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# Autobiography of Vladislav Nikolaevich Nuvano (born 1963)

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## **АВТОР**

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Владислав Николаевич Нувано (1963 г.р.) – чукотский ученый, этнограф, научный сотрудник Лаборатории истории и экономики Северо-Восточного комплексного научно-исследовательского института им. Н.А. Шило Дальневосточного отделения Российской академии наук, автор множества публикаций по оленеводческой культуре чукчей.

## **My Parents**

I was born on September 12, 1963 in the village of Vaegi (Anadyr District, Magadan Oblast, southeast Chukotka) into a reindeer herding family. My father was Nikolai Ivanovich Nuvano, and my mother was Nina Ivanovna Nuvano (born N'av"elk'ai).

My father Nikolai Ivanovich Nuvano (1937–2006) was a member of the *Viliunei* group of the Chukchi (which takes its name from Mount Viliunei, located between the villages of Khatyrka and Vaegi). His ancestors came from a very wealthy family group. All three sons of Gemav'e—Trunku, Kotakvyrgyn [the father of Nikolai Ivanovich Nuvano], and Eket'et—were

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ii. Translated from Russian by Benjamin McGarr.

owners of several herds. Eket'et's herds were collectivized later than anyone else's, presumably in 1944 (see Nuvano 2008a; Omrytkheut 2008).

From the age of ten, my father Nikolai Ivanovich worked in reindeer husbandry. From 1962 to 2002, he was the *brigadir* or foreman of the reindeer herding brigade. He was also a two-time recipient of the Order of Labouring Glory, as well as of other government awards (Omruv'e 2005).

My mother Nina Ivanovna Nuvano (born N'av"elk'ai) (1937–2000) belonged to the *Eigyskyl'yt* group (эйгыскылыт: a mixed group comprised of Chukchi, Koryaks, and reindeer Chuvans who migrated along the Yablon and Yeropol rivers). During the Great Patriotic War, several herds belonging to Chaivurgin (Nina Ivanovna's father) were handed over to the Defence Fund. After graduating from a seven-year school in the village of Markovo, Nina Ivanovna Nuvano went to study at the School of Collective Farm Personnel in Anadyr graduating in 1957. From 1957 to 1960, she studied at the School of Soviet Workers in Vladivostok. In 1960, after graduating, she was sent to the village of Vaegi, Anadyr District, Magadan Oblast, where she worked for the village administration up to 1970. From 1970 to 1999, she worked out in the tundra where she was mistress of a *iaranga* [a mobile nomadic dwelling].

## My Childhood

I grew up in the village of Vaegi in a family of Chukchi reindeer herders. Until the age of four, I lived in the tundra with my grandmother and father. When I was taken to the village to my mother, I spent a brief spell in the Kindergarden there. To me, this time seemed like an eternity; every morning, I had to get up early and go to the Kindergarden, where the days tediously dragged on for so long.

Another “eternity” (the time dragged on awfully long) lay ahead of me, this time in my school years. I first went to school in 1970. The only breaks were my vacations out with the reindeer herding brigade. After the second year, at the age of eight, I started going out to the herd with my uncle. After finishing the fifth year, I realized that being out with the herd and the deer was not just fun: it was also real hard work. I remember how, after the end of the ninth year, we children of the reindeer herders were taken out to the tundra. Looking out the window of the helicopter, I looked with envy at my classmates in the village and thought that they were very lucky—they would have a nice rest during the summer holidays—while for us, the children of reindeer herders, all that was coming soon was a lot of hard work.

Today, I consider myself very lucky in my life. My university studies—working in the tundra and communicating with “real Chukchi” who didn't even know Russian and who remembered their history—were not at all in vain, as the knowledge I amassed there still helps me, even now.

## My Professional Career

Up until the age of 24, I was a reindeer herder and it was only then that I entered the institute. In 1980, after graduating from Vaegi high school, I worked as a reindeer herder on my native state farm, the *Put' k kommunizmu* sovkhos [Path to Communism]. While working as a reindeer herder, I studied the Chukchi-Koryak system of reindeer herding, the culture of reindeer herders in southeastern Chukotka. Happily, Soviet schooling had provided me with much fundamental knowledge that could be applied in any field of activity.

Despite the fact that I had worked as a reindeer herder for several years, had served in the Soviet army, and then had gone back to working as a reindeer herder, it was still easy for me to recall what I'd learned at school and to pass the exams to get into the institute. From 1986 to 1991, I studied at the Primorsky Agricultural Institute (in the town of Ussuriysk, Primorsky Territory) to become a zoological engineer (in Russia, a *zooinzhenir* is a specialist in the biological field engaged in the selection and breeding, hygiene, and feeding of animals).

After graduating from the institute, I worked from 1991 to 1996 in production as a livestock breeder, zoological technician, and the chief livestock specialist for all the farms of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug. I was already quite mature in years when I began to work in science at the *Severo-Vostochnii kompleksnyi nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut imeni N. A. Shilo DVO RAN* (the N. A. Shilo North-East Interdisciplinary Scientific Research Institute, under the Far-Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences) in the town of Anadyr.

## My Scientific Work

From 1996 to the present, I have been working as a researcher at the Laboratory of History and Economics in Anadyr. In my scientific work, I study the problems related to the reindeer herding culture of Chukotka, as well as the biology of the wild reindeer.

In the early 1990s, the interrelationship between domestic and wild reindeer (which correspond to the same trophic level and are natural competitors), became a highly acute concern in Chukotka. In October–November 1998 and February–March 1999, I participated in fieldwork coinciding with the beginning of the autumn and spring migrations of wild reindeer to their winter and summer living territories.

In the summer of 2002, together with the staff of the Heritage of Chukotka Museum Centre and the Russian State Museum of the East, I examined the sites used by ancient hunters in inland Chukotka, the results of which provided a basis for a retrospective analysis of the migration of wild deer during the Neolithic period. In addition to expeditions to the

grazing zones of the wild reindeer, wherever it was possible I also conducted surveys of the reindeer herders and hunters, and thus have accumulated a body of factual material relating to traditional knowledge about wild deer.

Since 2004, the Alaska Chukotka Development Program, for which I am a consulting biologist, has been monitoring wild reindeer populations in Western Chukotka. I also participated in the 2007–2008 International Polar Year (IPY) project as part of the international trans-Arctic project SIKU (Sea Ice Knowledge and Use, headed by Igor Krupnik).

From 2007 to 2012, together with researchers from the Institute of Ecology and Evolution A. N. Severtsov of the Russian Academy of Sciences, several expeditions were done on the territory of Chukotka. The information gathered enabled us to study DNA polymorphism in the domestic and wild reindeer of Chukotka using mitochondrial DNA.

## **My Publications**

Applied ethnology has always been the discipline closest to my heart—one in which you can speak with living witnesses of events and experts in culture. Moreover, we live in a region where there is such an opportunity to talk with Elders, the eyewitnesses of collectivization and connoisseurs of culture and history. The results of conversations with these individuals have led to the publication of academic articles.

My first group of articles is devoted to the formation of the southern Chukchi groups (Nuvano 2003a, 2008c). The second group of articles discusses the calendric festivals and the economic cycle of Chukchi reindeer herders (Valgirgin & Nuvano 2006, 2008; Nuvano 2021). A separate group of articles deals with collectivization (Nuvano 2003b, 2008a). The articles on collectivization and the history of reindeer herding at the end of the 19th and middle of the 20th centuries were written in collaboration with Oksana Kolomiets (Kolomiets and Nuvano 2017). The next group of articles regards Chukchi funeral practices, in particular the rite among the southern Chukchi of burning the deceased (Nuvano 2006, 2008b; Kolomiets & Nuvano 2020). A considerable portion of the articles are devoted to climate change and the corresponding challenges to reindeer husbandry (Nuvano V. N. & Nuvano N. I. 2013; Nuvano N. I. & Nuvano V. N. 2013, Antonov et al. 2018, 2019). Other articles focus on the Arctic diet of Indigenous people. These have mostly been written in collaboration with Andrei Kozlov (Kozlov et al. 2005; Kozlov et al. 2008). I believe that by talking with living witnesses of events and confirming their accounts with archival, scientific, and literary data, we can achieve the greatest degree of reliability in our research.

## On Working with Documentary Filmmaker Aleksei Vakhrushev<sup>1</sup>

In 2009, Tatiana Iur'evna Achirgina (Aleksei Vakhrushev's mother) told me about an idea Vakhrushev had to make a film on the reindeer herders of Chukotka. Of course, I agreed at once to be the film's consultant. I did not know the director of the film personally, but I was readily willing, to the best of my ability and knowledge, to help with the shooting of this picture. Aleksei Vakhrushev had by this point already submitted his project to the non-profit Kupol Foundation for Social Development.

Aleksei Vakhrushev told me that the original intention had been to implement the project in Ust-Belaya, however the main character from the reindeer herding brigade there fell ill, and then his sons left to go somewhere else. And so it was that I, as the film's consultant, suggested a similar reindeer herder in the Chaun Tundra: Boris Vukvukai, who worked alongside his sons—likewise a dynastic concern. The project was therefore relocated to the Chaunskii district.

The first phase of work began with the arrival of the creative team in Pevek. Director Vakhrushev and cameraman Viacheslav Makarev flew in from Moscow, and I, serving as the scientific consultant and translator, flew in from Anadyr. The journey from Pevek to Boris Vukvukai's brigade involved a distance of over 300 km, to be crossed by land transport. There were two field trips: one in the spring, from March 28 to May 2, 2010, and one in the autumn, from September 1 to September 25, 2010. Some routes had to be done on foot carrying heavy loads. Nevertheless, thanks to the financial support of the non-profit Kupol Foundation for Social Development and Vukvukai's reindeer herding brigade, who fed and sheltered the crew members for a combined period of two months, the film was made. The film crew was also grateful for the transport provided by two gold mining enterprises; thanks to the leadership of the Chukotka prospectors' artel and the Maiskoe gold mining company (Polimetal). With their invaluable help, the film was able to be brought to life.

The film *The Book of the Tundra: The Tale of Vukvukai the Little Rock* is a presentation of the traditional culture of Chukchi reindeer herders of the Chaunskii District of Chukotka, which continues to live on fully in the modern world. It reveals the peculiar traits of an ancient and absolutely vital

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1. Aleksei Vakhrushev is a director, screenwriter, and producer of Yupik origin, born and raised in Chukotka. Since the 1990s, he has been making documentaries about the Indigenous people of Chukotka. His 2021 film, *Kniga tundry. Povest' o Vukvukae – malen'kom kamne* [The Book of the Tundra. The Tale of Vukvukai the Little Rock] tells about the daily life of the nomadic Chukchi and has received numerous awards. In 2021, he released a documentary film with animated inserts entitled *Kniga Moria* [The Book of the Sea], about the marine hunters of Chukotka [note from the editors].

culture of the Indigenous people of the North, their age-old way of life, the unique knowledge of the reindeer herders, and the continuity of knowledge, subsistence skills, and cultural traditions.

The film was a success, receiving several awards. At the 25th Nika cinematic awards ceremony in 2011, it received the prestigious Nika Award for “Best Non-Fiction Film”. In that same year, at the “Rendezvous with Russia”, the second All-Russian Tourist Film Festival in Ekaterinburg, it won “Best Film” and was awarded the Cinema Press prize and the Russian Documentary Film Archive prize. The film did not escape notice from foreign platforms either. In France, for example, it received the “Monde en regards” prize from the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales (Inalco) at the International Ethnographic Jean Rouch Film Festival in 2012.

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