DISSERTATION / DOCTORAL THESIS

Titel der Dissertation /Title of the Doctoral Thesis

Soviet Infrastructure in the Post-Soviet Era?

Building a Railroad and Identity

along the Baikal–Amur Mainline in East Siberia

verfasst von / submitted by

Olga Povoroznyuk

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doktorin der Philosophie (Dr. phil.)

Wien, 2022 / Vienna 2022

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Acknowledgements

Most importantly, I owe a lot of gratitude to my extended network of family and friends within and beyond the BAM region. I thank all my relatives and school friends in my home city of Chita for being much more than networks of care and shelter on my way to fieldwork. In the study region, I deeply appreciate all the logistical and emotional support that came from my sister Margarita and her family and friends in Tynda, where I always felt at home. And, finally, I can never thank enough my mother Tatiana in Moscow, and husband Dmitrii and my children Aleksandr and Daria in Vienna, for their love, patience, and support that encouraged me throughout my research and helped me complete this dissertation.

My research project on the BAM, summarized in the form of this dissertation and reflected in additional published or forthcoming articles and chapters, has finished. Yet, my interest in the entanglements of local communities with infrastructure in the Circumpolar North continues within the new research project "InfraNorth: Building Arctic Futures: Transport Infrastructures and Sustainable Northern Communities" (PROJECT-ID: 885646). This large-scale ERC project, launched in 2021 and currently running under the leadership of Peter Schweitzer and with my scientific coordination, promises new comparative research results and publications on the role of transport infrastructures in the habitation and well-being of Arctic communities.

This introduction is copyedited by Patty A. Gray according to US English spelling rules following the Chicago Manual of Style. All proper names in the text are transliterated with the application of the simplified (lacking diacritics) Library of Congress system of romanization of Cyrillic. All references and in-text citations are formatted to *American Anthropologist* reference style. The titles of the Russian language publications are transliterated and translated [in brackets] into English. The responsibility for the correctness of the information and facts provided in the text rests with the author.

I.   Introduction

1. The Topic and the State of the Art

"*The construction of the Baikal–Amur Mainline breathed new life into this taiga region*" (Administratsiia Tyndinskogo Raiona 1991). This is a rather common phrase used in reports on the socio-economic development of the East Siberian region and in other official documents and discourses that were produced by local and regional authorities throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s. One of the longest northern railroads, the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) stretches for over 4,300 km crossing the vast territories of six regions in East Siberia and the Russian Far East. Its main sidetrack, the Amur–Yakutsk Mainline (AYaM), leads to the central areas of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya) and extends the railroad network by almost 1,300 km.

In this introduction, I refer to the BAM as *transformative infrastructure*, a late Soviet industrial project that became a showcase of large-scale technological and social engineering. Its agency stretched far beyond the dramatic physical alteration of natural environments through the application of technologies and heavy machinery. The railroad became a symbol of the Soviet state and an embodiment of socialist modernization promises and ideologies that were initially used for mass propaganda and recruitment of labor during the railroad's construction period. The mass population inflow and engagement of local and indigenous populations into the orbit of infrastructural development eventually led to large-scale social transformations and the construction of collective identities drawing on socialist ideologies. In the post-Soviet period, these identities have been reconstructed and recycled to fuel postsocialist memories and politics of identity and emotion aimed at the legitimization of the political power and continuation of the Russian state modernization project in East Siberia.

1.1. Background

The history of the BAM starts with early construction plans dating back to the nineteenth century and continues with the first tracks laid during the Stalinist regime in the 1930s. The majority of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984, within the industrial program of "mastering the North" (Slavin 1982). The late socialist BAM became a grandiose engineering endeavor and "the last megalomaniac Communist industrial project exploiting the USSR's vast natural resources for propagandistic and economic reasons" (Ward 2009: 2). Public discourses, media, and popular literature glorified the BAM as a "century project" (Josephson 1995) and a symbol of human achievement in the "conquering of the wild nature." The myth of the BAM

that emerged from this Soviet modernization project created public enthusiasm, hopes, and expectations for a better life—equal education, employment, and economic opportunities (Ward 2001). A sociological survey conducted among local and indigenous populations at the beginning of the construction registered positive images of, and expectations from, the BAM (Boiko 1979). Even higher were the expectations and emotional uplift of young engineers and workers who came to the region from different parts of the USSR. Propaganda by the Communist Party's youth organization *Komsomol* in combination with actual material stimuli (high salaries, access to scarce goods) attracted a mass labor force to the construction site (Argudiaeva 1988: 10). A large share of the migrants settled in the towns that emerged along the railroad, where they currently constitute the majority.

The official leitmotif *"The whole country builds the BAM"* reflected the multiethnic composition of migrants and referred to Soviet nationalities policy. Aimed at shaping the ideal "Soviet people" and formally supporting ethnic diversity, this policy, in fact, favored Slavic groups (Martin 2001). In the course of construction, migrants consolidated into a distinct socio-professional group with the self-designation "BAM builders" or *bamovtsy*. Currently, boundaries between "indigenous," "local," and "migrant" populations are constructed and contested within the framework of the politics of identity and emotion, where important identity markers are not only ethnicity, but also the time of one's arrival to the region, participation in the construction of the BAM, and one's current entanglement with the railroad.

The end of the BAM construction, which coincided with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has led to an economic downturn, public disillusionment, and criticism of the BAM in the media. BAM-2, a recently launched state program of technological modernization fueled by resource extraction interests, is aimed at construction of the once-projected second track. The program involves the railroad organizations, construction companies, *bamovtsy*, and other local residents, and it evokes memories and nostalgia for the socialist BAM as well as new expectations and disenchantments.

1.2. State of the Art in the Field of Research
1.2.1. Soviet Socialism: Modernization and Nation-Building

In her well-known book, anthropologist Katherine Verdery explores the nature of socialism in order to understand the past and the present and to predict the possible future(s) of Eastern European countries. Recognizing the variability of socialism across different national contexts, she identifies its shared distinctive (primarily socio-economic) characteristics: the shortage economy with its specific forms of paddling budgets and hoarding materials; surveillance and

paternalistic redistribution of resources between the center and its citizens; politicized forms of consumption; and "etatization" of time (Verdery 1996). At the same time, anthropologist Chris Hann deconstructs socialism as a model of a society squashed by a totalitarian form of power, arguing that corresponding concepts of state and society may not always explain how actual socialist political systems have operated (Hann 1993:15). He suggests that socialist ideas and ideologies, such as material rationality, the developmentalist paradigm, and planned economy, have often proven to be incompatible with local traditions and established social orders (ibid.: 20). Other researchers of socialism claim that actually existing socialism and actually existing capitalism were never so distinct from each other; instead of "pure" economies, there were hybrid forms of state building and economic survival strategies (e.g., "market socialism") (West and Raman 2009: 3–5).

Among different forms of socialism, the Soviet type with its ideologies and practices of modernization, industrialization, and multiethnic nationalism was a classical model that many other socialist countries struggled to adopt. James Scott (1998) introduced the concept of "high modernism" to criticize the core values of modernization in authoritarian states: the belief in a continued linear progress; development of scientific and technical knowledge; expansion of production; the rational design of social order; and an increasing control over nature (ibid. 1998: 88–90). In the Soviet Union, these values informed environmental policies (Josephson 2013), as well as industrial and regional development. A series of large-scale infrastructure projects or "projects of the century"—from railroads, to dams, to subversion of rivers—reflected Soviet fascination with technology as well as dedication to "the construction of communism" (Josephson 1995: 519). While forced labor "mobilization" and associated violence and terror prevailed in the early Soviet (Stalinist) period (Graham 1996), communist propaganda became a more conventional method of labor recruitment at such construction sites during late socialism. It relied on communist ideologies and slogans about "conquest of nature," "struggle with the elements," and "building civilization" to motivate and attract human resources and create public expectations and belief in the state (Bolotova 2014).

Popular representations of the North and Siberia as being on the edge of "civilization" and populated by "primitive" peoples, which were characteristic of late imperial Russia (Saburova 2020), survived into the Soviet period. Marxist ideology emphasized the importance of massive exploration, modernization, industrialization, and urbanization of the Russian Arctic, including assimilation of its population (Josephson 2015). One of the vivid examples of how Soviet development plans were informed by the socialist ideological agenda was the state program of "mastering the North" (Slavin 1982). A few historical accounts of the largest Soviet

industrial projects illustrate how these infrastructures became tools of internal colonization (Kotkin 1997), and how various (sometimes extreme) forms of technological and social engineering along with ideological propaganda served nation-building purposes (Payne 2001; Mote 2003). The Soviet planners expected that large-scale infrastructure projects would not only transform nature and build a new socialist civilization at the frontiers of the country, but would also shape the new Soviet Man (Kotkin 1997: 74; Grützmacher 2005: 214).

The definition of the USSR as an "affirmative action empire" alludes to the strategy of discrimination against Russian culture that was intentionally used to mask the structural superiority of the Russian elites (Martin 2001). This policy, implemented in the 1920s and 1930s, resulted in the assignment of Soviet territory to non-Russian republics and the stigmatization of Russian culture as a culture of oppression. "Soft line" measures (popularization of non-Russian ethnic cultures and languages) were in dialogue with the "hard line" practices of ethnic cleansing in order to prevent non-Russian nationalisms on the way to achieving the main Bolshevik goals. By the late 1930s, the concepts of the Soviet people, the socialist nation, and "friendship of the peoples" rehabilitated and recognized the centrality of Russian culture and language in building Soviet socialism (ibid.: 455). One article comparing the USSR to a communal apartment argues that early Soviet nationalities policy or "nation-building" was a successful attempt at a state-sponsored conflation of language, "culture," territory, and quota-based bureaucracy, where ethnicity was ranked higher than class (Slezkine 1994: 414). Its ethnic particularism promoted group rights and institutionalized ethnoterritorial federalism, while classifying individual citizens on the basis of their biological ("passport") nationalities. These primordialist interpretations of nationality led to the fact that ethnicity (and not class or ideology) became the only meaningful identity. While it was only later that Russian culture was officially recognized as "great" and Russian language as the state's *lingua franca*, Russians always remained *de facto* the dominant nationality, controlling key state institutions of the Soviet hierarchy.

Fitzpatrick showed that the construction of "Soviet identity" affected all spheres of social life in the USSR (Fitzpatrick 2005: 9). Individual identities and life projects were constructed and manipulated through a number of bureaucratic tools, such as "file-selves" (the self constituted through one's personal data files). Since the mid-1960s, the identity of the "Soviet Man" was naturalized and widely circulated; however, it was occasionally challenged by counter cultures. The Soviet citizen was expected to cultivate a collectivist ethic, to repress individualism while becoming an enlightened and independent-minded individual (Yurchak 2006: 11). While many of the fundamental socialist values and ideals were genuinely important

for Soviet people, many of them routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain official rules and norms. This was especially true for late socialism and the last Soviet generation (people born between the 1950s and the early 1970s), whose common identity was formed by the shared experience of disbelief in the official authoritative discourse (ibid.: 32).

The Soviet state institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as fundamental social categories, which were sharply distinct from statehood and citizenship. By the late socialist period, it had managed to forge the imagined community and identity of the Soviet people. However, legal incongruence and a spatial mismatch between two components—the national territories and personal nationalities that were inherent to the Soviet nationality regime and nation-building project—eventually contributed to the breakup of the USSR (Brubaker 2014).

1.2.2. Postsocialism and Post-Soviet Transformations

Between 1989 and 1992, Eastern European socialist regimes collapsed at a speed that took the world by surprise, and a number of countries in Europe entered the postsocialist condition. In response to these events, the new, rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of "transitology" emerged. Economists, political scientists, sociologists, and other specialists focused on the central concept of transition as a process connecting the past to the future, where the future was "textbook capitalism" (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). Anthropologists were among the first to challenge the teleological concept of transition, which was based on binaries that had begun to predominate in the social sciences. In doing so, they called for looking at the inseparability of economic, political, and cultural processes, and for talking rather about "transformation" than "transition," seeing it as a combined and uneven process with multiple trajectories. They sought to avoid textbook notions such as "free market," "liberal democracy'" etc., in favor of analyzing the distinctive dynamics of postsocialist societies (ibid.: 14–15). Moreover, "transition" was criticized as a cultural construct of the West, informed by experiences and studies of the "Third World" with their underlying categories and empowered by western superiority in technology, politics, and economy (Berdahl 2000).

The dramatic events of the late 1980s and 1990s opened up new topics and fields (Hann 2002: 2) as well as research dilemmas (Dudwick and De Soto 2000) in social anthropology, which historically had not been prominently engaged in studying socialist countries because of its overriding concern with "exotic" tribal societies. Ethnic and nationalist conflicts, re-articulation of identity, neocolonialism, gender regimes, religion, material culture, kinship, and

other ethnographic topics soon became the main foci of anthropologists working in postsocialist countries (Berdahl 2000: 4). Anthropological studies of the transformation of postsocialist societies in Eastern Europe and beyond demonstrated the legacies of the socialist order in different domains. These legacies were not limited only to economic path dependency and "fuzzy" forms of property, but extended to cultural persistence, circulation of elites, and reshaping of old networks into new institutional hybrids existing between the state and the market (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Verdery 1996). With the reproduction of "moral communities" of socialism as a common component of socialist institutions, ideologies and moral purposes continued to have decisive effects on the everyday life practices of the millions of people whose lives had been shaped by socialist ideologies (Hann 2002: 10–11). Socialist economic, political, and cultural forms have also endured in the countries beyond Eastern Europe. For example, the postsocialist present in Latin America reveals paradoxical continuities with pre-socialist and socialist pasts both on ideological and material levels (West and Raman 2009).

The anthropology of postsocialism not only challenged teleological assumptions and evolutionary perspectives surrounding the trajectories of postsocialist change; it also undertook the task of reconciling different visions of modernization. It argued that both capitalism and socialism are built on a progressive vision of the future embodied in new products, technological innovation, urbanization, and industrialization. Each of the ideological systems claimed to be a true bearer of the modernist project, even as they appeared diametrically opposed in terms of how to achieve this end. Thus, the collapse of socialist regimes (Soviet socialism in particular) entailed the process of demodernization and collective identity crisis in the 1990s (Lampland 2000: 213).

Post-Soviet postsocialism has been characterized by a restructuring of state investments in development and the appearance of powerful private actors. It has led to emergence of recombinant or "fuzzy" forms of property (Verdery 1999: 75) and uneven accumulation of resources. However, in Russia these socio-economic transformations and political shifts have not completely abolished the Soviet modernization project. Its underlying socialist ideologies, infrastructures, and identity politics continued well into the post-Soviet period. Ssorin-Chaikov's anthropology of time illustrates the existence of multiple modernities inscribed into the linear development paradigm of the Russian state (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017). Drawing on his ethnography of indigenous communities in Siberia, he argues that Soviet development plans have survived both on paper and in infrastructural debris (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016). In his recent book, the same author argues that the Soviet colonial order in Siberia was constituted by

constant struggle with chaos or "the state of nature"—the unpredictable local environment with its indigenous inhabitants (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017: 28–29). As the modernization programs of the Russian state failed and rose, "giving up" on development was in competition with the rediscovery of its necessity (ibid: 33–36).

1.2.3. Postsocialist Politics of Identity and Emotion

The term "identity politics" came into use in the 1960s (Hobsbawm 1996: 38) in response to the breakup of the "traditional authority structures and the previous affective social units"—nation, class, and family—in American and West European societies. Hobsbawm argues that genuine identities are multiple or combined, while identity politics stems from social movements and political projects usually fostering particular types of identities (ibid.: 39–44). He concludes that despite the fact that ethnicity has historically been the most common basis of identity politics, citizen nationalism is the most comprehensive type of identity politics that provides the common identity to the "imagined community" of a nation (ibid.: 45).

In the social anthropology of the 1960s, Fredrik Barth emphasized the meaning of ethnicity (vis-à-vis culture) in the social organization of groups. He defined ethnicity as "a matter of social organization" and ethnic identity as "a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction" (Barth 1998 [1969]: 6), and he distinguished the mechanisms maintaining boundaries between ethnic groups and identities. The political dimensions of identity are more obvious in Eriksen's analysis of ethnicity and nationalism. From his perspective, ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between individuals belonging to one particular group that matters insofar as cultural differences are perceived as being socially important (Eriksen 2001: 14). Identity politics includes political ideology, organization, and action that represent the interests of designate groups formed on the basis of "essential characteristics" (ethnic origin, religion, etc.) (ibid. 2001: 42). In this process, rigid boundaries may be imposed when they offer a meaningful ordering of the world and the promise of resources (ibid.: 197).

Brubaker (2004) suggests a constructivist perspective on ethnicity and identity that criticizes pervasive "commonsense groupism" and refocuses analytical attention from identities to identification, from groups to group-making projects. Close to Brubaker are approaches suggested by Cohen (2000), Wimmer (2008), and Eidson et al. (2017) that stress the importance of institutions and networks of actors that make and unmake (ethnic) group boundaries and identities, and which occurs in the process of strategically choosing group affiliation or engaging in a cross-boundary struggle for control. While such a bottom-up constructivist

framework might be useful for the analysis of identity construction processes in neoliberal societies, it might not be very productive for understanding identity politics in postcolonial postsocialist contexts. Erikson's approach seems to be useful for understanding identity politics in postsocialist countries, where rapid societal transformations, rising nationalisms, and intergroup conflicts cause uncertainty, havoc, and separatism. In post-Soviet Russia, and especially in Siberia, multiple national, regional, and ethnic identities have been rebuilt in response to dramatic socio-economic and cultural transformations following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Habeck 2005). For example, indigeneity and indigenous identities have been used strategically by group leaders and activists to claim associated legal and social recognition as well as economic benefits (Donahoe et al. 2008; Sokolovskii 2012).

Emotions and affects play a particular role in national and ethnic identity politics. A rather recent "affective turn" in social sciences (Greg and Seigworth 2010) marks renewed interest in the social dynamics and political dimensions of emotional interactions (Lutz and White 1986). Sara Ahmed points out the role of emotions as mediators between individuals and collective bodies and as cultural constructs (Ahmed 2004, 2014). The state and its agents have been among the most powerful institutions that elicit a wide range of emotions while shaping their political fields, subjects, and objects (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2018: 3–6). By mediating and representing the past and reinforcing the sense of belonging to a community, emotions address complex interconnections between memory, identity, and imagination (Kontopodis and Matera 2010: 3). The cultural politics of emotion shapes imagined nations through the wide circulation of emotionally appealing texts and discourses (Ahmed 2014).

Among an array of emotions—from pain, to fear, to love—that can be politicized, nostalgia plays a prominent role. It is seen as affective yearning for a different (better) time and a relationship between personal and collective memory (Boym 2001: xiv–xvi). Svašek introduced the concept of "postsocialist politics of emotions" to describe collective reactions to political, economic, and social transformations after the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe (Svašek 2006). Nostalgia, mistrust, fear, and anger, on the one hand, and joy, pride, enthusiasm, and hope, on the other, became leitmotivs of memory narratives and official discourses of political actors and reformers. Such a politics of emotions still "shapes social life and provides a moral framework in which power relations are being discussed and played out" in the context of rapid change and uncertain development in Eastern European countries (ibid.: 7).

Among various emotional states, nostalgia, in its different forms and shapes, has strongly informed postsocialist identities. In former Yugoslavia, nostalgia became a response to multiple transitions in economy, societal organization, and collective ideology and identity. As a

complex combination of bitter and sweet, funny and serious, silent and outspoken, it also has been a strategy for dealing with the socialist past and a way to overcome identity crisis (Velikonja 2009: 536–547). Berdahl (2010) saw *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for East Germany) as a counter-memory and symbolic resistance in the asymmetrical context of the reunified country. It informed vernacular identities of East and West Germans and created different forms of oppositional solidarity. In Russia of the 1990s, post-Soviet nostalgia associated with distrust in political institutions, escape from public life, and reliance on personal networks found its expression in memories, ironic and reflective art forms, and lively debates about the past in the media. However, with the increased interest in the past, future aspirations began to shrink (Boym 2001: 58–66).

The Soviet Union was an affective community with subjectivities based on the values of one's ethnic culture on the one hand, and the norms of Soviet life on the other. At the same time, the emotional power of ethnicity was greater than Soviet civic identity (Suny 2012: 23–25). The collapse of the Soviet system did not result in a consensus on national or state identity, but left an ideological vacuum that was filled with an emotional disposition of early post-Soviet nationalism (ibid.: 33). Despite the attempts to "purge out" socialist identities in the 1990s (Fitzpatrick 2005: 303), the current controversies of ethnic and national identities are resonating with those of the Soviet period, on both ideological and emotional levels. Contemporary Russia's nation-building project, which draws on the strategy of state national politics, still tends to attribute to ethnicity a highly prominent space in public life, despite the voices that seek to strengthen civic identity and replace ethnos with civic loyalties and allegiances as the defining marker of nationhood (Protsyk and Harzl 2013).

1.2.4. Anthropology of Infrastructure

The word infrastructure, which originated as a specialist term in nineteenth century French civil engineering, entered the English language in the twentieth century and evolved into a generic and plastic term used in mainstream social sciences in association with development theory and Marxism (Carse 2017). Recently, the Marxist infrastructural formula—the sum of the "base" (means and relations of production) and the "superstructure" (law, beliefs, and ideologies)—has been critically reconsidered by anthropologists (Murawski 2018). Currently, "infrastructure" has been applied not as a descriptive term, but rather as an analytical lens for looking at social relations through a mix of heterogeneous materials, practices, meanings, and affects (Carse 2017; Niewöhner 2015).

Contemporary social anthropology has come late to focusing on infrastructure compared to other disciplines. A seminal article by Susan Leigh Star was the first call for ethnographic attention to infrastructure in a way that singled out its fundamental, socially meaningful properties (Star 1999). In the last two decades, the field of anthropology of infrastructure has been dynamically growing. The main thrust of anthropological literature on the subject has been to show how infrastructures become terrains for political engagement (Anand 2015; von Schnitzler 2013) and to examine the nexus between infrastructures and state modernization policies (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012; Masquelier 2002). Larkin argues that infrastructure is strongly politicized to "represent the possibility of being modern, of having a future, or the foreclosing of that possibility," calling infrastructures the "means by which a state proffers these representations to its citizens and asks them to take those representations as social facts" (Larkin 2013: 333–335). Infrastructures operate as materialized aspects of state politics and designs for the future, and as such are conduits for state effects (Harvey 2005). Infrastructural lines, such as railroads and roads, stitch together vast territories of nation-states in the process of colonization and globalization, as the case of American railroads demonstrates (Heins 2015). In post-Soviet Russia, modernization of iconic large-scale infrastructures, such as the Northern Sea Route, is loaded with political and social meanings that appeal to the popular imagination (Gavrilova et al. 2017). Yet, everyday mobility practices and social networks are facilitated by local transport and other auxiliary infrastructures at the local level, as ethnographic examples from the Russian Arctic show (Vakhtin 2017). In post-Soviet urban contexts within and beyond Russia, transport infrastructures serve as arteries that connect societies more tightly than other state mechanisms or processes (Tuvikene et al. 2019). Not surprisingly, infrastructural and technological change, such as increased auto-mobility due to construction of new roads in post-Soviet Siberia, changes travel patterns and ways of life (Zuev and Habeck 2019).

Star reminds us that infrastructures as material objects do not grow *de novo,* but are built on an installed base and, thus, have to wrestle with the inertia and limitations of this base (Star 1999: 381). This materiality of infrastructure creates a certain path dependency in its future development as predetermined by infrastructural design, technological standards, and existing points of connection. Collier's analysis of postsocialist reforms in a provincial city in Russia showed the durability of the Soviet infrastructural legacy. The material set-up of such mundane and invisible infrastructures, such as heating systems, restricted interventions into the heating system and, thus, prevented well-conceived neoliberal reforms (Collier 2011). At the same time, infrastructures are subject to material transformation and modification: while ruination symbolizes degeneration, retrofit might be an attempt to test the solidity of infrastructure (Howe

et al. 2016). Paying attention to materials and material processes that (re)shape infrastructures and to relationships that people experience with material forms provides a better point of interrogation of state politics. From this perspective, the cracks in the tarmac of a crumbling road in Peru can be perceived as not just a failure of infrastructure but a failure of Peruvian politics itself (Knox 2017: 4–5). As a case study of railroad infrastructure in Argentina shows, a physical process like rusting can be interpreted not only as a manifestation of infrastructural deterioration, but as an allegory of the decay of the nation. Therefore, ethnographic engagements with infrastructure need to attend to the politico-social worlds in which materials are enmeshed (McCallum 2016). Ruined or deteriorating infrastructures can undermine people's everyday comfort and living conditions or even "attack" them (Chu 2014). However, in most cases, they reveal the limits of humans' power to govern, regulate, and control the obdurate structures of their living spaces, as hydraulic infrastructures in Mumbai do (Anand 2015). The programs of technological repair and modernization of infrastructures are often underlain with political agendas, and can become stories of patchy renovation and messy relationships shaped by unruly material histories (McCallum 2019). Thus, ethnographic attention to materiality and (mal)functioning of infrastructures, be it the hard and fast material design of heating systems in post-Soviet Russia, rusting trains in Argentina, or leaking water pipes in an Indian city, helps us reexamine the configurations of relationships between states and their citizens in postsocialist and neoliberal contexts.

Affective dimensions of infrastructure are informed by the enchantments of modernity and, thus, are highly political. Mazzarella (2009) reminds us about the unabashedly affective nature of contemporary public culture and political discourse and that "any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective" (ibid.: 299). Knox (2017) draws attention to affective relationships that people experience with material forms and, though them, with the state. Her "material diagnostics" is "a form of questioning, interrogating, tracing, supposing, linking, storytelling, and demonstrating" the entanglements between bodies, histories, and materials in such moments that she calls "infrastructural affect" (Knox 2017: 5). A long-term road construction project in Peru that engendered despair among local residents and disenchantment among its engineers is a good example of infrastructure politics. A short visit by the president, seen as the embodiment of the state with all its institutions and promises, marked not only the end of the construction project but also of people's hopes for a better future and recognition. This infrastructural affect showed that politics is not a set of relationships, but rather a potential toward which people move in the process of material engagement with infrastructure (ibid.: 12–14). Laszczkowski's case study

(2020) of the protest movement against the construction of the Tourin–Lyon high-speed railway in northern Italy also contributes to understanding the affective dimensions of infrastructure as part of infrastructure politics. Even such a material substance as "micro-dust," produced during the construction of the railway tunnel, can generate environmental and health concerns and affects that mobilize local residents for political action. This example demonstrates how affect can bridge a neo-materialist focus on things with attention to human imagination, discourse, and knowledge and, thus, can give meaning to affective encounters with material entities (ibid.: 941). Finally, Schwenkel's study (2013) of urban infrastructure in post-war Vietnam has demonstrated how its material elements, such as bricks, can produce "new, feeling subjects committed to the work of socialist nation-building" (ibid.: 252). Bricks of the new buildings that historically represented utopic objects of desire and hope "harnessed" collective emotions by shaping belief in future betterment (ibid.: 254). While socialist affect implied belief in socialism and solidarity, "postsocialist affect," a term introduced by Schwenkel, means growing sentiments of discontent and disaffection from the state as market reforms produce new forms of socio-economic exclusion and stratification (ibid.: 257). This effect is especially sensitive among the long-term residents of those post-war apartment buildings and their engineers, once committed to the building of socialism but now left behind. Currently, post-war urban blocks embody heterogeneous meanings and affects. Being a product of the two-fold socialist project of material and ideological construction, their ruined infrastructure provides fodder for capitalist redevelopment (Schwenkel 2020: 22).

Underlying the affective dimension of infrastructure is the recent debate about its power to stir the imagination and evoke promises. Topics include how infrastructure "operates on the level of fantasy and desire" (Larkin 2013: 333), how it holds "promises of emancipatory modernity"—namely, those of speed and connectivity, political freedom, and economic prosperity—and how it "enchants" with the hopes and dreams of development (Harvey and Knox 2012: 523). As "dense social, material, aesthetic, and political formations, critical both to experiences of everyday life and expectations of the future," infrastructures "have long promised modernity, development, progress and freedom to people all over the world" (Appel et al. 2018: 3). While their construction and management were central to the performance of liberalism, they guaranteed liberties for some at the expense of the subordination and colonization of others. While (neo)liberal modernity is characterized by infrastructural development driven by the integration of nation-states into the global market economy, new infrastructures are more often built to signify that the nation is advanced and modern than to satisfy needs (ibid.: 17–19).

Infrastructures, such as roads, have long been in the center of historical and anthropological accounts. As Guldi's inquiry into the origins of the infrastructure state in Great Britain shows, the story of roads is not that of a glorious "transport revolution." While visions attributed to the road may include the elimination of poverty, the ideals of participatory government, and the creation of radical political cultures, they often founder on the grim reality of who controls the infrastructure (Guldi 2012: 23). Roads "carry us back and forth between the sweeping narratives of globalization, and the specific tangible materialities of particular times and places" (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 459). They elicit powerful imaginaries holding the promise of future connectivity, but can also be accountable for disconnecting and excluding populations from a condition of mobility (associated with modernity). Drawing on their ethnography of roads in Peru, Harvey and Knox (2012) trace disruptive and destabilizing process through which roads come to hold the promise of transformation and to "enchant" the public with the three specific promises: speed, political integration, and economic connectivity. In their follow-up book on anthropology of roads, the authors further elaborate on roads as political projects that assemble different kinds of publics, from engineers, to local enterprises, to governmental officials, to transnational consortia (Harvey and Knox 2015: 14). Their rich ethnography of infrastructure and expertise illustrates that roads can be sites of political transformation, promise, uncertainty, and risk. However, it is not only state that makes the road. Users and practitioners construct the road through their respective practices and interactions, including imaginative, narrative, cosmological, and sensual efforts (Beck et al. 2017). Thus, roads do not bring all-round development, but rather reshape social spaces and draw new populations. In the communication and migration space of indigenous nomadic and semi-nomadic communities, they can mark borders (Argounova-Low 2012) and serve as orientation marks (Istomin 2020).

Railroads have been among the favorite subjects of historians who have treated them as projects of territorial expansion, colonization, and modernization by large nation states (Marks 1991; Payne 2001; White 2011; Karuka 2019). For example, the Turkestan-Siberian Railroad (TurkSib), being part of the Soviet campaign to industrialize and transform the country into the first socialist society, also served the regime's "civilizing mission" that produced its victims and beneficiaries (Payne 2001: 5–7). It was only relatively recently that railroads came into the focus of anthropology in general (Bear 2007; Edelman 1997) and anthropology of infrastructure and more-than-human sociality in particular (Fisch 2018; Minn 2016; Swanson 2015). Bear's anthropology of the railroad colony at Kangapur (2007) shows that the promised form of modernity that railroads were supposed to bring to India has never arrived. In fact, the pre-

existing distinctions based on caste and race engendered a new "railroad caste"—an Anglo-Indian *Jati*. Edelman's ethnography (1997) of the work of shunters in a contemporary railroad yard in Sweden is a detailed illustration of how technology, skilled work, and social relations are co-constituted in order to keep infrastructure running. In his ethnographic study of the commuter train network in present-day urban Japan, Fisch (2018) develops the notion of the technosocial as a convergence of the human and the technological in order to reflect on "techno-ethics" and specific kinds of relationality enabled by technology under conditions of extreme capitalism (ibid.: 19–23). While trains are no longer central to logistics and transportation in many parts of the world, economic, political, environmental, and imaginary patterns fostered by them and marked by colonialism, ecological conversion, and resource extractivism remain firmly in place (Swanson 2020). An attempt to problematize these patterns has recently been made in a collection of articles on the anthropology of railroads, combining historical perspectives with detailed ethnographic attention to railroads as infrastructures that assemble different socialities and make and unmake particular spaces and temporalities across Eurasia (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2020).

1.2.5. Previous Research on the BAM: Identifying Knowledge Gaps

A particularly productive genre of literature about the railroad project has been historiography, providing critical studies of this Brezhnev-era infrastructure project (Ward 2009; Grützmacher 2012; Röhr 2012). While only few publications provide details on the sinister Stalinist history of the project associated with forced labor (Grützmacher 2012; Thomas 2014), most of the accounts show how the late Soviet BAM, the quintessential Soviet engineering megaproject, was constructed "to bolster collective faith in the collective-administrative system, as well as to improve the economy" (Ward 2009: 2). A more specifically focused paper by the same author addresses the role of mass media in propagandizing the "myth" of the BAM—an official legitimizing perspective on the railway that contained tropes, imagery, and metaphors appealing to railway workers and local populations (Ward 2001). Another article argues that the myth of the BAM was constructed in the context of the Soviet, or Siberian, "frontier" that was to be developed and colonized by young "heroic" builders of the BAM (Grützmacher 2005). Commemoration practices and discourses of the construction period among *bamovtsy* are in the focus of another history paper (Röhr 2016).

Among the existing social science publications about the BAM, articles and volumes by economists, sociologists, and geographers prevail. Thus, a number of publications analyze the effects of the BAM project in the context of regional socio-economic development and resource

extraction (Aganbegian et al. 1984; Mote 1990; Kin 2015). Other publications, primarily sociological, focus on the railroad's social impacts, as well as expectations and concerns of indigenous communities whose way of life was affected by the modernization shock produced by the BAM (Boiko 1979; Karelov 1979; Karpov 2003). Another body of sociological literature is, on the other hand, dedicated to demographic change and to migrants—"builders of the BAM" or *bamovtsy*—who were molded into a distinct group during the construction process (Argudiaeva 1988; Belkin and Sheregi 1985). Two recent sociological articles focus on the nostalgic memories of *bamovtsy* about the construction period (Voronina 2009; Bogdanova 2013). The most recent article about the BAM examines informal mobility practices and the social embeddedness of the infrastructure in local communities (Kuklina and Baikalov 2021).

Among the few earlier anthropological publications is an article on modernization policies and the transformation of indigenous economies and ways of life along the BAM (Anderson 1991). Socio-demographic change and assimilation of indigenous Evenki communities in the regions of the Russian Far East crossed by the railroad are the focus of another publication (Turaev 2004). A social impact assessment of a gas pipeline corridor carried out by an ethnologist and a geographer analyzes (potential) cumulative effects of follow-up industrial development in the region on indigenous communities along the BAM (Sirina and Fondahl 2006). Finally, an anthropological study of reindeer herders' mobility patterns highlights the meaning of infrastructural objects left by the BAM project on the taiga landscape and how they structure the nomad's space (Davydov 2017). These publications represent eloquent ethnographies of change brought by the railway; however, they tend to focus on one (typically, indigenous) group or local community. The research project "Configurations of 'Remoteness' (CoRe): Entanglements of Humans and Infrastructure in the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) Region" has recently filled in gaps of ethnographic knowledge about the BAM (Schweitzer et al. 2017; Kuklina et al. 2019; Povoroznyuk 2020).

The publications included in this dissertation project represent a more comprehensive study of the entanglements of two different groups—indigenous peoples and builders of the BAM—with the railroad infrastructure. For this purpose, it bridges different strands of theoretical discussions on Soviet socialism and postsocialism and anthropology of infrastructure. In contrast to existing publications about the railway, I use the conceptual lens of infrastructure to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of social, affective, and material entanglements of mixed communities with industrial infrastructures in a comparative diachronic perspective. My ethnographic research in indigenous and railroad communities along the BAM explores the role of large-scale infrastructure in the nexus between the Soviet

and post-Soviet state modernization and identity construction projects in East Siberia, Russia. In this sense, this is the first application of an infrastructural lens to the anthropological study of socialist megaprojects or "projects of the century." In order to analyze the material and non-material dimensions of infrastructures and the far-reaching social agency of the railroad project in question, I introduce the concept of *transformative infrastructure.*

2. Discussion of the Research Questions that Connect the Publications

My Ph.D. project explores the role of large-scale infrastructures as an embodiment of Soviet and post-Soviet state modernization and identity construction projects. Drawing on the case study of the BAM in East Siberia, Russia, I raise the following specific *research questions* that connect the five publications included in this dissertation.

1. *How did the BAM construction project build identities and communities in the Soviet period?*

2. *What is the role of Soviet-era ideologies and memories in the post-Soviet politics of identity and emotion?*

3. *What kind of material and non-material continuities and ruptures can be revealed between the Soviet BAM project and its post-Soviet reconstruction program BAM-2?*

The first research question addresses the historical dimensions of the BAM construction in the Soviet period. By exploring the social dynamics—including migration, colonization, and formation of groups, communities, and identities—it illustrates the role of the BAM not only as a "project of a century" (Josephson 1995) marked by technological achievements, by also as a powerful agent of social change (Povoroznyuk 2017: 134). I show that the socialist BAM infrastructure implied the co-construction of the new built and social environments, where technological and social engineering ran parallel under the conditions of Soviet hyper-modernism (Scott 1998). Thus, the railroad's construction and the foundation of multiple railroad cities, towns, and settlements as part of Soviet internal colonization (Kotkin 1997) and efforts to reopen the Siberian frontier (Grützmacher 2005) have shaped culturally, ethnically, and socially diverse local communities. Furthermore, this research question explores how the identities of the Soviet migrant "BAM builders" (*bamovtsy*) who came to the construction site, as well as those of indigenous residents, were constructed within the framework of Soviet nation-building ideologies and industrialization policies (Ward 2009). Thus, I examine the historical factors and experiences that inform affective memories and identities of the migrants

from across the USSR who made their home in the North (Bolotova and Stammler 2010; Povoroznyuk 2019).

On the other hand, I engage with the construction of indigeneity vis-à-vis the BAM project among Evenki residents whose identities were affected by encounters with the railroad infrastructure and its administrators and construction workers. My attention to indigenous communities and identities along the BAM raises further interest in remoteness as a resource for cultural resilience and a form of (hidden) resistance that has been facilitating the articulation of indigeneity (Li 2000; Ardener 2012; Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019). At the same time, I further explore the full spectrum of identities of indigenous (Evenki) residents, informed by their experiences and memories of the socialist BAM project—from vocal supporters to the most critical voices. This inquiry helps in understanding the factors that shaped ambiguous memories and perspectives of the BAM, as well as configurations of identity of different indigenous groups (Povoroznyuk 2021). Attention to such a nuanced historical background and the long-term social dynamics, including different forms of entanglements by indigenous and migrant groups with the BAM, is instrumental for understanding continuities and changes along the Soviet railroad infrastructure in post-Soviet times (Povoroznyuk 2020, 2021).

The second research question elaborates on the roles of Soviet ideologies, memories, and emotions in post-Soviet identity construction. This question is important for tracing the present-day collective identities and ethnic names back to the older classifications that were shaped by Soviet nation-building and modernization ideologies (Sokolovskii 2012; Povoroznyuk 2017: 140). Here, I examine the role of social and generational memory (Assmann 2008; Connerton 1989) in the construction and reproduction of identities. More specifically, I analyze how the emotionally charged memory of the socialist period plays out among the last Soviet generation (Yurchak 2007). Furthermore, I examine the interplay between (post)socialist collective memories, emotions, and identities as shaped by and bound to the infrastructure of the BAM and how they manage to serve the present-day political regime (Oushakine 2013). In the same way, I ask how Soviet nation-building policies and ideologies implemented along the BAM have been affecting indigenous (Evenki) communities on and off the railroad in recent years. This leads me further to explore the possibility of using the proposed "right to remoteness" as a political and/or cultural resource by communities resisting modernization and assimilation (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019: 249). To arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous entanglements with infrastructure, I further unpack the role of ambiguous memories in the current positionalities of Evenki people towards the BAM and BAM-2 programs

(Povoroznyuk 2021: 2). Finally, but most importantly, I explore the possibilities and limitations of affective memories and identities shaped by the Soviet BAM as post-Soviet ideological and rhetorical resources. I interrogate the extent to which they can be exploited by authorities and the media in the context of the railroad reconstruction program BAM-2 at the national and regional levels (Povoroznyuk 2020: 251–252). This question leads to theoretical debates about infrastructures as enchanting and affective political projects (Harvey and Knox 2012; Knox 2017; Laszczkowski and Reeves 2018).

My third and final research question examines the temporality of the BAM infrastructure as a suspended project (e.g., Carse and Kneas 2019) through the comparison of the BAM socialist construction project and the postsocialist reconstruction program BAM-2. By looking at the material (railroad and other transport and urban infrastructure) and non-material (social, mnemonic, affective) aspects of infrastructure, I am searching for continuities and ruptures between the two projects carried out in two different periods. In the first of the publications (Povoroznyuk 2017), I argue that the objects of unfinished Soviet construction (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016)—foundations of the abandoned buildings, decaying rails and temporary housing for *bamovtsy*)—are filled with collective hope for resumed construction and community development. In my next article (Povoroznyuk 2019), I argue that the memories and emotions of *bamovtsy* are inscribed in the railroad infrastructure. The examples of the ceremonial launch of the BAM-2 program and the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the BAM construction help to explore the symbolic, mnemonic, and affective continuities between the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and the ways in which they are intentionally reinforced by the government and media as part of the "affective management of history" (Oushakine 2013). Here, I draw parallels between Russia's politics of identity and emotion along the BAM in East Siberia and postsocialist politics of emotion in Eastern Europe (Svašek 2006). In the article on "the right to remoteness," Peter Schweitzer and I (2019) explore how the notions of indigeneity and remoteness, as symbolized by a missing bridge and the (relative) isolation of an Evenki community, have been co-constructed throughout the late Soviet and post-Soviet period. At the same time, I inquire about the diverse forms of entanglement of the Evenki population with the BAM in the past and at present (Povoroznyuk 2021). The last of the five publications engages directly with the continuity and change of the BAM as (post)socialist infrastructure, by zooming in on the material and affective dimensions of the reconstruction program BAM-2 through the eyes of the *bamovtsy* participating in this process (Povoroznyuk 2020). Following Collier (2011), I am looking at the material dependence and bureaucratic constraints of the reconstruction program as part of the Soviet legacy that prevents reforms or significant changes.

At the same time, my ethnographic attention to infrastructure helps to explore the relations between citizens and the state under the new economic conditions characterized by the withdrawal of once-taken-for-granted social services and investments, as suggested by Humphrey (2003). This leads me to analyze ruptures, changes, and resulting challenges faced by local residents along the BAM in the post-Soviet period in comparison with other postsocialist contexts characterized by fuzzy property (Verdery 1996), mutating structures of governance and responsibility, shady dealings, and uneven investments in infrastructure (Tivukene et al. 2019).

3. Chosen research Approach, Theoretical Foundations, and Methods
3.1. Methods of Data Collection

The practice of fieldwork, with its associated ethnographic methodology, has been the quintessential hallmark of the discipline of social anthropology and the core of its professional socialization and training. At the same time, ethnography as a genre of writing and, comparatively recently, attention to fieldwork and "the field" as a method and a location are topics that have been increasingly drawing critical attention (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Amit 2000). This critique aimed at challenging the radical separation of "the field" from "home" and the resulting hierarchy of purity of field sites; the colonial valorization of some kinds of knowledge and the exclusion of others; and the construction of a normative anthropological subject shaped by a clear distinction between "the Self" and "the Other" (Gupta and Ferguson 1996; Clifford 1986). Such deconstruction of the colonial anthropological project as an exploration of Otherness helped to undermine the concept of the field as a locally bounded site and to unpack the archetypal image of the lonely fieldworker (the first-world white male anthropologist) and the consequent ordering of identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1996: 16–17). Critical reflections on "the field" and fieldwork also cover such issues as trans-local and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), ethical choices and positionality of third-world, double-bound anthropologists and "halfies" (Abu-Lughod 1991), and alternative and regional anthropological traditions deviating from "the standard." From a critical perspective, the field and fieldwork are constructs in which the researcher and his/her personal and professional characteristics, experiences, and relationships are central (Amit 2000: 2–3).

As an anthropologist (or ethnologist, using the Russian equivalent) by training, I have remained reflexive about the process of constructing the field throughout my long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the BAM region. Being born and socialized in an East Siberian city

situated a thousand kilometers to the south of the studied area, I was initiated into fieldwork in the northern districts of my home region as a university student. The north of Zabaikal'skii Region, which is crossed by the BAM, is also home to Evenki people, an indigenous minority group belonging to the so-called of indigenous numerically small people of the North and Siberia of Russia. The Soviet past and post-Soviet socio-economic and cultural transformations of indigenous communities were first at the core of my attention. This research yielded a university thesis, a dissertation for the degree of *kandidat nauk* (roughly equivalent to a PhD) defended in 2005, and a book published in 2011 in Russian. A Russian anthropologist working among an indigenous group of the North was a rather typical model from the perspective of the Moscow-based school of ethnography (the discipline changed its label to "ethnology" after the dissolution of the Soviet Union). At the same time, the geographical proximity (although measured by Siberian standards) of the place of my origin (which was still my "home" back then) to my field sites created both opportunities and challenges. My extensive network of relatives and friends throughout the study region facilitated fieldwork logistics and interview contacts in many locations and also prompted academic exchange between my university in Chita and my institute in the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. At the same time, my culturally mixed background and identity as a Siberian did not always allow for easy distancing from my study object.

After the completion of my dissertation project and the publication of my ethnography of indigenous communities in the North, I switched my topic and approaches but not my region. The theme of the BAM as the last socialist megaproject that changed the lives of so many people was reiterated in conversations with indigenous and local residents of the North. As a result, the research project "CoRe" was elaborated in collaboration with Peter Schweitzer and other colleagues from the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Vienna, and the current PhD project was crystalized as well. Although I did not have to introduce myself to the study region anew, my geographic and thematic scopes expanded, and my theoretical and methodological approaches were significantly reconsidered. With the change of the topic, the scope of my research attention also expanded to include not only indigenous groups but also Soviet migrants—the group of "BAM builders" (*bamovtsy*).

Respectively, my field sites came to include "my" old and some new indigenous Evenki communities (Kholodnoe, Chapo-Ologo, Pervomaiskoe, Ust'-Niukhzha) as well as towns and settlements along the railroad founded during the construction period and populated primarily by *bamovtsy* (Severobaikal'sk, Novaia Chara, Tynda, Yuktali). These northern settlements administratively belong to three federal subjects—the Republic of Buriatia, Zabaikal'skii Krai,

and Amurskaia Oblast' (see Figure 1). While I refer to some of my previous fieldwork materials, the main body of data for this dissertation was gathered during fieldwork for the CoRe project in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. My rich background knowledge of the region, pre-established social networks, and previous research experience in four of the eight studied communities have proven to be valuable assets in conducting ethnographic research in multiple communities within this big region. While to certain degree I still faced the dilemmas of a double-bound anthropologist mentioned above, I remained reflexive about my positionality as a fieldworker and writer. Equality critical for me was the choice of field sites—diverse in terms of their origin, present population, and built and social environments, but assembled into a coherent multi-sited ethnographic field by the infrastructure of the BAM.

Figure 1. Location map showing field sites (cartography: by Alexis Sancho-Reinoso).

3.1.1. Ethnographic Fieldwork

In my research, I used an array of data collection and interpretation methods. Ethnographic fieldwork (Madden 2010; Fontein 2014) has been the building block of my empirically driven research and the primary method used for collection and generation of data. It incorporated classical anthropological tools such as participant observation and fieldnotes, in-depth biographical interviews, expert interviews, and focus groups (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2002;

Bernard 1994). Fieldwork, which is defined as "a comprehensive immersion" (Amit 2000) or even as "deep hanging out" (Fontein 2014), is in fact a family of methods involving direct and sustained social contact with people (ibid.: 58–59). In my fieldwork, social dimensions of infrastructure have played a paramount role. My concept of the BAM project implies the people standing behind its construction and reconstruction who are entangled with its material and other structures in multiple ways (Povoroznyuk 2019; Povoroznyuk 2020).

While planning my fieldwork in advance, I remained open to new, unexpected situations and opportunities of data collection that required a certain degree of methodological flexibility (Rivoal and Salazar 2013). For example, my fieldwork included a few spontaneously gathered focus groups. When I started an interview with one or two research participants in a public place—in a local administration building, a museum, or a cultural center—others got involved in the conversation, and a biographical interview grew into a group discussion. In most cases, *bamovtsy* most eagerly joined conversations about the BAM construction period and the current role of the railroad and life in the region. On a few occasions, community gatherings and my project presentations in indigenous villages grew into focus group discussions about the past and present impacts of the BAM and expectations from BAM-2.

Mobile ethnography as an ethnographic practice (and, to some extent, as a theoretical approach) has played a prominent role in my field research. The recent rise of mobile ethnography has been linked with the introduction of the "new mobilities paradigm" in social sciences (Sheller and Urry 2006; Novoa 2015). However, in anthropology, mobile ethnography has a long tradition rooted in studies of (semi)nomadic peoples, as well as being on the move simply as a way of doing ethnography. While direct participation in analyzing mobile practices is nothing new in anthropological research, what emerges as innovative is methodological and theoretical preoccupation with mobility as a phenomenon (Salazar et al. 2017: 14). Three decades ago, Appadurai (1986) "followed the thing" as a method to study commodity chains and the social life of material objects. More recently, Latour (2005) used a similar approach to study movements and interactions of humans and non-humans. In between, Marcus (1995) introduced his multi-sited ethnography as "following people, things, ideas, metaphors and biographies" in an attempt to grasp an increasingly mobile world.

In practice, mobile ethnography means observing, interviewing, and recording while being on the move with others (walking, nomadizing, and travelling with different means of transport) and is, in fact, "a translation of traditional participant observation onto contexts of mobility" (Novoa 2015: 99). As a mobile form of participant observation, it enables questions about sensory experience, embodiment, emplacement, perceptions of space, environment, and

assemblies of material objects, people, ideas, and information (ibid.: 100). I used the tools of mobile or multi-sited ethnography to follow the people as well as their biographies, ideologies, and identities, travelling by train along the BAM. On the one hand, the limited space of the train created special conditions for deep immersion and more intimate co-presence with others than in "normal" life. On the other hand, alternating taiga landscapes outside the train window, the rhythmical sounds of railcar wheels, and the whole materiality of the rails and the train inspired conversations about the infrastructure object that was enabling the travel—the BAM railroad itself. Such mobile ethnography (which I also call "train anthropology") allowed focused and fruitful participant observation on the move. While most of it was unstructured, I could observe and record what people were doing on the train (Russel et al. 2011) in order to make some general conclusions about how people act and interact with each other on trains. But most importantly, such ethnography on the move yielded a few eye-opening encounters and detailed in-depth interviews with residents of the BAM region.

My ethnographic fieldwork in local communities was based on participant observation *in situ*. It included such basic steps as establishing rapport within a new community, learning to act so that people would feel comfortable in my presence as an anthropologist, and removing myself from cultural immersion in order to intellectualize what had been learned (Bernard 1994: 137). Focus on one of the two components of the method—participation or observation—marks the degree of the researcher's involvement in an event or a scene, his stance (experiential vs. analytical), and depends on circumstances. As a fundamental ethnographic method, participant observation facilitates collection of a variety of field data—from archival records, to interviews, to statistical and visual data.

Moreover, participant observation includes not only gaining access to and immersing oneself in new social worlds, but also producing written accounts or descriptions of them (Emerson et al. 2002: 352). Anthropological field notes should be seen as primary written accounts of observed cultures and a particular kind of field data generated in the course of participant observation. They represent transformations of field experiences and observations of a researcher into a form of ethnographic writing. Whatever strategy or genre the researcher chooses for writing his fieldnotes, their value as a memory device and an initial ethnographic text is clear (ibid.: 362).

Participant observation in the studied communities along the BAM allowed me to gain access to new field sites and strengthen my social networks in the places where I had previously worked. It was crucial for establishing trustful relations with informants regardless of their culture, ethnicity, or age. However, it was even more important for establishing rapport in

indigenous Evenki communities that had been negatively affected by colonial encounters triggered by the BAM. Organization and participation in community gatherings, cultural events, and celebrations, mutual visits involving joint meals and tea drinking, as well as my good background knowledge of the region, facilitated informal communication, in-depth interviews and focus groups not only with Evenki but also with BAM builders. The fieldnotes that I produced in the aftermath of participant observation in the field have been extremely useful for reconstructing the course of events, interactions, and conversations with my interlocutors. While they were not the major ethnographic data of my PhD project, they complemented other data (e.g., interviews and focus groups) and were instrumental in writing my ethnography of the infrastructure of the BAM.

Interviewing is the most widely used and informative method of data collection in social anthropology. Similar to participant observation, efficient interviews require from the anthropologist time to gain rapport with the interviewee or the informant, as well as consideration of ethical principles and, finally, skills and knowledge of interview techniques and technologies (Bernard 1994: 208–209). The step following the introduction of the anthropologist into the studied community is the selection of interview informants. While some anthropologists use sampling to ensure the resulting data is representative, the majority of them practice the snowball technique to find their interlocutors. I used community gatherings in order to both introduce myself when entering a new town or a village and to identify key informants (gatekeepers). In the course of the fieldwork, I also used primarily the snowball technique for finding new interlocutors through the existing social networks of relatives, friends, and informants.

There are several types of interviews, depending on the degree of control by the interviewer over the conversation, usage of an interview questionnaire, and the (in)formality of the interview situation (ibid.: 209–210). For example, informal interview or communication is characterized by the complete lack of structure or control over the interview process and is useful for beginning a conversation or establishing contact for a more focused follow-up interview. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews, to different degrees, follow an interview guide or a questionnaire and are most widely used for interviewing people in situations that require efficient use of time. Finally, structured interviews can be similar to surveys, where short questions and concise answers are expected (ibid.: 237). While unstructured and semi-structured interviews are more appropriate for longer in-depth or biographical interviews in rather informal settings, more structured interviews are best suited for experts and are usually conducted in more formalized environments.

One important genre of interviewing is the biographical or a life history interview. It is widely used by historians as a method and a source for oral history and historiography, and it tends to be treated by them as complementary to traditional archival research (Skinner 2012: 14). For historians, biographical interviews are usually dyadic encounters and a mode of data collection (often for archival projects), whereas for anthropologists who are relying on a combination of narrative and behavioral evidence they are ethnographic encounters (Di Leonardo 1987: 3–4). Successful anthropological research combines life history interviews implying intensive work with select individuals with other forms of interviewing and knowledge of the wider ethnographic context. In individual interviews, and especially in life history interviews, the anthropologist should consider the relationship between culture and personality, and between personal/unique and cultural typical/normative dimensions. Similar to other narratives, individual biographical interviews require critical reflections on the informant's background as well as on the researcher's positionality and the power differentials between them (Mintz 1979).

During my fieldwork, informal communication was an integral part of participant observation and, in many cases, served as an opener leading to interviews on the topics of my research. Unstructured and semi-structured life histories or other in-depth individual interviews with local residents (indigenous people and *bamovtsy*) constitute the main body of my collected ethnographic data. Structured and semi-structured interviews with experts—specialists from local administrations and railroad organizations, experts in local history and culture—are yet another type of individual interviews. I used one unified questionnaire for individual unstructured or semi-structured interviews that was adjusted to the cultural and social background of an informant. Questions included in expert interviews varied depending on the field of expertise and the institutional background of the informant.

Focus groups are another method of qualitative data collection used primarily in research on media, marketing, and public health (Bernard 1994; Barbour 2014). They represent more a more efficient means of collecting the views of individuals than other qualitative methods. As they are usually researcher-convened groups, and they require some preparatory work, such as pre-selecting informants (usually by demographic criteria), reserving a suitable location, and compiling a short guide to focus the discussion around one or a few issues. While conducting and analyzing focus groups, a researcher should keep in mind that they are sites of self-representation and performativity where both verbal and non-verbal communication matters, and they can be used for testing relations and the co-construction of narratives within a studied

community (Barbour 2014: 316–319). In social anthropology, focus groups are another type of group interview that are gathered and moderated by one or more researchers.

In my fieldwork, I did not initially plan to prepare and conduct focus groups; however, in several of my field sites they were organized in cooperation with local public organizations, administrations, and community leaders to discuss the past and present of the BAM. For example, one such focus group consisting of middle-age *bamovtsy* was organized on short notice by the head of the cultural center in Novaia Chara. On another occasion, a focus group of *bamovtsy* gathered in Severobaikal'sk in the local railroad museum. Focus groups with Evenki people that included middle-aged residents who witnessed the BAM construction were convened with the help of the heads of local administrations in the indigenous villages of Pervomaiskoe and Ust'-Niukzha. In each case, I thoroughly introduced myself and my main research questions, as well as explaining the use of the data, before the start of the discussion. Then discussion topics and attendance lists were circulated among the groups to register the participants. Focus groups proved to be an efficient method helping to reconstruct collective memories, identities, and emotions associated with the Soviet BAM and to gather opinions on the current modernization program BAM-2 (Povoroznyuk 2019).

The overwhelming majority of my interviews and focus groups were recorded with a voice recorder, while a few were sketched out in the form of notes. The recordings then were transcribed with the help of special software.

3.1.2. Work with Archival Records and Policy Documents

Contemporary anthropologists and philosophers often see archives as expressions of hegemonic ways of thought and modes of colonization and control over citizens (Zeitlyn 2012). Yet by reading along and across the archival grain, researchers can follow the development of ideas and processes across historical periods and recover the history of subaltern groups. From the point of view of historians, archives are a liminal zone between memory and forgetting as well as a repository for the intersecting personal and collective memories of social groups (ibid.: 465). The most widespread type are administrative archives that represent long-term repositories of documents produced by governments and other institutions in their everyday operations. However, there are also other systematized archives belonging to researchers, travelers, and missionaries. Classical paper archives have recently been competing with digital archives, repositories that grant access to wider audiences but are harder to maintain and to control from a logistical as well as an ethical point of view. The historical part of my field research included work with archival records dating back to the Soviet period of the BAM

construction in the 1970s and 1980s. I worked in the administrative archives of Tyndinskii and Severobaikal'skii districts, as well as in the archives of the Museum of the BAM construction in Tynda and the Museum of the Exploration of Southern Yakutia in Neriungri, examining the official records, documents, and photographs of local municipalities, construction organizations, and collective farms (*kolkhozy*) that were involved in the BAM project. I also worked with personal archives, including collections of photographs, ephemera (e.g., designated medals and orders), and documents (honorary certificates and letters) of individual families who participated in the railroad construction. Archival records complemented the biographical data and interviews with the BAM builders, on the one hand, and on the other hand helped me to reconstruct a more nuanced and critical history of indigenous subalterns: Evenki communities and individuals who carried the costs of industrialization.

In addition to archival records, I worked with official information and documents provided by local and regional administrations. While working with documents, one should keep in mind that they are "social facts" that construct particular types of representations of reality (Coffey 2014: 369). Thus, it is important to understand the purposes and audiences for which particular types of documents are produced. The most typical types of documents that I worked with were so-called "district passports" and "investment passports." They typically contain general information, historical background, population numbers, socio-economic indicators, and cultural diversity data of administrative districts and their local communities. They are aimed at general audiences as well as potential investors in new projects in the spheres of resource extraction, infrastructural development, tourism, and culture. Such documents were usually helpful in obtaining an overview of the socio-economic situation in the studied areas and were critically analyzed as additional sources of information.

Finally, materials of select national and regional newspapers that have been publishing about the BAM since the beginning of its construction in the 1970s represented one more source of data. Collection of newspaper materials involved onsite library work (especially with issues dating from the Soviet period), as well as additional online follow-up in the case of the newspapers that have been recently digitalized. For example, the national railroad industry newspaper *Gudok* has been an important source of information on the history of the BAM and its railroad builders and workers. Regional newspapers focusing on the BAM included *Industriia Severa*, *Severnaia Pravda*, and *BAM*, and were published in the railroad cities of Neriungri, Novaia Chara, and Tynda. They provided information on the social life of these cities as well as their railroad organizations and extractive industries. While studying state

development policies and modernization programs, I analyzed policy documents and information gathered in local administrations and offices of the Russian Railroad Company.

The collected ethnographic materials and qualitative data were further complemented by population data from district and regional statistical bureaus. Finally, throughout my fieldwork I practiced photography, and the obtained photographs of infrastructure objects, landscapes, and people have been used in my articles, primarily for illustrative purposes.

3.2.   Methods of Data Analysis

The collected ethnographic data, including transcripts of interviews and focus groups, official documents, and mass media materials, were analyzed using the method of qualitative content analysis (Schreier 2014). While the method itself has multiple definitions and applications (ibid.: 172), most of them highlight that it emphasizes an integrated view of interviews, speeches, and texts and their specific contexts. In contrast to quantitative data analysis, content analysis is mainly inductive, grounding the examination of topics and themes, as well as the inferences drawn from them, in the data (Zhang and Wildemuth 2005). Thus, I followed the main steps of qualitative data analysis: units of analysis (texts of transcribed interviews and newspaper articles) were identified and a system of codes was developed, tested, and applied to the interviews and selected texts. The coding process aimed at capturing continuity and change in the memory narratives and present-day discourses about the BAM and its peoples at national and regional levels. The codes covered such themes and subthemes as social dynamics, identities, and intergroup relations; railroad (re)construction (everyday work, construction milestones and anniversaries, launch of reconstruction); indigeneity, remoteness, and modernization; material, social, and affective dimensions of railroad infrastructure; socialist legacies and postsocialist transformations, etc. I applied these basic codes for the analysis of the texts both on paper and in MaxQDA, a software package for qualitative data analysis.

Comparison based on ethnographic description was another analytical tool used in my work. Holy (1987) notes that comparison can be analytically linked either to description or to generalization, and that the "comparative method" that was characteristic of positivistic anthropology has been replaced by varying styles of comparison. While the distinction between anthropology as a generalizing science and ethnography as a mere description of a particular society or culture has become blurred, the disagreement about a useful scale of comparison in social anthropology has remained (ibid.: 3). With the move to the new interpretative paradigm, the emphasis in anthropological discussions shifted from problems of generalization to problems of description. In a similar vein, Niewöhner and Scheffer (2010) argue for "thickening

comparison" as the most productive method of ethnographic inquiry. They claim that comparability is not a natural starting point, but is a result of the ethnographic analysis depending on the research problematic and writing strategies. Similar to Geertz's thick description (1973), "thick comparison" takes seriously ethnographic fields and objects as being produced through "thickening" contextualizations: analytical and cross-contextual framings meant to facilitate comparison (ibid.: 4). In my work, "thickening" description based on observation (DeSilvey 2006) was important for understanding the materiality of infrastructure with its cycles of ruination and reconstruction throughout different time periods. Narrated memories and archival documents about the BAM construction period, on the one hand, brought into dialogue with observation of and discussions about the railroad reconstruction program BAM-2, on the other hand, yielded a rich comparative ethnography of the railroad.

Gingrich (2012) lays out the array of comparative methods or varying types of comparison that are currently widespread in social anthropology. For example, self-reflexive binary comparison is a device of cultural critique that brings together two contrasting cases in order to reassess a seemingly familiar setting. Regional and distant comparison, on the other hand, are tools facilitating the relevance of a particular ethnographic case to broader regional and theoretical contexts. Shifting time/space comparison is the most complex comparative method helping to identify and tackle the most diverse cases though setting a common thematic frame of global relevance that is addressed with ethnographic detail on the local level (ibid.: 211–212). In that sense, anthropological comparison fully recognizes the priority of ethnographic fieldwork and engages with questions about the uniqueness of a particular case while, at the same time, representing more general or even universal phenomena (ibid.: 214). Thus, research pursuing anthropological comparison should be careful about the choice and discreteness of compared units, as well as the criteria and scale of comparison.

In my research, I have been using both spatial and temporal comparison. The units of my regional comparison were selected with consideration for some structural–infrastructural, demographic, social, and cultural similarities. They included two types of communities: 1) indigenous and mixed villages located close to the BAM and affected by its construction; and 2) railroad towns and settlements that came into being during the construction process. The temporal comparison between the late Soviet BAM project and its recent reconstruction program BAM-2 was critical for my research design. It facilitated a deeper understanding of temporality of the railroad infrastructure, including the built and social environments that it has been shaping, seen through the lens of postsocialist transformations in the region and in the country at large. Finally, so-called distant comparison has been important for two purposes: 1)

for inscribing the case of the BAM into a broader geographical context extending beyond Russia and the postsocialist space; and 2) for contextualizing research findings within larger theoretical fields in social anthropology.

Time/space comparison is the most challenging method that traces phenomena across various periods and sites, and it is constructivist by nature. Conceptually and epistemologically, it is inspired by and closely related to multi-sited ethnography, which "takes unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity" and "investigates and ethnographically constructs life-worlds of variously situated subjects" (Marcus 1995: 96). Born in response to postmodernist empirical and epistemological challenges, it addresses the emerging global dimension while arguing about the connection between sites, even if those seem to be worlds apart. Multi-sited ethnography suggests several modes of construction designed abound chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes his or her presence (ibid.: 105). These threads can follow the people; the metaphor; the plot, story or allegory; the life of biography; the conflict, etc. While testing the limits of ethnography, the application of the multi-sited method reorganizes the power of fieldwork and undermines colonial paradigms. In my ethnography of the BAM, I followed the railroad infrastructure, its people's life stories, and, in some cases, their train rides. Thus, my fieldwork was multi-sited in the sense of different time periods (the late socialist past and the present) as well as the life-trajectories of the people who arrived in the region to build the railroad, or who relocated, voluntarily or forcefully, because of its construction, and who remain mobile, moving in, out, and between communities because of the railroad as a transport infrastructure, an employer, and a powerful agent of social transformations.

Shifting between different scales of attention (Hastrup 2012) was crucial for my ethnographic work on both methodological and epistemological levels. Hastrup (ibid.) addresses the question of scaling through conversations, connections, and concerns that surface in the field but greatly transcend the local. She argues for scaling in and out of the field by "bending" and "stretching" the anthropologist's attention in order to meet the contemporary challenges of mutable fieldwork practice and to produce a complex and vibrant ethnographic description that cannot remain local in any conventional sense (ibid.: 47). While shifting the scales and establishing connections between local concerns and global issues, anthropologists construct their field as a site, method, and location (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). In order to analyze my ethnographic data and to fully address the complexity of my field, I shifted attention between three different scales. *The macro-level* was important for understanding transnational

factors driving the regional development and interconnections between global and national discourses and ideologies of modernization in the BAM region. *At the meso-level,* I traced social dynamics boosted by the railroad's construction, functioning, and reconstruction, focusing on collective identities, memories, and emotions of indigenous people and Soviet migrants in the changing national political and socio-economic context. *At the micro-level*, I followed individual life stories and the current material and affective entanglements of local residents with the railroad infrastructure.

3.3. Chosen Research Approaches

Approaches from the field of Soviet and postsocialist studies were important for understanding the temporality of the BAM infrastructure and the dynamics of social change in the region. In analyzing the parallel developing processes of Soviet industrialization and nation building, I used the concepts of *hypermodernism* (Scott 1998) and *internal colonization* (Koktin 1997). While doing so, I focused on the phenomenon of so-called projects of the century (Josephson 1995)*,* a series of socialist infrastructural megaprojects (Payne 2001; Graham 1996) that expanded populations and shaped new communities and identities at the country's frontiers (Stolberg 2005; Thompson 2008; Bolotova and Stammler 2010). I also referred to the concept of *affirmative action empire* (Martin 2001), explaining the principles of Soviet nation-building politics to explore the origins of socialist ethnic categories and identities and intergroup relations described in historical accounts of the BAM (Ward 2009; Grützmacher 2012; Röhr 2016).

In my analysis of post-Soviet socio-economic change, following Burawoy and Verdery (1999) I am using the concept of *postsocialist transformations* as opposed to *transitions*, which has more teleological connotations and suggests a unilinear process suspended between the past and the present. The concept of *transformations* implies the plurality of socialism and the diverse trajectories of experiences of postsocialism, and it challenges social science categories that have been inspired by presumed western political, economic, and technological superiority (Berdahl 2000: 2–3). In my ethnographically grounded research of local communities along the BAM, I identify important material, social, and ideological continuities between socialist and postsocialist periods. Here, the notion of *path dependency* is helpful for explaining "why memories, knowledge and networks from the past are reconfigured in the present to serve…in situated social practices in new conditions" (Kalb 2002: 323). In my work, I extend the notions of postsocialist *path dependency* and *continuity* (also used in the plural) to material and non-

material aspects of BAM infrastructure. I show that the short period of political and ideological shifts and the articulation of indigenous identities in the 1990s was followed by a more recent reinstatement of refurbished socialist development plans, ideologies, memories, emotions, and identities under neoliberal economic conditions. Finally, I use the notion of *post-Soviet modernity* to examine the co-existing socialist and postsocialist/neoliberal modernities in the context of infrastructure (Collier 2011; Ssorin-Chaikov 2017).

The most productive and innovative theoretical approaches that I have applied in my work originate from the rather recent but dynamically expanding field of *the anthropology of infrastructure*. I am following Larkin's definition of infrastructures as "things, but also the relation between things" (2013: 329) and his attention to the *politics* (the political and the social) and the *poetics* (the ideological, the aesthetic, and other intangible aspects) of infrastructure. The focus on the *materiality* of infrastructures—that is, on its condition and its physical entanglements with human and non-human actors—is instrumental for understanding their *politics* and *temporality.* Functioning, decaying, or failing roads and railroads, water pipes and heating systems and other infrastructures are useful sites for exploring the relationship between states and their citizens (Harvey and Knox 2015; Anand 2015; von Schnitzler 2013). Thus, failing communal infrastructures in post-Soviet Siberia undermined trust in the state (Humphrey 2003) while also restricting neoliberal reforms through their material design (Collier 2011). My attention to the "Soviet debris" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016), that is, the socialist infrastructural legacy, during the construction, ruination, and subsequent reconstruction of the BAM has helped me to explore the relationship of indigenous and migrant groups in East Siberia with the state in the past, at present, and in the imagined future of the railroad and communities along its way. Finally, I have used the notions of the *enchantments of infrastructure* (Harvey and Knox 2012) and *the promise of infrastructure* (Anand et al. 2018) to address ideological, emotional, affective dimensions of the BAM as an infrastructure project that has deeply involved individual and collective memories and expectations. I show that the technological progress and socio-economic development promised with the arrival of the railroad enchanted at least some population groups and evokes certain expectations among others. To capture the current entanglement of local residents, especially *bamovtsy,* with the railroad, I have used the concept of *postsocialist affect* (Schwenkel 2013), which has helped me to reflect upon the changing materiality (reconstruction) of infrastructure as an emotionally evocative and at the same time politically loaded and historically embedded process.

Additionally, I have applied a few other concepts aimed to bridge my discussions in the fields of the postsocialist studies and the anthropology of infrastructure. The concepts of

identity, memory, and emotions have been important for my interpretations of postsocialist transformations as well as non-material aspects of infrastructure. Following anthropological literature, I have used the notion of *identity politics* to explore the construction and articulation of indigenous and local identities (e.g., Donahoe et al. 2008; Li 2000; Sokolovskii 2012). While doing so, I paid particular attention to the role of collective memories and emotions in shaping the identities of social groups (Kontopodis and Matera 2010). I operated with Connerton's notions of *remembering* and *acting out* as two ways of bringing past events into the present (2009: 26). The concept of *emotional remembering* (White 1999) was especially relevant for the interpretation of the narratives of *bamovtsy* about the railroad construction period. Another interesting concept, the *affective management of history* introduced by Oushakine (2013), highlighted the role of performative aspects of historical memory while also pointing out the manipulative role of media in emotional (re)construction of the past in line with the national ideologies. This historically driven approach has been useful for my analysis of the role of mass media and public discourses at the launch of the BAM-2 reconstruction program and the enchantment of the public with the new infrastructure promise. Finally, the concept of *the politics of emotions* (Svašek 2006) has been instrumental for inscribing my Russian case study into the broader geographical context of Eastern Europe, where rapid postsocialist transformations and new political campaigns provoked a wider range of emotional reactions. My ambition, however, was to analyze the *postsocialist politics of identity and emotion* in the BAM Region through the infrastructural lens, that is, to see how collective Soviet-era emotions and memories are inscribed in the material and ideological structures of the railroad.

Transformative infrastructure is the central concept that I have introduced in relation to the BAM. While I have been writing extensively about the railroad as an agent of social change in the articles included in this dissertation project, I apply this term in this introduction for the first time in order to conceptualize the profound transformations, both creative and destructive, caused by this large-scale infrastructure. Recently, the term has been used in some social science publications in reference to a more sustainable infrastructural development considering environmental concerns (de Graaf-van Dinther et al. 2021; Jain and Rohracher 2022) and, to some degree, pressing social issues such as human health (Haigh et al. 2020). While my anthropological research doesn't downplay the environmental impacts of the BAM, it focuses rather on the social dimensions of infrastructure. Moreover, in my application of the concept I refer to the social transformations launched by the Soviet modernization program and more recently by post-Soviet socio-economic reforms and political and ideological shifts, rather than to a transition towards sustainable economic development.

3.4. Notes on Research Ethics

While there were and are no official regulations or required permissions for conducting anthropological research in Russia, I adhered to the highest ethical standards, following the guidelines for ethical research and data governance of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (n.d.). My fieldwork was carried out in close collaboration with local communities and based on respect for human and cultural rights and the prior informed consent of research participants (Schensul et al. 1999). Each of my interviews was preceded by sharing information about the project and use of data. Conversations were recorded only with the permission of the interviewee. The research materials were analyzed and treated with consideration for personal data protection.

4. The Central Research Findings and Presentation of the Publications

My Ph.D. thesis consists of five peer-reviewed publications: one book chapter and four journal articles. Each of the publications focuses on one theme and/or one group—indigenous or non-indigenous residents—and addresses the main research questions formulated above. These five pieces represent only selected portions of the research I have published in English in recent years on the topic of my dissertation. More publications based on my research on the issues of social dynamics and identity politics within the CoRe project have been published or are forthcoming. While I decided not to include them in this dissertation, I am referring to some of them in the course of this introduction. The selected publications are presented chronologically. The first publication (a book chapter) introduces local communities, population groups, and identities. The second and fifth articles published in peer-reviewed social science journals, focus on Soviet labor migrants (*bamovtsy*) and eventually on the mixed local population. The third and fourth articles in an established peer-reviewed social anthropology journal, focus on indigenous Evenki residents living along the BAM. The last article tackles the central research question: continuity and change between the Soviet-era BAM construction project and the post-Soviet reconstruction program BAM-2, as seen through the materiality of the railroad infrastructure. In what follows, I briefly introduce these five publications and elaborate on research findings highlighted in each of them.

Publication 1. Povoroznyuk, Olga. 2017. "Social Dynamics and Sustainability of BAM Communities: Migration, Competition for Resources, and Intergroup Relations." In *New Mobilities and Social Changes in Russia's Arctic Regions,* edited by M. Laruelle, 133–157. New York: Routledge.

In the first publication, I focus on the social environment, composition, and dynamics of population to explore how the local communities along the BAM were formed during the railroad construction process in East Siberia and the Russian Far East. In my analysis, I distinguish two main population groups formed according to principles of socio–professional and ethnic belonging and self–identification. The first group consists of indigenous people (*aborigeny, korennye zhiteli*), which includes primarily Evenki, but also other ethnic minorities who were living in the region long before the arrival of the BAM. The Soviet and later the Russian state included them into a special group of so-called "indigenous (numerically) small peoples of the North," characterized by a number of particularities. The second group, the so-called "BAM builders" (*bamovtsy*), were initially Soviet labor migrants who were directly or indirectly involved in the railroad construction project. BAM towns (*bamovskie poselki*), established in proximity to the existing indigenous and mixed communities as temporary settlements, grew into permanent small and medium-scale railroad towns. Erected by *Komsomol* construction brigades that were delegated from a variety of Soviet republics or cities, railroad stations and settlements were meant to represent the ethnic and cultural roots of their builders through artistic elements, architectural forms, and street names. Thus, the principles of Soviet nationality politics became engrained into the infrastructural design and urban planning of the BAM settlements.

With time, as I show, the socio-professional identity of *bamovtsy* that was shaped by the Soviet identity construction project transformed into a territorial identity. This population category has grown to include all Soviet migrants and their second and third generation descendants, "the children of the BAM" (*deti BAMa*), and more recently, permanent residents of the BAM region. A third identity of "newcomers" (*priezzhie*), in contrast to indigenous people and *bamovtsy*, is an ascribed one, constructed in the course of local identity politics. This label, which was earlier used by the indigenous population in relation to BAM builders, more recently has been applied by both groups to recent migrants or temporary residents (e.g., industrial shift workers). Belonging to local communities and privileged population groups is contested in the context of access to natural and economic resources and continuously shrinking social services and job opportunities in these single-industry BAM settlements. However, such identity politics, drawing group borders along ethnic, social, professional, and territorial lines,

is exercised primarily at the ideological and discursive levels. With this observation, I am arguing that social capital accumulated in the Soviet period and patterns of relations between the different groups established during the BAM construction can be a source of social sustainability in the overall context of the current socio-economic decline and resource curse.

Publication 2. Povoroznyuk, Olga. 2019. "The Baikal–Amur Mainline: Memories and Emotions of a Socialist Construction Project." *Sibirica* 18 (1): 22–52. DOI: 10.3167/sib.2019.180103

The second publication included in this dissertation is devoted to the analysis of the role of memories and emotions in co-constructing the identities of *bamovtsy* and the infrastructure of the BAM. I start the article with a historical overview of the BAM construction process that attracted migrants from across the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. Further, I analyze the ideological, material, and other factors that shaped the multicultural group of BAM builders (*bamovtsy*) who currently constitute the majority population in the study region. Drawing on individual in-depth interviews and focus groups with *bamovtsy* in the BAM towns, I show how emotionally charged memories of the socialist BAM project have been important in the reproduction of *bamovtsy* identity in the postsocialist period. Here, I introduce the notion of the *politics of identity and emotion* that combines the concepts of identity politics and politics of emotion (Svašek 2006; Ahmed 2014). This notion is instrumental for understanding how affective memories of socialist projects like the BAM can support Soviet-era identities and how such identities then can be recycled in media and public discourses for political purposes.

I propose that *bamovtsy* co-emerged together with the BAM project and are, as such, a product of the late socialist period (Yurchak 2007). Both nation-building ideologies and place-making practices at construction sites and places of residence consolidated the *bamovtsy* as a social group in the past. Currently, *bamovtsy* are a heterogeneous group including different generations, occupations, and places of residence along the BAM. Not surprisingly, their transforming identity is being contested. Postsocialist reevaluation of the BAM projects and reconfigurations of the materiality of infrastructure (its decline in the 1990s and more recent national reconstruction) have impacted *bamovtsy* identity. I also demonstrate how the dynamics of individual and collective remembering forms a vibrant discursive and emotional field, in which socialist memories and identities are narrated and re-lived. Remarkably, both types of memories, and especially collective narratives, tend to idealize the Soviet period, valorize the labor of *bamovtsy*, romanticize their lives and achievements in the hostile natural environment, and emphasize social cohesion over differentiation in the period of railroad construction.

Next, I proceed with exploring of how sense is made of the post-Soviet BAM. I point out that the official end of the construction process, followed by the abrupt postsocialist changes of the 1990s, resulted in a bundle of parallel processes, such as socio-economic crisis, population flight from the North, and infrastructural de-modernization of the BAM. The BAM project was for the first time severely criticized, and *bamovtsy* were relegated from socialist heroes to an invisible group abandoned by the state to live in unfinished or temporary housing. Memories of this decade are filled with the emotions of disillusion, offense, and nostalgia that are articulated through infrastructural decline as a symbol of the failed promises of state modernization. Affective commemorations of the BAM in the last decade, however, have referred to the late socialist "golden age" of the railroad. I show how the fortieth anniversary of the BAM construction was symbolically synchronized with the launch of the reconstruction program BAM-2, in 2014. Both events became platforms for public remembering and media campaigns that actively and affectively used Soviet symbols, rituals, and rhetoric (also see Oushakine 2013). I conclude that this form of postsocialist politics of identity and emotion, embodied in the symbolic, ideological, and material infrastructure of the BAM, aims at rebuilding the loyalty of Russian citizens to the state in times of socio-economic decline.

Publication 3. Schweitzer, Peter and Olga Povoroznyuk. 2019. "A Right to Remoteness? A Missing Bridge and Articulations of Indigeneity along an East Siberian Railroad." *Social Anthropology* 27 (2): 236–252. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12648

The third of the selected publications, written in co-authorship with Peter Schweitzer, is based on my field research in an indigenous Evenki community located in the relative vicinity of the BAM but disconnected from its infrastructure by a river. The article focuses on the story of the missing bridge as a symbol of remoteness, circulating in different local narratives. According to this undocumented story, in the heyday of the BAM construction in the 1990s, the community refused to allow a bridge over the river that would have connected it to the next railroad town. This decision, often justified with pragmatic reasons (to restrict the circulation of unwelcome substances, to limit the access of newcomers to natural resources like berries, mushrooms, game animals, and eventually to lands), is currently interpreted as having significant cultural impacts on the indigenous people. While analyzing this rather unique case of an indigenous community along the BAM, we were exploring the constellation of remoteness, indigeneity, and infrastructure, asking whether there might be a moral right to remoteness. In this article, we treat remoteness not as a primordial characteristic of a place, but as a relative and relational socio-spatial concept open to reconfigurations (Hussain 2015). In a

similar vein, we interpret indigeneity not as a fixed quality of identity, but as a process of "positioning" and "articulation" of indigenous identities (Li 2000), in our case in relation to infrastructure.

In the historical background, we point out that grand socialist infrastructure projects like the BAM have been a materialization of the Soviet modernization paradigm aimed at "overcoming remoteness" and "bringing civilization" to "backward" indigenous populations of remote areas (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016). The arrival of the BAM has dramatically affected indigenous communities and reconfigured the geographic and social spaces of East Siberia. While nomadic reindeer herders and hunters suffered the loss or degradation of traditional lands, indigenous villages were exposed to intense cultural contact with incoming migrants and uneven exchange between construction organizations and indigenous collective farms (*kolkhozy*). The cultural, social, and economic boundaries between *aborigeny* and *bamovtsy* were built on ethnic hierarchies and stereotypes, as well as inequalities in social prestige and remuneration of *kolkhoz* employees versus railroad construction workers.

The ideological and political shifts of *perestroika* and the early postsocialist period, characterized by overall socio-economic and infrastructural collapse, provided more public space for articulations of indigeneity and self-determination of ethnic minorities (Pika 1999). Public criticism of the BAM project not only pointed to its high construction costs and low profitability, but also raised the issues of environmental degradation and cultural assimilation of indigenous people. Russia's indigenous movement formulated counter-discourses and alternative visions to the mainstream concepts of modernization that linked remoteness with indigenous land rights and cultural revitalization. In the changing political climate of the 2000s, the state *de facto* recalled legal provisions regulating territorial claims, pushing indigenous rights back into the cultural sphere. In the article we claim that political, legal, and cultural shifts have been impacting articulations of indigeneity in the Russian North.

Living without a bridge in an indigenous village today has its own advantages and disadvantages. The initial rationale—restricted access for outsiders—continues to be seen as a positive side of disconnection from the BAM, and is believed to be an explanation for the high levels of ethnic language retention and nomadism in the community. At the same time, the lack of a reliable all-season infrastructural link to places of work, as well as to healthcare, banking, cultural, and other services available in the neighboring railroad town, seem to be negatively impacting quality of life in the village. Yet, assessments of this (relative) remoteness of the community vary. Being perceived primarily positively from within the village, it is typically criticized by the residents of the railroad town on the opposite riverbank. While some non-

indigenous actors still see remoteness as a drawback and a sign of backwardness, indigenous leaders, activists, and local residents tend to interpret it as a favorable condition.

This article concludes with the finding that remoteness, symbolized by a missing infrastructural link, can become a cultural resource. Focusing on discourses linking remoteness and cultural revitalization, we conceptualize the story of the bridge not as the result of political resistance but rather as an articulation of indigeneity, which foregrounds cultural rights.

Publication 4. Povoroznyuk, Olga. 2021. "Ambiguous Entanglements: Infrastructure, Memory and Identity in Indigenous Evenki Communities along the Baikal–Amur Mainline." *Social Anthropology* 29 (4): 1064-1080. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.13032

In the fourth publication, I further elaborate on the topics of indigeneity, memory, and infrastructure along the BAM. Drawing on a broader set of ethnographic data collected in three indigenous Evenki villages along the railroad, I argue about the ambiguous entanglements of indigenous residents with the BAM. While it boosted socio-economic development and mobility for some groups, it triggered social and cultural change and immobility for others. While some Evenki consider the BAM an achievement of Soviet development, others remember mostly its negative impacts and losses they had to suffer. In this article, exploring ambiguous perceptions of indigenous residents of the BAM, I focus on factors that have shaped indigenous memories of the BAM construction processes, as well as on how different entanglements with the infrastructure inform multiple identities of Evenki people at present.

In order to address my research questions, I bring together literature on infrastructure (Anand et al. 2018; Hetherington 2016) and megaprojects (Gellert and Lynch 2003), indigeneity (Blaser et al. 2004) and memory (Assmann 2008). I argue that the North and Siberia have been the frontlines of industrial and infrastructural development (Schweitzer et al. 2017). Currently, transport infrastructures are configuring social networks and mobility practices of indigenous and local residents (Vakhtin 2017; Zuev and Habeck 2019). In order to reconstruct a more critical recent history of large-scale infrastructure projects like the BAM, more attention should be paid to "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990) and to the colonial project of indigenous identity construction (Slezkine 1994). Therefore, I highlight the underrepresented indigenous voices of the witnesses of the BAM construction process.

Based on my long-term ethnography of the BAM, I argue that the railroad construction and operation accelerated, and in some areas along the BAM, completed the process of sedentarizing nomads, pushing reindeer herders out of the taiga and into villages (Povoroznyuk 2011). This became possible due to profound transformations of landscapes and depletion of

resources: the railroad destroyed and polluted reindeer pastures and hunting grounds, while the incoming population poached domestic reindeer as well as wild game. Such dramatic encounters with the railroad informed critical perceptions of the BAM and strong articulations of the indigenous identities (*aborigeny* or *korennye zhiteli*) as forms of cultural and ideological resistance to the sweeping modernization process accelerated by the railroad.

Rural Evenki communities, as I demonstrate, experienced other entanglements with the BAM project. These included exchange between construction organizations (which supplied materials, as well as some goods and products) and local collective farms (which procured meat, fish, and milk products for *bamovtsy*), as well as mixed marriages between the locals and newcomers. Both processes eventually led, as I argue, to different forms of socio-economic marginalization and cultural assimilation of *aborigeny*. Rural residents often complain about the social and economic inequalities that were propelled by the BAM. At the same time, they often refer to themselves and/or their next generation as *deti BAMa* ("children of the BAM"), a term also used in relation to the younger generation of *bamovtsy*, as a recognition of their mixed backgrounds.

Only in exceptional cases were Evenki *Komsomol* and Communist Party members and intelligentsia allowed to participate in the railroad construction process. This special experience in Brezhnev's prestige project has profoundly impacted their memories and perceptions of the BAM, as well as their identities. Positive assessments of the project, filled with idealized memories of the socialist period, prevail among this small group of indigenous residents, who refer to themselves as *bamovsty* while still keeping their indigenous identity of *aborigeny.*

I conclude the article with the finding that diverse and often ambiguous entanglements of Evenki people with the BAM in the past inform their multiple identities and positionings vis-à-vis this infrastructure at present. Thus, the attitudes to the reconstruction program BAM-2 range from moderate expectations, to apparent indifference, to fears of environmental degradation and assimilation that are expected to progress with the growth of extractive industries along the BAM.

Publication 5. Povoroznyuk, Olga. 2020. "(Re)Constructing the Baikal–Amur Mainline: Continuity and Change of (Post)Socialist Infrastructure." *Transfers* 10 (2-3): 250–269. https://doi.org/10.3167/TRANS.2020.1002317

The last of my five publications, backdated to 2020 because of the delays caused by the pandemic, in fact appeared in press only in 2021. Drawing on the comparison between the railroad construction project BAM-1 and the reconstruction program BAM-2, it focuses on

continuity and change in (post)socialist infrastructure. In this publication, based on interviews with *bamovtsy* and ethnography of reconstruction works, I argue that the present modernization efforts of the state are predetermined by material path dependency on the unfinished infrastructure and are harnessing the collective identities, memories, and emotions of its builders. I interrogate the role of the Soviet infrastructural legacy in postsocialist modernization and reconstruction programs. This article pays particular attention to the role of propaganda and myths, rooted in the socialist past, in the construction of collective identities and emotions, and explores continuity and change engrained in the transforming materiality of infrastructure.

In my analysis of the BAM project, I look at infrastructures as political projects filled with promises (Harvey and Knox 2012) and failures of development and modernization programs (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016). From this perspective, malfunctioning or transforming infrastructures drawing on the promises, plans, and designs of Soviet modernity can be sites for reconsidering the relationship between the postsocialist state and its citizens (Humphrey 2003), between neoliberalism and social modernity (Collier 2011). Infrastructures can also be objects of postsocialist affect harnessing political passions that, over time, transform into "dystopic ruins" signifying unfulfilled promises (Schwenkel 2013).

The Soviet BAM project has yielded the rails, the roads and bridges, the towns and smaller settlements, and the ideological construct of the "myth of the BAM" as a social and cultural icon (Ward 2001), as well as the carriers of the social memory of the construction period: the *bamovtsy* and the local population who were involved in the construction project (Povoroznyuk 2019). The decline and partial ruination of the railroad and unfinished construction left along its path in the 1990s symbolized unfulfilled promises and disillusionment, but also hope.

BAM-2, a state program of railroad reconstruction launched in 2014, is aimed at completion of the second track and full electrification of the railroad that was planned back in the Soviet period in order to boost the railroad's cargo capacity. Interestingly, the program is surrounded by images, discourses, and myths of the BAM as "a path to the future" that were constructed back in the Soviet period, and is in fact a continuation of the socialist construction plans. At the same time, it is implemented in neoliberal economic conditions characterized by mixed forms of property and investments. The alliance between powerful state and private actors, formed by joint resource extraction interests, brings no benefits to local communities struggling to carry the costs of socio-economic decline and environmental degradation. Not surprisingly, illicit optimism and hopes for fulfillment of the promises given by the state at the launch of the program BAM-2 soon grew into criticism and disenchantment. Such politics of

emotion becomes especially explicit at the reconstruction works involving *bamovtsy* and construction organizations that survived from the times of BAM-1. The lack of expertise among shift workers employed in the reconstruction, the malfunctioning long-distance chain of command from Moscow, and the non-transparent distribution of resources along BAM-2 provoke resentment and exasperation among *bamovtsy* striving for the completion of the Soviet construction project.

I finish this article with a statement about the BAM as a formative infrastructure whose materiality harnessed Soviet-era emotions and memories, and an assemblage of human actors, organizations, construction plans, machinery, and propaganda. My ethnographic comparison between BAM-1 and BAM-2 eventually leads to findings about material path dependency and discursive and ideological continuity that is characteristic of the railroad reconstruction program. At the same time, Soviet myths and ideologies are used as a discursive resource in the new political and socio-economic context, with different stakeholders and structures of investments that make BAM-2 a postsocialist infrastructure. My final observation concerns the open-endedness of (post)socialist infrastructures living through cycles of boom and bust, construction-decline-reconstruction, promise and failure.

5. Contributions of the Research to Debates in Social Anthropology

My research bridges the discussions on Soviet postsocialism (Humphrey 2003; Oushakine 2013; Ssorin-Chaikov 2017; Verdery 1996; Yurchak 2006) with the anthropology of infrastructure (Anand et al. 2018; Collier 2011; Harvey and Knox 2012, 2015; Schwenkel 2013, 2020; Venkatesan et al. 2018). Attention to the construction of identities (Eriksen 2010; Bassin and Kelly 2012) and emotions (Ahmed 2014; Svašek 2006) articulated through infrastructure helps me to explore the state modernization project in historical perspective. In my research, I argue that the late socialist BAM was an infrastructure that held the promises of modernity (Harvey and Knox 2012). More specifically, the BAM embodied the promises (and failures) of Soviet modernity that have survived in the form of unfinished modernization plans and durable material structures in Siberia (Ssorin-Chaikov 2017), similar to other remote regions in post-Soviet Russia (Collier 2011).

I call the BAM a *transformative infrastructure* because of the tremendous role it has been playing historically in social dynamics and regional development. In fact, the socialist BAM transformed the natural environment and shaped the social fabric of local communities as it attracted a massive population inflow, affected indigenous Evenki people, and forged the

identity of *bamovtsy* as a product of both nation-building ideologies and everyday practices of place-making. Focusing on the present-day Russian railroad infrastructure, I demonstrate that its modernization program BAM-2 reveals striking bureaucratic and material path dependence as well as discursive and ideological parallels with the socialist BAM. On the material level, the program is a continuation of the unfinished Soviet construction plans, including the completion of the second rail track. Soviet-era memories, identities, and emotions were recycled in media and official discourses at the launch of the BAM-2 program and in celebrations of anniversaries of the BAM construction. In that sense, the post-Soviet railroad modernization program is designed to reconstruct not only the built environment, but also collective identities that had been built in the Soviet past. These identities are "affectively managed" (Oushakine 2013) to reawaken patriotic feelings and to rebuild the loyalty of Russian citizens to the state in the context of rapid socio-economic and political transformations (Svašek 2006).

At the same time, new constellations of actors, different structures of investments, and fuzzy forms of property characteristic for the post-Soviet market economy mark ruptures between the BAM and BAM-2. Non-transparent management of resources, lack of state support, and the growing environmental pressure of the associated extractive industries are decreasing the popularity of BAM-2. This modernization program, implemented against the background of declining urban and social infrastructures and shrinking population, has recently elicited criticism, disillusion, and nostalgia in local communities along the BAM. In conclusion, I make a point that the life cycles of the BAM infrastructure—its construction, ruination, reconstruction, and modernization, are filled with promises and failures, enchantments and disenchantments that should be understood within the context of (post)socialist modernity as a heterogeneous open-ended process (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016, 2017).

5.1. Postsocialism and (Post)Colonialism

The Soviet modernization aimed at the building of socialism was characterized by ambitious industrialization goals and by a contradictory national identity construction project. In the Soviet period, Enlightenment ideals and slogans were used to boost the tempo of industrialization and the construction of cities, plants, and factories, to mobilize human resources, and to colonize the vast territories on the margins of the Soviet Empire (Kotkin 1995; Payne 2001). The BAM became one of a series of Soviet large-scale infrastructure projects or so called "projects of the century" (Josephson 1996), serving the purpose of hyper-modernism (Scott 1998). As with other Soviet megaprojects, the BAM combined the practices of social and

technological engineering implemented under the authoritarian regime. It became a materialization of Soviet industrial development and internal colonization of the northernmost areas of East Siberia and Russia's Far East. The project implementation was protracted in time—from the 1940s and 1950s, when the first rails were laid by prisoners of Stalinist labor camps, to the Brezhnev era, when the majority of the railroad was built by voluntary migrants. At the same time, my findings illustrate that it is the late socialist BAM that is currently being publicly remembered and referred to, while the earlier dark pages of its Soviet history seem to be forgotten or, at best, confined within the walls of regional museums.

Soviet nation-building policies of different periods included various intricate and often contradictory forms of identity construction as they aimed at reconciling territorial and ethnic affiliations of the Soviet people (Slezkine 2014; Brubaker 2014). The Soviet identity construction project relied more on the emotional power of ethnicity than on Soviet civic identity (Suny 2012, 25). At the same time, it structured the Soviet Union as a multiethnic state through the strategy of affirmative action that allowed for avoiding the perception of empire while preventing non-Russian nationalisms (Martin 2001). The ubiquitous notion of "friendship of the peoples" became an inherent part of the propaganda and popular imageries of large-scale Soviet infrastructure projects.

My ethnography of the BAM contributes to a better understanding of the long-term effects of Soviet state modernization and identity construction projects. A popular slogan of the BAM construction period, "We build the BAM and the BAM builds us!," expresses the idea of co-construction of the railroad and the identity of the Soviet people. Officially, the late socialist BAM was presented as a multiethnic and even a multinational endeavor, as brigades from different parts of the USSR and from other socialist countries were delegated to the BAM. Another popular slogan, "The whole country builds the BAM," created an image of the BAM as an open and inclusive project. In practice, however, it was mostly migrants with a Slavic background from the Soviet republics of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus that predominated at construction sites (Argudyaeva 1988). Other Soviet ethnic and territorial groups and identities were represented at the BAM primarily on symbolic and discursive levels, as many of the migrants from the Baltic states and the Caucasus would leave the region shortly after arrival. At the same time, Evenki and other indigenous minorities living in the region were, by and large, excluded from direct participation in the construction and from entitlements to the benefits it entailed.

By the 1960s, the Soviet national identity construction project yielded the overarching naturalized concept of "the Soviet People" (Fitzpatrick 2005). While ethnicity remained by far

the most meaningful category of identification, other social and territorial identities came to matter during the late socialist period. For example, distinct identities of Soviet migrants to the remote areas of industrial development in the North emerged in the process of place-making, adaptation, and integration into receiving communities (Bolotova and Stammler 2010; Thompson 2008). While the Soviet official rhetoric, ideology, and politics of nation-building were losing their mobilizing power, other mostly social and economic factors predetermined identifications and life strategies of the last Soviet generation (Yurchak 2007). These shifts in nation-building ideologies and practices also found their reflection in the industrialization projects of the late socialist period. Being the last Soviet "project of the century," the BAM shaped the identity of *bamovtsy*—originally "builders of the BAM," or migrants who participated in the construction process. In the late 1980s, it was not only Soviet nationalities policy and propaganda but also everyday work and life experiences and social networks that formed *bamovtsy*. More recently, this rather narrow socio-professional identity has grown into a new territorial identity that can be situationally applied by local and indigenous residents as well.

The demise of the socialist states in Europe in the 1990s prompted fundamental political, ideological, and socio-economic changes and marked the beginning of the new global order. The early postsocialist period was broadly characterized by hybrid or recombinant forms of property, changing patterns of distribution and consumption, as well as by the spread of new nationalisms and national sentiments (Verdery 1996). The politics of emotion—from fear, mistrust, and resentment, to nostalgia and hope—became a collective response to rapid political and socio-economic changes in Eastern Europe (Svašek 2006). In the former Yugoslavia, *jugonostalgia* or red nostalgia became a strategy of dealing with the past as well as a utopian hope for a better regime, one shaped in response to "turbo-capitalism" with its social injustices, clericalization, and national conflicts (Velikonja 2009: 535–537). In East Germany, *Ostalgie* became not only a means of identification with socialist Germany, but also a form of oppositional solidarity rooted in consumption patterns (e.g., in the commercialization of GDR products) (Berdahl 2010: 49, 56). In Russia, the process of cultural westernization and the introduction of new values and forms of behavior, on the one hand, and nostalgic reconstruction of Russianness through retreat to pre-Soviet imperial times, on the other hand, facilitated the invention of new post-Soviet identities in the 1990s (Fitzpatrick 2005). The early postsocialist nostalgic memory, along with selective forgetting, seemed to be expressions of Russia's nation-wide midlife crisis (Boym 2001: 58). However, with the increasing interest in and revisioning of the Soviet past, "future aspirations began to shrink" (ibid.: 66). While pre-existing social

categories were redefined and renegotiated after 1991, post-Soviet identity construction processes have been continuously drawing on Soviet-era memories, habits, institutions, and linguistic formulas (Bassin and Kelly 2012: 8).

The postsocialist transformations across Russia's vast territories reached remote regions of East Siberia, where they were projected on and articulated through the infrastructure of the BAM. Infrastructural decline along the BAM progressed along with ideological and political shifts, public criticism of the socialist period with its modernization promises, and changes in ideologies and identities in the 1990s and the early 2000s. While the BAM construction was, for a short period, "forgotten" and *bamovtsy* identities subjugated, alternative regional development projects were conceptualized, and indigenous cultures and identities were articulated. The older industrialization paradigm, however, returned with the renewed investments in resource extraction projects in the BAM region. Since the launch of the BAM-2 railroad modernization program in 2014, socialist memories, emotions, and identities have been reconstructed, recycled, and re-launched. Not surprisingly, the Soviet slogan "We built the BAM and the BAM built us!" reemerged on the covers of recently published coffee table books and journals celebrating BAM anniversaries and the start of its reconstruction. The ideological and material ruins of the Soviet BAM seem to have endured the post-Soviet political and socio-economic transformations. And currently, they are being used to support politically loyal subjects whose identities are affectively rooted in the late Soviet era.

Postsocialist conditions in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe opened up new research opportunities as well as dilemmas (Dudwick and de Soto 2000). Social scientists, especially anthropologists, have been criticizing the widely circulating term "transition" for its teleological connotations (Burawoy and Verdery 1999) and underlying western developmentalist categories (Berdahl 2000). Instead, the more neutral concept of "transformations" reflected the heterogeneity of pre-existing socialisms (Hann 1993) and the diversity of trajectories of change experienced in different postsocialist national and local contexts (ibid.: 11). Soon, however, the discussion of the value of "postsocialism" as an analytical category became central (Hann et al. 2002). Some anthropologists read this notion, in most contexts, as obsolete (Müller 2019), colonizing (Cervinkova 2012), and orientalizing (Owczarzak 2009), and have offered alternative conceptual lenses of postindustrialism (Ringel 2021) and, more prominently, of postcolonialism (Chari and Verdery 2009; Cervinkova 2012).

At the same time, arguments about socialism as a still existing category and a reality, especially in some parts of the world beyond but also within Europe, have been raised (West and Raman 2009). Used as an emic category, postsocialism might still be useful to think with

when talking about social relations and care (Thelen 2011), about identities of generations who have experienced socialism and can make sense of its follow-up (Berdahl 2010), as well about intersectional subjectivities shaped by gender, class, ethnicity, and race in postsocialist settings (Koobak et al. 2021). In addition, Müller (2019) distinguishes two paths taken by postsocialist nations. One of them, which abandons postsocialism as an ideological rudiment and focuses on other political agendas (such as European integration and globalization), is taken by most of the Eastern European counties. The other one, which is characterized by strong path dependencies on the past and references to (post)socialism, is taken by the core postsocialist nations of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. This observation supports an earlier finding by Chari and Verdery (2009) about a very specific postsocialist trajectory of Soviet socialism as the regime that was lying at the core of the bipolar global order.

While using the term "postsocialism" critically, I highlight its relevance for the national context of post-Soviet Russia. "Post-Soviet" is both an emic category and an etic definition that I have been using interchangeably with "postsocialist" to analyze a bundle of socio-economic, political, and ideological continuities and transformations illustrated with my ethnography of the BAM project. While the concept and the theory of postcolonialism generally offer an attractive alternative framework for some postsocialist contexts, I argue that the term itself has rarely been used beyond narrow academic circles in Russia. Nor can the postcolonial framework be productive for analysis of the top-down relations between the state and its citizens, between the administrative center and remote regions, between the majority and minority groups, which are set in the national and regional contexts, where sweeping modernization plans are taking over the environmentalist agenda and sustainable development goals.

5.2. Temporality and Affective Politics of Infrastructure

My ethnography of the BAM project also contributes to anthropological debates that have recently been developing around temporal, political, and affective dimensions of infrastructure. While there is a thrust of historical accounts on large-scale infrastructures, particularly railroads (Marks 1991; Payne 2001; Ward 2009), anthropologists relatively recently turned their attention to infrastructure to study social hierarchies rooted in colonial histories hiding behind many grand infrastructure projects (Bear 2017). More than two decades ago, Star (1999) noted that infrastructures reach out beyond a single site, event or time period. Recently Anand and co-authors (2018) reminded us that infrastructures are spatiotemporal projects that unfold over many different moments and embody different temporalities. In that sense, they are usually not finished products on a planner's map, but the (potential) materialization of the desires, hopes,

and aspirations of a society (ibid.: 20). Unfinishedness is, in fact, not an exception but a norm, as unbuilt and unfinished infrastructures become "the axes of social worlds and sites where temporalities are knotted and reworked in unpredictable ways" (Carse and Kneas 2019: 10). Unfinished infrastructures can then be used as a foundation on which states re-launch their modernization programs, as the case of post-Soviet infrastructural ruins in Russia's remote regions shows (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016).

My study of the BAM is the first comprehensive anthropological inquiry of a railroad built in a remote region of the Soviet Empire that instrumentalizes the concept of infrastructure to trace the historically shaped material and non-material structures of the built and social environments that emerged with this project. As I illustrate, the temporality of the BAM is deeply rooted in the early and, even more so, in the late Soviet period. While the project was officially declared to be completed with the quintessential ceremony of the "golden spike" in 1984, the sense of unfinishedness has been hanging in the air. The years of the 1990s and early 2000s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the rupture of the unilinear developmental time of the BAM, as the incomplete infrastructural objects (rails, bridges, houses, and stations) were abandoned to decline and those that seemed to be finished started malfunctioning. In two recent decades, the railroad that nevertheless didn't stop operating was "reassembled" on the material, ideological, and identity levels. The celebrations of the railroad's anniversaries and, especially, the launch of its technological modernization program in 2014 symbolized the beginning of a new life cycle of the BAM as a still unfinished infrastructure stretching across multiple modernities and temporalities (Povoroznyuk 2020[2021]).

The notion of the politics of infrastructure points to the fact that infrastructural forms offer insights into political practices (Larkin 2013), as well as that ethnographic attention to infrastructure helps to reconfigure anthropological approaches to the political (Venkatesan et al. 2018). From those perspectives, infrastructures can be seen as "critical locations through which sociality, governance and politics are formed, reformed and performed" (Appel et al. 2018). Technologies and infrastructures are not only symbols for political expression, but also terrains where moral questions rooted in political struggles are negotiated (von Schnitzler 2013). And infrastructural projects are sites of politics full of uncertainties and falterings that help exploring the relationships between state power, knowledge practices, and modes of governance (Harvey and Knox 2015: 12).

In the post-Soviet context of rapid transformations, de-industrialization, and retraction of state support and social services in the 1990s, malfunctioning infrastructures became sites for

re-examination of relationships between the state and its citizens. For example, a collapse of a thermo-power station in the middle of winter caused a whole Siberian city to freeze and "remade" the infrastructure from a foundational taken-for-granted support into a source of anxiety and a sign of decay (Humphrey 2003: 104). Collier, drawing on his ethnography of infrastructural reforms in a provincial town in post-Soviet Russia, shows how "pipes and valves, budgeting formulas and bureaucratic norms, emerge as privileged sites where the relationship between neoliberalism and modernity can be reexamined" (2011: 2–3). In his case, material infrastructures like heating systems, by constraining neoliberal reforms, made post-Soviet change path-dependent (ibid.: 9).

Another case of a road that reconfigures the border between two states in Central Asia speaks to the Soviet legacy of technological and social engineering that informs the ambiguity of post-Soviet infrastructure projects, seen as both a promise and a threat (Reeves 2014). A more recent collection of studies of postsocialist urban infrastructures from across the former Soviet space and Eastern Europe points to the hybridization of infrastructural regimes. It shows how legacies of socialist regimes that are still present in both material (housing stocks, tramlines, etc.) and non-material (governing bodies, public discourses, etc.) forms are currently being embedded in diversified paths of neoliberalism or paternalism taken by postsocialist states (Tuvikene et al. 2019: 3). Thus, infrastructural realities become dependent on diversified institutional settings, governance arrangements, and power relations that exhibit a range of varieties of neoliberalism and capitalism (ibid.: 13).

The case of the BAM contributes to discussions about the postsocialist (post-Soviet) politics of infrastructure. I have shown how the Soviet infrastructural legacy of the BAM, after a short period of abandonment and decline, has recently been reassessed and reconstructed. The postsocialist infrastructure politics of the BAM has been characterized by material path dependencies reflected in the railroad modernization program, as well as by revitalization of Soviet modernization ideologies, memories, and identities embodied the BAM. However, the Soviet infrastructural legacies of the BAM, similarly to other large projects, are reconfigured, recycled, and embedded in the essentially different Russian context of hybrid capitalist (oligarchist) institutions developing under authoritarian forms of government.

Affective dimensions of infrastructure are closely tied to political imagination, discourses, and practices. The affective relationship that people experience with material is formed in moments of "infrastructural affect" (Knox 2017), be it a break, a malfunction or, on the contrary, a long-awaited launch of an infrastructure that evokes a range of emotions. Infrastructural affects can also shape political activism, for example, as form of protest against

environmental pollution from high-speed rail construction (Laszczkowski 2020). More specifically, postsocialist affect rooted in belief in socialism and solidarity, and embodied in the materiality of infrastructure (e.g., bricks or other material forms), can be "harnessed by the state to produce new, feeling subjects committed to the work of socialist nation-building" (Schwenkel 2013: 252). Thus, building socialism is a twofold project of material and ideological construction—the manufacturing of cities, as well as of people (Schwenkel 2020). Even socialist infrastructures that are falling to ruin can symbolize the utopic socialist future for those who have built them.

My ethnography of the BAM brings forward the discussion about (post-)socialist affects and emotions embodied in infrastructure. In my work I show how collective emotions, articulated in the politics of infrastructure, glue together materiality, temporality, and identity within the politics of infrastructure. BAM builders' identities, built along with the building of the railroad and socialism in East Siberia, are different from the racialized colonial identities formed by Indian railroads (Bear 2007), or the narrow professional identities shaped by labor practices in a railroad yard in contemporary Sweden (Edelman 1997), or the transient identities of the urban rail system in post-unification Berlin (Merrill 2015). The (post-) socialist reconstruction of identities and emotions along the BAM is articulated through the transforming materiality of the railroad infrastructure itself—from construction, to decay, to reconstruction. Furthermore, I have shown that identities and emotions, engineered in the Soviet past, are currently being mobilized by the state to rebuild the loyalty of the citizen to the state under the conditions of an authoritarian regime, a declining resource-based economy, shrinking social services, and population outflow in East Siberia as in other remote regions of the country.

5.3. On the Promise of Infrastructure and Modernization

The concept of infrastructure seems to be hard to disentangle from the ideas of modern society, development, and progress. Infrastructures, such as roads, can appear to be material forms oriented toward the future that retain social promise through "enchantment with the promises of emancipatory modernity" (Harvey and Knox 2012: 512). Affective and rhetorical engagements with the development process, as well as material encounters with infrastructural forms, enact these promises, making a rational technological project more comprehensible. Closely related to "enchantments of infrastructure," "infrastructure as gesture," is a notion that marks the potentiality of unrealized projects in late capitalist contexts (Weszkalnys 2016). However, by far the most comprehensive notion of the "promise of infrastructure" (Anand et al. 2018) captures political, temporal, and affective qualities of infrastructure projects as part of

the modernization process and embodiments of modernity. At the same time, infrastructure promised is not the same as infrastructure delivered, due to fragility and uncertainty, as well as the social, political, and environmental risks associated with their implementation. While new infrastructures are promises about the future, old and unfinished ones symbolize the debris of experienced or expected modernities (ibid.: 27).

The larger the scale of an infrastructure project, the bigger its promises and impacts. Infrastructural megaprojects—from dams to roads and railroads and plants—are projects of rapid and profound environmental and social transformations and displacements (Gellert and Lynch 2003; Brun 2011). The process of social displacement is made to seem inevitable by the modernizing ideologies and practices associated with colonialism and development, both capitalist and state socialist, and more recently, with globalization. While project workers and migrants abandoned after the end of construction suffer the impoverishing effects of displacement, indigenous and local populations are exposed to different forms of discrimination and exclusion (Gellert and Lynch 2003). In his ethnography of transnational capitalism at Yacyret dam, Ribeiro (1995) explains why large-scale infrastructure projects should not be conceptualized as development projects. He argues that rational mobilization of human and natural resources reinforces disparities and favors those social actors who are connected to the national political and transnational economic circuits (ibid. 163–164). Thus, regional and local actors, indigenous peoples, and other minority groups in most cases have to suffer the costs rather than enjoy the benefits of infrastructure projects (Blaser 2004; Li 2017).

Such rather recently introduced instruments as environmental and social impact assessments and public consultations have been providing underrepresented groups with more space for negotiations (Campregher 2010) and sometimes facilitate battles for indigenous rights (Hornig 2014). However, these instruments can be manipulated by technical entrepreneurs to produce uncertainty. It may take various forms—from threats and fears to opportunity, promises, and aspirations, as shown in the case of the late industrial project of Lao Hydropower and its associated environmental risks (Whitington 2018). What these and many other examples, especially from the Global South, seem to reaffirm is that infrastructure projects embody promises of modernity and are part of modernization, even if it is a non-linear process with reversed developments, shattered myths of teleological progress (Ferguson 1999: 13), and social inequalities reinforced under neoliberal conditions.

To situate my ethnography of the BAM infrastructure and its promise in the global context, I highlight the specifics of the socialist modernity underlying the Soviet state modernization project. Soviet socialist hypermodernism (Scott 1998), including extreme forms

of social and technological engineering, aimed for rapid industrialization of the vast and largely agrarian country. Soviet modernization implied a bundle of parallel processes of industrialization, urbanization, and internal colonization, especially in the country's remote regions (Kotkin 1997). National programs of regional development and exploration and exploitation of new resource frontiers were discursively rooted in the ideology of "mastering nature" (Slavin 1982). As I have shown, a series of socialist "projects of the century" drawing on large-scale technologies were not only serving economic development, but also fulfilling broad political and cultural purposes and serving as symbols of achievement, especially during the late socialist period of stagnation (Josephson 1995). Thus, the promise of the BAM is deeply rooted in these highly determinist Soviet modernization ideologies and practices, belief in human engineering, and utopic visions of progress. The mass propaganda of the BAM foregrounded its positive effects and promises of economic prosperity, social equality, and opportunities to the inhabitants of the newly built socialist microcosm, while completely ignoring the social and environmental costs of the infrastructure.

In Russia, despite the post-Soviet transformations and new socio-economic realities, the socialist modernization project has never been fully reworked. Neither have the dramatic impacts of the Soviet large-scale infrastructure been publicly criticized. These facts explain a number of ideological, discursive, and material continuities between Soviet and post-Soviet infrastructures and modernization promises that they carry, as well as the environmental and social threats that they pose (Collier 2011; Ssorin-Chaikov 2016; Schweitzer et al. 2017). Environmental degradation, social marginalization of local communities, and cultural assimilation of indigenous and other ethnic minorities, propelled by the existing and planned infrastructure projects, are not being publicly discussed. This statement is also true of the current technological modernization program of the BAM. Despite the new non-transparent investment schemes, lack of human resources, uncertainty, and fears that are spreading in shrinking local communities, the BAM-2 is publicly imagined as a strong symbol both of the past and the future. Thus, the temporality of the BAM infrastructure encompasses Soviet and post-Soviet modernities and is fraught with the ever-present promise of development. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the tripartite division of the world into First, Second, and Third Worlds fell out of use, and what used to be called the "Second World" (Eastern Europe including Russia) was included in the "more developed" Global North. Nevertheless, unabashed visions of development combined with a lack of civil society institutions and social benefits, as well as weak environmental standards for public and private

developers, have led to a number of similarities between infrastructure projects in post-Soviet Russia and the Global South.

While my research illustrates the power of the state modernization and identity construction projects embodied in the BAM, my argument goes beyond the promise of infrastructure. In this first application of an infrastructural lens to the anthropological study of a Soviet megaproject, I introduced the concept of *transformative infrastructure* to capture the agency of the BAM that created new social and built environments, but also resulted in massive displacements. In fact, the railroad line that made the vast territories of East Siberia into a Soviet resource frontier has become a project of large-scale technological and social engineering that moved both natural and human objects. Remarkably, it was not the rational economic planning but rather the underlying affective power of modernization ideologies that brought this late socialist infrastructure to life. In that sense, the Soviet BAM was much more than a promise or a gesture; it was a megalomaniac materialization of development. The construction and operation of the railroad have resulted in profound social transformations: migrations and relocations of indigenous populations, the formation of new mixed communities, and the construction of collective identities and emotions.

In contrast to the Soviet construction project BAM, the post-Soviet reconstruction program BAM-2 is driven by the resource extraction interests of the state as well as of private national and transnational stakeholders. In that sense, its implementation is based both on calculations of economic profit for powerful actors, and on mass propaganda discursively drawing on the images of socio-economic stability experienced by local communities during late socialism. Therefore, the Soviet ideologies inscribed into the infrastructure of the BAM have been recycled and reused by state-controlled mass media with a double purpose. First of all, these ideologies were aimed at the re-enchantment of the local population with the promise of new development, publicly declared at the launch of the railroad modernization program BAM-2. And on a more general level, they were used to rebuild the loyalty of Russian citizens to the state, rooted in Soviet-era identities and memories of a more prosperous late socialist era, in a region facing demographic and socio-economic decline.

Yet, on a concluding note, I would like to argue that the railroad infrastructure in question has been not only been a symbol of power, an object of ideological propaganda and of nostalgic memories of the golden socialist past. It has also been a terrain of resistance and political and social tensions between different groups and identities (e.g., indigenous people vs. migrants), between the center and the periphery, and between the Russian state and its subjects, even if those tensions have been—and are even more so today—hidden, underrepresented, or

suppressed. As resource extraction along the BAM grows in scale, local communities increasingly suffer its devastating environmental effects. Hopes and expectations of development give way to fears and concerns about the future of the region, which is, using the words of a local resident from Tynda, "turning into the state's resource colony." While this research was designed to focus on social transformations, more critical attention to the environmental dimensions of the railroad as an infrastructure of the Anthropocene is needed. In this sense, the concept of *transformative infrastructure* placed in the context of discussions about a transition toward more sustainable socio-economic and infrastructural development can be both provocative and thought-provoking: Is there potential for a sustainable infrastructure benefiting local communities along the BAM under conditions of a resource-based economy and the strengthening authoritarian regime in post-Soviet Russia?

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II. Publication 1. Social Dynamics and Sustainability of BAM Communities: Migration, Competition for Resources, and Intergroup Relations

7 Social dynamics and sustainability of BAM communities

Migration, competition for resources, and intergroup relations[1]

Olga Povoroznyuk

The BAM region refers to the territories situated along or connected to the Baikal–Amur Mainline. This is the most important Northern transportation route, a railroad system transecting six federal subjects of Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East and linking Eurasian countries with East Asia. The logistical and geopolitical importance of the transportation route in this sparsely populated Northern region, as well as its large mineral deposits of gold, copper, rare metals, and coal, prompted the railroad's construction in the Soviet period. Recent socio-economic trends show a renewed interest in the BAM, primarily to facilitate the extraction and transportation of mineral resources to Asian markets.

The cities and towns located along the mainline were originally intended to be temporary settlements or railroad stations in proximity to the existing indigenous and mixed communities. Currently the BAM network encompasses 210 railway stations, some of which gave rise to the large cities of Ust'-Kut, Severobaykal'sk, and Tynda; towns like Taksimo, Novaya Chara, and Khani; and a number of smaller settlements (see Map 7.1) built by labor migrants from particular Soviet republics, regions, or cities. The settlements' man-made environment – such as the architectural design of railway stations, city planning, and street names – still reflects the cultural or ethnic particularities of the builders. From a socioeconomic point of view, BAM urban settlements are typical single-industry towns dependent upon the railroad and extractive companies.

The social and ethnic fabric of BAM communities is woven of three main population categories: indigenous people (*aborigeny*); BAM builders (*bamovtsy*); and industrial shift workers and more recent labor migrants from the post-Soviet space (*priezzhie*). In this region, Evenki people have lived alongside Russian settlers and people of mixed origin (*gurany*) for centuries, whereas BAM builders and new migrants have been arriving since the late Soviet period. Relations among the main groups have varied from peaceful coexistence to competition and social tensions. Currently, life along the BAM implies existing within a fluid system of stakeholders, including state authorities, private industrial companies, employees of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and indigenous enterprises (*obshchinas*) that represent the interests of different groups. In BAM settlements, where labor migrants constitute the majority population, being part of a local community is a valuable asset in local identity politics (Sokolovskii 2012).
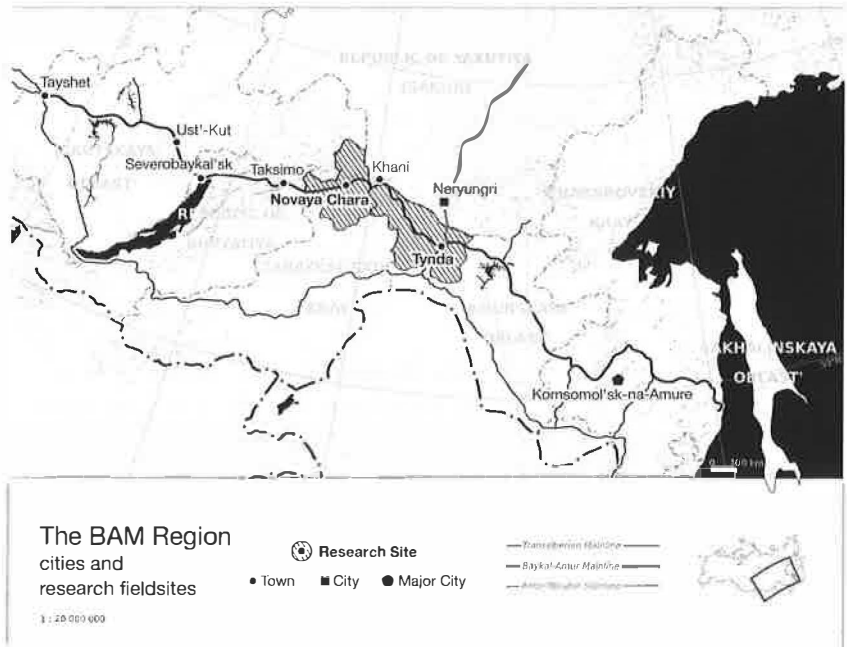
Map 7.1 The BAM region, cities and field sites.

Source: Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

The chapter draws on the field data collected in the Northern parts of two federal subjects lying within the BAM zone – Amurskaya oblast (Tynda and Tyndinskii rayon), and Zabaykal'skii krai (Novaya Chara and Kalarskii rayon) – in September–October 2013, with a focus on two urban communities – Tynda (population ca. 36,000), the hub city and the "capital" of the BAM, and Novaya Chara, a medium-size town of about 4,300. This chapter explores the social dynamics and sustainability prospects of BAM communities in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods. I claim that the BAM has served not only as an important transportation route, but also as an agent of social change connected with migration and the formation of a culturally, ethnically, and socially diverse local population.

Further, I examine the sustainability prospects of the local communities dependent on the railroad and extraction industry, applying the concepts of the single-industry town and the resource curse that reflect the unsustainable develop- ment path of many countries and regions endowed with natural resource wealth (Kronnenberg 2004). This phenomenon is also characteristic of the current indus- trial development of the BAM region as an emerging Northern resource frontier. Finally, I will demonstrate that the strongest "pillar" for the sustainable development (Colantonio 2007) of BAM communities is social and human capital accumulated in the process of successful integration of newcomers, nation-building, and community identity construction. Cultural and ethnic tolerance carries the most

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significant potential for creating a favorable social environment, while traditional industries and the emerging field of ethnic tourism present attractive prospects for the sustainability of BAM communities.

Industrialization history of the BAM region

The BAM region (or the BAM zone) is a term used to describe the territories adjacent to and dependent on the infrastructure of the Baikal-Amur Mainline. BAM's legacy begins in the late nineteenth century. With the outbreak of World War I, the tsarist government built a railroad at the southern shore of Lake Baikal in an attempt to ensure the geopolitical security of the Russian Far East and East Siberia against China. The next ancestor of the contemporary BAM was the railroad stretching from Komsomol'sk-na-Amure to Sovetskaya Gavan' in Khabarovskii krai, built between 1932 and 1953 by labor camp inmates, military personnel, and prisoners of war (Mote 2003). That project was abandoned after Stalin's death in 1953, and the idea of restarting the BAM construction gained official favor only in the Brezhnev era, nearly two decades later.

"The third BAM" represented a grandiose engineering endeavor and the last megalomaniac Communist industrial project exploiting the USSR's vast natural resources for propagandistic and economic reasons. Moscow hoped that a completed BAM would bolster collective faith in the command-administrative system and serve as the prototype for further conquests of the Soviet Union's vast and resource-rich northeastern frontier in the twenty-first century (Ward 2009, 2–5). In 1974, the Komsomol, the Communist Party's youth organization, announced the beginning of BAM construction and a youth labor mobilization campaign. Soviet propaganda urged young people to rally together and build BAM in the spirit of "self-sacrifice" and "fraternal cooperation" for the sake of "social strengthening" in the remote corners of the USSR (Brezhnev 1993).

The majority of the mainline was built between 1972 and 1984, although some sections were put into operation as late as in 2003. Due to its high construction and maintenance costs and the fact that the railroad has never operated to its full capacity, the BAM has been considered an unprofitable enterprise. In the 1990s, these circumstances resulted in public criticism of the BAM project, the loss of the project's social prestige, its absence from the public spotlight, and further decline. In 1997, the BAM network was transferred from the state-owned Baykalo-Amurskaya Zheleznaya Doroga company to Rossiiskie Zheleznye Dorogi (RZhD), currently Russia's largest state railroad company.

The present day BAM is approximately 4,300 kilometers (2,600 miles) long, with its main branch, the Amur-Yakutsk Mainline (AYaM), constituting 1,200 kilometers (746 miles). The Mainline crosses the Northern districts of six federal subjects – Irkutskaya oblast, the Republic of Buryatiya, Zabaykal'skii krai, in East Siberia, and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya), Amurskaya oblast, and Khabarovskii krai in the Russian Far East. With its existing and projected side-tracks leading to mineral deposits and connecting remote settlements with administrative centers, the railroad provides a reliable transportation network for people, goods, and resources.

The mineral resources of the BAM region include the largest coal deposits (Neryungri field in South Yakutiya, the Apsat deposit in Northern Zabaykal'skii krai, the Bureya deposit in Khabarovskii krai), oil and gas deposits (Markovskoe, Yaraktinskoe, Ayanskoe) in Irkutskaya oblast, nonferrous and rare metals deposits (Udokan copper deposit in Northern Zabaikal'skii krai, the Kholodninskoe and Ozernoe lead and zinc deposits in Buryatiya), as well as numerous other ferrous metal deposits scattered across the region. In the 1980s, Moscow drafted plans to establish several regional industrial clusters, such as the Udokan mining and processing plant, as well as coal mining centers in South Yakutiya and Khabarovskii krai, which would have resembled the existing industrial centers in Ust'-Kut and Komsomol'sk-na-Amure (Aganbegian et al. 1984, 9–11). These state plans, however, have not been realized due to the economic collapse.

BAM communities

Settlements located in the BAM region, in the general sense, vary from cities to small indigenous and mixed villages. However, in this chapter I focus on BAM communities (*bamovskie poselki*) located along the mainline or in immediate proximity to it. These communities emerged as railway stations and temporary industrial settlements, some of which have grown into towns and cities. Remarkably, each BAM settlement with the adjacent infrastructure was usually built by a "patronage team" (*shefskaia brigada*) from a certain city or region in Central Russia or from a Soviet republic. The BAM was considered to be "the incarnation of friendship and cooperation between all peoples in the USSR" (Brezhnev 1993, 92). For example, the city of Tynda, where BAM and AYaM crisscross, was built by Muscovites, and the city of Severobaykals'k by Leningraders. Smaller towns and settlements along the railroad were built by Kazakhs (Novaya Chara), Uzbeks (Kuanda), Turkmens (Larba), Georgians (Ikab'iya, Niya), Armenians (Yanchukan, Tayura), Azeris (Ul'kan), Moldovans (Alonka), Estonians (Kichera), Latvians and Belorussians (Taksimo), Lithuanians (Novyi Uoyan), Tajiks (Soloni), and so on.

Currently, the BAM encompasses over 200 stations and traverses 65 villages and towns. According to the 2010 federal census, the largest cities of the BAM include Tayshet (35,485 people) and Ust'-Kut (45,375 people) in Irkutskaya oblast, Severobaykal'sk (24,929 people) in Buryatiya, Tynda (36,275 people) in Amurskaya oblast, Neryungri (61,747 people) in Yakutiya, and Komsomol'sk-na-Amure (263,906 people) in Khabarovskii krai.[2] However, the typical BAM settlement is a town of a smaller scale. There are 14 urban BAM communities in Tyndinskii rayon, Amurskaya oblast, with the population ranging between 243 residents in Amosovskii and 3,029 in Yankan.[3] There are four BAM communities (three rural and one urban) in Northern Zabaykal'skii krai. In 2010, Novaya Chara, the only urban community of Kalarskii rayon, had a population of 4,315 residents.[4] The population size of BAM communities peaked in the mid-1980s and rapidly declined during the socioeconomic crisis and mass exodus of the population from the North in the 1990s (Heleniak 2010). Currently, BAM communities continue to lose their residents, with the annual, well-documented

out-migration from Siberia and the Far East. For example, in 2012, Tynda lost 733 residents due to out-migration.[5]

Most BAM communities resemble typical single-industry towns that depend on the functioning railroad and developing extractive industries. According to economic criteria, a monotown (*monogorod*) is a town that has one or more enterprises functioning as a single production cluster, which employs over 25 percent of the economically active population, accounts for more than 50 percent of overall industrial production, and, optionally, for over 20 percent of all organizational taxes and revenues to the municipal budget (Animitsa 2010, 9–10). In Russia, monotowns are a Soviet legacy: their foundation and development was a means of adaptation and territorial organization of workforce in the USSR's geopolitical, economic, geographic, and climatic context. The collapse of the planned economy caused a decline or complete closure of backbone enterprises, creating numerous socioeconomic problems for the residents of such towns. Post-Soviet monotowns are characterized by a homogeneous occupational structure, high levels of unemployment, underdeveloped social institutions, and insufficient cultural and educational opportunities (15). In addition to economic dependencies, they experience a crisis of social and cultural self-determination: while the residents are attached to their communities, they tend to refrain from participating in public life and local politics.[6]

In Northern Amurskaya oblast, transportation is the major industry since the mainline plays a paramount logistical role. In Tyndinskii rayon, the railroad enterprises employ approximately 20 percent of the local economically active population.[7] In BAM communities, the overwhelming majority of the local labor force work for railroad service and maintenance companies, while many others are employed in public organizations or look for shift-based jobs in large-scale mining companies operating in the same or neighboring districts and regions. In contrast to Soviet times, when the intelligentsia from all over the USSR flew to the BAM zone, current public institutions, like the district hospital in Tynda, lack specialists because young doctors are not willing to stay in the city, let alone smaller BAM towns. At the same time, Tyndinskii rayon has high unemployment levels. Low-skilled job seekers from BAM towns in Northern Amurskaya oblast and Zabaykal'skii krai resort to shift work for the Petropavlovsk mining and processing group.

The physical environment of BAM towns, including architecture, place names, street layout, and other details, reflects the cultural or ethnic particularities of the builders. Thus, the railway station in Novaya Chara in Zabaykal'skii krai resembles a Kazakh yurt (Figure 7.1), and the street names (i.e., Arbat, Krasnaya Presnya) and high-rise buildings in Tynda resemble those of Moscow (Figure 7.2). The social infrastructure of the BAM urban communities includes necessary facilities such as administrative buildings, kindergartens, schools, hospitals, fire stations, and shops, depending on the size of a community. Cities like Tynda, "the capital of the BAM," have a well-developed trade and service sector, including large shopping centers, restaurants, and fitness clubs, as well as museums, theatres, exhibition and concert halls, churches, and monuments commemorating construction of the BAM (Figure 7.3). However, many ambitious urban construction and development projects announced in the BAM

Figure 7.1 Railway station in Novaia Chara, Zabaikal'skii region (photo by the author).

Figure 7.2 High-rise apartment buildings in Tynda, Amurskaya Province (photo by the author).

Figure 7.3 Installation commemorating the 40th anniversary of the construction of the BAM in Tynda, Amurskaya Province (photo by the author).

heyday have not been implemented due to the recent economic crisis. In Chara, several foundations for unfinished apartment buildings dot the contemporary cityscape, while the decaying foundation of a shoemaking factory in Tynda reminds the city's residents and visitors of Soviet-era construction plans.

In 2006, RZhD Company started to transfer housing, utilities, and other social infrastructure in BAM communities to district and local municipalities, whose budgets cannot afford this burden. Over 50 percent of the housing stock in Tynda and Chara is decrepit. The same is true for the roads connecting the district centers to other BAM towns and villages. The significance of such poorly maintained roads became evident when new restrictions were introduced barring the use of BAM work trains to transport civilians.

Currently, federal investments in community development in the BAM region are drying up, and local revenue related to the railroad and resource extraction are not sufficient to fill the budget gap. In order to compensate for the high construction and maintenance costs of existing infrastructure, local authorities often appeal to extractive companies in the region. However, their support is officially recognized as voluntary, as federal administrators do not anticipate any regular revenues from mineral extraction flowing to local budgets. Thus, the current social programs of extractive companies in Kalarskii rayon are limited to occasional one-time funding of social and cultural events and selected construction and renovation projects. In Tyndinskii rayon, the Petropavlovsk

and Priisk Solov'evskii companies make more visible investments in the social infrastructure of BAM communities.

The population and identities

The population of BAM towns is comprised of three categories of people: the indigenous population (*aborigeny, korennye*), including Evenki and Russian Old Settlers of mixed background (*gurany*); BAM builders (*bamovtsy*); and migrants (*priezzhie*) (Bulaev 1998). These labels draw on a specific genealogy of ethnic and nation-building policies and classifications dating to Soviet times. Currently, these and other names are used by representatives of different groups and stakeholders in their claims to belong to local communities.

Aborigeny

The Evenki, a Tungus-speaking minority group, are the indigenous population of the region. They generally refer to themselves as "aboriginals" (*aborigeny*), whereas other groups may also call them "indigenes" (*korennye*). Evenki nomadic reindeer herders and hunters were gradually sedentarized through the Soviet collectivization campaign, agricultural reforms, and "cultural construction" carried out among the indigenous peoples of the North. The shift-work method, introduced to so-called traditional activities (herding, hunting, and fishing) ostensibly to increase their productivity, in reality resulted in gender-based socio-professional distortions within indigenous communities. Whereas indigenous men continued working in the taiga, women with children settled in villages and became employed in the administrative or public sector. Indigenous enterprises (*obshchinas*), which appeared after the reorganization of collective farms (*kolkhozes*), now employ mostly male herders, whereas few reindeer herding families still pursue the traditional way of life (Povoroznyuk 2011) (Figure 7.4).

According to the 2010 All-Russian Census, 501 Evenki lived in Kalarskii rayon, Zabaykal'skii krai.[8] The main places of their residence located along the railroad include the BAM settlements of Novaya Chara (17), Chara (53), Ikab'ya (19), and Kuanda (29) and adjacent indigenous village Chapo-Ologo (141). The remaining Evenki population lives in the villages of Kyust'-Kemda (56 persons) and Srednii Kalar (39 persons).[9] In Tyndinskii rayon, Amurskaya oblast, 810 Evenki live in the villages of Ust'-Urkima (221), Ust'-Nyukzha (401), and Pervomayskoe (188) located along the BAM.[10]

Documents provided by the Administration of Kalarskii rayon in September 2013 show that the majority of Evenki lead a sedentary life working in state-funded organizations, while only 41 are registered as reindeer herders and 99 individuals as hunters, respectively. The lands officially designated for herding and hunting are allocated to six Evenki enterprises, according to land lease agreements. However, de facto, the number of unregistered family-based units pursuing traditional economic activities is bigger. There are 17 registered enterprises

Figure 7.4 Evenki reindeer herders' family in their village house, Chapo-Ologo,
      Zabaikal'skii region (photo by the author).

(*obshchinas*) involving 63 persons and owing 4,797 reindeer in Tyndinskii rayon.[11] In both districts, Evenki are also entering the emerging fields of ethno-tourism, souvenir production, and reindeer antler procurement.

In recent years, the notorious social problems of unemployment, low living standards, and alcoholism among the indigenous population have been aggravated by the withdrawal of internationally recognized indigenous rights, particularly in the sphere of land use, from federal and regional legislation and cuts in state support (Yakel 2012). While the Russian Federation formally participates in the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples and has a special state program for socioeconomic development of the indigenous peoples of the North, in practice, the major funds allocated under this program go to the (re)construction of social infrastructure, facilities, and housing in indigenous villages.[12]

Despite these facts, Evenki are the most stable population of the BAM region. They are characterized by low levels of social and geographical mobility. Their routes include taiga camps, indigenous villages, and the nearby BAM settlements, usually within the same federal subject or within the BAM region. Such strong attachment to the place of birth and residence are predetermined by kinship and family ties, on the one hand, and the lack of educational and employment opportunities in other places, on the other. Thus, when juxtaposing themselves with other groups, Evenki use the term "aboriginals" (*aborigeny*) in order to highlight their rootedness in the region. At the same time, *bamovsty* and other residents, who were born or spent most of their life in the region, claim to belong to the

same group of *aborigeny*, while referring to Evenki as indigenes (*korennye*) in the contexts when they wish to stress their cultural difference.

Bamovtsy

In the 1970s and 1980s, the construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline attracted labor migrants from other Russian regions and other former Soviet republics (Belkin and Sheregi 1985). Generally referred to as BAM builders (*bamovtsy*), about 500,000 temporary BAM workers were lured to the region by the Communist party's youth organization, the *Komsomol* (Ward 2009). The labor force recruited to build the BAM was largely comprised of young, educated, and skilled men, who initially came to work on a contract, but often married and settled in the region. One-third of the BAM builders arrived from different parts of Russia, one-fifth from Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, and the remaining part from Belorussia, the Baltics, and the Caucasus (Argudyaeva 1988, 9–11). In 1984, the European part of Russia (19 percent), the Far East (18 percent), and Ukraine (15 percent) were the main home regions of the BAM migrants, whereas indigenous people accounted only for 1 percent of the local population (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Composition of residents of the BAM zone (percent) by home regions

Home region	1981	1984
Far East	4.5	17.8
East Siberia	15.8	14.1
West Siberia	7.7	5.0
Ural	6.4	8.5
European part of Russia	15.3	19.4
Ukraine	21	15.2
Moldova	5.3	13
Belorussia	4.2	2.5
Baltics	5.5	1
Kazakhstan	4.3	7.8
Central Asia	5.5	6
Caucasus and Transcaucasia	1.2	0.9
Indigenous population of the region	3.3	1.2

Source: Based on Argudiaeva 1988, 1.

Young BAM builders were motivated by Communist ideology and the romanticism of the Komsomol youth movement, a characteristic of other Soviet large-scale industrial projects (Rozhanskii 2002). The image of the BAM as "the building site of the century" as well as other propagandistic slogans and clichés were used to lure young workers from across the USSR to the railroad construction and, later, to develop solidarity among *bamovtsy*. Prior to enrollment in a BAM construction brigade, a specialist was supposed to meet certain educational and professional requirements and to demonstrate his or her motivation and compliance with Communist ideals.

Yet, during late Soviet socialism, builders were also attracted by the lucrative material benefits. According to the contracts that workers concluded in their home republics and regions, the state provided them with apartments and cars after several years of work, as well as high salaries and other social benefits. The BAM builders also enjoyed access to goods and commodities regularly supplied to the region but unavailable elsewhere in the country. As a result, a contract at the BAM often yielded a substantial amount of income in a relatively short period of time. Such opportunities attracted not only specialists, but also fortune-seekers – short-term contractors, and, since the 1990s, individual entrepreneurs and dealers.

The former builders that I interviewed fondly recalled the sense of solidarity and communal feeling among *bamovtsy*. Many informants refer to the period of BAM construction as the happiest time of their lives (Bogdanova 2013), when people were friendly, helpful, and supportive of each other. In addition to the ideology and material benefits, the sense of unity and belonging was achieved through social factors – a mostly homogeneous age, educational, and professional profile that facilitated social networks. For example, the neighborhood settlement patterns, wherein colleagues working in the same organization or construction brigade also became neighbors in their apartment buildings and, thus, spent time together both at work and at home, strengthened friendly ties. The ideological and social underpinning of the BAM railroad and related settlements' construction gave the builders a sense of fulfillment, contributing to the very creation of the place and the following attachment to its social and built environment (cf. Bolotova and Stammer 2010, 208).

> While people in the country had nothing to eat or drink, there was everything here; there was a little communism here. We could easily buy what people couldn't afford in 30–40 years of intensive work. In three years, we could buy a car. We had free money, so we could go on vacation. We lived a rather wealthy life. In a certain period of time, we developed an "affection for the North," some kind of attachment: once you came here, it's hard to leave. There is a special type of people here – open-minded, kind, hospitable, ready for selfless help. The North engages you, the North makes you a hostage. We make our mind to leave, but then change our point of view. We got used to here, we feel comfortable and cozy.[13]

In the 1990s, the BAM region witnessed a large-scale out-migration of the non-local and non-indigenous population. The socioeconomic crisis of the 1990s

drove the majority of BAM builders from the North. Local authorities estimate that approximately one-third and one-half of the *bamovtsy* population relocated to Kalaraskii rayon and Tyndinskii rayon, respectively. These were the people who had participated in the construction and early use of the railroad. Currently, the *bamovtsy* category has a broader interpretation. It includes an informal community of "the children of the BAM," the second generation of BAM builders who spent their childhood and, sometimes, part of their adult life, in the region. This group name has also been self-ascribed to the specialists and entrepreneurs who "came to work at the BAM" in the 1970s–1990s, but did not directly contribute to the railroad construction and maintenance process itself.

In the 1990s, the BAM project became an object of open criticism and public amnesia due to its unprofitability in the context of the socioeconomic crisis and ideological turn. However, a decade later, the BAM was again regarded as a unique technological, socioeconomic, and ideological endeavor. In fact, the BAM turned out to be a testing ground for Soviet ideological, nation-building, and economic policies. The BAM legacy was reflected in the local folklore and art exhibited in museums, and became part of *bamovtsy* life stories and the recently rehabilitated social memory of the region.

Priezzhie

At the local level, the term *priezzhie* (newcomers) is usually associated with recent migrations and migrants, who constitute an insignificant proportion of residents, not enough to compensate for the departing population. In recent decades, there have been two distinct categories of *priezzhie*: (1) long-term or permanent migrants from other regions and districts and the post-Soviet states and (2) shift workers (*vakhtoviki*) outsourced by extractive companies from the neighboring districts and regions and, more rarely, from other parts of Russia (see Chapter 5). In 2012, the majority of Russian migrants (10,507 out of 23,245 people who moved to Zabaykal'skii krai) indicated family as their main cause of migration, whereas for most international migrants (474 out of 814 people) a job was the main factor.[14]

Migrants from other parts of Russia usually find employment in public sector, especially with RZhD, while some of them start their own business in trade and services. International labor migrants from the former USSR arrive at BAM settlements mostly from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Ukraine. This is the smallest and most diverse and scattered group, who tend to be self-employed, on a semi-legal basis, in trade, agriculture, and services. However, those who manage to acquire Russian citizenship become eligible for more attractive job opportunities in both the public and private spheres. In Novaya Chara, Kalarskii rayon, several such employees work as track inspectors for the East Siberian Branch of RZhD. In Tynda, some migrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus keep their own smaller farmsteads at the city outskirts; others open grocery and flower shops and restaurants in the city center. They are also visible at open-air flea markets and in the main shopping malls.

The growing number of international migrants from the post-Soviet space has recently come to the attention of local and regional authorities. While federal legislation and the state strategy for ethnic policy regulate the legal status of migrants, the social pathways for their integration are still developing. In 2013, a center for sociocultural assimilation opened in Chita. It plans to offer courses in the Russian language and migration laws and to provide social and psychological support to migrants' families. However, in the Northern districts of the BAM region, such centers are still lacking; therefore, social networks, including familial and friendship ties, traditionally help migrants adapt to the new social and cultural environment.

The mining companies currently in the region mostly recruit labor from other parts of Russia using fly-in/fly-out shift work (*vakhtovyi metod*). According to some estimates, Sibirskaya Ugol'naya Energeticheskaya Kompaniya (SUEK), which is developing the Apsat coal deposit, employs over 200 shift workers (*vakhtoviki*), who previously worked for its subsidiary company in southern Zabaikal'skii krai. BGK Company, operating at the Udokan copper deposit, has only a few employees from the local population, while the majority of its labor force (approximately 120 qualified mineral engineers and other specialists) are shift workers from other parts of the region (Figure 7.5). Experts from the Ministry of Natural Resources in Chita argue that the fly-in/fly-out method has proved effective in the Northern conditions and will be increasingly used in mining in future,[15] in contrast to the Soviet era, when labor was recruited by building large, permanent settlements (Heleniak 2010, 33). Thus, *vakhtoviki* are a growing socio-professional group of *priezzhie* in the BAM region.

Figure 7.5 Shift workers at the experimental plant, Udokan deposit, Zabaikal'skii region (photo by the author).

Social dynamics: migrations, ethnicity, and intergroup relations

As mentioned above, since the 1990s, the population of the BAM region has been steadily decreasing. Figure 7.6 shows the data for Zabaykal'skii krai and Amurskaya oblast. In Kalarskii krai, the recent migration loss fluctuated between 91 people in 2006 and 239 people in 2012. Among 390 migrants who left the district, there were 306 interregional, 80 interdistrict, and four international migrants in 2012 (see Figure 7.7). The majority of interregional migrants left Zabaykal'skii krai for other parts of Siberia and the Far East, South Russia, and the cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.[16] Amurskaya oblast, located farther north, has faced an even higher migration loss. The out-migration from Tyndinskii rayon took away 540 people in 2011 and 529 in 2012,[17] whereas the outflow from Tynda municipality was 787 and 733 persons in 2011 and 2012, respectively.[18]

The changing socioeconomic situation in Russia has affected migration as well. The population leaving BAM has been partially substituted by a growing wave of post-Soviet migrants from other Russian regions (interregional migrants), other parts of the region (interdistrict migrants), and, to a lesser degree, international labor migrants, arriving, mostly, from the post-Soviet space. Among 142 migrants who arrived at Kalarskii rayon in 2012, there were 88 interregional, 48 interdistrict, and six international migrants.[19] The migration statistics for Zabaykal'skii krai reflect the general trends for its Northern BAM region: the majority of interregional migrants arrive from the neighboring federal subjects and the Far East (11–13). As for international migration to Zabaikal'skii krai, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan account for the overwhelming majority of migrants from the post-Soviet states, whose number
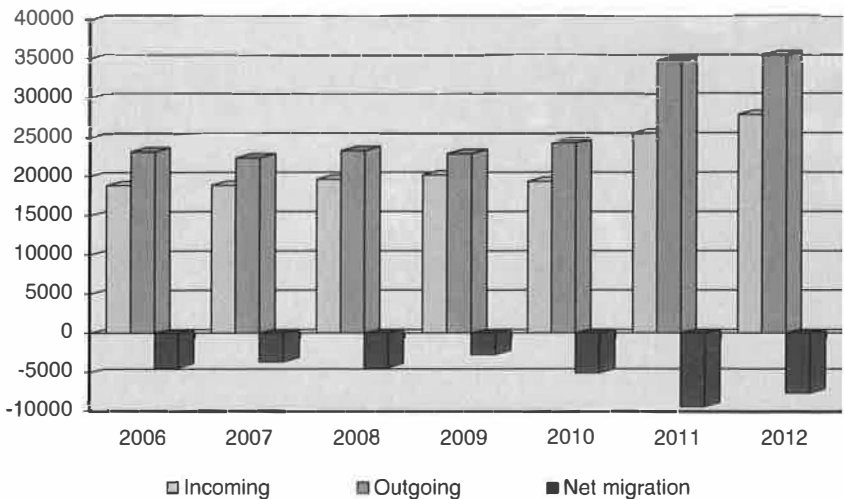
Figure 7.6 Migration dynamics in Zabaikal'skii region (number of residents).

Figure 7.7 Distribution of migrants in the district of the Far North, Zabaikal'skii region (percent) in 2012.

Based on: Migratsiia 2013, 33.
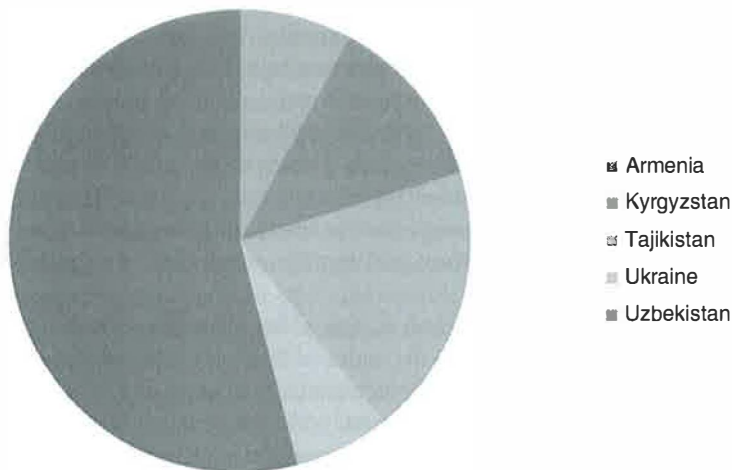
Figure 7.8 The structure of the international migration from the post-Soviet countries to Zabaikal'skii region in 2013.

Based on: Svedeniia 2013.

has been steadily growing since the early 2000s (see Figures 7.8 and 7.9).[20] Most of these migrants settle in the region's capital city, Chita, while some move up North to the BAM area.
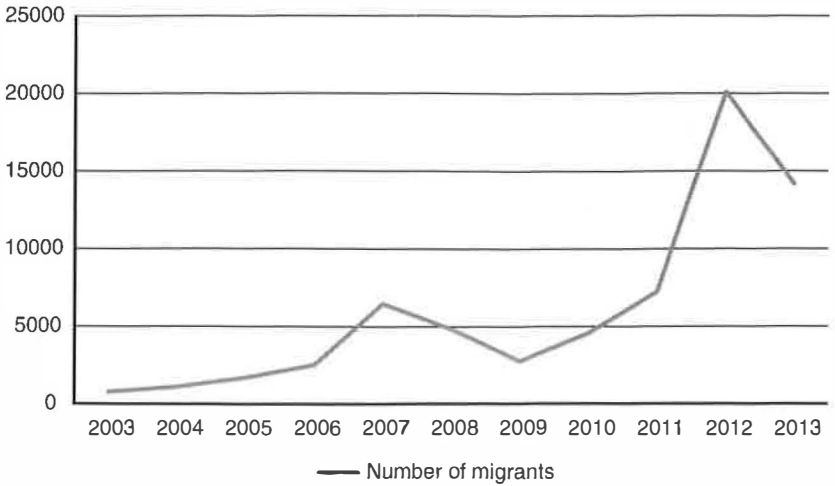
Figure 7.9 Dynamics of migrations from the post-Soviet countries to Zabaikal'skii region in 2003–2013.

Based on: Svedeniia 2013.

The mass out-migration from the Far North in the 1990s can be explained by the "surplus workforce" phenomenon reaching back to Soviet industrialization practices. In fact, during the post-Soviet socioeconomic crisis, loss of jobs was an important driving force behind out-migration from the North. However, since the 2000s, unemployment has been coupled with other social, economic, and environmental hardships experienced by Northern residents, including the high cost of living, income inequality and poverty, non-participation, deficient social services and infrastructure, and environmental pollution. Remarkably, the weight of economic factors was lower for migrants born in the North, who emphasized the frustration of living there, discomfort, and family circumstances (Vlasova and Petrov 2010, 168, 179).

The Statistical Bureau of Zabaykal'skii krai registered the following push factors for out-migration (30,688 people in total) in the region in 2012: (1) personal reasons (13,906), (2) employment (7,941 people), (3) education (5,246 people), (4) return to a former place of residence (1,563). Personal reasons (primarily family issues) were also the main push factor for the departure of interregional and interdistrict migrants. Potential migrants in Tynda also mentioned unemployment, low salaries and living standards, and unfavorable climate as the main causes of the current migration loss in the BAM region.

The remaining *bamovtsy* and other populations stayed in the region for different reasons. While some of them did not have housing in their home regions, others have developed attachments to their local communities, family and friendship ties, or stay for their "love for local nature." The social support provided to the residents

of the BAM region include a Northern wage premium (*severnaya nadbavka*), compensation of travel expenses connected with medical treatment, education, and recreation (the latter on a biannual basis), and other minor benefits usually provided to the residents of the Far North and the territories with similar climatic conditions. There are also several state programs in the region targeted at the socioeconomic development of indigenous people, relocating the BAM population to new housing, and relocating of the population from the North to "climatically favorable zones." However, these projects have recently been cut back to such an extent that, in practice, only a few families in Tyndinskii rayon, which has a total population of over 15,000 people, get new apartments or relocation subsidies each year.

> There is still a considerable outflow of population. State support programs don't work in the Far East. The average salary is 38,000 rubles and the prices are definitely high. That is why people leave and look for jobs. The [climate] conditions here are also harsh: we start wearing winter clothes in October. Only those remain here who don't have anywhere to leave for or whose heart is chained.[21]

Currently, ethnic Russians are the dominant group in BAM communities, with a rather insignificant proportion of indigenous Evenki (5.6 percent) and other ethnic groups. In 2012, 509 Evenki, 95 Uzbeks, 19 Azeris, 13 Armenians, 6 Tajiks, and 1 Kyrgyz were registered among the 9,051 residents of Kalarskii rayon.[22]

The interethnic relations in the BAM region are regulated by a presidential decree, "On Strategy of the State National Politics of the Russian Federation until 2025"[23] and regional legislation.[24] The major state subsidies allocated through seven special programs are spent on publications, mass media, and courses in ethnic (particularly Russian, Buryat, and Evenki) languages, folk groups, museum exhibitions, and cultural events. The Government of Zabaykal'skii krai has a work group focused on harmonizing interethnic and interreligious relations that monitors relevant activities of local and regional authorities, NGOs, and mass media. According to interviews with government officials working on ethnic and religious issues, the Northern districts of the BAM area have traditionally been characterized by ethnic and cultural tolerance. At the same time, the increasing inflow of migrants to the region raises concerns and demands adequate attention on behalf of authorities.[25]

The interregional Assembly of the Peoples of the Transbaikal region (*Assambleya narodov Zabaykal'ya*), which unites most of the registered "ethnic" NGOs, facilitates a public dialogue among the authorities, religious and ethnic leaders, academic communities, and other stakeholders. Whereas the regional cultures of indigenous peoples, Russian Old Believers,[26] and Cossacks have traditionally drawn public attention, the inflow of migrants from the former Soviet space have only recently boosted the emergence of their diasporas and NGOs.[27] The most prominent "ethnic" organization registered in Kalarskii rayon is a local branch of the Russian Association of Indigenous Numerically Small Peoples of the North and the Far East (RAIPON), which has been protecting Evenki rights since the 1990s.

A regional NGO called the Union of BAM Veterans, headed by a local journalist and a museum specialist, commemorates the history of the construction of the BAM and represents the interests of local *bamovtsy*. Other than a few groups in Chita, there are no organizations promoting the cultures and interests of the long-distance labor migrants working in the BAM region.

Authorities both in Novaya Chara and Tynda emphasize the ethnic and cultural diversity and tolerance, high educational level, and social cohesion among the local population. In interviews, they also describe qualities perceived as characteristics for each ethnic group in their districts.

> Interethnic or interreligious conflicts are nonsense for our district. The ethnic diversity of the district was facilitated by the BAM construction. Evenki have always been hospitable and nice. ... They will welcome you in taiga with some tea. Our *gurany* are stubborn and complaining as usual. But the major population is those who came during the BAM construction – Komsomol members, volunteers, sometimes reckless adventurists. They came, married, and had their children born here. Each station was built by its own republic. ... We don't have any kind of those conflicts that the TV shows in the Caucasus, although the regional administration is very concerned about interethnic relations. We all have been living together – we came when we were 20–22, we slept together and ate from the same plate.[28]

> Tyndinskii rayon stands out for its diverse population – there are lots of people with different professional and ethnic backgrounds from everywhere here. Despite the fact that we are considered a far periphery, children get a quality education here, because teachers came from across the (Soviet) Union, highly qualified education specialists. The same is true to engineers. Tyndinskii rayon is lucky because its people have good expertise.[29]

As indicated above, the final segment of BAM builders consider themselves to be local. When recalling BAM history, they refer to themselves as *bamovtsy*. However, in many other contexts they stress their belonging to local communities by ascribing to themselves the identities of *aborigeny* or *gurany*.

Evenki living in the BAM region have historically been considered the most tolerant, peaceful, and complacent population in terms of interethnic and interreligious relations. They appreciate the cultural and ethnic diversity of BAM communities, propagating the principles of sharing and "living like one family." The involvement of Evenki in the international indigenous rights movement and the rise of their self-consciousness in the 1990–2000s led some indigenous leaders to voice concerns regarding social discrimination, land rights, and environmental issues. In Kalarskii rayon, Evenki are worried about industrial encroachment on their lands and claim discrimination in job opportunities and education. Evenki narratives about the BAM, *bamovtsy*, and migrants typically include motifs related to environmental pollution and destruction.

They are all temporary residents (*vremenshchiki*). I have seen how they destroy the nature in Chara. They live for the day. … They still have these habits: they fish with nets and collect berries with scrapers taking more than they can carry and preserve.[30]

In other cases, Evenki residents of BAM towns blame non-indigenous teachers for creating and circulating negative stereotypes of Evenki reindeer herders, which harm the social prestige of traditional activities and undermine the ethnic pride of Evenki children. Evenki social status seems higher in Tyndinskii rayon, which has a more sizeable and well-represented Evenki population, visible not only in reindeer herding, but also in administration, education, culture, and other spheres. There are several large-scale events regularly conducted in the district to promote Evenki culture and language. The district authorities also seem to pay more attention to traditional activities, ethnic tourism, and indigenous rights, which helps to mitigate emerging social tensions.

A certain degree of xenophobia among local residents in relation to *priezzhie*, shift workers, and labor migrants from Russia and the post-Soviet space is also connected with ecological concerns and competition for jobs. In Kalarskii rayon, local residents are concerned about potential negative impacts of developing mining and transportation infrastructure for the Udokan copper mine, fearing that it would lead to increased alcoholism, drug use, and crime in their area.[31] The competition for jobs is connected with the fact that migrants tend to be more successful in terms of employment, especially in the spheres of trade, services, and extractive industries. While the companies and authorities, apparently, lack feasible strategies for increasing employment of the local population and mitigating potential social risks presented by industrial projects, such social concerns and tensions prevail.

The BAM curse or social sustainability?

The concept of a resource curse, widely used in social sciences, rests on the argument that the countries endowed with great natural wealth tend to lag behind comparable countries in terms of long-run GDP growth and other indicators of socioeconomic development (Tompson 2006, 189). Extraction of natural resources is by definition unsustainable due to their quick depletion. Therefore, as a country runs down the available "natural capital," it has to invest in other types of capital, particularly social and human resources, in order to move to a path of sustainability (Kronnenberg 2004, 405). Today, the resource curse is observed in many countries and communities dependent on resource extraction, with Russia's Northern BAM region providing an excellent case study for this phenomenon.

State socioeconomic development strategies for Siberia, the Baikal region, and the Russian Far East[32] are targeted at stabilizing the current population levels, developing the community, supporting indigenous peoples, and diversifying local economies. At the same time, they foresee increasing extraction of mineral

resources alongside industrial, technological, and infrastructural development of the Northern territories. The expected growth of the transportation infrastructure and the (re)construction of the BAM second track presume increased exports of raw materials to Asian markets. In the future, the BAM complex, with its network of side-tracks and roads, should ensure access to gas fields and metal deposits in the region. Thus, the state strategies pursue development paths leading in opposite directions. In practice, most development programs focus on exploiting mineral wealth and underestimate the value of social capital. While developing technologies and infrastructure for extractive industries, lawmakers, authorities, and companies slash investments in human resources – education, social infrastructure, services, and other important aspects of community development.

The social sustainability agenda used in political and academic discourses includes a commitment to enhance education and provide the new skills required for the "knowledge-intensive" economy, revamping employment policy to create "more and better jobs," modernizing social protection to accommodate challenges faced by welfare states, fighting poverty, and promoting equality and social inclusion (Colantonio 2007, 6). While adopting some of the clichés and buzzwords from the global mainstream political debates on sustainability, Russian development strategies and their implementation mechanisms overemphasize economic efficiency at the expense of social issues. The sporadic use of the terms "sustainable development" and "social sustainability" by authorities and company leaders in the BAM region does not mean that any tools are included to measure the sustainability of current programs and policies.

BAM construction and operation have had diverse social and ecological impacts on local communities. The prospecting stage preceding construction demonstrated the best practices of involving the local, particularly the indigenous, population in industrial projects throughout the whole history of the BAM region. In Kalarskii rayon, Evenki reindeer herders worked as porters of food, goods, and soil and stone samples for geological and engineering organizations.[33] At later stages, however, construction was carried out by a migrant labor force, with minimal participation by the local population.

However, the BAM has become an indispensable means of communication between indigenous villages, administrative centers, and reindeer herders' camps. Its social and transportation infrastructure has become invisibly, but deeply, integrated into the everyday life practices and transportation schemes of the local population. After the demise of the local aviation sector and degradation of other transportation routes in the North in the 1990s, settlements lying along the BAM or connected to it by permanent roads were left in the best position. Remote taiga areas, however, experienced increased poaching, especially among the non-indigenous population, which also increased social tensions between *aborigeny* and *bamovtsy*. Since the launch of the railroad, its growing infrastructure has also had a negative impact on the taiga landscape and Evenki traditional land use. The BAM polluted the fragile Northern taiga, interrupted animal migration routes, and damaged reindeer pastures and hunting grounds (Anderson 1991; Fondahl 1998).

Future development plans, dating back to the Soviet era, for the BAM region include construction of the second track and multiple side-tracks of the railroad, as well as the establishment of industrial clusters. One projected cluster will be located near the Udokan deposit in Northern Kalarskii rayon and includes a large processing plant and a network of the largest mineral deposits found in the region. This large-scale industrial project foresees (re)construction of the airport, roads, and social infrastructure and creating over 20,000 jobs, most of which, however, are to be occupied by outside shift workers (Polyakov 2013). This ambitious project will need significant state and private investments, which, as of late 2015, have not been secured.

BGK and SUEK, the two biggest companies presently operating in Kalarskii rayon, employ shift workers from other parts of the region, plus a few permanent residents from Udokan village, located by the mine and the administrative center of Novaya Chara. In Tyndinskii rayon, the mining industry employed 3,094 local residents, making it the largest employer, followed by railroad construction and maintenance, which employed 1,074 residents in 2012.[34] Remarkably, mining companies very rarely recruit their labor force from the indigenous population. While local authorities argue that indigenous and local residents lack the requisite education and professional skills, some company leaders propagate negative stereotypes about indigenous people.[35] In turn, Evenki NGOs blame the companies for discrimination and indifference toward their traditional culture and economic activities, as well as to the pollution and devastation of natural resources.

While extractive companies in different districts provide different employment opportunities for the local population, their overall contribution to community development is limited. Usually they act as sponsors of small-scale social projects and regular events, such as the Reindeer Herders' Day celebrated in indigenous villages, sports competitions, tourist festivals, construction of sports and cultural centers, and renovation of housing and administration buildings. Priisk Solov'evskii in Tyndinskii rayon has demonstrated the best development practices by reconstructing the social infrastructure of the rural community of Solovievsk. Authorities in Kalarskii rayon have pinned their hopes for new roads and housing on BGK, a growing company that has not yet provided any significant support to the local communities.

"Traditional industries," including reindeer herding, hunting, and associated activities, as well as the emerging field of ethnic tourism, also offer prospects for economic diversification and social sustainability of BAM towns. The authorities and heads of indigenous enterprises in Kalarskii rayon have been discussing the establishment of a reindeer breeding herd and a herder's union that would consolidate small-scale indigenous *obshchinas* and qualify for a significant state subsidy. The production of reindeer meat and skins for souvenirs and clothing, as well as the procurement of deer antlers for the pharmaceutical industry, could also be profitable and provide additional jobs and social security for herders in future.

"White Deer" is another project coordinated by the agro- and ethno-tourism center at the secondary school in Kuanda, Kalarskii rayon.[36] In addition to

educational programs in traditional industries, the center organizes tours to reindeer herders' camp in the taiga and sponsors museum exhibitions on Evenki culture.[37] In Tyndinskii rayon, tourists can visit the "Evenki Village" museum that opened in the Pervomaiskoe indigenous settlement in March 2012. The site includes an Evenki cultural center, a souvenir shop, and exhibitions of traditional and contemporary Evenki dwellings and artifacts.[38] Currently, these initiatives are supported by the socioeconomic development programs for indigenous peoples of the North and employ some local activists and educators. However, more significant state and private investments could further promote ethnic tourism, increase employment, and draw public attention back to indigenous issues.

The developing mining industry has increased competition for natural resources, especially land. The growing industrial infrastructure encroaches upon traditional lands of indigenous *obshchinas* involved in reindeer herding and hunting. In Kalarskii rayon, the current policies, focused on resource extraction, are implemented by a coalition of local authorities and companies. Indigenous NGOs may assert land claims at public hearings, but they tend to be disregarded by company leaders. In terms of rival land claims, the local authorities give unconditional preference to large industrial companies. They foresee the relocation of Evenki reindeer herding enterprises and the alienation of their traditionally occupied lands for industrial development, without compensation. Such encroachment of expanding industrial infrastructure on traditional lands reduces opportunities for the development of large-scale reindeer herding and ethnic tourism, while increasing social tensions, especially between indigenous and non-indigenous populations.

Conclusions

The BAM region represents a remarkable site for an anthropological inquiry into the Soviet and post-Soviet industrialization history of the Russian North. Contemporary BAM settlements, with their ethnically and culturally diverse population, resemble typical single-industry towns dependent upon the functioning of the railroad and mining industries. Indigenous people, BAM builders, and newcomers are three distinct groups forming the social networks of BAM communities.

The original ethnic fabric of the region was woven of the indigenous population – Evenki and other Tungus-speaking minorities and Russian Old Settlers. Their subsistence activities – hunting, reindeer herding and cattle-breeding – still play an important economic and cultural role. Presently, there are dozens of small-scale indigenous enterprises leading semi-nomadic lifestyles on their traditional lands, which are often encroached upon by extractive industries and infrastructural developments. However, labor migrants have also played a major role in the formation of the region's cultural tapestry.

The construction of the BAM settlements and infrastructure triggered the most significant population influx in the region's history, drawing potential workers from across the former USSR. The BAM has considerably shaped local identities

and communities, and BAM builders and their descendants now constitute the majority of the population in the settlements along the railroad, as well as a visible proportion of residents in adjacent mixed communities. Today, a second wave of migrant workers from the post-Soviet space has flooded the region to revive and expand the railroad, housing, industrial plants, and other infrastructure. In many cases, they experience precarious working conditions and confinement to specific economic sectors. Another set of new incomers are long-distance commuters (see Chapter 5): the extractive industries operating in the region increasingly employ qualified workers from all over Russia, using the fly-in/fly-out shift work system as their main method of operation.

Aborigeny, bamovtsy, priezzhie, and other names serve as identity markers, ascribed and self-ascribed in the course of identity politics and intergroup relations. Soviet nation-building policy has proven effective in forging the social coherence of a multiethnic labor force using the construction of the BAM as an experimental social engineering project. In this process, ethnicity has served as an important factor in forging the culturally diverse, yet integrated local communities with histories of long-term, peaceful co-existence and cooperation. The present cultural and religious tolerance still carries significant potential for social sustainability of the BAM region. While the boundaries between "locals" and "migrants" are flexible and penetrable, having ties to the local community is an asset, which is especially valued in interrelations between the main groups and stakeholders.

The 2012 national political strategy and recent regional development programs have yet to be tested by new socioeconomic reality and trends. Local authorities and mining companies operating in the region pursue resource-dependent economic policies, often neglecting social and human capital as the most important factor for sustainable community development. Such unwise policy leads to mutual negative stereotypes and social tensions between local and non-local residents, based on competition for jobs, lands, and state support. Official support of traditional economic activities and ethnic tourism, recognition of indigenous rights, and creation of local mechanisms for integration of new migrants would create more equal employment opportunities and access to land and other resources and redirect BAM communities to a path of a more sustainable socioeconomic development.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on the field and archival study conducted in the city of Chita, Kalarskii rayon, Zabaykal'skii krai, and the city of Tynda in Amurskaya oblast in September–October 2013. The preliminary results of the study were presented and discussed at the Arctic Frontiers Conference in Tromso, Norway, on January 22, 2013. The author thanks the George Washington University for supporting the research upon which this chapter is based. During the final stages of preparing this publication, support from the Austrian Science Fund (FWF, project P27625-G22, "Configurations of Remoteness (CoRe): Entanglements of Humans and Transportation Infrastructure in the Baykal–Amur Mainline (BAM) Region") has been important.

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17 *Itogi*, 17.
18 *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe polozhenie*, 31.
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24 For example, Law of Zabaykal'skii krai, "On State Support of Socially Oriented NGOs in Zabaikal'skii Krai"; Governor's Decree, "On Monitoring of Interethnic and Interreligious Relations and Responding to Manifestations of Religious and Ethnic Extremism"; Governmental Act, "Action Plan for Harmonization of Interethnic Relations in Zabaikal'skii Krai in 2011–2013."
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30 Author's interview with respondent N.P.G., 2013.

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III. **Publication 2. The Baikal-Amur Mainline: Memories and Emotions of a Socialist Construction Project**

The Baikal-Amur Mainline

Memories and Emotions of a Socialist Construction Project

OLGA POVOROZNYUK

Abstract: The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), a railroad in East Siberia and the Russian Far East, became the last large Soviet industrial project. Its construction in the 1970s and 1980s attracted migrants from across the USSR, who formed the *bamovtsy*, or group of BAM builders. They share a history of working and living along the BAM and constitute the majority population in the region. The article argues that emotionally charged social memory of the BAM construction plays the central role in reproducing and reinforcing the *bamovtsy* identity in the post-Soviet period. Drawing on in-depth interviews and focus groups, the article examines the dynamics of both individual and collective remembering of the socialist BAM. It forms a vibrant discursive and emotional field, in which memories and identities are reconstructed, relived, and contested. Commemorative ceremonies such as the fortieth anniversary of the BAM serve as forums of public remembering and arenas for the politics of emotions.

Keywords: Baikal-Amur Mainline, emotions, identity, politics, post-socialism, social memory

The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) is the longest northernmost railroad crossing the regions of East Siberia and the Russian Far East to link the Eurasian countries with East Asia. The history of the BAM starts with early construction projects dating back to the nineteenth century and continues with the first tracks laid under the Stalinist regime in the 1950s. However, the majority of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984, under the authority of the Soviet industrial program focused on "mastering the North" (Slavin 1982). The mainline was built for resource extraction and became a "century project" employing modern technologies for the transformation of the natural environment (Josephson 1995) and a symbol of Soviet "high modernism" (Scott 1998),

combining the elements of technological and social engineering. The communist propaganda in mass media underlying the launch of the project and mass labor mobilization campaign constructed "the myth of the BAM" (Ward 2001). The railroad became a part of the Soviet project of modernization and internal colonization (Kotkin 1997), an agent of social change and the backbone of regional development (Povoroznyuk 2016).

The railroad construction brought a dramatic change to the territories sparsely populated by indigenous, primarily Tungusic-speaking peoples by attracting a massive inflow of labor force from different parts of the former USSR. The migrants included young, primarily male engineers, drivers, and other workers, usually recruited by Komsomol, a communist youth organization; they were delegated to designated construction sites in Russia and other Soviet republics and regions. It should be noted that in addition to communist ideology, material stimuli were applied as part of the late socialist methods of labor recruitment. High salaries, along with access to scarce goods and social benefits, were used to motivate and attract young people to the construction site. Upon completion of the construction, many of the migrants settled in the cities and towns they had built along the mainline to form a majority population with a distinct socioprofessional identity: the "BAM builders" (*bamovtsy*).

The popular Soviet slogan "We built the BAM and the BAM built us" (*BAM* 2012) reflects the process of co-construction of the railroad and *bamovtsy* identities. The ideal of a new man who develops positive personal qualities through overcoming everyday hardships in the process of the "nature's conquest" and construction of a communist society (Bolotova 2014: 73) informed heroic images of the BAM builders as part of the Soviet people in general. The region of BAM construction was intended to become a miniature model of the Soviet Union: each railroad station was supposed to represent a particular republic and/or an ethnic group. The Soviet nationality policy, despite its Russian particularism and inherent contradiction between ethnic and territorial identities (Brubaker 2014; Martin 2001), along with other factors, was instrumental in the management of cultural diversity among the growing population along the BAM and the consolidation of the migrants.

The dissolution of the USSR marked a shift in the discourse about the BAM project and its builders, from glorification to public criticism. The following socioeconomic crisis, which coincided with the official end of the major construction works, also drove a major part of the *bamovtsy* population out of the region. The *bamovtsy* became a "silent

group," whose heroic narratives were no longer part of the mainstream collective memory. Yet their identity and memory persisted throughout political, ideological, and mnemonic shifts since the late socialism and the dissolution of the USSR into the post-socialist times. Although *bamovtsy* is a contested identity based on internally drawn boundaries, they form a distinct social group. These people remember the BAM as both a grandiose national project and an important personal experience. Their memories have gone from privately held individual stories into publicly manifested emotional narratives.

I argue that social memory—as informed by socialist state ideologies, as well as by firsthand experience of participation in a historical event or a process like the BAM construction—plays the central role in post-Soviet identity-building. The dominant state discourses of the late Soviet period left little room for individual narratives, but the immediate experience of the first-generation BAM builders sustains the affective and living memory of the BAM and supports the identity of its carriers. A sociological study conducted among former BAM builders in Moscow and St. Petersburg concluded that *bamovtsy* are a product of the late Soviet subjectivity and their memories are essentially internalized discourses of a communist utopia (Bogdanova 2013: 215; Voronina 2009). While these findings resonate with my study, I claim that *bamovtsy* are both a product of the state ideologies and policies and an outcome of shared everyday life experiences related to participation in the BAM construction. Furthermore, the dialogue of "internalized" public discourses and "externalized" individual life stories (White 1999: 506–507) constitutes a multilevel remembering process that informs the reproduction of *bamovtsy* identity.

In this article focused on the memories of the construction of Baikal-Amur Mainline, I ask the following questions: How did the state policies and propaganda interplay with the lived experiences of the railroad construction in shaping *bamovtsy*? How much space is left for private memories of the BAM construction and what is the dynamics of individual and group remembering? Which role do affective memories of *bamovtsy* play in post-Soviet politics of emotions and identity-building in Russia? Finally, I consider the role of commemorative events in the reconstruction of the BAM social history, memory, and identity of *bamovtsy*. I address these questions drawing on my field data, which include observations, focus groups, and individual interviews with the builders of the BAM living in the cites of Tynda and Severobaikal'sk and the towns of Novaia Chara and Iuktali in East Siberia and the Russian Far East (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Location map. Note: the map represents only the districts (raions) where the main research sites are located. Author: Alexis Sancho-Reinoso.

The total sample included 30 informants: 3 focus groups and 5 individual interviews were conducted in 2016; and 3 focus groups and 8 individual interviews in 2017. The size of the focus groups varied from 2 (4 occasions), to 5 (1 occasion), and 10 (1 occasion) individuals.[1] For this research, I sought out people who had directly participated in or moved to the region during the construction process, consider themselves to be *bamovtsy* and continue to live permanently in the region. In order to find informants, I contacted local administration centers, museums, and local nongovernmental organizations of *bamovtsy*. My previous extensive fieldwork experience in the region, although on a different topic,[2] helped to build contacts with *bamovtsy* through social networks I had already established. The two larger focus groups in 2016 were organized with the assistance of a local administration body and a BAM museum respectively. Their participants were informed about a meeting in advance, though with short notice. The four other small focus groups emerged more spontaneously when informants suggested bringing along or including another person—a colleague, a friend, or a family member—in the conversation. In all cases, focus group participants knew each other from before through professional (former or/and current common place of work) and other social (neighbors, friends,

family members) networks. Individual interviews were arranged by the recommendations and contacts provided by the aforementioned institutions or by using snow ball sampling methods. In the case of the two larger focus groups, we invited 3 out of 10 and 2 out of 5 participants, respectively, to individual follow up interviews. The larger focus groups took place at the premises of a club in Novaia Chara and a local museum in Severobaikal'sk, while two smaller groups were conducted at informants' work places and two others at participants' homes. The locations of individual interviews varied from people's homes, to cafeterias and other public places, to hotels where I was staying.

Although focus groups were not planned in the initial research design, informants remembered the BAM construction collectively better, in the company of peers and friends. Therefore, I had to adjust to the circumstances and opportunities that such an interview format offered and to develop a number of key questions that could help to streamline the remembering process in groups. As a result, a combination of focus groups and in-depth interviews turned out to be instrumental in taking a more nuanced perspective regarding the emotional contents, functions, and dynamics of individual and collective memories of the BAM.

Memories and Emotions of (Post-)socialism

The idea that the experience of the present depends on the knowledge of the past held by a particular person or a group is a common place of memory studies. Memory can be an individual faculty, but collective or social memory is a dimension of political power that uses images of the past to legitimate a present social order (Connerton 1989: 1–4).

Aleida Assmann (2008) argues that collective memory is an umbrella term extending to different memory formats. Among them, social and interactive memory is embodied and grounded in lived experience that vanishes with its carriers. "As we pass the shadow line from short-term to long-term durability or from an embodied intergenerational to a dis- or re-embodied transgenerational memory, implicit and fuzzy bottom-up memory is transformed into a much more explicit and institutionalized top-down memory" (Assmann 2008: 55–56). From her perspective, memory can be learned and/or experiential and that it is often difficult to disentangle what one experienced from what one read or saw in films; thus, the past cannot be just remem-

bered but has to be memorized through internalization and rites of participation that create the identity of a "we" (Assmann 2008: 50–52). Following this work, I point out the complex nature of the memories about the BAM and the sources that feed it: from Soviet propaganda slogans and clichés to individual life stories. I also discuss the transformation of the living memory of the BAM construction as narrated by the participants who experienced it firsthand into a more standardized and legitimized form of collective remembering transmitted to the next generations of *bamovtsy* or "children of the BAM" (*deti BAMa*).

Although memory can be a reservoir of history, it is not the same thing as history. Personal memory, collective memory, and written history interact and shape each other as versions of the past are constructed and reconstructed (Watson 1994: 8–9). Collective memories do not depend on a single individual's direct experience of the past. However personal memories of events that they experienced themselves may be passed on in conversation and storytelling, written down in the form of diaries, autobiographies, or memoirs to become a powerful source of social memory. An avalanche of popular literature, newspaper articles, and photo albums about the BAM drawing on personal stories and interviews with the builders was produced during the construction process. Soviet mass media used individual examples to create the myth of the BAM that informed the collective memory. Thus, Soviet rhetoric and the social history of the BAM have been exploited as resources supporting the railroad modernization program.

Connerton (2009: 26) distinguishes two ways of bringing the past into the present: remembering and acting out. According to him, remembering is a capability of forming meaningful narrative sequences as an attempt to integrate isolated or alien phenomena into a single unified process. These narrative sequences are formed and modified throughout the time and translated from generation to generation. Commemorative ceremonies can be considered another important mnemonic device. They serve to remind a community of its identity as represented by and told in the master narrative: a collective variant of personal memory and a collective endeavor of making sense of the past (Connerton 2009: 70). Formalism and performativity are the features that they share with other rituals and forms of ritualized behavior. At the same time, an explicit reference to prototypical (be they historical or mythological) persons and events, alongside the powerful memory-shaping tool of re-enactment, distinguishes commemorative ceremonies from other rites (Connerton 2009: 61).

An affective turn in the social sciences turns its attention to the social dynamics and political dimensions of emotional interactions (Lutz and White 1986: 405–410, 417). Thus, emotions are mediators between the psychic and the social, and the individual and the collective rather than mere psychological dispositions (Ahmed 2004: 26). By mediating and representing the past and reinforcing the sense of belonging to a community, they address complex interconnections between memory, identity, and imagination (Kontopodis and Matera 2010: 3). Personal stories are often used as allegories to embody and emotionalize national histories. Acts of remembering bring personal memory and collective history into the same discursive field, thereby working to simultaneously emotionalize history and nationalize understandings of self and community (White 1999). Since the late 1990s, nostalgia, mistrust, fear, anger, on the one hand, and joy, pride, enthusiasm, and hope, on the other, have been leitmotivs of post-socialist memory narratives (Palmberger 2008). The concept of the politics of emotions sees rapid change in post-socialist states as an emotionally evocative context. Post-socialist emotions shape social life and provide a moral framework in which power relations are being discussed and played out (Svašek 2006: 3–7). I argue that the BAM builders' memories are populated by the reawakening feelings of joy, pride, hope, and nostalgia for a strong state, as well as by resentment and disenchantment caused by post-Soviet social change. These emotions are objectified and "managed" in order to sustain loyal socialist identities, such as that of the *bamovtsy*, within the current political regime.

In his case study of the Victory Day Parade in Russia, Serguei Oushakine vividly describes the role of commemorative rituals and emotions in the reconstruction of the Soviet history and the rise of performative patriotism. His concept "affective management of history" implies practices of active evoking of sensorial responses and emotional encoding, when "facts and events . . . are emotionally relived and re-enacted" (Oushakine 2013: 274). The use of media and technologies (e.g., a big screen on the Red Square showing war scenes), the collective singing of patriotic songs, as well as TV interviews with prominent figures, all induced synchronized collective emotions. The reinvented symbols of the war (e.g., St. George's ribbon, which is associated with the Soviet Order of Glory) became affective mnemonic objects connecting the history with the present. The author argues that the public remembering of the Great Patriotic War draws on new forms of memorialization that become dominant ways of organizing the Soviet experience in contemporary Russia. The celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the BAM

construction and the following launch of the program of the railroad's technological modernization became public forums of commemoration of the BAM history in the same way as described in Oushakine's article on the Victory Day.

Soviet Industrialization and Nation-Building

Soviet industrialization campaigns included a series of large-scale projects popularly known as "communist construction sites" (Graham 1996; Kotkin 1997; Payne 2001) that were intended to serve as show-cases of modernization and development in different parts of the Soviet Union. Drawing settlers of diverse backgrounds to the country's frontier regions, communist construction sites followed similar ideological, economic, and demographic patterns. Popular arts and propaganda literature created the images of pioneers conquering a new frontier—brave and hard-working builders creating a new life in the harsh conditions of remote regions (Stolberg 2005).

The mobilization campaigns of the early Soviet period drew on forced labor, including the conscription of inmates of the notorious GULAG camps. During late socialism, new recruitment methods such as propaganda and the state programs of the voluntary distribution of the labor force became popular. A massive population influx had a major impact on the social and cultural fabric of the northern regions: the resulting ethnic diversity of its population was managed by the Soviet nationality policies. The official discourse proclaimed that the Soviet Union was a "happy family of nations," where "the national question" had already been resolved. Such idealist representations of nationality policies contradicted the realities of ethnic tensions, discrimination and conflicts that were widespread across the nation. The intrinsic controversy of the Soviet nationalities strategy—pre-determined by legal incongruency and spatial mismatch between the concepts of national territories and personal nationalities (Brubaker 2014)—challenged the policy's mission, which was the forging of the entity of "Soviet people." A critical historical study of the BAM argues that there was ethnically based discrimination at play, noting that there was a predomination of Russian and other Slavic migrants at the con-struction site and that more members of these groups that tended to gain access to well-paid jobs (Ward 2009: 99–114).

While ethnicity and its derivative state-imposed categories might have played a role, especially at the beginning of the construction, other

processes of boundary-making and identity-building proved to be more important with the time. The differentiation between "locals" (*mestnye*) and "newcomers" (*priezzhie*) became a more meaningful category distinction in mixed communities emerging along the railroad. In the late socialist period, the Soviet state systematically invested its economic resources in regional development. New settlers were often attracted to the North because of state benefits and privileges granted on a temporary basis, but over time they developed roots and a sense of belonging to local communities. BAM builders, similar to Russian settlers in Chukotka (Thompson 2008), were drawn to the North by romantic images, ideological slogans, and new life opportunities. They formed their communities during a period of economic stability, solidarity, free access to education, jobs, and leisure; the life conditions of the last Soviet generation later became the objects of post-Soviet nostalgia (Yurchak 2007).

Building the BAM and BAM Builders

BAM's legacy begins in the late nineteenth century. With the outbreak of World War I, the tsarist government built a railroad on the southern shore of Lake Baikal as an attempt to ensure the geopolitical security of the Russian Far East and East Siberia against China. The next ancestor of the contemporary BAM was a railroad stretching from Komsomol'sk-na-Amure to Sovetskaia Gavan', which was built between 1932 and 1953 by labor camp inmates, military personnel, and prisoners of war (Mote 2003). That project was abandoned after Stalin's death in 1953, and the idea of restarting BAM construction gained official favor during the Brezhnev era nearly two decades later.

"The third BAM" represented a grandiose engineering endeavor and the last massive Communist industrial project "exploiting the USSR's vast natural resources for propagandistic and economic reasons" (Ward 2009: 2). Moscow hoped that a completed BAM would bolster collective faith in the command-administrative system and serve as the prototype for further conquests of the Soviet Union's vast and resource-rich northeastern frontier in the twenty-first century. The Komsomol labor mobilization campaign launched in 1974 urged young people to rally together and build the BAM in the spirit of "self-sacrifice" and "fraternal cooperation" for the sake of "social strengthening" in the remote corners of the USSR. Thus, the major part of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984, although some sections were put into operation as late as in 2003.

The present-day BAM is approximately 4,300 kilometers (2,600 miles) long, with its main branch, the Amur-Yakutsk Mainline, stretching 1,200 kilometers (746 miles). The Mainline crosses the northern districts of six federal subjects: Irkutskaia Oblast', the Republic of Buriatiia, Zabaikal'skii Krai in East Siberia, and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiia), Amurskaia Oblast', and Khabarovskii Krai in the Russian Far East. With its existing and projected sidetracks leading to mineral deposits and connecting remote settlements with administrative centers, the railroad provides a reliable transportation network for people, goods, and resources. The growing demand for coal, oil, and timber resulted in almost double the increase in cargo transportation (RZhD 2016). For the purposes of continued extraction and transportation of resources, a state program of the railroad modernization was launched in 2014.

As previously mentioned, the construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline attracted labor migrants from other Russian regions and former Soviet Republics (Belkin and Sheregi 1985). From 1980 to 1985, 1,000,000 young people arrived in the Far East, including the BAM Zone[3] annually: 800,000 of them then moved on to other places and only 100,000 stayed in the same location for two winters (Argudiaeva 1988: 10). The labor force recruited to build the BAM was made up of young, educated, and skilled men, who initially came to work on a short-term (usually three-year) contract, but often married and settled in the region. One-third of the BAM builders arrived from different parts of Russia, one-fifth from Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, and the remaining part from Belarus', the Baltics, and the Caucasus (Figure 2).

As also mentioned previously, the young BAM builders were motivated by communist ideology and romanticism of the Komsomol movement, a driving force of other Siberian large-scale industrial projects during late socialism (Rozhanskii 2002). Prior to enrollment in a BAM construction brigade, a specialist was supposed to meet certain educational and professional requirements and to demonstrate his or her motivation and compliance with communist ideals. Official discourses heroicized *bamovtsy* and celebrated their labor (Figure 3).

Ideological slogans, clichés, and romantic images of "the building site of the century," "the path to the future," "the project of the era of developed socialism" propagated in mass media and popular literature, created "the myth of the BAM" (Ward 2001). The theme of the BAM and the images of *bamovtsy* were reflected in local arts, literature, music, poetry, and architecture (Figure 4).
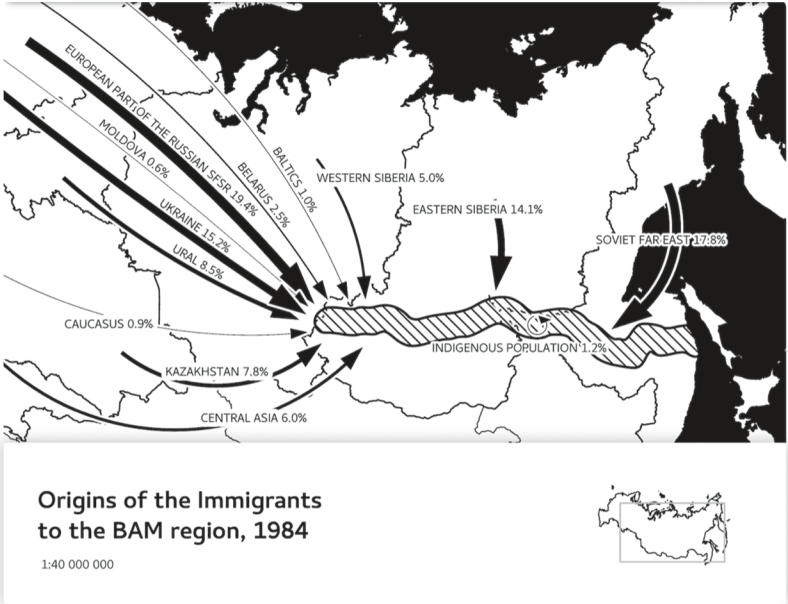
Figure 2. Map of migrations to the BAM region in 1984. Author: Christoph Fink. *Source*: Argudiaeva 1988.

Figure 3. BAM builders with slogans at a demonstration. *Source:* Courtesy of the Museum of the BAM Construction in Tynda.

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Figure 4. Monument to the BAM builder, Severobaikal'sk Railway Station. Author: Peter Schweitzer.

Special events that occurred during the BAM construction, such as the connection of the eastern and western tracks (*stykovka zolotogo zvena*), visits of high profile officials and pop stars to the region were surrounded by public ceremonies (e.g., drinking champagne from helmets) and festive events. This massive propaganda, extending the mythologization and ritualization of the events (Grützmacher 2012: 46–47, 64–66), helped develop a sense of solidarity and reinforce *bamovtsy* identity.

Builders were also attracted to the construction project by lucrative material benefits. According to contracts that workers signed in their home republics and regions, the state provided them with apartments and cars after a few years of work, as well as high salaries and social benefits. The BAM builders also enjoyed access to goods and commodities that were regularly supplied to the region but unavailable elsewhere in the country. As a result, a contract at the BAM often yielded a substantial amount of income in a relatively short period of time. Such opportunities attracted not only specialists, but also fortune-seekers: short-term contractors, and, since the 1990s, individual entrepreneurs and dealers.

In addition to the ideologies and material benefits, the sense of unity and belonging was achieved through social factors; a mostly homogeneous age, educational, and professional profile of the BAM worker facilitated the creation of social networks. For example, the neighborhood settlement patterns, wherein colleagues working in the same organization or construction brigade also became neighbors in their apartment buildings and, thus, spent time together both at work and at home, strengthened friendly ties. The construction of the newly built environment, including the BAM railroad with its settlements and social infrastructure, gave builders a sense of fulfillment and the subsequent attachment to this new environment (Bolotova and Stammler 2010). Thus, the collective experience of overcoming of everyday hardships (especially in the early days of the construction), and the establishment of professional and personal networks formed an identity based on a sense of belonging to the North and making a contribution to a great development and modernization project.

Currently, the term *bamovtsy* is used both as an external and self-designation primarily in relation to those who directly took part in the construction process. Among this core group, most distinguished are veterans of the BAM (*veterany BAMa*) who came at the initial stages of the BAM construction. They differentiate themselves from "late comers" who arrived when the road and settlements were almost fin-

ished and launched and, thus, could enjoy better life comforts. There is also a strong internal differentiation among *bamovtsy* by their institutional affiliation and the infrastructural objects; they distinguish between builders of the tracks, tunnels, bridges, and so on. A current place of residence is another marker. Those who settled in the region consider themselves to be "real" *bamovtsy* in contrast to those who left during the economic crisis of the 1990s, despite the strong social networks among *bamovtsy* living in the region and beyond.

The self-designation *bamovtsy* can also be interpreted in a wider sense. For example, it can be applied to specialists and entrepreneurs who "came to work at the BAM" in the 1970s–1990s. They did not directly participate in the construction, but worked in the public sector (trade, communal services, education, and health care), which was emerging parallel to the railroad. A broader interpretation of *bamovtsy* as a regional identity exists that can be applied to all permanent local residents of the BAM Region. Finally, "children of the BAM" (*deti BAMa*) are the second generation of BAM builders who were born into *bamovtsy* families and spent their childhood and/or their adult life in the region. Furthermore, some informants also mention a legal concept of *bamovtsy*, which applies to those who took part in the BAM construction for at least three years and received an order of merit or other distinctions. The latter interpretation of the term is not so wide spread.

Narrating the Socialist BAM

Individual and collective memories of the socialist period of the BAM construction share a number of common themes that follow, to varying degrees, the master narrative of the BAM. The main distinguishing feature between the two is a scale of attention: while individual stories are told from a perspective of oneself and one's own family and immediate surroundings, memories that pop up in focus groups tend to raise larger-scale issues. In remembering, though, personal stories and collective memories intermingle, informing each other and these bringing different perspectives together. Both individual and collective narratives have a performative aspect, but it is more pronounced in focus groups. The line between the remembering informant(s) (the actors) and the anthropologist (the spectator) sets the stage for the (re)construction of memories and identities. Personal stories illustrate and emotionalize descriptions and chronologies. The repetition of individual stories with a similar cognitive and emotional message in focus groups either

reinforces the overall sense of happiness, joy, pride, disenchantment, or nostalgia or reveals latent dissonances and tensions.

The theme that opens memory narratives usually includes first encounters with the BAM project and one's motivation to participate in it. Some informants present their decision to join the construction as simply taken for granted: BAM was such a large and well-known construction site that it was hard to avoid coming there. Others recall where and when they first learned about the BAM, including the facts that caught their attention and reasons that motivated them to join the project. While many *bamovtsy* mention the material benefits as important stimuli, virtually all of them claim that nonmaterial motivations were stronger. Genuine interest in the grandiose industrial project, a sense of romanticism, enthusiasm, and inspiration for new and exciting life opportunities, and the challenge of testing oneself professionally and personally were all reasons given for engagement with the BAM project:

> I can tell you that we all went to "the building site of the century," as it was declared. Komsomol, youth, romantic people were coming. When one is 20 he is not yet seasoned—not for money, but for romanticism. People with pure souls were coming for the idea . . . There was unity, and respect for each other. All this created a good environment." (AICh, Severobaikal'sk, 2017)

Even though in practice many of the BAM construction leaders managed to build a career, achieve a high social status, and to accumulate solid material resources, they preferred to highlight other motivations for their participation in the project.

The second master narrative relating to the BAM concerns its status as a great industrial and modernization project. *Bamovtsy* reiterate that the railroad brought "civilization" with its modern infrastructures and lifestyle to this remote region and its indigenous population. Only few of our interlocutors could critically reflect on the project's negative impacts, such as environmental pollution, encroachment on traditional lands and lifeways, and the assimilation of indigenous peoples. And even when doing so, they justified these impacts as inevitable costs of "progress" and development:

> BAM gave life to the north of the Republic of Buriatiia. Development, roads . . . Now all the settlements are accessible: there is asphalt. There is also electricity everywhere. Radio and television broadcasting towers were built everywhere. Today even in B.K. they use these [mobile] phones. They could not even imagine it earlier . . . Most

important, they [the indigenous people] got development. Look at people from those villages now. They work in industrial companies and at the railroad. They got higher education, specialized secondary education. (focus group, Severobaikal'sk, 2016)

The rhetoric of "mastering the North" penetrates individual stories of everyday hardships, labor, and human achievement in "conquering nature." These memories are filled with the pioneering spirit and heroic feelings and are distinctly related to the early days of the BAM. Typically, former builders and their family members recall their austere living and working conditions in a harsh natural environment, unsettled lives caused by frequent travels and relocations, as well as an insufficient supply of food and goods. "There were not any facilities: a barrel with water and a toilet outside. My husband's apartment was a small room: a self-made wooden table, a cupboard and a TV. When we entered, I thought: 'And how are we going to live here!?'" (GVL, Novaia Chara, 2016).

As interviews develop, survival stories—with their background emotions of surprise or astonishment—usually give way to joyful and proud memories of the first achievements of the BAM construction. These memories are often connected with public celebrations of the milestone events at the construction process:

> In 1974, the construction was launched, and in 1979 it had progressed. This work was then appreciated and recognized. It was a big source of pride. We were meeting the first train. My husband was given a floor since he was a trail-blazer of the construction. The first train went here. The golden spike was made here. We have outlived all this. We had a hard life. We were freezing and burning, we were eating dried vegetables. (GVL, Novaia Chara, 2016)

> One could feel real life here! I worked as a switch-board operator and connected deputy ministers with our [BAM] administration. Every day we gave a summary report on each kilometer and requested all we needed: "The track-laying vehicle reached such and such kilometer. Such and such an object was put into operation." And you had a feeling of moving on and on. (NIK, Tynda, 2016)

The repetition of similar stories in focus groups reinvigorated shared emotional memories as well:

> We were happy when the first train arrived. This was crazy because I couldn't believe it! When you live in a such an out-of-the-way place, when the only means of transport are a boat in summer and in winter

we have to wait for two or three months before the river freezes so that the first car could bring us apples, onions and cabbage . . . That was infinite joy!! (focus group, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Many informants remember so-called socialist competitions between building organizations and brigades, a tool commonly used for increasing labor productivity in the Soviet period. These memories are associated with individual stories of career growth and financial rewards received for personal achievements during the construction. Even if informants used these competitions as stimuli for getting higher positions and salaries, they also pointed out the minor role of money in the everyday life and economics of the BAM. Money is usually devalued in their narratives, in contrast to socialist ideas and human capital. In practice, this attitude to money was predetermined by the late socialist economic system. The state regulated citizens' consumption through target supply and state-provided services and predefined an assortment of available foods and goods as well as opportunities for spending money on leisure activities, especially, in remote regions along the BAM:

When there is a high idea, money stops being a value that is now being forcefully introduced into our consciousness. That is, I spend money when there is an opportunity and it makes sense to spend it. Moreover, I don't feel sorry. The trust [among *bamovtsy*] originated from the fact that there was no sense to steal money. And it was not even that there was nothing to spend it on, but there was no time to do so. (TNV, Severobaikal'sk, 2017)

During the later stages of the construction process, the emerging BAM settlements—which initially suffered from scarcity of consumer goods and a humble lifestyle—had grown into "an earthly communist heaven." BAM builders enjoyed free access to commodities, including highly prestigious consumer articles that were unavailable to average citizens elsewhere in the country. Exalted stories of the fresh-frozen vegetables supplied directly from Bulgaria, fruits from Uzbekistan, high quality shoes, clothes, carpets, furniture, and home appliances from China, Japan, Yugoslavia, and the GDR are also a favorite theme in the narratives. The belief in—and reliance on—the strong state that could take care of its people and provide them with all they needed, along with few opportunities for spending along with limited ideas about investing, engendered bizarre practices of financial management. Few people invested in housing or deposited money in banks since public trust in the planned economic system was still strong.

The golden thread of BAM builders' memories of the Soviet construction period is related to solidarity. It was experienced in different forms: professional networks and friendship, communal leisure and cultural activities, and through ethnic and social relations. Virtually all of the interviews mention this topic in different contexts at least once. The shared idea and goals set by the project united the labor migrants of different backgrounds into one distinct community. At the BAM, professional and neighborhood relations often turned into lifelong friendships or marriages. The general humanist idea of mutual help, support and sharing in difficult situations is illustrated by multiple examples. While reiterating the communist slogans of "fraternal cooperation" and "socialist solidarity," these memory narratives are essentially built on individual lived experiences.

> I keep telling you they were coming here neither for glory, nor awards, nor money, nor cars. Their task was to build a road to future . . . And they didn't only build it, but also united two centuries. And the traditional BAM builders' lifestyle—one of mutual support and help, when you don't have relatives, but only friends around—is still living. (TNV, Severobaikal'sk, 2017)

Sports events, dances, musical and drama studios, and other leisure activities were equally unifying for young *bamovtsy*. Memories of public holidays and weddings "celebrated by the whole neighborhood" when "tables were served in the middle of the street" and cultural festivals devoted to the BAM project were attended by Soviet and world-renowned pop stars, constituted other factors for the consolidation of *bamovtsy* as a distinct group.

Examples of how *bamovsty* solidarity crossed ethnic and national borders are quite common. The official slogan "The whole country built the BAM," referencing the complex map of origins of the organizations and teams who built the BAM, is reiterated by *bamovtsy*. Individual biographies or family histories of those who came from "far away" (usually referring to Central Asia or the Caucasus) often serve as illustrations of this theme. Main characters of such stories first re-immigrate to their countries and regions in the 1990s, but often return because they "feel drawn to the North" as their new home or/and because no one waits for them in the motherland. In some cases, builders do leave the BAM for good, but retain their networks in the region. The idea of the peaceful interethnic relations in the region during the BAM construction and at present is supported by examples of cooperation at work, interethnic marriages and friendships, and mixed neighborhoods:

> Among our friends we had and still have a lot of people from the Baltics. Uoian was built by the Balts. In general, all 15 republics were represented here: each republic had its own organization. Ikab'ia was built by Georgians, Chara by Kazakhs. But not only Kazakhs built it; there was a brigade from Chita and a brigade named after Kedyshko from Belarus'. Friends from the Baltics left in 1989 on the eve of the dissolution of the USSR. (LMK, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Such memory narratives contrast with the findings of other critical historical accounts of the BAM construction, which mention the ethnic discrimination and the marginalization of non-Slavic builders (Ward 2009). Our interview data show that in some cases, the common ideology, similar age, shared working and living conditions, as well as a sense of co-creation of a new environment contributed to the social solidarity and formation of *bamovtsy* identity that overrode ethnic differentiation. As one of my informants, a local poet and activist, pointed out, "the term *bamovtsy* has grown from a territorial self-identification into a nationality that implies special kinds of relationships: more honesty, sincerity, and friendship" (TNV, Severobaikal'sk, 2016).

Making Sense of the Post-Soviet BAM?

The end of the major construction works at the BAM overlapped with the beginning of the socioeconomic crisis and political turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the infrastructure along the railroad declined: unfinished side-tracks and buildings were abandoned to decay. The BAM region witnessed a large-scale out-migration of the population. Local authorities in Kalarskii Raion estimate that approximately one-third of *bamovtsy* left the district in that period. The population of Tyndinskii Raion, another northern district along the BAM, has decreased by almost one-half since its population peak registered in the census of 1989. *Bamovtsy* relocated to other regions, including home Soviet republics and provinces, as well as the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and regional administrative centers (e.g., Irkutsk). Due to this reorganization and general economic problems, *bamovtsy* who stayed in the region lost their jobs at the railroad. They have also not yet received the long-awaited permanent housing promised by the state. Because of its high construction and maintenance costs and the fact that the railroad did not operate to its full capacity, the BAM project was losing its social prestige and, for the first time, was openly criticized in media and in public discourses in the

1990s. In 1997, the BAM as a legal entity ceased to exist and was transferred from the state-owned Baikalo-Amurskaia Zheleznaia Doroga to Rossiiskie Zheleznye Dorogi (RZhD), currently Russia's largest state railroad company.

The 1990s are now remembered with predominant feelings of disillusion, fear, and resentment. The fact that the early post-Soviet media discourse renamed the project from "the road to the future" to "the road to nowhere" reinforced those feelings. The 1990s are publicly remembered as "troubled" and "cursed" times of failed expectations and plans. There is popular saying "if Brezhnev would have lived 5 more years, the BAM project would have been completed," revealing the public dissatisfaction and sense of incompleteness:

> Well, they didn't fulfill our expectations . . . Old BAM builders are disappointed, let's put it this way, by the fact that the BAM Zone is not being developed. And many *bamovtsy* left, left the BAM reluctantly because they could not find a job, because they were no longer needed. And they, this huge productive labor force, have dispersed all around. (focus group, Severobaikal'sk, 2016)

Disillusion, offense, and nostalgia are wide-spread feelings, especially among those *bamovtsy* who, upon the end of the construction, continued living in temporary housings barracks type without prospects of relocation into permanent apartment buildings or houses. Lack of jobs, the high costs of communal services and consumer prices are among the challenges of everyday life in the towns along the BAM where this research was conducted.

Narrating the BAM in a temporal perspective, *bamovtsy* associate the challenges of the socialist construction period with the feeling of pride, and those of the post-socialist life with offense. This emotional paradigm constructed in the remembering process reflects shifts in the quality of life, as well as in state ideologies. The demonstrated emotions are as much signs of individual justification of one' own life as those of collective nostalgia for the strong state:

> It [the construction] was a difficult period, but it was different and better. We were motivated, striving for something better, for improvement . . . However difficult life was, the state took some care of us: salaries were higher, foods and goods were supplied, education had a different value . . . We built the BAM, went through all these hardships, sacrificed our youth and health; we all came young and beautiful, and now we are not just old BAM builders, but simply old people . . . And now no one cares about us, we have crazy prices for

everything! . . . Now all of us, *bamovtsy*, thinking that we've built the road, feel proud. And, of course, one is offended to hear someone saying: "All your awards are not worth anything." (focus group, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Commemorating the BAM: The Second Track and the Fortieth Anniversary

Public discussion and criticism of the state in the early post-Soviet period have gradually retreated and given way to a new sense of "patriotism" and trust in the current political regime. Russia's new "patriotism," nourished by the state leadership in recent decades, has found fertile breeding ground in the BAM region. In the houses of former BAM builders one can find calendars, embroidery, and other souvenirs with the images of Russia's president and vice president displayed along with awards for the BAM construction, sometimes alongside Orthodox icons. This reminds us of Oushakine's (2013) article on "affective management of history," drawing on the case study of the practices of public remembering of the Great Patriotic War. He demonstrates how material symbols of victory marked a mnemonic shift "from the playful retrofitting of the past in the late 1990s, with its aesthetics of ironic noninvolvement, to the obvious attempts to envision "history" as an assemblage of emotionally charged objects" (Oushakine 2013: 301–302). In the BAM region, this nation-wide "patriotic education" policy has a particular connection with the late socialist BAM and its commemoration ceremonies taking place in the present. The Victory Day itself is an important public celebration on the national and regional level. The Great Patriotic War and the BAM construction are the two most popular historical events in the region, drawing on the similar concepts of heroism, self-sacrifice, and the overcoming of hardships. Patriotic feelings penetrate all BAM-specific events, where collective emotions and identities of *bamovtsy* are relived and performed (Röhr 2016). Since the 2000s, with the stabilization of the socioeconomic situation and reemerging patriotism, BAM has been regaining its popularity as a unique engineering and nation-building project. These socioeconomic, political, and ideological shifts have affected BAM social memory and builders' identities. Silence in the period of the public criticism has recently given way to public remembering fueled by reinvigorated memories of *bamovtsy*.

In 2014, two key events—the launch of the state program of technological modernization called BAM-2 and the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the BAM construction—symbolically coincided. The long-awaited project BAM-2 was, in fact, a continuation of unfinished Soviet regional development programs brought back to life by new economic realities and initially backed by financial resources accumulated during the relative socioeconomic stability of the early 2000s. While the railroad has always played a minor role for passenger connection, cargo transportation by BAM doubled since the late 1990s due to growing resource extraction in Russia's northern regions and the insufficient capacity of the Trans-Siberian Railway (TransSib). Not only was the launch of BAM-2 a continuation of Soviet socioeconomic plans, but it also relied on the slogans of the communist propaganda and "mastering the North" being reintroduced into official discourse. Not surprising, both BAM builders and average residents of the region alike initially associated the BAM-2 with future resource extraction, expecting community development, but also fearing possible ecological problems.

The popularity and expectations of the BAM-2 project between 2014 and 2017 have mismatched the realities. Limited job opportunities targeted and fragmented investments and rumors of financial mismanagement and fraud characterize the implementation of the reconstruction program. While the RZhD managers that I interviewed officially vested great hope in the current railroad modernization, informal communication with people involved in the (re)construction works revealed how limited their expectations are. In the stories told about BAM-2, the idealist images and clichés of the BAM as "a railroad built with love" that "will work a long century" contradict statements that reveal skepticism and disillusion (TNV, Severobaikal'sk 2017).

The celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the BAM construction was preceded by a well-prepared media campaign drawing on the same retro-discourses and images. The Ministry of Transportation and RZhD, along with the leading media agencies, created dedicated Internet resources (e.g., Vspominaem BAM 2018) and supported the publication of a series of special issues of railroad journals and photo albums. Several editions dedicated to the BAM popular history, BAM builders' biographies, and other relevant topics were published on the eve or shortly after the anniversary (*Bronepoezda pobedy* 2015; Il'kovskii 2014). A series of events and celebrations along the BAM were marked by the arrival of "BAM anniversary trains" (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Train "40th Anniversary of the BAM." *Source:* Courtesy of the Public Affairs Office, Administration of Tyndinskii Raion.

Two trains coming from the opposite directions—from Irkutsk in the west and Khabarovsk in the east—left to meet in the city of Tynda and stopped at every BAM station and settlement to celebrate the anniversary. Their passengers were BAM veterans, who met the second generation of BAM builders at every stop.

Major celebrations took place on July 8, 2014 in the city of Tynda, recognized as the BAM capital due its location at the crossroads of TransSib, BAM, and Amur-Yakut Mainline (AYaM) and the fact that it hosted the BAM Administration during the construction process. The event was attended by a number of important guests, including high-profile officials, journalists, and pop stars. The opening started with the awards ceremony where certificates of merit, medals, and other symbols of distinction (e.g., ribbons of honor, scarfs, and souvenirs with the symbols of the BAM) were distributed among veterans of the BAM construction (Figure 6).

The awards ceremony with public speeches by officials and BAM veterans ran parallel to the opening of a new training center and a conference at the premises of the RZhD company. The evening cultural program included hits of the 1970 and 1980s devoted to BAM, as well as

Figure 6. Awards ceremony, fortieth anniversary of the BAM. *Source:* Courtesy of the Public Affairs Office, Administration of Tyndinskii Raion.

remakes of patriotic war songs performed by pop stars and accompanied by public karaoke singing. Two concerts were held simultaneously in the central city park and at the stadium called "BAM." In the latter location another momentous event, a teleconference with the state leader, took place. The president did not only congratulate *bamovtsy* with the event, but "committed" to a ritual of the Silver Spike. The ritual symbolized the joining of the first sections of the second railroad track between the stations of Taksimo and Lod'ia and the first achievement of the current modernization program BAM-2. The ritual immediately triggered the memory of the first Silver Spike ceremony in 1975 that symbolized the joining of the first railroad tracks Tynda-Chara, thus, reconnecting BAM-1 and BAM-2. The public celebrations were closed with festive fireworks.

BAM builders from Tynda recollected the BAM anniversary celebrations with the strong feelings of pride, patriotism, and belief in the current state power:

That was a great event! Celebrations took place throughout the city. Visitors from Moscow and Iakutiia came to congratulate us. There was

a teleconference with Putin. I respect Putin and wish we had more strong-willed men like him . . . I wish every generation on this earth had such a construction project as the BAM so that they could understand the unity and honesty of human relations. Let the politicians do their things, nothing depends on us anyway. If you live your life right, everything will be right. We have good people, we have good Putin! (NIK, Tynda, 2016)

However, the celebrations also provoked more critical attitudes and reflections on what and who were to be commemorated and distinguished. These reflections were particularly related to the ceremony of awards and questioned a moral right to entitlements and symbols of distinction distributed among the large group of *bamovtsy*. A ribbon of "honorary BAM builder" or a medal "for construction of the BAM" become "affective objects" of social memory and, in some cases, evoked dissatisfaction and resentment:

> "I saw these people marching with the ribbons of honorary BAM builders." For some reason, no one tied such a ribbon around me and I never asked for it. But I am thinking: Why did you put this ribbon on when you don't know what BAM is, when you came to live in a normal house, worked in a different organization but never on the railroad? There are so many people who worked hard and died at this railroad. People who came later don't know what it is but got housing while we still live in shanties. I am looking at these people and thinking that they don't have any sense of consciousness! (focus group, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Thus, public celebrations of the BAM demonstrated affective management of history and patriotic education at work. The launch of BAM-2 and, especially the fortieth anniversary, created a temporal and spatial continuum where visions and discourses of the socialist past were iterated and "encoded" in mnemonic objects. However, in the new socioeconomic realities, these verbal and material mnemonic codes often induce cognitive and emotional dissonance. The same individuals may feel patriotic and loyal to the state when remembering the glorious past of the BAM construction, and disenchanted and deceived by it when reflecting on the current social problems such as the lack of appropriate housing.

This politics of emotions, leading to social tensions and public contestations of the *bamovtsy* identity, doesn't seem to significantly affect the memories of the socialist past. Those are transmitted from the first to the second generation of *bamovsty*, although in a slightly transformed

and critically assessed way. Below are the words of a young women from a *bamovtsy* family who currently works at the railroad and considers herself to be a "child of the BAM":

> I am now reading Bradbury's "Dandelion Wine" and the story "Happiness Machine." The main character was trying to build one, but it didn't work. And then it turned out that happiness consists of everyday things . . . I think that the BAM is not a finished happiness machine, but a perfect time machine (laughing) . . . because all those events are so memorable. I think it's a typical perception of *bamovtsy*— those who didn't come across the BAM don't have anything special to remember about that time. (LVK, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Conclusions

The construction of the BAM attracted mass population inflow, consolidated multicultural migrants, and forged the identity of BAM builders as part of the Soviet people. Following Assmann (2008), I have argued throughout the article that the social memory of the BAM is grounded in socialist ideologies as well as in lived experience of its carriers, the *bamovtsy,* which is central to post-Soviet identity building processes. Memories of the BAM construction are informed by different sources that constitute their learned and experiential dimensions. *Bamovtsy* identity is reconstructed, translated from generation to generation and reinforced through the rites of participation in public events. In line with Connerton (1989), I have shown how socialist ideologies, discourses, and emotions are used as a resource for the legitimation of the present social order.

Public and private remembrances form a vibrant discursive field incorporating not only internalized popular Soviet slogans, but also "externalized" individual biographies and voices (White 1999). Emotional narratives and performances of the BAM construction are the two most significant acts of remembering that sustain *bamovtsy* identity and reinforce their we-feeling and set them apart as a distinct group. Their memories of the construction period are charged with the emotions of happiness, enthusiasm, joy, romanticism, pride, and fulfillment correlating with socialist slogans and images of "mastering the North." Remembering takes a nostalgic turn as soon as it comes to the present socioeconomic predicaments. Visions of the future associated with the BAM-2 are colored with the mixed emotions of hope, expectations, and mistrust.

Recollections about the first encounters with the BAM and motivations to participate in the construction, labor competitions and achievements, supply of goods and economics at the BAM, cultural life and solidarity constitute main themes of memory narratives. Individual and collective memories interplay with each other to form a dynamic discursive and emotional environment. Focus group participants usually follow master narratives internalized in the Soviet period; the reiteration of similar plots and emotions of individual stories reinforces collective feelings. Disagreements and diverging interpretations of the past, however, reveal latent emotional tensions. Individual remembering is usually more spontaneous, detailed and based on personal and family stories. The immediate experience of participation in the construction project serves as an identity building factor and a powerful emotionally charged source of the social memory about the BAM.

Commemoration ceremonies referring to the BAM history serve as public forums, where *bamovtsy* memories are narrated and performed. Two almost synchronic public events—fortieth anniversary of the late socialist BAM project and the launch of BAM-2—were widely celebrated in 2014. On the one hand, they served as favorable grounds for performing *bamovtsy* memories and identities; and the use of Soviet discourses, images, and affects as a resource for the legitimation of the present social order, on the other. The celebrations demonstrated how idealized memories of the construction period with their mnemonic symbols and underlying nostalgia for the strong state became objectified in the politics of emotions along the BAM.

Acknowledgments

Olga Povoroznyuk is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department for Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna. Her research interests cover the topics of ethnicity, identity, post-socialism, infrastructure, and built environment with a focus on Northern Russia. She is the author of the book "Evenki of Transbaikal Region: Socio-Economic and Cultural Transformations in the 20th–21st Centuries" [in Russian, 2011] and a number of academic articles published in Russian and in English. Since 2015, she works on a project on entanglements of humans with transportation infrastructures in remote regions, where she focuses on social dynamics and identity building in the region of the Baikal-Amur Mainline, East Siberia. Email: olga.povoroznyuk@univie.ac.at.

Notes

1. For the sake of anonymity, the names of the informants are disguised throughout the text.

2. I have conducted long-term field research in indigenous and mixed communities of the northern Zabaikal'skii Krai (since 1998) and Amurskaia Oblast (since 2013).

3. The BAM Zone is an official term used in acts and regulations in relation to the construction sites, including emerging settlements and other infrastructures along the railroad.

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IV. **Publication 3. A Right to Remoteness? A Missing Bridge and Articulations of Indigeneity along an East Siberian Railroad**

PETER SCHWEITZER AND OLGA POVOROZNYUK

A right to remoteness? A missing bridge and articulations of indigeneity along an East Siberian railroad

The Soviet Union and its successor states have been avid supporters of a modernisation paradigm aimed at 'overcoming remoteness' and 'bringing civilisation' to the periphery and its 'backward' indigenous people. The Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) railroad, built as a much-hyped prestige project of late socialism, is a good example of that. The BAM has affected indigenous communities and reconfigured the geographic and social space of East Siberia. Our case study, an Evenki village located fairly close to the BAM, is (in)famous today for its supposed refusal to get connected via a bridge to the nearby railroad town. Some actors portray this disconnection as a sign of backwardness, while others celebrate it as the main reason for native language retention and cultural preservation. Focusing on discourses linking the notions of remoteness and cultural revitalisation, the article argues for conceptualising the story of the missing bridge not as the result of political resistance but rather as an articulation of indigeneity, which foregrounds cultural rights over more contentious political claims. Thus, the article explores constellations of remoteness and indigeneity, posing the question whether there might be a moral right to remoteness to be claimed by those who view spatial distance as a potential resource.

Key words remoteness, indigeneity, culture, bridge, Siberia

Introduction

Alongside the BAM,[1] a relatively new railroad traversing eastern Siberia north of Lake Baikal, the small and predominantly indigenous community of Ust'-Nyukzha has gained notoriety for supposedly rejecting – back in the 1980s – the construction of a river bridge that would have provided a year-round connection to the railway line and beyond. While 'what actually happened' more than 30 years ago remains unclear from the oral history and written records, it is the prominence of the 'missing bridge' in local and regional discourses of today that has prompted this article.

The history of infrastructure and modernisation projects is punctuated by protests against them (see, e.g. Chu 2014; Schüler 2017; von Schnitzler 2016). There are, however, no documented traces of protest or 'resistance' (see, e.g. Gellner 2007) against the railroad in question. While this can be understood as a result of the authoritarian and non-transparent political culture of the Soviet Union at the time, reports about environmental protests against the degradation of nearby Lake Baikal (see, e.g. Rainey 1991; Zaharchenko 1990; Ziegler 1987) confirm that any kind of 'movement' would certainly have reached the attention of western scholars. The notion of 'refusal', on

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[1] BAM is the acronym for 'Baikal–Amur Mainline'; the history and specifics of this railway line will be discussed below.

the other hand, recently propagated by Audra Simpson (2014, 2017) in the context of North American (and Australian) indigenous studies, cannot be as easily dismissed by the absence of 'protest' as defined by western expectations. At the same time, the political subjectivities of indigenous individuals and communities in Soviet and post-Soviet contexts seem to be quite different from the Mohawk and others written about by Simpson.

As mentioned above, what happened in the 1980s is not really of central relevance here. Instead, we are interested in the social contexts in which the missing bridge is used today. Our title question obviously alludes to Henri Lefebvre's famous phrase of the 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996 [1968]). While his text, originally published in the 1960s, was a battle cry against the deteriorating cities of his day, subsequent users of the phrase rediscovered its applicability under conditions of neoliberalism and increased privatisation of urban spaces (see, e.g. Harvey 2008). As Attoh (2011) has pointed out, however, it remains unclear in many of these usages what kind of right 'the right to the city' is. In the context of the Russian Federation (or anywhere else, to our knowledge), there is certainly no legal right to remoteness, as such.

Thus, our article explores constellations of remoteness and indigeneity, posing the provocative question whether there might be a moral right to remoteness. This entails a view of remoteness as a potential resource to some and as an obstacle to others. At the same time, we acknowledge multiple meanings (spatial, cultural, etc.) of remoteness. Thus, our investigation will follow how different notions of remoteness are being co-constructed in the story of the missing bridge. This leads to questions such as how these notions of remoteness (and connectivity) are being imagined and experienced by different groups in the region, what outsider and insider perspectives on the missing bridge are, and how notions of otherness are being merged with spatial concepts of distance and disconnection.

Remoteness, modernisation and articulations of indigeneity

In concert with the editors of this special issue, we see 'remoteness' not as a primordial condition but as a socio-spatial concept (Hussain 2015) that is relational and relativising and thereby constantly open to reconfigurations. As Martin Saxer points out, remoteness should also be seen in conjunction with connectivity, and 'remoteness is not only a relational condition, but in many places also a relatively recent one' (2016: 110).

At the same time, 'remoteness' has received too little theoretical or conceptual attention within anthropology. While some notions of spatial distance and 'out-of-the-way-ness' dominated – consciously or unconsciously – the selection of anthropological field sites in early years of the discipline, neither the ontological nor the epistemological qualities of 'being remote' have typically made it to the level of research questions. On the contrary, as the examples of the emergence of urban, global, transnational and other kinds of anthropologies show, 'remote' served as the supposedly natural starting point of anthropologists' choices of research areas. While there have been manifestos for urban anthropology, or global or transnational

connections, seemingly nobody felt the need to produce them for 'remote anthropology' or an 'anthropology of remoteness'.[2]

Since the re-publication of Edwin Ardener's seminal article on 'remote areas' in 2012, an increase in theoretical interest in 'remoteness' within anthropology has become noticeable. After all, when Ardener's article was first published in 1987, it was in an edited volume entitled *Anthropology at home* – thus, one might conclude that the anthropological conceptual work on 'remoteness' started – and was quickly abandoned again – in reaction to anthropologists practising other forms of anthropology than what had been the unquestioned – and largely unspoken – rule of where the discipline should be practised. Ardener's article – and even more so the collection of articles entitled 'Remote and edgy' and published in 2014 (Harms *et al.* 2014) – made it clear that an anthropological engagement with the notion of 'remoteness' cannot be limited to spatial dimensions, though of course spatial elements do matter: spatial distance (from political and administrative centres) and difficult access have been important to individuals and groups throughout history, either to protect their 'unlicensed' faith, hide their activities not approved by the centre or avoid higher property taxes, to name just a few possible reasons. James Scott's insistence that some marginal groups have chosen their (remote) location to maintain their autonomy (Scott 2009) fits well with our understanding that remoteness can be a resource and carry positive value to some groups at certain points in time.

As our regional focus is defined by a railroad – that is, by a form of transportation infrastructure – it might be reasonable to assume that the ultimate goal of the (state-financed and directed) endeavour was to 'overcome remoteness' (for raw materials, goods and people). While this is a classical goal of development ideologies (Arce and Long 2000; Li 2007), it is also a way of depoliticising decisions of social and spatial significance (Ferguson 1994). Railroad construction in general can be seen as a prototypical modernisation project involving a number of linked ideological, infrastructural, political, socio-economic and cultural processes (Kaschuba 2004; Schivelbusch 2000). Unlike European projects belonging mostly to the 19th century, Russian/Soviet railroad projects have been primarily a feature of the 20th century, implementing ideologies and policies of 'high modernism' (Scott 1998).

The Soviet industrialisation programme of 'mastering the North', with its underlying modernist idea of human dominance over nature, constructed the northern frontier territories as hostile and their local population as uncivilised and backward. In this context, the definition of remote carried mostly negative connotations and was interpreted as being synonymous with 'uncivilised', 'backward' or 'Other'. Thus, modernity and remoteness were officially and discursively constructed as two poles of the modernisation paradigm (cf. Hussain 2015).

Discussions about the missing bridge are primarily situated within the discursive space of indigeneity, by indigenous and non-indigenous speakers alike. Without entering the seemingly endless conversation on 'what is indigeneity', we follow Tania Murray Li's (2000) usage of 'positioning' and 'articulation' in the context of indigenous

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[2] This simplifying description and rushed overview do not give sufficient attention to important contributions of the 1990s, such as Tsing (1993) and Piot (1999). Both grapple with 'marginality in an out-of-the-way place', that is with an anthropology of remoteness within a discipline confronting postmodernism, globalisation and transnationalism.

identities. The term 'articulation', which has a long Marxist genealogy reaching from Gramsci to Althusser, is adopted by Li from the writings of Stuart Hall. Hall's notion of articulation acknowledges that distinct elements can be combined, need not be reduced to an ultimate cause and are relations of 'no necessary correspondence' (Hall 1996: 14). This enables Li – and us – to speak of indigenous identities as 'positionings' and not as primordial essences. Thus, our case of the never-built bridge and the different usages of remoteness it has triggered are seen as articulations of indigeneity, and as positionings in relation to these articulations.

Regional preliminaries

The history of the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) railroad

'The BAM construction breathed new life into this taiga region' were the dramatic words used in a report by the district administration in Tynda (Pasport 1990). The region suddenly found itself at the epicentre of a gigantic construction process. The major route of the BAM intersects with the Amur–Yakutsk Mainline (AYaM), which provides a connection to the Trans-Siberian railroad, in the district centre of Tynda. The latter turned not only into a transportation hub but also the 'capital city' of the region hosting the administration of the BAM. The impacts of the BAM on local mobility patterns, traditional industries, indigenous culture and language were comparable to, if not exceeding, the magnitude of the collectivisation reforms that swamped the region and its people in the early Soviet period.

The BAM is among the longest and northernmost railroads in the world and the largest industrial and modernisation projects of the late socialist period of the Soviet Union. It traverses the Northern districts of five regions in Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East, with its longest side branch, the AYaM, stretching to the southern part of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya).[3] According to the 2010 All-Russian census, the largest cities along the BAM include Komsomol'sk–na-Amure (263,906 people), Neryungri (61,747 people), Ust'-Kut (45,375 people), Tynda (36,275 people), Tayshet (35,485 people) and Severobaykal'sk (24,929 people), while more typical settlements have a population between 300 and 4,000 residents. Most of the indigenous Evenki people live in so-called 'national villages' (*natsional'nye poselki*),[4] located off the railroad and sometimes off roads.

While its history starts with early construction projects dating back to the 19th century, the majority of the railroad was built between 1974 and 1984. The BAM as a continuation of the Soviet modernisation project had a mission of 'bringing civilisation to remote corners of the country'. In this modernisation paradigm, local, primarily indigenous, people were imagined just as being remote – other, backward and

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[3] This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in the central BAM Region, including the cities of Tynda, Novaya Chara and Severobaykal'sk and the villages of Pervomayskoe, Ust'-Nyukzha, Ust'-Urkima, Chapo-Ologo, Kyust'-Kemda and Kholodnoe in Amurskaya Province, Zabaykal'skiy Region and the Republic of Buryatiya in 2013, 2016 and 2017.

[4] The term was officially introduced during the Soviet period to refer to settlements with a predominant or significant indigenous population.

underdeveloped.[5] Under the conditions of late Soviet socialism and its planned economy, mass labour mobilisation stimulated by ideological propaganda and material benefits attracted migrants to the BAM construction. The local population was retained in the kolkhoz and public sectors, while the construction works were to be realised by a labour force recruited from across the Soviet Union.

The railroad affected indigenous Evenki and other Tungusic-speaking peoples living in the region in various ways. While nomadic reindeer herders and hunters suffered degradation or a loss of traditional lands and domestic reindeer and game, the village population was exposed to intense cultural contact and uneven exchange with the inflowing migrants. Evenki involvement in the railroad construction was limited to unskilled work (porters, stone dressers, wood cutters) at the initial stages of the project and trade (supply of traditional produce) between local kolkhozes and construction companies. Higher salaries, a number of social benefits and the labour prestige of the BAM builders created a social gap between the migrants recruited for the railway construction from across the Soviet Union (Ward 2009) and the local population consisting primarily of indigenous Evenki people. This social and cultural boundary between indigenous people (*aborigeny*) and the BAM builders (*bamovtsy*) was also reproduced through a settlement pattern where indigenous villages were spatially separated from the settler towns emerging along the railroad. An image of Evenki communities as remote and marginal, both in spatial and social terms, quickly spread among the *bamovtsy*.

Post-socialist reconfigurations of space

Perestroika and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union challenged the modernist paradigm in general and the BAM myth in particular. Political changes and the withdrawal of state subsidies in the 1990s reconfigured geographical and social spaces through an infrastructural collapse and a 'return of remoteness'. The degradation and ruination of roads and railroad tracks, as well as the discontinuation of regular air connections became widespread phenomena across the sparsely populated areas of the North (Campbell 2003). For example, after the cancellation of air flights to the Evenki settlement of Sredniy Kalar, its residents found themselves in forced isolation (Povoroznyuk 2011). The parallel curtailing of support for the social infrastructure of the settlements on and off the BAM – which had been provided by the Soviet state and was taken for granted (Humphrey 2003) – deprived local residents of vitally important medical, banking and other services. Currently, one has to travel the distance of over 300 km from Yuktali to the district centre of Tynda in order to see a doctor. This kind of remoteness seems to be growing, especially among the 'surplus' population of BAM builders left after development (cf. Li 2017).

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[5] Early Soviet modernisation policies towards indigenous peoples of the North were aimed at bringing them 'to the next stage of development' and included a series of campaigns, from collectivisation and agricultural reforms to 'enlightenment' and 'cultural construction' in the 1930–1950s. The early Soviet policies irreversibly changed traditional lifestyle and culture of the local Evenki: nomadic reindeer herders and hunters, especially women, were pushed out of the taiga and sedentarised into villages with a predominant indigenous population.

The socio-economic crisis of the 1990s provoked public criticism of the BAM project due to its high construction and maintenance costs and environmental impacts and raised the issue of assimilation of indigenous people. The environmental and indigenous rights movements grew in Russia from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s inspired by similar international movements. While some of these globally operating organisations at least partially relied on essentialist concepts and constructed a particular type of indigeneity (Ghosh 2006), they opened a public space for alternative discourses and perceptions of remoteness. For the first time, indigenous NGOs, cultural leaders and their supporters spoke about remoteness in the context of tradition and modernity (Pika 1999), territorial rights (Fondahl *et al.* 2001) and sustainable development.

While no uniform counter-discourse to modernising concepts was formed during that short time period, the notion of remoteness acquired more positive connotations: from being out of the way and/or abandoned to a symbolic resource helping to protect traditional lands and indigenous culture. In the 1990s, indigenous activists strategically used the concept to claim their land rights and to be physically remote from the industrial infrastructures of the BAM and resource extraction sites.

Currently, the Russian state tends to re-appropriate indigenous lands and recall their special territorial rights altogether. In this situation, cultural rights often remain the single vestiges of indigeneity and appear as compensation for political marginalisation. While contacts with most foreign indigenous organisations have become more difficult, cultural exchanges with Evenki communities in China are on the rise. A recently launched state railroad modernisation programme, BAM-2, is, in essence, a continuation of Soviet construction and development plans, both on ideological and material levels (Ssorin-Chaikov 2016). Although carried out in a different socio-economic and geopolitical context, it re-enchants the local communities with promises of modernity, connectivity, speed and socio-economic development (cf. Harvey and Knox 2012). These new hopes, however, clash with physical distance and economic austerity. While some, mostly young, Evenki work 'on the rails', others are concerned about potentially adverse effects of these new state modernisation efforts and the increased connectivity that might result from them.

The case of Ust'-Nyukzha[6]

Historical background

> We have a village that is accessible exclusively by train. Last spring, they wanted to cancel the train Komsomol'sk-na-Amure–Tynda, but people protested because it is impossible to access the village at any time, but in winter.

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[6] Our fieldwork in Ust'-Nyukzha was preceded by long-term anthropological study among indigenous communities in the northern Zabaykal'skiy Region and Amurskaya Province. One of the authors first learned about 'the special case of Ust'-Nyukzha' in 2013 in Tynda and later in the indigenous villages Pervomayskoe and Ust'-Urkima, where the story about Ust'-Nyukzha has been circulating. During a stay in the village in July 2017, a series of community meetings and in-depth interviews with indigenous people (reindeer herders, education and cultural specialists, activists) and Soviet-time migrants to the village were conducted. In the course of interviews, special attention was paid to local concepts of remoteness (in relation to connectivity, mobility and indigenous culture) and attitudes to the story of the missing bridge.

> Ust'-Nyukzha is also currently immobile: the freeze-up starts and they cannot cross the river. But they don't want to build a bridge, because the bridge brings cars, Russian hunters and a supply of vodka and other bad products. When the issue of the bridge was discussed and the money for its construction was allocated, they [the local residents] decided not to build it. … good for them! (Interview: NFK, Tynda, 2013)

We first heard about this widely circulating story from a specialist on indigenous affairs in Tynda, the administrative centre of Tyndinskiy District. The story relates that one day during the peak of the BAM construction in the 1980s at a meeting of residents of Ust'-Nyukzha village, a wide-reaching decision was made – not to build a bridge that would have connected the village with its twin settlement Yuktali. Furthermore, albeit undocumented, the story of the missing bridge seems to interrelate spatial disconnection and cultural otherness of the village: the missing bridge seems to make Ust'-Nyukzha culturally central for Evenki people, but remote for the rest of the population.

The 'national village' of Ust'-Nyukzha was founded as a trading post (*faktoriya*) in 1923. It is home to a majority population of Evenki, some Sakha families, descendants from Russian Old Settlers, as well as Soviet migrants of diverse (primarily Slavic) backgrounds, who came with the construction of the BAM. The Nyukzha River (a tributary of the Olekma) separates the village from the nearby railroad town of Yuktali that lies only 7 km away. Yuktali was founded by BAM builders in 1976 and was first called Ust-Nyukzha-2. 'Old' (Ust')-Nyukzha, as it is still called by locals on both sides of the river, stands out among other national villages for its 'traditional' nomadic lifestyles, Evenki cultural festivals, high native language retention rates and a nomadic school, one of a few of its kind in the Russian North.

The local Evenki belong to a culturally distinct territorial group of this widely dispersed ethnic group, whose nomadic ancestors hunted and herded their reindeer in the valleys of Vitim and Olekma rivers before collectivisation. Large herds of 400–500 domestic animals have been grazing on the pastures that are presently part of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya) and northern Zabaykal'skiy Region. Collectivisation boosted the sedentarisation of nomads and the growth of the village. In the early 1930s, the first school was built, the local administration was formed and soon thereafter the collective farm *Lenin Okton* (meaning 'Lenin's Way' in Evenki) was established (Pasport 2012: 1–2).

Throughout the Soviet period, hunting remained an important indigenous subsistence activity, despite the fact that state development plans focused on reindeer herding. In addition to the so-called 'traditional industries', new agricultural branches were introduced. Fur farming, cattle breeding and horticulture became part of collective farming in Ust'-Nyukzha, like elsewhere in the Soviet North (Grant 1995; Humphrey 1983). By the 1970s, Ust'-Nyukzha had its own hospital, a school and a boarding school, a kindergarten, a shop and a post office. Yet, it was almost exclusively the seasonal ice-road Dhzeltulak–Ust'-Urkima–Ust'-Nyukzha that made the connection with the district centre in Tyndinskiy possible. While communication and the supply of goods by trucks was possible in winter, no regular connection with the village was available during other seasons, except for occasional helicopters and airplanes sent to this 'deep' taiga area by geological expeditions (Tugolukov 2005: 229).

The BAM construction has led to drastic demographic, socio-economic and cultural changes. The laying of tracks, the construction of haul roads and the logging practised by Korean companies affected pastures and hunting grounds and changed the seasonal sequence of animal migrations. Evenki residents in Ust'-Nyukzha still recall the following:

> Elders were first naturally against the BAM – they were afraid that newcomers would hunt the animals to extinction … but then had to accept it. (Interview: GAA, 2017)

The local collective farm in Ust'-Nyukzha got involved in the supply of so-called 'traditional products' (mostly reindeer meat) to the BAM builders. The construction companies opened a 'BAM shop' in the village: there the local residents could acquire – through purchase or through the exchange of their products – food items and other goods the BAM builders had received from Moscow and from socialist countries (such as Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, etc.). Following the official end of the BAM construction period and the beginning of the post-Soviet socio-economic crisis, collective herding declined and, in 2001, the farms were reorganised into *obschchiny* – indigenous non-commercial land use enterprises.

Living without the bridge today[7]

Currently, Ust'-Nyukzha is a 'national village' with a population of 649 residents, 414 of whom are Evenkis. Yuktali, on the opposite side of the river, is a typical medium-size town along the BAM with a predominant *bamovtsy* population (1,615 in 2016), urban housing and infrastructure (Pasport 2017b). In contrast to mass population outflow from Yuktali,[8] the local population in Ust'-Nyukzha has been growing due to a high birth-rate and a low level of outmigration (Pasport 2017a). The main spheres of employment of village residents include transportation (most importantly, the railroad company servicing the BAM), communal services, education and trade (in 2017, the community had eight small shops). Many villagers keep cattle, horses, pigs and poultry at their individual plots for subsistence. Ust'-Nyukzha is home to a few nomadic Evenki enterprises. Eight reindeer-herding enterprises with a total reindeer head count of 1,930 have been registered within the municipality's boundaries and more indigenous families are informally involved in herding. Hunting (especially for fur) is widely practised by both indigenous and non-indigenous residents.

Despite the fact that Ust'-Nyukzha has been affected by the BAM, research conducted by Soviet and, later, Russian anthropologists tends to emphasise the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the community *vis-à-vis* other indigenous villages in the region. For example, Ust'-Nyukzha has the highest rates of indigenous language identification and retention in the Tyndinskiy District. According to one survey conducted

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[7] The case of Ust'-Nyukzha brings to mind anthropology's most famous 'bridge study', namely Gluckman's 'analysis of a social situation' (Gluckman 1940). For us, the events surrounding the non-event of not building a bridge are out of temporal reach; instead our interests focus entirely on how this form of disconnection is interpreted today.

[8] The mass outmigration from the BAM region is a post-Soviet trend that has been visible in most of the settlements located along the railroad with predominantly *bamovtsy* residents.

in 1989, 81.7% of the Evenkis of Ust'-Nyukzha considered the Evenki language to be their native language (Turaev 2004). Another feature that distinguishes the village in the field of indigenous education and language retention is a secondary school with a strong emphasis on teaching the Evenki language and traditional industries. The innovative project of a nomadic elementary school for reindeer herders' children was recently successfully introduced by a French anthropologist doing long-term research and living in the community (Lavrillier 2013). The nomadic school for indigenous children (one among very few similar initiatives in Russia), combined with the fact that in 2012 the village hosted an Evenki festival '*Bakaldyn*', has added to the popularity of Ust'-Nyukzha as a 'hub' of indigenous culture.

While there is no visible difference in lifestyles and occupations between indigenous and non-indigenous residents of the village, Evenki identities become articulated in discourses about indigenous rights and, more recently, about cultural revitalisation. Cultural events (such as the Evenki festival mentioned above), as well as negotiations over native language and education initiatives and ethno-tourism investment programmes, provide the public space for indigenous leaders to voice their concerns and claim their rights.

> Their consciousness has been re-awakened: they will not change their ethnic identity as they would have done earlier when they were not using or even willing to use Evenki language. When the politics of the cultural revitalisation of Evenki people, Evenki rites and similar started … they got more interested in their own life, in the life of their people and in their language. (Interview: KSA, Tynda, 2016)

The missing bridge is one of the factors that allows Ust'-Nyukzha to be officially categorised as a 'remote' and 'hard-to-access region of North' (*otdalennyy*, *trudno-dostupnyy rayon Severa*) (cf. Kuklina and Holland 2018). Yet, the missing bridge symbolises not only physical disconnection and separation but also the border between indigenous and non-indigenous communities representing two different cultural worlds on opposite sides of the river. Thus, it brings together different meanings and constellations of remoteness, otherness and indigeneity.

Most local residents understand remoteness in spatial (*otdalennost'*), geo-political (being far away from administrative centres) and socio-economic (being unprofitable, needing subsidies) terms. The similar words 'disconnected' or 'detached' (*otorvan-nye*) were also used by our interlocutors to broadly refer to communication gaps (lack of roads or mobile phone and Internet connection). Remoteness as a socio-cultural category opens a much wider space for interpretation, ranging from 'isolation from civilisation' (*'otorvannost' ot tsivilisatsii'*) to 'wilderness' (*dikost', dikaya priroda*), to, finally, 'cultural distinctiveness' (*obosoblennost'*). Recently, there has been a shift from negative to positive interpretations of remoteness. In the context of cultural revitalisation, this shift is an expression of the changing positionality of indigenous people and articulations of indigeneity (Li 2000) in post-Soviet Russia.

Remoteness: a gaze from the outside

Our field observations and interviews speak to the relational and contextual qualities of the notion of remoteness. When analysing the concept of remoteness, one should

take into account its multiple meanings and uses informed by the interplay between experiential and discursive, physical and symbolic domains and factors such as place of residence, ethnicity and occupation.

The range of attitudes towards remoteness among our interviewees allows us to make a distinction between outside and inside perspectives on the missing bridge. While the Ust'-Nyukzha case is widely discussed on a regional scale, including the district centre of Tynda, the most critical opinions are voiced in Yuktali on the opposite side of the river. Yuktali plays here the role of an urbanised centre in relation to its remote 'periphery'. The modern infrastructures and amenities of Yuktali are often juxtaposed with rural life and the lack of comfort in the nearby rural settlement. The mere existence of Ust'-Nyukzha is seen as depending on the BAM and supplies coming from Yuktali:

> Ust'-Nyukzha would have died long ago in the 1990s. Earlier we had a cooperative consumer association here. They supplied food from Tynda on trucks by an ice road … And who would have made an ice road for them; who would have supplied them (Ust'-Nyukzha residents) now? (Interview: NVM, Yuktali, 2017)

The post-Soviet decline of communal infrastructure and social services currently experienced in Yuktali, as well as the missing bridge to Ust'-Nyukzha, are seen as challenging. Many residents in Yuktali, which still consists primarily of *bamovtsy*, express bewilderment toward Ust'-Nyukzha's refusal of the bridge:

> I am not sure if they [the residents of Ust'-Nyukzha] admitted their mistake. Bamovtsy wanted to build a bridge there, but they refused and said: 'No, [unwanted, non-local] people will be coming here.' I am not even sure what kind of repercussions they might have to face now. (Interview: NVM, Yuktali, 2017)

Other residents of Yuktali, who came to work for the BAM as doctors, teachers and kindergarten nurses, share a similar modernisation perspective regarding the missing bridge. When talking about the remoteness of Ust'-Nyukzha, the case of the bridge pops up as an example of an unreasonable, emotion-driven decision against the comforts of 'civilisation'. Even if the person whose words are cited below is a descendant of a mixed Russian–Evenki family and the wife of a non-Russian BAM builder, she clearly blames the 'uncivilised' and 'uncultured' behaviour of the Evenkis for their decision:

> When Evenkis were allocated money, they said: 'Why do we need a bridge? Bamovtsy would come and harvest our berries ….' Now, they should have been happy to have one: the hospital is here and they have to come by boats. I feel sincerely sorry for them. It might be OK for an adult, but what if you would need to come with a baby? What if there is floating ice? (Interview: IKK, Yuktali, 2017)

Remoteness from within

While the polyphony of voices and deliberations among local residents makes an insider/outsider dichotomy challenging, spatial and symbolic remoteness is experienced

and perceived differently in Ust'-Nyukzha than in Yuktali. Which value an individual assigns to remoteness depends a lot on the social characteristics (such as age, occupation, ethnicity) of that person. *Bamovtsy* or those education and healthcare professionals who came to the village with the BAM construction have typically a more negative view of remoteness. Indigenous and pre-BAM settlers, on the other hand, see remoteness rather as a resource than a negative quality. While the majority of villagers do not feel remote or uncomfortable without a road bridge, they are not totally opposed to the BAM, development or 'modern' life with its promises, including certain forms of connectivity and mobility.

The missing bridge is the most tangible symbol of remoteness and stands for disconnection from 'the Big Land'.[9] The absence of a permanent road connection makes Ust'-Nyukzha fully accessible for ground transportation and large-scale supply only during the winter season. It is only the publicly-run boat that keeps the village connected to neighbouring Yuktali and the BAM from mid-May through September. A recent attempt to introduce a hovercraft did not pay off due to high maintenance costs, according to the local administration. The high costs of fuel and technical service required by the vehicle could not be covered by local users without state subsidies. Therefore, the administration rents it out to private entrepreneurs and calls it back to public community service only in emergency situations. In cases of fire, health emergencies, deaths and births, helicopters can also be called from Chul'man, the nearest airport in the southern part of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya).

The local administration of the village has a clear pro-development vision. The head of the administration, a former *bamovets* who settled in the village, sees the absence of a bridge and the disconnection from the BAM as a major problem and as a sign of socio-economic decline and abandonment. His nostalgic reference to the golden age of the BAM construction is, therefore, not surprising:

> Of course, the BAM boosted the economic development of the district, first of all, in terms of the transportation infrastructure. It gave an opportunity to supply products and materials at any time, not only by the winter road. Yet, we still remain a village with a limited supply period. As you see, we live on an island … No one needs us – the railroad doesn't need us because we are lying out of its way. We used to have a collective farm and supply meat on an industrial scale; we had pig and fur farms, they were interested in us. Now we don't produce or supply anything except for the workforce – young people who work at the railroad. This is the main reason of our impoverished existence … (Interview: AVM, Ust'-Nyukzha, 2017)

The spatial remoteness of Ust'-Nyukzha may indeed present challenges for local residents. The periods of freeze-up and floating ice make the use of public and private boats a highly risky endeavour. Yet, some residents have to resort to it, especially in cases when they need to get to their work at the railroad headquarters or urgently see a doctor in Yuktali or Tynda. A few local residents currently work 'at the rails' or at the new construction project launched within the 'BAM-2' programme. They have to regularly commute between the two settlements and risk their lives crossing the river

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[9] The term 'Big Land' (Russ. *bol'shaya zemlya*) is a widely used expression drawing on a popularly imagined juxtaposition between centrally located places and isolated, hard-to-access communities (especially in northern Russia).

during freeze-up and spring melt, something they consider routine business. Likewise, pregnant women need to get across the river in any season to deliver their children in the hospital, which has recently moved from Yuktali to Tynda. For these pragmatic reasons, a public boat service and a pedestrian bridge appear to be reasonable solutions to many, while a road bridge is still mostly unwanted.

Evenki reindeer herders and hunters have a more or less straightforward interpretation of remoteness as a positive and desirable condition. Their concept of space is based on differentiation between the 'peace' of the taiga, the 'headache' of the village, and the loud and aggressive interventions from the 'outside'. Their wish to be physically remote from the BAM is rooted in negative experiences of the impacts of the railroad. Reindeer herders whose pastures are traversed by the railroad tracks continue to suffer losses. Their domestic animals often get scared or injured when crossing the rails or fall prey to wolves and other predators attracted by waste food thrown out of passenger trains [Interviews: SAK, OKA, Ust'-Nyukzha, 2017].

Thus, the lifeworlds of Ust'-Nyukzha residents demonstrate that connectivity and remoteness co-constitute each other. Local residents do interact with the 'outside' world, an observation already made by Ardener in other contexts ('remote areas are in constant contact with the world'; Ardener 2012: 528–9). They see the advantages of connectivity (e.g. in terms of their own mobility), but feel vulnerable to certain forms of it (e.g. 'invasion' from outside and negative impacts of the railroad). The following interview with an Evenki leader and NGO activist talking about the importance of the railroad illustrates that spatial remoteness and disconnection of Ust'-Nyukzha are relative and relational:

> It's good that they opened a railroad for us [in the 1980s]. There were more problems [with travelling] earlier: we had to sit and wait for a plane for weeks. And now you can travel anywhere. But, of course, in the winter a lot of people come. There are lots of cars: youth from Yuktali drive here day and night. (Interview: GAA, Ust'-Nyukzha, 2017)

Remarkably, not one of the interviewed residents referring to the story of the missing bridge personally participated in that legendary meeting in the 1980s where the decision against the bridge was supposedly made. Yet, no one considers that decision 'wrong', as it is still bolstered with arguments against a year-round invasion of cars, alcohol, drugs and crime from Yuktali, which takes place when the river is frozen.

> We didn't want the bridge ourselves. Everyone was against it because we didn't want too many outsiders, too many people. We thought it would create a mess in the village…. And now they organised a public boat: 40 rubles per trip, from 6 am to 8 or 9 pm. No problem to get to Yuktali. (Interview: GAA, Ust'-Nyukzha, 2017)

Remoteness as a symbolic and social category tends to be seen as positive and as a kind of protection of indigenous Evenki culture against influences from the *bamovtsy*. In Tynda, we met an indigenous leader, activist and native language teacher. She was born and spent most of her life in Ust'-Nyukzha and is among the few interlocutors who recall details about the protests against the bridge. In her interpretation, the decision against the bridge was made because the older generation of Evenki residents were equally concerned about both the destruction of reindeer pastures and cultural

assimilation. In her mind, the missing bridge might have ensured the retention of Evenki traditional activities and culture in Ust'-Nyukzha:

> In Pervomayskoe that was close [to the BAM], we observe that they immediately lost reindeer herding and fur farming because of the impacts of the nearby BAM construction site. And we [Ust'-Nyukzha] have more or less preserved ourselves because we were remote from the construction. The railway station is on the one side and we are – on the other. (Interview: KSA, Tynda, 2016)

Evenki cultural centres and indigenous culture organisations at local and regional levels play active roles in the construction and representation of 'authentic' indigenous culture in cultural events and development projects with a focus on ethno-tourism. The largest Evenki festival 'Bakaldyn' was hosted by Ust'-Nyukzha in 2012 and included a number of competitions, ethnic sports, workshops in handicrafts and storytelling, an art exhibition, as well as a conference on indigenous issues (Ermakov 2012). Recently, the festival has grown from an interregional event into an international project that initiated cross-border cultural exchanges between Evenki communities in the Russian Far East and in China.

Remoteness and indigeneity in Ust'-Nyukzha are also co-constructed in reports, development programmes and tourism investment projects in Tyndinskiy District. Such documents are often illustrated with photos of 'unspoiled' nature and of Evenki people in national costumes, emphasising the otherness of Evenki culture. Northern regions have a long history of being represented as wilderness and ignoring their built environments (Schweitzer *et al.* 2017).

Finally, mass media outlets also are using the bridge story in Ust'-Nyukzha to connect remoteness and indigeneity. Not surprisingly, the community has been featured by regional and national media for its successes in promoting indigenous education, culture and traditional industries (e.g. Ermakov 2012). Journalistic reports have repeatedly emphasised the spatial disconnection and isolation of Ust'-Nyukzha because of the missing bridge (Ermakov 2016), thereby constructing remoteness as exotic otherness of the local community (cf. Mankova 2018). Similar to Luo, Oakes and Schein (this issue), we observe that certain notions of remoteness can be produced and reproduced, as they are seen as a resource that is promising gain. In this process, media organisations, agencies responsible for cultural revitalisation and tourism pro-grammes, as well as indigenous leaders play key roles.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The ideological shift from a modernist vision of remoteness as a defect to one where 'hard to access' and 'cultural distinction' are seen as positive is not uniform or unidirectional. The diversity of visions of remoteness found among different groups of interlocutors in Ust'-Nyukzha challenges simplistic dichotomies such as emic/etic, insider/outsider, Evenki/BAM builders, despite a tangible dividing line between indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Evenki residents in Ust'-Nyukzha and elsewhere are not mere victims of state modernisation but stakeholders in regional and global development processes. The non-existent bridge is a strong symbol for everyone involved: it is as much a potential project and a promise of connectivity that should bridge the

gap between two cultural environments as it is a sign of the latent but enduring resistance to sweeping top-down assimilation. Finally, the missing bridge more recently has become a symbol of state withdrawal resulting in a kind of return of remoteness. No matter what actually led to not building the bridge in the 1980s, everyone agrees that no one would finance it today.

The story told here cannot be generalised for all of Siberia or other 'remote' regions. Ust'-Nyukzha is a special case in many respects, including the fact that its 'insistence on remoteness' reaches back into Soviet times, when speaking up against modernisation plans was less common and riskier than in post-Soviet times. The beginning of the story of the missing bridge also brings us back to the rise of the indigenous rights movement in Russia. Indigenous rights entered local discourses during the 1990s, when global movements entered the previously closed space of the Soviet Union and its successor states. While indigenous leaders, herders and village residents can no longer voice their opinions as openly today, 'culture' remains an area where a certain amount of autonomy seems possible. At the same time, remoteness is seen by some as being conducive towards the conservation and development of the indigenous culture. As we have seen, some indigenous leaders connect the infrastructural isolation of Ust'-Nyukzha with the distinctiveness of Evenki culture. Thus, the 'moral right to remoteness' is an implicit one, based on cultural rights which ought to guarantee the preservation of 'traditional' ways of life and cultural distinctiveness.

Deliberations about remoteness as *a resource* also emerge in discussions about the prospects for cultural and ecological tourism, the commercialisation of traditional activities and other alternative development projects in local administrations. One could say that the commodification of culture that Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) talk about might be the intended or unintended end goal of equating remoteness and cultural vitality, although current levels of tourism development are still negligible. The example of Ust'-Nyukzha also reminds us that opposing a bridge is not necessarily a statement against development and connectivity. Here, notions of socio-spatial remoteness as being something positive coexist with visions about more contacts with other Evenki groups and increased tourist traffic. Despite the fact that Ust'-Nyukzha's initial statement against infrastructural connectivity was made more than 30 years ago, it is possible to detect an increase in positive attitudes toward spatial remoteness and disconnection there and in other communities of the BAM region. At the same time, the uneven infrastructural and socio-economic development of the region under post-Soviet conditions puts a question mark behind future development plans, whether locally desirable or not. Thus, the future might hold an involuntary 'return to remoteness' that is separate from a 'right to remoteness'.

Acknowledgements

Ust'-Nyukzha who introduced us to the community, as well as to all our interlocutors from this and other indigenous villages along the BAM for their openness and interest in our research project.

Peter Schweitzer 🆔 *and Olga Povoroznyuk* 🆔
Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology
University of Vienna
Universitaetsstrasse 7
Vienna
Austria
peter.schweitzer@univie.ac.at
olga.povoroznyuk@univie.ac.at

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Un droit à l'isolement ? Un pont manquant et des articulations d'indigénéité le long d'un chemin de fer en Sibérie orientale

L'Union soviétique et ses États successeurs ont été de fervents partisans d'un paradigme de modernisation visant à « surmonter l'éloignement » et à « amener la civilisation » à la périphérie et à son peuple indigène « arriéré ». Le chemin de fer Magistrale Baïkal–Amour (la BAM), construit en tant que projet prestigieux très médiatisé du socialisme tardif, en est un bon exemple. La BAM a impacté les communautés autochtones et reconfiguré l'espace géographique et social de la Sibérie orientale. Notre étude de cas se focalise sur un village d'Evenki situé assez près de la BAM, célèbre aujourd'hui pour son refus supposé de se connecter par un pont à la ville ferroviaire à proximité. Certains acteurs considèrent cette déconnexion comme un signe de retard, tandis que d'autres la célèbrent comme la raison principale de la préservation de la langue maternelle et de la culture. Se focalisant sur des discours reliant les notions d'éloignement/isolement et de revitalisation culturelle, l'article plaide en faveur d'une conceptualisation du récit du pont manquant, non comme le résultat de résistance politique, mais plutôt comme une articulation de l'indigénéité mettant en avant des droits culturels plutôt que des revendications politiques plus controversées. L'article examine ainsi des constellations d'éloignement et d'indigénéité soulevant la question d'un droit moral à l'isolement qui serait revendiqué par ceux qui conçoivent la distance spatiale comme ressource potentielle.

Mots-clés   éloignement/isolement, indigénéité, culture, pont, Sibérie

V. Publication 4. Ambiguous Entanglements: Infrastructure, Memory and Identity in Indigenous Evenki Communities along the Baikal-Amur Mainline

OLGA POVOROZNYUK

Ambiguous entanglements: infrastructure, memory and identity in indigenous Evenki communities along the Baikal–Amur Mainline

The Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) project has been the embodiment of (post-)Soviet modernisation with its promises of economic prosperity, mobility and connectivity. It boosted regional development and introduced new forms of mobility, but also accelerated sedentarisation, assimilation and social polarisation among Evenki, an indigenous people who had been living in the region long before the arrival of the megaproject. Complex and often ambiguous entanglements of Evenki with the BAM infrastructure – from participation in construction to the exchange of goods to loss of reindeer and land, shaped indigenous ways of life, memories and identities. The master-narrative of the BAM seems to have been internalised by many Evenki and to have drowned out critical voices and indigenous identities. In this article, I direct attention to 'hidden transcripts', thereby giving voice to underrepresented memories and perspectives on the BAM within Evenki communities. Drawing on ethnographic materials and interviews with indigenous leaders, reindeer herders and village residents, who experienced the arrival of the BAM and have been entangled with the railroad in various ways, I seek to contribute to a critical and comprehensive history of the BAM and to explore the construction and articulation of indigenous identities *vis-à-vis* large-scale infrastructure and development projects.

Key words infrastructure, indigeneity, Evenki identity, Siberia

Introduction

The Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) was the last Soviet infrastructural megaproject and one of the longest northern railroads, crossing six administrative regions in Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East. The BAM construction of the 1970–1980s became the embodiment of late Soviet modernity with its promises of economic well-being, education, job opportunities, connectivity and mobility. The official discourse glorified the BAM as 'the project of the century' and 'the path to the future' that was supposed to 'bring civilisation' to the remote region and its 'backward' population (Ward 2001, 2009) and raised expectations of a better life. The railroad not only boosted regional socio-economic development and new forms of mobility in the remote areas of Siberia, but also triggered tremendous social and cultural change and immobility among its indigenous population. Thus, it accelerated sedentarisation, assimilation and social polarisation among Evenki people, an indigenous group who had been living in the region long before the arrival of the megaproject. The entanglements of Evenki with the railroad varied from involvement in the construction process to the loss of land and reindeer.

Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the BAM project was for the first time openly criticised for its high economic and environmental costs. While some Evenki people who were directly or indirectly involved in the construction process had primarily positive experiences with the BAM, others (among them activists as well as reindeer herders) voiced their concerns about the dramatic impacts of the infrastructure project on their traditional culture, land use and nomadic way of life. In 2014, a new programme of railroad technological modernisation, named BAM-2, was launched. While it is much smaller in scale than the Soviet construction project, it has raised expectations as well as concerns among Evenki.

How can we understand the ambiguous perspectives of indigenous residents on the BAM project? Which ideological, social and occupational entanglements of Evenki people with the railroad have been shaping indigenous memories of the BAM? And how are different identities articulated through the experiences of participation in the construction of the BAM, on the one hand, and resistance against modernisation and infrastructural development, on the other? In this paper, I argue that the master narrative and ideology of the (post-)socialist BAM project subsumed indigenous discourses and identities. Focusing on underrepresented Evenki voices, I strive for the reconstruction of a more comprehensive history of interactions of the minority population with the railroad and unpack the process of indigenous identity construction in relation to this large infrastructure project.

My anthropological research with indigenous Evenki of East Siberia affected by the BAM started back in the late 1990s and yielded a book on Post-Soviet transformations in local communities (Povoroznyuk 2011). This article is a result of my follow-up ethnographic enquiries focusing on entanglements of humans and infrastructure in the BAM region. In the period between 2016 and 2018, I continued my research in the indigenous villages of Pervomayskoe and Ust'-Nyukzha in Amurskaya Oblast', Chapo-Ologo in Zabaykal'skiy Kray and Kholodnoe in the Republic of Buryatiya. My data collection methods included biographical interviews and focus groups with the local residents of these villages who had indigenous background and identified themselves as Evenki, as well as research in local archives and libraries. Over 30 interviews with indigenous residents – teachers, librarians, administration specialists, kindergarten nurses, doctors, activists, reindeer herders, hunters, railroad workers and leaders of indigenous enterprises – were analysed. While I tried to cover all age groups of the indigenous population, interviews with representatives of the generation of people who are currently in the age group 40 to 70 years old were especially important for this research.

Thus, this article intends to give a voice to Evenki people, who witnessed or experienced the construction of the BAM in various ways, primarily representatives of the local intelligentsia and indigenous activists, but also reindeer herders and hunters. I will show how these complex and often ambiguous entanglements reconfigured Evenki indigenous identities. Moreover, I will analyse how identities are being constructed and articulated in memory narratives of the Soviet period and attitudes towards the present-day railroad reconstruction. Being part of this special issue on mobilities in the Anthropocene, this case study examines the material and social entanglements, including aspects of (im)mobility, between indigenous communities and transport infrastructures in the environment affected by industrial development (Haraway et al. 2016).

In the main body of the article, I situate my research within larger anthropological debates on infrastructure, indigeneity and memory. At the same time, I portray the

late Soviet history of the BAM construction and modernisation project, analyse its main effects on indigenous ways of life and identities, and explore how the memories, experiences and expectations of Evenki people are being rearticulated in relation to the current railroad reconstruction programme, BAM-2. In the conclusion, I briefly address the research questions and discuss the results, emphasising the role of the BAM infrastructure project in the construction of indigenous identities and linking it to the theme of this special issue.

Infrastructure, indigeneity and memory in Siberia

Anthropology of infrastructure has become a booming field of research in the last decade (Morita et al. 2016; Anand et al. 2018). In many publications, infrastructure figures as the nexus between construction projects and modernisation policies (Harvey and Knox 2012), as terrain for political engagement and neoliberal reforms (Collier 2011) or as an inseparable part of both the natural and the built environment in the times of Anthropocene[1] (Hetherington 2019). Infrastructural megaprojects entail large-scale transformation of landscapes, environmental pollution and destruction, reconfiguration of spaces, and relocation of populations (Gellert and Lynch 2003). Large-scale Soviet infrastructure projects, such as the BAM (Josephson 1995), were a product of hyper-modernism (Scott 1998) with its extreme forms of technological and social engineering and exploitation of natural resources for political purposes. Thus, remote parts of the country, including the North, became the frontlines of industrial and infrastructural development (Schweitzer et al. 2017). Mobility, connectivity and sociality that facilitate movement and circulation of people, goods and information across space (Larkin 2013) are some obvious properties of transport infrastructure. Roads, for example, can be conduits of change (Pandya 2002; Windle 2002) as well as webs of social relations (Argounova-Low 2012). Yet, they do not only forge connections but can also disconnect and entrench violent exclusions of established political and material orders (Dalakoglou and Harvey 2012: 460). Railroads that were often at the centre of historical accounts (Marks 1991; White 2011) have only recently been receiving anthropological attention as infrastructure that shapes identities (Bear 2007) and assembles human and non-human actors (Fisch 2018; Swanson 2015). Presently, the Russian North and Siberia are crisscrossed by roads (Kuklina and Holland 2017), while the railroads continue to be the backbone of transportation and regional development, shaping social relations and identities (Povoroznyuk 2019). Infrastructural and technological change in Siberia has been leading to the diversification of means and patterns of travel with roads and railroads (Zuev and Habeck 2019).

Siberia has for centuries been home to a number of indigenous nomadic and sem-inomadic groups. Similar to other indigenous populations, numerically small peoples of the North and Siberia are characterised by a colonial history of sedentarisation, relocations, political marginalisation, and cultural and ecological destruction, on the one hand (Niezen 2003), and a special connection to the land and its underlying environmental ethics, on the other (Jentoft et al. 2003). Large-scale development projects lead to drastic transformations of indigenous ways of life, often resulting in the loss of political and economic autonomy and culture. Recently, the colonial development

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[1]   See a critical discussion on the use of the term in anthropology in Haraway et al. (2016).

paradigm, predominant in western modernisation ideas, is being critically revised to embed local histories and indigenous life projects (Blaser et al. 2004).

The Soviet state constructed an image of the so-called 'small peoples of the North' as 'an extreme case of backwardness … that provided a remote but crucial point of reference for speculations on human and Russian identity' (Slezkine 1994: ix). The popular representations of indigenous peoples of Siberia varied from 'victims of capitalist exploitation' to 'endangered species' (Ssorin-Chaikov 2000). Not surprisingly, the paternalistic policies of the socialist state turned indigenous minorities into subjects of its civilising missions of the 'eradication of illiteracy', 'cultural construction' and collectivisation (Grant 1995). The decades of Soviet colonial assimilation policies have transformed traditional ways of life and nomadism.

The end of the Soviet regime in the 1990s marked the rise of self-determination and the indigenous rights movement in Russia. The indigenous status and associated benefits became a resource contested by minority groups that 'emerged' in public political discourse (Donahoe et al. 2008). This movement helped to carve space for articulations of indigeneity as a process of 'positioning that draws upon … landscapes or repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle', including resistance to infrastructure projects (Li 2000: 151). While the present legal concepts of indigeneity in Russia are still defined by rather vague criteria and essentialist ideologies (Sokolovskiy 2011), one can trace counter narratives and articulations of indigenous identities at the local level (Varfolomeeva 2019: 273).

Identities shaped and reformulated in the process of remembering are part of collective memory. Most people 'memorise' rather than 'remember' the past by participating in their group's vision of its past through cognitive learning and emotional acts of identification and commemoration (Assmann 2008: 51–2). Thus, the memories of more powerful and politically dominating entities prevail in textbooks and mainstream representations and discourses. Only by focusing on lacunas, awkward facts and voices of minorities can the researcher arrive at a more comprehensive vision of a history of a particular group or a society. Close to the idea of lacunas is the notion of 'hidden transcripts' that characterises discourses and memories that develop 'offstage', beyond direct observation by powerholders, and marks resistance against the dominant public transcript (Scott 1990).

Ethnographic examples from the Russian North and Siberia also show the roles of regional and local memory for the articulation of indigenous identities. The case study by Cruikshank and Argounova features the struggle for recognition of the aboriginal Sakha (Yakut) people and demonstrates the role of local memory in the deconstruction of the Soviet totalitarian past and authoritative discourse in the 1990s (Cruikshank and Argounova 2000). An article by Simonova discusses relationships between local commemoration practices and national 'memorial regimes', showing how residents of an indigenous Evenki community deliver their version of history to a wider audience (Simonova 2012). An ethnographic paper on the imagined Sami community in Northern Russia analyses the power of discourse in the interpretation and utilisation of memories of the Soviet and pre-Soviet past for ethno-political identity claims. Allemann (2017) explores how nostalgic 'sovkhoist' discourse and the 'activist' need-and-misery discourse are used strategically and are constructed along the overlapping lines of generation, gender and locality. Finally, the ethnography of memory along the Russian Arctic coast argues that memory-making is a socially meaningful process, where technologies of silencing of marginalised memories and alternative views are used by communities to create particular public images of themselves (Stammler et al. 2017).

While literature lists on (transport) infrastructure, indigeneity and memory could be expanded, anthropological studies that bring these discussions together in the context of Siberia are few. Argounova-Low (2012) explores the role of roads as conduits of local and indigenous narratives, memories and identities. A recently published article on rivers and roads shows how transport infrastructure becomes an integral part of nomadic landscapes and perception of space (Istomin 2020). A special issue of the journal *Sibirica* illustrates the complementarity and social agency of a variety of 'traditional' and modern infrastructures in the Russian North (Vakhtin 2017). Finally, a special issue of the journal *Siberian Historical Research* on transport infrastructure in the Circumpolar North brings together ethnographic case studies of sea routes, roads and railways (Povoroznyuk et al. 2020). Yet, the role of railroads in the production of memories and (re)construction and articulation of indigenous identities has been understudied by anthropologists, despite the tremendous effects of these large-scale industrial infrastructures. This paper aims to fill this gap by analysing (re)construction of indigenous memories and identities in relation to the railroad in communities affected by the Baikal–Amur Mainline through the infrastructural lens.

Soviet modernisation and the BAM

The history of the BAM starts with early construction projects dating back to the 19th century and continues with the first rails laid under the Stalinist regime in the 1950s. However, the majority of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984 by labour migrants (BAM builders or *bamovtsy*) from across the USSR in order to exploit the untapped resources of the North and to 'bolster collective faith in the administrative-command system' (Ward 2009: 2). The Soviet propaganda created 'the myth of the BAM', promoting values of an ideal socialist society (Ward 2001). The BAM became an iconic symbol of modernity, with its promises of a better life, including socio-economic development, mobility, and new education and employment opportunities.

The promises of the BAM, with its underlying Soviet modernisation myth, raised expectations not only among enthusiastic BAM builders but also among the indigenous population. During the initial stage of the BAM construction, a sociological survey was conducted in selected indigenous communities affected by the railroad. The survey reported that 66% of the respondents expected an improvement in their living conditions and hoped for new jobs and education opportunities, higher levels of income and better supplies. The rest of the respondents expressed concerns about adverse impacts of the railroad on traditional activities, especially on reindeer herding (Boyko 1979: 163).

Evenki are an indigenous minority population dispersed across different regions of East Siberia and the Russian Far East (while some groups also live in China and Mongolia; Figure 1). In the pre-Soviet period most Evenki groups pursued a nomadic life, practising reindeer herding, hunting and fishing in taiga areas. The Soviet policy of 'cultural construction' introduced elementary education and basic medical services among indigenous peoples of the North that stimulated sedentarisation of the nomadic population in the newly built 'ethnic villages' (*natsional'noe selo*).[2] My previous

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[2]   This term was introduced in the Soviet period in relation to rural settlements with a predominantly indigenous population.

**Figure 1   Evenki herders waiting for the ceremonial arrival of the
first train at the BAM settlement Zolotinka, Yakutiya, 1976.
Source: Museum of the History of Exploration of Southern Yakutiya,
Neryungri**

research among Evenki indicates the BAM project significantly accelerated and, in
many communities, completed sedentarisation of nomads in remote parts of East
Siberia and the Far East (Povoroznyuk 2011).

Today, most Evenki and other indigenous groups (*aborigeny*) live in ethnic villages, some of which are connected to BAM settlements by roads, others are hardly
accessible by motorised vehicle. The majority of Evenki people, especially indigenous
intelligentsia who managed to get a good education in the Soviet period, currently
work in local administrations, schools, kindergartens, cultural centres and libraries. An
increasing number of indigenous individuals work for railroad and extraction companies. Each administrative district where I conducted my fieldwork, including
Tyndinskiy Rayon, Kalarskiy Rayon and Severobaykal'skiy Rayon, has only about a
dozen so-called 'clan communities' (*obshchina*)[3] that lead a nomadic way of life.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened the way for public criticism towards
the socialist modernisation myth and the BAM project. Due to its high construction and maintenance costs, in the 1990s the BAM was considered an unprofitable
enterprise. Negative environmental impacts and damage to indigenous lands were

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[3] Rus. *obshchina* (or 'clan community') of indigenous numerically small peoples of the North is a
legally registered entity that usually implies an indigenous nomadic group of relatives, neighbours
or friends leading subsistence activities (hunting, reindeer herding, fishing, gathering, small-scale
tourism and souvenir production) on designated lands. Clan communities became the most widely
spread form of organisation among the indigenous population of the North after the dissolution
of *sovkhozes* and *kolkhozes* in the Post-Soviet period. *Obshchinas* can enjoy a number of benefits,
including tax alleviation or exemption and financial support.

for the first time publicly recognised. Since the beginning of the economic recovery and reconsideration of resource-extraction projects in the 2000s, the volume of cargo transported by the BAM has been steadily growing. Oil, coal, timber, rare metals and gold are the main resources transported from the region to the Asian markets and to central parts of Russia. The recently launched modernisation programme BAM-2 aims to increase the railroad's cargo capacity and promises new infrastructure and socio-economic development.

Effects of infrastructure: ways of life and indigeneity in transformation

The BAM became the last Soviet 'project of the century' (Josephson 1995) that transformed the natural and social environment of north Siberia. The arrival of the BAM megaproject had different environmental and socio-economic impacts on Evenki nomads. Transformation of traditional occupations, mobilities and ways of life in the course of interactions with the railroad infrastructure reshaped indigenous identities.

The industrialisation programme of the region, including the BAM construction project, foresaw the recruitment of labour from other parts of the USSR in order to avoid potential labour shortages in local collective farms and other organisations. In line with this labour recruitment pattern, the authorities and planners expected indigenous residents working for collective farms to also procure reindeer meat and agricultural products for the construction organisations. BAM builders, in their turn, were assigned to 'supervise' ethnic villages located in proximity to the BAM. Construction organisations supplied local communities with an assortment of goods and foods imported from the central regions of the country and from abroad. Larger construction organisations were assigned to build houses for villagers and permanent dwellings for reindeer herders in the taiga.

During the BAM construction, the majority of the Evenki population was enrolled in northern *kolkhozes* as reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen. At the same time, ideological propaganda and higher salaries at the railroad construction boosted the popularity of the BAM project among Evenki as well. While many attempted to sign on with a construction organisation, only few managed to work directly for the BAM. One such Evenki family spontaneously set out to the construction site that opened in the vicinity of their village. According to Maria, they were lucky to get jobs at the BAM: her husband was accepted to work as a stone dresser and she worked first as a painter and decorator and then as a kindergarten nurse. Memories and photos from the family archive show that this short but memorable experience was important to them. Maria was among the few Evenki individuals who received the prestigious 'medal for construction of the BAM' – a sign of distinction and recognition that was awarded to outstanding workers of *kolkhozes* and local organisations providing food, goods and services to BAM builders.

While some Evenki benefited from emerging exchange between *kolkhozes* and construction organisation, as well as from participation in the construction, others had to suffer negative environmental, social and cultural costs. The BAM infrastructure transformed traditional ways of life by changing land use practices and year-round nomadism into seasonal migrations. The railroad cut through and polluted pastures

and hunting grounds with noise, abandoned industrial waste and litter thrown out of passenger trains. BAM builders and other newcomers who flew into the region for the railroad construction encroached on Evenki lands. The illegal shooting of domestic reindeer and sale of meat, poaching and forest fires undermined reindeer herding and hunting (Fondahl 1998). The words of the head of an Evenki reindeer herding *obshchina* from the village Kholodnoe indicate that the loosely controlled trade with traditional products had negative effects on the livelihood of the nomadic Evenki population:

They [the authorities] transported sacks full of deer leg skins out [of the region], slaughtered reindeer, including does, and caused the herds to scatter … The BAM has brought no good to reindeer herders, although one could have organised the slaughtering and selling of meat to builders. (AG, Kholodnoe, 2017)[4]

Moreover, the Soviet state perceived nomadism as a 'backward' form of mobility that had to be administratively handled (Davydov 2017). While in many other parts of the Russian North agricultural reforms (for instance, the introduction of the shift method to reindeer herding[5]) happened earlier, it was the BAM project that boosted sedentarisation of nomads and turned Evenki herders into hunters in northern parts of East Siberia (Anderson 1991). In most parts of the region, this employment practice replaced family-based nomadism. In addition, the construction of stick-frame houses in the taiga, introduced as a measure of support to reindeer herders, reconfigured their nomadic patterns and enabled sedentarisation.

Currently, there are a few legally registered indigenous groups, as well as individual herders and hunters, who continue a nomadic way of life. Altogether though, nomads constitute only a small percentage of the total indigenous population in these areas. One of the main reasons for this is the alienation of lands and competition for resources. The pressing issue of land rights over traditional territories repeatedly comes to the fore when Evenki herders and hunters are pushed out of their lands.

The BAM construction changed mobility practices not only in the taiga, but also in indigenous villages. On-ground transportation with buses and private cars was boosted by the construction of roads and bridges that came along with the BAM. Many informants indicate that the BAM facilitated communication between relatives living in different indigenous villages. At the same time, such connectivity also had negative effects on the local population. For example, while the selling and consumption of alcohol in ethnic villages was most of the time strictly regulated, this went out of administrative control once the local communities along the BAM became more accessible to illegal traders.

With time, the railroad became deeply integrated into the everyday mobilities of indigenous villagers and town residents. Currently, the BAM serves the supply of local communities with goods and food, but only to a limited degree. The prices for container transport are too high for small and medium enterprises to easily afford them. In cases when products are delivered by railroad, they usually arrive from Moscow or from the big Siberian cities of Krasnoyarsk and Novosibirsk. Smaller freight is

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[4] The interviews were initially conducted in Russian and translated by the author into English.

[5] The introduction of shift work in reindeer herding meant the creation of rotational male-dominated brigades who spent half of their time in the taiga and the other half in the village. The proliferation of this method in the Soviet *kolkhoz* economy has radically transformed indigenous subsistence activities, ways of life and gendered division of labour and mobility in the North.

informally delivered by train and handed by a train conductor to the addressee. Local residents use the train to transport agricultural products such as reindeer meat, fish and berries to their relatives and friends.

Thus, following the Soviet modernisation policies, the BAM ideologists and administrators treated indigenous peoples as 'a case of backwardness' (Slezkine 1994) to be handled through administrative measures and a 'cultural construction' policy (Grant 1995). While interaction with the migrants reconfigured indigenous identities (e.g. leading to the emergence of *deti BAMa*, explained in the subsection below), involvement of Evenki in the railroad construction and servicing also shaped new identities (e.g. that of a BAM builder or *bamovtsy*). At the same time, the aboriginal identity *aborigeny* persisted, especially among the people leading a nomadic way of life. Indigeneity was politically defined and articulated (Li 2000) on the wave of the indigenous rights movement and cultural self-determination (Pika and Grant 1999) that followed the end of the BAM construction and the dissolution of the USSR in the 1990s.

From the beginning of the BAM construction, Evenki people had to adapt to rapid demographic change and intensive cultural contact with migrants of different ethnic and social backgrounds. These interactions as well as participation in the BAM project have transformed indigenous people's identities: new mixed and multiple ethnic identities appeared, as well as the adoption of the Soviet identity of the 'BAM builder' in some cases. Today, the 'traditional way of life' based on a special connection to the land continues to play a decisive role in articulations of indigeneity *vis-à-vis* the BAM infrastructure and resource extraction projects in East Siberia.

While the BAM builders who arrived in big numbers at the railroad construction settled primarily in the towns and cities that they were building, they visited indigenous Evenki villages on different festive and other occasions. The interactions between *bamovtsy* and *aborigeny* could result in life-long friendships or mixed marriages. This is how an Evenki woman remembers encounters between indigenous villagers and *bamovtsy* during the construction period:

> Well, earlier they [BAM builders] came to buy food; the youth did not have their own club, so they visited ours. It was young people who arrived. They, the pioneers who didn't leave, now have families and still live here. (GA, Ust'-Nyukzha, 2017)

The typical pattern of partnerships and marriages involved local indigenous women and single male BAM builders (*bamovtsy*). Such mixed marriages soon became a widespread phenomenon, especially in the villages lying in close proximity to the BAM, such as Pervomayskoe (Turaev 2004: 45). The new identity of the 'children of the BAM' (*deti BAMa*) emerged as a reference and a self-reference in relation to the children born and raised in mixed marriages. Most of these children are still officially registered as Evenki, which enables access under the Russian legislation on indigenous numerically small peoples to a number of benefits. Evenki often use the concept of *deti BAMa* in conversations about assimilation, language loss and identity shift. An Evenki school teacher and activist originally coming from the indigenous village Ust'-Nyukzha talked about the language loss and *deti BAMa* in the 1980s, in the context of the BAM project and the present cultural revitalisation movement, in the following way:

I once counted the number of metis children or half-Evenki. It was interesting to correlate this number with language loss. Because of mixed marriages, many settled in villages. Now their ethnicity has reawakened. Earlier they never used or wanted to learn their language. The current policy aimed at the preservation of Evenki people, rituals, etc. has raised their interest in their own life, the life of their people and in the language. (KA, Tynda, 2016)

A *bamovtsy* identity was also adopted by Evenki who in one way or another partici-pated in the BAM project. Not only participation in the construction process, but also selling traditional products in *kolkhoz* shops or providing educational, cultural and other services to *bamovtsy* qualified as 'work at the BAM'. Successful Evenki employ-ees who worked in these spheres could be awarded the 'medal for construction of the BAM'. This distinction, as well as cooperation and friendships with *bamovtsy*, prompted some Evenki to take on a *bamovtsy* identity as well. According to my obser-vations, in the case of Evenki this is a situational identity that pops up in conversations about the BAM. While currently being an indigenous leader striving for the revitalisa-tion of Evenki culture and traditional activities, my interlocutor Maria proudly refers to herself as *bamovka* (a female BAM builder):

Although I am *bamovka*, I was invited to work as a specialist on the issues of indigenous numerically small peoples at the administration. It was in 1990 to 1992. I used to fly over the reindeer herds on a helicopter since I had to register them all. (MG, Novaya Chara, 2016)

Participation in the BAM project gave Evenki BAM builders and *kolkhoz* administra-tion workers a number of privileges, including access to new housing and BAM shops with their wide assortment of goods, as well as monetary rewards. This caused polari-sation within Evenki communities.

The difference in social prestige and economic remuneration between the occupa-tions of BAM builders and *kolkhoz* workers reinforced social tensions and a growing gap in living conditions between migrants and locals. An Evenki woman working as the head of the municipality in a BAM town critically assessed the divide that emerged between the two groups during the construction:

One can draw a line between the migrants who came and those who have been living here for a longer time. Living standards of the local population remain low – nothing has changed. And those [migrants] received cars and northern subsidies and managed to earn money and get apartments, while our lives have not changed … The benefits [of the BAM] have mostly bypassed us. (SK, Chapo-Ologo, 2016)

Memories, experiences and expectations

At the moment, the BAM is the main job provider sustaining local communities. As a transport infrastructure, it serves primarily the transportation of cargo and the extractive industries, as was foreseen back in the Soviet period. Although the social effects of the BAM are different from what they were in the construction period, it is

still filled with promises and discourses of development and economic prosperity for the region and its population.

The visions of today's role of the BAM and its modernisation programme seem to be shaped by the memories of the socialist project, and experiences of participation in or resistance to the construction of the railroad. While the state discourses glorifying the BAM predominate, underrepresented voices within the Evenki minority help to arrive at a more comprehensive picture (Assmann 2008) of the effects of the infrastructure on the indigenous population. The carriers of hidden transcripts and dissenting views about BAM are the less empowered groups within the indigenous population (Scott 1990) – herders and hunters who suffered losses due to the construction. The discourses and memories of Evenki communities along the BAM, similar to the Sami case referred to above (Allemann 2017), are thus divided by generation, as well as occupation, way of life and type of interaction with the BAM.

As such, Evenki who participated in the BAM construction and adopted the *bamovtsy* identity 'domesticated' the railroad in their memory discourses. They also tend to justify the environmental and other costs of the construction and have a positive assessment of the BAM. While talking about the role of the railroad, Evenki BAM-builder Maria distances herself from Evenki elders:

> Of course, the machinery has damaged pastures, but they can still herd deer there. Of course, the railroad has cut across paths and sledge routes, but that is life. Thanks to it they have a railroad and can travel wherever they want, even to their pastures. It's convenient. Everybody is happy. Although the elders were especially unhappy about it, one can now see its benefits. (MG, Novaya Chara, 2016)

The younger Evenki generation also tend to see the BAM in a positive light. One of the reasons for that is the increasing number of indigenous residents employed by the railroad company. Attracted by its stability and the relatively high salaries offered by the RZhD railway company, Evenki youngsters from Chapo-Ologo, Ust'-Nyukzha and other villages work 'on the rails' as track workers, mechanics, train attendants or guards accompanying cargo trains. Some indigenous youth successfully combine employment on the railroad with subsistence activities, while others are challenged by the high demands and strict schedules and shortly switch to other jobs in the extractive industries, public organisations or *obshchinas*.

However, beyond these positive assessments of the railroad in the past and the present, there are a variety of critical indigenous voices and perspectives. Such voices come from those bearing the environmental and socio-economic costs of the railroad's construction and functioning. An interview with an Evenki activist and retired school teacher, who was born to a family of reindeer herders and who remembers the construction, reflects a critical opinion of the BAM project:

> We don't see any good come from the railroad … Earlier they said that they would pay us rent for our lands and pastures. But that was a deceit. The railroad traversed our villages and the lands where our parents kept deer and nomadised – it crossed them all. And now the railroad doesn't pay itself off. (KA, Tynda, 2016)

Currently, the BAM infrastructure disturbs traditional land use: herders cannot cross the railroad with reindeer (no special crossings have ever been constructed) and the litter thrown out of train windows attracts wolves that kill domestic deer. In conversations about infrastructure projects, including the BAM and extractive industries, the burning issue of indigenous rights to lands and fisheries pops up. In this context, the BAM is usually a starting point leading to discussions about the railroad's long-term, far-reaching and indirect impacts caused by resource extraction, logging, illegal hunting and tourism in the region. Unresolved land rights come to the fore when Evenki herders and hunters are pushed off their lands by non-local users or industrial companies or where these parties pollute the lands. However, the law defining the use of traditional lands remains the subject of immense political debate, especially regarding its implementation on the regional level. In this context, indigeneity as belonging to the legal category of 'indigenous numerically small peoples of the North' that entitles special land rights is contested locally in terms of cultural authenticity and ethnic purity, as far as the words of an Evenki *obshchina* leader from the Republic of Buryatiya go:

> The government seems to ignore Evenkis who are involved in traditional activities. Why didn't they implement the law on [traditional] territories? K. [The Head of the Republic of Buryatiya] should have allocated traditional territories a long time ago to protect reindeer herders and hunters. And the Buryats instead of protecting real Evenkis only look at those who dance for tourists. If you ask for a list of *obshchinas*, you will see there are individuals who were recognised as Evenki by court decision! (AG, Kholodnoe, 2017)

While the railroad remains relevant for visiting family and friends and for the transportation of small cargos and agricultural products to other parts of the region, it does not play a central role in local passenger transport, especially for short- and medium-distance travel. It is mostly due to the state subsidy for long-distance train journeys, allocated once in two years to local residents working for public organisations, that passengers continue to use the BAM for getting to places of study or for a holiday in other parts of Russia. Otherwise, the inconvenient passenger train schedules and high ticket prices decrease the popularity of the railroad.

Many Evenki today have a rather reserved opinion on BAM-2, in contrast to *bamovtsy* who often hope that it will be the long-awaited completion of the Soviet construction plans. Moreover, indigenous leaders are concerned about the future of their communities. These concerns are rooted in uncertainty about the status of traditional lands, competition with newcomers over resources in the taiga and environmental degradation resulting from resource extraction facilitated by the BAM. In this context, some communities and individuals see remoteness from the railroad infrastructure and the state's development programmes as an advantage and a resource helping to sustain indigenous culture and identity (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019).

Conclusion

The BAM has been an agent of major social change and a (post-)socialist infrastructure filled with the promises of Soviet modernity – social equality, economic prosperity, connectivity and mobility. Yet, the project accelerated and completed the sedentarisation

and cultural assimilation of indigenous nomadic people living in remote areas of East Siberia traversed by the railroad. In this article I illustrated diverse and often ambiguous entanglements with the railroad infrastructure that informed indigenous ways of life, memories and identities. This ambiguity is reflected in two contrasting citations from interviews with two Evenki female activists, who were both born into nomadic families but experienced the arrival and effects of the megaproject in different ways.

Maria, who was a Komsomol member inspired by communist ideas and participated together with her husband in the construction process, fondly remembers the socialist BAM:

> We were real pioneers of the BAM! The only Evenki family that was integrated into a Belorussian construction team … It was like living in paradise because 'everything was for the BAM', as Brezhnev declared, and we loved Brezhnev … The BAM changed us, changed our worldview. Life was full of joy, we had opportunities to communicate with builders from different republics, we became more open. (MG, Novaya Chara, 2016)

This can be compared to the view of Klavdia, a teacher of the Evenki language who witnessed the assimilatory impacts of the BAM while living and working in her native village affected by the railroad:

> When they were building the railroad, they promised to pay us rent for the lands that they used. But that was a deception. The railroad crossed our villages and the lands where our parents nomadised and herded their deer, but no one got anything from it … It didn't fulfil expectations. Our parents were against the construction, but they also saw possibilities for us, their children … And now I am not sure, I am personally disappointed because I hoped for a different future for my people. (KA, Tynda, 2016)

The two contrasting Evenki views quoted above mark a continuum of multiple perspectives, where pro-BAM opinions prevail, while anti-BAM voices that reveal 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1990) of the BAM construction remain underrepresented or ignored. In general, there seems to be a correlation between how the railroad infrastructure affected a particular group of the indigenous population and how they remember the BAM. For example, indigenous BAM builders, members of the intelligentsia and *kolkhoz* workers who were involved in the construction process or in the exchange of goods and products with *bamovtsy* tend to reproduce the internalised glorifying master narrative of the BAM. On the other end of the spectrum are interlocutors who were leading a nomadic life in *kolkhozes*, which was massively disrupted by the railroad construction. Their alternative discourses reveal memories of veiled criticism of the megaproject. The generational divide also plays an important role in understanding perceptions of the BAM. The older generation of Evenki, who were mostly leading a nomadic life at the time of the railroad construction and were negatively affected by the megaproject, see the BAM in a more critical light than the middle and the younger generations who could enjoy some of its benefits.

These varying and often ambiguous entanglements with and memories of the BAM shaped corresponding indigenous identities. Different types and degrees of involvement with the BAM depending on the occupation (from BAM builder to reindeer herder) and the way of life (from sedentary to nomadic) (re)configured indigenous

identities. While Evenki participating in the construction process or providing services for the BAM assumed a *bamovtsy* identity (as did Maria cited above), those who (like Klavdia) were criticising and resisting the negative effects of BAM have retained and rearticulated their 'aboriginal' identity *aborigeny*. Beyond these two opposing identities, the new mixed identity of 'children of BAM' *deti BAMa* that emerged in the process of interactions between migrant and indigenous populations has been spreading. Present official discourses drawing on idealised memories of the socialist BAM and surrounding the BAM-2 may find support among those members of Evenki communities who experience or experienced some positive effects of the railroad (employment, mobility and connectivity). At the same time, those Evenki who had to bear the environmental and social costs of the project are struggling to articulate indigeneity and associated legal rights to land and culture, or at least to publicly voice their environmental and social concerns *vis-à-vis* the reconstruction programme BAM-2 as a conduit of the sweeping modernisation and resource extraction.

Overall, I showed that Evenki memories of and attitudes to the BAM stretch from support and acceptance of the infrastructure project to critical voices against its construction. While many indigenous interlocutors who participated in the construction and/or internalised the master narrative recognise the BAM as an achievement of Soviet development and industrialisation, the 'hidden transcripts' of the BAM include silenced memories of environmental degradation and the transformation of traditional activities, mobility, ways of life and cultural assimilation. Parallel to the memories of the socialist BAM, indigenous identities are being (re)shaped, (re)constructed and (re)articulated. Attention to critical indigenous voices and to the articulation of indigenous identities *vis-à-vis* the BAM helps to reconstruct a more comprehensive history of this large-scale infrastructure project. Finally, this case study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of past, present and potential future effects of transport infrastructures on indigenous communities. This includes attention to competing forms of mobility (nomadism, locomobility and, more recently, automobility) in the broader context of interactions between humans, infrastructures and environments in the Anthropocene.

Acknowledgements

Olga Povoroznyuk 🔘
Social and Cultural Anthropology
University of Vienna
Vienna
Austria
olga.povoroznyuk@univie.ac.at

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Enchevêtrements ambigus: infrastructure, mémoire et identité dans les communautés indigènes Evenki le long de la ligne principale Baïkal–Amour

Le projet de ligne principale Baïkal-Amour (BAM) a été l'incarnation de la modernisation (post-) soviétique avec ses promesses de prospérité économique, de mobilité et de connectivité. Il a stimulé le développement régional et introduit de nouvelles formes de mobilité, mais a également accéléré la sédentarisation, l'assimilation et la polarisation sociale des Evenki, un peuple indigène qui vivait dans la région bien avant l'arrivée du mégaprojet. Les enchevêtrements complexes et souvent ambigus des Evenki avec l'infrastructure du BAM – de la participation à la construction à l'échange de biens en passant par la perte de rennes et de terres – ont façonné les modes devie, les souvenirs et les identités des autochtones. Le récit principal du BAM semble avoir été intériorisé par de nombreux Evenki et avoir étouffé les voix critiques et les identités indigènes. Dans cet article, j'attire l'attention sur les « transcriptions cachées », donnant ainsi la parole aux souvenirs et aux points de vue sous-représentés sur le BAM au sein des communautés Evenki. En m'appuyant sur des matériaux ethnographiques et des entretiens avec des leaders indigènes, des éleveurs de rennes et des résidents de villages, qui ont vécu l'arrivée du BAM et ont été mêlés au chemin de fer de diverses manières, je cherche à contribuer à une histoire critique et complète du BAM et à explorer la construction et l'articulation des identités indigènes *vis-à-vis* des projets d'infrastructure et de développement à grande échelle.

Mots-clés infrastructure, indigénat, identité evenki, Sibérie

VI. Publication 5. (Re)Constructing the Baikal-Amur Mainline: Continuity and Change of (Post)Socialist Infrastructure

(Re)Constructing the Baikal-Amur Mainline

Continuity and Change of (Post)Socialist Infrastructure

Olga Povoroznyuk

Abstract

The construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) in East Siberia and the Russian Far East in the 1970s and 1980s was the largest technological and social engineering project of late socialism. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the BAM was dogged by economic bust, decline, and public disillusionment. BAM-2, a recently launched state program of technological modernization, aims to complete a second railway track. The project elicits memories as well as new hopes and expectations, especially among "builders of the BAM." This article explores continuity and change between BAM-1 and BAM-2. It argues that the reconstruction efforts of the postsocialist state are predetermined by the durability of the infrastructure as a materialization of collective identities, memories, and emotions.

Keywords

During the construction period, there was a lot of attention on the BAM; in the turbulent 1990s, it was forgotten and ignored because of the lack of funding and development. No one cared about it until the 2000s . . . Now they are building the second track and people are coming here . . . the BAM is regaining popularity.

—SL, RZhD company manager, Yuktali, 2017[1]

The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) is a railway line built in the 1970s and 1980s in the northern areas of East Siberia and the Russian Far East. Construction of the BAM was the largest engineering project of the late Soviet period, accompanied by communist propaganda, a mass population influx, and the formation of new groups and identities. The project was filled with the myths and promises of modernity. By the end of the construction, however, which almost coincides with the end of the socialist era, economic bust, infrastruc-

tural decline, public disillusionment and criticism clouded the BAM project. The 1990s were marked by the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Dramatic political, ideological and economic transformation left behind unfinished infrastructure projects.[2]

Currently, the Baikal-Amur Mainline is among the longest northern railroads in the world. Its main track, stretching for over forty-three hundred kilometers, cuts through the taiga of six northern regions of East Siberia and the Russian Far East, while its twelve-hundred-kilometer extension, the Amur-Yakutsk Mainline (AYaM), leads to the southern parts of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiia). The railroad infrastructure encompasses over two hundred stations and traverses sixty-five villages and towns. The BAM is the backbone of regional development and the main job provider in most of the single-industry towns along its way. The railroad network connects mineral deposits and remote settlements with district and regional centers. It serves primarily for the transportation of cargo—natural resources (timber, oil, coal, metal ore) and, to a lesser degree, foods and goods.

Soviet engineers designed the BAM as a fully electrified two-track railway line. Yet, while the electrified segment of the railroad extends from the BAM's starting point in Taishet to Taksimo, the second railway track was laid only along the oldest railroad segment between Taishet and Ust'-Kut (see Figure 1). BAM-2 is a recently launched state program of technological modernization of the railroad fueled by renewed resource extraction interests. It aims to complete the originally designed second railway track and full electrification of the BAM. The project involves the state-owned monopoly Russian Railroad Company (Rossiiskie Zheleznye Dorogi or RZhD), numerous construction firms, and "BAM builders" or *bamovtsy,* former migrants who were drawn to the region to participate in the construction project. It evokes memories and emotions associated with the socialist-era BAM project, as well as hopes and expectations for completion of the original Soviet construction plans and community development. However, a new way of organizing labor, nontransparent funding and management schemes, and unequal power relations, where non-local interests dominate over the needs of local communities, seemingly feed into another cycle of public disenchantment, especially among *bamovtsy* involved in BAM-2.

This article, drawing on a comparative case study of the socialist BAM construction project and the postsocialist reconstruction program BAM-2, aims to explore continuity and change in the transition between these two projects by focusing on the railroad infrastructure, which consists of construction plans, material objects, organizations, and individual human actors. While doing so, I will ask the following questions: How do the legacy of the Soviet regional development programs and the materiality of the built and unfinished infrastructure of the railroad impact its post-Soviet reconstruction program? What is the role of propaganda and myth about the BAM in mobilizing labor
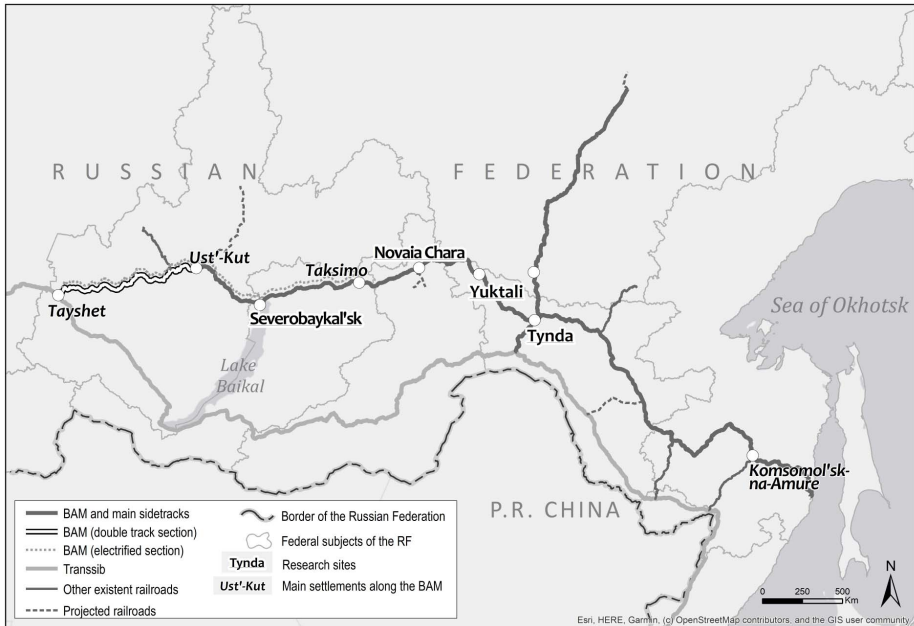
Figure 1. Map of the Baikal-Amur Mainline showing field sites and double-track sections. Permission granted by Alexis Sanco-Reinoso.

resources and shaping collective identities and emotions around BAM-1 and BAM-2? What can we learn about continuity and change from ethnography of the reconstruction works that focus on the (mal)functioning of the infrastructure of the BAM under postsocialist conditions?

The research presented in the article draws on ethnographic fieldwork I have been conducting in the region of the Baikal-Amur Mainline since 1998. In addition, this article builds on twelve biographic interviews and three focus groups with BAM builders, as well as eleven expert interviews with specialists in local administrations and employees (managers, heads of subdivisions, and trade unions) of the national railroad company RZhD. The majority of the experts also identified themselves as *bamovtsy* who either directly participated in the BAM construction or come from BAM builders' families. These interviews and focus groups, along with ethnographic observations, were gathered in the railroad towns of Tynda, Novaia Chara, Severobaikal'sk, Yuktali, Neriungri, and Berkakit between 2016 and 2019. In addition to the ethnographic qualitative data, official information provided by regional subdivisions as well as by the central office of the RZhD company in Moscow, policy documents concerning the realization of the reconstruction program BAM-2, and materials of the local and regional press were used in my analysis.

(Post)Socialist Infrastructures: Materiality, Identity, and Emotions

According to a popular definition, infrastructure is matter that "enables the movement of other matter."[3] The word "infrastructure" was adopted in English from nineteenth-century French civil engineering. Back then, it, in fact, referred to the organizational work required before railroad tracks could be laid. By the late twentieth century, it had turned into a generic term widely used in international development and in social theory.[4] Social scientists, including anthropologists have been using the analytical lens of infrastructure in writing about modernity, development, and modernization. For example, Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, drawing on their ethnography of road construction in Peru, argue that infrastructures like roads and railways are archetypal technology of post-Enlightenment, emancipatory modernity that "enchant" with the hopes and dreams of development.[5] At the same time, as the authors write elsewhere, roads promised are never quite the same as those delivered, because they are, in essence, risky ventures full of uncertainty and surrounded by stories of corruption, embezzlement, and shady dealings.[6] Railroads, typologically and functionally similar infrastructure objects, are even more potent expressions of modernity. In the world history of industrialization, colonization, and formation of nation-states, railroads figure as symbols of power,[7] stitching together vast territories of rising empires.[8] Soviet railroad projects with their underlying ideology and practices of high modernism[9] symbolized and enforced state power in remote parts of the empire.[10]

Socialist economic, political, and cultural forms have endured in postsocialist Eastern Europe and beyond.[11] In Russia, despite political shifts and socio-economic transformations, the Soviet modernization project with its socialist plans, ideologies, and identity-building policies continued well into the post-Soviet period.[12] Demographic and socio-economic decline, degradation of infrastructure, and "fuzzy" (nontransparent or mixed) forms of property[13] characterize the postsocialist development of frontier regions. While the current regional development strategies reveal path dependency on the Soviet industrial plans, massive state investments in infrastructure have been substituted by targeted private funding. Companies' investments and benefits from resource extraction "fly over" local communities producing "modernization enclaves"[14] in landscapes of uneven development.[15]

In her famous article on ethnography of infrastructure, Susan Leigh Star noted that infrastructures, be they optical fibers or railway lines, do not grow de novo, but are built on an installed base.[16] While infrastructures have to wrestle with the inertia of that underlying base, they are, in fact, dynamic material objects going through different cycles of transformation. Ruin and retrofit are among the key paradoxical qualities of infrastructure, where ruination suggests its degenerative quality and retrofit an attempt to test its solidity.[17] Ruination or a breakdown of once taken-for-granted, state-supported com-

munal infrastructure, as was the case with the thermo-electric station in a Siberian city in 2003, help to rethink the relationship between the postsocialist state and its citizens.[18]

Stephen J. Collier argues that infrastructures emerge "as privileged sites where the relationship between neoliberalism and social modernity can be reexamined."[19] His research in a provincial city in post-Soviet Russia showed the vital importance and durability of Soviet material structures, bureaucratic routines, and resource flows. The material setup of such mundane infrastructure as heating systems restricted attempts to "unbundle" those systems. As a result, marketization reforms took the shape of a selective intervention to reprogram key nodes in the system while leaving much of its structure intact.[20] In a similar vein, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov shows how infrastructural ruins (in the form of abandoned roads, development plans and ideas) in Siberia reveal the paradoxical continuity of Soviet modernity, with its promises and failures, and serve as a foundation for new state construction projects.[21] Following Collier and Ssorin-Chaikov, I show how temporal, geographical, and affective dimensions of BAM infrastructure are rooted in the Soviet modernization project and construction plans. In fact, the socialist-era BAM and its current reconstruction program reveal ideological continuity with Soviet development plans. At the same time, the materiality of the railroad infrastructure (e.g., the foundation laid for the second track, unfinished infrastructure objects) predetermines and constrains the ongoing reconstruction program.

Collective emotions, elicited by state actors and institutions, are crucial in structuring political fields, subjects and objects, and come to be invested in particular sites, such as material infrastructure and projects.[22] In the countries undergoing rapid postsocialist transformation, public images and emotions from the socialist era still shape social life and provide a moral framework in which power relations between actors are being discussed and played out. For example, nostalgia, mistrust, fear, and anger juxtaposed with joy, pride, enthusiasm, and hope have been leitmotifs of postsocialist memory narratives and the politics of emotions in Eastern Europe.[23]

The term *postsocialist affect* has been used to describe how the collective emotions of the builders of apartment blocks in postwar Vietnam were "harnessed by the state to produce new, feeling subjects committed to the work of socialist nation-building."[24] In her study of urban infrastructure redevelopment, Christina Schwenkel focuses on the materiality of buildings as conduits of socialist ideologies and emotions. She illustrates how the bricks of old apartment blocks, "harnessed political passions . . . that over time came to signify unfulfilled promises of the socialist state and dystopic ruins that today stand in the way of capitalist redevelopment."[25]

Similar to the socialist generation of construction workers and urban residents in Vietnam, builders of the socialist BAM fill the old rails and surrounding landscapes with nostalgic memories of their lives inscribed in the

country's landmark construction project. The collapse of Soviet socialism, which coincided with the official end of BAM construction, engendered a public disenchantment and pessimism that was projected onto the railroad as the landmark of the socialist epoch. The renewed public attention on the BAM and investments in its technological modernization, fueled by resource extraction interests, evoke new hopes and expectations anchored in Soviet modernity as an open-ended process.[26]

Thus, the infrastructure of BAM assembles rails, people, machinery, construction plans, ideologies, and emotions extending beyond a single historical epoch or political regime. This article demonstrates how Soviet ideologies, memories, identities, and emotions are embedded in the material structures of railway tracks, stations, and towns.[27] Furthermore, it seeks to explore the materiality of the railroad and unpack the Soviet modernization myth and ideology in the context of post-Soviet transformations by focusing on ethnography of reconstruction works.

BAM-1: The Soviet Construction Project

The history of the BAM starts with early plans dating back to the nineteenth century and continues with the first railroad sections built under the Stalinist regime in the 1930s. While the major part of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984, some sections and infrastructure objects, such as tunnels and bridges, were put into operation as late as 2003. Built within the industrial program of "mastering the North" with the primary goal of resource extraction and regional development,[28] it represented a grandiose and final Soviet "project of the century."[29] The late socialist BAM was glorified in public discourse, media and popular literature as a symbol of human achievement in the "conquering of wild nature," "bringing civilization to remote corners" of the country, and constructing the "Soviet man."[30]

The "myth of the BAM," with its promise for a better life, was used as part of Soviet propaganda in the labor mobilization campaign.[31] In 1974, the Communist Party's youth organization Komsomol announced the launch of BAM construction. Soviet slogans urged young people to "rally together" and build the BAM in the spirit of "self-sacrifice" and "fraternal cooperation." In addition to ideological propaganda in mass media, material stimuli (high salaries, access to scarce goods) also played a role in attracting a mass inflow of laborers, including young engineers, drivers and construction workers, to the region.[32] Public heroization of the BAM project and the builders' labor added to the social prestige of the *bamovtsy* as a socio-professional group. The application of special knowledge and expertise in everyday labor during BAM construction was publicly acknowledged and financially encouraged. According to engineers who worked on the railroad construction, the BAM was a test

ground for brand-new technologies and engineering solutions and an opportunity for professional growth:

> I was attracted [to the BAM] mostly by the fact that it was a new region, a new engineering solution . . . that was challenging. I attended a university course in Marxism and Leninism and listened to radio programs [about the BAM] that were on all day long. There was some kind of fascination . . . Why can't I participate in this grandiose construction project? That seemed interesting and great! (VF, BAM builder, engineer, Severobaikal'sk, 2017).

BAM construction yielded not only the tracks and railway stations but also a series of settlements, ranging from villages and towns with populations of 4,000 to 70,000 residents, such as Severobaikal'sk, Novaia Chara, and Tynda, to big cities such as Komsomol'sk-na-Amure with its population currently exceeding 260,000. The labor mobilization campaign attracted multicultural populations from different parts of the Soviet Union to the construction site. Soviet nation-building policy officially aimed at supporting cultural diversity in its ultimate pursuit of forging the "Soviet people."[33] The architectural design of railway stations and urban infrastructure, containing ethnic ornaments and symbols, with signs in the local languages of the peoples of the USSR, officially aimed to represent the ethnic and territorial diversity of the country. At the same time, the fact that the main stations and cities along the BAM were "assigned" preferentially to construction organizations from Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia revealed the hidden hierarchies of Soviet nationalities policy.[34] Thus, for example, the key cities of Tynda and Severobaikal'sk, informally known as "the capitals of the BAM," were built by engineers and construction workers from Moscow and St. Petersburg respectively (see Figure 2).

While ethnicity played a certain role in residence patterns and social relations along the BAM, it was mostly an emerging sense of belonging to local communities and communal labor during the construction of the railroad that shaped the identity of *bamovtsy* and consolidated them as a group. *Bamovtsy* made the built and social environment of the newly emerged communities in the BAM region, similarly to Russian settlers in Chukotka or Soviet migrants in industrial frontier regions.[35]

The majority of BAM builders, especially, those recruited to the construction site by Komsomol, were men in their twenties and thirties who of-

Figure 2. The railway station in Severobaikal'sk, symbolizing a ship's sail and designed by engineers from St. Petersburg. Photo by author.

ten started their families in the region. Similarities in age and in educational and professional background, as well as overlapping residential patterns, collegial relations, and marriages with other BAM builders or indigenous residents helped them to build strong social networks and integrate into local communities. Currently, *bamovtsy* remember the construction period as the golden days of the BAM and their own lives filled with joy and enthusiasm.

> There was enthusiasm. We had a musical band here. I was also part of it. We were dancing and singing. It was very interesting. There was an idea. There was construction. Only youth gathered here. Teams came here from Ukraine and Belorussia. That was so interesting! In the first year, a lot of people got married . . . (NK, BAM builder, retired, Tynda, 2016)

BAM-2: From Decline to Reconstruction

The political and socio-economic crisis following the dissolution of the USSR has resulted in a sharp decline in living standards, population flight from the North, and public disenchantment. The late Soviet BAM project was criticized in the media as "the road to nowhere" due to the fact that, during the bust period of the 1990s, the railroad was heavily underexploited. High maintenance costs no longer covered by the state resulted in infrastructural decline. While some fragments of the BAM declined without proper repair and renovation, sidings leading to mineral deposits were completely abandoned to decay. Many ambitious urban construction and development projects announced in the BAM's heyday were not implemented because of the economic crisis.

Today, foundations of unfinished apartment buildings dot the contemporary cityscape in Chara, while the decaying foundation of a shoe factory in Tynda reminds the city's residents and visitors of unfinished Soviet construction plans.[36] Over 50 percent of the housing stock in Tynda and Chara is decrepit. Many builders of the BAM never received their promised apartments and continue to live in rotten temporary housing. The same is true for bridges and roads connecting district centers with other BAM towns and villages: due to the socio-economic bust, many bridges were never finished and service roads were never paved. Recently constructed apartment blocks rising up next to unfinished and abandoned foundations of public buildings and other decrepit infrastructure constitute the disparate built environment along the BAM. In interviews with *bamovtsy,* the pervasive sense of the incompleteness of the BAM is strongly associated with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent socio-economic crisis:

> It was a turn of events. In that period many construction sites were left unfinished. As far as the BAM is concerned . . . one of them was, of course, the dissolution of the USSR with its negative consequences. If the state had lasted five more years, it would have done good for our town and for the whole region.

> First of all, the unfinished objects like this building . . . would have been put into operation. That would have improved our living conditions in the future. (focus group with BAM builders, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Since the early 2000s, the country and the BAM region have experienced economic recovery. Cargo turnover along the BAM increased by 51 percent in the period 2006 to 2015.[37] Accordingly, in 2014, the Russian government launched BAM-2, a state program of technological modernization aimed at boosting the cargo capacity of the railroad. The ultimate goal of the project is to bifurcate the functions of the BAM and the Trans-Siberian Railroad (Trans-sib): the former is to specialize in the transportation of cargo while the latter will focus on passengers and, additionally, on agricultural and fish products.[38] The project, supported by the National Welfare Fund, the federal budget and RZhD, is prioritized in national and regional development plans. According to RZhD, which is mainly responsible for administering the program, 462 kilometers of main track, 45 switching tracks, and 51 railway stations are to be built by 2020, with a total investment of 304.1 billion rubles shared between RZhD (135.3 billion), the National Welfare Fund (119.3 billion), and the federal budget (49.5 billion).[39] While the reconstruction program does not foresee the construction of a second track along the BAM's full length, it includes full electrification of the railroad and completion of old and new infrastructure objects (tunnels, bridges, etc.) with the purpose of increasing carrying capacity. The goal is to have the BAM transport natural resources (coal, timber, and rare metals), extracted in the vast region it traverses, toward the sea ports and border-crossing points in the Far East, and from there to supply the Asian markets (see Figure 3).

The official launch of the program BAM-2 in 2014 coincided with the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of BAM construction. Both events were accompanied by media campaigns, including the production of dedicated popular literature, coffee table books and encyclopedias of the BAM project. They obviously aimed at reconstructing the glorified image of the BAM as an embodiment of state power. Relying on propaganda slogans of the late socialist-era BAM, media discourse seemed to be aimed at reawakening patriotic feelings, enthusiasm and pride suppressed during the 1990s wave of public criticism

Figure 3. At a railway crossing, Kuvykta, 2017. Photo by author.

towards the railroad. References to the BAM as "a great construction site," "a railroad built with love" [40] and "a path to the future," biographies of BAM construction workers and organizations, as well as archival photos depicting milestones of the construction process and everyday life during BAM-1 filled the pages of the regional press.[41]

The popular term "BAM-2," associated with the rhetoric of the "second life" or the "second wind"[42] of the railroad and the region, literally refers to the construction of the second track. Indeed, BAM-2 reveals striking continuities with BAM-1 not only on a discursive, but also on bureaucratic and material levels. It is, in fact, a continuation of the Soviet regional development program of "mastering of the North" that tied the construction of the BAM to so-called "territorial industrial clusters," centers of resource extraction and processing.[43] Thus, potential and ongoing development of the largest deposits of coal, gold and rare metals discovered in abundance in the region has informed the current strategies of regional development and railroad reconstruction.

According to local administrations and RZhD, the Soviet construction projects have remained almost unchanged: the ultimate goal of BAM-2 is the completion of the second track and of the full electrification of the railroad. In fact, the second track was constructed between the points of departure and delivery along selected railroad segments that already had strategic importance for cargo capacity during the BAM-1 era. At many sections of the railroad, one can find abandoned but still durable overhead wire supports and roadbed filling that had been prepared for the second track—the self-evident physical path-dependency of the rails. These material remains, as well as engineering surveys from the late socialist period, facilitate the laying of the second track and the construction of supporting infrastructure such as bridges, tunnels, and electricity lines. At the same time, not all of the initially planned infrastructure will be completed within the scope of the reconstruction program.[44]

However, when it comes to the actual benefits for local communities from BAM-2, increasing volumes of raw materials flowing to China by rail are expected financially to bring the locals nothing but modest revenues for the transit. In contrast to BAM-1, BAM-2 does not foresee investments into urban infrastructure and social services in the settlements that once emerged together with the railroad. While federal investments in community development dry up, local revenues from exploitation of the railroad and resource extraction are not sufficient to fill the budget gap. In order to compensate for the high construction and maintenance costs of existing infrastructure, local authorities often apply to extractive companies operating in the region for funding. However, their support is officially recognized as voluntary, and federal administrators do not anticipate any regular revenues from mineral extraction flowing to local budgets. Thus, the current social programs of extractive companies in Kalarskii District are limited to occa-

sional one-time funding of social and cultural events and selected construc-
tion and renovation projects. In Tyndinskii District, the Petropavlovsk and
Priisk Solov'evskii companies make more visible investments in the social
infrastructure of BAM communities.[45] At the same time, the potential and
actual ecological impacts of logging and resource extraction cause public
concern and complaints by local residents against turning northern Siberia
into a new resource colony.

Currently, *bamovtsy* constitute the majority of the local population and
shape the social environment in which the technological (re)construction of
the railroad is carried out. They are a heterogeneous multi-generational group
whose identity has been transforming from a professional to a territorial one.
Still, the core group of *bamovtsy*—"the veterans of the BAM"—are a cohort
of professionals and workers who were involved in the construction process
from the early days of the project and who are often members or activists of
BAM builders' societies and NGOs. Definitions of "the real *bamovtsy*" can be
based on such criteria as the time of arrival to the region (e.g., those who ar-
rived in the 1970s and 1980s to build the railroad and the cities from scratch);
the current place of residence (those who remained in the region after the end
of the construction); a particular set of moral values; or long-lasting profes-
sional, social, and emotional entanglements with the railroad:

> The word *bamovtsy* has a magic effect. When I meet a new person and, in a con-
> versation, it becomes clear that we are *bamovtsy*, we know that we both share
> a particular set of qualities. We will feel a lot of trust to each other because this
> term describes our personal traits . . . In my book I have the poem "*Bamovtsy*
> is our nationality." It [the nationality] doesn't have a definition of its own. It
> characterizes a personality. (TNV, BAM builder, poet, activist, Severobaikal'sk,
> 2017)

The launch of BAM-2 caused a variety of collective emotions among
bamovtsy: from optimism, pride and hope, to doubt, criticism and disen-
chantment. Interviews with RZhD experts and local officials tend to reflect
the propagandistic discourse of the BAM-2 with its overly optimistic future
visions of the railroad and the whole region. Rarely providing grounded argu-
mentation, this discourse is emotionally charged and appealing:

> The [Soviet] plans will be implemented, believe me! The people who devel-
> oped them were not fools, were they? Can you imagine what a mad enthusiasm
> they had? They could walk barefoot in winter! (VT, head of the railroad depot,
> Novaia Chara, 2016)

In biographic interviews with *bamovtsy*, general expectations of the recon-
struction program are rather moderate. They are often implicitly associated
with the promises of unfinished Soviet construction plans and alternate with
more realistic assessments of the current situation:

I think that if the second track is laid, the railroad hubs, the depots, and the turnover will grow. In this connection, there will be some development in the town, because people who will be coming need to live here. It means there should be conditions created for this . . . It seems to me that the construction [of the second track] will be going in parallel with the existing track. It takes large-scale construction for growth and upsurge. (GL, BAM builder, retired, Novaia Chara, 2016)

Regardless of what kind of vision *bamovtsy* interlocutors may have of the future of the BAM region and their home communities, most of them can draw a rather clear distinction between the current reconstruction program and the socialist-era BAM:

The region will develop—and it is developing now. It means there will be jobs . . . The railroad bed filling is being made. But it [BAM-2] will not resonate as the first BAM construction did. Passenger and cargo trains are passing. They make a gap in the schedule and prepare the roadbed. It is all going slowly. (NK, BAM builder, retired, Tynda, 2016)

Reconstruction Works

The reconstruction process on BAM-2 involves RZhD, construction companies, *bamovtsy* and shift workers, as well as trains, tracks, and construction machinery. Following the institutional reform of 2003, the railroad was transferred to RZhD, while responsibility for the BAM communities, including housing and public organizations, was delegated to local administrations. RZhD has the legal status of a joint stock company, but in fact it is a fully state-funded and vertically integrated organization. This hybrid legal form, established when property was placed by the state under RZhD trust management, puzzles experts and the wider public alike, because nobody is sure to whom the company belongs. In reality, the main owner of the BAM (and most of the other Russian railroads) is the state, which invests money in the infrastructural modernization and maintenance and supplies RZhD's charter capital. RZhD acts as the main juridical person responsible for the realization of the program of modernization of the BAM and Transsib.

RZhD human resource policy aims to attract skilled workers and managers to its local offices in the BAM region. High salaries, a number of social benefits and, in rare cases, an opportunity to receive corporate housing make the work at RZhD prestigious for local residents. Not surprisingly, not only some *bamovtsy,* but also their children and grandchildren work for RZhD. In fact, *bamovtsy* dynasties are the company's social capital and original brand. At the same time, the company's attempts to attract specialists from other regions cannot prevent the continuous population loss that is occurring. The same RZhD managers who may promote BAM-2 in the beginning of inter-

views, later express concerns about the lack of experts working on the rails and the disconnect from the central parts of the country:

> People are fleeing from the BAM region. They closed the school and the hospital . . . The infrastructure of the settlement is totally wasted! Although now the BAM is getting a "second wind," with the second track and passing loops being constructed, I wonder who will be left to maintain all this? There are no roads, no bridges: you can get here in winter only when the rivers are frozen. Only trains keep us connected . . . It will be hard to draw youth to this region. (SL, RZhD company manager, Yuktali, 2017)

In the post-Soviet period, labor recruitment practices used by RZhD have increasingly favored the shift work method. This trend has become especially obvious in the process of implementing BAM-2. The federal funds allocated for the implementation of BAM-2 are centrally transferred to RZhD, the main responsible body, which then contracts larger and smaller construction companies. The latter might bring their own shift workers and machinery or subcontract local construction organizations that have the necessary labor resources and equipment. The majority of the shift workers involved in reconstruction works consist of poorly qualified men from other regions of Russia or from post-Soviet countries. In many cases, subcontracting construction companies transfer their labor resources to BAM-2 sites from other finished construction sites.

Most of the companies implementing the BAM-2 program are based in other cities of the country (e.g., in Belgorod, Sochi, Krasnodar, and others). While construction workers may arrive from one city or region, track maintenance cars and other equipment may be rented out and brought by the companies from other regions. Still, most companies come to BAM-2 with their own equipment and housing infrastructure that facilitate autonomous life. They accommodate their shift workers in trailers in industrial settlements during the summer—the only season when reconstruction works are feasible and least costly, considering the local climatic conditions.

Only a few local railroad construction organizations hired by RZhD for the implementation of BAM-2 are survivors from the times of BAM-1. Among them are BCM, the largest transportation construction and engineering company, and BTS, a company specializing in the construction of tunnels. These organizations, consisting pri-

Figure 4. Reconstruction works along the BAM, 2017. Photo by author.

marily of *bamovtsy,* represent a pool of qualified labor resources. A few managers and high-skilled specialists who used to work on BAM-1 also received posts within the framework of BAM-2.

Companies submit tenders to apply to work under the reconstruction programs. In 2014, RZhD invited bids for the reconstruction of multiple costly infrastructure objects along the railroad. BCM, a descendant of a large-scale Tynda-based organization with the same name, which once did construction on BAM-1, won the competition for the reconstruction of the railroad's eastern section. BCM, similar to other general contractors, has a few minor subcontractors. Subcontracting firms are usually responsible for the construction of smaller railroad segments and are expected to organize the workflow at the local level and to purchase and deliver building machinery and materials.

There is a clear dividing line between *bamovtsy* and shift workers involved in the reconstruction works on BAM-2. *Bamovtsy* are both local residents and professionals who have the knowledge, professional skills, and ingenuity required to build tunnels, cities, and bridges and to lay rails in difficult mountainous landscapes under the challenging climatic conditions. By contrast, shift workers are temporary residents coming from other, primarily southern, regions with different environmental conditions. In addition to that, they often have previous experience in other construction industry segments, which predetermines their skill set and limited knowledge of the railroad reconstruction process. Last but not least, *bamovtsy,* in contrast to newcomers, have a particular emotional and mnemonic entanglement with the railroad that reaches back to the time of the socialist construction project BAM-1.

Those *bamovtsy* who are involved in the reconstruction work in one way or another express more criticism and pessimism in relation to BAM-2 than their counterparts who observe the process from afar. Their critical remarks about the reconstruction program are concerned with the lack of professionalism of the shift workers, financial mismanagement, and a lack of proper organization of the reconstruction work. These issues are considered in the larger context of postsocialist transformations:

> I think that one of the biggest problems for our state and for us, construction workers, is the degradation of the construction sector in recent times. They have destroyed the largest working construction teams. And what we can observe now is theft, disorder, and defect . . . And the state cannot or does not want to cope with this problem. (VK, focus group with BAM builders, Severobaikal'sk, 2016)

The story of Sergei provides a glimpse of the reconstruction work from the emic perspective of a *bamovets* participating in the program BAM-2. Sergei was born in the city of Omsk in Siberia and then moved to live with his father in Ukraine. There he met his future wife Elena and soon the young family, inspired by the Komsomol, went off to build the BAM. They moved from one

construction site to another before finally settling in the town of Yuktali. Both spouses remember life in the region during BAM-1 as the golden age of the whole region. They enthusiastically and nostalgically recall the milestones of the railroad construction process inscribed in the landscape and associated with the major events of their family life (construction of the first house, birth of the children, and so on):

> I remember every kilometer of the track I laid and the day when my son was born. On that day, the track-laying machine reached Yuktali (earlier there was a maternity hospital there). It was a big event. The machine stopped in front of the windows of the hospital to celebrate the mothers with newborn children. (SM, BAM builder, Yuktali, 2017)

Sergei got involved in BAM-2 as a dedicated *bamovets* and an experienced professional, proud of his achievements on BAM-1 and believing in the continuation of the Soviet construction plans. According to Sergei, financial reasons played a role in his decision to join BAM-2; however, his enthusiasm for completing the BAM was his overriding motivation. The Moscow-based company responsible for laying down the thirty-kilometer segment of the second track and the reconstruction of the railway station at Yuktali was to deliver work worth 1.7 billion rubles in 2017. In July of the same year, when I met with Sergei, the reconstruction work was still at the preparatory stage. The responsibility for remaining issues was delegated from top management down to Sergei's subcontracting enterprise in Yuktali. Nevertheless, the Moscow-based manager called several times a day to "control" the situation.

> They tell me to spend 240 million in August. I say: "Are you crazy? I have not even gotten the machinery yet!" They keep telling me that they sent the machinery two weeks ago. And this was three weeks ago! (SM, BAM builder, Yuktali, 2017)

The long-distance chain of command does not properly connect the political and financial center in Moscow with the remote railroad town of Yuktali. Moscow-based managers seem to lack the expertise that *bamovtsy* and some other local residents have—knowledge of the landscape and climatic conditions, as well as engineering skills to dig the soil, lay new tracks and start an engine at low temperatures.

The distribution of finances is another item of discord between Moscow and Yuktali. The Moscow-based firm does not pay its bills and seems to economize on essential things, such as accommodation for shift workers and railroad security services ensuring the safe delivery of building machinery. As a result, the delivery of the equipment is delayed and subcontractors are often concerned that it has been stolen en route.

After three months of hard work at his own subcontracting firm and negotiations with Moscow, Sergei did not receive his salary. While talking about

BAM-2, Sergei, overwhelmed with exasperation and resentment at the time, lost the ability to speak. Elena, with her voice filled with sorrow and disappointment, commented:

> We are completely shocked. It [the reconstruction program] was promoted and associated with the fortieth anniversary of the BAM construction. And now this Moscow firm . . . just drives everyone crazy. I know only one thing: the money has already been stolen. This is so sad! (EM, entrepreneur, Yuktali, 2017).

Conclusion

The socialist BAM was a large-scale infrastructure project involving extreme forms of technological and social engineering. The BAM harnessed feelings of enthusiasm, pride and patriotism that continue to be associated with the railroad's construction and feed identities and memories of the *bamovtsy*, the migrants who came to the sparsely populated region to build the railroad and towns along its way. The BAM that historically shaped local communities continues to be a formative infrastructure. The current socio-economic role of the railroad institutionally represented by RZhD is hard to overestimate. It provides employment, maintains the population in remote places and serves as a framework of transportation and regional development.

In this article drawing on a comparative case study of the socialist BAM project and its current reconstruction program BAM-2, I traced the continuity and change of the railroad infrastructure that assembles construction plans, individual human actors and organizations, material objects, as well as identities and emotions. I have shown how Soviet development programs, as well as existing, but often unfinished, infrastructure objects (the railroad bed filling and overhead wire support for the second track, abandoned buildings in railroad towns), predetermine the material path-dependency of the reconstruction program. My ethnographic materials also illustrate a certain degree of discursive and ideological continuity between BAM-1 and BAM-2. The myth of the BAM as the central part of the propaganda campaign that surrounded the Soviet construction project has survived, at least on the pages of newspapers and other mass media. It was a useful instrument of the Komsomol labor mobilization and remains part of the idealized collective memory of the BAM construction among the *bamovtsy.* At the same time, it no longer has the same effective mobilizing power over local communities that have been experiencing dramatic socio-economic transformations throughout the post-Soviet period. The ethnography of the reconstruction work helps to explore the functionality (and malfunctioning), durability and transformation of the BAM as an infrastructure that stretches beyond a single construction site or historical period. Such attention focused on infrastructure unpacks the myth of the BAM as a Soviet ideological construct and a propaganda resource and, at the

same time, examines the durability of material objects as an embodiment of collective memories, identities, emotions, expectations and disenchantments.

Following Collier,[46] I argued that the reconstruction and development efforts of the postsocialist state are predetermined by the material and bureaucratic constraints of its socialist infrastructure. The tracks, tunnels and bridges being completed under BAM-2 follow the original plans of the 1970s and 1980s. As such, the existing material infrastructure enables but also constrains the reconstruction project. At the same time, socio-economic change, institutional reform and new political regimes and actors characterize the postsocialist BAM-2 program. The fact that neither the state nor the private companies represented on BAM-2 anticipate providing social programs or investments in the construction of new housing, or to help secure basic social services in shrinking settlements along the BAM, mark the most dramatic difference between BAM-1 and BAM-2.

Publicly voiced hopes and expectations of BAM-2 among *bamovtsy,* the carriers of the social memory of the BAM construction, are still affectively anchored in the promises of Soviet modernity with its unfinished construction plans. However, interviews with *bamovtsy* involved in the reconstruction work show a growing disenchantment and nostalgia for the socialist BAM in the context of rapid postsocialist socio-economic transformations that negatively impact local communities. Thus, boom and bust, construction-decline-reconstruction, and enchantment and disenchantment seem to form the life cycle of the infrastructure of the BAM as a materialization of collective identities and emotions and an open-ended (post)socialist (re)construction site.

Olga Povoroznyuk received her degree at the Russian Academy of Sciences and works as a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Institute of Cultural and Social Anthropology, University of Vienna. She is an author of a book on Soviet history and post-Soviet transformations in indigenous Evenki communities and a number of peer-reviewed articles on the issues of ethnicity, culture and identity, postsocialism, infrastructure, and the built environment in Russia and the Circumpolar North. Her recent research focuses on the role of transport infrastructure in the construction of collective identities, memories and emotions, social dynamics and sustainable development in remote northern communities.
Email: olga.povoroznyuk@univie.ac.at

Notes

1. In order to protect the anonymity of informants, only initials of the names of people are provided, followed by the person's profession and the location and year of the interview. For the same reason, in one case, the name of a company was left as an abbreviation only. All interviews were conducted in and translated from the original (Russian) language by myself.

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3. Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–343, here 329, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522.

4. Ashley Carse, "Keyword: Infrastructure: How a Humble French Engineering Term Shaped the Modern World," in *Infrastructures and Social Complexity,* ed. Penelope Harvey, Casper Jensen, and Atsuro Morita (London: Routledge, 2016): 27–39, here 27.

5. Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, "The Enchantments of Infrastructure," *Mobilities* 7, no .4 (2012): 521–536, here 523, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2012 .718935.

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7. Steven G. Marks, *Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

8. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise: Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im 19. Jahrhundert* [History of the railway journey: On the industrialization of space and time in the nineteenth century] (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2011).

9. According to Scott, high modernism is a particular vision based on belief in scientific and technological progress that in authoritarian states has led to extreme forms of technological and social engineering of all spheres of social life (James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

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14. James Ferguson, "Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 377–382.

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16. Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, no. 3 (1999): 377–391, here 382.

17. Cymene Howe, Jessica Lockrem, Hannah Appel et al., "Paradoxical Infrastructures: Ruins, Retrofit, and Risk," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 41, no. 3 (2015): 547–565, https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243915620017.

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19. Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011): 2–3.

20. Ibid., 8.

21. Ssorin-Chaikov, "Soviet Debris."

22. Mateusz Laszczkowski and Madeleine Reeves, "Introduction: Affect and the Anthropology of the State," in *Affective States: Entanglements, Suspensions, Suspicions*, ed. Mateusz Laszczkowski and Madeleine Reeves (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018): 1–14.

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24. Christina Schwenkel, "Post/Socialist Affect: Ruination and Reconstruction of the Nation in Urban Vietnam," *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (2013): 252–277, here 252, https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12003.

25. Ibid., 273.

26. Ssorin-Chaikov, "Soviet Debris," 692.

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30. Alla Bolotova, "Conquering Nature and Engaging with the Environment in the Russian Industrialised North" (PhD diss., University of Lapland, 2014).

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32. The myth of the BAM also aimed at the indigenous population. A sociological survey conducted in 1976 in indigenous communities of the central BAM region

reported that positive expectations (66 percent among Evenki and 75 percent among other indigenous groups) prevailed over concerns about degradation of the lands and subsistence activities (Vladimir I. Boiko, *BAM i Narody Severa* [Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1979], 103. My more recent research in Evenki communities along the BAM showed disenchantment, discontent and hidden forms of resistance to the construction project among indigenous residents, especially those involved in traditional land use practices (Povoroznyuk, 2011).

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37. RZhD, "*Gruzooborot BAM za 2006-2015 gody*," 2.
38. Decree of the Russian Government, 17 June 2008, *Strategiya Razvitiya Zheleznodorozhnogo Transporta v RF do 2030 goda*, no. 877-p.
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Abstract

Soviet Infrastructure in the Post-Soviet Era?
Building a Railroad and Identity along the Baikal-Amur Mainline in East
Siberia

This PhD. dissertation explores large-scale railroad infrastructure as an embodiment of Soviet and post-Soviet state projects of modernization and identity construction. I apply an infrastructural lens to explore the entanglements of local communities with the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), a railroad line built in the 1970s and 1980s in East Siberia. How did the Soviet BAM construction project shape new communities and identities? What is the role of Soviet-era ideologies and memories in the postsocialist politics of identity and emotion? What kinds of continuities and ruptures can be revealed when comparing the Soviet BAM project and the post-Soviet reconstruction program BAM-2? My ethnography of the BAM draws on a combination of field data (interviews and observations), archival records, policy documents, and media reports, gathered in railroad towns and indigenous villages in three regions of East Siberia.

I refer to the BAM as transformative infrastructure, as my research highlights the railroad's agency in regional development and social dynamics. I explore how the Soviet BAM built local communities and identities by attracting migrants and pulling indigenous residents into the orbit of modernization. Furthermore, I demonstrate how Soviet identities embodied in the railroad have been recently reconstructed and recycled in public discourses and media campaigns surrounding the BAM-2 program. I argue that this postsocialist politics of identity and emotion aims at re-enchanting local residents with promises of modernity and rebuilding loyalty of citizens to the state in an era of socio-economic decline. My research findings, reflected in five peer-reviewed publications, contribute to anthropological discussions about post-Soviet forms of postsocialism and the temporal, political, and affective dimensions of infrastructure.

Keywords: infrastructure, postsocialism, transformations, identities, Baikal-Amur Mainline, Siberia

Zusammenfassung

Sowjetische Infrastruktur in der post-sowjetischen Ära? Die Konstruktion einer Eisenbahnlinie und von Identität entlang der Baikal-Amur-Magistrale in Ostsibirien

Diese PhD. Dissertation untersucht eine großmaßstäbige Eisenbahninfrastruktur als Verkörperung sowjetischer und postsowjetischer Staatsprojekte der Modernisierung und Identitätskonstruktion. Ich wende eine infrastrukturelle Perspektive an, um die Verstrickungen lokaler Gemeinschaften mit der Baikal-Amur-Magistrale (BAM), einer Eisenbahnstrecke, die in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren in Ostsibirien gebaut wurde, zu untersuchen. Wie hat das sowjetische BAM-Bauprojekt neue Gemeinschaften und Identitäten geformt? Welche Rolle spielen Ideologien und Erinnerungen aus der Sowjetzeit in der postsozialistischen Identitäts- und Gefühlspolitik? Welche Kontinuitäten und Brüche lassen sich beim Vergleich des sowjetischen BAM-Projekts und des postsowjetischen Wiederaufbauprogramms BAM-2 aufzeigen? Meine Ethnographie der BAM stützt sich auf eine Kombination aus Felddaten (Interviews und Beobachtungen), Archivdokumenten, politischen Grundsatz- und Strategiepapieren und Medienberichten, die in Eisenbahnstädten und indigenen Dörfern in drei Regionen Ostsibiriens gesammelt wurden.

Ich bezeichne die BAM als eine transformative Infrastruktur, da meine Forschung die Rolle der Eisenbahn in der regionalen Entwicklung und sozialen Dynamik hervorhebt. Ich untersuche, wie die sowjetische BAM lokale Gemeinschaften und Identitäten aufbaute, indem sie Migranten anzog und indigene Bewohner in den Orbit der Modernisierung zog. Darüber hinaus zeige ich, wie in der Eisenbahn verkörperte sowjetische Identitäten in jüngster Zeit in öffentlichen Diskursen und Medienkampagnen rund um das BAM-2-Programm rekonstruiert und recycelt wurden. Ich behaupte, dass diese postsozialistische Identitäts- und Emotionspolitik darauf abzielt, die lokale Bevölkerung mit Modernitätsversprechen aufs Neue zu begeistern und dadurch die Loyalität der Bürger zum Staat in einer Ära sozioökonomischen Niedergangs wiederherzustellen. Meine Forschungsergebnisse, die sich in fünf „peer-reviewed" Publikationen widerspiegeln, stellen einen Beitrag zu anthropologischen Diskussionen über postsowjetische Formen des Postsozialismus und zu den zeitlichen, politischen und affektiven Dimensionen von Infrastruktur dar.

Schlüsselwörte: Infrastruktur, Postsozialismus, Transformationen, Identitäten, Baikal-Amur-Magistrale, Sibirien

Резюме

Советская инфраструктура в постсоветскую эпоху?
Строительство железной дороги и конструирование идентичности
в регионе Байкало-Амурской магистрали в Восточной Сибири

В этой диссертации, представленной на соискание ученой степени PhD. рассматривается роль крупномасштабной инфраструктуры железной дороги как воплощения советского и постсоветского проектов модернизации и конструирования идентичности. Я использую аналитическую рамку инфраструктуры для изучения взаимосвязей местных сообществ с Байкало-Амурской магистралью (БАМом), железной дорогой, построенной в 1970-х – 1980-х гг. в Восточной Сибири. Как советский проект строительства БАМа сформировал новые сообщества и идентичности? Какую роль играют идеология и память советской эпохи в постсоветской политике идентичности и эмоций? Какие формы преемственности и изменения помогает выявить сравнение между советским проектом БАМ и постсоветской программой модернизации железной дороги БАМ-2? Моя этнография БАМа опирается на сочетание данных полевых исследований (интервью и наблюдений), архивных материалов, директивных документов и публикаций СМИ, собранных в железнодорожных городах и национальных поселках в Восточной Сибири.

Я называю БАМ *трансформативной инфраструктурой,* подчеркивая в своем исследовании значение железной дороги в региональном развитии и социальной динамике. Я исследую, какую роль сыграл советский проект БАМ в формировании местных сообществ и идентичностей в процессе привлечения в регион мигрантов и втягивания коренных жителей в орбиту модернизации. Более того, я показываю, как советские идентичности, воплощенные в железной дороге, в последние годы реконструировались и использовались в официальных дискурсах и пропаганде программы БАМ-2 в средствах массовой информации. Я утверждаю, что постсоветская политика идентичности и эмоций нацелена на то, чтобы вновь «очаровать» местных жителей обещаниями модерности и восстановить лояльность граждан государству в эпоху социально-экономического спада. Результаты моих исследований, отраженные в пяти рецензированных публикациях, вносят вклад в антропологические дискуссии о постсоветских формах постсоциализма и темпоральных, политических и эмоциональных аспектах инфраструктуры.

Ключевые слова: инфраструктура, постсоциализм, трансформации, идентичность, Байкало-Амурская магистраль, Сибирь