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FRACTURED CONNECTIONS? CONTENDING WITH RUPTURES, SAFEGUARDING RELATIONS (INTRODUCTION)

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As of the completion of this volume (February 2025), entering the fourth year of Russian hostilities toward Ukraine, the situation with the war continues to be bleak (to use our terminology from the *Introduction* to Volume 1 – Kasten et al. 2024a).[1] The ongoing senseless slaughter of civilians, destruction of infrastructure and cultural heritage is tragic on so many counts. By the end of 2024, the state of affairs seemed even bleaker… If *perestroika* at one time looked irreversible (Vitebsky, *this volume*), its legacies of openness and collaboration, of literally seeing the Arctic as a cohesive transnational social space (Young 1985; Osherenko and Young 1989, see Laptander et al. 2024), has sadly collapsed. We also have witnessed a lassitude in the organizations such as the Arctic Council, which can no longer function at a circumpolar level, and which may indeed wither, as the war enters its fourth year.

Moreover, there are growing signs that more than three decades of international cooperation and openness in the Arctic are being replaced by a new "Ice Curtain." Russia's withdrawal from the Barents and Bering Sea Regions cooperative structures and agreements, the suspension of its participation in the Arctic Council, closure of consulates and diplomatic missions in the North, restricted cross-border mobility and shipping (see Povoroznyuk, *this volume*) have already transpired into the field of academic partnership and cooperative research. As papers in this collection, as well as those in the previous *A Fractured North* volumes indicate, the past vision of the unified circumpolar North is no more. Arctic specialists and aspiring young students in the West face the shrinking research space, with a huge portion of the Arctic being sealed off and increasingly excluded from comparative studies, joint ventures, and data exchange. We personally witnessed these alarming developments at the recent international meetings, both at the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø, Norway and the Arctic Congress in Bodø, Norway in January and May 2024, respectively.

Meanwhile, the importance of the Arctic/North for Russia itself has only intensified over the past year, due to its rich resources and geopolitical position. Russia's government shows ever-growing interest in the development of its Arctic stores of minerals and fossil fuels, and in its strategic "protection." Such pressures increasingly impinge on Indigenous people's lives and livelihoods. At the same time, organizational, financial, and moral support from Indigenous organizations outside of Russia

1 Recently, the pressure has grown to negotiate a solution to this conflict, althought an outcome remains undetermined as this volume goes to press.

has been curtailed – a "circumpolar solidarity" mostly suspended (Sulyandziga 2024). Some colleagues in Russia have despairingly bemoaned their decreased ability to contribute to improving or even stabilizing the situation of Indigenous rights, faced with censorship pressures. Any Indigenous persons who seek justice are ever more likely to be branded as "separatists," a hard accusation in today's Russia.[2]

As the divide between Siberia/Russian North and the "rest" of the Arctic is growing, the Western community of northern specialists also feels a certain powerlessness. Our ability to contribute in an informed fashion to critical debates on the many challenges faced by the Circumpolar North, its people, first and foremost Indigenous northerners – and on their potential resolutions – is being curtailed. Over the past thirty-plus years, we have become accustomed to working across borders, of looking "circumpolar-ly," and of being able to bring our pan-Arctic analysis and comparative data under a common aegis and to many a highly placed audience. This ability may come to an end with the current cessation of opportunities to directly work with our partners in Russia. Our understanding of the evolving landscape of the Russian North is kerbed by the inability to spend time in the North, with Northerners, as well as by our hesitancy to even chance communicating with our partners and colleagues there,

Fig. 1 Panelists at the "Fractured North" session at ICASS XI in Bodø (left to right: Stephan Dudeck, Roza Laptander, Nadezhda Mamontova, Nicholas Parlato, Peter Schweitzer, and Piers Vitebsky). 31 May 2024.

2 See "Russia Labels 172 Indigenous Groups as 'Terrorist' Organizations" (22 November 2024). https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/11/22/russia-labels-172-indigenous-groups-as-terrorist-organizations-a87106 [accessed 24.11.2024]

not knowing to what degree such contact might be detrimental at present. Yet, citing one of our volume contributors, "…it is our professional duty to examine, understand and document the evolving landscape of Siberia, regardless of our own opinions or judgments" (Mamontova, p. 187, *this volume*).

Nowhere were the concerns about the newly reduced space of the "fractured North" more obvious than at the XI International Arctic Social Sciences Congress (ICASS XI) in Bodø, Norway in May 2024. In the special session, "Contending with a 'Fractured North': Reflections on the Future of International Social Sciences Collaborations in the Russian North" (organized by Gail and Igor), our panelists, contributors to the "Fractured North" series lamented the fragmented field of Arctic social research and its growing damage to our ability to generate knowledge and build bridges across the Arctic spaces (Figs. 1–2). Our diverse international audience of 50+ people, including a few colleagues from Russia, shared the pain. At the much larger public event the same evening called *Quo vadis?"* (Where are we going?), its moderator Florian Stammler challenged three panelists (Igor, Peter Schweitzer, and Lenore Grenoble) to consider the prospects of the newly "divided Arctic" – with restricted niches for cooperation, almost impermeable borders, a growing "diaspora" community of the Russian Arctic specialists, and shrinking space for general circumpolar research. The panelists' statements and queries from the audience resonated with many a somber message of this volume. Even if most other sessions at the same joint ICASS-Arctic Congress event proceeded as "business as usual," without refer-

Fig. 2 International audience at the session, "Contending with a 'Fractured North': Reflections on the Future of International Social Sciences Collaborations in the Russian North." 31 May 2024.

ring to the exclusion of the Russian Arctic from the circumpolar discourse, even in the planning for the next International Polar Year 2032–33, we find the current state of affairs hard to process.

Throughout the three volumes of our *A Fractured North* series, it has been important to both the editors and contributors to make a variety of voices and viewpoints audible. Our authors include senior scholars and PhD students; colleagues from the "West" and those trained in Russia (many of them emigres long before the war, some at its onset); and researchers from a range of disciplines – mainly anthropology, but also human geography, linguistics, political and legal studies, and sociology. We regret the inability to include the voices of colleagues directly in Russia, but inchoate discussions with a few were met with understandable hesitancy and led us to conclude that doing so might pose unacceptable risks. We would always welcome (and facilitate) opportunities for them to express their reflections and concerns in ways that they themselves see appropriate (cf. Melnikova and Vasilyeva 2023, 2024). That the editors have vivid memories of working in Russia during the Soviet period might have motivated this decision, even if we readily admit that today's situation is quite different than that of the previous Cold War.

In the first two volumes our authors considered some of the ethical and moral dilemmas of the "fractured" North and, specifically, the dangers, real or perceived, of continuing research in the Russian Arctic and Siberia, and some of the fallout of having to cease such collaborations (Kasten et al. 2024a, 2024b). Some colleagues repudiated collaborative research with citizens of Russia at the current time. Others have abandoned it due to concerns for their partners and colleagues and/or in deference to rules established by the institutions of which they are members. Everyone laments the collapse, at least freeze of circumpolar connections. Yet some have continued such research, at various levels and through various creative strategies, striving to keep our professional "home" circumpolar.

Contributions in this, third volume in the series focus on how we might move forward, despite the many fissures of the newly "fractured" North. Relationships has proved an ongoing theme throughout this series, but especially important in the contributions to Volume 3. Each of us calculates the desirability of staying connected with the risks; both varying across our collaborators and partners. The proposed maps for moving forward include a variety of approaches: adopting new(er) methodologies for carrying out research from "afar" (e.g. "netnography"); establishing new connection hubs at Western institutions but with the inclusion of Northern knowledge-holders from Russia (e.g., recent emigrants/ asylum seekers); maintaining already established research collaborations through joint meetings and gatherings on "neutral" territory, and more.

Once again, we organize the volume into three thematic sections. Section One, "The Long Dureé," includes articles from more senior "Siberianists," who started their fieldwork-based research in the Russian North shortly after the region opened to foreigners in the early 1990s. Once again, a focus on relationships permeates several of the articles. The section opens with a piece by Tjan Zaotschnaja, an Itelmen activist who has resided for decades in Germany. She recounts her distress at the state

of the Itelmen language, and documents projects to address the situation. Stephan Dudeck details his history of collaborative anthropology with Khanty partners, and the long-term relationships these have engendered. Alex King reminisces about what his work in Kamchatka provided him, in terms of personal and professional growth. Otto Habeck muses more broadly on the shifting roles of "gate-keepers" and of the "field" itself in anthropological studies of the Russian North, especially given the change in access to the field and resultant geographical shifts in research. And Olga Povoroznyuk, originally from Siberia, recounts the history of an increasingly integrated circumpolar anthropology over the course of her career, now "disrupted," and what that has meant for "reconfiguring" approaches to collaborative research in the Russian North.

In Section Two, "Moving Research Online," three scholars (one mid-career, two early career) describe their decisions to move their research on-line, given their inability to pursue fieldwork, and discuss the challenges and opportunities that this entails. The topics they plan to investigate have in cases remained the same, in others have changed. The more senior scholar (Ferguson), grieving the fracture in relations that have accompanied the need for new methods and approaches, also expresses concern for the well-being of former collaborators; the more junior scholars (Ollila, Zmyvalova) lament the lost prospects for forging the research relations with locals that co-production of knowledge requires. All tackle these new methodological approaches with openness and a critical eye to the new quandaries posed by "netnography;" we may expect advances and finessing of these research methodologies from their work. Ferguson contemplates what "best practices" might look like for continuing socio-linguistic studies of Indigenous languages from afar, including ones that protect one's colleagues. Mirkka Ollila, having planned field-based research on the Kola Peninsula for her PhD, now considers how she will readjust her research focus and methods to a "netnography"-based study of power relations in lithium mining, a topic she hopes will inform and abet Indigenous environmental and rights concerns. Similarly, constraints on engaging with Indigenous communities in Russia have caused Ekaterina Zymvalova to refocus her research and associated methodologies, from Sami language instruction policy and practice to the politics of rights experienced by Sami fleeing Russia for Nordic countries.

The final section of Volume 3, "New Initiatives, Novel Adaptations" is comprised of two reports on current projects, a reflection on how shifting our perspective may aid us in "moving forward," and an account of innovative means to keep projects – and relationships – alive. Igor Chechushkov and his colleagues describe the project, *Crossroads 2: The Bridges to the Future,* that aims to expose Russian scholars to high-caliber American anthropological research through webinars, with goals of both improving knowledge and debunking current propaganda about nefarious goals of such research. In Erich Kasten and colleagues' chapter, the authors explain their part in the project *Digital Museum of the North.* Each team member gathers information

on Siberian items from collections in western museums, using virtual methods to overcome the inability to bring Indigenous knowledge holders and the items together. This co-creates a better understanding of these artifacts, as well as making them accessible to the peoples from which they originated. The knowledge holders represent eight peoples, spread from Western Siberia to the Pacific, while the museums include institutions in France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, and the USA. Jessica Graybill offers a distinctive take on "moving forward," from her position as an educator of mainly undergraduate students and an editor of a polar-focused journal. Using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, she argues for shifting our perspectives to accommodate the new realities we face in imagining and designing new research projects, as well as in our teaching and editorial roles. Florian Stammler and Aytalina Ivanova explain how they are continuing key collaborative research projects, and the relationships that underpin them, through both on-line communication and in-person meetings in "neutral" locations; they note the unexpected benefits the latter strategy has introduced into their relationships.

We are very grateful to Piers Vitebsky for agreeing to contribute an epilogue to this volume and series. Piers, a dean of Siberian studies, has served as a mentor and example since the late 1980s for many of the now senior western scholars who have pursued research in the North (including many of those contributing to these three volumes). He thus is an "influencer" to the many more students whom these researchers have mentored. His epilogue provides a quick chronicle of the development of a partially shared (and yet sometimes also competing) anthropology between "Western" and "Russian" scholars; and the transformative power of collaborative fieldwork, especially for Western scholars. Vitebsky concludes with suggestions for moving forward by preserving materials, an understanding of the context of these materials, and – preserving relationships.

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In this concluding volume to the "Fractured North" series, we can only hope for an improvement in the situation in Ukraine, although current geopolitics does not encourage much optimism. We may need to wait a long while for another "Murmansk" moment (i.e., the ground-breaking speech by Mikhail Gorbachev – see Laptander et al. 2024) that precipitates a new opening of the Russian North to foreign social scientists, and once again encourages collaboration across the entire circumpolar space. Tragically, the gains in circumpolar collaboration over the last three decades, both scholarly and political, have been frozen if not obliterated. And, as Pavel Sulyandziga warned in his prologue to this series (Sulyandziga 2024: 10), even when the situation does change to allow fieldwork to resume, "things won't be the same as they were before!"

An especially difficult challenge for those of us still active in teaching and mentoring, is how to encourage our younger colleagues to continue their interest in and

study of the *circumpolar* Arctic as a coherent region, in the absence of direct access to the Russian North. These younger folks, with more limited connections and experiences, who had only begun to forge – and enjoy – key relations with Indigenous and other local partners, may find it hard, both professionally and personally, to sustain an active career interest in such "circumpolar" perspective and comparative approach. Yet the world direly needs such expertise. Those of us who were on the cusp of the last Arctic "Thaw" of the late 1980s and early 1990s, ready to dive into fieldwork and to build relationships, benefitted amazingly from these new circumpolar opportunities, both professionally and personally. In the "open Arctic," our abilities to generate knowledge increase exponentially – as illustrated by the *BOREAS: Histories from the North* project (2006-2009) (Ziker and Stammler 2011; see also Vitebsky, *this volume*), the *International Polar Year* 2007-2008 (Krupnik et al. 2011), the *Arctic Human Development Reports* of 2004 (Einerson et al. 2004) and 2014 (Larsen and Fondahl 2015), the *Study of the Living Conditions in the Arctic* (SLiCA, 2001-2006; Poppel 2023), scores of conferences and publications by the Max Planck Institute and its Siberian studies team (Kasten 2002, 2004, 2005), and by dozens of similar transnational studies of the past three decades.

Our research horizons will once again shrink dramatically if we accede to the "fractured North" of the closed Russian Arctic and the "rest." To the extent that we can, we need to continue to nurture our relationships with partners and colleagues in the Russian North. This is the main message we would like to pass to our readers, and especially to the younger cohorts.

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Figures

1 Panelists at the "Fractured North" session at ICASS XI in Bodø (left to right: Stephan Dudeck, Roza Laptander, Nadezhda Mamontova, Nicholas Parlato, Peter Schweitzer, and Piers Vitebsky). Photo: Igor Krupnik, 2024.

2 International audience at the session, "Contending with a 'Fractured North:' Reflections on the Future of International Social Sciences Collaborations in the Russian North." Photo: Igor Krupnik, 2024.