**Environment, Space and Identity**

**in the Eurasian Region**

***2-3 December 2021***

***School of Sociology, HSE University, Moscow***

**Online: ZOOM**

All times are UTC + 3:00 (Moscow Time Zone)

***Thursday***

11.00 Welcome words & Introduction to the conference: *Lili Di Puppo, Arnab Roy Chowdhury & Christian Froehlich*

**11.15 The topography of debt: Notes on exchange theory, Siberian Indigenous trade and political ecology of imperial space**(Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, HSE University, Saint Petersburg)

**12.15 Changing Human-Landscape Relations, Continuity and Identity** (Chair: Anna Strelnikova, HSE University, Moscow)

- Anna Varfolomeeva (University of Helsinki): *Articulations of indigeneity in mining landscapes: Local visions of resource extraction in Northwestern Russia and Siberia*

- Elizaveta Polukhina (HSE University, Moscow): *Material culture of industrial neighborhoods: Housing, practices and identities in post-Soviet Russia*

- Tobias Köllner (Private Universität Witten): *A post-socialist palimpsest: On the restitution of property and the making of ‘authentic’ landscapes in contemporary Russia*

13.45 Lunch Break

**15.00 Land, Extraction and Memories of the Past** (Chair: Victor Albert, HSE University, Moscow)

- Maurizio Totaro (Ghent University): *Ancestral Petroscape: Oil, territory, and nationalism in Western Kazakhstan*

- Manjusha Nair (George Mason University): *Between land and the market: Mobilizations against land acquisition in India*

- Elizabeth Bishop (Texas State University): *Spaces of the Aswan high dam: Kremenchuk*

16.30 Coffee Break

**17.00 Postsocialist/postcolonial tempolocalities and decolonial sensibilities – towards the refuturing communities of change** (Madina Tlostanova, Linköping University)

18.00 *Dinner*

***Friday***

**11.30 Land, Law, and Subaltern Resistance in India**(Kenneth Bo Nielsen, University of Oslo)

**12.30 Mobilization, (Im)material Resources and Local Cosmologies I** (Chair: Daria Tereshina, HSE University, Moscow)

- Xeniya Prilutskaya (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen): *Air quality advocacy NGO in Bishkek and urban youth culture*

- Anna Dupuy (EHESS-LAS): *Genghis Khan, the environmentalist: Reinterpretation of Mongolian cosmologies through the “waste problem”*

13.30 Lunch break

**14.30 Mobilization, (Im)material Resources and Local Cosmologies II** (Chair: Daria Tereshina, HSE University, Moscow)

- Shayan Shokrgozar (University of Stavanger, Norway): *Desert geographies: Solar energy geographies of just transitions*

- Jesko Schmoller (Humboldt University): *The inner life of Toratau: Reviving tradition in the Southern Urals*

**15.30 Exclusionary extraction and energy geographies of just transitions** (Siddharth Sareen, University of Stavanger, Norway)

16.30 Coffee Break

**17.00 Final Roundtable**: *What does the dual post-Soviet / post-colonial lens tell us about environmental debates and movements beyond the Western world?*

18.00 *Dinner*

**Abstracts**

**Workshop concept**

The conference aims to study the interconnections between space, the environment and identity in the Eurasian region from different perspectives: extractive practices, religion and the sacred, and local citizenship movements. The Eurasian space, which the conference aims to explore, comprises the countries and regions between the two major powers Russia and India (Central Asia, Mongolia and the Indian subcontinent). By focusing on this region, we aim to go beyond studies that examine environmental debates in Western liberal states and economies to analyze how non-Western civilizational and state models influence the way in which the environment is approached.

A major aim of the conference is to bring the postcolonial and post-socialist conditions of the post-Soviet space and the Indian subcontinent together in order to explore the similarities (and differences) that make these regions comparable; and, through the Eurasian geography and discourse, to some extent entangled and connected. This world is ‘floating precariously’ (McLeod 2016) between neoliberal and neo-colonial global capital. We observe several phenomena emerging: extractivism through resource grab, migration flows, de-secularization, climate change, and the realpolitik of the rise of conservative powers.

The study of environmental encounters in the Eurasian space demands that we consider various legacies that are present in the region. Major among these legacies, which have influenced the relationship of humans with the natural environment, are Soviet modernity and the colonial experience. Both are characterized by the duality of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, which is central to the modern era and which has shaped the radical societal, political and environmental changes of the 20th century in the Eurasian space. For example, the attempt to control ‘nature’ has profoundly affected community life and livelihoods, previously embedded in the natural environment through relations of singularity and sacred enchantments.

The attempts by the Soviet and colonial state to create new modern secular subjects have brought ‘disenchantment’ and a profound remodeling of the relationship between humans and the environment. Though post-colonialism has been preoccupied largely with the issues of identity politics, multiculturalism, and nationalism, an eco-critical turn in postcolonial studies has started to emerge (McLeod 2016), paving the way for a theoretical and practical engagement with environmental and ecological issues.

The Eurasian region can be conceived as a dynamic space in which new localized visions of orders and identities are emerging in attempts to ‘re-embed’ humans in their natural environment. They can take the form of movements to protect the natural space in a citizenship rights discourse, a re-enchantment of the relationship with nature or the re-establishment of a connection with ancestors, legends and myths as in the case of certain religious and indigenous communities.

**Elizabeth Bishop (Texas State University, United States): *Spaces of the Aswan High Dam: Kremenchuk***

Going beyond a mere examination of environmental debates in Western liberal states, this research project considers the implications of a diplomatic agreement between the U.S.S.R. State Committee for Foreign Economic Ties and Egypt’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1958), with its reference to half-completed construction on the Dnieper River in Ukraine as a model for development interventions. Egyptian executives, headed by Egyptian Minister of Public Works Musa Arafa, visited the U.S.S.R. during May 1959. There, A. P. Nikitin and researchers from Gidroproekt demonstrated the how they control water flow. The visiting Egyptian engineers stated they admired the precision and efficiency they saw on construction sites. For the Egyptian civilians invited to the U.S.S.R., a high point of their visit was the river closing at Kremenchuk. This provincial city was in the midst of being turned into the Ukraine’s energy capital; in addition to the hydroelectric plant, an oil refinery was being built to process crude oil drilled in East Ukrainian fields. The spectacle which met Egyptian guests was framed with a military-level precision based on standards of discipline and order, complete with references to the recent military victory over Germany. At Kremenchuk, as MSES staff described girls who, holding little pennants to guide the truck drivers, looked 'just like the traffic girls on the road that led to Berlin during the last war”. The foreign visitors were especially awed by the structured activity: “this is magnificent! Everything is done so precisely, as at a military parade!” enthused Cairo University's Professor Sabry.

**Anna Dupuy (EHESS-LAS, Paris): *Genghis Khan, the environmentalist: Reinterpretation of Mongolian cosmologies through the “waste problem”***

Waste in the steppe, that is human traces outside their dedicated places, is mainly addressed today in Mongolia through a technical and environmental angle. The perception of waste as an undesirable is rooted in the Mongolian socialist cultural campaigns that implemented new hygienic and cleaning standards. From a perception of waste as the “food of the earth”, taking part in an exchange circle (of energy, nutrients) with humans and non-humans, waste has become a problem that should be treated. Today, the “waste problem” is seen through an ecological thought and is located at the heart of the relationship between Man and “nature” (*bajgal' orchin*). This relationship, and therefore waste management, allows to place oneself in the world and to speak about oneself. Indeed, facing technical discourses based on other countries’ examples, voices are rising to advocate for a “Mongolian ecology” based on local pre-socialist cosmology, seen as the founding principle of Mongolian identity, in particular through leaving no marks in the environment as the owners of the places are spirits (*ezen*) and not men: throwing waste in the steppe would, according to them, be inappropriate according to the XIIIth century and ancestors conceptions. Therefore, some Mongols refer to Genghis Khan, perceived as the founding father and the guarantor of Mongolian identity, to condemn waste throwing in the steppe: they say that despite his power, Genghis Khan left no trace (buildings, waste, his own dead body) and that it illustrates a choice. Thus, the question of human marks and waste in the environment is integrated and reinterpreted through the prism of a reinvention of pre-socialist Mongolian cosmology, which is supposed to guarantee the Mongolian identity and which heads toward picturing Mongolian ancestors as “environmentalists, minimalists and eco-friendly” people. Therefore, through the induction of non-biodegradable waste into the reinvention of a Mongolian cosmology, Mongols speak about themselves, positioning themselves in the world by proclaiming their unique identity and their continuity with their ancestors, especially with Genghis Khan. This raises religious struggles: are *ovoo*'s plastic-made offerings modern offerings respecting ancestors' legacy or a lack of manners polluting nature?

**Tobias Köllner (Private Universität Witten, Germany): *A Post-Socialist Palimpsest: On the Restitution of Property and the Making of ‘Authentic’ Landscapes in Contemporary Russia***

Since 2010, religious organizations in the Russian Federation have had the opportunity to claim back property confiscated by the state after the October Revolution in 1917. The restitution of church buildings, however, meets with claims from different religious and non-religious organizations. Despite strong ideological convergence between Russian Orthodoxy and politics, and joint attempts to erect an ‘authentic’ Russian landscape filled with religious symbols, the implementation of property restitution, however, has often a propensity for conflicts. Surprisingly enough, the current owners have not been asked before and the generally positive attitude towards the Church in society was mistaken. But an overall positive attitude seems in danger when play grounds or parks are removed, and museums or planetariums are replaced. This seems to be an unintended consequence of the process and so these conflicts involve religious institutions, the organizations currently using former church properties, and different levels and areas of state administration. Sometimes conflicts have even arisen among actors from the same agency on the local and national level.

Accordingly, property is not a ‘thing’ as such, but it does very deeply concern the social relations between different actors. In this way, power emerges as a very relevant issue for the analysis of property relations, the justification of claims to property rights and the current restitution of property to religious organizations in the Russian Federation. A difference in power influences the mode and the course of the conflict considerably. Nevertheless, the Russian Orthodox Church is able to reclaim most of its buildings successfully. Thus, attention is drawn to the increase in power of the Russian Orthodox Church and to the interplay between religion and politics as ‘entangled authorities’.

Nevertheless, the existence of these conflicts indicate that Russian Orthodoxy is not very well suited for providing legitimacy for the state. Quite the contrary is true because Russian Orthodoxy developed an independent agenda and, increasingly, comes into conflict with the local population. Here it becomes obvious that property restitution is no successful implementation of a well-thought out plan. Instead, it is an open-ended process with cooperation, competition, open conflict and many unintended consequences.

**Manjusha Nair (George Mason University, United States): *Between Land and the Market: Mobilizations Against Land Acquisition in India***

The Indian state holds the right of eminent domain — the right to acquire, distribute and formulate laws on the land according to a colonial law of 1894 — and this has been used to seize farmers’ lands for the setting up of public, private, and joint business ventures.  The protests by farmers, in coalition with social movements and political parties, have been effective in halting some of the projects.  How far can these protests be characterized as a countermovement to reclaim rights on land, resisting the encroachment of market forces on society? Between 2015-2017, I did field research in the Indian regional states of Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh to study these protests.  With the help of two research assistants, I conducted surveys of 201 households and ten villages and interviewed 65 participants in the protests. In Uttar Pradesh, protests were mobilized through farmers’ political organizations and they portrayed land as a market asset that was necessary to protect them against uncertainty in the future. In Chhattisgarh, protests were mobilized through civil society organizations and the protestors wanted to reclaim land from commodification as a source of livelihood. My paper argues that in Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the forms of mobilization were shaped by the context of accumulation (real estate versus extractive mining), the historical relation to the state (patronage through green revolution versus neglect by the ruling states prompting the legitimacy of civil society organizations), and collective memory (of farmers’ union versus tribal resistance to intrusion from outside). I suggest that these complex and divergent historical processes might be at the root of why these mobilizations are predominantly subnational rather than national in scale.

**Kenneth Bo Nielsen (University of Oslo, Norway): *Land, Law, and Subaltern Resistance in India***

In this paper, I examine the role of the law in subaltern anti-dispossession movements in contemporary India. I focus particularly on how anti-dispossession movements have incorporated and appropriated the language and institutions of law into their struggles to retain or reclaim land in the face of dispossession. Taking my point of departure in an ethnographic account of an anti-dispossession movement in Singur in the Indian state of West Bengal, I argue that the movement’s seemingly vacillating engagement with the language and institutions of law can be understood as a dynamic and strategic process of judicialisation and de-judicialisation in a context characterised by rapidly changing political constellations. The attractiveness of invoking the language and institutions of law as part of subaltern land struggles therefore significantly depend on the attractiveness of other modalities of resistance at a given moment. I use this ethnographic case from Singur to; first, rethink the seminal work of Partha Chatterjee on political society and the politics of the governed in post-colonial India, in which the domain of the political is misleadingly bifurcated into “civil” and “political” spheres. Second, I seek to decipher the relationship between localised subaltern invocations of law, and larger law-making processes in the domain of land use, at the state and national level (focusing particularly on the emergence of India’s ‘new rights agenda’ through a study of the making of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2013). This relationship, I suggest, can be understood as negotiations of compromise equilibrium between, on the one hand, subaltern groups vulnerable to marginalisation and capable of mobilisation; and, on the other, dominant groups whose economic interests are linked to the exploitation of the spaces of accumulation enabled by land dispossession. How this compromise equilibrium is negotiated over the years to come will significantly shape the terrain of subaltern politics in India.

**Elizaveta Polukhina (HSE University, Moscow): *Material culture of industrial neighborhoods: housing, practices and identities in post-Soviet Russia***

The main unit for all Soviet urban planning was the neighborhood with a standardized block of residential housing and buildings. Usually, it was simple buildings with a store, school and kindergarten – all this was included in the mandatory compositional and functional set of residential development. The neighborhood became the basic unit of all Soviet urban planning. The residential area plan was socially heterogeneous and neighborhoods were socially divided, where poor and rich were segregated.

This paper analyzes material culture industrial neighbourhoods in post- Soviet Russia through the changes in housing stock, symbolic meanings of housing, resident’s practices and identities. I apply the concept material culture and understand it as dynamic relationship between things and individuals. So the material object communicating with individuals produced such elements of culture as social meanings, symbols, practices, habits. In this context the materiality co-produced the culture.

The field research in the strategy of the ethnographic case-study of the neighborhood was conducted in two industrial areas, in Yekaterinburg and Moscow, between 2017-2018. Generally, the empirical base for the two neighborhoods consists of more than 35 interviews with residents of the areas and experts; 26 mental maps of neighborhoods; more than 40 sessions of observations fixed in the researchers’ diaries; more than 700 photos and videos. The cases in our project were neighborhoods with the biggest USSR factories and high significance for the Soviet economy. Both neighborhoods were constructed during the formation of the Soviet Union, in the era of early Soviet industrialization. And both territories had fateful changes after the collapse of Soviet Union and continued to exist in the post-Soviet era. Historically, the residents of both neighbourhoods were industrial workers.

Now these neighbourhoods are socially divided and strongly gentrified. So the social distance between resident’s different types of housing (Stalinki, Khrushchevki etc) is symbolically constructed and still exists in the post-Soviet time. But at the same time, different classed groups habituating the same type of housing as far as borders between classes are blurred in post-Soviet Russian society.

**Xeniya Prilutskaya (Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen):** ***Air quality advocacy NGO in Bishkek and urban youth culture***

Deteriorating urban air quality in major Central Asian cities, and the emergence of new data on air pollution and its impact on health, has given rise to a wave of new urban activism. Along with the already existing and for some time operating organizations, new non-governmental organizations and individual initiatives have appeared in these cities.

In Bishkek, this new activism is especially appealing to urban youth. In this paper, I share my experience of observing and working together with a youth-eco-advocacy-NGO with a young female leader. This NGO has air quality as focus, was founded by foreign actors, but is successfully operating in the context of modern Bishkek and its problems with air. I look at this NGO from the inside, through the personality of its leader. I look at the work, focus, methods, techniques, perspectives, fears and emotional engagement. The main informational methods they use for raising attention at their platforms are posts and small publications, small video sketches, explanations and event announcements. They also often broadcast live from events and give interviews in local media, newspapers and television. It is happening in the context of the rise of eco-consciousness, following the global trends taken from English speaking sources. Air quality and the fight against air pollution was quite a peripheral topic compared to other environmental business-like ideas, such as sewing cotton eco-bags, recycling of plastic and producing eco-food. However, in the context of the worsening climate crisis and the strengthening of global environmental movements, the considered eco-NGO quite successfully mobilizes urban youth of Bishkek, disoriented in modern conditions and gives them new guidelines in the formation of identity through eco-consciousness.

This paper is based on 9-month field research and participant observation, and applies perspective at the intersection of social anthropology, visual/media studies, social movements theory and activism.

**Siddharth Sareen (University of Stavanger, Norway): *Exclusionary extraction and energy geographies of just transitions***

In a global neoliberal capitalist system, academic debates on extractivism and indigenous dispossession must be clear on their own relevance at a tautly contested historical conjuncture. On the one hand, energy systems are battling over a deep rift between fossil fuel lobbies and renewable energy proponents, as large low-carbon transitions gather pace, while contractions of existing fuel sources remain slow. On the other hand, acceleration of exclusionary extraction continues to characterise the deep supply end of energy systems. While sustainability statements crowd national and urban visions, extractive injustices appear as occasional headlines and manifest in social imaginaries of marginal rurality.

Academics are largely based in urban contexts and with limited time and ability to conduct challenging research in remote spaces and places of extraction. The recent and ongoing global pandemic circumstances exacerbate this limitation. What actionable knowledge can our work generate to advance the cause of marginalised communities, who bear the brunt of extractive practices in these contexts to cater to the desires of a neoliberal world order? Compared to the volume of energy transitions research, ethnographic work on extraction and dispossession is marginal in recent public and policy discourse. Faced with this political economy of a transitioning sector, what constitutes a responsible response from academics?

I focus on the indigenous *adivasi* Ho communities in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand (in India) to argue for a response centred on the energy practices of, and the effects of extraction on, such politically marginal inhabitants who live in co-dependent relation with nature in an extractivist postcolony. Customary dependence on biomass and charcoal can be substituted by increasingly affordable alternatives such as solar energy and micro-grids, and expanded electric grid access. Shifts in which resources are mined as societies transition from coal to renewables can be accompanied by revenue sharing arrangements and moratoria on mining at culturally and ecologically significant sites. I argue that energy geographies insights can catalyse and inform such strategies for a just transition away from exclusionary extraction.

**Siddharth Sareen (University of Stavanger, Norway) and Shayan Shokrgozar (University of Stavanger, Norway): *Desert geographies: Solar energy geographies of just transitions***

While sustainability statements crowd national and urban visions, injustices in the implementation of climate change mitigation infrastructures, such as lower-carbon energy infrastructures, populate popular debate only as occasional headlines, but manifest in social imaginaries of marginal rurality. This paper focuses on the rollout of solar energy infrastructure in Rajasthan in Western India to argue for a response centred on the energy practices of, and the effects of energy development on, politically marginal inhabitants who live in co-dependent relation with nature. To that end, we consider what environmental governance arrangements under transition can reveal about the recursive relationship between socio-material reconfiguration of the energy sector and co-evolving power relations and institutional structures. Our interpretation of the governance of solar energy transitions along these lines is aided by concepts that enable combined and contextualised analyses of institutional, relational and socio-material change. We propose three overlapping bridging concepts of institutional change, changes in accountability, and socio-material change to identify and inform pathways for just transitions in publicly accountable ways, and connect to themes in environmental governance research. We argue that energy geographies insights can catalyse and inform emergent strategies for a just transition away from renewed extraction and growth-wedded economic paradigms, and towards using appropriate technologies to attain decent living services.

**Jesko Schmoller (Humboldt University, Berlin) and Lili Di Puppo (HSE University, Moscow): *The inner life of Toratau: Reviving tradition in the Southern Urals***

In the semi-arid vicinity of the city of Sterlitamak in the Republic of Bashkortostan, Russian Federation, one can already spot from afar the Shihan hills, with the Turkic language names Toratau, Shakhtau, Yuraktau and Kushtau. While protests erupted in August 2020 over Kushtau, guardians of nature and indigenous culture had for a long time already been concerned about Toratau; a place that enjoys the status of a “complex natural site of republican significance” but is nonetheless desired by the so-called Bashkir Soda Company (BSC) for mining purposes. Craving the limestone that the Shihan hills consist of, Shakhtau in turn has become a victim of extraction and mostly disappeared. The case of the conflict around Toratau is so special, as it brings together environmental activism, ethnic minority concerns and religious sensibilities.

Historically, the territory of the Shihan hills belonged to the Bashkir Yurmat tribe. The Bashkir people are traditionally closely connected to the land they inhabit, wherefore space, history and identity are interwoven for them. According to one legend, the mother of Dobun-Mergen, an ancestor of Genghis Khan, was from this area. Since Toratau came to be recognised as a sacred site, it was here that Bashkir khans were appointed during the uprisings of the 17th and early 18th centuries. The interaction of people and landscape also turns up in the narrative of a Bashkir activist from Ufa, who is convinced that shamans used to charge the hills with energy. Apart from the activism, another strategic move to preserve the Shihan hills was the recent creation of the project “Geopark Toratau”. Over the last two years, an infrastructure has emerged at Toratau, allowing visitors to enjoy the place as a touristic site. But visitors are just as much involved in processes of place-making, commemoration and commodification, when, for instance, people bring home souvenirs that indicate the natural environment or Bashkir tradition.

**Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (HSE University, Saint Petersburg): *The topography of debt: notes on exchange theory, Siberian Indigenous trade and political ecology of imperial space***

Anthropology of exchange approaches credit and debt as temporal categories. Debt is something to be repaid by a certain date in the future. To take credit is to exchange time for money. This paper asks how one might theorise debt by focusing on forms of space that accompany this organisation of time. What is social landscape that relations of credit and debt create? Where are creditors and debtors located in relation to one another? How far does credit history, and credibility that it affords, travel? What are territories of crediting, credit payments — as well as their dodging or deferral (refinancing)? In this paper I share some preliminary findings of this topographic research into the anthropology of debt, as well as illustrate it with a particular example. My focus is on fur, one of the classic resources of Russian extractive economies in Siberia. Also classically, it has been explored through the lens of tribute collection. While fur trade has been widely acknowledged as existing alongside fur tribute (most frequently, as tribute’s informal flip side), it has been less frequently explored as having its own colonial logic. My case in point is porkuta, Siberian category for taking credit before fur hunting season, carries a double connotation of ‘circling’ and ‘binding’ which suggests a typography of both circular movement of a fur hunter who goes away to hunt and comes back to repay the debt, and peon-style personal dependency. In this paper, first, I detail the space of credit and debt in the north of the Yenisei river basin, Central Siberia, in the early 20th century; second, I historicise pokruta as recursive to relations between Russian traders and their creditors that hark back to the idiom of credit for expeditionary exploration of new uncolonised territories. My goal in doing to is to re-imagine north Siberian space through the lens of the topography of debt addressing the role of credit in colonial expansion, including comparative examples such as East Indian Company.

**Madina Tlostanova (Linköping University, Sweden): *Postsocialist/postcolonial tempolocalities and decolonial sensibilities – towards the refuturing communities of change***

I am going to reflect on specific tempolocalities marked by the state socialist legacies as well as the global coloniality that we find in the non-European former colonies of Russia/USSR. Intersections of post/neocolonial and postsoviet experience trigger subjectivites and sensibilities that fall out of the conventional understanding of colonialism/ postcolonialism and socialism/postsocialism that still tend to overlook each other`s focal points while the postsoviet Central Asia or the Caucasus present complex and dynamic cases of ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial, ideological, social and other aspects of intersectionality. To better understand the entanglements of the postcolonial and postsoviet we need a separate discourse and optic that is already in the making. I argue that the postsocialist-postcolonial multi-layered tempolocalities with their specific embodied memories, are promising spaces for decolonial refuturing, where redirective communities of change can be born. These communities will take into account the experience of the soviet and postsoviet modernity/coloniality and work for launching of the truly decolonial subjectivites, tempolocalities and cosmotechnologies.

**Maurizio Totaro (Ghent University, Belgium): *Ancestral Petroscape: Oil, Territory, and Nationalism in Western Kazakhstan***

This paper traces the practices and discourses embedding oil extraction as an integral part of western Kazakhstan's sacred geography, contributing to the anthropological literature on the relations between oil, cultural identities and spatial imaginations across postcolonial and postsocialist contexts. Drawing from participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis, the paper shows how, since independence, the emergence of a sphere of circulating oil wealth has been accompanied by the creation of regional cosmogonies and projects of cultural renewal endorsed by political and cultural formations. On the one hand, oil companies and cultural producers have supported the re-imagination of the region as relevant not only for its underground wealth but for its “spiritual” one, embodied in its sacred landscape and the historical and mythical figures which inhabit it. On the other hand, oil is constructed as an integral part of such a landscape, with some oilfields considered “sacred sites”, surrounded by legends and prophecies, and protected by the spirits of ancestors. By means of this dual process, oil extraction is discursively and affectively naturalized as well as nationalized, with the ancestors intervening in protecting, mediating, permitting and sanctioning oil extraction. While such a process is interwoven with the postcolonial nation-building of independent Kazakhstan, I argue it is indebted to late Kazakh Soviet narratives which tied oil extraction to the revitalization of territory and ethnic identity, not only materially but “spiritually”.

**Anna Varfolomeeva (University of Helsinki, Finland): *Articulations of indigeneity in mining landscapes: Local visions of resource extraction in Northwestern Russia and Siberia***

This paper analyzes complex impacts of resource extraction on indigenous communities focusing on the case studies of two indigenous minorities in Russia: Veps in the Republic of Karelia and Soiots in the Republic of Buriatia. Veps and Soiots have a history of engagement with resource extraction, which goes back to the 18th-19th centuries and continues till the present time. Veps in Karelia experienced a switch from small-scale artisanal mining of rare stones (gabbro-diabase and raspberry quartzite) to extensive industrial development in the Soviet time, and the closure of state enterprises and turn towards private mining since the 1990s. Soiots, on the contrary, witness a rather recent development of the gold mining industry, which started in the 1990s and still generates complex responses in the community. Starting from the early 2000s, many local residents have also been involved in illegal jade extraction and trade. By focusing on two models of human – landscape relations and industrial development at indigenous territories, the paper discusses the complex perceptions of decorative stones among Veps and Soiot households. It specifically focuses on parallels between mining and other forms of economic activities such as hunting, fishing, or tourism development. The paper demonstrates that different forms of resource extractions in Veps and Soiot multispecies households are closely connected, forming a common resourcescape. Both mining and other forms of extracting natural resources contribute to complex local visions of sustainability, which unite various forms of engagement with nature.