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14 OPENINGS AND CLOSURES: THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SIBERIA AND THE POLITICS OF FIELD ACCESS

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Introduction

When I started to pen the last chapter of my Habilitation on the history of anthropology in Siberia (Schweitzer 2001) in 2001, my task was to synthesize the several hundred years of Siberian research I had presented and discussed in the previous chapters. While I focused more on the "what" and "who" of the 300+ years of research, the "how" received at least some attention. In doing so, I found one particular pattern that, back then, seemed only of secondary relevance:

> While the Siberian field has been characterized by tight political control since the 17th century, it is nevertheless necessary to differentiate between different periods within this seemingly uniform pattern. Generally speaking, we can distinguish periods of opening … and periods of closure ... "Opening" and "closure" should be understood as relative terms, since neither openings nor closures have ever been absolute. Likewise, the sequence of relative openings and closures does not follow a strict pattern, since it has been Russian internal politics, which determines its course. (Schweitzer 2001: 291)

"Opening" and "closure" had been used as a descriptive, non-theoretical, set of terms. As the quote above indicates, these terms should be understood as relative and relational. That is, "opening" and "closure" should not be seen as absolute values but rather as points on a continuum. This also means that state changes are typically occurring gradually and are not a matter of switching from A to B. The qualifier relational should remind us that "opening" and "closure" are rarely ever a matter of applying to all countries and regions to the same degree. For most of this article and especially for the recent past, this relationality will focus on Russia and the "West", that is western Europe and North America.

This chapter will be devoted to historical illustrations of shifts along this opening-closure continuum. The focus will be on the 18th and 20th centuries. My intention is to apply these historical lessons to our present situation, and to ask whether we can learn from them.

Historical Sketches

From the Middle Ages to the 18th century

The history of "western" knowledge about Siberia reaches back into the Middle Ages, when travelers to Muscovy, China or other parts of Asia came in direct or indirect contact with what we call Siberia today. Most of it was knowledge by hearsay, for example when the Austrian diplomat Baron Sigmund von Herberstein recorded rumors and eye-witness accounts about the areas east of the Ural Mountains, during his long-term stays in the city of Moscow in the first half of the 16th century, and published them in his famous Rerum Moscovitarum Commentarii (1549) (Schweitzer n.d.). The reason for travelers typically not being able to visit Siberia had less to do with "closures" in the sense of politically motivated travel restrictions than with the absence of Russian control over the area, and with the lack of transport infrastructure for getting there.

Once the Russian state had gained political control over sizable parts of Siberia in the early 17th century, it started sending criminals and other unwanted individuals (such as religious non-conformists) to Siberia. By the mid-17th century, exile to Siberia was well established as a punishment for a number of offences (Forsyth 1992: 43). Since the early days, punitive exile was in no way limited to Russians: it included Ukrainians (such as Grigorii Il'ich Novitskii) and Poles, who had participated in insurrections, as well as Swedes, Germans, and others, who had been taken as prisoners-of war (Schweitzer 2001). The above-mentioned Novitskii wrote *Kratkoe opisanie o narode ostiatskom* [A Short Description of the Ostyak People], which the official Soviet historian of anthropology hailed as the first ethnographic monograph about a Siberian people (Tokarev 1966).

Swedish prisoners-of-war were abundant in the early 18th century as a result of the Russian victory over the Swedes in 1709. The most important one for Siberian studies was Philipp Johann von Strahlenberg (1676–1747), who spent ten years (1711–1721) in Tobolsk. After returning to Sweden, he spent several years compiling his opus magnus *Das Nord- und Ostliche Theil von Europa und Asia* [The Northern and Eastern Part of Europe and Asia] (Strahlenberg 1730), which was later translated into English, French, and Spanish (Andreev 1965) and remained popular throughout the 18th century. While Novitskii and Strahlenberg made important contributions to our understanding of Siberia, they do not represent the prototypical 18th century Siberianist we have learned to associate with the "great expeditions" of that century. Unlike their better educated successors, the trained naturalists associated with the Russian Academy of Sciences, Novitskii and Strahlenberg ended up in Siberia against their will. The Russian state sent them to Siberia as punishment, a practice that is still being used into the 21st century. Thus, the information originating from their travels can be seen as an unintended consequence of the state trying to get people out of the way and out of sight, from the vantage point of the centers of political power.

In contrast to Strahlenberg and Novitskii, Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt (1685–1735) was a perfect representative of 18th century scholarship. Born in Danzig, he had studied medicine in Jena, before moving to the university in Halle, where he added zoology and botany to his medical studies and defended his dissertation in 1713 (Novlianskaia 1970). Messerschmidt returned to his home town, which at the time was at the center of political rivalries between Sweden and Russia (Winter and Figurovskij 1962). When Russian troops took Danzig in 1716, Peter I visited the town and asked about potential candidates to conduct a research expedition to study the natural resources of Russia; the prominent Professor Breyne, the founder of the Museum of Natural History in Danzig, recommended Messerschmidt (Novlianskaia 1970). After lengthy negotiations and delays caused by the ongoing Nordic War, Messerschmidt arrived in St. Petersburg in April of 1718. His assignment was to conduct a seven-year expedition to Siberia, which would collect information and specimens related to all fields of the natural sciences and medicine. Although the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg was not yet in existence, the rationale for hiring Messerschmidt was closely connected with ongoing activities in that direction. Laurenz Blumentrost, who was in charge of preparing the establishment of an academy of sciences, and his brother, Johann Deodat Blumentrost, who headed the Medical Office at court, were primarily responsible for the organization of Messerschmidt's Siberian journey (Winter and Figurovskij 1962).

Messerschmidt's remarkable journey lasted from 1719 to 1727 and covered large parts of western, southern and eastern Siberia. He and Strahlenberg traveled part of the way (in 1721 and 1722) together. When Messerschmidt finally returned to St. Petersburg, he had amassed an enormous wealth of materials covering the fields of botany, zoology, archaeology, linguistics, ethnography, and medicine (Winter and Figurovskij 1962). But times had changed at the capital of the Russian Empire. During his absence the Academy of Sciences had become a reality. However, after Peter I's death (1725) the political situation in the country was characterized by chaos and internal power struggles (Peter's successor Catharine I died shortly after Messerschmidt's return). While the Academy of Sciences could not come up with any funds to pay Messerschmidt for working on his materials, it asked for the transfer of all notes and collected items, as well as for a signed statement that he would keep silent about his expedition and would not publish anything without the permission of the Academy (Winter and Figurovskij 1962). Disappointed and deprived of the fruits of his labor, Messerschmidt arrived in his home town Danzig in 1729. He returned to St. Petersburg in 1731, where he lived in extreme poverty and died in 1735 (Novlianskaia 1970). Although Messerschmidt's notes have been used extensively by later generations of scholars, hardly anything of his rich legacy has been published. It took until 1962 to start the publication of the remaining parts of his diaries (covering the years 1721–1726) in a five-volume series under the title Forschungsreise durch Sibirien (Messerschmidt 1962–1977).

Messerschmidt's journey was a direct result of the Russian Tsar's Peter I interest and investment in the exploration and study of Siberia, while Strahlenberg's sojourn was also triggered by Peter's military successes against the Swedes. The reign of Peter I can be seen as the first "opening" for international research in Siberia. In general, his policies stimulated an opening toward western Europe and resulted in a kind of forced modernization from above. While the pros and cons of these developments are not at issue here, it is beyond doubt that he influenced the course of Siberian studies dramatically. It is not an exaggeration to call the 18th century a turning point in the history of Siberian studies. Peter I was not only interested in an "opening towards Europe" but he realized the need to study the unknown possessions east of the Ural Mountains in order to make economic use of their resources. Thus, Peter's sponsorship of the sciences was not an end in itself but tightly connected to his pragmatic goals of economic and political growth. In Germany, it was the excitement of the eminent philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz for all things Russian, which changed public perception of Russia from a barbaric empire to a vast tabula rasa with enormous potential for the implementation of enlightened principles of policy and education (Groh 1988). The fact that France and England remained, at least during the early decades of the century, politically and philosophically more skeptical toward the new Russia, might have contributed to the preponderance of German involvement in Russian science in general and Siberian research in particular.

The establishment of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1725 marked the culmination of Peter's plans to introduce science into Russian society. At the same time, it provided the institutional basis for most scientific endeavors directed at Siberia for the rest of the 18th century. Apart from Messerschmidt's expedition, Peter I initiated the "First Kamchatka Expedition" (1725–1730) directly and the "Second Kamchatka Expedition" (1733–1743) indirectly, both of which were led by the Danish captain in Russian service Vitus Bering and devoted to the age-old quest for a Northeast Passage. As there is abundant literature about these endeavors (e.g., Golder 1914; Fischer 1977; Møller and Lind 2003), I will mention just a few aspects relevant to this article.

From a scientific perspective, the "Second Kamchatka Expedition" or "Great Nordic Expedition", with more than 600 participants, was by far the more important one. The list of its scholarly participants – e.g., Louis Delisle de la Croyère, Johann E. Fischer, Johann Georg Gmelin, Stepan P. Krasheninnikov, Jakob Lindenau, Gerhard Friedrich Müller, Georg Wilhelm Steller – is impressive even three centuries later. All of them deserve a lot of scholarly attention, and most of them have received it. I briefly refer to the specific research conditions of two participants, namely Gmelin and Steller.

Johann Georg Gmelin (1709–1755) studied natural sciences and medicine in his home town of Tübingen before following his teachers to St. Petersburg in 1727. In 1731, Gmelin was appointed professor of natural history and chemistry at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (Dahlmann 1999). Next to Müller and Delisle de la Croyère,

he was the lead scientist of the Second Kamchatka Expedition, which he accompanied throughout its entire duration. His major work, *Flora Sibirica*, appeared in four volumes between 1747 and 1769 in St. Petersburg. Ethnographically most important are his *Reise durch Sibirien* [Travels through Siberia], published in four volumes in Göttingen in 1751–1752. Gmelin's account constitutes the only travelogue resulting from the Second Kamchatka Expedition, and covers all the areas visited by the author.

That none of the other expedition members had published such an account, and the fact that the book was published in Germany, follows from the complicated situation at the Academy during the 1740s. Shortly after his return from the expedition Gmelin asked for his discharge from the Academy. The leadership of the Academy did not want him to leave and invented continuously new demands that he had to fulfill before being allowed to travel abroad.

The so-called "Gmelin affair" (Maier 1979) resulted in Gmelin signing another contract in St. Petersburg, in order to leave Russia temporarily in 1747. Gmelin had no intention to return and was elected chair of the medical college in Tübingen in 1748. Bitter controversies ensued, and, when Gmelin announced the publication of his *Travel Through Siberia*, rumors appeared that disguised agents were planning to abduct Gmelin (Maier 1979). In the end, the relations with the Academy seemed to calm down and his application for foreign membership was only prevented by his premature death (Maier 1979).

Georg Wilhelm Steller (1709–1746)[1] war born in Bad Windsheim, and studied in Wittenberg and Halle, where he developed connections with the Pietism of August Hermann Francke (Köhler 2012). As job prospects were poor at German universities, he moved to St. Petersburg, where got into contact with scientists at the Academy of Sciences. In 1737, he signed a contract with this institution and was ordered to join the Second Kamchatka Expedition, which had started several years earlier (Köhler 2012). After a lengthy trip, interspersed with research along the way and meetings with Müller and Gmelin, he arrived in Kamchatka in 1740 and stayed until 1744 (interrupted by a voyage to Alaska in 1741/1742). On his way back, Steller was confronted with a variety of accusations and arrests; he died in Tiumen in 1746. His main work, *Beschreibung von dem Lande Kamtschatka* [Description of the Land Kamchatka] was edited posthumously by J. B. Scherer (Steller 1774).

Scherer, the editor of Steller's work about Kamchatka, accused Krasheninnikov of plagiarism of Steller's materials (Steller 1774). This unfounded accusation might have been partly triggered by the similarity of the two works, which can be explained by partially shared experiences and mutually shared notes. In addition, as Müller pointed out in a letter to Büsching in 1755, "Scherer seems to have made it his duty to denounce Russia" (Hoffmann 1995: 388). In any case, Scherer's assault resulted in an unfortunate series of nationalistically tainted exchanges, reaching well into the 20th

1 More on G. W. Steller's life and work in Kasten 2020 – *eds.*

century, as to whose account was better and more accurate (e.g., Stepanov 1956). This situation was aggravated by the fact that Steller's account remained only accessible in German and that Krasheninnikov's book is most easily found in Russian. Thus, Russian/Soviet students of Kamchatka most often refer to Krasheninnikov as their major source, while German students more readily cite Steller. However, there is no doubt that the two monographs complement (and, at times, contradict) each other and should be read in conjunction. The bottom line is that the two accounts constitute the best available sources on the Indigenous life-ways of the peoples of Kamchatka in the 1700s, written just before they were severely altered by Russian colonization.

Most of the results of the Second Kamchatka Expedition were published long after its completion. While, undoubtedly, personal problems and the early death of some of its scholars contributed to those delays, even more important were the unstable political conditions within Russia during the years following the expedition. The Academy of Sciences was under siege and, in 1745, rumors about its imminent closure were in circulation (Maier 1979). As the case of Gmelin demonstrates, information policies during the 1740s and 1750s were extremely restrictive. The Russian state seems to have been more worried about keeping the enormous materials gathered during the expedition to itself than about the potential sensation they might have created in the international world of scholarship.

After several inept successors of Peter I, most of whom did not support education in general and the Russian Academy of Sciences in particular, the final decades of the 18th century saw another great ruler, Catharine II or Catherine the Great (1729-1796), who continued what Peter had started. Her lengthy rule (1762-1796) had a positive impact on the development of Siberian studies. Catherine II, who was strongly influenced by French Enlightenment philosophers, considered the promotion of the sciences as one of her goals (Donnert 1998). The Academy of Sciences regained the reputation it had held before the 1740s, the publication of scientific results was again actively pursued, and new scholarly ventures were undertaken. One of the first results of the new spirit within the Academy was the organization of the so-called *Academic Expeditions* (1768–1774). The initial intent was to conduct astronomic observations during the passage of the Venus in front of the sun in 1769. The French astronomer Jean Chappe d'Auteroche (1722–1769) had observed the Venus passage in Tobolsk in 1761 but his measurements were considered inaccurate.

A driving force behind these endeavors was Peter Simon Pallas (1741–1811), who was born in Berlin and studied medicine and natural sciences in Berlin, Halle, and Göttingen, before graduating as Doctor of Medicine in Leiden in 1760. After travels and research sojourns in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (1761–1767), he was invited by Catherine II to join the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. Shortly after arriving in the Russian Empire he participated in the above-mentioned expedition. After returning to St. Petersburg in 1774, he devoted most of his time and energy to issues of "science management" for the Academy of Sciences: he not only engaged

in research and publication activities in connection with the materials collected by himself but was also extremely active in reviewing and editing the work of others. Pallas certainly was one of the key figures in the scholarly exchange between Germany and Russia during the second half of the 18th century. For example, Wendland (1992) calculated that Pallas was in contact with at least 450 contemporaries: 183 of them resided in the Russian Empire, 132 in the countries of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, 52 in the Netherlands, 45 in Great Britain and Ireland. Pallas's individual contacts were spread all over Europe; one correspondent in China was listed. Pallas remained in Russia and conducted a private research trip to its southern parts and the Crimean Peninsula in the years 1793 and 1794. Subsequently, he set up residence on the peninsula from 1795 to 1810. He then returned to his native Berlin, where he died in 1811 (Wendland 1992).

Despite Catherine the Great's efforts, higher education in Russia was in a dismal state at the end of the 18th century. Aside from the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, the University of Moscow, founded in 1755, was the only institution serving students. During the last decade of the 18th century (the final years of Catherine II and the reign of Paul I) higher education fell victim to state repression. In early 1803, when Tsar Alexander I started his reforms of higher education, Moscow University had 64 students (Andreev 2000). The reforms, which lasted until 1812, reopened or created a number of new universities and provided relatively liberal conditions for academia. The remaining decades of the first half of the 19th century were characterized by periodic state interventions against the autonomy of universities and against broad access to them (Pavlova 1990). Despite these obstacles, university education became a regular feature of Russian intellectual life during those years.

A first assessment of openings and closings

The 18th century provides ample material for a first illustration of the concept of "openings" and "closures" regarding international access to the Siberian field. These openings and closures took a variety of forms – all of which were tied to political control by the Russian state and to "demand" for access by outside actors. While Russia slowly began to exert control over territories east of the Ural Mountains during the 17th century, voluntary travel to Siberia, other than by Russian fur hunters and peasants trying to escape servitude, remained rare occurrences.

The demand for scientific access to Siberia increased noticeably at the beginning of the 18th century. As detailed above, the modernization and economic development policies of Peter I had Siberia, and the scientific study of that region, as one of its centerpieces. From outside of Russia, this interest was stoked by Leibniz (e.g., Kuentzel-Witt 2018). Leibniz and the young Tsar had extensive exchanges about Russia's eastern landmasses and their significance for a fuller understanding of the earth's geography. To build up research infrastructure inside Russia more or less from noth-

ing, Peter I had to attract and hire foreign scientists. This led to the quasi-colonial situation that European research traditions, along with outside research interests, were transplanted into Russia. It is not surprising that this led to tensions in the course of the 18th century.

In terms of the *forms* of political control of access to Siberia, the historically oldest strategy was to send unwanted individuals, often from "enemy" regions or states, to the distant expanses of Siberia. This form of a "negative opening" – by not letting people out of Siberia – already in the 18th century led to descriptions about these unknown lands (e.g., by Novitskii and Strahlenberg), most likely unanticipated and unintended by the punishers. As we will see below, this inadvertent relationship between exile and ethnography even grew in importance by the second half of the 19th century (see below).

The most common strategy of political control over Siberian research was not only to keep people out (although one can presume that such cases of foreigners not getting permission to visit Siberia for scientific purposes were not always documented in the historical record), but to limit access to and control over the information gathered while conducting research in Siberia. Messerschmidt's and Gmelin's post-fieldwork troubles are good examples of this strategy. Legally speaking, there seems nothing wrong with the funding party – in this case the Russian state – demanding control over data collected with its funds. What exacerbates the story, however, is that the Russian state was seemingly afraid of information about Siberia, especially that of "foreign" researchers, reaching the eyes and ears of foreign powers. This kind of paranoia seems to have remained a constant over the centuries. It might have been based on proto-nationalist sentiments as well, as more openly demonstrated by Steller's case.

Finally, it should be remembered that the 18th century was a kind of "golden age" for Siberian research, despite the problems mentioned above. Given the specific conditions of the development of higher education in Russia at the beginning of the century, this research largely had to be conducted by foreigners. While several foreign scholars could be named as positive examples for international relations within the context of Siberian research, none of them surpasses the role of Peter Simon Pallas, who can be seen as the best role model for mutually beneficial research in Siberia and elsewhere in the Russian Empire. The long and stable reign of Catharine II contributed to his success story, as some of the problems at mid-century stemmed from with rulers disinterested in research and/or xenophobic toward the Academy, which was largely in the hand of foreigners.

The 19th century

After the large-scale endeavors of the 18th century, the 19th century, at least its first half, seems quiet at first glance. Activities picked up in the second half of the cen-

tury, primarily due to the activities of the Russian Geographical Society (founded in 1845), and to the research interests of Finnish and Hungarian scholars, who desired to document cultural testimonies by their linguistic relatives. Finnish and Hungarian researchers differed in their relationship to the Russian state. Finland had been part of the Russian Empire since 1809; thus, it was relatively easy for Finns to travel to Siberia. The importance of this circumstance is highlighted by the fact that Finish expeditions to (western) Siberia, numerous between the 1840s and 1917, ceased for almost 70 years after Finland gained independence from Russia, until the 1980s (Schweitzer 2001). For the Hungarians, access developed differently, given that Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Only after Hungary came into political dependence on the Soviet Union after World War II, was (limited) access to Siberia possible for scholars.

The exile of scholars continued to be important in the 19th century. The Russian Decembrist revolt of 1825, which brought more than 100 (mostly aristocratic) individuals to Siberia for hard labor and enforced settlement, as well as the convictions following the Petrashevskii affair of 1849 (which brought Dostoevsky to Siberia), led to a further increase of the intellectual potential residing in Siberia (Forsyth 1992). In addition, educated Poles sent to exile, as a result of their political activism against the Tsarist state, contributed to the development of scholarship and civil society in Siberia throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. During the second half of the 19th century, Russian and Jewish revolutionaries join the ranks of the exiles in Siberia. Among them were Waldemar Bogoras (1865–1936), Waldemar Jochelson (1855–1937) and Leo Sternberg (1861–1927), who would become founding fathers of Siberian anthropology within Tsarist Russia (Kan 2024).

All three of these scholars were connected to the "Jesup North Pacific Expedition" (JNPE, 1897-1902), which marked one of the largest and most fruitful transnational endeavors in the history of Siberian studies and the entry of US-American anthropology into the Siberian field. While the "what" and "why" of the JNPE has received much scholarly attention, especially around its 100th anniversary (e.g., Krupnik and Fitzhugh 2001; Kendall and Krupnik 2003), here I focus on "how" it was conducted. Led by the German-born anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942), the American Museum of Natural History launched the JNPE in 1897. It would last for five years, cost US $100,000, and involved almost twenty researchers, whose task was to resolve the question of cultural relations between the Old and New World (Boas 1908).

To accomplish this task, Boas assembled North American and Siberian sections of the JNPE. The latter consisted of two parts. The first, focused on Sakhalin Island and the Lower Amur Region,was conducted by two US-based researchers, Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) and Gerard Fowke (1855–1933) in 1898/1899. German-born Laufer was an Orientalist; Kentucky-born Fowke an adventurer and archaeologist. Both seem to have been able to conduct their Siberian research without much interference. The northern part of the Siberian section of JNPE was headed by the Russia-based former exiles Bogoras and Jochelson (Freed et al. 1988; Vakhtin 2001) (accompan-

ied by American naturalist Nicholas Buxton, Swiss-based Russian emigré Alexander Axelrod, and two spouses, Dina Jochelson-Brodsky and Sofia Bogoras – *eds.*). As Boas seemingly had no good US-based candidates to work in the north, he contacted Wilhelm Radloff at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in St. Petersburg for recommendations, resulting in the hire of Jochelson and Bogoras. These "Russian" researchers had more problems with local authorities in Siberia than the foreigners, most likely because of their past as political exiles. Notwithstanding these minor difficulties, the JNPE represents a high mark of international collaboration in the field of Siberian studies.

The 20th century

The main event affecting Siberian studies in the early 20th century was the Russian Revolution of October 1917, which redefined international relations vis-à-vis (Soviet) Russia.[2] Unlike many other "western" countries, the so-called Weimar Republic of Germany and the young Soviet state had extraordinarily good relations as a result of the "Rapallo treaty" from 1922 (Bowring 2017). This only changed in 1933, when Hitler came to power. These special relations might also help explain why three scholars from the German-speaking world – Hans Findeisen, Otto Mänchen-Helfen, and Wolfgang Steinitz – had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Siberia, independent of each other, between 1927 and 1935. Nothing comparable from any other country outside the Soviet Union is known during that period; not until the 1990s would a comparable rate of Siberian fieldwork by German and Austrian anthropologists be achieved. As Dudeck (2024) has recently provided a detailed account of the interlocking fates of Findeisen and Steinitz, I focus on Mänchen-Helfen.

Otto J. Mänchen-Helfen (1894–1969) was born in Vienna and studied Sinology and related subjects at the universities of Vienna, Göteborg, and Leipzig. He received his PhD from Leipzig in 1923 (Göbl 1969; Mänchen 1992). After private studies in Vienna, he became the chairman of the Department of Sociology and Ethnology at the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow in the fall of 1927 (Mänchen-Helfen 1992). When the Moscow-based Communist University of the Working People of the East planned to send an expedition to the Tuvan People's Republic, a formally independent Soviet puppet state that was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1944, he decided to come along. The expedition intended to explore the economic conditions and the future potential of Tuva and was supposed to include three or four Russian economists and five Tuvan students (Mänchen-Helfen 1992). Despite being neither a Soviet citizen nor a member of the Communist Party, Mänchen-Helfen succeeded in obtaining a

2 In addition to ongoing research by Finnish and Hungarian scholars, the pre-revolutionary years of the 20th century also saw the writings of Polish-born and England-based Maria Czaplicka's, as well as her trip to Siberia in 1914/15 (Kubica 2020).

visa in the capacity of an ethnologist (Mänchen-Helfen 1992). However, the expedition was delayed for financial and political reasons. Mänchen-Helfen traveled ahead to Kyzyl, where he was notified that the expedition had been officially postponed until the next year (Mänchen-Helfen 1992). Still, since the five Tuvan students also had come to Kyzyl, Mänchen-Helfen was able to travel with them through parts of Tuva during the summer of 1929.

After his return to Moscow in September of 1929, Mänchen-Helfen published a short article about Tuva in the German-language newspaper Moskauer Rundschau, which was markedly pro-Soviet. However, he shortly thereafter sent the greater part of his Tuvan notes to the West, and he himself seems to have relocated to Berlin around 1930 (Göbl 1969). A year later, his account of the journey to Tuva was published as Reise ins asiatische Tuwa in Berlin (Mänchen-Helfen 1931). Since the book was in no way pro-Soviet, its publication was followed by a scathing Soviet book review written by Karl Schmückle, who had escorted Mänchen-Helfen through Tuva (see Mänchen-Helfen 1992: 227–242 for the review). In 1933, Mänchen-Helfen was finally offered a lectureship in Berlin, which he never assumed, because he refused to join the pro-Nazi National Socialist (NS) union of lecturers (Göbl 1969). Between 1933 and 1938 he lived as a private scholar in Vienna, from where he was forced into emigration a second time (ibid.). Mänchen-Helfen spent his remaining years in California and retired as a Professor of Art at the University of California, Berkeley in 1961 (Göbl 1969). He never returned to Tuva, neither physically nor in his writings, but his 1931 book about Tuva was translated into English in 1992 (Mänchen-Helfen 1992). As Katja Geisenhainer (2022) has pointed out, Mänchen-Helfen's positioning on the political left contributed to his marginalization within German anthropology, even long after the fall of the Nazi regime.

Findeisen and Steinitz both worked at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin between 1924 and 1926, where they met with both Waldemar Bogoras and Leo Sternberg in 1924 (Dudeck 2024). They also encountered each other in Finnish Lapland during fieldwork in 1929 (Dudeck 2024). Their personal fates evolved rather differently from there on.

Hans Findeisen (1903-1968), born in Berlin, began his studies of Ethnology (Völkerkunde) and European Ethnology (*Volkskunde*) in the fall of 1922. In 1927, he defended his PhD dissertation on fishing among the Paleosiberian peoples. Shortly thereafter, Findeisen traveled to the middle reaches of the Yenisei River, where he conducted fieldwork among the Kets between July 1927 and May 1928 (Maghlakelidse 1996). In 1934, Findeisen's contract with the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin was dissolved. The timing of his firing suggests political motivations by the new rulers in Germany, a notion that Findeisen himself propagated after the war (Maghlakelidse 1996). However, Findeisen's case is at least ambiguous, as Findeisen had been a "supporting member" of the SS since 1934 and a NS member since 1937 (Maghlakelidse 1996). From the late 1930s, he actively courted party institutions for a job, including

offering to establish a "Eurasian Institute" for Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* (Mosen 1992). After the war, Findeisen found himself between all fronts. His attempts to defend a post-doctoral thesis were fended off by the establishment. Unable to find academic employment, he spent his final years as a freelancer in Augsburg,

The Breslau-born Wolfgang Steinitz (1905–1967) began to study ethnology and languages at the University of Berlin in 1923. Eventually focusing on Finno-Ugric studies, he completed his PhD dissertation in 1932 (Sauer et al. 1968). Steinitz had been politically active early on and joined the German Communist Party in 1927 (Peters 1989). In 1933, he lost his job as Assistant Professor (Peters 1989), and emigrated to Leningrad, where he taught at the Institute of the Peoples of the North between 1934 and 1937 (Pomerantseva and Terent'eva 1967). In 1935, he was able to conduct six months of field research among the Khanty and Mansi (Sauer et al. 1968; Dudeck 2024). As Stalin's terror machine gained speed, Steinitz was forced to leave the country; he spent the remaining years of the Third Reich in exile in Stockholm (Peters 1989). When Steinitz returned to Berlin in early 1946, he immediately became involved in science management and university politics of the emerging German Democratic Republic. He became the founding director of the Finno-Ugric Institute at Humboldt University, was a member of German Academy of Sciences, and served as its vice-president for several years (Peters 1989).

The fates and trajectories of these three German-language ethnologists, all of whom had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork in Siberia in the interwar years, differed significantly. Still, there are some general lessons to be learned. The politics of access in the 20th century was also determined by ideological positions. Both Mänchen-Helfen and Steinitz were supporters of political ideologies close to those declared by the Soviet state. Even Findeisen, who later showed his willingness to collaborate with the Nazi regime, seems to have benefited initially from the leftist leanings of his teacher Max Schmidt; these political views would be held against him later in Germany (Dudeck 2024). Despite their different positions, all three were eventually declared "enemies" of the Stalinist terror machine; luckily, all of them survived. By the late 1930s, Stalin's totalitarian regime put an end to German-language field research in Siberia for more than 50 years.

Interestingly, no Siberian fieldwork was conducted by US-American anthropologists during the inter-war years.[3] This is somewhat surprising, as the USA was home to a number of émigré Russian anthropologists, including some with field experience in Siberia. Waldemar Jochelson was certainly the most prominent among the latter. But, as Krupnik (1998) has pointed out, the influence of the Jesup paradigms, as set forth by Boas, was on the decline after 1915. It is important to also recall that the US and Soviet governments did not entertain diplomatic relations until 1934. It would

3 The Indigenous scholar and US citizen Archie Phinney was nevertheless able to study and teach in Leningrad between 1932 and 1937, supplied with letters of recommendation by Franz Boas and others (see Balthaser 2020 and Kuznetsov 2020 for more details on Phinney).

have been extremely difficult for American citizens to obtain visas and research permits before that year; after that, the Stalinist purges and World War II prevented any such endeavors.

After World War II and before the impacts of perestroika came to be felt in Siberian research around 1988/1989, less than a handful of researchers from outside the Soviet Union received permission to conduct research east of the Ural Mountains. Two of them came from Hungary, namely Vilmos Diószegi (1923–1972) and Éva Schmidt (1948–2002). This representation of Hungarian scholars can be linked to two factors. Firstly, Hungary was a "brother country" and part of Soviet sphere of political influence, which made things easier, although it did not mean that every Hungarian could easily travel anywhere in the Soviet Union. The other important factor was that of the Ugric research tradition, which reached back into the 19th century. Post-WWII, Hungarians built on an impressive body of research produced by their predecessors. Diószegi was able to visit southern Siberia during the 1950s with the help of the archaeologist Aleksei Okladnikov. Schmidt had been able to visit and work with Ob-Ugrians of western Siberia on several occasions in 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Schmidt 1988). In the early 1990s, she settled down in a small village in the Tiumen region, from where she conducted participatory research until her untimely death.

The most spectacular feat by someone from outside the "Eastern Bloc" was achieved by a British scholar Caroline Humphrey, who conducted short-term fieldwork on a Buriat collective farm in 1966 and 1975, which became the topic of a detailed monograph (Humphrey 1983). The first fieldwork conducted by an American anthropologist was not until 1976, when Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer participated in a Soviet expedition to the Khanty-Mansi National Region (Balzer 1981; 1983).

Research access to Siberia became more possible in the final years of the Soviet Union, from 1989 onwards. While only a few researchers – e.g., David Anderson, Anna Kerttulla, Debra Schindler, Piers Vitebsky, and the writer of these lines – made it to the Siberian field during Soviet times, the number of foreign researchers east of the Ural Mountains increased sharply after the end of the Soviet era. As the final decade of the last millennium progressed, this "avalanche" was being perceived as problematic by some (Gray, Vakhtin and Schweitzer 2003). Still, from today's perspective, the roughly 30 years between 1990 and 2020, when the Corona pandemic halted most travel, were "golden years" for international research in and about Siberia. That is, they constituted a perfect example of an "opening."

Now, that we are dealing once again with a "closure", it deserves mention that the opening of these golden years were not even in the field access they provided. Individual cases of denied access to Siberia for researchers emerged during the 2000s; the overall attitude of the Russian state toward foreign researchers became even more restrictive after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the western sanctions that followed. The reintroduction of borderzone restrictions, increased surveillance through Russian federal security forces, as well as the local impacts of

constant anti-western mass media messaging have made fieldwork by foreigners in Siberia more and more difficult and more reminiscent of Soviet conditions, as my own experience between 2016 and 2019 can testify.

Conclusions

The historical sketches provided above demonstrate a multiplicity of strategies that have been used by the Russian (Soviet) state to discourage or prohibit "foreign" research in Siberia. They provide a complex web that can be referred to as a "politics of access." This was not limited to preventing access, but also consisted of actions hindering the analysis and publication of data afterwards. Both sets of strategies also served the purpose of discouraging scholars to even seek access. The "politics of access" thus determined to which degree international and transnational scholarship was both desirable and possible.

When I was researching and writing my *Habilitation* in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I had the privilege of experiencing an extraordinarily "open" period in the anthropology of Siberia. Still, even then, the prospect of a future closure was lurking. In 2001 I observed:

> Since most of the 1990s were characterized by an intellectual opening – a transnational moment –, it is to be expected that the next phase of closing is not too distant in the future. (Schweitzer 2001: 293)

Today, we are again in one of such dark phases of Siberian studies. The current closure dates precisely to the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022. As this attack was preceded by the COVID-19 pandemic, most foreign researchers have not been active in Siberia since Winter 2020. The pandemic did not end all non-Russian Siberian research – some researchers got "stuck" in Siberia for a while at the beginning of the pandemic, while others were able to enter during short phases when pandemic travel restrictions eased. The current situation seems to prevent most foreign research activities in Siberia. It is unclear, however, whether this situation is based on a prohibition by the Russian state alone. At this point, "western" research and funding agencies prohibit actively such activities, as a part of broader "sanctions" aimed at the Russian state and its institutions. Thus, to some degree, the current closure is self-imposed by "western" universities and agencies, albeit for good reasons. At the same time, we can assume with some certainty that the Russian state would deny visa requests for field research in Siberia by citizens from "unfriendly countries" (see Campbell, *this volume – eds.*).

Given the current geopolitical constellation, in which Russia declares the West as its enemy and works hard on finding new "friends", the question is whether among this heterogeneous group of countries – ranging from the full-scale supporters to

states that do not explicitly criticize Russia's invasion of Ukraine – some new centers of Siberian research may emerge. It would not be the first time that geopolitical constellations make a difference in how much or how little access to Siberia scholars of individual countries have. The history of Siberian anthropology teaches us that research activities have been built upon certain research traditions and research infrastructures (Schweitzer 2001; n.d). Whether new players from the countries like China, Iran or Turkey will enter the field of Siberian research during the current period of closure (for western countries) remains to be seen.

Of course, the historical pattern of openings and closures carries a positive message as well: every closure is eventually followed by an opening. The record of the last few centuries does not provide us with re-occurring cycles of equal length. Still, closures typically last at least a decade and rarely more than three decades. In recent history, the period between Steinitz' last fieldwork in western Siberia in 1935 and Humphrey's research on the eastern shores of Lake Baikal in 1966 seems to define a kind of "maximum closure" of just over 30 years (though Siberia did not become "open" to foreign scholars till twenty-some years later – *eds.*).

In the end, the beginning of the next opening will not be determined by a set number of years but by political changes inside Russia, in the same way as Gorbachev's perestroika enabled the latest opening in the late 1980s. What is needed on our end is patience and the will to maintain research traditions, connections, and infrastructures through these dark periods.

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