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ARTICLE



Locals and immigrants on the Yamal Peninsula. Social boundaries and variations in migratory experience

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ABSTRACT

Western Siberia and the entire Arctic region have been a beacon for migrants from the European part of Russia, from the national republics and the southern regions of Siberia in the post-war era. In contrast with the other regions of Siberia, the oil- and gas-rich North remains a magnet for migration from the entire former Soviet Union to this day. This paper presents research into the contemporary sociocultural environment of Yar-Sale, the administrative centre of the Yamal district of Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The research focuses on the migrational experiences of 'new' migrants and their relations with the native Nenets population. Special attention is paid to concepts such as 'local'/'immigrant', and 'insider'/'outsider'. The author holds that the boundaries between these categories are flexible. An immigrant may become a local and an insider may become an outsider, with ethnicity far from always being the deciding factor.

KEYWORDS

Migration; Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug; Nenets; Islam in the North; migrants; xenophobia; interethnic relations

Introduction

In the post-Soviet period, the Russian Arctic was subject to significant demographic changes, largely as a result of migration. While the Far East experienced and continues to experience large-scale emigration,¹ the immigrant population of the oil- and gas-rich regions of Western Siberia (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO)) is, on the contrary, growing. The population of YNAO grew from 481,398 in 1989 to 534,104 in 2016. According to Marlene Laruelle, there are *two Russian Arctics*: first, regions in crisis that have declining populations, and second, regions in the midst of economic boom which attract an increasing number of foreign migrants.²

Western Siberia and the entire Arctic region have been a beacon for migrants from the European part of Russia, from the national republics and the southern regions of Siberia in the post-war era. In contrast with the other regions of Siberia, the oil- and gas-rich North remains a magnet for migration from the entire former Soviet Union to this day. Only Moscow, Moscow Oblast, St. Petersburg, Leningrad Oblast, Krasnodar Krai and Belgorod Oblast can compete with YNAO and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug in terms of attracting migrants.³ Yamal is in the top 10 Russian regions by

Table 1. The ethnic make-up of the administrative centre Yar-Sale, Yar-Sale tundra and the neighbouring settlement of Syunai-Sale.

Ethnic group	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Indigenous peoples of the North	4376	4494	4841	4681	5116	4964	5142	5325
• Nenets	4270	4389	4725	4574	5000	4849	5024	5206
• Khanty	40	37	46	42	45	46	45	46
• Komi	36	38	38	37	40	42	43	42
• Mansi	23	24	25	21	24	21	24	25
Russians	1218	1310	1445	1381	1554	1500	1586	1637
Tatars	245	255	279	263	281	260	274	280
Ukrainians	162	160	166	161	166	157	161	157
Kalmyks	41	51	60	58	79	78	91	82
Mari	37	39	43	44	51	54	54	53
Belarusians	20	21	21	18	20	19	18	18
Bashkirs	16	20	21	16	16	13	18	18
Moldovans	12	9	12	13	14	13	14	16
Caucasus	41	50	79	89	116	110	128	128
• Karachays	13	14	26	23	31	27	36	38
• Nogais	16	19	22	31	41	36	41	37
• Ossetins	3	4	8	6	11	11	12	13
• Armenians	3	2	4	5	8	10	10	10
Central Asia	42	42	67	74	99	108	129	130
• Kyrgyz	20	25	48	55	80	87	108	102
• Kazakhs	12	13	14	13	13	14	14	19
• Uzbeks	8	2	3	4	4	4	4	5
• Tajiks	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Overall population	6243	6487	7070	6833	7550	7311	7643	7881

Data provided by the Yar-Sale rural council as of 1 January 2016. The most populous ethnic groups are presented. Note that Syunai-Sale is an almost entirely homogenous Nenets settlement, and only Nenets families live as nomads in the tundra. Not only peoples indigenous to the district (Nenets, Khanty, Selkups, Mansi and Komi) are included under the definition of indigenous peoples of the North, but also Buryats, Veps, Koryaks, Nanais, Chuvans and Evens living in Yar-Sale. The peoples of the Caucasus include not only the most numerous ethnic groups in Yar-Sale (Karachays, Nogais, Ossetins and Armenians), but also representatives of small diasporas who also live in the settlement: Azeris, Georgians, Abazins, Balkars, Kumyks, Tats and Cherkess. Aside from the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz indicated, the Central Asian peoples in the table include Uyghurs of which there were two living in Yar-Sale as of 2016.

arrivals of labour migrants from abroad.⁴ Aside from representatives of East Slavic peoples, oil and gas sector specialists from the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, Dagestan, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan migrated to Yamal in the post-war era. The number of Tatars also grew through immigration from the Tyumen and Tobolsk regions. In 1990–2000s, large-scale immigration of members of North and South Caucasian and Central Asian ethnic groups began. Despite the fact that this migration is predominantly seasonal, the size of the permanent Central Asian and Caucasian population grew and continues to grow. According to YNAO administration figures, members of Central Asian, and North and South Caucasian ethnic groups amounted to approximately 35,000 people or 7% of the population of the autonomous okrug in 2010.

The fieldwork undertaken in relation to this paper was conducted in YNAO in October–November 2016. Most of the time was spent in the administrative centre of Yamal district, Yar-Sale, but research was also undertaken in the neighbouring settlement of Syunai-Sale, the capital of the okrug Salekhard, and in the administrative centre of Priuralsky district Aksarksa, located 55 km from Salekhard.

This paper presents research into the contemporary sociocultural environment in Yar-Sale, the administrative centre of the Yamal district of YNAO. The research focuses on the migratory experiences of ‘new’ immigrants, primarily Kyrgyz people, Kalmyks, Karachays and Nogais, the ethnic groups with the greatest representation among recent

migrants (see Table 1). Special attention is paid to relations between the Nenets and 'new' migrants. At first glance, it seems that the indigenous population and recent migrant workers and specialists lead parallel lives without points of interaction. However, in recent times, many Nenets-Kyrgyz couples have been appearing (and to a lesser extent Nenets-Tajik, Nenets-Uzbek and Nenets-Kamyk couples), official marriages are entered into, there are conflicts between 'locals' and 'immigrants', and friendly relationships are forged. The everyday practices of the local population are changing. Migration is transforming the sociocultural environment of the settlement, and is even affecting the daily lives of the Nenets from the tundra who periodically visit. At the okrug level, a new regional identity is appearing, as reflected in the official positioning of Yamal as a multi-national territory. The Islamic presence in the towns is marked by mosques, halal shops, funeral services and cemeteries. In Yar-Sale, Muslims pray five times a day in the cultural centre, and *Kurban Bairam* (Eid al-Adha) and *Uraza Bairam* (Eid al-Fitr) have become conspicuous events. Some Nenets people in the okrug have converted to Islam, which is a rare exception to the norm and is perceived in different ways by Muslim and indigenous residents, but all consider it to be an unusual occurrence. The paper pays special attention to concepts such as 'local'/'immigrant' and 'insider'/'outsider'. The author holds that the boundaries between these categories are flexible. An immigrant may become a local and an insider may become an outsider, with ethnicity far from always being the deciding factor.

The growing Caucasian and Central Asian immigration to Yamal as a consequence of the active development of the region by the oil and gas industry is a fact of modern life, which, to varying degrees, is transforming the daily practices of the indigenous population and changing the okrug's urban and rural environment. The issue of interaction between the indigenous population and 'new' immigrants has not yet been investigated by either foreign or Russian anthropologists. Various works examine the problem of migrants' adaptation to life in Arctic towns⁵ and new migration trends to the Russian Arctic cities.⁶ Works on indigenous peoples and the industrial exploitation of the North have examined migratory patterns over recent years as a secondary focus.⁷ This paper attempts to pose questions and lay out various important issues and anthropological lines of inquiry, which could serve as a vector for further academic research into the interactions between the indigenous Siberian population and new immigrants.

Variations in migratory experience

Members of small, indigenous ethnicities comprise around 74% of the population of the Yamal district, the administrative centre of which is Yar-Sale.⁸ Yamal district's population is the most indigenous in YNAO, with 44% of the okrug's nomadic population concentrated there.⁹ YNAO is the only Arctic region in Russia where the nomadic lifestyles of the indigenous population have been fully preserved, and domestic reindeer herds have not only managed to avoid a decline in numbers since the fall of the USSR, but are growing steadily (Lyarskaya 2016: 54). The Yamal district holds the leading position in the okrug in terms of the number of reindeer. According to the statistical authorities, as of 1 January 2016, the number of reindeer amounted to 254,020, or 35% of the total population of reindeer in

YNAO, and 33% of residents of Yamal district are engaged in reindeer herding and lead a nomadic lifestyle. The sustainability of traditional use of natural resources acts as a guarantor of the survival of the language and unique nomadic culture. At the same time, 22% of the world's gas reserves are concentrated in YNAO and the okrug accounts for 85% of natural gas extraction in Russia.¹⁰ Resource extraction in Yamal district makes up 11.2% of the total volume of extraction in YNAO.¹¹

While the main ethnic groups represented in Yar-Sale before the fall of the Soviet Union were indigenous peoples, Russians, Ukrainians and Siberian Tatars, the settlement's ethnic landscape began to change significantly from the 1990s onwards. This does not refer to rotational workers at gas fields who barely encounter the local population. The new residents of Yar-Sale arrived and are arriving in the settlement to trade, build, open small businesses and work in the hospitals, schools administration and other institutions. Resource extraction on the Yamal peninsula has resulted in a construction boom. Over the past 16 years, virtually all the housing has been renovated, and a new school and other communal buildings were built by Turkish workers. The mass migration of 'new ethnicities' began in the 1990s and has intensified over the past 16 years.

Northern Caucasus

Some of the first to arrive in Yar-Sale were members of a single Karachay family. They began to sell clothes, shoes, toys and everyday goods. Until the mid-2000s, all non-food commerce took place on the street. The traders subsequently moved to a flea market in an unheated shed, and only fairly recently did shops appear on the ground floors of new constructions and in certain buildings equipped with central heating. Karachay women do not only sell on goods they have purchased, but knit socks and scarfs themselves. Karachays regularly travel to large markets in Moscow. Usually, groups of women travel together, and sometimes Armenians and Kyrgyz who also trade in Yar-Sale join them.

Every month we travel to Moscow for goods. The holidays are starting now and people will be giving presents, we need to buy plenty. It's best to go yourself, we buy everything, from needles to jackets. So we need to go around the depots ourselves and choose. (Female, born in the 1970s, Karachay, in Yamal since 1991)

Currently, Karachays and Nogais form the two largest Caucasian ethnic groups in the settlement. The significant migration of indigenous peoples from Karachay-Cherkessia (Karachays, Cherkess, Abazins and Nogais) to Western Siberia has had a material social impact on both the North Caucasian republic itself, and the northern region.¹²

Family migration is typical of North Caucasian peoples, and there are numerous Karachay and Nogai children in the settlement and even a number of elderly people. Many Caucasian families living in Yar-Sale are linked by tight familial connections and friendships that began in the Caucasus.

My wife was 16 and I was 21. I kidnapped her in Karachay-Cherkessia when she and her parents were visiting from here in the summer. We got married, lived there for a year and moved here in 2008. Her parents worked here from 2003, trading. My father-in-law was an authority figure, everyone here knew him. I've been in Yar-Sale for nine years. We had our

own business here, we opened a café, I worked in construction, my wife baked bread and made pizza. (Male, born in 1986, Karachay, in Yamal since 2008)

In contrast with the majority of migrants from Central Asia, Northern Caucasian families tend to settle in Yamal for long periods. They acquire apartments, and open shops and cafés. Many begin to consider Yamal home.

I went home in the summer. After two months, I couldn't bear it anymore, I was shaking, I wanted to go back to Yar-Sale. This place was calling me back as if I were born here and had lived here my entire life. (Female, born in the 1980s, Karachay, in Yamal since 2006)

One of the characteristic features of the North Caucasian diaspora in Yar-Sale is its cohesiveness and insularity. The social circle is limited to other North Caucasians, even among those who have lived in the settlement for more than 10 years. In contrast with Kyrgyz or Tajiks, North Caucasians never marry locals, and marry within the community. During the week preceding the Forum for Peoples' Friendship organised for Day of National Unity (a recently established official festival that takes on 4 November), the author of this paper regularly attended rehearsals held by the Caucasian diaspora. They prepared a song about the North Caucasus in Russian as well as a Lezginka dance. Not only teenagers participating in the concert attended, but also their relatives – mothers, aunts, grandmothers, men and small children. Everyone gathered in the dance studio of the cultural centre or in the school hall where they exchanged news, supported those participating in the rehearsals, clapped and cried out, forming the energetic entourage that accompanies performances of the Lezginka dance. These rehearsals served to alleviate the lack of social space in the settlement, representing practically the only collective public leisure activity.

Kyrgyz

The Kyrgyz community in Yar-Sale is the largest diaspora to have appeared in the settlement in the post-Soviet era. While there were 20 Kyrgyz people in the settlement in 2009, seven years later the population of permanent Kyrgyz residents in Yar-Sale had grown to 102. Since 2015, Kyrgyzstan has been a member of the Customs Union, and work migrants do not need to purchase work patents, which puts them on an equal footing with Russians in terms of labour rights. A large number of Kyrgyz living in Yar-Sale have Russian citizenship.

According to the leader of the Kyrgyz community in Yar-Sale, around 25 Kyrgyz families live in the settlement. On average, they arrived in Yar-Sale nine years ago and they live in separate rented apartments, working in trade. For example, Almaz, the owner of two shops in the settlement, arrived in Yar-Sale in 2001. His sister immigrated to Yamal even earlier. Almaz currently works in a clothes shop, and he recently opened a groceries shop in a newly built part of the settlement in which his relatives work. Curiously, both shops are called 'Almaz'. Kyrgyz merchants sell clothes from large markets in Moscow, and they import fabric from Kyrgyzstan. Almaz already knows which fabrics are popular among the Nenets and which are popular among the Khanty, and brings the required materials in from Kyrgyzstan by order. They are then used in the *chums* – temporary tents where local nomads reside. The leader of the Kyrgyz community, also called Almaz, arrived in Yamal in 2003. He worked as a builder in

Labytnangi, Panaevsk and Novy Port for some time before settling in Yar-Sale. Now Almaz works as the deputy business director for all cultural centres in Yamal district, and he leads the Yar-Sale Muslim community.

Most Kyrgyz migrants are not members of families engaged in trade or other areas requiring year-round work, but are seasonal construction workers. Kyrgyz people arrive in Yar-Sale in June and work until November–December. There are around 10 Kyrgyz brigades that work at various construction sites. They mainly construct apartment blocks. The builders work six days a week from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., with a 1-hour break at lunchtime. They live in rented apartments with 10–15 people in each. The fathers and adult children of individual families often come to take part in construction projects, and around half of the builders in each brigade can be relatives. Almost all of the builders already have extensive work experience in Russia. Sometimes, to avoid spending money on travel to Kyrgyzstan, builders leave for Moscow in January–May, where they work as cashiers, baggage handlers, couriers and taxi drivers, and in June they return to Yar-Sale. Some builders move from one brigade to another, or leave Yamal without waiting for the end of the building season. The leader of the community and other Kyrgyz people living in the settlement on a permanent basis try to resolve all conflicts arising among Kyrgyz people, between Kyrgyz people and the administration or Kyrgyz people and locals. They fulfil the function of a unique form of adaptational institution.

The Muslim community

The migration of Muslims to Yamal began in the pre-war era. Tatars from Tobolsk travelled to the North, and Tatar *kulaks* were exiled to Yamal along with members of the national intelligentsia. Along with Russians, Nenets people and Ukrainians, Tatars participated in the construction of settlements in Yamal, worked in the boarding schools, hospitals and shops, and were one of the dominant ethnic groups in the towns and settlements of the area. During the Soviet era, Islam had a familial character among the Siberian Tatars. The men sometimes secretly gathered to say prayers, and certain believers kept the fasts. Muslims who knew the Quran were invited to recite memorial prayers. In the 1990s, one Tartar brought a recording of the Islamic memorial prayer on tape to Yar-Sale. The cassette was played at memorials and funerals. The tape's popularity in the 1990s indicates that by that time almost none of the Tatars was able to recite the prayer.

According to data from 2016, there are more Tatars in Yar-Sale than the other Muslim peoples combined. However, the public sphere in the Muslim community is defined not by the older Tatar residents, but by new migrants, many of whom differ in terms of religiousness and adherence to tradition. Friday prayers take place every week in the dance studio of the local cultural centre. Almaz, head of the business affairs of the cultural centres in Yamal district and ethnically Kyrgyz, acts as the imam. Sometimes, Marat, a Karachay man, reads the *khutbah* (sermon). Neither of them have any formal religious education. Before Almaz, the imams often changed. They were both locals who left and immigrants appointed by the mufti of YNAO. Ten to fifteen men attend Friday prayers. Local Tatars do not attend and neither do construction workers, whose lunch hours do not coincide with the prayer times. According to the construction workers,

some prefer to take part in collective prayers at the building site within their narrow circles. The majority of those participating in prayers at the cultural centre are Kyrgyz or members of North Caucasian ethnic groups engaged in trade or other areas with a flexible work regime. On *Kurban Bairam* (Eid al-Adha) and *Uraza Bairam* (Eid al-Fitr), 100 or more people attend, including local elderly Tartars. The local Muslims solve the issue of halal meat communally. Certain families, mainly those engaged in trade, bring in national cuisine from Moscow or their own regions, including halal meat. Sometimes people join together and contribute towards buying a cow from a local farm or a reindeer from the Nenets and slaughter it in accordance with Islamic practice. Some order halal food from Salekhard where an Islamic food shop recently opened. For *Kurban Bairam*, certain entrepreneurs deliver meat from Omsk Oblast, Ekaterinburg and Kostroma Oblast to Salekhard. One Tatar recently began opening a sheep farm in Salekhard.

The dominance of emigrants from the North Caucasus and Central Asia in the Islamic community is revealing in regard to the religious knowledge and daily practices of the older Tatar inhabitants. The latter began to invite migrants to their homes to conduct a ceremony. Recent arrivals from Muslim regions are surprised by the secularity and the level of assimilation into Russian culture of the local Tatars.

Local Tatars even change their names, they are ashamed of their own names. 'I'm Roma', one guy said to me. Roma? Say your name properly – Ramil. 'No no, I'm Roma'. The Tatars don't come to our prayers either. (Male, born in the 1960s, Kyrgyz, in Yamal since 2003)

The level of religiousness among migrants varies significantly. A large number consider themselves Muslims but do not observe the five pillars of Islam. Some practising Muslims with whom the author of this paper spoke do not go to Friday prayers at the cultural centre because they do not trust the imam rather than out of being secular or too busy.

I'm not sure that Almaz can lead as an imam. He lacks knowledge. There was a Tajik who studied in Pakistan. He could do everything, he knew everything. An imam should know everything correctly. There's a guy who works as a taxi driver here at the moment. He has two mullahs in his family. He knows and observes all Islamic laws. Almaz doesn't observe them. He can't even read prayers properly. (Male, born in 1960, Tajik, in Yamal since the 2000s)

Some Muslims told the author that they do not like praying in the dance studio, where discos are held at the weekend.

The issue of prayer in the Arctic region deserves special attention. This is an area that is also subject to variation. Some Muslim migrants in Yar-Sale pray (and fast during Ramadan) according to Salekhard time, some according to Tyumen time and others lead their religious lives according to Mecca time.

Kalmyks

The first Kalmyks appeared in YNAO in the 1930s and 1940s. They were the families of exiles and deportees. Over the past 20 years, the migration of Kalmyks to the Northern regions of the country has taken on sizable proportions. The main reason for the

shrinking population of Kalmykia is emigration.¹³ When the author undertook field work in Far East in 2011–2012, Kalmyk families were living in each of the ethnic villages. They were involved in health care and education, served as border guards, worked in the police, and some Kalmyks danced in the Ergyron National Chukotka Ensemble.

The Kalmyks used to be deported to the North, now they themselves are rushing over here. It seems to me that a quarter of all Kalmyks live in the North. There are even people who were born in Salekhard and have never been to Kalmykia. They have nowhere to go, all of their relatives are in the North. (Male, born in 1986, Kalmyk, in Yamal since 2012)

According to the rural council, 82 Kalmyks live in Yar-Sale. All adult Kalmyks are employed and hold good positions by the standards of the settlement: head of the Multifunctional Centre for Government Services, head of conscription at the military enlistment office, deputy to the local manager of a company and choreographer at the cultural centre. Kalmyks work at the hospital, in the commercial sector, and a Kalmyk was once the police chief. There is a free Kalmyk dance club at the cultural centre for local Kalmyk children. In many homes, people have erected Buddhist altars, families sometimes travel into the tundra to perform the fire offering ritual, Kalmyk holidays are celebrated, and the diaspora sometimes congregates together. Modern Kalmyk migration to Yamal is family-based. It is mainly married, educated specialists that arrive together with their children. Kalmyk migration is dynamic in nature. The only thing that keeps Kalmyks in Yamal is work. If people lose their jobs or get a better offer elsewhere, they are ready to leave. According to one respondent, since 2012, three Kalmyk families have left and six new ones have arrived.

Migratory practices

Social, ethnic, religious and legal differences among new immigrants as well as variations in migratory experience create certain difficulties in drawing general conclusions. The most populous and notable new ethnic groups are described above, i.e. North Caucasian peoples, Kyrgyz and Kalmyks. All new arrivals can be roughly divided into temporary and permanent migrants. However, as an example, over the course of 10 years Central Asian construction workers, whom are broadly defined as seasonal migrants, can arrive once a year for the construction period and then leave for Moscow or other Russian cities, establishing personal relations in Yamal, but only appearing in the settlement periodically. Such migratory experiences among construction workers from Central Asia are not unusual. In turn, Kalmyk doctors or Karachay traders with permanent work in the settlement can return to their homelands having lived in Yamal for five years. Contemporary migration to Yamal is variable in nature. As Ekaterina Kapustina surmised on Dagestani migrants in Surgut, ‘Not only is the process of movement and relocation itself important, but also the fact that the end of this process is marked by return’.¹⁴

The duration of stay in the settlement depends on many factors, including the migratory pattern preferred by each ethnic group, and the combination of legal, social, economic and cultural conditions that determine the overall migratory pattern of the community. Neither emigrants from the North Caucasus, Kalmyks, nor East Slavic

peoples live as seasonal migrants in the settlements and towns of YNAO. They usually bring their children and aim to live in the North for the long term. The majority of Central Asian migrants cannot stay in Yamal for an indefinite period for legal reasons and for personal reasons. Many Central Asian men have families at home whom they need to support (wives, children, aging parents, brothers and sisters).

The North is characterised by its inaccessibility and is not such an obvious migratory destination as, for instance, Moscow or St. Petersburg. New migrants are often linked to their ethnic peers who are already residing in the North. The settlements of YNAO experience self-regulating migration. New migrants usually arrive in the North through acquaintances, relatives or lone migrants who can give work or help them find it. If a seasonal migrant fails to strike up good relations with the diaspora, the brigade or other employers may not call him back next year.

The migrant communities have great potential for mutual assistance due to their small memberships and the close horizontal links. Larger, consolidated diasporas such as the North Caucasian and Kyrgyz communities set aside communal resources that can be used in case of illness or death to send the body back to the homeland. Funds are also sometimes used to help with construction in a new area. The Kyrgyz of Yar-Sale, for example, contribute 100 roubles each on a monthly basis, the Karachays and Nogais donate money towards specific needs as they arise. Mutual assistance also expresses itself in the form of solidarity during conflicts.

There used to be many conflicts with locals. I work as a security guard at the administration. All the locals come in from the tundra. There are no shops in the tundra, so they start drinking immediately. They don't do their business first, they get drunk, and I can't let them in. They make threats, say they'll get me. I say to them: 'My shift ends at 9, come then and we'll talk'. I've never seen anyone. I can phone my Kalmyk friends, they would all wake up, gather together and help. (Male, born in the 1980s, Kalmyk, in Yamal since the 2010s)

Migrants do not shirk their ties with their homeland. These ties present themselves in the form of regular trips home, sending children to stay relatives for the summer and in everyday practices when in Yamal. The fieldwork for this paper was undertaken in October–November, soon before the Peoples' Friendship Forum. Tatars, Russians, Ukrainians, Kalmyks, members of North Caucasian nations, Kyrgyz and, of course, Nenets people prepared dances and other performances. Migration brings the question of ethnic identity to the fore and impels immigrants towards performative cultural acts. Prior to their arrival in Yamal, many migrants had never participated in national dances or appeared before an audience at all. Being in a foreign ethnic and religious environment also affects the migrants' religious practices. While some pay no regard to Islamic practice, others intensify their religious lives, beginning to pray five times a day, socialise in Muslim circles and overcome new difficulties to acquire halal meat.

Relations between new arrivals and the indigenous population

Indigenous peoples make up the majority of residents of Yamal district, amounting to 11,500 people out of 16,412 in 2014.¹⁵ According to the rural council, as of the beginning of 2016, 5325 members of indigenous peoples were registered in Yar-Sale,

Syunai-Sale and the surrounding tundra, the vast majority of which were Nenets (5206 people). The total population of Yar-Sale, Syunai-Sale and the surrounding tundra amounted to 7881 people.

The Russian, Tatar and Ukrainian presence in Yamal is currently perceived as a natural occurrence among the indigenous population, despite the varying degrees of underlying discontent towards Sovietisation felt by indigenous Siberians. Nationalism, which certainly exists in the Arctic, has its own particular nature in this region. If anti-Russian sentiments exist among the indigenous peoples of the North, then they are of a hidden and weakly expressed nature. The main complaints are of a social nature (for example, discontent with active industrial exploitation clashing with the requirements of traditional land use), or they concern the Soviet past, which is associated with Russification and forced modernisation among other things. The migratory patterns of the post-Soviet period have posed a certain challenge for the indigenous population, who had previously not encountered a large Caucasian or Central Asian presence in the region. Nenets' attitudes towards immigrants vary depending on personal experience, the situation and the social position of each migrant in the settlement. Anti-migrant sentiments are often limited to xenophobic verbal assaults, but they have been known to boil over into open conflict. Ambivalent attitudes exist as well as respect for immigrants accompanied by interest in them and their cultures.

'They are stealing our jobs'

The region's poverty and, primarily, the typical spectrum of problems faced by the indigenous population provide fertile ground for anti-migrant sentiments. Problems such as alcoholism, unemployment, discrimination by the more privileged Russian population, the high rate of suicides, violent death, emigration to cities and social alienation among the young are a fact of life in the modern Arctic. The most common complaint about migrants is that they take up jobs.

Almost half of the working population registered in Yar-Sale and the surrounding tundra are nomadic reindeer herders. Nenets from the settlement and tundra are constantly interacting with each other, and often part of the family lives in the settlement while the other part lives nomadically in the tundra. There is a flow of labour between the settlement and tundra. A person from the settlement may join his relatives' camp, and a person from the tundra can move to live in the settlement. Despite the movement between these two arenas and the social continuum of tundra folk and settlement dwellers,¹⁶ these two groupings within the indigenous population have different needs and face different problems. The main problem facing Nenets in the settlements is unemployment. Oil and gas companies almost never employ people from indigenous ethnicities. Aside from traditional activities, the Nenets and Khanty are primarily engaged in health care and education. There is a national intelligentsia in the settlement, and members of indigenous peoples work in the settlement administration, school and hospital. Nenets and Khanty people often occupy positions not requiring high levels of education or qualification (Rossiyskaya Arktika... 2016: 109). Members of the same indigenous ethnicities who obtain higher education in the cities do not always seek to return to their home settlement. Commerce is almost entirely dominated by new migrants, and in the hospital, Nenets mainly work as orderlies and

cleaners. Young indigenous men represent the most vulnerable category on the Arctic labour market. While women can apply themselves in auxiliary roles in the educational or health care sectors, fewer options are available to men. Nenets people are essentially absent from construction activities. The construction boom that began in the Arctic more than 10 years ago could provide work for a large number of locals. However, construction companies prefer not to employ indigenous people. One of main reasons is that the Nenets tend not to endure nor agree to the tough 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. schedule with an hour for lunch, six days a week. The construction schedule must be met, especially when the building seasons lasts for only six months. Furthermore, the majority of Kyrgyz migrants already have construction experience. The locals' lack of experience, the tough schedule, employers' prejudices against indigenous people (tendency towards alcoholism, laziness and lack of discipline) as well as their reluctance to hire Russian citizens and thus pay more are all factors in the domination of foreign seasonal workers in construction, one of the fastest developing sectors of Yamal's economy, while Nenets men from the settlements remain without work. This situation provokes anti-migrant sentiments in society.

'They give them all apartments'

The housing problem is one of the most pressing and worrying for the indigenous population. In 2011, 1173 families needing housing were registered in the Yamal district.¹⁷

I'm jealous. I can't drive a car, but for some reason they get to drive around in them, they give them all apartments. My wife has three children, she can't get an apartment. They get apartments, sell them and move on. (Male, born in 1988, Nenets)

It is certainly the case that some migrant families stay in Yar-Sale primarily to get an apartment which they then plan to sell before leaving the settlement. Young Nenets families are often forced to live with their parents in overcrowded conditions. Nonetheless, many migrants' housing conditions are also far from ideal.

I was standing in the queue for a document at the rural council. There were probably around 10 other people in the queue. One man decided to skip the queue. I said to him, 'Everyone is in a queue, stand in line'. He said, 'You already had apartments when you came here, I have many children, but I have no apartment'. I said to him, 'I have a local husband, but I also have no apartment, so does that mean I should skip the queue?' The house in which we live was built before Kugaevsky (author's note: head of the Yamal district) was born. (Female, born in the 1970s, Ossetian, in Yamal since 2010, married to a local mixed-race man)

Migrants' attitudes towards the indigenous population

Migrants' attitudes towards the Nenets and the sociocultural and natural environment in which they find themselves are also ambiguous. Many have extensive migratory experience, and often people now living in Yamal were born in cities such as Nalchik, Elista, Bishkek, Osh and Yerevan. Some of them studied in Moscow or St. Petersburg. The isolation of the settlement and poverty in the public space can weigh heavily upon migrants.

I felt as if I had ended up on an island. The longer I live here, the more this place gets to me. I can't travel anywhere, it's very difficult to get out. You have to queue in the airport, spend the night and queue for those tickets. There are more opportunities in the city, more prospects. If you want to go to a restaurant in Yar-Sale it will set you back at least 2000 per person. (Male, born in the 1980s, Kalmyk, in Yamal since the 2010s)

Many of the migrants with which the author spoke have practically no contact with the local population. This is just as much due to being very busy, working hard and belonging to closed families, as not being able to find common ground with them. Some migrants brought up their disapproval of their perceptions of alcoholism, promiscuity and slovenliness among the indigenous population. The 'flaws' among certain Nenets people are most resented among Caucasian women who, for example, unlike the Kalmyks and Kyrgyz, have no experience of life in Moscow or St. Petersburg, previously having never travelled beyond the borders of their national republics.

I talk to Nenets women, but not closely, I have no Nenets girlfriends. I don't understand them. If you see how they live, it's awful. They drink, sleep with different men and then walk around covered in blood and bruises. They have no limits. The government does everything for them, gives them housing, look at their apartments: the doors are bashed in, the windows smashed, everything is dilapidated. (Female, born in the 1970s, Balkar, in Yamal since the early 2000s)

Where the Zhar-Ptitsa café now stands, there used to be a disco. We do not sit with guys, hugging them, kissing them. You can tell such people off. But here it's welcomed. I was shocked when I saw it, of course I told them off. It didn't go down very well. (Female, born in the 1980s, Nogai, in Yamal since the 2010s)

I had just arrived here. My husband and I were driving around the settlement. We saw a woman standing, a Nenets woman in a small top by the road. It was cold and raining, and she was standing without moving. I cried out to him, 'Stop, she will freeze'. He said, 'Calm down, there are people like that all over the place here'. We visited our friends, and one and a half hours later she was still standing there as if frozen. (Female, born in the 1970s, Balkar, in Yamal since 2016)

Disdain aside, many migrants respect the indigenous population and are interested in their culture. By no means do all consider drinking to be an absolute vice. Migrants pity people who have lost their way and try to help them. The author was told how migrants sometimes even collect money and buy products for poor local families. With time, migrants are beginning to understand the specific nature of the region and to see beauty in the tundra. They divide the Nenets into those who live in the settlements and those who live in the tundra. The latter are almost universally respected for their traditional lifestyle and work ethic. Personal experience determines attitudes towards the Nenets. One story has it that people from the tundra helped a Nogai family. The Nogais had ventured out on a boat to fish and gather berries in the tundra. On the return journey, the boat broke down and the people stumbled upon a camp where they were fed, poured tea and given berries for the journey home, and the men fixed their boat.

The specific cultural and natural environment of the region in which the migrants find themselves makes up part of their personal experiences, constituting a personal victory over hardship – they were able to adapt to a completely different culture and way of life. Yar-Sale's daily hardships and exoticism, particularly when Nenets people arrive in the settlement on reindeer sleighs wearing their traditional clothes, add a certain interest to life in Yamal, filling the lives of migrants with new experiences.

When we used to go out we would mainly see local people. Now I don't see them. I see immigrants – Karachays, Kyrgyz. When I used to go out, it was immediately obvious where I was. I used to like Yar-Sale, not anymore. Back then there weren't any roads, there was no running water, it came out rusty with kerosene and oil, provisions were not delivered regularly, you couldn't eat the bread. And that made it more interesting. (Female, born in the 1970s, Ossetian)

Almost none of the new migrants had been to a tundra camp, excluding those who are married to local Nenets people and who have visited their in-laws. For new migrants, Reindeer Herder's Day is a milestone event. During the festival, they have their first opportunity to visit a *chum*, meet Nenets people from the tundra, and temporarily become part of the distinct life of the settlement and feel a sense of belonging in the new place of residence.

I talk to people from the tundra. On Reindeer Herder's Day I have always taken part in traditional forms of sport. I have won before. All the tundra folk know me. I was on TV, they even wrote about me in the papers. (Male, born in 1986, Karachay, in Yamal since 2008)

Interethnic conflicts

Even recently, conflicts have broken out between locals and immigrants in the settlement. The conflicts were resolved the next day with a reconciliation of the opposing sides; however, the very existence of collective fights and the mobilisation of different ethnic and social groups against each other points to tensions resulting from migration, a mutual lack of understanding and deep social problems that remain unresolved.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a new school was built in the settlement by Turkish workers. According to witnesses, a conflict broke out when a Nenets man asked a Turkish man to light his cigarette, but the Turkish man did not understand and a fight ensued. This was the most significant interethnic conflict remembered by the inhabitants of the settlement. One Turkish man was even shot in the arm. At that point, there were few law enforcement officers in Yar-Sale, and, realising that they were not able to calm the crowds of young people, they turned off the electricity in the settlement for a few hours.

In the 2000s, a gang called the Berliners formed in Yar-Sale. It was made up of local Nenets, Russian and Tatar youths from the settlement. The youths roamed the settlement, giving Nazi salutes and shouting 'Kyrgyz out!' From time to time fights broke out with Kyrgyz construction workers. The gang was known as the Berliners as they lived in barracks in an impoverished part of settlement that locals called West Berlin at the time.

We were at war with each other. There was a gang called the Berliners here. They attacked everyone, beat up immigrants. Then they started drinking and fell apart. We are not united, so they (author's note: migrants) walk around freely here. We forced our way into their apartment somehow. One of our guys said that Kyrgyz guys beat him up. We gathered some guys and went over to their place. We just wanted to talk, but they weren't having it and started throwing their fists around. Then they started attacking with chairs, stools and tables. There was such a crowd, you couldn't get through. And they were all throwing themselves at us. We were drunk. Everyone wants to fight when they are drunk. Then their women and children started to get involved, shouting and defending them. We

aren't stupid enough to hit women and children. Everyone dispersed. The next day we met, we resolved everything peacefully, they apologised to the guy. I never understood what the argument was actually about. (Nenets, the rest of the respondent's details are not disclosed for ethical reasons)

There are no longer any nationalist groups in Yar-Sale and there have not been any serious mass conflicts for a relatively long time. Nonetheless, almost every male migrant can share a story about a fight in which they have been involved in Yamal.

It was 2014, in Yar-Sale. I left my home and was going to the shop. Some locals came up to me: 'Where are you going?'. 'What do you mean? I'm going to the shop'. And one of them hit me. I stepped back and ran. Two Nenets guys and a Russian. I just didn't want to fight anymore. I'm an immigrant, not a local. I rang our guys and changed into sports clothes. But none of our guys answered me. It turns out they were fighting at the time. The next day the locals came and apologised. What was that about? Drunk, probably. (Male, born in 1990, Kyrgyz, in Yamal since 2014)

Interethnic marriages

In recent years, there have been many interethnic unions both registered and unofficial. In most instances, Nenets women marry immigrants. Russian-Nenets and Tatar-Nenets marriages were common in Yamal during the Soviet period. In the 1990s, Nenets-Kyrgyz, Nenets-Azeri and other couples appeared. According to research carried out in 2012 by S.E. Serpivo, the highest number of mixed marriages could be found in the Yamal district, at 24 out of 121 married couples. In Yar-Sale, there are plenty of mixed race people who often live in broken families where the father has left the mother with a child or does not even know about the son or daughter. While the adult generation often includes people of mixed Russian-Nenets background, Kyrgyz-Nenets and Turkish-Nenets children can be found among school pupils. Many children bear their mother's Nenets surname, with Islamic names and patronymics from their father.

Attitudes towards interethnic marriage vary within the settlement. There are clear problems. Such marriages often fail as the husband leaves the wife, is deported or returns to his first family in Central Asia. There was one instance when a man who returned home for some time was forced to marry a local girl at his parents' insistence. His first wife, a Khanty woman, found out and went after her husband in Tajikistan, forced him to divorce and returned with him to Yar-Sale. After separation or the deportation of the husband, the mother has problems taking the children anywhere, even to Salekhard, without official permission from the father, which is hard to obtain. Many in the settlement believe that men enter into such marriages for the sole purpose of obtaining Russian citizenship.

However, there are also successful interethnic unions, both registered and non-official. There is a particular Kyrgyz-Nenets family in Yar-Sale. The husband first arrived in Salekhard from Kyrgyzstan in 2002 to work on a construction project. Since 2006, he has lived in Yar-Sale. His wife is a Nenets woman from a tundra family. For three years after getting married, she lived in Kyrgyzstan, learned the language and worked in a nursery school. Her children also speak Kyrgyz; however, at home they mainly speak Russian. Among all the inter-ethnic couples, the main spoken language is Russian. Curiously, it was her husband who decided to return to Yar-Sale, and she

would prefer to remain in Kyrgyzstan. Children in such families have Islamic names, and unlike everyone else, do not travel to relatives in the tundra for the summer, but to paternal relatives in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan.

The story of one Kalmyk-Nenets family that won the Family of the Year contest in Yamal several years ago is particularly emblematic. They made a film in which the Kalmyk spouse in his national dress proposes to the Nenets woman in a Nenets traditional clothes. She agrees and takes off the *yagushka* (Nenets outerwear) to reveal a Kalmyk costume.

Some young Nenets women seek marriage with a 'Russian', i.e. with any non-indigenous person. This position is a result of a desire to leave the tundra and the North, and fear of the poverty and potential drunkenness of an indigenous husband. The tendency among indigenous women towards marrying non-indigenous men has its roots in Soviet times and is related to post-Soviet conceptions of prestige and well-being.

Islam and indigenous peoples

The issue of Islam and the indigenous peoples of Siberia remains largely unaddressed by anthropologists. While the Nenets have been in close contact with Orthodox Christianity and even evangelical movements for a long time, there are very few Nenets Muslims. The Islamic presence in Yamal is becoming increasingly evident, and not only in the towns, but in rural areas. Shops in Yar-Sale sell halal goods (*pelmeni*, chicken), and in the summer men walk around in tops displaying crescent moons. Everyone knows that Friday prayers take place at the cultural centre. Nenets people from the settlement observe the expanding Islamic community and make friends among people from Muslim ethnic groups. Thus, in any case, Islam is part of the changing sociocultural environment of the settlement to varying degrees. However, close, direct contact with Islamic traditions is rare for indigenous people. While Nenets women marry men from Muslim ethnic groups, they rarely convert to Islam, as their husbands do not insist on it. In some instances, the husband asks his new spouse to take part in *nikah* (marriage in accordance with Islamic practice), which involves her reciting the *shahada* (the testimony of faith in the oneness of God, the main condition for adopting Islam). However, even after ritual conversion to Islam, the spouse does not become a practicing Muslim. The imam of the mosque in Salekhard spoke about several Nenets women who have converted to Islam in recent years. One of them decided to become a Muslim independently and began to read books. According to the imam, her interest in the religion grew out of having walked past the mosque in Salekhard and having heard the *adhan* (call to prayer).

A Nenets man who converted to Islam one year ago is known in the Muslim community of Salekhard and the settlement of Aksarka (not named for ethical reasons). He is a practising Muslim, having undergone circumcision at the hands of a local Kyrgyz surgeon, and has been praying five times a day, observing fasts and trying to travel from Aksarka to the mosque in Salekhard on Fridays over the course of the past year. Despite the problems faced by this convert (such as Federal Security Service interrogation and his Khanty wife's doubts), he continues to observe Islamic practices. He is attracted to the Muslim community's unity. The man has found new friends, a

tight social group and a mentor in the form of the imam. He goes to *iftar* (breaking the fast during the month of *Ramadan*), discusses religious issues and travels to the mosque in Salekhard with local Muslims.

Conclusion

Today, Yamal's population is characterised by pluralism. This refers not only to ethnic diversity; the Nenets community itself is heterogeneous. There are social boundaries between children who live in the boarding school and children from the settlement, Nenets people from Yar-Sale and those who come to the administrative centre from other villages, between Nenets from the settlement and those from the tundra, and between the national intelligentsia and the marginalised rural poor. Social pluralism has its roots in the variety of lifestyles, family backgrounds, personal experiences and fields of employment. In this context, categories such as 'insider'/'outsider' cease to be ethnic designations. Over time, many new migrants become 'insiders' or 'almost insiders' for the local population. A Nenets person arriving in Yar-Sale from Novy Port can fall under the category of an 'outsider', while a Kyrgyz person living in the settlement for 15 years and raising children there is categorised as an 'insider'. For many, a local Nenets person who converts to Islam joins the 'outsider' category, while an immigrant from a Muslim ethnic group has every opportunity to become an 'insider'. The plurality of lifestyles in modern Yamal legitimises the presence of people from different backgrounds on the condition that they engage with the local social environment. The ethnic dimension of identity and the identification of individuals in terms of ethnicity therefore depend on the situation and are to some extent secondary, while the local,¹⁸ professional, family and other dimensions of identity and being identified come to the fore.

I began to sell telephones at the market in Yar-Sale. And someone called me 'chernozhopy' (author: an ethnic slur used against people with darker complexions, usually from the Caucasus and Central Asia). I have faced similar situations. I also have also had fights with Nenets people. A crowd of youths came and said, 'This is our land! Why did you come here?' They began to pick on me. There's none of that anymore. Now everyone knows me, we understand each other. (Male, born in 1986, Karachay, in Yamal since 2008)

The time it takes to move from 'outsider' to 'insider' and indeed the permeability of the border between the two depend on many factors, including the intensity of interaction with the inhabitants of the settlement, the length of time spent in one settlement, the openness of the new migrant and his or her attitude towards the local population and the area in general. If an immigrant arrives 'with serious intent and for a long time' and does not take a purely commercial and exploitative attitude towards Yar-Sale, locals begin to notice and value the person. The person then transitions to the 'insider' category.

For the first year, it was really difficult, I wasn't accepted at all. It was like an empty place. Now everything is ok. Wherever I go, everyone knows me, they know I work as a choreographer. (Male, born in 1986, Kalmyk, in Yamal since 2012)

Both migrants who are 'anonymous' to locals and migrants who can be recognised by the rest of the residents of the settlement work in Yar-Sale. The 'anonymous' include, for example, seasonal Kyrgyz construction workers who barely interact with the rest of the

population, and their stay in the settlement is limited socially and geographically. The social circle of 'anonymous' migrants is reduced to their peers working in construction, sometimes to the members of their brigade, and the areas they move in are limited to the construction site and their apartment. 'Anonymous' migrants do not even interact with the local Muslim community as they cannot attend Friday prayers. 'Recognised' migrants include traders, people who have started families and everyone else living in Yar-Sale for a long time, establishing ties with the local community and enjoying a reputation and social capital in the settlement. For instance, each inhabitant of the settlement has certain preferences regarding choosing a shop based on their relationship with the merchant, who gives discounts or gives goods on credit. Flexibility in commerce is based on the friendly relations established between the two parties to the process.

'Anonymous' migrant construction workers are an 'imagined community' for the local population, just as the local population is for the migrants. However, 'recognised' migrants form 'communities of practice', as they are constantly interacting with the other inhabitants of Yar-Sale and are understood not in terms of ethnic or national categories, or not only in terms of these categories, but in terms of familial (sister's husband), professional (manager, teacher, doctor, trader) and other categories where ethnicity ceases to be definitive.¹⁹

Notes

1. Heleniak, Holzlehner, and Khlinovskaya, "Der Grosse Exodus".
2. Laruelle, "Assessing Social Sustainability," 94.
3. Zayonchkovskaya, Mkrtchyan, "The Role of Dynamic," 26.
4. Averkieva et al. *Between Home*, 144.
5. See Kapustina, "Northern Ownership"; Zmeeva, Razumova, "I decided to live here"; Yarlykapov, "Oil and Nogai Migration".
6. See Laruelle, "Assessing Social Sustainability".
7. Tishkov et al., *Russian Arctic*; Funk et al., *Culture and Resources*; Golovnev et al., *Ethnic Expertise*.
8. *Report*.
9. Golovnev et al., *Ethnic Expertise*, 17.
10. *Ibid.*, 12.
11. *Report*.
12. Yarlykapov, "Oil and Nogai Migration".
13. Volgin, "Republic of Kalmykia," 328.
14. Kapustina, "Northern Ownership," 123
15. See above 9.
16. Lyarskaya, "Somebody has to live," 58.
17. Tishkov et al., *Russian Arctic*, 117.
18. See Habeck, "Dimensions of Identity".
19. Reed-Danahay, "From the 'Imagined Community'; Lave, Wegner, "Situated Learning".

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