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Memory and forgetting among the Nivkhi of Sakhalin Island

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Rice University, 1993

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MEMORY AND FORGETTING AMONG THE NIVKHI
OF SAKHALIN ISLAND

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
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Abstract

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of Sakhalin Island

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Bruce Grant

On the basis of field and archival research on Sakhalin Island, and in Moscow, Tomsk and St. Petersburg, conducted over a twenty-four month period between 1989 and 1992, this project offers ethnographic and historical accounts of the production of Soviet culture among a Siberian indigenous people, the Nivkhi. Through Nivkh oral accounts, archival documents, as well as Russian and Soviet ethnographic sources, the dissertation charts a dramatic series of policy shifts in the governance of Nivkh life in the twentieth century, shifts which were in effect organized state campaigns of cultural invention and cultural erasure. By highlighting two dominant and often contradictory streams of official state narratives which counterposed Siberian indigenous peoples as being both children of nature and the most authentic of modern proletarians, the dissertation finds a population in late perestroika whose own views of Nivkh culture were largely underwritten by statist interpretations. The project argues for a closer reading of the nature of Soviet cultural construction than is often found in writings on Soviet nationality policies, and of the very hybrid identities which the Soviet period, and now the post-Soviet period, have produced.
Acknowledgements

Research for this project was conducted over the course of four stays in the former Soviet Union and Russia: in Moscow from January to May of 1989, and from September 1989 to March of 1990; on Sakhalin Island from April to October of 1990; in Moscow and Leningrad in November of 1990 and November of 1991; on Sakhalin Island again, and in Tomsk, from June to August of 1992. I am grateful to the following institutions for their support: Sigma Xi, the Scientific Society, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Association of Colleges and Universities of Canada, and the National Science Foundation. During the period of writing up, I was greatly aided by the generous support of Rice University, which provided me with a Lodieska Stockbridge Vaughan Fellowship as well as foreign travel funds, and the Social Science Research Council, which invited me to participate in their Workshop on Soviet Sociology and Anthropology.

Although this is not an ethnography of traditional Nivkh life, I owe an enormous debt to the Russian and Soviet ethnographers on whose far more extensive researches into Nivkh life I was able to rely when my own investigations found little of the same world they had so richly described. In North America, the analyses of Robert Austerlitz and Lydia Black have done a great deal to make these materials available in the English language.

Over the course of my research in Moscow and Petersburg, I was given the generous support of many associates of the Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnography (now the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology), including Sergei Aleksandrovich Arutunov, Anna Borodatova, Elena Novik, the late Sergei Serov, Anna Vasil'evna iv Smoliak, Chuner Mikhailovich Taksami, Valerii Aleksandrovich Tishkov, and many others. I am grateful also to Aidyn Jebrailov, Irina Monthéard, Vladimir Zineevich Panfilov, Aleksandr Pika, Tania Pika, Lusia Pol'shakova, Galina Aleksandrovna
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Having arrived on Sakhalin in April of 1990 after a laborious and labrynthine visa process, it is unlikely that I would have been granted permission to remain without the immediate support of the Sakhalin Regional Museum, who became the sponsoring institution for both of my stays. I am grateful to the director, Vladimir Mikhailovich Latyshev, and to such a rarely congenial and productive collective of scholars as at the museum, including Kira Iakovlevna Cherpakova, Marina Ivanovna Ishchenko, Gennadi Matiushkov, Valerii Pereslavitsev, Mikhail Proko'ev, Tania Roon, Valerii Shubin, Olga Shubina, Sasha Solov'ev, Mikhail Stanislavovich Vysokov (now of the Sakhalin Centre for the Documentation of Modern History) and Lena Zlatogorskaia. I am particularly grateful also to the staff of the Sakhalin State Archive. The bulk of the archival documents used in this study, including those eventually obtained in Tomsk, would not have been available to me without the unflagging kindness of Galina Ivanovna Dudarets.

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Note on Transliteration

The system of transliteration of Russian words follows that of the Library of Congress. Soft signs and hard signs from the Russian language are recognized with one and two apostrophes respectively, with only very occasional exceptions, such as the omission of the soft sign from proper names such as El'tsyn or Ol'ga.

When transliterating the names of Siberian indigenous peoples in lists, I have used the standardized Russian spellings. This is particularly the case with Nivkhi since I find it useful for clarity to distinguish between Nivkhi, as a plural noun, and Nivkh, as a singular noun or adjective, and also since the anglicized addition of an s to indicate the plural in the Nivkh case makes for an almost unpronounceable alternative. I have not followed the Nivkh language variant of Nivkhgu because of the diminutive number of Nivkh language speakers among Nivkhi with whom I worked.

More liberty is taken in the regular text with other ethnyonyms, particularly when the plural is more readily recognizable with the use of an s, such as for Giliaks (the prerevolutionary name for Nivkhi), Oroks or Buriats.
Chapter One/ Introduction

At the close of the nineteenth century, when Nivkh parents suspected that a young child might be the reincarnation of a deceased relative or supernatural being, fathers sometimes performed a "ritual of memory removal." If the child were to retain a memory of their otherworldly life, he or she might not adjust to their new circumstances, and could bring about unrest. In a ritual involving the placing of hats wrong side forward, the father would repeat a set formula, "You do not remember." Only a generation later, when the new Soviet government singled out Nivkhi and other Siberian indigenous peoples for intensive cultural reeducation programs, the Soviet vision of modernity, too, hinged on an express overcoming of the past.

Today there are some 4500 Nivkhi, roughly half of whom live on Sakhalin, with the remaining half living on the banks of the Amur. To chart their cultural history over the last one hundred years is to witness a process of modernization undertaken at remarkably great speed. Neither the type of the modernization nor the organized management of the past were unique to the Soviet Union, but it was a vision of modernity defined explicitly by state ideology at almost every stage. The goal of my research has been to explore the lived experience of this Soviet vision, and to look at the Soviet social project through an expressly ethnographic lens.

For many Russians and non-Russians alike, it has always been easy to make light of the artificiality of Soviet culture as it was propagated in education, public rituals, official pronouncements and indeed, in almost all domains of Soviet life. Writing on Central Asia, S. Enders Wimbush was not out of place when he proffered that, "Common sense suggests that fourteen centuries of brilliant Irano-Turkic-Islamic culture cannot be

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quickly swept away by sixty-eight years of Russian-dominated Marxist-Leninist pseudo-culture, among whose highest offerings -- by the Soviets' own admission -- figure the complete works of Leonid I. Brezhnev.² But at the same time, not all Sovietization efforts were the same. In contrast to the policies towards the larger republican nationalities in European Russia and Central Asia, the state made few if any concessions to the existing cultural identities of Siberian peoples at the outset of the Soviet period. Essentially "without culture," Nivkhi were not a palimpsest but a tabula rasa onto which a new Soviet identity and way of life could be inscribed. The more difficult and interesting question then, comes in exploring the extent to which Soviet patriotic strategies won over their intended audiences and created new hybrid identities, hybridities which fast blurred the popularly invoked oppositions of Soviet and local, traditional and modern.

Siberian indigenous peoples rise to the fore in this regard since the initial low regard with which their cultures were held in Soviet circles, in effect, their "culturelessness," made them ideal candidates for social reformation. Their role as a blank slate, backward peoples waiting to be inducted into the twentieth century, led them ironically to be viewed as "the most true proletarians," and their trajectories within the Soviet world were anticipated as the most lucid markers of the new culture. How then have indigenous peoples adjusted to the feverish transformations in Siberia and the Far East over the last eighty years? Russian bookstores, libraries and archives are still filled with rows of books filed under "Soviet cultural construction," books intended for public consumption and devoted to the Sovietization of the nation. What then were the rationales were provided for supplanting a Nivkh culture by a Soviet one? What did this process mean to Nivkh, and how did they appropriate these new cultural forms?

I began my research on Siberian indigenous peoples in the Soviet Union in 1989, at a time when access to fieldwork for foreign researchers was considerably limited. With the possibility of not obtaining field access at all, I chose to study Nivkh over other Siberian indigenous groups because of the enormous corpus of Russian-language literature devoted to them and the possibilities these presented as a project in reserve. Prior to the bolshevik revolution of 1917, Nivkh figured in the Russian imagination as the notorious bounty hunters of prisoners on the run from Sakhalin's legendary prisons. The "Hades of Russia," Sakhalin was the most dreaded of exile posts at the turn of the century, and the most expert Nivkh hunters were rewarded for placing their talents in the service of the state. Indeed, it was partly Sakhalin's dark history of exile suffering that has contributed to Nivkhi being one of the most studied of all Siberian indigenous peoples. The German ethnographer Leopold von Shrenk conducted a lengthy survey of Nivkh life for the Imperial Academy of Sciences in 1859. Lev Shternberg, one of the eventual deans of Russian ethnography, spent eight years as prisoner cum ethnographer in exile on Sakhalin from 1880-1888. While on Sakhalin, Shternberg met and began a collaboration with the exiled Polish scholar Bronislaw Pilsudskii, and their contributions to the ethnography of the Russian Far East have been enormous. At the outset of the Soviet period one of Shternberg's graduate students, Erukhim Kreinovich, began what would become decades of research on Nivkh life; while in the 1960s and 70s and 80s, there have been considerable contributions by Anna Smoliak, the Nivkh ethnographer Chuner Taksam, and the collective of the Sakhalin Regional Museum. In the English language, Lydia Black put the nineteenth century materials to excellent use in her monographs on Nivkh social organization and symbol systems. The Nivkh language itself, so distinct as to have no known affiliation to any other linguistic group, has been the subject of many studies, including those by Robert Austerlitz, Roman Jakobson, Claude Levi-Strauss, Galina
Otaina and Vladimir Panfilov.  

Despite these scholarly riches, particularly those from the Soviet period, the materials that were not there often made more of an impression on me than those that were. With the exigencies of censorship both induced and imposed, the Soviet literature from the 1930s onwards gave us little sense of how Soviet policies, particularly those aimed at internationalizing the small peoples of Siberia and the Far East, affected people's lives at the local level. There are few accounts where indigenous voices play a role, save for effusive testimonies to the success of Soviet government which tell us mainly about the formulae of patriotic texts. Western literature on Soviet nationality policies is not readily helpful in providing answers given the predilection for studies of the larger nationalities in the non-Russian republics. Moreover, while Soviet scholarly works were largely approving of Soviet policy, there was often an inverse tradition in Western scholarship which denied the legitimacy of Soviet institutions altogether. Alexander Shtromas once wrote that "underneath the surface of almost total obedience to the powers-that-be, functions a society of almost total dissent," and one can see this tendency written into numerous studies on Siberia which emphasize the noble persistence of traditional culture in the face of the Soviet monolith. Soviet symbols and rituals are often dismissed because they were "imposed from above." Yet after several decades of Soviet rule, how distinct was "Nivkh" from "Soviet"? To what extent did Nivkh see themselves as being not exclusively subject to but part of a Soviet Union?

As I grew more familiar with these literatures, I began to realize that there were essentially two Siberias being talked about, as well as two sets of native peoples ascribed there. On the one hand, ever since the 1960s, when Soviet leaders began to announce that

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3 The bibliography on Nivkh at the end of the dissertation lists the works of these and other, mainly Soviet, scholars.
the formation of the Soviet nation had been achieved, Siberian indigenous peoples have been roundly praised for their heroic leap from primitive-communal society to socialism. In contrast to their more populous counterparts around the Soviet Union, Siberian peoples were considered to be less advanced along the Marxist scale of historical progress, and their induction into modernity meant the bypassing of the slaveholding, feudal and capitalist modes of production. Numerous book titles herald this "stride across a thousand years" where the early days of social reconstruction were "equal to centuries," and it became customary to preface studies of Siberian native culture with passages such as the following:

The results of this gigantic undertaking [socialist construction] are readily visible: the liquidation of illiteracy, the creation of written languages, the rise of native literary, musical and dance ensembles, and finally, the very existence of native intelligentsias -- all this permits us to conclude that the cultures of [northern] native peoples have ceased to be "traditional" and have begun to be "historic," that is, developing.\(^5\)

Through the cultural development of northern peoples, "a planned and directed process,"\(^6\) the Soviet government drew the indigenous population out from timelessness and brought them into history. Such a passage from tradition to modernity was equally congruent with the Soviet nationality policy that was emergent in the 1920s. Maintaining that ethnic tension was class-based, the bolsheviks held that the disappearance of the class struggle under communism would in turn cause interethnic struggles (and perforce, ethnic identity) to atrophy. Free of oppression, Soviet peoples would flourish and come together as a new international ethnus. Here was an example of a state policy which did not deny, but rather


\(^6\)Ibid.
insisted upon the coevalness of its indigenous subjects.

On the other hand, to speak to anyone in Moscow, St. Petersburg or Novosibirsk, to appreciate the almost negligible role that Siberian peoples have played in Russian popular consciousness, and to witness the history of state paternalism towards them, one could well contend, according to an opposite vision, that Siberian peoples have remained the children of nature that they were long presumed to be. Despite the focused efforts of government planners to integrate them into Soviet society, the *malye narody Severa*, Russia's "small peoples of the north" who numbered over 184,000 in the 1989 census, have merged with the dominant perception of Siberia as a wild and untamed land.

A testimony to the plasticity of representation, Siberia remains a mythical domain despite its enormous size, population and modern achievements. Since its marginalization in the 1800s by Count Nesslerode, Nicholas I's foreign minister, as "a deep net" into which Russia could cast its social sins, most of the literature on Siberia, as one European observed, dealt either with exile accounts or Siberian railway sketches. Since then, it would seem that not much has changed: in the 20th century Valentin Pikul's *Katorga* [Labour Camp] has perhaps replaced George Kennan's *Siberia and the Exile System* in prominence, and the lore of BAM [the Baikal-Amur Mainline] has replaced tales of the Trans-Siberian. Siberia has eternally been the place to which one retreats, takes refuge, or draws upon for spiritual and material resources. It gained a special place in Soviet folklore when thousands of women and children were evacuated there during the German invasion in World War II, and it retains its appeal as the destination of millions more who, attracted by "a romantic desire to be closer to nature" signed up to forge their characters through work projects. Although Siberia has been distinguished throughout Russian and Soviet

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literature by its daunting distances, inaccessibility and dark history of exile suffering, it must be noted that, as in many popular myths, "that which repulses is also that which attracts."10

Siberia, now as through the centuries, means boldness combined with energy, daring, persistence and iron will of entire generations in carrying out plans and the ability to endure hardships --all those inner qualities which material incentives alone, no matter how strong, cannot arouse. There are few heroes in today's world who can measure up to the Siberians. These men and women are the principals in the century's greatest epic drama. We shall see them locked in fierce struggle with limitless space and inhospitable natural conditions, conquering, day by day and hour by hour, obstacles which match Siberia's huge dimensions, the exceptional harshness of its climate and the incredible rigours of its natural conditions.11

We are presented repeatedly with visions of Siberia as symbolizing nature in contrast to the Russian centre as symbolizing culture. Siberia's indigenous peoples have largely been locked into this semiotic matrix of nature and timelessness, and the consequence has been the popular contention that Siberian native peoples have lived apart from the flow of events that affected their compatriots throughout the Soviet Union. As the Russian ethnographer Aleksandr Pika has asked,

Over recent years we have come to know more of the tragic fates of Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian peasants at the end of the 1920s and through the 1930s. We have begun to understand more clearly how these

events have influenced and continue to influence modern economic and cultural conditions, indeed, all spheres of our life. But what went on in places where there was no peasantry? For example, in the far north, what became of the small nationalities and tribes of pastoral nomads, semi-sedentary hunters and fishermen who, over the course of two or three years were to have progressed from primitive communal society to socialism...

Northern peoples achieved socialism, and what of it?\textsuperscript{12}

Cold, distant and without history: these are the parameters by which much of Siberia is represented.

We have then two dominant images of Siberian native peoples: one that heralds their transition into the modern world, and another that consigns them to the timeless world of yesteryear. Each relies on the rhetoric of exoticism, either through its cultivation or its forgetting, and each speaks to the politics of representation. The questions I look at here then are the following: How did the changing fortunes of each of these ideal types influence the nationality policy of various periods? How did they reverberate back through the communities they were meant to define?

When I finally did get to Sakhalin in April of 1990 and stayed there on my first visit for six months, I realized the extent to which these polarized oppositions had governed my own expectations. When friends in Moscow looked balefully on the prospect of half a year at a distant exile post, I would reel off evidence of a populous island with many and varied modern conveniences. But in my mind it was still Chekhov's island of desolation I was expecting, and it took me some time to part with my own romance of suffering when I arrived on an island of over 700,000 people, lush in the south

with bamboo groves and staggeringly beautiful in the north with larch forests and deep blue seascapes.

So too was I expecting not so much Nivkh isolation but Nivkh separateness. Yet the stories told by Nivkhi with whom I lived and worked were very much in step with the turmoil in the Russian state of which they were a part. A great deal of what they talked about was new to all of the accounts I had previously seen. Rather than a large prison colony at the cold edge of the world, the prerevolutionary Sakhalin of Nivkh accounts was a cosmopolitan island at the crossroads of the Pacific Rim and the North Asian mainland. Many Nivkhi were indeed illiterate and subject to the harsher effects of late 19th century colonization, as the redemptive theme in Soviet literature traditionally began, but many others shopped regularly at the Japanese, Chinese and Korean stores that covered the island. That indigenous peoples were affected at all by Stalinist terror is not mentioned in Soviet literature, yet it was rare to meet a Nivkh who had not lost a family member during the 1930s or 1940s. In 1937-38 alone, one third of all Nivkh men were removed by the KGB, according to one archival source. In more recent times, what plagued many Nivkhi I knew was a dramatic resettlement program introduced by Khrushchev in the late 1950s, when he attempted to streamline agricultural production by concentrating the country's rural population into agrocentres. On Sakhalin, between 1962 and 1986, more than 1000 towns and villages were reduced to 329. Coastlines which were once lined with Nivkh villages every ten kilometres became littered with ghost towns.

The fact that my field research began during perestroika exerted a decisive influence. With the conjunctive elements of release, unease and the considerable spirit of the absurd that Gorbachev's reconstruction evoked, Nivkhi I knew looked upon perestroika more as a source of collapse than for promise of renewal. The growing chaos also thrust the Nivkh sense of identity under harsher light. With the Soviet vision of a
utopian modernity now in rubble, there was little to suggest that the stride across a thousand years had been worth the effort, if it had been achieved at all. However, nor was it clear that Nivkh had a tradition to reclaim. Lydia Black was indeed right when she suggested that little of the Nivkh world, as it was known to Shrenk, Shternberg, Pilsudskii and Kreinovich, still remains.\(^\text{13}\) Where Nivkh accounts show that they largely negotiated their identity over the last seventy years between the variously manifested dialectics of tradition and modernity, then perestroika, to borrow Walter Benjamin's phrase, represented these dialectics at a standstill.

After a month of initial travelling and orientation on Sakhalin, I settled in the fishing village of Rybnoe on the island's northwestern shore. Home to some 250 residents, half of them Nivkh and half Russians, Rybnoe also housed the Red Dawn collective fishery where I worked for three months during the summer fish run. In the formal side to my research I conducted frequent and lengthy interviews with Nivkh and Russians about the process of Soviet cultural construction and where it had led them. Topics usually ranged chronologically from stories of prerevolutionary life (either experienced or learned from parents); the early Soviet reforms such as the institution of hospitals; schools and special literacy campaigns organized out of "Culture Bases"; collectivization; Stalinism; 1960s resettlements; and perestroika. In addition, I made regular visits to other towns and villages on North Sakhalin where Nivkh communities were most concentrated, particularly Romanovka, Rybnovs, Liugi, Nekrasovka, Moskal'vo, Okha, Nogliki and Chir-Unvd.

When I told the Nivkh I met that I wanted to study Nivkh culture, most laughed and grew dark, looked gloomy and grew darker, or just looked at me darkly. While perestroika had given people some cause to be optimistic, the dominant mood of most of the Nivkh I knew in the summer of 1990 was one of tragedy and mourning. "You want

to study our culture?" the responses would begin, "You're too late! It's gone! The Soviets ruined everything." And indeed, these claims to desolation were not hard to believe. Less than ten percent of Nivkhi today have any command of their native language; many are locked into degrading cycles of job and housing discrimination; and much of Sakhalin itself, despite its endowed natural beauty, is a landscape of man-made ruins. From poisoned lands and crumbling homes, it did not seem much of a step to ruined lives.

These tides of lament were at first so great that I began to wish I had not asked in the first place. Villagers who I had expected to be retiring if not reluctant parties to my project badgered me to make note of their discontent. Yes... World going to hell in a handbasket... Soviets criminal, Nivkhi betrayed. This was a cathartic time and many Nivkhi seemed satisfied to have a foreign interloper about to record it. Yet it did not take long to see that this new form of public therapy disgruntled local Russians who felt they were being left out of the equation. This added a further element of confusion: At this crossroads when Nivkhi were framing their selves through cathartic lament, the Russians around them were no longer professing hegemony. "You think your culture is dead??" Russians coworkers countered to Nivkhi over endless rest periods at work, "At least you made some progress over seventy years. Our culture was once great! We were one of the most powerful empires in the world, and now look at us! We have a lot more to be sorry for than you do!"

It is with no exaggeration that at least a dozen late nights ended in heated debates over whose culture was the most ruined, with myself the befuddled spectator.

However, it was in the less formal months that followed, when I began to run out of questions and when my hosts concluded that the baleful truth of their emptiness had been etched into my consciousness forever, that the narratives turned in different
directions. Friends and coworkers regularly held forth with at times lyrical nostalgia about the Soviet period, about impressive accomplishments under Stalin and about the excitement of moving to new towns under Khrushchev. "Pro-perestroika" Nivkh revealed themselves to be most anti-perestroika in their opposition to political pluralism, private property and free speech. Radical anti-communist Nivkh leaders turned out to be the very figures who engineered the closing of native villages only ten years previous.

The shifting allegiances between what was constituted to be Nivkh or Russian and what was constituted to be Soviet underlined for me the complexity of the hybrid identities that the Soviet Union's efforts to internationalize its constituencies had produced. It also seemed to lay to rest the David and Goliath angle on which so many visions of Siberian indigenous peoples are based, that these "small peoples" are down but not out, oppressed but still resistant. However, lest the original presentations of self be lost on either myself or the readers which my presence connoted, the tides of lament readvanced when I was leaving Sakhalin in October of that year. The formalities of leaving were even more generous than the formalities of arriving, with long evenings of vodka and grilled salmon. But the toasts which marked the end of my stay would begin dolefully, "Our culture, it is true, is no more..."

The pronunciation of culturelessness by the bearers to whom culture is ascribed is not a strategy specific to this time or place. Elizabeth Colson discusses it in her 1953 monograph on Makah Indians of the American northwest coast and responds to similar Makah contentions by distinguishing between notions of "manifest traditional culture" from "latent culture." More recently, Marilyn Strathern invoked this strategy in The Gender of the Gift, an ethnography of Mount Hageners in Papua New Guinea. Strathern is rightfully uncomfortable with the ease by which many ethnographers ascribe Western

categories of identity on their subjects of study. Through a strategy of negation (the X or Y have 'no society'), she calls attention to what are essentially competing epistemologies in an ethnographic text, and shows how claims to culturelessness are both acts of identity displacement and identity reformation.\textsuperscript{15}

That many Nivkh I knew in 1990 chose to define themselves on the basis of loss is not hard to understand in the uneasy context of perestroika, when the dramatic turns left a vast number of Soviets with the feeling that their lives had been spent in vain. Yet, to be sure, this negation could also be seen as "an extension of meaning," in Strathern's sense, as part of Nivkh efforts to redefine themselves in a context of enormous uncertainty and notable discrimination. Nivkh claims to culturelessness were rarely proffered without various degrees of blame ascribed to Russians qua Soviets. To this extent we see Nivkhi playing out their symbolic capital for their own negotiations of self and for assaulting, in a very conscious way, the Russian and Ukrainian holds on local resources.

Bearing Strathern's caveats in mind, it is important here to consider the ideas of culture and society which are at stake. From much of Western ethnography is seems clear that Edward Tylor's 1871 omnibus definition of culture, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and many other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society"\textsuperscript{16} still underwrites the myriad ways in which the term is invoked. Herder's emphasis on culture as \textit{Folksgeist} may arguably be closer to scholarship in Western anthropology since the 1960s, when more attention has been paid to ethnicity as an ongoing process of reformulation from generation to generation. When Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn tackled culture's etymologies, they worked through more


than one hundred definitions which staked out culture's territory. The risk in these encyclopedic efforts, however, has often been in seeing notions of race, national and culture exclusively, for as Brackette Williams has shown, concepts of race, ethnicity, place and nation competitively label different aspects of identity formation. This position is made clearer when one considers the homologous evolution of the English words "culture" and "nation," particularly as their currency heightened as part of European Enlightenment discourse.

The growing attention in 1980s social science scholarship paid to the invention of culture, the invention of tradition or the production of national ideologies bring us closer to the spirit of literature on "Soviet cultural construction" and the critical role of the state in directing collective consciousness. Among all the factors which come to the fore in identity formation, the role of the state is most often overlooked. Here again the drive to specificity becomes crucial. In the Soviet context, the state is conventionally opposed to "the people," with the vast part of theories we construct on nationalisms and ethnicities assuming the interests of the latter. But the state is not an essentialised homogenous body, as Katharine Verdery demonstrated well in her monograph on rural life in Romania, Transylvanian Villagers. Moreover, the state often has nationalist agendas of its own, creating discourses of homogeneity out of heterogeneity, order out of disorder and purity out of impurity. These discourses are at the heart of Soviet cultural construction, and in exploring these state creations here, I look to balance state visions of the Nivkhi with

Nivkh visions of their state.

In the course of my field research I seldom asked whether there was a Nivkh definition of culture and what it might be. I presumed that, like most people, the Nivkhi I knew didn't give these etymologies much thought. Yet since then, I have often been struck by the depth of Nivkh consciousness of themselves as a culture and the extent to which they have appropriated Marxist-Leninist concepts of collective identity. The senses of being in and having a culture (be it Soviet, Nivkh, or both) built on a shared knowledge of Marxist-Leninist theory from elementary school onwards. The regular and remarkably consistent message that Nivkhi were a backward people reformed by the Soviet state resonated from literacy units to Culture Bases, from ideology lectures at the fishery to home entertainment, from the produce of Soviet ethnographers to the imponderabilia of printed matchboxes. "Culture" meant having one's race stamped into the ubiquitous domestic passport.21 "Culture" meant subscribing to official tenets of equality but having special access to goods and services on the basis of a continuing subordinate status rendered by structural discrimination. Last but not least, "culture" came with belonging to a Soviet Union where, to at least my own surprise, it was rare to meet anyone of any apparent social group, anywhere, who did not know what ethnography was, and what ethnographers do.

That Marxist-Leninist ideology was ubiquitous does not tell us how it was received, but sketching out some of the key principles from the Soviet context helps us to understand the terms of the debate.

The Russian word for culture, kul'tura, was borrowed from the French during the

Francophilic reign of Empress Catherine the Great (1762-1796). *Kul'tura*, consistent with its etymological roots from the Latin *colere*, was used initially to describe a growth process or a process of positive development, hence the verb *kul'tivirovat’*, analogous to the English 'to cultivate,' which was used to describe processes of intellectual or moral formation as well as agricultural cultivation. 22 The concept of a people was denoted in Russian by *narod* (from the verb root *narazhat’/narodit’*, to give birth to or beget) 23 and it was the idea of a *narod* that rose to prominence in the nineteenth century by capturing the essence of an essentialist Russian spirit distinguished from an advancing European qua Western cosmopolitanism. Throughout the nineteenth century in particular, more or less up to the Bolshevik revolution, the dynamics of cultural debate in Russia were comparable to those going on elsewhere in Europe. The most well known debates took place in the 1840s between Slavophilic interests, who saw themselves as guardians of the Russian soul and defenders of nationally symbolic institutions such as the peasant commune, and Westernizing factions, who favoured European enlightenment notions of civilization and modern progress. 24 These political debates over the Russian identity were comparable to similar trends in Germany contrasting *Folksgeist* to *Kultur*, yet as in Germany, the Russian variants were more complex than a nationalist/internationalist tension, or as a struggle between backwardness and progress. 25 Both camps, embodied by thinkers such as

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24 For a broad overview of Russian intellectual debates in the nineteenth century, see Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955 (1937)).
Khomiakov or Dostoevskii in the Slavophile tradition, or Herzen and Tolstoi in the Westerner tradition, advocated modernization and a liberalization of autocratic state policies. Both shared a firm belief in the mystical, redemptive quality of the Russian people. The crucial disagreement was initially over the pace of reform, and later on in the century, whether capitalism would be a necessary stage for Russia in light of the growing influence of Marxist thought. Although by the 1860s, the Slavophile-Westerner debates in Petersburg salons were supplanted by different political movements, by splits between populist narodniki, socialist narodniki, and various camps of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the Slavophile-Westerner opposition managed to hold sway in the Russian imagination by reaching out to the broader binary rubrics of romanticist nationalism and enlightenment universalism.

It was in the context of this binary rhetoric that Marx's relegation of culture as a tool of the ruling class found unexpected resonance. In place of culture as the essential glue binding human societies, Marx stressed mode of production; in contrast to visions of (high) culture as a process of uplifting, Marx countered that this was a false consciousness engendered by the bourgeoisie to legitimize and maintain their hold on the means of production. The introduction of Marxist theory in Russia, despite Marx's own resolution that socialism could not be advanced in a primarily non-industrial setting, spoke to both populist romantic and universalist enlightenment interests. While Marxists who looked to proletarianize the peasantry assailed the bucolic idealism of the Narodniki, their attacks on European bourgeois democracy responded to broadly Slavophile concerns regarding the relevance of the European experience for Russia. Likewise, the Marxian modernist, internationalist agenda reached out to the cosmopolitan interests of Westernizers: World revolution brought about by the shared interests of an international proletariat left little room for idealist national allegiances. With the intended eradication of class conflict, there
would also be a new role for the idea of culture itself.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the development of Marxist-Leninism as the guiding ideological force in the building of the new Soviet state at first introduced few revisions to Marx's laconic positions on culture and nationality policy. Marx's relational programme between infrastructure and superstructure was maintained as a causal framework dividing culture into the material and the spiritual. "Material culture," as The Great Soviet Encyclopedia notes, "embraces all material activity and its results (for example, the instruments of labour, dwellings, household items, clothing, and means of transportation and communication). "Spiritual culture" embraces the sphere of consciousness and intellectual production (knowledge, morality, upbringing and education, law, philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, science, art, literature, mythology, and religion)."26 These two genres are said to function as an organic unity, but the salience of the base-superstructure reasoning remains in place when it is further noted that, "The historical continuity in the development of material culture is precisely what forms the basis for the developmental continuity of culture as a whole."27

What we find here then is a decisive move away from culture as Folksgeist, where cultural identity stems from a vaguely defined primordial state of belonging. Culture, instead, becomes a universal class phenomenon which can be charted along an evolutionary trajectory of socioeconomic development. Soviet culture represented the zenith, but it was also a carefully monitored achievement, since, "under the leadership of the Communist Party the development of socialist culture acquires for the first time in history a consciously planned character."28

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28 Ibid., p. 300.
The planning of the new state identity required not only the presentation of new ideologies but the eradication of the old. Lenin's "transformist hegemony," in the Gramscian sense, came in the form of the cultural revolution, on which he wrote repeatedly from 1918 to 1923.\textsuperscript{29} Cultural revolution hinged on the dramatic restructuring of the socioeconomic base indicated by the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the socialization of the means of production, socialist industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture. The task as a whole was to transform all citizens of the new Soviet state into socially-active participants in socialist construction. One gets a sense of the magnitude of the the agenda from the excerpt below.

The cultural revolution includes the development of a socialist system of public education and enlightenment, the reeducation of the bourgeois intelligentsia, the formation of a socialist intelligentsia, the development of socialist literature and art, the rise of science, the formation of a new morality, the strengthening of the atheistic world view, and a reconstruction of mores. Its most important aim is to make the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideology the personal conviction of everyone and to develop in him the ability to use these principles in his practical activity and to fight uncompromisingly against survivals of the past and against bourgeois and revisionist views.\textsuperscript{30}

The importance of social homogeneity here, be it in economic, political or expressly ethnic terms, became crucial. With nationalism understood as a temporary phenomenon induced by bourgeois property relations, socialist culture made an internationalist statement, envisioning the formation of a new historically defined

\textsuperscript{29}V. I. Lenin, "O kooperatsii" (1925) in Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, 5th edition (Moscow), vol. 45.
\textsuperscript{30}GSE, Vol. 13, p. 297.
community, the Soviet people.

Despite the ideological gymnastics that the Bolshevik concept of culture now performed, Lenin's use of culture harked back to the European enlightenment notions of moral growth. This led in turn to converse directives as to what did not constitute cultured behaviour. As Alfred Meyer has pointed out,

The adjective "uncultured" was... used very often to characterize the rough-shod methods of Soviet and party bureaucracy, its authoritarian degeneration and its corrupt abuses. Culture, then, was by implication the achievement of a smoothly and democratically functioning administrative apparatus... The Soviet press and other Soviet literature is filled with admonitions to raise the level of culture in tractor maintenance, in the fight against worker absenteeism, in daily etiquette, both public and private, in cutting administrative red tape, and virtually all other activities.\(^31\)

Under Stalin the internationalist agenda in Soviet construction was modified. "National culture," meaning ethnic rather than federal culture, reentered official policy and paved the way for the new maxim in Stalinist nationality policy, "National (ethnic) in form, socialist in content."\(^32\) Partly this was in recognition of the limits of historical

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\(^{31}\) Alfred Meyer, "The Use of the Term..." p. 216.

\(^{32}\) By equating ethnicity with nationality, the Soviet state defined itself as "multinational" in the sense of having many ethnic groups under its banner. According to the principles of historical materialism, groups could be referred to as a *plemias* [tribe], defined as an endogamous unit consisting of exogamous clans and having poorly developed productive forces; as a *narodnost*, an intermediate group which arose when tribes and clans amalgamated; or as a *natsiia* [nation], which required a territorial, cultural and linguistic community, in addition to a comprehensive economic system (see Kuoljok, *The Revolution in the North*, pp. 22-23). However, all citizens were also grouped according to *natsionalnost*, for which Teodor Shanin has pointed out there is no adequate translation ("Soviet Theories of Ethnicity: The Case of a Missing Term" New Left Review, 158 (1986), pp. 113-122). Given its colloquial usage, the closest translation might be "ethnicity," but I follow the customary use of "nationality" to retain the formal implications of the state policies.
materialism: By pronouncing that economic factors were "effective" but not determining causes in social formations, Stalin's policy makers opened the way for recognizing features unique to social groups which transcended the sequence of historical development outlined by Marx and Engels. In this way, the homogenizing agenda was scaled down to ongoing ethnic conflicts which had persisted despite socialist rule; more importantly, the recognition of specific ethnic differences deferred to the new status accorded the Russians for the purpose of their mobilization during WWII.

The ideological slippage between the notions of "ethnic in form" but "socialist in content" speak to the broader tensions of Soviet nationality policy that underlay it from the beginning. By one view, local culture was to be celebrated; at the same time, it was to be phased out in favour of pan-Soviet values and structures. This inherent tension underwrote Nivkh's own retrospections in 1990 as the Soviet Union was disintegrating around them. On the one hand, there was the Soviet Union's important legacy of having consolidated ethnic identities as nationalities, that is to say, as nationalities on the sub-state rather than the state-wide level. In contrast to other multiethnic states in the twentieth century, sociologist Rogers Brubaker has argued, the Soviet Union institutionalized its multiethnicity by recognizing ethnicity as nationality, and (at least on paper) fostering the development of dozens of sub-state national units. The result was a broad fostering of local cultures. In this respect, early Soviet reforms among Nivkh represented a strong departure from the openly assimilationist policies of the tsarist era. "Soviets" instituted schools, Soviets created the Nivkh writing system, Soviets trained

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33James P. Scanlan "From Historical Materialism to Historical Interactionism: A Philosophical Examination of Some Recent Developments" in Samuel H. Baron and Nancy W. Heer, eds., Windows on the Russian Past: Essays on Soviet Historiography since Stalin (Columbus: AAASS, 1977), p. 5.
Nivkhi in universities around the country, Soviets instituted "Nivkh" kolkhozes, and Soviets, by the 1960s, took to organizing the "Festivals of Northern Peoples." In short, "Soviets," be they defined here as Russian or eventually, even Nivkh officials, took responsibility, and in turn credit, for the reification of public things Nivkh.

On the other hand, there was still a homogenizing agenda at work. This was explicit in the utopian pronouncements of the 1920s anticipating the formation of the New Soviet Man, and it resurfaced most strongly through Khrushchev's three point plan where ethnic groups were scheduled to "flourish, grow closer and merge." Merging was to lead to the formation of the Soviet people, a new historical community.35 Western Sovietologists have traditionally paid more attention to this dimension of Soviet nationality policy, but while it worked alongside its contrary dynamic of the strengthening of ethnic identities, it nonetheless had a great impact on the lives of Siberian peoples, where to a degree, the smaller the population, the greater the force of Sovietization. In the postwar period, while Buriats and Yakuts had their own Academies of Science, Nivkh schoolchildren were being made to stand in the corner for not speaking Russian. In the 1960s and 70s, when Khrushchev's introduced his ill-conceived plan to economize on rural settlements, the impact again was greatest among the smallest of groups.

This contradictory matrix reverberated continually through Nivkh narratives of Sovietization, and it brings us closer to understanding the sense of loss brought about by the collapse of the world around them. For Nivkhi, this period bore a bitter double irony: As they came more fully to understand the loss of their traditional culture, they were also marking the demise of the symbols and ideals that they traded them in for. In 1990, the

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perceived loss of the ideals of both tradition and modernity left Nivkhi sorting through the
remains of each of the different pasts to which they at one time subscribed.

At the outset of my research on Sakhalin, it was clear that the original plan for a
study of traditional Nivkh life in the 1990s would not make for a weighty volume. Left
without a set goal for how to proceed, I nonetheless found myself caught up in the endless
turns of political events and how these were destabilizing the ways people thought about
their own biographies. With a future portentous and the present chaotic, it soon became
apparent that in 1990, the closest thing to an ethnography of a Nivkh present was an
ethnography of Nivkh pasts. Had I arrived on Sakhalin in 1989, when the March elections
to the new Congress of People's Deputies had people crowded around transistor radios at
Moscow bus stops, stirred by the debates, Nivkhi too might have been more forward
looking, rather than retrospective. When I returned for the second time in 1992, as I
discuss in Chapter Seven, the atmosphere was totally different again, with people
expressly trying not to think of much anything at all.

This is a study in retrospection then, retrospection by Nivkhi and Russians on the
cultivation of Soviet identity on north Sakhalin Island, and retrospection through the lens
of a specific time and a specific place. Through archival documents, travel accounts, and
the copious literatures produced by officials and scholars, tsarist and Soviet, the project
creates a base to which extensive Nivkh narrative accounts respond. It is especially in the
context of Nivkhi themselves sorting through the remains of the Soviet ethos to which
they once subscribed that I began to explore the reverberations of the dichotomous mythic
constructions in which they have been cast. This is not a question of setting up the
"myths" against "what really happened," but a mapping of the process of shifting and often
contradictory interpretations brought about the recollections themselves.

It is important then for the structure of the dissertation that Chapter Two, "Rybnoe
Reconstructed," begins with Rybnoe in 1990 in order to establish the arenas of recollection through which the rest of the chronological material was produced. Chapter Three examines historical accounts and memories of the prerevolutionary period. Chapter Four looks at the establishment of the new Soviet order on North Sakhalin from 1925 to the early 1930s. Chapter Five discusses collectivization, Stalinism and the Second World War. Chapter Six focuses on Nivkh reactions to the 1960s resettlements, while Chapter Seven, "Perestroika Revisited" looks at the same Sakhalin communities two years later in 1992 and discusses directions in which Siberian cultural politics could go in the near future.

Apart from the immediate arenas of scholarship on Nivkhi and Sakhalin Island, it is hoped that this dissertation will be useful in a number of ways. The first layer of comparison addresses Siberian indigenous peoples as a whole. The twenty-six "small peoples" of the Russian north share a recent history of conquest of colonization, and many of the measures taken by Nivkhi will be familiar to their counterparts around Siberia and the Russian Far East. Yet the malye narody are far from a homogenous assemblage, and more specific records of their experiences over the past three hundred years give us more room to recognize the distinctness of groups so long presumed to be the same. While I have not made express gestures here to compare the experience of Siberian indigenous peoples to other, particularly northern indigenous communities elsewhere, I hope that the current work might be useful toward these ends.

That said, the setting provided by late perestroika brings out the singularities of the indigenous position in the Soviet Union. With a federal movement of native peoples which was in fledgling stages in 1990 and 1992, Nivkhi I knew were far from politicized, and lamented the fading of the Soviet world to at least the same extent as they recognized the fading of their own.
Secondly, as a study of Soviet cultural construction, I emphasize the important role of the Soviet Union's own nationalist agenda rather than just the national identities of the groups constrained by it. I also try to recognize the very hybrid identities related to me by Nivkhi, whose narratives underlined in such concrete ways how quickly the tension between "Soviet" and "local" became blurred after the Second World War. The emphasis on "Soviet culture" here is not simply a nod to the role of the state in fashioning ethnic consciousness, but it obliges us to question the very locus of culture creation in at least the Nivkh context where, from the vantage point of 1990, Nivkh recollections of their own pasts stemmed more from statist interpretations than the proverbial "local" ones.

In a concrete sense, the themes of memory and forgetting emerge in the turbulent campaigns of state planning on Sakhalin in the twentieth century. In a rollercoaster of policy shifts, Nivkhi have seen a wide constellation of cultural icons, from language to clothing to native cadres to shamans disparaged (Nicholas II) and then celebrated (Lenin), repressed (Stalin) and then revived (Khrushchev), ignored (Brezhnev) and then revived again (Gorbachev). The romantic inclination is to imagine that, now freed from these cycles (or at a free stage within the same cycle), memories of Nivkh life will flourish again. But this would appear to be romanticism belated. Freud and many others have reminded us that repression makes for a sharp spur to remembering, but the protracted Soviet experience leads us to question just how much can be remembered after so long. Memory and forgetting also underwrote my own participation in Nivkh lives, where at the behest of a visitor, Nivkhi tried to recover the inherently partial memories of a past which was at times as elusive to them as it was to me. How Nivkhi manage the past is essential for understanding what took place over the Soviet period, and for understanding rationales for current redefinition in a post-Soviet setting and in the new geopolitical matrix of North Asia.
"Ruins are where history merges into the setting"
-Walter Benjamin

In the 1890s, Grigorii Zotov was a Petersburg businessman who kept an apartment on one of the city's most posh canal streets, the Fontanka. He had extensive business interests in the Russian Far East. Through his firm, G. I. Zotov and Company, he was among the first Russian businessman to profit from the oil riches on Sakhalin Island, Russia's notorious penal colony. And, from 1892-1902, he rented some of the best fishing grounds off of Sakhalin's northwestern shore. He began with twelve small fisheries which he administered out of the town of Rybnoe, the only Russian settlement on the upper coast. At the fisheries or artels, as they were known, Zotov employed over 500 Russians, including 160 exiles. During the peak seasons, he employed up to an additional sixty Japanese men and over 600 Giliaks, the largest of the island's indigenous groups.¹ Fish from the area was sent to Japan, Australia, Vladivostok and Odessa.² When asked to prepare a report on the moral codes of the indigenous peoples on Sakhalin in 1897, Zotov wrote that Giliaks were reliable workers but, in contrast to the neighbouring native Oroks and Tungus, they had been largely resistant to Christianity, continuing to subscribe instead

¹At the turn of the century, the island's indigenous population consisted mainly of Nivkhi [Giliaki], Oroki, and Evenki [Tungusy] on the northern half, and Ainu on the southern half. The Ainu were relocated to Japan in 1945 after forty years of Japanese rule on the southern half of Sakhalin [Japanese, Karafuto] came to an end. As of 1989, the largest indigenous groups on Sakhalin included 2,008 Nivkhi, 129 Oroki, and 188 Evenki; from Goskomstat SSSR, Raspredelenie naseleniia po natsional'nosti, rodomu iazyku i vtoromu iazyku narodov SSSR po Sakhalinskoii Oblasti, Tom I (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk, 1990), pp. 5-7.
²Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv RSFSR Dal'nego Vostoka (Tomsk) [hereafter TsgADV], f. 702, o. 2, d. 117, "O lovke ryby na Severe Sakhalina," Il. 2-61; N. A. Troitskaia, "Russkaia burzhuiia na ostrove Sakhalin, materialy k biografiiam" Kraevedcheskii Biulleten' 1 (1991), p. 10.
to their shamanic beliefs. "Of course, one must take into account their isolated position and the almost complete lack of interest on the part of the governing Russian population toward their neighbours. It is as if the natives are not considered to be people at all."³

One hundred years later in 1990, when the town of Rybnoe celebrated its centennial, there was no mention of Grigorii Zotov or prerevolutionary riches. I had never heard of him, nor when I asked some years later, did it appear that many of the Nivkh or Russian residents of this small fishing town had. People knew that Rybnoe was one of the first Russian settlements on the shore, set amidst a cluster of smaller Nivkh villages. People knew that Soviets then arrived, developed the area, and that the rest was a story of gradual development and achievement. One could venture here that Zotov's passage into oblivion was another casualty of the structural amnesia of Soviet historiography: As a private merchant and therefore an exploiter, Zotov's only role could have been to demonize the past. But in 1990, this was a past too distant for most. The Nivkh men who worked in his fisheries, the most active and most educated of the Nivkh population, inevitably disappeared during Stalin's purges. Moreover, despite the fraying Soviet narratives of modernity and prosperity, who could imagine that this tiny, windswept village might once have been a hub of commerce?

The Rybnoe of 1990 took its name not from a Russian rendition of a local precursor, but from its main resource, fish. Loosely translated from the Russian as "Fishy," Rybnoe is located ten kilometres to the north of Rybnovsk (Fishtown), a town of 700. In from the beach around a central square is the Rybnoe village soviet (or town council), a clubhouse, a general store and a few dozen greying wooden clapboard houses from the 1930s, all standing at various degrees of inclination. Fading political slogans

³ TsGADV, f. 1133, o. 1, d. 1511, "O prestupleniikh i prostupkakh inorodtsev" (1896-1898), l. 16-25, esp. 17o.
("We will catch up to and surpass America!") and rusty metal portraits of Lenin could be spotted through the taller pine brush alongside the public buildings. On cold days, the wet sea air mixed with the strong smell of coal from the fishery's central boiler. A web of narrow, broken down boardwalks still connected the houses on the square to the kolkhoz: Once meant to spare people from sinking into the sand and snow, they now added to the village's strangely collapsed look. Part Lenin, part Stalin, part Dickens, part Solzhenitsyn.

Pitched on sand, and overlooking the Tatar Strait across from the mouth of the Amur River, Rybnoe is home to a branch of the Red Dawn fishing kolkhoz or collective farm, a set of wooden barns alongside the water for processing salmon and red caviar. Initially, Rybnoe's independence from Red Dawn is what saved it from closure during the rash of village closings in the 1960s. But in the mid 80s, flagging profits spurred the government to merge the village operation with the Rybnovsk and Nekrasovka offices of Red Dawn. A new sign had been made up for the barrack like offices in Rybnoe, proclaiming the operation, "Rybobaza "Rybnoe" Rybnovskogo Rybkominata Oblrybakkolkhozsoiuza" [Fish Base "Fishy" of the Fishtown Fishery, Regional Fishermen's Collective Union].

Along with Romanovka and Liugi, two towns closed in the 1960s but still inhabited by a handful of older Nivkhi, Rybnoe and Rybnovsk are collectively referred to as the Rybnovsk shore. Until 1964, they constituted their own raion or district administration, but following the concentration of rural settlements advocated by Khrushchev and Brezhnev, they are now administered through the oil town of Okha. Rybnovsk, being the larger of the two, has the greater fish processing capacity, its own lighthouse and a border patrol post to monitor sea traffic across the Tatar Strait. Despite the facts that Rybnovsk is being steadily reclaimed by the sea -- water now covers what were once two central streets, washing onto a beached bank vault which was too heavy to move -- and that local deforestation has rendered all of Rybnovsk almost two feet deep in
loose sand, it was Rybnoe, with its grassy knolls and low pine groves, not Rybnovsk, that
the government declared to be "lacking in prospects" [*neperspektivnyi*] in 1982.4 Rybnoe
residents traditionally bore grudges against the Okha administration which had downscaled
the shore's economy and left them without roads, running water or natural gas. As in
much of rural Russia, there are few roads to link the shore to the rest of the population
around it. Heavy transport trucks could traverse the 200 kilometres of logging trails to
Okha in roughly seven hours. The majority of residents on the shore travelled by Aeroflot
helicopters, or more often by motorcycles with side cars, which were the main means of
transportation within and between villages themselves.

Yet with the effects of food shortages brought on by the confusion and growing
anarchy of perestroika, it was precisely Rybnoe's isolation that began to work in their
favour in the late 1980s. The store still received its allotted minimums of goods and had
few passersby to pillage them, in contrast to the larger towns and cities. Indeed, after a
year of making my way through the grey warrens of Moscow streets and regularly doing
battle in the stores of the capital, it was Rybnoe's general store that was by far the most
luxurious I had seen. Television sets, irons, chandeliers, coloured candles, tools, electric
teapots, reasonable clothing, extensive canned goods... Granted, meat and cheese were on
the wane. Fruits and vegetables were rarities. I was convinced that were I ever to see the
Soviet Union's past, the proverbial days of plenty that preceded the slow collapse wrought
by Gorbachev's reforms, this would bring me the closest. But that said, there was little
else that spoke to stasis. Far from the calm which I had anticipated in a small village on
the edge of the Union, Rybnoe was in the same upheaval facing the rest of the country,
distinguished further by a native resurgence in its most embryonic stages. That plans for a
centennial were underway lent an air of historicity to a year already turned upside down.

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4*Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sakhalinskoi Oblasti* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk) [hereafter *GASO*], f.
53, o. 1, d. 1497 "Ob utochenii perechnia perspektivnykh, ograničennogo razvitiiia i
neperspektivnykh naselemykh punktov oblasti" (1982), II. 54-56, 64-73.
To understand the widespread discontent of the day was to understand the alienation of the entire economic system from the land and the absurdities on which much of that system was premised. Up until 1965, there were three fishing kolkhozes along the island’s upper northwest coast: Freedom in Romanovka, 21st Party Congress in Liugi and Red Dawn in Nekrasovka. Freedom and 21st Party Congress were successful, wealthy and populous, while Red Dawn, the weakest of the three, had never met its plan in the more than thirty years since it had been in operation. Yet it was precisely the first two whose property was transferred to the third after the 1960s relocation policy, and their corresponding villages were closed. The town of Nekrasovka remained the headquarters of the still unsuccessful Red Dawn, and has become something of an exhibition village for visitors since it is one of the few towns along the upper five hundred kilometre stretch of the island with running water. Relocations gave the once all-Russian Red Dawn the title of "national kolkhoz" meaning Nivkh kolkhoz, and entitles the administration to special access to goods and services through specific nationality based policies. But by 1990, most people agreed that Red Dawn’s national status had long been fictional. Of the five hundred members of Red Dawn, some one hundred and fifty of whom are Russian administrators based in Nekrasovka, Nivkhi compose 73% of the unqualified labour ranks. In Rybnoe what little work does exist is assigned by the Russian and Ukrainian transient supervisors to themselves. Inquiring as to the kolkhoz’s history of misfortune, few visitors discover what is clear to anyone living on the shore: In the waters off of Nekrasovka, there are almost no fish.

What the alienation leads to is a daunting pall of indifference. In the Rybnoe branch of Red Dawn where I worked during my stay, the policy was that the fish had to be cleaned, sorted and salted within six hours of reaching the village pier. It was a rare occasion when this was accomplished in less than twelve hours, at a stage when it was difficult to work with the fish because of the advanced stages of rot. It made little
difference to the workers whether the end product was of the highest sort (sent for export) or of the lowest (animal feed). The salary was more or less the same, and even the most retiring of senior citizens know more readily than I that the fifty kopecks we earned each hour was roughly three cents at free exchange rates. One ton of processed pink salmon, which garnered from $4000 to $8000 U.S. dollars at 1990 European market prices, earned Red Dawn thirty-five rubles, or roughly $1.75 at the most generous rates of exchange for the time.

The problem with the fishing collective ran deeper than the question of incentive or morale. At the heart of the matter was the disjuncture between natural calendrical cycles and the structure of the kolkhoz system. Off the coast of Rybnoe there are only two short fish runs. The summer run of pink and chum salmon traditionally begins shortly after the Day of the Fisherman on July 9th and continues for six weeks. In January, February and March, there is a sporadic run of navaga. In times past, the Nivkhi divided their spare time collecting other foodstuffs, hunting and fishing for whatever else was in season. In 1990 as kolkhozniki, they were obliged to be at work eight hours a day all the year round regardless of the work load. This was an often deadening process, marked by sitting inside the kolkhoz buildings, listening silently to the sound of sand beating against the glass and playing card games for weeks on end.

At a time when Sakhalin had recently elected a new pro-business leader, an intense looking former economics professor who vaguely resembled a popular hypnotist who had been plying his trade on Soviet central television, many people on the northwestern shore took up the banner of privatization and economic reform within the kolkhoz system. Gorbachev had already introduced the system of independent cost accounting, which mainly served to redistribute budget burdens and aimed to reduce deficits, and for Red Dawn this meant slightly greater access to their own profits for the purpose of at least ostensibly negotiating reinvestment and selling to buyers other than the state.
More telling however were the limits on reform, introduced at almost any stage where entrepreneurs pretended to kolkhoz property. In 1989, the fledgling Nivkh cooperative *Ykh-Mif* [Nivkh, Our Land] proposed to sell fresh fish, berries and fiddleheads to local stores, items which rarely got to stores despite fish being the mainstay of the island. Resistance from all sides was marked. In the first months of its existence, an almost continuous round of Moscow commissions arrived to scrutinize and harangue the less than dozen members of the fledgling collective, while Nivkh government representatives frowned on their local cousins for embodying open dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. The newly elected *Red Dawn* chairman, eager to be liked but more eager to prove himself as a manager for the new age, endorsed the workings of free enterprise only so far as they remained under his jurisdiction. One day, when I pressed him on the new cooperatives trying to get started, he asked me quizzically, "How am I supposed to help someone else start a fishing business on my own property and meet my quotas at the same time?" His logic made enough sense within the realm of the system, but it was less clear why the property was his to mete out in the first place.

In Rybnoe, as the village soviet met monthly to decry the scourge of waste and idleness around them, large amounts of crude oil used for the generator were dumped regularly on the ground; and as the garbage receptacles had evidently long been abandoned, refuse blew across the village square like tumbleweed. Never far from one's field of vision were the pastures of detritus: rusting metal wire, torn salting gloves, plastic bags and pitched vodka bottles amidst piles of orange radiators; these were punctuated by the more colossal ruins, beached steam boilers three metres tall, sinking into the shore; and piles of old rails which once trolleyed the fish on carts from the pier. Most disturbing perhaps was that in the Okha district of which Rybnoe was a part, 25% of the lumber felled and 15% of the fish caught annually went to waste because of a lack of processing facilities. Asked how this could happen, kolkhoz administrators pointed to a Five Year
Plan for felling which is greater than the capacity for processing, and the need to collect one's salary.

After the closure of neighbouring towns over the 1960s and 70s, the Rybnoe village council remained known as the Liugi Council, despite Liugi no longer officially being in existence. Over the same period, the role of the village council or soviet, once a watchdog of civic propriety wielding considerable influence over local affairs, had atrophied along with waning interest in official mores. With a hammer and sickle waving over its threshold, the soviet office still bore the markings of the schoolroom which was originally housed in the one long room under its roof. The walls were covered with portraits of Lenin and Gorbachev, as well as construction paper directives listing the progress of committees under the soviet's aegis. The soviet's main function was to organize the regular meetings of the elected executive committee, which in Rybnoe consisted of fifteen members, and to ensure that the laws of the state were implemented on the territory of the village. The soviet's immediate realm of administration incorporated the Day Care Centre as well as the local House of Culture, which in turn included a three-room clubhouse with an auditorium, a games room and a small library. Representatives of the village soviet were to preside over the burning of books every quarter when the library received its list of volumes to be removed from the shelves. They also oversaw the annual and quarterly socialist competitions [sotsrekonvaniia] between the medical feldsher, the baker, the store, the House of Culture and the post office. Socialist competitions were one of the main avenues of worker incentive dating from the 1920s. At the onset of each fiscal year, central planners in Okha issued production goals to which each of the village civic organs were to strive. The store resolved to sell more foods and wares, the feldsher resolved to conduct more physicals, the library resolved to lend more books, and the post office resolved to sell more magazine subscriptions. A red pennant was issued to the overall winner for each year's competition, and Lidiia Ivanovna, the
aging manager of the post office who had arrived from Western Siberia telling locals only that she wanted to escape her past, was certain that she would become this year's winner.

The role of the soviet was also to oversee the work of various civic committees to improve village life, which were many. The Voluntary Friendship Society, regarded by most villagers to be neither voluntary nor friendly, had been created only two years earlier in 1988 to monitor public order on holidays and to combat the growing habit of drinking on the job by conducting spontaneous raids. The problem was that few would cooperate on the raids into the kolkhoz and private homes, and the fact that the society's only active member was one of the village's two communists was starting to give partymindedness a bad name. The Women's Council was designed to similarly ensure standards of propriety in the home and the day care centre, although the woman registered as the head of the council claimed not to know of her having being named for the job, nor to like the invasion of privacy that the council stood for. In a similar vein, the Comrade's Court, a local conflict resolution body, had also lost much of its lustre. The idea of the court was that villagers accused of minor legal infractions could opt to go before a village tribunal rather than immediately being reported to the police. The most popular cases involved personal matters such as adultery, which routinely attracted neighbours and onlookers to the clubhouse as the details of the events were being replayed.

The activities of each of these bodies was recorded duly in the village registers, neatly typed out by the council secretary and resonant with phrases culled from political how-to manuals which lined the bookshelves of the council office. To examine the minutes of the meetings was to find the kind of complaints heard everyday in the corridors of the kolkhoz or the store. The local head of the kolkhoz bemoaned his constituents' dependence on the fishery to conduct even the most minor repairs on kolkhoz housing; the day care centre was tired of the central coal boiler breaking down; pensioners railed against the decrepit state of the boardwalks; the post office declared that the electrician
should be ashamed of himself, and so on. Still, the rich prose of the transcripts never quite matched the people to whom they were credited. For an entry on the 19th of April, 1989, the chairman of the council opened with three tightly spaced pages of speech on voter's requests and the fundamental role that they played in the democratic process. Logical, fast-moving and well-composed, with many historical notes, this was from the same fellow I knew to revile writing, public speaking and the turgid turns of phrase which were the stuff of officialese. "Of course I didn't write it myself, what do you think?" he responded when I asked him. He grimaced as he toyed with a matchbox which read, "12th Five Year Plan: Goods to the People! Furniture in 1990, up 130%!" "Who on earth cares about those kinds of things?" And indeed, following the town meetings, the real work fell to the village secretary to produce documents suitably innocuous for inspection by the district authorities. Hence, in their first 1989 report to the district executive committee in Okha, the Liugi Village Soviet, named in honour of a neighbouring village which did not really exist, but really did, announced that: It was entering into a socialist competition with neighbouring Rybnovsk (not actually conducted); that it had held a number of political enlightenment lectures at the House of Culture with titles such as "Stories about Communists" and "The Rules of Etiquette" (not actually held) and that conditions were created favourable to perestroika, democracy and the tenets of the decisions of the 27th Communist Party Congress in Moscow.

For most Rybnoe residents, these were the small absurdities of daily life that hardly merited attention. But while the ebb of disintegration and the toll of abnormality had perhaps become the norm over the last twenty years, the turn of the decade and the start of the 90s had introduced extremes previously unknown. To open any newspaper was to find the headlines charged with discontent. The four-page issue of the province-wide

5"Ispolnitel'nyi komitet Liuginskogo sel'skogo soveta narodnykh deputatov: Protokoly, sessii, reshenia printiaye sessiami i materialy k nim za 1989 g.; Protokoly zasedanii ispolkoma i materialy k nim za 1989 g."
newspaper *Soviet Sakhalin* on the 8th of June, 1990 led with the following: "From Clouds over Land" (on controversial land reforms); "Sad Story" (on the lack of funds to continue running a children's scout camp); "Records be Damned" (on whether the amount of street litter in Ituzno-Sakhalinsk, the island centre, would qualify them for the Guinness World Book of Records); "Why I Quit the Party"; "Why I'm Staying in the Party"; "How to Avoid an Economic Crash"; "Get Out Your Passports" (for food rationing); "The Market: For and Against"; "Humiliation" (on lineups for alcohol); and "Wait until September" (on striking elementary school teachers). The June 30th edition of *The Sakhalin Fisherman* was no less mindful of the turbulence around them: "We are against the Market"; "Is there an Administration in Ramskoe?" (on anarchy in a farming town); "A Millionaire with no Millions" (on a failing kolkhoz); "Is all our Fish Swimming Away to Japan?"; and one single non-political piece, "Do Paranormals Really Help in Police Work?"

Nor was television any less charged. When not glued to the Czech soap opera "Suburban Hospital," or the command repeat screening of the Brazilian melodrama "Slave Girl Izaura" which had so riveted the country in 1989, Rybnoe was privy to the renovated ill performed television news show *Vremia*, where fingers of Russian elders would point at every instalment as to who should be ashamed of themselves, why, and what to do about it. In keeping with the times, *Vremia* revamped its opening credits early on in the summer: In place of the bold red star hovering over the globe to a trumpeted battlefield call came images of a sunset, the Kremlin, a space capsule landing in the sea, a satellite, a forest fire, tanks, singing dolphins, and surgeons in operation. The Far Eastern evening edition at 8 p.m. (noon Moscow time) acquired a new lead anchor, the boyish Viktor Stepanov, who looked regularly ready to burst into tears for love of his country and the truly miserable state into which it had fallen. New scriptwriting enabled him to insert brotherly monologues about the proverbial "cold, hunger and devastation" [*kholod, golod i razrukha*] besetting the nation, peppered with generally awkward "In my opinion's" and
"The way I see it."

The combination of live Vremia tapings and the nonsensical requirement for anchors to activate their own microphones, a simple but forgettable task that might best have been left to a studio technician, made the show's rating among Rybnoe residents shoot up. The 5th of July edition was illustrative of Vremia's new popularity when: i) Viktor Stepanov forgets to engage his microphone and mimes resolutely into the camera for half a minute; ii) Studio hands mix film clips, transposing river pollution in Kiev for promised footage on the Communist Party Congress; iii) Stepanov neglects to engage his microphone a second time; iv) The announced film clip on a model collective farm fails to appear, and Stepanov silently answers his Fisher-Price desk phone with such artifice that one finds it difficult to believe that anyone was speaking at the other end of the line, let alone that the phone might be connected. After a calculated delay he returns the phone to its carriage and announces the clip a second time. The footage appears without sound, then the sound appears without footage, and the resulting confusion is masked by a confident display of the (old) Vremia emblem; and v) An early sequeway into the foreign news makes an attempt to pick up the slack, but is interrupted by the full screen sports graphics in the middle of a commentary on German reunification. In this spirit it was encouraging to see the next evening's installment, where the long-suffering Stepanov was replaced by the far snappier Tatiana Komarova, who managed such polished commentaries that it was possible to imagine she had written them herself.

It was clearly a season of experiments. For stimulation, central television offered up a smorgasbord of international programming, featuring weekends of French, Italian, Belgian and Norwegian imports. For consolation, there was the always popular Vladimir Molchanov, who opening his Friday evening editions of "Before and After Midnight," as he did on July 29th, with avuncular therapy for the harangued viewer. "How are you coping with this hot, hot summer?" he would open in sympathetic tones, "You must be
very tired..." The Soviet Mr. Rogers for adults, informing even the lumpiest of his guests that they had "expressive, beautiful eyes," he appeared to be at once the earnest state aesthete and his own parodist.

But, for all of the lure of the new, it was also a period of disillusionment, of people who saw the present being turned against the past, and who were not happy with what they saw. "Market" by and large meant nothing but rising prices; "perestroika" was the hypocrisy of promised renewal that brought only collapse. In the age of glasnost', the Russian word signifying not merely 'openness' but the revealing of that which had previously been concealed or private, there were many who held that there were things better left as they had been before.

* * *

The grumblings of discontent held sway among the people I knew on North Sakhalin in 1990, and these reached a new pitch when Boris Eltsyn announced that he would be visiting the island at the end of August, not long after having been elected President of the then Russian Republic (RSFSR). Geographic isolation evidently figured in the political calculations behind the trip, since in addition to Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk and Okha, he scheduled a visit to the Rybnovsk shore, pronouncing it to be "the remotest destination" of his around Russia tour. I was looking forward to his visit, since all of Rybnoe and Rybnovsk did little in the days leading up to the event but ready him for slaughter, snorting about price increases and plotting how they would give him a piece of their collective mind. I arrived into Rybnovsk late, missing the bearish scowling politician by some twenty minutes, and found to my surprise even the most hardened anti-Eltsyn communists smiling and gurgling like children in his wake. Eltsyn's helicopter set down in

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6In this context, the German concept of unheimlichkeit comes closer to glasnost' in meaning than 'openness.' Schelling wrote, "Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained... hidden and secret and has become visible"; cited in Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" Collected Papers, Volume IV (Edinburgh: R. and R. Clark, 1925), pp. 368-407.
Rybnovsk for all of fifteen minutes, in the true whistle-stop tradition of the West. But rather than kissing babies or pledging state largesse, Eltsyn mounted a small stand with a performance that could only have seduced voters in the era of late perestroika. "What a nightmare!" he repeated several times as he winced for television cameras. He cast his arm toward the town square half consumed by sand drifts. "This place is a dump!" "Do you seriously live here?" "This is straight out of the seventeenth century! Places like this make me ashamed to be Russian!" Vastly insulting all around him, Eltsyn wooed the crowds, and they loved it. Please, come and insult our town!

Precisely at the time when Eltsyn had come and gone, and the fish season had ended, Rybnoe became not quieter but more restless. Eltsyn and the island's new governor, Fedorov, urged their new apostles to act, to break free from the fetters constraining them, and do business! In local parlance this was quickly translated into an anti-kolkhoz movement, and within two days of Eltsyn's visit, neighbouring Rybnovsk had held a stormy worker's meeting and decided to separate from Nekrasovka. The new name for their operation: "Freedom"! And so in their own way, along with Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Moldova and other progressive alienated bodies, Rybnovsk too found its own voice for the time.

It was another matter for Rybnoe. Fewer in number and somewhat less revolutionary in nature, residents of Fishy greeted the idea of separation more coolly than their counterparts in Fishtown. Moreover, Dzhunkovskii the kolkhoz chairman was in Rybnoe at that time, and on Saturday morning, I found the collective outside the gates of the kolkhoz office, gathered around the chairman in his naval regalia and epaulets. All seemed to be as usual: Dzhunkovskii asked for questions and stifled each in turn with an erudite smile and a promise to examine the matter in detail some other time. His charges asked questions about holidays and whether they would ever be able to see the much
talked about Japanese import goods. They left out the more provocative issues: Why was X working and not Y? Why did the supervisors do no work? Why is half the workforce drunk every weekend? Why does the supervisor assign himself all the highest paying jobs? Finally they came to the matter of separation. Epaulets urged all present to consider the matter "sanely and without emotion," whereby surely they would come to a prudent conclusion. Or as Dzhunkovskii later suggested, they could wait on a transition period of perhaps five years. Five years was a popular waiting period for separations, since Gorbachev had proposed the same to the Baltics. But five years also seemed a little long when Misha Kolomytsev, a machinist of some thirty years of age, lean and mangy in his bleached work jacket, shouted with the ring of a practiced incendiary, "Sure, think it through, and then decide!"

In good form it was decided by Dzhunkovskii to form a commission to examine the matter. Someone proposed Sonya Biktasheva, the small-mouthed, nervous Comrade Procurator, and she feverishly resisted. Sergei Nikolaevich proposed instead two of the senior kolkhoz supervisors, himself and Kolomytsev -- that is, the same people who always form such commissions -- and the matter seemed sufficiently doused. By this time the rank and file were milling in the background with impatience. The meeting was declared closed and Kolia Vershinin, the leather-skinned, prematurely aged husband to the Comrade Procurator nudged the tractor driver (husband to the head of the Voluntary Friendship Society who now organizes the anti-alcohol raids) and said, "Let's drink!"

But that was Saturday. On Tuesday, news of Rybnovsk's final decision to separate reached Rybnoe, and people began to discuss it all again in earnest. The noble commission had studied the matter in traditional style and decided "that they would see," but they were quickly superseded by waves of the less patient. Most people saw no reason not to separate: They had lived for eighteen years under the auspices of the main fishery in Aleksandrovsk and did nothing but toil to relieve Aleksandrovsk of its debts.
Now they were doing the same for another kolkhoz in Nekrasovka. The Nekrasovka figures posted in the Rybnoe offices of the kolkhoz appeared to bear this out. In 1989, the 326 kolkhozniks of Red Dawn in Rybnoe and Rybnovsk (10% being administrators) produced roughly 6.5 million rubles worth of gross production and cleared 2,170,000 in profits. But this met only 98% of the projected total set by Nekrasovka, and workers on the Rybnovsk shore were denied additional bonuses. By contrast, the 270 kolkhozniks in Nekrasovka (79% being administrators) logged a 15,000 ruble deficit, but because they met their quotas at 120%, they awarded themselves bonuses in the form of cash supplements and consumer goods.

Rybnovsk's decision was made on Monday, and Rybnovsk awaited Rybnoe's decision before going to Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk. On Wednesday morning a motley crew of some sixty-five kolkhozniki gathered in the village House of Culture, in the small auditorium outfitted in red linoleum, stacking chairs, heavily shellaced cedar wainscotting and a fresh coat of pungently toxic green paint. The House of Culture was a worn grey wooden building which rarely had its doors open and never lost that biting cold drafty feel. The meeting was opened by the slippery Sergei Nikolaevich and taken up by Misha Rezanov from Rybnovsk. Rybnovsk had decided to make its break, he announced, and had plans for a bright future. They will grow potatoes on a collective basis, and they would like very much to develop a system of stocks and bonds. This was quickly interrupted by Misha Kolomytsev, who only five minutes into the meeting and appearing already like a pressure cooker ready to spill over, heartily enjoined everyone (at a very high volume) that Rybnoe could well do the same and more! He did not specify what he meant by "more," or why, if growing potatoes and keeping livestock was so easy and profitable, no one had tried it before. But the mood was such that there would soon be the promise of luxury condominiums if people acted in time. That there was no talk of fish at the given moment didn't seem to trouble anyone.
The revolutionary pace was interrupted by a very drunken fellow who stood up and animatedly snorted his very strong feelings on the subject. These were comprehensible to no one, and were followed by a long and unexpected silence. Liuda Kozlova stood up and wanted to know how they were going to keep themselves busy in the wintertime. Kolomytsev rose to his feet, insisting, "But we have a programme! We'll separate now and then decide on how to keep busy!" This was followed by loud shouting from all corners, including many raucous insults about the speakers. The Rybnovsk contingent had noted that Rybnoe was envied for its friendliness, but the uproar that was already in progress did little to give credence to this compliment.

Another Lidiia Ivanovna, not the postmistress but the head accountant from Red Dawn in Nekrasovka, stood up to defend her much slandered employer. "We never really wanted your fishery anyway. We lived fine before you came along!" This did not seem like much of an argument to keep anyone from separating, and the furore began anew. Liuda Kozlova shouted that the decision was being made too early, while the normally taciturn Aleksandra Kon, spurred by the maelstrom, enjoined audibly, "We have so many problems, why not separate? Lithuania wants to. Why can't we?" This caused Zhenya of the caviar section to get very red and flustered, and to collapse into a fit of giggling.

There was much stir created by the prospect of voting, and it was at this precise moment, as if by special timing, that the tousled young chairman from Nekrasovka entered in his epaulets and cap. His presence complicated things, for despite his essentially adversarial stance to their designs, no one could deny his good intentions or his personal disappointment in watching his new fiefdom crumble. In his disappointment people saw their own hopes of the last thirty years, hopes for a collective plan which they had wanted to succeed, but which had not.

His arrival swayed the question of voting momentarily, and he waited patiently as the leading loose cannon and a heavy set housewife with badly dyed red hair started a
fresh argument, which was punctuated by her abruptly turning her back to her interlocutor after each volley of invective. Seeing his cue, Dzhunkovskii repeated his avuncular plea to cast emotion from the proceedings. But unable to overcome his own resentment at having been spurned by his underlings, he too repeated the puzzling disclaimer of his Nekrasovka colleague. "No one wanted this marriage anyway. The government arrived like an aging matchmaker, bound us together, and left. We would have gotten on fine without you. If you want to separate, then separate, but it will be you and your families that will suffer!"

This muffled threat appeared to fall on deaf ears. Among the few in the hall who were not already engaged in high volume debate was one woman in the back who appeared to be sobbing but was actually yawning fiercely. The woman on the left of her, her head wrapped in brightly coloured scarves, appeared to be sleeping, and the man on the right, oily and filmy and evidently unbathed for several weeks, could have been mistaken for his wax mannequin double.

The chairman resumed his carefully prepared declaration that Nekrasovka was being unnecessarily blamed, but this proved to be too much for the Loose Cannon who dismissed his poorly masked politeness and shouted, "We're tired of listening to your stupid presentations! You don't have to be smart to figure out how badly off we are!"

With the meeting long into overtime, Epaulets urged to defer voting, and the small auditorium, still awash in the clucking and banter of unfinished arguments, gradually began to empty.

A cold wind whipped up sand around the club as people left to go back to work and drink tea, or go home.

In the days that followed, as the kolkhoz referendum was deferred and then deferred again, a pronounced uneasiness resonated throughout the town. While throughout Soviet, and some might say, Russian history, there has been a long tradition of criticizing the preceding political generation, this time the vantage point from which to lay
blame seemed unclear. Perestroika had produced a regnant uncertainty, at times hypnotic and, by at least partial definition, destructive. Despite the support of the village soviet chairman, Boris Ivanovich, in favour of kolkhoz independence, there seemed to be little support for the village soviet itself during the kolkhoz meetings, and Rybnoe took to debating the proposal that the village soviet be done away with altogether. Council members snorted in disapproval at the idea: With no village soviet, all administrative functions would have to be performed in Rybnovsk, such as the registration of birth, marriages and deaths; the store, the club, the feldsher, the post office -- all were under the dominion of the council. The tension reminded everyone of the longstanding rift between the village council and the kolkhoz over who precisely dominated village affairs. Boris Ivanovich noted disparagingly that when he worked at the kolkhoz, even five years ago, even the workers would badger the supervisors for extra work. There was money to be made and the money was worth something, and the supervisors, he suggested, had their act together. In contrast, workers now sluggishly showed up late to work, often to simply join a card game or wait around in the corridor for assignments. The supervisors shrug their shoulders and explain that there is nothing to do. When work is short, the masters assign it all to themselves, they get the cash, and the rest can take care of themselves.

Throughout early September as most of the meetings were transpiring, a typhoon warning was in effect, leaving the village cold, wet and overcast, and inclining most people indoors. The rarer members of Rybnoe remained above the fray, such as postmistress Lidiia Ivanovna. Left without envelopes or stamps, she entrenched herself at her desk behind the omnipresent abacus and the sponge wrapped in panty hose used as an ink pad, still plotting her victory in the socialist competition.

Television too, for all its expanded capacities to lure viewers, could also be disarming. During the same week in September, in the home of the Nivkh family where I lived during my stay, three of us settled down one morning in front of the television set,
myself and two Nivkh women, one of whom worked on the fledgling Nivkh newspaper, 
_Nivkh Dif_. The feature was a panel discussion on the removal of a statue of Lenin from the
main square of the Ukrainian city, Lvov. As hundreds of gathered spectators chanted and
jeered, the wrecking ball from a massive crane knocked Lenin in the head. Welders fired
at his feet while further blows were made to his shoulders and chest. The crowd
applauded wildly. The panel discussants, including the actor turned Minister of Culture
Nikolai Gubenko and three others, winced at the replay of the tape. When the crane
lowered a severed Lenin to the ground and lay him horizontally on his back, he was roped
about the head for towing as if being blindfolded. When the restrainer fences folded in
from the surge of spectators toward the fallen statue, crowds rushed forward to pound
their fist against his outsized head.

There was complete silence from a normally editorial household as we watched on.
Clips of Lenin's funeral from 1924 followed where there were scenes of mourners coming
down from the hills through the country snow. "Look at them," one of the women said,
"For them they had something sacred. Today we've got nothing."

Lenin came up again when I visited the resident kindergarten cook and bricklayer
over lunch. Over the laundry basin, Nadia said, "I was watching it, and it felt just like it
was me they were hitting in the head." Misha, imbibing coffee and vodka in alternating
doses, snorted over Ukrainian dissidence and thought that Ukraine should be forcibly
separated from the Union before he was made to watch any more nationalist nonsense.
Nadia, a bit cooler, went on, "I understand why it was needed, but I almost cried I was so
angry." In these last few weeks of my stay in Rybnoe, with a world slowly crumbling
around them, everyone in Fishy became a little more disgruntled, a little more confused, a
little more angry, and a little more patriotic.

At the end of September, against this backdrop of the summer fish run having
ended, the drive for kolkhoz separation and the bad weather forcing people back inside,
the Rybnoe centennial finally came to pass. Who was organizing it seemed as open to question as anything else. Boris Ivanovich washed his hands of the matter. Olga Afanas'evna, the council secretary, strangely too said that it was the club's work, while the club director, in whom I had been able to detect few signs of life aside from knowing that she had given her first husband the boot, made few pretences to overseeing much of anything. This created tension with the Culture Division in Okha who felt it to be their responsibility to arrive in helicopters with forty performers to provide a professional show. Rybnoe residents protested that Okha would add a turgid two hours to a more interesting village-produced matter, which more or less turned out to be the case. But, in spite of the Okha visitors not being much welcome, their volunteer performance left them free to pursue the real reason for the trip, stripmining the general store for available goods and combing the fishery for drunken purveyors of salmon and caviar.

Some one hundred people finally gathered in Rybnoe House of Culture on the last Sunday in September for the official ceremony. It was a rare occasion for so many people from the village to be in one room, let alone for it to be the second time in one season, coming on the heels of the kolkhoz debates. The programme opened with a hunched and laconic Boris Ivanovich, who gave a short, prosaic welcome to those gathered, wishing them joy, health and happiness. "What a fantastic honour," he began flatly, "To actually be the chairman of the village soviet at the very time of the village's centennial!" The mistress of ceremonies, a young woman recently returned to Rybnoe after schooling in the island centre, led with nervous speeches of poetry and professed gratitude to the baker ("Bread, O Bread..."), veterans, multi-children families, exemplary worker bees, and aging Nivkhi. Over half the prizewinners were absent.

The Rybnoe-produced entertainment began the afternoon, with four women singing Russian folk songs or chastushki. While not very good, their performance was a stark contrast from the capacities in which most everyone knew them otherwise, dressed
in overalls or shouting loudly into telephones to conduct affairs with Okha, and their efforts were loudly rewarded. Alla Viktorovna, on the accordion, and Olga Afanas'evna, on the balalaika, followed with an unlikely duet; this too was rewarded. Two young Nivkh twins performed an ancient Nivkh dance batting sticks against the ground. This was warmly applauded. And finally came Baba Olia, a tiny woman of some eighty years who crept quietly on stage to perform the dance of the shamaness. Without music or accompaniment, she silently softshoed her way about the stage, mimicking the actions of a dancer in the forest, gurgling a tune barely audible to those present. With the rumblings of the audience, it was clear that many thought she was infirm, were it not for the look on her face which suggested that, if no one else could see the forest in her mind, she could. Applause was awkward and less pronounced.

For the Okha portion, we had a choral group of all-Union prizewinning proportions, the well known group Song (five middle aged women in matching long dresses reminiscent of the Lawrence Welk show). Song opened with a rendition of their original composition "Sakhalin," performed in charged soprano overdrive: "Sakhalin, Sakhalin, Russian Island in the Far East! Sakhalin, Sakhalin, Severe Climate, Horrible Weather!..." This was followed by: a tormented looking juggler, whose unnatural smile did not hide her apparent terror of her chosen profession; a female contortionist who, despite manoeuvring her frame with the required looks of amazement and sexual depravity, was far too young for the comfort of most parents in the room; and finally, two unfunny clowns. All were taunted by the local drunks to have their photographs taken afterwards.

It was only long after I had left Rybnoe that I learned about Grigorii Zotov and the success of Rybnoe's prerevolutionary fisheries; about the early Soviet artels Pike and Jolly that replaced them; about the former White guardsmen that took refuge there; about the prizewinning salmon that Rybnoe sent to the World's Fair in Paris in 1937; about the
documents relating to Rybnoe and Rybnovsk being destroyed in Okha after the death of Stalin; and about the Sakhalin government declaring Rybnoe to be lacking in prospects. With the sense of Rybnoe as a locality so capriciously redefined by outside forces on such a regular basis, I increasingly had the sense that one could learn about Rybnoe almost anywhere but there. To know Rybnoe became a process of navigating people's memories and historical records continually being reconstituted, and of realizing that this latest round of perestroika was only another in a long series of reconstructions over the twentieth century.
Chapter Three/ Nivkhi Before the Soviets

During the brief reign of perestroika in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Soviet General Secretary turned President plied audiences with the extensive repertoire of allegiances from the vast state. In Murmansk, Gorbachev proclaimed the Soviet Union's committed membership to the "common European home." In Vladivostok, he declared the USSR to be "an Asian country." When I lived on Sakhalin in 1990, I often asked Nivkhi I knew whether they thought of themselves as Asians or Europeans. "Europeans?" came the usual first reply. Europe was London, Europe was Paris, Europe was maybe Moscow, but Europe did not include Sakhalin Island. Asia then? This was more difficult. On their enormous coastal island only fifty kilometres north of Japan, Nivkhi, the Paleoasiatics of scholarly lore with their ubiquitous bound volumes of Tolstoi, Pushkin and Dostoevskii, and yellowing copies of Pravda stuck in the windows to insulate from the cold, rarely showed much enthusiasm for being known as Asians. Asia has long represented the dark side to Russia's multiple personalities, and Nivkhi shared in this unease. To speak of Asians on Sakhalin was also to invoke the widely held conviction that the Chinese and Japanese who once held the island in their sway did little but pillage the territory of its resources. "We're Soviets," came the most common reply. And after seventy years of Soviet rule, this answer, to be sure, made sense. But to understand the plasticity of Nivkh identity and the politics of the Nivkh past, one also has to look at the extraordinary plasticity of Siberia itself.

Nivkhi are often referred to as belonging to the "peoples of Siberia," but like all broad labels, this elides much of that which sets them apart from the larger grouping. Physically and linguistically, the peoples of Siberia are a heterogenous population, with over 120 languages and dialects tracing from the Turkic, Mongolian, Tungus-Manchu, and Paleoasiatic families, as well as other languages so distinct as to have defied broader
classification to this day.\textsuperscript{1} Traditionally, Siberian peoples fall into two groups. In the first category are the peoples who predominate in central and south-western Siberia, such as the Buriat, the Yakut (being the most northerly and most easterly of this group), the Altaitsy, Kalmyki, Khakassy, Tuvintsy, and West-Siberian Tatary. The Buriat, Yakuty and Tatary dominate this group in population, and their cultures lay to rest the myth that all Siberian peoples were largely illiterate prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Buriat have used classic Mongolian script since the thirteenth century, while the West-Siberian Tatary have long maintained their ties with the ancient capitals of Central Asia through the use of Koranic Arabic. While the Yakuty have not had a formal script as long as the others, they are nonetheless renowned for their ancient epic verse known as \textit{olonkho}.

The second category is an assembly of peoples defined by the Soviet government in 1925 for administrative purposes as the "\textit{malye narody severa}" or the "small peoples of the North." This group includes (in descending order by population based on the 1989 census) Nentsy (pop. 34,665), Evenki, Khanty, Eveny, Chukchi, Nanaitsy, Koriaki, Mansi, Dolgany, Nivkhi, Selkupy, U'chi, Itel'meny, Udegeitsy, Saami, Eskimosy, Chuvantsy, Nganasany, Iukagiry, Kety, Orochi, Tofalary, Aleuty, Negidal'tsy, Entsy and Oroki (pop. 190).\textsuperscript{2} While both of these broad categories of peoples share a long history of Russian


\textsuperscript{2}These are \textit{Goskomstat RSFSR} figures from the 1989 census as noted in Zoia P. Sokolova, "\textit{Narody Severa SSSR: Proshloe, Nastoiaashchee i Budushchee}" \textit{Sovetskaia Etnografija} 6 (1990), p. 31. These twenty-six groups comprise the 184,478 "peoples of the north" as of 1989. \textit{Goskomstat} lists 1511 Chuvantsy in the census, based on self-definition during polling, although others contend that the assimilation of the Chuvantsy by Russians and Chukchi at the start of the century leave them more closely affiliated to the Iukagiry. See for example Juha Janhunen, "Ethnic Death and Survival in the Soviet
state intervention, the exigencies of demographics and the effects of colonization make the Nivkh experience most directly comparable to this second category. What unites all of these peoples nonetheless is the prerevolutionary legacy of the Siberian semiotic matrix.

Cast as a land of snowy expanse, suffering and oblivion, Siberia suggests emptiness and alterity in a way that few of the other great nether zones of history can. In stretching from the Ural Mountains east to the Pacific, Siberia covers over eight per-cent of the world's land mass. Siberia acts as home to over forty million people and would constitute the largest country in the world were the rest of Russia to be cleaved from its western flank. When Siberian accounts include mention of the non-Russian peoples living there, their history is traditionally told as a chronicle of physical survival in the face of tough natural odds. Yet their real struggle has not been with the environment, to which their cultures have long been well adapted, but with the changing aspirations of the Russian state under whom they have been ruled for roughly three centuries. At this level, their story is one of the turbulent and often brutal history of colonization. But at another level, their fate speaks to the alternating visions of Siberia as the land of promise and the House of the Dead.

Siberia's reputed promise, now as it has been for centuries, arose through its potential as a resource-based colony of Russia. Some of the earliest Russian records of exploration into the area date back to the eleventh century when explorers from the medieval Russian city of Novgorod made their first ventures across the Ural Mountain range. It was there, "in the midnight lands," that they heard stories of "impure people of Japheth's tribe who ate all sorts of filth... and also ate their dead instead of burying them."4

North" Journal de la Société Finno-ougrienne 83 (1991), pp. 111-122. Throughout the text I use the Russian plural form of ethnic group names, following popular usage in the former Soviet Union and among Nivkh.

3Western scholars and nineteenth century Russian scholars have generally referred to the entire territory east of the Urals as Siberia. However, within Russia, the contemporary usage distinguishes between East Siberia, West Siberia and the Far East.

4Yuri Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples: The Policies and Attitudes towards the Native
However, it was not until the broader colonial expansion underway in Europe in the 17th century that Moscow began to turn its eye to the east. Hungry for profits from the fur trade, they looked to the inozemtsy or "people from a different land" as a new path to wealth.\textsuperscript{5}

By initial accounts, the Russian newcomers often impressed their native hosts with unknown foods and wares. In a meeting between Russians and the reindeer-herding Evenki, one Evenk,

chewed some bread for a while - and liked it. He said in Evenk: "Good."

Then he took a cracker, ate it, and said: "Delicious." Then he ate some sugar. "Don't even think about killing those good men," he said [to the other]. So they threw away their bows and began to eat."\textsuperscript{6}

The goals of the newcomers were nonetheless economic rather than altruistic. In order to extract a regular supply of pelts from the native "foreigners" who were drawing increasing attention in the Russian court, they instituted a fur tax known as iasak.

On paper, it became the obligation of every native male aged fifteen and higher to provide a fixed number of sable pelts or the rubles equivalent once a year to the Russian state. In practice, the institution of fur tribute began what was to be almost three hundred years of organized plunder and degradation. Enforced by unlettered provincial tyrants, the Russian policy was frequently to take hostages in order to ensure payment. Iasak debts were shared collectively and could be inherited. Hence, entire peoples carried the burden of payment in perpetuity under the threat of marauding gangs and a corrupt military.

\textsuperscript{5} For more on the prerevolutionary fur trade in Siberia, see Mark Bassin, "Expansion and colonialism on the eastern frontier: views of Siberia and the Far East in pre-Petrine Russia" Journal of Historical Geography, 14, 1 (1988), pp. 3-21; Basil Dmytryshyn et al., \textit{Russia's Conquest of Siberia} (Portland: Western Imprints, 1985); Raymond Fisher, \textit{The Russian Fur Trade 1500-1700} (Berkeley: University of California, 1943); George Lantzeff, \textit{Siberia in the Seventeenth Century} (Berkeley: University of California, 1943).

\textsuperscript{6} Vasilevich in Slezkine, p. 28.
Numerous battles attested to native resistance, while rare groups such as the Chukchi from far northeastern Siberia fought off the Russian invaders entirely. For Siberian peoples as a whole the toll was staggering. In the 1640s alone, almost one third of the entire revenue of the Russian state came from the fur trade.

In the eighteenth century, the promising image of Siberia gained added weight in the eyes of the Russian colonizers. In the 1730s, the Russian geographer and historian Vasilii Tatishchev effectively redrew the border between Europe and Asia by declaring Siberia's eastern boundary along the Ural Mountain range, rather than along the Don River as previously held. Tatishchev's revision defined Siberia in a way which had a wide-ranging impact on its peoples: Whereas the Russians represented European culture, Siberian peoples were now Asian savages in need of civilization. Indeed, this new civilization was expected to flourish. During the reign of the Russian empress Catherine the Great (1762-1796), utopian plans for the colony envisioned the building of "our India, Mexico or Peru." In 1763, in an optimistic gesture, Catherine sent an emissary to Siberia to "punish those responsible for the ruin of the "timid and helpless iasak people," but also, to find a way to raise the fur revenues still higher.

The new Russian Peru of course never materialized. With a climate too cold and distances too great, the government persuaded few merchants and settlers to take a chance in the vast new territories. But the growing official interest in Russia's eastern colony resulted in a number of new measures to bring the natives under state control. Hundreds of Russian Orthodox missionaries spread out to convert the Siberian savages, whose cultures in many cases already leaned toward pronounced Islamic, Tibetan and shamanic faiths. Despite the absurdity of mass baptisms being conducted in languages unknown to

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the converted, many natives acceded since conversion signalled the end of their "foreignness" and hence (at least on paper) the cancelling of their iasak obligations. In 1720, the Siberian Metropolitan Filofei Leshchinskii was congratulated for having converted over 40,000 native pagans.  

The outlook for improvement in Imperial Russian-Siberian relations showed its greatest promise in 1822 with a series of reforms instituted by the Siberian Governor-General, Count Mikhail Speranskii. Speranskii's "Statute of Alien Administration in Siberia" divided Siberian peoples into three categories: settled, nomadic and wandering. The new law did not absolve the obligation to pay fur tribute but it granted greater native autonomy in land use, governance and religion. An integral part of the plan was the eventual conversion of the nomadic and wandering peoples to a settled way of life through the introduction of farming and the influence of growing number of Russian settlers.

Not all newcomers to Siberia went voluntarily, but a number of early nineteenth century noblemen and intellectuals in exile there took heart in what they found. The Decembrists, military officers exiled to Siberia after their failed uprising against Tsar Nicholas I in December of 1825, were a prominent example. The absence of serfdom and rigid social hierarchies in Siberia made a particular impression on them, making Siberia, in their eyes, more egalitarian and democratic than European Russia. "The Siberians better understood the dignity of man," wrote N. V. Basargin, "and valued their rights more highly." The Russian intellectual Aleksandr Herzen, who followed the Decembrists in Siberian exile in 1835, wrote with equal earnestness:

What is Siberia? -- here is a country that you do not know at all. I breathed in the icy air of the Urals: it was cold but fresh and healthy. Do you know that Siberia is an entirely new country, an America sui generis,

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10 Slezkine, p. 84.
11 For a longer discussion of the Speranskii reforms, see Marc Raeff, Siberia and the Reforms of 1822; Slezkine, pp. 124-146.
12 Quoted in Bassin, "Inventing Siberia," 776.
precisely for the reason that it is a land without aristocratic origins, the daughter of the Cossack and brigand, which doesn't remember its forebears, a country in which people are renewed, closing their eyes on their entire past... Here everyone is an exile and everyone is equal... Back there [in European Russia] life is enjoyable and enlightened, but the most important things are freshness and newness.13

For Herzen, closing one's eyes on the past paved the way for a new beginning, and the same theme was echoed decades later when one of the best known Siberian patriots Nikolai Mikhailovich Iadrintsev wrote, "The Siberiak14 has forgotten not only the history of the land he has left, but his personal history as well."15 In the early nineteenth century, geography and the virtues of oblivion conspired to produce what has perhaps been the most enduring image of Siberia -- the land of suffering. As the fur trade waned, willed forgetting became Siberia's leading commodity. This was the darker side of Siberia's Janus face.

It was originally the Russian emperor Peter the Great who introduced hard labour as a widespread form of punishment in Russia in the early 1700s; Empress Elizabeth, who reigned from 1741-61, linked hard labour to exile in imperial decrees; and Catherine the Great, reigning from 1762-1796 touted her policy of "assisted emigration" to people the Siberian kingdom with the most available bodies.16 However, with the failing economic performance of the enormous eastern colony, it was Nicholas I's (1825-1855) foreign minister, Count Nesslerode, who formally proposed that Siberia become a dustbin for Russia's sins, a dark colony of convict labour to which criminals and political prisoners

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13Quoted in Bassin, p. 787.
14A Russian term denoting a special Russian-Siberian identity; see for example, Marie Czaplicka, My Siberian Year. London: Mills and Boon, n.d., p. 242-244.
alike were banished.\textsuperscript{17} Exile became a veritable growth industry for the flagging colony, leading in turn to the entrenchment of Siberia as being equivalent to horror and oblivion.

From the point of view of Siberian native peoples, the new exile policies added to an already burdensome position. The Speranskii reforms, intended to promote greater native autonomy, added further taxes to already heavy \textit{iasak} obligations. Where exploitation of the native population by imported Russians was already the established custom, the added arrival of the most hardened of criminals from European Russia increased the pressure to defend indigenous lands and ways of life. Russian emigration to Siberia reached its peak in the early years of the twentieth century; in 1908 alone over 759,000 people crossed over the Urals to "close their eyes on the past."\textsuperscript{18} Competition over good land and fishing waters became fierce, and as a rule, the surest indication of a prosperous areas were native villages.

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For many of the early years of the Russian colonization of Siberia, Nivkhi fared somewhat more easily than, for example, their counterparts in Northwestern Siberia such as the Nentsy or the Khanty, mainly because they were so much less accessible. Where so many visions of Siberia were predicated on distance, Sakhalin entered these ranks as the most distant outpost of them all. At some 6,500 kilometres and eight time zones from the Russian capital, Sakhalin remains farther from Moscow than Newfoundland. Despite its most northerly tip being on the same latitude as Hamburg or Dublin, the island is routinely thought of as being Arctic; despite being only fifty kilometres north of Japan, it is thought of more often not as the Far East but "the Uttermost East," or more commonly, "the end of the world."\textsuperscript{19}

These literal and metaphoric distances turned against the Nivkhi in the mid-

\textsuperscript{17}Bassin, "Inventing Siberia," p. 774.
nineteenth century when the tsarist administration saw in Sakhalin the perfect outpost for its growing exile population. Officials began considering the penal colony idea in 1870, and by 1881, the island prison system was established. The tsar accorded Sakhalin its own governor, and from 1884 onwards over one thousand exiles were shipped to Sakhalin each year. "By 1888 Sakhalin had become, in the words of George Kennan, "The largest and most important penal establishment in Siberia."" 20 Indeed, although exiles were banished all across Siberia during the tsarist (and Soviet) period(s), often to places much farther than Sakhalin such as Chukotka or Kamchatka, the island's choppy seas and perceived isolation made it one of the most dreaded of exile destinations. Any man with a sentence of more than two years and eight months qualified to be sent to Sakhalin; any woman under the age of forty with a sentence of two years or more could go; and political exiles of any stripe qualified automatically. 21 Aleksandr Ermakov, who was awaiting sentencing in the Russian capital in 1901 for having distributed revolutionary literature, could not at first understand why his fellow Petersburg prison inmates were not only refusing their food but generally doing all they could to deteriorate their health. Soon he realized: Only the healthiest men were thought resilient enough for Sakhalin, and inmates were tripping over themselves to be perceived to be as weak as possible. 22 Solid health and demonstrated depravity became the main criteria for selecting Sakhalin's assisted emigrants. As one observer noted,

The island has not a single port worthy of that name, and the two or three anchorages thus used, are so guarded by troops, that ingress and egress, except by exceptional permission, are considered alike impossible. Hence this island has been reserved chiefly as the final destination of the unshot, the unhanged, the convicts and exiles who by frequent escapes or repeated

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21 Hawes, In the Uttermost East, p. 337.
22 A. Ermakov, "Dva goda na sakhalinskoj katorge" GASO: Fond Ryzhkova, p. 3.
murders have graduated perhaps from other prison stations throughout the vast territory of Russia and Siberia. It will hence be easy to imagine the vague terror which all through Russia, and even in the mines throughout Siberia, is inspired by the appalling and almost prohibited mention of Sakhalin.\textsuperscript{23}

James McConkey concurs that by the end of the nineteenth century, Sakhalin had become synonymous with hopelessness, bestial callousness, moral depravity, obliteration of the self, despair and miasma.\textsuperscript{24}

Many turn of the century writers chronicled the senselessness and terror of Sakhalin's notorious prison system,\textsuperscript{25} but undoubtedly the most prominent was the restless Anton Chekhov, who made the unpredictable journey to Sakhalin at the height of his career in 1890. Chekhov's plans puzzled his friends in Moscow who could not understand why he would want to impose his own exile upon himself and risk the dangers of the trip. Whether he went out of altruism ("In our time a few things are being done for the sick, but nothing at all for the prisoners"), to enlist public consciousness ("I'm sorry I'm not sentimental or I'd say that we ought to make pilgrimages to places like Sakhalin the way the Turks go to Mecca") or to supplicate anomie ("Granted, I may get nothing out of it, but there are sure to be two or three days that I will remember with rapture and bitterness"),\textsuperscript{26} Sakhalin clearly met his requirements of distance and difference. In the words of literary critic Cathy Popkin,

Chekhov views Sakhalin... as "separated from the entire world by 10,000

\textsuperscript{24}James McConkey, \textit{To a Distant Island} (New York: Dutton, 1986) p. 154.
\textsuperscript{26}These three Chekhov quotations are from McConkey, \textit{To a Distant Island}, p. 15.
verses," so remote that it would take "a hundred years to get home again."

"This is where Asia ends"; "This is the end of the world"; "you can't go any
farther than this" (45). That Sakhalin is "far, far away" (42) to the very
edge (41), to elsewhere... It is the exotic Orient, where people seem to
exchange greetings by waving geese (45), that the climate is "fierce" and
the inhabitants are fiercer still (41), that it is "not Russia," "not Russian,
"not ours" (42-43), not Europe, not continent and most saliently not
known...27

Alterity embodied, Sakhalin was, if not a blank slate, an imperfect slate waiting to be
righted.

Despite his efforts to have the book be a chronicle of humanity and the victory of
the human will, Chekhov's Ostrov Sakhalin is more a testimony to the constant struggle
between the alternating visions of Siberia as heaven and as hell. Of the arduous 6500 mile
journey across tundra and through forest, Chekhov wrote to a friend that he saw "prose
before Lake Baikal and poetry afterwards."28 But in his own accounts, he wrote of the
fabulous tedium and depressions he endured, passing town after town inhabited by people
"who manufactured clouds, boredom, wet fences and garbage."29 The prospect of
describing Sakhalin upon his arrival was less vexing since, in its pre-redeemed state,
Chekhov expected the island to be horrible. As his boat neared the Sakhalin shores for the
first time,

I could not see the wharf and buildings through the darkness and the smoke

27Cathy Popkin, "Chekhov as Ethnographer: Epistemological Crisis on Sakhalin Island"
Slavic Review, 51, 1 (1992), p. 36. Page references in parentheses are from Anton
Chekhov, Ostrov Sakhalin: (Iz putevykh zapisok), Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem,
published under the title, The Island: A Journey to Sakhalin [Translated by Luba and
28Quoted in McConkey, To a Distant Island, p. 119.
29Quoted in Robert Payne, "Introduction" in Anton Chekhov, The Island: A Journey to
Sakhalin, p. xxi.
drifting across the sea, and could barely distinguish dim lights at the post, two of which were red... On my left, monstrous fires were burning, above them the sky from remote conflagrations. It seemed that all of Sakhalin was on fire. 30

Early into the trip, the horrors of Sakhalin were not just the vales of suffering, but the trauma of senselessness that pervaded the prison administration.

Absurdities and inversions abounded. Chekhov was struck that no one knows what becomes of exiles after sentencing, but even on Sakhalin this was still not clear. There was an almost complete failure to distinguish prisoners; the warden could not be bothered to sort out the sick from the well; the forced labour and the free labour could not be told apart from each other. 31 Chekhov ignored the northern half of the island, but referred to the centre of the island as northern. "By the end, after countless claims that the south is more "x" than the north, and the north is more "y" than the south, Chekhov concedes that they are probably just the same. North, which is really centre, is the same as south." 32 The strait which insulated Sakhalin and was supposed to render it the impenetrable island of the damned froze over in the winter, thus negating the insularity. In sum, nothing on Sakhalin was quite what it seemed. Sakhalin, Chekhov ruminated, evinced a "vague mood" (febris sachaliensis). 33

Chekhov's odyssey through the island's heavenly and hellish qualities extended to the Giliaks (Nivkhi). The native population on Sakhalin was intended by Chekhov to contrast the errors of the man-made environment. Giliaks are "a wonderful and cheerful people... always intelligent, gentle, naively attentive" 34 yet they are also dirty, repulsive

30Quoted in McConkey, p. 141.
31Popkin, "Chekhov as Ethnographer," p. 44.
32Ibid., p. 42.
33Ibid., p. 47.
34Chekhov, The Island, p. 146.
and prone to lying.\textsuperscript{35}

Other, non-Russian gentlemen travellers made their way to Sakhalin around the same time and were less constrained by the noblesse of humanity that bound Chekhov. All claimed to be the first of their kind (the first Englishman, the first Frenchman, the first American); all met beautiful young women on the boat going over whose tragic fates had sent them in search of meaning; and all had disparaging things to say about Nivkhi. B. Douglas Howard, an Englishman travelling to Sakhalin just before Chekhov in 1889-90, brought with him trinkets which he wagered would be "pleasing to savages anywhere,"\textsuperscript{36} but found the (Giliak) food repulsive, the women's hair like horserakes, and the clothing grotesque.\textsuperscript{37} The Frenchman Paul Labbé, travelling to Sakhalin ten years later in 1899, might well have concluded that Howard had spoiled things for him: In efforts to enrich his private collection at the Trocadero, Labbé complained that Giliaks charged for being photographed -- they had been ruined by the Russians living around them.\textsuperscript{38} Harry de Windt also echoed the theme of ruin when he travelled to Sakhalin in 1896. Giliaks, with "their repulsive mask-like faces [which] leered out at us like evil spirits... may be summed up in three words: dirt, drink and disease, the two latter having been greatly augmented since their intercourse with Europeans."\textsuperscript{39} Only the Englishman Charles Hawes, who travelled to Sakhalin in 1901, ventured a more sympathetic portrait. After visiting Giliaks in the northern interior he wrote at length on problems of contact with Russians: Native hunting preserves had been overtaken, the best fishing spots had been appropriated, increases in clearings had chased off game, and Giliak dogs could no longer be left to roam and feed themselves since they frequently attacked Russian cows; once tied, they had

\textsuperscript{36}Howard, \textit{Life with Trans-Siberian Savages}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., pp. 37, 59, 63.
\textsuperscript{38}Paul Labbé, \textit{Ostrov Sakhalin}, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{39}Harry de Windt, \textit{The New Siberia}, p. 112-113.
to be fed, further depleting Giliak fish supplies. Nor had the exile community added any good, for "If a purse is almost indispensable in Regent Street, a revolver is absolutely so on Sakhalin."  

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What all of these writers shared were two of the official Russian presumptions about their subject that echo throughout accounts of the period: i) that the island was wholly Russian; and ii) that the natives existed in a vacuum. Both of these visions later took root as commonplaces in the Soviet literature, but neither were very effective in dealing with the complicated history of Sakhalin or the Nivkh.

Sakhalin's Russian pedigree grew in importance after World War II when the Soviets reclaimed the southern half of the island occupied by Japan from 1905 to 1945. Yet the Russians were far from the first nation to either explore, settle or claim Sakhalin as its own.

Archeological expeditions undertaken on the island in the 1960s yielded a number of stone industry artefacts from the preceramic period, dating from 30,000 to 7,000 years ago. More recent investigations into the Neolithic period (5000 B.C. - 1000 A.D.) on North Sakhalin have produced a portrait of a material culture greatly resembling that of the Nivkhi in the nineteenth century, but Soviet scholars have hesitated to assert that these were expressly Nivkh productions. The subject of Nivkh ethnogenesis in general has long been a source of debate among Russian and Soviet ethnographers.

40Hawes, In the Uttermost East, p. 274.  
41Ibid., p. 355.  
42Olga Shubina, "Sovremennoe sostoyanie arkheologicheskoi izuchenosti sakhalina i zadachi sakhalinskoi arkheologii" Kraevedcheski Biulleten' 1990 (4):106-119. The Northern Neolithic culture suggested a sedentary way of life distinguished by land hunting, river fishing, sea mammal hunting, and gathering in the taiga --all of which closely resembled early accounts of Nivkh life. The housing structures from the Neolithic period were also quite similar to those of nineteenth century Nivkh.  
43Erukhim A. Kreinovich, Nivkhgu (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), pp. 21-22; Leopold von Shrenk, Ob inorodisakh amurskago kraia (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1883) Vol. 1, ch. 2; Lev Ia. Shternberg, Giliaki, Orochi, Gol'dy,
Early Chinese sources on Sakhalin have been little studied in the West, as the historian John Stephan has pointed out, though the Chinese influence on Sakhalin dates back much farther than many realize. Chinese Han period sources (202 B.C. - 222 A.D.) refer to native peoples on extreme northeast Sakhalin who wore fish skins and covered their hair, possibly denoting either Nivkh or the more predominantly southern Ainu of Sakhalin. Chinese earrings and beads dating from approximately 600 A.D. have been excavated on Sakhalin, suggesting early trade with China. By 1287, the Yan dynasty had erected garrisons on Sakhalin, and some records indicate Giliak-Chinese clashes.\textsuperscript{44} The decline of Chinese influence by the seventeenth century on Sakhalin and the Amur was followed by the rise of Manchu power. In 1644, Giliaki, Tungusy and Ainu established tributary relations with the newly established Ch'ing dynasty, and from approximately 1700 to 1820, Giliaki, Oroki and Ainu from Sakhalin each sent tribute missions to Manchu posts on the Amur river.\textsuperscript{45} However, it is known that Manchu officials made few efforts to actively colonize the indigenous inhabitants of Sakhalin.

The work of the Japanese explorer Mamiya Rinso (1776-1844) leaves us with one of the most detailed portraits of Nivkh life from the Manchu period. Rinso had been a minor government official on Hokkaido and was instructed in 1807 to make a study of Karafuto, the Japanese name for Sakhalin. He set off in June of 1808 at the age of twenty-six and remained until November of 1809. In the interim he spent a good deal of time among Ainu, Orokko (Orok) and Sumerenkuru (Giliak) communities.

Rinso's remarks about North Sakhalin Nivkh/Sumerenkuru life are remarkable for

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\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., p. 22-24.
the level of sophistication they convey, contrasting so starkly with the travelogues of Russian explorers of the same period. Rinso narrates active trade and tribute conducted between Giliaks and the Manchu administration, facilitated not only by dog sledges over the frozen Strait of Tatar in the winter season, but via seven ferries which traversed the strait regularly at seven different points between contemporary Pogibi (J. Noteto) and Moskal'vo (Tamurao). On the northwestern shore to the north of Pogibi, Rinso wrote of a Sumerenkuru community more refined than the reindeer-herding Oroki. They wore Manchurian-made cotton clothes, washed their mouths and faces every day "to keep their looks clean and handsome," and were amiable to strangers. Among the women were a number of beauties; all women by and large were skilled at needlework. Their diet consisted mainly of fish, but included also millet, buckwheat flour, wheat flour and beans imported from the mainland, although these were expensive and not eaten as staples. Japanese lacquerware was present in most homes, as were wine bottles, tin cups, and earthenware brought over from Manchuria. The Sumerenkuru did their own forging but the dearth of ironwares were a continual problem.46

Rinso's account also notes the limited extent to which the Manchurian administration attempted to inculcate authority within the Nivkh communities.

Among the Sumerenkuru of this island who make the annual trip to the Chinese government post in Manchuria to present tribute of animal skins and to return with gifts, are those called Harata (headmen) and Kashinto (second men). They receive their appointments from the Manchurians...47

However, Rinso also contends with the increasing availability of goods through the Japanese on South Sakhalin, Nivkh-Manchurian relations began to wane. The islanders formerly crossed over to Manchuria several times a year but,

47Ibid., p. 115.
of late, Japanese goods have become so widespread in Hatsushima that they cross over once every two or three years.\textsuperscript{48}

Instead, both Nivkhi and Oroki would travel south to Shiranushi (approximately modern Kholmsk) to trade and sometimes work on farms. While the Japanese generally offered hides, liquor, axes, cotton, tobacco and kettles, the northern peoples could offer brocades, jewels, pipes, sables and fish.

Rinso likely erred on the side of courtesy when he described certain aspects of the Nivkh/Sumerenkuru way of life. His illustrations of Sumerenkuru interiors for example suggest a far greater degree of good housekeeping than any other prerevolutionary account. It was also salient that he spent time with Nivkhi from central and northwest Sakhalin, who had a history of much greater contact with their Asian colonizers. Had he fraternized with Nivkhi from the eastern shore, whom Russian administrators would refer to later as Sakhalin's "Dark Giliaks," the portrait might have been different.\textsuperscript{49} But his matter of fact renderings of Sumerenkuru commerce, industriousness and affability provide, however briefly, a rare portrait of Sakhalin aboriginals outside the conventional nature-culture continua. It lays the ground in turn for questioning the politics of backwardness and isolation so often ascribed to Sakhalin Nivkh communities upon the arrival of the Soviets.

Still other aspects of Rinso's account jar the reader even from a modern perspective. To imagine not even one but seven public ferries running between the Amur and the northwestern shore of the closed military zone that Sakhalin went on to become, seems impossible by either Cold War or post-Soviet standards -- the monopoly of state transport and the attendant atmosphere of closure remain too powerful. Japanese lacquerware? Manchurian pottery? This produces nothing but cognitive dissonance in the

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 107.
\textsuperscript{49}Tsentr\'al'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv RSFSR Dal'nego Vostoka (Tomsk) [hereafter TsGADV] f. 1133, o. 1, d. 2031 (1900), I. 11.
same land where contact with foreigners constituted treason for so many decades. It produces still further cognitive dissonance on an island where even Chinese wares remain absurdly out of reach for consumers left behind amidst the ruins of the Soviet state economy. And where were the Russians? Could Rinso really have been talking about the same island?

Indeed, the Russian presence began to increase not long after Rinso departed. As Manchu sovereignty over the area faded, Sakhalin became a disputed zone between Russia and Japan from the mid 1700s onward. The first documented Japanese landing on Sakhalin was in 1635, though Japanese proximity to the island suggests that they may have been there earlier. The Dutch explorer Maerten Gerritszoon Vries reached Sakhalin's Aniwa Bay in 1643. And one year later in 1644, Vasilii Poiarkov lead the first Russian expedition to the area, although there is no firm documentation that he went to Sakhalin.50

By the 1800s, both the Russians and the Japanese were maintaining a more substantial presence on the island. Following a long record of clashes, both countries made mutual territorial claims beginning in 1853, to be resolved temporarily in 1875 by the Treaty of St. Petersburg which granted all of Sakhalin to Russia in return for the four most southerly of the Kuril Islands, known to Japanese as Chishima.

Nevertheless, even with the advance of Russian colonization, Nivkhi of Sakhalin island operated in a relatively mixed orbit well through to the 1920s. The Russian scholar P. Tikhmenev observed in 1863 that, for whatever reasons -- Japanese intimidation or distrust of the Russians -- Sakhalin Nivkhi preferred to purchase goods at Japanese stores, even when the same products from the Russian-American Company were less expensive.51 The English historian John Baddeley puts this remark into context when he

51P. Tikhmenev, Istoricheskoe Obozrenie Obrazovanii Rossiisko-Amerikanskoi
pointed out that on the Amur delta, even before the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 when Russia's defeat led to the southern half of Sakhalin being handed over to the Japanese, Russia... was economically dependent upon her Asiatic neighbours. Meat came from Mongolia; corn from Manchuria and the Maritime Province; such vegetables as were grown locally were produced by Coreans or Chinese.  

So too, the historian John Forsyth as noted that at the same period, [The Russian citizen in the Far East] lives in a house built by Chinese labour with Manchurian timber, the stove is made of Chinese bricks... In the kitchen the Chinese boy gets the Tula samovar ready. The master of the house drinks his Chinese tea, with bread made of Manchurian flour, from a Chinese bakery... The mistress of the house wears a dress made by a Chinese tailor... In [the] yard a Korean is at work chopping wood.  

It should also be considered that the significance of the Russian defeat to the Japanese in 1905 signalled not only a change of administration for the southern half of the island but a new fallibility of the Russian colonizers in the eyes of the colonized.  

* * *

In the Soviet period, it became standard to berate the Japanese for their rapacious stewardship of both South Sakhalin from 1905-1945 and of North Sakhalin from 1920-1925. And so on a rainy day in July of 1990, after a long afternoon spent watching "State

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Line" (a spy film about love among Soviet border guards) and "Mirage" (a spy film about bloodless American bank robbers set in Central Asia qua Texas) with some younger Nivkhi and Russians in their 20s and 30s, I wanted to know what it was about the Japanese that left them too in the Soviet category of suspicious foreigners. All five of my companions began to hold forth animatedly with negative examples from when North Sakhalin was under Japanese control. I didn't know very much about the period, but I pointed out that, if nothing else, the roads and the buildings left behind by the Japanese on Sakhalin fifty years ago or more were to this day the only ones still in good condition. This was ill-proposed on my part, and the anti-Japanese sentiment began anew. Older Nivkhi, however, usually had different responses.

In 1990, the recollections of the Sakhalin Nivkhi I knew who were old enough to look back on the pre-Soviet period spoke to the images of a cosmopolitan island at the crossroads of the mainland and the Pacific Rim. Their accounts stood out so sharply from the empty island at the cold edge of the world of which I had spent so much time reading.

"My father was born in 1892. He used to talk about all the Japanese that used to be on Sakhalin and the Amur. The Japanese used to hire the Nivkhi as workers. There were Chinese too; one of our relatives was married to a Chinese man. She eventually left for China and stayed there. They used to send us letters, but we didn't hear from them after the [second world] war. As for my grandfather, he was Ainu, he was a very famous hunter. He used to tell us about how they kept horses, and used to the horses to go across to Manchuria. Straight from Sakhalin -- on boats across the strait and then with the horses into Manchuria. Most of the time they traded furs for Chinese silks and brocades. My father spoke a little Evenk, and a little Chinese. He spoke Japanese best of all, quite well."55

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55 All field quotations are taken from interviews I conducted in the North Sakhalin villages of Nogliki, Chir-Unvd, Okha, Moskal'vo, Nekrasovka, Rybnoe, Rybnovsk and...
Another woman born in 1929 recounted,

"Sure, my father spoke Japanese. He worked as a brigadier on a Japanese artel. He worked with them before the revolution and then during the war... We used to do a lot of trading. Before we used to live better off, even better than the Russians do now. When I grew up on Baidukov Island [in the northwest Tatar Strait], we used to have a large wooden house. When we moved to Sakhalin in '35 I had never seen a zemlianka [semi-underground Nivkh winter dwelling] before. I couldn't imagine that people lived in it. I thought that it was for keeping dogs. My father took me along once to visit some of our relatives and I wouldn't go in. I wasn't about to walk into a dog house! I thought the dogs would eat me on the spot. On Baidukov we used to have a large house with a verandah. It's still there today. I have some relatives there still. Most of the houses left on Baidukov were built by the Japanese.

Still, it was not like we were cut off from Nivkh life. Every year my father would find a bear den and make off with one of the bear cubs. We would raise it for a year, feed it, and then when it was one year old, we would have a bear festival. I remember them especially. We had all kinds of Nivkh dishes: mos [potato and cranberry pudding], muvi [blueberry and fish skin custard], iukola [dried salmon]... everything you could want or imagine."

Grigori Pakskun was only eleven when the Japanese purchased a fishing concession on the northwestern shore in 1922. In the few years after the Bolshevik Revolution when the Whites and the Reds were struggling for control of the Far East, Japanese assumed

Romanovka between April and November of 1990 and between June and August of 1992.
control of the entire island from 1920 to 1925.

"I remember the Japanese but they were only in Grigor'evka for three years. They arrived by some agreement in 1922 and left when the Soviets came in 1925. Most of them were fishermen who arrived with their families. They seemed to get along pretty well with everyone. There were a few Russians in our area, like the artel Pike in Rybnoe, Sazan in Grigor'evka and Swan in Tengi. But mostly there were Chinese merchants, selling dry goods. They had the strangest jewellery and the most beautiful brocades. But by 1925 they were gone too."

Raisa Taigun, born in 1918, was living in the village of Vereshchagino, just to the south of Rybnoe when the Japanese worked there.

"Vereshchagino was the prettiest place. Beautiful! In the middle of the village there were trees and flowers -- that was when we were still little. There was a Nivkh cemetery. That's where we had the little mortuary houses (Nivkh, raf) where people's ashes and amulets were kept. But eventually people gave that up. The schoolchildren used to play there and take the amulets. Cleaned them out. Today it's all sand. Sand from old houses. Beside the town was the Japanese fishery, from 1915 on. That's gone now too. It had "1915" written right on it..."

They say that they took all the Chinese and Japanese away in 1925. They recruited them, they said. My mother talked about how my older brother would go up to the Japanese at the Third Fishery and -- how do you call those big Japanese dishes? -- he would ask them for rice to try. They would always give him some and he would run back home. They gave him sugar too. It was all of half a kilometre from Vereshchagino to the Third. The Chinese, they said, used to marry our Nivkhi, and they lived in
Vereshchagino. What good cooks they are, the noodles and broths they would make...

Sometimes our parents would go ask us to mail a package at the Japanese station and we would come running back saying, "The Japanese chased us away!" Everyone was afraid of them. They didn't have any women. That's what my mother said. I didn't know any myself. We had a Chinese store too. A little house. A little bigger than this room maybe [3m x 4m]. They had everything! Real honey! What they didn't have! The beads were so beautiful. My mother used to take me there. And little boats. Little sailboats."

There was one woman I met over the course of my stay who was in her nineties, and who could look back on the period from personal experience. Her name was Kalrik, and she lived in the predominantly Nivkh village of Chir-Unvd (from the Nivkh meaning "New Life") which was created when the Soviets consolidated four smaller Nivkh villages in the area in the 1920s. She was the only Nivkh I was to meet over my eventual nine months on Sakhalin who knew no Russian, and I travelled to meet her along with Galina Dem'ianovna Lok, a Nivkh ethnographer from nearby Nogliki.

Visiting Chir-Unvd had long held a strange appeal for me. The well known ethnographers Shternberg and Kreinovich had both worked there, and travellers like Charles Hawes wrote of the fine French tastes of the adjacent Russian community of Ado-Tymovo in 1901. Ado-Tymovo, built on the ashes of a Nivkh village which had been burnt down to make way for Russian settlers, had been a popular way-station for people moving across the island from shore to shore.

But the Ado-Tymovo of today was an unexpected shadow of its former self. With a train barely coming to a halt along its edge each day to exchange a few passengers, the town is a cluster of some twenty abandoned shells of houses overgrown by huge thickets
of grass and trees. Some five families still live there, and in what surely should have been one of the great discoveries of the USSR-in-perestroika, it still housed its own store in an abandoned apartment, with a respectable selection of goods and family-run service. Yet were it not for the crumbling houses slumped down amidst groves of trees, it would be hard to believe that this crumbling way station had ever been anything but a grassy clearing in the forest.

Ten miles away by motorcycle, Chir-Unvd is a small village of approximately 280, 200 of whom are Nivkhi. Settled alongside the Tym' River amidst forest and distant hills, it was quite beautiful, with dirt roads and the seemingly ubiquitous wooden houses in various postures of slump, stoop and outright abandonment. Kalrik lived along with her niece in a two room cabin close to the cemetery. The house was sparsely lined with three beds and two tables, a refrigerator and television, but dominated in all respects by the central Russian wood stove, which was found in most of the homes throughout the village. Every wall seemed pitched at a different angle.

"Before the revolution, when the Russians first appeared here, they started immediately to distribute rations... rice, sugar, and flour. We had never seen these things before and we were delighted. It had been a hungry year. There had been few fish that season and people were starving. The food meant a lot to us. When my younger sister was born in 1916, my parents called her Paek [Russian, ration]. That's her Nivkh name!

Still we didn't see the Russians very often. There were four stores in Ado-Tymovo -- Japanese, Chinese, Russian and Korean. Four stores that all served Nivkhi! But I mean, ones that accepted fur instead of money. Most of the time we didn't have money. Our people would come in from hunting, and there would be an exchange. They would give in the fur at the Chinese store, take their groceries and go home. We bought grain
mostly, rice and flour... Everyone liked the Chinese silks most of all. We would make our own clothes from them. But we would shop around. All the stores took Kolchak money.\textsuperscript{56}...

In Ado-Tymovo, the Chinese also had a school, for Chinese children. It was pretty. We didn't see as many Russians then. Most of the Russians we saw were fugitives from the prisons (\textit{Russian, varnaki}). We used to call them "Bolsheviks." They were frightening because they were so desperate. They would steal from villages to keep themselves going. Sometimes they were nicer, and would stay longer and hide. They sometimes asked us to make shoes for them. I had a Russian friend in Ado-Tymovo though, Mitia Torlov. He used to have a gramophone. We would go over to his house and dance to jazz records. That was just before it all changed."

* * *

What then was the extent of the Russian colonial administration of Nivkhi on Sakhalin at the turn of the last century? Russian archival documents provide an inherently partial account (here Japanese and Chinese accounts would make a larger contribution), but this sense of partiality may stem from an administration which was itself inherently partial.

Despite sporadic state policy shifts regarding the administration of Siberian indigenous peoples, the tsarist government at the turn of the century had no overarching plan for native development.

Thus, even at the time when the indigenous peoples of Siberia were better known than ever before, they hardly mattered as part of the empire and

\textsuperscript{56} Provisional currency coupons had been issued in the name of Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak (1874-1920), the Russian admiral and explorer who became war minister in the anti-Bolshevik government that formed in Siberia after the Bolshevik revolution.
were totally irrelevant in terms of the "accursed questions" that the politicians and the intellectuals grappled with. They were not even history: as far as most people (and history narratives) were concerned, the conquest of Siberia ended with "Ermak's rout of Kuchum."57

The most frequent observation found in Russian state reports of the late 1800s and early 1900s was that, since there was no administration of the northern half of the island to speak of, no one except exile ethnographers like Shternberg and Pil'sudskii knew much of anything about the native inhabitants. In 1911 the Sakhalin government wrote to the Maritime Governor General in Khabarovsk that Giliaks had been miscategorized as nomadic when they were in fact sedentary. "Despite their number and the fact that they occupy the enormous northern portion of the island rich in fish and animals," he wrote, "the island administration has paid little attention to them."58 Other officials noted that Nivkhi were "completely outside administrative control."59 As of 1909, there were only 194 Russians residing on North Sakhalin, spread out in the communities of Rybnoe, Astrakhanovka, Nevel'skoe, Uspenskoe, Valuo and Liangery. They were attended to sporadically by government strazhniki, or rural police constables.

The central government sometimes sought out Nivkh artworks as ornaments for the empire, and the attention could be elaborate, as was the case with the Amur Nivkh Pozvein in 1862. Pozvein had worked as a guide for Nevel'skoi (and later Tikhmenev). In recognition of the furs, birch baskets and fish nets made from nettles that Nevel'skoi took back with him to Petersburg, the Imperial Economic Society of Petersburg initiated eighteen months of correspondence between three Governors-General, an admiral and a prince to ensure that Pozvein was rewarded for his contributions with a gold medal on the proper imperial ribbon.60

57Slezkin, "Russia's Small Peoples," p. 248.
58TsGADV f. 702, o. 3, d. 310 (1911), l. 293.
59TsGADV f. 702, o. 1, d. 645 (1909), l. 4.
60Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Irkutskoi oblasti, f. 24, o. 10, d. 1659, ll. 5-23. I am grateful
On Sakhalin, as one official noted in 1883, Russians generally did as they liked and Giliaks followed suit. In practice this meant that the Russians forcibly appropriated native fishing sites, leaving Giliaks with little recourse. There are no records of Giliak insurrections. The role of convict settlers on Nivkh communities should also not be underestimated. By 1893, there were over 13,000 convicts, former convicts, and exile settlers on the island. Forsyth has noted that the Nivkh population dropped dramatically during the early years of the Sakhalin prison administration -- up to one third of Nivkh died from associative diseases or by foul play, by some estimates. It was former convicts who originally razed a Nivkh village to make way for Ado-Tymovo, later murdering entire Nivkh families who persisted in staying on.

Politically, there were efforts begun in the 1880s to create a network of native officials or starosti who would act in the service of the colony. Rinso indicates that the Manchus had attempted to institute a similar system approximately one hundred years earlier, but as Shternberg notes of the Russian case, the practice never was successful. The chosen starosti tended to be among the most obsequious and least influential in the Nivkh communities. In 1911, Gondatti, the Maritime Governor-General, discouraged a campaign to make Sakhalin Nivkh eligible for military service -- the idea had been that military service would aid in their gradual Russification while their numbers would add to the strength of the forces. "Natives knew the backward regions," Gondatti conceded, but that "to expect that the inorodtsy [people of a different birth] will be promising and loyal soldiers is difficult to assess, since many of them spend more time

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to Galina Dem'ianovna Lok for these documents.

61 TsGADV, f. 1154, o. 2, d. 27 (1883), l. 590.
62 TsGADV, f. 702, o. 2. d. 516 (1913), l. 35.
63 TsGADV, f. 1154, o. 2. d. 27 (1893), l. 10.
64 Forsyth, A History of the Peoples of Siberia, p. 219.
65 TsGADV, f. 702, o. 2. d. 516, l. 35.
67 Shternberg, Giliaki, Orochi, Gol'dy..., p. 112.
with the Chinese than they do with they Russians..."68

Economically, the picture is equally disparate. Some Nivkhi found wage
employment on the Russian artels such as Grigorii Zотов's in Rybnoe where over 500
Nivkhi worked in high season.69 But it is unclear what they were paid, how they were
employed, and so on. More notoriously, others worked as bounty hunters in the service of
the prison administration, hunting down fugitive prisoners and returning them to the
authorities. Felling a "white sable" brought Nivkhi financial remuneration if not the
morbid respect of the administration. Prison officials, such as the officer who penned the
following 1887 letter, were effusive in their praise for Nivkh efficiency in this regard.

"The Giliak Vas'ka has long distinguished himself by his energetic
participation in the search for fugitive exiles. Only recently he personally
returned six men... Further, the antagonism expressed by exiles toward him
is a clear sign of his diligent efforts. In light of the above, I have the
honour of awarding the Giliak Vas'ka a special monetary award in the sum
of three rubles for each prisoner caught, in recognition of his exemplary
service."70

When Nivkhi went wanting in times of famine, as was the case when storms and low tides
curbed the salmon runs, the government made a number of efforts to organize food relief
to native communities, though this was often a complex operation, since as the military
governor of the island observed in 1909, there was not a single government official on the
northern half of the island.71 At one point in 1908, foodstuffs such as rice from Saigon,
flour and sugar were shipped through private merchants on the northwestern shore,
leading to a myriad of investigations when the supplies immediately disappeared.72

68 TsGADV, f. 702, o. 1, d. 589 (1911).
69 Confirm this again.
70 TsGADV, f. 113, o. 1, d. 203 (1887), l. 8.
71 TsGADV, f. 702, o. 3, d. 317 (1909), l. 4.
72 TsGADV, f. 702, o. 3, d. 317 (1908), l. 331.
Particularly bad years included 1908, 1914 and 1917.

To understand the famines affecting Nivkh during these years, particularly in light of the bucolic picture offered by Rinso in the same area only one hundred years earlier, one has to consider the impact of the intense and repeated Russian encroachments upon all of the most prominent fishing and hunting sites. Colonial officials routinely remarked upon Giliak laziness as the root of the problem, but the Polish emigré ethnographer Bronislaw Pil'sudskii countered with a spirited defense:

"To attest to Giliak laziness is to never have seen them at work, for example, during the fishing season when, to not even speak of the men, women work from morning tonight with such energy that their hands start to swell... Laziness can not be possibly be the leading marker of a people that look upon it as a vice. In the winter... they are also obliged to work. They hunt deer, bears in their dens and the sable, with traps. They gather wood, repair tents, work on skis, the sled, dishes and so on; finally they must travel to distant locations... to exchange nettles and nets for seal oil, seal skins and other things which they don't have in the Tymovsk Valley.

As for women, there is nothing to say -- they are eternally at work."\(^73\)

Pil'sudskii pointed out that Nivkh normally lived in their own houses for their entire lives, but that by 1900, many had been forced to move three or four times because of Russian encroachment, creating a large drain on their resources. "After all this, could anyone be surprised that Tymovsk Giliaks live in such ramshackle lean-to's... They hardly know whether next year they will be obliged to move and start all over again."\(^74\)

In the cultural sphere, there were no particular efforts made at Russification since,


\(^{74}\) Ibid., p. 12.
as we saw above in the military recruitment example, the perceived the questions of loyalty and cultural difference seemed too great. In contrast to the Japanese, who had set up twelve schools on South Sakhalin for Ainu children by 1917, there were no schools established for Giliaks. Only one Nivkh was known to have been formally educated at the turn of the century, Imdin, who had been sent by Pil'sudskii to study in Vladivostok. It was Imdin who reported to Charles Hawes the legend of a group of brothers who travelled with their written papers long ago during a storm. During the storm, the wind carried away the papers of two of the brothers, the Giliak and the Tungus, and they forgot the art of writing. The brothers whose descendants went on to become the Chinese and the Japanese saved their writings and travelled on to a new country. In early Soviet accounts, it became popular to cite the example of the tsarist Sakhalin administrator in 1913 who expressed interest in education for Giliak children, were it not for the "certain odor" that precluded their being exposed to Russian children. As one early Soviet reformer put it, "Such was the dilemma: either shed the "certain odor" or remain in darkness. The latter alternative wins by default, since the Giliak native --politically and morally forgotten -- has had no chance to attempt the former." Other prerevolutionary officials were more solicitous. In 1911, the Sakhalin Governor wrote the Governor-General of the Amur Region requesting that the Sakhalin aborigines be upgraded from the status of "wandering" to the status of "semi-sedentary," a legal change which would have afforded them greater social services. "[Giliaks and Oroks]," he wrote, "are hardly

75 Great Britian Foreign Office, Sakhalin (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1920), p. 20. The Japanese schools may also have accommodated children of Nivkh families remaining in the southerly Korsakov Okrug. There were 71 Giliaks counted in the Korsakov Okrug in 1883, TsGADV, f. 1154, o. 2, d. 27 (1883), l. 70; only six were counted in the 1896 records, f. 1133, o. 1, d. 1428 (1896), l. 18.
76 P. Nikolaev maintains that while the tsarist administration did have five schools for Nivkhi, they were unknown to most and existed in name only. See "Natsional'nye shkoly na Sakhaline" Prosveshenie Natsional'nosteii 1934 4:43-46.
77 Quoted in Hawes, In the Uttermost East, p. 240-241.
78 TsGADV, f. R-3158, o. 1, d. 48, l. 30 (1925).
inclined to run from culture," but his arguments appeared to have little sway.\textsuperscript{79} Efforts to convert Nivkh to the Russian Orthodox faith appear to have been equally minimal. As early as 1887, the prison administration in Due sent missionaries to North Sakhalin, but without clear results.\textsuperscript{80} By 1901, the Sakhalin military governor cited only two Nivkh men and two Nivkh boys who had been converted.\textsuperscript{81}

While local administrators debated the implications of nomadic and sedentary statuses for Nivkh, the one real legacy of the legal debates over remained the symbolic change brought about by the 1822 Speranskii reforms. By the early nineteenth century, the aboriginal Siberian \textit{inоземетс} [man of a different land] graduated to \textit{инородетс} [man of a different birth], as the historian Yuri Slezkin has shown.\textsuperscript{82} Politically, the term \textit{инородетс} was applied to anyone not speaking the Russian language, such that even Ukrainians were sometimes included in this category, but legally, the list was considerably shorter, ranging from Siberian natives to hill tribes of the Caucasus to Kirgizy. In a 1910 article, the Russian ethnographer Lev Shternberg argued that neither the political or legal uses of the term were appropriate, since the reliance on language "characterizes neither the level of culture, nor the degree of national [\textit{natsional'no}'] self-awareness of a given individual." When neither race or religion managed to satisfy Shternberg's criteria either, he arrived at the one determinant that seemed to link all \textit{инородцы} together --alienation from European culture.\textsuperscript{83} In the years leading up to the bolshevik revolution, Nivkh were defined as non-Europeans; they were also about to become much less Asian.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{79}TsGA\textit{D}, f. 702, o. 3, d. 310, ll. 293-294o.
\item \textsuperscript{80}TsGA\textit{D}, f. 1164, o. 1, d. 11 (1887), ll. 2-5.
\item \textsuperscript{82}Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples," p. 87.
\item \textsuperscript{83}Shternberg, \textit{Inorodtsy}, p. 532.
\end{itemize}
Chapter Four/ 1920s and the New Order

"Vulgar philistines say that socialism is a structure of total stagnation. Rubbish, the crassest rubbish! Only with socialism does real progress begin. Man will look for the first time at himself as if at raw material, or at best, as at a half-finished product, and say: "I've finally got to you my dear homo sapiens, now I can get to work on you, friend!"

-Lev Trotsky, "A Few Words on How to Raise a Human Being" 1

While the Bolshevik Revolution echoed around the globe in November of 1917, the news took some time in reaching Siberia's northern natives. It was a full eight years before the Soviets were able to establish a unified government straight across to the Pacific, and a few years still more before they fully made themselves known in the remotest corners of the former empire. For most native northerners, the overall breakdown of the established order was enough to signal that change was at hand. Others came into direct contact with prolonged fighting, since Siberia was one of the last holdouts of the imperial forces. In the far east, fighting went on directly in Evenk, Nivkh, Nanai, Ulchi and Udeghe territories. "One can say with certainty," the Russian scholar G. Lebedev wrote in 1920, "that the Russian revolution has saved [the northern peoples] from their "friends" forever, from theft and deception, but on the other hand, the Civil War has affected them in the most harmful way. Before these small nationalities were shamelessly and inhumanly taken advantage of by our [Russian] "Kulturtrager"... Today... trade has ceased, there is no bread... no salt, no needles, no thread... The situation is completely tragic." 2 However, it was not only their perceived helplessness but their backwardness that made these peoples unique. 3 The aboriginal peoples, Lebedev suggested, "for whom modern life is a bona fide fairy tale on the scale of A Thousand and

2 G. Lebedev, "Vымирающіє братія" Zhизн' Natsional'nostei No. 19, 1920.
3 The perception of native backwardness in pre-and post-revolutionary Siberia is a theme from Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples..."
"One Nights," were by consequence "the truest proletarians," and they deserved state assistance.

In the Russian Far East, the Civil War continued through the early 1920s. A pro-Bolshevik Far Eastern Republic was established in 1920, tenuously declaring administration over the Transbaikal, Amur, Primor'e and Kamchatka regions, as well as northern Sakhalin. It eventually merged with the RSFSR in 1922, but not after several fundamental decrees had been made, decrees which would later be instrumental in the charter of the Moscow-based Committee of the North. The Far Eastern Republic's Minister of Nationality Affairs was Karl Ianovich Luks. One of Luks' first and most important acts was the decree, "To all Peoples of Non-Russian Nationality of the Far Eastern Republic" issued in 1921:

The constituent assembly of the Russian Far East ensures the right of all nationalities of the Far Eastern Republic to an independent cultural life. Every nationality or tribe has the right to independently determine all aspects of their national life free of pressure on the part of state. The Russian working masses, having taken power into their own hands, has triumphantly turned away from the policy of pressuring and badgering smaller nationalities, as practised from the time of the tsars and the Semenovshchina. Henceforth the state aspires only to the general governing and control over the overall way of life of each nationality, without which the existence of a united, powerful state would be

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4Luks (1888-1932) spent much of his youth in and out of tsarist prisons since his first arrest in 1905 for his participation in the Social Democratic Party of his native Lithuania. In 1916 he was permanently exiled to Eastern Siberia and worked for several years in a cement factory in Kamyschet in the Nizhneudinskii Uezd. He served on the Chita Revolutionary Committee from 1918-1920 and become Minister of Nationalities Affairs in the Far East Republic from 1921-22. He died in 1932 while on expedition in the far northeast. For more on Luks see the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (New York: MacMillan, 1973), 15, p. 175; A. P. Fetisov, K. Ia. Luks (Khabarovsk, 1966).
inconceivable."⁵

Nonetheless, there was a responsibility that went with the new directives.

Each individual citizen of each nationality must carefully remember that
these rights have been apportioned by the working masses, and their
significance will be manifested only through the maintenance and
strengthening of the workers' state.⁶

Luks was fast to map out a vision of aboriginal government within the new Soviet system.
Native autonomy would be based on a three-tiered system of administration, beginning at
the bottom with clan councils, mediated by native coordinators and convened regularly at
Clan Council Congresses. Native courts were slated to have the main voice in resolving
local disputes. The ministry barred traders from native areas, pledged to establish trading
points to ensure access to essential goods, and also set aside funds for native education.⁷

The problem Luks had in implementing these reforms grew not only from the
exigencies of the ongoing civil war, but the nature of the autonomy being drawn up. The
Bolshevik agenda for cultural development called for a drawing together of all the
nationalities of the new Union; however others, such as the Russian ethnographer
Vladimir Bogoraz, saw virtues in having the northern peoples live apart. Bogoraz was an
influential player in the early development of aboriginal policy in Soviet Siberia. Having
been exiled to Kolyma in 1890, he had impeccable political credentials; his monumental
monograph, The Chukchee, which resulted from his internment, made him one of the
foremost ethnographers (along with Lev Shternberg) to lead the new field of Soviet
ethnography. But where the closing line to Bogoraz's 1908 monograph made his
sentiments about Russian-Native contacts clear, "In modern times, the same as two
centuries ago, Russianization for this nomadic and primitive people would bring

⁵Karl Ia. Luks, "Vsem grazhdanam nerusskoj natsional'nosti DVR" [Brochure by Luks
dated 20 June 1921, Chita] TsGADV f. 623, o. 1, d. 11, l. 21.
⁶Ibid.
⁷TsGADV, f. R1468, o. 1, d. 120 (1921), "Zakony pravitel'stva DVR," ll. 10-50.
destruction and death,"\(^8\) he went out on a limb still further with a 1922 article pressing for
native reservations before a largely unreceptive readership.

Currently the state approaches the natives with the same line as before:
"Hand it over." They take their fish and nets, they kill reindeer for the
meat, never at the proper time and always in excess, with no idea of the
environmental or economic circumstances. For the sake of competition,
they propose to compare the natives with the local Russians, to merge
them together, even where it concerns the division of reindeer, to count the
natives as the same as everyone else and limiting them to monthly rations.
This kind of merger is a virtual end to the natives -- they are crushed into
smithereens like an earthenware pot tossed in with iron kettles.\(^9\)

Here and in another 1923 article,\(^10\) Bogoraz argued in favour of the North American and
Scandinavian experiences of creating territorial reservations. The idea was stopped short
by the Narkomnats, the People's Committee on Nationalities in Moscow which directed
native affairs in Siberia until 1924, and the reaction of later historians, such as Mikhail
Sergeev, writing in 1955, sums up the problem Bogoraz faced.

[The reservations proposal] found itself in scandalous contradiction with
Marxist-Leninist teaching on the noncapitalist development of backward
peoples and their passage to socialism through the active assistance of the
victorious proletariat. It ran counter to the objectives of national
construction and the socialist development of the North, and testified to the
profound lack of understanding of the very nature of the Soviet
nationalities policy. Its author was not aspiring to give backward tribes a
new culture, but to leave them in isolation, to artifically preserve an exotic

\(^9\) V. Bogoraz, "O pervobytnykh plemenakh" Zhizn' Natsional'nostei, 1922 (1).
\(^10\) V. Bogoraz, "Ob izuchenii i okhrane okraimykh narodov," Zhizn' Natsional'nostei,
No. 3-4 (1923), pp. 168-80.
"museum culture." Such a "conservation" of backward "races" through their isolation in special "human reservations" advocated the theory and practice of modern reactionary Anglo-American science, dedicated to the service of imperialism... It goes without saying that such a vain and politically harmful concoction did not even merit discussion among Soviet authorities. 11

It was clear early on that Siberian peoples were to play an integral part in the new society.

As the Civil War dragged on in the Far East, Sakhalin's fate hung in the balance more than most people realized. As the Bolshevik-led Far Eastern Republic tried to gain an administrative foothold in the region, a 1923 meeting of the Party Politbiuro in the Kremlin, attended by Stalin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and others, resolved to sell Sakhalin off to Japan for one billion yen. Under the 1905 agreement following Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese war, Japan already owned the lower half of the island, known as Karafuto. Japan later took control of the entire island in 1920 and had begun to develop the northern oil and coal deposits in earnest. 12 In June of 1924, the Politbiuro again discussed how long it would take to evict the island's residents were the island to be sold. 13 However by 1925 the Red Army gained control of Russia's northern half of Sakhalin and began to call on all Whites to hand themselves in. 14

Much of the Sakhalin population had landed there as punishment by the tsarist government and were content to see it fall; still others were eager to see the departure of the Japanese, whose appropriation of North Sakhalin in 1920 was protested by the

12Stephan, Sakhalin: A History, ch. 6, esp. p. 100.
14The decree is listed in GASO, f. 287, o. 2, d. 1, l. 39.
Americans as well as Sakhalin residents witness to the uncommonly zealous development of the island's natural resources. The problem, however, also lay in convincing the dwindled Russian population to return to work -- some Soviet officials claimed that the Japanese had paid North Sakhalin residents so extravagantly that "young women were walking about in silks, thinking this to be normal, not even realizing their humiliation."  

In the Rybnovsk district, there remained approximately 2000 people: 1017 Russians, 620 Nivkhi, 273 Koreans and 53 Chinese. Armed with newspapers and Stalin's brochure on the results of the 14th Party Conference, Communist Party coordinators set out through the district to cultivate membership. In one of their earliest memos, they urged representatives to focus on youth, work up to anti-religious themes gradually, and not to alienate women by leaping pell-mell into discussions of sexual diseases. "Don't even think about working among the Giliaks," they advised, however. This task would be left to specialists.

In 1922, the Soviet government entrusted the welfare of the Siberian indigenous population to the ethnographic bureau of the Poliarñyi Podotdèl, the polar political division of the People's Commissariat on Nationalities [Narkomnats]. With the dissolution of the Narkomnats in 1923, a more broadly based planning body was proposed, and in 1924, this came in the form of the Committee for the Assistance to Peoples of the Northern Borderlands, or Committee of the North.

With the founding of the Committee in June of 1924, the Moscow-based working group set out three main priorities for northern native development: native self-

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16Sakhalinskii Tsent Dokumentatsii Noveishei Istorii (formerly the archive of the Communist Party of the Sakhalin Oblast', Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk) [hereafter STsDNI] f. 13, o. 1, d. 2 (1926), l. 52.
17STsDNI, f. 2, o. 1, d. 1zh (1925).
government, economic reorganization and social enlightenment. Immediately there were proposals for creating a network of northern correspondents, for starting a special fund for northern problems, for releasing native peoples from payment of direct taxes and for recruiting students to work in the north. Given their ambitious program, what is striking about the Committee's early work was the shared high regard for existing native channels as an avenue of reform.\(^{18}\)

One of the central means for achieving this compromise between the "traditional" and the "modern" became the establishment of kul'tbazy or "culture bases," all-purpose social service centres which would serve as the main avenue for information collection and program implementation. During the ten years that the Committee was in existence, eighteen such bases were established. The idea was that they would serve nationalities rather than regions, and would look to the "furthest, darkest, least accessible and least studied"\(^{19}\) groups as their constituents. In 1929, the third of such bases was established in the town of Nogliki, on Sakhalin's northeastern shore. Within a few years, the Culture Base comprised a hospital, a two-story boarding school (internat), a reading room (izba-chital'nia), three houses for the staff, a storage wing, an ice house, a dog stable, trade workshops, and administrative offices for the district clan council, the Communist Party, the Youth League and the local newspaper, Bolshevik Fish Run. Still further buildings, such as a veterinary unit, were planned.\(^ {20}\)

By locating the Culture Base at Nogliki, the Committee of the North was

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\(^{18}\)The main source of information on the Committee of the North is fond 3977 at the Central State Archive of the October Revolution and Soviet Construction in Moscow. However, a number of the same points reviewed here are discussed at greater length in Sergeev, Nekapitalisticheskii Put', part two; Yuri Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples", pp. 278-334; and Adele Weiser, Die Völker Nordsiberiens: Unter Sowjetischem Herrschaft von 1917 bis 1936 (Munich: Klaus Renner, 1989).

\(^{19}\)Tsentr'al'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva SSSR [hereafter TsGAOR], f. 3977, o. 1, "Istoricheskaia spravka," l. 4.

\(^{20}\)For more material on Culture Bases in general, see A. K. L'vov, "Kul'turnye bazy na severe" Sovetskaia Aztiia (1926) 3:28-36; P. Ustugov, "Zadachi natsional'noi raboty na krainem severe" Revoliutsiia i Natsional'nosti (1931) 1:40-49, esp. 46.
following its pledge to serve the furthest and the darkest of native communities. Sakhalin officials rarely if at all visited Sakhalin's eastern shore since they took up active administration of the island in the late 1800s. Nogliki's location at the intersection of the only three roads in the area also made it ideal for the work of the *Dom Tuzemtsa*, or House of the Native, which formed an integral part of the Culture Base's work. In prefatory remarks in a 1931 *Bolshevik Fish Run* piece about the House (which evidently presaged automobile club tourist brochures), correspondent Nikolai Rutkevich saw public relations in overnight accommodation.

Natives pass through Nogliki for many reasons... to the hospital, school and cooperative... or simply to look at the big village. In the House of the Native, they will be able to warm up, have something to eat, and stay overnight... Representatives of the district council will tell the natives in their own language about Soviet cultural construction, about how Soviet power is improving the lives of the natives through the Culture Base...

Doctors will read lessons about the human body, about epidemic diseases...

Teachers will organize discussion groups with the magical flashlight about cultural construction... The Technical Director of the Culture Base will tell them how to best build their house, dog houses and yukola racks... The veterinarian will tell them how to help their dogs and reindeer.

While there was much emphasis on political and cultural enlightenment, rapid modernization with a sensitivity to local circumstances was the express objective.

Class work should not occupy too much time -- not only because of an overload of unfamiliar, intellectual activity which may be discouraging to the natives, but because bookish questions are less of what they need...

The goal is to give practical knowledge and to apply modern culture and
Correspondingly, the formation of hunting and fishing artels, small collective enterprises of up to twenty members were formed among the Nivkh through the kul'tbazy. Sakhalin's Okhottovarishchestvo, a hunting union, was founded in 1925. Intended to eliminate exploitation in the fur trade, the union started with fourteen "hunting cells" bringing together 206 native members. Like many early collective unions it was a shareholding operation, originally under the organization of the Sakhalin Joint-Stock Company (Aktsionernoe Sakhalinskoe Obshchestvo). Fishing artels were easier to establish, partly because many were already in existence before the revolution, and partly because Nivkh fishermen frequently worked in groups. Sovietskii Rybak [Soviet Fisherman] was established in 1927 to lend credit to local fishing entrepreneurs.

Images of the "magical flashlight" predominate in the literature of the early years of Sovietization among Sakhalin Nivkh. Culture volunteers in the form of "Red Delegates" taught Nivkh to make bread, "and soon Nivkh women were comparing bread and competing." Nivkh were taught to plant potatoes, "and soon they were harvesting

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21 TsGAoR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 940, l. 7.
22 TsGADV, f. R4560, o. 1, d. 3 (1926-27), l. 69. For more information on the Okhottovarishchestvo, see the article "Pervye shagy" Sovietskii Sakhalin, 26 August 1966, where the Sakhalin Congress of Hunters from March 28, 1926 is discussed. At the congress it was proposed that all game should go to the hunting union, administered through the local hunting cells and artels. In the interests of consolidating resources, it is relevant that several Nivkh villages north of Aleksandrovsk were relocated to Tyk, Viiakhta, Trambaus and Vandy. "In this way, economic development prompted the necessity of the concentration of the local population." The union is also discussed in GASO, f. 287, o. 2, d. 1 (1925), l. 52.
23 An early planning meeting for Sovietskii Rybak is documented in "Protokoly s'ezda Sovietskogo Rybaka" STsDNI, f. 2, o. 2, d. 41 (1929), ll. 2-110. For more on the early years of the Soviet fishing industry on Sakhalin, see Krushanov, Stranitsy istorii..., p. 32; and Anna V. Smoliak, "Osnovnyye puti razvitia ekonomiki, kul'tury i byta za gody sovetskoi vlasti u narodov basseina nizhnego Amura i Sakhalina" in I. S. Gurvich, ed. Osushchestvlenie leninskoi natsional'noi politiki u narodov krainego severa (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), p. 317. Some of the twenty-one fishing artels circa 1930 are listed in TsGADV, f. R4559, o. 1, d. 2 (1928-31).
bushels."  

Sakhalin Nivkh who were shown motion pictures in 1926 "had virtually no idea what precisely a movie was, or how it was that living people, horses, moving cars, ships and crowded battles could take shape on the screen. Some ran away in fear that there really were armed crowds, that it was not simply a picture, but something sent by an invisible power. However, little by little they began to request certain films such as Death Bay, Battleship Potemkin and other revolutionary works."  

What such accounts took for granted was the childlike fear of and fascination with the Russian prestations of modernity. But they also elided many of the difficulties in implementing the Soviet agenda.

While artels were established relatively quickly, for example, the question of native self-government came about more awkwardly. The main difficulty was in defining the Nivkh community as a political unit: Nivkh clan structure had largely atrophied toward the end of the 1800s, and there were few parts of the island where Nivkhi lived apart from the Russian community. Documents outlining the formation of "clan councils" were interpreted to local officials as simply meaning "Nivkh."

The structure of native self-government was highly organized, at least on paper. Karl Luks played a hand in the design of four tiers of governing in his 1926 "Temporary Administrative Position of the Native Tribes of the Far Eastern Province."

The lowest level was the "General Clan Meeting" open to all members of a given clan (rod) above the age of 18. It was to meet once a year, voting was to be open and decided by a simple majority. The second level was the "Clan Executive Committee" (Rodovoi ispolnitel'nyi komitet or RIK). Having a RIK required at least fifteen clan families. The RIK elected a chairman and two officers, one of whom would serve as deputy chair. The third level was

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24 TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 117-1 (1928-1931), ll. 22-24.  
25 TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 1117, ll. 153-154.  
26 Lev Shternberg, Giliaki, Orochi, Gol'dy..., 2; TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 432.  
27 TsGADV, f. R4560, o. 1, d. 3 (1926-27) "Vremennoe polozhenie ob upravlenii tuzemnykh plemen, prozhivaiushchikh na territorii Dal'nevostochnoi Oblasti."
the "District Clan Executive Committee." This committee united the various clan committees in a given district or raion under the guidance of a district chairman, elected for a one-year term. It was at this tier that natives had the power to resolve local conflicts, except those involving political crimes, murder, robbery, violence, forgery and speculation. Finally, at the highest level, all voting natives would attend the "District Clan Congress" held at least once a year. The Congress was the highest organ of Soviet power in the native community; it required at least 400 members and had its own deputies -- one deputy for every twenty-five people up to no more than twenty-five deputies. This same structure was reaffirmed in a 1936 directive, although the names of committees were altered slightly.28

By 1928, a network of fourteen Nivkh village councils or tuzsovetь were developed in tandem with two Nivkh district councils (tuzriki) -- one in Nogliki, on the eastern shore, and another in Viskovo, on the western shore. However the Sakhalin Nivkh councils were run more as information posts rather than administrative organs. There was not a single literate chairman for all of the councils, and, as one Sakhalin official reported, none of the councils functioned much at all.29 However, despite the disjuncture between theory and practice, there was a performative gesture involved in spurring Nivkh to realize their potential roles in the new system. As the Russian ethnographer Erulkhim Kreinovich, one of the Nivkh's first political organizers observed,

To speak of a high quality of work of the native councils in their first year of existence, given an almost complete absence of literacy, is not called for.

But nevertheless in the protocols of the meetings, one can see that the

28"Remennogo polozhenia ob upravlenii tuzemykh plemen severnykh okrain RSFSR" (1926) in V. I. Mishchenko, "Proshloe Nivkhov do Oktiabria" (1957), GASO, fond Ryzhkov, ll. 20-23. In the 1936 document, the four tiers were referred to as obshchee rodovoe sobranie, rodovye sovetь, raionnye tuzemye ispolkomy and raionnye tuzemye sozy.
29TsGADV, f. R4559, o. 1, d. 5 (1931), l. 53.
majority of questions are directed at the cultural-economic organization of native lives... the development of private plots, the organization of fishing artels, schools and literacy units, as well as Houses of the Native, as has already been implemented in Chaivo. 30

What the Viskovo council did organize, however, was one of the first Nivkh schools. In 1927, the school year opened with a play featuring scenes for Giliak life and a speech about Soviet government. Seventeen Nivkh boys and one Nivkh girl were in attendance. Soviet sources normally look back on the early years of native education citing parents' reluctance to send their children to strangers' houses let alone to other towns. But the Viskovo school was a good example of the virtues of having a trustworthy instructor. When Russian Petr Tuganov served as the teacher or shkrab [skhol'nyi rabotnik] in 1927, parents reportedly eagerly sent their children to him, and twenty-four Nivkh students learned to read and write. When he left because of the conditions -- classes were held in the home of a Chinese resident where five regular guests smoked and drank in the same room as the students; Tuganov himself lived with a local Nivkh family -- interest dropped off. He was succeeded by Kotovshchikov, a Russian instructor who drank along with the adult guests, and then a Korean instructor by the last name of Kim, who traded in furs, and so on. 31 Circumstances were similar in the central Sakhalin Nivkh town of Chirevo, where the first school was held in a bathhouse. 32

With time it became clear that certain aspects of the agenda of the Committee of the North were not just difficult to implement, but fundamentally at odds with the exigencies of regional development charging alongside. One stream of the Committee's work was to empower Nivkh to assert political and economic control over their territory. Yet on Sakhalin, this goal was becoming increasingly quixotic. Newcomers from

30TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 432.
31TsGADV, f. R4559, o. 1, d. 4 (1929), l. 12.
32TsGADV, f. R4559, o. 1, d. 4 (1931), l. 52.
European Russia were settling in large numbers as a move to stabilize the northern Soviet half of the island. Kreinovich, who had been among the most inspired of the Committee's footsoldiers, combining ethnographic study with the political commitment of the day by working from 1926-1928 as an instructor for native affairs, noted the widely held if at times vocal desire many of the Russian newcomers expressed that the backward Nivkhi would quickly become extinct. With some regret he observed that, "While it's clear that the Nivkhi aren't going anywhere, it is also clear that the problems of the Nivkhi are not going to stop either mining or agricultural colonization."\(^3\!

However, what the committee may have lacked in political or economic clout, they made up for in energy and innovation, with early reformers such as Kreinovich now enshrouded by Nivhi in an almost legendary status. Bogoraz, who through the ethnography department of the Institute of Geography from 1922 onwards helped to train many of the young officials who were to go eastward, looked upon his early work was a messianic vision.

We must send to the North not scholars but missionaries, missionaries of the new culture and the new Soviet statehood. Not the old ones but the young ones, not the experienced professors but the recent graduates, brought up in the new Soviet environment and ready to take to the North the burning fire of their enthusiasm born of the Revolution, as well as the practical skills perfected by revolutionary work. Before they begin their work, these young agents of the Committee of the North must receive complete and thorough academic instruction - primarily in ethnography -- but in the North their man work will be practical, not academic, in nature.\(^4\!

In contrast to the historically uneasy relationship between ethnography and the state in

\(^{33}\)Ts\textit{GAOR}, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 432.

\(^{34}\)Bogoraz in Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples," p. 294.
Western scholarship, the mission of Soviet ethnography in the service of the federal administration had always been a clear one: Over the course of ethnographic research, the new missionaries of socialism were to collect information with a view to facilitating Soviet government in the most expedient way possible. In the early years under Bogoraz, Shternberg and Smidovich, ethnographic research built an almost Jesuitic tradition of syncretic approaches to new Soviet principles and native categories of administration.

One of the emissaries of the Committee's new vision was the young graduate student Iurii (Erukhim) Kreinovich. Having become interested in ethnography after reading Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* in high school, Kreinovich studied under Shternberg in Leningrad. The product of a "bright epoch," he arranged a posting to Sakhalin in 1926 at the age of twenty, against the wishes of his family who protested on the grounds of his health and his sanity. From 1926 to 1928, Kreinovich worked on the praesidium of the Sakhalin Revolutionary Committee in Aleksandrovsk, first as an assistant to the Commissioner for Native Affairs *(Upoltuz)*, and later as the Commissioner himself.

Kreinovich travelled widely during his tenure on the Sakhalin Revolutionary Committee, and he described his overall assignment in 1926 as being sixfold: i) to look for survivals of organized debt servitude; ii) send evidence of the above to the courts; iii) organize financial credit to the natives; iv) train native village chairmen; v) help develop hunting and fishing cooperatives; and vi) compose a native dictionary. But it is not

\[\text{\textsuperscript{35}}\text{See for example, M. D. Pechenkin,} \textit{"Leninskii plan issledovaniia i osvoeniia severa" in V. I. Boiko et al., eds., Problemy sovremennogo sotsial'nogo razvitiia narodnosti severa (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1987), pp. 16-28; and I. S. Gurvich and Ch. M. Taksami,} \textit{"Vklad sovetskikh etnografov v osushchestvenie leninskoj narodnosti na Severu" in Leninizm i problemy etnografii (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987), pp. 181-197.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{36}}\text{See E. A. Kreinovich,} \textit{Nivkhi}, pp. 9-21; also Slezkin, "Russia's Small People's," pp. 298-299.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{37}}\text{Kreinovich's job with respect to credit was not only to arrange financial credit in the faktorii for Nivkhi, but to mete out livestock (cows and horses in the main) to Nivkhi who showed the most promise of succeeding in agriculture. See *STsDNI*, f. 2, o. 1, d. 89 (1928) \textit{"Materialy po rabote sredstv tuzemcev,"} ll. 1-6.}\]
surprising that Kreinovich made more enemies than friends when he began to travel across the island frontier which by definition was home mainly to convicted criminals or newcomers looking to make fast money off of the fish and fur supplies.

One of Kreinovich's reports from 1927 charts a long litany of Russian and Chinese exploiters who had outlasted the transition to the infant Soviet system on Sakhalin. On the eastern shore, Vinokurov, the director of the state faktoriiia, or trading station, was working for the Japanese and should be exiled from the island.38 In Nyivo, where ten Chinese traders lived, the head trader Yun-Dziun-Fu claimed to be poor, but all of the Nivkhi were in debt to him.

A Giliak will go to visit Yun-Dziun-Fu. Yun-Dziun-Fu's wife is a Giliak.

She serves the visitor tea and the Giliak will start to ask Yun-Dziun-Fu to sell him flour and Manchurian tobacco. But the Chinese man always answers the same: If I give you the little I have, the price will be high.

And so the Giliak pays, as they all do... three to four times the price.39

Kreinovich's early documents which are now in the archives of the Russian Far East are covered by frequent blackened sections from either self-imposed or external censorship.

The documents testify not only to the personal antagonism with which he was met by most Russian locals,40 but his own frustration with the contradictions of the new state.

It's time to pay for old sins, and they are indeed many. How do a group of Russians, let alone former criminals condemned to hard labour, get by

38 TsGADV, f. R2413, o. 2, d. 394 (1927), l. 16.
39 TsGADV, f. R4560, l. 1, d. 3 (1926-27), ll. 76-76o.
40 Many Sakhalin Russians evidently looked upon Kreinovich himself as a hangover from an era better forgotten. One Russian asked him, "What's an old bourgeois like you supposed to do to help us... Couldn't they find someone better?" from Ibid., p. 79o. In a bellettristic account of early work among the northern nationalities, Voskresshee Plemia, Bogoraz cited the travails of the ethnographer "Prestovich" working on Sakhalin in conditions little better than those of the notorious tsarist labour camps (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1935), pp. 207-208. Kreinovich's troubles were consistent with those of many other early researchers, cf. Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples," pp.313-314.
when they neither sow nor reap their own bread? How did they support themselves before? To me there is no more striking evidence than the look of fear that the natives have when they are around them. Can the Revolutionary Committee really think that the presence of people like Kalevskii, Krotov, Boiko, Chervinskii, Meriniuk, Zelinskii and the Chinese act favourably upon the natives of the eastern shore? I know it not to be the case. Their continued presence on the island can only be seen as silent forgiveness for their actions.41

Kreinovich's supervisor Aleksandr Il'in made his own expedition to the Rybnoy district on the northwestern shore in 1925 and expressed many of the same frustrations.

In the villages of Rybnoy district, located alongside Russian settlements, Giliaks live somewhat more cleanly. Here, along with the art of card playing, drinking and cursing, the Giliaks have absorbed a number of aspects of Russian life. Many Giliak yurts are fashioned after Russian houses. In many soap can be found.

However the presence of dirt in Giliak yurts should in no way be looked upon as a consequence of their cultural heritage. It is the direct consequence of the continual economic oppression of the native and absolute absence of political rights. From the arrival of the Russians, the natives have been hounded from the favourable fishing grounds where they have lived for centuries. From the de facto master of the land, he has quickly been transformed into the object of shameless exploitation. With the loss of the fishing grounds, the haul has diminished but the demand has remained the same... Hungry years have become more frequent and the

41Ibid., l. 760.
native has been confronted with the pressing dilemma: What to buy now? Buy a net and forget about a hunting rifle? Or buy a rifle and forget about a net? And how do you get the fish in order to trade for one or the other? Do you feed less fish to your family and dogs in order to sell more? What then do you eat?

Under such economic conditions it is of no surprise that Giliaks have been reduced to the dirt and sloth of which it has become so popular to speak, dirt and sloth which indicate the absence of any purpose in life excepting the pursuit of a full stomach and the most immediate of needs. "Soon our Giliak will die out altogether" -- is how the surrounding population looks to the future. At the start, this might have been posed as a question. However, after years of oppression, darkness, illness and work of cabals, it is looked upon as fact with the greatest of certainty.

The Sakhalin climate and the surrounding environment do no especially incline one to either laziness or the contemplative mood. On the contrary, they incline one to energy and the urge to struggle. To suggest that dirt and laziness are characteristic of the Giliak people is nonsense. The Sakhalin Giliaks long ago began to make strides to improve their living conditions and continue to do so today. They began to build "Russian style houses" already thirty-five years ago, and if you visit the village of Viskovo, you will see that they wash their floors too.42

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Looking back on the early reforms of the Soviet period, the ethnographer I. S.

42Ibid., ll. 170-190.
Gurvich suggested that the process of Sovietization among Siberian indigenous peoples could be divided into several phases:

1917-24: release from the past
1924-29: early sovietization
1929-34: early collectivization
1934-41: completion of transition to socialism
1941-45: war years
1945-56: accelerated industrialization and cultural advancement

The difference on Sakhalin is that, given the late start for sovietization, the release from the past and the headlong charge into the Soviet vision of modernity were little distinguished from each other. People like Kreinovich, Il'in and other reformers were recruited and banished from the island long before most Nivkh learned to read or write. In contrast to the sympathetic accounts of the earliest reformers, Sakhalin news articles of the late 1920s, which appear to have been much closer to popular sentiment than the reports of native affairs officials, focused almost entirely on dirt and the prospects for redemption.

Once, going into a gloomy cabin, I was surprised: Amidst the disgusting grime, the smell and the smoke was a white brochure on the wall with the slogan, "Lenin said: The Giliak Will be Clean! Cut Long Hair!"... A Giliak boy had brought it home from school.

By the start of the 1930s, the mandate of the Committee of the North narrowed, largely due to the advance of other ministries eastward to assume the responsibility of the economic and political reforms. The main task before them became "cultural construction," where the culture in question was Soviet, rather than those of the indigenous Siberians.


44"Giliak sakhalinskoi taigi" Tikhookeanskaia Zvezda, 28 April 1928, p. 3.
The heightened division between cultures Soviet and local was not mutually exclusive: It represented the start of a balancing act that went on to define Stalin's nationality policy, where the languages and cultures of individual nationalities were promoted so long as they contributed to the flourishing of a pan-Soviet community. In the native context, the formula mapped neatly onto the professed dialectic between modernity and tradition. Embracing a Comtean brand of evolutionism, the state supported indigenous traditions early on in order that native peoples themselves would recognize the errors of their ways. As S. I. Dimanshtein argued in his 1919 article, "Soviet Power and the Small Nationalities," they may not be visible, they lend a recognizable flavour.45

We as communists should not make it our business to cultivate nationalism among the smaller nationalities, to become its ideologues or advocates... but on the other hand we should avoid the fate of the Aesop's donkey, who found himself between two virtually identical haystacks and could not decide which one to start with since there was no reason to prefer one over the other; the donkey died from hunger because of its indecision...

We are making it clear to all small peoples on the road to development: we will help you develop your Buriat or Votskii language and culture and so on, since that way you will become more familiar with culture known to all mankind, with revolution and with communism. Through this development process, you yourselves will be convinced by your own experience the extent to which your nationalism, your national language confines you...

The qualities that distinguish various nationalities (narodnost) will not

disappear without a trace but will be, let us say, like salt or sugar sprinkled on food -- though they may not be visible, they lend a recognizable flavour.46

The shift to Soviet cultural construction of the early 1930s did not reduce Nivkhi to mere ornamentation or "flavouring," but it did begin a process whereby the state appropriated control over the definition of what "Nivkh" meant. As of the 10th of February, 1930, when Sakhalin Nivkhi, Oroki and Evenki held their first District Clan Congress in Nogiliki, Nivkhi were humble, forward looking people who thought little of their past and their former landlords. The Nivkh Pimka presented this testimony:

We -- we are a dark and uneducated people. Before Soviet power, people thought of the natives as there to be trod upon [podmetka] and said, why not let them die off? The Japanese gave us vodka and little else. Under the Japanese, everyone died off because the Japanese didn't pay us. The Soviet authorities prohibited the sale of vodka and paid us wages. We are grateful... We have become farmers... My district sold 800 puds47 of potatoes to the Culture Base and made money. Natives need credit for building, cattle and equipment. We are all poor hired hands [batraki].48

This approving nod to Soviet rule was characteristic of the increasingly effusive public discourse of the day, but it was not characteristic of Pimka, who was described during a

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47A prerevolutionary Russian unit of measurement equivalent to 16.38 kilograms or 36 pounds.
48M. Me'l'nikov quoted in Sergeev, Nekapitalisticheskii Put', p. 304. A second congress was held in Nogiliki the following October but fewer natives attended because of the fishing season. Viskovo held its first district congress in December of the same year. For more on the congresses, see TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 117-1 (1931), ll. 71-74.
1928 expedition to Chir-Unvd as uncooperative and recalcitrant. Rehabilitated for political advantage during the Nogliki native congress of 1930, Pimka was downgraded by 1931 to "that polukulachnik," an exploiter of others, according to Bolshevik Fish Run.

At the time of the elections Pimka aspired to the downfall of the kolkhoz, spreading the rumour that those who enter the kolkhoz will be sent to prison; he tried to prevent people from sending their children to school...

These facts speak for themselves. The moment has come for the entire native population to lead a decisive battle against class enemies, to strengthen the party, the Communist Youth League and the kolkhoz. The moment is approaching when, through total collectivization, worker natives will destroy the kulak as a class.

By the close of the 1920s, official appropriations of native life began to present a far more edited version of events.

The state may have tightened its control over the presentation of native identity, but the new rigor did not mean that there was any shortage of idealism. As the years advanced, the process of cultural construction became more standardized, assuming in some instances an almost paramilitary quality. Typical of the new mass emphasis on cultural revolution throughout the Soviet Union was a 1931 kul'testafeta or "culture relay race" organized jointly by students of the Khabarovsk Polytechnical Institute for Peoples of the North and the Communist Youth League. Using the language of an actual race with a start and a finish, the idea was to relay or "bring culture to the taiga and tundra" across six far eastern districts which included the town of Viskovo on northwest Sakhalin. The goal was to liquidate illiteracy among native adults, and to produce kul'tarmeetsy or

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50 "Stavka kulakov bita," Za Bolshevistskuiu Putinu, 1 February 1931.
"Soldiers of Culture," as the graduates of the literacy courses were called, who would in turn pass the baton of culture on to their compatriots.52

Spirits were high among the twenty student participants when they presented their manifesto for the race.

We, participants of the culture relay race, students of the Khabarovsk Polytechnical Institute for Peoples of the North, welcome the plans of the Central Office of Culture Excursions and the Committee of the North for the cultural storming of the taiga and tundra. We look upon our participation in this great political event with joy. Our first hand experience in this culture relay race through the districts of the small peoples of the North is a test of our readiness in the battle to reconstruct the semi-primitive North along a new socialist line. We assure the party and all workers that we will bring to bear all our energy and all our years of training to meet this task with honour, in the spirit of the Communist Youth League and the Bolshevik way. All twenty of us pledge to meet this task as shock-workers, and to persevere through to the final training of the [new] Soldiers of Culture... We will fight hard for culture, for a new way of life, for the collectivization of the native economy, for the liquidation of exploitation [kulachestvo], for the correct implementation of the Leninist nationality policy, and for the general line of the Party.53

"The illiterate man stands outside of politics," Lenin wrote, "so first one must teach him to

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52 The long form for kul'tarmeetsy was kul'turno-prosvetitel'nyi armeets or Soldier of Cultural Enlightenment. For more on this and other related terms of the mass culture movement of the 1920s, see Barry Crowe, Concise Dictionary of Soviet Terminology, Institutions and Abbreviations (London: Pergamon, 1969). For the work of kul'tarmeetsy among Siberian indigenous peoples more broadly, see Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples," p. 388.
53 Skorik, "Kul'turnyi shturm..." p. 35.
read."54 This was the mobilizing credo for the students when they arrived in the Viskovo district in July of 1931. Eighty-six percent of the local Nivkh population was estimated to be illiterate, but the existing infrastructure of native affairs programs enabled the students to move quickly. Viskovo itself already had a district native bureau [raikal'shtab], while three villages, Viskvi, Iuk and Vas'kvo had corresponding village units [sel'tuzshtaby], permitting Soldier of Culture courses to be established in all four places. Twenty-four Nivkhi enrolled in the course in Viskvi for example, where classes were held in the fishery. Shamans reputedly attempted to disrupt the courses, spreading rumours that participants would be charged for the literacy lessons. A number of women were reluctant at first to participate, until two Nivkh mothers completed the first course and began to enjoy the respect of others.55

The Khabarovsk students wrote with particular pride of the forty-nine year old Nivkh chairman of the Viskovo district committee, Mikhail Petrovich Kul'pin. Although almost completely illiterate at the start of the kul'testafeta, Kul'pin had already done much to distinguish himself as a leader among Nivkhi in the new order. As chairman of the Viskovo tuzraikom since the start of 1931, he was commended in a number of Sakhalin newspapers and state documents for having initiated special sanitation measures among Nivkhi -- the digging of garbage ditches outside of homes, the daily cleaning of benches and floors, and the construction of a bathhouse and special fish drying areas. Kul'pin's commitment to social hygiene extended with equal diligence to errant kolkhozniki, many of whom he purged from the fishery. Since Kul'pin himself could not write, the Korean secretary of the native council V. Kim prepared a number of dismissal notices for kolkhozniki such as the Russian Plamskovskii who propagated anti-native sentiment and "messed up the artel finances like a Black Hundreds element."56

54Ibid., p. 33.
55Ibid., p. 36.
56The Black Hundreds movement was an umbrella organization for pro-tsarist activists in Russia in the early 1900s. The Kul'pin quotation is from GASO, f. 513, o. 1, d. 1
Despite his educational handicaps, Kul'pin pledged to become a literacy shock-worker himself, entering into competition with Ugnun, the Nivkh chairman of the village kolkhoz, and spending all his free time with a pen and paper. "To help the collectives produce qualified cadres," the Khabarovsky coordinator wrote, "This is the task before us... The Ivans, the Kul'pins and the Ugnuns represent the start of this work." 57 Returning to Khabarovsky in October, the six student brigades who had fanned out to native communities across the Far East celebrated the fruits of their efforts. They had planned to train sixty native Soldiers of Culture, but had managed 227. Of these, thirty-nine were women, 204 were kolkhozniki, and thirty-eight were members of native councils. 58 "Taking into account our experience, will arrive at the next finish with even greater results, particularly when in this very year northern peoples are receiving new textbooks, and lessons will be conducted in their native languages... Illiteracy will be liquidated in even the remotest corners of our Union." 59

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Accordingly, one of the most important reforms of the 1930s was the creation of a written language for Nivkhi under the aegis of the Committee of the New Alphabet which had been formed in 1932 to work in tandem with the Down with Illiteracy Society. The most radical aspect of the new literacy campaign was the choice of the Latin alphabet rather than the Cyrillic one for the new scripts. The Latin alphabet was not only thought to be more internationalist, it departed in a bold way from the Russificatory overtones of the recent prerevolutionary past, thereby attempting to sidestep both local nationalism and Russian chauvinism. But the new alphabet was not just for unlettered Siberians.

"Protokoly prezidiuma Zapadno-Sakhalinskogo natsional'nogo RIKA za 1931 g." (1931), p. 20. The same file documents the extensive assistance that Kul'pin extended to the Khabarovsky contingent, pp. 36-38.
57Ibid., p. 37.
58Further, by nationality, the 227 included 77 Nivkhi, 62 Tungusy, 44 Gol'dy, 31 Negidal'tsy, 9 U'l'chi and 4 Ainu; Ibid., p. 38.
59Ibid., p. 39.
Only on the basis of the new latinized alphabet, easily accessible to the proletariat and the poorest peasantry, can the cultural revolution of the peoples of the Soviet East be fulfilled, for those who previously employed Arabic or other complex writing systems which were inaccessible to the broad working masses.60

The Committee intended its new alphabet for use among a broad range of non-Russian nationalities in a strategy which would not only represent a break from the past but give far greater control over what broad working masses would be reading. A campaign was launched to drape the new alphabet in the cloth of reform by referring to it as "the new alphabet, born of the October Revolution" and "the Octobrist alphabet of the peoples of the USSR."61

The Far Eastern wing of the Committee of the New Alphabet focused on three groups: Chinese (of whom there were still 92,000 in the USSR in 1926),62 Koreans and the northern natives. As in the manifesto of the union-wide Committee, they made a direct link between language and politics.

For the working masses of the peoples of the Soviet Far East who were previously schooled in hieroglyphic or other difficult scripts, or who were without writing systems altogether, the path to socialist culture hinges on the creation and cultivation of a new latinized alphabet as a powerful tool of cultural revolution.63

The task before them, clearly, was an enormous one. In their 1932 plan, they set up travelling expeditions to study various dialects, orthographies, grammars, and the viability

60TsGADV, f. R353, o. 1, d. 1 (1931-37) "Tsirkuliary i protokoly zasedanii prezidiuma Vsesoiuznogo Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Novogo Alfavita," l. 81.
61Ibid., l. 85.
63TsGADV, f. R353, o. 1, d. 1, l. 31.
of publishing facilities. As soon as possible, they were to produce primers and readers for eleven nationalities, grammars for eight nationalities, special typewriters for ten nationalities, and special support staffs among all fourteen of the nationalities under their jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{64}

One of the reasons for the success of the Committee's ambitious plans was that they had the support of existing infrastructures already in place. Party members, local RIKs, ethnographers, Culture Base workers, Red Delegates, Soldiers of Culture and the rabsel'kory, a network of proletarian news correspondents (these categories not being mutually exclusive), all joined in the work of the local literacy cells consisting of three to fifteen members. The Sakhalin Committee worked only on the Chinese and Nivkh languages. Kreinovich developed a written script for Nivkh based on one of the language's three dialects,\textsuperscript{65} and extra teachers were hired in the villages of Nogliki, Viskovo and Viakhta, and Soldiers of Culture travelled to present the lecture, "Towards a New Alphabet."\textsuperscript{66}

Here Kreinovich's mastery of the Nivkh language, a complex tongue with eight verb conjugations and twenty-six different systems of counting, was put to full use. Kreinovich authored the first Nivkh primer Cuz Dif [Nivkh, New Word], which appeared in 1932, and translated a second grade reader which appeared in 1933.

The texts were intended for use by children in schools, as well as adult workers, through a system of likbezy [illiteracy liquidation units]. Though both efforts were considered to be equally important, it was noted on Sakhalin as elsewhere that,

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{64}] TsGADV, f. R353, o. 1, d. 1 (1931), l. 86.
\item[\textsuperscript{65}] Traditionally, scholars have divided the Nivkh language into Amur, West Sakhalin and East Sakhalin dialects. See for example, V. Z. Panfilov, "Nivkhsko-Altaiskie iazykovye sviazi", Voprosy Iazykoznaniia 5 (1973) pp. 3-12. In the same article, Panfilov challenges the presumption that the Nivkh language is a linguistic isolate. In the preparation of the first reader in 1932, Kreinovich relied on the Amur dialect.
\item[\textsuperscript{66}] For more on the work of the Far Eastern Committee of the New Alphabet see GASO, f. 513, o. 1, do. 9 (1933) and d. 34 (1935-36).
\end{itemize}
...social reconstruction of the native economy can be accomplished only with the patience of the younger generation, and not of the older ones still living in an outmoded century, whom it is difficult to reeducate, who have years of outdated customs and old views that they bring to bear on their new life. 67

Kreinovich stressed that the material was politically oriented against Nivkh exploiters, kulaks and shamans who resisted the implementation of Soviet institutions. To overcome resistance hidden and overt, he urged local teachers to concentrate their efforts on the poorer echelons of Nivkh society [batratsko-bedniatskie sloi] and to set examples from among local Nivkh Communist Youth league members. Particular emphasis was placed on the conversion of women to the Soviet worldview.

The working Nivkh women represent the most forgotten, exploited part of Nivkh society. Nivkh domestic law, to a large extent created by Nivkh elders, shamans and kulaks, denies women the same rights assigned to the male producer. The woman is given the worst spot in the house to sleep, on the edge of the bench by the door; in the home of a Giliak with two wives the second wife lives in poverty; the woman is defenseless from the moment of her birth -- she is an object to be bought and sold; she is not permitted to take an active part in clan ceremonies. As a result we have almost a complete absence of women in meetings, in the councils and in the kolkhozes. 68

Women came to play an increasingly important role in the 1930s as potential builders of culture, not only because of their manifest influence on children, but because of the paltry successes early reforms had met with older native males. 69

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67TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 1117, l. 98.
68P. N. Zhulev, Kniga dlja ohteniia (perevod s nivkhskogo iazyka E. A. Kreinovicha) (Leningrad: OGIZ, 1933), p. 73.
69Cf. Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples...," p. 400.
The new Nivkh textbooks introduced local vocabulary and the stuff of children's readers everywhere: "Boat. Horse. Fish... The little boy goes to school. The little girl goes to school. The children go to school!" But learning to read went hand in hand with learning about the nature of new social institutions. Throughout Cuz Dif and the companion reader, Nivkh children were versed in a panoply of social and political topics, including past exploitation of Nivkh fishermen by capitalists, the virtues of daily hygiene, the importance of agriculture over fishing and foraging, the idea of voting and socialist competitions, and the lingering threat posed by shamans.

In our village we have a reading hut. Every evening men and women visit the reading hut. They read books. They listen to the radio. We children also go to the reading hut to listen to the radio. Radio. Does your village have a reading hut?

Today in our village we had a meeting. Men and women gathered and said, "We don't want to catch fish the old way. It's hard to catch fish when you have a small net and you are on your own. Let's form a kolkhoz, and catch fish with a big net and a pier." Everyone agreed. We workers didn't admit shamans and kulaks into our kolkhoz.

What is a kulak?...A kulak is someone who lives off of someone else's labour. We have a kulak in our village. His name is Koinyt. Koinyt has a long net and lots of equipment. Koinyt lies to the poor and the hired hands (batraki). When fish come, he gathers the poor workers, and gives them his net to catch fish. When they are done, he takes fish for himself, his wife and his little children, but he doesn't give enough to the workers to feed their wives and children. Having enslaved and deceived the poor year after year, he became rich. A kulak gets rich by taking orphans, enslaving them,
and selling the orphan girls. Do you have a kulak in your village?70

The life of Nivkh women is hard. As soon as we are born, they sell us...

We aren't masters of our own lives... Comrade women, what do you think, are we not people? Can we not live by our own minds? Are we to live by the minds of shamans, the rich and kulaks? Women, let's cast off the old laws, let's live in the Soviet way.71

By training native cadres, The Committee sought to create a "native high culture,"72 but most Nivkh parents were reluctant to release their children to unfamiliar schools where tuberculosis, among other diseases, was rampant. However, the minimal progress which was made permitted a small number of students to be sent to the Institute of Northern Peoples in Leningrad, including four sent in 1932 who were drawn into service to the new order through the last pages of Cuz Dif.

Voksin, Nengun, Pen'guk, Sarat: As Nivkh students in Leningrad we speak to working Nivkhi on the Amur and Sakhalin:

Working Nivkhi, cast off shamanic law, live only by Soviet law.

Don't elect kulaks or shamans to your soviet.

Strengthen your soviets and your kolkhozes.

Boys and girls, join the Pioneers and Young Communist Youth League.

Read this Nivkh book well.73

70In the spirit of Pavel Morozov, the Russian boy folk hero who denounced his father to the courts, Siberian teachers as in the rest of the Russian countryside encouraged their native elementary school students to identify kulaks by polling students in class as to what various members of the community had inside their homes. For a Khant example, see Sergeev, "Nekapitalisticheskii Put'," p. 278.
72TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 19, l. 11.
73Kreinovich, Cuz Dif, p. 64.
Chapter Five/ The Stalinist Period

"From being a forgotten, exploited, impoverished, uncultured inhabitant of the taiga and tundra, the native has begun to build a new life and is attaining culture."¹

The new social forms and new tools of cultural transmission reflected the dramatic social changes that were rapidly transforming North Sakhalin. In less than ten years, most Nivkh had made the shift from a family economy to artels, and from artels to kolkhozes. By the spring fish run of 1930, Sovrybak had become Rybakkolkhozsoiuiz, which set about creating thirteen kolkhozes from the forty-seven fishing artels that operated on the Soviet part of the island.² In the east Sakhalin district where Nivkh had had the least contact with Russian settlers, adult literacy had risen to 28%.³ By 1933, 223 Nivkh, Evenk and Orok elementary students, comprising 76% of the entire student age population,⁴ were enrolled in government schools. In the more active trading area of Ado-Tym on central Sakhalin, four Nivkh fishing villages were incorporated into the agricultural collective "Chir-Unvd," or New Life, an operation that developed quickly and thrived. Most Nivkh by this time were living in Russian-style homes, Nivkh dress and braids for men were largely abandoned, and the ranks of Nivkh enrolled in schools, visiting hospitals and joining the Komsomol were swelling. By 1934, well over half of the Nivkh in the area of

¹P. Nikolaev, "Natsional'nye shkoly na Sakhaline" Prosveshchenie Natsional'nostei 1934 (4), p. 44.
²On the transfer from artels to kolkhozes, see the "Resolution on Collectivization" in STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 5 (1930), ll. 42-44.
³V. I. Mishchenko, "Proshloe nivkhov do oktiabria" (1957) in GASO, fond Ryzhkova, l. 67.
⁴Nikolaev, "Natsional'nye shkoly...," p. 44. The rate of 76% was slightly higher than for the Siberian North as a whole. By 1933, the Committee of the North had overseen the opening of 338 schools in total, drawing 60.5% of the entire student age population. See TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 144(2), l. 95.
the Nogliki Culture Base were listed as Russian-speaking.\footnote{Krames, "Iz doklada zaveduiushchego sakhalinskoi kul'tbazoii Komitetu Sodeistviia Narodnostiam Severa pri Prezidiume Dal'kraiispolkoma o rabote kul'tbazy za 1932-1934gg" (1934) in N. I. Kolesnikov, ed., Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo na Sakhaline (1925-1945 gg.) (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskaia oblastnaia tipografiia, 1967), pp. 337-339. For a survey of changes over this period in the Siberian North as a whole see Smidovich's report, "Main points of the presentation on prospects for socialist construction in the Far North in the Second Five-Year Plan" (1935), TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 1048, as well as A. Skachko, "Desiat' let Komiteta Severa," Sovetskii Sever No. 2 (1934).}

By most accounts, the substantial process of collectivization went relatively smoothly, partly because of the attendant distractions of modernization. As one Nivkh fisherman from West Sakhalin recalled,

Representatives came from Nikolaevsk-on-the-Amur to organize meetings. They said, "We're going to gather it all up. You'll work as you did before. You'll fish as you did before." But everyone had to give their things in. Someone had a net, another a boat. We voted in a chairman of the village soviet, who was a little more literate than the rest of us. That's how it went and went and went.

We didn't catch any less fish than before... We fished and give it in to the kolkhoz. Generally people were happy. The main thing is that before we didn't have a store. They built a store, a club... they began to bring in films.

The shamans, though, they would run away as soon as the Russians came.

If the shaman were in a trance during a performance and someone shouted, "There's a Russian!" he would stop and go away.

After that it was all kolkhoz, kolkhoz, kolkhoz. It was all about potatoes and kolkhozes. About how to give your things in. People gave their horses, their ploughs. We began to plant potatoes. We learned everything: how to give in the horses, how much to plant and how much to give to the kolkhoz, how much to fish and how much to give to the kolkhoz. We
processed the fish ourselves and then handed them over in barrels to the
state.

Since many Nivkhi had already been participating in a market economy, the transition to a
more routinized system of production was potentially less disruptive, for example, than for
Siberian hunting and herding peoples. Among the nomadic Evenki of central Siberia,
publicly planning ahead was considered bad luck and therefore taboo. How were they
therefore to take part in a Five Year Plan? Among herders on Chukotka and Kamchatka,
ancient beliefs maintained that there was a spiritual bond between a reindeer and its owner.
Even when reindeer were held by families, each deer was tied to a specific individual. To
collectivize them was a sin. Across the entire north, herders began to slaughter their
reindeer rather than collectivize them, resulting in a sharp drop in the size of the entire
Siberian herd by one third in only three years. In the mid-1930s, Anatolii Skachko, the
acting head of the Committee of the North, assessed the debacle by noting, "We have paid
for the transferral of [only] twenty percent of the herd into the socialist sector by
destroying thirty-five percent of the reindeer."

At the same time, however, the entire process of collectivization on North
Sakhalin, and perforce the expansion of the fishing industry there, was predicated on the
appropriation and restructuring of Nivkh villages. Where prerevolutionary Russian settlers
may have hounded Nivkh from many of their ancestral homes, Soviet planners kept their
eyes on the places to which Nivkh had relocated. Collectivization by definition meant that
the entire populace would have to be concentrated into fewer settlements in order to
streamline production. Hence, in 1930, when Rybakkolkhozsoiuz transformed forty-seven
artels into thirteen kolkhozes, the government reduced the twenty-five villages in

6See Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, "Istoriia and Ulo: A Critique of Sociological Reasoning
with a Siberian Evenk Epistemology," Master's Thesis, Department of Anthropology,
Stanford University, July 1991.
7Pika, "Malye narody severa...," p. 320.
8Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples...," p. 373.
Rybnovsk district down to six.\textsuperscript{9} But the interesting aspect to these first series of village closings on Sakhalin is that native villages were the ones kept open. That is to say, they were also the ones to be redeveloped into larger fishing centres dominated by Russians. A report of the same year explained the situation matter of factly.

In order to develop the fishing sector, economic planners should focus on the sites where natives live. As the Giliaks have located their villages in the most convenient locations, and occupy the very best bodies of water, this is where large scale development should begin. By building up native areas, natives will be crowded and eventually excluded from the best fishing grounds. The natives will be unhappy, since this not only goes against their interests but transgresses the decrees of other directive agencies. But given their diffuse dispersion, there can be no other alternative. Some natives are taking this into account, and now realize that living in such small villages is no longer possible.\textsuperscript{10}

Such radical acts of displacement indeed did go in the face of the efforts of the Committee of the North, who argued that it would be harmful for the native communities to be so extensively overhauled. But the rapidly changing political climate had been working against the Committee of the North since Stalin's entrenchment of power in 1929. Of their three central goals, native self-government, economic reorganization and cultural enlightenment, only cultural enlightenment remained an active arena by the early 1930s.

The new order represented a break from the past that many Nivkhi embraced. But the official intent was more specific: What began as a series of profound changes became an express "war against the past," and as the 1930s advanced, it became more difficult to

\textsuperscript{9}STsDMI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 7 (1931), l. 98. [A separate system of pagination lists the same page as l. 13.]

\textsuperscript{10}TsGADV, f. R4559, o. 1, d. 5 (1931) "Doklady Upolnomochennogo po tuzemnym delam pri prezidiume Sakhalinskogo okrrevkoma o kontsentratsii i kolektivizatsii korennogo naselenia, 1928-1931 gg.," l. 51.
determine which changes were voluntary and which were coerced. As resistance to
collectivization mounted, the government struck back everywhere by singling out the
wealthiest capital holders as kulaks, from the Russian word for "fist." The term kulak
quickly became a catchword for anyone in opposition to state policy. Among Siberian
peoples, this meant particular trouble for shamans, the spirit mediums and healers who
acted as religious figures across the continent.\footnote{The experience of Siberian shamans throughout the Soviet period has been a turbulent one, and is a subject that I have left out of this project because of its magnitude. However, recent excellent examinations of the social dynamics of shamanism in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods include Marjorie Balzer's "Behind Shamanism: Changing Voices of Siberian Khanty Shamanism and Cosmology and Politics" Social Science and Medicine 24 (1987), pp. 1085-1093; as well as "Two Urban Shamans: Unmasking Leadership in Fin-de-Soviet Siberia" in George Marcus, ed., Late Editions: Amid Transitions at the End of the Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Caroline Humphrey, The Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), ch. 8.}

For northern social planners, a war against the past called not only for the eradication of shamans, kulaks and class enemies, but the aggressive jettisoning of all forms of traditional life in favour of a new Siberia in step with history. It marked a decisive turning point for Siberian peoples' great leap forward.

While the Communist Party had advised its faithful to leave Nivkhi to themselves
when they set up government on North Sakhalin in 1925, there were nine Nivkh
candidates for party membership by 1930.\footnote{STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 16 (1933), l. 1.} One of the key roles to which the candidates were assigned was vigilance in matters of political and economic sabotage. Though Stalin's war on the past is most often associated with the yezhovshchina of 1936-1938,\footnote{John Stephan, "Cleansing the Soviet Far East, 1937-38," Acta Slavica Iaponica, Tomus X (1992), p. 43.} the period when Yezhov, the new head of the state security forces or NKVD presided over the arrest and killing of millions of Soviet citizens, it is clear that on Sakhalin, as elsewhere in the country, organized campaigns of terror began to take root much earlier.
A 1931 Communist Party circular from the Rybnowsk district noted that the exposing of kulaks was being stepped up in earnest with the announcement of total collectivization in the area. Of twenty-seven households under investigation, twenty were slated to be "dekulakized" (podlezhat raskulachivaniiu), causing district party officials to be called on the carpet for having failed to expose these class enemies earlier. Still worse for the local officials, a significant number of the persons under investigation had already had their voting rights revoked for their roles in religious organizations or the tsarist state apparatus. In their response, the Party office in Rybnowsk urged all its members to carry out dekulakization of the area to the last offender, particularly in Nivkh settlements where work of this nature had been undertaken only haphazardly. Whereas any citizen with a dubious past was at risk, so too was anyone perceived to have prospered financially under the new Soviet system and who in all likelihood would be trying to unload their movable goods in an attempt to ward off the inevitable. "Bearing in mind that with the announcement of total collectivization in the district, kulaks will undoubtedly attempt to liquidate their assets by selling them off, destroying them or spreading them amongst friends and relatives -- Party cells, Young Communists, the working poor, and all Soviet organizations must be on full alert."

The elderly fisherman Koinyt was one of the first Nivkhi whom officials offered up for sacrifice, singling him out in the pages of the children's reader Cuz Dif. The ethnographer Bronislaw Pilsud'skii had forty years earlier hailed the young orphan Koinyt as a great poet and a celebrated shaman, but Koinyt's shamanic talents served him poorly in the new atheist state. A Nivkh youth group in Viskovo followed suit in 1931 by voting to disenfranchise the shaman Upin in upcoming elections, suggesting a pattern whereby Nivkhi who had most distinguished themselves in opposition to state

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14STS_DNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 7 (1931), l. 42.
16TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 1117 (1929-1931), l. 98.
policies over the previous decade -- elders and shamans -- were the first to be harassed.
Recent studies have suggested that Siberian native communities as a whole managed to escape the first waves of violence brought on by collectivization in the early 1930s,\(^\text{17}\) and this appears to have been the case for Nivkh also. Yet even in these initial years, they could not fail to have been affected generally by the assaults on neighbours and coworkers going on around them. In Rybnoe, party secretary Ivannikov and his coworker Krylov were arrested for drunken behaviour, keeping religious icons in their homes, and recruiting tsarist bandits into the Rybnoe kolkhoz Bolshevik and the neighbouring Liugi kolkhoz Stalin.\(^\text{18}\) Similar campaigns were going in Lupolovo, Nai-Nai and other regions with large Nivkh communities.\(^\text{19}\) But if Nivkh were left out of some of the first repressive campaigns, the 1931 party circular above would suggest that this was only for lack of organization. In a largely clandestine 1934 campaign known as "The Islanders Affair," V. M. Drekov, the head of Sakhalin's Border Patrol and the island NKVD, culminated three years of investigation into undercover Japanese espionage movements with a sweep through twenty-two North Sakhalin settlements. 115 people were arrested and killed, forty of whom were Nivkh and Oroki.\(^\text{20}\)

Kreinovich, returning to Leningrad in 1929 to teach at the Northern Division of the Institute of Eastern Languages (renamed in 1930 as the Institute of Northern Peoples) found an environment much changed. Class-based quotas had become the main criteria

\(^{17}\) Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples...," p. 343.

\(^{18}\) STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 16 (1933), l. 1.

\(^{19}\) See GASO, f. 856, o. 1, d. 1 (1931), l. 27; Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv dlya byvshikh polkov (TsGADV), f. R4549, o. 1, d. 75 (1928-1930), l. 77; and STsDNI, f. 4, o. 1, d. 3 (1931), ll. 72-79. For material on raskulachivanie on Sakhalin more generally, see G. Dudarets and A. Strakhov, "Vtoraya Voina 1929" Molodaiia Gvardiia, 14 November 1989, pp. 1-3; Aleksandr Kostanov, ed., Istoriia bez belykh pitan' (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Ispolkom sakhalinskogo oblastnogo soveta narodnykh deputatov, 1989).

\(^{20}\) From the files of V. L. Podpechnikov, GASO. Further material on the "Delo Ostrovnykh" is forthcoming in an article by the same name in the journal "Novaia Zhizn'." A recent publication by the Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk Publishing House, Kukhnia Diavola, examines the career of V. M. Drekov.
for selecting students and the curriculum had become increasingly politicized.\textsuperscript{21} Across Siberia, the pressure to identify class enemies in what had effectively been stateless, classless societies required extensive revisions by ethnographers of the role of indigenous social organization.\textsuperscript{22} At departmental meetings, Kreinovich resisted claims that Nivkh social organization had been by nature exploitative and was censured for his views.

In the offices of the Committee of the North in Moscow, the ideological upheavals were equally turbulent. Having resisted central government efforts to forcibly sedentarize the northern indigenous communities for several years, the Committee had lost much of the minor sway it had once had amidst the ascendance of economic factors over cultural ones. In 1935, Stalin sent a letter to the Committee congratulating them for a job well done, and formally dissolved it. The work of the Committee was transferred to the Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route [Glavsevmorput'], an organization which was eminently wealthier and eminently less interested in native affairs. Glavsevmorput's role was to oversee the rapid industrialization of the north, and its reputation as "the absolute ruler of all of northern Asia above the 62nd parallel" was challenged only by Dal'stroi in the Far East. "Thus," as historian Yuri Slezkine observed, "most native northerners became part of two quasi-independent fiefdoms bent on industrial development."\textsuperscript{23}

By 1936, the Committee of the New Alphabet found its new alphabet declared to be old, and plans were underway to rewrite the new Siberian scripts on the basis of Cyrillic. In a July meeting of the Far Eastern division of the Committee, members gathered to lambaste the errors of latinization. In 1932, only four years earlier, Comrade Al'kor

\textsuperscript{21} TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 850, ll. 14-17.
\textsuperscript{22} I. S. Gurvich and Ch. M. Taksami, "Vklad sovetskikh etnografov...," p. 187. See also Yuri Slezkine, "The Fall of Soviet Ethnography, 1928-38" Current Anthropology 32(4) (1991) for a broader treatment of the ideological turbulence in Soviet ethnography at the time.
(Koshkin) had advocated the latinized *Edinyi Severnyi Alfavit* [ESA] or "single northern alphabet" as internationalist and less Russificatory, but a number of the participants took issue with the slander this implied for Russians.

Do the authors [of the ESA] truly equate the prerevolutionary missionaries with their vodka and their bibles alongside the hospitals, schools, kolkhozes and councils that the Russian Bolsheviks brought to the north?24

Another delegate ruminated,

I don't understand why someone who is for the Yakut language which already exists in the Russian alphabet, is a nationalist and a chauvinist, while someone who is for the alphabet of the French and the Italians [of the 1930s] is an internationalist.25

The revisions were in keeping with the reinstating of the Russian people under Stalin as the leading members of the new fraternal Soviet Union, and they clearly spelled trouble for the northern reformers who had been advocating native autonomy in the interests of limiting exploitation of the northerners by Russian newcomers. Comrade Razumov from Leningrad complained that the very work of the Institute of Northern Peoples, responsible for the teaching of native languages among other things, was harmful. "Peoples of the north," he argued, "are hungry for the Russian language, for the party literature in Russian, for the central newspapers..."26 Regardless of whether Siberian peoples hungered for the Russian language, it is not hard to see that the linguistic isolation brought on by being in the latinized minority had little place in the increasingly centralized state.

On Sakhalin, there were cursory efforts in August of 1936 to distribute flyers with texts in

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24 TsGADV, F. R353, o. 1, d. 88 (1936), l. 16. Delo 88 is fittingly entitled, "Perekhod na novyi alfavit," giving the committee its second new alphabet in only five years.
26 Ibid., l. 18.
both scripts so as to let Nivkh themselves decide which was easier to read, but by December the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities of the USSR reversed the latinization policy. In the Far East, the alphabets of the Nivkh, Nanai, Even, Evenk, Chukchi, Koriak and Eskimo languages were Russianized, while the written languages for the Udegeiatsy and Itel'menye were abandoned altogether because of the small size of the respective populations.

The form of native languages may have been settled by the 1936 decision, but the question of the content of the children's readers and adult primers for Siberian peoples came under increasing fire, illustrating the ideological tightrope which fewer and fewer authors were deft enough to negotiate. In K. D. Egorov's review of children's readers in northern schools over the 1930s, case after case is calumniated. Some errors were minor: I. Ia. Chernetseva's book for the Mansy overlooked the role of the working class before 1917; O. P. Sunik's book for the Nanaitsy forgot to mention the role of the peasantry in the October Revolution; Sunik "speaks about soviets, schools, and Red Yarangas", but not one word about kolkhozes; and Prokofev's book for the Nentsy mentioned Lenin's name only once over eighty-eight pages. Other errors were considered to be more fundamental, such as distorted ideas about proper discipline in the work place.

Stebnitskii included the following conversation between "eager workers" in

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27 GASO, f. 509, o. 1, d. 34 (1936), l. 30.
28 TsGADV, f. R353, o. 1, d. 88 (1936), l. 20. See also GASO, f. 509, o. 1, d. 34, l. 26.
29 V. N. Uvachan's insistence that latinization "artificially wrenched northern peoples away from the language of the brotherly Russian people, despite the Russian language having enriched the vocabularies of northern languages well before the October revolution" is representative of the position taken at least on Sakhalin well until the 1980s. See V. N. Uvachan, Perekhod k sotsializmu malykh narodov severa (po materialam Evenkiiskogo i Taimyrskogo natsional'nykh okrugov) (Moscow: Politicheskaia Literatura, 1958), esp. pp. 150-154. For a general review of the politics of the two alphabets, see Isabelle Kreindler, "The Changing Status of Russian in the Soviet Union," International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 33 (1962).
his primer:

-What are you doing?
-Nothing.
-And what is your comrade doing?
-Helping me.31

Egorov explained that Stebnitskii's problem was, in part, that he "gives no examples of the lives of heroes, Stakhanovites,32 Shock Workers or the Warriors of socialist labour discipline." But Stebnitskii's real problem may have been that he wrote a children's primer with children in mind. Egorov complained that Stebnitskii's primer for the Koriaks was "filled with almost nothing but fairly tales... Fox stories predominate, including "The Fox" (p. 52), "Fox" (p. 55), then in succession "The Sly Fox," "The Fox and the Wolf," "Foxes," "The Little Foxes" and "The Story of Kovak" (again about a fox)."33

All of these distortions are the result of sabotage by bourgeois nationalists, the absence of efforts to combat the consequences of such sabotage, and the extremely weak supervision over the publication of these textbooks on the part of Narkompros... Only through the battle for partymindedness in scholarship, and by preventing the oversimplification of pedagogic ideals in the northern schools will we be able to root out the Trotskyite-Bukharinist gangs, the bourgeois nationalists and saboteurs on the ideological front.34

Mistranslations in the Nivkh textbooks also spelled trouble for Kreinovich and the other scholars that worked on the negotiation of the three Nivkh dialects for publication. The Nivkh word "kolanivkh" was intended to signify "kulak," but came out contextually as

31Ibid.
32Stakhanovites were members of a movement that began in 1935 to raise labour productivity.
33Ibid.
34Ibid., p. 32.
"the leader, the distributor of wealth, the rich man who helps others." The Nivkh word "krygris" was intended to signify the Russian "batrak," a term for hired hand which was ennobled by the Soviets; instead it came out as "slave." The use of "khutikhumnivukh" was intended to mean "sredniak," or middle peasant; however its use in context suggested only "the one living in the middle of the village," or "a man of average height." Equal suspicion was cast on the expression used for "joining the kolkhoz" which was the same expression in Nivkh for getting caught in something, such as a net.35

By the middle of the decade when the mass purges started in earnest, Nivkh were especially at risk. With Sakhalin party and government officials under duress to produce enemies of the people in greater and greater numbers, it is not surprising that they should have turned to Nivkh who, as a contingent, were far from full members of society in the first place. Given the rampant xenophobia that held the country under sway during Stalin's reign, the Nivkh's history of cooperation and trade with Japanese, Chinese and Korean merchants made them particularly vulnerable.

What was striking about the purges among the Nivkh was the speed of the turnaround. Native leaders who had been celebrated as model Soviets one year became enemies of the people the next. Manifestations of a traditional way of life, which were praised and encouraged as signs of new political freedom in the 1920s, were now grounds for arrest and disappearance.

Aleksei Churka had been one of Kreinovich's first Nivkh guides on Sakhalin. He was the first Nivkh under the Soviets to receive a higher education at the Institute of Northern Peoples in Leningrad. He had been a party member since 1934, and became chairman of the East Sakhalin RIK that same year. On October 12th, 1926, he was fired on the grounds of an undisclosed state crime. His wife recalled in 1990,

The first chairman had already disappeared and the second had been fired

35 TsGADV, f. R353, o. 1, d. 88 (1936), l. 7.
without reason, 36 so we had an idea that Churka would be taken away too.

One day we had gone for a long walk and then to the bathhouse. When we
got back, the house had been searched and the militia were there. He just
went and that was that.

Following his arrest, the East Sakhalin District Party Committee excluded Churka from
the party on the grounds of "Japanophilism and local nationalism." On September 20,
1937, the NKVD sentenced Churka to five years of hard labour "for inciting nationalist
antagonism between Russians and Nivkh for speaking out against government plans,
giving away state seal resources, for opposing the merger of two state kolkhozes and for
praising Japanese culture." 37

When I asked people about the Stalinist period on Sakhalin's northwestern shore, it
was exceptional to find someone who did not have relatives who disappeared in the 1930s.

All the good people, all of them, all of them, through to Rybnovsk. They
put them in prison. All the brigadiers, all the people who would speak at
the meetings, those were the kind of people they put away.

In 1937, they took a lot of good people. Men, women and sometimes even
children. The Tungusy [Evenki] especially. A lot of people were taken away. As
if they were kulaks. Who was a kulak? There were some people that had more
than others but there weren't any kulaks. There were families with seven or

36 Churka replaced Nikolai Akhmadeevich Akhmadeev, also a Nivkh, as head of the RIK
in 1934 when Akhmadeev was arrested on the 7th of April of that year. Akhmadeev was
charged under article 58.2 of the constitution for inciting armed rebellion and participating
in espionage. On the 11th of July, 1934, he was sentenced to ten years in a concentration
camp. The state rehabilitated him on August 20, 1959. From the files of V. L.
Podpechnikov, GASO.

37 The Sakhalin historian V. Ia. Kantorovich, who sat in the same prison as Churka, wrote
that Churka died in prison in 1941. Others say that he died in a camp in Magadan in 1947.
The individuals who spoke against him for the prosecution later disavowed their
testimonies in 1958. The state rehabilitated him on December 7, 1959. From the files of
V. L. Podpechnikov, GASO.
Table 5.1

**Technical Instructions**\(^{38}\)

[Rybnovsk, 1931]

1. All kulak families should be retrieved and delivered to the commissioner of the OGPU [Oblastnoe Glavnoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie or Main Regional Political Directorate] in the village of Vereshchagino.

2. The delivery time in Vereshchagino should be agreed upon with the OGPU with sufficient accuracy so as to not have kulaks wait for the steamship in Vereshchagino more that 1 to 2 days.

3. Once the delivery time has been agreed upon definitively, the District Council [raispolkom] should appoint particularly firm and self-restrained representatives, at least one for each village from which kulaks will be removed.

4. The Council representatives, upon arriving in the appointed village, will gather the most active members of the labourer-peasant ranks in the village and put together a presentation on the liquidation of kulaks as a class as a result of the total collectivization of the district. A decree will be prepared regarding the eviction of kulaks indicated on the list. (The time of eviction is not discussed at the meeting, but is delimited by the general phrase, "the fastest removal from our village").

5. On the same day, a general meeting of the kolkhozniks and the labourer-peasants will assemble to hear the presentation and endorse the decree of the village poor (once again without indicating the exact time of removal).

\(^{38}\)TsGADV, f. R-4549, o. 2, d. 16 (1931), ll. 226-227.
6. At the conclusion of the general meeting and the endorsement of the decree on the removal of kulaks, the Council representative will summon that same evening the most active kolkhozniks and activists from among the members of the village soviet -- strong, staunch and restrained comrades -- among whom the task of undertaking the immediate removals will be assigned.

7. Immediately thereafter, the comrades head to the houses of kulaks and the eldest among them will proclaim the will of the village poor and kolkhozniks: That the kulaks are to be evicted immediately and are expected to be completely ready to leave by morning.

8. From this moment, no one will be allowed in or out of the house of the kulak until the moment of the departure of the kulak from the village.

9. In the presence of the kulak, one must first remove any firearms, money or valuables (excepting personal crosses) and conduct the most thorough possible search, beginning with the actual kulak and then members of the family. According to instructions, the kulak will have the right to take along the uttermost necessary items, by no means valuable, and foodstuffs -- up to a total weight of 30 puds [1080 lbs.].

10. During the confiscation of property, comrades must demonstrate the uttermost restraint and steadfastness, by no means harping on trifles or permitting excesses...

11. All items selected by the kulak for transport should be carefully packed in strong sacks together with necessary instruments such as axes, saws and so on. Food items are to be packed in separate sacks.
12. A list is then drawn up in the presence of the kulak or an adult member of the family indicating the nature and value of all remaining belongings to be given over to the village soviet according to instructions.

13. Two trustworthy comrades are to be posted at the house of the kulak until morning.

14. Early in the morning, appointed comrades will bring round carts for the transport of women, children and the kulak's things.

15. The carts, accompanied by the village poor, are delivered to the Commissioner of the OGPU in Vereshchagino and are surrendered as kulak families along with the listed belongings.

16. The District Council at the kulak receiving post in Vereshchagino should oversee the provision of lodging, food (if the kulak supplies are insufficient) and in the same manner, if necessary, medical care for the kulak families over a period of one to three days.

17. Over the course of this entire operation, it is essential to remain restrained and steadfast, under no circumstances deigning to crude remarks or excesses. It is necessary to strictly remember that kulaks are not merely under arrest or persons being removed by administrative means, but strangers, hounded from their surroundings by the poor-labouring and kolkhoz peasantry.

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[5 copies]
NTs./IL
27.V.1931.
eight children and they took the fathers away. In one village not far from ours they took almost all the men away.

No one knows why they took my father away. We never saw him again. Sometimes it was enough that one wore Japanese glasses. This meant you were a collaborator. Or that you found a candy wrapper, with Japanese writing on it, that had been floating down the river. People would ask, "Where did you get that from?" Or they wouldn't ask at all, and the police would come all the same.

I was young, but I already understood. When the police would go around the yards, the NKVD, you knew what they were doing. They would look for that material -- the shiny silk, it was Japanese or Chinese. They don't make it here any more. A few people had the material in their homes, and as soon as the police found out about it they would immediately take them away. I remember once how my father got angry at his mother. She had some silk and wanted to bury it, but he wanted to burn it.

Whole villages! All the elders. All the supervisors. They came, they took people away, and that was it. My grandfather they took. And my brother, and my uncle. A lot of them were sent to work on that tunnel they tried to make across the Tatar Strait. That's where a lot of them died, during construction...

There were no good reasons. What reason could there be? The old men, they worked on the kolkhozes, they fished and they hunted. None at all... They would simply come in one of those big trucks, a five ton truck, the kind they used on the
kolkhoz for transporting the fishing nets. They would go up to a door and say, "Let's go. Get ready." They'd put you in the truck. Where to, they didn't ask.

The police never told us why. When they came to the door, they called our order to leave a putevka, a tourist pass. But we were hardly tourists. We spent four years moving from town to town on the mainland looking for work. It was the dead of winter the night we left and the baby was only seven months old. He fell ill on the trip and died. "An enemy of the people." What kind of enemy was I?

The sum result was a stunning level of repressive terror. A 1948 Ministry of the Interior document concerning anti-Soviet activities in the Rybnovsk district asserts that from 1917 on, and particularly during the Japanese occupation of north Sakhalin from 1920 to 1925, Japanese intelligence cultivated a network of counter-revolutionary agents among Nivkhi and Evenki living in the district. In the village of Viskovo, the site of the native executive council founded in 1926, the ministry credited Japanese intelligence with the formation of an anti-Soviet Nivkh group known as "the Viskovo counter-revolutionary organization" headed by the former Nivkh council chairman, Mikhail Petrovich Kul'pin.

Kul'pin was the same man so praised in 1931 by the visiting Culture Army from Khabarovsk for his assiduous efforts to combat illiteracy and prerevolutionary traditions.39 He was working as one of the directing brigadiers at the Red Baikal fishing kolkhoz in Viskovo at the time of his arrest in November of 1937. He was convicted in March of 1938 on grounds of espionage and shot in nearby Okha later that month.

Kul'pin's main transgression, his granddaughter later recalled, was that he had a Japanese watch. But his mistake may also have been speaking out against the work of the party at a

district meeting in April of 1937.

Self-criticism is the guiding principle in our work. Nivkhi have much to be thankful for: before 1926 we lived in twenty-seven lousy villages around the district, and now we are grouped into seven kolkhozes. This is a real achievement... But we won't stand on our laurels. We receive little assistance from district organizations. There is no longer mass cultural work conducted in Viskovo, despite Central Committee directives requiring this. It would be better if these directives were observed. We have had Soviet government in our district since 1926, but I rarely see [any government officials]. You could organize party meetings in our village but you don't. In 1930 we had ten Nivkhi who were nominated to the Party. Now there are only three and have nothing to do, so they are dropping out. No one organizes discussions about the constitution. Nivkhi don't know about their own achievements under socialism, and yet they are interested.40

In turn, Kul'pin's son and a Red Baikal coworker were arrested on the grounds of harbouring an enemy of the people and remaining silent about espionage activities of which they were presumed to be cognizant.41

Through NKVD operations, "the Viskovo counter-revolutionary organization, consisting of eleven members, most of them from the Nivkh population, was summarily (operativno) liquidated."42 Likewise, an unspecified number of Nivkhi from the nearby village of Grigor'evka were arrested for anti-Soviet activity and collaboration with the

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40 STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 29 (1937), l. 70. Orders for Kul'pin's arrest are listed on l. 93.
41 For the arrest of Kul'pin's son, see STsDNI f. 13, o. 1, d. 29 (1937), l. 93. The case of Kul'pin's coworker, Aleksei Ivanovich Alek, is documented in STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 38 (1938), l. 12.
42 Medvedev, "Politiko-ekonomicheskaiia kharakteristika Rybnovskogo raiona sakhalinskoi oblasti," ll. 40-50, GASO.
Japanese in the same year. On the whole:

As a result of repressive measures undertaken against counter-revolutionary and rebel elements among peoples of the North in 1937-38, approximately 36% of the adult population was removed (iziat), composed mainly of Nivkhi and Evenki from forty to sixty years of age, while the remaining 64% expressed their understanding and support for the measures undertaken by the Soviet government. A persistent but insignificant anti-Soviet element continued their activity; although most came to support the Soviet government over the years, those remaining were arrested as necessary. 43

The NKVD report also asserts that Nivkhi were active supporters of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians (VSEKh), a "counter-revolutionary umbrella group" based in Leningrad with ninety-one registered members throughout the Rybnovsk area. A number of VSEKh members, who evidently had influence over the native population through public chapels in the Rybnovsk region, were also liquidated over the course of 1937-38.

The few remaining foreigners on the island became fewer still. A number of Japanese oil interests and traders remained on North Sakhalin through the late 1930s following an agreement concluded when Japan ceded North Sakhalin to the USSR in 1925. 44 However the hundreds of North Sakhalin Koreans who had been recruited by the Japanese as immigrant labour in the north found themselves in increasingly tenuous positions. 45 The 1936-37 ledgers written from the Korean settlement of Kefi three

43Ibid., l. 6. The figures are comparable with those from Chukotka in Pika, "Malye narody severa..." 320.
44Stephan, Sakhalin, p. 85.
45On Japanese Karafuto, the Korean population reached 150,000 by 1941. Some 43,000 Koreans remained on the island when the Soviets reclaimed the south, from Stephan, Sakhalin, p. 151.
kilometres north of Rybnoe were like those of any other village council, recounting the
dividends of the year and making plans for propagating the new Stalin constitution in
1938. The notes end abruptly one day in 1937, when trucks arrived to close the village
and relocate the Koreans off the island, most to Kazakhstan and destinations in Central
Asia. One woman recalled in 1990,

In 1937, a boat arrived. I was already twelve. And they took away
everyone from Kefi and Naumovka, two Korean villages. They came to
Vereshchagino too and took all the Koreans away. There was an old man
who escorted them to the shore and sat there for hours after they left. He
was probably crying. They gathered them together, got them on the boat
and went away. My mother was against it. They had to break up families,
leave wives and children behind. We got one letter from a man in
Tashkent, he wrote from Tashkent. At least, someone else wrote for him -
- he was illiterate.

Back in Leningrad, guilty by association, Kreinovich was arrested in 1937 on
grounds of plotting with the Japanese. He later recounted being beaten and held without
sleep for five days, and then being required to sign documents attesting to his participation
in anti-state bombings. He went on to spend ten years in prison and a further eight in
Siberian exile -- a stark reminder of how much had changed (and how much had remained
the same) since his mentor Lev Shternberg had himself been exiled to Siberia and had gone
on to lead ethnography in the brave new world.

Throughout all of this, the Culture Base in Nogliki managed to remain open, but
not without trials of its own. In 1934, Bolshevik Fish Run pronounced the Nogliki base to

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46 GAsO, f. 577, o. 1, dd. 111, 111a, 112. Most of these files are written in Korean. For
material on the expulsion of Koreans elsewhere in the Far East, see John Stephan,
""Cleansing" the Soviet Far East...", p. 47.
47 From conversations with Kreinovich's second wife, Galina Aleksandra Razumikova,
Voronezh, November 1990.
be "a dead institution" and "a refuge for vagrants." The staff commanded little respect in the community, anti-religious work was reported to be weak, mass-cultural work was not being conducted, the school and hospital were not heated in the wintertime, and Nivkhi travelling through the town were no longer offered a warm place to stay since the House of the Native had been given over to Russians. Perhaps most problematic given the Culture Base's original charter, only four of the forty-four students enrolled in the elementary school were actually native (Nivkh, Evenk or Orok). Moreover, five adult students had returned from their training in Leningrad (Utkin, Lanzhero, Mariia Kofkan, Semroiden Chikht and Churka), but the Culture Base had refused to hire them and they were left to fend for themselves. The Culture Bases's director, Comrade Krames, in a separate report, offered a simple defense: As he himself was the target of accusations and threats, local organizations had ceased to cooperate with him, and allotted funds from Moscow had not been forthcoming. Krames, in turn, was replaced by Kniazev in 1936, who was in turn dismissed for taking the name of the proletarian writer Maksim Gorkii in vain, and for excusing himself over extended periods on the pretext of illness. Kniazev disappeared in 1937 to be replaced by Golovin, who in one of the first documents indicating his stewardship, was accused of being an enemy of the people. He was replaced the same year by Vasil'ev. On it went.

Throughout the 1930s and 40s, the Culture Base accounting ledgers and director's files present a stark series of dismissals, discharges, firings, removals and early retirements. The Base's operation was not a small one: In 1934 there were forty employees in addition to occasional hired hands. Yet in 1936, the Base's director fired twenty-six employees

48 TsGAOR, f. 3977, o. 1, d. 1139.
49 Ibid., ll. 2-8.
50 STsDNI, f. 16, o. 1, d. 17 (1936), ll. 121-122, 159-163.
51 STsDNI, f. 16, o. 1, d. 9 (1937-38), ll. 14-143.
52 GAZO, f. 1071, o. 1, d. 2 (1934). The staff included a director, chief accountant, handyman, janitor, water carrier, two washerwomen, the director of the medical unit, a doctor, a nurse, a feldsher, four sanitation specialists, a stoker, the director of the school,
for transgressions, accepted eight resignations, and issued warnings to several others. Tramenko, the first teacher to be fired, was dismissed for failing to provide proper socialist education to children, for spreading rumours, and for sabotaging the Stakhanovite movement. The second teacher was fired for improperly harbouring Communist Youth League documents. On it went.

It was an era of total politicization of almost all spheres of life. In 1938, the town of Nogliki voted to change its street names from the original Nivkh and Russian ones to more patriotic incarnations already ubiquitous around the country such as Soviet Street, Communist Youth League Street, Pioneer Street, Freedom Lane, First of May Street, Partisan Street, Physical Culture Street and Red Army Street. On the kolkhozes, accountants listed fishing boats by names such as Construction Worker, Shock Worker, Freedom, October, Activist, Stakhanovite, Bolshevik, Commune, Decembrist, Avant Garde and Spy. On the Freedom kolkhoz in Vereshchagino, names for horses such as Five Year Plan, Courageous and First of May were common, while cows, perhaps the only collectivized commodity with a pulse to escape the patriotic gambit, were nonetheless filed under vaguely menacing names such as Falcon and Eagle.

Much of the zeal demonstrated on North Sakhalin kolkhozes at the time belonged to real patriotism and the spirit of building a new society of which many if not most saw themselves as a part. But the quest for appearances became equally crucial on kolkhozes where simply not working hard was sufficient grounds for being labelled an enemy of the people. Between 1938 and 1940, the Freedom kolkhoz, with 120 members, let forty-five teachers, three day care workers (vospitateli), four cleaning women, two bakers, two additional kitchen staff, a metalworker, a joiner-carpenter, a shoemaker, a ploughman, a bath house attendant, a milkmaid and a shepherd.

53 *GASO*, f. 1071, o. 1, d. 3 (1936-38), 4 (1939), 5 (1941-45).
54 *GASO*, f. 53, o. 2, d. 35 (1938), l. 8.
Table 5.2

"Slogans for the 1935 May Day Celebrations, Rybnovsk"57

1. Long live the May Day military review of the revolutionary might of the international proletariat!

2. Class brothers, victims of the fascist terror, prisoners of capitalism: in honour of May Day, our proletarian greetings!

3. Proletarians of the world! Strengthen proletarian internationalism! Stand under the banner of the Communist International!

4. Onward to new battles and victories! Long live the world socialist revolution!

5. Our brotherly greetings to the revolutionary proletariats of Germany! Long live the heroic Communist Party of Germany! Freedom to prisoners of fascism!

6. "We seek not one inch of the land of others. But we will cede not a speck of our own land, not to anyone." -Stalin.

7. "We stand for peace and will defend the cause of peace. But we are not afraid of threats and are ready to respond to warmongers blow for blow." -Stalin.

8. Long live our own invincible Red Army -- mighty bulwark of the peaceful labour of the peoples of the USSR, true defender of the achievements of the October Socialist

57STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 24 (1935), l. 213.
9. Workers and kolkhozniks! We will meet the Five Year Plan in its entirety! We will achieve the technical reconstruction of all sectors of the economy! Let material and cultural levels rise still further! Let us build a classless socialist society! Onward to new victories!

10. To the army of millions of shockworkers and distinguished people of our country, to the heroes of socialist construction, our ardent Bolshevik greetings!

11. Workers, engineers and technicians! Master the full strength of our socialist industry! To the mastery of new technology! To the fullest use of the shortest working day in the world!

12. Kolkhozniks! Let us strengthen the kolkhoz system day by day! Assist lagging kolkhozes to rise to the level of the best! Let us make all kolkhozes Bolshevik and all kolkhozniks prosperous! Let us nominate honourable private workers for entrance into kolkhozes. Long live the friendship between workers and peasants triumphantly building socialism!

13. "To join the personal interests of the kolkhozniks with the social interests of the kolkhozes -- there lies the key to strengthening kolkhozes" - Stalin.

14. Kolkhozniks! To work in the kolkhoz honourably and to maintain the goodwill of the collective -- this is the path to a prosperous life!
four members go and hired seventy-two new ones. In the same time period, *Red October*, with 160 members, let sixty members go and hired eighty-nine new ones. Bearing in mind that these were quite small communities dominated each by one kolkhoz, these were enormous turnovers.

The extent of the purges was consistent with the systematic terror engineered throughout the rest of the country, but as the historian John Stephan has pointed out, the Soviet Far East would appear to have suffered disproportionately.

On the basis of a recent estimate that 30,000 people were shot in Far Eastern prisons "in the time of Stalin" (i.e. 1929-1953), one can hypothesize that about 15,000 of these perished during 1937-38...

Assuming that about 200,000 were repressed in the Far East during 1937-38, that would constitute 8% of Dal'krai's population (2,338,095 in 1938), a significantly higher percentage than for the USSR as a whole.

The disproportionately high mortality of Far Easterners is suggested by party statistics. Of 1,956 voting delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress in 1934 from all parts of the USSR, 1,108 were arrested. Of thirty-two Far Eastern delegates to the Seventeenth Party Congress, *none* appeared at the 18th Party Congress in 1939. Of 139 candidate and full members of the Central Committee in 1934, ninety-eight were shot. *All* Far Eastern members and candidate members of the Central Committee in 1934 were shot or committed suicide. Far Eastern party membership, 44,909 on 1 January 1933, fell to 27,730 by 1 January 1937 and to 24,885 on 1 January 1993.59

Stephan notes that the Far East was distinguished by durable party elites which Stalin may

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58GASO, "Ekonomicheskoe polozenie i rabota rybolovetsskikh kolkhozov Rybnovskogo raiona Sakhalinskoj oblasti" (1941).
have sought to disrupt, but the proximity to Japan appeared to be the critical downfall for Nivkhi who were themselves still different in a society bent on normative sameness.

After such wholesale purgings, who was there left to run Sakhalin? Kolkhozes managed to make up for their losses by recruiting extra labour oftentimes in the same way they did after the October Revolution, by hiring newcomers trying to elude their pasts elsewhere. But in the government and the party finding competent individuals was more difficult since, by definition, almost anyone in a position of responsibility had been at the greatest risk during the purges. Of the six new political enlightenment specialists hired at the Nogliki Culture Base in 1939 to organize reading huts in the district, the youngest was fifteen while the oldest was twenty-two. No one had higher than a seventh grade education. The purges clearly had supporters among educated elites, but in reading through the Culture Base ledgers, it is not hard to see that as the invective against enemies of the people went up, the erudition of the directors went down. From the 1941 ledger, a four-sentence accusation by the director against one of the aforementioned political enlightenment specialists contained forty-five errors in spelling and grammar.

Throughout the Stalinist juggernaut, there were no famous acts of resistance among Nivkhi since ennobled, such as the mass slaughter of reindeer to protest collectivization as we saw above, or the rebellion by northwest Siberian Khanty in the 1930s. But amidst the usual rubber-stamped accounts of kulaks and saboteurs that pervade the archival documents of the era, there are more rare pedestrian accounts of insolence from the 1930s which stand out for their sheer anomaly: Aleksei Churka being

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60A 1925 article on Rybnoe made note a handsome young fisherman with suspiciously fine speech, "Evidently a fugitive White... Such "fishermen" are most of the Rybnoe population...[with Rybnoe] a rare quiet haven for White Guard soldiers." "Rybyyi Klondaik," Sovetskii Sakhalin, 27 September 1925, p. 3.
61GASO, f. 509, o. 1, d. 35 (1938-39), l. 33-34.
62GASO, f. 1071, o. 1, d. 5 (1941-45), l. 2.
63Pika, "Malye narody severa...," p. 321. See also Chichlo, "La collectivisation...," p. 296.
reprimanded by the Party in Nogliki; for having publicly insulted a local Russian doctor, Andrei Khevtun in Rybnoe ceasing to go to work and declaring that he had entered the Party by mistake; or Nivkhi on the Five Year Plan kolkhoz in Tengi vowing to leave the collective if the Russians stayed on. If there were express elements of resistance of Nivkhi as there were randomly among other Siberian peoples, one can expect that these were quickly suppressed as the state began to systematically extract "the people who spoke up at meetings," and eventually, even those that didn't.

The irony is that in its zeal to bring all motions of society under its control, the state coopted resistance as well. By regularly arresting ordinary citizens without pretext, and by wildly exaggerating accounts of saboteurs posing as honest citizens, the Sakhalin administration had most Nivkhi pressing to bury their pasts in ways both metaphoric and literal. On a rainy afternoon after lunch in Moskal'vo in 1990, a Nivkh hostess brought out a Manchurian dress once owned by her mother. It was a floor length gown in a blinding silk brocade the likes of which I had never seen in any museum. "It's in pretty good condition..." she said plying at some stray threads holding prerevolutionary Chinese coins around the hem, "Considering it was buried underground for twenty years." The dress, like most of the outward trappings of premodern Nivkh life, lay dormant in a box buried in sand for most of the Stalinist period.

World War Two proved to be a turning point for Siberian native peoples in the Soviet world. For all the citizens of North Sakhalin, it was a chance to focus on a collective cause rather than the losses of the purges. For Nivkhi, it marked the threshold of their independent entrance into Soviet society. For the men, it was a chance to define

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64 STsDNI, f. 16, o. 1, d. 5 "Protokol No. 72 ot 26 dekabria 1935 g." (1935).
65 STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 30 "Postanovlenie Biuro Rybnovskogo RK VKP(b) "O sostojanii i podgotovke k putine kolkhoza "Rybnoe""" (1937).
66 STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 26 "Protokoly zasedanii biuro Rybnovskogo raikoma" (1936), l. 178.
67 For the role of the matye narody more broadly during WWII, see V. N. Uvachan, Gody, Ravnye Vekam, pp. 155-157.
their citizenry by taking part in Soviet missions. And with the men were off at war, it was a chance for the government to finally coax women into the work force. In manifesto after manifesto, Nivkh kolkhozes on North Sakhalin pledged to give freely of their time to overfulfill their quotas to aid the front. On April 25, 1934, the women of Freedom challenged the women of Hammer in an open competition, with the Freedom women, Nivkhi and Russians, pledging to be responsible for twenty per-cent of the total kolkhoz quota, to complete a new net within one month, to plant four hectares of vegetables, to build a new children's playground, to improve cleanliness among Nivkh families, and to demonstrate the greatest participation in the decisions of the 17th Party Congress. The sixty-two women of Hammer responded by forming a special all-women's brigade called "17th Party Congress", and by pledging in turn to take on twenty-five percent of the fishing quota, to submit only fish of the highest quality, to build a cafeteria by the middle of May and so on.68 Nivkh women on the kolkhoz New Way of Life were reported to have regularly overfulfilled their plan by 500%.69

"Vymyt tor, urla tor" -- "Soviet government is good government," the Nivkhi say. "Soviet government has made a good life for us," said Nivkh Comrade Ryskun, a skipper on the Trapper kolkhoz and deputy of the Aleksandrovsk City Council. "The bloody fascists," he said, "want to enslave our people, when, thanks to Soviet government, we have only just begun to live. The fascists will never succeed. In fulfilling the orders from the front, our kolkhoz met its underwater fishing quotas before all the other kolkhozes in the Aleksandrovsk district and provided the country with hundreds of additional tsentners70 of navaga. For this the crews worked

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68Kolesnikov, Sotsialisticcheskoe Stroitel'stvo..., pp. 333-334, 348. For the role of the Sakhalin fishing industry during the Second World War more generally, see Krushanov, Stranitsy Istorii..., ch. 3.
69Kolesnikov, Sotsialisticheskoe Stroitels'tvo..., p. 519.
70A current unit of measurement denoting 100 kilograms.
fourteen hour days seven days a week. Each month every kolkhoznik contributes two days' pay to the defense fund, and many more have donated a further one thousand or fifteen hundred rubles to the cause. 71

The role of women in the Second World War is particularly important since Nivkh women had long been among the most reluctant of Sakhalin citizens to participate in the new rituals of Soviet life. Prior to the war, efforts to recruit women into politics and kolkhoz work had been fledgling. Soldiers of Culture organized the first Nivkh women's meeting in the Ado-Tym area village of Chirevo in 1928, and held six further meetings over the course of that year. Three women were elected to a Nivkh women's council, sewing courses were organized in both Chirevo and Viskovo in order to encourage women to pool their talents in clothing workshops, and the Committee of the North distributed questionnaires to district offices to assist them in measuring participation of native women in kolkhozes, village council meetings, the level of women's literacy and more. 72

Minutes from a 1933 Vereshchagino meeting, held in the yurta of a Nivkh woman Paiguk, show that twelve women attended to hear a visiting Russian doctor lecture on "Native Life Then and Now," and to learn how to encourage other women to use the bathhouse and not smoke around their children. If nothing else, the Committee of the North was by this time better organized, with lengthier instructions on enlightenment measures among women. In a series of proposed monthly gatherings, instructors would lead with a prescribed topic of discussion, beginning with "Native Life Then and Now," and then moving on to the class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, how to help the party to help the poor, how to create a cultured village, the Pioneer and Komsomol

71 "Agitatsionno-propagandistskata rabota sredi narodnosti Severa" GASO, fond Ryzhkov (1942), l. 21. The same file includes notes on model Nivkhi who served in the war.
72 STsDNI, f. 2, o. 2, d. 55 (1929), l. 9-20.
movements in the village, and so on.73

However, it was the absence of men that marshalled the majority of Nivkh women into the workforce through all-female fishing brigades. Most of the older Nivkh women I knew on Sakhalin in 1990 looked back to the war again and again.

Hard work? You can't imagine! All the men were gone during the war. So we had to do all the jobs. We collected wood for ourselves and for the kolkhoz -- that meant sawing down trees in the taiga and hauling them away by dog sled. Sometimes we had the horses. One year I delivered the mail between Langery and Tenge on reindeer sled. There were two sleds and about seven or eight deer. The deer are a little faster than the dogs. We didn't have any days off either. That was hard. We normally worked from about eight in the morning to six at night, but when the fish were running, that was another matter.

I was ten when the war started. I had only been in school a year but our mother had no money, so I started working on the kolkhoz. There were other young girls, thirteen, fifteen, but I was eleven -- I was the youngest. It didn't seem so strange at the time. My mother had already been working on Five Year Plan hauling fish, so I worked with her. Now it's all mechanized, but back then it was hellish work. We had to pull in the fish nets by hand. Most of the times we didn't have gloves, out on the ice, pulling in nets that had been underwater. It really hurt, but if you let go you only had to pull them in again. We cried, we ran around... anything to keep warm. But we were pretty good.

73STsDNI, f. 13, o. 1, d. 5a (1930-34), ll. 51-52, 67-69.
There were only fifteen of us in our brigade, but we worked hard. There was another brigade of men, sailors, who sometimes tried to help, but they had a terrible time! They couldn't work as well as us. When the war ended I was only nineteen. That's when I became a Stakhanovite. They gave us the award on August 31st, on the beach. Vorobev came from the raiispolkom [district executive council]. There were three of us from the women's brigade, and some men too. I still have the Stalin pin they gave me. I wear it on holidays.

The widespread integration of Nivkh women into the workforce was an important step for Soviet planners concerned with native development more broadly. By 1942, Sakhalin voters elected the first Nivkh woman to a local council seat, Tamara Urziuk from the New Life kolkhoz in Chir-Unvd.74

With the defeat of Japan in 1945, Allied Forces agreed to return South Sakhalin to Russian hands, ending forty years of Japanese rule on Karafuto, as the island was known to Japanese. The land transfer was a huge boon for the Soviets. While North Sakhalin's population reached only 106,000 in 1941, the Japanese had transformed Karafuto into a wealthy fishing and agricultural colony, with a population of 447,976 by 1944.75 It also signalled a tidal shift in Soviet human resources from north to south. The Sakhalin capital moved from Aleksandrovsk to Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk (formerly Toyo-hara) and hundreds of Soviet functionaries set about erasing traces of the Japanese occupation. The state relocated dozens of North Sakhalin kolkhozes to the south, necessitating yet another series of village closings and reshufflings. Vereshchagino was closed after moving Freedom and its mainly Nivkh work force twenty kilometres south to Romanovka. Tengi was closed when Five Year Plan went south, and its Nivkh kolkhozniks joined the

74 For more on Tamara Urziuk, see her application for party membership, STsDNI, f. 17, o. 2, d. 911 (1942), l. 3; and P. Chernikov, "Doch' nivkhskogo naroda" Sovetskii Sakhalin, 10 December 1950.
75 Stephan, Sakhalin, pp. 111, 125.
Vereshchagino emigrants on *Freedom*.

Such post-war moves were in keeping with an enormous state apparatus already in place for encouraging hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens to relocate to the Far East. In his history of the Far East, John Stephan cites the case of Valentina Khetagurova, who moved from Leningrad to the Far East at the age of eighteen. When Khetagurova authored a 1937 article, "Girls, Come to the Far East!" in the central newspaper *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, over 70,000 women responded.76 Throughout 1937 in particular, the pages of *Sovetskii Sakhalin* were filled with testimonials of satisfied arrivals who intended to stay on permanently. The oil worker P. M. Kalinin moved from Groznyi to the north Sakhalin town of Okha in 1931. "The people wanting to move to Sakhalin were so many that only the lucky ones were able... Sakhalin has taught me to love the heroic spirit of our working life, Sakhalin has tamed my wandering spirit."77 Likewise, the Stakhanovite border guard P. A. Burov, in his article, "I'm Staying to Work on Sakhalin" called on all demobilizing soldiers to remain on the island where they were needed.78 Starting in 1941, cinema houses in Moscow and Leningrad started showing the short film "Around Sakhalin" as a trailer before feature presentations in order to recruit further settlers. A virtuoso tribute to island cornucopia, the film offered rivers swelled with fish, verdant trees straining under the weight of their fruit, smiling kolkhozniki bearing flowers, brimming oil wells, a homage to Stalin ("The Best Friend of Physical Culture") and Nivkhi, decorated in military honours.79

For Nivkhi, the post-war Stalinist period marked a watershed of changes. It was a

76Stephan, ""Cleansing the Soviet Far East...,"" pp. 43, 54.
78P. A. Burov, "Ostais' rabotat' na Sakhaline" *Sovetskii Sakhalin* No. 211, August 14 (1937), p. 3.
79From the film archives of GASO. In contrast, the first known footage of Soviet Sakhalin from the 1929 NKVD film, "*Po Kamchatke i Sakhalini*" focused on the overcoming of the island's dark past [GASO].
slightly delayed version of what historian Yuri Slezkine described for Siberia as a whole earlier on.

By the mid-1930s the revolution was over. Some reformers had run out of steam, some had to be restrained and silenced by the commander-in-chief, and others achieved their aims through social mobility. Agriculture had been forcibly collectivized, and industry had been greatly expanded. Millions of class enemies had been fired, arrested, or exiled; millions of peasants (including class enemies) had moved into towns, and thousands of workers had become managers. There was no more opposition, and all political, scholarly, and artistic discourse had become official. Ethnography had been declared a bourgeois pseudoscience; the Committee of the North had ceased to exist; and the small peoples of the North had lost their special status as most of their reindeer.\(^{80}\)

Stalin had handed the administration of Siberia's small peoples to Glavsevmorput' in 1935, but the Sea Route Administration declined this responsibility three years later, such that from 1938 to 1957 there was no administrative body dealing expressly with indigenous peoples.

Cultural work among Sakhalin Nivkhi continued during this interlude, and it reflected the more streamlined professionalism that resonated throughout the Soviet administration after what was in some places over thirty years of tenure. Over the course of the War, the character of cultural work among the native populations changed: In place of Red Tents and Red Boats came agitkul'brigady, Culture Agitation Brigades versed in native languages, armed with films, books and a catalogue of lectures to choose from.\(^{81}\) Agitation, in the Leninist sense, was any work undertaken on behalf of the Party

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*\(^{80}\)Slezkine, "Russia's Small Peoples...", p. 338.
which sought to spread general ideas through slogans, brochures and posters. *Propagandisty*, in turn -- propaganda specialists -- would tour native communities explaining the finer points of party and government policies to smaller audiences.

In 1942, the Rybnovsk district could boast eighteen agitation collectives uniting 298 agitators, the majority of whom belonged either to the Party or the Komsomol. In keeping with the required excesses of the day, the Rybnovsk *agitkollektiv* reported logging a fantastic 7,730 conversations throughout the district [1937 popn. 6602]82 in the one year, conversations meaning anything from formal lectures to individual exchanges, primarily on war-related topics, Stalin's speech on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Revolution, and events unfolding in North Africa.83 In 1943, the 196 agitators of the East Sakhalin district [1937 popn. 4498]84 logged an equally remarkable 100 lectures in a 140-day period with a cumulative attendance of 6000. This meant that formal presentations were held twenty-one days out of each month, with approximately sixty people at each lecture.85 Among the East Sakhalin cadres were nineteen Nivkh and Orok agitators, including Comrades Sira from the kolkhoz *New Life*, Voksin from *New Way of Life* and Antik from *East* who were commended for their use of party brochures and posters in their work.86

In 1990, the agitators and the propagandists stood out little in the minds of most older Nivkhi, not because of their unimportance but because their near constant presences had made them almost a natural part of the landscape.

Agitators, propagandists, disseminators [*rasprostraniteli*] -- it all depends who you were talking about. Sure, they used to come around, encourage

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82*GASO*, f. 3, o. 1, d. 50 (1937), l. 19.
83*STsDNI*, f. 13, o. 1, d. 70 (1943), l. 1.
84*GASO*, f. 3, o. 1, d. 50 (1937), l. 22. The East Sakhalin district was eventually renamed as the Nogliki district.
85*STsDNI*, f. 16, o. 1, d. 53a (1943), ll. 17-18.
86*GASO*, f. 53, o. 25, d. 16 (1944), ll. 50-6.
us to study, to join the kolkhoz, to tell us how Soviet power related to us. But most of all it was to study. To go to school. To go to the literacy classes. In the 40s and 50s they read mostly political lectures. Lots of people used to show up for the stories about Stalin and Churchill and the meeting at Yalta. Vasilii Kuzenko was the one I remember most. I can't remember what happened to him.

By all accounts, large numbers of people did attend the patriotic lectures, including Nivkhi. The lectures were not only a testimony to how the highly streamlined state wanted to present itself, but to the growing success of winning over the populace to a collective mission. One evening in June of 1990 I sat with two women who had been children in a two-family Nivkh village that had since gone on to become a bustling port. We met in the home of one of the women who lived in the tumble-down main office of the since defunct local prison. It was a nostalgic evening as they recalled the different kinds of plants and berries that use to grow in the area before it was settled, the friends and relatives lost during the purges, and the ways in which people's lives had changed. It was only late into the conversations, long after I had retired my notebook and desisted with constructive questions, that the woman whose father had been taken away under Stalin began the same topic which was repeated again and again over the course of my stay in brief renditions: "Stalin has a bad reputation now, but he was handsome, don't you think?" "There were a lot of good things that Stalin did too... People blame Stalin for everything now, but there was an entire system at work, not just one man. I liked Stalin. I supported him then and I support him now."

The heady years after the war were marked by proclamations of economic triumph. At Freedom's new location in Romanovka, the net intake per fisherman almost doubled between in the three year period between 1954 and 1957; in 1957 the kolkhoz overfulfilled
its plan by 235%. Projections through to the early 1960s on all north Sakhalin fishing kolkhozes were comparably ambitious, and plans were approved to diversify into fish processing. Whether these striking figures had any basis in fact is open to question, but their importance here is the contribution they made to perceptions of social development. By the time the Nivkh ethnographer Chuner Taksami hailed the "renaissance of the Nivkh people" his work reflected the official position that the great stride into history had been made. Nivkh living standards had been increased by such an extent since the 1930s, he contended, that "they differed little from those of the Russians." Moreover, the new way of life had brought about fundamental changes in Nivkh consciousness.

New psychological characteristics developed which were typical of socialist societies -- political awareness, a socialist attitude to labour, Soviet patriotism, trust and respect for other peoples and the feeling of civil obligation toward the socialist homeland.

The spirit of change was the order of the day, but there was still sufficient ambiguity in the implementation of the Soviet nationality policy for the Nivkhi to maintain some fundamental aspects of an otherwise familiar lifestyle: extensive fishing rights, a seasonal work cycle and perhaps most importantly, residence in favourable territories.

Throughout the Stalinist period, the darker sides to Sakhalin's past had by no means disappeared. Secret prisons and labour camps still lined the central artery of the island from Pobedino on Aniva Bay to Pogibi on the northwest shore from at least 1947 onwards, and possibly earlier. By the start of the 1950s, seven corrective labour colonies housed roughly 5000 prisoners, 70% of whom had been arrested under article 58

88 Ibid., 51.
89 Ibid., 60.
90 Documents from GASO suggest the existence of labour camps throughout the 1930s, although the earliest verifiable sources are from 1947. From S. Sakhtaganov, "Sakhlag," Germes 1-15 July 1990.
of the RSFSR Criminal Code as "enemies of the people." By 1953, 12,500 prisoners were working on two of the most notorious work projects on Sakhalin in the Soviet period -- a railway leading from Pobedino to Pogibi, and an underground rail tunnel running the seven kilometres under the Tatar Strait from Pogibi to Lazarev on the mainland.\footnote{Projects No. 506 and 508, from Sakhtaganov, "Sakhalag": A. Pashkov and G. Dudarets, "Ob"ekt No. 506" SN, 23 December 1989, p. 6; "Materik, GULAG, Sakhalin" Komsomol'skaya Pravda, 2 March 1989, p. 4.} When Stalin died in March of 1953 and a political amnesty was declared the following month, the number of prisoners working on the project dropped to 3500. Former subway construction workers were recruited from Moscow to continue working on the tunnel, despite the warnings of engineers that the force of the current at that point in the Strait was too strong to permit underground passages. Workers on both the Amur and Sakhalin sides managed to dig underground for three kilometres on each side, leaving only one kilometre between them. In Pogibi, residents speak of the dramatic end to the project on a day in the 1950s when workers struck an underground lake, and hundreds were drowned. "Stalin waves his right hand --a city grows up in a swamp, he waves his left -- factories and plants spring up, he waves his left -- swift rivers start to flow," went the homage to the Soviet leader in a verse from the folklorist Kovalev.\footnote{Frank J. Miller, Folklore for Stalin (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990), p. 81.} But in an eerie rejoinder to Stalin's resolve was the Nivkh admonition recorded by Kreinovich in the 1920s, "When winter comes, lightning sinks to the bottom of the Tatar Strait, just to the north of Cape Pogibi. This place is called nyum'u. There the water freezes first. Lightning lives there like a blind man, not seeing anything."\footnote{Kreinovich cited in Lydia Black, "Dogs, Bears and Killer Whales," p. 65.}

Despite efforts after the amnesty to rehabilitate those who disappeared during the purges such as Aleksei Churka, the late 1950s were a time to look forward rather than look back.

In 1959 a publishing house was established in Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk that has
since issued popular local histories for national consumption. Epithets such
as 'treasure island,' 'gem,' 'Soviet forepost on the Pacific,' 'order-bearing
island,' and 'beloved island,' have been promoted in the hope of ridding
Sakhalin of its unfavourable connotations."

Where early activists in the 1920s and early 30s were prone to look syncretically at Nivkh and Soviet ways of life, a wartime report on North Sakhalin Nivkhi summed up the shift in perspective by noting, "There is no need to write about the position of the peoples of the north before the establishment of Soviet power on Sakhalin. With the arrival of Soviet power, the resurrection of these peoples, in the fullest sense of the word, got underway."

For Nivkhi, their stride across a thousand years was considered to have been formally achieved.

94Stephan, Sakhalin, p. 186.
Chapter Six/ 1960s Resettlements and the Time of Stagnation

"Ask any Nivkh. We are all from somewhere else."
-Nivkh schoolteacher, 1990

In the autumn of 1990 after a long fish run, some of the smoke from the stormy meetings over the future of the kolkhoz began to clear, and as everyone's routine in the village of Rybnoe began to slow down, I resolved to extricate myself in favour of a trip to the near empty town of Pogibi down the western coast. Pogibi had loomed large in my mind throughout the summer of interviews: Vasia Pogun had driven Enemies of the People there on his dog sled from Rybnovsk in the 1930s, and those that weren't interned there, initially in a prison or later on in the 40s to work on the notorious underwater tunnel project, were shipped along the next leg down to Aleksandrovsk. It was once the juncture point of several closed military camps. But most importantly, it was peripheral enough to my research to afford something of a retreat.

North Sakhalin's infrastructure is deceptive, for despite roughly 100,000 people living on the top half of the island at the time, a regular and inexpensive air service made up for an almost complete lack of roads. Pogibi is only eighty kilometres down the coast from Rybnoe, yet it was only after seven hours in a kolkhoz truck headed in the opposite direction for Okha, followed by two more hours in a cargo bush plane, that I managed to reach my destination. My high spirits from getting away diminished only with the descent of the airplane. As it touched the ground, I realized that I had propelled myself on the spur of the moment into a town where I clearly knew no one, where, as a foreigner at a time when foreigners were not often about, I was arriving unannounced, where I had heard something about there maybe being a place to stay, and where, if no one in particular minded, I wanted to photograph crumbling Stalinist labour camps.

I expressed this realization to one of my two fellow passengers, a health official in

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a bright pink pant suit, who resolved to take matters into her own hands. Handing me two large bags of unspecified frozen foodstuffs, she commissioned me to pass them on to her medical counterpart on site. We parted with the plane's motors still roaring on the forest airstrip -- she, pleased that she could fly on across the strait to other business, and I, satisfied with my flimsy pretext for knocking on strangers' doors. As the plane pulled away, I chose the footpath on the forest's edge that looked the most travelled, and set towards it.

On the other side of the forest grove stood some twenty tar paper trailers which housed construction workers working on the pipeline that goes across the strait. I wandered from cabin to cabin asking where I might find the town nurse, and finally planted myself on her stoop with my by then dripping bags of melting edibles. Beside me in the sweltering heat, one of two sleeping miniature dogs rose on its legs to observe my arrival. Its stomach convulsed slightly, and it neatly coughed up an entire fish head, or parts thereof, looked balefully in my direction, and laid down again to rest. We were all swimming in the heat and waiting for someone I did not know. Several hours later, the Pogibi nurse did show up, receiving her thawed parcels with grace, and showing little distress at the thought of a stranger arriving to photograph the lesser sides of Soviet history.

Pogibi is at the narrowest point between Sakhalin and mainland, where across the Tatar Strait to the town of Lazarev lie only seven kilometres. From Lazarev, Sakhalin's flat stretches of sand and dwarf pine make it look unreachable, but from Pogibi, the tall hills of the Amur basin rise up sharply against the horizon, making it impossible to believe that the other side is more than a few minutes away. When the Nivkhi, the Japanese and the Manchus travelled the area at the start of the nineteenth century, Pogibi was known as Noteto.1 And as late as 1970, it was a town of some two thousand people involved in

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1John A. Harrison, "Kita Yezo Zusetsu..." Proceedings of the American Philosophical
forestry, oil, border patrols, and the movement of goods back and forth between the mainland, and the very closed island. However by 1990, save for the few dozen itinerant construction workers refitting oil pipes by the airstrip, only twenty people remained behind among the various ruins of camps and schools and stores left behind.

The Pogibi nurse passed me on to the meteorological station in the original Pogibi a kilometre away. It is in old Pogibi that one of its last older residents, who along with her three daughters, their three husbands and their children (otherwise at state boarding schools) form the remaining family who maintain the weather station and their own small farms. It was a startlingly vaguely romantic kind of isolation (to an interloper), with sporadic electricity from their own generators, water from wells and mail service only once a month in the remains of a verdant village where it appeared that several hundred neighbours had closed up their homes for short absences and just never returned.

I spent all of three days in Pogibi, having waited a suitable amount of time for the currents in the Tatar Strait to calm sufficiently to travel by motorboat to visit the camps. And in this respect, I found what I had come for. Along with two men from the meteorological post, we visited two sites at the very narrowest point between the island and the mainland, where the remaining fifty metres of wooden pilings from Stalin’s ill-fated bridge jutted out into the water. The first camp was from the Stalinist era, had been closed down in the late 1950s and had been used on and off until 1985 for military purposes. It was now a popular stopping ground for hunters, and it was evident that someone had been there in the last few days. There were some ten buildings left spread out over an acre, some storehouses and barracks positioned around a stone monument to Soviet power, and an eternal flame, since extinguished, set into the ground by a steel red star. The taiga had grown up around the camp since it had last been used. There was a watch tower which was barely visible now through the brush. The floors of the barracks

Society, 99 (1955), No. 2, pp. 93-117.
had rotted and fallen through, though the inspirational slogans of border-guard-dom, "We will defend the Pacific!" were still legible over entranceways. The sense of isolation was tremendous.

The second camp, the meteorologists said, was dated from before the 1917 Revolution. It was all but impossible to find after a few kilometres of wandering through the brush. Said to still be standing ten years ago, with the names of inmates scrawled on the crossbeams from the turn of the century, the buildings had evidently succumbed to their own weight, and the remains of five or six very large buildings could be identified through the thickets only by the rooftops and attics which rested on the surface of the ground. Each of the buildings had plunged so evenly into the soil around it that to crawl into the vaulted roof chambers was to find an almost perfectly dry, perfectly preserved attic space looking almost to have been built a few years previous were it not for the fact that the entire first storey was now interred in soil.

Both of these camps lost their reasons for existence over three different political generations when first the Petersburg and then the Moscow central governments called an end to the keeping of prisoners on the island. But to focus on these more obvious remains would be to overlook the more compelling ruins left behind in Pogibii itself. To walk from the construction worker barracks to old Pogibii, as I did each morning, was to pass the concrete hull of the former two-storey cinema house, the gaping shell of a now rusting water tower, and some dozen two-room wooden homes from the 1930s now used as hunting sheds. Around the weather station, with its absurdist yard of brightly coloured weather vanes, precipitation trays and mechanical wind gauges, the small wooden buildings left behind had slumped into the pastures on the edge of the strait. My first tour from the oldest daughter and her husband was an act of the imagination. "There's my old school," she said, as we looked at the boarded up remains of a one-room cabin and flag post, "It used to go up to the eighth grade." We crawled our way into the old store,
which still had its shelves and display cases. In turn we paid respects to the former post office, and to the homes of several neighbours, now serving as chicken coops.

At the end of the first day, when the sea had been stormy and grey and generally opposed to small motorboats, the health official from the plane trip returned, and we dined with the family at the station in the old part of the town. The houses and pastures were plunged into darkness, in stark contrast to the glittering lights which rose on the horizon from the homes in Lazarev across the water. At a table in the yard of the main house, set amidst the weather vanes and with a view to the sea, we lingered over a dimly lit dinner of salmon pies, followed by much homemade wine and conversations about UFOs. "But what about those five people from outer space that landed in Canada? There was a ship and they all got out... No, that was Brazil!" Late into the evening when it seemed already too dark to find our way back to the housing trailers by the construction site, it was voted that we adjourn to the club. I had little idea of what a club might amount to under such circumstances, and as we entered a long, dark, windowless shed on the water's edge, I was prepared for grotesque, clandestine rituals. I was expecting something in order of a damp, decaying barn as we stood with the matriarch, her three daughters and two of the husbands, waiting in the dark for the remaining son-in-law to fiddle with the generator.

Instead, with the lights activated, it seemed clear that the clubhouse was the one piece of town life that had not been allowed to court oblivion. We found ourselves in an auditorium with rows of wrought iron cinema seats with worn red velvet upholstery, red flocked wallpaper, art deco style glass light fixtures on the walls, and windows painted over black from the Second World War. There was an oil barrel wood stove in the rear, and alongside, over thirty reels of film sent six months earlier by the weather administration. In brighter days, Lenin's famous aphorism had called Pogibi to culture: A long, red velvet banner over the stage read, "Art belongs to the People!"

Since it was readily clear that all present had seen each of these films at least once,
the evening's selection fell to myself, and we whiled away the evening before a Soviet murder mystery featuring French capitalist spies and a decadent chateau. The chateau paled in comparison to what seemed the more extraordinary splendour of an evening spent in one Soviet cinema which had not lost its appeal for the masses. Over the course of the summer I had been to many abandoned towns along the Sakhalin coastline. Some were so empty as to have been created by Hollywood rather than Brezhnev; others like Romanovka and Liugi had, respectively, either a handful of Nivkhi in their sixties and seventies who would not leave, or a few couples who had informally taken refuge from kolkhoz life. But in Pogibi the atmosphere was neither of recalcitrance or retreat, and the residents were neither of an alternative social vision or outcasts. In this small, strange remainder of the Soviet past extant but for another stroke of an administrative pen, it was clear that at least in the minds of the people who lived there, far more of Pogibi remained.

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In 1957, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Soviet Council of Ministers adopted Decree No. 300, "On Measures for the Further Economic and Cultural Development of Peoples of the North." The initiative was intended to redress what had been twenty years of a policy vacuum since the Northern Sea Route administration had abdicated its involvement. But in practice the decree was overshadowed by a seemingly unrelated resolution introduced by Khrushchev on the strengthening of collective and state farms. The idea was that fewer settlements would mean fewer problems of coordination and distribution.

These were not the first resettlements on North Sakhalin, nor for Nivkhi in

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particular. Since their concerted colonization of the island from the mid-1800s, Russians had been obliging Nivkhi to relocate on an almost regular basis. Prior to and immediately after the revolution, Russian and Japanese settlers expressly overtook Nivkh communities on the presumption that they were the most auspiciously located. Collectivization itself was about "concentration" and "strengthening" of the work force, and the inertia from this process meant that across the native north from the 1940s onward, as the Evenk writer V. N. Uvachan wrote, small kolkhozes were gradually merged with others.³ Uvachan reasoned that the first waves of collectivization in the north in the 1930s had brought about an artificially enforced specialization of labour. Originally, most communities mixed herding, fishing and hunting until these first kolkhozes dictated a focus on one activity. Hence, as kolkhozes united to broaden their occupational base in the years following, their numbers dropped. In the Chukotka and Evenk national okrugs for example, the number of kolkhozes dropped 30-40% between the 1940s and 50s.⁴ On North Sakhalin, the process of kolkhoz relocations was further accelerated by the total shift in resources from the north to the south after Japan relinquished Karafuto at the close of World War II.

The scourge of the resettlements on Sakhalin in the 1960s, however, was that in almost every case when one kolkhoz had to be selected from among many for expansion, the least profitable enterprises on the least profitable sites were chosen. Indeed, the only criteria for selecting which communities to expand and which to close appear to have been proximity to existing regional centres and the consequent ease of administration.

For Nivkhi, these latest moves and village closings were the most visible and sobering indication of how much and how quickly their lives had changed. On Sakhalin's northwest and northeast coasts, the number of villages lining the shore between 1905 and

³V. N. Uvachan, Gody, ravnye vekam (Stroitel'stvo sotsializma na Krainem Severe) (Moscow: Mysl', 1984).
1975 dropped by more than 75%. Between 1962 and 1986 alone, the number of settlements on Sakhalin as a whole dropped from approximately one thousand to 329.5

The burden on local government was to legitimize the resettlements in a manner consistent with the policy prescribed by Moscow. In 1963, on Sakhalin's eastern shore, the collectives Red Sakhalin in Pil'tun and East in Chaivo were shut down and transferred to the regional centre of Nogliki. The Nogliki party committee reasoned that the economic and cultural standards of the towns had become unmaintainable: Salaries at the two kolkhozes had fallen to 920 and 600 rubles a month respectively, work loads had been decreasing, and the town's locations -- seventy-five and 150 kilometres from Nogliki -- made it increasingly difficult for the state to provide proper food supplies, communications, educational and medical services. They pointed out that sending children to the boarding school in Nogliki imposed financial obligations on parents, and that, "after lengthy absences from their parents to attend school, children want to return to their villages for the summer, avoiding pioneer camp, and thereby weakening the process of collective upbringing."6

In contrast to the 1963 explanation which listed the average salaries of kolkhozniks in Red Sakhalin and East as a disparaging 920 and 600 rubles a month, a 1962 kolkhoz report lists much higher figures of 1567 and 1033 rubles a month, which

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5 A. I. Gladyshev, ed., Administrativno-territorial'noe delenie sakhalinskoi oblasti (Uzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1986), pp. 79-106, 125. Gurvich estimated that as a result of the kolkhoz strengthening plan, the number of enterprises in northern regions was reduced by more than sixty per-cent. For example, on Chukotka between 1953 and 1966, the government reduced the number of selkhozarteli from 1,444 to 300, and the number of fishing artels from 600 to 250. Inversely, the number of state farms in the area, considered by the state to be a more developed form of socialist industry, rose from 50 to 200, from I. S. Gurvich, Etnicheskoe razvitie..., p. 94; "Osushchestvlenie leninskoi natsional'noi politiki u narodov Krainego Severa SSSR" Sovetskaia Etnografija 1 (1970), p. 26. These figures are comparable to those on the Khanty-Mansiiskii okrug in Kerstin Kuoljok, Revolution in the North, p. 128.
6 TsGAOR, f. 53, o. 25, d. 2612, l. 53.
were in fact a profitable increase of 9% from five years earlier. Moreover, Chaivo's East had been the only regional kolkhoz to successfully meet its yearly plan in 1962, and the Nivkh brigadiers of both Red Sakhalin and East were favourably singled out for their production.\(^7\) In 1990, one of the same brigadiers described the meeting where the village closure was announced,

None of us could believe the news when we first heard it. The town had grown to about 700 people, about 300 of us, Nivkhi. The government had spent so many years building us up! There was a school, a laboratory, two clubs, a kolkhoz... They had only just finished a whole new set of houses and a two-storey hospital on the edge of the village. A new rail line too. I had been a party organizer [\textit{partorg}] there before and I didn't know a thing. They called a meeting of the whole village. The \textit{raiispolkom} explained that small settlements were no longer profitable for the country, that they were too broadly spread out and maybe even dangerous. Then they tried to tell us that the town was badly situated, that there was a danger of flooding.

There's never been a flood there ever!

On the northwest coast, where the fishing kolkhozes Freedom and 21st Party Congress\(^8\) were closed down and amalgamated with the failing Red Dawn, the experiences were similar.

Vasilii Mikhailovich the brigadier assured me that "Suddenly they moved us all here. People were frightened into leaving. Sometimes the militia would have to come in trucks and even move people out by force." But across Sakhalin, the stories told by both

\(^7\) For favourable reports from 1959 to 1962 on Nivkh kolkhozes which were closed down thereafter, see \textit{GASO}, f. 53, o. 25, d. 2612, ll. 9-12.; A. I. Krushanov, ed., \textit{Strantsy istorii rybnoe promyshlennosti Sakhalinskoj Oblasti (1925-1987 gg.)} (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: DVKI, 1989), p. 213.

\(^8\) \textit{Oblyakhokolkhozsoiuiz} renamed Liugi's Stalin kolkhoz as 21st Party Congress after Khrushchev's "secret speech" criticizing Stalin.
Nivkhi and Russians about the resettlement operations suggested more incremental withdrawal. The younger generations were usually the first to accede to the offers of better housing elsewhere, while among the older generations and the hesitant, party members were the first to be told to go. The school would be moved, forcing parents with children to follow. From the stories and archival accounts, one can chart almost a hierarchy of organized oblivion, with the hospital next to go, then the village council, then the post office, then the store, and then the electricity.

Of course, people didn't want to leave. Here there isn't the same kind of fish. There you'll find everything. Those that didn't want to go stayed behind. But how can you stay behind if there is no kolkhoz any longer?
No school? No store? So you move.

Similar stories were repeated again and again.

The 1960s were a turning point for us, when they began the closings. They closed the Shirokopadskii plant. There were five villages in that area and all five were closed. That's five villages that automatically lost their reason for existence. The Khoenskii kombinat was closed, that was another six villages. Here in the northwest we had the villages of Tuzrik, Viski, Astrakhanovka, Nevel'skaia, Uspenovka, Liugi, Kefi, Naumovka, Grigor'evka, Kalinovka, Valuska, Third Station, Fourth Station, Romanovka, Lupolovo, Ten'gi, Pogibi... and all the rest around there... all gone!

And yet to cast the moves in a roundly negative light would not be accurate. For most of those involved, only in retrospect has the resettlement programme come to be so rued. At the time, the plan met with few incidents of overt resistance. Most people interpreted the decision as official policy and assumed that it would be for the best. As one Nogliki
resident remarked in 1990, "The tragedy is that nothing happened. The empty houses in Nogliki were all ready. The kolkhoz had already been built. Most people just got up and moved. That's the tragedy -- that there was no tragedy."

Indeed, what sets the 1960s resettlements apart from those that immediately followed World War II was the absence of economic virtue. By 1968, Nogliki's reconstituted East was palpably failing: Debt was increasing, plans were not being fulfilled, and the kolkhoz recommended more expeditions further afield, namely back to Pil'tun and Chaivo. At both East and Red Dawn, the average fish catches were four times lower than the average for the region, while the average kolkhoz salaries were two and a half times lower. In 1969, when residents of the defunct town of Venskoe complained in a letter to the Sakhalin Regional Executive Committee (Oblispolkom) that they had been moved involuntarily, the Oblispolkom claimed otherwise. "People wanted to move to Nogliki immediately," they argued; there was little interest in traditional life, and the authors of the letter, "the majority of whom are elderly and illiterate," did not fully understand its contents. Chuner Taksami, the Leningrad ethnographer and initiator of the Venskoe letter, was chided for his "incorrect, subjective approach... which, advocating the preservation of 'northern peoples as children of nature,' was only representing obsolete customs, morals and way of life." The committee's response coincided with the recasting of the broader Soviet nationality policy at that time, whereby Nivkh were to have bloomed (rastsveli), drawn closer to Russian culture (sblizili) and finally merged with it (stili). But the persistence of expressly Nivkh cultural forms (language, dress

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9GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897a, ll. 101-104.
10Ibid., l. 30.
11GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897, ll. 4-6.
12For sources on this three-step process, see Yaroslav Bilinsky and Lapidus in Chapter One, footnote 35. Lapidus is right to point out that by the "time of stagnation" most Soviets had long given up the idea of ethnic merger. What interests me here are the contradictions of a policy which continued to be advocated long after it lost its salience.
and diet) plied at the contradictions of the official position: Traditional life was at once to be lauded (as a marker of the freedom of peoples) and suppressed (as a lingering resistance to abstract notions of Soviet homogeneity).

The resettlements, rather than representing a merger of collective interests, reduced the Nivkh to second class status. In the shuffle of kolkhoz reorganizations, Russians supplanted Nivkh in the vast majority of skilled and administrative positions. In 1968, despite East's status as a Nivkh kolkhoz, only 19% of Nivkh in the collective worked in skilled positions, and few were being trained for promotion.\textsuperscript{13} Figures show that overall kolkhoz membership dropped sharply with the moves while there was a marked increase in unemployment and underemployment for the Nivkh community. Many who were unable to find work in the towns to which they relocated lost their pensions and state benefits. Several years later, the Soviet scholar V. I. Boiko would explain this puzzling failure of Nivkh to rise within the ranks of their own kolkhozes as a casualty of their great leap forward.

The poor work performance of the indigenous population in industrial production, without question, negatively affects supervisors' attitudes to sending native workers to be trained... In the kolkhoz "East," where over 30% of the working native population of the Nogliki raion are employed, only six natives were sent for special training over the entire period of the 10th Five Year Plan...

The strict reglamentation of the working day, unfamiliar working conditions and the high intensity of industrial production do not correspond to the ethnopsychological makeup of the indigenous population... For Nivkh, not having gone through the stage of the industrial revolution, this is particularly difficult.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897, l. 73.
However, since Nivkh character did not impede their successful management of kolkhozes either before or after WWII, their collective demotion would appear to be more a question of social justice.

Despite the proposals set forth in Decree No. 300, the new East was in disarray. The medical clinic was not being funded, bath facilities were not functioning, and there was no work being done to address growing rates of alcoholism and illiteracy. Of particular consequence was the introduction of regulations governing the amount of salmon which Nivkhi were entitled to catch each year. Through the 1950s, the Nivkh diet was still heavily based on salmon: Individuals consumed on the average up to 1000 kilograms each year (much of it in dried form), an amount far beyond that which could be afforded in local stores. In 1962 an annual limit of 200 kilograms was imposed, and in 1969, with concern for ever-weakening kolkhoz production, the limit was further reduced to sixty kilograms. If Nivkhi had joined the Soviet family of nations, it was reasoned, there was no cause for them to be treated exceptionally. After the resettlements the reduction in fishing allowances turned out to be yet another reason for many Nivkhi, otherwise patriotic, to question their social contract.

As of the 1970 USSR census, Siberia's indigenous population graduated another rung from "the small peoples" (malye narody) to "the nationalities of the north" (narodnosti severa). By definition, their being narodnosti meant that they had still not achieved the level of development characteristic of the larger, fully industrialized peoples of the Soviet Union, but the diminutive implications of malye (meaning "numerically small," as in malochislennye, or just "small") and the relative position it suggested within the USSR's multiethnic union, was jettisoned. So too, the documents dealing with northern native peoples themselves changed, as specificity gave way to effusive

15GASO, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897a, ll. 72-78.
16V. N. Uvachan, Gody, Ravnye Vekam, p. 4.
17Cf. Chapter One, footnote 32.
generalizations about northern accomplishments. A. I. Krushanov's 1985 *History of the Sakhalin Fishing Industry*, full of material on Nivkh in the pre- and post-war periods, effectively grinds to a halt at 1961, when the archival documents drift into accounts of "further accelerated development," progress and success. In the same period, lesser known internal government documents began to cite the drops in investment for native education, housing, medical care, and professional development, but the more common official narratives began with testimonies to how Nivkh were subscribing to higher and higher numbers of magazine subscriptions, thereby improving their lot.

For many Soviets, this onset of the Brezhnev period is looked back upon as the "time of stagnation." In official circles, it marked the achievement of advanced socialism. And for many Nivkh, it was an era of slowly declining standards of living after the relative prosperity of the initial post-war period. Advanced socialism, again, also meant fewer exceptional policies toward northern peoples. In 1963, when the Russian Ministry of Education sent a letter to the Sakhalin oblispolkom requesting that they outline their needs for native language education, Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk responded that native languages in the region were not studied due to lack of interest.

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"Before we lived in the swamps, and were unable to rise out, but today we stand with the mountains, and for that, Lenin, thank you!"

-from the Festival of Northern Peoples, Nogliki, 1970

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18 *GASO*, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897a (1968), ll. 26-34, 99-112; *GASO*, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897ots (1968), ll. 128-136; "Uverennym shagom -- k namechennym rubezham (s otchentogo sobraniia upolnomochennykh rybkozzo "Vostok")" Znamia Truda, 24 March 1967, *GASO* f. 53, o. 25, d. 3897a-ots (1967), l. 1830.


20 *GASO*, f. 53, o. 25, d. 3584, l. 44.
What made the 1960s resettlements so compelling was not only the attendant drop in quality of living for the indigenous community but the way in which they visually transformed the Sakhalin landscape. Coastlines which were once lined with villages every ten kilometres became littered with ghost towns.

The absurdity of the 1960s moves made even the harsher collectivization of the distant 1930s seem almost more favourable by comparison. With little economic rationale to explain the dramatic shifts, the explanations given were primarily cultural ones.

The creation of concentrated villages in northern native areas goes hand in hand with the raising of their social and cultural potential, the creation of new forms of housing and the mastery of non-traditional types of work. All this leads to a change in their ethnic self-consciousness. For these national minorities, life in multiethnic, multilingual villages and labour collectives is connected with the need for preserving their "ethnic identity," their roots and their cultural self-respect. In other words, the accelerated development of an international way of life and the transformation of traditional cultures into socialist ones sharpens rather than weakens the need for recognizing the diversity of national cultures.21

Rather than strengthening and internationalizing, the resettlements produced a spirit of absence felt on economic, social and personal levels. Rather than moving forward, they generated a retrospective force that pulled many back. The brigadier from Chaivo remained behind when all of East was transferred to Nogliki. By 1970 he was the only one of 700 remaining and to this day he visits Nogliki only a few months each year. Remaining behind in empty towns which no longer officially existed, he and others like him became icons of a "traditional" way of life which had become reified and reinforced by

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21 Derevianko and Boiko, "Puti kul'turnogo razvitija...," 11.
a policy expressly designed to diminish it. In creating a spatial dichotomy between past and present, the resettlements divided allegiances by obliging people to choose (and in most cases making the choice for them).

The fortunes of both *Red Dawn* and *East* continued to decline through the 70s and 80s, with the worsening ecological situation and growing bureaucratic regulations causing a drop in fish catches. Both kolkhozes have "national" status, meaning they receive special incentives and allowances as largely indigenous enterprises, but by 1982, Nivkh comprised only 120 out of the 336 members of *East* and only 127 out of 400 members of *Red Dawn*. In 1980, a further decree, "On Measures for the Further Economic and Social Development of the Peoples of the North" was enacted by the Soviet Council of Ministers. The government spent an enormous amount of money in the implementation of the decree -- 31.2 billion rubles by 1990, or 169,125 rubles for every indigenous representative in Siberia, colossal sums over a period when monthly salaries averaged 500 rubles. However, the Nivkh writer Vladimir Sangi, who helped draft the decree, noted ruefully that the funds intended for the cultural and economic development of the Nivkh were spent by local authorities to purchase oil pipes, automobiles, thousands of pairs of plastic skies, typewriters, calculators and compact toilets.

By the late 1980s, the retrospective assessment for Siberian peoples as a whole had little to say for the virtues of internationalization.

The results of sixty years worth of development are not very comforting:

from highly qualified reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen, native

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22I. Krupnik and A. V. Smoliak, "Sovremennoe polozhenie korennoy naseleniiia severa sakhalinskoj oblasti" [dokladnaya zapiska po materialam poezdki s sentiabria 1982 g.] (Moscow: Institute of Ethnography), 7.
northerners have been transformed into auxiliary workers, loaders, watchmen and janitors.\textsuperscript{25}

This process of lumpenization of small peoples is looked upon by some 'optimistic' experts as a 'new progressive phenomenon - growth of the working class,' while the profound social alienation, passivity and pessimism engendered by this situation are regarded as 'relics of the primitive patriarchal past.'\textsuperscript{26}

Public health statistics from recent years indicate the extent to which decades of required self-congratulation occluded considerable problems. As of 1988, the life expectancy for Siberian indigenous peoples was eighteen years lower than that of the USSR as a whole -- forty-five years for men and fifty-five years for women. Social problems such as alcoholism and suicide are four to five times as high as in the rest of the country, and few native communities have acquired the trappings of modern living: the housing base has changed little since the 1950s; only 3\% of native homes have access to gas mains; 0.4\% have running water, and only 0.1\% are connected to district heating systems.\textsuperscript{27} The venting of frustration over this state of affairs perhaps reached its formal climax at the first All-Union Congress of Northern Peoples held in Moscow in March of 1990, when speaker after speaker mounted the podium to lash out at government mismanagement. Nikolai Solov'ev, one of the Sakhalin delegates, joined in the litany of lament by bemoaning decades of "shameless historians... discrimination and loss... government fictions... ecological disasters..." and "hypnotic blinders."\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25}Pika, "Malye narody severa..." 306.
\textsuperscript{26}Pika and Prokhorov, "Bol'shie problemy..." 80.
\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28}Nikolai Solov'ev, [Presentation to the Congress of Northern Peoples, Moscow, March 1989].
While the spirit of disillusionment is now pervasive, it is nonetheless critical to bear in mind that Nivkh experience over the last seventy years does not render them passive, tragic figures. The Sakhalin Nivkh with whom I worked were no more or less patriotic or resistant to Soviet ideology than the Russians, Ukrainians and Tatars around them. Indeed, in his research among the Evenki of the Podkamennaia Tunguska River Basin in central Siberia, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov has contended that Evenki in that area were even more patriotic than either the administrative staff of the local settlements or the Russian newcomers.

...Evenks tend to value administrative honours more than the Russians -- medals and diplomas for the achievements in the building of socialism' are kept in the forest among other precious things... The most distinguished reindeer herders in the region, the restless and sincere defenders of the 'socialist values' of sovkhoz organization, those who are usually invited to the regional administrative gatherings as tokens of 'the progress of the Soviet minor nationalities,' come from the families that suffered most during collectivisation.29

In the 1920s, as the Committee of the North sought to formulate a development strategy that reverberated between both of the dominant perceptions of Siberian peoples -- protecting their cultural integrity while preparing them for radical transformation -- Nivkhi who look back on the period recall little hesitation about the new state of affairs.

The pre-revolutionary government wasn't interested in us the same way the Soviets were. When the Soviets came, the children started to study in schools. We got a hospital. Of course it was better than before. The first time I gave birth it was in a tent by myself, in keeping with Nivkh tradition.

It was a frightening experience. Sometimes other women were with us but not always. One woman I knew gave birth alone in the winter and her legs became frostbitten. The Japanese doctor had to amputate.

The nascent educational system in particular was recalled again and again.

We studied in Nivkh for two grades only, and then the readers ran out or something. We were pretty poor. For the first two years we had lessons from our primer and in mathematics. All in Nivkh. What a shame there aren't any of the textbooks left. It was so easy to read the Latin letters. We missed our parents but it was fun to be with the other kids. We were all of different ages and we were pretty wild.

Those likeliest to have resisted the cultural program were the Nivkh shamans, but since Soviet power was not established on Sakhalin until 1925, there was little or no lag time between the point when shamans might have realized their potential threat to Soviet construction and the point when they began to be the subjects of concerted persecution toward the end of the decade. For the Nivkhi, the Stalinist period was undoubtedly the most turbulent of the last century however, as discussed in the previous chapter, the reign of terror was combined with the attractions of modernity. Given the weight of disorder and uncertainty during and after perestroika, it is also easier to see that the Stalinist period is remembered by many Nivkhi for the seeming prosperity that followed in the wake of the purges. As one of the former Nivkh chairmen of Freedom remarked,

It was a completely different atmosphere then. You had to get going, you had to work, but the mood was good. That was the important thing. That was the same time when there was no limit to the amount of fish that we could catch. You fulfilled the plan or you didn't. But you could fish as much as you liked. The work ethic was much stronger. People drank but they knew how to drink and work at the same time. They had it down. If
you needed to fix your hangover the next morning (pokhmelit'sia), the store was right there. Everything you needed!

Indeed, after the mobilization of the female work force during World War II, almost the entire Nivkh population had been effectively integrated into the state economy.

It was with the controversial resettlements of the late 1960s that the two dominant perceptions of Siberian peoples within Soviet policy -- as timeless primitives and as model proletarians -- were at their point of greatest tension. Traditional culture was unique and to be respected, but the celebration of Nivkh tradition could only be achieved in dialectical relation to Soviet modernity. The relocations were justified by this cultural dialectic, since, as noted above, "the accelerated development of an international way of life and the transformation of traditional cultures into socialist ones sharpens rather than weakens the need for recognizing the diversity of national cultures."30 This kind of logic appeals to the Foucauldian vision of establishing identity through a heightened awareness of difference, though the nature of the difference in this context is arbited by the state. With the same imperative by which the early Soviet reformers insisted on the primitivism of the prerevolutionary Nivkh past (at a time when many Nivkhi were widely involved in trade with their Japanese, Manchu and Korean neighbours), the very notion of the traditional took on different connotations in the 1960s. As Kerstin Kuoljok pointed out, with the emphasis on internationalization, "The cultural heritage of the peoples of the North is not something which belongs solely to the individual peoples." In an excerpt she cites from Taksami,

The way of life which the Nivkhi share with other peoples, chiefly the Russians, appears clearly in the Nivkhi culture. Housing, clothing, food and other things are often borrowed from the Russians. But, at the same time, the Nivkhi have preserved the cultural elements which are of practical

30Derevianko and Boiko, "Puti kul'turnogo razvitiia...," p. 11 [italics added].
value. They then become the property of all the peoples with whom the
Nivkhi live and work.\textsuperscript{31}

David Anderson has also argued that descriptions of Evenki reindeer herding tradition in
southern Siberia in the 70s and 80s were often tailored to vindicate the Baikal-Amur
railway project undertaken in the region at the time.\textsuperscript{32}

The resettlements may be roundly regretted today: In 1988, the otherwise pro-
pan-Soviet V. I. Boiko reported that over half of all Sakhalin Nivkhi wanted to return to
the closed village sites.\textsuperscript{33} But not all Nivkhi, by any means, had to be coaxed into the
new agrocentres.

My parents wanted to stay behind, but I didn't. Here we have running
water and gas. It's the way they handled it afterwards that started to cause
problems.

Sure I wanted to go. We got an apartment immediately, with a bathroom
and a kitchen. I got a good job too. Today I would choose an old village
over anything, but I didn't think twice about it then.

The nostalgic process of remembrance that now reconfigures Nivkh experience may say as
much about dissatisfaction with the present as it may about the past. The disintegration of
the Soviet Union has been attended by widespread disillusionment, but for Nivkhi, this
process has borne a double irony: As they come to more fully gauge the loss of their
traditional culture, they also mark the loss of the pan-Soviet culture they traded theirs in
for. In effect, this is the disintegration of both of the mythic paradigms by which they have
been cast. With a language largely forgotten,\textsuperscript{34} a population dislocated and an

\textsuperscript{31}Taksami in Kuoljok, \textit{Revolution in the North}, pp. 142-143.
\textsuperscript{32}David Anderson, "Turning Hunters into Herders: A Critical Examination of Soviet
\textsuperscript{33}V. I. Boiko, \textit{Nivkhi Sakhalina}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{34}Mikhail Vysokov, "Sovremennoia iazykovaia situatsiia v raionakh prozhivaniia
environment ecologically in ruins, few claims can be made for a romantic image of natives living out of time. But so too, with all aspects of the Soviet past under revisionist siege, it is no longer clear to Nivkh proletarians that their ambitious stride was worth the effort.

In the wake of these ideological reshuffles, Russian scholars have called for a development strategy for Siberian indigenous peoples based on "neo-traditionalism."35 The idea is a broad one, calling for a revival of the principles of native autonomy explored in the 1920s, an emphasis on traditional land use and economic development through smaller scale, local initiatives. The approach is an important and useful one, but on North Sakhalin, it begs a broader ontological question: After nearly seventy years of Soviet administration on North Sakhalin, what constitutes tradition?

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35B. B. Prokhorov, A. I. Pika et al., Metodicheskie osnovy kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki optimizatsii uslovi zhiznedeiatel'nosti malochislennykh narodov severa (Moscow: Institut problem zaniatosti AN RF i Mintruda RF, 1992).
Chapter Seven/ Perestroika Revisited: On Dissolution and Disillusion

"The state must never take steps that can evoke an ironic attitude among its citizens."

-Fazil Iskander, 1989

From the time I left Sakhalin at the end of 1990, my next visit back to the Soviet Union was in November of 1991, to Moscow. For November, Moscow was cold, wet and dark, but the sense of gloom was entrenched more by the social disintegration that had worsened since the failed coup attempt the previous August. The coup plotters may have abandoned the stage as rapidly as they had seized it, but the defense of democracy so touted in the international press appeared to have been, at best, an accidental victory. Nor, as the credibility of the Soviet apparatus continued to crumble, could any Manichean dualisms be brought to bear on personal and political landscapes so compromised by participation in a system being discredited in such a wholesale manner. At this stage, the sense of tragedy and loss that had so dominated my previous stays only appeared to have deepened. But with such a rapid unfolding of events over perestroika's brief tenure, each year was different from the next. To return only seven months later in June of 1992, not to the Soviet Union but to Russia, tragedy had mostly given way to nihilism, and to the gritty practicalities of living by an old system under a new name.

Sakhalin may have once inspired dread in the heart of every Russian, but it modern threat to most of Russian humanity lies in the nine-hour Aeroflot flight from Moscow. For my 1992 trip back to Sakhalin, I awoke late the morning after my arrival into Moscow and readied myself to do battle for the purchase of the ticket. While hunting for tickets in 1990, I had joined the early morning crush outside of Intourist on Ulitsa Petrovka at 7 a.m. and passed a day's worth of waiting in line in an airless second floor chamber filled with resident black-marketeers and foreigners emulating the lesser of Russian queuing

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1 Moscow News, No. 11, p. 16.
techniques. In 1992, Ulitsa Petrovka seemed to give little sense of things having changed, with its side streets jammed by crowds of people hawking their possessions for cash. But in the back alley courtyard of Intourist, all appearances suggested that they had closed down. Instead of finding fifty people clamouring at the door, about to crush through the glass, only white poplar seeds floating about the empty yard. Climbing to the second floor, I walked into the same hall where I had been so often before, and found not one hundred people, but one. Waiting to be struck over the head with the broom handle of an always irate attendant, I ventured to an open wicket with a sense of cognitive dissonance so fundamental as to almost feel queasy. Ten minutes later, I had a ticket. That I had just paid nine hundred dollars, rather than the fifteen I had paid two years previous, seemed hardly noticeable under the otherwise otherworldly circumstances. That prices had gone up sixty fold since then was also little different from the hyperinflation beginning to plague more essential ventures.

With Aeroflot functioning on little gasoline and fewer scheduled flights, the plane to Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk took off after several hours of delay on the ground. The cabin was stuffed to overflowing with baggage in the aisles and spilling off of open racks overhead, since no one would trust airline handlers not to steal their possessions. The passenger behind me removed her socks and wedged a pungent corny foot between the wall and my elbow. The normal respite, a walk to the back of the plane, was out of the question, since the aisle was clogged further by drunken passengers in the process of getting still drunker from the bottles they had brought with them. The bathroom floors were soaked with water and urine, rank with ammonia which had been tossed about indiscriminately. Lunch, rock-hard chicken with hair still on the skin, was impervious to knife and fork. Sticky soda was served in unwashed plastic cups. This was the Aeroflot I had known and loved.

After eight hours of the flight, pinned to the wall against my neighbour's foot, the stewardess announced with a studied abruptness that fog prevented our landing on
Sakhalin and that the flight would be diverted temporarily to Khabarovsk, the large coastal metropolis of the Russian Far East. An already boisterous cabin turned to organized revolt: The passenger collective rancorously agreed that this was an excuse for the Khabarovsk-based crew to go home early, and a shower of raucous shouting ensued. "You bastards! We paid for this flight! We know what you're doing! Charlatans! Fog -- tell us another one! Kill the pilot!" The fracas was led by the largest fellow on the plane, who after having gone to the front to threaten the crew, acted as incendiary for the remaining fifty minutes of shouting, laughing and calumny. The passengers around me, with whom I had exchanged only predictable conversations at the start of the flight, animatedly explained that this, in the age of a new independent Aeroflot, had become standard fare. And so upon landing, with revolt having led to resignation, the plan finally came to a stop along the runway, and we waited for the now wholly slandered crew to usher us off the plane. Some ten minutes passed when the same appointed passenger-thug went to investigate. In the rear of the plane could be heard only his outraged announcement. "They're gone!" he cried. And indeed, the entire crew of pilots and attendants had escaped by a rope ladder through a baggage hatch at the front of the plane, nary to appear again.

Some twelve hours later, after further passenger protests had required the arrival of airport guard with rifles (to disband the group of passengers organizing a sit-in on the tarmac), after the emptying of the plane, after the reloading of the plane, further threats to Aeroflot officials, and after the discovery upon final arrival that the few hundred dollars worth of random electronics, clothing and personal effects taken from my suitcase would be reimbursed at the rate of fifteen cents a kilogram, a familiar face from the Sakhalin Aeroflot ground crew looked at me wryly. "Bruce," she said, trying not to sound too patronizing, "You didn't really believe that fog business, did you?"

After two days in the local capital of the south end of the island, Iuzhno-
Sakhalinsk showed its own kinds of change. Sakhalin had been obliged by a UN declaration in 1991 to rescind its status as a closed border zone, which once had meant that even Soviet citizens had to obtain special visas to go there. But the two main city streets still intersected at the corners of Lenin and Communist Prospects, while the statue of the Bolshevik leader still presided over the main square. City bus fares had gone up by fifteen times; the portraits of Marx, Engels and Lenin at the corner of Communist and Peace Prospects had been replaced by a billboard for Baltic Bank; the former East hotel was now the International Lada Business Centre, and the front pages of the main newspaper Soviet Sakhalin now carried inspirational axioms from the Baha'i leader, Baha'u'llah. Valentin Fedorov, the island's reform-minded governor who had come to power on a well-publicized privatization platform, had secured a multi-million dollar oil development scheme for North Sakhalin, but as in the rest of the country, domestic entrepreneurship was limited almost exclusively to mafia-run kiosks proffering chocolate and alcohol. During a period when average monthly salaries were listed as 3000 rubles (up from 300 two years previous), would-be entrepreneurs wanting to establish their own bakeries, bookstores and art studios were told by the island government that bribes started at 500,000 rubles. While newspapers touted the opening of a new hard currency café in the city, it was more striking that over half of the rubles cafeterias had closed for lack of patrons able to afford the prices. The Sakhalin Regional Museum, which had generously organized my stay the first time around, was now continuing to operate only by paying its researchers the most symbolic of salaries.

On North Sakhalin, the financial strains were exacerbated by almost complete deficits of available cash in the public sector. In the Nogliki and Okha areas, cheque books had been issued for the first time ever, but these had run out. To cash a cheque required a special identification card, and these had run out. Since few stores had any cash, no change could be given, and credit was prohibited by state law. People either
bought in bulk, or disbursed entire cheque sums on trifles out of exasperation. Worse still, since cheques could only be guaranteed in the districts that printed them, one couldn't take the cheque to Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk where they did have cash and did give change. For the same reasons, most people had not received their salaries for at least two months, while in the most extreme example, men on the fishing brigade in Rybnovsk had not received their salaries for ten months. Artefacts of the first humanitarian aid programs to the former USSR were on sale on street corners everywhere. Western European and North American relief agencies had been diligently sending food baskets to Sakhalin pensioners and veterans despite their being no signs of any actual want of food, just higher prices.

All of these changes had affected the lives of the people I knew on Sakhalin across the board. But it was really only when I returned to Rybnoe that I was able to put the developments in a more familiar context. And in this respect, for Rybnoe, less perhaps had changed, rather than more. Granted, in the place of the hammer and sickle, a new Russian tricolour flag flew over the office of the village council, and two new state housing bungalows which had been four years in the construction, were finally completed. But around the kolkhoz, inspirational axioms from "The Moral Codex of the Soviet Citizen" still hung from the walls of the workplace: "Your honour is the honour of the collective!" "Soviet means Outstanding!" "The Conscience of the Worker is Greater than any Supervisor!" Rybnoe fishermen and fisherwomen, who once passed their evenings glued to the Brazilian serial "Slave Girl Izaura" and the Czech melodrama "Suburban Hospital," had by now made their way through the first fifty episodes of the 250-instalment Mexican soap opera, "The Rich Cry Too," and had just embarked on the beginning of five years' worth of the American daytime drama, "Santa Barbara." It was one of the first times such lengthy serials had been shown on television, and many wanted to know why there was no end to the plots. Men in the salting section at the kolkhoz discussed "Santa Barbara" with equal vigour as the women in the cleaning section, and
within a few days I was happy to join in these evening viewing rituals of catatonic mesmerism.

But what in the last two years had happened to the kolkhoz? On the eve of my departure in 1990, fishery meetings were charged with the invective of independence, yet it soon appeared that, as elsewhere in the country, brief reforms had given way to the inertia of the past. Officially, Rybnoe did separate from Red Dawn. Now rather than being "Rybabaza "Rybnoe" Rybnowskogo Rybkombinata Oblrybakkolkhozsoiuza", it was now just Rybabaza "Rybnoe", or simply, Fish Base "Fishy." Federal laws still prohibited them from selling their fish to whomever they liked, and the lack of modern equipment made visiting Japanese businessmen cringe from shock. So relations essentially continued as before, with Rybnoe processing the fish that Red Dawn brought in. Administratively, the fishery now had more latitude in making its own decisions, but the same transient administrators, having come to Sakhalin to make money and prone to abuses of power, still ran the day-to-day affairs. Rybnoe's 1990 director had since relocated to the fishery in Rybnovsk where he was being investigated for fraud. His replacement in Rybnoe, who had previously led the fight for independence, became cowed by his new responsibilities and left town after only a few months. For the first time in several years, both fisheries were unprepared for the season's most important fish run when the summer began.

I had greater hopes for the mostly Nivkh fishing brigade in neighbouring Rybnovsk. Some thirty men from Nekrasovka had been living one hundred kilometres down the coast in Rybnovsk in a dormitory during the fishing seasons of the last number of years, and in 1990, plans were laid to finally have them form their own fishery. They were led by one of the few Nivkh men who had a good handle on the art of administration and were one of Red Dawn's most efficient units. To start their own fishery they would have had to purchase their own boats, their own processing equipment and more. But in the end, the greatest obstacle was the men themselves, who despite having lived apart
from their families for six months out of the year, several years in the running, were unwilling to give up apartments in Nekrasovka for life on the Rybnovsk shore without running water. Tolia Ngavan, the brigade leader, was thinking of giving it all up and moving his family back to the abandoned village of his youth to live more quietly.

Nonetheless, the kolkhoz did show new, unexpected signs of life. In Rybnoe, a handful of men and women who once resembled the walking dead were now miraculously revived by the new shortages of alcohol. In 1990, it was a rare weekend in the salting section when drinking (of vodka) did not begin at 11 am, and continue at regular intervals through the day at 2 pm (Azerbaijani wine), 5pm (samagon bootleg), 9 pm (beer), and finishing at midnight with fermented yeast drinks. But the ceasing of shipments of beer, wine and vodka to the village store, once required by law, and the lack of money to spend on rotgut made these rituals harder to maintain.

The village soviet, or village council, was now simply known as the village administration, and here too the changes had mostly to do with the dispensing of formalities. Where portraits of Lenin and Gorbachev once hung on the walls of the council office, Gorbachev had been happily jettisoned and Lenin alone now presided. The village council chairman and the village secretary were no longer obliged to preside over the burning of censored books in the library, and once familiar institutions such as the Women's Soviet (to ensure cleanliness in the home) and the Voluntary Friendship Society (to monitor public behaviour) were done away with. But as the village chairman intoned, the sense of openendedness was at times illusory.

Our job is to look out the window and make sure that people are observing the laws of the region and of the country. But what are we supposed to do? We still don't have a constitution. We have an old constitution for a country that doesn't exist any more. So what has changed? Nothing has changed. Nothing will change until we have private property, and we have
nothing of the sort right now.
Where the village soviet once administered monthly meetings of an elected town council, plans for 1992 sessions had been scrapped. "The town is about the size of your finger, so why bother meeting?" the village chairman said. "You see people every day. You already know what they think."

It was the village store, perhaps, which showed the greatest marks from two years of upheaval. Once the best stocked store I had seen anywhere in Moscow, Petersburg or Sakhalin, it had now joined the ranks of the disembodied. Formally, they also gained more independence with the new administrations. Where they once routinely sold whatever was shipped to them and returned all the profits to the central stores in Rybnovsk, they were now affiliated with the Commercial Section of the district government in Okha. They could order what they wanted and keep their own profits, but were now obliged to pay taxes and maintain the building in which they were located. The state still owned the store, but the woman who once ran it could now act as its de facto proprietor.

On the day I went in with my notebook to ask about price changes [see Table 7.1], the blue haired director of the store was in the midst of an animated conversation over the events conspiring on "The Rich Cry Too." I asked her if we could go through the prices of what was in the store and the list of what had since become unavailable. We started at one end of the horseshoe-shaped counter and spent half an hour going from one near empty glass case to another. "Over here is where we used to keep the tools," she began. "The locks, the hammers, the glue, the paint, the nails, the bolts and screws, the keys and the hooks... We used to have the winter coats behind you. Two years ago they were 600 rubles each. Then they went up to 15,000 so we had to send them back. And up top behind me is where we used to keep all the toys. Do you remember all the toys?"
I did remember all the toys, which had made such an impression on me before, as well as the electric kettles, the irons, the crystal decanters and the candles that came in different
colours. So too did the three other people in the store who had been standing in the corner talking and who came over to join in.

"Over here were the pens and schoolbooks" another shopkeeper laughed. "Look at that soup pot. Two years ago you could get one for eight rubles. Now its 702!"

What had begun as a solemn marking of absent goods and mordant prices had now become a boisterous tour. The village baker joined in.

"Look at that rubber raft. Volodia bought one when they cost ninety-five rubles," she shorted. "How much is it now?"

"5370!" they wheezed breathlessly.

The two shopkeepers were now splitting their sides. By the middle case in the store, everyone was talking animatedly at the same time.

"Refrigerators! Over 20,000 rubles! Who would have guessed!"

"Do you remember that toothpaste we used to have? Look, we still have an empty box!"

"Ginger cakes -- up fifty times!"

For the women in the store who each earned no more than three or four thousand rubles a month at the time, the prices were indeed cause for either laughter or grief, and genuine mirth over what had happened to their salaries prevailed for the moment. But as the spectators peeled away, and our excursion from case to case wound its way down, my guide resumed a more funereal tone.

"We kept the candy jars but left them empty. Maybe that's just as well. The plastic chandeliers no one bought anyway. This is where we used to keep the light bulbs. Now I dare you -- you try to find one light bulb anywhere on this island, and I'll buy it from you."

* * *

On expressley Nivkh fronts, some substantial changes had been made in the way people could regain their former homes. Aided by a decree
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item:</th>
<th>1990 Price</th>
<th>1992 Price</th>
<th>Percentage Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>honey/kg</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>255.00</td>
<td>6,071%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children's pot</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>750%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large soup pot</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>702.00</td>
<td>8,775%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cigarettes</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>92.00</td>
<td>30,666%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notebooks</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>1,600%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ginger biscuits/kg</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>48.00</td>
<td>5,333%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noodles/kg</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>41.93</td>
<td>7,623%</td>
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<tr>
<td>flour/kg</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>30.95</td>
<td>6,728%</td>
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<td>butter/kg*</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>150.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>beef/kg*</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>203.00</td>
<td>10,684%</td>
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<td>chicken/kg*</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>134.00</td>
<td>5,360%</td>
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<td>matches</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>15,000%</td>
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<tr>
<td>soap</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>12.19</td>
<td>2,708%</td>
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<tr>
<td>bread</td>
<td>.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>condensed milk</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>5.29</td>
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<td>detergent</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>5.37</td>
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<td>.22</td>
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<td>.45</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>38.00</td>
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<td>cabbage*</td>
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<td>refrigerator*</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>22,000</td>
<td>3,666%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>television*</td>
<td>700</td>
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<td>2,857%</td>
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<td>motorcycle*</td>
<td>1100</td>
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<tr>
<td>rubber raft</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>5370</td>
<td>488%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloth/metre</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>6,250%</td>
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<td>fall jacket</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>3,125%</td>
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<tr>
<td>men's boots</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1,182%</td>
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<tr>
<td>slippers</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>121.00</td>
<td>3,457%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underwear</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>3,829%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panty hose</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>150.00</td>
<td>5,000%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small metal bowl</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>159.00</td>
<td>1,988%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frying pan</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>306.00</td>
<td>3,825%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shampoo</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>5,000%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Still for kopecks: toothbrushes, earrings, knitting needles, plastic combs.
Have:

stove doors, screwdrivers, detergent, paint brushes

bottled watermelon, marinated peppers
tinned peas, tomato puree, tinned vegetable soup with rice,
tinned borscht, tinned pea puree, tinned eggplant puree, marinated cole slaw
tinned salmon, tinned mints, tinned squid

pepper, bay leaves
honey
biscuits, vermicelli, noodles

metal bowls, metal buckets, 1 soup pot, frying pan

notebooks

25 women's and girls coats
22 dresses (in various sizes)

3 rolls of textile
1 inflatable raft

rubber boots
brown shoes
grey shoes
blue runners
1 sweater
various pants, underwear of all kinds
children's shirts

soap, skin cream, tooth brushes, combs, knitting needles, berets, nail files, mascara,
rollers, 3 pairs of earrings, crochet needles, razor blades, 1 plastic bracelet.

Have Not:

locks, hammers, glue, paint, nails, screws bolts, keys, tools, hooks
candy, milk, eggs, sunflower seeds, toys
televisions, chandeliers, tape recorders, tea kettles, light bulbs, teacups, glasses, crystal,
electric appliances
pens, pencils, vases
pocket boiler, irons, calculators, vacuums, toothpaste

bags, suitcases
the entire winter coat section (from 600 to 15000 rubles)

**Rarely:**

cabbage [1.20 -35R]
eggs
meat

**Don't Sell:** (because no one buys)

fish at 60R/kg
caviar at 95R/can
potatoes

**By Ration Coupons Only:**

sugar [1kg/mo]
butter [250 g]
cigarettes [10 pk/mo]

**No longer shipped:**

beer
wine
vodka

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from Eltsyn,² Sakhalin had embarked on a system of clan plots for Nivkh, whereby Nivkh families could return to areas they once lived in to start up their own fishing and processing enterprises. The move was far cry from proposals in 1990 to return almost one third of Sakhalin to its circa 1850 status as largely Nivkh territory, but the idea of clan

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²Presidential Decree No. 397, 22 April 1992, "O neotlozhnykh merakh po zashchite mest prozhivanija i khozajstvennoi deiatel'nosti malochislennykh narodov Severa" stipulated that free land be allotted on a permanent basis to northern native peoples for traditional land use. Peoples of the north would have a main say in licenses distributed on this land for fishing, hunting and other resource-related pursuits.
enterprises had caught on. The average allotment was twenty square hectares. Originally they were intended to be given in perpetuity as private property, but reluctant local officials intervened and leased them on time-limited arrangements. By August 1992, thirty-six plots had been claimed. Some families had returned to the abandoned village sites of their youth and looked upon the plots as subsistence operations for their families. Others sought formal sponsors such as the Sakhalin Geological Trust to make bigger profits. In the latter cases, some had taken advantage of outrageous loans of up to 200,000 rubles, only to discover by the time the money was disbursed that it was no longer worth as much as they needed. But the enterprises nonetheless had drawn Nivkh men and women into a form of independent activity they had not known since before World War II. Nivkh friends in Okha, in whose homes I had once spent long quiet evenings, had now stepped up the usual barter trading into a frenzy of exchange: twenty kilos of fish for two crates of beer, two sacks of sugar for ten sacks of salt, one ton of gasoline for fifty kilograms of mutton... cars for apartments, refrigerators for motorcycles, a case of vodka for telephone installation... and on and on. At a time when money did not necessarily make someone rich, exchange could.\(^3\)

The new flurry of activity was an improvement over the first efforts in 1989 and 1990 to start an umbrella Nivkh cooperative known as "Ykh-Mif" or "Our Land." The idea was to gather together Nivkh who knew the land well in order to collect and market the fruits of the island which had almost never been available in stores. But it had not gone well. Only three years after its founding in 1988 did Ykh-Mif finally receive permission to formally exist, but by then the dissolution of the country and the talk of clan plots had altered the terms of debate. The state representative for Nivkh affairs in Okha, Antonina Nachetkina, summed up how her work had changed when we saw each other

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again two summers later.

AN: Clan plots, some of the first in Russia, have made a big difference. We didn't pay much attention a few years ago, especially because we figured that no one would be interested, that people were already too Russified. But this year, we figured, things have already gotten so bad, why not try? We have nothing to lose. The first plot was given to Valia Poliakova in Chingai, then a few more, then a few more, then a total wave. And the most pleasant aspect is that they have attracted the young people, young people from Red Dawn and so on. I honestly didn't think that much could come from it at the start, but I have been totally surprised.

It means that you end up having some way to battle with the problem of passivity. [Names five young families in Nekrasovka] -- they all moved back to their native areas, and I can't tell you how pleasant it is. You want to help them with all of your strength. But what are you supposed to do? Business has never been our specialty.

No one has any money and everyone needs everything. They need boats, they need snowmobiles, they need fuel, they need construction materials for housing... the list is endless. People are ready to relocate their entire families back into the middle of nowhere, back to where they were living thirty years ago, and we are completely unable to help them. So we now have the idea of trying to revive a few of these villages that used to exist. Obviously we are talking about the smallest, most incremental changes. But look at Valia in Chingai -- they built their own house, they are sleeping on Nivkh style benches, they are using seal fat for their lamps instead of
kerosine. They're not living that way because it's tradition, they're living that way because, as the rest of the island collapses around them, this is the only alternative left!

Goskomsever has made a few gestures in our direction, but we are talking about kopecks. Everyone is completely on their own. And we are all without any experience in enterprise. So now we have the idea of trying to revive Romanovka. But who knows. It is a battle in and of itself just to get permission to trap a bear. Clan plots got permission to catch only two tons of salmon this spring alone -- this is nothing, and there is nothing left for the fall. This is far from enough. This is not enough. We are encouraging people with one hand and setting them back with the other.

BG: What about the fact that all of the Nivkh activists are women? Do you think there's a reason for this?

AN: With the clan plots, there are more young men involved and I can't tell you how good this is. This is extremely important. They are great fellows. Before they spent all of their time drinking, and now they are actually doing something. Our hunters, on the other hand, have all drunk themselves into the grave. Hunting is supposed to be a Nivkh tradition, but today you will find only one or two that still know how to set out after an animal properly. There are no real Nivkh hunters left, but suddenly the young people are starting to set old-style traps again, they're starting to ask for hunting licenses again. Why? Because it's useful for them.
BG: But what happened to the men of your generation?

AN: This is the real tragedy. They drank themselves away. They drank themselves away. Look at the women around you. Look at R---- she's alone. Look at Z---- she's alone. Look at G----- she's alone. These are perfectly normal women, and there is no one for them to spend their lives with. Either the men killed themselves, or they drowned in alcohol -- they felt that they had no other way out from their problems, and their loss is something that we still feel every day. The drank themselves to death because they couldn't see any role for themselves in the world the way that they had come to know it -- instead of working as fishermen or hunters they were given jobs of the lowest sort. This is a tragedy for all of us.

Those of us that do things, I mean, for Nivkhi -- today we're not ready at all, because there is no one left to do our work when we leave off. Sure there are younger Nivkhi, but we realize now that we haven't done anything to prepare them to take on the kind of work that I am doing for native affairs in the city council, or that Rima Khailova has been doing on the Nivkh language newspaper, the kind of cultural work that Zoia Ivanovna Liutova has been doing in the library and so on. We ourselves are somewhat guilty of this, for not having trained our successors.

In a sense we all went through the same kind of system, we were all raised in state boarding schools. But when my generation went through the internaty, we were constantly working -- we were chopping wood, we were hauling water, we were made to look after the younger children -- it
was a completely different mind set. The generation below us, they went through the boarding school in a completely different age, politically and economically, and like it or not, we can't depend on them now. They were raised to always have other people do things for them. In the next ten years we should all be starting on our pensions and who is there left to take up our work?

BG: *Internaty* -- it's common today to portray them as something straight out of Dickens, and it's not hard to imagine. But a lot of the time, people speak of them with some nostalgia. Of all those wonderful years...

AN: The ones that are smiling are from my generation. Those are my friends, and that's because when we went through the internats, it was a real collective. We collected berries together, we all lived as one big family. We planted potatoes together, we chopped wood together, we caught fish together, we all depended on each other and we all helped each other. We did it for ourselves and we did it for each other. And it was, in its own strange way, fun. But for children who went through them in the last twenty years it was a different story. Everything was ready for them. Everything was given to them. The government fed them and clothed them and bought them shoes and did their laundry. That's all very well, and even pleasant in a sense, maybe that's the way life should be. But that's when the dark side of the internat system came out. It produced a whole generation of young people completely unable and uninterested in taking care of themselves. It is an entire generation that was raised apart from their parents, and of course in the end the result was unfortunate. The language,
the culture -- everything fell by the wayside. Moreover it gave rise to a real cynicism.

For all the efforts to have our young people get a good education in colleges and institutes around the country, just as before most of the Nivkh youth are abandoning their studies to just remain in place, to stay on Sakhalin. You might think that this is nice, that they want to stay on the island, but when you look at the level of education around us and see the want of leadership, you see that this is really a problem. Even if we were able to train all of one person for each of our jobs, that would be something. That would be a lot. Yet they themselves don't really want to. They've gotten used to having other people do everything for them. That's the problem.

It's not even on the regional level, or on the district level, but on the village level. For example, Zoia Ivanovna Liutova has left the library in Nekrasovka and that's it. That's the end. There is no one that can or wants to take her place. And you immediately feel her absence because of all that she used to do. There are all kinds of examples like that. Or Liudmila Kravchuk, who used to work in the village soviet and who now has left for Schmidt to run her own clan plot. She knew all the local Nivkhi in her town and she constantly helped me. I mean, I know people of my own generation, but I don't know the lives and details of the younger generation. I could phone her at any time and ask her what was going on, which families needed assistance for the season and so on. She was my right hand, and now she's gone. But most importantly, I can't think of a
single Nivkh to call and get the same advice from.

BG: Let's move over to utopia. If you had a great deal of money, how would you get down to work?

AN: If we had a great deal of money, [shortles], we would rebuild the infrastructure for the town of Romanovka, so that people would be able to move there and feel themselves at home. We would resurrect places like Chingai, Uspenovka... We would help unite a few of the clan plots so that they could form a real fishery of our own. People would be "occupied," but occupied in the best sense of the word, people would be doing the things that they wanted to be doing... But it's not really about money anyway. Everywhere I go people ask me, "Why is Goskomsever taking so long? Why haven't they subsidized us yet?" And I tell people, forget about Goskomsever, forget about everyone else, just start working. Two tons of salmon is nothing, I realize, but catch it anyway. Collect mushrooms, collect fiddleheads, collect wild onions, collect berries -- do everything that you can to at least feed your own family and then start thinking about getting ahead. To do that today is already a big accomplishment.

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To accomplish anything at the time was indeed an achievement since everywhere were signs of disintegration and few signs of rebuilding. The sense of social confusion was palpable. Over lunch one day with friends from the first stay, the director of the bookstore in Okha said that her store would probably close because of lack of funds. Her husband, a reporter for the Sakhalin Oil Worker added, "I'm a correspondent. I've
worked here for years. I'm supposed to write about the economy, and I swear, I don't have the slightest idea what is going on! Not the slightest!" On another day, with another reporter from a smaller rival paper, *Free Sakhalin*, our conversation was interrupted by a caller with a lead for a story. Three hundred kilograms of fresh pork, a rare and outrageously expensive commodity, had been found in a garbage dump out by the airport. The reporter put down the phone and poured some more tea. "Aren't you going to go and find out about it?" I wanted to know. "No," he said, "This kind of stuff happens all the time." I offered my theory that the local mafia probably wanted to keep prices up by imposing scarcity. "Maybe," the reporter said. "Or maybe the people who were supposed to sell it just didn't feel like it."

At a dinner in Okha before I left to return to the southern end of the island, I sat with one of the Nivkh officials who had always been among the staunchest supporters of the Soviet system I had known. We sat with her children around a table in the living room adorned with miniature busts of Lenin and politically inspired greeting cards. She raised her vodka glass for a baleful toast, "No one believes in anything. You can't trust anyone. Nothing is interesting. So eat. Food is our only insurance."
Chapter Eight/ Conclusions

"As a label [ethnicity] may sound better than tribe, race or barbarian, but with respect to political consequences, it still identifies those who are at the borders of the empire. Within putatively homogenous nation-states, this border is, however, an ideologically produced boundary between "mainstream" and peripheral categorical units of this kind of "imagined" social order. Such a categorical unit cannot be dissolved by the acts of persons so labelled. They cannot eradicate the category -- either by processes of individual material assimilation to different class strata or by their shedding of inappropriate cultural enactments across generations, or by a socialization process that directs individuals to apish acculturation of a national mainstream ... Under the current constructions of nationalist ideologies, constructions of ethnic cultures are efforts to repay a debt that was never made and can never be repaid."

-Brackette Williams

Ever since people began writing about Nivkh life, Nivkhi, like the ethnics described above, have always been at the periphery of other people's social orders. But in the aftermath of events such as the collapse of the USSR, sometimes being positioned on the periphery can have its advantages. Given the legacy of a Soviet system which promoted the Nivkh language and then repressed it, which gathered Nivkhi into kolkhozes and then presided over widespread job and housing discrimination, and which has generally taken a dim view of its own past, Sakhalin residents are increasingly touting Nivkhi as the only group on the island who survived the Soviet period with their integrity intact. In 1990, when the Sakhalin government was considering a quixotic project to transfer advisory control of almost half of North Sakhalin into Nivkh hands (then known as prioritetnoe prirodopol'zovanie, or priority land use), the plan drew widespread support from Russian environmentalists. The plan was not without its complications. Many people objected

that the transfer of so much land to such a small group transgressed the notion that all citizens were equal in the eyes of the state. When I asked some of the Russian proponents about their active endorsement of the Nivkh stewardships, a common answer was, "Everyone knows the Nivkhi will be more protective of the land than other people. It's in their tradition." While their response drew a fine line between philanthropy and public relations, it was clear that the idea that Nivkhi were unfairly severed from the land and deserved recompense was a useful strategy from the point of view of ecology. Cloaking the environment in the rhetoric of the noble savage protects it from savagery of a more civilized nature.

This was one appropriation of Nivkh identity by outsiders that many Nivkhi seemed to endorse. It also took root in the first of the two myths about Siberian indigenous peoples that I offered at the outset of this dissertation -- the vision of timeless tradition, whereby Nivkhi have essentially lived apart from the flow of historical events around them. In the post-Soviet era, it might be seen as an affirmative gesture, conferring faultlessness on Nivkhi in a society obsessed, for the time, with the vectors of blame. But it overlooks the crucial fact that Nivkhi have changed greatly with the dramatic history in which they took part. The presumption of Nivkh innocence is an idealism on the upswing on Sakhalin, but ironically it subtracts from the very coevalness of Nivkhi -- the at least formal recognition of Nivkhi as equals -- which was one of the few dividends of the Stalinist vision of Nivkhi as instant moderns. In the rhetoric of the environmentalists, Nivkhi are, like Jacques Lacan's image of *le tout savoir*, "the subjects presumed to know," presumed to be the bearers of values no longer appreciated in the world of the disenchanted.

The second central narrative, the notion that Siberian indigenous peoples were making a stride across a thousand years, was not only a rhetorical device for including them in a programme of rapid modernization, it projected an aura of success for the
cultural agenda of a country which had been by definition experimental. Since Siberian peoples were considered to be a blank slate on which to inscribe a new Soviet identity, their experience perforce was to have been one of the most lucid markers of the new state culture. In return for their great leap forward, Siberian indigenous peoples were granted a vision of coevalness which was rare for an otherwise largely colonial relationship. It was a vision of coevalness that was essential for many Nivkhi in seeing themselves as participants in the Sovietization movement.

Against the traversal of multiple modes of production to meet modernity, the Nivkh denial of culture, the professed "culturelessness" which was so regnant in 1990 and to a lesser extent in 1992, came as the ultimate revenge against a state which defined them so capriciously for so many decades. This was the very inversion of the triumphant stride, not one step forward but two steps back. After decades of dramatic reification of the idea of culture itself, of having given up a "traditional" culture so as to be given a "modern" one, these denials of culture were the reciprocal responses: We are the truest bearers of your ethnicity, and look what happened. With little to work with but their pasts, Nivkhi are discovering a symbolic capital amidst the ruins of both of these myths.

These kinds of inversions would appear to be strategic, since as the preceding chapters have tried to demonstrate, both of the polar visions of Siberian indigenous peoples had their dark sides. When idealized versions of traditional life were invoked, as we saw at the outset of the Soviet period in the 1920s, the resulting social policies were oriented to self-government and the creation of new hybrid social forms. When idealized versions of radical transformation were hegemonic from the Stalinist period through to Brezhnev, the policy of Soviet cultural construction hinged on a willed negation of the past. The myth of childlike purity also fed into the charge for change under Stalin, but the political consequences in this event were just as detrimental: if Nivkhi were children of nature, their past need be forgotten; if they were on the road to building socialism, their
past again need be forgotten; if they were part of the natural landscape, they did not require attention; if they were part of the cultural landscape, they were already attended to. With a future predetermined and the past redetermined, the stride across a thousand years heeded everything but the present.

At the level of public political discourse, including the realm of Soviet nationality policy, there was a strong and conscious reification of the opposition between the traditional and the modern, the local and the federal, Nivkh and Soviet. These were reified if not buttressed in ironic ways by a Soviet nationality policy that expressly sought to collapse these oppositions, emphasizing the dialectical negotiations of the traditional and the modern in the pursuit of a new historical community, the Soviet people. This polarized public discourse also found a logical role in dissent, when opposition to the state almost inevitably found expression by juxtaposing any nationality to the Soviet centre.

However, while the public and the private are hardly mutually exclusive, one gets a much different impression at the level of the lived experience of these discourses, where such kinds of oppositions are harder to distinguish because of the ways in which they were so mutually manifested. Most Nivkhi I knew thought of themselves as Soviets first and Nivkhi second; a good number of others, especially younger people, thought of themselves as Soviets only. It was at this level that one had to sort through the seeming contradictions of dwelling on the loss of family members during Stalin's purges and then praising him for his firm hand, of Nivkhi who had lost their homes or pensions during the resettlements and yet so vigorously opposed the loosenings of state control under perestroika.

Had I remained on Sakhalin only through the first month, when the Nivkh assertions of having been left in ruins were at their most earnest, my impression of Nivkh life and Nivkh history would have likely been confined to the level of public discourse at which their discontent was being presented. The spirit of loss was not hard to see in the
Nivkh setting, but while this is true, it can only be a partial truth. In their narratives, Nivkhi didn't see themselves as passive or tragic figures. Like the rest of the disgruntled nation which was being transformed around them, they felt themselves to have followed a path which didn't end in the place they wanted.

What is so remarkable about the historical trajectory of Nivkhi in the twentieth century is the dramatic rollercoaster of policy shifts. Along the twentieth century continuum when a series of Nivkh cultural icons were discouraged (Nicholas II) and then encouraged (Lenin), repressed (Stalin) and then revived (briefly, Khrushchev), ignored (Brezhnev) and then revived again (Gorbachev), the state in effect led campaigns for Nivkhi to forget, remember, forget, remember, forget and remember again.

The negation of the past may be germane to modernity itself, as Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin have argued, and sole very word that most Nivkhi know for "to remember," the Russian *vospominat*, brings to life this Janus face of invention and oblivion. *Vospominat* builds on the word *pominka*, for funereal wake, a gathering to remember what has since been lost. Yet the Soviet materials here present a case in the extreme, since the dramatic policy shifts also meant the widespread destruction of documents and ideas from previous periods on which each step forward was predicated. This not only destabilizes the physical bases for knowing the past in a fundamental way, but it left the state's constituents with an extraordinarily reified sense of culture as an object to be constructed, reconstructed and dismantled at will. It was a sense of culture also thought to emanate largely from the state.

Amidst all of these shifts, what then became of Nivkh notions of the authentic? When I arrived on Sakhalin in the spring of 1990, many of the Nivkhi I met had photographs and slides to show from the shooting of a film the previous summer on Sakhalin's northern Schmidt peninsula. The film was based on the writer Chingiz Aitmatov's short story, "Spotted Dog Running along the Seashore." Aitmatov wrote a
love story set amidst the timeless life of Nivkh fishermen who lived in tents, wore fish-skin garments and communicated in a mysterious language germane to the austere northern landscapes. Although professional Kazakh actors portrayed the lovelorn Nivkh leads, a great number of Nivkhi took part in the project. Special sets recreated traditional Nivkh life, including a bear who served as the focal point for many of the film's affinity-with-nature scenes. Despite the usual shortcuts in accuracy, where at times almost any ethnic-looking setting or costume or language sufficed for the film's purposes, it was an important time for many Nivkhi young and old to reconnect with an imagined past. The photographs from the shooting showed an almost jamboree-like atmosphere. It was a few years after this, towards the end of my second stay on Sakhalin, that I asked the film's main Nivkh consultant what kind of film she would have preferred to make had the decision been hers.

GD: When we had the filming on Schmidt, I gathered together all of the Nivkhi that I could find, especially the ones that everyone thinks of as no-goods and parasites [tunejadtsy]. When we were all out on the tundra together, you can't imagine how they came to life! If I had my way, I would have made a film just about them. They were wonderful.

People call them lazy, but it's not laziness. I mean, you go and try to catch a bear, hunt him and kill him, by yourself. That's not laziness. It is the internal psychology of the Nivkh. He isn't afraid of going to hunt a bear by himself. He knows deep down that he will catch him. Or if he goes fishing, he wouldn't do what we do today. He wouldn't say -- let's go fishing tomorrow. He wouldn't get up at 8 in the morning and stay until 8

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3Chingiz Aitmatov, "Spotted Dog Running along the Seashore" in Mother Earth and Other Stories (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 229-309.
at night and freeze all day just because it's convenient, like in the kolkhoz. A real Nivkh wouldn't do that. A real Nivkh would already know the ecological calendar, the local conditions. He knows the meaning of all the natural signs... the direction of the wind, the direction of the water. He doesn't need to plan anything, he just bears these things in mind and one day he'll say, "I'm going fishing now." And at 4 o'clock in the afternoon he'll go and catch fish. The rest of the time he'll sleep, daydream, do nothing... because he already knows precisely what to do and when to do it. That's a real Nivkh. To Russians this is laziness and to me this is the height of living [vostorg]. I don't know how else to describe it.

BG: What about someone like K----? He still hunts and fishes privately for the former party leaders. How does he get around the system?

GD: He's already worked his required thirty years, but he is too young to be on a pension. He worked from age fifteen and finished at forty-five. He didn't have the right to get another job because he has already worked his limit, but he is not fifty-five yet and so can't get his pension. So he works on the side until he can start receiving his pension. So he works for himself. He wanders around the forest. He sleeps a lot. He goes fishing. He decides that he wants a boat and he makes one himself. He makes him his own nets. Imagine! People call him lazy and he is nothing of the sort. Who could be more energetic? This is the Nivkh way of thinking. He knows what he wants and he goes his own way quietly. He's not interested in being rich. He doesn't dream of having a table laden with wine and kolbasa. He wants to eat fish, so he goes and catches some. He has fresh
fish all year long. If he catches a bear, then they have bear meat. If he
catches a dear, they have deer meat. If he catches a seal, then they have
seal meat. It's all illegal of course, but that's another matter. People like
him never go hungry. If I had my way, he is the kind of person I would
make a film about. Why? Because he's a normal person.

BG: Dmitrii S----- reminded me of the same type, though he wasn't quite
as sociable.

GD: There are times when he is supposed to go to his Soviet work, but
everything inside him tells him that he should go fishing instead. He even
told me once, it's like a pathology -- he has to go fishing. Then it subsides
and he goes back to his Soviet job. It seems to me that that's how it should
be for everyone. For me it's a mix of both -- part of me is very Nivkh and
part of me is more modern. I want to have a nice apartment, I want to be
able to move around and see things, I want to have different kinds of food
on the table, and for that I have to have money. For that I have to go to
work.

BG: I get kind of depressed when I see films like O-----'s about how Baba
Nastia makes robes from fish skin. On the one hand, it's genuine art, and
it's interesting to see. But it gets passed off as "daily life" when, in fact,
Baba Nastia makes robes from fish skin only if she needs something to
wear for a funeral, or if an ethnographer comes and asks her to.

GD: What you have to do is kind of play a trick on the viewer. Give them
the stereotype they think they already know, give them the lazy native, and then, shift the ground out from under them.

BG: When I was at the Rybnoe centennial two years ago, I remember when Baba Olia got up on stage. It was so quiet. And also kind of depressing because the dance was all about shamans in the forest but there were neither shamans nor for that matter, many forests left in real life. Then a folklore ensemble of Russian women got up on stage and started stomping and yipping -- it was really almost a violent performance. To compare Baba Olia with the women on the stage was incredible. When I went home that night I was going to write about it and thought, "So, you know, the Russians are well, Russians, and the Nivkhi are... well, kinder." Kinder! I know lots of Nivkhi that are not so kind. I had returned full circle to the nineteenth century!

GD: The Russians will never understand that though. The Russians look at their own art and they are delighted. They look up at a Nivkh woman singing and all they see is some drunk up on stage. It's the same thing when Spotted Dog won first prize at the Moscow Film Festival this year. Oleg Yankovskii, the festival organizer said, "Why would they want to give a prize to a film like that?" For me, that said it all.

* * *

To think of Sakhalin at both ends of the Soviet period, at the turn of the twentieth century and now at its close, there are signs that the former cosmopolitanism of the island is resurgent. With the return of Japanese fishing interests, American oil developers, New Zealand peat brokers, German manufacturers, Baha'i evangelists and Mexican soap operas, and with an indigenous population increasingly aware of the political rights and
hazards of what being "indigenous" means elsewhere, the face of the island is poised for change. But with no food in the stores, no cash in the tills, and life in a society where even the highest echelons of power are unsure as to what is transpiring, the new old world is still working on its appeal. For the time being, Nivkhi who have the personal resources to retreat to the hills, live without electricity, and dry fish properly enough to store it for the winter are arguably among the few citizens of Sakhalin Island who are finding peace of mind.

In the wake of the Soviet period, many Nivkhi are looking ahead, mindful of the past, and wary of the present. But in contrast to the six political generations before them, there is no call to negate the past by superimposing the future. The past is now an open field, albeit one in ruins. For those Nivkhi tied to their kolkhoz lives in Rybonoe and Rybnovsk, or remaining in their Soviet housing blocks in Nogliki or Okha, for whom the hermitic life is out of reach, there is at least one consolation in the emergent present -- living among and with the ruins of the old order, rather than upon them.
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