Nomads in a Petro-Empire: Nenets Reindeer Herders and Russian Oil Workers in an Era of Flexible Capitalism

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Abstract

This dissertation is based on a total of one year of ethnographic field research that took place between 2008 and 2010 in an oil-rich region of northwestern Russia, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO). It explores the ways of life and interactions between four groups living and/or working in the NAO: Nomadic Nenets reindeer herders; sedentary Nenets villagers; predominantly Russian settlers who arrived in the NAO during the Soviet days to explore the okrug's oil and gas potential; and currently employed Russian oil workers who extract oil from deposits discovered by Soviet prospectors. Following and engaging in discussions with each of these groups, as well as examining changes in their ways of life since the nineteenth century, this dissertation shows how the Nenets, the settlers and the current oil workers' lives have been and continue to be profoundly shaped by political and economic processes. The processes I examine have their origins in the policies of Soviet state, and more recently in the developments made by the oil industry operating in the context of flexible capitalism. Through an examination of state legislation, the operation of the oil industry, the construction and use of infrastructure, and the health concerns experienced by each group, this dissertation explores the ways in which each group experiences pressure from both the state and the oil industry to modify the scale of their mobility. Ever since they began to be targeted by the "civilisational" agenda of the Soviet state, the traditionally nomadic Nenets have been pressured to lead a less mobile way of life. In contrast, the Russians who settled during the oil exploration rush of the 1960s are now indirectly pressured to be more mobile in order to gain access to the shift-work employment offered by oil companies or in other related economic sectors. Today, the most mobile population in the NAO are the oil-workers who are transported in and out of the region to work in shifts (*vakhty*) for an industry that operates according to the contemporary exigencies of flexible capitalism.

Résumé

Cette thèse est basée sur un total d'une année de recherche ethnographique qui a eu lieu entre 2008 et 2010 dans l'Okrug Autonome Nénètse (OAN), une région du nord-ouest de la Russie riche en pétrole. La thèse examine les modes de vie de quatre groupes vivant et/ou travaillant dans l'OAN: les éleveurs de rennes nénètses qui sont nomades; les villageois nénètses; les colons russes, venus dans l'okrug à l'époque soviétique pour y explorer le potentiel en pétrole et en gaz; ainsi que les travailleurs du pétrole russes qui viennent aujourd'hui pour y extraire le pétrole découvert par les prospecteurs soviétiques. En suivant et en discutant avec chacun de ces groupes, ainsi qu'en examinant les changements survenus dans leur mode de vie respectif depuis le XIXième siècle, cette thèse montre que la vie des Nénètses, des colons ainsi que des travailleurs du pétrole d'aujourd'hui a été et continue d'être façonnée par des processus politiques et économiques. Les processus que j'examine trouvent leurs origines dans les politiques de l'État soviétique et, plus récemment, dans le mode de développement de l'industrie du pétrole qui opère dans le contexte du capitalisme flexible. À travers un examen de lois mises en place par l'État russe, du mode d'opération de l'industrie du pétrole, de la construction et de l'utilisation d'infrastructures, ainsi que des problèmes de santé vécus par chacun des groupes, cette thèse analyse les manières dont chacun des groupes est poussé à modifier son niveau de mobilité. Depuis que l'État soviétique a imposé aux Nénètses son agenda "civilisateur", ceux-ci sont poussés à être moins mobiles. De leur côté, les Russes qui se sont installés dans l'okrug durant la ruée vers le pétrole à partir des années 1960 sont indirectement poussés à être plus mobiles afin d'avoir accès aux emplois par quarts (*shift-work, vakhty* en russe) offerts par les compagnies pétrolières ou dans d'autres secteurs économiques. Aujourd'hui, le groupe le plus mobile en OAN est celui des travailleurs du pétrole, qui sont amenés dans la région pour y travailler par quarts au sein d'une industrie qui opère selon les exigences actuelles du capitalisme flexible.

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Introduction

Russia is the world's foremost producer of natural gas and its second producer of oil, after Saudi Arabia. One of the particularities of Russia's production of fossil fuels is that the majority of these resources are extracted from deposits located in the country's northern territories, which were industrialised following the Second World War as part of the Soviet state's project to unleash the economic potential of its natural resources. Due to this early development of oil exploration and extraction, Russia today continues to benefit from these resources to support its economy. However, as in other circumpolar regions, Russia's Arctic is home to a variety of delicate ecosystems populated not only by wildlife but also by various groups of indigenous peoples.

This dissertation focuses on the ways of life and interactions between four groups living and/or working in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO), an oil-rich region of northwestern Russia: Nomadic Nenets reindeer herders; sedentary Nenets villagers; predominantly Russian settlers who arrived in the NAO during the Soviet days to explore the okrug's oil and gas potential; and currently employed Russian oil workers who are extracting oil from deposits discovered by the Soviet prospectors. Following and engaging in discussions with each of these groups, as well as examining changes in their ways of life since the nineteenth century, it becomes apparent that the Nenets, the settlers and the current oil workers' lives have been and continue to be profoundly shaped by political and economic processes having their origins in the policies of Soviet state, and more recently in the developments made by the oil industry. As important the interactions between these communities are to shaping their ways of life, more important is the particular position they maintain in relation to the state on the one hand, and vis-à-vis the oil market on the other. What becomes apparent when examining these groups alongside one another is the ways in which both the state and the oil industry generate pressures on them to either increase or reduce their level of mobility. Rather than solely undertaking the resettlement of nomadic indigenous people away from oil-rich lands, the state and oil companies have instead together shaped the movements of nearly all permanent and temporary inhabitants of the NAO, encouraging or discouraging their mobility across the region. As I will show, the movements of people, as much as oil, flow along with the requirements of capital.

This mobility is largely a consequence of the imposition of a new "law" on the okrug, post-Soviet Russian law, which is dictated by the needs of both an increasingly authoritarian state addicted to oil and those of oil companies operating in the context of the global neoliberal economy, or what I will refer to as flexible capitalism (Sennett 2006). Hence, the interactions between the groups in question in this dissertation are largely shaped by the encounter between the Nenets "law of the tundra" (*zakon tundry* in Russian), remnants of the Soviet world order, and the post-Soviet Russian law, imposing itself as a new "law of the tundra." What is characteristic of both the Nenets law of the tundra and post-Soviet Russian law is their flexibility in terms of access to land and of redistribution of resources, as well as a strong emphasis on mobility.

Throughout this dissertation, I will demonstrate how two ethnic groups, the Nenets and the predominantly Russian settlers of the Soviet era, have come to share a somewhat similar way of life and way of relating to the state, as compared to the current oil workers. These similarities between the Nenets and the Russian settlers are highlighted both in the discourses of the current oil workers, as well as in medical literature, which, to a certain extent, posits a similarity in the level of their biological adaptation to the Arctic. The perception of these similarities will be shown to be related to the history of their interactions with one another and their respective experiences of living through both the Soviet era and the socioeconomic hardships that resulted from the dismantling of the USSR. In contrast, while both settlers and current oil workers are largely ethnic Russians, their parallel experiences and ways of life, defined by their respective economic role in the okrug, largely preclude them from being perceived as a united group. The oil workers' movements alongside the flows of capital between oil-producing regions, as well as their embrace of values stemming from the current market economy, constitute two major aspects of their differentiation from the settlers, whom they generally perceive as being too dependent on the state. Such deeply entrenched perceptions appear to have had an effect on the way the oil workers and settlers are depicted in medical research, as well as on how the individuals belonging to the latter group perceive themselves as biologically adapted to the Arctic, and thus less able to leave the region to follow the flows of capital to other areas where work may be available.

The Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Ahlenius and UNEP/GRID-Arendal

The Nenets Autonomous Okrug was the first "national" okrug to be created in 1929 in the name of its indigenous people, as part of the Stalinist policies which aimed at solving the "problem of nationalities" in a country inhabited by over a hundred national groups. [1] Soviet power then had the simultaneous goals of protecting the Nenets and twenty-five other peoples indigenous to the North and Siberia – the so-called "small peoples of the North" – against the abuse of Russian traders and individuals considered wealthy, while at the same time modernising the practice of their traditional activities, be it hunting, fishing or reindeer herding. Although they had formed two-thirds of the 9000 inhabitants of the territory now comprising the okrug in 1897, the Nenets represented less than 14 percent of the NAO's population, that is, about 7 000 out of 48 000 permanent residents in 2005 (Stammler and Peskov 2008: 832-833; Le petit futé 2006: 44). Towards the end of the 2000s, reindeer herding was the main occupation of about 2500 people in the NAO, of which approximately 1500 live permanently in the tundra, herding over 163 000 reindeer (Stammler and Peskov 2008: 836).

[1] The notion of nationality (*natsional'nost'*) was introduced in official documents by the Soviet authorities in 1932 to categorise individuals and groups to allow the state to elaborate particular ways of relating to these different groups and individuals. Although this legal category disappeared from official documents, in post-Soviet Russia "nationality" remains a category widely referred to, as will be seen in later chapters. Nationality has come to convey a meaning similar to that of "ethnicity" widely used in the Western countries.

Throughout the NAO's history, reindeer herding has served as a symbol for the district as a whole. In the okrug's capital, Naryan-Mar ("Red town" in Nenets), reindeer often appear on the facades of buildings, on the names of streets, and most importantly, on the plates of most town dwellers. In fact, most of the production of reindeer meat is sent to the Myasokombinat ("Meat Factory"), the majority state-owned factory which packages and prepares meat to sell to the okrug's inhabitants, largely in Naryan-Mar. [2] Nomadic reindeer herding is still perceived as the traditional activity and way of life associated with the Nenets. However, starting in the 1920s, the Nenets began to be incorporated into Soviet socialist institutions as they too became the targets of collectivisation, which aimed, like elsewhere in the country, to create a classless society. This process allowed for the state to seize the reindeer herds, and hand them over to novel institutions, the collective farms. Collectivisation was also closely associated with an increasing civilisational pressure to make the Nenets and other small peoples of the North sedentary, since a nomadic way of life was judged unsuitable for the modern world. However, sedentarisation worked against another Soviet requirement, that is, the need to produce more meat and hides for the collectivity, which led the state to rationalise the practice of reindeer herding (Pika 1999: 96; Stammler 2005:147). As Taylorism modernised craftsmanship, the Nenets' way of life and productive activities were transformed as Nenets individuals became parts of specialised "brigades" devoted to only one task: herding, hunting, or fishing (Slezkine 1994: 204).

As the Nenets and other indigenous peoples were increasingly involved in Soviet institutions, the Soviet state and its population gradually embarked on the process of conquest and mastery of nature, from the atom to outer space, from the harsh conditions of the Arctic to its resources under the frozen ground. One of the important motivations for the state to unleash the natural resources of the North, such as oil and gas, was to extract them and sell them on the world market. Since the Soviet authorities persistently perceived that their country was lagging behind Western industrialised countries, they

[2] In 2010, the Myasokombinat was controlled by the Nenets Autonomous Okrug administration, which owned 80 percent of the shares in the company. Rumours were circulating to the effect that the okrug would purchase the remaining 20 percent of shares to make it fully state-owned. During an interview with the Director of the Myasokombinat, he told me that the company received approximately 800 tonnes of reindeer meat in 2009 from different reindeer herding farms. Except for small exports to Moscow and St-Petersburg, most of the meat is consumed in the okrug.

held hope that the currency generated from the selling of natural resources would permit the purchase of the technological means needed to industrialise the country quickly, on top of supplying it with coveted natural resources. To do this, the Soviet regime initially relied on the massive influx of prisoners arriving from all parts of the country to work in the gulags throughout the period of Stalinist repression.

Following the death of Joseph Stalin and the arrival of leaders less prone to violent repression and forced labour, the Soviet state established a range of northern benefits (*severnye l'goty*), which included better salaries, longer vacations, earlier retirement, and faster access to an apartment to both attract workers to settle in the Russian North and to compensate them for the hardships of living and working in a remote and cold environment. Like other indigenous peoples, the Nenets could also have access to some of the privileges offered to the newcomers (*priezzhye* in Russian) such as earlier retirement or access to housing in the villages or in Naryan-Mar. However, these privileges were also part of a Soviet process of sedentarisation of Nenets peoples. Yet, with the arrival of a great number of newcomers – who eventually became settlers – starting in the 1960s, the Nenets soon became in a position of minority (Shnirelman 1994: 210). As a result of these migrations, an ethnic stratification of employment and society began to take place in the North, at the top of which were newcomers, most of whom were Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian or had come from "traditional" oil producing regions of the Caucasus, such as Chechnya or Azerbaijan; and on the bottom indigenous peoples, like the Nenets.

Today, the vast majority of the okrug's population have their origins in this wave of workers who settled in NAO during and after the 1960s in order to explore the okrug's potential in fossil fuels. The town of Naryan-Mar was largely built by and for them as a base from which the men could go work in the tundra to extract oil, while their wives and children would live in town. The *neftianiki*[3] would bore the frozen sub-soil at high cost, discovering deposits considered small at the time and of a lesser quality compared to the oil deposits discovered in Western Siberia (Tolkachev 2000a: 511). In the mid-1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev accessed the post of the General Secretary of the Communist

3 The Russian term *neftianiki* derives from the word *neft*', which means "oil". Thus, neftianiki are "oilmen" or "oil workers".

Party, the country's economy was in a disastrous situation. This forced him to embark the country on a wave of economic reforms known as *perestroika* ("restructuring"). One of the new conditions established by the reformists was that state enterprises had to become self-sufficient. In the NAO, this had as a consequence that many prospecting expeditions had to stop their activities as they could no longer afford to carry out such ambitious and costly exploration projects.

The situation only worsened for most of the okrug's inhabitants following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. More drastic economic and political reforms designed and instituted by international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, aimed to develop a market economy and democracy throughout the former Soviet republics. Referred to as "shock therapy", these reforms were implemented quickly in order to prevent political debate within post-Soviet Russia (Rethmann 2004: 261). After 1992, the state was required to remove itself from various domains it until then had been subsidising. Both the geological expeditions and the reindeer herding farms, which constituted the two main economic sectors in the okrug, had to find themselves a spot on the market and learn to respect its principles. Hence, the herders and the farm administrators who were accustomed to receiving subsidies had to turn the farms into profitable businesses, and to pay salaries based on the profits generated (Schweitzer and Gray 2000: 30). Throughout the country, the situation of collective and state farms was and largely remains unstable. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, most of them had, and still often run into debt (Tuisku 2002: 196). For the oil workers, the low oil prices as well as the high costs of both exploration and extraction led most geological expeditions to cease their operations. As a result, the okrug saw 27.6 percent of its population emigrating from the okrug between 1989 and 2006, most especially settlers (Heleniak 2009b: 132). As was the case in other regions of the Russian North, many of those who remained had to rely on fishing and hunting in order to subsist, as well as on networks of exchange established with neighbours and friends since even those who could keep a job, including in the public sector, were not receiving a salary on a regular basis.

Yet, it remained that in first half of the 2000s, the Russian Federation still hosted 49 percent of all of the Arctic's inhabitants and 67 percent of the Arctic's gross domestic product, more than all other Arctic countries' combined (Grover, et al. 2008: 3-4). Today,

it is not only the traces of the Soviet oil industry which are still highly visible in Naryan-Mar, but also those who worked for it, as well as their descendants. Neighbourhoods like the Khorei-Ver Expedition (*Khorei-Verskaya Ekspeditsia,* named after the geological expedition of Khorei-Ver) or the village adjacent to Naryan-Mar, Iskateley ("Prospectors"), are inhabited by families of both urbanised Nenets, and Russian settlers, along with their children and grandchildren.

As reforms were being carried in the 1990s, a certain discourse gained in influence among international and Russian analysts which sought to explain Soviet and post-Soviet Russia's lack of economic success in terms of the overpopulation in that part of the country traditionally viewed as its source of wealth: Siberia and the Russian North. Comparing with other northern countries, such as Canada, where extractive industries have been relying largely on fly in/fly out work organisation for decades (Storey 2010), the Soviet-inherited model of development focusing on settlers was increasingly questioned. It was thought that maintaining such a large population far away from centres and infrastructures, as well as the allocation of bonuses to those living above the Polar Circle came to Russia with too high a cost. This situation came to be referred to as the "Siberian curse" by Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy (2003). According to them, the Russian authorities had instead to relate to Siberia and its resources in the following way:

> The resources of Siberia can be developed, but this should be done by reducing to more technologically intensive methods of extraction and temporary work schemes that do not require a large permanent population or extensive urban infrastructure (Hill and Gaddy 2003: 213).

What is implied in these recommendations is that it was not sufficient for post-Soviet Russia to have entered the market with the Soviet-inherited work organisation. The Russian North had to be developed according to principles of flexibility of the workforce increasingly embraced in Western countries since the 1970s: those of flexible capitalism (Sennett 2006). Hence, a new, more flexible organisation of labour could limit the costs and adjust more easily to the variability of prices of the natural resources produced, thus requiring a high degree of mobility from the workers involved. Although shift-work organisation (*vakhtovyi metod* in Russian) had existed in the Soviet Union, in the NAO the oil industry had been relying on workers who first settled in the North and then went to work on their shift (*vakhta*) by travelling to their work site located at a

distance short enough to be reachable by helicopter or by all-terrain carriers (*vezdekhody*).

In the early 2000s, the NAO experienced a second oil boom. Improvements of the oil-extraction technologies, a drastic increase in the price of oil, and especially the reduced cost of extracting oil in a region where the exploration (*razvedka*) of the oil deposits had already been conducted, brought the attention of both Russian and foreign oil companies back to the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Hence, more than twenty oil companies are exploiting or projecting to produce oil and gas from the nearly one hundred discovered oil and gas fields (Dallmann et al. 2010: 5). In 2006, the NAO had the most rapid increase in its oil production of any region in Russia, growing 61 percent between 2003 and 2005 (Stammler and Peskov 2008: 832). The main company responsible for the increase in oil-related projects is the Russian private company Lukoil. After having formed a joint-venture in partnership with ConocoPhilips, called Naryanmarneftegaz ("Naryan-Mar Oil and Gas"), Lukoil did not only bring to the okrug its oil workers, but also subcontracting companies it had been working with in other oil-producing regions, which operate in such diverse realms as security and construction. The oil industry now relies on 10 000 workers, who work as long-distance commuters, arriving at their work-sites by helicopter or in all-terrain personal carriers from neighbouring Arkhangelsk or Murmansk provinces, from more southern regions of Russia or even from member-countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Borrowing from Yvette Vaguet (2007: 8) who conducted research among the workers of the oil and gas-rich regions of Western Siberia, I will refer to these workers as "oil nomads" ("nomades du pétrole") in contrast to their predecessors who settled in the NAO.

The second oil boom also brought more revenues to the NAO's administration, from taxes earned on lease of land, and oil production taxes. In 2006, 98.8 percent of the okrug's revenues came from the oil industry (Dallmann et al. 2010: 5). The administration, then, was able to redistribute a share of these revenues to the population and public institutions, such as agricultural cooperatives,[4] and to the reindeer herders,

[4] An Agricultural cooperative (*sel'skhozyaistvennyi proisvodsvennyi kooperativ*, SPK) is the economic-administrative form taken by most former collective (kolkhoz, from *kollektivnoye khozyaistvo*) and state

who saw an increasing number of oil extraction projects taking place on the land they had been migrating through. Even after the Russian federal state appropriated most of the oil revenues in the 2000s, the population of the okrug still seems to be benefiting from the oil developments. In 2009, in the midst of the global financial crisis, the nominal monthly salary of the Naryan-Mar inhabitants was 44 564 roubles compared with 16 895 roubles for the rest of Russia (Rosstat 2010). In the Nenets villages, however, the economic situation is very different. Although I do not have official statistics on the level of unemployment on the island of Kolguev, one can easily imagine that the former state farm, which used to employ the greatest number of the islanders, employed in 2008 just over 20 of the 458 of Kolguev's inhabitants (Dallmann et al. 2010: 135-136). It is not surprising that enormous differences have been noticed in the levels of yearly income received by the reindeer herders in the okrug (varying from 200 000 to 600 000 roubles) and those of villagers (from 30 000 to 50 000 roubles) who are often largely subsisting off other traditional activities, such as hunting and fishing (Ibid.: 10).

As I initially arrived in the field, I aimed to study the interactions between oil workers and reindeer herders. As was somewhat expected, I came to understand that the encounters, in person, between herders and oil workers are not very frequent. However, it is impossible not to notice the presence of the oil industry in the tundra, be it from the metal waste left behind since the Soviet days, the damaged pastures, or the Naryanmarneftegaz calendars hanging in the *chums* (Russian name for the Nenets tepee-like traditional abode), the clothes, generators, and DVD players given to the herders by oil companies.

(sovkhoz, from *sovetskoe khozyaistvo*) farms in the post-Soviet days. As will be seen in later chapters, their organisation and the people involved in them displays continuity with the Soviet institutions they were borne out of. Hence, the NAO's inhabitants constantly refer to their farms by their Soviet appellations, kolkhoz and sovkhoz. Throughout the dissertation, I will invariably refer to these farms by either using the acronym of these cooperatives, SPK, or by the Soviet-inherited terminology.

Behind the Russian flag flies the flag of Naryanmarneftegaz.

"To us, the North is not the limit at all." Advertisement by Komi Republic branch of Lukoil, which has a visible presence in the NAO.

In the hallways of oil extraction sites, of the offices of oil companies and in the state offices of this oil-producing region, one often finds pictures of the beautiful tundra landscape, most often of Nenets herders with their reindeer, hanging on the walls. In advertisements for government celebrations, such as the okrug's 80th anniversary, as well as for those of oil companies, one invariably sees Nenets reindeer herders with their reindeer. This not only testifies to the cultural, symbolic and economic significance of both the oil industry and of reindeer herding in the region, but also gives an indication that those involved in either of these economic sectors must have some form of interaction. In fact, the Nenets herders and the oil nomads do have some interactions in the tundra, namely through trading, although security forces and perimeters, as well as prejudices about each other do not facilitate encounters. Similarly, the oil nomads who are employed in oil companies' offices in Naryan-Mar or who travel through the capital on the way to or from the extraction sites do walk through the same streets of the city as the settlers, but they rarely work together, visit the same venues or are involved in the same networks of friends.

In order to better understand what shapes these interactions, as they are taking place during the okrug's second oil boom, this dissertation chronologically examines the political and economic contexts in which Nenets herders and villagers, settlers and oil nomads have evolved as groups and have been led to interact with each other and with the land they are living and/or working on since the 19th century.

Research Settings and Methods

As I prepared for my field research, I initially imagined that the major portion of my year of field research would mostly take place in the tundra, where I would be studying the interactions between Nenets herders and oil workers while they are at their extraction sites, in the tundra. However, due to the Russian visa regulations, the one year visa I received only allowed me to be on Russian soil for 90 out of every 180 days. Hence, my field research took place in four phases:

Phase 1: August - October 2008

Phase 2: February - April 2009

Phase 3: August - October 2009

Phase 4: June - August 2010

An important consequence of these visa regulations concerns the preparation for my stays in the tundra. The Nenets Autonomous Okrug is considered a border-zone (*pogranichnaya zona*) due to the presence of the military complex situated on the Novaya Zemlya archipelago. Hence, in order to leave the capital, one must receive a border-zone permit (*pogranichnyi propusk*), which normally requires at least one week. Then, one must find a helicopter flight to the tundra and make certain that there will be a flight back in time to fly from the okrug and leave Russia before end of the 90 days period.

This situation led me to spend more time than initially anticipated in Naryan-Mar. This circumstance allowed me, however, to develop an understanding of the way of life of the Russian settlers. My initial contact with the settlers' hospitality can be traced back to a posting I had placed on Live Journal, a web-site widely consulted in Russia, in the Spring 2008 in which I asked if anybody could answer certain questions regarding the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. I soon received a reply from a former resident of the NAO who had moved to southern Russia. She put me in touch with some of her friends residing in Naryan-Mar. It was they who agreed to host me during my stays in the capital. Very soon, I was integrated in their networks of friends and relatives, which allowed me to learn about the history of settlers who had come to the okrug during the first "oil boom", as well as to discover their way of life and that of their descendants.

Following my initial arrival to the NAO, I soon met a group of oil workers during a visit to one of Naryan Mar's rare bars. Most of them had come from central Russia to

work in the offices of oil companies in the capital. During my stays in Naryan-Mar, I would always meet up with this group, go for picnics, share meals and weekend evenings. By spending time with them, I was able to understand why they had made the decision to come to work in the NAO, and to live there, and to learn about their perceptions of and interactions with both the Nenets and with the newcomers.

I used the technique of snowball sampling to conduct my research with both the settlers and the oil nomads living and working in Naryan-Mar, as well as with Nenets villagers. I did not generally follow the approach mentioned by H. Russel Bernard (1995: 97), according to which snowball sampling relies on the naming of relevant individuals by a person who has been identified as possessing the knowledge or characteristics relevant to one's study. Rather, my research approach consisted in finding a "seed" household or group of friends or relatives to find out who was part of their network and follow them in their daily interactions. This was generally done through participant-observation of different events in their daily lives, as well as a great number of informal discussions.

During the various phases of my field research, my stays in the okrug's capital also involved visits to several federal and okrug-level state agencies related to the indigenous peoples' affairs, to agriculture and reindeer herding, to the oil industry and to the protection of the environment, where I conducted several semi-structured interviews. I also visited the offices of different oil companies, as well as those of companies closely associated with the oil industry, such as construction companies, where I was also able to conduct semi-structured interviews. Naryan-Mar is also home to the Association Yasavey (Nenets words which means "guide", "person who knows the land"), an activist organisation representing the rights and interests of Nenets people in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, which I visited on a regular basis while in the capital. Yasavey's goals are to "[…] work to solve the socio-economic problems of the life of the Nenets people, to assist the growth of its national self-consciousness, the protection of culture and traditional way of life" (Translated from Russian, by R. Rouillard, Yasavey's website).[5] The organisation is affiliated to the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples

[5] From now on, all the translations I made from Russian to English will be indicated in the following manner: (Transl., Source Year: Page Number).

of the North (RAIPON), which operates at the federal level. In the recent years, Yasavey has been increasingly dealing with issues related to the growing impact of the oil industry in the NAO. Yasavey members were also initially very helpful in putting me in contact with Nenets individuals and herding brigades as I was preparing for my research in the tundra. This part of my research took place in two regions: on the island of Kolguev and in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra.

The Island of Kolguev and the Bolshezemelskaya Tundra

The island of Kolguev is situated northwest of the okrug, in the Barents Sea. The Nenets living on the island mostly descend from the few Nenets herders brought from the mainland by Russian traders from Mezen[6] to herd reindeer, hunt and fish for them in the 18th century. However, ten families of Nenets residing on the archipelago of Novaya Zemlya were also brought to Kolguev in 1957 as the military complex had been established and where nuclear experiments were to be conducted between 1955 and 1990. In 2008, Kolguev had a population of 458 people, 441 of whom were Nenets (Dallmann et al. 2010: 104 and 135). Most of them reside in the island's main village, Bugrino, situated at the southernmost part the island (See Appendix 2). During my stays in the village, I was hosted by one family thanks to whom I came to understand the way of life of villagers, as well as how they relate to the tundra, to reindeer herding and to the herders since they have been sedentary for three generations. In the tundra, I was hosted by the herders of one brigade, composed of around ten male herders and one or two "tent-workers" (*chum-rabotnitsa* in Russian) as they are officially called, depending on the period of the year. It is worth mentioning that the Kolguev herders live in individual shacks (*bolki*) and not in *chums*. Due to the relatively short distances between the brigade's pastures and the village and to their high reliance on the snowmobile for transportation, the herders and their village-relatives maintain constant contact. My stays with the herders allowed me to understand the significance of these interactions between the tundra and the village from the perspective of herders. This island's relatively small size allowed me to travel to meet with the herders of the other brigades both in the tundra and in Bugrino, or to meet herders who had come to the village to gather supplies or

[6] Mezen (founded in the 16th century) was, with Pustozersk (founded in 1499), the two important administrative and trading centres in the region until the early 20th century.

while they were off-duty or on vacation. The pasture grounds of the brigade I conducted most of my research with are located in the east of the island. Also situated in the eastern part of Kolguev is the Peschanka Lake where oil fields were discovered in the 1970s and from where oil has been extracted since the middle of the 1980s.

During the second phase of my fieldwork, which took place between February and April, I visited the extraction sites of both oil companies operating on the island. The first one is operated by Murmansk-based Artikneft ("Arctic Oil"), a private company previously owned by Lukoil sold to Urals Energy in 2005. As I visited it on a day trip, I soon realised that the company's future on the island was highly uncertain due to the difficulties it was experiencing in the middle of the global financial crisis. Though the site was nearly deserted, I was able to conduct an interview with the person overseeing the remaining extraction activities. The production activities of their "neighbours" remained more intense as I sojourned at their site for nearly two weeks. Artikmorneftegazrazvedka ("Arctic and Sea Oil and Gas Exploration", AMNGR), is a state-owned company, also based in Murmansk. At its Kolguev site, AMNGR relies on two alternating shifts, comprising some 200 workers each. One of my interests in visiting this site was that it had been explored and became productive in the Soviet days, which allowed me to contrast it with the sites where the extraction began in the post-Soviet days.

I also conducted research in the Western part of the Bolshezemelskaya tundra (which translates into "Big Land" tundra) (See Appendix 3). Through contacts I had made in the village of Krasnoe, the herders of one of the seven brigades of the agricultural cooperative "Kharp" ("Northern lights" in Nenets) agreed to host me. I sojourned with this brigade during three stays, lasting from over a week to six weeks. These herders are part of a brigade which differs from the ones on Kolguev, and could be considered as more "traditional" in different respects. For example, they follow much longer migration routes, traveling from the Barents Sea in the summer to the northern part of the Komi Republic in the winter (See Appendix 4). Thus, migration occupies a much larger part of their time than for the Kolguev herders. During my stays with them, the herders migrated on average every second or third day from one camp site to another. Furthermore, they rely almost exclusively on reindeer to migrate and travel, although in

winter and spring, they have access to one snowmobile, which they primarily use to visit relatives or procure supplies in the village, as will be seen in chapter 6.

The Kharp brigade I conducted my research with is comprised of some ten herders, most of whom are young men. Two women take care of their respective relatives, living on either side of the one chum they live in together. During the day, while the men attend to the herd, the women generally stay around the chum in order to prepare food, pick berries or mushrooms in the summer, fetch water and take care of the domestic realm. With these herders, I visited other Kharp brigades, and herders from the private cooperative *Erv.* I also celebrated Reindeer's Day (*Den' olenya*) with the Kharp brigades. Every year, the first weekend of August in the NAO marks the Reindeer day (previously called "Reindeer Herders' day"), where the brigades of each cooperative gather, giving them the opportunity to see friends and relatives whom they have not seen in months, if not in years.

The territory allocated to the seven brigades of the Kharp agricultural cooperative is highly coveted by oil companies since different deposits had been discovered by Soviet geological expeditions. The one brigade I conducted my research with migrate near the territory of one of the okrug's largest extraction sites, Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu ("Southern-Khylchuyu" named after the river called by the Nenets "Khylchuyu"). This extraction site is a project developed by both Lukoil and ConocoPhillips' joint-venture company, Naryanmarneftegaz. The construction of the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base began in 2006. As I stayed for one week at the site in the fall of 2009, it was entering into its productive phase, leading the company to reduce the number of its employees from 2000 to 900, with the goal of stabilising it to 500 - 600 once having fully entered the productive phase.

During my stays at both oil extraction sites, on Kolguev and in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, the workers were initially reticent to talk to me, for understandable reasons. Talking to a foreigner about issues related to the oil industry, a strategic resource for Russia, is a rather delicate matter. At the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu site, I was in fact not allowed to take pictures nor to leave a small part of the base, which was called *Svezdochka* ("little star") based on its architectural design. It is the part of the compound where the engineers, subcontractors, as well as company's higher ups are living. At the AMNGR, I was not given any limitations in my movement, besides the

requirement that I should not disturb the workers while they were on duty. After having sojourned for a couple of days at either site, when everyone had heard about my presence or seen an unknown person, the workers were more and more willing to talk to me, often out of curiosity. After meeting them in the smoking room or at the cafeteria, I would often be invited to their rooms to drink tea and they generally were rather open to talking to me. I thus conducted over twenty semi-structured interviews at each site, which were recorded on a voice recorder or on paper, as well as an incalculable number of informal discussions.

Trust was expressed in a very different way by the Nenets herders with whom I conducted my research. As was the case for Florian Stammler (2005) doing research with Yamal Nenets, the herders of both brigades would generally not tell me what I had to do, what had to be done. Rather, they would let me know that I should not have done something, sometimes by ignoring me for a certain period of time. On a daily basis I made efforts to gain their trust so that they would both allow me to take part in certain activities and also so that I could be as helpful as possible to them. Succeeding in catching my first reindeer on the escape or being able ride a sled without lagging behind during our daily travels brought me a deep sense of joy. However, I would also sometimes fail at certain tasks and consequently lose their trust, sometimes with the result that I would be forced to stay near the chum for a day or more, which was a rather efficient way of making sure I would not repeat the same mistakes.

The majority of Nenets people I was living or exchanging with spoke primarily Russian in their daily life. I will show in the following chapters why most herders I conducted my research with were predominantly young men aged between 20 and 40. Although most of them said they could understand the Nenets language or some of it, since it was often the language they spoke before entering school, they generally claimed to be unable to speak Nenets or to speak it badly.

Because both reindeer herding and the oil industry rely predominantly on male workers, this ethnographic research relates to a large extent the points of view and ways of life of men. However, while being in Naryan-Mar and in the villages, I also had access to several female informants among the Nenets villagers and Russian settlers. At both

extraction sites, I was also able to discuss with support staff, such as cafeteria or cleaning personnel, most of whom are women.

Finally, the political nature of this research as well as the small size of the NAO's population required that I adopt particular measures in my way of presenting my data. This is especially true as the Russian authorities have become increasingly authoritarian prior to and following the re-election of Vladimir Putin as president in 2012. Only months after the election, a number of civil society organisations, such as the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, were closed down by the Russian state. Hence, in the following chapters, I will be referring to participants in this research by pseudonyms. In some instances, I will use different pseudonyms to refer to a same person when it would be possible to identify them. On certain occasions, I describe certain people or events with a certain vagueness for the same reason.

This dissertation examines the evolution of interactions between different ethnic and professional groups in a region where an indigenous population has been living for centuries, but which saw the arrival of two successive waves of oil workers, arriving in two different political, economic and ideological contexts. In order to ease the comprehension of the next chapters, I will situate my research in relation to anthropological scholarship on the oil industry, shift workers, and on the indigenous peoples and settlers of northern Russia.

The Anthropology of Oil and of the Russian North

The extraction of natural resources often takes place in regions where one or different peoples considered "indigenous" live and have previously experienced the annexation of their territories by an imperial power or by the state. Social scientists have conducted pioneering work on oil extraction in regions where indigenous or minority populations have been living. Suzana Sawyer (2004) studied the struggle of indigenous peoples against oil companies and the state in Ecuador, and Michael Watts (2001) has long been conducting research among the "oil minorities" of the Niger Delta. Several of the contributors to the recent *Crude Domination: An Anthropology of Oil*, edited by Andrea Behrends, Stephen Reyna and Günther Schlee (2011) have also conducted research on the impact of oil extraction on indigenous peoples and other marginalised populations. What is common in these works is that they concern regions and populations

which previously experienced colonisation by imperial powers, which have left a legacy in terms of the political and economic structures that determine the position of formerly colonised peoples.

In the Russian North, the long history of interactions between Russians and indigenous peoples, as well as the international character of the Soviet Union suggest that the characterisation of peoples like the Nenets as colonised would be inaccurate. If they were colonised, when did this occur and by whom? In recent decades, it has become more common for scholars within and outside Russia to describe the Soviet Union as a particular form taken by the Russian empire, which remained an empire as it extended its powers over conquered territories and new populations which it colonised. Describing the USSR and the interactions between Moscow and other regions, between Russians and other nationalities in terms of colonisation by an imperial power would miss a crucial point, well phrased by Bruce Grant (2009: 60):

> Looking back at the USSR […] what we gain in comparisons with imperial rule in other parts of the world we can also lose in not fully grasping the stunning distinctiveness of the Soviet internationalist project, one that generated a surprising degree of federalism and social mixing over seven remarkably tumultuous decades.

In former colonies, indigenous populations were generally targeted by imperial powers and their institutions in order to exert an economically grounded domination and, in countries like Canada and the United States, often to facilitate their removal be it through genocide or ethnocide. Like other groups who have formerly experienced colonisation by European powers, the Nenets and other "small peoples of the North" have been targets of state-organised violence and were forced to enter socialist institutions. However, it was not because they were Nenets that they faced violence resulting from forced collectivisation, but rather because they too were to become Soviet citizens, along with all the members of various national groups living in the USSR, including Russians. Yet, the inclusion of the Nenets and other indigenous peoples of the North into Soviet state institutions had tremendous consequences, as their way of life was long discounted as "backward" and uncivilised, in contrast with the lifestyle of the large number of settlers arriving in the North as the vanguard of Soviet civilisation.

Following the collapse of the USSR, the opening of borders as well as the possibility to travel more freely within Russia allowed researchers, foreign and Russian,

to sojourn in the North and Siberia where they could conduct extensive anthropological research with different indigenous peoples. What they often focused on was the socioeconomic consequences of the disappearance of the Soviet state, as well as on the extent to which indigenous peoples had preserved various aspects of their culture despite the transformative effects of their inclusion in Soviet institutions. Of particular relevance to my research are the works of Tuula Tuisku (1996; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2008) and Karina Lukin (2010, 2011a, 2011b) who conducted ethnographic research with the Nenets of the Bolshezemelskaya tundra and of Kolguev, respectively. Florian Stammler (2005, 2009, 2011) has conducted extended research among the Nenets reindeer herders in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. He provides insightful in-depth analyses of the Nenets herders' way of life, while also allowing for comparison with the "European Nenets" with whom I conducted my research in the NAO. The works of Joachim Otto Habeck (2002; 2005) focus on Komi reindeer herders in the neighbouring Komi Republic and provide valuable descriptions of the evolution of interactions between the Nenets and the Komi herders, as well as on the mutual influence of their respective ways of practicing reindeer herding. These works, among other ethnographic studies of Siberia and the Russian North, will be referred to throughout this dissertation. One of the underlying themes of these works concerns the challenges experienced by indigenous peoples living in regions where extractive industries have been present for several decades and reconfigured these regions politically, economically and socially, namely due to the arrival of a large number of settlers.

What was absent in studies of the Russian North was the perspective of the settlers themselves, often presented as a majority, dominating group situated at the top of political and economic structures in resource-rich regions where indigenous peoples have been living. Niobe Thompson (2004; 2008) conducted ground-breaking research with settlers in Chukotka. One of his contributions is to have presented the experience of the settlers, by examining their history, their way of relating to their region of origins, to the North and to its indigenous inhabitants, the Chukchi and the Yup'ik. His study took place in the early 2000s, as oligarch Roman Abramovich was elected as governor to the region. One of Abramovich's goals was to decrease the size of the population, most especially of the settler population and to assist them in their resettlement back to the South. Parallel to

this plan, the new governor also had the project of modernising the okrug, that is, to improve the infrastructure of Anadyr', the capital, and to improve administrative and economic institutions, such as state farms where Chukchi and Yup'ik herders and hunters were working.

Thompson's description of Abramovich's modernisation project, and of the attitudes of these largely Moscow-based "modernisers", as well as their interactions with the settlers and indigenous peoples resembles to a certain extent the situation I observed in the field, with the presence of the oil nomads in the NAO. Shift-workers have also attracted the attention of anthropologists in recent years, as the oil and gas industry, which plays such a crucial role in the country's economy, is increasingly relying on shift-workers. Hence a growing number of studies have appeared which examine shift-work in Russia, from different perspectives, whether to examine the impact of shift-work on the lives of individual workers, or on the communities in the Russian North (Stammler and Eilmsteiner-Saxinger (eds.) 2010, Vaguet 2007).

Though my research has benefited immensely from the works mentioned above, the analysis I present in this dissertation departs from them in that it focuses on the political and economic processes which have shaped the ways of life of Nenets nomadic reindeer herders, sedentary villagers, Russian settlers as well as oil nomads since the nineteenth century. These groups are differentiated on the basis of their inclusion of individuals belonging either to particular professional or national groups.

The Soviet concept of nationality appeared in 1932, during collectivisation and at the beginning of Soviet industrialisation. At the time, the authorities needed a mode of identification, which would allow them to efficiently control the movements of the population (Brubaker 1996: 32). "*National'nost'*", or "nationality", appeared on a person's internal passport[7], the main Soviet identification document. According to Rogers Brubaker (1996: 31),

> Ethnic nationality (natsional'nost') was not only a statistical category, a fundamental unit of social accounting, employed in censuses and other social surveys. It was, more

[7] The internal passport was the main identification document for Soviet citizens within the country. This document, as well as others, displayed the nationality of each citizen, which was attributed based on their parents' nationality, and not on linguistic or residential criteria. In the case of children from mixed nationality marriages, he/she had to choose his/her nationality by the age of 16 with no possibility of subsequent change (Brubaker 1996: 31).

> distinctively, an obligatory and mainly ascriptive legal category, a key element of an individual's legal status.

In 2002, nationality stopped being mentioned in most Russian official documents, such as the internal passport or in the census. However, "nationality" remains a category widely used in the NAO by individuals to describe the ethnic group they belong to, or to qualify a cohesive settlement. For example, the villages of Nelmin-Nos and Bugrino are commonly referred to as "national villages" to indicate that the vast majority of inhabitants are Nenets "by nationality" (*po natsional'nosti*). Furthermore, nationality is included in certain pieces of legislation concerning the Russian indigenous peoples of the North, a practice which is not without difficulties, as I will show in chapter 5.

Although the notion of nationality might appear to provide a measure of cohesiveness, as if the Nenets were living separately from other ethnic groups, the reality of demographics in the NAO is more complex. The village of Krasnoe, where the Kharp farm is located had a population of 1650 people in 2005, of which 900 were Nenets (Dallmann et al. 2010: 105). The other inhabitants are either Komi or Russian. As in Krasnoe, it is not rare to see mixed nationality couples in Naryan-Mar, which may comprise partners of Nenets, Komi and Russian origin. For example, Kolya, one of my hosts in Bugrino was the son of a Belarussian father and of a Nenets mother. I believe it is in large part due the fact that he grew up among the largely Nenets community on Kolguev that leads him to refer to himself as Nenets. In the case of the villages and in the herding brigades where I conducted my research, individuals are generally referred to and identify themselves as Nenets, either based on their Nenets ancestry, on the fact that they live among many Nenets, and, in the case of herders, because of their occupation, which is closely associated with the Nenets. Although Kharp has some brigades predominantly comprising Komi, the brigade I conducted my research with in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra only included Nenets members.

Like the groups of Nenets herders and villagers with whom I conducted my research, neither settlers nor oil nomads form highly homogenous groups. The oil nomads very often shared similar ethnic and regional origins with the settlers, since they both generally came from either the Slavic republics of the former-USSR (Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus), or from oil-producing regions of the Caucasus or central Russia. In post-Soviet Russia, a distinction was introduced to distinguish between those who are ethnic

Russians (*Russkie*), and those who belong to one of the different national groups living in Russia, though they are Russian citizens (*Rossiyane*). Hence, a Nenets individual would be, in that sense, *Rossiyanin*. However, the vast majority of my interlocutors among the settlers or the oil nomads used the term *Russkii* while they were in the NAO, whether they were ethnically Russians, Tatars, Bashkirs, and even in certain circumstances Nenets. Hence, throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the settlers and oil nomads as being Russian which is the way they most often refer to themselves.

The settlers and the oil nomads do not form a perfectly homogenous group in terms of their occupation either. Members of both groups have been or are, in principle, working for the oil industry or for an economic sector closely related to it. In the Soviet days, many of the settlers living in Naryan-Mar who were not directly involved in oil exploration were and are still working in the public sphere (*byudzhetnaya sfera*) in a sector either related to services to the population (such as schools, hospitals, airport) or for state agencies. Today, the support staff (for example, the cleaning and cafeteria staff) at the operational oil extraction sites, as well as many of those working in different economic sectors more or less related to the oil industry (for example, construction workers, security guards, and café employees) also have a lifestyle which is more similar to that of the oil nomads, be they engineers or technicians. For the sake of precision, I will describe as settlers those individuals who came to the Nenets Okrug from the 1960s until the collapse of the Soviet state, in 1991. The category "oil nomads" will refer to those who have been working shifts or working in the Naryan-Mar offices for the oil industry. It is important to note that the oil workers operating the AMNGR extraction site on Kolguev are very particular in the sense that most of them are settlers to another region of the Russian North, the Murmansk Oblast ("province"), though they come to the NAO to work in shifts.

While discussing the interactions between each group – the Nenets herders and villagers, the predominantly Russian settlers and oil nomads – I will demonstrate how the creation and maintenance of boundaries between ethnic groups reflects a performative aspect and is not necessarily linked to the "content" of ethnicity. As Fredrik Barth ((1969) 1998: 6) suggests,

> […] the cultural features of greatest import are boundary-connected: the diacritica by which membership is signalled and the cultural standards that actors themselves use to evaluate and judge the actions of ethnic co-members, implying that they see themselves as "playing the same game".

As I will show, the length of cohabitation in the okrug, their shared experience of the Soviet regime and of the collapse of the Soviet state, as well as their involvement in networks of exchange led the Nenets and the settlers to be "playing the same game" to a large extent. By contrast, though the settlers are generally Russian "by nationality" as the oil nomads, members of the latter group seem to be playing a different game, the rules of which are largely defined by the market economy. Yet, both the settlers and the oil nomads have in common the fact that they have been the main agents of two successive development projects, one informed by socialist ideals, the other by those of flexible capitalism. In a related manner, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003: 202) remarks the following concerning state development projects taking place among the Evenki of central Siberia:

> […] the condition of "failure" characterizes not merely one or another developmental campaign but the very structure of the Russian administration in this area since the seventeenth century. In this long history, the Soviet period, dramatic and exceptional as it seems, remains only one episode. The closer examination reveals contradictory, even chaotic, fragments of different projects-from tributary districts, administrative clans, and clan soviets to "elementary," "proper," and state collectives, and to other statist and traditionalist constructions that are not only mutually constituted but also stand similarly unfinished.

This dissertation will demonstrate the impact on the Nenets of two successive development projects, which are both related to the presence of oil in the NAO. I will demonstrate how during both the Soviet and post-Soviet projects, the settlers and then the oil nomads successively perceived themselves as generous agents of development in the region. The notion of the gift has been largely studied in anthropology, namely since the publication of Marcel Mauss' work *The Gift* (1967). Mauss observes about exchanges that they organise society and that they constitute both persons and groups. On the object given, Mauss (1967: 10) remarks that "[t]he thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place". As I will demonstrate, what has been taken since the 1960s in the NAO is oil and what has been given back is "civilisation."

This form of exchange with the Nenets first involved the settlers, who were bringing Soviet civilisation to the okrug, and then the oil nomads, who brought another type of civilisation, this time to both the Nenets and the settlers. What is remarkable about the relations between agents and recipients of development is that the settlers have largely been replaced by the oil nomads who now hold the higher political and economic position and have established paternalistic relations with both the Nenets and the settlers. In a related manner, Bruce Grant (2009) has studied the way of relating between the Russian empire and the Caucasus, which the Russians tried to conquer for centuries. He remarks that the conquest of the Caucasus was closely associated with a description of that region and of its inhabitants as benefiting from the benevolent help of the Russian empire, thus constituting what he calls a "gift of empire":

> […] while the gift of empire may ultimately be unilateral, it sets in motion a remarkably effective means of establishing sovereignty over others, hinging on a language of reciprocity that requires little or no actual reception among the conquered. It is the logic of sovereign rule where the act of taking - of lands, persons, and goods is enabled by the language of giving (Grant 2009: 44).

Throughout this dissertation, I will examine the ways in which the "gift of empire" has been provided to the Nenets by the agents of two successive development projects, which took place in two different political, economic and ideological contexts.

Thesis Organisation

The first chapter situates the Nenets in relation to their historical and geographical neighbours, the Komi and the Russians, as well as in relation to other reindeer herders of Eurasia through the literature on reindeer herding and nomadic pastoralism. I will introduce the Nenets' law of the tundra as the guiding framework through which the Nenets interact with other beings – human and non-human – present in the tundra. I also situate the origins of the Russian oil industry in Baku, in today's Azerbaijan, a region long fought over before being conquered by the Russian empire. While relating the origins of the Russian oil industry in that region, I will also show that the existence of fossil fuels had long been suspected, if not known of, in the region of the Pechora River, crossing today's Komi Republic and Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

In chapter 2, I examine the integration of the Nenets into novel Soviet institutions, such as the collective farms, until the Second World War. Like other indigenous peoples, the Nenets became the targets of collectivisation, as well as of interventions into their

relations with the reindeer and the land for the sake of productivity. At the same time as the Soviet state was trying to make the Nenets socialist citizens, the authorities began to engage in the exploration of fossil fuel deposits in other regions than the Caucasus, leading to an increased interest in the Russian northwestern territories. The socialist state's quest for these resources was related to its plan to export them in exchange for technologies allowing it to develop the country's industrial base.

The third chapter focuses on the period between the 1960s and the late 1990s, that is, from the okrug's first oil boom until perestroika and the resultant collapse of the Soviet Union. I will discuss the economic and social impact of the arrival of a large number of predominantly Russian workers who came to work either in the exploration for oil or in the public sector. I will show how those who settled in the Arctic were depicted by the state as the vanguard of civilisation, bringing development to the okrug and to the Nenets and other indigenous peoples of the North. I will also discuss the socioeconomic consequences of the collapse of the Soviet state on these communities, based on ethnographic accounts on the Russian North and Siberia in the post-Soviet period. It will be seen that during the 1990s, not only the Nenets herders and villagers, but also those Russian settlers who decided to remain in the okrug had to rely largely on hunting and fishing, as well as on their networks of exchanges to subsist.

In chapter 4, I examine the political and economic context which resulted in the development of what I refer to as post-Soviet Russian law and its establishment in the NAO. Basing my argument on literature stemming from political science, I will show how the arrival of Vladimir Putin introduced drastic changes to the redistribution of revenues and of political power as the federal state undertook a process of centralisation in Moscow. One of the most significant characteristics of this law is that it aims to facilitate the operations of the oil industry, which presently adheres to the requirements of the global neoliberal economic order. Hence, the production of oil in the NAO is now undertaken by a more flexible workforce than the one which discovered the oil deposits. Drawing on the anthropological literature on neoliberalism I will relate the ways in which settlers perceive the impact of an increased reliance of the oil industry on a flexible workforce coming and going from faraway regions. In order to contrast the flexibility

inherent in both the code of conduct of the Nenets and that of Russian law, I will refer to the requirements imposed by neoliberalism as "flexible capitalism."

In chapter 5, I will examine how the interactions between two legal frameworks, that of the Nenets law of the tundra and the Russian law are affecting the ways in which the four groups perceive and interact with the land and, as a result, with each other. In order to do so, I will discuss certain characteristics of the Russian legal system and analyse certain federal- and okrug-level legislation related either to indigenous peoples, to reindeer herding or to the extraction of oil. Based on different theoretical frameworks related to space, I will also discuss each group's perception of the land in the okrug and beyond, as well as their respective ways of relating to the state and the market.

Grounded on recent literature on infrastructure, chapter 6 examines the role of five different types of infrastructure (pipelines, houses, helicopters, snowmobiles, and mobile connection) in the lives of the residents of the okrug – Nenets and Russian – and of those of the oil nomads. I will show how these types of infrastructure are used by the different groups, the impact they have on their way of life and how they allow for both connections between people and regions, while sometimes being agents of disconnection between people and particular places. I will also show that the infrastructures developed by oil companies allow the oil nomads to perceive themselves as bringing positive developments to the okrug, relegating in a paternalistic manner both the settlers and the Nenets to the position of beneficiaries of the oil boom, thus discrediting any concerns the latter groups may express.

In the final chapter, chapter 7, the question of connection to the NAO and to the Arctic, and disconnection from one's region of origins in the South at the biological level will be discussed. Basing my analysis on literature stemming from medical anthropology, I will show how in recent Russian medical and scientific studies, oil nomads, Russian settlers and the Nenets are depicted as being located at different stages of the physiological adaptation process to the Arctic. It will be seen that medical specialists advise the oil nomads to only remain in the Arctic for limited periods of time in order to avoid experiencing health problems due to their low level of adaptation to such environments. The Nenets, on the other hand, are described as perfectly adapted to life in the Arctic, despite all the socioeconomic changes they have undergone in the 20th century,

namely their sedentarisation. I will show that the fixity of the biological depiction of the Nenets may also serve to deflect attention from the presence of historically conditioned health and social issues.

1

Genealogy of Ways of Life

Upon entering the word "Nenets" in Google's image search engine, the results are a great number of pictures, most of which show Nenets individuals, wearing traditional clothes made of reindeer hide and fur, either surrounded by several reindeer, or on a reindeer sled. On images used for advertisements by the authorities of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, as well by oil companies operating in the region, one invariably sees the same elements. The Nenets are perceived to be inseparable from reindeer. Nenets myths, as well as archaeological findings also testify to the Nenets' ancient interactions with this animal. However, the terms of engagement with reindeer have changed in very significant ways throughout the Nenets' history, from hunting wild reindeer to herding large numbers of domesticated reindeer. This change is generally thought to have taken place during the 17th and 18th centuries. At around the same time, in certain regions of Siberia and the Caucasus, which the Russian state was seeking to integrate, reports relating the existence of "thick flammable water" were arriving in Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. With time, prospectors and investors, as well as the state were displaying a growing interest for a resource that was to play a key role in the development of the Russian state.

This chapter relates the origins of the way of life of two groups that met and cohabited in 20th-century northwestern Russia. I will first introduce the Nenets and the development of their lifestyle as reindeer herders. In order to facilitate the reading of the next chapters, I will present and situate their way of practicing nomadic reindeer herding through an examination of literature on that way of life as practiced in Eurasia. In the second part of the chapter, I will describe the roots of the Russian oil industry. It will be seen that the development of the oil industry took place to a large extent in the Caucasus, namely in Baku, which the expanding Russian empire was seeking to conquer. Parallel to the developments in that region, oil prospecting was also taking place in the Russian northwestern territories, where the Russian state had already established its control centuries earlier.

Situating the Nenets in Space and Time

One of the most common understandings of the origins of the Nenets is that they descended from groups of hunters once living in the Sayan mountains of southern Siberia, who migrated towards the North for reasons and at periods that are not agreed upon by specialists (Castrén 1854; Khomich 1976: 5-8; Stammler 2005:7). Their language is part of the Samoyedic group[8], which includes extinct languages such as Kamasin, Koibal, and the current Enets, Nganasan and Sel'kup, which are part of the Uralic language family (Khomich 2003: 10). The Nenets language is divided in two sub-languages, that is the forest Nenets and the tundra Nenets. The latter is spoken by the vast majority of Nenets-speakers. The tundra sub-language is divided into the Western dialects, which include those spoken on Kolguev and on the Kanin Peninsula, and Eastern dialects, such as those spoken on the Yamal Peninsula. L. V. Khomich (1976: 36) suggests that the dialect spoken in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra is an intermediate dialect, between the Western and Eastern dialects. Along with the Yamal dialect, the Bolshezemel'skii dialect was in fact used as a point of reference for the creation of the Nenets literary language in the early Soviet days. Today, the majority of Nenets I encountered predominantly speak Russian in their day-to-day life, an issue which I will discuss in subsequent chapters.

The ethnogenesis of the Nenets, a topic which has been studied by anthropologists in the Soviet era (Dolgikh 1970, Khomich 1976, Vasil'ev 1976) has not found consensus as of now. Anthropologist Florian Stammler (2005: 6) remarks that the question of origins is not a major topic of interest among the Nenets of the Yamal Peninsula, unlike other regions of the Russian North and Siberia, where different indigenous peoples who have been cohabiting more or less peacefully throughout history have had competitive claims to land[9]. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the indigenous status of the Nenets is generally not questioned. However, the Nenets presence on the island of Kolguev is, as will be seen in chapter 5, questioned by the oil workers. Their relatively recent arrival to

[8] The term "Samoyed" was the ethnonyme given to the Nenets, as well as to the related Enets, Nganasans and the Se'lkups by Russians. Although it is often thought that the term served to name groups of people perceived as cannibals (from "samo-" (self) and "-yed" (eat)), the origins and meaning of the term Samoyed did not find consensus among researchers (Khomich 2003: 3).

[9] In regions such as Chukotka, where Chukchi and Yuit live, and Taimyr, where Dolgans, Nganasans and Nenets cohabit, the question of who is the most indigenous group to a territory is still very current.

the island in the mid-1800s allowed oil workers to call into question any claims the Nenets may make to the island's territory. It remains, however, that the okrug's Nenets are considered neither to be the first inhabitants of the region nor the only group practicing an economic activity closely associated with "indigenous groups": reindeer herding.

B. O. Dolgikh (1970: 52) suggests that the territory now inhabited by the Nenets was inhabited by humans at the end of the 2nd and at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. However, the oldest traces of Samoyedic presence date from the 11th century. Thus, when the ancestors of the Nenets arrived in the region, they would have entered the world of legendary inhabitants: the Siirts (*sikhirtya*). The Siirts' existence has been suggested by their presence in Nenets tales, as well as in archaeological vestiges of their presence, such as the small shelters (*zemlyanka*) which they are thought to have inhabited. The question of their disappearance, however, remains a mystery. Andrei Golovnev (1995: 106) relates that in their folk tales, it is never mentioned that the Nenets would have been at war with the Siirts. Instead, it is said that the Siirts disappeared to the hills. On Kolguev, my Nenets hosts would in fact tease me when I was leaving to take a walk away from the village or from the herding camp that I should be cautious of meeting the Siirts.

The other group with a historical presence in the tundra of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug are the Komi. The Komi are Finno-Ugric-speaking and were originally sedentary, living off agriculture and cattle breeding. Starting with the foundation of Pustozersk in 1499, the Komi began to expand toward the North, as they were undergoing an economic crisis (Habeck 2005: 63). In the following decades, two Komi settlements were established upstream along the Pechora River: Ust'-Tsil'ma (1542) and Izhma (circa 1567). The Izhma Komi[10] initially became involved in hunting for fur animals, in order to trade with the growing number of Russian traders arriving in the region. This put pressure on the Nenets, who were also predominantly living off hunting for subsistence. With time, the Komi began to hunt for trade and to pay *yassak*[11] to the Russian state

[10] The category "Izhma Komi", or "Izhemtsy" came to designate the northern groups of Komi who became involved in reindeer herding. Otherwise, this way of life and economic activity is not associated with the Komi elsewhere (Habeck 2005: 159).

[11] The Yassak was a tribute paid in fur to the Russian administrators by the indigenous peoples of the Russian North and Siberia as the Moscow State and then Russian Empire were extending their control over those regions.

administrators. According to Vladimir Islavin (1847: 20), some Komi began to own reindeer in the middle of the 17th century. Although they only began to migrate with their herds of reindeer after the 1760s, the Komi were generally trying to live as sedentary a lifestyle as possible. They viewed reindeer as a resource, that is, they used the animals for meat to feed themselves and also to sell. At the beginning of the next century, the number of reindeer owned by Komi herders was growing faster than those of the Nenets (Habeck 2005: 65-66). This success, and its lack of on the Nenets side, created a situation which was criticised by many observers, leading them to perceive the Nenets as being exploited by both the Komi owners and the Russian traders (Islavin 1847; Startsev 1930). In fact, these unequal relations between the Komi and the Nenets were one of the reasons used by the Soviet power to separate both "national" groups and to integrate the Nenets into new institutions, as they needed to be protected from their historical oppressors by the new benevolent regime.

The Komi now live predominantly in the Komi Republic and in the Kola Peninsula. However, because they exceed 50 000 people, the Komi are not considered a "numerically small indigenous people", a category which is closely associated with indigeneity according to the Russian legal framework. When I was at the office of Yasavey, one of the members told me that certain Izhma Komi herders consider the association as too exclusive since it is more oriented towards assisting the Nenets, especially Nenets herders. In the next chapter, which discusses the establishment of the Soviet order in Russian northwestern territories, I will further discuss the Nenets-Komi interactions as each group became part of two different territorial-administrative units. I will now introduce the one creature which has been at the centre of the way of life of both the Nenets and the Izhma Komi: the reindeer.

Meeting the Reindeer

Both the Eurasian reindeer and the North American caribou belong to the *Rangifer tarandus* species, which is part of the family of cervids. There is no consensus as to when and where the reindeer first emerged. Tim Ingold (1980: 17) relates the discovery of reindeer remains dating 440 000 years in Central Europe, yet he, among others (Khazanov 1994 and Chernov 1985) is more inclined to believe that the reindeer most likely came from forested areas of Alaska, spreading across the Bering strait and to

Siberia. The history of interactions between humans and reindeer can be traced back to the Middle Pleistocene, which historians have called the "Age of Reindeer". This era is described in this way based on reindeer bones in human camps in Western Europe, dating 11 000- 18 000 years ago, and 11 000 years ago in North America (Ingold 1980:5 and Vitebsky 2005: 17).

Morphologically, the reindeer is extremely well adapted to cold. Its fur is composed of two layers. The outer layer has thick, hollow hair, which is effective in gathering air and better insulating against both the extreme Arctic cold and the cold water reindeer must swim through when rivers, bogs and swamps are not completely frozen (Vitebsky 2005: 19). The shape of reindeer hooves also make it better adapted to swimming than other cervids. Reindeer can run distances of forty kilometres per hour without stopping, and, when escaping a predator, it can reach speeds of up to eighty kilometres per hour (Ingold 1980: 19, Vitebsky 2005: 19).

On average, a reindeer lives about fifteen years, and becomes sexually mature by its third year. The rut takes place around late September and early October, a time of the year when the antlers of males are turning into wooden horns, ready to fight other males, and fall soon after the mating period. Does, however, retain their antlers until after fawning, which takes place the following spring. This is one of the particularities of the reindeer as compared to other cervids, whose females do not have antlers generally. This particularity of female reindeer may be related to the necessity to dig craters in the snow in order to find food for the fawns and protect them from other deer (Ingold 1980: 20-21; Vitebsky 2005: 19-21).

Another important characteristic of the reindeer is its gregariousness, which manifests itself in a particular way when it is threatened, by either a predator or parasites. Contrary to other cervids, which tend to run away from predators, the response of reindeer, both wild and domesticated, is to aggregate in order to form a loosely structured crowd in movement. Ingold (1980: 43) relates that even the forest wild caribou tend to respond to threats in such a way, by aggregating in open spaces in the forest. He remarks that,

> [i]t is […] no accident that the reindeer is the only cervid to have formed the basis of a pastoral economy. Tolerance of crowding is a necessary condition for pastoral herd growth, and the tendencies to bunch in response to threat, and to organize for joint

> movement and defence, form essential elements of the herding equation through which men control and protect their animals in the terrain (Ingold 1980: 45).

When practicing reindeer herding, it is thus essential to understand this collective behaviour of the herd as well as those of individual reindeer, which, in the case of the herders I was living with, numbered between two and three thousand animals on the Kolguev tundra and in the Bolshezemelskaya respectively.

Another key characteristic of the reindeer, both wild and domesticated, is the fact that, unlike other cervids, they do not only gather in herds, but also migrate following routes that they have repeatedly followed in search of good and fresh pastures. They often have to migrate for several hundreds of kilometres each year, as drastic seasonal changes of temperature and of vegetation force them to change ecological zones. Piers Vitebsky (2005: 315) writes about the movement of domesticated reindeer: "[j]ust as in the migrations of wild herds, there is a tension in domestic reindeer between the animals' instinct towards cyclical repetition and their response to changes in the environment". Ingold (1980: 43) goes so far as to say that compared to other cervids, the reindeer lacks "any form of territoriality".

Based on the environment, the diet of the reindeer may vary, yet it relies principally on lichens and reindeer moss (*cladonia*). Yu. I. Chernov (1985: 123) suggest that among mammals, only *Rangifer tarandus* can feed for long periods of time only on this type of vegetation, although it can also easily live without them, eating shrubs, dwarf shrubs, and mushrooms. Florian Stammler (2005: 61) summarises the diet patterns of the reindeer in the following way:

> The general variation of reindeer diet throughout the seasons can be imagined as lying on a continuum between the two extremes of eating almost exclusively lichen (winter) and green plants (summer). Between winter and summer lie the other seasons of spring and autumn, where reindeer use a combination of the two.

Throughout the Arctic and in several subarctic regions, wild reindeer served as an essential component of the subsistence of several human groups of hunters. What the hunters generally did – and still do in several parts of Eurasia and North America – is to anticipate the movements of the reindeer in one area as the herds are heading north in the spring, generally to a coastal area, where they can use the winds to rid themselves of parasites, and in the autumn, as the reindeer are heading south in order to be shielded from the cold winds and temperatures by the trees. As a result, the hunters who relied

very closely on reindeer often had to hunt enough animals in the autumn in order to procure meat and skins for clothing or for the tents until the next spring, as reindeer are often hard to locate in the winter (Burch 1991; Ingold 1980: 56). The storage of food was of the utmost importance and, following the autumn hunt, was made easier, by the cold temperatures. Conversely, it was more difficult, following the spring hunt, as meat had to be dried to be preserved and transported. Among those groups relying closely on the reindeer hunt, starvation was not uncommon during certain parts of the year, most especially towards the end of winter[12].

Anatoli Khazanov (1994: 112) relates the depiction of domesticated reindeer in the *Bolshaya Boyarskaya pisanitsa* petroglyphs found in the Republic of Khakassiya and which date from the 7th to the 3rd centuries B.C., as well as of Chinese sources referring to herded deer in the 5th century AD. The earlier form of domestication implied that small communities of hunters would domesticate a few reindeer in order to use them for transportation and/or hunting decoys. What is very particular with reindeer domestication is, as Vitebsky (2005: 19) remarks "[i]t is probably the only animal in history that was originally domesticated for riding in order to hunt its wild cousins". There are two general ways in which the reindeer is used for transportation to hunt other reindeer. The first one is riding, which originates from Southern Siberia, where reindeer are still ridden by the Evenki and Yakuts, among others. Vitebsky (2005: 23-32) suggests that when southern reindeer riders arrived in the tundra, they met locals who had been using dog sleds, probably for thousands of years. The encounter between the two groups led to the adaptation of sleds to be drafted by reindeer. Archaeologists found traces of reindeer sleds on the Yamal Peninsula which date back 1,400 years. Tim Ingold (1980: 76) imagines the following scenario: "Let us imagine, for the sake of argument, that a human group of more or less constant size were to 'change its ways', following the herds instead of intercepting them, and slaughtering selectively for the satisfaction of finite, immediate needs only".

[12] Knud Rassmussen's ((1927) 1969) description of his arrival to certain Inuit communities depicted people lying down in their igloo, waiting for death to come as the autumn hunt had not provided enough meat to subsist on until the spring. During a visit to the Inupiat community of Anaktuvuk Pass, in Northern Alaska, in the summer of 2009, it was mentioned by several villagers that a community located north of them, had killed a very large number of caribou as they were migrating southward towards their village. Although they currently do not solely depend on caribou for subsistence, this hunt is of very high importance for them, creating tensions between the two communities.

This seems to have happened in several regions of Eurasia starting around the 17th century. Although some, like Igor Krupnik (1993) perceive this transition as a radical one, a "Reindeer Revolution" of sorts, others, like Ingold (1980) and Stammler (2005) prefer to see this transition as a continuum.

Nenets Nomadic Pastoralism

Anatoli Khazanov (1994: 41) defines the form of nomadic pastoralism practiced by the Nenets as being of the "North Eurasia type", which includes three sub-types: the Lapp (Saami), the Komi-Nenets and the Chukchi-Koriaks, which are differentiated more based on their "ethnocultural" characteristics than on the way they practice this economic activity. As Khazanov defines it, this type of pastoral nomadism is the one which is the more fully monospecialised, relying primarily on reindeer, and most homogenous form of nomadism. It is, however, important to understand that the monospecialisation was strongly amplified by the Soviet regime's industrialist approach to reindeer herding.

Prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, and probably until collectivisation, the European Nenets were generally living in camps of herders, often related by blood or marriage. The camp could be composed of a few families, but could also include up to forty to fifty people in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra. These units, which Krupnik (1993: 94) calls "group of neighbouring herding camps", were flexible in the sense that a family could branch off for a certain period of time and come back together during later periods of the year, depending on access to pasture grounds or on the family's involvement in other activities, such as fishing or hunting. Krupnik (1993: 94) describes the Nenets herding camp in the following way: "[i]t was this relatively stable economic and demographic collective that implemented and regulated tenure over its territory, including the annual herding routes and grazing pastures allotted to individual camps and families."

The Nenets reindeer herding collectivities were marked by social and economic differentiation in a number of ways. A first way in which they were differentiated was based on the number of reindeer a herder or his family owned. It is estimated that before collectivisation, the richest five to ten percent of the Nenets herders of the Bolshezemelskaya tundra owned thirty to forty percent of the reindeer (Ibid.: 91). This situation led certain herders to practice particular activities, based on the number of reindeer they owned:

> […] the more reindeer a family owned, the more focused it was on herding, and the less importantly hunting, fishing, gathering, and marine-mammal hunting figured in its subsistence. And, inversely, the fewer reindeer a household owned, the more fully its members tried to extract the maximum value of all the resources of their own territory: fish, fowl, fur-bearing and game animals, marine mammals, edible plants and berries (Krupnik 1993: 92).

A particularity of reindeer herding is that owners of a larger number of reindeer consume the same amount of reindeer for subsistence as herders possessing fewer animals. The wealth of a herder thus lies in the surplus "on the hoof" (Ingold 1980: 193). It remains, however, that "[…] as a rule, in the nomadic community close relatives are not exposed to exploitation as this would jeopardize essential social ties", as Khazanov (1994: 153) remarks. There were, in fact, certain aspects of the organisation of reindeer herding communities which limited such socioeconomic inequalities. One of them is the institution of assistantship. A poor household may wish to send a son whose work is redundant to work as an assistant to a wealthier household, thus decreasing the risk of dividing the herd to an undesirable level if he marries and branches off to migrate with another camp. For the richer household, hiring an assistant may offer the double advantage of gaining additional labour force, while at the same time finding a potential heir (Ingold 1980: 79). The representatives of the Soviet state who came to the North following the Bolshevik Revolution often saw in these inequalities evidence of class exploitation, leading to a great number of the "rich" reindeer owners, qualified as *kulaks,* to be repressed or killed throughout the Russian North and Siberia.

Because the European part of the Russian Arctic became incorporated early within the Russian empire, it appears that administrators and traders, as well as the Komi have placed many of the Nenets in a disadvantaged position. Descriptions provided by visitors to the region insist on exploitation of the Nenets at the hands of Russian traders, Komi herders and also of richer Nenets owners. Throughout his book, Vladimir Islavin (1847), who sojourned in the region in the middle of the 19th century describes the mistreatment of the Samoyeds by the Izhma-Komi and by the Russians. Islavin relates that there were 594 Samoyeds, or 86 families of reindeer-less and even tent-less Nenets, present around and in the towns of Mezen, Kol'mogor and even Arkhangelsk. Suggesting these numbers are lower than his own estimations, Islavin (1847: 64-65) writes the following about these people:

> For all of them, either they themselves or their father had reindeer that were transferred to the Russians or the [Komi] Zyrians in various ways: All of this is fresh in their memory and they can clearly point to the person, to the time, to the place, where they were deprived of their property, they see it in the hands of others and cannot imagine the possibility of getting it back. Among them, there are those whose reindeer had been taken by the Zyrian and Russian either by theft or by force due to old or new debts […](Transl.).

Trade was at the root of the Nenets presence on the island of Kolguev. The first mention of Nenets is present in the work of I. Lepekhin from 1767, who writes that two Nenets were brought to the island from the continent by a trader from Mezen so that they would graze his reindeer, which were also brought there (Karapetova 1990: 247). Later on, A.S. Saveliev (cited in Karapetova 1990: 247) relates that merchants from Mezen and Pustozersk hired Nenets (especially from the Kanin tundra) whom they provided with the necessary equipment and clothes to hunt migrating birds and sea mammals on Kolguev, while also grazing their reindeer. British ornithologist Aubyn Trevor-Battye ((1895) 2010: 319) who sojourned on the island in the late 19th century writes the following:

> They were very useful to the Russians traders. Not only did they supply them with skins of polar bear, walrus, and seal, the feathers and down of ducks and geese, but also they were pasturers of the Russians' reindeer. They entirely owned a proportion of the deer, but also they tended many herds which belonged to the Russians solely, or in which they had a half interest. In those days there were according to Alexander Samarokoff, no fewer than 25,000 reindeer on the island, of which 10,000 were owned by one man, Alexis, a Russian.

Another way in which the Nenets were divided was along clan lines. According to B.O. Dolgikh (1970: 14), the European Nenets were traditionally part of three main exogamous clans (*rody*). From his research on the Yamal Peninsula, Florian Stammler (2005: 7-8) found that the Yamal Nenets think of themselves as originating from two main clans and that, though it is not always followed, the Nenets he met continue to practice predominantly exogamous marriages. Stammler's (2005: 131) research shows that, despite the different reorganisations of reindeer herding in the Soviet and post-Soviet days, the land allocated for pasture and migration to Yamal Nenets reindeer herders is characterised by a continuity of occupation, namely along clan lines. Though I suspect that in certain areas of the NAO such continuity of clan-related presence on a given territory remains, the settings where I conducted my research did not have such a continuity of occupation on the land. For example, in the case of the Kharp herders I was migrating with, their grandparents had moved from the Varandey area, in the Eastern part

of the okrug, with their brigade's herd to the West, as their children had to attend school in the kolkhoz's base, in the village of Krasnoe.

Finally, the Nenets communities were and are also divided along gender lines. The *chum* and its vicinity remain predominantly women's space, where they spend most of their day and where they are busy sewing, preparing food, fetching water, gathering mushrooms, eggs, or berries and many more tasks. Women as a rule do not attend to the herd (*stado* in Russian), which is generally located some kilometres from the *chum*. The inside of the *chum* was traditionally divided into a female (*nio*) and male (*si*) spaces. Several rules applied, such as the prohibition for a member of one gender to cross the line demarcating the space of the other gender. As will be seen later, the impact of Soviet reforms changed the ways of behaving and interacting between men and women to a large extent. Gender roles are rather flexible, however, and can be adjusted to the circumstances. For example, during World War 2, women had to perform several tasks normally associated with men since many male Nenets had been sent to the front. Considering that the number of women present in the tundra has significantly decreased in the past decades, male herders must often perform tasks generally attributed to women. This is the case on Kolguev, where the majority of male herders now live alone in their shacks. In the Kharp brigade I stayed with, there are two female tent-workers for ten male herders. Thus, when the older tent-worker left for her vacation, she asked every one of us to assist the remaining female in her tasks.

Both researchers and the Nenets themselves generally acknowledge that during the Soviet days, the Nenets of the NAO have stopped performing certain practices related to the traditional Nenets cosmology, especially behaving according to taboos, of which many concern the actions of women. Several of these taboos are nonetheless still observed by the Nenets in the Yamal peninsula. These taboos concerning women's actions were very powerful, since they could make the life of a person leave him or her. Andrei Golovnev and Gail Osherenko (1999: 33) write:

> According to Nenets traditions, the woman must not step over a lasso, a khorei (the stick used for driving reindeer hitched to a sled), male clothing, weapons, hunting and fishing tools, or a harness. Nor should she cross the path of a moving caravan. All these actions can bring evil not upon her, but upon the man and the family's reindeer and possessions. When this kind of evil is brought upon a person, an animal, or an object, the Nenets say that the "power" or "life" then leaves them.

Previously, a woman was not allowed to deliver her babies in the chum, or even in a camping spot where another woman had previously given birth. Thus, she had to give birth on her own either outside or in a smaller chum prepared for that purpose. The female tent-workers of the Kharp brigade were retrospectively criticising this bygone tradition and were very happy that it was no longer observed.

Reindeer-Human Interactions

Tim Ingold (2000: 75) suggest that one should not see in the domestication of reindeer an "objectification", but rather that both hunting and herding rely on the same fundamental premise, that animals, like humans, are sentient beings, capable of autonomous actions. However, an important nuance in comparison with hunting lies in the fact herding requires a transition in "the terms of engagement" with the animals. Whereas the hunter establishes a *trust* relationship with the world that a reindeer will offer itself to him to afford him life (Willerslev 2007), a herder establishes relation of *domination* with the reindeer, namely through his use of superior force.

There is always a risk that the reindeer may run away and blend in with another domestic or even a wild herd in regions where they still exist, and become feral, thus requiring the herders to maintain close control over the herd (Beach and Stammler 2006: 9-10). Throughout recent centuries, herders have been doing selective breeding in order to maintain or increase particular morphological or behavioral characteristics of the animals comprising their herds. This led Soviet zoologists to distinguish four sub-species or breeds of reindeer across Eurasia, the Nenets, the Even, the Evenk, and the Chukchi (Khargin) breeds, each named after a particular ethnic group (Stammler 2005: 61). This selective breeding has generally been performed by slaughtering and castrating males who were in surplus or too aggressive, while maintaining the females at least until they had fawned. Castrating also serves the purpose of protecting the selected bulls, having less aggressive male competitors during rut.

The case of the Kolguev reindeer is particular in that regard. Due to their origins, presumably from the Kanin Peninsula, their isolation as well as the insular environment they live in year round, Kolguev reindeer are known for having bigger body structures than the reindeer on the continent. Thus, they have attracted the attention of agricultural managers in the Soviet era, who wanted to introduce certain of their characteristics to

other herds in the NAO. For example, some reindeer had been brought from the Kolguev to the Kharp herds, but they apparently did not adapt well to the new conditions of the continent, as one of the actors involved in the project explained to me.

The relationship established by the herders with the reindeer also involves protection, as the former need to preserve their animals in order to subsist and exchange, but also due to the presence of parasites, carnivorous animals, as well as to disease. Compared with the hunter, the herder is surrounded by many more animals that he may eat. However, the lack of access to sufficient pasture, namely due to freezing rain or intruding predators may decimate the herd, which would be, according to Ingold (1980: 78), the main motive explaining the desire to accumulate as many reindeer as possible. This, however, may be questioned, as there are other aspects, such as prestige and wealth, behind these accumulative aspirations. Furthermore, in the case of epizootics, it is not guaranteed that a larger herd is less vulnerable than a smaller one. Hence, the herders must know their animals very well, in order to be able to identify changes either in their behaviour or in their physical characteristics. For example, on several occasions, in the fall, the Kharp herders I conducted research with were noticing changes in the antlers and shape of the eye-orbit of the reindeer, which may indicate that the animal is suffering from *golovnaya bolezen or bol'* ("head disease" or "headache"). In that case, the herder must intervene immediately by cutting off the antlers to save the deer.

Reindeer suffering from the "head ache"

The herder must also protect the herd against predators, the most common of which are, in the NAO, wolves and the bears. For the herders of the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, it

was necessary for one herder to constantly tend to the herd during days and nights, which was termed in Russian *dezhurit'* ("to be on duty" in Russian). On Kolguev, the absence of predators during most of the year – except for the polar bears in the spring – allowed the herders not to have to maintain a continuous presence near the herd (Karapetova 1990: 248) . The "free grazing regime" (*svobodnyi rezhim vypassa*) is still maintained to a large extent, a situation that the two successive directors of the farm I met complained about, perceiving it as a sign of the herders' laziness and lack of discipline. Nonetheless, both in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra and on Kolguev, the presence of at least one herder was required during fawning in order to make certain that no predators, including foxes, attacked the herds, especially the fawns.

Parasites also require herders to be attentive. The warble fly (*ovod* in Russian) lays its eggs under the fur of the reindeer in the summer, which then hatch into larvae feeding themselves off the flesh of the animal until the next summer. A reindeer may be carrying dozens of larvae, causing weight loss, stress and pain. Thus, in the winter and spring, the herders generally identify the behaviour of the infested reindeer and search for the eggs under the skin in order to remove them. Other significant parasites are mosquitoes and flies, which abound in such number in the summer that they may make life miserable for both herds and herders. Reindeer herds tend to respond to both these parasites' "attacks" by running in a circle, thereby generating sufficient heat to keep away or kill the parasites. Herders can also assist the reindeer in their struggle by making smoky fires close to the herd.

Warble fly

Another moment when the herders assist the reindeer is when pasture grounds are inaccessible. This happens namely when freezing rain falls over layers of snow, making digging extremely difficult for the reindeer. In these situations, herders may themselves dig the snow, if in the tundra, or scrape moss from trees in the forest in order to allow the reindeer to feed themselves.

The herders must also always be aware of the location and movements of other herds and herders. This has several implications, for a reindeer which may have found itself farther away from its herd may run to another herd. Hence being a herder implies knowing the land intimately, but also being aware of the movements of other herds and herders who are following neighbouring migratory routes. The way of relating to the land thus has to be seen both spatially and socially (Stammler 2005: 225). Krupnik (1993: 93) suggests that the " […] traditional land-use system among the tundra pastoralists was based upon the common law of nomadic peoples, however, it was also reasonably flexible". By this, he means that there existed – and still exists – some agreed-upon boundaries, in which some territory was considered as attributed to one group of herders, yet, upon arrangements, herders could change pastures or use those of other herders for an agreed-upon period of time. This flexibility in the land-use system was especially important in emergency situations, such as epizootics, periods of excessive snowfall, winter thaws, and insufficient fodder (Ibid.: 96).

Flexible Law in the Tundra

Michael Casimir (1992: 1) suggests that, like different animal species, humans may switch from having territorial to non-territorial behaviours in response to certain situations, be they environmental or social. As he writes, "[f]lexibility is the generalised answer to the changing constraints nomads experience, and so their attitudes towards the spaces which 'hold' the resources they need and want are also resilient" (Casimir 1992: 22). This insistence on the flexibility of nomads towards land seems to correspond well to reindeer herding as practised in the NAO, as herding implies a high degree of flexibility in the ways of relating to the reindeer, to the land, and to others. The herders interact with the reindeer, which have their own agency, thus making migration a space of negotiations between the wills of both species across space and time. As Beach and Stammler (2006: 7) remark,

> [t]he herders follow the reindeer that follow the desires of the humans. Herders balance their decisions between the 'species-specific' needs of reindeer with their grazing connected to the distribution of plants on pastures and other ecological determinants, and the social needs of humans connected to boundaries, proximity of markets, infrastructure, population density, and economic activities other than reindeer herding.

The notion of flexibility is also at the heart of what is alluded to as the Nenets "law of the tundra" (*zakon tundry* in Russian). Stammler (2005: 84) relates that during his field research with Nenets herders of the Yamal Peninsula, his informants were often referring to the term "law of the tundra", which he describes in the following way: "The 'law of the tundra' (*zakon tundry*) is not a law in the Western sense – it is not written or carved in stone, nor is it even an explicit set of rules. I came to see it as a means of implicitly organising the way people relate to the tundra not merely as territory, but as holistic space, embracing all its beings."

Although this term was mentioned only on a few occasions by herders during my field research, his description of what this "law" refers to corresponds closely to what I observed. In chapter 5 I will focus mostly on what this law implies in relation to the interactions between humans as well as to interactions between humans and the land, keeping in mind, however, that this law has much broader ethical and cosmological implications. These implications would require extended interactions with Nenets herders to understand in a comprehensive way. The law of the tundra binds people to the tundra and brings them into a network of generalised exchange involving humans and non-humans (Stammler 2005: 90). In a part of the world where the climate is rigorous for long periods of the year, and reindeer herders' brigades often far from each other and villages, hospitality and mutual help are obligations. Because everyone present in the tundra is involved in the generalised reciprocity network, a giver does not expect to receive something from the same person he gave to or assisted, but rather he or she anticipates that someone else will give him or her back some form of help in the future. Later in this dissertation, I will focus on this form of exchange and situate it among other forms of exchange which are not generalised, most especially when involving current oil workers in the tundra. Thus, I will show how exchange and reciprocity networks serve as constituting groups, namely the Nenets herders and villagers, the Russian settlers and the

oil nomads. In the following part of this chapter, I will present the roots of the oil industry in Russia from its beginnings until the event of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Genealogy of a Strategic Industry

The oil we consume on a daily basis comes from various sources. The process by which it is extracted, transformed and used has also evolved through time, as much as the people involved in its production, and its economic, political and symbolic significance. The word used to describe petroleum in Russian is "*neft*", a word of Persian origin from which the English word "naphte" also derives. It is believed that the word "neft" has as its Indo-european root the word "nabh", which one can find in the Sanskrit "nabhas", in the Greek " nephelē", in Latin "nebula", in the German "Nebel", in the Russian "nebo" , words which all mean "cloud" (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 11). The relationship between the oil industry and the "clouds" it generates has been, in the late 20th century, behind scientists' apocalyptical prognoses, international agreements, citizens' worry, as well as technological innovation in its production and consumption.

The etymology of the word "neft" point to the ancient use of oil, namely in Middle East. The ancient Egyptians used asphalt, extracted from the shores of the Dead Sea, in the process of embalming dead bodies (Tolkachev 2000a: 13). In the *Tale of Bygone Years*,[13] it is related that in 941, Kievian Prince Igor came to realise that another use of oil was possible, a military one. During a naval battle between Prince Igor's troops and the fleet of Theofan the Greek in front of the Bosphorus, the Rus' troops were attacked by what seemed to be lighting. This "Greek fire" (*Grecheskii ogon*') was in fact prepared by a powerful mixture of saltpeter, sulfur, and tar (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 11). Thus, the existence of oil and certain uses have been known of in Russia for more than a millennium, often through interactions with traders coming from India, Greece or Persia. In Moscow, "thick flammable water" would sometimes appear from the Caucasus, and from a little known Northern river, the Ukhta, located in today's Komi Republic, and which is a tributary to the Pechora River, flowing through the NAO (Tolkachev 2000a: 13). Before examining the significance of the Caucasus and of the Russian Northwestern

[13] The *Tale of Bygone Years* (*Povest' Vremennykh Let* in Russian), also known as *Nestor's Chronicle* is the oldest document recounting the history of Kievian Rus' from the 850s to the 1110s.

regions where the presence of oil had long been known about, I will briefly discuss the origins of oil per se.

The Origins of the Black Gold

It is now generally assumed that oil and natural gas derive from organic sources, that is, from the decomposition of organic matter. However, there are still some doubts as to the possibility for oil to form from non-organic matter, despite the widely agreed upon organic thesis.[14] What is called crude oil and gas are hydrocarbons, that is, organic compounds formed of hydrogen atoms combined with carbon. These atoms can be assembled in various ways, ranging from methane (CH_4), the smallest and most common hydrocarbon molecule, which is a combination of one carbon atom with four hydrogen atoms, containing only single bonds. Hydrocarbon molecules composed of five or more atoms of carbon are called "petroleum liquids", as they can exist in liquid forms in atmospheric conditions. As Charles F. Conaway (1999: 123) describes, "[i]n general, the larger the size of the hydrocarbon molecule (number of carbons), the greater its viscosity, the lower its volatility and the darker its colour." Based on its characteristics, crude oil varies greatly all over the world, thus requiring more or less refining operations, depending on its weight and consistency: whether it is light, evaporating quickly, or heavy as tar. Another aspect that determines the price of oil is its purity. Hence, if oil contains a high level of sulfur, making it a "sour crude", it will be of lower value because it requires more refining, as opposed to a "sweet crude", which contains less sulfur (Falola and Genova 2005: 7-8). The oil from Timan-Pechora geological province, in today's NAO, is generally heavy and has a high paraffinic content, thus requiring more refining. This explains in part why, despite all the resources invested by the state to explore the oil and gas potential of the okrug, the Soviet authorities preferred producing higher quality and more abundant oil from regions such as the Caucasus and the Volga, as well as from the more recently-discovered oil fields of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and other regions of central Russia. However, with the increase of oil prices in the

[14] The "inorganic thesis" still has some adherents, namely in Europe, since there are still certain aspects of the hydrocarbons' genealogy which remain unclear. For example, methane, which is the main component of what we call "natural gas" can be produced in laboratory by adding pressure and heat to certain minerals (Conaway 1999: 19).

last decade, both Russian and foreign companies have been more interested in extracting oil from the NAO (Sagers 1994a: 33).

Charles Conaway (1999: 123) identifies two conditions for the existence of oil and gas reserves large enough to be economically viable. There should be a complete death of large quantities of plankton and algae in the area, as well as a rapid burial so as to prevent bacteria from consuming the dying organisms. Thus, regions where two powerful water currents meet or have met in ancient geological eras tend to be good places for geologists to search for fossil fuels. Where the two currents meet, dead organisms are often carried away to a certain area where they sink towards non-oxygenated waters, and are quickly covered by the sediments of both water masses, such as clay. This explains why deltas, such as the Niger Delta or the Mackenzie Delta are rich in hydrocarbons. In northern Russia, regions such as the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, where the Ob' River meets the Kara Sea, or the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, traversed by the Pechora River which joins the Barents Sea, are also good examples of this phenomenon.

Conquering, Discovering, and Making Russian Oil

Although there is no precise date for the discovery of oil in the Russian North, "Northern oil" had made an official appearance in 1597, when "thick flammable water" was brought to Moscow from the Ukhta River. In the following century, the region started to attract the attention of more prospectors. For example, a research expedition led by the "metal-scholar" (*rudoznatsy*) Master Leont'ev reached the Pechora area in 1618. In 1692, the Dutchman Nikolas Vitsen related in his work "Northern and Eastern Tataria" that

> River Ukhta separates from the Pechora [River]; on that river, at a distance of 1.5 miles from Voloka, there is a small place where a certain fat (*zhir*) emerges from the water, surfacing on the water and seeming to be black oil, where a certain stone (*kamen'*) burns like a candle and releases a black smoke (Transl., quoted in Tolkachev 2000a: 14).

At the time, the search for the little-known "flammable water" was conducted by metal prospectors. Different types of metal were highly prized during late 17th and early 18th centuries in Peter the Great's Russia, as there were escalating tensions with the powerful western military power, Sweden (Tolkachev 2000a: 8). In 1700, Peter the Great wrote an order creating the Geological Service of Russia (*Geologicheskaya Sluzhba Rossii*), which was to supervise mineral exploration, with the "ore-searchers" (*rudoiskateleï*), "[…] paying taxes, not taking or giving bribes, not offending the locals,

and telling the locations of their discoveries" (Transl.). Two years later, Tsar Peter the 1st wrote another order dictating that the exploration and extraction of minerals should be devoted to the strategic use of the Moscow state, namely in its coming wars with Sweden. The order also had as its goal to allow Russians to become more knowledgeable about the minerals.

Twenty years after Tsar Peter's death (1725), Arkhangelsk citizen Fedor Pryadunov received permission from the Mining College, the state institution overseeing mining operations, to build a factory (*zavod*) on the Ukhta River. This was the first industrial refinery, thus marking the beginning of the oil industry in Russia. Pryadunov managed to refine more than fifteen tonnes of kerosene to serve the growing needs of Moscow, St-Petersburg, as well as for export (Sukhanovskii 2008: 36). There were, however, several constraints imposed by the Russian state at the time on Pryadunov's oil, one of which was the prohibition of its use as medicine. In the end, Pryadunov was imprisoned for tax evasion, and died in 1753. After changing owners repeatedly, Pryadunov's factory ceased to function (Ibid., Tolkachev 2000a: 17-18).

The presence of oil began to attract the attention of scientists, leading to a new period of geological research (Ibid.). One of the key actors of that period was renown scientist Mikhail Lomonosov, to whom is attributed the first classification of tectonic movements. With the permission of the Mining College in 1764, oil from Ukhta was sent to Lomonosov's laboratories to be studied. In 1771-2, academic expeditions were sent to the European North, in order to develop maps of the territory and investigate mineral potential. In 1782, the Tsaritsina Catherine 2nd wrote a manifesto about the freedom of production, distributing property of subsoil resources to prospectors who would be equal owners with the state. However, this measure led to confusion in the management of prospecting and production activities, forcing the cancellation of Catherine's decision in 1796. As a result, powers and competencies over mineral resources were given back to the Mining College, which was replaced by the Mining Department eleven years later (Ibid.: 21).

The scientific interest grew with the demand for oil, which led to the first significant geological expeditions in the Northern Urals, as well as in Northwestern European Russia (Sukhanovskii 2008: 36). Among these explorers and scientists, many

foreign experts were invited to explore the mineral potential of the European North. In 1843, Aleksander Keiserling and Pavel Kruzenshtern travelled more than 7000 versts[15], from the roots of the Pechora to its mouth, along with its tributaries, and published the first geological map of the Timan-Pechora Ridge. Until then, the North had been imagined in fantastic terms, nearly empty, drawn on maps thanks only to the words of the native inhabitants. Keiserling himself said that the "Pechora region (*krai*) has a very curious land, reminding one of interior Africa and which is waiting for its settlers " (Transl., quoted in Tolkachev 2000a: 22).

A key factor that led to the increasing significance of the oil industry, not only in Russia, but in the world, has been growing number of technologies relying on the energy produced by fossil fuels. One of these inventions was the kerosene lamp, which appeared in the second half of the 19th century and which began to fuel street and domestic lamps in growing urban environments. The Russian empire was a key player in the development of the oil industry, most especially after it had gained control over most of the Caucasus, in 1813. Of central importance to the conquest over this region was the integration of Baku, one of the world's oldest and most productive oil-rich regions, now the capital of Azerbaijan.

The history of the methods of exploration and extraction of oil is somewhat debated, namely between the two main oil producers, Russia and the USA. Already in 1835, in Taman, by the Azov Sea, and in 1848 in Bibi-Heybat, near Baku, exploration for oil was carried out with drilling. However, since no oil was found at the sites, history instead remembered the exploit of American Edvin Drake who, in 1859, was the first to drill a well where oil was found at 20 meters, in Pennsylvania (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 24-25). Relying on such new extraction methods, John Rockefeller gradually began the creation of what became an oil empire, Standard Oil Company. The coinciding growing global demand and American offer soon led European and Russian markets to be flooded with American kerosene.

In Northwestern Russia, it was the merchant Mikhail Sidorov, who brought drilling to the Ukhta River in 1868, having received permission from the state to search for oil

[15] A verst is a Russian unit of length, no longer used however. One verst was equivalent to 1.0668 kilometres.

there. With the help of foreign specialists, Sidorov was to spend the next two decades searching in vain for oil, at a cost of nearly 650 000 roubles. Towards the end of his life, and after numerous unsuccessful attempts at requesting assistance from the state authorities in his endeavor, Sidorov wrote:

> Notwithstanding all the obstacles, I used all my forces to build the foundation of the oil industry in order for it to serve the motherland (*rodina*). The future generation will not blame us for not having cared about its well-being, on the contrary, it will be grateful to us (Transl., quoted in Sukhanovskii 2008:37).

The connection between Russian patriotism and the oil industry is not a recent phenomenon, and neither are the tense relations between key investors, prospectors, and the Russian state. Among the important actors to arrive in Russian-conquered Baku in the late 1870s were the brothers Robert and Ludvig Nobel, from Sweden. At the time when the price of kerosene was low, they understood the potential of profits that could be made in this industry, namely by improving the efficiency of the work involved in it. When they arrived, a large part of oil transportation was still done with people carrying buckets from the well to reservoirs. Soon, the Nobel brothers developed a system of pipes, as well as steam-pumps to transport the oil to places connected to the rest of the world by either tankers or railways (Ibid.: 74). They also invited specialists from the USA and Galicia to introduce them to new technologies. For example, the Nobels were the first to introduce the drill-stem in their extraction sites (Ibid.: 79). They were also the first to introduce the idea of gathering geological data on the oil extracted (Ibid.: 92).

Nonetheless, the main producers of kerosene were still American, and their oil was circulating widely in Russia. In order to give advantage to the oil produced within Russia, a tax was introduced on foreign oil. As in contemporary Russia, the question of the foreign presence and ownership of natural resources was a delicate one, and strongly debated. Interestingly, the firm of the Nobel brothers was not perceived as foreign, since originally, it was also created by Russian capital, raised by the brothers, and because it was oriented mainly toward the Russian market (Ibid.: 122). What became the topic of political and commercial discussions and tensions was the arrival of the British branch of the Rothchild family, who established their enterprises in Baku in the mid-1880s and soon created a monopoly by controlling the transportation of oil by train. The Rothschilds moved a large part of their operations towards another region of the Caucasus where oil

deposits had recently been discovered: Grozny, in Chechnya. Soon, they had more than 170 oil rigs and created one of the most important oil companies : Russkii Standard (Ibid.). It is estimated that by 1914, seventy-two percent of the oil land, and sixty-two percent of the oil rigs were owned by British capital. In 1900, of the 24.2 million puds[16] of oil produced worldwide, 51.6 percent was produced in Russia, and 42.2 percent in the USA (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 90-91).

Baku at the time was considered the most multicultural city of the Russian empire, with more than twenty national groups. Aside from the workers (twenty-three percent of whom were Armenian workers and eleven percent Azeri), there were also Russian, French, British and Persian populations. (Ibid.: 107). Starting in 1901, the south Caucasus became the site of labour unrest which was to trouble that region for the next two years. In July 1903, oil workers in Baku launched a strike, which was to spread through the south of the empire to become Russia's first general strike. The following year, another general strike was launched in Baku, spreading through the country and leading to the first attempt at a revolution in Russia, in 1905 (Mitchell 2011: 33). One of the results was a first attempt at revolt, which led the Tsar to introduce political reforms. The country was in turmoil, and the supply of oil, both for internal consumption and for export, was now highly reduced due to the instability in Baku. Oil extraction fell by one third, giving the USA the status of main producer of oil, with 61.6 percent, with Russia following behind at 28 percent (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 111).

The rising price of Baku oil in the following decade, as well as the growing demand caused by increasing use of various technologies, namely during the First World War, attracted increasing attention from oil entrepreneurs. In fact, it was a Russian company based in Baku, called Neft', which brought the last private capital to the Ukhta region, where the company drilled by the Chibiu River between 1914 and 1917. Despite the fact that a single oil rig had given 40 puds of oil, the company decided to stop its activities in the area on October 28th 1917 (Sukhanovskii 2008: 35). The next geological expeditions to take place in the Timan-Pechora geological province would not be conducted to increase private capital, but would take place in the name of the Soviet people.

[16] Puds were a measuring unit used in Russia. 1 pud equals 16. 38 kilograms. It was officially abolished by the Soviet state in 1924.

Conclusion

This chapter's goal was to present the roots of two ways of life – those of the Nenets reindeer herders and of oil workers in the Russian empire. There are already certain elements of discussion that foreshadow issues that will be examined in the following chapters. The social and economic organisation of the Nenets communities was characterised by flexibility in access to pastures, as well as in the activities of families or individuals. It can be anticipated that the flexibility that lies at the heart of the law of the tundra and that guides the Nenets through their actions with other beings present in their environment will be challenged to a large extent during their integration into the Soviet regime.

The examination of the roots of the Russian oil industry, which focused on its historical political and economic contexts, also points to certain elements that will be seen in later chapters. At the heart of this industry are conquests and the integration of resource-rich territories into the extending empire, which was increasing the influence of a central power, based in Moscow or Saint-Petersburg. As was seen, tensions existed between prospectors and investors interested in developing the oil industry and the state. The latter's attitude and rules it established could be described as flexible in the sense that the state changed them in order to maintain its control over the land, the resource it contains, and the wealth it could generate. It remains that for the state and for certain prospectors and investors, potential wealth was also perceived in a patriotic way, as it was thought that oil was an increasingly key resource for the country. Hence, the Russian state displayed an ambivalent attitude towards foreign investors, as the country's economy could not generate sufficient capital to allow the industry to fully develop. To a certain extent, the issues experienced by the oil industry in Tsarist Russia could be said to resemble more those experienced in post-Soviet Russia as, in both periods, the industry had and has to operate in the context of both an authoritarian state and an increasingly global market economy. I will now turn to the early decades of existence of the Soviet state in order to examine the inclusion of the Nenets into Soviet institutions as well as the role played by the oil industry in the new socialist state.

2

Herding Through Time, Exploring Space

In September 2009, the brigade of Kharp herders I was migrating with had to make it in time for the yearly inventory (*proschet)* of the reindeer. During the fall, each of the farm's seven brigades is scheduled to arrive at a certain time to a corral with its herd. The operation is quite delicate since the herders must manage their herds as several thousand reindeer are closer to each other than at most other moments of the year. Thus, the herders must make certain that no reindeer escapes or blends in with other herds, or is attacked by predators which are attracted by this great number of potential prey. Assisted by the herders of each brigade, villagers employed by the farm bring the reindeer into the corral, herd after herd. Together, they count the number of male and female calves born in the previous spring, see if and how many reindeer have gone missing, and determine which animals must be slaughtered during the yearly slaughter which, in the okrug, takes place between November and January, depending on the cooperative and on the weather conditions.

Gathering the reindeer to conduct the inventory, Bolshezemelskaya tundra

Kharp's chairman (*predsedatel'*) is an ethnic-Komi who loved talking to me as much about the existence of extra-terrestrial creatures as about the heyday of the farm,

back when it really set the pace for both the village and tundra life. Back then, the kolkhoz had hundreds of cows, a fur farm, and over 20 000 reindeer. As he was always eager to help me become better acquainted with reindeer herding, he asked me to assist him in the counting of male and female deer. I was standing next to him in the last of the three chambers of the corral, which functioned as a funnel (*voronka* in Russian). It took a whole day to bring all the 3000 reindeer of our brigade through, count them, and release them as soon as possible so as not to traumatise them. As we left the corral to go have dinner in the employees' temporary barrack, one of the workers to whom I had not talked during the day approached me to ask what a foreigner was doing there. I briefly explained my research project to which he responded: "My grandfather was declared a kulak because he apparently had too many reindeer. Then, they killed him."

During my last visit to Kolguev, in the summer 2010, I was staying as usual at Igor's house. His mother, Natalia Ivanovna, happened to be celebrating her fiftieth birthday, an event for which relatives from both Naryan-Mar and the village had gathered. While the celebration was going on, one of the neighbours started talking about my hosts' shamanic origins. For the whole night thereafter, Natalia Ivanovna talked about the sad fate of her grandfather. Like other shamans, he experienced social and economic isolation, amongst other things by being forced to clean the village's latrines for the rest of his life.

These three brief stories – the planned inventories, the repression of both the kulaks and the shamans – all have one point in common: they take their origins in the first decades of existence of the Soviet state. In this chapter, I will describe how the way of life of the okrug's Nenets came to be changed as they began to be incorporated into novel institutions, such as the collective (*kolkhoz*) and state (*sovkhoz*) farms. It will be seen that the productivist aim and organisation of these institutions put pressure on the Nenets to transform their way of relating to the reindeer, to the land and to each other. It was not only on the economic level that the Nenets experienced drastic changes. They also witnessed the creation of a "national" territory bearing the name of their national group, as well as their increasing involvement in political and cultural institutions which had as an aim to both protect them as a national group and to form a Nenets Soviet intelligentsia. Despite these pressures, many fundamental aspects of the lives of many Nenets, such as

the significance of the reindeer in their individual and collective lives have been and are still perpetuated, as will be seen throughout this dissertation. In the second part of this chapter, I will relate the context in which geological exploration took place in Nenets Okrug. I will show that, from the beginning, the interest shared by geologists and state authorities in the region cannot be detached from the role the oil industry played in assisting the USSR to become a modern, industrialised country. Ironically, it is the Soviet Union's involvement with the market which led to an increase of exploration operations throughout the country, as it was hoped that the currency generated from the export of national resources was going to help the Soviet Union become a socialist superpower.

Turning the White Tundra into the Red North

In her examination of the history and political philosophy leading to the Cold War, Susan Buck-Morss (2002) compares the perspectives held by leaders of the two rival camps in terms of visual landscapes. She suggests that,

> [t]he most striking difference between these two modern political visions is the dimension that dominates their visual landscapes, determining the nature and positioning of the enemy and the terrain on which war is waged. For nation-states, that dimension is SPACE: for class warfare, the dimension is TIME (Buck-Morss 2002: 22).

As peoples anchored in time immemorial, the indigenous inhabitants of the Russian North became involved in class warfare, and were targeted by state-promoted initiatives in the name of progress. It was even thought that because their lifestyle resembled that of primitive communism, that their transition to scientific communism would be made easier (Slezkine 1994: 292). Nevertheless, this perception by the Russian authorities that the indigenous peoples had to evolve and become modern can be traced back directly to policies dating from Tsarist Russia.

In the 1820s, Count Michael Speranskii was given the task of creating a coherent legal-administrative structure allowing for the administration of the Russian empire, at a time when it was expanding, thus incorporating conquered territories and their inhabitants (Berman 1963: 206). In the 1822 "Statute of Administration of Siberian Inorodtsy", which came to be known as the "Speranskii Code", the citizens of the Russian empire were divided into two broad categories: the *"prirodnye obyvateli"* ("natural inhabitants", meaning the general citizens, most of whom were Russian) and the *"inorodtsy"* (which means "foreign-born people"). Each category of inorodsty had specific rights and duties,

based on their lifestyle, which to a large extent was related to their level of mobility. Thus, the settled "*inorodtsy*" had rights and duties similar to those of the "natural inhabitants". Here is how "nomadic groups" were defined in the Speranskii Code: 1. non settled location; 2. low level of civil education; 3. simple manners; 4. specific customs; 5. livelihood; 6. difficulties in means of infrastructure communication; 7. lacking circulation of money; 8. lacking market for selling the catch and other products (Stammler-Gossmann 2009: 76).

Hence, one of the main criteria establishing belonging to one or the other category of the population was based on a group's level of mobility, which, as will be seen, was retained in both the Soviet and post-Soviet legislation on the indigenous peoples. Another key characteristic of the Speranskii Code in relation to the nomadic and "wandering" peoples is a paternalistic claim that they needed state protection, namely against the Russian traders and regional administrators, while at the same time aiming to sedentarise and convert these peoples considered "backwards" to Orthodox faith. When the Soviet power arrived in the Russian North, the revolutionaries came with a similar paternalistic mindset as they had as a mission to bring modern civilisation to the indigenous peoples. I believe it does make sense to view the incorporation of the indigenous peoples, as well as of other Soviet citizens, in terms of teleological visual landscape, as Buck-Morss suggests. However, the fact that the revolutionaries arrived in the North in order to gain control over resource-rich lands and to establish a new, more rational way of relating to the land for herders lead me to suggest that the spatial dimension was also part of the revolutionary visual landscape.

Making Soviet Herders

Russian anthropologist Aleksandr Pika (1999: 12) suggests that the Soviet authorities, officials, as well as scholars, held two main approaches with regard to the indigenous peoples of the North. The traditionalist approach, which dominated in the 1920s, viewed them as fragile, requiring state assistance against damaging external threats, yet rather able to determine by themselves the pace of their adaptation to modern society, though with the help of the government. The approach of modernisers, which dominated in the country from the 1930s until the 1970s, promoted a more interventionist

development programme for the indigenous peoples, seen as unable to regulate themselves properly to achieve the socialist ideals.

Yet, the attitudes and measures adopted by the Soviet authorities demonstrated, at different points in these decades, a complex attitude that the Soviet authorities had toward not only the indigenous groups of the North, but also toward numerous national groups present in the country. Already in 1919, Vladimir Lenin, at the Eighth Party Congress, insisted on the existence of nations as natural entities, and that "[…] not to recognize something that is out there is impossible: it will force us to recognize it" (Lenin cited in Slezkine 1994: 143). Soon after the Revolution, Joseph Stalin was put in charge of the national question, serving as the People's Commissar for National Affairs. At the 10th Congress of the Communist Party, in 1921, he suggested that

> […] the essence of the nationality question in the USSR consists of the need to eliminate the backwardness (economic, political, and cultural) that the nationalities have inherited from the past, to allow the backward peoples to catch up with central Russia (cited in Slezkine 1994: 144).

Hence, on the one hand, the national groups needed to be able to exist, and "express" their nationality. After all, the proletarian revolution had been won by and thus should have been serving both the different nationalities as well as the proletarians (Ibid.: 143). On the other hand, there was also the necessity to civilize the backward peoples.

In June 1924, the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (to be referred to hereafter as the Committee of the North) was founded to protect the indigenous peoples of the North. Slezkine (1994: 155) writes that

> [p]rotecting the helpless natives and keeping their body and soul together were necessarily the most pressing tasks of the moment, but the Committee's true and sacred vocation was to assist the small peoples in their difficult climb up the evolutionary ladder.

In Arkhangelsk, a regional branch of the committee was created in order to organise the lives of the indigenous peoples. Initially, the Soviet regime tried to become more present among the Nenets by creating clan councils (*rodovye sovety*) so as to reach them in the tundra, without interfering in the nomadic way of life, supervised by newly created "indigenous councils" (*tuzemnye*[17] *sovety*). Towards the 1930s, other structures were

[17] The adjective *tuzemnye* refers to the noun and category *tuzemtsy*, which means "people who inhabit those lands."

created to incorporate the Nenets more fully, which was one way of increasing their connections between the political power and the settlements and villages where it was hoped that the Nenets would eventually settle in. Village councils (*sel'sovety*), trading cooperatives, "nomadic" and "sedentary" schools, as well as higher administrative level "regional councils" (*raisovety*) were created. G.A. Startsev (1930: 42) writes that the branches of the committee "[…] considerably served the Samoyeds' self-consciousness (*samosoznaniya*) as a free and equal people among other nationalities of the USSR" (Transl.).

One problem that existed concerned the legal categories used to describe the *inorodtsy* of the North, as they were called during the late-Tsarist period. Some twenty new terms designating indigenous peoples had been used in the 1920s (Sokolovski 2000: 92). Soon after the revolution, they came to be characterised as *tuzemtsy* (Stammler-Gossmann 2009: 82). One expression which gained in importance and was finally adopted is that of "Small Peoples of the North" (*malye narodnosti*[18] *severa*). It was the category which was in use to describe the indigenous peoples of the North until the end of the Soviet period. In the 1926 "Decree of Temporary regulations about the administration of the native nationalities and tribes of northern peripheries of RSFSR"[19], the notion of "small nationalities" was introduced. Twenty-six national groups were included in that category on the basis that they had lifestyles characterised by: "[…] – a nomadic, semi-nomadic, 'wandering' and settled way of life; – traditional subsistence economy (reindeer herding, hunting, fishing, sea mammal hunting, gathering), but – without particular territorial units (republics and districts)" (Stammler-Gossmann 2009: 83).

The association between a group's mobility and its development level on the evolutionary scale did not lose the importance it had in the Speranskii Code. The decree attributed certain rights and privileges to indigenous peoples, such as the release from most taxes, and military obligations. They could also have access to food in state stores at

[18] The term *narodnosti* does not have a direct equivalent in English. Yuri Slezkine (1994: 152) remarks about the term *narodnost'* (nationality) that denoted " […] a community situated above the tribe (primitive communism) but below the nation (formed under capitalism)". *Narodnost'* has a similar meaning to the French word "peuplade".

[19] Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

a subsidised price. This decree was also an attempt at codifying which national groups could be considered "small peoples", and thus deserving protection and certain privileges. Buryats or Yakuts, for example, could not, as they were too numerous, and too politically assertive to merit such state protection (Slezkine 1994: 151-152).

The region known today as the Nenets Autonomous Okrug was until the revolution part of the territorial-administrative unit of the Arkhangelsk Gubernia ("Government"). In the early Soviet days, the gubernia included the Kanin, Timan, Malozemelskaya and Bolshezemelskaya "tundras" (*tundry*), as well as the islands of the Arctic Ocean. The main goals of the Arkhangelsk regional branch of the committee was to work for the "[…] development of the cooperative movement in the tundra, reindeer herding, liquidation of cultural and economic backwardness of the Nenets" (Transl., Bulatov 2000: 9). In 1927, a resolution on "integrated (mixed) cooperatives" declared that the economic mode of functioning for the North should be cooperatives in order to connect trade cooperatives with production cooperatives. These were the early steps of collectivisation, applied to the North. By 1929 five cooperatives and three consumers' societies (*obshchestva*) had been created in the region, which were involved in trade, preparation of furs, reindeer and other products (Ibid.: 10).

The second important task of the committee was the "liquidation of illiteracy" (*likvidatsia negramotnosti*), which implied that "national" schools be created in the North. On Kolguev, the first school on the islands of the Arctic was created in 1931, as well as a society called "*Doloi negramotnost'* " ("Away with illiteracy"). Out of the 280 Nenets of the island, 190 are reported to have received elementary education (*nachal'noe obrazovanie*). A nomadic institution, called *kul'tbazy* ("cultural stations") was also created to travel in the tundra. They provided educational, medical and veterinarian services, as well as the possibility to read the newspapers and hear more about the Soviet state's plans and promises. As Slezkine (1994: 159), remarks, the cultural stations served as "[…] magnets, as focal points of spreading civilization."

A separate Institute of Peoples of the North was also created in Leningrad to educate teachers and produce a new indigenous intelligentsia, as a part of a process called *korenizatsiya* ("indigenization"*, koren'* meaning "root") (Slezkine 1994: 221). Thus, young individuals belonging to indigenous peoples came to learn about the principles of

Marxism and Leninism, which they were expected to teach and apply while occupying certain administrative positions in order to assist their own national group to rapidly evolve. The members of this new intelligentsia were also supposed to develop their national culture; not without giving it a socialist content, however. This period is also the one during which the various languages spoken by indigenous peoples were codified and became written languages.

Parallel to korenizatsia, another approach to improving the predicament of the indigenous peoples was the "demarcation of national boundaries" (*national'noe raionirovanie*), an approach which was also followed for other national groups in the country (Slezkine 1994: 269). Already in the year following the Bolshevik Revolution, Article 11 of the 1918 Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) stated in that "[…] the territories, which are characterised by a specific way of life, can be affiliated as autonomous territorial entities and would belong to the RSFSR on the base of a Federation" (cited in Stammler-Gossmann 2009: 79). In the coming years, discussions were taking place at high levels of authorities concerning the way to make the korenizatsia process correspond to an administrative-territorial apparatus (Vakhtin 1992: 11). Finding a solution for the European Nenets was not straightforward, as the territory they inhabited was coveted by both the Arkhangelsk Oblast ("province" created on the basis of the gubernia) to the West, and the recently-born Komi Oblast (1921) to the South. With the creation of the Komi Oblast, the territory of present-day NAO was divided in two: the Bolshezemelskaya tundra was largely included in the Komi Oblast, while the Kanino-Timan' tundra and the Malozemelskaya tundra were part of the Arkhangelsk Oblast. As Sergey Shubin (2000: 16) remarks,

> [t]he border tore up the tundra which had been like one economic organism, separated two clan communities (*obshchiny*) from each other; the summer and winter pasture grounds of the Samoyeds ended up in different administrative entities (Transl.).

On top of not following the principle of "national space", this situation kept the Nenets in danger of being victims to both groups of historical "colonisers": the Russian traders from the Arkhangelsk Gubernia and the Komi-Izhemtsy from the Komi Oblast (Shubin 2000: 17). At the 1927 VII Samoyed Congress, Nenets nomads are reported to have claimed: "We must not be torn to pieces, but instead we should be given our own administration (*upravlenie*)" (Transl. Ibid.: 17**)**. Hence, on the 15th of July 1929, the All-

Russian Central Executive Committee created the country's first national okrug, the Nenets National Okrug. It included three regions (*raiony*): the Kanin-Timan, the Bolshezemelskoi and the Pustozerskii. Its population in 1930 was composed of 5514 nomadic Nenets, 4880 Russians and 3719 Komis. It included six nomadic councils and five Russian agricultural councils (Medvedeva 2000: 89). Though the okrug's initial administrative centre was the village of Tel'viska, Naryan-Mar (*Red Town* in Nenets) soon became the capital. As will be seen in the second part of this chapter, these developments cannot be detached from the increasing attention that was being paid to the region's natural riches.

Bringing Indigenous Peoples to the Future

At the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s, the Nenets and other indigenous peoples of the Russian North had to undergo a drastic and dramatic process which was sweeping the whole country: collectivisation. However, in relation to these peoples, collectivisation also had as its aim to modernise their way of life and productive activities. Boris Kagarlitsky (2008: 281) remarks that in the 1920s, Russian society existed on the basis of a compromise between the cities, controlled by the Bolsheviks, and the countryside, which maintained a certain level of economic independence. Throughout the country, the framework of the struggle of the classes was imposed on national groups which often did not know of such classes as may have existed in Marx's or Lenin's worlds. Nonetheless, these groups came to be divided into three categories: poor (*bednyaki*), middle (*sredniaki*), and kulaks. These categories, attributed to the population by "collectivising agents", were, however, not fixed or precise, as one could fall into the obscure categories of "kulak sympathiser", or "kulakizing element" (Werth 2001: 239).

Because of their desire to rapidly industrialise the country, the Soviet authorities made the decision to focus on the development of heavy industry. However, since the country was perceived by the Soviet authorities as lagging behind European powers economically, it did not have the technology to fully embark in this process, forcing them to import the technological means. One of the solutions found was to export grains (and oil, as will be seen) in exchange for currency to purchase these technologies from the West. At the 15th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party, in December 1927, intense debates took place over the fate of agriculture and industrialisation. Joseph Stalin

and Vyacheslav Molotov were the proponents of a harder approach, according to which the kulaks needed to be put down in order to have access to the harvest. Others, like Nikolai Bukharin, feared that a violent pumping (*perekachka*) of resources from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector would have disastrous effects (Werth 2001: 226).

Contrary to Lenin, who favoured cooperation with the peasants, Stalin was convinced that the construction of the world's first socialist state should involve the creation of "socialist fortresses" in the countryside; that is, socioeconomic institutions such as collective farms and state farms. Hence, complete collectivisation was a means to reach socialism and it was to be achieved by all possible means. In a Plenum of the Central Committee, in 1929, Molotov set the tone by saying "[l]a construction du socialisme sous la direction de la dictature du prolétariat peut-être réalisée à une vitesse encore inconnue dans l'histoire" (cited in Werth 2001: 237). If in the 1920s, the direction to be taken by the country was never certain, that is, more democratic or more authoritarian, by the late 1920s the direction chosen was a clear one: complete collectivisation implied that the Soviet system went from an authoritarian one to a totalitarian one, bringing, by force if necessary, the whole economy under the control of the state. Buck-Morss (2002: 37) argues that under Stalinism, the integration of people took place differently from the way the modernising enterprise was happening in the West:

> Stalin was doing something decidedly different (if not altogether new). He militarized the space of historical transition and turned the terrain of economic development and peasant collectivization itself into a war zone – a "wild zone" for the deployment of the machinery of absolute power. It was not a question, as in war communism[20], of mobilizing the economy for war, but of mobilizing the economy *as* war. Moreover, it was a war against time.

The process of collectivisation was thus thought to modernise agricultural practices by grounding them in "rational" approaches. Hence, the industrialisation of agriculture would not only increase productivity, but also allow for the deeper integration, when not conquest, of rural regions. As Slezkine (1994: 265) put it, "[i]ndustrialization had two dimensions. It was to bring socialism to Russia and take Russia into Asia". Because of its

[20] War communism (1918-1921) was the political and economic system established by the Bolsheviks during most of the period referred to as the Civil War, which lasted between 1917 and 1922.

relatively better accessibility due to geographical proximity to the centres of European Russia, the Nenets National Okrug was one of these regions where collectivisation was to be achieved more efficiently (Ibid.: 210). Collectivisation was not, however, a process which took place in one phase; rather it was initially conceived as a gradual process. For example, despite the pressures on the herders to join the collectives, they could join on a voluntary basis. As I will show, "gradual" meant in practice that collectivisation was going to be characterised by drastic back and forth steps.

Although it was initially Soviet officials who began the process of collectivisation, there were also a few Nenets and Komi activists promoting this process (Tuisku n.d.: 3). In May 1929, the okrug's first collective farm was created: the "First Nenets Reindeer-Herding Collective" (*Pervyi Nenetskii Olenovodcheskii Kollektiv*, PNOK). It was later renamed after Nenets communist activist L.P. Vyutcheskii. According to Tuula Tuisku (1996: 2), it was herders with few reindeer who initially joined the kolkhoz who gathered between 264 and 450 reindeer.

The kolkhoz, as an institution, quickly became the institution through which the state was to revolutionise the lives of the Nenets in a number of ways. Anatolii Skachko one of the leaders of the Committee of the North suggested that the

> [i]ntegration into larger cooperative units would take care of the problem by allowing specialized "brigades" to devote themselves entirely and profitably to only one type of economic pursuit. Meanwhile, the wives and other auxiliary personnel could remain at the central base, saved from the discomfort of nomadic life (cited in Slezkine 1994: 204).

This transformation of reindeer herding to a more productive economic activity was marked by the state's civilising and evolutionary programme. Thus, the state gave itself all the means to rid society of elements considered obstacles to progress or segments of the population slowing down that process. In the winter of 1928, the Politburo declared "emergency measures", modifying the Criminal code so as to send to jail anyone who might be an obstacle to the production of grains (Ibid.: 227). In relation to the northern indigenous inhabitants, these measures implied that they had to rid themselves of both the kulaks and of the shamans, two groups which were slowing them down in their march towards civilisation. Hence, the modifications made to the Criminal code also included a new chapter on "Crimes that Constitute Survivals of Tribalism" (Slezkine 1994: 226). Two years later, the authorities nonetheless demanded some restraint regarding the

treatment of the Nenets' integration into modern civilisation. In the 1930 Resolution no 122 "On the socialisation of reindeer herding in the Nenets Okrug", it is stated that okrug communists "should refrain from conducting massive collectivisation of reindeer herds (*khozyaistv*)", that entry into the socialist institutions should be done on a voluntary basis, that any attempt at *raskulachivanie* ("dekulakisation") would be punished (Stal' et al. 1964: 328-329). Nevertheless, the kulaks had lost both their political and economic significance, as is summarised by Slezkine (1994: 202):

> "Defeated" politically, the kulaks needed to be "squeezed" economically. They were given elevated "fixed [work] assignments" and fined for non-compliance; assigned increased transportation duty; denied credit; forced to buy state bonds; fined for "social and economic crimes"; and charged special double prices at the stores.

Further pressures were exerted on non-members of collective farms to join as they were required to pay higher taxes and higher prices for merchandise at the cooperative store, which had become the only alternative to receive supplies from (Ibid.). Throughout the Russian North, herders forced to collectivise their reindeer resisted, namely, by slaughtering their animals. In January 1932, Resolution 178 "On the collectivisation of the sedentary and nomadic population of the okrug" ordered that, despite the collectivisation of sixty-one percent of the poor (*bednyaki*) and eighteen percent of the middle-class (*serednyaki*), the party organisation should complete the collectivisation of the sedentary population and of thirty-five percent of the nomadic Nenets population (Stal' et al. 1964: 457). One year later, the okrug authorities had to issue a resolution, titled "On the correction of mistakes in the construction of the tundra kolkhozes", establishing a distinction between fragile (*neokrepshye*) and firmly established (*okrepshye*) artels.[21] It was suggested that the former ones receive the status of *tovarishchestvo* (associations) and receive back their reindeer and belongings, such as chums and sleds.

By 1931, there were eleven kolkhozes and one sovkhoz established in the okrug (Tuisku n.d.: 3). Collective farms were institutions initially created on the basis of cooperation between peasants with small farms, and their relatives (Humphrey 1999: 13). In the Nenets National Okrug, they began to be established in the 1930s and remained in existence throughout the Soviet days. As in many other Soviet regions, the kolkhoz

[21] The *artel* is an association of workers, involving fishermen, reindeer herders or hunters. It was generally composed of a smaller number of members than kolkhozes, which gradually came to include them.

benefited early on from the support of the state, namely by having access to the better land, at the expense of the kulaks (Tuisku 1996: 3). State farms also began to be established throughout the country on the basis of the properties of large landowners who were employing wage labour elsewhere in Russia. Starting in the late 1950s, the new agricultural institutions established in the North tended to adopt the model of state farms, although they were not created on the basis of previously large agricultural properties. Hence, in 1956, a sovkhoz was established in Bugrino, which was called the *Kolguevskii sovkhoz* ("The Kolguev State Farm"). An important difference existing initially between the kolkhoz and the sovkhoz was that in the former, the workers managed their own income, and were obliged to make the farms profitable, whereas in the latter, the workers had a basic wage, as well as pensions and insurance. However, over the decades of existence, the status and way of functioning of both the kolkhoz and sovkhoz came to resemble each other in terms of their socio-economic significance (Humphrey 1999: 13).

In the Nenets National Okrug, the struggle between classes also often had an element of interethnic tension. As was alluded to earlier, previous discourses by travellers, ethnographers and revolutionaries described the Nenets as a group exploited both by the Russian merchants and the Komi, who were also often involved in reindeer herding. It was also seen that the boundary established between the Nenets National Okrug and the Komi Oblast was subject to tense discussions between the Moscow authorities, the Arkhangelsk and the Komi Oblasts, and the allegedly hopeful Nenets. This boundary however had another effect.

Joachim Otto Habeck (2005: 76) remarks that the establishment of a border between the Nenets National Okrug and the Komi Oblast implied that on the Komi side of the border, the economic priorities of the authorities were focused on the production of fossil fuels, timber, flax, and cattle breeding. Thus, the economy of the Komi herders came to be seen as peripheral, far from the priorities of the oblast' authorities. However, the Nenets, who had recently received a national territory, had to make their contribution to the state, which had to be based largely on reindeer herding, fur, and fish. What is quite paradoxical, however, is that the form of reindeer herding practiced by the Komi came to be seen as a model in terms of productivity and lifestyle. The fact that mainly men were involved in reindeer herding and that their lifestyle was more sedentary, thus seen as

more modern, led the authorities to find in the Komi form of reindeer herding a blueprint to apply to all of the reindeer herders of the Russian North (Ibid.). Although it was aimed at separating both national groups and allocating national territories to them, there are still Komi herders from the Komi Republic[22] who migrate to the Nenets Okrug's territory where their summer pastures are located, while a number of Nenets herding brigades have their winter pastures in the Komi Republic (Habeck 2005: 69).

One of the important elements which changed with the integration of the Nenets and other "small peoples of the North" into the new Soviet farms is the way they were pressured to interact with their reindeer. It was seen that previously, Nenets reindeer herders tended to work and live in rather small groups, mostly constituted of relatives. They were often also involved in economic activities other than reindeer herding. However, the perception that more could be produced out of that economic activity was a vision that existed even before the Bolshevik Revolution. Already in 1911, Communist veterinarian Sergey Kertselli (1911: 108) suggested that,

> [o]nly when the reindeer herder receives complete confidence in the future will the possibility of increasing the number of reindeer happen and the tundra's territory, unused to a large extent today, will be used in a rational (*gramatnyi*) way. Until this day, only the Arkhangelsk Gubernia is predisposed towards international trade, but there is no doubt that the establishment of a decent company near the mouths of the Ob' and Yenisey will open up the possibility for appropriate use of the grandiose Siberian tundras (Transl.).

Kertselli's words relate a view according to which the herders were not "using" the territory, the pasture grounds, in a correct way, and that productivity in terms of number of reindeer was closely connected with faith in the future. Comparing with the Alaskan experiment of introducing reindeer, Kertselli (1929: 133) suggests that the "empty" spaces of the tundra and the taiga could be colonised by reindeer, not only as nomadic animals, but that reindeer could even be raised in a "sedentary" manner. This way, the Russian North would be able to host as many as 15-20 million reindeer. This conception of the Russian Arctic where reindeer herding is practiced displays what Henri Lefebvre (1991) describes as an abstract space. As he suggests,

> [a]bstract space *contains* much, but at the same time it masks (or denies) what it contains rather than indicating it. It contains specific imaginary elements: fantasy

[22] In 1936, the Komi Oblast received the status of an autonomous Soviet socialist republic (ASSR). Following the demise of the Soviet state, the region was renamed as the Komi Republic.

> images and symbols which appear to arise from 'something else'. It contains representations derived from the established order: statuses and norms, localized hierarchies and hierarchically arranged places, and roles and values bound to particular places (Lefebvre 1991: 308).

In this case, the established norms are of an economic nature as conceived in the political centre, which has its own fantasies about the Arctic territories, about what it contains, and about the role the indigenous inhabitants could play. The way these indigenous peoples conceive of these lands, of the reindeer and of each other are masked behind the notions of struggle between the classes, and replaced by quantitative, productivist notions. It remains that benevolent communists would sometimes criticise wrongs caused to the indigenous peoples, yet keeping in mind the ideals of productivity. For example, Kertselli (1929: 119-121) relates the incompetence of certain administrators who, arriving in the North during War Communism, categorised herders with 100-200 reindeer as kulaks. He remarks that

> […] requisitions took place, unjustified by the circumstances as well as nationalisation of herds, which instilled in herders uncertainty of their rights, which led to the destruction, the halt of care for the herd and strongly influenced on the decrease of their numbers (Transl., Kertselli 1929: 120).

In some regions, the reduction of the number of reindeer was drastic. For example, in the Kanin Peninsula the number of reindeer went from 53 000 in 1914 to 20-22 000 in 1925 (Ibid.). Thus, there was new pressure for the herders working in collective and state farms to be more productive, most especially to compensate for the catastrophic outcomes of the early Soviet days, and of collectivisation. Being more productive meant that a system of inventory (*proschet*) needed to be developed, with statistics, and percentages of losses and increases. In the Proceedings from a meeting "On the preliminary conclusions about socialist emulation[23] with the Yamal Okrug" orders were given to the heads of the farms and to the herders of the Nenets National Okrug to establish standard approaches in order to preserve (*sokhranyat'*) calves and big (*krupnyi*) cattle in the name of the socialist emulation with the Yamal Okrug. Thus, inventories had to be conducted under the supervision the head of the kolkhoz, sovkhoz or okrug's executive committee (Stal' 1964:581).

[23] Socialist Emulation (*sotsialisticheskoye sorevnovanie*¸ often also translated into English as "Socialist Competition") was an approach developed early by the Soviet authorities in order to increase productivity by promoting and stimulating the sense of "socialist self-obligations" (*sotsialisticheskie obyazatel'stva*) among and between state enterprises and individuals.

The promoted Soviet way of conceiving of and interacting with the reindeer was also quite different from the Nenets way. Kertselli (1929: 130-132) uses the concept of *tovarnost'* (from *Tovar,* merchandise, thus translating best into "marketability") to talk about what could be done with the great number of reindeer from the Russian North. He recommended approaching the production of reindeer products through an "integral cooperation", involving the herders, as well as workers operating in various productive units which would be located in villages. As he suggested, the focus should be on the production of hides and meat, easier to transform for the new workshops and factories, and to also export. However, Kertselli added that "[…] the intestines, the antlers, as well as the hooves could also be objects of export" (Ibid.: 131). The expected quality of reindeer was also projected, with statistical targets in order to reap anticipated profits:

> According to the supposition I made, that out of 3 million reindeer only 2 millions may be marketable, it implies that all the production of reindeer may reach 4 900 000 roubles, also merchandise for exports may give us 3 700 000 roubles, and the merchandise of the domestic market, 1 200 000 roubles (Transl., Kertselli 1929: 132).

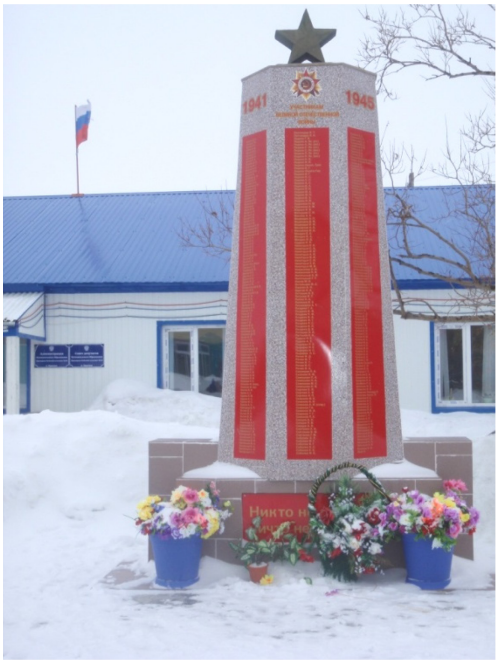
The integration of reindeer herders into collective farms had a strong impact on their way of relating to the reindeer. Habeck (2005: 82) remarks that among the Komi herders, the centralisation as well as the enlargement of the agricultural enterprises rendered the herders' responsibility abstract. This increasingly manifested itself in the involvement of scientists and veterinarians in reindeer herding, who began to dicate to reindeer herders how they should be relating to their animals.

Based on his research with the Evenki reindeer herders of the Taimyr region in the post-Soviet days, David Anderson (2000) relates the development of a dual way of interacting with the reindeer. On the one hand, there is the approach of the herder,[24] and the *tundrovik,* which means someone living on the tundra. As he remarks,

> [t]o be a successful herder [*pastukh*] requires a certain respect for the administrative landscape of the farm with its quotas, delivery dates, and time clocks […]. To be a successful *tundrovik* requires a special type of knowledge, which includes a wide repertoire of technical skills, but most importantly involves a respect for the ethical imperatives which govern the relationship between people, animals, and tundra (Anderson 2000: 28).

[24] In Russian, the commonly used word *olenevod* translates in English into "reindeer breeder", or more directly in the French expression "éleveur de rennes." The herders are also sometimes called "shepherds" (*pastukhi*).

Although such categories were not used among the Nenets herders I conducted my research with, they do resonate with the dual way they relate to the reindeer, a duality taking its roots in the incorporation of the Nenets into the kolkhoz and sovkhoz, as will be seen in chapter 5.



The monument above was erected in the village of Krasnoe in honour of those who perished during the Second World War, termed the Second Great Patriotic War in Russia (1941-1945). It was the first war during which the Nenets were asked to serve in the army, and was one of the key events which increased their sense of belonging to the greater Soviet nation. Already at the beginning of the war, in November and December 1941, the Nenets National Okrug had sent to the front more than 7000 sled reindeer, along with their herders to be part of the "Reindeer-Transport Sections of the 14th Army." These sections transported more than 17 000 tonnes of cargo, nearly 8000 military to the front and brought back more than 10 000 sick and injured soldiers (Kanev 2010: 260). As many of the young Nenets men were gone to the front, those left in the tundra, including women, had to supply the front with reindeer meat as well as skins, which implies that the load of work of women was largely increased. In 1941 alone, the okrug sent more than 22 000 reindeer to feed and dress the soldiers on the front (Ibid.: 83). The number of sled reindeer – 7000 – might appear small in comparison. However, the sled reindeer are

of a very high value to the herders, as they are selected and trained for the purpose of transportation.

One anecdote I often heard from different Nenets herders and villagers was that the Nenets soldiers of the "reindeer army" fought bravely and often mentioned that they would prefer dying themselves to having their reindeer killed. These war anecdotes brought back from the front circulated widely among their descendants. They suggest that despite their incorporation into the collective farms with their focus on production and industrialisation, and their incorporation into the Soviet regime in the most dramatic years, the reindeer remained at the centre of their lives, and that preferring one's own death to the killing of a sled reindeer would be deemed dignifying.

The following section will describe the initial steps leading to the encounter between Nenets reindeer herders and villagers with oil workers, most of whom came from southern and central regions of European Russia. I will begin this examination at the same moment where I started the previous section, with the Bolshevik Revolution.

Finding Soviet Oil For the Market

The Russians came for furs, but later the Soviet regime stayed for minerals
Piers Vitebsky

As the First World War was going on, Baku was a site of high strategic relevance for Turkey, Germany and England. For the Bolsheviks taking control over Caucasus' oilfields was also of the utmost necessity in order to win another war, the Civil War (1917-1922). Hence, due to their geopolitical significance, both the Baku and Grozny regions were marked by destabilisation and could not provide constant production of oil. As a consequence, in 1919, the Russian consumption of oil was three times less than the consumption level of 1916 (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 174). In late May 1920, Azerbaijan came under the control of the Soviet state and the Baku oil industry was nationalised. Far from that region, in the Russian north-west, a small number of geological expeditions had been improving the knowledge about the delimitation of the Timan-Pechora geological basin which was thought by some geologists to hold abundant, yet hidden, mineral riches. In 1918, the All-Russian Soviet of the people's Economy (VSNKh) as well as the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) began receiving

letters from scientists suggesting to Lenin to dedicate state resources for the exploration of the natural riches of the Ukhta and Pechora region. P. Ivanov and N. Kiselev wrote the following to the Sovnarkom:

> Dear Comrades! In the recent times the treatment of the exploitation of the Ukhta riches was dealt with by social organisations at the district level (*zemstvo*); but this dammed tsarist regime, bought by the Baku capitalist-predators, obviously made the people's riches inaccessible.
>
> This being said, we draw Your attention to the fact that the resurrection of the Ukhta region (*raion*), aside from the incalculable future benefits for the Russian *Russian* [*Soviet*] *Federative Socialist Republic* should at the current moment be occupying more than one hundred thousand workers' hands (Transl., cited in Tolkachev 2000a: 36)

The following year, the Sovnarkom decided to invest 5 million roubles in the construction of a road to Ukhta. Although projects of exploration were promoted in other regions presumed to hold a certain potential in terms of fossil fuels, the decrease of fuel and industrial production were so intense as to be one of the reasons for Lenin to bring War Communism to an end. The way out of this situation was to institute a new policy, the New Economic Policy – the NEP –, which was to officially last from 1921 to 1928. However, as early as the beginning of 1920, Western oil companies had already been trying to make deals over the Baku oil fields as it was believed by many that the Bolshevik regime would not last long. For example, in July 1920, that is three months after the nationalisation of the Soviet oil sector, US firm Standard Oil of New Jersey purchased half of the oil fields previously owned by the Nobel brothers. This was the equivalent of a third of the oil produced in Russia, forty percent of its transformed oil, and sixty percent of the Russian domestic oil market (Ibid.: 178). Nonetheless, oil was produced at the time by three main state-owned producers – Asneft', Grozneft', and Embaneft'– which were obliged to sell all of their production to the state-owned Oil Syndicate (*Neft'sindikat*) (Ibid.: 182).

Between April 10 and May 5 1922, an international economic conference took place in Genoa, where thirty countries were represented. The young socialist state came to be at the centre of attention, as a committee was created to deal with "the Russian question". Though the word oil was mentioned in none of the five requests expressed by Western states to the Soviet regime, oil was at the centre of it. The Soviets would agree to allow concessions to Western companies, but not the right to ownership of the oil fields.

As a result, the world's largest oil companies gathered in Paris one month later to declare a boycott on Soviet oil. Smaller enterprises, such as International Barnsdall Corporation and Sinclair Consolidated received concessions to operate in Soviet Russia but for a short time. By 1924, the Soviet state had already abandoned its project of letting foreign oil companies operate on its territory and instead rebuilt its export network, with offices in London and Berlin (Labban 2008: 97). Though the boycott on Soviet oil remained on paper for decades, Western oil companies bought Russian oil in secret throughout the Soviet period (Igolkin and Gorzhaltsan 2003: 187, Labban 2008: 97).

Boris Kagarlitsky (2008: 262) describes the postion the Soviet Union occupied in relation to the market during that period in the following way:

> The Bolshevik revolution, the nationalisation of industry and the repudiation of the tsarist debts excluded Russia from the global process of capital accumulation, but not from the world market. Indeed, participation in the world market was integral to the hopes of accelerated industrialisation held by the country's leaders. When Russia set out on this road, it would not be able to get by without technology transfers and purchases of equipment.

Hence, the USSR opted for the export of grains as a way to receive currency in order to purchase new technologies from the West and catch up with it through industrialisation of the country at all costs. In the 1930s, this led to the starvation of several million citizens, namely in the tragic event known as Holodomor, in the Ukraine. Both Lenin and Stalin admired the successes achieved by Henry Ford's approach to production and they believed that Fordism was the approach to follow in order to swiftly industrialise the country. Hence, the Soviet state imported industrial and technological equipment, namely from the United States. In 1930, it imported 31.2 percent of its technological supplies from the US, a proportion which increased to 42. 8 percent the following year (Kagarlitsky 2008: 278)

Besides grains, oil also served as a major source of revenue from export. With the network it had established abroad, the Oil Syndicate allowed the Soviet Union to receive the recognition on the world market as major oil producers by the late 1920s, at a time when the country had still not been recognised as a legitimate state by many countries (Labban 2008: 98). As the world markets fell in 1929, the Soviet oil industry increased its production, with the result that between 1929 and 1932, its share of world exports of oil went from 4.7 to 9.1 percent (Ibid.). The effect it had was to lower the price of oil, which

was perceived by the Western countries as a plan to further destabilise the capitalist economy, although from the Soviet authorities' point of view, the main goal was to acquire modern technologies as they were strongly needed.

The increasing demand for oil, most especially for export, led the Soviet state to increase its exploration activities in various parts of the country, in regions other than the traditional producing region, the Caucasus. In addition to this attitude held by the state, the conviction held by a number of geologists, such as Aleksander Chernov, concerning the presence of fossil fuels, played a strong role in bringing interest towards the Nenets National Okrug and its neighbouring territories. By 1929, Chernov had been conducting several prospecting expeditions in the Pechora basin which he strongly believed contained large coal and oil reserves. That year, an administrative region called the Northern Krai was created, which included the Arkhangelsk, the Vologda and Komi Oblasts for the purpose of coordinating the exploration and extraction of the riches they held. All elements were finally in place for the dreams of enthusiastic geologists convinced that the Pechora and Ukhta regions held considerable mineral wealth to come true: the regions had been declared a resource region, and labour would be easily found to operate under the harsh conditions of the North because of the labour force provided by the great number of Soviet citizens targeted by Stalinist repression (Tolkachev 2000a: 40). However, these developments initially concerned the regions of Vorkuta[25] and Ukhta, in the Komi Oblast (Ibid.: 56).

Naryan-Mar was founded in that context to serve the developments taking place in the Komi Oblast. There were nonetheless small geological expeditions surveying the tundra of the Nenets Okrug as well. For example, Viktorin Popov (1932: 79) relates the encounter between Nenets and geologists on the island of Vaigach, a sacred site for the Nenets:

> The Vaigach Nenets easily and quickly became friends with the expedition. The head of the expedition, Comrade Eikhmans was the first to enter the *chum*, the Nenets served him steamed reindeer-meat, fresh Arctic Cisco with tea. For the important guest the wives wiped the blackened earthenware cups with the hems of their skirts.
>
> The Nenets drove the members of the expeditions on their reindeer for their distant survey and, in preparation for the goose hunt, stopped by at the expedition's stall to purchase the needed produce and merchandise (Transl.).

[25] Vorkuta was located in the Nenets National Okrug until 1940, when it was included in the Komi Oblast.

In 1924, the Northern Sea Steam-Navigation established warehouses and a shelter for the staff of 8 people (and between 40-50 dockers during the navigation season) at Beloschelye, in the Pechora Delta. The intense industrial development taking place in Vorkuta, situated higher on the Pechora River, made necessary the creation of a port, which was decided in September 1931 to be established at the small port in Beloschelye, to be renamed Naryan-Mar. By 1933, there were 6 912 dockers as well as 22 739 prisoners of the Ukhtapechlag (Ukhta-Pechora work camps) working at the port (Chuprov 2004: 21).

In 1932, the village of Naryan-Mar – to be officially recognised as a town (*gorod*) three years later – already had a population of more than 8000 people. The planning of the city was done in a very chaotic manner, without street plans prepared nor space allocated to settlers. However, establishing the new capital of the young okrug on that site had the advantage of replacing the region's historical political, economic and religious centre: Pustozersk (Prourzin 2000: 38). In order to solve the shortage of houses, houses were moved from Pustozersk, and also from neighbouring villages of Oksino, Tel'viska, Ustje and Kuya to Naryan-Mar (Chuprov 2004: 23). In the summer, there were also "tent villages" built, one for the workers of the Ukhta Trust who were operating the port, and another one for the "temporary workers", most of whom were gulag prisoners. The description given by Ivan Ya. Prourzin (2000: 38), the First Secretary of the Nenets Okrug's Communist Party testifies to the chaotic aspect of the years following the foundation of the capital:

> The young town steadfastly coped with the hard experiences it had to face: floods, frost and winds, shortage of housing and disruption of supplies. There was a terrible scurvy epidemic. The winter 1932/1933 was severe: cold, with frost reaching minus 56 degrees. The inhabitants were getting weak in your eyes. On the streets, you could see more and more people limping, having difficulties stepping on their injured legs. The children were losing their usual agility and mobility. Half of them were sick of bleeding gums and chattering teeth (Transl.)

Nevertheless, Naryan-Mar had a growing population, going from 8198 to 10 049 between 1935 and 1940 (Ibid.). The discovery of large coal deposits in the Ukhta region has the consequence of bringing the region located between Timan and the Urals at the centre of attention for prospection. Hence, geologist A. Ya. Krems received the mandate to establish the boundaries of the Timan-Pechora geological province (Sukhanovskii 2008: 65). However, because of the Second World War as well as the following

reconstruction of the country, the development of an oil industry in the okrug had to be delayed.

Conclusion

Henri Lefebvre (1991: 54) wrote about revolutions that "[a] revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses." The Bolshevik Revolution and most especially the institutions created by the revolutionary regime could not but alter the lives of the Nenets and other indigenous peoples to a large extent. Indeed, the young Soviet state did try to impose on the indigenous peoples of the North a new conception of the land, transformed into an abstract, quantifiable space, in the name of rationality and productivity. This imposition cannot be dissociated from the integration, when not conquest, of these regions by the Soviet regime. At the time, the distant territories of the Russian Arctic were seen as good regions to send undesired citizens to, and, increasingly, as potentially resources-rich lands which could bring significant benefits to the country. Nonetheless, this potential would only be fully revealed to the Soviet authorities following World War 2, as will be seen in the following chapter. In it, I will relate the arrival of a large number of Soviet citizens who settled in the Nenets National Okrug to explore its oil and gas potential. The arrival of the oil industry and of such a large number of settlers drastically transformed the pre-existing collectivities as they were integrated more deeply into the Soviet world. Yet it remains that despite these changes the Nenets herders and villagers did not fully embrace the Soviet revolutionary conception of the land or of those human and non-human beings inhabiting the tundra, as I will show further along in this dissertation.

3

From The Thawing North to a Melted Union

As I was migrating southward with the brigade of Kharp herders, at one point we had to go ask if the oil workers at one extraction site could give us some diesel for our generator, which had been provided by Naryanmarneftegaz in earlier years. The head of the brigade, the brigadier, went to talk to the Drilling Forman (*burmaster*) who said he could give us some in exchange for some salted salmon. As we left the mobile compound where the Forman's office was located, I noticed that two workers were photographing each other next to our sleds in order to bring back visual souvenirs from their exotic work place.

Visiting an oil extraction site, Bolshezemelskaya tundra, Fall 2009.

This could only remind me of what I had heard from oil workers I had met a few weeks earlier, as I sojourned at the main base of Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil fields. Many of them told me that one of the important reasons why they had wanted to come work for the oil industry in the North was *romantika*. It is a perception of the North, of its people and of its land which is very present in the discourses of the oil workers, in the songs written by geologists and in the perception of the profession dating from the Soviet era and perpetuated to this day. In discussions with settlers who had arrived to the okrug in the Soviet days I could also often detect an ambivalent attitude among them, one combining both *romantika* and a civilisational impetus. Based on his research among the

Russian settlers in Chukotka, Niobe Thompson (2008: 76) describes this complex attitude they hold in these words: "[a] changing regard for the oriental other, which shifted from an early emphasis on enlightening primitive nomads toward romantic notions of the noble savage, resulted in a paradoxical inter-mingling of colonial arrogance with adulation, even mimicry, of the native identity". This attitude cannot be detached from the organisation of society established in the period following World War 2 as an increasing number of "newcomers" (*priezzhye*) began to settle in the North. Igor Krupnik and Nikolai Vakhtin (2002: 17) summarise the socioeconomic organisation in the following way:

> From the start, the Soviet administration in Siberia allocated to newcomers the status of the 'vanguard of modernization' and of the bearers of 'advanced' forms of ideology and culture. The indigenous people, on the contrary, were assigned to the role of the 'receivers', those who are to be directed to a new and better life. This basic dichotomy was a pillar of the Soviet ethnic policy in Chukotka and elsewhere in Siberia for the 70 years of the regime.

These regions of the Russian North and Siberia were perceived as peripheral, populated by indigenous populations seen as backward, requiring intervention of the representatives of the centre in order to help them modernise. Hence, Soviet modernisation implied a form of "equalisation" of the different national groups, be they living in the tundra, villages, or towns and cities. However, it was not only the socioeconomic differences which had to be alleviated, but also the cultural differences between the national groups which needed to be mitigated. Soviet Ethnographers were thus busy developing theories concerning the merging (*sblizhenie*) of the different national groups. Yuri Bromlei, one of the leading Soviet anthropologists, established hierarchies of ethnic communities with the same result: "the higher up on the evolutionary ladder the ethnic community found itself, the less "ethnic" it was" (Slezkine 1994: 346). Hence, the post-War period was also one during which there was an attempt at continuing the deeper integration of all the national groups cohabitating in the USSR in order to create a Soviet international consciousness which would nonetheless retain certain national elements.

This chapter relates the context in which the Nenets saw the arrival of a large of number of predominantly Russian newcomers as the Soviet state embarked more intensely in the industrial development of the Russian Arctic, following World War 2.

These decades are marked by drastic changes regarding the organisation of the economic activities taking place in the tundra. I will present the processes which led to a situation where both reindeer herding and oil exploration increasingly involved predominantly male workers, often involved in short-distance shifts, while the women and children were settling in the growing villages and in the capital, Naryan-Mar. I will show how the Soviet northern benefits provided by the increasingly benevolent welfare state and allocated to both Nenets and Russian settlers had different purposes and consequences for each group. With the advent of perestroika and the following collapse of the Soviet state, the disappearance of work opportunities as well as of state-provided services and benefits strongly affected both the Nenets and Russian settlers. Hence, I will relate how the Nenets herders and villagers, as well as Russians residing in the okrug experienced these drastic socioeconomic changes.

Civilising, Consolidating, and Sedentarising the Nenets

The Nenets National Okrug was headed between 1959 and 1975 by Ivan K. Shvetsov, the okrug's First Secretary of the Party. In a collected volume published in honour of the 70th anniversary of the okrug, Shvetsov (2000: 64) writes the following about the changes his administration introduced among the Nenets population:

> Our okrug was the first to engage in the path of bringing the Nenets to lead a sedentary way of life. I know, there were opponents in the okrug, as there are now. But in my opinion, these peoples who lead a nomadic way of life are the most backward. Be they reindeer herders in the North, shepherds in the South – it is a part of the population which is deprived of the benefits of culture, and their level of development lags behind that of others. Therefore I am a proponent of the liquidation (*likvidatsiya*) of such a way of life (Transl.).

Shvetsov relates the challenges experienced by the Soviet state in relation to its "Small peoples of the North." On the one hand, their alleged backward lifestyle needed to be eliminated for their own good; while on the other hand, there was a need to maintain them as productive agents in society, most especially, in order to feed the growing newcomer population. In order to solve these contradictory needs, the Soviet authorities embarked on a vast project called "consolidation" (*ukrupnenie*). As David Anderson (2000: 56-7) remarks, consolidation had two main ways of proceeding:

> First and foremost among the new policy initiatives was the centripetal process of forcibly resettling people into relatively large, fixed villages. […] A secondary but significant development was the centrifugal process of instilling a complex division of labour wherein tasks were specialized among diverse spectrum of professions. This

> had the latent effect of specializing tasks among nationalities, and creating a population that was divided between strictly sedentary segments and highly nomadic ones.

Like other indigenous peoples of the North, the Nenets were resettled into larger villages where, it was said, more services would be made accessible, most especially schools. From then on, children from the North between 7 and 14 years of age were sent to boarding schools. The closure of small villages and the displacement of schools was in fact a strategy used in various parts of the Russian North and Siberia to pressure parents to move to larger settlements (Grant 1995: 127).

The Kharp kolkhoz was previously based in the village of Karegovka. Following spring floods which devastated the village in 1956, the farm and the village were relocated to Krasnoe. Most herders of the Kharp brigade I was living with were the grand-children of herders who had previously migrated more to the West of the okrug, in the Varandey region. I was often told by herders that the reason why their grandparents had left the Varendey region was that their children had to attend school in Krasnoe. The situation was different for the Kolguev Nenets, since all children – from herders' and villagers' families – had to attend the boarding school (*internat*) in Naryan-Mar as they do now after completing the 4th class in the village's school.

The goal of the education they were receiving "[…] was generally aimed at opening a road to fixed jobs, […] and to a guaranteed salary under a state-controlled economy" (Krupnik and Vakhtin 2002: 22). However, as the children attended the boarding schools, or went even further in the Soviet educational system, for long parts of the year they lacked contact with their native language and were not taught the knowledge required for them to work and live in the tundra. Although the Soviet education system gave little importance to the teaching of native languages, there was nonetheless some room for it, and some effort made in the direction of the preservation of the languages. The Soviet authorities' rigid understanding of nationalities and cultures often led to the preference of one particular dialect over others in order to create literary forms of the indigenous languages (Bartels and Bartels 1995: 73). The case of the Kolguev dialect is striking in that respect. I could often hear aunts of my host, Igor, complain about the Nenets language classes that were part of the curriculum as they were in the boarding schools in Naryan-Mar: "That language we were taught had nothing to do with the way we speak

Nenets. On the continent, they have those sounds which we do not have." Even today, the few weekly Nenets lessons taught between the first and fourth grades in the Bugrino elementary school are based on the Nenets literary language created on the basis of the Yamal and Bolshezemel'skii dialects. Thus, the education system had consequences for native pupils, which are well described by Slezkine (1994: 342): "[s]uccessive generations of native graduates (and dropouts) found themselves unwilling and unable to rejoin their elders or even communicate with them in their mother tongue […].

A new labour organisation was also introduced for reindeer herders: shift-work (*smennii vypas,* which would translate into "exchangeable grazing"). It is retroactively presented in the following way by Shvetsov (2000: 64): "We decided to make the grazing of reindeer by rotating brigades [*smennymi brigadami*]: one part of the brigade lives in sedentary bases, in the village, while another one takes care of the grazing for two weeks or one month" (Transl.). This approach was made easier by the use of transportation means which were becoming increasingly available in the North: the helicopter, all-terrain vehicles (*vezdekhody*) and snowmobiles (Tuisku 2001: 46). In the case of the Kharp farm, whose herders were – and still are – often at a distance of several hundred kilometers from the village, the new transportation means made it easier in principle to introduce such changes to their lifestyle. However, this policy was resisted by both the herders and by the kolkhoz administration. In fact, they declared the change of shifts would take place twice a year, but the herders in fact continued working according to the previous organisation (Ibid.). Also, although the authorities forbade the private ownership of reindeer, the regional officials were forced to accept that in reality the herders kept owning a few reindeer (Ibid.: 53).

On Kolguev, shift-work was adopted, though at a later time, in the late 1970s (Lukin 2010: 27). As is the case now, there were two herders' brigades on the island: brigade number one occupying the Western side of the island, whereas brigade number two used pasture grounds located on the Eastern side of the island, where the extraction of oil was and still is taking place. In 1981 there were twenty-eight people involved in reindeer herding, working in shifts. The shifts were organised in such a way that herders of each brigade would be in the tundra for periods of fifteen days. As V. I. Vasili'ev ((1981) 2006: 108) relates, this organisation is

> […] appropriate to the conditions in Kolguev, where the reindeer pasture grounds are located at relatively small distances from the sovkhoz: in the winter- 75 km, with a maximum distance of 90 km, in the summer- at 45 km, and the closest only at 25 km from the village of Bugrino (Transl.).

Shvetsov (2000: 64) remarks, nonetheless, that the introduction of shift-work had some negative consequences due to the herders' increased presence in the village:

> Of course I could also notice negative sides to this important business. Did we not lead the people to detach itself (*otuchit'*) from the tundra? Who knows? Of course, the qualitative indicators of reindeer herding are getting worse when the herders switch to a sedentary life-style. Because if a person is only herding reindeer for two weeks or for one month at a time, he already does not know the "face" of each reindeer, and there is no good control of the herd. But the main goal is to improve the living situation of the reindeer herder and not only the qualitative indicators of his work. We had to develop other measures so that the indicators did not decrease (Transl.).

The negative consequences resulting from these changes were hoped to be compensated for in different ways. On the one hand, by increasingly using new transportation modes, such as snowmobile and the helicopter, the sled reindeer would not be used on such long distances, and thus would not lose as much weight on the way to the village. It also implied a decrease in the need for sled reindeer, which are nearly always male reindeer (Tuisku n.d.: 8). As a result, the Naryan-Mar agricultural experimental station took as its goal to increase the number of females (*matochnoe pogolov'e*). As Shvetsov (2000: 64-65) remarks, "more females (*matochnoe pogolov'e*) means more calves, more meat for the state…" Hence, there was a change in the composition of the herd under pressure by experts, the state and kolkhoz administration, thus less trust in the herders' expertise.

The other approach used by the Soviet authorities to reach both their productive and civilising goals was to restrict access to the tundra only to those categories of the population deemed productive. Hence, "unproductive" elements such as children of school age, women and elders who have reached retirement age (fifty for women, fifty-five for men) were pressured if not required to move to the recently established villages. The brigade was also transformed to a large extent. In the case of Kharp, the herders of each brigade had to live in one *chum*, as they do now. Furthermore, only one woman could be present in the tundra for two herders to work as a "tent-worker" (*chum-rabotnitsa*). As Tuula Tuisku (2001: 46-47) remarks, "[t]he designation 'tent worker'

indicates accurately the Soviet attitude towards reindeer herding: the tundra should be a place for production but not for living."

The former First Secretary of the Party in the okrug, Shvetzov (2000: 64) suggests that the female councils in the Nenets villages played an important role in "helping" the herders getting used to (*osvaivat'*, literally "to make one's own") the new way of life. Hence, the collective and state farms increasingly became involved in a number of economic actvities in order to create employment for the new villagers, most especially for women. Sewing workshops were created for settled Nenets women to sew clothes for reindeer herders. In Krasnoe, the workshop was not very appreciated as the herders generally preferred the clothes prepared by their own relatives (Tuisku 2001: 50). On Kolguev, such a workshop still existed in 1981 and employed 12-14 Nenets women (Vasil'ev (1981) 2006: 110). From 1956, fur farms (*zverofermy,* literally "animal-farms") were introduced throughout the North, predominantly employing women (Schindler 1992: 60). That year, the Kolguev sovkhoz received blue foxes from Arkhangelsk in order to establish a fur farm. However, the foxes did not adapt well to the island's environment and climate, leading to the closure of the farm in the early 1960s (Golovanov 2005: 445). In Krasnoe, the Kharp kolkhoz also had a fur farm which remained in operation for longer in the Soviet period.

Fur-farm in Kranoe. Picture taken at the Kharp Museum.

The limitations on the number of women in the tundra and the boarding schools had the effect of introducing a negative perception of the lifestyle of reindeer herding. The village came to be seen as a more modern place, with access to electricity, stores, doctors and public saunas, which had the effect that villagers increasingly considered the tundra a

lesser place, and the lifestyle led by the Nenets herders as deprived of "civilisation" (Tuisku 2001: 48). The resulting situation was similar to what Bruce Grant (1995: 134) describes as a "spatial dichotomy between past and present", a dichotomy between which the Nenets herders, like other indigenous peoples of the Russian North, had to and still have to choose from.

Freeing Prisoners and Attracting Workers

Up until the 1950s, the extractive industries had been relying on an abundant labour-force supplied by the Stalinist repression to extract the natural resources of the North. It is estimated that in the 1951-1955 Five-Year Plan nearly twenty percent of all Soviet capital investment was dedicated to the Ministry of the Interior, which was in charge of the labour camps. In 1953 the Central Committee of the Communist Party had commissioned a study which revealed that the costs of relying on labour camps outweighed the profits generated by their production. This aspect, combined with the denunciation of Stalinism by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, brought forced labour to lose its significance in the development of the North (Thompson 2008: 44). A colossal restructuring thus had to take place, starting in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s in order to shift from forced labour to a new labour force arriving in the North to extract the country's natural riches. One of the key characteristics of this labour force was that the workers were to be given access to new privileges provided by the state. As Niobe Thompson (ibid.) remarks, "[i]f, earlier in the decade [in the 1950s], the North was still largely a destination for the regime's enemies, by the end a northern posting was considered a reward reserved for the Soviet labour elite."

On July 6th 1958, the Nenets geological exploration expedition (*Nenetskaya geologorazvedcheskogo ekspeditsia,* NGRE) was created. The work brigades were composed of variegated ethnic, professional, and social groups. There were Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Tatars, Bashkirs, as well as a few Nenets who had received education in Leningrad. Some of these workers were part of the new labour force, while other colleagues were either convicts, or the children of enemies of the people who had little option but to try to succeed in life in parts of the country which were far from the centre. There were also youngsters who had recently graduated or completed their military service looking for a promising career, in addition to specialists of coal mining

without any experience in the exploration of oil (Tolkachev 2000a: 79-87). This resulted in the particular situation in which some workers would receive awards and medals for their good work, while their colleagues would receive additional rations.

On top of relying on many inexperienced workers, oil exploration was conducted with technologies of poor quality. The drilling engines they were using, the KAM -300 and -500, for example, were not very powerful (Ibid: 88). Also, due to the fact that the best quality steel was reserved for military purposes, drilling operations normally requiring top-grade steels were conducted with limits in the speed and depth they could achieve (Gustafson 1981: 69). There were also constant problems with the supplies. Kim Martyushevskii, the son of an enemy of the people, did not have many options in life, although the Thaw was starting to have its effects. After his military service, where he served as a radio-technician, he started working on the oil rigs. Here is how he describes his work conditions in these days:

> In order to get concrete, clay, coal, and replacement parts, we had to go on empty sleds to the nearest village on the Pechora. And there was frost and wind! You had to jump and run behind the sleds in order to get warmer. […] It took me a long time to understand: why could the expeditions not make requests? I now believe that it was probably because the leaders were from Ukhtpechlaga and Vorkutlaga[26] (Transl., cited in Tolkachev 2000a: 89).

The oil workers thus had to conduct exploration operations, often with little experience, with technology of low quality, and with problems with supplies which, in Martyushevskii's opinion, could be explained by the fact that those overseeing the operations were former cadres in gulags, not concerned much with the workers' living and working conditions. In 1960, the different smaller expeditions exploring the tundra of the Nenets National Okrug came under the umbrella of the Ukhta Territorial Geological Direction (UTGU). The goal of this organisational change was to increase the capacity of the oil industry to achieve complex and complementary work, benefiting from the geophysical and seismological analyses, as well as deep drilling (Ibid: 99-100). By producing a map of the tectonic structure of the northern part of the Timan-Pechora geological province, the development and planning of the oil exploration work was made much more efficient (Sukhanovskii 2008: 102). In 1966, the oil workers of the 4th oil exploration expedition of the UTGU reached the first fountain of oil in the Nenets Okrug,

26 Ukhtpechlaga ("Ukhta-Pechora Camp") and Vorkutlaga (Vorkuta Camp") were both work camps.

by the Shapkina River, some 70 kms south-west of Naryan-Mar, thus firmly confirming the presence of oil in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra (Ibid.: 104).

Elizabeth Dunn (2004) suggests that, although the leaders of both enemy camps of the Cold War had a strong fascination for a Fordist organisation of labour, it was practised in a very different way. Although both the Western capitalist states and socialist states of Eastern Europe implemented Fordism as part of their respective modernising projects, the workers' experience was so different on either side of the Iron Curtain that Fordist production led to the formation of different subjectivities (Dunn 2004: 18). In both the Eastern states and Western countries, the abstract and mental work was performed by an entity different from the one which performed the manual, directly productive tasks. In the West, it was the companies' administrations which were responsible for abstract work and planning, whereas the central planning practised in the USSR implied that decisions regarding enterprises, their productivity, the supplies, were in large part decided in Moscow. Considering that in the socialist economies the supplies tended to be uncoordinated, but that there were still production requirements, the workers often had to engage, in practice, in both mental and manual work in order to carry out the productive activities.

Based on his research on the oil and gas industry in the Tyumen oblast, Eugene Logunov (1998: 14) suggests that it is in large part the antiquated aspect of Soviet technology which led the USSR authorities to rely on what he calls a "development through settlement" model, as opposed to the already widely-used model of shift-working in remote resource-rich regions of Western countries. According to him, the state's priority on the discovery and production of both oil and gas also led to very poor living and working conditions for the workers arriving to the region in those days. This would be consistent with what some of my acquaintances among the settlers mentioned, a state of things that they, however, see with some pride. They saw and still see themselves as pioneers who had been living and working in very difficult conditions for the good of the Soviet state and society. The way these workers were attracted to the North is summarised in the following way by E.S. Aleshkevich (2010: 110):

Propaganda, reinforced by economic incentives (higher wages and initial funding for infrastructure development), based on an unprecedented raising of patriotic feelings and a new romanticism, the Komsomol building projects initiated by the state and, most importantly – the construction of monoprofile cities with a settled population, and with corresponding injections of funds into the regional budget.

"Drilling more actively is a progress of science in production", Naryan-Mar.

The predominant organisation of shifts existing during those days in the okrug corresponds closely to what S.I. Kvashnina and S. G. Krivoshekov (1998: 7) call "near shifts" (*blizhnyie vakhty*). According to that type of shifts, the workers came from or resided in the same "natural-climatic zone" as their work environment, and arrived there by terrestrial transportation or by air transportation over relatively short distances. In the case of the workers who came to work in the Nenets National Okrug, they generally moved to the town where their organisation was based, either Naryan-Mar or Murmansk, and from there would go on their shifts.

Between 1955 and 1975, 800 new towns were created in the Russian North and Far East, most often for industrial purposes (Engel 2007: 285, cited in Stammler and Eilmsteiner-Saxinger 2010: 10). The towns are referred to as "*monogrady*", that is mono-industrial towns because they relied – and often still rely – on one main resource and/or industry. This was part of a Soviet civilisational process, *osvoenie,* which aimed not only at producing natural resources for export in order to acquire currency and technologies from the West, but also to serve as a proof of superiority to the rest of the world. Furthermore, they believed they were at the same time bringing civilisation, as defined by the centre, to the native populations of the North (Thompson 2008: 42).

Another significant difference concerning the operation of the oil industry at that time as compared to currently had to do with interactions with the Nenets. I remember Kolya, the local Russian young man from Naryan-Mar telling me about visits to his father, as he was working in the exploration in the tundra. He said that it was there that he first learned how to ride a sled, because the workers would sometimes have to rely on the Nenets to transport them to certain sites. According to the Chairman of the Kharp collective farm helicopter flights were much more frequent in the Soviet days than they are now, and it was generally not an issue for a herder to hop on a helicopter used by oil workers, an act which has now become much more formalised today.

One way to bring in a new labour force was based upon creating incentives to attract the best elements to the North. Already in 1932, legislation had been put in place to attract skilled workers to the North. It was only in the 1960s, however, that several measures were actually carried out in that regard. In 1960, a territorial-administrative division was created according to which the North was divided into two zones: "the Far North" and "regions equated with the Far North" (See Appendix 5). By working in and inhabiting these regions, a person would be given access to certain privileges, such as earlier retirement and different pension rights, longer vacations and priority access to housing and education (Thompson 2008: 46-47).

Niobe Thompson's pioneering work on Russian settlers in Chukotka reveals many similarities with what I observed among the Russian settlers in the Nenets Okrug. Yet, the situation in my research setting seems to be distinguishable from that of Chukotka in one important regard. Thompson (2008: 45) describes the existence of a "closed distribution system" which was designed to attract the most loyal employees to Chukotka. Like in Chukotka, the Nenets Okrug also had a system of residency permits (*propiska)* as it was a closed zone, due to the presence of the Novaya Zemlya Military Complex. However, coming to the Nenets Okrug in those days was for many a second chance given in life, either as they were born as the children of "enemies of the people" or because they themselves has been to one of the gulags which existed in the neighbouring Komi Oblast. Engineers who made history and often gave their names, posthumously, to the streets of Naryan-Mar, arrived in the region as they did not have many other places to go to

because they were ethnic Germans, Jews, or belonged to other groups of people which did not have the trust of the state.

A closed distribution system did, however, exist, but in a different manner. My friends and interlocutors would tell me that they had access to various foods and other resources which were scarce in other parts of the Soviet Union. For example, they could travel back to their regions of origins during their vacations. However, certain interesting aspects of life common in other parts of the Soviet Union were also present. Not unlike the people from the Moscow region (*podmoskov'e*) travelling in trains to Moscow in order to buy dry sausages (*kolbassa*), I was told that some people from Naryan-Mar would take the helicopter to go to Bugrino or the military settlement of Amderma when they found out that the villages' state stores had been re-supplied. However, it was only those who had access to permissions (*propusk*) who could do so since those zones were not accessible to everyone. Besides, not unlike Thompson's (2008: 70) account of Chukoktan settlers' display of an anti-materialist behavior, I also heard on many occasions Russian settlers talking proudly about how they would carelessly spend their money while travelling to Moscow.

Workers were thus attracted to the North by various privileges, as well as various material and non-material advantages. Eugene Logunov (1998: 72-73) relates how in four different gas-related organisations in the Tyumen Oblast, the salary varied from between 500 to over 700 roubles at a time when the average salary in the country was below 200 roubles. Hence, the workers formed a new class, that of northerners, characterised in large part by spectacular access to rights and goods which other Soviet citizens thought of as scarce. However, it is not clear that the financial advantages were necessarily the main motivation for moving to or remaining in the North. Niobe Thompson (2008: 67) suggests that the North also served, at the time, as a haven against disillusion, most especially vis-à-vis the centre, surging from the period of stagnation: "[…] if the technocratic promise of Soviet planning fell to earth under Brezhnev, the North was idealized as a zone of pretechnological purity, where direct contact with "nature" was still possible […]".

For most of the Russians who came to work the in Arctic, the idea of permanently settling in the North was generally not initially intended. These workers had originally

come to work in the region for fixed terms, varying between three to ten years depending on the organisation hiring them; they had not generally intended to remain there for more than the duration of their contracts. Logunov's (1998: 53) research reveals that 68.2 per cent of the workers who had worked in the Tyumen Oblast for more than ten years had initially arrived in the region to stay there for no longer than five years. The composition of the labour force was dominated by young males, many of whom had just graduated from institutions of higher education and received job placements for up to five years. There were also women who came, attracted by the possibility of gaining access to higher wages, access to an apartment, the chance to gain work experience, and also to contribute to the state-led development of the North (Ibid.: 16 and 52). Although I do not have statistical data concerning the settlers to the NAO regarding the initial intended duration of their stay in the okrug, Logunov's account resembles what my acquaintances among the settlers were telling me. They had come to work for the duration of their contracts, but various events of life, such as meeting a husband or wife working in the okrug led them to remain there for longer.

To be sure, along with various northern benefits, one of the key elements which was at the heart of putting down roots in the North was the access to an apartment, something so difficult throughout the USSR. Kolya, one of my hosts in Naryan-Mar, told me how his family had been living in one room of a communal apartment (*kommunal'ka*), with three children, and about the relief they felt when they moved to an apartment which they could live in on their own. Thompson (2008: 57) remarks that "[t]his geographically fixed system of privilege […] incentivized a long-term commitment to northern life ". In the following section, I will examine the economic context, as well as the corollary political decisions made by the Soviet state leading to an acceleration of oil prospecting in the okrug's subsoil.

The Advanced Socialist State, Oil, and the Market

Mazen Labban (2008: 106) writes that the Soviet Union decidedly entered the world market in 1972, by signing an agreement with the United States on wheat exports. Another important indication of the USSR's increased presence on the market was its exports of oil, produced in large part in the newly productive Khanty-Mansi National Okrug and the gas from the Yamal-Nenets National Okrug. During the same period, the

Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 took place, a war during which Arab oil producing states opted for the use of the "oil weapon", creating an international crisis known as the "oil shock". Hence, oil prices rose by four hundred percent which was what Stephen Kotkin (2001: 15) describes as "[…] the greatest economic boon the Soviet Union ever experienced". The high prices of oil led the state to increase its exploration operations, most especially in the Russian North and Siberia. In the following period, between 1973 and 1985, energy exports in fact amounted to eighty percent of the Soviet Union's hard currency earnings (Kotkin 2001). Deeper integration of the USSR and its satellite states into the market also manifested itself by the fact that they began to borrow more due to interest rates being low (Labban 2008: 106). This description could lead one to believe that the Soviet economy was then a very strong one, but it did in fact become more dependent on its oil and gas revenues.

The increase of oil prices also led to an increase of prices of the machinery and other products for the industry, as well as of food imported by the USSR. As a result, the negative trade deficit went from 360 000 to 3 million roubles between 1970 and 1976 (Kagarlitsky 2008: 298). Furthermore, the cost of developing oil and gas fields in increasingly remote areas was very high for the Soviet state. Still the Moscow-based Soviet officials had the hope that by selling enough hydrocarbons to the West, they would be able to enter and compete on the world market where they could eventually sell Soviet technology (Ibid.: 294). This situation leads Kagarlitsky (2008: 293) to come to the conclusion that,

> [t]he turn to the foreign market was not the result of processes of democratisation in the USSR, but on the contrary, of an attempt to slow down these processes and to substitute for them. In similar fashion, collaboration with the West provided a way of maintaining the old system of authority and administration, thus acting as a substitute for the economic reforms that had been frustrated by the bureaucracy. In these circumstances, the effect of international cooperation was not so much to stimulate the Soviet economy and society, as to speed their disintegration.

Such a view, according to which the Eastern Bloc's integration into the market was a form of strategy used by Western powers to dismantle the Soviet empire, contrasts starkly with opinions more widespread in the West. Clifford Gaddy and Gary Ickes (2010: 297), for example, suggest that the USSR was using the revenues provided by oil and gas as a way to "[…] prop up Eastern Europe and to engage in military build-ups and adventurism."

It is in this context that in April 1974, the Council of Ministers as well as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) decreed a resolution "On the measures for the reinforcement of exploratory geological work and on the development of oil and gas industry in the Northern regions of the Komi ASSR and in the Nenets national Okrug of the Arkhangelsk Province". In order to increase the pace of exploration, the Minister of Geology of the RSFSR, L. I. Rovnin announced in the spring of 1975 the creation of the Arkhangelsk Territorial Geological Direction (*Arkhangelskoe territorial'noe geologicheskoe upravlenie* (ATGU)), which would not only include the already existing Naryan-Mar oil and gas exploration expedition, but also two new expeditions of deep drilling, that of Varandey, operating in the east of the okrug, and of Khoreiver, operating in the south. The decree aiming to increase the production of oil had far-reaching effects on the Nenets National Okrug. Most especially, it led to drastic demographic changes as many more workers were needed in the okrug. This implied the construction of accommodation for the workers.

In the 1974, two explored fields – the Layavozh oil field and the Vasilskii gas field – became ready for extraction. The former is significant for being the first of the explored fields in the okrug to receive its exploitation permit (*gosudarstvennyi promyslovyi passport*) (Tolkachev 2000a: 226). The latter is very important for it became in 1978 the source of natural gas providing Naryan-Mar with energy. It is important to mention that it was under the influence of the Soviet Minister of the Gas Industry that a branch of the pipeline connecting the Vasilskii field to Naryan-Mar would be built to connect the village of Krasnoe, where the Kharp kolkhoz is located, to the network (Romanov 2000: 77). The installation of this infrastructure would, as will be seen in chapter 6, be of great significance for the Krasnoe villagers and explains why this village attracted many new inhabitants. Hence, the oil and gas developments taking place in the okrug were said not only to benefit the workers or the country itself, but also to help the Nenets. Retroactively, journalist, oil worker and former state-propagandist (*agitator*) Viktor Tolkachev (2000b: 171) writes the following about this period:

> The region of reindeer herders – the Nenets Okrug – also became a region of geological-prospectors. Understanding the importance of the task, the inhabitants of the Arctic, in a brotherly way, brought them [the herders] increased acess to food, cultural, medical and consumer services (Transl.).

What can be noticed in these words is, to a certain extent, the transfer of state paternalism to the oil industry as a benefactor to all of the okrug's inhabitants. In the following chapters, it will be seen that the rhetoric of the benevolent oil industry was perpetuated during post-Soviet days. However, starting in the mid-1980s the industry experienced over a decade of economic, political and social turmoil slowing down, if not halting, the development of the oil industry in the okrug.

Towards Perestroika

In a paradoxical way, it is in the political and economic context marking the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union that both oil extraction sites that I visited were explored and discovered. On Kolguev, the Khoreiver Oil and Gas Exploration Expedition (*Khoreiverskaya NGRE*) had begun exploration in 1971. In 1980 the Arctic Oil and Gas Exploration Expedition (*Arkticheskaya* NGRE) completed the delimitation of the Peschano Lake (*Peschanozero*) geological structure, located some 45 kilometers north-east of the village of Bugrino. In 1987, the first oil produced in the conditions of the Arctic shelf was produced on that island. The expedition discovered ten oil deposits at an oil field evaluated as mid-size (Sukhanovskii 2008: 148-149). It was in 1981 that the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil field, located at 114 kilometers to the northwest of Naryan-Mar, was discovered by the Khoreiver expedition. With its four deposits found, the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu was considered a large field (Ibid: 148). Nevertheless, it is only in the early 2000s, that discussions about exploiting this oilfield began anew, as will be seen.

An important event which significantly affected the context in which these discoveries took place was the adoption, in 1980, of the Federal law "About the Autonomous Okrugs of the RSFSR". This law augmented the powers of the okrugs' councils regarding twenty-one spheres of the economy and society. However, only two aspects concerning the indigenous peoples after which the okrugs were named were included in this law: the control for preserving the reindeer pastures (par. 3, art. 22) and measures on "the development of the national cultures, art and literature (par. 3, art. 29) (Kryazhkov 2004: 127). From then on, the Nenets National Okrug was the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO). The okrugs' political autonomy did however not go to those people giving their names to those territories. Not only had they become minorities

during the previous decades, but their traditional activities had been relegated to a lesser position by the extractive industries (Pika 1999: 4-5).

The last All-Soviet census conducted in 1989 revealed that 52.9 percent of the NAO's inhabitants were not born in the okrug (Heleniak 2009a: 38). Nearly 36 percent of the okrug's population had lived in the okrug for 9 years or less (Ibid.:40). It was mainly Naryan-Mar which hosted them, a town which had 20 200 inhabitants in 1990 (Chuprov 2004: 121). More generally, the Russian North had 8 million of the 10 million inhabitants of the circumpolar region. This situation had high costs to the state as it was assumed that the settlers should have access to certain standards of living, thus requiring the establishment of various infrastructures. It is in fact estimated that six percent of the country's GDP was dedicated to maintaining the population of the Russian North (Thompson 2008: 40).

To the Western world, the 1980s are generally associated with the event of perestroika, with the fall of the Berlin wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc and the collapse of the USSR itself. These events are in part related to the lack of efficiency of the Soviet economy, namely to the country's dependence on oil revenues. What would happen if, for example, the price of oil were to fall as drastically as it jumped in 1973? This is precisely what happened in the 1980s. Mazen Labban (2008: 95) remarks that,

> [t]he windfall from the oil crises of the 1970s may have postponed the collapse of the Soviet economy till 1991, only to reveal, however, the extent to which its development, or perhaps survival, had become dependent on revenues from oil (and gas) exports.

Because the decrease in oil prices coincided with an increase of commodity prices due to higher interest rates, the Soviet state began to receive less currency and technologies in compensation for the oil and gas it was selling to Europe (Kagarlitsky 2008: 299-300). Although European countries were increasingly willing to import Soviet oil in exchange for technologies, the United States, led by Ronald Reagan, tried to stop this trade, most especially in order to prevent the USSR from increasing its military power and influence over Europe. Allied with Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain, the Reagan administration was able to impose a restriction on Western European countries, limiting their importations of Soviet gas to thirty percent of the gas consumed. Reagan also forbade them to export any American equipment to the USSR, as well as any

European technologies which included US technology, most especially those technologies related to the oil and gas sectors (Labban 2008: 104). It would be very simplistic, however, to suggest that these imposed policies alone led to the complete dissolution of the USSR. As O. L. Marganiya and D. Ya Travin (2008: 507) remark,

> [i]t was not the cause of the crash of the socialist system; it was predestined as the basic characteristics of the Soviet economic-political system : the formation in the late 1920s, early 1930s of institutions which were too rigid, not allowing the country to adapt to the challenges of the international developments taking place during the late 20th century. The heritage of socialist industrialisation, abnormal defense responsibilities, the heavy crisis of agriculture, the incapacity of manufacturing sectors made the collapse of the regime inevitable (Transl.)

Analysts generally focus on different reasons to explain why Mikhail Gorbachev had no choice but to implement a series of reforms, some of which were more related to the economic situation, others to internal problems within the Party or within Soviet society. Stephen Kotkin (2001: 27) writes that "Perestroika, […], was born not simply in tangible indicators, but in the crucial psychological dimension of the superpower competition." Instead, Russian journalist Viktor Tolkachev (2000a: 481) suggests that "[l]ooking back, I am now convinced that real perestroika in the country was not initiated by the state or the Communist Party, but by the stores' empty shelves, by the queues of hungry people forgotten in the last decade". This view contrasts in a stark way with the view that Mikhail, my host among the Kolguev herders who, as we were talking about perestroika and the somber 1990s, told me: "We had everything we needed, we had the reindeer, so we had all the food we needed". As we were having this discussion, I was already acquainted with the Nenets' professed ethos, according to which one should not complain, that one should adjust to changes. Nonetheless, adjusting to the changes brought about by perestroika and the following collapse of the Soviet state was not felt in the same way and to the same extent by all of the okrug's inhabitants, whether Russian or Nenets, be they oil workers, reindeer herders, or villagers.

Perestroika, Glasnost and the North

In the early 1980s, the Soviet state had already begun a process of decentralisation, which was further pursued by Gorbachev. As a result, the central administration was losing its access to oil rents at a time when the prices of oil had fallen drastically. Thus, Clifford Gaddy and Barry Ickes (2010: 297) remark that "[i]t was this dual hit of lower

rent production and a weakened RMS [rent-management system] that fatally weakened the Soviet state and led to its collapse in a process akin to a bank run." Those years are generally marked by catastrophic economic situation in the country: zero growth in 1989, budget deficit of 100 billion roubles in 1988-1989, weekly inflation of twenty-five percent in the end of 1991 (Werth 2001: 550). Nicolas Werth (2001: 551) remarks that during the 1985-1991 years, all discussions regarding reforms to the Soviet economic system were focusing on the place to be left to the market, within a socialist economy. The measures leading to such a situation were following two main axes: the implementation of autonomy among enterprises and increasing private initiative.

Thus, the Law on enterprises of 1987, to be implemented as of January 1st 1988, introduced two principles: *samookupaemost'*, which implied that costs of an enterprise should be covered by its production; and *samofinansirovanie*, self-financing of the activities. Amongst other things, this law allowed for enterprises to establish horizontal connections amongst each other. However, in an economy which had been centrally planned for over sixty years, characterised by its heavy bureaucracy and corruption, this had as a consequence that supplies became even more complicated to receive (Ibid.: 550-553). For example, at the recent Kolguev extraction site operated by the Arctic expedition, Leonid A. Lur'e, one of the Engineers said the following at the beginning of perestroika:

> […] we cannot clearly tell the collective how we will be working farther. On the island, there are no drilling pipes and drilling without them is impossible. We have some internal reserves. We can cut more drift wood [ourselves] instead of having wood and lumber material shipped from the continent (s *Bolshoi zemli);* we can economise the chemical agents (*khimreagenti*) and we are working in that direction. But without pipes, we cannot work (Transl., cited in Tolkachev 2000a: 482).

The economic reforms taking place under Gorbachev's perestroika also aimed at creating a private sector, which, alongside state enterprises, could invest in economic projects, as well as to force them to be competitive on the world market (Werth 2001: 551). Already in 1987, the Soviet Ministry of Oil Refining and Petrochemical Industries had signed a contract with American Combustion Engineering to modernise petrochemical facilities and the oil industry (Labban 2008: 107). In the NAO, Conoco and Arkhangelskgeologiya entered into discussions about the exploitation of the oil reserves found at the Ardalin deposits, in the south of the okrug. This led to the creation

of Northern Lights (*Polyarnoe Siyanie*) in 1991, which became the first partnership between Russian and American partners who introduced Russian oil workers to more sophisticated means to extract that oil.

The reforms did not, however, give the expected results and the Soviet oil industry which it had been counting on for decades could no longer bring the revenues the state had been used to collecting. Although the USSR remained the world's largest producer of oil, production was diminishing and with a lower price of oil, the state's earnings in hard currency generated from oil export had fallen from eighty percent to around forty percent between 1984 and 1990 (Labban 2008: 107). In that context, the Soviet Ministry of Geology issued a decree in 1990 according to which the heads of collectives and expeditions were prompted to attract foreign investments and to enter into partnerships with foreign companies (Tolkachev 2000a: 506). This was the end of an era for most of the oil workers in the NAO, as state funds for exploration were no longer available, and the price and the quality of the oil present in the region were not (yet) attractive to foreign companies. Mazen Labban (2008: 108) suggests that,

> Gorbachev's opening of the Soviet oil and gas sector to foreign capital investment seemed to realize two goals that transnational oil companies had striven for since Standard Oil speculated on purchasing the Nobel oil properties: the integration of Russian oil into the world economy through direct investment rather than commercial exchange and the collapse of the Bolshevik government.

The period of perestroika is also connected to another process which Gorbachev's team wanted to implement: *glasnost* (transparency). At the same time as a restructuring of the economy was taking place, Soviet citizens were also from that point on allowed to discuss, and criticise if necessary, the prevailing situation. The introduction of glasnost also had an impact on how the Small indigenous peoples of the North related to the state, to its institutions and to their predicament, since they had become small minorities in most of the regions they were living in. In March 1990, representatives of the twenty-six "Small peoples of the North" held the Congress of Peoples of the North at the Kremlin. Following this congress, an Association of Numerically-Small Peoples of the North was formed with Vladimir Sangi, a Nivkh writer, as president (Gray 2005: 32). For Sangi, the northern peoples needed to have a real autonomy, enshrined in the law, which would necessitate the following rights:

> 1) the right of national societies in elections, which must be properly governed; 2) the right of self-determination; 3) the right of priority in land-use and natural resources 4) the right to process materials and goods and to realize the efforts of production; and 5) the right to disbursed funds received from ministries and departments as they see fit (Cited in Schindler 1992: 62).

As soon as it was founded, branches of the association – now better known under its English acronym RAIPON, standing for the Russian Association of the Peoples of the North – were rapidly developing at the different lower levels of territorial administrative entities of the RSFSR, such as republics, provinces (oblasts), districts (okrugs), counties (raions), and villages. This was done "[…] partly in the hope of channelling information on indigenous needs and demands up the hierarchy, and diffusing information downward on opportunities for funding and other support that the Russian government began to create" (Fondahl 1998: 82). It is in that context that Yasavey[27] was created in order to represent the political, social and environmental interests of the Nenets, be they urban, villagers, or herders. In the early years of the organisation, Yasavey, like RAIPON, became involved on the international scene of indigenous movement. It was receiving funds from international agencies (such as the Saami Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Council) and from the okrug's administration. However, the next section of this chapter as well as the next chapter will show why the successes of the indigenous organisations were limited in the political and economic context of post-Soviet Russia.

From a Red to a Bleak North: The First Post-Soviet Decade of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug

The collapse of the Soviet Union happened at a time when there was a centrifugal process taking place, and further promoted by Boris Yeltsin, the President of the USSR's main legitimate heir, the Russian Federation. During the months preceding and following the collapse of the USSR, some of the national territorial-administrative entities were demanding, if not declaring unilaterally, more autonomy from the centre, in an episode which came to be called the "Parade of Sovereignties". In 1992, Yeltsin acknowledged and codified this by officially recognising the autonomous okrugs as complete federal subjects, and that all of the federation's subjects that they should "take as much sovereignty as they can swallow" (Blakkisrud 2006: 35). Hence, the Nenets Autonomous

[27] In 1998, Yasavey was officially renamed The Association of the Nenets People "Yasavey". In the rest of this dissertation, I will refer to this organisation as Yasavey.

Okrug became an equal subject of the federation, independent of the Arkhangelsk Oblast, thus having the possibility to negotiate on "equal" terms with Moscow as the oblast.

At the same time, the IMF required Russia to implement measures of privatisation of state property. It was termed the "shock therapy". During the first wave of privatisation, three quarters of Russia's collective and state farms became agricultural cooperatives, as the managers and workers chose to buy at least fifty-one percent of them. State institutions from the federal, regional or municipal levels also often retained shares in the farms, allowing them to maintain a say in the way the enterprises would be managed, or how they would be further privatised. As Stephen Kotkin (2001: 132-133) remarks,

> [t]his was, perhaps unavoidably, an ambiguous outcome: the state was generally not a good owner (hence the drive to privatize in the first place), while the main method of private incorporation (majority employee ownership) could hinder market-oriented restructuring that presupposed mass lay-offs.

The situation for reindeer herders and indigenous villagers throughout the Russian North was marked by the quasi dismantlement of the Soviet state, the collapse of the economy and the resulting social problems to which I shall return briefly. Overall, the number of domestic reindeer in Russia went from 2 261 000 to 1 520 000 between 1991 and 1998 (Khruschev and Klokov 1998: 4). However reindeer herding is not a homogenous economic activity, because it is practiced according to different cultural traditions across different ecological zones of Russia, with intra-regional differences and managed with more or less difference based on the farms' administrative culture (Jernsletten and Klokov 2002: 17). The decrease in numbers of reindeer may be attributed differently depending on the region, either to the fact that herders were consuming or selling them more, because of poachers, because the reindeer escaped due to a lack of attention of herders who lost the motivation in their activity, or for other reasons.

In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the variation in the number of reindeer was not as drastic as in other regions, such as Chukotka or Magadan. In fact, the okrug's herd went from 159 279 to 145 761 between 1991 and 1995 (Khruschev and Klokov 1998: 17). As in the rest of the country, most of the herders of the NAO opted for the joint-stock option, officially called "agricultural cooperatives" (SPK standing for *Sel'skhozyaistvennyi proizvodstvennyi kooperativ*). Although the farms' official title and

form of organisation has changed, I will refer to them as kolkhoz or sovkhoz as per the local terminology still widely used by the herders and villagers. I will now examine the ways in which these institutions, initially created to become "total institutions" in the early Soviet days experienced the political and economic transition.

The structure of ownership was the first aspect affected by these changes. Tuula Tuisku (2002: 191) establishes a distinction between three types of reindeer ownership in the okrug in the post-Soviet period. There are, first, the collective ones owned by the SPK, which are the majority of the animals comprising the herds. Then, there are the "personal reindeer" (*lichnye oleny*), which are grazed by herders who are members of the SPK. In fact, with the new organisation, the limits to the number of "personal reindeer" that a herder could own and herd with the cooperative's herd was annulled as long as the farm's herd did not exceed the norms of reindeer pastures' carrying capacity (*oleneemkost'*) established by the okrug. In both brigades of herders I stayed with, the private reindeer represented about twenty-five percent of the herds they were grazing.

The third form of ownership of reindeer is that of "private reindeer". Such reindeer are those grazed by the members of the enterprise *Erv* (Nenets word meaning "Master"). Erv is constituted by a group of herders migrating in the Varandey area which separated from Kharp during the first phase of privatisation, in 1991-1992 and then registered themselves as "farmers" (*fermery*), as per the new legal categories emerging at the time. They are often still referred to as *fermery* by the Kharp herders or by the Krasnoe villagers. While talking with the older generation of Kharp herders or administrative staff who had already been working for the kolkhoz in the Soviet days, I could feel in their way of talking great nostalgia for Kharp's heyday, when it had more than 3000 foxes, 325 cows, 140 horses and 22 000 reindeer, and could employ the majority of the villagers. One topic that to this day seems to be quite sensitive is the separation of Erv herders from Kharp, which meant a weakening of the kolkhoz in the transition days. As I was in the field, I once heard a rumour circulating as to the original intentions of those herders during this separation. Because their territory was located above discovered oil deposits, the rumour held, the herders who migrated in the Varandey area had decided to separate from Kharp and form Erv in order to be able to negotiate on their own with the oil companies. Thus, according to that informant, who said he had highly credible sources

supporting this statement, it was absolutely not the advantages of owning reindeer, of being apart from the collective farm which was the key motivation for them to separate, but rather the profits they could generate from agreements with the oil companies. Although the veracity of this rumour might be questioned, what it reveals is that in some contexts, and based on the perspective of a villager, the arrival of an oil company on the territories herders are migrating in might be something positive and may even generate envy.

Entrance to the Kharp SPK

The economic situation of the collective farms in the 1990s was very precarious. They had been the main employers in the villages and in the tundra. Tuisku (2002: 196) relates that one of the important problems for the SPKs in the 1990s was the tax burden. For example, a 1992 Federal tax exemption on reindeer herding units was apparently only implemented in the NAO in 1997. Furthermore, since helicopter transportation was either not subsidised or not to the same extent, it became very difficult for the farms and herders to finance helicopter transportation to bring people or supplies to or from the tundra (Ibid.:197). One of the consequences of that is that they began to increasingly rely on their reindeer for transportation, which meant that the farms or herders had less meat to sell for the collective farm and thus less revenues (Tuisku n.d.: 12).

The question of salaries and revenues was also highly problematic. Johny-Leo Jernsletten and Konstantin Klokov (2002: 52) suggest that in the mid-1990s, the

wholesale price of reindeer meat varied between USD 1.00 and 3.50. Thus, the maximum income a tundra herder could receive was USD 1540. For the farm, around fifty percent, if not more, of the income generated from the selling of the meat had to be paid as the salaries of reindeer herders. The rest served to pay for the farms' taxes or for the transportation costs. It is estimated that in those days, the herder's salary at a low intensity enterprise – most of which were in the NAO at the time – amounted to about USD 800 per year, with a minimum required for a herder to sustain his family of USD 1900 per year (Ibid.).

The herders thus often had to find their own sources of income in order to subsist and support their families. Based on his research with the Komi herders of the Kola Peninsula, Yulian Konstantinov (2002) describes the reindeer herders' response to the economic situation as "crypto-entrepreneurship". The herders developed ways to trade reindeer meat, skins or the antlers (*panty* in Russian), fish or berries with different economic actors outside the realm of the farm. Contrasting this approach to "overt entrepreneurship", Konstantinov (2002: 172-173) suggests that crypto-entrepreneurship "[…] seeks existential security through social and economic activities in which private concerns operate under the umbrella of collective property and collectivist ideology and practice". This approach is common among both groups of herders I was living with in the late 2000s. For example, the Kharp herders' brigade I migrated with would, amongst other things, gather the antlers of reindeer, saw them and send them on the next helicopter flight. When I asked them what they did with the antlers, the reply given to me was "We've got contacts in Naryan-Mar who buy them", indicating that this type of trade did not involve the SPK.

Although there were ways found to raise enough income to get by during the first post-Soviet decade, the socioeconomic consequences of the reforms in the country hit many people in the region very hard, especially villagers. Muscovite Journalist and author Vasili Golovanov (2005) sojourned on Kolguev on a few occasions during the 1990s. He relates that in order to fight unemployment, the sovkhoz reclassified workers as administrative staff, allowing for the periodic payment of salaries to villagers (Golovanov 2005: 424). Still, the picture he gives of Bugrino at the time is very bleak

and, unfortunately, corresponds to a certain extent to what I observed in the following decade:

> A présent, cette partie de la population est confrontée à un dilemme: se procurer le nécessaire, comme autrefois, en finançant sa propre existence, ou bien tenter d'agir sur son destin, abandonner l'ile, semer ses graines sur le continent, en y transplantant sa progéniture. Une partie de la population autochtone la mieux adaptée, possédant le plus grand nombre de rennes pourrait sans doute vivre sur Kolgouev et mettre en place une économie marchande. Mais pour que ce processus s'effectue, il faut du temps. Pour le moment, le plus évident est le déclin dans tous les domaines: incapacité à maîtriser les ruines de l'économie socialiste, sentiment d'humiliation, comportements agressifs et désespérés, sentiment de rejet, d'injustice, alcoolisme, état végétatif, existence au bord de la famine, tels sont les tristes signes du présent (Ibid.: 430).

One can read in this depiction what seems to be not only economic deprivation, but also a sense of moral breakdown. Aleksei Kotkin (2000: 133) relates the words of Kharp's chairman in the late 1990s: "The youth became spoiled, lazy. In our Krasnoe, there is a huge number of lazy people. They don't want to go to the tundra nor do they want to work" (Transl.). These words could be perceived as a typical intergenerational discourse, but I would suggest that they also relate to a sense of nostalgia for order which many Nenets associate with the Soviet days, when everyone had to be a productive element of society. In the late 2000s, I could still hear villagers in Bugrino criticise the island's herders for their lack of discipline. Kolya, the son of a former brigadier now residing on the continent, comes back regularly to the tundra where his brother still lives as a herder. "Our father was known to be a good brigadier, he said. He was making the herders work and there was discipline. It is not how it is these days". This sense of disorder which existed at what could be called the micro level of society was largely an outcome of that which existed in the higher political and economic spheres of Russian society, which I will now examine while relating the consequences of the economic confusion within the oil industry in Russia and in the NAO.

Privatising the Oil Industry

Pauline J. Luong and Erika Weinthal (2010: 127) suggest that there were three phases in the process of privatisation of the Russian oil industry. A first one began following the adoption, in December 1993, of a Law on Subsoil, which was to set the new terms of oil and gas production. The model that was chosen by the reformers at the time was a liberal model for the future of the oil industry, with an emphasis on privatisation. Thus, it was hoped that several private companies would be created and

would be competing against each other to have access to deposits owned by the state, the owner of the subsoil (Rossiaud and Locatelli 2009: 427). In order to create that model, vouchers were given to the employees of the expeditions which could only be sold to other Russian citizens. Very quickly, former Communist Party officials, as well as insiders of the industries, were able to amass large numbers of shares in companies for a fraction of their worth (Luong and Weinthal 2010: 127-128). The Subsoil Law also contained a "two-key principle" provision according to which the federal and regional governments would share the oil revenues. The state's ownership of the land and the rights to subsoil aimed to allow the state to be a part of the joint-ventures and determine the conditions for the lease of land where oil and gas is located. Nonetheless, privatisation was partial in the sense that ownership of the land and subsoil, as well as a majority of shares remained in the hands of the state.

A second phase of privatisation took place in the mid-1990s. At the time, the state's budget was marked by a high deficit and the economy by a very high inflation rate. This situation required the state to borrow money, which it did largely from the newly formed Russian banks. In exchange, the Russian authorities used as their collateral the majority of shares owned in some of the most precious sectors of the economy, such as the oil industry. As the state was unable to repay its loans, the banks seized the controlling shares, and were thus able to acquire at very low costs large segments of the Russian economy (Ibid.). The programme of "loans for shares" took place in 1994-1995, a process by which the oligarchs were able to consolidate their role in the post-Soviet economy. It is this process which has been – and still is – a topic of discussion and criticism among many Russians and has been exploited by Vladimir Putin ever since he accessed the presidency.

A third phase of privatisation took place in the late 1990s, when the government decreased its ownership in the oil industry to an even greater degree. The key point of this phase is that the state rid itself of many of its shares in Russian oil companies, except for the state-controlled Rosneft ("Russian Oil"). Another important characteristic of this phase is a loosening of the maximum investment allowed for foreign companies in the Russian oil industry. If until then, the level of foreign investment in Russian oil companies could reach fifteen percent by virtue of the Production Share Agreements

(PSAs), depending on the extraction project concerned, it was now up to the Russian companies involved in the international projects to decide what amounts of shares they would allow foreign companies to acquire (Ibid: 129). However, in 1998 and 1999, the Duma made different amendments to the PSA laws, according to which no more than thirty percent of the reserves of a deposit could be involved in a PSA, and the imposition of a maximum of thirty percent of foreign equipment used in the PSA projects (Sagers 2001: 174).

The result of these different steps of privatisation of the oil industry was the formation of an oligopoly, comprised of a small number of vertically-integrated companies, sometimes starting from banks, as in the case of Mikhail Khodorkovskii's Yukos. In 2003, five companies – Lukoil, Yukos, TNK (the "Tyumen Oil Company"), Surguneftegaz and Sibneft – controlled nearly seventy-three percent of the country's oil production (Rossiaud and Locatelli 2009: 427). It had initially been hoped that taxes would be returning to the owner of the land and subsoil rights: the state. However, due to the arbitrary tax rates, confusion between the regional and federal taxation systems, tax evasion was very high (Luong and Weinthal 2010: 134). Furthermore, the oligarchs had so much power vis-à-vis the government that they were able to buy themselves protection against it, thus depriving the state of massive amounts of tax-revenues from the oil production (Gaddy and Ickes 2010: 297-298).

The transition to the market economy implied that from 1993 onwards, the main revenues had to come from oil companies "on the basis of the production of mineral and natural resources", as well as investments, both Russian and foreign (Tolkachev 2000a: 524). Russia's overall production had fallen from 569.5 to 301.2 million metric tonnes of oil between 1987 and 1996, most of it being produced in Western Siberia, namely in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug the production of oil had nonetheless increased between 1.2 and 3 million metric tonnes between 1990 and 1996 due, most especially, to the entry in the production phase of the Kolguev and Ardalin oilfields (Sagers 2001: 160). Throughout the country, operations of exploration did, however, plummet drastically. Between the peak in 1990 and the low in 1998, exploration drilling went from 4 603 000 to 790 000 metres annually (Ibid.: 163). One

can thus imagine what was left for the workers to do and live off in a region like the NAO, where a great number of them had settled to work in oil exploration.

Although the World Bank suggested that the creation of a market economy and the recovery of Russia should be based on the oil and gas industry, recovery was easier said than done (Golovnev and Osherenko 1999: 137). In the NAO, salaries remained unpaid for long periods of time, the social benefits allocated by the state or the oil organisations were distributed intermittently, leading to the emigration of qualified cadres from the region. It is estimated that the number of oil workers who were part of expeditions went from 12 000 to 8 000 between 1993 and 1997 and fell afterwards (Tolkachev 2000a: 524). As consequence, between 1989 and 2006, the okrug lost 27.6 percent of its population, that is about 15 000 people to migration (Heleniak 2009b: 132). Those workers who remained despite having lost their jobs had little hope in sight to find a new one. Often, it was their wives, who had jobs in the public sector (*budzhetnaya sfera*), such as in hospitals, daycare or in the administration, who were able to bring the only income to the households, and this, only when salaries were paid. A sense of moral breakdown installed itself and, as related to me by some friends in their 30s, this was a moment when their fathers began to have drinking problems. In neighbourhoods such as the Khorei-Ver Expedition, many of the former oil workers had no choice but to revert to hunting and fishing to allow their families to subsist. Kolya, one of my Naryan-Mar hosts, told me a number of different stories about this period, when he would go hunting geese or fishing salmon with his father. It is also at this period that some former oil workers converted to a new profession: poaching, which will be discussed in chapter 5.

The two main oil companies remaining in operation in the NAO at the time were Komineft' and Arkhangelskgeologia. The latter company was the first organisation in the okrug to establish a partnership with a Western company, Conoco, leading to the formation of the joint-venture company Northern Lights (*Polyarnoe Siyanie*). Its main extraction site is the Ardalin oil field, in the southern part of the NAO. Arkhangelskgeologia soon after came under the control of the Minister of Fuel and Energy, which decided to sell a controlling portion of shares. The 6000 workers of the Soviet organisation could not gather such sums of money to purchase those shares. In the end, Arkhangelskgeologia was purchased by Rosneft', the Russian state-owned company

(25.5 percent), Conoco (15.7 percent) and V.A. Invest (57.8 percent). Very soon, Russian private Lukoil purchased the later companies' shares in order to become the most active company in the Timan-Pechora province, both in the Komi Republic and in the NAO (Tolkachev 2000a: 569-570). However, it was in the following decade that Lukoil's role was going to be felt, as the private domestic company became the okrug's main economic actor.

Conclusion

Following World War 2 and, most especially after the death of Joseph Stalin and the end of intense repression of its citizens, the Soviet state began to conceive of different ways of extracting the natural wealth found in its northern territories. These resources were needed by the state in order to both satisfy the growing demands of citizens requiring access to a certain standard of living, while also serving the industrialisation of the country namely thanks to the currency generated from export of these raw resources. Hence, the approach chosen by the Soviet authorities was to attract workers who would be offered northern benefits, which not only attracted many workers, but led them to develop a strong attachment to both the material advantages of and way of life in the North.

Indigenous peoples, like the Nenets, were also eligible for some of these privileges. They too were given access to housing in the capital and in the growing villages. They too were allowed to retire earlier than most other Soviet citizens. The work arrangements they were pressured to adopt – shift-work – further resembled the settlers' way of life. However, the state's motivation behind these privileges and work organisation had other implications for them. It was part of a paternalistic plan which viewed the Nenets as requiring the adoption of a sedentary, more civilised and productive way of life. This situation implied that the tundra was increasingly inhabited by predominantly young male workers – be they Nenets herders or Russian oil workers. However, the tundra had become a productive space where the Nenets traditional activities were relegated to a lower position on the list of state priorities relative to the oil industry.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, with the consequent economic and social turmoil, many settlers chose to leave the okrug. Those who decided to remain often had to rely on the resources provided by the tundra as well as on networks of exchanges in

order to palliate the absence of work and access to northern benefits or services they had become accustomed to. The Nenets herders and villagers also underwent drastic socioeconomic difficulties and still do. Nevertheless, despite the changes they had undergone throughout their incorporation into Soviet socialist institutions, reindeer herding remained at the centre of the lives of many and, as I will show in chapter 5, reindeer retained its importance for the Nenets, not only for subsistence, but also for its cultural significance, even among Nenets villagers.

Yet, the oil discovered from the 1960s onwards in the NAO mostly remained under the soil. The higher prices of oil on the global markets and a central state's addiction to oil revenues led to a second oil boom in the NAO where the oil deposits discovered by the Soviet prospectors came to be extracted, this time by workers operating in the context of flexible capitalism.

4

Putin's Plan, Flexible Capitalism and the Oil Industry

As I was standing in line in Bugrino's only store, I was puzzled by the slogan written on a poster displayed on the wall: "Putin's Plan is Russia's Victory". I asked Mikhail, my host, hoping to better understand what kind of victory was implied in this slogan for Vladimir Putin's political party, United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*). He was puzzled as he found it difficult to explain the meaning conveyed in this sign to a person who had not grown up with such slogans. "It is not about a victory over anyone. It is about Russia's victory in itself", he explained. Still, I felt I did not fully understand the message on this poster , having the impression that the sentence was not complete, that for me a victory has to be over somebody (*nad kem*) or something (*nad chem*).

"Putin's Plan is Russia's Victory" (Transl.), Bugrino, 2008

The victory in question is most certainly related to Putin's alleged success in allowing Russia to "get back on its legs again" after the 1990s, perceived by many Russians as catastrophic and humiliating. Hence, it is in large part an economic victory. Russia has experienced relative economic success over the last decade, due in particular to increased production and export of fossil fuels. This success led to the country's inclusion into a select group of "emerging" countries called the BRICS (standing for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). However, the country's recent record in terms of democratic culture and rule has led many analysts and Russian citizens to express serious concerns. In this chapter I will examine interactions between central political power in Moscow, and peripheral regions such as the NAO. I will also discuss the interactions between the state and oil companies in relation to the role they are

playing in the NAO and in Russia. I will describe the measures adopted by the federal state to extend its control over both the oil-rich regions and over those companies wishing to have access to the coveted black gold in the Russian North. It will be seen that the authoritarian turn of Putin's regime can operate within the current global economy, often characterised as neoliberal. I will thus show how this current order is leading to the adoption of approaches attributed to neoliberalism, namely in relation to a more flexible labour organisation to extract oil in the Russian Arctic. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, this manifests itself in the increasing significance of shift-work (*vakhtovyi trud*), which to a large extent occurs at the expense of hiring settlers and Nenets. It also creates boundaries between the workers of the Soviet oil industry and those of the post-Soviet industry. First, I will describe what I refer to as flexible capitalism in this dissertation, a conceptual term which borrows much from the discussions of political and economic processes often described as "neoliberal".

Flexible Capitalism

The term neoliberalism is widely used to refer to an ideology, a doctrine and processes, often in critiques stemming from the Left, to denounce the current global economic order. However, the term itself remains vaguely defined. James Ferguson (2010: 170) remarks that various descriptions of neoliberalism generally include the following:

> a valorization of private enterprise and suspicion of the state, along with what is sometimes called "free-market fetishism" and the advocacy of tariff elimination, currency deregulation, and the deployment of "enterprise models" that would allow the state itself to be "run like a business".

This moulding of "non-economic domains" to the exigencies of the market is, for Michel Foucault (2008: 131), "[…] not a question of freeing an empty space, but of taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them to, of projecting them on to a general art of government." Hence, if this application of market principles is not done in a totalising manner, one may wonder what the "content" of neoliberalism is if it can coexist with other forms of governance without ridding itself of them totally. In his research on budgets and infrastructures in post-Soviet Russia, Stephen Collier (2011: 11) proposed in its place a "methodological" examination of techniques of governing described as neoliberal. What he remarks about these techniques is their

mobility and flexibility; that is, their potential to be re-deployed in other political or institutional contexts, such as that of Russia following the economic reforms of taking place in the 1990s (Ibid.: 248). During the implementation of these reforms, namely in the process of the privatisation of state enterprises, they were presented as abiding by the "natural law" of the market that was to be be reinstated following decades of socialist experimentation. In this process, the creation of a market economy took precedence over the fostering of democracy, despite the latter being an essential alleged goal of the reforms. As Boris Groys (2009: 124) remarks, "[...] the postcommunist situation is distinguished by the fact that it reveals the artificiality of capitalism, in that it presents the emergence of capitalism as a purely political project of social reorganization, and not as the result of a 'natural' process of economic development."

This is one critical aspect of neoliberal techniques of governance: that they enable different processes to be perceived as taking place outside the realm of politics or ideology, since they are described as solely related to economic rationality. David Harvey (2005: 19) distinguishes two ways of conceiving of neoliberalism: as a utopian project, according to which international capitalism should be reorganised; and as a political project, allowing for a freer, more flexible, accumulation of capital as well as for the restoration or creation of economic elites, as he suggests was the case in post-Soviet Russia. According to Harvey, the utopian project behind neoliberalism most often serves as a justification for the political project, adjusting the theories and principles if need be to serve the needs of an economic elite.

In the present chapter, I will examine the adoption of certain neoliberal principles concerning the functioning of the oil industry, as well as the way oil companies and the Russian state relate to those who live and/or work in the NAO. Rather than using the general term "neoliberalism", I will emphasise the polymorphous character of processes generally qualified as neoliberal as taking place in the context of "flexible capitalism." In his investigation of the "new capitalism" developed in recent decades, Richard Sennett (2006) examines the formation of a new culture and new forms of interactions between humans, as corporations and bureaucracies have begun to emphasise the necessity for them to be more flexible. Despite his use of the term "flexible capitalism", Sennett does not provide a precise definition. Rather, the meaning I wish to give to what I understand

as flexible capitalism is very close what David Harvey (1999: 147) describes as "flexible accumulation":

> Flexible accumulation […] is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation.

Thus, the emergence of new forms of organisation of the workforce will be a central aspect tackled in this chapter. It was mentioned earlier that the Soviet state had long striven to industrialise its economy thanks to Western technologies. Both Lenin and Stalin were in fact strong admirers of Henry Ford and his productive successes, namely in relation to the work organisation he had established. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the global economic system had by then been transformed, moving into a Post-Fordist phase marked by an increased circulation of capital as well as of labour. This had led to the emergence of what Dunn calls (2004: 19) "flexible production" according to which the production of different parts of one commodity take place in different regions based on the ratio of costs-benefits inherent to the different phases of production. In the case of extractive industries, flexible production can often be seen in the companies' reliance on a more flexible workforce – fly in / fly out – rather than relying on more permanent workers whose presence and maintenance would require the establishment of infrastructure deemed costly. However, this more recent approach to work organisation has a strong impact on the lives of workers. Dunn (2004: 22) remarks that in post-Fordist production,

> [p]ersons who are "entrepreneurs of themselves" flexibly alter their bundles of skills and manage their careers, but they also become the bearers of risk, thus shifting the burden of risk from the state to the individual.

This aspect is fundamental to understanding the interactions between oil nomads and the permanent residents of the NAO, most of whom are ethnic Russians. It is not only that the oil nomads I encountered at the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base or in Naryan-Mar are often younger, which means that they did not come of age in the Soviet state as many settlers did. I believe that their embrace of this more flexible way of life as well as their higher appreciation for private enterprise lead them to negatively view the settlers who still have access to and value Soviet-inherited northern benefits. In fact, these benefits

may be seen as "exceptions to neoliberalism" (Ong 2006: 4), protecting social safety nets for the settlers, though their provision has also been altered by the principles of neoliberalism, as I will demonstrate below. Hence, it appears as if it is their respective ways of relating to the market and to the state, rather than the "content" of their ethnicity (Barth (1969) 1998) that serves to a large extent as a boundary between the NAO's permanent residents and the oil nomads, as will be seen further along in this dissertation.

Putin's Russia and Russia's Oil

In 1999, around the time he was appointed as the Head of the FSB, Vladimir Putin published an article titled "Mineral Natural Resources in the Strategy for Development of the Russian Economy." This article was based on his doctoral research in Economics at Saint-Petersburg's Mining Institute.[28] In that article, Putin (2006: 50-51) describes what he considers to be the role of mineral and fossil fuel resources for the country:

> Russia's mineral raw materials complex plays an important role in all spheres of the life of the state:
>
> • It provides stable supplies to the raw materials branch of the economy. […]
>
> • It makes a major contribution to the country's budget receipts; its production continues to constitute the main source of foreign currency. […]
>
> • It constitutes the basis for the country's military might. […]
>
> • It provides social stability. […]
>
> • It facilitates development of integration processes among countries.

In 2000, when Putin became President, Russia was in a disastrous economic situation. In 1998, the country had had to default on its debt payment, thus going bankrupt. The following year, Russia owed $ 16.6 billion to the International Monetary Fund alone. Then, between January 1999 and the summer of 2000, the price of oil rose from $ 9 to $35 per barrel (Lynch 2005: 195). This allowed for a renewed interest in the production of oil in Russia. European countries turned towards Russia as a more stable source of fossil fuels than the turbulent Middle East. By 2001, Russian oil and gas

[28] The title of his dissertation is *Strategic Planning of the Regional Production of Mineral Resources in the Conditions of the Formation of Market Interactions (Saint-Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast')* (*Strategicheskoe planirovanie vosproivodstva mineral'no-syrevoj bazy regiona v usloviakh formirovaniya rynochnykh otnoshenii (Sankt-Peterburg i Leningradskaya oblast')*) (1997). There are many discussions concerning V. V. Putin's dissertation. Did he actually complete doctoral studies? Economist Clifford Gaddy suggests that Putin's dissertation was in large part plagiarised from the works of other authors, and was most likely written for him, not by him (Corwin 2006).

accounted for more than sixteen percent and about twenty percent of European Union consumption respectively (Hill 2004: 27). For Russia the implications were enormous: the oil industry represented seventy percent of the valuation of Russia's stock market; the selling of energy resources, most of which were oil and gas, constituted half of the state's revenues; the value of the oil and gas exports represented more than half of all exports and fifteen percent of Russia's GDP (Lynch 2005: 206-207). Although this dissertation focuses on the significance of the Russian oil industry, it is highly possible, as Fiona Hill (2004: 32) suggests, that it is more its gas reserves which will constitute the real Russian energy potential with the different pipeline networks that connect or will connect Russia with Europe and with China. Thus, Putin strongly benefited from high oil prices at the beginning of his presidency. The increased state revenues not only permitted him to finance the second Chechnyan War, but also allowed for a switch in the balance of power that favoured the central government in relation to the oligarchs.

In the fall of 2003, Mikkhail Khodorkovskii, the founder of Yukos, Russia's largest oil company, was arrested by the forces of order and remains in prison to this day. His public opposition to Putin as well as his alleged intention to run for president, may be significant reasons for his imprisonment. However, Khodorkovskii was also hoping to merge Yukos with one or the other major Western oil companies, one of the goals of which was to increase the share of Russian oil sold in the US from one percent in 2004 to fifteen percent by 2015 (Legault, Laliberté, and Bastien 2004: 30). For Moscow, the merger would have reduced considerably the state's control over decisions and revenues of a resource so crucial, which cannot but be related to Khodorkovskii's imprisonment (Lynch 2005: 14). As a result of Khodorkovskii's arrest, it became clear that the control of the oil industry ultimately belongs to the state, and that oligarchs not yet imprisoned or exiled should dance to Putin's flute.

There were and are international joint-ventures, or production sharing agreements (PSAs) in the Russian oil industry. In the late 1990s, the Sakhalin-1 project was established to exploit oil and gas reserves under the Okhotsk Sea shelf. The project was initiated by ExxonMobil, Mitsubishi, Shell and Sakhalin Energy, the latter a consortium led by Russian state-controlled Gazprom (Wilson 2002: 152). A few years later, a sister project, Sakhalin-2 was also being planned, again through a consortium of Russian and

foreign companies, including Shell. In 2006, Oleg Mitvol, the Deputy Head of the Russian Federal Service for the Oversight of Natural Resources (*Rossprirodnadzor*), found that foreign companies were not respecting the Russian environmental regulations, thus allowing a well-publicised scandal against them. [29] As a result, Shell sold its shares in Sakhalin-2 to Gazprom at a lowered price in order to continue being involved in PSAs elsewhere in the country. Considering the environmental record of Russian extractive industries, which I will point to in the next two chapters, this series of events appears to be a cunning maneuver by the Russian government to revise agreements made in the 1990s, considered unprofitable. These events also served to send a message to foreign companies to the effect that from then on they would have to respect new principles and conditions. These actions allowed Moscow to control which companies have access to the oil fields, most of which are located in the Russian North and Siberia, as if a new "law of the tundra" were being established.

It is worthwhile to pause briefly to say a few words about Lukoil, the company responsible for the most recent oil-boom in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. In 1992, a presidential decree gave Lukoil the status of share-holding company. Very early in its history, the company began to operate as a vertically-integrated corporation, with several affiliated "daughther companies" (*dochernye kompanii*). By 1998, Lukoil was producing twenty percent of all Russian oil and was active in more than thirty Russian regions, as well as in more than fourteen other countries (Peregudov 2001: 122). One of the particularities of Lukoil is the close connection it had, from the beginning, with the state. The company's first President, Vagit Alekperov, was the Minister of Petroleum prior to his arrival at Lukoil (Pirani 2010: 19). Like him, those who composed the company's board of directors in the late 1990s were part of the Soviet oil industry managerial elite. The shared Soviet origins of Lukoil's high management and of many high-level state officials allowed for a common understanding of the industry's role in the country and of the way it should be operating (Novikova 2006). Analysing the case of large Russian companies with a focus on Lukoil, Sergei Peregudov (2001: 133) writes that these

[29] On a few occasions, I met Russian oil workers in the NAO who had visited the site damaged by Shell on Sakhalin. They all shared the opinion that this scandal was political maneuver as the environmental damage was limited when compared with the type of environmental damage they had seen elsewhere, at other oil extraction sites in Russia.

companies "[…] are becoming less statist in their general approach and are doing their best to free themselves from state shareholdings. But, at the same time, they are becoming more and more politicized." In the following chapters this politicisation will be examined, most especially as I show how Lukoil and its daughter company, Naryanmarneftegaz, appear to be replacing the state in a number of its functions, often resulting in the establishment of paternalistic relations between the company and its workers, and the okrug's residents. First I will discuss the impact of the reliance on oil on exporting countries, namely by engaging with the concept of "the resource curse."

The Resource Curse and the Russian Oil Industry

Terry Linn Karl (1997) examined and compared the political and economic situations of different oil exporting countries (Venezuela, Iran, Nigeria, Algeria, Indonesia and Norway). She came to the conclusion that oil booms tend to have a destabilising effect on the economies of exporting countries. As she remarks, despite their respective ideological, cultural and geographical characteristics, oil exporting states tend to develop similar institutional arrangements and suffer from similar problems. Among them are problems in the establishment or maintenance of a democratic rule and uneven redistribution of the oil revenues across society. The one counter-example she uses is that of Norway where a democratic culture and highly developed bureaucratic institutions pre-existed the discovery of large oil deposits (Karl 1997: 213-221). One criticism of the "resource curse literature" is offered by Michael Ross (1999). After having analysed and tested different claims made by authors supporting the idea of the resource curse, Ross suggests that there is no strong evidence showing that countries with economies largely based on the export of natural resource will nearly inevitably suffer from the resource curse.[30] Yet, he remarks that many such countries do struggle with a lack of democracy and problems of corruption.

[30] Ross analysed and tested the economic explanations for the resource curse, which argue for example that depending on natural resources does not allow for a country to stimulate economic growth, namely due to the "Dutch Disease"(Ross 1999: 301-307). The political explanations he analysed are, as he describes them, of three different types: The "cognitive explanations" of the resource curse focus on the short-sightedness of those in power as they generate easy wealth from the natural resources (Ibid: 309-210). Ross (1999: 310-312) describes as "societal explanations" those political analyses establishing a link between the resource curse and the negative influence nonstate actors may have on economic growth due to the economic benefits diverted to their sector, thus not requiring from them to aim for growth. A third set of explanations for the resource curse are the "state-centered explanations", generally mixing one or the other of the

The arrest of Khodorkovskii, the seizure of Yukos, and various infringements of the country's democratic principles such as electoral fraud reported during the 2011 legislative and the 2012 presidential elections could be seen as evidence that the wealth generated by Russia's oil exports may be more a curse than a blessing to society, mainly benefiting a certain Russian political and economic elite. William Tompson (2006) suggest that it would be a mistake to analyse the impact of Russia's dependency on its oil revenues in light of the resource curse theory. As he remarks, Russia's taxation legislation was not strongly focused on the oil industry and its revenues while the country was experiencing marked economic improvement (Tompson 2006: 194-195).

In *Oil is Not a Curse*, Pauline J. Luong and Erika Weinthal (2010: 6) suggest that in order to see if an oil-producing country may be affected by the resource curse, a correct analysis should focus on the structure of ownership established to manage the wealth produced. According to them, each ownership structure provides for a different set of actors who may claim access to the revenues generated by the production of oil. From the 1990s until 2005, the ownership structure in Russia enabled private domestic company owners to be direct claimants to the revenues provided by the oil industry. The governing elites were indirect claimants, benefiting from the revenues through taxation, and would seek to reintroduce fiscal stability in the country, which was achieved in the early 2000s. Russian citizens were also indirect claimants, who benefited from a more stable economy. However, Luong and Weinthal (2010: 124), and Tompson (2006: 196) negatively view the Russian state's desire to re-introduce state control or ownership of the oil companies, especially following the arrest of Khodorkovskii and the nationalisation of Yukos. Luong and Weinthal (Ibid.) also criticise this change of ownership structure according to which the direct claimants are the governing elites and the enterprise bureaucrats; the indirect claimants, still Russian citizens. Most especially, what they criticise is that the state has moved away from the goal of bringing fiscal stability in the country by increasing the spending of oil revenues and redirecting them towards other economic sectors.

In the men's washroom at the AMNGR site on Kolguev, two articles cut from newspapers were posted on the wall. The first was titled "The Abrupt Turns of

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explanations mentioned above together in order to explain why in a resource-based economy, the state is unable to stimulate economic growth (Ibid.: 312)

Privatisation: The Oil and Gas of the Arctic are Going to Private Hands" and the other "Rossimushschestvo[31] Protects the Shelf from « Sintez » Corporation." Most workers on this site had been working together since the mid 1980s, when the extraction of Peschanka lake oil fields began. Many workers told me that nothing had changed at their site since the late Soviet days. However, the country around them had changed very much and so had the role and structure of the industry they have been a part of for decades. In my interviews and informal discussions with AMNGR workers, it was very clear that they were experiencing the privatisation of the oil industry as a personal and collective loss.

This conception was deeply unlike what I heard at the Yuzkhnoe-Khylchuyu oil field, operated by Naryanmarneftegaz, by then still a joint-venture by Lukoil and ConocoPhillips[32]. Many there were working for subcontractors based in different regions of Russia or other CIS countries. Although it was clear for them that the oil industry was playing a central role in the Russian economy, I did not hear the opinion that the oil industry should be owned by the state, nor nostalgia for the state-owned enterprises. Nonetheless, ownership by a domestic company did seem to matter to the workers I met. At a dinner with oil workers, they were discussing a rumour concerning ConocoPhillips' plan to sell its shares in Lukoil. Their analysis, framed derogatorily, was that the American company "just took the money and left". Under further discussion, it appeared as if they were criticising ConocoPhillips' lack of loyalty to the Russian company. They had embarked on this challenging project together, but they were now leaving their Russian partners alone, I was told.

Although the Naryanmarneftegaz workers did not generally insist on the importance for a company to belong to the state, as the AMNGR believed, their opinion concerning the role of this strategic industry often translated into a patriotic perception of their occupation. The workers at the Naryanmarneftegaz site were, on average, younger (25 to 40s) than those at the AMNGR site (40 to mid-50s). I met one middle-aged worker

[31] The Federal Agency for State Property Management.
[32] In 2004, ConocoPhillips purchased the remaining 7.6 percent of Lukoil shares owned by the Russian state for $ 2 billion (Pirani 2010: 74). In 2010, ConocoPhillips departed itself from its shares in Lukoil, and halted its participation in Naryanmarneftegaz.

at the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu, coming from the Krasnodar District in southern Russia. He explained how he viewed the role played by oil workers:

> Those working in harsh conditions such as the Northern regions really feel like they are serving the country because of all that oil gives us [Russian society]. In the Tyumen Oblast in 2004, a block of floating ice was threatening to break a pipeline. I had to stand all night in the river, wearing a special combination and attached to the shore in case I had to shut the valve so that there would be no leak.

Among the young workers, it was more rare to hear them describe their function in Russian society as if they were serving the motherland. "We all come here because of the salary", said Vladimir, an engineer from Perm in his early thirties. "Contrary to how it is in the city [Perm], the salaries are stable here." Only one of the younger workers I met at this site suggested he was primarily doing this to serve the country. He was in fact one of those few workers I met who had become an engineer because he responded to an advertisement indicating that Lukoil was ready to pay for the education of certain students in a discipline related to the oil industry, and who could be hired once they graduated.

Although they viewed the place of the industry as well as their own place in society as one of great importance for the country, the workers at both extraction sites often criticised the country's current overdependence on the oil revenues. It is commonly said in Russia that the country is addicted to oil (*Rossiya sidet na nefyannoi igle*). This implies that the country depends too much on its oil and gas revenues, which makes it vulnerable to events such as a rapid decrease of oil prices. For Clifford Gaddy and Barry Ickes (2010: 293) this addiction

> […] refers to a condition in which there is an imperative to allocate rents to maintain and expand specific production sectors of the economy, notably those that the Russian economy inherited from its Soviet predecessor.

They suggest that this addiction to rent, traditionally used in the Soviet days for "production for production's sake" regardless of the costs and efficiency, explains Russia's economic lag behind Western countries (Ibid.). The problem of addiction is also closely related to the problem, widely discussed in relation to the Russian oil industry and the revenues its produces, of the diversification of the economy. On many occasions, I heard oil workers suggesting that "oil money" should be used to develop other sectors of the country's economy. However, some analysts recommended that the Russian

authorities avoid diverting the wealth produced by the oil industry into other sectors of the economy, as was done by the Soviet state. As Fiona Hill (2004: 58) remarks,

> [t]he Russian economy still needs to be restructured and buffered against oil price shocks, and Russia has to avoid the trap of diverting itself away from investment in the development of its energy sector to pursue the chimera of a 'more balanced' economy and by launching costly infrastructure and new industrial projects.

Luong and Weinthal (2010:162) inform us that the Russian governing elites at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade believed that they should avoid diverting the revenues to other sectors, having the Soviet experience in mind. The preferred option is instead to stimulate economic growth by encouraging the development of the private sector and through tax reforms such as lowering taxes on a sector to be developed rather than injecting money into that sector. Economists Gaddy and Ickes (2010: 292) also see negatively any attempt by the state to develop the economy by diverting oil money. They attribute the pressure to do so, first, to the lack of prestige afforded by being a resource-based economy. This attitude was shared by Dmitrii Medvedev when he was President. Gaddy and Ickes (2010: 292) also attribute such pressure to those who perceive that there are particular sectors of the economy which should be benefitting from investment of oil revenues. Instead, the Russian government improved the country's economic situation, namely, by creating a rainy day fund called the Stabilisation Fund (*Fond Stabilizatsii*) in 2004. This fund was initially established to reimburse the country's external debt while at the same time preparing itself against a drop in oil prices (Tabata 2006: 46).

However, the relationships between the oil industry and political power lead many Russian citizens today to suspect individuals or groups belonging to either of these influential realms of being corrupt. Gaddy and Ickes (2010: 302) describe the current management of oil revenues and the state's interactions with the oil industry as "Putin's Protection Racket." They remark that when it was created, "[…] this system was not primarily a system of extortion. Rather, it was a mechanism for ending the conflict among the oligarchs while restoring the capacity of the center to collect rents" (Ibid.). However, during the global financial crisis, arrangements between Moscow and the oligarchs demonstrated that "[…] Putin is a hostage of this system as much as the oligarchs are. They are sitting on the same powder keg" (Ibid.).

In that period the price of oil plummeted, which implied that state revenues from fossil fuels were diminished. At the same time the oligarchs' enterprises and the jobs of many Russians were under threat. Hence, Moscow spent $100 billion of its foreign currency reserves to give the oligarchs time to adjust to the crisis, and to avoid a drastic fall of the rouble (Ibid.: 301). Prior to the crisis, I heard current oil workers and Russian settlers talking with pride about how the Stabilisation Fund would allow Russia's economy to avoid the instability experienced after the 1998 default. The crisis, however, brought up cynicism and anger in the Russian population and led to much speculation regarding the state's actions. Many started questioning the management of the Stabilisation Fund and speculated about the possible losses of that fund, either to the oligarchs or to Western banks. [33]

Another episode symbolising unjust effects of the connection between central power and the oil industry involved Lukoil more directly. On February 25 2010, a Mercedes transporting Lukoil's Vice-President Anatoly Barkov collided head-on with a car, killing the latter car's two passengers on one busy Moscow road, where multiple cameras were or should have been filming traffic. It was declared that it was the fault of the deceased women, who were driving in the wrong lane. Several witnesses contradicted that story, but Barkov and his driver were nonetheless acquitted. An important detail in that story was that none of the video cameras were apparently working at the time of the accident. This sparked anger among many Russians. A rap song titled "Restore Justice" was produced that denounced the situation, and citizens organised a new kind of collective action consisting of driving in big groups of cars through Moscow with blue lights on their cars, lights normally attributed to VIPs. This was an early opposition demonstration as Putin's scheme to re-access presidency was becoming more clear. Manoeuvres to increase Moscow's control over oil rents did not only concern the oligarchs or foreign companies, but also the redistribution of these riches between the peripheral, resource-rich subjects of the federation and the Russian central state.

[33] For example, Russian conservative writer Nikolai Starikov (2010) published *Chercher la oil: Why is the Stabilisation Fund there* (Transl.). In it, Starikov argues that Western banks and states not only exported "democracy" in order to gain access to the riches of the Soviet state, but also developed a similar stratagem in order to have access to the wealth placed in the Stabilisation Fund.

Lukoil: Now with a license to kill (Transl., Ekho Moskvy 2010)

Transforming the Periphery

Soon after being first elected President, in May 2000, Putin established seven federal districts (each of which is also called *okrug*) which included the eighty-nine subjects of the Russian Federation in an effort to recentralise the country politically, administratively, and economically after over a decade of centrifugal tendencies within the federation. Each of these federal okrugs is supervised by a state representative appointed by Moscow. Unlike state institutions established during the Soviet days, such as the State Committee of the North (*Goskomsever*) which was abolished in that year, the seven okrugs were designed to integrate territorial-administrative units in a North-South way, and not in a pan-Arctic way (Blakkisrud and Hønneland 2006a: 14). Hence, the Nenets Autonomous Okrug became a part of the Northwestern Federal district, whose administrative centre is St. Petersburg.

Moscow's centralising effort also manifested itself in the reduction of subjects of the federation, from eighty-nine to eighty-three in 2008. This was typically done by merging smaller subjects, such as autonomous okrugs, with larger subjects, such as oblasts, as was the case for the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, which was merged with the Arkhangelsk Oblast in 2008. The okrug's change of status cannot be detached from the fact that the attitude and actions of the okrug's Governor, Vladimir Butov (in the position between 1996 and 2005) were in fact a source of worry for Moscow. Butov was in favour

of more autonomy for the oil-rich NAO and was also perceived as using the licensing power of oil deposits for his personal advantage (Kryukov and Moe 2006: 138). In the 2001 okrug-level election campaign, two main positions confronted each other. The first, promoted by Butov's administration, was that the arrival of Lukoil and other big companies would open the door for oil oligarchs and their order in the okrug. Instead, Butov promoted a development approach that focused on smaller companies which would pay more attention to the needs and interests of the okrug's inhabitants and, hopefully, pay more taxes to the okrug (Peskov 2002: 21-22). The second position advocated an increased role for large-scale oil companies like Lukoil in the okrug, as the company had begun to gain access to oil fields. The strongest proponent of this vision was Aleksander Shmakov, General Director of Northern Lights, co-owned at the time by Rossneft and ConocoPhillips. The tenets of that position suggested that the arrival of such important companies would bring new infrastructure and increase job opportunities for local inhabitants.

After being re-elected with nearly seventy percent of the NAO's electors, Butov was judged uncontrollable by Moscow. Both his popularity and his autonomist views served as an impetus and justification to merge the oil-rich yet sparsely populated okrug with the rather poor yet populated Arkhangelsk Oblast. Considering the okrug's history as part of the Arkhangelsk Gubernia and later on Oblast, the decision was widely criticised by the okrug's inhabitants, be they Nenets or Russian newcomers. "During the 1990s, when there was no job, no money for us, they did not do anything for us. Now that we have become a donating (*donor*) okrug, they [the Arkhangelsk Oblast] want to take our riches" said a Russian settler in his thirties to me. "Butov wanted to do a lot for Kolguev. A lot. But then, they arrested him" said a friend from Bugrino.

The opposition to the merger cost the post of governor, not only to Butov, but also to his successor Aleksei Barinov, NAO's Governor between 2005 and 2006. Both of them were fired by Moscow after strange criminal allegations involving the beating of a law enforcement officer for Butov and tax fraud and "loss of trust" by the central power for Barinov. It soon turned out that there was no compelling evidence against Barinov. This situation confirms Alena Ledeneva's (2006: 186) observation that tax collecting agencies tend to be involved in state-organised stratagems to get rid of disturbing political or

economic figures. In sum, the autonomist desires of two governors and Moscow's reactions to their ambitions have led to political and administrative instability in the okrug. Since 2005, the NAO has been headed by three governors, including former KGB (and FSB) agent Valeri N. Potapenko (2008-2009) and Igor G. Fedorov (2009- present) who, prior to his appointment, was head of a branch of the Arkhangelsk-based electricity company Arkhenergo.

Until summer 2010, when I was in the field, the merger with the Arkhangelsk had not yet resulted in a clearly defined redistribution of powers in all administrative realms. The merger relates strongly to questions of redistribution, the rules of which have been changing under Putin. This was especially true for oil-rich regions, where the "two-key principle" allowed them to secure revenues and have control over the development of natural resources deemed strategic for the country as a whole. The Minister of Natural Resources said that the principle represented "[…] a right for regional officials to set up one more barrier [for business]" (cited in Kryukov and Moe 2006: 138). The oil and gas-producing regions, such as the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YaNAO), the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous OKrug (KhMAO) and the Nenets Autonomous Okrug were allowed to keep sixty percent of the tax revenues from the "use of mineral resources" until 2002. In that year, a new federal tax on the "extraction of sub-surface resources" was established to replace the previous one, according to which these regions would receive only twenty percent of these revenues, the rest going to the Federal government in Moscow to be redistributed nationally (Stammler and Wilson 2006: 16). In 2005 this share was reduced to five percent. The following year, when the Federal government decided to merge the NAO with the Arkhangelsk Oblast, the revenues from tax on oil production had to be distributed in the following way: 2.5 percent to the NAO, 2.5 percent to the Arkhangelsk Oblast, and 95 percent to Moscow (Stammler and Peskov 2008).

Today, the okrug receives its oil-related money primarily from the licensing of land to oil companies, and from investments made by these companies make in the NAO. In 2010, for example, of the 17 821 million roubles invested in the okrug, 11,9 percent were invested by the public sector, with only 0,1 percent coming from the federal government (Rosstat 2012). These numbers point to the important economic role of private companies

in the okrug, most especially of the oil companies. However, in that same year, the okrug gave 38 134 million roubles in mandatory payments to the federal budget (Rosstat 2011a).

I have shown different institutional and legal mechanisms used by the Russian federal state to expand and maintain its control over the production of oil as well as the revenues the oil industry provides. Considering its addiction to oil as well as its strong centralising tendencies, one can describe the Russian state as a petro-state. Stephen Reyna and Andrea Behrends (2011: 5) define as petro-states those states which "[…] are capital-intensive oil exporters with high ratios of oil to total exports; petroleum industry enclaves; and enormous rents or royalties (from oil sales), which accrue directly to the central government". I will now describe the role played by one institution which played a key role in the process of centralisation of political and economic powers in Moscow: Putin's political party, United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*).

Uniting Russia: Putin's Party in the NAO

In summer 2000 I visited the office of United Russia in the brand new Palace of Culture situated in the "new" centre of Naryan-Mar to meet with the representatives of the Party. The location did not please everyone, at least not Nikita, one of the rare Nenets who has been employed by an oil company as a welder. "This does not make any sense. Why do they have to have their office there? Did you see in Bugrino, they are also hanging the United Russia flag on top of the village's administration building?" I too had been surprised to see that flag above the island's administrative building, where a Russian flag normally flew. However, I was even more surprised when I heard from Maxim, one of my hosts in Bugrino, that United Russia planned to build houses on Kolguev for the herders' families and for those whose houses were threatened by erosion because they were located close to the shore. It was hard for me to believe that a political party would get involved so directly in such construction projects. However, I was also aware of the fact that the Head of the village administration at the time, a Russian business man from Arkhangelsk who is both a member of United Russia and the owner of the island's only store, enjoyed telling how much he and the party were doing for the Kolguev inhabitants. Upon discussion with a spokesperson for United Russia in Naryan-Mar, I realised that

those houses would in fact be built as part of an okrug state programme, as will be seen in chapter 6.

While staying in Naryan-Mar, I often visited the state offices of governmental agencies concerned with agriculture and reindeer herding, with the numerically-small indigenous peoples of the North, or with the oil industry. I soon became acquainted with many state officials and elected representatives of the government at the oblast, okrug, and village levels who were also members of United Russia. When visiting the party's office, I once saw a list of all the names of the Heads of administration of villages, next to which the name of their party was listed. When I asked the party's spokesperson how many were members of United Russia, he said that all but two were. He then "reassured" me by saying: "They too will soon be members of United Russia."

Upon being elected for the first time, in January 2000, President Putin presented a statement titled "Russia on the Threshold of the Millennium". In that statement he presented his strategic plan to bring back stability to the country after more than a decade of economic, political and social turbulence. One of the important themes of this statement was the need for more unity and cohesion in the society, which could be facilitated by an organ of power, such as a political party (Gaddy and Kuchins 2008: 121).

Putin's first Presidential victory was a well-orchestrated operation involving control of the media by Russian oligarch and media owner Boris Berezovskii, exiled in the United Kingdom. Putin was elected by over fifty percent of the electorate as an independent candidate, thus without the support of a political party apparatus present and strong at all levels of the territorial-administrative entities composing the Russian Federation. In December 2001, United Russia was created through a merger between two political parties: Unity and Fatherland-All Russia. The publicly expressed goal of the new party was to bring stability back to the country after the turmoil of the 1990s. However, in the early 2000s, peripheral and rural regions in many parts of Russia were still strongholds of the Communist Party which, in later elections, could threaten the chances for Putin and United Russia to remain in power. United Russia soon began to spread its influence across the country. Andrew Konitzer and Stephen Wegren (2006: 515) suggest that the growth in popularity of the party can be attributed to the improvement of the

country's economy as well as to the influence of an increasing number of regional governors who became members of the Party or at least supported the party. In 2004, Putin decided to abolish elections for governors, making this position appointed (and often removed) by the President. This was one important moment that allowed the political party to extend its influence to more levels of the state administrative apparatus.

The new situation generated important changes to the political system, such as a new form of contract between the peripheral regions and the centre based on reciprocal obligations. Throughout the country, the main regional political figures were generally able to retain their positions, which allowed them to use the new structure as well as their allegiance to United Russia as a way to spread the Party's influence and their own to the lower levels. As Konitzer and Wegren (2006: 509) remark about the governors,

> [i]f they aligned with United Russia, they regained the full use of their administrative resources, enjoyed the support of their region's United Russia party structures, and could rely on additional backing through federal structures and media outlets. However, those who refused to align with the federal center and the party of power faced the full enforcement of a new array of legal restrictions on the use of state property, personnel, and other benefits of their office.

This form of contract was described by Vladimir Gelman (2010: 19) as "electoral authoritarianism". In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the previous governors had in fact been opposed to the merger with the Arkhangelsk Oblast, which is still not supported by a large share of the okrug's population. Yet, in a resource-rich region like the NAO, where most governors have been involved either in the Soviet KGB (or its successor, the FSB) or in the energy industry, the regional and local elites constitute lobbying groups which, if they remain loyal to the centre, may benefit from its largesse and protection. The form of political system in place creates the following situation, described by Gelman (2010: 19):

> The economic base of these regimes was built on a system of politically conditioned exchanges of resources between the center and regional and local bodies of power, which flowed as in the well-known model of the "political business cycle," except that payoffs were made not to citizens but to local elites.

Many inhabitants of the NAO share this opinion about the regional political elite. For example, reflecting on Butov, an informant in her mid-fifties said, "They are all stealing from us, but at least Butov was giving something back to the people here."

Helge Blakkisrud and Geir Hønneland (2006b: 201) remark in the way Moscow deals with the Russian North "[…] the change from an ideologically driven policy toward

a more economically based approach to the development of the Russian North". The leaders of United Russia and, probably, many of their members and supporters wish for stability in the country which often requires, according to them, continuity of policy and that those responsible for those policies remain in power. While Russia was preparing for the 2008 presidential elections, when Putin had to end his presidency according to rules of the constitution, Vladimir Churov, the Chairman of the Central Election Commission, described the country as a "corporate state" in an televised interview in August 2007: "We have a state corporation and we are electing the top management of our state corporation" (quoted in Gaddy and Kuchins 2008). This makes me wonder why the federal state's change of approaches in relation to the country's northern territories and inhabitants are described by Blakkisrud and Hønneland as a move away from ideology and not as an ideological change?

The Siberian Curse and the Neoliberal Remedy

During the 1990s, many of the extractive industries established in the North drastically reduced their operations while the federal and regional state institutions were no longer able to provide services and benefits to a population living in rigorous Arctic conditions. The NAO, like the Russian North in general, lost a significant number of its inhabitants following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In fact, it is 17.3 percent of Russian residents who left the country's northern territories, and more specifically, 27.6 percent of the NAO's residents who left the okrug between 1989 and 2006 (Heleniak 2009b: 132). Yet, compared to other Arctic countries, the Russian North is still densely inhabited, with some 10.6 million people, most of whom settled during the Soviet days (Barents Observer article cited in Spies 2009a: 260).

As post-Soviet reforms were carried out in the 1990s, the Russian authorities along with international agencies such as the World Bank as well as a number of academics began to promote a re-adjustment of the population of the North. It was – and still is – said that the population was a drain on the Russian economy in its transition to a market economy since it required too much state financing in terms of benefits and costs of infrastructure. This situation was described by Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy (2003) as "the Siberian curse." In the early 2000s they wrote that

> Russia still has a nonmarket distribution of labor and capital across its territory. People and factories languish in places communist planners put them – not where market forces would have attracted them. Russia cannot build a competitive market economy and a normal democratic society on this basis (Hill and Gaddy 2003: 2).

In their view, Russia had to "shrink" its economic geography by concentrating its population in the more temperate and productive zones and rely on a more mobile workforce in other to extract the natural riches of the country's remote regions instead of maintaining and perpetuating a settler population (Ibid.: 5 and 213). This did not, however, correspond to the creation of a "normal democratic society" and from the perspective of settlers, it is difficult to imagine how it could be, given that little decisional power is left to the residents of the NAO, who have to accept Moscow's political decisions.

In the late 1990s the State Committee of the North estimated that about ten percent of the population wanted to move South. Hence, state and World Bank programmes were developed to promote and support their resettlement. However, only ten percent of those who did migrate were assisted by federal programmes (Blakkisrud 2006: 42). In 2002, a law "On housing subsidies for citizens leaving the regions of the Far North and places equivalent to the Far North" was adopted. However, the number of applicants was too high for the state resources to support it (Ibid.: 41).

The notion of comparative advantage, which supports the idea that only those towns which are economically competitive may survive needs to be problematised in light of the settlers' perspectives since their very strong sense of attachment to their region contradicts the implications of the Siberian curse discourse. For example, at the turn of the millennium, Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich took it upon himself to invest in Chukotka, one of regions of the North which was the most affected by the collapse of state support in the 1990s. After being elected as the okrug's Governor, Abramovich invested more than $200 million[34] of his own resources to finance a resettlement of Russian settlers, while also investing in the modernisation of infrastructures supporting the Chukchi and Eskimo farms, as well as those in the capital, Anadyr' (Thompson 2004: 75). The result was that many of the settlers who had spent

[34] It is interesting to note that while Abramovich served as Governor of Chukotka, the yearly amount of money he invested in the okrug equalled the money he invested in the Chelsea soccer team, which he acquired in 2003 (Thompson 2004: 80).

most of their active lives in Chukotka, who often had children and grand-children there, became more reticent to settle in the South as they had a strong sense of belonging to Chukotka. One of the ironies of this situation was that investments made in the okrug led several settlers to either decide not to leave Chukotka, or even to come back (Thompson 2008). In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, I witnessed a similar process. Because of the new developments associated with the oil boom of the 2000s, the NAO administration has been able to provide the northern benefits to its registered residents. As I will show in chapter 6, the fact that the okrug can subsidise in part the purchase of apartments is leading some settlers or children of settlers who have left the okrug to come back to the NAO.

The question of northern benefits (*Severnye l'goty*) is at the heart of the interactions between the Russian state and its northern citizens and their attachment to the region. It was a characteristic of the Soviet welfare system to attribute different privileges to their citizens on the basis of their service to the state, on merit (as in the case of the war veterans) or in order to attract workers to remote areas. These benefits were of different kinds: earlier retirement for workers in the North (age fifty-five for men and fifty for women, in both cases five years earlier than for other citizens); free access to bus transportation; priority in terms of apartment allocation. In 2003 there were 236 categories of Russian citizens who were eligible for a variety of more than 1000 different forms of social services and payments from the Federal state. These privileges were a crucial source of support for Russian citizens during the social and economic turmoil of the 1990s when they were delivered. Furthermore, because they were based on what the Soviet state had designed as merit, the *l'goty* were also a source of pride and symbolic capital to those who benefited from them (Wengle and Rasell 2008: 741-742). But there was an important problem with the various benefits, generally provided in accordance with federal laws: lack of funds.

In 2004, Putin's government passed Law 122 (implemented in 2005)[35] which aimed at regulating and redistributing the responsibilities of the federal and regional

[35] Federal'nyi Zakon ot 22 August 2004 N 122-FZ 'O vnesenii izmenenii v zakonodatel'nye akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii priznanii utrativshimi silu nekotorikh zakonodatel'nykh aktov Rossiiskoi Federatsii v svyazi s prinyatiem Federal'nykh Zakonov 'O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v Federal'nyi Zakon ''Ob obshchikh printsipakh organizatsii zakonodatelnykh (predstavitelnykh) i ispolnitel'nykh organov

administrative levels. The consequence was that the regional administrations became responsible for supporting two-thirds of those eligible for benefits of various kinds (Ibid.: 744). The implementation of this law was one of the first moments where a great number of Russian citizens began to criticise Putin's administration as this new law was judged by many as "anti-people". However, Law 122 did not change the categories of people eligible to the *l'goty*. The significant change it brought was that instead of receiving the benefits "in-kind", the state began to provide those benefits by cash payments, engendering the name "Law on monetisation".

For residents in the North, Law 122 brought one important modification. Northern benefits – such as salary enhancement to compensate for the cold conditions of the Arctic – became the responsibility of employers and of the regional authorities (Ibid.: 752). Hence, because the *l'goty* became in large part administered by the regional administrations, richer regions, such as the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, could offer comparatively more benefits to their residents. For example, all of those who are registered (who have *propiska*) in the okrug have priority access to apartments, as will be seen in chapter 6, and are reimbursed for the transport costs of a trip within the country every second year. From what I could notice, Russian settlers often use this opportunity to visit relatives in the region they had left, and to give their grand-children access to more vitamins and sun. For some Nenets villagers I met this provided an opportunity to go with their entire families to vacation areas of the Black Sea, such as Anapa. I did not hear, however, of a single reindeer herder – either from Kharp or from Kolguev – who enjoyed this opportunity.

The recent changes to the l'goty system are taking place differently in each region. Nonetheless, there seems to be an important change in terms of the way welfare is managed in Russia. As Wengle and Rasell (2008: 753) remark,

> [t]he reforms introduced logics of cost effectiveness, accountability and transparency. A process is underway that shifts the burden for welfare provision from state budgets onto individuals, for l'gotniki must now economise with limited cash allowances. These are key characteristics of a liberal welfare system and a clear departure from the Soviet-era rationale of l'goty.

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gosudarstvennoi vlasti sub'ektov Rossiiskoi Federatsii" i "Ob obshchikh prinzipakh organizatsii mestnogo samoupravleniya v Rossiiskoi Federatsii"'.

The changes can be seen in light of Stephen Collier's (2011) observation regarding neoliberalism, that the neoliberal technical mechanisms may in fact be used in various political and social contexts. In this case, Soviet-inherited benefits are provided to particular categories of the population, yet in a manner which seeks to increase individual responsibility. However, access to northern benefits also has consequences for the way labour is increasingly organised and for the relations the oil companies and their workers establish with the okrug's permanent residents.

The New Flexible Workforce

The pressure to switch from a model of labour organisation relying on settlers in the North to one favouring shift-work has been a topic of debate for several years in Russia. Discussions took place at the State Council meeting in 2004 during which Aleksei Miller, CEO of Gazprom, the Tyumen federal district's Governor Sergei Sobyanin, and federal state officials made public their support for a switch to a work organisation focusing on shift-labour. In opposition were the governors of the Yamal-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs and of the Sakha Republic who "[…] called for the impossibility of phasing out training and the preservation of their vital activities"(Aleshkevich 2010: 112). At a conference on matters of demographic development in February 2008, Dmitrii Medvedev, one month prior to the presidential election, said the following regarding an increased reliance on shift-work to develop the Russian North and Siberia: "Some senior leaders are talking about developing Siberia using the rotation method. This is complete nonsense. There are officials who speak from their pulpits without thinking about the situation or the consequences their words can have" (quoted in Aleshkevich 2010: 113).

The existence of such debates concerning the North's future illustrates how both the companies and the state are important stakeholders when it comes to defining the way the labour force is going to be organised in such crucial economic sectors as extractive industries. It is much easier to see why companies might favour shift-work, most especially in the context of Russia, as they would rather reduce the costs of the labour force, by, for example, avoiding paying Northern residents Soviet-inherited social benefits. For the state too, the costs of building or maintaining infrastructure for permanent residents is also quite significant, although it is not as clear that state

representatives at the regional or municipal level would favour shift-work (Spies 2009 b: 30). The third main stakeholder is the worker. The status of those working in shifts is defined in the following way in Chapter 47, Article 297 of the Labour Code of the Russian Federation:

> -Work in shifts is a special way of executing work that functions out of the place of residence of the employees when they cannot return to their place of residence on a daily basis.
>
> -Work in shifts is applied when the place of work is far away from the office of employer with the purpose to reduce period of construction, repair, reconstruction of industrial, social, and other objects in thinly populated, far regions or regions with unfavorable environments.
>
> -When at the place of work shift workers live in camps especially constructed for them by the employer that represents a set of buildings and constructions assigned to ensure conditions for living of the mentioned workers during their work and breaks between shifts.

There are seven articles of Chapter 47 (Articles 303 to 309) which define the maximum duration of shifts, aspects of salaries and vacations for shift-workers, the quality of life during shifts, the responsibilities of companies vis-à-vis employees, as well as the number of foreign workers which may be hired. However, it is stipulated nowhere in this law that companies should give preference to hiring local residents.

Shift-work was already used by the oil and gas industry in the Soviet days. It was estimated that in the early 1980s about one third of workers involved in Western Siberia's oil and gas sectors were *vakhtoviki* ("shift-workers") (Hill and Gaddy 2003: 205). There are however two main approaches to the organisation of the labour force according to the *vakhtovyi metod* ("shift-work method"). As mentioned earlier, "near-shifts" (*blizhnye vakhty*) predominated in the Nenets okrug in the Soviet era. Workers' wives and children would be based in Naryan-Mar, where the *neftianiki* would also live between *vakhty*. Hence, the oil workers generally operated according to a shift-work schedule where the time and distance between the work and living space were limited. The case of AMNGR, on Kolguev, is unusual in that the company still relies on the *vakhtovyi metod* elaborated during the Soviet days. Most of its workers are settlers to the North, as the majority of them settled in Murmansk from different oil-producing regions of the Soviet Union, such as Azerbaidjan, the Volga Region, and Chechnya. Two alternating rosters composed of some two hundred workers each arrive and leave the extraction site at the same time.

The introduction to the market economy as well as the arrival of new oil companies changed the labour organisation significantly in the okrug, to make it resemble more what Kvashnina and Krivoshekov (1998: 7) refer to as shifts of "expedition type" (*ekspeditsionnyi*). According to this labour organisation, workers often come from distant regions of the country, from different climatic zones and may travel over distances of two to three thousand kilometers or even more. This describes well the way that most of the Naryanmarneftegaz workers operate. To my knowledge, the workers I met there could be divided into two main categories. There are, first, the technicians, engineers and administrative staff, both at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu and at the Naryan-Mar Head office. These workers most often come from regions of central Russia where Lukoil has been operating, such as Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and the Perm' region, as well as from Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. At Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu there were also engineers hired from other former Soviet republics, such as Kazakhstan, who have expertise in the production of oil, or who have more general professional backgrounds (such as electrical engineers) and come to Russia where they can enjoy higher and more stable salaries. This was the case for a number of workers coming from the Ukraine and Belarus. A second category is that of supporting workers, that is, workers with lower levels of education and expertise, such as cafeteria workers, cleaning personal or welders. These workers tend to come from the neighbouring regions, like the Komi Republic or the Arkhangelsk Oblast, and some from the NAO. Hence, it appears as if the farther one comes from relative to the Nenets Okrug, the higher one may be in the hierarchy of the work organisation.

At both the AMNGR and the Naryanmarneftegaz extraction sites, very few workers come from the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, be they Russian settlers or Nenets. On Kolguev, there is one Nenets villager who works at the Peschanka oil site, as a welder. There used to be two villagers, but one of them had to resign. The issue was that the company did not allow for both of them to be on the same shift, allegedly because the company feared that they might get drunk together and cause trouble at the base as per the widespread prejudice concerning the Nenets. The young Bugrino villager who stopped working at AMNGR explained to me how difficult and dangerous it was to travel alone in the tundra more than 40 kilometers, either by snowmobile in the winter, or on a small boat in the other seasons. For the one who remained in position at AMNGR, the

situation is more simple since he has relatives among the herders who can drive him to and back from the oil extraction site on snowmobile or reindeer sled. To my knowledge, neither are there Russians "by nationality" from the NAO who are employed by AMNGR. If there were, they would have to take a flight from Naryan-Mar to Murmansk and fly, or sail, to the island with all the other workers. At Naryanmarneftegaz, there are also very few local workers, most of them occupying low functions, such as that of cleaning staff.

Not long before leaving the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, at the end of the fourth and last phase of my field research, my acquaintances among oil workers who work at different offices in Naryan-Mar organised an evening at the *banya* (Russian sauna). Excepting Vanya, the son of Russian settlers to the NAO, now engineer in his late twenties, all of the other workers had come from Russia's central regions, where Lukoil is present. While we were talking about the mentality of local Russians, one of my acquaintances who is also Vanya's superior said: "The locals don't want to work. They all want for free. This one, [he was pointing to Vanya], he's the only one I've hired, because I saw that he was ready to work. Otherwise, I don't hire the locals". Such discourses are, in fact, quite common among the oil nomads. In the NAO, they constitute some 10 000 people present, mainly in the tundra, in addition to the current okrug's population, which consists of over 45 000 registered residents.

For many of the Russian settlers and other permanent residents of the NAO, the recent improvement of the economy has brought many benefits, most especially as the okrug's administration is now able to provide them with their northern benefits on a regular basis. However, the growing number of shift-workers and the role played by shift-work in the okrug's economy is increasing many settlers' anxieties. Statistics on unemployment in the NAO may testify to the fact that the recent oil boom is not having the hoped for impact on the okrug, although establishing a direct causal relation between the oil companies' reliance on shift-workers and the level of unemployment would require more data and, more importantly, the identification of a causal mechanism, which goes beyond the scope of this research. Yet, it remains that during the decade in which intense oil-related developments were taking place in the NAO (placing the okrug

seventh[36] among the oil-producing regions of the country (Rosstat 2010)), the levels of unemployment were often higher, or at best, not significantly lower in the okrug than average levels of unemployment in Russia.

Levels of Unemployment in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and in Russia (%)

	2000	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010
Russian Federation	10,6	7,8	7,2	7,2	6,1	6,3	8,4
Nenets Autonomous Okrug	11,0	7,5	11,4	5,6	6,4	7,7	9,7

Rosstat (2011b)

It may be understood that the oil companies now tend to hire fewer local Russians, even those who were involved in the exploration of oil, in part because the processes of exploration and extraction differ like "day and night" as one of my acquaintances among the oil nomads used to say. Furthermore, the approaches used to extract the oil have also changed since the Soviet days, due most especially to the collaboration between Russian and Western companies which, like ConocoPhillips, have brought new technologies into the extraction of oil fields such as that of Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu. Thus, in order for a local person to be hired, it is likely that he would have to go study and get experience in another centre of oil production in order to come back, or that he would have to move to a region where oil companies are based in order to come to work in his region of origin. This ironic situation has been reported in other regions where work is structured by fly-in, fly-out labour organisation (Storey 2010: 1163). However, it is intriguing to notice that other sectors of the economy are now also adopting this form of labour organisation, as I will show in the following chapters.

While in the field, I first came to notice anxieties among settlers as I heard acquaintances among technicians and mechanics at the airport discussing the rumour concerning the potential purchase of the Naryan-Mar Airline or the helicopter fleet by Moscow-based YuTAir. For months, many rumours were circulating and little

[36] According to the official web-page of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the extraction of oil in the okrug went from 10,5 million tonnes in 2004 to 13,0 million tonnes in 2007 and to 18,8 million tonnes in 2009 (Administration of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug)

information was given by either the state-owned helicopter company, nor by its potential buyer. One of the rumours held that if YuTAir bought the airline, it would come with its own workers and send the Naryan-Mar employees to work in the South in order to avoid paying the northern benefits. During that whole period, I could see my acquaintances mobilise their social networks to try to find out more information about the potential purchase and, most especially, to find a job elsewhere if it did happen. I was even more surprised following a discussion at the okrug's main library. As I was searching through the archives, a librarian I was acquainted with told me that rumours were circulating to the effect that the library will start employing librarians from Arkhangelsk who would come to work in the NAO's library – in shifts.

Conclusion

This chapter described the mechanisms by which the Russian federal political power established its control over resource-rich regions under Vladimir Putin's presidency. I have shown that Moscow has been using a number of legal and institutional mechanisms to re-establish its control over the management of the oil deposits and revenues following the 1990s, when the oil industry became controlled by a small number of individuals – the oligarchs – and by the political leaders of the oil-rich regions. Since many if not most of the oil deposits are located in the Russian North and Siberia, it appears as if Putin has been establishing a new political and legal framework which I will refer to as post-Soviet Russian "law of the tundra", which must be respected by both the companies wishing to have access to oil-rich lands and by the regional administrators wishing to remain in office.

Following the drastic increase of the oil prices at the turn of the millennium and the re-centralisation of the country, oil capital began to pour into Moscow's and the loyal oligarchs' coffers. Many Russian citizens began to doubt the good management of the oil revenues, sometimes suggesting that the country is too addicted to oil and that the oil revenues should be bringing more benefits to society and serve the development of other economic sectors. Many also began to more loudly express suspicion about the appropriation of these riches by a small political and economic elite, thus resembling the neoliberal political project as described by David Harvey (1999).

Though residents of the NAO are indirectly benefiting from the second oil boom taking place in their okrug, namely due to the fact that it enables the administration to provide them with northern benefits, they also see most of the oil revenues being seized by Moscow, most especially following the forced merger of their okrug with the Arkhangelsk Oblast. Another source of worry for many settlers is that employment generated by the oil boom may be benefiting more shift-workers coming from other regions of the Russian Federation or from other former Soviet Republics than the okrug's population. Elisabeth Dunn (2004: 129) remarking on the organisation of labour, stated that "[…] an important globalizing force is organizational form, in addition to content." In the context of post-Soviet NAO, it appears as if the requirement of flexibility manifesting itself in the work organisation of the oil industry is increasingly serving as a mould for other sectors of the economy. As a consequence, growing pressure is being put on settlers to be more mobile in order to follow the flow of capital and to adopt a way of life more similar to that of the oil nomads. As I will show in the following chapter, the cohabitation of different cultural and professional groups in the okrug also has consequences on the way they each relate to land, based on their respective codes of conduct guiding them.

5

Flexible Laws and the Land

The rigidity of our laws is compensated for by their non-observance

Russian Proverb

Legality now is only the functional mode of a state bureaucracy which, of course, must concern itself with enactment of acts emanating from the central command-post responsible for this bureaucracy.

Carl Schmitt, The Nomos of the Earth

During a visit to the regional office of the Russian Federal Service for Supervision of Natural Resources (*Rosprirodnadzor*) in Naryan-Mar, I met with a state official with the hope of discussing the Russian laws concerning environmental impact assessments and their implementation. Throughout our conversation, I came to realise that not only did I have difficulty in understanding the precise role of several regional and federal agencies, as well as their interactions, but that the official was also somewhat confused by the numerous recent modifications in environmental legislation. The inclusion of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug within the Arkhangelsk Oblast, the different phases of reorganisation of state agencies responsible for the protection of the environment in the 2000s, including the transfer of competencies regarding environmental impact assessments from *Rosprirodnazdor* to *Rostekhnadzor* (The Federal Service for Ecological, Technological and Nuclear Supervision) – all of these were recent changes which could not but lead to confusion concerning this legislation and its implementation.

In this chapter, I will examine the "laws" which guide the conduct of Nenets herders and villagers, as well as Russian settlers and oil nomads as they meet in the tundra or in the NAO more generally. I will suggest that these laws shape the spatial conceptions of each group, hence provide them with a particular way of relating to the land and to its human and non-human inhabitants. I will show that the flexibility inherent in the Nenets law of the tundra is in fact pressured by the Russian post-Soviet law, imposing itself as a new law of the tundra. Although it contains elements inherited from the Soviet days, such as a productivist way of relating to reindeer herding and to the land, the new Russian law is also characterised by a high degree of flexibility to accommodate both a federal state addicted to oil and the oil industry operating in the context of the

global market. Hence, in this discussion on the two different sets of laws of the tundra, I will reveal how the different groups in question in this dissertation are involved in particular networks of exchange and connected in particular ways to the state and to the market, resulting in different interactions with the land. Before examining different laws adopted by the Russian state in the late 1990s and in the 2000s, which define the status and rights of the numerically-small indigenous peoples of the Russian North, I will discuss certain characteristics of the Russian legal system in order to explain what I refer to when using the terms "post-Soviet Russian law."

Flexible Laws

The fathers of socialism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, viewed legalism as a "bourgeois fetish", as laws enacted by political and economic elites were believed to support capitalism by justifying the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Because socialist society was to eventually rid itself of the contradiction of capitalism, it was expected to be able to function and administer itself without the rule of law (Butler 2003: 70). After the Bolshevik Revolution, the new regime did, however, construct a formal legal system, aiming to assist the foundation of a socialist state which would give way to communism. Law was thus perceived as a transitional necessity which would eventually become obsolete. Several decades later, Russia was to experience yet another transition as reforms were put in place to introduce the post-Soviet state and society to democracy and the market economy in the 1990s. This required a new constitution and legal framework, adopted by President Yeltsin in 1993 (Ibid.: 4). The concept of transition, as applied to former socialist countries, is however problematic in different respects. First, the teleology of the "transition" taking place in the 1990s was contradicted by the fact that the varied reforms were in practice leading neither to solid improvements in democratic governance, nor to a liberalisation of the economy (Burawoy and Verdery 2002). Second, the notion of transition assumed that Western capitalist nations had already "arrived" at a stage which had yet to be reached by the former socialist states.

The notion of transition also concerns the "post-" comprising the chronological qualifier "post-Soviet", widely used (including in this dissertation) to characterise Russia, its political, economic and legal structures, as well as its society. Foreign academics, journalists and politicians often blame Russia's "failure" to foster a western-style

democracy and market economy on the backwardness inherited from the Soviet regime. Yet, in the 1960s, Harold Berman (1963: 237) wrote about the Soviet legal system that "[...] while the Soviets have inherited the backwardness of the Russian legal tradition [...] they have also inherited many of its achievements." Nearly fifty years later, one hears very similar assessments, yet with the reversal of the words Soviet and Russian.

Rather than examining the political and economic changes taking place in Russia since the disappearance of the Soviet Union through the lens of transition, I examine these changes as "transformations" characterised by an indeterminacy of direction informed by the country's particular history. In his ethnography on the Evenki of Katonga, in Western Siberia, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003) describes the transformation of the interaction between the indigenous people and the state in a way which relates closely to the way I analyse the evolution of political and economic processes affecting the collective and individual lives of Nenets of the NAO. In his work, Ssorin-Chaikov (2003: 5) conceives of transformation as

> […] ontologically prior to a given social form. I am not arguing that one can divide the twentieth century history of the Katonga area into "tributary," "socialist," and "traditionalist" phases and then chart a "transition" between them. These social forms make up historically specific configurations that are in a process of continuous displacement. Transformation is a constant state of these configurations - just as at a given historical point these forms do not appear as unified institutional bodies but, rather, as constantly shifting political boundaries.

In this chapter I will examine how Russian legislation determines the status and rights of indigenous peoples of the North and regulates the ways in which Nenets peoples and oil workers conduct their respective productive activities. In a way similar to Ssorin-Chaikov, I will show how ideological and political shifts within Russia, as well as the arrival of the oil industry within a new global economy, were implicated in shifts in political boundaries and interactions between Nenets reindeer herders and villagers, Russian settlers and oil nomads. This can be most clearly seen in changes in their respective ways of relating to the tundra, to the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and to distant territories, which arise in part from the laws guiding their conduct. In the previous chapter, I presented the political and economic context that informed the development of what I referred to as the post-Soviet Russian law (of the tundra). In this chapter, I will highlight the flexibility of Russian law and contrast it to the Nenets law of the tundra, namely in relation to respective ways of allocating land and redistributing resources.

Peter Solomon (2008: 116) has noted that in Post-Soviet Russia, the public administration often applies the rule of law in ways that serve particular interests – their own or those of particular agencies –rather than in a universalistic manner. He further suggests that one characteristic of bureaucracies in Eastern European socialist states was their tendency to be more "rule-creating" than "rule-observing", making them both powerful and deviant. This characteristic seems to be one that has been retained within the post-Soviet legal system. Alena Ledeneva (2006: 22) argues that the future-orientation of the Russian legal system, that is, its striving towards the improvement of political and economic order in the country, allowed for the installation of loopholes in the formulation and implementation of laws. This created a context in which informal norms became as significant as formal rules. The persistent incoherence of the legal system forces nearly all Russians to violate formal regulations and to seek solutions outside of formal institutions.

Another characteristic I wish to emphasise when referring to post-Soviet Russian law as flexible is its economic component, that is, its connection to the market, most especially as the federal state is addicted to oil and gas revenues. Decisions concerning particular development projects, as well as those concerning the organisation of the workforce are often made in order to satisfy the needs of both the state and the oil industry. Hence fundamental decisions concerning these developments in peripheral regions such as the NAO are most often made in distant regions, be it at the political centre, in Moscow, or by the international shareholders of different companies (Wilson 2002: 164).

The New Russian Law of the Tundra

Following pressure from RAIPON, Boris Yeltsin included Article 69 in the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation, which, for the first time, recognised the need to protect and expand the rights of indigenous peoples "[…] in accordance with generally recognised principles and standards of international law and international treaties of the Russian Federation" (Pavlov 2005: 38). This implied, amongst other things, that the Russian Federation's policies to the International Labor Organisation's Convention 169, "On Indigenous Peoples and Peoples Leading a Tribal Way of Life in Independent Countries" (Fondahl 1998: 85).

I turn now to a discussion of different post-Soviet laws which were formulated to a certain extent to allow the country to conform to international law. The laws to be examined concern the status of the numerically-small indigenous peoples as well as their interactions with extractive industries. Each of these laws concern more or less directly the way indigenous people relate to land. I will demonstrate that most of these laws have in common a discrepancy between what they entail on paper and their implementation, due, for example, to their formulation or to the difficulties for state agencies to abide by them (Abryutina and Zubov 2009).

The first law to be examined is the Federal law "On the Guarantee of the Rights of the Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation" (1999). It is an important piece of legislation because it introduced the "Unified List of Numerically-Small Peoples of the Russian Federation", expanding the Soviet categorisation of "Small Peoples of the North" from twenty-six to forty-five peoples under the "Unified List." Inclusion on the list is determined based on the presence of the following characteristics: "– reside in territories traditionally inhabited by their ancestors, – maintain traditional ways of life and economic activity, – number less than 50,000 people, and – identify themselves as separate ethnic communities" (cited in Stammler-Gossmann 2009: 90).

This law thus recognises the need for specific indigenous rights to be protected, namely in relation to the land on which groups of people live and practice traditional activities (Pavlov 2005: 46, Osherenko 2000: 713). This protection, however, appears to be granted only if there is continuity of presence on a given territory. Considering the displacements of indigenous populations which took place during the consolidation, it would be difficult for many of their communities to have access to the land where they were living or migrating through. However, this law maintains the Soviet-inherited insistence on nationality and its association to a particular territory. Hence, one can wonder if belonging to a national group associated with a regional territory would imply protection by this law.

The second characteristic of this law is its numerical criterion. The Soviet term "small" (*malye*), which implied "less developed", was replaced by the term "numerically-small" (*malochislennye*) in post-Soviet Russia. This criterion concerns those people who could become or are nearly extinct, thus requiring state protection. Hence, this criterion

perpetuates a paternalistic attitude towards those "endangered" peoples, in need of benevolent state help (Stammler-Gossmann 2009: 100). Another reason for establishing the numerical criterion is that it serves to determine how strongly established a group is within a territorial-administrative entity. As Stammler-Gossmann (2009: 101) remarks "[i]t brings us to two ingredients of ethnic dominance: indigenousness and power within the Russian construction of ethnicity, territoriality, nationalism and statehood". However, there is always a risk of falling on the other side of the threshold. During meetings at Yasavey, the former President of the association must have been only half-joking when he said how important it was for the Nenets to have children, with the added remark: "don't forget that we have to be careful not to exceed 50 000". It is thus quite ironic that the Nenets, the most numerous of the numerically-small indigenous peoples of the Russian North, may lose their legal status as their population grows. Nonetheless due to their political and symbolic significance both within Russia and within the global indigenous movement, it is likely, as Stammler-Gossman (Ibid.) has noted, that if the Nenets came to trespass this threshold, the legislation would be changed.

The fourth and last criterion concerns the identification of indigenous peoples with a distinct national group. In 2002, the criterion of nationality, discussed in the introduction, was removed from internal passports of Russian citizens. That year, the first all-Russian census in the post-Soviet period was also conducted. Contrary to the Soviet censuses, the one taking place in 2002 introduced a significant change. Instead of being based on one's documents or already existing nationality received by descent, nationality would from then on be based on self-identification. However, an individual could only prove his/her belonging to a particular national group by using former documents, such as their parents' birth certificates or Soviet internal passports. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, certain villages, such as Nelmin-Nos, are referred to as "national" in that they are mainly inhabited by Nenets. Still, in conformity with the law state programmes, this tends to target only those involved in the one economic activity associated with the Nenets: reindeer herding. Hence, those who, on Kolguev or in Varandey, had been, are living off or wish to be living off fishing or sea-mammal hunting, are not eligible for such support. However, it will be seen in the next chapter that the ways of supporting nomadic reindeer

herding may be questioned when programmes concern, for example, housing construction.

The law "On the Guarantee of the Rights of the Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation" (1999) also regulates political representation and organisation (Pavlov 2005: 46). According to Mikhail Todyshev (2005: 55), Article 13 of this law

> […] reinforces the right of Russian constituent federal entities to establish representation quotas for the indigenous peoples in the assemblies of the provinces and in the representative authorities of local government for the purposes of finding the most appropriate solutions to the social, economic and cultural development of these peoples, protection of their historic habitat, traditional way of life, home management and trade.

This law grants certain powers for the regions to establish representative quotas for the numerically-small peoples of the North in the legislative and representative bodies. However, it neither demands nor sanctions the right to establish representational quotas (Kryazhkov 2005: 210). Although no quotas exist in the NAO, there are two main institutions representing the interests of the Nenets. A first one is Yasavey. As seen, Yasavey stems out of an association created during perestroika called RAIPON. It used to receive funds from the okrug, as well as from international organisations, to conduct social and cultural projects. Today, Yasavey's main support from the okrug is access to an office space where it holds its meetings and coordinates social activities, such as Reindeer's Day. Yasavey members also serve as legal advisors and representatives for Nenets groups and individuals, especially in their interactions with the oil companies or with state institutions.

The second institution is the Direction for the Affairs of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North, which used to be an office of the okrug's administration, but has recently received an independent status, although financed by the NAO. Like Yasavey, this office is predominantly staffed by Nenets individuals. Until recently, the okrug allocated nearly four percent of its budget to the Nenets, be they herders or villagers. The supporting programmes often were and still are administered by the Direction for the Affairs of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples. In a discussion with one of the employees of this office, I was told that the share of the budget

remains approximately the same, despite the end of such a fixed quota. This office works closely with Yasavey as they have established an agreement of reciprocity.

During my field research, I took part in a celebration at Yasavey's office soon after the okrug-level legislative elections, in which three of its members had been elected at various levels of the state administration. Vladislav Peskov was elected as a deputy of the oblast-level Duma, in Arkhangelsk, Aleksander Belugin as a Duma deputy at the okrug level, and Nikolai Latyshev was elected at the Zapolyarnyi Raion[37]. Hence, although Pavel Pavlov (2005: 47) criticises the law "On Guarantees…" for its declarative nature, it may be, in certain places and over certain periods, compensated by the existence of activists, as has been the case in the NAO in the last few years. It remains, nonetheless, that their powers are very limited in an okrug where even governors can easily be removed by the central power.

A second law of strong significance for the indigenous peoples in Russia is "On General Principles of the Organisation of Communities (*obshchinas*) of the Numerically Small Indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation" (2000). The *obshchina* is a Russian peasant institution, most often formed by a kin-based community which traces its roots to a period long before reindeer herding was adopted as a way of life in the Russian North (Fondahl 1998: 33 and 133; Stammler 2005: 224). As the law was created, the federal government aimed at "resuscitating" this institution by promoting its implementation across the North as corresponding to the "traditional" way of life of the indigenous peoples of the Russian North. An *obshschina* is described in the 2000 law as a collective uniting individuals,

> […] at their own discretion to pursue traditional land-use on territories which were already worked by their ancestors. Each *obshchina* obtains usufruct rights over a delineated area and, by this, a limited guarantee to forestall other kinds of land use (Habeck 2002: 136).

The *obshchina's* structure is viewed as a form of indigenous self-government, which is seriously limited as it does not have land ownership or more secured rights to land. In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, there were thirteen *obshchinas* established in 2010. Six of them were located in the village of Nelmin-Nos. The village, situated north-

[37] The Zapolyarnyi Raion ("Polar District") is an administrative entity created in 2005. Officially, it has the status and competencies of a municipality and includes all the areas of the NAO, with the exception of the capital, Naryan-Mar.

west of Naryan-Mar, hosts the Vyucheiskii SPK, which was on the verge of bankruptcy as I was in the field. The lack of success of the SPK may both explain, and be explained to a certain extent by the fact that certain families opted for the formation of *obshchinas*. One very particular *obshchina* existing in the okrug is that of Yamb-To. This community of Nenets reindeer herders had in fact escaped the control of the Soviet state by migrating mainly in the north-east of the okrug towards the Ural Mountains. For several decades, they were living at the margins of Soviet society, receiving their necessary supplies by trading with rural shops and inhabitants. Today, this *obshchina* is composed of some thirty families, with over 100 people who were previously never registered as citizens of the Soviet Union. Hence, they did not have identification documents, their children did not attend schools and the young men did not do their military service. It is only at the time when the Soviet state began to rely on coupons for distribution of supplies in the late perestroika days that the Yamb-To Nenets were forced to ask for state assistance since they were no longer able to obtain supplies. Ever since, the okrug authorities have tried find them a legal status – that of an *obshchina* – and allowed them to maintain their more independent lifestyle, while at the same time providing them supplies to subsist (Dallmann et al. 2010, Tuisku 2002: 191). The Nenets herders with whom I conducted my research opted for the more common option, the transition from the kolkhoz or sovkhoz to that of agricultural-production cooperative (SPK), which allowed for a certain form of stability as the market economy was being established throughout the country.

A third important federal law is the one "On Territories of Traditional Nature Use of the Numerically Small Indigenous Populations of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation" (2001). One of the interesting aspects of the 2001 law is that "[…] only the indigenous peoples or their authorized representative can initiate the establishment of territories of traditional resource use" (Pavlov 2005: 48). This implies that indigenous peoples have the right to be entitled to natural resources in line with their customs. This law was replicated the following year in the NAO, leading very soon to the creation of Territories of Traditional Nature Use (TTNU) in the okrug. On Kolguev, a TTNU was established in January 2002 comprising the territory of the former sovkhoz. According to this law,

> [t]he formation of the TTNU "Kolguev" serves the conservation of the biological diversity and support in their natural condition of the natural complexes and objects to be preserved, guarantees the right to indigenous peoples to participate in the regulation of use and preservation of renewable natural resources related to their land, promoting the development of the culture and spiritual life of the numerically-small indigenous peoples living on a given territory (Transl.).

This law allows for the practice of reindeer herding as a traditional activity which must, however, respect the principle of *oleneemkost'* ("carrying capacity of reindeer pastures"), which I will discuss later in this chapter. The traditional activities of hunting, fishing, collecting of vegetation, as well as handicrafts are also included in the list of activities to be protected if undertaken within the confines of the TTNU. Furthermore, the law states that industrial activities should only take place in such territories in agreement with numerically-small indigenous peoples of the North inhabiting such lands, and without infringing upon their rights. A few months prior to my initial visit to the herders of the Kolguev SPK, the members of the second brigade found a newly established oil rig for which they had not been consulted. Following complaints of the SPK administration to AMNGR, the company ceased its operations on that site. In the case of Kharp, no TTNU was established, as the farm holds tenure on the land it is allocated by the state. One of the problems of the law is that, like other Russian regulations, it does not determine clearly what is not allowed within the territory, thus giving latitude for industrial activities (Dallmann et al. 2010).

In March 2002, a "Law on Reindeer Herding" was adopted by the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, which describes more clearly the rights and responsibilities of reindeer herders and of the farms. The goals of this law are:

> -the establishment of legal, economic, ecological (*prirodookhrannykh*) and social guarantees of stable development of reindeer herding independently of the type of ownership;
>
> -the satisfaction of the needs of the okrug's population in terms of reindeer production;
>
> - the preservation and development of reindeer herding as a base of the traditional way of life of the numerically-small indigenous peoples of the North and ethnic communities;
>
> -the establishment of preferential (*preimushschstvennogo*) right of the numerically-small indigenous peoples and ethnic communities to practice reindeer herding (Transl.).

This law combines several aspects of the three federal laws discussed previously. It has, nonetheless a wider reach as it provides many specifications concerning the way reindeer herding should be practiced, and outlines the rights the herders are entitled to. It

also establishes a clearer definition of the ways in which industrial activities should be conducted on the territories used by herders. The NAO law "On Reindeer Herding" establishes that the reindeer and the products made out of them belong to the owner, unless arranged otherwise by a federal law or by agreement, for example, in the case of the reindeer collectively owned by the SPK (Article 5.1). Although the okrug does not limit the number of private reindeer, herding must be practiced in observance of the principle of "pasture grounds carrying capacity" (*oleneemkost'*), established by the administration of the okrug (Article 14.2), to which I will return shortly. In Article 10, it is written that independently of the type of ownership, reindeer herders must register, keep records of the reindeer production and perform inventories (*proschety*), with the support of the local authorities. The results of these inventories must be presented to the okrug administration. Article 11 defines the ways and the moments in which the process of marking the ears (*kleimenie*) determining the ownership of a reindeer must take place. Hence, the law on reindeer herding does not only define the rights the herders are entitled to, but also describes how it must be practiced as a productive activity, according to a Soviet-inherited conception of reindeer herding.

The law also dictates the way of relating to the land where reindeer herding is undertaken in the okrug. According to this law, the territories used by the herders are to be determined between and within the farms (Article 6). In the case of Kolguev, the herders retained the same migrating routes as those established in the Soviet days. The Kharp brigade I conducted my research with also kept the same route. However, the situation for Kharp is slightly different, since they had to transfer the lease of the territories used by those herders migrating in the Varandey area, who split up to form Erv. Article 7 stipulates that reindeer herding farms, independently of their ownership forms, may graze their reindeer in the territories of other subjects of the federation as well as in territories of other farms, if respecting the Civil and Land legislation. Hence, the herders of Kharp I conducted my research with spend the winter across the border between the NAO and the Komi Republic, while there are Komi herders from the latter republic who spend the spring and summer in the NAO.

The law "On Reindeer Herding" also determines the interaction between reindeer herding collectives and industrial interests, in this case, the oil industry. As per article

17.2, it is the administration of the okrug that authorises industrial activities with the potential of depleting the habitat and pasture grounds of the reindeer. However, in article 17.4, it is said that anyone involved in reindeer herding, their executive representatives and representatives of Yasavey, as well as local authorities may propose the conduct of environmental and social impact assessments, in which they may participate when industrial developments are being proposed. I will now relate certain aspects of the Russian Federation's legislation on the protection of the environment. Due to the complexity of this legislation, and most especially to the numerous changes adopted in both the legislation and in the institutions involved in them in the last decade, this examination will have more of an illustrative purpose than a fully descriptive one.

In 1995 the Russian state passed a law entitled "On the Ecological Expert Review", which obliges all industrial projects to pass through a process of "State Ecological Expert Reviews" (SEER). Until the 1st of January 2007, these reviews were, in principle, taking into consideration the possibility that negative social, economic or environmental impacts could be caused by an industrial project (Khmeleva and Grechushkina 2010: 155). There were, nonetheless, several problems related to the different procedures involved in the SEER.[38] In 2007 the Federal Law "On Modification of the Town-Planning Code of the Russian Federation and Separate Acts of the Russian Federation", significantly weakened the procedure of environmental impact assessments. One of the significant changes was that instead of involving independent experts to conduct analyses, the assessments began to be based solely on documents presented by the project developer to the state agencies. Hence, as long as a project respects the legislation on paper, a project may take place in a context where regulation is often ill-defined. For example, it is required that technical regulations respect environmental ones, although no technical norms exist concerning the protection and preservation of the environment (Khmeleva and Grechushkina 2010: 155).

[38] One problematic aspect during the first phase of the SEER, the assessment of the impact on the environment (OVOS in Russian), was that the applying developer of the project hired experts, be they individuals or a non-governmental organisation, to serve as their representatives. What tended to happen was that these experts would migrate to the team of state experts to approve the project during the second phase – the state environmental review (Reisman et al. 2002: 14). The third and last phase of the SEER, the public environmental review, was also marked by problems. In principle, the public had to be informed about industrial developments and should have been given the opportunity to express their agreement or voice their concerns. In practice, the public was often informed about a project after it had been approved, and state officials tended to ignore the results of public hearings or only consult the public on concrete issues, indicating that citizens had no or little say in the realisation of the project (Ibid.: 11).

These changes were but one of the significant changes taking place in the 2000s. Jo Crotty and Peter Rodgers (2012) examined the interactions between regional and federal authorities as such changes were taking place within the agencies responsible for the protection of the environment. They explore the tensions and confusion existing between the agencies of different administrative levels, such as the State Ministry for Environmental Protection (*Goskomekologiya*) and the Ministry for Natural Resources, which were merged in 2000. Arthur Mol (2009) terms the different modifications to the bureaucratic structure of agencies concerned with the protection of the environment "environmental deinstitutionalization". Such changes, he suggests, have generally been made both in favour of a more centralised and authoritarian regime, and for the benefit of the extractive industries on which the country largely depends.

During an interview with two officials of Rostekhnadzor, to which the competencies for the examination of the documentation concerning environmental impacts were transferred, I was told that these changes allowed for the simplification and speeding up of industrial development. What was prioritised was the reception of appropriate documents, respecting the different legal codes of the Russian Federation, most especially the Land Code and the Construction Code. The importance of the documentation was confirmed in discussions with two specialists of environmental issues called *ekology* ("ecologists") employed by Naryanmarneftegaz. That company is in fact quite innovative in hiring such specialists in the protection of the environment. However, the two *ekology* pointed out to me that their main tasks were to ensure that the production operations were respecting a great number of regulations, requiring them to fill out a lot of paperwork. In a related vein, following my visit to Rostekhnadzor, an acquaintance of mine among the oil nomads told me about that federal institution's influence on the realisation of an industrial project: "Whenever there is a problem concerning the documents, my boss calls them and tells them to fix the papers."

In theory, the federal and okrug-level legislation still allows for the possibility of the public to be informed and to call for public hearings before an extractive project takes place. This may happen, for example, when an oil company is projecting development on TTNU land. In such circumstances, the land-users, that is, the reindeer herders in the NAO, may organise a referendum to allow for this project to take place or not. Although I

never attended such a referendum, the Kolguev reindeer herders told me that they did take place on a number of occasions at the SPK office in order to authorise a particular site to be drilled or not. In May 2009, I attended a public meeting held by Naryanmarneftegaz concerning the construction of an additional facility at the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil fields. I had found out about the meeting in a small announcement placed in *Naryana Vinder*, the main newspaper in the okrug. The advertisement was also posted on the company's website, in an okrug where access to the internet was nascent. The public hearings took place in the village of Iskateley, where different oil companies preferred to have their offices due to lower taxation levels than in Naryan-Mar. As I entered the auditorium, which could probably host approximately a hundred people, I quickly noticed that among the eight people attending the meeting, no herder, member of the Kharp administration or representative of Yasavey was there. Specialists of various consulting companies, from distant Moscow and St-Petersburg showed slides with images and graphics, and described the different measures and impacts of the new facility to be built. One after the other, the experts made their presentations to agree and conclude that no significant environmental consequences should be expected.

In the days following the event, I met with members of both Yasavey, Kharp workers and herders, as well as other active members of the Nenets community. I told them about the event of which none of them said they had been informed. To be fair, the changes proposed were in fact minor compared with the construction of the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base and extraction sites. It should also be mentioned that the company was quite innovative in consulting with the farms' administrators, as well as with the herding brigades, while planning the trajectory to be taken by the pipeline. Hence, different passing points were planned, and the pipeline was generally placed quite high above the ground to facilitate the movement of reindeer, as will be seen in the next chapter.

On the left, one can see an *argysh* ("caravan") as it is crossing the pipeline connecting the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu extraction site to the Varanday terminal, from where oil is then shipped by tankers. On the right, is a crossing point created to allow for reindeer to cross the pipeline.

On Kolguev the observation of ecological legislation is more problematic. Both companies operating on the island are based out of Murmansk, which implies a less direct connection with the political and administrative structures of the NAO. Furthermore, the Direction for the Natural Resources and Ecology in Naryan-Mar does not generally have the means of organising a helicopter flight to visit the remote extraction sites when changes are made or in case environmental degradation takes place as a result of the extraction of oil.

Besides the question of environmental impacts, indigenous activist organisations such as RAIPON have been lobbying the Russian state to adopt regulations making social impact assessments compulsory prior to industrial development (Murashko 2006: 81). In the 1999 federal law "on Guaranteeing the Rights of Indigenous Minorities of the Russian Federation", a new term was introduced, that of *etnologicheskaia ekspertiza* ("ethnological expertise"). It is defined as the "[…] scientific study of the impact of changes in the indigenous peoples' original environment and the socio-cultural situation on the development of the ethnic group" (Ibid.: 82). However, several problems have been identified in relation to the *etnologicheskie ekspertizy.* The most significant among them is that they are not mandatory. Furthermore, the vagueness of their legal and practical definitions make their application difficult (Ibid.: 83 and 90).

These three federal laws, as well as the NAO "Law on Reindeer Herding", hold the potential for improving the political, economic, and social situation of indigenous populations of northern Russia, as well as the preservation of their culture, at least because they recognise the necessity of giving rights to these minorities. However, as is the case with other pieces of Russian legislation, they tend to be incoherent and susceptible to frequent changes (Ledeneva 2006: 12). Hence, the ways these laws are formulated and implemented could be seen as being in line with an important characteristic of the interactions between indigenous peoples and political power, as identified by Niezen (2003: 90): "the state abrogation of treaties". However, the transformations Russia has experienced in the last decades, as well as the role played by the oil and gas industry in the country, operating in a global context, both lead me to prefer to speak about the flexibility of the Russian legal system. A 2009 article co-written by anthropologist Florian Stammler and Vladislav Peskov, former President of Yasavey and current deputy of the Duma in Arkhangelsk, argues that, due to the constant changes and institutional frameworks, Nenets herders and villagers from the NAO should not wait for legislation to shape dialogue between oil companies and the local indigenous population. Rather, they suggest that "[c]ontinuous dialogues can provide stability for stakeholders on both sides that currently cannot be provided by the federal Russian legislation" (Stammler and Peskov 2008: 838).

In the following section, I will examine how such a dialogue is taking place between Nenets herders and villagers, oil nomads and settlers in relation to land. It will be seen that the way each group is interacting with the land is related to the particular "law of the tundra" they are observing, which sometimes leads to tensions between them.

When Two Legal Cultures Meet Over Oil Fields

Following decades of depreciation of reindeer herding, it may seem surprising to see that most herders comprising the brigades I conducted my research with, as well as several others, are young men in their twenties and thirties. In response to the question of why they had decided to become reindeer herders, their answers were of the following variety: "What could I do in the village? We grew up here. That's why we became herders"; "I had dropped out of school and there was nothing else for me to do"; "Once I

came back from the military service, there was nothing else for me to do".[39] One young Nenets woman in her early twenties told me that she had just recently begun to live and work in the tundra. "My grand-mother retired, so somebody had to replace her in the tundra." The most common reasons given by the young herders and tent-workers to explain why they had decided to live and work in the tundra thus implied a sense of obligation, if not of fatality. I was never told, however, why young men and women who had grown up in the tundra up to school age had decided at some point to drop out of school. Could it not be that it was to a certain extent a longing for the tundra life which led them to drop out? I believe that this negative justification for choosing to live in the tundra cannot be detached from the pejorative opinion most Russians and many Nenets villagers have about reindeer herding, an opinion which seems to have been integrated by some herders, at least, at the discursive level. In the following sections and chapters, their appreciation for the life in the tundra will become clearer, as it relates to their attachment to the land, experienced and expressed in different manners.

Despite their inclusion in the strict authoritarian regime of the Soviet state, the Nenets reindeer herders have continued to relate to the tundra, and to its human and non-human inhabitants, in a way characterised by flexibility. Nomadic pastoralism has also been studied in relation to such a flexibility. For example, Neville Dyson Hudson (1972: 9) suggests that because

> […] contingency and variability are the essence of nomadic pastoralism (as manifestations of that adaptive flexibility which has allowed herding groups to survive in marginal environments) it also suggests that the kind of units we should be paying attention to are more likely to be pragmatic than formal - *networks* rather than corporate groups, in fact.

Although there was an institutionalisation of the collectives involved in herding through the formation of brigades as the main units grouping reindeer herders, the network of people more or less directly involved in a herding brigade's life may extend widely and is quite flexible. Relatives, acquaintances and friends living in the village or

[39] It must be remembered that the Nenets children must all – except probably for those who belong to the Yamb-To obshchina - go to schools, that is residential schools in the case of tundra children and for the Kolguev children after the fourth grade. Military service, which lasts from two to three years depending on the military branch, is also compulsory for them. Some Nenets embrace the possibility of doing the military service in order to go to other regions. For example, I met Nenets people who had done their military service as far as Baku and the German Democratic Republic during the Soviet days.

in town may be providing crucial material or logistical support to the herders who, in exchange, provide them with meat or different products from the tundra necessary for subsisting and preservation of Nenets culture. Habeck (2005) remarked that in the late 1990s, reindeer herding and life in the tundra among the Komi may have both complemented and been complemented by the wage-labour among relatives living in towns and villages. In the NAO, I also became aware of the fact that relatives and friends may come to live in the tundra with the herders for a number of reasons and for different durations, without even the SPK knowing about it. For example, it may happen that a herder's friend or relative from town or from the village goes to the tundra to escape certain problems, such as alcohol abuse, and becomes involved in herding temporarily.

The Nenets way of relating to the territory is in many respects a function of the presence and needs of both the reindeer and humans. Stammler (2005: 325) remarks that what is important about the Nenets form of nomadism is

> […] not the act of movement itself, but how movement is connected to people's understanding of themselves and other beings in the tundra. It is about flexibly using pastures and animals, about shifting entitlements among friends and relatives, about sharing the use of land and animals.

In both my research settings, the form of interaction between the herders and their herd differs widely. In the case of the Kolguev SPK, the herders practice a type of herding which involves less constant interaction with the animals (Karapetova 1990). Today, the herders on Kolguev even rely on snowmobiles to travel between Bugrino and the summer pastures. In the winter, they most often rely on the snowmobile also to round up the sled reindeer. Hence, they tend to require less and less sled reindeer and may travel back and forth to the village rather easily. Since there are no predators throughout most of the year, the herders do not generally need to tend to the herd throughout the day. However, they do so during the fawning period (*otel'*), in April/May, which also coincides with the period of the year when polar bears visit the island. This approach of "free grazing" also implies that the reindeer from both herds may get mixed, a problem of which the two successive chairwomen of the farm I met complained. This "lack of discipline" among the herders is criticised by the administration of the farm, and even by villagers. It appears to me that most of the island's inhabitants recall the herders of the Soviet days as being very disciplined, strictly following the productivity requirements

and inspiring respect. Furthermore, the farm did not have the means to conduct a proper inventory in several years, which means that it is very likely that the animals of both brigades have been mixed for a long period of time. In the case of the Kharp brigade I migrated with, the situation is very different. The rhythm of life is organised around a migration route of several hundred kilometers, following north-south corridors. The presence of predators, of poachers, and of other brigades' herds migrating in parallel routes force the herders to constantly attend to the herd. At least one herder must always remain with the herd, while others generally go to the herd during the day. Yet, I never heard herders – be they from Kharp or Kolguev – complain about the fact that other herders may be using pasture ground allocated to their brigade, thus risking a reduction the quantity and quality of pasture grounds.

Although the Nenets herders make their decisions on how to manage their herd based on the presence of other humans and animals, the Nenets code of conduct – the law of the tundra (*zakon tundry* in Russian) – also implies that if a person is present in the tundra, that he might have good reasons for being there. By their presence, those who are in the tundra have the potential for entering the network of generalised reciprocity implied by the *zakon tundry* (Stammler 2005: 91). Hence, the Nenets herders do not oppose, as a rule, the presence of oil workers in the tundra. It is the lack of respect for the Nenets code of conduct which they judge negatively. Mikhail of the Kharp brigade once told me: "The *neftyaniki* have their own laws and we have our own". Thus, one could suggest that it is the encounter between "two laws of the tundra" – the Nenets one and the post-Soviet Russian legal framework– which leads to misunderstandings and, sometimes, to tensions in the interactions between the Nenets and the Russian oil workers. It was seen earlier that at a higher political and economic level, Moscow may decide which company will be allowed to be present in oil-rich lands, often located in the subarctic and in the arctic territories. I will now discuss how in the tundra of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug the oil workers occupy these lands, and how their code of conduct may reveal itself as incompatible with the one guiding the Nenets herders in their life. This will be discussed in relation to access to land, reciprocity, as well as to knowledge of the land and the animals.

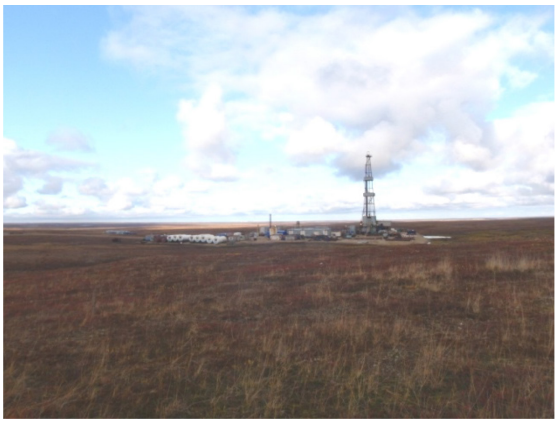
Throughout the world, sites of natural resource extraction have often followed the model of "enclaves" in recent decades, that is, sites which are often more connected with a country's capital and with the global market, than with the surrounding area, most especially due to the presence of fences and security forces (Ferguson 2005, 2006). Although there are no fences surrounding the Yuzhno-Khylchuyu site, there are security guards patrolling the base, making sure that no one enters or leaves the base without authorisation. When I arrived at the Naryanmarneftegaz base, brought there by two herders from the Kharp brigade, the security forces of Lukoma, a Lukoil "daughter" company, were guarding the area. Kolya and Tolya remained at a distance of a few hundred metres, knowing that they should not come near the site. As I entered the site to talk to the head of the base, who should have been pre-emptively warned about my visit, I asked an employee of the cafeteria where the *nachal'nik's* ("boss") office was located. During my conversation with the boss, whose official title was deputy-general director of operation, I could see security guards waiting outside his office, waiting for his commands about how to deal with me. One of their sources of worry was the presence of Kolya and Tolya, about whom they were constantly enquiring: "What are they doing here? How long are they going to stay there?" Kolya called me a few times on my mobile phone to find out if I would be allowed to stay, expressing their wish to leave as soon as possible as they did not feel comfortable waiting so close to this site. On Kolguev, neither of the extraction bases – AMNGR and Artikneft' – holds a security force similar to what exists at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu. It remains nonetheless that the herders tend to avoid visiting either sites because the workers would not generally appreciate such a visit, as I was able to witness when I arrived there with a Nenets friend from Bugrino.

In principle, the oil workers are not allowed to leave their worksites either. The security guards at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu were giving me different reasons to explain these rules. One of them was that a worker could easily get lost by venturing in this environment where the weather can change abruptly. The boss of the site also explained to me that the company has responsibilities vis-à-vis its workers, that if something were to happen to a worker, that Naryanmarneftegaz would be held accountable for it. There is also the need to protect the environment, for example, by making certain that the workers do not gather protected vegetation in the tundra. For example, *Rhodiola rosea* (*zolotoi*

koren' in Russian) is a plant known for its medicinal properties, but it is a species included in the country's Red Book of protected species. Hence, the Nenets herders may harvest it in their Territory of Natural Use for medicinal purposes, but it is forbidden to others to do so.

There are however, more remote extraction sites where oil rigs are located. At such sites, fewer *neftianiki* are working in more isolated locations, yet under less scrutiny of the company. These are sites which the reindeer herders feel more comfortable to visit in order to exchange with the workers, most often for diesel, gas and, sometimes alcohol. On their part, the oil workers generally appreciate the possibility of getting reindeer meat or fish. These exchanges, which most often happen in a discreet manner, are generally one place where both "laws of the tundra" meet, potentially revealing their incompatibility.

Exchanges are described very differently by the herders and the oil workers. From the latter group's point of view, such exchanges correspond closely to what Marshall Sahlins (1972: 220) defines as "balanced reciprocity", that is "[…] to give for that which is received." One characteristic of balanced reciprocity is that exchanges take place without delay (Ibid.: 194). From the herders' point of view, accustomed to a more generalised form of reciprocity, which may be both unspecific and delayed, these balanced exchanges sometimes generate frustration. A large part of this frustration is related to the herders' impression that the workers are being greedy in what they are ready to offer, most especially because they do not own what they trade. It is, however, my impression that the reindeer herders will generally bring meat from a collective reindeer instead of a private one. Hence, the objects exchanged often belong to none of the actors involved in the trade. Yet, because the exchanges take place on sites where oil is being extracted, benefiting primarily the oil companies and their workers, the herders often see in exchanges with oil workers a sense of "negative reciprocity", which Sahlins (1972: 195) defines in the following manner: "Negative reciprocity is the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity, the several forms of appropriation, transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage".



Remote drilling site, Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil field

The oil workers generally perceived exchanges with the Nenets as a form of gift or of help to the Nenets. “We are always ready and happy to help” is a sentence I heard on countless occasions at both extraction sites. I believe that the oil workers’ readiness and willingness to “help” cannot be detached from the position that the Russians were attributed during the Soviet days, as the benevolent vanguard of civilisation. Perceiving oneself as belonging to such a group may imply the corollary perception of the recipients of such help, as unable to manage on their own and being irresponsible. “They are like children. All they do is to come and ask for help all the time. We are willing to help them, but we cannot do it every time”, said one worker among others. However, the oil workers were often explaining the limits to their generosity and helpfulness in relation to the Russian Federation’s mechanisms of redistribution. “We are already paying Naryan-Mar, Arkhangelsk and Moscow for the land lease and for taxes. It is up to them to redistribute the money to the Nenets on Kolguev”, I was told by an AMNGR worker. In the context of the global financial crisis which was affecting the oil industry, the companies’ financial difficulties were similarly used as reasons explaining limits of their alleged generosity. Thus, the oil nomads’ capacity to exchange with the Nenets, or to help them, is described by workers as being determined to a large extent by rules and decisions made by the centralising state and on the world markets. Nonetheless, even when they are unable to exchange, or help, the oil workers always see themselves as helping, and the Nenets are invariably depicted as the recipients of help and gifts. This understanding and description of exchanges with the Nenets as gift giving relates closely to what Bruce Grant (2009: 156-157) remarked about gifts:

> Gift giving […] can be effectively unilateral. Gifts may be simply pronounced and delivered, establishing the generosity (though not immediately the acumen) of the giver. Whether they are received, how they are received, and whether they are successful are secondary questions.

Another aspect revealing some incompatibility of both laws of the tundra concerns the knowledge expected from people present in the tundra, as per the Nenets Law of the tundra. Based on his research with the Evenkis, David Anderson (2000: 120) remarks that "knowing" the land and the reindeer largely determines how a person is situated among others: "[a] competent performance of one's knowledge earns a person respect, establishes one's status, but also entitles one to enter into a relationship with the land as an independent and competent person." Similarly, among the Nenets herders, the question of "knowing" the tundra also implies such competence regarding the way of relating to other herders and the reindeer (Stammler 2005: 227).

In the day to day management of the reindeer, herders generally approach the herd from the back, to pressure the animals to go forward, and along the sides so that they go in the desired direction. One afternoon, I tended to the herd with Mikhael to gather the reindeer and lead them in one direction. We had spent several hours to gather most of the three thousand reindeer and lead them towards one area from where it would be easier for the animals to cross the pipeline the next day. At some point, we saw the reindeer in the front spread in various directions, which meant that most of the efforts of the afternoon had been lost. Realising that the sun was setting on this autumnal day, we had to direct our sleds back to our camp-site, while another herder "on duty" was on his way toward the herd. On the way back, we saw from a distance two oil workers. They were near the head of the herd, with fishing rods. They had probably been out fishing, and decided to approach the herd, yet not in a proper way.

To my knowledge, other Nenets herders or villagers who regularly visit the tundra are more aware of the code of conduct required by the tundra life and reindeer herding. Most importantly, they generally know the limits of their competencies with regard to a herd and to the area it is migrating through. Both on Kolguev and in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, I saw Nenets villagers or urban dwellers visiting the herding brigades. They were generally friends or relatives of the herders, former herders or the owners of reindeer which were herded by one herder in the brigade. I witnessed that

when these visitors came to a brigade, they would avoid approaching the herd without the presence of herders from that brigade, in order not to disturb the herd's movement or the intentions of the herders to direct the herd. Villagers owning reindeer in that herd would also first meet the herder taking care of their reindeer, and would ask him to approach and slaughter the one reindeer they want to bring back to the village. One of the reasons for this is that the ownership of the reindeer is inscribed in the "ear-marks" on reindeer. Thus, in order to identify one reindeer among a herd of two or three thousand animals requires a high level of knowledge of the animals, of their physical as well as behavioural characteristics.

There are also Russian settlers and their descendants who may visit the tundra on a more or less regular basis. Among them, there are those who have lived or grown up in villages or in particular neighbourhoods of Naryan-Mar and may be part of the networks of exchange with Nenets herders. In such cases, the terms of the exchanges often seem to follow the more generalised and delayed characteristic of reciprocity as commanded by the Nenets law of the tundra. For example, the Kharp herders I was migrating with had an acquaintance among the oil workers of Naryanmarneftegaz. As we were getting closer to an extraction site where he had been in his shift, they contacted him to see if he could find some canvas for the *chum,* which he found and left in a particular hidden spot so that the herders would come pick it up. Since he was now living in Naryan-Mar, this oil worker was also the contact person to supply the herders in a number of ways, be it to put credits on the herders' cellphones or to buy material for the houses built for the herders in Krasnoe when they were in the tundra.

Another category of people present in the tundra is that of poachers (*brakon'ery*), who often happen to be settlers who have arrived in the okrug to work for the Soviet oil industry. The *brakon'ery* do not form one coherent group and, to my knowledge, they are not all referred to as such by the Nenets herders. I mentioned that in the 1990s, several settlers had to start relying on fishing and hunting for subsistence as they were jobless and/or because the combined income of their household was not sufficient to support a family. Today, the life routines of many settlers are informed by the calendar of fishing and hunting seasons as different fish species and waterfowl migrate to and from the Arctic at particular times of the year. This even concerns many settlers who have

permanent jobs. For example, Maksim, one of my Naryan-Mar hosts, scheduled his work to go on fishing and hunting trips with his friends who were also the descendants of Russian settlers. They would generally do so based out of their *izbushka* (shack) located outside of Naryan-Mar. At times, those settlers may become poachers, for example, when fishing species such as the salmon (*semga*), which is forbidden to fish during the spawning season. I believe that in such circumstances, the individuals become "poachers" more in regard to the law than, for example, in the eyes of the Nenets they may encounter. Such activities may not only serve to enable subsistence, but may also allow access, by hunting or fishing, to valuable commodities to exchange for services. For example, I met several Russian settlers who would go to bigger towns, such as Moscow and Arkhangelsk, during the summer as they were registered in courses to improve their work qualifications. Sometimes these educational institutions are themselves underfinanced and are missing certain requirements to offer valid diplomas. Hence, I became aware of the fact that the *semga* brought from the NAO could become a valuable commodity at the bottom of a chain of bribes allowing one to receive a diploma.

There are also poachers who have a more permanent or, at least, recurrent presence in particular areas in the tundra. Due to their history of interactions with the Nenets herders, they seem to be better aware of the Nenets code of conduct and may be more involved in their reciprocity network. For example, the herders of the Kharp brigade once stopped for tea at one remote extraction site because they knew one of the workers there. When asking them how they knew him, I was told: "You remember when we met these poachers near the coast? He was working with them before." Felix was an oil worker who had come to the okrug from the Caucasus in the Soviet days. When he lost his job in the 1990s, he engaged in fishing and hunting in the tundra to support his family in Naryan-Mar. When I met him, he was working at one extraction site, where the herders would stop to have tea and, sometimes, to ask for material favours.

However, there are also poachers who completely infringe on the Nenets code of conduct, purposefully. These people may use one of the few roads existing in the okrug to get near the herds to shoot reindeer as they are located close to the dirt road linking the Komi Republic to Naryan-Mar. On Kolguev, a herder told me that oil workers were once

shooting at the herd from a truck, while he was with the herd. He then had to try to move the herd farther from the road.

In the next section, I will show how Nenets' ways of interacting with the reindeer, which they perceive as endowed by their own agency, may sometimes lead to disagreements with Soviet-inherited approaches to reindeer herding and with the farms' administrations, most especially in the presence of the oil industry.

Trust, Overgrazed Land and the Oil Industry

When travelling on a sled, harnessed in the Nenets way, one sits on the left side, generally with at least the left leg on the left-hand glider, which means that one most often has one foot very near the ground. On a number of occasions, I happened to hit my left foot against half earthed debris, often of metal, generally left behind by prospecting expeditions in the Soviet days. Such objects may injure the herder and, even more so, the reindeer, most especially when the tundra is not covered by snow. Some oil companies, such as Naryanmarneftegaz, have begun to engage in the restoration of the tundra, called *rekultivatsia* in Russian. In principle, the restoration of land is compulsory as per the Russian Land Code. However, in practice, it is difficult for state agencies to control as they often do not have the means to supervise these operations. To my knowledge, land restoration often seems to be the result of agreements between the oil company and the SPKs.

Former exploration sites, Kolguev Island

The above site is in the south of the island, some 10 kilometers west of Bugrino, where a prospecting expedition left its debris, along with the carcass of a helicopter which had crashed with casualties in the 1990s. This site is located on a territory which was used by the predecessors of Artikneft', the other oil company operating on Kolguev. In winter 2009, I visited the main base of Artikneft' for a few hours and had the chance to discuss with the engineer who was the leading the operations at the base. One of the topics addressed in the conversation was this site. I asked him if they had plans of conducting *rekultivatsia*. "We wanted to do it, but then the administration of Bugrino told us that they will do it themselves because they wanted the pipes left there". Both the former chairwoman of the Kolguev SPK and one of the staff at the village administration denied this, affirming that they had never signaled their desire or capacity to clean up the site themselves.

Former exploration site near the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil fields

Farm administrations and herders do ask the oil workers to gather together and leave behind the wooden pieces they use in their operations, as good burning wood is a

rarity in the tundra. During the fall migration of the Kharp brigade, the herders adjusted their path by taking into consideration the existence of former exploration sites in order to gather some wood they could carry during their migration. However, the oil workers generally do not only leave wood behind once they cease their operations. When asking the herders of both the Kolguev and Kharp brigades about their concerns that the reindeer might visit oil exploration sites and injure themselves, I always received the same answer: "The reindeer do not even get near these sites. They know that they are not good for them". This belief that the reindeer know best where to be or where to go was a very typical remark I heard on number of occasions, indicating how the herders view the reindeer as an apt being. I remember being impressed one night, when Kolya and Tolya came to bring me back from the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base to the camp, a ride which took more than three hours. Since it was so dark and rainy, I could not see well ahead of me, most especially because my glasses were constantly foggy and covered with raindrops. "Just let your reindeer follow us." I was told by Kolya and Tolya.

The trust in the reindeer also concerns the question of overgrazing, which relates to the Soviet concept of "pasture grounds carrying capacity" (*oleneemkost'*). Early on, the Soviet state began to approach reindeer herding as an economic activity which could reach high productivity levels, as it was promoted by revolutionary experts such as Sergey Kertselli. For him, the production of reindeer could be increased by occupying the pastures in a more rational way, based on the evaluation of experts. The development of "pasture grounds carrying capacity" was one of these experts' significant contributions. Various Soviet research institutes were involved in the taking of inventories of reindeer pastures throughout the Russian North. They measured the carrying capacity of pastures based on estimates of the average consumption of a reindeer in relation to the amount of biomass of edible vegetation available in a pasture unit (Stammler 2005: 242). The concept of carrying capacity of pasture grounds became central in the Soviet integration and control of reindeer herding practices throughout the Russian North. It also reveals how the tundra came to be conceived as an abstract space which, as Lefebvre (1991: 287) argues, "[…] has homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its 'lens'."

In 1990, the 1 950 000 domesticated reindeer present in Russia in 1990 were using ninety-four percent of the pasture grounds. Considering the decline of the reindeer

population in the 1990s, it was in total half of the pasture grounds' carrying capacity that was used by the early 2000s. By that time, it was estimated that nineteen percent of Russia's territory, that is 3 303 388 km², were pasture grounds which could potentially carry up to 2 400 000 domesticated reindeer (Jernsletten and Klokov 2002: 56). These numbers varied, however, between and within regions. For example, it was estimated that in the NAO, the pastures were used to seventy-five percent of their capacity (Ibid.: 57). On Kolguev, it is estimated that the amount of suitable (*prigodnye*) pasture grounds went from 453 700 hectares in 1936 to 354 600 hectares in 2000. The most considerable reduction in pastures took place between 1986 and 2000, when it went from 425 000 to 354 600 hectares. Although these years correspond to the period of intensive oil exploration operations, apparently only 120 hectares were allocated for industrial activities by the okrug (Romanenko 2007: 13). This implies that the loss of reindeer pastures would most likely have been caused by an overly intensive practice of reindeer herding, as was done in the Soviet days. Still, the number of reindeer has been stable between 1998 and 2007, as it remained between 5500 and 6000 reindeer (Ibid.: 22).

One can imagine how the calculations of carrying capacity may be a source of disagreement and tension between reindeer herders, the state authorities and the scientists determining them. In the Yamal Peninsula, for example, this question has been hotly debated. At the same time as the gas industry was increasing its activities over the last decades, the population of reindeer was also increasing. In 2001, the Governor of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug (YNAO) sought a balance between the ecological sustainability of reindeer herding and herders' economic needs. Still, Stammler (2005: 250) remarks that the tensions between the herders, the authorities, and the "experts" determining the carrying capacity is based, to a certain extent, on both cultural misunderstandings and unreliable calculations.

During my field research with reindeer herders, concerns over the possibility of overgrazing were only mentioned to me once in a discussion with Kolguev reindeer herders. The brigadier, who was also the oldest herder in the brigade, told me that there might be a problem with overgrazing, but that thus far the reindeer had been able to feed themselves properly, thus acknowledging the understanding of the reindeer as having their own agency. However, I also witnessed in one region of the NAO some tensions

resulting from different conceptions of the land between Nenets herders and villagers with one administrator of an SPK who was a Russian settler.

In the opinion of the administrator, it was important to reduce the number of reindeer on that territory, namely in order to respect the estimated carrying capacity to assure the stability of herding. The administrator also had the goal of (re-)introducing more discipline among the herders. In an interview with the administrator, I could hear the perceived lack of discipline of the Nenets herders, if not of all of the Nenets:

> You know how nice it was to work with the herders in the Soviet days? They were educated then. The most important thing was that the herders were respected. Since perestroika, they have gone on free swim (*svobodnoe plavanie*) and they stopped being respected. Soviet power allowed for a decrease in the mortality levels and increased their level of education. Russians, the Russian people are very patriotic and have been very generous with the Nenets.

This depiction expressed a typically paternalistic view in which the Nenets were the recipients of benevolent help from the Russians, a help for which they did not seem grateful enough, according to the administrator.

One topic I heard from various villagers of that area concerned the previous yearly slaughter, which normally takes place in January. The descriptions given to me were horrific: “The administrator ordered to kill all our reindeer”, or “Pregnant cows were slaughtered, with their calves hanging out”. The only positive opinion I heard about the new administrator was “At least the herders are getting paid on time”. Still some of these descriptions were hard for me to believe, as I doubted that such a “massacre” could be ordered and that the herders and farm employees who live in the village would allow such a thing to happen. Nonetheless, the rumour mill continued to turn. An acquaintance of mine whose parents and siblings were involved in reindeer herding in the area suggested that the new administrator may have made a secret arrangement with the oil workers to empty the area of its reindeer so that they could conduct their extractive operations there. This event may also be indicative of the perception of interethnic relations when it is thought that even the farm administrator would be more willing to make a deal with other Russians – the oil workers – than to protect the livelihoods and lifestyle of the Nenets.

The fact that reindeer are considered significant sentient beings for Nenets villagers does not mean, however, that Nenets herders have not integrated the productivist

approach to reindeer to a certain extent. As was seen earlier, a dual way of relating to the animals and to the land developed among the herders in the Soviet days. David Anderson (2000: 27-28) remarked that among the Evenkis, a person had to develop the knowledge and competencies of a *tundrovik* ("person who lives in the tundra"), which required technical aptitude, "[…] but most importantly involves a respect for the ethical imperatives which govern the relationship between people, animals, and tundra." A person must also develop the skills of the *pastukh* ("shepherd", often used to describe the herders), which implies the ability and knowledge required to navigate within productive and administrative structures.

The adoption of a productivist attitude was demonstrated by different Nenets herders on a number of occasions. When we were at the site where the inventory is conducted for the seven Kharp brigades, the herders of one brigade had brought their herd near the site, but spontaneously decided not to conduct the inventory. Apparently, that brigade had made that decision because they were unable to keep the herd together, possibly due to the presence of a nearby predator. The herders of the brigade I had initially come with reacted very negatively to the latter brigade's decision: "They will not receive the official documents, and they will not be able to sell their meat", complained Felix, the brigadier. On another occasion, I was told by Galina Petrovna, one of the tent-workers of the same brigade, that during the previous year they had ended in first position in terms of productivity among the brigades of the SPK, which implied certain salary and material benefits. As I congratulated her, she immediately replied "One should not praise" ("*Nel'zya khvalit'* "), scared that this would bring misfortune to them and that it would affect their success.

Results of the productivity levels of each of the seven brigades of the Kharp SPK for the year 2010. The brigades are ranked according to their productivity and receive (or not) certain material or salary benefits based on their productivity. This document was handed to the herders by the farm's chairman on "Reindeer Day".

There are thus different layers of significance in the relationship the Nenets maintain with the tundra, and with its human and non-human inhabitants, some of which were inherited from the Soviet regime. In the next section I will discuss the tundra as comprising sites of high spiritual significance for the Nenets herders and villagers. This discussion will be brief, because these aspects are manifested often in a subtle way and constitute a limit to my research. However, it is important to relate them because the spiritual aspect of the land is an important element of the law of the tundra, ultimately illustrating how the tundra lands remain highly significant even for Nenets villagers today.

The Spirituality of the Land

In the months following my initial arrival in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in August 2008, I came to realise that many of the rituals and taboos comprising the traditional cosmological world view of the Nenets had stopped being practiced and respected. In discussions with Nenets interlocutors, I heard on several occasions that many of these rituals and beliefs are still observed by the Nenets of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, but are no longer practiced by the "European Nenets", as they were more deeply affected by Christianisation in the Tsarist days and during the process of "Sovietisation".

As time went by, different events and encounters with various Nenets individuals led me to realise that this description is missing important details. A story related to me about the grandfather of two young herders of the Kharp brigade is but one example. Filip Yurevich suffered from a severe illness as a youngster and was treated by a shaman. Prior to curing him, the shaman warned him that in order to save his life, the lives of his unborn sons would have to be taken away. He accepted the deal and recovered from his illness. Decades later, both of his sons died. Another story was told by Maria Valentinovna, the mother of my host in Bugrino. She related that her grandfather, who was a shaman, had cast a spell on a family. The spell implied that all of the descendants of that family, who now happen to be her neighbours in the sedentarised village, would stutter. Both of these brief stories, which served to explain the causes of certain events, were related to me by people of different generations, suggesting the perpetuation of these beliefs through time.

While migrating or circulating through the tundra in order to perform various tasks with the herders of both the Kharp and Kolguev SPKs, we happened to cross different sacred sites that the herders would vaguely point to. “Over there, there is a sacred site”, they would generally tell me. I was often surprised that they would never make a stop at them. I initially presumed that this was so because the herders were younger Nenets who no longer shared these beliefs. Although this might be true to a certain extent, accepting this conclusion completely would be simplistic.

On Kolguev, there are four main Nenets sacred sites – Seĭkorkha, Semigolovnaya, Savdi or Bol’shoĭ Nos – all of which are located on hills. Karina Lukin (2010: 34) remarks about these sites that,

> [t]hese form a network of high, sacred hills on the island which is linked to former nomadic practices, as sacred sites usually lie in areas that were continuously inhabited […]. The four hills are all common sacred sites, which means that every island family visited them when passing. Thus, they formed a collective, ritual landscape for the islanders.

Lukin writes of a project initiated by Ada Rybachuk and Vladimir Mel’nichenko, two Ukrainian artists who had sojourned among the Kolguev herders in the late 1950s. In the early 2000s, in the context of the decade of the International Indigenous Peoples, the artists had proposed to donate a sculpture of a Bronze Head and to place it at the top of Seĭkorkha. Despite the good intentions behind this initiative, the project was met with

strong opposition from the Kolguev Nenets. Lukin explains this opposition by the fact that the presence of these heads would affect the sacred world and infringe on the lands still largely understood as remaining outside the realm of the state.

Considering that the vast majority of islanders live in the village, this event illustrates in another way how the tundra remains part of the village life. Apart from the reindeer herders or their close relatives, most of the adults I met in Bugrino told me that they had never or very rarely been to the tundra. It must be remembered that both children of herders as well as those of villagers have had to leave the island after the fourth class to live in boarding schools or among their relatives in Naryan-Mar until they completed their compulsory school education. Hence, they normally visited Kolguev in the summer, and could hardly acquire the knowledge required for life in the tundra unless they were children of herders. In a discussion with Maria Valentinovna, I discovered that she had only been once in the tundra, despite her fifty years of age. It was at one New Year's Eve celebration that she and other guests were invited to go to the tundra in an all-terrain vehicle (*vezdekhod*). She was remembering how shocked she was the next morning upon waking up and wanting to go back as soon as possible to Bugrino. It is not long after this discussion took place that she told me about her grandfather who was a shaman. In that conversation, she began to talk about a shamans' graveyard, situated on the territory of one of the reindeer herders' brigades. Maria Valentinovna stated that anyone who would venture to enter this area would likely die, unless they were shamans. Because of her shamanic ancestry, she believes that she and her children could go there without risking anything. As we were having this discussion, one herder of that brigade happened to join us. He confirmed that no herder from his brigade dared to enter the area of the shaman cemetery.

The tundra and its most numerous inhabitants – the reindeer – remain important sources of livelihoods and symbolic source of identification for the Nenets, individually and collectively. Karina Lukin (2010: 29) describes the interconnections between the tundra and the village in the following way:

> Often described and set against the tundra, the village is also part of the network of Kolguyev's places the islanders know. The village is not just the opposite of the tundra, but also part of it. Thus, the village itself cannot be understood through the village environment and practices only, but becomes comprehensible in relation to other places on the island.

Yet, despite the spiritual significance of the tundra, many villagers perceive a "chronological" gap between the village and the tundra, as if the former represents modernity and the latter the sites of the remnants of their traditions and culture. However, I will also discuss in the next chapters how the tundra is often seen as a moral haven against the social problems present in villages and in Naryan-Mar. In the next section, I will examine how Russian settlers and oil nomads relate differently to their regions of origin, a process which also involves different chronological and spatial conceptions of the connections between the Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the *materik* (continent).

The Tundra, the Continent and the Market

For those who came to work for the Soviet oil industry, living in the North gradually became a process of being uprooted from regions of origin and re-establishing roots in the North. Hence, individuals coming from different regions of Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus and other Soviet republics had to establish networks together which would, to a certain extent, come to replace the deep bonds they ostensibly had back home. With little infrastructure built when they came, both in the town where their families were based and at the work place, the settlers had no choice but to start relying on each other in their new home region. Based on his research with settlers in Chukotka, Niobe Thompson (2008: 117) remarks that,"[o]ne very important ingredient in the sense of difference, indeed, superiority, that settlers felt vis-à-vis the average Soviet was membership in an enveloping, benevolent and robust community, which through the practices of sharing, generated a constant sense of social belonging."

However, the settlers kept in touch with their regions of origin. Longer vacations and cheap, if not free transportation to the *materik* were among the benefits they were receiving to compensate for the hardships they experienced in the rigorous North. This was how my Naryan-Mar friends who were in their thirties met and maintained contact with their distant relatives as they were children. Such trips to the South were also related to the fact that the Soviet authorities assumed that children of settlers growing up in the Arctic were missing the vitamins provided by the sun and fruits and vegetables required to be healthy.

As was seen, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent dismantlement of most prospecting expeditions, many settlers chose to move back to the

"South", often to their region of origin. Those who remained, nonetheless, had to face extremely challenging situations. One of the options available to them was to engage in hunting and fishing in order to subsist, or to complement insufficient or sporadic income. Another source of support was also their inclusion in networks of reciprocity both in the NAO and with their friends and relatives on the *materik*.

As my field research coincided with the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, I could see how my friends' and acquaintances' interactions with their regions of origin were taking place. Compared with some of these regions, oil-rich NAO seemed to be a place of stability. Hence, contrary to the vast emigration to the *materik* which took place throughout the 1990s, I noticed that some people were in fact coming to the okrug either because they had been living there earlier or because they had relatives willing to welcome them. For example, Oleg, one of my Naryan-Mar friends, welcomed his cousin from the Ukraine to come work on apartment renovations. He had come for several months to make money to support his family, as Ukraine's economic situation was very bleak. Due to the better economic situation of his okrug, Oleg was also able to encounter again two friends from his youth who had decided to move back to the NAO from central Russia, namely because they could qualify for state programmes facilitating access to apartments, which I will discuss in the following chapter. Furthermore, because of its better financial situation compared to other Russian regions, the NAO is able to continue providing its inhabitants with free transportation anywhere within Russia, every second year. Hence, Oleg's parents spend weeks in the summer with their own parents and relatives, and bring their grand-children so that they can have access to a climate and diet deemed healthier.

It remains that the global financial crisis also had as a consequence the cancellation or postponement of numerous development projects by the oil industry in the okrug. Among those residents of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug who were employed by the oil industry, permanently or temporarily – like some villagers from Krasnoe who were employed for seismic operations – several lost their jobs. Some smaller companies located in Iskateley had to close their doors. The workers at AMNGR most often began working for the company in the late Soviet days, either on Kolguev or on offshore exploration. The majority of the workers arrived from the "traditional" oil producing

regions (Azerbaidjan, Chechnya, the Volga Region) and settled in Murmansk, where the company was and still is located. Hence, most of them have been living and working in the Russian North for decades. The workers operating the Peschanka site are divided in two shifts, working generally between forty-five to fifty-five days, then staying at home for the equivalent period of time. Thus, the work collectives are now like a second family to many of them. According to the workers, the salaries offered by AMNGR, as well as the conditions in which they work, compare rather badly to those offered by other oil companies in the country. Their work-site also looks like one built and operated in the Soviet days and has not changed ever since: "The only thing that has changed is that we now have a tennis and a pool tables, and that we are now older", said one worker to me. Several workers also mentioned that even the technologies they were using in their production operations were "ancient" (*drevnye*).

In the context of the global financial crisis, this collectivity was increasingly challenged. AMNGR had to reduce its expenses, which implied that they might also fire employees. The company demanded concessions from its workers in order to cut down its expenditures. Not only did they have to accept being transported by boat, as opposed to by plane, but the workers also had to accept working in shifts lasting between seventy-five and eighty days. As will be seen in chapter 7, this has certain impacts on their physiological and psychological health.

I have shown that the workers employed by AMNGR were strongly opposed to the privatisation of the oil industry, for they believe this industry is too strategic for Russia and that the revenues should go to the Russian state and society. Thus, the global financial crisis brought an important source of anxiety among them because the future of their state-owned company was jeopardised. Was it going to be sold to a private company, a foreign one, or remain in the hands of the state? Was it going to be purchased by the main Russian state-owned company Rosneft or by a Vietnamese state-owned company? There was in fact a rumour circulating among the workers that AMNGR might be purchased by a Vietnamese state-owned company in order to explore and extract oil off the shores of Vietnam, in the South China Sea. Many workers, especially the older ones, anticipated this possibility with anxiety. "I am over fifty and have lived and worked for decades in the Arctic, and now they want me to work in hot Vietnam?" shared one

worker, among others. All these changes – the longer shifts, the possible privatisation of the company as well as the chances of being sent to Vietnam – were sources of anxiety for these workers now experiencing individual and collective pressures from the market.[40]

The work organisation and pace at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base are very different from what is described above. Very soon after arriving at the Naryanmarneftegaz site, I could find much more resemblance with the base I had visited in 2009 in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska. The site felt like a hive, with the buzzing sounds of helicopters leaving and arriving at different moments and from various directions. The subcontractors worked on shifts with different durations, coming from diverse regions of Russia or the CIS.

Situated in a political and economic context where decisions affecting a remote area are made in Moscow or elsewhere in the world, Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu resembles more an enclave, as described by James Ferguson (2005), than the Peshanka Lake site. Being born out of the cooperation between two private companies, Naryanmarneftegaz is a global company, and its *modus operandi* reveals what Ferguson (2005: 379) remarks about these global extractive corporations:

> […] the movement of capital that is entailed in such enterprises is "global" in the sense that it crosses the globe, but it does not encompass or cover contiguous geographic space. The movements of capital cross national borders, but they jump point to point, and huge areas are simply bypassed. […] When capital is invested in spatially segregated mineral-extraction enclaves, the "flow" of capital does not cover the globe, it connects discrete points on it.

The site in question connects the world widely as its shareholders, who make decisions regarding the company's activities, which may be located anywhere in the world. The site also connects different regions of Russia and the CIS to flows of capital, which has as a consequence the need for workers to embark on these flows and embrace a lifestyle characterised by mobility and flexibility. This flexibility creates the possibility for Naryanmarneftegaz to rely on workers who come from different regions in Russia and the CIS to meet the specific needs at lower costs, both for its Naryan-Mar head office and

[40] In a subsequent phase of my field research, I discovered that a Russian-Vietnamese joint-venture company, RussV'etPetro (Russian-Viet Petroleum), had been formed involving Rosneft' and a Vietnamese state oil company. As I visited the brand new office of that young company, in Naryan-Mar's downtown, it was clear from my interview with its one representative that RussV'etPetro had the intention of becoming one of the key actors in the okrug. When asking if the company had the intention of acquiring AMNGR, the representative said that he did not know, yet he smiled.

for the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu extraction site. When I was at the latter site, I met workers who had come from various regions, including Kazakhstan, Belarus, the Ukraine, and from the Russian regions of Perm, Tatarstan, Bashkiria, Moscow, St-Petersburg, from the Arkhangelsk Oblast and the Komi Republic and a very small number from the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The main motivations for most of the workers I met at either of the Naryanmarneftegaz work places were higher and more stable salaries than those available in their home regions as well as better possibilities of advancement.

Compared with the workers at AMNGR, the workers at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu were generally working much shorter shifts, most often from two to four weeks. On average, they were also much younger than those at the Peschanka Lake, ranging from twenty-five to forty-five years old. Hence, the recent entry of the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil fields into the production phase served for many as one of the first experiences in oil production, and they viewed it as a good place to begin their career. Still, it seemed very clear to them that if higher salaries and better work conditions were offered elsewhere, most especially in their home regions, they would not hesitate before choosing to leave their work for Naryanmarneftegaz. One Russian engineer I met had recently moved to the Moscow Region from Kazakhstan and could not find a job in his new home region to support his young children. Until then, he had been working for different oil companies in Middle-Eastern countries and was hoping to either find a decent job in his new hometown or emigrate altogether to the West. The life-path chosen by an acquaintance of mine among the oil nomads reveals a similar way of making decisions concerning where one is willing to work. Maxim is an oil worker in his late 20s originating from the Arkhangelsk Oblast who had settled with his young family in the NAO. When I met him, he was working at the Kharyaga oil extraction site, located in the south of the okrug, operated by French Total and other Western companies. After just a couple of years working there, he was offered and accepted a higher salary to work shifts at an extraction site in the Russian Far East, several thousands of kilometers away from home.

By comparing the situations and opinions of the workers at AMNGR and Naryanmarneftegaz, one can see that the respective models of work organisation originate from different time periods and ideological contexts. The workers at AMNGR accepted, collectively, to remain on the island for a longer shift in order for most workers

to keep their jobs, although it is clear from the beginning that their salaries and work conditions were already lower than those offered by other companies. The workers at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu clearly embody the values of both flexibility and autonomy generally attributed to neoliberalism. These shift-workers embrace the conception of mobility increasingly required not only by the extractive industries operating in remote areas, but also in other sectors of the economy. In this sense, these workers embody a conception of mobility which Foucault (2008: 230) associates with the American neoliberals:

> The mobility of a population and its ability to make choices of mobility as investment choices for improving income enable the phenomena of migration to be brought back into economic analysis, not as pure and simple effects of economic mechanisms which extend beyond individuals and which, as it were, bind them to an immense machine which they do not control, but as behavior in terms individual enterprise, of enterprise of oneself with investments and incomes.

Hence, it seems that what leads oil nomads to move between the continent and the okrug are flows of the capital, whereas for the settlers, movement tends to be related to Soviet-inherited state programmes that allow them to maintain a connection with the *materik*. Such benefits are one of the reasons leading oil companies to relinquish hiring settlers. The latter's access to these benefits also seem to be behind the oil nomads' impression that settlers are too dependent on the state. It remains, however, that both oil nomads and residents of the okrug share a strong attachment to the Russian state, which manifests itself spatially.

The Indivisibility of Land in a Collapsed Empire

In August 2008, during the first phase of my field research, I was in Naryan-Mar when the Georgian army launched an attack on South Ossetia, thousands of kilometers away from the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. This event was widely discussed in the NAO, as the Russian media largely portrayed the Georgian attack on South Ossetia as backed, if not sponsored, by the United States and NATO. Very soon after, MIG fighter jets were flying above the okrug's capital throughout the day, a signal that I interpreted as the need for the Russian state to show the rest of the world that it was ready to protect its sovereignty as well as its zones of influence in the CIS. Indeed, my initial encounters with people in the okrug were often marked by expressions of patriotism and admiration

for the might of the Russian Army and Air force, and by the conviction that no NATO country could ever conquer Russia.

As I had experienced during previous stays in Russia and elsewhere outside of Québec, people were often confused about my origins, due to the fact that I have a French name, French as my mother tongue, but come from North America. Hence, I was often thought to come either from the United States or France. I first came to be allegedly associated with NATO when I was invited by a group of young oil nomads working in the offices of oil companies for a barbecue "in the nature" outside of Naryan-Mar. Throughout the afternoon, remarks were often made, "with humour", that Russia would never surrender to anyone, obviously pointing to the fact that I came from a country which had some ambitions over Russia as all NATO, if not all Western states allegedly had. I landed on Kolguev for the first time a few weeks following that war. I was very surprised to hear the Nenets I was getting acquainted with hold similar patriotic discourses as the people I had recently become acquainted with in Naryan-Mar. Opinions like "No one will ever conquer Russia", "I'm ready to die for my country" were as commonly expressed in Bugrino, in the Kolguev tundra as in Naryan-Mar.

This situation is, of course, very contextual and fueled by information circulating in the predominantly state-controlled Russian media. On Kolguev, most of the herders I stayed with had done military service, which, as they explained to me, they generally viewed as a way to serve the country, to discover new parts of Russia, and to experience new adventures._My Bugrino host, Kolya, mentioned that he had his mother and other relatives pressure the *Voenkomat* (the army's recruitment office), unsuccessfully, to admit him despite an injury he got during his childhood so that he could fight in the Second Chechnyan War. His mother was equally disappointed years later when Kolya's younger brother was not taken by the army due to similar reasons. My astonishment about this situation may be explained, partly, by the fact that anthropology is too often accustomed to conceiving of "indigenous peoples" as victims of the state and less so as willing participants in certain state projects such as the military service or wars. Yet, it remains that the concerns over the country's territorial sovereignty and integrity may sometimes result in tensions in a region like the NAO, where different ethnic groups have been cohabitating for decades.

When I first arrived at the Peshanka Lake oil extraction site, most of the AMNGR workers I had become acquainted with were mentioning a documentary shot on Kolguev by French film-directors Nina Beliaeva and Jean-Pierre Bozon (2006) in the mid-2000s, *Le premier pétrole arctique*. In the documentary, we see the workers at AMNGR conduct their operations, we hear them talking about their life both at work and at home, as well as about their appreciation of the island and their perception of the Nenets. We also see and hear both the administrators of the farm in Bugrino and herders in the tundra talking about how the oil industry is bringing them little benefit, and how the presence of that industry is jeopardising the future of reindeer herding. The narration in the documentary arguably replicates the common narrative of the marginalised, if not oppressed indigenous people at the hand of the majority group and of the state.

My visit to the AMNGR base took place a couple of years following the release of the documentary, which had been seen by most if not all oil workers. The workers frequently discussed the content of the documentary, which appeared to be the first moment they actually heard the Nenets express their discontent about their presence. "How can they say that this island is theirs? We have all been living here together for decades" one engineer told me, in a way that resonated with the opinion shared by most workers I discussed with. The engineer heading the operations of the site was an ethnic-Russian who had come from Chechnya and settled in Murmansk decades ago. As I would have my daily coffee in his office, he would often look at the map of the Russian Federation and reminisce about the size of the Soviet empire. One of the moments he found difficult to cope with was what he described as the "sudden appearance" of ethnic tensions in his home region. Thus, the realisation that some Nenets may be questioning the oil workers' presence on the island heard in the documentary resonated, in his discourse, with events taking place in the faraway Caucasus.

One evening, one of the cooks at the cafeteria came to sit next to me when I was finishing my tea. She came from Dagestan, the neighbouring republic of Chechnya, also highly affected by interethnic and confessional violence to this day. After demonstrating similar opinions on the tragedy of the Caucasus and also comparing the ethnic tensions existing there and on Kolguev, she suddenly asked me: "Do you know that the Nenets in fact all came from Novaya Zemlya in the 1950s?" This opinion was related to me as a

fact by virtually all the workers I had discussions with. However, only ten families had arrived at the island from Novaya Zemlya in the late 1950s, removed from there prior to the conduct of nuclear tests (Dallmann et al. 2010: 104). Karl, a Nenets elder I would sometimes sit and discuss with in Bugrino, once told me that Kolguev kids would often fight with the children who had arrived from Novaya Zemlya. Nevertheless, I did not happen to meet one person who mentioned being a descendant of those Nenets "migrants". I do not know the origins of this "information" circulating among the oil workers, but it is clear that they used it to discredit and criticise the alleged autonomist aspirations of the Nenets, based on their status of indigenous people.

Another argument that was used to discredit the "indigeneity" claims of the Nenets was the existence of a Pomor[41] cemetery on the island. In 1767, a group of seventy Pomory settled on the island and gradually died, apparently of scurvy. They were buried at a site located on the western side of the island, along the Krivaya River (Golovanov 2005: 240-241). When discussing with AMNGR workers, a driver at once told me to come and hop on his truck, because he had to show me a site where he claimed the Pomory had been buried just outside the Peschanka Lake base, located on the eastern side of the island. Although it is not clear whether it was a Pomor burial site, it is evident that by suggesting the older presence of the Pomory, a group associated with the Russians, the workers question the indigeneity of the Nenets on the island, whom are thought to only have arrived in the 1950s. Hence, the questioning of the older roots of the Nenets testifies to two characteristics of the way of relating to space. Borrowing the words of Lisa Malkki (1997: 58), this demonstrates how "[…] culture and nation are kindred concepts: they are not only spatializing but also territorializing […]". The importance of the burial site to the workers also exemplifies the importance of culture as located "in soil" in order to justify belonging (Ibid.).

[41] The Pomory ("Seasiders") descend from a group of Russians who settled throughout the areas now referred to as Russia's northwestern territories. Throughout the centuries, the Pomory have been characterised by their maritime way of life, as they explored the northern seas in order to fish, hunt sea-mammals and trade. Today, there is a movement among descendants of the Pomory to ask for the state to acknowledge their cultural specificity, which they hope would provide them with specific rights, namely in relation to fishing.

Cross indicating a burial site outside of the AMNGR base.

Like many Russians, especially for those who grew up in the Soviet days, the collapse of the USSR did not only imply a loss of pride for the strength of the empire, or the suffering caused by interethnic tensions, but also a type of "uprootedness". The country in which they had grown up and in which they had been the vanguard of civilisation ceased to exist without them even leaving it. Hence, any questioning of their presence in a territory, any perceived threat to the integrality of the Russian reign over a given territory is felt strongly. Thus, the workers were very prompt to remind me that Kolguev is located within the Russian Federation and that as Russians citizens (*Rossiyane*) they have the right to be living and working on the island, just as much as the Nenets do.

The Kolguev Nenets herders and villagers I met generally saw little direct benefit from the extraction of oil. It remains nonetheless that the herders do not wish for the oil workers to disappear from the island as they are aware of the role of the oil industry in Russia: "It is a positive role. It enriches our economy", I was told by Mikhail, a young herder. They also value their belonging to Russia: "Where would we go without Russia?! Russia is our motherland. We grew up in Russia", added Pavel. Hence, they do not necessarily want the oil workers to leave Kolguev, but they would like them to be more careful with the environment: "If they were more careful (*akuratnee*), remarked Mikhail. I've heard of a company on the continent (*na materike*). When they leave, the grass is already green."

The situation at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu would appear to be very different from the one at AMNGR. When I visited the base in 2009, it had only existed for three years. The workers there also have much less interactions with the Nenets, because it is forbidden for them to leave the base unless they work at more remote drilling sites, because they do not have a long history in the region, and have much shorter work shifts.

The oil workers at both Naryanmarneftegaz and AMNGR generally expressed a mix of opinions about the future of reindeer herding. On the one hand, the majority of the workers with whom I spoke could hardly imagine how the herders can lead a nomadic way of life, without the advantages of civilisation (*bez blag tsivilizatsii*), and in such a rigorous climate. On Kolguev, I often heard oil workers express paternalistic opinions about the necessity to help the Nenets, if not to rid them of their backward way of life. However, most of the workers at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu saw themselves as "guests" in the tundra, stating that they should try by any possible means to preserve the tundra, which they wish to return as intact as possible to the Nenets so that they may continue herding the reindeer once the oil production ceases. It must be remembered, however, that Naryanmarneftegaz is projecting to extract oil from these fields for the next twenty years. Hence, the big question is how oil workers will see land either as more extraction sites enter into operation, or if they last for longer, thus increasing the risk of tensions between the Nenets and the Russian oil workers. Still, because of their embrace of a more mobile way of life, the workers I met at Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu do not generally seem to intend to remain there for decades, as the workers at AMNGR did.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the ways in which the Nenets herders and villagers, settlers as well as oil nomads perceive of and interact with the land in the NAO and beyond. This examination revealed that each group is guided by laws stemming from the particular political, economic, and cultural contexts from which they come. I focused primarily on how the interactions between these groups reveal the particularities of two legal frameworks, the Nenets law of the tundra as well as post-Soviet Russian law, and may sometimes lead to tensions. Ronald Niezen (2003: 18) has noted about the global indigenous movement that it aims to establish "[…] an honorable relationship with states in which their rights to land are affirmed and compensation for their losses and suffering

is honorably provided." This basic aspiration can of course take a variety of forms. Although in the context of the NAO, the question of compensation for past suffering is not something discussed among the Nenets, the examination of the interactions taking place in the tundra reveal that sources of tension primarily concern the lack of respect for the Nenets law of the tundra with regard to access to the land, reciprocity, and knowledge of how to behave with the tundra's inhabitants – human and non-human.

Though I focus primarily on the Nenets law of the tundra and post-Soviet Russian law, it remains that the interactions with the territory, within and beyond the NAO, integrate certain elements which take their roots in the Soviet order. The concept of carrying capacity of the pasture grounds introduced in the Soviet management of reindeer herding forces the herders to engage with the animals in a productivist manner, which may be a source of frustration for the herders, as well as for Nenets villagers. Another aspect which illustrates a spatial conception inherited from the Soviet era concerns the settlers primarily, as one of the Soviet-inherited northern benefits allows them to travel for free anywhere in the country every second year. This allows them to remain in contact with their relatives and friends in their region of origins, a contact they often make sure to perpetuate by bringing back their children and grand-children back there in the summer.

In the post-Soviet context, the trauma experienced by many Russians due to the dismantlement of the USSR, as well as the consequent interethnic and inter-confessional tensions are still highly felt, and lead the oil workers on Kolguev to feel very strongly about the questioning of their presence by some Nenets. However, the spatial conception emerging in the post-Soviet context also concerns the market. In fact, the oil nomads experience the pressures of the market differently from settlers, because they are already more accustomed to the idea of following the flows of capital elsewhere if need be, or most especially, if it can provide them with better salaries and work conditions. It remains that the oil nomads will most certainly still have work to do in the NAO and elsewhere in Russia as the Russian state is likely to remain "addicted" to oil and to continue facilitating the operations of oil industry, namely by creating laws and regulation flexible enough to accommodate both the oil companies and Moscow's to meet their respective needs. This will most likely also imply that in those oil-rich regions, the oil industry will

be the most important agent of development, bringing new types of infrastructure and a new taste to these regions, as I will show in the following chapter.

6

(Dis-)connecting Infrastructure

The tundra is often imagined by those who do not inhabit it permanently as beautiful yet potentially dangerous due to the intensity of its climate, the presence of wild animals, such as polar bears, and its vast, empty spaces seemingly disconnected from the rest of the world. The Russian concept of *romantika* referred to by many oil workers evokes this ambivalent perception not only of the tundra, but also of its indigenous peoples. The workers' difficulty in appreciating the lifestyle of the Nenets herders, even from a distance, is generally expressed in relation to what they see as their disconnection from civilisation. Behind this perceived disconnection from and/or lack of civilisation is the absence of built infrastructure generally associated with urban and industrial settings. Hence, it appears as if *romantika* cannot but have as an end point "civilisation" (*tsivilizatsiya*) with its constructed environment. The numerous pictures of the tundra, of its fauna, flora and of its indigenous inhabitants in halls of the oil companies' offices testify to this paradox. The tundra is, however, far from empty of social and cultural life. Various beings – human and non-human – have been interacting with one another for millennia. Additionally, the tundra is far from being disconnected from the rest of world. Politicians in Moscow, shareholders and oil consumers around the world make decisions on a daily basis which have an impact on life in the tundra.

In this chapter, it is this connection and disconnection between those living and working in the Arctic from other people and regions that I will examine in relation to infrastructures present in the NAO. More specifically, I will examine the various ways in which five different types of infrastructures present in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug serve as agents of change and (dis-)connection among one or the other group present in the NAO: pipelines, houses, helicopters, snowmobiles, and mobile phone connections. These infrastructures have in common the movement, connection or transportation of commodities and/or humans. Most importantly, they share a particular connection to the oil industry; some since the Soviet era, others only appearing with the recent oil boom. Before each of these types of material agents of (dis-) connection are tackled, I will relate some relevant elements of analysis stemming from recent literature on infrastructures as well as of the role of corporations in the time of flexible capitalism.

Infrastructure and Corporate Paternalism

Splintering Urbanism written by Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001) is a path-breaking work on the study of infrastructure that emerged from urban planning. Graham and Marvin focus on urban infrastructures (such as streets, energy and water systems, transport). These "networked infrastructures" have traditionally served to create a sense of cohesion within cities and between cities and larger regions, connecting them in the name of national or public interest. The material connections these infrastructures establish between regions, cities or neighbourhoods also allow for the definition of broader identities (Graham and Marvin 2001: 8). Networked infrastructures may also create, perpetuate or increase inequalities and divisions between and within regions and their respective inhabitants. Graham and Marvin (2001: 11) observe that infrastructures "unevenly bind spaces together across cities, regions, nations and international boundaries whilst helping also to define the material and social dynamics, and divisions, within and between urban spaces." Hence, while they may connect different regions and people together, the establishment of such infrastructures may also become barriers for other people.

In *Signal and Noise*, Brian Larkin (2008) examines the role played by infrastructures in colonial and post-colonial urban Nigeria. For Larkin (2008: 6) the term infrastructure "[…] refers to this totality of both technical and cultural systems that create institutionalized structures whereby goods of all sorts circulate, connecting and binding people into collectivities." Although I use the term in a similar manner, the types of infrastructures to be examined in this chapter also include those which move not only goods, but also people between places in order to facilitate production. My research, however, departs from the contexts studied in both of the works mentioned above since my analysis will focus largely on a "rural" area – the tundra – as opposed to a strictly urban setting. Nonetheless, Larkin's work bears resemblance to the context I analyse in that it focuses on how these connections are used as forms of control by a metropolis over a faraway territory.

The current way of perceiving infrastructures takes its root in the Enlightenment ideal of ordering the world rationally so as to allow for the circulation of both ideas and goods (Larkin 2008: 8). Over the centuries, previous forms of infrastructure have left

their imprint, whether they remain physically present or present only in people's minds. Hence, the appearance of new technologies and infrastructures does not necessarily erase or overtake previous ones. In a previous work on the appearance of new means of telecommunications in urban settings, Graham and Marvin (1996) describe the interactions between various infrastructures taking their origins in different periods as "enhancements". As they suggest, the "[…] interactions between telecommunications and infrastructure networks can be most accurately characterised as one of interdependence, complementarity and synergy" (Graham and Marvin 1996: 284). However, it is important to remember that infrastructures do not have a universal effect as there is no deterministic consequence of introducing a technology or form of infrastructure (Graham and Marvin 2001: 11). For example, I will show, especially in relation to the snowmobile, that the herders of two regions of the NAO have adopted this technology in different ways.

In the Soviet Union, it was predominantly state enterprises – be they collective and state farms, or exploration expeditions – that connected citizens to the centrally planned economy. This connection was often made visible by the different types of infrastructures established to assist production and to provide citizens with access to certain living standards. Hence, these enterprises functioned as "total social institutions" integrating Soviet individuals as both producers and recipients of all the materials and services made available by the state (Humphrey 1999: 452). This was even truer in a region like the Nenets Okrug, where two economic sectors comprised the main forces of development: reindeer herding and the oil industry. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the associated dismantling of many of its enterprises were felt strongly by the okrug's inhabitants, leading many to emigrate. One consequence of the collapse was the reduced or non-availability of certain infrastructures the population had been relying on for decades. For example, the costliness and scarcity of helicopter flights became an important issue for herders, villagers and farms since they were an essential means of bringing supplies to the tundra, as well as reindeer meat from the tundra to the village.

In the 1990s, waves of privatisation did not only affect the oil industry at a macro level, but also, at a micro level, individual dwellings. Although many apartments were privatised throughout the country, they generally remained connected to centralised water and heating systems. In his study of Soviet and post-Soviet infrastructures, Stephen

Collier (2011) describes the resulting situation as "the intransigence of things," in which networks of infrastructures, such as heating systems, were generally not privatised despite the various waves of reforms often categorised as neoliberal. This leads him to conclude that what is often termed as a neoliberal agenda might not be as totalising as is often thought, and more pointedly, that neoliberalism may be more accommodating than generally assumed. I will be discussing the question of housing later in this chapter, I will show how the okrug's second oil boom is associated with a particular architectural aesthetic, one that is associated with market forces and that appears intolerant of Soviet-inherited buildings. Yet, this intolerance does not prevent the okrug administration from maintaining the Soviet-inherited northern benefits for settlers, such as priority access to new apartments, which its oil revenues allow it to do.

The return of the oil industry to the NAO in the early 2000s also means that, once again, the industry serves as the main agent of political, economic, and social development for the okrug. However, the oil industry is now operating according to the principles of flexible capitalism, namely in terms of the organisation of work, as previously shown. Although Lukoil and its daughter company, Naryanmarneftegaz, have a preference for hiring shift-workers coming from faraway regions, the companies and their workers often hold a paternalistic discourse vis-à-vis the Nenets and settler inhabitants, who are perceived as the recipients of their generosity. To a certain extent, it could be said that Lukoil, with its subcontracting companies are replacing Soviet "total social institutions", especially in relation to the different types of infrastructures they are establishing in the okrug. This process is akin to the recent corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach and discourse embraced by numerous companies throughout the world. Dinah Rajak (2011: 25) remarks about CSR that it "[…] appears to fill a veritable 'gap in the Market', endowing it with much-needed ethical values and virtues, enabling corporations themselves to address the social and environmental consequences of capitalist development." In the post-Soviet context, the inhabitants of the NAO experienced the vanishing of the state institutions just two decades earlier. However, it is not a "gap in the market" that oil companies are filling, but a gap left by the state.

(Dis-)Connecting Pipes

> The normally invisible quality of working infrastructure becomes visible when it breaks: the server is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout. (Star 1999: 383)

Graham and Marvin (2001: 11) remark that "[t]he construction of spaces of mobility and flow for some, however, always involves the construction of barriers for others." The first type of infrastructure I discuss, the pipeline network, may have this paradoxical effect, connecting sources of production to the market, while also serving as a barrier for others living in the area.

In Russia, large segments of the current pipeline network were established in the Soviet period. In 2005, it was reported that at least half of the Russian oil pipelines and one third of the gas pipelines were more than than twenty years old. This situation resulted in seventy-five to eighty ruptures in the oil pipeline network per year, resulting in environmental damage (Lynch 2005: 211). In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, however, few pipelines were established during the Soviet era since intensive production had not yet begun. One of the few existing pipelines was laid in 1986 to connect the newly productive Kharyaga oil fields to the pipeline network built in 1975 in the Komi Republic (Sagers 1994b: 97-98). In the late Soviet period, the Usinsk-Kharyaga pipeline was used not only by Russian companies, but also by the joint-venture Polar Lights, in which Conoco was involved.

In the fall of 1994, there was a major rupture in the pipeline, releasing a large quantity of oil into the tundra and most importantly, into the tributaries of the fish-rich Pechora River. It is estimated that between 14 000 and 65 000 tonnes of oil were spilled, the latter figure being about double the amount released by the Exxon Valdez spill (Sagers 1994b: 101). Even more worrying is the amount of oil that may have spilled before and even after the incident. In fact, holes had begun appearing in the pipeline as early as 1988, and some 700 and 800 minor incidents had occurred on the pipeline in 1991 and 1992 respectively (Ibid.: 97). Alarmed by this situation, the authorities of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug sought to monitor the environmental impacts of the spill(s), with the financial and technological support of the Norwegian state via its research institution Akvaplan-Niva. Although their final report concluded that "[…] there has not been any considerable discharge of oil products from the Komi oil spill to the Pechora

Sea" (Wartena and Evenset 1997: 9), NAO authorities reported a drastic fall in the number of whitefish caught (Ibid.: 42).

On Kolguev, a small pipeline network was laid in order to connect the extraction site of the Peshanka lake oil field to the small port where tankers were filled to then sail to Murmansk or Europe (See Appendix 6). The network was built low to the ground without consideration for the movement of reindeer. This has been a concern for herders of the second brigade, even if they manage to pass through at different points. An evident additional hazard of this pipeline are the small buckets containing a flammable liquid which are hung underneath the pipes in order to prevent oil from freezing in the pipes.

Pipeline network between the AMNGR base and its port.

In the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, a small terminal became operationnal in 2000 in Varandey to connect production sites in the tundra to the world market (See Appendix 3). In 2002, 200 000 tonnes of oil were shipped via the Varandey terminal (Dallmann et al. 2010: 41). In 2008, the old Varandey terminal was replaced to enable the shipping of oil produced at the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu oil fields. It was estimated that by 2009 the new terminal would have the capacity to transport 8 million tonnes of oil through tankers transiting in Murmansk or sent directly to Europe (Ibid.). I will discuss the impact of the installation of this terminal on the Nenets inhabitants of Varandey. Before a deeper examination of the history of the terminal, a few words need to be said about the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu – Varandey pipeline itself from the perspective of the Kharp brigade with whom I conducted my research.

In the spring of 2008, when the herders of that brigade were migrating towards the North to reach summer pastures, they noticed that the 3000 reindeer composing their herd could not cross the newly laid pipeline. This situation required the herders to spend hours gathering the reindeer and forcing them to cross at a higher passage point. Hence, the presence of a pipeline on their migration route initially increased their work load and created uncertainties, since they had to make certain that the herd was able to pass through the pipeline. The herders of the area were initially consulted in the planning of this pipeline network to find out where the herd normally migrated in order to create crossing points. Naryanmarneftegaz even ensured the network was built high enough so the reindeer could cross at several points not designed specifically as crossing points. According to the herders, after this first encounter with the pipeline, the reindeer of that herd have not had difficulty moving across that particular pipeline, as they do twice a year heading southward in the fall and northward in the spring.

Herders' caravan passing under the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu – Varandey pipeline, September 2009

A more troubling aspect of the pipeline is its final destination: the Varendey Terminal. The site was in fact inhabited by a community of Nenets for several centuries. In the 17th century, French explorer Pierre Martin de la Martinière visited a settlement he believed was called Borondai on the shore of the Barents Sea. He reports that people were "[…] living in pit houses, sewing clothes from polar bear skins and using knives made of stone and bone" (cited in Golovnev 2007: 135). This description is very far from the image of a group of nomadic Nenets reindeer herders living in a *chum.* Indeed, by the late Middle Ages, there were already more or less sedentary groups of Nenets living near

the coasts of northwestern Russia living off sea-mammal hunting (Krupnik 1993, Golovnev 1992). One of my elder informants recalled that his father was living off hunting of sea-mammals on Kolguev, but that he was eventually pressured to join the state farm and become a reindeer herder.

Varandey became officially registered by the Soviet state in the early 1930s after the Varandey Nomadic Tundra Council was created. It included over six hundred people, most of whom were reindeer herders migrating in the neighbouring areas. However, Varandey was known as a good place for sea-mammal hunting, as it was well protected from the storms that hit the coast. During that decade, Nenets reindeer herders who were dispossessed of their reindeer during collectivisation began to set up tents near the settlement. Furthermore, an increasing number of oppressed exiles began to arrive from other Russian regions, such as the Komi Oblast, as well as from the Ukraine and Belarus, leading to the creation of a village on the site of the original settlement. A collective farm called Lenin was created, then merged with another farm, the Stalin farm, based out of the other coastal village of Chernoe (in 1951-1952). Later in the decade, the Stalin farm was itself merged with Kharp (Golovnev 2007: 136-137). Varandey's population increased from 28 inhabitants in 1936 to 240 in 1966 (Dallmann et al. 2010: 132) .

An important change happened in 1974 when a geological expedition, led by the well-known geologist Roman Trebs, set up camp about five kilometers from Varandey., The camp rapidly became a settlement, as houses, streets and even an airport were built. This led to the creation of a division between Old (*Staryi*) and New (*Novyi*) Varandey. From 1985, attempts were made to ship oil from Varandey to Arkhangelsk. During the initial experiment, oil was spilled in the site of a seal rookery, marking the beginning of the end for Old Varandey (Golovnev 2007: 137). In the fall of 1992, a major storm hit Old Varandey, damaging its infrastructure. The following year, it was declared a "disaster zone." The village was to be closed and its inhabitants resettled, but it only in 1998 that the okrug authorities decided to close Old Varandey permanently and remove its remaining 120 registered inhabitants. One former resident told me that people were evacuated in all-terrain passenger trucks (*vakhtovka*), while other testimonies suggest some were removed forcibly by helicopter (Moring 2008). This event was clearly

controversial, especially because the removal of the Old *Varandeytsy* was followed a year later by the construction of a new Varandey Terminal.

Although not all *Old Varandeytsy* agreed with the move, they were relocated, some in Naryan-Mar, some in Arkhangelsk, others elsewhere in Russia. Soon after, some displaced Varandeytsy realised they were unable to become accustomed to the urban lifestyle; they could not find employment at a time when Russia was experiencing the consequences of the default in 1998. Some began to drink. At this time, five Varandeytsy decided to walk the hundreds of kilometers from Naryan-Mar to Varandey and resettle the village that no longer had any functioning infrastructures. With time, a few more decided that they wanted to move back to Varandey. Among them, a small group among them took this cause to heart and helped more Varandeytsy move back. "I always say that people without a *rodina*[42] do not exist", said Nina Nikolaevna, one of the activists involved in this struggle.

This struggle was very arduous for a number of reasons. Neither the authorities nor the oil companies were enthusiastic about having the presence of Nenets people living nearby the terminal. According to Nina Nikolaevna, one of the worries expressed by the oil companies present at the terminal was that some of the Varandeytsy would be drinking near their facilities. "We told them we would be good neighbours" she said. Those who decided to move back are now living in a highly changed environment and do not have access to supplies. "Now the people there trade with the oil workers. People have always been trading and bartering there", said Nina Nikolaevna.

One of the significant difficulties experienced by the Varandeytsy is that the federal and okrug legislation on indigenous peoples, as well as the sources of financial and logistical support primarily concern those who practice the one activity considered as traditional for the Nenets: reindeer herding. The okrug law "On Reindeer Herding" evokes this. In February 2007, the politically active Varandeytsy based in Naryan-Mar attempted to establish a Territory of social self-rule (*territoriya obshestvennoro samoupravleniya,* TOS) on the basis of the Federal Law, "On the general principles of organisation of local self-rule in the Russian Federation", adopted in 1995. In 2007, they

[42] The Russian word *rodina* is often translated as home, homeland, or motherland. It is related to the verb "*rodit'*" ("to give birth").

received permission to begin the process of establishing a TOS. The following year, it was refused on the basis of the absence of either administrative units or registered people in Varandey, although there were already some Varandeytsy who had moved back. Thanks to the persistence of a small number of activists, the Territory of social self-rule of Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples of the North "Varandey" was finally created in March 2009 within a delimited territory. Interestingly, a news item on the webpage of the Zapolyarnyi Raion, the administrative entity responsible for rural areas of the okrug, suggests that oil workers were trading alcohol for fish and meat with the Varandeytsy. It demanded that oil companies do more to prevent workers from bringing alcohol to the workplace, either for consumption or for trade with the Nenets (Zapolyarnyi Raion 2012).

The case of Varandey illustrates how the laying out of the pipeline network, intended to connect the region to world markets, may in fact generate social disconnection for others. Varandey Nenets were removed from their village in both a questionable manner and at a questionable time. There is however a more positive example in the NAO, that of Krasnoe. As mentioned earlier, when the pipeline was laid to supply Naryan-Mar with gas from the Vasilkov gas fields, a branch was also laid to supply Krasnoe. Gas thus supplies both heating and cooking in houses. Krasnoe is also connected by a dirt road throughout most of the year to the capital. Today, the village is booming and welcomes a growing number of Nenets, Komi and Russian inhabitants. In a discussion with the head of the administration, he mentioned that the administration is now having difficulties finding land to build new houses.

In Bugrino, the absence of a gas pipeline connecting the oil extraction site to the village is a source of frustration among many villagers. It is widely known among them that the gas associated with the oil production is flared. Although very few villagers visit the tundra, everyone is aware of the flaring and this disconnection from the extraction site contributes to the villagers' sense that they receive little or nothing from oil production. As Valentina told me while cooking on her electric stove, "They burn the gas up there. Why don't they just lay a pipe to connect with the village? " The workers' explanation was that their company cannot afford the high costs of such an infrastructure. As a result, the village administration must bring in a "mountain" of coal every year to be piled up behind the village store, which the villagers come to collect almost on a daily basis. To

start the fires that warm their houses on the treeless island, the villagers need to use either imported wood, drift wood, or waste. Thus, the heating of houses in Bugrino requires constant effort from villagers, on top of causing ecological damage to the village area. This situation also makes the villagers dependent on outside regions for both wood and coal, although these fuels are subsidised by the state. Hence, the role of the stokers (*kochegary*) to heat buildings such as the school, the daycare, or the island's medical clinic in the winter is fundamental. Also of high importance is the person who takes care of the diesel plant, which supplies houses with electricity for lights and appliances. Although houses are generally associated with attachment among settlers, or in the case of the Nenets, with sedentarisation, houses and built infrastructures sometimes serve as agents of movement and disconnection, as I will demonstrate below.

On the left picture, one can see the gas flared at the AMNGR production site. On the right-hand picture, one can see the "mountain" of coal in Bugrino.

Dwellings

The Nenets chum has been the typical abode in the region for centuries. In both Soviet and post-Soviet periods, it has been integrated into architecture as ornament, serving as a symbol connecting the region to its history despite the various attempts to alter the lifestyle of its indigenous inhabitants. In this section, I relate how the types of dwellings used by the Nenets herders and villagers, as well as by the settlers and oil nomads manifest the different pressures experienced by each group in regards to their degrees of mobility. The question of housing and built infrastructures also shows the role

of the oil industry as the main agent of development in the NAO, relegating, to a certain extent, both the Nenets and the settlers to the passive position of recipients of recent developments.

On the left picture: A chum is placed at the top of the entrance to city's new stadium. On the right picture: The entrance to the state-owned store Myasoprodukty ("Meat Factory") has the shape of a chum.

The construction of Naryan-Mar initially took place in a rather haphazard way. Supply materials and the workforce were not managed according to a coherent and well-structured plan. This situation resembles that of many new Soviet industrial cities, as described by Stephen Collier (2011: 113):

> After spending so much of the Soviet period as "non-cities"—industrial enterprises surrounded by rough collections of huts and barracks with only the most limited urban amenities—in the last Soviet decades small cities experienced rapid modernization, as the elements of urban and social infrastructure that had been anticipated at the outset of the Soviet period and specified in post–World War II general plans were built.

Collier's work focuses on Rodnik, a small industrial town of Southern Russia. In a booming town of the Russian Arctic like Naryan-Mar, the harsh climate and distance from other centres required the swift construction of a town in order to accommodate the growing incoming population.

As oil exploration was intensifying in the 1960s, the workers of some prospecting expeditions, such as the Ukhta Expedition, stayed with their families on the drilling sites in trailer-houses (*vagon-domiki*). However, the risks of having children running around explosives and chemical waste material led the Arkhangelsk Territorial Geological Direction to forbid their presence. As a consequence, houses needed to be built in

Naryan-Mar for women and their children who were to remain in town while their husbands were on their *vaktha*. The growing presence of families required institutions like hospitals and daycares as well as the creation of the corresponding administrative apparatus (Tolkachev 2000a: 140). As mentioned earlier, the possibility of receiving an apartment was also used by the state as an incentive to attract workers to the region in a country with drastic housing shortages (Thompson 2008; Tolkachev 2000a).

From the 1960s onward, there was also an increasingly widely diffused ideal shared by both Soviet authorities and citizens that one should have access to minimal standards of living wherever one lives, via access to to standard social and communal infrastructures. As Collier (2011: 110) remarks, "[c]rucial in this development were national infrastructures […] that plugged cities into national regimes of resource distribution." One of the key characteristics of the Soviet system was a highly centralised network of infrastructures for electricity, heating, and water. Hence, in Naryan-Mar, the houses of each neighbourhood (*raion*) were and are still connected to a centralised heating station and water system network. Like most of the buildings in the Khorei-Ver Expedition and in many other neighbourhoods built at the time, the apartment I lived in during most of my stays in Naryan-Mar was heated by hot water circulating in pipes inside the apartments. In winter, only very hot and non-potable water circulates in the buildings, while in the summer, this water is cold. For drinking water, many if not most of the inhabitants of such buildings must either collect water from tank-trucks that supply the residents on a daily basis, or they may get it from acquaintances living in better equipped houses. Urban planning dating from the Soviet era had a strong impact on how Naryan-Mar inhabitants came to be connected to each other and to other regions. As Collier (2011: 111) notes, "[b]udgets, gas and electricity networks, and urban utilities were […] key elements in articulating an infrastructural social modernity at the national level."

First Secretary of the Nenets National Okrug, Ivan K. Shvetsov (1959-1975) (2000: 62) argues that one of the important events leading to the oil boom in the okrug was the 1974 Resolution "On the Geologial Exploration and Industrial Extraction of Explored Riches". This led not only to the arrival of many more workers and the creation of additional geological expeditions in the okrug, but also created a need for vast

construction projects. For the Nenets National Okrug, the period generally known as the Brezhnevian Stagnation in fact witnessed some of the most intense activity. In 1959, a bookstore opened, in 1964, a House of Culture was built, and the following year a veterinarian-technical school, as well as school No 3 were opened. In the following decade, more apartments and "socially significant" (*sotsialno znachimykh*) buildings were constructed in Naryan-Mar and in the rest of the okrug by a number of different collectives. For example, in August 1976, Building Units (*stroitelnye otryady*) of students coming from ten different Soviet cities built sixty buildings in the okrug's capital. The next First Secretary of Nenets National Okrug, Yurii S. Romanov (1975-1991), wrote that, back in the late Soviet period, "[…] the okrug had the possibility of receiving capital investments and resources both from Arkhangelsk and from Moscow, especially through the union and republican ministries and institutions" (Transl., Romanov 2000: 81). Romanov remembers with pride and nostalgia the construction of more than thirty big "socially significant" buildings during that period.

Members of geological-prospecting expeditions also participated in the construction of apartment houses and other infrastructures. For example, the workers of the Khorei-Ver Expedition built many of the wooden houses in the neighbourhood now bearing its name. Despite the existence of central planning, many initiatives were taken by the workers, if not by the leaders of the different expeditions. For example, in January 1982, the workers of the latter expedition built a pig farm, as well as greenhouses in order for the oil workers and their families to have access to vegetables (Chuprov 2004: 117, Romanov 2000: 78).

Left: Soviet-built apartment buildings in the Khorei-Ver Expedition. Right: Apartment buildings built in the late Soviet days in Naryan-Mar's centre.

Still, for workers and their superiors, more buildings meant the establishment of increasingly centralised infrastructures. A technological revolution began in 1978 as boilers from different neighbourhoods were connected to the natural gas pipeline network, taking its source at the Vasilkov gas fields. This meant people could use gas stoves, gradually ridding Naryan-Mar of its coal "mountains" (Chuprov 2004: 115). The possibility of having access to apartments faster than in their regions of origin in southern and central Russia served as a strong incentive for oil workers to move to the North or to stay there. During the period of privatisation, those who lived in an apartment in Naryan-Mar were generally able to become owners. This was also an important element preventing many from leaving Northern regions like the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, since it was not certain they were going to have access to an apartment elsewhere in Russia, despite the existence of Russian and international programmes promoting emigration from the North.

Today, the okrug facilitates the acquisition of apartments for those who have resided there for over ten years. As per the changes introduced in the *l'goty* system in 2005, the measure combines principles inherited from the Soviet system with those of the market economy. First, there is a priority list giving precedence to those who have resided in the okrug for at least ten years. Among these "settled" residents, some other categories of people have priority access to an apartment without "standing in line" (*stoyat' v ocherede*): those whose houses were damaged by accidents, as well as families with more

than three children, categorised as families with numerous children (*mnogo-detnye sem'i*). Other categories such as war veterans also fall into a priority list, speeding up the process for them. Second, access to apartment is attributed following a standardised ratio of number of persons per square meter. Third, access to apartments is overseen by the okrug administration through its office of Direction of Construction and Housing and Communal Service (ZhKKh). The Direction pays six percent of the price of the apartment to long-term residents who have constant revenues. This situation has the consequence of promoting apartment ownership over rental, thus allowing for one to maintain or deepen attachment to the okrug.

When I lived in Naryan-Mar, my acquaintances in two Soviet-built neighbourhoods, the Khorei-Ver Expedition and Lesnoi Zavod ("the Lumber Factory"), told me that they received notices announcing the eventual destruction of their houses. Most of the wooden houses in these neighbourhoods are now in poor condition, with leaking ceilings, cockroach infestations, and often without access to infrastructures, such as water or toilets. The okrug administration therefore decided to demolish them and to compensate residents so that they could buy new apartments. Notices of demolition and resettling were accompanied by rumours, since the date of the destruction was continuously delayed. This situation was attributed by my acquaintances to financial uncertainties related to the global financial crisis. Yet, I observed that they found it difficult to face the prospect of resettlement because both the date of the destruction and the location of the promised new apartment were unknown. The idea that they were most likely going to be relocated to an apartment equivalent in size in central Naryan-Mar did not please them. A family of urbanised Nenets told me how stressful they found the situation, because they knew they would most likely have to live farther from the neighbours and friends with whom they had been living and on whom they had been able to rely for decades. It was initially difficult for me to understand their reticence to move to other areas where they would have access to a newer apartment, with better heating systems, running water and toilets. That was until I realised the importance of the network of friends and acquaintances they had established in their neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood life remains a very strong element for inhabitants of neighbourhoods such as Khorei-Verskaya Expedition. During my stays there, I came to

understand that the inhabitants of each neighbourhood are close to each other because they had been working together or because they have grown up together, attending the same kindergartens, and schools. For the first generation of settlers, the neighbourhoods were often sites of mutual support among their (former) colleagues for dealing with the hardships of the first post-Soviet decade. Their children, now often in their mid-twenties to mid-thirties, have also built their own solidarity networks, as well as a sense of rivalry and competition with those from other neighbourhoods. During my stay in the Khorei-Ver Expedition, the young men I became acquainted with were strongly advising me against going to Iskateley, that I could be beaten up and that they could do nothing for me in that "village". I thought this was an exaggeration, but one of the oil workers I met who had grown up in Iskateley told me about memorable fights between the young men of his neighbourhood and those from the Korei-Ver Expedition. In Kolguev, my younger friends and acquaintances, all of whom had gone to the boarding school located in central Naryan-Mar, reminisced about similar fights between people from different neighbourhoods. Oil nomads, however, were not concerned with such tensions between neighbourhoods as the young men from Naryan-Mar were. However, they were also excluded from networks of exchange present in each neighbourhood and had to rely on their colleagues who, like the settlers, have been coming from different regions to work in the North decades earlier. In the next section, I will examine how labour organisation and aesthetic taste associated with the recent oil boom in the okrug serve as elements distinguishing the new developing agent, the oil industry and its workers from those who came in the Soviet days to work predominantly for oil prospecting.

New Naryan-Mar

While walking through Naryan-Mar, it is easy to discern different waves of construction, as well as the political, economic, and ideological contexts in which they were built. The latest wave of construction began in the early 2000s, as Lukoil arrived in the okrug. Nevertheless, Lukoil, with its desire to increase profits, did not arrive alone. It was followed by construction companies that are subcontracted in other regions where it operates, such as the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. Hence, Lukoil did not only arrive with a labour force organised with the principles of shift-work, but also with a particular aesthetic.

Naryan-Mar's Palace of Culture "Arktika"

New apartment building in downtown Naryan-Mar

New neighbourhood with new apartment buildings in downtown Naryan-Mar

Naryan-Mar "Village", a new neighbourhood situated at the town's outskirts

Left: New Ethnographic Museum Right: New Okrug library

In summer 2010, I visited the office of Verso, a company specialising in the construction of massive buildings referred to as "monoliths" (*monolity*) by Naryan-Mar dwellers. Verso's General Director told me that his company had been present in the okrug for seven years, initially taking contracts from Lukoil and Naryanmarneftegaz, and later on for the okrug's administration (*byudzhetnye*, literally "budget contracts" referring to contracts from the public sector). The more than 300 workers hired by Verso come from Turkey, Moldova, the Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia. These temporary workers who come to Russia to work in construction are referred to by the word *gasterbeitery*, which originates from the German word *Gast-Arbeiter* ("guest-worker"). These workers can only be in Russia for one year as per visa regulations. They therefore generally come to the NAO to work for 11 months, and take one month of holiday. The *gastaterbeitery* are probably the population category that is least appreciated in the okrug, possibily even in all of Russia. In fact, racist opinions against them are shared by many Russian settlers, oil nomads and Nenets. These workers live in dormitories on the outskirts of Naryan-Mar, which I never visited.

According to Verso's General Director, there are a number of reasons for their preference for hiring non-locals: "The locals (*mestnye*) are not disciplined. You see all that we've built in the last seven years? The locals would not have been able to do that. There are also specificities to the construction of monoliths." He later added that it costs less to hire guest-workers than the local population. This widespread opinion regarding locals resonates with what was seen in earlier chapters: they are seen as lacking discipline, are either incompetent or not specialised, and more onerous to hire. Yet, they must be grateful for what is being built for them. This illustrates how the okrug's permanent residents, be they Nenets or settlers, are now both recipients of the "gift of empire" from the oil nomads and others who follow the same flows of capital.

The other category of people in Naryan-Mar who consider themselves as the main engines of development are the oil nomads who work in offices in the capital. For example, there are geologists who receive data from extraction sites, analyse them with the use of sophisticated computer programmes and maps in order to make informed decisions about production in different sites in the tundra. There are also a number of different specialists who coordinate various aspects of regulation, as well as those who

coordinate supplies for production operations and workers in the tundra. These workers reside in newly constructed apartments, most often owned by Naryanmarneftegaz or Lukoil-Sever. Depending on the contract between company and workers, they generally pay only for "communal fees" (including heating and electricity). To my knowledge, the company does not discourage wives and children of these workers to follow them in the North. Rather, it appears to me that because the oil nomads generally do not expect to remain in the okrug for many years, they choose not to relocate their families to this smalltown in the Arctic. If they did, wives would have to find jobs (ustroit'sya na rabotu) and register their children to new schools, knowing that they are likely to move elsewhere if better job conditions are offered. Thus, the apartments which the current oil workers live in in Naryan-Mar have a transient character, like the rooms where the oil nomads live in while they are in the tundra.

The main base where Artikmorneftegazrazvedka operates was established in late Soviet times. It hosts over two hundred workers, most of whom reside at the base. There are also more remote extraction sites (*kusty*) where the workers live in smaller barracks. To my knowledge, all workers share their room with at least one roommate, except for the head of the base, as well as certain engineers and drill masters. The site has a sauna that opens twice a week, a T.V. room, billiard and ping pong tables, as well as a mini-gym for workers to spend their free time. "It is worse here than prison" one worker told me when describing these living conditions. He was especially alluding to the size and the quality of the rooms, such as the fact that the bed mattresses are simply laid on wooden boards reminiscent of doors.

AMNGR base, Kolguev, March 2009

During my visit to the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu site, I was offered a luxurious room in the compound where the engineers, subcontractors, as well as company's upper echelons live. For security reasons I was not allowed to take pictures or to leave this small part of the base, called *Svezdochka* ("little star") because of its architectural design.[43] Despite the fact that I was limited in my movements, staying in that part of the base allowed me to see differences in the way labour was organised here compared to the Soviet-style base on Kolguev. I visited a number of different bedrooms to conduct interviews with workers. Except for rooms such as the one I was sleeping in, the others were shared by workers. Let us now examine some aspects of the lifestyle and taste of the oil nomads when they are in Naryan-Mar.

While I was in the field, a new club opened in an old hangar in Iskateley. Called 'Red Town,' which is the English translation of the Nenets name "Naryan-Mar," it joined only a few existing leisure venues in the town. The club was opened by two young men from Moldova, where most of the staff also originate. Like the oil nomads, the Red Town staff works in shifts. Following the rapid success of their club, the two businessmen decided to open a new venue, a restaurant/bar/café called 'Timan'' in honour of the cultural and geological region. There are two main distinguishing features of this venue. The first one is that it is the only place in the capital where meals containing local tundra vegetation and fauna are served. Hence, one may eat reindeer meat all year round, as well

[43] I heard different reasons used to justify the fact that I was not allowed to take pictures. The one I heard the most often was that an airplane accident had taken place at a site operated by Lukoil some years earlier. Apparently, journalists arrived on the site and filmed the accident.

as different types of fresh fish. Second, there is an emphasis on local artefacts, most of which originate in the material culture of the Nenets. They are arranged around the bar to offer a very local experience and aesthetic.




At the Restaurant/café Timan', July 2010

Both Red Town and Timan' are predominantly frequented by office workers of oil companies, oil workers on their way to shifts, the employees of subcontracting companies to the oil companies, as well as employees of the okrug's administration. This not only suggests a strong connection between the state and oil companies in terms of similar incomes and shared lifestyles, but also in terms of tastes. During my few visits to both

places, I rarely encountered settlers employed in other sectors, which my local acquaintances explained was due to their lower incomes. I believe that it is also, to a certain extent, the result of a difference in lifestyle and taste. It is much more common among settlers to invite each other to drink tea or share a meal in the comfort of home. For example, my Naryan-Mar hosts, as well as their friends with whom I became acquainted,all had access to fresh fish, geese, or reindeer meat from fishing and hunting, or because they were involved in networks of exchange with Nenets reindeer herders. Thus, my hosts found it difficult to understand why people are willing to spend money on a meal that they can eat at home.

The fact that Timan' employs and welcomes shift-workers who follow flows of oil and money while making Nenets objects so central to the Timan' experience is not trivial. How to explain that in this new venue, which celebrates and displays elements of traditional Nenets culture, one gets the feeling of being in a café like Starbucks or the Russian equivalent Kofe- House? Boris Groys (2008) questions the emergence of a post-modern aesthetic taste and its embrace and promotion of diversity and difference. Most especially, he questions the disapproval of Soviet aesthetics, seen as a grey, monotonous and universal aesthetics that should disappear in the name of diversity of taste in the context of the market economy. As he writes,

> [e]very expanding market, as we know, produces diversification and differentiation of the commodities that are offered on this market. Therefore, I believe that the discourse and the politics of cultural diversity and difference cannot be seen and interpreted correctly without being related to the market-driven practice of cultural diversification and differentiation in the last decades of the twentieth century. This practice opened a third option for dealing with one's own cultural identity—beyond suppressing it or finding a representation for it in the context of existing political and cultural institutions. This third option is to sell, to commodify, to commercialize this cultural identity on the international media and touristic markets (Groys 2008: 151).

Groys' analysis allows one to understand not only why Timan' attracts predominantly oil nomads, but also why it was created during the recent oil boom. Although Soviet oil workers who came to live with Nenets neighbours developed a taste for reindeer meat, often prepared 'à la Russe,' I believe that only the arrival of people embracing the "taste of the market" could have led to the creation of a place where one can have both reindeer meat and a cappuccino that tastes like one at any global coffee chain. The opening of Timan' also indicates that, despite the perpetuation of a romantika

vision of the North and of its indigenous inhabitants by successive waves of oil workers, it now serves as a new site in which the paradox of romantika and civilisation become manifest, yet in a reconfigured manner: the market economy rather than Soviet socialist civilisation is now behind this paradox. This also excludes the settlers to a certain extent. In the next section, I will examine the housing situation of the Nenets, both in the villages and in the tundra.

The type of abode associated with the Nenets is the chum. Even today, most reindeer herders reside in them. In the case of the Kharp herding brigade, all of the eight to ten herders and the two female tent-workers I conducted my research with were living in a single chum. This organisation in terms of livelihoods takes its roots in the post-World War context when the Soviet authorities introduced productivity requirements and limited the number of people present in the tundra only to "productive elements". By contrast, the herders of the private cooperative Erv who seceded from Kharp in the 1990s live in smaller *chumy*, yet accommodating one family each.

Left: Summer chum; Right: Winter chum

Except for skin layers, the material used to build the chum is generally provided by the SPK. Relatives of herders who reside in the village also assist them in various ways. For example, they prepare and repair the winter cover made of reindeer skins because

they have access to sewing machines. The cover is collected by acquaintances who come by car to the spring pasture grounds located near a road, not far from Krasnoe. The herders then pick it up again as they head southwards in the fall, once the brigade reaches the same road. Other objects present in the chum are often offered by the oil companies as gifts during the yearly "Reindeer Day" (*Den' olen'ya*), which in the okrug takes place every first weekend of August. During that event, the SPKs' administrators come by helicopter with supplies and with the issues to be solved for the coming year. Journalists as well as representatives of the oil companies also attend the Day, which features competitions of Nenets sports (jumping over sleds, reindeer-sled race, wrestling).The winners receive a number of different gifts, such as thermoses, electronic equipment like portable dvd players, and clothing. Some years, the herders receive sponsored snowmobiles as presents from the oil companies.

Left: Setting up the chum. Right: Inside the chum. Below: By the late-winter pasture grounds

On Kolguev, the reindeer herders began to live in mobile shacks (bolki) left by prospecting geologists in the 1970s (Vasil'ev 2006 (1981): 106). One of my informants recalls seeing the last chum in the village in the early 1980s. The herders of each brigade have six pasture grounds, between which they move from season to season. Each herder has a shack in every pasture grounds.

Above: Shack at the early-spring pastures. Below: Shacks at the late summer pastures.

The Kolguev herders live individually each in their own bolok. “I don’t know how those herders on the continent (na materike) can live all crammed with others” said Mikhail, my host in the tundra. For him, the possibility of having privacy was of great importance. The herders of that brigade do however constantly invite each other to drink tea (chai pit’) which for the Nenets generally means to share a meal. During the summer vacations, when their wives and children visit, the activities as well as the day to day arrangements of the housing tend to become more centred around the family. “Western-like” tents are also installed to accommodate the increased number of people.

One of the particularities of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug is that reindeer herders have been allocated houses in the villages, which has now been the case for decades Following the Second World War, the Soviet authorities sought to increase the productivity of reindeer herding, while at the same time ridding Nenets of their "backward" lifestyle. The kolkhozes and sovkhozes thus constructed houses for the herders in order to make most Nenets sedentary, while maintaining as few herders as possible in the tundra to be involved in reindeer herding. As elsewhere in Russia, these houses were often privatised in the post-Soviet period. As in Naryan-Mar, the houses built in the last decade in both Krasnoe and Bugrino can easily be distinguished from those dating from the Soviet era. The herders I met generally appreciated having a house, either because they can stay in them while on their vacation, because relatives can stay in them or because they believe that once they retire, it will turn out to be a good asset.

On top left: Houses affected by the erosion of the shore in Bugrino. Right: New houses in the village. Below, left: View from a rooftop of the houses in Krasnoe, most of which date from the Soviet days. Right: New houses, some of which are built for reindeer herders.

The construction of houses for reindeer herders is one of the priorities for the okrug in the villages where SPKs are located. For example, in 2009, the okrug allocated 3 132.7 square meters to house 31 families of reindeer herders and tent-workers, 181 people in all (Direction for the Affairs of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North 2010)., This meant that three families received apartments or houses both villages of Bugrino and Krasnoe. However, the state authorities are not the only providers of housing for herders. Today, the construction of houses is often included in agreements between oil companies, such as Naryanmarneftegaz, and the SPKs. For example, in that same year – 2009 –, Naryanmarneftegaz built 9 houses for Kharp herders. I visited one of these houses within a few months after they were built and could not but notice cracks already appearing in the walls and ceilings since no heating system had been installed. Because the herders live in the tundra, they must rely on the help of sedentary relatives or acquaintances to find material supplies to complete the house. For example, one young Kharp herder who had received a house was fortunate to have a Russian friend in Naryan-Mar who could come to Krasnoe with the material required to install a heating system before winter began.

I discussed the housing question with Naryanmarneftegaz's Manager of ' Relations with Society.'[44] According to him, the construction of these houses is an expression of the company's generosity to the herders. Yet he was h pessimistic about the survival of reindeer herding in the okrug. In his view, it is not only the fact that few subsidies are allocated to that economic sector, but also the fact that the oil extraction will only increase in the okrug. "God wanted the North to hold a lot of resources. The North gives a lot to Russia." In terms reminiscent of those used by Soviet authorities in the post-World War 2 period, he saw the gradual sedentarisation of the Nenets as a way of introducing them to a civilised way of life: "We must help those who live in the tundra to adapt gradually. For example, by building them houses, they will get used to comfort and will end up becoming sedentary." After having gone through the Bolshevik Revolution, collectivisation, and consolidation in addition to the arrival of two successive waves of

[44] "Menedzher po svyazyam s obshchennost'yu" in Russian, which resembles the function of Manager of Public Relations.

oil workers, the Nenets are still being asked to adapt, albeit gradually, to a sedentary and "civilised" lifestyle.

Houses and dwellings are not often thought of as infrastructure, as opposed to the networks of pipes, electricity wires and roads connecting them. However, when dwellings host a moving population or pressure people to move elsewhere, they come to bear some of the characteristics of infrastructure, connecting or transporting people or commodities from one region to another. This section showed how in today's NAO, houses serve as connecting points that have particular intentions embedded in them: they connect the herders to the villages and are associated with a more or less overt agenda to make them sedentary; they serve as transition points between the oil nomads' homes and workplaces; and they may connect the settlers to new neighbourhoods and new aesthetics. However, these dwellings also serve as agents of disconnection from the tundra, the home region, as well as social life in the Soviet-built neighbourhood, It is not clear that this situation is best analysed in terms of the "intransigence of things" as Collier suggests. Instead, the new aesthetic and built-environment associated with the oil industry and with the oil nomads, which they view as "gifts" to the okrug, as well as the reticence both of Nenets herders to move to the village, and of the settlers to move to new neighbourhoods might be more illustrative of the intransigence of different groups of people towards each others' tastes and ways of life.

Snowmobiles

In August 2008, I visited Kolguev for the first time. Thanks to the Yasavey staff, I was able to arrange to spend time with the island's reindeer herding brigades. When I arrived at the arranged meeting point in the middle of Bugrino, I saw the two Nenets men who would take me to the tundra but no reindeer. After introducing ourselves to each other, Maxim and his teen-aged son told me explained we would take a snowmobile with a sled attachment to get to the camp-site. Having grown up in a place and in a family in which the snowmobile plays an important role in winter, I was confused by the idea of driving a snowmobile on the green cover of the tundra.

In this section, I will discuss the ways in which the snowmobile has been part of the life of the tundra inhabitants, both on Kolguev and in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra. There is a direct connection between the oil industry and snowmobiles in the sense that

this mode of transportation in the nearly roadless okrug only works with gas. Snowmobiles are also the most coveted prizes awarded to herders by oil companies on Reindeer Day. Not every company gives such presents, but when they are, they are often seen as a sign of generosity and as a sign of greediness when they are not. Finally, snowmobiles are sometimes included in agreements between a SPK and an oil company as compensation for the use of the territory. Before examining this in more details, I will discuss observations of the impact of the "snowmobile revolution" among the Sami reindeer herders of northern Europe.

On the main track between Bugrino and the late summer pastures

Pertti Pelto (1973) studied changes following the introduction of the snowmobile among the Skolt Sami in Finland from the early 1960s. "Delocalization" is a key concept in Pelto description of these changes:

> […] the various social and economic aspects of "modernization" are best understood in terms of a very generalized loss of local autonomy through the growth of dependence on a worldwide system of resource allocation and political power. A central feature of the process of delocalization is the growth of dependence on commercially distributed sources of energy (Pelto 1973: 166).

Hence, the capacity to travel over longer distances came at the expense of a loss of autonomy through dependence on non-local technologies and sources of energy. Furthermore, not all herders were able to afford increased expenses, with the consequence that they could not reap correlated profits engendered by the new ways of practicing reindeer herding following the introduction of the snowmobile. Increased reliance on the snowmobile thus resulted in the reconfiguration of social stratification. A

new group of "have-nots," defined by their inability to purchase a snowmobile, emerged and became dependent on the Finnish welfare state to subsist. These herders also had to pay the more successful snowmobile-owning herders for services relying on their mobility such as round ups taking place at different times of the year. For Pelto (1973: 168-169), the introduction of snowmobiles led to a "loss of adaptive flexibility" for these "have-nots."

Another new form of social stratification was intergenerational. Snowmobiles were more readily adopted by younger male herders than by older ones, differentiating generations by levels of productivity. Pelto attributed the reluctance of older herders not so much to their capacity or willingness to develop proficiency in the new technology, but rather to their attitude towards reindeer herding As he remarks, "[t]he prospect of eliminating many of the old herding practices was distasteful to many of the men who had been most active and successful in pre-snowmobile days" (Pelto 1973: 140). The diminished importance of older herders was associated, according to Pelto (1973: 139), with the loss or drastic change in skills required for reindeer herding. For example, the training and driving of sled reindeer had been replaced by the ability to maneuver and maintain snowmobiles.

Yet over a decade later, Pertti Pelto and Luger Muller-Wille (1987) warned against technological determinism in the interpretion of the impact of the snowmobile on Arctic indigenous communities. They came to the two following conclusions:

> 1. The advent of an expensive new machine does not by itself automatically cause an aggravation of social stratification.
>
> 2. The social effects of the new technology can be quite different from one ecological setting to another, depending on the details of local technoenvironmental adaptations (Pelto and Muller-Wille 1987: 196).

In the 21st century, Elina Helander-Renvall (2007) seemed even less pessimistic in her analysis of the impact of the snowmobile on Sami reindeer herders in the Kaldoaivi District, the area of Finland where Sami herders first began using snowmobiles in herding. She suggests that,

> [s]nowmobiles were easy to operate even in the difficult snow conditions. The gathering of reindeer took place much faster than earlier. For the young herders, the new technology was especially attractive. The introduction of the snowmobile gave them new opportunities to become successful. What is more, the snowmobile took

> them to places and activities that provided them with good possibilities to learn more about the traditional ecological knowledge (Helander-Renvall 2007: 31).

In the Russian North, the introduction of snowmobiles began in the 1970s, that is, about a decade after they had already strongly affected communities living in the North American and European Arctic. The main model used at the time — and still the most common— is called Buran ("snow-storm"). It is based on the 1967 Bombardier Ski-Doo Alpine 640E, which has since then been reproduced. That snowmobile was designed for forested areas with a single front ski meant to maneuver easily between trees and the capacity to carry heavy loads with its two tracks (Stammler 2009: 54).

Not only was the snowmobile introduced to the Soviet North later than in other regions of the Arctic but also in a completely different context. As Florian Stammler (2009: 55) remarks,

> […] the emphasis of the Soviet-planned agricultural industry, of which herding and hunting in the Arctic was a part, was not as much on mechanised transport for individual herders as on general modernisation according to a master-plan for the whole country."

Unlike the situation observed among the Sami herders, the snowmobile was introduced to the Soviet North to serve collective purposes. Another difference is that elder herders were already being pressured to move to villages. Thus, the question of intergenerational social stratification resulting from the introduction of the snowmobile was less relevant to the Nenets herders. In addition, the introduction of the snowmobile cannot be separated from other means of transportation,especially the helicopter, which became involved in both the processes of sedentarising the Nenets and of introducing shift-work as the new type of labour organisation for reindeer herders. Therefore, it was hoped that the snowmobile would be one more type of infrastructure allowing the herders to cover longer distances in shorter times, namely between the tundra, where they would work, and the village, where they would live or spend their holidays.

Today, the Kharp reindeer herders' brigade use snowmobiles similarly to the Nenets from the Yamal Peninsula. As Stammler (2009: 56) remarks, the snowmobile is now principally used to visit friends and relatives, and to get supplies. Similarly, the Kharp herders have one snowmobile which they can only use after reaching a village near the border with the Komi Republic, where they store it until next year. During winter, it is easier for guests to visit the brigades, and to bring them supplies by snowmobile, or for

the herders to pay short visits to friends and relatives in other brigades or in the village by using their Buran. However, daily roundups of sled reindeer and various other work-related activities are still conducted using the reindeer's muscle power.

The above picture shows herders who had gone to a forested area with sleds with four harnessed reindeer each – as opposed to the three normally used for transportation in snowy periods. They had gone to gather wood for preparing various objects required for herding, such as sleds and *khorey*[45]. The herders could have used a snowmobile to conduct these operations, especially since the two tracks of the Buran are specifically designed to carry heavy loads. However, in a place with limited access to snowmobile parts and gas, herders generally prefer to minimise their use of motorised transportation. Furthermore, as described in previous chapters, exchanges with oil workers, which most often concern diesel or gas, tend to be a source of discomfort to herders. Consequently, even today, snowmobiles are not used individually as they are in Fennoscandia, butcollectively. Even in Krasnoe and Bugrino, the villagers spoke about the number of snowmobiles they owned by including those of their relatives. As in the Yamal Peninsula, the reliance on reindeer for transportation in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra also indicates that the sled reindeer is most likely to remain the main source of muscle in the foreseeable future.

On Kolguev, increased reliance on the snowmobile has effects that seem more like those of the "snowmobile revolution" described by Pelto for Skolt Sami herders (1973).

[45] *Khorey* is the Nenets word to describe the long stick used by the herders to direct the reindeer.

However, this resemblance is superficial. On the island, the introduction of shift-work among reindeer herders, as well as the relatively-small distances they need to cover due to the size of the island, are probably the main factors shaping herders' use of the snowmobile. However, the use of this vehicle in the summer is more difficult to explain. I was told herders began to drive their snowmobiles between Bugrino and the summer camps fewer than two years before I initially visited Kolguev in August 2008. Apparently, this began when one young herder decided to try leaving the island's main village to reach the summer camps by snowmobile. After he succeeded, most of the herders began to use their Buran to go to the tundra. I was told by different herders that they only use the main track (*trassa*) going from the village to the tundra, which is normally used by the tractors owned by the SPK, and that when they need to travel off this track, they rely on their reindeer. However, having gone on fishing trips with some herders and their relatives, I saw the use of snowmobiles outside the main track.

I believe the existence of this path in a region where roads are rare is, in itself, a reason that partly explains the use of this type of motorised individual mode of transportation. Contrary to what I witnessed on Kolguev, the use of motorised vehicles – such as tractors and all-terrain vehicles – is strictly forbidden by the okrug administration. Permissions can be obtained for some uses. For example, workers doing *rekultivatsiya* ("land restoration") in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra can use vehicles with very large low air-pressure tires, thus largely reducing the footprint on the tundra vegetation. Although the same rules apply on Kolguev, on certain occasions the SPK sends tractors to bring supplies and material to the tundra. To do this, the SPK administration must request permission from the okrug, which is usually granted. In conversation with to two retired herders on Kolguev about the use of snowmobiles in summer, they did not see it negatively. "It's less damaging for the tundra than the tractors or the all-terrain vehicles. Still, it's sad for the machine (Mne zhal'ko tekhniki)."

Significantly, unlike herders of the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, Kolguev herders each have access to a snowmobile. This might lead to a situation such as thatdescribed by Pelto (1973). However, because the herd is mostly owned by the SPK, the ownership and use of snowmobiles does not increase personal benefits. It could, however, lead to the "de-domestication" of herds as described by Pelto (1973: 98). Among the Skolt Sami,

snowmobile use decreased reliance on sled reindeer. Considering that it was easier to regroup the herd faster, the Skolt herders were also able to decrease their attendance. When I travelled herders on Kolguev during the time of the year when they trained (obuchayut) previously selected draught animals, some complained reindeer are becoming weak because they are not used enough for labour. Yet to speak of de-domestication would not be quite apt, since reindeer herding on Kolguev has always been characterised by a more or less tightly-controlled form of free grazing.

As mentioned earlier, snowmobiles are sometimes given out either during the Reindeer's Day or are included in agreements between oil companies and the administrative staff of the SPKs. In the latter cases, it is up to the farm's administration to then redistribute snowmobiles among brigades. The Kharp brigade had been one of the most productive over the few years before I conducted my research with them. It was headed by a young, disciplined and good-hearted brigadier. However, he then, at some point between my stays with his brigade, began to drink. To encourage him and the brigade, the chairman of the farm promised them a new snowmobile if he accepted treatment for his alcohol-consumption problems. This treatment, called *koridovanie*, will be described in the next chapter. The snowmobile was thus used as an objectnot only to encourage Mikhail to get on the right track, but also to channel pressure and encouragement from his fellow herders, who would also benefit from his acceptance and observance of the treatment. In the next section, I will examine the role played by helicopters in the lives of the okrug's inhabitants and workers.

Helicopters

The importance of helicopters in the NAO, as well as in many other regions of the Russian North, is hard to miss. Virtually all of the okrug's tundra and village inhabitants, as well as most oil workers, have to fly in helicopters on various occasions and all have stories to share about these flights. Even villagers of Krasnoe who are connected to Naryan-Mar by one of the okrug's rare roads become disconnected from the capital for several weeks when the Kuya River rises during the spring snowmelt, forcing the authorities to preventively remove its bridge. Consequently, they rely on helicopters until the level of the river has stabilised. Air transport also disconnects most herders and some villagers from their children who attend residential schools during the school year,. As the

summer vacations begin, families are reconnected together as the children are brought back to the tundra by helicopter.

Helicopter landing in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra during the municipal elections.

Founded in 1946, the Naryan-Mar Airline relied solely on airplanes (Po-series and An-Series) to connect growing villages to the capital during its first two decades of existence. In 1963, at approximately the same time as more intensive oil exploration began in the region, a new type of airborne equipment appeared in the USSR and in the okrug: the Mi-4 helicopter, later to be replaced by ulterior series of Mi. Though it would be difficult to connect these two events too strongly, the introduction of helicopters changed the ways in which the tundra, villages, and oil exploration sites were connected to the okrug's capital. Today helicopters play a very important role in circulating food and material between tundra, villages, and Naryan-Mar. Very few villages where the agricultural cooperatives are located are connected by a road. Krasnoe is one of the few villages with such access. Therefore, the slaughter of the reindeer takes place near the village as Kharp has refrigerators to store meat, which can then be sent by road to Naryan-Mar where the meat is processed by Myasokombinat, the state-owned meat processing factory. In most other villages where an SPK is based, like Bugrino, reindeer meat must be sent by helicopter to Naryan-Mar.

In a discussion with the director of the Naryan-Mar Airline, I noticed his hesitation in confirming that over seventy percent of all helicopter flights are "sponsored flights", that is, flights paid for by oil companies, as opposed to "subsidised flights", as is the case for flights to and from villages, largely subsidised by the okrug. The association between

oil industry and airline became apparent when I was waiting for my helicopter flight to go to Kolguev for my initial visit in August 2008. The helicopter was supposed to leave early in the morning from Naryan-Mar's small Soviet-style airport. Passengers who already had tickets were supposed to be there at 9am, while those without tickets had to arrive at the airport by 6 am to line up in the hope of obtaining one of the remaining seats in a helicopter that can carry around twenty passengers. As I was waiting there among unfamiliar faces, (potential) passengers would enquire at the information desk when the helicopter was going to leave. "*Pogody net*" ("The weather is not good"), answered the airport agent in an abrupt manner. While waiting and attempting to contain my impatience, I went to talk to a group of people who appeared to be waiting for the same helicopter. "They always use that excuse, but the helicopters are in fact used by the oil workers instead. It gives them more money than to take us to the villages," I was told. This was the first time I heard Nenets people express discontent about the impact of the oil industry on their lives. Yet, relating this event to a friend who works as a technician at the airport, he told me that it was indeed very likely that the weather conditions over the Barents Sea were not good enough to allow for the flight to take place at that moment.

The island of Kolguev is connected to the mainland by helicopter every two weeks, when flights bringing people to and from Bugrino are scheduled. However, on the island as in the rest of the okrug, a "sanitary flight" (*sanitarnyi reis*, or *sanreis*) may be called to bring a person to the okrug's hospital in Naryan-Mar in the case of a medical emergency. Until a few years ago, the oil workers on Kolguev used to fly by plane from Murmansk to Naryan-Mar and, from there, by helicopter to the oil extraction sites by the Peshanka Lake. Thus, flying to and from the oil extraction site meant that they would sometimes have Nenets passengers or make stops in Bugrino, representing one of the few moments when they might encounter Nenets or have a glimpse into the way of life of Nenets villagers.

Since helicopters are one of the main agents of connection between the capital, villages, and the tundra, people at either site need to be aware of their schedule throughout the year. Thus, the tundra inhabitants as well as their friends and relatives either in the villages or in the capital know the dates of the "postal" (*pochtovyi*) flights delivering mail to the tundra, the "school" (*shkol'nyi*) ones that take or bring school-age

children to and from the tundra, as well as the election (*vybornyi*) flights to order from the other side and to prepare for the exchanges of supplies or services. What is particular with these flights is that they are one of the moments in which different people engaged in networks of exchange become visible. the helicopter flights also testify to the inclusion of the Nenets by Russian institutions, particularly systems of law and order. Indeed, attorneys and investigators are frequent passengers on helicopter flights when they go investigate incidents in remote villages or in the herding brigades, as will be seen in the following chapter. Before, I will discuss the most recent type of infrastructure introduced to the NAO, which facilitates, among other things, the preparation of supplies before helicopter flights take place: the mobile phone network.

Mobile Connection in the Tundra

Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001: 11) write that

> […] infrastructure networks, with their complex network architectures, work to bring heterogeneous places, people, buildings and urban elements into dynamic relationships and exchanges which would not otherwise be possible.

Up to the present, few infrastructures have allowed for so many people, located in such a wide array of areas and across such distances, to be potentially connected with each other as the mobile phone. In my research area, historically, only the Nenets shamans could make their souls travel to distant places without their bodies in order to seek information or advice (Stammler 2009: 52). Centuries later, that is, in the Soviet days, a technology was introduced that allowed for the connection of people across distant spaces: the radio. It arrived in the Nenets Okrug following the Second World War with the purpose of establishing a connection between farms and the tundra. Radios thus served as a type of infrastructure for maintaining a level of contact and control over herders' activities, while also serving safety purposes. As I was in the field, I only witnessed the use of the radio among herders on Kolguev. Previously, it was either the Bugrino administration or the state farm that made contact with the herders once a day at a given time. When neither the village administration nor the farm could get in touch with the herders, the radio operator of the AMNGR base contacted the herders at a given time every day and then re-transmitted the information to Bugrino. This was captured in Beliaeva and Bozon's film in the mid-2000s (2006).

One of the problems with radio is that the connection is not very reliable. During my initial stay on the island, the herders once tried unsuccessfully to contact the farm by radio to verify that the children who had been taken by their uncle back to the village had arrived safely. We found out when we came back to Bugrino that the antenna had not been set up properly. The herders generally do not seem to want to establish contact with the village as they enjoy avoiding the gaze of the village or farm administrations. Like Stammler (2009: 52), I would also suggest that the lack of privacy and confidentiality related to radio transmission may be another important aspect explaining Kolguev herders' avoidance of radio use, especially as these values seem very dear to them, as was seen in relation to their housing situation.

On the continent, the establishment of mobile connections cannot be dissociated from the second arrival of the oil industry in the early 2000s, when MTS (Mobil'niye Telesistemy), a Russian mobile provider, set up its network. The company has as a policy to connect all villages of more than 1000 inhabitants but few of the okrug's villages reach that threshold. One of them is Krasnoe, where a transmission tower was installed in 2005. Thus, as the Kharp and Erv herders arrive within twenty to thirty kilometers of Krasnoe, they can contact their friends, relatives or the farm's administration. In 2005, mobile connection was also established at the Varandey Terminal, allowing for Erv and some Kharp herders to be connected to the network during their summer migration. During the construction of the base of Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu, a transmission tower was also established there, which means that Kharp herders may have access to the connection during some parts of the late summer/early fall and late spring/early summer migrations. However, the connection is not always available, even in the 20-30 kilometers range, or it may extend further, for example if one is situated at a higher altitude. In this final section, I will show how the arrival of mobile connectivity changed some aspects of the life of Nenets reindeer herders in the NAO. Before, I will briefly explain the "connectivity" available in both regions where I conducted my research.

The remoteness of Kolguev island from the mainland as well as its small population make it unlikely to attract the interest of a mobile connection provider. Thus both Bugrino residents and oil workers must rely on satellite connection to contact the mainland. At the AMNGR base, there was a satellite phone in the radio-operator's office.

Every evening or during the hours where the operator is available, workers lined up, hoping to have a chance to get in touch with their loved ones. Conversations are limited by the cost of the calls they will have to reimburse. Furthermore, workers have little privacy since they have to talk in the presence of the radio operator. In Bugrino, villagers have had access to phones through satellite connection for a number of years, but only houses located closer to the satellite dish, in Bugrino's "centre" have access to this connection. The installation of free wifi internet in Bugrino, which also functioned through the satellite, brought about a minor revolution. In a matter of months, one could see computers and laptops increasingly appearing in the houses of the villagers, purchased by acquaintances in Naryan-Mar or in other Russian towns where they are cheaper. Hence, the Kolguev Nenets have become increasingly present on social network websites such as vkontakte or odnoklassniki, allowing them to maintain contact with the Kolguev "diaspora" living in other villages, in Naryan-Mar or elsewhere in Russia.

In the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, the herders may reach zones during their migration where mobile phone connection is available. Often, they must stand up on a sled and raise their arm in the air or go to the nearest elevated area in order to catch a signal to send or receive a text message. The Kharp herders told me that the availability of a connection sometimes influences their choice of campsite or the length of stay at a particular site. However, they generally set up their camps at the same sites year after year. Since they tend to be normally located in the more elevated parts of an area, to avoid the accumulation of water, they are also more likely to catch the mobile connection. Inside the chum, the mobile phones are also generally hung at the highest levels in order to catch a signal and permit the reception of text messages or phone calls.

Herder trying to catch the mobile phone signal, Bolshezemelskaya tundra, August 2009

The Kharp herders, most of whom are young men, spend very little time in the village. Finding a female partner is not easy since the tundra is predominantly inhabited by men. It is even more challenging for young herders to find a potential female partner willing to both live with them in the tundra and work as a tent-worker. One of the difficulties of life in the tundra that different Nenets women pointed out is that it will mean either sending their potential children to the village or to Naryan-Mar during the school-year, or remaining separated from a male partner and live in the village during long periods. Yet, mobile phones now seem to serve as a potential infrastructure facilitating the establishment and maintenance of contact between (potential) partners. I came to understand this one night when we reached a zone where we could "catch" the connection. At night, I was trying to sleep between two young herders who finally were able to use a mobile connection to talk to a young woman located either elsewhere in the tundra or in a village. Notwithstanding my presence, this event relates the possibility offered by mobile phone connection for more privacy and confidentiality than the radio. It must be added that the herders may send text messages or go away from the chum to have more private exchanges. The advantage of allowing for more privacy is one of the reasons leading Stammler (2009: 52) to characterise the introduction of this new technology as the "mobile phone revolution."

Stammler also remarks that mobile connections create a "new equality" *within* communities since they do not discriminate on age, gender, origins, or class background.

Rather, he suggests that "[…] the inequality among people in the Russian North in the future will be rather between regions with and without network coverage" (Stammler 2009: 73). Comparing one region with coverage to another without, I am unsure about the form of inequalities that may arise between "connected" and "not-connected" herders. On Kolguev, herders can generally get to the village within a few hours when they need to, which is not the case for most of the Kharp brigades during most of the year. Hence, I believe the potential for inequalities between herders on the basis of access to mobile phone connection mostly concerns herding brigades that remain distant from the village for longer periods of the year. However, given that uses of mobile connections and phone technology develop at a very fast pace, the consequences are difficult to predict. To be sure, the fact that internet use in the NAO had only begun to develop as I was in the field – and it did so exponentially thanks to portable USB-modems functioning on the mobile network – it is difficult to imagine the extent to which access to mobile phones and to the internet may change the practice of reindeer herding and the lives of the herders in the future.

One of Stammler's findings concerns the loss of flexibility in interactions between people following the introduction of the mobile phone. Both in the tundra and in the Nenets villages, the inhabitants are accustomed to unplanned visits, that is, to a flexible way of dealing with time. Stammler (2009: 73) recounts that it was an element which some herders were uneasy with and concludes that,

> […] in sedentary societies mobile phones may create space for a new form of nomadism, freedom, and flexibility, whereas among nomadic pastoralists they do the opposite, tighten the grip on people's life rhythm, and reduce freedom and flexibility. Differently from city nomads, tundra-nomads did not need mobile phones to become mobile and express their freedom, and nomadism is not a "backdrop" but the basis of people's life, their relationships and their natural and spiritual environment.

In my field research in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, the spontaneity of a visit and the readiness to welcome guests clearly did not seem lost. First of all, mobile connections are generally not available on a daily basis and herders may spend weeks without a connection. Secondly, if visitors come from parts of the tundra where they cannot catch the network, they will be welcomed in the very same way. What is less clear, however, is what will happen if and when mobile connections exist everywhere in the tundra.

The pace and independence of tundra life form a key feature cherished by all the herders I met, and also related by Stammler. It is one of the reasons why Kolguev herders avoided using the radio, especially to avoid being in contact with the farm's administration. The mobile connection also carries the potential to become a means of discipline and control. However, the direction of this control does not always go from the town or village towards the tundra. It may also be the opposite. The capacity to find out from the tundra what a herder is doing while on vacation may in fact allow for members of a brigade to maintain forms of care, worry or even discipline over their fellow herders. When I was in Krasnoe, the herders of one brigade contacted me to go to the house of a herder to convince him to go back to the tundra on the next helicopter flight because they had found out through phone discussions that he had been drinking his time, money, and life away during his vacation. On another occasion, it was found out that a tent-worker had been drinking for a long time during her stay in the village. When she came back, the other tent-worker, instead of welcoming her warmly, yelled at her for a whole day because she had been left alone to take care of a whole brigade. Thus, unlike the radio, a mobile connection seems to allow for confidentiality and for herders to remain in contact with each other, to care for each other and, sometimes, to take measures to impose discipline on each other, without involving the farmadministration.

Finally, the appearance of mobile connection may also confirm a person's inclusion in a redistribution network governed by the law of the tundra even when not in the tundra. Considering that herders remain far from villages or from Naryan-Mar for most of the year, they do not have access to terminals on which to add credits on their phones. In order to keep using their phones, they contact relatives or acquaintances either by texting them or calling them to ask them to put credit on their phone or that of a fellow brigade member.

Conclusion

Mobile phone connection is part of a complex set of interacting types of infrastructure that allow people to be connected with others across different spaces. For example, mobile phone connections facilitate the localisation of a herding brigade in the tundra, which can then be reached by snowmobile or helicopter. These infrastructures may also "enhance" each other in the sense that they can introduce innovative ways of

using a type of infrastructure established in earlier times (Graham and Marvin 1996). Here again, the arrival of mobile phone connection and growing access to the internet in the okrug can be expected to bring significant changes to the way that transportation of people or of supplies will be planned and organised between Naryan-Mar, the villages and the tundra. Yet the disappearance of certain technologies or reduced access to certain infrastructures is not always easily endured by people. For example, following the collapse of the Soviet Union with the consequent economic hardships, the difficulties of access to helicopter flights was remembered as having made the exchanges between Naryan-Mar, villages and the tundra much more difficult. Today, however, the okrug is able to subsidise helicopter flights to the tundra, in part, thanks to the revenues it receives from the oil industry and from companies' use of helicopters. Oil companies are now playing a fundamental role, often filling a void left by the collapse of the Soviet state. At the same time, they perpetuate its highly paternalistic attitude regarding the Nenets and now often vis-à-vis the settlers. Yet, what is judged problematic when snowmobiles are not awarded on Reindeer's Day is that it is up to the oil companies to decide the terms of their generosity, even though they are extracting oil below the land where the Nenets have long been living, oil which was mostly discovered by settlers. The fact that construction companies, like oil companies, are reticent to hire settlers, but take pride in "giving" "monoliths" to the okrug's inhabitants also reveals the troubling aspect of the "gift of empire". Besides, one cannot but see some irony behind the fact that the "gift" of new buildings, serving as agents of attachment to the okrug for the settlers and of sedentarisation for the Nenets, is built and given from a transient population that is only present in the okrug because of the flows of both oil and capital.

This chapter focused on the connecting and disconnecting aspects of different types of infrastructure. On top of making visible the giver/recipient logic, the various types of infrastructures may also reveal who is part of a network of reciprocity. For example, the form of reciprocity characterising the Nenets law of the tundra may become visible through the way people prepare the distribution of goods over the phone. However, certain types of infrastructure may also serve as agents of disconnection. The example of the Varandeytsy and the Varandey Terminal probably is the most troubling in this regard. For settlers whose houses are going to be demolished, not knowing who will be their new

neighbours might be a serious source of worry. Another aspect making certain types of infrastructure agents of disconnection are the commodities they may allow to circulate. Thus, alcohol brought to the villages and to the tundra by helicopter may bring social instability, disconnecting individuals from their fellow herders, friends or families. The next chapter will examine the health concerns of the different groups present in the okrug based on their different experiences of a form of connection, at the biological level, to the region.

7

Getting the North Into Your Heart

During the first phase of my field research, which took place in the summer and fall of 2008, I spent one and a half months on the island of Kolguev, both in the tundra, and in the village of Bugrino. Shortly before returning to Naryan-Mar, I began to experience headaches of a kind I had never had before, as well as a strange pain which seemed to be located in the chest area. Upon landing in the okrug's capital, I mentioned this to Dima, one of my hosts, who recommended I go see a doctor in order to make certain that my health condition was good enough to take the plane back to Montreal, as I had to leave Russia before the expiration of my visa.

When I arrived in the okrug's hospital, one doctor and two nurses examined me, measuring my blood pressure and cardiac rhythm. After each test conducted by one or the other of the health professionals, I noticed some worry on their faces. After a second electro-cardiogram, I was told by a doctor that my blood pressure and heart beat were abnormal, leading them to insist that I stay under observation for a few days. I was then brought to a room and given an intra-venous drip that I identified as nitro-glycerine. As each day passed, a procession of different nurses and specialists entered my room to administer different injections, to insert a different kind of I.V. drip into my arm, or to give me unrecognisable pills to swallow. I wondered what they were worried about, although answers from the doctors were not forthcoming. The only time I was able to talk openly to a health specialist was when a doctor who was a veteran of the Russian Army entered my room, bored with his night-shift and looking for conversation. He invited me to go outside with him for a cigarette. This, understandably, confused me, as it did not exactly seem appropriate for a person in my condition.

After five days in my hospital room, the Deputy Director of the hospital came to tell me that I was healthy and that I had to pay and get out. She would only give me a diagnosis and return my passport after having paid my bill. While I was happy to be discharged from the hospital, I was also being worried that I might have an undiagnosed cardiac condition that had perhaps only revealed itself during my fieldwork. Trying to rationalise this event and to comfort myself, I came to the conclusion that the only reason why the doctors had put me under observation was that they had to ensure that nothing

would happen to a foreigner in their hospital, in their okrug, otherwise they might experience negative consequences from the authorities for having failed at their duty.[46] I left the Nenets Autonomous Okrug not knowing what exactly was wrong with me, but still feeling ill, and visited a cardiologist in Moscow on my way back to Montreal, who conducted a series of tests that certified that I was healthy. I was somehow not entirely convinced.

During the second phase of my fieldwork, which took place in the winter and spring of 2009, I was invited by a group of office workers of an oil company operating in the okrug to go for *shashlyki* (barbeque) "in the nature" outside of Naryan-Mar. As I was putting meat on the metal skewers, I happened to make several small cuts on my fingers, which strangely would not coagulate. This situation left me puzzled, as I had never experienced coagulation problems before. Not understanding this, I showed my hands to one of the guests. "The level of oxygen is different here, you haven't been here long enough. It's like that for everyone who is not from here", he remarked.

In the summer of 2010, I returned to the NAO for the fourth and last phase of my field research. While waiting for the *pogranichnyi propusk* (border zone permit) that would allow me to go to Kolguev, I stayed in Naryan-Mar. This time, I could not stay with Dima, as he had just got engaged and his fiancée had moved in with him, but his parents offered to host me in their apartment. Dima's father, Peter Petrovich, was normally previously a very energetic and strong *Severyanin* (Northerner) in his early fifties who had settled in the okrug from European Russia in the 1970s to work for the oil industry. A few months prior to my return to Naryan-Mar, however, Petr Petrovich returned from his *vakht* (shift) very ill, and was soon after declared invalid for work. As I was staying in his family's apartment, I could see he was feeble, spending most of his time in bed, getting up mainly to eat and to go to his daily appointments at the hospital. His wife, Galina Petrovna, was working at the okrug's hospital and told me that his blood was not circulating properly in his extremities, a sort of medical condition apparently typical of those *neftyaniki* working in the North. In discussions with Petr Petrovich and

[46] On a few occasions, I related this event to different acquaintances who were not familiar with the NAO. Very quickly, their first conclusion was that the doctors had most likely wanted to hospitalise me in order to extort money from me. It is important to clarify to the reader that it could hardly have been the case. The amount I had to pay for my stay at the hospital was relatively small, and could hardly have benefited either the hospital or any doctor residing in Naryan-Mar.

Galina Petrovna, I heard them say a few times that his condition might be a consequence of the working and living conditions he experienced while working in oil exploration during the Soviet days. As Peter Petrovich explained, life and work were much harsher than they are now, since there was little infrastructure built in those days to support the oil and gas exploration.

Reflecting on her doctoral field research on Kolguev, Finnish anthropologist Karina Lukin (2007: 238) writes "I have often found myself crying about the 'nothingness' of the entire landscape in Kolguev. Especially in the wintertime, the tundra seems to be confusingly empty of features". Peter Petrovitch's health problems, my blood not coagulating, and my hospitalisation are all events which led me to wonder about what arriving in the Arctic does to a person who is not from there. What does it do to the body? What does it do to the mind?

By the Peschanka, Kolguev, Winter 2009

This chapter focuses on the health issues of different groups of people living and/or working in the okrug. The first half of this chapter will discuss the importance of the concept of adaptation. I will examine how recent Russian medical and scientific literature depicts oil nomads, Russian settlers and the Nenets as located at different stages in the process of adaptation to the Arctic. Descriptions of the biological differences between these groups in medical literature and in other forms of discourse reify the adaptability of

the Nenets and make the health of oil nomads an area of concern, while minimising the political and economic constraints and possibilities that structure each group's movements to, from, and within the NAO. In the second half of this chapter, I will examine health concerns which are deemed particular to the Nenets, a group nonetheless described as perfectly adapted to the life conditions of the Arctic. More precisely, I will discuss problems of alcohol addiction among the Nenets, which is generally explained by Russians as stemming from their biology. As will be seen, this perceived feature of the Nenets, commonly expressed through prejudice, serves both as a means of ethnic differentiation as well as a way to justify a paternalistic attitude commonly held by the Russian population and state towards the indigenous peoples of the North. To begin, I will briefly relate some of the ways in which the Soviet authorities understood early on the physical consequences of the Arctic upon citizens who migrated from the South during the Soviet conquest of the Arctic.

The Soviet Conquest of the Arctic and the Body

The proper goal of communism is the domination of nature by technology, and the domination of technology by planning, so that the raw materials of nature will yield up to mankind all that it needs and more besides.

Trotsky

This quote by Trotsky nicely expresses the conquistador and anthropocentric understanding of nature held and promoted by the Soviet authorities, an understanding which they largely shared with their Western counterparts (DeBardeleben 1985: 80). Soviet philosopher Stanislav Shvarts contended that a given ecosystem takes its value from the possible human use of nature, and not from some abstract principle of harmony (cited in Weiner 2002: 81). Furthermore, consistent with Marx who, like his contemporaries, believed that it is in our "innate makeup" to dominate nature, the Soviet leadership, consistently throughout its different periods, had a strong faith in the human capacity to use technology to transform nature in a positive manner (Levins and Lewontin 1987: 256). Thus, as late as in 1968, Leonid Brezhnev remarked that " [f]or us communists, builders of the most advanced society in the history of man-kind, scientific-technological progress is one of the main ways of speeding up the plans of the party regarding the transformation of nature" (quoted in Fleron 1977: 53). While it is clear that one of the most important changes to the landscape of the "inhospitable" Russian North

was the arrival of significant numbers of workers from the South, considerably less is mentioned about the effects of the landscape on "southern people" who migrated there.

The interest of the Soviet state in the Arctic began before the Second World War and was not solely related to the state's desire to unleash its vast potential of natural riches. As early as the late 1920s, the Soviet state had embarked on projects that could demonstrate its capacity to dominate one of the harshest zones of the world. Military terms, such as conquest, attack, and assault were – as they are today – widely used in the mass media to describe Soviet exploits in the Arctic. Among these exploits was the one led by Professor Otto Shmidt, a 1932 expedition on an icebreaker, the first ever to cross the entire northern coast of the continent. In 1937, Soviet pilots became the first to fly from Moscow to the United States over the North Pole, and to land at the Pole itself (McCannon 2003: 241) .

The Arctic thus became a mythical region in which the Soviet state and people would be able to demonstrate their mastery. Polar stations were established throughout the North, staffed by model citizens who had access to film collections and libraries so that they could replicate their "civilised" way of life, even in the Arctic (Ibid.: 247). John McCannon's (2003: 244) research explores first-hand accounts in which scientists and explorers have described the effects of the Arctic wilderness on their minds and bodies. Besides the cold, the isolation and hard work, the challenge they consistently described as the most difficult to cope with was the winter darkness, which they often experienced with despair. In an interview with an American journalist, the Chief of the All-Union Arctic Institute, Rudolf Samoilovich, is reported to have said that "[t]he Arctic does strange things to men" (quoted by McCannon 2003: 244).

Soviet leaders possessed a long-standing and strong belief that the technologies developed by Soviet scientists would allow their state and citizens to exploit nature rationally through conscious planning. McCannon (2003: 246) remarks that

> [...] as much as possible, the Arctic myth downplayed the notion that the North had any real psychological impact on the Soviets who lived and worked there. Instead, it chose to emphasize how the region was being dominated by the Soviets - in other words, how Moscow was able to extend its controlling hand even to the farthest reaches of the USSR's mythic universe.

This belief diminished in the following decades, when the North became a key source of natural resources, which had to be extracted by a growing number of citizens

migrating from southern regions. Though the authorities recognised that the Soviet workers could adapt to the conditions of the Arctic, there was – and still is – a civilising ideal that all Soviet citizens should have access to certain living and working conditions. Thus, various privileges, such as early retirement, longer vacations, and paid trips to the "South", all testify to the state's recognition that the settlers were undergoing hardships, both physical or psychological, which should be alleviated and for which they should be compensated. The Nenets and other indigenous peoples were also given access to such privileges. However, the possibility of an earlier retirement implied for the Nenets herders that the tundra had become a space of production, a space where elders were no longer welcomed.

Another example which testifies that the Soviet authorities had concerns about the adaptation of such a large number of "southerners" to the Arctic was the 1972 decree number 460 of the Minister of Health of the USSR. In this decree, the Scientific Centre for Clinical and Experimental Medicine, in the secret academic city Akademgorodok, near Novosibirsk, was given the mandate of studying the "[…] physiology and mechanisms of human adaptation to different climato-geographical and production regions of Siberia, the Far East and the Far North (Transl., Scientific Centre for Clinical and Experimental Medicine n.d.). In 1978, the Scientific Centre for Clinical and Experimental Medicine welcomed researchers specialising in Arctic-related health issues from thirteen countries for the International Symposium of Polar Medicine.

Twenty-eight years later, it did so again, but in a completely different context. The Cold War was over and the Soviet Union had collapsed, which increasingly led to international collaboration between countries possessing Arctic territories and the introduction and use of the term "circumpolar," as opposed to "polar". Thus, the conference title "Circumpolar Health 2006 Gateway to the International Polar Year", in Novosibirsk, confirmed that the Arctic had changed, geopolitically. P.I. Sidorov et al. (2009: 1) define circumpolar medicine as

> a system of scientific knowledge and activities the goals of which are a reinforcement and preservation of the health of the population living and/or working in the Arctic zone and in high-latitude territories adjacent to the Polar circle, the prolonging of life-expectancy, as well as prevention and treatment of human illnesses (Transl.).

In the years between 1978 and 2006, and particularly during the 1990s, Arctic regions of Russia, including the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, experienced several dramatic changes. Both the oil industry and collective farms of the okrug began to experience severe financial difficulties when the state reduced or stopped subsidisation of their activities, often forcing them to cease operations. As was seen, a considerable part of the population was forced to live in dire conditions, leading over one-quarter of the okrug's population to emigrate, in many cases back to their regions of origin.

The arrival of new oil companies to the okrug, most especially of Lukoil in the early 2000s, led to a transformation of the typical mode of labour organisation for oil companies. Instead of employing Russian settlers, who would be working according to a "near-shift" form of work organisation, oil companies began to rely principally on a workforce organised in what Kvashnina and Krivoshekov (1998: 7) refer to as shifts of the "expedition type" (*ekspeditsionnyi*). In the next sections, I will explore the medical and scientific research that informs the way that the adaptation of individuals working on expedition type shifts in the Russian Arctic is conceptualised.

Adapting to the North

Questions concerning the ability of humans to adapt to various natural environments and the effects of these environments on human constitutions first emerged in the late 18th century, in the context of colonisation. Margaret Lock and Vinh-Kim Nguyen (2010: 150) remark that "[a]cclimatization was a powerful idea that linked climate, environment, constitution, and temperament through the trope of 'adaptation.' " Though the term did not initially imply a strong connection to the biological, the growing of influence of Darwin's theory of natural selection modified conceptions of adaptability. Central to the notion of acclimatisation is the idea that each race is the result of adaptation to a particular climate. The corollary idea implies that an individual of a given race would degenerate if "transplanted" into another climate. This, however, could be alleviated by acclimatising, that is, "seasoning" prior to departure to the colonies, as was done in colonial France (Ibid.). Thus, the notion of acclimatisation implied differentiation: the bodies of those who were acclimatising – the colonisers – were to be taken care of differently than those who were adapted, that is, the natives and the colonised. As a result, this often implied being blind to the health concerns of the latter

groups, who were perceived of as comprised of individuals whose bodies did not require assistance, being already adapted to their particular environments.

In the Soviet era, the health of the northern indigenous peoples was an area of intervention dating from at least the 1920s, with the introduction of nomadic "Red Tents" (*Krasnyi Chum*) staffed by Russian doctors. Today, in the NAO, certain aspects of the Soviet regime's "civilising" legacy remain, such as the okrug's provision of constant medical support in villages inhabited by Nenets. For example, a Russian doctor had been living with her family in Bugrino for a few decades. She was always available for the villagers in her small clinic during the day, and made herself available at other times in case of an emergency. During her summer vacations, when she would go to the continent, the okrug administration would replace her with a doctor.

In the next sections, I will discuss medical research which takes a different approach to the various groups present in the okrug or in the Russian North more generally. I will show that these findings sometimes reveal some of the issues described by Lock and Nguyen concerning notions of adaptation and acclimatisation. However, considering that Russian and international scientists and health specialists have been conducting research on such matters for decades, it would not be reasonable to deny the validity of their research and results, simply due to the colonial genealogy of the concepts of acclimatization and adaptation[47]. I will instead take a stance similar to that proposed by Lock and Nguyen (2010: 108) who argue that "[…] biology is inevitably a snapshot, one situated in the time and space of a complex and shifting material reality, historically patterned by society, culture, economics, and politics".

[47] The following discussion of medical research is based, to a large extent, on the proceedings of the 2006 and 2009 conferences on Circumpolar Health (Maksimov (ed.) 2006; Murphy and Krivoschekov (eds.) 2009). However, I also base my discussion on several other publications and on interviews with different informants, including health specialists, in the NAO. In the recent Russian literature examined, I observed that the use of the concept of acclimatisation seems to have lost its significance in favour of discussions of various stages of adaptation. In the late 1990s S.I. Kvashnina and S.G. Krivoshekov (1998) were still using both terms, without clear distinction. The terms remain in use however even among Western scientists. For example, Jean-Claude Launay and Gustave Savourey (2009: 221) establish a clear distinction between adaptation, acclimation, and acclimatisation: "[t]he term adaptation is referred to phenotypic or genotypic changes that reduce the physiologic strain produced by the cold, a strain relating to every change in the climatic condition). The term acclimation relates to phenotypic changes in response to an experimentally and specific climatic condition such as temperature or wind speed. The term acclimatization describes the adaptive changes occurring within an organism in response to changes in the natural climate, combining different climatic conditions such as ambient temperature and humidity and wind speed".

Russian scientists have developed elaborate definitions relating to the stages of adaptation based on research in the Arctic. Psychologist Natalia Simonova (2011: 26) describes physical adaptation as a "[…] return of the parameters of the adapting system to the previous level or as their stabilisation to the new level" (Transl.). A.B. Gudkov and O.N. Popova (2011: 1) identify three stages in the process of adaptation of newcomers' (*priezzhye*) organism to the North. The first one, they identify as "adaptive tension" (in Russian, *stadya adaptativnogo napryazhenya*), which lasts from the first two to six months; the second one is "stabilisation of the functions" (*stabilizatsii funktsii*), from the sixth or eighth month up to two or three years, and the third phase, that of "adaptation", (*adaptirovannosti*), from the third or fourth year of life in the North. Gudkov and Popova (Ibid.) suggest that "[…] success or failure of the whole process of adaptation to the conditions of the North are determined in a decisive way by the character and outcome of the adaptative reactions of the migrant during the first and most difficult stage : that of adaptative tension" (Transl.). Because of the importance attributed to this stage for individual migrants, as well as the fact that it is the one which is the stage that is the most temporally distant for the populations that have been living in the North for the longest time, the Nenets, I will focus on this stage.

During the initial phase of adaptation, individuals arriving in the North are said to experience changes affecting the cardio-respiratory system, as well as cerebral activity. A.S. Sarychev (2006: 62) suggests that the cardio-respiratory system is the first to be involved in the process of adaptation to unfavourable climatic conditions. According to his research, it is the central nervous system which initially stimulates changes to the heart rate. Another important element of change is the reduction of Vital Lung Capacity (*zhiznennaya emkost' legkikh*), most likely due to an increase in blood flow to the lungs. Interestingly, Gudkov and Popova (2011) identified the higher blood supply to the lungs as a characteristic of the natives of the North. Hence, during the first two months following arrival in the North, there tends to be increased pressure on the newcomer's cardio-respiratory system, leading to a reduction in its efficiency and thus requiring a greater energy-expenditure for each vascular and respiratory cycle (Ibid.) During the fourth and fifth months, the system begins to adapt to the new climatic and environmental conditions. It has been noted that Russian settlers tend to have lower losses of energy due

to more efficient gas exchange systems as well as hypometabolism, thought to be developed through the time spent in the North (Grishin and Ustyuzhaninova 2010).

The intensity of the first phase of adaptation is apparently so strong that it prompts changes in the brain, affecting memory and emotions as well as activity in both cerebral hemispheres. S.G. Krivoshschekov et al. (2009: 206) suggest that adaptive tension experienced in extreme conditions, such as those of the Arctic induces what is termed a functional asymmetry of the brain (*funktsional'naya asimmetriya mozga*) as one of the response mechanisms. This reaction is characterised by an increase of the cerebral activity in the right hemisphere among predominantly right-handed people. Krivoshschekov et al. (2009: 207) have noticed the existence of a "polar metabolic type", that is a type which has already adapted to the North, characterised by different levels of insulin and cortisol, which are evidence of different levels of activity in the brain. Comparisons with the indigenous populations of the Russian Arctic seem to confirm this as the number of dextral individuals is significantly lower among Nenets boys (thirty-three percent) than among Russian young boys (eighty-one percent) (Ibid.). This, according to Krivoshschekov et al (Ibid.) indicates "[…] the particularities of the formation of pre-adaptive mechanisms and structural changes of the psychotypes (*psykhotipov*) in the population of indigenous peoples of the North." (Transl.). This connection between the physiological and the psychological realms stems from a field of research which has a long history in Russian science, as one may recall from Ivan Pavlov's work. In the next section, I will explore the psychological impact of living and working in the Arctic, based on my research as well as that of Natalya Simonova, who conducted research at one of the extraction sites at which I stayed.

The North in the Head

The extraction site of Artikmorneftegasrazvedka (AMNGR) is located in the Eastern part of central Kolguev. The base of state-owned AMNGR comprised about two-hundred workers. Following the economic crisis, the company was forced to cut down on transportation expenditures, bringing the workers to the island by ship from Murmansk, instead of by airplane, as had been the practice in previous years. Nevertheless, the main impact of the crisis was not in how workers got to the island, but rather, for how long they were going to stay there. Although the company had previously asked workers

comprising one of the two *vakhty* (shifts) to operate the site for some forty-five to fifty-five days, the financial situation of the company now led the managers to ask the workers to remain on the island for seventy-five to eighty consecutive days , working seven days a week, with shifts of twelve hours of work and twelve hours of rest.

Natalya Simonova (2009) studied the phenomenon of "group isolation" (*gruppovaya izolatsiya*) among the oil workers at the AMNGR oil extraction base. Group isolation refers to the "[…] prolonged presence of a group in conditions of limited space, which may result in interpersonal interactions being affected by emotional tensions, asthenia of the nervous system, and limited receptivity of the senses" (Transl., Simonova 2009: 964). In her study, Simonova analysed the size of the group as well as the length of stay. During her research, the workers were posted on the island for fifty-two days, and would spend the next fifty-two days at home. She compared the situation of workers who would sleep at the main base, bringing them into contact with more people, to those working and staying in smaller groups at remote extraction platforms. She found that the size of the collective mattered in the sense that the smaller the group, the more the isolation was felt by the workers (Simonova 2006: 61). She also noticed that there were certain phases of the shift where workers experienced isolation differently. For example, she remarked that towards the end of the *vakhta* workers tended to experience "isolation syndrome", to a higher extent, whereby feelings of aggressiveness, authoritativeness, and impulsivity increased the chances of conflicts between workers (Ibid.).

When I first arrived at their site, I was surprised at how, not only the head of the base, but also the workers were curious, interested and willing to talk to me about my research, their lives, and to learn about my life, my home country and about the Nenets. Considering the high level of secrecy within the oil industry, it was surprising to notice how eager the workers were to talk with me. One of the cherished characteristics of the work site mentioned to me by several workers was that it was a family-like environment. They were fully aware of the fact that they could command a higher salary if they were working for another company, but that the quality and history of interactions with their co-workers was of high value. In fact, many of these workers had been working together since they built this base in the mid-1980s.

When I arrived at the base, the workers had already been together for about fifty days, and had nearly thirty more days to work. I was told by a few workers that they were happy to have a new person around to talk to, as they were all beginning to get tired of each other. One typical evening, I was having dinner with the workers at the cafeteria, watching the evening news on the television. It felt surreal to be in the middle of the Barents Sea, surrounded by people who normally lived in Murmansk, hearing news day after day about the crashing prices of Moscow real estate in the midst of the economic crisis. That evening, I could see in several faces that the loudness of the T.V. was bothering them, so I took it upon myself to go turn down the volume, as I had already by then been there for over a week and felt comfortable enough among the workers to make such a "good action". For some reason, the T.V. shut off as I hit the volume button and I could no longer turn it on again. "What the fuck did you do that for?" screamed a worker at me, one with whom I had not had a chance to talk to yet. His remark and especially his tone did not only make me uncomfortable, but also those workers with whom I was already acquainted. Immediately, the main cook, who overheard the irritated worker yelling at me, came to fix the T.V., while looking at me to imply that I should not worry about it. I related this event to Vasya, the young geologist I would often spend my evenings with, playing table tennis or watching T.V. together in his room. He had already heard about the situation and commented on it, saying that he noticed that people were becoming more impatient with each other and that conflict was in the air. Unsurprisingly, the head of the base, Sergey, a very experienced oil worker with whom I would have coffee daily in his room or office, would repeat to me: "The hardest part of this work is in the head. Not everyone can handle this kind of work".

At the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base, I did not sense group isolation to the same extent. First, the shifts were generally much shorter, being on average from two to four weeks, depending on the function of the worker and on the contracts established between Naryanmarneftegaz and the subcontractor. Thus, there were always new faces appearing. I can easily imagine that the presence of so many helicopters also gives a sense to the workers that if something happens, they can be flown to Naryan-Mar. It was definitely not the case for the workers on Kolguev, for whom leaving before the end of the *vakhta*

would imply requesting and paying for a special helicopter flight (*sanitarnyi reis*) specifically for them which would have to fly to Naryan-Mar.

What is striking regarding the research on group isolation is that such research has not been conducted among the Nenets reindeer herders, who live in brigades of eight to fifteen people all-year round. I suspect that this is because they are perceived of as being well-adapted to the life conditions of the Arctic. While reading Knud Rasmussen's (1969) accounts of his travels from Greenland to Chukotka, one can understand, as I experienced myself, how the tundra was and is not an "empty" space for indigenous groups, contrary to what the oil workers generally believe. As I was migrating with Nenets herders, I was constantly surprised at the arrival of visitors who seemed to me to be arriving from nowhere. This reavealed the extent of my own disconnectedness from social life as it took place on the tundra. When arriving in a new camp site, the herders knew and expected that this or that friend or relative would pay a visit. Other herders in the more or less distant neighbouring pasture grounds were also expecting that herders from the brigade with which I was migrating with would come and visit. Villagers were also aware of the movements and locations of each brigade. They thus came to visit the herders, depending on the presence of snow and distance, in order to bring them supplies, or to slaughter a reindeer they owned and that the herders were herding for them. It is therefore more difficult to imagine the herders as suffering from group isolation. However, this does not imply that living with the same small group of people all year round is easy on each individual.

I could sometimes sense that tension was in the air between herders or between the female tent-workers. An important difference with the oil workers lies in the fact that the Nenets brigades are most often based on kinship. They are often comprised of the children and grandchildren of former members in the same brigade. However, as was seen earlier, there is a certain disconnection felt in the tundra between the nomadic way of life and the sedentary lifestyle of the village. Most especially, the lack of interest in reindeer herding and the nomadic lifestyle among Nenets women in the okrug cannot but give a sense of disconnection between the two lifestyles, namely the possibility for a herder to get married and have a family. Hence, perceiving the Nenets as perfectly adapted to life in the Arctic turns a blind eye to the feelings of isolation resulting from

this situation. If they were taken into consideration, it would be possible, for example, to institute positive measures to encourage women to be more willing to engage in reindeer herding.

Before moving on to the second part of this chapter, it is important to pause to analyse the related medical research[48] by putting in context, in terms of "ancestry", the different ethnic and professional groups I conducted my research with. The "oil nomads", that is the Russian shift-workers, constitute those whose presence in the okrug is the most recent. Their lifestyle is not so particular to the region, the Russian North, but increasingly common where the extractive industries operate in other parts of the circumpolar north, and elsewhere. According to Kvashnina and Krivoschekov (1998: 14), the scientific and medical research conducted on adaptation of the shift-workers should have three main goals:

> -the increase of efficiency of work
> -preservation of human health
> -all-encompassing (*vsestoronnyi*) development of the person (*lichnost'*) (Transl.).

The question of efficiency and productivity is inextricably linked to that of profits. As was seen, one of the logics behind the promotion of long-distance commuting is that it " […] helps resource industries to access resource deposits in very remote northern places in an economical manner and deal with unstable commodity markets by increasing their ability to (re)act more flexibly" (Spies 2009b:13). One of the ways in which both the oil companies and state administrations make savings is by reducing the amount of infrastructure and number of installations, and by reducing the number of potential recipients of northern benefits (*l'goty*). In relation to the second goal mentioned by Kvashnina and Krivoschekov – the preservation of human health – it appears that the health cost seems to be quite high for those individuals who have to adapt to the region. It is recommended for them to adapt gradually, to work in shifts lasting periods not exceeding about one month, and then to go home for the equivalent period of time. During this process, it is recommended that both at work and at home, that health

[48] On the topic of adaptation, other Russian studies could also have been discussed. For example, the premature aging of shift-workers as a result of oxidative stress (Kulikov, Fridman, and Fomin 2006), the effect of heliogeophysics, that is of the magnetic plasmas on blood pressure (Polyakov and Trofimov 2006), or on different meteorological and gravitational phenomena in the Arctic which may influence the level of stress (Hasnulin 2006).

specialists monitor their health, as they put their lives in danger (Kvashnina and Krivoshekov 1998). It is thus not entirely trivial to compare the question of adaptation to that of "acclimatisation", of "seasoning" of the colonial days.

In relation to the third and last goal of medical research on adaptation – the development of the person – it was seen in the previous chapters that there are two main motivations among the workers I have encountered on Kolguev, at the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu base, as well as in Naryan-Mar. The oil workers generally accept to come work in the Arctic because they believe that by doing so, they are helping the country flourish, and/or because they see this as an opportunity for higher salaries and the possibility of career advancement within the industry. They can also choose to find a job elsewhere, in another region where the capital is flowing, as investments are made in other oil fields. Borrowing loosely from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987), one could potentially see the oil nomads as "deterritorialised biologies", available to follow different flows of capital if they are more advantageous in terms of salaries or more promising in terms of career advancement.

It was seen that after a number of years living in the Arctic, one mechanism of adaptation experienced is that of hypometabolism and the emergence of a "polar metabolic type". One wonders how it would be for those people who have settled in the NAO, often in their prime years, to resettle back in the South, as there is now a more or less direct pressure on them to do so by the job market. Would they not have to re-adapt to the conditions of the South, on the continent? In his research on the Russian settlers in Chukotka, Niobe Thompson (2008) heard the belief that resettling in the South after having adapted to the North could be fatal. However, as he relates it, the "[…] actual causes of mortality, as some northerners reflected, might rather be linked to the psychological stress of displacement and the practical consequences of losing family and community support" (Thompson 2008: 232). I heard similar discourses on a few occasions. In a discussion with a local doctor, this belief was confirmed to me, as she mentioned that because of their age, the Russian settlers would have great difficulties re-adapting to the South, physically. One could say that the Russian settlers seem to have reterritorialised in the North, both biologically and socially, and can hardly deterritorialise their bodies to another climate anymore.

It was also seen that scientific and medical studies reveal different ways of relating to the indigenous population of the Russian North. The Nenets are often considered to be already adapted to the Arctic climate. Their brain activity is measured and serves as a point of reference to be compared with that of the workers recently arrived in the North. Thus, the Nenets are described in medical literature as exhibiting an advanced capacity for adaptation to the Arctic as if it were a biological given, frozen in time. What is problematic with such descriptions is that they neglect the role of the social, individual, environmental issues that shape the life experiences of Nenets people. Already in the early 1980s, Emilio Moran (1981) examined the notion of adaptation to Arctic zones, focusing predominantly on the indigenous peoples of the Western world. His conclusion is that "[t]he bulk of the mechanisms for human adaptation to arctic areas are social and cultural rather than acclimatory, developmental or genetic" (Moran 1981: 20).

Margaret Lock (2001: 484) describes "local biologies" as " […] the way in which the embodied experience of physical sensations, including those of well-being, health, illness, and so on, is in part informed by the material body, itself contingent on evolutionary, environmental, and individual variables." Thus, I wish to place a stronger emphasis on the "local" aspect of local biologies than Lock attributes to it herself, as a way of contrasting them to those of "less indigenous peoples" living in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. What will be seen in the next sections is how the health of the Nenets, and to a certain extent, of some other indigenous groups of the Russian North, are discussed through prejudices which maintain social and ethnic differentiation with the Russians and allow for both Russians and the Russian state to maintain a paternalistic attitude towards the Nenets. I will relate some examples of how the opposition against these attitudes is expressed by Nenets activists. Furthermore, I will provide examples of how interactions with oil workers may have an impact on the health of the Nenets.

Local Biologies and Russian Paternalism

Soon after I arrived in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug for the first time, in late summer 2008, I established contacts with some of the activists at Yasavey, who I visited a few times a week to learn more about the situation of the Nenets in the okrug, as well as to prepare for my first stay with the Kolguev reindeer herders. One day I was invited to attend a meeting without knowing what it would be about. As I entered the office's

conference room, I saw three individuals who appeared to me to be Russian, sitting among an audience comprised primarily of middle-aged to elderly Nenets women.

Vladislav Peskov, then-President of Yasavey, introduced the three speakers who happened to be doctors conducting a research project about environmental health and the indigenous peoples of the Russian North. They had already collaborated with Yamal Potomkam ! (*Yamal for the Descendants* !), the Nenets activist organisation in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, where they collected blood samples of the Nenets population, as well as samples of fish, reindeer, and vegetation. They began to present their project and its potential benefits to the Nenets of the NAO, namely by making them aware of the kinds of food which contained contaminants. It did not take long before they were interrupted by members of the audience: " Do you not think that we are able to see by ourselves what food we can eat?", said one of them, in an irate tone. All of a sudden, others from the audience began to loudly express their disapproval of the project. The three doctors seemed shocked, as they had come there with good intentions, but they were not made very welcome. Having been introduced as someone arriving in the okrug to do research with the Nenets, I was just waiting for this hostility to be directed against me, once they were done with the Russian doctors who were getting ready to leave. However, this did not happen, to my great relief. Still, I initially could not quite understand why the crowd of Nenets activists were reacting that way.

A few days later, as I was walking in the Khorei-Ver Expedition neighbourhood, I ran into one of the most vocal opponents of the doctors' project and stopped to talk with her. I felt like I needed to better understand what had happened, in part, in order to make certain I would not repeat the same kind of "mistake" that the doctors had made, which I could not quite identify. "Did you not hear how they were talking to us?, she said. They were talking to us as if we know nothing. They did not realise that they have in front of them the intelligentsia. We too have gone to university. And now they want to come and tell us what to eat and what not to eat."

Larissa Abryutina[49] and Leonid Zubov[50] (2009: 17) have made the point that it is scientists working for the state who have created the "Unified List of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples", a list giving specific rights to those who fall into these categories. Abryutina and Zubov criticise this list since it does not take into account the differences between the various indigenous peoples or between social groups within a people. For example, the federal law "On the Guarantees of Rights of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation", in which the list was introduced, states that in order to receive certain benefits indigenous groups should not only be members of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples, but also that they should be living in the tundra or in the taiga, practicing their "traditional economic activity". Thus, it implies, if taken literally, that those indigenous peoples living in villages or in towns do not count as indigenous peoples (Ibid.: 18). Abryutina and Zubov (Ibid.) remark that despite the fact that certain laws are created in favour of the "traditionalists" living in the tundra, most state programmes are in practice designed for those indigenous peoples living in villages and towns for the following reasons:

> First, achieving the programmes in villages and towns in much simpler, cheaper, and more visible, compared to the remote *obchshiny* (collectives) and on migratory routes,
>
> Second, the programmes achieved in the towns allow, not only for the solving of indigenous peoples' issues, but also for all the town and regional inhabitants' issues, including the personal problems of the managers of resources,
>
> Third, the concentration of benefits in the villages and towns pushes the "traditionalists" to leave the places (*mesta*) of traditional dwelling, freeing them [the places] for industrial development (Transl.).

The Russian authorities most often perceive the problems experienced by the Nenets, and other indigenous peoples, as being generally caused by external factors. Thus, the ways of solving the problem are generally of the following kind: "[…] the improvement of legislation, the legal framework resolution of questions of land property, self-government, the creation of job opportunities, increase of anti-crisis financial measures, and the improvement of the ecology" (Transl., Abryutina and Zubov 2009: 19).

[49] Larissa Abryutina is an indigenous activist from Chukotka. She has been very active at the Russian federal and international levels to raise awareness of the fate of the numerically-small indigenous peoples of the Russian North.

[50] Leonid Zubov is a doctor, teaching and doing research at the Arkhangelsk Pomor University. For decades, he has been working with the Nenets. Most especially, he has been undertaking the initiative of a nomadic medical clinic called the Red Tent in the Kanin Peninsula, in the NAO.

Abryutina and Zubov remark, however, that the problem is that these decisions and measures more often than not, do not reach the practical level. This recalls the flexibility of the post-Soviet Russian legal system, as examined in chapter 5. I have referred to the fact that this legal system is "future-oriented", that is subject to very frequent changes to improve a given situation, often resulting in difficulties to implement them (Ledeneva 2006: 22). Hence, in the context of an already marginalised group such as the Nenets, this characteristic of the Russian legal system may sometimes help perpetuating a paternalistic attitude, often without provision of concrete solutions (Abryutina and Zubov 2009: 19).

The position expressed by Abryutina and Leonidov, as well as that of the Nenets Yasavey activists mentioned earlier is one of the indigenous intelligentsia. This group was formed in Soviet institutions created in the 1920s and 1930s, in the name of *korenizatsia* (the indigenisation of of administrators and intellectuals). Those who benefited most from the Soviet project of creating a class of intelligentsia in each "national group" often serve as the strongest critics of the State's paternalism towards Nenets people. The language of "help and assistance", of the benevolent Russians reminiscent of the "gift of empire", is one that the Nenets intelligentsia is opposed to. They do acknowledge, however, the existence of problems within the indigenous communities, some of which they could solve themselves. In the next section, I will examine how the "local biologies" of the NAO's indigenous inhabitants are interpreted in a fixed manner through prejudices largely shared among Russians concerning the Nenets' problems with alcohol consumption. It will be seen that this perception of the Nenets allows Russians – settlers and oil nomads – to perpetuate a paternalistic attitude while ignoring their own role, as well as that of the state, in the genesis and persistence of this problem.

To Drink or not to Drink: Research and Work Ethics

Ever since I studied and lived in Russia, in 2000, I could see that there were many personal and social problems which were related to alcohol consumption. Eugene Raikhel (2006: 2) relates that the average yearly consumption of pure alcohol by Russian adults is nearly fifteen liters per person, twice as much as in the European Union. Raikhel also reports that although there are about 47 500 deaths directly related to alcohol each year,

the combination of all deaths both directly and indirectly related to alcohol in Russia could amount to nearly one-third of all deaths in the country. As I will demonstrate, in the NAO alcohol-related problems may serve as a means of interethnic differentiation, through prejudices that are most often directed towards the Nenets.

It is rather difficult to discuss alcohol-related problems in the NAO, as a discussion may easily reinforce prejudices related to the indigenous population. It is also quite difficult, as a researcher and acquaintance, but most of all as a friend, to witness the problems that certain individuals have problems with alcohol. Each time I arrived in the tundra, I would only bring one bottle of vodka with me to share with the herders and celebrate our meeting again, as per local expectations among Nenets and in Russia generally. While migrating through the tundra, there are obviously no stores, and hence, no access to alcohol, and there is a lot of work to do from morning to sunset, so there is very little drinking. However, I will show how the connections forged via the trade of alcohol between oil workers and the Nenets may in fact lead to social disruption, both in the tundra and in villages. But first I would like to glance at the "biological explanation", often used to explain alcohol problems among the Nenets, as well as among other indigenous peoples of the Russian North and elsewhere.

Throughout this dissertation, I have been hesitant to establish any comparison between the Nenets and other indigenous peoples of Canada. However, even before arriving in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug for the first time, the descriptions I received by email from Marfa, my first contact in the okrug, included descriptions of the drunken Nenets wandering in the town and villages. This resonated with the prejudices widely circulating in Canada about the individuals and communities comprising Canada's First Nations. Marie-Pierre Bousquet (2005: 135) relates that the image of the drunken Amerindian was already widely present in chronicles dating from the French Regime (1608-1760). Viktorin Popov (1932: 14) gives a similar description of the impact of Russians on the Nenets in the 1930s: "They [the Russian traders] took away from the Samoyed the results of hard labour, his reindeer and the [hunted] fox in exchange for alcohol or cheap shiny objects. Culture came to the tundra with alcohol and venereal disease" (Transl.). Popov describes how drinking was a problem generated from the

outside, a problem brought by Russian traders who used alcohol in order to exploit the Nenets, a form of "alcolonialism" remembered in Canadian history.

In North America, as centuries passed, several explanations for the alcohol-related problems among indigenous peoples came to be used. Some involved the spiritual and political, while others, which are still very present, involve the biological realm. Amnon Jacob Suissa (1999: 72) examined research on the genetic transmission of alcoholism in North America. She concluded that the methodology used in such research is generally highly questionable and that multi-factorial causal models provide better explanations of alcohol addiction. Still, the belief that a certain genetic predisposition or a lack of acetaldehyde could explain the alcohol problems existing among Canadian First nations remains a widespread prejudice. Similar beliefs are equally shared among the Russian settlers and current oil workers about the Nenets in the NAO. For example, I conducted an interview with a doctor who had resided in the okrug and had worked with the Nenets for several decades. Asking her what were the main health issues she encountered among her Nenets patients, she said: "First of all, they belong to the yellow race. They have all the characteristics of the yellow race. They lack the substance allowing them to assimilate alcohol." It is not just the direct connection to their biology which is striking in her discourse, but that the first health concern that came to her mind concerning the situation of health among the Nenets was related to alcohol consumption.

There are a number of tragic events I witnessed myself or heard about while I was in the field, events which in the opinions of those relating them were associated with an excessive consumption of alcohol. One of the saddest events, which traumatised the villagers of Bugrino, happened on December 31st 2009, that is, on one of the days when alcohol is sold at the store. On that New Year's Eve, two Nenets women shot their husbands. In one case, rumour has it that the husband had been violent towards his wife, thus bringing sympathy for the woman from some villagers, as she was sent to prison. In a discussion about this event with Dima, a Naryan-Mar friend who is a Russian settler, his response was cynical: "That's in the order of things for them. It happens all the time on New Year's Eve in Nenets villages".

The life expectancy among the Nenets is situated between forty to forty-five years (Dallmann et al. 2010: 19). One of the most common causes of death is violence,

including suicide. More generally, Russia ranks very high on the list of countries by suicide rate (20 suicides per 100 000 inhabitants). The Nenets and the Koryak Autonomous Okrugs are the two regions with the highest rate of suicide in the country (the latter with 133 suicides per 100 000 inhabitants) (Revitch 2008: 13). The easiest explanation for these violent deaths is to correlate them with alcohol abuse. I believe this explanation has, to a certain extent, resulted in turning a blind eye to the fact that the Nenets have undergone drastic changes in the last century, most of which were imposed by the Soviet state. Correlating the low life expectancy, due to violent deaths, to excessive alcohol consumption also provides an opportunity for the Russian state and, in some ways, for Russians, to maintain an interethnic boundary as well as a paternalistic attitude towards the Nenets. Florian Stammler has done research with Nenets reindeer herders of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, where the world's largest gas reserves are being extracted, Florian Stammler (2011: 262). He goes so far as to suggests that, in a society where the interests of the state are widely accepted as superior, including by many Nenets, suicide may be one way of escaping the corollary hardships brought about by the powerful gas industry, as well as the difficulties of not being seen as loyal enough to the state by others.

Yet, on several helicopter flights I took between Naryan-Mar and the tundra or Bugrino, I noticed that a regular passenger is the prosecutor (*prokuror*), sitting among passengers and supplies being brought to the villagers or to the herders. Often, this representative of state justice was on his way to investigate a case of violent actions, including murder or suicide. Ironically, the helicopter was not only bringing a representative of order to the tundra, but it was also generally carrying the bottles and canisters of that liquid often thought to create disorder and sorrow.

Kolguev is in principle a dry island, in the sense that the only store of the island does not sell alcohol, except on days of celebration, such as New Years Eve. However, the bi-monthly helicopter flights allow for passengers to bring alcohol to Bugrino on a regular basis. Thus, on the days following the arrival of a helicopter, friends and relatives meet again and often celebrate with alcohol. After that, the village becomes quiet again and life assumes its routine again. Some reindeer herders may also attend the arrival of

the helicopter if they are located not too far from the village at the time, or if they are less busy. Thus, this is one moment when they can also bring back some alcohol to the tundra.

Another way of obtaining alcohol on the island is through the oil workers. In principle, the oil workers are supposed to be screened prior to their departure at the airport or at the port. However, it is generally quite easy to find ways of avoiding these controls, especially for the workers on Kolguev. This is one thing I found during my first visit to the herders. I was initially welcomed with food and, as it normally goes, was offered to toast to the encounter with a type of alcohol that was not vodka. A little bit of this liquid was poured from a ten-liter plastic canister into a cup, to which water was then added. We had a few glasses of that drink, which tasted like fire inside, and we ate, and got to know each other while having some more of that burning liquid. Throughout the next day, I was marvellously introduced to the area by Ivan, my host, and his brother and the latter's wife, walking through the tundra and hunting flying geese in the late August afternoon sun. The herders, whose families had just left to prepare their children for school, remained in the camp, drinking what I found out was rubbing alcohol (*meditsinski spirt*). The drinking did not stop for several days, to the extent that the sled reindeer managed to disappear without the attention of the herders. Realising that there were no sled reindeer left, and soon after that there was neither food nor wood to heat up the shacks on the treeless island, Mikhail, Ivan's brother, insisted I go back to the village with him by snowmobile. This was my first contact with the herders.

Fortunately, I came to realise that this situation was actually a very particular one, one that coincided with both the departure of the relatives, but most especially, with the presence of canisters of alcohol. Only a few months later, during a next visit, did I understand what had happened. One of Ivan's cousins, living in Bugrino, had made a deal with an oil worker. In exchange for money, he received several canisters of rubbing alcohol, which he was hoping to sell in the village[51]. However, he began to drink this alcohol away. Seeing this situation, Ivan thought that it would be safer for his cousin and

[51] Petra Rethmann (2001: 17) did research in Kamchatka in the 1990s, as the Russian economy had basically collapsed. She remarked that "[o]ne response to the ruinous effects of constantly rising prices was that liquors such as vodka and wheat- or potato-fermented home brew turned into a liquid hard currency […], being much more reliable and stable than money." Her description seems to correspond to what I observed on Kolguev. Selling alcohol there also allows one to make profit as a bottle of vodka which costs 300 roubles in Naryan-Mar is sold on Kolguev for 1000 roubles.

for his investment to bring the alcohol to the tundra and save it in his shack. It is important to state that Ivan did not drink anymore. He had stopped after receiving a treatment often referred to in the NAO as *kodirovanie* ("coding") or more formally as *kimzhat'sya* ("chemical protection"). Although I had heard of this treatment on various occasions during previous stays in Russia, it was in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug where I met the most individuals who had undergone this treatment. It consists of injecting or implanting a depot injection of an alcohol antagonist called disulfiram (Raikhel 2010: 133). One of the medically unconventional aspects of this treatment is that narcologists often replace disulfiram with neutral substances, thus relying on a placebo effect. As I was told by my Nenets acquaintances who had undergone this treatment, before receiving the injection, the doctor asks the patient for how long he/she wants to be treated. Among those I knew, they normally chose to have the one year treatment during which they would know (or believe) that drinking would make them very ill, if not kill them.

When visiting the oil workers the following winter, I was constantly asked by oil workers about how it was for me to be living with Nenets herders, about their living conditions, about Bugrino. I quickly understood that excessive drinking was generally the first image the oil workers had in mind when they were talking about the Nenets, whom they would very often refer to as "Chuckchi[52]". The herders were known for coming to the base in order to get diesel, gas or sometimes alcohol. When asking the workers if they give or sell them alcohol, the response was always the same: "No, before we fly here, there are very strict controls and our luggage is checked, so we cannot bring alcohol". I later found out that some workers were making *brago* (moonshine) on the extraction site as I was invited to drink with them following the weekly *banya* (Russian Sauna) day. The next morning, I made it, not without difficulty, to the cafeteria in order to have breakfast during the hours when it was served. As I entered, I could see the knowing smiles on the faces of several workers, as if this was nothing really wrong.

Such a situation could not have happened at the Yuzhnoe-Khylchuyu extraction site. There, the workers do not work according to the same shifts, they remain there for much shorter periods, and they do not have as strong collectives as on Kolguev, thus

[52] The Chukchi are one of the Numerically-Small Indigenous Peoples of the North, living predominantly in Chukotka, across from Alaska. There are many Russian jokes about the Chukchi, where they are depicted as uncivilized and very naïve.

making it more difficult to assemble and maintain the required installation for making alcohol. I was told that whenever someone is caught with alcohol, they are either fired on the spot or have to pay big fines. I asked several workers about this and was told that the checks are, indeed, very strict – especially when the employees come by helicopter. In the winter, however, it becomes easier to carry alcohol for those who arrive in all-terrain carriers, often from the Komi Republic. The reasons justifying the interdiction of alcohol consumption is, as I was told by the head of the base, not only in the name of productivity, but also for safety and responsibility issues: "So long as an employee is at work, he is under the responsibility of the company. Thus, if someone makes a mistake affecting himself or others due to his consumption of alcohol, the company will be responsible".

This relates to the Russian popular notion of *pokhmel*, (hangover), which refers to the symptoms following a drinking event. In Russian narcological literature, it is referred to as the abstinence syndrome (*abstitentnyi sindrom*, in Anglo-American literature, as withdrawal syndrome) and is characterised by " tremors, sweats and difficulty sleeping" (Raikhel 2006: 103). In a discussion I had with Kalin, a Nenets from the south of the okrug who worked for a number of years for an oil company, he related one event which, according to him, had a strong impact on the ways in which his company began to control more seriously the presence and consumption of alcohol on its work and living sites. One worker apparently arrived on the first day of his *vakhta* at the extraction site, following binge drinking in the preceding days, while he was at home. Because he was hungover, probably experiencing the symptoms of withdrawal, he got up at the cafeteria, went to put away his plate and, with a knife, cut open his abdomen in order to take out his intestines and cut them like sausages. This was, according to Kalin, one of the reasons why oil workers must have a blood test in order to evaluate the consumption of alcohol, before beginning their shifts. Although this story may sound like an urban legend, it is telling of the perceived consequences of drinking, and the difficulties in the work situation, as well as justification for the measures taken by some oil companies.

Conclusion

As I arrived to Bugrino in winter 2009, I stayed as usual with Tikhon's family. Tikhon's sister, Lyuba, who resides in a neighbouring republic, also arrived on the same

helicopter as me. During the following days, I saw that Ivan, my tundra host, began to pay regular visits to a family with whom he normally does not feel very comfortable. I soon began to understand that his motivation was the presence of Lyuba, a girl, I was later told, to whom Ivan had not been indifferent since the school days. Over a few days, Ivan would drop by to take her and her son for snowmobile rides. Tikhon and I enjoyed teasing Lyuba a little bit about what seemed to be the beginning of a romance, which was however not very new. Unfortunately for Ivan, she was not interested in him, she told us, justifying herself in part by speaking negatively about the life he is leading, that of a reindeer herder.

One day, as I was walking through Bugrino, I saw Ivan riding his snowmobile without a coat or hat on. For a few days, he would drive passed me without even saying hello or acknowledging my presence. He had begun drinking again. It might all have been a coincidence. Maybe the end of his treatment's efficiency simply coincided with the arrival of an uninterested Lyuba. Maybe not. If it is the case, then one cannot but see in his situation the disconnection between the tundra and village lives. Ivan's mother was saddened by the fact that Ivan had gone binge drinking, after a year or so of sobriety. She mentioned that he would probably continue drinking until the next helicopter flight, which would take him to Naryan-Mar to receive the treatment again. And so he did.

The tundra life may be seen by some villagers in a rather negative way. However, it also remains a place where many Nenets feel more at home, or as a haven where one can escape to from the village or city where drinking opportunities are more frequent. Feodor, a herder of the Kharp brigade in the Bolshezemelskaya tundra, surprised me when he told me he had not been to the village in several years. "How can you not go there even when a house has been built for you and your family by Naryanmarneftegaz", I asked him? "We can't stay at home" he said. That was something I had often heard among the herders. "It's dangerous to get lost there". What was meant, is that if you go to the village, or if you stay there for too long, there is a risk of getting lost in drinking. Similarly, Tikhon's cousin from Naryan-Mar, Pavel, went to Kolguev in order to go hunting the migrating geese in the spring. There was however more to his motivations for going hunting. He had just been treated for his alcohol problems and chose to leave Naryan-Mar in order to stay away from alcohol.

The description of the hardships experienced by those Nenets herders and villagers illustrates awareness on their part that drinking, or placing oneself in particular environments, is risky, and that they may succumb to temptation. It also illustrates the social and cultural contexts in which this takes place, as well as the difficulties certain individuals go through in order to avoid drinking. Unfortunately, neither the biological explanation for alcohol addiction, nor the medical research showing – directly or indirectly – how well the Nenets are adapted to the Arctic, take into consideration the realities of individuals or communities, influenced by past and present state policies, as well as by the presence of the oil industry. The depiction of the Nenets in some of the research presented seems to imply that the Nenets exist frozen in time, that their biologies are so "local" that they may not live their lives otherwise. The fixity of such depictions cannot but be related to both the fixity of the prejudices that many Russians have with regard to the Nenets as well as the rigidity of the depiction of what a "traditional" Nenets should be in the legal documents that the Russian state uses as the framework of its interactions with the indigenous peoples of the North.

The fixity of the Nenets biology contrasts with those of settlers and of the oil nomads. The former appear to have been "reterrioralised" within the Arctic to such an extent that there is a fear among many of them that moving back to their region of origin or to a more southern region of Russia could have serious consequences on their health, if not be fatal. Yet, they highly value one of the northern benefits, which subsidises travel anywhere in Russia. Many use this opportunity every second year to go spend the summers back in their region of origin, where they take their children and grandchildren to both acquaint them with those regions, and to counteract the effects of the lack of sun and vitamins in the northern climate and diet. The medical descriptions of the oil nomads' "deterritorialised biologies" contrast the most with those of the Nenets. The various changes taking place in the oil nomads' bodies are studied and monitored by health specialists. Recommendations are made to limit their stays in the Arctic in order to avoid putting their health at risk. One could wonder to what extent these recommendations could not be seen as a fear that the oil nomads will adapt too well to the Arctic, adding to the burden of the state and companies to provide them with benefits and build necessary infrastructure.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have examined the evolution of the ways of life of Nenets reindeer herders and villagers, the predominantly Russian settlers, and current oil workers. I also focused on their interactions with one another from the 1960s through to the "oil boom" that began in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in the early 2000s and continues to the present day. I situated these interactions in relation to the position occupied by each group vis-à-vis the state, the oil industry and, the oil market. However, I have also shown that the ways of life of each group as well as their relations with one another are shaped by previous forms of interactions with the state. The ambivalent attitude of the Russian state towards the indigenous peoples long pre-dates the Soviet period. In the course of the last two centuries, at least, it has been assumed that the *inorodtsy, the tuzemtsy*, the "small peoples of the North", later the "numerically-small peoples of the North", as they were defined by successive political regimes, needed first to be protected from Russian traders and corrupt regional administrators, then from kulaks and other exploiters. On the other hand, the indigenous peoples have consistently been judged as leading a "backward" way of life by the Russian authorities: at first because they were not Christian, and later because they were not modern, productive or communist enough, or, more recently, because they are too dependent on the state and on the oil industry.

One of the characteristics continually described as a sign of the Nenets' lack of "civilisation" was the fact that they generally led a nomadic way of life, that of reindeer herders. In 1822, the Speranskii Code classified the different inhabitants of the expanding Russian empire in a way that closely associated a high level of mobility with a low level of development. Thus, "wandering" (*brodyashie*) and "nomadic" (*kochevye*) peoples, such as the Nenets, were situated at the lowest level of civilisation. This categorisation paved the way for the establishment of paternalistic relations between the state and its representatives on the one hand, and indigenous peoples on the other. As I have demonstrated, such paternalistic relations were perpetuated throughout the Soviet period, as "civilisation" was brought to the Nenets National Okrug, first by the Soviet revolutionaries and later by the settlers, described as the vanguard of socialist civilisation.

In the post-Soviet period, such paternalistic relations were also perpetuated, though in an altered manner and by different actors. The higher oil prices as well as the fact that several oil deposits had already been discovered brought the oil industry back to the okrug, now to extract oil. This time, oil companies, the most important of which are Lukoil and its daughter company Naryanmarneftegaz, arrived with a workforce organised differently than in the Soviet days, in accordance with the economic requirements of the context in which they are currently operating, that of flexible capitalism. As I have demonstrated, the industry responsible for the economic development of the okrug as well as the individuals involved in it describe themselves as the new principal agents of development of the region. However, this time they relegate both the Nenets and the settlers to the position of recipients of "civilisation", a civilisation that embraces the market-related principles, chief among them in this case, of mobility. What is striking about this situation is an apparent reversal of the order inscribed in the Speranskii Code: the more mobile a group, in terms of the regularity of their movements as well as the distances they travel, the higher the group's position on a scale of levels of "civilisation", as defined by the industry and the oil nomads themselves. The fact that even at oil extraction sites, those situated higher in the hierarchy tend to come from the more distant regions, compared to the cafeteria and cleaning staff, testifies to the importance of mobility to the positioning of individuals within a social and economic hierarchy.

This reversal took place while significant political changes differently framed the interactions between those who live and/or work in the NAO. I have discussed the adoption by the Russian state of both an authoritarian as well as a more centralising approach towards peripheral resource-rich regions, such as the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. This implies that the terms of the redistribution of oil revenues came to be dictated by Vladimir Putin's government, which centralised revenues in Moscow. One means to this end was the merger of the oil-rich NAO with the poorer Arkhangelsk Oblast, a decision denounced by many if not most of the NAO's residents and which cost the appointments of two successive governors, removed by Moscow. The Russian state also ensured the maintenance of control over its strategic resource by only giving access to oil deposits to companies, be they state-owned or private, under the condition that they respect Moscow's dictates. If they did so, the oil companies were able to operate within a

legal and institutional system flexible enough to facilitate their operations. This flexibility was one of the central characteristics of the post-Soviet Russian legal system and of state agencies discussed in this dissertation.

Oil companies also have their own exigencies, since they are operating in the context of a global economy, which I described as flexible capitalism. One way oil companies found to reduce their expenses was to rely on a flexible workforce, thus avoiding the payment of northern benefits, to which residents in regions of the Far North are entitled, as well as the costly infrastructures which would be required if large numbers of workers with a more permanent presence in this region of the Arctic were to be hired. In the NAO, the significance and consequences of this form of labour organisation will most certainly become more visible in the coming years, as the oil industry will most likely produce oil from several other deposits discovered by Soviet prospectors. Contrary to their predecessors, or even to the workers operating the Artikmorneftegazrazvedka (AMNGR) production site, on Kolguev, it seems very unlikely that most of the present oil nomads will settle in the NAO or in the North in general. It is also possible that many of the oil nomads working for Naryanmarneftegaz or Lukoil will work at either other extraction sites operated by these companies, or by other ones elsewhere in Russia. In fact, many of these workers are using their work placement in the NAO as a stepping stone experience with the hope of advancement, or as a chance to receive a higher and more stable income, compared to those available in the regions in which they live, most often in central or southern Russia. Yet, the work arrangements typical of shift-work are difficult, since these workers must leave their families for weeks at a time, and work in conditions they judge to be harsh. In certain ways, one could see in these individuals' life challenges some of the difficulties experienced by a growing number of people in the current global economic context, in which workers are increasingly required to be mobile and to adapt to the needs of flexible enterprises.

Not unlike their Soviet predecessors, the oil nomads and the other economic actors following the flows of capital to the NAO, largely see themselves as the main agents of development in the okrug. Throughout this dissertation, I have pointed to different moments where the oil nomads took up the Soviet settlers' role as the vanguard of civilisation, in being the benevolent providers of the "gift of empire". Unlike the

interactions taking place between the settlers and the Nenets in the Soviet days, today's gift is not only given to the Nenets, but also to the settlers, and serves as a way to distinguish and constitute each group in relation to the other (Mauss 1967; Grant 2009). This is expressed among the oil nomads in their paternalistic way of relating to both the Nenets and settlers, who they commonly describe as being too dependent on the state and the oil industry and as generally incompetent. These descriptions cannot be dissociated from the fact that the the Nenets and settlers are eligible for northern benefits (*severnye l'goty*) provided to permanent residents in the okrug. It is one of the ironies that the revenues the NAO receives from the leasing of land to oil companies – which do not favour the hiring of locals – allows the payment of benefits to those same local residents of the okrug.

Questions of access to land and reciprocity between the oil companies, their workers, and the Nenets are characterised by divergent perceptions of the meaning and purpose of exchange. As I have shown, the Nenets herders favour a form of exchange which can be defined as generalised, as per the Nenets law of the tundra (*zakon tundry*). This outlines their way of relating to the pastures, according to which access to pastures should take place in a flexible manner. I have demonstrated how the presence of security forces as well as the attitude of oil workers and companies on extraction sites constitute an infringement on the law of the tundra, by making these places nearly inaccessible to the herders. Furthermore, oil workers characterise nearly any type of trade with the herders as "help" for the Nenets, even when the diesel or fuel they give the herders is not their own, but the property of the company. For the herders, this type of exchange is perceived as either balanced – if not negative – exchange, a form of exchange significantly different from the one implied by the Nenets law of the tundra (Sahlins 1972). Nenets accept the presence of non-Nenets occupying the land differently, in part because of their integrated capacity to sacrifice themselves for the greater needs of the nation (Stammler 2011: 257). However, the herders find it difficult to cope with the oil workers' lack of respect for the Nenets' code of conduct, especially with regard to access to the land, generalised reciprocity and their conduct towards the land and with the animals. This wish, that the land, including its human and non-human inhabitants, be treated with greater respect by those comprising the majority of their country and by

extractive industries, is often foremost among the demands made by indigenous groups worldwide (Niezen 2003: 18).

The oil industry, its workers, and the affiliated economic actors, often describe the new infrastructures being established in the NAO as a "gift" to the okrug's inhabitants. I analysed the use of the infrastructure brought in mostly by the oil industry and the transformation it engendered in relation to mobility. What became clear is that each type of infrastructure carries the potential to be both a connecting and disconnecting agent. For example, the new architectural aesthetic accompanying the recent oil boom appears to be intolerant of Soviet aesthetics and standards, which it aims to replace. As a result, this forces the settlers and urbanised Nenets to move to new neighbourhoods, where they fear being disconnected from those who are part of their reciprocity networks. Access to housing is also related to the Soviet-inherited northern benefits which further connect the settlers to the NAO. Other types of infrastructure, such as snowmobiles, helicopters and mobile phones also have the potential to facilitate exchange and organise the provision of supplies, yet they may also facilitate the transportation of alcohol and thus serve as agents of social instability.

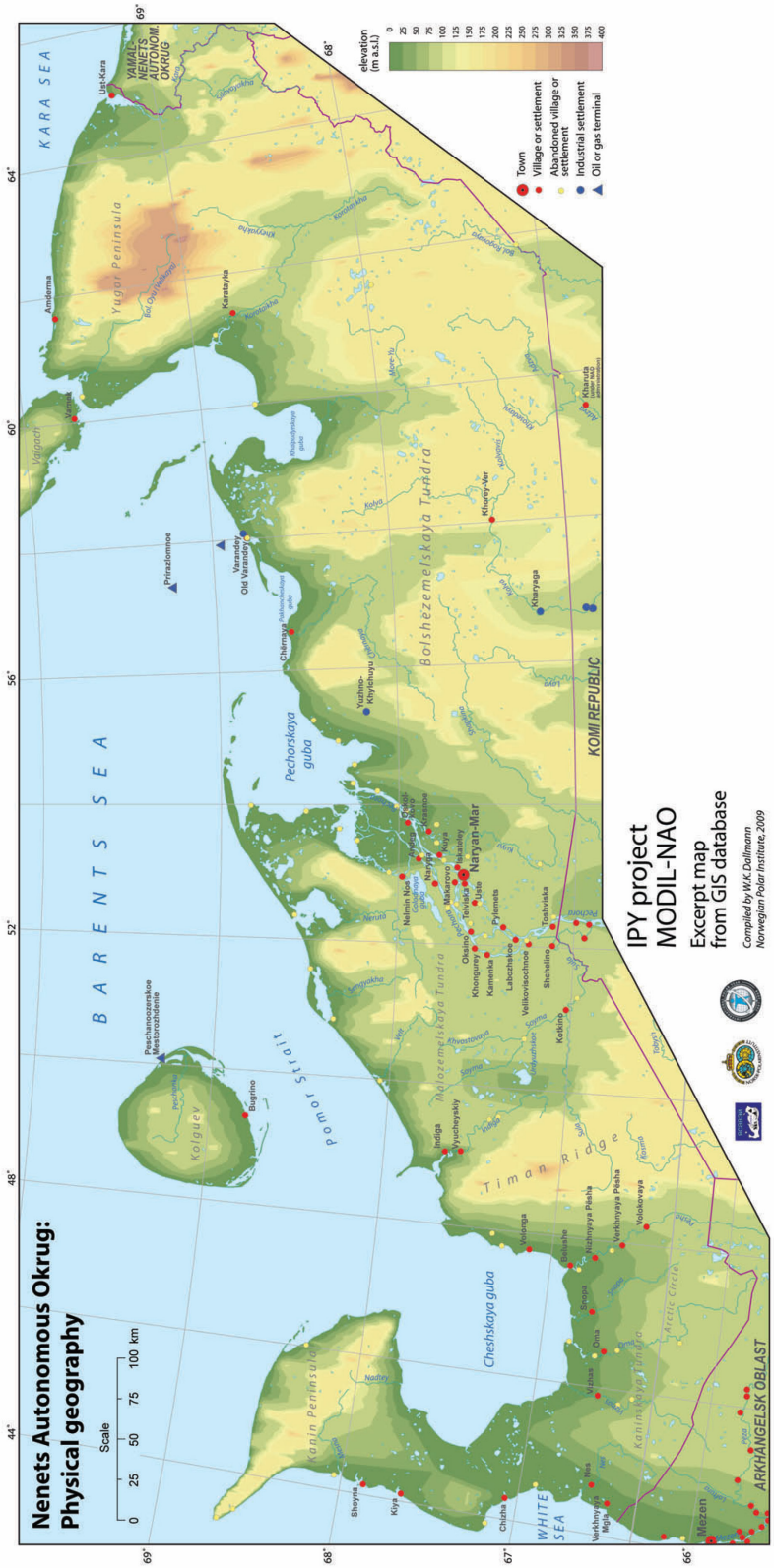
The question of disconnection from one's land of origins was examined in relation to each group's health concerns. What I noticed is that the different groups are studied and portrayed very differently in medical research on health problems and adaptation to the North. For example, I have demonstrated how the early notion of conquest of the North by Soviet citizens evolved from a conception of the Soviet person as capable of adapting to any conditions, to the recognition that life and work were more difficult in the Arctic, necessitating the provision of to northern benefits. More recent studies seem to suggest that the workers should avoid staying in the okrug or in the Arctic generally for more than a few weeks at a time. I suggest that the production of medical knowledge justifying shorter stays in the Arctic cannot be dissociated from the increasing reliance of oil companies on shift-workers. This relates to what Monica Tennberg (2009: 198) observed about Arctic science, namely that

> [i]n polar regions, the promises of access to natural resources is a discourse typical to the current neoliberal mode of governmentality in which nature is owned, commodified and commercialized. […] Neoliberalism, as a mode of governing, is based on 'the concern for the population and its optimization (in terms of wealth,

> health, happiness, prosperity, efficiency) and the forms of knowledge and technical means appropriate to it' (Dean 1999, 20).

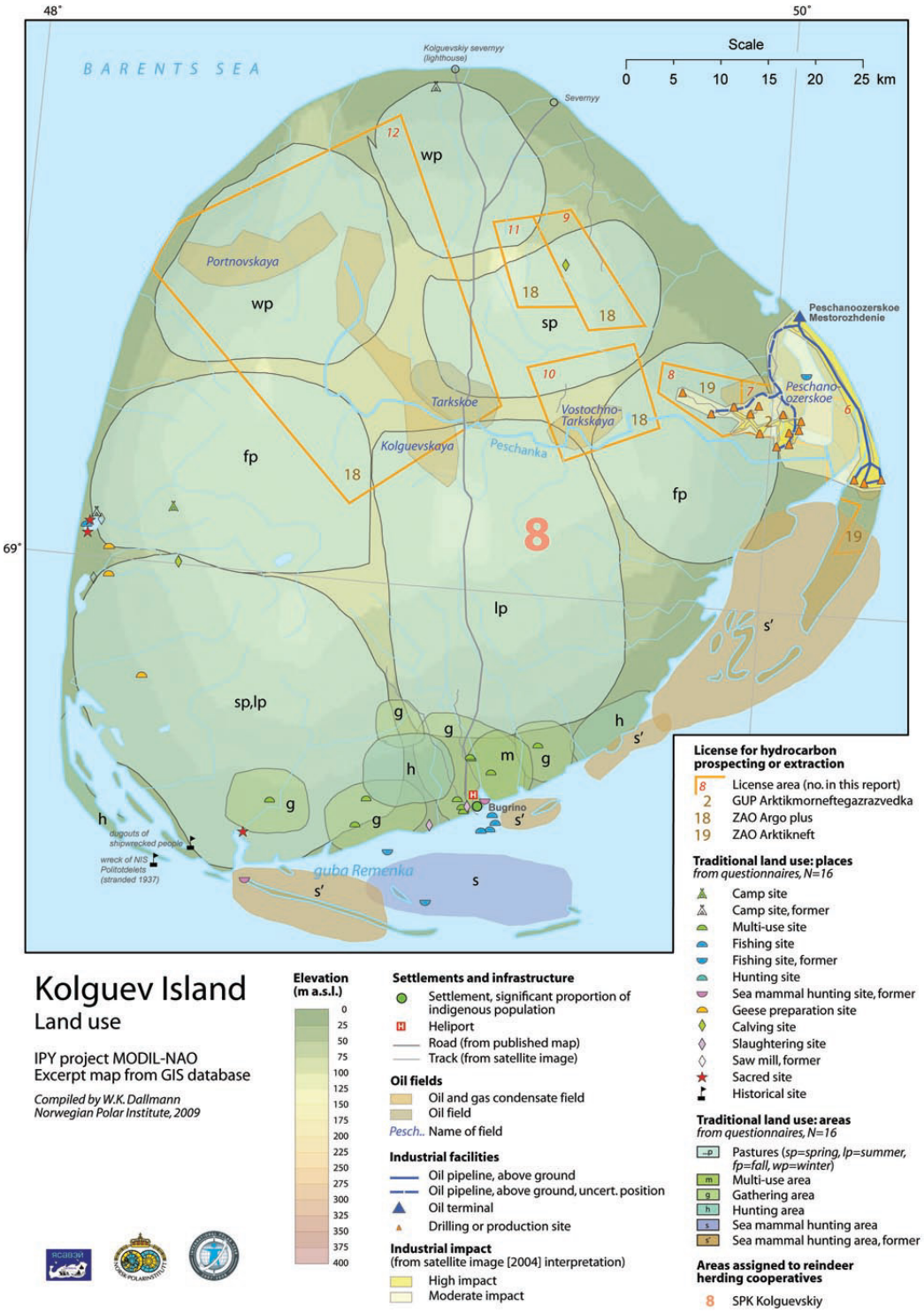
The Arctic territories and their inhabitants, in Russia and elsewhere, are likely to experience intense social, cultural, demographic and environmental changes in the near future, especially as the circumpolar region will continue experiencing the impacts of climate change, while at the same time increasingly attracting extractive industries. Thus, indigenous peoples and non-indigenous residents of Arctic will most likely be increasingly cohabiting with new populations coming to work in extractive industries, or in other economic sectors closely related to them. As I have demonstrated by describing the interactions between the Nenets reindeer herders and oil workers in both the Bolshezemelskaya tundra and on Kolguev, each indigenous community copes in its own way with the presence of workers coming from different regions, and adapts differently to the new infrastructures associated with developments made by the oil industry. This suggests, on the one hand, that natural and social scientists increasingly attracted to various regions of the Arctic should not assume that economic and political processes aiming to "develop" the Arctic affect each of the cultural and professional groups present in one region in the same way. On the other hand, although the significant differences between the ways of life of those employed in extractive industries and of indigenous peoples will most certainly remain (especially due to their respective ways of engaging with the land), my research also points to the risks of making *a priori* assumptions that the culture or that the history of presence in a region automatically implies that a group is better adapted to the Arctic, given that many regions of the Arctic are sites of intense political, social, and environmental change.

Appendix 1 Nenets Autonomous Okrug: Physical Geography



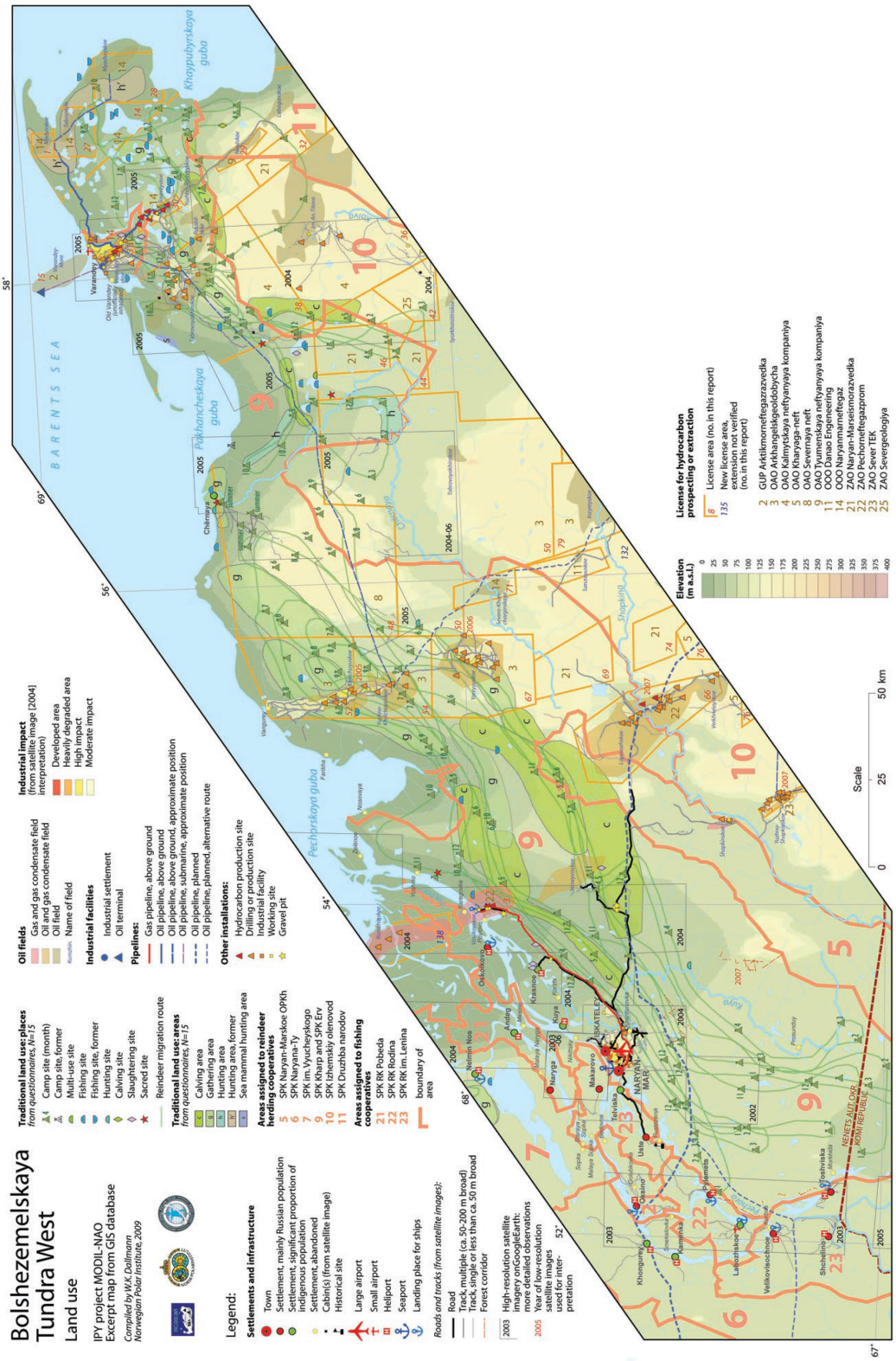
Dallmann 2009a

Appendix 2 Kolguev Island: Land Use



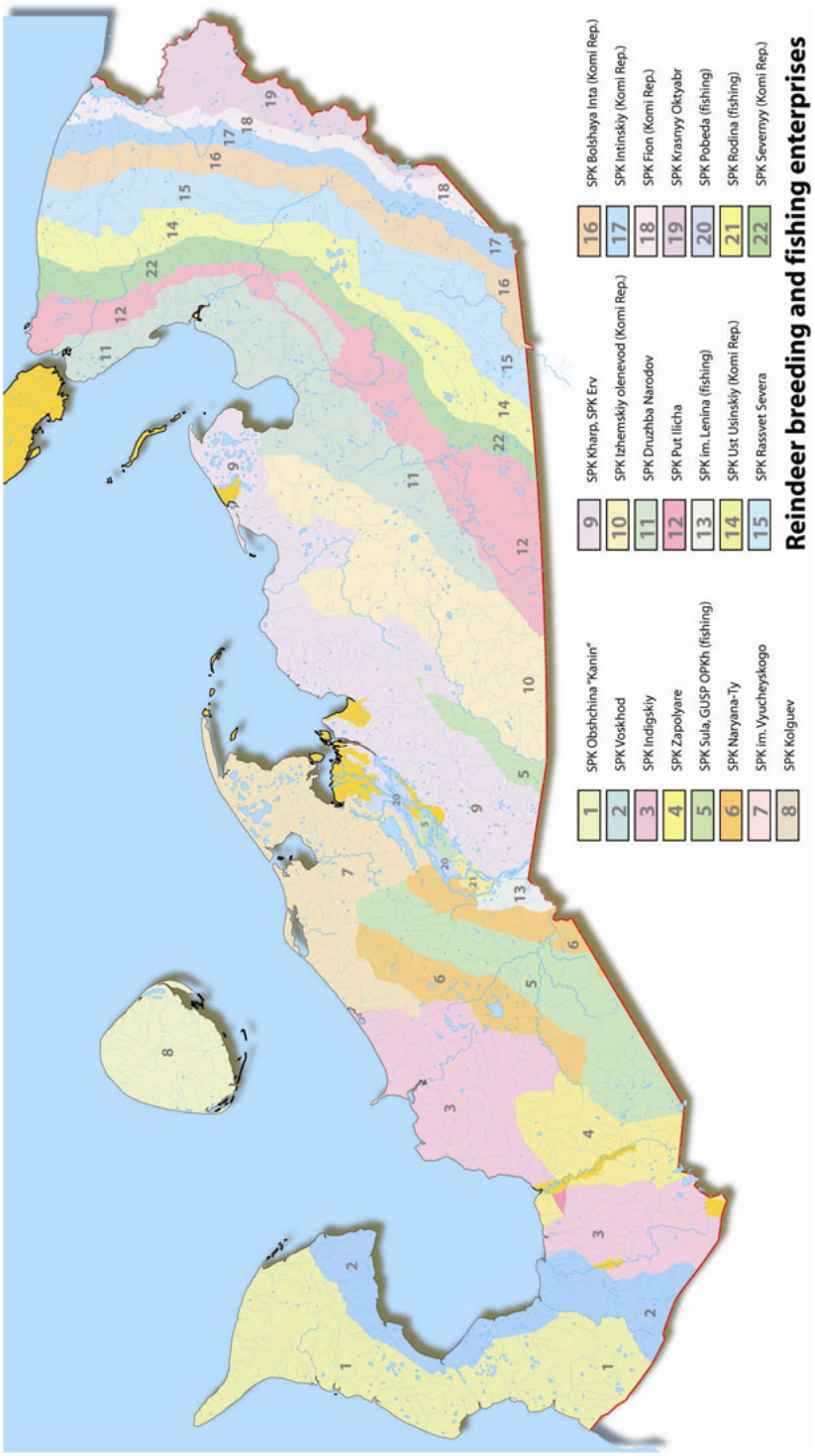
Dallmann 2009b

Appendix 3 Bolshezemelskaya Tundra West: Land Use



Dallmann 2009c

Appendix 4 Reindeer Breeding and Fishing Enterprises



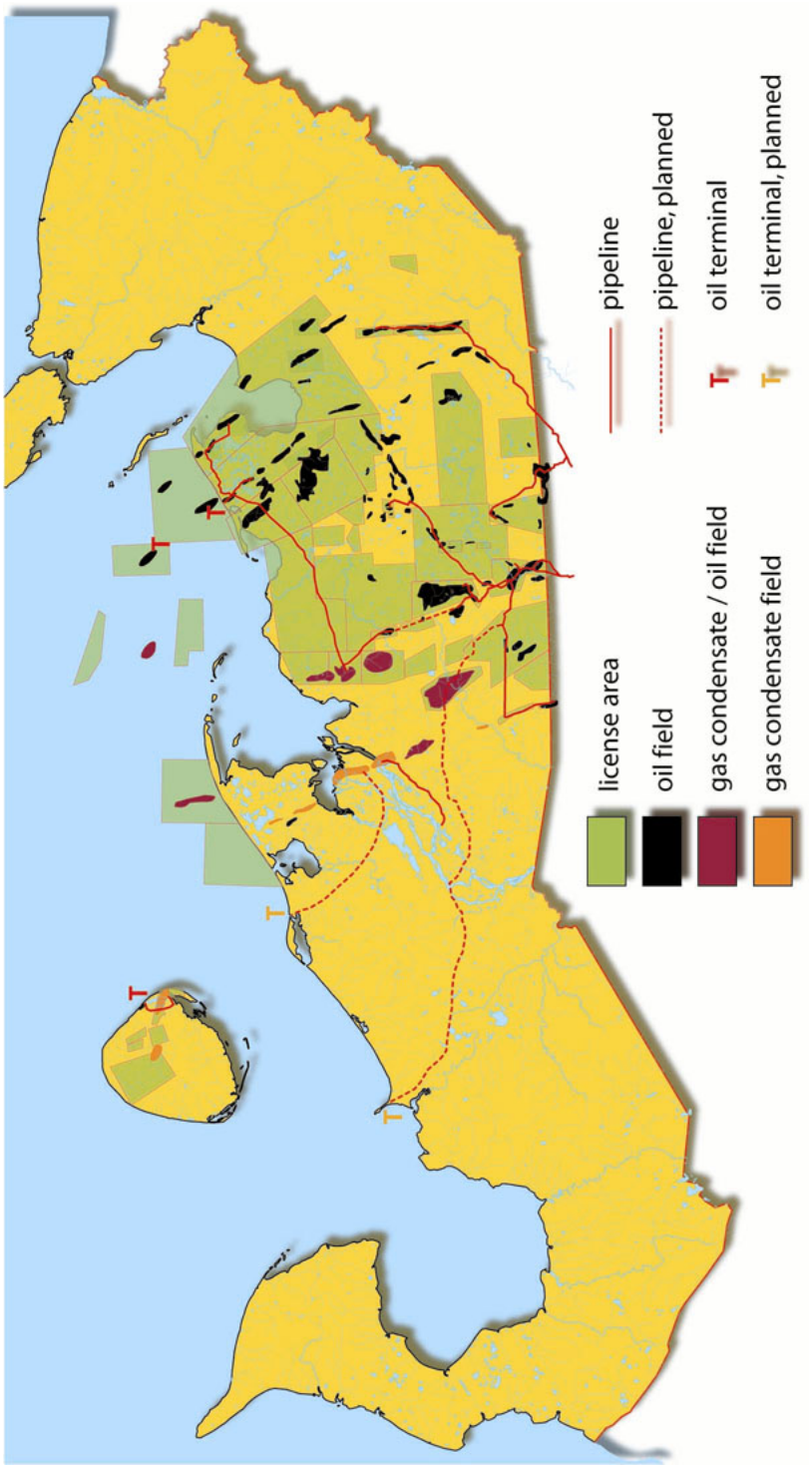
Norwegian Polar Institute and Association of Nenets People "Yasavey." N.D. a.

Appendix 5 The Russian Far North

Source: Rosstat (2006).

Heleniak 1999 (With permission of the author)

Appendix 6 NAO Oil and Gas



Norwegian Polar Institute and Association of Nenets People "Yasavey." N.D. b.

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