

LIVES "ON HOLD" (INTRODUCTION)

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This collection represents the second volume in the series initiated in 2023 under the title "A Fractured North." We envisioned these publications as a response of the international community of Northern scholars to the ongoing war in Ukraine and to the disruption ("fracture") it caused to our common field that encompasses Arctic/Siberian/Northern/ Indigenous domains. We wanted to create an open forum for practitioners of various disciplines – anthropologists, historians, human geographers, museum specialists, as well as Indigenous experts and knowledge holders – to share personal perspectives, reflect on the current situation, and discuss challenges and strategies that we face as a globalized community, both retrospectively and proactively.

Sadly, not much has changed in the past few months, since we completed the production of the first series volume of the series, *A Fractured North: Facing Dilemmas* (Kasten et al. 2024). It was released in Spring 2024, first as an online edition¹ and soon after, as a printed book. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the destruction and sufferings it has brought to millions of people continue unabated. The community of Arctic/Siberian specialists remains divided by new rifts created by this war. Joint projects are on hold; traveling and fieldwork across the borders have almost stopped; and many personal connections have been suspended since February 2022. To the extent of our collective knowledge in the first half of 2024 no European, NorthAmerican, or Japanese social scientist conducted on-site research in Siberia nor was even on an official visit to Russia supported by their home institution. In regard to fieldwork, this happened perhaps for the first time since Caroline Humphrey's research in Buryatia in 1966 (Humphrey 1983).

As distances, both physical and mental, keep growing, the divides within a once thriving international field solidify. Nothing has proven it more obviously than the recent International Congress of Arctic Social Scientists (ICASS-IX) in Bodø, Norway, where the number of our colleagues coming from Russia was minimal. Instead, the Congress featured several panels on the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on international Arctic research filled by Western scholars and Russian expatriates. We will provide a more detailed account on the ICASS panel inspired by our book series, *A Fractured North*, in the next issue, in late 2024.

This second collection brings the number of "stories" featured in the *Fractured North* series to over 30; the third volume planned for late 2024 will expand it to almost 50. The series documents a significant and representative cross-section of feelings and

1 <https://dh-north.org/publikationen/a-fractured-north-facing-dilemmas/en>

perspectives of our diverse international community (except, regretfully, for our Russian colleagues, whom we would love to engage as well). In recognizing the diversity of opinions and personal narratives, we opted to frame each of the three volumes along a particular key theme or set of messages, even if posted under a common series title. The recently published Volume 1, *Facing Dilemmas*, addresses ethical (moral) issues and personal choices in cross-border partnership during the time of war and/or in working under oppressive political regimes, in general. The current volume, *Journeys on Hold*, explores the damage inflicted to our collaborative field by the current geopolitical realities in Russia and beyond. The forthcoming Volume 3, *Maintaining Connections*, will examine various creative paths to keep the relations, individual and collective, across the newly (re)built divides.

Like the preceding collection, this volume is organized in three thematic sections, each with a particular set of stories. Five chapters in Part 1, *Personal Journeys* (by Roza Laptander, Bruce C. Forbes, and Timo Kumpula; Art Leete; Craig Campbell; Jaroslava Panáková; and Vladislava Vladimirova) address the traumatic impact of the current “freeze” inflicted by the war of 2022 on *personal* connections. They all reminisce on individual biographies and research trajectories framed by the years, often decades, of joint fieldwork and warm relations that the authors forged with their partners in Russia. Now, these friends, partners, and colleagues of many years cannot even be named for the reason of safety or are listed under pseudonyms. Even if some relations may eventually continue under new formats, the pain of missing one’s friends and experiences of one’s formative years is palpable. It goes well beyond the loss of scientific data, project funding or of planned scholarly publications.

The damage to our collaborative work is explored in more depth in the four chapters making Part 2, *Ashes of Our Collective Dreams* (by Vera Solovyeva; Tero Mustonen; Shinichiro Tabata; and Igor Krupnik, Martin Schultz, Eduard Zdor, and Liliya Zdor). The dominant motif of these four stories is that of a “collective suspense,” a paralyzing uncertainty looming over many promising international ventures. First grounded by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–2022 and now by the war in Ukraine, each team was stopped in its “unfinished journey.” As the momentum was stalled, the losses again become more palpable in the third year with “no work,” because of broken connections, inability to visit local partners, and the changing nature of once promising research sites.

Four chapters in Part 3, *Reflections: What Went Wrong?* (by David G. Anderson; Erich Kasten; Lukas Allemann; and Martin Gross), offer various interpretations of *how* and *why* international collaborations in Siberian/Northern research fell apart. This introspection is painful to the authors, and it may be uncomfortable to some readers, as each story tries to assess where and when international collaborations fell apart on both sides. Even if the war of aggression remains an overwhelming force in the newly frozen professional connections, the authors are carefully weighing in on what could have been done differently in both past practices and the immediate

response by Western institutions and scholars after February 2022. This often-overlooked side in our common assessment of the realities of the “Fractured North” is critical for the sake of history, but also to learn the lesson(s) for building future relations.

The volume concludes with the chapter by Peter Schweitzer that offers a long-term view on the history of research on Siberia and its Indigenous people. In Schweitzer’s assessment, it was a history of *many* alternations between what he calls the “phases of opening” and the “phases of closure.” Some were long; many were painful; yet, Schweitzer identifies the dominant factor as always the Russian state policy of restricting (or easing) access to Siberian field sites or even to the data from these sites, for international studies. It is then the long history of our field that offers many recurring lessons to learn from (Alymov 2021; Meskell 2022).

So, if we acknowledge that the field of Siberian studies was not “internationalized” for the first time in the 1990 (as many assume) nor even in the 1800s, the roots of the current situation may indeed go much deeper. Under this perspective, old stories of closures and openings may be as illuminating as the new ones, as we argue in a short post-script to the volume. The theme of “surviving bad years” will be central to the forthcoming third collection in this series, *A Fractured North: Maintaining Connections*; its preparation will begin in Summer-Fall 2024. If the next “phase of opening” is imminent, as the series editors hope, the best strategy is indeed to “stay connected” – personally, online, via joint publications and other creative arrangements, even by keeping Siberia and its people in your heart. The trauma of the current rift and the pain of abandonment may seem overwhelming, but Siberia can never be forgotten. At some point, the “journeys on hold” may resume, even if by other travelers...

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