First published in "A Fractured North – Facing Dilemmas," edited by Erich Kasten, Igor Krupnik, Gail Fondahl 2024: 13 – 21. Fürstenberg/Havel: Kulturstiftung Sibirien. — *Electronic edition for* dh-north.org

A FRACTURED NORTH – FACING DILEMMAS (INTRODUCTION)

Erich Kasten, Igor Krupnik, and Gail Fondahl

On 24 February 2022, the day Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine, the field of Northern studies[1] faced its greatest shock since the end of the Cold War. Over the past three decades, many of us have worked to build an international field of Northern research and cooperation, after an era of isolation and ideological hostility. As Russian tanks rolled across the Ukrainian borders and the future of Ukraine as a sovereign nation was at stake, we watched helplessly as the world of scholarly partnership and trust that we have built capsized …

The challenges that our community of Arctic scholars confront pales in comparison to the suffering the war brought to the citizens of Ukraine. Yet, the international community of Arctic social scientists faces a summons of its own – on how to respond to actions far from the Arctic that nevertheless impinge on scholarly relations in what has been touted as a paragon of a region for peaceful cooperation and scientific collaboration between former adversaries. Our goal for this series and volume is to provide a venue to reflect on the impact of the war on the field of Northern studies, to explore strategies to address its challenges, and to contemplate on the paths through the fog of hostility it created. We hope that the voices assembled in the book illustrate, even if partly, what we feel as scientists, citizens, and humanists.

How *A Fractured North* was born

While the developments that preceded February 2022 are well documented; the war nonetheless came as a shock, amidst people's fervent hopes that it would not happen. Immediately following 24 February, a group of Russian anthropologists issued an online petition to the President of the Russian Federation and the Government of Russia protesting the war and demanding the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Ukrainian territory.[2] The petition was quickly

1 We use "Northern studies" in this book to refer to studies of the Russian North, including the Arctic and Subarctic, the Siberian and Western North.

2 See https://www.change.org/p/russian-president-and-russian-government-stop-the-war-in-ukraine [accessed 9.03.2024]. The petition was soon translated into English, French, and other languages, and was posted on the sites of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASSA, see https://www.easaonline.org/news/russiapetn.shtml [accessed 9.03.2024]), the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA, see: https://www.waunet.org/wcaa/statements/wcaa-statement-on-ukraine/ [accessed 9.03.2024]), and other professional international associations. As of last checking (August 2023), 1,047 people signed the petition.

signed by several hundred specialists in anthropology and related disciplines, both in Russia and worldwide. Some Russian signatories, having added their names, rushed to airports to leave the country; many dozens of professionals and students soon followed. In the following days, several international organizations of anthropologists and social scientists condemned the Russian invasion (Bošković 2022; Ries et al. 2022a, 2022b). In response, a small group of Russian high-level academics, including several key figures in Northern studies, issued a statement of their own, claiming that signatories of the petition "do not represent the views of the Russian anthropological community."[3] The ensuing rifts within the Russian and international community of Northern scholars thus added to the anxiety and shock inflicted by the war.

Our main professional organization, the International Arctic Social Sciences Association (IASSA), issued a statement condemning the Russian war against Ukraine on 8 March 2022.[4] In the days and weeks after February 2022, an international group of its members engaged in online communications to discuss prospective actions. During these frantic zoom meetings the idea of a book to frame the responses of Northern scholars to the war was born. To many, however it appeared as too detached an effort, as people involved themselves in more urgent tasks of assisting dozens of Ukrainian and Russian colleagues who suddenly became refugees in need for support.

A year passed before some of us revisited the idea of a book about changes brought to our colleagues' lives and research by Russia's war on Ukraine. While many things had shifted by spring 2023, the key challenges remained the same. How should we, as social scientists working in the Russian North and often in close collaboration with colleagues and partners from Russia, respond to the war? How are we to deal with those who support the war, including our colleagues and local partners? How best can we support those colleagues who are against the war (or at least do not support it), but who may be at risk by continuing collaboration with "Western" colleagues, professionally and personally? What can we do to sustain our circumpolar Northern community, threatened as it is by this war?

The mood was bleak, and continues to be so. Two years into the war, the rifts in our field have deepened. They may persist for a long time. The war has fractured the community of Northern scholars. It has challenged the foundations of academic processes. Barriers and prohibitions have been re-established, pushing us back to the "'oldest"

3 The response signed by five Russian scholars was posted on the official site of the Association of Russian Anthropologists and Ethnologists (AAER) https://aaer.co/?fbclid=IwAR3mKIN9I9Jn30SIGvSNqzkF5kgopCE3505PDMHBW5ajVMlVkrLIfNqhMzg [accessed 9.03.2024].This link is not working anymore. On 3 March 2022, this position was reiterated in the statement of the Executive Committee of the Association of Russian Ethnologists and Anthropologists (AAER)

4 See https://iassa.org/news-archive/98-iassa-statement-on-ukraine. [accessed 9.03.2024]. The International Arctic Science Committee issued a statement as well, https://iasc.info/news/iasc-news/963-assw-2022-statement-on-ukraine [accessed 9.03.2024], as did several other northern-focused organizations.

days of the Cold War, if not to the pre-WWII situation. Many Western institutions and agencies have imposed bans on cooperation with their Russian counterparts. Western scholars refrain from visiting field areas in Siberia, or even traveling to Russia. They have quit joint projects, appointments, and editorial boards to protest Russian actions. Russian scholars who have remained in Russia, in turn, lament being excluded from international networks and publications. Dozens of Russian colleagues, students, and Indigenous activists have left the country, making the prospects for future partnerships even more remote. Of course, we continue to acknowledge that the plight of our colleagues in Ukraine is much, much darker (cf. Drążkiewicz et al. 2023).

The achievement of our lifetime, a truly internationalized field of Northern social science research, epitomized by IASSA and the International Polar Year of 2007–2008, faces a grave threat. Many believe that we have entered a new cycle of antagonism and division similar to that which charaterized Arctic and Siberian anthropology through most of the 20th century, if not earlier (Gray et al. 2003; Schweitzer 2001, 2013; Krupnik 1998). Whereas we have little power to stop another "closure'" phase in these boom-and-bust cycles in Northern international research, we need to ask what we might do to address and perhaps even mitigate the multifold new risks that we and our colleagues and partners in Russia confront.

As we grappled with these issues over the past two years, we tried to find an adequate focus and a title to convey this vision of a newly fractured field. Our choice for the series, *A Fractured North*, nods to an earlier book, *Anxious North* (*Trevozhnyi Sever* – Pika et al. 1996), whose title was adopted from the name of the first grassroots organization of Russian Siberian specialists in the late 1980s. That era of hope and opening paved the way to the re-integration of Russian Siberian studies into the international body of Arctic social science research. *A Fractured North* is also our new characterization of the "Circumpolar North," a term embracing a vision of the Arctic as an area of shared interests and cooperation (Young 1992).

To solicit contributions, we contacted over 90 colleagues personally by email. We also used the IASSA network to invite articles. We described the goals of our series as follows:

> The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, now in its fifteenth month, has had a chilling impact on our common field of research, publications, museum work, and interactions with Indigenous partners and colleagues in Russia. Joint projects have been postponed or cancelled, fieldwork and visits banned, and many personal connections frozen or imperiled. While happening not for the first time in our historical memory, the cumulative shock is devastating, after three decades of vital and fruitful collaboration.
>
> To help counter these impacts, a team of Siberian/Arctic scholars proposes a new series of volumes under the Foundation for Siberian Cultures (Kulturstiftung Sibirien). We call the series *A Fractured North* […] to underscore the artificially sundered situation of our field. For this new series, we invite papers by those who

> work to support Arctic/Siberian humanistic scholarship, Indigenous cultures, and languages – anthropologists, historians, geographers, Indigenous cultural activists, archaeologists, museum, and language specialists, and colleagues in other disciplines. The volumes are intended to support our research relationships and maintain the scholarly discourse over Arctic/Siberian themes, past and present, during this challenging time.

To our initial invitations we received more than fifty responses – some positive and enthusiastic, other cautious, even detached.

The desire, even need, to engage with the impact of Russia's invasion on our research and lives among our colleagues is reflected in the many positive responses we received, and the commitment of our authors to meet ambitious deadlines. As members of a tightknit research community of Arctic-focused social scientists we individually and collectively struggle with how to contend with the new restrictions, uncertainties and fears. An important recent publication, *Academia across the Borders* (Melnikova and Vasilyeva 2024) that appeared shortly before this volume, also compiles voices of scholars working in, with, or on Russia in the context of current collapse of cross-boundary collaboration in social sciences, if through shorter testimonials. These voices similarly record structural disruptions, ethical and political uncertainties, and individual emotional and analytical reflections from the fallout of the war, introspections that contributions to this volume echo and amplify.

How the series *A Fractured North* will be structured

The new spirit of collaborative research by scholars from both East and West working in the Russian North during the early years after the region became accessible to Western social scientists is well-reflected in the trilogy *Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia* (Kasten 2002, 2004, 2005). The papers in these volumes thoroughly discusse experiences and outcomes from field studies, including approaches that for the first time applied a combination of Soviet and Western methodologies. The deeply felt hope and enthusiasm of that time – over 20 years ago – now contrasts with the despair and frustration expressed in many papers in this collection and in the forthcoming volumes about the new political realities of pursuing research in Russia's North. Nonetheless, our commitment to collaborative studies of the North, in the North and with Northerners has prompted us to search for urgently needed new approaches and to adjust our activities to a drastically changed situation.

We have included in this series papers that discuss both past and current obstacles to collaborative (international) research in the Russian North, including historical perspectives on conducting scholarly studies under repressive political climates. We hope that taking a broad approach to our series' scope will allow a better understand-

ing of how the presently "fractured" research landscape came into being, as well as an exploration of what strategies might be used to overcome academic and political blockades. We plan a thematic sequence of volumes with the preliminary titles: *Facing Dilemmas, Journeys on Hold, and Maintaining Connections*.

The aims and the content of this first volume, *Facing Dilemmas* are explained below. The second volume, *Journeys on Hold,* will discuss collaborative projects in the Russian North in various scientific fields that have been halted because of the Russian war against Ukraine. While focusing on the events and the new situation after 24 February 2022, we remind our readers that the breakdown of scholarly collaboration and relations did not happen fully unexpectedly or all at once. A long record of events, and political moves, has eroded freedoms, including for social scientists, both Russian and Western, since 2000.

Beyond lamenting the loss of collaborative research opportunities, we wish to encourage a discourse on new – and pragmatic – approaches to future research partnerships between "East" and "West" in the North. Therefore, the third volume in the series, *Maintaining Connections,* will focus on how to keep or restore connections among partners, given the productive research networks established since perestroika, and how these can be further developed in the future, if under different premises.

So far, Northern Anthropology and related fields have had a mixed and conflicting record in addressing the current war. We hope that the contributions assembled in this collection offer insights on how moral dilemmas for humanist scholars – anthropologists and social scientists in related disciplines of human geography, political studies, linguistics, and more – have been addressed in the past, as well as in the post-2022 era. In particular, the past examples of moral standing in a war-torn atmosphere and in the repressive political climate, explored in the second section of this volume, are critical to our reflections on the ethical choices we face today.

One person, Franz Boas, stands out in providing a useful orientation, although he never had carried out field studies in the Russian North. Boas took a clear stand against those scholars in Germany who, for various reasons opportunistically aligned their academic careers with Nazi ideology (Langenkämper 2022). He offered unwavering support to his colleagues who were forced to leave the country, even as he was swamped by requests for help beyond the limit of his professional and personal resources (Langenkämper 2015; Krupnik 2022). Boas likely experienced dilemmas akin to those with which we struggle today, self-reflectively and even perhaps unconsciously. There remains an unanswered question of why Boas was less critical (if hardly at all) towards Stalinist Soviet politics in contrast to his strong condemnation of Nazi Germany's actions (Bullert 2013; Kan 2021; Krupnik 2022; Kasten 2022). Similar blind spots in the treatment of "Northern realities" in the former Soviet Union and in today's Russia will be explored in this collection and in the following contributions in the series.

This volume's organization

We have divided this first volume of *A Fractured North* into three sections: "Lives Shattered," "Historical Examples of Researchers' Stances" and "Research with Indigenous Communities in Troubled Times," while recognizing that questions and concerns cut across across the contributions. The first section, "Lives Shattered', offers papers from early career scholars whose planned career trajectories have been upended by the war. As graduate students they have faced difficulties in conducting their research at this time of heightened mistrust and fear of repercussions (Vasiukov, Karaseva, M. Zdor), or have suffered a total loss of the ability to carry out planned fieldwork (Parlato). Members of the communities in which they have worked, some of them long-term acquaintances or friends, treat them with increasing suspicion. Relationships with many colleagues, peers and research partners have been stifled if not sundered. These scholars speak of the importance of interpreting the silences they now encounter, as well as the conversations (M. Zdor, Karaseva). In such times of severe personal doubts and anxieties, Karaseva underscores the importance of supportive friends and colleagues: these critical collegial relationships, which enable one to persevere, moving forward, are inadequately acknowledged in academia.

In our volume's second section, "Historical Examples of Researchers' Stances" four papers examine dilemmas that scholars working in the Russian North faced in the past – or in some cases failed to face. To access remote areas, scientists often had to depend on others (colonizers, military, traders), whose contempt for and treatment of local/Indigenous populations they found abhorrent. Yet to protest could damage one's career (Kasten). Later, associating even with other scholars of different (unsanctioned) political beliefs – and national backgrounds – could also threaten one's well-being. Yet, some researchers nevertheless chose "principled and brave conduct" in maintaining relationships in the face of danger from political authorities (Kan). During the height of a former repressive regime associating with foreign scholars proved highly damaging, possibly even fatal to Russian citizens (Dudeck). Authoritarianism and isolationism have not always emerged from outside of academia; as Lajus shows, academics themselves have been culpable of repressing scholarly freedom. These papers, if exploring historical occurences, argue for our assisting brave colleagues from Russia, both those who have felt impelled to leave their country and those who have stayed but refuse to acquiesce to demagoguery and militarism. The papers also bid us to be aware of and reflective on the dangers that relationships, even casual ones, may inflict in times of political repression.

Papers in the volume's third section, "Research with Indigenous Communities in Troubled Times", examine relationships, both burgeoning and deteriorating, as observed by scholar with long histories of working in the Russian North. Indigenous Buryats, fleeing from Russia south to Mongolia to avoid conscription, have met with hospitality and support: nationalism and compatriotism, but also simple

empathy inform such responses from their culturally-close neighbors, the Mongols (Takakura, Horiuchi and Dalaibuyan). Meanwhile, at Russia's northeastern periphery, both researchers and residents experience the intensification of state control of their lives (Naumova, echoing Karaseva). In a time of increased suspicions, the state has demanded obsequious demonstrations of loyalty from non-governmental organizations, including Indigenous associations, and has closed down those it has not been able to coopt (E. Zdor; see also Goloviznina 2022). Termination of these organizations, and the broader imposition of contraints on all residents, follow the "rule of law," as Russian law itself becomes ever more draconian in its demands of citizens and its punishments for those who defy its dictates.

We conclude this volume of *A Fractured North* with an emotional testimonial by two scholars with longstanding, close relations in communities in Chukotka as well as Ukraine (Yamin-Pasternak and Pasternak). They share their utter bewilderment at the seeming willingness of Chukotkan friends and acquaintances to accept state propaganda, demonize Ukrainians, demonstrate support for the war, and even take up arms. They ask: how do we maintain cherished relationships in these cases?

* * *

Throughout the papers in this volume, the theme of relationships – their importance, their many dimensions, their consequences – looms large. The authors highlight the importance of continued relationships to understanding events, choices, limitations and agencies of our colleagues and partners in Russia; the changing nature of research relationships and ways of coping with these; dilemmas of maintaining relationships that might be beneficial to oneself but compromise others; the courage to maintain relationships when faced with pressures to discontinue; and the criticality of recognizing the threat relationships may incur. Pavel Sulyandziga, in his prologue, ends with a plea that Western scholars continue to interact with their colleagues and especially with Indigenous partners in Russia, even those who are silent in the face of the war. Humanity is thus maintained.

Acknowledgements

The editors thank Patty Gray and Alex King for their generous assistance with the translation of two of the articles in this collection. We also extend our appreciation to the many colleagues who reviewed these papers, at different stages of their preparation, most of whom are mentioned at the end of the respective contributions.

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