

Siberia: Colony, *Krai*, or Myth? Expressions of
Regional Consciousness in the late Soviet Press, 1988-1991

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the volatile time period of the late Soviet Union to examine movements towards a developing regional consciousness in Siberia. Using the reformed and emergent press found between 1988-1991, this study has sought out ways in which residents of the Krasnoiarsk krai and Novosibirsk oblast conceived of their place in the Soviet Union as Siberians. Splitting the frame of analysis between official and unofficial periodicals, this work analyzes the nuanced differentiations in Siberian narratives—cultural, political, and otherwise. This text engages in both observing regional discourses and understanding which forms they took. The thesis argues that, despite the unstable time period in which journalists and informal organizations operated, regionalist discussions still managed to enter the public spheres of Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk.

The different forms in which regionalist narratives operated reveals information about the origins and audience of such discussions, and demonstrates a wide degree of opinion there. The work also evaluates the role of informal organizations in this movement, and how they brought certain ideas to the mainstream public discourse. Furthermore, this analysis calls into question the commonly agreed-upon chronology, actors, and motivations of the Siberian regionalist movement. This discussion contributes to the subject of regionalism in Siberia by addressing a time period (the Soviet years) and source base that are often neglected. By utilizing news periodicals, especially the undervalued informal press, this thesis also intends to highlight the role that such sources can play in diversifying historical analyses.

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2. Cartoon from *Etap: Ezhenedel'naia gazeta Sibirskogo informatsionnogo tsentra* [Step: Weekly newspaper of Siberian information center] Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, 54AB, July 1990. p. 2. Artist: O. Surusina.

Introduction

In 2011, following the publication of the 2010 Russian census, the director of the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, Aleksandr Surinov, found himself pressured to clarify his earlier remarks that “Siberian,” may soon become its own official nationality.¹ Such a comment was required when Surinov had previously commented on a noticeably high number of citizens who had used the “other” nationality category for the national census to identify as Siberian (*sibiriak*). Following this fact, Surinov asserted that, as noted by Russian law, if the number of respondents of “*sibiriak*” passed a certain threshold, that it may be considered an official nationality. Surinov faced criticism after such remarks, and as such had to revisit the issue, underlining that a nationality is not created from a census. Almost twenty years earlier, on November 7, 1993, a majority of the Regional Council of the Krasnoïarsk Krai voted down a proclamation to establish the “Yenisei Republic.”² This was certainly not the first of such proposals to create new republics within Siberian lands; in fact, from 1991 on, the Irkutsk and Tomsk oblasts had proposed their own separate republic, while others, such as the East Siberian Republic and the Ural Republic were declared.³ These events stick out only among many others as expressions of the changing relationship between the center and periphery in the years leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union. This era, for the purposes of this paper, 1988-1991, was confusing and chaotic, with shifting allegiances and dynamic voices, where the center appeared unable to hold. The reforms of perestroika, so often attributed as the catalyst for collapse, will here be analyzed alongside

¹“Glava Rosstat ne schitaet, chto perepis’ sozdaet sibiriakov,” [Head of Rosstat Does Not Consider That Census Creates Siberian] in GlobalSib: News from Siberia and the Far East, 13 April 2011, <http://globalsib.com/10185/> (last accessed 30 March 2014).

²E. Sosipatrova, “Yeniseiskaia Respublika ne budet.” [Yenisei Republic Will Not Be] *RR Itogi Nedeli*, 7 November 1993. Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. OSA HU 205-4-201, Box 215.

³Robert Valliant, “The Political Dimension,” in *Politics and Economics in the Russian Far East: Changing Ties with Asia-Pacific*, ed. Tsuneo Akaha (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9.

ethno-national self-determination uprisings and complex political changes which threatened the established power of balance between federalism and regionalism.

This paper hopes to provide a new perspective on one particular periphery, Siberia, and its role as a regional battleground which emerged under Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure. While historiography of the end of the Soviet Union has often had a highly focused lens fixated on places like the Baltics, Caucasus, and Central Asia, with their restless nationalisms provoking and questioning the Party line, the same is not true of scholarly work on regions (*oblast* or *krai*) within Russia.⁴ The issue of regional autonomy consistently re-emerged for a variety of reasons during the time of perestroika, as well as immediately after. First, reforms on the structure of regional and local self-government were initiated by Gorbachev, where lines and demarcations of power were redrawn with no actual mechanisms of enforcement attached. This created a wide degree of chaos at the levels of local Party organizations and diminished the influence of the central government in such organs. Second, Gorbachev's economic reforms and market liberalization wreaked havoc on the whole Union, antagonizing the government and, for the regions, the economic core as well. As such, greater regional autonomy seemed to be one possible solution to resource curses which plagued parts of the Union.⁵ Finally, Gorbachev's attempts to open the public sphere to a more independent media made such voices critical of Moscow louder

⁴ For a brief example of the proliferation of works on the former subject, see: Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁵ Vladimir Shlapentokh, Roman Levita, and Mikhail Loiberg, *From Submission to Rebellion: The Province Versus the Center in Russia* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, n.d.).

and angrier than ever before. While the precise degree to which this actually happened is debated, an undeniable shift in popular opinion and public political culture occurred.⁶

These three factors were each significant to regionalist movements which emerged around the end of the Soviet Union. This paper will specifically employ the last factor, a reformed official and new unofficial press, to understand the changing relationship of the periphery to the core in the late Soviet Union. Using news periodicals collected between 1988 and 1991, from two primary locations, Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk, I will analyze new expressions of regional consciousness for which perestroika allowed.⁷ As the following paper will show, “regional consciousness” can encompass a variety of different discussions or ideas, from political calls for separatism to cultural and historical references, as well as regionalist language. However, this paper will also focus on the entire publications, not only articles emblematic of the region, in order to contextualize such discussions.

This work will attempt to seek the linkages between the reforms of perestroika (primarily, those concerned with the liberalization of the press and changes to federal administration) and developments in regionalist narratives in Siberia. Specifically, these research questions will be asked:

- 1) Did newspapers begin to adopt language which set Siberia apart from the Soviet Union; and if so, to what degree? What kind of languages were these-- political, historical, etc.?
- Which issues provoked the greatest regionalist reactions?

⁶Isaac J. Tarasulo, *Gorbachev and Glasnost : Viewpoints from the Soviet Press* (SR Books, 1989).

⁷ These newspapers were located at the Open Society Archives, in Budapest, Hungary, in the Samizdat Archives, Fond 300, Subfond 85, Series 18-19 (Regional and Informal press, respectively).

2) Did any differences exist in the regionalist narratives of official and unofficial periodicals? If so, what kind?

For reasons I will explain later, related to the timing, actors, and reasons of this regional movement, I believe it is not enough to state that such movements occurred simply because of the upheaval and rupture of one political system in favor of another. Furthermore, such an examination is justified by contributing new dimensions and frames of analysis for the general study of regionalism. The discussions sprung from these questions will contribute to a conclusion on how, in just a few short years, such events as were described at the beginning (of “*sibiriak*” nationalities, the “Yenisei Republic,” and so on) could have evolved out of the highly centralized and autocratic Soviet state. I seek to use such newspapers from Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk in a microcosmic study of the origins and popularization of regionalist themes in the public dialogue. An investigation of such newspapers can assist in understanding how these ideas first entered the public scene. When Gorbachev lifted restrictions on speech and media, discussions of national and environmental questions or political issues could no longer be shielded from public view, and the Party could not put the lid back on criticisms of the government; such a description is often used as a reason for the end of the Soviet Union. This can contribute to an understanding that struggles from the periphery against Boris Yeltsin had been building years before he came to power, rather than simply arose out of the political event of the formation of the Russian Federation. This paper will analyze how such struggles evolved and adopted a political language which would be released upon Yeltsin as the structure of the new Russia was crafted.

For this paper, I drew information from a variety of secondary supplements in order to frame my primary source analysis. Some related to general history of Siberia, while others

specifically studied regionalism in the Soviet Union.⁸ Histories of Siberia may focus on any range of different time periods (pre-Imperial, Imperial, Soviet), on various social trends (education, the exile system, religion), or on different actors (indigenous groups, revolutionaries, intellectuals). I used general histories on the subject, specifically looking at the Soviet period and the *oblastnichestvo* movement. Information on perestroika and the evolution of Soviet press at this time was also invaluable.⁹ However, there does appear to be a dearth of information in some areas of this study; specifically, there are few studies on the rise of the informal press (or “new samizdat”) under Gorbachev, nor are there many analyses on Siberian regionalism (or lack thereof) during the Soviet years.¹⁰ I hope that this paper can contribute to filling in some of these gaps.

I will first provide a brief background on Siberian history, as well as a conceptual framework for such a study. Following this, I will give a conceptual framework for the rest of the study, including the source selection process as well as methodology. A brief summary of Soviet newspaper history, as well as information on informal periodicals, will further contribute to the

⁸ Of those in relation to Siberian history which were useful to my study: James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Igor V. Naumov *The History of Siberia*. 1st published. Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe. (New York: Routledge, 2006), Eva-Maria Stolberg, *The Siberian Saga: a History of Russia's Wild East*. (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 2005)., and Alan Wood, *Russia's Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2010.) Regarding regionalism in the Soviet Union, , Peter J. Stavrakis *Beyond the Monolith: The Emergence of Regionalism in Post-Soviet Russia*. (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997.)

⁹ For instance: Joseph Gibbs, *Gorbachev's Glasnost: The Soviet Media in the First Phase of Perestroika*. 1st ed. Eastern European Studies no. 9. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999.) and Isaac J. Tarasulo, *Gorbachev and Glasnost : Viewpoints from the Soviet Press*. (SR Books, 1989.)

¹⁰ Those which largely contributed to my understanding of informal press at this time were: Elena Strukova, *Alternativnaia periodicheskaia pechat' v istorii Rossiyskoiy mnogopartiynosti* [Alternative periodical press in the history of Russian multi-party system] (Moskva: Istoricheskaya biblioteka, 2005), as well as Ann Komaromi, “Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Politics,” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Spring 2012). Some book chapters also were insightful on the nature of Siberian regionalism during the 1990s, such as: Vladimir A. Zhdanov, “Contemporary Siberian Regionalism,” as well as Paul T. Christensen, “Regionalism, “Democratization,” and the Politics of Economic Control in the Kuzbas, 1989-93.” in Stephen Kotkin and David Wolff, eds., *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*. Vladimir Shlapentokh's chapter on regionalism in *From Submission to Rebellion* was also invaluable.

paper. After this background, I will engage in the primary source analysis, and draw some conclusions from this body of work. A further section will briefly discuss the ways in which this analysis corresponds to the current historiography on the topic.

Background Chapter

Historical Background

Before beginning a historical background on Siberia, I would first like to provide some clarification of the terminology which will be used in this paper. In discussing regionalism, the term refers to an ideology, or a type of activity or movement, that is “geared toward achieving greater regional autonomy, or greater particularization of substate entities.”¹¹ As such, when discussing “regionalist” tendencies, movements, trends, and so on, this paper considers the ways in which specific oblasts and krajs (or other administrative divisions, if mentioned) conceived of themselves and interacted with the federal whole of the Soviet Union.

This paper, overwhelmingly concerned with the regionalism in Siberia, adopts the traditional definition of Russian lands east of the Ural Mountains until Lake Baikal, though of course a multitude of other definitions are possible and in use.¹² Nonetheless, when other specific definitions of the land are needed they will be provided. However, the “Siberian” generally referred to here is a historic notion of the area, its conquest begun by Yermak Timofeyevich.¹³ While the differentiation of Siberia and the Russian Far East (including Yakutia, Amur, and Primorye) has not always been clear in Russian history, the evolution of modern administrative divisions in the Soviet Union will be examined. However, when analyzing the primary sources, this issue becomes complicated by the various conceptions that journalists and writers had of “Siberia” as well. As we will see later, writers typically provided their own conceptions of what

¹¹ Shlapentokh, Levita, and Loiberg, *From Submission to Rebellion*, 5.

¹² Remnev, A.V. “Geograficheskyye, administrativnyye, i mentalnyye granitsy Sibiri (XIX—nachalo XX v.)” (Geographical, administrative and mental borders of Siberia (19th- beginning of 20th century) *Sibirskaya zaimka* (30 December 2002).

¹³ Victor L. Mote, *Siberia: Worlds Apart*, Westview Series on the Post-Soviet Republics (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1998).

was Siberian, or Far Eastern, or Russian. Whether or not those decisions were arbitrary is not revealed.

While this paper may be interested in discussions of Siberian regionalism in the late Soviet period, a background on the subject before that time is clearly beneficial. Indeed, notions of a particular Siberia may be difficult to come by, as any characterization of a historical Siberian identity is typically more focused on its place as a frontier or wilderness, rather than its own absolute place.¹⁴ Indeed, 18th and 19th century Russian historiography categorized Siberia as a “wandering cultural belt.”¹⁵ Perhaps bolstered by the influx of political exiles after the Decembrist revolt and Polish uprising, Siberia indeed became attached to an alternative narrative, as a place that was “a source of Russia’s national advancement and rejuvenation.”¹⁶ Alexander Herzen and Vladimir Solov’ev became outspoken proponents of Siberia as a “second America,” where the open spaces, self-reliance, and absent nobility could compel *sibiriaki* to seek autonomy in a federal system. Of course this worried the Tsarist government, especially upon discovering underground groups advocating for Siberian secession in cities such as Irkutsk. These groups were founded and populated by Siberians educated at St. Petersburg University who returned to Siberia in the 1860s.

Two of these such students who were influenced by the Decembrist revolts were Nikolai Iadrintsev and Grigorii Potanin, founders of the *oblastnichestvo* movement, one of the most

¹⁴Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1993).

¹⁵ Eva-Maria Stolberg, in Foreword to *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia’s Wild East*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2005), 9

¹⁶Eva-Maria Stolberg, “The Genre of Frontiers and Borderlands: Siberia as a Case Study,” in *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia’s Wild East*, ed. Eva-Maria Stolberg, (Frankfurt am Maim: Peter Lang GmbH, 2005), 16

prominent groups of Siberian regionalists.¹⁷ Understanding the *oblastniki*'s demands for reform provides to a sense of coherency of similar separatists movements which would come a century later. Alan Wood points to five primary calls for reform outlined by Iadrintsev and Potanin: 1) the abolition of the Siberian exile system, 2) the cessation of exploitation of Siberian natural resources, 3) the improvement of Siberia's educational and cultural structures (especially literacy), 4) a program of settlement and migration to unearth the full potential of Siberian agriculture, and 5) the amelioration of the indigenous population's living conditions, both legally and materially.¹⁸ In evaluating the legacy of *oblastnichestvo*, Wood claims that it "was genuinely symptomatic of the highly-charged atmosphere of widespread anti-government feeling, social unease, intellectual ferment, emotional concern for the plight of the Russian *narod* (people), and developing revolutionary challenge to the regime."¹⁹ Such characteristics of the time period could even be found over a hundred years later, at the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Following the arrest of Potanin and Iadrintsev by Alexander II, the *oblastniki* fell into the shadows, working behind the scenes in an attempt to avoid imprisonment. This worked in their favor as the 1917 Revolution brought civil war to the frontier and the *oblastniki* emerged from the woodwork once again. The resistance from Siberia and the Far East to the rule of Moscow and Petrograd is understandable when taking into account that these places were unencumbered by centralized rule for the first time since the 16th century.²⁰ Wood notes that before the revolution, Siberian regionalists were mostly at work in "intellectual circles, newspapers,

¹⁷ A.V. Remnev, "Koloniia ili okraina? Sibir' v imperskom diskurse XIX veka," [Colony or edge? Siberia in the imperial discourse of the 19th century] in *Sibirskaia zaimka*, <http://zaimka.ru/remnev-colony/> (Last accessed 30 May 2014)

¹⁸ Alan Wood, *Russia's Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991*, (London: Bloomsbury), 87-89.

¹⁹ Wood, *Russia's Frozen Frontier*, 91.

²⁰ Ibid.

scholarly publications, and local associations,” but the breakdown of Soviet power in Siberia by mid-1918 brought their issues to the active forefront.²¹ Indeed, the rise to power of Alexander Kolchak and the interventions of the Czech Legion and Japanese army make Vladimir Lenin’s understanding of Siberia as the “main and critical theater of the Civil War,” quite clear.²² Yet what followed in the years after, between 1918-1922, is better characterized as a struggle between the Bolsheviks, White Army, and Green partisans, rather than a play for Siberian autonomy. Certainly, Siberian regionalism was at work to some extent in rejecting the direct rule of Moscow, but such a movement was overwhelmingly usurped by Kolchak’s royalist aspirations.

For Siberia, the Soviet period stripped the area remarkably of any regionalist sentiments (at least, any expressed publicly), and Siberia was spared any of the tense and complex relationship that so affected other minorities in the Union Republics.²³ Rather, Siberian regionalism and the idea of a *sibiriak* were eliminated from any public discourse. This, however, does not mean that Siberians profited from any sort of automatic inclusion into the Russian Republic-- rather, colonial exploitation of the land and people accelerated, if anything else. As Martin Aust explains, “In the same way as the Rjurikides and the Romanovs, the Soviet governments regarded Siberia as treasury.”²⁴ Rather, the exploitation which Siberia suffered, especially in regards to the ecology of the area, makes local protests on the topic in 1989 unsurprising.²⁵

²¹Wood, *Russia’s Frozen Frontier*, 172.

²²Wood, *Russia’s Frozen Frontier*, 184.

²³N. G. O. Pereira, “Regional Consciousness in Siberia before and after October 1917,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne Des Slavistes* 30, no. 1 (March 1, 1988): 112–33. Also: J. R. Hughes, “The Irkutsk Affair: Stalin, Siberian Politics and the End,” *Soviet Studies* 41, no. 2 (April 1, 1989): 228–53.

²⁴Martin Aust, “Rossia Siberica: Russian-Siberian History Compared to Medieval Conquest and Modern Colonialism,” in *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Russia and Siberia in the World-System: German Perspectives (2004), 198.

²⁵Michael Bradshaw, “Perestroika and Siberian Development,” *Area* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 1990): 83–85.

To understand “Siberia,” for this work, it is helpful to consider the administrative parts which constitute it, since so much of Soviet society depended on a designation of “official.” To do so, it is necessary to discuss the administrative structure of the Soviet Union, and how the Siberian lands were incorporated into the Union after the Civil War. Unlike Union Republics, which were defined on the basis of a non-Russian population, or Autonomous Republics (defined by a significant ethnic group), Siberian lands were demarcated administratively purely on the basis of territory, for instance, pre-existing borders like mountains, rivers, etc. Owing to the complex and stratified administrative system in the Soviet Union (though still entirely centralized), while these Union and Autonomous Republics were granted much higher levels of autonomy than other territorial groupings, they in fact only made up 28.6% of the territory and 15.2% of the populations.²⁶

As seen in the earlier discussion of current *sibiriak* movements, this paper benefits from an analysis which also incorporates discussions of the period immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the political changes of the collapse wholly upturned the fate of Union Republics such as Estonia, Lithuania, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, the regions of Siberia were brought into the post-Soviet world relatively peacefully. Instead of violence, what occurred was an outright power struggle between the centralized power in Moscow, at this point directed by Boris Yeltsin, and the local self-governments in the eighty-nine regions of the new Russian Federation. In 1990, following republic and local elections, the Supreme Soviet Committee for Local Soviet Affairs began to deliberate on legislation which would provide for new, standardized demarcations for local governments. Yet, these efforts only resulted in another set of ambiguous

²⁶Joan DeBardeleben, “The Development of Federalism in Russia,” in *Beyond the Monolith: The Emergence of Regionalism in Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Peter J. Stavakis, (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), 37.

regulations, and if anyone succeeded in securing power, it was neither local self-governments, nor the federal government, but rather the regional committees.²⁷

Indeed, Yeltsin noticed this structural problem and took advantage of it to undermine Gorbachev's hold by encouraging regions to "take as much power as they could swallow."²⁸ Yet, as John Young explains, Yeltsin was later forced to confront his own machinations against Gorbachev as he took on the highest position in the land, and was now forced to deal with the results of such power-grabbing. Indeed, both the regions and local self-governments of the Russian Federation were now attempting to settle the limbo they found themselves in with their relations to the center. A manifestation of this uncertainty, the Constitution of 1993 in fact named fourteen bureaucratic areas which fell under the authority of both the federal and regional governments.²⁹ As Yeltsin sporadically endowed different regions with different levels of autonomy, krais and oblasts, deprived of any legal standard, vied for the same benefits. In the end, this harmed Yeltsin and the central government, as certain regions began to withhold or reduced payments to the federal center, or engaged in vocal and unrelenting criticisms of Yeltsin's regime over such issues as the Chechen War.³⁰ Regional and local governments indeed were beginning to realize the power they could wield over the central government, without very much harm to themselves.

Conceptual Background

Among the possible Siberian areas to examine for this study, there were particular reasons for choosing Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk. First, their urban centers are similar in population

²⁷ Shlapentokh, Levita, and Loiberg, *From Submission to Rebellion*, 190.

²⁸ John F. Young, "At the Bottom of the Heap: Local Self-Government and Regional Politics in the Russian Federation," in *Beyond the Monolith*, 83.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Shlapentokh, Levita, and Loiberg, *From Submission to Rebellion*, 198.

size, though the regions are different in population density. One reason for this qualification is that larger regions would have official oblast or krai newspapers, or even better, multiple. Such papers would provide a substantial body of work to compare with the unofficial newspapers of the region.

Novosibirsk (called Novonikolaevsk until 1926) and Krasnoiarsk, along with the respective regions surrounding them, are large industrial strongholds. They have both been centers of Siberia since the end of the eighteenth century, though Krasnoiarsk had developed somewhat earlier than that. Both cities were incorporated into the Trans-Siberian Railway early on in its development, while Krasnoiarsk had already been made part of a Moscow-Irkutsk highway in the mid-18th century. Novonikolaevsk and Krasnoiarsk both experienced massive industrial and urban growth around this time, fueled by the business which the railways created.³¹ During the 1905 Revolution, Krasnoiarsk established itself as a hotbed of radicalism, as soldiers there seized control of the city (including the railway, police forces, and a printing press) in December of that year. The newspaper which these soldiers established at the printing press was in fact the *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, one of the publications of this study. Moreover, on December 9, these revolutionaries established the “Krasnoiarsk Republic,” which lasted a month until it was crushed by the Imperial Army. Though not to the same extent, Novonikolaevsk at this time also experimented with worker’s soviets.³²

In the tumultuous years following the 1917 Revolution, both regions fell into the hands of Bolsheviks, the White Army, and finally the Red Army, who brought the area firmly under control by 1920. In 1934, Krasnoiarsk became the administrative center of the Krasnoiarsk Krai,

³¹Igor V. Naumov, *The History of Siberia* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 130.

³² Naumov, *The History of Siberia*, 164.

while Novosibirsk was similarly incorporated as an oblast in 1937. During the Soviet period, the industrialization of these cities became even more intense, benefiting from a wartime boom in production. The two regions engaged in heavy machinery production, metallurgy, electric power, and mining, among many other industries.

Where the character of Novosibirsk differs (significantly, for the purpose of this study) is its role as a center of education, research, and culture. This was due primarily to the founding of the Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences there in 1957. This provided the city with a wealth of libraries, one of the Soviet Union's best universities, as well as an 'academic city' (*akademgorodok*) built outside of it. This side of the city flourished for years, fostering many young talents in scientific as well as cultural fields. This became more and more evident in the 1970s and 1980s, as the city became home to many intellectuals, some of whom became part of the Soviet dissident population.³³ The legacy of these individuals showed during the perestroika period, as they became associated with opposition bodies such as the Interregional Deputies Group, a democratic coalition established in Congress of People's Deputies.³⁴ Indeed, such sorts of activities contribute to this study, as they perhaps lends some explanation to the much higher prevalence of informal periodicals from Novosibirsk compared to Krasnoiarsk.

Of course, some conditions of the study of these two cities should be clarified. First, these two areas represent just a small fraction (in both population and landmass) of the rest of the Siberian territory. To that degree, then, they should be consistently regarded as samples of Siberian regionalism during this time-- not representative of the whole. Furthermore, there is a

³³ I.S. Kunetzov, "Novosibirskii akademgorodok v 1968 godu: "Pis'mo soroka shesti" chast' 1" [Novosibirsk akademgorodok in 1968: "Letter 64" part 1], in *Sovremennye Problemy*, <http://modernproblems.org.ru/hisrory/162-letter46-1.html?start=4> (Last accessed 30 May 2014)

³⁴ Naumov, *The History of Siberia*, 218.

significant urban/rural divide that should be addressed. Informal papers of Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk would have faced more barriers to circulating their texts throughout the oblast or krai considering they had limited circulation and the informal organizations associated with the publications were headquartered in the cities. This being said, this study requires another disclosure which acknowledges its urban-centric foundation. Nonetheless, Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk are still today two of many other areas where Siberian regionalism is active in clubs, writing, as well as on the internet.³⁵ Furthermore, the percentage of readers of these papers who were ethnic Russians or indigenous residents is also unknown-- as such, this is not an angle which will be studied, though of course the question of indigenous tribes had significant ramifications for the perestroika period.³⁶

The methodology of this essay is heavily influenced by the sources at hand. I have selected for examination and analysis twenty-six newspapers from Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk. Fifteen of these are informal, and eleven are official press publications. Perhaps due to the larger urban center of Novosibirsk, the newspapers from this oblast constitute a majority of both informal and official periodicals. Elena Strukova's work on alternative periodical press in Russia reflects the same proportion of informal newspapers in the cities.³⁷ While it is difficult to establish the exact number of official newspapers, established by Councils of People's Deputies, in the oblast and krai during the Soviet era, a plausible estimate might be hover around five for each location.³⁸ Mark Hopkins also broke down the division of newspapers (from 1940-1968) by the geographic

³⁵ V. Antipin, "Grazhdanin Sibiri" [Citizens of Siberia] *Russkiy Reporter*, 22 February 2011, <http://rusrep.ru/article/2011/02/22/sibir/> (Last accessed 24 March 2014).

³⁶ James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 395.

³⁷ Elena Strukova, *Alternativnaia periodicheskaya pechat' v istorii Rossiyskoi mnogopartiynosti* [Alternative periodical press in the history of Russian multi-party system] (Moskva: Istoricheskaya biblioteka, 2005), 262.

³⁸ Mark W. Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970), 200-1.

levels at which they operated. In 1968, 289 oblast or krai newspapers existed throughout the Soviet Union (which contained 120 oblasts and six krais), while 597 city newspapers were in print.³⁹ While city newspapers increased rapidly over these twenty-eight years (more than doubling the amount), oblast and krai newspapers decreased from 321 to 289 during this time. Nonetheless, the average circulation for each oblast newspaper swelled well around 50,000 at this time. While statistics on newspaper circulation during perestroika is hard to attain (mainly because of its relatively short time period), a general consensus is that circulation between 1987 and 1989 dramatically increased at a rate never before seen.⁴⁰ It was also noted that all general newspaper circulation rose by 5.1% in 1987 and by another 4.2% in 1988.⁴¹ In fact, such a conclusion can even be revealed in the fact that a massive paper shortage hit the Soviet Union in 1988, with demand rapidly outstripping supply.⁴²

Unfortunately, another major difficulty exists in the examinations of these newspapers: the samples found do not all cover the same or even contiguous time periods. For instance, while the official papers may have been in circulation for decades, the editions in the collection may only come from the years 1989-1991, or 1990-1993, and so on. Furthermore, for informal periodicals (issued weekly or monthly) the editions in discussion are rarely found as part of a complete set. To this degree, what is used here must be considered as somewhat of a random, though representative sample. The sample is still seen as representative because the individual periodicals do seem to consistently correspond a coherent agenda throughout the time span.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Council for Cultural Cooperation, *Cultural Policy in the Russian Federation*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 1997.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Lack Of Paper Straps A Freer Soviet Press" Steve Goldstein, in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 September 1988. http://articles.philly.com/1988-09-02/news/26232671_1_ogonyok-soviets-literaturnaya-rossiya (Last accessed 30 April 2014).

These concerns bring us to the actual question of methodology, and how these primary sources were analyzed. These newspapers, whose total page count numbered well into the thousands, were read and considered as part of larger wholes, and within the broad contextualization of the changing time period of the late 1980s. A specific effort was made to find points of convergence in both a temporal and thematic space. As such, I searched for areas of similarities, either in date or topic, between the official and unofficial newspapers of both regions, and evaluated any differences in editorial perspectives. The narratives set out by each group of newspapers are strikingly different but perhaps unsurprisingly so. Research on the complex nature of free speech at this time lends itself to some assumptions about which newspapers would or wouldn't say what. As such, what I engaged with here was less of a semiotic discourse analysis than a large scale study of mass communications at a particular time period and location. While at times there are involved studies of language used in the papers (especially in regards to variations of the word "Siberia"), overall I attempted to understand the broader scope of these periodicals, both individually, within their various categories, and in comparisons. To evaluate this topic, however, it is necessary to look at the changing nature of Soviet press at this time, to understand what may have been expected from both these official and unofficial publications.

Newspaper Background

Mikhail Gorbachev set out his mission of perestroika and *glasnost* ("openness") as one with an almost holy and messianic character. In order to save the Soviet Union, it had to be completely 'restructured.' In many speeches on the subject, Gorbachev casts the reforms of perestroika as a way to not only improve the current condition of life for Soviet citizens, but to

strengthen socialism in the Union as well.⁴³ Gorbachev frequently linked the revolution of perestroika to the revolution of 1917, to re-assure citizens of the socialist quality of economic privatization and marketization.⁴⁴ *Glasnost*, the notion of bringing transparency to all aspects of Soviet life and society, also had the goal of eliminating the “blank spots” in the Union’s history as well as its media. Of course, each of these reforms were realized slowly, and sometimes not at all. The issue of reforming press censorship, one which Gorbachev had deemed necessary in 1985, was a slow, tedious process, sometimes with as many steps forward as back. In fact, the main organ of censorship, *Glavlit*, was functional until 1990, and even when that time came it was simply renamed rather than reformed. Censorship was forbidden in the new Law on the Press of 1990, but Glavlit’s successor (GUOT) upheld the same tasks, director, and staff.⁴⁵

Aleksandr Bovin, one-time Central Committee bureaucrat and then journalist for the government newspaper *Izvestiia*, paints an accurate description on the situation in 1989:

Compared to the situation in 1985, glasnost today is remarkable. But compared with what is needed, it is still semi-glasnost. Bureaucratic agencies continue to ration out information to journalists. Control over the media and the number of forbidden zones have been greatly reduced and there is much more information, but some areas and events remain off limits to the press.⁴⁶

Bovin’s statements, along with the general reorganization of structures and introduction of new laws at the time, indicates the confusion and ambiguity of the perestroika era. Nothing was as clear and decisive as initially presented, and such a reality was reflected in the very press of this time.

⁴³Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, *Speeches and Writings* (Pergamon Press, 1987), 168.

⁴⁴ Alec Nove, *Glasnost' in Action* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 40.

⁴⁵ Joseph Gibbs, *Gorbachev's Glasnost: The Soviet Media in the First Phase of Perestroika*. 1st ed. Eastern European Studies, no. 9. (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 19.

⁴⁶ Stephen F. Cohen, and Katrina Vanden Heuvel, *Voices of Glasnost: Interviews with Gorbachev's Reformers*. 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1989), 220.

Returning to the newspapers under this analysis, we see this vague stance on openness and transparency muddled through by the various official newspaper editors. In fact, for the unofficial newspapers, it almost seemed like their opportunities to openly publish or form became much more clear and numerous. Yet official newspapers still received funding from the Communist Party and its various administrative organs, and as such had to agree whenever a censor shut down an article. This being said, the fine Party line became more and more blurred during this time, and while censorship existed, there seemed to be some flexibility in this, and things that may not have been previously allowed on paper were indeed permitted. For unofficial newspapers, the editors and writers of them (formerly associated with intellectual or dissident movements) were already used to operating independently, and the laws on corporations and unofficial organizations which were introduced during perestroika actually made their efforts somewhat easier.⁴⁷ Indeed, reforms in copyright laws were passed (so unofficial papers could charge money), papers could be reprinted and passed along with extreme ease, and printing presses became much more accessible. It is in such an environment that both informal newspapers and organizations began to flourish. For reasons that we will see in the following sections, it is important to understand the nuances of various publications, and to refrain from idealizing the reforms of both perestroika and glasnost. What appears in the newspapers of this study is a much more complex relationship between the press, Party members, and informal activists, and the way they conceive of themselves, and their region, in an ever-changing state.

The first, and most definitive place to start in addressing the background information of these periodicals is the people, groups, and funding behind them. This fundamental difference between official and informal publications reveals and leads to much of the other subsequent

⁴⁷ Strukova, *Alternativnaia periodicheskaia pechat'*, 24-5.

information on the subject. I have decided to use this categorization of official and unofficial periodical as my primary one to organize this paper, as they provide the greatest counterpoints to each other, rather than Novosibirsk versus Krasnoiarsk, or 1988 versus 1991, for instance. Indeed, I believe this designation is most fruitful for this analysis. As will be seen later, however, it is not purely an examination of contrasts between these two groups, but also of comparisons.

Who were the men and women behind the official publications of Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk? The biography here is rather similar to the historical background provided earlier on the newspapers of the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ Of course, it depends which periodicals we are discussing, as they offer a wide range of experiences, but there are some generalizations we may find. The editors and writers of the newspapers were overwhelmingly members of the Communist Party. The funding for the newspapers seems to have come primarily from organs of the Communist Party, such as the city Soviets of People's Deputies. Apart from the editors, it is rather difficult to find much information about the contributing writers and staff. The editors, however, do betray some information which falls in line with the general principle of Soviet newspapers during the time.

The members of official newspapers represent a much more homogeneous population than those of informal publications. Informal publications of this time often, but not always, had strong connections to informal intellectual and social groups. Though there is a link between samizdat of the 1960-70s, and the informal publications of the 1980s, they also did develop separately, in large part due to the role of informal associations.⁴⁹ Often times these periodicals, whether related to current events or themes, were the actual print outlets of such associations. In

⁴⁸ This information on the background of these newspapers was found in the individual newspapers themselves, unless other noted. A full list can be found in the bibliography.

⁴⁹ Ann Komaromi, "Samizdat and Soviet Dissident Politics," in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Spring 2012).

these cases, the publications were printed in order to inform members of current projects and activities of the groups, or to advertise the group to non-members. Understanding these groups can give us important insights into the publications which they founded. At times they were simply called ‘human-rights organizations,’ whereas others aligned themselves with more overtly political agendas, as in the case of democrats, anarcho-syndicalists, or anti-perestroika socialists.⁵⁰ As discussed earlier, it was these groups who benefited from the laws of glasnost and perestroika which liberated regulations on free association. In other cases, publications were not associated with any other organizations, but rather were constituted by a loose group of like-minded individuals (in the tradition of earlier samizdat).

A comparative analysis of the content of these newspapers, official and unofficial, can further enlighten and reveal information not only about the press during perestroika, but also issues of regionalism. Describing a representative sample of these publications can assist in laying the foundation for the types of newspapers we are discussing here. Following this, we can position the newspapers against each other to view the different ways in which regional consciousness was explored.

The two evening newspapers of Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk (*Vechernii Krasnoiarsk* and *Vechernii Novosibirsk*) reveal the complicated and ambiguous legacy of the Party mandate in Soviet press. Both *Vechernii Krasnoiarsk* and *Vechernii Novosibirsk* functioned primarily as an outlet for basic news stories, providing reports of current events of both the whole Union and the city itself.⁵¹ The stories which fill the pages of these two periodicals are not organized or selected at all thematically—rather, they present a picture of a broad swath of life for residents at the time.

⁵⁰ This information was also taken from the individual informal periodicals, found in the bibliography.

⁵¹ *Istoriia Goroda: Novonikolaevsk-Novosibirsk (istoricheskie Ocherki) [History of the City: Novonikolaevsk-Novosibirsk (historical Essays)]* (Novosibirsk: Historical Heritage of Siberia, 2005).

Vechernii Krasnoiarsk indeed set out its mission and content along the header of its front page as “Facts, Interviews, Reporting, Opinions, Announcements.” On estimate, both newspapers devoted about 80% of their paper space to issues and news of the city, and the remaining space to all-Union events. To preface the rest of the discussion, it is important to contemplate the very purpose of an *oblastnaia* or *gorodskaiia gazeta*. What could such a paper provide that a national newspaper could not? And what should be the focus of such a newspaper during the Soviet Union? This is in fact somewhat difficult to determine. The laws and regulations regarding the creation of krai or oblast newspapers in fact are quite vague in regards to the actual *purpose* of such publications.⁵² Much is known about the managerial aspects of these newspapers, but less is known about what is expected of them; what kind of stories are editors meant to publish? As Mark W. Hopkins explains in his 1970 work on Soviet press, “Representative of most Soviet newspapers, *Leningradskaya Pravda* mixes local or regional information with national and international;” yet Hopkins does not delve any further into how these decisions are made.⁵³ Indeed, while he notes the presence of all-Union information from TASS dispatches, it is unknown why the subsequent local articles are chosen.

The same is still true, if not more, even during perestroika—there is no clear ruling on what is meant to be published, or what type of editorial policies were in place. Of course, within the realm of ideological censorship, it is common knowledge what type of information would *not* be printed—but expanded outside of this realm, it is a vague line. Nonetheless, even if we do not know the stated purpose and goal of such newspapers, we can learn at least what the editors and journalists prioritized based on the information they printed.

⁵²R. Ovsepiian, *Istoria Noveshei Otechestvennoi Zhurnalistiki [History of Recent Domestic Journalism]*, ed. Ia. N. Zasurskogo (Moscow: MGU, 1999).

⁵³ Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union*, 220.

The unofficial, or informal (*neformalny*), periodicals of the late Soviet Union had a much larger editorial toolbox at their disposal with which to approach the issues of Siberian regionalism and center-periphery relations. In my source analysis, I will discuss and analyze the various discourses found in such publications, as well as the ways used to transmit them. Such methods take a multitude of forms (editorials, news reports, political cartoons, etc.), but the primary way which these informal newspapers differ from their official counterparts is the degree of criticism found in articles. While official newspapers found in Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk were often much more subtle and indirect in purporting regionalist views, this simply is not the case for these informal periodicals.

This discussion pulls from fifteen unofficial periodicals from these two cities (though the majority from Novosibirsk), as a sample—not to understand all publications of this time, but rather some. Such an approach is also due to the fact that this essay is not concerned with the characteristics of newspapers at this time, but rather the regionalist discussions found in them.

Indeed, the context of these publications is just as important as the content and form of them; the people and structures involved in their production indicate a great deal. As noted in the historical background, behind the majority of these periodicals were informal associations, typically staffed by ideological dissidents representing a range of political tendencies. Important to note here is that while these groups may have espoused reformist views on Siberian separation or Soviet federalism, none of them were in fact dedicated to such causes—rather these ideas merely came under a more general ideological scope of the group, such as democratic, anarcho-syndicalist, etc.

While unofficial newspapers did engage in discussions of the center-periphery relations, it was a much less common occurrence in official press. However, the absence of such directly

critical examinations does not mean that indications or gestures were made on the topic. Before we address these gestures, it is worth noting such a fact is indeed significant because it demonstrates that it was not only intellectual dissidents writing in the informal press who were concerned with relations between Moscow and Siberia. Furthermore, in discussing the very origins of such movements in Siberia, while still working within a Soviet framework, it is important to note that such movements did not merely come about once the Soviet Union collapsed. Rather, as will be seen, these gestures (in official papers) and direct criticisms (in unofficial papers) indicate that notions of Siberian regionalism were coming into the public sphere in the Soviet Union. If the time frame of this movement demands re-evaluation, then perhaps the causes of it do as well. Following this, we can begin to understand what sort of issues were related to this topic and perhaps what precipitated it.

Research Chapter

These two groups of periodicals—official and unofficial—offered two wholly different approaches to the issue of Siberian regionalism. The ways in which the different newspapers conveyed any sort of regionalist sentiment varies on a spectrum of subtlety which might be classified as “soft” on one end, and “hard” on the other. Perhaps the vast scope of the expressions covered in these dozens of publications provides some sort of golden medium for the wide variation of opinions. In this spectrum, discussions of largely cultural and social trends drift towards the “soft” end, whereas political concerns dominate the “hard” side. This distinction will become more tangible as we investigate the ways in which periodicals engaged with this spectrum, and try to understand what possible reasons they may have had for doing so.

The research involved in this chapter seeks out a few primary issues. First, it will clarify the practical, concrete differences found in the official and informal periodicals—doing so will provide some analysis on the status and role of the press in general during perestroika. Second, this research will seek out how, if at all, Siberian “regional-ness” (*oblastnost*) was both understood and expressed at this time, by the official and unofficial periodicals.⁵⁴ Third, I will investigate the encounters between these official and unofficial publications, and analyze what effects such institutions played in fostering Siberian particularism. Finally, this research will consider in what ways the analysis reached may contradict earlier narratives on related topics.

⁵⁴ Harriet Murav, “The Regionalist Concept of Siberia, 1860-1920” in Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1993).

Part One: The Regional Newspaper

The content which frequently filled official newspapers could be described most plainly as “fluff,” public interest stories with typically little impact on the population. The detachment which most of these stories often had from any sort of politics might cause one to wonder how there could be any Siberian or regionalist sentiment to them at all. These types of stories could often be profiles of older residents of the area, lighthearted pieces on a school performance, or reprints of short stories, poems, or songs. This is not to say that all of the articles of any given official newspaper fit into this mold. Usually a few political articles, for instance on the latest session of the Council of People’s Deputies, were present in each issue. Usually short news briefs from other parts of the country were included in every issue, and of course, when large, all-Union events occurred, these newspapers published information about them as well.

In this way, these newspapers attempted to merge news at both the regional, national, and all-Union level. Photographs frequently took up much space here, but never political cartoons. Letters to the editors and polls were also often included, portraying a sort of spontaneity to the newspapers. These newspapers, such as *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, *Vechernii Krasnoiarsk*, or *Krasnoiarskaia Gazeta* were published daily, or three times a week (i.e., Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday). Some exceptions do exist to the present sample’s general classification, however. This usually occurs in the publication of specialist or irregular newspapers, such as *Vash Posredniki*, the informational edition of the Novosibirsk Union of Journalists, and *Molodost’ Sibiri*, the regional weekly paper of the Komsomol. These specific periodicals differed from the daily or thrice-weekly newspapers as they were more involved pieces of work which published long-form stories related to the theme. They typically stayed away from the less serious news stories that featured so heavily in other newspapers, and also printed political cartoons. Ideologically,

however, such specialized official newspapers still held to the same line as the other general official papers.

Similarities appear in both the form and content of each different *neformal'ny*, or informal periodical. While these newspapers always address the most recent news events in the USSR, there are also editorials and repeating thematic sections. Occasionally, particular writers have their own column which is part of every issue. Indeed, there is not much to the form of the paper which strikes a reader today as much different from any other newspaper. Yet, the content which fits into these familiar molds of printed news is radically different from the earlier tradition of Soviet print media. It may seem quite obvious to make this point, but the degree to which these publications presented an alternative news source (which was easier to obtain than earlier samizdat) cannot be understated. They presented both an alternative to the common Party ideology found in the official newspapers, as well as to the particular stories printed in them. In definite marked contrast to the official news publications of cities and oblasts, these informal periodicals refrained from the objectively naïve and trivial local news stories so popular in the former case. Their highly critical nature knew very limited bounds; openly attacking the Soviet system as well as key political figures (both national and local) was exceedingly common, and the political cartoons were not only sharp, but often crude. The fact that they operated as “regional periodicals” was not attributed to the fact that they carried local news stories, but rather that they espoused regionalist attitudes, interests, and concerns vis-à-vis the center.

The themes discussed in these works reveal the main priorities of the writers and editors and demonstrate which issues appeared most relevant and important during this dynamic time period. The editors of informal publications did this with unflinching candidness, presumably writing whichever stories they pleased. Certainly, though, the radical nature of this institution

should not be idealized, as we cannot know precisely to which degree writers practiced the most “sophisticated” form of censorship, self-censorship. Nonetheless, in a comparative view vis-à-vis official publications, the distinction is perhaps more comprehensible. While interest level of course factors into publishing decisions, in this case, the fact that many stories appear in the pages of informal press that do not show in the official press more likely has to do with censorship.

What is perhaps most apparent in the differences between the official and unofficial newspapers at this time is the different ways in which they approach Siberian regionalism; specifically, on which principle they seem to discuss it—a cultural or political one. Whereas the official publications focus on such intangible topics as Siberian identity or particularism, unofficial newspapers deliver biting critiques of the system of relations between Siberia and the center. In fact, it appears that there are two different narratives on Siberian regionalism. In one, Siberia is a different state with a different identity from the rest of Russia—a particular Siberian geography, culture, perception, etc. In the other, Siberian regionalism rises as a political response to the colonial exploitation of the area by the federal Russian center. The two narratives differ on the emphasis of the colonial aspect of the center-periphery relationship. Again, another cartoon (corroborated by many other articles) illustrates this phenomenon particularly well.⁵⁵ In Figure 1, Siberians emerge from a physical map of their own country, looking bewildered, lost, and almost like tourists, gazing at various other areas of the country. Siberians, the message seems, are a victim of their place—they don’t fit in with the rest of the nation. Moreover, they seem to have burst through the map (the space behind them almost resembling a black hole), ripping apart the seams of it to see what the rest of the country holds.

⁵⁵ *Press-Biulleten’: Nezavisimogo Sibirskogo Informatsionnogo Agenstva (SibIA)*. [Press-Bulletin: Independent Siberian Information Agency (SibIA)]” (Novosibirsk, 1989), OSA HU 300-85-19. AB 34., Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. 3 December 1989, page 1



Figure 1

Part Two: Themes of Discussion

The Environment

Before investigating which topics are emphasized in the official press compared to the informal press, and how they contributed to regional consciousness, it is useful to examine convergences in topics to clearly juxtapose the official and informal press. One such convergence is a topic frequently treated in both the official and unofficial press of Siberia at this point: the environment. This is an issue naturally tied to the exploitation of resources for which colonialist endeavors are infamous, but was also becoming an increasingly more present issue at this time

with events such as the Chernobyl disaster as well as the denigration of the Aral Sea and Kuzbass coalfields.⁵⁶ The Siberian region, with its vast mineral wealth, industrialization, and massive amounts of forests and waterways, has been particularly exploited for such very reasons. The environmental issue is one place where we can highlight some differences in the degree of criticism exhibited by the official and unofficial newspapers.

Despite government attempts to whitewash environmental concerns (most infamously in the case of Chernobyl), the issues in Siberia were too large to hide. Issues such as air pollution and safety concerns that led to miners' strikes were extremely tangible consequences of the exploitation of Siberian resources.⁵⁷ This may offer one explanation for the fact that references to such problems are indeed frequently found in the pages of the official press of Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk. However, the official treatment of such concerns demonstrates one of the greatest differences between the two types of press.

In one issue of the official *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, a story was published on concerns about radiation contamination in the Yenisei River.⁵⁸ The article, however, quite specifically did not broadcast its own concerns on the matter, but rather indicated that concerns existed. In fact, the story (published on August 14, 1990) is simply a message written by the "Interdepartmental Commission," which studied the issue. The message is printed virtually without comment, except its introduction. From the text, the reader learns that the commission, which had been at work for three months, came to the conclusion that concerns about radiation in the vicinity of the city of

⁵⁶ "Perestroika and Siberian Development," Michael Bradshaw, in *Area*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Mar., 1990), 83-85.

⁵⁷ "Regionalism and Politics in the Kuzbass," by Paul T. Christensen, in *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East*, ed. by Stephen Kotkin and David Wolff, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 212.

⁵⁸ *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii: Organ Krasnoiarskogo Kraevogo Komiteta KPSS I Kraevogo Soveta Narodnykh Deputatov* [Krasnoiarsk Worker: Organ of the Krasnoiarsk Regional Committee of the CPSU and the Regional Council of People's Deputies.]. Krasnoiarsk, 1991 1987. OSA HU 300-85-18. Box 117. Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. No. 186 (21477), 14 August 1990, Page 3.

Krasnoiarsk were unnecessary, and that radiation levels were ‘stable.’⁵⁹ The story appeared on the front page of this edition, indicating its importance, but what seems most remarkable is that it was not a reporting article at all, but rather a mere reproduction of a letter from the government. No further articles on the topic, in that edition or following editions of the paper, were published.

What is equally striking is not that this was a one time occurrence, but rather that this seeming ambivalence and unquestioning acceptance of such pressing and potentially dangerous issues reveals itself again in other issues and other official newspapers. In *Vechernii Krasnoiarsk*, for instance, a story was published just days after the story in *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, about a contaminated fish population in the Kacha River, a tributary of the Yenisei.⁶⁰ This story seems to be equally whitewashed, and provides absolutely no reference or connection to the concerns posed about the Yenisei River just days earlier. In fact, the story (again on the front page) even seems to hint at some wrong doing by the environmental agency, or perhaps the water management facility. Yet once again this story (comprising about one hundred words total) is remarkably short-sighted. Again, no follow up is provided in any other editions of the paper and rather than ending in a question, the article merely, almost coyly, states that “...perhaps the consequences were not considered” by whichever unnamed party at fault. It seems to hint at some criticism of reckless environmental policies, but no damning condemnation of one person or organization is provided. Questions are simply raised, and then the journalists move on. Perhaps most disconcerting about these patterns is that who else, if not investigative journalists, can address these types of problems? Furthermore, such a story about one river in one region of Soviet

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Vechernii Krasnoiarsk: Organ Krasnoiarskogo Gorodskogo Komiteta KPSS i Gorodskogo Soveta Narodnykh Deputatov* (Evening Krasnoiarsk: Organ of the Krasnoiarsk City Committee of the CPSU and the City Council of People’s Deputies) (Krasnoiarsk, 1990), OSA HU 300-85-18. Box 77., Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. No. 88, 16 August 1990, page 1.

Russia would most likely never have been picked up by national news sources. In this way, a local reporter could provide a crucial function to such a place.

In Novosibirsk, itself not a stranger to environmental and nuclear issues, one segment of an edition of *Vechernii Novosibirsk* from September 10, 1990 is dedicated to the “Ecological Situation.”⁶¹ Yet all is presented here is a largely unintelligible report on the amount of dust particles, nitrogen dioxide, and phenols, in the atmosphere for the past month. When the rate is higher than normal or permissible, the (anonymous) author makes a note of it, but no concerns are expressed over such cases, it is merely stated. Similarly, a section from the previous month titled “Committee on Protection of Nature” discusses a wide range of environmental issues, from strange smells to the construction of new homes, etc.⁶² These short articles are perhaps more interesting, but they still are largely inconsequential—more hypothetical ideas than anything else.

How does the treatment of such urgent issues by the official press connect to the issues of Siberian regionalism? It demonstrates the striking deference of journalists to the Communist Party, years into the glasnost project, and even after the passage of the new Press Law. Despite this deference, however, it also reveals some important information about the ways official journalists approached potentially controversial issues. In regards to the environmental issue, we see the same non-accusatory and non-inflammatory stance taken over and over again both in Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk. It is not that these newspapers blatantly ignore such news, as they perhaps would have in earlier decades, but rather that they speak in excessively “soft” terms, unchallenging and cautionary. Perhaps this is due to self-censorship, or direct censorship, but the

⁶¹ *Vechernii Novosibirsk: Gazeta Novosibirskogo gorodskogo komiteta KPSS i Novosibirskogo gorodskogo Soveta narodnykh deputatov. (Evening Novosibirsk: Newspaper of Novosibirsk City Committee of the CPSU and the Novosibirsk City Council of People's Deputies).* (Novosibirsk, 1990 1989), OSA HU 300-85-18. Box 130-131., Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. No. 208 (9893), 10 September 1990, page 3.

⁶² *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 197 (9882), 28 August 1990, page 5.

result remains the same. These issues are not politicized by the official papers; rather, they are treated merely as problems addressed by some level of bureaucracy. In addition to showing the reader their position on the government, the editorial treatment of the environment highlights the official newspapers' conception of the oblast or krai as one which is immune to politics. We will see later how this view expands to other topics of discussion.

In contrast, the informal newspapers of both Novosibirsk and Krasnoiarsk had no qualms when it came to environmental concerns in the area. One of these such informal periodicals, *Severnyi Telegraf* (a work of the human rights group, Vienna-89), regularly featured a section on ecological issues, where issues such as the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Katun River were debated.⁶³ Articles on such issues typically referenced the superiority of the needs of the center over those of Siberia. The narratives involved in such discussions in the informal press are rather coherent and consistent throughout each of them, and indeed correspond to other concerns of regionalism found in such texts.

Another popular use of informal publications was to advertise the upcoming meetings of various informal groups throughout many Siberian cities. Environmental groups and lectures were frequently highlighted, or reports on previous meetings were given. The *SibIA Press Bulletin* (a Novosibirsk publication which will be discussed at length in following sections) provided a report of an April 1989 rally in Bratsk that was not merely for drawing attention to the environment, but rather the whole “ecological crisis.”⁶⁴ The meeting had over one thousand

⁶³ *Severnyi Telegraf*: *Obschesibirskii khudozhestvenno-politicheskii zhurnal* [Northern Telegraph: Greater Siberian artistic-political journal,] Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. OSA HU 300-85-19. AB 40. No. 4, July 1989, p. 25.

⁶⁴ *Press-Biulleten'*, April 1989, p. 2.

attendees, and concluded with a proposal to demand a citywide referendum for the reduction of productivity at a local factory.

It was not only the discussion of meetings and demonstrations which these informal publications provided, but also commentaries and articles on specific environmental issues. Other long form articles, such as one found in the *Press-Biulleten*’, debated energy sources and the operation of hydroelectric power stations in the region.⁶⁵ Such discussions were concerned not only with the safety and security of such stations, but also possibilities for new, more environmentally-friendly energy sources. These discussions are just some of many that filled the pages of informal press on a regular basis. This indicates a general concern from the population over such matters, as well as a sense that the government was not doing enough to address these issues. Instead, then, the informal associations and press had to involve themselves as an alternative.

The Official Press

When considering these ideas against the backdrop of narratives and stories found in both the official and unofficial press, a dichotomy of “soft” or “hard” language seems to emerge, corresponding to a cultural or political understanding of the Siberian region. The stories which filled the pages of the official newspapers, as already discussed, are approached with great nuance and subtlety. The official periodicals wrote about Siberian identity as an attractive group of belonging, at least for those readers of such papers. This group shared many common attributes, hometown heroes, native poets and writers, familiar singers, and easily identifiable landmarks. These were, quite significantly, not always figures or associations of Krasnoiarsk or Novosibirsk,

⁶⁵ *Press-Biulleten*’, No. 19, 15 August 1989, p.8.

but rather from the Siberian regions. Contrasted with the informal papers, this rhetoric contributed to a notion of identity separate from others (for instance, Russian), but not actively against them. Most significantly, the official press engaged in a regional discourse about Siberia largely by drawing attention to the region as a region at all. This is noteworthy considering no such official administrative division of “Siberia” existed. Newspapers in the Soviet Union only existed on the level of administrative divisions or other official groups, such as publications for various unions, so for the official press to refer to an “unofficial region,” so to speak, is noteworthy. The administration was so stratified that official newspapers had limits and quotas established by the government allocating which determined what level of news should be international, national, or local.⁶⁶ In many ways, the official papers engaged in expressions of regional consciousness, rather than a heavily-connoted “regionalism.”

In analyzing these official newspapers, it becomes clear that they overwhelmingly engaged in a discourse on the nature of Siberia which focused heavily on local characters and culture. How did such articles dedicated to these fields manifest as a representation of Siberian identity, if at all? One way official newspapers embarked on a cautious and “soft” path of identity formation is by highlighting particular members of Russian society at the time who were more often than not from Siberian territories, if not only Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk. In doing so they established something of a pantheon of Siberian saints, if only tacitly. Perhaps this would not be notable, if not for the fact that this was a feature almost entirely reserved for Siberians-- rarely a non-Siberian was profiled, unless it related to a “Siberian” topic. Interviews were conducted with Siberians of all status, from local members of the Congress of People’s Deputies, to grandmothers. Sometimes it is a local hero, such as one of Krasnoiarsk’s elderly veterans from

⁶⁶Ovsepian, *Istoria Noveshei Otechestvennoi Zhurnalistiki*.

the Second World War; other times a young soloist in the symphony is treated and described as the “Siberian Nightingale.”⁶⁷

The use of the word *sibiriak* in these publications calls for its own analysis. Of course, the word is not banned from Soviet life, but why it is chosen to be used at some points, when perhaps *Novosibirsky* or *Krasnoiarsky* would work just as well, demands some contemplation. The official newspapers frequently used the word in almost playful terms, such as the life of a “sibiriak.” In one article of *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, Vasilii Fedorov (a poet laureate) is referred to as “Poeta-Sibiriaka.”⁶⁸ Other times, a newspaper discusses the caricature of a Siberian, or writes articles directed at “Sibiriaki.”⁶⁹ In Novosibirsk, when describing methods of transportation in the winter, a man describes how “Siberian means skier,” (“*sibiriak znachit lyzhnik*”).⁷⁰ These are warm accounts of Siberian life which fill the pages-- never are articles titled “What is a Siberian?” One article of *Vechernii Novosibirsk* also reports “from the lab of Siberian researchers.”⁷¹ Even the People’s Deputies of the Krasnoiarsk krai engage in such dialogues too, mythologizing Siberia as a refuge for anyone.⁷² One recurring section of *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii* hails the “Great Citizens of Siberia,” at one point even writing about Grigorii Potanin.⁷³ Here, Potanin is praised, and the writer laments the fact that his work, since 1917, has been relegated to the dustbin of history. Indeed, these stories don’t ring with the urgency of environmental or ethnic problems, but they nonetheless refer to Siberia in a way which, while perhaps not in conflict with the Soviet system, may exist apart from it.

⁶⁷ *Vechernii Krasnoiarsk*, No. 80, 28 July 1990, page 1.

⁶⁸ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 221 (9906), 25 September 1990, page 1.

⁶⁹ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 154, 5 July 1990, page 4.

⁷⁰ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, 28 September 1990, No. 224, page 5.

⁷¹ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 224 (9909), 28 September 1990, page 3.

⁷² *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, No. 181 (21472), 7 August 1990, page 1.

⁷³ *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, No. 175 (21466), 31 July 1990, page 3.

Cultural events and organizations are another connection made by the official newspapers to a concept of Siberian particularism. These topics are in fact found with overwhelming frequency, potentially highlighting a number of conclusions both about Siberia and its cultural life. The way in which Siberian culture is referred to varies largely, however. In a July 1991 issue of *Krasnoiarskaia Gazeta*, the biography of Gennadi Teptin, a native of Krasnoiarsk active in the revolutionary period, is provided with his portrait.⁷⁴ Providing local linkages, the newspaper describes his time in Krasnoiarsk, and how had been printed in the newspaper of the Krasnoiarsk komsomol. In the same issue, Evgenii Popov, another writer from Krasnoiarsk, is discussed in his relation to some of his satirical works.⁷⁵ The biography provided for Popov (introducing him as “our countryman”) also highlights his debut in the pages of *Krasnoiarskiy komsomolets* many years earlier. While living in Moscow, *Krasnoiarskaia gazeta* explains, he never forgot his “native Siberia” (*rodnaia Sibir*).⁷⁶

Yet to understand these gestures toward a Siberian region in the official newspapers, we also must look at the newspapers as a whole, not just such types of articles as highlighted. It is not enough to say that simply because these newspapers published such articles on Siberian culture or lifestyle that they were advocated a regionalist stance. In fact, one way to prove this was politically motivated is to show that the official press only began to publish such articles in the glasnost era. This, however, is not the case-- articles on Siberian characters and culture existed in the previous decades. Yet when considered as a coherent whole, among the chaotic and dynamic time of a rapidly changing country, it is noteworthy that such articles continued to be

⁷⁴ *Krasnoiarskaia Gazeta: Kraevaia Narodnaia Gazeta* [Krasnoiarsk Paper: Krai People’s Newspaper]. Krasnoiarsk, 1992 1991. OSA HU 300-85-18. Box 117. Open Society Archives, Budapest, Hungary. No. 26, 18 July 1991, page 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

printed. It was during this period of glasnost that the press became more critical-- not completely open, of course, but more critical of the government, Party, and society, than earlier. I have already discussed how the official newspapers addressed the environment; while newspapers still were not openly blaming the local government, they were at least discussing the environmental problems. It is quite difficult to understand the degree of press liberalization in the Soviet Union at this time, but what we see in the environmental question is indicative of the glasnost reforms by publishing information about the problems, but not ascribing fault.

A similar pattern follows in other descriptions of social problems. For instance, when discussing the ethnically-charged riots in Tuva of August 1990, *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii* in fact publishes multiple articles on the situation, sending their own special correspondent and not relying on TASS reports.⁷⁷ One article is presented as a day-by-day briefing of the journalist's visit there, but refrains from engaging in either anti-Russian or anti-Tuvan rhetoric. The articles are not accusatory, but they are noteworthy for covering an extremely explosive situation that highlights ethnic unrest in Siberia, just next door to the Krasnoiarsk krai. Another example of the reformed treatment of disasters in the press is that of the Ufa train catastrophe in June 1989. When *Vechernii Novosibirsk* covered the event, they discussed commissions which had been established to investigate the disaster, and also reported on "many streamlined failures" which contributed to the event.⁷⁸ Again, the reports are not exactly inflammatory, but compared with the Soviet Union's previous history of covering up public tragedies, this is a different step.

While not as dramatic as the events in Tuva and Ufa, more subtle expressions of discontent came from other newspapers as well, demonstrating the new role of the press. For

⁷⁷ *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, No. 186 (21477), 14 August 1990, page 3, Another report on the Tuvan situation found on 7 August 1990 No. 181 (21472).

⁷⁸ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 130 (9515), 8 June 1989, page 1.

instance, in one report from *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, reporters ask residents if they are “Ready for winter?”⁷⁹ In fact, not a single person is ready for winter, and blame this on a variety of problems - there is no hot water, no heating, etc. One respondent goes as far to say that perestroika “continues, in a sense, to go, but does not progress.”⁸⁰ Another article from Novosibirsk describes a demonstration in defense of Valentin Komov, director of the publishing house of the newspaper *Sovetskaia Sibir*.⁸¹ He had been accused of collaborating in the putsch of August 1991, but this article describes the number of his supporters who came to his defense. The point of describing such articles is to demonstrate the fine line that official editors walked, and how they approached controversial topics in the press in an entirely new way during this time. Given this information, it is even more significant that they would continue to discuss a Siberian lifestyle, or Siberian culture, in such a volatile time for the regions of the USSR. It would be less significant if these critical articles were not printed, or likewise, articles on “Siberia” and “Siberians,” but by publishing both types of texts, they seem to complement each other and form a coherent whole.

The Informal Press

In contrast to the official press, the informal papers engaged in political discussions which explicitly targeted Moscow and the leaders of the RSFSR. In these pages, writers of the informal periodicals set themselves against one nation which had continued to exploit them for centuries. There is a fine line in this argument, however, that is difficult at times to discern in the informal press: Has the central power gone above and beyond what is appropriate in their use of Siberian resources, or did they not have the right to the use of such resources in the first place? Indeed,

⁷⁹ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 224 (9909), 28 September 1990, page 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 224 (9909), 28 September 1990, page 3.

different informal periodicals advocated different solutions to the problematic center-periphery relationship. There was no general consensus among the publications that Siberia should separate from the rest of the RSFSR. Rather, some advocated increased autonomy, some promoted forming a republic, and others desired a reorganization of the existing administrative structures.

To analyze these periodicals, however, it is just as instructive to study what is in them as it is to notice what is omitted. In the case of the official newspapers, we can see what is largely omitted from their articles by analyzing informal periodicals. One theme which resurfaces again and again in these new, unofficial publications is, naturally, perestroika—is it good, is it bad, how good or how bad? This aspect of the discussion is not entirely foreign to Soviet newspapers of the time; indeed, even official newspapers were often directly critical of both Gorbachev and his reform program. Yet, these Siberian informal publications put a new spin on the discussion of perestroika by addressing the effects of the program on Siberia, a trend rarely found in official publications. Political cartoons, a regular feature of almost all informal periodicals, deliver brief but biting commentaries on such affairs. For instance, in Figure 2, a cartoon from the periodical *Etap*, a man representing the Communist Party reads a newspaper article on perestroika while seeming to simultaneously defecate into a pot marked “Siberia,” surrounded by other pots labeled “Caucasus,” “Central Asia,” and “Baltics.”



Figure 2.

Other informal publications addressed the same topic in a more discursive way. Certainly, perestroika was the word on the lips of millions of Soviet citizens during this time—it is absolutely predictable and rectifying that the word would make its way to front pages everywhere. For Siberians, however, perestroika could affect their livelihoods in entirely different ways, and it is the way these papers discuss such a fact which edifies ideas of Siberian regionalism. The same opinion of perestroika seems to appear in all the pages of these periodicals: perestroika is merely more of the same, a new way for Moscow to exploit the resources of Siberia. The economic reforms of perestroika were not kind to Siberia, however; they in their own way demanded attention to regional concerns. The region was not only already extremely poor proportional to the rest of the Union, but the reforms which were supposed to unilaterally improve the economic situation in fact again disproportionately damaged it in Siberia. Not only did the region suffer the same problems of the rest of the country, it suffered them worse, after already being far behind in both development and general quality of life.⁸²

⁸²Naumov, *The History of Siberia*, 211-216.

Other informal periodicals also analyzed the structure of politics during this time, looking at the role of political parties as well as legislative bodies. Indeed, no sweeping generalization about the position of these informal periodicals on the issue of Siberian autonomy (or any other issue, for that matter) can be made. For the most part, each periodical advocated different positions. When it came to the issue of Siberian government vis-à-vis the center, a diversity of opinions and ideas can be found. This can partly be attributed to the fact that these periodicals, unlike the official newspapers, were mostly the products of different interest groups or informal associations. As such, they each promoted an opinion which might correspond to their general ideology or position. Whereas these informal publications focused on politics at a rather conceptual level, official periodicals typically refrained from doing so.

In *Golos Truda*, the Novosibirsk-based publication of the Confederation of Anarchists of Siberia and the Far East, one issue explored why regional parties, such as the Siberian People's Party, were necessary.⁸³ Here, the author (A. Rumyantsev) explains that according to the encyclopedia, Siberia is the territory from the Urals to the Kolyma Mountains; and yet, "optimists" believe that a "common European home" can be built from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals.⁸⁴ "Forgetting" Siberia, this would leave its residents free to create their own common and sovereign home. Attacking Moscow, the article declares that a free Siberia would have the autonomy to decide its own usage of resources and way to live. The article continues by explaining the statistics of Siberian land and resource wealth, and how it is exploited by the center. In order to fight this, Rumyantsev claims, a Siberian political association and independent

⁸³ *Golos Truda: Konfederatsiia anarkho-sindikalistov* [Voice of labor: Confederation of anarcho-syndicalists] Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, 12 AB. 30 June 1990.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

trade union must be formed. The Siberian representatives in Moscow are merely careerists, he argues, who will not fight for Siberia.⁸⁵

In other articles of *Golos Truda*, the writers question the feasibility of glasnost, and also discusses the relationship of anarchism to regional parties. Reporting on the events of the Baikal Conference of Anarchists of Siberia and the Far East, a statement of the conference released the new title of the association (Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists-- Zauralye), as well as its administration.⁸⁶ In a resolution from the July 1990 conference, the members of this event explain that Baikal is not only the heart of Siberia, but the “Heritage of Humanity.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, however, this group condemns the Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill (BTsBK) for causing “irreparable harm” to the shores of Lake Baikal and promises to search from solutions to the ecological problems of the area. The text serves to highlight some of the most important issues for such groups. Another resolution passed by the conference was one on “Sovereign Siberia,” which they describe as a “necessary step in the struggle for liberation from a violent state.”⁸⁸

It was not only anarchists who were so passionate about political concerns of Siberia, but also some liberal democrats. Those with such political tendencies often found an outlet on the pages of a number of informal periodicals, such as the democratic group “Svoboda.”⁸⁹ This group was formed by Novosibirsk democrats in 1981, and later became associated with the Democratic Party of Russia, but before then began publishing in the periodical *Novaia Zhizn’*. “Svoboda” typically did not tackle issues of Siberian regionalism in this periodical, but were instead more

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Novaia Zhizn’*: izdanie gruppy “Svoboda” [New Life: Publication of group “Freedom’] Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, AB 30.

concerned with issues of democratization in the whole Soviet Union. Nonetheless, this periodical demonstrates a different side of informal organizations and press. Indeed, all the writers (who were typically workers or skilled laborers, as was listed in the issues) were residents of Novosibirsk. To them, however, it seems the cause of democracy usurped that of regionalism, and references to Siberia were in fact largely left out of the pages. Indeed, this periodical, concerned with larger, all-Union issues and in fact aligned with an all-Union organization, seems to offer the least references or discussions of “Siberia” from all the publications studied.

The *SibIA* (Siberian Information Agency) *Press-Biulleten'* was a weekly publication which collected short news memos from all over Siberia and reprints them in one issue. The Press Bulletin was first printed by the Siberian Information Agency (SibIA) of Novosibirsk, an association founded in 1989. Yet the publication itself was first printed as samizdat in 1980.⁹⁰ Alexei Manannikov, the editor of the newspaper, became a well-known figure throughout Siberia, and was even called the “mind, honor, and conscience of our city” by the *Sibirskii Kur'er*.⁹¹ In terms of periodicals which advocated a particular sense of Siberia, *Press-Biulleten'* perhaps stands out among all others, both official and unofficial. The format of the periodical combined editorial articles, reproductions of TASS reports from Siberian cities, as well as political cartoons. Some long-form articles were included as well including one titled: “Siberia: Self-sufficiency or autonomy?”, and another which studying the higher rates of economic productivity in Siberia compared to the average of the RSFSR.⁹²

⁹⁰ *Istoriia goroda: Novonikolaevsk-Novosibirsk (istoricheskie ocherki)* (History of the city: Novonikolaevsk-Novosibirsk (historical essays), (Novosibirsk: Historical Heritage of Siberia, 2005), 799.

⁹¹ *Sibirskii Kur'er: Gazeta profsoiuza nezavisimyykh zhurnalistov SSSR* [Siberian Courier: Newspaper of union of independent journalists of the USSR], Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, 9BB. No. 15, June 1990, p. 1.

⁹² *Press-Biulleten'*, No. 3, 23 April 1989. Also: No. 22, 3 September, 1989.

In one indication of their view of Siberia, their regular “News in Brief” section subdivided reports into news from the world, Siberia, the “empire,” and “Russia.”⁹³ There was no dedicated division to Novosibirsk news, but Siberian news was set apart from the rest of the USSR as well as the RSFSR. A typical statement from them also calls Siberia “the largest colony in the world.”⁹⁴ In addition to these editorials, they also regularly provided lists of informal organizations’ meetings in Siberian cities. This was primarily related to the periodical’s function as a written organ of the “Vienna-89” (*Vena-89*) human rights organization of Novosibirsk, still in operation today.

Press-Biulleten’ was not the only publication offshoot of this group, however, as others such as *Etap*, *Sibirskii Kur’er*, and *Severnyi Telegram* provided variations on a similar theme. *Sibirskii Kur’er* (founded June 1989) acted as the “Newspaper of the Trade Union of independent journalists of the USSR,” while *Severnyi Telegram* (founded was published as a “Greater Siberian artistic-political journal,” with no required membership. In terms of content, *Sibirskii Kur’er* focused heavily on human rights issues of Siberia while *Severnyi Telegram* promoted some radical political dialogue. *Etap* quite closely resembled *Press-Biulleten’*, especially in its inclusion of similar Siberian news reports, but provided more in-depth, long form articles. These periodicals were all associated with *Vena-89*, and used its publishing house, but had different editorial boards and directions.

While differences in theme and content existed for these publications, they nonetheless all took overwhelmingly critical approaches to the politics and system of the Soviet Union. While

⁹³ *Etap: Ezhenedel’naia gazeta Sibirskogo informatsionnogo tsentra* [Step: Weekly newspaper of Siberian information center] Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, 54AB No. 6, September 1990, p. 2.

⁹⁴ *Press-Biulleten’*, No. 36, 10 December 1989, p. 4

the Siberian Information Agency (*SibIA*) specifically targeted the exploitation of Siberia in its mission and activities, *Vena-89* was a general human rights association which accused the Soviet government as violating the Vienna Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) of 1989 by infringing on the human rights of Soviet citizens.⁹⁵ *SibIA*, however, takes a much firmer stance on the status of Siberia, which it refers to as a colony, and bases its founding charter on supporting “the idea of regional self-financing, Siberian autonomy, and the democratization of Siberian society.”⁹⁶ It argues its purpose of founding an information agency for the region is that Siberia requires a press which is not “controlled by the ideological attitudes of Union leadership.”⁹⁷ While based in Novosibirsk, this founding statement was signed by representatives of independent publications and independent journalists of Irkutsk, Kemerov, Krasnoiarsk, Novokuznetsk, Omsk, and Yakutsk.

There is indeed something significant in the very existence of publications such as *Press-Biulleten'*, *Etap*, *Sibirskii Kur'er*, and *Severnyi Telegraf*, and how they existed as specifically “Siberian” periodicals rather than city or all-Union newspapers. Indeed, the official newspapers only existed at the levels of krai, oblast, raion, all-Union, and republic.⁹⁸ Moreover, while the official newspaper *Sovetskaya Sibir'* (one of the largest publications in the USSR) existed as a specifically Siberian newspaper, by 1937 it became an organ of the Novosibirsk regional and city councils, as the Western Siberian krai was abolished.⁹⁹ Yet the informal publications of Siberia not only changed what could be considered a “Siberian periodical,” but also eschewed the very administrative districts of the RSFSR. Indeed, these publications considered news from a variety

⁹⁵ *Severnyi Telegraf*, No. 4, July 1989, p. 3.

⁹⁶ *Press-Biulleten'*, No. 1, 9 April 1989, p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ovsepiian, *Istoria Noveshei Otechestvennoi Zhurnalistiki*

⁹⁹ “Sovetskaia Sibir” in *Entsiklopediia Sibir'*, <http://russiasib.ru/sovetskaya-sibir/> (Last accessed 30 May 2014).

of different krais and oblasts, which were rather indeterminably selected. Unfortunately, it is difficult to indicate how these publications envisioned Siberia when they referred to it, since they themselves never provided any category or boundary. Perhaps this designation was not as important to these writers as was the greater issue of the relation of the center to the periphery, or the West to the East of the Urals.

The informal periodical *Vestnik demokraticeskogo dvizheniia* (Newspaper of the democratic movement) was another Novosibirsk publication which, similar to *Novaia Zhizn'*, was also concerned with greater political issues of the whole Soviet Union (primarily democratization) and not specifically interested in Siberian affairs. Yet, in one publication they printed the entire text of Aleksandr Rar's "RSFSR-- It is Russia" essay.¹⁰⁰ In this, he provides a detailed analysis of the Siberian situation, questioning whether it is in fact a colony, and deliberating on the historical, cultural, and ethnographic uniqueness (*svoeobrazie*) of Siberia. In this text, he advocates a "middle way," in contrast to some of the periodicals mentioned here, that calls for the reorganization of administrative divisions and the re-establishment of the "Siberian krai." This essay is also notable for its reference to the "many people" who are discussing this issue, and its references to other informal periodicals. This was clearly an issue discussed in these groups, whether or not they were specific "Siberian" or *oblastnichestvo* groups.

Despite these highly politicized topics and discussions found in these informal newspapers, they did not ignore issues of culture and history all together. However, the types of stories in these categories still offer a remarkable counterpoint to those found in official papers. Poetry, for instance, was often found in the periodical *Gazetka*, but it was almost always political,

¹⁰⁰ *Vestnik demokraticeskogo dvizheniia* [Newspaper of the democratic movement], Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, 3BB. No. 4, 12 October 1989.

reprinted from publications such as *Antisovetskaia Pravda*.¹⁰¹ Reading lists and radio programs were also suggested to readers of *SibIA Press Biulleten'*, but directed specifically to “all those interested in Siberia.”¹⁰² In *Etap*, historical articles described, for instance, the extraordinary Siberian congress of December 1917, where the future of a Siberian government was debated.¹⁰³

What can be learned from the topics frequently visited in these newspapers? Certainly we can see which various issues and controversies plagued residents of Siberia and made them hostile to central rule, yet we do not require the newspapers specifically for this information. Rather, these various topics of discussion demonstrate the degree to which this type of consciousness-raising occurred. It is not merely that some bursts of anger occurred as an infrequent reaction whenever extreme events demanded them—rather, writers in these publications continuously returned to these issues, over and over again, even when no obvious events demanded it. Evidenced by the frequency of articles, the issues of Siberian identity, regionalism, and colonialism were in fact constantly present in the psyches of numerous publications from different parts of Siberia.

Part Three: Encounters

It is also important to note actual encounters between the official press and informal associations and publications. By publicizing the activities of such groups, the official newspapers in fact offered a subtle endorsement of them. In an issue of *Krasnoiarsk Rabochii*, an article was also written on the most recent edition of the *Al'manakh Yenisei*. This publication

¹⁰¹ *Gazetka* [Newspaper], Open Society Archives: Budapest, Hungary: HU OSA 300-85-19, AB 9. No. 3, August 1990, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Etap*, No. 5, August 1990, p. 4.

was a literary journal of the Krasnoiarsk krai that had been published for decades.¹⁰⁴ The full-length article features and highlights the latest edition of the almanac, but perhaps what is most interesting is that it indeed finds the need to do so. Certainly the literary journal would have had its own following, but the newspaper still decided to praise and herald its new release, describing in detail all of the stories and poems published in the edition. Also significant was that this edition of *Al'manakh* in fact featured an article by Vladimir Pomerantsev (a prison of a Krasnoiarsk camp) on "Tsarist and Stalinist Prisons," which had been provided by the Krasnoiarsk branch of the informal, nationwide human rights organization *Memorial*. In fact, this edition was the first, though not the last, where *Al'manakh* gave a special section to the organization to provide documents related to the Stalinist repression.¹⁰⁵

An article in SIBIA also describes correspondences between the editor of the informal journal and that of Igor Sosnin, the editor of *Vechernii Novosibirsk*.¹⁰⁶ Similar encounters between the unofficial and official sides of the regions are numerous. The same Memorial society found in *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii* also is discussed in numerous other papers where interviews with leaders of the group are published, as well as informative articles.¹⁰⁷ *SibIA* and *Etap* are also quoted at length in *Vechernii Novosibirsk*.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the informal publications also frequently referred to each other's work as well, establishing links between these various groups which also spread to the official sphere of life.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ *Krasnoiarskii Rabochii*, No. 175 (21466), 31 July 1990, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Aleksei Babii, "Novyi razdel al'manakha "Enisei" formiruetsia v osnovnom iz materialov, predstavlenykh krasnoiarskoi gruppoi "Memorial"." [New section of the almanac "Enisei" formed mainly from the contributions of Krasnoiarsk group "Memorial"], 1990, www.memorial.krsk.ru/public/90/1990_3.htm (Last accessed 30 May 2014).

¹⁰⁶ *Press-Biulleten'*, No. 32, 12 November 1989, p.3.

¹⁰⁷ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 130 (9515), 8 June 1989, page 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Vechernii Novosibirsk*, No. 214 (9899), 17 September 1990, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, in *Press-Biulleten'*, No. 3, 23 April 1989.

These links did not only exist on the pages of newspapers, however. At times, these informal groups even entered the official political sphere, involving themselves in such work. For instance, in August 1989 in Krasnoiarsk, a meeting was held between the krai committee of the CPSU and representatives of informal organizations of Krasnoiarsk.¹¹⁰ The purpose of the meeting was for the informal groups to explain and describe their work, as well as advocate their own positions. Between these various encounters, both on paper and in the outside world, the connections between informal organizations and press, and the official press and institutions. This demonstrates that informal organizations, despite their size, do demand attention and analysis, especially at the time of their initial emergence. In fact, since these are connections found only in some publications, it is possible to imagine the greater extent of such connections between official and unofficial society in daily life at this time.

Part Four: Questioning Narratives

From the analysis provided, I believe that there are three basic errors in the current historiography on greater topic of Siberian regionalism at the end of the Soviet Union. These three issues deal with the chronology, actors, and reasons prevalent in the common narrative. By analyzing different sources, such as the press and informal organizations, a contrasting picture emerges.

The first issue is that of chronology; specifically, when these regionalist movement in Siberia began to emerge and gain traction. First, it is extremely rare that any texts will address a notion of Siberian regionalism during the Soviet Union; Vladimir Shlapentokh's *From Submission to Rebellion* is one of few. When Siberian regionalism is discussed between the time of 1917 and 1991, it is typically only in reference to the Russian Civil War. As Dov B.

¹¹⁰ *Press-Biulleten'*, No. 19, 15 August 1989.

Yaroshevski explains it, the regionalist movement “[By 1920] had been eliminated by the Bolsheviks and their rivals.”¹¹¹ If an author is concerned with the later end of the spectrum, Siberian regionalism is typically only traced to 1991, for instance, at the formation of the Siberian Agreement (*Sibirskoe soglashenie*).¹¹² As noted earlier, when the years of perestroika are connected to the regionalism in the Soviet Union, it is typically only in reference to the Caucasus or Baltics, rarely Siberia. Yet what is found in this analysis is an earlier starting point for regionalist sentiment in Siberia. While it may be a difference of only three or four years, this is significant in its own right, primarily for the implications it has for regionalist motivations. Furthermore, it may be even earlier than 1987 or 1988, as evidenced in the *SibIA Press-Biulleten*’s earlier manifestation as pre-perestroika samizdat.

If the timeframe of this discussion of Siberian regionalism shifts, then it also calls into question the motivations typically ascribed to the movement. One of the more popular explanations for the emergence of Siberian regionalism relies on the general deterioration of center-periphery relations at the end of the Soviet Union. As James Hughes explains, “the increasing insecurity of regional elites under the combined pressures of the disintegration of the country, the economy, the command-administrative system and its hub, the Communist Party” all contributed to the rise of regionalism in Russia, especially Siberia.¹¹³ This assessment largely conforms to other readings of the situation. Even Shlapentokh, who sees regionalism emerging earlier than most, still attributes this to the power-grabbing of local Party members. However, the

¹¹¹Dov B. Yaroshevski, “Russian Regionalism in Turkestan,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 65, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 77–100.

¹¹² Vladimir A. Zhdanov, “Contemporary Siberian Regionalism,” in Stephen Kotkin and David Wolff, eds., *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 124.

¹¹³James Hughes, “Regionalism in Russia: The Rise and Fall of Siberian Agreement,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 7 (December 1994): 1133.

narratives found in these newspapers revolve more around issues of exploitation felt at the lowest segments of society. Local party personalities are not especially common, nor are their actions against Moscow. Instead, environmentalism, workers' strikes, and shortages are typically the source of complaint from citizens in these newspapers.

While a political figure does typically wield more power than an average citizen, and the local Siberian politicians may have directed the majority of decision making for their regions, this does not exclude or negate the role played by citizens and informal groups. This brings us to the third error of this historiography: the actors involved. The role of non-elite actors is typically ignored or downplayed in such discussions; as Vladimir Shlapentokh notes, "the masses were, in 1986-1991, in general indifferent or even hostile toward the autonomy of regions."¹¹⁴ Certainly, journalists and writers constitute a particular population rather than merely "the masses," but their interest in the subject of the Siberian region demonstrates that this was a topic of interest for its reading audience, not only local party bosses. Moreover, the role of informal groups also alters the common narrative. *Vena-89* was one of many other non-governmental groups that began to emerge in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. The organization was in especially good company, surrounded by many similar informal groups. Yet this is not just a situation specific to the city of Novosibirsk—Krasnoiarsk also had a wealth of such organizations, as did other Siberian cities such as Tomsk, Barnaul, and Kemerovo. These groups, while not staffed by members of the "elite" also deserve greater attention in this discussion, considering that many of them still operate today. These three factors-- chronology, motivations, and actors-- are indeed all related, and suggest that there is still much more probing to be done on this topic.

¹¹⁴ Shlapentokh, Levita, and Loiberg, *From Submission to Rebellion*, 190.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this thesis I posed two research questions, to investigate if Siberian regionalist narratives could be found in the Soviet press of 1988-1991, and if so, in what forms they existed. By analyzing a large amount of periodicals from this time period of two Siberian regions, I hoped to demonstrate the value in a close reading of such press sources, both official and unofficial. In my consideration of the gaps in the current historiography, it is clear that more investigations can follow not only of Siberian regionalism, but post-Soviet regionalism, informal organizations, and periodicals as well. This paper has responded to some crucial questions, but is also a gateway for more to be asked.

This analysis also demonstrated the diverse range of experiences of journalists at the end of the Soviet Union. It was able to do so by incorporating a methodology which focused on a small group of local press publications, during a short time frame. As such, the more subtle and nuanced means of expression in periodicals and newspapers become apparent-- for instance, in letters to the editors, or street surveys. Given the instability of both glasnost and perestroika, a more in-depth and detailed analysis appears productive in evaluating the real effects of the reforms.

From such an analysis as described, this paper determined the many ways in which residents and writers of Krasnoiarsk and Novosibirsk envisioned the unofficial region of which they considered themselves a part. This paper found that political conceptions of the region were just as common as cultural conceptions. While these ideas remained largely separated by the type of periodical in which they originated, some overlap did nonetheless exist. Notions of Siberia as a territorial, cultural, and historical idea were found in each official newspaper. The subtle remarks on characteristics of “Siberia” or “Siberians” that were found in the official press all

demonstrate the ways in which these journalists brought the question of a Siberian region to the official sphere. Specifically, the ways which these newspapers and periodicals, both official and informal, addressed the issue of the environment highlights an extreme concern among the local population for the Siberian land. The articles found in the official papers, both related and unrelated to Siberia, demonstrate that regionalist discussions are not exclusive to politics, though they may be informed by them.

The range of opinions found in the informal periodicals also shows a more diverse notion of political regionalism. As seen in these publications, the problems of Siberia were offered solutions that drifted across a wide political spectrum. The informal periodicals offered a new form of 'local press' as well, that concerned itself with historical rather than contemporary political borders. The interactions between the informal and official side of publications and institutions also formed a wider arena for discussion. From these interactions, the way was paved for the formation of unofficial communities, both mental and institutional. This conclusion then demands a continuing re-evaluation of the current historiography on the topic, such as was already begun.

This paper also showed that Siberia as a place and idea was important to those who occupied it, and existed in the public consciousness. Siberia, even if not officially authorized as a region or area, still had a remarkable staying power for Russians. While the politicization of the region is indeed important, the large amount of discussions of the region which are apolitical is also significant for this reason. Siberia, with its sheer vastness and majesty, can easily be seen as a trope; this analysis provides a more concrete understanding of it as such.

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