

## **‘I love the city but I have to leave’: Migration, Mobility and Connectivity among Vorkuta Youth**

Hilary Pilkington

This paper considers what patterns of current and prospective mobility and migration among young people in the city of Vorkuta in the Russian Arctic tell us about the connection between people, culture and (peripheral) place in ‘global’ times. It is based on the analysis of data arising from sociological research conducted as part of a larger AHRC funded project ‘National identity in Russia since 1961’ in the cities of Vorkuta and St Petersburg (2007-08). The research was conducted collaboratively with Elena Omel’chenko (‘Region’, Ul’ianovsk) and designed as a mixed-method study comprising a survey (n=1500) and in-depth interviews (n=80) with young people aged 16-19.

Survey data from the research suggest that 85% of young people in Vorkuta expect to leave the city. This appears to confirm a vision of Vorkuta as a globally disconnected, deindustrialising and anomic city, which young people are desperate to leave. Drawing on qualitative (interview) data collected, however, the paper interrogates any simple vision of a deterritorialised world in which territorial roots and the cultural distinctiveness of places have been lost (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 9). The paper explores young people’s patterns of mobility and connectivity (actual and imagined) in their historical and cultural context. It suggests that this connectivity is *rhizomic* rather than *rooted* in nature (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 7) and is itself a product of Soviet period, ‘deterritorialization’ in which temporary territorial relocation - during military service, work placements, holidays at work-based sanatoria and pioneer camps – was encouraged as part of the Soviet identity project but employed by individual subjects as a means of social and material mobility. Earlier deterritorialization projects, it is argued, structure the mobility of young people in contemporary Vorkuta and the ensuing networks of connectivity map out for them possible lives elsewhere. The paper suggests, nonetheless, that young respondents’ narratives of Vorkuta do not demonstrate the death of the ‘local’. On the contrary, their continued connection to, and affection for, the city as well as their reflection on their future in or out of it, illustrate one way in which a new kind of self-aware local subject is reproduced in ‘global’ times and places.