

# “Where Do You Get Fish?”

## Practices of Individual Supplies in Yamal as an Indicator of Social Processes

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**Abstract:** While there have long been communities in the Arctic where natives and incomers live together, many anthropological works on the region focus either on the natives or on the incomers exclusively. This article based on field data collected in the three points of the Yamal (Iar-Sale, Salekhard, and Salemal) where natives and incomers have long lived together, shows how this default distinction often employed by researchers and local authorities works differently in actual everyday practices of mixed communities. The author describes the practices aimed at compensating for the infrastructural deficits and insufficient supplies in the Yamal through the use of social networks to acquire necessary food and goods. The analysis shows that mixed communities of Yamal are more complex than previously thought and that the dichotomy of “incomers/natives” is not adequate to describe them.

**Keywords:** anthropology of the Arctic, indigenous people, infrastructure, local population, northern communities, Yamal

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For a long time, Siberian anthropology was the anthropology of its native peoples. The primary disposition of anthropologists to study indigenous people and villagers remained here much longer than in other fields; moreover, this preference was typically found not only in the Russian tradition but in the North American one as well. As Peter Schweitzer put it, “Modern anthropology of the North is one of the last traditional culture research areas” (Schweitzer 2016: 10). In Russia, the “urban natives” have only recently attracted the attention of scholars; recent special issues of *Sibirskie Istoricheskie Issledovaniia* (no. 2, 2014) and *Etnograficheskoe Obozrenie* (no. 1, 2016) have focused on these groups. (An overview of urban studies in Canada and Alaska can be found in Schweitzer [2016].) Later, anthropologists turned to native residents’



conflicts with the oil and gas extraction industry, and then the oil and gas companies' employees themselves.<sup>1</sup>

There are interesting studies of northern industrial cities (e.g., Bolotova 2014), but they do not specifically deal with the indigenous population. At present, Arctic populations are most often described with the help of categories like "incomers" and "natives."<sup>2</sup> Not only does such a differentiation date back to an old academic and journalistic tradition, but it is also fixed in many legislative acts.

It is obvious to anyone who has ever been to the modern North that the native people and oil industry workers live close by (and often together). However, studies of the northern cities and settlements as consolidated communities that compare the attitudes and practices of different social groups (including native and nonnative) are scarce.<sup>3</sup>

When my colleagues and I were designing the project "Children of the 1990s in the Russian Arctic," we thought it would be interesting to conduct an experiment, and carry out our research not only with natives but with all the residents of a region. We intended to ask the research questions to all of them, as we wanted to find out whether there would be anything that would correspond to the differentiation between natives and incomers. The assumption of difference is *a priori* for both scholars and local administrations. As the title of our project shows, our attention is focused on those who live in the Arctic today and were children in the 1990s. We included all the representatives of this age cohort in our project, no matter whether they were born in the region in question, arrived there recently, or belong to the native peoples of the North (i.e., the formal list of indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East). It is likely that any differentiation between incomers and natives is important in some situations and less relevant in others. For this project I investigated this hypothesis in the Iamalo-Nenetskii Avtonomnyi Okrug (IaNAO).<sup>4</sup> I conducted fieldwork studying the life of the contemporary native population and the influence brought there by different Soviet and post-Soviet modernization practices for many years. For this project I worked with all the population groups, including those whose lives had no direct connections with the indigenous inhabitants'. I focused mostly on those born in the 1980s but worked with informants both younger and older than the main focus group.

During my fieldwork, I collected interviews with different categories of informants following the unified guide for the whole project, and I conducted participant observation, as I was involved in planning, buying, and transporting food and goods in the families with

whom I lived. This article is based both on the data gathered within this project and my earlier field materials. In the course of my fieldwork, I found out that the practices of supply employed by locals to make up for a scarce selection of food, clothes, and household goods offered by local traders made a very good case to explore the processes in which I was interested. I will elaborate on this below, after a short account of the specificity of the region and the place in which I did my research.

## **Yamal: A General Description of the Region**

IaNAO (together with Khanty-Mansiiskii AO) is the main center of hydrocarbon resource extraction in Russia, which means relatively high wages in many sectors of the economy; this attracts migrants from other Russian regions<sup>5</sup> and from abroad.<sup>6</sup> It is crucial to note that not just oil and gas professionals are coming but also teachers, doctors, bureaucrats, salespeople, police officers, security guards, and so forth. Some of them leave the North after a few years, others develop a kind of “northern addiction” and spend ten, twenty, or more years there, and do not leave before they have earned a right to the “northern pension.” Some of the incomers choose to stay in the North for good. According to the 2010 census, 72 percent of IaNAO residents were born outside the Okrug (*Sotsial’no-demograficheskii portret Rossii 2012: 149–158*). As a result, in most Yamal localities, the majority of the population is constantly being renewed, a considerable part of Yamal residents have a relatively high income,<sup>7</sup> and many people maintain ties to regions beyond the Far North.

Another feature of the IaNAO is that, unlike many other northern regions, reindeer herding is alive and actively developing there, remaining the basis of economic life for a considerable part of the Nenets, Khanty, and Komi population. A part of the native IaNAO population retains a nomadic lifestyle, which means that the tundra is permanently populated by adult men and women, as well as by elderly people and children. These people make up half of the native population of the Yamal Peninsula. The other half now lives in settlements and cities, engaged in activities not connected to reindeer herding and fishing. Both groups are tightly bound to one another by kinship and friendship ties (see Liarskaya 2009, 2016). For this article, it is important to know that both these native populations are characterized by relatively high mobility within their region of residence.

Both the developing reindeer herding and the constant flow of the new population coming to the region make the Yamal situation particularly interesting to study in comparison with other regions of the Russian Arctic (Siberia and the European North) that have experienced population outflow during recent decades, inflicted by the large-scale "westbound drift" (Zakharov 2015: 304–308; Larsen and Fondahl 2015: 53–104).

The IaNAO has a very large territory, and its populated localities are significantly different in their characteristics. There are cities populated almost entirely by incomers, and there are so-called ethnic (*natsional'nye*) settlements where most residents are indigenous. Considering that my task was to find out how differentiation between natives and incomers works in everyday life, I looked for places with a mixed population and finally selected Iar-Sale, Salekhard, and the Salemal settlement as my field sites in 2015.<sup>8</sup> The population structure in these three localities allowed me to explore the lives of groups whose ways of life are usually described as very different from each other. My informants included nomadic reindeer herders, fishers, and residents employed in administration, communal services, schools, kindergartens, fire stations, hospitals, shops, museums, science centers, and so forth.

## Locations

The locations I selected have little in common. Salekhard, with its population of 48,000, is the regional capital; the regional administration, museum, research center, and offices of gas-extracting enterprises are all located here. For a long time now, a significant part of the local population has been composed of students of various technical schools who come here from different parts of the region, and many of them are natives. A significant number of Nenets, Khanty, and Komi live and work permanently in the city.

Iar-Sale, populated by over 7,000, is the capital of Iamal'skii Raion. Native peoples currently constitute about 70 percent of the Iar-Sale population. The main local employers are the residential school (the largest one in Russia), the regional hospital, communal services, and the local administration. The settlement is the center of gravitation for a significant part of the nomads in Iamal'skii Raion, who go there to study, receive medical treatment, visit relatives, fulfill bureaucratic formalities, buy food, and so forth. Many of those who live permanently in the tundra now own accommodation in the settlement as well.

Salemal, home to around 1,000 people, is a fishermen's settlement. Natives, descendants of those exiled to the North in the age of Stalin, and those who came to earn money on their own comprise its mixed population. In contemporary Salemal, native peoples of the North make up a little more than 50 percent of the whole population. The main employers in the settlement are the residential school, kindergarten, and communal services.<sup>9</sup>

While all three localities have been quite successful in developing over the last few decades, the transport infrastructure in all of them is underdeveloped. None of them are connected to the rest of the country with a year-round highway or have any year-round transport connection to the world except for air transport. There are airports in all three locations, connected to each other with regular helicopter flights; Salekhard has air connections to several major cities of the country.

Even Salekhard, a large city sitting precisely on the Arctic Circle, has no highway connecting it to other places. The railway line ends on the west bank of the Ob River, in the city of Labytnangi,<sup>10</sup> which is connected to Salekhard by ferry in summer and by ice road in winter. During the thaw period, the connection is interrupted. A single dirt road connects Salekhard to the settlement of Aksarka (60 km away). In addition to that, there are seasonal winter roads and water transport in the summer linking up to Salekhard via the Ob River.

These settlements are located north of Salekhard, in the Yamal Peninsula. There are no paved roads leading there: they can be reached by winter roads or by water in the summer.<sup>11</sup> During the thaw period, only helicopter transportation is available. The road distance between Salekhard and Salemal is 140 kilometers, including 60 kilometers of dirt road to Aksarka and then another 80 kilometers of winter road; the distance between Salekhard and Iar-Sale is around 220 kilometers (including 160 km of winter road). These distances may seem large enough in the off-road conditions to significantly impede communication between settlements; however, they are not considered to be vast by northern standards. If the weather is good and an all-terrain vehicle is at hand, the distance can be covered in one day (and, with luck, one can get back on the same day too).

If a winter road is available and not closed because of the weather conditions, it is actively used for goods and passenger traffic. While there are private entrepreneurs organizing this kind of transportation, private car ownership was not always so prevalent. It has been rapidly increasing during the last 10–15 years, especially after concrete roads were laid within the settlements. Many residents of the settlements and

some city dwellers also have boats and snowmobiles. Snowmobiles are used for going to the tundra—for visiting friends and relatives, hunting, fishing, and having picnics—rather than to connect the settlements and the city.

The absence of all-weather roads leads to the fact that one cannot leave this part of the region by car during the summer period (e.g., when going on vacation): to reach the federal highway, the car first has to be loaded on the ferry or on a rail platform. This significantly complicates the planning of vacation logistics. Conversations with today's residents of the North reveal that for many of them, living in the North is hard not because of the cold climate and polar night but because of the lack of roads and supplies and impeded communication with the rest of the country and the entire world (including poor Internet connectivity), resulting in expensive and uncomfortable travel, high costs of shipping, and the unavailability of various goods and services to which people living in other parts of the country are accustomed.

Low population density (0.7 people per km<sup>2</sup>) is as responsible for these logistical problems as is the harsh climate of the Far North. The combination of factors here results almost inevitably in a state of transport infrastructure that can be described with the metaphor *rarefied infrastructure* (on the analogy with rarefied gas).<sup>12</sup> Traveling to these locations is often a hard and very costly task, delivery is very expensive, so the goods transported here are fewer and much more expensive, resulting in the high demand for various goods being left unsatisfied. The local government is fully aware of permanent deficits, as explained in a quote from a report by the local administration head, published in the *Ekonomicheskii vestnik Iamal'skogo raiona* (Otchet glavy raionnoy administratsii 2014: 26): "In Iamal'skii Raion, the *residents' income is higher than their expenses, . . . due to the fact that solvent demand for long-storage and non-everyday goods is not met, and the prices for these goods are higher than in the southern regions of Russia.*" In other words, as a result of "*the imbalance between income and expense of the population,*" expenses within the region are reported to be low, while people take their money out of the region (italics added).

The focus of my research lies in the individual practices developed by local residents as a reaction to the income-expense imbalance to make up for the lack and high costs of food and other goods supplied through official (state or private) trade channels. I do not make a full description of the whole range of practices; rather, my aim is to explore what kinds of practices are common and what kinds are specific for different social groups. Because of the mixed population of the selected

localities, I can compare the tactics applied by different groups who share the same conditions in each particular place.

Therefore, my research questions can be articulated as follows: How does the differentiation between natives and nonnatives work in the practices of individual supply? Which practices unite different population groups? Which practices include only natives or only incomers? By what factors is inclusion in a practice determined?

## Local Population Groups

What categories do the residents of selected locations use to arrange their social environment? Of the whole range of social and ethnic characteristics, I am interested mainly in those connected with having one's roots in a local community and the number of years spent there. The usual differentiation between natives and incomers appeared relevant, but only in certain situations. According to the Yamal natives themselves (Nenets, Khanty, Komi), humankind can be divided into "natives" and "Russians"—*lutsa* (i.e., "all the rest"; it is not an ethnic term in this case).<sup>13</sup> This division is evoked when it is necessary to stress cultural differences, ethnic origins (e.g., when speaking about life in the tundra or marital perspectives), or in the discourse of the native peoples of the North.<sup>14</sup> In these cases, this differentiation is acknowledged by all the residents of Yamal.

When describing the local population in other situations, both natives and nonnatives use three categories instead of two: "natives" and the two subcategories of Russians, "locals" and "incomers." There is no agreement in the community as to who is "local" and who is an "incomer"; this issue is topical and often emerged spontaneously in different situations during my fieldwork. Those who grew up in a different place and came to Yamal recently are called "incomers"; this category is rather flexible, depending on who applies it and whom it is applied to—oneself or others. "Locals" are definitely those who were born in Yamal or at least finished school there, or those who came "long ago." How long "long ago" is considered to be is the main question, which is often defined by a person him- or herself, as well as by others.<sup>15</sup> The lack of commonly shared criteria often results in public controversies.<sup>16</sup> The debates, however, are more often focused on people of middle and senior age, while the younger generation—on which I focused my research—causes less ambiguity. The young people in the North either grew up here (i.e., they are undoubtedly local) or came to the North

after graduation (i.e., several years or even months ago), and then everyone including themselves considers them "incomers."

It is interesting to note that my colleagues who worked in Kamchatka, Taimyr, the Kola Peninsula, and Magadan Province never encountered such a system of categorization. The opposition of "locals" and "incomers" is probably relevant in Yamal because a significant part of the population is permanently being renewed: somebody is constantly coming in, while others who have spent some time there are leaving.

## **The Practices of Individual Supply**

In the Soviet time, shipping goods to the settlements had been entirely a responsibility of the state; however, private entrepreneurs joined that system in the early 1990s. The majority of the population was always dependent, in one way or another, on "external" actors and institutions who determined what goods and of what quality and price would be shipped to the local retail networks. The "external monopoly" has begun to dissolve only in the last decade, as soon as off-road vehicles became available for private ownership.

### ***Meat***

It is difficult to be a vegetarian in the North: vegetables are scarce, and fruit is even scarcer and very expensive, so the problem of obtaining them is an everyday concern. Meat and fish, however, are easily accessible. The stores offer beef and pork, deep frozen and imported from far away (there is no local production). In Salekhard, one can sometimes buy mutton. Now and then, without any regular schedule, merchants come to the settlements to sell meat (usually pork) just in the streets, "from the wheels."

Another kind of meat specific to the North is reindeer meat. Unlike pork or mutton, reindeer meat is always locally produced, with reindeer herding being an exclusive business of the natives.<sup>17</sup> There are residents who eat reindeer meat and those who do not. Many people prefer store-bought meat (pork or beef) to reindeer because the former has a more familiar taste. I know people who have spent a long time in the North and always emphasize that they have been unable to get accustomed to reindeer meat; they say they do not like the aftertaste. While these



people are quite “local” by other parameters, I have not met people with a distaste for reindeer meat among those who grew up in Yamal. In general, it is not as much an issue of personal food preferences as it is an instrument of building individual boundaries between oneself and the native population.

Reindeer meat can be obtained from different sources: in Salekhard, reindeer meat is sold in the streets, outside the stores or markets, and by people in traditional fur clothes off their sleighs. Many people buy reindeer meat in this way, but some are reluctant to do so: they have doubts about the nature and the quality of this meat. Once on Reindeer Herder Day, I heard a woman (a recent incomer) asking another woman (a tundra resident) who was selling meat from her sleigh: “Is this really reindeer meat? Surely not pork?” Her question seemed to greatly amuse the reindeer herders standing around—they must have imagined a herd of pigs grazing on the tundra! Recently, reindeer meat has become available in the stores of the Iamal’skie Oleni (Yamal Reindeer) chain,<sup>18</sup> which is marketed as “Yamal buys Yamal-made” and did not exist in Salekhard prior to 2015.

Another way of obtaining reindeer meat is to buy it directly from reindeer herders, through relatives or friends. Unlike sales in the street, such distribution channels often become quite stable: a person buys meat from a specific vendor and thus can be assured of its quality and source:

*I cannot buy meat from just anyone. We always buy meat from an acquaintance of ours named Petr. I don't fear buying from him, we have known them for a long time, we have even been to their chum once as guests. At least I am sure that the meat is fresh and the reindeer didn't die of a disease or something. (EU-Yamal 2015, HIM)*

Nearly every settlement resident has access to such purchase channels, with the exception of recent incomers who lack social connections. City residents can also use this method if they are close enough to a native family.

Some settlement and city residents get reindeer meat from tundra residents regularly and for free. Those are relatives or close friends of reindeer herders included in the kinship exchange and assistance networks. These people either go to the tundra for meat themselves, or their relatives bring it to their homes.<sup>19</sup>

In the last two cases, meat is usually measured not in kilograms but in carcasses (one can sell or buy a whole carcass, half carcass, etc.). This meat can be stored outside in a shed; it can also be kept on balconies

or in the large food freezers many people keep inside, even in small one-room apartments.

These are the main ways of obtaining meat—there are other, less frequently used options. For instance, my Muslim acquaintance from Iar-Sale who has spent around 10 years in the settlement still does not like the taste of reindeer meat; he told me that he specially orders mutton from somebody who brings it to Yamal from Northern Kazakhstan in a refrigerator truck—there are enough potential clients for this service to be offered there.

### ***Fish***

In Salekhard, fish is sold in the stores, and that is how most residents obtain it. In addition, both in the city and in the settlements, fish can be ordered directly from the fishermen or through their relatives and friends (sometimes these people professionally engage in fish sales).<sup>20</sup> The case of fish is similar to that of meat, with one major difference: there are both "native" and "local" fishermen in Yamal. The indigenous residents, as in the case of meat, often get fish for free through their kinship networks. Like meat, non-store-bought fish is measured not by weight but by "tails" and "tens of tails."<sup>21</sup>

### ***Mushrooms and Berries***

The practice of picking mushrooms and berries unites all three groups: incomers, locals, and natives. It is a matter of individual preferences, needs, and opportunities.<sup>22</sup> One can pick berries and mushrooms "just for home use" or for sale.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, there is no evidence of incomers picking either for sale in my field data: only native and local residents are mentioned doing that. The incomers themselves never mention this method of making money. It seems that they pick berries for home use only.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Nonperishable Goods***

Long-storage goods, household chemicals, shampoos, and so forth can be bought from local stores, but the selection is not very wide (especially in settlements) and the price is very high, so people are always

investigating other ways of solving the problem. People often buy these items on their way back from travels or from visiting friends. Another option is a private trip to small-scale wholesale warehouses in Labytnangi. These warehouses have the lowest prices in this part of the region, and the selection of goods is also the richest: they are located close to the railway station where the goods from the European part of the country are delivered. For the residents of Salekhard, getting there is easy: Labytnangi sits directly across the Ob River from Salekhard. During winter and summer (except for the thaw period),<sup>25</sup> there is a regular ice road or ferry connection, so traveling from the regional capital to these warehouses is a widespread practice, not much harder than a trip to a mall located in the outskirts of a large city in the European part of the country or in the southern Siberian regions. Private trips to Labytnangi are also widespread in the other two settlements in question, although such trips are longer, more expensive, and much more difficult: there are neither permanent roads nor regular transport connections between Labytnangi and these settlements.<sup>26</sup>

How do these trips work? First, they are quite costly: it makes financial sense only if one purchases a lot. If we leave aside cases of reselling, complex calculations are to be made: it should be determined how much sugar, flour, oil, detergents, and so forth the household needs for the next few months. These calculations require certain skills usually absent in regions with common supply chains. A similar need of calculating the exact amount of food and goods for up to half a year has long existed among the tundra residents, who used to come to the settlements for shopping twice a year.<sup>27</sup> This practice now is developing among settlement residents as well.

Second, to make such a trip one has to have access to vehicles that can run cross-country and carry a heavy load; however, such vehicles are not widely available for private individuals in the Russian North. In Yamal, goods and passenger operations are organized not only by the state, oil and gas companies, or local administration, but also by private businesses: private companies offer their services to people; different organizations also have transport that can be used by employees on various terms. There are people who operate their large private cars as taxis, as well as private off-road vehicles that can drive on winter roads under favorable weather conditions.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, organizing such trips requires information about the selection of goods in the warehouses and their price tags. In 2014–2015, such information could not be obtained via the Internet, so people usually had to ask those who had just returned from Labytnangi; another

option was to ask friends or relatives to drop in to Labytnangi and investigate on-site.

Local and native people are always included in these practices; recent incomers shop in these wholesale warehouses much less frequently. It should be noted that when affordable off-road vehicles became available in Labytnangi, many tundra residents also began shopping in those warehouses instead of using settlement stores, as they had done before. Such trips became much more cost-efficient for them, given the fact that they usually make stocks last for at least six months. To organize such trips, they act as the settlement residents do: either hire a car and a driver or join traveling kinsmen who possess a vehicle. In some cases, supply routes and timing can vary; my field data provide an example of a family who chose to purchase household chemicals, toiletries, long-storage food, and so forth for the entire coming year in Tyumen'.

There is another, special, case of individual supply. Some reindeer herders from southern Yamal spend their winters close to the city of Nadym. There is no public transport between Nadym and Iamal'skii Raion settlements, nor a winter road: to get from Iar-Sale to Nadym by car, one has to make a long detour through Salekhard. But there is a good snowmobile track used by tundra residents and their relatives between these points; it runs along the same route as the one that Nenets and Khanty have long been using to get there from Yamal. When new kinds of vehicles became available (including powerful snowmobiles), many families began shopping for the spring and summer season in the stores of Nadym, where the selection is better and the prices are lower than in Yamal settlements. Before that, all the spring supplies came through Iar-Sale: it was impossible to drag the heavily loaded sleighs from Nadym for over 100 kilometers of spring snow and then take them across the Ob River. Bringing goods to the Yamal side first and then going back to reindeer herds (the way they do it now) was impossible before without powerful snowmobiles. (Once again, this example makes us think about the sense in which we can speak about the "lack of roads" in the North.)

Another type of widespread trade in the region is direct sales, which is how beauty care, perfumery, and household chemicals are distributed. These networks usually include women from all population groups: incomers, locals, and natives. The Amway network is of particular interest here.<sup>29</sup> This network was first brought to the IaNAO by a woman with a university degree; she spent her early years in the tundra (EU-Yamal 2014). I saw Amway items (household chemicals and

washing liquids) in the homes of all kinds of *okrug* residents: teachers, bureaucrats, museum employees, plumbers, doctors, drivers, and so forth. I even had a chance to witness and record a workshop for Amway product distributors: the distributors were taught how to explain to tundra women the advantages of this brand for nomadic households. Because of the lack of roads, the network distributors have to create complex schemes that involve all available channels of goods shipping (sending them in parcels with drivers, with traveling friends, by helicopter, etc.).

### ***Clothing***

The majority of my interviewees were not satisfied with the selection and prices for clothes and shoes in the stores in Salekhard and in the settlements. Almost everyone said that they were purchasing only the essentials in the local stores. Various fairs and mobile trade are organized occasionally in the settlements, but they are unable to meet the local demand.

What are the alternatives? One can purchase things while on vacation or on a business trip. These practices are quite widespread and are not limited to clothing. Those who spend at least a part of their vacation in a different region will in all probability plan their trip in such a way as to relax, meet their family and friends, and also go shopping<sup>30</sup> to buy any necessary clothes, shoes, and so forth.<sup>31</sup> This is, in fact, the majority of the population, including locals, incomers, natives living in cities and settlements, and tundra residents who go outside the *okrug* to study or get medical treatment. This option is not available to the tundra residents who rarely leave Yamal; they have to go shopping in local stores.<sup>32</sup>

Some buy goods outside Yamal more often, and some use this opportunity more rarely. As I mentioned above, Yamal residents do not just have relatively higher wages than the non-northern residents, their holidays are also considerably longer, and they get their holiday travel covered by their employer every second year. This enables them not to spend all their holidays on shopping and greatly reduces the overall costs of buying clothes. According to some settlement residents, they do not buy any clothes in the North but bring everything, including children's socks and T-shirts, from "the mainland": the selection and quality is much better there, and the prices are lower. Yamal residents still, in a certain sense, live in a society of deficit like the one that existed in the USSR. They need goods and have money, but there is not much

to buy in local stores. In a shop they often have to buy what is available without any choice, and the local administration is well aware of the situation.

Those who prefer buying clothes while on holiday have to solve several complex problems. First, as in the case of warehouse trips, the amount of clothing required for the entire family for the coming year should be calculated. If the family has children, this task becomes more complicated, as one needs to predict how fast the children will grow and how many clothes and shoes of what size they will need. Second, the purchases have to be brought to Yamal by either using the unreliable Russian Post service or carrying everything on one's own. This is inconvenient, because people usually travel by airplane and must use several connecting flights, while the airlines allow only limited luggage weight.<sup>33</sup>

This practice is also common for everyone traveling outside Yamal, regardless of whether they are incomers, locals, or natives. Interestingly, the geographic distribution of purchases can reveal the connections between Yamal, the rest of the country, and the world. For instance, my informants mentioned bringing underwear from Kalmykia, girls' dresses from the North Caucasus, men's clothes from Bashkortostan, outdoor clothes from Mari El, textiles from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, T-shirts from Cyprus, leather jackets from Turkey, and so forth.

There is one other way of diversifying one's stock of clothes: online trade. People buy clothes for themselves and for their children this way. One young woman, who had recently come to the North, told me: "In my home region, I always loved touching clothes and trying them on before purchasing; however, here, in Salemal, I learned the way of choosing the right things online. But what else can I do?" This practice is widespread in all groups: incomers, locals, and natives; young people use it more frequently than others.<sup>34</sup> According to my informants, the development of online trade is significantly restrained by two factors: the low quality of the Internet connection (everyone complained about it in 2015) and serious problems with delivery.

## **Individual Supply Practices and Categories of Population**

So, we have a set of practices and regulations and a system of new trading practices, sometimes virtual but mostly quite real. How do they work together with the population categories listed above? In

most cases, neither the level of income nor the level of education nor the town of residence determined one's practices of supply. Rather, the crucial factor was having the status of an incomer, a local, or a native. For instance, there are two teachers with university degrees, N. (who studied in St. Petersburg) and T. (who studied in Kurgan), living in Salekhard and receiving almost the same salary. N. gets meat from the tundra because she is native, while T. has to buy it from the store because she had come from the Kurgan region only a year ago (EU-Yamal 2015). This case testifies that the division between incomers, locals, and natives is relevant for the practices described here. At the same time, my data show that in most cases, the practices in question cannot be unambiguously related to a certain category of population; the community works in a more complex way.

First, it turns out that there are no practices used exclusively by one group of the population. There are practices typical of everybody and those typical for two groups out of three. Only the native residents herd the reindeer and can get meat free of charge, both native and local residents can go fishing, and everyone can go berry and mushroom picking.

Second, in many cases, both natives and locals use almost the same practices, and the dichotomy "native / not native," which is so often applied to describe the situation in the North, is not relevant. Both groups go to Labytnangi or buy fish from mediators they know; both go fishing, hunting, and so forth. This rule has only two exceptions: First, only the natives can get reindeer meat from their relatives *regularly* and *free of charge*.<sup>35</sup> The locals usually purchase it. Reindeer belong to the native people, which makes buying reindeer meat fundamentally different from fishing, for example.<sup>36</sup> Second, natives of southern Yamal buy food and goods not only in Labytnangi, as everyone else does, but also in Nadym. Trips in the direction of Nadym are not typical for other groups. As I mentioned before, the track between southern Yamal and the Nadym side of the Ob River is an old route of Yamal nomads that is still in use. Therefore, there are only two practices that are not shared by locals and natives, both dating back to the time long before settlements emerged and large numbers of "Russians" came to the peninsula, and both are still important. There is no significant difference in terms of individual supply practices between natives and locals, but the two important exceptions described above.

The difference is, rather, to be found when comparing the incomers and the rest. Locals and natives are obviously more involved in the practices demanding good navigation skills in both geographic and social

space, knowledge of infrastructure in the region, being part of local social networks that enable coordinating joint actions, giving access to the right persons, finding suitable transport, and so forth. This is why, for example, the incomers can also go fishing but rarely do that on their own, preferring the company of more experienced people, local or native. It also means that social borders drawn on the basis of individual supply practices (as opposed to the one of self-identification or a number of years spent in the North) are constructed differently. Social structure based on supply practices is not a set of static categories but rather a system of dynamic interactions organized around the points of access.

## **Practices of Individual Supply and Social Networks**

No matter how long people live in the North or how they identify themselves, it is essential to be part of the appropriate social networks to be involved in many (though not all) practices of individual supply, which is often connected to how one came to the North. Those coming by themselves, after finding a job through the Internet or with the help of friends who moved to the North recently, are very likely to be excluded from many local practices, and much more likely than those who came recently as well, but have family or friendly relations with older residents. Here I will introduce two cases from my field data that illustrate this idea and help explain how it works. In both cases, young people have moved to Yamal in the last several years and are considered to be incomers.

O. was born in Yamal; she was still a small child when her family went back to the Omsk region, with no friends or relatives left in the North. O. grew up, graduated, and started her professional career in Omsk. She also married there and last year, after a divorce, decided to go to Yamal. She found a job in Salekhard through the Internet. O. builds her personal story in a very interesting way, stressing constantly that she always remembered that she was born in the North, that she feels at home there, that she did not move to the North but came back home, and so forth. She, therefore, obviously would like to identify herself as a local. However, she doesn't have friends in Yamal except for her colleagues, who also have just recently arrived. It is no surprise that she is not involved in supply practices used by locals and natives, which means that she buys food only in a shop, rarely has a chance to get a piece of reindeer meat, and hasn't yet found out where to go to pick mushrooms, and so forth (EU-Yamal 2015).



N. is a young man who came to the North five years ago from the Cheliabinsk region after military service. He considers himself to be an incomer rather than a local. He was invited to move by his aunt, his mother's sister, who came to the North when she was young. Thus, a relative helped him to find a job and accommodation; she introduced him to her friends and taught him how life worked there. Together, with her husband they went fishing, or took the winter road to Labytnangi, and so forth. For everyone around, N. was not just a young man freshly arrived, with neither job nor dwelling, but his aunt's nephew. As a result, he was immediately involved in social networks that had existed long before he came. It was, therefore, not surprising that his supply practices are more typical of locals than those who came recently (EU-Yamal 2015). There are quite a few people like N. in Yamal who can be described as new members of old families.<sup>37</sup>

The examples above show that in terms of supply practices, being involved in well-rooted local social networks is more important than self-identification or years spent in the North. To gain access to various ways of compensating deficit, being involved in old local social networks appears to be as crucial as, for example, having a good command of local geography. Incomers who are not well networked have to make do with goods from local shops and with meat and fish from unknown sellers, and they fully experience their inability to get better food for reasonable prices.

When social networks are built on the basis of family and friendship ties, there must be persons involved in several networks at once. I have already given such examples with locals and incomers. The intersections occur between other groups as well. If a local or incomer happens to be a relative of natives,<sup>38</sup> he or she will be very likely included in their social networks and get access to their supply practices, while natives can get involved in practices more typical of other groups. The following example from my field data shows it well. A young family in Iar-Sale consists of an incomer man, a Nenets woman, and their two children. The family helps their tundra relatives to maintain food supplies, getting meat and fish for free in exchange. They bring goods from Nadym, order goods online for themselves and for their tundra relatives, and travel to Labytnangi to shop. Their children regularly visit their grandmother who lives in the tundra, where they wear traditional fur coats (*malitsas*), and then continue their vacations, staying with their other grandmother in the south of Russia, where they eat apples and buy clothes (EU-Yamal 2014, 2015, 2016).

## **Individual Supply Practices and Local Communities**

Such cases as those described above give us a better picture of how local communities are structured. When seen not as built on the basis of ethnic belonging, self-identification, or years spent in the North but from the perspective of supply practices in use, local communities are not so easily divided into clear, stable categories (like "natives," "locals," "incomers") anymore; they look more like a continuum. Some practices are more typical of a certain group, while others can unite several groups. There are also people in between: locals and incomers included in the practices of natives, natives included in the networks created by incomers, and so forth.

The selected factors enable us to comprehend how, in the three locations in question, despite the constant turnover and renewal of a significant part of population, we still see the gradual formation of more or less stable communities and the appearance of social networks comprising different categories of population and practices shared by different groups.

The case of a family from Iar-Sale, cited above, provides a good illustration of this statement. Mixed marriages of native people and incomers are often regarded as a threat to the traditional culture, but one can view these processes from a very different perspective. Mixed marriages do not destroy social networks of natives and incomers. It is quite the reverse—the networks get extended with new options (like going to visit a grandmother in the south of Russia). I believe that such an extension of social networks makes a Nenets family, in a way, even more sustainable than before. Because of these relations, even nomads from the tundra are included in networks of incomers, while incomers get involved in the lives of the tundra residents. The incomer man from the family in question is now involved in many local practices that wouldn't be available to him without the mediation of natives, and his social position became much more stable as well.

On the one hand, these communities rely on local social networks and local knowledge and skills. On the other hand, they maintain regular and intensive connections between Yamal and the rest of the country. The role of those called incomers is of great significance in this regard. Their regular trips to other regions of the country to visit relatives and buy goods connect Yamal to the rest of Russia, breaking the isolation of this remote Arctic region. Thanks to their individually made connections, Yamal is integrated into Russian economic and

social space (and into the global space as well) not by the gas pipe alone. Most local and many native Yamal residents maintain such connections as well, but the role of incomers is the least obvious. A widespread opinion of them as “useless transient-workers” (*vremenshchiki*) is thus undermined.

Inside Yamal, the interactions are based mostly on connections and the local knowledge of native and local residents.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the presence of all three groups and their constant cooperation makes the local communities more functional and sustainable.<sup>40</sup> I argue that it is this cooperation that allowed the residents of this area to develop a new phase of relations with their social environment, exemplified by private shopping trips between Labytnangi and the settlements.

To fully appreciate the importance of this practice, one should keep in mind that until recently, the Yamal residents who are not natives or professional drivers have not been able to move through the tundra on their own, especially for long distances. They had neither the skills nor the vehicles. At the same time, as I said before, all the settlement residents were dependent on “external” forces and institutions that decided what goods and of what quality and price would be shipped to local retail networks.<sup>41</sup> When the cross-country vehicles became available (and affordable) to individuals, this monopoly began to fade. The settlement residents learned how to drive the vehicles off-road,<sup>42</sup> gained skills for navigating in the tundra, and got accustomed to the fact that the area previously inaccessible for ordinary people suddenly became accessible.<sup>43</sup> Apparently, this new perspective of the tundra shared by all groups of the population was affected by the native attitude toward space: for the native Yamal residents, the tundra has always been a comprehensible and livable area where one could move on one’s own.<sup>44</sup> The arrival of vehicles, the changing perception of the tundra among locals, and the development of new skills enable people to skip waiting for someone to provide them with necessary (and expensive) supplies and to take action into their own hands instead.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude, let me indicate once more that the questions of supply, like the one in the title, helped me to explore two issues. First, they provide a good diagnostic tool that shows one’s place in the existing networks. For instance, if a recent incomer in a settlement claims to regularly get reindeer meat from the herders, there is no doubt that this

person doesn't just have friends among natives but is well incorporated into a native network; if the interview continues, there is a good chance of finding out that this person is either married to a native person or has a native relative. In some cases, asking questions about where people get certain goods helped me to disclose new social networks of which I was not aware.

Second, the supply practices turn out to be related to the issue of community self-organization. In the studied cases, the young, mobile, and solvent residents who experience shortages of supplies and logistical troubles choose not to wait until someone provides them with necessary goods but to solve these problems themselves. They create new contacts and groups that include incomer, local, and native residents and connect them to each other, thus increasing community viability and sustainability.

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## Notes

1. See, e.g., Funk 2015; Novikova 2014; Saxinger 2016; Stammer 2011; Tishkov 2016.

2. In rare cases, a category of "local Russians" is employed (see Vakhtin et al. 2004).

3. First of all, one should mention Niobe Thompson's book (2008) dealing with Chukotka.

4. In citations of field materials, EU stands for the archive of the European University at St. Petersburg and is followed by the place and year of recording, and, occasionally, initials of informants.

5. According to the data of *Demoscop Weekly*, the journal issued by the Higher School of Economics Institute of Demography, the gross migration level in Yamal has been one of the highest in Russia for many years. In the first half of 2016, the region held the second position in the country on this indicator (132 people per 1,000 of the resident population) (<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2016/0697/barom04.php>). The IaNAO and Khanty-Mansiiskii Autonomous Okrugs are important destinations for labor migration in Russia, contested only by Moscow (see more in *Naselenie Rossii 2013*: 327).

6. Special support measures to keep able-bodied population in the North were introduced by the government as early as the Soviet period: northern benefits and compensations including the so-called northern top-ups—increasing top-ups to the usual salary depending on the number of years one has spent in the North. The “northern top-ups” of a worker who is younger than 30 will grow much faster than the worker’s senior colleagues; this is why it is more profitable to come to the North young. “Northern top-ups” are supplemented with “regional coefficients” that increase salaries even more. All the northerners have a longer paid leave than the rest of the country. Residents of the North and their families receive a free holiday trip to any place in Russia every two years. Those who have worked in the North for 15 years or more have the right to retire earlier and get a higher pension. All these benefits are still dispensed in present-day Yamal. By law, everyone working in the North is entitled to them (for a review of the current legislation, see <http://info-personal.ru/oplata/lgoty-i-kompensacii-rabotnikam-krajnego-severa>; for an analytical perspective on the topic, see *Stammler-Gossmann 2008*). In practice, while those employed in state-financed organizations get the whole benefit package, small businesses are sometimes not able to cover, say, a holiday trip for their employees. As a result of these measures, salaries in Yamal, especially in rural areas, are now often much higher than those for the same jobs in other regions (for example, according to my informants, the salary of a rural doctor or teacher can be five or six times higher in Yamal).

7. Particularly when compared with the Southern Urals, the Volga region, and southern Russian regions.

8. None of these three settlements is directly associated with gas production. I made a conscious decision to study locations not associated with gas production at this stage of the project in order to explore the lives of people and places not involved in this industry. It may be that Gazprom and Yamal LNG do not affect the aspects of life I am studying, but this requires further investigation.

9. The fish factory used to be the main employer here during the Soviet period. It has little significance now, though fishing is still a very important part of the household livelihood for most residents of the settlement.

10. A railway connection to Bovanenkovo has been recently introduced in the western part of the Yamal Peninsula, which made a significant impact on logistics in this area of the tundra. The region in question, Southern Yamal, however, still has no railways.

11. This is why summer is preferable for transporting large, heavy loads and building materials.

12. A detailed discussion on the infrastructure in the North can be seen in the article by Bolotova et al. (this issue).

13. E. S. Yaptik, a settlement Nenets, describes this division in her report about interethnic marriages as follows: "In our case, Nenets, Komi and Khanty and the children born out of their marriages are considered to be indigenous. They are equally named so. Nobody would ever call a Komi (*ngysma*) or a Khant (*khabi*) *lutsa*. All the others are *lutsa* (literary 'Russians'), including all Russian-speaking ones: Russians, Ukrainians, Moldavans, Belarusians, Tatars, Caucasians. A Tatar, however, is not just *lutsa*, but *khadian*. Caucasians are also called *paridena lutsa*, 'black Russians,' as people say they herd sheep in the mountains, live in *kishlaks*, etc. Kalmyks, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz people are called *lutsa* when opposed to Nenets (*nenei nenets*)" (Yaptik 2017, oral report).

14. It is actually even more complicated. A Nenets employed as a teacher or doctor can also be called *lutsa*, and it would refer not to an ethnicity but to a job. This is a topic for another paper, however, and I will not elaborate it here.

15. An informant of mine, who came to Salemal after finishing school in the Volga region, married, and brought up two children there, once told me: "Maybe I am local already? I don't know." Everyone around had no doubt that she was "local," and that was actually why they wanted me to talk to her.

16. "A taxi driver told me today that he had been long in the North! How long? For more than 8 months already! A local, indeed!!!" My acquaintance in Salekhard who lived in the North for more than 30 years told me this with the utmost indignation (EU-Yamal 2015).

17. The exceptions are singular and extremely rare. There was, for example, a reindeer herder in Iamal'skii Raion called Slepushkin, who, according to a legend, was born and brought up in the Crimea, came to Yamal for practical training, and stayed in the tundra for good. He married a Nenets woman and lived in a *chum*, and his children were considered to be Nenets.

18. A procurer organization with the official title "The Municipal Enterprise for Reindeer Slaughter and Produce Processing 'Yamal Reindeer.'"

19. I took part in these networks many times when settlement Nenets visiting their relatives to get some meat brought me from a settlement to the tundra, or when I was asked to bring reindeer meat from the tundra to children of tundra residents who lived in the city.

20. The situation with fish has become more complicated in the last few years. Because of rapidly decreasing fish resources, the government officially prohibited fishing of many species, including nelma (*Stenodus nelma*) and muksun (*Coregonus muksun*). On one hand, the prohibition has never managed to stop private fishing and the distribution of catches. It, however, immediately turned those who had always been engaged in fishing into poachers, and made everyday economic practices illegal. The stories of "how someone ran away from fishing inspectors" have been a popular plot in many men's tales in the

last several years. On the other hand, to satisfy the demand for usual species of fish in Yamal, official vendors now buy them not from local fishermen (this is forbidden) but in Krasnoïarskii Krai and the Republic of Sakha-(Iakutiia) (EU-Yamal 2015, SM). As a result, the fish that used to be a symbol of Yamal cuisine is now rarely actually a local food.

21. It should be mentioned that among the tundra residents, a division of labor also exists: herders may buy fish from the fishermen, and fishermen can get meat from reindeer herders. In addition, fishermen not only sell fish through their relatives and friends but can also sell it to the bulk buyers, or “businessmen.” However, a detailed description of such meat and fish sales chains requires a special investigation.

22. For instance, several residents of Salemal mentioned that they used to go berry picking and would gladly do it again, if it were not for fear of bears recently seen roaming in sight of the settlement.

23. Berries are usually sold within networks of acquaintances. Some probably sell berries to commercial procurers, but none of my numerous informants have ever mentioned it.

24. To find out the reasons why, additional research is required.

25. These are, roughly, late April–May and late October–November.

26. Salekhard and Labytnangi are connected by minibus routes, but the only official regular passenger link between Salemal, Iar-Sale, and Salekhard in the winter is by helicopter; these flights are expensive, and only a limited weight is allowed on board.

27. This skill has always amazed me as an urbanite. Every woman keeping her own household is able to make quite accurate calculations of how many loaves of bread and kilograms of flour, how much petrol, condensed milk, and crisp bread rings or dishwashing liquid they need to buy so that it would last until the next supply opportunity is available, which can be as long as a half a year.

28. As I mentioned before, snowmobiles are quite widespread in the region, but as far as I can judge, they are rarely used to go from settlements to Labytnangi for shopping.

29. Amway (short for “American Way,” renamed Quixtar in 2008) is an American company that uses a multilevel marketing model to sell a variety of products, primarily in the health, beauty, and home care markets. It has operated since 1959 and came to Russia in 2005. According to company data, its total turnover in Russia in 2014 consisted of 18.85 billion rubles (approx. \$310 mln.) (<http://news.amway.ru/amwa%D1%83-2014-sales-results/>).

30. Many people complain that the practice of seasonal goods distribution adopted in large cities was not very convenient for them: when they go on holiday, they need to buy winter clothes, while the stores only offer swimsuits, T-shirts, and sandals.

31. This practice is fundamentally different from what the residents of the big European Russian cities buy while on vacation. They often aim to buy

something unusual, nice, or unexpectedly cheap, while in Yamal people are methodically filling the gaps in their stock of clothes.

32. They, too, sometimes have a sort of "remote access" to such goods: their relatives going outside the region often bring something to them from their trips. In the tundra I saw dresses made of cloth bought in Tajikistan, boots brought from Tyumen', headscarves sent to mothers and sisters from St. Petersburg, etc.

33. One should not underestimate these problems. To clarify, I will compare such a holiday trip for shopping to occasional shopping tours to some other part of Europe practiced by some groups in consumer society. If someone living in Munich or Moscow wants to go to, say, Milan, it is enough to buy air tickets and follow a more or less stable flight schedule or travel by car along a good highway. There will be luggage trolleys in the airport, hotels, taxis, and public transport will be available. The way is clear, predictable, and comfortable enough (except in the event of some extraordinary calamity, which rarely happens). There is no need, traveling with small children, to carry bulky bags, spend several hours in an off-road vehicle along a winter road, or change from cutter to ferry, from ferry to train, and wait for several days until the weather conditions allow the helicopter to leave the settlement, only to find that the flight to Moscow booked in advance already left, which means that the tickets to the final destination also go to waste. Now the Yamal family needs to look again for air tickets, which are often already sold out. Children cry for food and drink, run, and play around; heavy luggage cannot be left unattended; local friends are probably not able to shelter the family for the time needed to find tickets, and so on and so forth. Complex itineraries, the number of changes, unreliable connections, and the low level of comfort while traveling dramatically distinguish Yamal holiday trips for individual supplies from shopping on vacation in Milan.

34. Other goods can also be purchased online, such as computer accessories, needlework, etc.

35. I mean regular delivery, not occasional presents from tundra residents.

36. There are professional fishermen among both locals and natives. As far as I know, there are professional fishermen-incomers in other Yamal settlements; however, I never met them in the three localities of my fieldwork.

37. I came across many similar stories of how old school (or high school) friends, brothers, nephews, or even children or parents moved to the North in this way.

38. As my field data show, in order to get meat or fish from the tundra residents for free and on a regular basis, one should join a native family or share a household with someone native (e.g., when a native and an incomer share a dormitory room, the incomer has regular access to meat free of charge). Just maintaining friendship ties with natives is not enough (EU-Yamal 2014, 2015, 2016).

39. The same kind of role distribution in Chukotka was mentioned by Thompson (2008: 139).



40. The lack of cooperation and disregard for the interests of one of the groups can, of course, cause conflicts. Such conflicts can definitely be found in Yamal, but the private supply sphere analyzed in this article does not demonstrate many examples of them.

41. A Salemal resident who was born in a settlement told me in 2015, “I used to think that dairy products cannot be tasty, because they were always sold expired in the settlement. Now we bring them from Labytnangi and the children like them.”

42. For an important analysis of the notion of “off-road conditions” in the North, see Argounova-Low (2012); Konstantinov (2009).

43. To define the residents of northern settlements who professionally travel across the tundra on their own, Yulian Konstantinov has suggested the term *tundra-connected persons*, contrasting them with the people who do not travel in that way (Konstantinov 2009: 39). If one applies this term to Yamal, one can see that this group is rapidly growing in number in Salemal and Iar-Sale because of the increasing number of drivers.

44. A considerable part of those who drive along the temporary winter roads are today native residents.

45. This is an essential difference between this situation and the one described by Aimar Ventsel (2011) for Anabarskii Ulus of Yakutiia. Since 2014–2016, the supply of the Yamal settlements has ceased to be the exclusive privilege of professional merchants (although this had been the case previously).

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