

BROTHERS FOREVER.  
FRATERNAL TIES AND THE DYNAMICS  
OF OBLIGATION IN ARCTIC RUSSIA

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This ethnographic documentation of a settlement in Arctic Russia demonstrates the role of brotherhood in local institutions, individual decision-making and family- and community-based obligations. It shows how crucial these are for understanding the complex dynamics of power, obligation and identity to distinguish the diverse use of fraternal metaphors in the community in contrast to the national level or state ideology. I start with the premise that the most prevalent and emotionally charged concepts of brotherhood are, in fact, local and are rooted in two social institutions – the institute of “a hunting crew” and the local kinship system(s). Although these two evolved and transformed under the Soviet and post-Soviet state regimes, the principles of social organisation, positioning and obligations, essential for ties between men, persisted. As the kinship relations are transformative, they do not create an immutable basis for kin-based resources. Labour, such as marine hunting, makes such a basis. In individual decision-making, only non-optative relations with parents and siblings matter. In this study, my focus is the influence of male siblings and cousins on a man’s actions. In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, some families approve of the monetised service in the army as a substitute for family care and subsistence, and men join their siblings and cousins in the army. The study thus shows how the notion of brotherhood impacts individual decision-making and why it is not difficult, metaphorically speaking, to change sealskin- for heavy-duty leather army boots.

KEYWORDS: brotherhood, return, parallel kinship system, marine hunting, Russian Arctic

The events that followed 24 February 2022 in Ukraine prompted me to think about my male interlocutors from the Russian Arctic and their engagement in the armed forces. As their recruitment has been enlisted and conscripted (asserted by state

authorities through a summons; *povestka*), the question of motivation for such action arises. In the Russian (non-indigenous) province, true patriotism is the prime reason mentioned by relatives when explaining why their son, father or brother decided to go to the Ukrainian front voluntarily. The male friend's influence, financial motives and self-realisation are considered secondary, if at all (Sologub 2022). In the early stages of the war, these recruits grounded their decision in the conviction that they would survive and come back; the operation was still perceived as “not a war” and the death – distant, improbable, most unlikely. In Indigenous communities, however, the decision-making follows different rules, and the reasoning may be different. This study looks at how kinship and the concept of brotherhood enter the decision-making process. Although it has nuances, this model can be applied to other decisions, such as a university choice, career or the passing of the day.

I propose thinking about the concept of brotherhood as a leading factor. This is not a fraternal metaphor the state employs to convince men of their obligations towards their homeland. Rather, this is an internal cultural model, deeply rooted in pre-Soviet social relations. Although the understanding and practice of kin have radically changed throughout the last century (Krupnik and Chlenov 2013, 295), kin relations still provide ground for the most relevant, influential and personally meaningful obligations. In an existentially critical situation, they are imperative.

In the local context, the current participation in the armed forces is not easy to overlook. It must be visible in daily interactions that more than a sixth of young adult men under 30 and about a sixth of mature men between 31 and 45<sup>1</sup> have left the village of approx. 425 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Although urban and work migration, especially in the former age group, is present, the return is unclear in this case, and contact is limited.

The men who “went there” (as they may say in the online chat in regard to mobilisation to the front) and those who did not can be easily clustered according to their kin identity. It is assumed that non-optative relations may have an influence on the decision-making; in this case, parents and siblings have a word to say. There were cases when parents held back their sons from going. Those who went, however, are often brothers, cousins and uncles with the same kin. Whether or not this fact is used by the subjects within or outside the community to persuade the subjects in one way or another remains beyond the scope of this paper. My focus is on the ties among the men that make the decision feasible and, presumably, the action bearable.

1 These numbers are very rough estimates as of spring 2023. No official statistics are open to the public for obvious reasons. The main wave of recruitment, the only conscription in the region so far, occurred in the autumn of 2022. It counts to ca. 12 men from the location. All other men have been enlisted. Men who are natives of the field site but changed their residence are also included. *Emically*, they are perceived as “ours”.

2 *Vserossijskaya perepis naseleniya 2020 goda* (All-Russian Population Census of the year 2020) (2020). Federalnaya sluzhba gosudarstvennoj statistiky (Federal State Statistics Service).

Based on my fieldwork, I assume that two important elements provide the building blocks for the brotherhood model: (1) the hunting crew as an important socioeconomic and kin-related unit and (2) a parallel kinship system derived from a belief in the return of the dead. Let me explain the context of these two phenomena and then link them to the current situation.

#### DISCLAIMER

At the outset, I must mention several important points. I visited the field in person several times (2008, 2010, 2011 and 2014). Due to personal and global circumstances, I have continuously conducted online research since 2015. Therefore, along with the genealogical and community data gathered in person, I regularly consult my partners online, focusing on specific topics we agree on; with their permission, I reflect on the narratives, photographs and videos they send me. I sometimes argue with those partners closest to me, as external pressures inevitably affect our relationships. Moreover, now, at a distance like this, building social relations requires much more work.

The next qualification concerns the protection of my partners. In the field, I always used visual methods of data creation and representation. My interlocutors not only agreed with the collection of visual data but even insisted on it so that their faces and names would never be forgotten; they refused to be anonymised. Today, the situation is rather different, and I am obliged to take extra care so that nothing I write harms their safety; in this text, I will refrain from using personal names, names of the locations and names of the ethnic groups. Thus, I am trying to write about something happening now, despite not being there, something that is very fragile and therefore requires metaphorical language, something that no one has yet had enough distance from. So why write about it at all? The answer is simple. It is impossible not to write. That is how important it is.

#### SETTING

The study focuses on one seashore settlement in the Russian Arctic with the central subsistence economic activity being marine hunting. Since the establishment of the Soviet administration in the region in 1922 (Krupnik and Chlenov 2013, 15), the local Indigenous population has undergone a radical transition. The collective farm system and consolidation policy (*politika ukrupneniya*; 1933–1955 and 1955–1960 respectively) that prompted sedentarisation and relocation affected the hunting opportunities. Today, local people are also employed in the non-customary, state-owned economy (local school, administration, housing management – electricity,

heating, cleaning) or are officially unemployed. In addition, they are involved in small-scale inland hunting, sea and lake fishing, and bird hunting.

Soviet modernisation and the post-Soviet era have transformed the relationships between the groups and increased overall interethnic interactions (Gray, 2005). The lingua franca is Russian (Morgounova, 2004), with formal education also occurring in Russian. The local people themselves conceive and reflect upon the diverse tonalities of status differentiation based on ethnicity and inhabited space. Although I consider numerous occasions that emerge from this co-existence, in regard to the analysis of the kinship model, I focus on the ethnic majority.

#### THE CONCEPT OF BROTHERHOOD IN VARIOUS CONTEXTS

The notion of brotherhood is deeply embedded in diverse aspects of social life, spanning across different cultures and eras. In spiritual traditions, it is often contrasted with natural, blood-based relationships. From a Christian theological perspective (Kessler 1987), brotherhood is mainly about shared faith and the collective pursuit of salvation.

In the medieval history of chivalry, two knights in a close relationship are commonly referred to as “brothers-in-arms” (Keen 1962, Pieniadz 2023). This form of brotherhood is both a legal and a profoundly personal bond, rooted in mutual trust and shared values of honour and bravery. In recent history, the brotherhood has also been a rallying cry in labour and civil rights movements, a powerful tool for social justice and community empowerment (see Green 1973 on the brotherhood of timber workers in the southern United States in 1910–1913 and Webb 2012 on the brotherhood of sleeping car porters). Brotherhood has also evolved within consumer culture, tied to notions of masculinity, leisure and recreation and is commodified (Swiencicki 1988).

In the anthropology of rituals, the accent is on how brotherhood is formalised through ritual practice. For example, Ferdinand Okada’s (1957) study on ritual brotherhood in Nepal highlights how these bonds function as cohesive elements within society. Similarly, Arthur Hocart’s (1935) research on blood-brotherhood explores how such practices among the Zande (Azande) people create enduring bonds that resemble familial relationships. Hocart notes that blood brotherhood is not merely symbolic but entails mutual obligations and privileges, including rights to intermarriage and shared responsibilities. According to Christopher Taylor (2024), this form of brotherhood reflects a complex interplay between ritual, social structure and personal relationships.

In my study, the notion of brotherhood is elucidated as a phenomenon closely related to the kinship system, multiple personhoods and social cohesion. As

community is part of a broader social context, local notions of brotherhood inter-tangle with meanings attributed by the state. The distinction between brotherhood as a metaphor in state ideology and a social phenomenon on the micro-level is crucial. It helps us understand the complex dynamics of power, obligation and identity. Despite the shared terminology, the meanings and obligations at each level can vary significantly.

On the national and state levels, brotherhood is often employed as a metaphor to unify diverse populations under a common identity. These metaphors serve to create a sense of belonging and solidarity among citizens, urging them to perceive their relationship to the state and fellow citizens as akin to familial bonds. The state often mixes paternal, maternal and fraternal metaphors to craft a cohesive national identity, suggesting that the bond between citizens is as natural and unbreakable as that between siblings. The nation is envisioned as a family, and different ethnic groups are seen as brothers within that family. However, this framing can mask underlying power dynamics, where some “brothers” (ethnic groups) are expected to occupy subordinate roles, sacrificing their interests for the greater good of the “family” (nation). This ideology promotes a hierarchical relationship, where unity against external and internal enemies is prioritised, but at the cost of enforcing and perpetuating inequality among different groups. Moreover, use of the fraternal metaphor can also place unrealistic expectations on individuals.

The critical challenge here is recognising the differences in the diverse use of the notions of brotherhood – it is vital to understand the implications of any metaphorical connotations.

This study uniquely focuses on the intimate, personal meanings of brotherhood, providing a fresh perspective on the topic. I have grounded my perspective in an ethnography of the kinship system and daily practices, both spiritual and for subsistence. Only then, based on observations of the social phenomenon, do I turn to the use of fraternal metaphors. But even on such occasions, my primary emphasis will be on the personal and kinship aspects of brotherhood.

#### HUNTING CREW AS A MODEL OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Kinship relations in the studied community are transformative; they do not create an immutable basis for kin-based resources, labour does (cf. the Iñupiat in Barrow and Wainwright, Alaska; Bodenhorn 2000b, 128). The settlement’s long-term key subsistence has been marine hunting. It had always been bound to collective action<sup>3</sup>.

3 Although seal, for instance, was hunted individually and distributed within a family, in the wintertime, if needed, seal meat was shared with others (Bogoraz-Tan 1984, 10).

It was regulated through a social organisation based on a particular kinship model. As marine hunting on the open sea is primarily gendered, and the harvesting and butchering are done by men, the focus will be on men's groups. I will show how the recruitment of the hunting crew changed over time, resulting in an increased role in making the men relatives – “brothers”.

Throughout the twentieth century, the kinship system transformed repeatedly and radically: from the clan and lineage (1910s–1930s) to (mixed) residential community (1930s–1950s), the nuclear family (1960s) and an extended matrifocal family (led by a widowed or single mother or grandmother since the 1970s–1980s) (Krupnik and Chlenov 2013, 297).

These changes translated into the ways hunting crews were formed. In the 1920s, the hunting crew was formed through lineage. The main decisions about the hunt were taken by elders in the lineage, often older and more experienced men than the boat owner. Before the Soviet modernisation, the composition of the crew was dynamic. If a lineage lacked a sufficient number of adult men, then the crew included more lineages from one clan or all the families, regardless of actual kin ties or the boat owner's affinal relatives from other lineages and clans (e.g., the boat owner's brother-in-law).

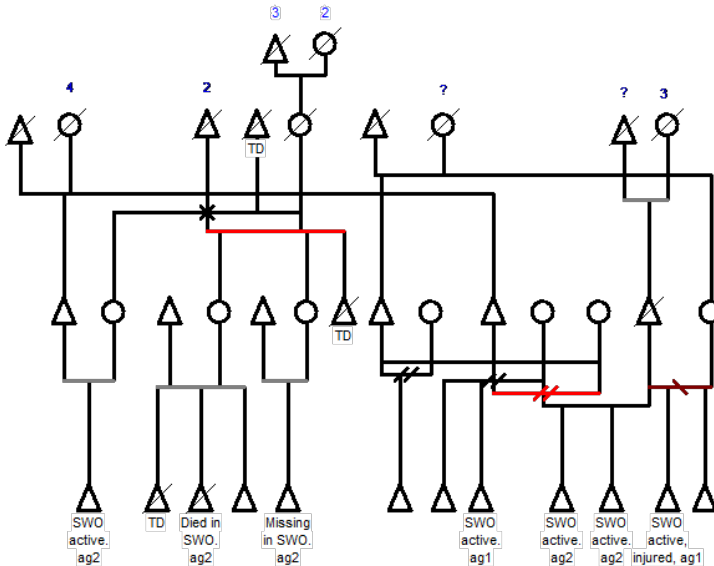
Under the pressure of Soviet policies, such as permanent settlement, controlled housing, relocation and consolidation, many of the foundations of kinship ties appeared obsolete. The significance of kin still persists but it appears as more of a “symbolic social element” (Krupnik and Chlenov 2013, 290); however, in certain contexts, it continues to shape collective action. The division into lineage and territorial groups remains a vital structuring principle of social organisation (Bodenhorn 2000b, 130), whether it concerns hunting, burial places or commemoration rituals.

Scheme 1 demonstrates how the hunters in contemporary hunting crews are recruited and how they are related.

A hunters' crew bound to one whaleboat has persisted as an important symbolic social unit; this is observed also in adjacent seashore communities (Vakhrushev 2006, 126).

In the 1990s, the resumption of crew marine hunting occurred in the settlement, paralleled by a process of reinventing “tradition”. After about two decades of industrial hunting and even three decades of completely absent or extremely sporadic crew hunting, two stepbrothers, both descendants of a well-respected hunter, initiated a return to the crew type of marine hunting. Another impulse came from related communities in Alaska; this was possible when the US-Russian border opened in 1988 (see Freeman et al. 1992 and Kishigami 2016 for the same processes in the Arctic).

The significance of the revived whaleboat crew as a social unit, I suggest, is mainly symbolic. The practice of recruiting hunters from extended family or non-relatives



*Scheme 1: Kinship ties among men – special military operation (SWO) recruits*  
 This scheme portrays just a few men involved and serves as an example. I built two other schemes with other volunteers. The prevailing relations are brothers, cousins and step-cousins. In the emic understanding, they are simply brothers.  
 The scheme only shows male offspring in the current generation.  
 The locus is shown in the oldest generation with a number in blue. If a number is not shown, the men are incomers.  
 ag+number is the age group to which the person belongs:  
 born in 1980s  
 born in 1990s  
 born in 2020s  
 TD stands for tragic death.

as opposed to the relatives directly from one’s own lineage has become common. In the Canadian Arctic, Nobuhiro Kishigami identifies the same flexibility and finds the reason for the introduction of the quota system by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) (Kishigami 2013, 5). This is not the case, however, in this settlement. The choice of men to join a whaling crew is limited. The official occupational flux might not seem high but the high variety of personal dynamics in crew arrangement is (observation of two hunts in 2010 and 2014); the latter might be connected mainly with the shortage of young men willing to join the organisation

as full-term employees. The insufficient number of hunters may be due to it being a risky, low-paid profession with an insufficient transfer of knowledge and the presence of alcoholism.

The establishment of “territorial-neighbourhood community hunting organisations of the small-numbered Indigenous nations of the north” (*Territorial’no-sosedskaia obshchiny korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa*)<sup>4</sup> in the 2000s has led to new property relations. These relations are entangled, however, in the former Soviet *sovkhoist* (state farming) practices. On the one hand, boat ownership, which was originally essential for the hunting arrangements, is only formal, at the time of the hunting. In reality, all the devices and gear belong to the municipal organisation sponsored by the regional government. On the other hand, the actual use of the gear goes beyond the organisation’s utility; in everyday life, it is used for both private and professional ends. The head of the municipal organisation uses prestige and authority to create the primary hunting crew. His reputation now does not depend solely on the skills related to hunting, but also on his capacity to communicate the community’s needs with the government<sup>5</sup> and acquire as many extra financial resources as possible, for example, through the maritime transportation of guests (e.g., geologists, archaeologists, filmmakers) or tourist hunting expeditions.

To understand decision-making and how kin ties matter, it is important to look at the next step of collective labour – meat distribution. Studying Saqqaq in North-western Greenland, Jens Dahl (2000, 177-178) distinguishes sharing as being an integrated part of relations in the production system and, thus, a moral obligation, an exchange in which the distribution of meat gifts is voluntary. Kishigami (2013, 34), writing on Barrow, also describes two kinds of sharing of whale: sharing by rule and voluntary sharing. Barbara Bodenhorn (2000b) writes about large scale sharing based on a generalised exchange and individual sharing based on individual or marital decisions, in which relatives are expected to share but it is not predetermined. In the settlement under study, the system of sharing is open, in the sense that men of any kin background are allowed to enter the hunting crews. Thus, the catch is not distributed within a single kin group but is dispersed among the majority of the community members. The share is compensation for what the hunter has invested in the hunt; this is mostly his skills, as the tools and gear are ascribed to an

4 This status is further described in the Civil Code of the Russian Federation (Grazhdanskij kodeks Rossijskoj federacii), Article 123.16 (part I, 30 November 1994 N 51-FZ, amended on 8 August 2024. Changed 31 October 2024). The detailed information on the communal organization is given in the Registry of Businesses and Organizations. Rusprofile. 2023. “TSO KMNS ‘Chaplino’.”

5 It is done in cooperation with the authorised representative of the district’s head of administration. In 2010, the leading hunter’s brother-in-law took this post; in 2014, the leading hunter’s wife assumed the position.



individual but represent the property of the hunting organisation. Entitlement for a share is not determined by kinship or marital connections.

Nevertheless, the amount and the quality of the share varies. A successful crew does not exclusively own the whale meat. All the hunters who took part in the hunt, towing as well as other men (individual helpers – non-hunters or hunters who for certain reasons did not take part in the hunt) who assisted in carving up the animal, get their share. Today's harvesting process is very similar to that described by Kishigami regarding the community in Barrow (2016, 50-51). Sharing during the butchering follows standardised practices. All the men who participate in the hunt and whale harvesting receive a share of meat and a share of whale blubber. Some hunting trips are done in cooperation with the members of other communities. The guests may assist in the process of butchering the meat, but their role may be of minor importance. For instance, in 2010, one crew from another village assisted in whale harvesting and butchering. Ultimately, each hunter took home two regular shopping bags filled with meat and blubber. Even if unrelated in terms of kinship, these men have the right to put forward a claim generated through their labour.

Villagers who come to the shore where the whale is butchered weigh the meat and blubber they wish to have and pay for the items in the village (the payment is not for the marine product itself as, according to the IWC license, this is forbidden, but for the costs of the actual hunting, such as fuel and equipment). The baleen, walrus tusk and walrus penis are the subject of the grey economy. The successful hunter decides who gets it, assuming that the item will be sold for money, and he will get the share. Community feasts or feasts in the captain's house are not strategies employed for sharing in this community. Most community events, even if they include "native food", are sponsored by the district government and are highly formal. As mentioned above, immutable ties (spouses, parents) do not suggest that the individual is obliged to reciprocate the meat or money earned in the hunting. Yet, sharing this with optative relatives is expected. If they are recruited, for instance, as brothers through friendship (relatives not affirmed through birth), sharing is welcome.

Additionally, the system of sharing is comprised of voluntary, rather informal sharing. Voluntary sharing supports the assumption that close kin must be available as a source of altruism (e.g., Lee and DeVore 1968) and, thus, provides sufficient adaptivity for the kin group. This is also true with respect to marine products, although they are not necessarily essential to today's subsistence. The benefits of sharing comprise of much broader realm of services and items than marine meat. It is also important to consider the social costs of *not* giving (Mauss 1925): loss of reputation or even exclusion from the community might be the case.

Both strategies, formal and voluntary, enable highly valued resources culturally, such as marine products, to be distributed efficiently to a whole community

(Fienup-Riordan 1983; Bodenhorn 2000a, 2000b; Kishigami 2013) and levelling the amount of consumption and possession of marine products among local households, contributing to community well-being and unity (Evaloardjuk et al. 2004).

The system of sharing the catch transforms into other types of sharing (other food provision and security or childcare) and is bound to specific types of social and genealogical relations. Genealogical relatedness and residence play important roles in sharing (Betzig and Turke 1986). In the community, these two intersect. If some people move from the village to the town, people try to find ways to overcome the extra distance and provide benefits to close relatives. This is complicated by the limited transport infrastructure, transport costs, dangerous environment and longevity of the marine products. Therefore, food-sharing households are more closely related genealogically than any other households in the population at large. More food is shared within the community than between the settlements. The costs for extra distance must be compensated for by the genealogical relatedness. An in-kind return gift is never a certainty; a person minimises the risk of loss by investing in related individuals (see, e.g., Essock-Vitale and McGuire 1980, 1985).

In exchanges between individuals of two adjacent villages who are not relatives, the flow of items or services is supported because both actors find them scarce and value them highly. The capacity of such an exchange, even outside of kin, is an important factor in the development of the ranked and stratified society. Interfamilial differentiation of occupations and subsistence patterns also belong to these conditioning factors in the ranking of maritime food-gatherers (Watanabe 1983, 217).

In exchanges between relatives and non-relatives, products other than “native food” must be subject to a gift. Soviet modernisation led to a new understanding of categories such as personal, private and public property; to a certain extent, these persist to the present day. The flow of property from the collective to the personal – “popular redistribution” – is a common practice; Konstantinov (2015, 17) uses the terms “bottom-up redistribution” and “vernacular redistribution”. In the 1990s, for instance, employees of a fox farm consumed fish designated for foxes or exchanged them with relatives and non-relatives for other products. Morally, it was justified by the state’s inadequate food supply in the northern territories as well as by the fact that the fox farms were to be put out of service soon anyway. The blurry boundary between personal and public equipment, such as snowmobiles or whaleboats, lingers under the new hunting organisation; in this case, their use for private purposes is justified by the needs of the local community. The kickback from deliveries or projects has remained a regular transfer of goods or benefits from public to private hands; this practice is usually monetised. For instance, a portion of rubbing alcohol, delivered to the peninsula as disinfectants and antiseptics for medical clinics, is sold privately to substance abusers. These arrangements have become embedded in the existing

system of kin relationships and distribution and have triggered additional informal models of exchange in everyday life.

#### KIN AND “PARALLEL KIN” AS A MODEL OF INTERNAL BONDS

My perspective on the phenomenon of brotherhood through social organisation and local kinship model(s) must be further expanded by the analysis of what I call *parallel kin*. Such kin stems from the animistic belief in the *return* and is closely related to the Indigenous naming system, especially the acquisition of personal- and a dead person’s name(s).

Becoming a “real” person is marked by naming (vom Bruck and Bodenhorn 2006). As Kishigami states, naming serves to classify or identify individuals and is a part of the worldview conception<sup>6</sup> and social structures<sup>7</sup> (Kishigami 1997, 151). The naming mechanism reflects a circular conception of the universe divided into two modes, natural and supernatural, where an interchange of the living and the dead constantly takes place (Hamayon 1990; Bodenhorn 2000a). The notion of a return, present in both systems, stems from the principle of horizontal connectedness and interaction throughout the cosmos (Turner 1994) and equally concerns human beings and animals, such as whales or seals (Rasmussen 1929, 55–59).

When a person dies, a certain notion of the personhood (locally not always understood as a soul)<sup>8</sup> is surrendered to be returned, and this is secured by the name given to the new-born descendants; this may happen five times at most. I use the emic term “the return” (*vozvrashchenie*) used in the Russian language (the *lingua franca* of the region), rather than reincarnation or rebirth, to mark the importance for the local people of the decisive role of ancestors in the movement of this cycle.<sup>9</sup>

6 Cf. Wachtmeister 1956; Fienup-Riordan 1983.

7 Cf. Heinrich 1969; Guemple 1965, 1972; Saladin d’Anglure 1970, 1994.

8 In my research on the *return*, I draw on the study of Mark Nuttall (1994) on the acquisition of a dead person’s name in the Upernavik district of northwest Greenland. Here the *return* is materialised in the name, which “upon death leaves the body and remains ‘homeless’ until it is called back to reside in the body of a newborn child” (Nuttall 1994, 123). In contrast to the term *name-soul* (Nuttall 1994, 123) or *recycled name-souls* (Schweitzer and Golovko 1997, 170), I employ the term “returned name” or “shared name” mostly as the term “soul” is viewed as Christian by the locals. The name is regarded as a social and spiritual component of the person, something that is closely connected with the other spiritual components of the soul and the breath soul (spirit). The local ontology of soul, spirit and personhood indeed deserves a separate study.

9 Rane Willerslev (2009) uses the term “rebirth” for the dead coming back to life through their newborn descendants and the term “return” for the living leaving this world for the realm of the dead. This logic follows the hierarchical order, in which the dead stand higher than the living. I shall use the emic term

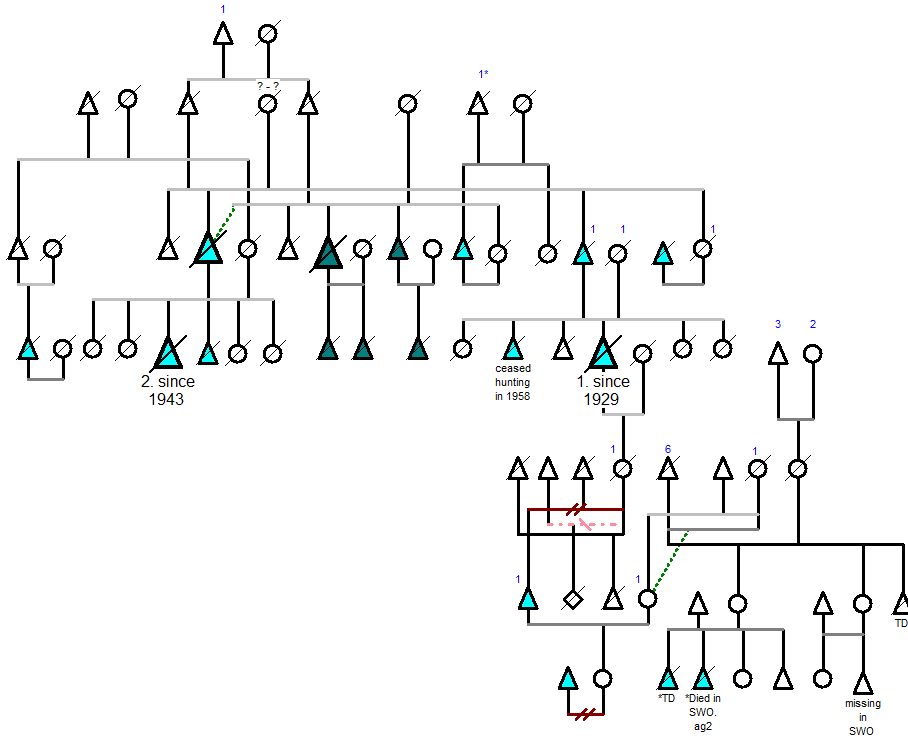
The locals explain the deceased person in a newborn as being “the one who has returned”. A deceased person in a dream guides the living: “I will come back in your child.” Besides dreams, other ways of knowing who is to come back in a newborn baby include divination, elders’ advice or birth circumstances. It is also possible that the name of a returned ancestor is long unknown, and the child may grow up without it, using only the Russian first name.

The return of the deceased has a specific reference to a particular person. The naming pattern does not restrict itself to the use of the same name in alternating generations (grandparents and grandchildren), to gender or even to a relative (return of non-relatives or animals is common). Numerous informants told me that the person can have several local names (even names to mislead the bad spirits) but “only those names are real, which have already been used” (i.e. “the returned”). The continuity of the names makes material the circulation of the living. During the Soviet era, the naming became more complicated. Without diverging into another subject, it is worth mentioning that on an official level (birth certificate, IDs, etc.), local people started naming their children with Russian first names, adopted patronyms and made-up surnames (the first surnames usually come from the first names of the father or mother). The returned name has persisted as an inner, more intimate name.

The *return* of a dead person’s name (Nuttall 1994, 123) does not just play an important role in preserving the notion of ancestorship, it is not only directed towards the past. The dead person’s name has an impact on a living person’s genealogical and social identity without, however, giving a person implicit instruction on how to act. Local children learn the identities of those people who returned through them. The children equally acquire knowledge of the various relationships that link them to an intricate pattern of *genealogical* and *affinal* kin. Kin relationships by name are often extended beyond one’s own lineage, however. Therefore, they encompass a wider network of people and may include broader relations of solidarity. Nevertheless, different names can lead to contested identities: a person, while being him or herself, is nonetheless regarded as a returned deceased relative. These multiple names and identities pose a question as to how possible singularisation of a person’s identity is and whether it is at all necessary. Perhaps there are multiple selves of a “dividual” (Strathern 1988).

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*return*, which might change the perspective, from the view of someone who is still alive. Life is then seen as something that is worth postponing. If, however, the reunion with deceased relatives is idealised, such postponement makes no sense. The distinction between fearing the dead, fearing death and longing to return to deceased relatives can then be easily blurred. This, in turn, raises numerous questions on how the phenomenon of *return/rebirth* (Nuttall 1994; Bodenhorn 2000a) affects people’s lives, including someone’s decision to stay alive or, by contrast, commit suicide.



*Scheme 2: Role of kinship in the formation of a hunting crew*  
 The enlarged gender symbol shows the lead hunter. In the 1920s–1940s generation, two crews are shown in two colours: turquoise and petroleum green. In 1958, many hunters ceased hunting and were forced to shift to construction work. The men in the next generation ceased crew hunting due to the introduction of industrial hunting.  
 The offspring of the lead hunter 1 form today hunting crew 1, always marked turquoise, whereas the offspring of the lead hunter 2 now form hunting crew 2, not shown here.  
 \*Not from locus 1 but related to the lead hunter through a step-aunt.  
 1\* He was originally from a different locus but identified with a new one through his foster father.

This complex social classification preserves the bond between the dead and the living and produces additional affiliations among the living. It provides a subject with a set of extra social bonds (and obligations) based on parallel kin ties. One such additional affiliation may be brotherhood.

Consider this example (Scheme 2): X returned for the first time in 1 (deceased nephew to X). Then he returned in the same year through 2 (alive, first cousin twice

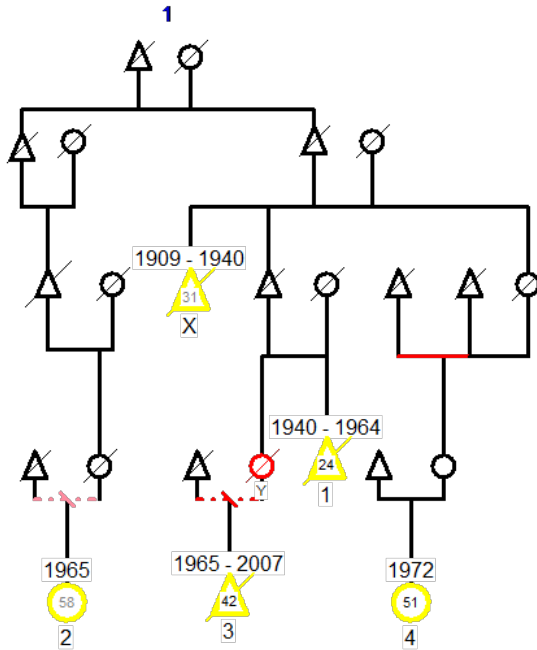
removed to X) and 3 (deceased, grandnephew to X). In seven years, X supposedly came back again with the birth of 4 (alive, grandniece to X). She is already the fourth person to return and to hold the name X. The circulation of the living mentioned above is made evident by the continuity of the name.

Even more crucial for understanding the model of brotherhood is the fact that this name transmission puts several individuals in close social associations, such as namesake relations (Kishigami 1997, 154). For those who come from the same regular kin group, this extra tie provides them with a set of additional bonds and obligations. One person can come back through several persons, even peers – what are called *name-sharers* (Kishigami 1997, 154). In the above example, all the name-sharers come from the same locus, but this might not always be the case.

Subjects 2, 3 and 4 are all holders of the name X and name-sharers in a namesake relation (Kishigami 1997, 154). This name-sharing inspires a specific mode of classification; in addition to the genealogical system, there is another system of relationships by name which extends beyond genealogical kin to encompass a wider social network of people. The three persons may address each other using either a regular kinship term, for example, 2 addresses 4 as “(third) cousin”, or they could use just “X”, referring to a namesake term as they are “buddies” sharing the name of the returned uncle X (cf. formal and skewed kinship terms in Kishigami 1997, 155; and voluntary in Guemple 1965, 331). They are of similar age, so the name-sharing would suggest but not oblige them towards mutual care, help, and gift-giving.

Besides buddies, the returned name also prompts brotherhood (“by addition”, not through the same parent) as it confers a social identity on the person who, while being himself or herself, is simultaneously regarded as a returned deceased relative. According to Scheme 3, Y had a patrilineal uncle X, a brother 1, and a son 3; that is what the “regular” kinship system demonstrates. In the system of relations set by the returned name, Y’s son was at the same time her patrilineal uncle and brother. So, there might have been a life situation, in which 1 is reminded of himself through 3, that is 3 acted as if he was 1; Y then could address 3 with the word “Bro”, not “Son”.

And yet, there is nothing implicit in naming that informs people how to act; individuals are autonomous in their agency. Although all the individuals who hold the same returned name, as mentioned above, may also share some personal traits that resemble X, they have their distinct personalities and biographies. Shared names do not determine people’s personality, they are rather reference points in a complex network of interpersonal relationships amongst persons, both living and dead. There is a vast room for particularity, which can be expressed through individual skills, conduct and dispositions (“excellent hunter”, “cheerful kind of guy”, “mother of ten children, out of whom four died tragically”). At the same time, the persons who share the same returned name might have



Scheme 3: Brotherhood by addition through the returned name.

a different position in the parallel kinship system; hence, their obligations and affiliations towards their relatives differ.

As shown, naming mechanisms play a significant role in the context of multi-layered individual, communal and ethnic identities. The concept of *return* invokes parallel kinship relations, including name-sake relations, affiliations beyond kin and wide social networks. The returned name can thus put several men in close social association. In addition to consanguinity and genealogy of the locus, there is another system of relationships – genealogy based on the “returned” name(s). It spans a broader social network of people and, hence, creates additional networks of brotherhood.

CONCLUSION

The enormous stress of the last century has led to a multilayered system of formal and informal rules that involve local kin as well as Soviet and post-Soviet regulations and informalities. As the two examples of a hunting crew and the returned

name elucidate, the transition must be seen under the light of continuity, not as an abrupt change. Despite the radical changes in the social structure, kinship ties can still facilitate mutual reciprocity. Equally so, however, proximity is produced through labour. Both patterns, hunting crews embedded in the current socioeconomic dynamics and name-sharing – in the parallel kinship system – translate into models of brotherhood.

Despite their multiple affiliations, individuals can act as independent agents; their decision-making is autonomous, but it does not happen in a boundless vacuum. My study shows that the brother has a crucial impact on man's choice-making.

The recruitment to become one's brother cannot be reduced to individuals who belong to each other by virtue of being born to the same mother, by adoption by the same person or by an acknowledged sexual union outside of marriage. The ties occurring through a hunting crew and name-sharing may bring up a brotherhood of equal significance. They also fall into the non-optative kinship sphere (Heinrich 1963 as cited in Bodenhorn 2000b, 136), their relatedness cannot be denied without incurring social disapproval.

Based on my experience, we can also add a brother by friendship to this list of recruitment possibilities. It is not yet another descriptive category but a powerful bond with significant moral content. It is neither a tight friendship, "best buddies" in the European sense, nor a brotherhood-like bond enforced through a criminal act (Ben-Yehoyada, 2022). Even if these close friends are not immediate relatives, they always agree they must be kin-related in such a small-numbered community. What is decisive is that this category brings along numerous moral commitments.

A close affinity between men may result in cooperation, such as hunting, fishing, car repair and construction (a garage being a local men's club), and setting up a casual job for a pal. Brothers share names from their families (both regular names and returned names) and give them to their brother's children. Childcare, joint hunting and the sharing of political standpoints also fall within the expectations of this relationship. As the men – women's relationships might not always saturate the emotional intimacy (except perhaps mother-son relationships), the relationship with "my bro" and "my buddy" also allows for intimate talks or advice.

Manly togetherness is also associated with addiction. "Brothers" can become, for instance, alcoholics together: "K. started in the company of alcoholic friends, perhaps he was subconsciously attracted to those people who were drinking and to alcohol itself. He then said, 'I've had enough of those who drink, they are as weak as me, I cannot help them,' and he was able to quit" (F, 2014).

Brotherhood is a heavily emotionally charged relationship, as is evident in the case of liminal experiences. If the two men want to end their lives, they do it together or soon after each other. It is also not rare that when a man dies, of addiction or not,



the other one follows him, committing suicide. At the same time, if one of the buddies is older or more experienced and decides to stay sober, this role modelling can encourage his brother to also quit: “When there is stimulation, there is no risk of drinking. Like S., he took me as a role model, saw that without drinking one can buy a car, a motorcycle or a scooter. So he managed to quit” (V., 2014).

The two models presented in the paper may serve as explanatory tools with certain limitations: an in-depth ethnography of the organising principles embedded in the two local institutions does not say how exactly these principles lead to certain observable actions or behaviours. In this effort to understand how local men make decisions today regarding their lives, whether their collective participation in state-prompted events, shared private business in the city, local marine mammal hunting or something else, it is necessary to engage the principles of brotherhood not only through obligations towards the kin but also through the perspective of intimacy and emotion.

It is precisely because of the interplay of emotions and individually perceived obligations that the metaphors used by the state to promote a unified national identity do not automatically resonate with the same meaning at the micro-level. People’s understanding of brotherhood within their families or communities may not translate directly to their perception of national or military brotherhood. Points of tension occur when individuals and communities reflect on (or even question) the ways in which the State extends familial obligations to the national level.

The state’s emphasis on family values, however, can contribute to a situation where individuals feel trapped by their obligations, leading to frustration, even aggression. The state may demand loyalty, sacrifice and even self-subordination by framing these demands as natural extensions of familial duty or kinship-like obligations one owes to one’s family. For instance, “going against the nation” can be equated to abandoning one’s family, thereby stigmatising dissent or the desire for emancipation from domination as a violation of deeply ingrained moral duties. In some cases, the increasing intrusion of state ideology into private life exacerbates these tensions, leading to domestic violence, substance abuse and other forms of dysfunction that reflect broader societal pressures.

The violence within kinship relations mirrors broader societal violence enacted by the state. This cycle of violence reflects the deep entanglement between personal and political spheres, where the pressures of national ideology seep into and distort intimate relationships. From this perspective, an individual can find the link between a kin brother, a nation-brother and a brother-in-arms congruent. In making choices, the shift, metaphorically speaking, from sealskin- to heavy-duty leather army boots, from family care to service to the state, may not seem perplexing.

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