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**THE SECOND OR THE FOURTH WORLD:
CRITIQUE OF COMMUNISM AND COLONIALISM
IN CONTEMPORARY NORTH ASIAN LITERATURE***

North Asian indigenous writers provide numerous responses to the traumatic experiences of their communities with colonialism and state socialism and the legacies of the two. This article explores post-Soviet Siberian and Far Eastern literature through the works of Buryat, Khanty, Koryak, Itelmen, and Evenki authors.¹ Posing the simple question of who or what was the collective oppressor of the respective indigenous communities when analyzing the texts, the study unmaskes major ambiguities in indigenous attitudes to the Soviet past and Russian present. Responses to the question include the

* The article was prepared within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), the International Research Project “Comparative Historical Studies of Empire and Nationalism,” and supported within the framework of a subsidy granted to the HSE by the government of the Russian Federation for the implementation of the Global Competitiveness Program. The authors are grateful to the reviewers, *Ab Imperio* editors, and participants of the Princeton Conjunction Annual Conference “Imperial Reverb: Exploring the Postcolonies of Communism,” held at Princeton University, May 13–15, 2016, for their helpful suggestions and invaluable critique.

¹ For the biographies of most authors mentioned in the text, please visit: <http://ugralit.okrplib.ru/authors>; <http://soyol.ru/personas/poets-and-writers/>; <http://www.kamchatsky-krai.ru/biography/>.

Russians, the capitalists, the communists, the state, the lack of humanity, and other phenomena or groups in various combinations.

The metaphors of the Second and the Fourth Worlds, which are discussed in the following section, offer an understanding of the contradictions and intersections between various types of oppression concomitant with capitalism, colonialism, and state socialism, as well as the ambivalence of responses. The two metaphors, which represent the illusive socialist decolonization and the incomplete capitalist decolonization, respectively, allow a positioning of contemporary North Asian literature in broader postsocialist (the Second World) and global indigenous (the Fourth World) contexts and trace the intersections between critiques of communism and colonialism.

Use of the term North Asia instead of Siberia allows the inclusion of writers of the Russian Far East in the analysis and the avoidance of methodological nationalism. The master narrative of Russian history fills the concept of Siberia with pejorative connotations of backwardness,² while the numerous administrative reforms of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries not only detach the Far East from Siberia but also disentangle native Siberians from those indigenous communities that were linguistically and economically kindred to them yet happened to live across the international border. The term North Asia was supposed to help in deconstructing state-centered approaches to indigenous communities and highlighting the transboundary settlement patterns of Mongolic, Tungusic, Finno-Ugric, and other linguistic communities.

Taking a historical rather than ethnographical approach, this article aims to overcome categorizations into “small” and “large” indigenous peoples, limit the use of ethnic identifications, avoid persistent romanticizing of native Siberians, and follow the authors’ escape from the confinement of their communities and localities. The Republic of Buryatia, the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District (Yugra), and the Kamchatka Territory, which are the focus of the analysis, are treated as postimperial situations rather than administrative regions. Just as “imperial situation,” the term “postimperial situation” grasps the dynamics, asymmetries, and ambiguities of interactions between vaguely delineable populations and institutions,³ but also underlines

² Anatolyi Remnev. *Siberia and the Russian Far East in the Imperial Geography of Power* // Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Eds.). *Russian Empire. Space, People, Power, 1700–1930*. Bloomington, IN, 2007. Pp. 425–54.

³ Ilya Gerasimov, Serguei Glebov, Alexandr Kaplunovski, Marina Mogilner, and Aleksandr Semenov. *In Search of a New Imperial History* // *Ab Imperio*. 2005. No. 1. Pp. 33–56; Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Alexander Kaplunovski, Marina Mogilner, and Alexander Semenov. *Do the “Assemblage Points” Exist?* // *Ab Imperio*. 2014. No. 1. Pp. 16–21.

the recent collapse of the previous imperial structures, the Russian Empire and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and equivocalities of the current federal formation.

The analysis of narrative texts (novels, short stories, diaries, letters, plays, and so on, with the exception of poetry, journalism, and research), written by Eremai Aipin (Khanty), Baira Bal'buova (Buryat), Viktor Baldorzhiev (Buryat), Kim Balkov (Buryat), Gennadii Bashkuev (Buryat), Mikhail Batoïn (Buryat), Erzhená Batorova (Buryat), Alexei Gatapov (Buryat), Vladimir Koianto (Koryak), Bulat Molonov (Buryat), Alitet Nemtushkin (Evenki), Dashi-Nima Radnaev (Buryat), Nelia Suzdalova (Itelmen), and Iurii Vella (Khanty and Nenets) and published between 1990 and 2014 in Russian, allow the outlining of several overarching directions of social critique and specific themes in contemporary North Asian literature and the discussion of each in an individual section. Indeed, each author has mixed attitudes toward the past and present. The generalizations and typologies presented in this article derive only from the works cited here and do not consider other texts or political activism of the named writers.

Several works, especially those written by Koianto, Vella, Suzdalova, Batoïn, and Radnaev, tend to present the Soviet Union as a model for overcoming colonialism, imperialism, and unequal ethnic relations. Some authors, especially Radnaev, praise the Soviet Union and mourn its collapse. They consider Soviet modernization and decolonization parallel and view their overall legacies positively. For them, the USSR undoubtedly differed from the oppressive Russian Empire, whereas Koianto and Radnaev also foreground the tendencies of capitalist recolonization during the post-Soviet period. This does not mean that these authors view the whole Soviet period uncritically. Vella and Koianto acknowledge the destructive effects of some Soviet policies and institutions, such as boarding schools, on indigenous communities and cultures. These effects are nevertheless treated as necessary concessions to social progress. In general, this group of works supports not only the official Soviet interpretation of its modernizing efforts, but also the Eurocentric argument that equates modernization to Westernization, with socialism being its acceptable if not superior form.⁴

⁴ Arjun Appadurai. *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, MN, 1996; Sebastian Conrad and Andreas Eckert. *Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, Multiple Modernen. Zur Geschichtsschreibung der modernen Welt* // Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, Ulrike Freitag (Eds.). *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*. Frankfurt am Main, 2007. Pp. 7–49; James Forsyth. *A History of the Peoples of Siberia. Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581–1990*. Cambridge, 1992.

Discussions of the authors' experiences with third spaces such as boarding schools, the Soviet Army, or the Communist Party proved that individuals could benefit from Soviet modernization.⁵ All the authors who viewed Soviet experience positively were active in the USSR and continued publishing until the early 2010s.

Aipin, Bashkuev, Baldorzhiev, Nemtushkin, and Batorova disagree with the interpretation of Soviet modernization as decolonization. For Bashkuev, the Soviet regime was a direct continuation of Russian colonialism, although it introduced new forms of oppression. Aipin and Baldorzhiev are much less critical of the tsarist period and the Whites in the Russian Civil War contrasting them to the Bolsheviks. Nemtushkin stresses that Soviet repressions damaged the population of the whole country, but could also be selectively directed against particular cultural groups. The themes of the Civil War, anti-Bolshevik struggle, and the Great Terror connect the works of the named North Asian authors to the larger body of postsocialist literature that reassesses the violence of the Soviet and related regimes. The trend did not fade by the early 2010s. Forced Soviet modernization, which for some communities was the first violent colonial experience in decades, remained the breaking point in the history of North Asia and the Second World in general.⁶ Unlike other authors who discussed communist violence, Balkov called for humanism and reconciliation from the perspectives of state-centered post-Soviet Russian nationalism and Orthodox Christianity.

Engaging in postsocialist critique, Aipin, Bal'burova, and Bashkuev question the rationality of the Soviet regime, challenging its succession to the European Enlightenment. Aipin also mentions the economic exploitation of native lands and social exclusion of the indigenous population, connecting the Khantys to the global history of indigenous peoples and discussing the legacies of state socialism in postcolonial terms. Bashkuev, Molonov, and Batorova focus on the existential crisis and collapse of individuals and communities during the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Discussions of conformity, alcoholism, and violence connect everyday experiences in North Asia to the struggle of individuals with the dystopian socialist and postsocialist realities elsewhere. Poverty and social problems were similar

⁵ Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. London, 1994.

⁶ Aleksandr Etkind. *Krivoie gore. Pamiat' o nepogrebennykh*. Moscow, 2016; Ivan Sablin. *Rearrangement of Indigenous Spaces. Sovietization of the Chaucus and Ankalyms, 1931–1945 // Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*. 2014. Vol. 16. No. 4. Pp. 531–550.

to those among excluded populations in neighboring Mongolia, Eastern Europe, and in the global Fourth World.⁷

Gatapov and Molonov address global problems, such as environmental degradation and deficiencies of global capitalism, in much more detail. They do not articulate their critique in terms of intergroup ethnic conflicts, though Gatapov refers to global indigenous solidarity, while Molonov unravels everyday xenophobia and oppression. Gatapov expresses the sentiments of the heterogeneous global ethical minority,⁸ reaffirming the widely discussed albeit disputable role that indigenous peoples could play in solving environmental problems.⁹ Molonov explores the Fourth World of disadvantaged minorities and labor migrants from a personal perspective. Unlike most other authors, he focuses on the solutions that globalization could offer, at the same time acknowledging the risks of global capitalism.¹⁰

The Second and Fourth Worlds interacted, intersected, and converged in post-Soviet North Asian literature. In the Second World, the Soviets exhausted the region with labor camps, violent secularization, breakup of families as well as encouraged and forced settlement, and rampaged industrialization. The post-Soviet mass exodus of the population did not decolonize the region, whereas corruption, capitalist exploitation, and crisis made it part of the Fourth World.¹¹ The Second World did not end colonization but changed its forms and made the population passive and incapable of self-organization; the collapse of the Soviet Union did not reinvigorate mass activism and it left the people in the existential impotence of the Fourth World.

⁷ Maria E. Fernández-Giménez. *The Effects of Livestock Privatisation on Pastoral Land Use and Land Tenure in Post-Socialist Mongolia // Nomadic Peoples*. 2001. Vol. 5. No. 2. Pp. 49–66; Gail Kligman. *On the Social Construction of “Otherness.” Identifying “the Roma” in Post-Socialist Communities // Review of Sociology*. 2001. Vol. 7. No. 2. Pp. 61–78; John M. Wallace, Jerald G. Bachman, Patrick M. O’Malley, John E. Schulenberg, Shauna M. Cooper, and Lloyd D. Johnston. *Gender and Ethnic Differences in Smoking, Drinking and Illicit Drug Use among American 8th, 10th and 12th Grade Students, 1976–2000 // Addiction*. 2003. Vol. 98. No. 2. Pp. 225–34.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, 1987.

⁹ Stephen R. Kellert, Jai N. Mehta, Syma A. Ebbin, and Laly L. Lichtenfeld. *Community Natural Resource Management. Promise, Rhetoric, and Reality // Society & Natural Resources*. 2000. Vol. 13. No. 8. Pp. 705–715.

¹⁰ Scott Rozelle, J. Edward Taylor, and Alan DeBrauw. *Migration, Remittances, and Agricultural Productivity in China // The American Economic Review*. 1999. Vol. 89. No. 2. Pp. 287–291.

¹¹ Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy. *The Siberian Curse. How Communist Planners Left Russia out in the Cold*. Washington, 2003.

Despite the growing popularity of converging postcolonial and postsocialist approaches, North Asia remains understudied and underrepresented in contemporary scholarship. Post-Soviet studies have focused primarily on the newly independent nation-states in Eastern Europe and to a much lesser extent on the Caucasus and Central Asia, whereas the projects dealing with Russia have remained largely Eurocentric.¹² David Chioni Moore includes Yuri Slezkine's groundbreaking book in his overarching analysis of intersections between post-Soviet and postcolonial studies,¹³ but does not discuss Siberia in detail.¹⁴ Klavdia Smola's comparative piece on Khanty and Assyrian literature is one of the few works that relies on evidence from North Asia.¹⁵

Works dealing with postsocialist transformations in North Asia have rarely inquired into contemporary indigenous literature,¹⁶ although this self-representational media constitutes a major subfield in postcolonial and indigenous studies.¹⁷ Siberian and Far Eastern literature of the Soviet period

¹² Dorota Kolodziejczyk and Cristina Sandru (Eds.). *Postcolonial Perspectives on Post-communism in Central and Eastern Europe*. London, 2016; Dobrota Alzbeta Pucherová and Róbert Gáfrík (Eds.). *Postcolonial Europe? Essays on Post-Communist Literatures and Cultures*. Leiden, 2015; Nataša Kovačević. *Narrating Post/communism. Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization*. London, 2008.

¹³ Yuri Slezkine. *Arctic Mirrors. Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca, 1994.

¹⁴ David Chioni Moore. *Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique // Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. 2001. Vol. 116. No. 1. Pp. 111–128.

¹⁵ Klavdia Smola. *Ethnic Postcolonial Literatures in the Post-Soviet Era. Assyrian and Siberian Traumatic Narratives // Klavdia Smola and Dirk Uffelmann (Eds.). Postcolonial Slavic Literatures after Communism*. Frankfurt am Main, 2016 (forthcoming).

¹⁶ Alexander Pika and Bruce Grant. *Neotraditionalism in the Russian North. Indigenous Peoples and the Legacy of Perestroika*. Seattle, 1999; Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer. *The Tenacity of Ethnicity. A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective*. Princeton, NJ, 1999; Idem. *Shamans, Spirituality, and Cultural Revitalization. Explorations in Siberia and Beyond*. New York, 2011; Alexia Bloch. *Red Ties and Residential Schools. Indigenous Siberians in a Post-Soviet State*. Philadelphia, 2004; Patty A. Gray. *The Predicament of Chukotka's Indigenous Movement. Post-Soviet Activism in the Russian Far North*. Cambridge, 2005; Erich Kasten (Ed.). *People and the Land. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin, 2002; Erich Kasten (Ed.). *Properties of Culture, Culture as Property. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin, 2004; Erich Kasten (Ed.). *Rebuilding Identities. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin, 2005.

¹⁷ Adam Shoemaker. *Black Words White Page. Aboriginal Literature 1929–1988*. 3rd ed. Canberra, 2004; Lúcia Sá. *Rain Forest Literatures. Amazonian Texts and Latin American Culture*. Minneapolis, 2004; Craig S. Womack. *Red on Red. Native American Literary Separatism*. Minneapolis, 1999.

has been better studied. Melissa Chakars offers a comprehensive account of Buryat literature;¹⁸ Johanna Nichols, Adele Barker, and Yuri Slezkine provide a critical outline of literary developments in other parts of North Asia.¹⁹

The small number of copies and lack of translations into English contribute to the underrepresentation of indigenous North Asian perspectives in global postcolonial and postsocialist studies. Even though Alexander Vashchenko and Claude Clayton Smith have published an anthology of native Siberian literature,²⁰ the collection includes only excerpts from texts by North Asian authors who engaged in heated discussions after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The minority status within their autonomous units and the absence of autonomy in the case of the Koryaks, Itelmens, and Evenkis affected the print market. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were no large-scale state-sponsored publication projects of indigenous works. Even though the existence of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District and the Republic of Buryatia allowed the establishment of regional writers' organizations under the names of the corresponding groups, indigenous writers formed a significant part only of the Writers' Union of Buryatia. Furthermore, members of regional unions complained about insufficient funding and low circulation numbers.²¹

Literary periodicals provided an alternative publishing model but were also insufficiently funded. The St. Petersburg-based journal of the Finno-Ugric peoples, *Sterkh*, which was distributed in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District after 1990, was closed in 1996 due to a lack of funding. In 2009 it was relaunched in Khanty-Mansiysk as an appendix to the journal

¹⁸ Melissa Chakars. *The Socialist Way of Life in Siberia. Transformation in Buryatia*. Budapest, 2014.

¹⁹ Johanna Nichols. *Stereotyping Interethnic Communication. The Siberian Native in Soviet Literature* // Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (Eds.). *Between Heaven and Hell. The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*. New York, 1993. Pp. 185–198; Adele Barker. *The Divided Self. Yuri Rytkheu and Contemporary Chukchi Literature* // Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine (Eds.). *Between Heaven and Hell. The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*. New York, 1993. Pp. 218–226; Slezkine. *Arctic Mirrors*.

²⁰ Alexander Vashchenko and Claude Clayton Smith (Eds.). *The Way of Kinship. An Anthology of Native Siberian Literature*. Minneapolis, 2010.

²¹ Badma Aiusheev. *Soiuz pisatelei Buriatii. Khodim s protianutoi rukoi* // *Gazeta RB*. <http://gazetarb.ru/news/section-society/detail-201988/>. All the Internet links in the article last checked March 6, 2016; Liubov' Oprishko and Aleksandr Shuldikov. *V biblioteke Iugry 2,500 knig iugorskikh avtorov, no chitaiut ikh malo* // *Iugra TV*. http://www.ugra-tv.ru/news/society/v_biblioteke_yugry_2_500_knig_yugorskikh_avtorov_no_chitayut_ikh_malo/?sphrase_id=5781497.

Novaya Iugra. Although the new journal claimed to continue the mission of its predecessor, it failed to reach even major libraries. The State Library of Yugra in Khanty-Mansiysk, the Russian State Library in Moscow, and the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg hold only a few issues of *Sterkh* from the early 1990s. The government of the Republic of Buryatia continued to sponsor the literary and social journal *Baikal*. In 2014, however, the periodical was almost closed due to a lack of funding.²² At the same time, the availability of some issues of the journal in digital formats made it accessible to a global readership.²³

Baikal has been an invaluable source for this article. Founded in 1947, the journal has published contemporary fiction, poetry, and opinion journalism by authors who associate themselves with the Baikal region and the Republic of Buryatia, but has been open to external submissions as well. The journal featured social critique already during the Soviet period and became famous after the publication of the novel *Snail on the Slope* by Boris and Arkady Strugatsky in 1968, for which its editorial office was reprimanded.²⁴ In the 1990s and 2000s, the journal published a variety of opinion pieces on the Soviet period. The publication of Molonov's short stories in 2008 demonstrated that the periodical was also capable of transcending conventional literary genres, publishing texts that were explicitly oral in style and that originated as blog entries.

Other works studied here were brought out by various public and private publishers in Khanty-Mansiysk, Ulan-Ude, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Irkutsk, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, and accessed at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg and the Russian State Library in Moscow. Only one publishing project, the Buriad-Mongol Nom, aims specifically at publishing books by Buryat authors and books about Buryatia. In 2014, it published an extended collection of Bulat Molonov's short stories keeping his bilingual Russian-Buryat writing style in place.²⁵

The brief overview of the publishing market and the search for sources unmasks further intersections between the postcolonial and postsocialist trends. In the Second World the indigenous authors were published, but

²² Literaturnyi zhurnal "Baikal" chut' ne zakryli v preddverii "Goda literatury" v Buriatii // UlanMedia. <http://ulanmedia.ru/news/byuriatia/26.12.2014/411123/literaturniy-zhurnal-Baikal-chut-ne-zakryli-v-preddverii-god.html>.

²³ Zhurnal "Baikal." Izdatel'skii dom Buriad unen. <http://burunen.ru/publications/baikal>.

²⁴ Vladimir Baraev. Poslednie zalpy po shestidesiatnikam // Literaturnaia Rossiia. 2012. No. 13. <http://www.litrossia.ru/archive/item/5668-oldarchive>.

²⁵ Bulat Molonov. Tanets orla. Ulan-Ude, 2014.

could barely criticize the gradual deterioration of their natural and social environments; in the Fourth World the crisis continued and intensified, while the lack of resources curtailed opportunities for expressing criticism.

The Two Worlds

The terms the Second World and the Fourth World derived from different discourses. The first came from the three-world model that divided all countries into three groups depending on their assumed position in the Cold War and global economy. After the Soviet experiment failed, the category of the Second World implied not only transition to capitalism but also the legacies, both positive and negative, of state socialism. The concept of the Fourth World emerged as a reaction to the deficiencies of the three-world approach and developed into a critical concept calling attention to individuals and communities that were excluded from the three worlds. The Second World is therefore a supranational metaphor pertaining to the shared experiences of countries under and after state socialism, whereas the Fourth World sheds light on both global social exclusion and individual experiences with it.

North Asian writers have much in common with representatives of other minority groups that were marginalized in the global nation-state system and included in the Fourth World by indigenous activists. Initially, this term, coined in the 1970s,²⁶ included “all aboriginal or native peoples whose lands fall within national boundaries and techno-bureaucratic administrations of the countries” of the first three worlds, “the peoples without countries of their own, peoples who are usually in the minority and without the power to direct the course of their collective lives,” the “non-nations.”²⁷ The metaphor pertained to the incompleteness of decolonization.

The concept served as a powerful instrument for redefining indigenous studies and for mobilizing indigenous peoples globally. The challenge the concept posed to sovereignty, the key principle of international law, prevented its wider usage. The United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted only in 2007, a quarter century after the UN Economic and Social Council set up its Working Group on Indigenous

²⁶ Ben Whitaker (Ed.). *The Fourth World. Victims of Group Oppression. Eight Reports from the Field Work of the Minority Rights Group.* London, 1972; George Manuel and Michael Posluns. *The Fourth World. An Indian Reality.* New York, 1974.

²⁷ Nelson H. H. Graburn. Introduction. *Arts of the Fourth World // Nelson H. H. Graburn (Ed.). Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World.* Berkeley, CA, 1976. P. 1.

Populations. The declaration stressed the traumatic experiences of the indigenous peoples who had “suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests.” Despite its nonbinding character, several large states with considerable indigenous populations voted against the document (the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) or abstained (the Russian Federation).²⁸

Whereas Nelson H. H. Graburn expressed hope for the future independence of the Fourth World,²⁹ the UN declaration muted the nation-building connotations. In the meantime, Manuel Castells and other scholars redefined the term extending it to all socially excluded individuals and groups that “are systematically barred from access to positions that would enable them to an autonomous livelihood within the social standards framed by institutions and values in a given context.” As social exclusion is a process rather than a condition, the boundaries of the Fourth World constantly shift; its dependence on both the individual and the context makes social exclusion relative. In the contemporary world “entire countries, regions, cities, and neighborhoods become excluded, embracing in this exclusion most, or all, of their populations.”³⁰ The Fourth World of the global poor, unemployed, “homeless, incarcerated, prostituted, criminalized, brutalized, stigmatized, sick, and illiterate” is rising with the rise of “informational global capitalism.”³¹

The postcolonial and global capitalist interpretations of the Fourth World did not fully apply to North Asia. The Soviet past and its legacies made native Siberians part of the Second World. Although the three-world model is highly contested and obsolete,³² the metaphor of the Second World, and its contrast to the Fourth World, highlights the peculiarities of the situation in which North Asian indigenous peoples found themselves in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

²⁸ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples // United Nations. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf.

²⁹ Graburn. Introduction. P. 1.

³⁰ Manuel Castells. *The Rise of the Fourth World* // David Held and Anthony G. McGrew (Eds.). *The Global Transformations Reader. An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*. Cambridge, 2000. Pp. 348–354.

³¹ Idem. *The Information Age. Economy, Society, and Culture*. 2nd ed. Vol. 3. *End of Millennium*. Malden, MA, 2010.

³² Nigel Harris. *The End of the “Third World”?* // *Habitat International*. 1987. Vol. 11. No. 1. Pp. 119–132.

The Bolsheviks claimed to represent an alternative global project rooted in the European Enlightenment before the Cold War officially started. In the world of socialism, which they tried to build in contrast to the world of capitalism, there was no place for colonialism.³³ The efforts to ignite the World Revolution went hand in hand with the showcase decolonization of the former Russian Empire through institutionalization (and sometimes creation) of minority nations as autonomous political communities.³⁴ The connections between diversity management within the Soviet Union and its policies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America persisted after the World Revolution was put aside. The Cold War and articulation of the anticolonial Third World community at the Bandung Conference of 1955 reaffirmed the relevance of decolonization for expanding the socialist Second World and stimulated Soviet efforts to prove that it was different from the oppressive capitalist First World.³⁵

The implicit accusations of colonialism and human rights violations directed at the Soviet Union at the Bandung Conference revealed the inner contradictions and illusiveness of socialist decolonization.³⁶ The non-Russian peoples of the Soviet Union were formally decolonized but denied the freedom of speech and creative expression and experienced cultural and ethnic chauvinism.³⁷ They were victims of symbolic and discursive violence of the regime as were other Soviet citizens,³⁸ but in their case it also facilitated their alienation and implanted them with the complex of cultural inferiority. The indigenous peoples had to speak of themselves using the derogatory terms and the forms prescribed by the Soviets.³⁹ They had to remain silent or provide only implicit references to interethnic conflicts, discrimination, and cultural assimilation.

³³ Donald E. Davis and Eugene P. Trani. *The First Cold War. The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson in U.S.-Soviet Relations*. Columbia, 2002.

³⁴ Francine Hirsch. *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca, 2005.

³⁵ Tobias Rupperecht. *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin. Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War*. Cambridge, 2015.

³⁶ Roland Burke. "The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom." *Human Rights at the Bandung Conference // Human Rights Quarterly*. 2006. Vol. 28. No. 4. Pp. 947–965.

³⁷ Slezkine. *Arctic Mirrors*.

³⁸ Aleksandr Etkind. *Vnutrennaia kolonizatsiia. Imperskii opyt Rossii*. Moscow, 2013.

³⁹ Il'ia Kukulin. "Vnutrennaia kolonizatsiia." *Formirovanie postkolonial'nogo soznaniia v russkoi literature 1970–2000-kh godov // Aleksandr Etkind, Dirk Uffelmann, and Il'ia Kukulin (Eds.). Tam, vnutri. Praktiki vnutrennei kolonizatsii v kul'turnoi istorii Rossii*. Moscow, 2012. P. 846

The Buryats, Khantys, Mansis, Nenets, Koryaks, and Evenkis were institutionalized as nations by means of autonomy. On the one hand, the creation of autonomies was supposed to protect their cultural, social economic, and political rights by fostering education, publishing, and communication in native languages, supporting and developing indigenous economies, and ensuring representation through self-government. On the other hand, it imposed the European concept of nation upon the indigenous groups at the expense of religious, clan, and other categorizations, inscribed them into centralized economic and political structures, and paved the way for further settler and prisoner colonization and unchecked resource exploitation.⁴⁰ Their traumatic experiences in the Soviet Union corresponded to those described in the UN declaration.⁴¹

The collapse of the USSR left the indigenous peoples in an ambivalent situation. The old imperial structure was dismantled but the new one was yet to be assembled. The Republic of Buryatia succeeded the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District within the Tyumen Region was kept intact and received the status of a federal subject, whereas the Koryak and Evenki autonomous districts were revoked in 2007. The Aga and Ust-Orda Buryat districts, which were detached from Buryatia in 1937, lost their autonomous status in 2008. The post-Soviet formation reintroduced religion into diversity management. Buddhism was institutionalized as one of the four “traditional religions,” but was not to challenge the monopoly of Orthodox Christianity on its “special role” in “the history of Russia,”⁴² whereas Shamanism was not included in the federal legislation.

The post-Soviet formation also reaffirmed the concept of the “indigenous small peoples” defined as those “living on the territories of traditional settlement of their ancestors, retaining traditional lifestyles, economies, and trades,” numbering “less than fifty thousand people,” and “perceiving themselves as independent ethnic communities.”⁴³ The division of indigenous peoples into “small” and “large” masked the minority status of most indigenous groups within their administrative regions. In 2010, the 286,839

⁴⁰ Forsyth. *A History; Niobe Thompson. Settlers on the Edge. Identity and Modernization on Russia's Arctic Frontier.* Vancouver, 2008.

⁴¹ The United Nations Declaration.

⁴² Federal'nyi zakon ot 26.09.1997 N 125-FZ “O svobode sovesti i o religioznykh ob”edineniiakh” // <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102049359>.

⁴³ Federal'nyi zakon ot 30.04.1999 N 82-FZ “O garantiiakh prav korennykh malochislennykh narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii” // <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=102059473>.

Buryats formed slightly less than 30 percent of Buryatia's population, while the 2,974 Evenkis made up around 0.3 percent of the republic. The 19,068 Khantys, the 10,977 Mansis, and the 1,438 Nenets were also a minority in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous District, with all three groups combined comprising around 2 percent of the population. After the abolition of the Koryak Autonomous District, the 6,640 Koryaks and the 2,394 Itelmens corresponded to 2 percent and 0.7 percent, respectively, of the new Kamchatka Territory's population.⁴⁴

The North Asian indigenous peoples found themselves in a dual situation. They were institutionalized as autonomous nations, but became minorities within respective administrative units. They were formally recognized, but found themselves occupying disadvantaged positions in the social hierarchies. The question of whether socialist decolonization was indeed decolonization remained.

Socialist Decolonization

The Bolsheviks presented their modernization project as an alternative to capitalist colonialism. Some participants of the Bandung Conference tended to view the Soviet Union as another Western colonizer. Other anticolonial and postcolonial politicians accepted Soviet assistance genuinely supporting or paying lip service to the benefits of socialist modernization and criticizing colonialism and neocolonialism of its capitalist counterpart.

The critique of colonialism connected North Asian indigenous authors to other indigenous literatures already during the Soviet period. Eremai Aipin included an explicitly anticolonial passage in his critical late Soviet novel *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight*.

Forever gone are the Indians of many tribes. They were exterminated by colonizers. Exterminated by English colonizers. Exterminated by French colonizers. Exterminated by Spanish colonizers. Exterminated by colonizers of other kinds. Exterminated by colonizers and other scum. You did a good job, colonizers, didn't you?⁴⁵

Soviet authors continued the late imperial trend initiated by the Siberian Regionalists,⁴⁶ but stressed the capitalist rather than Russian background of

⁴⁴ Vserossiiskaia perepis' naseleniia 2010 g. // Demoskop Weekly. http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_etn_10.php.

⁴⁵ Eremai Aipin. *Khanty, ili Zvezda Utrennei Zari*. Moscow, 1990. P. 302.

⁴⁶ N. M. Iadrintsev. *Sibirskie inorodtsy, ikh byt i sovremennoe polozhenie*. St. Petersburg, 1891.

colonialism.⁴⁷ The late Soviet glasnost and collapse of the USSR allowed Russian connotations of colonialism to be made explicit. Reflecting on the celebration of the “voluntary accession of Buryatia to Russia” in 1959, Gennadii Bashkuev referred to the 1658 uprising of “Buryat-Mongolian tribes against violent colonization” of their homelands. “The brutality of the colonizers knew no boundaries. The trade in Buryat-Mongol women flourished across the whole country.”⁴⁸

Dashi-Nima Radnaev noted in his autobiography that dozens of “small non-Russian peoples,” including the Buryats, lived in Siberia, that they had their “indigenous lands and interests,” and that they all contributed to the world culture.

The history of the Russian tsarist exploration of Siberia since Ermak is a history of violent seizure of other people’s lands by Russian Cossacks, who by fire and sword made their way through the expanses of Siberia, they resorted to the physical elimination of small-numbered peoples. Seizing other people’s lands, Russian Cossacks settled on the best lands, captured the best hunting grounds, started to exploit natural resources, subjected local people to tribute, and in order to attract them to their side, fostered their alcohol consumption.⁴⁹

The critics of colonialism reaffirmed the claims made by Siberian nationalists and Regionalists during the revolutions of 1905 and 1917,⁵⁰ but according to most Soviet and some post-Soviet texts, the creation of the Soviet Union resolved the colonial question by granting the indigenous population equal political rights and ensuring their social and economic welfare through modernization of their communities and their inclusion into the larger Soviet society. Radnaev mitigated his critique of the prerevolutionary Russian settlers by making them the pioneers of modernization who brought agricultural civilization to the Baikal region.⁵¹ For him and other authors,⁵² the Soviets continued Russian modernization but minimized its

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Vladimir Sangi. *Zhenit’ba Kevongov*. Moscow, 1977; Iurii Rytkeu. *Aivangu*. Moscow, 1980.

⁴⁸ Gennadii Bashkuev. *Na perelome*. Ulan-Ude, 2007. P. 20.

⁴⁹ Dashi-Nima Radnaev. *Vospominaniia o prozhitoi zhizni*. Part 3 // *Baikal*. 1995. No. 2. P. 133.

⁵⁰ M. N. Bogdanov. *Ocherki istorii buriat-mongol’skogo naroda*. S dopolnitel’nyimi stat’iami B. B. Baradina i N. N. Koz’mina. Verkhneudinsk, 1926.

⁵¹ Dashi-Nima Radnaev. *Vospominaniia o prozhitoi zhizni*. Part 2 // *Baikal*. 1994. No. 5–6. P. 119.

⁵² Sangi. *Zhenit’ba*.

colonial constituent. Stylistically, such works occupied an intermediary position between Socialist Realism and Soviet romantic Orientalism and focused on the social advances of Siberian “noble savages.” In the case of nomadic indigenous groups the process of Soviet modernization involved their sedentarization.⁵³

The stories of modernization continued to be published after the collapse of the USSR. Vladimir Koianto’s post-Soviet volume included his earlier short story about an old woman named Chachamme who continued to live in her “ancient tent” despite the availability of new housing in the 1950s. Maria, a local Komsomol leader, felt ashamed of Chachamme’s “backwardness,” connecting it to her illiteracy and poor knowledge of Russian, and her faith in “the eternal fire” and “the dwelling of her ancestors” was portrayed as a further obstacle to modernization, which implied both learning Russian and abandoning traditional beliefs.⁵⁴

The boarding school, a major instrument of Soviet modernization and Russification,⁵⁵ occupied a central place in Iurii Vella’s prose. He acknowledged the role this institution played in separating children from their parents, but explained it as a conflict between urban and rural lifestyles, with the inevitable victory of the “city,” which “took” the children during the process of modernization. The boarding school was also a third space that enabled the interaction and diffusion of different ethnic groups,⁵⁶ and to a large extent facilitated Vella’s own location between Khanty, Nenets, and Mansi cultures. It was a space of cultural Europeanization in which Vella claimed to have heard Ludwig van Beethoven’s *Für Elise* for the first time, but it failed to create a unified modern Soviet community, as the romanticized Khanty remained different from the Russians in Vella’s work.⁵⁷

Koianto referred to the boarding school in his diaries, which were first published after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He told the story of an Itelmen boy who was caught eating a reindeer plate bone. The teacher was puzzled by the fact that “after fifty years these children still followed their savage ways.” Her husband, also an Itelmen, was “almost alien” to her and she feared that he too was eating plate bones under his pillow. In this conflict Koianto undoubtedly sided with the Soviets whose modernizing nationality

⁵³ Forsyth. *A History*.

⁵⁴ Vladimir Koianto. *Tummi*. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, 2006. Pp. 208–210.

⁵⁵ Dennis Bartels and Alice Bartels. *When the North Was Red. Aboriginal Education in Soviet Siberia*. Montreal, 1995.

⁵⁶ Bhabha. *The Location*; Bloch. *Red Ties*.

⁵⁷ Iurii Vella. *Veterok s ozera*. Khanty-Mansiysk, 2008.

policy he praised. The integration of the indigenous peoples into the modern society demanded their departure from the “tribal system.”⁵⁸

Koianto did not criticize Russification, as it was inseparable from the modernization process. For him, Russian was the second native tongue of the indigenous peoples. He invoked the practice of playing Russians mentioned by Iurii Rytkeu (Chukchi).⁵⁹ “We also played Russians as children, the life before the war was so much fun, nobody cared if you were Russian or Koryak. . . . Who could then understand that people were different?”⁶⁰ Nelia Suzdalova also welcomed the adoption of external cultural traits and praised the communists. Yet, the newcomers remained “alien” to the romanticized Itelmens.⁶¹

Unlike Suzdalova and Vella, Koianto did not romanticize the indigenous peoples and referred to their drinking problem. At the same time, he idealized the Soviet past and cited, for instance, the unrestrained contacts between Kamchatka and the Japanese, though their existence is doubtful. Koianto appropriated the paternalist Soviet narrative and referred to the heroic Russian teachers who helped the small peoples of the North to enter the new world started by the October Revolution of 1917 by educating, advising, and assisting in all matters. Recalling his experience at the Herzen Institute in Leningrad, Koianto followed his lecturer there and underlined the equality of “the Northerners,” “the children of the North” with other students. “It was he and his comrades who convinced us that we were also people in the first place.” This idealized paternalistic image of the Soviet Union was transferred to Russia. “We, the people of the North, irrespective of being small or large, are Russia.” Just like the mythical “good old female reindeer,” Russia remained the protector of all its peoples.⁶²

The idea of the USSR as protector was consolidated in some texts dealing with World War II. Radnaev connected his participation in the struggle against Nazism for the great Soviet state to his membership in the Communist Party.⁶³ The need to defend the Soviet Union was described not only in terms of defending the shared Fatherland but also as a means of protecting the

⁵⁸ Vladimir Koianto. *Moi XX vek*. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, 2010.

⁵⁹ For a discussion of the practice, see Ivan Sablin. *Written Oral History. Dimensions of Identity of Chukotka’s Indigenous People in the Works of Rytkeu // AlterNative. An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*. 2012. Vol. 8. No. 1. Pp. 27–41.

⁶⁰ Koianto. *Moi XX vek*. P. 19.

⁶¹ Nelia Suzdalova. *Zemlia predkov*. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, 2013.

⁶² Koianto. *Moi XX vek*. P. 281.

⁶³ Radnaev. *Vospominaniia*. Part 3. P. 127.

indigenous peoples from possible recolonization by imperialists, Germans, Japanese, Americans, or foreigners in general.

Mikhail Batoïn's story, "The Far Shores," contained an episode of encounter between two Buryats and Japanese prisoners shortly after World War II. One of the locals expressed his contempt for the prisoners who were punished for their desire for other people's lands, but agreed to sell meat to one of them. Other prisoners interrupted the deal and beat up their fellowman confirming the lack of humanity in the capitalist other. "I often used to pass through the place where my relative and I sold meat. I saw large wooden crosses on the hillside where they used to cut wood. Now it is impossible to find these graves of the Japanese soldiers who lost their lives for nothing on our soil."⁶⁴

Recalling a conversation with an American journalist, Nima, a Buryat military journalist and the main character of "The Far Shores," mentioned his mistrust toward the foreigner who could search "for something 'negative' in our life." The journalist, John, was writing an article about the Baikal–Amur Mainline and asked Nima about his national identity. Nima responded that he was Buryat, but did not acknowledge the shared Buryat-Mongol identity, Buddhist religion, and descent from Genghis Khan put forward by the American. "We are the Buryats. You are right, we have the same roots with the Mongols, but our clan lineage is different. We were never under Genghis Khan's authority." John then asked him about the attitude of the "small peoples" to the construction of the mainline. "My people live in the united family of our peoples as one of its equal members. But we are the masters of our destiny. We build our life ourselves." Feeling "ashamed" of this "stilted speech, of all those clichés," Nima nevertheless continued to channel the official views on the future intercontinental railway to North America that would follow the trails of the ancient nomads and become the "Great Mainline of Peace" along with the discourse of peaceful coexistence. John called Nima a communist romantic, to which he responded, "We like to dream about the future," and left the conversation feeling proud that the American could not provoke him into criticizing the Soviet Union with the questions about "Genghis Khan, the Mongols, and national feelings."⁶⁵ Radnaev also implicitly referred to so-called Pan-Mongolism, which led many Buryats to prosecution and death before World War II, and continued to be a dangerous topic until the introduction of glasnost.

⁶⁴ Mikhail Batoïn. *Dalekie berega* // *Baikal*. 1992. No. 5. Pp. 17–18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Pp. 35–37.

The supporters of the socialist decolonization approach to the USSR did not view the Soviet experience uncritically. Radnaev criticized the violence against “class enemies,” especially among the “small-numbered peoples,” such as the Evenkis. He held the highest authorities, the members of local bodies, and secret police responsible for the mass repressions and collectivization that brought unskilled and illiterate people to leadership, but interpreted them as mistakes and excesses supporting the Soviet reforms as such using their official counterintuitive explanation through future events. “The collectivization of individual peasant households was the only correct policy” since only collective economy could “supply the front.” For Radnaev, the repressions and famine were problems of management, not problems of the system, as the same communists who were responsible for excesses during collectivization and dekulakization implemented many positive policies crucial for the future of Buryat peasants.⁶⁶

Referring to the proclaimed formation of the “new historical community of people, the Soviet people,” consisting of individuals who did not know their native language and the claim that the Russian people not only preserved their language but enriched it borrowing from other languages, Radnaev asserted that the party had rushed to such conclusions. The people wanted to preserve their languages and cultures, which could be seen in the “many cases of nationalism and separatism” during perestroika. He again mitigated his criticism by saying that learning Russian was absolutely necessary for joining “the culture of the great people” and world culture, blaming the older generations of Buryats for their indifference toward own culture and not the official policies for the fact that the Buryat youth did not speak their native language.⁶⁷

Batoïn invoked the everyday racism and alienation of indigenous peoples, when a young woman questioned Nima as to whether he was Korean, Chinese, or Mongolian, and found his name “strange.”⁶⁸ Radnaev also noted that even though the October Revolution stopped Russian colonialism, people soon started to forget about its ideals and neglected the interests of the “small-numbered” peoples, just like those of other groups, “under the noble slogans of internationalism and friendship of the peoples.” Some local officials were “hopelessly infected with the great-chauvinistic fervor”

⁶⁶ Dashi-Nima Radnaev. *Vospominaniia o prozhitoi zhizni*. Part 1 // Baikal. 1994. No. 4. P. 116.

⁶⁷ Idem. *Vospominaniia*. Part 2. P. 118.

⁶⁸ Batoïn. *Dalekie berega*. Pp. 8–9.

and hated Buryats and Russians alike.⁶⁹ But these cases were dismissed as minor defects of an otherwise well-functioning system.

The advocates of the USSR viewed its collapse as a precondition for the recurrence of colonialism. Radnaev feared that the democrats of Boris Yeltsin planned to reestablish constitutional monarchy in Russia and revive the Cossacks, which oppressed the non-Russian population of imperial peripheries, as one of its foundations.⁷⁰ He was disgusted with the revision of the Russian Civil War and admiration for Alexander Kolchak and “his White Guard scum” who had long been “dumped in the bog of history.” Radnaev described the plans to erect a monument to Kolchak in Irkutsk as the most vile and loathsome sacrilege to the “memory of the heroes who died for freedom and independence of the peoples.”⁷¹ Radnaev opposed perestroika and the post-Soviet reforms as having led “the great multinational power” to its collapse and resulting in degradation of the society, the plunder of national wealth, and poverty. He also deplored the dissolution of the Communist Party.⁷²

Koianto was especially critical of capitalism as the driving force of the post-Soviet oppression. Referring to a meeting on Kamchatka’s economic development, he noted that when something profitable was being built indigenous peoples were forced to move from their lands and disapproved the lack of popular participation. “How will the people of the North perceive your program? You discussed everything with directors and what about the people...”⁷³

Koianto also regretted the collapse of unifying ideas. He emphasized the role of indigenous intellectuals in the spiritual renaissance of their communities. Addressing his friends, Aipin, Iuvan Shestalov (Mansi), and Vladimir Sangi (Nivkh), and indigenous peoples in general, Koianto criticized the revival of religious ideas. “There is no Soviet power, our twentieth century has become history. It is impossible to bring that time back. This is probably why we got lost, reaching for the tambourine or flipping through the Bible.” His overall reaction to the post-Soviet changes was pessimistic, despite the paternalistic disposition of the Russian state. “Neither the ‘bright future’ nor the ‘golden’ horns had come and it is the time when we found ourselves

⁶⁹ Radnaev. *Vospominaniia*. Part 3. Pp. 133, 142.

⁷⁰ *Idem*. *Vospominaniia o prozhitoi zhizni*. Part 4 // *Baikal*. 1995. No. 3. P. 86.

⁷¹ *Idem*. *Vospominaniia*. Part 2. P. 131.

⁷² *Idem*. *Vospominaniia*. Part 1. P. 148; *Idem*. *Vospominaniia*. Part 2. Pp. 131, 135; *Idem*. *Vospominaniia*. Part 3. P. 115.

⁷³ Koianto. *Moi XX vek*. P. 260.

imprisoned in our mental breakdown, in the depth of which we buried our Faith and Ideas.”⁷⁴

Soviet Colonialism

Many authors did not interpret socialist modernization as decolonization. Some rendered it as a continuation of Russian colonialism, whereas others looked into the new forms of oppression, structural violence, and discrimination that emerged during the Soviet period. Embarking on their civilizing and modernizing mission, the Soviets not only resembled their tsarist Russian and Western capitalist counterparts, but often surpassed them in physical and symbolic violence. Economic discrepancies were translated into cultural hierarchies; difference was interpreted as inferiority; indigenous communities were devastated irrespective of the goals and ideals of the oppressors.

In his play *Chukcha*, Gennadii Bashkuev explored everyday racism and Orientalism in contemporary Russia. Chukcha, who was of Asian but not Chukchi descent, had to work for a Russian policeman, Slava, after the latter arrested him for not having a residence registration. Slava, a fan of the Soviet “Chukchi” jokes, treated Chukcha as a subhuman, called him names, used racial slurs, questioned him about cultural stereotypes, and ultimately almost smothered him to death with a plastic bag. Boria, Slava’s friend of Jewish descent, was sympathetic toward Chukcha, but he also abused the Soviet anticolonial discourse.

Slava: Hey you, Chukcha! Hey! Come to heel! [...] Seen this? Labor [slave] force! Why did you squint? Say hello to the guest of our *yaranga* [traditional Chukchi home]. Say, “Salam aleikum!” [Assalamu alaykum] And you, Shiffer [Slate, Boria’s nickname based on his Jewish descent], “Shalom aleichem!” (Laughs).

Chukcha: Hello.

Boria: Fraternal greetings to the toilers of the Orient! [...]

Slava: Tell me, Chukcha...

Chukcha: I am not a Chukchi.

Slava: Who cares! You better tell me. They say you have a custom of giving your wife to a guest for a night. Do you? We had a bet at our department...

Chukcha: There isn’t such a custom. Maybe you have it here but we don’t. [...]

⁷⁴ Koianto. Tummi. Pp. 10, 32, 35.

Slava: So, yes? Where did you park your reindeer?

Chukcha: What reindeer?

Slava: The ones you rode to Moscow you freak! Wait a second, we'll harness them... We will ride, we will rush the reindeer early in the morning and you will see that the North is called Far North without a reason... [reciting a popular Soviet song by the Nanai singer Kola Beldy] You will be the last one!

He takes a plastic bag from the table and puts it on Chukcha's head.

Slava: So, is the North endless, is it? Hey you, why did you squint?! Here, let's make big Russian eyes... [...] You sat with the white men, now go and work, Chukotka! Arbeiten [mimicking Soviet portrayal of forced labor under the Nazis].

Chukcha: Give me my passport, I will work. Am I human?⁷⁵

Bashkuev presented his character as deprived of freedom and dignity, as a fully enslaved human being. For him and some other writers the October Revolution did not end or hamper Russian colonialism.

In his collection of short stories *When the Birds Scream and Travel...*, Viktor Baldorzhiev observed this continuity through the Russian Civil War in which the Whites treated the local population of the Baikal region better than the Reds. The war itself was a war of Russians against Russians who killed each other instead of working. Many people left Buryatia for China, Mongolia, and even Tibet because they anticipated repressions against Buddhism and worsening violence. Those who hoped that since the "Russians stopped fighting" they were "going to restart trade" and stayed in Siberia found themselves amid terror and plunder. People were killed or made to disappear; emigration and arrests separated families. The promises of the Russian "masters" and Buryat "bandits" that life would be good soon accompanied all this.⁷⁶

For Ereimei Aipin, Russian colonialism not only continued under the Soviets, but took much more repressive forms. The Soviet internationalists were no different from the Russians. In *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight*, his characters referred to the Red Tsar who took the place of the overthrown White Tsar. This Red Tsar had "the best intentions, to build a new life for all hunters and fishermen." But before that one had to "uproot and destroy everything old."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Gennadii Bashkuev. Chukcha. P'esa v chetyrekh kartinakh // P'esy raznykh let. Ulan-Ude, 2007. Pp. 1–24.

⁷⁶ Viktor Baldorzhiev. Kogda krichat i kochuiut ptitsy... // Baikal. 2007. No. 6. Pp. 14, 16, 19, 31, 36.

⁷⁷ Aipin. Khanty. Pp. 99–100, 142–143.

Aipin was very critical of the boarding schools, sedentarization, and Soviet paternalism in general. Sending children to the boarding school meant giving them to the state. His characters questioned the need to detach children from families, criticized the inconsistency of the imposed sedentary lifestyle with fishing and hunting, and doubted the capacity of the Red Tsar to teach the experienced hunters and fisherman their trades. The anti-Russian stance was reinforced by superstition: spending the night in one room with a Russian woman meant losing one's luck while hunting.⁷⁸

Soviet violence was central to Aipin's later novel *Our Lady in the Bloodied Snows*,⁷⁹ which told the story of the Kazym Rebellion, the armed resistance of the Khantys and Nenets to collectivization and other official policies in 1931–1934. The novel, first published in 2002, was based on recently declassified archival documents and reflected Aipin's literary rendering of the conflict between the representatives of the Soviet state and indigenous peoples.⁸⁰ The novel became a success, and a film adaptation followed in 2009.⁸¹

The conflict was presented as a war between the Ostyaks (an obsolete designation of the Khantys and sometimes other indigenous groups) and the "Red Russians," which was started by the head of the Kyzym Culture Base, a newly constructed Soviet settlement that was supposed to become the center of modernization, the chairman of the Integrated Union of Cooperation, an economic organization, and a female commissar representing the Ural Regional Committee of the Communist Party who decided to attack the Ostyak Gods and defiled a major sacred site. The "Red Russians" were later reinforced by a special group of the secret police. After this group was also destroyed, the Soviets sent in the Red Army detachments.

The novel revolved around an Ostyak woman, the mother of five children who had to defend her home from the Reds. The latter not only killed her husband and two children but also shot all their neighbors and burned their homes. The woman, referred to as the Mother of the Children, was forced to join the rebellion and decided to travel to another settlement for help. During her journey, which is the central part of the novel's plot, she

⁷⁸ Ibid. Pp. 100, 112–113, 126.

⁷⁹ Ereimei Aipin. *Bozh'ia Mater' v krovavykh snegakh*. St. Petersburg, 2010.

⁸⁰ Alexander Pika, Jens Dahl, and Inge Larsen (Eds.). *Anxious North. Indigenous Peoples in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. Selected Documents, Letters and Articles*. Copenhagen, 1996; Andrew Wiget and Olga Balalaeva. *Khanty, People of the Taiga Surviving the Twentieth Century*. Fairbanks, 2011.

⁸¹ Oleg Fesenko. *Krasnyi led. Saga o khantakh*. Drama. Iugra-fil'm. Russia, 2009.

remembers her previous life and reflects on the “evil communist spirit.” She lost her daughter and one of her two remaining sons to an attack by a Soviet airplane.

The title of the novel referenced the fusion of Shamanism and Christianity, which, according to Aipin, was eagerly adopted by the Ostyaks. They had icons in their tents because Christian martyrs protected them at home, and other Gods reigned outside. In their war against the Reds, the indigenous population mobilized under the banner of the Tsars’ faith. The White Colonel, who stayed in the region after the Russian Civil War, supposedly headed the rebellion. He planned the military operations of the Ostyaks, set up explosives, and ensured ammunition supplies. His base was supposedly located somewhere deep in the woods in the upper streams of Ostyak rivers near an Orthodox church or a chapel. “The Ostyaks were charged by faith there, strengthened their spirits. They prayed to, as they said, the Russian God, asked the Russian God for help against the Red Russians.”⁸²

At the same time, the Ostyaks were portrayed as independent actors rather than loyal subjects of the Tsar. Aipin stressed the mythical nature of the White Colonel, as the Ostyaks did not need a leader in their struggle against the Reds and organized all groups themselves. The White Colonel was indeed a former commander of the Russian army who sought to save the Tsar from the Reds but was saved himself by the husband of the main character. The Colonel lived with the Ostyaks for some time carving icons with the faces of the Tsar’s family and telling stories of the old regime, but then left to seek a way to Europe where his family had emigrated.

The Ostyaks had sympathy for the Tsar’s family and liked the icons, but did not seem to share the Colonel’s devotion to the Tsar as “God’s representative on earth.”⁸³

During the war between the Whites and the Reds small detachments of armed people often came to the Agan either looking for guides, or reindeer rides, or supplies. Of course, they mainly harassed the settlements close to the Agan, the Large Ob, and the town of Surgut. They said that a Red Tsar emerged and went to war with the White Tsar. In this war the Ostyaks were more sympathetic toward the White Tsar, he was nearer and easier to understand. He was the Tsar of the Ostyaks already for many centuries. . . . During his reign people were born, lived, and loved, prayed to their Gods, hunted and herded reindeer, caught fish, got old, and departed to the Lower World. His hand signed the

⁸² Aipin. *Bozh’ia Mater’ v krovavykh snegakh*. P. 65.

⁸³ *Ibid.* P. 107.

orders that supported the Ostyaks and their trades. By his name the Ostyak princes and Russian voivods, which were later substituted by governors, ruled the land. And now he was defeated and destroyed by the Red Tsar whose people promised many good things in words. But one cannot be fed by words.⁸⁴

The motivation of the Red Tsar's later actions remained a mystery even for the commander who was sent to crush the rebellion. "And who needed the Ostyak snows and ices?! If one hadn't touched them they would remain in their woods for another hundred years, they wouldn't trouble anyone. But no. The Soviets need their lands."⁸⁵

Aipin dehumanized the Soviets in the conflict. The key scene in the novel, the attack of the Soviet airplane on the Mother and her Children, was a metaphor for the Soviet technological prowess used for destroying life. The Mother perceived the machine as a bird of prey, but hoped for its mercy. She and her children kneeled before the airplane showing that they were unarmed, but the airplane opened fire and killed her daughter.

Everything was destroyed. Everything fell into pieces. It seemed that the end of the World, of humanity, of the Ostyak people was approaching and together with it approached the demise of the Mother and her Children. And nobody will be able to avert this coming catastrophe since even the bloodied Mother of Jesus was powerless before the Reds.⁸⁶

Aipin further dehumanized the Soviets by presenting them as a senseless system. *Our Lady in the Bloodied Snows* ends with a factual epilogue.

As soon as the trial ended, a note appeared on the last page of the protocol saying that all eleven leaders of the rebellion, for whom the death penalty was substituted with prison sentences, died "of heart failure." In reality they were simply beaten to death in their cells. The government explained this truthfully in a sense, "The Ostyaks absolutely cannot handle life in prison." The trial ended, justice in the Soviet style was victorious.

That is the real price of freedom... For the Ostyaks.⁸⁷

Aipin had already started to explore Soviet violence in *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight*. He described the Great Terror as the "time of

⁸⁴ Ibid. P. 124.

⁸⁵ Ibid. Pp. 14–15.

⁸⁶ Ibid. P. 59.

⁸⁷ Ibid. P. 232.

the Bloodied Eye.” It was hard to find a family among the Khanty that was not touched by this “pointless and black” time of genuine mystical horror.

He had many faces. He was called different names: “Samerin,” “That One,” “The Evil Spirit,” “Iimpesiot” [a monster that is not subordinate to a god or a human], since he was all-knowing, he could emerge here and there in a completely unexpected form. He could come day and night, late in the evening or early in the morning. He could fall on one’s head in summer, in winter, in autumn, and in spring. He could do everything. He was invisibly present everywhere. He saw and heard everything. He knew what every person knew and thought. But this was not enough. He knew what the people thought. He was never wrong, he was never sorry, he performed his deeds easily and without a thought. On each arrival, he took “enemies of the people” with him, from three or four to ten people. He told a man, “You will go with me.” And the men got on the carriage or the sledge and followed the Master thinking that in the district they will investigate everything and will instantly let him go home. Since nobody felt any guilt in any misconduct. Nobody thought of and tried to run or defend himself. The hope for salvation lived in everyone. But among those who were taken by him only two people returned . . . Many and many disappeared without a trace. There were even no usual notifications that they died “of heart failure,” since “they absolutely cannot handle imprisonment” and die as flies. They disappeared without a trace as if they never lived in this world.⁸⁸

Aipin explicated that the Khantys did not discriminate between different Russian authorities and could not comprehend their guilt. Piotr, an old man who was an appointed elder during tsarist times, asked the One of the Bloodied Eye if everyone was to be killed since everyone served the Tsar and got a positive response. Those who worked for the new authorities, like Aisidor, the kolkhoz chairman, were terrified that by showing native lands to a higher official they exposed them to the “Evil spirit” who would now spoil everything and curse every clan member. Indeed, the Bloodied Eye presented a long list of those who were to be repressed including the clan of every offender, Ostyak or Russian alike.⁸⁹

The Great Terror was not only the time of disappearing. Many people were forcibly relocated to North Asia. The movement of people and their shared experiences of oppression were a unifying factor for the culturally

⁸⁸ *Idem*. Khanty. P. 60.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* Pp. 56–57, 100–101.

diverse population of the Soviet Union. Referring to the annexation of the Baltic states and relocation of many Lithuanians to Siberia, Alitet Nemtushkin explored the love story between a Lithuanian exile Piatras Minkus and an Evenki woman Ogdo.

The story “May He Rest in Peace” began with the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in 1940. The Soviets were dehumanized in a manner similar to Aipin and to the conventions of portraying Nazis in Soviet literature. “We all stuck to the windows: from around the corner a whole column of black monsters [tanks] was moving, in the sky fighters circled like vultures.” The arrival of the Germans halted the repressions that unfolded after the Soviet occupation. But the Nazis, who were “the uterine brothers of communists,” also engaged in plunder. The Soviets renewed their repressions on liberated territories before the war ended, arrested Piatras as a “collaborator,” and sent him to Siberia where he met Ogdo.⁹⁰

Nemtushkin shared the romantic attitudes toward the indigenous peoples, “the naive children of nature,” and regretted their alcoholism. He also claimed that the benefits of the October Revolution for them were a bluff. Instead, the revolution ceased their “harmony with nature” and “rational behavior,” while the Bolshevik masters destroyed their culture, “trampled their language, customs, way of life, made them outcasts in their native land.” At the same time, the indigenous peoples helped the arriving exiles.⁹¹

Gennadii Bashkuev discussed structural violence against the Buryats as a nation. Referring to the partition of the Buryat-Mongol Republic in 1937, he claimed that Buryatia was for him not an administrative unit but “the territory of the spirit,” while its separation into several autonomies was a direct continuation of colonial politics in the Russian-Qing borderland. According to Bashkuev, the nomads had long dreamed of uniting their tribes and dialects, but their plans were hampered by the border patrols of the eighteenth century. In the early twentieth century the Pan-Mongolian idea reemerged, but Joseph Stalin crushed it in 1937, since he did not trust the Buryat-Mongols and other “small nations.” Some Buryats, including Bashkuev’s mother, were exiled to the Crimea. The Soviet Buryat autonomy was “nothing but a screen for covering the totalitarian nature of the state,” while “academic history was nothing but a legend of the state that was composed locally following orders from the center.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Alitet Nemtushkin. Pukhom zemlia emu // *Baikal*. 1992. No. 4. Pp. 101–119.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* P. 120.

⁹² Bashkuev. *Na perelome*. Pp. 4–21.

Religious oppression in Buryatia was also an important topic for many perestroika and post-Soviet authors. In *My Happy Luna*, Erzhenya Batorova told the story of Aiusha, a crippled Buryat boy, who took care of the famous Zandan-Zhuu statue of the Buddha when Buryat communists arrived to pillage the monastery. Having hidden inside the van where the statue was loaded, he turned into a beautiful statue himself, but a Russian supervisor ordered that both statues be burned despite their aesthetic appeal to the Buryat communists. By personifying the burned statues, Batorova not only referred to the traditional interpretation of the statue as a living being but also stressed the illusive boundary between cultural heritage and faith, as well as the cruelty of the Soviet regime: even a miracle of the Buddha could not save Aiusha who was to be burned. Batorova also explored the naive attitudes of Buryats toward Buddhism and the Soviet regime.

Aiusha was happy that the Soviet government did not let anyone to go to the datsan [university monastery]. He had enough work already. ... Aiusha told Zandan-Zhuu all the news. The Buddha smiled. Aiusha brushed away the dust and went to sleep.

One day, the people who came from the city to the abbot returned. It was a winter night. They raised the abbot from bed and started yelling at him. Aiusha woke up from the noise. He slept alone in the most remote house. He looked out of the window and saw the abbot fall into the snow under his window. Silhouettes of people in long coats moved toward the datsan. Aiusha ran out of the house to the abbot. "Zandan-Zhuu," the abbot croaked once he saw Aiusha. The abbot had a hole in his belly, from which blood was flowing. Aiusha took off his shirt and packed the wound. The abbot said again, "Zandan-Zhuu." Khuvaraks [students] and lamas looked out of the windows, but nobody came out. They prayed and watched the naked boy run to the datsan.⁹³

The Zandan-Zhuu statue was returned to the Buddhist community during a massive celebration of the 250th anniversary of Buddhism's official recognition in Russia in 1991, an event that attracted dozens of prominent Buddhist leaders including the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to then still Soviet Buryatia.⁹⁴ The lives of the many people who were killed by the Soviets, however, could not be returned. Eremai Aipin underlined the role of historical memory in preventing the revival of an oppressive regime in *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight*. The Bloodied Eye was ultimately gone, but old Efrem said to the people who celebrated the victory of justice, "He and

⁹³ Erzhenya Batorova. *Moia schastlivaia Luna // Baikal*. 2012. No. 1. Pp. 99–100.

⁹⁴ G. Kovrov. *Itogami vizita ia dovolen... // Baikal*. 1991. No. 4. P. 89.

his time will be able to return only when we forget about his black deeds. We must not forget anything.”⁹⁵

Existential Collapse

North Asian critics of communism also challenged the rationality, all-knowing character, and omnipresence of the Soviet regime. They foregrounded the devastating effect of the contradictions between proclaimed ideals and everyday practices on individuals. They criticized excessive centralization and miscalculated social engineering, social exclusion and economic exploitation, alcoholism, and conformity.

Instead of following the official narrative of the Soviet civilizing, modernizing, and secularizing mission, Eremai Aipin told the story of mythologized appropriation of Vladimir Lenin and the Bloodied Eye, deconstructing the excessive centralization of the Soviet state satirically.

Sometime during the ancient times Lenin visited our people, the Khanty used to say. He visited our lands. He traveled through these lands, stopped in every settlement, talked to the people, to hunters and fishermen, to their wives and children, to ancient old men. He observed how they lived, asked them what they needed, what they thought, what they dreamed of, how they pictured their future. He traveled throughout Yugra, the land of the Ostyaks and Voguls [Mansis], from the Ural Mountains to the Yenisei, from Tobolsk to the coast of the Arctic Ocean. In summer he traveled by boat and in winter he rode reindeer. And to the upper streams of remote rivers and deep into the woods where one or two families lived, he, as the old men used to say, “just sent the eye” and immediately comprehended everything, covered everything... After that he stepped on the lands of other peoples of the North. Having traveled through the whole planet and having met all the peoples, he returned to the main Russian city and commenced with creation of the Party. Having created the Party, he created the Revolution. Having created the Revolution, he created the Soviet government. And he said, people of the earth, build your future. The Future has to be happy.⁹⁶

Aipin did not simply imagine how the Khanty tried to comprehend Lenin’s omnipotence, but implicitly mocked the global and totalitarian (in the sense of involving everything from international to personal affairs)

⁹⁵ Aipin. Khanty. P. 264.

⁹⁶ Ibid. Pp. 269, 272.

claims of the Soviets. Lenin could only know the needs of the Khanty and other groups if he asked them personally and witnessed their lives, which he obviously had not.

The apparent impossibility of knowing everything undermined the ability of rational decision making and the very secular character of the Soviet leadership. Speaking through one of his characters, the Khanty hunter Demian from *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight*, Aipin described communism as a religious belief, “You believe in the teaching, in the book, in communism. They all are your gods. You just don’t call them gods, but something else. [...] You are looking for the Highest Truth of Life with their help.” Saying this to a Russian woman, Demian distanced himself from the “educated faith.”⁹⁷ Hence, in Aipin’s interpretation, the communist religion remained the religion of the Russian other for the Khanty.

This irrational belief in communism hampered the ability for critical thinking. In a collection of short stories *The Sun, Pictures, and Communism behind the Window*, Baira Bal’burova criticized the ignorance of the Soviet people, comparing them to ants. Baigalma, a Buryat girl, was taking care of an anthill when one of the ants told her the legend of Shorgolzon Khan, the King of the Ants, who once taught human language to the animals and later regretted it very much. The ant represented a stereotypical constructor of the Soviet regime who did not question ideology and official policies.

The ant spoke in astonishment, “We live in such communism, such communism!” He also criticized the past.

Our old men used to say. Imagine, before there were exploiters. Terrible individuals. They made all ant people toil for them. They lay all the time with their bellies up. ... They lay like that and grew fatter, only opened their mouths. All the people fed them, fed them, fed them...⁹⁸

Baigalma was different from the ant people. She did not accept the story, challenged the ant’s views, and posed logical questions about the consequences of the Ant Revolution, Red Terror, and the murder of Shorgolzon Khan. “Where is the sense? Don’t you have to work?” The ant responded that after the revolution they in fact had to work even more, as “the slaves of Babylon,” but refused to discuss the lack of improvement. “Hush. There are agents around us, whistle-blowers... If they consider you an enemy or a spy, there is death by shooting, trial, and a prison cell.”⁹⁹ Criticizing the Soviet

⁹⁷ Ibid. P. 132.

⁹⁸ Baira Bal’burova. *Solntse, kartiny i kommunizm za oknom // Baikal*. 2013. No. 2. P. 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

society built on the distorted perception of reality, Bal'burova excluded the romanticized indigenous population, represented by Baigalma who lived in harmony with nature, from it.

Gennadii Bashkuev did not agree and explicitly included the Buryats in the heterogeneous Soviet people. World War II played the key role in consolidating shared loyalty to the Soviet "Motherland."¹⁰⁰ For Aipin's characters, however, the Motherland during World War II was not the whole Soviet Union, but rather their Northern home region. In the short story "In the Trenches, or the Advent of Catherine the Great," the main character met a woman who symbolized patriotism and looked like Catherine the Great, but an internalized Catherine the Great with "brown, pike's eyes."¹⁰¹

In Bashkuev's "The USSR, or the Union of Soldiers' Heart Wounds," the loss and suffering during World War II are a unifying traumatic experience. The war shattered the life of a small Buryat village where it split several young couples.¹⁰² In "The Missing One," mobility during and after the war makes the people apprehend the Soviet Union, which consisted of countless localities, spatially. Zhargal Nurov or Zhorik, the main character, meets an old woman from his home village whose son had gone missing during the battle in a remote village of Berezhnyaki. The old woman asks Zhorik for help because she is afraid to travel alone. "Never before has the crone realized that she lived in such an immense country."¹⁰³

In the collection of short stories *The Notes of an Aged Boy*, Bashkuev confirms that during the second half of the twentieth century the Buryats were fully integrated into everyday late Soviet life and shared many practices and perceptions with the rest of the population, although there were new divisions, differences, and misunderstandings. Recalling an excursion to Moscow during his pioneer childhood, he claims, "Sometimes it seemed to me that the Muscovites were not like us, on the outside they were like people but inside they had a much more twisted organization." Despite the feeling of provincial inferiority, the encounter with Lenin's body proves that the Buryats internalized the Soviet present. "Grandpa Lenin was small, scrawny, not handsome, the way a Buryat grandpa was supposed to look."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Gennadii Bashkuev. Propavshii // Na perelome. Ulan-Ude, 2007. P. 280.

¹⁰¹ Eremai Aipin. V okopakh, ili Iavlenie Ekateriny Velikoi // Sovremennaia proza Iugry. Khanty-Mansiysk, 2010. Pp. 19–33.

¹⁰² Gennadii Bashkuev. SSSR, ili Soiuz Soldatskikh Serdechnykh Ran // Gennadii Bashkuev. P'esy raznykh let. Ulan-Ude, 2007. Pp. 30–54.

¹⁰³ Bashkuev. Propavshii // Na perelome. Ulan-Ude, 2007. Pp. 260–274.

¹⁰⁴ Bashkuev. Zapiski pozhilogo mal'chika // Na perelome. Ulan-Ude, 2007. P. 340.

In the short story “Down the Mississippi,” Bashkuev explored the collapse of the socialist paradise. The writer’s own grandfather, a veteran of World War II and honorary citizen of his district, never pondered the questions of where the Mississippi was and whether it was worth seeing until his grandson came by and told him about the river. The grandfather went to his boss to apply for a tourist trip to see the river, but the latter threw him out of his office.¹⁰⁵ Soviet isolationism and the Cold War were in sharp contrast to ideological appeals to internationalism and global human solidarity.

Bashkuev’s portrayal of dystopian realities of the late Soviet state resembled the prose of other Soviet and post-Soviet authors. *The Notes of an Aged Boy* resonated with Sergei Dovlatov’s *The Suitcase* and Iurii Rytkheu’s *Road Lexicon*,¹⁰⁶ in their bitter satirical portrayal of Soviet everyday life as experienced by the authors. Bashkuev told a story of his childhood friend who spent many years in prison and decided to have a duel after he was released. Bashkuev was invited to assist him. This story of a life broken by prison and other sketches demonstrated that the absurdity of things happening to Buryat individuals could have happened anywhere else in the illogical and socially degraded Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷

The experiences of Zhargal Nurov in “The Missing One” continue the unpleasant explorations of Soviet existentialism, full of lies, corruption, alcoholism, disillusionment, and worthlessness. Instead of having a normal job Zhargal turned a kopeck by doing small assignments at the kolkhoz. The people there offered him permanent employment for a minimal wage and the opportunity “to live like everyone else,” but he did not take the offer. Once Zhargal’s brother, who “raised himself to the people” in the city, worked in a factory, and got a Zhiguli car, visited him. The brother needed the house in which Zhargal was no longer living and came to ask him to give it up. Zhargal, who was then working in the pasture, was astonished by the visit of the commission with “big bosses from the city.” “It was incomprehensible: a big man talked to Zhorik equally (accompanied by vodka!) on international topics.” Later some scientists visited Zhargal and “confirmed that the West was decaying.”¹⁰⁸

Zhorik was ultimately expelled from the kolkhoz for constant drinking parties, of which he was not guilty because the bosses came to him and

¹⁰⁵ Bashkuev. Vverkh po Missisipi // Na perelome. Ulan-Ude, 2007. Pp. 216–219.

¹⁰⁶ Sergei Dovlatov. Chemodan. Tenafly, 1986; Iurii Rytkheu. Dorozhny Leksikon. St. Petersburg, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Bashkuev. Zapiski.

¹⁰⁸ Bashkuev. Propavshii. Pp. 224, 226–27.

asked to “slaughter a lamb” and not the other way around. Zhargal started to take revenge on fellow villagers for his expulsion by slaughtering their sheep and engaging in drunken mischief. Ultimately he left the village, and went wandering and begging through different towns and cities. The story is constantly accompanied by weather reports on “heavy snows in Europe” and the disturbed claims of the Soviet citizens that “we don’t have such things in the USSR!”¹⁰⁹

According to Bashkuev, the failure of the Soviet experiment led to existential collapse not only of individuals but also of the Buryat nation as a whole. The breakup of the USSR was met with indifference in Buryatia. Bashkuev regretted that Buryatia did not go its own way as Tatarstan had. According to the writer, Buryatia was unlucky that at the turning point the Eternally Blue Sky did not send a second Gesar (a legendary hero in Inner and East Asia) to the rescue of the people. For Bashkuev, the USSR was born legless and could not progress with this birth injury. It had the most important part, the consolidating national idea, amputated, whereas the new historical community proved to be a myth.¹¹⁰ The Soviet people were hence an involuntary alliance of individuals united by shared suffering and traumatic experiences and not a self-perpetuating social category.

Factionalism within this alliance and local chauvinisms were abundant. Bashkuev recalled being brought to a detoxification center with his friend and three brawlers in the 1980s. The latter were soon released because they were from the same area as the officer in charge. Bashkuev was very critical of such local nepotism, “being asked ‘where are you from?’ when doing small business is one thing, but when this question is being asked at the level of state agencies it is a completely different thing.”¹¹¹

Bashkuev did not dismiss nationality policies completely, but criticized them. Referring to the crisis of indigenous languages, he noted that the problem emerged not after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but already in the 1950s. Because of the Soviet nationality policies the Evenki children forgot their native tongue. But the nationality policies played a major role and determined the situation in which the writers in Tatarstan could write in their own language and the Buryats could not because there were no funds for publication.¹¹²

In a similar manner, Aipin criticized not Soviet policies toward the indigenous peoples of Northern Eurasia as such, but their departure from

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Pp. 230–32, 258.

¹¹⁰ Bashkuev. Na perelome.

¹¹¹ Ibid. P. 85.

¹¹² Ibid.

the initially proclaimed goals. The North was supposed to solve its own problems, but state assistance was welcome. Speaking through the abstract old men in the *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight*, Aipin retold the history of the Committee of the North under the All-Russian Central Executive Committee established in 1924 under Pyotr Smidovich's chairmanship with the objective of "assisting the gradual development of the small peoples of the North in all matters." Even the transfer of its competence to the administration of the Northern Sea Route in the middle of the 1930s did not undermine the positive developments, in which Aipin praised the publishing of literature in indigenous languages, supply of the indigenous population with necessities, and the transfer of modern science to the North.

But the most important thing was that in everything that survived from those times he will feel and see the touching love for the North and the Northerners. Everything had its mark, which resisted the years. Many of those whose hands created all this departed the earth. But the creations of their hands and hearts will serve the people. And maybe will serve many more summers and winters... Mikul' will remember all those years of change in the North. He will meditate. Where has everything gone? Where is this love for the land and the people?¹¹³

The well-intentioned paternalism paved the way for exploiting North Asia's natural wealth and sidelining indigenous populations in the regional economy. In the same novel, Aipin summarized the consequences of Soviet rule for the indigenous population.

He knew that every indigenous person without professional education would need a year or two to earn this thousand. And others would need even more. Under the pressure of geologists and oilmen the settlement will gradually decline. At first the farm will lose three reindeer herds, then cows and horses. Without fertilizers vegetable gardening will wither. Because of the pollution of rivers and lakes and unreasonable logging the populations of animals and fish will decrease. This will make them close the farm of black and blue foxes.¹¹⁴

Poverty, social exclusion, and environmental disasters made the North Asian indigenous peoples part of the Fourth World, the dystopian Soviet experiences kept them in the Second World. The collapse of the USSR did not lead to immediate relief and even worsened the situation. Recalling her childhood in the early 1990s, Batorova mentions the blackouts, extremely

¹¹³ Aipin. *Khanty*. Pp. 299–300.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* P. 232.

low salaries and their delayed payments, the devaluation of savings, the lack of medication and death of children in hospitals, and the inability of people to cope with the situation. On hearing that the USSR was no more, her grandfather started crying.¹¹⁵ Bulat Molonov highlights similar problems and the protracted inertia of the Soviet existential collapse, but also mentions the means of resistance available to the people, for instance, sport or rock music.¹¹⁶

Ethical Minority

The normative legacies of Soviet literature and the negative experiences in the USSR contributed to the emergence of new topics in North Asian literature. One of them was the importance of solidarity rights, such as the right to a healthy environment and the right to work. The potential of indigenous communities in resolving environmental problems became part of the global discussion in the second half of the twentieth century, but remained relatively unexplored in post-Soviet literature.

Aipin approached the topic from the perspective of indigenous environmental ethics, which was part of Soviet romantic Orientalism. Demian in the *Khanty, or the Star of the Morning Twilight* called the oilmen he met in his homeland “relatives,” since the people who studied his land could not have any evil in their hearts and because those close to his land were his own relatives. He also criticized the transnational tradition of celebrating the New Year by cutting down conifers, questioning the need “to kill so many living trees” just for one day.¹¹⁷

Environmental ethics is at the center of Alexei Gatapov’s screenplay *The Chess Garden*. John, an American Slavicist, meets Seseg, an indigenous artist returning from Moscow, on the plane to Ulan-Ude. Together they come to a remote village near Baikal to work, where John collects material and Seseg paints pictures. They spend time with poor, drinking, and uneducated Russian villagers, some of whom Seseg has known from her childhood years. The villagers seem friendly at first, but on the day after their arrival, Seseg engages in an argument with local children who are burning a tire on the shore of Baikal. After that the villagers criticize her for getting involved in their affairs. The conflict takes a dramatic turn when Seseg decides to clean up a huge garbage dump next to the village. The villagers first obstruct her

¹¹⁵ Erzhenia Batorova. Moia schastlivaia Luna // Baikal. 2012. No. 1. Pp. 100–101.

¹¹⁶ Molonov. Tanets.

¹¹⁷ Aipin. Khanty. Pp. 38–39, 238.

efforts by rescattering the garbage, then threaten Seseg and John who has helped her, and finally call the police denouncing John as a suspected spy.

Gatapov romanticizes Seseg by stressing her attachment to the nature of the Baikal region. Even though she is a modern woman who exhibits her works abroad and lives in Moscow, her connection to the global indigenous peoples undermines her social position. John compares the Buryats to Native Americans and asks Seseg why the Buryat youth do not speak their native tongue. Seseg sees the main reason in the complex of cultural inferiority produced by the intersection of majority–minority and urban–rural tensions.¹¹⁸

Most of the Ulan-Ude youth are students who came from villages.

They spoke Buryat at home and did not speak Russian well. Many parents do not speak Russian. They come to the city and if they manage to stay here they try to speak Russian to become civilized. [...] They know Buryat better, but are ashamed to speak it in the city.¹¹⁹

Seseg is different from both the Russian barbarians, who do not care about the nature they have exploited, and the American capitalist, who is surprised about why the Baikal water is not bottled and sold, and jokes about marketing the air as well.¹²⁰ Seseg's mother is Evenki, which dilutes her membership in a clearly delineable indigenous community and underlines her broader indigenous status. There is in fact no need for an ethnic community when dealing with nature.

Having found themselves in the remote wilderness, they suddenly abandoned all conventions of civilization, which held them in the bounds of decency and controlled their behavior, leaving only the natural: they started shouting and singing excerpts from random songs, laughing. Emotions gushed over the edge, but they did not have fun without a reason: they enjoyed the sun, the trees, the air. Their long stay in the clutches of urban life and the sharp escape into the wild, primitive forest may have initiated their primitive desires. They were fooling around, did not hesitate in front of each other. John shouted in English, howled as an Indian quickly and sharply placing his hand against his mouth.

So they finished their way without noticing the distance. But in the end they had to endure a few unpleasant moments. Just before the village the road stumbled upon a small meadow. The whole meadow was littered with piles of garbage, a mixture of broken bricks, slate,

¹¹⁸ Aleksei Gatapov. *Shakhmatnyi sad* // *Baikal*. 2006. No. 3. Pp. 121–122.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* P. 124.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* Pp. 125–126.

iron, cans, bottles. The scenery hurt their eyes. Having passed through the wild taiga, as they thought, still untouched by civilization, and rejoicing wholeheartedly that there were still places on earth where one could get an excessive amount of healthy energy, suddenly they saw that it was not the case, and here the human had done his wicked deeds, spoiling and ruining everything that before him.¹²¹

Seseg teamed up with John who despite being a modern capitalist became part of the ethical minority that did not form a coherent group and could not be territorialized. They became minoritarian, created their own ad hoc ethical minority in the given social context, by not becoming the Russian or American exploiters of nature. For John this was an active choice against his utilitarian inclinations, and it was motivated by his conscience and affection for Seseg.¹²² John, however, failed to become part of the anticorruption ethical minority together with Seseg when he gave the police officer a bribe, which allowed them to continue cleaning up the dump. He nevertheless managed to convince Seseg who interpreted the bribe as a payment for her release from slavery that it was necessary for the success of their struggle. The environmental ethical minority became revolutionary.

And You! Will you surrender before the evil, before the vile, stupid, and cowardly people and let them trample on our values, destroy our happiness? *No pasarán*, Seseg, we will not surrender! We will fight! Pull yourself together, *no pasarán*! Listen to what the guerrillas sang in Latin America on the night before the final battle!¹²³

Kim Balkov explored another solidarity idea, the idea of peace, from a different normative perspective. Responding to the social conflicts in Soviet and post-Soviet society, he addressed the topic of the Russian Civil War. The main idea of the novel *Those Going into Darkness* was to demonstrate that “we all are people,” and even the Bolshevik antagonists were forced to make a choice by their life circumstances. Despite his agenda to show the war from both sides, Balkov was sympathetic toward the anti-Bolsheviks and took a Russian nationalist perspective in describing his book as a novel about the disaster, which contributed to the destruction of Russia so immensely that even today it could not “come to herself” and understand “what it was and what it was for?”¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibid. P. 126.

¹²² Deleuze, Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Pp. 10, 292.

¹²³ Gatapov. *Shakhmatnyi sad*. P. 150.

¹²⁴ Kim Balkov. *Idushchie vo t'mu*. Irkutsk, 1994. P. 2.

Balkov also drew inspiration from Orthodox Christianity. The Bolsheviks were portrayed as an unnatural demonic force that usurped power and subjugated all life in Russia. A White general was represented as a mythical figure of divine providence, similar to the White Colonel in Aipin's *Our Lady in the Bloodied Snows*. The general told a man of God, "I heard that in these lands where the Transbaikalian and Buryat Cossacks live everyone will find the Promised Land and nobody will leave it." Including the Buryats in the Cossack estate, Balkov defined the Baikal region not only as part of the Christian world (although historically some Buryat Cossacks were Buddhist) but also as a sacred site of social reconciliation.¹²⁵

Both the Reds and the Whites in the Civil War felt remorse. The White general felt guilty for the rest of his life for killing a soldier of the Red Army. A Red soldier felt compassion for a young woman. "All the same, from whatever angle he looked, the woman he met was of the bourgeois seed and [it was unclear] whether it was necessary to help her. But after thinking about it, he went to the soldiers' kitchen."¹²⁶

In the novel *From Thy Brother's Hand*, Balkov continued to explore the history of the Russian Civil War from the normative perspectives of Russian nationalism and Orthodox Christianity. One of the key characters, Father Mortirii, encounters Red cavalry soldiers which makes him think about "leaving these people and knowing nothing about them and hearing about nothing" but he decides to stay and return to the church to help those in need. He deliberately decides to become minoritarian in the new Soviet age. Another character, the Red soldier Pashka Chernyi, unintentionally addresses God in a prayer.¹²⁷ This openness of the Red soldier to Christianity is introduced to prove the point that the Civil War was the worst event in Russian history not because of the evil nature of individual Bolsheviks, but because of the fratricides it brought, making former friends and relatives fight each other with cold hearts and without fear or mercy.¹²⁸

Lifting the responsibility for violence from the participants of the war, Balkov introduces the infamous Cossack warlord Grigorii Semenov as a key positive character. Semenov is portrayed as a devoted patriot who foresaw the destructive force of the revolution, which from Semenov's perspective "was not inevitable on the Russian soil and was brought from the outside."¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Ibid. Pp. 6, 212.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Pp. 100, 193.

¹²⁷ Kim Balkov. *Ot ruki brata svoego*. Irkutsk, 1997. Pp. 19, 403.

¹²⁸ Ibid. Pp. 19, 20, 60, 403.

¹²⁹ Ibid. Pp. 67–68.

The xenophobic stance of fictional Semenov and the misogynistic comments another character makes about Bolshevik women, who were “like animals” because they dressed in leather and used weapons, implied that it was social conservatism and ideological protectionism that could become the core of potential reconciliation. The final scene in *From Thy Brother's Hand*, in which captured Semenov gets a visit from Joseph Stalin, reinforced the contradiction between the proclaimed humanistic goals of Balkov's novels and their nationalist and Christian normativity. Stalin asks Semenov what the latter's motivation was when he declared war on Japan before the arrival of the Soviet troops in 1945. Semenov responds that as a Russian he sought to help the Motherland. Stalin continues, “Does it mean that you admit your guilt before her?” Semenov responds negatively.¹³⁰ Balkov's adherence to the late Soviet and official post-Soviet normativity made him a representative of the conservative discourse that called for reconciliation with the legacies of the twentieth century's conflicts.

Unlike most of the abovementioned authors, Bulat Molonov (Mobu) departed from Soviet, Christian, and Buddhist normativity. Exploring the experiences of socially excluded villagers in late Soviet and post-Soviet Kizhinga (Buryatia) and those of labor migrants in Ansan (South Korea), using a mixture of Russian and Buryat, and adopting explicitly oral or on-line writing style, Mobu nevertheless provides an implicit critique of Soviet everyday experiences, the post-Soviet ethical crisis, and global capitalism.

One of the ethical problems Mobu addresses is the legacy of Soviet xenophobia, which was enacted both within and beyond the country.

I don't like Americans, though Jim Morrison, Chuck Berry, and Kurt Cobain were Americans, but there is something that makes me not like Americans. Maybe it is something from the USSR: the Cold War and so on, the corrupting influence of the West, all this left a trace in my geographical preferences.¹³¹

The irrational mistrust toward the West cultivated by Soviet propaganda outlived the USSR. Similarly, his own experiences with racism and chauvinism did not make Mobu tolerant of fellow countrymen, but the shared disadvantageous position in the economy did.

It was 1983 or 1982. I went to school then. [...] [A]rmenians or Azerbaijanis, Khachiks [pejorative term for people from the Caucasus], began to lay asphalt. Khachik means cross [krest] in Armenian, I read

¹³⁰ Ibid. Pp. 133, 408, 414.

¹³¹ Bulat Molonov. *Rassказы Mobu // Baikal*. 2008. No. 1. P. 95.

about that somewhere and was surprised. Khachikian therefore means Krestov, and we call Khachiks even the Muslims, but whatever. They worked relatively quickly, bla-ack, hairy, bearded, they frightened me with their savageness maybe, I cannot find the right word. [...] One of them ran back, looked at me very seriously, then crouched next to me and using the very same stick began to eliminate the prints of our feet, hands, and so on. He rolled asphalt evenly, carefully, saying, “Come on, why are you doing this, we’re working here...” and drops of sweat trickled down his nose, falling on the soft and warm asphalt... And I sat next to him, and something was born in me, something that I later called respect for the other’s work.¹³²

The experience with unemployment, low wages, and hard work far from home became relevant for many people of the former USSR, including the Buryats. Some of them contributed to the rapidly growing East Asian economies.

Two Buryat men were at Arsik’s place. About 50 years old. We are wandering, they say. They quit their jobs, they didn’t get their salaries, they have no money. The end, in one word. The black stripe. We all were in this situation more than once and therefore we understand them. “You’ll be okay! The main thing is to keep looking for a job, something will come up!” we support them. We drink Baikal and smoke LM. [...] I look at the men, their faces are sad, brown. Buryats... villagers... what made them [...] come to this Korea? Need! Because there are no jobs in the villages. They slaughter their cattle, change their own Badmaev, Damdinov, Batuev last names to the Korean Tsoi, Khan, Kim, and go to Korea in their hope to earn some money for the education of their children... and they earn it! But it also happens that they ruin themselves by drink and go to Christian missions, eat there. Everything happens, the main thing is to remain human.¹³³

Through the Buryat labor migrants the Korean city of Ansan became connected to their home Kizhinga, and the two localities fused into one deterritorialized space of the global Fourth World.

Arsik rented an apartment in the industrial district of Ansan. You know, a district that is similar to a black ghetto, some Harlem or Bronx. Overfilled garbage cans, the wind blows papers through the streets, pieces of cellophane, rolls empty beer cans. Phone booths with broken glass, drunk passersby, cheap prostitutes with vulgar war paint on their

¹³² Ibid. Pp. 102–103.

¹³³ Ibid. P. 95.

not so fresh faces, smoking cigarettes and swearing loudly at passing cars. And there, in a three-story house on the first floor my good friend Arsik rented a wretched apartment. Who didn't stay at his place? Almost all Buryats of south Seoul knew that in Ansan there lived Arsik and that one could always stay at his place and that he would receive everyone.¹³⁴

Ansan became an extension of the homeland and Mobu claimed to love the city with "its fast rhythm, with its Mongolian restaurant," with its "labor exchanges," with its "fights between Uzbeks and Kazakhs," with its industrial districts.¹³⁵

Yesterday was my birthday. We got drunk with Goo Maral, ate buuz [large dumplings], went to the Night, although there was no point in going there: the beer is expensive and one cannot chat, this "Tuns-tuns-tuns!" beats in your ears. We sat, drank, tried to dance, but for some reason could not dance. We finished our drinks and went again to the Mongolka [the Mongolian restaurant]. Ordered some vodka, buuz. Drank, ate, and went home. In general it was fun actually.¹³⁶

The Fourth World became a domestic space and absorbed Kizhinga, or perhaps the North Asian part of the Second World as a whole. It was now East Asia that promised escape from the Fourth World through social inclusion without paternalism, but it did not guarantee success.

Conclusion

The collapse of the Soviet Union made the three-world model obsolete. Large-scale categorizations, however, remained. The postsocialist world was caught in a limbo between the former colonial and postcolonial states, between the developed and developing world, between the Global North and the Global South, and was labeled transitional. The ambiguity of the direction and content of the transition unmasked the inadequacy of the static state-centered approaches and simple one-criterion explanations. The predominance of methodological nationalism concealed the fact that not only the different countries of the postsocialist world but also different groups and individuals within these countries were drifting in different directions, and these directions, as well as those in drift, could not be comprehended even from internal perspectives. For Gennadii Bashkuev the Buryats are

¹³⁴ Ibid. P. 94.

¹³⁵ Ibid. P. 96.

¹³⁶ Ibid. P. 107.

yet to rediscover their national identity, for Kim Balkov indigenous Siberia is moving toward the Russian national collective consolidated by social conservatism and religion, for Alexei Gatapov the people of North Asia have the opportunity to join the global environmental avant-garde, while Mobu's characters have already become aware of their belonging to the ever shifting, heterogeneous, and deterritorialized Fourth World and are working hard to escape it.

SUMMARY

Comparing texts published by Buryat, Khanty, Evenki, Itelmen, and Koryak writers between 1990 and 2014, the article positions indigenous North Asian literature within the global postcolonial and postsocialist discourses. Many authors focus on the experiences of their communities in the Second World, interpreting the Soviet past and its legacies. Some criticize capitalist colonialism and rendered Soviet modernization as decolonization. Others denounce the Soviet regime for its devastating effects on communities and individuals. Several authors connect the experiences of North Asian indigenous peoples to the global discussions of minorities and social exclusion, discovering their communities and themselves in the Fourth World.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В статье анализируются произведения бурятских, ханты, эвенкийских, ительменских и корякских писателей, опубликованные между 1990 и 2014 гг., в контексте глобальных постколониальных и постсоциалистических дискурсов. Многие авторы интерпретируют советское прошлое и его наследие, размышляя об опыте своего народа во “Втором мире”. Некоторые критикуют капиталистический колониализм, рассматривая советскую модернизацию как деколонизацию. Другие осуждают советский режим, нанесший катастрофический урон народам и судьбам отдельных людей. Есть и те, кто связывают опыт коренных народов Северной Азии с глобальной проблемой меньшинств и социальной изоляции, обнаруживая себя и свой народ в “Четвертом мире”.