Chapter 5
Rehabilitation of the Northern Home: A Multigenerational Pathway

Yulia V. Zaika

Abstract The very beginning of Soviet times was marked by repressive politics of the state, targeting different individuals including prosperous peasants (*kulaks*). While being rich but hard-working farmers, these families were seen as one of the most important bases for the economic growth of the country. The 'soft' collectivisation to consolidate individual land and farms was therefore suggested by state economists and rejected by Stalin. Instead, the expropriation measures and repressive policies (*dekulakisation*) were largely applied throughout the country, dramatically influencing people's destinies. A large number of peasant families was relocated to the harsh northern environments in order to build the industrial potential for the country's prosperity. Later on, subsequent rehabilitation measures undertaken by the post-Stalin government brought little to no relief for the acceptance and understanding of this new Northern home. But this is a changing reality which spreads through several generations.

This chapter is an autoethnography of a member of a family which has been forcibly relocated by the state during early 1930s from Pskov to the Murmansk region. It discusses the development and evolution of identity and the sense of the Northern home through four generations of a single family, from the painful disastrous relocation of great grandparents to the harsh unfriendly Arctic environment, and finally, towards the peaceful triumphant acceptance of the sweet Northern home by their great grandchild.

Keywords Russia · Northern home · Arctic identity · Relocation · Rehabilitation

To my family

Y. V. Zaika (✉)
Khibiny Research and Educational Station, Faculty of Geography, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Kirovsk, Murmansk Region, Russia

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5.1 Introduction

The history of the Arctic as a populated region is reflected in people's destinies, told and untold stories of this land, and shapes the social infrastructure of the area as the basis for its existence and development. Multidimensional aspects of living in the Arctic reveal different frontiers of attachment to the place and its identities. A nomadic way of life, indigenous cultures, industrial towns and fishing villages, reindeer herding communities, resident populations, and commuting workers to name a few, all have their stories. My story starts in the Pskov region and ends by now in the Murmansk region of Russia.

Be that as it may, the Pskov region remains the unknown home to me where I have never been and know nothing about. In present days, the Pskov region like the Murmansk region is part of the Northwestern Federal Okrug[1] of Russia and lies 1400 km southward from where I live now. My family had a large farm there, and were peasants involved in flax production, forcibly relocated by the state to the Murmansk region in the 1930s during the '*dekulakisation*' campaign. *Dekulakisation* (Russian – '*raskulachivanie, раскулачивание*') is "to deprive from the peasant (kulak) his land and rights (in the times of collectivization in USSR)" (Efremova 2000, p. 688). Dekulakisation was the Soviet campaign that consisted of the expropriation of the properties of kulak households (to be used to fund the new collective farms) and their expulsion from the village (Viola 2008). Aimed at arrests, deportations and executions of millions of peasants, dekulakisation brought many families to new hostile environments and places in the remote areas of the North, Ural, Siberia, Far East and Kazakhstan. My family has been relocated thrice, firstly to the Murmansk region, then to Kazakhstan and back to the Murmansk region with the final destination being the town of Kandalaksha.

As discussed by many authors (Bolotova and Stammler 2010; Shaskov 1993; Shashkov 2004; Bojkov 1983) the dekulakisation campaign increased the population of the Murmansk region in different years for thousands of people, as Fig. 5.1 demonstrates starting the data of the first general census of population. For the Murmansk region, such an inflow of population brought the work-force which played the substantial role in the industrialisation process within the territory which was rich for mineral deposits.

At that time the formulaic identities of relocated people, namely my own family, were merely attached to the labels given by the state from '*kulaks*' to '*spetsperese-lentsy*' (explained below), while the territorial and personal identity remained from the Pskovian home left behind. While identifying oneself is the inner act of cognitive self-representation or representation of *Self*, a label is the description applied from outside and can hardly represent the self-identification of an individual. Those labels were mostly *ideologemes* – fundamental units of Soviet ideology

[1] *Federal okrug* is not the subject or any other constitutional part of administrative-territorial division of the Russian Federation but was established by analogy with military or economic districts in May 2000. Currently, Russia has 8 federal okrugs.

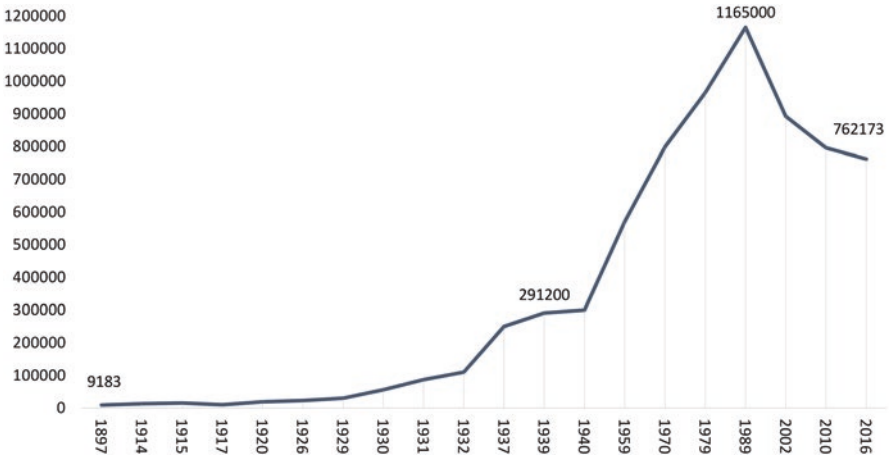


Fig. 5.1 Population of Murmansk region from 1897 to 2016
1897 – The first general census of the population; 1920 – The first Soviet census of population; 1926 – The first All-Union Census of the Soviet Union (without population of Kandalaksha); 1937 – The second All-Union Census of the Soviet Union (the most controversial); 1939 – The third All-Union Census; 1959 – The first post-World War II census; 1970 – The second post-World War II census; 1979 – The third post-World War II census; 1989 – All-Union Census; 2002&2010 – Russian Census; 2016 – Murmanskstat. Sources: Lokhanov (2012), Murmanskstat (2017)

at that time. Even these days, while searching historical dictionaries for definitions of foregoing labels, one can find a variety of descriptions attached to the same word. For example, *kulak* – prosperous peasant constantly using hired work-force (Efremova 2000); the Russian name for rural *bourgeoisie* originated during social differentiation of peasantry (Soviet Encyclopedia, 1981). Or, *spetspereselentsy* – the largest category of special population contingent of Stalin's epoch; the group of peasantries relocated in the extrajudicial procedure from the place of residence to the special devoted territories under the control of special agencies (Lamin 2009).

Larger discussions on the usage of labels versus identities, and which of these are more important if not both, are that they are similar and how they are understood in different contexts (Piazza and Fasulo 2014; Biddle et al. 1985; Safran 2008) can be found elsewhere and are endless. Labels are quite common and are all around in our everyday life at present. They can have positive or negative connotations which mostly depends on matters, situations, periods and events they are used, and the affect they might have on someone's life. In the situation of my own family, which is the main focus of this chapter, labels are definitely seen as negative because during the historic period of the 1930s they were the basis for dramatic changes in which people's lives and destinies were affected – from forcible relocation away from homelands to incessant attempts throughout several generations of relocated people to get rid of disgraceful labels. At present one can hardly imagine what does it mean to be 'the enemy of the people' – one of the labels and clichés of political rhetoric of the Stalin period.

Identity as a theory as well as identity formation are the complex subjects discussed at different dimensions from philosophical, political, social and psychological sciences (e.g. Stets and Serpe 2016). As described by the Cambridge Online Dictionary (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/), *identity* reflects who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others; the reputation, characteristics, etc. of a person or organisation that makes the public think about them in a particular way.

Following my personal interest as a geographer and the scope of this chapter, I will dive more deeply into the concept of *territorial identity* which is more important when studying the development of *Northern identity*, and then will look into the discussions related to *attachment to the place* which, from my point of view, plays the predominant role in shifting territorial identities of relocated groups of people. Relocations themselves, especially in the Northern context, were amply studied and discussed during the MOVE ("Moved by the State") project (Schweitzer 2010). Among the outcomes of this project, one can explore interesting findings of perceptions of the North as a home among community members and individually relocated families, indigenous and non-indigenous groups of Arctic populations, narratives and perceptions of places and geographic locations, and pathways of post-relocation within the Circumpolar North from Alaska to Kolyma.

As mentioned earlier, my great grandparents were farmers which means that land and territory played an essential role. In fact, to them the land was their life, and territory was their geographic space for residence and work. Territorial identity and usage of land resources reveal personal identity on the basis of human-environment relations, which changes over time and with places during the consequent shift to other environments. The coherent triangle 'territory-land-environment' will be mentioned on multiple occasions in this chapter, in order to avoid a misunderstanding, the vision and difference between each meaning is to be explained. In this context "*territory*" is an area within the Pskov and the Murmansk regions that my family and myself holds a connection to, be it through belonging or originating from. "*Land*" refers to areas in the Pskov region that used to be owned and/or cultivated by my past family members and consist of farmland and land holdings as well as the land resources (in agricultural meaning) found within them. Finally, *"environment"* is the overall natural conditions within both the Pskov and the Murmansk regions that has played the major role in shifting my family's identities.

Territorial identity as a phenomenon is used by different disciplines within their own theoretical concepts and knowledge, and thus "impose various readings (spatial–regional–local identity–self-identification–consciousness etc.)" (Karlova 2015, p. 5). The communications that are based on emotional, cultural, historic, social perceptions of the place and its population as a whole with a common identity, connected to the informal local groups of people and their interpersonal and group interactions give way to the *vernacular (mental) regions identity.* This for me is the most interesting parts of territorial identity. Such regions are 'intellectual inventions' and a form of shorthand to identify things, people, and places. Vernacular regions reflect a "sense of place", but rarely coincide with established jurisdictional borders (Scheetz 1991). Examples of such regions spread from a macroregional,

e.g. Siberia, to microregional levels, such as the name of a particular district within the city.

In her chapter devoted to the theory of attachment, Maria Giuliani discusses the concept through the lens of environmental psychology and human-nature interactions where individuals develop affective bonds with their physical environment. Giuliani argues that the "very variety of terms used to refer to affective bonds with places – rootedness, sense of place, belongingness, insideness, embeddedness, attachment, affiliation, appropriation, commitment, investment, dependence, identity, etc. – seem to indicate not so much a diversity of concepts and reference models, but as a vagueness in the identification of the phenomenon" (Giuliani 2003, p. 138).

Rubinstein et al. define "*attachment to place*" as a set of feelings about a location that emotionally binds a person to that place as a function of its role as a setting for experience (Rubinstein and Parmelee 1992). In this light, the concept of *topophilia*, developed by humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan in the 1960s, might help to uncover roots of mental attachment to the place. The term topophilia is defined as the affective bond with one's environment–a person's mental, emotional, and cognitive ties to a place (Heimer 2005). In his research devoted to topophilia and the quality of life, Oladele A. Ogunseitan discusses the roles of both natural and constructed environments in relieving mental stress (Ogunseitan 2005). He refers to Hartig and Staats describing *"restorative environments"*, which in the tradition of environmental psychology are defined as specific geographical contexts that renew diminished functional capabilities and enhance coping strategies and resources for managing stress (Hartig and Staats 2003). While forced shifts of environments in the history of my family induced mental stress, could it be possible that gradually gained environmental familiarity with the Arctic conditions developed into perception of the Arctic as a "restorative environment", which in its term cultivated the Arctic topophilia in succeeding generations?

Undoubtedly, this tight human-environment connection is of most importance for this chapter especially when discussing *Northern identities* and self-identification as a *Northerner*. While the *Arctic Human Development Report II* (Nordic Council of Ministers 2015) largely discusses Northern identities within indigenous communities, peoples and cultures, it very briefly mentions "*other identities*" that also exist in the Arctic among other residential non-indigenous populations. Such dichotomy is a very pronounced sign of forgotten identities and personalities. By ignoring the fact that there are a lot of "other identities" in the Arctic, we deplete the history and culture of the region. As some authors discuss (Schweitzer 2010; Khlinovskaya Rockhill 2010; Thompson 2008) the indigenous subject has monopolized Northern studies. As Khlinovskaya Rockhill mentiones, "Anderson (2000), Ingold (2000); Kerttula (2000), King (2002), Krupnik (1993), Rethmann (2001), and Vitebsky (2005) have conducted research on reindeer husbandry, gender relations, property rights, shamanism, nationalism and ethnic identity – all focusing on indigenous people (Khlinovskaya Rockhill 2010, p. 44). Thompson argues that European settlers "offer themselves as a foil against which are built rich descriptions of indigenous lifeways, identities and cosmologies" (Thompson 2008, p. 213). I have a lot of

friends among indigenous groups in different regions of the Arctic, all of which are amazing, sincere and honest people, and whose cultures I have a fascination for. I am fascinated by their culture. However, once I had a conversation with an indigenous activist who very expressively told me that "*You all came to our land!*". Knowing the story of my family by that time I felt offended, I answered "*It was not the intention of my family to come here, but this place became a home for us*". When settling into any geographical area, by building the social environment around themselves, people introduce their own traditions and cultures to the area too, which later develops into a sense of attachment to the place.

When thinking of attachment to the place in the light of relocations, the other important side of the story emerges – people's perception of the place as a temporary or permanent place of living. This idea in the Northern context has been discussed for the relocated population of Kolyma (Khlinovskaya Rockhill 2010). While there are still some state programs of relocation from the North to other geographical locations in Russia, the problem of personal preferences and perceptions stay unstudied.

In this chapter I attempt to trace the development of a coupled phenomenon "*identity-attachment to the place*" within the relocated family. The disaster-triumph concept accurately frames the narrative revealing maxima at both ends of the family's timescale: from disastrous forced relocation to the unwanted environment and place to triumphant development of the sense of the same place as the home framed with topophilia in succeeding generations.

5.2 Applied Methods

Authoethnography is the core method of this chapter. Being an environmental scientist and geographer, this method was a new concept to me bringing the challenge of self-reflection and self-understanding through the scientific thinking and reanalysis to assimilate historical observations of a single family throughout several generations. Even though sociological studies are not new in my professional trajectory, telling a story from the first person perspective and investigating my own family and own perceptions was challenging especially on such a sensitive (personally and nationally) topic, and took me a year to settle this idea in my head.

The context of "*scientific-personal*" dualism which, following the authoethnographic methodology in many aspects, in my case, helped me to evaluate and reflect many hidden frontiers of self-identification and revealed some important edges that I have never thought of before.

Authoethnography as a method is a very profound tool for qualitative research though very disputable within the scientific community. Traditional scientific approaches, still very much at play today, require researchers to minimise their selves, viewing self as a contaminant and attempting to transcend and deny it. The researcher ostensibly puts bias and subjectivity aside in the scientific research process by denying his or her identity (Wall 2008). Sarah Walls discusses the positivist

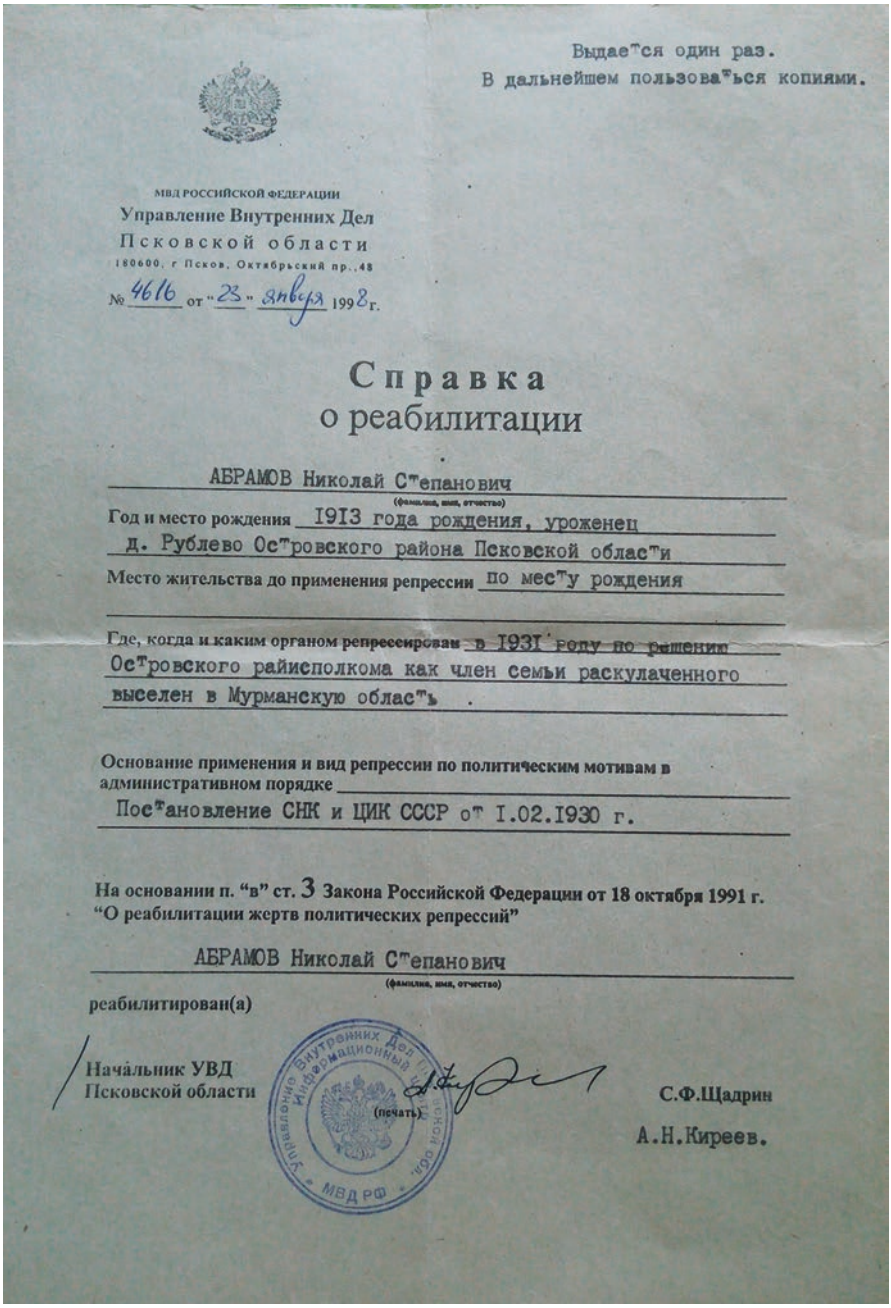
paradigm which breaks down the façade of objectivity in science and lends support for research methods that rely more on subjectivity, such as qualitative methods as a whole (Wall 2006, p. 2). Within the Arctic scope this paradigm and methods have staged the scene during the last 10 years bringing in traditional knowledge of indigenous communities not only to accompany 'too objective' Arctic research but, most importantly, to underline and justify it. In this regard, telling the story, or better to say reflective writing, becomes a powerful tool of qualitative research but is not the only method I have used for this chapter.

When getting back to the very beginning and thinking of the timeline of my so-called autoethnography research, I should state that it took me 12 years of conscious investigation and self-reflection from understanding of importance of knowing the family history to analysing and summarising my observations and conclusions to this particular chapter. I have started to become more interested in my family history since my university ages when I saw my grandmother receiving and carefully collecting documents and papers that confirms the '*status*' of the family and herself. What was that 'status' and why it was so important to her that she has spent more than 30 years of her life to obtain it? I didn't know, or more precisely, I have never been told. When coming to my grandmother's apartment during my younger school ages, we always sat at the table, had tea and read through the papers with official stamps that I didn't even understand. Later, I have found what they meant (Fig. 5.2). I would rather call it *gradual immersion* to the family history as there were particular reasons for my constrained ignorance (*See section* "*From Pskov to Murmansk and Kazakhstan*").

In the context of this chapter, the other method I have used can be described as *archival research*. Since the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, I have collected and scanned all the documents that my grandmother obtained as well as searched through the state and regional archives in order to find any supplementary information. By now, I have the collection of historical documents related to my family along with the photographs and some personal paper letters. I was able to put together the family tree back to five generations which contains the knowledge that almost no one from our present family have after my grandmother passed away 3 years ago.

In the course of my own PhD thesis in socio-economic geography, I have used interviewing of local population within the geographical area of my research as one of the methods to collect information and data. If we include informal family discussions and conversations on the topic of this chapter into account, then I can describe the other research method as *in-depth unstructured interviews* which I undertook unintentionally at early stages and later intentionally with the members of my family. Whilst the unintentional conversations mostly with my grandmother regarding the patterns of her life are less constructive in the scientific sense and can be described as probing and creating a pathway towards the later structured interviews, where topics were more targeted and focused. These interviews brought a more comprehensive understanding of personal perceptions of the Northern home.

By outlining the methodological approaches of self-research and applied methods, I have attempted to structure my own consciousness of personal identity and



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МВД РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ
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№ 4616 от "23" января 1998 г.

Справка
о реабилитации

АБРАМОВ Николай Степанович
(фамилия, имя, отчество)

Год и место рождения 1913 года рождения, уроженец д. Рублево Островского района Псковской области

Место жительства до применения репрессии по месту рождения

Где, когда и каким органом репрессирован в 1931 году по решению Островского райисполкома как член семьи раскулаченного выселен в Мурманскую область .

Основание применения и вид репрессии по политическим мотивам в административном порядке
Постановление СНК и ЦИК СССР от 1.02.1930 г.

На основании п. "в" ст. 3 Закона Российской Федерации от 18 октября 1991 г. "О реабилитации жертв политических репрессий"

АБРАМОВ Николай Степанович
(фамилия, имя, отчество)

реабилитирован(а)

Начальник УВД
Псковской области (печать) С.Ф.Щадрин

А.Н.Киреев.

Fig. 5.2 Statement of rehabilitation status
Statement of rehabilitation is issued by the Department of Internal Affairs of Pskov region as of 23.01.1998 concerning the "rehabilitation of Abramov Nikolay Stepanovich repressed in 1931 by the decision of Ostrovsky district executive committee as the member of kulak family and relocated to Murmansk region". Basis for rehabilitation: point "в" article 3, Law of the Russian Federation from 18.10.1991 *"About rehabilitation of the victims of political repressions"*

perception of the Arctic within the conceptual paradigm: *Arctic is the home – Home is the Arctic*. Summarising all the mentioned above methods, I can with some certain confidence say that the *participant observation* method has been largely applied during all 12 years of my interest.

To conclude, peer-reviewed, academically valid research is not the aim of this chapter. This chapter is an attempt to understand my own place and self within the geographical space of the Arctic region.

5.3 Pskov Region: The Home I Have Never Known

The Early 1900s Is The Period That I Was able to restore with the memories of my grandmother. At that time my family resided in the Pskov region[2] which along with the Novgorod region were famous for flax production in the Russian Empire. Flax has been known as the "*Northern gold of Russian land*" and was considered an original part of the Russian culture (Kondratiev 2011, p. 210). The very beginning of the nineteenth century was marked with growing flax production which was the result of the development in *spinning* machinery, and the Pskov region held the first place among all the regions of Russia involved in flax manufacturing.

During that period the population of the region counted at 1,188,000, 93% of which were peasants. As described by Vasiliev, before the revolution of 1917, the Pskov region did not have any large factories (Vasiliev 2013). The social stratification of the Pskovian population reflects that 60% of farms belonged to the poor and farm laborers (*bednyak*, *batrak*), 25% of farms to "*serednyaki*" and over 15% to a prosperous upper class of peasants (*kulaks*). After the abolition of serfdom and peasant reform (Emancipation Manifesto of 1861), peasants became independent and were given different rights from purchasing and leasing of land to founding of own enterprises. Due to different economic conditions several classes of peasants existed at that time, among them: *bednyak, batrak* (Russian for 'beggar') – a hired (seasonally) farm worker which owned a small amount of land or for the majority none at all; *serednyak* (Russian for 'averaged') – a peasant who owned the small land, did not hire any workers and was usually described as the class between batrak and kulak; and *kulak* – the upper class of better-off peasants (Osipov 2004). The most important feature was the right of purchasing of their own land by peasants which at some cases accounted for up to 23% of allotted lands, and the Pskov region was one of the most active regions for such bargains.

Comprehensive descriptions of everyday life in villages within peasant communities can be found in different works which includes architectural, historical, anthropological, political and cultural overviews (Lantsev 2015; Plisak 2008;

[2] Current Pskov region at the time of Russian Empire was called "*guberniya*" (county, province, government). Guberniya was the highest unit of administrative-territorial devision of Russia from 1708 to 1929. The head of guberniya was "*gubernator*" (governor), the word is also used nowadays to name official positions of the heads of Russian regions.

Nikitina 1999, 2012, 2015; Nikulin 2009; Shubina 2000). Thus, Lantsev describes the farmyards as mostly constructed within a one-story roofed yard, in which all the buildings adjoin to each other including constructions for cattle. Houses were mostly built from wood and clay, representing traditional Russian wooden architecture. The main feature of yards was the flexibility and possibility to transform constructions, so-called "growing houses", where all elements are unique and represents the harmony with the landscape (Lantsev 2015).

The social life of peasants included working days, and days of leisure with large celebrations and festivals. In this context, Nikitina discusses the importance of community life and community attachment for peasants. It was the institute to unite public and personal interests, to preserve traditions and moral qualities of peasant community (Nikitina 1999). Plisak in the article devoted to famous "Diaries of peasant" shows how important communicative practices were. Peasants used to discuss agronomical practices, cooperation, news from other regions, fiscal issues, including reading and discussing newspapers. The traditional prejudices of a "peasant being tied with the land" was just a stereotype (Plisak 2008). The land works usually stopped in autumn which opened the opportunity for travelling large distances, not only within the region. Traveling for economic reasons and seasonal work was quite usual (so-called "*othodnichestvo*") to the capital St. Petersburg and other regions of Russia.

Nikitina describes the North-West of Russia as the region of specific climatic conditions, which prevented peasants to grow corn. Nonetheless, North-West Russia fields and the pastures were pleasant for cattle breeding and flax production (Nikitina 2015). Shubina discusses the traditional to Pskovian peasants flax manufacturing. She notes that it was mainly women's work which also had metaphysical context connected to the way of thinking that was prevailing among peasants and connected to space, time, life, destiny, and the general world view. Flax manufacturing required specific skills which had been passed over from generation to generation. Families of peasants were usually large, including 8–10 children who were involved in everyday work (Shubina 2000).

The reconstructed story of my family begins from 2 villages in the North of the Pskov region: *Skugry* (Dnovsky area) and *Rublevo* (Ostrovsky area) where the farms of my great-grandfathers Abramovy and Dmitrievy were located. Both villages still exist on the map of the Pskov region and resides at around 150 km from each other. The pathways of two families crossed when Marfa Fedorovna Dmitrieva (Skugry) met Nikolay Stepanovich Abramov (Rublevo) – the parents of my grandmother Galina Nikolaevna Abramova and her sister. Both families were matched at the time of relocation, and my great grandparents were preparing for the wedding. As my grandmother Galina used to memorise from shared memories of her mother and my great grandmother Marfa (Galina was born at the labor camp during the relocation):

"Mom used to tell me about their farm and house. When she was young girl, they had large house with a lot of children. Let me count: Izot, Sergey, Ivan, Lukeria, Matrena, Irinya, Tatiana, and herself Marfa. They all were hard workers, when having the land, it is impossible to stay out of work. They woke up at 4 am every day to take care of their land and cattle. They manufactured flax products and always wear beautiful dresses and clothing. Grandfather sold flax at the market and always returned back to the village with presents to his children. Girls of the family were very stylish. They were a good family, they always gave work for those jobless in the village."

Such memories clearly reflect that our family was from the upper class of peasants labeled as kulaks. Nevertheless, the region and Pskovian peasantry at that time experienced tremendous social and political disturbances as the result of the Russian Revolution of 1917 which led to the Civil war of 1917–1922. As Vasiliev describes in his PhD thesis devoted to the Pskovian peasantry of that period, such Soviet administration systems as military communism and surplus appropriation (*Prodrazvyorstka*) led to the repartition of the land among different classes of peasants in which the confiscated plots of land were given to *bednyak* and *serednyak*. This, in turn, led to the dissolution of large farming areas in the region. Such averaging (*osrednyachestvo*) of peasantry resulted in plain redistribution of resources rather than an increase of agricultural capacity, and resulted in a lack of crop yield, cattle, equipment, and seed grains (Vasiliev 2013).

Prodrazvyorstka debilitated farming as it required peasants to give the surplus to the state. This had a fatal influence on people's psychological condition. Peasants lost their interest to develop the land and husbandry (Brutszkus 1995). Farming became naturalised to produce volumes required only for own family consumption. Flax production also decreased as it became unprofitable, flax crops amounted to 13,4% in total when compared with pre-revolution volumes. The need to minimise own husbandry induced economic depression and consequently changed the ideology and views of peasants (Vasiliev 2013).

The market-oriented 'New Economic Policy (NEP)' was introduced by V.I.Lenin in 1921 in order to foster the economic growth of the country, which experienced unprecedented social and economic losses after the Civil War. 1927 was a transitional year in the Soviet regime's relations with the peasantry: it marked the beginning of the end of the NEP and the reemergence of repression as the basic modus operandi for Soviet rule in the countryside (Viola et al. 2005). Later, the NEP was declared as a "too soft policy" which was not enough for the country's economic growth, and was abolished by Joseph Stalin in 1928 (Shaskov 1993). Policies of *collectivisation* were largely implemented throughout the country at that time. Collectivization included consolidation of individual farms into collectives – *kolkhoz and sovkhoz* – at the end of the 1920s and 1930s (Osipov 2004). This led to confrontation and mass social protests among peasantry, especially those from the

prosperous upper class. Such reactions accelerated state-induced repressive measures – forced relocation – towards different groups of the population (See Annex I). Peasants were considered enemies, and together with their families, they were arrested, exiled or executed. This relates to my family as well. One might ask why they were considered enemies? The state intended to repossess everything that families had carefully developed, lovingly grew and rightfully earned. During this time peasants did everything they could to prevent this including killing their cattle and burning their own homes in order not to give it away.

When reading research papers and manuscripts devoted to this historic period (e.g. Stepanov 2009; Lekontsev 2016; Dobronozhenko 2012; Shashkov 2004), I have found myself in a very challenging situation. Different authors suggest different views to that period, connotations and narratives spread from negative to positive, and at times reminds me of maximalist moods. Stalin's repressive politics are still disputable and a very sensitive topic even within present day Russia. For example, in June 2017 the Russian Public Opinion Research Center – WCIOM (https://www.wciom.com/) undertook a survey among different groups of the Russian population older than 18 years on the mass repressions of the twentieth century. Results indicate that over 90% of respondents know about "Stalin repressions" but only 9% are well aware of the destinies of their repressed family members, and 6% know nothing about the destiny of their relatives (WCIOM 2017). I can certainly share my story with these numbers knowing only the part.

5.4 From Pskov to Murmansk and Kazakhstan

My great grandparents were relocated from the Pskov to the Murmansk region in 1931 (See Fig. 5.2 above). Unfortunately, this is the most hidden and blank period of our family story. I know almost nothing about my great grandfather and where he is buried. Our family photo archive does not even contain his picture or any other documents that could help to restore any information about him. We only know that he died during the Great Patriotic War (according to a death notice) as public enemies were sent to the front as "food for the flames". Here is what my great grandmother Marfa Fedorovna told to my grandmother Galina about past events:

> *"They came at 3 a.m. to our house and ordered to get ready in 30 minutes. Each family member was allowed to take small sack with some personal things. We were placed in dirty railway cabins together with other families. Several days we have spent there without any conveniences, sanitary was disastrous. The most dramatic in such conditions was to take care of children and elders. Few days later cabins full of exhausted people arrived at our new destination."*

As mentioned earlier, my family was relocated trice: from the Pskov to the Murmansk region, from the Murmansk region to Kazakhstan, and back from Kazakhstan to the Murmansk region in 1940s. There was a reason why it happened.

The present day Murmansk region is known for its strong industrial profile. Mining enterprises, nuclear power, the Atomic Fleet, large and active transportation systems are some main features of the region's economy. Such giants in the period of active industrialisation of the Soviet country required strong and powerful electrification according to the GOELRO plan. GOELRO is the transliteration of the Russian abbreviation for "State Commission for Electrification of Russia"; the plan represented a major restructuring of the Soviet economy based on the total electrification of the country. Rich for natural water resources, namely rapid rivers, regional environment provided lots of destination for labor camps to build power networks.

When relocated to the Murmansk region, my family was assigned to "NivaGESstroy" (in Russian stands for *Niva* – the name of a local river in Kandalaksha area, *GES* – hydroelectric stations, *stroy* – construction) – an enterprise established to build hydroelectric power stations. This was to be the first hydroelectric power network located above the Polar Circle in the Soviet Union. According to archival records, populations of labor camps as of data for 02.10.1931 was 12,000 people, who lived in severe conditions in tents and barracks. *Spetspereselentsy* were supplied with bread and sugar, no other products were available. Most of them still used bast shoes as the stock of warm clothing was not enough. Such conditions jeopardised work capacity and survival in the cold Northern environment.

Among *spetspereselentsy* were peasants, former officers, churchmen, engineers – the people with strong characters and personal features. Nevertheless, cold, polar night, hopelessness, loss of property and homesickness drove them to despair (Kiselev 2008). But most of them still stood strong, tried to keep families, survive and build new places of living. In such a context one hardly can use the word 'home', but as one of the remarkable evidence of people's willingness to live and keep families was the birth of Anna Abramova, the sister of my grandmother, in 1937–6 years after the relocation.

In 1941 with the beginning of the Great Patriotic War (the Russian context of World War II), enterprises and industrial equipment were evacuated to the East-Kazakhstan region of the USSR. People and facilities from "NivaGESstroy" were relocated to Ust-Kamenogorsk where my grandmother was born in 1942 (see Fig. 5.3). It is hard to restore any memories or senses our family members experienced during the second relocation from the place which they never called 'home'.

By reading research papers devoted to that period, we can partly unfold the picture of events which took place there (for example, Shaymukhanova and Makalakov 2012). Not all members of the family were relocated to Kazakhstan. Some stayed in the Murmansk region and worked at different places during the war, for example in the hospital (as could be seen from the records in labour book). When the war ended in May 1945, family members were resettled back to the Murmansk region for restoration and reconstruction of facilities after military activities (see Fig. 5.4).

Fig. 5.3 Great grandmother (in the middle) Marfa Fedorovna Abramova (Dmitrieva) with her little daughter and grandmother Galina Nikolaevna Abramova on hands, 1940s, relocated from Murmansk region to a camp in Kazakhstan

Fig. 5.4 Great grandmother Marfa Fedorovan (on the left) at NivaGESStroy upon the third relocation from Kazakhstan

One of my biggest regrets is that family history became open to me too late, only after I had entered university, and later on I supported this interest with historical literature reading and archival work. My grandmother passed away and I did not get to ask her the questions that I would have asked her today, which was due to my,

already mentioned, constrained ignorance. Once, when I tried to ask my grandmother about my great grandparents she immediately kept silent. Later, I heard she told my mother: "Don't tell anything to Yulia, it's a shame and pain, she shouldn't know". My mother stayed true to her word and I did know nothing until some time ago. It was common for people who suffered from repressive politics to not talk about it even amongst themselves. The history of collectivisation of Soviet agriculture has long been obscured by official taboos, historical falsification, and restricted access to archival source material (Viola et al. 2005). The CEO of WCIOM Valery Fedorov when presenting results of a public survey about mass repressions said in 2017: "This is the stamp of silence. It is a taboo which was enforced. It was denied to talk about even when repressions ended, even when Stalin died, even when this all was gone". Unconsciously following such *behavioural* traits under silent taboo and when working on this chapter, I felt mentally naked. Such silence might be a very common thing at the beginning but later on it might be explained as a protective measure for future generations to avoid psychologically disruptive reactions from youngsters to family tragedies. Someone said, "By reverting from oblivion even one human life, we retrieve memories about these people". Here I can certainly say, in the search of my family's historical pathway and upon finding the truth, I have found myself.

When discussing identity and place attachment in the context of constant relocations, disappointment, silent taboos, family separation and homesickness, I would rather refer to "*past identities*". My family members clearly knew who they were before relocation experiencing heavy homesickness, but they did not understand or did not think about who they were within the given time and space due to the severe conditions which required strong survival abilities. They were no longer involved in land farming but rather construction, they experienced environmental assimilation and adaptation to new nature conditions. It was rather short in historical perspective, a time period of 40 years full of political changes and perturbations, personal shocks and tragedies, and there was no time for self-reflection. People tried to keep and restore memories of a past life rather than develop new narratives. As revealed from family interviews, my great grandparents never spoke about getting back to the Pskov region nor about permanently settling in Murmansk.

5.5 Murmansk Region: The Home of My Self

Once during our conversations with my grandmother, I asked her: "*When does a place become home?*" She immediately answered: "*When you start your own family there, get married, give a birth to your kids and have a place where you live all together*". Families of relocated people were not allowed to travel out of specially indicated zones and especially back to the regions from which they were relocated. They had no passports, except those which were stored in a commandant's office. My great grandmother got her passport back only in the mid-1960s, and together with her daughters she travelled to Skugry village (Pskov region) in the 1970s.

There still were some people who knew our family, some distant relatives, one of the family houses was used for as offices for the local administration and the other for a school at that time. This trip might have also been a trigger for understanding that the Pskovian home is now completely left behind.

The Murmansk region became home to our family with the life story of my grandmother Galina. She was married here, had children – my mother and aunt – and worked in Kandalaksha town for her entire life. However, for the most part of her life – almost 30 years – she fought to get the 'not guilty' status for the family and thus, to get rehabilitation from the repressive Soviet politics. It was not the easiest process – to collect archival documents, to find witnesses from the Pskov and Murmansk regions who can provide oral evidence in court, and to get in touch with the administration of former kommandatura. Later, in 1998 – almost 70 years after the repressions – she got that precious *Statement of Rehabilitation, Справка о реабилитации* (see Fig. 5.2) issued as a single copy. That single paper was the triumph for her, the sign of freedom for several generations of our family. It certainly was. If we get a look back to the timeline mentioned in this chapter, it appears that even if we will count from 1861 (the abolition of serfdom) up to the 1960s (when my great grandmother received her passport) no generation of my family was actually free.

As for the present day, my parents and family of my aunt still live in the Murmansk region, in Kandalaksha town which I call "*hometown*" because I was born there in 1984 (Soviet Union) and spent my kindergarten and school ages there. I also studied at the university in the Murmansk region and even today I am still working here. I have never lived somewhere outside the region though I am travelling a lot. Writing through the historic pathways of my family was interesting on the one hand and hard on the other. It was hard because I tried to stay neutral and emotionless when reading and writing about the past, the tragedies my family experienced and passed through. This sensitive topic is still much disputed among Russians. There is plenty of literature and people who justify Stalin's politics. I often hear comments that *kulaks* were greedy, lazy people who forced other poor people to work at their farms which still tens of years later is the effect of Soviet propaganda. Nevertheless, it was interesting writing too. I have discovered hidden corners of our family history which helped me to enrich and understand my own identity and answers to some personal characteristics. I can now explain why I am fond of planting and do it successfully at our summer house (*dacha*), why I am eagerly travelling around the world, why I am a responsible and hard-working person, and finally why I have this very strong sense of justice, which at times, I suffer from. Looking back to all the characters of our family members, at stories of what kind of people they were, I felt like I look in the mirror, their personalities and characters reflected in who I am.

Along my scientific career I have been asked plenty of times by my colleagues why I have not moved somewhere else, why I am still staying in the depopulating North, why I am not leaving to other places where I can get more opportunities and a better life. The answer is simple. I am attached to this place, I am attached to my family. I feel homesick every time I am away longer than 2 weeks. I love this cold Northern nature, forests, rivers, lakes, seas, tundra, rocky mountains, polar day and

even polar night, magic auroras, all 4 seasons of the year and the strong spirits of the people who live here.

And even though our family now lives in different cities of one region, the very warm and cosy family traditions of celebrating birthdays, Christmas, New Year brought all of us together at one table to share successes and happy moments, to talk about those relatives who passed away, to chat about everyday life and smile to each other. Home is all about family traditions which we also have: the spring tradition of celebrating May and getting to the summer house for planting, the autumn tradition of gathering berries and mushrooms, and year-round tradition of family fishing.

My strong ancestors made everything so that the future generations of their family can call this place '*Home*'. There is a Russian proverb, equivalent to "My house is my castle", saying: "When you are at home, even the walls help you, Дома и стены помогают". I feel spiritually strong when I am at home, and I call this place *home* as much as my parents do. I am (identifying myself as) a Northerner (*Severyanka*) in the fourth generation and am very proud of it.

5.6 *Severyanin*[3]: The Russian Construct of the Northern Man

I would call *Sever* (The North) a vernacular region of Russia where people share not only common geographical space but also stories and conditions of their life to which they have successfully adapted. The population of the Russian North is diverse. Along with indigenous groups there is a non-indigenous population which have lived in the territory for several generations like my family. Rapid depopulation of the North influences the social infrastructure of these territories. The unique legacy and experience of several generations of people to adapt and settle in the Northern conditions subsequently disappear. This concern has been discussed by several authors (e.g. Lazhentsev 2010; Dregalo and Ulyanowskiy 2011) as a permanent population is the crucial element for further development of the North and the Arctic.

In this context, *Severyanin/severyanka* is not the ethnical construct but rather the overarching geographical framework which includes both indigenous and non-indigenous populations. The strong self-identification as *Severaynin* of the northern population of Russia is reflected in many aspects, from economic to personal. To be *Severyanin* means to get state preferences (certain level of wages, reduced living costs, compensations) which, nevertheless, currently is a disputed topic and is subject to state regulations. Depending on the region, professional specialisation or mode of living, it might be very disadvantageous to live in the severe North. It is one of the main reasons for outmigration. From the other hand, while the younger popu-

[3] *Severyanin* (masculine gender) and *severyanka* (feminine gender) refers to the Northerner, it is the resident of the Northern part of the region or a country, antonymous to *yuzhanin* (yuzhanka) – the Southerner.

lation is migrating in search of more profitable life, the older groups of the population refer to *rootedness* and *attachment to the place* as one of the major factors to stay. The Northern territories of Russia are not only depopulating, but also ageing.

As the part of IPY (International Polar Year) project PPS Arctic (www.ppsarctic.nina.no), between 2008 and 2010 I was responsible for interviewing the local population in the Murmansk region. As an international project, the survey was developed for its purposes. The word '*Arctic*' was mainly used in the questions to population which constituted the questionnaire. As the result of interviewing, I was not only able to receive and analyse opinions and information but also observe the reactions the local people had when I used the word '*Arctic*'. At that time, for all of us the area where we live was still the Far North rather than the Arctic. In its turn, the Arctic was imaged as the area around the North Pole with ice, white snow and nothing around for hundreds of kilometers. Respondents did not understand why I called the territory of their living as 'Arctic'.

In the light of this discussion, it is important to mention the rising change of geographical concepts and thus identities among northern population of Russia. The linear at first glance space "North – Far North – Arctic" (in Russian "Sever – Krayniy Sever – Arktika", Север – Крайний Север – Арктика) is constantly boosting with the governmental interests and decisions. Though, the Arctic is narrower in geographical sense than the North, it has been framed within state legislation only 10 years ago with the formulation in 2008 of *Basics for State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period of 2020 and Further Perspective* (Russian Federation 2008). Before that, the northern population of Russia lived in the Far North.

The *Far North of Russia* is a diffused geographical concept which mostly refers to socio-economic regulations. There are Far North and the areas recognised (by legislation) as equivalent to the Far North. In different years these equivalent areas have changed depending on the purpose of local regulations (different cost zones, wages, transportation regulations, seasonal delivery of goods to the Northern territories – Northern Delivery *Severny Zavoz*, etc.) and lobbying by regions themselves. For example, in 1970, 1971, 1975, 1977, 1982 and 1985 the list of Northern regions was expanded to include areas within the Primorsky and Khabarovsk Krai, Chita and Tomsk regions, which were later excluded from the list (Gavrilieva and Arkhangelskaya 2016).

The *Arctic territory of Russia* is now determined by the *Presidential Decree about the Land Territory of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation* №296 as of 02.05.2014 (Russian Federation 2014). Present statutory wording includes 9 subjects of Russia which territory partially or fully is included in the Arctic zone. These are: fully included – the Murmansk region, Nenets Autonomous Okrug (district), Chukotka Autonomous Okrug; and partially included – Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Republic of Karelia, Komi Republic, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Krasnoyarsky Krai, Arkhangelsk Region. While the Development Strategy and the Program for development of the Russian Arctic are in force, there is still no basic

legislative document. This being said, *The Law of the Arctic Zone of Russian Federation* has been drafted several times from since 2010 but needs more detailed work as certain corresponding amendments need be done to other legislative documents and acts of the country.

The Russian Arctic is part of the Far North. Nevertheless, the word 'Arctic' has already superseded 'Far North' in different contexts, which is also reflected in people's perceptions. They now live in the Arctic but still call themselves *Severyane* (Northerners) as I do.

5.7 Conclusions

This autoethnography is at the same time the tragic and triumphant story of how the Arctic, as part of the North, became home. Getting back to the conceptual paradigm: *Arctic is the home – Home is the Arctic*, I can certainly say that Arctic as a geographical space is my home, and home as my personal secure space is the Arctic. For me, it is the answer to an endless search of Self in the world of diverse identities. Northern people obtain poly-paradigmic and volumetric identities throughout their lives and experiences rich in cultures and surrounded by different contexts. Attachment to the place, to the Arctic plays an essential role in self-reflections and development of an own identity. Knowing family history can bring new edges of self-identification which at times are not as accidental as it might seem. Starting with the Arctic being 'not a home' for my great grandparents through environmental and mental coping strategies for survival in disastrous circumstances this chapter ends with the Arctic topophilia and a blossoming of an Arctic identity.

This is only one side of my family story which comes from my mother's line. My father's line is no less disastrous as almost every second family in the Russian Arctic shares a similar story. This gives an even stronger and even more triumphant taste to this chapter. However, my next target is to explore the Pskov region, the home I have never known and the suitcases are already packed.

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Annex I

Decree of the Council of the People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Executive Committee of the USSR 'On the measures of the agriculture socialist reorganization increase in the regions of the dense collectivization and kulaks' fighting', 1 February 1930.

In order to guarantee favorable conditions for socialistic reorganization of agricultural sector, the Council of the People's Commissars of the USSR and the Central Executive Committee of the USSR claim:

- To abolish in the regions of total collectivization operation of the law of land lease and hired labor in individual peasant farms. The exclusion could be made upon a special mutual decision of the regional and district executive committees only with respect to the peasants of average means (*serednyak*).
- Local authorities had emergency powers 'up to the complete confiscation of kulaks' properties and their eviction outside the certain regions and territories'. The confiscated properties, for the exception of the part which was intended for paying off the kulaks' duties to the state and cooperation bodies, are to be given over to the indivisible collective farms' funds (*kolkhozy*) as a fee on behalf of poor peasants and farm hands joining them.
- To suggest to authorities of union republics in order to foster present decree pass on required instructions to local authorities and executive committees.

Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR – M.Kalinin
Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of the USSR – A.Rykov
Secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR – A.Enukidze

Resource: Presidential Library, https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/618998

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