First published in "A Fractured North – Maintaining Connections," edited by Erich Kasten, Igor Krupnik, Gail Fondahl 2025: 35 – 48. Fürstenberg/Havel: Kulturstiftung Sibirien. — *Electronic edition for* dh-north.org

2 COLLABORATION WITH KHANTY PARTNERS: A STORY OF 30 YEARS OF ENGAGEMENT

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The following text is an attempt to summarise reflections on a long-term engagement with Indigenous partners in Western Siberia and experiences of collaboration under the current conditions in the project "Documentation of Museum Objects by Indigenous Knowledge Holders" (Kasten et al., this volume). In a climate where, on the one hand, colonial legacies are under increased scrutiny in research and, on the other hand, relationships of solidarity and commitment to the rights of Indigenous peoples in Russia are under attack from state repression, I feel the urge to look back at the beginnings of my own relationships, some of which have lasted for over 30 years. It may have been an unusual and bumpy road, but perhaps these smaller and less trodden paths will prove more persistent and certainly more fruitful in the long run than the official ones, or so I hope. Certainly, collaborative anthropology is associated with the precarity of practitioners in the academic world, but it also produces the networks of mutual support that help to cope with such instabilities.

When I was asked to share my reflections on the experience of working with Khanty partners from Western Siberia on museum collections and objects located in Western Europe, I began to reflect on my motivations, but also on the conditions under which I am able to do this work. This convinced me to try to defend a very specific position that I had chosen and to look for arguments in favour of it. It is that anthropologists in research bear responsibility for the relationships they have built up over years and decades with their partners in the field in Siberia. Today, so-called helicopter research is often criticised by representatives of Indigenous peoples, and rightly so (Stammler-Gossmann 2024; Saxinger and First Nation of Na-cho Nyak Dun 2018). Generations of anthropologists have exploited their social position and the cultural hierarchies that existed between them and the communities in which they conducted research (Deloria Jr. 1988; Simpson 2011; Smith 1999; Yua et al. 2022). Looking back, I can say that questions of personal responsibility, also in a political sense, have been central to me from the beginning of my anthropological career. The responsibility arising from the global socio-economic links between regions of resource extraction and consumption gives German scientific research in Western Siberia a special context, both then and now. Only later did I turn to questions of responsibility for the past of Siberian research as such.

My journey began in the early 1990s, when, as an anthropology student at the Free University of Berlin I was part of a self-organised student "project tutorial"[1] that sought to address this historical legacy, not for the sake of theoretical reflection, but to develop new research methods (Dudeck 2000). Erich Kasten, one of the editors of this volume and the then-initiator and director of the project that sparked these reflections, turned his students' attention not only to the former Soviet Union and to research in a spirit of solidarity and advocacy, but primarily to Indigenous rights activism in the face of the enormous environmental and socio-political challenges facing Indigenous peoples in the post-Soviet space (Kasten 1992).[2]

From the beginning, our work was based on solidarity, not primarily on the production of knowledge, but on identifying opportunities for mutual support. One of the main ideas was to look for concrete links between environmental and political processes in our social reality and those of Indigenous communities and their struggles, which would require our solidarity. We found such an issue in the debate that was going on at the time in German energy policy about switching from domestic lignite to supposedly clean Siberian oil and gas. The student initiative I was part of decided to contact the "Khanty and Nenets peoples" in Western Siberia in response to German energy policy and the oil and gas pipelines connecting us to Western Siberia. We saw ourselves in a direct relationship with their lives at the other end of the pipeline. We warned of the consequences of Germany's turn to supposedly clean and safe energy sources in Western Siberia. But we had no idea at the time of the threat of a future war that the so-called resource curse would lead Russia into, with German support, as we are now seeing. It is this bloody war that is now radically threatening our long-standing relationships with research partners and friends.

A second important idea was that we should change the main method of anthropological research and, instead of travelling to the territories of Indigenous peoples, would invite their representatives to Germany to support them and raise awareness of their struggle to defend their territories and rights. At first we tried to find representatives of Siberian Indigenous groups among the Soviet troops stationed in East Germany at the time, prior to their withdrawl in 1993–1994. This was of course unsuccessful, as contacts of the Soviet military personnel with the German popula-

1 German: Projekttutorium

2 The leader of this group and the only one who received a small salary as a tutor from the University was Heribert Lehnacker, who later defended a master thesis in anthropology based on the materials on Indigenous voices collected by other members of the group, especially on their travel to Siberia. I would like to name especially Caroline Grosse and Matthias Schlegel, who were engaged in establishing contacts and collaborations with Khanty and Nenets in Western Siberia. Several students who took part in the discussions of those days at Erich Kasten's seminars and the project tutorial at the Berlin Institute are still pursuing anthropology: Otto Habeck, Aimar Ventsel, Michael Rießler (in his case linguistics) and Tsypylma Darieva. To this "Berlin-lab" to explore new ways of sensitive fieldwork and community-driven co-productions in the North also belonged Tjan Zaotschnaja and Rainer Hatoum.

tion were almost completely restricted. Later I realised how many representatives of Indigenous peoples were actually serving in the Soviet military in the GDR, and that we hadn't been so misled.

Building personal bridges

The first Khanty we were able to meet was the recently deceased scholar, educator and long-time cultural activist Evdokia Nyomysova (1936-2024), who visited German linguists and our Khanty language teacher, Dr Gerd Sauer and his colleagues in Berlin. The linguists' relationship with the Khanty people was a legacy of their teacher and German Finno-Ugrist Wolfgang Steinitz, who worked in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, (Dudeck 2024). Another very outspoken activist who came to Berlin in 1995 for the first World Climate Conference was the Khanty linguist Agrafena Sopochina (Pesikova). But that was after a number of students, including myself, had decided to visit the Khanty homeland in 1993 to establish personal contacts that weren't possible through communication from afar. This and subsequent visits did not result in academic papers, but rather in an exhibition and a programme of educational talks in schools and cultural centres in the German states of Berlin and Brandenburg. Their goal was to raise awareness of the voices of the Khanty and Nenets against environmental destruction and the dispossession of Indigenous lands by the oil industry.

In the context of my studies of "extractivism," Indigenous activism and the social conditions of Khanty life amidst the oil fields, my Khanty friends also asked me to explore issues of cultural heritage, language preservation and ceremonial practices. On the one hand, they pointed out that solidarity and cooperation in other areas would be difficult without a deeper understanding of Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. On the other hand, they asked me, as an anthropologist, to help them document knowledge and practices. In 1996, at the invitation of the Nenets poet and activist Yuri Vella (1948-2013), one fellow student and I took part in an expedition to the Agan River to document oral history and toponymy (Dudeck and Grosse 1999; Vella 2010). The lessons learned from engaging not only in joint environmental activism, but also in a process of learning about Indigenous ways of resisting, negotiating power relations, and preserving the cultural world and social fabric of their society, led to my dissertation project on one of the most important public events where Khanty negotiate their relationship with the state and oil companies: *The Day of the Reindeer Herder* (Dudeck 2014).

Later, I was invited to participate in a project to document the oral history of the Nenets on the Kanin Peninsula (Dudeck 2013b). In 2016, my Khanty research partners asked if I could help them document a bear ceremony (Dudeck 2022). The last time I visited the Khanty area was on a trip to the Kazym River in 2021 to document environmental knowledge with Khanty partners (Dudeck 2021). This project had promising

beginnings and raised great expectations among the participants, but unfortunately could not be continued as planned. What all these research projects have in common is that they were never planned in advance. They all resulted from discussions with and suggestions from research partners, friends among the Khanty and Nenets. During the first 15 years of my involvement with the Khanty, I didn't receive almost any travel funding. The only exception was the Austrian documentary film "Elsewhere," made in 2000,[3] which also provided honoraria for the Khanty participants.

By 2022, it was clear that field research and collaboration with Khanty partners in Siberia would no longer be possible in the same way as before. Researchers from the "hostile" (NATO) countries have to take now incalculable risks when travelling to Russia, and Russian partners can hardly travel to Western European countries anymore. Funding for such collaborative research in the social sciences has also virtually ceased. There are discussions among colleagues that it would be better to change the research region and that, given the precarious working conditions in social science research, there will hardly be any opportunities to carry out joint studies with partners in Russia in the near future.

Why do we need "bridges?"

However, I see a more important reason for not burning bridges with those with whom I have built relationships of solidarity and collaborative research over the last 30 years or more. This reason lies in the research methods that I have followed, intuitively at first, but more and more reflectively and consciously over the years. I realised that the production of knowledge in anthropology is based on human relationships, both predetermined in the social and political context of the research, but also forged in participant observation. These relationships involve obligations of respect and reciprocity that build trust and always have to be negotiated in an intercultural but also personal relationship. My experience has taught me that these relationships grow slowly, are always fragile and require a high sense of responsibility.

The time factor is an important aspect and an argument for taking responsibility for the ties on which joint scholarship and solidarity are built, even under the conditions of such far-reaching political events as Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and the obstacles it has created. In the course of my 30 years of work in Western Siberia, I have also come to realise that these connections go beyond individual relationships. The aforementioned Wolfgang Steinitz was certainly a key figure for me. He visited the Khanty in 1935 to document their language, but also to develop new forms of education and literacy for the Indigenous peoples of the North as part of the Soviet Union's affirmative action policy. He came to work as a linguist at the Institute

3 https://www.geyrhalterfilm.com/elsewhere [accessed 01.10.2024]

for the People of the North as an emigrant to the Soviet Union who, as a Jew and a Communist, had had to flee Nazi Germany (Dudeck 2024).

I have already mentioned the links that his students and my teachers had with the Khanty and the descendants of Steinitz's language teachers and students. As I was often reminded by my Khanty partners of Steinitz's work, I realised how much my relationships with the people of Western Siberia have been built on and influenced by the work and relationships of other researchers. I would like to mention just one other outstanding person of our time, Éva Schmidt (1948-2002), whom I had the honour of meeting in my early years. Her life and work among the Khanty left a mark that is still not fully understood, but today she has become an almost mythical figure in the Khanty communities with whom she worked for decades (Voldina et al. 2004). My colleague Márta Csepregi has published on the importance of networks of researchers and community members that extend across national borders and generations, in which personal relationships influence each other (Csepregi 2009).

These relationships are not always positive. There are many examples, but it is not always clear how to write about them publicly. I will give just one anonymous example. In a family of reindeer herders and ritual specialists who hosted many researchers from Russia, Finland, Estonia and Hungary, and who welcomed me in a very friendly and helpful way, I was repeatedly made aware of a Finnish researcher who not only refused to behave according to local ethics, but also violated religious taboos, even though the hosts explicitly pointed this out to him. He was repeatedly presented to me as an instructive example of how not to behave. Not to ignore this advice, but to take responsibility not only for my relationships, but also for those of future generations of researchers, was also an important argument for me to continue the relationships after 2022.

Continuing to work with the Kazym Khanty

I would now like to turn to the history of my relationship with the Khanty on the Kazym River, which is central to the project "Documentation of Museum Objects by Indigenous Knowledge Holders" (see Kasten et al., *this volume*). I first came to the Kazym River in the early 1990s. I visited the village of Kazym because I had met the Khanty scholars Tatiana Moldanova and Timofei Moldanov in the regional capital, Khanty-Mansiisk, and they had suggested this visit. I remember very well that I was invited to Tatiana Moldanova's mother's birthday party with little knowledge of the language and was curiously questioned by everyone there. I was particularly interested in the educational experiments being carried out by Tatiana's sister Olga Kravchenko at the "Cultural Anthropological School" (Ventsel and Dudeck 1998). This was one of several attempts to reform the Russian school system to combat the cultural

alienation of children. Later, I supported another school experiment by my friend, the Nenets writer and reindeer herder Yuri Vella (Dudeck 2013a).

It was not until the end of the 2010s that I returned to the village of Kazym. It was my interest in visual anthropology that led me to ask my local acquaintances about the fate of a famous experiment in collaborative visual anthropology, Asen Balikci and Mark Badger's film 'Siberia Through Siberian Eyes' (Badger and Balikci 1993; Danilko 2017). The film has only recently been made available to the community again via the Internet, and it has sparked lively discussions. Khanty folklorist Timofei Moldanov, for example, picked up a video camera for the first time to document Khanty traditions, and went on to become the most knowledgeable scholar of Khanty folklore and religious practices. I saw the film's collaborative and advocacy approach, which was revolutionary at the time in Siberia, as an important issue to explore with my Kazym partners. The film itself is now an important historical document both for the Khanty and for the "strange tribe" of anthropologists. I was looking for the films made by Khanty and other Indigenous activists in collaboration with these foreign anthropologists during Baliksi's project in the early 1990s. Unfortunately, these films have not yet resurfaced, but I was invited to Kazym to learn and discuss visual documentation techniques with local museum staff and educators (Dudeck 2021). Joint outcomes included the filming of a play about the Indigenous boarding school experience, the organisation of a blogging workshop, and the documentation of Khanty craft traditions for making decorated birch bark vessels.

I supported my partners in their cultural and educational activities, and they enabled me to pursue questions on Khanty visual culture and especially on ethnobloggers in joint discussions. In addition, my suggestion that they attend an international online workshop on "Ethics and Methods in Transformative Arctic Research" (WEMA II, organized by the Research Institute for Sustainability Helmholtz Centre Potsdam in November 2021) (Herrmann et al. 2023) fell on fertile ground. Together we produced short, filmed statements by various members of the Khanty community, both Elders and Khanty cultural workers, scientists and politicians, who for the first time publicly formulated their views on scientific research and local concepts of ethics, reciprocity and responsibility, and presented them at an international seminar to representatives of Indigenous peoples and scientists from a wide range of disciplines. Unfortunately, in the light of subsequent events, the risk of publicising this important Khanty contribution was deemed too great for the Khanty, and also for the organising institutions, so it remained internal, and the short films of Khanty statements on research ethics remained unpublished.

In 2024, when I received news from Erich Kasten about the possibility of a digital heritage exchange project between European museums and Indigenous communities in Siberia, I naturally thought of my partners in the village of Kazym and the work we had begun. The news that there was a rich collection of Khanty objects in the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Bordeaux did not come as a complete

surprise to me. Years ago I had noticed an exceptional object there, one of the unique Khanty musical instruments that are an important part of the cultural heritage of this people.[4] It is an arched harp, a *tor-sapl-yukh* (crane-neck wood), the use of which in sacred contexts has almost disappeared among the Khanty, but which is now played in folklore performances, sometimes in modified form, as part of a cultural revival. A few years ago, the plan to document the few examples of this instrument scattered in museums and making them available for Khanty cultural activities was unfortunately not realised. The idea of such a project is quite old, and I well remember the visit of the Khanty scholar Agrafena Pesikova to the storerooms of the Berlin Museum of Ethnology more than 25 years ago, organised by Erich Kasten, to initiate a similar project of knowledge sharing. The Khanty scholar immediately began telling stories and sharing knowledge about the sometimes poorly documented objects. Unfortunately, at that time, funding agencies were reluctant to finance such work, even though the conditions for carrying it out were much more favourable.

Only now has the opportunity arisen to document parts of the collection in the Bordeaux museum and to link them to local Khanty knowledge and the cultural context of the artefacts in a way that would support cultural and educational activities in Khanty communities. The catalogue of the Khanty collection provided by the museum (Meriot and Taksami 1996) raised the question of which objects in the collection would be most suitable for this purpose. It was clear to me that priority should be given to the wishes of the Khanty partners themselves. The difficulty was that the information the Khanty needed to prioritise which objects to work with was limited and fragmentary in a French-language catalogue. There were photographs of some objects, but only brief descriptions of others. Some names and attributions turned out to be incorrect, as my initial inspection and translation revealed. The available information quickly circulated through the channels used for online communication between my Khanty acquaintances in Siberia, a Khanty colleague abroad and myself, but also within the Khanty community itself. For example, a bag shown in the catalogue without cultural attribution and placed in the context of shamanism quickly turned out to be a typically decorated bag with a thimble holder used by Khanty women to store their sewing utensils (Meriot and Taksami 1996, 6:188 201-995.X.1).

However, setting priorities for further collaboration proved to be difficult, and not just because of insufficient information. Questions arose as to how and why the museum objects become relevant at all and what relevance do these objects have for the Khanty today. The simple title of "cultural heritage" too easily obscures the fact that this relevance does not lie in the objects themselves but comes about through a process of cultural exchange. Examining the historical processes in which museum collections come into being shows us developments in which the relevance of objects decreases or even disappears. A term like "cemetery of cultures" for ethnographic

4 https://webmuseo.com/ws/meb/app/collection/record/4402 [accessed 01.10.2024]

museum collections draws attention to this process of possible decontextualization and recontextualization (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Collecting ethnographica has itself contributed in part to the loss of relevance of objects and the knowledge associated with them.

Conversely, there are cases where the appreciation of scholars and museums abroad has encouraged cultural preservation efforts. For example, Khanty scholar Tatiana Moldanova pointed out how important the work of Estonian art students in documenting Khanty everyday artefacts and valuing them as cultural assets was in the late Soviet period, inspiring the Khanty intelligentsia to question the devaluation of Khanty material culture in the Soviet discourse of progress (Moldanova 2015).

Co-producing relevance

All the Khanty objects in the Ethnographic Museum in Bordeaux were collected by the French geographer Charles Rabot during his journey across the Urals to the middle Ob basin in 1890. Rabot, who was not a professional ethnographer and was accompanied to the Khanty land by a Russian student as a translator and a Komi[5] policeman, was primarily interested in collecting geographical information and a collection of ethnographic objects from the local inhabitants (Rabot 1894; 1891; Bessonov 1909). There is evidence that he used methods of collecting objects in Western Siberia at the end of the 19th century that were sometimes ethically questionable, even by the standards of the time (Leete et al. 2022; Bessonov 1909). My expectation that the Khanty would find Charles Rabot's collection in Bordeaux problematic was not fulfilled. The fact that artefacts from their own culture were being preserved in a city that was a coveted destination for the Khanty project partners provoked positive and optimistic reactions, which were unfortunately dampened by the prevailing travel restrictions.

The exchange of images, the translation of descriptions, and the discussion of different objects and their characteristics and interpretations set in motion a process that I would like to describe here as the *co-production of relevance*. The museum's interest in producing knowledge that could be made available to museum visitors can also be seen as a dialogue partner in this process of creating and discovering relevance. Representatives of the museum and I assumed in a preliminary discussion that the Khanty perspective should have absolute priority. But the Khanty partners also made it clear that they did not want to set their priorities alone. Even my persistent questions about which objects, groups of objects, cultural areas or craft techniques were most important for documentation were repeatedly met with evasive answers.

5 The Komi people also speak a language that belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family. Their homeland is located in the region east of the Ural Mountains, and members of these peoples, who possessed knowledge of the territories in Western Siberia, contributed to the Russian conquest and colonization by serving as guides.

I can only attempt to interpret the resulting online dialogue with a degree of caution and formulate some conclusions that will need to be validated with Khanty partners. These partners made it clear that cultural relevance has a collective dimension and that no general statements about the importance of cultural documentation can be expected from individuals within Khanty society. Depending on one's place in society, the priorities and relevance of things and knowledge may vary.

Secondly, relevance cannot be definitively determined and is linked to social relationships and, in the case of museum collections, also to outsiders. Building these relationships and recognising and nurturing aspects such as mutual respect, fair reciprocity and responsibility are prerequisites for cultural activities in which objects also gain relevance for the Khanty. A one-sided prioritisation of relevance on the part of the Khanty seems to stand in the way of such an emphasis on social relations.

The process of dialogue and negotiation, in which the issues are discussed and proposals are made by all those involved, seems to be more important than the outcome, in which decisions are made about prioritising further work. The latter should always be of benefit to all concerned and contribute to the long-term maintenance of relationships.

In concrete terms, this meant that the Khanty repeatedly inquired about future opportunities for collaboration, regarding both scientific research and museum plans, and shared their desire to be involved in these in the longer term. In return, the Khanty reported on the activities of the local cultural centre in Kazym to preserve and pass on the techniques of decorated birch-bark vessels and discussed the potential of museum objects and ornamental techniques that are no longer available locally, such as a bucket decorated in a particular way. Another technology that plays an important role is the processing of fish skin. A sack made of burbot skin in the Bordeaux collection(Meriot and Taksami 1996, 6:62162-900-15-69), which at first sight appears unremarkable, aroused the interest of the Khanty partners because it may allow conclusions to be drawn about processing and sewing techniques.

The sacred objects were also of interest, as they were mainly associated with bear ceremonies, such as the musical instruments and birch bark masks. Here, however, the question of the practical use of the objects is more difficult to decide. Another category were objects whose meaning or execution is sometimes unclear, and which therefore aroused a desire to learn more about them and their cultural context. I suspect that their potential lies in provoking local discussions about the relevance of these objects and possibly rediscovering relevant knowledge. This category includes, for example, two decorated paddles and a carved pipe.

Quite spontaneously, in the early summer of 2024, Hungarian colleagues informed me of a ten-day trip by four Khanty women from the lower reaches of the Kazym River to Budapest to work on a project on Khanty folklore and to help open the Éva Schmidt Archive.[6] They offered me the opportunity to work with these women, only one of

6 https://schmidt-eva-archivum.nytud.hu/ [accessed 08.10.2024]

whom I knew personally before the trip, if I would lend my skills and technology to the audiovisual documentation of their memories of working with Éva Schmidt and their own biographies. I jumped into a chance to ask them for their thoughts on the relevance and whether they would also be willing to share their knowledge of the Khanty artefacts in the Bordeaux museum.

The potential of one object quickly became apparent. On the one hand, it is an everyday object that almost all Khanty come into contact with, especially in rural areas. It is a birch bark cradle, which also has a deep spiritual significance. Looking at the first photos taken in Bordeaux and the catalogue (Meriot and Taksami 1996, 6:61174-900-15-38), the cradle instantly caught the attention of the Khanty; one of the women, Rimma Slepenkova, straigtaway and spontaneously began to tell a story from her childhood that pointed to its spiritual significance. I asked her to record it on video in Khanty and she agreed.

This spontaneous moment pointed to an important aspect of documenting Khanty knowledge. Stories, folklore and the performance of oral tradition are typical forms of transmitting knowledge that differ in many ways from direct oral instruction and explanation, but have greater legitimacy and familiarity in Khanty pedagogy (cf. Cruikshank 1995). Many of these stories contain an element of the unusual and often horrific. They tell of extraordinary situations and offer multiple interpretations. They often refer to collective traditions and concepts of beings with special spiritual powers. This was the case as well with the story of an unusual event in the childhood of Rimma Slepenkova. Once, as an older child, she had a cradle that was hanging from the ceiling tied to her foot with a younger sibling in it, as is common among the Khanty. On this night, when her parents were absent, a frightening monster entered the house.

How to move on from now?

Lastly, there remain challenges for which I have found only partial solutions. They will certainly continue to accompany our work in cooperation with Indigenous communities in Siberia for some time to come.

As a rule, Western partners work in the post-2022 setting under conditions that they cannot cooperate with state institutions in Russia and also that they avoid cooperation with people who are openly involved in supporting military aggression against Ukraine. This is also a moral imperative, as one cannot do anthropological studies and legitimise or support military aggression both from the point of view of research ethics and personal moral convictions. However, insight into conditions on the ground is very limited. The motives and pressures to cooperate with state propaganda are difficult to assess from a distance. When in doubt, should a decision be made for or against cooperation?

A prominent representative of the Indigenous peoples of the Russian North has repeatedly stressed to scientists who are active in solidarity for the rights of Russia's

Indigenous peoples the importance of not severing ties and that doubts about the integrity of partners within Russia should not lead to a breakdown in dialogue and communication.[7] Financial support for research cooperation, but also for civil society actors, is virtually impossible. Funding from Western countries, as well as the potentially political nature of the cooperation, which is often interpreted very arbitrarily and broadly, would be grounds for potential persecution of Indigenous partners in Russia. Western partners are open to accusations that they are being used to legitimise official Russian state policy, that they are undermining sanctions, and that by working on research topics in Russia they are perpetuating the traditional marginalisation of other post-Soviet research regions (see Stammler and Ivanova, *this volume – eds.*) The latter two accusations may be easy to refute, but the first is more difficult.

Many aspects of joint studies cannot be discussed publicly in the current situation without endangering the safety of participants. In any case, my experience with both the partners in Kazym and the Khanty guests in Budapest has shown that there is a strong desire on the Khanty side to maintain links. Not only they, but also other Khanty partners and friends, regularly emphasise that cooperation in the cultural field is apolitical and without risk. However, the very fact that they stress the need to stay out of big politics already points to the existence of risks.

On 26 July 2024, the Russian Ministry of Justice published a list of 55 organisations, including Indigenous and academic organisations, such as the German Society for Eastern European Studies, accused of being structural subdivisions of an alleged "anti-Russian separatist movement" invented by the Russian authorities and classified as extremist (Zmyvalova 2024). This makes it impossible for members of Indigenous communities in Russia to maintain contact with many socially engaged relatives who have emigrated, unless they want to risk persecution. On the other hand, official propaganda in Russia tries to create the impression that cultural and scientific exchange is only hindered and sanctioned by the West, and that state policy supports Indigenous cultures, languages and research. Cooperation with Indigenous representatives is currently caught in this "double bind" of Russian policy. It is difficult to say how great the risk is that cultural and scientific exchange and cooperation with so-called representatives of civil society will become the target of state repression. It is equally difficult to say how likely it is that foreign researchers will be detained on trumped-up charges in order to become a bargaining chip in a prisoner exchange. As in the past, denunciations are often used to settle personal scores or in the hope of climbing the hierarchy, and ideological struggles are often just a pretext.

The war situation also brings a lot of psychological stress. Since 2022, I have sensed an increase in tensions and misunderstandings between partners working together. Personal animosities, suspicions and conflicts arise, fuelled by uncertainties about who is on which side, which can be very destructive. The temptation to make moral

7 For understandable reasons, I can not provide details about such forms of solidarity work and people involved.

accusations is often strong; the damage is often difficult to assess; possible long-term consequences are ignored. It is too tempting to fall into the role of victim, focusing on the other person's shortcomings while ignoring one's own. Relationships that have taken time and patience to develop are quickly broken. Nurturing relationships beyond self-interest requires a high degree of self-critical reflection, social skills and experience in social movements, which have not been much encouraged in academia, which focuses on individual achievement and ethics informed by individualistic moral models.

Such long-term relationships, established between specific individuals and forming cross-generational and international networks, have enabled anthropological, folkloristic and linguistic research on Khanty culture and language in the past, and I have the impression from conversations with my research partners over the past two years that such relationships are also desired by my Khanty partners for the future. It will not be easy to maintain these. Resources are scarce and precarious, and circumstances are unfavourable for doing so. Yet it is also clear that the most pressing social and environmental problems, especially in the circumpolar region, do not recognise national borders and do not simply disappear when old lines of conflict are opened and new ones added. One of the reasons I am involved in the project presented here is that I believe it will build the necessary networks of cooperation and solidarity and will not ignore inequality and unjust structures.

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