First published in "A Fractured North – Journeys on Hold," edited by Erich Kasten, Igor Krupnik, Gail Fondahl 2024: 195 – 210. Fürstenberg/Havel: Kulturstiftung Sibirien. — *Electronic edition for* dh-north.org

10 FRACTAL CONVERSATIONS

David G. Anderson

Introduction

This chapter, in part, tells the story of an ongoing collaboration with folklorists, historians, and Siberian Indigenous knowledge holders, which has been continuing in fits and starts throughout the period of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. It addresses the theme of a "fractured North" through an analysis of the constant difficulties the project faces in the new hostile environment created after the wholescale invasion of Ukraine. In particular, it sketches out the roadblocks we are encountering, many of which were set by our own European and North American universities. It reflects on the responsibilities of scholars confronted with this tense international situation.

In line with my own training as an anthropologist, the article is guided lightly by theories of "trans-relational" or "multi-situated" ethnography (Sunder Rajan 2021; Majbroda 2023). Much can be said about intersubjective relationality, but here I would like to confine myself to how unexpected conversations can still be had at the start of this frighteningly tepid War – much like they were had during international standoffs in the past. I am describing this repetition-of-the same as having a "fractal" quality. This mathematical metaphor has been used by anthropologists and historians of science to demonstrate how opportunities and misunderstandings tend to repeat themselves at different levels of analysis (Jensen 2007; Strathern 1991). Therefore, this is a story of continuities of practice, albeit within a frustrating context. It does imply taking a position about the purpose and vocation of research and the role that it plays in building new futures. In some cases, it means that one must work around and in-between the structures that organise and police academic research, in order for these conversations to thrive.

The background to the story is a small externally funded research project that a group of us have been pursuing since 2018. The project is alive, and as I write it, is nearing its end-phase. It is a rather small-scale attempt to digitise and disseminate a collection of audio tape recordings of Siberian Indigenous peoples held in a public state archive in Russia. The recordings in question represent the lifework of a veritable "who's who" of Siberian ethnographers and folklorists over the course of the 20th century. More importantly, they feature invaluable recordings of knowledgeable Elders, shamans, and folklorists, many of whom are famous and well-remembered in their home communities.

Fig. 1 Endangered audio tapes in an archive, 2020.

Although for many of those reading this text, such reel-to-reel and cassette audiotape recordings may not seem particularly ancient, they are in fact endangered (Hess 2008; Bijsterveld and van Dijck 2009). The magnetic particles glued to long thin plastic strips wrapped on reels are separating from their media. The reels themselves warp or the tape sticks together. Indeed, for some of the lower quality tapes they can only be played one more time before they destroy themselves. A technology which filled the lives of scholars and teenagers alike during the later part of the 20th century and was responsible for the dissemination of songs and knowledge during the Soviet period, is slowly turning to dust. Moreover, the once ubiquitous machines that played and amplified their recordings have also become rare, and extremely expensive. Finding working equipment has become a research project in and of itself. All these factors lent a heavy sense of obligation to continue this small project during the period of the Russian invasion since it is likely that many of these recordings might not exist after the war ends.[1]

1 This project is also not unique. Tjeerd de Graaf (De Graaf 2011; De Graaf and Denisov 2015) in particular had been very active in digitising audio collections across Siberia.

Although the project is quite humble and technical, it remains controversial (as we will see, these collections have always been controversial). For these reasons I will not be very precise in naming the people, institutions, and places involved – although I suspect that most of the people reading this article will know these collections and actors already. I hope that in the not-too-distant future the electronic version of this chapter can be updated to give credit where credit is due. Therefore, with some reluctance, I will reflect on the broader meaning of the voices inscribed on these tapes, and how those voices inspire new forms of cultural revitalisation without naming the individuals actually doing the work. This creates the mistaken impression that I am the omniscient engineer of events, whilst I only see my role as being another proxy for voice and events that emanate from conversations.

I would like to begin with the controversies.

Controversy 1: Krasnoyarsk 1999

The KGB desk officer dropped his formal mask and looked at me with paternal exasperation. "Why are you so interested in writing about our small peoples? Don't you have your own people to write about?"

I had rung the buzzer on the front door of the reception office of the Krasnoyarsk Territorial Headquarters of the KGB to ask how I could read a manifesto written by a group of rebellious Indigenous reindeer herders in 1932, which had given voice to concerns about collectivization. A local author even gave me the class mark from their institutional archive. To make a long story short, I left the building without having seen the document, but instead haunted by this question.

I learned about the 1932 Taimyr uprising from Nikolai Anisimovich Popov (1929–2008) a Dolgan intellectual, and a friend, who was entranced by my dissertation project, and who initially billeted me with his relatives in the village of Khantaiskoe Ozero.[2] On a spring day in 1997, in Dudinka, near the end of my dissertation fieldwork, he was once again helping me to get a government seat reservation on an overbooked flight to Krasnoyarsk. He suggested that we both take a break from our daily rounds of petitioning officials, and instead fish for whitefish smolts at the mouth of a small creek which emptied into the port. Among other topics, he told me the story of Roman Dmitrievich Barkhatov, a missionary-school educated Dolgan shaman who

2 Nikolai Anisimovich Popov (1929–2009) was a Dolgan journalist and author who published several collections of short-stories and was deeply involved in the translation of the New Testament into Dolgan (Popov 1996). He studied at the Hertzen Pedagogical Institute and the Krasnoyarsk Higher Party School and was a member of the CPSU. A member of the Union of Writers of Russia, he became Honorary Citizen of Taimyr in 1995. His work was republished after his death, with his biography (Popov 2011). A short biography can be found online (Interaktivnyi atlas 2024).

Fig. 2 The Port of Dudinka, 1997.

led a multi-national contingent of Indigenous reindeer herders to take armed action against what some sources claim was a renegade government detachment which was looting the tundra.

The Volochanka uprising (*vosstanie*) lasted from March to May 1932. The actions began with a so-called kulak congress under the leadership of Vasilii Sotnikov, which upon refusing to comply with the nationalisation of reindeer herds called for a general congress of the Avam region. A military detachment was sent from Dudinka, which, which according to the leaders of the uprising, opened fire at dawn on the tents of the leaders. Further East, in Khatanga, a second action resulted in a large number of Russians being taken hostage. The two actions are usually connected, but fragments suggest that the Khatanga uprising had somewhat different aims. The manifesto to the European powers was written on 5 May. The cost of the rebellion is not entirely clear without seeing the files. Some accounts say that the rebels killed four officers, other accounts claim 26 officers, with no clear footnotes or references. The cover of the OGPU dossier O-21878, published online, refers to the "brutal killing of 24 Soviet workers in April 1932" (Shykova 2024). The fate of the rebels is also not entirely clear. Many authors associate the killing of 169 kulaks at the end of 1937 as a delayed punishment for rebelling. On 1 September 1932 the Politburo passed a resolution criticising the excesses (*peregiby*) of collectivisation on Taimyr.[3]

3 The events were first published by Troshev (1996) as historical fiction. This followed with a book-length account (Troshev 1998). Since that time Sheksheev (2021) published a historical

My memory of the story was my friend's admiration for the multi-national collective of Dolgan, Nganasan, Nenets, Evenki and Enets leaders whose final aim was to reach the international telegraph station at Dikson to send an electronic message to the world calling for assistance. My friend smiled when describing Barkhatov, who he sketched as being a "white shaman" travelling on a reindeer caravan of exclusively white reindeer – like "a blizzard scouring the tundra." He said, "those elders were strong men – not like today." He was proud to say that his grandfather was one of the participants. Later, in his home office, he gave me a re-typed carbon-copy version of the telegram text which I was told was copied from the original files. His typescript is still paperclipped to the pages of my field diaries. Re-reading it today it still pulls on a multi-situated and multi-relational set of intentions which on that day in May 1932 could have led in a number of different directions.

> … In the name of the All-Powerful God, we, the oppressed tribes of the Taimyr peninsula, and with our prayers, are calling on all European powers to defend us and to stay the hand of the powers that be from [committing] these injustices. We well understand the civilised manner in which the European powers look after their own tribes. Across this wide expanse, we the native peoples (*tuzemtsy*) of the Russian North extend to you our hand with our firm request and hope to receive your help as soon as possible. [4]

It is difficult to imagine any other text today which pulls on so many conflicting post-colonial themes as the words of this manifesto.[5] But it also speaks to the problem of "voices" and the role of locals and outsiders who listen to them.

Initially, out of doctoral-dissertation anxiety, I was driven to put my hands on the original text. I went from library to archive with my typescript, on which there was a handwritten class mark, to try to find the original document. I was then wryly advised to knock on the door of the local KGB office, which I naïvely did. My most vivid memory of entering the building was seeing so many familiar faces who sheepishly smiled back at me. Putting on his formal face again, the exasperated desk officer declined my request citing "data privacy" and suggested that I come back with notarised letters of permission from the descendants of all involved.

---

account citing manuscripts from the KGB archive. A detailed overview, with photographs of some of the documents and of the leaders, is available online (Shykova 2024)

4 There is no available reproduction of the manifesto itself, but re-typed versions can be found in (Troshev 1996; 1998) and online in Piskunov (2024).

5 The appeal to an All-Powerful God may point to Barkhatov's missionary education, or it may be an assumption that quoting a Christian image might attract the attention of the European states. This ambiguity continues with the dual-stranded evocation of "oppression" and "prayers" combining liberal and religious idioms. The reference to the "civilising" nature of European powers here (and in other parts of the manifesto not quoted here) seems to fit within the liberal nationalist rhetoric of the Siberian regionalist movement (Kovaliashkina 1999). The key *oblastnik* claim is the desire for a regional assembly or local self-government which they associated with becoming a colony (Yadrintsev 1892).

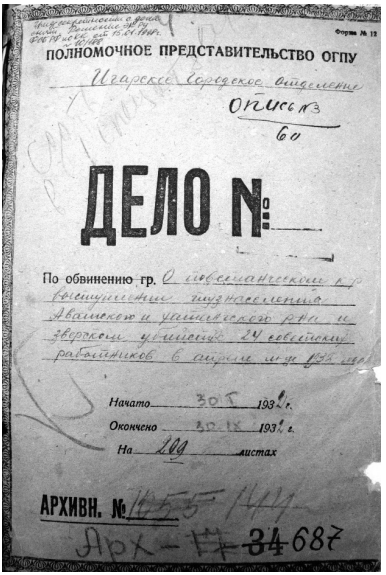

Fig. 3 The Barkhatov file.

My naïve empiricism likely would not have yielded the original text in Barkhatov's mission-school handwriting anyway. Most likely, had I been given sight of the folder, I just would have found yet another typescript version of the text that I already had in my hand. In my experience, Soviet-era written archives breathe the fractal principal – they tend to be proxies all the way down. Since my weak attempt, some other historians and journalists have published on this event – one seemingly citing specific pages from the folder (Sheksheev 2021). I have since been given other versions of the Volochanka rebellion from elders in Volochanka itself. Further, Dolgan and Sakha linguists have also shared with me versions that they themselves had recorded with an eye to teasing out gerunds and case-endings. Although it is too early in the flow of our current project for me to make a definitive statement, I suspect versions also sits in the recordings that my colleagues are digitising as I write. It is likely the most-widely-known top-secret event in Taimyr history.

I originally sought out a proxy of the original manifesto charged with the enthusiasm of my elderly friend that the text would make me understand better the resolution and strength of Taimyr *tundroviki*. I now think about the text in the context of other such Indigenous rebellions across Siberia, like the Nenets *mandalada*, the Kazym Khanty uprising, and more (Leete 2004, 2023; Laptander 2014; Arzyutov 2014), as well as through the folklore genre of the "prophecy narrative" – a genre of future-affirming narratives that one can find throughout the circumpolar Arctic (Cruikshank 1994; Nabokov 1991; Estes 2019). By far the dominant published narrative of the Taimyr rebellion is a rather convoluted story of loyal state security workers bravely and wisely reining-in a protest whilst simultaneously stopping a group of unauthorised "bandits" who, in the name of the state, had been looting households. I, of course, am aware that the KGB desk officer saw this event more simply as stain on the history of his agency for being unable to keep public order. Likely it is for that reason that he embargoed the files and instead sent me away in 1996 to sort my own dirty laundry back at home in Canada.

This first controversy, therefore, leads to a set of questions about who holds the right to speak about future-inspiring historical events, a position which is relevant to understanding the stalemate in Siberian research today.

My Dolgan patron in Dudinka had most likely first heard of the rebellion in mythic mode as a child growing up in Volochanka. More likely than not he learned of the details, and the above manifesto, in the article published in a regional literary magazine by the Krasnoyarsk based novelist Zhores Troshev (1926–2005) shortly before we spoke (Troshev 1996). I understood the story and accepted his gift of the reproduction of the manifesto as a hint that he felt this story should be part of my dissertation work. It is not difficult to link his gift to the reported words of Barkhatov himself, who called for the assistance of the "civilised European powers." Popov and Barkhatov were "extending their hand" and I accepted it. Therefore, this would be my first answer to the controversy of why parts of this story were relevant to me, as a traveller/outsider. The facts surrounding the partially successful rebellion at the time were not known at all outside of Taimyr and were an important page in the history of how a multinational group of Indigenous leaders agreed to work with Soviet modernisers. This story links very clearly to stories in other parts of the North, even among "my own small peoples" of Canada. The strongest parallel is that of the Northwest Rebellion in British North America (Canada) led by the visionary Metis leader Louis Riel, which though brutally supressed, did lead to an accommodation within the history of Canadian federalism (Flanagan 1976; Sawchuk 2005). This uprising therefore deserves to become a chapter of longer story on the history of negotiation and resistance across differing colonial situations in different parts of the North (Hämäläinen 2022).

This argument can be understood as a variant "transnational" interpretation of events, where history is seen as multi-stranded and of holding value and meaning] for people in different parts of a unified global system.[6] The story therefore cannot be "owned" by any one group; people situated in different places will take away different meanings. Fracturing access to primary evidence limits the richness and nuance of these meanings, but it also accentuates other meanings. Without having sight of the Soviet security service (OGPU) archival reports, my account of the rebellion places its emphasis instead on the oral history of the event passed down between generations (unlike most other accounts – although see (Sibir' Realii 2024)). In the current conjuncture, where mobility and access to primary resources is restricted, the argument leads to the plea that researchers could be understood as individual travellers or "honest brokers" if not floating free of their own institutions at least able to make partial connections (Sarkki et al. 2020; Zandlová and Čada 2023).

An opposing argument can be represented by the advice of the desk-officer, and to some extent those historians who have published accounts of the Volochanka rebel-

6 The "transnational turn" in literary and historical studies is primarily a movement among North American ethnohistorians. It has a wide-ranging set of definitions but at its root tends to avoid framing histories with the frame of a single nation-state (Goyal 2017; Clavin 2005; Bayly et al. 2006). In this case it would refer to the impossibility of understanding the Volochanka rebellion merely as a page in the history of the establishment of Soviet power but would interpret is a global event.

lion. Their point of view might be represented as the work of "hegemonic" historians who are allowed access to primary evidence since they are trusted to select information which portrays events according to a collectively agreed point-of-view. It is tempting to think of this a type of deceit, but in the context it likely is closer to a form of policy science, or "science arbiter" (Sarkki et al. 2020). As mentioned above, the four published accounts, seemingly based on a reading of the paper archive, tend to construct a sympathetic account of both sides – of the rebels and of the Russian security officers. The rebels are portrayed as using excessive deadly force to resist overenthusiastic expropriation of their means of livelihood. The security officers are portrayed in a heroic style for their restrained response which led to instigators on both sides being arrested, and a new policy being instituted concerning appropriate measures for collectivization. The local mythic narrative of a charismatic and magical shaman is thereby transformed into a different future-creating narrative of a wise and restrained state apparatus. It is important to repeat that this hegemonic narrative is neither selective nor false but tends to favour the interpretation of a single protagonist. In other words, it is situated.

As controversial as they may sound in the current conjuncture, this story does imply that there should be room for both hegemonic and transnational narratives. They are in fact linked, since the refusal to allow access to sensitive original documents creates a space for oral histories. Today, the hegemonic narratives, as we discuss below, are more likely to be enforced by North Atlantic institutions.

Controversy 2: Aberdeen 2022

The University manager adjusted her glasses and asked patronisingly, "Can you really not find a research topic closer to home?"

A quarter-century later, I was sitting in a similar Spartan office – perhaps slightly better lit – being confronted with the exact same question. I struggled to keep a straight face. As in 1996, I had been doing the rounds of various managerial waypoints trying to restore a funded project, which this time had been "paused" due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces.[7] Unlike in 1996, taking respite

7 Without going into too much detail about the project and the funding agency, this modest project had been subject to two funding rounds. The 2018 application was rejected in 2019 due to a negative external review: the reviewer felt we had not sufficiently cited digitisation work already done on wax cylinders in the same archive with South Siberian and European peoples. We reapplied in 2020 narrowing the focus to Arctic peoples and to magnetic tapes. That project was contracted in November 2021, only to be "paused" by the funder in March 2022. The funding agency replied positively to our request that the project be "unpaused" in August 2022. The "unpausing" required in essence a re-application. The revised application went into some detail on how project meetings could be carried out in Türkiye, and funds could be dispersed, also in neutral third countries. The formalities of unpausing the project

by going fishing at the local river mouth with an elder (or a student) was no longer an option.

The specifics of the "pausing" are likely familiar to most reading this book, but I will repeat them briefly here. Following the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, the United Kingdom government implemented sanctions against a set of individuals in the Russian Federation and also restricted the export of specific equipment and of funds. Further, all UK higher education institutions severed agreements with Russian higher education and research institutions (although this was not a legal requirement). The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued an advisory for citizens not to travel to Russia. This meant that the University would not book travel to Russia, nor provide travel insurance to anyone who travels. Locally our university Senate passed a motion supporting the work of individuals holding Russian passports and the individual work of scholars on Russian topics. Unlike with some other European universities, email correspondence was not curtailed.

I ended up in the manager's office at the end of a labyrinth of processes which was difficult to understand at the time. Although individual-level research was encouraged, and officially the funder has asked that the project be re-activated, contracts and invoices were silently not being processed. The trail ended at the desk of a senior manager.

It was explained to me that although the project had been authorised by all existing committees, it became subject to a "secondary managerial review" due to the war in Ukraine. The structure of that review was to invite all six chairs of the University ethics committee to read an outdated, pre-Invasion version of the project proposal and to provide individual assessments of the project, each of which were kept confidential. I was given the "gist" of the reviews but denied access to the actual documents on the grounds of data protection. Several interesting insights arose from this procedure that could be placed squarely within the frame of hegemonic histories.

I was told that whilst most of the reviewers supported the project, several comments raised specific concerns over intellectual property. One reviewer felt that the entire digitisation process violated the "intellectual property rights" of the Russian state archive (aside from the fact that most ethnohistorians would see the text as owned by the communities, the fact that the archive had already declared the collections to be open-access). Another chair felt that in the current international situation placing the spotlight on Russian culture and history would subject the University to reputational damage (despite the fact that the application had clearly stated that it was working with collections of non-Russian, non-dominant peoples). A third felt uncomfortable exporting "strategic equipment," such as reel-to-reel audio tape equipment

locally required a sign-off from an externally sourced solicitor who was asked to establish if the export of cassette tape recorders violated the list of sanctioned equipment. Although the budget code was re-enlivened shortly after, all unpaid invoices and travel claims were frozen again by my University at the end of October 2022 subject to a "secondary ethics review."

manufactured in the 1960s, which could be interpreted as "supporting the war effort." Upon consulting these specific reviews, the University Secretary initially decided to cancel the project citing an entirely different reason: that the (outdated) proposal was asking a contracted researcher to cross the border to the Russian Federation at the behest of a British institution, which would put that person at risk. An interesting quality of "secondary managerial review" was that a judgement could be made not on the balance of probabilities but vetoed on the authority of any single negative verdict.

We were fortunate to have the project uncancelled, and the accounting codes reinstated for a third time after I patiently walked that manager through the up-to-date project proposal in detail. I also repeated the guarantee that no University employee or contractor would ever cross a border into Russia for any purpose to deliver funds or to export technology. We kept our promise, with some reluctance, by sourcing recording and digitisation equipment within Russia, and distributing project reimbursements at meetings in Türkiye. The negotiations took three months and severely delayed our progress. However, like in 1996, it was the manager's question that still haunts me.

At first glance, there is an ironic inversion of roles where the North Atlantic university managers are now performing the role of KGB desk-officers in Russia during my earlier encounters. Aside from the symmetry in their patronising advice, there is also a strong family resemblance in their reluctance to allow unfettered access to primary documents, and a fear that international research poses reputational risks to the organisation. A key theme which illustrates this bundle is the controversy over intellectual property rights. The manager had frozen the project a second time since she lazily assumed that our university would harvest the recordings and take ownership of them ourselves. This "business as usual" scenario would be impossible under the regime of sanctions since to do so would require a contract with the Russian state institution "holding" the property and transferring it to us. The original application to the funder was based on activating an open-access creative commons license. This relied on a unilateral signed declaration from the Russian state institution which made the entire collection available to … anyone … including her. I had to point out to her that a legal agreement between the institutions was not necessary – all that was needed was curiosity.

The crux of the problem, as with all existential problems, was kinship. Both today's University manager and the perestroika-era KGB officer were worried that authorising a reading (or listening) of the archives would create a relationship between groups who ideally should be kept separate. As the political philosopher Lea Ypi (2022) described in her biographical fictional political history of Albania, in certain contexts projects can only be married to an individual who holds an appropriate "biography." The primary documents of the Volochanka uprising were made legible to local historians and journalists whose parents and grandparents held "biographies" which fit within the policy framework of the society at that time. A digitisation project, launched by

a Scottish university, would run the risk of marrying that institution to an overseas archive, creating a dilemma of optics and responsibility. It took a rather long lecture on the ethnographic complexity of the Russian Federation to explain that through the project we would be liberating records of subject peoples – a proposal which projected a very different type of mutual aid, solidarity, and matrimonial property.

In the end, as similar as these two controversies might seem, there are subtle differences which in both cases allowed conversations to continue.[8] Both the KGB desk officer and the North Atlantic university manager were concerned about controlling narratives and thereby limiting institutional risk. In the former case, guided by a late Soviet reverence for written sources, banning access to the *podlinnik* (original) of the case reduced risk by forcing me and others to ground our accounts in community oral histories. Oral history was likely perceived by the desk officer as ephemeral and empirically thin and therefore could not pose a legal risk. His refusal therefore created an opening. In the latter case, banning any document, transfer or contract which suggested a collaborative project, reduced risk to the institution by creating the fiction that access to primary audio materials was coincidental. As ironic as it may seem, both refusals bear a strong relation to Audra Simpson's (2014) "ethnographic refusal" whereby consenting to participate in an ethnographic project would undermine sovereignty or self-respect.

However rather than wallowing in the inability to launch official bilateral projects we should remain attentive to the new openings. Open-access arrangements, supported by digital technology, works wonders in this situation, by disrupting what would have been a symmetry of intentions. As with Barkhatov's telegram, the ability to mediate relationships through electronic technologies creates a way to keep ambiguities open, creating "plausible deniability," and therefore to leaving open a space for the Siberian research to continue in between the anxieties of the hegemons.

Who owns Siberian Ethnography?'

During the hey-day of the liberalisation of Siberian anthropological research, a group of colleagues, some of whom are represented in this series, asked the question "who owns Siberian ethnography?" (Gray et al. 2004). The question was designed to be deliberately controversial to open up a space to describe the different histories of research in Siberia in Imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet times. As that article demon-

8 Just to be clear in case my ironic comparison upsets at least one reader, in 1996 following the collapse and restructuring of the Soviet Union the KGB at the time was just starting its project of rebranding itself. Publishing histories with a positive spin were part of their project to improve their public image. A local Siberian office also would have its own local parochial concerns which could be quite separate from state policy. Therefore, the parallels only really work if accept that the organisation in 1996 was different from that in 1930 or indeed 2024.

strated, each era was unbalanced. The Imperial and post-Soviet periods, until recently, had been dominated by foreign researchers, whist the long "Soviet period" was monopolised by Soviet researchers. Each period also had a mismatch of methods, with etnos-derived collective portraiture favoured during much of the Soviet period, contrasting sharply with "honest broker" cacophony of competing interpretations in the short-lived post-Soviet period. My colleagues' article in the end did not really address the issue of intellectual property – other than to conclude romantically that "we all are owned by ethnography". They did imply, however, that Siberian ethnography generally has been owned by coherent collectives, or if you like, competing kinship groups.

At first glance, it would seem that the balances have shifted once again. Russian ethnographers, once again, have unimpeded access to rural villages, and likely better funding (given that external funders across the North Atlantic realm are not likely to sponsor a Russian ethnographic project). Again, this symmetry with the Cold War is deceiving. North Atlantic researchers are not technically prevented from working in Russia – and many who have dual citizenship continue to travel, mixing personal voyages with a peek into a public library, museum or archive. What has changed is that North Atlantic researchers can only carry out projects "under the radar" of their own home institutions, which have proven to be very creative in blocking them. They become truly private initiatives, relying on trust and friendship, and perhaps becoming more honest in the process.

This suggests a different answer to that which Gray et al. (2004) posed. The "who" generating Siberian ethnography are individuals, motivated by curiosity and friendship. Disciplines, departments, and institutions have locked themselves out of this region, and have pushed ethnography into the hands of amateurs – perhaps where it has always thrived the most. In the newly fractured North, Siberian ethnography has become a personal calling but not a career.

Building on twenty years of liberalisation, we can also count on the fact that ethnographers here and ethnographers there can read each other's work, no longer isolated by a lack of understanding of each other's languages. Mediated by sophisticated electronic technology which did not exist in the Soviet period, these conversations can be sustained through emails, social media, and zoom calls. Admittedly the lack of opportunity to wake up to feed the fire in a conical tent on the tundra will change the immediacy of the imagery. But perhaps it is time that we relinquish the "I was there" model of ethnography for a model which pays attention to the voices and texts that do reach us from those who still are there.

Amateurish and unobtrusive, reaching their hands across a fragmented institutional landscape, the Siberian imaginary no longer can be owned by one or another institution. It is visible through the empathy we demonstrate for the consequences of the climate emergency, or somewhat formal meetings at the international crossroads of Istanbul or Hulunbuir (Hailar). Brave individuals, turning their back on the tribal kinship networks of their home institutions can listen to stories which are perhaps

not documented but nevertheless evocative. Perhaps not entirely different from the friendships and correspondence circles of the period of the Cold War, it is a time for listening, and moreover hearing, the stories of lives lived in a field that can no longer be the exclusive property of any one group.

Conclusion: Fractal conversations

In this chapter, I have suggested that we understand Siberian ethnography as being "multi-situated" – as sitting in between the hegemonic interests of formal institutions and the future-oriented imaginations of local community members (Sunder Rajan 2021). I have suggested that refusals and borders can invigorate ethnography in unexpected ways. A ban on reading a certain archival file opens a space to listen to unwritten, oral histories. A ban on designing "projects" leads to the construction of a different type of conversations in the new cosmopolitan cities in China or Türkiye where completing lineages meet (much like they once met at a forest Sámi winter market, or an Evenki *suglan*). I have chosen to draw attention to the long history of these ruptures and connections through the image of the fractal.

This mathematical metaphor somewhat romantically suggests that patterns in nature replicate themselves over and over, recursively, at different scales. The usual image is that of the design of a snowflake where the design of the whole repeats itself within each arm, and then each branch of that arm. In anthropology, Marlyn Strathern (1991) uses the metaphor to suggest that we as ethnographers, or as people, can only ever make "partial connections," and that if we try to reach out to capture the entire picture, we only create new holes and barriers to understanding. Therefore, she argues, nothing can ever be fragmented. What may seem to be a fragment, like the branch of a snowflake, contains a pattern that suggests a larger unity. In the context of this chapter, therefore, I am suggesting that ownership of texts, and of relations, have always been controversial and contested – but that with a bit of humbleness it is possible to work around these controversies now, as we did then.

Although the story of this particular project is unfinished, at the time of writing we are holding out great hope for a meeting or ethnographers and Indigenous knowledge holders in Istanbul in June 2024. This meeting of experts from different places in a neutral third space takes advantage of the openings created by the institutional refusals in the North Atlantic, but it also creates a new type of conversation. Although it is somewhat disembodied from the sounds and smells of community life, it nevertheless points to that experience and thereby gives a fractal sense of how life continues in Siberia, and how Siberian ethnography can take advantage of these fractal conversations.

References

Arzyutov, Dmitry 2014. «Épîtres» altaïennes : histoire et vie des textes du mouvement religieux Ak-jaŋ. *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 45. http://emscat.revues.org/2464. [accessed 16.06.2024]

Bayly, Christopher A., Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, and Patricia Seed. 2006. AHR Conversation: On Transnational History. *The American Historical Review* 111 (5): 1441-1464. doi: 10.1086/ahr.111.5.1441.

Bijsterveld, Karin, and José van Dijck, eds. 2009. *Sound Souvenirs: Audio Technologies, Memory and Cultural Practices*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Clavin, Patricia 2005. Defining transnationalism. *Contemporary European History* 14 (04): 421–439.

Cruikshank, Julie 1994. Claiming Legitimacy: Prophecy Narratives from Northern Aboriginal Women. *American Indian Quarterly* 18 (2): 147–167.

De Graaf, Tjeerd 2011. Endangered Languages and the Use of Sound Archives and Fieldwork Data for their Documentation and Revitalisation: Voices from Tundra and Taiga. *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 7 (1): 27–46.

De Graaf, Tjeerd, and Victor Denisov 2015. The Use of Sound Archives for the Investigation, Teaching and Safeguarding of Endangered Languages in Russia. In *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*. M. Kominko (ed.), 617–634. Cambridge: Open Books Press. doi: 10.11647/OBP.0052.19.

Estes, Nick 2019. *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. London/New York: Verso.

Flanagan, Thomas 1976. *The Diaries of Louis Riel*. Edmonton: Hurtig.

Goyal, Yogita 2017. Introduction: The Transnational Turn. *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 8: 1. doi: 10.5070/T881036931.

Gray, Patty, Nikolai B. Vakhtin, and Peter Schweitzer 2004. Who Owns Siberian Ethnography? A Critical Assessment of a Re-internationalized Field. *Sibirica* 3 (2): 194–216. doi: 10.1080/1361736042000245312.

Hämäläinen, Pekka 2022. *Indigenous Continent: The Epic Contest for North America*. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Company, a division of W. W. Norton & Company.

Hess, Richard L. 2008. Tape Degradation Factors and Predicting Tape Life. *ARSC Journal* 34(2): 240–274.

Interaktivnyi atlas. 2024. Popov, Nikolai Anisimovich: Interaktivnyi atlas korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka: yazyki i kul'tury. Moskva: Ministerstvo nauki i vysshego obrazovaniia. https://mobile.atlaskmns.ru/page/ru/people_dolgany_persona_1.html [accessed: 5.20.2024]

Jensen, Casper B. 2007. Infrastructural Fractals: Revisiting the Micro–macro Distinction in Social Theory. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (5): 832–850.

Kovaliashkina, Elena Petrovna 1999. *"Inorodcheskii vopros" v Sibiri v kontseptsiiakh gosudarstvennoi politiki i oblastnicheskoi mysli* (The "Indigenous Question" in Siberia through the Lenses of State Politics and Regional Thinking). Tomsk: TGU.

Laptander, Roza 2014. Processes of Remembering and Forgetting: Tundra Nenets' Reminiscences of the 1943 *mandalada* rebellions. *Sibirica* 13 (3): 22–44.

Leete, Art 2004. *Kazymskaia voina: vosstanie khantov i lesnykh nentsev protiv sovetskoi vlasti* (The Kazym War: The Khanty and Forest Nenets Rebellion against Soviet Power). Tartu: AO Vali Press.

— 2023. Narratives of Indigenous Resistance in North-Western Siberia in the 1930s. *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 47 (3): 53–73.

Majbroda, Katarzyna 2023. Activating Transrelational Ethnography. Interweaves of the Field in the Process of Energy Transition. *Łódzkie Studia Etnograficzne* 62 (1): 183–199.

Nabokov, Peter 1991. *Native American Testimony: A Chronical of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492–1992.* Toronto: Penguin Books.

Piskunov, Sergei. 2024. *Taimyrskoe vosstanie* (The Taimyr Rebellion). http://www.hrono.ru/sobyt/1900war/1932taim.php [accessed 21.4.2024]

Popov, Nikolai Anisimovich 1996. *Evangelie ot Marka na dolganskom yazyke* (The Gospel of Mark in the Dolgan Language). Moscow: Rossiiskoe otd. Instituta perevoda Biblii.

— 2011. *Po piati rekam Avama* (Along the Five Rivers of Avam). Krasnoiarsk: Kass Plius.

Sarkki, Simo, Hannu I Heikkinen, Teresa Komu, Mari Partanen, Karoliina Vanhanen, and Élise Lépy. 2020. How Boundary Objects Help to Perform Roles of Science Arbiter, Honest Broker, and Issue Advocate. *Science and Public Policy* 47 (2): 161–171.

Sawchuk, Joe 2005. We Are Included! The Metis People of Canada Realize Riel's Vision. *Canadian Historical Review 86* (3): 561–562.

Sheksheev, Aleksandr 2021. *Maut dlia russkikh. Vosstanie na Taimyre* (A Lasso for the Russians. Taimyr Rebellion). *Sibirskie Ogni* 12: https://www.sibogni.ru/content/maut-dlya-russkih-vosstanie-na-taymyre [accessed 16.06.2024]

Shykova, S.A. 2024.«*Eto bylo na Taimyre», iz vospominanii Mikhaila Nikolaevicha Shorokhova* ("This Happened in Taimyr." As remembered by Mikhail Nikolaevich Shorokhov). Taimyrskii Kraevedcheskii Muzhei. https://taimyr-museum.ru/shlykova-sa-eto-bylo-na-taymyre-iz-vospominaniy-mihaila-nikolaevicha-shorohova [accessed 20.04.2024]

Sibir' Realii 2024. *Bunt shamana Barkhatova. Kak na Taimyre otbivalis' ot kollektivizatsii* (The Rebellion of Shaman Barkhatov. How People Fought Collectivization in Taymyr). https://www.sibreal.org/a/bunt-shamana-barhatova-kak-na-taymyre-otbivalis-ot-kollektivizatsii/32788459.html [accessed 22.04.2024]

Simpson, Audra 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Durkham NC: Duke University Press.

Strathern, Marilyn 1991. *Partial connections.* London: Rowman and Littlefield.
Sunder Rajan, Kaushik 2021. *Multisituated: Ethnography as Diasporic Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Troshev, Zhores 1996. Taimyrskaia tragediia (Taimyr Tragedy). *"Den' i Noch"*. *Literaturnyi zhurnal dlia semeinogo chteniia* 6: 5–6 https://www.krasdin.ru/1996-6/s031.htm [accessed 16.06.2024]
Troshev, Zhores Petrovich 1998. *Taimyrskaia tragediia*. (Taimyr Tragedy). Moskva: Slovo.
Yadrintsev, Nikolaĭ M. 1892. *Sibir' kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom otnoshenii.* (Siberia as a Colony in Geographical, Ethnographic, and Historical Sense). St. Petersburg: izd. I. M. Sibiriakova.
Ypi, Lea 2022. Free: A Child and a Country at the End of History. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
Zandlová, Markéta, and Karel Čada 2023. Ethnographer As Honest Broker: The Role of Ethnography in Promoting Deliberation in Local Climate Policies. *Critical Policy Studies*: 1–20.

Figures

1 Endangered Audio tapes in an archive, 2020. Photo: Anonymous project member.
2 The Port of Dudinka, 1997. Photo: David G. Anderson.
3 The Barkhatov file.