). In Milovidov’s materials, women accounted for 70–80 % of Old Believers in different regions of the USSR. Furthermore, most of these women were of older ages, widowed (a situation resulting from the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945), and illiterate or with low literacy skills (Milovidov, 1979, pp. 56–58). The percentage of interfaith marriages was also growing, as Milovidov points out elsewhere (Milovidov, 1969, p. 108). Interestingly, he marks the Tuvan Upper Reaches as one of the most conservative and least modernized regions, where men were more numerous than in other places (Milovidov, 1979, p. 56).

Although Soviet accounts represent a rather adequate picture of active performance in Old Belief, the community structure could have been much more complicated than they assumed. The modernized gender contract required the individualization of religious practices and values. Therefore, younger generations engaged in production could opt for temporal abandonment of religious practices in order to avoid problems, while older generations were not pressured on the same level by authorities due to their exclusion from labor and active social secular life. Eventually, gender specialization became a way of social reproduction itself.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have focused on how post-Soviet traditionality was produced by Soviet modernization. I applied the concept of gender contracts to figure out how reshaping of territories influenced drastic changes in social reproduction in Old Believer communities. In discussing two basic variants of gender contracts in Siberian villages of *Chasovennoe* denomination, I argue that settlements in which tradition seems to be more preserved appeared as sites of tradition due to the geographical distribution of Soviet production. Some places like gold mining or fur hunting sites required not only sufficient manual labor but also a certain gender order that was aligned with distribution of gender roles common in Old Belief.

In order to support these arguments, I firstly questioned the restrictiveness of groups boundaries. It is true that Old Believers have always limited communication with strangers. This was established *po zakonu*, i.e., by religious law. Nevertheless, as we have seen, this was not a great obstacle for interfaith marriages before the Revolution. In Soviet times, the barrier between Old Believers and non-Old Believers became more impenetrable, since average peasant skills and qualities were now considered to be part of the religious values of future marriage partners. This refers primarily to the manifestation of local gender contracts. Therefore, the group became more restricted, although it abides with the typical perception of the Old Belief. My assumptions are based on reports of Belikov, who has shown that Old Believers often took women from outside the community, even though they would have had to force them to accept the new faith. The thing is that those Old Believers had no doubts that the outsider women could be converted. This contradicts contemporary claims of Old Believers that nobody would join Old Belief, because it is truly difficult to learn, understand, and most importantly, to acknowledge all these numerous rules and regulations that permeate their life. At the same time, Old Believers, and more specifically Old Believer women, had been accustomed to this kind of life since childhood. Therefore, the gap between the Old Believer community and the general public had grown much bigger since then. Traditional gender division, in its turn, should be regarded in the same manner. What used to be a part of labor practice common for peasantry, i.e., in case of women taking over domestic work, cooking, and gardening, turned to be a set of Christian virtues. Indisputably, this model in its full extent applies only to rural communities.

Secondly, I paid attention to the relocation of peasant working practices from the secular sphere of labor to the circle of religious values. In particular, this affected women. If Soviet state policy forced emancipation in women, they had to stick to now outdated practices in Old Belief. For example, skirts and headscarves were common female working and everyday clothes, but since Soviet times this dress code has been already perceived as a vestige of the past. However, for Old Believer women this was a time to emphasize that traditional clothes mark them as Christians, i.e., it represents their values.

That said, I argue that contrary to the above-mentioned popular images, *Chasovennye* Old Believers have been subject to changes, even if they have not been intentional. Those stories from which I quoted, and many other stories and videos that circulate online or in printed form, in fact, exoticize the Old Belief by adding an air of organic antiquity. Of course, this path has been partially charted by the *Chasovennye* themselves who are committed to the covenants of fathers and grandfathers.

NOTES

- 1 From Russian *chasovnia* (chapel).
- 2 Krai is one of the federal units in Russia.
- 3 Tamara Mamsik points out that the Russian colonization of this region in the 1720s started later compared to more northern areas of Siberia (Mamsik, 1989, p. 4).
- 4 From Russian “Kamen” (stone), a vernacular name for the Altai Mountains.
- 5 Initially, Old Believers were represented by several denominations in Kaa-Khem but now only Chasovennye are left.

- 6 See an extensive overview of the concept in Temkina and Rotkirk (2002).
- 7 The reasons behind this social order are explained further in the text, mainly in the section about the modernized local gender contract.
- 8 This terms stands for a community leader responsible for conducting religious services, life cycle, and occasional rituals (like blessing of a newly built house), and most importantly hearing confessions of the community members and distributing the holy communion among them. The Russian word used by Chasovennye is “nastavnik,” which literary means “mentor.” In this chapter I opt for an English word “elder” which I acquired from my fieldwork among Chasovennye Old Believers living in Oregon, USA.
- 9 Here I refer to a practice of keeping a separate set of tableware for Old Believers and strangers (see Morris, 1991, pp. 75–76; Sheffel, 1991, pp. 178–179; Rygovskiy, 2019, pp. 64–66).
- 10 By law.
- 11 In her research of language shift in bilingual Austrian-Hungarian Oberwart, Susan Gal focuses on such markers as social networks, occupation, religious commitments, and even settings of yards to distinguish between peasant and urban social categorization in the town (Gal, 1979, pp. 24–34). Here the line exists between a modernized and a precarious rural lifestyle.
- 12 N. V. Kol'tsov was a Soviet history professor and lecturer in atheism based in Kalinin (historic name: Tver). He extensively used press reports about the infamous cases of suicides and home violence in the Tuvan Old Believer community to prepare materials for atheistic propaganda against Old Believers. His work is available in Tallinn as a manuscript published in 1964.
- 13 “Wordly” (Rus. *mirskoi / mirskaia*) is a specific Old Believer term applied to all outsiders.
- 14 A colloquial variant of the name “Aleksei.”
- 15 See Rogers (2009).
- 16 Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy.

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CHAPTER 18

ARCTIC LNG PRODUCTION AND THE STATE (THE CASE OF YAMAL PENINSULA)



Ksenia Gavrilova

INTRODUCTION

The social sciences, mass media, and recent history narratives have established the view that Russia owes its economic growth (or, at least, stability) to the export of raw materials, mainly oil and natural gas. As traditional resource deposits in Western Siberia depleted at the beginning of the 21st century, the Russian hydrocarbon industry focused on the extraction of “tight” oil, the recovery of gas (condensate) and industrial expansion to the North and East of Russia. New technologies in hydrocarbons extraction, changing geography of fuel sales, and increased demand for natural gas facilitate such developments. The Yamal Liquefied Natural Gas Joint Stock Company (Yamal LNG) is perfectly in line with the trends. Yamal LNG is the developer of the Yuzhno-Tambeisk gas field, located in the north of Yamalo-Nenetskii autonomous okrug (region), producing liquefied natural gas for subsequent maritime shipping. The company’s license blocks its neighbors—the village of Se-Yakha (where over 2500 persons live), several trading stations (*faktorii*), and lands used by about 30 Nenets nomadic reindeer-herding families.

Anthropological work on Russian hydrocarbon development is mostly focused on the interactions between the industrialists and local Indigenous peoples, describing everything from conflicts to community support projects that are part of companies’ corporate social responsibility policies (Wilson & Istomin, 2019). Most of these anthropological studies are in the form of an ethnological/expert review (e.g., Novikova, 2008) or a comparative analysis (e.g., Stammer & Peskov, 2008; Novikova, 2014; Henry et al., 2016). An exception is the work of Gertrude Saxinger, dedicated to the rotational (shift) workers (*vakhtoviki*) of industrial enterprises in the North (Saxinger, 2016). In this chapter, I suggest a new perspective, namely, the social behavior of the companies’ representatives who perceive and describe their companies as *agents* promoting change.

YAMAL LNG AND THE RUSSIAN “ARCTIC AGENDA”

Yamal LNG is “an integrated project encompassing natural gas production, liquefaction and shipping” from the Yuzhno-Tambeisk license block, located on the western shore of the Gulf of Ob.¹ The project built a LNG plant with an annual capacity

of 16.5 million tons of liquefied natural gas to be supplied to the markets of the Asia-Pacific region and Europe. A logistic infrastructure, including an airport and the Sabetta seaport, was essential (Yamal LNG, 2015). The Sabetta toponym refers to the rotational settlement that is a conglomerate of camps used for accommodating the employees of the parent enterprise of Yamal LNG (including a “vital infrastructure complex,” or “KOJO” camp) and subcontracting organizations’ camps. In 2017, both the employees of Yamal LNG and the officials of the autonomous region referred to the project as “a century-scale construction.” The Sabetta settlement was the only place associated in the region with the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which was the most important issue on the Russian “Arctic agenda.”

The current concept of development in the Russian Arctic depends on intensifying the use of the NSR as a “nation-scale transport communication route” (Federal Law № 132, 2012). Representatives of the federal center generally see the NSR as a way to transform the whole world’s logistics and connect Russia’s Arctic regions. More importantly, the NSR infrastructure makes the nation state visible in the Arctic (Gavrilova, 2020). Between 2017 and 2020, Sabetta began to play both functional and rhetorical role as the newest “supporting sea port” (*opornaia tochka*) of NSR infrastructural project (Geoenergetics, 2019; Savosin, 2019)—an impressive sign of availability of (Russian) infrastructures in the Arctic seas and shores.

Since the beginning of construction, Yamal LNG received comprehensive support from the state. The project utilized a special tax regime,² and financial support from the government was essential for the construction of transportation infrastructure. The public-private investment partnership put the new infrastructure in a somewhat ambiguous position. On the one hand, state support *for* Yamal LNG helped in construction of objects like the Sabetta cargo port and ice-class LNG tankers. On the other hand, the seaport has the official status of an “associated object,”³ and the tankers belong to the state-owned PAO Sovkomflot. Yamal LNG is currently the only beneficiary of the new associated infrastructure involved in gas transportation. However, the infrastructure itself does not belong to the project, and therefore, is a long-term social-economic and political investment in the development of the Russian Arctic.

The ambiguity of the status of associated infrastructure is important for the analysis of Yamal LNG’s role within its zone of direct or indirect influence. The company sees this zone as including both the Yuzhno-Tambeisk area and the villages of the Iamal’skii raion (district) (ENVIRON, 2013). As other enterprises extracting hydrocarbons in the Arctic, Yamal LNG has certain commitments to the region’s government as part of its corporate social responsibility programs. Thus, the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (ENVIRON, 2015) describes compensatory agreements entered into by the company and the authorities of the Iamal’skii raion and the entire Yamalo-Nenets okrug, purporting to compensate for the damage inflicted on the ecosystems, and to assist and support the Indigenous communities. These assistance measures vary from providing financial support and building housing and infrastructure in the villages to organizing supplies of fuel, foods, communication services, and emergency medicine for locals.

The contemporary Russian vision of CSR, corporate social responsibility, was partly influenced by the Soviet practice of having town-forming enterprises sustain villages and cities (e.g., by providing housing, foods, and medical support). Given

that the people had become accustomed to corporate support and current regional governments were eager to shift part of the budget expenses to the companies, an approach appeared that corporate responsibility researchers call *neopaternalism* and that is mostly applied at the remote territories (Henry et al., 2016). The neopaternalist support from the company, its investments into the infrastructure of small, rural settlements often turn into local-scale welfare provisioning (Ibid.), i.e., doing what the regional governments would have aimed to do otherwise.

INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE TERRITORY AND PERFORMANCES OF SOVEREIGNTY: THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To study the interaction of industries, especially multinational corporations and syndicates, with the regions, it makes sense to concentrate on the formers' ambition to control the territories in a more or less autonomous, *sovereign* manner.⁴ A strict opposition of sovereign national state and multinational corporation trying to avoid governmental control has long been criticized in anthropological studies.⁵ Drawing examples from Southeast Asia, Aihwa Ong (2000) analyzes the phenomenon of uneven, graduated sovereignty, arising when territorial states meet globalization. Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat insist that in post-colonial contexts developing countries commonly denationalize and allocate lands to multinational companies as distinct economic zones covered by a differential or graduated sovereignty regime (Hansen & Stepputat, 2005). If sovereignty is understood as a set of strategies for managing people and territory, a graduated sovereignty regime consists in giving various civil rights to different population segments depending on their political or economic role, or in such kind of interactions between the state and corporations within the state's territory when the industrial company acts as "quasi-state authority." It takes over the governance of the land provided by the national state and the social life of workers who are still formally citizens of the state.

James Ferguson (2006) describes even more radical territory governance strategies based on the examples of industrial enclaves in African states. He focuses on multinational projects developing offshore oil that exist autonomously, separated from the rest of the state's territory. In Angola, for example, the government allocates to extraction operators enclaves that are almost independent from the national state under whose jurisdiction the land formally stays. The equipment, the water and foods for the workers, and the skilled labor itself is all imported. Private security agencies guard these enterprises. Such territories are a clean set-up, uninhabited and detached, which is very convenient for both the governing elites, who benefit directly from the lease, and for the extracting companies, since it eliminates the need for assessing the enterprise's social impact (Ibid.). Meanwhile, the configuration of sovereignty as a function of the national state is, in this case, characterized by *inefficient* control of the territory, and *no* monopoly for violence, but merely the possibility of providing the multinational company with the right to work, on a contractual basis (Ibid.; see also Ferguson, 2005).

The suggested views on governing territories might be regarded as ideal models reducing the relations of power to an opposition of two parties (a weak state versus a strong corporation) and associating sovereignty (although deficient) with national state. The alternative approach sees sovereignty not as something static and only

characteristic for a state-like formation, but as an unstable, performative project of a range of actors (from political movements to criminal leaders). These actors affirm themselves as sovereign by exercising power, through violence (of various nature, not necessarily something threatening an individual's bare life), or through manifesting will to govern⁶ (Hansen & Stepputat, 2005). The analysis of various competing sovereignties is somewhat similar to studying the metaphoric "*margins of the state*." The margins themselves should be understood not geographically but rather as a critically important background for the state to assert the "normal" (regular) governing procedures; not so much as a territory far away from the symbolic center but as sites of practice where the state legislation is, to a various extent, colonized by other governance forms (local, cultural, ethnic, etc.). (Das & Poole, 2004). Geopolitically, the "margins" can refer to isolated production facilities mentioned above, or to a state's border zones or entire regions adjacent to the borders. This includes the Arctic ones where, according to Claus Dodds, flexible state regulation and problematic configurations of sovereignty rights and claims are especially relevant (Dodds, 2012).⁷

Industrial corporations in the Russian Arctic are significant economic, political, and social actors whose activities intended to "reclaim" the territory can compete with the local authorities' initiatives. Reclamation strategies can be seen as a performative assertion of sovereignty, consisting in striving to govern and taking the appropriate actions. In the following sections, I will explore the pragmatics of Yamal LNG acting like a state and using the metaphor of "state," based on the field investigations and interviews conducted in the Sabetta settlement in 2017.

SABETTA: ON THE POSSIBILITY OF FIELDWORK AT A CLOSED INDUSTRIAL SITE

Getting an official permit for field investigations in Sabetta settlement took our group three months.⁸ We were required to receive approvals from top level of Novatek and Yamal LNG, go through a series of interviews with the Yamal LNG managers, and then make a guaranteed payment of the tickets and full board in advance. Requests for access to the areas controlled by private companies need to be sent to the managers of the corporations, not to the local authorities. The right to make these decisions independently is the first strategy of asserting corporate autonomy. The second factor contributing to autonomy is the spatial isolation of Sabetta, which is a conglomerate of camps and production facilities in the middle of the Yamal tundra. Transportation limitations determined by geographical position of Sabetta is the third major factor. In 2017, there were daily flights from Novy Urengoy and Moscow to Sabetta (plus occasional ones from Salekhard, Ufa, Samara, and other cities). However, it was impossible to just come to the airport and buy a ticket. A passenger's name has to appear on a special pre-approved list in order for a passenger to register for a flight and get a ticket. There was an option of getting to Sabetta by sea but only as a crew-member of a vessel expected in the port; of course, there is no civil passenger traffic over this part of the NSR. Finally, there were no permanent roads or well-trodden winter roads (*zimniki*) between Sabetta and other settlements in the region. No one but the Nenets families living in the area, who were under the social patronage of the company, can come to Sabetta by land. Representatives of Yamal LNG enjoyed

seeing Sabetta as a completely “leakproof,” isolated place, closed for any unauthorized visitors that could come by land, sea or (to a lesser degree) air.

The course of the fieldwork required of us turned out to be as unusual to anthropologists as it was routine to the host side. A corporate social responsibility manager, named Lora,⁹ came from Moscow to accompany us in Sabetta. To her, the research group was something like the delegations of journalists, auditors, and experts with whom she normally dealt. Thus, a unique field situation crystallized where the official (“professional”) representative of Yamal LNG pre-approved all the interviewees, although in line with our interest in the social and logistic aspects of life in the settlement. The company offered us a conventional image of Yamal LNG. We experienced the pre-approved, ideal scenario of the functioning, social life, and territorial governance, presented to a typical outsider visiting Sabetta. As might be expected, Yamal LNG employees continuously opposed themselves to “outsiders,” emphasizing their belonging to the corporation and seeing Yamal LNG/Sabetta as an agent with a consolidated will.¹⁰

Next, I present an analysis of the architecture of this imagined corporate body and the way it functions, using the field materials collected under peculiar conditions, namely under almost total control from a correcting gaze of the company’s representative. I regard the very *conditions* of fieldwork on a closed industrial object as a unique and impressive case for analyzing the social life of an industrial company.

SCENARIO OF BEING AUTONOMOUS: INFRASTRUCTURAL INDEPENDENCE, CONTROL OVER SPACE, AND MANAGEMENT OF POPULATIONS

According to official documents and interviews with managers, Yamal LNG built Sabetta from scratch. This includes the plant, and rotational lodging camps, supporting infrastructure and communications, such as internal roads, the seaport, and the airport. The “main” camp, KOJO, has a centralized social infrastructure, an uncommon option for many rotational settlements in the North. The overall visual grandeur of the place—a futuristic oasis in the middle of a white plain, something you cannot take your eyes off—correlates with rhetoric strategies of Yamal LNG managers. Quite in line with the stereotyped Arctic imaginaries (e.g., the Arctic as *terra nullius*, no man’s land, see Steinberg, et al. 2015) and representations of the industrialized territories (Ferguson, 2006), the Yuzhno-Tambeisk area is said to have never been inhabited before.

That’s why we never interfere with them [the locals]. Actually, this used to be a place for geological survey. Or, as the long-term residents say: “Oh, we still remember Sabetta as a trash hole. A complete trash hole!” Some barrel left by the military, or the geologists that worked here, in the [19]60s and the 70s, they just left it all here to rot. And when Yamal LNG came, the company cleaned it all up, the entire territory! Cleaned up, refined, and started with construction. So, my point is that there had never been any reindeer herders or fishermen here, on this tiny plot of land next to the sea port. Contrary to what everyone is saying now.

Lora, CSR manager

The suggested version of Sabetta's history implies that Yamal LNG came to the land where no reindeer herders had lived, there was no fishing, and only a few uninhabited, chilled-through buildings were left from the geologists. During our tours of KOJO, Lora mentioned these buildings as evidence of how abandoned Sabetta looked in the pre-Yamal LNG era. The military had left nothing but a mess and filth that the local administration never cleaned up. Only a private company could do that. The configuration of the Yamal LNG infrastructure and the accompanying rhetoric contributed to affirming that the company had an exclusive right for this territory. The place was a "clean set-up," and the company never damaged anything that requires reporting. As part of the official representation of the company, these rhetorical strategies serve as persuasive openings. For example, during our first conversation in Sabetta, Lora talked about the environmental impeccability of Yamal LNG, as well as deliberate and successful minimization of any impact on the environment.

Daily life in today's Sabetta completely depends on a strict labor routine.¹¹ Private security firms ensure compliance to the regime, and have the right to inspect and control anyone in the settlement. They monitor the entrance to the canteen and look for alcohol infractions. Mandatory use of Yamal LNG or contractor uniforms and scrupulous control of personnel circulation make life in Sabetta so transparent that noticing an "intruder" is no problem. In order not to raise any suspicion in Sabetta, one has to wear uniform and only stay outside during the allowed hours.¹²

Yamal LNG is well aware of its right to develop its own regulations. As Lora put it, "We are a private enterprise after all." Yamal LNG representatives see their regulations as an evidence of the fact that Sabetta is like *a state of its own*. They point out low prices in the canteens, and the fact that workers get compensation for their meal expenses, calling it *actual communism*. Idealizing Sabetta's organization is an important narrative strategy of the company's staff: the settlement is absolutely safe and orderly; the rotational staff comes back is characteristic of a long-term relationship with an ideal management in an ideal company and not due to the pay. Any problems in Sabetta turned out to be at the margins of Yamal LNG's jurisdiction in the blind areas of subcontracting organizations and their camps.

The balance between lockdown and access to specific infrastructures within the Sabetta conglomerate demonstrates a differentiation between various types of staff. A special source of pride for the managers, KOJO's infrastructure includes several canteens, a cafeteria, gyms, a sauna, a laundry, a leisure center, several shops, several medical centers, three ambulance cars, an orthodox church and Muslim prayer rooms, book-sharing posts, and a kiosk selling the products of the Yamal Deer meat-processing factory. Yamal LNG represents its extensive modern infrastructure, intended to make the workers' lives easier in the extreme conditions of the North, as a unique gift to all the employees and as a part of the contract between the company and the worker. In practice, access to this social infrastructure, mainly found within KOJO, depends on "citizenship"—belonging to a specific part of the social hierarchy and system of contracting organizations that constitute the "state" of Sabetta. Apart from different living conditions and shift configurations, belonging to a specific settlement or subcontractor within the conglomerate defines access to gyms, saunas, and more importantly, medical centers.¹³ Unequal access to medicine is a part of the logic of the conglomerate's structure. While each subcontractor is obliged to provide its workers with basic medical help, there is only one

well-equipped hospital, located in KOJO. On the other hand, it is not very common to request medical help in Sabetta because sickness can be reason to suspend an employee from work and then send him/her back home, sometimes without renewal of the contract.

Another side of social life of the “state” of Sabetta deals with the “host region” and the Nenets Indigenous people living nearby in the tundra or in Se-Yakha village. The governing actions of YLNG with regard to the territory involved both industrializing a part of the tundra and improving the settlements that were regarded as “depressed” and “collapsing,” that is lacking infrastructure to be considered “normal” by the company. The reconstruction of the Se-Yakha village is a good example.¹⁴ In 2017, Yamal LNG’s social projects manager saw the company’s CSR experience as unprecedented among industrialists in the Arctic. To describe the interaction between the company and the locals, she used terms ranging from “paternalism,” “actual help” and “overprotection” to “friendship” and “dialog.” Yamal LNG uses various management technologies outside the Yuzhno-Tambeisk area, including the widely popular paternalist ones, such as special Yamal LNG classes at schools, gifts to war veterans and children, organization of public hearings, and even hiring an ex-representative of the RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North) to serve as a mediator between locals and the company.

In spite of Yamal LNG’s declared and actual efforts, the *social* wall between the Nenets population and Sabetta remained sound. As I have already mentioned, only people looking like reindeer herders can come to Sabetta by land and be admitted. Shift workers who are not allowed to cross the borders of Sabetta are well aware of these special rules for local people. The presence of the Nenets within Sabetta’s secured space is absolutely no wonder to anyone. In other words, where a non-suspicious person has to wear a uniform, any clothes that look Nenets *enough* are a kind of uniform, allowing their owner, for example, to use a local shop or to sell fish right from their snowmobile. While the confines of Sabetta are actually quite accessible to local people, the social wall still separates them from the workers. As the Nenets are an object of absolute care and protection, they are so deprived of agency that they are treated as absolutely harmless. Separated from Yamal LNG by a wall of education and technology, they cannot *act* from within. They are social outsiders and the company always endows them.¹⁵ Among other things, the company’s representatives consider medical services available to Nenets in Sabetta a gift: “Both Se-Yakha people and other locals see it [Sabetta] as a piece of civilization. They are perfectly aware that they are always welcome here and that help is here for them. No one will ever send them back to the tundra” (Lora, CSR manager).

Other techniques of supervising the locals include systematic studies and censuses that are similar to the governing strategies of the colonial state. For example, in 2017, Yamal LNG’s Department for Sustainable Development worked out social programs, including a five-year Indigenous People Development Plan. The department regularly produced educational content for the people the company was controlling, such as information sheets about the enterprise for the Nenets and about the Nenets for the workers of the enterprise. The department’s task list also included simultaneous monitoring of locals and biological diversity in the area using special questionnaires.¹⁶ In 2018, they also planned to take a census of “our reindeer herders” in order to manage them more efficiently.

STATE REPRESENTATIVES (*FEDERALY*) IN SABETTA

Yamal LNG holds itself out as an autonomous industrial enclave exercising authority to industrialize a part of the tundra, develop an empty territory, and manage its own workers, as well as the locals according to its own vision of the support that the locals need. Nevertheless, the rhetorical importance of a “state within a state” metaphor for the Yamal LNG officials does not eliminate the relevance of a shared image of a “real” state, the national one. Although the regional population regards Yamal LNG as a governmental project, there are perfectly clear boundaries between the company’s representatives and the federal authorities’ representatives (*federaly*) in Sabetta. Both parties assert their rights to control the territory through a range of performances of sovereignty. In Sabetta, the *federaly* are the police officers, border security agents, customs service officers, traffic police and, primarily, the seaport operators. Although the port is an associated object, it reports to the West Arctic Ports Administration federal state budgetary organization. The military guards the seaport that functions as a restricted-access facility requiring a special pass for anyone wishing to visit it, *including* Yamal LNG representatives.

Well, the port is federal property. It doesn’t belong to Yamal LNG. So, it has a somewhat special position ... And the seaport is a federal, state-owned structure. With its own procedures and rules ... You see, we cannot just go there. They ask for a pass. We the people from Yamal LNG are not allowed there, unless we have the passes ... I checked out today how we could easily get to the seaport. And they really didn’t want to let us in: “Here you go, breaking the rules again ... You’re breaking the Russian Federation laws!”

Lora, CSR manager

The seaport staff adheres to another segmentation of the population, and insists on the observation of its own rules, the “laws of the Russian Federation.” It is just as hard for any Yamal LNG employee or a local allowed into Sabetta to get into the port as it is for anyone unapproved by YLNG to come to Sabetta. The omnipotent Lora’s connections could not help us interview the port captain. We did interview him by recommendation of his Narian-Mar colleague or, in other words, by the professional network of Arctic captains.¹⁷ The seaport is the national state’s vanguard on this company’s territory. The captain and his mates perform governmental control, namely, verify compliance with maritime legislation, inspect vessels, and ensure the safety of the waters in and around the port. The port is simultaneously a powerful symbol of the state’s involvement in the project and a reminder about who is the actual owner of the “entrance” to the Northern Sea Route. This second meaning is more striking, given that there is actually not much *physical* federal property in Sabetta. It actually only includes ice protection structures, the navigation control systems, a seaport office block, and the waters of the Gulf of Ob (Yamal SPG. Port). All the rest belongs to Yamal LNG, including the quays, warehouses and off-loading equipment, engineering communications, and contracts with stevedoring companies or icebreakers that work in the bay. The port captain has his own vision of Sabetta’s space: no industrial miracle, no ideal state, but “no place for life,” meant only for LNG plant employees and federal authorities’ representatives. It is no wonder that

Yamal LNG employees see the port as a stronghold of the federal government in their territory, which often acts legally but not quite fairly. After all, the port is for the project in their view, not the other way round. Moreover, the way Sabetta managers perceive *federaly* is rather similar to their opinion on the governmental commissions and international auditions coming to Yuzhno-Tambeisk area. Lora calls them “punitive,” and believes that they are an obstacle to the sovereign performance of the company.

CONCLUSION

The image of Yamal LNG as a sovereign actor, narratively produced in front of an outsider audience, consists of several rhetoric and practical statements: infrastructural autonomy except for the seaport, ability to produce significant changes in the territory, impenetrability of the settlement’s borders, consistent efforts to govern, and efficient management of the territory with all of its resources and populations. Just as in case of other sovereign bodies, statements cannot always, and need not always, be told from actions. The state metaphor has performing power able to legitimize the actions, although actors also scrupulously observe the norms dictated by the actual state. Sabetta’s living conditions by the Gulf of Ob are extreme. Arctic climate, remoteness from major cities, and high-tech production facilities—all seem to justify the rigid models of control over the territory that are characteristic for many frontier companies. Those who can provide help to vulnerable human bodies and operate at least some scarce/unique infrastructure can easily position themselves as a state, and the people under their control, especially rotational workers, presumably perceive the company as such.¹⁸ Another crucial part of the company’s sovereign body are the strategies of interacting with the local Nenets people, lying somewhere between neopaternalism, international CSR standards, and colonial recordkeeping.

Nevertheless, this brief field study in Sabetta has shown that Yamal LNG is acting among competing performances of sovereignty, namely those coming from the seaport (a federal property object), the okrug authorities, international partners, and the far-away federal center. Of course, this competition is not legal, but rather symbolic, manifested at the micro-level of interactions between the people standing for one “state” or another. There is still some ambiguity about how authorities of different levels influence Yamal LNG. For example, the seaport acts as a shadow of the state, but does not actually intrude into the company’s activities. It can control passage through the state border and navigation in the Gulf of Ob, but it cannot decide which vessels are entitled to enter it. Still, it has an important performative function—to serve a sign of federal authority at the Northern Sea Route entrance. Such persistent manifestation of the national state’s presence is characteristic for the Arctic where it is in the state’s interest to support major industrial objects and logistic infrastructures, such as the NSR. Unlike the federal center, an industrial company understands sovereignty as the legitimization of its own rules and governance. In this sense, Sabetta is not unique. Historically, Dalstroi is comparable. Contemporarily, Nornikel and Gazprom are comparable. As for the NSR, Yamal LNG managers seem to regard it not as the “national transport communication route” that embraces supporting sea ports on the Arctic shores, Sabetta being an important one of them, but merely as the practical opportunity to bring cargo in and out.

NOTES

- 1 Yamal LNG, the project operator, is a joint venture of PAO (JSC) Novatek (50.1%), the Total LB group of companies (20%), the China National Petroleum Corporation (20%), and the Silk Road Fund (9.9%).
- 2 For analytical reviews of tax benefits and direct subsidies strategies for YLNG, see for instance Lunden and Fjertoft (2014) and Gladysheva (2017).
- 3 Associated objects are defined as objects “that are not financed as part of the project, that would not have been built or expanded should the project have not been in place, and without which the project would not have been viable” (Social and Environmental Contributions, 2013, p. 53, 63–65). See also: “Throughout the operation period, the sea port shall be basically used for the purposes of Yamal LNG, however the functioning of its objects will not be run by Yamal LNG JSC but by Rosmorport Federal State Unitary Enterprise” (Ibid., p. 57).
- 4 In this case, the *territory* under control combines a geographically (and legally) demarcated space (the land as is), the infrastructure, the resources extracted/the product manufactured here, and the people who stay (live) here along with the results of their work.
- 5 It is exactly the national state model that is understood under the popular definition of *sovereignty* as the possibility to govern the territory of a political body without any restrictions from external laws (Humphrey, 2010; see also Hansen and Stepputat, 2005).
- 6 Cf. Caroline Humphrey investigates the “illegal” and “autonomous” post-Soviet communities that embody “localized sovereignty forms” asserting their authority over lives and deaths in particular social spheres, e.g., in the regulation of a city’s transport system (Humphrey, 2010).
- 7 As a researcher of the “global” Arctic, Dodds pays special attention to the public performances of sovereignty, particularly in the sea zone, such as boosting (national) security measures, militarization, or symbolic actions, like hoisting a flag on the Arctic Ocean’s bottom (Dodds, 2010; Dodds, 2012).
- 8 The research project “Russian Harbors of Transarctic Route: Space and Societies of Russia’s Arctic Coast on the Eve of a New Period in the History of Northern Sea Route” was funded by Russian Federation Ministry of Education and Science (No. 33.2257.2017/II4, 2017–2019). Three members of the project group conducted fieldwork in Sabetta: Mikhail Agapov, Ksenia Gavrilova, and Valeria Vasilyeva.
- 9 The name was changed.
- 10 As a social space, Sabetta appears to be a bunch of overlapping hierarchies: Yamal LNG, its contractors, subcontractors, supporting industrial facilities, and catering companies form a complicated “nested-doll” structure.
- 11 A standard shift lasts for ten hours, from 8.00 AM to 8.00 PM, with a two-hour break at noon. A rotation can last for two to three months, one month, or 45 days. Both the rotational workers and the management work seven days a week. In 2017, these rules applied to all the institutions in Sabetta, including canteens, leisure centers, and even the Orthodox Church, which only performed its services at night, be it by lay order or with the participation of the priest from Novyi Urengoi.
- 12 Lora never let us go anywhere unescorted, even to a neighboring building to take an interview, allegedly because we had no uniform.
- 13 As an employee of Nord Logistic (interviewed in Amderma in 2018) put it: “Only the foremen [were allowed to go to the gyms]. The foremen or, say, the directors. There was the sauna there, and all that stuff. Many simple workers were also eager to go to the gym, too. But they were never allowed to. Just no way to get there.”
- 14 The Information Note about Yamal LNG’s activities that our research group received before starting the fieldwork says: “In accordance with the Agreement with the Government of YNAD, a Construction Program was implemented in the years 2011–2015 ... [and]

the following objects were commissioned: Se-Yakha village: 8 residential houses with 24 apartments each one, a daycare center for 120 children, a boarding school dormitory for 200 children, a hotel, a bath-house, an energy facility, a boiler station, water-treating facilities, reindeer-meat-processing facilities, helicopter decks, engineering communication networks, roads, and technical equipment of the local hospital”; see also (ENVIRON, 2015, p. 48–50).

- 15 Another researcher who participated in the project, Elena Liarskaya, was not allowed to come to Sabetta “by land” from Se-Yakha together with the Nenets she knew. It was explained to us that only the locals could enter Sabetta by snowmobiles, while a “Russian,” especially one wishing to make an expert review of Yamal LNG, had to come by plane and be always accompanied by a company’s employee.
- 16 The merging of the “Indigenous population” and “ecological security” agendas are quite common for the official discourse of Russian state and CSR programs of Russian industrial companies.
- 17 The first question the port captain asked us was, “You come on behalf of the state, right?”
- 18 Industrial companies, obviously, can perceive and represent their employees as “citizens,” especially when it comes to rotational workers whose contracts cover many issues like housing, meals, medical help, or to put it simply: biological maintenance. The exclusive right to send people who have become sick away to the mainland, exercised by Yamal LNG management or doctors, makes an impressive sign of sovereignty in Sabetta, where there is not even a single pharmacy, which could have been a competitor to the company’s monopolistic control over the workers’ bodies.

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CHAPTER 19

BIOGRAPHY OF ALCOHOL IN THE ARCTIC VILLAGE



Anastasiia A. Yarzutkina

INTRODUCTION

“They have forgotten how to hunt for walruses and whales. Vodka is to blame for everything,” “I have one friend—the bottle,”¹—such statements can often be heard from residents of Chukotka villages, which I visited from 2003 to 2020.² The discourses trace the perception of alcohol as a certain force, an enemy or friend, an object capable of influencing not only human behavior but also society, culture, and relationships. Almost every rural school has anti-alcohol posters with an anthropomorphized bottle of vodka: it has eyes, mouth, hands, and feet; it performs actions, e.g. hugging a person or strangling him. Thus, in incorporating liquor into their human world, people have put the non-human on a level with themselves. The authors of these posters attributed to an inanimate substance the ability to take away or change something without a person’s participation or volition.

A whole bundle of emotions accompanies the perception of alcohol in the Far North: from sharply positive, as the savior of a frozen organism, to sharply negative, as the culprit of injuries or deaths. It can be seen that alcohol—this substance or thing—has a presence, meaning that it has a configuration that endures, however briefly (Hodder, 2012). The Danish sociologist Jacob Demant noted that, when studying the effects of alcohol, social scientists pay little attention to the substance itself (Demant, 2009).

It was the anthropomorphization of alcohol that made me think about presenting its story in the form of a biography. Just as every person has his own biography, so everything has its own history (Briggs, 1988). The “biography of a thing” concept is by no means new. In 1929, Sergei Tretiakov, the leader of literary factography, directed his readers’ attention from the human characters to the objects that surround them (Fore, 2016). In his words, the biography of an object “has an extraordinary capacity to incorporate human material” (Tretiakov, 2006).

Over the past few decades, the concept of the thing has become highly influential in the social sciences and humanities (Pels et al., 2002; Bijker et al., 1987; Latour, 1992).³ This opened up prospects for the study of alcohol through the projection of actor-network theory, which blurs the distinction between substance and society (Demant, 2009).

The biographical approach considers a thing not just at a single point in its existence but in the context of its cultural shaping, revealing the presence of several biographies in one thing that greatly differ in terms of their cultural informativeness (Kopytoff, 1986). Yet the anthropological works of A. Appadurai, C. Gregory, J. Hoskins, M. Strathern, and N. Thomas propose various techniques for using the biographical approach in the study of things and society. C. Gosden and Y. Marshall, who analyzed these works, expressed the opinion that no theory will ever be adequate to understand all circumstances (Gosden & Marshall, 1999).

In the ethnographic tradition, researchers perceive alcohol in terms of a beverage and often describe it along with food. In and of itself, ethyl alcohol is a common substance; however, it manifests its sociality most clearly when treated as a colorless volatile liquid having a characteristic odor that is imbibed by a company of drinkers. The materiality of alcohol is quite specific: after entering the human body, both the drinker and the alcohol change. And, as I will show in this text, a change in the material state of alcohol also entails certain changes in social relations in the context of an Arctic village.

T. Ingold distinguished between the material world and the world of materials. As an example of the fact that the properties of materials cannot be defined as fixed attributes of things but are rather as processes in relation with other processes, he cites a wet stone that dries during the course of reading an article. Thus, “stoniness” is not constant but infinitely variable in relation to light or shade, moisture or dryness; consequently, in order to fully describe the properties of the stone, it is necessary to respond to these variations. To describe these different properties of things, according to Ingold, is to tell their stories (Ingold, 2007). Accordingly, we can represent the biography of alcohol in the form of changing properties of its matter and its presence in particular environments. In this way, the changing properties of alcohol allow us to investigate the social environment surrounding it.

THE SPACE IN WHICH ALCOHOL LIVES ITS LIFE

Chukotka is the most remote and most sparsely inhabited Russian region. Of around three dozen villages scattered over an area twice the size of Germany, most of these are small settlements located close to or beyond the Arctic Circle. The life of the settlements here is inextricably linked with poor transport infrastructure, a harsh climate, inconsistent supplies of goods and information, and dependence on regional and federal subsidies. The villages are home to about a third of the population of the Chukotka okrug; about 90% of the residents consider themselves to be representatives of the Indigenous minority peoples of the North. Due to the lack of external influences, the unique character of each village is dependent on the individual manifestations of each of its residents.

However, with the exception of reindeer herding camps, the relatively uniform infrastructural layout of the villages tends to mimic urban institutions.⁴ The villages continue to preserve traditional forms of economic activity supported by the state: marine hunting, reindeer husbandry, hunting and fishing.

There are no national and regional legal constraints (Yarzutkina, 2017)⁵ prohibiting the purchase or consumption of alcoholic beverages in the villages. Alcohol is a convenient product for the north: it does not deteriorate, it can be stored for a very

long time and there is a stable demand for it. In addition, it can be made locally from sugar, a socially significant product whose supply to northern villages is controlled by the state. The entry from the field diary of the well-known northern researcher Zoia Sokolova that “alcoholic beverages are imported in unlimited quantities and as a matter of priority” (Sokolova, 2017) is quite consistent with the situation in the villages of Chukotka.

Alcohol in Chukotka is sold in municipal and commercial shops, as well as illegal “points of sale.” From here, alcohol is haphazardly dispersed to homes, as well as occasionally being conveyed in all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles in the form of gifts to reindeer herding camps. On holidays, alcohol ends up in individual premises where it is not subject to a moratorium. It also happens that alcohol goes to the tundra to participate in leisure activities or to places where its use is conducive to the remembrance of ancestors. At other times, it hides in various secluded corners of the village. Alcohol is not mistaken in the impression that it has something to hide from: as elsewhere in the North where Indigenous people live, alcohol is officially considered a “sick” topic and an undoubted evil (Leete, 2019). Nevertheless, it is embedded in everyday life and, together with other objects, people and concepts, participates in the construction of the world of the contemporary rural community.

In what follows, I will attempt a coherent description of the “life” of alcohol in its various states classified as solid, liquid and gas (see e.g. Fayer, 2010). To this, I added an element characterized by the physical absence of matter, which lies outside the field of physics but can nevertheless be studied in the field of anthropology—i.e. discourse. In its different states, alcohol is an actor (Demant, 2009; Latour, 2005) involved in the internal interactions of the rural microcosm and, therefore, functioning as a means through which we can learn more about this world.

STATE: LIQUID

In the village of Tigyt, there are three alcohol producers:⁶ two Russians who “brew” samogon,⁷ and one of mixed ethnicity who “puts on” a home brew (*braga*).⁸ Three other residents of this village resell the finished products of vodka and wine, which are on sale at a local shop. In the village of Onylgyn, there are three to four “points” (*tochka*) of illegal sale of alcohol. The number varies due to the fact that the samogon producers can suspend their activities, while the sellers of finished liquor periodically change (i.e. at any particular moment some “points” may be closed, while others are open). Two sellers are working steadily, both newcomers (Russians), who specialize in the sale of diluted alcohol. Alcohol with a high proof (95.6% ethyl or 92% denatured alcohol) comes to the village most often by sea, on ships that bring goods and coal to settlements. Rural traders have developed strong personal relationships with the crew of these ships.

Pure ethanol is a more profitable product than industrially produced alcohol like vodka: “The delivery of vodka is troublesome and expensive. Why should we waste effort in bringing water?”⁹ Ethanol is a raw material for producing alcohol for sale. It is common practice to dilute ethanol to the state of vodka—40° or to a lower degree of 25–30°. Traders dilute ethanol to various degrees and sell it depending either on a buyer’s nationality or their social status, i.e. a status endowed by a trader. Therefore, while maintaining the same price, different alcohol is sold to different people.

Russians (and some “visitors”) are usually offered beverages with a strength of 40°. Alcohol of a lower proof is intended for native residents. This division based on the nationality principle refers to the existing stereotypes about the consequences of alcohol consumption for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Stefan Dudeck noted that Indigenous people associate alcohol consumption with precipitousness and destruction, while Russians attribute to alcohol such positive values as fun and relaxation (Dudeck, 2015). Indigenous people seem to be more prone to rapid intoxication and aggression. The belief about the different effect of alcohol on the representatives of different nationalities (see, e.g. Beretti, 1929) arose during the initial contacts of Europeans with the Indigenous inhabitants of the region, being largely based on the perception of superiority of the former over the latter (Sudderdorf, 1989). At present, this stereotype is widely maintained as a way of preserving unequal power-status relations (Coyhis & White, 2002).

The relationship between the quality of consumed alcohol and the status of the person is well-known (Veblen, 1934). In Chukotka, this relationship has some specific features. Returning to the above-described situation of alcohol dilution, the social status of a village dweller can be defined through the quality of liquor he or she consumes (e.g. its strength or purity). An informant told me a story that some Indigenous youths broke into the house of an alcohol trader (an elderly Russian) and tried to beat him for the poor quality of the diluted alcohol sold to them. As a result, the rural community, comprising 90% of Indigenous residents, insisted on a strict punishment of the youths.¹⁰ It turned out that these people perceived selling diluted alcohol with a lower proof to the young more acceptable than beating an older person, even a visiting Russian. Older people sharing local traditions, although being poor or lonely, tend to have a higher social status. According to alcohol sellers: “We feel ashamed to sell bad staff to them.”

Traditional gender differences implying that men drink stronger beverages than women are also true for Chukotka villages. Thus, a municipal shop in the village of Yunnan offers several types of alcohol: cognac, whiskey, vodka, several types of wine, and low-alcohol fizzy cocktails. Cognac and whiskey are traditionally purchased as gifts, while vodka is the main commodity for men, wine is preferred by women, and low-alcohol cocktails are considered appropriate for young people and those in the state of hangover (perceived as children). Local dwellers consider it shameful for a man to buy and drink wine, even when the desire is really strong. Thus, an alcohol-dependent director of an organization, where I worked, never drank wine, although all his colleagues (women) preferred this beverage. One pregnant woman, whom the neighbors saw drinking vodka, was condemned by the public of the village. And the reason was not the potential harm to the unborn child but rather the choice of the beverage. “Why couldn’t she just buy some wine?”¹¹—the female villagers lamented.

The gender rules for drinking are also determined by age. The older the woman becomes, the higher social status she acquires. As a result, she is “allowed” to opt for stronger alcoholic drinks. “Well, we had a grandmother, she almost never drank when young ... But when she was 91, I once brought some Finnish liquor—ethanol, very strong and good. And we sat and talked while drinking.”¹²

Low-alcohol cocktails, as well as home brew, are the subject of a contemptuous attitude. People consider these drinks suitable only for extreme cases or in the complete absence of any alternatives. According to my informants, brew is never

offered at a festive table. My friend—a native Chukotka resident from the village of Yunen—made excuses that she had to buy a low-alcohol fuzzy drink: “I had no money, but the headache was excruciating.” She felt awkward not because she had a morning hangover but because she had to buy an alcoholic beverage not appropriate to her status.

Society imposes restrictions on the world of people and the world of things simultaneously: by socially constructing things and socially constructing people (Kopytoff, 1986). The composition of alcoholic beverages marks social/age/gender roles or their combinations. The opposite is also true: the social structure determines the hierarchy of alcohol in terms of its strength and purity.

STATE: SOLID (LIQUID IN THE SHELL)

For many people I have spoken to, alcohol is a “bottle.” Undoubtedly, this is a good description, since any liquid requires a container. In today’s world, liquids are most frequently placed in bottles. However, the word “bottle” does not always mean a cylindrical glass container of liquid. I have witnessed multiple times when people called a plastic bag containing samogon a “bottle.” In remote villages, producers of samogon or diluted ethanol often experience a shortage of containers:

It is incredible what we had to invent! Bottles are more or less ok ... but bottle tops! Sasha R. showed me those napkins, which are first moistened, then dried and rolled. You get a great bottle stopper. When rubber bands for binding money appeared, people started to use them over a piece of plastic. But then bottles were gone. All. Do come with your own bottles. Yes, but where would they get bottles? And we poured into plastic bags.¹³

Placing alcohol in a plastic bag, a glass jar, or a plastic bottle is not just a way to transport the liquid but also a form of interaction between the trader and the buyer, or the trader, the buyer, and other villagers. In the first case, the sale of alcohol in a container that cannot be broken, rather than in a glass bottle, reveals the form of the transaction. Producers and sellers of samogon and diluted ethanol run their activity at home. The place of trade coincides with their place of residence. As a result, publicity competes with privacy. The seller solves this problem by moving the transaction outside his house. In a private house, the relevant transaction usually takes place in the yard. In an apartment building, the area near the apartment cannot be the place for such transactions because it causes protests from neighbors. The transaction is conducted through a window. The buyer either buys on credit (the amount is written in a special notebook), or ties the money to a string that the seller lowers from the window. From there, the buyer receives the product—alcohol—in the form of a package containing the liquid.

In another case, sellers used containers other than glass bottles to hide the fact of alcohol trading. In Chukotka villages, private alcohol trading is illegal for two reasons. First, alcohol dealers, as a rule, do not register or license their activities. Second, the rural community considers such trade immoral. The activity of an alcohol dealer (producer) is perceived as “accustoming to drinking” the Indigenous population and “profiting from someone else’s grief.” These two circumstances

force alcohol producers and sellers to carry out their activities in secret. A popular approach to conceal the fact of alcohol trading is to disguise the product: delivering alcohol in any other container than a bottle.

The “solid body” of alcohol—an unopened bottle—is used as a form of currency within the village, a stable means of payment for services and goods. The local community never uses bottles with low-alcohol beverages and wine for such purposes. However, not all members of rural communities adhere to the practice of paying with bottles. One Ukrainian resident from the village of Umkuum said:

For example, you need to pay for delivering anything ... Of course, you will give a bottle. If you offer money to a tractor driver, he will no longer respect you. ... But this is only with Russians. It is different with the natives; their values are different. They, of course, ask for a bottle first. But after negotiations, they can barter for meat. And they never pay with a bottle: if they have it, it's all for them ... Do you have any children? How are you going to make payment to children?¹⁴

Considering the difference in the economic behavior of the Indigenous population and incomers, the bottle as a means of exchange is rather performative (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2000): for Russians it is a commodity and an equivalent in exchange, whereas for Indigenous people it is a gift.

STATE: GAS (SMELL)

Alcohol exists in Chukotka villages in diverse forms; here I do not refer just to the assortment in local shops. As part of society, alcohol takes a variety of states, not only the liquid one.

In small northern villages with a population of up to a thousand people, there are no restaurants or cafes serving alcoholic beverages; therefore, drinking is most often a private process. Then, how does the rural community become aware of the presence of alcohol to be capable of applying its rules and morals? This information is disseminated through behavior and smell.

The concentration of alcohol in the exhaled air after drinking low-alcohol beverages (beer, gin and tonic) reaches a maximum following 1–30 minutes, remains at this level for another 15 minutes, and then gradually decreases. After drinking vodka, the smell of alcohol continues to increase for 60 minutes, reaches a peak in 90–150 minutes (Nuzhny et al., 2003; Wright & Cameron, 1998) and remains in the exhaled air for 4–5 hours (Wright & Cameron, 1998). When taking large amounts of alcohol, the smell remains in the body for up to a day or more (Jones, 1995). According to K. Dubovski, when alcohol is present in human breath, its concentration is many orders of magnitude higher than the concentration of other volatile organic substances of endogenous or exogenous origin (Dubowski, 1991). Accordingly, having a certain olfactory experience, the fact of alcohol consumption can be determined by the smell from the breath. The exhaled vapors of ethanol and its decay products have been the official means of proving the presence of alcohol in the human body for over 80 years (Dubowski, 1991). In the Russian language, this smell has a special term—*peregaz* (booze breath).

The question of the perceived pleasantness or unpleasantness of the smell of exhaled alcohol differentiates people within a rural community to groups. The smell of alcohol

stands out from a series of other smells. Indigenous people perceive the smells of skins, deer, fish, dogs, and even an unwashed body as normal. “He came from the tundra. A special smell, of course [laughs]. And I love it—reminds me of childhood, yaranga, reindeer.”¹⁵ A different reaction to the “smell of reindeer herders” was described by the so-called newcomers, i.e. people of different nationalities having arrived at the village to work. “Smells like animal skin ... I immediately start to feel sick.”¹⁶

The smell of *peregar* (booze breath) raises a similar contrast of opinions. For many Indigenous people, this smell causes a mixed feeling of envy and admiration, rather than any negative emotions. A rather paternalistic statement by one of my Russian interlocutors is quite indicative:

They [reindeer herders] do not understand that this [drinking] is harmful, that it leads to death, children are then born ill, well... Here he stands, smelling of alcohol [*peregar*] for a kilometer. But for them [the Indigenous people] it is good: if you can drink, you are rich and lucky. Being drunk means being happy.¹⁷

The combination of a lack of alcohol in tundra camps with the joy of the rare opportunity to drink it, the gaiety and excitement that it gives, formed a positive reaction to the smell of alcohol fumes among herders.

Although exhaled alcohol falls under the category of “own” among reindeer herders, this attitude is not shared by the majority of their villagers. The smell of exhaled alcohol falls under the “normative regime of everyday life” (Levinson, 2010), thus revealing mental boundaries existing within the village and between the village and tundra camps. In the public space of a village, under increased social control, the smell of alcohol reminds the community that alcohol is to blame for troubles, abandonment of the traditional way of life, death of fellow villagers, orphanhood of children, loss of reindeer, etc. Every village has its unique list of sorrows caused by alcohol.

When a drunken person appears in a public place, and people around feel the emanating alcohol smell, alcohol becomes an actor of social interactions. The body of a drunken man is a carrier of a substance (alcohol) that marks its presence with a smell. Pierre Bourdieu equated the existence of objects and human beings (bodies, biological individuals) in space (Bourdieu, 1993). The man himself and his physical body are in the social space. Therefore, the substance contained in his body is also present in this space, thus being capable of participating in interactions.

This can be explained using the following example. Your acquaintance comes to visit you, she may be either alone, accompanied by a person that you like, or accompanied by a person that you despise. In all these cases, your behavior will differ. In the latter case, you may even not let both of them into the house. The situation is almost the same with the presence of alcohol as an independent actor. The presence of alcohol in the form of smell affects relations between fellow villagers. In a camp or in a house where drinking is common or frequent, alcohol is a welcome guest. In a public place in a Chukotka village, a person carrying alcohol inside can be perceived negatively, regardless of his behavior. By bringing alcohol with him, this person violates the boundaries of a space, where the presence of alcohol (in the state “inside a person,” marked by a smell) is prohibited.

A villager can come to a post office or an administration building with a package containing bottles of alcohol. In this case, neither the owner of alcohol nor the

alcohol inside his package will be perceived negatively. In other words, if a person buys a bottle in a store—a public place—this will not cause a negative reaction from other citizens. However, if he comes to buy alcohol having already imbibed some alcohol, this will inevitably cause a reaction from fellow villagers. This reaction depends on the gender and age of the person bearing alcohol inside him- or herself. In a shop in the village of Tuiket, I observed a situation when the seller and the customers made a decision to not sell alcohol to a woman. Her behavior was not aggressive; however, the customers, referring to the smell of alcohol, justified their position by caring for the children of this woman. In a shop in the village of Kupren, a drunken reindeer herder, about 30 years old, caused gossip among the customers. Many residents of the village of Koyn'yn, including two teachers, found it unpleasant to stand in a queue next to an elderly drunken Chukchi woman. A strong smell of booze emanated from her. But this aroused understanding and sympathy among other buyers. One man even joked: “Nikolaevna has a holiday again today.” At the same time, the seller was unhappy and, after selling vodka to the old woman, tried to quickly escort her out of the shop and ventilate the room.

In each surveyed village, I aimed to distinguish those places where alcohol was prohibited or not welcomed. These public areas vary from village to village. For example, in the village of Kupren, representatives of the Evangelical Christian-Baptist community noted that they permit those who have imbibed alcohol to a service; however, if a person emits a strong smell of alcohol, he is asked to come another time. In this village, people organize sober dance parties once a week, welcoming only those without a smell of alcohol. In the village of Ilir, dance parties are held every Saturday, in which schoolchildren also participate. In order to control the penetration of alcohol to a party, a school employee determines the presence of alcohol by smell to prohibit this person from entering the event.

A drunken person displays deviant behavior, which may threaten the well-being of other people. At the same time, the smell of exhaled alcohol itself, unlike e.g. tobacco smoke, does not harm the health of others. In my opinion, this difference in attitude depends both on moral values (public violation of the struggle against “accustoming the Indigenous population to alcohol consumption”) and the peculiarities of olfactory perception. According to Georg Simmel, when smelling something, we absorb this impression or this smell-producing object so deeply, thereby assimilating it with ourselves through the vital process of breathing (Simmel, 2000). Each villager is somehow connected with alcohol: someone had previously used to consume it; for some, addiction continues to be a problem; others have lost close people because of alcohol. The smell of exhaled alcohol hurts the senses of many. The state of publicity adds to the general tacit message that alcohol is an enemy. In this situation, people who consume alcohol or emanate its smell are considered as not belonging to the common culture, as “others” not meeting the intra-village standards.

Westerners have traditionally considered heavy drinking to be a sign of the lower class, poverty, immorality, and even mental disability. Snobbish discussions around the topics of alcohol have become a symbol of belonging to the elite (Struchkova & Ventsel, 2015). In Chukchi villages, the presence of smell and alcohol abuse are the signs of naivety, childishness, or stupid destruction of one's life. The lack of understanding of the fatal consequences of drinking alcohol, forgetting the traditions of their people because of alcohol addiction are characteristic of information

poverty and ignorance. The rural elites in Chukotka are progressive in terms of their knowledge of the dangerous effects of alcohol and the necessity of public abstinence from drinking. They demonstrate respect for the traditions of their ancestors and are active in the fight against alcohol. Some rural teachers, who drink quietly at home, skillfully get rid of the smell or render themselves ill, because the smell of alcohol may destroy their careers and social status.

STATE: PHYSICAL ABSENCE (DISCOURSE)

Following my 4-year-old daughter viewing the cartoon *Ice Age*,¹⁸ part of my time is devoted to stories about big and kind mammoths. We sculpt mammoths out of playdough, draw them and even bake mammoth-shaped cookies. Are mammoths involved in my relationship with my child? The answer is certainly “yes,” despite the fact that these animals have become extinct many thousands of years ago. The anthropologist Dmitry Arzyutov described the relations of Nenets people with the invisible (Arzyutov 2019; Arzyutov 2021).

Alcohol can “exist” in the form of words and, in this form, can influence the relationship of villagers. Even if we were to imagine a fantastic situation in which alcohol completely disappeared from rural Chukchi settlements, it would still be present in society in the form of discourse. Discussions about alcohol are a reason for social interaction between people almost all over the world. Thus, the sobriety system of anonymous alcoholics is built around the statement “I am an alcoholic.”

In Chukchi villages, the alcohol discourse, similar to alcohol itself, is an integral part of everyday life. Gatherings of villagers to discuss issues associated with combating alcoholism, selling alcohol, the drinking behavior of fellow villagers, and helping families of alcoholics have become a common social phenomenon. In addition to mass discussions, conversations about alcohol occur within families, friends, alcohol consumers, abstainers, medical staff, police officers, elders, and even in children’s groups in the form of preventive conversations. The entire community of Indigenous villages is permeated with speeches mentioning alcohol in one or another way.

I will provide just one example from an extensive number of interactions, in which alcohol participates in the form of discourses. This was the gathering of the Council of Elders that took place in the village of Agvyk in 2015. The reason for the gathering was the abuse of alcohol by three female residents. At the event, the women were sober, similar to other participants. Accordingly, alcohol in this situation was present only discursively.

Here is the quote from the minutes:

There were cases when the children of G. and K. wandered around the village unattended in the winter. Recently, K.’s children went to the village for a local game in torn socks. The mother could not buy new socks for her child, but found money for alcohol ... G.’s son frequently sleeps at his classmates ... Repeatedly conversations were held with K. and G., but there were no positive results ... Villagers frequently complain about noisy parties held in N.’s house.

At the end of this meeting, the women themselves spoke, expressing intention to change their lives:

K. promised that she would definitely try to get a job ... G. decided at the end of the school year to move with her son to the regional center ... N. said that she would pull herself together, then she plans to go to her sister on the mainland.¹⁹

Many scientists call alcohol addiction a disease. Since this disease is not transmitted by airborne droplets, it is considered to be a personal problem. In the same way, the use of alcohol, similar to the use of any other food product, is the individual choice of a person. In a Chukchi village, where each person is somehow connected with the community (through family ties, participation in social life, etc.), the private can become public if the community needs it. During discussions, the life plans and interactions of the participants can change. For example, without this gathering and talks about alcohol, the interaction between the school director and K., as an employer and an employee, would not have taken place.

In the state of discourse, alcohol can be an instrument in the fight for power or economic benefits. Thus, when transferring information from one person to another, one and the same process could imply just “selling goods,” “treating,” or “accustoming of Indigenous people to alcohol.” Here, the choice of framing depends on the context, situation, and communicative goals.

The topic of “accustoming of Indigenous people to alcohol” is a means of manipulating public opinion in relation to a particular person. For example, when villagers want to express a critical attitude towards this or that leader, they usually mention the facts of selling alcohol or covering for those engaged in alcohol trading. The association of a person with alcohol trade—or with alcohol in general—creates a negative image. The topic of alcohol is also employed in economic wars:

We once took tourists to a reindeer herding brigade. Foreigners. Everything was fine. They stayed there for three days and then returned by an all-terrain vehicle. Sometime later K. said to me: “Why did your foreigners get our reindeer breeders to drink?! We don’t need more tourists like that, that everybody in the brigade is drunk afterwards.” Well, I was taken aback. I’ve lived here for so many years; I would never have let even a drop of [alcohol] sniff. I know them. And then it turned out that it was N. saying that, and about me too. He also brings tourists ... being, in general, a competitor.

Conversely, public condemnation of alcohol trading and the declaration of the need to fight alcohol are used as strategies to form a positive image, to strengthen positions among the national intelligentsia and to seek support from public associations of the Indigenous peoples of Chukotka. Information, along with other elements of the actor network, can be an actor itself (Cetina, 2010), independent of the question of its trustworthiness.

CONCLUSION

My experience of investigating the life of rural Chukotka settlements shows that the contemporary Arctic village cannot be understood without describing the role of alcohol. Alcohol has its own biography, acts as an independent actor in various human interactions, and exposes its presence even when being physically absent. By

analyzing various states of alcohol and its embeddedness into the lives of Indigenous populations, we can learn more about this world. In Chukotka villages, alcohol functions as a means for building social hierarchies, dividing or uniting the population, and stigmatizing certain behavior. Alcohol turns out to be a very influential actor in the community of an Arctic village.

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NOTES

- 1 Alcohol-related topics are traumatic for residents of Chukotka villages because alcohol is often used as a means of manipulation. In small settlements, information on this topic can have unpleasant consequences for particular people or be used against them. Many of our informants expressed the desire not to have their name or place of residence recorded. For this reason, the names of the villages and their inhabitants have been changed. Interview transcripts have been edited for the convenience of the reader. Links to them contain an indication of the sex and year of birth of the informant. For example: Alexandra, f-1952.
- 2 This text is based on observations and interviews of residents from 11 rural settlements (with a population of 200 to 1000) located in the Chukotskii autonomous okrug, the most north-easterly subject of the Russian Federation. Fieldwork done by the author of this chapter to various villages between 2003 and 2020 had an average duration of three weeks except for one village, where the duration of stay was six months. The aim was to study the culture and everyday life of the inhabitants of Chukchi villages. From 2015 onwards, the presence of alcohol in the studied communities was transformed from a merely contextual factor to become the priority focus.
- 3 By this, I refer to the so-called “materiality turn” in sociology, history, and anthropology.
- 4 There are 17 reindeer herding enterprises in the Chukotskii autonomous okrug.
- 5 In Chukotka autonomous okrug, the official rules prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages only from 20:00 to 12:00 and on holidays. In half of the rural settlements, some additional restrictions have been introduced: sale of alcohol is permissible on particular days or for several hours a week. In addition, some people sold liquor illegally, and this activity was not restricted by time. For details, see <http://cdm.unfccc.int/Reference/Standards/accr_stano1.pdf>.
- 6 Here we refer to drinks containing ethanol, a monohydric alcohol with the formula C_2H_5OH comprising a volatile, flammable, colorless transparent liquid.
- 7 A traditional strong alcoholic drink in Russia is homemade alcohol, known as samogon. As for other liquor products, sugar comprises a raw material for samogon production in Chukotka.
- 8 A traditional low-alcohol drink in Russia, obtained by fermentation of sugar or other sugary substances.
- 9 Constantine, m-1966.

- 10 Viacheslav, m-1965.
11 Irina, f-1976.
12 Viacheslav, m-1965.
13 Constantine, m-1966.
14 Oleg, m-1956.
15 Valentina, f-1956.
16 Olga, f-1958.
17 Marina, f-1967.
18 *Ice Age* is a series of animated films produced by Blue Sky Studios, from the Ice Age to Continental Drift (information from the site: <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/> citing Barnes, Brook Blue Sky Studios Takes Aim at Big Names in Animated Film // New York Times. January 10, 2010).
19 Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Elders No. 1 dated April 23, 2015, kept by the administration of the village of Agvyk.

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CHAPTER 20

SANCTIONED AND UNSANCTIONED TRADE



Aimar Ventsel

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1990s, a prominent thread of anthropological research in post-socialist countries has been on the topic of the informal economy. Informality is understood “as an activity, performed by an individual or a group of individuals (organization, family, clan) that eventually bypasses the state or the overarching entity regulating the life of that group or society” (Polese, 2021, p. 3). The informal economy has a political dimension because actors often conceal their activities from the state (Routh, 2011). Literature on the informal economy shows that such economic activities often remain in the shadows. This can be because of profitability, a response to a system where the actors think that they are not treated fairly or where complying with formal rules is too costly or impossible (de Soto, 1989; Perry et al., 2007). The political, economic, and social transition after the collapse of the Socialist Bloc created many such situations, and nearly every former socialist country embraced a certain degree of the shadow economy and its informal practices.

Studies have demonstrated that the economies of these countries underwent a difficult period of restructuring from central planning to capitalist markets during which informal economic practices became a common response to social and economic insecurity (Åslund, 2002; Berdahl, Bunzl, & Lampland, 2000; Brandtstädter, 2003; Hann, 1994, 2002, 2003; Kaneff, 2002; Mandel & Humphrey, 2002; Pine, 2002a, 2002b; Torsello, 2003; Verdery, 1999; Vitebsky, 2002; Ziker, 2003).

Especially chaotic were the early 1990s when old economic structures, such as the centrally-planned production quota system and supply chains controlled by the state, disappeared almost overnight. Former socialist enterprises experienced a shortage of raw materials, markets, and therefore, income. Enterprises were unable to sell their products, something guaranteed under socialism. The state regulatory function of the state changed tremendously in the first post-Soviet decade, and in Russia the state had very little power to control entrepreneurs. This was a period of economic crisis, accompanied by a state default in 1998. The wider population often had difficulties in making ends meet during this time.

Shadow economies began to mushroom in all the former socialist countries. The informal economy usually means that trust between actors is essential, because in most cases the actors cannot go to formal courts, business is not formally documented,

and in order to continue a business relationship, people have to build up a trust relationship. As a result, the informal economic practices in post-socialist countries involved kinship networks (Brandtstädter, 2001; Pine, 2003; Schatz, 2005; Ziker & Schnegg, 2005; Ziker, 2014; Ziker, Rasmussen & Nolin, 2016; Ziker & Fulk, 2019). Russia was not an exception, and the transition period hit ordinary people the hardest (Afanas'eva, 1990; Heady, 2003; Humphrey, 1998; Ssorin-Chaikov, 1998; Nolin & Ziker, 2016). Russian Arctic regions, and especially Indigenous settlements, were in many ways affected by the economic transition harder than other parts of the Russian Federation. In this chapter I discuss how the symbiosis of legal and informal practices continue to exist in the Russian Arctic and the role that kinship plays in this.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE COLLECTIVE AND STATE FARM ECONOMY

In the Soviet era, the life and economy of Arctic Indigenous people in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was heavily subsidized by the state. During Soviet development, a large number of Indigenous people were relocated to remote tundra or taiga (polar forest) villages, difficult to reach under normal circumstances. The Soviet state subsidized the costs of air transport, and the shipping of construction materials and supplies, in order to ensure the villages were connected with the outside world. Since the main economy of the villages involved low profit activities, or hunting, reindeer herding, fishing, and small holdings of animals for their furs, the products of these activities, and also the salaries of Indigenous workers, were financed by state subsidies. In the 1980s, life in a Soviet Arctic village was not too bad—people had relatively high wages, they were able to afford to travel within the country, shops were well stocked, and people could afford to purchase imported food, consumer goods, and household furnishings. The system of subsidies collapsed in the early 1990s. Such subsidized enterprises were a financial burden for the state during the time of transition, and the Russian federation wanted to get rid of such responsibilities. The first task was to reform the state and collective farms, and turn them into private, communal, or municipal enterprises. Reforms started in the very early 1990s. Theoretically, President Boris Yel'tsin liquidated the state and collective farms around 1992 (Wegren 1998), but they existed in various forms in many Russian regions until the early 2000s, when they were slowly converted into different assets. In all cases, the financial support of the new enterprises was placed on the shoulders of regions which often delegated the financial obligations to districts or municipalities. The results of such uneven financial support were obvious in the Republic of Sakha in the early 2000s. In districts where enterprises engaged in the extraction of natural resources, like diamonds, gold, coal, Indigenous reindeer herding, hunting or fishing enterprises, these were more subsidized from local tax money than in districts that lacked similar industries. In poor districts, “the neo-traditional economy” (Pika & Prokhorov, 1994; Pika et. al., 1996) barely survived, wages were rarely paid, and a lot of fish, furs, or meat was sold illegally to private traders.

Research for this chapter was conducted in the north western Republic of Sakha, in the Anabarskii ulus (district). This district is one of the smallest districts in the republic. Over roughly 40,000 square kilometers, there are three settlements with an overall population of approximately 4,000 people. The majority of the population

are Indigenous Evenki and Dolgan. A significant proportion of Sakha incomers work in local administration, hospitals, and schools. A small group of Russians mainly work in the district's administrative center—Saaskylaakh—at the local airport. Saaskylaakh has two schools, a fish smoking shop, border guard station, district hospital, and two administrative facilities—one for the village and another for the district. Saaskylaakh is also the biggest settlement of the Anabarskii district, with approximately 2,500 inhabitants. In addition to Saaskylaakh, there is a smaller Dolgan village close to the coast of the Arctic Ocean, and a small diamond mining village largely isolated from the rest of the district.

From 2000 to 2001, I spent a year in the district researching for my dissertation (Ventsel, 2005). At this time Saaskylaakh was a village whose main economy revolved around reindeer hunting, reindeer herding, fishing, and springtime goose hunting. In the village there was one reindeer herding enterprise, a former state farm, with five reindeer brigades, several hunting enterprises, and many family-based collectives, also engaged in hunting. Hunting determined the annual life cycle of the village. There are two reindeer-hunting and two fishing seasons annually, during this time most of the adult male population spent their time in the tundra. It was not uncommon for women and children to be taken to the tundra, where they spent weeks or even months. It was also very common for hunters and reindeer herders to take their families to the tundra during the summer, where families lived in either nomadic reindeer brigades or stationary hunting bases. A lot of people, not only hunters or reindeer herders, earned a substantial part of their income by selling or bartering reindeer meat and fish during this period. Such activity relied on the lax laws regarding hunting and fishing. Namely, in the 1990s in Russia, generous laws were passed that gave the Arctic Indigenous population the right to hunt and fish throughout the year for their own needs, “for one’s own kettle,” as it was put (Fondahl, Lazebnik, & Poelzer, 2000; Sirina, 1999; Stammeler & Ventsel, 2003; Wilson, 2002).

In Russia, much of the Arctic Indigenous population falls under a special legal category of Indigenous Small-Numbered People, and most of them live in the polar region. The privileges associated with this designation and subsequent legislation (see Filippova, Fondahl, & Savvinova, this volume) were seen by activists and the state as supportive of Indigenous cultures, hence hunting in the Republic of Sakha is classified as part of the “traditional” economy.

Renewable resources from the tundra were an important source of income, directly and indirectly, for most Indigenous families of the district during the early 2000s in a complex system which regulated the use of hunting and fishing territories. In addition, village people relied on their tundra-dwelling relatives (*tundroviki*) to gain access to both meat and fish. They either spent time in the tundra during the hunting and fishing season, where they stayed with tundra relatives, or provided an in-kind benefit, such as taking care of their relatives’ children who remained in the village. Many village people had private reindeer that were kept in tundra reindeer brigade herds, and these animals were mostly kept as a potential source of meat. Reindeer herders and hunters also supplied their relatives with the fur needed to sew boots, coats, and hats. The tundra economy, especially work in the reindeer brigades, was subsidized by the Republic of Sakha, and therefore the *tundroviki* had a steady income, for both men and women. This all made the *tundroviki* respected people in the villages.

CHANGES IN VILLAGE LIFE

When I returned to the Anabarskii district 15 years later in November of 2016, I noticed many changes. As I was accustomed to from my first fieldwork period, I was picked up by some local hunters at the airport in Saaskylaakh and driven to the village by snowmobile. In Saaskylaakh I saw new houses along the road, and the road to the village center had been improved. I saw new shops and traffic signs that were not there when I had first visited the district. This time, I traveled with my local research associate who had relatives in the village. We stopped at his relative's house and then I recognized the past that I knew. It was one of the quick-build, several-roomed houses that one can see in most Russian Arctic villages. We were given a room in the building, furnished with cheap, broken beds. The house was without running water and had an outdoor toilet, as was the case with all houses in Saaskylaakh in 2000 and 2001. In the snow-covered street stood weary looking snowmobiles, and one could see the scattered dogs who always roamed the streets of Arctic villages. In the evening, I discovered that in the village there were now street lights, something I truly wished for 15 years ago. My few weeks of fieldwork were very intensive. Apart from a very exhausting trip to the tundra, where I spent time among reindeer herders and hunters, I did what I had very little chance to do 15 years ago—I interviewed officials from the local administration, school teachers, and entrepreneurs. As my old acquaintance had some connections with well-respected families of the village, I was able to do a surprising number of interviews in a short time and visit the local school, a new museum, and a new hospital.

As my fieldwork demonstrated, during 15 years there had been substantial changes to village life. On the one hand, there was an improvement in village life. Saaskylaakh was filled with small shops, selling mainly foodstuff. I also saw a few new shops being built. Some stores had also installed ATMs, where one could also pay phone and electricity bills. Apart from the street lights, Saaskylaakh seemed less crime ridden. Children were playing in the streets on a winter night, and I saw laughing groups of young people. There were no drunkards as before. Saaskylaakh had grown, there were new streets with private homes, some of them had bio-toilets and saunas. With good weather, one was even able to use mobile internet. When one and half decades ago there were only two or three working street lamps in the village, then now the entire village was illuminated.

However, more noticeable were changes in the local lifestyle. The center of Indigenous life had become the village. Fifteen years ago, men were the main income providers in the family, now women contributed a steady income to the family budget. Russian Arctic villages are notorious for not providing jobs to men. As explained above, in the past, a large number of men spent a substantial amount of time in the tundra, hunting and fishing. Tundroviki, or professional hunters and reindeer herders, dictated the rhythm of family life, so their wives and daughters often had to work in temporary precarious jobs, such as cleaners; during the season women had to go to the tundra and help with the processing of hides, salting fish, and women also did the cooking in the tundra for the men and kept their clothing in order. When I first conducted my fieldwork in 2000, most of the adult male population of the village—tundroviki or not—periodically took time off work and annually spent several weeks in the tundra during the goose or reindeer-hunting season, or for fishing. This time it

was remarkable how alcohol abuse had noticeably decreased. For some reason, the old and ancient custom that the guest should be greeted with a bottle of vodka had disappeared, and when visiting my old friends, I was never offered vodka.

Contrary to life in Saaskylaakh 15 years ago, most village men had given up the long hunting and fishing trips to the tundra, and their wives and children spent even less time outside the village. Hunting bases in the tundra stood unused most of the year, and a large number of people tried to make their living in the village. Regular jobs in the village were scarcer for men, as women had more opportunities to work in the two local schools, child day care center, village and district administration, house of culture, hotel, airport hospital, or telecommunications station. Men were able to work in some—mainly leading—positions in both the village and district administration, local heating station, as drivers for administrative jobs like shipping drinking water or garbage, at the airport, and a few other manual jobs. Women also had better opportunities finding work in the private sector. All the shops I visited in Saaskylaakh had female workers. A fur processing and sewing shop in Saaskylaakh had only women working there, as was the case with a fish smoking shop.

A lot of the men that I had a chance to discuss the employment situation in Saaskylaakh with were mainly engaged in *khaltura*, a Russian expression for short term, often informal jobs. These men worked on construction when someone wanted to repair a house or build a new shop. They loaded and unloaded trucks, helped in the airport, and did many similar odd jobs. One of my old friends was a village jeweler who made earrings and rings to order. Some of my older acquaintances also helped to repair snowmobiles for money. The increase of the importance of *khaltura* for the income of men meant they were no longer the main breadwinners of the family. They could not provide a stable influx of cash, as was the case when they were hunting and fishing regularly, and the women now had a steady, although maybe not very big, disposable income. Their husbands' contribution to the family budget was more erratic and unpredictable. This was also one of the reasons why most Indigenous families ceased to spend months in the tundra—women just could not (and in many cases did not want) to leave their village job. Because most inhabitants of the Saaskylaakh were now relatively sedentary, the importance of informal trade had grown. One item that circulated in the village black market was fuel. It was stolen from the heating station and sold and resold illegally. When in earlier times most men were entitled to some amounts of free or cheap fuel as support for the “traditional economy,” now when they did not hunt officially, they had to have access to fuel otherwise.

Due to increasing sedentarization, fishing had become more important than hunting for Saaskylaakh's inhabitants. The season when men left the village for a longer period, often taking their families with them, was the fishing season, in the middle of summer. This fish was consumed by the family or sold to traders. There was, nevertheless, a change in fishing patterns. Fishing was now concentrated in the lakes and rivers around the village, and hunting bases far into the tundra were seldom used. There were several reasons for such a shift. First of all, traveling to the deep tundra demands more fuel and additional suitable clothing, both articles being a problematic expenditure when men's income had become irregular. I also had the impression that most men I talked to preferred to stay within the range of the mobile phone network in order to communicate with their families, relatives, and friends in the village. That meant they seldom went further than 50 kilometers.

I arrived in Saaskylaakh during the period when most men were busy preparing ice for the winter period. In winter, every house has a supply of ice blocks stored outside the house that are melted for drinking water. Every man had *his* lake where he cut ice for such consumption. It must be noted that the lakes where one takes ice are different from the fishing lakes. The user rights to ice lakes are informally divided within the community, whereas fishing rights are formally controlled by the state. These laws and regulations will be the topic of the next section.

THE IMPACT OF NEW REGULATIONS

The decline in hunting was, in part, caused by changes in the laws regarding Indigenous land use. As it appears, earlier privileges for small-numbering Indigenous peoples became subject to increasing regulation. A person, who wanted to hunt, now needed a license and be registered as a professional hunter, whereas previously hunting was considered a traditional economic activity accessible to all Indigenous people. In addition, individual hunting was limited to one reindeer per week, and another license for trapping was introduced. For fishing, a slow and complicated system of entitlement was implemented. To catch fish legally, one needed permission to do it at a certain lake or spot on the river. These permits needed to be confirmed not only in Yakutsk, but also in Moscow. As the main hunting inspector of the Anabar district told me, the whole procedure was so slow that the permits usually arrived after the end of the fishing season. “Therefore, we turn a blind eye when people fish without the official permit. Otherwise people would be without any basis for their livelihood,” he told me. The old informal entitlements for the hunting territories in the tundra I had studied in the 2000s (Ventsel 2005) were nonexistent when only a few hunters were active. However, a strong sense of territorial entitlement for fishing waters, either lakes or rivers, still existed. Increasing bureaucratization meant only very few people were interested in applying for the large-scale hunting licenses needed to sell wild reindeer meat in large quantities. As a result, legal commercial hunting was in the hands of a few “hunting kings,” who assembled a hunting brigade for every hunting season and were able to obtain all the necessary papers to sell the game legally to traders. These entrepreneurs also bought meat from other people, even from hunters of other villages. I met a few individual hunters in the village who were still active. We spent a week in the tundra and had plenty of time to speak about their economic practices. Individual hunters poach a lot. As I was told:

There is a right to shoot one reindeer in a month. One week I shoot one reindeer, then next week I shoot another one reindeer!

This ironic remark meant that individual hunters pretend to stay within the legal limits, presenting every carcass they bring to the village as the legal “one in a month.” In fact, these few hunters were busy hunting, trapping, and fishing illegally. Fifteen years ago, trapping furs was an important source of income for the tundroviki. Now, trapping has practically ceased due to the same strict regulations. As individual hunters confessed, they trap less and sell their furs to the villagers, who use them to make hats or coats. Meat and fish that is not consumed is also sold, in most cases illegally, to village people or hunting entrepreneurs.

As a result of these changes, reindeer meat for villagers had become a food that people had to buy, instead of having their own supply in an underground ice chamber, or receiving it as a gift from neighbors. A lot of men I knew from earlier times had not renewed their hunting licenses, instead they occasionally poached. One night, I even witnessed how poachers drove to the village turning off their snowmobile lights before entering the settlement. Compared to the situation in the early 2000s, the local economy had undergone changes in the flow of food, mobility, and geography. Meat was not shared anymore with neighbors, but more than often sold. The focus of life had become more village centered. Fish had become, in terms of disposable income, more important than reindeer meat. And long trips to the tundra were resigned to the past.

The Indigenous economy in the Anabarskii district has always contained a combination of legal and illegal practices. In my book, and elsewhere, I have shown, however, that the roots of such economic practices go back to the Tsarist and Soviet period, where local Dolgans and Evenkis were engaged simultaneously in reindeer herding, reindeer hunting, trapping, and fishing (Ventsel, 2005, 2010). Depending on the season and migration routes of the wild reindeer, either hunting or herding gained more importance as alternative survival strategies, but the focus of local life has always been the exploitation of the tundra's resources. The Soviet sedentarization policy was not very successful in breaking these economic patterns. Paradoxically it matched with the local socioeconomic regime of maneuvering between different sources of income. Part of the tundra economy which in the Anabar district had been legal, in the subsequent decade could become illegal. For example, private commercial trapping and large-scale hunting was illegal in the Soviet era, whereas it became legalized in the post-Soviet era. However, even legal activities always included some hidden illegal practices, like hunting over the limit, or an illegal trade with reindeer meat or fish.

It can be said that the previous “domestic mode of production” (Sahlins, 1972) has again been turned upside down in the Anabar district. By 2015, the center of the local economy became the village, and against a long tradition, women were now providing a steady flow of money. One of the most important initiators of these changes was new legislation and the state's ability to enforce control. The regulations for the trade in meat are stricter in the Republic of Sakha than in other parts of the Russian Arctic I have been in recent years. One needs more certificates and licenses, not only to hunt, but also to legally sell and buy reindeer meat. Apparently, the formerly halfway-illegal trade in reindeer meat had become so regulated that on the one hand it moved the hunting to a few entrepreneurs, and on the other hand reduced traders' willingness to buy poached meat. The changing legal-administrative landscape has led to a reduction in individual hunting activity, and there remain only a few hunters willing to do this difficult, dangerous, and hard job, while still being able to earn enough money to meet their needs. These hunters retain the attitude I encountered in the early 2000s: namely they think that they have the right to hunt whenever and how much they need, without paying too much attention to the rules. Their main market is, nevertheless, in the village, and they have become more dependent on the amount villagers can afford to pay for meat. Hunting has turned from a regulated common pool resource into a monopolized practice of a few entrepreneurs, where scant individual hunters are able to sell their mainly illegal game.

KINSHIP AND ECONOMY

All these changes have also affected the nature of kinship networking. I was able to locate only a few families that had maintained the formerly widespread pattern of reciprocal kin relations that connected the tundra and the village (Ventsel, 2001, 2010). Those few individual hunters I mentioned earlier relied on relatives when they left the village for longer hunting trips. In these cases, their children, and sometimes women, were taken in by their relatives, and the hunter repaid such favors with meat or fish. Because a job in the hunting brigades was reserved foremost for relatives of the entrepreneurs, and the number of such jobs was limited, changes have left most of the village male population to rely on odd jobs, fishing, and occasionally poaching.

The nature of sharing has changed over the years. Now, the extended family is pooling fuel and spare parts for their snowmobiles, to guarantee every male member an opportunity to fish and prepare ice. Due to the falling prices and more complicated license system, the trapping of animals for fur has been transformed to satisfy the needs of the village, and was no longer oriented to large-scale commercial sales. Poaching, under the pretext of legal hunting, or as a fully informal activity, had become a source of money for some people, and a source of food for those who bought the meat. One change was also the stronger presence of state officials. The hunting inspector now lived in Saaskylaakh, whereas 15 years ago inspectors flew in from Yakutsk or other districts, so poaching has become riskier. I was told that since the hunting inspector was a local, he tolerated poaching to a certain extent, especially when the violators were his relatives. Poaching was, nevertheless, done in secret, and so snowmobiles with their lights turned off continued to arrive after dark.

While one and half decades ago village relatives took care of the children of the tundroviki, and looked after the buyers for the meat tundroviki brought from the tundra, then such a division of tasks seldom existed in 2016. I could see that the extended families still had a strong sense of solidarity, but nuclear families had become more common. With the demise of reindeer herding, and mass large-scale wild reindeer hunting, there was no central activity that united relatives, and provided food and a certain income for all. Men were more dependent on their luck finding *khaltura* jobs than contributing to the family hunting and meat trade. As interesting as it was, a certain increase in the prosperity of the village had helped to enforce undeniable individualization. Because the Russian state wishes to increase its control over its Arctic territories and develop them, it has channeled more money to improve living conditions in the Arctic settlements. Due to this policy, people have easier access to regional financial support to build their own houses, and this is what they do. As a result, the lifestyle where several nuclear families live under the same roof became less common and the central leadership of the family elders diminished.

The members of a family visited each other often and kept in close contact. As mentioned above, I witnessed how people shared snowmobile fuel, spare parts, or snowmobiles. Nevertheless, the spread of smartphones in the village made everyday face-to-face contact between relatives unnecessary. There was, probably, a more reciprocal relationship among the women who could inform each other about jobs in the local administration, hospital or schools, and kindergartens.

CONCLUSION

Since I first visited Saaskylaakh, an Indigenous village in the northwestern Republic of Sakha, I have documented several changes in the local economy and land use. A village of semi-nomadic Arctic hunters and reindeer herders had transformed. A sedentary lifestyle became more dominant, and importance of hunting declined, and reindeer herding had almost disappeared. Interestingly, fishing remained important for the local Indigenous economy, but there were significant geographical shifts. The main fishing sites were now in the vicinity of the village. The local tradition of recognized user rights on the water continued to exist, and there is one organizational foundation for fishing. Local authorities recognize the importance of fishing, and tolerate a certain amount of illegality. One reason for their tolerance is probably because fishing is essential to every Indigenous family, by providing a staple food and additional income. Once the fishing season is over, documents are formed post factum, and people are able to sell their additional fish. The difference between fishing and hunting is that fish have less value in the village. Hunting existed in an “encapsulated system” (Bailey, 1969, p. 144–147)—a system operating within its own set of rules, where sellers and buyers were interested in avoiding the attention of officials. Fishing remained, by contrast, an unencapsulated system where the officials were aware of the trade and its geography. Fishing remained semi-legal, where the officials tolerated fishing even when paperwork was not in order. First of all, fishing was seen as an important livelihood for villages. Therefore, officials did not demand fishing licenses at the beginning of the fishing season. When documents arrived, the licenses were registered, even if it was after the season ended. When the licenses were registered, it was also relatively easier to sell fish to various traders who usually appear in Saaskylaakh during mid-winter. Therefore, fishing, contrary to wild reindeer hunting, was not completely illegal, and was at least partially subordinated to the state laws and regulations.

This concentration of resource procurement undoubtedly has ecological impacts. There will likely be problems with fish stocks in the near future. Already, some who fish along the Anabar river complained of a shortage in fish. The shift from the meat trade to the fish trade means that the pressure to fish as a resource has grown, since more people needed more fish. The increase of human activity around the village also has an impact on the vulnerable tundra nature—snowmobile tracks recover slowly, people throw away plastic bags and all kinds of modern waste, fishermen often keep their fuel in old metal barrels in the tundra, which tend to leak. The noise, pollution, and human movement also drives fur bearing animals and wild reindeer away. The impact can be noticed with the naked eye, approximately a dozen kilometers before the village the snow was covered by snowmobile tracks. One change that occurred with the ongoing voluntary sedentarization was that most men had several snowmobiles, one for the summer and several for winter. The decrease of reindeer herding means that summer travels are now made by snowmobile. Using snowmobiles during the summer means that they break down more often, and that contributes to the need to sell more fish in order to buy spare parts and fuel.

Changes in the legal situation and local economy have changed kinship cooperation. Extended families still maintain a high degree of solidarity and reciprocity, “sharing in” or uniting people, but there occurred a “re-positioning of the normal

state of affairs” (Widlok, 2017, p. 24), where access to the tundra’s resources (like hunting grounds, fishing waters, reindeer meat or fish) were no longer shared, but instead families shared snowmobile fuel, snowmobiles, and spare parts.

Informal economic activities—or bypassing the state and avoiding its attention—have traditionally been part of regional economic activities since the Soviet era, but these have been modified and transformed alongside changes in the society and its economy. Women have become an important (and sometimes main) provider of stable income to the family, local Indigenous life has become increasingly centered in and around the village. Therefore, men were no longer seeking their income on the tundra as hunters, but as khaltura workers in the village. Hunting as such has become the main income only for a few men in the village, either legally or illegally. Other men in khaltura jobs—construction work, or loading-unloading trucks, or something else—depended more on their village neighbors, and not so much from traders, who 15 years ago traveled to Saaskylaakh to buy or barter meat. The informal trade in meat has moved to the village where many inhabitants now buy meat from poachers. That needed mutual trust within the village. In a situation where a dominant part of villagers interlinked through a common upbringing, or were related to each other, informal practices were common, and in many places had replaced the state regulated official economy. Paradoxically, the improvement of the living standards increased the demand for such trade. People now had better housing, more snowmobiles, a better assortment of goods in local shops, and they required more disposable income to afford it.

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CHAPTER 21

LONGITUDINAL ETHNOGRAPHY AND CHANGING SOCIAL NETWORKS



Susan Crate

Last night was Elana and Victor's 25th anniversary celebration at the Elgeerii village culture hall. Suddenly it hit me how long I had known Elana. I flashed on that 1992 February day in Yakutsk when, while attending a folklore class for culture workers from across the Sakha Republic, the instructor announced my presence as an American scholar looking for a host to go to *Suntaar* to study *yhyakh* (Sakha's summer festival). Elana's hand shot up immediately and, in a few months, I landed by riverboat to Elgeerii on a cold rainy May evening. I was whisked into a small log house on the river bank to meet Elana, her *ebe* (grandmother), her cousin and family. I did not know the Sakha language and everyone referred to me as *the American*, a species that many had yet to lay eyes upon. Via the longitudinal work I have done since 1992 to date, and the many relationships that have developed over that time, when I arrive today, I have a true sense of coming home. I want to know how people are and I spend the first few days flitting about the village to find out.

Journal entry, August 10, 2018

My relationship with Elana is one of the many threads woven into a mural of memories, experiences, and understandings of change over the course of three decades of ethnographic research in Elgeerii, a village in the Suntaar region of the western Sakha Republic, Russia. Moments, like that night at the 25th anniversary, track my time in the field and happen when I least expect it. Another was when, in 2018, I was preparing for an interview with a young savvy newscaster from Suntaar. Out of nowhere she commented that she remembered me so clearly as the sandaled hippie American girl who was the honored guest at her grandfather's 75th birthday celebration in Elgeerii in 1992. She was three years old at the time. Or in 2010, in Viliuisk, a regional center downstream from Elgeerii on the Viliui River. I was there to facilitate a knowledge exchange, focused on permafrost thaw and other change in the climate and weather, eliciting local inhabitants' observations of change and sharing regional scientific findings (Crate & Fedorov, 2013). After the event, the young minister of ecology for the region thanked me for my work on *Kwök Tyyn* (Green Spirit), a collaborative publication to educate about the environmental issues of the Viliui regions (Crate, 1995). He said that his grade school had used it for teaching and that the book had inspired

his career to protect the environment. Another moment was in 2018 when I realized that the new president of the Sakha Republic was the son of the family that I stayed with in Verkhnyviliuisk in 1992 while conducting field research on *yhyakh*.

This chronology of relationships and events mark my time in the field. Although they may not be the central crux of empirical investigation, they nevertheless are an important aspect of longitudinal research. They add local color and contour to my work investigating change, collaborating with Viliui Sakha communities in western Sakha, northeastern Siberia. By fore-fronting them, I give readers a more inductive sense of my research experience. I focus the rest of the chapter on how we, as researchers doing longitudinal ethnography, are privileged to witness, document, and interpret the warp and the weft of change, the bottom-up complexity of socio-cultural interactions with change (Hastrup, 2009), through long-term work in a specific place and with a specific culture.

LONGITUDINAL ETHNOGRAPHY AND CHANGE

Longitudinal ethnography is a bellwether method to discern change over time during which “both internal and external factors can be examined in a context about which quite a lot is already known” (Hammersley 2016, p. 541). My authority to understand and speak about *change* in Viliui Sakha communities is based on conducting ethnographic research and living with Sakha communities since 1991. I practice participant observation, the method of *being there* that “allows for a slower accumulation of evidence and understanding and for key insights to arise unexpectedly, during experiences that allow glimpses of how the world is perceived and experienced by local peoples” (Roncoli et al., 2009, p. 88). This sensitizes me to understanding the continuity of cultural predilections via more visceral experiences ... the moment I looked up inside a cow barn and saw a *salama* (a braided horsehair rope adorned with birchbark figures and colored cloth strips as gifts for a deity), which I thought was a long-forgotten Sakha practice, only to learn that many cow-keepers continued to use them; or the witnessing of one cow-keeper’s sacred relationship with her cow herd when hearing her assure a steer headed to slaughter that this was his next step to the upper sky world to join the cow deity. It also opens me to surprise encounters that serve to track change over time. The day in 2000, while an elder so eloquently described the old ways of skidding hay over ice and gathering branches from the ground for firewood, that I was transported to that time. After completing that oral history interview, I was then jerked back to the present upon leaving his home and almost colliding with two teenagers walking past, brandishing pierced navels and orange hair.

I also track change over time in the process of analyzing narrative accounts, eliciting and interpreting narratives to contextualize *what people say* within a cognitive frame and within the knowledge system(s) of which that specific culture shapes, understands, gives meaning to, and references their world (Agrawal, 1995; Escobar, 2001). This involves the unpacking of tacit knowledge that is both “compound—a portfolio of intertwined knowledge systems mediated by experience, tradition, crafts and skills, social organization and not least science—and dynamic, used ephemerally, contingent to the task at hand” (Bremer et al., 2017, p. 673). As such, vernacular knowledge systems are gateways to understanding how a culture perceives,

understands, responds and adapts to change (Gómez-Baggethun and Reyes-Garcia, 2013; Pretty, 2011; Reyes-Garcia, 2010; Tengö et al., 2014; Sillitoe, 2007; Cash et al., 2003). Untangling them is key to understanding change because Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge “supply the nonlinear and pluralistic perspectives that ... provide a socially relevant context” (Klubnikin et al., 2000, p. 1304).

The new subfield of climate ethnography—critical, multi-sited ethnography in collaboration with affected communities—adds a new dimension to the tracking of change (Marino, 2015; Crate, 2011a). Climate ethnography is about teasing out the multiple drivers of change, of which climate is one, to discern how a culture not only perceives and understands climate change based on their tacit knowledge but also orients themselves to their future (Huntington, 2000; Maldonado et al., 2016). Beth Marino’s pioneering climate ethnography, *Fierce Climate, Sacred Ground* (2015), is a careful analysis of one Inupiaq settlement’s confrontation with the multiple disasters that climate change has ushered in. She uses a vulnerability framework to unpack how unprecedented flooding and erosion present a physical threat and a potential loss of sacred homeland for the Shishmaref community. Her analysis also reveals how the failures of policy, funding, and organizational response are intimately entangled in the community’s future.

My recent book, *Once Upon the Permafrost: Culture and Climate Change in the 21st Century* (2021), is a longitudinal climate ethnography about the tensions between vernacular and scientific *knowing* of a specific cultural-ecological system. The book provides an in-depth analysis of Sakha’s Indigenous knowledge system as it informs their intimate physical and spiritual relationship with *alaas*,¹ the specific ecosystem used in their pastoralism subsistence and that today are threatened by anthropogenic climate change (c.f. Crate et al., 2017). I argue that local understandings of change, founded in vernacular knowledge systems, are often dissonant with scientific knowledge but provide critical information about cultural attachment and meaning, necessary for effective interdisciplinary engagement. I challenge the hegemony of scientific knowledge and neoliberal *solutions* to climate change by bringing to light the importance of the depth and breadth of one culture’s knowledge system, and the need to engage all available knowledge systems for effective policy prescriptions.

For the purposes of this chapter, I draw from my longitudinal ethnography to discern changing social networks. Undoubtedly, Soviet-period collectivization, state farm establishment, and the post-Soviet turn each affected social networks. What I want to show here is more of an assessment of how some of the important players in Viliui Sakha’s social networks have changed and how two of the relevant drivers of change interact with those players. I will focus on changes in village demographics, considering the past and present status of elders, youth, and cows, and the two of the main drivers of change: communication and transportation.

ELDERS²

The old guard—the orators, hunters and guardians of tradition—had gone
—Andrew Beatty, *Return to the Field* (2012, p. 3)

Beatty’s words resonate strongly with me. In the last decade of field research, I find myself yearning to time travel back to the 1990s in Elgeei and Kutana. I want more

time with the elders. Writing about it calls up images of conducting life history interviews, sitting with each elder as they reached into their past to recount memories and the times of their childhood and youth (Crate 2002; 2006a; 2008). Although I interviewed dozens of elders for my master's research on the yhyakh and how the festival had changed over time, the bulk of life history interviews I conducted during 1999–2000 dissertation research. I had originally planned to work with five male and five female elders, but once I began to their histories and the transformational changes they had lived through, I was compelled to do more. By the end of the year I had interviewed 54. There are no elders today, at least not like those back then who remember the dawn of the Soviet period, the changes of collectivization, and the post-Soviet context. The elders I had the opportunity to work with recalled being born and raised in an ancestral homestead on an *alaas*, distant from the village center. I asked them to draw the landscape of the homestead they grew up on with the main house and outbuildings, a process that called up more memories (Crate, 2006b, pp. 167–190). Some remembered how Elgeei was when it was a settlement of ten households, long before it became the center of the state farm. Several of them were village historians who wrote extensively and contributed to regional historical efforts, thereby making a point to perpetuate what they knew. Some were the village poets who taught their craft. And there were recollections of local healers and shamans. Overall, they described a life in which all work was done by either humans or animals; there was no electricity; and they learned to be avid readers of the sky both day and night, for orientation to their world. In more recent climate inquiry, many comment on how busy it has gotten *up there*, saying, for example, “They go into space and mix up the sky. When I was young, they didn’t do that, and we knew the weather—it rained when it was supposed to—now the climate is all mixed up.”

The elders’ oral histories personalized, with a richness and context, the changes over the last century. However, none rivaled what I learned from my mother-in-law, whom we call *Ebee* an endearing form of the word for “grandmother.” I married an Elgeei resident in 1995, a master jeweler and linguist. I witnessed Ebee’s daily life during my 69 months of research between 1993 and 2018. She taught me what it was to be Sakha. She chose her words carefully. She did most everything by hand and wasted nothing. She worked hard and loved napping in the sun, under the larch trees. Ebee taught me to make *suorat* (kefir), *kymys* (fermented mare’s milk), *küörcheh* (whipped crème fraîche), *leppueske* (flatbread), *belimien* (dumplings), and *bereski* (pies); to feed and say words to the spirit of the home hearth so all would be well; and to sew anything that was needed out of materials found. When our daughter was born, she was the best grandmother this world has known.

Ebee also shared memories of what life was like before, usually during tea time when I shared what I had learned from elders that day. Once I told her how an elder remarked that in their youth, they took their shoes off after the snow melted in May and would not put them on until the first snow fell in September. They did so not because it was warm but because they did not have shoes! Ebee commented how, especially in the cooler mornings of spring, they would stand in the fresh cow manure and urine to warm their feet. There were no rubber boots back then. The only summer footwear were *eterbes*, handmade cowhide boots with thin leather soles, which were only to be worn when it was dry. Most only had one pair, made from the hide of the one cow households were allowed to have in the collective times. Ebee

made eterbes for her 11 children, borrowing leather from others with fewer feet to cover. Another day at tea I mentioned that, when visiting one *ötökh* (an abandoned homestead), we had eaten the newly grown *kiihile* (sorrel)—a plant with bitter, zesty tasting leaves. Ebee told me how during the *achchyk d’yl* (starvation year 1942), *kiihile* and *dölühüön* (rose hips) were all they had to eat for days at a time. When she told me that talking about *kiihile* made her want some, the next day I biked to a field and picked her a bag. She ate a few leaves every day for weeks. What I would give to know the memories that flooded her mind with the taste of each leaf. Ebee passed in 2019. It was then that I realized that only 2 of the 54 elders I interviewed in 1999–2000 were still alive. Considering they were raised with only human and animal power and lived long enough to talk with their great grandchildren on a cell phone, they witnessed quantum change over the course of their lifetimes. The remaining elders, those who have that expansive gaze of change over time, are absent in contemporary villages. They can more easily relocate to the city where they can have better conditions, including central heat, running water, indoor toilets, and comprehensive medical care.

YOUTH

Although I did not work extensively with youth as I did with elders, I included them in focus groups during my research in 2004, 2008, and 2018. I held one male and one female focus group in each of my four research villages, each having two youth, two middle-aged, and two elder participants. I began by having them complete a chart detailing their ideas about the topic at hand (2004: future sustainability; 2008 and 2018: weather and climate observations). This way, I could have input from those who were not participating. Of the three age groups, youth participated the least and male youth were the most silent. I was told this was in part due to respect for their elders and in part due to their lack of knowledge on the topics.

I learned a lot about changes in the youth from elders and middle-aged inhabitants. I began hearing their opinions in 2004, when they voiced concerns about young people’s pre-occupation with computers and other devices as technology made its way to the regions. One elder commented, “I am very surprised. I take my son hunting—he used to love going with me and staying out in nature. Now he will not stay—he complains that he is cold and uncomfortable and wants his computer and so he walks home” (Kutana inhabitant, 2011). Similarly, many compared the activities and interests of their youth to today,

I remember being a boy in summer—it was great back then ... we boys did not come out of the forest! We also fished. Kids these days do not do that ... they just want to go to the city but for now stay inside on the computer and TV ... and they do not go in the forest and outside

(Kutana inhabitant, 2018)

For the 2004–2006 project investigating local understandings of future sustainability I conducted one-on-one interviews with youth (Crate, 2006c). The response most relevant to the discussion here concerned their plan to stay in their birth village, either continuing to live and find work there or to go to the city for a higher education and

return. Nineteen of the twenty participants said they planned to return to their birth village after getting a higher education. Today, I would not get the same response. Contemporary youth cannot get to the city fast enough.

Since the early 2000s, youth have increasingly out-migrated to the city. Part of this change is historical. In the Soviet period, youth were required to complete two years of service on the state farm, which delayed going to the city for a higher education. This resulted in more of them staying and continuing farm work, and in many more returning from the city after getting a higher education and finding work in their home village. Without a state farm, there is no mandatory two-year service and, perhaps most critical, no employment opportunities guaranteed on their village farm. This is only part of the reason why youth go to the city and seldom return. Another factor is that their parents encourage them to go to the city because they want them to have other opportunities besides keeping cows and horses in the village. As a result, they go, for a higher education or not, and stay, often finding other, more often than not, menial work to support their life there. Many elders purport that their main incentive to do so is to be with their peers and to have an easy life. As one elder put it, “They are listening to another calling.”

Village youth are highly cognizant of how their future is panning out differently from their parents’ and grandparents’ futures. A Kutana tenth-grader conducted a study in 2014 to understand the aspirations of his school’s population (Fedorov, 2014). He developed a set of questions to discern whether they planned to keep cows as their parents and ancestors had. Of the 104 students interviewed, 100 said “no,” giving three main reasons: they were lazy; they planned to live in the city; and they would choose a different profession. Whether this change is good or bad is not my point here but rather that it is a significant change to the relatively stable populations of the last decades. Furthermore, it directly interacts with the next changing demographic.

COWS

Cows are also in decline in Sakha villages today. Their numbers are intimately linked to both elders and youth. During my 1999–2000 dissertation research, I administered a household survey to gauge how inhabitants adapted to the 1992 loss of their state farm for employment and food products. In terms of the latter, most households reported that they had started keeping cows. At the same time, however, many of the surveyed households’ yards were devoid of a *khoton* (cow barn). I was perplexed. Then one day an interviewee mentioned having just returned from her parents’ house to get milk. I inquired about how that worked. This revealed how households were reciprocating with several other households to realize their household’s needs of both labor and food. To test and systematically understand my theory, I developed a new one-page supplemental questionnaire to find out who each survey household got their food products from. I found a similar pattern across the populations. Households had developed an inter-household food production system, which I termed cows and kin (Crate, 2003). In general, several households worked together to realize their labor inputs and cow products. Most commonly, the parental household did the daily cow care and the younger households performed the arduous summer work of harvesting hay for the herd. In many ways, householders were responding in

fundamental cultural-ecological ways by retrieving production knowledge, reviving ecological knowledge, and relying on kin (Netting, 1993). In this context, both elders and youth were critical elements to the cows and kin social network system, with elders doing the majority of daily care and youth playing a significant role in the summer haying.

Twelve years later and four years into two climate projects, I *looked up* one day to notice that there were no cows on the Elgeei streets—at least not in the numbers that supported my dissertation findings of the cows and kin adaptation (Crate, 2006b). With climate change effects squarely on my mind, I predicted that there were fewer cows due to the flooding of hayfields and pastures. When I realized that even the stoic and steadfast cow herders, with whom I had worked since 1992, were also *freeing themselves from the khoton*, I decided to investigate what was going on. I added several questions about cow-keeping to the climate change interview questions that summer. What I found was that yes, climate change was a factor, but there were two other drivers: youth out-migration, which I discussed earlier, and fully stocked stores. The latter decreased the demand for inhabitants to engage in home food production, which was the only way they could feed their household in the early 1990s' period of food scarcity. By 2012 that scarcity had flipped,

We used to get most of our household food from our animals, garden and nature. Now we get most of it from the store. Back then everything was deficit in the store—I remember getting in line the night before for some deficit item—a women's dress or other—now the stores are full and we are having a deficit of cow products! That's a big change, if you ask me.

Elgeei inhabitant, 2012

In short, climate change, youth out-migration and economic globalization that resulted in fully stocked stores, interacted with each other to precipitate the decrease in cow numbers. I termed this phenomenon the *complexity of change* (Crate, 2014).

There were several households in each village who maintained their herds, who kept them for household food production. When asked why, one householder explained, "It's simple ... when you have your own herd, you have food and you do not need the store. And who knows when the store may not get supplies? It happened before!" The half-dozen households in Kutana and in Elgeei who are continuing to keep their cows also want to make the most of a nascent local market. These entrepreneurial households mostly sell meat. They know that local inhabitants prefer the taste and quality of local meat over the meat available in the village stores, imported from Central Asia and Australia. Several also sell *ürüng as*, literally, "white food" referring to the array of Sakha dairy products, to their neighbors. This satisfies the many elders who long for *ürüng as* now that their households have stopped holding cows. This recent entrepreneurial cow-keeping trend suggests how communities are moving towards specialization in cow-keeping and that the cows and kin adaptation served as a bridging survival mode from a time when stores were empty to a time when they were full. The move to specialization is also intimately associated with the loss of elders and youth, both critical player in the household-level cows and kin system.

In adjacent settlements, smaller than Elgeei (p. 2400) and Kutana (p. 1100) inhabitants are keeping cows differently. Inhabitants of *Kundeii* (p. 750) and *K kei*

(p. 325) are holding their cows cooperatively, in one common khoton. In these arrangements, household-level cow owners pay workers a nominal fee to tend their cows in the non-pasture months (approximately September through late May). Then, from June to early September, these cow owners manage their own herd, milking in the morning before the cows head to pasture, and again at night when they return home. In Kundeii the present-day cooperative is a continuation of the group that worked together during the Soviet-period *soukhoz* (state farm) and who continued their work after the 1991 break-up. It is made up of several tightly-knit extended kin groups, no different from the small settlement itself. The keys to this and other cooperatives in smaller settlements are these long-term kin-based relationships and how they work to nurture their youth, the next generation of cow-keepers, to stay involved,

They [Kundeii] are a great community ... they understand each other and trust each other ... they help each other ... from long ago the elders have gotten the youth to work with them. They say because of some very wise person who planned the school work ... the kids are very smart and are very active in the community!

(Elgeeii inhabitant, 2019)

Engaging youth early, as in the Kundeii case, helps to perpetuate these cooperative cow-keeping efforts on a village level. Inhabitants of both Elgeeii and Kutana would like to hold their cows cooperatively. Size is a factor but there are also issues specific to each village that impede such efforts. The main complaint of Elgeeii inhabitants was that their villages are too big to maintain the trust needed to do so,

I do not want a stranger watching my cows because they do not care about me and therefore won't take good care of my cows; concerns of *freeloading*, when some work very hard and others do not; and differences in resource inputs, "my haystack is bigger than yours, so I am contributing more hay."

Elgeeii inhabitant, 2018

Interviewees in Kutana said that the main reason a cooperative would not work there was simple: with a high percentage of village households employed by *Aian Suol* (name of road building company centered in Kutana, literally means "traveling road"), people no longer had the incentive to keep cows. They could make a good salary and purchase all that they need.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

The demographic changes in the elder, youth and cow populations in these rural areas are, in part, driven by changes in communication and transportation. When working in Siberia 30 years ago, I felt like I was going to a different planet. My invitation to the 1991 yhyakh came by telegram. I remember needing to make a phone call during my summer research in 1992. Elana took me to one of the two houses in Elgeeii with a phone. In the winter of 1993 for my first nine-month research trip, I brought a satellite phone with me in case of emergency. If needed, I was instructed to go out

into an open field, turn it on, point it upwards and hope to connect with a passing satellite. In the late 1990s, dial-up email arrived. However, it took several minutes for one page to load. I therefore checked email once a week and allotted a four-hour window to do so. In 2006 cell service came to the capital city and in 2010 to the regional center, Suntaar. I was in Elgeeei when cell service arrived in 2013. I wondered if the date would be added to the historical timeline in the village museum, after *first tractor* and *first telephone*. One big surprise when I got to the village in 2018 was that we could get high-speed internet and Wi-Fi in our house. But perhaps the biggest surprise that year was the ubiquity of WhatsApp. This first came to my attention during a focus group, when a 30-year old participant talked about how much she had learned about medicinal plants. Assuming she had been working with a village elder, I asked who she had consulted. She responded, “I learned about them from multiple posts on WhatsApp!” Shortly thereafter I noticed that most everyone was using it. I asked to join the neighborhood WhatsApp group but removed myself after a few hours. My phone buzzed several times a minute with messages.

This change in communication modes has had its effects on social networks and the overall social fabric in rural areas. Local inhabitants commented on it regularly,

I want to talk about the change in people, in people’s characters ... now it is very rare to find receptive and interactive people here, for example, on the village streets—they are hard to find. Before, when you saw each other, people used to take the time to converse with each other. You would meet someone on the street and stop and talk and know the news from each other ... now everyone walks along staring at their phone—no one needs anyone anymore ... there is no interaction now ... today people only interact over WhatsApp!

(Toloon inhabitant, 2018)

This contrasts sharply with how people learned the news a generation ago,

Before, people would visit each other a lot and have tea. This is where people learned the latest news and connected with each other. It was how we lived. Now it is already not accepted. When someone enters a house, the inhabitants ask ... “what did that person come in for?” and “what do they want?” Also, most households today do not even give tea ... they just ask— “what did you come here for?” and then, when that is decided, they shoo the person away ... it is a huge change in our culture. Before when a person came in, they used to right away pour tea ... I did this and saw my mother practice it also ... she would go to see neighbors a lot. If she did not go for a few days, she would get in a bad mood ... she had to go and listen and chat. She always came back in a very good mood with all the news of the village!

(Kutana inhabitant, 2018)

Even in villages of 1,000–2,500 inhabitants, most people in the streets are looking at their phones. This is no different from what people do in many parts of the world today. However, the pace of change, from satellite phone to the universal use of WhatsApp in a short 30-year time span, verifies the transformation of the villages’ communication lifeways.

The changes in transportation since 1991 are similarly quantum. To this day you can hear stories about the condition of the roads *back then*. Consider this testimony of a retired nurse in Kutana.

There were no roads, no good communication and no medicine back then. It took 6 hours to drive to Elgeei and 6 hours back. Today it takes 20 minutes each way! Back then we only had 2 or 3 cars in all of Kutana and they were always being used for state farm business.

Clearly cars, like telephones, were also a deficit in those times.

I remember my own experience, traveling with Elana to Kutana in the summer of 1992 to conduct interviews about *hyakh*. Halfway to Kutana, we came to an impassable puddle in the road. We tried to go around it with no luck. An hour later we heard a distant rumbling sound growing louder and louder. It was our Kutana host driving a soviet-period tractor, the kind with tank treads, moving ever so slowly towards us. It continued through the puddle, with water almost reaching the driver's cabin in the deepest part. Without hesitation, Elana climbed on the back, pulled me up and off we went. It took us a total of 5 hours to get from Elgeei to Kutana, a distance of 20 kilometers.

That experience contrasts sharply with my travel experience 25 years later in 2016. We traveled 956 km in a short 12 hours. We had flown from Yakutsk to Suntaar to visit relatives over the New Year break. Upon arriving in Suntaar in late December, we learned that the next plane returning to the city was not until January 12, five days after our return flight to the States. We had no choice but to take a taxi. Taxis to Yakutsk are minivans, usually that seat 12+ passengers and have a reinforced roof rack which, as the drivers circulate through the villages to take on their passengers, is stacked higher and higher with luggage. If you pass one on their route to the city, they fly by at breakneck speed and you may wonder how they stay upright, with so much weight on top. The taxis begin their passenger roundup in the late afternoon then drive all night to arrive in the city early the next morning. We were the third group to be picked up, and I felt more anxious as we took on another and another set of passengers. There are usually two drivers who trade off. At around 2 am our drivers traded off. The driver who had just quit his shift immediately curled up in the shotgun seat and went to sleep. A few minutes later, I noticed the one driving was nodding off. I was the only one awake among the 15 passengers. I asked him if he would turn on the radio—which he did—but his sleeping partner moaned, reached over and promptly turned it off. It baffled me how everyone else could sleep through this. Then, I nodded off myself. We made it, arriving early morning to Yakutsk. Our driver got a ticket just inside the city limits for carrying too many passengers. These taxi drivers are some of the young people who have relocated to the city from the regions they serve. This work is one way that young people can afford to stay in the city.

The taxis to and from the city and all the travel and car traffic on the roads would not be possible today without improved roads. Aian Suol does some of this work. It is the Russian Federation that funds the road improvement. It benefits local inhabitants. However, the government's main aim is to make high-speed roads between Yakutsk and Mirnyi and the other diamond cities to access diamonds and other

resources expediently. Today, travel to Kutana from Elgeei takes 20 minutes maximum, and you can travel overland to Yakutsk year-round.

CONCLUSION

Some predict that the changes, some of which I have detailed here, in rural demographic, transportation, and communication systems foretell the end of life in rural Viliui Sakha settlements. In 2012, I consulted with the Suntaar regional statistician shortly after I noticed the change in cow numbers and the interacting drivers of youth-outmigration and economic globalization (Crate, 2014). He explained to me in grave terms that, given the demographic trends of the last decade, in 20 years the villages would cease to exist (*ibid.*, p. 57). I followed up with him in 2018 to learn that he maintained his stance. He used visual graphs to show the continued decline of youth populations in the villages. This disgruntled me for a time. And then it did not. I realized that there was more going on here. I remembered how the cows and kin adaptation and its demise did not mean the end of cows in the villages but rather a reallocation to more efficient cow-keeping systems. I came to this realization via qualitative inquiry based on longitudinal research. Qualitative insight informs what is going on by moving the answer beyond the act of crunching numbers. It is about understanding, based on a background in longitudinal study, a culture's inherent capacity to evolve and change with changing conditions. I share a few examples to illustrate.

First, my own lived experience and research in Elgeei, with similar forays in Kutana in the last few years, helps me see things differently. For one, Elgeei has a relatively new village head who, among other things, aspires to bring more opportunity to the village for young people. In 2019, he acknowledged the fact that their youth go to get an education and most do not return. Developing opportunities for them in their specialties is a more long-term process. For now, he explained their work hiring 20 young specialists, many from other villages and regions, but nonetheless, bringing in younger people. One of the issues is that of providing *conditions*, specifically indoor amenities (toilet, shower). There is a lot of work to do, but there is also a clear sign that this is fully attainable for Elgeei. One of the big surprises for me when I initially arrived at my host's home in 2018 was that they had these amenities. They had installed a several hundred-gallon tank in their bathroom which they filled with water by pumping it from local sources that then was pumped for use in their shower, sink, and toilet.

Second, although I bemoaned the ubiquity of WhatsApp earlier and the other forms of social media that have infiltrated the rural areas, the COVID-19 pandemic shows how these communication ways are immensely critical. They allow for the perpetuation of vital social networks, especially in less advantaged rural areas. They are also serving an important place in the perpetuation of cultural practices. Among all the various events and posts, perhaps the most poignant for me is the YouTube series "*Arai Biiirde*" (At One Time), hosted by some of my Kutana collaborators.³ The hosts present 5–20-minute snippets of their hunting adventures and, in several, share Sakha hunting knowledge.

And the world keeps getting smaller. That is to say that now, as I write this, in the time of a global pandemic which has temporarily stopped my and many others' travel and research, there is a continued connection with my collaborators on the other side

of the planet. Yes, social networks have and are changing. But based on my 30-year experience conducting research and living with Viliui Sakha, they appear resilient in the face of substantial changes in demographics, transportation, and communication.

NOTES

- 1 *Alaas* are the areas where Sakha's Turkic ancestors settled and bred horses and cows upon arriving from the south and continuing up until the Soviet period. An *alaas* is an ecosystem consisting of a cryogenic lake, surrounded by hayfields that transition to taiga (boreal) forest.
- 2 There are different ways to define who an elder is. In my 1990s' research, women went on their pensions at age 50 and men at 55. But I did not go by age. I first and foremost followed the advice of local inhabitants to decide who to talk to about knowledge of the past.
- 3 www.youtube.com/results?search_query=%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B9+%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B4%D1%8D

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PART IV

FORMAL AND GRASSROOTS
INFRASTRUCTURE AND
SIBERIAN MOBILITY





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CHAPTER 22

EVENKI HUNTERS' AND REINDEER HERDERS' MOBILITY

Transformation of autonomy regimes



Vladimir Davydov

INTRODUCTION

Siberia is a unique region for its complex cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic composition of the population. It has always been a territory of active intercultural interaction and exchange of experience, knowledge, and skills between local Indigenous people and newcomers. Its resources constantly attracted new people, who had to learn the skills of survival in the new environment. The lack of transport infrastructure and the remoteness of some areas from regional centers have formed specific models of relations between the state and local people. In many locations, Evenkis served as a bridge connecting state representatives with specific localities important for creation of new arterial roads and development of the mining industry. Evenkis played a significant role in communication with newcomers, and many of them worked as guides (*kaiury*) providing members of numerous geological expeditions with reindeer transport (Davydov 2013).

This chapter analyzes field materials the author gathered while working among Evenkis in the Republic of Buryatia, Zabaikal'skii krai, and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) from 2007 to 2018. It focuses on the two notions applied to categorize Siberian Indigenous groups—statics and dynamics. Russian scientific and administrative discourse reproduced the stereotype of regarding Siberian nomadic population as tied to particular places. This chapter shows how the forms of representation, such as documents, ethnographic texts, and maps, created static images of Evenkis by taking the temporal aspects out of the ethnographic description of live processes. This view correlates with the idea of *frozen knowledge*, which both scientists and administrators perceived as a result of long stay in one particular place and as existing prior to people's movements. According to it, the knowledge is treated as a simple accumulation of facts connected to certain places. Therefore, the temporal dimension often functioned in Russian scientific texts only as a consequence of events, represented as an evolution of people's practices in certain places, and did not pay attention to continuous movements between a number of places. In other words, Russian researchers often interpreted innovations such as construction of houses to “sedentarize nomads,” creation of kolkhozes, and introduction of certain facilities and infrastructure as key historical facts that changed local people's lives (see Tivanenko & Mitypov, 1974; Boiko, 1979). In many respects, scientific accounts

often represented a history of places, with the researchers describing settlements and permanent structures rather than people as the main actors (*Ibid.*).

Evenkis have always lived in places of cultural interactions and contacts. It would not be possible to find locations where they would stay in isolation without relations with their neighbors and administrative bodies created by the state. Migration, infrastructure development, and maintenance, as well as changes in the state apparatus and administrative system, had strong impacts on the life of Evenkis. Emergence of new centers for resource redistribution inevitably changed their mobility patterns. This chapter describes these changes as a result of complex interactions occurring in the context of a combination of different temporalities (i.e., specific ways of organizing movements and practices over time), the first one being related to the mobility of hunters and herders and the second manifested due to the presence of the state. These interactions led to the transformation of autonomy regimes and the lives of taiga groups.

RELATIVE AUTONOMY

Taiga nomadic communities are characterized by a high degree of autonomy, made possible by local people's skills and knowledge. In case of fluctuations in the annual amount of resources, community members were able to switch to new activities. It made them less dependent on one particular resource or external supply. However, the creation of centralized supply channels bound Evenkis to certain places and made them more dependent on communication with representatives of the state authorities. The emergence of infrastructure as a part of the state paternalistic policy had significant impact on Evenkis' mobility patterns. Evenkis developed particular models of land use, which enabled them to stay autonomous for long periods without the need to return to resource redistribution centers.

The ability to live autonomously was a prerequisite of Evenki reindeer herders' and hunters' mobility. They were able to supply themselves with food, to produce clothing and find construction materials in places of their temporary stay in the taiga. Many authors mentioned the important role of reindeer in providing Evenkis with food and materials for clothes and dwelling coverings, as well as in helping them to travel over long distances and transport goods (Vasilevich, 1969; Tugolukov, 1969). According to Tugolukov (1969, p. 81), the use of reindeer products among Evenkis is an example of a unique "intensity." It meant they avoided any kind of waste with their engagement with environment. They were very pragmatic in their use of skills and technologies. Thus, in case of reindeer, these animals served as a kind of universal source to produce food and things as well as conduct movements.

Vasilevich (1957, pp. 170–185) stressed the symbolic meaning of this animal, emphasizing its role in the perception of the world as well as in relations with master spirits. Joint movements with reindeer made Evenkis able to maintain a relative autonomy. These animals not only provided humans with a means of transport but also required to be mobile in search of suitable pastures. Joint movements enabled people and animals to obtain necessary resources. At the same time, constant motion helped saving pastures and protecting local resources from depletion. Periodic movements helped to preserve them for future use.

Evenki tools, vehicles, dwellings, and clothes were well adapted for constant movement (Vasilevich, 1969; Tugolukov, 1969). Evenkis used to repair and produce

things in the conditions of mobility and lack of additional supplies. Malykh (1925, p. 8) emphasized that their “clothes, utensils, all their not so numerous tools are adapted for comfortable motion in the taiga; everything, including portable dwelling-yurt and a cradle, is portable, sturdy and can be easily loaded on a reindeer back.” The degree of Evenki reindeer herders’ autonomy increased due to the use of food preservation technologies such as meat and fish drying.

A significant change in the strategies of using space by Evenkis took place in the 20th century. The distinctive features of this transformation included more active use of campsites and general decrease of the number of actual moves. In post-Soviet period in some regions reindeer herders began to use the same campsites from year to year and did it more intensively. In order to maintain them the herders needed building materials and fuel. Therefore, in many places the intensive use of local resources was accompanied by deforestation and degradation of pastures. The need to constantly return to certain points restructured the movements of Evenkis, making them more and more dependent on external supplies, thus anchoring people to certain territories and framing the main trajectories of their movements.

DIVERSE TEMPORALITIES

The life of Evenki hunters and reindeer herders includes a combination of dynamic and static ways of interaction with the environment (Sirina, 2002, pp. 93–217). Mobility of Evenkis can be seen as a dynamic process, which takes place in the context of movements of numerous actors as well as constant changes of the environment, weather conditions, and landscapes, which should not be considered as something static or frozen (Ingold, 1993). Everyday movements of hunters and reindeer herders occur in the context of multiple temporalities (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2017). Each state institution has its own temporal dimension, which implies certain ways of accommodating things and organizing actions in space and requires Evenkis to be present or absent in specific places during certain periods. The need to visit the intensively used places such as settlements, bases, resource distribution hubs, trade centers, and other points at a certain time is a strong motive for the mobility of Evenkis.

The Soviet temporality meant a dynamic document flow in state organizations in accordance with a certain rhythm. The flow included the procedures for planning and preparation of reports, which were supposed to indicate quantitative achievements of collectives. In many respects the mobility of Evenki hunters and reindeer breeders depended on seasonality, including movements organized with reference to the migration patterns of wild and domesticated animals. Evenkis had to combine several types of temporality, but such a combination urged them to travel in constant pendulum movements between settlements and locations in the taiga. The maintenance of this mobility has become much effective with the creation of infrastructure due to various development projects.

Reindeer herders and hunters actively employed roads built as part of industrial development projects. Roads helped to more rationally arrange the delivery of food and equipment to hunters’ and reindeer herders’ bases and changed the spatial structure of their localizations. The construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline had the strongest impact on the Evenki lifestyle (Povoroznyuk, 2020).

The temporality of the Evenki hunters' and reindeer herders' movements depended on seasonal practices and required people to stay in the forest for long periods. Evenkis constantly monitored the needs of reindeer in new pastures and took into account changes in the environment. Temporality was a part of the "sentient ecology" (Anderson, 2000), associated with the observation of processes in the environment and constant reflection, which allowed local people to adjust to these changes.

Mobility of Evenki hunters and reindeer herders is a result of a reflexive process, which implies continuous update of information. By constantly assessing the current state of affairs they form a chain of actions and movements, arranged in a certain sequence. Their decision-making is based on observation of current conditions (Mertens, 2016). Evenkis constantly monitor the movements of multiple social agents. Therefore, the taiga temporality implies continuous reflection of present-day changes (Davydov, 2017b). The timeline of a sequence of practices depends on a number of previous events and movements. Each movement of Evenki hunters and reindeer herders, even though it may at first glance seem unplanned, is a result of a current situation analysis. Moreover, they take into account their own previous movements as well as movements of other social agents. Overall, the mobility of Evenkis has many similarities with a chess game, where the movement of each piece is a result of thorough calculation and understanding of a specific situation (Ibid.).

Thus, Evenki movements are a kind of strategic play with multiple agents—people, domestic animals, and predators as well as master spirits inhabiting the area. Evenkis made decisions about movements upon observation of a number of factors that may lead to various actions in the current situation. In case of different possible scenarios, people evaluate potential actions and movements of other actors. Sometimes the logic of such movements may not correspond to the common perception of rationality. Staying with Evenki reindeer herders, one can get the impression that they do not like to agree on specific things or to explicate them verbally, since previously devised plans can easily be upset in the taiga and people often have to make adjustments. It seems that Evenki reindeer herders and hunters do their best to avoid any permanent attachment to a specific place and obligations that will force them to stay there for long periods. Therefore, they do not like to plan, think ahead, and discuss future actions in detail. They also try not to guess how long the road will take, especially if one has to move through the taiga, they can simply answer: "The road will show."

In everyday life Evenki reindeer herders and hunters try to overcome everything that could bind them to a specific place. While on the move, Evenkis try to spend their resources sparingly and avoid unnecessary actions. Staying in the taiga, they never store too much, since unused material objects can potentially impede their movement. For instance, Evenkis usually do not store large amounts of firewood for future use; they usually harvest it only for one to two days. Such lack of reserves is mostly due to a relative availability of this resource—firewood can be obtained when people need it. The author of this chapter, while working with the reindeer herders near the Olonnokon River in the Olekminskii District, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), prepared a supply of firewood, but it was unnecessary, since we had to leave it and follow the herd in order to set up a camp in a new place. Yet before that, none of the reindeer herders could say with certainty when exactly we would start our journey. They monitored the weather and animal behavior. At that place people kept reindeer within a long fence (Rus. *gorod'ba*), stretching for several kilometers.

It had been built as a part of the Soviet innovations to increase efficiency of reindeer herding. Saami reindeer herders used such fences at the Kola Peninsula and the idea was adopted to provide more control over the herds. Local people built the fence from tree logs without wires or nails, making it easy for animals to cross it if they no longer wanted to remain inside (such behavior could serve as an important signal to move to a new place).

Such non-rigid structures give animals an opportunity to express their foraging intentions, extending the ability of reindeer herders to “feel the land” (Sirina, 2008). When reindeer herders see that animals jump over the fence, they understand the need to move. Thus, the results of reindeer behavior observation motivate people to move. In many places people used fences in combination with natural objects that could serve as barriers, including mountain slopes, rocks, and banks of rivers and lakes. In the northern Baikal region reindeer herders employ mountain river valleys protected from both sides by mountain ranges which form a natural enclosure. They call these valleys “narrow places.” In addition, reindeer herders always chose places which allow good observation of surrounding territories. In that way they can track animal movements and make timely decisions to move to a new camp. In the northern Baikal region people call one of such places, located in the valley of the Niurundukan River, Lokot’. The name can be translated from the Russian as “Elbow.” Reindeer herders used it as a campsite. It received its name because of a specific bend of a mountain spur—a kind of a natural amphitheater, which allowed people to observe a large territory and track directions of animals’ movements.

Evenkis rarely take unnecessary things with them. If possible, they leave some personal items, equipment, and supplies that they do not plan to use in the nearest future in the places to which they can return. According to Vasilevich (1969, p. 108), in order to reduce the weight of things they had to carry, they left everything heavy and unnecessary for summer movements in storage sheds built in narrow forest valleys on their winter hunting grounds. Moving in the taiga, they left frames of their dwellings behind, transporting only the coverings (Shimkevich, 1894, p. 5; Doppel’mair, 1926, p. 232; Vasilevich, 1969, p. 108). The constant redistribution of things allowed Evenkis to facilitate their mobility. At the same time, leaving part of their property in certain places, they reduced the degree of their autonomy. In this case, they had to return to certain points in order to pick up and change things. Settlements, reindeer herding, and hunting bases as well as storage platforms (Ev. *delken*) in the taiga served as locations where supplies, services, and materials were located and issued.

State organizations embody a quite dissimilar temporality. In addition to a different perception of activities as arranged along the timeline, the logic of administrative discourse introduces a particular regime for organizing people’s practices as well as regulates their implementation in time. One of the key factors is the creation of administrative boundaries.

The administrative discourse represents space cartographically, on a flat surface like on a map. In the case of the Baikal region and Zabaikal’e such a vision seems to “condense” the mountainous landscape, reducing the surface area, which consists of a large number of river valleys and folds of mountain ranges. A two-dimensional map with demarcated areas can serve as a scaled-down model of this vision of the landscape. It is not surprising that in many cases Evenki nomadic routes did not fit into

the newly created boundaries of districts and regions. For reindeer herders the most important factor was the availability of suitable pastures, rather than the administrative division of the territory. In Soviet times northern Baikal Evenki hunters often went to hunt sable in the neighboring region—the territory of the Irkutskaiia oblast'. Thus, representation of various types of territories on a cadastral map strongly differs from the actual practices of land use by Evenkis. Nowadays, the amplitude of movements of hunters and reindeer herders can change due to the practices of territory distribution to meet the needs of a particular community or an enterprise. The practice of leasing state lands to Evenki Indigenous communal organizations (Rus., *obshchina*) creates the reasons for intensifying mobility within a certain area. Evenki hunters and reindeer herders do not always follow official rules. They often maintain economic activities in certain territories without acquiring any official registration or the right to use them.

THE HETEROGENEITY OF STATE CONTROL

Sovietization was not a uniform process and could not achieve equal results in all remote places in Siberia. Depending on the distance of a particular region from the center, the degree of state control over different areas could vary considerably. In many places Evenkis became a part of the Soviet project implementation. They had detailed knowledge of the surrounding land, in particular they were familiar with trails and paths, that was part of their nomadic experience. The state needed this knowledge to get furs and find mineral-rich places. Many Evenki hunters and reindeer herders worked as guides in topographic and geological expeditions, helped to explore territories, find minerals, and search for suitable routes to remote places in the mountain taiga (Davydov, 2013). Some members of Indigenous communities worked in local administration. Generally, Evenkis who were literate and fluent in the Russian language moved up the career ladder. According to an Evenki informant from the northern Baikal, who worked as a head of a reindeer farm in the 1960s, they “became closer to authorities” and served as mediators between local residents and members of the Soviet administrative apparatus (Ibid.).

In each region of Siberia, governance models have been adapted to local context. Evenkis were not against such innovations, but at the same time, they never accepted them in the form the administrators had planned (de Certeau, 2013, pp. 41–42). Authorities used a similar strategy of governance system adaptation in many nomadic communities of the North (Davydova, 2015). The Soviet policy of sedentarization employed the idea of modernization as a leitmotif (Dumont, 2015). In the case of different Evenki groups, this strategy was not fully implemented mainly due to the conflicting trends in state policy. On the one hand, the state created settlements and infrastructure in order to enable settled life. On the other hand, it needed furs and required Evenkis to travel long distances and hunt for long periods outside villages (Zabelin, 1930).

Evenkis adapted settlement infrastructure in order to fulfill their daily tasks. They were interested in exploring new resources and opportunities but at the same time tried to use them in their own way, adjusting to their needs. Moreover, the state could never fully control and regulate all spheres of local people's activities. There have always been “free spaces” (Martis, 2001, pp. 160–162; Morris, 1993, pp. 27),

where people implemented their own strategies. The existence of such free spaces, which were not completely controlled by the state, allowed Evenkis to actively use local resources, relying on local “informal” models. After the collapse of the Soviet system, when the strength of the state control decreased, the free spaces helped people to adapt to the new economic situation.

The existence of territories where the control of state structures over the actions of local people was weak created the possibility of informal use of natural resources. After the collapse of the Soviet system, many places were insufficiently supplied; people lost their stable income and had to turn to local resources. Rather often, they did it without formalizing or registering their rights to use territories and resources according to legal requirements.

Free spaces are not bound to specific places. In many respects, their temporality depends on the strength of the state control. Particular localization of free spaces may change as circumstances require. The skills of autonomous living in the taiga and constant mobility allowed Evenkis to find spaces with little or no government control, where they could follow their own patterns of land use. This practice enabled them to utilize local resources despite the change of the economic system, lack of supply and closure of state-owned enterprises. The exploitation of resources largely depended on reindeer herders' and hunters' skills where the art of movement and orientation were especially important.

LIFE ON THE MOVE AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN SETTLEMENTS: NEW FORMS OF MOBILITY

The life of Evenkis imply constant movement. My informants often expressed the idea of freedom of movement and compared the life in a settlement to the life in the taiga. Life on the move requires observation from an individual point of view and implies recognition of changes in the environment. In many respects, movements of hunters and reindeer herders are the result of rational choice. When Evenki hunters and reindeer herders migrated with their families, there was no need for frequent pendulum travels and returns to the settlement. They perceived a mobile dwelling in the taiga as their home. However, during the Soviet period the very notion of “nomadism” changed (Tugolukov, 1969, p. 90). The strategies for the use of space by reindeer herders and hunters transformed under the influence of Soviet policy. Brigades and their units (rather than families) became main agents of movements. Thus reindeer herding and hunting gradually moved to the shift work model (Golovnev et al., 2015, p. 57), when families stayed in a village while hunters and herders spent most of their time in the taiga, returning to the village from time to time.

This new model meant that a person was alienated from his home and the places in the taiga. In addition, he was supposed to make pendulum trips to the settlement and bases. And while he stayed there, his neighbors, relatives, or friends usually replaced him at work. This practice gradually made a worker easily changeable. Someone else could take the place of a hunter or a reindeer herder who returned to the village. Within the framework of this model, a person's attachment to a certain small group, labor collective, or territory gradually weakened. As a result, contemporary obshchinas constantly change their “employees.” In many cases people do not receive any official

salary and earn money by selling hunting products. For instance, northern Baikal and Zabaikal Evenkis often move to work from one obshchina to another. However, official documents do not register their movements. These people can often be members of one obshchina and work for another. Quite often temporary “workers” do not belong to any communal organization at all. Some Evenki obshchinas use territories without officially leasing pastures and hunting grounds.

When the nomadic lifestyle changes, new forms of movement may emerge (Golovnev et al., 2015, p. 41). For example, one can observe small-scale migrations (Rus. *perekochevki*) within settlements. This type of movement is typical for places where permanent infrastructure objects are concentrated. Meanwhile in the village, some hunters and reindeer breeders migrate between flats, staying overnight in the dwellings of their friends and relatives. Moreover, families that permanently live in the settlement often change their place of residence and move from one flat or house to another. Some families change the place of their residence several times a year.

Frequent movements of residents from one house or flat to other dwellings exist in many Evenki villages. The author often had to deal with a situation when, returning to a village after some time, he found out that the people he knew had moved to a different place—another house or even another settlement. At the same time, local people tracked these movements and knew exactly who had migrated, when, and where to. Such mobility often implied that hunters and reindeer herders stayed part of their time in the taiga and their relatives or friends who remained in the settlements could use their living spaces.

Thus, *perekochevki* within a settlement is a way of infrastructure appropriation by people who are not used to live in one place for a long time. We can approach such movements as a form of exchange as well as a strategy of development and maintenance of settlement infrastructure in the situation of temporary absence of some local inhabitants—hunters and reindeer herders.

Northern Baikal Evenkis rather often move from one dwelling to another and take their belongings with them. Some people (mainly unemployed and single men) in winter may form small groups, move into one house and run it together to save resources, thus changing the internal density of population in a dwelling (see Mauss, 2013). It allows them to save firewood as well as go fishing and work together. Such temporary small groups constantly change their composition, as some of their members may move to another house or to the taiga.

PRAGMATIC USE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

The studying of Evenkis’ daily movements in dynamics allows the static approach of representing settlements and infrastructure as existing separately from the surrounding landscape to be abandoned. The movements of Evenkis have never been chaotic but have always represented a well-coordinated system based on reflexive process.

This system gradually changed under the influence of industrial development projects that implied construction of new transport infrastructure. Evenkis incorporated it into their everyday practices and employed it to facilitate mobility. Their movements imply the use of a large number of bases, which serve as places for overnight stay and storage. Settlements perform a similar function. Some of them were built before the Revolution of 1917, and Evenkis actively use them as places

of constant return (Davydov 2017b). With the creation of new infrastructure, which was a part of government projects, Evenkis began to use the new facilities (houses, hunting log cabins, garages, and sheds) for temporary stay and for storage purposes.

In many settlements, researchers observed simultaneous use of mobile and permanent structures by Evenkis (Neupokoev, 1926). Despite the construction of houses, some Evenkis continued to use conical lodges along with the houses, employing them to prepare food and store things (Shubin, 1963, p. 182). We can explain this not only by traditions but also by the fact that some infrastructure development projects were unfinished (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2016). Evenkis needed extra spaces, since their economic activity was not limited to the use of houses. Conical dwellings and buildings, for example, were more practical and convenient for storing clothes and tools than houses. Such dwellings enabled people to make fire in any weather and cook food traditional way. With the widespread of new materials Evenkis started to replace conical buildings by rectangular sheds. They used conical buildings as additional spaces, expanding the possibilities for everyday activities and storage. If some elements of infrastructure were abandoned, local people gradually dismantled them and employed their parts as building materials and fuel. For example, Evenkis recycled wooden parts of abandoned geologists' houses in many places in the northern Baikal, Zabaikal'e, and Olekma River basin (e.g., Pereval, Torgo, and Olonnokon). They dismantled planks from abandoned buildings in order to construct barns, houses, bathhouses, and sheds for reindeer. Evenkis also used wooden parts as fuel for heating and cooking, as well as for making smoke to save reindeer from insect bites in the summer.

In scientific texts, nomadic Evenkis living in the taiga are often opposed to settlers who have switched to a settled lifestyle in villages (Lavrillier, 2013). However, their life did not remain intact neither in settlements nor in the forest. In the 20th century, Evenki mobility patterns dramatically changed under the influence of government projects and administrative practices that gradually transformed the autonomy regime of many nomadic communities. In this sense, the use of space by Evenkis in the taiga correlates with the use of infrastructure in settlements that enabled Evenkis to increase the degree of their autonomy in the places where the state invested into the development of non-autonomous economy.

The new infrastructure transformed the routes of hunters and reindeer herders and created new mobility patterns based on the intensive use of permanent structures in their everyday movements. Thus the state and its policies have always changed the autonomy regime of local people. The creation of the state supply system made Evenkis dependent on external resources and had a strong impact on their mobility strategies, reorienting them to make periodic visits to distribution centers.

THE CHANGE OF AUTONOMY REGIMES

Evenki reindeer herders and hunters used to live in relative isolation for certain periods. To stay in reindeer herders' camps and hunting bases people require relative autonomy, which means a certain attitude towards resources. The mobility of Evenkis is a part of a particular landscape appropriation strategy, which helps people avoid resource depletion. While on the move in sparsely populated areas, they actually minimized the intensity of the use of certain places and building permanent infrastructures that would imply their long stay in certain localities.

When a tool or a vehicle breaks down, Evenkis usually repair it right away. They used to do the same with their clothing. Even in the taiga one can always find some resources to fix things. For example, in the northern Baikal region people use winter log cabins (Rus., *zimov'ia*) for this purpose. In such cabins one can always find a minimum set of items necessary for survival: matches, tools, a needle and thread, dishes, and a supply of food that can be used in case of emergency. So, moving around the taiga, people can always fix their clothes if they know the locations of winter log cabins. Evenki hunters usually keep in winter cabins a small supply of food, firewood, a needle and thread, and other tools. This pre-made storage allows people to make routine repair of their clothing while on the move. If a person has used the available resources, he or she is supposed to replenish them, for example, gather dry firewood that someone else may need in the future. This ethic of using hunting infrastructure continues to exist in relatively isolated systems. When the number of outsiders who do not follow this rule grows, the system stops working. Its functioning, therefore, can be maintained in case of relatively isolated places involved in the movements.

Expanding the Evenki practice of utilizing permanent structures by involving houses in settlements, hunters and reindeer herders were able to optimize their mobility, constantly redistributing resources between particular places of intensive use. In this context, settlements with houses were turned into places of storage, as well as dwellings for temporary stay.

In the case of Evenki reindeer herders, the development of vast territories became possible only with the help of animals. These collaborative movements provided a certain synergistic effect (Davydov & Klovov, 2018). In this sense, the loss of reindeer could signify the loss of relative autonomy for Evenkis. Reindeer could be kept without any additional external resources since the vast taiga territories could provide pastures for grazing animals.

Mobility of Evenkis can be analyzed employing different scales (Davydov, 2012). Reindeer herders and hunters cover long distances, when on the move, often returning to places of intensive use, which serve as centers for redistribution of things and resources. This return to the same points is the most important characteristic of their movements' temporality (the practice of organizing mobility within certain periods). In a similar manner people maintain micro-mobility (Istomin, Popov & Kim, 2017), which implies constant relocation of material objects.

The interaction of Evenkis with the state always led to changes in their autonomy regimes. With the formation of public administration institutions, construction of infrastructure, and implementation of new development projects, the structure of mobility of local people changed as soon as certain centers for resource distribution were created. They required constant pendulum movements between the places on nomadic routes and the resource distribution centers.

The need of periodic returns to the same points gradually bound Evenkis to certain territories. Introduction of administration models that required people's presence in certain places changed their mobility patterns. Emergence of new bases and places, where Evenkis could redistribute and store food supplies and things, led to a change in the autonomy regime, gradually eliminating the "principle of autonomous mobility" (Golovnev, 2017, p. 11), which characterized nomadic communities and meant the ability to modify and change the intensity and direction of movement depending on the situation.

The mobility of Evenkis gradually acquired features of a “complex combination of presence and absence” (Urri, 2012, p. 147) of people, animals, and things in certain intensively used places—villages and bases. Moreover, all their movements became limited within a certain territory. S. M. Shirokogoroff (1929) introduced the idea of the Tungus “cultural complex” and its transformation under the influence of neighboring groups. He described the migration of Tungus groups as a part of the unified process of cultural transformation and analyzed four migration waves. They all had occurred before the creation of boundaries for administrative units. After the formation of Indigenous administrations and the strengthening of state control over migrations such movements of Evenki groups became unlikely and their nomadic movements were limited by the need for constant visits to administrative centers.

Evenkis developed adaptive mechanisms that made it easy to settle in a new place and join the system of exchange with neighboring groups. They built social relations not only with people, but also with animals, landscapes, and master spirits in various places (Shirokogoroff, 1929; Brandišauskas, 2016).

In the past Evenkis were able not only to maintain nomadic lifestyle within a certain territory, but also to choose and vary areas for nomadic movement. In other words, the set of annual movements was not tied to a certain territory; it could change in case of resource depletion. Many Evenki groups had earlier traveled in the areas different from their current location. For instance, according to northern Baikal Evenki legends, the Kindigir Evenkis came from the North led by the great shaman Kyndygyr (Neupokoev, 1926, p. 30). With the development of administrative apparatus, such movements of Evenki groups became less and less likely. Governmental practices inevitably tied nomadic routes to certain territories, encouraging people to periodically return to the points where local authorities and resource distribution centers were located. Evenkis could maintain their autonomous existence due to the reproduction of skills for getting food in the taiga. They also produced main tools themselves (Tugolukov, 1969, p. 66). In some places Evenki blacksmiths smelted iron from ore (Ibid.).

In addition, the minimalism of things could not be separated from the skills of their use, the ability to produce everything you need in camps and on the move, as well as the multifunctionality of various tools, mobile dwellings' coverings, clothes, and vehicles (Golovnev, 2017, pp. 13–14). Local people's skills and good knowledge of the lands made it possible to facilitate their autonomy and to carry out long migrations.

It would not be possible to separate space from time in the perception of nomadic group representatives (Ibid., p. 7). Furthermore, the mobile lifestyle itself contributes to the perception of space and time in an inextricable connection, where one category can be understood through the other (Sirina, 2012, p. 338). However, the public administration discourse often represents space and time separately, with the space viewed as a map, and time—as a kind of line on which one can mark different events associated with a certain place. Evenkis conceive time in terms of spatial movements and often measure distances using temporal characteristics. For example, they can measure it by “days of travel” and use the expression “*khodit' obudenkom*” (Rus.) to indicate that a walk to a certain place and back takes one day.

The change in the autonomy regimes was due to the fact that within the framework of the early Soviet policy local authorities introduced new principles

of territorial formation. They initiated construction of new settlements, which at first became centers of fishing artels and later—collective farms (Davydov, 2017a, p. 163). Such settlements were transformed into centers for resource redistribution and storage, into the places of constant return. Depending on the degree of control and the amount of investments in infrastructure, the autonomy regimes can change in different ways. Population can become more or less dependent on the resources provided and distributed by the state.

Autonomy is always a relative characteristic. Complete autonomy would not be possible, since Evenkis needed for their movements objects and products brought from other regions. In the 20th century with the invention of new vehicles a need for fuel and spare parts emerged there. When the new vehicles were introduced, the number of pendulum movements to certain places had gradually increased. Any serious breakdown forced people to return to a settlement or a base, for example, for welding, and the use of heavy equipment required constant supply of fuel. So the need to repair technical equipment, obtain food, fuel, clothing, and building materials as well as the practice of things and food distribution and transportation made the very possibility of hunters' and reindeer herders' mobility depend on the pendulum movements, reducing the degree of their autonomy. The state sedentarization policy involved local people in new types of activities that were not possible without external supplies. Due to the state's need for furs, such a transition became possible only for some Evenkis.

CONCLUSION

Each institution or social group acts within its own temporality. Attempts to combine different temporal regimes lead to the emergence of new forms of local people's mobility. Joint movements with reindeer as well as environmental knowledge and skills gave Evenkis the capability for long autonomous existence. However, the creation of new centers for resource redistribution inevitably entailed changes in the strategies employed by Evenkis and affected the degree of their autonomy from state institutions. Due to the introduction of the public supply system and the construction of infrastructure, their autonomy gradually decreased. Acknowledgement of this process helps to investigate qualitative changes in the mobility practices of Evenkis.

Evenkis used many infrastructural innovations in their own pragmatic way; they put to good use everything that allowed them to build their own models of space appropriation. The Soviet project of sedentarization was never completed. Mobility patterns underwent changes in the regions, where a part of Evenki men, mainly engaged in hunting and reindeer herding, retained large amplitude of movements compared to women living in settlements. The construction of infrastructure and building of centers for resource distribution led to an increase in pendulum movements between such centers and intensively used places, thus reducing the relative autonomy of hunters and reindeer herders.

To sum up, the state reproduced its own model of temporality, demanding people to visit distribution hubs. It created "gaps" in the temporal regimes of hunters and reindeer herders that could be reduced by constant replacement of some actors with others. As a result, new forms of mobility (e.g., pendulum movement, house exchange, and "migrations" within the same settlement) and the need for constant

migration of workers between obshchinas and patron employers in villages emerged. These new forms of mobility of Evenkis were a strategy of energy saving, caused by the change in temporality regimes (organization of practices in time). It implied the transfer from constant existence in motion (seasonal migrations of the family) to the state of constant search for new points to which one could regularly return or, in other words, search of new places for future intensive use necessary to maintain the movements.

Using a number of such places, Evenkis could increase the degree of their autonomy where the state had weakened its control. Government projects as well as the property created and distributed within their framework shaped new patterns of mobility that involved more options than just traveling along a certain route: Evenki hunters and reindeer herders began to rely on intensive movements back and forth between the settlements, bases, and taiga campsites.

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CHAPTER 23

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Translocal Dagestani migrants in Western Siberia



Ekaterina Kapustina

People from the Caucasus region, primarily oil and gas specialists from Azerbaijan and Chechnya, began to arrive to work in the oil and gas centers of the Khanty-Mansiyskii and Yamalo-Nenetskii Autonomous Districts (KhMAO and YNAO) in the 1960s. Dagestanis started migrating to the region to work beginning in the early 1980s, greater numbers arrived in the mid-1990s, and the number of Dagestani migrants has continued to increase over the last 15 years. From the Caucasus to the cities and villages of the KhMAO and the YNAO, most often, migrants represent ethnic Nogays and Kumyks from Northern Dagestan and ethnic Lezgins, Tabasarans, and Kaitag Dargins from Southern Dagestan. The KhMAO and YNAO regions are attractive because of the strong labor market, high wages, developed urban infrastructure, excellent quality of medical services, and regional social payments.

Previous research on resettlement to industrial and mining cities and towns in the north of Russia (Bolotova, 2014; Children of the nineties, 2020; Eilmsteiner-Saxinger, 2010; Oparin, 2018; Zamyatina, 2014; Zmeeva, 2011) has largely neglected migration from the Russian Caucasus to Siberian regions. Only in the last few years have anthropologists and sociologists begun to study migration from the North Caucasus to Western Siberia. Of particular interest is the role of Caucasian migrants in the region and changes in the community of origin as a result of the migration process (Kapustina, 2014, 2019; Sokolov, 2016; Yarlikapov, 2020).

The migration of Dagestanis to the *sever* (Rus., North) is usually characterized as long-term.¹ Migrants live in a new place for a long time, rent housing, settle in there, and establish new relationships. Some members of the family often join them in migration. Migrants, maintaining ties with the community of origin, in many ways, participate in the social and economic life of their home village and plan to return to it someday. Observing the practices adopted in such families, and analyzing the discourses that are relevant to them, admittedly one cannot place these migrants and their relatives in one or another territorial and sociocultural reality, as if they existed in several worlds at once. The translocal approach that has been very popular in migration research in recent decades can be useful for this case.

The concept of translocality is usually considered as an analogue of transnationalism. Translocality is a type of migration in which migrants develop and maintain multiple forms of relationships that cross regional borders but does not involve

crossing national borders (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Another view of translocality can include the existence of a national border between the sending and receiving communities, but the emphasis is on the mobility of money, commodities, and information flows (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

I have considered the translocal nature of migration from Dagestan to the cities of KhMAO and YANAO in previous articles (Kapustina, 2019, 2020). There are several reasons for migrants' inability to fully fit into the life of their original community. Among them there are: economic investments and significant rituals both in the place of migration and in the sending community; and the intensity and regularity of the movement of people, things, goods, money, and information between sending and receiving communities. As a result, Dagestani transmigrants continue to build their identity and their social networks in their new home based on connections with their place of origin, as a rule, their native Dagestan village.

The translocal paradigm of the research necessitated fieldwork both in the place of migration and in the originating communities. This chapter draws on semi-structured and biographical interviews in several Western Siberian cities: Surgut, Pokachi, Pyt'-Yakh, and Novyi Urengoi. In addition, my work draws on fieldwork in communities in the Republic of Dagestan, including Khasavyurt, Dakhadaev, Kaitag, and other areas, as well as the capital of the Republic, Makhachkala. My informants included labor migrants and members of their families, fellow villagers and neighbors in migration, as well as those remaining in their historic homeland and participating in the translocal life of migrants.

MIGRATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructures are the systems that enable circulation of goods, knowledge, meaning, people, and power, and are components of how people experience space (Dourish and Bell, 2007). The concept of infrastructure includes both engineering networks and projects, and the system of social institutions and the efforts of people and social networks. In this chapter, infrastructure mostly will consider a social perspective, that is, what A. Simone calls "the infrastructure of people" (Simone, 2009). There is also a technological aspect of infrastructure present, but it does not play a key role in constructing a translocal lifestyle.

There are different approaches to what "migration infrastructure" means. For example, Xiang and Lindquist define migration infrastructure as the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p. 124). However, you can take a broader view of the infrastructure as a network that facilitates the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space (Larkin, 2013, p. 328). The infrastructure used by a migrant may overlap partially or almost completely with the infrastructure that is relevant for other groups of the population not related to labor migration. In addition, one approach focuses on the infrastructure that migrants form for themselves. This approach is obviously associated with the ideas of migrant/"ethnic" economy as the nature of migrant employment in the host society and migrant's independent solutions to the problem of providing for themselves (Light & Karageorgis, 1994; Waldinger, 1986, etc.). These ideas are close to the image of the informal economy (Portes and Haller, 1994). There are also researches showing the parallelism

of migrant and host infrastructural worlds (on Russian data see Demintseva & Kashnitsky, 2020; Demintseva & Peshkova, 2014, Peshkova, 2015).

The regional specificity of the host society can undoubtedly also determine the researcher's view on the relevant migrant infrastructure. There are remoteness of the region, complicated and irregular communication with the so-called mainland, difficulties with food supplies, harsh climatic conditions which have formed this specificity. All this, as well as the interaction with Indigenous peoples of those who came to this region from other parts of the country, create a specific system for obtaining food, the emergence of specific barter and cooperation practices in the north (Liarskaya, 2017; Davydov & Davydova, 2020). At the time of my research, food supply was not an issue. Developed infrastructure projects were still important for people from Dagestan. This chapter shows that the resilience of such projects stems not only from the remoteness of the north and scarcity associated with it.

To understand the specifics of the migrant infrastructure organized by labor migrants from the Republic of Dagestan in the cities of the KhMAO and YNAO, one should take into account, above all, the legal status of migrants. Residents of Dagestan are Russian citizens and have the possibility to obtain a regional residence permit (*propiska*). Residence permits are helpful for arranging education, health care and, to some extent, employment. In these areas, the need to build a specific migrant infrastructure is minimal.

However, it is fair to note that Dagestani migrants face discrimination and restrictions in finding work, renting housing, and organizing everyday life. These challenges stimulate the development of migrant infrastructure utilizing the resource of ethnicity and regional specifics. In this way migrants co-determine models of economic behavior and solve their pressing everyday problems—primarily discrimination—phobias, and violence by members of the host majority (Light, 2004).

Considering Dagestani translocality, the transportation of both people (living and dead) and goods between current locations of migrant residence and originating communities becomes a problem (Kapustina, 2017). Despite the distance of more than 4000 km between Dagestan and the cities of the KhMAO, and especially the YNAO, transportation of people and goods is regular and at quite a large scale. Such movement is carried out both through non-migrant elements in the transport infrastructure, such as airplanes, trains, and through elements that have arisen as a result of migrant needs. Rather than describe the entire infrastructure system associated with migration from Dagestan, this chapter focuses on the organization of everyday family meals of translocal migrants. The questions I address include: how are food transfers between the receiving and sending localities arranged? And how does the urban catering infrastructure created and used by migrants from the Republic of Dagestan in the northern cities of Western Siberia operate?

FOOD TRANSFERS IN THE LIVES OF TRANSLOCAL MIGRANTS

Articles on the movement of things in migration show that food and other items needed for cooking are the most common type of transfer between sending and receiving communities (Mata-Codesal & Abranches, 2017, p. 2). The popularity of food transfers goes beyond purely economic motivations. In particular, the role of food is in maintaining warm relationships with relatives remaining in the native

community, particularly with parents, spouses, and more distant relatives. In addition, identity actualization often occurs through the consumption of ethnic foods from their originating community. That is, in this case, food transfers are conductors of the symbolic connection between migrants and the place of departure (Mata-Codesal & Abranches, 2017, p. 3).

My field observations have also confirmed the popularity of food transfers from the sending community to Dagestani migrants in Western Siberia. Talking about the ties with the homeland and contacts with it, my interview participants most frequently mentioned the shipment of food products that they receive from the republic. Often packages were quite large and consisted of several boxes, bags, bottles, or cylinders, depending on the type of product. Some informants stated that a significant part of the food on their table was imported from the republic. It is noteworthy that food transfers, and packages in general, move mainly from Dagestan to the place of migration, and not vice versa.

Food transfers are associated with the active migrant movement between the place of departure and the destination of migration. Migrants returning from their homeland often organize the transfer of food parcels by themselves before returning to *sever*. Just ten years ago, when flights to the KhMAO and YNAO were quite expensive, most of the migrants and their relatives who went to visit them used ground transportation, mainly using personal cars and buses, and less frequently trains. In recent years, with the advent of low-cost flights between Dagestan and Surgut and Novyi Urengoi, migrants and their families prefer to fly by plane. However, they usually send their luggage, including food transfers, by land transport, mostly by buses that have reoriented to transporting food and trucks. Relatives who send packages to their migrants when they are already in the north also use these land routes. Some trucks are specifically equipped for the transportation of perishable products. People from the republic organize the transportation. Informants mentioned Gazel' and larger trucks with refrigerator units plying between their native villages and major cities in migration. This is how fellow villagers react to the needs of migrants and turn the transportation of food transfers into a separate business.

According to my field data, the most common type of food transported from Dagestan to the cities of the KhMAO and YNAO is meat and meat products, frequently lamb and beef. Many informants living in the north noted that they mainly eat meat from Dagestan. Some said that they actually do not buy meat in the north, and are only using packages from their homeland. Meat shipped in large pieces is stored frozen in large refrigerators or freezers. Relatives send meat to migrants, or migrants organize shipments to the north during trips to Dagestan. Migrants also buy meat in northern cities from fellow Dagestani suppliers. Many migrants have the phone number of a supplier in their contact list. Suppliers are often found near the mosque. In Novy Urengoi supplier trucks are parked next to the mosque.

An example of one Kumyk family living in Novy Urengoi demonstrates the scale of meat consumption from Dagestan to the north. Aminat told me in an interview that recently her mother sent her 37 kg of beef from her native village.³ This meat was not even enough for one month for this husband and wife family. This amount of meat, she said, was consumed because of the regular guests in the family, including relatives, fellow villagers, and her husband's colleagues. Almost all main traditional dishes of Dagestani cuisine are made with meat.

In addition to meat, Dagestanis bring other food products to the north, including dry meat, poultry (usually not for sale), fish from northern regions of Dagestan, local specialties (e.g., cheese, *urbech*, and jam), and ingredients for traditional dishes (e.g., corn flour, spices, and wild garlic). Seasonality is observed in food shipments. For example, in the spring, migrants bring or are sent herbs for making traditional *chudu* pies, including wild garlic and wild onions. In summer and autumn migrants who do not travel home on vacation receive fruits, vegetables, and berries. In autumn and winter it is more common to ship meat after livestock slaughter, especially since it is easier to transport it in winter due to the low temperatures.

TRADE DEVELOPMENT

As L. Pries wrote, once the migrant flow reaches a critical level, a simple issue of food and cultural leisure in the place they migrate to is sufficient to create new earning opportunities (Pries, 1999). Many migrants, unable to find suitable work in northern cities, use their connection with Dagestan as a resource for create new businesses. Initially, the main consumers of meat are migrant fellow villagers, and trade is carried out through the networks of relatives and fellow villagers. For example, a Gazel' with meat departs Dagestan for the north and those involved in the shipment notify their clients about the opportunity to buy this meat. Subsequently, traders go outside their networks of relatives and fellow villagers, and their colleagues and neighbors begin to buy meat. Gradually, the meat business loses its exclusively migrant focus and products are offered to everyone.

The meat trade occurs through networks and retail outlets. For example, Dagestani trade pavilions, mainly Nogai, deal meat at the Surgut market "Druzhba," located on the outskirts of the city. The volume brought to the market is significant and the meat is transported by trucks. At the same time, fellow traders agree among themselves about supply scheduling. For example, at the beginning of the month one truck brings the meat, and in the middle of the month another arrives, so as to avoid competition.

Thus, using the example of meat transportation, one can see that food transfers, among other things, can be an incentive for the development of migrant business. A. Portes and M. Castells (1989), describing examples of emigrant economic practices, emphasized that informal economic practices (the informal economy) are often the choice of migrants who face discrimination in the host society and do not have access to normative ways of earnings. The founders of the concept of transnationalism, N. Glick Shiller, L. Bash, and S. Zanton Blank (1995), also highlight the importance of discrimination against migrants in the host society in understanding the choice of migrants' transnational life strategy. My field data confirms these remarks. Those who migrated to the north and cannot find a different kind of job (or alternatively, the job was not profitable enough), often go in the meat business, either in shipping between Dagestan and northern cities or in businesses associated with transportation.

The religiosity of Dagestani people plays a meaningful role in their food practices connected with translocal transfers. The overwhelming majority of my informants stated that they eat exclusively (or try to eat) products that are not prohibited in Islam. As a result, it became important to label the products used, primarily meat,

as meeting standards of halal.³ Judging by my interview data, such requirements for food have been imposed in recent times in particular. This change is due both to re-Islamization in Dagestan and the possibility of obtaining halal products in the far north. The latter is relevant, in particular, for Novyi Urengoi. Migrants with 20 years of experience in the north noted that at first it was very difficult to buy any meat and poultry, so they ate everything that they could buy considering inconsistent supplies from the mainland. “We will buy these chicken legs, then there wasn’t a question of halal or not halal, there was no meat at all. You buy the chicken legs; it was just as good, because it was meat” (*Field materials of the author, collected in Novyi Urengoi (Russia)*, 2019). However, during my work in the region, it became apparent that it was important to all my informants that meat be halal.

Food infrastructure in the Russian north is often considered through the concept of remoteness. The general idea is that mobility and social networks compensate for the lack of infrastructure in the Arctic and subarctic (Gavrilova, 2017; Liarskaya, 2017). However, migrants who spoke with me about the use of the food infrastructure do not live in Arctic villages away from large cities. Rather, they live in large cities, such as Surgut or Novyi Urengoi, where, in general, there is no shortage of large retail chains, smaller stores, and food markets. Nevertheless, all informants used transmigrant food transportation infrastructure in one way or another, and purchased some products mainly through it. Religious specifics also does not fully explain the need for Dagestan products. Informants who order meat from Dagestan note that they can buy or order halal products locally, without contacting migrant networks. This can also order it from other regions, which are closer to northern cities than Dagestan, for example, slaughterhouses near Tyumen. I propose that the scarcity and high cost of desired goods, the availability of Dagestani transmigrant infrastructure, trust in this infrastructure, and the perception of superior quality products from Dagestan all play a role in the continuing demand for Dagestani products in the north.

In the north the spread of information about the transfers with products from Dagestan most often occurs through social networks and instant messengers. This greatly facilitates and accelerates the access of fellow villagers to food infrastructure, and directly uses social networks that are relevant for migrants. These networks are based on kin associations, rural communities, and less often ethnicity (for more on this, see Kapustina, 2019, 2020).

The following question—whether migrant recipients pay for the shipment of food and the cost of the food itself, and if so, to what extent—deserves a more detailed consideration. Migrants, with rare exceptions, do not pay for the cost of shipping or the products sent, when packages are sent from close relatives. Considering the previously described scale of food transfers, the sending society sends food that is worth large sums of money to migrants.

According to Massy et al. (2005), migrants and non-migrants are interlinked in a complex network of social roles and interpersonal relationships. Supporting a migrant through food transfers may be an attempt at establishing reciprocity relationships that can bring dividends in the future.

In the case of long-term migration, food transfers become an opportunity for parents to show care and attention to children who have left. Perceiving migration as a project not of individual migrants, but of their family and close circle of relatives,

supported by a migrant's parents and other close relatives turns into a common migration project.

CAFES AND SHOPS: SELLING THE TASTE OF DAGESTAN

Another significant element of the migrant social infrastructure, which may be related to people from Dagestan, is the organization of cafés and grocery stores. While the food transfer system more generally aims at meeting the needs of the migrant community itself, expanding trade beyond the migrant networks in cafés and shops is a by-product of the development of this infrastructure, not the inherent focus.

Not all of the cities considered had cafés run by people from the republic, much less cafés labelled as Dagestani this way or another. Meetings of Dagestani activists and, more importantly, weddings and other celebrations used local Azerbaijani and Chechen cafés. The use of “Caucasian” cafés as meeting places for fellow villagers is a fairly typical situation for Dagestani migrants. Surgut, Novyi Urengoi, Pyt-Yakh, and Raduzhnyi have similar practices.

Nevertheless, there are cafés opened by Dagestanis and marketed as offering Dagestan cuisine. For example, in Surgut there is such a café located at the Druzhba market. In addition to a basic menu, this café offers an assortment of national Dagestan dishes, and uses references to Dagestan in the interior, including photographs of mountain villages, portraits of people in national costumes, traditional utensils, and replicas of weapons of the peoples of Dagestan. The owner of the café is also an activist of the local Dagestan community. For instance, she participates in the organization of urban ethnic festivals. The café, of course, is targeting working fellow villagers that come to the market and other visitors to the market. However, this cramped and cheap café is most unlikely the main meeting point for activists.

There is also a café in Pokachi which serves Dagestan food. It is a canteen at a store and is not marketed as ethnic. Previously, there was a restaurant in the city decorated in the ethnic style. Dagestani weddings, national holidays, and other celebrations of the Dagestan community were held there. The restaurant was run by a local community leader, a successful businessman. Later, he became a deputy and closed the restaurant.

The following case is noteworthy. One of my informants in Surgut decided to go into private business after leaving a budgetary organization and, at some point, he opened a café-bar. The place initially had no references to Dagestan in the interior or on the menu. However, the bar had some features specific to the republic. For example, in the café there was a booth—a niche fenced off from the main hall, practically closed from the eyes of other visitors. In addition, the owner's mother-in-law, who volunteered to help with washing dishes and cleaning the hall, began from time-to-time to take orders for Dagestani dishes and to offer them to guests. Unwittingly, the owner created a source for urban Dagestani catering.

The movement of trade and public catering options to the Internet has also spawned projects offering the delivery of Dagestani food. Several years ago, these were Dagestani women preparing traditional dishes for large events of their fellow villagers, such as weddings and anniversaries, or for men who temporarily or

permanently lived without women. In recent years, delivery options for chudu pies, *khinkal*, and other Dagestani dishes have developed. The focus is not on fellow villagers but rather on all citizens. Such food delivery services are now operating in Novyi Urengoi and Surgut.

Dagestani cafés also appear on the routes of translocal migration from Dagestan to the north. Along the entire road between the republic and the cities of the KhMAO and YNAO, there is a catering infrastructure targeting Dagestanis. According to informants, there are quite a few cafés serving Dagestan cuisine, apparently opened by people from Dagestan on the route from Pyt-Yakh to Khasavyurt. These cafés have names associated with Dagestan, for example, “05 region,” referring to the car code of the region.

In Western Siberia small retail outlets with products from Dagestan are now common in cities. In Surgut, there is even a chain of stores, *Dary Dagestana* (Gifts of Dagestan), one of which is located near the mosque. In 2018 that store started as a small food truck. These stores feature products from Dagestan, including meat, poultry, and meat products, such as sausages and dried mountain sausages, as well as semi-finished foods used in traditional Dagestan dishes, cereals, and corn flour. Some products not related to Dagestan, but targeting Islamic consumption, are also sold. In general, the entire assortment suggests that it aimed mainly at people from Dagestan. The design of the shops also makes them similar to the somewhat disorderly rural shops in the Republic of Dagestan.

These stores are not a closed migrant infrastructure project. Saleswomen note that the store serves any citizens who come to them for food, even if they have nothing to do with Dagestan. In fact, when I did research in these stores, there was not a single Dagestani among the visitors. Several families of my informants, who have contacts in the community and have lived in the city for more than ten years, did not know about *Dary Dagestana*.⁴ These families receive such products through migrant networks from the republic or transported them during holidays in the republic. As a result, these stores are not becoming tangible competitors for the already established translocal infrastructure.

According to my observations, these stores initially had a commodification function aimed at offering Dagestani products to other citizens not associated with the republic. These stores market to the Muslim population of Surgut, offering halal products, sourced from Dagestan, where the overwhelming majority are Muslim. In addition, obviously specific ethnic products for non-Dagestanis are marketed as healthy and environmentally friendly products from a region untouched by genetic modification.

It should be noted that the *Dary Dagestana* stores belong to the elder brother of the chairman of the Dagestan fellow villagers' organization of Surgut. This particular leader aims to actively position the community as a partner with its authorities. *Dary Dagestana* turns out as a commodification project stemming from a local Dagestani ethnic festival at which the community traditionally presents dances, traditional costumes, dishes of national cuisines (Kapustina 2014). Also, *Dary Dagestana* stores rebrands a popular slogan in Russia from the previous decade—“Stop feeding the Caucasus”—and offers instead an image of Dagestan as a source of healthy and environmentally friendly food, not a source of radical Islamists and migrant parasites.

CONCLUSION

Natives of Dagestan involved in long-term migration to the cities of the KhMAO and YNAO often choose a translocal way of life, which leaves an imprint on many of their life practices. They maintain active contacts with the place of origin as many of modern migrants to the Arctic and subarctic regions of Russia. In addition, other important and specific factors play a role, such as clan and rural identity, active social networks of fellow citizens-migrants, and discriminatory practices among other citizens and employers (Caucasian phobia). These conditions are favorable to the formation of a migrant infrastructure aimed at transporting people and things of various kinds. Food transfers, one of the most common forms of transfers, affect the specifics of the infrastructure organization and determine the ways of its functioning.

The migrant infrastructure associated with transportation of products meets the needs of migrants in organizing their everyday life and provides jobs for migrants and their families in need. As a result, businesses develop, focused initially on needs within the migrant community but also going beyond that market and becoming a mainstream part of the urban environment. Thus, such businesses are contributing to the social life of the host region and forming new economic demands.

The study of food transfers is a valuable way to understand the specifics of maintaining and reproducing personal connections across spaces in a migration environment. The intensity and scale of food transfers should be taken into account when studying the nature of the interaction of transmigrants with relatives who remain in Dagestan. In particular, migration in this case should be considered not as a purely economic measure, linearly aimed only at increasing family income. It is a complex system, where the reciprocity options between migrants and non-migrants should also be taken into account, as well as the strategies of the migrant network. Trade in food products provides opportunities for the translocal social space functioning and incentivizes migrants to be transmigrants, literally living between the two territories, both geographically and socially.

Food projects that go beyond the migrant networks are mainly associated with the organization of cafés with Dagestan cuisine and grocery stores. The commodified nature of such projects is associated with attempts to offer a new image of Dagestan to the external consumer as a territory of healthy food and ethnic delicacies, as a “donor” region. These food projects offer an alternative to the stereotype of the Caucasian homeland as a land of fundamentalists and tax recipients.

Larkin (2013, 338) points out that any discussion of infrastructure is a categorical act, since the embedded nature of infrastructure means that it is difficult to mark a beginning or an end to its existence. It follows that methodology is contingent and that identifying a methodological approach to migration infrastructure is a theoretical problem. In my opinion, it is important to see precisely the collective construction of infrastructure projects in the disparate attempts of migrants to improve their living conditions in northern cities. At first, acting exclusively in the interests of migrants, infrastructure projects can subsequently expand their functions and begin to grow into the general infrastructure of the region to varying degrees. It is important to look at migrant practices when considering the inclusive development of northern cities, as well as to identify the potential and limitations of this development.

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NOTES

- 1 Fly in/fly out (*vakhta*) is much less common.
- 2 All the names of the informants were anonymized.
- 3 Allowed for consumption under Islam.
- 4 The shop near the mosque is in full view of all believers, but the shop located in the market was completely unknown to them.

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CHAPTER 24

DEVELOPMENT CYCLES OF CITIES IN THE SIBERIAN NORTH



Nadezhda Zamyatina

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century is a special era in the development of the Far North. This period marked the emergence of a specific set of cities in the Arctic that acted as bases for the development of large resource deposits. Industrialization burst into Alaska with the gold rush and into Arctic Sweden with the development of the iron ores of Kiruna. In the USSR, the first-borns of industrialization were Kirovsk and Naryan-Mar with a timber plant in the European part of the country. In the Asian part of the country, new settlements that ensured the export of resources, navigation, or for the exploitation of resource deposits, such as Magadan in the Far East, arose at the same time. The emergence of industrial centers was a revolution for the Arctic, but on a global scale it was a continuation of a powerful wave of development associated with the transition to fossil-fueled civilization (Barbier, 2011).

In the modern world, Arctic cities include political capitals and business and university centers (Zamyatina & Goncharov, 2020). However, in Russia, and especially in Siberia, industrial cities are dominant. Their appearance can be explained by two factors. First, mid-20th century industrialization reached large resource deposits, like Noril'sk, which had the potential to be used for decades. Given transportation at the time, it was more logical to develop full-fledged cities instead of working camps. The second factor was a technological factor. The development of technologies for early industrialization in the Siberian Arctic was such that the development and transportation of resources required the creation of settlements in close proximity. Rotational resource-development methods had not been developed yet. New settlements "on deposits" (or deposit towns) provided the mining industry with personnel, personnel, social and cultural services, often food, clothing, and the simplest tools. I term this type of settlement a deposit town with the allusion to a company town or factory town. I also include towns built to exploit oil and gas resources with this concept, although there are some differences with mining towns due to the distributed nature of oil and gas resources.

An additional function of many of the early cities in the Siberian North was research focusing on industrial development of unexplored areas under harsh climatic conditions. Scientific developments originated in the fields of geology, polar agriculture, hydrology, and construction.

During early industrialization, deposit towns emerged throughout the Arctic: Fairbanks, Dawson, and Whitehorse, which arose in connection with the gold rush in Alaska; Kiruna in Sweden, and a number of new cities in the Soviet Far North (Kirovsk, Vorkuta, Noril'sk, & Magadan). In some cases, cities developed at locations convenient for transshipment of goods (Igarka) or coal bunkering for ships (Dikson). The analogy with a resource deposit is relevant here, as well as the reserves of the deposit. The benefits of geographic location can be exhausted as technology changes in the same way that ore reserves can be used up. Dikson is a vivid example where the need for coal bunkering is no longer required with modern diesel- and nuclear-powered ships. Similarly, Igarka, developed to reload timber from rafts onto ships. Other cities were founded in more southern regions in the field of communication with the development of hydrological resources (e.g., Bratsk and Ust'-Ilimsk).

The era of the northern deposit towns began to end in the West as early as the 1960s. Today, there are just a few such cities, and they are small in terms of population, for example, Kiruna in Sweden and Labrador City in Canada. In the USSR, the period of the emergence of deposit towns dragged on, as a result of which an unprecedented network of cities arose across Siberia. The Surgut historian Igor Stas' convincingly argued that this was not so much the result of a planned economy but rather a firm politics. Cities arose as if by default, while the planning authorities proposed more economical solutions (Stas', 2014, 2015).

The main feature of deposit towns is that they experience boom-and-bust cycles. The amplitude of these cycles raises questions about the fate of the cities of the Siberian North.

Resource-related city life cycles are generally a well-studied topic (Findlay & Lundahl, 2017; Wright & Czelusta, 2004). Various methods of restructuring the economy of such cities can be employed. However, the question remains open of whether it is possible to redevelop a Siberian deposit town into a more or less sustainable, typical city. In other words, how is it possible to escape from the traps of a resource economy? Alaskan economist Lee Husky hypothesizes the conditions for getting out of the frontier trap, formulating the "Jack London hypothesis" (Husky, 2017). A young city in a frontier boom period can accumulate a critical volume and diversity in an economy, which will allow, as the main resource is depleted, the city to continue into the post-resource stage.

The structural changes that take place during the boom may change the economic environment in such a way that it will promote new opportunities for economic development in the future. Local politicians may wish to pay heed not only to the extraction of natural resources, but also to the sectors of the economy that will remain after the boom.

(Husky, 2017, p. 344)

The hypothesis put forward by Husky inspires us to move away from simple descriptions of the cycles of boom-and-bust to focus on the possibility of entering the post-raw material stage of the development.

The following section generalizes the trajectories of the development of cities in the Siberian North. I analyze the prospects for getting out of boom-and-bust cycles in the

context of economic and historical geography. The research is based on interviews I conducted during various studies in 2013–2019 in northern cities.

IGARKA: PIONEER OF INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE SIBERIAN NORTH

Igarka is a former port city in the lower reaches of the Yenisei River. As the first industrial city created in the North of Siberia in 1929, Igarka is very indicative for observing the characteristic development cycles of a deposit town. I consider Igarka's case in detail in other studies (Zamyatina, 2020b, 2021), so I only summarize the main conclusions here.

1. *Non-universality of the city's comparative advantages.* The emergence of a city is due to a certain combination of conditions in a specific place and at a specific time. Time, among other things, determines the use of specific technologies. Even the geographical location turns out to be advantageous under certain conditions. For example, the position of Igarka was ideal for transshipment of timber, rafted in rafts, onto ships for further transportation along the Northern Sea Route. With the founding of Igarka timber operations became regular and reached an industrial scale. However, with modern types of maritime transport, as well as with the modern capacity of railways in the south of Siberia—the main competitor of the Northern Sea Route, the advantages of Igarka's geographical position are no longer so significant.
2. *The effect of “increasing returns.”* A change in technology is a well-known factor contributing to the economic collapse of single-industry cities. However, the Igarka's fate is more interesting. In the 1960s, a new cycle of timber export began, and in the 1970s, maximum transshipment volumes were reached. At the same time, rafts were phased out for barges with pilots. The long passage of sea vessels along the Yenisei River and increasing volumes of congestion created difficulties in Igarka. A seasonal labor force was brought to Igarka every year. Transshipment in Igarka remained likely because of the returns on previously created infrastructure including a ready port and a timber processing plant, and a skilled local labor force including stevedores.¹ In the summer, stevedores worked on loading, and in the winter, they switched to sawmilling. The reason to keep sawmilling was partly the aim to give seasonal jobs to skilled loaders in winter while it was loading that was the main branch of the city's economy. In the summer, seasonal workers, paradoxically, worked partly to “keep places” for the loaders in the sawmill during the 1970s and 1980s.²
3. *The splendors and miseries of the golden age of narrow specialization.* Igarka demonstrates a paradoxical example of how exactly in the golden age of the development of timber exports, when gross economic indicators reached records, the opportunities to diversify the local economy were lost (Figures 24.1 and 24.2). The possibility of creating a Jack London effect was undermined (Zamyatina, 2021). In fact, there was something like the Dutch disease,³ but at the level of a single city. As the technological order changed (repeatedly aggravated by the general change in the economic and political system after *perestroika*), the city found itself with nothing.



Figure 24.1 Igarka during the frontier boom became a showcase of the achievements of the Soviet system. The chief architect of the city was the constructivist architect Ivan Leonidov—one of the most outstanding architects of the era. Photo of the author, 2013.



Figure 24.2 Abandoned buildings in Igarka after the collapse of the city's main enterprise. Photo of the author, 2018.

4. *A narrow range of economic specialization options.* The effect of increasing returns in the North, regions with objectively low densities of both localities and the general population, is obviously more important than in more southern areas. At the time, Soviet geographer K. P. Kosmachov outlined the importance of the fishing hut as a starting infrastructure at the initial stages of development (Kosmachov, 1974). However, the spectrum of infrastructure types and the positive effects of new development cycles are often very small. Igarka allows us to understand why the impact of new resource projects in connected cities has a limited effect. In the 2000s, a new, post-timber cycle of development of Igarka began. This development cycle was associated with the use of Igarka as a base for the development of the Vankor oil field, located about 140 km from Igarka. However, with modern technology the development of these deposits no longer required the creation of a city nearby. This is very clearly evidenced by the experience of the development of oil fields in the Nenetskiĭ autonomous okrug, which began in the 1990s. In the area of new fields, only shift settlements (Kharyaginsky, Varandey, etc.) appeared, but not cities. Accordingly, expectations of a revival for Igarka in connection with the beginning of oil production were in vain.

In Igarka, in fact, only the airport was in demand. The impact of oil production on Igarka itself was very limited. The redevelopment of the airport provided jobs for airport employees—in fact, the continuation of its operation—as well as jobs for security structures. Local people generally do not work directly in oil production but they were involved in the organization of a winter road from the Igarka towards Novyi Urengoi, as well as some sponsorship programs.

In this regard, the question of the possibility of urban development after the end of the initial resource cycle cannot only be considered solved but is raised with renewed vigor.

CITIES OF NORTHERN SIBERIA: TIME SCALES OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Igarka is in the third cycle of resource development—perhaps one of the oldest cases for the Siberian north. The lessons from Igarka are relevant for younger cities. Most of these cities are connected with raw materials extraction industries. Therefore, they will experience similar boom-and-bust cycles. There are very few non-resource cities here. Salekhard, the capital of the Yamalo-Nenetskiĭ autonomous okrug, with its satellite town Labytnangi, and its more southern “twin brother” city of Khanty-Mansiysk—the capital of the Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug—are examples. These cities appeared long before industrialization, and their patterns of development are quite different. A special case is Dudinka, which until 2007 was the capital of a separate region of the Russian Federation. However, after its incorporation into the Krasnoyarskiĭ krai, Dudinka became an ordinary district center. As a result, Dudinka’s dependence on the fate of neighboring Noril’sk, for which Dudinka is an outpost and year-round port, has sharply increased.

Noril’sk is a classic mining city, but it has no analogs in the world in terms of the scale of production and the size of the city in such extreme natural conditions.

Founded in 1935, Noril'sk is located adjacent to an exceptionally rich deposit of copper-nickel ores that also contain precious metals. Even the Noril'sk-1 field, developed in the 1930s, is expected to operate until 2050 (Nornickel, 2022).⁴ Strictly speaking, the second phase of the city's development that began with the opening and commissioning of the Talnakh ore node in the 1960s is still underway. The construction of the new Nadezhdinskii Metallurgical plant, and the emergence of the new city of Talnakh (now the Noril'sk microdistrict) are included in this phase.

If it were not for Talnakh, it is possible that Noril'sk would have already been closed as the initial reserves were exhausted. Discussions about closing the city were raised in the 1950s. Today, Noril'sk has relatively good prospects for maintaining the functions of the base due to the availability of research infrastructure and skilled labor force. However, both have degraded considerably compared to the late Soviet period, and the future of the city and the district requires considerable effort and will to revive.

The most typical city-by-deposit in the north part of Siberia is a city in Western Siberia associated with the development of oil and gas fields. Even professionals did not expect their appearance. S. V. Slavin, a key expert on the economy of the Far North, wrote:

From Salekhard to the east to Igarka and Noril'sk lie vast expanses of the West Siberian Lowland, where no natural resources have yet been discovered. But even if such fossils were discovered, they are covered with layers of Quaternary sediments, and their extraction will be extremely difficult and, in any case, less economical than on the eastern slope of the Northern and Circumpolar Urals or on the coast of the Yenisei.

(Slavin, 1961, p. 208)

Slavin published these words in 1961, the year that geologists discovered massive oil deposits in the east of Western Siberia. Because of the geography and size of the region, the approach to development had to change radically. The discovery of oil deposits caused the cancellation of a project to flood the West Siberian lowland for a giant hydroelectric power plant.

Today, the oil and gas cities of Western Siberia stand out from others in terms of cultural and leisure facilities. This was shown, in particular, by a recent study of the types of settlements in the Russian Arctic (Goncharov, Dankin, Zamyatina, & Molodtsova, 2021).

In contrast to the western part of the Russian Arctic where many localities have a good transport situation, but a poor socio-cultural environment, there are five Arctic subcenters in the north of Western Siberia: Salekhard, Nadym, Novyi Urengoi, Gubkinsky, and Noyabrsk. These cities comprise more than half of all the subcenters allocated in the Russian Arctic (Goncharov et al., 2021). These cities are relatively saturated with objects in the field of culture and leisure. Other, smaller cities often belong to the category of subperiphery (*ibid.*). The region of oil and gas development in the Russian Arctic is practically devoid of the potential for innovation. I measure innovation potential by the presence of a university. There are universities in the southern part of the oil and gas-producing region in Khanty-Mansiysk, Surgut, and Nizhnevartovsk. The high level of development of the service sector in the Arctic is a

sign of the peak in the resource-development cycle. It itself a highly developed service sector is by itself an alarming sign. Other Arctic and northern regions of Russia, even with lower incomes, have their own higher education institutions (e.g., Murmansk, Apatity, Arkhangel'sk, Yakutsk, and Magadan). The failure of the Western Siberian Arctic to diversify is notable.

Oil and gas settlements in Siberia received the status of city mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. Now many of them are at the stage of falling production. The resource is not as extensive as that in Noril'sk. The duration of a field's operation depends, of course, on the volume of reserves. However, the specificity of the development of oil and gas was that the resource-extracting trusts of the Soviet era sought to obtain maximum profit in a short time. This led to the rapid depletion of reserves. Soviet-era exploitation was often inefficient. Deposits were quickly flooded, and the production potential in some cases was quickly exhausted. For example, the famous Samotlorskoe field is already among the depleted. Rosneft' company received tax breaks for working there.⁵

Cities that are younger (Gubkinsky), larger (Surgut, Nizhnevartovsk), or those in which the regional headquarters of companies are located (Kogalym) are in the best position. In some (so far rare) cases, signs of decline have already appeared. First of all, decline is noted in the settlements that specialized in the earliest stages of development, namely, in geological exploration.

A striking example is the former geologists' base at the settlement of Novoagansk, located to the east of the modern Surgut–Noyabrsk highway. The Noyabrsk micro-district developed at the crossroads of the Agan River waterway and the route to another pioneer village, Vyngapurovsky (80 km away). In the early years of its development, Novoagansk was at the leading edge of development but now it is at a dead end (Figure 24.3). Geology no longer plays a role as a development driver in Novoagansk, and the geological enterprise was liquidated in 2012. Novoagansk now



Figure 24.3 Novoagansk settlement (Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug-Yugra). Photo by the author, 2018.



Figure 24.4 Today, only an artistic composition remains on the main square of the town in the place where the headquarters of a large geological enterprise stood. Photo by the author, 2018.

resembles Igarka instead of the relatively well-groomed prosperous city that it was (Figure 24.4). Like Igarka, residents of Novoagansk often recall the golden age of the town, when geology was a prestigious field and the town was so well supplied that people went to it for food from the neighboring city Raduzhny.

LIFE AFTER THE FRONTIER, OR THE QWERTY EFFECT FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT AREAS

The problem of the future of the oil and gas cities of Western Siberia is one of the most acute topics for the region. However, the gloomy experience of Igarka going through three development cycles without diversification does not negate the possibility of the city's eventual transformation. The nuances of the Jack London effect are important to consider. The wealth generated frontier cities' consumption sphere quickly diminishes after the collapse of a city-forming enterprise. Both Novoagansk and Igarka had commodity abundance during the boom, a part of their development that is no longer apparent.

To escape the frontier-cycle trap a city must transform itself from permanent, large camp servicing a local extracting industry to a center for the development services for surrounding areas. Irkutsk geographers proposed the term *development services* in the 1970s and 1980s. Sysoev proposed a definition of a development-services base as the “spatial-temporal concentration of development services” (Sysoyev, 1979, p. 105; see also: Pilyasov, 2016). The fundamental difference between a development-services base and a deposit town is that a development-services base can restart the frontier cycle through discovery and support of operation for extraction of new resources.

In the 1970s and 1980s, in its golden age, Igarka could not play the role of a development-services base. The technologies of reloading the forest in packages, which allowed to achieve record volumes of reloading the timber, came to Igarka from the outside (Zamyatina, 2021). Igarka had no endogenous resource-development capacity.

As an opposite example, we can cite the second wind of Noril'sk in the 1960s. With the depletion of the initial reserves of copper-nickel ores, discussion of "closing" Noril'sk arose. Closing the city would mean centralized decommissioning and depopulation. However, geologists discovered new rich deposits in the Talnakh area, and the construction of new infrastructure began. The highlight of this process was that this launch was largely a local initiative. The city had specialists, material resources, technologies, along with faith in the city and courage to make decisions.

The field has not yet been delineated, we did not know its reserves, but after consulting with geologists, the director of the plant V. I. Dolgikh took a risk. The construction of the mine has begun. Then it turned out that the risk was justified.
(Luks, 2018, p. 4)

In a sense, a development-services base performs in ways analogous to a textbook city. The classical city is a center for the production of innovations and the birth of new technological structures (Jacobs, 1984). However, differences remain. A classical city provides high-quality, intensive, economic development. A development-services-oriented city provides quantifiable, extensive, broad-based development. A development-services base can incentivize economic development in an entire surrounding region. What this means in northern realities is such cities help prevent the frontier from choking. This is the most important function of such base cities. Deposit towns do not have the infrastructure to serve broad-based development, even if they are saturated with service industries.

We can mention another important nuance. In modern Russian discussions about the fate of cities in Northern Siberia, the unprofitability of maintaining cities in high latitudes is proclaimed as an original fallacy. Such discussions do not consider potential increasing returns that are the cornerstone of the development of cities. It is the accumulated assets—not the initial advantages—that become the basis for future development. Here, it is easy to recall the classical views from economic geographer N. N. Baranskii, who noted that "a city can create a situation for itself" (Baranskii, 1980). Similarly, economist Paul Krugman cites the example of New York, a city which grew up on the transportation routes connected to the Erie Canal, but successfully diversified after the end of industrial navigation on the canal (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2011). As an explanatory mechanism, Krugman proposed an economy of increasing returns. It is much more profitable to place new activities in an existing city than to build new cities under new conditions. This is exactly what the Jack London effect should entail (Zamyatina, 2021).

In Northern Siberian cities an example of one type of resource that provides an increasing return is specialized human resources. People living there are experienced in the conditions of the North and have specific professional skills needed in that environment. A most distinctive example is the ability to modify and handle a car at low temperatures. Skilled drivers often develop their own solutions to insulate vehicle

cabins. In addition, for many car brands, a big problem is to start a car in the cold, and northern drivers also come up with their own solutions to that problem.

Discussions in the media about the fate of oil and gas cities in the Siberian north, most often focus on the use of human resources for development of new oil and gas fields utilizing the shift method. The shift method is already in use by Surgutneftegaz in Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug and Noyabrskneftegaz in Yakutia. However, expanding this option for existing deposit towns raises questions. The maintenance of deposit towns as bases for long-range shift work in the North has economic challenges due to the costs of transportation of people, goods, and services.

Theoretically, the introduction of development services in a deposit town should foster activities that provide services more broadly. Iceland demonstrates a most striking model for the addition of development services. Iceland generates about 25% of its electricity from geothermal power plants and has been a pioneer in geothermal space heating (Orkustofnun: National Energy Authority, 2022). With this experience Iceland also now exports construction services for geothermal power plants in other countries. Isolated examples of such development-services specialization in narrow niches, nurtured on local specifics and local problems, can be found in the cities of the north of Russia. The Magadan Mechanical Plant supplies devices for washing alluvial gold, despite the remoteness and high northern costs of the manufacturer, to several regions of Russia as well as to foreign countries including Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Ghana, Mali, and Zimbabwe (Zamyatina, 2020a). Kogalym, less than a hundred kilometers from the Arctic circle, supplies chemical reagents for oil production to dozens of other cities in Russia. In Soviet times, the technology developed in Noril'sk for constructing multi-story buildings on permafrost was used in many northern cities of the country. In the first years of Igarka's existence, the city served as a multilateral base for the development of the Yenisei north.

Igarka has now become the only home-building base of the entire Far North: Dudinka, Noril'sk, Ust'-Port and all other points of the Taimyr District receive timber and lumber from Igarka sawmills, and polar standard houses (winter quarters, etc.) are fully implemented in Igarka and are rafted to their destinations in disassembled form. Igarka's experimental work in the field of agriculture is extremely important for the entire Far North. The Igarka's experiments showed that the problem of production of vegetables and a number of other agricultural plants can be successfully solved in the conditions of the Siberian Arctic, which significantly moves the border of agriculture.

(Ostroumova, Brilinskiy, & Chepurnov, 1935, pp. 7–9)

The root of the city's problems, apparently, go beyond the collapse of the timber export industry. Igarka's nascent role as a development-services base was rejected in favor of gradual narrowing of the spectrum of economic specialization (Zamyatina, 2021). This narrowing of Igarka's economic role occurred because authorities transferred many of the broad-based economic services to Noril'sk or Dudinka. I suggest a parallel trajectory in the history of Arkhangel'sk as a key port connecting Russia with European countries in the 16th and 17th centuries. St. Petersburg replaced Arkhangel'sk as a major northern port in the 18th century and Arkhangel'sk lost its role as a leading center of trade with European countries, which negatively

affected its economy. The opportunity for a city to take on the role of a development-services base may depend on its settlement network density. In the northern regions of western Siberia, the density of the deposit-town network, paradoxically may not help. A dense network of deposit towns complicates the transition to development services because each of these towns becomes a potential competitor and in a sparsely populated area, none of them can gain enough market volume around them. In western Siberia towns in the best position are, of course, cities with a more favorable transport position (Surgut), larger (first of all, Surgut, as well as Nizhnevartovsk, Novyi Urengoi, and Noyabrsk) and towns with corporate headquarters (Surgut, as well as Kogalym).

CONCLUSION

Siberian deposit towns are a product of the industrial era, facing an innate problem of resource cycles. The further north, the more narrowed the options for the development of additional industries. For example, manufacturing is often impossible due to too high production costs, a narrow sales market, and transportation costs. For extremely northern (Arctic) deposit towns, however, a different path is possible. These towns can turn the difficulties of their context, characterized by weak development of the territory and a sparse network of settlements, into opportunities to specialize in development services for the surrounding territory and other new areas. Resource-based industrial cities in Northern Siberia could contribute to a post-industrial global era in this way. Such development may require some changes, for example, a much smaller but more qualified population is required for performing the functions of a development base. Northern cities, often created in conditions where it would not be effective to create a city from a modern point of view, can use the QWERTY effect and become bases for further development of the adjacent territory, as well as generators of technologies and development models for new frontier territories.

NOTES

- 1 Stevedores are longshoremen who specialize in loading cargo into the holds of ships requiring special skills.
- 2 From the author's interview with F. F. Sukhinin, Chairman of the Igarka City Council of Deputies, 2018.
- 3 The negative consequences that can arise from a spike in the value of a nation's currency.
- 4 Currently, total ore reserves are estimated at 1561.6 million tons with an annual production of 17.3 million tons in the Noril'sk industrial district as a whole (Nornickel, 2022).
- 5 www.rbc.ru/business/06/10/2017/59d7b0889a7947de154ad136.

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CHAPTER 25

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES A RAILROAD MAKE?

Transportation and settlement in the BAM region in historical perspective



Olga Povoroznyuk and Peter Schweitzer

INTRODUCTION

Tynda is like a transit point now. People are passing it by on their way to shift work. My sister came the other day: she works in Mirnyi building a bridge across the Lena there...People also commute from Tynda. They look for jobs, find them and work there. Jobs are lacking. Still, the region will be developing...which means there will be jobs...We would not be living here, if there would not have been the BAM.

(Interview, NK, BAM builder and local resident, Tynda, 2016)

The place Tynda was transformed into a settlement by the end of the 1930s within Dzheltulakskii District...The construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline marked the beginning of a new life in this taiga region. Dzheltulakskii District found itself in the middle of the nation-wide construction site. Tynda, lying at the crossroads of the “little” and “the big” BAM and linked directly to the Trans-Siberian Railroad, was immediately recognised as “the capital of the BAM.” In December 1975 the settlement Tynda was transformed into a regionally governed city. Since 1972 the district has been experiencing rapid economic development.

(Kratkaia kharakteristika Tyndinskogo raiona, 2016)

The two statements above refer to the same town, Tynda, a place in East Siberia that has been called the capital of the BAM, or the Baikal-Amur Mainline, a railroad line running parallel to the Trans-Siberian Railroad and north of Lake Baikal. While these statements indicate that big changes have happened over a few decades, the question remains how sustainable the social, economic, and demographic changes triggered by the BAM are and have been in the past. With reference to the title of this volume, we want to demonstrate how one particular railroad line created new Siberian worlds by reconfiguring the built, natural, and social environments of the region, thereby deconstructing any lingering romantic images of Siberia as untouched wilderness. At the same time, in the light of post-Soviet transformations in the region,

we want to question how sustained—and sustainable—these reconfigurations are. Our title question—what difference does a railroad make—will be broken down into three research questions. Which ecological, economic, demographic, and sociocultural impacts have the construction and functioning of the BAM had on the region and its local population since the 1970s? How do the Soviet material, economic, and ideological legacies preconfigure the current and future developments along the BAM? Finally, what is the “agency” of transport infrastructures in remote regions, based on the example of the BAM?

In order to answer these questions, we will make use of a multitude of data obtained through a variety of methods. We are making use of our own field materials (primarily biographic and expert interviews, as well as focus groups), archival materials collected by us in local depositories, as well as data from published sources. While this chapter makes relatively extensive use of information collected by others, our main method throughout the project has been fieldwork based on conversations with a variety of people living and/or working in the BAM region, from railway workers to Indigenous reindeer herders, and from BAM builders to recent migrants.¹ In other words, it is only through these interactions and traveling with the BAM (see Figure 25.1) that we began to understand the role of the railroad for the people along its course.

Our work is situated within the anthropology of infrastructure, a field that has recently seen a lot of exciting contributions. While some branches of the social sciences and humanities, especially science and technology studies, have a long track record of engaging with infrastructure (see, for example, Edwards, 2003; Hughes, 1983; Mrázek, 2002; Star, 1999; Star & Ruhleder, 1996), anthropology has been a



Figure 25.1 Passenger train at a BAM station, 2016. Photo by Peter Schweitzer.

latecomer in that respect. More recently, however, there has been a veritable explosion of anthropological literature on the subject (e.g., Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018; Carse, 2012, 2017; Harvey & Knox, 2012; Harvey et al., 2017; Howe et al., 2016; Larkin, 2013). A main thrust of anthropological infrastructure studies has been to show how infrastructures become terrains for political engagement (e.g., Anand, 2017; Venkatesan et al., 2018; von Schnitzler, 2013, 2016). Further to this, several authors have investigated the nexus between infrastructures and modernization policies (see Çelik, 2016; Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012; Masquelier, 2002). Our understanding of infrastructure includes its non-physical elements, such as infrastructure standards (Carse & Lewis 2017) or the “promise of infrastructure” (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018). Our topic falls within the domain of transport infrastructure, where the “road” has been at the center of social science attention (Beck, Klaeger & Stasik, 2017; Dalakoglou, 2010, 2017; Harvey & Knox, 2015). The “railroad,” on the other hand, has often been relegated to historical accounts of modernization and industrialization (Aguar, 2011; Bear 2007; Monson, 2011; White, 2011) and only more recently was understood as a study object that brings together human and non-human actors (Fisch, 2018; Minn, 2016; Swanson, 2015).

After a short introduction of the main actor of our story, namely the BAM railway line, we will discuss the known impacts of the BAM, divided into distinct domains, such as environmental changes, economic changes, as well as demographic and socio-cultural impacts. After that we will provide a brief overview of the changing role of—and attitudes toward—the BAM as a socialist megaproject under post-Soviet conditions. Finally, in the conclusion, we will return to our initial question—what difference does a railroad make—and explore the role of transport infrastructures in remote regions as evidenced by the BAM and other systems.

BAM: A SHORT POLITICAL HISTORY OF A RAILROAD

The BAM is among the longest of the northern railroads that crosses six vast regions in Siberia and the Far East of Russia. The history of the BAM starts with early construction projects dating back to the 19th century and continues with the first sections of railroad built under the Stalinist regime in the 1950s, though the majority of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984 during the Brezhnev era. The mainline became the last socialist “project of the century” (Josephson, 1995) that involved extreme forms of technological and social engineering. Designed to boost regional development through the exploitation of untapped natural resources and to strengthen collective faith in the administrative command system (Ward, 2009), the late socialist BAM became a large-scale project of transformation of natural landscapes and internal colonization (Kotkin, 1997). While earlier Soviet megaprojects (Graham, 1996) as well as the BAM predecessors, used forced labor and military personnel, it was mostly ideological propaganda combined with material benefits that drove labor migrants to the railroad construction in the 1970 and 1980s.

Local pre-BAM population groups included earlier Soviet migrants, as well as Indigenous Evenki and other Tungusic speaking people (*aborigeny*). While reindeer herders and hunters lived nomadically in the taiga, the majority of local residents led sedentary lives in the villages that emerged during the process of collectivization and exploration of natural resources. A number of so-called “national villages”

(*natsional'nye poselki*) where Evenki and other Indigenous minority groups were concentrated existed prior to the arrival of the megaproject. While the local population hardly participated in the construction process, it was nevertheless affected by the railroad infrastructure in multiple different ways.

Young migrants, the builders of the BAM, were primarily recruited to the construction through Komsomol¹ organizations. Building brigades and organizations from a particular Soviet republic or a Russian region or a city were ceremonially assigned to design and/or to build a particular town, settlement or station along the BAM. The multicultural composition of the migrants was supposed to represent the ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union and to be managed according to the Soviet national politics with its ideologies of “friendship between peoples” and practices of hidden racial and ethnic discrimination (Brubaker, 2014). Nevertheless, the joint experience of the railroad construction and communal living shaped the migrants into a solid particular group of population with their own socio-professional identity. Currently, the former “builders of the BAM” (*bamovtsy*) constitute the majority population concentrating in the communities that emerged during the BAM construction, including the biggest cities of Tynda and Severobaikal'sk, as well as in numerous smaller railroad towns and settlements. Thus, the BAM project was instrumental in creating a new built and social environment in remote regions of the Soviet Union that were previously deemed remote, uncivilized and barely inhabited.

IMPACTS

Environmental changes

We begin with the impacts the construction of the BAM had on the natural environment of the region. While any large construction project obviously has enormous ecological effects, building a railroad line extending several thousand kilometers, mostly on mountainous permafrost soil, could not but severely impact the environment around it. Interestingly, there is very little documentation of these environmental challenges and possible critical voices against them. On the one hand, this is not very surprising as the BAM was built during Soviet times when open (scholarly or other kinds of) criticism was still rare and politically dangerous. There are a few Western summary publications that were written during these years and are based on Soviet sources (see, among others, Precoda, 1978; Rich, 1979; Rosencranz & Scott, 1991). Still, even these non-Soviet publications seem to have been more fascinated by the modernizing promises of the railroad than by its potential ecological problems. Rich is most uncritical and states, “BAM was planned with considerable respect for the environment” (Rich, 1979, p. 203), while Precoda conveys some problematic issues such as forest clear cutting and removal of moss from slopes (Precoda, 1978) Rosencranz and Scott, who published their review during the heydays of *perestroika* and the final year of the Soviet Union, are most critical, which is no surprise as they had more publications to work with that defied censorship. Still, even their account has more to say about social problems along the BAM (such as high worker turn-over and the housing shortage) than about ecological ones. More recently, the collective volume *An Environmental History of* speaks of “significant environmental impact” (Josephson et al., 2013, p. 78), “environmental degradation” (Josephson et al., 2013,

p. 101), and “endangering local forests and the Baikal basin” (Josephson et al., 2013, p. 235) when discussing the ecological impacts of the BAM. Still, the sources for these statements remain unclear or are the same ones mentioned above.

The historian Christopher Ward has made the interesting argument that the construction of the BAM was not just dominated by an ideology of development and modernization—or, as Ward calls it, “prometheanism”—but also contained an element of environmentalism, championed by local scientists, Komsomol functionaries, and local media (Ward, 2009, pp. 12–41). This reminds us that the process of building the BAM was not the smooth process of “mastering the North” as it seems in hindsight. As construction started in the 1970s, certain forms of environmental consciousness (especially around the issue of the pollution of Lake Baikal) had begun to develop (obviously, construction during the 1950s would have been very different in that respect, with or without Stalinism). Still, notwithstanding these critical ecological voices, in the end “prometheanism” prevailed and the main parts of the BAM were built within ten years. Historian Johannes Grützmacher, on the other hand, seems to accuse Ward of constructing ecological opposition in the context of the BAM without sufficient evidence (Grützmacher, 2012, p. 400). Likewise, Andreas Röhr sees the BAM project primarily as a foil for the projection of Soviet images of society’s struggle against nature and criticizes Soviet environmentalists in that context for not having been able to develop ecological counter models (Röhr, 2012, pp. 98–99). Weiner’s famous compendium of Russian and Soviet nature protection, however, mentions Komsomol’s skepticism and criticism toward the railroad megaproject during its early phases (Weiner, 1999, p. 405). While the political system of the Soviet Union left little room for any form of protest, one of the few well-documented cases of ecological protest during Soviet times was directed against pollution and environmental degradation at Lake Baikal (Rainey, 1991; Zaharchenko, 1990). The BAM passes Lake Baikal, which is a unique biological resource and has sacred significance for some of the area’s residents, in close proximity to its northern end. Interestingly, most of our local interlocutors during the 2010s did not highlight ecological issues when talking about the BAM and its consequences, with the exception of Evenki reindeer herders, whose movements and reindeer pastures had been severely impacted by the railroad.

Economic changes

While the level of environmental opposition to the BAM project remains somewhat unresolved, its ecological impact is undeniable. Even if people we talked to did not foreground ecology, it is clear that the indirect consequences of the BAM, such as enabling huge non-renewable resource extraction operations, have been tremendous. But what have been the economic impacts of building a railroad north of Lake Baikal?

The available literature on the relationship between railway construction and economic development remains somewhat ambiguous. While the “father” of modernization theory, W. W. Rostow, had declared that “the introduction of the railroad has been historically the most powerful single initiator of take-offs” (Rostow, 1960, pp. 302–303), a number of other economic historians during the 1960s (e.g., Fogel, 1964; Kellett, 1969; Mitchell, 1964) countered that the economic impacts of railroads were more modest by stimulating construction or reducing transportation costs. As John Kellett had expressed it in his classical work *The Impact of Railways on Victorian*

Cities, “if the steam locomotive by some chance had not been invented, economic progress would not have halted” (Kellett, 1969, p. 423). Kellett and Mitchell had based their analyses, however, on conditions in the UK (and Fogel in the USA), an area where rapid economic development and modernization were long under-way before railroads entered the scene. For our purposes—that is, to understand what difference the BAM made in the remote areas north of Lake Baikal—comparative examples from the north might be more fitting. Recently, a team of Swedish and Spanish economists and geographers attempted to assess the impact of railways on economic development in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden between 1860 and 1960 (Enflo et al., 2018). They argue that the phenomenal transition of the Nordic countries from being part of Europe’s poor periphery to being among the most prosperous countries in the world during the century under consideration can to a certain degree be explained through improvements in the transport system, primarily through state planned and financed railroad expansion (Enflo et al., 2018, pp. 63–64).

In 1990, after the main stretches of the BAM had been completed and just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a group of US-American and Canadian geographers published an assessment of the regional development of the Soviet Far East (Rodgers, 1990). Robert North’s (1990) assessment of the transport system of the region is particularly relevant here. He argues that, in general, Soviet transport policies in remote areas were not built on the assumption that the expansion of transport would lead to economic development, but that the BAM was an exception to that rule by providing heavy investment ahead of demand (North, 1990, p. 215). While such a strong state initiative is reminiscent of railroad policies of Nordic countries, the economic impacts along the BAM seem to have been very different from Fennoscandia.

The economic and transport expectations of the BAM were high, namely to carry 35 million tons of cargo, including 25 million tons of crude oil, per year (Kin, 2015, p. 316). By 1987, the cargo seemed to be less than one million per year (North, 1990, p. 213). At the same time, the BAM seemed not only to be the most expensive Soviet railroad to build but also to be the costliest one to operate; in 1985, its ton-kilometer costs were the highest in the country (North, 1990, p. 214). In the end, the BAM has not yet fulfilled its exaggerated economic expectations, while at the same time it does act as economic engine of the region. This railroad might have been too expensive to build from a monetary perspective but it has changed the economic (and employment) landscape of the region significantly.

Demographic changes

As with the economic impacts of railroads, the case of the demographic efficacy of railway development is less straightforward than it seems at first glance. As John Kellett reminds us, London had become a metropolis with a population of two million during the pre-railway era (Kellett, 1969, p. 424). In the case of the BAM, however, things were clearly different. As mentioned above, Brezhnev’s prestige project did not just include the construction of a railroad line but the creation of new settlements along the way. This had two major demographic consequences: on the one hand, it increased the population of the region significantly, and, on the other hand, it shaped a new group of people who called themselves (and were called by others)

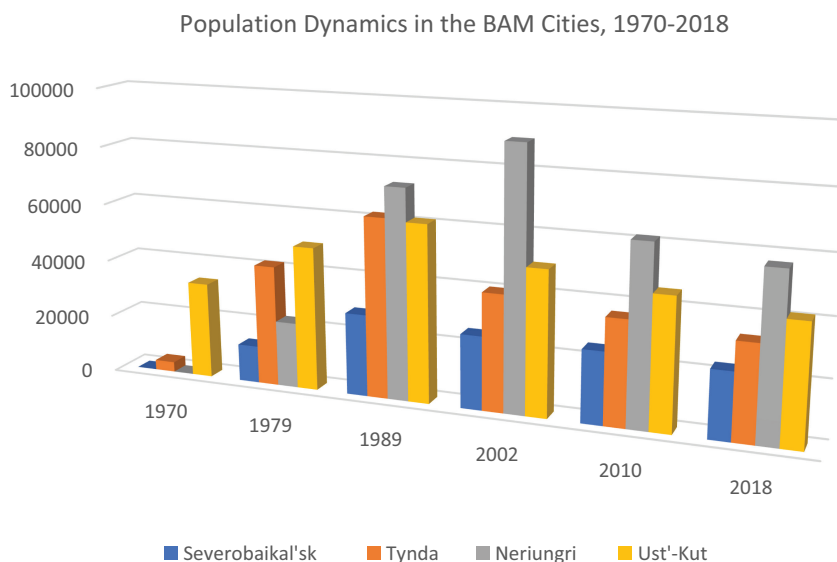


Figure 25.2 Population dynamics in the cities along the BAM, 1970–2018. By Vera Kuklina. Sources: Census and municipal data bases of the Russian Federal Service for Statistics.

“BAM builders” (Rus. *bamovtsy*). According to some estimates, over 500,000 labor migrants in their 20s and 30s arrived at construction sites from across different parts of the USSR (Ward, 2009).

Here is not the place to go into detailed demographic analysis. Instead, Figure 25.1 provides a glimpse into the demographic dynamics of the region, including its heterogeneity. For example, in Tynda, the “capital” of the BAM, we see enormous gains during the construction period and enormous losses ever since. Between 1970 and 1979, Tynda saw a twelvefold increase in population, another 50% increase between 1979 and 1989, and a steady decrease ever since (the numbers in 2018 were slightly more than half of the 1989 figures). While the general tendency of growth between 1970 and 1989, and losses ever since, holds more or less true for the entire region, there are significant differences. For example, the logistics hub of Ust'-Kut that marked the end of the railway line before the construction of the BAM, showed small increases and subsequent smaller decreases. The town of Severobaikal'sk, located at the northern end of Lake Baikal, is a prominent tourist destination and trading center. Thus, the decrease after 1989 was not very sharp and the population numbers for 2018 are still almost double from 1979. Finally, the South Yakutian gold mining town of Neriungri, the starting point of the Amur-Yakutsk Mainline (AYaM), grew between 1989 and 2002 and has since fallen to a level that is still 2.5 higher than in 1979 (also see Figure 25.2).

Sociocultural changes

The BAM project brought not only new population and railroad culture into the region, but also became an important social and cultural icon of the 1970s and 1980s (Ward, 2001). Migrants arriving at the railroad construction eventually formed a multicultural

socio-professional group with their own identity of *bamovtsy* in the process of ideological propaganda, communal labor, everyday life, and social practices. While socio-cultural characteristics of this group deserve a special analysis, in this section we will focus primarily on the impacts of the BAM on the society and culture of the population that had been living in the study region before the arrival of the megaproject.

The pre-BAM population of the present Tyndinskii, Kalarskii, and Severobaikal'skii districts includes Indigenous Evenki and Buryat, as well as earlier Soviet (primarily Russian) migrants to the North, including geologists, education and healthcare specialists, and other professionals. The BAM had ambiguous impacts on these local communities. On the one hand, Soviet ideology and popular culture transmitted with the BAM proliferated in this region in a short period of time and turned from a remote corner of the country into a center of attention for national mass media with a wide audience. On the other hand, the labor recruitment and remuneration practices at the BAM created social segregation and differentiation of living standards between the local population that was employed at low paying jobs in kolkhozes, and the migrant BAM builders (*bamovtsy*) who enjoyed significantly higher salaries and a number of other benefits (Ward, 2009).

The most dramatic sociocultural changes of the BAM concerned Indigenous minorities, primarily the Evenki. In contrast to other Indigenous groups (for example, Buryat, Sakha, and Russian Old Settler groups), this originally nomadic people has been least represented in terms of both population numbers and political and social empowerment and, thus, suffered most concerning the costs of the infrastructure project. First of all, the inflow of migrants due to the BAM construction has further demographically, socially, and culturally marginalized the Indigenous Evenki minority (Anderson, 1991). While BAM builders primarily settled in railroad towns and cities, they often visited Evenki villages and taiga camps for the exchange of products and joint cultural events. The interactions between *aborigeny* and *bamovtsy* ranged from fights to cooperation, friendships, and mixed marriages. The latter typically involved *bamovtsy* men and Indigenous women, which could be explained, unsurprisingly, by the predominance of men among the migrants at the BAM frontier (Grützmacher, 2005). The phenomenon of “the children of the BAM” (*deti BAMa*)—the next generation of local residents with mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds and multiple or shifting linguistic and cultural competences and identities (Turaev 2004)—became one of the results of the interactions between the local and migrant populations during the BAM project.

Secondly, the BAM changed the traditional way of life associated with nomadism. While many Evenki, who traditionally practiced reindeer herding and hunting in taiga, were sedentarized already during the collectivization and so-called “cultural construction” that were unfolding in the Soviet North in the 1930s–1950s (Grant, 1995), the BAM project accelerated and, in some cases, completed the sedentarization of nomads in these remote parts of Siberia. The railroad construction and exploitation causing environmental pollution, forest fires, and destruction of pastures and hunting grounds have been pushing Evenki out of their traditional cultural domain of subsistence activities. The resource extraction projects associated with the BAM lead to further alienation of people from their traditional lands and, thus, reduce opportunities for continuing their traditional nomadic ways of life (Fondahl, 1998, Povoroznyuk, 2011).

Finally, the proliferation of Soviet popular culture and of the Russian language, the changes in the socio-demographic structure, and traditional land use and nomadic practices described above, led to an overall cultural assimilation and Russification of Indigenous Evenki people during and after the BAM construction. While Evenki communities residing off the railroad used and continue to use their relative remoteness from the railroad to strengthen local ways of life, as well as their language and culture (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk, 2019), Indigenous villages in close proximity to the BAM were most effected by the changes that came with the BAM. The words of an Evenki resident from the village Pervomaiskoe connected to Tynda by an all-year road express the situation best:

The Baikal-Amur Mainline significantly impacted traditional industries and the way of life of the population that lives in this area traversed by the BAM. The [Indigenous] population decreased, life changed drastically...Now we can travel to Moscow or to anywhere by train or by plane, but there are no more reindeer. (Focus group with local administration, Evenki intelligentsia and reindeer herders, Pervomaiskoe, 2016)

THE BAM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The political, ideological, and socio-economic transformations following the dissolution of the Soviet Union opened the way for public criticism of the BAM project. In the 1990s, the negative environmental and social impacts of the railroad, as well as its high construction and maintenance costs were for the first time officially recognized. During this decade of political and economic liberalization, local and Indigenous activists were able to raise the issues of pollution and alienation of traditional lands, cultural assimilation, language loss, and transformation of traditional nomadic way of life under the pressure of infrastructure project. However, this relatively short period of critical reassessment of the BAM was followed by old discourses and images reaffirming the importance of the railroad at national, regional and local levels.

In the post-Soviet period, the BAM continued to be the main transportation artery and the centerpiece of regional development closely associated with further resource extraction plans. Although its role as a booster of infrastructural development and provider of social services to local communities changed, the monopolist national railroads company *RZhd* that currently administers the BAM, remains an important or, in some cases, the only employer for several monoindustrial towns (Kuklina et al., 2019). Railroad communities, in many cases, can use it for medium- and long-distance passenger travel supported with state subsidies. However, at a larger economic scale, the BAM serves primarily as a conduit for the transportation of resources and other cargo out of the region to international markets, as Figure 25.3 shows.

The increased utilization of the BAM in the context of economic growth and extraction of mineral resources, coal and oil has resulted in the launch of a program of technological modernization of the railroad in 2014. The program, which is called symbolically BAM-2, relies on Soviet ideologies, images and discourses of the BAM, as well as on some old regional development plans (Slavin, 1982). Nevertheless, it is being implemented under new economic conditions involving private investments and the utilization of shift labor from distant regions and post-Soviet countries. While the



Figure 25.3 Trains with cargo at the BAM station in Severobaikal'sk, 2018. Photo by Olga Povoroznyuk.

rhetoric and imagery of the BAM-2 initially raised public hopes and expectations of new development, its implementation practices and its limited or non-existent positive effects for local communities have triggered disenchantment with the new project and nostalgia for the Soviet BAM project (Povoroznyuk, 2020).

CONCLUSION

If we try to answer our slightly provocative title question, we cannot but state that the specific railroad in question—the BAM—made a tremendous difference in the parts of Eastern Siberia it now traverses. First of all, it has drastically transformed the taiga landscapes that had been previously mostly untouched by industrial development. Originally designed to boost regional development based on resource exploitation, it launched a large-scale construction of new settlements, roads, and resource extraction infrastructures. It is clear that different groups have been affected differently by the BAM. We have repeatedly pointed to the differences between Indigenous groups and railroad builders who settled there. Likewise, different segments of the Indigenous population (e.g., nomadic vs. settled) of the region have been affected differently. Among non-Indigenous people, the (Russian) settlers who had lived there before the BAM and the arrival of *bamovtsy* are often forgotten in this context. Our data confirm that the local (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) residents were pushed away from the railroad and its employment opportunities, leading to a spatial and social marginalization, which in some cases enabled them to lead lives affected to a lesser degree by the railroad than some of the other groups.

The effects of the BAM do not only vary among different groups of people but are also noticeably different among different settlements. Not surprisingly, settlements directly located at the BAM (and having a train station) feel the impacts of the railroad most. Communities located off the railroad and difficult to reach from there are obviously less impacted. The Indigenous villages that we included in our case study are well connected to the BAM by roads and, thus, have experienced its various impacts to a significant extent. Opportunities for enjoying the benefits of the BAM are thus not equally distributed within the region, creating a hierarchical politics of mobility (Schweitzer, 2020).

So, has the BAM been “good” or “bad” for the region? While it is not our aim to pass any value judgments, this question might be ultimately unanswerable. While the majority of our interlocutors would see the BAM in a more or less positive light, this shows first and foremost that the region under consideration here—the area north of Lake Baikal between Ust’-Kut and Tynda—is unimaginable today without the railroad that gives the region its name. The world inhabited by the residents of this region today would not exist—or rather, would be a radically different one—if Brezhnev would not have pushed through his prestige project. No matter whether one thinks that this project was economically, socially, or culturally wise, it created a new set of conditions that heavily preconfigure the present and future of the BAM region. While path dependence is a contested concept within development studies (Hetherington, 2017; Mahoney, 2000), it seems quite appropriate to speak of “track dependence” in our case. Still, notwithstanding all this “agency” of railroad infrastructure, we must not forget that political decisions and economic developments strongly influence “what infrastructure can do.” If nothing else, the similarities and differences between the Soviet BAM project and its post-Soviet modernization program remind us of that. This also means that “track dependence” should be understood as a process of continuity and change of political and economic regimes materialized in particular infrastructural forms such as railroad tracks.

NOTES

- 1 This article is based on research conducted within the framework of the project *Configurations of Remoteness: Entanglements of Humans and Infrastructure in the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) Region* (CoRe) supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [P 27625 Einzelprojekte]. During the final months of work on the article, the support came from “Building Arctic Futures: Transport Infrastructures and Sustainable Northern Communities” (InfraNorth), a research project funded by the European Research Council (Project ID 885646). Finally, we would like to acknowledge our local research partners, including local administration and archives for their hospitality and logistical support.
- 2 Komsomol is a syllabic abbreviation of the Russian name which is translated as “Communist Youth’s Union” or “Young Communists’ League.” It was largely a political youth organization that served the interests of the Communist Party and propagated socialist values among the young citizens of the Soviet Union.

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CHAPTER 26

STUCK IN BETWEEN

Transportation infrastructure, corporate social responsibility, and the state in a small Siberian oil town¹

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and Gertraud Illmeier*

INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs by extractive industry companies provide a basis for following the international trend of “doing well by doing good,” i.e. engaging in good corporate conduct which should result in greater security for extractive operations (for instance by preventing local protests), thereby securing corporate benefits. In the Russian context, CSR activities are usually based on voluntary (non-binding) agreements between state bodies or community institutions and the companies themselves. The charitable nature of CSR is strongly tied to political requirements in a given region and the expectations of the state or a community. It is often also characterized by a paternalistic model of company–community relations. The CSR performance of the main company in our case study (Irkutsk Oil Company, *Irkutskaiia Neftianaiia Kompaniia* or INK) is also based on the environmental and social requirements of an international development bank, namely the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD),² which is a shareholder of—and lender to—INK. This is quite a different situation compared to some other oil companies in the region, such as the Moscow based NK Dulisma company, who do not have relations with banks that have set ethical and sustainability standards, and whose CSR activities are more charitable and voluntary—if they happen at all.

In the case of Verkhne-markovo, a small town located on an oil and gas condensate field in Irkutskaiia oblast’ (Irkutsk region) in Siberia, we show how people’s mobility practices and needs are negatively impacted by the lack of sufficient responsibility for good transport infrastructure on the part of the state and the companies, including the maintenance of roads or public transport provision. We explore the relationship between CSR and the wellbeing of individuals and communities, with a focus on transport and mobility infrastructure.

Back in the 1980s, Verkhne-markovo was a prospering town located among rich oil fields on the banks of the Lena River. The first oil well at the Markovskoe oil field was drilled in 1962 (Antipina, 2008b). From the 1960s onwards, the development was continuously thriving in such a way that the authorities considered renaming

the future city Nefitelensk (*neft'* means oil in Russian, *lensk* refers to the Lena River). The “Angara-Lena Oil and Gas Prospecting Expedition” (*Angaro-Lenskaia neftegazorazvedochnaia ekspeditsiia*)³ was the state-owned local oil company at that time. The operation of this company, along with the state-owned agriculture enterprise (*sovkhoz*) “Markovskii” and the state-owned timber company “Zaiarnovskii Lespromkhoz” meant that the socio-economic development of the region was relatively diversified.

During the time of the Lena Expedition, speed boats (*zaria*) on the Lena River, regular air transport, and a 150 km road between the district center Ust'-Kut and Verkhnemarkovo, provided transportation links and opportunities for people of the small town to connect with other places. In the beginning of the 1990s, the transformation of the state system led to the stagnation of the settlement, and the transport networks shrank substantially. Population numbers illustrate the downturn of the town, which had already begun during *perestroika*. In the 1980s, Verkhnemarkovo had around 5700 inhabitants,⁴ including incomers from different parts of the Soviet Union, but this number had shrunk by 1989 to around 4200 and has stabilized today at around 2500 people (Alekseienko, 2010; Vlasov, 2018).⁵ Currently, the local economy is highly dependent on the oil industry, where most of the men work, and local businesses act as subcontractors to the larger oil companies. Local shops are partly dependent on the transient oil workers (*vakhtoviki*), who do their shopping on their way to the camps at the various oil fields. The public sector also provides some diversification within the job market.

Today, no public transport runs the 150 km along the so-called Viliui Highway or A331 between Verkhnemarkovo and Ust'-Kut. A private company provides taxi and minibus (*marshrutka*) services between these places, as well as a taxi service within the town. The roads of Verkhnemarkovo are poorly maintained. The Viliui Highway is surfaced only as far as 35 kilometers outside of Ust'-Kut, where it leads to INK's new refinery and polymer production plants, the Lena River harbor facilities, and the wood processing companies.

These roads come under the administration of different bodies belonging to the federal, regional and municipal governments. The main oil company in the region, INK, supports the maintenance of some public roads, in particular those roads which lead to their oil facilities. As part of INK's CSR program, the road from Verkhnemarkovo's subdivision Zaiarnovo to the school in the center has also been improved by INK and is cleared of snow by the company in winter. Since the town is spread out over seven kilometers, transport infrastructure is crucial for the people, but remains only insufficiently available or costly. People are dependent either on private cars, which are not available to everybody, or the local taxi company.

It is evident that the town is highly dependent on the oil sector, and everyday life is organized around this industry. CSR programs are a crucial way for companies to support social, cultural and other projects that are relevant for the community and the residents' wellbeing. People are expecting support from the oil companies, with a mindset harking back to the Soviet period, when state companies were responsible for wide-ranging social, cultural, and infrastructural support in local communities, including road building and maintenance. As this case study demonstrates—and others have also demonstrated in different parts of the world—this situation contains the risk of the state retreating from its responsibility to care for local (sustainable)

development as expected by the people. Against this backdrop, this paper therefore tackles the following research question: does CSR under post-Soviet conditions lead to community wellbeing through the example of transport and mobility infrastructure in the case of the small town of Verkhnemarkovo?

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is based on qualitative data⁶ collected by all authors during ethnographic field work in 2014, 2016, and 2018. We demonstrate some key results from around 30 semi-structured interviews held with different gender and age groups: people who are employed by the state or by the oil companies and their subcontractors; town and regional administration representatives; self-employed people and business owners; women active in local cultural activities; pensioners; single mothers; and schoolchildren. During these three field trips—which lasted between two and four weeks—participant observation and informal interaction with people was possible. This frequently provided insights deeper than interviews or questionnaires would allow and also provided visual impressions related to societal inequalities and the conditions of transportation and mobility infrastructure.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article relates to the fast-expanding body of literature on one major source of environmental and social change: the extractive industries, their impacts, and relation to society (Appel et al., 2015; Behrends et al., 2011; Gilberthorpe & Hilson, 2014; Johnstone & Hansen, 2020; O’Faircheallaigh, 2013; Rajak, 2016). Although Verkhnemarkovo is not located in the Arctic, Siberia in general shares common features and sustainability problems with Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

This chapter questions whether CSR can enhance community wellbeing, and thus quality of life, in the context of poor transport infrastructure. Lane (1989, 4) argues that development can lead to human wellbeing, if the development in question “is continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing themselves to their maximum potential” (cf. Kusel & Fortmann, 1991; Riabova, 1998; Smith & Reid, 2018; White, 2017). The characteristic of being in constant transition (Baerenholdt & Aarsaether, 1998) applies to Verkhnemarkovo, as it does to other northern regions; in this particular case with legacies back to the Soviet era and the collapse of the economic base following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Therefore, we explore the role played by mobility and transportation infrastructure—including people’s memories of a “better” past—in keeping communities vivid and thriving. We consider how people’s social, cultural, and economic needs are met, and a “good life” is practiced (Riabova, 1998), as communities continually adapt to social and economic changes.

The keyword in Arctic social sciences and interdisciplinary research today is “sustainability,” be it in terms of sustainable development, sustainable communities, or socio-cultural, economic and ecological development (Larsen & Fondahl, 2014; Larsen et al., 2010; Petrov et al., 2016), all of which are closely tied to wellbeing

and reflected in the current UN Sustainable Development Goals.⁷ A key factor influencing such processes is the power relations between stakeholders and within a community, and aspects of intersectionality such as gender and age, or other distinctive components of a community (Petrov et al., 2016) and how it is embedded within a national and global political economy. International financial institutions, such as the EBRD, also have sustainability standards that they promote through their financing practices (Wilson, 2017; 2020). Sustainability and CSR standards become legally binding through lending or investment contracts.

Our research also contributes to studies in mobilities, emphasizing that mobility and immobility are intertwined phenomena (Cresswell, 2010; Salazar, 2010). In contemporary “regimes of mobilities” and “mobilities paradigms” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Sheller & Urry, 2006), power relations are at work when it comes to exclusion from mobility (Cresswell, 2010). In this article, this is of particular relevance considering mechanisms of local dependencies from state planning and decision making or if the above-mentioned international standards of lending banks are of relevance in a certain context or not. We ask if these dependencies have an impact on people’s mobility. At the local level, considerations such as gender and age dimensions lead to inequality related to access to functioning means of transport and opportunities to move. Mobility is conditioned by the available transport infrastructure and its shape. This article contributes to studies of mobility in remote regions where passenger transport is currently scarce and expensive, while it was abundant and cheap in Soviet times.

In anthropology as well as human geography, an increasing body of literature has emerged in recent years tackling the various elements of transport infrastructure such as its social, economic and cognitive meaning, as well as the notion of “infrastructural violence” (Rodgers & O’Neill, 2012). Infrastructural violence occurs by the effects of the existence—or non-existence—of infrastructure, when they suffer from processes of marginalization, abjection, and disconnection as a result. This is shown by Illmeier & Krasnoshtanova (2021) in the case of Verkhnemarkovo’s neighboring village, Tokma, where roads across the *taiga* forest are constructed for the oil company, but local people are excluded from using them. Argounova-Low and Prisyazhnyi (2016) and Argounova-Low (2012) have delivered a unique new understanding of the narrative and social dimension of roads for people that go beyond sole discussions about political or economic contexts in road studies. This relates to the notion of “enchantment” by infrastructure, described by Harvey and Knox (2012, 522) when they explore people’s enthusiasm for roads in terms of their capacity to enchant, even if they have not been constructed but merely promised.

CSR is primarily related to issues of morality, inequality, and fairness: the concept of CSR has been evolving over many years, particularly since around the 1980s (Hilson, 2012; Hilson, 2014), and gains increasing popularity among companies who aim to build relationships with local communities in order to become good corporate citizens and thus increase their reputation and business success (Rajak, 2011; Hilson, 2014). CSR considers the impacts of corporate decisions on society and the environment, requiring companies to abide by national laws and international regulations and to exercise ethical and transparent behavior towards all stakeholders in order to contribute to sustainable development (Agudelo et al., 2019).

CSR can comprise voluntary compensation payments and benefit sharing as a source for sustainable resource governance, as proposed by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, 2011). It can also be tied to international ethical, sustainability, environmental, and social performance standards, such as those of the International Finance Corporation (IFC)⁸ or—important for our case—the EBRD (Wilson, 2017; Wilson, 2020).⁹ States might implement procedures that require corporations to support local communities or make payments to state bodies as part of the licensing process. Therefore, this requires effective coordination between international instruments and national legal and regulatory regimes (Wilson, 2017).

In the case of Russia, a specific post-socialist situation prevails in regard to CSR (Crotty, 2016; Henry et al., 2016; Kelman et al., 2016; Novikova, 2014; Novikova & Wilson 2015; Wilson & Istomin, 2019). Legal mechanisms are in place in Russia that require proponents of industrial projects to consult with affected local populations (Loginova & Wilson, 2020). However, under the neoliberal global market conditions which steer the oil industry in Russia, CSR seems to have developed largely in the form of voluntary benefit sharing; this is in contrast to the Soviet period, when responsibility actions were based on the social and infrastructural support systems connected to the state enterprises. This leads to a situation when responsibilities are not taken on by either party, the state or the company, and people's expectations tend to be disappointed; thus the so-called social license to operate (see below) is compromised (cf. Saxinger, 2016; Tysiachniouk et al., 2018; Wilson, 2016). While the large state-owned oil and gas companies in Russia, such as Rosneft or Gazprom, can (and should, based on the imperative of the “state as owner”) still fulfill the demands for wellbeing of local society, private companies and subcontractors are no longer tied to this seemingly Soviet logic. Therefore, it is also important to consider power relations between the differently constituted corporations and the various state levels including the different types of communities (urban, rural, Indigenous, or non-Indigenous); all these groups tend to have different interests (Murashko, 2008; Novikova, 2014).

In order to secure the success of a project or an operation the corporation ideally obtains a so-called social license to operate (SLO) from nearby communities. Wilson (2017, 3) describes the SLO as follows:

The term “social licence” may refer to informal relations or to a general relationship of trust between the parties. [...] A social licence can also be formalised through signed agreements, which are negotiated between companies and communities as a way to build trust, establish mutual expectations and jointly agree development pathways for the future.

An SLO is not necessarily permanent, and “where local residents voice their expectations and concerns, this can also push companies to improve their environmental and social performance” (Wilson, 2017, 3). Typically, the SLO is acquired through CSR activities and stakeholder engagement. A change in power relations is necessary in order for communities to move forward in securing their interests (Syn, 2014; Wilson, 2016). The SLO is dynamic and must be carried on beyond the project planning into the future (Wilson et al., 2016).

Overall transport infrastructure

In the 1970s and 1980s, public passenger transport was working well in the town. People in Verkhnemarkovo were satisfied with the existing level of passenger transport, and the available means and costs of transportation, which was fully subsidized by the Soviet state. Regular flights with AN-2 planes were provided to the district center Ust'-Kut. This could be due to the lower cost of subsidizing flights, compared to the cost of constructing a proper and well-functioning road. During the summer season, speed boats (*zaria*) were also available to take people by river to Ust'-Kut; these boats enjoyed great popularity among the residents of Verkhnemarkovo, who considered them to be quite convenient and cheap. The Ust'-Kut–Verkhnemarkovo road was not used much at that time. In the period of *perestroika*, when the public transportation system—air and boat traffic in particular—was radically downsized or closed down, the importance of this road began to increase.

Today, the only mode of transport for the average population is the car, but there is no gasoline station in town. Due to the road's still rather poor quality, the municipal administration cannot introduce an official public transport line. Considering the need of the population to travel, and because not every family has its own car, a private minibus line was established that works on a daily basis. The price for a return ticket to Ust'-Kut is 1,400 rubles. In urgent cases, people can order a taxi to the district center for 6,000 rubles, which is obviously very expensive.¹⁰ Moreover, within the town itself—which stretches seven kilometers along the Lena River—there is no public transport in place except a school bus. One private company offers taxi services. The price of a ride within the boundaries of Verkhnemarkovo is comparable to the price of a taxi in the city of Ust'-Kut—around 150 rubles.

Hopes among the local population that the road to Ust'-Kut would be improved arose in the middle of the 2000s, when the authorities turned to an older project plan to upgrade the dirt road. This is part of a major project, the “Federal Automobile Road A 331 Viliui” —named after the longest tributary of the Lena—that should in future connect the city of Tulun in the south, located on the Transsiberian Railroad, with the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) to the north. So far, an asphalt road is in place from Tulun up to Ust'-Kut. The stretch from Ust'-Kut to Verkhnemarkovo is a gravel road (full of potholes). The main sections in Irkutskaiia oblast' are currently being improved and extended, but only small portions are paved with asphalt. From Verkhnemarkovo, the Viliui Highway would establish a road connection further up to the northern districts of Irkutskaiia oblast', connecting them also with the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Currently, from Verkhnemarkovo onwards, the Viliui Highway is only a winter road (*zimnik*) leading to the “diamond town” of Mirnyi in the western part of Sakha (Yakutia), passing by various oil fields along the way. In 2009, construction plans for these sections of the Viliui Highway were drafted and various options for laying the road were developed. Repeated postponements of improvements to the new sections and the slow pace of construction work have nourished a skeptical attitude among the local residents towards the Viliui project. People no longer believe that there will ever be an asphalt road, though they acknowledge that the gravel road was improved in recent years, and that rides to Ust'-Kut take only three hours instead of the previous six. Between 2016 and 2017, during our fieldwork, costly construction works were being carried out in the sections between

Verkhnemarkovo and Ust'-Kut and between Ust'-Kut and Tulun, but it is difficult to assess how much time these operations will take, while at the same time other sections are likely to deteriorate. There is a common saying in the region: "The construction of the new road is very slow and the part that has been built is worn out quicker than the road is finished."

Mobility within Verkhnemarkovo

Most, but not all, people are rather mobile despite the very difficult transport conditions. Within the town, mobility and transport are essential for everyday activities like shopping and visiting family and friends, also because Verkhnemarkovo, with its subdivisions, extends over seven kilometers. It has never had a gas-station and therefore one has to go to Ust'-Kut to haul gas for a reasonable price in canisters to have enough fuel for a certain period. Verkhnemarkovo has primarily dirt roads with some relatively good gravel roads as an exception; the latter primarily leads to the oil extraction facilities, which are maintained by the oil companies, and to the heliport which was in operation until 2018.

However, the potholes (see Figure 26.1) are severe on most of the roads in Verkhnemarkovo and cars can only drive at a maximum of 20 km/h. The budget for local road maintenance is transferred from the federal budget to the municipality, which needs to apply for the money and hope that it is granted. Such application



Figure 26.1 The unpaved dirt roads become muddy in spring and fall, central square, Verkhnemarkovo. Photo by G. Saxinger.

processes for funding of roads can take years. Nevertheless, in 2020 the repair of the local roads is again a priority of the municipality (Administration of Verkhnemarkovo 2020).

People from Markovo on the other riverbank have private boats to cross the Lena River for everyday business or work. No ferry service is in place. This is especially hard for elderly people, and the majority of the around 50 people who live in Markovo are pensioners, except for some middle-aged people with a few kids. Shops, the medical facility, and the post office that used to operate in Markovo are now closed, and the church has been abandoned. The location of Markovo is problematic in the in-between seasons (spring and fall, known as *rasputitsa*), when the ice is not yet or no longer thick enough for people to drive on the ice road, which is maintained in winter. This ice road can be crossed by snowmobile or car. In these in-between seasons, when the difficult conditions last for around two or sometimes more weeks, kids live at friends' or relatives' homes in Verkhnemarkovo, in order to be able to go to school. Adults also move to the other side for access to their workplace. People from Markovo do their shopping before the ice road conditions get bad, and they stockpile goods to cover the period while they are stuck. Larger items, such as furniture or wood, can only be transported over the ice road in winter.

Transport to Ust'-Kut

As outlined above, the citizens of Verkhnemarkovo are very strongly connected to the district center Ust'-Kut and frequently travel back and forth. A so-called Multifunctional Center (*Mnogofunktsional'nyi tsentr gosudarstvennykh i munitsipal'nykh uslug* or *MFTs*)—a one-stop-shop for administrative issues, like issuing birth certificates, passports, residency registrations, and the like—operates every Tuesday in Verkhnemarkovo, and the shops take credit cards. Nevertheless, people still need to go to Ust'-Kut for special administrative and banking issues. Although there is a small clinic in town (with one doctor and a few paramedics), for major health issues people go to the Ust'-Kut or Irkutsk hospitals. There is no medical air transport available for severe cases, although we were told that sick or injured workers from the oil fields can fly out for treatment by helicopter, paid for by the companies.

When people go to Ust'-Kut, they fully load their cars with goods and products, since the prices in Verkhnemarkovo are substantially higher than in Ust'-Kut. At 7 am the minibus (*marshrutka*) leaves Verkhnemarkovo, and it departs from Ust'-Kut at 4 pm for the return journey. One way is three hours on the Viliui Highway and costs 700 rubles. Paying 1,400 rubles for the return journey is difficult for low-income families and pensioners, not to mention taking a taxi, which costs around 6,000 rubles one way, as mentioned above. One must further consider the cost of taxi services in Ust'-Kut when a private car is not available. The schedule of the minibus is not convenient, since often there is not enough time to wait in line at the hospital or at administrative offices. When someone has an early morning appointment, they must stay overnight in a hotel—which is not affordable by all—or with friends or relatives. In this way, social inequality in the settlement becomes visible among those who have their own car, or not, and are thus more, or less, flexible.

CSR RELATED TO MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Besides jobs and business opportunities for small local enterprises, the CSR program of INK is relevant to the prosperity of Verkhnemarkovo. The downside of oil company activities is the ecological impacts which locals are very worried about, but at the same time they still highly appreciate INK's economic and CSR activities. The mayor of Verkhnemarkovo states that "without INK nothing works": the local hospital was provided with an ambulance and training for medical staff was paid, the roof of the kindergarten was repaired, the culture club had renovations done and events there were supported, or the veteran club was sponsored etc. The road where the school bus runs is snow plowed by INK. INK also funds programs for secondary schools in Ust'-Kutskii raion (and thus also in Verkhnemarkovo) for teaching technical and natural sciences to prepare young people for future jobs in INK and the oil sector in general. INK's payment and programs are on a voluntary basis. However, as outlined above, INK has the obligation to interact with the communities and carry out other CSR activities, because of its relationship with EBRD, which has standards for ethical, social, and sustainability conduct. In general, INK is considered to be a good corporate citizen—in 2012 it even won EBRD's award for excellence in environmental and social performance.¹¹ INK is also perceived as taking social issues into consideration because it is located and registered in the region, e.g. in Irkutsk. It must be assumed that there is also political pressure by the state on such a large corporation to share its benefits.

Like NK Dulisma, the other major oil company operating in the region, the many smaller subcontracting companies do no voluntary sponsorship at all in Verkhnemarkovo. NK Dulisma had an agreement with Verkhnemarkovo in the mid-2000s, but it was not extended; until last year, they just had one in place with the city of Kirensk but this was not extended either. This might be related to the fact that NK Dulisma is a very unstable company with reports about its regular financial problems over the last ten years and recent news on its bankruptcy procedures (Vedomosti, 2020). In general, in Verkhnemarkovo, NK Dulisma has a reputation of being unstable, paying low salaries, and not being very committed to the region. It is not seen as a good corporate citizen, but rather as "taking the money and running."

Regarding transport infrastructure, besides the few INK activities in Verkhnemarkovo outlined above, other roads are the state's responsibility (i.e. that of the municipality, using federal funds) and are in a very bad shape. The state evidently does not feel responsible for the very high maintenance costs since federal funds are difficult to attract for the municipality. The roads are impacted by permafrost and severe Siberian climate conditions, and the heavy traffic from big trucks and lorries going through town. But this does not mean that companies (other than INK) feel any responsibility to contribute to the maintenance of the roads. People feel as if they are in limbo because neither the state bodies, nor the companies who degrade the roads have taken on responsibility for their maintenance (Saxinger et al., 2018). People remember the role of state enterprises in the Soviet period, when they took responsibility for technical, social, and cultural infrastructure. Since the oil companies and the locally operating timber companies make big profits, the people feel that they deserve their share too (see Figure 26.2). Some



Figure 26.2 Upon sealing of this oil well someone wrote into the wet concrete: “INK—give money to the town.” Photo by Gertrude Saxinger.

say, “they make billions and we get just *kopeiki*.”¹² In one way or another, people expect the companies to behave as good corporate citizens, similar to the way that state enterprises behaved in Soviet times, or even today in other resource regions in Siberia. Some residents are resigned to the situation because they feel the administration is satisfied with what they get, while others are content with the negotiation skills of the town’s mayor.

CONCLUSION

In this article we have inquired into opportunities of societal wellbeing in a small oil town and how people manage their mobility and circumstances of immobility under conditions of insufficient transport and mobility infrastructure. Infrastructural violence (Rodgers & O’Neill, 2012) due to the absence of good transport infrastructure (or promises not upheld, as in the case of the improvement of the Viliui Highway) and power disparities in decision making and in consent procedures related to new projects, along with inequity and discrimination in mobility-related opportunities, all characterize contemporary life in Verkhne-markovo. People are in a state of limbo, where it is unclear which stakeholders will take over responsibility for infrastructure of different kinds; more precisely, the question is whether the state or (and to what extent) oil companies should pay for the maintenance of the public roads that they use extensively for industrial purposes.

Although the Russian state has a strong top-down political hand in planning and implementation of large-scale infrastructure, it is incapable of ensuring the wellbeing of local small and remote rural communities, such as are found in Siberia.

It tends to leave social, cultural, and infrastructural support activities to—in this case—the oil companies. Even many years after the breakdown of the Soviet Union’s system of state enterprises, which used to maintain a fully-fledged infrastructure in industrial or agricultural settlements, people in the post-socialist era still expect care from the state and the main locally operating enterprises. However, under neo-liberal global market conditions—which steer the oil industry in Russia (Saxinger, 2016; 2017)—corporate social responsibility seems to have developed primarily in the form of voluntary benefit sharing. Even more, it is doubtful if we can truly speak of “benefit” sharing or if this is not rather handing out “beads and trinkets” (Wilson & Istomin, 2019).

Nevertheless, the impact of CSR by extractive companies should not be underestimated when it comes to its contributions to the prosperity of the community. CSR is not legally binding in Russia, and political and state actors are therefore considered as remaining responsible for infrastructure and social wellbeing in the country. People remember the Soviet past and are disappointed and disenchanted by today’s unfulfilled state promises. While the large state-owned oil and gas companies in Russia, such as Rosneft and Gazprom, can still fulfill the demands for wellbeing of local societies, private companies and subcontractors are no longer tied to the Soviet logic (Saxinger, 2016; 2017). If—and how—the state will take over responsibility again for transport and mobility infrastructure is unclear, as long the oil flows and oil companies are able and willing to donate to a community; furthermore, communities are expected to be grateful for this, despite environmental damage. It is doubtful whether the current system can be considered to be supporting socio-economic and ecological sustainability in general, or sustainable wellbeing for individuals or whole communities who, like the people of Verkhnemarkovo, depend to such a great extent on good roads and transportation networks.

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NOTES

- 1 This chapter is a condensed version of our article “Neglected Transportation Infrastructure: Corporate Social Responsibility and the State in a Small Siberian Oil Town” in *Sibirica*, 20(3), 1-45.
- 2 EBRD www.ebrd.com/news/publications/policies/environmental-and-social-policy-esp.html [April 4, 2020]. In 2012, INK won EBRD’s award for excellence in environmental and social performance <http://irkutskoil.com/about/history/> [April 4, 2020]
- 3 Henceforth called Lena Expedition.
- 4 Interview with the head of Verkhne-markovo town administration, June 2018.
- 5 Verkhne-markovo (the city) has no Indigenous ethnic population. The Indigenous people in the greater area are Evenki.
- 6 The results of an additional quantitative survey undertaken by the authors also inform this paper but are not analyzed directly in this chapter. They will be published elsewhere: Sancho Reinoso, A. et al. (in preparation).
- 7 UN Sustainable Development Goals <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org> [April 11, 2020]
- 8 See also: International Finance Corporation www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Topics_Ext_Content/IFC_External_Corporate_Site/Sustainability-At-IFC/Policies-Standards/Performance-Standards [April 11, 2020]
- 9 See also: International Organization for Standardization. ISO 26000 and the International Integrated Reporting Framework Briefing Summary. 2015. www.iso.org/iso/iso_26000_and_ir_international_integrated_reporting_en_-_lr.pdf [April 11, 2020], European Commission. Communication from the Commission Concerning Corporate Social Responsibility: A Business Contribution to Sustainable Development. July 2, 2002. https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/communication-commission-concerning-corporate-social-responsibility-business-contribution_en [April 11, 2020].
- 10 For comparison, the average pension is 10,000 rubles and the average income is 30,000 rubles/month.
- 11 <http://irkutskoil.com/about/history/> [April 11, 2020].
- 12 The small coins of the ruble.

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CHAPTER 27

HIDDEN DIMENSIONS OF CLANDESTINE FISHERY

A misfortune topology based on scenarios of failures



Lidia Rakhmanova

INTRODUCTION

An integral part of hunting and fishing is “luck”: an elusive element among the strict regulations, proven scenarios, interrelated actions, signs, and omens. Luck is a condition and, at the same time, a reason for the abundance of the caught prey or fish. Remarkable ethnographic cases (see, among others, the notion of “hunting luck” in Brandišauskas, 2017; Hamayon, 2010; Hamayon, 2012) have been analyzed to show how to attract luck and achieve success in hunting and/or fishing, revealing the intentionality of hunters’ actions and those of the community as a whole, targeted at a future time. Stakes are made by hunters to attract luck and enter into a “partnership” with it in order to achieve good results in catching prey, thus ensuring the success and survival of the community or hunter himself.

In this chapter, I attempt to turn the logic of “hunting luck” (which is directed forward, to the future) upside-down; here, I show how reverse temporality operates in an example of river fishing. The ethnographic material in which I am grounding this analysis reveals the hidden practices of a fisherman, which are aimed not at attracting luck and success in fishing but rather at preventing possible failures, breakdowns, and misfortunes. “Fishing failure” turns out to be an alternative core around which practices, actions, fears, and hopes concentrate. It is crucial to show how different the desire for success is from the pursuit of eliminating failures or surviving “despite” them.

From the perspective of economic anthropology, this approach provides a different interpretation to the time budget and patterns of investment in the informal economic practices of fishermen and hunters. Within the framework of the anthropology of the state and controlling authorities, my aim is to introduce the practices of informal nature management and non-compliant practices into a new risk horizon that affects the actions of fishermen: the threat of being caught by an inspector and the “river panopticon” forms a certain risk topology in which the fisherman’s house and his village are the most dangerous “points of return.” In this situation, other points, warehouses, shelters, and caches are created, reflecting dangerous and less dangerous areas in terms of frequency of inspection raids. However, inside these zones there is another logic that does not succumb to the logic of control: it is guided

by the “logic” of failure and the intention to eliminate the consequences of failures in the field. Thus, we find a multidimensional space with different causalities appearing in the geography of the fishery.

Here it is necessary to make a caveat and specify that the ethnographic case I rely on relates exclusively to river fishing. It means that the hidden architecture of the space includes the space of the river itself, its inflows, as well as riverbanks and the river bottom. Sea fishery or taiga hunting deal with other landscapes, and their dramaturgy follows other scenarios. These differences lead us to the necessity of a phenomenological analysis of the landscape in the ethnography of hunting and fishing. In this context, the intention for luck and the intention for failure prevention are a unique structural component—or perhaps even a unique language—that provides a new understanding of the intentional nature of the interaction between the human and the landscape.

My field research took place in villages located on the right and left banks of the middle reaches of the Ob River (in the Tomsk region). The most vivid and revealing material that prompted me to think about patterns of failures and misfortunes in fishing, especially non-compliant behavior, was collected in 2017, but during the winter and summer seasons of 2018 and 2019 I returned to seasonally isolated remote villages in order to participate in fishing again and learn more about new failures and ways of preventing risks. My research methodology included staying with a fisherman’s family for a month or two on a permanent basis, helping the fisherman’s wife with all household chores in order to finally be allowed to go night fishing with the homeowner. In addition, I interviewed many fishermen in villages whose livelihood relies solely on fishing for expensive and rare species of fish.

It is also interesting to note that participant observation of this type involved not only a fishing trip and assistance aboard a boat but also participation in the aftermath of a “fishing failure,” which is the semantic center of this chapter. The successful unraveling of the cut and damaged pieces of bottom trawline with hooks at the host’s home allowed me to gain greater trust from my informants, which I may not have achieved had the fishing expedition gone well.

FISHERMAN’S MISFORTUNE AND ANTHROPOLOGIST’S LUCK

The fisherman muttered something under his breath; he looked very dissatisfied, pulling from the riverbed a bulging bundle that was full of hooks. I only heard fragments of what he was saying: “I told you... how can... nonsense! a woman on board! There is trouble afoot... I told her!”

That day my presence and observation of night solo fishing was itself a “failure” and thus something unacceptable for the owner of the house where I was staying. Something had already gone wrong earlier in the evening when I got into his boat and he allowed me to accompany him to check the anchored (bottom) trawline (trotrline)¹ (*donnye samolovy*). As it turned out later, the whole situation that night turned out to be composed of numerous layers of failures, breakdowns, accidents, which overlapped each other at the same time and almost in one place, creating unique conditions for participant observation.

We spent the evening in suspenseful wait for complete darkness, when we could go to the field without fear. A company of fishermen from nearby villages gradually gathered near one of the fishing huts. Two of my guide’s comrades drove up and

reported that since they had stored their boat motor near the warehouse and hut, it had been stolen because it was not well hidden. This led to a lively conversation, revolving around the story of some friends' misfortunes. It turned out that over the past week there had been a series of thefts, not only of motors from boats standing near the shore but also motors hidden in little-known caches and hiding places. They first started to discuss where it was now safe to hide things, but the conversation quickly became a discussion of how jointly created caches are no longer caches.

The second "malfunction" of the evening occurred when an overwhelming number of local fishermen discovered that their collections of riverbed gear were cut into parts. Townspeople, who used other nets, other boats, and equipment—and generally fished for fun—were accused of doing this. Local fishermen, one after another, approached the hut on the shore to report that they were now missing parts of bottom trawlines and other fishing gear. My informant seemed noticeably worried while waiting for the moment when it would be possible to go to check on his "possessions." When it got dark, we went to "hut number two," which was not his property and was built by people from another settlement; however, he had the right of access to it in case of a storm and other emergencies, as well as the need to substitute oars, twines, benders, ropes, hooks, and so on.

When the check of the anchored trawlines began, we found the third bottom-rope was soaked with sand and snags at the bottom. Thus its weight had increased and this prevented the gear from lifting, after which the twine burst and, together with the grapnel (*koshka*)—a special device for catching the rope of the anchored trawline—was left at the bottom of the river. In this case, there was a spare grapnel in the boat, but it was less heavy, less comfortable to hold, and less effective. We had to continue checking the trawlines using it. The fifth bottom trawline was cut into two halves, just as the fisherman feared. Due to the strong current and the weight of fish stuck on the hooks, the ends of the 150-meter rope at the bottom twisted into two knots. It was barely possible to lift them, and one could untangle them only in the village, at home. It was necessary to cut off the ends of the rope and pack it for repair.

While checking the last hook bundle, the twine of the gear became wrapped on the screw of the motor. The fisherman was noticeably nervous, as he was used to doing everything alone and managing the space of the boat by himself. It was clear that my presence was causing additional stress. Winding the twine with the grapnel behind my back, he recklessly led the twine through the stern, not the nose. The boat rocked, her nose rose above the water, and we almost tipped over. To balance the weight of a fisherman and my weight I had to crawl on my belly to the engine screw and cut the rope that held the grapnel at the bottom. This is how the owner of the gear was left without a second "catching instrument."

Nevertheless, the checking process had to be finished for several reasons. On one hand, because of the inspection raids two days prior, nobody dared to go out on the river even at night. The fish could die and spoil. On the other hand, the anchored trawline with hooks could again be cut by urban fishermen or other outsiders. Therefore, the catch had to be taken away immediately. But with what? The fisherman thought for a long time, looked at me and took a course to the opposite shore, upstream.

We drove for a long time in darkness and stopped at the mouth of a small river. The fisherman left me in a boat, having moored, jumped onto the bank and disappeared. For twenty minutes I could hear the rustle of grass and his quiet curses. After

that he dug out of the thickets with a rusty huge grapnel in his hands. He was looking for a stash that he had not accessed for several years (AFD,² 2017, Tomsk region). This hiding place existed in case of extreme misfortune, which we had experienced that night, when one failure was imposed on another and entailed a third. The grapnel was not comfortable, or rather, the fisherman was used to working with tools that were better shaped. However, it was only a matter of time and adaptation of techniques for him to be able to use it.

And so a series of accidents and failures in the fisherman's practice turned out to be an incredible research success. How does the "anthropology" of failures and misfortunes work? Does the breakdown reveal only the peculiarities of hidden and informal/illegal practices, or is it capable of giving us an unexpected look at quite common, unpunished activities and phenomena that seemed so simple in structure that they did not demand research? I will try to address these questions in the remainder of this chapter.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: ANTHROPOLOGY OF MISFORTUNE

When we claim to be studying how certain social structures are organized and how they are formed or regulated by different practices, we try to highlight them and observe them directly. Or, less reliably, we ask our informants to tell us how everything is organized. In the course of 2017–2018 field research of non-compliant behavior, my research goals were to find out, among other things, how the fishing industry on the Ob River is organized in villages that are cut off from federal highways and regular transportation by air and waterways. What lay on the surface and were the first to be described ethnographically were the types of fishing; the fish breeds that were considered valuable and even prohibited; and the fishing equipment, such as nets, planes, wicks, muzzles, and trawls.

However, it turned out that by simply finding out how, why, and by which methods the fishing is carried out, we cannot reveal more than a third of the information. The rest of the knowledge remains hidden in both formalized interviews and intimate conversations. In part, this is due to the fact that we often do not quite correctly formulate questions for our informants. This is partially due to how our informants simply do not realize that when a researcher asks about the "front side" of the fishery, in fact, he means the back side of this business, which a fisherman would not even consider talking about. He will not talk about it precisely because it is a story of inefficiency, a story of failures, a story about what happens when the things he is used to that always work suddenly break down and stop working.

The anthropological investigation of failures and misfortunate events can be explored from several perspectives. Firstly, it can be considered as a methodological technique in field research. However, such an approach necessarily raises questions about how failures can be anticipated, and how one can know for sure the time and place when they may occur in the "field." Provoking misfortunate episodes is closer to an ethnomethodological perspective and raises several ethical questions unique to the research of informal practices and non-compliant behavior.

Secondly, the risks that sometimes turn into failures and even tragedies have their own special spatial structures which we can interpret and explore as a "hidden

architecture of risk prevention.” In order to reveal the spatial dimension of risks, one should consider the essence of spaces and scapes that are considered in the course of field research. What “space” do we actually encounter and explore while observing, practicing, and assisting our informants who are fishing? Is the structure and geometry of risk and failure spaces fully comparable to the specific physical and geographical conditions and landscapes in which fishing takes place?

Third, the anthropology of misfortune deals not with a linear temporality, but rather with the reverse. Instead of investigating the event as an incentive and response to the case, here the anthropologist deals with proactive actions and practices. These practices are carried out one way or another in the horizon of risks and failures that are located in the future time zone in relation to the insurance actions carried out in advance.

Fourth, value regimes and levels of “security” create, intersect, and overlap with hierarchies of different types: hierarchies of spaces and the practices permitted in them, hierarchies of actions, and, of course, hierarchies of different caches and hiding places. The question in this case is how precisely we can reconstruct these ranks and hierarchies, based on verbal interpretations, observed practices, and emotions of informants. Whether we can talk about meanings and hierarchies directly, and if not, how the order of action during the collapse points us to a phenomenon of greater or lesser significance. Or perhaps it is possible to consider all points and all practices in a given topology of misfortune to be equivalent?

RESEARCHER AS A SOURCE OF FAILURE: SCENARIO LAUNCHING

In earlier papers I have described how the most valuable information for an anthropologist can be related to his/her relatively vulnerable position, according to the local community members (Rakhmanova, 2019). The position of a beginner, an unskilled worker, an urban dweller, a woman in the context of a “purely masculine” occupation, has great potential and allows her to become, for a time, an “apprentice” of her informants, who is reluctant but still taught the subtleties that would not manifest verbally in a normal conversation or interview. However, it is obvious that it has limitations and a lot of ethical questions surrounding it. In particular, this position calls into question the boundary between playing the “naive urban girl” and misinforming the local resident (informant) about her intentions as a researcher.

Gender identity manifests itself quite clearly in the field and influences not only the nature of information disclosed but also the interpretation of the reasons for “luck” and “failure” in fishing and hunting: “a woman on board—trouble to come”; “there is no place for a woman in a boat.” As in the case of the field situation described above, I was a source of new tonality in the rhetoric used by male fishermen to explain their disasters and failures. However, the methodological weakness of this statement is that being in this position, I will never be able to figure out how exactly men would explain the missing tools and motors if there were no woman among them that evening, especially a woman who was an outsider.

Nevertheless, the provocativeness of the situation lies in the conjugation of the researcher’s intervention with the arrival of rich people from the city who have disrupted the inviolability of conditional boundaries of commercial water areas on the river. Thus one can record not only rhetorical passages and strategies of substantiation

and explanation of events that are used by members of the local community, but also directly observe the reaction to breakdowns and failures. These non-verbal observations reveal the flip side of the fishery and allow us to carry out an archeology of the earlier measures and find the traces of practices that anticipate the failures.

ARCHEOLOGY OF PREEMPTIVE PRACTICES: PLACES OF NON-RETURN

What exactly I was able to “excavate” after a night full of constant losses, breakdowns, failures, and disappointments? The loss of the first grapnel [*koshka*] at the bottom paved the way to the “storehouse of spare parts” in the boat itself. This fact seemed to me obvious and banal, until spare gear that was in the boat was also lost or broken. The storage place on board ended up being a part of everyday small practices and found itself in a wider system of insurance and supply system for individual fishing. Thus, if my informant usually needed only the boat itself and the tools and gear inside it, then in the evening when the participant observation was conducted, he also had to go to the other side of the river to take a rope and hooks in a storehouse, which had been preserved since last season in a common area shared by several fellow fishermen from two villages on the neighboring riverbanks. The warehouse was intact, and next to it there was a temporary summer shed serving as a fishing club, where they gather before the night fishing and discuss the latest news (AFD 2017 Tomsk region). However, even the additional gear did not allow to immediately repair the trawline system: tangled and cut into two parts, their use was postponed for repairs in the “final point of arrival,” the village house.

All other problems that arose in the course of the fishing required a solution on the spot, without going to the settlements or seeking for help. Therefore, the third grapnel, the last one, which was available in the fisherman’s inventory, had to be taken out of the stash near the river mouth, which was closer to the usual place of fishing than the village. This grapnel had been lying there for several years, according to the fisherman, and was never required before this case (AFD, 2017, Tomsk region). If we had missed or broken this instrument, we would have to turn to the non-individual stocks in a warehouse near the shed that the fisherman was allowed to access. Thus, he would have had to give himself away by putting us in the “spotlight” near a fairly visited place which the inspector could have known about. It was fairly risky, but less dangerous than returning to the village for inventory.

The choice made by a fisherman in an emergency situation shows the existing hierarchy of “places” in terms of their *safety*, *proximity* to the fishing sites or home, as well as the *degree of publicity* (or, conversely, maximum *secrecy*). A boat is an obvious place to store tools and parts, and therefore an ideal object for theft, and yet as an individually used tool, it retains some degree of physical control of the owner. A stash in the grass near the mouth of the river in the system described above is an individually created, most secret, well-hidden, and safe “place.” The warehouse, where it is possible to find some necessary equipment and then, at the first opportunity, to return its analogue in respect of duty, is a public and popular place where you can meet both a friend as well as the ambush of the controlling bodies. However, turning to the warehouse as a way to cover the traces is preferable to returning directly home when it comes to protecting family members from suspicion.

HIDDEN EDGES OF CLANDESTINE FISHERIES

Why is the anthropological study of failures aimed precisely at non-compliant practices and informal individual fishing activities? Before the observation at the inspection raid and at the night checking of anchored trawlines, I assumed that the fishery itself was based on a number of technological elements; however, it turned out that most of the investment in the fishery is related to the replenishment, maintenance and support of the hidden elements of sterlet fishing, rather than the basic processes of fishing itself (techniques and technology of fishing, skills). I reflected on the “hidden” only in the context of legal and illegal fishing. However, it turned out that control over the extraction of valuable fish species is only one sort of danger in this system among numerous risks and threats that have a source in the landscape structure, relationships within the community and beyond.

In case of any clashes, disputes, or conflicts between fishermen, for example, due to the theft of a boat motor, the fish itself, and parts of bottom trawlines, the participants can not appeal to the police, regional investigation committee or “folk” court in the settlement. Giving publicity to such a conflict would lead to disclosure and attract the attention of local authorities and controlling bodies (river traffic police and fishery inspection) to illegal fishing. Since vigilante justice and threats are not a tolerated means of resolving conflicts with competitors—and addressing the police/inspection does not work and causes more trouble than good (AFD, 2016, Tomsk region)—fishermen are forced to minimize clashes themselves. They must prevent competitors and thieves from committing a violation, or, if a crime is committed, find an alternative and replace the stolen/broken tool or instrument.

Here it will be appropriate to point out the difference between a storage hut/warehouse and a stash/hiding place: the first type of “place” or “point” in the structure that provides the fishery is the place where you should go in case of failure, where you can and must return, and you can rely on it: it is for “return” that they were created and maintained. A stash is a place where you do not have to go, or it is not desirable to return to. It is very likely that the cache can be discredited after the first “return” to it, not counting the moment that the stash is originally “filled with content.”

In this regard, the phenomenon described by Vladimir Davydov (2017) as a “place of constant return,” which mainly concerns terrestrial landscapes, may be redefined. In my case, when dealing with the community and investigating the practices of mutual assistance and support, I also cannot help but pay close attention to the importance of individual fishing; the secrecy of all key practices under the influence of the legislative framework; and finally, the direct control of executive bodies over the activities of fishermen on the Ob River. Where isolation plays both a negative and liberating role, and where the inspector’s boat can still reach the same places as the fishermen themselves, the stake is not on the public availability of the warehouses as rescue strongholds, but on the hidden invisible network, which I partly was able to discover and “excavate” owing to my participation in night fishing.

SCATTERING AND COLLECTING: THE REVERSE TEMPORALITY

Hidden structures consist of the networked places where you have to return, or where you can return only once; later, having discredited this place as a hiding place,

you must create a new one. This complicated scattering and then collecting tools and resources to solve a problem or overcome difficulties reveals to us the sophisticated temporality of fishing: these practices are not immersed in linear or cyclic time. So how do they work? In the scheme (Figure 1) I show that the fisherman's thinking is immersed in the future, while the task of his physical practices and actions is to work with the "past of his future." Even before fishing, the hiding places must be defined and equipped with the most precious details and inventory (in advance cache creation). As new information about raids, competitors' practices and rumors become available, the contents of the cache can be "re-hidden" and the place created for risk prevention will shift in the physical space ("transfer/creation of a new cache"). An even more lightning-fast reaction, just before entering the field, might be necessitated if the fisherman witnesses the failure or misfortune of his closest friend/neighbor. In this case, the spatial pattern of the caches must also be shifted or completely changed (transformations as a result of "neighbor's failure"). In the center of the scheme you can see the very process of fishing, which can last unhindered according to the scenario until the first failure, after which the owner of the caches will use their contents or turn to a common public warehouse. Using a cache and the things stored there requires replenishing resources while waiting and anticipating a new failure.

However, a new risk exists for each solution and anticipatory practice. On one hand, there is the possibility of failure itself: breakage, loss, complex fishing equipment that requires additional equipment. On the other hand, there is another risk: the possibility of stealing tools from the caches (which does not affect those who do not have caches at all). Finally, even if the cache is intact, you could be noticed by the inspector on your way there, since when on the shore for a few minutes in search of a cache you become vulnerable to observers. Scenarios of risk in this case are similar to the structure of a nesting doll, where the counter-actions against one threat automatically creates the ground for the second and third.

Other key questions arise from this framework. Do all these practices generally tend to have a strong intentionality? In what way does this intentionality differ from the type of intentionality embedded in the practices of hunters preparing for hunting? As a rule, the focus of practices, ritual actions, prayers, spells, bodily practices

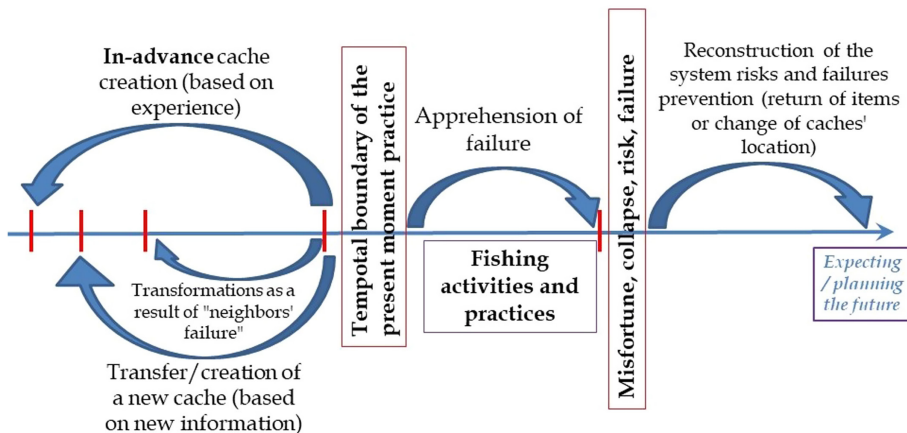


Figure 27.1

is aimed, on the one hand, at protecting the body and spirit of the hunter, i.e., at “strengthening” it, and at establishing a dialogue with the prey, which should be pliable enough, or submissive and indifferent enough to be easier to hunt. The focus here is on the body of man and animal/fish.

In the case of scattering and gathering of objects, the creation of caches and stashes, what is to be strengthened, protected, and stabilized is the very process of fishing in its duration. The “joints” and other organs may fall out of the “body of fishery”: a grapnel, which helps to find gear at the bottom, hook and lift the bundle of self-tapping hooks, a rope that tears, a boat that threatens to tip over.

And here I want to return to the episode described above, in which the twine of the grapnel caught the screw of the boat motor. Thinking about how, by habit, to save the situation by himself, to release the boat, stuck and chained to the bottom as at anchor, on a grapnel, the fisherman told me: “Well, now we will jump in and cut the rope in the water!” (AFD, 2017, Tomsk region). While not thinking about his body, health, risks of drowning, or getting hurt from the myriad of double-edged hooks assembled near the boat, the fisherman thought about the continuity of the process of catching and replenishment of “misbehaving parts” or lost tools. Instead of jumping into the water, I suggested using the difference in weight of our bodies to balance the boat, which allowed me to approach the sunken stern and cut the twine. In this way we solved the problem without personal injuries. However, if the events had required urgent medical assistance—or bandages, patches, or tourniquets to stop the blood—they would not have been found in the boat, unlike the spare grapnels.

This case shows how the value of an uninterrupted fishing process comes to the foreground, while the embodied knowledge, the agency of the fisherman himself, his physical ability, remains in the background, becoming as if an optional condition. Thus, fishing associated with the extraction of valuable fish species is not connected to the master’s luck; it is rather the exact solutions found in response to all the challenges and misfortunes one might face, and of course, the continuity of the process itself, which is central to the system.

PHENOMENOLOGY OF ACTION: THE-MOTIVE- BECAUSE IN CLANDESTINE FISHERIES

The above differences point to various types of intentionality (in terms of the temporal regimes that are characteristic to different types of fishing and hunting) and, on the other hand, to different types of rational action, which Alfred Schütz defined as “motive-for-it-to-happen” and “motive-because” (Schütz, 2004, pp. 23–25). “Motive-for” is directed exclusively towards the future and its cherished purpose is (in one of the variations) the hunting luck. “Motive-because” is the source of those practices and the embodied knowledge that allows one to create secret networks of stashes, keep them secret from his wife and close friends and strive not to return to places where the most valuable tools and things are located.

However, the fisherman certainly acts according to a mixed logic: if we zoom in and look at his fishing in general, you will see that all these precautions, stocks, and safety measures were created in order to ensure the catch of fish, to feed his family, to sell and get money for the fish, and so on. The question remains: is there any “luck” in the perspective of fishermen as such, do they expect luck, do they hope for it? After

all, a successfully completed act of fishing, resulting in the abundance of fish for the one who has reinsured himself in advance from failures, is only a consequence of his activity, not luck, which was influenced from the outside. As Schütz wittily remarks, pointing to the obvious limitations in the methods of interpretation and research of practices that are at our disposal, “only the actor himself knows ‘where his action begins and where it ends’, i.e., what it must be done for. The temporal length of his projects links his actions together” (Schütz, 2004, p. 25).

The difference between motives for the fisherman and the researcher who is involved in fishing and conducts research is particularly sharp in the case under analysis. This observation leads us to the need for a critical review of what the landscape and topology of the caches represent and imply in our study. The difference of landscape and land is concentrated in the idea, as Tim Ingold puts it, “land is not something you can see” (Ingold, 1993, p. 153), while landscape, the very notion of *scape*, presupposes a “view” and a certain “observer position.” The language repertoire defines the interpretation of the word “*scape*” that suggests the distance of an observer and arising of a third subject or agent between the land and the human, through which land becomes a landscape. However, a different genealogy of the “*scape*” prefix, which Ingold suggests considering in his work on rethinking task-*scape*, discredits this distance and offers a completely different approach: “Thus it is not land looked at but land shaped” (Ingold, 2017, p. 24).

Thus, the landscape in which the clandestine fisheries unfold is “shaped” by one passion and one fear: the passion for hard-won fish and the fear of breaking the script, the fear of failure and misfortune. Setting traps at the bottom of the river and stashes on the shore, the fisherman has two different objectives, two different tasks: the first are created to “work” on catching in the future time (relative to the time of setting up the traps) and presuppose fisherman constant return. The second, on the contrary, are created to avoid scenarios of failure “to be triggered.” Their value is to support “never-happening” events. It is a task-*scape* of never-completed tasks (see Ingold on the “unending task-*scape*,” 1993, p. 162).

CONCLUSION: STASHES OF CLANDESTINE FISHERMEN: INVISIBLE IN SPACE, MANIFESTED IN TIME

If we look at fishing stash not in the light of “risk prevention” but in terms of perceptual world and effector world (see Uexküll, cited by Ingold, 2000, p. 177), we will see that once created, a stash has the intention not to become an “object of the perceptual world” for anyone, and it is in this forgetfulness, abandonment, or exclusion from the horizon of perceptual world that his only purpose and effectiveness lies. In the perspective of this “dysfunctionality,” abandonment and invisibility, Ingold’s thesis about opposing “*scape*” as a vision and seeing “*scape*” as an act shaping the world becomes gradually clear. The mysterious landscape of fishermen is formed not by the gaze but by the deed; it works precisely because it is invisible and breaks when it gets into the “field of view.”

Revealing the system of caches, we are dealing with a type of “*scape*,” which is not visible, nested in the visible landscape. The stash is invisible in two senses of the word. Firstly, it is impossible to detect it by those who are not privy to the mystery, even if just by accident. Secondly, it is an invisible object because it is not located in the

present. At the exact moment when a fisherman throws a grapnel into the water to get the bottom trawline with a good catch, he acts in the landscape of the present, where the secret topology of stashes is absent. Stash is in the past, being associated with the prudent action of its creator and at the same time, the stash is an element of potential (future) landscape, or rather—a potential “functional tone of landscape” (Ingold, 2000, p. 175), which is designed by the fisherman, having in mind its “future use.”

What happens at this moment with the time of fishing itself? If turning to the hiding place is a kind of work with the past, the interrupting of the fishing scenario, directed towards abundance and continuous extraction of resources, can we say that this pause is like the sleeping harvester in a painting by Bruegel (Ingold, 2017, p. 24)? Does Tim Ingold speak about those very frictions in clandestine fisheries, when describing the temporal structure of the landscape? Let us reflect on the phrase below: “for things to pour forth into their surroundings, they must also periodically withdraw into themselves” (Ingold, 2017, p. 24). From a diachronic perspective, as we have described above, if we consider the process or flow that involves fishing practices, the trap at the bottom is located in a completely different chronotope than the stash on shore. However, if we consider stashes in a synchronous phenomenological perspective, trying to map an intention to luckily catch and readiness to misfortune in one landscape, we would discover that the fishermen’s stash is a flip side of those hooks that bring a good catch. Literally, the things that lead to luck and that preclude failures are the two sides of the same coin that has withdrawn into itself and poured into the surrounding landscape.

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NOTES

- 1 A special type of clandestine fishing gear, used to catch sturgeon and sterlet: a line of hooks (or series of interconnected lines), both ends of which are anchored to the riverbed.
- 2 Author’s Field Diary (AFD): Tomsk region, middle flow of the Ob River, 2016, 2017.

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CHAPTER 28

INFRASTRUCTURAL BROKERS IN A LOGISTICAL CUL-DE-SAC

Taimyr's *wild* winter road drivers



Valeria Vasilyeva

INTRODUCTION

The trail looked impassable from the very first meters. [...] During the first day we actually did almost nothing but looking for the right tactics. [...] One might ask, what about the chains? No chains, actually. Strange as it may seem, you're about hip-deep in snow. If you use chains, the cars will sink, not move forward, unable to push such a load of snow. In the tundra, the snow is nothing like we are used to see in central Russia. It's solid-sounding, and sometimes you can walk on it like on concrete; but if a jeep sinks, we've got a big problem. This is why vehicles ride atop the snow in the tundra. [...] So, here are basically the rules: taut motion, careful use of gas, tire pressure around 0.3, and there we go. I'd better not trouble you with the details about roadlessness in the North. What I mean to say is it is really no trifle. In the first day, we only traveled 20 km, while the entire distance of 500 km to [the destination]¹ took us 5 days of traveling 12 hours every day. Our shovels were our best friends for many of these days.

(Nublan, 2011)

This is a passage from a blog post of experienced off-road drivers who used to travel from Moscow to various hard-to-reach places, including the winter roads of Northern Russia.² In most cases, official winter roads are more easily traversed as different institutions care for them. Municipalities depend on these roads for accessibility to a settlement or extracting industry that needs such roads for product delivery. However, this time off-road drivers traveled along a specific, particular road that is not a part of the known winter road network and has no institution (either governmental or private) to maintain it. According to their blog, there was almost no information about this road beforehand. They did manage to collect scarce information through personal communication with people from nearby settlements. However, the reality turned out differently than expected.

This fragment gives an idea of the problems faced by this specific expedition, unprepared for those conditions, and it also sheds some light on the material aspect of how the winter roads function without being supported by any institutions. I will

hereafter refer to them as *wild* winter roads (Vasilyeva, 2019). The wild winter road infrastructure contemplated herein is actually built up by self-employed drivers who use their heavy-duty trucks to bring commodity goods to far-away settlements and to export fishing and hunting products, in all cases off the grid. Wild winter roads are rather a commonly-known approximate route than a physical trace. Ruts formed by trucks in virgin snow are completely covered up during poor weather. A new trace can have been laid at a distance. One informant stated: “you don’t like it here, so move 30, 40, or 50 meters apart and move on.”

The author quoted above offers some specific tricks helping his team overcome the skidding and keep moving. Even when a driver has significant experience in navigating other rough terrains, it does little to serve him or her here. As I am going to demonstrate below, being able to move under these conditions requires specific skills that originate from knowledge and experience in these specific territories and also certain social connections. In particular, the chains mentioned in the quote above are a well-known tool against sliding on frozen surfaces, but they prove useless in this case, just as any knowledge about the physico-mechanical properties of snow and ice from other regions. It took these particular travelers a great deal of time trying to adapt to such conditions. Their success was partly due to the truck with fuel that they hired in the nearby village to accompany their cars, driven by someone with experience in wild winter roads and ready to share his knowledge.

Although the jeeps column followed the recent trail of the truck that came the same way, the author says that there was absolutely no road. This Russian term *bezdorozh’e*, literally roadlessness, should not be understood as the actual absence of road but rather as lack of normal from the speaker’s point of view communication between two points. This term is mainly used by persons that are extraneous to these lands, who perceive the tundra as hostile space (Konstantinov, 2009). Basically, roadlessness means that there is no institutional infrastructure support (either private or governmental) that the person is used to, but it does not imply that there is no actual connection between one point and the other.

One of the most important points in infrastructure studies is that infrastructures are socio-technical systems in nature (Edwards, 2003). While the material aspect of infrastructure functioning is significant for many (Campbell, 2012; Kernaghan, 2012), the social relationships are the main aspect of others (Simone, 2004; Carse, 2012). The wild winter roads in Taimyr, like the one being described above and many others similar to it, are regularly used to transport people and commodities, regardless of the physical appearance of the road. It has no institutional support and consists of the stable practices of a relatively small group of people skilled enough to drive in these conditions.

This example of non-institutional infrastructure is not one-off. Amy Penfield (2019) describes a very similar case from the Amazonian region in Perú and Venezuela, an area known for illegal gold mining.³ The “fluid” infrastructure Penfield describes is required to move equipment and transport ready products. This infrastructure is, for obvious reasons, strictly dependent on the absence of external control. The perception of the Amazonian forests as wild and remote, ensuring the necessary privacy, is of great importance. For this purpose, “the remoteness *is* the infrastructure” (Penfield, 2019, p. 232, original emphasis). At the same time, this does not mean that there is no close connection to the global markets. Political ups and downs markedly affect

the situation in this shadow economy, and people working there (or wanting to work there) come from all over the world. The author demonstrates that even in the absence of stable physical constructs, the system of paths and passageways used by the miners is actually an infrastructure, since the connections between objects, maintained mainly through social connections, are of utmost importance.

This chapter focuses on structural features of the driver's figure who has all the skills, social connections, and equipment necessary to maintain infrastructure of wild winter roads. I describe a small professional community who can be considered "infrastructural brokers," as a paraphrase of the classic anthropological term "cultural brokers" (Wolf, 1956; Geertz, 1960). Cultural brokers are usually understood as agents that, due to certain reasons, are in an intermediate position between local communities and governmental authorities, and benefit from acting as mediators. On the one hand, they convey ideologies locally. On the other hand, they help metropolitan intelligentsia efficiently manage local communities making use of their integration in such communities or having leadership positions there. The importance of brokers often applies to postcolonial countries where the intellectual elite with Western education is not quite familiar with the realities of rural communities. A specific person often takes on the role of a broker if they have some very specific skills (seldom taught formally) which are important for both groups and they actively strive to occupy the niche (Eversole, 2018).

Just like cultural brokers, wild winter road drivers have a set of unique competencies. On the one hand, they are well established in the "urban" communities of Taimyr, have access to heavy-weight vehicles and maintenance, and have the opportunity to purchase relatively cheap products in the regional center. On the other hand, they can do this business because they have skills to drive with no roads and have social connections in the villages. Wild winter road drivers' business functions similarly to that of other businessmen in the North. In particular, they have to cover significant distances in order to run their businesses and often conduct barter exchange (Ventsel, 2011). However, the principal peculiarity of infrastructural brokers is a specific configuration of skills, essential for cargo transportation over these intermittent routes and that only applies to this type of transportation. Just like in the case described by Penfield, the constrained function of this infrastructure does not mean it is not integrated into the global economy. On the contrary, it is actually a logistical creep hole that only makes sense given the existing transportation capacities and regional pricing configurations. By complementing official infrastructure, wild winter roads create special opportunities for the transport of people and goods, but can only be used by a limited group of people. Based on interviews and participant observations conducted between 2013 and 2017, I review the role of wild winter roads in the current infrastructural situation in Taimyr, discuss the historical background of the drivers' specific skills, and identify the functioning of the social component of this fluid infrastructure.⁴

WILD WINTER ROADS IN THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE TAIMYR PENINSULA

The Taimyr Peninsula is found in the north of Central Siberia, being the northernmost region of continental Russia. Its entire territory lies north of the Arctic Circle, in

the permafrost area. The only large city in Taimyr is Noril'sk, built in the places where the development of a large rare-earth metal deposit was initiated in the 1920s. Dudinka, the center of a municipal district, is far smaller, however more attractive for the people from small villages of Taimyr than Noril'sk. The surrounding villages are mostly inhabited by Indigenous people (Dolgans, Nenets, Nganasans, Evenks, Enets). The non-Indigenous population is only numerous in the two cities and in the towns of Dikson, Khatanga, and Karaul.

As in most Arctic regions of Russia, Taimyr has almost no all-year roads. The only asphalted road is a small section between Noril'sk and Dudinka. An airport, the main means of communication with the rest of the country, is located midway between the cities. In summer, daily flights to the "mainland" are supplemented by motor vessel communications over the Yenisei River. Within the peninsula, passenger service is performed by planes and helicopters. "Official" winter roads maintained by industries and municipalities are really scarce in Taimyr, as opposed to many other northern regions of Russia. Heavy-weight cargo is mostly delivered by water in summer and small cargo deliveries are made in case of need by air during the rest of the year.

Logistical expenses are fairly high in the northern regions, so the government subsidizes the cost of supplies of vital goods (e.g., coal, petrochemicals, and food). However, a significant portion of trade is private. For private entrepreneurs in small villages, air delivery of goods results in much higher final prices, so delivery of products by land during winter turns out to be in demand. And given the absence of regularly maintained seasonal roads in Taimyr, the only real alternative for private trade to delivery by air is shipping on *Ural* and *Kamaz* trucks over wild winter roads. Drivers typically live in Noril'sk or Dudinka, where they buy products for entrepreneurs in the villages at relatively low prices, traveling up to one thousand kilometers to far-away villages.

Another important feature of the wild winter roads of Taimyr is limited access to governmental control. Given the popularity of informal natural resource use in the villages—above all, wild reindeer hunting and fishing—wild winter roads are an ideal way to export surplus goods. On the one hand, this is a way to elude regulation of meat and fish, and on the other one, products are exported without a high transportation margin. Therefore, a driver's benefit is a margin on "city" goods sold in the village and hunting and fishery products from the village transported to the city. Configuration of "employers" is always different. One informant states: "We find the jobs by ourselves and we do them by ourselves," drivers say. In some cases, both orders can have been received beforehand (and be intended for the same entrepreneur). Elsewise, drivers find a second order right on the spot. Institutionally, most drivers only perform the transportation, agreeing occasionally about each particular ride or (less often) selling products themselves. However, some drivers are known to have started their own businesses, opening a shop in the village where they purchase the products from hunting and fishing from locals, thereby ensuring a stable supply of traffic for themselves. In addition, working on a wild winter road can leave some space for industrial transportation through official, better equipped winter roads.

Wild winter roads are an example of non-institutional infrastructure, created through grassroots actions of a small group of people with the necessary skills. By

non-institutional infrastructure, I mean both the absence of a maintenance agent and the lack of supporting infrastructures. One of the authorities states: “If they go there and get into any trouble, no one will be there to save them.” This infrastructure only exists because its initial point is connected to the official infrastructure, exactly where the “alternative branch” of the non-institutional infrastructure does make sense by cutting down logistical expenses and exploiting the lack of infrastructure control. Unlike in Penfield’s case, wild winter roads are not the only way to get to the destination, but they do have a specific quality of brokerage. They reduce the logistical expenses compared to the official infrastructure of air transportation. They also satisfy the needs of the communities at its endpoint for the export of hunting and fishery goods. However, for an infrastructure like this to appear, agents with specific skills are required, particularly the ability to maintain equipment in a stable and problem-free manner. This contrasts with the off-roaders mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, who were unable to drive there successfully because the ride was nothing but a one-off discovery voyage for them.

FORMER GEOLOGISTS AS INFRASTRUCTURAL BROKERS

Commercial transportation over wild winter roads started in Taimyr during the 1990s, as a very typical Russian business for those times, which, according to Caroline Humphrey, was initially based on the differences in local conditions (Humphrey, 2002). Particularly, in this case, there was a deficit of foods in one place and fresh meat in the other. However, there were already people at the moment who had the necessary skills and social contacts and were unemployed.⁵ My informants had come to work as wild winter road drivers in a variety of ways, but most of them shared a background, sometimes extensive, in the field of geological research. I believe that the unique skills they gained during this work helped them create the wild winter road transportation business.

For example, Viacheslav was born in the Volga region near 1958 and came to the North to work at the construction of the Nadezhda factory (a division of Noril’sk Nickel). After the first stage was launched in 1979, he was sent to another venue, the construction of Kureika hydro power station. All the cargo was delivered there from Noril’sk over a winter road. It was there where Viacheslav got his first experience in winter road transportation. He decided to proceed in this field and found a job at Noril’sk Geological Survey Expedition that had a road department specializing in making and maintaining winter roads. This is how he describes the workflow:

You have a map and you trace a route over it. Following a landmark, you lay the road. Eluding all the objects, like, say, rivers, that are impassable. We started working on the winter road, say, in late September, or in October. We brought an off-track vehicle, a truck tractor, a sleigh to lay the road and to put the range pods. [...] And then, we went making some branches [from the main winter road] as necessary.

At the early stages of geological research, a winter road has to be made to bring heavy-weight equipment. Viacheslav commented, “Who is ever going to maintain this road? Say, if it’s one-off, they make one ride or two, and that’s it. An off-track passes,

sets up the direction, then the trucks follow it, and that's it, done." If a deposit does not prove to be prospective, the winter road is never renewed. "Outfitting" the road (i.e., scraping, cleaning, and placing landmarks) is only performed in anticipation of continued, heavy traffic in the area. Working in geological road services involved constant work on laying new roads in virgin snow, which would often turn out to be insufficiently equipped. It is telling that the rated winter road driving speed at Noril'sk Expedition was 8.5 km per hour—the basic value for calculating time and fuel expenses. In other words, the quality of the winter roads was never intended for high-speed driving.⁶

Efficient driving skills necessary for a driver on a geological winter road include many practices. Firstly, one needs to adjust the action plan depending on the weather, time of day and specific properties of the snow: "The snow in the south [of the peninsula] is different and the snow in the west is different, too." Secondly, control the gauge of the truck and adjust the technical settings, like the tire pressure: "Take the drivers who come from the 'mainland.' Driving on a wild winter road is something completely different. You should know how to use the inflation technique correctly. No inflating chock-full that makes the whole tundra explode"). Thirdly, it requires taking collective action to improve the winter road's condition:

A driver rides over a ready road, right? But when on a winter road, he contributes to building it. He drives, and he also builds the road. Say, a truck has passed, and a rut has appeared. Now you should make this rut five centimeters wider. Roll it wider

Fourthly, knowing which terrain is good/dangerous for the driving, for instance, avoiding river banks and peaty lakes due to the risk of ice build-up and acquaintance with specific places: "In some places, I know beforehand that, say, this hollow on this plain [rus. *laida*] gets snow-covered [...] and is hard to crush [with the wheels]." Fifthly, use of technical facilities such as upgrading the truck, using welding goggles. Finally, one makes sensory observations (trying the snow with a foot, listening to the motor). Besides, the drivers have to have the skills necessary to find their way in the tundra. A poorly maintained wild winter road is hardly visible during bad weather. Also, drivers sometimes go off-route to hunt or fish, so they use wayfinding techniques characteristic for off-road driving (by cardinal points, stars and other celestial bodies; remembering special landscape features; following the natural lines, river beds above all).

To this effect, their practices were significantly different from those used by drivers in regular roads or serviced winter roads, only related to driving over a preset route (compared to modern statements: "They can't do this the way we do it here, treading the snow. They just can't. All they do is pedal to the metal, eyes goggled, and go, go, go. While we have to mind the clutch and the pressure"). It's also interesting that today's wild winter road drivers often call themselves *tundroviki*, i.e., tundra workers, a term generally used to refer to reindeer herders, hunters and fishers (e.g., Anderson, 1998). The rhetoric of identity of wild winter road drivers looks rather like that of geologists than of drivers or long-distance truckers: they often emphasize the heroic nature of their work ("This is not for everyone") and their emotional bond to the landscape, but not to the road ("I see the snow and am like 'can't wait to go

to the tundra,” “those who stayed in the tundra, they loved it and still love it, they have no need for the cities.”)

In their winter road-laying activities, the geologists have been using the locals’ knowledge ever since the times of Noril’sk plant building, when the main means of transport were reindeer carting, unsuitable for carrying heavy cargo, and the first attempts were made to use mechanic transport for this purpose (Urvantsev, 1935, 1937). The geologists also used the competencies of local hunters and fishers much later on. This is how Viacheslav describes the case of such co-working that is very well known between former geologists (maybe because the route is still in use), occurred in early 1980s:

The Sovkhoz asked for the geologists for, like, help, in bringing diesel fuel, some other cargo, foods as well. I don’t know what exactly, but they just said they needed assistance in bringing some kind of stuff. The rivers must have been low and no navigation possible. So, they used trucks. Another reason was, I guess, the need to blaze some trails to export some products. They used to have reindeers, and stuff, and fishing industry, you know. No waiting for the summer. After we blazed the road, they started driving, the industrial unit started sending their trucks. Our guys started trucking like, six trucks and an ATC [all-terrain carriers]. And then, as they reached, I guess, maybe [name of the river], they were received by local guys on snowmobiles. So, they used to meet them on their snowmobiles, and the locals showed them the best ways. [...] The right directions. Like, you go here now, you go there now. Say, they can climb a mountain on their snowmobiles, while a truck has a hard time on a mountain. The ATV goes ahead and looks for the best paths.

So, we see that during late Soviet times, the geologists were considered by the village authorities a group that was very skilled in overland driving in the absence of roads. Although the locals were well familiar with the landscape, they could not lay the way for trucks since the strategy of driving over virgin snow can be very different depending on the vehicle (see a similar example at the beginning of the chapter, except that the off-roaders also were not acquainted with the landscape). This being said, the cooperation between the locals and the geologists was a win-win.

Thus, post-*perestroika* times allowed for a community of people skilled at driving in overland tundra and acting as infrastructural brokers to develop. Many drivers like Viacheslav did not stop using their skills after losing their jobs in geology. To the contrary, they spent the entire winter driving Ural trucks, but as private entrepreneurs. By the time I got familiar with the community, some former geologists had stopped working altogether or were finishing their careers. However, it is interesting that almost all the drivers who had come afterward were their disciples. Before starting to drive, these new drivers had ridden many miles as passengers together with an experienced driver, riding short distances under their control, and learning to use landmarks. Today, drivers use GPS navigators, so wayfinding has become easier and lowering the probability of getting lost in the tundra. However, it is still very useful to know how to “read” the apparently monotonous landscape and choose the optimum route in terms of passability. These skills, as well as the ability to adjust the truck, are still conveyed informally.

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF WILD WINTER ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Wild winter road infrastructure does not significantly manifest physically. It has to be coordinated between numerous agents through social connections. The exchanges performed by drivers on wild winter roads involve a number of persons: the owners of shops who order products from district centers; the sellers of hunting and fishing products; the people from villages and tundra huts located along the way; people from the destination village; representatives of local authorities; and hunting wardens. As described elsewhere in the examples of Yamal businessmen who deal with velvet antlers (Stammler, 2012) and the traders of foods and equipment from Northern Yakutia (Ventsel, 2011), social networking is the key resource for informal traders working within small communities. Businessmen must be well established in the corresponding communities in order for such trading and barter networks to function properly.

Social connections to the locals along the road give drivers a number of opportunities. They can stay overnight in hunters' huts or in the villages, or get assistance with truck maintenance. Welding is of particular importance since it cannot be performed without access to electricity, the necessary equipment and premises, as well as without a skilled specialist. In turn, people from the villages can send packages with the driver or order products "from the city," from teakettles to snowmobiles, and in some cases even get some rides to other villages:

I have my hunting cabin [rus. *balok*] on the winter road, so all the drivers know me well. They can give me a lift, or help with stuff. And I give them some fish, or deer meat, or put them up in my *balok*.

Winter road drivers and their customers have long-term stable social connections, but usually with no written contracts, only verbal agreements. For instance, the owner of a village shop almost always orders delivery by winter road with a simple phone call ("I can give him a call today, like, I've got something for you, Yura ... please bring some stuff from here to there.") This is unlike when she orders goods by sea or by plane. Situations of product damage are handled on a case-to-case basis, although the drivers still bear the greatest part of the expenses. This also applies to businessmen who order products from hunting and fishing, since the transportation of such products often occurs with many violations. Both the customer and the driver can be made responsible for these violations, if revealed. Because of that, such transportation is often based on solid and recurring social connections, including controlling officers.

For example, hunting wardens, police inspectors, and traffic police representatives rarely conduct field inspections intending to control transportation over a wild winter road. These inspections are usually performed close to towns because the inspectors generally do not have reliable transport and are not skilled enough to drive through the tundra. Drivers with strong social connections usually get to know about upcoming audits in advance and sit out in the tundra waiting for the inspection to be over or for a possible violation to be ruled out. For example, a driver may wait for alcoholic intoxication to pass. In case a driver is poorly established in the network consisting of customers, locals, other drivers, and inspecting officers, or his connections have been impaired, he cannot act as a reliable infrastructural broker.

An impressive example is the behavior of a district police officer that I observed in one of those villages. As a government agent, he had to cooperate with the hunting control authorities from Noril'sk, but as a local man, he also had connections in the local community and networked with many drivers. He also had no problem using their services, up to sending dirty washing to his wife in Dudinka every week. So, when the chief hunting inspector asked him to "find a case," that is, inform him about drivers carrying illegal hunting and fishing products, the policeman chose the driver with whom he had no social connections. "Two trucks were completely unknown. Other two were driven by guys I knew. So, I went to the ones I knew: 'Got licenses?'—'Sure thing'. So, I reported the two other trucks I didn't know." This also applies to relationships between drivers. When drivers snatched an order from other drivers that had a prior verbal agreement about an order, there were negative consequences for those who snatched the order. The disenfranchised drivers reached out for *their* policeman, and he informed the hunting inspector in Noril'sk that certain drivers had infringed informal norms.

This all said, it turns out that customers in the destination villages, people from these villages and authorities were all involved in the social network formed in relation to wild winter road transportation, although in various manners. The difference lies in the nature of the resources being exchanged and the character of the relationships. However, those relations are equally important for infrastructure to function properly: getting orders and help with complex maintenance tasks, eluding control officers and others.

CONCLUSION

The case of infrastructural brokerage in Taimyr is by far not unique in Northern Russia. There are similar communities in many other regions, for instance, ATC-transportation in Northern Komi and snowmobile transportation in Arkhangel'sk region.⁷ The differences between these cases and Taimyr consist in the kind of vehicle used—resulting in different cargo volume and driving strategies—and the origin of the off-road driving skills. However, there are similarities among infrastructural brokers in all the cases. First, brokers have unique positions, being embedded in several communities that are all equally important for successful business. Second, the brokers work complements infrastructural opportunities already available in the region. They provide a logistical alternative and create a new opportunity space.

The spread of such practices is often claimed to have taken place during the post-*perestroika* era, but the groups of people with the necessary skills actually formed somewhat earlier. Taking Taimyr, the infrastructural brokers are generally former geologists (Viacheslav's case is very common) who knew well how to drive and find their way in the tundra thanks to their professional background. They were urban people and well familiar with the opportunities to buy and sell products. The economic situation of the 1990s definitely prompted the formation of this practice. It was then when many geologists lost their jobs, were in search for additional income, and had their own vehicles (or had the opportunity to buy one). The uniqueness of the wild winter road drivers' skills consists in knowing the techniques of driving and maintaining the trucks, wayfinding competencies, and having the social connections necessary to get orders and ensure efficient driving.

Wild winter road drivers have different brokerage functions in relation to various groups of agents. First, they ensure the availability of affordable products in villages during winter. This can go unnoticed for ordinary people unfamiliar with pricing mechanisms provided that the system works smoothly. Importantly, the failure of this function would definitely affect the quality of life in the village. Second, wild winter road transportation allows for the sales of hunting and fishing products, being a means for transporting significant amounts of meat and fish cost-efficiently while eluding official systems of control almost completely. Lastly, social connections between the people from the villages along the way and the drivers give the latter an opportunity to promptly perform maintenance, stay overnight, and get local products as treats. At the same time, locals get access to “town” products. Drivers either facilitate the transportation of these goods, give them as presents, or distribute them as part of the exchange chain.

Heavy-weight wheel vehicles became the technical tool of choice for wild winter road drivers in Taimyr, but they are not the only possible ones in the tundra. As we see from the off-roaders’ experience, even light-duty vehicles can technically be used in the tundra. However, the skills necessary for the drivers of various vehicles to ensure proper functioning of the infrastructure can vary significantly and be of various origins.

NOTES

- 1 Most toponyms, as well as real names and biographical information of informants, have intentionally been excluded from the chapter to ensure anonymity of the community.
- 2 A winter road is built atop the compacted snow or ice crust and functions as little as several months during the year.
- 3 However, there are many other, distinct cases that could be quoted as examples, from the infrastructure created by precarious drivers of Indonesian unofficial motorbike taxis who provide support to official urban transport (Peters, 2020) to the infrastructure of private tutoring in India that complements the official education system and gives additional shortcuts and bypasses to its members (Salovaara, 2017).
- 4 The fieldtrips on this topic took place in March 2013, January–February 2014, and February–March 2017, about three months in total. My activities included doing participant observations in my travels over the winter roads and collecting about 70 interviews with wild winter road drivers, people from underway villages, local authorities’ officers, shop owners, and regulatory authority officers.
- 5 There is a similar example in Tatiana Argounova-Low’s article (2012): most of today’s private winter road drivers in Yakutia are also former drivers for major enterprises such as YakutAvtoDor and AlmazDorTrans.
- 6 Today, wild winter roads still do not allow for significant speeds. When driving on a snow-dumped winter road during a blizzard (i.e. actually making a new one), a 450-km route took the drivers four days to cover, although they had to stay over 12 hours a day at the steering wheel (Fieldnotes 2014).
- 7 Fieldnotes Komi 2018 and Arkhangel’sk region 2018 (together with Kseniia Gavrilova); fieldnotes Komi 2020.

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CHAPTER 29

ICE ROADS AND FLOATING SHOPS

The seasonal variations and landscape of mobility in Northwest Siberia



Mikhail G. Agapov

As the Russian state and corporations continue developing northwestern Siberia, the problem of vehicle access is still a key issue. Two approaches, historically, have been used to address the problem. First, Siberia is being “conquered” through the implementation of large-scale infrastructure projects, including the construction of sea and river ports, railways, highways, and bridges. This is a top-down approach, and it requires centralized leadership and nationwide resource mobilization. It is worth noting that many projects of this kind absorbed vast quantities of material resources and numerous human lives during the middle of the 20th century. At the same time, many of these projects were never completed or, if completed, resulted in low demand.¹ The second approach embraces bottom-up initiatives for adaptation of human activities to the natural conditions and seasonal cycles of the Far North.

The landscapes of the north of Western Siberia are extremely diverse. The Arctic tundra seems roadless to an outside observer, but nomadic Nenets reindeer herders, the Indigenous population, distinguish a lot of paths there. There are well-trodden roads (*sekbery*), tracks with directing marks (branches, bushes) (*piadavy*), paths made by caravans (*neda*, *nedarma*). In fact, the tundra is conceptualized as one endless road for reindeer herders (Golovnev 2009: 345). Various waterways in the area also provide ample opportunities for getting around. However, the tundra turns into impassable swamps in summer, while in winter, the rivers freeze over. The top-down approach suggests the Arctic seasonal changes can be overcome through extensive and specialized engineering. The second approach turns these climatic peculiarities to advantage. The first approach follows a general model of exploitation of the land and its resources, while the second one includes a wide variety of practices that can be selectively adjusted to local landscape conditions and seasonal fluctuations.

In reality, these two approaches are not fully distinct. Mobility practices often combine and take diverse and hybrid forms. In this chapter I demonstrate the variability of mobility practices with a case study of remote villages on the Yamal Peninsula. I focus on the ways people adapt modern land and water vehicles to local landscape features and seasonal changes. In particular, I am going to consider the two most common means of transportation in the north: a motor vehicle and a ship, exemplified by cargo trucks and floating shops.

The social philosophy of B. Latour, J. Urry, and J. Law is key for the conceptual framework of my research. These authors postulate a constantly moving heterogeneous, hybrid world and a need to study networked, mobile, and variable forms of social life. It can be considered a common framework for those lines of research on the social life of transportation infrastructures, which can be, perhaps, attributed to an infrastructure turn (Ferguson 2012; Larkin 2013; Harvey & Knox 2015; Zamiatina & Piliashov 2018; Schweitzer 2020). A focus on studying how transport networks contribute to the formation of social and political inequalities and hierarchies is typical of this turn (Argounova-Low 2012; Kruglova 2019; Kuklina et al. 2020; Schweitzer, Povoroznyuk, & Davydov, 2020; Vasileva et al. 2020). Nevertheless, researchers have drawn attention, mainly, to the activities of social and technical agents who ensure the functioning of the network, while the network itself is up in the air, to a certain extent. T. Ingold points out this contradiction. His criticism is aimed to bring the actor-network theory down to land, to change research focus from socio-technical to socio-natural networks (Ingold 2011). In this regard, the concept of a landscape as a communication space, a continuum between people and their environment is of great importance (Ingold 2000). Communities of people are embedded in the environment through the use of landscape affordances. H. Heft defines them as “perceived functional significance of an object, event, or place for an individual” (Heft 2001: 123). M. Heras-Escribano and M. de Pinedo-García argue that landscape affordances have a processual nature (Heras-Escribano & De Pinedo, 2018). Affordances become visible within practical developments of the landscape. These practicalities include skills, sensitivities, and orientations of people developing in a particular environment and resulting in particular life scenarios (Ingold 2000: 25).

AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Up until the industrial revolution, Western European tradesmen used the roads built by the Romans, as if they had been designed for future use, branching in a tree-like manner into areas with mineral resources. Rivers played a role in the development of this dendritic network in Northern and Eastern Europe. The Western Siberian taiga and circumpolar tundra were colonized “under the sign of an oar and a sail” (Vershinin 2018: 162). The meridional direction lacked above-ground roads for a long time. Traders reached the most remote and fur-rich regions of the Western Siberian taiga and circumpolar tundra by water during a short summer (about 100 days) and along so-called “winter roads,” which were mainly laid over the same rivers covered with ice during the long winters (Istomin 2020).

The “Great Ob waterway” was the most important route for the colonization of Northwest Siberia and natural resource transport. In 1760, the Russian Academy of Sciences sent out a questionnaire to all the Siberian settlements in order to collect materials for a geographical atlas of the Russian Empire. One of the questions was about communication routes in the region. The Surgut Chancery reported on April 18, 1760, answering this question as follows: “there are no roads by land. People use mostly sleds and dogs to travel along winter roads up the Ob River to the town of Narym, and in summer, they travel on different vessels along the river” (Mavrin & Kaidalov 2011: 40). The transportation revolution of the 19th century (Taylor 1951; Bagwell 1974) propelled the exploration and construction of new routes in

the Ob River basin. The trade and transportation routes laid along the river channels reshaped the social fabric of the Indigenous societies in the region, irreversibly changing their way of life and inextricably linking them to merchants and middlemen within a commercial network.

From the beginning of the Soviet period, the Committee for the Assistance to Northern Peoples under the Presidium of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and the Northern Siberian State Joint Stock Company for Trade and Industry were responsible for organizing trade and transportation in the Ob North (Slavin 1975: 66). As a result of collectivization, Indigenous populations were “assigned” to settlements (administrative centers of collective farms). A *Rospotrebsoiuz* store was built in each settlement as well as so-called shops or stalls in villages. Mobile sales points to a certain extent compensated for the lack of permanent stores and relatively poor choice of goods. Food trucks and their water analogs, self-propelled barges with stalls on them, began to appear in the 1920s (Sokolova 2017: 99–100). It is important to note that even after the Ob North was turned over to the command of the Main Directorate of the Northern Sea Route under the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR in 1935, trade with the northern territories and their procurement with goods were conducted mainly in the south-north direction along the rivers in summer, and snow and ice roads, in winter. With automotive development of the Soviet Arctic (Urvantsev 1935; McCannon 1998; Schweitzer et al. 2017), proposals were made in the 1930s to organize automobile and track transportation service over the ice of the Ob Bay, the sea, some rivers, and lakes in Yamal (Golovnev and Volzhanina 2014: 220).

The strategic importance of the meridional transportation routes in Siberia was fully realized by the Soviet leadership in the 1960s when the development of oil and gas areas of the Soviet polar zone began (Istomin 2020). During that period, all-purpose vehicles and other rigs forced their way into the taiga and tundra. Special scientific research institutes developed winter ice road projects to provide service to remote oil and gas reservoirs. Construction of a meridional railway via Tyumen, Tobolsk, Surgut, and Urengoi was started in 1966. It was known as “the Tyumen BAM” (an analogy with the Baikal-Amur Mainline) and had no other analogs in the world. Before it was completed in the early 1980s, mainly river transport workers had been supplying the new northern industrial regions. A whole range of hydraulic engineering works transformed the landscape along the rivers so that oil and gas fields could be accessed directly from the water.

Along with the shelf of the Pechora Sea and Yakutia, the Yamal Peninsula is the most important area in the Arctic where Russia is undertaking new industrial development with the creation of one of the world's largest natural gas production centers, embracing the Bovanenkovo, Tambei, and Southern industrial zones. A new railway conducts freight traffic between Obskaia (Labytnangi), Bovanenkovo, and Karskaia. Gazprom intentionally built this rail megaproject. The Salekhard-Labytnangi industrial transport hub is the key logistics hub in the area. Large volumes of cargo are transhipped from rail to water transport and vice versa there. In the early 2000s, the Yamalo-Nenetskii autonomous okrug ranked fourth after the Evenk, Taimyr, and Chukotka autonomous okrugs regarding the total length of snow and ice roads. Now, ice roads are important only in the Southern industrial zone of the Peninsula servicing the Novoportovskoe oil and gas condensate field. Ice roads account for just

over 20% (1,394 km) in the total length (about 6,000 km) of the motor roads in the Yamalo-Nenetskii autonomous okrug (Katkova & Gopaklo, 2013).

“THERE ARE NO ROADS HERE, THERE ARE ONLY DIRECTIONS”: MOTOR VEHICLES ON THE YAMAL PENINSULA

Snow and ice roads, more often referred to as *zimniki* (Rus.; winter roads), are the most visible manifestation of the seasonability of logistics in the north. It is largely thanks to zimniki that motor transport comes first in terms of the volume of goods transported (Ivanova 2013), making up a third of all motor roads in Russia's Arctic zone (Biadovskii et al. 2017). Compared to conventional roads, snow and ice roads require minimal expenses and do not require construction of bridges. This fact is important for northern regions, as numerous rivers cross the territory. In the summer, road traffic in the Russian Arctic is restricted to a poorly developed road infrastructure that does not traverse inter-settlement territories.² In winter, on the contrary, networks of snow and ice roads help to significantly expand above-ground transportation. A car is mainly a winter mode of transport in such areas where permanent road infrastructure is poorly developed or absent, such as Yamal, Taimyr, and Chukotka. In addition, transport workers consider winter to be the most favorable period for transportation in face of all the difficulties with maintenance and operation in winter conditions. “In summer, there are only directions here, and in winter you can drive [along a zimnik] as if it were a highway,” says truck drivers redeployed in Yamal. Zimniki are mainly used by forwarding agents and sole proprietors to carry cargoes.

Snow and ice roads vary according to their status. Official zimniki are equipped and maintained by local authorities and/or large operating companies. Local communities and other concerned parties lay numerous unofficial snow and ice roads referred to as “wild zimniki” (See Vasilyeva, this volume). Formally, authorities do not recognize wild zimniki, however, the authorities regularly use them, including for work purposes. In terms of the anthropology of transportation infrastructures, unofficial snow and ice roads fall into a category of “informal channels of communication,” and are considered as the most important element of the bottom-up transport infrastructure (Trombold 1991; Argounova-Low 2012; Kuklina 2017; Zamiatina & Piliashov, 2018). However, the borderline between official and unofficial snow and ice roads is not impenetrable. For example, shortcuts are laid between roads to get from an official zimnik to an unofficial one and vice versa.

There are two main regular snow and ice roads in Yamal. They are renewed every winter along the same route. An industry-sponsored (“Gazprom”) road starts at railway station Paiuta extending to Novyi Port village and then to Mys Kamenny village. An okrug-sponsored road goes via Aksarka village, Salemal village, Panaevsk village, and Yar-Sale village. Two winter roads of municipal importance (along the routes Beloiarsk village, Aksarka village and Yar-Sale village, Ciunai-Sale village) are connected with it. A significant part of the “Gazprom” road runs along the Obskaia–Bovanenkovo railway. A large section of the okrug-sponsored road runs along the frozen branches of the Ob delta where passenger ships are tied up in the summer. The same stations serve as hitches in summer and as checkpoints in winter, thus visually reflecting this overlapping of multiseasonal communication routes. In addition, the

local population lay unofficial winter roads from Yar-Sale (the administrative center of Yamal district) further north to the villages of Novyi Port and Mys Kamenny. These wild zimniki complement the official road making it longer (Davydov & Davydova 2020). Such bottom-up initiatives overcome the permanent “incompleteness” of leveraged infrastructure projects (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016; Bennet 2018).

Industry- and okrug-sponsored snow and ice roads, as well as ice crossings, are provided with protective rod-shaped waymarks along the entire length. They are also equipped with road signs and checkpoints. These roads are provided with special draws-in, so that the vehicles can pass each other, and heavy special equipment is on duty in dangerous areas. There is an interactive map of winter roads on the geoportal of the Yamal Unified Mapping System. Online video cameras were installed at some checkpoints in 2018.

In contrast, wild zimniki are almost invisible to non-professionals. Even experienced local drivers often go astray on wild winter roads. The road in this case is presented as a GPS tracker or a line on an imaginary mental map (Istomin & Dwyer 2009).

Sole proprietors who own village shops in the region are the main non-enterprise users of winter roads. When the shipping season comes to its end, goods can only be delivered by land. Air transportation is too costly for small business owners. This is why winter roads are the roads of life for them.

Officially, snow and ice roads in Yamal operate from December to April. In practice, though, they are inaugurated earlier and closed up later. In the 1990s, goods were delivered to Yamal by land using large tracked vehicles. In the 2000s, tracked vehicles were gradually replaced by nature-saving snow and swamp-going vehicles manufactured by OOO Research and Production Company TREKOL.³ These vehicles are equipped with ultra-low pressure tires which ensure their high cross-country performance. They are the first to start transportation when the winter begins. In December, when winter roads become practicable for heavy trucks and tractors with drop-side trailers, ZiL vehicles enter the zimniki. In January, when traffic-compacted and frost-bound winter roads turn into real highways, heavier vehicles, such as KAMAZ, MAZ, Ural, Scania, Tatra, and some others, get into action. Depending on the model, modification, and presence or absence of a trailer, heavy trucks can transport from 5 to 15 tons of cargo. When the spring comes, sections of winter roads located in swamps, on slopes heated by the sun, and in places where meltwater accumulates, begin to disintegrate first. Freight traffic changes in the reverse order: first, KAMAZ and Ural trucks leave the zimniki, then ZiL vehicles draw back. At the end of April, winter roads are officially closed, and only snow and swamp-going vehicles run on them.

To build an official winter road, snow is raked aside and compacted by graders, ice crossings are organized on rivers. The road surface is made of snow, ice, and frozen ground. The use of natural materials reduces the construction costs of zimniki, but at the same time, they become dependent on weather conditions. Despite technical requirements, the surface of a winter road is usually below the level of the surrounding snow cover. That is why strong winds and snowfalls cover the road very quickly. The construction of zimniki affects the interests of different parties. Attempts to reconcile these interests are made at the planning stage.

The needs of nomadic reindeer herders are taken into account. For instance, places where reindeer can cross the roads are organized, and holy sites that are revered by

Indigenous communities are marked so as not to disturb them. Nevertheless, applied anthropological work (known in Russia as ethnological expertise) has documented that damage cannot be always avoided. Reindeer often die under the wheels of cars when they cross roads in search of lichen. Industrial and household waste along the roads leads to excessive injury and poisoning rates of reindeer year-round (Adaev et al. 2019: 83, 87, 89). In elevated areas, the wind often blows snow off the winter road uncovering the ground. Trucks pass through there and destroy lichen, contributing to soil erosion, which intensifies during the summer due to soil blowing. Reindeer pastures are irreparably damaged. Even worse, construction technology for winter roads invades the environment more and more due to global warming in the Arctic.

Unofficial zimniki are beaten and compacted by the efforts of individuals. Mainly, they are owners of village shops and nomadic reindeer breeders who are equally interested to quickly organize regular shipment to remote villages, trading posts, and, consequently, camping grounds. The routes of the unofficial zimniki are very diverse and variable. They mostly run: (a) along summer roads of local importance referred to as tractor roads; (b) along river beds; (c) where industry-sponsored winter roads functioned earlier. Therefore, unofficial zimniki overlap with already existing and more or less transparent transport infrastructure. So, to a certain extent, they reproduce summer routes in winter.

Unofficial zimniki form a network of various paths in the inter-settlement territories. These paths are invisible to a person who is unaware of local practices of mobility. At this level, the distinction between “roads” and “directions,” as reflected in the northern aphorism (“there are no roads here, there are only directions”) is in many respects blurred. In particular, this phrase has a positive connotation in winter, while in summer it implies major challenges for those who want to leave a village by land. On the contrary, this aphorism used in winter conditions suggests almost limitless possibilities of mobility for any owner of a snow-going vehicle.

“WE CALL IN WHEREVER THERE IS WATER”: FLOATING SHOPS IN THE OB NORTH

Standardized self-propelled floating shops began to be actively used in Northwest Siberia in the 1970s and 1980s to supply goods to geologists, oilfield and gas workers, and engineers. Floating shops quickly proved to be effective in the Ob North. Along with the colonizers, local fishermen and reindeer herders became their clients, too. At the same time, transportation costs were high, while selling prices were kept artificially low, which is why supplies to the north were a burden on trade organizations. So, it comes as no surprise that they dissolved agreements with the northern territories when the Soviet Union switched to self-financing socialism in the 1980s, and the floating shops were laid up (Slezkine 1994: 376).

“We had to survive somehow.” This is what most entrepreneurs told me when I asked them why they had decided to go into that business and to travel on their floating shops down the Ob River in the 1990s. All my informants started with one floating shop, either purchased or rented. Many of them had already had entrepreneurial skills in other areas and considered floating shops to be a good investment. Subsequently, their business trajectories differentiated. Some of them sold their

floating shops, others occupied a narrow niche (for instance, in sales of building materials only), while only a few managed to create their own shipping companies.

The “golden age” of floating shops in the Ob North goes back to the 2000s. The paying capacity and local consumer demand noticeably increased in that period, while the transportation infrastructure was still too poor to ensure the supply of goods from the south. Discounting pricey helicopters, the river fleet was the only economical means of transport in summer, as it was in the 1900s. Floating shops were an extremely profitable business. The situation changed at the end of the 2010s when on-ground communication routes reached most of the settlements of the middle and lower Ob River and large retail networks opened their stores. Nowadays, only remote villages on the Lower Ob and the Gulf of Ob are of interest for floating shops. In addition, competition, increased costs for fuel and lubricants, depreciation of ships, and difficult navigating conditions in the Gulf of Ob have forced many entrepreneurs to quit the business and list their floating shops for sale. According to various sources, there are currently from 10 to 15 floating shops on the Ob River (including those put up for sale). This number accounts for half of all floating shops registered in Russia (Loktionov 2013: 17).

Entrepreneurs who started their business in the 1990s through the early 2000s worked under challenging conditions. Hydraulic engineering works had yet started and berthing facilities had not been repaired on the lower Ob River since the 1970s–1980s. Due to a lack of regular maintenance, sand bars in river mouths eroded and collapsed river banks, and overgrown watercourses had changed the river landscape very quickly. It was a deindustrialized space with a ruined landscape resembling, to some extent, the region at the turn of the 20th century, which had to be rediscovered by entrepreneurs and their modern ships. The environment and the economy of the region were closely interrelated in the 1990s. This relation also manifested in the revival of some pre-modern trade practices, such as barter. Floating shops became quickly ingrained in the life of the villages during the 2000s. Their activities up to the present day are conditioned by the ethos of their owners and crews described almost three thousand years ago: “faring to and fro with his benched ship, is a captain of sailors who are merchantmen, one who is mindful of his freight, and has charge of a home-borne cargo, and the gains of his greed” (The Odyssey, VIII: 158).

The metaphors of “multiple spaces” and “heterogeneous networks,” which is normative for modern social geography, can be used to describe how floating shops produce, use, and appropriate the space in the Ob River basin in order to commercialize it. In terms of P. Bourdieu, they receive “profits of localization.” Floating shops turn an economic profit by the distribution of rare social goods and services in conditions of unequal access to them. Floating shops participate in a struggle for “profits of localization” in the form of spatial mobility (Bourdieu 1993: 44). This spatial mobility, in its turn, was enabled by variable attunement of the landscape features perceived by people to the aims of their actions and technical capacity (Ingold 2018).

The Ob River has a small number of tributaries in the steppe zone. On the contrary, it has such an extensive network of streams, tributaries, and watercourses in the taiga that the distance between them rarely exceeds 10–12 km. Among all the users of the Ob River, floating shops, by virtue of their pragmatic nature, are to a greater extent associated with the settlements and camping grounds located (if not to

say lost) along numerous Ob watercourses and on islands. Any waterway that leads to potential customers is perceived by a ship driver as an affordance provided by the landscape. “We call in any village where there is water. If there is water we go there, if there is no water we don’t go.” The navigation of floating shops among remote settlements beside the river re-maps them and unites them within a sufficiently dense and stable network.

Ship’s performance and freight-carrying capacity are the most important aspects of attunement of the elements of the water-coastal landscape and the work of floating shops. Typical floating shops often were initially used as river tour ships. Other types of ships—self-propelled motor ships, small cargo motor ships, “Kolkhozonitsa” small freight-carrying vessels, water buses, and barges—designed to navigate large and small rivers also were transformed into floating shops in the 1990s. “A vessel with a low draft and high speed” is the most suitable type of ship for floating shops, as these characteristics allow such ships to use landscape affordances to good advantage.

Standardized floating shops are classified as “special ships.” They are motor ships with commercial premises in the topside, and warehouses and cold-storage accommodation in the cargo hold. The inner space of a floating shop is divided into two parts: top and bottom. The top includes compartments in the topside (or repurposed cabins at crafted floating shops), while the bottom consists of compartments in the cargo hold of the vessel. Grocery departments including frozen items, vegetables and fruit, and storage areas are usually in the top area. All other departments staple food, clothes, household chemicals, tools, and hunting and fishing are in the bottom. Departments are often combined.

Floating shops offer an extremely broad choice of products. The goods can be grouped as follows: household and digital appliances, furniture, windows, building materials and tools, textiles, sports goods, household goods. Fresh vegetables and fruits are lucrative products, so floating shops with a freezer obtain advantages over others. According to my informants, each floating shop has its own focus. “We focus on household appliances. Furniture, ready-built kitchens, tables, building materials are in great demand. Some floating shops sell only construction materials.” Floating shops can also deliver special orders, i.e., fully or partially prepaid goods. This category also includes goods purchased from companies that are not suppliers to floating shops, for example, IKEA. In this case, floating shops earn money on transportation. Large floating shops are especially proud of being able to deliver any product. “Once they ordered a snow and swamp-going vehicle. No problem. We delivered it to them.” The flow of goods passing through a floating shop includes, as a rule, small volumes of smuggled goods sold by the crew members.

Alcohol and cigarettes are highly demanded in remote villages. Nevertheless, they are not sold at the floating shops. First of all, it is permitted to sell alcohol only at stationary stops. It is not only about that, though. Huge freight costs make the owners seek to sell as much volume of goods as possible. Thus, floating shops are initially loaded with goods that (1) are persistently demanded, (2) are sold at a *good* price, (3) are compact and easy to transport. Alcohol does not comply with all these conditions. In particular, it is at a disadvantage in comparison with household and digital appliances, the most commonly sold group of items at medium and large floating shops. Moreover, the crew tends to drink if there is alcohol on board, and local people constantly ask the crew to sell them alcohol on credit which terminates

in conflicts. The monthly turnover of an Ob floating shop is from three to five million rubles (as of summer 2019).

The reverse flow of goods from the northern villages to the towns where floating shops are homeported is not so diverse. Currently, it is mainly scrap metal. Crews of floating shops either buy it from the local population or they find abandoned metal along the rivers. In the 1990s, floating shops commonly accepted fish from the local population in payment for other goods and sold it somewhere else. In the 2000s, that practice was commonly and largely abandoned. Nevertheless, fish is nowadays the second most important item in the reverse flow of goods after scrap metal. Local people think that selling fish to salespeople from the mainland brings them more money, as the regional fishing enterprises buy it at a lower price (Martynova 2018: 709). Unsold goods are also transported back and stored in warehouses until the next navigation period. Some floating shops render warranty services for household appliances to their clients in northern villages.

Transportation infrastructure typically utilizes a set of corridors in space that provide a reciprocal flows of people, goods, and ideas, such as highways, railways, and waterways, along with hubs of larger transport networks, such as seaports and airports (Schweitzer 2020: 21). Interestingly, floating shops combine qualities of both corridors and hubs, occupying, therefore, an intermediate position in the system. They trace communication routes and serve as exchange hubs. In other words, a floating shop is the very place where “ranges of relational networks and flows coalesce, interconnect and fragment” (Urry 2000: 140).

CONCLUSION

Landscape conditions and seasonal changes play a crucial role in the formation and functioning of on-ground mobility infrastructures in Northwest Siberia. While large industrial projects in the region involving the construction of railways, oil and gas pipelines, and ports still aim to “conquer” nature, through “nature-saving technologies” such as TREKOL, small bottom-up projects seek out another way due to a smaller amount of available resources. Bottom-up projects consist of adapting modern vehicles to the difficult natural and climatic conditions of the Siberian North. Moreover, as the cases of floating shops and winter roads demonstrate, the Yamal landscape has its own agency in assembling space, organizing channels for the flows of goods, money, and raw materials. The fact that transport workers on the Yamal aim to use landscape advantages in order to gain spatial benefits makes the mobile commercial infrastructure they have created highly adaptive. In terms of T. Ingold (Ingold 2000, 2018), this adaptability firmly links the infrastructure to the surrounding landscape, which results in their merging into a single functional system.

NOTES

- 1 For example, Transpolar Mainline, also known as 501 Railroad. Some projects were eventually abandoned, such as the Igarka Sawmill and Transshipment Complex.
- 2 According to Russian municipal law, an inter-settlement territory is an area within a municipal district, with a low density of rural population, and located outside urban and

rural settlements and not included in their structure. Federal Law of the Russian Federation No. 131-FZ of October 6, 2003, On General Principles for the Organization of Local Government in the Russian Federation.

3 A limited liability company under the laws of the Russian Federation.

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PART V

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CHAPTER 30

CONTEMPORARY SHAMANIC AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES IN THE CITY OF YAKUTSK



Lena A. Sidorova

INTRODUCTION

In Yakutia, since the 1950s, the number of urban residents has gradually exceeded the number of villagers; by the end of the 1980s, the number of townspeople had doubled (Chiamova and Zueva, 2015, 349). This global process of urbanization coincided with the beginning of significant socio-political and cultural changes in the country caused by policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* carried out by M. S. Gorbachev. The late 1980s and early 1990s heralded the beginning of the revitalization of the Indigenous cultures of Yakutia, a return to pre-Soviet cultural values, which was called *bargaryy* (Sakha: revival). The increase in the number of Indigenous peoples becoming urban residents was associated with a change in lifestyles in the countryside. Fewer and fewer Indigenous Sakha people began to engage in traditional farming (e.g., cattle breeding), and many young villagers began to choose trades and work as taxi drivers in order to feed their families, going to the city in search of new opportunities.

Rural residents have long been moving to the city, but in the last decade (post-2010) this process has become more intense. However, with the development of social networks, communication technologies, the development of public transport businesses (e.g., the emergence of taxis that travel any distance with great risk and constancy), and the urbanization of the village means that moving to the city does no longer mean a final break with the former social environment as it did in the past. Mortgage lending has made it possible for many to purchase apartments in Yakutsk, and many rural families strive to have two houses: one in the village and an apartment in the city.

Thus, a “ruralization” of the city is taking place and the villagers are becoming less and less like the stigmatized “others” in the city as they were before (Argounova, 2007). Yakutsk has become the center of concentration of the economically active population, full of young people who are looking to use their creative powers and fulfill their goals and aspirations. These new townspeople brought their traditional understanding and values, and have adapted them to urban life, thereby changing the spiritual landscape of Yakutsk.

How have the spiritual practices of Indigenous¹ peoples—the new inhabitants of the city of Yakutsk—changed? What new forms have appeared? What sources do

they have, and how do they fuel the spiritual practices of a new city dweller who is becoming the target of unification in the city? I argue that in the 2010s, modern spiritual and shamanic practices in Yakutsk are characterized by several features: a wide variety of practices; the blurring of boundaries between traditional and non-traditional forms; and the attempts of some groups to go beyond the narrow confines of the religious field and to influence public life.

The article is based on meetings (between 2017–2021) with healers and those who are called shamans, including followers of the religion *Aar Aiyy Itegehe* and members of the group *Üs Tümsüü* (2019); studying the content of the groups *Algystakh Artyk* (Blessed Way), *Sakhalyy Emteni* (Sakha-style treatment) in WhatsApp (2019–2020); participation in *Tankha* (2018–2020); visiting *Yhyakh*—the Sakha new year/summer solstice festival—yearly; and participation in classes offered by *Algystakh Artyk* (2020). I focus on five cases, including a) the organization *Üs Tümsüü*; b) conducting rituals during *Tankha* and *Yhyakh*; c) treatment by the shaman-healer S.; d) the young shaman Yuri, whose practice can be considered an example of urban shamanism, and e) the “new” ancestral practices of K.’s group.

BACKGROUND ON THE CITY OF YAKUTSK

The city of Yakutsk was founded by Cossacks in the middle of the 17th century on the Lena River in central Yakutia. Framed by hills, it lies within the Tuymaada valley, where Sakha clans were living at the time. The highest hill, Chochur Muran, is associated with the name of the Sakha leader Tygyn. At the beginning of its history, Yakutsk was a typical Siberian outpost: a military fortification with a small Orthodox church inside. Then the city developed, became the capital of the Yakutsk region and acquired an Orthodox look. The Indigenous population of Yakutia was completely Christianized by the beginning of the 19th century. The religious diversity of the city was formed over several centuries mainly due to the exiles and their descendants, among them Muslims, Jews, Catholics (Sidorova, 2014). In Soviet times, in the 1920s–1930s (Vasilyeva, 2001), a fierce anti-religious struggle wiped out the enemies of the new Soviet life: primarily Orthodox priests, rabbis and shamans since these religions were the most numerous or influential in Yakutsk.

In the 1990s after *perestroika*, Yakutsk revived its Orthodox identity; the Russian Orthodox Church is indeed the most numerous of religious organizations in Yakutia. In 1993, the Yakutsk-Lensk diocese was restored, and the Indigenous peoples of Yakutia turned back to Orthodoxy. The socio-political events of the late 1980s and 1990s in Russia created conditions for the emergence of various forms of spiritual practices, including the restoration of Protestant religions, Buddhism and Islam, Bahá’í and new religious movements (NRMs) in which representatives of Indigenous peoples were also involved (Sidorova, 2014).

Along with these processes, there was a revival of the spiritual and shamanic practices of the Indigenous peoples. People kept in mind the myths of shamans and their burial places, sacred mountains, spirits and supernatural beings—all this was the constant background of everyday life. Folklore, legends and *Olonkho* (epic poetry) became the cultural environment in which people’s consciousness was formed; the existential fear of cold and vast spaces helped form a mystical perception of reality. Among the spiritual practices, the practices of animism have always remained stable:

the belief in *ichchi* (spirits) and associated special rules of behavior and prohibitions. These rituals had been relegated to the periphery of Soviet life, but they persisted. Revived by Yakutsk residents in the post-Soviet era, they created the conditions for the development of Sakha spiritual practices in the 2010s.

Here, I interpret spiritual practices as regular actions with the aim of cultivating spiritual development, that is, following a path and achieving the goal. Sakha spiritual practices are based on a cosmology in which the center of the universe is the sacred tree, *Aal Luk Mas*, which grows in the Middle World; with roots in the Lower World, its branches are directed high into the sky, where the deities (*Aiyy*) of the Upper World live. Other spirits (*ichchi*) live with people in the Middle World. The goal of spiritual practices is spiritual development through self-improvement and, above all, the harmonization of *kut-sür* (*kut*—soul, *sür*—psychic energy). The spiritual practices of the post-Soviet period (e.g., the rituals of *Yhyakh*, *Tangkha*, healing, traditional shamanism) were revived based on the surviving animistic ideas, Indigenous knowledge, and the oral tradition of transmitting sacred shamanic knowledge.

Practices have been reconstructed from different sources, including descriptions in ethnographic works written by European travelers and ethnographers. For example, a list of “4 main books for studying *Aiyy* teachings” includes “A Brief Description of the Verkhoyansk District” by I. A. Khudyakov and “Yakuts” by V. L. Seroshevsky (Afanasiev-Teris, 2017, 6). Most of the sources are from the 19th century, when Sakha culture was already sufficiently globalized and its spiritual life had already begun to acquire an external, performative form and what I call a deeper, internal, invisible form. Many researchers, travelers, and political exiles described customs and shamanistic rituals, holidays—everything they witnessed, or even festivities sometimes organized at their request. Yet more hidden, invisible shamanic practices remained on the periphery of public life, far from Yakutsk. Another source in the reconstruction of modern beliefs and practices is the *Olonkho* epic poetry. Even though the transcription of the oral *Olonkho* began no earlier than the 19th century, it is considered the source of the most archaic ideas and pre-contact knowledge. Thus, it has been perceived and proclaimed as a source of true knowledge in the development of the *Aiyy* teachings.

Shamanic practices were also of great importance. Tied to the everyday co-existence with spirits, shamanism did not exist within the strict dualism of good and evil. The main functions of shamans were healing and divination since shamans had special connections with both spirits and deities. Of course, shamans were very helpful and important persons along with blacksmiths and *algyschyts* (blessing-makers). But unlike blacksmiths and *algyschyts*, the shaman had an important symbolic role as the protector of the clan; even after death, he continued to protect his clan and the place of this clan. Even now, the inhabitants of Yakutia can tell legends about the burials of *oyuuns* (male shamans) and *udagans* (female shamans) in the forests around their homes. There were shamans in every clan, and the names of the *uluu oyuuns* (great shamans) have been passed down are only a small fraction of the shamans who once practiced everywhere in Yakutia. When a modern-day Sakha person begins to talk about the fact that there were shamans in his family, this is almost always true. The period of Soviet repression of shamans and their children, which intensified in 1932 (Ilyakhov, 1996), discouraged people from talking openly about their ancestors;

however, clan memories and legends about shamans were transmitted orally and revived in the 1990s. At that time, public interest and conferences about shamanism gave rise to a new wave of shamans: those who took practices from ethnographic sources or ancestral memories and used them for different purposes.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES IN POST-SOVIET YAKUTSK

As mentioned, a very strong internal interest arose among the scientific and creative intelligentsia in spiritual culture in Yakutia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Writers, ethnographers, artists, journalists, and teachers in rural schools turned their interest to the history of Yakutia and Indigenous beliefs. It must be noted that cultural policy, and in particular the Concept of Renewal and Development of National Schools (1990), influenced the spread of *Aiyy üörekhe* (Aiyy teachings) and spiritual practices. Within the framework of the lessons of “National Culture” *sier-tuom* (rituals) was introduced. These lessons about culture were not abstract, like the lessons of chemistry or mathematics, but were transferred directly into ordinary, routine life. Teachers enthusiastically taught *khomus* (jaw harp) playing, sewed national costumes for students and explained the meaning of Yhyakh rituals.

Against this background, Teris (Lazar’ Afanas’ev) and Vladimir Kondakov stood out, as they turned all disputes and discussions and myths and legends about spirituality into texts. These texts were not only a response to the public interest in the topic of shamanism, but also a reflection of the characters of the individuals themselves, and the degree of their claims to be oracles. For this purpose, Kondakov used all possible methods and, above all, the tempting archetypal figure of the shaman. He lit a spark under the question of the “professional” identity of shamans and avoided answering, leaving the issue to smolder among a small community of Sakha intelligentsia, who were unwittingly involved in the disputes between Kondakov and another key figure—Teris.

The works of Kondakov and Teris

Much has been written about Vladimir Kondakov (Balzer, 2013), who created many high-profile titles for himself and wrote many texts on spirituality. He is known primarily as the founder of the Association of Traditional Healers in Yakutsk in 1990, which had the goal of studying the techniques of the “*Uluu oyunnar*” (great shamans), Nyykan (Nikon Vasil’ev) and Georgy Gerasimov from Verkhnevilyuisk ulus. He created a network of alumni of the Association and equated all their healing practices with shamanic practices. In particular, he introduced the image of the White Shaman when he was invited to hold the opening ceremony at Yhyakh in the 1990s (Figure 30.1). Kondakov made the ritual more spectacular, turning it into performance (Illarionov, 2019, 112). But at the same time, shamanism² was not de jure recognized as a traditional religion of the titular nation and taken under the government’s protection (Szmyt, 2017, 94). Unlike Buryatia, for example, in Yakutia there have never been associations of shamans, only the Association of Folk Healers.

In the 1990s, shamanism may have represented the quintessence of religion for Sakha, then, perhaps, since the 2010s, spiritual practices have been increasingly fueled by conceptualized beliefs about Aiyy (the deities of the Upper World) as

interpreted by both Kondakov and Teris (Lazar Afanas'ev). In Kondakov's interpretation, the figure of the shaman is more and more transformed into the figure of a priest (Kondakov 2014). At the same time, in the hinterland, far from cities, the concept of so-called traditional shamanism remained stable: a shaman does not strive for publicity, lives rurally ("closer to nature") and practices rituals.

In the teaching of Teris, called *Aiyy Suola* (the Way of Aiyy), a belief in Aiyy represents self-improvement (Teris, 2002; 2012). This happens through the development of one's own *kut* (soul), which consists of three parts: *ie-kut*, *buor-kut* and *salgyn-kut* (the mother soul, earth soul, and air soul). "*Kut-sür*, this is what in other cultures is called spirituality," as the North-Eastern Federal University professor A. S. Savvinov explained to me. He actively spreads the teaching of Teris and connects spirituality with the Yakut epic: "for the development of spirituality, parents should read *Olonkho* to their child every day."

Teris's ideas inspire teachers and those who studied in schools after the 1991 Concept for the Renovation and Development of National Schools, mentioned above. Most of the graduates of rural schools began to enter the Yakut State University in the Faculty of Yakut Philology, where "National Culture" teachers were trained. After university, they returned to rural schools and formed the core of the teachers who implement Teris's educational ideas. In 2019, a new school of *Aiyy kyhata* (Divine Forge) was opened in Yakutsk, which uses the teachings of Teris.

In response to Teris, Kondakov created the text of a "more ancient religion," and as he believed, a purer religion (in comparison with Teris's Aiyy Teachings). His text, "*Aar Aiyy Itegehele*" (Aar Aiyy Religion) was published in a large and impressive folio. In this book, Kondakov substantiated the image of the White Shaman, and created a classification of 12 levels of healers, *algyschyts*, herbalists, shamans. Starting from the sixth level, *algyschyts* can become "Aiyy shamans" (Kondakov, 2011, 527). He thus equated shamans and *algyschyts* and gave his Association members the opportunity to be called shamans.

Kondakov's (2011, 2014) texts sometimes provide a harmonious description of religious foundations, and sometimes in places reveals the usual lamentation of a very elderly person about the "bad, spoiled youth." As it turns out, these ideas about youth were heard and the influence of the text on the subsequent religious life of Yakutsk turned out to be more significant than expected, thanks to the followers of his teachings and members of the *Üs Tümsüü* (Trinity) group, which I discuss below.

For Kondakov, perfection, or reaching a special level of spiritual development, is associated with ethnic identity. One of the activists of the *Üs Tümsüü* group, a follower of his teachings, expressed the idea as follows: "*Sakha* is not a nationality, it is a state (of being). *Sakha dien omuk buolbatakh. Sakha dien tahym.*" Improvement develops through adherence to the religion of Aiyy and the observance of its rules and requirements. But this is not enough; it must be achieved through actions, related to the fulfillment of duty. The concept of action is associated with the restoration of the heroic principle. The *Olonkho* serves as a source for understanding this idea, as it is a description of the Golden Age, the age of heroes. For Kondakov, the history of Yakutia is the story of the loss of heroism. The main motif in "*Aar Aiyy Itegehele*" is that the decisive time has come to decide to return to the "true religion" and live according to these ancient precepts. These mythological attitudes lead to real action, as seen in the following case.

CASE 1: ÜS TÜMSÜÜ

Every Sunday in the Archy House, the organization “Üs Tümsüü” gathers. This organization was registered in February 2018 as the “Üs” Center for Civil-Patriotic Education of Youth of the Sakha Republic, its purpose being to strengthen the institution of the family. In September 2019, I attended one of their meetings. There an *algyschyt* dressed in white conducted an *algys* (blessing). Accompanied by the ringing of bells, more than 50 men of various ages repeated words from the text “Aar aiyy iteghele.” Then they joined hands and performed the *ohuokhai* (circle dance). Looking at the impressive circular ritual, I recalled the words of Kondakov’s text that the main purpose of a man is to increase wealth in the form of herds of cattle and horses (Kondakov, 2011, 122), or all the gifts of the Gods—this constitutes a “sacred duty” before the ancestors. This is the restoration of an idealized order, a return to the times when the Middle World was inhabited by ideal Sakha people.

Üs Tümsüü became known in the city for its kind of missionary work. They advertise widely and are active on Instagram and other messenger apps, inviting young men to their meetings. But these calls are not approved by some young people, but rather the opposite. One student, originally from the village, told me in November 2019:

They are sending out on the networks something like, “if you call yourself Sakha, then come.” They are strange, they get together every Sunday in the Archy House, dance hand-in-hand. It’s not Sakha at all, no one has ever danced like that. *Omuk kien* (like others, i.e., non-Sakha).

Üs Tümsüü members became known for trying to protect young girls from the “vices of the city.” In January 2019, this group began to conduct raids on cafes and clubs and conduct “explanatory work among young people about the dangers of alcohol.” Most of these conversations were with girls, since the first of 24 rules states that a woman should “prepare herself from childhood to become a good mother” (Kondakov, 2011, 124); being out late in a café is therefore not permissible for the ideal girl. After this action, youth began to condemn the group more often. As another student, T., stated: “Eh, there are such people, men, who go to bars and when they see girls, they drive them away. Strange, how can you do this? In general, this is wrong.”

Nevertheless, there is a constant group of Kondakov’s followers, who continue to cite his teachings from “Aar Aiyy Itegehele.” In an analysis of texts in 2019–2020 in the WhatsApp spiritual groups I observe, he is the most cited author. Meetings continue to take place in the Archy House, an important site for spiritual practices in the post-Soviet space of the city (Balzer 2005, 2007).

CASE 2: TANGKHA AND YHYAKH

In the Archy (“Purification”) House where Üs Tümsüü also gathers, another interesting event takes place—Tangkha, associated with the Sakha deity Tangkha Khan, the foreteller of a person’s fate. Tangkha also coincides with Orthodox Christmas-time fortune-telling, held between *Orohoospo* (Christmas) on January 7th and Epiphany

on January 19th. The purpose of the rituals—*Tangkha ihillir*, eavesdropping on Tangkha—is to find out one’s fate through listening to spirits (Kulakovsky, 1979, 21). In order to find out your fate, you need to try to overhear the conversations of *sulukuuns*, water spirits that gather in abandoned houses near the ice-hole.

I attended Tankha in 2020, and that evening, the entire Archy House was full (Figure 30.1). The two halls were divided by curtains into small makeshift offices. There were many fortune-tellers and healers who sat behind these curtains to consult with individuals. Every year this event sees more and more visitors, but also more and more disputes about the tradition. Algyschyt Boris, an employee of the Archy House, told me: “We held Tangkha days every year. But there were people who obstructed these events. Meanwhile, fortune-telling is associated with the faith of the Sakha people. Tangkha is *üges*, that is, a tradition.”

While Tangkha is conducted in January after the winter solstice, in June many spiritual practices at Yhyakh are connected to the summer solstice: meeting the sun, feeding the spirits of a place, and expressing gratitude to the deities who—like the Heavens—are closer to the earth during this period. Cleansing with smoke is the very first action you engage with as soon as you enter the territory of Yhyakh in the area of *Üs Khatyn* (Three Birches). Every year in June, this area, which would have once been inhabited by Sakha clans, this holiday associated with horse culture is held. Previously dedicated to the deity *D’öhögöj*, the patron deity of horse breeding, the main events involve drinking *kumys* (mare’s milk) and horse racing. In Soviet times, this holiday was preserved and held continuously in some uluses of Yakutia.



Figure 30.1 Ritual of Collective Purification (Archy House, Yakutsk, 2020).

The 1990s saw the first post-Soviet city Yhyakh in Yakutsk, and the revitalization of religious rituals became the focus of public organizations like “Kut-Sür,” “Sakha Keskile,” and “Sakha Omuk.” Yhyakh was defined as “a sacred holiday in honor of the heavenly deities of Aiyy,”; at the Hippodrome, the first city ceremony of meeting the sun was held (Illarionov, 2019, 120). Meeting the sun is the culmination of the holiday, and attracts many attendees, who believe they can strengthen their health for the next year by gaining the sun’s energy. Another important element of this holiday was the figure of the shaman who presides over the ceremonies. Though disputes began to arise about the authenticity of the White Shaman-priest, this vivid image of Kondakov in white robes was well received by the public and began to be replicated in other regions of Yakutia. Since then, researchers of Yhyakh often call the holiday itself—and all its rituals—shamanic. This caused controversy, since some residents believed that shamans were not part of the holiday, and in general they were less attractive figure than Kondakov made them out to be. We will return to shamans and their practices in the following section.

THE FIGURE OF THE SHAMAN AND SHAMANIC PRACTICES

The spiritual practices of the 1990s and 2000s have been characterized by a diversity of Indigenous spiritual practices (Balzer, 2013), and as noted, shamans have played a crucial role in cultural recovery and revival (Balzer, 2007). Shamanism and shamans are what were perceived as key spiritual phenomena, as the quintessence of the beliefs of the peoples of Siberia. However, unlike in the 1990s, healers have recently become less likely to call themselves shamans. Why? Perhaps Kondakov’s too bold reforms raised the question of shamanic identity; many are not ready to accept his hierarchy of healers and *algyschyts*. The members of *Üs Tümsüü* are guided by Kondakov’s texts, but many others who follow Sakha beliefs are inclined towards the more moderate teachings of Teris.

As noted, the revitalization of Ysyakh and the Association of Traditional Healers changed the meaning of the shaman during the period of cultural recovery in the 1990s. In prior times, the goal of Soviet propaganda was either to ridicule and humiliate the figures of the shaman, or to make him frightening and repulsive. But it failed, as even now, shamans generally command respect. In different periods of history, shamans have had different meanings. They have always been called *ajylghattān ajdarylaakh*, or “gifted by nature” (Gerasimova-Sehgere, 2015). Despite their otherworldly sociality, shamans were mentioned alongside blacksmiths, *algyschyts* and *olonkhosuts* (performers of *Olonkho*) (Teris, 1990). Shamanism is a kind of “profession,” if you will, which is distributed by Uluu Suorun (Great Raven) and is associated with the Sakha concept of the tripartite soul, since it was this concept that explained the abilities and functions of the shaman.

However, public interest in Sakha shamans peaked in the 1990s, perhaps partially due to the interest in shamanism within the framework of the New Age in Western cultures, which reached Yakutia in the 1980s (for example, filming the rituals of Matrena Kulbertinova, Nikon, Ioakim Izbekov) (Sidorov, 2001, 38–39). But this interest arose primarily within a narrow circle of researchers and journalists. Yakutia was a good field for study, because despite the prohibitions, there were old *oyuuns* here in the 1970s who were born in the pre-Soviet era and had preserved knowledge

and even performed rituals. Oyuun Nikon was born in 1880 (in some sources, 1881), and Georgii Gerasimov in 1900. Legends about other great shamans or hero-shamans were also spread among the people (Balzer, 2007). Then, in August 1992 in Yakutsk the International Conference “Shamanism as a religion: genesis, reconstruction, traditions” was held; over 150 people took part, 47 of whom came from the USA, Japan, Turkey, Holland and other countries. Alongside this came the publication of a book by Sakha ethnographer G. V. Ksenofontov, entitled “Shamanism. Selected Works (Publications 1928–1929).” These events too shaped the public consciousness of shamanism.

In the 1990s, another wave of shamans emerged, who had lived in the city for a long time or performed treatment and meetings in the city. Due to Yakutsk being the city where the government of the Republic is located, entering the circles of high officials gave carte blanche for shamanic practice and other forms of social activity. The figure of Dora Kobyakova appeared: Ed’ii (Older Sister) Dora, shaman-turned-activist (Balzer, 2013). She became known through the media, promoted by the editor of the Republic’s children’s newspaper, Nina Protopopova. Ed’ii Dora was very popular among those in power and held algyys meetings in theaters and various halls. It was her images that were first used on calendars and sold in many stores. Her figure embodied the archetypal image of a mother and protector, which also increased her popularity among the public. Thus, society received the shamans well, as they became famous thanks to the media and the activity of their assistants during these years of religious revival in Yakutia (Vitebsky and Alekseyev, 2021, 114).

Another reason for the popularity of these shamans were their stories. In traditional shamanism, the connection with the shamans of the past and the passage of *uhuyuu* (the shamanic initiation) is very important. Each one emphasized his kinship with—or had a blessing from—a well-known shaman of the past. For example, the famous Nikon often mentioned that his ancestors were shamans and Ed’ii Dora mentioned her ancestor was the famous shaman of the 1970s, Georgii Gerasimov (Protopopova, 2019). Kulan talked on video about being blessed by the Evenk shaman Savvei, and Zoia Duranova called herself a relative of Ed’ii Dora, and therefore also the great shaman Gerasimov (Popova and Myreeva, 2011, 39).

Below, I consider two different cases: the *emchit*, or healer, S. and the young shaman Y., who I call an “urban shaman.” Healers like S. have practices in Yakutsk as well as in the villages, while urban shaman Y. prefers, as he states, to travel to other cities (and countries), where he is invited to perform rituals.

CASE 3: A HEALER IN THE CITY

In the spring of 2021, I looked through the list of healers and fortune-tellers offered in the What’s app to the Sakhalyy Emteeni group (treatment Sakha-style) and could not find any shamans. It was easy to do this seven to ten years ago, since many, especially the graduates of Kondakov’s Association, called themselves shamans. Now the situation has changed. Even the name of the famous Ed’ii Dora was modestly accompanied by the title of “emchit.” Out of more than 30 names, only one—that of S.—was listed as “oyuun.” I dialed a phone number, and after carefully asking who I was and why I needed to meet, he agreed to meet to heal my back. A few more negotiations and I arrived at his private house in the suburbs of Yakutsk. As it turned

out, the cause of the pain was “my lack of gratitude to the ichchi of the area.” I was prescribed daily prayers for each ichchi for 40 minutes. He gave me a list of things to thank. Here it is: “ichchi Tuymaada, ichchi Chochur-Myraan, the Lena River, the sun, ancestors, Baikal, the Arctic Ocean, the Kihileekh and Urung Aar Toion mountains.” (In his opinion, the deities of Sakha religion are all a delusion, and only the spirits of fire and terrain should be worshiped). All prayers had to be combined with wushu movements. In addition, I was prescribed a 1 km walk daily at one o’clock. This was followed by a lecture that the world was mired in a pandemic due to people’s distance from nature.

Then he began to heal me, as he said, “with one of the 16 shamanic methods” using moxibustion. I have seen before such a method of treatment in the village of Amga, where a warm bundle of burnt *bogorodskaia* herb (thyme) was applied to the sore spot, but this time the procedure was painful. I could not resist and asked to stop the session. In response, he was indignant: “What are you?! You need to endure. Only pain heals! I gave myself moxibustion 17 times.” In confirmation of the effectiveness of the method of treatment, he quickly took off several shirts and showed traces of burns on his chest: “I changed my heart four times. I have a new heart now.” He pulled up his trouser leg to display more small burns. He showed me a box of herbs “for treating eyes,” but immediately added: “I don’t give it to anyone, because I myself heal with smoke from this herb and *tylynan* (in words, in speech). It doesn’t work otherwise, without Sakha words.” I was relieved to leave S.’s house. The burn site ached, and there was weariness from his lecturing, which was interspersed with conspiracy theory terms (S. records his lectures and posts them on YouTube).

In the end S., who claims to use shamanic methods of treatment, still avoids calling himself a shaman. The ease with which healers called themselves shamans has passed after the early 2000s. Nowadays, few people will dare to call themselves a shaman in Yakutia, because the local population makes more demands on those who call themselves that. The process of becoming a shaman is always hidden and it is rarely declared, and among local Sakha, I have never met those who talk about the facts of the emergence of new shamans. Much of the local population, in fact, avoids any discussion of shamans, leaving this topic to the media. Yet there are some who still boldly use the term.

CASE 4: Y., THE URBAN SHAMAN

The urban space is multicultural and requires new forms of spiritual practice. In Yakutsk, various people have appeared, who involve shamanic attributes in their healing practices. I met the shaman Y. through my friend N. In 2018, she told me about him, saying: “Oh, this is a strong shaman, a real one. It is difficult to get to him, but I will arrange a meeting with him.” After some time, she invited me and a colleague to a *balaghan* (Sakha traditional winter dwelling), 6 km away from Yakutsk. When we arrived at the place, he soon appeared with an assistant and busily began to lay out his things: a shaman’s suit, a drum. A fire was lit in the fireplace. The doors were closed, and rituals began in the twilight. The sounds of a drum, of metal pendants clinking on a luxurious suit, incomprehensible muttering, ecstatic dance—everything that makes up a typical idea of who a shaman is and what he should do was demonstrated. After the ritual, Yuri took off his shaman costume and

appeared again as an ordinary young man. And he told his story, in which there were also all the necessary components: shaman ancestors, diseases, which, according to his version, were shamanic, and discussion of his purpose in life.

He told us that his ancestors were Buryats, but he was brought up in Vilyuisk, and therefore speaks both Sakha and Buryat. He began to practice only after he graduated from the school “*Uhuyuu*” (Initiation) which is held in the Archy House. The beginning of his initiation was a vision of a local shaman. When he was a child, he was often sick and casually overheard his grandmother asking his grandfather: Why does he get sick so often? to which he replied: “It is he who is ill ‘in Sakha’—he is looking for himself.” Being ill “in Sakha,” or having “the Sakha disease,” (*Sakhalyy yarytyy*) means a shamanic illness and can be proof of initiation. While lying at home alone, Y. saw a transparent image of a shaman above him: “It turns out that it was the clothes of the shaman Onoho. He was such a shaman. A strong shaman.” Now the young shaman is very busy. According to him, 30–40 people come to him a day from all different parts of Yakutia. He is also invited by rich Sakha (*toyottor-khotuttar*) living in the Emirates, Kazakhstan, and China.

Y. is very attentive to external attributes; I have never seen such a rich shaman costume on any shaman. That is, he uses it to give himself credibility. It is important to note that those I call “urban shamans” *use* the markers of shamanism but may not *be* shamans. As a rule, their services are generally not targeted at the local population, but rather at external consumers who are interested in traditional shamanic practices. Like many alumni of Afanasii Fedorov’s “*Uhuyuu*” school, he still emphasizes his connection with shamanism. He uses recognizable markers of traditional shamanism: rituals in the forest in a hut, a striving to adhere to the details and structures of the rites. He has the initiation story, which he willingly tells himself. However, he is also involved in other pursuits: working out and opening a café. He advertises widely on social media, and loves the attention of journalists, which draws attention to shamanism more broadly.

CASE 5: K’S “NEW SPIRITUALISM”

As an example of new forms of occultism and spiritualism (Khakkarainen, 2015, 35) we can examine a group that I have been observing since 2019: “Algystaakh Aartyk” (Blessed Way). The meetings of this group include classes, online communication after classes and trips to the countryside with pilgrimages to sacred trees. This group was founded by K. in 2015; he moved to Yakutsk with the mission of purifying the city, as he believes it needs to be cleansed. I learned about this group from a friend who sent me a message reading: “The Algystaakh Aartyk group is an association for the preservation of ancestral traditions. The main effort is systematic work to improve communication with native places and carrying out joint activities to strengthen the traditions of our ancestors.”

In November 2019, I found myself in an ordinary co-working room in a residential building, everyone was greeted by a tall, thin man of about 40. He introduced himself, but asked to be named K. As I learned later, he had recently moved from Nyurba, where he had worked as a clerk in the administration of the municipality. K. stressed that the meeting would be of practical importance. Most of those who came are women who had recently moved to Yakutsk, or still lived in a village. Everyone

sat down in a circle and introduced themselves. Some complained about the lack of work. K. explained that they needed more than just a purification rite. All difficulties in life arose only because we lost a connection with our ancestors, due to the fact that we moved to the city. It was therefore necessary to re-establish contact with our native places and ancestors.

The first stage, “*Turukka kirii*” was the entry into a special state of consciousness. This is usually a typical ritual, which is accompanied by feeding the fire (Figure 30.2), and an *algys*, or appeal to the gods. But in this room in an ordinary city building, the ritual was shortened and no *algys* occurred.

The next step was “*Dyaryk*,” an exercise, which was an attempt to meditate to the sounds of *khomus*. K. explained that during the meditation, “our ancestors should have quietly stood behind our backs.” These immersions were repeated several times for about 15 minutes during the meeting of five-plus hours. After each meditation, K. asked us to tell the group what we saw. Basically, the visions were of one’s native *alaas* (clearings in the taiga where Sakha build homesteads), seeing the self as a child in the meadows—all ideal pictures of a past rural childhood. The purpose of the exercises was to restore communication with one’s native places, and thus with one’s ancestors. K. explained that the ancestors should become our source of protection (*kharyskhal*). As we had seen them in *tuul*—in dreams or visions—now they had to follow us, be our companions and protect us. After a few sessions, we should see changes in our life for the better.

A traditional principle—“do not disturb the memory of your ancestors”—is now replaced in this group by “establish a connection with them.” The main idea, a return to the past in the new conditions of the city, has its own modernization. The case of K.’s group is interesting because, following its own ideas, it creates new spiritual



Figure 30.2 Feeding the fire ritual—this urban, indoor version uses a small basket rather than a bonfire (Yakutsk, 2019).

practices by relying on more traditional ones like cult of ancestors, ancestral totems, and dreams. In this modernization of an ancestor cult, the ancestors are not passive objects of worship and veneration. Following the new migrants, they also become quite “city dwellers” themselves. The interpretation of dreams, too, is an ancient occupation; there are *tuulleekh*, ordinary people who have specialized in explaining dreams (Kulakovsky, 1979, 63). In this group, dream interpretation became a common practice among all members. Finally, the group also incorporated pilgrimages, group tours from city to village—a kind of return of city dwellers to their homeland, where they sought out sacred trees to further connect to their roots.

CONCLUSION

If belief in spirits (*ichchi*) is part of the foundation of Sakha cosmology, we can see that animistic ideas about the existence of area spirits are indeed preserved in the city and transferred to the natural objects that surround the city. As S. advised me, giving daily thanks to Chochur-Myran and the Lena River is the perfect recipe for healing. He suggests referring to the *ichchi* of Baikal, thereby including the ancestral home of Sakha (Gogolev 2004) into the concept of “locality” as a part of the Middle World. He also does not ignore the *ichchi* or power of words, still important in conducting shamanic healing.

Myriad new forms of shamanism and spiritual practices are spreading well through the Internet. There is no “post-Soviet” confusion in it after the collapse of the Soviet Union, since in my opinion the forms of traditional spiritual practices have always been preserved in Yakutia, or they have been adapted to suit the city. For example, in K.’s group, *ichchi* are supplanted by the idea of protective ancestors, since apparently the asphalt of the city is apparently not the best medium for *ichchi* to inhabit.

We see how life in the city also leads to new spiritual practices, such as the search for new forms of protection and community (see also Balzer, 2007 on community protection). In K.’s group, a connection is established with the ancestors, who become the defenders of the new townspeople. Members of this group, mainly elderly women, share their problems, find sympathy or understanding, advice, and communicate closely even after the classes end. Such relationships are characteristic of rural communal life in small villages. In the city, many women seek new social connections and often find groups such as this, that connect them with their past.

City dwellers return home not only in dreams. In K.’s group, they are united by the idealization of the past and their homeland of the *alaas*. But a network of sacred trees establishes their new dwelling place as a new homeland. The groups travel both to villages close to the city and to the suburbs, too, and in these nearby places unusual trees become sites of pilgrimage. These new treks to the trees to feed the spirits of the sacred trees complement the virtual pilgrimages of meditation and sleep. Through their actions, they too make an active appeal to other Sakha beliefs (Ysyakh, rituals of purification and the feeding of the spirits).

Urban religiousness finds other forms, too, going beyond the narrow limits of the religious field and influencing public life more broadly. Spiritual practices become not only a means of individual practices and spiritual searches, and a means of ethnic identification, but also make it possible for some groups to participate in the political field of the city. The conceptualization of Sakha religion led to a new interpretation of spiritual

development as the protection of morality and active participation in the public life of the city, as displayed by members of Üs Tümsüü. Kondakov's idea of the onset of a decisive period for Sakha in history is complemented by the words that "only we can help ourselves," as stated by the head of Üs Tümsüü in March 2021 on an Instagram video recording. These are the most radical interpretations of Kondakov's teachings, which side by side with the more moderate ideas of Teris, the latter often implemented in the educational system by his followers. In both sets of teachings, the gender distribution of the roles of traditional society and the veneration of *ichchi* play a key role.

Numerous sources fuel the spiritual practices of city dwellers. The Olonkho epics serve as a source for the creation of canonical texts of religious teachings and strengthened the orientation towards the Myth and the Past—the Golden Age of Yakut history. This is articulated in the desire to reproduce the rituals with ethnographic accuracy, as Y. the urban shaman does, and to appeal to Olonkho as the only true source, with strict adherence to gender roles (as in Üs Tümsüü). In their spiritual practice, the followers of V. Kondakov develop the idea of the Sacred Duty, which obliges one to action, and thus salvation.

However, Kondakov's teachings nevertheless affect the daily life of people less than might be assumed. Perhaps most people in Yakutsk are more accustomed to addressing the *ichchi* of the locality—the spirits close to ordinary people in the Middle World—rather than turning to Aiyy, because they transfer social hierarchy and power distance to these transcendent forces. Then they turn to the ancestors, as discussed in K.'s group above. Ancestors become not just a passive guarantor of order, they become active. They themselves must defend their descendants—the current inhabitants of the city.

All various spiritual and shamanic practices are an example of good adaptation to the rhythm of modern life: modern communication methods and social networks on the Internet (Instagram and WhatsApp, along with others, are actively used by Y., K., and Üs Tümsüü). Commercialization of these practices is underway, with activities held at the Archy House and by Y. as he travels abroad to demonstrate rituals, and there are many other healers and *algyschyts* who offer their services through social messenger apps. All this further contributes to the spread of shamanic and spiritual practices in Yakutsk, which continue to orbit around a preserved belief in *ichchi* and other key aspects of Sakha cosmology.

NOTES

- 1 Here, I use "Indigenous peoples" to refer to all peoples who lived on the territory of Yakutia before the arrival of the Russians in the 17th century: Sakhas (Yakuts), Evens, Evenkis, Yukaghirs, Chukchis, and Dolgans. The most numerous Siberian people, the Sakha, live mainly in Central Yakutia and in the Vilyui river basin. This article looks at the residents of the city who are moving out of these areas. Evens, Evenkis, Yukaghirs, Chukchis, and Dolgans live mainly in the Arctic part of Yakutia and in the far south. These Indigenous peoples are Indigenous minorities (*korennye malochislennyye narody Severa*, KMNS – lit. "small-numbered Indigenous peoples of the North"), that is, in accordance with Russian laws, peoples whose population is less than 50,000 people.
- 2 Shamanism is a phenomenon that the local population does not perceive as directly equivalent to Sakha religion or beliefs; rather, shamanism is one part of a complex of spiritual practices.

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CHAPTER 31

THE MAKING OF ALTAIAN NATIONALISM

Indigenous intelligentsia, Oirot prophecy, and socialist autonomy, 1904–1922



Andrei Znamenski

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the development of ethnicity and nationalism among Indigenous people of the Mountain Altai amid the fragmentation and collapse of the Russian Empire and the eventual ascent of the political religion of Bolshevism. Geographically, the Mountain Altai is an area in southwestern Siberia, which is located at the intersections of the present-day Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese borders. The Altaians, its Indigenous population, are Turkic-speaking pastoral people, who, prior to 1917, were usually known as the “Mountain Kalmyks” or “Altaian Kalmyks.” Until the middle of the eighteenth century, these Turkic-speaking people who later became known as the Altaians were formally affiliated with Dzungaria, a loosely organized tribal confederation in Western Mongolia, which is also sometimes referred to as the Oirot “state” (after the name of the clan that dominated its polity). In the 1750s, torn apart by internal conflicts, Dzungaria disintegrated under the attacks of the Qing dynasty. The latter unleashed genocidal warfare against the Oirot population as a punishment for the disloyalty of some of its chieftains, who constantly changed their loyalties. Chinese troops literally wiped out Dzungaria from the face of the earth. Fighting for their physical survival, some communities found a refuge in the Altai mountains in the vicinity of Russian borderland forts, where Russian empress Elisabeth allowed them to settle as her new subjects.

Although originally these refugee splinter clans spoke different languages that can be traced to the Turkic, Mongol, and Finno-Ugrian families, the dominant Altaian Turkic-speaking population eventually absorbed and assimilated them. Despite the formal affiliation of the Altaians with the Russian Empire, for a long time, the Mountain Altai served as a buffer zone between the Russian Empire and the Western Mongol/Chinese domains. In fact, several southernmost Altaian clans continued to drift back and forth between the two empires, acquiring a peculiar status of double-tribute payers (*dvoedantsy*) and pledging their allegiance both the Russian tsars and Qing emperors. The latter situation did not find its resolution until the 1870s when during the border demarcation all Altaians eventually became full-fledged Russian subjects. Still, well into the early 1880s, they remained relatively isolated from contacts with the Russian Empire and its population.

When Russia integrated the southern Altaian clans as new subjects, it admitted them along with the remnants of their Oirot administrative system, which included tributary units named *duchins* (tributary districts that went back to the medieval Mongol practices) and traditional leaders called *zaisans*. Socially, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Indigenous society of the Mountain Altai represented a collection of nomadic camps (*ails*) that included representatives of different clans. Ideologically, they were shamanists who at the same time had long-time interactions with Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism), which had been embraced by the Oirot rulers since 1616.

Russian authorities reserved for the Altaians a loosely defined territory of about 77,000 square miles, which was defined as the “Kalmyk encampments.” As in the case of other Siberian tribes, officials rarely interfered into the internal life of Altaian communities, restricting their relations mostly to the collection of tribute that chieftains (*zaisans*) themselves delivered to collection points. However, after the abolition of serfdom, the land shortage among the peasantry in the European part of the empire prompted the government to allow the agricultural settlement of the Altai in the 1880s. The sudden advance of Russian colonization became a challenge to the “nomadic paradise.” The population movement reached its peak during the 1891–1892 famine in European Russia. Soon, the Altaians, whose number never exceeded 26,000 people, felt threatened by Russian settlements. In 1904, apprehensive about uncontrolled population movement and a possible decline of the Altai as a tribute-paying area, authorities placed Indigenous lands under its temporary protection. Still, the insecure status of native territories caused much stress and tension among the “Kalmyks.” The story that I want to outline below will be unfolding in the aftermath of those background events, which contributed to the consolidation of the Altaians and the eventual manifestation of nationalist sentiments among them.

The emergence of ethnic self-awareness in the Mountain Altai was developing on three levels. First, it proceeded through the involvement of the Altaian Indigenous intelligentsia into the intellectual culture of European/Russian romantic autonomism (*oblastnichestvo*). Between 1900 and 1920, educated Altaians participated in the collecting, recording, and displaying of their own ethnographies and folklore, assisting their autonomist colleagues of a Russian extract. Siberian regionalism or autonomism was a cultural movement among local Russian and Indigenous intellectuals who sought to raise the status of Siberia within the Russian Empire. An important part of the autonomists’ agenda was collecting and publicizing Indigenous folklore and cultures (Znamenski, 2002; Mikhailov, 2004).

Second, Altaian ethnic self-awareness was developing from below among Indigenous masses in the form of a prophetic movement of religious reform called Ak-Jang (White/Milk/Pure Faith) or Burkhanism (Danilin, 1993; Mamet, 1994; Sherstova, 2010; Znamenski, 2005; 2014). This grassroots millenarian movement, which spontaneously sprang up in 1904, heavily borrowed from the Tibetan Buddhism of neighboring Mongolia and transgressed traditional community-based shamanism and clan organization, NOURISHING the territorial unity of semi-nomadic population of the Mountain Altai. The White Faith appealed to the restoration of the ancient Oirot legacy—a reference to vague memories of Dzungaria (“Oirot”), a loose nomadic confederation that had existed in Inner Asia until the middle of the 1700s.

Like in the rest of its multinational borderlands, in the Altai area, the Russian Empire was increasingly losing its control in the early 1900s; this process started in

1904–1905 and accelerated in 1917. The disintegration and eventual collapse of the Empire in 1917 created a vacuum of power which was quickly filled by borderland nationalisms. The White Faith planted the seeds of popular ethnicity that were later invoked by Altaian Indigenous intelligentsia when, after 1917, they needed to make their case for the construction of Altaian autonomy. The disintegration and fragmentation of the empire became a third factor that provided a fertile environment for the forging of Altaian nationalism.

Since the 1910s, the development of borderland nationalisms in the Russian Empire occurred parallel to the spread of various brands of socialism, which not infrequently intertwined and merged with local nationalisms. Eventually, political religion of Marxism-Leninism (Bolshevism), the most aggressive and potent offshoot of the socialist creed, came out as the winning force that was superimposed over the vast areas of Eurasia. Local Indigenous actors, who were subjected to—or sided with—Bolshevism, assimilated this ideology, making it part of their usage and Indigenous tradition. From 1919 onward, the further development of Altaian nationalism continued within the Soviet Empire that was able to reintegrate much of the former imperial borderland areas by promoting cultural self-determination and simultaneously forging the supranational community of equals (so-called Soviet people) (Hirsch, 2005). For the Altaians, this manifested itself in the establishment of the Oirot Autonomous Province (see Figure 3 I.1); this involved a limited autonomy the Bolsheviks granted to the people of this area in 1922.

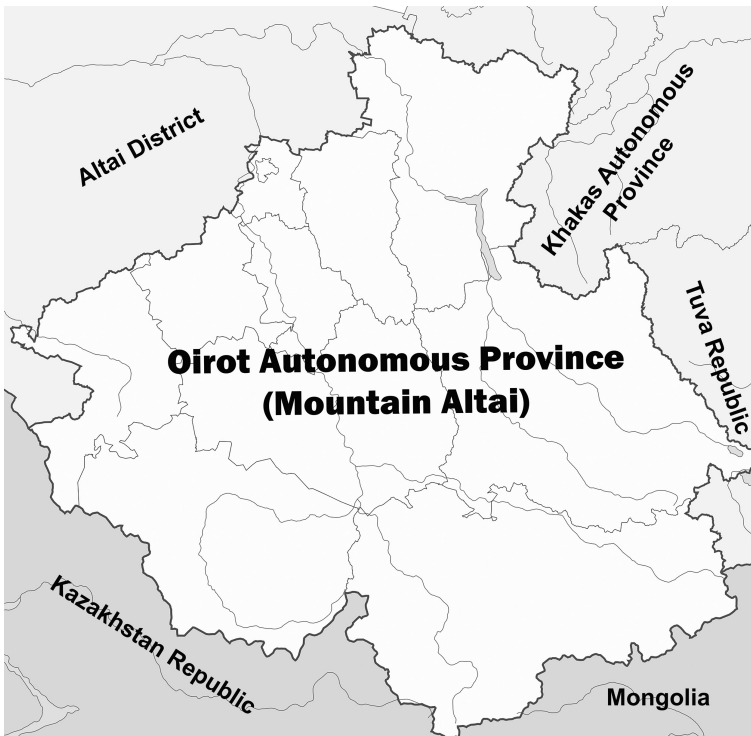


Figure 3 I.1 Location of the Oirot Autonomous Province.

SIBERIAN AUTONOMISTS AND FORMATION OF THE ALTAIAN INTELLIGENTSIA

To set the story in an appropriate context, I need to provide a brief outline of how Siberian autonomism and the popular Oirot prophecy created prerequisites for the growth of Altaian nationalism. By the 1880s, Siberian autonomists headed by Grigori Potanin (1835–1920), a prominent geographer and ethnographer, became convinced that Indigenous antiquities and folklore represented a useful resource in demonstrating that Siberian cultural heritage could match or even surpass that of the Russian hinterland. The idealization of Russian Siberian settlers as rugged individuals, free spirits, and carriers of democratic expectations could not fully serve the goal of autonomism. Siberian Russians were new arrivals, and their histories were not ancient enough to be extensively used to manufacture a “genuine” archaic identity of Siberia.

Given that stance, the fact that Potanin was less interested in the ethnography of Russian Siberians should not surprise us. E. L. Zubashev (1927, p. 62), one of his colleagues who later escaped to Europe from the Bolshevik dictatorship, remembered that the “Siberian Russian village drew less of Grigorii Nikolaevich [Potanin]’s attention.” In contrast, native Siberia represented the object of his special tender feelings. At the time, when he still was able to move around, each summer, he used to come to Altai where he lived among natives, studying their folklore and assisting the emergence of their cultural projects (opening of schools and so forth). In his memoirs, literary scholar N. M. Mendelson (quoted after Batianova & Riumina, 2003, p. 108) confirmed Potanin’s intellectual stance: “Given Potanin’s huge interest in the Asian Orient, its living representatives, Siberian natives, were the object of his constant thoughts, talks, and writings.”

As far as Altai is concerned, in the first two decades of the last century, several members of the emerging Altaian intelligentsia worked together with Potanin and other autonomist writers, collecting folklore, recording shamanism, and putting together ethnographic and art exhibits. The cultural space they shared generated knowledge that later provided Indigenous intelligentsia with tools to mold their own local nationalism. Blessed with a good climate and picturesque landscapes, Mountain Altai was a favorite travel and ethnographic retreat for autonomists. Their travelogues (“Pis’mo Iadrintseva k Khristoforovu,” 1927, pp. 183–184) portrayed this area as “Siberian Switzerland” that sported magnificent landscapes, fresh air, and crystal-clear waters. Indigenous intellectuals, who were associated with autonomists, absorbed these perceptions of Altai as a unique and mysterious natural preserve and later transformed them into the image of a blessed and spiritually charged area they referred to as “Khan-Altai.” For Grigorii Gurkin (1870–1937), an Indigenous painter, who later inaugurated Altai autonomy in 1917, the valorization and spiritualization of Altaian landscapes became the signature approach of his entire oeuvre.

The keen attention Potanin and his circle paid to the collecting and public display of Indigenous culture as a valid ancient tradition empowered Indigenous intellectuals. Good examples are Gurkin, Georgii Tokmashev (1892–1960), and Nikolai Nikiforov (1874–1922), who, after 1917, became prominent figures in the Altaian autonomist movement. Thus, in 1910, having graduated from a four-year Russian Orthodox Mission school, Tokmashev moved to Tomsk. There, by chance, he met ethnomusicologist Andrei Anokhin (1869–1931), another member of the autonomist

circle, and joined his ethnographic expedition to the Altai, during which he came to appreciate folklore and shamanism of his own people as a valuable cultural asset. Through Anokhin, he befriended Potanin. Later Tokmashev began assisting Potanin and Anokhin in deciphering and translating Altaian folklore texts (Batianova & Riumina, 2003, p. 109). Nikiforov, another Indigenous intellectual, graduated from the Biisk Catechist School and had a similar experience, working with Potanin on collecting Altaian epic tales and eventually producing *Anos Collection* (Nikiforov, 1915) that sampled Indigenous folklore and heroic tales.

In his letter to Potanin, Gurkin stressed, “Your cause is my cause, and I always listen to your advice” (Pribytkov, 2000, p. 61). With the autonomists’ help, Gurkin not only gain publicity as a prominent regional landscape painter, but he also came to better appreciate his own Indigenous legacy and eventually became one of the major spearheads of Altaian nationalism. In 1917, he (Gurkin, 1924, p. 14) began to dream about building among the Altaians a common “national cult based on pagan past, when people were free and worshipped only invisible forces of nature.”

Moreover, the autonomists’ skepticism of the Russian Orthodox Church, along with their persistent attempts to record and publicize Indigenous religions, heavily contributed to the spiritual transformation of local intelligentsia, who were graduates of Orthodox seminaries and schools. Many of these “tribal” intellectuals began to shed the Orthodox creed which they had absorbed in their youth and which later they came to associate with Russian colonization. What was coming to replace that creed was budding secular nationalism peppered with intellectualized elements of traditional spirituality and popular socialism.

Again, a good example of such a mindset is Tokmashev, a missionary-educated Altaian and later one of the organizers of the 1917 Altaian autonomy. He stressed that being around Siberian autonomists contributed to his cultural, political, and ethnic self-awareness, particularly between 1911 and 1917. After meeting Anokhin, who introduced him to the Potanin circle, Tokmashev came to view his earlier education at the catechist school in a negative light as Russification and oppression. This new awareness, in his words, “nourished in me nationalist feelings.” From 1916 to 1919, while closely working with Anokhin on recording traditional culture and epic tales, Tokmashev (“Protokol doprosa G. Tokmasheva,” 1934, p. 48) felt that the ethnomusicologist “nourished in me those feelings, frequently talking about the oppression of Altaians by Russians and simultaneously glorifying Altai with its primordial way of life.”

To be exact, one need to take this testimony that intimidated Tokmashev made after being arrested by Soviet secret police in 1934 with a grain of skepticism. In it, he conveniently downplayed his own agency by placing entire responsibility for his own budding nationalism on the deceased Anokhin. Yet, at the same time, this very testimony does reveal the intellectual effect of Siberian autonomists on the mindset of Altaian intelligentsia. Generalizing the effects of his exposure to autonomists’ ideas, Tokmashev (“Protokol doprosa G. Tokmasheva,” 1934, p. 48) concluded,

Moving around in this political circle, I could not avoid becoming a socialist revolutionary populist of a particular Asian brand because all those individuals [autonomists] studied Altai and talked a great deal about its poor people that were drunk to death by the Russians.

The result of such talks was his growing desire to liberate “dear Altai” from the intruders.

FROM OIROT PROPHECY TO KARAKORUM REPUBLIC

Simultaneously, along with the activities of Altaian intelligentsia and their autonomist allies, on a grassroots level, there was growing proto-nationalism in a form of religious revitalization called Ak-Jang (White Faith). Several activists and leaders of this movement were also working with Siberian autonomists and Indigenous intellectuals on folklore collection projects and, after 1917, on shaping local Altaian autonomy.

Ak-Jang was seeking to reform old shamanism and its polytheism by introducing a more monotheistic spirituality that was centered on the legendary redeemer Khan Oirot and Burkhan (which means Buddha in Mongolian); Oirot personified the bygone Oirot (Dzungaria) state that encompassed Altai, Western Mongolia, and Western China in the 1600s. The Oirot folk utopia was a response to anxiety and insecurity caused by the pressure of Russian land colonization, zealous activities of the Orthodox Mission, and the government’s attempts to erode traditional self-government. Many non-literate Altaians came to believe that the legendary savior would bring back the golden “Oirot time” and deliver them from that onslaught.

The unfolding prophetic movement spread around potent folklore material: dozens of grassroots preachers of the White Faith travelled through nomadic camps, singing songs, and disseminating tales about the glorious legendary redeemer that was to save his children irrespective of their clan affiliations. After 1917, in the situation of chaos and the vacuum of power, the emerging Altaian intelligentsia could not bypass such a powerful resource of budding ethnicity.

The educated segment of the Altaians already began to gradually process and secularize the Oirot prophecy as early as the 1910s. A good example of this intellectual rereading of the popular folklore prophecy was an essay-report produced by one Mikhail Chevalkov (1913), a 22-year-old educated Altaian; he belonged to the famous Chevalkov lineage started by Mikhail V. Chevalkov (1817–1901), the first Indigenous missionary in the area who is also considered to have written classics of Altaian literature. Mikhail Chevalkov, Jr., a graduate of the catechist school, was temporarily employed by the Orthodox Mission as a psalm reader in the early 1910s. Formatted in a form of a historical essay, his report was apparently written in fulfillment of an unspecified request from his superior Venerated Fr. Konstantin Sokolov.

In contrast to a regular dull missionary report, this text did not describe Chevalkov’s proselytizing activities. Instead, it represented a summary history of the Mountain Altai as viewed by an educated Altaian. He began his narrative by describing how Russian Cossacks, whom he called the ruthless gang of predators, had conquered and plundered the prospering Siberian Khanate, then part of the vast Mongol Empire. In his romantic rendition, Altai, one of the last splinters of the glorious Mongolian horde, was able to survive for a while as a free island populated by peaceful nomadic stock raisers. The Altaian people had to withstand the attacks of powerful enemies: the Russian Empire, which was hovering over the Altai from the north, and some unspecified Asian neighbor that was ravaging nomadic camps from

the south. Chevalkov stressed that, at some point, the Altaians faced a dilemma: to which powerful hegemony to submit themselves to avoid a complete destruction.

Interestingly, he never mentioned the fact that the Altaians were part of historical Dzungaria (the “Oiroi state”) that was idealized in the popular prophecy. Instead, Chevalkov (1913, pp. 11–12) wrote about the mythological Khan Oiroi as if he had been a real historical character. Moreover, according to Chevalkov, that khan prompted the Altaians to become the subjects of the Russian Empire, which, as the psalm reader stressed, “was politically a fatal mistake.” Most importantly, in rendering one of the folk tales about Oiroi, Chevalkov (1913, p. 12) noted that Oiroi himself did not follow his people into the Russian possessions. Instead, humiliated by the tragic pro-Russian choice he had to make, Oiroi retreated southward to Mongolia.

Hinting to an alleged historical irredentism of his “tribe,” Chevalkov stressed that the Altaians’ affiliation with Russia was only nominal. Repeating autonomists’ romantic narratives, Chevalkov called the Altai “Siberian Switzerland” and valorized its landscapes, climate, and natural riches. Interestingly, his long list of natural riches (gold, silver, various semi-precious stones, coal, nuts, and wood) was not simply a dry roster. In his (Chevalkov, 1913, p. 13) hands, that simple list acquired poetical tones: “Furs, oils, honey, wool, nuts, horses, and these horses soar as birds and gallop as fast as a wind. Oh, that land hides numberless riches!”

Moreover, to emphasize the sacred and ancient nature of his Altaian motherland, Chevalkov (1913, p. 13) resorted to Biblical metaphors: “This land is no less important than that blessed land that Lord had granted to the Hebrew people!” Although Chevalkov ended his romantic essay-report with the required acknowledgement of Russian Orthodox Mission work, which civilized the “wild Altai,” he nevertheless stressed that Russians got hold of all Altaian riches for free. Moreover, betraying his emerging socialist leanings, he (Chevalkov, 1913, p. 16) rebuked the “Russian bourgeoisie” for stuffing its coffers with Altaian gold.

Political chaos and the temporary fragmentation of power in borderland areas that followed the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 provided fertile ground for such budding nationalists as Chevalkov, Gurkin, and Tokmashev. By 1918, in Siberia, autonomists from Potanin’s circle, many of whom were members of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, established Provisional Siberian Government. This government was ready to accommodate Indigenous requests for sovereignty. It was also helpful that such Siberian Socialist-Revolutionary leaders as M. B. Shatilov and Vasili Anuchin (1875–1943) were simultaneously prominent ethnographers. In the summer of 1917, Gurkin, Potanin and Shatilov (the latter became the official responsible for nationalities affairs in the new government) sponsored the establishment of the Altaian Mountain Duma, an amorphous administrative structure that aimed to organize Indigenous self-government in Altai.

Like most political forces in Russia (from constitutional democrats to Bolsheviks), which opposed the tsarist regime in 1917, Gurkin, Potanin, Shatilov and their associates opportunistically followed or shared ideas of socialism that was in vogue in the Russian intellectual mainstream at that time. Gurkin and Shatilov understood socialism as local self-government based on collective property relations. Hence, the Mountain Duma’s decision to turn Altaian land into a communal property. The Altai Duma included a Siberian autonomist leader (Shatilov), who specially came to the area to personally bless its first gathering, Altaian intelligentsia (Gurkin, Nikiforov,

Tokmashev, Leonid Sary-Sep Konzynchakov, Sergei S. Borisov), a former missionary of an Indigenous origin who dropped his vocation (Fr. Stefan Borisov), and two prominent activists of the White Faith (Argymai Kul'djin and Tanashev) ("Sostav Altaiskoi gornoj dumy," 1917; "Spisok predstavitelei i sluzhashchik Karakorum-Altaiskoi okruzhnoi upravy," 1918, p. 55)

In February of 1918, after the impotent republican Provisional Government in St. Petersburg collapsed and the power was picked up by Bolsheviks, the Mountain Duma decided to take advantage of the new Soviet government's slogan of national self-determination. At a special meeting it reconstituted itself as the autonomous Karakorum-Altaian District Administration with Gurkin as its leader. In popular usage, this autonomy became known as Karakorum (Black Stones). Gurkin ("Protokol doprosa Khabarova," 1918, p. 16) later explained that the name was chosen as a tribute to the memory of the legendary capital of Genghis Khan, whose remains were in Mongolia. By introducing the metaphor of Karakorum, Gurkin, Tokmashev, and their Russian expert-consultant Anuchin aimed to outline their broad geographical aspirations regarding the contemplated nationalism. In fact, it was Anuchin who came up with the whole idea of such broadly imagined autonomy. An anthropology professor at the Tomsk University who studied Siberian shamanism (Anuchin 1914), he was a radical autonomist and socialist revolutionary who also suffered from delusions of grandeur.

Pointing out that the inner Asian "Oirot state" had already existed and disintegrated under the pressure of the aggressive policies of China and czarist Russia, Anuchin, Gurkin, and Tokmashev (Gurkin, 1924, p. 15) considered Karakorum a temporary structure that was to eventually lead to the establishment of the great "Republic of Oirot" within the borders of that seventeenth century Oirot confederation. The very name of the contemplated autonomy (Karakorum-Altaian) implied that it was to eventually transgress administrative and international borders to include Altai, Tuva, and Western Mongolia.

Yet, in fear of possible reprisals from the Bolsheviks, who in 1917–1918 mostly represented the interests of local Russian colonizers, the Altaian autonomists decided to trim their grand dreams. For this reason, as a temporary measure, Gurkin, Anuchin, and the rest of Duma settled for reducing the borders of the new autonomy to the Mountain Altai only. Also, instead of a republic, they established a district (*okrug*) self-government that they named Karakorum-Altai District. At the same time, the Altaian autonomists decided to take steps to move toward the greater "Oirot Republic" as part of the Russian Federation. Anuchin was appointed the chief commissioner to work out the details of this would-be republic that was to transgress international borders.

By secularizing the Oirot myth, Indigenous intellectuals and the Russian ethnographer politicized the memory of the bygone nomadic confederation and turned it into the utopian project of the "Oirot Republic." In contrast to the grassroots proponents of Ak-Jang who in their imagination were looking to anchor their Oirot prophecy within the Mountain Altai borders, Karakorum leaders began dreaming about bringing together all the Turkic-speaking "tribes" of Russian and Mongolian Altai, Khakassia, Tuva, and even Western China.

However, the Mountain Altai soon became a battleground between the "Red" Bolshevik forces and the "White" armies fighting for the restoration of the old

regime. The Altaian autonomists desperately maneuvered between the “red sickle” and the “white eagle,” which only inflicted on them the animosity of both sides. At one point, to survive and placate the Bolsheviks, they renamed themselves into a Karakorum-Altaian Soviet District Administration (*uprava*).

BOLSHEVIK SECULAR PROPHECY AND THE OIROT AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE, 1922

Initially, with the defeat of the “white” army in 1919, the Soviets abolished Karakorum, stripped the Mountain Altai of any autonomy, and placed the entire area under the direct control of a Bolshevik revolutionary committee. A large segment of native population, exhausted by the warfare and by Reds’ food requisitions, moved southward beyond the Russian border to Mongolia. The revolutionary committee was worried about the ugly “Russians versus natives” dimension the civil war took in the Altai, which set a negative example for the next-door “Oriental” neighbors such as Mongolia and China.

Early Bolshevism considered domestic national liberation a part of its international social emancipation message and took seriously the issues of ethnic sovereignty, placating to ethnic identity in borderland periphery areas. To address problems of nationalities, the new regime established the Narkomnats (National Commissariat on Nationalities Affairs), which was entrusted to entrench socialism through ethnic and national building among non-Russian population of the former empire. The plan was to placate some nationalist aspirations in Indigenous borderlands under the supervision of the Bolshevik party and through the cultivation of local Indigenous (national) communists. The early Bolsheviks expected that eventually the nationalist aspirations would be exhausted on their own and all nationalities and “tribes” would evolve into the new socialist entity called the Soviet people. For this reason, central Bolshevik authorities were ready to put some pressure on the local Russian-dominated Soviet administration in Siberia that was hostile to the sovereignty of any Indigenous autonomy in Altai.

Among its various affirmative action measures that were to placate Indigenous borderlands, the Narkomnats brought back the abortive autonomist project of the “Oirot Republic” advocated by Anuchin. Yet, to the Bolsheviks, Anuchin was not the right person to build autonomy for the “people of Oirot.” In addition to being an ethnic Russian, this ethnographer greatly compromised himself by his active participation in the Socialist-Revolutionary movement that resisted the ascent of the Bolsheviks. For this reason, the major work of promoting and advocating the new edition of the Oirot project was laid on the shoulders of Indigenous leader Konzychakov. Like the rest of the Altaian intelligentsia, he was educated in a local missionary school. Later, he worked as a teacher, and, in 1917, he became a minor Karakorum official who was able to quickly jump off the sinking “Karakorum ship” and conveniently join the Bolshevik party in 1920. Konzychakov became the chief of the nationalities department of the entire Altai region (*guberniia*) that included the northern (Russian) and the southern (Mountain) Altai, where only half of the population were Indigenous nomads.

Konzychakov belonged to the category of people who became known as so-called “national communists”—pro-Soviet Indigenous cadre that threw their lot with the

Bolsheviks during the civil war, lured by the slogans of anti-colonialism and self-determination. In the Soviet government, the voices of Indigenous communists were articulated by Mirsait Sultan-Galiev (1892–1940), one of the leaders of Narkomnats (Muhametdinov, 2010). The Altaian national communists had essentially the same pre-revolutionary educational background as Gurkin, Tokmashev, Nikiforov, and the rest of “Oirot” intelligentsia. Yet, in contrast to Karakorum leaders, who were always wary of the Bolsheviks, such people as Konzychakov readily joined the Soviet cause, got themselves accepted into the Bolshevik party and quickly learned how to “speak Bolshevik.” Among the other major members of this group there were Ivan Alagyzov, Pavel Chogat-Stroev, and Nikita Medzhit-Ivanov. The latter, a seasoned proponent of Bolshevism with a pre-revolutionary tenure, was appointed to head the would-be Bolshevik autonomy. Drawn to the communist cause by its message of global social liberation, these people nevertheless remained nationalists, which created lingering tensions on a personal level.

As it later happened world over throughout the twentieth century, nationalism, being blended with socialism, frequently clashed with and overrode cosmopolitan and internationalist sentiments of the latter. Such tension was obvious in a letter that Medzhit-Ivanov (1925, p. 1) wrote to his party colleague Alagyzov:

I view my feelings of the intimate connection to the Mountain Altai as sickening feelings. For a communist, the entire world should be my native motherland. For a fighter for the proletarian idea, a native motherland is the land where the chains of oppression have not yet broken. Yet, I was born twice in Altai. At first, I was born physically by my mother, and then the revolution bore and taught me. For better or for worse, I do love Altai, and probably nothing will cure me from this love.

Konzychakov, a close friend and deputy of Medzhit-Ivanov, was appointed as a special representative of the Altaian people in Narkomnats’ central bureau in Moscow in 1921. Being entrusted with the shaping of the future autonomy that, he (“Doklad ob organizatsii Oiratskoi respubliki,” 1921, p. 15) immediately began to frame it in “Oirot terms.” Making this new case for the Altaian sovereignty under the new regime, Konzychakov (Sary-Sep Konzychakov, 1921, p. 2) again was eager to paint with wide strokes, seeking to blur borders between the Mountain Altai proper and surrounding Turkic-speaking Indigenous groups:

The Oirats currently reside in different countries, but intimate connections among them survived to the present day. And this is quite natural because both Altai, Jungaria, and Urankhai [Tuva] are populated by the Turkic people who speak the same language and who have similar customs, order, and religion, or, in other words, the same culture. They do not recognize state borders and, so to speak, have a double affiliation.

Interestingly, in the text of his program article regarding the contemplated Altaian autonomy, Konzychakov never used the word “Altaians,” preferring instead “Oirot” and even “Oirot-Khakass.” The latter was an attempt to expand the borders of the future autonomy by blending the Altaian “Oirot” with the Khakass, a distinct and

distant Turkic-speaking group that nominally too had been part of the historical “Oiroi” state.

At the same time, unlike the Karakorum leaders who centered their imagination exclusively on the restoration of the seventeenth century Oiroi “state,” Konzychakov strengthened his autonomy project by appealing not only to the historical legacy of that “state” but also, most important, to the popular Oiroi prophecy, dressing his plan in a national liberation garb. It was a clear attempt to adjust local spiritual sentiments to the formal Bolshevik invitation to listen to the voice of the masses. Konzychakov stressed that among his “unlettered” fellow-tribesmen the idea of social and national liberation was closely associated with such images as “Oiroi” and “Khan Oiroi.” Since the White Faith represented the only major social movement in the Indigenous Altai, its Oiroi mythology could be recast into a spontaneous national liberation movement against Russian colonialism.

Moreover, Konzychakov (1921, p. 333) centered his official memorandum to Narkomnats about the establishment of the “Republic of Oiroi” on the popular prophetic eschatology:

Liberation of the Oiroi will happen when a glacier from the Belukha mountain falls down. That summer, on that day of all days, the glacier shifted. According to a legend, this natural phenomenon marks the liberation and revival of the Oiroi state. This is not surprising if one considers the independent statehood existence of the natives in the past. The question is quite clear here. The population wants to get rid of misfortunes and death, which, according to the people’s legend, is only possible through revival of Oiroi.

Pointing out that the Altaians attached prophetic meaning to legends and tales and comparing Indigenous mindsets with messianic aspirations of ancient Hebrews and early Christians, Konzychakov concluded that it would be appropriate for the Soviet power to take into consideration this prophesy that reflected the sentiments of the grass roots. In November of 1921, overcoming the resistance of local Russian Siberian communists to his broadly defined project and to strengthen his position, Konzychakov wrote a letter to Stalin, then the head of Narkomnats, seeking his personal support of the Oiroi republican autonomy that would include all Turkic-speaking peoples of Siberia. Stalin did fully approve his project. Still, despite this support, the borders of the proposed Oiroi Republic that went beyond the Mountain Altai and covered a large area of southwestern Siberia populated by the Russian majority aroused objections of several members of the Bolshevik Central Committee. Moreover, in the Mountain Altai proper, the Altaians numbered less than half of the population.

As a result, by the spring of 1922, the Konzychakov project was reconsidered and trimmed down. At first, the “Oiroi Republic” was reduced to the level of a province that was to encompass only the Altaians and the Khakass people (“Oiroi-Khakass Province”). Finally, in the summer of 1922, the Bolshevik government downsized this project further and ended up by establishing the Oiroi Autonomous Province (OAP) that roughly matched the borders of the abolished Karakorum-Altaian District—the stronghold of the White Faith movement.

In the relaxed atmosphere of the 1920s some White Faith preachers also tried to accommodate their creed and its rich folklore to the new regime. For example,

Kul'djin, the major sponsor of Ak-Jang and formerly one of the Karakorum activists, readily embraced the cliché about Lenin as “the Oirot of all oppressed.” In his conversation with ethnographer Danilin (1928, p. 4), Kul'djin stressed that there was in fact no contradiction between the Soviet and White Faith eschatology because the expected chief Oirot already manifested himself in the shape of Lenin. Reporter Zinaida Richter (1930, p. 157) similarly observed in the 1920s that “Oirot mystics” associated chief Oirot with the image of Lenin and viewed representatives of the Soviet power as his prophets.

Yet, Altaian national communist leaders (Medzhit-Ivanov, Pavel Chogat-Stroev, and Konzychakov) did not want to reconcile their ethnonational dreams to the limits of the Mountain Altai. They still envisioned the new autonomy in far wider borders that were to match the historical “Oirot state.” Like Karakorum ideologists, the national communists considered OAP as a temporary measure on the way to a larger republican entity, which they hoped would include the Khakass, Shor, and even Tuvans; the latter were not even a part of the newly established Soviet Union. Moreover, Medzhit-Ivanov, an Altaian Bolshevik organizer who spent many years in Mongolia, openly suggested that in near future Western Mongols too should be part of the grand socialist “Oirot Republic.” In his memorandum to the Siberian Revolutionary Committee, he (Medzhit-Ivanov, 1922, p. 7) essentially repeated Anuchin's thesis, stressing that the Altaians, Tuvans, Khakass, and Western Mongols were all the “Oirot people.”

Yet, in contrast to the Karakorum leaders, national communists envisioned the future state of all “Oirot” peoples not as a pure national entity but as a “national socialist” Soviet republic that was to become a magnet for all oppressed inner Asian populations that, in their view, were “Oirot” by culture. Ascribing to Western Mongols a strong aspiration for a unification, Medzhit-Ivanov (1922, pp. 8–9) argued that OAP should be the gathering force for all people of the “Oirot descent.” Trying to legitimize his utopian construct in the eyes of his party superiors, Medzhit-Ivanov (1922, p. 9) insisted that his grand scheme enjoyed a wide support among Indigenous leaders and grass roots of the autonomous province who allegedly wanted all “Oirot tribes” to become part of the Russian Soviet socialist federation.

However, Bolshevik leaders were very apprehensive about building large supranational states that involved people of the same religion or the same language family. Eventually, Moscow rejected Altaian national communists' proposal not only because it went against the official policy but also because it did not match the actual aspirations of the “Oirot people”: the Indigenous groups that populated the Mountain Altai. The reluctance to establish large “supra-tribal” entities certainly had much to do with practical considerations of administering the borderlands of the vast Soviet Empire, and it boiled down to the good old principle: divide and rule. At the same time, the Bolshevik inclination to exercise administrative particularism also originated from the ideological stance of the Soviet regime on nationalities issues. On the scale of human evolution, the Bolsheviks viewed ethnic cultures as an unavoidable evil that they had to take into consideration and to temporarily placate, while moving toward a future utopian communist nationless state. The goal was to give these cultures a chance to flourish under Soviet tutelage and gradually navigate them toward merging into a supranational socialist nation. Later, it was immortalized in the famous formula that defined the Soviet approach to national building within the USSR: socialist in content and national by form.

Pursuing these goals, in the 1920s, the Soviet regime sought to identify visible ethnographic groups of Indigenous people with some “primordial” features and to lock them within various forms of autonomy under the party and police supervision (Hirsch, 2005, p. 8). This explains why in the 1920s the Bolsheviks tried to create the whole hierarchy of numerous autonomies with their own languages, cultures, and communist elites. In that scheme, even miniscule “tribes” of hunters and gatherers in Siberia were entitled to their schools, languages, and Indigenous bureaucrats. Later, the same logic, which drove Moscow to disrupt the OAP national communists’ project, made her abort a Tuvan Indigenous elite’s plan to merge with Red Mongolia and the Buryat area. Instead, the Bolsheviks preferred to deal with three separate units: the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Republic within the USSR, Mongolia, and semi-independent Tuva.

As a reflection of this trend toward watering down the supra-tribal construct promoted by the OAP leadership, in 1926, the Central Statistical Bureau forbade using the name of “Oiot” during census taking and other surveys (Sukhotin, 1931, p. 95). In 1924, Medzhit-Ivanov fell out of favor and lost his position of the head of the OAP administration that he occupied only for two years; he was sent away, at first to Tuva and then to Mongolia to serve as a Soviet consul. Finally, in 1948, OAP was renamed the Mountain Altai Autonomous Province—a symbolic policy decision that was to purge once and for all the remaining linguistic vestige of the grand “Oiot” utopia that forty years prior to that had stirred the minds of Altaian intelligentsia and “unlettered” nomadic masses.

CONCLUSION

In the first two decades of the last century, Indigenous autonomists and later national communists of the Altai were feeding on the ethnographic “print culture” that was generated by Siberian ethnographers and on the oral “Oiot legacy” of the White Faith that was developing spontaneously from below in the area. At the same time, in their intellectual fantasies the autonomists and national communists were ready to go further than the “unlettered” masses by imagining a utopian supranational socialist Oiot Republic that was to match the borders of the loosely organized seventeenth century Oiot tribal confederation.

It was not only the Altaian grassroots population who did not care about that utopian vision. The ruling Bolshevik elite was strongly against this type of projects. Building their affirmative action empire and courting Indigenous periphery, the Soviet leadership was ready to go far enough to give local ethnic and ethnographic groups an opportunity to make their cases for autonomy. The official policy was to identify visible ethnographic entities that could be safely “locked” within their administrative autonomies and allowed to “flourish” within the established Soviet commonwealth to eventually shed their national features and to evolve into a cosmopolitan nation-less entity called the Soviet people.

Not only did Altai lack any powerful movement that was ready to transgress international borders but there was also no visible entity that manifested potent ethnic sentiments except the nomads of the Mountain Altai with their Oiot prophecy. Both the popular sentiments and the stance of the Bolshevik leadership canceled the grand dreams of Karakorum leaders and local national communists.

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CHAPTER 32

MISSIONARIES IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC

Religious and ideological changes among Nenets reindeer herders



Laur Vallikivi

INTRODUCTION

Reforming the lives of Indigenous peoples in the enormous northern and eastern stretches of Russia has always been a challenge for the Russian state, as these communities live in remote areas where climate is harsh and traveling hard. Furthermore, the natives' lack of Russian language knowledge as well as their hostility toward attempts at colonization have made the colonizers' attempts to spread their ideologies of submission difficult. The actual violence has only worsened these relations in the colonial encounter. In this context, it is not surprising that most accounts of proselytization in Arctic Russia contain frequent references to failures (Znamenski, 1999). Paradoxically these serve as justifications for further reforms, whether Christian or Soviet (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2003). Despite the opposition between these two totalizing morality systems, from the point of view of the Indigenous peoples they are not that different, as both ideologies subject them to fervent, even aggressive, missionizing.

This chapter explores mission encounters between the 15th and 21st century in the Siberian and European north of Russia with a focus on the Tundra Nenets who live on the border of geographical Europe and Asia (Siberia) (see Figure 32.1). Earlier Orthodox missions among Nenets (like among several other Indigenous groups across Siberia such as Chukchi, Eveny, Nganasan, etc.) rarely brought along drastic alterations of existing ontologies, epistemologies, and ethical practices. However, these alterations have been more extreme under the more recent Soviet indoctrination or Protestant conversion. While the Soviets engaged in social engineering, including widespread educational measures, evangelical Protestants have relied on visiting mission work, sometimes transforming distant camps and villages more efficiently than the pervasive Soviet regime. However, unlike some other regions such as Melanesia or Amazonia, the number of Protestant converts in this part of Siberia are relatively small (even if they are proportionally higher than among non-natives in the region).¹

Although Russian Orthodoxy has the longest presence as a centralized institutional religious force in the North, being an occasional source of identity, rituals and stories, it has seldom inspired Indigenous peoples to radically change their ontological assumptions (e.g. animals have souls like humans that survive the death of

their bodies) or reject earlier key ritual practices (e.g. sacrificing animals to the spirits). At the same time, even members of the most secluded communities have incorporated a few Christian elements into their rituals. More radical conversions and pious self-transformations have taken place especially among those whose way of life has changed, for instance when settling down, marrying a newcomer, or pursuing a career in a religious institution.

The religion of the Nenets and other Arctic peoples is usually characterized as animism and/or shamanism (Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2021). These labels given by outsiders refer to disparate practices, techniques and concepts inherited from forefathers as well as to certain perceptions and experiences that keep emerging from the act of living on the land with other species. Unlike Christianity or Soviet Marxism, these forms of local religiosity do not require personal commitment or references to dogmatic truths. Instead, humans engage with non-human beings (while awake or in dreams) who are attributed souls, consciousness, volition, and intentionality and who expect respect and gifts from humans. People need to engage in cautious relation-making with spirits by using flattering terms of address and feeding their tangible figures. For instance, Nenets make sacrifices by strangling a reindeer and saying short petitionary phrases in the presence of anthropomorphic images (N. *khekhe*)² who are smeared with blood and vodka: the *khekhe* act in their camps as mediating persons on behalf of the spirits (N. *yerv*) who live across the landscape. Nenets men also carry out sacrifices at special sacred sites to solve more significant problems (Kharyuchi, 2004; 2018). These rituals are based on the principle of reciprocity as people expect food, fortune, and health in exchange for their offerings. In these ethically complex but pragmatic exchange circuits, spirits prevent disasters and offer well-being, but can also punish people for disrespectful behavior. Even if some spirits are considered malevolent, they can all be induced to cooperate with humans. However, disturbing the dead must be avoided at any cost, as they can pull the living into their realm.

Shamans are believed to be more knowledgeable and skillful in communicating with the spirit world. Initiation involves a painful cutting-up and reconstitution of the candidate's body by spirit helpers (N. *tadyebtsy*), which in turn gives them an ability to locate otherworldly beings and solve specific problems for a client or community. During their dramatic seances, shamans persuade spirits to cooperate in order to heal the sick (to return a stolen soul), foretell the future, or find missing animals. Shamanhood illustrates particularly well the wider ontological principle of permeability between the realms of humans and non-humans, be these animals, spirits, or the dead, who can take on various forms.

However, alien ideological regimes have tried to change these cosmologies and ritual practices by prohibiting, demonizing, or ridiculing them. Nevertheless, attempts at indoctrination have led to adding new narratives, relations, and rituals (re)interpreted largely in the “old” ontological framework. Indeed, a few concepts have influenced local cosmologies and moralities such as sin (modifying the older Nenets notion of taboo or prohibition, *khevy*, into a concept of an offence against God), heaven and hell (transforming the concept of a morally neutral afterlife), or the sky deity (changing the creator god Num into an all-seeing transcendent judge). But these have not necessarily introduced new ethical practices leading to individual transformation based on a strong version of dualistic morality. Nenets people have

often moved between different ideological regimes, concealing local ways of engagement with spirits which they know are disapproved of by church or state institutions (though ordinary Russians may also carry out sacrifices at Nenets sacred sites, see Borisov, 1907, pp. 75–76; Nordenskiöld, 1882, pp. 64–76).

In the following sections, I will describe the historical developments of Christian and Soviet proselytization across the Nenets areas, dealing in turn with Russian Orthodox missionaries and the Indigenization of Christianity; the state-led campaigns of militant atheism in the Soviet period; and finally the recent activities of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as Protestant missionaries' evangelization, using my own ethnographic case study in the eastern Great Land (Bolshezemelskaya) tundra and the Polar Urals.

ORTHODOXY: EARLY MISSIONIZATION IN THE NENETS TUNDRA

In the early colonial period, between the late 15th and early 18th century, a very small number of Nenets (Russians called them Samoyed) were converted to Christianity, for example child workers who were (usually forcibly) taken to live in settlements (Yasinski & Ovsyannikov, 2003, p. 314). However, the overall policy of Russian tsars was not to Christianize the empire's new subjects since Christians were exempt from paying the fur tax (R. *yasak*), which was the main source of income for the rapidly expanding Muscovite state.

In the early 18th century, the position of northern natives and the practice of conversion in the frontier areas changed significantly as Peter the Great attempted to unify all colonized areas into a single cohesive empire and convert its non-Christian subjects, whether “pagan” (R. *yazychnik*), Muslim or other. Initially, the spearhead of the new missionary policy was targeted towards the Khanty and Mansi, the southern neighbors of the Nenets. Filofey (Leshchinskiy) from Kyiv, appointed as the metropolitan of Siberia and Tobolsk, baptized thousands of locals between 1712 and 1727 by using the tsar's draconian decrees, soldiers' brute force, short-term tax exemption and gifts such as caftans, shirts and bread. The decrees ordered missionaries to burn “idols” (R. *kumiry*), destroy sacred sites (R. *kumirnitsy*) and build Orthodox chapels and churches on them. Those natives who resisted were to be punished by death. The natives who were baptized were flogged when failing to meet the new ritual requirements or when found out to be dealing with “idol worship” (Ablazhei, 2005; Balzer, 1999; Glavatskaya, 2005; see also Geraci & Khodarkovsky, 2001; Slezkine, 1994; Werth, 2014; Znamenski 1999).

While thousands of Khanty and Mansi underwent mass river baptism, Nenets were more difficult to deal with. They attacked not only the missionaries but also the newly converted neighbors, killing many of them and taking away their reindeer, crosses and dragging “on the ground the holy icons tied to the sledges” (quoted in Golovnev & Osherenko, 1999, p. 55). The fierce resistance of the nomads of the Obdorsk tundra as well as the tsarist authorities' fear of not receiving fur tax saved the locals from further campaigns for years to come. During the reign of Catherine the Great in the second half of the 18th century, greater religious tolerance towards non-Orthodox subjects became a norm and proselytizing efforts in the North almost stopped.

In 1822, the northern peoples were granted freedom of religion with the Statute on the Administration of the Natives, which explicitly forbade forcible conversion. West of the Urals, a similar law was enacted in 1835. However, a dozen years before that, archimandrite Veniamin (Smirnov) was given the task of converting the western Nenets in the European tundra. Despite initial resistance, he managed to carry out baptisms in most camps he visited. According to his report, between 1825 and 1830 he and his entourage baptized 3303 people, roughly three-quarters of all European Nenets. Veniamin boasts that he erected large wooden crosses in places where he destroyed sacred sites (sometimes with the help of hesitant neophytes), where wooden and stone “idols” had stood, including the seven-faced spirit Vesako (“old man”) on the island of Vaigach (Veniamin 1850, pp. 438–439). He also invented a written form and translated portions of the New Testament into Nenets, though these texts were never used. Like missionaries elsewhere in Siberia, Veniamin authored an ethnographic overview of the locals’ way of life, including their “pagan faith” (1855, p. 114; see also Vallikivi, 2003).

After the official end of Veniamin’s campaign, three churches were established to serve the newly baptized in the western Nenets tundra. For instance, the Kolva Church of St Nicholas was built in 1830 at the bottleneck of migration routes where Nenets and Izhma Komi reindeer herders passed twice a year. Two priests, one deacon and two readers were assigned to work there to look after “the spiritual needs” of the nomadic population in a parish of the size of Iceland. A few Nenets settled there, usually those who had lost their own reindeer and could not live in the tundra anymore. Some of them pastured “the reindeer herd of God” which served the priests on their tours in the tundra. Over time, the small number of settled Nenets married with Komi and adopted local Orthodox customs (Okladnikov & Matafanov 2008, pp. 245–253, pp. 309–317). Some of them returned to nomadism, taking their new religious practices to the tundra.

East of the Urals, the Obdorsk Mission was established in 1854 (after a failed attempt in 1832–1833), to serve a territory the size of France. Here, most Nenets and Khanty were unbaptized. The mission was able to function only in the more accessible southern areas at the border of the forest and tundra. Nevertheless, priests tried to offer their teachings and rituals to the natives who had come to trade and pay the *yasak* during annual winter fairs. One of the most active missionaries at the turn of the 20th century was hieromonk Irinarkh (Shemanovskiy). This man, who later became a Bolshevik agitator (Shemanovskiy, 2005, p. 10), was more attentive to the natives than were Veniamin and other earlier missionaries. One of his main aims was to educate native children at school. However, Nenets considered giving their children to boarding school unnecessary and even dangerous, as they saw the schools as threats that could turn the children into “Russians” (N. *lutsa*), leave families without working hands, and lead to the loss of their children due to outbreaks of illness in settlements. As a result, very few Nenets, mostly orphans, ended up in mission schools.

Mission priests would visit the nomadic flock in the tundra and carry out private rituals (R. *treby*) such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Often children were baptized at the age of ten and couples were given a church wedding after years of living together (Borisov, 1907, p. 61). In their reports, missionaries talk about how arduous their trips were and how little the converts understood “the true faith” which was usually mediated through an interpreter into a language that lacked a corresponding

terminology (Glavatskaya, 2005, 168). Yet, to the surprise of priests, Nenets sometimes came to ask for baptism even if they had not been proselytized before, after taking a vow (R. *obet*) in a critical situation such as a grave illness, reindeer plague, or danger of drowning. Usually, one committed oneself to be baptized as soon as possible in the nearest church (Shemanovskiy, 2005; Templing, 2003, 2004, 2007). Nomads in the lower Ob area often avoided church burials, betrothals, communion, and confession (Shemanovskiy, 2005, p. 15). However, in the western Nenets tundra the church gave nomads not only Russian personal names and holidays, but also inspired the new habit of baptizing their children and burying their dead in the ground, instead of building above-ground box graves. Nevertheless, Orthodox missionaries did not manage to instill teachings such as original sin, repentance and future salvation.

At the same time, hybrid ritual forms arose such as offerings to icons and telling stories of “Russian” cosmological figures, especially Mikola, that is, St. Nicholas the Miracle Worker. This saint was one of the most venerated saints in popular devotion among Russians and Komi and had been known among the Nenets in the western tundra for centuries, long before the first missionaries came. Strategically, the Russian Orthodox Church dedicated most new churches and chapels to this saint (like the one in Kolva mentioned above). Nenets integrated St. Nicholas into their cosmology while retaining his foreign identity as a “Russian spirit” (N. *lutsa khekhe*). Nomads visiting Khabarovo, the summer settlement on the shore of the Kara Sea, left polar fox pelts, reindeer skins, and money to Mikola in the Old Chapel to ask hunting luck, growth for the herd, health for the family, but also a safe passage over the Yugor Strait to Vaigach where they made sacrifices to Nenets gods, including for Vesako whose sacred site was relocated near the sanctuary destroyed by Veniamin (Baryshev, 2011, p. 201).

Christian elements were submitted to local logic to a varying degree. In some places, Mikola was seen as the helper of the sky god Num or was merged with him. In older myths, Num made the world but then retreated from active participation; however, especially in the western tundra, he became an active character and a direct addressee of sacrifices by the late 18th century (Yasinski & Ovsyannikov, 2003, p. 371). Increasingly, Num came to be considered a moral judge capable of seeing everything and deciding the fate of human beings (Khomich, 1979). Just as the sky god was Christianized, so was his brother Nga, identified with the Devil.

There are many references to the Devil in missionary reports on shamans (N. *tadebya*). They were a favorite rhetorical target, exotic but disturbing characters whose trance, seen as demonic possession, triggered amazement and condemnation (Shemanovskiy, 2005, pp. 42–43; Veniamin, 1855). Missionaries insisted that natives should stop communicating with “devils” (R. *besy*). Shamans’ relations with Christian clerics and their churches varied from hostility to collusion, depending on personal and power relations. For instance, Christianity could offer an exit from dire situations, as when a young Nenets shamans’ apprentice got scared of “a crowd of spirit helpers” after which he had himself baptized (Castrén, 1853, pp. 191–192).

Some shamans were baptized and called themselves Christians. However, they continued moving between different religious regimes, usually well-aware of the exclusivist demands of Christian priests (Lar & Vanuyto, 2011, pp. 137–140). One shaman in the Great Land tundra, after finishing his shamanic seance, “prays and

cries day and night in Russian language, making the sign of a cross and calling the Mikola (Nicholas) the Wonderworker” (quoted in Znamenski, 2003, p. 49). At the same time, another Nenets shaman named Ganjkka in the lower Ob, who was not baptized, understood Christian forces to be less exclusive and more cooperative. He had a sacred figure, “a mother of god” as a helping spirit to whom he offered money. During his initiation rite he was typically dismembered by spirits and while unconscious traveled to the sky where he met Mikkulai (St. Nicholas), who told him to sew a cross from silver ribbon on his shamanic head gear (Lehtisalo, 1924, p. 147). Ganjkka argued that the Nenets had the same god as the Russians: “But when evil people killed the son of Mikkulai, a new kind of religion emerged which we do not know, as we are illiterate” (Lehtisalo, 1924, p. 28). The sense that the Nenets’ way of dealing with the spirit world was a “religion” and different from that of Russian ways had become common by the late tsarist period, when it was called “our faith” (Lar & Vanuyto, 2011, p. 139).

THE SOVIET PERIOD: OPEN RUPTURES AND VEILED CONTINUITIES

The coming to power of the Bolsheviks led to radical change for the Russian Orthodox Church as well as for the Indigenous population. Soviets closed monasteries, churches, and chapels, confiscated their valuables and imprisoned, tortured or executed priests as “anti-Soviet elements.” In the North, priests were replaced by Sovietizing atheists—“missionaries of the new culture and new Soviet statehood” (Bogoraz-Tan, 1925, p. 48)—who preached a bright Communist future instead of a heavenly one. In place of the church infrastructure, new institutions were formed, such as the League of Militant Atheists, which made anti-religious propaganda on the new model of re-educating the population. However, in the sparsely populated North their influence was negligible. To reach the native population special “culture bases” (R. *kul’tbaza*) were built, such as Khoseda-Khard in the southern part of the Great Land tundra. These were to become micro-villages for economic transactions but also for teaching literacy, Marxism-Leninism, hygiene and new gender relations. “Red tents” were introduced, “a sort of traveling kul’tbazy modelled after the mobile churches of the missionaries” (Slezkine, 1994, p. 229).

Soviets continued with several initiatives begun by Orthodox missionaries, such as school education and the translation of doctrinal texts into Indigenous languages, at the same time forcing locals to attend new holidays and carry out rituals such as marriages and burials in a novel way. These new forms promoted materialism, science and atheism. Like Orthodox missionaries, Soviet “missionaries” claimed to reveal the falsity of local knowledge concerning spirits, the cosmos and moral rules. But unlike the Orthodox, the Soviet activists not only promoted their ideology but also restructured much of economic, political and social life, with lasting effects.

In the 1920s, the Soviet authorities regarded religious issues among natives as a marginal issue, indicating their “backwardness.” Shamanism seemed to avoid the definition of religion as it was not organized enough, and did not have proper cult buildings, explicit teachings, official institutions and regular services. Curiously, at the time, in some places shamans became more active, encouraged by the disappearance of the rival Orthodox clergy, and more importantly by the general turmoil of

civil war and famine (Bulgakova & Sundström, 2017; see also Balzer, 2011, p. 39; Znamenski, 2007, p. 328).

However, with the beginning of the Stalinist Cultural Revolution and “class struggle” in the late 1920s, shamans were defined as a serious obstacle on the natives’ path to socialism accused of being counter-revolutionaries who supported the rich kulaks exploiting the “toiling masses,” despite the fact that they were often poor themselves. Furthermore, they were also accused of illegal medicine, fraud and extortion and their ritual objects were confiscated or destroyed. Although repressions against shamans were in general not as harsh as against Christian priests, many were imprisoned for a few years and when released they hid or discontinued their practice. In the Great Land tundra, the best-known repressed shaman was Ivan Ledkov who was characterized by an anti-religious activist as “the literate shaman [...] who now pretends to be a Soviet person” (Skachkov, 1934, p. 28). He spent three years in a Gulag and returned to become a tailor and informant for Russian folklorists. Probably the last time when a larger shamanic ritual was performed in the area was in 1943 before the Soviet military attacked a group of Nenets in the Polar Urals who resisted Sovietization. The shamans with dozens of other Nenets men were sent to the Gulag to never return (Vallikivi, 2005).

Although most Communists were non-natives, some Nenets also became Communist Party members. Several had been in mission schools and became activists, administrators, and teachers for the new government. For instance, Arkadiy Yevsyugin, whose father was Nenets and mother was Russian, became a Communist regional leader in the 1930s. In his memoirs, he describes approvingly how in 1920, as a schoolboy in Pyosha, he saw the priest-teacher confronted by school children who had been changed “under the influence of Red commanders, political instructors and revolutionary songs” (1993, p. 7). As in many other early Soviet narratives of conversion to Communism, one can discern a pattern similar to that of Christianity with motifs of rebirth, confession, and repudiation of one’s past self. Ironically, like many other Indigenous reformers, Yevsyugin was arrested as an “enemy of the people” and sent to a Gulag in 1938.

Despite the pressure, Orthodoxy-related rituals did not disappear. By the early Soviet period, many Nenets, especially in the western tundra, identified themselves as Russian Orthodox. Curiously, state representatives even flirted with locals’ religiosity in order to pursue other goals of Sovietization. For instance, in 1934, Nenets herders asked the regional administration to restore the chapel in Khabarovo. At the request of Yevsyugin, who was in charge of collectivizing the resistant Nenets in the area, the prisoners of the Vaigach Gulag had to “fix, paint and limewash the chapel and put the religious items back in their places” (Yevsyugin, 1993, p. 26). On 2 August (St. Elijah’s Day which was replaced by Reindeer Day), Nenets arrived and “were satisfied with the church looking better than before” (ibid.; see also Leete & Vallikivi, 2011). Officially collectivization was a success but in reality, many families remained outside the state farms for years to come (more below).

In the following decades, nomads continued with their ancestral practices such as reindeer sacrifices and offerings to spirits at camps and sacred sites. Some families went on baptizing children by themselves, celebrating church holidays by lighting candles, wearing neck crosses and keeping icons among other power objects. The introduction of universal schooling in the late 1950s led a younger generation to

express a lack of belief in “religion,” “God,” the church and shamans. But when returning to the tundra, they kept relating to the landscape as a living environment, taking part in sacrificial rituals and observing taboos. Reindeer herders see this as a kind of morality, the “law of the tundra” (Stammeler, 2005, p. 84), which covers relations between all human and non-human persons. Eventually, forced secularization and modernization contributed to an inevitable decrease of older ritual and cosmological knowledge among those who passed through boarding school, pioneer camps, the Communist Youth League and the army. Furthermore, the religious landscape changed as many sacred sites were destroyed by geologists prospecting for oil and gas (Kharyuchi, 2004).

THE POST-SOVIET RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE: SELVES AT STAKE

In the early 1990s religious freedom was restored in Russia and various identities began circulating in public space. Alongside “atheist,” labels such as “Russian Orthodox” or “pagan” became openly available to be taken up. Many Nenets families, who were settled in the villages between the 1960s and 1980s, had less contact with the sentient landscape and its agents. This does not mean that in urban settings animistic sensibilities completely disappeared. Thus, a Nenets curator and her Russian boss who both identify themselves as Orthodox Christians feed spirit figures with alcohol in their museum, while Nenets visitors offer coins to a model of a sacred site there (where one of the “idols” has a Young Communist League pin attached) (Liarskaya, 2011) much as how in the past nomads made offerings to St. Nicholas in an Orthodox church. Although shamans had disappeared among Nenets—except for some rare cases who persisted into the post-Soviet period³—the post-Soviet North saw a revival of shamanism. Shamanic performances often occurred at folklore festivals and on theatre stages with a touch of global New Age spirituality, by artists and activists making political demands for the recognition of their Indigenous culture (as elsewhere in Siberia, see e.g. Balzer 2011; Vitebsky 2005).

The Russian Orthodox Church considers Arctic Russia to be part of its “canonical territory.” However, until recently there has been relatively little Orthodox missionization, even if the Russian Orthodox Church has built dozens of new churches and chapels and carried out baptisms (without probation periods) in village club houses, known as Houses of Culture (see Donahoe & Habeck 2011). The remote tundra camps where Orthodox priests usually do not travel have become a field for Protestant evangelists who move around in all-terrain vehicles or river boats and try to visit every tenthhold. Most are Russians (many of them ethnic Ukrainians) based in nearby cities or visiting from further away. The Russian Orthodox Church regards evangelical movements as “totalitarian sects” and agree with the state that they are proponents of decadent Western values, foreign agents, and a menace to Russian Orthodox civilization.

One of the hotspots where Protestant missionization in the Nenets area has been particularly intensive is in the eastern part of the Great Land tundra and Polar Urals (where I have done fieldwork since the year 2000). These are families who—despite Yevsyugin’s and other Communists’ attempts—were never Sovietized. Throughout the 20th century they continued with old sacrificial practices as well as baptized children in an Orthodox way. In the mid-1990s, a young Nenets man from the Yamb-To

community was baptized in the Baptist church of Vorkuta and since then has helped its Ukrainian pastor visit tundra camps. More than half of the local nomadic Nenets population, around five hundred strong, has converted to Baptism, while a few other families have converted to Pentecostalism. However, many nomads, especially older people, refuse to engage with missionaries, whom they see as undesirable intruders destroying local ways.

Protestant missionaries have transformed earlier patterns of sociality with kin, animals and spirits beyond recognition. For the first time, reindeer herders have accepted Russians' teachings and now engage in a demanding form of piety (see also Vagramenko, 2018). Candidates for baptism must pass a long probation period to learn the basic tenets of the faith, and prove their ability to change by abandoning their "sinful" habits. For instance, it is common that a convert counts himself—usually men talk like this—to be a believer from the moment he has quit drinking for good. Controlling each other and reporting "non-Christian" behavior has become part of everyday life. Repenting, witnessing and Bible reading are new ethical exercises of self-transformation which requires the acquisition of reading skills as well as learning biblical Russian with its archaic vocabulary. Old rituals have been replaced by new equivalents: cleansing rites with smoke to ward off uninvited spirits are replaced by prayers of purification to the Christian deity. The old ways of marrying, raising children, burying the dead, giving gifts, playing games and celebrating holidays have been openly denounced. Missionaries have not only urged people to burn their sacred objects and banned the sacrificial slaughter of reindeer but have also discouraged widespread practices such as drinking reindeer blood or marriage between maternal cousins (see Vallikivi 2009, 2011, 2022).

Recently dozens of reindeer herders living in remote camps have come to participate in a systematic objectifying discourse on themselves and their community. Earlier ways of relating to spirits with few words (except for highly specific shamanic songs) have been replaced by Christian ritual behavior demanding a particular kind of verbosity: one is required to talk abundantly to God and about God, remembering that everything is overheard and judged by Him, and asking forgiveness and expressing praise to this Christianized sky deity (who is still called Num). The new attention at one's self has become overwhelming, as thoughts and feelings are constantly judged for their sincerity. In short, this can be seen as a movement from a more taciturn animist world, in which most principles cannot be easily expressed in words and one's actual deeds are evaluated by others, to a verbally explicit religion in which each act can and should be reflected on, for instance, through reference to some passage in the Bible. The previously taciturn culture is unraveled and transformed by the verbose rhetoric of the evangelists, as a discreet, non-explicit Nenets personhood is reshaped by the need to demonstrate and broadcast a new person (Vallikivi, forthcoming).

CONCLUSION

Some elements of Christianity have permeated most Northern Indigenous communities in Russia, though to a varying extent. In recent anthropological research on Christianity there has been a lively debate over the issue of continuity and change in religious conversion (Robbins, 2007). While those who have studied Protestant conversions tend to stress the Christian logic of rupture, others who have studied more

“syncretic” (e.g. Eastern Orthodox) cases emphasize continuity over transformation, including the reinterpretation of external ideas through Indigenous categories. Indeed, during the history of contact between Nenets and Russians we can see both trends. With Orthodox Christianity, the incorporation of the new teachings has had a limited influence on Nenets’ animistic sensitivities and sensibilities. On the other hand, Baptist conversion in the early 21st century has introduced more thoroughly an evangelical logic, at the expense of the old religion which is systematically silenced and demonized.

One of the reasons why Western and Eastern Christianities have had a different impact is their distinctive theologies, which treat propositional teachings and interiorized states differently (see Hann & Goltz, 2010). While Baptists have required prior training in Christian doctrine (or rather a particular view of this), Orthodox priests have primarily stressed the role of participation in key rituals as enabling personal transformation. Further to this, the Russian Orthodox Church’s mechanisms of control for discipline have been less rigorous than among evangelical missionaries, who have managed to introduce new forms of authority that help to reconfigure converts’ personhoods and relationalities. Although the effects of Orthodox missions have varied from place to place, there has rarely been such a radical rupture with earlier religious practices as there is with Protestant conversion in remote reindeer herders’ camps in recent years. Even the atheist regime of the Soviets which eradicated the shaman’s institution (but not shamanic sensibilities) did not usually trigger a re-fashioning of one’s self, kinship, and morality to such an extent. At the same time, it has to be noted that the “success” of Christianization in the wider Nenets area has been rather modest, as today the vast majority of nomads have not re-evaluated their earlier ideas and practices, which are continuously shaped by their experience with the living landscape full of sentient beings with their own whims and wishes.

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NOTES

- 1 There has been relatively little research on Christian proselytization in today’s Russian Arctic (see case studies in Leete & Koosa, 2012 on Komi; Plattet, 2013 on Koryak; Skvirskaja, 2014 and Vagramenko, 2014 on Yamal Nenets; Vaté, 2009 on Chukchi; Wiget & Balalaeva, 2007 on Khanty).
- 2 In what follows, the abbreviations N. and R. indicate words in Nenets and Russian respectively.
- 3 One such shaman was Gavril Mandakov, who also contacted Mikola on his spirit journeys (Lar, 2005, p. 90).

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CHAPTER 33

NANAI POST-SOVIET SHAMANISM

“True” shamans among the “neo-shamans”



Tatiana Bulgakova

INTRODUCTION: THE LOCAL FOCALIZATION OF THE NANAI TRADITIONAL SHAMANISM

In the Far East of Russia, there is a place where—as shamanists of the entire region believe—shamanic power emerges with the greatest force. This is a small part of the Nanai district in the Khabarovsk territory, namely the two villages of Daerga and Naikhin, which have almost merged into one large village.¹ To a lesser extent, this part also includes the territory adjacent to Daerga and Naikhin along the Amur riverbank. These are the villages of Dada and Dzhari, and the distance between the extreme points of this territory is only about 40 km. The bearers of shamanic worldviews (and not only those among the Nanai people²) believe that in no other place in the Russian Far East can one find such a powerful shamanic influence as in that place. It was in this place that traditional “classical” shamanism, despite all the oppression and propaganda of the Soviet era, lasted longer than in other regions, and it was from there that an updated form of shamanism, called neo-shamanism, emerged (Yelinskaya & Ivashchenko, 2019). It was here that tragic events occurred, affecting primarily the local youth (accidents, suicides among young people) when Nanai neophytes were called by the spirits to shamanize but refused to accept the shamanic invocation. Nanai elders explained those events by the fact that there used to be many shamans in this territory, whose former spirits-helpers had not left the local villages and their inhabitants, and that “the remaining spirit helpers of deceased shamans” strongly demand that the local people obey them and continue the tradition of shamanic praxis. The shaman L. B., who came to Daerga from neighboring Dada, said: “I am scared! It is hard for me to come here” (Bulgakova, 2016, p. 33), because “the local spirits are bristling, rebelling, crowding against me” (ibid.). During a shamanic rite, she sang: “I don’t like to go to Daerga, I don’t like to come (here). / (There) are only (dead) shamans, shamans (their spirits), / (there are lots of) ‘people’ (shamanic spirits) wandering around” (Bulgakova, 2016, p. 261). Even at the time when she said this (in 1994), this particular place remained saturated with the local spirits left by the deceased shamans despite the fact that there was no longer a single practicing shaman in Daerga. Furthermore, it became the locus from which Nanai shamanism resumed and spread again, clothed in new

forms; these variants employ new methods of healing and rely on the modern occult and pseudo-scientific discursive practices.

“The inheritance of shamanic abilities will never stop!” (FMA, L. B.)

The place of local focalization of Nanai shamanism was famous not only for the unusual supernatural abilities of resident shamans, but also for the fact that the so-called traditional (classic) version of it was preserved in this place longer than in other regions. According to V. I. Kharitonova, traditional shamanism persisted in certain areas of Siberia until the mid-1980s (Kharitonova, 2009, p. 148), but in the Nanai “epicenter of shamanic power” I had the opportunity to observe a limited range of individuals whose very active traditional shamanic practice lasted much longer, until the mid-1990s. This variant of shamanism can be called the traditional one, judging by the descriptions left by researchers for more than a century (Shimkevich, 1896; Lopatin, 1913, 1922; Kozminski, 1927; Shternberg, 1927, 1933; Smolyak, 1999). Its main features remained stable and recognizable. However, in 1993–1995, several of the most active Nanai shamans passed away, and the “traditional” shamans who remained after that (until 2002) living outside the “shamanic epicenter” almost stopped practicing, explaining that they were “left by the spirits.” One of these traditional shamans, O. K. (born in 1920), also practically no longer practiced, but lived until 2013 and had the opportunity to observe all the events of the transition from traditional shamanism to its modified forms. She became a real expert for me, as she expressed the traditional view onto the innovations that affected Nanai shamanic practice.

In the first half of the 1990s, when the last traditional shamans were still actively practicing, young and middle-aged people were making their religious choices in the context of a new worldview, sharing the global values of the era of “new religiosity.” This was the time when

the bearers of the traditional culture were actually in cultural and linguistic separation. For example, in many Nanai families, the grandparents, who spoke only Nanai, could not communicate with their grandchildren, who did not understand the Nanai language, without a translator.

(Bulgakova, 2013, p. 217)

However, in the religious sphere, such “interpreters” were not in demand; young people were not interested in the activities of the traditional Nanai shamans who still lived next to them. They were more impressed with the information coming from the media and preferred to master the occult literature that had appeared in the book market at that time.

In the 1990s, the territory between Dada and Dzhari designated by us as the “epicenter” of the shamanic power, people suffering from shamanic disease did not stop appearing; however, they mostly refused the challenge of shamanic praxis and soon died. Shamanic disease is a rather significant phenomenon associated with shamanic praxis. It is necessary to distinguish between two types of disease, one of which affects the individual and the other, a collective shamanic one. The individual form of the disease has been described by the researchers in some detail. It is caused by

spirits who compel the afflicted person to accept their call and become a shaman. Since the majority of people will oppose it, “the spirit of the ancestor pushes, attacks, and presses” (Verbitsky, 1870, p. 63), and “the shamanic call takes on a pronounced character of coercion and torment” (Dyrenkova, 1930, p. 267). Some symptoms of the individual shamanic disease are “severe attacks, or seizures of the disease,” when a person “lay and sang and shouted senselessly, suddenly jumped up and, disappearing from the house for a long time, wandered around the neighborhood” (Dyrenkova, 1949, p. 110).

In other works, descriptions of collective illness can be found (Bogoraz, 1910; Zelenin, 1936; Alekseev, 1984; Priklonskii, 1891; etc.); Shirokogoroff (1919, 1935) asserts the shamanic character of the illness:

It may affect a very great number of persons who belong to the same unit — usually a clan, or a village, and even an ethnic group. In this form the condition can be considered as mass psychosis, which may take two forms: an “epidemic” form that suddenly affects the unit and soon passes away, and an “endemic” form that from time to time affects groups of persons, even the same persons who belong to the same unit.

(Shirokogoroff, 1935, p. 260)

Despite the fact that the last traditional Nanai shamans were aware of the low prestige of shamanic service at that time (1980s and early 1990s), they did not doubt that the inheritance of shamanic abilities would ever stop. They were sure that, despite the young people’s lack of understanding of the Nanai language and their complete disregard of ritual knowledge, the powerful inherited stream of spiritual dependence on spirits would break through the dam of socio-cultural barriers, and that shamans would again reappear and continue their shamanic service—even in a different language and in completely different ways. The shaman L. B. spoke about this as follows:

Our newly born children will be like another people (as not the Nanai). But (still) somebodies (inherited spirits) will torment them in their sleep, and they (our children) will become shamans. All those beings (spirits) that people used to live with will again (live) in young people. New shamans will shamanize in the language they will speak. Even speaking and singing in Russian, but they will shamanize!

(FMA, L. B.)

Another shaman succinctly expressed herself on this topic as follows. “The old laws will never disappear!” (FMA, T. B.).

Indeed, after a short break, in the early 2000s, new shamans began to appear on the territory of the shamanic “epicenter”—however, they were significantly different from the previous traditional shamans. Under the influence of innovative ideas that had made their way into the consciousness of Nanai youth, new religious rhetoric was formed that was significantly alien to the traditional one. The new shamanic discourse included the occult concepts of “energy,” “space,” “information field,” and others, replacing the previous concepts of “spirits” and “souls.” The techniques of shamanic practice also changed meaningfully. As before, the new shamans treated

people, but the methods of treatment they used were much different (e.g., contact or non-contact massage).

This raised the question of whether the innovative version of shamanic practice should be considered a continuation of tradition and whether the term “shamanism” should even be retained. Or were the changes so profound that a new term would be needed? The opinions of researchers and the local community differed. On the one hand, researchers began to apply the term “neo-shamanism” to these forms of renewed shamanism in Nanai communities (Yelinskaya & Ivashchenko, 2019). This followed the trend in Russian science that regards neo-shamanism as the use of eclectic techniques, borrowed from various religious practices. On the other hand, the terminological contrast between “traditional (classical) shamanism” of the indigenous peoples of Siberia and “neo-shamanism” as a modernized and modified version of it was not accepted by those who began to be called “neo-shamans.” They insisted that they were *real, true* shamans, not “neo-shamans.” Not agreeing “with the prefix neo-, modern shamans claim that they are the heirs of an autochthonous ancient tradition” (Ozhiganova, 2015, p. 213), and that post-Soviet changes in shamanic practice are not sufficient grounds for rejecting the terminology generally recognized by both researchers and shamanists. As for the bearers of the traditional shamanic worldview, for some reason they do not call some new shamans “neo-shamans,” but “real shamans,” while they do not consider other new shamans to be shamans at all. In order to determine whether the new version of healing practice is an extension of shamanism itself, or whether a new term (neo-shamanism) is required to define it, it is essential to keep in mind how the authenticity of the shamanic vocation was determined in the traditional Nanai shamanic community.

Traditional criteria for the authenticity of shamanic abilities

The critical and skeptical attitude of the shamanic community to the authenticity of a person’s shamanic abilities is not a new phenomenon. Even in the past, the authenticity of the shamanic title was usually questioned and had to be proven. So, demanding that the grandfather of one of my informants prove the reality of his shamanic abilities, people asked him to perform a shamanic trick in front of everyone. “Show us that! If you cannot show it, we will beat you! You are probably kidding us and you are not a *kasati* (great) shaman at all! That is how it used to be!... If you can’t do it, you will not be a shaman!” (FMA, I. T.). Once, doubting that a person was becoming a real traditional shaman and that the stone image of a bear was really a container for his shamanic spirit, people drowned that stone bear in the river. After a while, the shaman said to people: “Go to the beach and look!” People went to the river and saw that the stone bear was standing on the beach not far from the water, and the track in the sand went to it from the water’s edge as if a motorcycle passed there... “Well, do not you still believe?” the shaman said (FMA, M. T.). The rite of initiation of the neophyte was performed only after people were convinced that he had the most important thing—a strong connection with the spirits. However, such a connection was not always reliable enough, and spirits could leave the shaman. That shaman was then required to confirm their ability to reestablish that connection.

Those tricks that should have been performed when a community distrusted a shaman were sometimes so amazing and contradictory to the natural laws of nature

that the stories about them seem to be fiction. At the same time, my informants insisted that during the rituals of the “great” shamans they had the opportunity to watch such tricks with their own eyes. Surely researchers must retain a critical towards such stories, but it would be imprudent, in my opinion, to go to the other extreme and completely neglect them. One of these unbelievable tricks consisted in overcoming the laws of gravity. V. P. recalls how once before his eyes, a shaman woman “rose above the floor.” Those present, according to him, began to shout: “Now she is going to fly away! Hold her!” V. P. recounted that “Interestingly, she rose above the floor! [...] It seemed creepy! Why was she flying away?” (FMA). About another shaman, V. C. said “That time there were no curtains on the windows, and we looked from the street through a window ... Oh! I saw, it was amazing! Oh, my! Ohoh! She (a shaman woman) was flying!” (FMA, V. C.). In other cases, it was reported that they saw not only the shaman himself or herself who raised above the floor, but even figures representing spirits began to fly, and fire appeared from under the shaman’s armpits. “It was the *sewen* (shamanic spirit) who did it. Terrible was that *sewen*!” (FMA, I. T.).

Another unlikely trait in the context of the scientific worldview—which at the same time a trait was absolutely authentic in the eyes of Nanai shamans—was the ability of shamans to shapeshift. “In order to comprehend how the Tungus-Manchu themselves perceive shamans turning into tigers and other animals, it is useful to listen to those shamans who affirm that they have had experiences of such transformations.” (Bulgakova, 2018, p. 9). My informant N. P. claimed that sometimes, against his will, he turns into a tiger. He described a case of this transformation as follows. He was

once walking in the forest together with his mother, father-in-law, and elder brother and ran a few steps ahead of his family. Then he stopped and looked back at his family approaching through the heavy foliage. However, when his relatives spotted him, they took fright and started running back. Later, his mother explained to him: “It was not your face, not a human face, but a tiger’s muzzle that was looking at us from the bushes, that is why we were so frightened.” N. P. was convinced that this had occurred because he had a shamanic spirit-helper tiger.

(Bulgakova, 2018, p. 9)

During my field work, I had to communicate with those who saw “with their own eyes” (as they say) the spirits that sometimes became visible and audible during the shamanic rite, and with shamans who moved objects, and performed other seemingly unbelievable tasks.

Not all traditional Nanai shamans were considered great and mighty enough. Some of them had more modest abilities, but nevertheless they could do things that were not possible for ordinary people (they could, for instance, still predict the future and heal incurable diseases). For the shaman community, such abilities were a sign of unity between a shaman and the spirits; this in turn was the criterion necessary for the authenticity of the shaman title in the eyes of the always critical Nanai community. From the point of view of bearers of the traditional worldview, it is precisely the unity with spirits that makes it possible to overcome natural laws and is thus the most reliable measure that helps to identify the legitimacy of the shamanic vocation.

This criterion of authenticity of the shamanic vocation is still applied by the carriers of the traditional shamanic worldview in relation to present-day Nanai shamans. Indeed, with some of the new shamans—just as it was traditionally—there are inexplicable irrational phenomena that contradict the natural course of things. I have not heard of any of them being able to overcome gravity, but according to my informants, shapeshifting is quite accessible to them. Modern shamans are convinced that they inherited not spirits, but “energy” from the previous traditional shamans. They say that this “energy” can be separated from them and reunited with the certain animals, and then people can see them (shamans) in the images of those animals. One of the new shamans stated: “I can come (to people) in the form of a dog. Yet only in the image of a dog. I sleep, but my spirit walks” (FMA, Z. N.). Another modern shaman E. K., who also claims that she has repeatedly appeared before other people in the form of a dog, can also, as several informants assured me, momentarily move in space to be in two places at once.

She can sit at home (in Dzhari village) and appear at the same time in Sinda (in another village). And people see her in Sinda, even though she is sleeping at home in Dzhari. She sees in a dream that she is in Sinda, and in Sinda people watch her in reality.

(FMA, R. B.)

E. K. herself has told me about one of the episodes of her transformations and movements:

My friend spent the night at my house with her adult son D. and her daughter. I heard them in the middle of the night, at half past three in the morning, they were talking (in their room). I opened the door. They were mumbling! I say, “What are you doing? Are you awake?” Everyone was so excited... “Aunt,” D. (the friend’s son) says, “have you already changed your clothes? Has your rattle been removed?” L. (a friend) said “Do you walk at night, and frighten me? You (just) came here in a long white dress, a white hat and with a rattle, also white, and with colored lights. You stood there and rotated the rattle!” I say, “Are you crazy? I just woke up. What is a rattle? I have never seen any rattles in my life! And I do not have a hat” ... They actually saw me like that!

(FMA, E. K.)

Curiously, at that moment E. K. did not know that some peoples of Siberia considered the rattle a shamanic tool before they started using drum for shamanic purposes (Prokofieva, 1981, p. 54). However, according to E. K.’s explanation, who appeared to the guests in her form, her spirit helper knew about it, thereby demonstrating E. K.’s closeness to the spiritual world and the authenticity of her shamanic vocation.

Nanai neo-shamans as “not real shamans”

There are two distinct groups of contemporary Nanai shamans. One group includes those who position themselves as shamans without having clients, and who try to practice special exercises in order to awaken their shamanic abilities. Let us consider

the first group. It includes people who came to shamanism indirectly through various courses of healing, hypnosis, etc. Even though the traditional practice was characterized by the resistance of neophytes to the shamanic vocation, these new shamans actively seek to acquire the shamanic gift without waiting for the call from the spirits in order to “improve themselves” and “discover in themselves unmanifested abilities.” According to the definition of N. P. Dyrenkova, this is an active form of shamanic invocation, due to the conscious search for the neophyte’s shamanic gift and the desire to learn shamanic service (Dyrenkova, 1930). The enthusiasm of the neophytes of this group was provoked by post-Soviet global transformations, when new value orientations began to be introduced into the minds of people through the media’s interest in occult topics and the introduction of popular occult literature into the book market. Those shamans were appeared because of the global processes of cultural and religious integration and unification spreading to the Nanai district of the Khabarovsk territory. These Nanai “neo-shamans” hoped that shamanic practice would open up prospects for personal growth, lead to self-improvement and the development of mental abilities, and result in positive life changes. Shamanic practice for them is a method of self-realization, achieved as a result of independent training, the use of special literature and modern forms of communication. A descendant of traditional shamans, E. K. talks about her desire to acquire the shamanic gift:

I do not have such a gift inside me yet... I do not yet know how to enter into a trance... Perhaps it is necessary to relax, to go into your own mind, so that there appear some visions... (People) ask me: “Do you already see something (some spirits)?” “No, I do not see anything!” I answer... I do not do all that. I should probably try to make sure that no one interferes, but I do not have such conditions... I need to learn how to charge myself... I am not working on myself!... I must charge from the Sun, but I forget about it.

(FMA, E. K.)

It is such self-appointed seekers of shamanic gifts who are not considered to be real shamans (FMA, O. K.). Those who still retain memories of the “real” shamanic tradition speak of such self-styled, self-taught people with irony and mockery:

On TV, a Russian woman said that she became a shaman, that it is not necessary to have a drum for that! She just sits and tells others that she has become a shaman! Just like that, quickly she has learned, she says.

(FMA, O. K.)

For those who seek the shamanic gift on their own initiative, psychology is primary, and the influence of spirits is either secondary or not relevant at all. The emic term “non-shamanism,” used to refer to such persons, corresponds to the scientific term “neo-shamanism.” Those persons, who are trained in the courses, understand shamanic practice through the materialistic aspect as a result of mastering in “numerous courses of hypnosis, psychotherapy of different directions, magic-mystical techniques of various variants, bioenergotherapy, eniosuggestion, etc.” They are interested in developing “their own bioenergetic and eniosuggestive abilities,” as well as mastered “techniques of hypnosis” and other techniques of “practical psychology and

eniology.” (Kharitonova, 2006, p. 223). Spirits for them are only images that symbolize certain natural phenomena (for example, real animals), contributing to living in harmony with nature. The superficial understanding of the shaman’s worldview by modern contenders for the title of shaman is clearly expressed, for example, in the following words of the informant V. I. Kharitonova:

I... read an article by Michael Harner, where he says that what makes a shaman to become a real shaman is his spirits. And when I read this phrase, it made me sick. I thought everything was fine, I like everything on this path except spirits. I accept everything on this road, but whether it is possible that all this happened, but only without the spirits?

(Kharitonova, 2016, p. 250)

In an attempt to generalize what the bearers of shamanic worldview express, one can say that those who are considered “not true” or “fake” shamans are themselves active, while the spirits are passive in relation to them. On the contrary, in another group, to which we will now turn, the passive form of vocation on the part of the neophyte is accompanied by “a special predisposition of a person due to heredity” (Dyrenkova, 1930), that is, with an active interest on the part of the spirits.

Modern “true” shamans who do not care about preserving traditions

According to the Nanai elders, who still maintain the traditional shamanic worldview, and particularly to our significant expert, the traditional shaman O. K., the real contemporary Nanai shamans are those who have inherited the shamanic call from shamans of the previous generations. At the same time, the innovative healing techniques used by the modern shamans do not confuse our traditional experts. The new shamans, who reject calling themselves “neo-shamans,” justify their authenticity by saying that they are “approved” by the inherited spirits of the deceased traditional shamans. The present-day shaman M. S. believes that she was taught massage techniques by a spirit, the former assistant of a traditional shaman L. B. who died in 1994. That spirit appears to M. S. in the guise of L. B.:

I (sometimes) see the grandmother L. B. She shows me directly with her hands where to poke (during the massage). I saw her so clearly! That is how it happens. I work and say: “Oh, grandma has come!” She tells me: “Put your finger here!” I am putting it here. “Move it there!” “I am moving it there.” And we start working together (with her) like this.

The use of the new techniques was unavoidable, due to the fact that contemporary shamans had poor familiarity with the Nanai language and the features of former ritual practices. Television programs and popular literature, which promoted occultism, encouraged them to develop an interest in such healing methods that, as they believed, were based on science and promised to be much more advanced and effective than the traditional ones. By the end of the 20th century, almost all Nanai people, including traditional shamans, knew the names of A. M. Kashpirovsky, D. Davitashvili, A. V. Chumak, S. S. Konovalov, the Bulgarian Vanga, and other healers

and fortune-tellers famous all over Russia. The interest in their activity was already impossible to extinguish. Opportunity to attend the courses of visiting healers also appeared, and some of the Nanai who came to such courses were surprised to learn that their inherited powers were superior to those of the visiting lecturers and healers. An artist, E. K. who later became a shaman, attended a seance of a visiting Uzbek healer (“I was so curious, she says, I was interested in everything, I watched her passes and actions with such attention and energy!”). Then the healer interrupted the seance and addressed to E. K. with such words: “No offense, but I have a request for you, can’t you go for a walk? You are bothering me!” “How can I bother her? I am standing there quietly!” thought E. K. Wondering why exactly she was noticed in a crowded audience, E. K. then approached the psychic after the session and heard from that healer about her own abilities: “Do you know that you also have the same power (as I do)?” The psychic recommended E. K. read a pamphlet about non-contact massage by D. Davitashvili.³ E. K. told me about it like this:

I felt that I had something, but I did not know... I wondered what kind of person that Davitashvili was... I bought a brochure, leafing through... and even in the pictures where the hands were drawn, I saw a glow... although in fact, this (radiance) was not shown in the drawing... I put the book in my bag, and I even had goosebumps!

(E. K.)

That same evening, E. K. began to apply the techniques recommended by Davitashvili in practice, and, as she reports, immediately learned to heal the sick (FMA, E. K.).

The Nanai material clearly shows that the new generation of shamans does not have the task of preserving the traditional shamanic praxis unchanged, but that they are inspired by the other purposes. They seek the most effective ways to provide the certain services to the population. None of the new shamans who began their work in the early 2000s sought to emulate the traditional shaman, O. K., who lived until 2013. Being adherents of the “scientific” view on the nature of shamanic activity, they said that they “surely respect the traditions, very much respect [them],” but they are also going to use “the modern knowledge” in their activities (FMA, M. S.). However, the alienation of traditional and new shamans was mutual. When applying for shamanic initiation E. I. complained to O. K. about her troubles. O. K. decided that the cause of the troubles was that E. I. performed the rite of sacrifice on her own without help of a true shaman; however, E. I.’s request that O. K. help her was answered by an evasive refusal. O. K. also refused to help E. I. in a shamanic initiation (FMA, E. I.; O. K.).

As for the attitude to tradition as such, the modern shaman E. A. speaks about it as follows:

Tradition is not the main thing. The main thing is to be effective and to succeed. I am not going just to dance, to shout, to sing, right? I want to give assistance to a person. And for this purpose, everything that can enhance the effect and that can help me identify the trouble faster and to fix it efficiently suits me. Why not to use (some new methods)? Or just traditional ones? You know, back then, literacy (among the traditional shamans) was low. They did everything

intuitively... But we are already science-savvy people. Why not use it (scientific methods) for good?

(FMA, E. A.)

“True” new shamans are clearly opposed to those who are popularly called “non-shamans” (neo-shamans), who are declaratively concerned about the preservation and revival of the former traditional forms, although due to their lack of knowledge about (or how they ignore) these forms, they are only vaguely aware of what exactly they are.

A mysterious territory that activates shamanic praxis

The criterion of the “true shamanism” is, according to the native worldview, the will of the spirits to hold power over humans and the encouragement of the spirits to participate in the ceremonial activities of people. In the context of this emic perspective, this true dependence of people on spirits tends to be fixed in certain material objects, ritual objects, and certain “shamanic” territories like territory between the Dada and Dzhari villages.

Carolyn E. Boyd refers to such mysterious territories as to “gateway to the world below” or “the sacred portal into the Otherworld” (Boyd, 1996, p. 162), where, as it is believed, a person can accidentally find himself on the other side of the border separating the material realm from the spiritual one. It is thought that such physical objects as a cave, a pit, a whirlpool, a well, etc. can—under certain circumstances—turn out to be the entrance to the spiritual world (Bulgakova, 2014, p. 5). In the small area between Dada and Dzhari, which we designate as the “epicenter” of Nanai shamanic praxis, there were lots of traditional shamans practicing and, accordingly, numerous sacral sites remained. The localization of most sacrificial and other sacral sites has been forgotten, but their presence did not cease to affect the people living in that area. Each of the previous traditional shamans kept the souls of their patients in special stores, which were a kind of spiritual space inscribed into a specific physical object (a rock, hill, large stone, island, etc.). After death of the local shamans, the spiritual content of these objects has changed, but has not been lost. Rather, it continued to strengthen the internal spiritual concentration of the place. The area around the villages of Daerga and Naikhin was especially saturated with such hidden places, making the descendants of shamans who lived there dependent on the local spirits and designating that territory as a “spatial rift,” or door to the spiritual world. The peculiarities of that territory means it is considered risky for its inhabitants. The elders believe that the shamanic spirits left by the departed shamans continue to act even “without their masters, because they are free” (FMA, O. K.). That is why during the period of “silence,” when there was a transition from traditional shamanism to its modern version and when no new shamans appeared, there were a lot of suicides in Daerga and Naikhin. O. K. explained that “Nanai atheists threw away some shamanic equipment,” so “in turn the spirits also do not spare the children of those atheists” (FMA, O. K.).

As already mentioned, it was that territory, where the spirits of all the previously-shamanic Nanai people were concentrated (as shamanists believed), that gave rise to a new surge of transformed shamanic practice. However, some of new shamans, who

came from that place, had to leave their native place for the neighboring cities (e.g., primarily Khabarovsk) during the course of their activities. The relative proximity of Khabarovsk (135 km from Naikhin) did not affect their connection with the spirits of their native places. At the same time, I observed a young Nanai woman, born in Naikhin, who started suffering from the shamanic disease. When that woman got married and went with her husband to Moscow for good, all the symptoms of shamanic illness left her. As the elders explained, “Moscow was too far from Naikhin, and the inherited shamanic spirits had lost her trace” (FMA, R. B.).

Fitting into a new socio-cultural context, and focusing on the expectations of the modern clientele, the new variant of shamanism was assimilated “by such cultural forms as business consulting, artistic creativity, tourism, show business, psychotherapy, manual medicine” (Yelinskaya, 2020, p. 59). The connection with their native territory and with their inherited spirits was crucial for the new shamans. They could not responsibility for preserving the tradition; almost all of them were highly educated and guided by the modern ideas about the world. The urbanization of new shamans and their move to the city, closer to a wider clientele who could not criticize them due to the lack of information about real shamanic traditions, also did not contribute to the desire of new shamans to preserve traditions. In the discussions of modern shamanists, the criterion for the truth of a shamanic title is not at all a desire to follow traditions. In the context of the emic perspective, only the initial connection with a certain invisible “shamanic territory” and with the inherited spirits that saturate this territory, only the ability to use this connection to influence a certain part of society for the purpose of various occult actions helps to determine which of the applicants for the shamanic title is “a true shaman.”

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NOTES

- 1 The author’s study is based on the extensive ethnographic field data research conducted in the Nanai villages in Khabarovskii krai in Russia. This research has been conducted for over 35 years and consists of almost annual short-term (from two weeks to two months) visits to the Nanai informants. The research takes an emic approach, which involves clarifying the view of the bearers of the studied culture concerning those issues that were of the author’s interest. The study was conducted in the language that was most convenient for informants to speak, so a significant part of the recorded material was in the Nanai language.
- 2 The Nanai people are an Indigenous population of Russia’s Far East. They live in Russia and China along the banks of the Middle Amur and its tributaries Ussuri and Sungari; however, this article is only about Russian Nanai. The current number of Nanai people in Russia is about 12,000 people. The Nanai language belongs to the group of Tungus-Manchu languages; in recent years, the number of native speakers has decreased to less than one-fifth. Most Nanai live in villages, although the number of urban Nanai is growing and currently accounts for almost a third of the total population. The modern popula-

tion of Nanai in Russia is characterized by universal literacy, and the percentage of Nanai specialists with higher and secondary education is quite high. Modern Nanai youth are becoming more and more interested in traditional Nanai culture and especially traditional beliefs, which has led to the revival of some traditional animistic and shamanic practices.

3 Dzuna Davitashvili positioned herself as a healer and astrologer.

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CHAPTER 34

FEEDING THE GI'RGIR AT KILVEI

An exploration of human-reindeer-ancestor relations among the Siberian Chukchi



Jeanette Lykkegård

INTRODUCTION

Galina, my neighbor, has gone to her apartment to get something she wants to show me. She returns with a bag made of reindeer skin. From the bag, she pulls out two wooden figures with many interesting objects attached to them. The figures themselves are carved out as simple people with eyes and mouth. In vertical lines across the body there are several depressions. They kind of look like sunken buttons.

Galina explains: "When I began to live with Vova, my husband, my mother said that I have to keep these together. This is my husband," she says, pointing to the larger of the wooden figures, "and this is me," she says pointing to the small one. "They are our *gi'rgir*. They are masters who guard us. That is why we feed them. We feed them at Kilvei. Kilvei is a ritual for the reindeer calves. We feed them at Kilvei with the purest fat, so that everything will be good. They come from our ancestors and we maintain ourselves through feeding them."

Perplexed, I look at these guarding masters and the attached string filled with various interesting looking things. I point to a wooden fork-like piece attached to the string. "What is this?" I ask. "This is an *ok-kamak* (Koryak, wooden spirit). You know, people have died. When people die, we make these, see this is from my mother, from when she died, and this is my husband. They are still fresh." I ponder for a second upon the fact that her dead husband is both one of the *gi'rgir* and also one of the *ok-kamaks*, but Galina does not give me much time before she moves on to a stone in a small bag made of reindeer skin.

"And this is *anju*. In our language *anju* is grandmother. When we do *zaboi*, (Russian, slaughter; here referring to a ritualized reindeer slaughter) I feed my *anju*. She does not have skin, but she has ornaments. Look at this ornament for example. This is from when I heal with my hands, people then give me a bracelet. I wear the bracelet for a while and then hang it onto my *anju*. All of these things, we are keeping them. We feed them. In autumn and in spring, we feed them. Even in summer, I feed them, if one of the reindeer calves die. Look, this is a reindeer tail. It was the first reindeer that I had that died. And look, this is

part of a reindeer ear. When we mark our reindeer, we cut a piece of their ears. Look, this is that piece.”¹

Reindeer are the foundation of the economy of many of the Indigenous peoples of Siberia, most particularly of the Nenets, Chukchi, Evens, and Evenks in the Russian North (Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015). The body of anthropological literature covering the subject of human-reindeer relationship in these groups of peoples is continually growing. These relationships have often been explored in comparisons of hunter-gatherers and pastoralists. Some have argued that in hunting societies animals are experienced as beings with which one must build trust and reciprocity, while the process of domestication carries understandings of the animal in terms of a product and requires domination (e.g., Hamayon, 1990; Ingold, 2000). In this context trust refers to the idea among hunting peoples that a successful kill of an animal is the result of its own willingness to being taken or giving itself to the hunter (Ingold, 2000; Willerslev, 2007). In pastoralist societies herders have been observed to take on a different dominating role in which the herdsman himself “takes life-or-death decisions concerning what are now ‘his’ animals [as] protector, guardian and executioner” (Ingold, 2000: 72). This perspective however, it is argued, does not completely apply to herders of North Asia, where herders seem to remain close to the relational understandings of hunting societies (Pedersen, 2001). Several authors indeed place emphasis exactly on the importance of trust and reciprocity between herders and animals in reindeer herding (Anderson, 2014; Beach & Stammler, 2006; Donahoe, 2012). It has even been reasoned that it may be the hunter’s ideal of the perfect hunt where the animal gives itself up in trust as an act of reciprocity that has been a prime mover in the transition from hunting reindeer to herding them (Willerslev et al., 2015). Some authors prefer now to use the biological notion of “symbiosis” to describe the relationship between herder and herd (Beach & Stammler, 2006; Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015). Others argue that this term may better describe a sedentary kind of herding with fodder supply and fixed structures, rather than the forms of mobile grazing herding that are widespread in North Asia (Stépanoff et al., 2017: 58).

As becomes evident from the above, the relationships between human and reindeer in reindeer herding communities of Siberia are complex. Additionally, we see that various heuristics can be used to explore this complexity. The examination of the relationship between Chukchi people of Achaivaia and their reindeer in this chapter will add to the ongoing scholarly conversation on this matter, by unfolding how an essential part of this relationship among the Chukchi has to do with their ancestors: the upper people. During everyday life among the reindeer herders, as well as among the villagers, it is not obvious that the ancestors form part of the relationship between the Chukchi and their reindeer. This becomes evident particularly through ritual practices, such as the mortuary rituals (described thoroughly in Lykkegård, 2016; Lykkegård & Willerslev, 2016) as well as the spring ritual, Kilvei. This chapter will be mainly concerned with exploring this through Kilvei.

The whole celebration of Kilvei, which takes place around the time of the birthing of the reindeer calves, revolves around preparing for and feeding the *gi'rgir* (Chukchi, sacred fire tool, master who guards us, or fire-reindeer tool), which were introduced in the opening vignette. As I was told by Zoya, whom we will return to during the

description of the ritual: “We do it so that hopefully they will allow the calves to grow strong.” “Who?” I asked. “The upper people (Russian: *verkhnie liudi*),” Zoya answered, referring to the ancestors.

The ritual actions performed by the multi-species participants in Kilvei forms the basis for this chapter. I argue that the main figure of the ritual, the gi’rgir, can be understood as a physical manifestation and unfolding of the relationship between the living, the ancestors and the reindeer. And through an understanding of gi’rgir and the attached family string, we can broaden our understanding of how the Chukchi of Achaivaiaam perceive of their relationship with their reindeer.

In other accounts of Kilvei, the gi’rgir, as well as the other ritual objects, are understood symbolically (Vaté, 2005; Karstens, 2017). I take a different approach. For example, during the ritual the human participants perform as reindeer calves. I was told that they did in fact become reindeer calves. What if we take this seriously? What will we learn if we do not interpret this symbolically, but instead take it quite verbatim? And in this specific case, what will we learn about human-reindeer-ancestor relations among the Chukchi? This chapter is an exploration of these questions.

When engaging with Kilvei, I consider all the participants in the ritual as live acting participants, whether they are human or non-human, visible or invisible (to me). In this approach to analyzing Kilvei, we see the interconnectedness between reindeer, the Chukchi people in Achaivaiaam, and the ancestors in the upper world. And through this we may understand from a new perspective why Chukchi people say: “without deer, we are nothing” (King, 2002).

Before returning to describe Kilvei as it was experienced by me, the author, in May 2012 in and around the tent of Zoya, I will briefly introduce the Chukchi as a people and then expand on the way I understand ritual.

CHUKCHI IN ACHAIVAIAAM

Achaivaiaam is a village of around 400 inhabitants consisting primarily of Chukchi people, but Even² and a handful of Russian and Ukrainian people also live there.

While much prominent anthropological work on post-Soviet Indigenous societies shows how villages are largely deprived of pre-Soviet traditions (Vitebsky, 2005; Willerslev, 2010; Ulturgasheva, 2012; Ulturgasheva, 2014), this is not the case in Achaivaiaam. On the contrary, the Chukchi population here maintained a close connection to what we have termed animist and shamanic ways of dealing with important life matters. The Chukchi more generally, and their neighboring people, the Koryak, are among the very few of the nationalities in Russia who have completely refused to convert to orthodox Christianity throughout Russian colonial times (Willerslev, 2009). Since most of the shamanic activities took place in the home, there was no religious organization to attack, and so it was relatively easy for shamanism to survive underground. Furthermore, in Achaivaiaam, the most important rituals are carried out in the village instead of the tundra, which appears to be unique to Siberian villages. These rituals are not carried out to try to restore a link with a way of life that they have left behind, as Vaté (2005), for example describes it to be for some Chukchi, they are indeed a way of sustaining and continually creating a life that is constantly coming into being (see also Lykkegård, 2016; Lykkegård & Willerslev, 2016).

The village of Achaivaiaam was founded in 1934. As with Chukotka and the rest of the northern Kamchatka, the greatest transformation took place from the 1950s to the 1970s, when infrastructure in the form of helicopter routes was established. The fact that the people in Achaivaiaam have maintained a privately-owned reindeer herd is unusual, and as we shall come to see, of paramount importance to their life and in death. In the 1980s to early 1990s, the period of *perestroika* and post-*perestroika*, many communities experienced great poverty, with many people suffering from withheld wages, as well as an almost total collapse of the social welfare system (Gray, 2005; Kerttula, 2000; Rethmann, 2002; Vitebsky, 2002). In Achaivaiaam, maintaining reindeer herds were vital in the further survival of the community. I was told that “the only way to survive was the old way.” Alexander King (2002) writes that while we as ethnographers do our best to avoid essentializing other people, many Chukchi as well as Koryak people essentialize themselves by insisting on reindeer as essential to ethnographic understanding. For these people, he writes, a reindeer herd is not simply a group of deer managed by people, it is “a holographic entity providing a scale model of the social life of animate beings in the universe” (King, 2002: 134).

RITUAL AS A HEURISTIC TOOL

Chukchi rituals, as I have come to understand them, come into being through a certain way of relating to and acting within the world. Rituals of birth and naming rituals link people across time through the sharing of ancestral souls (see also Balzer, 1999). Those rituals are ways of communicating with the part of life which is not always visible, or which is difficult to communicate with through common human language.

Despite the ritual's inflexible physicality, having human and non-human perform very exact actions according to detailed prescriptions, its overt materiality and intrinsic immateriality nonetheless convey the potentiality for flexibility. Ritual is something concurrently material and immaterial in ways that are simultaneously spiritual, social, and physical (Morehart & Butler, 2010: 589). Both analytically and practically, ritual embraces the interface between immateriality and materiality (Rappaport, 1979). By doing so, rituals offer materiality to immaterial theories understood to exist beyond normal boundaries of space and time (Bloch, 1977). Rituals hereby challenge dichotomous views of the world, which may be why they have come to serve as such a fruitful heuristic for me in the context of the Chukchi people. Despite countless efforts to move beyond a dichotomized way of describing the world, most social scientists keep falling into same dichotomous trap, perhaps because the language with which we understand and describe the world is built on these very oppositional binaries (Levi-Strauss, 1962). The dichotomous formulations of the sacred and immaterial, as opposed to the profane and material, keep entering the arena when speaking of rituals (Morehart & Butler, 2010). I will probably not be able to do otherwise, but in many ways, among the Chukchi, there is no *a priori* separation between the various phenomena in the world, which gives sense to these dichotomies (Lykkegård, 2019). The physical is always also spiritual and vice versa (see also Pedersen & Willerslev, 2012). And from these few clarifications on how I understand ritual also as an analytical tool, let me take you to the ritual practice itself, as I experienced it in Achaivaiaam in 2012.

KILVEI IN ACHAIVAIAM

On a crisp morning in May 2012, I walk towards the small group of *iarangas* (round tents made of reindeer skin) and smaller square reindeer skin tents, situated around a kilometer from the village. I have just returned from reindeer-camp four, where all the newborn calves are running around closely followed by their mothers and their herders. Today is the day of the life sustaining spring ritual, *Kilvei*.

When reindeer die in this world they are said to return to the realm of the ancestors, as long as they are ritually sacrificed and sent in the proper direction (Lykkegård & Willerslev, 2016). There, they are born again, and they live with and expand the herd of their deceased ancestors. From the upper world, they are then sent back here again, where they may again increase the herd (King, 2002). In Achaivaiaim, death is generally understood as a transformation rather than a definite end. When you die in this world the hope is to be reborn as an ancestor, and when ancestors die, they are spontaneously reborn here (see also Willerslev, 2009, 2013). All this points to a circular movement of birth-life-death-birth-life-death-birth (Lykkegård, 2016).

Reindeer are reborn in this life during the calving season. And *Kilvei* is performed as a way of communicating with, and thanking, the ancestors for the offerings on their side, and as Zoya said, praying that they will allow them to stay. While the living cannot demand or take back reindeer already sacrificed for the ancestors, the ancestors have the power to do exactly that. By throwing this feast every year around the time of the birth of reindeer, it is hoped that the ancestors will be so pleased that they allow the reindeer calves to survive and grow strong and, consequently, the herd to expand.

Upon entering the tent of Zoya and her sister, the well-known mixed scent of reindeer and bonfire reaches my nose. The interior design is different from the normal, though. At the far end right side, which would normal be a sleeping place, a sleigh full of offerings for the ancestors has been placed.

Bogoras describes how the reindeer Chukchi differentiate ceremonials connected to their reindeer herd from all others. According to Bogoras, Chukchi during that time referred to these types of rituals as *taaro'ngirgit* (Chukchi, sacrifice) or *l'ietaro'ngirgit* (Chukchi, genuine sacrifices). Vaté disagrees with this translation. *Taaron* means “praise” or “respectful greeting” and as a verb, *taaronyk*, means “to serve,” “to seek somebody’s favor,” “to beg for mercy,” or “to greet respectfully” (Vaté, 2005, referring to the Chukchi-Russian dictionary, Inênlikêj & Moll, 1957). I have not met any people in Achaivaiaim using the Chukchi word *taaro'ngirgit*, but in Russian they have explained the feeding of the *gi'rgir* and the ancestors during *Kilvei* as a way of “praising” the ancestors, as a way of speaking to their good-will. But that is, to the Chukchi I know, an inherent meaning of sacrifice too. Sacrificial acts among the Chukchi in Achaivaiaim appear to always have to do with directing life in a wishful direction, a way of sustaining and cocreating the circular movement of the life of the Chukchi themselves (Lykkegård, 2016; Lykkegård & Willerslev, 2016).

Preparations

Kilvei in Achaivaiaim runs over two days for each family, most of which is spent preparing. Preparations for today actually began the previous year. The earliest preparations took place in the previous summer, when grass was collected and boiled with a bit of

reindeer feces. This has been stored over the winter and has, now, through the creative hands of Zoya, been turned into two reindeer with eyes of berries and antlers of twigs.

Shapeshifting, or changing bodies, is often described in communities which anthropologists have termed animist. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro describes the animist perception of the body as something made, rather than something given (1998: 480). It is this principle which allows for various types of lifeforms to substitute for each other. Rane Willerslev has argued that “it is the substitution that defines sacrifice as sacrifice and which distinguishes it from other related forms of death” (Willerslev, 2013: 6). He refers to reindeer as the prototypical substitute in the Siberian North, which stands in for the person or persons who are making the sacrifice (ibid.). Similarly, Bogoras notes that the slaughtering of domestic reindeer is considered as a sacrifice (Bogoras, 1904–1909: 368).

The tiny green reindeer are placed among meat from the brisket and around the stomach of the reindeer recently sacrificed for the occasion. There is a boiled fish mixed with berries in a bowl between the other offerings, too. The *gi'rgitti* of this family with the attached family strings are hanging above the offerings (see Figure 34.1).

Zoya and her sister are busy crushing reindeer bones. They began very early in the morning. The bones stem from a young reindeer sacrificed last year during the autumn slaughter. The meat has been eaten during the year, and the bones have been saved for this occasion.

I take over Zoya's seat, while she explains to me what to do.

You have to crush the bones. Place a piece on that big stone, and use the other stone to crush it with. We need all that marrow to be exposed. That is what we need. We are going to make fat for the *gi'rgitti* and our guests to eat.



Figure 34.1 Sleigh with offerings beneath the *gi'rgitti* in Zoya's tent.

I carry on with the work which proves to be strenuous.

Zoya's tent is one of six family tents which have been put up for today's celebration. In the five other tents, women too are crushing bones. They all carry out this ritual today, and the progression is almost synchronic.

When all the bones have been crushed, they are boiled and the rich oil from the marrow are surfacing. Zoya scrapes of the oil and let it cool down by mixing it with snow to a perfect white mass of fat. Some of this is taken inside the tent and is smeared on the meat placed on the sleigh with all the sacrifices under the gi'rgitti inside the tent. The rest of the fat is set aside.

Making fire, moving in circles

We clean up the tent and the outside area. Zoya explain to me that she has to make a ritual fire with her *gi'rgir*. And all the gi'rgitti must contribute to that fire with sparks too. One's *gi'rgir* should contribute to making a fire at least once a year, as a way of keeping the life of the family going. If one is unable to light a fire or make a spark with ones gi'rgir, it may be a sign of upcoming death. More people have shown up, both in and around Zoya's tent. The ritual fire is about to be made. She places the drill inside one of the holes of her gi'rgir and moves it back and forth with the bow, very fast. After what seems like a long time, but may have only been a few minutes, there is a spark. Zoya carefully places that spark on top of a small piece of grass. It begins to smoke and with the help of Zoya's sister, it becomes a small fire. The same is repeated with all the gi'rgir. The family fire is sacred, and exchange of it between families is strictly prohibited. This fire is called "the genuine fire," and it is obtained by means of a wooden drill and the gi'rgir (Bogoras, 1904-1909, p. 348).

The *gi'rgir* are then carried to the back of the tent, where they are placed upon a base of willow branches mixed in with a few antlers. This is currently the reindeer herd. If the ritual had been carried out on the land close to the herd, this would probably have been a heap of antlers (see i.e. Bogoras, 1904-1909; Vaté, 2005). Sometimes Kilvei is referred to a "ceremony of antlers" (Bogoras, 1904-1909, p. 377; Kuznetsova, 1957, p. 300) This, Vaté explains, may be because much of Kilvei takes place around the antlers that the female deer lose when they give birth (2005, p. 47). In Achaivaiaim, I have never heard the expression "ceremony of the antlers." The focus of the Kilvei is not the antlers, but the birth of the reindeer calves (ibid.). This did not seem to be the case at the time of Bogoras, at least he did not make that connection, but it certainly is today.

The ritual fire is now carried to the back of the tent, to drive away *kelet* (Chukchi, bad spirits). Movements on the campsite are at all times structured according to the movement of the sun. This is typical of ritual movements among the Chukchi (Bogoras, 1904-1909, p. 509; Plattet, 2005; Vaté, 2005; Kasten, 2017; Lykkegård, 2016). Likewise, during any reindeer slaughter, the reindeer is, after its death, circulated in the direction of the sun.

The ritual fire is placed close to the gi'rgir and their herd. Nina, a respected elder who has turned up, takes place next to the ritual fire. It has to keep going and be carefully watched during the feeding.

Feeding ancestors, feeding Gi'rgitti

All the guests are now given a small amount of fat mixed with small pieces of reindeer meat. Bleating like reindeer-calf, we begin to walk, of course in the direction of the sun, around the iaranga. The iaranga in itself is a microcosmos, containing in its construction the whole universe. The ancestral world is situated on top of the iaranga. We continue to bleat with voices of reindeer calves as we throw small pieces of fat and meat onto the ceiling. In this moment we *become* reindeer calves feeding the ancestors.

Afterwards, again as human beings, we gather next to the gi'rgitti and their herd. We watch while Zoya and her sister are feeding the gi'rgitti and their connected family string of various charms and amulets with the white fat. When they have all been properly fed, Zoya covers them with blankets of reindeer skin and leave them to spend the night outdoors, watching the herd. The rest of us withdraw to the tent where we feast on the remaining meat and fat until we call it a day.

The following morning the gi'rgitti are brought back into the tents and they are each given a small new lasso to aid in their reindeer herding before they are packed back into their home, the bag made of reindeer skin.

GI'RGIR AND THE CONNECTED FAMILY STRING

Vaté argues that Chukchi herding rituals are performed in order to reassert social links in the family, herder encampments, the community more generally, as well as between humans and various nonhumans, spirits, the living and dead, including humans, wild game animals, and reindeer (Vaté, 2005). Kilvei nourishes and maintains relations between a long line of ancestors, living people, and reindeer. While most of Kilvei revolves around the preparation of food, and the feeding of the family gi'rgitti and their connected family strings, there is not much explanation of what kind of beings these gi'rgitti are in other descriptions of Kilvei (Bogoras, 1904–1909; Vaté, 2005; Kasten, 2017). To me, trying to understand what kind of beings the gi'rgitti are, has been of paramount importance to understand Kilvei.

Gi'rgir are each associated with a certain portion of the reindeer herd with its own brand or mark. These brands pass with the gi'rgir from generation to generation (Bogoras, 1904–1909, p. 350). As we have seen, the gi'rgir today are connected to the family string. During the time when Bogoras lived among the Chukchi, this was not the case. Interestingly, Bogoras describes that the small wooden human figures, when tied onto the family string, become protectors of the reindeer herd, and are called *qaa'kên êñ'nvīt* (*Chukchi*, masters of reindeer) (1904–1909, p. 353). Kasten (2017), who attended Kilvei in Achaivaia in 2013, writes that these small wooden figures on the family string are depicting specific forefathers.⁴ The ancestors are also sometimes called the owners or masters of the herd.

Its sacredness he took to be derived from its daily connection with the fire of the hearth (ibid.). I understand the importance of gi'rgir the same way. While the gi'rgir are no longer used for making fire in everyday life, it is important that they make fire every time the family perform Kilvei. As I was told on the second day of Kilvei, which I participated in in Galina's tent: "We need to get make fire with our gi'rgir,

otherwise we may not continue to live. If there is no fire, there is no life.” In cooperation with their human, gi’rgir make fire, thus they can make life.

And through various ways of co-acting with gi’rgir, the Chukchi people take part in creating the life that they understand as a Chukchi life. Creating and maintaining a Chukchi life becomes evident in an interview with Galina, whom you met in the opening vignette. Galina explains:

When a person dies, we make a knot here [on the family string], in that way we continue to stay on the same track. Every knot is a human. A family member. We hang them onto the gi’rgir, so that they return. And so that the rest of us can stay here. Or come back if we go out. We do this so that it will continue to be like this, also in the future. We live on this Earth. Those of our forefathers who have gone out; they live up there and look after us. They are our protectors and masters of this life. But we keep our traditions. We feed them, and ask that we may live well, that everything will be well, that we are in good health, that we have plenty of reindeer and that our children may live well.

Kasten (2017: 109) describes the gi’rgir as representing “the hearth, and thus, the unity of the family” (my translation). He further points out that when the gi’rgir are used to make fire during the ritual, this becomes a way of having the ancestors present. As Galina said,

They are our gi’rgir. They are masters who guard us. That is why we feed them. We feed them at Kilvei. Kilvei is a ritual for the reindeer calves. We feed them at Kilvei with the purest fat, so that everything will be good. They come from our ancestors, and we maintain ourselves through feeding them.

But are *gi’rgir* ancestors themselves? I do not think so. I believe that they are a phenomenon of relations. Galina told me that *her* gi’rgir is herself. “This is me,” she said several times, when we looked at the smaller of the two gi’rgitti introduced in the opening vignette of this chapter. Galina received her gi’rgir from her mother. The bigger one is her husband, who is now living as an ancestor. They are, Galina said, also types of masters and protectors of their lives. The family string connected to the gi’rgir is filled with amulets, some inherited and others placed there by herself. The family strings are connecting her ancestral history to the present through the many knots that has been tied on there every time a person from the family “has gone out.” This ensures that they will return. Her *anju*, which is Chukchi for grandmother, is also connected to the string. During an interview about time and rebirth, Galina took out her anju, and told me that during the autumn reindeer sacrifices she feed her some blood too. “It is my way of flattering her,” Galina said, looking at her anju, “this is my protector.” And after a little while Galina said, still talking about her anju, “this is my essence” (Russian, *suchchestvo*). This may all seem confusing at first. How can various objects, apparently external to Galina, be herself or her essence?

To understand this apparent contradiction, we may look deeper into the Chukchi concepts of life and existence. Particularly the elder people I spoke to in Achaivaiaim described life as we know it as being permeated by and created from what the elder people call *va’irgin*, meaning simply being or existence (Lykkegård & Willerslev,

2016; Lykkegård, 2019). The younger generation does rarely know the Chukchi word, but as a foundational principle in their way of being brought up, the consequences of this concept guides their lives, too. Va'irgin has a visible side, which is called *unatgirgin*, which simply means, life. This is life as it is concretely manifested, actualized, and lived in the physical bodies of various beings. In fact, without *unatgirgin* there would be nothing of what we know as the world. Everything that has a body is alive, including humans, animals, and inanimate things. What is characteristic of any life, and any body, is that it needs to eat. "Life continues, life never stops, never stands still," as Galina said to me one day. But how life, *unatgirgin*, manifests in that movement is uncertain. It is being created all the time. Galina takes part in creating her own life by feeding various phenomena connected to her very being, her very essence, her anju and gi'rgir are examples of these kinds of phenomena. For Galina, as for many of the people of her society, there is no dichotomy between many and one. She herself has been reborn from several ancestors all at once. One person can be reborn and distributed in several people all at once as well. Boundaries between phenomena are from the outset naturally absent (Willerslev, 2007; Lykkegård, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Through the Kilvei ritual as it is carried out among the Chukchi of Achaivaiaim it becomes possible to explore the human-reindeer relationship in this community as a complex of many entangled relations transgressing various times and worlds. The ritual, as a way of communicating with and flattering the ancestors into allowing the newborn reindeer to live for a long time, instead of regretting their offer and taking them back right away, open up to an understanding of reindeer as a phenomenon that for the Chukchi invariably encompasses a relation to the ancestors.

The main participants of the ritual, the gi'rgitti, at once the owner or master of the herd, and giver of life, closely connected to the family hearth, are being fed as a way of honoring and pleasing the ancestors, so that they, the ancestors, may allow the newborn calves to live a long life and allow for the herd to expand.

By broadening the Chukchi environment to include the lifeworld which exists after death, and which is so entangled and dependent on life before death, we come to understand that the human-reindeer relationship for the Chukchi involves many more beings than just human and reindeer. For a Chukchi life to continue, they need reindeer. Quite obviously to survive, bodies need to eat, and reindeer meat, together with fish, is the main food intake for the Chukchi of Achaivaiaim. But the reindeer in Achaivaiaim are also needed in order for Chukchi lives as such to continue through and endless cycle of rebirths (Lykkegård, 2016; Lykkegård and Willerslev, 2016).

By engaging with Kilvei and the participants of this ritual, including the gi'rgitti and the family strings, we can see that when analyzing or trying to understand the relationship between Chukchi herders and the reindeer herd. We may only comprehend part of the qualities and depths of this relationship. For example, it is not even the Chukchi people who own the reindeer herd. While the herders may take on a dominating role of deciding which animal should be slaughtered, a herder can never take the life of the reindeer. It has to be given to him by the reindeer. Exactly like it has been described in hunting societies. Ingold described the pastoralist, on the other hand, to consider their herd as "his' animals [as] protector, guardian and executioner"

(2000: 72). But among the Chukchi herders of Achaivaia, while they do indeed guard and protect the herd, they know that ultimately, if the reindeer belong to anyone at all, it is the Chukchi ancestors, just like it is true for the herders themselves. When the reindeer gives itself up before a sacrifice, and here we must remember that any slaughter is turned into a sacrifice (Bogoras, 1904–1909; Willerslev, 2009), it gives itself up not only to their herder but also the ancestors within and above him. Manifest life has to undergo changes. It cannot stay the same. Not even ancestral life. Everyone that lives depends on their death for their life to continue.

Kilvei, the gi'rgitti and their connected family string with all their ancestral life knots, amulets and protective beings, may show us just how entangled human, reindeer and ancestors are in the constant co-creation of Chukchi life. All are dependent on each other's sacrificial acts in order to live, die, and live again. As Galina said:

We live here on Earth, those of our ancestors who has left, live up there, and they look after us. They are the protectors of this life. But we keep our traditions, we also feed them. We feed them and ask that we may live well. We die as a people if we do not continue our lives and traditions from our fathers and grandfathers.

So, when Chukchi people say, “without deer, we are nothing” (King, 2002), it may mean that they literally die out as a people. Not only in the way of losing a certain identity, but literally, because without deer there it is not possible to be reborn as a Chukchi. Life always continues. It never stops. But that particular manifestation of life, Chukchi life, may come to an end.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter is based on several periods of fieldwork, amounting to a total of 12 months between 2011 and 2014, among a group of reindeer herding Chukchi people from the village of Achaivaia in Northern Kamchatka. Empirical passages throughout this chapter are composed from fieldnotes and taped interviews. The Chukchis are an Indigenous people numbering about 15,000, living in the north-eastern part of the Russian Far East, mainly in Chukotka and the northern part of the Kamchatka Peninsula (Schweitzer, 1999).
- 2 The Even is another Indigenous group of people of Siberia, numbering around 19,000.
- 3 I was told by one elderly woman in Achaivaia that the word Kilvei is composed of two Chukchi words: *kil* (navel) and *vei* (feeding). Erich Kasten was told that the word Kilvei was probably derived from the Chukchi word from *kilkil*, meaning umbilical cord (2017, p. 107).
- 4 Kasten refers to these small wooden figures as *gičgi*, which is most similar to the Koryak word for gi'rgir. As Kasten has kindly placed a picture which portrays these figures, I can see that these are the fork-like wooden spirits, ‘*ok-kamak*’ that caught my attention when I first saw the family string—the situation described in the introductory vignette.

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CHAPTER 35

FEASTS AND FESTIVALS AMONG CONTEMPORARY SIBERIAN COMMUNITIES



Stephan Dudeck

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Soviet Union and the losing grip of its cultural politics caused severe changes and diversification in public events and festive cultures of Russia in general. Spaces for cultural and ethnic activism opened up while ideological control weakened (Balzer, 2012; Habeck, 2019; Tul'tseva, 2012; Vladimirova, 2016; Dubin, 2003). Festivals fit well into the discourses of ethnic nationalism and regionalism and into the logics of local elites and cultural bureaucrats in Russia's provinces. Several authors point to the fact of the longevity of festival traditions that preserved, despite Soviet secularization, pre-Soviet ritual traits, and religious meaning to reappear in the post-Soviet period (Balzer, 2012; Tul'tseva, 2012; Uliashev, 2012; Bat'ianova, 2011). These festivals often were a hybrid celebration of orthodox Christian, pre-Christian, Soviet, and secular ethnocultural elements that were creatively adapted to local needs and able to raise social and emotional engagement and increasingly attract outsiders like tourists. As "demonstrations of interethnic tolerance, chances for young people to find mates, moments of social release, bacchanalia, or crude tourism—they provide great material for insights into cultural change, continuity, and values" (Balzer, 2012, p. 4).

Most of these authors agree that festivals provide infinite opportunities to study the production of social cohesion as well as the negotiation of minority identities and relations to the surrounding majority society. In the public celebration of ethnic minorities, these often appear homogeneous to the outside, but a closer look reveals internal differentiations played out in diverse forms of involvement in public as well as backstage spheres of the event (Dudeck, 2014). The festival as a place where Indigenous lifestyle becomes a consumable object allows for an understanding of the "political economy of presentation" of cultural difference (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 149). Two recent articles (Mankova, 2017; Vladimirova, 2016) deal with ethnopolitical dimensions of festivals focusing on Indigenous identity with case studies from the European part of the Russian Arctic. They point to the heterogeneity of meanings these festivals have for local inhabitants, state bureaucrats, and tourists today. This is often overlooked in literature interpreting these events solely as socially integrating and ideologically uniform. This chapter provides an overview of the

public ethnic festivals and celebrations among Indigenous Peoples of Siberia today and describes some of the most prominent ones. It looks at their historical roots, analyzes their main components developed during Soviet times, and shows how they are used today in the context of ethnic revivalism and cultural politics.

PUBLIC CELEBRATIONS OF RITUAL TRADITIONS

Ethnic festivals in today's Siberia often relate to local ritual traditions marked as shamanism, which has become the dominant category for a diversity of religious practices with animistic, totemistic and polytheistic features since the 18th century (Khakkarainen, 2007). These practices were intimately linked to the economics and seasonal cycles of hunting, gathering, fishing, and reindeer herding. Usually, bigger collective rituals were held in times of abundance of resources in autumn or spring when the snow cover allows for easy transportation and gathering and "fertility becomes the focus of community survival and joy" after the harsh winter (Balzer 2012, p. 4). Another characteristic time for celebrations is related to reindeer migration between winter and summer pastures. The midsummer and midwinter seasons are less work-intensive for reindeer herding than the rutting time in autumn and the calving and mosquito-rich time of spring and early summer, thus allowing for more elaborate ritual activity. These ceremonies incorporated diverse ritual communications with the spirits or deities like sacrifices, prayers, but also forms of shamanic trance and divination. They were social events with feasting, food sharing, gifting and mate-selecting, and the exchange of information. During these events, resources were shared and social bonds renegotiated not only within human society but also with non-human actors and the environment. (Lambert, 2003; McNeil, 2008; Hamayon, 1996; Lavrillier, 2003)

The Ikenipke festival of the Evenki people is a ceremony originally associated with the renewal rites and collective feasts in springtime after the winter hunting season (Brandišauskas, 2017; Lavrillier, 2003; Hamayon, 1996; McNeil, 2008; Vasilevich, 1957). Other Evenki rituals, Bakaldyn and Muchun, provided their name for contemporary public festivals around midsummer for audiences in towns and villages as well. They follow a pattern that is universal for almost all the public events I consider here. A cultural part which consists of performances of folklore, sometimes reenactments of ritual traditions, presentation of markers of ethnic diversity like clothing, handicraft, and food, is followed by a second and even more important part of competitions in ethnic sports disciplines (Sorokina, 2011). Similar festivals are known among other Siberian people are Eviniek among the Even (Lavrillier, Dumont, & Brandišauskas, 2018), the Ilaptiko among the Selkup (Hamayon, 1996), the D'yly oduuluur among the Dolgan (Popov, 1981, p. 258), the Nganasan Any'odaly at the summer solstice (Simchenko, 1963), and their nine day long annual festival at the end of January (Lambert, 2003).

Virginie Vaté describes an urban version of the Chukchi Kilvēi ritual performed in the settlement of Tavaivaam next to Anadyr, the capital of the Chukotka region Anadyr (Vaté, 2005). In the tundra, it serves the purpose of feeding the ritual objects and spirits to negotiate luck. In the village, the festival presents the ritual in a reduced and impoverished form, but enriched with folklore performances and filmed for

television. For the Koryak's Ololo (Plattet, 2011; King, 2009; Kasten, 2013), as well as the Itel'men's Alkhalalalai, dancing is a central element. The regional state administration declared in 2009 the Koryak Khololo (Ololo), the Nurgenek of the Even and the Alkhalalalai of the Itel'men as official holidays of the Kamchatka region (Bat'ianova, and Murashko, 2019).

Even before the Russian Revolution, local rituals merged with holidays of Christian saints. As among the Russian peasants, one of the most important of them was Saint Elijah's Day on the 2nd of August (by the Gregorian calendar) celebrated as The Day of the Reindeer among the Nenets (Geidenreikh, 1930; Kertselli, 1911; Lambert, 2005), as the midsummer holiday for the Khanty (Uliashev, 2012) and among the Teleut of Southern Siberia (Bat'ianova, 2011). These holidays developed a dual nature, consisting of a public part of Christian character consisting of church services, the veneration of Christian icons and prayers, while the intimate and often hidden parts involved traditional sacrificial and shamanic rituals and often excessive feasting (Martynova, 2020). In Soviet times, Christian elements were replaced by speeches, economic reports, award ceremonies, and a folklore program. In the intimate part of the celebration, ritual elements survived hidden from the eyes of antireligious politics. The Soviet form continued into post-Soviet times deprived just of some of the most ideological elements. Until today, sports competitions and traditional folklore remain central. Now stylized religious ritual performances are added to the public part often accompanied by intimate rituals performed hidden from the outsiders' view (Uliashev, 2012; Dudeck, 2014).

THE YHYAKH OF THE SAKHA

The Sakha midsummer festival Yhyakh of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) is the main stage for the performance of Sakha ethnic identity today (Peers & Kolodeznikov, 2015; Peers, 2013; Nikanorova, 2019). The main elements of the celebrations are religious rituals like the greeting of the rising sun, a ritual fire, and libations of fermented horse milk (kumys) accompanied by prayer and the collective round dance *ohuokhai*. The spiritual elements are accompanied by more secular elements, like sports competitions and beauty contests. The leading role during the ceremony belongs to ritual specialists. Members of the local social elites like politicians, businessmen, or intellectuals give speeches and sponsor the festivities. Participants stress the importance of the performances of Algys (prayers for blessings and purification), *ohuokhai* (circle dance), and *ohuokhai* (epic recitations) (Nikanorova, 2019). Another major motivation to attend are the sports competitions, especially the horse races, or "Suu-ruute" (Crate, 2006), the concerts, and feasting with family and colleagues. Sakha scholars highlight the origin of the Yhyakh in Sakha mythology (Romanova & Ignat'eva, 2012). Eleanor Peers (2013) emphasizes how the Sakha assimilate European modernist concepts brought by Soviet ideology and employ them to manage a perceived crisis of ethnic identity with a call for ethnic and religious revival. Nikanorova (2019) remarks how foreign scholars put an accent on ethnic mobilization as a response to acculturation and colonization by the Russian state in the Yhyakh, while Sakha scholars stress the harmonious interethnic relations and do not mention colonial relations at all.

THE BEAR CEREMONIAL COMPLEX

The bear ceremonial complex has a special place in the festive traditions of the Siberian peoples. All around the circumpolar world, communities cohabitating with brown bears have developed forms of bear ceremonialism. These rituals express the link of humans with bears in a shared environment and celebrate a rite of passage on the occasion of the bear's death. It emphasizes the roles of the bear as an honorable guest, ancestor, animal master, or spirit, whose remains have to be treated respectfully (Hallowell, 1926; Chichlo, 1985; Balzer, 1996; Sokolova, 2002). The bear feast became the target of antireligious politics during the Soviet period and ceased to be celebrated in public (Chichlo, 1985). The most elaborate ritual complexes existed in the western and eastern margins of Siberia. In the far east on the island of Sakhalin, Nivkh and Ainu people held bears in captivity to be killed as part of a ceremony that lasted several days (Irimoto, 1996; Kwon, 1999). After the last bear ceremonies among Nivkh people on Sakhalin Island were performed in the late 1950s, attempts to revive the ritual in the 1990s were not successful¹ (Kwon, 1999).

The content and structure of the Western Siberian Khanty and Mansi² bear ceremonies are well described in the ethnographic literature (Moldanova, 2016; Moldanov, 1999; Schmidt, 1990; Lukina, 1990; Popova, 2013). The bear feast is celebrated occasionally after a bear hunt. The bear is entertained as an honorable guest by the human community but also by other spiritual beings, who present themselves in songs and dances performed by ritual specialists. The bear festival is officially recognized as cultural heritage in the Khanty-Mansi autonomous district and is considered one of the most important parts of the local Indigenous culture (Moldanova, 2016). Due to the lack of skilled performers, the celebration has become rare and now requires much effort and resources to be organized; many cultural activists call for the support of the state in safeguarding cultural heritage. On the other hand, they are also concerned with the potential influence of outsiders in the bear feast, as Khanty communities are used to performing communal religious rituals concealed from outsiders. This is not only motivated by negative memories of former repression, but also by concerns about potential mischief occurring as the result of failed communication with non-human persons—due to the violation of taboos by outsiders (Dudeck, 2014). These internal ideas of purity and concealment well meet the outside conception of the endangerment of authenticity by touristification, folklorization, and theatricalization. To fulfill its task of preservation, the state is required to document and manage the objects of cultural heritage and to support the Khanty bear feast. On the other hand, officials are not to interfere. They accept their exclusion as outsiders (Shanina, 2019). Khanty activists are refusing to modify and integrate the Khanty ritual into public events performed according to the general model of the public ethnic holiday. Some voices among the Khanty call for a lifting of restrictions and use modern media technology to make the cultural heritage more attractive to the younger generation. It is difficult to judge if such modernization attempts will offset the purist approach. It seems nevertheless clear that in preservation attempts, the crucial point is still Khanty forest inhabitants' concern with the behavior of the brown bear in a changing environment and their relationship with this keystone species.

THE DAY OF THE REINDEER HERDER

In striking contrast to the mentioned festivals publicly performing Indigenous ethnicity in Siberia's regions, the "Day of the Reindeer Herder" is a festival celebrated over the whole North of Russia, from the Kola to the Kamchatka Peninsulas. Even if it is rooted in pre-Soviet festive traditions, it is a result of Soviet cultural engineering to create new forms of celebration as substitutes for the social and emotional functions that former feasts and rituals played in people's lives. It became even more popular after the fall of the Soviet Union with a wave of festivals celebrating the variety of local and ethnic identities.

History

One can trace the roots of today's "Day of the Reindeer Herder" back to three regions of the North, where the celebration was introduced in the 1930s, the Kola Peninsula and the Nenets autonomous okrug both in the European part of the Russian Arctic and the Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug in Western Siberia. The "Northern Olympic Games"—later renamed the "Festival of the North"—were established in 1934 in the city of Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula with skiing competitions and, since 1937, reindeer races (Mankova, 2017; Vladimirova, 2016). In the villages of Lovozero and Krasnoshchel'e, reindeer races were organized as far back as 1927 to replace the fair at the religious holiday of Epiphany (Kreshchenye), and the "Day of the Reindeer Herder" was established for people working in the reindeer herding enterprises (Mankova, 2017). Mankova mentions the Soviet state's attempt to modernize the races through standardization, pedagogical instrumentalization, and folklorization by detaching them from their original everyday context and representing them as symbols of ethnic identity. The aim to promote and optimize reindeer breeding with the help of these races has been part of the modernization ideology of the young Soviet state as both Mankova (2017) and Momzikova (2013) indicate.

The roots of the "Day of the Reindeer" in the Nenets Autonomous District go back to Saint Elijah's Day. It's striking that one can already find here all of the elements of the festival later orchestrated by Soviet officials: reindeer races over a distance of around a kilometer, throwing the lasso and ax, and wrestling. The festival culminated in a feast and finished with the performance of epics in the evening (Geidenreikh, 1930, p. 30; Kertselli, 1911, p. 98). The Soviet geographer A. I. Babushkin suggested transforming traditional Nenets festivals he had observed in the late 1920s among the Nenets of Bolshezemelskaia-Tundra (Babushkin, 1930). In 1935 the executive committee of the Nenets Autonomous District decided to introduce a "Day of the Reindeer" as a replacement for Saint Elijah's Day (Lambert, 2005, p. 28). This festival, renamed in Soviet times as the "Day of the Reindeer Herder," again today is celebrated among the European Nenets as "Day of the Reindeer" at the beginning of August.

Among the Nenets, Khanty, Mansi, and Selkup of Western Siberia "Day of the Reindeer Herder" is celebrated in early spring, usually in March or the beginning of April. This is the best time for the reindeer races on a solid snow surface that is still frozen enough to not let the reindeer break through the surface. The first

festival of the “Day of the Reindeer Herder” or as it then was called “Reindeer Herders Olympics” was held in 1939 in the Soviet outpost (kultbaza) of Kazym in the Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug. In the period after WWII, the festival was established in a few other settlements; only in the 1990s did it spread to almost all Indigenous villages of the region.

Here the tradition can be traced back to tsarist times when regular fairs (yarmarka) were held to collect the fur tax (yasak) and trade with local Russians. The timing of these fairs served as a reason to gather for collective sacrifices at a local sacred place not far from the Russian city (Perevalova & Karacharov, 2006). According to Roberte Hamayon (1996), the elements of entertainment and competition that one can prominently find in all of today’s Siberian festivals originate from the mimesis of important hunting animals during their rutting and mating times, which should have also inspired the widespread tradition of round dances from the Buryat Yokhor (Krist, 2009), or the Yakut *ohuokhai* (Crate, 2006; Nowicka, 2016; Lukina, 2018; Romanova & Ignat’eva, 2012) to the Evenki Yokharye (Mamontova, 2014).

After the Second World War, a centralization and nationalization of former reindeer herding, fishing, and hunting cooperatives took place. At least once a year, it became necessary to gather those members leading a nomadic life in central settlements for accounting, to award or rebuke the subordinated and announce the latest production plans. During the Soviet period, the organization of the festival was in the hands of the state hunting and fishing enterprises and the local administration. In the Western Siberian oil province where I conducted my fieldwork during the post-Soviet period, the festival is financed by the local administration, organized by state cultural representatives of the Houses of Culture or local museums and sponsored by the oil companies (Dudeck, 2014).

There is some evidence that the Soviet holiday celebrating reindeer herding had already spread to almost all regions where this activity was carried out in the 1930s. Then, on the Taimyr Peninsula and in Northern Yakutia, people had begun to organize reindeer races in native villages and the “Day of the Reindeer Herder” was established in the reindeer herding districts of Northern Yakutia in 1936 (Momzikova, 2013). There seems to have been a decline of the festival in the 1940s, and it was only resumed in the post-war times in some settlements. The annual celebration of the “Day of the Reindeer Herder” was initiated in the 1950s and 1960s, but sometimes it was again abandoned in later Soviet times (Momzikova, 2013; Stepanova, 2018). Today, it is celebrated in many villages and towns in all regions from the Kola Peninsula in the west, the Komi Republic, and the Nenetskii Autonomous District, the northern regions of Western and Central Siberia up to Chukotka and in the southern regions of Siberia and the Tyva Republic (Momzikova, 2013; Vinober & Vinober, 2018).

Organization

The time of the year the festival is organized varies. In most cases, it takes place during the best snow conditions for reindeer races in March and April. In some regions like Northern Yakutia or on the Taimyr Peninsula, it was celebrated in November (Momzikova, 2013) or, as mentioned above, in August among the European Nenets. Also, local names like “Khuktyvun” (the festival of the sun) appear in the town of Iengra, Yakutia, or “Kheiro” on the Taimyr Peninsula. Often, the particular

days these festivals are celebrated in different remote settlements of one region are centrally planned. This allows officials as well as participants of the races to visit as many celebrations as possible.

The events I visited in the Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug consisted of three main parts, a meeting of the Indigenous hunters and fishermen with state officials on the first day and sports competitions and a cultural program followed by private celebrations on the second day (Dudeck, 2014). This way, it copied the general three-fold structure identified by historian Malte Rolf (2013) in all Soviet holidays, with their division into the official meeting at the eve of the proper holiday, the festival program during the next day, and food and drink in private in the evening. Another element of the celebrations are religious rituals. The introduction of Soviet holidays was meant to be an instrument to replace old religious practices with the celebration of Soviet work. Instead of the disappearance of the religious rituals, they were celebrated in privacy or hidden within seemingly profane performances in the cultural program. In post-Soviet times, ritual elements again became a prominent part of the public performances, as seen in the contemporary public reindeer sacrifices among the Yamal Nenets.

For some of the Indigenous inhabitants in remote regions of the North, the public celebration is the only occasion throughout the year to visit the central settlement and see most of their relatives. The choice of time in spring at the end of the hunting season enables state hunters to deliver pelts and receive salaries. Additionally, a group of medics is sent to the settlement to provide a medical examination of all forest inhabitants. Besides the sports competitions and a cultural program, there is also a market where the Indigenous participants can sell food and handicrafts, and professional traders can offer consumer goods. The day usually ends with dancing to pop music in the local house of culture³.

The festival has its own topography which divides public spheres from places and situations exclusively accessible only to particular groups. The public sphere consists of the market, often some nomad tents, the venue of the sports competition, and the main stage for the cultural program. Private spaces and backstages are diverse and sometimes unite several groups, like the official but closed-to-the-public meeting of reindeer herders with the officials; others are exclusively private like the drinking sprees or the religious offerings by reindeer herders at a sacred place in preparation for the festival.

Sports competitions

Sports competitions became an indispensable element of all the festivals of the Northern people. The cultural engineers of the early Soviet Union understood how well sport served their needs. Early Soviet festivals were designed to unite sports, entertainment, and ideological education (Riordan, 1980). They offered relaxation, adventure, and a meal for free (Efimova, 2010). Sports appeared apolitical at the surface, which made it especially attractive to fill the gap the abandoned religious holidays and fairs had left and spread values like patriotism, discipline, cleanliness, abstinence, and collectivism (Riordan, 1980; Rolf, 2013).

The distances and the type of reindeer races differ considerably through the regions. In the Western Siberian village of Kazym for instance, I could observe diverse

disciplines of driving the reindeer while standing on skis or a reindeer skin, and sitting or standing on the reindeer sledge. Among the European Nenets, I observed different types of races according to the gait of the reindeer, which either trot or gallop. The distances might also vary from short distances of several hundred meters to several kilometers.

The sports competitions are usually divided into parts for men and women, and particular competitions reserved for each gender vary from region to region. We can observe a tendency to standardize Indigenous sports disciplines since Soviet times. Today, there exists a normed set of “combined Northern disciplines” which is promoted all over Russia consisting of lasso and axe throwing, a triple jump, a sprint on snow and jumping over sledges. Nevertheless, at the public festivals the local diversity shows great resilience and is not replaced by unified disciplines. Besides diverse forms of reindeer races, we find that skiing, wrestling, fighting while sitting on a log, climbing logs, carrying weights, and other forms of folk competitions are common. In contrast to most other regions, team-based competitions have prevailed since Soviet times on the Kola Peninsula, supposedly representing reindeer herding cooperatives or reindeer herding professional schools (Mankova, 2017).

Contrary to the perception of many scholars and the general public, the Indigenous sports do not represent unchanged traditions expressing Indigenous identity “as non-capitalist, embedded in the locality” in opposition to modern global sports disciplines (Mankova, 2017). They are an invented tradition by Soviet administrators and enthusiasts to produce something according to Stalin’s motto “ethnic in form, Soviet in content” (Hamayon, 1990, p. 59). Reindeer races stem from a long historical tradition, as already in tsarist times Nenets reindeer herders were brought to the capital St. Petersburg to entertain the public on the frozen Neva River with reindeer sledges (Mankova, 2017). Today reindeer herders might earn money by catering to tourists in the industrial cities of Murmansk or the Western Siberian oil region during the festivals.

Reindeer races are often the main attraction and the prizes offered a motivation to take on the hardship of traveling with reindeer sledges over far distances. In former times, the winner of self-organized competitions was often awarded a reindeer. The Soviet state introduced other prestige items as prizes, first offering hunting equipment like rifles, and then consumer goods, especially those symbolizing progress like a gramophone or TV set. Today again, useful instruments like sewing machines or chainsaws serve as prizes, and, of course, the most valued of prizes is the snowmobile (Momzikova, 2013; Dudeck, 2014). The intention was not only to check workers’ skills, but also to provide symbolic recognition and gratification for the profession and later the whole ethnic group. Today, prizes are often sponsored by big companies pursuing industrial projects on the land of the Indigenous communities, like for instance oil and gas development. Extractive industries are willing to spend a considerable amount of money for the public representation of their support of Indigenous groups, because in contrast to the weak legal guarantees of the rights of Indigenous people for compensation payments or benefit-sharing, this sponsorship serves several purposes at the same time (Vladimirova, 2016). Money and prize offerings by the private sponsors and state authorities are perceived by local people as compensation for the damage to Indigenous lands. They are gifts that oblige gratitude and loyalty and they are public demonstrations of generosity, not only to the Indigenous inhabitants of

the taiga and tundra, but to the sedentary inhabitants of the towns and villages as well. The symbolic meaning of the prices might be interpreted as a symbol for the patronage of the state and the companies (Momzikova, 2013; Dudeck, 2014).

Today, the festival is often an essential part of the yearly cycle of Indigenous families. Over a few days, it unites all necessary interactions between the reindeer herders and the authorities. Reindeer herders present their loyalty, the products of their economy, and their status as content clients of the paternalist politics of state and companies. The authorities provide awards, prizes, and gifts as material signs of respect and recognition, reprimand the non-fulfillment of the production plan, and offer medical care for free. Representatives of state power also become accessible to the expression of protest and complaint at this time (Stepanova, 2018). This serves to renegotiate the relationship between the Indigenous communities and the people in power. Even if people complain about the empty speeches of officials, the boredom of the cultural program, and the alcohol excesses in the evenings, the festival is a central event nobody can miss because it is such an important social resource. The official façade serves to submit the message of the festival of harmony and happiness—it presents the Indigenous people and their culture as an exotic but vulnerable resource for the enrichment of the region's cultural life, yet in need of patronage by state policy. In this way, the festivals become an indicator of the effectiveness of the social policy of the state in relation to Indigenous minorities.

CONCLUSION: THE PUBLIC EVENT AS A RITUAL CELEBRATION

Ceremonies often have no other purpose than to demonstrate to participants their fixed place in society inside a social group and kinship networks. Yet, besides the stabilizing, affirming, and legitimizing function of rituals and their constituting immutable sequence of formalized acts, we should not ignore the elements of change and transgression (Handelman, 2006; Herzfeld, 2001). The public space created by rituals might involve groups based on subcultural, religious, or ethnic belonging who might negotiate not only the hegemonic order but their subordinated, informal, real, or utopian views of order in public rituals. Festivals also offer the opportunity to escalate conflicts, express long-suppressed critique, and let hollowed-out social borders collapse (Scott, 1990; Frost, 2016). On the other hand, rituals offer the opportunity to keep outdated or colonized social orders alive as utopias in the guise of tradition or religion that might await their moment to challenge the hegemonic order.

Soviet roots

The official order of festivals organized by the state—and the ethnic festivals considered here as belonging to that category—is rooted in the tradition of the Soviet mass festival (Rolf, 2013; Lane, 1981; Binns, 1979, 1980). The October Revolution in Russia did away with the previous social conditions and consequently with the ritual order of the old regime. In the years after the revolution, the Soviet Union became more and more a dictatorship, staging and putting enormous effort into the display of dogma, norms, and visions of the future (Rolf, 2013). Old ritual forms were

reintroduced under the label of progressive tradition and folklore of the suppressed masses; life itself should have become a feast according to this aim.

Up to present times, cultural workers in state-financed institutions stick to conventions that have not changed significantly since their childhood in the 1950s to 1970s. These conventions are passed on with the festivals in a habitualized way. The schedules and scenarios of former festivals are often kept in the organizing institutions like local museums or houses of culture. Centrally issued instructions for the organization or methodology of such events do not exist anymore, even if parts of the festivities are standardized by state-controlled sports organizations.

I would like to provide some of Malte Rolf's conclusions on the Soviet mass festival, as I consider them crucial for an understanding of post-Soviet ethnic festivals in the northern periphery of Russia. From the perspective of the state, festivals primarily served the display of norms and doctrines (Rolf, 2013). Public staging made authority visible and thus perceivable. In a utopian manner, they anticipated the ideal order but also served to enforce it habitually. They were characterized by unflinching faith in the performative power of ritual, able to bring into existence the verbally, visually, and restlessly repeated representation. The festival presents the social hierarchy with theatrical and rhetorical means, and through the organization of space and time. The self-proclaimed avant-garde confronted the "backward" inhabitants of the periphery with the didactic elements of the festival. The gap between the present reality and the ideal utopia was reinterpreted as an opposition between the backwardness of the people and the progressiveness of the social avant-garde, and justified the paternalist and educational attitudes towards the "immature" and "backward" masses.

Even if reality and proclamation were opposed, it didn't undermine the success of the festivals, which had already taken over other important social functions besides their superficial propagandistic character. They became events of a symbolic gift-exchange in a client-patron relationship between state and citizens (Rolf, 2013). Participants delivered commitments and statements of loyalty and thankfulness. The state organized a feast and mobilized material resources. Local communities or working collectives could use the festival to voice dissatisfaction over nuisances the state should have eliminated before the festival and demanded material resources. The 1930s brought the public demonstration of Soviet power through the symbolic extension of the Soviet festival culture to the most peripheral places of the country. Festivals were staged in the icy wilderness in the high mountains and other remote places, connected by telegraphy directly to the state's center to exchange greeting messages. The establishment of the "Day of the Reindeer Herder" fits into this symbolic acquisition of the periphery. And thus, rural areas received innovations in their festival culture which remained nevertheless rooted in local religious traditions (Rolf, 2013).

The scenario of the public holiday supervised by the state and its role in reasserting central authority has remained almost the same until today. These festivals not only survived the crisis of the 1990s but even spread to new locations in these post-Soviet times (Vladimirova, 2016). The events I described in this chapter have adapted through ritual transfer and ritual invention historically transmitted local forms to diverse and sometimes contradicting needs of the local population and the local state (cf. Stepanova, 2018; Vladimirova, 2016).

Ethnic revivalism and cultural politics

Late Soviet times saw a rising discourse of cultural revival and Indigenous cultural rights. Emerging ethnic festivals became the local cultural institutions' response to ethnic activism, creating a stage for the representation of indigeneity. The Indigenous intelligentsia, often much less able to enter the sphere of political decision making, could attract state resources to the cultural sphere to create instruments for community building and ethnopolitical activities.

I identify the official rhetoric of strengthening Indigenous identities with what Yulian Konstantinov (2015) called the “preservationist sentiment,” announcing the flourishing of Indigenous cultures through state-organized measures that motivate local people to keep cultural practices alive. But festivals indeed serve as arenas for Indigenous revitalization. They continue to legitimize ethnic and cultural diversity and negotiate the framework for it to exist, as well as particular hierarchies of ethnicity (Vladimirova, 2016). Despite the ubiquitous public rhetoric of the “preservationist sentiment” (cf. Tul'tseva, 2012), social functions of socializing, conversations with power, engaging in symbolic politics, and negotiating group status and even individual prestige are more important motivations for local participants. Nevertheless, the question remains why this rhetoric of safeguarding Indigenous traditions is so dominant. For our impression it serves as a legitimizing device for the paternalist attitudes of state policies towards national minorities which are mainstreamed during the festivals not only by official speeches by representatives of power, but also in the way prices are sponsored and the event is structured. Markers of ethnic difference become elements detached from their social context and serve as ornaments symbolizing the harmony of hierarchies of ethnic belonging, center-periphery, and majority-minority relations, as well as the relation between Indigenous groups and industrial enterprises (cf. also Vladimirova, 2016; and Mankova, 2017). The complex structure of these events allows for a diversity of niches and backstage spaces for different actors involved as well, where they can engage in discourses that sometimes contradict the dominant ones on the public stage. Here internal social tensions can be expressed and possibly solved, and alternative viewpoints may be articulated.

SUMMARY

The post-Soviet increase of ethnically marked celebrations in the Indigenous communities of Siberia indicates the significance of the phenomenon for the cultural life of Indigenous peoples of the North in today's Russia. In this chapter, I explored the history of these celebrations rooting in pre-Soviet times and experiencing a major shift through Soviet cultural engineering. This Soviet heritage still seems to be very much alive and frames the way that the paternalist attitudes of the state towards ethnic minorities are expressed. These complex social events nevertheless also provide space for the continuity of local practices, perspectives, and values, as well as rich emotional and social experiences. Historical legacies are today modified by growing tendencies of commodification, adaptation to touristic needs, and new media and technologies of representation. I suggest looking at these events as complex formations that become main stages for local cultural politics and the formulation of ethnopolitical

agendas often lacking other possibilities for political expression. A comprehensive study of contemporary Siberian Indigenous public festivals in terms of the interplay of Indigenous ethnopolitics, the Indigenous rights discourse, and cultural politics of the state, as well as a comparative historical study of the Soviet cultural engineering of Indigenous festivals and celebrations in Siberia, remains still a desideratum. Further research is needed also on religious activism's (of new protestant denominations as well as Indigenous traditionalists) influence on ritual change and the development of local festive culture. Festivals and feasts and their association with emerging discourses of intangible cultural heritage preservation, intellectual property rights, and Indigenous self-determination in their interplay with traditional paternalist cultural policies remain an important topic in the study of Indigenous-state relations in Siberia.

NOTES

- 1 Beside the loss of cultural knowledge, a main factor seems to be the negative public perception of a ritual killing of a wild mammal in captivity today.
- 2 The Khanty and Mansi, commonly also called Ob-Ugrians, share a very similar religious system and ritual life with small regional differences. I refer here mostly to the Khanty context and in particular to the Eastern Khanty, where I did fieldwork on the ceremony myself in 2016 (unpublished). Similar processes are going on among the Northern Khanty and the Mansi as well.
- 3 The "Houses of Culture" are communal cultural centers established in the Soviet period to establish a new Soviet cultural life and exist in most communities in one form or the other up to the present day (cf. Donahoe and Habeck, 2011).

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CHAPTER 36

ANIMALS AS A REFLECTION OF THE UNIVERSE STRUCTURE IN THE CULTURE OF OKA BURYATS AND SOIOTS



Veronika Beliaeva-Sachuk

Animals are an inalienable part of the life of all human communities around the world. The relationship between humans and animals is determined by different categories in different cultures: animals are usually considered as food, labor, friends, and sacred creatures. Animals are functioning or active actors, beings who, in interaction with humans, acquire their assigned role, depending on the circumstances (Ingold, 2000). However, the relationship between humans and animals, their position in the worldview structure, interdependence, and cooperation are particularly noticeable in nomadic cultures because the success of a person in obtaining resources that support his existence directly depends on animals (Klokov & Davydov, 2019). Animals become markers of the wellbeing and life of an individual, family, clan, and the entire nation, and become symbols of the stability of the universe and the interconnectedness of all living beings in the space of human surroundings.

Okinskii district (Oka) is one of the remote and hard-to-reach regions of Buryatia. Natural and climatic conditions and the geographical location of the area have influenced the fact that until now the main economic activities of the Oka people are cattle breeding, hunting, and, much less, fishing. Domestic and wild animals play the main role in these occupations, and the attitude to them is connected to two factors: the existence and development of traditional types of farming in the Oka to this day and a specific religious system, which is a religious syncretism of Buryat and Soiot shamanic cults with Tibetan Buddhism. Any mention of animals for Oka inhabitants is associated with such cultural markers as environmentalism and respect for nature, the source of which is the local traditional beliefs and Buddhism according to respondents. Such a perspective on the environment is considered one of the main features of the local Oka culture (both Buryat and Soiot):

The attitude to animals is connected with traditional culture, and Buddhism has harmoniously entered the level of shamanism and has taken the best from it. And it discarded bad things—for example, the sacrifice of animals to the gods of the mountains.

(Field research of author (FR), m. 22, Tunkinsky district, August 2010)

The position that animals occupy in the modern culture of the inhabitants of the Okinskii district depends on the category to which they belong—domestic or wild. Local communities divide animals very clearly into domestic and wild. These two categories are markers of the well-ordered universe for Oka Buryats and Sojots. Domestic animals should feed, protect, and help people, and they should stay in the socio-cultural space. Domestic animals belong to humans and obey them as master. Wild animals should stay far from humans. When the latter goes hunting, he negotiates with masters of wild animals, gods, and spirits of taiga and mountains about the possibility of using their resources. A human treats local sacred masters during a hunting in taiga and makes offerings of grown food and animals as well. The spirits of taiga and mountains, in gratitude, give him an opportunity to use their “property”—to kill a necessary quantity of wild animals. Thus, an honest exchange of resources between people and gods takes place, based on mutual confidence and respect (Simonova, Belyaeva-Sachuk, & Samsonova, 2020). Such an exchange is similar to some extent to the interrelations between nomads and settled farmers, who need resources from each other (Kradin, 2020). When wild animals appear in places unusual for them, too near to humans, this is the sign of the imbalance in the universe and discontent of the local deities.

According to my observations, domestic animals are not only of economic importance but also a marker of the identity of Buryats and their connection with the Mongolian world:

“‘Taban erdeni’—five jewels—this is how the Mongols call five domestic animals (horses, cows, sheep, goats, and camels). The Mongol people are too dependent on their animals. If someone says in such a manner about animals, they can’t treat them badly.” —Does it happen that sometimes people beat their animals? (V. B.-S.) “Sometimes it is necessary to beat the animal. Its mind is too polluted, and some things they cannot understand otherwise.”

(FR, m. 22, Tunkinsky district, August 2010)

This quote also shows how the scheme of relations between humans and animals is built in the modern Buryat culture, based on the fusion of shamanistic and Buddhist worldviews. In spite of the practical consumer approach to animal products, the animals should be treated without unnecessary aggression and one should not bring them unnecessary suffering, because a person may be born as an animal in the next life. However, since animals are of a lower birth and their minds are polluted, man has the right to use force in certain situations. This is even welcome, since everyone must stay in their place and behave according to their birth and status in order to maintain the ordered structure of the micro- and macrocosm.

The so-called “five precious animals” are still very important in the Buryat culture as domestic animals which feed people. The number five plays an important role in the culture of the Mongolian people due to the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, where structures consisting of five elements are of particular importance. In the Tantric tradition, the five Tathagatas (Dhyani Buddhas) play an important role. It is believed that together they create the body of the universe and that each of them is associated with a certain side of the world, color, animal symbol, element, feeling, etc. *Taban khushuu mal* (five varieties of livestock) is one of the representations of the model of the cosmos, the space where people live. Animals are divided into two groups: those

with hot breath—horses and sheep, and with cold breath—cows, goats, and camels. These two categories play an important role in the life of nomads. Animals with hot breath are considered the best food with high taste qualities. So horse and sheep meat is served to the most respectable guests and also cooked for important celebrations (Zhukovskaia, 2002). The meat of animals with hot breath is still used by Buryats as a medicinal (tonic) remedy. Horse and sheep were considered the most acceptable sacrifice for the gods and spirits in the tradition of local shamanism, and in the past, the meat of these animals was offered both at large tribal rites—*tailagans*—and during family or personal shamanistic rituals (Mikhailov, 1987). Currently, the main sacrificial animal used by Buryat shamans during rituals is a sheep because it is easier and much cheaper to buy than a horse. It is also easier to slaughter a sheep according to the type of sacrifice required in shamanic rituals: to make an incision on the stomach and tear the animal's aorta with a hand. Thus, the sacrificial blood will not fall on the ground and will not become a cause of the wrath of local spirits and deities.

The traditional Buryat five precious animals have changed somehow in the Okinskii district. Yak and reindeer appeared instead of goat and camel (cf. Oehler, this volume). The Oka people themselves say that these are the Oka (less often Sioit) five types of cattle. Local Buryats and Soicts emphasize that Oka yaks are the northernmost yaks in the world and that reindeer are the southernmost. This is not actually so. Tsaatans (Dukha) people in Mongolia rear domestic reindeer (Wheeler, 2000). Below, I present the material on each animal that plays an important role in the modern life of Okin residents.

The most important animal among all nomadic peoples of Central Asia, including the Mongolian peoples, is the horse, which is a character of the epics, and is in an indissoluble connection with the owner. The *serge* hitching post is a cult object, one of the *axis mundi* in Buryat culture, a symbol of the strength of the family and male succession, the power of sacred owners, etc. The dominant role of the horse is confirmed by the fact that it is the first of the five types of cattle and is called *morin erdeni*, that is, the precious horse (Zhambalova, 2004). The local people considered the horse the main friend of a human, it was forbidden to scold or beat it—especially on the head—or to step on the bit (Babueva, 2004).

For modern Oka people, the horse is less important, although in terms of the number of livestock it ranks second after cattle (along with yaks). However, horses remain mainly with large cattle breeders, in small villages as well as in farms with summer habitation. In Orlik (the district center of the Okinskii district), where more than half of all residents of Oka live, few people keep horses. Poltoradnev in 1930 pointed out the great importance of the horse in the life of both Buryats and Soicts, which, according to the researcher, was associated with the physical and geographical features of the Oka (Poltoradnev, 1930). Poor roads, mountain trails, and the lack of bridges across rivers still make the horse the main means of transportation for hunters and residents of villages and camps located far from Orlik and the central road of the district.

Many families that breed horses treat the animal with respect; no one except the head of a family may ride it. I also heard an opinion that white horses are sacred creatures that can be ridden by celestials, so they cannot be ridden by an ordinary human (FR, m. 49, Okinskii district, August 2015). Oka inhabitants demonstrate a special attitude towards the Buryat breed of horses—in the Oka, some cattle breeders are

trying to revive this breed. An example is Il'ia Turchaninov from the area of Khoito-Beye, who specifically buys horses from other regions of Buryatia, for example, from the Eravninsky district (FR, Okinskii district, August 2015). Despite the remaining important economic and sacred role of the horse, emotionally, in my opinion, it is beginning to give way to another pet—the dog.

Cattle are the most common domestic animals in the Okinskii district. Even in Orlik, almost every family has at least a cow. This animal in the culture of the Oka Buryats (less often Soioys) is represented as a wet nurse who gives white ritual food:

The cow feeds us, and we sprinkle her milk to the gods. So she feeds the gods, too. In the difficult 90s, we survived only owing to cows and their milk.

(FR, w. 55, Okinskii district, July 2014)

It is believed that cows should not be beaten or scolded, and every cow in a small farm should have its own name.

Sheep in the economy of the Oka inhabitants plays a much smaller role than in the tradition of the steppe Buryats. As early as 1930, Poltoradnev noted that sheep farming in the Oka “is poorly developed, despite the considerable number of sheep in the area” (Poltoradnev, 1930, p. 60). As Pavlinskaia noted, Oka inhabitants started describing their farm with cattle and horses, but they can forget about sheep altogether (Pavlinskaia, 2002). The number of sheep has declined sharply since the collapse of the collective farms, but it remains stable and does not differ much from the number of livestock before collectivization. The respondents did not say much about sheep—it was either a consumer assessment (that meat is good, delicious), or a kind of surprise at the stupidity of these animals:

Sheep are very stupid. None of the animals needs pasture with a shepherd. And when the mushrooms appear in the autumn, the sheep generally go crazy. They may run into the woods and get lost.

(FR, m. 47, Okinskii district, February 2004)

However, recently, in the Oka, as well as in the entire territory of Buryatia, the demand for “ritual” rams has increased. It is interesting that now it is more often business events than generic or family holidays for which a live animal is purchased—special people slaughter and skin it right at the place of celebration.

The yak (*sarlyk*) is one of the symbols of the Oka, an animal which people are proud of and respect. The local people often oppose yak to cow to emphasize its positive features. Local people also believe that yak is a cleaner animal:

The yak will never lie down in its waste. The cow lies and immediately defecates under itself sometimes. But the yak, even if it lies in the mud, will always rises up clean.

(FR, m. 62, Okinskii district, August 2014)

Respondents also pointed out that yaks are more cohesive and attentive animals than cows—they always hide their calves in the center of the herd so that wolves do not pick them up and they do not freeze in winter.

One of my interlocutors from Orlik, Liudmila Nimaevna Mandagaeva, told me a Soiot fairy tale that she had heard from her mother, who was Soiot on her father's side, explaining why the yak looks the way it does:

The god came in the Altai Mountains and distributed the years of the eastern horoscope (among animals – V.B.-S.). The god invited animals. And our yak also ran there. He ran, ran, got tired of crossing the mountains—in the direction of Altai, he had to overcome the Eastern and Western Sayans. And he naturally was too late. And when he ran there, the god saw the yak and pitied it. “Because you ran so far, descended from a height, from the snow-capped mountains, I love and respect you. Therefore, I award you four qualities—you will be hardy like a horse, you will give milk like a cow, you will give wool like a sheep, and you will grunt like a pig.” For the fact that he ran and aspired like that, and got there, he was awarded four qualities. And so he returned from there to his native land, and in such a beautiful place he flourishes and thrives, and still lives.

(FR, Okinskii district, August 2015)

The existence of folklore texts dedicated to the yak indicates its special place among other domestic animals bred in the Oka (Rassadin, 2012). Yak is one of the markers of the identity of the local culture of the Oka People, emphasizing their connection with Tibet. The Okinskii district is called the Small or Buryat Tibet by the residents themselves, indicating that here is the land of the celestials, the pure space of the Buddhist religion, as well as the fact that, like Tibetans, Buryats and Soicts breed yaks.

Keeping yaks in a high-altitude climate is more cost-effective than keeping cows. Zhambalova (2000) cites the materials of her field research, where an informant from the village of Sorok (the administrative center of the rural settlement “Soiotskoe”) says that Mongolian cows require care and special feeding, especially when snow crust appears in winter or autumn. Yaks and hainaks (a mixture of Mongolian cow and yak) can feed themselves all year round, gnawing tree branches in severe frosts (Zhambalova, 2000). Despite this, in the time of N. S. Khrushchev (1953–1964), the authorities considered the breeding of yaks and reindeer in the Oka unprofitable as part of the struggle to increase the productivity of the national economy. The slaughter of these animals started, and the reindeer livestock was completely destroyed. The same fate was reserved for the yaks. The import of Kazakh white-headed and Kalmyk cattle breeds began, which destroyed the yak livestock in most of the kolkhozes. Yak growing in Oka was saved owing to the position of the “50 years of October” kolkhoz chairman (Soiotskii somon) Aiusha Puntysykovich Nalkhanov, who did not agree to the slaughter of his animals (Pavlinskaia, 2005). During field research, many of my respondents spoke about this, believing that Nalkhanov saved one of the most important symbols of the Oka.

Yaks, according to Oka inhabitants, are more wild animals than cows and therefore more noble, but also more dangerous. Owners typically forbid other people to approach the yaks. During my research, I was lucky to see how bull yaks fight. The local people I traveled with said it was a good sign, a blessing from the gods of Oka, but they forbade me to move away from the car so that I could hide in case of an animal attack. This is related to the problem of accustoming female sarlyks and

hainaks to milking. Now, almost no one can do this. Informants say that conditioning animals to milking ceased in the 1960s when the yak livestock was on the verge of destruction. Now, the milking of hainaks is beginning to be revived (for example, in the village of Sorok), however only individual farms practice this now. Yak's milk contains more fat than cow's milk, but the milk yield of yaks is much smaller in volume. Hainak gives quite large milk yield, and the fat content of its milk is not much less than the milk of yaks. The hybrid is also much calmer than the female yak and is easier to accustom for milking. These are the reasons for replacing the practice of milking female yaks with hainaks.

Reindeer are the mainstay of the traditional Soiot economy and are probably the most important cultural marker of their ethnic identity. The destruction of the entire reindeer livestock in the 1960s led to a severe degradation of the traditional Soiot culture—they stopped nomadizing. A well-known Buryat scientist-breeder who was engaged in reindeer husbandry, Semen Pomishin, worked as a zootechnician for several years in the Okinskii district in the late 1940s and believed that the elimination of Soiot reindeer was a tragedy for domestic reindeer husbandry, since “there was an irretrievable loss of the gene pool” (Pomishin & Atutov, 1983, p. 19). The scientist also believed that these animals were one of the largest and strongest species of taiga reindeer in the world.

The restoration of this branch of animal husbandry began in 1992 with a herd of 60 deer purchased in Tofalaria (Pavlinskaia, 2002, p. 98). Taiga reindeer husbandry is also strongly associated with Soiot shamanism among the inhabitants of Oka. According to some respondents, it was the death of the last Soiot shaman, Chimit Putunkeev, after the end of World War II that caused the slaughter of all Soiot reindeers. People accompanying the reindeer from Tofalaria in 1992 said that at some point the animals scattered. Then the Tofalar reindeer herder performed a ceremony: he sprinkled vodka, whispered some words, and the animals returned after a while. And the local Soiets, not having their own shaman, could not take care of the reindeer, whose number began to rapidly decrease, since Putunkeev “closed” the transfer of the shamanic gift by his death (FR, Okinskii district 2010, 2014, 2015). Thus, successful breeding of reindeers is impossible without sacred contact with animals and the spirits of the taiga associated with them.

The reindeer evokes very strong emotions, especially among Oka Soiets. For many of my respondents who have caught reindeers before “optimization” in the 1960s, the arrival of hunters on reindeer, the opportunity to pet this animal, and even riding it are some of the most vivid and positive memories of childhood. In general, Soiot reindeer are spoken of with pride and sadness as the lost wealth and identity of Soiot culture. However, sometimes, in the stories of respondents, the reindeer appears as a symbol of the civilizational backwardness of Soiets. Many residents of the village of Sorok recalled that when they came to Orlik, some locals laughed at them, asked why they rode horses and not reindeer as all Soiets should (FR, w. 48 Okinskii district, August 2011). Other people also deprecatingly called Soiets “people losing reindeer hair.” One of my interlocutors from the Tunka district, who has lived all her life in the village of Khoito-Gol, said that in the 1930s–1950s, Ilchir Soiets often descended into the village on reindeers to sell their hides and meat. Local Buryats willingly traded with Soiets but, according to the respondent, rarely let them into their homes. Buryats believed that each Soiot could be a strong shaman and, if he is dissatisfied,

will cause damage to the house or stain the house with reindeer hair, which falls from clothes made from the skins of these animals (FR, w. 88 Tunkinsky district, August 2015).

The last important domestic animal in modern Oka culture is the dog. Although the dog traditionally is very important for hunters, various prohibitions are associated with it, for example, entering a house or lying where people are sitting or sleeping, etc. Now the position of the dog is beginning to change. The dog is no longer simply a necessary animal in the household but is becoming a pet. The ban on entering a house, due to the fact that the dog is a creature of the underworld or a guide or guardian of the dead, no longer always pertains. People now allow dogs not only in the summer kitchen but also in the rooms, and owners explain this in different ways—the dog is old, it deserves pity, children like to play with it, etc. In my opinion, this may be due to the adoption of elements of urban culture where a dog in most cases is not a working animal.

For Oka hunters, a dog is now the most important pet. The local hunters believe now that a person may get a good hunting dog only once in a lifetime. Therefore, one cannot praise a dog in the presence of strangers—it can be stolen. This story happened to one of my respondents—someone took his dog away over a distance of more than 200 km. The dog never became accustomed to the new owner. After several unsuccessful attempts to escape, that person shot the dog, as one of the eye-witnesses told my interlocutor (FR, m. 47 Okinskii district, February 2004).

I can mention an interesting method of choosing a good hunting dog. Puppies from a good bitch are taken at the age of six months to hunt in the taiga. The owner observes which puppy takes the trail better, is not afraid of game, etc. This puppy is taken home, and the rest are left in the woods. However, if one of them returns to the village, the owner leaves it at home and believes that this dog will also become a good hunter (FR, w. 64 Okinskii district, August 2011). Usually hunting dogs enjoy freedom, they are rarely kept on a leash all the time or are not released outside the estate because local people believe that the dog should have a chance to go into the taiga to hunt when it has such a need. Otherwise, the dog may lose its hunting abilities. According to my informants, if the owner does not go hunting for a long time, the dog runs away to the taiga for 10–14 days, after which it returns home, sometimes with wounds from taiga animals.

Local people believe that wild animals are under the “jurisdiction” of Bayan Hangai—the sacred master of the taiga and the entire natural world in general. A person’s contact with wild animals should take place only in the taiga under certain conditions, either during hunting or when a person stays in the forest for a long time, loses the “human smell,” and the animals stop being afraid of him. The appearance of wild animals and birds in the places where a person lives, in his socio-cultural space, and not in his natural habitat, is perceived as a warning or threat from the Bayan Hangai (less often from other gods and spirits) and awakens a fear. A particularly bad sign is the arrival of large wild ungulates—Manchurian deer, elk, or roe deer. It is considered to be impossible to approach them and even look at them. You should close your eyes and recite mantras and/or pray to Bayan Hangai until an animal goes back to a forest (FR, w. 69 Okinskii district, August 2014).

However, a person can perceive a meeting with some wild animals outside his territory as a blessing, accompanied by joy or even sacred awe. In Oka, a good sign

signifying the favor of the local gods and spirits is to see eagles or other large birds of prey—local people believe that eagles are messengers of the deities of the mountains. It is especially good to meet these birds on *oboo* or other sacred places. For the Oka Buryats, a good omen is a meeting with swans, since the mythical foremother of the Khongodor tribe, whose representatives make up the majority of the Buryat population of the district, is considered to be the heavenly Swan Maiden. I was of the opinion that it would be a good sign to see a snow leopard in the mountains.

There is a fairly large group of animals for which it is prohibited to hunt. Compliance with these prohibitions is still maintained. You cannot kill eagles and swans, which are sacred birds, or scoter ducks, and it is believed that they are the rebirth of lamas who sinned in a previous life—this is due to the characteristic color of the bird. The Oka hunter will not hunt a female with a cub and females after rut. It is strictly forbidden to kill animals that differ in some way from their counterparts by specific color, size, signs on the skin, etc., as well as unknown species—under these guises Bayan Hangai or his children may hide (Beliaeva-Sachuk, 2013).

People pay special attention to the bear. The symbolism of this animal is very wide and diverse in the culture of all groups of Buryat. The bear is associated with the male principle, the symbol of day and spring. On the other hand, it is a chthonic creature associated with the east (empty side) and the bottom side. A bear is a shapeshifter, and black shamans can transform into it or use it as their riding animal (Dashieva, 2015). While studying the shamanism of Buryats of the Tunka Valley, Gerasimova recorded a shamanic invocation that states that the bear is the ancestor of the local Buryats (Gerasimova, 1969). Also, the names of the bear in Buryat—*baabgai* and *baakhaldai*—can be interpreted as the younger uncle on the father's side and, accordingly, the younger brother of the mother (Dashieva, 2015). The relationship between a bear and a human can be indicated by field materials collected in Oka. The bear is not specifically hunted at all and is killed only as a last resort. They always apologize to the dead bear, saying that it was his own fault for his death or that they found him already dead. It is believed that a hunter cannot kill more than 60 bears in a lifetime: the 60th bear is “fatal”—he will either kill the hunter himself or a hunter will die soon after a successful bear hunt. This is due to the idea that a bear is a person—in a previous life, it was a human who led a sinful life or a hunter who specifically hunted bears and killed too many of them (FR, Okinskii district 2004, 2011, 2014).

The connection with the bear, as well as with the reindeer, can also be traced in one of the most widespread beliefs in the entire Sayan region of Buryatia, the cult of Sayan girls, which has a Soiot origin. They are the sacred mistresses of the area and own the territory of the southern slope of the Eastern Sayan: from Lake Ilchir in the north-eastern part of the Okinskii district to the resort of Arshan in the Tunkinsky district of Buryatia, as well as lands along the Kitoi River. Sayan girls are presented as young women (some local Buryats say that they are Buryats) dressed in traditional clothes or as little girls who may be dressed in modern clothes. People believe that they ride reindeer, and they can turn into these animals themselves and show themselves to people in this form (Belyaeva, 2009). The territory of the spirits' possessions, the connection with the reindeer, and the fact that many stories about them say that they lived and were buried in the taiga after their death, indicate that the Sayan girls were Soiets.

People tell several versions of mythological stories about how girls became sacred mistresses after their death. Here is the most common of them.

There were two girls. They lived with their father. Two hunters met them. They [hunters] went away and then came back to woo. However, the girls died when the hunters were out, and their father buried them in the taiga [left the corpses in a forest according to Soiot's funeral practices—V. B.-S.]. The guys came back, but the father was sitting alone. They asked, what happened? And the old man replied that there was an infection and they went to the mountains. The guys went after them, but they found the girls dead. They buried the girls and left them gifts, which they brought to the brides. And all the vodka that they had with them was poured out there. But you can't spray vodka for a dead person. So they became mistresses. And everybody should splash vodka for them. These girls became the owners of Shumak.

(FR, m. 83 Tunkinsky district, August 2004)

In 2019, I also recorded an interesting version that the Sayan girls were two little girls, sisters, who were killed by a bear and, therefore, after their death they became the owners of the area where they died (FR, m. 40 Okinskii district, July 2019). This may indicate that the bear cult was once widespread among Soicts as a mediator between the world of gods and people, a mediator or executor of the will of the gods. Similar views existed among many peoples of Siberia and the Far East.

The natural and climatic conditions and the geographical location of the Okinskii district of the Republic of Buryatia have influenced the fact that animals still play an important role in the life of most Oka inhabitants. They continue to be the main source of food for local people (meat and dairy products), as well as the main source of income, since people are engaged in cattle breeding and the sale of animal products, in addition to public services, trade, and the newly developing tourism sector. Some domestic animals have become an important ethnic marker (reindeer = Soicts) or the regional identity of the Okinskii district (yaks, hainaks). In recent years, the production of souvenirs from yak wool began to develop, but so far it has not gained wide popularity, since the Okinskii district attracts mostly climbers and river rafters. Ethnographic tourism, despite all the efforts of the administration and the Oka people themselves, has not yet spread.

The sacredness of many animals, especially wild ones, plays a huge role in the modern beliefs of local people. This is primarily due to the fact that in cattle breeding and hunting, too many factors are not stable and depend on the surrounding nature. This means that these occupations depend on the will of local gods and spirits, according to the Oka Buryats and Soicts. Therefore, each unusual phenomenon or incident is evaluated as a message from supernatural beings, and animals are perceived as possible mediators between the world of people and deities. Tibetan Buddhism, which has dominated the local belief system since the 19th century, has made significant changes in rituals and animal attitudes. So, many residents of Oka currently believe that one should not torture and kill animals purposelessly (for example, during hunting in excess of the needs of the family, just for fun) and generally bring them unnecessary suffering; because of this, one may be born as animal in the next life.

The patterns of treatment of both domestic and wild animals, their place in the socio-cultural space of people, are a reflection of the structure of the macrocosm in the modern culture of Oka Buryats and Sojots. It is not by accident that five types of domestic animals still play the most important roles and are symbolically directly related to the Buddhist model of the world. The elimination of a particular type of animal husbandry (reindeer husbandry) is a violation of the universal balance in human's lives, which leads to changes in behavior in other economic activities (hunting) and lifestyle (taiga nomadism and all the tools that allow free movements), which ultimately lead to negative consequences for the whole culture (Sojots). It is not a coincidence that many people in Oka believe that the welfare of the residents of the area began to improve when reindeer returned to these lands and filled up the vacant place in the sacred five of domestic animals. Wild animals also fit into the model of the macrocosm, symbolizing the order and stability of human life, being in their place, that is, outside the territory of man. If they come to people, it is a symbol of the destabilization, a message from higher powers, a violation of established rules and a warning of future changes. In turn, the attitude to animals indicates the attitude of people to the surrounding world.

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PART VI

CONCEPTIONS OF HISTORY





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CHAPTER 37

ECONOMICS OF THE SANTAN TRADE

Profit of the Nivkh and Ul'chi traders in Northeast Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries



Shiro Sasaki

INTRODUCTION

The southern part of the Russian Far East, comprising the Lower Amur River basins, Primor'e, and Sakhalin Island (further Sakhalin), has had a unique historical and political experience beginning in the second half of the 19th century. During the last 150 years, four different kinds of powers ruled this region one after another: pre-modern East Asian political powers (the Qing dynasty and Tokugawa Shogunate), modern empires (Russian and Japanese empires), a socialist government (the Soviet Union), and a contemporary capitalistic government (Russian Federation). With three drastic political transitions taking place, the southern part of the Russian Far East is unique within the Siberian world.

In this chapter I show that the first transition is a fundamental one. Many problems concerning the rights of the Indigenous ethnic minorities in this region have their root in this transition. To my knowledge, no researcher has ever seriously considered the influence of pre-modern East Asian political powers on local societies and cultures in this region (Sasaki, 2016). Russian and Soviet historians avoided attention to the substantial time that Chinese and Japanese powers ruled preceding the Russian Empire in this region (Melikhov, 1985a, 1985b).

However, as some historians mentioned and this chapter will show, the local Indigenous people were actively involved in regional history and, at times, played a decisive role in conflicts between China, Russia, and Japan from the 17th century to the mid-19th century (Sasaki, 2016; Morris-Suzuki, 2020a, 2020b). At the same time, the Indigenous peoples were deeply dependent on the political and economic systems of that time, which granted them exclusive rights to access resources and engage in commercial activities. However, Russian and European researchers, who came to this region in the late 19th century, saw people living in poor conditions, looking like survivors of the Stone Age. I hypothesize that these researchers only observed the results of the policies of modern empires that had destroyed the system and order of the pre-modern power.

In this chapter, I examine this hypothesis and clarify the significance of the first political transition in the region, focusing on the trade activities of the ancestors of two Indigenous minorities in this region: the Nivkh and Ul'chi (see Figure 37.1). The former live in the northern part of Sakhalin and the lowest Amur River basin, while

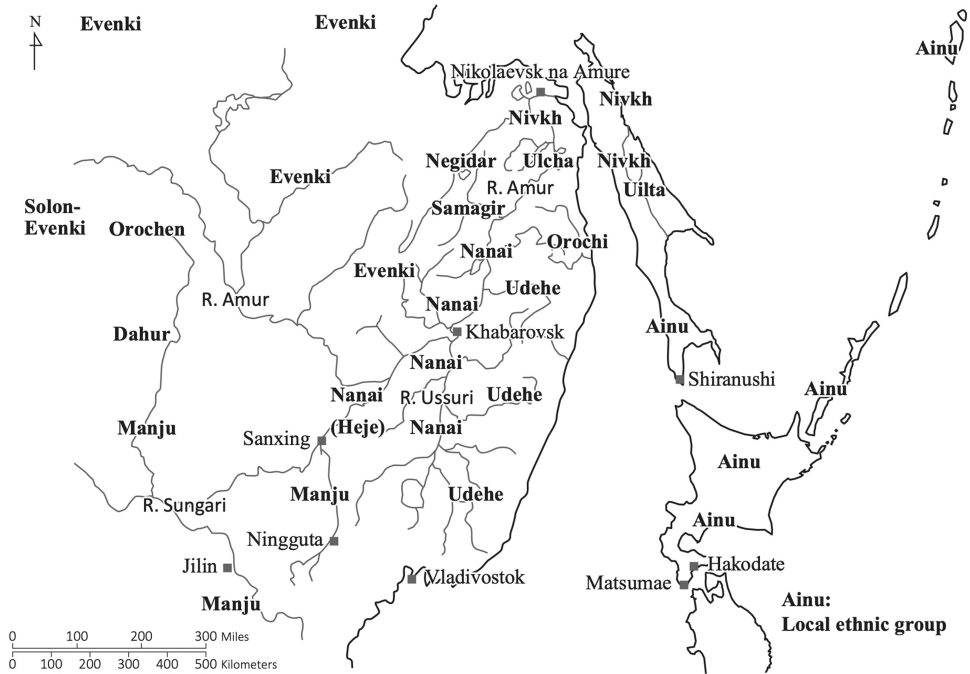


Figure 37.1 Northeast Asia in the 19th century with the location of local ethnic groups (Sasaki, 2016, p. 161).

the latter live in the upper side of the former along the Amur River. I chose these two ethnic groups because of the significant roles they played in the history of this region, enthusiastically engaging in trade activities along a long commercial road that stretched between China and Japan via the Amur River and Sakhalin. These activities are called “*Santan trade*” by Japanese historians and have recently begun to attract the attention of Russian researchers (e.g., Samarin, 2011).

The *Santan trade* refers to the commercial activities conducted in Sakhalin by traders from the continent until the beginning of the 20th century (Sasaki, 1999). The Japanese and Ainu called such traders *Santan*. Based on their vocabularies and some cultural traits recorded by Japanese explorers, researchers argue that the *Santan* people included ancestors of the present Ul’chi and a component of the Nivkh (Ikegami, 1961; Sasaki, 1996). Though the beginning of the trade is unclear, there is evidence that it prospered during the mid-18th to mid-19th centuries when the region was under the control of two pre-modern East Asian political powers. The Qing dynasty governed the people using the tribute system. After the decline in Qing dynasty power in Sakhalin in the early 19th century, the Tokugawa Shogunate extended its power from the south to Sakhalin to rule the Ainu people with a capitalistic colonial system and establishing new rules concerning the *Santan trade*. Though China and Japan ruled this region in different ways, both countries enhanced the trade.

The geographical locations of the Ul’chi and Nivkh were advantageous for trade, as they were far away from the centers of China and Japan (Beijing and Edo, respectively). As a result, the ruling powers were not strong enough to restrict and

control their activities (Sasaki, 1998). The analysis presented in this chapter shows that the ancestors of both Ul'chi and Nivkh earned remarkable profits from the exchange of Chinese and Japanese products. Previously, I analyzed Santan traders' profits based on concrete examples recorded by Japanese and Manchurian officers and Russian researchers in the 19th century (Sasaki, 2011). In this chapter, in addition to it, I examine how the trade prospered until the mid-19th century. Finally, I evaluate the impact of the first transition from the pre-modern East Asian rule to the modern capitalist and imperialistic rule on the social history of the Indigenous people.

OUTLINE OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF NIVKH AND UL'CHI

In many ethnographic records written and published since the end of the 19th century, the Nivkh and Ul'chi were represented as foragers (hunter-gatherer-fishers) living in large river basins. For example, Soviet anthropologists M. G. Levin and N. N. Cheboksarov, in their classification of the Siberian minorities based on a theory of economic-cultural types (Levin & Chebolsarov, 1955; Levin, 1972), defined the Nivkh as characteristic representatives of the type of "fishermen of large river basins." The Khanty and Mansi in the Ob' River basin and the Itel'men in Kamchatka are also categorized into this type (Levin, 1972, pp. 4–5). According to the typology, fishermen of large river basins had the following characteristics: a) the main year-round food was fish, b) a comparatively sedentary way of life, c) harness-dog breeding, and d) fish skins were widely used as material for clothing (Levin, 1972, pp. 4–5).

The image of the society and culture of the Nivkh and Ul'chi, which is now widely accepted, was created by anthropologists who conducted field research in the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin from the 1890s to the 1930s (e.g., Pilsudski, 1898; Shternberg, 1933; Zolotarev, 1939). As cultural anthropologists, they described these people based on what they observed in their field research. However, they mentioned trade activities rarely if at all. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine from 20th century ethnography that the Nivkh and Ul'chi were commercial traders 150 years prior.

Research at different times presents different images of the same people. For example, the ethnography recorded in the 19th century by Rinzō Mamiya and Leopold von Schrenck presents the Nivkh and Ul'chi as active, vital, and affluent societies. Mamiya traveled in Sakhalin and the Lower Amur basin in 1808 and 1809 (Mamiya, 1810a/1988a, 1810b/1988b), while Schrenck engaged in scientific research from 1854 to 1856 (Schrenck, 1883, 1899, 1903). Both witnessed the real process of the Santan trade, which was not possible for later researchers (Figure 37.2). Mamiya said that the trade occupied the first place in their productive activities of the Nivkh (Mamiya, 1810a/1988a, p. 85). Schrenck allotted a chapter for the description of trade in this region (Schrenck, 1899).

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS SURROUNDING THE SANTAN TRADE

Rule of the Qing dynasty

The peoples of the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin Island experienced the direct rule of a complex political entity for the first time in the 13th century. The Mongolian



Figure 37.2 Santan people's travel on a boat (from "Hokui bunkai yowa" in National Archive of Japan).

Yuan dynasty which conquered China and ruled from 1271 to 1368, dispatched a military delegation to the Lower Amur River basin. By the mid-13th century, the Yuan dynasty brought the ancestors of the present Nivkh, Ul'chi, and Nanai under its control. The official chronicle and other documents on the history of the Yuan dynasty ("Yuan shi" and "Yuan wen lui") indicate that the Mongolian force fought the first battle against the ancestors of the present Ainu in Sakhalin in 1264, finally subduing them in 1308 (Nakamura Kazuyuki, 2010). Following these events, the people in the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin Island maintained a continuous political connection with Chinese dynasties including the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1616–1912).

The Qing dynasty, established by the Manchurians, was the most powerful entity to rule this region. The dynasty came into contact with the people in the Lower Sungari basin at the end of the 16th century, and finally brought the vast area covering all the basins of the Amur River system and the majority of Sakhalin Island under its control in 1732. This expansion was a result of the dynasty's quest for trade partners in sable fur production areas (Sasaki, 2016). Also, the Qing dynasty was victorious against Russia in the Russo-Chinese conflict that started in 1643 and ended with the Nerchinsk Treaty in 1689, resolving the territorial dispute over the Amur River basin.

The Qing dynasty's ruling system maintained the traditional tribute system of the preceding Chinese dynasties. The people (or their representatives) agreed to recognize the dynasty's authority and pay tributes in the form of special local products. In turn,

the dynasty rewarded the tribute payers with social status, such as king or chief, and precious things that provided the latter with social and economic benefits. The Qing dynasty maintained and further developed the existing tribute system in the Lower Amur River basin and Sakhalin (Sasaki, 2016). Tribute payers were organized into units—clans, villages, and households—and an appointed chief headed each unit. The chief was responsible for tribute payment and maintaining social order. In the final version of the system established in 1750 when there were 56 registered clans, approximately 130 villages, and 2398 households (Liaoning sheng dang an guan et al., 1984). Every household was obliged to pay a piece of sable fur annually. Thus, the dynasty could obtain at least 2398 pieces of sable fur every year, but it had to prepare 2398 sets of rewards for the payers. The rewards consisted of cotton clothes and rolls of cotton cloth. Appointed chief received silk costumes, headgear, and other items representing their status (see Figure 37.3).

Furthermore, tribute payers, who visited the local government center or branch office¹ to pay tribute, were granted the right to trade with merchants from Manchuria and inland China. They sold various kinds of furs, such as seal, red fox, raccoon dog, weasel, and other animals, except sable and black fox (which were under government control). They purchased silk and cotton clothes, glass beads, knives, iron pots, bronze or brass goods, ceramic ware, food materials, and liquor. The goods obtained through the tribute ceremonies and commercial exchange became the capital and commodity of the local people of the Lower Amur River basin for trade with the Ainu and Japanese in Sakhalin. Chinese silk cloth and garments were beloved items of the Japanese upper-class people. Some tribute payers, including the ancestors of the Nivkh and Ul'chi, enthusiastically engaged in trade, traveling between Manchuria and Sakhalin.

Control of trade by Japanese powers

The Qing dynasty's rule over the Lower Amur River basin and Sakhalin formally continued until 1860. At that time, a vast area of the Amur River basin was ceded to Russia with the Beijing Treaty between Russia and China. The dynasty's power



Figure 37.3 A Manchurian silk garment (in National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan; photograph by the author).

actually began to decline in Sakhalin earlier—at the beginning of the 19th century. At the same time, the Japanese, who had brought Hokkaido and the southern end of Sakhalin under its control, extended their power to the north in Sakhalin, while the Russians, who had advanced to Kamchatka, tried to approach Hokkaido and Sakhalin through the Kuril Islands.

In the early 17th century, the Tokugawa Shogunate entrusted the governance of Ezo-chi—the lands that included present-day Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands—to the Matsumae clan, one of the *daimyo* (Japanese, great lord) of the Shogunate, who were allowed to monopolize trade with the Ainu people. The clan began to dispatch research delegations to Sakhalin in the early 17th century. It traded with the Sakhalin Ainu at the Soya trading post in northern Hokkaido during the 17th and 18th centuries and constructed the Shiranushi trading post in southern Sakhalin in 1790 to control the Santan trade. Silk products, eagle tail feathers, and glass beads, which the Matsumae clan acquired from the Santan traders through the Sakhalin Ainu, profited the clan in its business with other daimyo and merchants. The clan, however, was not active enough to govern the Ainu, control the Santan traders, and defend the territory, while confronting the Russians.

The Tokugawa Shogunate, sensing a crisis with Russia approaching the Kuril Islands and Hokkaido in the late 18th century, decided to bring Ezo-chi under its direct control. It first took over the southern part of Hokkaido and the Kuril Islands (mainly the islands of Kunashir and Iturup) in 1799, and then the northern part of Hokkaido and Sakhalin in 1807. The Shogunate once again returned Ezo-chi to the Matsumae clan in 1822 due to a lapse in Russian pressure and corruption within the Shogunate, but again brought it under its direct control in 1855.

In 1808, the Shogunate dispatched Denjurō Matsuda and Rinzō Mamiya to Sakhalin to conduct geographic and ethnographic research. In 1809, Mamiya went to the northern end of Sakhalin and the Lower Amur River basin to the Manchurian post Deren, passing straight between Sakhalin and the continent. Matsuda was dispatched to the Shiranushi post to govern the Ainu people and control the Santan trade from 1809 to 1821. Original copies of their reports are preserved in the National Archives of Japan. One can glean much information about the geography and ethnography of Sakhalin and the Santan trade (Mamiya, 1810a/1988, 1810b/1988; Matsuda, 1822/1972) from these reports.

When Matsuda began to engage in matters of Sakhalin, the local Ainu people suffered from debts owed to the Santan traders. Although the cause and process of the accumulation of the Ainu's debt are too complicated to be discussed here, in brief, they can be ascribed to the economic exploitation of the Ainu by the Matsumae clan and the clan's inability to control the Santan trade. Matsuda resolved this problem by paying off the debt of the Ainu at the expense of the Shogunate's budget (Matsuda, 1822/1972). The Shogunate allowed Matsuda to pay off the Ainu's debt because it was afraid that the Ainu's antipathy against the Japanese would harm the governance in Ezo-chi.

Matsuda established rules to govern the Santan trade in Sakhalin, according to which the Santan traders were allowed to trade only with Japanese merchants under the supervision of Japanese officers at the Shiranushi post. All the commodities had to be sealed immediately before arriving at the post, and were stored in the storage house near the main building. Commodities were traded one by one in front of the

Japanese officers, chiefs of the Ainu from Shiranushi and Nayoro, and chiefs of the Santan traders. The supervisors from among the Santan chiefs were rewarded with a package of rice (8 *sho* = 14.4 liters), a barrel of liquor (2 *sho* = 3.6 liters), and two bundles of tobacco leaves (Kaiho, 1991). Matsuda also established the exchange rate, that is, the price of commodities based on a piece of sable fur (Matsuda, 1822/1972), which played an important role in the further prosperity of the Santan trade in the 19th century (see Table 37.1).

Though Matsuda's policies liberated the local Ainu from the long-standing debt to the Santan traders, they were subsequently alienated from the trade and began to

Table 37.1 Price list of commodities determined by D. Matsuda in 1812 (Matsuda, 1972, pp. 219–225) (Prices are estimated by pieces of Sakhalin sable fur.)

Fur	
Otter	2 pieces
Hokkaido sable (4 pieces)	1 piece
Fox	1 piece
Badger (3 pieces)	1 piece
Santan traders' commodities	
Blue silk cloth with embroidered dragons (2 <i>jo</i> ≐7.6 m)	30 pieces
Blue silk cloth with embroidered peonies (2 <i>jo</i> ≐7.6 m)	25 pieces
Red silk cloth with embroidered dragons (2 <i>jo</i> ≐7.6 m)	30 pieces
Red silk cloth with embroidered peonies (2 <i>jo</i> ≐7.6 m)	25 pieces
Flower pink silk cloth with embroidered dragons (2 <i>jo</i> ≐7.6 m)	27 pieces
Brown silk cloth with embroidered dragons (2 <i>jo</i> ≐7.6 m)	30 pieces
Silk garment with embroidered dragons	40 pieces
Leather costume	10 pieces
A set of feathers from an eagle tail	25 pieces
Smoking pipe	1 piece
Blue glass beads	Dependent on the size
Bow of Santan style	2 pieces
A sheet of tapestry	9 pieces
Chinese cotton cloth (1 <i>tan</i> ≐12.5 m)	2 pieces
Japanese commodities	
Rice (8 <i>sho</i> ≐14.4 liters)	4 pieces
Rice fermented by <i>Aspergillus oryzae</i> (8 <i>sho</i> ≐14.4 liters)	4 pieces
Sake (1 <i>sho</i> ≐1.8 liters)	1 piece
Tobacco (1 bundle)	1 piece
Ezo-style sword	5 pieces
Ezo-style dagger (2 sets)	3 pieces
Old Japanese garment	15 pieces
Japanese white cotton cloth (1 <i>tan</i> ≐12.5 m)	4 pieces
Iron pot (1 <i>sho</i> ≐1.8 liters)	4 pieces
Iron pot (1.5 <i>sho</i> ≐2.7 liters)	5 pieces
Iron pot (2 <i>sho</i> ≐3.6 liters)	6 pieces
Iron pot (3 <i>sho</i> ≐5.4 liters)	7 pieces
Iron pot (4 <i>sho</i> ≐7.2 liters)	8 pieces
Iron pot (5 <i>sho</i> ≐9 liters)	9 pieces
Iron pot (8 <i>sho</i> ≐14.4 liters)	25 pieces
Iron pot (1 <i>to</i> ≐18 liters)	27 pieces
Iron pot (1.3 <i>to</i> ≐23.4 liters)	28 pieces
Iron pot (1.5 <i>to</i> ≐27 liters)	30 pieces

be much dependent on their relations to the Japanese. These trading practices were observed until just before the collapse of the Shogunate in 1867.

ECONOMIC PROFIT OF SANTAN TRADERS

Quantitative data

The Santan trade prospered the most during the second half of the 18th century, when the Qing dynasty under Emperor Gaozong was still powerful enough to manage the tribute system in remote areas far from Beijing. At that time, Russia had expanded its territory to the north and northeast after the conclusion of the Nerchinsk Treaty, while the Japanese only extended its power to the southern end of Sakhalin. All the tribute payers and traders were able to conduct business under the stable rule of the Qing dynasty. Local government centers had the ability and authority to solve problems between the tribute payers. For example, some Manchurian documents describe how the Sanxing local government solved a murder that took place at Kiji village in 1742 (Liaoning sheng dang an guan et al., 1984; Matsuura, 2006).

Unfortunately, we do not have enough quantitative data on the Santan trade in the 18th century as Manchurian officers and bureaucrats of the local government recorded only official data that is suspect. We have better information on the activities of the Santan traders from Japanese and Russian officers and ethnologists in the 19th century when the trade was in the last stretches of prosperity. By this time, the Qing dynasty had lost its power and authority over Sakhalin, the southern part of Sakhalin came under Japanese control, and Russia started exerting military pressure on the Amur River basin from the mouth of the river. Alongside these shifting political systems, Japanese officers and Russian explorers were able to begin conducting field research in this region.

Volume of trade

Quantitative data on the Santan trade in Sakhalin can be found in Japanese documents in the mid-19th century. As mentioned above, the Tokugawa Shogunate directly controlled Ezo-chi from 1799 to 1822 and from 1855 to 1867 to prepare against the approach of the Russians. During the Shogunate's second direct rule, the Hakodate office (Hakodate Bugyosho) recorded concrete data about the commodities of the Santan trade. The Shogunate constructed a permanent branch office at the trading post of Shiranushi, and dispatched officials to manage and supervise the trade. The records and their copies are preserved at the University of Tokyo, Hokkaido Prefectural Archives, Hokkaido Museum, and Hakodate City Library.

Table 37.2 is a result of the author's analysis of the records, which was published by S. Takakura and Historiographical Institute the University of Tokyo, to show the change in the number of boats and crews, and the quantity of silk garments and silk and cotton cloth rolls, which were the main trade commodities from 1853 to 1867. This table indicates that the Santan traders were enthusiastic about trade with Japan even just before the collapse of the Shogunate.

Though it is often difficult to estimate the total length of imported cloth, some records held in the Hokkaido Prefectural Archive and Hokkaido Museum detail the length of imported silk cloth in 1853. These records specify name, size, quality,

Table 37.2 The numbers of boats and crews and quantity of silk garments, silk cloth, and cotton cloth from 1853 to 1867

<i>Year</i>	<i>Boats</i>	<i>Crews</i>	<i>Silk garments</i>	<i>Silk cloth (rolls)</i>	<i>Cotton cloth (roles)</i>
1853***	4	66	7	92	0
1856****	1	6	0	3	0
1857****	1	4	0	3	0
1858***	5	46	10	34	1
1860***	7	54	2	59	76
1863***	2	17	1	22	7
1864***	2	10	0	6	12
1865***	5	39	0	38	26
1866***	1	7	1	2	2
1867***	5	31	2	45	5
Sum	33	280	23	304	129

*** Takakura, 1939, p. 178.

**** Historiographical Institute the University of Tokyo, 1922/1972, p. 121, p. 706

estimated price, and real payment for 199 sets of commodities. According to Mineo Kaiho's analysis of the records, the length of the imported silk cloth (92 rolls) is estimated to be 2895 *shaku*, which is equal to 1097.2 m (1 *shaku* = 0.379 m) (Kaiho, 1991). Kaiho reevaluates the volume of trade, arguing against the widely accepted assumption that the Santan trade was small-scale (Kaiho, 1991). Although the case in 1853 might not be a typical one, the volume of the Santan trade appears to be much larger than was previously assumed.

Other kinds of commodities of trade in 1853 and their volumes are indicated in Table 37.3. The sum of the prices of all the commodities on both the Santan and Japanese sides is estimated to be equal to that of 4,422 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur. The Sakhalin sable was the most reliable unit for evaluation of commodities for the people participating in the Santan trade, and Matsuda defined it as the official price unit.

Price of commodities

The price of a commodity often differs depending on local demand and economic and political systems. While an item can be highly evaluated in one place, the same item can be sold and bought at a low price in another place. Traders typically look for such differences, transporting commodities from one place to another to realize profits. The same was true for the Santan traders.

The prices of fur and silk greatly differed in China and Japan. One archival record of the Sanxing local office provides reliable information on the price of sable fur in China. According to the office archive (Sanxing dang an) of 1825, many tribute payers could not come to Sanxing to pay the tribute because of the smallpox epidemic in the Amur River basin in 1824. The Sanxing local office decided to make up for the shortage of sable fur by purchasing the fur. It sold 750 reward sets for tribute payers for 1500 *liang* in silver coin, and bought 750 pieces of sable fur from the people living near Sanxing (Liaoning sheng dang an guan et al., 1984, pp. 204–205). From this record, one can calculate that one piece of sable fur cost 2 *liang*.²

Table 37.3 List of commodities of the trade in 1853 (Kaiho, 1991, pp. 7–8)

From <i>Santan</i> traders to Japanese side		From Japanese side to <i>Santan</i> traders	
Silk products		Fur	
Silk garment	7	Otter	1,265
Silk cloth (with dragon pattern)	792 <i>shaku</i> *	Fox	588
Silk cloth (without dragon pattern)	2,103 <i>shaku</i> * (Sum 2,895 <i>shaku</i> *)	Sable (Sakhalin)	258
Wool carpet	2	Sable (Hokkaido)	324
Tapestry	4	Iron products	
Patchwork tapestry	28	Large size pot with four ears	5
Small size beads		Middle-size pot with four ears	2
Blue glass beads	1,904 sets	Pot with four ears (7 <i>sho</i> **)	6
White glass beads	77 sets	Pot (5 <i>sho</i> **)	1
Brown glass beads	10 sets	Pot (3 <i>sho</i> **)	2
Middle-size beads	515	Pot (2 <i>sho</i> **)	5
Eagle tail		Pot (1 <i>sho</i> **)	5
Eagle tail (Steller's sea eagle)	376 sets	Rasp	58
Eagle tail (white-tailed eagle)	93 sets	Adze	5
Eagle tail (young bird)	8 sets	From Japanese side to <i>Santan</i> traders	
Eagle tail (other)	7 sets	Fur	
Smoking pipe	10	Otter	1,265
Flint	7	Fox	588
Walrus tusk	1	Sable (Sakhalin)	258

Whole sales were evaluated 4422 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur

* Japanese unit of length, 1 *shaku* is equal to about 0.379 meter by *Kujira-jaku* (a whale measure).

** Japanese unit of volume, 1 *sho* is equal to 1.8 liters.

Other archival records reveal the value of a roll of blue cotton cloth. The Manchurian officers, who were dispatched to the branch offices built at the Lower Amur River basin like Kiji and Deren, sold rolls of blue cotton cloth to buy sable fur from tribute payers in addition to the tribute payment. It was estimated that they bought 246 pieces of sable fur by selling 492 rolls of cotton cloth (Liaoning sheng dang an guan et al., 1984, pp. 390–391), indicating that a piece of sable fur is equal to two rolls of cotton cloth and that a roll of cotton cloth cost 1 liang. Unfortunately, there is no data on the length of a roll of cotton cloth.

Compared to China, the price of sable fur was much lower in Japan. It is well known among the Japanese historians that the Shogunate and Matsumae clan bought sable fur from the Ainu hunters in Sakhalin and Hokkaido as part of deals with the *Santan* traders (Deriha, 2009). The purchase price differed depending on the region. In the early 19th century, a piece of sable fur cost the most 121 *mon* of copper coins in Sakhalin, while it was bought at a much lower price in Hokkaido, such as for 32 *mon* in Tokachi and 50 *mon* in Nemuro and Kushiro (Takakura, 1939, p. 190). This difference might reflect the quality of the fur. Sakhalin sable fur has a much higher quality (black and glossy), while Hokkaido sable fur is whitish and less glossy.

Although it is difficult to compare the prices of sable fur in China and Japan, there are ample hints to calculate the difference. When Matsuda established the rules of the Santan trade and decided the price of the commodities in 1812, he determined that a roll of Chinese cotton would be exchanged for two pieces of Sakhalin sable fur (see Table 37.1). As mentioned above, the Chinese side bought a piece of sable fur for two rolls of cotton cloth, that is, the Chinese price of sable fur was at least four times higher than that of Japan. When a Santan trader sold two rolls of cotton cloth to the Japanese side at Shiranushi, he would receive four pieces of sable fur. He had purchased the cloth for one piece of sable fur at the branch office in the Lower Amur River basin. Thus, he profited by three pieces of sable fur. I do not think that any trader would have missed such a chance.

Moreover, the Santan traders had their own price system for their commodities. Almost all researchers engaged in ethnological studies of the Nivkh, Ul'chi, and other Indigenous people of the Amur River basin and Sakhalin have overlooked this point. Only Schrenck, conducting field research in the Lower Amur River basin and Sakhalin from 1854–1856, referred to this system in his ethnography published in 1899 and 1903 (Schrenck, 1899, 1903). He said, “they evaluate commodities and daily necessities not only in the relative exchange rate, but also in the absolute price, which can be represented in a numerical value” (Schrenck, 1899, p. 278).

The price unit was named *ya* in the Nivkh language and *yan* in the Ul'chi language. Schrenck found out the name of the unit with great difficulty, because the Nivkh traders usually did not clearly say the unit, but only replied, for example, “it costs one” (*niun chalkbach* or *niun chalkhara*) (Schrenck, 1899, p. 278).

The terms *ya* and *yan* were derived from the Manchurian monetary unit *yan*, which is a translation of the Chinese *liang*. Schrenck pointed out that 1 *ya* or *yan* was equal to 1 *liang* of Chinese silver coin (see Figure 37.4) and to 2 rubles of Russian silver coin (Schrenck, 1899, p. 279). He said that the Gol'd people (present-day Nanai), who lived in the upper basins of the Amur River, knew subunits named *dikha* and *tsirikta dikha*, and that the latter was a copper coin. One *yan* was equal to 10 *dikha* or 1000 *tsirikta dikha*. The Gol'd used the subunits, while the Nivkh and Ul'chi used only *ya* or *yan*. Schrenck assumed that the latter did not have to use the subunits

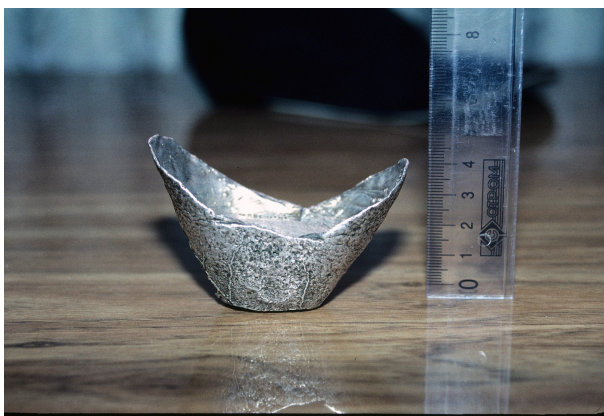


Figure 37.4 A Chinese silver coin held by a Nanai Family (in Kondon, Khabarovskii krai, Russian Federation, photo by the author).

because they engaged in only large-scale business (Schrenck, 1899, pp. 279–280). In fact, they used copper coins not as money, but as ornaments.

Schrenck also compiled a list of prices of the main commodities the Nivkh traders dealt with (see Table 37.4).

Profit of Santan traders

Schrenck pointed out that of all the people in the Amur River basin and Sakhalin, the Gilyaks (Nivkh) were the most enthusiastic to engage in trade (Schrenck, 1899, pp. 286–287). Mamiya had also mentioned Nivkhs' enthusiasm for trade, nearly 50 years before Schrenck's research (Mamiya, 1810a/1988a, p. 85). Why did they

Table 37.4 Price list of the commodities of the Nivkh (Schrenck, 1899, pp. 281–283) (Items that can be compared with prices of the Japanese side)

Fur	
Sable	1–3 <i>ya</i>
Fox (red)	2 <i>ya</i>
Fox (gray)	3 <i>ya</i>
Fox (black)	10 <i>ya</i> or more
Lynx	8–10 <i>ya</i>
Otter (per 1 <i>piad'</i>)*	1 <i>ya</i>
Cloth and clothes	
Cotton cloth (per 4 <i>sazhen</i>)**	1 <i>ya</i>
Woolen cloth (per 1.5 <i>sazhen</i>)**	1 <i>ya</i>
Manchurian silk cloth (per 4 <i>sazhen</i>)**	5 <i>ya</i>
Manchurian silk garment	5 <i>ya</i>
Lynx fur cloak (made of six pieces of fur)	30 <i>ya</i>
Women's fish skin coat	1 <i>ya</i>
Food	
Flour (1 package)	1 <i>ya</i>
Manchurian grain (4 packages)	4–8 <i>ya</i>
A box of vodka	10 <i>ya</i>
Tobacco leaves (10 bundles)	1 <i>ya</i>
Weapons and iron goods	
Bow strengthened with baleen	1 <i>ya</i>
Bow strengthened with rhinoceros or water buffalo horn	8–10 <i>ya</i>
Sword of elbow to tip length	1 <i>ya</i>
Sword inlaid with silver	3 <i>ya</i>
Spear tip of arm length	3 <i>ya</i>
Spear tip inlaid with silver	8–10 <i>ya</i>
Manchurian adze	1 <i>ya</i>
Old Manchurian armor	30 <i>ya</i>
Armor of local product	3–4 <i>ya</i>
Large Manchurian iron pot	4 <i>ya</i>
Small Manchurian iron pot	3 <i>ya</i>
Manchurian iron pot with handles	3–7 <i>ya</i>
Small Japanese iron pot	7–8 <i>ya</i>
Large Japanese iron pot	20 <i>ya</i>
Large Japanese iron pot with three ears (handles)	30 <i>ya</i>

* Russian unit of length: 1 *piad'* is equal to the distance between the extended thumb and forefinger.

** Russian unit of length: 1 *sazhen* is equal to about 2.134 meters.

engage in trade so enthusiastically? How much and what kind of profit did they earn from trade?

Fortunately, we have some concrete data to estimate their profits. Documents dated 1853, which recorded the volume of commodities traded at the commercial post of Shiranushi, also provide information about the sales and profit of Santan traders. In 1853, 66 traders came to Shiranushi to sell 199 sets of commodities to the Japanese side (Kaiho, 1991, pp. 7–10). Each trader had one to nine sets of commodities (Kaiho, 1991, p. 10) comprising silk rolls, silk garments, cotton products, eagle tail feathers, and glass beads (see Table 37.3). I analyze the case of three traders, Nunte, Chinkaruku, and Uetennu, and simulate their profit. They were all important persons both in their local community and the Japanese side, and traded in many sets of commodities.

Before the simulation, some assumptions about the price of commodities for the Santan traders need to be made explicit, based on Schrenck's price list (see Table 37.4). First, I use the price unit yan for the evaluation of profit of the Santan traders, as they were probably ancestors of the Ul'chi. Second, the price of the Sakhalin sable fur, which was a unit of evaluation used by the Japanese side, is assumed to be 2 yan, while that of Hokkaido sable fur is 1 yan.³ Third, as to the prices of otter and fox fur, we assume that a piece of high quality otter fur costs 6 yan, middle quality—4 yan, and the lowest quality—3 yan, while fox fur of the highest quality (black fox) costs 10 yan, middle quality (gray fox)—3 yan, and the lowest quality (red fox)—2 yan. Fourth, we assume the prices of iron products as follows: a large-sized pot with four ears—30 yan, a middle-size pot with four ears—20 yan, a 7 *sho*-size pot with four ears—15 yan, and a rasp—1 yan. Finally, the price of silk cloth is assumed to be 5 yan per 4 *sazhen* (1 sazhen = 2.134 m) and a silk garment—5 yan.

Nunte, who was one of the subleaders appointed by Japanese officers in Shiranushi, sold nine sets of commodities, including one silk garment and six rolls of silk cloth (a set of eagle tail feathers and blue glass beads were also included). The length of the cloth sold was 18.9 *jo* (71.63 m). The Japanese side evaluated these silk products' worth as that of 235 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur but, in fact, paid him with 57 pieces of otter fur (28 pieces of high quality, 13 of middle, and 16 of lowest quality), 25 pieces of fox fur (11 black, 11 gray, and 3 red foxes), 24 pieces of Hokkaido sable fur, 15 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur, and 2 iron rasps. If the Santan traders had adopted the same price system as the Nivkh, Nunte could have evaluated his commodities' worth as 47 yan ($((71.63 / 2.134) \times 5 / 4) + 5 = 47$). On the other hand, the volume of the sable fur (235 pieces) determined to be the price of Nunte's commodities could have been estimated to be 470 yan, while the price really paid for the commodities could have been estimated to be 473 yan ($((6 \times 28) + (4 \times 13) + (3 \times 16) + (10 \times 11) + (3 \times 11) + (2 \times 3) + (1 \times 24) + (2 \times 15) + (1 \times 2) = 473$). In any case, Nunte earned 426 yan ($473 - 47 = 426$) from the real trade of his silk products.

In the same way, profits of Chinkaruku and Uetennu can be simulated. Chinkaruku, who was also a subleader, sold four rolls of silk cloth, which totaled 51.2 m. He also sold a cotton tapestry and 50 pieces of blue glass beads. The Japanese side evaluated silk products' worth as 127 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur, but actually paid him with 23 pieces of otter fur (14 pieces of high quality, 4 of middle, and 5 of lowest quality), 10 pieces of fox fur (4 black, 1 gray, and 5 red foxes), 13 pieces of Hokkaido sable

fur, 6 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur, 1 large pot with four ears, and 1 rasp. Based on Santan traders' price system, Chinkaruku could have estimated the worth of his silk products to be 30 yan ($((51.2 / 2.134) \times 5) / 4 = 30$), while the Japanese evaluation could have been estimated to be 254 yan and the real price paid to be 225 yan ($((6 \times 14) + (4 \times 4) + (3 \times 5) + (10 \times 4) + (3 \times 1) + (2 \times 5) + (1 \times 13) + (2 \times 6) + (30 \times 1) + (1 \times 2) = 225$). Chinkaruku earned 195 yan from the real trade of his silk products.

Uetennu sold two rolls of silk cloth, a cotton tapestry, 20 sets of eagle tail feathers, and 70 pieces of blue glass beads. The total length of the silk rolls was approximately 19 m. The Japanese side evaluated the silk products' worth as 55 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur, but actually paid with 12 pieces of otter fur (9 pieces of high quality, 2 of middle, and 1 of lowest quality), 3 pieces of fox fur (2 gray and 1 red fox), 4 pieces of Sakhalin sable fur, and 1 iron rasp. Uetennu could have estimated the worth of his silk products to be 11 yan ($((19 / 2.134) \times 5) / 4 = 11$), while the Japanese evaluation could have been estimated to be 110 yan and the real price paid to be about 82 yan ($((6 \times 9) + (4 \times 2) + (3 \times 1) + (3 \times 2) + (2 \times 1) + (2 \times 4) + (1 \times 1) = 82$). Uetennu earned 71 yan from the real trade of his silk products.

The total sale of the three traders can be estimated as follows: Nunte—514 yan (257 pieces of sable fur) in the formal evaluation and 504 yan in real payment, Chinkaruku—286 yan (143 pieces) and 264 yan, and Uetennu—254 yan (127 pieces) and 235 yan.

These sales and profit evaluations are based on simulations. I cannot confirm whether the Santan traders really calculated their sales and profits in this way. Moreover, these three traders do not represent the overall trade scenario in 1853. Many other traders sold only one, two, or three sets of commodities for few pieces of sable, otter, and fox fur. It is probable, however, that each trader earned a certain profit from his trade with the Japanese side. It is for this reason that they periodically came to the Shiranushi trading post until the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1867.

Property and wealth of Santan traders

I have discussed that the Santan traders earned much profit in their business, taking advantage of the difference in prices of silk and fur products between China and Japan. A trader could have accumulated great wealth in a short time by traveling several times between Sanxing in the Sugari River basin and Shiranushi in the southern end of Sakhalin, trading in silk and fur products. Of course, only a limited number of privileged people could have engaged in such a highly profitable trade business. However, judging from the records in the archives of Japan about crew members on Santan traders' boats, ordinary people could also participate in the trade to some degree.

L. von Schrenck witnessed some extremely rich people in the Nivkh society in the mid-19th century. According to him, they were called *kolla nivkh*, and were respected even by the Manchurian and Japanese officers. These people had to meet certain conditions to be called *kolla nivkh*, such as having cloak of lynx fur, bows strengthened with water buffalo or rhinoceros' horns, old Manchurian armors, large Japanese iron pots, and two or three wives, and responsibility for organizing several bear rituals (Schrenck, 1903). All the things that represented a person's wealth were

very expensive, and cost 10–30 ya in the Nivkh price (Schrenck, 1899). Marriage also cost a lot, and the bear ritual, of course, required much expense to organize.

Until the mid-19th century, when Schrenck conducted field research in the Lower Amur River basin and Sakhalin and officers of the Tokugawa Shogunate recorded the process and results of the Santan trade, such rich people were regularly seen among the Nivkh and other societies in the Lower Amur River basin and Sakhalin.

CONCLUSION

Finally, why and how did the Nivkh and Ul'chi descendants of Santan traders become impoverished and defined as Indigenous in their own homeland? To this end, I argue the following four points.

First, the ancestors of the Nivkh, Ul'chi, and other Indigenous people in the Lower Amur River basin and Sakhalin were highly dependent on the political and economic system of pre-modern East Asian countries. As already mentioned, their sales and profits were derived from the difference in the prices of fur, silk, and cotton products between China and Japan. Moreover, these products were abundantly supplied based on the tribute system of the Qing dynasty and the trade-controlling measures of the Tokugawa Shogunate. When the Tokugawa Shogunate collapsed in 1867, the traders lost their best buyers and were left to trade with local people on Sakhalin with minimum profit (Pilsudski, 1898).

Second, the evaluation of wealth and status drastically changed after the Russian Empire occupied the Amur River basin (1860) and Sakhalin (1875) and Japan became a modernized country (1868). As mentioned above, ancestors of the Nivkh and Ul'chi accumulated wealth in the form of commodities they considered to be prestigious, such as lynx fur cloaks, strengthened bows, old Manchurian armors, and large Japanese iron pots. However, under the modernized economic system, these things became increasingly valueless—antiques to be preserved in museums. The formerly rich Santan traders, who possessed a lot of such things, lost their wealth and social status owing to this turn of events (Sasaki, 1996).

Third, the border policy of the modernizing countries divided the Santan trade route into several parts and blocked the flow of traders and commodities. As I have mentioned in other articles, those concerned with the trade in earlier times, including the Santan traders, Manchurian officers, Japanese officers, and Ainu tribute payers, conducted a range of activities within voluntary borders (Sasaki, 2016). Such borders had never blocked the flow of commodities.

However, new borders did not allow the movement of people and things without special permission, and they were guarded by police or military force. One such border was established between Sakhalin and Hokkaido for the first time in East Asia in 1875 (based on the Saint Petersburg Agreement). The Russo-Chinese border on the Amur River basin was strengthened and strictly guarded in the early 20th century. As a result, local people in this region were not able to move along their traditional trade route.

Fourth, as is widely known, the development and immigration policies of the modernized countries disturbed local people's activities, damaged their population with unfamiliar epidemics, and deprived them of the resources of their own land and their rights to conduct trade.

The decline of the pre-modern East Asian political and economic systems and the establishment of modern systems impoverished the Indigenous people of the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin. As their population diminished due to impoverishment and epidemics, they had no choice other than playing a role of “primitive minorities” in Imperial Russia and modernized Japan. The socialist policy of the Soviet Union attempted to revitalize the society and promote the traditional culture of the people, giving them the status of “minorities of the North” and later “Indigenous people of the North.” This policy was based on the recognition that the socialist government should offer the people, who “stagnated” at the stage of primitive economy, an opportunity to jump up to the level of socialism (Levin and Potapov, 1956, p. 543). However, I consider that it is not appropriate to apply this recognition to the people of the Lower Amur basin and Sakhalin, who had lived in the larger East Asian political-economic system for hundreds of years.

The peoples of this region experienced an historical process that differs from that of the people in Siberia and other regions of the Russian Far East. Their involvement in the Santan trade offers a new perspective on various issues relating to the Indigenous people of Northeast Asia. Considering their historic role as wealthy international traders, classical anthropological interpretations of material culture, subsistence activities, social structure, and world view and religious concepts, as well as contemporary issues such as minority policies and revitalization of culture in the region, should be reconsidered.

NOTES

- 1 Local government centers were located in Ninguta (along the middle basin of Mudanjiang River) and Sanxin (located at the mouth of Mudanjiang). Branch offices were built at various locations. The most famous one was in Kiji near the mouth of Lake Kiji during the 18th century. Later, this office was moved to Deren, which R. Mamiya visited in 1809.
- 2 One *liang* is a silver coin of approximately 37 g.
- 3 This price is different from the official rate Matsuda determined. As Kaiho mentioned, the price of sable fur increased in the mid-19th century (Kaiho, 1991).

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CHAPTER 38

POWER, RITUAL, AND ART IN THE SIBERIAN ICE AGE

The collection of ornamented artifacts as evidence of
prestige technology



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the phenomena of “primitive art” have increasingly been examined from the vantage point of human ethology and evolutionary psychology. Several book publications, inspired by this novel interdisciplinary approach, have found the support of readerships; among them are *Beauty and the Brain* (1988), *The Anthropology of Art* (2006), and *Art as Behavior* (2014). The evolutionary paradigm concept of the symbolic behavior on the basis of using a large comparative diachronic and cross-cultural study of prehistoric paintings and mobile art takes a place of priority in these analyses. In the process of evolution, humankind formed a system of signs beginning from simple (i.e., based on the simulation of natural phenomena) to complicated cultural and social systems. Ritualization was then the next step. During the process of behavior ritualization into expressive movement, behavioral patterns undergo specific changes, serving conspicuousness, distinctiveness, and unambiguity. The simplification and exaggeration of behavioral sequences and amplitudes of movements occur as well as rhythmic repetition. Cultural and social symbols, along with bodily symbols, gestures, power domination, and language are constants of human communications (Barton et al., 1994; Filippov, 2004; Khlopachev & Devlet, 2016). From these positions, the prestige items that make up the Paleolithic collections of Siberia are of particular interest.

Siberian archaeological collections contain unique samples of early artistic culture which provide extensive information about the early stages of the formation and development of human communities and various cultures in Northern Eurasia. Cultural codes recorded in the described series of items can be expressed through a variety of forms, materials, technology, features of aesthetics, and other elements of human behavior strategies. The meaning of these codes lies in the form of a semiotic reading of signs; while there are universal components, we can also find ornamental elements specific to the Eurasian continent as a whole. The special interest in Siberian collections is explained by its transit position of the territory along the continental migration routes of ancient peoples, as well as by the movements of ancient people from north to south, and from west to east along the vast North Asian landscape zones.

The theoretical bases of prestige and the prestige economy role were developed in a number of works of well-known researchers of the 19th and 20th centuries. Bronisław Malinowski, Marcel Mauss, and Marshall Sahlins made a great contribution to the development of the concept of gift economy (Lbova & Tabarev, 2010). Further to this, Brian Hayden and D'ann Owens (among others) developed the concept of the functioning of transegalitarian societies in archaic times. Transegalitarian societies are characterized by some degree of socio-economic inequality, a sedentary or semi-sedentary lifestyle with permanent dwellings grouped in relatively dense settlement areas. Socio-economic inequality is embodied through the use of prestige items or other indicators of excellence (for example, the organization of periodic festivals and feasts). Hayden and Owens created a wide base of practical materials for developing the concept of functioning of prestige objects in archaic societies, described in greater detail in Hayden (1998).

“Prestige technologies” refer to a social and technological complex in archaic societies. Their purpose is to demonstrate wealth, prestige, and the elite position of one or more members of a given society. Whereas the purpose of practical technologies is to achieve a pragmatic task, prestige technologies are employed to demonstrate wealth, success, and power. The purpose is to solve a social problem or to perform a social task, such as to attract new productive people in the group (new workforce or allies) or to unite members of social groups via demonstrating the success (Hayden, 1998). Therefore, the logic and the strategy of making prestige items is totally different from the logic and the strategy of making practical items. The main purpose of prestige technologies is to make the most of surplus labor for creating the items, which would attract people to the possessor of those items due to admiration for economic, aesthetic, technical, or other skills. Rational use of the surplus labor for creating additive objects could significantly increase the attractiveness of these objects (and their possessors) for others. The objects that achieve this goal also drive other people to possess them, sometimes just for their own pleasure or self-esteem, rather than using them to demonstrate their quality, high cost, and other “prestige” elements (Hayden, 1998).

Prestige technologies also are used for attracting people and families to debts or mutual obligations (Gosden, 1989). Used in the way they promote the relationships that create hierarchical economic, social, and political organization in a society. Prestige elements in pre-governmental public organizations constitute the infrastructure of social and political hierarchies. Without them, these hierarchies would be unviable. Prestige items also play an active role in the functioning of cultural systems. The generation of hierarchical relationships connected with debt obligations can be considered as a secondary function of prestige technologies. Their tertiary function is the ability of prestige technologies to keep surplus production and labor in a transformed condition. This allows people to use significantly more resources than it is necessary for consumption. Therefore, prestige items must be considered as something more than simply a passive reflection of power (Hayden, 1998).

It is important to note that prestige items demand exceptional costs of their production; therefore, ideological symbols are not necessarily prestige objects because they can be made at very little cost. On the other hand, ideological and cult items can be made with a lot of time and effort, as is the case with the golden crosses of the Renaissance. In the cases when special efforts were employed to purchase or manufacture these ritual objects, it can be assumed that the main purpose of their

manufacturing is to impress participants or spectators. Therefore, these items should also be classified as prestige ones.

The main factor contributing to the emergence of prestige technologies in archaic societies is the emergence of surplus products (the same is the main condition for the emergence of transegalitarian societies). The formation of such societies takes place in the Upper Paleolithic-Mesolithic in hunter-gatherer societies of Europe and in North-East Eurasia. The main premise of the emergence of surplus in such societies is, according to the author, the abundance of resources and their intensive use. Stable surplus production is something that promotes the increase of human populations, leads to a partially settled lifestyle, and becomes a basis for the emergence of economic competition between individuals for control over access to resources (Hayden, 1998). Various economic innovations contributing to the systematization of the exploitation of natural resources also appeared at that time. Transport, fishing nets, fishing lures, and the other tools, early ceramics—these all were prestige technologies first and then transformed into practical ones (Hayden, 1994).

One more premise of the emergence of prestige technologies is the emergence of an individual or group of individuals called “aggrandizers,” a kind of political elite in archaic societies. The purpose of such people is to increase their prestige for promoting their goals and interests. The increasing frequency of prestige works both through the possession and the giving away of prestige items. It was the emergence of such people, according to Hayden, that caused the development of the institute of “prestige technologies,” the complication of social stratification in societies, and the emergence of chiefdoms and proto-states. The “aggrandizers” had a number of prestige functions: they organized feasts and celebrations, made war and peace decisions, used resources for attracting allies, made profitable marriages (both monogamous and polygamous), raised the status of their descendants through special initiations, had the opportunity to spend a great number of resources for making prestige items, and had control over the basic resources (Hayden, 1998; Owens & Hayden, 1997).

Thus, we can distinguish three main principles of prestige technologies for primitive society. Firstly, prestige technologies work for production of the items that are for public demonstration (often one-time, short-term, episodic, but no less significant). Secondly, they play a significantly important role in intergroup and interregional exchange. Finally, despite the exceptional cost and labor costs of production, prestige items can be publicly destroyed or solemnly placed in a burial site. It was prestige technologies that influenced the development of some practical technologies (for example, early ceramics); it was the emergence of prestige technologies that became a revolutionary factor which entailed a complication of social structure because thanks to them, human collectives began to produce more products than the cost of living required (Hayden, 1998).

MATERIALS AND DISCUSSION

Paleogeography and the environmental situation in Siberian Upper Paleolithic

The Siberian region is located in a contact zone of different landscape areas in Northern and Central Asia. The territory is situated within the limits of the Mongolian-Siberian

folded mountain belt, and the environment (geological structure, relief, climate, waters, biota, and landscapes) differs greatly. The region has a combination of mountain ridges, smooth watersheds, and intermountain basins, oriented in a northeast direction. In general, the mountains occupy a high-altitude belt of 600–1,000 m above sea level (Altai, Sayan, Sikhote-Alin, and Kamchatka) and of 400–600 m above sea level on plants (West Siberian, Middle Siberian, the Prilenskoe and Vitimskoe Plateaus, Central Yakutia). The study of the main geoarchaeological sections makes it possible to reconstruct the environmental conditions of the Paleolithic human occupations and to build a general geoarchaeological scheme for the main developmental stages of nature and human culture. It is necessary to note that most of the sites mentioned above were studied by a variety of natural-scientific disciplines, the results of which are confirmed by various dating methods. The main climatic fluctuations in the Late Pleistocene were established (Medvedev, 2001; Petrin, 1986; Lbova, 2014; among others). Palynological spectra highlights the return of forest formations, with conifers (in particular, pine) and birch light forests dominating (birch with an admixture of broadleaf species such as elm, alder, and hazel, along with meadow associations). Pollen data and the character of mammalian fauna at various localities of Northeast Asia indicate a mosaic landscape of steppes and forest-steppes.

The following species are dominant in the Early Upper Paleolithic (40,000/50,000–25,000/30,000 BP) cultural complexes: horse (*Equus caballus*), Mongolian gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa*), woolly rhinoceros (*Coelodonta antiquitatus*), and wild sheep (*Ovis ammon*). Other species, such as woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*), Asiatic wild ass or khulan (*Equus hemionus*), giant deer (*Megaloceros giganteus*), antelope (*Spiroceros kiakhtensis*), steppe bison (*Bison priscus* or *Bos primigenius*), camel (*Camelus sp.*), lion (*Pantera leo*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), steppe fox (*Vulpes corsac*), and hare (*Lepus sp.*) are also presented. During the Sartan period (25,000–10,000/12,000 BP)—a middle, classical stage of Upper Paleolithic—there were typical conditions with cold and arid climate and semi-desert landscapes as a tundra and tundra-steppe. The following species were dominant in the Middle and the Final Upper Paleolithic cultural complexes: mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*), woolly rhinoceros (*Coelodonta antiquitatus*), Northern deer (*Rangifer tarandus*), and Arctic white fox (*Alopex lagopus*, *Vulpes lagopus*).

Archaeological context (classical stage of the Upper Paleolithic)

The Middle, or the classical stage of the Upper Paleolithic (25,000–18,000/17,000 BP), or Last Glacial Maximum is represented by numerous sites and archaeological cultures. Most of the sites are clustered in the river valleys. The Early Sartan Glaciation (from 25,000 BP) saw the flourishing of a culture of hunters of reindeer and mammoth; this is evidenced by diverse mosaic lithic industries, a rich series of bone and antler implements, personal ornaments, and mobile art objects. Industries at most sites were based on the technique of removing the blades with prismatic cores, observed splitting treatment of bone and expressive art of small forms. The plan of graphical structures of most settlements includes the remains of residential structures and other facilities. Meanwhile, due to the results of recent discoveries in Siberia, more than 50 clearly stratified sites relevant to our subject have become known. Among them in Western Siberia the Tomskaya, Shestakovo, and Achinskaya

sites; in the East Siberia the Tarachikha, Novoselovo, Shlenka, Ui-1, Igteisky Log, and Mal'ta sites; in Yakutia the Dyuktai site; and in the Transbaikal zone we have the Ikhine-2, Sanyi Mys, and Ust-Menza sites.

As was often the case in the Upper Paleolithic throughout the Old World, the inhabitants of Siberia also relied heavily on big game hunting, exploiting many large ungulates. The classical stage of Upper Paleolithic sites displays evidence of intensive procurement of reindeer, mammoth and woolly rhinoceros and such sites as Kashtanka I, Mal'ta, and Buret' have evidence of specialized reindeer hunting. Of course, hunting was not only for procuring meat, and discoveries of numerous bones of arctic fox, red fox, wolverine, and wolf at Mal'ta implies various sources of fur for the Paleolithic inhabitants.

The time-space systematics of the Siberian classical stage of Upper Paleolithic seem to be very complicated (for a recent overview of the Upper Paleolithic development in general terms, see Vasil'ev, 1993). During the time span under consideration, industries based on advanced blade technology with rich and diversified series of lithic, bone, and antler tools predominated. The Middle Upper Paleolithic assemblages of Mal'ta, Buret', and Achinskaya, with an absolute majority of tools made on small blades, were contemporaneous with such assemblages as Shestakovo, which exploited both the blade and flake technology extensively. Despite some shared features, mostly demonstrated in lithic technology, there are marked differences among the sites, and they do not seem to be grouped as a clear-cut spatio-temporal entity. It seems safer to suggest only astonishing similarities in tool types, ornamental designs and art style in the assemblages of Mal'ta and Buret', which give rise to the definition of the Mal'ta Culture. A complicated mosaic-like picture of different cultural variants can be reconstructed. Worth mentioning here is the appearance of microblade technology, which became ubiquitous in Siberia in the Final Paleolithic, in both technological groups of assemblages.

The classical stage of Upper Paleolithic in Siberia displays cultural traits well known among European Upper Paleolithic assemblages. However, this superficial similarity does not provide ground for either an equation of the European and Northern Asian Paleolithic record, or for speculations about long-distance migration of the European Upper Paleolithic population. On the basis of a careful stylistically analysis of European and Siberian female statuettes, Abramova (1962) demonstrated peculiar features in the pieces from Mal'ta and Buret'. As such, the Mal'ta Culture is now regarded as having some local roots (Medvedev et al., 1996; Lipnina, 2012; Lbova, 2017).

The Siberian classical stage of Upper Paleolithic is, like its contemporary in other parts of the Old World, rich in artifacts reflecting their non-material way of life, such as superb mobile art objects and personal ornaments. No other period in the Upper Paleolithic development in Northern Asia is comparable to this time span, which yielded a series of art objects from Mal'ta and Buret', along with isolated discoveries from Achinskaya and Ust' Kova.

Archaeological artifacts as prestige objects

DISCOIDS

A famous site of the classical stage of Upper Paleolithic in Eurasia is the Mal'ta site located in the Baikal zone of (South Siberia); it is viewed as a key to understanding

Paleolithic migration processes to the North-East of Eurasia and later to North America, especially in combination with data regarding the ancient DNA of the Mal'ta local group (Raghavan et al., 2014). To summarize, Mal'ta is a typical site of the Siberian Ice Age, especially in Last Glacial Maximum. Gerasimov (Gerasimov, 1931, 1941, 1958) excavated this site between 1928 and 1958. Currently, Malta has presented stratified culture deposits dating from 43,000/41,000 to 12,000 years ¹⁴C BP. The “classical” component from Gerasimov’s excavation, characterized by ivory artifacts, anthropomorphic sculptures, and habitation features, dates between 19,000 and 23,000 years ¹⁴C BP; according to the latest results, it is included in the strata no. 8 and 9 of the geological section (Medvedev et al., 1996; Medvedev, 2001; Lipnina, 2002, 2012). Particular attention among the archaeological finds at the Mal'ta site has been paid to distinctive anthropomorphic figurines, which have become a historical source for our understanding of the life characteristics of the population of Siberia during the Ice Age (see, among others, Abramova, 1995; Marshak, 1991).

The collection contains six items made on ivory flat flakes and blades. They can be differentiated according to the type of blank, the shape and the style of decoration. The first group contains items which are made on blade blanks and have an elongated shape (Figure 38.1—1, 5) while round- or square-shaped disks are assigned to the second group (Figure 38.1—2, 3, 4, 6).

The first big plate (The Big Mal'ta plate) has a slightly arched trapezoidal shape with rounded corners and a hole in the center (Figure 38.2—5). The front side of the plate is covered with typical ornamentation for Mal'ta, which consists of spirals



Figure 38.1 Decorated ivory discs from Mal'ta site (19,000–23,000 BP). 1. Large plate with C-shaped marks. 2. Disc found in the child's burial. 3. Small disc with C-shaped marks. 4. Small disc with C-shaped marks (“shell”). 5. Big Mal'ta plate. 6. Disc with zigzag ornament.



Figure 38.2 Ornaments dagger from Chernoozerie II. 1. Fragment no. 1 of the dagger (front, back, macro). 2. Fragment no. 2 of the dagger (front, back, macro). 3. A drawing of the dagger made by Valerii Petrin.

composed of rounded dimples (or “cupules”). The ancient sculptor carved lines along which the dimples then line up. In the center of the plate, there is the biggest spiral which takes more than half of the plate’s area. It consists of seven spiral rows, which contain 242 cupules. To the right and left of a central spiral, there are two smaller spirals. It is remarkable that indistinguishable forms are symmetrically located on each side. In the bottom corners of the spiral (which has a trapezoidal shape), there are two simple spirals. The left one consists of 63 dimples (11 holes are for the wavy line which continues the spiral), and the right one contains 43 dimples. Two complex S-shaped spirals are located above the simple spirals. The right spiral has 46 dimples and the left one contains 57 dimples (Larichev, 1986). The concave side of the plate is decorated with six parallel wavy thin lines arranged two by a group; they are presumably the images of snakes. Whereas two snakes have enlarged heads, so that they resemble cobras with spread-out hoods, the third snake is depicted in a calmer state. All of the snakes’ heads are turned in the same direction and their wavy bodies occupy the entire length of the blade.

Two other discs in the collection have central holes and are covered with zigzag ornaments. Two discs which do not have a central hole are covered with C-shaped marks. The collection also contains a big plate covered with C-shaped marks; we have already described these items in detail elsewhere (Lbova and Rostyazhenko, 2019).

Thus, three categories of decoration are presented in the collection. The categories of marks are typical for Siberian Paleolithic Art, especially Mal’ta-Buret’ culture

(Lbova, 2017) and also for the matrix of signs compiled by G. Van Petzinger (2017): C-shaped or scalloped marks, zigzag (a.k.a. wavy lines) and round indentations (or “cupules”). C-shaped marks are found on three disks, zigzag is presented on three blades, one blade is fully covered with “cupules” and one more is covered partially.

DAGGERS

In addition, the Siberian collection includes a bone dagger with geometric micro-blades found on Chernoozerie II and covered with a row of drilled points, rhomboids, and V-shaped marks. The Paleolithic seasonal camp at Chernoozerie II is one of the most ancient sites of Western Siberia and contain evidence of human artistic activity. The site is located near the village of the same name in the Sargat district of the Omsk region (Petrin, 1974). The site was discovered in 1967 by the expedition under the direction of Vladimir Genning and Valerii Petrin. During the excavations, three cultural layers were found. The site also contained a numerous stone inventory and unique bone items. The collection of bone items consists of 34 pieces, which can be divided in four groups: insert daggers and knives, household items, decorations and unknown items. The found items were often covered with a layer of hard lime scale up to 1–4 mm thick. Its removal was almost always associated with damage not only to the surface, but to the whole item.

In the collection of bone items, an ornamented insert dagger is of particular interest for us. It was found in the cultural layer no. 1, near the fragments of another dagger and four decorative items (14,500 years ago). The dagger was represented by five fragments of a blade (Genning and Petrin, 1985), or in six fragments according to Petrin (1974). The dagger does not have a handle. Four of five fragments were glued to each other, with the fifth fragment kept separately. The length of connected fragments is 265 mm, while the length of a separate one is 132 mm. The maximum width is 42.5 mm, and the thickness is the same along the whole item (115 mm) and only at the distance of 100 mm from the tip does the dagger begin to narrow (Figure 38.2).

The dagger is double sharpened, and the blade has a regular elongated triangular shape. The blade is regular and oval in cross section, and the surface of the front side is solid, polished, and of a yellowish-gray color. The back side has some remains of spongy material which turns into solid bone about 100 mm from the bottom edge. The dagger is made of a rib bone of a large mammal, possibly bison. The blade consists of quartzite inserts placed in the slots on both edges. The slots have a triangular shape in cross section. Their depth is 2.5–3 mm, the width is 1.5–2 mm (average), and the depth of the slots reduces to a tip. On several of the inserts, there are traces of edge retouching.

The dagger's handle is broken on two holes, with a diameter of not more than 5 mm. They are located 11 mm from the edges, and drilled from both sides. The dagger is ornamented on two sides; on the solid surface of the front side, and there is a row of points along the central axis. The depth of points is not more than 1.5 mm. There are 11 points per 20 mm on average, with the row of points ending 35 mm from the tip. At a distance of 256–291 mm from the tip, the line of points has three adjacent rhombuses 9x5 mm in size. On both sides from the second rhombus, there are three V-shaped marks on the front and back sides made by sawing. The depth of each one is about 1.5 mm (Genning & Petrin, 1985; Gorbunova and Shmidt 2014).

On the back side of the blade, along the central axis, there is a groove triangular in cross section. Its depth and width in the upper side is up to 2 mm. The groove ends in 106 mm before the tip. In the upper part, it has three (two) zigzags (9–10 mm size, 3–5 mm height) located in the same place as rhombuses on the front side. These zigzags on the blade are more like wavy lines due to their smooth edges. The ornament was made by drilling, scratching, and sawing techniques. The front side ornament was made in two stages: sawing the organizing line, and then drilling points on it with a stone burin (Genning & Petrin, 1985). Traces of disposal on the inserts are not found, though two fragments of the dagger have a languette fracture. This allows us to consider that the dagger was broken after a strong blow.

Further to this, there is an opinion that the dagger ornament was a counting calendar-astronomic system (Shmidt, 2005). Similar daggers are also known from the Shestakovo, Oshurkovo, Kokorevo sites, and the Shigirskij peatbog.

“BÂTON PERCÉS”

Traditional “bâton percés” made of ivory and antler are well known in Upper Paleolithic Europe and Siberia. “Bâton percés” are widespread in the Europe and are found on Isturitz, Laugerie-Basse, La Madeleine, La Garenne, Mas-de-Azil, Molodova-5 etc. (Abramova, 1962; Glory, 1959). In Siberia, some important examples of “bâton percés” were found in the Studenoye-2, Listvenka, and Achinskaya sites. These unique artifacts require many labor resources and show a high level of decorative skill.

The “bâton” represented in Studenoye’s collection is made of the middle part of an antler. A natural microrelief of the antler was transformed with abrasive grinding of the surface. Then, the item was properly polished. A fragment of a through-hole arc remains at the distance of 25 mm from the proximal end; presumably, the hole was drilled from two sides. The maximum width of the hole is 21 mm. Microscopic pores on the antler’s surface are filled in with ocher.

The “bâton” surface is covered with an ornament which is represented in two areas. The first area is a “meander.” It is located along the base of the proximal part and consists of five elements. The second area is located below on the side surface of the item. It consists of three ovals made of two parallel lines, a strip, and a groove some notches. Making the “bâton” included several steps: cutting the fragment of antler required; preparing the surface; drilling the hole; and engraving the ornament. A fragment and a whole item like “shaft straightener” were also found in the collections of the Kokorevo I and III sites. The fragment of an antler item was found in Kokorevo III. The item has sizes 50x23x11 mm. Only a round tip and a part of a side of the hole remained (Abramova, 1979). Among the items of the Kokorevo I collection, there is a complete intact item. It has (unlike the previous one) a more convex shape. Three of such items were found in the collection of a famous site called Afontova Gora II (20,900 $\pm$ 300 BP) (Abramova, 1979). The items have a typical hole at one end, are unornamented, and are described as “shaft straighteners.”

Another “bâton percé” was found on the Siberian Upper Paleolithic Listvenka site located near the city of Divnogorsk city in the Krasnoyarskii krai. This “bâton percé” was found in the cultural layer 12G which has radiocarbon dates of 13,470 $\pm$ 285 BP. The item has a symmetrical elongated oval shape and “soft” round contours. A piece of a large split diagonally tusk was used as a blank and was likely

straightened later. The length of the item is 430 mm, the width is 60–90 mm, and the thickness is 2.5–3 mm. Slice negatives smoothed by further grinding remain on the surface of the “bâton.” One side of the item is more convex, while the second side is flat. On the convex side, in the center, there are shallow traces of sheer punches. The quality of preservation on the flat side is apparently due to where the item occurred within the strata. Along the longitudinal axis, there are three biconical holes. The complexity of the manufacturing process consists mainly of the selection of raw material that is difficult for such processing (Akimova et al., 2005).

Items similar to the one found at Studenoye are known among the collections of many Upper Paleolithic sites of the Old World. The items are often made in the form of animal heads or decorated with ornamental signs common in Upper Paleolithic, or simply do not have any decorations. The spreading of “bâton percés” begins with the Solutrean era and reaches its peak in the Magdalenian epoch (Glory, 1959). At present, there are nearly 37 interpretations of such items. A. Glory distinguish five types of interpretations: ideas based on the psychological probabilities of similar items used across the world; on the decoration of the items; on the results of experiments based on ideas gleaned from ethnographic materials; and finally, ideas based on the results of both experiments and ethnographic materials, where traces of wear are also taken into account. A. Peletier (1992) distinguished only three types of interpretations: as non-utilitarian items; as utilitarian items like shaft straighteners, tools for making fire, etc.; and as utilitarian items such as weapons. In the latest publications, in general, only two hypotheses are used: shaft straighteners for spears or handles for throwing.

CONCLUSION

Disks with and without a central hole are found on many Upper Paleolithic sites in Europe (most of them date back to the Solutrean-Magdelene period). They are made of bone or ivory, and stone; they have various engravings (ornamentation, singles, marks, the image of animals, people). In total, more than 300 disks and their fragments have been found in a vast territory stretching from Western Europe to Siberia. The purpose of such items is various: personal jewelry, elements of clothing, counting systems, and prestige items. It is possible that these pieces played a complicated role for all of the aforementioned purposes (De Las Heras et al, 2008; Barandiarán, 2006; Lbova & Rostyazhenko, 2019; Passemard 1920).

Daggers are quite widespread in the Upper Paleolithic collections of Europe and Siberia. They are usually made of bone, ivory, or antler and can have slots with inserts remaining. Some of the daggers have various elaborate ornamentation consisting of engraved patterns of marks or notches. Such daggers required much time and labor resources to be made. Considering these daggers as utilitarian items only does not explain why ancient people spent so many resources to make them. Therefore, we can assume ornamented daggers to be considered as prestige items.

Thus, “bâton percés” are spread on many sites of Upper Paleolithic Europe and Siberia. These are usually items made of antler with one oval or round hole located on one end of the item. Ivory was used significantly less often; at the same time, one of the main elements of the model was preserved: an elongated support handle. As we have already mentioned, the most popular point of view is that “bâton percés”

were used as shaft straighteners, frames for inserting tools or blanks of other items. However, this does not explain the fact that some “bâton percés” were decorated with an ornamental pattern or images of animals (Hayden, 1998).

In turn, indicators of prestige technologies in archaeological contexts can be reduced to the following: tools (including their blanks) made in high art, with the using of unusual or import types of raw materials, of unusually large sizes; elegant, decorated food containers made of ceramic, wicker, and stone and of unusual sizes, shapes, and colors, etc.; decorations (stone, antler, shells, fiber, feathers, etc.); special clothes (for ceremonies, dances, burials, etc.); vehicles (boats, sleds), made in a decorative style, with special care, hypertrophied or reduced (to the model) size; intentional deformation of skeleton bones, skulls, tattoos, piercings, body painting; toiletries, furniture; housing, household and ritual constructions made of expensive materials, imported or hard-to-get and hard-to-process raw materials; the constructions of unusual size; burials with rich inventory; musical instruments; protective armor made of organic materials; cosmetics, makeup; mirrors; mobile calendars, astronomic tools, counting devices; and narcotic drugs and substances.

In summary, codified records have been identified on some items. The records can be perceived both as an ornament, and as elements of counting. They can also carry other information which is at the level of discussion (Golan, 1993; Kabo 2002; Lbova & Tabarev, 2009; Lbova & Rostyazhenko, 2019; Larichev 1989, 1999; Weise 2003, 2007). Undoubtedly, important information was addressed to the “reader,” and these objects of sacred importance were stored in the dwelling space. We can assume the use of such objects both as subjects of prestige and as ways of recording priestly “mobile” texts. Perhaps these plates and disks could be a kind of “matrix” of information, which formed the basis for the decoration of sculpture and other objects.

The objects highlighted in the study are considered as evidence of the prestige technologies use that reflect not only a technical level of ivory, bone, or soft stone treatment but also the status, the position of their owner in the community (Lbova & Rostyazhenko, 2019; Palaguta, 2012). The results of the conducted research actualize the issues of genesis, classification, and periodization of forms, styles, technological characteristics, and ways of manifestation of ancient artistic creativity. The novelty of the proposed point of view lies in considering art objects (as archaeologists and excavators traditionally believe) within the framework of the concept of prestige technologies, assuming a social meaning in enhanced decoration of selected groups of objects, the use of rare exotic materials, and their non-utilitarian use.

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CHAPTER 39

ARCHAEOLOGY OF SHAMANISM IN SIBERIAN PREHISTORY



Feng Qu

Shamanism was documented in Siberian lands by European and Russian travelers and scholars as early as the 16th century. It is believed that shamanism must have a time depth in Siberian history. But when and how it happened has been an archaeological debate for many decades (Qu, 2017a, p. 47). More questions may include: can shamanism be archaeologically traced back to the Paleolithic period or Neolithic period, or only to later prehistory in Siberia? What are the indicators that identify ancient Siberian shamans and how can we recognize those indicators?

Reconstruction of an ancient belief system is always a problem in archaeological studies because of the fragmentary evidence (Gheorghiu et al., 2018, p. vi–vii). As Ekaterina Devlet states,

There is little consensus in the debates as to when shamanic practices first appeared in Siberia. The crucial problem has always been the limitation of our data... Nevertheless, there are clearly difficulties in interpreting which images are “shamanic” and which are not.

(Devlet, 2001, p. 51)

However, scholars generally believe that semiotic materials such as rock art, portable art objects, and adornments have potential shamanic elements to trace back the old belief and religious practices (Wallis, 2019; Price, 2001a). As Price correctly points out, archaeology of shamanism has been “largely confined to the study of prehistoric ‘art’” (2001b, p. 6), especially for rock art, it has been “one of the most lively and most frequently discussed issues” in establishing its relationship with shamanism (Rozwadowski, 2012a, p. 193). Devlet has also emphasized that “it may be seen that rock art motifs provide a unique opportunity for tracing the early roots of shamanic concepts” (2001, p. 51). Mihaly Hoppál writes,

What seems to be certain, at least in Siberia, the locus classicus of shamanism, is that a theoretical possibility exists finding the first expressions of shamanic rituals and symbols on the rocks of Central and North Asia. Moreover, Siberian rock art could be seen as the earliest documents available to us on the prehistory of Eurasian shamanism, or to use a more precise expression, these data could shed

light on the religious belief complexes from which Siberian shamanism emerged and started to develop.

(Hoppál, 1992, p. 133)

Several Soviet archaeologists such as A. P. Okladnikov and Matyuschenko pioneered the archaeological studies concerned with ancient shamanism in the 1950s (Hoppál, 1992). Since then, the topic about prehistoric shamanism has been a famous debate in Siberian archaeology. Three trends are evident during the second half of the 20th century and the 21st century. First, ethnographic analogy has been used as the primary method to explore ancient shamanic traits until today. Based on relatively abundant ethnographic data from Siberia, archaeologists have attempted to bridge the gap between archaeological materials and Indigenous spiritual practices. However, most approaches in this trend pursue the universal principle without contextual analysis, thus fail to have reached persuasive conclusions (Francfort, 2001; Qu, 2017b). The second trend is the neuropsychological model which was popularized by the South African archaeologist David Lewis-Williams in the 1980s and 1990s (Lewis-Williams et al., 1988, 1993). The neuropsychological model was employed by the Polish archaeologist Rozwadowski (2001, 2012b, 2017) and others (e.g., Lymer, 2004) in the 21st century to explore material evidence demonstrating potential shamanic trance and subjective vision. At the same time (the 21st century), a new trend—animist ontology theory—came to be considered in archaeological investigations in the study of prehistoric belief systems. This constitutes the third trend in the archaeology of ancient Siberian shamanism. This chapter reviews these three trends and examines how shamanism issues have been discussed in Siberian archaeology. Ultimately, this review argues that both the ethnography analogy and the neuropsychological model have problems because the category of “shamanism” has been used as overarching anthropological constructs. Instead, ontological concepts from anthropology provide archaeologists deeper understandings of material cultures in the archaeological record.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALOGY AND UNIVERSAL SHAMANISM

As early as in the 1950s, Soviet scholars, such as A. P. Okladnikov, Matyuschenko, Leontiev, and Potapov, started to seek archaeological evidence of shamanism in prehistoric material cultures (Hoppál, 1992). In his 1955 work, Okladnikov stated that the evidence of Siberian shamanism could be traced back to the 2nd millennium BC in the Baikal region. Based on his assumption of the skeleton adorned with beads and a pair of human figures made on mammoth bone plates, which was found at Glazkovo Burial 4 of Ust'-Uda, Okladnikov reconstructed an image of a female shaman in a shamanic costume with a drum (Okladnikov, 1955, cited by Aseyev, 2006, p. 57; Devlet, 2001, p. 52; Francfort, 2001, p. 256; and Hoppál, 1992, p. 133). In his 1972 work, Okladnikov focused on the man-animal motifs in the petroglyphs of Tomskaia Pisanitsa, and provided a shamanic interpretation of the rock images (Okladnikov, 1972, cited by Francfort, 2001, p. 256). T. M. Mikhailov borrowed Western concepts such as fertility cult, matriarchy, totemism, sun-worship, and ancestor-worship as theoretical ground to reconstruct prehistoric Buryat shamanism (Mikhailov, 1980, p. 56, cited by Hoppál, 1992, p. 134). However, from the perspective

of more contemporary studies, above comparisons are too general, too arbitrary, and too vague “without any specification to any tribe or culture” (Hoppál, 1992, p. 134). For example, one common bronze casting motif from Western Siberian Bronze Age is a man holding two sabres. Many Soviet scholars such as V. Y. Leshenko usually interpreted these images as shamanic after comparing them with early ethnographies of the Ob'-Ugrian people. Through reexaminations of ethnographic data, Natalia Fedorova argues that the sabres dance was more likely conducted by the warrior rather than the shaman (Fedorova, 2001, p. 60).

Hoppál specially pays attention to anthropomorphic or human-like figures on rock art. Based on his field observations of contemporary Siberian shamans, he provides five distinctive features to identify early shamans. They are listed as: 1) bird-headed (dancing bird-like figures); 2) human figures with phallus; 3) anthropomorphic figures with horns; 4) masks with horns and antlers; and 5) human figures with a drum. In his explanations, any image carrying one of these five features meets the rule of the shaman (Hoppál, 1992, p. 137; 2017, p. 23). According to above principles, Hoppál identifies bird-headed human-like figures on rocks found in Tas-Hazaa and Tom River, human figures with phallic feature found in the Baikal region, and several dancing human persons with horned headdresses from Central Asia as being possible shamans (Hoppál, 2017, p. 26). Based on Soviet scholar N. V. Leontiev's report, Hoppál holds that “[t]hrough the entire territory of Siberia, anthropomorphic figures with horns were carved into rocks to presumably denote shamans wearing antlers, as the deer-type shamans wore headgear with horns during their séance” (Hoppál, 2017, p. 26). Interestingly, over 200 drawings of human masks and other motifs were discovered at the Mugur-Sargol site in the southern part of the Sayan Canyon of the Yenisei River, and dated to the Bronze Age. Devlet suggests that these images might represent ancestors, heroes, and powerful persons of the clan including shamans (Devlet, 1980). In terms of his identification criteria, Hoppál further points out that those human figures with drums are likely ancient shamans (Hoppál, 1992, p. 138).

Following Hoppál, Devlet (2001) has proposed an ethnographic model primarily consisting of three criteria. The first criterion involves so-called “X-ray style” rock art anthropomorphs. According to ethnographies, some Siberian shamans' coats are adorned with skeleton symbols, which are explained as “representations of a shaman brought back to life after the dismemberment that occurs during the initiation process” (Devlet, 2001, p. 43). Such rock art anthropomorphs in the schematic form found in the Lake Baikal region, Mouny Ukir, and Bol'shaia Kada, in Devlet's interpretation, represented “a shamanic perspective on an intermediate condition between death and survival” (Devlet, 2001, p. 44).

Devlet's second criterion is the drum image which is believed to be associated with shamanic practices. Many drum images depicted with anthropomorphic images were found in ancient rock art sites in Middle Yenisei River and Middle Lena River. The historical shamanic drums in the Altai region share similar imagery with these rock engravings. For Devlet, these ethnographic data demonstrate that drums serve as an essential component of shamanic ritual activities (Devlet, 2001, p. 47). She further points out,

The drum may be seen in Siberia as one of the essential shamanic attributes, of crucial assistance in attaining an altered state of consciousness. In addition, it

served as a shaman's mode of transportation for visits to other spheres of the universe, as another form of armor and protection, and as a model of the universe. It also embodied the ancestral owner of the drum and the shaman him- or herself. (Devlet, 2001, p. 47)

Here, it is worth noting that, according to Rozwadowski (2012a, p. 196–197), there is no certain archaeological evidence of drum images before the first millennium AD, and drum motifs on rocks are mostly associated with historic periods rather than prehistory. As he states, “On the basis of this research we can conclude that there is evident lack of images of drums in the Bronze Age and possibly also in the Iron Age rock art” (2012b, p. 281).

Devlet's third criterion is headgear. Since headgear is regarded as important part of shamans' paraphernalia, and is often represented by horns and antlers, or bird feathers, Devlet treats horns and antlers adored on rock art anthropomorphs as the diagnostic of ancient shamanism. Such motifs are represented in Neolithic and Bronze Age panels from the Upper and Lower Lena, Aldan, Olekma, and Angara river basins, and similar engravings on rock even lasted to the recent historical period (Devlet 2001, p. 50–54).

Eliade's universalization of shamanism has inspired many scholars to explore potential shamanic practices through examination of archaeological records (e.g., Chang, 1983, 1992; Lommel, 1966a, 1966b, 1967). Since his famous monograph, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, was published at Paris in 1951, and its English translation was published in 1964, it has fascinated both scholars and the public worldwide and increased shamanism research around the globe. In this monograph, Eliade built a broad, cross-cultural, and universal framework (Eliade, 1964), in which shamanism was approached as “archaic, primal spirituality that sprang up independently among all peoples at the dawn of their history” (Znamenski, 2007, p. 171). In Eliade's approach, the shaman was defined as a specialist possessing ecstatic techniques and shamanism was featured with a tiered cosmos, cosmic pillar, world tree, and animal familiars (Eliade, 1964).

In Eliade's account, Central Asian and Siberian shamanism, which are characterized by special relations with spirits and magical flight, represent “a substratum of ‘primitive’ belief and techniques”¹ (Eliade, 1964, p. 6). Due to his argument that shamanism is a universal, archaic ecstatic system, Eliade traces this shamanic substratum back to the European Paleolithic cave art (1964, p. 503–504). Accordingly, the American anthropologist Peter Furst applies Eliade's “substratum” idea to New World shamanism, and states that the archaic substratum of the shamanic worldview “extended from ‘Paleo-Mesolithic’ Asia across the Americas” (1976, p. 156). Following Furst and Eliade, the Harvard archaeologist K. C. Chang proposes a “Maya–China continuum” model, in which Chinese Shang and Mesoamerican Mayan civilizations share similar shamanic cosmology. Chang further regards Siberia as the central area of the Maya–China substratum, supported by archaeological record from a Paleolithic assemblage discovered at Mal'ta in the Transbaikal region, dating to 15,000–18,000 BP (Chang, 1992). At the Mal'ta site, archaeologists excavated no fewer than 20 ivory female figurines, seven ivory birds, an ivory fish, an ivory wand, and two ivory plates (one is engraved with three wavy serpents). Archaeologists also found some deer and fox burials, and the antlers and hindquarters of the animals

are missing. Joseph Campbell suggests that these missing animal parts were possibly used to “furnish shamanistic attire” and the ivory wand was possibly “a shaman’s staff” (Campbell, 1988, p. 72). Based on Campbell’s suggestions, Chang believes that these animal motifs and the wand all served as shamanistic symbols, and that these archaeological finds at Mal’ta “tie the shamanism of East Asia and the New World together” (1992, p. 219).

Furst (1976) and Chang (1992) have also provided a list of shamanic indicators including a tiered cosmos, maskoids, human-animal transformation, headgear with horns and feathers, and sticks with animal heads. However, in H.-P. Francfort’s comments, these fragmentary pieces from the archaeological record are not sufficient to depict a picture about ancient shamans akin to those in ethnographic accounts (Francfort, 2001, p. 258).²

TRANCE THEORY AND THE NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL

Eliade provides a narrow definition of “shaman” and equates shamanism with techniques of ecstasy or trance (1964). His formulation of shamanism has had great impacts on shamanism studies and turned the attention of archaeologists to the pursuit of mental traits from archaeological materials (Qu, 2017a). In this way, many archaeologists have endeavored to identify potential trance-related traits and see them as a more convincing criterion to diagnose ancient shamanism. According to Zaur Hazanov (2017, p. 228), shamanic trance-caused means may include dance, sing, drum-beating, and hallucinogens. Gheorghiu also points out, “Based on fragmentary archaeological evidence and documentary ethnographic accounts, shamans often used hallucinogen substances to reach altered states of consciousness” (Gheorghiu et al., 2018, p. vii).

The mushroom carvings made from animal bone were found from a burial mound of the Khodzhalı-Kedabek Culture in Azerbaijan and in the Kazangul settlement of the Timber-grave Culture in Bashkortostan. Based on his comparisons with historical and ethnographic data, Hasanov has provided a shamanic interpretation of the artifacts (2017, p. 230–231). According to Devlet (2008, p. 123), many Siberian native peoples such as the Khanty, Nivkhs, Koryak, and Chukchi believe that fly agaric fungi own a spirit in a human form. Consuming mushrooms can take the intoxicated person to the spirit world. A group of mushroom-female images were found on rock art panels at Pegtymel, Chukotka. Archaeologists generally argue that these mushroom figures evidence a shamanic ritual tradition (Devlet, 2008, p. 123–124; Dikov & Bland, 1999).

After 2000, archaeological studies of trance in Central Asia and Siberia have been combined with the neuropsychological model. The model is based on neurological experimental work, which demonstrates that people are able to perceive entoptic phenomena and iconic hallucinations during altered states of consciousness (Lewis-Williams et al., 1988, p. 203). Since the end of the 1980s, the South African archaeologist Lewis-Williams and his colleagues have systematically conducted neuropsychological research in interpreting Southern African rock images, Upper Paleolithic art of Europe, and Neolithic art throughout Eurasia (Lewis-Williams et al., 1988, 1993; Lewis-Williams & Pearce, 2005). The goal of Lewis-Williams’ framework is “to build a generalized model of modern forager cosmological beliefs and religious practices

to interpret the meaning of archaeological remains” (McCall, 2007, p. 26). Based on the combination of neurological experimental results and the archaeological record, Lewis-Williams has drawn a universal shamanic conclusion of prehistoric art (Qu, 2017a).

Lewis-Williams’ neuropsychological model has been the impetus for the major debates in archaeological studies. While Lewis-Williams has earned some advocates (e. g., Bednaric et al., 1990; Bradley, 1989; Pearson, 2002; Whitley, 1992, 1998), other anthropologists have provided considerable criticism of his model (e.g., Bahn, 1997, 2001; Quinlan, 2000; Solomon, 1997, 1999). As Derek Hodgson puts it,

on the positive side, [the neuropsychological model] has helped open up a fresh approach to this aspect of art by providing some valuable insights as to its probable derivation. On the negative side, it leaves open certain questions relating to cultures in which shamanism is known to be absent, but the same or similar motifs are apparent.

(2000, p. 867)

Archaeologists who have introduced the neuropsychological model into rock art studies in Central Asia and Siberia include Rozwadowski (2001, 2012b, 2017) and Lymer (2004). In Rozwadowski’s view, visual hallucinations including entoptic images in various geometric forms and anthropomorphic figures proposed by Lewis-Williams are particularly important in studies tracing shamanic themes in rock art (Rozwadowski, 2012b, p. 281–282). For example, a type of anthropomorphic figures with heads surrounded by point-dots or radiating lines are a distinct rock art motif found at different sites in Central Asia, dated to the Bronze Age. These sun-like figures were previously interpreted as sun gods. However, Rozwadowski rejects this solar motif interpretation for two reasons. First, there is no evidence to demonstrate the solar cult as a phenomenon during the Bronze Age in Central Asia. Second, not all circular shapes symbolize the sun. In Rozwadowski’s opinion, these dots and radiating lines mostly resemble entoptic images derived from the neuropsychological experiment work, and thus, they are likely to represent human trance experiences. Connecting with historical record, Rozwadowski further speculates that these trance aspects may be caused by the sacred ambrosia *soma* (a ritual drink with hallucinogenic properties) which purportedly was used by Indo-Iranian priests during ancient times. The core question here is: did the *soma* ritual remain shamanistic influences, or was it completely independent from shamanism, though hallucinogens were used to produce visions? Combining ethnographic analogies, Rozwadowski suggests that these petroglyphs can be explained as representations of shamanic trance experiences (2001, 2012b).

Inspired by clinical observations of hallucination (Siegel, 1977) and related ethnographic case studies (Reichel-Domatoff, 1978), Kenneth Lymer also believe that the anthropomorphic figures with enlarged heads associated with dots and lines in Central Asia are “visions based on personal experiences of trance as well as graphic representations of vivid encounters with other-than-human agencies” (Lymer, 2004, p. 19). However, while connecting the trance model with the dots surrounding the human head, she provides an ethnographic interpretation of lines associated with human figures. In her suggestion, these lines are more likely representations of feathered headdresses rather than entoptic images. Moreover, some of these feather-decorated

figures might “have been powerful spirit masters of the mountains and patrons of shamanic practitioners” (2004, p. 19–20).

Both Lymer (2004) and Rozwadowski (2017) developed theories based on the engagement between shamanic trance and landscape. The petroglyph images were usually engraved on the hillsides and mountains in high locations. Lymer suggests that “these secluded areas were suitable places to engage with, or obtain dreams and visions of, spirits or shamanic ancestors” and the shimmering surface of the rock might “have been perceived as the manifestation of the powers of the spirit world” (Lymer, 2004, p. 21). Rozwadowski has noted that the petroglyphs known as Ilinsskaia Pisanitsa within the Sayan region in southern Siberia have an association with rock crevices. For example, an image portraying a human figure holding a drum was placed in a big hollow. In Rozwadowski’s identification, the large drum likely demonstrates the shamanic status of the image. The petroglyph may represent a shamanic journey to contact the mountain spirits, since Siberian ethnographic data has revealed that rock crevices usually symbolized gates to another world (Rozwadowski, 2017).

The trance-shamanism equation theory and the neuropsychological model have problems to measure prehistoric shamanism (Wallis, 2013). First, it is difficult to see the subjective visions generated from modern Westerners’ nervous system with prehistoric iconic and abstract forms as a homogeneous phenomenon. Second, even if we can identify the prehistoric images that reflect subjective visions, it is still difficult to prove if they derived from the shamanic consciousness or from other types of practitioners’ subjective experience. Although the trance model plays a central role in his rock art studies, Rozwadowski has already noted the weakness of this theoretical trend. As he states, “A trance, no matter how essential for a shamanistic practice, is not always linked with shamanism. Therefore, attempts to identify trance and vision experience in rock art are vulnerable to criticism when these observations are treated as evidence of shamanism” (Rozwadowski, 2012a, p. 194).

THE ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Since 2000, due to the dissatisfaction with the universal trend, some Western archaeologists began to employ animist ontology theory in replacing the general shamanism theory (including the neuropsychological model) to explore potential prehistoric belief system in the world (Borić, 2007; Wallis, 2009, 2013; Watts, 2013). These archaeological works have been inspired by Indigenous worldviews proposed by anthropologists such as Viveiros de Castro (1998, 2004), Descola (2013), and Ingold (1998).

First, animist ontology theory is opposed to Western dualisms such as culture/nature, mind/body, humanity/animality, and subject/object, which dominate anthropological ontology. Based on such a perspective, archaeologists have perceived non-human beings (animals, plants, and spirits) as well as archaeological artifacts as dynamic, subjective agents inhabiting the world, rather than as animated objects. In other words, all nonhuman animals and material things are agents and social actors like human persons (Borić, 2007; Wallis, 2009, 2013). Second, it has provided a relational model which proposes that all social actors constitute interpersonal and intersubjective relationships. The sociality is thus extended to a broad scope including animals, spirits and things (Alberti, 2016; Watts, 2013).

While ethnographic analogy is still predominant in the archaeology of Siberian shamanism (Devlet, 2001; Fedorova, 2001), a few scholars have begun to use animist ontology theory to interpret prehistoric artifacts. One among them is the Alaskan archaeologist Erica Hill. Archaeological data include a large number of amulets or personal ornaments which have been recovered from prehistoric sites along the coasts of Chukotka and Alaska. These amulets are usually ivory or bone carvings in the form of a sea animal, which are associated with a person's body, hunting tools or boats. Some amulets are part of an animal, such as bird skins, bird beaks, or animal bones. According to a theoretical analysis inspired by animist ontology theory and scrutinizing existing data, Hill suggests that these artifacts "expressed and performed their intersubjective relationships with other-than-human persons" (Hill, 2011, p. 412). Based on the animist perspective, she challenges the validity of shamanism theory in interpreting these personal ornaments, arguing that hunters, rather than shamans, were actors who dealt with these ritual objects in the ritualized hunting activities. She thus concludes,

Shamans could play critical roles in interpreting, mediating and improving relations between human and animal societies. However, hunters who tracked, dispatched and transported prey and women who thought about, processed and shared animals and their remains engaged in daily discourse with other-than-human persons and bore primary responsibility for maintaining these relationships. Focus upon shamans, to the exclusion of other members of society, risks underestimating the extent to which non-ritual specialists engaged in "ritual" activities.

(Hill, 2011: 421)

It is worth noting that one of my recent publications (Qu, 2021), which focuses on theriomorphic images discovered from the prehistoric Bering Strait including the Chukchi coasts, also relies on the theory of animist ontologies. This research explores "how the body was engaged with multiple relations between humans and other-than-human persons and between other-than-human persons" (Qu, 2021, p. 132). Ultimately, my theoretical analysis suggests that individuals who used amulets and other decorated artifacts were actually hunters rather than ancient shamans. The role of non-specialists is thus revealed (Qu, 2021). During the past 20 years, more and more archaeologists have applied animist ontology theory to interpret material patterning for a reconstruction of past ontologies (Alberti, 2016). Without any doubt, when ontological concepts from anthropology are deployed as an analytical tool, as suggested by Jones (2017), archaeologists can have deeper understandings of material cultures in the archaeological record and the past social life.

CONCLUSION

Using ethnographic analogy for identification of ancient shamans have constituted the main stream in the field for over a half century, whereas the trance theory and the animist ontology are more recent developments in the new century. Archaeologists have set up some indicators as tools to detect the potential shamanic traits from art motifs. The often-used indicators are bird images, horned headdresses, X-ray

style images, and drums (Delvet, 2001; Hoppál, 1992, 2017; Rozwadowski, 2012a). However, all these criteria have problems. Whether bird images, horns, and X-ray style images, they appeared everywhere in ancient cultures worldwide. It is questionable to treat these artistic motifs under one label: shamanism. However, we must be aware of that, as argued by the Cambridge scholar Piers Vitebsky, the ending “-ism” of the term shamanism “carries an implication of formal doctrine which belongs to more systematized religions and ideologies from the ‘western’ world and is inappropriate for the fluidity and flexibility of these uncoded religions from largely non-literate societies” (Vitebsky, 2000, p. 56). Andrei Znamenski has stated his observations on the shamanic approach to rock art studies

There is certainly no way to find out exactly what rock art meant to the ancient ones no matter how hard we try. It could mean many things depending on a place, time and a particular culture. In this case, a single explanation will always be doomed to remain flawed. What should archaeologists do in this case? That is the realm where scholarly imagination and “archaeological surrealism” step in and fill missing links.

(Znamenski, 2021, p. 201)

For over 70 years, archaeologists have been exhausted by their endeavors on seeking diagnostic characteristics of the shaman from the archaeological record. At the same time, the definition of the term shamanism and the problem of authenticity have intensified the controversy. Obviously, the primary problem here is not the ethnographic analogy or the neuropsychological model as the analytical tool, but the universal category of “shamanism” which has been imposed as an “overarching approach” (Jones, 2017, p. 176). Comparatively, the ontological way may provide us alternatives and have potentials to our interpretations of ancient imagery and societies.

NOTES

- 1 Eliade uses the term “substratum” in order to emphasize that “Siberian shamanism has the advantage of presenting a structure in which elements that exist independently elsewhere in the world” (Eliade, 1964, p. 6).
- 2 However, Andrzej Rozwadowski argues that Francfort has only provided criticism but not archaeological research and studies of shamanism (Rozwadowski, 2012).

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CHAPTER 40

ROCK ART RESEARCH IN SOUTHEAST SIBERIA

A history of ideas and ethnographic interpretations



Donatas Brandišauskas

INTRODUCTION

The Lena, Olekma, Aldan, and Amur watersheds are the densest areas for rock art paintings in Siberia. Starting in the 18th century, every well-known imperial expedition into this region documented rock paintings as objects of “uncovered mystery” (Miller, 1937 [1750]; Georgi, 1799; Vitashevskii, 1897; Klements, 1895, p. 33). Often painted in red ochre on the flat surfaces of large and outstanding rocks, many of these sites were located along riverbanks that served as travel routes through Siberia. The various images, symbols, and compositions of rock art have triggered the imaginations of explorers, naturalists, political and religious activists, as well as academics.

Siberian rock art reached a peak of scientific popularity and public fascination during the post-World War II period in the Soviet Union. Extensive field research by archeologists documented numerous rock art monuments in remote and difficult to access taiga locations all over Siberia and Far East. Rock art research became well known in the Soviet academic world with a handful of monumental monographs and dozens of articles (see Kochmar, 1994; Mazin, 1986; Okladnikov & Mazin, 1976, 1979; Okladnikov & Zaporozhskaia, 1959, 1969, 1970, 1972). With the collapse of the Soviet Union and lack of sufficient financial support for the larger expeditions, systematic rock art field research has almost come to a standstill in Russian academic institutions.

An early historian of Siberia, Gerhard Miller, was the first explorer who documented rock art sites along the Lena River in Eastern Siberia in 1750 (Miller, 1937). His work included Shishkino, the most impressive and famous rock art site. Miller believed that the Lena rock art, together with burial mounds (*kurgan*), were ancient monuments of the proto-Turkic Uighurs. Shishkino rock art site is located in one of the most spectacular valleys of the Lena River in Pribaikal’e (lower part of the Lena River). It consists of up to 2,000 rock art images and represents different archeological epochs, with the earliest historic images dated to 4,000 BC and the latest from the 19th century (see Okladnikov & Zaporozhskaia, 1959). The area was also known to early researchers as a Buryat sacred site.

The famous geographer and naturalist Johann Gotlieb Georgi (1799) was the first to refer to Indigenous people’s perceptions of the locally “well-known rocks” (Ru.

znatnye skaly). Georgi documented how rock art sites served as important places for Tungus (Evenki) social activities, such as the practices of customary law and rituals (*ibid.*, p. 19). He described how Tungus hunters and reindeer herders approached these sites with offerings of pieces of fur, carved wooden sticks, or tobacco. If a Tungus person was accused of crime or other misbehavior, he had to approach a “shamanic rock” and touch it and swear out loud in the presence of other members of the community. Hence, if one would lie, then one could easily get ill and even die. People used such rituals to serve as proof of innocence (*ibid.*, p. 38).

During the 19th century, the Imperial Russian Geographical Society employed educated Siberian exiles to lead different scientific expeditions to scientifically explore the remote territories of the Russian Empire and ethnographically document Indigenous inhabitants of remote places of Siberia (see for Sibiriakov’s expedition in Vitashevskii & Mainulova, 1905; Vitashevskii, 1897; Klements, 1895, p. 33). Nikolai Vitashevskii (1897) was one of the early exile researchers of the complex Sibiriakov’s expedition, who showed an active interest in rock art sites of the remote Olekma River basin and published an elaborate report with a story of finding the sites, providing a characterization of the natural environment of the site, and detailed sketches and paintings of the rock itself.¹ Vitashevskii also published sketches of rock art paintings giving his own subjective interpretations of rock art themes based on his visual observations (*ibid.*). He also incorporated views of his guides Indigenous Yakut and Tungus-Evenki people living in the area (*ibid.*).

Another exiled explorer of Sibiriakov’s expedition, Ivan Mainov (1898), was the first to use Tungus’ oral history and folklore to interpret their rock art. He also compared ancient rock art symbols to the contemporary use of paintings in communication between hunters and herders. Evenki, as many other northern cultures indeed actively use different systems of signs and paintings made on cleaned areas of trees (*ibid.*; see also Khoroshikh, 1950). As in the epoch of Mainov’s research, Evenki still use coal to draw on trees or birch bark figures of animals or humans, as well as leaving written messages on paper to convey information to their relatives about their anticipated travel direction, illness or death of members, or to warn leash dogs about poisoned meat intended for predators (see also Brandišauskas, 2012).

After the 1917 revolution, rock art became an object of interest of Sakha-born researchers that knew local languages and were searching for proto-Turkic tribes. Sakha ethnographer Gavril Ksenofontov (1927) was the first scientist who intensively studied rock art semantics employing comparative Sakha and Evenki (Tungus) linguistic, mythological, and ethnographic material that he collected. Ksenofontov (1927) saw rock art as a representation of human psychology. Thereby he argued that Yakuts, like old Turks, had a “psychological habit” to mark historical events on stones.

Ksenofontov was the first scholar calling for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of rock art, suggesting that one must learn varied traditions of ornamentation and artistic expressions, as well as study local religion and epics to be able to interpret rock art. Hence, departing from multi-modal comparative data, Ksenofontov saw rock art sites as important markers of historical events and geographical borders between territories of different ethnic groups. The presence of horse and cattle served as an important pictographic proof of Yakut presence and migration to the North (*ibid.*). For example, rock art representing a cow with an udder and the human standing below the cow was a depiction of the ancient epic storytelling tradition

about Sakha descent from cattle. Ksenofontov (*ibid.*) interpreted rock art painting representing the elk or probably reindeer standing on the opposite side of the cow as Tungus reindeer herding culture opposing or epically fighting with the Yakut horse culture. For Ksenofontov (*ibid.*) drawings of cows that were placed in the southern part of the rock and reindeer image that was placed in the northern part of the rock also represented geographical habituation of these different opposing cultures. He also thought that such locations of images of the rock art could represent some historical facts rather than only epic events (*ibid.*).

Later, historical and archeological research expeditions inspired by Ksenofontov also worked in the Lena River basin aiming to find early and ancient examples of early proto-Turkic writings (Barashkov, 1940, 1941, 1942). The interest in proto-Turkic writing maintains a strong interest among contemporary Sakha scientists to the present. For example, an international expedition in search of Turkic ruins in the Olekma region took place recently (Levin, 2015, p. 217–222).

Archeologist Andrei Savvin (1939) first aimed to identify and document different styles of rock art representations found in the contemporary Sakha Republic. At the Sukukhtakh Khaia site, located at Markha river, in 1939 Savvin discovered both ancient and contemporary offerings (especially different types of arrowheads) left in empty spaces between cracked rocks. Such rich and varied findings made scientists think about rock art sites not only as objects of artistic expressions or codified messages. This site demonstrated persistent ritual interactions with a site fulfilled with cosmological meanings. Indeed, the Suruktakh Khaia site contained offerings dated to the Neolithic, Bronze Age, early Iron Age, and the ethnographic present. Based on these archeological findings and analysis of different painting styles, Okladnikov worked out a chronology that was later used in analysis of other rock art paintings (see Okladnikov, 1949, p. 81–100; Okladnikov & Zaporozhskaia, 1972; see also Okladnikov & Mazin, 1979, p. 86).

Rock art research became an important scientific discipline in Soviet archeology under Alexei Okladnikov. Siberian-born Okladnikov was an active field researcher that led archeological expeditions in the different regions of Northern and Southern Asia for almost 50 years. His research expeditions in Siberia covered wide territories such as Altai, Zabaikal'e, Yakutia, Kolyma, large river basins, including the Ob, Angara, Lena, islands of the Arctic Ocean, and many regions of the Far East and Primor'e, the Okhotsk Sea and Kuril Islands. Okladnikov's scientific interest included extensive excavations, comparative research of cultural and technological features in Asia, migration from Asia to the Americas, ethnogenesis, as well as early history and ethnography of Indigenous people.

In 1966, when Okladnikov became head of the Institute of History, Philology, and Philosophy at the Novosibirsk branch of the Russian Academy, he and his students initiated a research school that aimed to discern different stages of human cultural evolution in Siberia, starting from the Paleolithic and finishing with modern times. Indeed, the Soviet state supported many archeological expeditions searching and documenting rock art sites in the context of state plans for industrial development of hydroelectric projects in remote Siberian areas.² Thereby, with extensive state support, rock art became a systematic multidisciplinary academic endeavor as well as one of the most enigmatic and romantically charged subjects in Soviet archeology. Essays published by Okladnikov and translated into languages of the

Soviet Union popularized discovery and science and presented interpretations of the worldviews of ancient people through rock paintings or carvings (see Okladnikov, 1969). Okladnikov declared that the documentation of many rock art sites in Altai, Mongolia, Amur Province, Zabaikal Province, Pribaikal'e, and Angara, as well as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were an opening of a “window to an unknown world” (Ru. *okno v nevedomyi mir*) (see Derevianko & Medvedev, 2008). The artistic expressions of ancient people gained the attention of Soviet media for several decades. Indeed, Okladnikov was referred to as an extremely successful discoverer of many iconic archeological sites. For the so-called “discovery” and reading of rock art sites as archeological monuments, Okladnikov gained authority in academia and received public and state attention. He was a full member of the USSR Academy of Sciences and was a corresponding member of science academies in other countries. He was awarded the highest awards of the time including Stalin's Book Award and Hero of Socialist Labor.

In his early career, when documenting many scattered rock art sites in Lena, Okladnikov started to conduct content analysis of the rock art images by comparing different narratives, painting styles, and symbols.³ In his interpretation of the rock art of the Lena River basin he used comparative ethnographic data including narratives of Northern Indigenous groups from all over the Russian empire, including Ostyaks, Saamis, Khanty, Nganasans, and Chukchis. He also referred to the cosmology of these Indigenous groups (see Okladnikov, 1942). His interpretations of rock art were also illustrated with unique examples of Yakut epos.⁴ Okladnikov (1943) suggested classification of rock art according to different painting styles and content, and such specific variations he attributed to different styles that represented archeological epochs such as Neolith, Bronze Age, and Middle Age.

Okladnikov distinguished between ancient Yakut rock art and Tungus rock art (see Okladnikov & Barahskov, 1941). Hence, he interpreted Yakut rock art via recorded Yakut mythology, while so-called proto-Tungus rock art was interpreted by rich existing ethnography. For Okladnikov, Evenki rituals such as *sinkelavun*⁵ (Anisimov, 1958, p. 29–32) and *ikonipka*⁶ (Vasilevich, 1930) serve as examples to interpret the aspirations of hunters and herders as depicted on rock art images. With each publication and book, Okladnikov integrated more and more folklore, mythological data, and narratives of Yakut and Evenki and Northern Indigenous groups as he aimed to reveal ritual meanings, ideas, and economic practices linked to rock art representations (see Okladnikov & Zaporozhskaia, 1959, 1972).

The geography of Okladnikov's field research became much wider and dense with ethnographic examples and explanations when his student archeologist and ethnographer Anatolii Mazin joined his expedition to the Olekma and Priamur regions. Mazin, who was born in the Amur region, was conducting ethnographic field research among the Evenkis of the Amur and Aldan rivers. Mazin contributed unique ethnographic explanations for different rock art sites described in their joint publications (Okladnikov & Mazin, 1976, 1979). Co-authored monographs contained elaborated descriptions of Evenki rituals and statements linked to hunting magic.

In their joint expeditions, Okladnikov and Mazin started to pay more careful attention to the ritual aspects of rock art. They searched for ritual offering sites located near the rock art. They also surmised that rock art sites were probably important places for various activities, feasts, rituals, and clan cults (Okladnikov & Mazin,

1976: 105). Okladnikov and Mazin linked the content of rock art images with narratives about Evenki cosmology, symbolism, epics, ideas of sharing, and daily beliefs and economic practices (ibid., p. 117).⁷ Both scientists also worked out a chronology of the rock art dating different rock art sites of Olekma and Priamur to different periods starting from 4,000 years BCE to the later Middle Ages.

In their second book on the rock art of the Aldan River basin, both Okladnikov and Mazin (1979) reiterated ethnographic descriptions of the main Evenki rituals that were outlined in work of Vasilevich and Anisimov. The book also included Mazin's extensive ethnographic field observations from the 1969–1971 research expeditions among the Evenkis of Amur region. In fact, many chronological interpretations were based on the findings of conducted intensive excavations of the offering sites (Ru. *zhertvenniki*) as well as comparative analysis of a great number of various offerings (see also Okladnikov & Mazin, 1979, p. 99). Indeed, by the end of the 1970s, rock cracks became a first object of archeological research since they helped to preserve many offerings that could be easily reached. As an example, in such cracks at the rock art site by the River Eniuiois⁸ in the Aldan River basin, humans left offerings during all historical periods and up to the present days, and archeologists found up to 80 stone tools (scrapers, fishing tools, stone flakes, various arrowheads) as well as musket bullets, small caliber bullets, beads, coins, cigarettes, matches, and pieces of fabric (see Okladnikov & Mazin, 1979, p. 14).

Okladnikov and Mazin excavation of three layers of the Soun Tit rock art site of the Aldan River basin demonstrated the rich variety of offerings. Various offering spots located close to the rock art site contained wooden arrows and laces, three types of bone arrowheads, different wooden and bronze pendants, a birch bark figure of a reindeer, stone arrowheads, and different tools and ceramics (ibid.).⁹ It also contained a huge amount of recent ethnographic objects idols referred to by archeologists as *shenkens*. In their joint book, Okldnikov and Mazin (1976, p. 106) borrowed the term *shenken* from Anisimov (1949) and suggested their interpretation. Hence, “master spirits” called *bugady* that was emplaced in rock art were approached by the Evenki not only with offerings, but also with carved anthropomorphic idols made from larch, pine or spruce trees. Similar idols were also documented earlier at rock art sites in Zabaikal'ia (see Sali River in Dukuvuchi, Okladnikov, & Zaporozhskaia, 1970, p. 42) and in the middle the Lena River basin (see especially Markha River in Okladnikov & Zaporozhskaia, 1972, p. 78).¹⁰ Indeed, *shenkens* were found in great numbers at rock art sites as well as were excavated in cultural layers of offering sites of Olekma and Aldan River basins (see Okladnikov & Mazin, 1976, p. 34–35).¹¹ In his personal monograph Mazin (1986, p. 136–137) elaborated that Indigenous people used to leave such idols after saying their wish and aspirations and such idols served as mediators between the special hunting idols called *barylakh* owned and fed by families, and master spirit *bugady* that owned rivers, taiga, and animals (see also Okladnikov & Mazin, 1979, p. 76).

Okladnikov and Mazin (1979) also paid attention to the different compositions of rock art that represented various economic activities, especially hunting scenes: hunter with dogs, use of corrals in the hunting of moose or wild reindeer, hunting with a boat, riding a reindeer, and the use of nets in the hunting of migrating wild animals when crossing rivers or lakes. In this context, the authors provided ethnographic descriptions of different practices and strategies of subsistence that prevailed

in the region up to the 1930s, arguing that these were also represented in the rock art (Okladnikov & Mazin, 1979, p. 55, 56, 58, 59, 77). The authors believed that ethnographic examples show that rock art has been directly linked to the daily economic practices of hunters and herders that continued in the region for ages (ibid.). They argued that creation of, and attendance to, rock art was driven by strong aspirations to gain material wellbeing (Ru. *material'noe blagopoluchie*), hunting luck, and the wellbeing of domesticated reindeer. The linkage of hunting magic and rock art was also supported by Mazin's ethnographic observations of ritual practices and beliefs in different good omens (such as the birth of *tugut* degenerate reindeer) among the Evenki communities of Amur region and respectful attitudes toward hunted animals, such as the collecting of wild and domestic animal bones on platforms (Okladnikov & Mazin, 1976, p. 111–112). Hence, the authors suggested that with the help of the magic of paintings and rituals, ancient Siberians aimed to fight hardships, reproduce wild and domestic animals, and generate success for their clan members. In the conclusions, the authors suggested that rock art originated with “ancient magic,” while the continuation of respect shown to these rocks confirms this explanation (ibid.).

After the death of Okladnikov in 1981, Mazin continued his precise rock art explorations in the taiga regions of the Amur River basin. In his personal monograph, he points out that one of the most widespread representations found in the rock art of Amur is linked to reindeer herding (Mazin, 1986, p. 122–150). He proposed that many rock art images illustrate the use of domestic reindeer, such as reindeer riding, walking with leashed reindeer, or catching reindeer with a lasso. He also noticed that these domestic reindeer representations are most common in the areas where there can be found the most persistent reindeer herding. Hence, for Mazin (ibid.) rock art representation of domestic reindeer use also provided a good context to include his own ethnographic field data and contribute to the debates about the domestication of reindeer that has been an issue of active discussions among different groups and generations of historians, ethnographers, and archeologists. His findings based on rock art research also supported ethnographers Vasilevich and Levin's (1951) theory about the Orochen type of reindeer domestication that featured the riding of reindeer. Thereby, Mazin provided not only archeological evidence, but also his own reindeer herding ethnography describing in detail the economic and temporal cycles of reindeer herding and the varied terminology of reindeer based on age, sex, color, use, and shape of antlers. He also described various uses of reindeer and tools used in reindeer herding (such as a lasso or a special curb) as well as in the transportation of humans and their belongings (saddles, sledges, bags, rugs) (ibid.). Thereby, Mazin discerned the so-called “reindeer style” (Ru. *olennyi stil'*) of rock art that he dated to the Middle Ages. He argued that rock art representations of this style are not limited to domestic and hunted animals, but also depict shamans and spirits having anthropomorphic features, as well as specific rituals that “served to enhance the number and wellbeing of animals and birds” (Mazin, 1986, p. 120).

To provide a better context for these cosmological representations, Mazin also continued with detailed explanations of the Evenki cosmological world structure, different spirits inhabiting different worlds and the meanings and symbolism of shamanic rituals and paraphernalia.¹² In his analysis of certain rock art images of Amur dated to the Middle Ages, Mazin (1986, p. 140–177) goes even further by suggesting

that many heroes of the Evenki, some mythic events, and personages are also represented in rock art images. He even identifies certain personages, such as *Mangi*, “the moose hunter who stole the sun,” at a rock art site near the Maia River; *Agdy*, “the thunder, a human-like being that had eagle’s wings and a bear’s head” in the Zeia River basin; the malevolent beings—known as *Kandykakh* in Shishkino rock art and *Khargi* in the Onon River basin—and mythical beings—*Seli* (mammoth) and *Kulin* (snake) in rock art paintings of the Arbi River basin (ibid.).

Aiming to explain function and use of the rock art Mazin (ibid.) also pays attention to the Evenki tradition of painting a special rug called *namu*. Such a rug was made by the Evenki of Amur from buckskin or leather and it served as a luck providing item as well as a marker of one’s territoriality (ibid.). Hence, if in the past the Evenki used to draw on rock, later they started to use painted rugs that belonged to the whole clan (Mazin, 1986, p. 128). These similar style paintings, according to Mazin, were made by the Evenkis to preserve rock art and served a similar function as icons among Orthodox people (see Mazin, 2005). Hence, Mazin linked rock art to the Evenki rituals during which the vernacular notion of power (Ev. *musun*) was emplaced into objects, such as fur rug *namu*, idol *sevekichan*, and sacred reindeer called *seveki* (ibid.).

To provide context for understanding rock art Mazin (1986) also aims to describe animistic worldviews linked to hunting luck, perception of animal personalities, respect to animals, rules of sharing. He pays special attention to the ancient rituals of respect still existing among the Evenkis of Amur linked to the bringing an animal’s (wild reindeer and moose) head to the camp and such event is celebrated enacting sharing and using various sacred items such as sacred items as idols (Ev. *sevekichan*) and amulets (Ev. *sinken*) as well as special carved idols/protectors (Ev. *mentai*) (ibid.: 130).¹³ The hunted animal’s head was cooked and eaten by the whole group and then the remains and bones were left on an elevated storing platform with great respect (ibid.).¹⁴ Mazin (ibid.) continuously provides detailed ethnographic descriptions about how bad luck was avoided and escaped with the help of old ritual *chipikan*, feeding of idol *sinken* and hunting luck rituals *sinkelaun* also called *beiunkan* among the Evenki of Amur.¹⁵

Rock art archeologist Nikolai Kochmar (1994) who dedicated his life to the study of rock art in southern Yakutia analyzed rock art sites as a “cult places,” taking into account the natural environments as well as offering sites. He examined displayed ritual objects *shenkens* that he found in great numbers in the areas of the rock art sites. Indeed, these anthropomorphic idols were present in almost every rock art site of Amga and in some rock art sites of Olekma (see Kochmar, 2002, p. 52–55). As Kochmar (Kochmar, 2002, p. 54) notes, such idols could vary significantly from 3–4 cm and up to 5 cm in diameter and starting from 3–4 cm up to 1.5 meters in length. Some of the rock art sites near Amga River also contained large idols that could reach 15–20 cm in diameter and 2–3.5 meters in length (ibid.). He indicated that *shenkens* were produced from mainly young larch trees that were cleaned of branches and with sidelong cuts was made a stylized anthropomorphic head that had a neck (or without it) and most heads of *shenkens* were burned on fire while the other side was split as two legs (ibid., p. 52). For him, such ethnographic evidence shows how these sites were functioning as centers of religious activity during the Middle Ages and up to our present days.

Since Okladnikov's and Mazin's publications, almost every Siberian rock art archeologist started to interpret uncritically rock art relying on the classical ethnographic examples borrowed from Vasilevich and Anisimov's rich ethnographic works, this way reiterating Okladnikov's interpretative approaches based on Evenki ethnographies as well as comparative cosmologies from all over Siberia and the North. Such direct rock art interpretations through historical ethnographic evidence of early Evenki and their cosmological narratives were also repeated straightforwardly in articles by generations of archeologists often without referencing to many previous work of Okladnikov and Mazin, Vasilevich or Anisimov. Hence, there were no attempts to find out how such wooden ritual items were referred to and interpreted by nomadic reindeer herders and hunters who still used that area for subsistence practices. Similarly to Indigenous storytelling traditions, such interpretations of rock art images based on intuitions and imaginations of scientists became an integral part of the scientific perceptions of the rock art, as well as part of the scientific storytelling tradition (see for example Neil, 2005; Kochmar, 2002).

Rock art has long been considered as archeological and artistic monuments that can reveal ancient human emotions, creative expressions, and anxieties. At the same time, recent rock art offerings found and documented by archeologists also confirmed the fact that these sites have been tended by local hunters and reindeer herders up to recent years. Indeed, most rock art sites have been very well known as significant landscape and cosmology subjects for local populations for many centuries. Although archeologists listed a variety of early as well as recent offerings left by Indigenous people near rock art sites, they did not aim to elaborate on the role of the recent offerings, often scornfully referred to them as *pozniatina* (late objects). The reason was that these so-called "ethnographic objects" (Ru. *etnograficheskie predmety*) in literature did not provide any archeological interpretations and had little value for the dating of rock art sites. Nevertheless, such remains of offerings were also proof that these sites were an important source of religious inspiration throughout the 20th century.¹⁶

The ethnographic research in Sakha Republic, Amur, and Zabaikal regions and Republic of Buryatia shows that rock art sites can be seen as important sites for the personal and social life of individuals and local Indigenous communities up to the present time (see Brandišauskas, 2017, p. 229–242).¹⁷ Furthermore, the contemporary Evenki perception of these sites can be seen as being linked to the paths of seasonal migrations, perception and use of landscape, ontology of hunting, and ideas of animism (Brandišauskas, 2020; 2021). Although some rock art sites are neglected by the Evenki due to diminishing nomadic lifestyles, others have been continuously visited and adorned even during the most disruptive times. They continuously play an important symbolic, religious, and political role in scientific, public, Indigenous, and political discourses.

Indigenous knowledge and past rituals as well as way-finding were important to access and interpret rock art by explorers and scientists. At the same time, little has been revealed about the persistence of meanings and contemporary views and attitudes enacted by communities at these rock art sites. This is especially true for publications during the Soviet times, when rock art research reached a peak of professional, academic, and public popularity. Firstly, there was a lack of interest in the interpretations of late artifacts seen as irrelevant to archeological inquiry. This began

to change with Okladnikov and Mazin. Secondly, due to the Soviet antireligious views, it was hard to question and write about existing practices and beliefs.

NOTES

- 1 Innokentii Sibiriakov was a goldminer and trader who agreed to support a large, complex historic and ethnographic expedition (1894–1896). The main task and uniqueness of the expedition was to conduct extensive spatial and temporal research that involved the local population, native intelligentsia, and well-educated political exiles in Siberia.
- 2 Okladnikov led the Lena expedition and conducted his field research even during World War II when most scientists even with doctoral degrees were mobilized to the front (see Klein 2014, p. 312).
- 3 Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia (1972, p. 75) believed that iron ore was carefully grinded and mixed with fish fat and then the paint was applied in wet or semi-wet conditions by finger. Confirmation of this could be the spots of ochre seen by Okladnikov on the cornice below the paintings (ibid.). However, I suggest that at least some of the later drawings could have been created with a tough chalk made from ochre and glue that could be produced by local technologies such as boiling fish parts as well as using the inner layer of animal skin. During the expedition supported by National Geographic Society (GEFNE175-16) and conducted together with Dr. Vladimir Davydov, we also found sharp edges of rocks with remains of paint at the rock art site Onen (Amur region). Hence, such edges, I would suggest, were probably used to sharpen tough drawing chalk for a better drawing effect. Falling pieces of chalk could also produce such spots. Similar drawing items were used by Evenkis in decoration of special buckskin rugs, early clothing, and saddles. Such paint remained on the wooden items even after a half century of heavy use and exposure of temperatures, sun, and rain.
- 4 These unreferenced examples were probably borrowed from unpublished works of ethnographer Ksenofontov that were repressed by the Soviet power structures at that time.
- 5 *Sinkelavun*—Evenki ritual of obtaining luck by shooting into different images of animals.
- 6 *Ikonipka*—Evenki ritual of eight days of pursuit of the moose enacted through dances and rituals.
- 7 The description presented Vasilevich's (1957) ethnography on Evenki luck providing amulets, idols *shenken*, shamanic rituals of stealing and bringing animal souls, ritual *ikenipke*, feeding of idol *barraliak* [*barilakh*] sacred reindeer cult *sevekenipke*, as well as Anisimov's elaborate ritual of catching luck *shenkelavun* (1949). In the description of the Olekma River and Upper Priamur region they also included some references to the famous exile Tungus researcher Sergei Shirokogoroff (1935) who was an often avoided ethnographer during the Soviet era.
- 8 This name of the river is derived from the Evenki word *onen* “sign,” “decoration,” “beautiful.”
- 9 Starting with the archeologist Arkhipov's findings of offerings, archeologists searching for ancient offering sites located at the rock art became an important and integral part of the forthcoming rock art research as well as dating of the rock art sites (see Kochmar, 1994, p. 24). Arkhipov (1970) was lucky to find five Late Neolith bone arrowheads (and one iron piece of armor probably left from the Middle Ages) in the offering site next to the Suruktakh Khaia of Tokko River. Arkhipov (ibid.) also found rich offering sites when visiting the KrestiaKh rock art site, starting from stone and bone artifacts and finishing with late offerings such as pieces of porcelain and ceramic bowls, as well as pieces of tools used in blacksmithing. These different items played an important role in suggesting a date of the rock art sites.

- 10 See also Georgi (1799) about bringing wooden sticks as offerings left at the rock art site by Tungus.
- 11 As an example, at the River Kovoibut (Olekma River basin), they found 15 idols placed near the rock. Some of these idols were 1.5–2 meters in length of larch or pine tree sticks without branches and with a carved end representing the head of an idol (Okladnikov and Mazin, 1976, p. 34–35).
- 12 These ethnographic descriptions can be also found in Mazin's (1984) detailed ethnographic book dedicated to Orochen worldviews.
- 13 While many ethnographies document similar rituals of respect paid to the bear, Mazin argued that there are very few examples of rock art with representations of bears; therefore, he suggests that moose and wild reindeer play a much more important role in Evenki worldviews.
- 14 Indeed, among different groups of Evenkis, many different parts of animals and especially of moose, as lower jawbones with teeth were collected into one sash and were used as amulets, attracting luck, also referred to as shenken or *shinken* (or as *barylakh*) (see also *shingken* in Anisimov (1949) and Vasilevich (1930)).
- 15 Hence, Mazin included most of the examples that he published in his ethnographic book representing the reconstruction of the past of the Amur Evenkis (see 1984).
- 16 Although Okladnikov and Zaporozhskaia (1972, p. 16–31) mention from time to time that some rock art sites (Surukhtakh Khaia near Markha River) had been respected among forest hunters until recently, in the book there are almost no descriptions of rock art perceptions provided by local communities or individuals except some remote references to the perception of past generations.
- 17 Anatolii Zabiyako and Van Tszian'lin' in their recent book dedicated to rock art of the North East of China also documented the altars with contemporary offerings as well as pieces of fabric left by Evenki at the Aniiani River rock art site and the tree with a carved anthropomorphic face (2015, p. 30–31).

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CHAPTER 41

A HISTORY OF SIBERIAN ETHNOGRAPHY



Anna Sirina

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 30 years, Russian ethnology/anthropology has gone through a period of dramatic change. Literally all its spheres have been affected: theoretical and methodological, subject matter, publication, and educational.¹ In assessments of the current state of Russian ethnology, two tendencies prevail: one is critical (Sokolovsky, 2014, among others), the other is positive (Tishkov, 2020). A careful analysis of the authors' positions reveals a weak point in their argumentation—insufficient attention to regional studies. At the same time, out of seven participants discussed in Tishkov's 2020 article, five are conducting fieldwork in Siberia, and three of them are foreigners. This fact shows a special role of Siberian studies both in Russian and world anthropology.

The history and current situation of Russian ethnology is reflected in summary works (Pypin, 1892; Tokarev, 1966; Solovei, 1998, 2004; Alymov & Sokolovsky, 2018, etc.). Numerous studies and reviews have been devoted to Siberian ethnography in general (Shimkin, 1990; Schweitzer, 2000, 2001; Vakhtin & Sirina, 2003; Gray et al., 2003; Sirina, 2003; Funk, 2018; Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015; Vakhtin, 2020, among others). Russian historiography pays considerable attention to certain aspects and directions of the historical and modern ethnography of Siberia, and to the biographies of scholars, though they are criticized, not always fairly, for the “ceremonial” tone of such publications (Sokolovsky, 2011, p. 133). The biographies of Leo Sternberg, Waldemar Bogoraz, and Waldemar Jochelson, transnational figures in the anthropology of Siberia, received much attention (Kan, 2009; Kasten, 2018, among many others).

This chapter will provide a brief description and assessment of the current state of Siberian ethnography in the context of its historical development. In the 18th century, Russian ethnography was dominated by the Academy of Sciences, and in the 19th century by the Russian Geographical Society. The Soviet period, the most notable research results, and the distinctions of the Moscow and Leningrad schools of Siberian studies will be considered separately. In conclusion, I analyze the period from the 1990s to the present, which includes the dramatic years of decline and difficulty as well as the obvious upsurge, largely associated with the inclusion of Russia in the world community, the internationalization of Siberian research, and

the resumption of funding for scientific research in Russia. Due to the vastness of the questions posed and the limited scope of this chapter, I do not claim any complete coverage of them.

INTRODUCING SIBERIA

Siberia is a vast region of Russia that occupies most of North Asia and consists of Western Siberia, Eastern Siberia and the Far East. At present, this territory is part of two federal districts, the Siberian (area 4,361,727 km², population 19,256,426 in 2010) and the Far Eastern (area 6,952,555 km², population 6,293,129 in 2010). In this chapter, this entire territory will be considered under the general term “Siberia.”² The Siberian landscape is highly diverse and includes tundra and forest-tundra, taiga and mountain taiga, forest-steppe, and steppe. Today about 30% of the Indigenous population of Siberia live in cities. At the same time, a significant number are still engaged in hunting, reindeer husbandry, fishing, gathering, and cattle breeding, and maintain shamanistic and animistic beliefs.

The history of Russian ethnography/ethnology/anthropology, like other scientific traditions, depends on the social and political contexts of the research. Siberia became part of the Russian state in the late 16th–early 17th centuries; Russia thus became a multiethnic state and was interested in collecting all possible information about the nature and population of the colonized territories.

Traditionally, three areas of research, with their own scientific organizations, specialists, and literature, have developed in the study of the peoples of Siberia. The first is the ethnography of the Indigenous minority peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East of the Russian Federation, the status of which is legally approved in the Russian Federation: these are specific groups of small numbers in the population living in the areas of traditional settlement of their ancestors, preserving their traditional way of life and economic activity. Before the 1917 revolution, most of them, according to The Charter “On the Administration of Aliens” of 1822, belonged to the category of “wandering aliens” (*brodiachie inorodtsy*). In Soviet times, they were called the Minority Peoples of the North; in the 1920s, 26 groups belonged to this category. Today their official name is “Indigenous Minority Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.” All of them are included in the List of Indigenous Minorities of Russia, adopted in 2000. Currently, 40 peoples live in the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, who originally spoke the following languages: Tungus-Manchu (Evenkis, Evens, Nanais, Ulchis, Udeges, Negidals, Oroks/Uiltas, Orochis), a total of 76,263 people, Finno-Ugric (Khantys, Mansis, Samis), totaling 50,919 people, Samoyed (Nenets, Selkups, Nganasans, Enets), totaling 49,378 people, Turkic (Shors, Dolgans, Tuvinians-Todzhins, Telengits, Soicts, Kumandins, Teleuts, Tubalars, Chelkans, Tofalars, Chulymys), totaling 42,340 people, Paleo-Asian (Chukchi, Koryaks, Nivkhs, Itelmens, Eskimos, Yukagirs, Kets, Chuvans, Aleuts, Kereks, Alyutors), totaling 37,562 people, Slavic (Kamchadals), totaling 1,927 people, and Sino-Tibetan (Tazys), totaling 274 people (2010 All-Russian Census). Some privileges remain for them which the peoples of Southern Siberia do not have. They are sometimes referred to as “hunter-gatherers and fishermen” and viewed as egalitarian communities.

The second area of research is the ethnography of the peoples of Southern Siberia: Buryats (461,389 people), Tuvans (263,934 people), Khakassians (72,959 people),

Altaians (70,800 people), as well as Sakha (Yakuts) (478,100 people), who live in the north of Eastern Siberia and the North-East of Russia. Previously, they were classified as nomadic and/or sedentary aliens (*kochevye/osedlye inorodtsy*). Notably, since the second half of the 20th century, research on these peoples has been conducted primarily by their own scholars. Finally, the third area is research into Russian old residents, who moved to Siberia before the middle of the 19th century, and later settlers of different nationalities.

Up to the present, Russian ethnology has been distinguished by its descriptive character and relatively low level of philosophical reflection. Perhaps this was favored by the abundance of unique field material, as well as the fact that ethnographic knowledge was produced not only for scientific purposes, but also toward the construction of a multiethnic state. Various ethnographers have tested themselves in Siberia, among them missionaries, academics, bureaucrats, military, *Narodniki*, and local educated peoples (Tokarev, 1966). Researchers often collaborate in several institutions at once, communicating with each other, which forms not only an intra-institutional and complex interactive scientific network and cultural environment.

ACADEMIC ETHNOGRAPHY (18TH CENTURY)

Systematic ethnography arose in Siberia due to the interaction between German naturalists and historians, on the one hand, and Russian scientists and administrators, on the other (Tokarev, 1966; Vermeulen, 2018). German scholars, invited by Peter the Great to the Russian service in the Academy of Sciences he created in 1724, left for long expeditions to Siberia as naturalists, and returned from there, as Andrei Golovnev (2018) precisely expressed, as ethnographers. The studies into the peoples of Siberia, in turn, played an important role in the formation of ethnographic science and national identity in Russia (Golovnev and Kisser, 2015). German and Finnish researchers continued their collaboration with the Russian Academy of Sciences in the 19th century also. Matthias Castren, a remarkable Finnish linguist, traveled across Siberia in 1845–1849 at the invitation of the Academy of Sciences in search of the Finns' ancestral home on a wave of national movements. He collected unique data on the Finno-Ugric, Samoyedic, and Tungusic languages and dialects of Siberia.

The German “scientific colonization” has been to the benefit of Russian ethnography; German scientists, such as applied natural scientific methods to describe peoples and created the science of peoples ethnology.

MISSIONARY ETHNOGRAPHY (19TH CENTURY)

In the history of anthropology, the role of missionaries has been silenced (Stipe, et al. 1980), although some of them collected valuable linguistic, folklore, and ethnographic material (Podgorbunskii, 1895; Veniaminov, 1840; Verbitskiy, 1893). The missionary activity of the Russian Orthodox Church should be viewed in the context of the colonization of Siberia, when the priests, fulfilling the mission of bringing Christianity to local peoples, also ensured “observation, control and state-social communication in the annexed territories” (Zulyar, 2017, p. 162). Data on the peoples inhabiting Siberia were necessary for the state, and the most difficult work of first contact with “aliens” was largely undertaken by the missionaries, who personally did

not have direct economic interest in this contact. Missionary activities influenced the Indigenous population, its level of literacy, and sometimes protected them from the arbitrariness of the authorities and traders (Korsun, 2019).

The distinctive features of past missionaries were long-term residence among the peoples who were converted to Christianity; knowledge of their languages, compilation of dictionaries and grammars, translations of sacred books into native languages; real participation in people's lives; and special attention to the study of beliefs and other aspects of culture. Missionaries' working methods changed over time from rigid and one-track during the early colonial period to something softer and more flexible in the 19th century. Missionary ethnography was especially developed in the 19th century, primarily thanks to the works of St. Innocent (Veniaminov) (1797–1879), the Illuminator of Siberia and America, an expert on the Aleutian language and culture (Veniaminov, 1840). He served among the Aleuts, Koloshi (Tlingits) (1724–1739), Koryaks, Chukchi, Tungus, and other peoples. A learned missionary, as Metropolitan of Moscow he strongly supported missionary activity. His contemporary, Archbishop Nil (Isakovich), who served in the vast Irkutsk diocese in 1838–1853, called on the priests to collect information on geography, statistics, ethnography, and meteorology for the Siberian Department of the Russian Geographical Society and was himself a philosopher, collector of paleontological and geological items, and an expert in the Buryat language (Karpuk, 2015). The priests, educated and knowing the languages of local peoples, assisted regional administrations, expeditions, and diplomats. For example, the Teleut priest, Mikhail Chevalkov, assisted in the collection of materials for the future academician, Radlov, a researcher into the Turkic peoples of Siberia.

In this way, the scientific activity of the missionaries was stimulated by the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and the intellectual niche that appeared in connection with the creation of the Russian Geographical Society. The results of the observations of missionaries were published both in secular and church journals, such as the journals “Eparchial Vedomosti,” which were published by the Tobolsk, Yeniseisk, Omsk, Vladivostok, Blagoveshchensk, Yakutsk, and Irkutsk dioceses from the 1860s until 1918, as well as in the publications of the Russian Geographical Society.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF SIBERIA IN THE RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (19TH CENTURY)

While during the 18th century the monopoly in ethnographic research belonged to the “closed” and mostly German Academy of Sciences, from the middle of the 19th century a significant part of ethnographic research was carried out under the auspices of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGS—the Russian abbreviation is IRGO, hereby: the Geographical Society). Created in 1845 in St. Petersburg, it had opened its doors to all educated people in Russia wanting to serve for its benefit. In the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, people, most of whom were not professional ethnographers, collected information, items and documents, helping to form the discipline; among them were many military personnel who worked on the borders of the Russian Empire. It was a Russian “national project,” a counterbalance to the German model of “pure science.” As Nathaniel Knight (1994) showed, the German approach was based on the Western European

tradition of strict and rigid hierarchies of nations and races, and the Russian on the concept of “a people,” with a descriptive tradition. Thus, the Ethnography Section of the Society became one of the most important organizing centers of Russian ethnographic science. With its formation, ethnography in Russia gradually began to stand out as an independent discipline with its own methodology and theories.

The Siberian branch of the Geographical Society was created in 1851 in Irkutsk. With the development/colonization of Siberia and the Russian Far East, new branches and sub-branches of the Geographical Society appeared in the cities, which, like a network, covered Western Siberia, Transbaikalia and the Amur Region, fueling both state and public interest in ethnographic research. Many expeditions were arranged with donations. Local departments of the Society were bases for expeditions from the center, but they themselves were also active. The results of field research were published in regional collections on ethnography (“Proceedings,” “Notes”). They were in great demand both in Russia and abroad; for example, ESBIRGS³ exchanged its printed publications with the American Smithsonian Institute. The museum collections of the Siberian departments of the Geographical Society subsequently formed the basis for museums, for example, the Irkutsk Regional Museum of Local Lore.

In the second half of the 19th century, a social and political movement of Siberian regionalism arose among a small circle of the Siberian intelligentsia. The *oblastniki* (regionalists) viewed Siberia as a separate region within Russia (hence the name) and as a colony; they advocated giving it greater independence and autonomy. Grigorii Potanin and Nikolai Yadrintsev, who became members of the Geographical Society, focused on the study of Siberia and Central Asia: the first made expeditions to Mongolia, Altai, Tuva, China, and Tibet (1876–1899), which provided a wealth of material on ethnography, folklore, and the epos of the Central Asian peoples; the second discovered ancient Turkic monuments on the river Orkhon, and Karakorum, the capital of the Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan, and explored Altai (1878–1880). The *oblastniki* advocated the expansion of the rights of “aliens” (*inorodtsy*), including them through the creation of local governing bodies, which was later implemented in the USSR.

Numerous expeditions organized by the Geographical Society and its Siberian branches played an important role in the study and development of the territories of Siberia and the Far East. In the second half of the 19th century, political exiles played an important role in the life of the Siberian departments of the Society, especially the *Narodniki*, a specifically Russian phenomenon (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2008). The largest expedition of the ESBIRGS at the end of the 19th century—Sibiryakovskaya (Yakutskaya) (1894–1896)—is unique in this respect. It happened due to the organizational efforts of the former Narodnik, chairman of ESBIRGS Dmitrii Klements and on the initiative and at the expense of the gold miner and philanthropist Innokentii Sibiryakov. The expedition occurred on the territory of the modern Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and the Irkutsk region in order to find out the influence of gold mining on the way of life of the “aliens.” Of the 26 participants, 13 were exiled *Narodniki*, and many of them had no formal higher education. Despite the different social status and interests of its participants, the expedition brought remarkable results, although little related to the original goal set. Yastremskii’s “The Grammar of the Yakut language,” Mainov’s “Tungus of the Yakutsk Region,”

Jochelson's "Essay on the fur industry and trade in furs in the Kolymsky district," and Pekarskii's "Russian-Yakut dictionary" were published. Due to meagre funding, the publication of materials stretched over many years. Nevertheless, the methods and themes developed in the Sibiryakov Expedition by Jochelson, Bogoraz and other participants and their collected materials contributed to not only domestic but world ethnography (the Jesup North Pacific Expedition).

The early 20th century was marked by the rapid development of Siberian ethnography in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences and in the ethnographic department of the Russian Museum.⁴ Their directors at the end of the 19th century were the researchers of the peoples of Southern Siberia Vasilii Radlov and Dmitrii Klements.

Thus, administrators, military, political exiles, teachers, and priests collected material with minimal theoretical reflection. At the same time, classical education, which then dominated in Russia, and translations of significant Western theoretical works introduced Russian scientists to evolutionism and diffusionism, and the institutional diversity of Russian Siberian studies ensured the creation of an ethnographic database, including reach museum collections. After the revolution, some ethnographers left the country, including Jochelson and Shirokogorov.

SOVIET ETHNOGRAPHY OF SIBERIA

The development of the ethnography of Siberia during the Soviet period was uneven and the principle of state protectionism predominated. Ethnography was in demand in connection with the tasks of nation-building in the USSR, including Siberia, where in the 1920s and 1930s several Soviet Socialist Autonomous Republics were created: Yakut (1922), Buryat (1923), Khakass (1930), etc. and National (Autonomous) Districts for Evenkis, Nenets, Dolgans and some other minority peoples of the North. The Committee for Assistance to the Peoples of the Outlying Northern Districts under the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, or Committee of the North (1924–1935)—with an extensive network of committees under the local executive bodies of power—was created for "the systematic organization of minority peoples of the North in economic, administrative, judicial and cultural-sanitary relations." Among the famous ethnographers worked in area of applied ethnology were Vladimir Bogoraz, Bergard Petri, Innokentii Suslov, and Elizaveta Orlov, but there were not enough professionally trained specialists. The research commissioned by the Committee of the North was well-financed, had an applied character and primarily consisted of collecting ethnographic materials. As Petri (1927, p. 11) noted:

if before each new fact obtained was the more valuable and interesting, the more traces of antiquity it concealed in itself, now we are mainly interested in those facts that provide the key to the correct understanding of the main springs that move the economy of the natives.

The political tasks of collectivization and anti-religious policy determined the collection of materials regarding land use, economics and budgets, living conditions, social structure and beliefs. The idea of creating reservations among the peoples of the North did not receive support because of the intercultural and interethnic ties

that had developed in many regions of Siberia, as well as in connection with the industrialization of the 1930s. The prospects set by the state were dashed by the unwillingness of its “wards” to live according to the rules they established (Slezkine, 1994). Nevertheless, the work for the Committee of the North opened up local ethnic groups, including assimilated ones, for research and provided unique comparative information about them, albeit with limitations. The land-surveying work carried out in those years in Siberia brought geography and ethnography closer together, enhancing the understanding of the role of the natural environment in the formation and support of cultural diversity.

In the 1920s, Soviet ethnography was characterized by different methodological approaches: evolutionism, diffusionism, and elements of functionalism; the ethnography of that era did not differentiate archeology, anthropology, linguistics, and folklore. As science in the USSR was centralized, it is worth talking about two “capital” ethnographic schools—Leningrad and Moscow. Scientific schools are localized in space and time, and their methods, ideas, methodology, and attitude to the authorities change in different periods of history (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Thus, the Leningrad Siberian ethnographic school grew out of the Soviet missionary project, but relied on the traditions of pre-revolutionary *Narodnik* ethnography. In 1916 Lev Sternberg and Vladimir Bogoraz began the planned training of ethnographers at the ethnographic department of the Geographical Institute in Leningrad (Vakhtin, 2016; Lyarskaia, 2016). Its graduates left for Siberia as teachers and Soviet administrators, with the goal of learning languages and collecting ethnographic material simultaneously. Subsequently, they became the authors of primers and dictionaries, taught students from among the peoples of the North, and trained national personnel. Thus, the life of the Soviet ethnographer and Tungus-studies scholar Glafira Vasilevich (1895–1971) was divided into two periods. In the 1920s and 1930s she was mainly engaged in practical linguistics and accumulated ethnographic materials, and in the 1950s and 1960s her scientific activity was associated with fundamental ethnography—problems of ethnogenesis, ethnic history, and with the training of linguists (Ermolova, 2003).

Moscow ethnographers of the 1920s studied people’s cultures and museology at the Moscow State University and Central Museum of Ethnology (1924–1948). From the 1950s to the 1980s the situation changed: Moscow ethnographers wrote memoranda to the authorities, and in the early 1990s, laws for the peoples of the North (Sokolova et al., 1995). The Moscow Ethnographic School originated from the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology and Ethnography (1863–1931) at Moscow University and is associated with the names of Anatolii Bogdanov and Dmitrii Anuchin. Siberian scholars began to appear in it in Soviet times, amongst them Boris Kuftin, Boris Vasil’ev, Maksim Levin, and Iakov Roginskii. A Faculty of Ethnology was established at Moscow University in 1925, combining the teaching of a wide range of humanitarian and social disciplines, but it did last long.

Scientific meetings of the late 1920s and early 1930s became a visible manifestation of the centralization and politicization of science and a watershed between “old” and “new” ethnography (Solovey, 1998; Arzyutov et al., 2014). While previously ethnology was balanced between history, biology and sociology, at the Meeting of Ethnographers of Moscow and Leningrad in 1929 it was declared a part of history, providing information for the study of primitiveness. At the 1929 Meeting, the task

of the “Marxization” of ethnography was set, but, in fact, Marxism was grafted into evolutionism, and other methods were declared incorrect. A discussion took place about fieldwork methods; instead of talking about the possibility of using different methods in different research situations, Professor Bogoraz, a representative of the Leningrad school, defended the stationary method (a counterpart of the participant observation method), which he and other scientists from among the exiled *Narodniki* were forced to master during exile to Siberia. Moscow ethnographers, in particular, Professor Kuftin, proposed rather short-term visits by teams of several people and an intensive planned collection of field material (Arzyutov et al., 2014). During the Tungus expedition (1927–1928), he and his colleagues successfully applied this method to collect a large amount of comparative field data and ethnographic collections on Evenkis, Orochs, Nivkhs, Nanais, and Udeges for the construction of the Moscow Museum of Ethnology (Davydov & Sirina, 2020). Kuftin was repressed in 1930; in 1933, after serving his term of exile, he left for Georgia and became a professional archeologist, changing both his specialization and the place of research. But this was not the worst option. Political repressions of the late 1930s led to the death of some ethnographers and the defeat of Leningrad and Moscow Northern Studies (Tumarkin, 1999; 2003; Vakhtin, 2020, p. 34). In the 1940s to 1950s, research gradually began to resume.

In 1944, the ethnographers and anthropologists of Leningrad and Moscow became united within the framework of the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, which optimized scientific work in post-war conditions. Tatiana Solovei (2020) believes that “The historical specificity of Russia is that the impulses stimulating socio-political, intellectual, cultural and other activity traditionally come from the center of the country.” This main ethnographic institute prioritized specific topics. The high level of centralization of scientific research led to the fact that from the united institute of the two capitals, attitudes and ideas about what and how to study rippled outwards through the country. In addition, there was a change in scientific approaches, themes and, accordingly, periods, which can be identified by the names of the directors of the joint Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (since 1991—the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences): Sergei Tolstov (1942–1965), Yulian Bromley (1966–1989), Valerii Tishkov (1990–2015), since they determined the scientific policy of the Institute and built relationships with the authorities.

In Tolstov’s era at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, complex specialists were in demand: ethnographers, physical anthropologists, and archeologists. The differentiation of archeology, ethnography, and anthropology was not yet completed in the 1950s. In this regard, there are questions of developing theories of ethnogenesis, which became a tradition in Russian ethnography, correlated with the national policy in the USSR. The north-eastern complex expedition of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences, under the supervision of the physical anthropologist Georgii Debets, worked in Chukotka and Kamchatka in 1945–1947, studying various groups of Siberian Yupiks (Eskimos), Chukchis, Koryaks, Evens, and Itelmens (Debets, 1951). They actively developed theories of ancient relations between Northeast Asia and North America and the initial settlement of the American continent, drawing on the ideas of Franz Boas and the Russian ethnographers Jochelson and Bogoraz (Korsun, 2019). Interest in the region was

maintained through contact between Soviet scientists with American anthropologist Aleš Hrdlička from the Smithsonian Institute, who dealt with the question of settling the New World (Krupnik, 1998; Korsun, 2019).

The methods of studying ethnogenesis in Siberia are similar among Leningraders and Muscovites; however, Leningraders paid more attention to the analysis of linguistics, folklore sources, and artifacts of traditional material culture based on field data and museum collections, while Moscow ethnographers addressed this topic mainly through ethnographic, archival, anthropological, and archeological materials (Dolgikh, Gurvich, Tugolukov). Two schools were not separated from each other; rich collections from the Moscow Museum of Ethnology were transferred to Leningrad after its closure in 1948 (Ippolitova, 2001).

In 1956, at the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in Moscow, a sector for the study of socialist construction among Northern minority peoples was officially created (Batyanova, 2013). In the Institute and the sector, the anthropology and ethnography of Siberia were studied by Maksim Levin, Georgii Debets, Boris Dolgikh, Ilia Gurvich, Sevan Weinstein, Vladimir Vasil'ev, Maria Zhornitskaya, Iurii Simchenko, Zoia Sokolova, Anna Smolyak, and Vladilen Tugolukov. Despite the name of the sector, Moscow ethnographers studied ethnogenesis and ethnic history considerably. Work on the present included the preparation of memoranda, certificates and other documents, based on knowledge of the current situation, to government bodies responsible for socio-economic policy in the North—they incorporated ethnographers' materials when creating the national policy of the state in relation to Northern peoples (see, for instance: Sokolova & Pivneva, 2004).

It was then that the project of the Northern Expedition (1956–1991) was born. The name of the expedition alludes to the Great Northern (Second Kamchatka) Expedition of the 18th century. The name Northern Expedition referred to planned annual expeditionary research of Moscow and Leningrad ethnographers in Siberia—which lasted up to six months—using methods of participatory observation, interviewing, and collecting information from documents in statistical departments, village councils, archives, and registry offices. In conditions when there were few ethnographers, a certain region of work and/or people was assigned to each. Thus, Doctor of Historical Sciences Zoia Sokolova (1930–2020) from the Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR was, for 15 years, the only ethnographer who worked with Khanty and Mansi. Before leaving for the field, a plan-program of work and questionnaires were drawn up, discussed and approved at a meeting of the sector. A report was then prepared based on the results. The collective style of work of Soviet scholars was also expressed in the preparation of collections on certain topics, in discussions of manuscripts of collections, monographs, and dissertations. According to Elena Batyanova (2013), the Northern Expedition contributed to the creation of a school of Soviet Siberian studies, which was distinguished by a combination of scientific and applied research, as well as the protection of Northern peoples' rights.

Among the major achievements of fundamental ethnography made in the 1950s–1970s, we can mention the origin of reindeer husbandry in Eurasia. Hypotheses—both polycentric, from the Baikal and Transbaikalia (Vasilevich & Levin, 1951), and monocentric, from the Sayan region (Vainshtein, 1971)—were based on the detailed analysis of the material culture, archeological data and field

materials from different Siberian regions. Scientists of the united Institute then created the fundamental Historical and Ethnographic Atlas of Siberia (1961), which is constantly in use.

The period under the direction of Bromley (1966–1989) was associated with his theory of “*ethnos*,” the creation of which was influenced by the works of Shirokogorov (Anderson, Arzyutov, 2019). Siberian scholars regularly went on expeditions, wrote monographs about separate peoples, and the details of interethnic relations, and traditional ethnography remained the main area of work. The books of Moscow scientists Gurvich about Northern Yakut (Sakha) reindeer breeders, Smolyak about the peoples of the Lower Amur, and Simchenko on the culture of deer hunters in Northern Eurasia became classics, as did the monographs of the Leningrad scientists Evgenia Alekseenko about the Kets, Glafira Vasilevich about the Evenkis, Andrei Popov about the Dolgans, Lyudmila Khomich about the Nenets, Innocent Vdovin about the Chukchi, and other scholars, no less worthy, who, for the lack of space, are not named here. Valuable research, with rare exceptions, is available only to those who know Russian (Shimkin, 1990; Sirina, 2004; Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015).

Thus, in the Soviet period, research was carried out on the material and spiritual culture of the peoples of the North and Siberia, hypotheses were proposed regarding the origin of reindeer husbandry in Eurasia, the ethnic history and ethnogenesis of many Siberian peoples were traced, and shamanism was studied in detail. Monographs were created according to the canon for describing ethnic culture from archeological antiquity to the present. In the same way, ethnographic sketches about the peoples of Siberia were written in the volume “Peoples of Siberia” of the 18-volume series “Peoples of the World,” which was soon translated into English (Levin & Potapov, 1956; 1964).

Throughout the post-war Soviet period, the number of Institutes of the Academy of Sciences in Siberia (the Siberian and Far East Branches) increased. In the middle and second half of the 20th century the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography in Novosibirsk, the Institute of Humanitarian Research and Problems of Minority Peoples of the North in Yakutsk, the Institute of Mongolian Studies, Buddhology and Tibetology in Ulan-Ude, and the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography in Vladivostok were created. In addition, research on the ethnography of Siberia was carried out in a number of sociological, linguistic and geographical Institutes of the Russian Academy of Sciences, each of which publishes at least one scientific journal. Scholars are associated with universities, which produce young specialists, and they themselves teach in them. In Siberia, local ethnographic schools were created, the leaders of which were researchers trained at the central ethnographic institutes of the Academy of Sciences. In the 1920s, the Irkutsk archeological and ethnographic school of Berngard Petri, from which arose outstanding scientists including academician Aleksei Okladnikov, founder and director (1966–1981) of the Institute of History, Philology, and Philosophy of the Siberian Branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk, was well known (Sirina, 2013). A distinctive feature of the work of its successor, the Institute of Archeology and Ethnography of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, is an integrated approach to the study of the cultures and peoples of Siberia ranging from antiquity to the present—ethnographic research is inseparable from archeological, historical, folklore-linguistic, and sociological work (Oktyabrskaya, 2018, p. 193). In the second half of the 20th

century, the Tomsk ethnographic and linguistic school (Andrei Dulzon, Nadezhda Lukina, Vladimir Kulemzin, Galina Pelikh, etc.) arose at Tomsk university, from which a laboratory of social and anthropological research was developed. The Omsk school of ethnography (Nikolai Tomilov and his students) (Smirnova, 2019) was set up at Omsk University.

Another feature of Soviet Siberian studies was the purposeful training of scientists from among the Northern and Siberian peoples at the Institute of Peoples of the North (now the Herzen Russian State Pedagogical University) in Leningrad/St. Petersburg. The strengths of Indigenous scientists are language proficiency and their involvement in local social networks (Balzer, 1995). Some combine research with social and political activities, such as Nanai scholar Evdokiia Gaer (1934–2019).

The Tishkov epoch (1990–2015) fell in the period of *perestroika*, a time of dramatic socio-economic and political change and subsequent recovery in the country. In terms of research, I would single out two periods within this time: post-Soviet (1990–early 2000s) and current. Tishkov assesses the period of his leadership of the Institute “as one of the most fruitful in the history of Russian ethnology in terms of the formation of new subdisciplines, thematic repertoire and geography of research” (Tishkov, 2020, p. 72). Andrei Golovnev, one of the participants of this discussion has noted that constructivism, which has established itself in the last 30 years in Russian ethnology, is only one of the tools of cognition, not excluding, but complementing primordialist approaches (Golovnev, 2020, pp. 110, 112). Olga Artemova (2020, p. 98) went even further: “Methodologies should be different, and not selected from among those already available, but created for themselves.”

In the post-Soviet period, the Academy of Sciences’ privileged position in scientific research changed due to a funding reduction and the emergence of research universities, including private ones, such as the European University at St. Petersburg. While in Britain anthropology is gradually leaving universities (Vokes, 2014), in Russia there is a noticeable reverse movement of the transfer of research, including anthropological, to universities: e.g., Tomsk, Omsk, and Krasnoyarsk. After internal reforms, academic institutions are restructuring their work through greater openness to the world scientific community, links with universities and the Russian Geographical Society.

The revival of the Russian Geographical Society took place in 2000s, and the process of creating branches continues in those regions that have become industrial centers, for example, Khanty-Mansiysk (2005), and Naryn-Mar (2012), i.e., in the places of oil and gas production in the north of Western Siberia. In 2011, an ethnographic commission was recreated, which works in close contact with the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences; however, the priority direction of the RGS’s work has changed from research to popular science and education, including media projects.

Since the 1990s Indigenous science continued to develop in the national republics in Siberia, as well as Western Siberia, where hunters, fishermen and reindeer herders live alongside oil workers. For example, the Ob-Ugric Institute of Applied Research and Development in the Khanty-Mansiiskii autonomous okrug (1991) studies the languages, folklore, and culture of the Khanty, Mansi and Forest Nenets. The founding of the Institute was initiated by Professor of Tomsk University Nadezhda V. Lukina and Hungarian folklorist and ethnographer Eva Schmidt (Voldina and Ershov, 2017).

Schmidt began creating lingua-folklore archives, or research stations in places of compact residence of the Khanty and Mansi organized by the people themselves.

New actors who grew up during the years of post-Soviet reforms are participating in modern Russian Siberian studies. Development trends involve intensifying university and regional research through competitive financing of innovative scientific and organizational projects, and improving research funding through state funds, e.g., the Russian Science Foundation, created in 2013, and strengthening international cooperation in the educational and scientific fields. Scholars of Siberia, the RAS Corresponding Member Andrei Golovnev and Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor Dmitrii Funk, have become the directors of ethnographic institutes in St. Petersburg (2017) and Moscow (2019) respectively, which reflect the high level of Siberian studies in comparison with other regional ethnological research inside Russia and their involvement in the world anthropology.

SIBERIA AS A FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In the history of Russian ethnography, there is a long but uneven dialogue with the Western anthropological tradition. Since the 18th century, the nature and population of Siberia has been studied by a cosmopolitan cast of participants. The Soviet period in the development of anthropology is called the time of total isolation (Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015), although some foreign scientists from the 1960s to the 1980s managed to work in Siberia (V. Diószegi, E. Schmidt, P. Veresh, A. Kerezi, M. Balzer, C. Humphrey, P. Vitebsky). The Siberian field opened up to foreign scientists in the 1990s, at the very moment when research in Russia sharply declined due to the fall of the Soviet system and the ensuing socio-economic and ideological crisis in Russia. Objectively, this was the time of decentralization for Russian ethnography on one hand, and its gradual integration into world anthropology on the other—the process that repeated the political changes of the time.

As the tradition of Siberian studies in the West had been interrupted, young foreign scientists in the 1990s were rather cautious, but at the same time persistently mastered the Siberian field—formerly the domain of exclusively Soviet ethnographers—often discussing their plans and fieldwork results with their Russian colleagues. The latter also actively mastered Western anthropology, partly through direct scientific contacts. In Russia, it was a time of great expectations and hopes for cooperation with the West, and, in the wake of criticism of the Soviet system, a certain disregard for its own heritage and traditions. In Russia, the mastery of the intellectual potential of world anthropology is facilitated by translated literature, holding international seminars and internships, studying at foreign universities, as well as the transition of Russian universities to world standards (for more details, see Vakhtin, 2020). The standards of fieldwork in modern Russian Siberian studies, not without the influence of Western anthropology, have changed in some cases to 10–12 months.

During the 1990s, Russian Siberian scholars, in real-time communication with colleagues, discussed topical questions of fieldwork and research, and planned and implemented joint projects. Foreign colleagues have contributed to the decentralization of ethnology in Russia by establishing direct relations with Siberian scientific centers, mainly in the republics where a strong scientific base was created in Soviet

times. This allowed the representatives of Siberian science to almost simultaneously get in touch with Western partners just as metropolitan scientists did (Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015). Today the international composition of scientists in Siberian research has become the norm.

The results of ethnographic research are published not only in Russian but also in English, French, German, Japanese, and other languages. The work of international and national universities and scientific centers interested in the Arctic and Siberia, various streams of scientific literature and information indicate that national scientific traditions continue to exist, despite the trend towards the internationalization of Siberian research. At the universities of Cambridge, Versailles, Georgetown, Boise, Aberdeen, Hamburg, Vilnius, Tartu, Vienna, and others, centers for the anthropology of Siberia have developed. By now, in English-speaking anthropology, a self-sufficient cosmopolitan “ethnos,” or professional community, of Siberian scholars has been formed. Foreign colleagues, who began their careers as anthropologists in the 1990s and 2000s, have already become professors and supervise the training of graduate students; many continue to travel to Siberia to conduct field research, give lectures and organize methodological seminars.

RESEARCH TOPICS SINCE THE 1990S

The 7th International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, held on August 18–22, 1993, in Moscow, made a significant contribution to the convergence of Western and Russian anthropologists and ethnographers. The organizer for the Russian side Viktor A. Shnirelman, on the pages of the “Ethnographic Review” journal, voiced the question of the congress participant Professor Richard Lee about why Russian scientists preferred to actively discuss the problems of traditional rituals, rather than the burning socio-political problems of the modern North (Shnirelman, 1994, p. 141). Almost 30 years have passed since then, and the changes in this area are obvious. By the 2000s, a shift in research topics from individual peoples to the entire population and from the study of the past to the present and applied research has taken place, which was also facilitated by the policy of foreign foundations based in Russia (Vakhtin & Sirina, 2003; Gray et al., 2003). At the same time, the tradition of studying peoples has deep roots in Russia and is fueled by the realities of life and the demands of the multiethnic state. It exists along with new trends in modern ethnography, anthropology and sociology, creating hybrid forms of studying socio-cultural phenomena and processes.

The rapid and dramatic changes that took place in the North in the 1990s, communication with hunters and reindeer herders raised issues of socio-economic transformations for study, the analysis of new subjects of economic relations, e.g., “clan” communities, as well as regional legislation (e.g., Beach, Funk, & Sillanpää, 2009; Pivneva & Funk, 2005; Sillanpää, 2008). Most of the oil and gas fields and other non-renewable natural resources are located on the lands of traditional residence and economic activity of the peoples of the North and Siberia. Research in legal anthropology, anthropology of resources are associated with the growth of identity, problems of legal support for the protection of the rights of Indigenous peoples, building relationships with extractive companies, the development of methods of social and environmental impact assessment and monitoring, and the

anthropological study of business structures (see Wilson & Stammeler, 2007; Sirina, Yarlykapov, & Funk, 2008; Novikova, 2014, Funk et al., 2015; Golovnev et al., 2021, among others).

Since the late 1980s, there has been a rapprochement between anthropology and history in the West, and in Russia—history with anthropology. In this context, a study was carried out of the 1926–1927 Subpolar Census in Northern Russia, which collected unique materials on the condition and way of life of Northern peoples (Anderson, 2011, among others). The subject of the specifics of Siberian “mainland” colonialism in comparison with the colonialisms of other regions of the world (Schorkowitz, 2012) and Siberian identity remain relevant. Today the questions of neo-regionalism and “Siberianism” are raised in connection with the question of the place and role of Siberia and its inhabitants in current and future models of Russia’s development. These topics are associated with issues of ethnic and territorial identity (4,116 people called themselves “Siberians” in the 2010 census) and with the anthropology of a Siberian city (Basalaeva & Rozhansky, 2016).

Since the 1990s, internal and external migrations have intensified, and the socio-demographic situation in Russia in general and in Siberia in particular has changed dramatically. The decrease in the number of newcomers continues, due to migration to European Russia; intra-Siberian migrations from rural areas to cities have flourished, including that associated with shift work in the mining industry, tourism from Southeast Asia, etc. Some representatives of Indigenous peoples have moved to cities and towns, and in recent years to Central Russia, and this has become the subject of anthropological analysis (Khakhovskaya, 2014; Funk, 2014; Povoroznyuk & Funk, 2016, among others). Siberian regions are unevenly developed and have great socio-economic differences; socio-economic crises in rural areas coupled with unemployment has forced people to overexploit natural resources, via illegal forest logging, gold mining and collecting Red Book listed medicinal plants and offering them to interested southeastern markets (Davydov & Zhuravskaya, 2019). Anthropologists have also focused on issues of adapting modern technologies in hunting and reindeer herding communities.

Access to resources is associated with the development of new deposits, hard-to-reach areas, and the construction of infrastructure. The design and study of communication and supply routes for the north-eastern regions of the USSR took place during the years of industrialization in the 1920s–1930s, when gold-bearing deposits in the North-East of Siberia, and the Northern Sea Route were being developed. The study of the influence of infrastructure on various social groups has become the focus of the anthropology of infrastructure; anthropologists, sociologists and cultural geographers (Schweitzer et al., 2017; Kuklina et al., 2020; among others) all actively work in this area.

A new reality has emerged in the confessional field of Siberia. On 1990, the law No. 267-I “On freedom of conscience and religion” was adopted. Since that time, due to the socio-economic and ideological crisis and the weakening of the influence of traditional religions during the years of Soviet atheism, there has been an increase in the number of followers of various kinds of Protestantism, the Bahá’í religion, and the creation of eclectic religious systems based on shamanic practices, Burkhanism, and Tengrian concepts, etc. These processes affected the Indigenous peoples of Siberia—the Nenets, Khanty, Chukchi, and others—which became the focus of attention of

anthropologists, religious studies scholars, and sociologists (Kharitonova, Klyueva, Wiget and Balalaeva, Vagramenko, Znamensky, among others).

Traditionally, much attention has been paid to reindeer husbandry and mobility, including methods of orientation in space (Istomin & Dwyer, 2009), ethnogeography (Mamontova), the study of a mobile lifestyle, the relationship between humans and reindeer, and the material, social and spiritual aspects of reindeer husbandry (Brandišauskas, Davydov, Sántha, Safonova, Willerslev, Vitebsky, Alekseev among many others). Contemporary themes of Siberian ethnography are related to ecology, global climate change and its impact on local communities, and relations between humans and animals, local physics of snow and ice (Krupnik & Bogoslovskaya, 2016; Lavrillier & Gabyshev, 2017, among others). The questions of preservation of endangered languages, language shift, and folklore research are constantly in demand (Funk, Vakhtin, Kazakevich, Mamontova, Morozova, among others). The coronavirus pandemic and the return of a promising subject is the study of social ties between non-Indigenous Siberians and Indigenous peoples. Recently, there has been a tendency to strengthen interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, alliances of ethnography/anthropology with cultural and physical geography, demography, sociology, and linguistics.

International cooperation has enriched not only Russian, but also world anthropology, and made it possible to develop new research topics (Vitebsky & Alekseyev, 2015; Funk, 2017). Thus, in addition to contemporary research, an interest has arisen in historical and ethnographic problems: the origin of reindeer husbandry; population censuses in Siberia; shamanism and animism and their links to economy; and the anthropology of anthropology, e.g., the origin of the theory of ethnos, etc. Recording of Indigenous traditional knowledge in partnership with the local people continues (Kasten, Lavrillier, Gabyshev among others). The interaction of different scientific traditions within the Siberian field also remains an interesting theme for future research.

Returning to the discussion about the state of Russian ethnology with which this chapter began, we can say that, judging by the intensity of the scientific movement expressed in active fieldwork, interdisciplinary research, the formulation of new research topics, conferences, and publications, and international scientific exchange and cooperation, the development of Russian Siberian studies is distinguished by its dynamism. It flourishes due to the openness of the Siberian field and the international character of Siberian ethnography. International cooperation will only accelerate given the practice of virtual networks, international conferences, and funding if, of course, unforeseen circumstances do not interrupt this process.

NOTES

- 1 Russian ethnography officially changed its name in 1991, becoming ethnology, however today it is increasingly called anthropology. The change in names reflects different historical stages in the development of the discipline, the subject of research, and the level of integration of Russian ethnologists into the global scientific community. However, quite often all these terms are used in the Russian tradition as synonyms; except in certain cases, they will be used as such in this chapter. In addition, there are the terms Siberian Studies, Northern Studies, and Arctic Studies, indicating the regional nature of ethnographic research.

- 2 It is important to note that Far Eastern inhabitants do not call this part of Russia “Siberia.”
- 3 Russian abbreviation VSOIRGO.
- 4 Now The Russian Museum of Ethnography.

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CHAPTER 42

CYCLES OF CHANGE

Seasonality in the environmental history of Siberia



Spencer Abbe and Ryan Tucker Jones

Approximately 40,000 years ago, a woolly mammoth died on the Taymyr Peninsula in Northern Siberia. Its body, embalmed by the cycles of freezing and thawing which form the preconditions for life in the region, waited in slow stasis as the climate, the ecology, and the world above it transformed. By the time of its excavation in 1901 by Otto Herz, the ice sheets had retreated, new and unfamiliar forests and foliage had sprung up to replace that which still sat partially digested in the mammoth's frozen gut, and human beings, bit players during the animal's life, had created complex cultures and partnerships with wolves, reindeer, bears, cows, whales, and many others. In the short stretch of centuries before the mammoth was unearthed, human empires began to arrive in the world above the mammoth. The agents of these empires entered Siberia, first from the south and then from the west, and introduced great changes to the cycles of human and animal lives in the region. The mammoth, now termed, "the Berezovka Mammoth" was transferred via an arduous overland journey to a museum in St. Petersburg where it eventually became a museum exhibit. From its climate-controlled display it has observed the literal and figurative shifts of the unstable earth which had entombed and preserved it but also given it back up. From its exhibit perch, it saw the frozen earth become an object of study and an enemy to be defeated. It saw the descendants of those Siberian people it knew during its long-ago lifetime dwindle in numbers but persevere. Now, it watches as climate change drastically alters the cycles of change which form the shifting foundations of all Siberian life.

This brief history of the Berezovka Mammoth suggests a series of questions that the field of environmental history is well-placed to answer: how has Siberia's natural world shaped the history of its human inhabitants, and how in turn have they changed their environment? How have these more-than-human stories impacted relations between different human communities, especially between native Siberians and Russians? This chapter addresses these questions and others by focusing on changing seasonal cycles in Siberia's history.

Of course, to foreground the environment in Siberian history opens up an irresolvable methodological conundrum. The notion of Siberia as a coherent region and unit of analysis is very recent, invented by Russian colonizers. Thus, Siberia itself is an historical construct, and the term obscures as much or more than it reveals. As ecologists

and historians have noted, what we call Siberia contains a diversity of ecosystems and human histories, from permafrost to desert, from nomads to settled agriculturalists. Furthermore, no natural boundaries set Siberia off neatly from Central Asia, or, for that matter, European Russia. Many question whether the Russian Far East belongs at all to Siberia. Environmental history adds another layer—that of time—to the instability of Siberia, demonstrating that Siberia was not even itself in the past. And time, like the Kamchadal god *kutq*, is a trickster. As this chapter, a journey through two yearly Siberian cycles, shows, things that are lost often return and the only stable feature is a constant cycle of change.

WINTER

Siberia is situated atop several geologically and tectonically-complex formations. The contemporary landscape rests upon a series of blocks—vast sheets of rock atop tectonic plates—which are bound together by a series of fold belts at their borders (Koronovsky, 2002). These geologic features have defined the biomes which have sprouted atop them, shaping the influence of air currents and weather patterns that form the preconditions for human and animal life in Siberia. However, although many of the seismic changes which shaped Siberian geography occurred in the distant past, parts of Siberia, including Transbaikalia and Kamchatka, remain relatively active. Siberia's human inhabitants kept an awareness of these processes, personified by gods such *kutq*—associated with volcanoes—charismatic and unpredictable reminders that the world's cracking bones might reveal themselves at any time in spectacular and sometimes devastating fashion.

Atop this slow-churning geology the world changed at a more rapid pace. In the early Pleistocene, beginning around 2.7–2.1 million years ago, Siberia entered a period of cooling which would make negative winter temperatures the norm (Velichko & Spasskaya, 2002). However, coldness did not arrive as a steady freeze. Siberia's Pleistocene climate passed through a series of warming and cooling cycles which shifted the location of water, forcing vegetation and animal life to move and adapt to changing climates. Recent research into stomach contents of megafauna whose bodies were preserved in permafrost, including the Berezovka mammoth, has revealed that many were not able to adapt to the swiftly changing cycles of climactic change.

“The cyclic nature of climatic variations,” writes V. Ukraintseva, “with the alternation of cold and warm periods, imparted an undulating, pulsating character to the unidirectional course of evolution. Because of the unstable character of the environment of the Pleistocene, the populations of animals had no common strategy of adaptation to certain conditions, thus dooming several species, genera, and entire groups to a rapid extinction.”

(Ukraintseva, 2013)

These cyclical variations in climate have made Siberia no stranger to extinction, and point to the need to understand the smaller, annual cycles of seasonality which form the preconditions for Siberian life.

Eventually, the cooling of the Pleistocene reversed, and the warmer Holocene commenced, but although many ice sheets went with it, permafrost, and the cycle of seasons that maintained it, remained. Permafrost refers to the phenomena of water in the soil remaining frozen year-round. Since the Pleistocene, its presence has dominated the landscape of vast swaths of Siberia. Both the permafrost itself and the prevailing temperatures necessary to maintain it have produced diverse ecosystems, their variety structured by the extent to which the permafrost warms and cools at varying depths and at varying times. This diversity would shape Siberia's blossoming of human culture.

SPRING

In most of Siberia, the warmth of spring brings an annual thaw to the soil lying on top of the permafrost. This thaw releases large amounts of water locked into the soil during the course of the winter, drenching much of Siberia in temporary flood. It was the erosion of a river during a spring thaw that partially unearthed the Berezovka mammoth. At the same time, rivers which spend their winters covered in thick layers of ice are suddenly opened and spill enormous quantities of water north towards the Arctic Ocean. Although life thrives throughout the year in Siberia, the sudden influx of warmth and energy brought on by the planet's annual tilting towards the sun produces an explosion of biological activity.

Larches are some of the most common trees in contemporary Siberia, and they rely on this annual spring thaw to find nourishing ground for their roots. Through the process of cryoturbation, the cyclical freezing and thawing of upper layers of soil in permafrost regions produces micro-topographies of hummocks and troughs. When warmer weather arrives in the spring, the upper levels of the earthen hummocks warm faster than those below, shedding water which accumulates in the troughs between the mounds. In response, larches grow their roots preferentially towards the warmer soil of the hummocks and away from the colder, more water-logged troughs (Kajimoto, 2010). Larch forests growing in these permafrost-altered landscapes harbor more ecological niches and a greater diversity of larch-associated plants (A. Zyryanova et al., 2010). According to the 18th-century naturalist Stepan Krasheninnikov, these larch forests constituted the best habitats for sable, an animal that would be of central importance to the later human history of Siberia (Krasheninnikov, 2004). The decomposition of these larches and other vegetation, only possible during the annual warming, produces enormous gluts of mushrooms. These fruiting bodies of Siberia's fungal colonies are rich in nutrients and constitute an important part of the diets of Siberia's many reindeer herds and are consequently vital to the people who depend on those reindeer for survival.

Many questions remain about how humans first entered Siberia. They likely arrived in Southern Siberia around 40,000 years ago. Their populations may have grown particularly quickly during the long stretches between prolonged cold periods given that a larger number of archaeological sites appear to have occurred during a mild phase of these climatic cycles (Goebel, 2004). It was not until between 20,000 and 25,000 years ago that human beings appear to have moved into the Arctic north of Siberia (Goebel, 2004).

The presence of animals was of central importance to these early people, and over time this importance developed into complex and meaningful relationships with several species. First dogs, and much later herd animals such as reindeer and cows, came to be of particular importance. Approximately 8,000 years ago, people living around Lake Baikal began to inter their canine companions, including wolfish dogs, in graves. Later, dogs were buried with jewelry or amulets, indicating that they held some degree of cultural significance to their human companions who appear to have kept them well-fed with fish and other aquatic resources (Losey et al., 2013).

In the more recent past, pastoralism became a common way of life in Siberia. The specifics of pastoral cultures in Siberia vary widely in methods, animals, and their timelines of development. While practices varied widely, most of the people who have historically herded animals in Siberia did so according to seasonal cycles which ensured that both they and their herds had enough to eat. One such group, the Sakha, migrated to the middle Lena by the 14th century following their defeat by Genghis Khan. Raising cows at this latitude presented unique challenges, so the Sakha developed a strategy of spending their winters at higher elevations in order to avoid the annual spring floods before moving their cattle to summer pastures. In contrast to more southerly cattle cultures they consumed more meat, as the frozen earth allowed for the year-round storage of butchered animals in specialized underground structures (Crate, 2008). This cyclical seasonal migration in conjunction with the breeding of cold-hardy animals allowed for Sakha people to take advantage of Siberia's changing seasons to create a unique livelihood.

The spring thaw causes changes in Siberia's maritime regions as well. In the Sea of Okhotsk and the Bering Strait, both normally covered by sea ice for most of the year, the annual thaw permits whales' migrations to their spring and summer feeding and breeding grounds throughout the western Arctic, including Siberian waters. Whales and their long-distance migrations play a critical role in cycling nutrients throughout the Pacific world, and their annual arrival in Siberian waters connects Siberian ecosystems to the ecosystem of the broader Pacific (Demuth, 2019).

The annual spring thaw transforms both the earth and the "floating coast" of sea ice that annually covers most Siberian waters, but its relative regularity forms its own source of stability. It encourages life histories based on movement, flexibility, and adaptability that characterized Siberian humans and animals. The thaw demonstrates that the stability of seasonal cycles on which all life in Siberia depends is itself dependent on regular periods of instability. Humans who demanded uniformity from this landscape, then, were likely to come into conflict with the most important conditions of life in Siberia.

SUMMER

Beginning around the mid-15th century, fur-seeking humans came to Siberia in order to consolidate claims to valuable animals that had already been flowing out of the northern forests for centuries. In most cases those seeking furs articulated ideas of empire and commercialization that were becoming increasingly commonplace, although unevenly so, across the Eurasian continent. These fur-seeking cultures, the Russians in particular, followed cyclical patterns of their own depending on the demands of the environment. In the winter, they hunted and trapped for furs, waited

out the cold, or traveled along Siberia's frozen rivers. In the summer, they cultivated what food they could, and made overland journeys to places which were impassable in the colder months. Although their conquest of Siberia is often described as a linear "push" or "urge" from west to east, this movement constitutes only part of the story. Seasonal opportunities for trade and riches brought not only agents of the Russian Empire from the west, but also Mongol, Chinese, and Japanese conquerors and traders from the south and east. Many of these later actors were involved in the Santan trade, discussed more thoroughly elsewhere in this volume. Regardless of who they were or what they sought in Siberia, the annual change in seasons influenced the course of their trade and conquest as the availability of game, furs, food, and transportation fluctuated

The first evidence of a trade in Siberian furs is difficult to establish, but by the 11th century Cuman, Qipchaq, and Qangli nomadic groups were competing with the early state of Rus' for access to the furs of the northern forest (Di Cosmo et al., 2009). The first of these major fur-seeking cultures to arrive and consolidate power in Siberia came with the Mongol conquests. Following the tumult and destruction of the initial invasion, the sprawling Mongol domain was subsequently divided into constituent hoards and khanates, one of which was the Siberian Khanate, founded and centered on Tura (modern Tiumen) by Hajji-Muhammed Khan in 1427 (Di Cosmo et al., 2009). The rule of the Khanate changed hands several times between the Taybughids, a locally-rooted, more Islamic dynasty, and the Shibanids, a dynasty descended from Genghis Khan. The town of Sibir' was established sometime after 1493 during a period of Taybughid control following the destruction of Tura. Throughout this process, furs remained a critical item of commerce and the foundation of wealth for the northern region, where agriculture and the traditional pastoralism of lands further south and east had limited success.

When, in 1581, the Cossack adventurer Yermak Timofeovich led a small band to conquer and capture the town of Sibir, he set in motion the disintegration of the Khanate. The defeat of the Khanate allowed more Cossacks, agents of the Russian Tsar, to begin moving deeper into Siberia and establish a far-flung network of *ostrogi*, or forts, for the collection of a tax in furs, termed *yasak*. The exact nature of *yasak* varied widely, and often concealed both vicious acts of coercion and voluntary trade relations beneath the veneer of tribute (Bakhrushin, 2016). Regardless, furs remained the most important trade good throughout these interactions. Russian agents did not initially acquire the furs themselves. Instead, the standard practice was to take hostages in an *ostrog* to compel an annual delivery of pelts, particularly the pelts of sables who made their homes in Siberia's vast larch forests.

The melt and exuberance of Siberian summers brought both misery and opportunity to these agents of empire. During the summer, the thawing ground often turned into a thick mud that made overland travel challenging, and in parts of Northeastern Siberia heavy summer rains caused flash flooding which washed out already treacherous routes (Gibson, 1969). The standing water produced by the spring thaw resulted in vast summer swarms of mosquitoes which, at least in modern times, tend to emerge rapidly in June before declining precipitously in August (Mirzaeva et al., 2007). Mosquitoes were not the only wildlife travelers needed to worry about. Bears dogged Siberian caravans in great numbers into the 19th century. In their ravenous periods of eating between their long cycles of winter hibernation they acquired a taste

for the carcasses of the many pack animals that perished on the muddy, water-logged Siberian roads (Gibson, 1969). The hunger of bears and another large Siberian predator, the wolf, for meat also extended to more exotic fare: when Otto Herz's party labored to excavate the Berezovka mammoth through the late summer and early autumn of 1901 they found that wolves and bears had already eaten several large chunks of the 40,000-year-old carcass, storing away this long-preserved energy to survive the next seasonal cycle (Ukrainitseva, 2013).

Siberian summers did offer some solace to the empire. Summers were the only times of year trade caravans could make it through certain passes at all, particularly near the southern Russo-Chinese border (Stolberg, 2000). In the Far East and North the summer warmth opened the seas to travel, and allowed early Russian invaders to bypass Koryak defenses to the north of Kamchatka and access the peninsula by sea (Sgibnev, 1869). Summer was also the heart of the growing season for agricultural products. Although grain production in Siberia rose steadily between the 17th and 19th centuries as more peasants, clergy, and exiles migrated from European Russia and began cultivation, the short growing season remained a challenge. Frosts, which sometimes set in as early as late July in some regions, frequently stopped grain from ripening (Gibson, 1969). The annual cycles of grain cultivation often proved to be incompatible with Siberia's seasonal cycles, and frustrated Russian attempts to establish a firm hold on the vast land.

FALL

Siberia's quick and dramatic cycling of sun and water posed challenges to Russians, but the environmental consequences of their arrival proved to be devastating for many Indigenous inhabitants of Siberia. Autumn brought Siberia's first snows and began the crucial annual transformation that fueled the region's colonization, the growth of the sables' luxurious winter coats. The sable, once trapped and its fur peeled from its body, attracted buyers in Russia, but more importantly, brought fabulous profits in Western European and Chinese markets (Martin, 2004). Russian hunters in the early 18th century, working in tandem with dogs, would corner their quarry and use blunted arrows tipped with mammoth or walrus ivory to avoid damaging the creature's pelt (Bychkov & Jacobs, 1994). Just as often, it was native Siberians who did the hunting, their knowledge of local environments and the creatures' habits speeding their success and fueling a boom in trade and local wealth. Throughout Siberia, native people increased their domesticated reindeer herds, often in spectacular fashion, probably in response to new market opportunities offered by the influx of Russians (Krupnik, 1993).

The fur trade was conducted with such efficiency and thoroughness that sables were quickly eradicated anywhere they could be reached. The same occurred with the North Pacific's sea otters, which grew rare by 1800 (Jones, 2014). These declines prompted ever-more arduous excursions to find more, and disrupted native economies. A 1664 Sakha (Yakut) petition for relief from *yasak* pleaded, for example, "we travel to far-off places now, in every direction, because all of the animals have been killed and driven away" (Dmytryshyn et al., 1985). On the island of Sakhalin, the commercialization that accompanied the fur trade eroded Ainu political independence (Walker, 2001). The Japanese and Russian empires increasingly gathered

control over the island, despite the efforts of Ainu diplomats to acquire better terms and more equitable trade relations (Morris-Suzuki, 2020).

But the decline in carnivorous animals hardly brought the worst consequences for native Siberians. Instead, it was the smaller, disease-causing bacteria and viruses that traveled with colonizers that most permanently changed Siberia. Smallpox was the worst of the scourges. In 1633 servitors from Mangazeia in Western Siberia were unable to collect *yasak* because everyone they had hoped would pay had either died or fled from the disease (Slezkine, 1994). The 19th century naval historian A. Sgibnev wrote in a footnote that, “In 1691 almost the entire Yukaghir tribe died from smallpox.”, and in 1715 an army raised by several Koryak groups was forced to abandon its nearly-successful siege of the Olyutorsk *ostrog* by an outbreak of smallpox in their ranks (Sgibnev, 1869). Often, disease and conquest went hand-in-hand.

The damage of the conquest frequently produced other environmental impacts on Indigenous Siberians. In October of 1737, the Avachinsky volcano in Kamchatka erupted in a violent display of the earth’s instability, covering the surrounding area in several centimeters of ash. This eruption was followed early the next morning by an earthquake and a massive tsunami which, according to Krashenninikov, covered the eastern part of the peninsula to a depth of over two hundred feet (Krashenninikov, 1972). The tsunami obliterated the Itelmen communities on the coast while leaving the inland settlements of the Russians relatively unharmed. The destructive power of Kamchatka’s volcanoes was nothing new, but when combined with the disease, poverty, and violence brought by Russian colonization, it was devastating.

The Siberian autumn, in its undoing of summer’s exuberance, falls suddenly and ends just as abruptly. And, in the 19th century, many of Siberia’s native people rebounded in numbers, adapting quickly to the new political and ecological realities. But the yellow taiga foretold another ending. By the time Otto Herz returned from Siberia with his mammoth prize in the autumn of 1901, the Russian Empire was entering its own twilight.

WINTER

In one sense, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution inaugurated a new winter for Russia and Siberia. Thankfully, this was not the nuclear winter that Cold War scientists feared, and whose likeliest trigger may have been the “tsar bomba” detonated over Siberia’s Novaya Zemlya in 1961, still the largest thermonuclear blast in history. Instead, the Bolsheviks’ winter arrived in a more literal sense. Seeing in Siberia large, untapped sources of energy and metals, the Communist regime applied its growing technobureaucracy and collective enthusiasm to exploiting and populating the lands and seas east of the Urals. This fierce modernization imperative subjected more Russians to colder temperatures than ever before in their history.

In the 1930s, these movements were organized primarily through the GULAG and *Glavsevmorput’* (Main Northern Sea Route Administration), a transportation trust tasked with facilitating navigation across the north, as well as building labor camps. The camps were substantial. In 1936, for example, the Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk’s c. 200,000 inhabitants were outnumbered by surrounding forced labor settlements housing more than 300,000 workers, primarily catching fish, chopping timber, and building industrial and transport infrastructure (Hill &

Gaddy, 2003). In 1932, *Dal'stoi*, another large slave-labor administrative organization, founded the city of Magadan on the Sea of Okhotsk as a transport hub opening up the Kolyma gold fields to the largely unpopulated north. Through slow, frigid, often murderous labor, these unwilling immigrants changed the human and material face of Siberia.

While Premier Nikita Khrushchev's "Thaw" of the late 1950s and early 1960s may have warmed international relations and Moscow's cultural scene, the GULAG population peaked in the postwar years. And, even as the GULAG camps were cleared out in the 1960s, Siberia's Russian population growth continued. Many former inmates stayed in the region, now hired on as engineering and scientific specialists. In a lesser-known part of his 1956 "Secret Speech" denouncing Stalinism, Khrushchev also called for a focus on Siberia as a center of the Soviet Union's future economic development (Josephson, 1997). Soviet technocrats supported as wide a spread of economic activity as possible, for strategic as well as ideological reasons. In Siberia, those investments came primarily in the form of massive engineering projects designed to wring as many minerals and as much energy out of the land as possible, regardless of cost. The gigantic Bratsk reservoir and power station on the Angara River opened in 1963, though it proved too far from population centers to be very useful. It also flooded an area of timberland equal to the annual harvest of lumber in the surrounding Irkutsk province (Josephson et al., 2013).

Leonid Brezhnev, who assumed power in 1964, redoubled the eastward outlook, planning for 500% industrial growth in Siberia in the 1970s (Josephson et al., 2013). His Baikal-Amur Railroad project, initiated in 1974, brought tens of thousands of Russians to Siberia in what is often considered the Soviet Union's last great experiment with volunteerism, and which Brezhnev extolled as the "project of the century." Another contender for that title might be the grandiose Turukhanskaia Hydroelectric project that would have created the world's largest freshwater reservoir in the Evenki Autonomous Region, in the process destroying significant amounts of the Evenks' pastureland (Dronin & Francis, 2018). Like the equally audacious plans to reverse the flows of the Irtysh and Ob' rivers to provide more water to Central Asian cotton plantations, first proposed in the 1950s, the Turukhanskaia project was ultimately abandoned. But other hydroengineering schemes went forward, with the Krasnoyarsk Dam on the Yenisei River coming online in 1971 and temporarily claiming the title of the world's largest power plant.

While Moscow's engineers and bureaucrats planned many of these projects, in the classic colonial style Yadrintsev would have recognized, increasingly the science crucial to re-arranging Siberia's natural world came out of the region itself. In late 1958, in a former pine forest "surrounded by fields of berries, fruit trees, and medicinal herbs and grasses," not far from the newly-completed Novosibirsk hydroelectric power station, the new city of Akademgorodok opened its doors (Josephson, 1997). Mathematician Mikhail Alekseevich Lavrent'ev had planned the city as a novel gathering place for Soviet scientists from all fields, a leafy, well-funded suburban enclave where the brightest minds could meet and pursue creative new research. The Siberian scientists would achieve some outstanding successes. Dmitrii Beliaev's work with captive foxes used for the Siberian fur industry led to a new understanding of the genetics of domestication in the Soviet Union and throughout the world (Dugatkin & Trut, 2017). Akademgorodok also hosted world-leading research in

cybernetics, while providing crucial assistance to the megaprojects and industrialization of Siberian agriculture envisioned by Soviet leadership. Similarly, the Yakutsk Institute for Permafrost Science, founded in 1960, became a world leader in research on that unique Arctic environment, whose dynamics were so crucial to urban development in Siberia (Chu, 2020). Yakutsk also became a leading center of mammoth research, “thereby including a certain Indigenous component” in inquiries into that ancient inhabitant of Siberia. In 1977, on an abandoned GULAG camp, a Russian strip miner discovered a nearly perfectly intact baby mammoth. Nicknamed Dima, this forever child’s stomach contents provided rare insight into paleolithic fauna, and also traveled the world as advertisement for Siberia’s exoticism and the Soviets’ avant-garde role in modern science (Arzyutov, 2019).

The creation of Akademgorodok and other scientific institutes helped facilitate the increase of the Russian population in Siberia. Led by explosive population growth in nearby Novosibirsk, along with other booming Siberian cities such as Omsk, the Soviet Union became a colder place for more people. With an average January temperature of -19°C , Novosibirsk alone contributed 5% of Russia’s per capita coldness (Hill & Gaddy, 2003). Coldness came with costs, as it dramatically increased the difficulties of working with industrial equipment. And, while many Indigenous Siberians possess cold-adapted genes which help the body’s fat stores produce heat, Russians typically do not, and therefore require more expensive infrastructure to live comfortable urban lives (Balter, 2013; Cardona et al., 2014). Only generous, often uncounted, subsidies from Moscow allowed this transformation of Siberia’s human population and its landscapes, an infusion of external energy every bit as transformative as the Russian Empire’s earlier withdrawal of furs.

SPRING

From one perspective, Siberia’s Soviet history might resemble the monochromatic white tableau of snow-covered tundra and taiga tundra in winter. But, as with the hidden networks of life below the frozen surface, the region’s environmental history, too, coursed with freshets of regeneration. Most famously, the roots of a nascent Soviet environmentalist movement have often been traced to Siberia’s blue heart, Lake Baikal. In the late 1950s, Akademgorodok scientists helped lay plans for a large paper mill on the lake’s shores. As part of another plan to increase electrical power generation, one scientist, N. A. Grigorovich, proposed dynamiting parts of the Baikal shore to increase its outflow. Grigorovich projected that water would rush out from the lake continuously for four years, dropping its level five meters and producing billions of kilowatt hours of power (Breyfogle, 2015). But, the audacity of the plan awoke opposition, first among fellow scientists. Ichthyologists noted the damage that drainage would do to the lake’s endemic fish. Even some of the normally aggressively instrumentalist Soviet economists and engineers quailed at the sacrifices the lake was being called on to make. As one scientist put it, “Every sober-minded person will be against [the plan]. Baikal is Nature’s unique gift to us ... We have no right to ravish [its] harmony and beauty” (quoted in Breyfogle, 2015). Not only did the tide turn against Grigorovich’s plan, but a conference of scientists proposed that the Soviet government make Baikal into a nature preserve, saving it from all future development.

That would prove to be a lengthy battle. But, over the next decade, a series of threats to Baikal—most importantly industrial pollution, but also run off from logging, overfishing, poaching, and problems associated with hydropower—galvanized a unique partnership between Soviet scientists, literary figures, and regular citizens. All extolled the unique virtues of the lake, the largest, deepest, and clearest in the world, and they invoked Soviets’ patriotic duty to preserve this renowned symbol of the country. “Glorified in many songs and legends,” one biologist wrote, “Baikal is dear to the Soviet people as the embodiment of the severe and sublime nature of Siberia” (Skalon, 1959). Letters to similar effect poured into Moscow planning ministries. Early successes, though, met reverses in the late 1960s, when several cellulose and pulp mills were built on the shore without promised cleaning apparatuses and began discharging pollutants. Dead zones soon appeared in the lake (Breyfogle, 2015). Baikal remained prominent in Soviet environmentalist circles through the 1980s, though more as cause célèbre than triumph.

However, protesters fared better elsewhere. Scientists, again, led opposition to the Northern Rivers Diversion Project, which, if implemented, would likely have permanently adjusted the Arctic Ocean’s temperature and salinity, and thus the climate in the Antarctic and by extension the entire globe (Darst, 1998). Some in the Politburo continued to back the project through 1984, but it died a final death with Mikhail Gorbachev’s ascension to power. Moreover, the proud pre-revolutionary tradition of *zapovedniki*, or nature reserves, survived mostly intact through the Soviet period. Barguzin *zapovednik*, established on the eastern side of Baikal in one of the richest sable regions in Siberia, was reduced in size in 1951, but restored in 1958. Tourism to Barguzin and other Siberian *zapovedniki* increased from the 1960s and helped generate broad support for a large national park on Baikal’s shores, a dream finally realized in 1986 (Roe, 2020).

The *zapovednik* system expanded in the Russian Far East as well, where the country found particular successes in rehabilitating the Siberian tiger population. In the 1930s, biologist Lev Kaplanov had estimated that, thanks to uncontrolled hunting, tiger numbers had fallen to a few dozen (Kaplanov, 1948). Amur leopards were similarly rare. In 1947, though, Stalin’s government outlawed trophy hunting of Siberian tigers and banned their live capture a few years later. After another period of rampant poaching shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, new Russian laws dramatically increased the number of federally-protected acres in the Far East, creating, amongst others, Bikin National Park, the “largest protected area for any tiger subspecies anywhere in the world” (Slaght, 2020). Perhaps 600 Siberian tigers inhabit Russian territory today, though Amur leopards have failed to make a similar comeback. As of 2015, their global population was thought to be only 84 individuals (Vitkalova et al., 2018). Still, even sables have in recent years been increasing in number, despite increased competition from invasive species like the American mink, introduced as another source of furs (Leont’ev, 2012a).

Russian explorer and novelist Vladimir Arsen’ev first drew national attention to the Siberian tiger through his lyrical evocations of the Sikhote-Alin mountains and his lament for the destruction of local forests and wildlife. His novel, *Dersu Uzala*, published in 1923, might be considered the first example of Soviet Siberian eco-literature. “Village prose” authors picked up Arsenev’s thread in the 1960s, first around the Baikal protests. Most prominently, Valentin Rasputin, born near Irkutsk, penned

a series of polemical novels decrying the impact of Soviet industrialization on the Siberian natural world. His 1979 novel, *Farewell to Matyora*, focused on the devastation the Angara hydroelectric dam wrought by flooding nearby villages. As Rasputin portentously began the novel, contrasting the cyclical time he perceived as natural to Siberia with the catastrophic disjuncture of Soviet prometheanism: “Once more spring had come, once more in the never-ending cycle, but for Matyora this spring would be the last” (Rasputin, 1991). Siberia’s nature was being recast as in danger of irreversible disjuncture. Around the same time Chukchi novelist Yurii Rytkheu wrote a series of novels drawing on traditional Chukchi environmental values that played a role in growing Russian opposition to commercial whaling. Still, there were limits to the movement. Rasputin’s passion for Siberian landscapes, and his identification of Siberia with true Russianness, later devolved into anti-Semitism, and no real successor to his ecocritical vision emerged in Siberia after the Soviet Union’s demise. Siberian ecocriticism, much like Siberian environmentalism, experienced a springtime but no summer.

SUMMER

Summer in Siberia is brief, but intense. Since the 1960s, it has also become notably warmer. In 2020, the mercury in the town of Verkhoyansk, located above the Arctic Circle, hit 100.4 °F (Machemer, 2020). Siberia as a whole has experienced a greater degree of warming (1.39 °C increase over the last century) than any other region in the Northern Hemisphere, greater even than the Arctic (Groisman et al., 2012). The atmospheric changes have written themselves into Siberia’s biosphere; populations of Manchurian deer, and many other animals, have marched inexorably north (Leont’ev, 2012b). The southern boundaries of Siberia are increasingly being converted to steppe, while larch forests expand northward, though at a slower rate than desertification (Tchebakova, Rehfeldt, & Parfenova, 2010). As with most temperate regions around the globe, the warming temperatures have also brought increased rainfall. Unfortunately for those invested in agriculture, Siberia’s extra rain has come almost entirely during intense storms in the winter months, while summers have seen longer droughts. As a result, Siberia’s water budget has actually decreased (Groisman et al., 2012).

The most immediate impact of these changes on humans has been the increasing length of the fire season in Siberia (Ivanova, 1996). While large forest fires were relatively rare during Soviet times, the post-Soviet years have seen the most dramatic change (Katamura et al., 2009). The 2019 and 2020 summer fire seasons were unprecedented in their intensity, as fires around Krasnoyarsk, Buryatia, and the Sakha Republic burned more than seven million acres and sent smoke across the Bering Strait to North America. The fires raised worries that the extraordinary amounts of CO₂ locked in Siberia’s peat permafrost would soon be released into the atmosphere, causing potentially catastrophic feedback loops of ever-increasing atmospheric warming (Demuth, 2020).

If the climate change driving Siberia’s fires, like the science used to understand them, mostly came from outside, this was not entirely the case. In the early 1960s, scientists and geologists, including some from Akademgorodok, succeeded in convincing Moscow to invest in tapping Northwestern Siberia’s oil reserves, or as Alan

Wood puts it, “to embark on yet another round of robbing Siberia of its hidden riches” (Wood, 2011; Tysiachniouk & Olimpieva, 2019). Since the 1968 discovery of the Samotlor oilfield, Siberia extraction of oil and gas has grown to become the world’s largest. Other discoveries, especially in the ocean off Sakhalin, have added to that total. Drilling in Sakhalin threatens to bring to extinction the last of the endangered Western Pacific grey whales, while that in Western Siberia has spilled oil into watercourses and burned tundra that fed reindeer, impacts felt particularly keenly by Siberia’s Indigenous people.

FALL

Any hard division between Siberia’s long-term Indigenous inhabitants and Soviet people disappeared after the 1930s. In the late-20th century, for example, many of Sakhalin’s Nivkh insisted that they had become as Soviet as any Russian (Grant, 1995). Early Soviet efforts at environmental transformation had as a secondary aim the “modernization” of Siberian natives, to be achieved primarily through the collectivization of their labor. In 1930s Chukotka, commissars collectivized walrus hunting and fox trapping, which in fact had little impact on activities that had already been communal (Demuth, 2019). Nivkh salmon harvesting seemed similarly amenable to collective labor (Grant, 1995). The main change for both groups was the ever-increasing demand for production the Soviet state made on them. Amongst reindeer-herding people such as the Evenki, however, Soviet intervention struck at the heart of their close relationships with individual animals. Instead of submitting to collectivization, they slaughtered perhaps a third of the entire Siberian reindeer population (Grant, 1995). While some, like the Yamal Nenets, were able to escape collectivization and maintain private herds, the Evenki were not. After collectivization was completed and nomadism outlawed, “the taiga became a giant open-air meat factory and the care of reindeer was isolated from the family and reduced to a worker’s job like any other” (Stammler, 2005; Vitebsky, 2005). Buryats too destroyed cows to resist colonization; there, human, as well as animal numbers plunged in the 1930s, part of a larger, mostly hidden story of direct and indirect Stalinist violence towards Siberian natives (Reid, 2002).

Khrushchev’s “village consolidation” scheme of the 1960s redoubled Indigenous Siberians’ dislocation. Shuttering hundreds of villages throughout Siberia, the forced movement of people into industrialized urban centers severed longstanding ties with local environments. It also separated Siberians from seasonal time, with the electricity from hydropower projects and nuclear reactors replacing migration as a primary response to changes in the seasons. These revolutions did not always mean reductions in natural abundance. Gains were seen in reindeer and walrus numbers, now managed mostly through socialist scientific planning. By the 1980s, most of the collectives had been consolidated into gigantic state-run enterprises, and many native Siberians worked not on the land, but as industrial, fox, pig, or cattle farmers, or in the offices of the growing cities consisting of Russian-style houses poorly adapted to the cold and permafrost (Lavrillier, Aurore Dumont, & Donatas Brandišausakas, 2018; Slezkine, 1994).

Despite some modest efforts to hire native Siberians, other extractive industries mostly bypassed them, relying on transient Russian laborers and leaving the locals to deal with the consequences (Slezkine, 1994). Such was the case with the diamond

industry in the Sakha Republic, which started in the 1950s. It improved the Soviet international balance of trade, while leaching sediments and heavy metals into local watercourses. In addition, the Soviets used nuclear explosions to assist mining operations, two of which released radiation into regions inhabited by Sakha (Tichotsky, 2000).

Nonetheless, many important features of Siberians' relationships with their abundant homelands persisted, and many more adapted to new circumstances. For the Evenki, the transformations of the 20th century did not rob the land of its spirits but did seem to increase the number of malign spirits, "since various rites of respect were neglected for a half century during the Soviet era" (Braundisaukas, 2018). Siberia's natural world has, in other words, become less of a welcoming home to some. In Chukotka, on the other hand, the last decades of Soviet rule saw renewed pride in local environmental traditions, and the end of communism allowed Chukchi and Yupik to re-learn lost ways of living from the ocean. In the 1990s, with the assistance of cross-Strait Yupik and Iñupiat brethren in Alaska, they began again whaling for themselves (Nielson, n.d.; Albert, n.d.). There, the seasons had turned, returning Chukchi to lifeways nearly forgotten, lifeways once again dependent upon the freezing of the sea ice, its summer thaw, and the return, every summer, of the whales.

CONCLUSION

In 1996, Russian scientist Sergey Zimov, procured the first acres of Siberian tundra in northern Yakutia for his planned "Pleistocene Park." The park would serve as a new homeland for animals once common in Siberia's grasslands, including—if genetic science ever allows it—the return of woolly mammoths. The plans have met resistance, not least from native Siberians, who fear tangling too closely with Siberia's barely-submerged spirits (Arzyutov, 2019). But Zimov's goals for Pleistocene Park are more ambitious than Frankensteinian experimentation or attracting tourists. Zimov and other scientists hope that, by reducing Siberia's forest cover, the massive herbivores will encourage the growth of grasses that capture extraordinarily large amounts of CO₂. If successful, the park could play a role in reversing global warming on a similar scale, as Siberian peat would heat the planet if the permafrost were to melt (Anderson, 2017). Pleistocene Park, in other words, is an attempt to ensure that winter again follows the long summer of the Holocene, that Siberia's life continues to respond to the familiar cycles of the seasons. About this future, Siberia's environmental history can offer little guidance. It suggests only that change is likely to be unpredictable, stability elusive, and that relics of the past will resurface.

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INDEX



- accountability 157–158, 160, 163, 165
- accounting 6, 157, 159, 163–164, 249
- adaptation 10, 16, 19–20, 93, 137, 170, 175, 179, 181–183, 186–188, 191, 197, 243, 316, 320, 330, 396, 416, 444, 511, 608
- affix 85–87
- Agan 358, 515
- age 34, 36, 44, 51, 128, 171, 201, 208, 212–213, 239, 264, 288–289, 291, 314, 321n2, 380–381, 465, 523, 554, 580; Bronze 194, 565–566, 568, 577–578; Golden 354, 359–360, 422, 435, 444; Ice 184, 293, 296n1, 554; Iron 566, 577; Neolithic 194, 563, 566–567, 577; Paleolithic 15, 551–558, 563, 566–567, 577, 615
- agency 18, 104, 125, 153, 236, 279, 365, 374, 401, 424, 450, 574
- agriculture 27, 176, 188–189, 197, 253, 262, 266, 267, 309, 322, 352, 361, 379, 611, 615, 617
- alaas 180–181, 183–185, 187, 321n5
- alcohol 8–9, 278, 285–297, 302, 423, 426, 469, 509
- Altai, Republic of 7, 13, 26, 192, 240, 261–263, 266, 268, 270, 446–458, 487, 521, 526, 552, 565, 577–578, 591, 606
- Amguema 5, 111–119, 499
- Amur River 15, 531–532, 534–536, 538–542, 545, 580
- Amurskaia oblast' 139, 141, 143, 145, 146, 150–153, 376
- Amur-Yakutsk Mainline 370
- an-2 383
- Anabarskii ulus 299–301, 304
- Anadyr (city) 49, 57–59, 111
- ancestors 13–15, 17, 20, 68, 98–100, 102, 104, 106, 114, 119, 123, 146, 151n3, 181, 199–200, 205, 220, 229, 287, 293, 315, 321n1, 433, 436, 439–444, 488–490, 492, 495–498, 531–535, 543, 545, 565, 569, 588
- animism 25, 28, 109, 432, 463, 499–500, 573, 574, 585, 601
- animist 15, 19–20, 490, 493; ontology theory 564, 569–570
- Arctic 1, 5–7, 10, 13–14, 31, 34–35, 40, 49, 98, 101, 104, 106–107, 126, 166–168, 170, 181, 183, 186, 233, 273–274, 276–277, 279–281, 282n7, 282n8, 285–286, 289, 291, 293–297, 299–301, 304–306, 345, 348, 352, 357–358, 361–362, 374n1, 380, 407–408, 416, 418–419, 421, 440, 444n1, 461, 463, 465, 467, 469, 471n1, 501, 505, 552–553, 577, 599, 601n1, 609–610, 615–617
- Arctic Circle 31, 286, 361, 407, 617
- Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) 34, 166, 176
- Arkhangel'sk (city) 97, 361, 413–414
- art 15, 111, 165, 203, 228, 308, 331, 338, 449, 549, 552–553, 555, 559–561, 563, 565–586, 605
- authenticity 20, 438, 478–480, 482, 504, 571
- autonomy 11, 179, 228, 276, 281, 325–327, 329, 333–337, 446, 448–451, 453–458, 500, 591
- Azerbaijan 226, 340
- Baikal (lake) 14, 165, 329–330, 332, 334–335, 337–339, 368, 374, 376, 553, 564–565, 595, 610, 615–616

- Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) 143, 245,
327, 337, 364–377, 388, 418; builders
(*bamovtsy*) 371, 373
- Baikal region 165, 329, 334, 339, 564–565
- Baranskii, N.N. (researcher) 360
- barter 290, 297, 307, 342, 407, 412, 422
- bear 14, 60, 87–88, 196, 242, 262, 297,
366, 412, 478, 504, 512–515, 524–525,
544–545
- Belikov D.N. (Orthodox missionary) 261,
265, 270–271
- Berezovka (village) 37, 40, 43, 607–609, 612
- bezdorozh'e* (roadlessness) *see* roads
- black market 8, 302
- blacksmith 99
- boarding school 36–37, 45, 50–52, 71, 74,
111, 251, 283, 465, 469
- Bogoras, V. (researcher) 68, 492–493,
495, 603
- Bolshevik Revolution 10, 36, 249, 261, 265,
270, 332, 455, 503, 509, 576, 588,
592, 613
- booze breath 290–291
- boreal forest 181, 205
- boundary 124, 140, 145, 149, 150, 153,
160, 163, 193, 222, 264, 270, 280, 284,
291, 329–330, 335, 350, 383, 397, 432,
491, 497, 603, 608, 617
- Bourdieu, P. (researcher) 291, 296, 422, 425
- brain-drain 238
- Bratsk 353, 614
- Brezhnev, L. (politician) 366, 369, 374–375,
377, 614
- Brezhnev era 366
- brigade(s) 111, 119, 167–169, 171, 248,
253, 300, 305, 331, 367
- Bukhtarma (valley) 262
- Buryat (people) 3, 14, 19, 194, 196, 197,
234–240, 243n10, 243n11, 243n15,
243n17, 371, 441, 458, 506, 517–519,
521–522, 524–526, 564, 575, 590, 592
- Buryatia, Republic of 8–9, 14, 20, 192–193,
202n8, 232–242, 242n1, 242n9, 243n13,
243n18, 325, 434, 517, 520, 524–525,
582, 617
- business 57, 130–131, 156, 235, 249, 319,
343–344, 346, 352, 362n5, 380–382,
385–386, 396, 407, 409, 412–413, 420–422,
485, 520, 536, 538, 542, 544, 600
- café 346, 436, 441
- capitalism 115, 163–165, 234, 242, 247,
249–252, 254, 257, 307, 415
- capitalist 62, 247–248, 250, 298, 533
- cartography 80, 94, 203
- cattle 7, 180–183, 187–188, 192–194,
197–202, 262, 431, 436, 517, 519–521,
525, 575–577, 588, 610; *see also* cow
- Caucasus 31, 340, 347, 350
- central Siberia 9, 93, 139, 192, 407, 506
- Chasovennye* *see* Old Believers
- Chechnya, Republic of 340
- China 1, 15, 282, 451, 453, 485, 532, 534,
539, 541, 544–545, 566, 584
- Christianization 219, 225, 471–472
- chronotope 403
- Chukchi (people) 4, 14, 19, 37, 48–61, 68,
111, 113–117, 186, 292–294, 295n2,
444n1, 471n1, 489–492, 495–497, 498n1,
498n3, 502, 567, 570, 617, 619
- Chukotka (administrative region) 5, 9, 21,
25, 36, 39, 47–49, 51–53, 55, 57, 59, 68,
77, 110–113, 115, 117–118, 285–295,
297, 349, 418–419, 425, 491, 498–499,
502, 506, 567, 570, 572, 594, 618–619
- Chukotka-Kamchatkan 65–67
- Chukotskii autonomous okrug 39, 57, 296n5
- chum* *see* dwellings
- circle dance 226, 436, 503
- civic initiatives 237, 242
- civil society 8–9, 241–245
- clan commune 6, 139–144, 146–152n9, 157,
330–332
- clan enterprise 130–131
- climate change 6–7, 10, 16, 21, 37, 43,
166–167, 170–173, 175, 179–181, 184,
312, 316, 338, 601, 607, 617
- collaboration 4, 21, 23, 41, 44, 65, 68, 76,
83, 94, 170, 310, 312, 589
- collective farm (*kolkhoz*) 193–194, 198,
238, 246, 248, 252–254, 257, 299, 325,
336, 371, 418, 520–521
- collectivization 5, 50, 111, 247–248,
266–267, 371, 468, 592, 618
- Commissariat for Internal Affairs *see* NKVD
- commodification 347, 511
- commodity 66, 288, 290, 359, 406, 415,
535, 539
- commune 151, 157, 159
- communication 18, 39, 43, 73, 97, 99,
104, 107n2, 156, 175, 213, 215, 220,
229, 238, 270, 274, 281, 283n14, 312,
317–321, 325–326, 342, 353, 405–406,
408, 417, 419, 422, 424, 431, 441–442,
444, 481, 504, 589, 598–600
- communism 9, 27, 108, 244–245, 247, 252,
278, 308, 351, 459, 468, 619
- Communist Party 247, 374, 468
- cooking 5, 90, 96, 98, 100, 106, 110–119,
222–223, 270, 301, 333, 342

- cooperatives 147, 249, 317, 506, 508
corporate social responsibility 12, 273–274, 277, 378, 388–392
cosmology 83, 433, 466, 578, 582
COVID-19 229, 320
cow 21, 311, 313, 315–317, 320–321, 520–522, 576–577; *see also* cattle
crane 219–223, 229, 322
cuisine 75, 112, 117, 343, 346–348
cultural revitalization 20, 70, 78, 219, 228–229, 511
curriculum 69
customary law 6, 123–137, 146, 149, 576
- Dagestan, Republic of 11, 18, 340–348
dance 38, 43, 219–221, 225–226, 229, 292, 436, 440, 483, 503, 514, 565, 567
Danilov, A. N. (linguist) 68
Darkhad (people) 193, 200–201
decollectivization 309
deforestation 327
demography 601
diamond mining 300
dictionary 65–66, 69, 72, 75, 445
diet 110, 112, 114, 117, 158
Dikson (town) 11, 353, 408
disconnection 381
discrimination 136, 342, 344, 367, 387
Dobrova-Iadrintseva, L. (researcher) 259
Dolgan (people) 133, 300, 309, 337
domestication 181, 187, 192, 337, 489, 500, 526, 580, 614
Dubches River 262
Dudinka (city) 351, 356, 361, 408, 413
Dukha (people) 197, 203, 519, 527
dwellings 2, 17, 51, 82, 175, 187, 300, 326–327, 329, 331–335, 440, 443, 550, 559, 585; Chukchi reindeer-hide tent (*iaranga*) 51, 112–115, 117, 119, 291; reindeer-hide tent (*chum*) 96, 100–103, 105–106, 166; yurt 327
Dzeltulakskii raion (administrative territory) 364
- East Siberia 15, 93, 165, 204, 215, 364, 514, 553, 584–585
eating practices 114, 116, 119
ecological adaptations 181, 185
ecological knowledge 7, 16, 27, 138, 206, 214–216, 316, 322
ecological security 283
economic collapse 354
economic insecurity 298
economics 21, 253, 259, 502, 531, 533, 535, 537, 539, 541, 543, 545, 547, 592
ecotours 236
- elder 55, 76, 196–197, 222, 248, 252, 268, 271, 311, 313–315, 317–318, 321, 347, 479, 494, 496
embeddedness 157, 295
Emel'ianov, A. F. (Soviet ideology worker) 262, 267, 272
emotions 107, 114, 285, 291, 338, 397, 522, 582
employment 10, 31–32, 38, 131, 239, 302, 315, 341–342, 369, 373, 600; opportunistic informal jobs (*khaltura*) 302, 305, 307; unemployment 51, 234, 240
Enets (people) 105, 194
enterprise (company) 6, 9, 111, 123, 130–131, 156–159, 161, 164, 168–169, 174, 274–275, 278–279, 282, 295n4, 298–300, 330, 355, 358–359, 379, 387–388, 414n5, 420
entrepreneurship 125, 131–132, 135, 137
environment 5–7, 15–17, 21, 76, 92, 116–119, 127–129, 145, 151, 162, 171, 179–188, 206–208, 210, 212–213, 221, 223, 225, 234–235, 278, 286, 311, 325–328, 331, 353, 357, 360, 367, 417, 421–422, 431–432, 448, 469, 497, 502, 504, 517, 552, 576, 589, 593, 607–608, 610, 615; language environment 70–71
environmental: change 7, 25, 175, 186, 188; degradation 175, 189, 327, 522
epic performer (*olonkhosut*) 222, 438
epic song (*olonkho*) 100, 108, 220–225, 227–228, 230, 432–433, 435, 438, 444, 450, 503, 576–577
Erkuta (micro-region in Yamal) 168–170, 174
ethanol 287–290, 295; *see also* alcohol
ethnicity 36, 196, 227, 233, 235–236, 241, 242n5, 287, 342, 345, 446, 448, 451, 505, 511
ethnographic analogy 564, 570, 571
ethnography 1, 9, 15, 20–24, 79–80, 87, 157–158, 241, 310–313, 315, 317, 319, 394, 449, 533, 536, 541, 564, 577, 578, 580, 583n7, 587–599, 601n1; climate 312; multispecies 199
Evangelical Christian-Baptist community 13, 20, 27, 165, 292, 461, 469, 471, 473–474
Even (language) 4, 39, 43
Even (people) 40
Evenki (language) 94, 101
Evenki (people) 79, 81, 94, 156–157, 372, 502, 576
- Far East 13, 33, 127–128, 140, 145, 150, 152n3, 352, 366, 369, 475, 485, 498,

- 525, 531, 546, 575, 577, 588, 591, 596,
602n2, 608, 612, 616
federal authorities' representative (*federaly*)
280–281
fence 50, 159–160, 252–253, 255, 328–329
fermentation 295
festival 8, 20, 59, 75, 159–160, 220, 229,
231, 310, 313, 347, 432, 500–507,
509–510, 513–516
fieldwork 9, 37, 64–65, 68, 73, 113, 129,
143, 156–158, 164, 167, 170, 205, 232,
242n1, 255, 271n8, 277, 282n14, 295,
301, 341, 365, 469, 498n1, 506, 512n2,
587, 594, 598
fire 5, 18, 46, 96–109, 113, 119, 212, 333,
390, 440, 442, 479, 489, 494–496, 581,
617; forest 102, 104, 190; ritual 442
firewood 85, 97–98, 100, 104, 211–212,
252–253, 255, 311, 328, 332, 334
fishing 6, 10, 21, 25, 37, 43, 48, 50, 75,
79, 97, 99, 104, 112, 118, 143, 146,
148–149, 167, 180, 182–183, 186–187,
200, 202, 254, 278, 286, 299–307, 332,
336, 356, 393–403, 406, 408, 411–414,
423–424, 502, 506, 517, 551, 579, 588;
illegal fishing 12, 125, 128, 130–135
floating shop 421, 423–424
folk ballet 220, 221
folk dancers 227
folklore 5, 13, 24–27, 43, 94, 99, 104,
108–109, 230, 296–297, 310, 415, 432,
447, 449–451, 456, 469, 472, 502–503,
510, 513–516, 521, 576, 578, 589, 591,
593, 595–598, 601
food 5, 11, 21, 34, 36, 181–182, 224,
251, 294, 304–306, 518–519, 525, 533,
535, 559, 611; food consumption 5,
315–316, 507; food nostalgia 18, 105;
food preparation 110, 116–119, 495; food
preservation 5, 100, 110–118, 327; food
production 10, 315–316; food sharing 8,
131, 264, 341–348, 502; food supply 38,
158, 162–163, 185, 249, 333–336, 342,
359, 408–409; food transfers 342–348;
gathering 5, 8–9, 21, 116–119, 162, 188,
197, 202n8, 247, 311, 401, 452, 457,
502, 588, 599, 614
foraging 117–118, 174, 181–182, 214–215,
254, 329; *see also* gathering
Forest Nenets (people) 97
fuel 97, 273–274, 302, 305–307, 327, 333,
336, 384, 406, 410–411, 422, 432, 444
garbage 246, 253, 255, 302
gas 9, 11, 18, 142, 150, 168, 175–177,
247, 273–274, 284, 287, 290, 340, 352,
357–359, 361, 363, 378–379, 382, 384,
388–392, 405, 418, 421, 424, 426, 469,
508, 597, 599, 603, 606, 618
gatherings 18, 43, 59, 65–66, 68–77, 110,
293–294, 452, 457, 614
gender 8, 10, 36, 110, 243, 245, 261–272,
288–289, 292, 380–381, 397, 444, 467,
508, 512
gender identity 397
gender imbalance 36, 265
gender roles 269, 289
geographical imagination 234
geologists 277–278, 333, 357–358, 360,
371, 409–411, 413, 421, 469, 617
glavsevmorput' *see* Main Northern Sea
Route Administration
global warming 1, 44, 172, 184, 187, 189,
191, 421, 619
globalization 3–4, 7, 10, 25, 44, 48, 93, 120,
170, 189, 245, 275, 316, 320–321, 390
gorod'ba *see* fence
governance 25, 27–28, 123, 126, 130, 138,
223, 249–250, 275–276, 281, 322, 330,
382, 536
governmental control 275, 280, 283, 408
grammar 50, 52, 56, 62, 73, 573, 591
grammatical structure 48
Great Ob waterway 417
Gubkinsky (city) 357–358
Gulf of Ob 171–173, 273, 280–281, 422
halal 345, 347
health 34, 38, 44, 70, 172, 173, 176–177,
226, 245, 292, 296–297, 342, 385, 401,
438, 463, 466, 496
hearth 5, 94, 96, 98–102, 106, 109,
113, 313
highly-educated people 13, 239, 294, 372,
407, 434, 447–452, 454–455, 458, 511,
583, 591
Holocene 184, 187, 609, 619
home brew (*braga*) 287
Horace (poet) 256
horse-herding 199, 225
household 10, 34, 112, 166–167, 172–175,
192, 197–200, 207, 246, 251, 253, 258,
261, 265–267, 299, 313, 315–318, 394,
421, 423–424, 523, 535, 556, 559
human-animal 193, 195, 197, 199, 201,
203, 499, 567
human-environment 2, 185–186, 190, 486
human rights 126, 127, 135
humor 56, 57, 64, 73, 292
hunting 5–11, 21, 48, 128–129, 133–135,
156, 158–159, 162, 164n3, 180, 182–183,
186, 188, 197–198, 200, 202n8, 247,

- 254, 257, 267, 269, 286, 299–307, 314, 320, 331–334, 336, 371, 406, 408–409, 412–414, 423, 489, 497, 502, 506–508, 517–518, 523, 525–526, 553, 570, 588, 599–600, 618; big-game hunting 303, 616; hunting bases 300, 302, 329, 333; hunting licenses 10, 148, 303–306, 413; hunting luck/magic 85, 99, 106, 393–394, 397, 401, 466, 578–582; hunting territories 87–91, 139–148, 151; sable hunting 205–206, 208, 210–213
- Husky, Lee (economist) 353, 363
- hydrocarbon 166, 175, 177, 273
- hydrological networks 4, 79
- hydronym 18, 91
- iaranga* (Chukchi reindeer hide tent) *see* dwellings
- identity politics 27, 220–221
- Iengrinskii Evenki National nasleg 150
- Igarka (city) 354–357, 359–363, 424
- illegal fishing 12, 125, 130–132, 399
- illegal hunting 413
- immobility 381, 387
- indigenous business 156
- indigenous elite 250, 458
- indigenous entrepreneurship 125, 130–132, 137
- indigenous knowledge 25, 45, 82, 131, 179, 181, 215, 312, 322, 433, 513, 573, 582, 603
- indigenous minorities 32–33, 152, 371, 444, 509, 531, 588
- indigenous rights 133, 135, 145, 151, 392, 512
- indigenous settlement 299
- indigenous small-numbered people 133, 135n1, 300
- industrial development 1, 10, 21, 23, 140, 142, 145–146, 151, 173, 175–176, 327, 332, 352
- industrialization 5–7, 38, 267, 275, 352–354, 356, 366, 593, 600, 617
- industry 137, 175, 226, 233, 253–254, 284, 325, 352, 354, 359, 361, 378–379, 382, 388, 391, 396, 405, 411, 418–421, 561, 592, 600, 606, 614, 619
- informal economy 298, 344, 349–350
- infrastructural violence 12, 18, 381, 391
- infrastructure 10–12, 18, 23, 150, 175, 187, 247, 274–275, 277–279, 281, 282n4, 325–327, 330–334, 340–348, 354, 356–357, 360, 365–367, 372, 374, 378–381, 383, 386–388, 406–409, 412, 414n3, 416–424, 467, 491, 600, 613, 615
- Ingold, T. (researcher) 6, 16–17, 92, 117, 119, 125, 171, 175, 192, 213, 223, 286, 327, 402–403, 417, 422, 424, 489, 497, 517, 569
- innovation(s) 10, 111, 119, 185, 197, 325, 329, 330, 336, 357, 360, 476, 510, 551
- intelligentsia* *see* highly-educated people
- intentionality 125, 400–401, 463
- internat* *see* boarding school
- International Finance Corporation 382, 389
- International Labour Organization (ILO) 125–126
- Irkutsk (city) 7, 94, 196, 200, 203–205, 231, 243, 330, 339, 359, 363, 378, 385, 386, 388, 391, 426, 561, 585, 590, 591, 596, 602–605, 614, 616
- Irkutskaiia oblast' (administrative region) 12, 193, 201, 378, 383
- Islam 228, 344, 349, 432; *see also* Islamic dynasty
- Islamic dynasty 611; *see also* Islam
- Itelmen (language) 64–70, 72–74, 77
- Itelmen (people) 3–4, 18, 21, 48, 65–77, 588, 594, 613
- Iul'tinskii raion (administrative region) 5, 111, 118
- Izvestiia* (newspaper) 232
- Jack London effect 11, 354, 359–360
- jade 156–159, 162, 165; *see also* jade-mining enterprise
- jade-mining enterprise 6; *see also* jade
- jargon 49–50, 61
- Jesup North Pacific Expedition 68, 592
- Jochelson, V. (ethnographer) 68–69, 73–74, 78, 587, 592, 594
- joke(s) *see* humor
- Kaa-Khem (administrative region) 262–263, 267–268, 270
- Kaitag 341
- Kaitag Dargins (people) 340
- kaiury* *see* mushers
- Kalarskii raion (administrative region) 144–151, 371
- Kamasin (people) 199
- Kamchatka 4, 20–21, 48, 52, 65, 68–70, 75–77, 491, 498n1, 503, 533, 536, 552, 594–595, 608, 612–613; Kamchatka Peninsula 64, 67–68, 498
- Katanga Evenkis 205, 214
- Katonga 246–248, 250, 252–255, 257
- Khabarovskii krai (administrative territory) 4, 13, 79, 475, 481, 485n1, 541
- Khaloimova, K.N. (researcher) 69, 72–73, 77
- khaltura* (opportunistic informal jobs) *see* employment

- Khan, Genghis 453, 591, 610–611
 Khan Oïrot (people) 451–452, 456
 Khanty (people) 98, 129, 464, 465, 471, 503–506, 512, 533, 567, 578, 588, 595, 598, 600
 Khanty-Mansi autonomous okrug (KhMAO) (administrative region) 97, 340–343, 347–348, 356, 358, 361, 505, 597
 Khanty-Mansiysk (city) 356, 357, 597
 Khasavyurt (city) 341, 357
khoton (cow barn) 187, 315–317
 Khudiakov, I. (researcher) 224–225
 Kindigir Evenkis (people) 335
 kinship 16–17, 83, 299, 305–306, 439, 471, 509; grandmother (*babushka*) 268–269
 Kirensk (town) 386
 Kirovsk (town) 352–353
 knowledge co-production *see* collaboration
 Kogalym (city) 358, 361, 362
 Kola Peninsula 97, 329, 505–506, 508
kolkhoz *see* collective farm
 Kol'tsov, N.V. (historian) 268, 271
Komsomol 367–368, 374n2, 487
korennye malochislennye narody severa (KMNS) *see* indigenous minorities
 Kosmachov, K.P. (geographer) 356
 Krashenninnikov, S. (naturalist) 68, 73, 609
 Krasnoyarsk (city) 133, 249, 597, 617
 Krasnoyarsk dam 614
 Krasnoyarskii krai 97, 246, 261, 262, 356, 557; *see also* Krasnoyarsk territory
 Krasnoyarsk territory 93; *see also* Krasnoyarskii krai
 Krugman, P. (economist) 360
 Krushchev, N.S. (political leader) 514, 521
 kulak 251, 468
kul'tbaza (protected cultural subsistence zone) 197, 467
 Kumyks (people) 340, 343
 Kyndygyr (Evenki shaman) 335
 Kyzyl (city) 267–268
 Labytnangi (town) 170, 356, 418
 land 2–6, 13, 16, 18, 21, 34–35, 37, 99, 126–127, 129, 134, 139–141, 143, 145–150, 152n9, 158, 164n3, 166, 168, 173, 175, 183, 185–187, 201–202, 205, 221, 233, 242n5, 267, 275–279, 282–283, 303, 306, 326, 329–331, 343, 348, 372, 402, 408, 416–417, 420–422, 447, 451–452, 455, 463–464, 466–469, 494, 508, 521, 545, 592–593, 612, 614, 618–619; allocated 147, 447; ancestral 139–140, 146, 148, 150, 202n8; hunting 146–148, 151; Indigenous 140, 447, 508; *obshchina* 139–142, 147–148; pasture 198; property 233, 242; rights 6, 139–140, 143; state 330; traditional 6, 23, 371
 landscape 4, 7, 11–12, 16, 21, 35, 80, 83, 85, 87–88, 91–92, 99, 110, 118–119, 167, 170, 180, 183–184, 192, 198, 200–201, 206, 213, 221, 229, 255, 304, 313, 327, 329, 332–333, 335, 366, 369, 373, 394, 397, 399, 402–403, 410–411, 416–418, 422–424, 431, 449–450, 452, 463, 469, 471, 549, 551–552, 569, 582, 588, 608–610, 615, 617
 language 1–5, 13–14, 16, 18–22, 32–44, 47–61, 64–76, 78, 81, 85, 92, 97–98, 101, 106–107, 128–129, 151, 180, 192, 194, 198–199, 222, 233, 235, 256, 258, 262, 265, 271, 290, 310, 330, 372, 394, 402, 446, 455, 457–458, 461, 465, 467, 476–477, 482, 485, 488, 491, 541, 549, 576–577, 588–591, 593, 597, 599, 601; change(s) 3, 18, 39; documentation 3, 4, 64–66, 68, 73–76; families 3, 55, 65–67, 97, 194, 457; learner(s) 51, 66, 74; learning 59, 66, 68, 75; majority 32–33, 36, 54; minority 22, 33, 39, 41, 60–61, 233; policy 32–33, 47; revitalization 2–4, 18, 22, 64–66, 76–77; shift 4, 33, 36, 38, 41, 47–48, 50, 53–54, 61, 76, 194, 271, 601; vitality 3, 4, 31, 33, 35, 38, 39, 44
 larch (*Larix sibirica*) 80, 180, 183–184, 313, 579, 581, 584, 609, 611, 617
 late Soviet period 33, 258, 263, 357
 law 2, 5, 6, 21–22, 32, 39, 121–135, 140–141, 143, 145–152, 215, 235, 242, 264–265, 270–271, 274, 283, 313, 346, 417, 424, 465, 469, 479, 576, 600; federal 22, 127–128, 133–134, 141, 143, 145, 150, 235, 274, 424; international 125; personal 125; territorial 125; *see also* legislation
 legal anthropology 6, 123–124, 599
 legal pluralism 123–124
 legal system 6, 23, 124–127, 130, 134, 135; *see also* law
 legislation 21, 123–125, 127–128, 131–133, 135, 138–141, 143, 145–146, 149, 151–152, 276, 280, 300, 304, 599; federal 128, 139–141, 143, 151; regional 139, 143, 146, 151, 599; *see also* law
 Lena expedition 379, 389, 583
 Lena River 7, 180–181, 184, 378–379, 383, 385, 432, 440, 443, 565, 575, 577–579
 Lenin, V. I. (politician) 247, 457
 Leonidov, I. (architect) 355
 Lezgins (people) 340
 linguistics 34, 64–65, 67, 69, 593, 595, 601

- luck 5, 12, 85, 106, 118, 129, 162, 208,
219, 305, 319, 393–394, 397, 401–403,
466, 502, 580, 581, 583–584
- Magadan (city) 352–353, 358, 361, 614
- Main Northern Sea Route Administration
259, 613
- Makhachkala (city) 341
- map-making 80, 82, 87; *see also* maps;
mapping
- mapping 80, 82, 87, 420; *see also* maps;
map-making
- maps 4, 24, 79–83, 87, 91, 325, 423; *see
also* mapping; map-making
- marshrutka* 379, 385; *see also* minibus
- Marxist political economy 251–252
- master spirits 326, 328, 335, 579
- materiality 255, 286, 295, 491
- materiality turn 295
- Mauss, M. (researcher) 250, 550
- megaproject 366–368, 371, 418
- memories 73–74, 83, 114–116, 268, 310,
313–314, 380, 434, 447, 481, 504, 522
- methodology 123, 157–158, 241, 348, 380,
394, 510, 591, 593
- Middendorff, A. (researcher) 225
- migrant(s) 11, 32, 243, 340–348, 365–367,
370–371, 443; community 342, 346,
348; emigrant economic practices 344;
immigrant groups 32; immigrants
31–33, 40, 614; infrastructure 346–348;
network(s) 345–348; translocal 342;
transmigrant(s) 341, 348; transmigrant
infrastructure 345
- migration(s) 4, 7, 20, 23, 31, 34, 38, 43,
79–81, 110, 168, 171, 173, 174, 193,
199, 208, 237–240, 243, 249, 254, 304,
326, 332, 335–337, 340–343, 345–348,
465, 502, 545, 549, 553–554, 576–577,
582, 600, 610, 618; immigration 32, 34;
immigration policies 545; infrastructure
326, 341, 348; out-migration 32, 34, 55,
239, 315–316; patterns 167, 327; youth
out-migration 320
- minibus 379, 383, 385
- minimalism 335
- mining 6, 142–143, 150, 156, 158, 266,
269, 300, 325, 340, 352, 356, 370, 406,
591, 600, 619
- Mirnyi (city) 364, 383
- missionaries 13, 221, 461, 463, 465–467,
470–471, 589, 590; Christian 13, 471;
Evangelical 13, 471; mobility 2–3, 10–12,
17–18, 48, 79–80, 82, 167, 174, 181,
209–210, 212, 233, 240, 241, 304, 323,
325–337, 341, 345, 374, 378, 380–381,
384, 386–388, 416, 421–422, 424, 601;
Orthodox 464, 466–467; Pentecostal 13;
Protestant 464, 469–470
- modern Chukchi (language) 4, 19, 51–53,
55, 57
- modernity 247–248, 252
- modernization 10, 48, 182, 263, 266–267,
269, 330, 366, 368–369, 372, 374,
442–443, 469, 504–505, 613, 618
- Mordy-Iakha (micro region in Yamal)
168–171, 174
- Mordy-Iakha River 168
- morphology 54, 55, 65, 67, 72, 83, 254
- Moscow (city) 33, 59, 143–144, 149, 237,
240, 242, 276–277, 303, 372, 378, 405,
455, 457–458, 485, 587, 590, 593–596,
598–599, 615–617
- mosque 343, 347, 349
- Mountain Shoria 261–262, 264, 266
- Murmansk 358, 505, 508
- musher(s) 325
- myth 163, 222, 363, 444, 453
- mythology 456, 503, 578
- Nadym (city) 357
- naming 4, 18, 79–81, 87–88, 92, 97, 491
- Nanai (people) 13, 20, 36, 475–486, 534,
541, 588, 597
- narrative 13, 18, 73–74, 81, 83, 90, 93, 109,
115, 164, 170–171, 222–223, 227, 248,
251, 254, 256, 261, 273, 278, 281, 311,
381, 451
- Naryan-Mar (city) 352, 597
- nation 97, 123, 126, 135, 167, 193, 228,
234, 236, 274, 364, 434, 457, 517, 592
- national identity 20, 219, 221, 589
- national intelligentsia 294
- national revival 8, 219
- national villages 366
- native villages 343, 506
- nature-on-the-move 179, 182, 185–188
- navigation 4, 79, 81–82, 87–88, 92, 173,
211–212, 280–281, 352, 360, 411,
423–424, 613
- Nenets (language) 97
- Nenets (people) 5, 7, 13, 18, 20–21,
96–107n1, 128–129, 133–134, 136,
166–168, 170–176, 194, 273, 276, 279,
283, 293, 340, 356, 408, 416, 418–419,
461–471, 489, 503, 505–508, 592,
596–597, 600, 618
- Nenetskii autonomous okrug
(administrative region) 97
- Neriungri (city) 79, 82, 370
- Neriungriinskii raion (administrative region)
141–142, 144, 146–147

- Nersesians, V.L. (legal scholar) 124, 132–135
 Nganasan (people) 104, 194, 408, 461, 502, 578, 588
 NGOs 9, 233, 240–242
 Niurundukan River 329
 Nivkh (people) 36, 132, 504, 531–535, 541–545, 567, 594, 618
 Nizhnevartovsk (city) 357–358, 362
 NKVD 248, 250
 Nogai 344
 nomadic camps 83, 168, 246, 447, 451
 nomadism 166, 174, 180, 331, 371, 465, 526, 618
 nomads 96, 164, 167, 170–171, 173–175, 182, 325, 371, 454, 458, 464, 466, 468–471, 518–519, 608
 non-capitalist development 247–248, 250
 non-compliant behavior 394, 396; *see also* non-compliant practices
 non-compliant practices 393, 399; *see also* non-compliant behavior
 non-human beings/agents 5, 6, 14, 18–19, 79, 81, 117–118, 186, 221, 285, 359, 366, 463, 469–491, 502, 504, 568, 570
 Noril'sk (city) 352–353, 356–358, 360–362, 408–411, 413
 Noril'sk industrial district (administrative region) 362n4
 North Caucasus 340
 northern Baikal Evenki (people) 330, 332, 335
 Northern Sea Route (NSR) 274, 276, 280–282, 354, 418, 600, 613
 Northwest Siberia 416–417, 421, 424
 nostalgia 18, 21, 24, 110, 114–115, 247, 252, 373
 Novyi Urengoi (city) 282, 341, 343, 345–347, 356–357, 362
 Noyabrsk (city) 357–358, 362

 Ob Bay 168, 174, 418
 Ob River 12, 168, 174, 394, 396, 399, 403, 417–418, 421–422, 614
 Ob River basin 418, 422
obshchina *see* clan commune, clan enterprise
 offerings 83, 227, 463, 466, 468–469, 492–493, 507–508, 518, 576–577, 579, 582–584
obuokhai *see* circle dance
 oil 11–12, 18, 38, 97, 129, 142, 150, 173, 247, 273, 275, 340, 352, 356–359, 361, 369, 372, 378–389, 418, 424, 452, 469, 494, 506, 508, 597, 599, 617–618
 oil industry 379, 382, 388
 Oirot (people) 13, 446–449, 451–458

 Oiunskii, P. (poet) 222
 Oka (region) 14, 192–194, 198–202, 517–526
 Oka Buriats (people) 14, 517–518, 520, 524–526
 Oka Soiots (people) 14, 194, 199–201, 517–518, 522, 525
 Okinskii raion (administrative region) 14, 192, 201, 517–525
 Okladnikov, A.P. (archaeologist) 564, 577–580, 582–584, 596
 Old Believers 10, 261–271
 Olekma region 577–579, 581, 583; *see also* Olekma
 Olekma River basin 333, 566, 575–576, 579, 583, 584n11
 Olekminskii ulus (administrative region) 141–142, 144, 328
olonkho *see* epic, epic performer
 Olonnokon River 328
 orientalism 251
 Orthodox Church 261, 265, 278, 282, 432, 450, 464, 466–467, 469, 471, 589, 590
 otherness 249–250, 257–258
 other-than-human(s) 5, 18–19, 81–82, 568, 570

 pastoralism 21, 181–183, 187, 197–198, 200–201, 312, 610–611
 pasture 10, 49, 134, 140, 147–150, 166, 168, 171, 173–175, 181, 187, 198, 200–202, 316–318, 330, 332, 334, 368, 371, 421, 465, 502, 520, 610, 614
 paternalism 251, 279, 281; neopaternalism 275, 281
 Pechora Sea 418
 people with disabilities 232
peregar *see* booze breath
perestroika 234, 354, 367, 379, 383, 411, 413, 431–432, 491, 597
 performance 13, 75, 219, 226–228, 261, 269, 281, 378, 382, 386, 389, 420, 423, 434, 503, 505
 performative arts 228
 periphery 234, 357, 369, 433, 454, 458, 510–511
 permafrost 1, 7, 21, 31, 37–38, 107, 179–180, 182–184, 188, 246, 310, 312, 361, 367, 386, 408, 608–609, 615, 617–619
 Petri, B. E. (researcher) 196–197, 199, 201, 204, 592, 596
 Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky (city) 68, 70, 75
 phobias 342
 place (location/space) 8, 12, 16–17, 19, 21–22, 32, 35, 37, 39, 55, 59, 70, 79–92, 96, 98, 100–101, 104–105, 110–111,

- 131, 140, 145–146, 148–149, 156, 158, 162, 167, 185, 197, 206–207, 221, 228, 234, 252, 261, 264, 266–267, 269, 274, 277–278, 287, 289, 291–293, 295n1, 307, 311, 320, 325–337, 340–341, 343–344, 346, 348, 353–354, 359, 364, 370, 379, 394–401, 403, 405, 408–410, 417, 420, 424, 432–433, 437, 440–443, 465–468, 475–476, 480, 484–485, 489–494, 501, 504, 507, 509–510, 518, 520–521, 523–524, 526, 539, 551, 557, 569, 571, 575–576, 578, 581, 584, 594, 597–598, 611–612, 614–615; displacement 35, 49, 119; sacred 96, 98, 125, 506–507, 524; workplace 238, 385
 place name(s) 79–88, 91–92, 167, 185; *see also* toponym
 Pleistocene epoch 181, 552, 608–609, 619
 poaching 132, 150, 305, 616
 Podkamennaia Tunguska River 246, 248, 262
 Pokachi (city) 341, 346
 Polar Census 24, 196, 202, 250; *see also* Subpolar Census
 political anthropology 232–233
 polysynthesis 60
 Popov, A. A. (researcher) 224, 596
 population 1, 5–6, 8, 11, 15, 31–32, 34–40, 43, 48, 57, 87, 111, 117, 124–128, 130–132, 134–135, 142, 145, 166–167, 179, 182–183, 185, 193–194, 199, 201, 225–226, 228, 234, 237–239, 242n8, 243n13, 249, 262–263, 275, 279–281, 283n16, 286, 289, 290, 292, 295, 298–301, 305, 315, 317, 320, 325, 332, 336, 341, 347, 353, 356, 362, 365–367, 369–373, 379, 382–383, 388, 389n5, 408, 416, 418, 420, 424, 431–432, 440–441, 444n1–2, 446–447, 454, 456, 458, 465, 467, 470, 483, 485n2, 490, 510, 524, 545–546, 551, 553–554, 582, 583n1, 588, 590, 598–599, 601, 608, 614–618; sable 206, 208; yak 201
 population growth 185, 238, 614–615
 post-*perestroika* 411, 413, 491
 post-socialism 232–233
 primitive production unit(s) 248, 252
 property 88, 125, 140, 213, 233, 242, 252, 280–281, 329, 337, 395, 452, 512, 518, 544
 protective factors 4, 35, 38, 43
 public place(s) 228, 291, 292
 public sphere 8, 167, 240, 242, 507
 publicity 8–9, 232–235, 237, 239–243, 289, 292, 398–399, 435, 450
 Pushkin, A. S. (poet) 256–257
 Pyr'-Yakh (city) 341
 quota(s) 131, 298
 Raduzhnyi (city) 346
 reciprocity 132, 306, 345, 348, 463, 489
 reflection 12, 14, 61, 104, 151, 328, 434, 458, 517, 526, 550, 589, 592
 refrigerator 5, 110–112, 115–116, 119, 343
 reindeer 5–7, 11, 13–14, 17–18, 37–38, 48–50, 52–53, 56–57, 61, 79, 81, 83, 85, 88, 90, 96–101, 104–105, 107, 110–119, 128–129, 139–140, 142–143, 145, 147–150, 156–162, 166–176, 180–183, 186–187, 192–194, 196–201, 205, 209–213, 233, 246, 248, 250–254, 258, 273, 277–279, 283, 286–287, 291–292, 294–295, 299–301, 303–307, 325–334, 336–337, 365–366, 368, 371–372, 408, 410–411, 416, 420–421, 461, 463–466, 468–471, 488–498, 502–503, 505–510, 519, 521–526, 552–553, 576–577, 579–585, 588, 595–597, 599–601, 607, 609–610, 612, 618; wild 174, 213, 303–306, 408, 579, 581, 584n13
 reindeer domestication 181, 187, 192, 200, 580
 reindeer farm 156, 158–159, 162, 330
 reindeer herder, day of 14, 505, 506, 510
 reindeer herding 6–7, 11, 48–50, 52, 79, 97, 111, 115, 119, 139, 142–143, 145, 147, 156, 158–159, 167–175, 180–182, 186–187, 194, 197, 199, 251–254, 273, 286–287, 294–295, 299–300, 304–306, 329, 331, 336, 371, 489, 495, 498, 502, 505–506, 508, 577, 580, 595, 600, 618
 reindeer meat 100, 158, 300, 303–304, 307, 495, 497
 reindeer slaughter 488, 494
 reindeer transport 325
 religiosity 344, 463, 468, 476
 religious movements 13, 432
 religious sacrifice *see* offerings
 remoteness 142, 281, 325, 342, 345, 361, 372, 374, 388, 406
 research collaborative *see* collaboration
 research methods 66, 123–125, 170, 394
 resilience 14, 60, 128, 166, 192, 201, 322, 342, 508
 revitalization *see* cultural revitalization
 Revolution of 1917 *see* Bolshevik Revolution
 risk 173–174, 394, 396–397, 399, 570; prevention 397, 400, 402
 rites 5, 19, 50, 96–99, 101, 106–107, 441, 470, 502, 519, 619
 rituals 3, 5, 13–14, 19, 96, 103, 243, 261, 266, 269, 271, 341, 432–435, 437–441, 443–444, 461, 463, 465, 467–471, 479,

- 489–492, 495, 502–505, 507, 509, 519,
525, 544, 563, 576, 578–584, 599
rivers 1, 4, 17–18, 79–83, 85–92, 104, 119,
171, 182, 194, 198, 238, 251, 302–303,
329, 409, 411, 416–420, 423–424, 519,
578–579, 609, 611, 614, 616
road(s) 12, 18, 150, 156, 159, 168, 255,
276–277, 283n14, 319, 325, 327, 373–374,
378–379, 381, 384–388, 405–412,
414n4, 414n6, 416–421, 424, 519, 612;
crossroads 43, 200, 358, 364; railroads
366, 368–369, 372; *rasputitsa* (period
when roads become impassable or difficult
to pass) 185; roadlessness (*bezdorozh'e*)
18, 24, 27, 405–406, 415, 425; roadside
246; winter road (*zimnik*) 12, 142, 176,
193, 276, 356, 383, 405–414, 417,
419–421, 424
ruin(s) 246, 252–253, 255, 258, 577
rural communities 270, 287–290, 345,
387, 407
Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of
the North 279
Russian Empire 8, 19, 193, 225, 248, 262,
417, 446–448, 451–452, 531, 545, 576,
578, 590, 611–613, 615
Russian Federation 4, 8–9, 19, 22, 31–33,
44, 59, 97, 125–128, 133–134, 135n2,
140, 147, 152, 196, 205, 219–220, 235,
241–242, 249, 280, 282, 295, 299, 319,
356, 424–425, 453, 531, 541, 588
Russian language 3, 47, 290, 330, 372,
461, 467

Saami *see* Sami
Sabetta 9, 168–170, 173–174, 276–283
sable hunting 7, 207–208, 254
Sakha *see* Republic of Sakha, Sakha
language, and Sakha people
Sakha (language) 32–33, 38–39, 310
Sakha (people) 9, 20, 33, 179–185,
188, 219–225, 227–228, 231, 431,
436–437, 610
Sakha, Republic of 4, 9, 18–21, 31–40, 43,
52, 79, 98, 141–146, 151, 219, 299–300,
304, 306, 310–311, 383, 503, 582, 591,
617, 619
Sakhalin Island 504, 531, 533–534
Salekhard (city) 357
salmon 75–76, 618
Samara 276
Sami 35, 170–171, 329, 578
samogon (moonshine) 287, 289, 295
Samoyedic languages 97, 194, 589
Sayan–Altai Region 7, 192–193, 524,
569, 595
Sayan Mountains 521, 552
schools 22, 36, 47, 50, 69, 75, 134, 247,
257, 267, 279, 300, 302, 305, 386,
434–435, 449–450, 458, 465, 468, 508,
587, 593, 595–596
seasonality 15, 327, 344, 607–608
sedentarization 180, 247, 302, 304, 306,
330, 336
Selenga raion (administrative region) 242n1
Sergeev, M. A. (researcher) 247–249
Severobaikal'sk 370
Severobaikal'skii raion (administrative
region) 371
shaman 23, 81, 105–106, 335, 432–435,
438–441, 444, 466–468, 475, 477–483,
485, 522, 564–567, 571
shamanic practice 439, 476–478, 481, 484
shamanic ritual 468, 565, 567
shamanism 13, 15, 20, 192, 194, 228,
432–435, 438–439, 441, 443, 444n2, 447,
449–451, 453, 463, 467, 469, 475–476,
478, 481, 484–485, 490, 502, 517, 519,
522, 524, 563–571, 596, 601
sharing 8, 10, 52, 77, 92, 98, 149, 162,
229n3, 250, 266, 278, 288, 305–306,
310, 382, 388, 476, 491, 502, 508,
579, 581
shift work 331, 361, 364, 600
shift workers 9, 273, 279
Shirokogoroff, S. (researcher) 80–82, 91,
335, 477, 583n7, 592, 596
shortage(s) 251, 253–254, 289, 298, 306,
367, 447, 539
Siberian Center for the Support of Social
Initiatives (SCSSI) 232, 236
Siberian Yupik (people) 48–50, 59, 61, 500,
594, 619
Sibiriakov, I. (goldminer) 583n1
Sibiriakov's expedition 576
singer(s) 76, 222, 227, 264
singing 59, 73, 76, 85, 219, 222, 451, 477
single-industry cities 354
Skachko, A. (Soviet administrator) 249–250
skill(s) 12, 80–81, 101, 116–118, 128,
174, 205, 212, 227–228, 235–236, 251,
266, 269–270, 275, 311, 325–326, 331,
335–336, 354, 357, 360, 362n1, 387,
399, 406–414, 417, 421, 470, 504, 508,
550, 557
skilled labor 275, 357
Slavin, S. V. (economist) 357, 372, 418
smartphones 65, 305
snow ecology 7, 174, 208–213, 506
snowmobiles 174, 209–212, 279,
283n15, 287, 301–302, 304–307, 385,
411–413, 508

- social constructivism 247, 597
social control 16, 291
social evolution 247
social hierarchy 278, 295, 444, 510
social marginalization 194, 373, 381
social media 40, 320, 441
social networks 10, 22–23, 43, 55, 241,
271n11, 312, 318, 320–321, 341, 345,
348, 431, 444, 597
social norms 23
social organization 2, 92, 134–135, 179, 311
social responsibility 12, 132, 273–274, 277,
378, 388, 389n1, 389n9
social status 287–288, 293, 535, 545, 591
Socialism 233, 247, 255, 257–258, 263,
298, 421, 448, 450, 452, 454–455,
468, 546
Soiot people 7, 14, 192–201, 202n8,
202n12, 517–522, 524–526, 588
Sokolova, Z. P. (ethnographer) 287, 595
song 60, 68, 71, 73–76, 100, 220, 223–225,
227, 229, 451, 468, 470, 504, 616
Southern Siberia 7, 181, 187, 262, 503, 569,
588, 592, 609
sovereignty 275–276, 280–281, 282n5–7,
283n18, 452, 454–455
Soviet: administration 225–226, 228, 454,
508, 593; bloc 233; development 8, 299;
Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR)
299; ideology 257, 261–262, 268, 371,
503; nationalities Policy 226; period 13,
19, 33, 87, 110–112, 117, 134, 141, 143,
146, 166, 168, 228, 257–258, 263, 304,
313, 315, 317, 319, 321n1, 331, 357,
379, 382, 386, 418, 464, 467–468, 504,
506, 512n3, 587, 592, 596–598, 616;
reforms 248, 250, 257; secularization
219–220, 227, 229, 469, 501; state 61,
225–226, 249, 251, 257, 270, 299, 383,
467, 505, 508, 577
Soviet Union's Geographical Society 227,
576, 587, 590–591, 597
sovietization 111, 222, 249, 330, 468
sovkhos (state collective farm) 50, 111, 254,
317, 379, 411
speakers, attriting 52–54, 59–60
speakers, heritage 52–53, 55, 59
speakers, second-language 51–52,
73–74, 194
specially protected nature territory (OOPT)
141, 145, 148
spirit(s) 9, 14, 17, 19, 76, 96, 98–101,
104–106, 107n2, 118–119, 185, 224, 310,
313, 326, 328, 355, 401, 463, 465–467,
469, 471n3, 475, 477–480, 482, 488,
504, 567, 569, 579
spiritual practice 13–14, 20, 220, 431–434,
436–438, 440, 443–444, 564
spirituality 8–9, 19–20, 434–435, 451,
469, 566
St. Petersburg (city) 24, 36, 52, 59, 65, 69,
240, 361, 453, 508, 545, 590, 597–598, 607
Stalinism 368, 614
Stalinist regime 366
Starokova, N. (ethnographer) 69
Stas', I. (historian) 353
state collective farm *see Sovkhos*
steppe 80–81, 180, 182–184, 192–193, 200,
256, 442, 520, 552, 588, 617
stereotype(s) 11, 48, 56, 288, 325, 348
storage 37, 162–163, 329, 332–334, 336,
398–399, 423, 536, 610
storage platform 329
storage sheds 329, 333
storytelling 66, 73, 222, 576, 582
stressors *see* United Nations Human
Development Report; Language Vitality
Network Model
subjectivity (of other-than-human beings)
125, 175, 564, 569–570
Subpolar Census 600; *see also* Polar Census
subsidy(ies) 201, 282n2, 286, 299, 372, 615
subsistence 4, 6–7, 10, 19, 21, 38, 48–49,
79, 83, 85, 92, 148, 180–182, 185–188,
192, 196–197, 202n8, 205, 214, 254,
312, 371, 546, 579, 582
Suntar ulus (administrative territory) 220,
222, 227–228, 229n3
Surgut (city) 341, 343–347, 353, 357–358,
362, 417–418
survival, strategy 21, 174, 182, 304, 316,
325, 334, 393, 446, 491, 502, 565, 609
sustainability 4–6, 16–17, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39,
41, 43, 45, 132, 166, 309, 314, 338, 378,
380–382, 386, 388
sustainable development 6, 44, 132, 135,
279, 380–382, 389n7, 389n9
Tabasarans (people) 340
taiga *see* boreal forest
Taimyr district (administrative territory) 12,
133–134, 361, 408, 418
Taimyr Peninsula 97, 170, 406–409,
413–414, 419, 506
Talnakh (city) 357, 360
taskscape 33, 116, 119, 210, 402, 413,
479, 592
taste 111–116, 158, 222, 314, 316, 346,
519, 611
taxi(s) 319, 379, 383, 385, 414n3, 431
technology(ies) 5, 10–11, 16, 23, 50, 52,
65, 110, 115, 158, 161, 171, 179, 186,

- 273, 279, 314, 326–327, 341, 352–354, 356, 360–362, 365–366, 372, 399, 421, 424, 431, 504, 511, 549–551, 553, 559, 583n3, 600
- temporality 7, 11–12, 118, 161, 167, 171, 175, 247, 255, 327–329, 331, 334, 336–337, 393, 397, 399–400
- territorial rights 151
- territories of traditional nature use (TTP) 127, 139–143, 145–146, 148–151, 202n8
- Tianskii National Evenki nasleg 142, 146–150
- time-space perspective 80
- Tobolsk (city) 418, 464, 590
- Todzhus (people) 193, 201n3, 588
- Tofas / Tofalar (people) 199, 201
- Tomskaia oblast' 564
- toponym 4, 79–88, 92, 274, 414n1
- toponymy 91
- trade 8, 15, 49, 61, 158, 248–250, 252, 287–289, 294, 298–300, 302–307, 327, 344, 346, 348, 361, 408, 412, 417–418, 421–422, 465, 506–507, 522, 525, 531–546, 592, 611–613, 619
- trading post 246, 250, 536, 538, 544; *artel* 336
- tradition: anthropological 598–601; culture 115, 450, 476, 517, 546; economy 6, 131, 145, 303; epic 221–222; Indigenous 127, 132, 448, 511–512, 601 invented 116–117, 508; oral 184, 433; religious 263, 510; ritual 106, 599; shamanic 13, 19, 481, 485; sport 508 storytelling 73; way 141, 151n3, 291, 333, 371, 588
- traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) *see* ecological knowledge
- traditionality 10, 261, 263, 266, 269
- trace theory (neuropsychological model) 564, 567–570
- Transbaikalia 553, 566, 591, 595, 608
- transhumance 197
- translocality 340–342
- transmigrants 341, 345, 348
- transnationalism 340, 344
- Transpolar Mainline 424n1
- transportation, systems 317
- transportation infrastructure 12, 150, 187, 274, 286, 325, 332, 342, 345, 365–366, 374n1, 378–381, 383–388, 417, 419, 421–422, 424, 613
- Trans-Siberian Railroad 364
- trapping 206, 208, 303–305, 618
- trauma, historical 35
- tribuna* (wooden stage for making public speeches) 227
- trust 131, 160, 294, 298–299, 307, 317, 345, 382, 394, 478, 489, 613
- Tsar 366, 611, 613
- Tsarist period 467
- Tsarist policy 221, 225
- Tulun (city) 383–384
- tundra: dwellers 175, 300; environment 117; life 5, 115; spirits of 96, 99
- Tundra Nenets (language) *see* Nenets (language)
- Tundra Nenets (people) *see* Nenets (people)
- tundroviki* (professional hunters or reindeer herders, tundra dwellers) 300–301, 303, 305, 410
- Tungus (people) 80–81, 100, 199, 246, 250, 255–258, 335, 479, 485n2, 588, 590–591
- Tungusic languages 39, 49, 366, 588–589
- Turkic languages 180, 192, 194, 196, 199, 446, 453, 455–456, 576–577
- tutsya* (Nenets needlework bag) 96, 101–102
- Tuva, Republic of 261–264, 267–269, 453, 455, 458, 591
- Tuvan (people) 3, 262, 268, 271n12, 458
- Tynda (city) 143, 364, 367, 370, 372, 374
- Tyndinskii raion 141, 143, 146, 150, 371
- Tyumen (city) 97, 135, 345, 418
- Ufa (city) 276
- Uimon valley 262
- Ukrainians (people) 290, 469–470, 490
- United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity 126
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) 125–126
- United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI) 34
- United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 124–125, 127, 129
- Upper Reaches (area in Tuva) 262, 264, 267–269
- Ural Mountains 1, 168, 174, 262, 357, 464–465, 468–469, 613
- Uralic languages 97, 194
- Urals *see* Ural Mountains
- urban development 11, 356, 615
- urbanization 5, 10, 13, 21, 37–40, 431, 485
- Urengoi (city) 418; *see also* Novyi Urengoi
- Ust'-Il'msk (city) 353
- Ust'-Kut (city) 370, 374, 379, 383–385, 388
- Ust'-Kutskii raion (administrative territory) 386
- vakhta* 359n1
- vakhtoviki* (shift workers) 273, 379
- Vankor oil field 356

- Vasilevich, Glafira M. (researcher) 79–82, 84–86, 326, 329, 579–580, 582, 584n14, 593, 596
- Verdery, Katherine (researcher) 253
- Verkhnemarkovo (town) 12, 378–380, 383–388, 389n5
- vernacular knowledge 55, 80, 82, 236, 262, 266, 270n4, 311–312, 581
- Viliui highway 379, 383, 385, 387
- Viliui River 310
- Viliui Sakha (people) 10, 311, 320–321
- violence 222, 275–276, 342, 461, 613, 618; domestic 268, 271n12; infrastructural 12, 18, 381, 387
- vodka 225, 285, 287–288, 290, 292, 302, 463, 522, 525, 542
- Volodin, Aleksandr P. (linguist) 65–66, 68–69, 72–74
- Vorkuta (city) 353, 470
- West Siberian Lowland 357, 552
- Western Siberia 11, 99, 183, 340–343, 347, 357–359, 362, 416–417, 504–507, 552, 556, 565, 588, 591, 597, 613, 618
- WhatsApp messenger 41, 43, 52, 115, 318, 320, 432, 436, 444
- wild reindeer *see* reindeer, wild
- wilderness 16, 254, 256–258, 267, 364, 510
- winter log cabin (*zimov'ia*) 334
- winter road (*zimnik*) *see* roads, winter
- wood processing company 379
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) 382
- World War II 35, 222, 226–227, 251, 506, 522, 575, 583n2
- yaks 519–522, 525
- Yakut (people) *see* Sakha (people)
- Yakutsk (city) 13, 20, 37–38, 40–41, 43, 52, 57, 184, 219, 228, 303, 305, 310, 319–320, 358, 431–435, 437–439, 441–442, 444, 585, 590–591, 596, 615
- Yamal Peninsula 9, 11, 166–169, 171, 175, 273, 416, 418–419
- Yamalo-Nenetskii autonomous Okrug (YNAO) (administrative territory) 97, 166, 176n1, 273–274, 340, 418–419
- Yamal'skii raion (administrative territory) 274
- Yeltsin, Boris (politician) 140, 299
- Yenisei River 84, 246, 249, 354, 408, 565, 614
- Yeniseisk Provincial Executive Committee 249
- Yermak Timofeevich 611
- yhyakh* (Sakha's summer festival) 8, 14, 20, 219–229, 310–311, 313, 317, 319, 432–434, 436–438, 503
- youth 9, 13, 33, 114, 170, 227, 243n16, 252, 288, 312–317, 320, 435–436, 450, 475, 477, 486n2
- youth movement 232, 235–241, 242n8, 242n9, 374n2, 469
- YouTube 40, 229, 320, 440
- Yukaghir (people) 32, 39–40, 48, 99, 106, 613
- Yuzhno-Tambeisk area 273–274, 277, 279, 281
- Zabaikal Evenkis (people) 332
- Zabaikal'e 329, 333, 577
- Zabaikal'skii Krai (administrative territory) 139, 141–145, 151, 152n5, 325
- zakon* (law) *see* law
- zimniki* *see* roads, winter
- zimov'ia* *see* winter log cabins
- Zverev, Sergei (Sakha singer and choreographer) 227–229