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INTRODUCTION TO 'ENTANGLED INDIGENOUS HISTORICITIES FROM THE EURASIAN NORTH'

ABSTRACT

The present collection examines the ways in which Indigenous peoples—the Sámi, Khanty, Nenets, and Tyva—deal with the past and how their conceptualisations of the past entangle with dominant ideologies in Russia and Finland, human—environment relations, and the colonial experiences they navigated. The researchers summarised here employ the notion of historicity, which is understood in François Hartog's terms as a 'temporal experience'. In this collection, we expand this notion towards a relational nature of 'temporal experiences', where 'their' and 'our' historicities are not necessarily 'the same' or culturally determined, but have been situated in long-term peaceful and conflictual encounters. Through those encounters, the diversity of meanings of the past were shaped and developed within and between local communities and communities of scholars. This collection comprises pieces by scholars from folklore studies, ethnology, cultural studies, and history, who analyse Indigenous historicities through extensive archival and field research.

Keywords: historicities, ethnohistory, Indigenous peoples, Eurasian North

In recent decades, historians and anthropologists have debated diverse ways of narrating the past as they are understood across different communities and cultures (e.g., Quijada 2019). The acknowledgement of that diversity has already significantly expanded the intellectual horizon and also brought about new questions. One of the earliest attempts to conceptualise this diversity was the development of the subdiscipline of *ethnohistory*, a societal project within North American anthropology. Apart from advocacy on behalf of various Indigenous communities in the courtroom in relation to their land claims, ethnohistorians were able to

expose different Indigenous peoples' narratives of the past, which often hinted at the agency of the environment and invisible worlds (Harkin 2010; McMillen 2007; Galloway 2006; Nabokov 2002). Thanks to that experience, the scholars posed a variety of questions about relations between 'Western' and Indigenous ways of perceiving and narrating the past. This was later provocatively summarised in a book by Eric Wolf entitled *Europe and the People Without History* (1982: 19). Therein, he stated, 'The more ethnohistory we know, the more clearly "their" history and "our" history emerge as part of the same history'. To a certain degree, that

statement remains relevant when reflecting upon the subtle cultural and political intersections shaping the meaning of the past. Yet, this did not come without its own controversy. The intellectual provocation of Wolf could not avoid the implicit dichotomy that we either have a 'shared' history or two 'different' histories ('theirs' and 'ours'), which always remain positioned in relations with Europe (see Asad 1987).

The subsequent intellectual debates, evoked by both the very title of Wolf's book and his statements, revealed the extent to which the encounters of various ways of history writing and narrating are embedded in social and political contexts and are situated in place and time (see Chakrabarty 2000). All of thatalong with the histories of inequality and colonialism—could not be excluded from the way the present collection deals with the past of Indigenous peoples, whose voices are still barely audible in the metropolitical offices of intellectuals, not simply due to geographic, but also socially constructed distances. Here, one may recall Raymond D. Fogelson's idea of ethnoethnohistory as an Indigenous perspective on their own pasts. Specifically, Fogelson writes that ethnohistorians should 'take seriously native theories of history as embedded in cosmology, in narratives, in rituals and ceremonies, and more generally in native philosophies and worldviews' (Fogelson 1989: 134; see also Kan 2019). Such a perspective, apart from its highly ethical and epistemic value, allowed many ethnohistorians to encapsulate various entanglements of multiple local/Indigenous and 'Western' forms of writing and narrating the past (see Burkhart 2016). As a result, the emerging variety of failed and successful conversations and their multidirectional evolvements and further intersections also become central in the present collection. Similar appeals to pay closer attention to 'the importance and agency

of post-contact changes sparked by Indigenous people's engagement with settler colonialism and modernity' are audible in more recent works dedicated to the New Ethnohistory, which 'embraces notions like hybridity; seeks to deconstruct discourse for what it reveals about colonial and patriarchal exploitation; is comfortable finding and critiquing power relationships of various kinds—including those within Indigenous society; recognizes that cultural change (even colonial-induced cultural change) need not be unidirectional; embraces the tensions between tradition and innovation; and does not need to be reminded that non-Native newcomers are not always the most important thing in Indigenous society and history' (Carlson et al. 2018).

Agreeing with this and given both the interdisciplinary nature of ethnohistory itself and our focus on conversations across various ways of narrating the past, we prefer to use the term 'historicity' over history. As François Hartog states in his work Regimes of Historicity (Régimes d'historicité), historicity can be held as 'a tool for comparing different types of history, and also (...) for highlighting modes of relation to time, and exploring forms of temporal experience here and elsewhere, today and in the past—in short, it serves to explore ways of being in time' (Hartog 2015: 9). This observation, as historians of anthropology may remind us, echoes the anthropological structuralism and its later development in the works of Marshall Sahlins, who concentrated the discussion on a famous statement that 'history is culture' (and 'culture is history') (1985; 2004). In our analysis, we expand the notion of historicity towards a relational nature of 'temporal experiences'. Here, 'their' and 'our' historicities are not necessarily 'the same' as in Wolf's reflections or culturally determined as Sahlins states. Instead, these historicities have been situated in

long-term peaceful and conflictual encounters through which the diversity of meanings of the past were eventually shaped and developed within and between local communities, state agencies, and communities of scholars.

Bringing those ideas to the circumpolar North and Siberia, one may conclude that this understanding has not quite been integrated into conversations that flourish in the field of ethnohistory. This collection aims to fill that gap. To pave our way through that intellectual polyphony, the authors of this special issue from different disciplines—folklore studies, ethnology, cultural studies, and history—aim to create their own field (Karina Lukin, Art Leete, and Victoria Peemot) with archival research (Karina Lukin and Otso Kortekangas).

Most of the articles within this special issue deal with the Russian social and cultural contexts, where the histories of non-Russian communities were quite often associated with the dominant Soviet theory of ethnogenesis or ethnic origin (etnogenez or etnogoniya) or ethnic history (etnicheskaya istoriya). As is well documented, that theory served as a tool of both Soviet policy policy on nationalities (Shnirelman 1993; Slezkine 1996; Laruelle 2008; Abashin 2018) and the post-Soviet ethnic identity claims (e.g., Bauer 2014). Its rhetoric continues to echo in public projects and even Putin's speeches today (Bassin and Kotkina 2016), and is also now mobilised in Russian sovereignty claims in the Arctic (Pirnes 2019). Born around the same time as ethnohistory, the Soviet ethnogenesis project was quite different from the ideas proposed by its overseas colleagues (Anderson 2007). As such, it aimed to construct a coherent univocal narrative where the examples taken from Indigenous songs, material artefacts, and even anthropometric measurements served the linearity of time and embraced the country's past (cf. Sleeper-Smith et al. 2015). Despite this, ethnogenesis was designed as a multidisciplinary project, which brought together Soviet ethnographers, linguists, archaeologists, and physical (biological) anthropologists, who were all able to enjoy some freedom in narrating the past of Indigenous and ethnic groups, which awkwardly neighboured the official Soviet history, but never fully coalesced with it. What's more, the ethnogenesis theory incorporated some Indigenous concepts of the past into its epistemic fabric, which return in today's discussions by Indigenous authors about the Siberian Indigenous people's pasts.

The historicities that Indigenous communities construct and maintain through complex relations with words, things, and the environment, the development of scientific ideas, and the dialogues between the past and the present are what sit at the centre of our collective work.

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In her article, 'Encountering the Tsar: Nenets Epic Singing as a Representation of Historicity', which opens our special issue, Karina Lukin (University of Helsinki, Finland) outlines the relations between the tundra Nenets communities and the Tsar's administration as depicted in epic songs dating to the beginning of the twentieth century. She argues that folklore as a scientifically constructed category was historically tied to European (and Russian) colonisation and modernisation, and served amongst other purposes to alienate the voices of Indigenous and local communities, rendering them as either backward or 'endangered'. Simultaneously, folklore was quite often interpreted as a vernacular form of narration, remembering and projecting the future—in other words, as a way of constructing Indigenous historicities which were tightly entangled with dominant colonial narratives. Lukin's article

is dedicated to the Russian imperial conquest of Western Siberia that took place beginning at the end of the sixteenth century and led to a colonial situation where the Tsar used local Khanty elites as administrators to govern the frontiers populated by Indigenous peoples such as the Mansi, Nenets, and Selkup. As we may judge from the historical documents, that system remained unchanged until 1822, when the new administrative reform shifted the role of the so-called Khanty prince (knyazets) in the town of Obdorsk (today's Salekhard) and lifted Nenets elders—or princes—to roles as administrators alongside the Khanty. Although those events are fairly well documented in Siberian historiography, they represent the point of view of the Russian imperial power (see Bakhrushin 1935). The Indigenous ways of narrating imperial governance, by contrast, have only been fragmentarily studied. Based on a microhistorical analysis of the narratives recorded by Finnish linguist and folklorist Toivo Lehtisalo amongst the Nenets in 1912, Lukin placed the notions of 'folklorisation' (Anttonen 2005) and 'traditionalisation' (Bauman 2004) in a critical dialogue as two epistemically entwined research technologies of constructing the Other. This is accomplished through ascribing some narratives to the 'living past' (folklorisation) and perceiving the oral performance as authentic evidence of a long-standing historical tradition (traditionalisation). Lukin examines Nenets epic singing as a register within which the Indigenous community has reflected upon its own past as entwined with relations with the Tsar's administration and how visiting scholars understood and recorded local narratives. Such a research perspective allows Lukin to reveal multiple historicities, which simultaneously diverged and converged in narrating the past. Furthermore, Lukin documented those fluctuations between 'official' and 'unofficial'

narratives during her ethnographic fieldwork amongst the Nenets.

Relations between the Russian state and Indigenous communities in the North unfold further in the article by Art Leete (University of Tartu, Estonia), who takes us to the early Soviet time in the North with its multiple uprisings against the newly established Soviet power. His article, entitled 'Narratives of the Indigenous Resistance in North-western Siberia in the 1930s', discusses official and Indigenous takes on the Khanty and Forest Nenets rebellion against the Soviets in Western Siberia, also known as the Kazym War (1931-1934) (see Leete's other works on the topic: Leete 2004; 2009). Some details of that resistance are known to scholars, thanks to a few published archival documents, historical articles, and several popular essays, as well as novels including those by Indigenous authors (e.g., Aipin 2002). Moreover, there are a few post-Soviet films which adapted some episodes from the tragic history of the Kazym War (Red Ice: The Saga of Ugra Khanty 2010; Angels of the Revolution 2014). Despite all of these, the oral history of the event scarcely appears in scholarly accounts. Indigenous narratives continue to circulate amongst people, with field scholars coming across them quite often. Therefore, inspired by the postcolonial scholarship and the idea of hybridity (see Bhabha 1994; see also Leete's reflections upon hybridity in Leete 2019), Leete analyses selected episodes of the Kazym War since they are reflected both in official Soviet/Russian historiography and Indigenous narratives. He focuses on the diverse modes of narrating, the possibility of revealing the vibrant Khanty historicity across the borderline between facts and fiction, and the mythic imagination shaping the way those events are remembered.

Art Leete's and Karina Lukin's articles thus discuss the contradictions between

and interfaces across official and unofficial narratives about the past. They both unravel the relationship between 'myth' and 'history', and examine the influence of the genre on the meaning and circulation of narration. The next two articles, however, written by Otso Kortekangas (Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland) and Victoria Peemot (University of Helsinki, Finland), bring us to one of the dominant themes in the field of ethnohistory: the relations between the land and the past in the narratives of Indigenous and local communities. They both consider the role of human and non-human beings in relation to the landscape and the stories that they shape amongst the Fennoscandian Sámi and the Inner Asian Tyva. While Kortekangas draws from data collected during fieldwork by the Finnish geodesist and amateur ethnographer Karl Nickul (1900-1980), Peemot discusses her own fieldwork materials and contemporary relations between material artefacts, land, and the past in her native Tyva.

Kortekangas's paper, 'Toponymic Notions of Sámi Past(s): Geodesist/Cartographer Karl Nickul and Skolt Sámi Historicity', examines the ethnographic materials collected by Karl Nickul, whose research beyond the geodesy aimed at reconstructing the Sámi past(s) through their place names. Based on the established scholarship on place-naming and the ethics which underlay Indigenous peoples' relations to the land (e.g., Basso 1996; Siragusa and Ferguson 2020) and the sociology of the co-production of knowledge (Jasanoff 2004), Kortekangas shows the extent to which Indigenous toponymic nomenclature amongst the Skolt Sámi in northeastern Finland/northwestern USSR was entangled with Nickul's construction of Sámi historicity. Nickul's case opens up a view to the period between 1920 and 1940 when the Petsamo area, which is historically populated by the Skolt Sámi, was colonised by Finland. As an employee of the Finnish government, Nickul can be viewed as a part of the colonial administration, but his writings served as a way to depict Sámi historicities using their own terms. Nickul considered the Sámi as possessing the 'moral right' to name their own region and to keep those names in cartographic representations: 'With the sensitive intuition of a people of nature, they identify with the landscape that they know through and through. They belong to it [landscape],' he wrote. According to Nickul, documenting Sámi place names was an epistemic gateway to the mental imagery of Sáminess. He was certain that those names not only reflected the landscape 'as it was', but also the ancient events, beliefs, and livelihoods of the Sámi. The life trajectories of those ideas are centred in Kortekangas' article. He pedantically depicts how the correspondence with his Skolt Sámi addressees, on the one hand, and with a wide international network of scholars, on the other hand, rendering Nickul's co-constructed idea of the Skolt Sámi's past, travel from Sámi communities to the international scholarly sphere. In those conceptualisations, Nickul defended Skolt Sámi historicity through place names as a tool to reconstruct the 'real' historical events that he could or tried to confirm from other sources, as the expression of mythological events that nevertheless could convey a lot of information about the Skolt Sámi culture. All of that, as Nickul wrote, might bring us close to understanding the Skolt Sámi themselves as remnants of the past. All of Kortekangas' observations described within his article are situated in the larger history of anthropological debates that took place in the first half of the twentieth century.

Notably, the Sámi historical writing has its own trajectories charted through national

Scandinavian historiographies, which have recently encountered post- and decolonial discussions aimed at overcoming national borders and raising larger theoretical questions (Nyyssönen and Lehtola 2017). As is known, earlier works focused on archaeology, historical linguistics, and ethnography—previously called ethnology in the Fenno-Scandinavian countries which brought together with folklore studies centred on conceptualising the ancient Sámi history or comparisons between the Fenno-Scandian modernities and the 'traditional' nature of Sámi social and cultural practices. The ongoing decolonisation of the field of Sámi studies has already led to the reconfiguration of research questions and approaches. Moreover, there is also an urge for more knowledge because of the truth and reconciliation commissions' work in Norway, Sweden, and Finland (see Sønneland and Lingaas 2023; Kuokkanen 2020). Lately, emphasis has been placed on more recent pasts, for example, the World War II era emigration and post-war boarding school experiences. This research was conducted through a dialogue with broader trends in the 'democratisation of history', but it rarely touches upon ethnographic questions (e.g., Lakomäki, Aalto and Kylli 2020; Junka-Aikio et al. 2022). One of the leading Sámi historians, Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2022), has brought multiple sources, such as narrations, ethnographic and historical descriptions of human-landscape relations, photography, art, and literature, into dialogue to reveal the scarcity of academic knowledge about the Sámi. Although applying the terms 'our' histories alongside 'theirs', Lehtola carefully manoeuvres between dichotomies, advocating attentive interpretations that respect different opinions within Sámi communities or between various producers of historical sources and their subjects (see also Lehtola 2015).

The concluding article in our special collection brings us back to Siberia, from where it builds a bridge between the region and the decolonial conversations within Sámi studies and ethnohistory. This piece is written by Tyva social scientist Viktoria Peemot (University of Helsinki, Finland), who possesses a deep knowledge of the language and the cultural practices of various groups of Tyva people living at the crossroads of Mongolia, Russia, and China. Her article, 'Storying with Homelands: Emplaced (Hi)stories and Resilience-In-Making', deals with the stories of land in the Sayan and Altay Mountains and focuses on how a pastoralist community makes use of the landscape agency to define its meaning of the past. Peemot traces that meaning through human-nonhuman stories which support joint community-homeland resilience to a possible threat from a mining project. To disentangle the complexity of those relations, Peemot carefully depicts the long history of the Tyva people, whose territory since the beginning of the twentieth century has been controlled, consecutively, by the Qing Empire, the Russian Empire, and Soviet Russia. Peemot's article centres around the construction of a Buddhist stupa erected by a local clan in the southern part of the Tyva Republic (Russian Federation). In her analysis, the religious material artefact becomes the epistemic knot in conversations about the past. The article relates to the ongoing debates in academia about the importance of human-nonhuman stories through collaborative efforts towards planetary survival. Despite growing recognition of human-nonhuman relations in scholarship, questions about whose stories are told reveal a power disparity in the practices of narration. All of this allows us today to highlight stories which have been silenced or marginalised by colonial rule, authoritarian

regimes, and various other forms of disparity. The re-conceptualised traumatic heritage in the work by Peemot places her research into conversations with recent anthropology writings about Indigenous Siberian sovereignty (Balzer 2022; Bernstein 2013) and especially with works by Justine Quijada about the 'rituals of history', where he wonders 'how people in post-Soviet, Putin-era Buryatia produce knowledge about the past in religious and civic rituals and how this knowledge of the past produces identities in the present' (Quijada 2019: 7).

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NOTES

When the first drafts of these articles were completed and we began preparing them for publication in 2022, Russia had invaded Ukraine once again. It is quite difficult to describe the shock we all continue experiencing, the constant pain we feel for the lives of Ukrainians and other people involuntarily involved in the

conflict, and the depth of our need to provide whatever help we can through charities, funding bodies, and personal cooperation. All of this has paralysed our work for some time. Today, nearly a year-and-a-half after the beginning of that brutal invasion, we have been able to gather our strength to finalise this collection. From our perspective, this topic is even more relevant today than it was during the 15th Congress of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), held in Helsinki in 2021, where Karina Lukin and Dmitry Arzyutov organised the panel on Indigenous historicities. We have plenty of evidence of the ethnically disproportionate drafting of people from Russian 'national' regions, anti-military protests in Yakutia, and other Siberian regions which neighbour the strong support of the 'special military operation' in Ukraine by dominant Indigenous rights organisations in the country, including RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North) as well as separate regional associations representing the Khanty, Kola Sámi, Nenets, and Tyva, whose relations with the past and the state are discussed in our thematic volume (Assotsiatsiya 2022). The involvement of Indigenous peoples in the war in Ukraine and in the discourses that legitimise that violence displays the extent to which Russian metropolitan powers continue to oppress the Indigenous populations of the country. However, a sharp look at local processes, as we provide in this collection, reveals not only the centralised metropolitan historicities, but also their encounters with the multiplicity of local ways of dealing with that dominance and the narratives of the past accepted within communities. The work on disentangling those dialogues and conflicts opens up broad perspectives on our perceptions of the past and its importance for understanding the present.

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