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# Reindeer Returning from Combat: War Stories among the Nenets of European Russia

Stephan Dudeck

*Abstract.* The following paper sheds new light on the Second World War oral history of the Nenets—indigenous people living in the northwestern part of the Russian Arctic. The participation of Nenets reindeer herders is commemorated and celebrated as part of the antifascist heroism of the Soviet people in the public historical discourse. Parts of the personal life stories Nenets elders shared in this research show striking differences to the public narratives of war. The paper analyzes the research setting as part of an oral history conducted with anthropological methods in order to learn about the Nenets historical experience as well as the Nenets ways of telling stories. The oral-history interview is perceived as a performance and an emergent dialogic relationship involving the social relations of the narrator, the research setting, as well as the relation of the storyteller with different audiences.

*For an experienced event  
is finite—at any rate, confined  
to one sphere of experience;  
a remembered event is infinite,  
because it is merely a key  
to everything that happened  
before it and after it.*

*(Benjamin [1929]2005:238)*

Sitting in a small kitchen with Nenets elders recording the oral history of their community, they regularly asked me about the way my own family would remember certain historical events. It made me realize that I was not merely an instrument to record these stories but reminded me once more of the often discussed dialogical character of oral history and the striking differences of oral recordings to written historical documents (Bodenhorn 1997;

Cruikshank 1981, 1990; Portelli 2005). This paper presents unseen aspects of the Nenets involvement in and the scope of the Nenets remembering of the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War as the Soviet participation is called in Russia. I will weave the stories and historical events into the argument that oral history emerges and establishes itself in dialogical relationships. To understand the character of these relationships I will introduce three aspects—the relations with the public discourse, within the cultural intimacy of the community, and with the researcher. I will contextualize the stories in their cultural and historical context but also analyze and reflect on the field-work situation. The aim is to facilitate a deeper understanding of the way Nenets tell stories in an oral-history research project aimed at making these

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stories available to a wider public. However, the paper cannot serve as a representation of Nenets oral history or even the Nenets' oral history of World War II. This would require the coauthorship of storytellers and local activists to give indigenous voices a more prominent stand. I employ the Nenets stories of World War II experiences as case studies being aware that this is justified by the ongoing work on public presentation of the materials produced in collaboration with Nenets partners. Very little literature is yet available on the Nenets' or any other indigenous people's experiences of the Second World War despite its prominence in public commemoration in indigenous communities throughout Russia. Here, I choose examples first of all as they serve to demonstrate the multi-layered and polyphonous character of oral stories told by the Nenets elders.

## Nenets History

The Nenets are an indigenous people of approximately 45,000 members inhabiting the arctic part of Russia in the vast tundra zone from the Kola Peninsula on the border to Norway up to the Taimyr Peninsula in Siberia. Approximately 7,500 Nenets live in the European part of Russia in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO), the region this paper is based on. They are famous for maintaining a nomadic reindeer-herding lifestyle (Forbes et al. 2009), even if nowadays a great number of Nenets are not engaged in reindeer herding but work in other professions in permanent settlements (Liarskaya 2009). There is some literature on the history of the Nenets published in English (the only general work is Golovnev and Osherenko 1999). Most research deals with particular historical phases and events like the conversion to Christianity and resilience of traditional beliefs (Lukin 2012; Toulouze 2011; Vagramenko 2017; Vallikivi 2003), resettlement and sedentarization (Leete 2004; Lukin 2017; Tuisku 2001), introduction of literacy and schooling (Liarskaya 2004, 2009; Toulouze 1999, 2004), very noticeable forms of resistance (Golovnev 1997, 2000; Laptander 2014; Leete 2005; Vallikivi 2001, 2005), or the history of reindeer herding and land use in general (Stammler 2005). Although most of these works are based extensively on oral histories and stories collected among the Nenets, the authors, with some exclusions (Laptander 2014, 2017; Lukin 2005, 2017), do not reflect on the specific character of Nenets oral traditions, the cultural context of storytelling, or the implications of the circumstances of research. Stories about the experiences of Nenets during the Second World War and their participation on the front lines, as well as events in the hinterland, are almost absent from scientific literature. The only exception is

the historical research of Waling T. Gorter-Grønvik and Mikhail N. Suprun (2000a) that I discuss later. The research of Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2015) on the experience of the Sámi in Finland could serve as a comparison to the Nenets experience; however, he concentrates on the well-known evacuation experience of the Sámi and widely employs oral sources without discussing the particularity of oral history. Susan A. Crate (2002) is another author employing indigenous oral history of the Second World War in her work. The Viliui Sakha stories she presents bear witness to the hardship and tragedy as well as possibilities of survival, the injustice of repression, and the unquestioned necessity for the men to leave to the front lines of the war.

## Research Method

The research this paper is based on was conducted during eight months in the NAO (Fig. 1) in the European part of Arctic Russia. Its task was to collect stories among the European Nenets (Dudeck 2013, 2015b).<sup>1</sup> I was usually recommended to the elders by relatives or had met them before at some of the frequent cultural events in the regional capital Naryan-Mar or the villages. My project partners suggested starting with the oldest and what they considered to be the best storytellers. Similar to the experiences made by Petra Rethmann (2002:130) in the Russian Far East age, and the anticipated amount of life experience obviously played the deciding role for the project partners to choose interviewees from their communities, but authority and charisma as well as kinship links to the activists in the association of indigenous peoples "Yasavay" were also important. Sometimes the interviews were undertaken in collaboration with a companion whom the interviewed person knew already and trusted (on their importance cf. Berreman 2007). In a number of cases, some relatives were present, but the classical version of the interview was long conversations face to face at the kitchen table with tea and some food served during or after the interview. Often I had to overcome some hesitation at the beginning. I told the persons interviewed about the aims of our project, about myself, and shared some knowledge already acquired during our fieldwork and other interviews. The conversation became more vivid, and my honest interest and patience to listen was subsequently rewarded. I usually just tried to provide some starting questions and then follow the themes that came up naturally and the stories that the elders decided to share. Later, I took up the themes discussed as being important for the inter-regional comparison with members of the research project in advance<sup>2</sup> and asked about things not yet touched upon. Never did I push into themes the



Figure 1. Location of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug.

interlocutor showed no interest in or was even hesitant to speak about.

Almost all stories were recorded from women. The female elders are more willing to share stories to outsiders in their village homes, and they are demographically in the majority in these villages. “Yasavey’s” demand to start with the oldest representatives of the communities also contributed to the gender bias, as indigenous women’s life expectancy is considerably higher. Male storytelling is more often associated with practices in the geographical landscape and to places where particular events happened, while women’s storytelling seems more connected to the social landscape, to friends and foes, to certain relatives, and to other families. Most of the stories by men were collected while coming across certain places or engaging in certain activities that triggered the memory of stories either told on the spot or the move or later on back in the tent or settlement (for the importance of place-names in oral history, see Cruikshank 1990). Women tend to tell stories at the kitchen table, while men are often cautious about this kind of storytelling, associating it with gossiping or even making facts up and cheating guests. The kitchen table situation was the dominant one for recording stories on an electronic device. I was often not able to record stories told by men somewhere on the road, which also contributed to the severe gender bias.<sup>3</sup>

## Theoretical and Methodological Approaches of Oral-History Research in the Arctic

It became almost commonplace in the literature on oral history in the Arctic that oral forms of narration about the past vary considerably from the written texts of classical historical documents (e.g., Bodenhorn 1997; Cruikshank 1981). “Oral traditions are texts to be heard, not documents to be stored,” states Cruikshank (1990:54), yet researchers also notice the emphasis of local elders and educators on the competence in understanding the fixed and textual information as well as the variable and performed oral ways of storytelling—the skills to understand and to make understand, the abilities to listen the right way, and to put things in context and perspective (as emphasized in Bodenhorn 1997). Petra Rethman’s (2002:130) statement is valid for other Arctic communities as well:

The narrative is significant because it relates Koriak views on regional events, teaches younger generations (and researchers) something about these views, and attempts to maintain and pass on parts of traditional knowledge that in particular younger Koriak women and men see as vulnerable to loss.

The question if oral history as an oral account of events in the past is valuable as a historical source



about that past or as an anthropological source about the cultural and social here and now of the community of commemoration is more and more not seen as an either-or (Crate 2002, 2006; Crowell and Oozevaseuk 2006; Cruikshank 1990). Alessandro Portelli (2005) points to the dialectical relationship comprising

a fact in the past, the historical event; a fact of the present, the narrative we hear; and a long-lasting, fluid relationship . . . [involving] the historical significance of personal experience on the one hand, and the personal impact of historical matters on the other (see Rethmann 2002:123 for similar portrayal).

There seem to be two preconditions for the researcher to be able to grasp the historical as well as the social meaning of the stories. One is the access to the cultural context through the classical participation of anthropological fieldwork that allows learning about local knowledge systems and ethics embedded in the everyday (Agar 1980; di Leonardo 1987). It means to learn the skills to hear, to ask the right questions, and to understand the context of actions and performances (Ingold 2014). Questions of social context seem to circle around three basic entities: the individual life; the family, including the temporal dimension by referring to the ancestors; and the village, locality, and environment as the spatial dimension. (Thompson 2000). The individual story of one's own biography involves a culturally distinctive construction of the self and ideas about agency that are collectively and socially framed (Maynes et al. 2008). The emic perspective, "what those testimonies mean to the people who transmitted them" (Joyner 1979:48) and "the place and meaning of the event within the lives of the tellers" (Portelli 2005) has to be taken into account as "interviewing operates within culturally specific systems of communication" and "the interview is a relationship embedded within particular cultural practices and informed by culturally specific systems and relations of communication" (Thomson 1998:581–82).

The other precondition is the embeddedness of oral-history work in collaborative agendas in which local communities and researchers find appropriate ways of reciprocity. This becomes more and more part of best practices in social-science research with indigenous groups especially in the Arctic, but it primarily provides an entrance to cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) as the place to learn how to understand the stories (Simpkins 2010). Cultural competence acquired during such engagement allows the researcher to listen to what is told between the lines, what is omitted and silenced and why (Joyner 1979:51; Simpkins 2010; Thomson 1998).

The focus should not be on "getting information before it is too late" but on developing mechanisms for its continued transmission: school curriculum projects, local museums, usable orthographies and training for Native people who want to work with and develop those materials (Cruikshank 1981:86).

Other questions come up, when the research produced already a corpus of recorded stories. Duranti (1986:239–324) raises questions of competency or rights, and I would add power, over the interpretation of oral stories. Agency remains primarily with the storyteller as she or he can employ linguistic devices in order to shut down or open up ways of single or multiple interpretation of parts of her narration through emotional or moral evaluation or, on the contrary, absence of such, and can switch between a descriptive or reflexive mode (Denzin 1989:126; for the Nenets see Laptander 2017). The storyteller refers and adjusts in most cases to the linguistic and cultural competencies of the interviewer. It is up to the "art of listening" of the interviewer to enable the dialogue, to ask the "right" questions and to refrain from the "wrong" ones, which demonstrates that the interviewer is a respectful person and able to learn (Portelli 2005). However, often the narrator has no intention to inform all among the present or imagined public to understand in the same way as Duranti (1986:243) remarks. The narrator can include hidden messages or meaning understandable to some, but not to others. The storyteller can leave messages "between the lines" (cf. Simpkins 2010). This is especially obvious in joking and humorous stories, where it takes different time and competence for different audiences to understand. Folklore often includes esoteric levels of meaning for the ones initiated into the appropriate knowledge and "reading" of the metaphorical language. Most authors stress that oral performances are, *per se*, polysemic and contain multiple layers of meaning, not fixed but open to diverse modes of usage, which are difficult to represent in a logical and rational textual analysis (Cruikshank 1994; Peltonen and Salmi-Niklander 2007:7; Portelli 2005). The ideas about authorship in oral history may differ significantly from hegemonic concepts in the West (Morrow 1995; compare also Foucault 1979). We can consider oral history therefore as a coproduction of stories with different people involved: the ones who ask, the ones who tell, and the ones who listen. Bakhtin's (1984:18) understanding of multivocality is valid for the oral stories recorded among the Nenets as well as for Dostoyevsky's novel:

Constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the

interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other.

It was not until the 1970s when oral historians started to discuss the role of subjectivity, not only as a factor that could “distort” the historical information and the involvement of the researcher in the storytelling as an “intrusion” (Yow 1997:57–58). Researchers began to pay attention not only to the role of the oral historian but also to the creativity and intentionality of the interviewee and the intersubjectivity or shared authorship of both (Denzin 1989; Grele 2007). In this way the oral-history story emerges out of the dialogical interplay of voices in two dimensions—a synchronic and a diachronic, in other words: “There are seemingly two relations contained in one—that between the informant and the interviewer, and that between the informant and his own historical consciousness.” (Grelle 1975:289; cf. also Peltonen and Salmi-Niklander 2007:5). Building on the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, oral historians reflected more and more on the dialogical relationships in oral-history telling (cf. Chambon 1995). Besides the storyteller, not only the researcher but also the audience (the storyteller’s own community as well as the anonymous listener/reader of recorded oral history) has to be seen as a coauthor in oral stories (cf. Grele 1975:289, 2007; Jaago and Kõresaar 2008:21). Oral history is an interactional discourse. The textual surface, the plot, and the interpretation of a story are joint achievements of narrators and audiences as speech is intersubjective by nature.

Performativity means that the stories as acts of communication and knowledge sharing do something with the involved actors. They inform and in that way transform the listener, but they aim as well at the social status of the performer, to confirm and enhance her or his role as a legitimate source of information. Oral stories are not detached texts standing on their own and are not easily transferable physically to different times and places of reading independently of the personal relation between storyteller and listener. Their performative power lies in the fact that the storytelling is transforming the status of the listeners. They become included in the group of people that share common knowledge, they transform from ignorant to knowledgeable persons. Alessandro Portelli (2005) considered oral history to be embedded into a learning relationship (something Tim Ingold [2014] mentions as well). Portelli (2005) makes the important observation: “*Common ground makes communication possible, but difference makes it meaningful.*” The shared knowledge establishes a social relationship between the storyteller, the social groups that share the oral tradition, and the person that listens to the story for the first time.

Oral history in the Arctic is often recorded in an intimate setting at home and in contrast to public forms of commemoration in museums, monuments, and official celebrations. Some researchers emphasize the potential of oral narratives as “a valuable source of critical commentary on official versions of history” (Rethmann 2002:131) or as rooted in Soviet propaganda and producing a nostalgic or heroic memory of the past (Crate 2002:152, 2006). Rethmann (2002:122) stresses the importance of the perspective of oral stories as a corrective to “an extensive ethnographic record on regional change in the Soviet cultural context.” Others see the relation of practices of public and private memory as more complex (Cruikshank and Argounova 2000:98). Public education and celebration concentrate on the part of the past charged with pride and unity of the communities and values serving recognition and respect from the outside and omit the ambivalent and potentially contested. Alessandro Portelli identified three main sources for these voices that represent different social contexts in the story, the “I,” the “We” (the community people identify with) and the wider society (Portelli 2005). Estonian researchers Tiiu Jaago and Ene Kõresaar (2008:19), following Portelli, speak in a similar way about “three layers” of oral history: the personal, the communal, and the institutional level. These different social contexts can obviously be paralleled with what Susan Gal (2005) called nested social relations of privacy (see also Ljarskaja and Dudeck 2012) that provide reference frames for storytelling.

## Nenets Fighting in the Second World War

Stories concerning the Second World War, either personal memories or memories of close relatives, came up during the research frequently. The commemoration of the war is one of the prominent themes of oral-history stories in the Russian Arctic as the indigenous groups inhabiting the remote periphery were heavily affected by its political, economic, and social consequences as was the whole population of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, nowadays no first-hand memories of participants of the Second World War are available among the European Nenets anymore. Research on the oral history of the war told by indigenous groups remains a desideratum up to the present day, even if it is a central theme in oral-history research in other regions of Russia (Melnikova 2007). Rich local collections remain not yet archived or digitalized but serve as sources for popular books celebrating the indigenous contribution to local history (Kanev 2010; Khanzerova 2009).

For the first time in their history, Nenets men were drafted by the state to fight as soldiers in the Soviet war with Finland in 1939 (Kanev 2015). This might have also been the occasion when the Soviet military command realized that transport by reindeer sleds gave an advantage to the Finnish troops maneuvering in the Northern Forest during the harsh winter. After Germany attacked the Soviet Union on its northern flank at the Kola Peninsula to take Murmansk in 1941, the Soviet army decided to establish troops with reindeer sleds (Kanev 2010:53ff.). Sámi, Nenets, and Komi reindeer herders served with their trained draft reindeer and wooden sleds to transport people and material in the conditions of the Arctic winter from early 1942 until 1944. They were also employed in summer where reindeer sleds could be used on the tundra surface. Their main task was to transport weapons and ammunition to the front and return wounded soldiers. They were used to evacuate airplanes and ride behind enemy lines as well. The history of the reindeer fighting battalions is extensively researched using personal recollections from archives or published in newspapers (Kanev 2010; Kotkin 2000; Kyziurov and Bukina 2005) or from interviews with veterans at the beginning of the 1990s (Gorter et al. 2005; Gorter-Gronvik and Suprun 2000a, 2000b).

According to the local historian Yuri Kanev (2010), around 600 Nenets, not 5,000 as published by Gorter-Gronvik and Suprun (2000b:327), went to serve in the reindeer troops in the Second World War. They provided more than 6,000 reindeer, most of them trained sled reindeer that usually made only a small part of the herd. One can conclude that the majority of draft reindeer of the Nenets, so crucial to their nomadic lifestyle, were collected at the front. This is the reason why some local reindeer-herding enterprises and administrators tried to resist the demand (Kotkin 2000:320–321). The reindeer were moved with the herders in the winter 1941/1942 to Arkhangelsk and transported by train to Murmansk. Losses on the road happened due to the lack of pastures and poorly organized ways of transport (Kotkin 2000:319–321). Almost a quarter of the whole population of the Nenets District was drafted to the war, and more than one-third of them did not return (Kostina 2010:16–17). In the reindeer fighting troops, the death toll was even higher, and roughly only half of the men returned (Gorter-Gronvik and Suprun 2000a). In addition to the trained sled reindeer, the Nenets reindeer herders had to deliver ten times more nontrained reindeer for war purposes to the state (e.g., for meat and hides) (Kostina 2010:12).

Gorter-Gronvik and Suprun (2000a) deal with the Nenets participation in Second World War fighting in some broader context of Nenets

traditional warfare after Russian colonization and in conflicts with Soviet authorities called *mandalada* (cf. Laptander 2014; Vallikivi 2005). Unfortunately, Gorter-Gronvik's and Suprun's description and sources are not very detailed and precise.<sup>4</sup> Laptander (2014) and Pimanov and Petrova (1997) suggest that members of the state security agency NKVD provoked the so-called uprisings of Nenets in the Soviet period and not the resistance of reindeer herders against the appropriation of their reindeer for the war.

## Oral Stories about the War

The material collected during the oral-history project differs significantly from the previously published materials. It completely lacks the eyewitness accounts of the reindeer transport battalions as all the Nenets veterans passed away before our project started. The stories were recorded in a different way and from different categories of people in comparison to the narratives used for the accounts mentioned previously. Summaries that exemplify the scope of the stories will be presented in the following section. They show the broad variety and the diverse character of European Nenets elders' commemoration of the Second World War recorded during the research. I will present one literal excerpt only to give an impression of the orally performed interview.

### The Prophecy of a Boy

In this story the now over 80 years old Mariya Yakovlevna Barmich told me how she and her mother survived without reindeer and sharing the tent with up to four other families. The women were fishing, and Mariya Yakovlevna underlined the strength of the women given the fact that after the hard-working shift that lasted the whole day the mothers were able to play ball games with their children.

*I want to tell. Well, we were waiting very long for our father. We were waiting long because mother remarried afterward. Long! Every day we went to meet the boat coming from Arkhangelsk, we met everyone. All! But no . . . I remember it quite well, mother put something on and went to meet (the returning men). No. Well, there was a boy. I don't know whose. I don't even know if he is still alive there in the village of Nes' or not. For some reason, he had a completely bald head. He had a bold head from birth on. Well, once the boat should arrive from Arkhangelsk. They returned from there. Well, it was in our chum [nomads' tent]. I don't remember mother. They came in our chum. And this boy, he was quite small. I don't know how many years old, probably six years, before school I think. We have this tradition: our children . . . it doesn't exist among the Russians. The children stand up*



*and look in this direction [she demonstrates how the boy looked back between his legs]. This way. He stood up and said, "Oh, the father of Timka arrived." Timka was as well there in this moment. His mother was Anna Lukopiorova. She lived with her children in one-quarter of the chum. "Timka," he said, "Timka's father arrived," he said. "He arrived, well, we will meet him tomorrow." And really, this Nenets came back. He was so small. With suitcases. There were of course more, but he arrived alone. Some time ago, I told this as well. He brought these suitcases. And he gave all of us presents. Mother and I got nail scissors for the first time. So small and so thin. He gave everybody some gift. Why these nail scissors? Mother told, I said the same: what will we cut with this, what is that? I said, "Well it is a gift, one has to. . . ." Nail scissors. We kept them very long. Where have they gone? He gave everybody some small gift.<sup>5</sup>*

Small children are believed among the Nenets sometimes to possess the ability to foresee the future, similar to shamans, as other Nenets later told me. However, instead of the return of the father of my interlocutor, she one day received a letter confirming that her father was missing in action.<sup>6</sup> Instead of telling her illiterate mother the truth, she quickly threw the paper into the bonfire and instead went with her mother to the pier every day to look for her father. Her mother never learned the truth that her husband had died in the war. Mariya Yakovlevna told me that she still feels guilty for not telling the news to her mother, but she wasn't sure if her mother would have survived the truth.

### Reindeer Returning from Combat

Stories with happy endings are rather the exception than the rule. Many stories are linked to the fact that around half of the men who left for the war did not return. The reindeer that were collected for the war effort were sometimes collected without any consideration for the families that were deprived of their means of transport and survival. One emotionally touching story of the late Nadezhda Petrovna Taleeva<sup>7</sup> tells us how after the Second World War, when she was helping her father with herding work in the reindeer collective, her grandmother all of a sudden repeated whispering, "He is back, the bull is back," and really, the exceptionally handsome reindeer bull, leading the team of Nadezhda's grandfather's reindeer sledge when he left for the front, had miraculously returned. According to Nadezhda Petrovna, the reindeer bull must have returned from the frontline and migrated through several thousand kilometers of unknown territory to return to his old herd.<sup>8</sup> Reindeer were driven by the herders to Arkhangelsk and then transported by railway to the front in the north of the Kola Peninsula. It was quite unbelievable for the Nenets that a reindeer

could find its way back. The historical sources tell us that reindeer that survived were not returned after the war but given to a reindeer-herding enterprise on the Kola Peninsula or left behind in Norway (Gorter-Gronvik and Suprun 2000b:328; Kanev 2010:193)

### Encountering the Enemy

The late Fedosia Semenovna Kauts was an over 70 year's old lady when I met her, who was engaged in cultural-revival activism in the regional capital of Naryan-Mar. She later became one of my close friends in Naryan-Mar and told me her whole life story. I reminded her, as she told me, of her late husband who was an ethnic German and a victim of Stalinist repressions. His father was executed, and as a boy he was deported, along with his brother and mother, to work in the forests of the Pechora region in the Russian Northeast. Later, he met and married Fedosia Semenovna here, who was then a student in Naryan-Mar. She sometimes mentioned that her children and grandchildren identify more with their German than their Nenets roots and are not as interested in grandmother's memories. She devoted her activism mostly to the Nenets folklore group "Khanib Tsë" (owl), where she met other elders and complained about the disinterest of the youth. I was a welcome exception, and I felt the satisfaction she had while telling me about the history and especially her own past. In the following, I summarize some of her stories.

Fedosia Semenovna Kauts told me two stories about Nenets and Germans coming close but miraculously not killing each other. One was the story of her father that survived the war and returned to his nomadic reindeer-herding family. He served in the Soviet troops at the northern front that used reindeer transport on the Kola Peninsula and often had to operate next to the frontlines to transport casualties or weapons and ammunition. Reindeer herders operated even behind enemy lines to catch so-called "tongues"—enemy soldiers or officers for interrogation (cf. interview with Nikolai Ivanovich Taleev in Gorter et al. 2005:54). Fedosia Semenovna retold her father's recollections that the Nenets soldiers with their reindeer were not well armed. At one of these trips, they recognized a group of well-armed and equipped elite German soldiers on a reconnaissance mission when it was already too late to hide. They understood that the Germans noticed them and were convinced that their last hour had come. But for some miraculous reason these Germans did not open fire, trotted along, and the Soviet soldiers kept quiet as well. The Germans had most likely another aim and were not interested to get involved into a skirmish even when the reindeer soldiers would have had no chance in this unequal



encounter. This is how the Nenets soldiers experienced a little moment of undeclared ceasefire and survived.

The other story stems from the personal memories of Fedosia Semenovna and recounts a German airplane that landed in sight of the Nenets tents near their camp at the Sengeiskii Peninsula. The children were ordered not to leave the tents but dared to look through some tent holes and could recognize the cross on the plane and some soldiers exiting. One was climbing on the aircraft and obviously succeeded in repairing it while another was guarding. Nobody from the small Nenets reindeer-herders' settlement within the range of vision started to approach the enemy nor did the German soldiers who could have easily attacked and wiped out the entire community. The airplane started to take off after some time and flew away.

### The Poisoning by Toxic Flotsam

I was told stories about toxic flotsam several times but heard it for the first time from Fedosia Semenovna Kauts. She emphasized that flotsam was and is always exciting for the reindeer herders that come to the pastures near the seacoast in summer for the salty meadows where the animals quickly gain weight. The war theater increased the amount of useful flotsam immensely due to the ships of the Arctic convoys sunk by the German submarines. The Nenets were ordered to deliver edible foodstuff to the village where state officials distributed it.

Some people found barrels of what they thought were just rectified spirits. They drank it and died soon after. In one case, a whole family including all children had died. Others found them later. The village administration ordered people to bury them and offered alcohol to the workers to enable them to stand the smell and the horror. The Nenets were convinced the poisoned alcohol was purposely delivered to the coast by the German submarines to poison civilians. The Germans were believed to think that the Nenets would drink everything they came across that smelled like alcohol.

I heard the same story again in greater detail told in a similar way but with some local differences in several villages some hundred kilometers apart. I believe that these were independent events that happened during the war along the NAO coast of the Barents Sea along the route of convoys of ships with foreign help for the Soviet Union (Kostina 2010:14). At every place, the storytellers accused the German enemy of deliberately releasing the flotsam. Interestingly, these stories did not make it to the newspapers or any historical documents available to me. As Russian historians I consulted have confirmed, it is not very likely that German troops used such

measures to terrify the civilians along the coast and the found liquid might have been methanol from the sunken convoys. The stories emphasize the tragic consequences of the longing for alcohol and the blind trust in everything smelling like it. Historical sources from the wartime harbor in the nearby town of Molotovsk (today Severodvinsk) confirm that cases of death due to consumption of stolen and misinterpreted methyl alcohol meant for technical purposes were quite frequent among the mostly nonindigenous workers (Shmigel'skii 2000). It is also a proof that similar events were not particular to just the Nenets wartime history.

## Discussion

There are certain striking similarities in the collected stories, even if some focus on the tragic events and others instead on the miraculous survival. They all deal with the unusual and exceptional, and they all address in different ways the agency of the Nenets in the face of circumstances that dramatically limit access to the very basic means of survival. To quote Julie Cruikshank (1992:28): "these narratives provided a conventional explanation for unprecedented events," adding that "customary cognitive models helped make strange events comprehensible." The younger generation is interested first of all in stories that matter for the present that are in some way relevant for them to gain pride or legitimation or source of identification. Another considerable and possibly the primary motivation for listening to the stories of the elders is just entertainment. Remarkable stories, stories about the unusual, the exotic, or the tragic are appealing to listeners. People can ensure their own identity in contrast to the out of ordinary and transgression of normality.

The following discussion aims to create a framework for interpretation that is not meant to be all-encompassing, but it takes into account not only the content of the stories but the context in which they emerge. Firstly, this is the everyday life of the narrators the stories are embedded in. Secondly, it is the social relationship with the direct and immediate listeners the stories are told to and the non-copresent audience it is recorded for. I suggest that these two aspects of social embeddedness appear in the stories in two ways: social context and performativity.

### Social Relations as Different Voices

There are different and sometimes contradicting voices noticeable in the stories even if it is almost impossible to separate them in the material presented earlier. The desire for alcohol by some Nenets, for instance, hides behind the proposed German tactic to poison the Nenets. This way

the internal motivation becomes almost invisible behind the identification with the collective (and official) role of the Soviet people as objects of German aggression. The participation in the heroic defense of the fatherland is intermingled with possibilities to escape the open confrontation with the enemy in Fedosia Semenovna's stories. Belief in the agency of supernatural forces and reciprocity obligations of returning relatives or neighbors are cultural features of the Nenets communities. Reflections on responsibility and the failure to live up to it in a mother-daughter relationship represent community values as well as reflecting on individual biographies and individual decisions framed by a collective Soviet experience of fallen fathers, missing soldiers, and homecoming POWs. I would use the term "polyphony of voices" by Bakhtin (1984) to describe this. It reflects the multitude of social worlds the storyteller is part of through her or his everyday life relationships in the community, through kinship and other reciprocity networks, but also the wider Russian society. Oral history is a history built around people. The communication is embedded in a social world embracing the native communities as well as state-controlled educational institutions and mass media. The storyteller has in her mind (and in her story) the voices of her ancestors and the contemporary witnesses of past events as well as the scientific discourse she is anticipating in the anthropologist. These different voices reflect nested social relationships the storyteller are embedded in. In contrast to Jaago and Kõresaar (2008), I would insist that these voices are seldom conflicting and ideologically opposed versions of the official history and a personal story. On the contrary, they seem to be in a complex dialogical relationship that involves compliance as well as subversion.

### **Performativity and Dialogical Relationships**

The previously mentioned stories about poisonous flotsam, the divining boy or miraculous survivals obviously bear different layers for different audiences. They tell stories about heroic suffering and survival and the contribution of the Nenets people to the victory of their fatherland. On a deeper level, they tell about ordinary people's victimization, which becomes understandable given the knowledge of collectivization, the confiscation of reindeer, and the first-time drafting of men for military service. Usually at the beginning of the interview, when explaining the purpose of the oral-history project, the researcher provided hints of his competence regarding the local history, and the biographical interviews contain a long list of these victimizing measures by the state (cf.

here Allemann 2017). Certain other aspects of the stories are understandable only considering insider knowledge, such as knowledge of shamanic practices and the supernatural generally concealed from outsiders. The social relationships that appear in the act of storytelling as part of recording oral history are what I would like to analyze under the aspect of performativity (Jaago and Kõresaar 2008:18; cf. Ong 1982; Perks and Thomson 1998:3). I use performativity as a term to describe the way the stories emerge in collaboration between the storyteller and the listener or public and are understandable only against the background of the social and cultural belonging of both (cf. Grele 1998:44). There are stories that are told repeatedly many times to listeners who know the stories very well. In this case, performativity is even more pronounced in the way the practice of storytelling confirms the social relationship established through the shared oral tradition. Different stories of course create different forms of social relationships—the most narrow and intimate ones are carefully guarded secrets that create cultural intimacy based on complicity (Herzfeld 1997; Steinmüller 2010). The performativity of the story and the coproduction of storyteller and audience in oral history are based on their ability to engage in what I would call epistemic mobility. As epistemic mobility, I regard the ability of both sides to reflect upon each other's competences and to move towards and between the standpoints, perspectives, motivations, and epistemic practices of the respective other in order to make learning possible.

### **Multivocality and Performativity from a Triangle of Aspects**

I would like to suggest a triangle of aspects to address the previously mentioned polyphonous and performative character of the Nenets stories.

The first corner of the triangle is the public memory practices relating to the particular orally transmitted story, in our case the rich and omnipresent public memory of the Second World War in the local community. The second corner is the social role of the oral-history researcher and the personal and public relationship she or he establishes with the storyteller. In my case, my own biographical background and role in a project that aims at sharing oral histories between different indigenous groups, as well as a wider international public. The third corner is probably the most complex one. It is the cultural background of the storyteller, in this case, the Nenets communities' oral traditions being in a process of transformation due to acculturation processes and the emergence of new media, the rich Nenets folklore but also the cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) it is embedded

in. The triangle might remind of the aspects Ronald Grele (1975:288) considers structuring the narrative: first, the linguistic structure as form of the text in grammar and style and as an internal one; second, the performative structure as the dialectical relationship between the interlocutors, their social and cultural background, the speaker, and the audience; and third, the cognitive structure that emerges between the story teller and the things he speaks about. In contrast, I see the triangle of aspects introduced in the following neither as a structure one could reveal from the narrative itself nor as one structuring the story. What I suggest is to structure the analysis of the oral story in order to access different facets of the oral-history work that the stories emerge from. It is easily understandable that this triangle of aspects is not accessible in the pure text of the story itself. These aspects are not even fully understandable through the nonverbal part of the oral performance, the place and time, the nonverbal interactions, and the visual part of the oral-history performance. They become accessible only through a broader participation of the researcher in and interaction with community life. Anthropological fieldwork based on participant observation, but also a collaborative approach to oral-history research are in my opinion the prerequisite to being able to reflect on this triangle of aspects.

### *First Corner: Public Memory*

The official war commemoration is quite visible in the villages—not only in obligatory war monuments often erected and maintained with local initiative but also in everyday TV programs; official holidays like the Victory Day, May 9; the Day of the Russian Army, February 23; or the day in commemoration of the start of the German invasion of the Soviet Union, June 22. In the practices of war commemoration, official ideology and private, sometimes very informal and intimate ideas and practices merge to popular forms of commemoration of war events and community history. One example is the consecration of the monument for the reindeer herders that served in the reindeer transport battalions during the war in the regional capital Naryan-Mar on February 23, 2012. I was asked to write a blog entry about the event for the web page of the Association of Nenets people (yasavey.org 2012), and I met several of the elders I conducted oral-history interviews with. The monument (Fig. 2) became the most popular in the capital city of Naryan-Mar among the three war monuments for young couples to lay down flowers at on occasion of their wedding in order to commemorate the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the lives of the next generations. It is the least monumental and martial among the monuments,

and it underlines the regional identity with Nenets traditional clothing of the soldier-herder, the sled reindeer, and the reindeer-herding dog. For the Nenets elders, it is the most important official sign of recognition for the importance of their ethnic group and their reindeer-herding lifestyle for the history of Russia. It also serves as a cenotaph, as a place for the personal commemoration for Nenets whose fallen grandfathers, fathers, or husbands did not find a grave in their home region. As late Nadezhda Petrovna Taleeva, one of my Nenets interview partners whose father was missing in action told me: “Now I have a place to go.”

In respect of the function of war commemoration as a source of recognition and prestige for the ethnic and local community, the oral-history stories oscillate between two poles. On the one hand, the stories underline the bravery, the fighting skills of experienced hunters, and the enthusiasm of young soldiers leaving for the front. On the other hand, a lot of storytellers stress how foreign the idea of military service was for the Nenets, who had never served before in the Russian army, and who, for instance, were prone to drowning while crossing rivers because they usually could not swim (cf. Kanev 2010:59 recollection of Aleksei Latyshev from the Kanin Peninsula) or were easy targets for the German airplanes with their well visible sledges and reindeers in the northern tundra. One of my interlocutors went as far as stating in an interview that the idea of killing people was completely alien to the Nenets who did not understand how one could shoot at humans. She must have known that I have some idea of Nenets folklore full of elaborate descriptions of war and bloodshed (cf. Golovnev 2000). The contradiction becomes understandable only when one considers how new and foreign the principles of modern warfare were to the Nenets with chains of command, in particular military tactics, and fighting morals.

The demand for the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War increases in present-day Russia. It builds upon the Soviet tradition of identity building and produces post-Soviet nostalgia, very noticeable in the Russian province today, and it links with the attempt of the state to build a new common identity for the multi-ethnic Russian Federation. One of the very few things that today provide for such an identity when religion, language, and even most parts of pre-Soviet history cannot serve that purpose in a multiethnic Russia seems to be the hegemonic national ideology of the Soviet Great Patriotic War narrative. This narrative tells of the family of nation that under the leadership of the Russians overcame fascism and freed the world from tyranny with the biggest sacrifice of human lives in human history. Some authors tend to reduce “official” narratives in Russia,





**Figure 2.** The monument for the reindeer fighting brigades in the city of Naryan-Mar (photo by the author).

especially if their elements are inherited from the Soviet Union, to their ideological function of delegitimization or even repression of alternative or dissident personal and communal visions of history (cf. e.g., Jaago and Kõresaar 2008:18). The institutional level introduced by Portelli (Jaago and Kõresaar 2008:19) seems to represent the public transcript of ruling elites while the perspectives of the subordinated remain hidden (Scott 1990; but see the critique of Ortner 1995) or as Cruikshank (1992:22) puts it:

[D]istinct cognitive models may generate different kinds of social analysis, leading to different interpretations of a given event, one of which is included in official history, while the other is relegated to collective memory.

I do not deny hegemonic ideologies, which dictate certain historical visions influencing the storytelling. Hegemony makes it possible to silence certain ways of interpretation, but it also helps to shape the deviations that grew into alternative views on history—what Scott calls the hidden transcripts. Deviation from institutionally legitimized and hegemonic narratives mark private and internal social context and spaces “between” the lines of public representation of what Caroline Humphrey (1994:23) called evocative transcripts.

### *Second Corner: The Role of the Researcher*

I have already mentioned my friend Fedosia Semenovna Kauts for whom my ethnic background became one incentive for her friendship. Despite her personal history as a head of a Nenets village

and Communist party member during the Soviet times and her nostalgia for the Soviet past, some of her harsh critique of Soviet injustice towards the Nenets, as well as towards the ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union, expressed in the interviews I associated with her knowledge about me and were based on our friendship, I believe. The inclusion of the listener in the sphere of intimate dialogue provided the security and trust needed in order to feel relaxed. In some cases, the story itself seemed to be able to carry the narrator away when memories override the wish to control emotions and the flow of information. People become overwhelmed by their own stories. This is often the case with laments, nostalgia, sorrow, and feelings of helplessness. Memories of situations in which the agency of the storyteller was dramatically limited seem to produce an internal pressure, a longing for the opportunity to speak out.

It became obvious that some voices in the stories related directly to my ethnic background, as it was perceived by the storytellers, often emphasizing common victimhood and lack of agency. In other cases, the storytelling itself and the fact of the presence of a representative of the former enemy was stressed as a proof for the successful overcoming of wartime enmities. The fact that I grew up in the former Eastern Bloc was taken as the basis to integrate me into the collective memory of the Soviet past. Stories of heroism that include the local community and traditional values, reindeer herding, and hunting skills in the reindeer transport battalions, dominant in the official memory, offered less of a possibility to include the researcher, as would opposition to and victory



over the German enemy imagined in national terms and not based on an antifascist identity to be potentially shared with the researcher. “Individuals say very different things to different interlocutors about the same topic” (di Leonardo 1987:9). Without a deeply self-reflexive exercise, not as an aim in itself but as an “important research tool,” as already mentioned by Valerie Yow (1997:70), oral-history research remains incomplete and half-blind.

### *Third Corner: Cultural Intimacy*

The third corner of the triangle is probably the most difficult to access as it involves the realm of cultural intimacy, to use a term of Michael Herzfeld’s (1997). The researcher has to understand the collective memory of the community, the common sense of the storyteller’s social group, and the pool of stereotypes, motives, and conventions the storyteller has access to (see Wertsch 2002:16ff.). Sharing of everyday life activities was the precondition to be included in the realm of cultural intimacy of the Nenets communities. It meant to spend time with the reindeer herders on their annual migration and in the villages as part of the families who live a sedentary life like most of the elders do nowadays. It enabled me to learn a lot about reindeer herding, about the social networks, and practices to keep the networks alive as well as about spiritual relations to the environment.

Without an understanding of concepts of reciprocity and gift giving, as well as traditions of prophecy, the previously mentioned story of the prediction of the little boy would remain just a strange anecdote. Many oral-history stories circle around unusual events and miracles, they tell of exceptional and often tragic events but about rescue and survival in the face of superhuman forces as well. The presented stories about the miraculous survival in the face of a superior enemy or the return of the bull could serve as examples. War stories fit very well into this genre, and they are by definition a historical and social exception from everyday life. The abnormality of war is understandable only against the backdrop of normality of everyday life “to achieve consistency between old values and changing circumstances” (Cruikshank 1992:33). Telling about the war allows people to make “statements about culturally appropriate behavior” (Cruikshank 1992:35) by thematizing the external crisis. In this way, the stories told about the past relate very much to the present, a feature that also became clear in the stories about the poisonous flotsam. The popular stories are understandable only in the context of present-day drinking practices and the moral discourse about these practices circling around control and uncontrolled behavior and questions of agency (cf.

Dudeck 2015a). These stories not only serve the moral condemnation of drinking habits but enable a partial shift of agency to the German enemy that was declared guilty of purposeful poisoning the reindeer herders. In this way, the stories can be interpreted as a warning towards the possible tragic consequences of alcohol consumption. In a general way, they can be read also as a critique of the thrill that befell people looking for flotsam, letting them forget the risks connected with their booty. Petra Rethmann (2002:130) points to a similar social critique when she states:

When senior Koriak women tell stories about their husbands, or express concerns about the drinking of daughters or sons, they typically highlight the serious consequences of instability in different social realms.

### **Conditions of the Polyphony of Voices**

Victimization and heroizing, critique and affirmation of values, identification with the Soviet Union and with the Germans—these are only some of the diverse and sometimes contradicting voices coexisting in the stories about World War II told to the researcher in the oral-history project. The stories grow roots in diverse directions; they carry messages that have different visibilities meant for different audiences. The narrator did not always seem aware and conscious of the voices that speak through the story. Often it was neither on the agenda nor motivation of the oral storyteller to be without contradiction. The story is a gift to be transmitted further so others will know even if these others are not fully known to the storyteller—fellow villagers, community members, relatives, but often adversaries as well—the state officials and people in power, strangers, a global and anonymous public. Different defining communities were available in the social fields the narrator and the listeners are acting in. People have the ability to relate to different reference frames of meaning; they are even able to use different benchmarks of identification, refer to different lifestyles, and switch between languages.

The acknowledgment of the multiplicity of voices, interpretations, perspectives, senses, and layers of knowledge is obviously something important for communities whose livelihoods are based on close interaction with the natural environment and a plurality of forces that are able to limit human agency in a dramatic way. The emerging literature on indigenous perspectivism (Brightman et al. 2014; Cruikshank 2012; Viveiros De Castro 1998) deals mostly with human–animal and human–spirit relations. In association with social and political phenomena of modernity, it was rarely employed and certainly not in the context of Arctic Eurasia. The question is not if

and what kind of polyphony exists in the stories, the question is rather why some voices are being heard more loudly and seem more important than others. What are conditions that narrow down the plurality of voices and what are the conditions in which people have more freedom to allow different perspectives to coexist?

The emergence of monotheistic religions, nation-states with hierarchical power relations, universalist morals, and exclusive epistemologies seem to endanger perspectivism or at least force alternative perspectives and voices to employ mimicry, subordinate themselves and retreat “between the lines” or into “hidden transcripts” and intimate spaces as described earlier. Polyphony can be easily lost and reduced to a linear consistent narrative that would serve the task to illustrate an exclusive and in most cases the official meaning of a historical event or experience sanctioned by powerful social institutions. Using the example of Clifford Shaw’s (1930/1966) *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy’s Own Story*, Adrienne S. Chambon (1995:127) explained that a life story can easily be reduced to a single plot line with a simplified narrative structure corresponding to “the institutional markers of Stanley’s criminal career as documented in official records of arrests, commitments to residential homes, jail sentences, and the use of probation services.” Through insensitive questioning, the oral historian can easily fall into the trap of “the biographical illusion” (Bourdieu 2000) and produce unintentionally unilinear stories according to an officially legitimized and hegemonic perception of a biography as a coherent, consecutive, and logical evolution of a single, consistent personality. The prototype of the true story is of course the one produced by the powerful institution of the law in a courtroom at a criminal trial with a final verdict (Carranza 2010). Situations of sharply expressed conflict seem to be the typical condition that narrows down the multiplicity of voices, epistemologies, perspectives, and standpoints—the polyphony in the story reduced to a black and white picture that drives some versions of truth into the realm of silence and produces at best hidden transcripts (Scott 1990).

The acknowledgment of the coexistence of diverse authorities, like the state and the spirits whose agency cannot be reduced to a simple hierarchy in the stories, make their interplay visible. They can be evaluated by shifting into registers of sarcasm, irony or pathos, emotional attachment, and awe. One criterion for the multivocality and the dialogical character of storytelling is its open-endedness, incompleteness, and the processual and infinite character of the narratives as Bakhtin (1984) mentioned. Dialogue means to be sensitive to the intentions of the other—to multiple perspectives. It means to have some common

ground of understanding but to at the same time acknowledge a difference, in quality or degree, of understanding (Portelli 2005). There are several conclusions to be drawn. First and foremost, if we take our role as participants in the process of communicating oral history seriously, we might foster the multivocality already in the way storytelling is performed by making clear that we are not looking for only one historical truth. That also means for the researcher to learn to recognize the diversity of voices to be heard in the field because not all of them are easily understandable, some of them are whispering, some are even hiding. The layers of oral history, often interwoven, contain official and informal, hegemonic and marginal, dominant and subordinated versions, and interpretations of history. It means paying attention to the context of the recording and its dialogical character and not to merely looking at the transcribed text detached from the performance of storytelling.

## Conclusion

The research among the European Nenets aimed to provide the means for an understanding of Nenets oral-history stories, to jointly, with the indigenous research partners, develop forms of representation that enable an understanding of Nenets history for people outside the community. To develop and provide an understanding of the Nenets motivation to share knowledge and oral stories with outsiders was a precondition of the project’s collaborative research. This paper has focused the attention on certain aspects of stories that are coproduced in an oral-history setting by the indigenous storytellers and the involved researcher. It aims to provide the researcher with a specific hermeneutical toolkit that might be useful in developing the “art of listening” (Portelli 2005) and the art of interactive and reflexive communication, which is participant observation (Ingold 2014). It means reflecting the social context the storyteller is embedded in as well as the social context of collaborative oral-history work. It also means paying attention to the performative aspects of storytelling that can easily disappear from sight because of the dominance of the produced recording as a cultural representation, a mere text, detachable, and open to decontextualization.

The triangle of aspects suggested in the discussion might serve as directions from which the produced recording, the story, the social situation of fieldwork, as well as the coproduction of cultural materials in collaboration with indigenous partners, can be accessed. Interpretation is the work the receiver of the oral message has to accomplish in order to allow the story to unfold its performative function. The oral story here is as a coproduction between the storyteller and the

listener in the context of the social setting both are embedded in. The proposed analytical framework might help to enable researchers and a wider public to learn what the stories tell us about the agency of people in the face of forces that limit agency in a dramatic and unexpected way.

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## Endnotes

1. The collaboration with local communities was founded on an almost decade long partnership of the research project leader, Florian Stammli, with the Association of the Nenets people “Yasavey” (ORHELIA n.d.; Stammli and Peskov 2008). Activists of the organization decided upon the villages and reindeer-herding camps that should be visited and the 65 elders to be recorded (200h interviews). The research project’s declared aim was to offer technology and researcher’s time to collect stories local people would decide to be meaningful. The interviews were evaluated with two appointed members of “Yasavey” and parts were chosen for a first public presentation on a DVD (Dudeck et al. 2015).
2. The common list of themes the project team developed was based on our prior knowledge about the history of indigenous groups in the Russian North and Northern Finland in the 20th century. It contained themes like the introduction of formal school education, different forms of resettlement, infrastructural, technological change, and so on,

and it has served as a basis for comparison of the oral history of different indigenous groups of the Arctic (Dudeck 2013:71–74; Mazullo 2017)

3. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the gendered notion of space behind these gendered storytelling practices. I am far from generalizing this gender difference for all Nenets communities, which show different degrees of sedentarization and gender shift (cf. Liarskaya 2010; Povoroznyuk et al. 2010; Tuisku 2001).
4. The authors’ knowledge of Nenets social reality seems to be quite limited as they call the Nenets communities with the Sámi term “*siida*,” translated as “reindeer groups,” and speak repeatedly about “extreme individualism” of the Nenets (Gorter-Gronvik and Suprun 2000a). The conclusions they draw on the Nenets attitude towards war, violent death, and the warfare tradition in Nenets society remain, to put it mildly, shallow.
5. Translation from Russian by the author.
6. Which in almost all cases meant that the soldier died in action as my Nenets interlocutors told me.
7. I decided to use the full names of the interlocutors (first name, father’s name, and surname or only first and father’s name) as this was agreed upon during the negotiation of consent to record and publish and is considered to be respectful among the Nenets with whom I worked. As skilled storytellers, most of my interlocutors were proud to provide their stories for public representation. Only when it comes to intimate or contested information I protect the informants with anonymity.
8. Aleksei Stepanovich Kotkin (Kotkin 2000:325) mentions archival sources documenting the return of seven draft reindeer in 1947 to the reindeer herd of the Kolkhoz “Nar’ana Ty” based in the village of Khongurei, where Nadezhda Petrovna Taleeva and her family used to live. However, it appears more likely that the reindeer were among the ones lost along the road to Arkhangelsk (cf. Kanev 2010:253).

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