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Continuous Militarization as a Mode of Governance of Indigenous People in the Russian Arctic

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Abstract

This article analyzes ethnographic data that shows long-term militarization forms a significant part of state governance of the population and environment in the Arctic. Kola Peninsula, the study region, is a borderland with the West and has since the 1950s been a heavily militarized area. Applying insights from research on militarization, subjectivities, materiality, borders, and regionalism in autocratic regimes, I show how militarization shapes the environment and the lives of Indigenous reindeer herders. Despite discourses of demilitarization in the 1990s, Kola Peninsula did not move away from militarization as part of governance. The article explores what I call *continuous militarization* by engaging with two phenomena: (a) fencing off territories for military use and infrastructure, and (b) nuclear pollution. It discusses the interrelations of materiality and knowledge in maintaining Indigenous subjectivities and culture in line with the objectives of militarization, and shows how Russia uses participation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region to support the objectives of militarization and justify them to the local population. The article finds that militarization is employed by the authorities to solidify the current autocratic regime among residents in the Arctic.

Keywords

Arctic; Indigenous people; Kola Peninsula; militarization; regional governance; Russia

1. Introduction

A common epistemological premise of research with Indigenous people in Russia is that state governance is grounded in domination, economic exploitation, and environmental injustice (Donahoe, 2009). Scholars have provided elaborate accounts of the Indigenous peoples' suffering and resistance (Anderson, 2000). In this context, the support of Indigenous organizations and individuals for the Russian war in Ukraine raises many

questions. Indigenous people seem not only loyal to Russian authorities but also willing to make huge sacrifices, including the loss of Indigenous lives. In this article, I cast light on this contradiction by analysing ethnographic data collected between 1996 and 2017 that uncovers how militarization in Russia is a realm for governance of people and land and produces Indigenous subjectivities that are more likely to live with, tolerate, and accept war.

Kola Peninsula, the geographical region of this study, is a borderland with Finland and Norway and a key part of a heavily militarized area known as Russia's Barents Sea bastion (Regehr, 2023). Russia's Northern Fleet is located there with some of the most important ports for servicing nuclear submarines in Gremikha, Zapadnaia Litza, Poliarny, and Vydiaevo. Air force bases Olen'ia and Pechenga, and nuclear missile bases Ostrovnoi and Severomorsk, were constructed in the 1950s–1960s, and after a period of decline in the 1990s are now being rebuilt (Melino et al., 2020). Reorganizations in 2010 and 2014 elevated the status of the Northern Fleet and made the region the headquarters of Russia's Arctic military command (Kjellén, 2022).

Here, I apply the notion of militarization as described by social scientists: A process of social and material production by which states apply violence in order to achieve certain results, (such as sovereignty, defence or even expansion of state territory), which they present as legitimate (Lutz, 2002). Militarization in the Kola Peninsula has been justified as defending against the West both during the Cold War and during the present war in Ukraine. Militarization includes the construction of military infrastructure, and stationing a large number of military personnel in the area. Of equal importance are the long-term formation of social institutions, knowledge, identity reconstruction, ideology, and values, driven by historical and Communist legacies, that all serve militarization and help justify its purposes and cost (Lankina et al., 2016; Lutz, 2002).

Militarism, as defined by scholars, is a much narrower term, attending to how a society forms its values around war as a way of protecting its sovereignty and security. Militarism's focus is on the political sphere and on social transformation driven by war-centred values, while militarization incorporates both the material and discursive aspects of military domination (Lutz, 2002). In this study I do not distinguish between these terms as I believe that material infrastructure is instrumental in knowledge and value formation (Bruno, 2019). Materiality is a mechanism of state power and is formative of Indigenous subjectivities as much as ideology. Previous studies on post-communist societies shed light on the power of propaganda and media on social behaviour, public opinion, trust, and attitudes (Ambrosio et al., 2022; Arpino & Obydenkova, 2020; Demchuk et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2022). Indigenous people in the Russian Arctic are influenced both by the historical legacies and the contemporary "information war" of ideological indoctrination.

Subjectivity is understood in this study as constitutive of governance over Indigenous subjects. Subjects are constituted by power, both power over and the power to act (Burchell et al., 1991). Subjectivities shape individuals' will and identity. Dominant knowledge and discourses orient subjects in terms of what is "normal" and expected. Subjects internalize a continual reflexive self-discipline that enforces normality and collective social control over individuals. Feminist theorists (Butler, 1997) contribute to the analysis of subjectivities by stressing their plural and dynamic character, and how they are constituted by material and embodied practices. Studies on animal subjectivities emphasise the importance of material things within a complex ecology (Holloway, 2007). As Anderson et al. (2017) argue, human relations with animals are inscribed in material infrastructures, such as fences and corrals. In reindeer husbandry, human and animal subjectivities evolve in constant interaction with each other and militarization and its materiality are

important factors in the process. Andy Bruno, who writes about environmental subjectivities in Russia, provides a review of research on subjectivity in the region (Bruno, 2019).

Despite discourses of demilitarization in the 1990s, grounded in regional international cooperation for peace and environmental sustainability in the Arctic (Regehr, 2023), Kola Peninsula did not actively move away from militarized governance, partially due to entrenched Communist legacies. In this article, I explore continuous militarization by engaging with two phenomena: (a) the impact of fencing off territories for military use and infrastructure, and (b) the impact of nuclear pollution and international cooperation around it. These have been selected as reflecting directly perceived material infrastructure, as well as the more invisible and slowly evolving impact of nuclear pollution on local residents and land users' environmental knowledge, everyday spatial practices, and bodily activities. I reveal how both visible and invisible infrastructures and impacts of militarization are being normalized as part of the terrain, air, and water, and define human movement and activities in the environment. I discuss how materiality and knowledge are interrelated in maintaining Indigenous subjectivities in line with the objectives of militarization. Following the recent literature on regionalism and its relation to autocracy, propaganda, and Communist legacies (Libman & Obydenkova, 2018; Obydenkova, 2022a; Obydenkova & Libman, 2019), I show how Russia uses its participation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR), to support the objectives of militarization and justify them among local population. My premise is that continuous militarization, naturalized in the environment and normalized in the bodily and knowledge practices of local residents is being employed by the authorities to solidify the present autocratic regime in the Arctic.

Social scientists emphasize the intersectionality of militarization (Enloe, 2000). As part of state formation, it produces inequalities along ethnic, cultural, economic, and gender divides (Gill, 1997). Discriminatory attitudes towards certain ethnic groups in Russia are pronounced today, as pointed out by studies on historical legacies (Libman & Obydenkova, 2019, 2020). In the Kola Peninsula, militarization intersects with processes, such as stereotypical representations of Indigenous culture and individuals as less developed, and of Indigenous economic activities as primitive and incompatible with modern economy (Vladimirova, 2014). These make excluding territories from reindeer herding for military purposes easier to justify or conceal.

This article incorporates ethnographic material collected by the author through numerous trips among Indigenous reindeer herders and village residents in the Kola Peninsula between 2001 and 2014. I quote published data and media sources, and I preserve the anonymity of individuals involved in this research due to personal security reasons. The region has been off-limit for ethnographic fieldwork for foreigners since 2017, but the period presented here (1990s–2017) is highly relevant for understanding the mechanisms of ongoing militarization with bases being rebuilt and military propaganda strengthened in recent years.

In Section 2, I briefly describe reindeer herding in the Kola Peninsula in the light of militarization. Section 3 shows how militarization is an area for spatial practices and social relations among Indigenous reindeer herders. In Section 4, I turn to nuclear pollution as a source of environmental knowledge and spatial practices, but simultaneously of normalization of militarization through international cooperation. Throughout the article, I analyze how militarism is instilled in Indigenous life activities through materiality and knowledge practices, and how it is being normalized. This analysis contributes to often overlooked dimensions of regional governance in the Arctic that transformed the life and subjectivities of Indigenous people and aligned them with the military goals of the state.

2. Indigenous People and Militarization in the Kola Peninsula

Kola Peninsula is the home of the Sami Indigenous minority in Russia. A small group of reindeer herding Komi migrated to the region in late 19th century. These groups continue to be involved in reindeer husbandry today, despite the latter's insignificant role in the local economy. According to Russian legislation, only groups under 50,000 people who live in their ancestral territories are classified as Small-Numbered Native Peoples of the North, a category that only Sami fit. This article, however, focuses on phenomena that affect equally Komi and Sami reindeer herders, who share a marginal status and historical legacies of Russian colonization. Despite Russian definitions, I use here Indigenous for both groups, as the concept is applied globally. Other local residents also experience varieties of militarization, but I focus on Indigenous reindeer herders as a strongly marginalized category (Vladimirova, 2006).

Reindeer herding was collectivized by the Soviet state and transformed to meet official ideas about the modernization and industrialization of the Arctic. At the time of this research, two reindeer enterprises operated. Cooperative Tundra whose territories border several military bases, is the focus of the present study. According to official documents, it is organized as follows: The reindeer are divided into 9 herds with 1,500–2,000 reindeer each. Herding teams (brigades in local parlance) of 7–9 people take care of each herd. Each brigade has a territory where its herd is supposed to follow its seasonal migration, in most cases over a few hundred kilometres. Despite Soviet ideas of controlled intensive reindeer breeding, at least since the 1990s extensive free-range herding has been dominant (Vladimirova, 2014). Brigades 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, located in the north-western part of the territory are called left-wing, and ethnic Sami are well represented in them. Brigades 1, 2, 8, and 9 in the eastern part constitute the right-wing and the majority of herders in them identify as Komi. Once or twice a year each wing jointly drives all brigade herds into a corral for the purposes of counting the animals, marking calves and selecting animals for slaughter. Konstantinov (2023) describes de facto reindeer herding organization of Tundra in the 2020s which shows a further decrease in herds and depopulation of the sector.

Militarization and industrialization have been major drivers of territorial planning in the Kola Peninsula. They have caused major transformations of landscapes and spatial and social practices. In addition to the large number of incoming population to service the military and industrial production, they forcefully moved Sami residents of old villages from the Barents Sea coastal area to a smaller number of villages in the interior of the peninsula in the course of the 1950s–1960s (Konstantinov, 2005). In the Census from 2010, Sami numbered approximately 1,600, with the biggest group in the village of Lovozero, and Komi also numbered 1,600. Centralization has contributed to the consolidation of administrative power over local people. Reindeer herders, living and moving about over the territory, have been perceived as a hindrance both to industrial exploitation and militarization. Soviet spatial planning excluded Indigenous people from large territories with outcomes extending far beyond limitations on movement and land use. This has transformed the economy, culture, and identities, and imposed new knowledge about the surrounding social world, where the Military-Industrial Complex as it is designated in Russia, are a superior power, answerable to their own centralized command and not subject to local administration or police (Hønneland & Jørgensen, 1998). Narratives of Indigenous displacement have become an important part of identity formation and ethnic mobilization among Sami people. Narratives blaming militarization for violence to Indigenous people are common in Indigenous oral culture, as in other parts of the world (Kuletz, 2001).

3. Fencing off Territories

The visible impacts of militarization in the Kola Peninsula are the partitioning of land, fencing off big territories for military use, and excluding Indigenous people and animals from the land. These processes intersect with major Soviet policies of transformation of Indigenous people in the name of modernization, such as re-organization of land use and economy, Indigenous social organization, and cultural practices. These have resulted in reconceptualizing reindeer as a species, and transforming ideas about their behaviour, methods of breeding, and economic and cultural importance. Material infrastructure has an important place in this reformation (Anderson et al., 2017). In the sphere of militarization, materiality is of special interest, because for security reasons it is simultaneously hidden from the uninitiated and present in order to maintain the fear of potential enemies. The territory of military installations and personnel is carefully marked off, i.e., fenced, creating a material and symbolic barrier to stop both movement and scrutiny of the uninitiated. In addition to fencing, military facilities and their testing have material impacts on human, animal, and plant populations, through polluting discharges and waste. Militarization's hazardous nature creates environmental injustice (Gregson & Crang, 2010). Military pollution, such as organic materials, chemicals, and landmines constitute dangerously altered ecosystems that reshape human individuals and communities (Kim, 2016).

Fencing off territories from Indigenous use transforms space and creates new spatial configurations. Knowledge of these militarized landscapes is slowly internalized as people re-learn the territory and adapt environmental practices and relations. Embodied spatial practices among reindeer and herders who use and know such landscapes best are heavily affected by military infrastructures and personnel. Below in this section, I offer ethnographic examples of spatial knowledge practices shaped by militarization. These narratives both critique and acknowledge complementarity between reindeer herders and the military. Their evaluations also point to the wide acceptance of militarization in life, reindeer economy, and land.

Contemporary theory offers a sophisticated analysis of borders' profound impact on humans and nature (Netz, 2004). Human and animal mobility and knowledge about space and the surrounding world are shaped by human-created borders (Hodgetts & Lorimer, 2020). One of the most striking forms of fenced-off military spaces on the Kola Peninsula is the "closed towns" that were hidden on Soviet maps, and designated by numbers instead of names. The existence of ZATO (in Russian, *zakrytoe administrativno-territorial'noe obrazovanie*, a closed administrative-territorial unit) was officially admitted only in the 1990s, but they continued to be under the administration of the Ministry of Defence. Each ZATO is connected to a particular base and provides housing for its personnel's families (Hønneland & Jørgensen, 1998). While for locals the ban on visits to ZATOs is part of tacit knowledge, anthropologist Yulian Konstantinov describes how in 1995 he and his companion took the road to a town that does not appear on any map in order to see what would happen. A railway line ran parallel to the road and no sign indicated where it led (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 37):

> A cross-beam appeared and a sergeant in a navy uniform and a black fur-hat with ear-flaps emerged wearily out of a sentry-box.
>
> —You cannot continue from here—he said in Russian—You have to turn back.
>
> —What is the name of this town?—Helena asked innocently.
>
> —Olenegorsk Eight.

Looking at the map, later Konstantinov noticed the road continuing for another 25 kilometres to the notorious Olenegorsk Eight. Herders of Brigade 3, called the town *Tsar Gorodok* (King of Towns), or diminutively "*Tsarka*," and pointed to it as the home of most poachers on their herd. It is part of the military base Olen'ia, built in the 1950s as a Russian Navy reconnaissance post, and since 2011 a long-range aviation base. Konstantinov describes the stretch of road leading to ZATO as empty with military installations visible on both sides: "A huge building with a concavely curved facade was said to have jet-planes flying out from the various floors" (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 38).

In the right-wing, Brigade 9 is adjacent to the ZATO of Ostrovnoi, or Murmansk-140. The adjacent Gremikha Naval Base is one of the Soviet Northern Fleet's main facilities for servicing nuclear submarines. The naval base had a considerably decreased budget in the 1990s and early 2000s and the population of the ZATO diminished from 5,032 in the 2002 Census to 2,171 in the 2010 Census. It has been severely affected by the economic crisis where civil budgets of neighbouring administrative units had to fund military personnel and infrastructure (Hønneland & Jørgensen, 1998). At present, the ZATO experiences difficulties in receiving regular food supplies due to its island location and is dependent on small-scale privately-arranged deliveries from the coast, that often consist of poached reindeer meat (Konstantinov, 2023). I have collected multiple stories about large-scale poaching of reindeer by personnel from the military base and town. "*Voiaki s'eli stado*" ("military ate up the herd") is an often-repeated phrase in interviews. Most severely affected are animals grazing near the base or accessible by military transport in the summer or snow scooters in the winter. Military personnel reportedly not only use the meat for subsistence but also sell it in nearby cities. The climax of poaching on the herd of Brigade 9 took place in the period between 2002 and 2007. In the winter of 2001, I observed Brigade 9 corral a herd far exceeding 2,000 animals, at that time the largest in Cooperative Tundra. By the winter of 2008, the herd was not readily gathered and its number remained uncertain, but was lower than 1,000 according to the brigade leader. At present, the brigade herd is extinct (Konstantinov, 2023).

Reindeer migratory routes are shaped by myriad seasonal climatic and environmental factors. In the right-wing, reindeer migrate Northeast toward the Barents Sea Coast in the summer to search for grass and protection from insects. In the winter, they move into the forest interior of the peninsula. Brigade grazing lands only roughly follow older migratory roads preferred by the animals. As a result, reindeer do not keep to the brigade territories. Rather, reindeer from the right-wing are mixed during their summer migration to the Barents Sea coast, and reindeer from all brigades are equally exposed to poaching from Gremikha. Military infrastructure thus has a huge impact on reindeer herding.

In the left-wing, where Konstantinov worked in 1995–1997, the grazing land of Brigade 3 reaches the military base Tsarka fence. Staff from the latter not only poached on the herd, but used the herders' camp for living and partying while on hunting trips. Fairly close to the north-western boundary of Brigade 5 is Kil'din Island with a huge naval base, often mentioned as another poaching centre. By the early 2000s, Brigades 3 and 5 had lost all their reindeer (Konstantinov, 2005).

Herders named figures in the region of 300–500 head lost annually for Herd 3 back in 1995, but Konstantinov argues such figures served to "heap" more blame on poachers and hide other forces depleting cooperative herds (Konstantinov, 2005). There were stories about military personnel armed with shotguns, sniper rifles, and Kalashnikov assault rifles travelling the tundra in search of game and sometimes even being

aggressive towards herders. Commonly, however, in the 1990s, they would stalk the herd, and hunt in secret, avoiding herders. Particular indignation was directed at poachers shooting trained bucks with collars and tags that identify them as valuable animals. Losing such a sledge team leader is like losing an expensive piece of machinery as well as an intimate friend (Vladimirova, 2006). In recent years, such stories have receded, due to the extermination of reindeer in Brigades 3, 5, and 9 near military bases, the improving prosperity of ZATOs, but mostly due to the increasing hegemony of the military and its power to silence complaints (Konstantinov, 2023).

The normalization of spatial and social practices related to militarization is visible in what Konstantinov (2005) defines as complementarity between reindeer herding brigades and the military. Complementarity is most striking in the contradictory representations of military personnel in narratives. On the one hand, poachers devastate the herds and aggressively invade herding territories and living facilities. Particular cruelty is shown in stories about soldiers shooting reindeer solely to take tongues and antlers—the latter a particular symbol of masculinity and status, while leaving the carcasses to rot (Vladimirova, 2014). Such "feats" are often ascribed to higher personnel. Even such cruelty, however, when coming from the military is tolerated. Only on single occasions have military poachers been reported to the authorities and arrested for poaching. In Brigade 3, a retired major had been caught with a shot reindeer, but later released. A clerk from the cooperative needed help for his son who was conscripted into a regiment to be sent to Chechnya. In exchange for changing his son's regiment, he did not bring charges for poaching that would tarnish the military's image (Konstantinov, 2005).

On the other hand, particular individuals and groups from the military are described in terms of friendship and reciprocity. Such contradictions are constitutive of the poacher's image more generally (Vladimirova, 2014). In Konstantinov's quote from a reindeer herder of Brigade 3, a young soldier from the nearby Tsarka is:

> —A nice boy….These soldiers are helping us a lot and we give them meat—they are very low on food. Still, do you know what our old people say? "If a Lopar [old name for a Sami] wants to become friends with a Russian, he has to have a big knife hidden close to his bosom."
>
> —Do they poach on the herds?
>
> —These are nice boys here, but you never know what their commanders may tell them to do. (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 419)

Spatial proximity and the capacity of military personnel to cross the base fencing create opportunities for mutual exchange and reciprocity. Such relations are visible on visits to reindeer herding brigades. The all-terrain transport vehicles that Cooperative Tundra uses are old tanks scrapped from the military. Military clothing is common among herders, especially in the summer, when traditional clothes cannot protect against the frequent rains. Some military clothing items are sold in stores, others are unavailable to civil persons, like the highly valued *himdym*—rubber boot-pants and a cloak used for protection in chemical warfare. These can only be acquired via personal connections with the military. Other exchange items are tarpaulins for covering luggage on the sleds, and fuel. Such goods are often exchanged for reindeer meat or longer-term relationships of reciprocity. Such exchange is of great mutual interest due to the high prices of meat and other food items, fuel, and spare parts in stores and the possibility of acquiring them for free (illegally) if one works for the respective organization. Konstantinov (2005) provides examples where the

military helps herders with transport between tundra brigade camps and the village, and in repairing cooperative vehicles. He even tells a story of military base fencing becoming permeable for reindeer herders when a Russian *bania* (sauna) is organized on the territory of the base three km away from the herders' camp and a soldier offers to transport herders to it.

Militarization of landscapes is also found in place names that remain long after the military has left the place or its infrastructure collapsed. Semerka (Seventh), near the village of Lovozero, was once a military airfield and *semerka* used to be their code signal (Konstantinov, 2005). The use of military transport in the tundra, including old tanks and helicopter flights, when seats are available, accustoms local residents to the soundscapes of military activity, as do military exercises. Konstantinov (2005, p. 162) describes vividly such soundscapes, "the heavy rumbling of artillery," and "the piercing screams of invisible jets" mixed up with the sounds and sights of everyday life activities in the brigade camp. Decommissioned items of military infrastructure and equipment are commonly recycled and repurposed both in herding and in the village and are co-constitutive of a transforming Indigenous culture and aesthetics (Fritz, 2010). Such items as carcasses of older military planes uncovered in tundra pits can be traded for cash to collectors.

4. Nuclear Pollution and International Regional Cooperation

In this section, I show how nuclear contamination as an essential but less visible part of militarization, determines social relations and spatial practices and eventually becomes materialized. Sources of nuclear pollution are decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines, large amounts of spent nuclear fuel, liquid and solid radioactive waste in storage along the coast, the civil nuclear-powered ice-breaker fleet, sunken reactors, and accidents, such as the Kursk disaster in 2000, and finally the Kola nuclear power plant (Baklanov & Bergman, 1999). Scholars assert that present contamination on land mainly reflects the contributions from testing on Novaya Zemlya and transfer from sources outside the region by the Atlantic currents, discharges from the nuclear installations in Siberia (Chelyabinsk, Tomsk, and Krasnoyarsk) into the Siberian rivers, and radioactive deposition from Chernobyl (Hanaček & Martinez-Alier, 2022). Officially reported levels of radiation do not exceed the norms (Bergman, 2001), but territories around military bases can be heavily polluted and constitute a danger to human health (Hanaček & Martinez-Alier, 2022). In 1982, 700 tons of water containing highly radioactive elements were released into the Barents Sea at Andreevo Bay.

Social scientists have so far ignored how Indigenous communities in the Russian Arctic have been affected by what Kuletz (2001) calls "state sanctioned violence" to the environment and people in the vicinity of nuclear and militarized landscapes. The concept of nuclearism captures the value shift of militarization where humanitarian objectives and suffering of living subjects, human and animal, are deemed insignificant against the values of war. In her research with Indigenous people in America, Kuletz (2001) describes nuclearism as a colonial project, "unofficial internal colonialism": nuclearism and militarization have contributed to the preservation of colonial domination over Indigenous peoples in the era of alleged decolonization. Military installations and nuclear weapon production and testing tend to be located in territories popularly seen as expansive and empty with little population, like deserts, oceans, and tundra. Those "landscapes of vastness" are the domains of 20th-century nuclear colonialism: "The violence of militarized and nuclear landscapes are some of the most extreme in the world today—invisible, hidden, unnoticeable for most people—low public profile and high insider's (government) profile" (Kuletz, 2001, p. 241). These insights are grounded in testimonies and critical voices of the victims of nuclearism, native

peoples. Indigenous testimony is not prolific in the Russian Arctic and applying Kuletz's concepts to Russian reality helps clarify the impacts of militarization on Indigenous people in the Russian North.

Testing of Indigenous residents that subsist on reindeer meat in Murmansk Region after the Chernobyl accident found that the content of radioactive caesium was five times higher than in other populations. Strontium in the bone tissue of reindeer herders can show values 60 times higher than in non-Indigenous people from the same areas (Khvostova, 2019). A study in the late 1990s showed that reindeer herders continue to have higher exposure to radioactivity, with body measurements 2.5–3 times higher than in other inhabitants of the same village (Travnikova et al., 2002). Long-term health effects are hard to follow, but despite the lack of scientific studies, local people and medical staff identify high numbers of lung and liver cancers among Indigenous people.

Reindeer herders and other Indigenous residents rarely discuss nuclear pollution, especially with foreigners, as political scientist G. Hønneland (2010) observed when he interviewed residents of Murmansk Region. This silence points to secrecies imposed by militarization. My long-term ethnographic research with reindeer herders shows that they are aware of nuclear pollution, and its risks. Herders avoid certain water sources both for household water and for fishing. I have overheard herders commenting that they are used as laboratory rats. These statements reflect a sense of fatalism and of the futility of opposing officials, companies, and the military. There is a general mistrust of officially available information regarding the radiological situation in the region. Stories about nuclear pollution are spread informally and tacit knowledge among locals helps them avoid contamination that is not openly announced, but people also fear there are polluted sites they do not know (Tønnessen, 2001).

Feelings of risk and insecurity are aggravated by the temporality of nuclear pollution: It is transmitted decades later through species such as lichen and mushrooms, that absorb extremely high levels of different radioactive substances, for example, caesium-134 and 137. Lichen is the main winter fodder for reindeer, and mushrooms are their preferred autumn fodder (Travnikova et al., 2002). Different life cycles recirculate nuclear and other forms of pollution in the Arctic, where it is a recurrent threat to Indigenous and local communities. Berries and mushrooms are important nutritionally and culturally for many people in the North and are regularly collected, and reindeer meat is an Indigenous staple product. Due to the long temporal cycles of nuclear contaminants, risk can be hard to evaluate or connect to specific symptoms and diseases (Vladimirova, 2023a). Radioactivity's long-term impact through the trophic chain can destroy the human reproductive system and bring dangerous genetic transformations that can be seen as forms of intergenerational violence. It takes further material forms by becoming a body constituent, that can shape bodily functions and life in the long run. Through long-term health risks and feelings of insecurity, nuclear pollution should be treated as slow environmental violence causing both physical and psychological suffering (Garb & Komarova, 2001).

Konstantinov provides examples of how insecurity is produced on a daily basis. During military exercises at the nearby Tsarka, herders not only hear noises but observe unexplained lights in the sky. On one occasion, herders lost all of their 500 calves who developed diarrhea three days after birth and died. Herders' speculation was that the military must have used some chemicals: "Anything is possible round here…they are up to all sorts of tricks. Cosmic weapons many people are talking about. But I really don't know—might have been just the weather" (Konstantinov, 2005, p. 156). Living with risks and insecurity normalizes them. Herders avoid being preoccupied with risks and consider facing insecurity as part of Indigenous masculinity (Vladimirova, 2006).

Reducing radioactive pollution and risks associated with nuclear power has been an important arena for Arctic regional cooperation since the early 1990s. This is rooted in efforts already during the Cold War making environmental cooperation a field for improving diplomatic relations: In the mid-1970s were signed a series of environmental cooperation agreements between US and Russia, and in the 1980s between Russia and Norway (Vladimirova, 2022). The 1990s witnessed democratization and diffusion of environmental values by the EU, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and nation-states (Garbis et al., 2023; Hall et al., 2022; Mavisakalyan et al., 2023; Obydenkova et al., 2022; Vladimirova, 2023b). Studies point to the role of the EU enlargement in implementing environmental policies in post-communist states as well as raising public awareness about environmental challenges (Ambrosio et al., 2022; Mišić & Obydenkova, 2022; Nazarov & Obydenkova, 2022; Stepanov et al., 2023). Cooperation started as bilateral and multilateral projects: In the period 1994–2001, Norway and US participated in a joint project expanding four times the capacity of the low-level liquid radioactive waste treatment plant of the Northern Fleet. The project was funded by foreign partners and faced many complications that led to conflicts over production deadlines, management of financing, the level and transparency of accounting, and finally access of foreign partners to ZATOs and other militarized territories (Hønneland, 2010).

In the 1990s, Norway launched a Plan of Action on nuclear safety in north-western Russia, and a Joint Norwegian–Russian Commission on Nuclear Safety. The immediate priority was to report on pollution in northern ocean areas and to facilitate the construction of storage and treatment facilities for radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel. In the 2000s, the removal of the dropped nuclear waste from Andreevo Bay and helping dismantle nuclear submarines have been major targets (Hønneland, 2010). Dismantling decommissioned nuclear submarines and disarmament have also been objectives of other agreements such as the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction signed by G8 members in 2002, the Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme in the Russian Federation signed in 2003, and the Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation between Norway, Russia, the UK, and the US from 1996. The EU Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, launched in 2001, funded activities supporting nuclear safety and environmental protection in northwest Russia (Hønneland, 2010). All these efforts, however, have not significantly contributed to disarmament in the Arctic. Neither Russia nor the US decreased their nuclear submarines, or bombers with cruise missiles. None of the Arctic missile launchers have been retargeted from their Cold War targets, and further many bombers and ships stationed previously in Soviet bloc countries have been moved to the Russian North (Spohr, 2018).

Environmental cooperation is institutionalized through various regional organizations such as the EU and the Arctic Council, but also adjusting newly launched organizations to policies of sustainable development, such as the Eurasian Economic Union before the war in 2022 (Garbis et al., 2023; Hall et al., 2022; Hartwell, 2023; Lavelle, 2022; Stepanov et al., 2023). Nuclear safety has been central to BEAR, established with the Kirkenes Declaration in 1993. Within it, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, work both on national and regional levels. Indigenous people are represented in their own right. Among the main purposes of BEAR are the promotion and facilitation of intergovernmental cooperation, increasing stability, and reducing military tension, allaying environmental threats in Europe and in the Arctic. Environmental protection and Indigenous rights are among the areas of particular concern. Russia has been cooperative, but is not as engaged in BEAR as it was in the Arctic Council before it stopped its activities after the start of the war in 2022 (Filimonova et al., 2023; Lavelle, 2022). Funding for BEAR initiatives in Russia has been predominantly Nordic, and cooperation on environmental protection is often inefficient, which scholars attribute to the lower status of

Russian environmental bureaucracy since the 2000s, and the refusal of Russian businesses to cooperate (Hønneland, 2010).

The level and character of Russian cooperation have changed over time. Foreign financial support to solve local ecological problems looked lucrative to politicians in the 1990s and was gladly accepted in order to secure their legitimacy and popularity among their electorate. Partnerships with the Nordic countries, especially in the realm of nuclear safety, were well received by the majority, despite circulating conspiracy theories about Western espionage through environmental cooperation (Hønneland, 2010). Russian narratives of hidden Western agendas and hostility together with the ideological emphasis on patriotism and Russian sovereignty in the Arctic emerged in discourses about international cooperation in relation to the environment and Indigenous people since 2010, as a strategy of Putin's consolidation of autocratic power. Such narratives have not been voiced at official BEAR events and meetings, where Russian representatives maintained their cooperative stance until March 2022, when Russia was suspended by other BEAR members due to the war in Ukraine. On that occasion, the Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova objected to this decision claiming "unsubstantiated" accusations can negatively influence established connections, beneficial projects and initiatives and the interests and everyday lives of millions of people in the Arctic ("Statement regarding Barents," 2022).

5. Conclusion

Militarization has marked the history, everyday life, culture, and identities of Indigenous people in the Kola Peninsula. It has been an important factor in territorial planning and land use, especially in reindeer husbandry. Spatial practices of movement, access to land, and migratory and herding routes, are influenced by the military's material infrastructure, fences, exercises, testing, and movements. There exist multiple dependencies between reindeer herding brigades and military personnel which are permeated by formal and tacit hierarchies, as well as emotional ties and friendship. Objects from the military or modelled after military inventory penetrate the work and everyday life of herders and other Indigenous people, transforming material culture and aesthetics. Even when resisted and criticized, such practices transform Indigenous subjectivities in alliance with militarization.

Militarization of Indigenous people is a long-term process with many different trajectories depending on individual's personal history, social relations, job opportunities, and mobility. While it is perhaps hard to find direct data on the process in Soviet time, local memories hint at its overarching impact (Konstantinov, 2023) and thus the findings of this study can be projected back in time. This study shows how militarization has been ongoing in the region with its material impact and mechanisms for control over Indigenous individuals and social relations. During Russia's economic crisis and weakened central governance, cooperation between the military and Indigenous reindeer herders helped sustain both military personnel and the reindeer herding economy, which emphasized further the dominant role and longevity of militarization.

Regional cooperation targeting nuclear security and Indigenous rights did not increase politicians' awareness of the threats of nuclear weapons and militarization nor of the violation of the human rights of the local population. Instead, they were instrumental in rebuilding the legitimacy and popularity of Russian autocratic politics. Participation in BEAR and other international initiatives has helped politicians improve the image of the country in the areas of peace-building, Indigenous rights, and environmental sustainability, and increase

the international credibility of the present regime through environmental discourse and imitating the rhetoric of such actors as the EU or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (Ambrosio et al., 2022; Hall et al., 2022). However, despite the employment of "environmental discourse," and legally promised support to Indigenous peoples (Russian Federation, 1999), there were no efficient implementations of specific policies for sustainable development or of Indigenous people's rights to land and resources, self-determination, and culture in their homeland in the Arctic (Garbis et al., 2023; Stepanov et al., 2023; Vladimirova, 2023b). The important role of legitimacy and rhetorical tools in autocratic regionalism has been studied elsewhere (Obydenkova, 2022b; Obydenkova & Libman, 2019). This article contributes an innovative analysis of autocracies-led regional governance focusing on the nexus of state-imposed militarization and society in the Arctic as well as the most recent socio-political transformations in this environmentally fragile region. Within Murmansk Region, BEAR and other multilateral projects have helped solve some acute problems of nuclear pollution and related insecurities, and alleviate problems faced by Indigenous people. However, it has also contributed to the empowerment of local authorities and increased people's trust in them. Through its ideological machine, the present Russian regime has increased people's mistrust of foreigners, particularly "the collective West" ("Statement regarding Barents," 2022), and appropriated the credit for the positive results of international cooperation. This has hardly improved the situation of the Indigenous population, which state security agencies have isolated from the international Indigenous movement in recent years, while their collaboration in the war in Ukraine alienates them further from the rest of the world. This article, thus, also contributes to the re-evaluation of the importance of international environmental cooperation in the diffusion of environmental and human values via maintaining stable and constant dialogue. Should Russia be excluded from international environmental cooperation, the consequences of this isolation could be increased militarization; triggering further development and testing of nuclear arms; destruction of permafrost; damaging life of Indigenous people; and in the longer run, steady and unavoidable global warming.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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