

Imagining Post-Imperial Order: Nationalism, Regionalism, Autonomism,
and State Socialism in Northeast Russia, 1905-1922

By

Aleksandr Korobeinikov

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Supervisor: Professor Charles Shaw
Second Reader: Professor Balázs Trencsényi

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Abstract

Focusing on the works and intellectual activity of the Yakut intelligentsia (the national and Bolshevik), the Thesis examines the development of post-imperial political imagination in Russia's Northeast region (Yakutia). The formation of the Yakut intellectuals occurred due to the circulation of wider imperial as well as global discourses on nationalism, anti-colonialism, socialism, regionalism during the crisis of the Russian Empire. By discussing the Yakut marginal, even colonial conditions, the Yakut national intellectuals followed the self-governmental aspirations, inherited from the Siberian regionalists, which became commonplace for many Siberian 'indigenous' movements. Despite the Stalinist myth, according to which the Soviet Union (and its social engineers) for the first time in Russian history produced the autonomists discourse in the Northeast, it was the Yakut intelligentsia who developed the self-governmental (autonomist) rhetoric during the first decades of the twentieth century. Regional political and social cooperation between the Yakut national and Bolshevik intellectuals during the imperial transformation contributed to the Soviet central government's decisions regarding the Yakut issues. Hence, the Yakut intellectuals became mediators of the post-imperial political projects in the Northeast that resulted in the establishment of Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922.

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Notes on Transliteration

Transliteration from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet is an eternal issue for anyone studying Russian/Soviet subjects regarding especially names, ethnonyms, and toponyms. Since I work with sources of personal origin mainly of the early twentieth century, I have opted for a dual system: in the text I usually use a simplified Library of Congress system. However, I depart from this system a) when a Russian name/surname has a clear English version (Joseph instead of Iosif, Maxim instead of Maksim); b) when a Russian name/surname, notion or concept has an accepted English spelling (for instance, Yakut instead of Iakut, Yadrintsev instead of Iadrintsev).

Abbreviations and Glossary

AN USSR – The Academy of Science of the USSR

ASSR – An Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

Bichik – The Yakut alphabet

GARF – The State Archive of the Russian Federation

Kolchakovshchina – The colloquial name for the anti-Bolshevik movement in Siberia headed by Alexander Kolchak during the Civil War in Russia

Ksenofontovshchina – The colloquial name for the anti-Soviet national movement headed by Pavel Ksenofontov in 1927-28, also known as the Movement of the Yakut Confederalists

NA RS(Y) – The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

Nasleg – A subdivision of an ulus

NB RS(Y) – The National Library of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)

Oblast – region

Olonkho – Epic poetry of the Yakuts

RGIA – The Russian State Historical Archive

RGO – The Russian Geographical Society

RKP(b) – Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)

RSDRP – The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party

RSFSR – The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

Sakha – The ethnonym of the Yakuts

SPbFA RAN – The St. Petersburg Branch of the Federal State Government-Financed Institution of Science of the Archive of Russian Academy of Sciences

Toyon – A nobleman in the Yakut social hierarchy that was frequently used to represent both respect and critique.

USSR – The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Ulus – An administrative unit in territorial division of the Yakut region

VSORGO – East Siberian Branch of the Russian Geographical Society

VTsIK – The All-Russian Central Executive Committee

YASSR – The Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

YAKOB – The Yakut Committee of Public Safety

YNC SO RAN – The Yakut Scientific Centre of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy
of Science

YTsf – The Yakut Labour Union of Federalists

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Introduction: Towards a Post-Imperial Order?

The Russian Revolution of 1917 marked a turning point in Russian imperial and indeed in global history. It can be interpreted as a tectonic shift, which nonetheless cannot be reduced to a straightforward linear Russian-biased narrative: the revolution revealed the existence of multiple ideas and projects that were initiated even by local political actors in different regions within the Russian Empire. The collapse of the Russian Empire, or rather its transformation, resulted in a long-term process of post-imperial¹ reorganization of diverse population characterized by a high level of regional self-organization, the growth of political imagination, the importance of nationalism, autonomism, and other widespread discourses, as well as the necessity to regulate social and political control in various stateless regions. In addition to the traditionally important and widely studied cases of the Western borderlands, the Caucasus, and the Volga region, recent historiography began to pay more attention to the provinces of so-called Asiatic Russia. Among the latest, the Northeast² played a significant role in the post-imperial transformations,³ despite its marginal status within the empire. Being for many decades a frozen land of exile in the Russian Empire, the Northeast accumulated political, social, and scientific experience of exiled activists that along with increasing mobility, cross-regional cooperation and accessibility of university education contributed considerably to the

¹ By the term 'post-imperial' in this thesis I mean the following: 1) the modern historiographical post-imperial turn (that explore the activity of diverse non-Russian actors and their roles in the revolutionary transformations); 2) the post-imperial political imagination (thoughts, ideas, and projects on Russian political and social reorganization before and after the Empire's end as well as alternatives to the nation-state in the transitional period); 3) and generally the state of Russia during its collapse and transformation into a new order. See Ilya Gerasimov, Marina Mogilner, Sergey Glebov and Alexander Semyonov, "What is the Meaning of Post-Imperial," *Ab Imperio* 18, no. 3 (2017): 9-16.

² The Northeast of Russia that is now the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is a little-known remote territory, part of the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. I will apply a mesoregional approach using this geographical term to refer to the studied region in order to avoid contentious issues created by national historiography. More on the historical mesoregions see, *European Regions and Boundaries: A Conceptual History*, eds. Dina Mishkova, Balazs Trencsenyi (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2017).

³ See, Stephen A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1-9, 170-175; Laura Engelstein, *Russia in Flames: War, Revolutions, Civil War, 1914-1921* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 414-420; Alfred J. Rieber, *Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 80-89.

formation of intellectual strata among the native Yakut population by the beginning of the imperial crisis.

Despite the Stalinist myth, according to which the Soviets for the first time in Russian history introduced statehood in non-Russian regions,⁴ it was not the Bolsheviks but ‘indigenous’⁵ intellectuals who implemented autonomy as a form of post-colonial political self-organization during the crisis and transformation of the Russian Empire into Siberia. In this vein, the Yakut intellectuals played a crucial role in post-imperial transformations of the Northeast providing an introduction of such global discursive trends as nationalism, autonomism, socialism, democracy, and enlightenment to the remote corner of the empire. These intellectuals – Vasilii Nikiforov-Kulumnur (1866-1928), Alexei Kulakovskii (1877-1926), Gavriil Ksenofontov (1888-1938), Semyon Novgorodov (1892-1924), Maxim Ammosov (1897-1938), Platon Oyunskii (1893-1939), Isidor Barakhov (1898-1938) – are almost overlooked by the modern historiography on the early Soviet nationalities policy which does not fully consider Northeast.⁶ Therefore, it is appropriate to shed light on the crisis of the

⁴ In this context, the Stalinist myth also covers the policy of repressions of the national intelligentsia. The study of groups of intellectuals who were subjected to repression during the Soviet era is a whole layer of research literature. See historiography of this question, Ekaterina Romanova, “Biografiia sredy v kontekste repressirovannoi pamiati: zhiznennye traektorii yakutskoi i kazakhskoi intelligentsii (20-30 gg. KhKh veka)” [Biography of the Environment in the Context of Repressed Memory: Life Trajectories of the Yakut and Kazakh Intelligentsia (1920-1930s)], in *1920-1950 zhzh. Kazakstan men Batys Sibirdegi zhappai saiasi kuzyn-syrgin tarikhyndaay zhaŋa esimder men faktiler / Novye imena i fakty v istorii massovykh politicheskikh repressii v Kazakhstane i Zapadnoi Sibiri v 1920-1950-kh gg.*, eds. Z.E. Kabul'dinov, M.M. Kozybaeva, H.B. Maslov (Astana: Poligraphia ‘Enter Group’, 2017), 114-121; Mambet Koigeldiev, “The Alash Movement and the Soviet Government: A Difference of Positions,” in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, ed. Tomohiko Uyama (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007), 153-184.

⁵ The general meaning of the term ‘indigenous people’ was introduced by Michail Speransky from the decrees of Peter and Catherine’s time, the term then was transformed into the classification of ethnic groups in the Russian Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century ‘indigenous’ came to mean the all non-Russian population. In the context of pre-revolutionary Siberia, the term had both ethnic and class identification. See, John Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of “Aliens” in Imperial Russia,” *The Russian Review* 57, no. 2 (1998): 173-190; Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, *The Social Life of State in Subarctic Siberia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Vladimir Bobrovnikov, Alexei Konev, “Svoi ‘chuzhie’: inorodtsy i tuzemtsy v Rossiiskoi imperii” [Familiar ‘Strangers’: Aliens and Natives in the Russian Empire], in *Orientalizm vs. orientalistika: sbornik statei*, eds. V.O. Bobrovnikov, C. J. Miri (Moscow: Sadra, 2016), 167-206.

⁶ Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca and London:

Russian Empire, its post-imperial transformation, and the USSR's formation from the Northeast regional perspective and examine the local actors' roles in elaborating the structures of governance in the context of (post-)imperial diversity management.

The thesis will encompass the spheres of Russia's post-imperial transformation from a non-Russian perspective focusing on nation-, autonomy-, and state- building during the Empire's crisis and the formation of the Soviet Union in Northeast Russia (Yakutia). The research examines the history of intellectual groups, consolidated by national identification and party affiliation, which were able for political and social activity. They put forward anti-colonial ideas, demanded broader representation within existing power structures, imagined new political orders, defended their native language, literature and other forms of cultural expression, as well as prepared projects of the establishment of the Zemstvo self-government and autonomy. Accordingly, the questions that I will address in the research are how the Russian Empire provided the possibilities for the formation of the Yakut intellectuals (the *imperial moment*)? How the intellectuals used the imperial experience for the creation of national autonomy (the *post-imperial moment*)? I examine which factors influenced the formation of the Yakut national and local Bolshevik intellectuals and what the role of the Yakut intellectuals (national and Bolshevik) was in the formation of the Yakut ASSR. Analyzing the Yakut national and Bolshevik intelligentsias of the first decades of the twentieth century, I concentrate on the continuity of imperial practices and languages that were created by the first generation of the Yakut intellectuals and transferred to the early Soviet period's construction of the Yakut nation and autonomy.

Following Ronald Suny's critical suggestion to pay more attention "to the non-Russian peoples, to the extrapolitical social environment, and to the particular contexts, contingencies,

Cornell University Press, 2005); Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

and conjunctures”⁷ of the Russian and Soviet past, I argue that the examination of the Northeast’s intellectual groups contributes to a reconceptualization of the Imperial and Soviet spaces beyond the political centers. In fact, the development of social and political thought at the beginning of the twentieth century influenced the increase of heterogeneity in imagining and shaping political spaces in regions and the growth of national intellectuals in the empire.⁸ Although the spread and the radical growth of the nationalists’ thought gave an impetus to the various ideas of national autonomies and potential nation-states,⁹ there were some alternative voices in the age of nation-state building.¹⁰ In the context of imperial diversity, local actors initiated projects of federal reconstruction of the Russian Empire, which in the Siberian case was a logical continuation of the Zemstvo self-governmental discourse.¹¹ The history of the Russian Empire as a federative state has been reinterpreted in recent times.¹² According to Mark von Hagen, different regional autonomists’ and federalists’ projects were not well connected; however, they indicated a discursive shift¹³ in the political and social life of the regional

⁷ Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 1-2.

⁸ On the topic of national intellectuals see Ronald G. Suny and Eley Geoff eds. *Becoming a National. A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Ronald G. Suny, Michael D. Kennedy, eds., *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁹ Stephen A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*, 3-5.

¹⁰ In fact, the ‘very long’ nineteenth century, according to Jurgén Osterhammel, was not the age of nation-state, but the age of empires and nationalisms that did not necessarily lead to the formation of nation-state after empires collapsed. See, Jurgén Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 392-468.

¹¹ In the post-reformed Russian Empire, a Zemstvo was a system of institutions for local self-government. In Western and Central parts of the Empire, it was used as one of the mechanisms of Russification. For many of non-Russian intellectuals in Siberia and Central Asia, Zemstvo was a space for self-governmental activity which gradually turned into autonomy. See Ivan Sablin, Alexander Korobeynikov, “Buryat-Mongol and Alash Autonomous Movements before the Soviets, 1905-1917,” *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 3 (2016): 214; Ivan Sablin, Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924,” *Modern Intellectual History* (2018): 4-6, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244318000252>.

¹² See, for instance, Mark Von Hagen, “Federalism and Pan-Movements: Re-Imaging Empire,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, eds. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatoliy Remnev (Bloomington, 2007), 494-510; Tanya Raffas, *The Soviet Union: Federation or Empire?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Ivan Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia’s Far Eastern Republic, 1905-1922: Nationalisms, Imperialisms, and Regionalisms in and after the Russian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2019); Dmitrii Von Mohrenschildt, *Toward a United States of Russia: Plans and Projects of Federal Reconstruction of Russia in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1981).

¹³ Mark von Hagen, “Writing the History of Russia as Empire: The Perspective of Federalism,” in *Kazan, Moscow, St. Petersburg: Multiple Faces of the Russian Empire*, eds. Catherine Evtuhov, Boris Gasparov, Alexander Ospovat and Mark von Hagen (Moscow: OGI, 1997), 399.

dimension. The Northeast imagined by the Yakut intellectuals as post-imperial Yakutia reveals another regional dimension explaining the significance of local actors in global transformations and their crucial role in the formation of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (YASSR) in 1922 as a part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

Although the (non-national) political, international, and economic aspects were crucial in the realization of the early Soviet project, the established YASSR was nominally based on the national category of the dominant ethnic group (Yakuts).¹⁴ Apart from the Yakuts themselves, the YASSR also included other non-Russian peoples who were divided into several groups based on the ‘evolutionary’ and social principles. Thereby the Soviets utilized both already existing imperial categories or those imagined by the national intellectuals and newly generated ones which, in turn, had to coincide with the early Soviet macro-identities of revolutionaries, proletariats, socialists, internationalists, nation-builders, and so on.¹⁵ The early Soviet ‘social engineers’ thus promoted the redefinition of (supra)national, ethnic, gender, religious, regional categories that formed emerging a new multi-ethnic, modern state. Thus, it is interesting to trace the differences in policy towards national, self-governmental, and regional issues in Russian/Soviet power authorities. In this regard, I intend to juxtapose the regime of governing diversity in the Russian Empire and the USSR that is the primary object of new imperial history studies.

A New Imperial History of Northeast Russia – Governing Imperial Diversity in Yakutia

The imperial turn¹⁶ in historiography right after the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed scholars to start a process of reexamination of the Imperial and Soviet pasts as multinational

¹⁴ Julie Cruikshank, Tatiana Argounova, “Reinscribing Meaning: Memory and Indigenous Identity in Sakha Republic (Yakutia),” *Arctic Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2000): 98.

¹⁵ Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911-1924: Buddhism, Socialism, and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building* (London: Routledge, 2016), 10.

¹⁶ The fundamental book here is Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall* (Munich: Beck, 1992). More about imperial turn see, Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, Alexander M. Martin,

states. In this regard, the notion of empire as an analytical concept underwent various changes from an “undoubtedly hegemonic political structure,” a “symbol of repressive and undemocratic political organization”,¹⁷ to a more modern “kind of state or as a particular form of domination or control that is exercised inequitably and with different forms of domination and different relations of power in each of its multiple constituent subordinated regions.”¹⁸ Another driving force in the reinterpretation was modern theories of nationalism: a great metaphor of Benedict Anderson, “we study empires as we do dinosaurs,”¹⁹ defined the search for empire in the analysis of many factors/processes/actors that operated in certain contextual conditions.²⁰ In this vein, a New Imperial History of post-Soviet space – a project based on the journal *Ab Imperio* founded in Kazan in 1999²¹ – was a logical continuation of the imperial turn.

Being in a stream of ‘new imperial histories’ with a proclaimed principle of questioning *difference* that widely “extends the pluralities of historical interpretation,”²² the proponents of New Imperial History of post-Soviet space, in turn, introduced empire broadly as “a special form for organizing multi-confessional and multi-ethnic polities” which can be applied even to ‘post-national situations’.²³ The main idea of New Imperial History is that empires need to be

“The Imperial Turn,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 4 (2006): 705-712; Durba Ghosh, “Another Set of Imperial Turns?” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012): 772-793.

¹⁷ Cited from Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Alexandr Kaplunovski, Marina Mogilner, Alexander Semyonov, “In search of a New Imperial History,” *Ab Imperio* 6, no. 1 (2005): 35.

¹⁸ Ronald G. Suny, Valerie Kivelson, *Russia's Empires* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3. See other modern definitions of empire, Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986); Dominic Lieven, *Empire: The Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹⁹ Benedict Anderson and Alexander Semyonov, “We Study Empires as we do Dinosaurs: Nations, Nationalism, and Empire in a Critical Perspective, Interview with Benedict Anderson,” *Ab Imperio* 4, no. 3 (2003): 57-73.

²⁰ The same set of objects/question was proposed by Sebastian Conrad searching the place of global history in modern history-writing. See, Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 90.

²¹ Almost simultaneously, other proponents of the imperial turn launched the journal *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*.

²² Kathleen Wilson, “Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3; Catherine Hall, *Cultures of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 16.

²³ Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Alexandr Kaplunovski, Marina Mogilner, Alexander Semyonov, “In search of a New Imperial History,” 34, 40.

studied not as a structure (of sovereignty, citizenship, power, authority), but as a dynamic *imperial situation* where the meaning of power and social difference are not prescribed by the structural condition, but rather derive from the interaction and encounter in the context of imperial diversity.²⁴

The imperial experience of states depended on a pragmatic strategy of their rulers who sought to maintain political control through the co-optation of new peoples and thereby to govern imperial diversity. Neither the Russian Empire nor other continental empires treated imperial diversity as a primary problem; however, the spread of nationalism, socialism, and liberalism along with providing more space for regional political initiatives caused a deep imperial crisis in this policy.²⁵ During 1905-1917 such new forms of post-imperial diversity as regionalism, autonomism, and federalism were widely discussed and intensively developed by non-governmental figures. Such political projects led to the transitional period with its uncertainties regarding the future political and social existence but also with the growing attempts to imagine an order that would synthesize the recent discursive experience with one's political agenda. For many non-Russian actors, the transitional period became a unique chance to proclaim their political expectations for the broader public, whether it was the Siberian Regional Duma or the regional Yakut Committee of Public Safety. In this case, it is not accidental that even the Yakut intellectuals were inspired by the idea of a federative republic as an alternative to the nation-state form of post-imperial order²⁶ that allowed them from the one

²⁴ See, Ilya Gerasimov, Sergey Glebov, Jan Kusber, Marina Mogilner, Alexander Semyonov, "New Imperial History and the Challenges of Empire," in *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, eds. Ilya Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, Alexander Semyonov (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 3-32. One of the obvious examples is the relation between Tsarist family and non-Russian elite. According to Dominic Lieven, "the tsarist elite was relatively open to new blood, to some extent from ethnically Russian families of the minor gentry and official class, but also from non-Russian minorities within the polity and from abroad". See, Dominic Lieven, "Russian, Imperial and Soviet Identities," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 8 (1998): 254-55.

²⁵ Peter Blitstein, "Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917-1953," *Ab Imperio* 7, no. 1 (2006): 203. See the comparative analysis of these tensions Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

²⁶ Alexander Semyonov, "The Ambiguity of Federalism as a Postimperial Political Vision: Editorial Introduction," *Ab Imperio* 19, no. 3 (2018): 26.

side to have their national institutions and from the other to be a part of a restored imperial contract.²⁷

Being *de facto* a colony of the Russian Empire, the Northeast became another periphery where Russian ‘colonial elements’ and natives struggled for the land. Russia’s imperial crisis, reinforced by the First World War and Russian revolutions, was the period of global history when at the same time Russia’s external colonies intersected with the internal ones,²⁸ while the imperial moment was transformed into a post-imperial stateless condition. Some historians, however, claim that due to the harsh climatic conditions and remote geographical location, the Northeast region did not have sufficient political and social awareness during the imperial transformations. With a counter argument in mind, I explore the regional sociopolitical environment of the Northeast’s diverse populations using the research optics of New Imperial History.

Another related historiographical issue is the impossibility of finding an equal place for the imperial actors (mainly national intelligentsia) and new Soviet regional elite in the Soviet narrative. This collision is manifested in the history of the Soviet national autonomies’ development in the early 1920s, when in the shortest time groups of local elites, embodying political plans and projects, appeared within the USSR’s new administrative system. A number of historians, following the works of Terry Martin²⁹ and Francine Hirsch,³⁰ suggest that the Soviet ethno-federative system was the result of social engineering by the central Bolshevik government, with central experts’ support. Others, influenced by Vera Tolz’s³¹ and Adeeb

²⁷ New approaches to the study of the post-imperial formation of Russia have demonstrated that after the February Revolution there were no real separatists’ intentions from the regional political elites, in contrast, the language of federalism, regionalism, and autonomism was to some extent a lingua franca for the emerging interest in the Russian Democratic Federative Republic. Ilya Gerasimov, “The Great Imperial Revolution,” *Ab Imperio* 18, no. 2 (2017): 29-33.

²⁸ On the internal colonialism, see, Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia’s Imperial Experience* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

²⁹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, 3-21.

³⁰ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, 4-15.

³¹ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28-31, 134-136.

Khalid's³² approaches, suggest exploring the Soviet nationality policy as a direct continuation of the nationality's and autonomism's discourses, which were formulated by the local national elites and experts-ethnographers in the late imperial period and imposed to the Soviet regime. In this thesis, I propose a more comprehensive model. On the history of the Northeast and its actors, I consider the YASSR's formation as a synthesis of both the Soviet state design and the complex processes of intellectuals' self-organization during the post-imperial transformation.

I center my research around various types of historical sources that reveal different perspectives on global transfers of ideas and discourses, imagining post-imperial orders, as well as the formation of the Soviet order in the Northeast in the form of the Yakut autonomy. In order to study the Northeast during the late imperial period, I analyze the published materials that are available online as a web-resource of the National Library of Sakha Republic (Yakutia), the electronic database provided by the Regional Library of Tomsk, and as a part of shared online collections. They include classic works of the Siberian regionalists namely Nikolai Yadrintsev and Grigorii Potanin, ethnographic studies, correspondence, and reports of the participants of the Sibiriakov expedition, and the official documents on Siberia and the Northeast. The documents reveal the activity of the Siberian regionalists, political exiles, and ethnographers that influenced significantly the formation of the first generation of the Yakut intellectuals. These sources demonstrate the complexity of the Northeast as diverse and transcultural space of encounter of various ideas and discourses brought by political exiles, ethnographers, and the Siberian regionalists and circulated in the region during the crisis of the Russian Empire.

The activity of the first and the second generation of the Yakut intelligentsia is represented in published collections of the intellectuals' personal documents as well as in the materials obtained from the National Library of Sakha Republic (Yakutia). Since I still do not

³² Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 2-8, 179-183.

have sufficient knowledge of the Yakut language, I deliberately do not use primary and secondary sources to study the activity of the Yakut intelligentsia. The published collections shed light on biographical aspects of the intellectuals, their correspondence, essays, photographs, and literary works. The first generation of the Yakut intellectuals frequently referred to the discursive language of the Siberian regionalists adopting it to the new regional environment formed after the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907. It should also be mentioned that the period between 1905 and 1917 became the most productive time for the regional press due to the almost complete inability of censorship to control the massive flow of printing. There are many regional periodicals, both Imperial and Soviet, which reflect the genealogy of post-imperial language, ideas and projects, and their discursive continuity during the formation of the Soviet Union (*Yakutskaya okraina*, *Yakutskaya zhizn'*, *Yakutskoe zemstvo*, *Avtonomnaya Yakutia*, *Krasnaya Yakutia*). Such newspapers as *Vostochnoe obozrenie*, *Sibirskaiia zhizn'*, *Sibirskaiia gazeta* include many articles of the Northeast' intellectuals who described regional conditions during and after the collapse of the Russian Empire. Moreover, these articles indicate how widely circulated imperial discourses and languages were perceived by the Yakut intellectuals.

In order to grasp forms of post-imperial self-organization in the Yakut region, I examine the documents of the Yakut Committee of Public Safety (YAKOB) located in the National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia) (NARS (Y), Yakutsk). Particularly, documents include minutes of various meetings of different political units (the SRs, the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks, and the Yakut intellectuals), telegrams to the Provisional Government on the situation in the region and vice versa, and the project of the Yakut intellectuals on the Indigenous Congress. These sources represent how the Yakut region was maintained politically, socially, and culturally after the February Revolution of 1917. Besides, they indicate the debate on post-imperial order in Russia, Siberia, and the Northeast.

The regional environment after the October *coup* in Petrograd are illustrated in newspapers *Yakutskoe obozrenie*, *Biulleten' Vremennogo Sibirskogo oblastnogo soveta*, *Yakutskoe zemstvo*, *Yakutskii golos*. Newspapers located in the National Library of Sakha Republic (Yakutia) demonstrate the activity of the Yakut Labour Union of Federalists that consisted from the members of the Yakut national intelligentsia who sought to establish the Zemstvo self-government as the first step of the Yakut autonomy.

The Soviet period of the Northeast could be traced in many collections of documents of the Yakut Soviet elite published during the Soviet period by the Yakut historians and in the Collection of the People's Commissar of Nationalities in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF, Moscow). In order to study the institutionalization of the Soviet order in the Yakut region, I analyze appellations to the *Sibnats*, the *Sibrevkom*, and the *Narkomnats* on the issues of the establishment of the Yakut *gubernia* and then autonomy. Also, the newspapers *Avtonomnaya Yakutia* and *Zhizn' natsional'nostei* contain articles of the Yakut intellectuals both national and Bolshevik on the necessity to join efforts towards the establishment of the Yakut autonomy as an ideal goal for the region. These sources demonstrate the continuity of ideas and languages constructed by the Yakut national intellectuals as well as the cooperation between generations of the Yakut intelligentsia on the shared aspiration in the form of autonomy.

In my thesis, I use a comparative approach that includes a two-layered analysis. The first is a global intellectual history of Empires.³³ It will entail their mutual influence, encounters, and global discursive transfers of, for instance, nationalism, autonomism, federalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Comparative historical studies of empires and

³³ On the methodology of global intellectual history see, Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) and Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* See also some recent examples, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010); Alexei Miller and Stefan Berger eds., *Nationalizing Empires* (New York and Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014).

nationalism play a significant role in displaying the Russian and Soviet imperial experience on the global political maps of the imperial formations.³⁴ Russian and Soviet imperial formations varied in every particular regional or colonial dimension, as did the French, British or Habsburg colonial rule, oppressing/promoting the birth of the anticolonial movements in different peripheries.³⁵ Indeed, the global, *ongoing* imperial situation reproduced itself at various times, spaces, and forms of ruling imperial diversity.³⁶ Accordingly, the second layer is an analysis of Russia's regional transformations in both Imperial and Soviet dimensions. It is crucial to understand similarities and differences while looking at Russia's history from a regional perspective in order to grasp Imperial/Soviet diversity management, in general, and the role of the Northeast, in particular.

The application of a theoretical and methodological field of New Imperial History can contribute to the analysis of Russia's historical experience in the context of multiple, heterogeneous, diverse imperial societies, in which there were continuous dialogues, interactions, and cooperation between actors in the space of different imperial languages and practices. The intellectual movements of the Northeast are considered as a 'point of assembly' – an encounter space for various discourses and imperial situations, constituting context-setting conditions for the Empire in which the future post-imperial political and administrative order was imagined.³⁷ By considering the regional actors within ongoing imperial and global transformations, it is possible to uncover the above-mentioned processes, which from the one

³⁴ On the notion of the 'imperial formations' see Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, "Refiguring Imperial Terrains," in *Imperial Formations*, eds. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan and Peter C. Perdue (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2007), 8-12; Ann Laura Stoler, "Considerations on Imperial Comparisons," in *Empires Speak Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, 39-42. Stoler looks comparatively at empires as "not fixed macropolitical entities but *ongoing* processes that produce gradations of sovereignty, not as exceptions to their architecture but as constitutive of them."

³⁵ See, Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber, "Introduction: Imperial Rule," in *Imperial Rule*, eds. Alexei Miller and Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2004), 2-4.

³⁶ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*, 8.

³⁷ Alexander Semyonov, "Empire as a Context Setting Category," *Ab Imperio* 9, no. 1 (2008): 194-203.

side influenced intellectuals' post-imperial imagination and political projects, and from the other shaped the conditions for regional rearrangement during the USSR's formation.

The thesis will provide the first comprehensive overview of post-imperial transformations in the Northeast region in English. Along with a general introduction of the region to modern historiography, an innovative analytical model and new archival evidence, it will also complement existing studies on Russia's imperial transformations. I chose this case because, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Northeast played a specific role in the Russian imperial power relations as a land of the future – frozen, geographically unachievable, potentially precious and valuable territory within Russia's views on the East. Nevertheless, the Northeast intellectuals as marginal actors (even compared to, for instance, the Buryat-Mongol or Alash intellectuals), combined the global discursive trends with the local needs and the native's demands on the anti-colonial existence. By studying the Northeast's intellectual and transcultural spaces, I explore the new roles the region and its political, social, scientific actors played within the Imperial and Soviet power relations. The research optics of New Imperial History will enable me to trace the historical development of discursive directions that covered not only the centers of the world empires but even the most remote corners such as Northeast Russia.

Categories and Practices: Nation, Nationalism, Intelligentsia, and Autonomy – Global Trends and the Transformation of the Russian Empire

The processes and events studied in my thesis are centered around the following categories and concepts: empire, nation and nationalism, autonomy, intelligentsia, post-imperial order. These concepts help to describe a complex system of political, social, and cultural organizations in imperial Russia, Siberia, and the Yakut region, and shape the focus on the activities of the Yakut intelligentsia as actors who imagined the potential order of the region

with its diverse population. The adaptation of these key legal and political notions to regional context during the postwar period was crucial for local actors because the latter considered them as a normative language for making regional development.³⁸ Special attention to these categories and practices that circulated in Siberia allows me to problematize the relations between empire and nation not as static but rather as dynamic with certain claims of some national representatives to modernize the Russian Empire and expand its regional representation.³⁹

Instead of using ‘Yakutia’, ‘Eastern Siberia’ or ‘Northern Siberia’ to describe the region, I apply the meso-geographical concept of the Northeast. It allows me to distance from the national historiography that always sought to explain the Northeast as an exclusively Yakut national region. In this case, ‘Siberia’ is also an inappropriate word because it immediately refers to the historiographical tradition of studying Siberia as a part of Russia or, in contrast, Siberia as a ‘separate’ polity. Both variants only complicate the perception of the Northeast. I examine the Northeast outside of national, Soviet, and Siberian historiographical frameworks in order to trace the complexity and nonlinearity of history of the region within both the Russian Empire and the USSR.

The long nineteenth century radically transformed the political and social map of the modern world by bringing new industrial technologies, scientific developments, new regimes of power, commercial relations and in general making states globally interrelated and mutually dependent.⁴⁰ Recent scholarship has launched a reconsideration of the European Empires nation-building projects’ history looking at the imperial cores as producers of advanced

³⁸ Ivan Sablin, Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924,” 3.

³⁹ See more on the relations between empire and nation in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Peter Blitstein, “Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917–1953,” *Ab Imperio* 7, no. 1 (2006): 197–219.

⁴⁰ See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789–1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848–1875* (London: Abacus, 1995); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Cristopher A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004); Jurgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*.

nationalizing empire-states.⁴¹ Accordingly, it demonstrates that the imperial, not national, relations were at the highest point before the global war started.

The collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian, and other Eurasian empires intensified local power relations, brought many regional actors into creative work provoking the growth of boundary-reconfiguration and autonomy-building. How did, in this case, the idea of autonomy influence the reconsideration of imperial relations? Emerging from the European Enlightenment, the concept of autonomy is closely connected with Kantian moral philosophy and his understanding of personal autonomy as the way of making decisions “without direction from another.”⁴² The American Revolutionary War and the French Revolution provoked the spread of democratic and national comprehensions as genuinely collective. Autonomy acquired a collective status that along with the spread of a national idea and nationalism made it an alternative to the full independence of different groups within empires.⁴³ By the mid-nineteenth century, intellectuals and politicians assumed autonomy to be not just a self-ruling polity with distinctive cultural and social existence within empires but also a territory with its own legal system.⁴⁴

In the case of the Russian Empire, the spread of global autonomist thought influenced the way of autonomy-making: the Empire granted some Western regions autonomous status a step toward full incorporation and Russification.⁴⁵ However, some successful European

⁴¹ Alexei Miller, Stefan Berger, “Building Nations in and with Empires – A Reassessment,” in *Nationalizing Empires*, 5.

⁴² Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” in *What Is Enlightenment?: Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 58. More on Kant’s moral autonomy see, Robert S. Taylor, “Kantian Personal Autonomy,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 5 (2005): 602-28.

⁴³ Jurgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, 397, 404-406; Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism, and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*, 59.

⁴⁴ Such an understanding of autonomy thus was closely connected with the Greek original meaning as ‘self-law’, Ivan Sablin, Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924,” 6.

⁴⁵ See Tatiana Khripachenko, “National Challenges to Decentralization: Autonomy and Federation in the Russian Liberal Discourse, 1900-1914,” (PhD diss., Budapest: Central European University, 2014); Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism, and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*, 14-16.

autonomist precedents inspired confidence and optimism of local actors for making their own efforts toward autonomy. By the end of the nineteenth century, the discourse of autonomism was perceived as a revolutionary rediscovering of the relations between heterogeneous parts of the Russian Empire. Designed by several political parties,⁴⁶ autonomism as a new form of governing imperial diversity played a certain role in the context of the imperial crisis providing possibilities for regional actors to have their own self-governmental claims. The autonomy's demands of the local political representatives during the imperial transformation and the USSR's formation were a logical consequence or rather a continuation of the post-imperial logic that eventually became a primary aim of the early Bolshevik political engineers.⁴⁷ Lenin, Stalin, and other socialists, in this regard, belonged to the group of practitioners, for whom the issues of autonomism and nationalism were a tactical instrument in pursuing their political and socioeconomic agenda in the transition to a new imperial regime.

The idea of autonomy appeared in the context of growing nationalism and national ideas, the development of which had drastic impacts since the very moment of their origin. Nation-building and nationalism as social and political processes were a product of the modern period particularly of several revolutions – political and the Industrial that both transformed the sociopolitical and technological environment of the modern world.⁴⁸ In the context of political and technological development, the idea of nation evolved precisely in two directions: as the political nation and accordingly as the cultural nation which became gradually naturalized and involved in state mythology.⁴⁹ Although scholars still believe that the spread of nationalism

⁴⁶ Primary by the SRs who produced decentralization projects which included “the right to national self-determination, territorial or non-territorial autonomy, and reorganization of the Russian Empire into a federation for boosting their support among minority nationalists.” Ivan Sablin, Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905-1924,” 8.

⁴⁷ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 9-10, 31; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, 25-27.

⁴⁸ Alexei Miller, “Natsiia, Narod, Narodnost’ in Russia in the 19th Century: Some Introductory Remarks to the History of Concepts,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56, no. 3 (2008): 379-90.

⁴⁹ Nathaniel Knight, “Ethnicity, Nationality and the Masses: Narodnost’ and Modernity in Imperial Russia,” in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, ed. David L. Hoffman, Yanni Kotsonis (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 43.

was equal in all parts of the ‘globalized’ world, seemingly obvious the similarities of modern nationalisms were really depended on a number of criteria and differed in every concrete regional context.⁵⁰

In order to deconstruct the history of the Yakut nation that is taken for granted in the Yakut historiography, in my thesis, I apply the well-known theory of ‘imagined communities’ proposed by Benedict Anderson. He defines several key markers of nation-building: language (spoken and official) that forms the basic morphology of the nation; ‘print capitalism’; education (with increasing knowledge it has become easier to awaken popular support); the activities of intellectuals; national novels and newspapers.⁵¹ By using this approach, I study the Yakut nation-building initiated by the Yakut intellectuals as a set of discourses and practices, not just a linear, homogenous, primordial process.

Rogers Brubaker, a representative of the postmodernist trend in nationalism’s theories, considers “nation as a category, a term, and nationalism as a particular language, a political idiom, a way of using that word or category.”⁵² In his view, ‘nation’ is a category of practice rather than theory. What is important is the fact of a declaration of national self-sufficiency: since it was not so easy to establish an independent nation-state, intellectuals consistently included in their programs the demand to have the right on autonomy.⁵³ The function performed by the category of the nation in the context of *national* movements was to create a political structure for a potential nation. The reproduction and dissemination of ‘national knowledge’ in potential polity (autonomy) were carried out through the mechanisms of state seriality, which

⁵⁰ See the critique of nations and nationalisms in global history, Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?*, 79-89.

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 32-34.

⁵² Rogers Brubaker, “In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 2 (2004): 116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 121-22. Autonomy in this case is understood as a political entity representing a potential nation and serving its interests.

ensured the penetration and circulation of national ideas within imagined borders.⁵⁴ Thus, the Yakut intellectuals were seeking to mobilize forces to establish the autonomous status of the region with claims to protect the rights of the population and legitimize a potential nation.

Another key concept in my research is intelligentsia. Until recently, historians perceived intelligentsia as exclusively Russian (in ethnic terms) educated actors and as tireless fighters with the Tsarist regime.⁵⁵ In his methodological essay on late imperial Russia, Alfred Rieber proposed to extend the limitations on considering intelligentsia by including new forms of identification, “regional and ethnic differences.”⁵⁶ Thereby modern studies on intelligentsia have encompassed not only the metropolitan intellectuals but also the non-Russian ones who played a certain role in regional modernization and fragmentation of the Russian Empire.⁵⁷ According to Marina Mogilner, an intelligent is “an intellectual in a modernizing society, who performs a number of functions to reorganize society in search of establishing his own complex (intellectual, social and political) identification.”⁵⁸ The formation and activity of the group of intellectuals are inextricably linked to the political, social and cultural context, as well as the group’s desire to represent the demands of the local population, criticizing the ruling elites, seeking to protect the population and reform the existing order.⁵⁹ The intelligentsia realizes its

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), 29-45. See also some research on the production of space, Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ This image was inspired by romantic views on intellectuals created by Russian poets and writers in the nineteenth century. See, the research that influenced the way of perceiving the Russian intelligentsia, Martin Malia, “What Is the Intelligentsia?” *Daedalus* 89, no. 3 (1960): 441-58; Richard Pipes ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961); Mark Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966).

⁵⁶ Alfred J. Rieber, “The Sedimentary Society,” in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, eds. Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 346.

⁵⁷ Alfred J. Rieber, *The Imperial Russian Project: Autocratic Politics, Economic Development, and Social Fragmentation* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

⁵⁸ Marina Mogilner, *Mifologiiia “podpol’nogo cheloveka”: radikal’nyi mikrokosm v Rossii nachala KhKh veka kak predmet semioticheskogo analiza* [Mythology of “the Underground Man: Radical Microcosm in Russia of the Early Twentieth Century as a Subject of Semiotic Analysis] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999), 8.

⁵⁹ Denis Sdvizhkov, “Ot obshchestva k intelligentsii: Istoriia poniatii kak istoriia samosoznaniia” [From Society to Intelligentsia: The History of a Concept as the History of Self-Consciousness], in *Poniatiia o Rossii: K*

otherness (alienation) based on its attitude to the government and the population, occupying the intermediate function of translators from the first to the second and vice versa. The intelligentsia justifies the right to power by belonging to a ‘different world’ – they are ‘internal Europeans’, listed in a non-European reality.⁶⁰ ‘Europe’ in the views of the intelligentsia plays an ambivalent role: on the one hand it is an imaginary ‘ideal world’ in which intellectuals seek to turn their own region, on the other – a source of tension because of the constant need to justify their status among the ‘uneducated society’ based on the experience of self-orientalization.⁶¹ In other words, in order to prove their status, the intelligentsia needs to consistently orientalize the rest of the (uneducated) society whether it is a peasant from central regions or a reindeer herder from the frozen corner of the Russian Empire.

Autonomy (and later federation) are categories used by intellectuals to imagine a new order in the (pre)revolutionary era. Various projects and methods of interaction in the center and on the periphery testified to the heterogeneity in the formation of the postcolonial order. Post-imperial political imagination can be understood as a set of political projects that formed different views on the (Siberian/Yakut) region during the imperial transformation as well as a way of managing the imperial heritage.⁶² The imagination of the post-imperial order was hence a collective process that involved both the Yakut and Siberian intellectual elites which sought to have self-government (autonomy), decolonization, greater rights to cultural and political existence as well as economic and national equality.

istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda, eds. Aleksei Miller, Denis Sdvizhkov and Ingrid Shirle, vol. 1 (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 383.

⁶⁰ Andrey Teslya, *Pervyy russkiy natsionalizm... i drugie* [The First Russian Nationalism... and Other] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom 'Evropa', 2014), 26.

⁶¹ The analysis of the intelligentsia self-narrative appeared after the publication of the core-stone book in post-colonial studies, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).

⁶² Ilya Gerasimov, Marina Mogilner, Sergey Glebov, Alexander Semyonov, “Forms and Practices of Envisaging a Postimperial Order: Hybridity as a New Subjectivity,” *Ab Imperio* 17, no 4 (2016): 19-28.

Historiography: A New History of Siberia?

This thesis extends beyond the traditional national historiography of Yakutia. As I mentioned before, the research examines the Northeast as a diverse space of encounters and interactions between imperial actors and native of the region. Instead of analyzing the linear narrative of the Northeast's transition from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union, I will trace transcultural cooperation by placing the region and its actors in imperial and global contexts. This research focus correlates with the study of post-imperial processes, which have recently received considerable attention in modern historiography. Several articles and books on the formation of new political and social spaces in the context of post-imperial state design have been recently published. For instance, two books by Ivan Sablin are devoted to the study of Siberian and the Far Eastern post-imperial political projects of the regional intellectuals. In the Siberian case, transnational cooperation in the Baikal region during the imperial transformation resulted in the formation of the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1923.⁶³ The Buryat-Mongolian intelligentsia sought to expand the spatial frameworks of their activity, forming new intellectual, gender, economic, and cultural fields, engaging themselves in global discursive practices of nationalism, socialism, and Buddhism. In the case of the Far East, the regional environment contributed to the various discussions of different political, national, and international groups on potential post-imperial orders.⁶⁴ A recent book by Adeeb Khalid discusses the nonlinearity in the imagination of the local elites of Central Asia in the formation of Soviet state projects.⁶⁵ Despite the existing myth of the full control of the Bolshevik elites in the process of state building in the region Khalid demonstrates the active involvement of local actors (Jadids) in the process of formation of the Soviet project in Central

⁶³ Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism, and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*.

⁶⁴ Ivan Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia's Far Eastern Republic, 1905-1922: Nationalisms, Imperialisms, and Regionalisms in and after the Russian Empire*.

⁶⁵ Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*.

Asia and their impact on it. The above-mentioned studies demonstrate the nonlinear perception of the socio-cultural context by political actors and the interaction of regional, Imperial, and Soviet elites in the search for new spaces.

To understand the complexities of the various events from a regional perspective, there is an approach that provides detailed accounts through the studying of localities, both territorial (provinces) and human (actors). The so-called ‘regional turn’ contributed to the development of regional history (not *kraevedenie*) which illustrate various economic, social, political trajectories of the late Russian and early Soviet Empires. Indeed, the regional perception of substantial political, cultural or discursive practices in the revolutionary period⁶⁶ can tell even more about the late Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet Union than was done by analyzing specifically central parts of the state.⁶⁷ Consequently, one of the aims of regional studies (and one of the general goals of my research as well) is to comparatively deconstruct “the central narrative” of the imperial transformation by inserting multiple actors, agencies, projects, and interests.⁶⁸ The emergence of new approaches that expand the established opinion about the inevitability of the transition from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union leads to a

⁶⁶ By “the revolutionary period” here I mean a long history of political crisis and transformations of the Russian Empire (from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century) and succession of the imperial practices by the Bolsheviks during the formation of the USSR. See Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London: Pimlico, 1997); Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002); Joshua A. Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Deconstruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mark D. Steinberg, *The Russian Revolution, 1905-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Stephen A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*.

⁶⁷ Despite the general disenchantment of the revolutionary history of Russia, traditional views on the collapse of the Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet Union were based on the central (totalitarian) models which created one-side pattern narratives for all regions, localities, and peoples from different polities. See, for instance, Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Robert Service, *The Russian Revolution, 1900-1923* (London: Macmillan, 1986). Also see the standard historical narratives of the Russian Revolution: Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 4th edition. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 450-459; Geoffrey A. Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire: 1552-1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33-40.

⁶⁸ Aaron B. Retish, Ludmila G. Novikova, and Sarah Badcock, “Introduction: A Kaleidoscope of Revolutions,” in *Russia’s Home front in War and Revolution, 1914-1922. Book 1. Russia’s revolution in Regional Perspective*, eds. Sarah Badcock, Ludmila G. Novikova, and Aaron B. Retish (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2015), 11-12, 15. See also, Susan Smith-Peter, “Bringing the Provinces into Focus: Subnational Spaces in the Recent Historiography of Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 4 (2011): 835; Alexei Miller, “Between Local and Inter-Imperial: Russian Imperial History in Search of Scope and Paradigm,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 1 (2004): 9.

significant revision of the historiographical tradition,⁶⁹ but this does not negate the fact that the latter should be taken into account in the formation of research optics.

Most of the modern studies on the national question of both the Russian Empire and the USSR often focus on Western borderlands, Caucasus, Volga Region, Central Asia, neglecting the complexity of Siberian ‘national’ provinces. Most of them concentrate on the ‘great’ events in history such as the First World War, Russian revolutions, the Civil War, and the formation of the USSR.⁷⁰ However, political, social, and economic changes in the Northeast were examined by the scholars living in the Republic Sakha (Yakutia) mostly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷¹ Although these scholars have not applied a sufficient amount of methodological or theoretical approaches, they have collected and analyzed massive amount of historical documents on the Yakut region as well as provided valuable data to reconstruct contextual features in the Northeast.

⁶⁹ Ilya Gerasimov, Marina Mogilner, Sergey Glebov, Alexander Semyonov, “Forms and Practices of Envisaging a Postimperial Order: Hybridity as a New Subjectivity,” 21.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet State*; Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414-452; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*; Joshua A. Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003); Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*; Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Dominic Lieven, *The End of Tsarist Russia: March to World War I and Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2015); Mark D. Steinberg, *The Russian Revolution, 1905-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷¹ See, Iraida Kliorina, *Vasilii Nikiforov: Sobytiia. Sud'by. Vospominaniia* [Vasilii Nikiforov: Events. Fates. Memories] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 1994); Gavriil Makarov, *Severo-vostok Rossii (Yakutiia, Okhotskoe poberezh'e i Chukotka) v 1921-1922 gg.* [North-East of Russia (Yakutia, Okhotsk coast and Chukotka) in 1921-1922] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 1996); Egor Alekseev, *Istoriia natsional'nogo voprosa v Respublike Sakha (Yakutiia): (fevral' 1917-1941 gg.)* [The History of the National Question in the Republic Sakha (Yakutia): (February 1917-1941)] (Yakutsk: Litograf, 1998); Egor Antonov, *Kul'turno-prosvetitel'noe obshchestvo 'Sakha omuk': 1920-1928* [Cultural and Educational Society ‘Sakha Omuk’: 1920-1928] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1998); Egor Antonov, *Intelligentsia Yakutii (1922-1938 gg.)* [The Intelligentsia of Yakutia (1922-1938)] (Yakutsk: Cakhapoligrafizdat, 1998); Vanda Ignat'eva, *Respublika Sakha (Yakutiia): retrospektiva etnopoliticheskoi istorii* [The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia): A Retrospective of Ethnopolitical History] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1999); Egor Alekseev, *Federativnyi tsentr i avtonomiia: na primere Yakutskoi ASSR* [Federative Center and Autonomy: On the Example of Yakutia] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2000); Anatolii Gogolev, *Istoria Yakutii* [History of Yakutia] (Yakutsk: Izdatel'stvo Yakutskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2006); Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutia v epokhu voyn i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigah* [Yakutia in the Era of Wars and Revolutions (1900-1919)] (Novosibirsk: Akademicheskoe izdatel'stvo ‘Geo’, 2013).

The historiographic tradition of the Northeast proved to be very rich in terms of ethnographic studies, political history, and socioeconomic analysis. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, well-known researchers were engaged in a comprehensive study of socio-economic and ethnocultural processes taking place among the ‘indigenous’ peoples of the Northeast. Among them are such prominent ethnographers, mostly political exiles, such as Waclaw Sieroszewski, Vladimir Jochelson, Vladimir Bogoraz, Vladimir Troschanskii, Ivan Mainov, Eduard Pekarskii, and others; the result of their activities was the publication of several works that shaped the perception of the Northeast in the Russian Empire up to its collapse.⁷²

The Soviet studies on the socialist development of Yakutia paid attention to the struggle of the Yakut Bolsheviks in the revolutionary period and during the Civil war in Yakutia. These studies revealed the first experience of the results of the October revolution and the project of the Yakut ASSR. During the Stalinist purges most of the Yakut intellectuals, both national and Bolshevik, were sentenced to prison or shot due to their ‘anti-Bolshevik’ views, ‘espionage’ for Japan, and the “promotion of the bourgeois nationalism.”⁷³ However, during the post-Stalinist

⁷² Waclaw Sieroszewski, *Yakuty* [The Yakuts] (St. Petersburg: Tipografia Glavnogo Upravleniia Udelov, 1896); Ivan Mainov, “Zachatki narodnogo obrazovaniia Yakutskoi oblasti” [Rudiments of Peoples Education of the Yakut Region], *Sibirskii sbornik*, no. 3 (1897): 174-229; Vladimir Jochelson, “U uykagirov” [The Yukaghirs], in *Aziatskaya Rossiia: Illustrirovannyi geograficheskii sbornik*, eds. A. Kruber, S. Grigor’ev, A. Barkov, S. Chefranov (St. Petersburg: Tipografia tovarischestva I.I. Kushnerev i Ko, 1905), 515-522; Ivan Mainov, *Russkie krest’iane i osedlye inorodtsy Yakutskoi oblasti* [Russian Peasants and Settled Indigenous Peoples of the Yakut Region] (St. Petersburg: Tipografia V.F. Kirshbaumana, 1912).

⁷³ See, for instance, Petr Petrov, “O razgrome yakutskikh burzhuaizno-natsionalisticheskikh band v 1921-1922 gg.” [On the Defeat of the Yakut Bourgeois-Nationalist Groups in 1921-1922], in *Sbornik statei po istorii Yakutii sovetskogo perioda* (Yakutsk: Yakutskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1955), 5-29; Zahar Gogolev, “Vosstanovlenie narodnogo khoziaistva Yakutskoi ASSR. 1923–1925 gg.” [The Restoration of the National Economy of the Yakut ASSR, 1923-1925], in *Sbornik statei po istorii Yakutii sovetskogo perioda*, 30-44; Petr Petrov, *Razgrom Pepelyaevskoi avantury* [The Defeat of the Pepelyaev’s Adventure] (Yakutsk: Yakutskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1955); Petr Petrov, *Ustanovlenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Yakutii* [The Establishment of Soviet Power in Yakutia] (Yakutsk: Yakutskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1957). The analysis of literary creativity of several representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia, for example, Alexey Kulakovskii allowed a number of researchers to reject their characteristic as nationalists, counterrevolutionaries, and reactionaries. Among such works, the monograph of Georgii Basharin, *Three Yakut Realists-Educators* published in 1944, deserves attention. Georgii Basharin, *Tri Yakutskikh realista-prosvetitel’ia* [Three Yakut Realists-Educators] (Yakutsk: Gosizdat YASSR, 1944). However, after the publication in 1951 of the article by Sergei Borisov in *Pravda*, Basharin himself was accused of nationalism, the book was banned.

period, there was a formation of the master narrative of the YASSR that was founded with the publication of three volumes of the *History of the Yakut ASSR*.⁷⁴

A new stage in the historiography of the topic under study began in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The new studies on the history of the region in the early twentieth century examine the activities of the national intelligentsia, develop the idea of reconstruction of the region during the revolution. Non-Soviet/Russian scholars also published several studies on the Northeast focused on various aspects of its modern history.⁷⁵ Recent books fill factual lacunas in the study of the processes of autonomy-building, diversity management, as well as rethink the role of the pre-Soviet intelligentsia in the reorganization of the Yakut society.⁷⁶ However, these studies do not take into consideration the modern approaches towards the understanding of nation and nationalism neglecting the intellectual context of the nineteenth century that affected the formation of the Yakut nationalism. Explaining the Northeast as the exclusively Yakut region, these researches also ignore ethnic, cultural, religious diversity of the region and transcultural cooperation among its actors.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the opening of archives, and the stimulation of international exchange together with the imperial turn all contributed to the rediscovering of the history of Siberia and its regions. Siberian history seemed like a moving frontier of Russian

⁷⁴ The history of the Soviet period is in the third book, see *Istoria Yakutskoi ASSR* [The History of the YASSR], Vol. 3: Sovetskaya Yakutia, ed. V.N. Antipin (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963).

⁷⁵ The first attempt to introduce the history of the YASSR's first years was done by Stuart Kirby, "Communism in Yakutia: The First Decade (1918-1928)," *Slavic Studies* 25 (1980): 27-42; see also James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Tichotsky, *Russia's Diamond Colony: The Republic of Sakha* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000); Julie Cruikshank and Tatiana Argounova, "Reinscribing Meaning: Memory and Indigenous Identity in Sakha Republic (Yakutia)," *Arctic Anthropology* 31, no 1 (2000): 96-119; Bella Bychkova Jordan, "A Geographical Perspective on Ethnogenesis: The Case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia)" (PhD diss., Austin: The University of Texas, 2002).

⁷⁶ Chingis Andreev, "Obraz zhizni korennykh narodov Vostochnoi Sibiri (buriat, khakasov, yakutov) vo vtoroi polovine XIX – nachale XX vv. (60 gg. XIX – oktiabr' 1917 g.): istoricheskoe issledovanie" [The Way of Life of the Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Siberia (Buryats, Khakas, Yakuts) in the Second Half of the XIX – the early XX Centuries (the 60s of the XIX – October 1917): A Historical Research] (PhD diss., Irkutsk: Irkutskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2002); Alexander Suchko, *Protsessy suverenizatsii narodov Sibiri v gody grazhdanskoi voyny* [The Processes of Sovereignty of the Peoples of Siberia During the Civil War] (Moscow: Lenand, 2014); Oleg Pamofov, *Den' osvobodzhenia Sibiri* [The Day of Siberian Liberation] (Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo 'Krasnoe znamya', 2014).

colonization;⁷⁷ however, with the publishing of Yuri Slezkine's book, the historical perception of the region changed almost dramatically. Indeed, the Northeast was a vast territory inhabited by many non-Russian peoples which were unequally perceived by the Russians during colonization, and then some of them reappeared as Soviet nations, the rest as small peoples of the North.⁷⁸ One of the prominent Siberian historians, Anatolii Remnev, was among the first scholars who examined imperial policy in Siberia. In addition to the examination of Siberian ambiguity being as a part of the 'Russian' state, Remnev convincingly demonstrated that Siberian 'separateness' (*otdel'nost'*), together with the romantic spirit of the nineteenth century, led to the reconceptualization of Siberia from a region of dark exile to a land of wealth and freedom.⁷⁹ In 2007, a collective of Siberian historians published a comprehensive history of Siberia as a part of the Russian Empire in which the authors develop the role of Siberia as a space of opportunities for local actors.⁸⁰ These modern historiographical accounts contribute to the reinterpretation of the region, which leads to the increase of Siberian studies. Yet there are still no monographs that examine comparatively the history of the Siberian provinces from a regional perspective.

Recent historiography of the imperial transformations challenges the traditional teleological views on the inevitability of transition from empires to nation-states.⁸¹ In the case of the Russian Empire, the political crisis, the Great War, revolutions, and the Civil War did

⁷⁷ Bruce Lincoln, *Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians* (New York: Random House, 1994); Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷⁸ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁷⁹ Anatolii Remnev, *Samoderzhavie i Sibir': Administrativnaia politika v pervoi polovine XIX v.* [Autocracy in Siberia: Administrative Policy in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century] (Omsk: Izdatel'stvo Omskogo universiteta, 1995).

⁸⁰ Lev Dameshek, Anatolii Remnev, eds. *Sibir' v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii* [Siberia as a Part of the Russian Empire] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007); see also another complex history of Siberia, Igor Naumov, David Collins, *The History of Siberia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁸¹ Sebastian Conrad, Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Competing Visions of World Order Global Moments and Movements, 1880s-1930s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Ivan Sablin, *The Rise and Fall of Russia's Far Eastern Republic, 1905-1922: Nationalisms, Imperialisms, and Regionalisms in and after the Russian Empire*.

not break the imperial practices; on the contrary, the imperial experience of local actors stimulated the regional self-organization during the formation of the USSR.⁸² Moreover, the Soviet nationalities politics was no less than a synthesis of the (personal) imperial background of the leading Bolsheviks as well as the strategic decision to provide non-Russian nations the rights to national development within the Soviet system.⁸³

Another important point of the historiographical discussion for my thesis relates to the designation of ethnic and national relationships in the ‘Russian’ revolution and Civil war. This question was challenged by Jonathan Smele, according to whom the diversity of actors participating in the revolutions and Civil war could not be called Russian without quotation marks.⁸⁴ Smele argues that the post-imperial conflicts in the Russian Empire started not in the central regions, but, in contrast, in the Central Asian revolt of 1916. While ethnic, national, confessional, gender and other groups that played a huge role in these events, we cannot neglect the role of regional actors including even the ‘indigenous’ population of Siberia and Central Asia.

Ultimately, reinvigorated studies on the non-Russian borderlands of both the Russian Empire and the USSR reinforce the interest in global and transnational history. A global intellectual history of Russian peripheries reveals the presence of many influential actors

⁸² See, Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921*; Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen, eds., *The Empire and Nationalism at War* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2014); Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks, and Melissa K. Stockdale, eds., *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22*, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2014); Mark D. Steinberg, *The Russian Revolution, 1905-1921*; Stephen A. Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*; David Wolff, Shinji Yokote and Willard Sunderland eds., *Russia's Great War and Revolution in the Far East: Re-imagining the Northeast Asian Theater, 1914-22* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2018).

⁸³ On the Soviet nationalities politics, see Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet State*; Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”; Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*; Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*; Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*; Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*; Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early*.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shocked the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

outside the political center that gradually leads to the de-centralization of Russian history.⁸⁵ Unlike the Baikal and Central Asian histories, the Northeast as a transcultural region in which the Yakut intelligentsias struggled for the national autonomy was never studied in modern historiography. With the application of a modern methodological approach and with the new archival evidence and recent historiography, this thesis fills an existing lacuna and leads towards a new history of Siberia.

The Structure of the Research

In this thesis, I focus on the various (global, imperial, and regional) processes necessary to describe the complex network of the Yakut intellectuals' interaction with Imperial/Soviet actors and the way they imagined the post-imperial order. The thesis is divided into three chapters.

The first chapter examines the experience of the Northeast as a part of the Russian Empire. It traces how the Northeast became the Yakut *oblast'* and how the Yakuts became the dominant ethnic group in the region. It also deals with the complexity of the Yakut intelligentsia's occurrence at the beginning of the twentieth century by reconstructing their intellectual networks. The mechanisms of the public sphere and publicity played the crucial role in acquiring loyalty from the local population of the Northeast by the Yakut intellectuals. The sources of activity of the Yakut intelligentsia (newspaper articles, open letters, public speeches, debates in literary circles) help to understand the aims and requirements of the

⁸⁵ See, Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, the Middle East, and Russia, 1914–1923* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Michael Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Russian and Ottoman Empires, 1908–1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Omer Bartov and Eric Weitz, eds., *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Sanna Tuoma and Maxim Waldstein, eds., *Empire De/Centered: New Spatial Histories of Russia and the Soviet Union* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013); Alfred J. Rieber, *The Struggle for the Eurasian Borderlands: From the Rise of Early Modern Empires to the End of the First World War*; Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire*.

intellectuals who began to realize themselves in national terms, to be the only representatives of the Yakut region.

In the second chapter, I examine the state of the Northeast during the imperial transformation when the regional self-organization led to debates about the Yakut self-government and the introduction of the Zemstvo institutions up to national autonomy. A special emphasis is paid on the ways of imagining potential post-imperial orders on the part of both the Yakut national and Bolshevik intelligentsia and representatives of political parties and associations that in the revolutionary period were in the Northeast. These debates reveal another dimension for an alternative to a nation-state development of post-imperial Russia because regional representatives discussed various ways of co-existence either within the potential Russian Democratic Federative Republic or within broad Siberian autonomy. Even though in the historiography of the Civil War much attention is paid directly to the militarized conflicts, the social and cultural activities of the Yakut intelligentsia contributed to the preservation of the relative peaceful situation in the region. The Civil War in the Northeast proved to be extremely important for the future YASSR because for the two years after the Revolution the Northeast was governed almost autonomously.

The third chapter concerns the activities of the Yakut Bolshevik intelligentsia and their ways of forming national autonomy in the context of the Soviet state project. Based on written works of the leaders of the Yakut Bolsheviks, newspaper articles and archival documents, I examine the processes of the establishment of the Yakut Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic as part of the RSFSR in 1922. The formation of the project of autonomy within the RSFSR took place with the direct participation of the Yakut national intelligentsia designed to help in the creation of national autonomy which was the ultimate goal of both the Yakut national and Bolshevik intelligentsia. The post-imperial order imagined by the Yakut intellectuals was realized within the new political regime. Despite the disapproval of the Yakut national

intellectuals' activity by the Bolshevik elites, the Yakut ASSR was a result of cooperation between old and new generations of the Yakut intelligentsia.

Chapter 1. The Yakut Intellectuals and Siberian Space in Late Imperial

Russia

On the mental map of Europeans, the Northeast (the Yakut region) was presented as part of Siberia – an ever-expanding territory to the East of the Urals which borders were finally determined only by the beginning of the twentieth century. Heterogeneous (multi-confessional and multi-ethnic) region, in different periods Siberia had a significant impact on the character of the Russian state. Russian imperial visions created different representations regarding the purpose of various Siberian regions.⁸⁶ Some of them, for instance, the Amur region became a priority for the Russian crown, others like the Northeast served as ‘a land of the future’.⁸⁷

During the nineteenth century, Siberia’s image and role in Russian self-understanding transformed several times due to the reassessment of the region in economic sustainability and the growing importance of nationalism.⁸⁸ Along with these developments, a new interpretation of the relationship between ‘Russia’ and ‘Siberia’ as the Russian *Other* appeared in the mental map of the imperial elites.⁸⁹ Siberia and its regions played a crucial role in Russia to emerge as a prosperous, geographically sizable colonial empire.⁹⁰ As a result, in 1914 a scholarly

⁸⁶ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, 5.

⁸⁷ The discourse of Siberia as ‘a land of the future’ circulated also after the collapse of the Russian Empire, see Boris Baievsky, “Siberia – The Storehouse of the Future,” *Economic Geography* 3, no. 2 (1927): 167-192.

⁸⁸ The study of the Russian geographical visions and imaginations includes numerous books and articles, see, for instance, Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors. Russian and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, eds. *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993); Mark Bassin, “Expansion and Colonialism on the Eastern Frontier: Views of Siberia and the Far East in the Pre-Petrine Russia,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 14, no. 1 (1988): 3-21.

⁸⁹ Concerning the concept of Siberia, or Asiatic Russia as Russia’s *Other*, see Mark Bassin, “Russia between Europe and Asia. The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 1-17; Vera Tolz, *Russia* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Paul Fryer, “Heaven, Hell, Or... Something in Between? Contrasting Russian Images of Siberia,” in *Beyond the Limits: The Concept of Space in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Smith (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura (SHS), 1999); Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia Russian Culture*.

⁹⁰ Claudia Weiss, “Representing the Empire: The Meaning of Siberia for Russian Imperial Identity,” *Nationalities Papers* 35, no. 3 (2007): 441.

publication on Asiatic Russia officially declared that the “lands of Asiatic Russia are an indivisible and inseparable part of our state and at the same time our only colony.”⁹¹

However, the ambiguity in ‘colonial’ status of Siberia was not the only issue of the region. With the growing number of peasant settlers from the central provinces, there were problems with the ‘indigenous’ population of Siberia. The resettlement policy was a part of the project of ‘merging’ Siberian regions with the Empire and their further Russifications.⁹² Peasant colonization was aimed at “filling Siberian lands with the ‘strong element’ to maintain consistency and reinforce colonial processes on the borderlands of the Empire.”⁹³ This practice of ‘nationalization’ of the Empire had different regional trajectories. According to Alexei Miller, “in the Western Province, it presupposed the inclusion of a huge mass of the native population as ‘Russian’; on the Volga, a fragmentation of non-Russian ethnic identities to enforce the dominant position of the Russians in the region; in Siberia, the change of territorial status from colonial to that of ‘homeland’.”⁹⁴ At first glance, the increase in the number of Russian settlers in Asiatic Russia accelerated the ‘merging’ the borderlands with the center. However, the government did not consider the possible consequences of the interaction of peasants with ‘indigenous’ populations, which included the aggravation of social, national, and religious issues. Due to the rural migration of peasants, there were so-called ‘questions’, among which the most significant were the Buryat, the Kazakh (Kyrgyz), and the Yakut that influenced the formation of local intellectuals.⁹⁵ The development of railway communication by the

⁹¹ *Aziatskaia Rossiia: Izdanie Pereselencheskogo upravleniia glavnogo upravleniia zemleustroistva i zemledeliia* [Asiatic Russia: Publication of the Resettlement Department of the main Department of Land Management and Agriculture], 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: A. F. Marks, 1914), 1.

⁹² On various trajectories of Russification see chapter 2 “Russification or Russifications?” in Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2008), 45-66.

⁹³ Anatolii Remnev, “Vdvinut’ Rossiia v Sibir’: imperiia i russkaia kolonizatsiia vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX veka” [To Push Russia into Siberia: Empire and Russian Colonization of the second half of XIX – early XX century], in *Region v istorii imperii: istoricheskie esse o Sibiri*, ed. Sergey Glebov (Moscow: Novoe izdatel’stvo, 2013), 52-55. See also, Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁹⁴ Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*, 176.

⁹⁵ Ivan Sablin, Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Buryat-Mongol and Alash Autonomous Movements before the Soviets, 1905–1917,” 214; Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Yakutskaiia avtonomiia: postimperskie politicheskie proekty

beginning of the twentieth century on Asiatic Russia transformed the material forms of social relations, contributed to the transformation of non-Russian populations' cultural perception in the Russian Empire through the expansion of spatial and discursive frameworks. The changing situation in Siberia directly affected the Yakut region, providing more possibilities for local self-organization.

The formation of the Yakut intellectual movements was a result of Russian colonial strategies, resettlement and exile policies, the land question, as well as a consequence of cooperation between imperial intellectuals, political exiles, ethnographers, and the Siberian regionalists with the Yakut representatives. The political conjuncture of late imperial Russia allowed the Yakut actors to have more possibilities for regional activities after the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907. Being administratively a part of Siberia, the Yakut intelligentsias attempted to organize their actions in cooperation with other non-Russian Siberian actors to justify their status as intellectuals for both the Yakut region and Siberian/Russian authorities.

This chapter is about Russia's imperial policies regarding the Northeast and its people, it is also about methods of power and governing diversity as well as of colonization and changing perception of the peoples living in the region. I will examine the contextual features of the Yakut intellectuals' emergence that encompass the complexities of the Northeast as a part of the Russian Empire, the role and influence of the Siberian regionalists, and cooperation of the Yakut actors with Siberian exiles and ethnographers. I argue that the formation of the Yakut intellectuals occurred in the encounter space of various ideas, discourses, and powers which were accumulated in the Russian Empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922 gg.” [The Yakut Autonomy: Post-Imperial Political Projects of the Yakut Intelligentsia], *Ab Imperio* 18, no. 3 (2017): 80.

1.1. The Northeast as a Part of the Russian Empire

The conquest of Siberia, mainly during the seventeenth century, coincided with the Western European colonization of the Americas.⁹⁶ For instance, French colonization was driven by the possibility of acquiring furs, and the subsequent emergence of fur trade allowed the natives to retain control of the hunting grounds and not to move to a sedentary lifestyle. The Russian colonization of the Northern regions of Siberia resembled more of the French model. However, unlike the Western European colonial model, Muscovy and Russian settlers were not interested in lands and (slave) labor. The primary purpose was furs acquired either through trade, or through hunting, or as a tax.⁹⁷ The Spaniards and later conquerors found in the newly discovered lands of societies and cultures, which did not correspond to their ideas of human, while the Russian conquest of Siberia did not bring such unexpectedness. As it was convincingly shown by Andreas Kappeler, as well as by Ronald G. Suny and Valerie Kivelson, the encounter with the Finno-Ugric and Tatar peoples who lived along the Volga river helped the Russians to develop specific models of interaction with the non-Orthodox and with non-Russian peoples, which could be easily reproduced in Siberia.⁹⁸ It is also fair to note that compared to other world empires such as Spain, France, and Britain the colonization of Siberia was not that bloodthirsty: despite the fierce resistance of local residents, the number of victims of Russian colonization was much less. Moreover, according to Valerie Kivelson, Muscovites created a system of possessions that secured the rights of natives to own their lands by the protection of a great sovereign of Muscovy.⁹⁹ In many ways, these policies determined the development of trajectories for governing imperial diversity.

⁹⁶ See, Anthony Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, 1500-1800* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 63-102.

⁹⁷ Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, 87-95; Bruce Lincoln, *The Conquest of a Continent: Siberia and the Russians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 53-56.

⁹⁸ See, Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History* (London: Longman, 2001), 27-29; and chapter Two in Valerie Kivelson, Ronald G. Suny, *Russia's Empires*.

⁹⁹ Valerie Kivelson, "Claiming Siberia: Colonial Possession and Property Holding in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," in *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History*, eds.

With the growth of territorial possessions, Muscovites and then the Romanovs step by step formulated the principles of the further ruling of the empire. According to Jane Burbank, the early Romanovs' rule was based on three main principles. First, the Romanovs advocated the practices of the land distribution by the ruler, which had a strong legislative basis. Second, they commonly attracted local elites from various groups to rule the territory through intermediaries. And, third, Romanov rule was flexible in legal, political, and social terms that opened the possibilities for diversity in one region.¹⁰⁰ In this case, Siberia and its regions played a crucial role in the formation of imperial understanding of Russia and the principles of its rule. Although the conquest of Kazan that is traditionally considered as the starting-point of imperial relations occurred almost a century earlier,¹⁰¹ Romanovs' colonization of the Northeast was another significant step eastward toward the Russian Empire.

It was Russia's Empires that created the Yakuts and the Yakut region during their colonization and ruled over the Northeast. The emergence of the Muscovites in the East of the river Indigirka traditionally dates to the seventeenth century. The official date of accession of the Northeast into the Russian state is 1632 when on the right bank of the river Lena Krasnoyarsk Cossack Peter Beketov laid the Lena *Ostrog* (fortress). The independent Lena county was formed in 1638 as a part of the Siberian *Prikaz* of Muscovy. In 1643, a new *Ostrog* which was called the Yakut became an administrative, military, political, cultural, and religious center of the Northeast.¹⁰² During the 1640s and 1650s, the territory developed, people built

Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 27-29.

¹⁰⁰ Jane Burbank, "Rules of Law, Politics of Empire," in *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850*, eds. Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 285-88.

¹⁰¹ Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 19; Jane Burbank, "Eurasian Sovereignty: The Case of Kazan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 1 (2015): 5-8.

¹⁰² James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 52-54; Evdokia Fedorova, *Naselenie Yakutii: proshloe i nastoiashchee (geo-demograficheskoe issledovanie)* [Population of Yakutia: Past and Present (A Geo-Demographic Study)] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1998), 25-27. On the examination of Russian colonialism in Siberia see, Andrey Zuev, *Pod sen' dvuglavogo orla: inkorporatsiia narodov Sibiri v Rossiiskoe gosudarstvo v kontse XVI — nachale XVIII v.* [Under the Canopy of the Double-Headed Eagle: Incorporation of the Peoples of Siberia in

new *Ostrog*s and winter quarters, discovered the geography and nature of the region. The result of this process was the emergence of secure permanent settlements around the Yakut *Ostrog* which served as a Northern ‘frozen’ frontier of Muscovy.¹⁰³

The geographical and climatic location of the Northeast affected the economic and social development of the region. As a part of Russia’s Empires, the territory of the Northeast region constituted up to 3,5 million square kilometers. A special role belonged to one of the greatest rivers of Siberia – Lena, flowing through the entire territory of the Northeast from South-West to North. The basin of the Lena river and its tributaries covered most of the habitable areas of the region.¹⁰⁴ However, the Russian administration, merchants, and entrepreneurs of the Northeast were concerned only in the sufficient supply of expensive high-quality furs and mammoth bone. As for the local population, most of the regional inhabitants were engaged in traditional sectors of the economy, such as cattle breeding, reindeer husbandry, fishing, and fur trade. The Northeast was inhabited by diverse populations that the Russian government divided into several categories depending on their activities. By type of economy, natives were divided into nomadic herders (Chukchi, Koryaks, Yukaghirs, Evens), sedentary and semi-sedentary pastoralists (Yakuts), hunters and fishermen (Yukaghirs, Evens, Kereks).¹⁰⁵ Imposing a fur tax on the local population, the Russian authorities gave (ethnic) names to the native people and distributed them into groups (‘gentes’). Sometimes utterly unrelated to each other families and nomad camps could find themselves in one ‘gens’ prescribed by the Russians. Later, ethnic terminology changed several times, and, given the high degree of mixing of the local population, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the old categories had

the Russian State in the late XVI - early XVIII century] (Novosibirsk: Novosibirskii gosudarstvennii universitet, 2017).

¹⁰³ Alan Wood, *Russia’s Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voïn i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors. Russian and the Small Peoples of the North*, 77; James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia’s North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*, 55.

virtually disappeared.¹⁰⁶ In practice, each territorial group of the local population had its own name and was aware of itself as a separate and distinctive community.

The history of naming peoples during the Russian colonization of Siberia is the key to understanding the nature of early modern Russia and its diversity politics that inevitably influenced the way of the Northeast's subsequent developments. The *Ostrog* and then the city along the Lena river was called Yakutsk because of the name of local people – the Yakuts. Paradoxically, the word 'Yakut' never referred to this ethnic group (the 'real' ethnonym is Sakha) since it was a name imposed to them by Muscovites after they heard this word from the Tungus.¹⁰⁷ According to Russian and Soviet ethnographer Nikolai Kozmin, the word 'Yakiit' or 'Sakhit' was heard by the Russians due to the peculiarities of pronunciation the ethnonym Sakha:

The Yakuts, as it is known, called themselves Sokha or Sakha, depending on whether the person speaks on 'O' or 'A' dialect. Their kinsmen living in the Minusinsk region, drawl 'O' dialect so clearly and pronounce their name, at least in the singular, as 'sokhy', with a big push on 'O' and a throaty sound. In the plural, this word has not uttered with such a distinct increase in the sound for 'o': it could be heard as 'sakhalar'. It is clear that the word 'sakha' can be pronounced as 'chzhakha' and 'yakha', and the word 'sokhy' as 'chzhany' or 'yaky'. If we form the plural not with the help of the most common Turkic ending in 'lar' (sakhalar, yakhalar, yakalar), but with the end of 'yt' or 'ut', we get 'sakhyt', 'yakhyt', or 'yakut'. In this form, the Russians perceived the name of the sakhalars who lived along the Lena river from their 'local intermediaries' – the Tungus.¹⁰⁸

The same principle of naming the city/region with ethnonym of local peoples was reproduced with the Buryats and city Buryatsk to acquire loyalty and accelerate the trade relations. Nevertheless, the city was later renamed after the brotherhood (Bratsk) thereby making an example of Yakutia to some extent unique. Apparently, due to the greater adaptability to the environment and higher assimilatory abilities the Yakuts (Sakha), who since the seventeenth century had expanded their territories towards the North, East, and West, became the dominant group in the Northeast.

¹⁰⁶ Janet Hartley, *Siberia: A History of the People* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 17-27; Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors. Russian and the Small Peoples of the North*, 91-97.

¹⁰⁷ James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*, 55; see also Nikolai Kozmin, "K voprosu o proishozhdenii yakutov-sakhalar," [On the Question of Origins of the Sakha-Yakuts] *Ocherki po izucheniu Yakutskogo kraya* 2 (1928): 5-14.

¹⁰⁸ Nikolai Kozmin, "K voprosu o proishozhdenii yakutov-sakhalar," 8.

The Christianization of the natives of the Yakut region (that by the end of the eighteenth century became *oblast'* of the Irkutsk *gubernia*) began in the first half of the seventeenth century and was one of the most critical aspects of the tsarist government policy. The tsarist government had to consolidate the colonized lands and ensure the further movement of Russian influence in the North and East up to the Arctic and Pacific oceans to promote the systematic exploitation of fur and other natural goods of the region.¹⁰⁹ Mass Christianization of the local population was carried out and completed during the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Since the time of Peter the Great, the imperial government initiated an intentional policy of conversions to Orthodoxy granting tax privileges and even local power to converted people. Although Catherine the Great's *ukaz* of 1773 'On the tolerance of all confessions and on the forbidding of hierarchs to interfere in matters concerning the other confessions and concerning the building according to their law of prayer houses, and the transfer of all matters to the secular authorities' ensured religious diversity in some regions of the Russian Empire,¹¹⁰ by this time, the Northeast was predominantly Orthodox region. Christianization, in turn, contributed to the deepening and expansion of communication links and social integration of the local population in Russian society. According to the Soviet ethnographer Sergei Tokarev, "religious strife in those days greatly hampered communication between people, so the Orthodox Church was an important social mechanism for the Yakuts."¹¹¹ Moreover, by this time, the Orthodox Church strengthened its position in Siberia, acquired the necessary experience of missionaries, and applied various methods of the baptism, freeing newly converted people from paying *yasak*.

¹⁰⁹ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, 8; Mark Bassin, "Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review* 96, no. 3 (1991): 768.

¹¹⁰ Especially, it was crucial for the regions along the Volga river, see Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*, 22.

¹¹¹ Sergei Tokarev, *Obshchestvennyi stroi yakutov XVII-XVIII vv.* [The Social System of the Yakuts, XVII-XVIII centuries] (Moscow: URSS, 2018), 216.

The *toyons*, prosperous, economically and administratively powerful nobles of Sakha, consisting of the hereditary leaders represented the top of the social hierarchy of the Yakut society. They were responsible for the protection of property, family and personal rights of relatives, legal proceedings, protection and expansion of the territory of *naslegs*. Until the 1760s, these positions were replaced by inheritance. The Russian administration did not interfere in the organization of the internal social structure, but eventually supported the aspirations of the *toyons* to organize the local administration in the Yakut region. The Yakut Deputy and head of the Kangalassky *ulus* Sofron Syranov was elected in 1768 to work in Catherine's Commission for the development of a new *Nakaz* (Instruction of Catherine the Great of the Commission on drafting a new Code).¹¹² The result of this visit was the decision of the Senate on the designation of the *toyons* as collectors of tribute. Alexei Arzhakov who in 1789 brought to Catherine the Great 'A plan on the Yakuts with an indication of their value and profitable proposals for them' made a significant contribution to the development of formal agreements between the Yakut *toyons* with tsarist authorities. The Imperial administration expanded the powers of *toyons* for the collection of tribute and other taxes, thereby gave them the power judicial and administrative functions.¹¹³ From the one side, by providing more opportunities to the Yakut *toyons* the Russian Empire allowed the latter to develop local self-organization, from the other side, being intermediaries of the Empire the *toyons* acquired much power becoming the sole representatives of authority in the region.¹¹⁴

By the end of the eighteenth century, the political and administrative vocabulary of the Russian government shifted from old notions of early modern time to the language of rationality and Enlightenment.¹¹⁵ In the eyes of Russian elites, native populations of Siberia were seen as

¹¹² Sergei Bahrushin, Sergei Tokarev, eds., *Yakutia v XVII veke* [Yakutia in the XVII century] (Yakutsk: Yakutskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1953), 132-37.

¹¹³ Ibid., 140-48.

¹¹⁴ On the imperial intermediaries in the Steppe region, see Ian Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire: Kazak Intermediaries and Russian Rule on the Steppe, 1731-1917* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 13-26.

¹¹⁵ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800*, 225.

backward ‘savages’ in need of education, protectorate, and civilization. The civilizational and evolutionist imagination of European thinkers also reflected on Siberia. The famous ‘Statue for the Administration of Indigenous People’ of 1822 developed by Mikhail Speranskii with the participation of Gavriil Batenkov for the first time officially introduced ‘indigenous’ people and divided them into three categories: settled, nomadic, and vagrant. According to the Statue, they were exempt from conscription; they were guaranteed self-government and freedom of religion: “Indigenous peoples who do not confess the Christian faith have the freedom to worship according to their law and rituals.”¹¹⁶ After the adoption of the Speranskii reform, there was an internal reorganization in the Yakut region. The Yakuts were registered in the nomadic category but retained their rights, the Steppe Duma was established as a local government body, which played an important role in the formation of the Yakut elite and initiated public activities in the region. At the congresses of the Steppe Duma, peoples discussed the prospects of abandoning administrative control, the equation of the rights with the Russians, the introduction of a court for the Yakuts.¹¹⁷ The vigorous activity of the Duma led to its closure in 1838, but the Yakut pages of self-government remained in the memory of more than one generation of the Yakut intellectuals who struggled for administrative settlement in the region.

The Russian Empire’s turn to the East during the ‘long’ nineteenth century, emerging of nationalism, and the discovery of natural resources (mainly gold and diamond) reaffirmed the status of the Northeast as the ‘land of the future’. In the imagination of Russian political figures, it had to become extremely important for the national needs in the uncertain future.¹¹⁸ To develop Siberia and its regions was one of the primary objects for the nationalists in order to enhance Russian national unification. Unlike European maritime empires that used their

¹¹⁶ Alan Wood, *Russia’s Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991*, 112.

¹¹⁷ See more on the activity of the Steppe Duma in Yakutia, Waclaw Sieroszewski, *Yakuty. Opyt etnograficheskogo issledovaniia* [The Yakuts. An Experience of Ethnographic Research] (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obzchestva, 1896), 481-88.

¹¹⁸ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, 8.

colonies for national development and unification of imperial core,¹¹⁹ the Russian Empire attempted to homogenize its diverse populations.¹²⁰ Such new terms in Russian colonial policy as ‘assimilation’, ‘merging’, ‘fusion’, and ‘Russification’ defined the role and place of Siberia as a natural part of Russian national state reinforcing state and internal colonization of its regions.¹²¹ The regional policy of the Empire was ultimately aimed at the political and economic integration of the state, the establishment of social, legal, and administrative homogeneity. The transition from diversity in the administrative structure (as it was in the early stages of the Empire) to an internally complicated homogeneous model inevitably led to an increase in centralization and bureaucratization of management, reducing the possibility of regional self-organization.

However, the specific needs of the Empire forced the government to continue treating the regional diversity. The hopes of the Russian Empire to fill the Siberian regions with the Russian ‘element’ collapsed due to regional peculiarities, which revealed the need for expert knowledge about the peoples and territories of the Empire.¹²² For instance, one of the features of the Northeast was so-called yakutization of resettled people: peasants from the Western and Central provinces adopted and assimilated the language, customs, social, and cultural practices of the Yakuts. This hybridization, according to Siberian ethnographer Ivan Serebrennikov, happened due to the small number of the Russians resulted in the weakness in cultural preservation.¹²³ While the leader of the Siberian regionalists Nikolai Yadrintsev saw the reason for the problem in physical characteristics:

With the encounter of Russian nationality with the Yakuts that correlates with the physical changes and the mental warehouse of the Yakut-Russian nationality, it is possible to notice the more or less significant

¹¹⁹ See, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*; Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*; Alexei Miller and Stefan Berger eds., *Nationalizing Empires*.

¹²⁰ Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865*, 56.

¹²¹ Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, 117-21; Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*, 9.

¹²² On the Russian Empire and ethnography on the Northeast see the following subchapter.

¹²³ Ivan Serebrennikov, “Zaselenie Sibiri russkimi” [Settlement of Siberia by Russians], *Sibirskie voprosy*, no. 7 (1908): 23.

deviations from the Slavic-Russian mental type. Education of young generations, which originated from a mixture of Russian and Yakuts, their concepts, customs, and language – all subjected to the predominant influence of the Yakut nation.¹²⁴

However, according to the ethnographer Vladimir Jochelson, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the opposite phenomenon occurred. With the help of administrative control, the Russian population was predominant over the residents and ‘indigenous’ peoples. The Yakut language, especially in Yakutsk, was also replaced by Russian.¹²⁵ As Willard Sunderland underlined, the phenomenon of so-called ‘wrong assimilation’ was a result of regional environment, as well as cultural backwardness of Russian colonialists themselves (many of who were penal exiles and drunkards)¹²⁶ which led to a crisis of Russianness and imperial race in the Northeast.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the adaptability of the Yakuts and the benefits that they acquired from the Russian administration led to gradual homogenization of the Yakut region. Almost all the small tribes that had their own distinctive features preferred to call themselves the Yakuts to avoid bureaucratic, social, economic and other misunderstandings with the Russians.

Late imperial Russia was characterized by a mixture of traditional and modern structures of rule. Siberian regions were perceived as colonies, not only due to their functions as Russia’s suppliers of raw material but also due to their low degree in social, economic, and cultural development, as well as due to the exclusion of natives from legal life of the Empire.¹²⁸ By the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Yakut region began to attract the

¹²⁴ Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibir’ kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom ontosheniiakh* [Siberia as a Colony in Geographical, Ethnographic, and Historical Respects] (St. Petersburg: Tipografia M.M. Stasiulevicha, 1882, 28.

¹²⁵ Vladimir Jochelson, “Zametki o naselenii Yakutskoi oblasti v istoriko-etnograficheskom otnoshenii” [Notes on the Population of the Yakut Region in Historical and Ethnographic Terms], *Zhivaya starina* 2 (1895): 5.

¹²⁶ Willard Sunderland, “Russians into Yakuts? ‘Going Native’ and Problems of Russian Identity in the Siberian North, 1870-1914,” *Slavic Review*, 55 no. 4 (1996): 810, 821-23.

¹²⁷ See Marina Mogilner, *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013); Anatolii Remnev, Natalia Suvorova, ““Russkoe delo” na aziatskikh okrainakh: ‘russkost’ pod ugrozoi ili ‘somnitel’nye kul’turtregery”” [‘A Russian Affair’ at the Asian Borderlands: The ‘Russianness’ under the Threat or ‘Questionable Kulturträgertheorie’], in *Izobretenie imperii: iazyki i praktiki*, eds. Ilya Gerasimov, Sergei Glebov, and Alexander Semyonov (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel’sтво, 2011).

¹²⁸ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, 321; Valerie Kivelson, Ronald G. Suny, *Russia’s Empires*, 256.

attention of industrialists and traders due to the abundance of natural resources. The Yakuts began to adapt to new forms of social structure and agriculture. Agriculture in suitable lands became an alternative to the widespread employment of cattle breeding in the region.¹²⁹ The first representatives of the Yakut intellectuals began to appear in the 1880s; they were mainly from wealthy families, the *toyon* nobility, who received higher education and were familiarized with urban culture and the Russian language. They were engaged in the field of medicine and law – doctors, assistant attorneys, private attorneys, court officials, judges, lawyers.¹³⁰ Interest in the cause of saving people from diseases, legal issues of the equation of indigenous peoples, their participation in local government determined their professional choice of university education. The population of the cities was not dense, the bureaucratic and petty-bourgeois environment prevailed. In Yakutsk, there was “neither library, nor pathetic book trade, nor the private company to extract newspapers and magazines, not to mention the extract of books.”¹³¹ In these circumstances, the Yakut *toyons* came to the fore as a support of the imperial officials in the social and administrative hierarchy, gaining a significant advantage in land relations. The so-called ‘class system’ of land use resulted in the emergence of the land issue in Yakutia.¹³² Social inequality and land exploitation created favorable conditions for the control and management of the Yakuts through the *toyons*.

The land issue was the key to the relations between the Russian Empire and its diverse populations. Mistakes in resettlement policy in the early twentieth century led to the aggravation of interethnic relations in the Steppe and the Baikal regions, which became an essential component of ethnopolitical processes in the previously seemed ones of the most

¹²⁹ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voin i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 26.

¹³⁰ Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)* [The Yakut Intelligentsia in National History: Fates and Time (The End of the 19th century – 1917)] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 2002), 134.

¹³¹ “Korrespondentsia. Yakutsk” [Correspondence. Yakutsk], *Sibirskaya zhizn'*, June 14, 1881. The author added “while you live in Yakutsk, you understand that time is going backward here.”

¹³² Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 15.

‘peaceful borderlands.’¹³³ The withdrawal of land for the Russians was always painful and caused numerous complaints from natives. These complaints were solved by ‘compensation’ sentences for ‘indigenous’ peoples or boundary acts on the renewal of old and carrying out new borders of peasant settlements.¹³⁴ However, there was no direct confrontation between the Russians and the Yakuts. For the future Yakut intelligentsia, the land issue was among the most important points in their program.

Modernization and development of the Russian Empire reflected on its borderlands, including economic, political, cultural spheres, discursive practices, and global trends. The spread of discourses on self-government, nationalism, and autonomism into the Northeast had different trajectories. Some aspects of anti-colonial nationalism were already contained in the discourse of Decembrists, Polish activists in the nineteenth century, and later in the ideas of socialists and populists exiled to Siberia, in the program of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Constitutional Democrats, and Social Democrats. The interaction between ‘indigenous’ intellectuals and the Siberian regionalists, followers of the idea of regional self-determination, contributed to the further conceptualization of the idea of autonomy. The influence of philosophers and thinkers whose ideas circulated through the emerging public sphere in the regions, the views of exiles, as well as the activities of ethnographers and Orientalists who studied the ‘Russia’s own Orient’ played a crucial role in the formation of the Yakut intelligentsia’s first generation. The specificity of imperial situation in the Northeast enabled many marginalized actors to initiate regional activity that, in turn, helped them to gain authority in power relations in the first two decades of the twentieth century, as well as to be

¹³³ See, Steven Sabol, *Russian Colonization and the Genesis of Kazak National Consciousness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism, and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*; Ian Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire: Kazak Intermediaries and Russian Rule on the Steppe, 1731–1917*.

¹³⁴ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voin i revoliutsii (1900–1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 97.

representatives of the region during the collapse of the Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet Union.

1.2. Siberian Regionalism as an Intellectual Center for ‘Indigenous’ Self-Organization

In the early nineteenth century, Siberia was a political and economic appendage of the Russian Empire. Speranskii’s reforms defined the beginning of the “short nineteenth century of Siberia,”¹³⁵ which can be called the century of reforms’ expectation. Speranskii not only produced a special form of government for the Siberian region but also determined the administrative and legal separation of Siberia from the rest of the Empire, which will later be perceived as a barrier to reform and an obstacle to the integration of the region into the imperial space.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, such isolation, otherness, and ‘backwardness’ led to the activation of intra-Siberian interest with the advent of the generation of the Siberian intellectuals in the middle of the century.

As a result of the expulsion of the convicted ‘Decembrists’ in Siberia, a new socio-political phenomenon such as political exile appeared in the Russian exile system.¹³⁷ The forced relocation of political activists resulted in the transfer of the Enlightenment languages as well as some elements of the publicity from the center to the periphery. The social and cultural activity of political exiles intensified the interest in Siberia: the growth of literary works helped to transform the conservative image of the region.¹³⁸ The ‘Decembrists’ also influenced the cultural development of the Siberian space; for instance, they were the first who organized

¹³⁵ Anatolii Remnev, “‘Korotkii’ XIX vek Sibiri: Sibirskoe vremia i prostranstvo” [The ‘Short’ XIX century of Siberia: Siberian Time and Space], in *Izobretenie veka. Problemy i modeli vremeni v Rossii i Evrope XIX stoletia*, eds. Elena Vishlenkova and Denis Sdvizhkov (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013), 229.

¹³⁶ Igor V. Naumov, *The History of Siberia*, 95-97; Anatolii Remnev, “Rossiiskaia vlast’ v Sibiri i na Dal’nem Vostoke: kolonializm bez ministerstva kolonii – russkii ‘Sonderweg’?” [Russian Power in Siberia and the Far East: Colonialism without the Ministry of Colonies – Russian ‘Sonderweg’?], in *Imperium inter pares: Rol’ transferov v istorii Rossiiskoi imperii (1700-1917)*, ed. Alexei Miller (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2016), 153.

¹³⁷ See more on Siberian exile later in this chapter.

¹³⁸ Yutri Slezkine, Galya Diment, “Introduction,” in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, 10-14; Anatolii Remnev, “‘Korotkii’ XIX vek Sibiri: Sibirskoe vremia i prostranstvo,” 230.

libraries in the Yakut region. In their correspondence and writings, the ‘Decembrists’ for the first time actualized the problems of colonial oppression and inequality in Siberia (Gavriil Batenkov), as well as compared Siberian development with North America (Ivan Pushchin).¹³⁹ Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinskii was one of the first to introduce the ‘indigenous’ peoples of Siberia in the field of high Russian literature.¹⁴⁰ The Polish uprisings of 1830 and 1863 became a significant chapter in Siberian history because of the filling of the Siberian space by political activists, who also played a role in the formation of intellectual movements at the end of the century.¹⁴¹

The emergence of an intellectual stratum in Siberia directly related to the development of the so-called ‘underground publicity’ in St. Petersburg.¹⁴² In the period between 1850-1860, many students from provinces entered the universities in St. Petersburg. One of them was a group of Siberians. Having learned such mechanisms of publicity as critical discussions of socio-political and literary texts, public speeches, and debates some Siberian students organized a circle of Siberian patriots aimed at analyzing the problems of economic, political, and cultural backwardness of the region.¹⁴³ Besides, they criticized government measures, went to demonstrations, talked about the possibility of revolution and reforms in the Empire.

¹³⁹ Anatolii Remnev, “Rossiiskaia vlast' v Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke: kolonializm bez ministerstva kolonii – russkii ‘Sonderweg’?” 156.

¹⁴⁰ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, 89.

¹⁴¹ See, Andrew Gentes, *The Mass Deportation of Poles to Siberia, 1863-1880* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁴² See, Christopher Ely, *Underground Petersburg: Radical Populism, Urban Space and the Tactics of Subversion in Reform-Era Russia* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016); Marina Mogilner, *Mifologiya ‘podpol'nogo cheloveka’: radikal'nyi mikrokosm v Rossii nachala XX veka kak predmet semioticheskogo analiza*.

¹⁴³ See the historiography of Siberian regionalists, Norman G. Pereira, “Regional Consciousness in Siberia before and after October 1917,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 30, no. 1 (1988): 112-133; Norman G. Pereira, “The Idea of Siberian Regionalism in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia,” *Russian History* 20, no. 1-4 (1993): 163-178; Stephen Watrous, “The Regionalist Conception of Siberia, 1860 to 1920,” in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, 113-132; James Hughes, “Regionalism in Russia: The Rise and Fall of Siberian Agreement,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 7 (1994): 1133-1161; David Rainbow, “Siberian Patriots: Participatory Autocracy and the Cohesion of the Russian Imperial State, 1858-1920” (PhD diss., New York University, 2013); Vladimir V. Kostyuk, “Siberian Regionalism and Power in Siberia in the Second Half of the 19th Century,” *Journal of Siberian Federal University. Humanities & Social Sciences* 8, no. 10 (2017): 1186-1195.

The populist ideas and works of Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Chernyshevsky, anarcho-federalist views of Mikhail Bakunin, ‘freedom-loving lyrics’ of Taras Shevchenko, as well as the idea of ‘tribal federalism’ and autonomy of Nikolai Kostomarov had a significant intellectual influence on them.¹⁴⁴ However, the concept of *oblastnost’* or the federation of self-governing regions developed by Afanasii Shchapov had the greatest impact on the formation of group self-identification.¹⁴⁵ While being a strong supporter of the regionalist conception, at the same time Shchapov advanced the theory of racial inequalities considering that the European race was stronger than the Asian one. He concluded that the Russian imperial race would unconditionally displace the weaker Siberian natives.¹⁴⁶ That is why as a way to regional self-understanding Shchapov called to develop Siberian patriotism that later became one of the main parts of the regionalist conception.

Followed Shchapov’s ideas of *oblastnost’* and people colonization of Siberia as well as based on a comparison of the colonial experience of Siberia, North America, Australia, and Canada Siberian students formulated the basic principles of future Siberian regionalism in St. Petersburg. Siberian regionalism was formed from the meeting of the young colonial elite and the ‘enlightened’ metropolis.

The mechanisms of public activity used by Siberian students in St. Petersburg were assimilated by them and transferred to the Siberian space. Inspired by the student movements of the capital, the populist and socialist intentions, and feverish situation, the young Siberians returned to their native land with the hope for immediate changes. However, the famous ‘Case of the separation of Siberia from Russia and the formation of the Republic like the United

¹⁴⁴ Anatolii Remnev, “Zapadnye istoki sibirskogo oblastnichestva” [The Western Origins of Siberian Regionalism], in *Russkaia emigratsiia do 1917 goda — laboratoriia liberal'noi i revoliutsionnoi mysli*, eds. Yuri Sherer, Boris Ananich (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 1997), 145.

¹⁴⁵ On federalist project of Russian reconstructions, see Dmitry von Mohrenschild, *Toward a United States of Russia: Plans and Projects of Federal Reconstruction of Russia in the Nineteenth Century*.

¹⁴⁶ Afanasii Shchapov, “Etnograficheskaia organizatsia russkogo narodonaselenia” [Ethnographic organization of Russian settlement], in *Sochinenia A. P. Shchapova*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: M.V. Pirozhkov, 1906), 365-387.

States' of 1865 weakened the radical aspirations of the Siberian patriots. In recognition of the future leader of the Siberian regionalists Nikolai Yadrintsev, the 'Case' was the result not of separatism, but true love for Siberia and its benefits. While another prominent representative of Siberian regionalism, Grigorii Potanin, admitted that the idea of separation indeed was in the minds of the Siberians. Radicalism and the willingness for instant transformation of Siberia did not bring the desired results; ironically, many participants were convicted and expelled from the region.¹⁴⁷

Despite the administrative control and censorship in Siberia, the 'Case' marked a significant change in the activity of Siberians: from radical actions to public and educational activities aimed at improving the welfare of Siberia, which were a typical characteristic of North American intellectuals.¹⁴⁸ Being under the influence of the North American colonial model, the regionalists also tried to bring up some elements of critical thinking in Siberians:

A revolution of the minds [in Siberia] and the replenishment of the voids in the [Siberian] heads – that is the role upcoming for us. Therefore, next to the study of materialism, you should study social doctrines and engage in reading historical and journalistic works, study the laws of revolution and reaction of political upheavals, tending to both the unification of nationalities and separatism, and most importantly in this reading – equating to all read the fate of our Motherland – Siberia.¹⁴⁹

In the last third of the nineteenth century, there was a search for the language of self-description among the regionalists that revealed unusual hybridity: on the one hand, they were Russians, on the other hand, the colonial elements.¹⁵⁰ In contrast to the unification trends of the imperial elites, the regionalists developed the program using the tools and categories of

¹⁴⁷ Sergey Glebov, "Siberian Ruptures: Dilemmas of Ethnography in an Imperial Situation," in *An Empire of Others Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, eds. Roland Cvetkovski, Alexis Hofmeister (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014), 292.

¹⁴⁸ In a letter to Jefferson in 1815 John Adams argued that "The Revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected... The records of thirteen legislatures, the pamphlets, newspapers in all the colonies, ought to be consulted during that period to ascertain the steps by which the public opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the authority of Parliament over the colonies." Cited from Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution. Enlarged Edition* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 1. In the case of North America, Hannah Arendt also holds the view of nonviolent change through the development of public institutions. See, Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 22-24.

¹⁴⁹ Cited from Anatolii Remnev, "Zapadnye istoki sibirskogo oblastnichestva," 148.

¹⁵⁰ Sergey Glebov, "Siberian Ruptures: Dilemmas of Ethnography in an Imperial Situation," 293.

colonialism and nationalism, as well as the experience of imperial Russian intellectuals.¹⁵¹ In addition to declaring Siberia as a colony, regionalists elaborated a peculiar notion of ‘the Siberian-Russian nationality’, viewing Siberia as a place of origin and emphasizing the importance of the ‘indigenous’ question.¹⁵²

The Siberian regionalists assumed that their program would be realized only if Siberian society would have public life independent from the center. In a letter to Yadrintsev in 1873, Potanin admitted with regret that “there is no social life in Siberian cities, there are no people who love their Motherland.” In order to involve the Siberian population in regional identification (Siberian patriotism), the regionalists resorted to the use of mechanisms of the public sphere. Due to the formation of the local press, journalism, literature, history, the organization of public speeches, lectures, and circles, there was a gradual birth of public opinion among the reading Siberian public. The regionalists also demanded from the Imperial authorities to introduce regional self-government, Siberian University and to solve the ‘indigenous’ question. These demands were implemented through the press (not by chance the organ *Eastern Review* was located in the capital) and circulated in the emerging public space. This form of publicity was a way of legitimizing the regional ideas and the inclusion of Siberian ‘national’ borderlands in the public space.

One of the instruments of articulation of publicity was the development of an alternative scenario to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Siberian accession, in which the regionalists attempted to declare the backwardness of Siberia and the needs of its development. For Yadrintsev the anniversary was an occasion to declare publicly about the Siberian needs, to unite the Siberian society in the fight for reforms. He initiated social activity in Siberian cities,

¹⁵¹ Anatolii Remnev, “Rossiiskaia vlast' v Sibiri i na Dal'nem Vostoke: kolonializm bez ministerstva kolonii – russkii ‘Sonderweg’?” 158.

¹⁵² See, Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibir' kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom ontosheniakh* [Siberia as a colony in geographical, ethnographic, and historical respects] (St. Petersburg: Tipografia M.M. Stasiulevicha, 1882).

trying to instill the idea that the anniversary was crucial for Siberians because it could facilitate reforms, evoke feelings of the Siberian civil society and attract attention to this ‘neglected’ country.¹⁵³ In his description of the Siberian history, Yadrintsev sought to point out the most important tasks and problems of the region:

We saw a period of conquests, pacifications, riots, even the period of exploitation of the gifts and resources of nature, the period of cultural agricultural development and emerging citizenship comes even later, but we have not seen a period of the spiritual life of the people yet. Now, on the verge of the 300th anniversary, the period of conscious life and understanding of its role in the future finally comes for Siberia. <...> The new period of the Siberian history begins with this consciousness of the universal existence and the conscious attitude to life. The awakening of the public initiative, the development of education in the East and the implementation of the university can create a different, better role for the Siberian outskirt, and the European conditions of existence will impart this lifeless land the light and warmth of civilization.¹⁵⁴

At the same time, Yadrintsev urged the Russian Empire to fulfill its duty to the Siberian colony providing it with education, development, and colonial institutions of self-government similar to those that the British Empire created in its colonies. The colonial discourse itself was ambivalent in the views of Siberian regionalists. From the one hand, colonial status was undoubtedly pernicious for Siberia, from the other hand, according to the regionalists, it opened a space for post-colonial development because young states “do not have prejudices of the old world and so to speak on the ruins of old civilizations they are free to create a new better life.”¹⁵⁵ In other words, the colonies were able to perceive the recent achievements of humankind, to develop with greater success than even the metropolis itself. Therefore, to publicly articulate this discourse for both Siberians and imperial elites, one of the main results of the 300th anniversary was the publication of the leading work of Yadrintsev *Siberia as a Colony*,¹⁵⁶ which received the unprecedented distribution in both Siberia and the intellectual and public circles of St. Petersburg.

¹⁵³ Nikolai Yadrintsev, “Nadezhdy i ozhidania Sibiri” [Hopes and Expectations of Siberia], *Nedelya*, November 8, 1881.

¹⁵⁴ Nikolai Yadrintsev, “Trekhsotletie Sibiri s 26 oktiabria 1881 goda” [The three hundredth anniversary of Siberia on October 26, 1881], *Vestnik Evrope*, no. 12 (1881): 844-45.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 847.

¹⁵⁶ Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibir’ kak koloniia v geograficheskom, etnograficheskom i istoricheskom ontosheniakh*.

However, despite the attempts of the regionalists to enhance the Siberian society, this did not lead not only to a separation of Siberia from the center but even to the origin of the Siberian revolutionary group. The Siberian regionalism existed as a common language and a set of problems, rather than as a political party or social movement. The rhetoric of socio-political and cultural activities and the ‘indigenous’ issue in the program of regionalists attracted groups of Siberian natives and responded to the activity of the Kyrgyz (Kazakh), Buryat, and Yakut intellectual figures during the crisis of the Russian Empire.¹⁵⁷

In the public space, the Siberian regionalists represented themselves as a cultural movement designed to awaken the internal forces of the locals and ‘indigenous’ populations of Siberia. They understood philosophy as the highest form of people’s consciousness, the articulation of which belonged to intellectuals. Enculturation of the Siberian population to European culture, science, literature, and philosophy, according to the regionalists, was the main mechanism of spiritual development of man. It was one of the arguments circulating in the Siberian discourse – a person (a group, a community, a nation) is independent in the desire to organize his/her own life. Potanin pointed out that “the population of any territory, especially if it is large, wants not only to eliminate the shortcomings of their social life but in general to be the creator of their own destiny.”¹⁵⁸ According to Potanin, the program and the ideological component of regionalism (the regional idea and the concept of autonomy) came from the philosophical views of Immanuel Kant:

... a man is his own end; he cannot serve as a means. The ideal state system is that all individuals in the state are fully developed individuals. From the same provision of Kant follows a number of freedoms: freedom of the individual, freedom of organization and social groups, freedom of self-government; hence the autonomy of municipalities and provincial assemblies, autonomy of regions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Ivan Sablin, Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Buryat-Mongol and Alash Autonomous Movements before the Soviets, 1905–1917,” 211–223; Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Yakutskaia avtonomiia: postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905–1922 gg.,” 78–91.

¹⁵⁸ Grigorii Potanin, *Oblastnicheskaia tendentsiia v Sibiri* [The Regionalist Tendency in Siberia] (Tomsk: Parovaya tipografia Sibirskogo tovarischestva pechatnogo dela, 1907), 32.

¹⁵⁹ Grigorii Potanin, “Oblastnichestvo i dictatura proletariata” [The Regionalism and the Dictatorship of Proletariat], *Sibirskaya zhizn*, July 18, 1917.

The ‘indigenous’ question in the program of the regionalists initiated the emergence of interest of the latter to the problem of colonialism and marked the formation of regional (national) intelligentsia. The regionalists promoted the study of the life of natives, cooperation with them, and their education. Already in the middle of the nineteenth century, Shchapov declared:

It is time for 8 million natives to recognize Zemstvo rights on an equal basis with all; only with equal and friendly, full and comprehensive self-expression of all the fundamental original social forces and interests there can be a genuine, reasonable and, if possible, equal progress of society and the people.¹⁶⁰

The critical problems that influenced the ‘unfair’ situation of natives, according to the regionalists, were penal colonization, drunkenness, and the land issue.¹⁶¹ According to Potanin, “the amount of land seized by Russians from natives was, of course, small, but over the years it gradually increased with the constant growth of Russian colonization.”¹⁶² Colonization was an important element in the crystallization of regional identity. The colonial question and its criticism began to circulate in the Siberian and Central Asian regions due to the substantial work of Yadrintsev, as well as through the organization of cultural and public spaces for discussions on the imperial policy on the borderlands.

Tomsk University opened in 1888 became an important social and intellectual center, bringing together scattered Siberian intellectual space and serving as a platform for activities of the regionalists.¹⁶³ The increase in the number of publications, press, and speeches, according to the regionalists, helped to develop the interest in Siberia and its problems: “...the regional press should discuss narrowly local needs and spread in cities and provincial towns.”¹⁶⁴ In

¹⁶⁰ Cited from Nikolai Yadrintsev, “Narodno-oblastnicheskoe nachalo v russkoi zhizni i istorii” [People-Regional Nature in Russian Life and History], *Vostochnoe Obozrenie*, no. 9 (1884): 45.

¹⁶¹ See, Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibir’ kak koloniia*; Grigorii Potanin, *Oblastnicheskaia tendentsiia v Sibiri*.

¹⁶² Grigorii Potanin, “Nuzhdy Sibiri” [The Needs of Siberia], in *Sibir’, ee sovremennoe sostoianie i ee nuzhdy*, ed. I.S. Mel’nik (St. Petersburg: Izdanie A.F. Devriena, 1908), 279.

¹⁶³ Anatolii Remnev, “Universitetskii vopros v Sibiri XIX stoletia” [The University Question in Siberia of the XIX Century], in *Region v sostave Rossiiskoi imperii: istoricheskoe esse o Sibiri*, ed. Sergey Glebov (Moscow: Novoe izdatel’stvo, 2013), 122. Potanin hoped that with the infusion of “enlightened Siberian peasantry” into the ranks of the Siberian intelligentsia, there will be the desired order in cultural space of Siberia. See, Grigorii Potanin, “Priznania sibirskogo patriota” [Confession of Siberian Patriot], *Sibirskaya zhizn’*, January 8, 1912.

¹⁶⁴ Grigorii Potanin, “Probuzhdenie oblastnichestva v Kazani” [The Awakening of the Regionalism in Kazan], *Sibirskaya zhizn’*, November 4, 1912.

correspondence, Potanin repeatedly emphasized that the main goal of the newspaper is to “unite the forces of the region.”¹⁶⁵ However, Potanin noted a big drawback of newspapers in the impossibility to consider the autonomy of the province, while the Siberians wanted to live on their own, “to have their own customs and laws, to read and write what we want, not what they will order from Russia.”¹⁶⁶

The educational theme was closely connected with the ‘indigenous’ question. Yadrintsev introduced the discussion on Siberian natives dying out because of the numerical superiority of the colonizers and the lack of enlightenment among natives.¹⁶⁷ As one of the solutions, the regionalists proposed the formation of ‘indigenous’ intellectual spaces, the cultural development of the indigenous peoples of Siberia through the introduction of the latter to culture, and their familiarization with the European system of scientific and cultural values in direct interaction with Russian culture. Assessing the role of Siberia in the world’s continuous processes, Yadrintsev was sure that “Siberian natives who will acquire the European enlightenment through the cooperation with Russian nationality can be very prominent mediators of this civilization and providers of great services to human progress.”¹⁶⁸ However, the regionalists realized that there are obstacles in the way of implementation of the mentioned ideas. Drawing attention to the ban on teaching in schools in their native language, Potanin noted:

The spread of education in our country is very hampered by fears of separatist movements of indigenous tribes. These fears keep the government from taking severe steps and spending heavily on indigenous schools. The results of this cowardly policy are as follows: the largest indigenous tribe – the Tatars – are turned by this policy into old believers, ultimately succumbed to the influence of mullahs and afraid of the light of European science.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ *Pis'ma G.N. Potanina* [Letters of Grigorii Potanin], vol. 2 (Irkutsk: Izdatel'stvo irkutskogo universiteta, 1987), 81; *Pis'ma G.N. Potanina*, vol. 1, 48-49.

¹⁶⁶ *Pis'ma G.N. Potanina*, vol. 1, 58-59.

¹⁶⁷ Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibir' kak koloniia*, 151.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁶⁹ Grigorii Potanin, “Novyi kurs v dele inorodcheskoi shkoly” [New Course in the Case of Indigenous School], *Sibirskaya zhizn'*, April 8, 1915.

The Siberian region, according to Potanin, needed innovations in which each tribe “the Tatars, Buryats, Yakuts...would have chances for cultural revival and self-determination.”¹⁷⁰

The regionalist variant to the solution of the ‘indigenous’ question included the populist’s ideas of developing ‘indigenous’ self-consciousness, growing of participation in the improvement of regional environment, emerging of local ‘intellectual centers’ and the regional intelligentsia, and overcoming of inertia, social and political indifference. As a mechanism for the formation of regional identification, the Siberian regionalists chose patriotism as “a civil religion that speaks and evokes feelings and passions that drive events.”¹⁷¹ Describing the principles of functioning of patriotism in the press, Potanin considered patriotism as a marker of regional differences because “in each region, there should be a contingent of local patriotism.”¹⁷² Potanin believed that “multicultural Siberia can provide peaceful cohabitation of the motley Siberian population only based on recognition and support of the processes of national forces’ awakening.”¹⁷³ For the leaders of the Siberian regionalism, it was necessary to find a formula for combining Siberian patriotism and regional features with universal values, such as the desire for freedom and justice. Regional patriotism was the ideological basis through which it was possible to implement the formed ideals. The mechanisms of the public sphere were a way to implement regional self-identification and potential social and political self-organization.

As a post-imperial political and administrative alternative, the regionalists saw decentralization: an involvement of regions of the Empire in the internal policy based on ethno-federal principles, economic federalism, national and cultural autonomy. Due to the increased circulation in the press, the regionalist’s discourse spread in the Siberian region, involving many

¹⁷⁰ Grigorii Potanin, “Nuzhdy Sibiri,” 287.

¹⁷¹ Nikolai Yadrintsev. “Pis’mo G.N. Potaninu 17 dekabrya 1872 g.” [A Letter to Grigorii Potanin of December 17, 1872], *Sibirskie zapiski: literaturnii, nauchnii i politicheskii zhurnal*, no. 3 (1917): 171.

¹⁷² Grigorii Potanin, “Rech’ na chestvovanii 80-letii so dnia rozhdeniia” [Speech at the Celebration of the 80th Anniversary of Birth], *Sibirskaya zhizn’*, September 23, 1915.

¹⁷³ Grigorii Potanin, “Kirgizy posle perevorota” [The Kirgiz after Coup], *Sibirskaya zhizn’*, November 14, 1917.

social and ‘national’ groups in the study of regional problems. The Yakuts used the concept of colonialism, social inequality, and oppression, gaining knowledge through both personal communication with the leaders of regionalism and the activities of ethnographers, *Vostokovedy* and local researchers-exiles who demonstrated an interest in the study of the Northeast.

1.3. Russia’s Own Orient? Ethnographic Knowledge and Exile in the Northeast Region

For more than three centuries, Siberia served as a ‘prison without walls’ for the Russian Empire.¹⁷⁴ Although the system of exile was changing overtimes, generally it was perceived as a practical way of displacement and colonization based on the right to legitimate violence and punishment. Because of isolation and inhuman condition of being in Siberian exile, poets and writers often represented it as a place of the inevitability of outrageous fortune that produced one of the most stable myths in Russian culture.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, due to the need to settle a vast territory beyond the Ural mountains and its further ‘mergening’ (*sliianie*) with the central part, the Russian Empire could exile thousands of people even without confirmation of their illegal actions. That in combination with surveillance in unfree open space removed from the natural social and cultural environment caused great fear and apprehension among both political figures and criminal elements. However, as it was underlined by Edward Said in his essay *Reflections on Exile*, despite its traumatic experience, exile enables a person to reinvent his or her ‘self’.¹⁷⁶ Thereby, some of those who were banished in Siberia could transform their fates getting new social and professional positions in the Siberian or regional hierarchy of power.

¹⁷⁴ Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1. See also Daniel Beer, *The House of the Dead: Siberian Exile under the Tsars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

¹⁷⁵ See, for instance, Galya Diment, “Exiled from Siberia: The Construction of Siberian Experience by Early-Nineteenth-Century Irkutsk Writers,” in *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*, 47-66; Harriet Murav, “‘Vo Glubine Sibirskikh Rud’: Siberia and the Myth of Exile,” in *Between Heaven and Hell*, 95-112.

¹⁷⁶ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 186-188.

One of the implicit purposes of filling Siberia with exiles and peasants was the ‘civilizational mission’ aimed at converting both Siberian and ‘indigenous’ spaces into the sphere of Russian cultural influences.¹⁷⁷ Russian settlers were seen as an important tool for the Russian Empire’s promotion to the East. However, as Anatolii Remnev and Natalia Suvorova argue, neither in Central Asia nor in Siberia Russian settlers (peasants, Cossacks, exiles) performed the way of Russian colonization as the Russian government imagined it.¹⁷⁸ On the contrary, in order to survive in Siberia, exiles often created networks of friendship for social and physical support. It helped to survive the loneliness and social isolation, which, undoubtedly, were the most terrible punishment. Also, contacts within these networks provided the opportunity for cultural exchange, interaction with native populations as well as getting local news and the information from European Russia.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, the very idea of being ‘Russian colonial elements’ seemed for them (convicted by a Russian court for various crimes) unprecedently irrelevant.

In the nineteenth century, there were several categories of exile in the Russian Empire.¹⁸⁰ In the context of my research, I need to clarify precisely two main categories that most strongly influenced the Siberian space. The first one is penal (criminal) exiles who were convicted of criminal offenses. They often lost their civil rights and property and were sent to penal servitude (*katonga*) for a period. The second category is political exiles who were sent to Siberia because of participation in illegal political circles and associations.¹⁸¹ Unlike penal

¹⁷⁷ Anatolii Remnev, “Siberia and the Russian Far East in the Imperial Geography of Power,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, 442.

¹⁷⁸ Anatolii Remnev, Natalia Suvorova, “‘Russkoe delo’ na aziatskikh okrainakh: ‘russkost’ pod ugrozoi ili ‘somnitel’nye kul’turtregeri’” [‘A Russian Affair’ at the Asian Borderlands: The ‘Russianness’ under the Threat or ‘Questionable Kulturträgertheorie’], in *Izobretenie imperii: iazyki i praktiki*, eds. Ilya Gerasimov, Sergei Glebov, and Alexander Semyonov (Moscow: Novoe Izdatel’stvo, 2011), 154, 206.

¹⁷⁹ Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism*, 82.

¹⁸⁰ Andrew Gentes did excellent research of detailing the different types of exile in Siberia. See, Andrew A. Gentes, *Exile to Siberia, 1590-1822* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) and his *Exile, Murder and Madness in Siberia, 1823-61* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁸¹ The most famous example that in fact was an outset of political exile in Siberia is the so-called Decembrists. They left a significant intellectual legacy in Siberia providing its regions with modern ‘European’ knowledge and practical advice for the improvement of local conditions. See, Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1966); Andrew Gentes, *Exile, Murder and Madness in Siberia, 1823–1861*; Daniel Beer,

exiles, political ones were not deprived of civil rights and could return to the European part of Russia at the end of an exiled term. However, they were obliged to stay in Siberian regions for a certain period.¹⁸²

In the case of the Northeast, some political exiles became a vital part of the social and scientific life of the region. The most significant number of exiles in the Yakut region was in the second half of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, criminal exiles, together with their family members, voluntarily arrived with them accounted for about 66.2% of the total Russian population of the region.¹⁸³ After the Polish uprising of 1830 and 1863, the Yakut region was filled by Polish political activists who played an important role in the sociocultural life of the region.

The policy of the Russian Empire regarding exile to the Northeast was contradictory: on the one hand, the government wanted the constructive development of the region, on the other, it was used as a ‘dump for punishment’.¹⁸⁴ Although the government encouraged the settlement of exiles to increase the Russian population in the region, the government encouraged the settlement of exiles, the measures created for marriages among the Russian population were not enough. Therefore marriages between Russians and ‘indigenous’ population were prevalent in the Yakut region, which, in turn, led to a crisis of ‘Russianness’ in the Northeast.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, in order to prevent further settlement of the Northeast by exiles, the Yakut governor argued that the region was “uniquely ill-suited to settlement given its almost

“Decembrists, Rebels, and Martyrs in Siberian Exile: The ‘Zerentui Conspiracy’ of 1828 and the Fashioning of a Revolutionary Genealogy,” *Slavic Review* 72, no. 3 (2013): 528-551.

¹⁸² Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism*, 13.

¹⁸³ Ivan Serebrennikov, “Zaselenost Sibiri Russkimi” [The Russian Population of Siberia], *Sibirskii voprosi: periodicheskii sbornik*, no. 8 (1908): 25; Sergei Bahrushin, “Polozhitel'nye rezul'taty russkoi kolonizatsii v sviazi s prisoedineniem Yakutii k Russkomu gosudarstvu” [Positive Results of Russian Colonization in Connection with the Accession of Yakutia to the Russian State], in *Nauchnye trudy: V 4 tomah*, Vol. 3: Izbrannye raboty po istorii Sibiri (Moscow: Nauka, 1955), 33-35.

¹⁸⁴ Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism*, 99-102.

¹⁸⁵ Willard Sunderland, “Russians into Yakuts? ‘Going Native’ and Problem of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870-1914,” *Slavic Review* 55, no. 4 (1996): 806-825.

total absence of industry and urban areas, and shortage of arable land.”¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the number of exiles banished to the Northeast grew steadily providing the region with different cultural and ethnic groups from various corners of the Russian Empire.

In fact, because of the system of exile, Siberia and its regions became an encounter space for the representatives of the Russian imperial diversity.¹⁸⁷ Muscovy’s and then the Russian Empire’s way of durable expansion contributed to the emergence of the tsarist dilemma of how to deal with rising ethnic, religious, and cultural heterogeneity in Siberia. It is no coincidence that the recent historiography has traced the development of the category of diversity in the Russian Empire, making a particular emphasis on the power of knowledge and the role of science in regional dimensions.¹⁸⁸ By the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian political figures sought to resolve the tension between increasing nationalism and the Empire’s political strategy. According to Vera Tolz, in order to develop new thinking in the context of imperial diversity, the Russian Empire resorted to using imperial scholars, in general, and ethnography as an academic discipline, in particular.¹⁸⁹

The need to obtain ‘reliable’ data on the population of the Empire led to the creation of a network of provincial and regional statistical committees by the initiative of the Ministry of

¹⁸⁶ Cited from, Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism*, 16.

¹⁸⁷ Andrew A. Gentes, *Exile to Siberia, 1590-1822*, 12. See also, Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski eds., *Imperial Cooperation and Transfer, 1870-1930: Empires and Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁸⁸ Roland Cvetkovski, “Introduction: On the Making of Ethnographic Knowledge in Russia,” in *An Empire of Others Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, eds. Roland Cvetkovski, Alexis Hofmeister (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014), 2. See also Sergei Tokarev, *Istoria russkoi etnographii (dooktyabrskii period)* [The History of Russian Ethnography (Pre-October Period)] (Moscow: Nauka, 1966); Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*; Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Nathaniel Knight, “Ethnicity, Nationality, and the Masses: Narodnost’ and Modernity in Imperial Russia,” in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, 41–64; Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*; Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*; Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*; Ian Campbell, *Knowledge and the Ends of Empire: Kazak Intermediaries and Russian Rule on the Steppe, 1731-1917*.

¹⁸⁹ Vera Tolz, “Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 10, no. 2 (2009): 261.

Internal Affairs in 1834 that a decade later became a part of the Russian Geographical Society, received in 1849 the status of the Imperial (IRGO).¹⁹⁰ It was these institutions that carried out most of the ethnographic studies in the Russian Empire, the results of which from time to time were used both in the organization of the management of the Imperial subjects and in interaction with ‘indigenous’ people on the borderlands. Academic ethnography in the Russian Empire was represented by the departments of Russian history (since 1835 in Moscow and St. Petersburg universities), departments of Oriental languages (since 1806 at the University of Kazan, since 1816 in the Main Pedagogical Institute in St. Petersburg), institutes specialized in Oriental studies (Educational Department of Oriental languages at the Asian Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in St. Petersburg, the Lazarev Institute of Oriental languages in Moscow, and later the Eastern Institute in Vladivostok), and from the late 1880s the departments of Ethnography and Geography at Moscow and St. Petersburg universities. The understanding of Russian history was in the spirit of the ‘internal colonization’s’ theory:¹⁹¹ for instance, the Muslim peoples (especially in the Volga region) were explored by the ethnographers from the perspective of Orientalism to study Russia’s own Orient.¹⁹² University’s ethnography was closely associated with physical anthropology, balanced between the liberal conception of imperial diversity and the nationalist idea of unification and Russification.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ On the history of IRGO see, Joseph Bradley, *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 92-104.

¹⁹¹ See more on the theory of internal colonization of Russia, Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization. Russia’s Imperial Experience*.

¹⁹² Robert Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*, 158-194. From the point of view of the Russian Empire, the knowledge and description of *inorodtsy* was necessary for their subsequent education and integration into ‘civilized society’. As the Tatar local historian Kayum Nasyri wrote in his book *Pover’ia i obriady kazanskikh tatar, obrazovavshiesia mimo vliianiia na zhizn’ ikh sunnitskogo magometanstva*, “before the Russian society has time to enlighten its *inorodcy* (including Tatars) with the light of universal education, it will have to get to know them.” Kayyum Nasyri, *Pover’ia i obriady kazanskikh tatar, obrazovavshiesia mimo vliianiia na zhizn’ ikh sunnitskogo magometanstva* [Beliefs and Rites of Kazan Tatars, Formed out of the Influence on their Life by Sunni Mohammedanism] (St. Petersburg: Tipographia V. Bezobrazova i Ko, 1880), 8.

¹⁹³ See Marina Mogilner, *Homo Imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia*.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the very notion of diversity enveloped the intellectual imagination among ethnographers. Indeed, living in the Empire of distinctive regions, imperial subjects “spoke different languages, practiced different forms of agriculture, had different physical appearances, cooked differently, and worshiped different higher powers.”¹⁹⁴ To collect the information about people and then to use it in ‘practice’ became one of the trajectories of governing the Russian Empire. The study of ‘indigenous’ people helped the Empire to understand itself better and to define the imaginary boundaries of the state, integrating more subjects to rule imperial diversity.¹⁹⁵ At the same time, ethnic and national categories of human description together with the Enlightenment discourse acquired considerable meaning in both politics and academic works.¹⁹⁶ Thereby, late imperial Russia was governed simultaneously through national and colonial principles, which contributed to the emergence of new forms of (anti)colonial ethnography¹⁹⁷ – Oriental studies or *Vostokovedenie*. Due to their multidisciplinary approach, Oriental studies embodied the complex nature of the Orient in terms of geographies (it included Central Asia, Caucasus, and Siberia), cultures, and histories of various groups in different regions.¹⁹⁸

In the case of the Siberian ethnography/Oriental study, it was developed in a controversial form of debates between liberal scholars and Imperial Orientologists/officials. The latter often claimed that Siberia had to be fully converted to ethnically Russian domain despite the issue of the Siberian native populations’ dying out. For instance, during the Third

¹⁹⁴ Charles Steinwedel, “To Make a Difference: The Category of Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russian Politics, 1861-1917,” in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, 67.

¹⁹⁵ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, 84-87.

¹⁹⁶ Vera Tolz, “European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 1 (2008): 55.

¹⁹⁷ According to Frederic Cooper and Ann Stoler, “the production of colonial knowledge occurred not only within the bounds of nation-states and in relationship to their subject colonized populations but also transnationally, across imperial centers.” See their, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13. See also, Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁹⁸ Alfrid K. Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), xiii.

International Congress of Orientologists in St. Petersburg in 1876 the well-known Russian *vostokoved* Vasilii Vasil'ev declared that "Russians must be credited for their ability to settle in Siberia in such a way that their population is growing rather than diminishing, as would have been the case with other newcomers."¹⁹⁹ He also stressed several times that "today the diminishing numbers of Siberian natives can be understood as a result of a significant part of them undergoing Russification, that is, many of them becoming Russian."²⁰⁰ In this regard, he reproduced precisely what was seen by the Russian Empire towards the question of Siberian 'indigenous' populations, because on the international stage Russia advanced its interests as a 'normal' European colonial empire.²⁰¹ At the same time, liberal ethnographers deeply involved in the national discourses set the boundary of recognizing the *Other* in the Siberian space and of refusing attempts to suppress or forcibly Russify the *Other*. This rejection of domination and reductionism was nothing more than a revision of ethnography's own grounds, an attempt to reconfigure an imperial discipline into anti-colonial anthropology following the approach of Franz Boas.²⁰²

That is why following Francine Hirsch's and to a greater extent Vera Tolz's approach, I argue that the encounter between 'indigenous' people and liberal ethnographers in Siberia during the late imperial time resulted in the origin of self-perception in national terms among regional non-Russian intellectuals who interacted with scholars being both holders of local knowledge and conductors of modern ideas to the region. Although the results of these

¹⁹⁹ Vasilii Grigor'ev, ed., *Trudy tret'ego mezhdunarodnogo s'ezda orientalistov v S.-Peterburge* [Works of the Third International Meeting of Orientalists in St. Petersburg], vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Brill, 1976), lxxxv-lxxxvii. Cited from Sergey Glebov, "Siberian Ruptures: Dilemmas of Ethnography in an Imperial Situation," in *An Empire of Others Creating Ethnographic Knowledge in Imperial Russia and the USSR*, eds. Roland Cvetkovski, Alexis Hofmeister (Budapest and New York: CEU Press, 2014), 295.

²⁰⁰ Vasilii Grigor'ev, ed., *Trudy tret'ego mezhdunarodnogo s'ezda orientalistov v S.-Peterburge*, lxxxvii.

²⁰¹ Sergey Glebov, "Siberian Ruptures: Dilemmas of Ethnography in an Imperial Situation," 295.

²⁰² According to the recent historiography, the roots of anti-colonial ethnography and anthropology that developed in Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were found in the Siberian ethnographic accounts of Gerhard Friedrich Müller and then perceived by Franz Boas. See, Han T. Vermeulen, *Before Boas. The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 131-218.

transnational interactions were not explicit before the Russian Revolution of 1917, after the October *coup* the intellectual legacy of ethnographers and Orientologists became foundations for the Soviet nation-building in various non-Russian regions.²⁰³

The two lines of narrative, exile and ethnography respectively, coincide in the case of study the Yakut region. Since the late nineteenth century, the region was filled with many political activists represented all spectra of revolutionary political groups in the Russian Empire – from Polish political actors to the Socialist Revolutionaries and Marxists. Most of them who turned to ethnographic activity in Yakutia came from the populist (*narodnicheskii*) background.²⁰⁴ Precisely because of the interest in the education of local people (*narody*) they became involved in ethnography. Some of them namely Dmitrii Klements, Vladimir Bogoraz, Lev Shternberg, and Vladimir Jochelson (the last three formed the so-called *etnotroika*) became prominent specialists on the Siberian ‘indigenous’ populations inspired by Victor Rozen’s ‘new school’ of Russian *Vostokovedenie*.²⁰⁵ Encouraged to study Russia’s Siberian Orient they were welcomed to have expertise from the Yakut representatives: ethnographers did not interfere with the national development of ethnic groups but instead attempted to involve them in modern cultural life. They also believed that the best way to integrate ‘indigenous’ populations in the political and social space of the Empire was to appeal to their own culture and heritage.²⁰⁶

The event, which became a turning point in the fate of many political exiles in the Yakut region and which also affected the intraregional life, was the Yakut (Sibiriakov) expedition held in 1894-1896. However, even before the famous Sibiriakov expedition the Northeast was one

²⁰³ Vera Tolz, “Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia,” *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2005): 129; Vera Tolz, “Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia,” 266.

²⁰⁴ Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, “Political Fieldwork, Ethnographic Exile, and State Theory: Peasant Socialism and Anthropology in Late-Nineteenth-Century Russia,” in *A New History of Anthropology*, ed. Henrika Kuklick (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 191.

²⁰⁵ Vera Tolz, “Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia,” 265; Vera Tolz, “European, National, and (Anti-)Imperial: The Formation of Academic Oriental Studies in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia,” 80.

²⁰⁶ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, 47, 120-122.

of the regions of natural science (*estestvennonauchnye*) studies: there were organized Vilyuy (1854-1855), Olekminsk-Vilyuy (1866), and Olekminsk (1873-1875) expeditions, where participants recorded and then published the materials about the ethnography, folklore, flora, and fauna of the regions. By the end of the century, there was an idea to organize a complex expedition to study the economy, social activity, material culture, and geography of the Yakut region. The initiator and the chief patron was the gold miner and philanthropist Alexander Sibiriakov, who allocated 12 thousand rubles for the needs of the expedition. Initially, Sibiriakov turned to Grigory Potanin, but the latter refused to lead the expedition because of his own expedition to China, pointing to the possibility of attracting Siberian associates in the person of Vladimir Obruchev and Alexander Adrianov. According to one of Adrianov's letters, Sibiriakov's level of awareness of the region, which interested him primarily in economic terms, was extremely low:

From his words, I was convinced that he has no idea about the region; so, he believed that the Yakut populations are no more than 5 thousand and was very surprised when I told him that they include 220,000 people, and Tungus more than 10,000.²⁰⁷

Due to certain circumstances, Adrianov was also unable to start organizing the expedition. Nevertheless, he recommended a figure of Dmitrii Klements who agreed to lead the expedition accepting on the two conditions: the independence of organization and full control of work.²⁰⁸

Because of his research and ethnographic experience, the organizing role of Klements was crucial. He was a famous revolutionary actor, a populist, a member of the Tchaikovsky's circle, which had close contacts with the Siberian regionalists.²⁰⁹ As a political exile Klements arrived in Siberian in 1881 and took part in various Siberian academic expeditions. Therefore,

²⁰⁷ Alexander Adrianov, "*Dorogoi Grigory Nikolaevich...*" *Pis'ma G.N. Potaninu* ["Dear Grigory Nikolaevich... Letters to G.N. Potanin"] (Tomsk: Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo Universiteta, 2007), 132.

²⁰⁸ "Pis'mo I.M. Sibiriakova k D.A. Klements" [The Letter from I.M. Sibiriakov to D.A. Klements], in *Izvestia Vostochno-Sibirskogo otdela Imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obschestva*, Vol. 45: posviashchaetsia pamiati Dmitriia Aleksandrovicha Klements, ed. Ivan Serebrennikov (Irkutsk: Tipografia Irkutskogo T-va Pechatnogo Dela, 1917): 160.

²⁰⁹ See more on the circle of Tchaikovsky, Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 164-179, 198-201.

he was personally acquainted with many political exiles who turned to ethnographic activities.²¹⁰ As for the purpose of the expedition, in addition to the geographical and geological study of the Northeast, its natural resources, Klements defined the task in a comprehensive analysis of the life of the ‘indigenous’ population of the Yakut region, clarifying the mutual influence of the Russian population on the natives.²¹¹ Eventually, one of the largest ethnographic expedition, organized without sponsorship the Russian Empire, had as its principal object in the “discovery of the national characters of the peoples.”²¹²

In addition to above-mentioned Obruchev, the expedition’s group consisted of 26 people, including 15 political exiles (Vladimir Bogoraz, Nikolai Vitashevskii, Eduard Pekarskii, Vladimir Jochelson, Ivan Mainov, and others), seven priests and servants, as well as four peoples from different Yakut *uluses*. Klements personally approached many political exiles who by 1894 were experienced in local Yakut or other ‘indigenous’ cultural, economic, and everyday life. For some of them, the invitation from Klements became “a ray of light that cut through the surrounding darkness” as in the case of Vitashevskii.²¹³ As Jochelson wrote later, Klements “opened up the possibility of a scientific career to me.”²¹⁴ Indeed, for many of the participants, the Yakut expedition became a turning moment which embarked on new careers as scholars, moving away from their revolutionary pasts.²¹⁵ The transnational

²¹⁰ Even before the expedition, he consulted with Vaclav Seroshevskii, the author of the famous work on the ethnography of the Yakuts, on the further study of life and culture of the population of the Northeast. The St. Petersburg Branch of the Federal State Government-Financed Institution of Science of the Archive of Russian Academy of Sciences (FARAN, St. Petersburg) contains the correspondence between the members of the Sibiriakov expedition, including those written in Yakut.

²¹¹ Tatiana Oglezneva, *Russkoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo: izuchenie narodov severo-vostoka Azii. 1845–1917 gg.* [Russian Geographical Society: The Study of the Peoples of North-East Asia. 1845-1917] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1994), 108; Sergei Glebov, “Siberian Ruptures: Dilemmas of Ethnography in an Imperial Situation,” 296-297.

²¹² Vera Tolz, “Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia,” 269.

²¹³ Cited from Sergei Glebov, “Siberian Ruptures: Dilemmas of Ethnography in an Imperial Situation,” 297.

²¹⁴ Vladimir Jochelson, *Pervye dni Narodnoi Voli* [The First Days of the People’s Will] (Petrograd: 15 Gosudarstvennaya tipografia, 1922), 45.

²¹⁵ As Bogoraz later underlined, “The social mission of the epoch of the last *zemlevol’tsy* and *narodovol’tsy*, who ended up in the remote exile in the far north-east, consisted of the study of the peoples scattered there, who were primeval, half exterminated and almost completely unknown. In general, this was a collective work that was performed by entire groups of political exiles, who became scholars and researchers.” Vladimir Bogoraz, *Chukchi*.

intellectual collaboration of representatives of populists, socialists, political exiles, revolutionary figures in Russia's Northeast also affected the social and to a large extent political environment of the Yakut region in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Specifically for the expedition, a research program was published in 1894.²¹⁶ The program based on the following brochures: the IRGO's program for the gathering ethnographic knowledge; the program to describe the Siberian natives, compiled by Nikolai Yadrintsev; handwriting program tailored for members of the expedition wrote by Klements himself.²¹⁷ The program included controversial categories for a description of the Yakuts because it simultaneously operated four categories such as tribe (*plemya*), 'indigenous' people (*inorodsy*), people (*narod*), and nation (*natsia*). For instance, it contained the point to "study the concept of the people about themselves" and to understand the "people's ability to change and novelty, interest in news, reports stories" as well as other points to analyze the level of *national consciousness* of the Yakuts.²¹⁸ No less important the points on the Yakuts' views on agriculture, "the attitude of the people towards themselves, towards the neighboring peoples and strangers in general," and "changing customs of the Yakuts under the Russian influence."²¹⁹ All these points were used during the interactions with the Yakuts that in addition to ethnographic knowledge also produced various ideas among the natives about their *national* existence and their *own* lands. It was during this expedition when the idea of 'small homeland'

Chast' I: Sotsial'naia organizatsiia [The Chukchee. Part I.: Social Organization] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Instituta narodov severa TsIK SSSR, 1934), XIII.

²¹⁶ *Programma dlya sobirania svedenii o nravakh i natsional'nom haraktere yakutov* [The Program for Collecting Information on the Customs and National Character of the Yakuts] (Yakutsk: Tipografia oblastnogo pravleniia, 1894).

²¹⁷ Eduard Pekarskii and Ivan Mainov, "Programma dlya issledovaniia domashnego i semeinogo byta yakutov" [The Program for Study of Home and Family Life of the Yakuts], *Zhivaya starina: periodicheskoe izdanie Otdeleniia etnographii Imperatorskogo russkogo geographicheskogo obschestva*, no. 1-2 (1913): 117-135.

²¹⁸ *Programma dlya sobirania svedenii o nravakh i natsional'nom haraktere yakutov*, 1-3.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

(*malaya rodina*)²²⁰ was intentionally or not transferred by ethnographers to the Northeast's non-Russian environment.

The expedition's members themselves conducted different studies during the fieldwork. Vitashevskii studied the customary law of the Yakuts, Pekarskii worked on the creation of the Russian-Yakut dictionary, Bogoraz studied the language, the peculiarities of the local life of the Yakuts, Chukchi, and Yukaghirs. With distinctive intensity, Jochelson traced interethnic relations between the Yakuts, Russians, Yukagirs, Evens, and Evenkis underlying that they all were equal in racial terms but differed in cultural developments due to various environmental conditions.²²¹ After the expedition, Klements highly criticized the attempts to Russify the non-Russian population of Siberia. In doing so, he emphasized that 'educated' Russians living in Siberia were interested more in 'international affairs' of the Russian Empire rather than in regional needs or in educating natives who, according to Klements, were glad to be Russified in order to get higher positions in the Russian bureaucratic hierarchy.²²²

In this regard, the Yakuts who participated in the Sibiriakov expedition (namely, Vasilii Nikiforov, a head of the Dupsyunskii *ulus*, the future representative and leader of the Yakut intelligentsia; Ivan Solovyov, a clerk of the Vostochno-Kanghalasskii *ulus*; Egor Nikolaev, an intellectual from Boturuskskii *ulus*; and Nikolai Sleptsov, a representative of Balgantaiskii *ulus*)

²²⁰ See more on 'small native homeland', Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, 37-40.

²²¹ Erich Kasten, "From Political Exile to Outstanding Ethnologist for Northeastern Siberia: Jochelson as Self-Taught Fieldworker During his First Sibiriakov Expedition 1894-1897," in *Jochelson, Bogoras and Shternberg: A Scientific Exploration of Northeastern Siberia and the Shaping of Soviet Ethnography*, ed. Erich Kasten (Fürstenberg/Havel: Kulturstiftung Sibirien, 2018), 40. In this regard, Jochelson expressed his appreciation of the Boasian approach to understand cultures in their own terms. A little later in his review on the book *The Mind of Primitive Man* he wrote that "The idea of the book is to prove that the highest civilization of the white race is not the result of its highest talent and the prevailing favorable conditions for its development. There are higher and lower cultures, but there are no higher and lower races. Those anatomical features, which a person differs from the closest to him humanoid, equally inherent in all human races. There is no necessary correlation between language, race, and culture. The same language can be spoken by people of different origins and cultures, or by people of the same origin can be spoken in different languages and so on. Boas rightly believes that these impressions may have arisen in the minds of travelers who do not understand that primitive people have *other* systems of values from that which they, travelers, measure the importance of things." See, Vladimir Jochelson, "Recenziï" [Reviews], *Zhivaya starina: periodicheskoe izdanie Otdelenia etnographii Imperatorskogo russkogo geographicheskogo obschestva*, no. 2 (1915): 314-321.

²²² Vera Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia," 138.

played a certain role as intermediaries of modern knowledge and discourses to the Yakut society. As Mainov recalled, “...on the views of the bureaucracy of that time, the invitation to participate in expeditionary meetings and the work of several representatives of the emerging Yakut intelligentsia was considered as something new and somewhat truly bold.”²²³

These Yakuts were, on the one hand, holders of local knowledge (conductors and translators), on the other hand, full participants of the expedition from ‘indigenous’ populations. For example, Nikiforov was engaged in collecting materials on the family life of the Yakuts, studied archaeological finds. In the article *Where Do the Yakuts Find Stone Tools and What Importance Do They Attach to It?* the future Yakut intellectual determined the place and distribution of the ‘Yakut’ ancient stone tools and drew attention to the healing power of the tools, as well as to the practical use in hunting.²²⁴ Archaeological materials found by Nikiforov formed the basis of a new collection of the Regional museum, which was opened in Yakutsk in 1891.²²⁵ Practical experience of communication and interaction with well-known scientists and political exiles influenced the future activity of Nikiforov, forming his political interests, personal identification as intelligent in *narodnicheskii* understanding,²²⁶ regional self-perception, and understanding of the socio-economic realities of the Yakut society. Increased interest in the region of their own habitat among Nikiforov and other *inorodtsy*, the organization of the Regional museum and the study of the Yakut history were a consequence of the Sibiriakov expedition, which became a transcultural encounter for mutual knowledge in the

²²³ Ivan Mainov, “Predislovie” [Preface], in *Materialy po obychnomu pravu i po obshchestvennomu bytu yakutov*, eds. Dmitrii Pavlinov, Nikolai Vatashevskii, Lev Levental (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1927), xiii.

²²⁴ V. V. Nikiforov-Kulumnuur, *fotografii i dokumenty* [V.V. Nikiforov-Kulumnuur, Photographs and Documents], eds. N.S. Stepanova, N.V. Shadrina (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2006), 44-45.

²²⁵ Interest in the ‘ancient Yakuts’ and the practical application of archaeological finds through the organization of the museum created the material basis of national interest. See more on the museum collections and nation-building, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 167-190.

²²⁶ As a person who was aware of his/her responsibility and duty to the people (*narod*), opposed to the authorities and fought for social equality and justice. Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushin and Russian Populism from the Great Reforms to Perestroika*, 55.

context of the imperial policy of governing diversity. As another representative of *etnotroika* Lev Shternberg argued, such activity of local intellectuals became the foundation of the native intelligentsia “which on the basis of deep knowledge of the past will be able to clearly see the horizons of the future, could be born only under the influence of the European enlightenment, that in their case is the environment of Russian culture and education.”²²⁷ Despite the Russification measures, the Empire did not prevent horizontal ties within its constituent parts, however, the interaction between imperial actors led to an increase in the activation of local figures who were aware of themselves as intellectual representatives of particular *national* borderlands.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the financing of the expedition completely stopped. Although most of the studies were never published and lost in various regional and personal archives, some research was published during the 1920s by the former members of the expedition in special series of the Commission for the Study of the Yakut Republic of the USSR’s Academy of Science. This expedition made it possible to continue the independent scientific initiatives of the authors described above. In other words, the study of “life, worldview, language, anthropological character of the tribe, socio-economic condition, attitude of the Russian population of the Yakut region towards the Yakuts and some other issues that were very little and superficially explored, in many parts even completely untouched”²²⁸ allowed the former ‘enemies of the regime’ to officially launch a research career, to protect some of the expedition’s results in the Commission of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, and to continue studying the region even in the new political regime.

²²⁷ Lev Shternberg, “Inorodtsy: Obshchii obzor” [Inorodtsy: An Overview], in *Formy natsional'nogo dvizheniia v sovremennykh gosudarstvakh*, ed. A.I. Kastelyanskii (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo t-va ‘Obshchestvennaya pol'za, 1910), 554.

²²⁸ *Otchet Vostochno-Sibirskogo otdela Imperatorskogo russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva za 1898 god* [The Report of the East Siberian Department of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society for 1894] (Irkutsk: Parovaya tipografia I.I. Makushina, 1895), 4.

The opening of the Yakut Department of the Russian Geographical Society in 1913 was a great event in the cultural and scientific life of the region. Former participants of the Sibiriakov ethnographic expedition (Bogoraz, Vitashevski, Mainov, Pekarskii) became honorary members of the Department. It also included the best representatives of the local intelligentsia: a young lawyer Grigory Ksenofontov, Alexei Kulakovskii, Nikolai Gribanovsky, Semyon Novgorodov, and others. Later by the recommendation of Ksenofontov, Nikiforov was involved in the activities of the Department. The Department itself had the following tasks: assistance to the researchers of the region; creation of a local library; the collection of exhibits for the Yakut Museum.²²⁹

This period was characterized by increased public and scientific interest in everyday life, traditions, beliefs, and culture of local peoples. The study of traditional culture was carried out by joint efforts in the context of transcultural interaction of the emerging Yakut intellectuals and political exiles/ethnographers who remained in the territory of the Yakut region.²³⁰ Scholars also encouraged the Yakut intellectuals to initiate publishing in the press in the Yakut language. For instance, Pekarskii personally took care of the purchase of printing machines with Yakut fonts.²³¹ These machines were designed for the first bilingual Yakut newspaper *The Yakut Region* published in 1907 and 1908.

Nevertheless, despite the excellent reputation of some political exiles, the Yakut region continued to be a place of exile in the early twentieth century, especially after the First Russian Revolution of 1905. During this period, the highest number of political exiles were the Bolsheviks. One of them Vasilii Sokolov after the arrival in the Yakut region in 1907 highly

²²⁹ Al'bina Diachkova, *G.V. Ksenofontov: uchenyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii deiatel'* [G. V. Ksenofontov: Scientist and Socio-Political Figure] (Yakutsk: Izd-vo Yakutskogo Universiteta, 2000), 38.

²³⁰ Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)* [The Yakut Intelligentsia in National History: Fates and Time (The End of the 19th Century – 1917)] (Novosibirsk: "Nauka", 2002), 134.

²³¹ Mikhail Pendratskii, "Pol'skie issledovaniia kul'tur Sibiri v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii" [Polish Studies of Siberian Cultures in Pre-Revolutionary Russia], in *Pol'skie issledovateli Sibiri*, eds. B.S. Schostakovich, M. Volos (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2011), 57.

criticized the romanticized views on the Yakut exile. As Sarah Badcock demonstrates, he argued that the post-revolutionary generation of political exiles *a priori* was in a worse position because of the increased control over politicians by the administration and the inability to find a job in order to simply survive in a harsh climate.²³² Still, even in such kind of conditions, the Bolsheviks were able to provide social cooperation and spread political literature and socialist ideas.²³³ With the arrival in exile of Grigory (Sergo) Ordzhonikidze on June 14, 1916, and Grigory Petrovskii on September 12, 1916, political struggle and propaganda around the issue of revolution and tactical tasks of various political forces rose to new heights. Political exiles invited to their meetings representatives of local youth. Maxim Ammosov, Platon Oyunskii, Stepan Arzhakov, and other young Yakuts joined the Marxist circle forming the second generation of the Yakut intelligentsia. After the October *coup*, they became regional leaders of the Soviet building in Yakutia.

Exile to the ‘prison without walls’ existed until March 6, 1917, when the Provisional government announced a General Amnesty. On April 26, 1917, the deportation to Siberia as the main punishment was officially abolished.²³⁴ Many of the political exiles returned to European Russia, some of them stayed in Yakutia or somewhere in neighboring Siberian regions enriching local social, political, and scientific networks. The Revolution of 1917 designated the period of unavoidable involvement in politics of both national intellectuals and

²³² Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism*, 92.

²³³ In fact, a lot was written and studied in the Soviet Union on the life and work of the exiled Bolsheviks in Yakutia, see, for example, *Istoria Yakutskoi ASSR. T. 2: Yakutia ot 1630-kh godov do 1917 g.* [History of the Yakut ASSR. Vol. 2: Yakutia from 1630 to 1917], eds. S. A. Tokarev, Z. V. Gogolev, I. S. Gurvich (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1957), 365-415; Prokopy Petrov, *Iz istorii revoliutsionnoi deiatel'nosti ssyl'nykh bol'shevikov v Yakutii* [From the History of Revolutionary Activity of the Exiled Bolsheviks in Yakutia] (Yakutsk: Yakgiz, 1952); his *Revoliutsionnaia deiatel'nost' bol'shevikov v Yakutskoi ssylke* [Revolutionary Activity of the Bolsheviks in the Yakut Exile] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1964); Zakhar Gogolev, *Yakutiia na rubezhe XIX–XX vv.* [Yakutia on the Edge of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1970), 193-217; Gavriil Makarov, *Oktiabr' v Yakutii: V 2 ch.. Ch. 1: Yakutiia nakanune i v period Fevral'skoi revoliutsii* [The October in Yakutia: In Two Volumes. Vol. 1: Yakutia Before and During the February Revolution] (Yakutsk: Knizhnoe izd-vo, 1917); Ivan Argunov, *Sotsial'noe razvitiie yakutskogo naroda: Istoriko-sotsiologicheskoe issledovanie obraza zhizni* [Social Development of the Yakut People: Historical and Sociological Study of Way of Life] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1985), 120-138.

²³⁴ Sarah Badcock, *A Prison without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism*, 170-73.

ethnographers having their ‘imperial’ background.²³⁵ After October 1917, the Bolsheviks who needed the expert knowledge about political disposition in the former imperial regions invited many ethnographers to perform the work on the Soviet national-building. Thus, for instance, Bogoraz and Shternberg did not just turn to be prominent Soviet ethnographers. Moreover, they become founders of the “Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands” that was established in 1924.²³⁶ Sharing their post-imperial expertise and vast scientific experience, these former political exiles were engaged in the Soviet modernization project aimed at from the one hand transforming the ‘traditional’ societies and from the other hand reciprocally providing ‘national’ institutions in return for the loyalty to the new regime from non-Russian populations.

1.4. Public and Political Activity of the Yakut National Intelligentsia

In addition to growing industrialization, urbanization, mobility, and communication, the increase of literacy and publicity (*publichnost’*) in late imperial Russia constituted a significant element of modernization.²³⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, a new educated public that represented the *obshchestvo* (‘community’, ‘public’ or ‘society’ consisting mainly of educated people) claimed to be alternative leaders of public opinion in the Empire.²³⁸ That is why such professions as doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers in their strive to have autonomy from the state acquired the ethos of serving to the *narod* reinforcing social fragmentation in the

²³⁵ Alfrid K. Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations*, 1.

²³⁶ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, 150-163; Matthias Winterschladen, “The Forgotten Member of the ‘Etnotroika’? Waldemar Jochelson in the Mirror of Research and his Scientific Legacy,” in *Jochelson, Bogoras and Shternberg: A Scientific Exploration of Northeastern Siberia and the Shaping of Soviet Ethnography*, ed. Erich Kasten, 15.

²³⁷ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, 309.

²³⁸ Samuel D. Kassow, James L. West, Edith W. Clowes, “Introduction: The Problem of the Middle in Late Imperial Russian Society,” in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, 4.

Empire.²³⁹ By creating the zemstvo self-governmental institutions and other types of societies, it was Russia's Great Reforms that broke the Imperial monopoly on public life.²⁴⁰ Through the circulation of books and newspapers, as well as through participation in voluntary associations and public events, this educated public, according to Stephen Smith, "disseminated the ideas and values appropriate to what the late-nineteenth-century Populist Petr Lavrov called the 'critically thinking individual'."²⁴¹ In regional contexts, this role was performed by the intelligentsia, which played a decisive role in the cultural and social life of provinces enhancing elements of publicity in regional dimensions.

Another vital element of public development was the growth of voluntary associations that actualized the sense of independent (autonomous) community, provided the ground for opportunities, and engaged people in individual initiative. Such associations and organizations became another mediating sphere where the *narod* could implicitly or explicitly communicate with the governmental elites.²⁴² In the regional scale, the results of the intelligentsia and voluntary associations activity became visible during and especially after the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907.

Due to certain political reasons, during the nineteenth century, public institutions in the Russian Empire were less developed compared to European Empires.²⁴³ Only by the end of the century, the analog of civil society with its characteristic features such as public spaces, an educated public, and critically thinking individuals began to emerge in various spaces in the Russian Empire.²⁴⁴ Although these critical masses were not allowed to power structures and

²³⁹ Alfred J. Rieber, "The Sedimentary Society," in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, 344. See also his book *The Imperial Russian Project: Autocratic Politics, Economic Development, and Social Fragmentation*.

²⁴⁰ Joseph Bradley, "Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture, and *Obshchestvennost'* in Moscow," in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, 139. See also his *Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society*, 1-16.

²⁴¹ Stephen Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*, 42.

²⁴² Joseph Bradley, "Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture, and *Obshchestvennost'* in Moscow," 147.

²⁴³ Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman, *Civil Society, 1750-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1-11.

²⁴⁴ Oleg Kharkhordin, *Republicanism in Russia: Community Before and After Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 69-75; see also his article "Ot zasil'ia obshchestvennosti k sile publichnogo deistviia?"

political decision-making, in the context of the imperial crisis and birth of mass society educated public transformed fundamentally political order in the Russian Empire. Despite the non-classical functioning of the public sphere in Siberia, I will use this concept as an explanatory model for understanding the role of newspapers, literary works, public speeches and so on in the formation of views on Siberia and its regions as a colony isolated from the imperial space.²⁴⁵ Through the public sphere, there was a process of education of local residents (especially urban) and their gradual involvement in the transformed socio-political realities. This activity led to geographically local, but global as an ideological basis the use of mechanisms of the public sphere by regional Siberian and national (for example, Yakut) intellectuals.

The history of the Yakut intellectuals was closely correlated with growing publicity as well as with political and social issues in the Northeast and the Russian Empire. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the educational sphere in the Northeast was almost absent: wealthy Yakut families gave their children to study to political exiles, who were engaged in their education and helped them to enter educational institutions. This form of socialization was also characteristic of the future few generations of the Yakut intelligentsia. Cultural life in the Yakut region was concentrated primarily in Yakutsk and had not a great variety of forms. Young people gathered in the local club, which held public readings (Zhukovskii, Pushkin), theater, and musical performances. A newcomer industrialist Fedor Chekalov organized literary

[From Public Dominance to the Power of Public Action?], in *Ot obshchestvennogo k publichnomu: Kollektivnaia monografiia*, ed. Oleg Kharkhordin (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii universitet v Sankt-Peterburge, 2011), 523.

²⁴⁵ On the concept of public sphere and its application in historical research see, for instance, Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution (Bicentennial Reflections on the French Revolution)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1991); Viktor Kaploun, "Some Rules of Historiographical Method: The Concepts of 'Enlightenment' and 'Society' as Applied to the Russian Intellectual History of the late 18th - early 19th Centuries," in *Vestigia Idearum Historica. Beiträge zur Ideengechichte Europas*, Vol. 2: Formen der Ideengeschichte, ed. Michel Henri Kowalewicz (Muenster: Mentis, 2014), 191-225.

evenings in his home.²⁴⁶ Such a social institution largely compensated for the absence of public life in the province and was the central place of the educated public. For young people, this form of leisure allowed to discuss social problems and to express their attitude to them. The model of such a close circle of young people, friends, and like-minded people served as a necessary form for broader associations and greater activity. Not differently from other non-Russian regions, the Northeast remained inadequate in terms of both social awareness and political participation of people in regional life.²⁴⁷ Strict control from the local administration, censorship, and the government fear of national separatism prevented any possibility of involvement of ‘indigenous’ people into imperial policy before the Revolution of 1905.

Some elements of public activity in the region evolved during the nineteenth century. The beginning of the Yakut social and political activity is traditionally associated with the name of Konstantin Neustroev, the first Yakut, who received higher education in St. Petersburg with a diploma of the candidate of Natural Sciences in 1881. Having moved to Irkutsk in the same year, Neustroev opened a circle (*kruzhok*) in which he talked about populist and socialist ideas, organized interaction with political prisoners and even prison escapes. His students were young Siberians and representatives of the Yakut region (G. Sleptsov, I. Burnashov, and F. Gubkin).²⁴⁸ Neustroev drew attention to the negative impact of penal exile, was a consistent critic of the Russian colonial policy, and condemned the low level of education among the Yakuts.²⁴⁹ Neustroev was impressed by the movement and activities of the Siberian regionalists, some of whom he knew personally. The Yakut actor was arrested for organizing an escape but shot in 1883 because of a slap in the face Governor-General of Eastern Siberia Dmitry Anuchin. The

²⁴⁶ Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 25.

²⁴⁷ Theodore R. Weeks, “Separatist Nationalism in the Romanov and Soviet Empires,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 200.

²⁴⁸ Nataliia D'iakonova, *Narodovol'cheskaia organizatsiia K.G. Neustroeva v Sibiri (80-e gg. XIX v)* [Populist Organization of K.G. Neustroev in Siberia (80s of the XIX century)] (St. Petersburg: Obrazovanie, 1995), 63.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 74; see also Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 35.

personality of Neustroev played an important role not only because of the superiority in social and political activities but more as an example to young Yakuts: the death message of Neustroev, containing hope for further transformations, influenced the new generation of intellectuals. Neustroev was also a role model for the future leader of the Yakut intelligentsia Nikiforov, who followed Neustroev in consideration of his duty to serve the Yakut *narod*.²⁵⁰

Another representative of the early Yakut intellectuals, Egor Nikolaev, was one of the first actors who initiated the struggle for the Yakut self-government. He began to think about the question of the Yakut self-government and the possibility of the political representation of the region. He was well acknowledged with the history of the Yakut Steppe Duma and considered its activities as evidence of the positive experience of self-government.²⁵¹ Nikolaev was interested in the work of the Siberian regionalists and unconditionally supported their idea, concerning the abolition of penal exile in Siberia.

The activities of Nikolaev attracted the attention of Yadrintsev who put Nikolaev on a par with outstanding figures from ‘indigenous’ people (Dorji Banzarov, Chokan Valikhanov). Yadrintsev wrote:

...the Yakut Nikolaev, a gifted representative of the Yakut tribe, who declared himself by many notes and petitions about the situation of the Yakuts <...> combined a warm love for his tribe with respect for civilization. <...> Such persons could most of all bring services to ‘indigenous’ education and take care of the fate of their nationality.²⁵²

In his note on the current state of the Yakut region of 1883, Nikolaev underlined several key aspects which, according to him, could contribute to the survival of the Yakuts. First, “the need to provide the Yakuts with possessions or with arable lands and protect them from seizures” that resulted from both the regionalist discourse and the land issue of non-Russian regions in Siberia. Second, “the demand for firm principles of public administration.” Third, “elimination

²⁵⁰ Iraida Klierina, *Vasilii Nikiforov: Sobytiia. Sud'by. Vospominaniia*, 15.

²⁵¹ Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 43.

²⁵² Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibirskie inorodtsy, ikh byt i sovremennoe polozenie* [Siberian Indigenous People, Their Life and Current State] (St. Petersburg: Tipografia I.N. Skorokhodova, 1891), 241.

of harmful consequences of exile – together with my compatriots I hope that several measures that can approve the provision of life, honor, and well-being will be developed soon.”²⁵³ According to Nikolaev, the only way to solve these issues was to get self-government that could be achieved after the Yakuts would be on the same level of education as the Russians.

Another proponent of the intellectual development of the Yakuts, Mikhail Afanasiev, offered practical advice addressed to both the future generations of the Yakut intelligentsia and the educated Yakut public in the form of a public letter-reflection.²⁵⁴ Related to the tradition of the Enlightenment and publicity, such letters acted as a symbolic communication between the individual and society. Afanasiev’s famous manifesto *On the Tasks of the Intelligentsia* that was written three years before the Sibiriakov expedition proposed several steps towards civic, modern, national life. Among the essential points, the author underlined the study of “our *narod*”, the cultural unification with the Russians, and the possibility to have an official platform for public activity in Yakutsk:

Currently, we need to focus on where there is at least some opportunity, some ground that can be cultivated for future activities. I consider the city such a paragraph. First of all, we will attempt to take some official place. Having taken a more or less prominent position, we will be able to influence both the spheres of our official activity and the city society. <...> Then almost the most important thing is the study of our *narod*. Not a single study with the scientific thoroughness, decent, detailed study of our *narod* has been done so far. Not to mention Russian science, Russian Ethnography, a serious and impartial study of our *narod* and country in all respects would be useful for ourselves, for a better understanding of our nation. <...> Only a close and living connection with the educated part of Russian society can support us, allow us to live and be useful there, in our native country. These are our goals, as they seem to me.²⁵⁵

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the social environment of the Northeast helped to emerge new associations, organizations, and unions. The Yakut agricultural society (YASHO) established in 1899 at the initiative of the intellectuals namely Vasilii Nikiforov,

²⁵³ See, “E.D. Nikolaev o sotsial'nykh problemakh yakutskogo obshchestva (Iz kratkoi zapiski o sovremennom polozhenii Yakutskogo kraia, 1883 god)” [E.D. Nikolaev on the social problems of the Yakut society (From a brief note on the current situation of the Yakut region, 1883)], in Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 224.

²⁵⁴ The form of public appeal to the Yakut public through a letter-reflection started by Afanasiev later became common for the first generation of the Yakut intelligentsia.

²⁵⁵ “M.A. Afanasiev O zadachakh intelligentsii (Iz perepiski yakutskoi intelligentsii kontsa 19 veka, 1892 god)” [M.A. Afanasiev On the Tasks of the Intelligentsia (From the Correspondence of the Yakut Intelligentsia of the late 19th century, 1892)], in Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 223-24.

Semyon Dmitriev, Mikhail Afanasiev, and Vasilii Sleptsov became one of the leading places among these societies and unions. The YASHO aimed to eliminate illiteracy in the sphere of the household's running and to share the modern knowledge of technology for the adaptation of agriculture to the Northeast's environment.²⁵⁶

Soon the development of the Zemstvo self-government questions began to discuss among the YASHO members. Although there was evidence that the governor Viktor Bulatov "demanded to prove that the population is not yet matured for the Zemstvo," the social mobilization of intellectuals and an educated public in Yakutsk contributed to the articulation of questions about the Zemstvo. In the summer of 1899, the YASHO developed a *Draft of Basic Principles on the Zemstvo Institutions in the Yakut Region* and submitted it to the Governor, but the latter rejected the project as designed not based on the Provisions of 1864.²⁵⁷ Then already under the leadership of Nikiforov, the YASHO presented a paper entitled the *Tasks of the Zemstvos in the Yakut Region*. In this document Nikiforov and other members proposed the idea of renewal, modernization of the Yakutsk region across the spectrum of numerous socio-economic problems: the improvement of the instruments of labor and production, improved methods of cultivation, processing of agricultural raw materials, the flooding and draining of meadows, development of the mineral wealth of the territory, environmental protection, reform of public education and medical care, "a complete cessation of penal exile."²⁵⁸

At the beginning of 1900, representatives of the Yakut *obshchestvo* took part in the discussion on the regulation of 'indigenous' peoples which had not changed since the time of

²⁵⁶ On the activities of the YASHO see, Egor Antonov, "V.V. Nikiforov i yakutskoe sel'skokhoziaistvennoe obshchestvo" [V.V. Nikiforov and the Yakut Agricultural Society], in V.V. Nikiforov (*Kulumnuur*) - *chelovek i lichnost'*. *Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, posviashchennoi 130-letiiu V.V. Nikiforova* (Yakutsk: Izdatel'stvo YaNTs SO RAN, 1997), 36-37; Iraida Klierina, *Vasilii Nikiforov: Sobytiia. Sud'by. Vospominaniia*, 106-14; Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voin i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 164-67.

²⁵⁷ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voin i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 168.

²⁵⁸ The documents itself was published in 1906 after the establishment of the Zemstvo in Siberia, see Vasilii Nikiforov, ed. *Zadachi zemstva v Yakutskoi oblasti: doklad Yakutskogo sel'sko-khoziaistvennogo obshchestva po voprosu o vvedenii zemstva v Yakutskoi oblasti* [The Tasks of the Zemstvo in the Yakut Region: Report of the Yakut Agricultural Society on the Introduction of the Zemstvo in the Yakut Region] (Irkutsk: izdanie Zemskoi komissii Otdela Geograficheskogo obshchestva v Irkutske, 1906).

Speranskii's Charter of 1822. Nikiforov and Solovyov received an official invitation to participate in this event. The new project did not satisfy the Yakut actors. Objecting to the renaming of the Yakut administrative units into Russian '*volosts*' and '*sel'skie obshchestva*', Nikiforov reasonably remarked:

it seems to me, at least, strange such a means of russifying 'indigenous' people by coercive measures of the police. In addition, to what extent these two terms can help in merging of two different races...²⁵⁹

According to Nikiforov, the development of a new regulation by the Imperial administration should be based not on the opinions of two or three *toyons*, but on the collective opinion of the majority of the Yakuts. Given the statistical, geographical, and economic experience of the study of the Yakut region, Nikiforov indicated that the land issue was the most important for the Yakut population:

Currently, the Yakuts have neither allocated land, nor the estate settlement, and the land is only in their temporary use, on the rights of tenants of state territories, and the administration has the right at any moment to destroy their settlement and the estate and transfer their land plots to the use of persons of other estates, which is currently practiced.²⁶⁰

Assessing the growing role of the *toyons* and the low cultural level of the Yakuts, the intellectual called for the introduction of the Zemstvo self-government as a way to solve land, economic, cultural, and educational issues with reference to the successful experience of the Yakut Steppe Dumas. Nikiforov called for an increase in the practical functions of teachers who would provide "children with useful information on agriculture and, if possible, would themselves be engaged in such, and then acquainted them with agricultural journals and books."²⁶¹ Later, he wrote about this period:

Convinced that the Yakut people, still very little cultural, underdeveloped to the revolutionary struggle against monarchical oppression, I turned all my forces to raise the cultural level of my people, by planting among them education, the fight against local vices...²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Vasilii Nikiforov, "Zapiska po povodu peresmotra polozheniia ob inorodtsakh kasatel'no yakutov Yakutskoi oblasti (3 apreliia 1900 g.)" [A Note on the Revision of the Provisions Regarding the Indigenous Yakuts of the Yakut Region (3 April 1900)], *Ilin* 4, no. 1 (1997), <http://ilin-yakutsk.narod.ru/1997-1y/28.htm>.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Vasilii Nikiforov, "Proshloe i budushchnost' yakutskogo khoziaistva" [The Past and Future of the Yakut Economy], *Sibirskaya zhizn'*, January 11, 1902.

²⁶² Cited from, Iraida Kliorina, *Istoriia bez flera: poslednie desiatiletie v zhizni Kylumnyra (1918 — 1928 gg.)* [The History without Flair: The Final Decade in the Life of Kulumnur (1918 - 1928)] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2000), 486.

However, all private initiatives on the possibility of introducing self-governmental or educational institutions in the Yakut region were rejected by the administration.²⁶³

By the beginning of the twentieth century, public life in the Yakut region was still in its infancy; nevertheless, the newly emerging Yakut intellectuals of the first generation gradually became prominent figures acquiring respect and loyalty from the locals. On the initiative of Nikiforov and other young intellectuals, the *Society of Education*, which aimed to preserve the material and spiritual culture of the Yakuts, began its work. The political exile Ionov prepared the Charter of the Society. The tasks of the Society included the preservation of monuments of oral folk art, the study of the spiritual and material culture of the people, the Yakut language and its relations with other languages, the translation of works of art into Yakut and Yakut into Russian, the spread of literacy. Soon as a part of the Society the *Indigenous Club* which united the Yakuts, supporters of the development of education and education of the people, was opened. The Club constantly held public readings of books in both Russian and Yakut languages, with discussion and debate, arranged lectures on literary and other topics. Often political exiles who turned to Ethnography gave their lectures on the current economic and social situation of the Northeast.

By the beginning of the First Russian Revolution, there was a consolidation of the Yakut ‘indigenous’ population based on the land issue. Potanin was outraged by the lack of an organized group of ‘indigenous’ intellectuals claimed that they still “have neither concentration nor the Kyrgyz or Buryat intellectual center.” However, the regionalists considered the Yakuts as the most promising ‘indigenous’ group for the development: due to differences in the economic development of the region “only the Yakuts seemed to have resolved this issue

²⁶³ However, in the region, there were private schools operating based on the personal initiative of political exiles. For instance, Nikiforov himself was one of the students of the exiled revolutionary leaders N. P. Stranden, D. A. Yurasov, A. Sipovich. See, V.V. *Nikiforov-Kulumnur: dokumenty, fotografii*, 25.

[cultural development], or at least have the makings to resolve it.”²⁶⁴ One of the tasks of overcoming such backwardness was the requirement of the nascent Yakut intelligentsia to educate the local population and involve them in public life through the dissemination of literacy, public speaking, and the press. By the beginning of the Revolution among the Yakut intellectual strata formed a range of issues that contributed to the *national* intelligentsia’s creation, which later transformed into an anti-colonial and autonomist movement. The Yakut intelligentsia was looking for ways to overcome social and economic backwardness, using the mechanisms of a public organization aimed at solving the problems of the region.

The global spread of national discourse led to its regional articulation; the ideas of the nation were localized, acquiring new semantic forms.²⁶⁵ The discourses on regionalism, anti-colonialism as well as autonomism and later federalism were produced in the context of the crisis of the Russian Empire by the regional and central actors, taking the experience from Austro-Hungarian and German Empires.²⁶⁶ The birth and rise of the national movement began firstly in the Western borderlands and then in the Caucasus, Volga region and Central Asia.²⁶⁷ The original demands of the nationalists correlated with the notion of self-determination, not nation-building, due to the lack of possibilities of national representation in imperial institutions.²⁶⁸

The possible solution was to some extent found in the escalation of national aspirations during the First Russian Revolution. One of the outcomes of it, the State Duma of the Russian

²⁶⁴ Grigorii Potanin, “Goroda Sibiri” [Siberian Cities], in *Sibir’ ee sovremennoe sostoianie i nuzhdy: sbornik statei* [Siberia and Its Current State and Needs: A Collection of Articles], ed. I.S. Mel’nik (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo A.F. Devriena, 1908), 259.

²⁶⁵ Alexey Miller, “Natsiia, Narod, Narodnost’ in Russia in the 19th Century: Some Introductory Remarks to the History of Concepts,” 284.

²⁶⁶ Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Pieter Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*.

²⁶⁷ On the national movement in the Russian Empire see Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*; Alexei Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2003); Tomohiko Uyama ed., *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts* (London: Routledge, 2012); Charles Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

²⁶⁸ Norman Wayne, *Negotiating Nationalism: Nation-Building, Federalism, and Secession in the Multinational State* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 23.

Empire, opened the opportunities for political representation. However many national voices were still abandoned due to the absence of official national policy (or at least existence of many officially recognized national regions as the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland) and strong nationalization of the Empire.²⁶⁹

The nationalists' demands of autonomy coexisted with the ideas and projects of political actors from the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) and the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs). Both parties demonstrated the interest in the national issue,²⁷⁰ in both cases, the program of the parties provided the establishment of a republican system with the provision of autonomy areas and "the application of the federal principle to relations between individual nationalities, recognition of their unconditional right to self-determination."²⁷¹ The further development of the discourse of autonomists among Russian socialists and liberals could not but affect the projects of the local intelligentsia. For regional politicians and intellectuals, the period of the imperial crisis was very productive in terms of both promoting the idea of autonomy and the development of post-imperial imagination among ordinary people.

By the beginning of the revolutionary events, according to contemporaries, there were exactly two sociopolitical currents in the Yakut region:

...at the head of one was the majority of the tojons, at the head of the other mostly teachers and generally representatives of free professions; the first was nationalist and sought to return to the ancestral life, the second was progressive and stood for the introduction of self-government on the basis of the territorial principle, linking the cause of reforms in the Yakut region and meeting the needs of national development of the Yakuts with the democratization of the state system of Russia.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ On the problem of national representation in the State Duma see Rustem Tsinchuk, "Peoples, Regions, and Electoral Politics: The State Dumas and the Constitution of New National Elites," in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, 366-398; Alexander Semyonov, "The Real and Live Ethnographic Map of Russia': The Russian Empire in the Mirror of the State Duma," in *Empire Speaks Out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, 191-229.

²⁷⁰ Tatiana Khripachenko, "Ponjatija federacija, decentralizacija, avtonomija v socialisticheskom i liberal'nom diskursah Rossijskoj imperii (konce XIX – nachalo XX veka)," [The Concepts of Federation, Decentralization, Autonomy in the Socialist and Liberal Discourses of the Russian Empire (late XIX – early XX century)] in *'Ponjatija o Rossii': k istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda. V 2-h tomah*, Vol. 2, eds. Alexei Miller and Denis Sdvizhkov (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 99.

²⁷¹ Alexander Steblev, Ivan Sakharov eds., *Programmy glavneishih russkikh partii* [Programs of the Main Russian Parties] (Moscow: Biblioteka svobodnago naroda, 1917), 22-24.

²⁷² Konstantin Zalevskii (Stanislav Trusevich), "Natsional'nye dvizhenia" [National Movements], in *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale KhKh-go veka*, Book 7, Vol. 4, Part 2, eds. L. Martov, P. Maslov, A. Potresov (St. Petersburg: Tipografia tovarischestva 'Obschestvennaya pol'za', 1911), 240-41.

The ‘progressive’ part of the Yakut intellectuals consisted of bright representatives of the Yakut educated men, proponents of social and cultural developments, and political reforms in the Russian Empire. It was namely Georgii Sleptsov, a graduate of the St. Petersburg Military-Medical Academy; Prokopii Sokolnikov, a graduate the Medical Faculty of Moscow University; Vasilii Nikiforov, a native of Dupsyunskii *ulus* actively championed the idea of territorial self-government; Mikhail Afanasiev, also from Dupsyunskii *ulus*, a graduate of the law faculty of Moscow University, worked in the Yakut district court; Mikhail Timofeev-Tereshkin, a native of Suntarsky *ulus*, one of the first Yakut writers; Alexei Kulakovskii, a native of Botuurus *ulus*, one of the first Yakut writer; Gavriil Ksenofontov, a native of the Zapadno-Kangalas *ulus*, a graduate of the Faculty of Law of Tomsk University, a private attorney of the Yakut district court; Vasilii Nikolaev, a native of Boturus *ulus*, a graduate of the Faculty of Law of the University of Kiev; A. Diakonov, a native of the Zapadno-Kangalass *ulus*, a graduate of the Faculty of Law of St. Petersburg University. Although they were not unified group with a particular plan for actions, in addition to the demands of social and political development in the Yakut region, the one thing that brought them all together was the declaration of the *national* and *social* characters of their actions.²⁷³

The Revolution was also a moment for the intellectuals’ self-description. For instance, in his *Letter to the Yakut Intelligentsia*, Timofeev-Tereshkin not only declared the identification of the intellectuals “as mediators, as best power in the region who must deserve themselves to the *narod*” but also defended the idea of the Yakut self-government. According to the actor, the Zemstvo was a necessary instrument that the *narod* is demanded, and only the intellectuals could serve the *narod* and know its needs and issues.²⁷⁴ The tasks of the Yakut progressive

²⁷³ Even though the Yakut national historiography claims that the activity of the ‘national’ intelligentsia led to broader involvement of the locals to the national discourse forming the Yakut ‘national’ movement, the actual number of the intellectuals was no more than 15 and despite the global spread of nationalism, their intentions were more socialist rather than nationalist.

²⁷⁴ Mikhail Timofeev-Tereshkin, “Poslanie k yakutskoi intelligentsii po voprosu zemskogo samoupravleniia v Yakutskoi oblasti, 21 noiabria 1905 goda” [Message to the Yakut Intelligentsia on the Issue of the Zemstvo Self-

intelligentsia were to find ways for the Yakut development through personal initiative and contacts with administration. However, the Yakut intellectuals themselves did not consider the notion of diversity and did not pay much attention to the problems of other ethnic minorities of the Northeast. It was a common characteristic of any of the national intelligentsia that sought to create a canonical image of the region as ethnically or nationally homogeneous.

The revolutionary wave of 1905-1907 affected the reconfiguration of power relations in the Russian Empire. The creation of the Parliament (the State Duma of the Russian Empire), the opportunity to be elected and represent regional interests in the center, the granting of rights and freedoms, and further liberal transformations of the legislative system transformed significantly the socio-political order both in the center and on the borderlands.²⁷⁵ As a result of the crisis of the early twentieth century and the birth of public and mass politics, the 1905 Revolution, according to Alexander Semenov, “was a period of active ideological creativity and crystallization of languages to describe alternatives to historical development.”²⁷⁶ The revolution as a critical point of the crisis of the political and social structures influenced the emergence of previously marginalized actors in the regions, who after 1905 declared intellectual and political mobilization. According to Alexei Miller, “even if they were denied access to administrative positions, the local communities had at their disposal various options to react to the authorities’ policies and various ways to communicate their opinions, including loyal and non-loyal forms of protest, legal and illegal forms of resistance to governmental measures, and outright sabotage.”²⁷⁷

Government in the Yakut region, November 21, 1905], in *Na rubezhe dvukh epokh: vospominaniia, nauchnye trudy, stat'i, pis'ma, proizvedeniia*, ed. N.V. Mizaleva-Saya (Yakutsk: Smik-Master, 2013), 298-300.

²⁷⁵ The possibility of parliamentary elections become one of the tools of intellectual mobilization and the formation of political groups representing the interests of the region. See, Roman Tsiunchuk, “Peoples, Regions, and Electoral Politics: The State Dumas and the Constitution of New National Elites,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, 389.

²⁷⁶ Alexander Semyonov, “Wither the Liberal Alternative? Historical Memory and Historical Alternatives,” in *Das Zarenreich, das Jahr 1905 und seine Wirkungen. Bestandsaufnahmen* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), 352.

²⁷⁷ Alexei Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research*, 68.

As noted by Konstantin Zalevskii, the revolutionary wave helped to develop a national culture in the various imperial borderlands stimulating the national question, which “always played an important role in public life.”²⁷⁸ ‘National’ movements *per se* were a stage in the imagination of the post-imperial order acting as an engine for the transformation of the Imperial Russian project.²⁷⁹ The liberalization of legislation, the democratization of the public sphere and the weakening of censorship allowed previously marginal revolutionary and regional actors to spread ideas through the printed word, which led to an increase in the circulation of knowledge in the regional perspective.²⁸⁰

The emergence of social and political freedoms in the revolutionary period weakened the policy of Russification necessary for the nationalization of the Empire by the beginning of the First World War.²⁸¹ The administration did not consider many regional peculiarities and petitions of the representatives of the borderlands. It, in turn, led to the revival of the issue of regional (Zemstvo) self-government, which in the Siberian regions was equated to the ability to solve almost all local issues, ranging from health problems to projects of self-government and autonomy.

The first Revolution demonstrated that there was an interest in the democratization of society in Siberia and the Far East. Democracy was perceived in the region as economic benefits, social justice, civil liberties, decentralization, and national self-determination.²⁸² The railway connection contributed to the rapid penetration of political and party figures into Siberia: representatives of Kadets, SRs, and other political parties initiated the inclusion of the region in the revolutionary stream. The representatives of the RSDLP were one of the most

²⁷⁸ Konstantin Zalevskii (Stanislav Trusevich), “Natsional’nye dvizhenia,” 151.

²⁷⁹ Alfred Rieber, *The Imperial Russian Project: Autocratic Politics, Economic Development, and Social Fragmentation*, 362-386.

²⁸⁰ Aaron Retish, “Becoming Enlightened: National Backwardness and Revolutionary Ideology,” *Proceedings of the Ohio Academy of History* 2002 (2003): 82.

²⁸¹ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I*, 16.

²⁸² Ivan Sablin, “Democracy in the Russian Far East during the Revolution of 1905-1907,” *Russian History* 44, no. 2-3 (2017): 450-53.

organized in term of propaganda activity, organization of meetings in the largest cities of Siberia.²⁸³ The circle *Mayak* created by the political Social-Democrat H.M. Steinbach became the future basis of the Yakut social democratic organization in Yakutsk. Members of the circle got acquainted with Marxist literature, spread revolutionary ideas, demanded greater rights for students of local schools. Because of their activities, the circle's representatives were prosecuted, but since the summer of 1906, another member, V.N. Chepalov, and newly arrived political exiles resumed the activities of the *Mayak* with the publication of the magazine of the same name.²⁸⁴

Due to the inability of the Russian Empire to control the growing mass discontent, on January 4, 1906, at the initiative of Nikiforov the *Union of the Yakuts* was created. The organizing members advocated for the introduction of the *Zemstvo*, for the recognition of the right to possess all lands belonging to the Yakuts, and for representation in the State Duma.²⁸⁵ The main goal of the Union was “to establish civil and economic rights” in the region.²⁸⁶ As Nikiforov wrote later:

This movement resulted in... the accumulated discontent ... with arbitrariness and injustice, ... with the oppression of the Russian autocratic government and ... with the obstacle to the cultural development and enlightenment of the Yakut people, and the desire for the development of national consciousness and self-government.²⁸⁷

After the Union was established, many of its participants went to the *uluses* and *naslegs* to create local branches, which attracted the attention of not only the regional administrative

²⁸³ Henry Reichman, “The 1905 Revolution on the Siberian Railroad,” *The Russian Review* 47, no. 1 (1988): 31-32; see also Mikhail Shilovskii, *Pervaya russkaya revoliutsia v Sibiri 1905-1907 gg.* [The First Russian Revolution in Siberia, 1905-1907] (Novosibirsk: Izdatel'stvo SO RAN, 2012).

²⁸⁴ See, “1904-1907 gg. – iz dnevnika V.N. Chepalova” [1904-1907, From the Diary of V.N. Chepalov], in *Dokumenty o revoliutsionnykh sobityakh 1905-1907 gg. v Yakutii*, eds. T. P. Korzhikhina, D. A. Tebekin, O. M. Tebekina (Yakutsk: Knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1957), 139-141.

²⁸⁵ According to the new Regulation on elections to the II State Duma, Akmola, Semipalatinsk, Turgay, Ural and Yakut regions were actually deprived of electoral rights. The refusal to represent the population of Siberia and Central Asia in the all-imperial Parliament correlated with the prohibition on military service, which, according to representatives of these regions, meant discrimination of the population and its symbolic ‘exclusion’ from the Empire.

²⁸⁶ *Dokumenty o revoliutsionnykh sobityakh 1905-1907 gg. v Yakutii*, 164-165.

²⁸⁷ Vasilii Nikiforov-Kulumnur, *Solntse svetit vsem: stat'i. Pis'ma. Proizvedeniia* [The Sun is Shining Everybody: Articles. Letters. Works] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2001), 367.

bodies but also of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Empire. In his telegram to V.N. Bulatov on January 13, Minister Pavel Durnovo demanded immediate arrest of the members of the Union.²⁸⁸ One of the representatives of the Union of Yakuts, Ivan Govorov, evaluated the results of actions during the revolutionary period:

Winged word ‘freedom’, flying over the Rus’, came to our blessed city Yakutsk... The first greeting, the first demonstration was political. Then rallies and trade unions were organized. Everyone here became more interested in reading newspapers and telegrams, judgment on politics, on the four freedoms, and so on. We had a good time – we talked freely!²⁸⁹

The discourse of self-government formed on the territory of the Yakut region began to spread through to the rudimentary mechanisms of public policy, through the press, speeches, literary evenings. The ideas of the intelligentsia entered gradually the cities and *uluses* of the Yakut region. Due to the vast distances and poor communications, the direct role in the transmission of information played by intergenerational and interpersonal relationships. The influence of ‘national romanticism’ as one of the projects of the nineteenth century led to the activation of the national intelligentsia, which sought to “come up with a canonical image of the nation, for further imposing it to the population not aware of it.”²⁹⁰

An important topic for the Yakut press was the ideological relationship with the all-Siberian and regionalist field. After the revolution, “there was the opportunity for local intellectual movements to serve by a printed word to small homeland, there was also the opportunity for temporary, voluntary or involuntary inhabitants to participate in the spiritual life of the population, helping to clarify its consciousness in the intensified struggle for the

²⁸⁸ On January 18, 1906, the leaders and members (16 people) of the *Union of the Yakuts* were arrested. In September, Nikiforov was sentenced to a year and a half of imprisonment in a correctional house, other participants were fined, some were acquitted. Nikiforov, however, filed an appeal in cassation impact on retrial. On July 23, 1908, all the defendants were released, except for Nikiforov, who received a year in prison. See, V.V. *Nikiforov-Kulumnur: dokumenty, fotografii*, 74-76. See more on the activity of the Union of the Yakuts, Iraida Kliorina, *Epoieia “Soiuza yakutov”*: (dekabr' 1905 g. – iiul' 1908 g.) [The Epopee of “The Union of the Yakuts” (December 1905 to July 1908)] (Yakutsk: Izdatel'stvo zhurnala Ilin, 1992).

²⁸⁹ Cited from Sardana Boyakova, “Ivan Govorov. Istoricheskie sobytiia cherez prizmu semeinoi khroniki” [Historical Events through the Prism of Family Chronicles], *Yakutskii arkhiv*, no. 1 (2000): 95.

²⁹⁰ Balázs Trencsényi, “Bunt protiv istorii: konservativnaia revoliutsiia» i poiski natsional'noi identichnosti v mezhoennoi Vostochnoi i Tsentral'noi Evrope” [Revolt against History. Conservative Revolution and the Definitions of National Identity in Interwar East Central Europe], in *Antropologia revolutsii*, eds. Irina Prokhorova, Ilya Kukulin, Maria Maiofis (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2009), 208.

creation of new forms of life.”²⁹¹ In the first issue of the newspaper *Yakutskaya Mysl'* that was created in 1909, there was an appeal of the Siberian intellectuals signed by Potanin and others. The main message was strengthening of the attention to problems of the native land and the Siberian needs, and the need for distribution among the population of the printing publications that cover public and cultural problems.²⁹²

The cultural and educational theme in the Siberian press was also reflected in the Yakut newspapers. The exiled *Narodovolets* Sabunaev on the pages of another newspaper *Yakutskii Krai* was surprised at the inertia of the Yakut population to the problems of education: “Is there no consciousness in the local society that the entire future of the Yakut people depends on raising education and mental development in its environment?”²⁹³ The author pointed to a decrease in the chances for the Yakuts to approach the all-Russian cultural level since the administration prohibited all initiatives of intellectuals because of their allegedly “harmful effects on the Yakuts.” However, he saw a positive moment in “the inability to prevent individuals from providing material assistance to children and young people seeking education.”²⁹⁴

Comparing the indicators of education and literacy of the Russian and European empires, the Yakut intelligentsia drew attention to cultural problems and the inability of Russia to reach the world educational level without proper development of educational organizations, public lectures, courses, clubs and so on. The intentions of the progressive part of the Yakuts “were to unite the public initiative in the field of public education, to gather in one organization all the cultural forces working in this area and widely develop educational activities among the masses.”²⁹⁵ To involve the latter, they saw a teacher as the one who could be “the first person

²⁹¹ V. Pylov, “Yakutskaya pechat' i ee nedrugi” [The Yakut Print and its Enemies], *Sibirskie voprosy: periodicheskii sbornik*, no. 27-28 (1908): 24.

²⁹² “Pis'mo k sibiriyakam” [The Letter to Siberians], *Yakutskaya mysl'*, February 13, 1909.

²⁹³ M.V. Sabunaev, “O prosveschenii” [On Education], *Yakutskii krai*, September 2, 1907.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ R.S., “S"ezd ligi obrazovaniia” [The Congress of Education League], *Yakutskaya mysl'*, February 13, 1909.

in the village to be able to answer the peasants all their questions.”²⁹⁶ The discourse of education associated with the growth of the number of regional newspapers become an important mechanism in the activities of the Yakut intelligentsia, creating a space for discussion of issues through the printed word. A great public resonance received the speech of the Yakut student Vasilii Nikolaev at the all-Russian Congress on public education in 1907. At the Congress, he made a report on the national and cultural revival of the Yakuts. Reflecting the opinion of the Yakut intelligentsia, Nikolaev said: “how the Yakut people should go to progress lies through national self-determination, through the development of education, and legal consciousness in the masses.”²⁹⁷

The land question and the land control by the *toyons* was another topical niche of the Yakut press. A group of progressive Yakuts attempted to cover this problem as widely as possible since the *toyons* committed arbitrariness “in a state with a constitutional rule.”²⁹⁸ As a supporting force of imperial power in the Yakut region, the *toyons*, according to representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia, were a reflection of the state land policy, proving “economic and legal oppression to ordinary Yakuts, bringing them to absolute landlessness.”²⁹⁹ Pekarskii urged to pay attention to the tyranny of the *toyons*, who “exclusively enjoy all the privileges and benefits.”³⁰⁰ In the leading articles on the power of the *toyons*, the word ‘oppression’ was often used to create an unambiguously negative image of the rich and well-born Yakuts. In contrast to the ‘handful of *toyons*’, the phrase ‘the Yakut nation’ was used to indicate all “workers of the Yakut masses” in a state of landlessness and striving for reforms of the land system.³⁰¹ For the intelligentsia, it was of fundamental importance to expand the discussion of the problem to

²⁹⁶ “Uchitel’ i obschestvo” [Teacher and Society], *Yakutskaya mysl’*, February 24, 1909.

²⁹⁷ Cited from, Nataliia D’iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional’noi istorii: sud’by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 108.

²⁹⁸ Inorodets, “Kak osvobodit’sya ot vlasti toionov” [How to Get Rid of the Power of the Toyons?], *Yakutskaya mysl’*, February 24, 1909.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Eduard Pekarskii, “Zemel’nyi vopros u yakutov” [The Yakut Land Question], *Sibirskie voprosy*, no. 17-18 (1908): 14.

³⁰¹ “Ot redaktsii” [From the Editors], *Yakutskaya mysl’*, April 9, 1909.

involve both ordinary people and Siberian figures in this discourse in order to destroy the censorship practice, which sought to completely isolate the discussion of the land issue in the public space.³⁰²

Even before the First Russian Revolution, the *Yakut Society of Education* which included the first public theater was created in Yakutsk. The first drama *Manchaary* written by Nikiforov was staged in the theatre in 1907.³⁰³ Nikiforov compared himself to the legendary *Manchaary*, a famous rebel who fought for the freedom of his people. Nikiforov's choice of *Manchaary* as the ideal hero was not accidental. The image of *Manchaary* lived in the historical memory of the Yakuts and was the most popular among the historical and cultural characters. In the same year, the society of *Sakha Omuk* arose on the basis of the closed Yakut Society of Education that, according to Afanasiev, was "the first organization that set the task of cultural and educational work among its people... and gave impetus to the rise of the national consciousness of the Yakuts."³⁰⁴

One of the brightest pieces of the Yakut literature was the poem *A Dream of the Shaman* written by Kulakovskii in 1910.³⁰⁵ It was a sociopolitical critique of Russian colonialism and the land issue. In the Yakut cultural and religious views, shamans are the men who could mediate between the real and the outer worlds. Moreover, the shamans are educated and wise man who always help the Yakuts with health and social problems. Through the eyes of the shaman, Kulakovskii blamed "big nations" because of their greed to share education with "small nations" (such as the Yakuts) which could disappear as (unintentional) victims in the war of these "big nations". After thinking about the consequences of the war, the shaman asks

³⁰² "K voprosu o demokratizatsii zemelepol'zovania" [To the Question of Democratization of Land Use], *Yakutskaya mysl'*, September 24, 1909.

³⁰³ Vasilii Nikiforov, *Manchaary* (Yakutsk: Tipografia V.V. Zharova, 1908).

³⁰⁴ The Archive of the Yakut Research Center of Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science, *Collection 5, Inventory 1, File 100, 5*.

³⁰⁵ Hiroki Takakura, "Indigenous Intellectuals and Suppressed Russian Anthropology: Sakha Ethnography from the End of the Nineteenth Century to the 1930s," *Current Anthropology* 47, no. 6 (2006): 1012.

how to escape from imminent death and gives a definite answer: “from these formidable nations, we will learn their invention, scholarship [*uchenost*’], and education [*obrazovannost*’], and the ability to comprehend the world...”³⁰⁶ Through the speech of the shaman, Kulakovskii carried the idea of two potential outcomes for the Yakuts. The first was a complete disappearance due to ignorance and inability to find their place in the modern world; the second was the educational assimilation through mediation with Russian culture. For the author, the second variant was seen possible only after the change of the aggressive policy of the Russian government. Thus, he implicitly imagined the order where Russia was represented by its rich cultural values but not political actions.

Cultural, educational and land issues were closely connected with the problem of self-government and introduction of the Zemstvo institutions, the idea of which was borrowed by the Yakut intellectuals from experience of the Steppe Duma, the ideas of the regionalists, and the programs of political parties. Based on the experience of the Siberian (regionalist) and Buryat Zemstvo projects, the “Report of the Council of the Yakut agricultural society on the introduction of Zemstvo in the Yakut region” was published in 1906. The document described a brief history of the relationship between the administration and private initiatives of the Yakuts to change the land issue, the development of mineral resources and their exploitation by the center, medical problems, prospects for innovations in the field of public education, and the negative impact of penal colonization.³⁰⁷ However, the initiative was not adopted.

In August 1908 in the newspaper *Yakutskaya Zhizn*’ there was published an article by an unknown author that defended the intention that “every nation has the right not only to the Zemstvo institutions but even to an autonomy up to the federation; this point of view has a solid

³⁰⁶ Alexei Kulakovskii, *Nastuplenie leta: izbrannye sochinenia* [The Onset of Summer: Selected works] (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1986), 138-44.

³⁰⁷ *Zadachi zemstva v Yakutskoi oblasti. Doklad soveta Yakutskogo sel'sko-khoziaistvennogo obshchestva po voprosu o vvedenii zemstva v Yakutskoi oblasti* [The Tasks of the Zemstvo in the Yakut Region. Report of the Council of the Yakut Agricultural Society on the Introduction of the Zemstvo in the Yakut Region], ed. Vasilii Nikiforov (Irkutsk: Parovaya tipografia I.P. Kazantseva, 1906).

scientific ground.”³⁰⁸ Nikiforov and other Yakuts spread information about the tax side of the Zemstvos:

in order to allocate the money for the Zemstvo activity corresponding to the importance and breadth of its task, it is necessary that the Zemstvo budget would be not cut in favor of any other estimates that have nothing to do with the development of culture, and that the blood money donated by the population would go to the development of its welfare, and not on oppression of the people and suppression of the cultural undertakings arising in its environment...³⁰⁹

Thus, the intellectuals connected the needs of the population with their direct financing for functioning “the Zemstvo activity which is democratically organized and proceeding in the conditions of full freedom.”³¹⁰

The growth of public activity in the Yakut region against the background of revolutionary liberalization was enthusiastically welcomed in the regional press. On the one hand, many authors wrote about the activities of the Union of the Yakuts, the organization of educational societies, the purpose of which was public education, but on the other hand, there was the reaction of the administration, which prevented the registration of new initiatives, closing regional newspapers every year.³¹¹ One of the results of the intra-regional activities of the Yakut intelligentsia was the “breaking of the order,”³¹² the formation of the Yakut social life necessary to involve more Yakuts in the problems of the region: “in order to ‘fair, uniform and unencumbered’ development, a bold experience was made over the system of the whole nation.”³¹³ According to the testimony of Sergei Poluyan (who wrote under the pseudonym Yasenovich), the Yakuts were able to organize a public space because they founded a club in

³⁰⁸ “Vozmozhno li zemstvo v Yakutskoi oblasti?” [Is it Possible to Introduce the Zemstvo in the Yakut Region?], *Yakutskaya zhizn'*, August 21, 1908. The program of the Yakut Zemstvo closely correlated with the program of the Siberian Zemstvo: in addition to the “progressive tax paid by all persons” the income of the Zemstvo consisted of Zemstvo capital, of duties for using the services of the Zemstvo, and of Zemstvo fees. See, P. Golubev “Po povodu tomskogo proekta o sibirskom zemstve (Proekt osnovnykh nachal ‘Polozheniia o zemskikh uchrezhdeniiakh v Sibiri’)” [On the Tomsk Project of the Siberian Zemstvo (A Draft of ‘Basic Principles of the Statute on the Zemstvo Institutions in Siberia’)], *Sibirskie voprosy*, no. 1 (1905): 310-315.

³⁰⁹ “Nasha biurokратиia i Yakutskaiia okraina” [Our Bureaucracy and the Yakut Borderland], *Yakutskaya zhizn'*, May 11, 1909.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Yakut, “Narodnoe obrazovanie v Yakutskoi oblasti” [Peoples Education in the Yakut Region], *Yakutskaya mysl'*, February 5, 1909.

³¹² “Lomka stroya (pis'mo iz Yakutskaiia)” [The Breaking of the Order (A Letter from Yakutsk)], *Sibirskie voprosy: periodicheskii sbornik*, no. 10-11 (1910): 25.

³¹³ Ibid., 32.

Yakutsk, where they read literary works, organized several theatrical productions, demanded the introduction of the Zemstvo self-government, the regional court, the Yakut representatives in the State Duma and other innovations. Nevertheless, all initiatives were rejected, the leaders of the movement were condemned.³¹⁴ However, these actions had the opposite effect, during the prewar years, the Yakuts organized not only public but also initiated interest in national life through the circulation of knowledge in the press, clubs, and theater.

The topics and issues that emerged during the discussions in the press and in public spaces needed to be addressed. One of the ways of the official struggle, from which the Yakut intelligentsia did not refuse, was the Yakut deputation to the capital on the 300th anniversary of the Romanov house. At the Yakut Regional Indigenous Congress, the Yakuts discussed the questions and issues to be presented to the Tsar: the right of representation in the State Duma; the introduction of the Zemstvo in the Yakut region; the reform of the land system; the opening of classes at the Yakut real school for everyone; the establishment of a scholarship for Yakuts leaving to continue their studies; the possibility of rail connection with the port of Ayan.³¹⁵ To a greater extent, most of these issues were discussed by the Yakut intelligentsia. Therefore, the proposed 12 issues were a logical result of the Yakut intellectual public activity. The Yakut delegation consisted of Sokolnikov, a doctor from Yakutsk, Sleptsov an ulus clerk, Nikiforov, and Governor Kraft arrived in St. Petersburg in February 1913. Striving to promote the development of industry, Nikiforov agreed with the St. Petersburg Society of Shipping on his speech with the report “On the fish resources of the Yakut region.” He spoke not only about fish but also about the enormous resources of the region: gold, silver, lead, coal, oil, salt, and

³¹⁴ Sergei Yasenovich, “Yakutskoe natsional’noe dvizhenie” [The Yakut National Movement] *Nasha Niva. Pershaia Belarускаia Gazeta z Rysunkami. Vykhodits' shto tydzhen' ruskimi i pol'skimi literami*, October 22, 1909.

³¹⁵ See the minutes of the congress, *Protokoly yakutskogo oblastnogo inorodcheskogo s"ezda, proiskhodivshogo v Yakutske s 15 avgusta po 2 sentiabria 1912 g.* [Minutes of the Yakut Regional Indigenous Congress, which Took Place in Yakutsk from August 15 to September 2, 1912.], ed. Vasilii Nikiforov (Yakutsk: Tipografia gazety Yakutskaya okraina, 1912).

furs.³¹⁶ He drew the attention of Russian trade and industry to the need to solve the transport problem of the region. As a result, the St. Petersburg Society of Shipping asked the Main Department of agriculture and land management to send instructors to the Yakut region to train local residents in new methods of fishing and conservation. Unfortunately for the Yakut *obshchestvo*, this was the only practical consequence of the deputation, the other questions were heard, but did not have any result.

The Great War that began in 1914 defined a new stage in the activity of the Yakut intelligentsia. Mobilization of the population, patriotic mood, and rejection of internal conflicts had to result in joint national activities.³¹⁷ However, the symbolic exclusion of the population of Asiatic Russia from the Empire led to the reinterpretation of the regional space by local actors. Despite the organization of collections and donations, participation in the activities of the Red Cross, there was no total unification of the population. On the contrary, the Great War as an important factor in the fragmentation and collapse of the Russian Empire played a role in the decolonization and regionalization of the state, ensuring the development of intraregional post-imperial projects.³¹⁸

Following the calls of Kulakovskii, a lawyer and a member of the Tomsk literary circle Ksenofontov, who was one of the first to hear the report of Potanin *The Regionalist Tendency in Siberia*,³¹⁹ published an article on the importance of education in the national language, the need for cultural fusion with the Russians, and the importance of creating a primer, “the cornerstone of the Yakut education.”³²⁰ United around the newspaper *Yakutskie Voprosy* formed in 1916, the intellectuals published articles about the benefits of rear works and

³¹⁶ Iraida Kliorina, *Vasilii Nikiforov: Sobytiia. Sud'by. Vospominaniia*, 227.

³¹⁷ Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I*, 27.

³¹⁸ See, Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Apocalypse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire*.

³¹⁹ Grigorii Potanin, *Oblastnisheskaia tendentsiia v Sibiri* [The Regionalist Tendency in Siberia] (Tomsk: Parovaya tipo-litografia Sibirskogo tovarischestva pechatnogo dela, 1907).

³²⁰ Gavriil Ksenofontov, “Nuzhna li Yakutam pis'mennost'?” [Do the Yakuts Need Writing?], *Yakutskaya okraina*, May 1, 1914.

irrationality of clashes with the local administration, and, according to Ksenofontov, “steadfastly, persistently, purposefully agitated and promoted the same ideas: representation in the Duma, the Zemstvo self-government, land use, and autonomy.”³²¹

The literary experience accumulated during the inter-revolutionary period – the appearance of the first play *Manchaary*, translations of *Marriage, Power and Darkness*, *Auditor*, Krylov’s fables – formed the basis of the cultural and educational potential of the Yakut nation. However, according to a linguist Semyon Novgorodov, this was not enough for the development of the written culture of the Yakuts. The intellectual began to actively develop the reform of the written Yakut language, which led to the publication in 1917 of the primer of *Sakhaaly Suruk-Bichik* based on the ‘ideal’ international phonetic system with implications of the Latin alphabet. According to the author, “part of the intelligentsia of the trans-Baikal Buryats is beginning to move to the Latin alphabet,” therefore, “in order to promote the Yakut literacy among the population, it is necessary to adopt this international, theoretically impeccable, practically and technically very convenient transcription system.”³²² The justification for such measures the Yakut intellectuals sought in the social activities of enlightened Russia and Europe, as “the printed word is the first need of all cultural peoples, that it served as a conductor of civilization, that it is the only platform from which only free and accessible to every word can be distributed.”³²³ The language reform as indeed a global phenomenon of the early twentieth century was not only a sign of polarization of scholars in their strive to modernize society but also a potential step towards independent cultural and national life that was also considered by Russian and non-Russian intellectuals.³²⁴

³²¹ Cited from, Al’bina Diachkova, *G.V. Ksenofontov: uchenyi i obchestvenno-politicheskii deyatel’* (Yakutsk: Izdatel’stvo Yakutskogo universiteta, 2000), 41.

³²² Semyon Novgorodov, “Delenie yakutskikh zvukov” [The Division of the Yakut Sounds], in *Saqalu: Suruk Bicik (Yakutskii bukvar’)*, eds. V.M. Ionov, S.A. Novgorodov (Yakutsk: Oblastnaya tipografia, 1917), 48.

³²³ Vasilii Nikoforov, “O znachenii pechatnogo slova” [On the Meaning of the Printed Word], *Yakutskie voprosy*, July 2, 1916.

³²⁴ Juliette Cadiot, “Russia Learns to Write: Slavistics, Politics, and the Struggle to Redefine Empire in the Early 20th Century,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 1 (2008): 164.

Despite the demands of the Yakut intellectuals to ensure the rights of national languages (especially Yakut) in the Northeast, Russian remained the main language of public debates, printing, and regional bureaucracy. Nevertheless, typical for most of the nationalist movements in the Russian Empire national language and its development was central to the Yakut intelligentsia. Language policy contributed to the development of the Yakut national culture. Due to the collection and recording of “verbal creativity of the people,” the study of its traditions, culture, and life, there was a formation of a system of future national life.³²⁵ However, national life, according to intellectuals, could not develop in the condition of social and cultural oppression, the idea of public organization, education, and independent activity circulated in the Yakut press, at ‘indigenous’ congresses, in theatrical productions, and literary works of the Yakut actors. The land issue as one of the crucial for the Yakuts was always at the center of the Yakut intellectuals’ activity. Decentralization of power in the Empire and the development of local self-government were the main slogans of the Yakut intelligentsia before the revolution, which was perceived by them as an opportunity to implement projects of post-imperial imagination.

1.5. Concluding Remarks

As I demonstrate in this chapter, before the post-imperial transformation in the Russian Empire, the Northeast was a dynamic, diverse region with certain claims to be the ‘land of the future’ for the Empire. However, as a land of exile, the Northeast was a transcultural region in which the people belonged to various social, political, and cultural groups. The Northeast was also an object of study of the Siberian regionalists and political exiles who turned to ethnography in order to transform their ‘self’.

³²⁵ Semyon Novgorodov, “Ob obrazovanii yakutov” [On the Yakut Education], *Yakutskie voprosy*, September 10, 1916.

All these characteristics of the region played a crucial role in the formation of the first generation of the Yakut intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century. They articulated many identifications accumulating knowledge given from the cooperation with imperial actors, Siberian regionalists, ethnographers, and exiles. The Yakut intelligentsia was not a homogeneous group of unified actors. In contrast, all of them had their own way of becoming intellectuals. However, the spread of the nationalist and socialist discourses, as well as the demand for the Zemstvo self-government, resulted from the imperial crisis led these people to be the Yakut intelligentsia. Through the mechanisms of publicity, the representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia not only involved the local population in modern socio-political practices but also imagined a potential post-imperial order in the Northeast.

Chapter 2. Between Two Empires: Revolutions, Civil War and Nation-Building in the Yakut Region

The imperial experience of the Russian Empire and the USSR as powerful polities with large territorial units, diverse populations, and multidimensional ideological visions has constituted an integral part of the global history of empires, colonialism, and nationalism.³²⁶ One of the most promising cases that integrate both imperial regimes is the history of imperial transformations³²⁷ that covers Russia's imperial crisis, the Great War, and revolutionary periods which placed diverse populations in a stateless context in between two empires. The kaleidoscope of revolutionary events between 1914 and 1922 displayed many imperial practices, which were consistently proceeded by the Bolsheviks during the formation of the Soviet Union.

Proposed by Jeremy Adelman, the analytical model of Imperial Revolutions³²⁸ was perfectly adapted to the Russian revolutionary environment by Ilya Gerasimov. He examined the Revolution of 1917 as a moment that had to restore “the original *imperial* project as a common social space” of diverse populations.³²⁹ In other words, political representatives of various regions of the former Russian Empire “decided not to stand for separation from Russia”³³⁰ after it collapsed. Although the stream of the Great Imperial Revolution resulted in

³²⁶ See, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference*; Valerie Kivelson, Ronald G. Suny, *Russia's Empires*; Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World*.

³²⁷ On the imperial transformations see following Routledge series edited by Alexander Semyonov and Ronald Grigor Suny, “Imperial Transformations – Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet History,” *Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group*, accessed October 21, 2018, <https://www.routledge.com/Imperial-Transformations-Russian-Soviet-and-Post-Soviet-History/book-series/IT>.

³²⁸ Jeremy Adelman, “An Age of Imperial Revolutions,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 2 (2008): 319-40.

³²⁹ According to Gerasimov, the central paradox of the Great Imperial Revolution of 1917 was that despite diverse constituencies attempted to reconceptualize the imperial space, they thought about this space in national terms, Ilya Gerasimov, “The Great Imperial Revolution,” 41.

³³⁰ Political, religious, national activists from the Steppe, Baikal, Yakut Volga regions, Turkestan, Siberia, and many others were active supporters of Russia's state borders preservation and geographic integrity, but with a change in its political structure. See, Tomohiko Uyama, “The Alash Orda's Relations with Siberia, the Urals, and Turkestan: The Kazakh National Movement and the Russian Imperial Legacy,” in *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts*, ed. Tomohiko Uyama (London: Routledge, 2012), 281; Charles Steinwedel, *Threads of Empire: Loyalty and Tsarist Authority in Bashkiria, 1552–1917*, 234-35; Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism and Nationalism in State and*

the loss of legitimacy of the tsarist regime, the imperial inhabitants were afraid of the Russian Empire's spatial usurpation by Russian nationalists or upper classes, because since 1917 they perceived it as equal social, national, and confessional spaces to be their own.³³¹

The logic of Russia's imperial revolution and its consequences was eventually rooted in a long-lasting crisis of the Russian Empire.³³² It, in turn, influenced the way of regional (Yakut) self-organization during the Great War as well as post-imperial trajectories of political development in the Northeast, Siberia, and Russia in general. The political and social transformations in Russia's Northeast were a continuation of the same processes in the imperial core. Global discursive trends and patterns such as nationalism, socialism, autonomism, even federalism directly reflected in the activity of the regional political representatives. In this chapter, I will study the transition of various ideas and their impact on the Yakut region's nationalization before the Revolution of 1917, trace the development of political imagination and social self-organization in the region, as well as examine the post-imperial projects on the Northeast's potential political orders.

2.1. Nationalizing the Northeast: Territory, Symbols, Languages of Self-Description, and the Yakut Political Imagination Before the Imperial Collapse

The crisis of the Russian Empire, above all, was marked by the awakening of the social awareness and political imagination among various national, social groups of the Empire. Multiple trends, ideas, thoughts, and projects were circulating across the imperial space during the late nineteenth century. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the periods in which nationalism played one of the crucial roles in the formation of global political and social

Autonomy Building, 71-73; Aleksandr Korobeinikov, "Yakutskaya avtonomiya: postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922," 95-96.

³³¹ Ilya Gerasimov, "The Great Imperial Revolution," 42-43.

³³² Stephen Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*, 9.

maps.³³³ Nationalism and the nation-building projects were a commonplace in the imperial relations: covering firstly the Western outskirts of the Russian Empire these projects had gradually affected the whole (even the Russian political core) imperial space.³³⁴ The development of modern political and philosophical thought in the early twentieth century influenced the formation of the visions and activities even of regional ‘indigenous’ intellectuals in Asiatic Russia who were previously marginalized local groups in the imperial power relations.³³⁵

The gradual history of the European Empires’ modernization during the long nineteenth century resulted in the imperial moment broke out on the eve of the Great War. The rise of the modern states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to a large extent referred to the imperial institutions. Indeed, urbanization, modern bureaucratic system, railroads’ construction, postal and telegraph systems, and many other imperial projects laid the groundwork for the modern (empire-)state-building.³³⁶ To illustrate, instead of indirect governing over many peripheries, a centralized rule based on the rationalized bureaucracy was established in the Russian imperial center.³³⁷ This policy meant the rising trend on nationalization of the empire as well as active mythologization of the peripheries’ past. Thus, for instance, by the mid-nineteenth century, the Tatar, Siberian, Crimean, Astrakhan diverse lands became widely imagined as an organic part of the Russian national territories.³³⁸ According to Alexei Miller, “this was the general trend of

³³³ Vera Tolz, “Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia,” 142-43.

³³⁴ Some nationalisms, including Ukrainian, borrowed samples from the nations of Central Europe, especially the Czechs and Poles, while Russian nationalism, for the most part, was looking for a sample in Western Europe, which is understandable because of the differences in their tasks. See, for instance, Alexei Miller, “The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation,” in *Nationalizing Empires*, 312-16; Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I*.

³³⁵ Ivan Sablin, Alexander Korobeynikov, “Buryat-Mongol and Alash Autonomous Movements before the Soviets, 1905-1917,” 214.

³³⁶ Alexei Miller, Stefan Berger, “Building Nations in and with Empires – A Reassessment,” in *Nationalizing Empires*, 8.

³³⁷ Marc Raeff, “The Well-Ordered Police State and the Development of Modernity in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Europe: An Attempt at a Comparative Approach,” *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 5 (1975): 1221-1243.

³³⁸ Ronald Grigor Suny and Valerie Kivelson *Russia’s Empires*, 177-181.

all modernizing empires.”³³⁹ On the other hand, the rise of Russian offensive nationalism led to defensive countermeasures among non-Russian populations resulted in increasing nationalization of many Siberian regions.³⁴⁰

The conceptual and analytical languages of politics and social sciences were considered to be a product of the empire- and nation-oriented nineteenth century. Thereby the political interests of the Russian Empire, both internally and externally, were articulated in the national terms.³⁴¹ Some historians have argued that although the Russian Empire was a dynastic-aristocratic, nationalizing and colonial state, it nevertheless identifies itself as *rossiiskaia imperia* (including all the territories and peoples in one large imperial compound) rather than ethnically *rusaskaia*.³⁴² However, the example of Nicholas II proves the opposite. In his diaries,³⁴³ the last Russian tsar never mentioned Russia as an empire preferring linguistically to use *ruskoe gosudarstvo* (Russian national state). Even in the sphere of his responsibilities, he identified himself neither an emperor, nor tsar, but *khoziain zemli russkoi* (the owner of the Russian land)³⁴⁴ that symbolically erased the powerful meaning of ‘empire’ for all its inhabitants. Thus, the lack of *imperial* power prompted Russian as well as non-Russian

³³⁹ Alexei Miller, “The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation,” in *Nationalizing Empires*, 322.

³⁴⁰ Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*, 46–49.

³⁴¹ See Ilya Gerasimov, Marina Mogilner, and Alexander Semyonov, “Russian Sociology in Imperial Context,” in *Sociology and Empire*, ed. George Steinmetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 53–82.

³⁴² Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire*; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*; Willard Sunderland, “The Ministry of Asiatic Russia: The Colonial Office That Never Was but Might Have Been,” *Slavic Review* 60, no. 1 (2010): 120–50. Stephen Smith, *Russia in Revolution: An Empire in Crisis, 1890 to 1928*, 15.

³⁴³ Sergei Mironenko ed. *Dnevnik Imperatora Nikolaia II (1894–1918)* [The Diaries of Emperor Nicholas II (1894–1918)]. Vol. 1: 1894–1904 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011); Sergei Mironenko ed., *Dnevnik Imperatora Nikolaia II (1894–1918)* [The Diaries of Emperor Nicholas II (1894–1918)]. Vol. 2: 1905–1918 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2013).

³⁴⁴ During the first Russian Imperial census of 1897 Nicholas II in the questionnaire column “occupation” wrote the famous words “the Owner of the Russian land.” More on his personality see, Boris Kolonitskii, “*Tragicheskaiia erotika*”: *Obrazy imperatorskoi sem'i v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* [“Tragic Erotica”: Images of the Imperial Family During the First World War] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010); Kirill Solov'ev, *Khoziain zemli russkoi? Samoderzhavie i biurokratiia v epokhu moderna* [The Owner of the Russian Land? Autocracy and Bureaucracy in the Modern Era] (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2017).

nationalists to imagine Russia's nearest future in "the only 'real' collective entities – nations (ethnoconfessional, political, or identified with a social class)." ³⁴⁵

Unlike some non-Russian Siberian regions, where the process of territorial nationalization was comparatively belated because of the peculiarities of the imperial situation, as I mentioned before, the yakutization of the Northeast began in the second half of the nineteenth century. ³⁴⁶ Severe climatic conditions, environmental distinctiveness, as well as isolated location, allowed the regional inhabitants to develop stable cultural practices. It, in turn, forced Russian 'colonial elements' to approach diverse native populations, which they usually called the Yakuts.

Another significant element of nationalization was paradoxically the Russian Imperial Census of 1897. ³⁴⁷ First, it imposed ascribed categories of identity on the people of the Yakut *oblast'* through both language and social-ethnic category (*inorodtsy*), and, second, spread the 'accurate' data on 82% ³⁴⁸ of the Yakut population circulated then by ethnographers, statisticians, through the regional press, notes of geographers, and hereby discussed among the Yakut intellectuals and other representatives of political life in the region. ³⁴⁹ Along with

³⁴⁵ Ilya Gerasimov, "The Great Imperial Revolution," 36.

³⁴⁶ Willard Sunderland, "Russians into Yakuts? 'Going Native' and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s-1914," 806-25.

³⁴⁷ On the first Russian Imperial Census see, David Darrow, "Census as a Technology of Empire" *Ab Imperio* 3, no. 4. (2003): 145-175; Juliette Cadiot, "Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire" *Russian Review* 64, no. 3 (2005): 440-455, Juliette Cadiot, *Laboratoriia imperii Rossiia/SSSR, 1860-1940* [Laboratory of Empire: Russia/the USSR, 1890-1940] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010).

³⁴⁸ According to the 1897 Census, the territory of the Yakut *oblast'* was mostly inhabited by the Yakut population (221 467 peoples out of 269 880 peoples in general. Based on the category of "native language" Russians (30 225) were on the second place, then the Tungus (11 647), Tatars (1 565), Chukchi (1 557) and Yukaghir (948). *Vseobshhaja perepis' naselenija 1897 g. Jakutskaja oblast'. Itogi pervoj vseobshhej perepisi naselenija* [National Census of 1897. The Yakut Region. Results of the First General Census of the Population] (Saint Petersburg: Izdanie central'nogo statisticheskogo komiteta Ministerstva Vnutrennih del, 1905), 14-16.

³⁴⁹ See, for example, Vasilii Nikiforov ed., *Zadachi zemstva v Jakutskoj oblasti. Doklad soveta Jakutskogo sel'sko-hozjajstvennogo obshhestva po voprosu o vvedenii zemstva v Jakutskoj oblasti* [The tasks of Zemstvo in the Yakutsk Region. Report of the Council of the Yakut Agricultural Society on the Introduction of Zemstvo in the Yakut Region] (Irkutsk: parovaja tipografija I.P. Kazanceva, 1905); Petr Golovachev, *Sibir': priroda, ljudi, zhizn'* [Siberia: Nature, Peoples, Life] (Moscow: Tipografija tovarishhestva I. D. Sytina, 1905); A.D. Dmitriev-Mamontov ed., *Putevoditel' po Velikoj Sibirskoj zheleznoj doroge. Ot S.-Peterburga do Vladivostoka. 1914.* [Guide to the great Siberian railway. From St. Petersburg to Vladivostok. 1914] (St. Petersburg: Tipografija I. Shuruht, 1914).

mapping, enumerating, naming and other markers of the modern state, census categories fixed naturally blurred distinctions of people's life, attributing them to a person from birth.³⁵⁰ These practices of ordering the modern empire became one of the practical tools of the Yakut homogeneity and 'national' self-identification that led to the fragmentation, de-colonization, and regionalization of the Russian Empire.

Native territory in the nationalists' imagination was one of the strongest symbolic markers that appealed to the people's 'minds and souls' turning imperial lands into the national ones.³⁵¹ In their written works and papers, the Yakut intellectuals frequently called the ordinary Yakuts for the defense of the 'motherland'. In addition to the many vital Yakut issues, in his famous *Letter to the Yakut Intelligentsia* of 1912 Kulakovskii was concerned about the weaning of the 'Yakut' lands by the Russian settlements who were potentially able to conquer and utterly destroy the Yakuts because of their miserable level of education and culture:

We used to think that everything in the world flows according to the prescribed order, that we were born, lived and died in *our homeland*, that it has been so for centuries and that it will continue so. We, in turn, are so childish-naively deceive ourselves with the idea that the ashes and *lands*, where our great-grandfathers lived and died, *belong to us* and that we will not give them to anyone. <...> Therefore, the Russian Treasury will inevitably take away from us already occupied lands under the plausible pretext of land norm's purpose in 15 tithes. All lands (mowing, arable land, pastures, forests) and water spaces will be divided between the Russians and the Yakuts in the same proportion and so that all per capita got 15 tithes; therefore, we will be taken away from our cultivated, planted land, instead of which they [the Russian government] will say that such and such Ivan or Peter is given so much forest from Khalyn-Kyra, so much water area from such a lake...³⁵²

Contrasting the interests of the Russian government with the natives' aspirations, Kulakovskii argued that despite the Yakut region was seen from the Empire's center as a "solid rock" or just "wild desert land", for the native Yakuts the land was the only way to survive,

³⁵⁰ See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 163-185; James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

³⁵¹ The prominent representative of ethnosymbolism in the nationalism studies Anthony Smith proposed to consider nation-formation through the detailed examination of art, symbols, memory, values, and myths that according to the author are inseparable and primordial parts of nations. One example is the territory as a national symbol, which emphasizes the location of the nation's sacred centers and places; the loss of the native land mobilizes ethnic identity and reinforces the desire for its return. See, Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 15; Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 14.

³⁵² Igor Vasil'ev ed., *Kulakovskii A.E. Yakutskoi intelligentsii (varianty pis'ma)* [Kulakovskii A.E. To the Yakut Intelligentsia (Variations of the Letter)] (Yakutsk: YaNTs SO RAN, 2000), 35.

because it provided with natural goods and spiritual energy for the Yakuts.³⁵³ In fact, these statements operated in two directions: first, as a critique of the Russian colonial rule in the Northeast (now the Yakut region, both administratively and nationally) and, second, as a (self)orientalization of the region and its people to demonstrate the intellectual potential of the intelligentsia to modernize the Yakut lands by their own work activities. According to Kulakovskii, only the Yakuts themselves were able to manage their future taking in the account that it would have been in close cooperation with educated, literate, generally enlighten Russian people, in which he excluded the Russian imperial government.³⁵⁴

The Yakut intellectuals considered the ideas of the Yakut motherland's defense and patriotism as direct tools for the peoples' unification. The elements of nationalism, socialism, enlightenment, scientific exploration, and preservation of "the Yakut historical values" began to play a crucial role in the Yakut intellectual activity. For instance, after studying at the Petrograd Imperial University,³⁵⁵ the Yakut linguist Semyon Novgorodov published in 1916 another letter to the Yakut intelligentsia, similar to the letter of Kulakovskii. He pioneered the idea of the Yakut nation that consisted accordingly of "the unity of the five elements – territory, tribe, language, which is reflected in the national culture, original religion and the state."³⁵⁶ The author called for the rationalization of life, pointed to the importance of science for "the Yakuts' own national self-determination and self-preservation," and advocated the comprehensive

³⁵³ Igor Vasil'ev ed., *Kulakovskii A.E. Yakutskoi intelligentsii (varianty pis'ma)*, 38-39.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁵⁵ Novgorodov studied at the Oriental faculty under the supervision of one of the pioneers in comparative-historical studies of Turkic languages and peoples Vasilii Radlov (Orientalist Vasilii Radlov defended the small peoples of the Russian Empire, calling for their development and progress. See, Vera Tolz, *Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia*, 137-138), consulted by a prominent Russian linguist, co-founder of phoneme theory Lev Scherba (On Lev Shcherba's sociology of language see, Mika Lähteenmäki, "The Role of 'Sociology' in Lev Shcherba's Conception of Language," *Slavica Helsingiensia* 35 (2008): 183-190.) and many other imperial scholars.

³⁵⁶ Semyon Novgorodov, "Osnovnye zadachi yakutskoi intelligentsii" [The Main Tasks of the Yakut Intelligentsia] *Yakutskie voprosy*, September 10, 1916, 3. Intentionally or not, Novgorodov proposed a truly modern definition of the Yakut nation-state, because for him a state is a natural part of the nation. Following the logic of the long nineteenth century, the 'revolutionary' concept of "nation" in the Russian context was inextricably linked with the requirement of the constitution for potential self-governmental polities or even nation-states. See, Alexei Miller, "Natsiia, Narod, Narodnost' in Russia in the 19th Century: Some Introductory Remarks to the History of Concepts," 379-390.

development of the foundations of homeland studies (*rodinovedenie*).³⁵⁷ The same tendency was observed with the native language as another distinctive national marker. Novgorodov frequently highlighted the fact that the source of the literature of every nation is a spoken word. From this point of view, he highly appreciated the rich folk heritage of the Yakut people, which “in its content and spirit resembled the works of Russian classics.”³⁵⁸

The growth of national activism went in some cases too far: some radical Yakut nationalists put forward the demand of “Yakutia for the Yakuts.” They formulated a binary opposition between ‘we’, the Yakuts and ‘they’, the Russians, which formed among the Yakuts a sense of community, proximity and, on the contrary, alienation, rejection and even hostility towards the Russians.³⁵⁹ The most extreme representatives of this nationalizing community created in 1910 the circle of *The Independent from Russians* which had a following separatist statement:

We, the Yakuts, must cling to Japan until the Russians had time to russify us. The Yakut secret nationalist circle decided to connect with Japan. We decided to constantly keep relations with Japan, secretly and openly.³⁶⁰

In this and other statements of the Yakut radical nationalists, Japan was considered as a potential leader of the Asian peoples. The nationalists seriously treated the possibility of a

³⁵⁷ Semyon Novgorodov, “Osnovnye zadachi yakutskoi intelligentsii”, 3. It is noteworthy that St. Petersburg then Petrograd was “theoretical center and principal place of origin” of *kraevedenie* (local or regional studies, close to *rodinovedenie*), which became a distinct social movement during the early years of the Soviet power. Uniting former imperial teachers, architects, academics and so on, it also turned in another example of post-imperial practices in the USSR. See, Emily D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: The Russian Idea of Kraevedenie* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Marina Loskutova, ““Nauka oblastnogo masshtaba”: ideia estestvennykh raionov v rossiiskoi geografii i istoki kraevedcheskogo dvizheniia 1920-kh gg.” [“Science of Regional Scale”: The Idea of Natural Areas in Russian Geography and the Origins of the Kraevedenie Movement of the 1920s.], *Ab Imperio* 12, no. 2 (2011): 83-121. On the national *kraevedenie* see, Ekaterina Melnikova, ““Sblizhalis narody kraia, predstavitelem kotorogo iavliaiua ia’: kraevedcheskoe dvizhenie 1920–1930-kh godov i sovetskaia natsionalnaia politika” [“The Peoples of the Region, of which I am a Representative, Came Closer”: The Kraevedenie Movement of the 1920s-1930s and the Soviet National Policy], *Ab Imperio* 13, no. 1 (2012): 209-240.

³⁵⁸ Semyon Novgorodov, “Osnovnye zadachi yakutskoi intelligentsia,” 4.

³⁵⁹ Nataliia D’iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional’noi istorii: sud’by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)* [The Yakut Intelligentsia in National History: Fates and Time (The End of the 19th century – 1917)] (Novosibirsk: “Nauka”, 2002), 109.

³⁶⁰ The Archive of the Yakut Research Center of Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science, *Collection 5, Inventory 11, File 34* “Vospominaniia uchastnika povstancheskoi organizatsii, primknuvshei k Iaponii vo vremia revoliutsii” [Memories of the Participant of the Rebel Organization that Joined Japan during the Revolution], 13.

Japanese protectorate as a geographically close country. They also attempted to prove the tribal as well as a racial kinship between the Yakuts and the Japanese by distributing of the newspaper illustrations related to the Russian-Japanese war, as a proof of the physical resemblance of two Asiatic populations.³⁶¹

Despite the gradual nationalization of the Yakut region, before the First World War, it remained a large part of the Russian Empire in both administrative legislation and intellectuals' understanding. Nevertheless, in their daily communications as well as in public speeches the representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia addressed to various cities as to 'Russia' in general in opposition to "our Yakutia":

Vasilii Nikiforov said that for his part he is ready to contribute to this [three-hundred-year anniversary of the Romanov dynasty in St. Petersburg] deputation by all means, both here on the spot and *in Russia*.³⁶² <...> I have been *to Russia* before and now. Because I know what costs will be on the road here *in Yakutia*, and what there – *in Russia*.³⁶³

The Russian Empire was perceived by the Yakut actors as a different space of the political power and sphere of opportunities, while St. Petersburg (Petrograd) was primarily seen as a

³⁶¹ Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaiia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 111. Pan-Asian discourse appeared in the Asiatic Russia shortly before the Russian-Japanese war caused by the Russian nationalists' ideology and racial prejudice regarding the 'Yellow' question on the East. See, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006). Such Japanese aspirations were also present in the views of representatives of the Kazakh intellectuals who considered Japan as an ideal combination of a modern economic model, Asian culture, and 'European' education. Paradoxically, neither the Yakut nationalists nor the Kazakh intellectuals discussed the colonial expansion of the Empire of Japan over the Chinese and Korean lands. See, Tomohiko Uyama, "Vospriiatie mezhdunarodnoi obstanovki nachala XX v. A. Bukeikhanom i ego sovremennikami" [The Perception of International Situation of the early 20th century by Alikhan Bukeikhan and his Contemporaries], in *Alash myraty zhane tauelsiz Qazaqstan: khalykaralyq zhylymi-praktikalыq konferentsiianyn materialdaryny zhinazy* eds. E. Karin, E. Sadikov (Astana: L.N.Gumilev atyndary EYU, 2011), 13-19.

³⁶² Vasilii Nikiforov ed., *Protokoly Yakutskogo Oblastnogo inorodcheskogo S"ezda, proiskhodivshego v gorode Yakutsk s 16 avgusta po 2 sentiabria 1912 goda* [Minutes of the Yakut Regional Indigenous Congress, which Took Place in the City Yakutsk from August 16 to September 2, 1912] (Yakutsk: Tipographia gazety "Yakutskaja okraina", 1912): 26. One of the main events in the Russian imperial scenarios of power were coronations and various anniversaries as integral parts of the mass politics. For the imperial court, it was a representation of "Russia's political essence merged together", see Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II (New Abridged One-Volume Paperback Edition)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 271-73. At the same time for the Yakut delegates, it was a possible legal way to represent the issues of the region directly to the ministers or Nicholas II himself. On the Yakut deputation see, Egor Antonov, "Yakutskaja deputaciya 1913 goda: vzaimodejstvie centra i provincii" [The Yakut Deputation of 1913: Interaction between the Center and the Province], *Yakutskii archiv* 34-35, no. 3-4 (2009): 19-22.

³⁶³ Vasilii Nikiforov ed., *Protokoly Yakutskogo Oblastnogo inorodcheskogo S"ezda, proiskhodivshego v gorode Yakutsk s 16 avgusta po 2 sentiabria 1912 goda*, 39.

political center of ‘the Russian nation-state’.³⁶⁴ At the same time, the Yakut region began to be widely popularized by the intellectuals as the remote, self-maintained, ethnically almost homogeneous territory that was symbolically excluded from the *real* political debates and decisions. However, due to the close contacts with the Siberian regionalists, it was also perceived by the Yakut intellectuals as a part of Siberia.³⁶⁵ Such a distinction between ‘Russians’ and ‘Siberians’/‘Yakuts’ was caused, from the one side, by the weakness of Russian settler colonialism, and from the other, by the shortcomings of the imperial geography of power placing the region as the Empire’s ‘second place’.³⁶⁶ The outbreak of the war only increased the marginalization of sentiments in Siberia and its regions, despite the widespread patriotic enthusiasm in the Russian Empire.

The Great War radically transformed the common perception of the imperial space across the globe. According to Ronald Suny, “the prewar years, and even more so the war years, were moments when reimagining maps was in the air.”³⁶⁷ It was a war of empires which redefined their potential roles and places in an unpredictable global world forcing all instruments of the imperial moment for potential post-war development. At the same time by the beginning of the Great War, the development of post-imperial political imagination of the regional, as well as many central actors of empires, came into a global arena. Such notions as anti-colonialism, nationalism, democracy, regionalism, self-determination, and autonomism

³⁶⁴ The only time when the Yakut intellectuals referred to empire was in the report of the Council of the Yakut Agricultural Society on the Introduction of Zemstvo in the Yakut region in which instead of the Russian Empire (*Rossiiskaia Imperia*) Nikoforov used “*Ruskaia Imperia* with St. Petersburg Chancelleries.” See, see Vasilii Nikiforov, ed. *Zadachi zemstva v Yakutskoi oblasti: doklad Yakutskogo sel'sko-khoziaistvennogo obshchestva po voprosu o vvedenii zemstva v Yakutskoi oblasti*, 5.

³⁶⁵ Symbolic link to Siberia and Siberian regionalists was maintained by the opening of the Potanin Educational Society supported by the new governor Roman von Witte in Yakutsk on May 3, 1916 – on the day of the eightieth birthday of Grigory Potanin. See the program of the Society, Roman von Witte ed., *Ustav potaninskogo prosvetitel'nogo obshchestva* [Charter of the Potanin Educational Society] (Yakutsk: Tipographia oblastnogo upravleniia, 1916), 1-4.

³⁶⁶ Anatolii Remnev, “Asiatic Russia: Colonization and ‘Russification’ in the Imperial Geography of the Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Asiatic Russia: Imperial Power in Regional and International Contexts*, 118-121.

³⁶⁷ Ronald G. Suny, “Bringing Empire Back,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, eds. Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov, Mark von Hagen (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2014), 1-5.

were widely circulating across the whole imperial space in various empires at the beginning of the twentieth century.³⁶⁸ It was the war that became the reason for a factual regionalization and decolonization of the Russian Empire. Sanborn explained the process of decolonization in terms of the interruption of the “imperial relationships,” no matter how strong the patterns of Russian domination were in a particular region.³⁶⁹ The war of decolonization, according to Sanborn, gave rise and opportunities for the ‘local moment’ or the ‘space of actions’, when regional actors attempted to build their own political or independent national institutions within the (former) Russian Empire.

Before the revolutionary events in Petrograd, there was a consolidation of non-Russian people in Asiatic Russia generally resulted from the imperial logic towards the ‘indigenous question’. For instance, the exemption of the Yakuts from military service that, according to Vasilii Nikiforov, happened because of “shortcoming of their cultural and civil enrichments,”³⁷⁰ became an important factor of the symbolic exclusion of ‘indigenous’ peoples from imperial relations.³⁷¹ As Charles Steinwedel argued, military service, along with the class position and the right to land was one of the factors of national self-identification and unification.³⁷² Inability

³⁶⁸ On the notion of global self-determination and anti-colonialism see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); the intellectual competition between Lenin’s and Wilson’s principle on self-determination during the first World War influenced the transformation of the post-imperial trajectory in the former Russian Empire. See Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past Nationalism, Revolution and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 20-23; Deborah Whitehall, “A Rival History of Self-Determination,” *European Journal of International Law* 27, no. 3 (2016): 719-734.

³⁶⁹ Joshua Sanborn, “War of Decolonization: The Russian Empire in the Great War,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, 53. Sanborn also introduced a three-step scheme of decolonization: phase 1, the imperial challenge stage; phase 2, the state failure stage; phase 3, a social disaster or collapse. To my mind, Sanborn’s first phase cannot be applied to the real decolonization due to the lack of response from the regional actors who were involved in the “challenge of the Empire.”

³⁷⁰ Vasilii Nikiforov, “Pis’mo v redaktsiiu” [The Letter to the Editors], *Yakutskaya okraina*, no. 27, 1915, 2.

³⁷¹ Yakut Governor Ivan Kraft on June 24, 1910, filed a petition for the involvement of ‘indigenous’ people of the Yakut region to military service. While he justified his proposal by the fact that the Yakuts, having been for several years in military service, “in more cultural areas and having learned the habit of living in human conditions, will be the best conductors of learned habits and knowledge among their relatives.” Thus, Kraft wanted to attach ‘indigenous’ peoples, Yakuts in particular, to a more civilized culture through military service, but his intentions remained unfulfilled. See more, Vasily Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voïn i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 131-33.

³⁷² Charles Steinwedel, “Tribe, Estate, Nationality? Changing Conceptions of Bashkir Particularity within the Tsar’s Empire,” *Ab Imperio* 3, no. 2 (2002): 271.

to serve the interests of the Empire reinforced the involvement of the Yakuts into the inner life of the region.

The Tsarist ‘command’ of June 25, 1915, to conduct rear works shocked the Yakuts. The Zemsky assessor of the third site of the Yakut district Solovyov on July 12, 1916, wrote to the district police officer:

Because of the surprise, this news has made them stunning impression that led to a substantial decline of the spirit. Despite all my explanations of the true situation of those who were called upon these sentiments remain the same: the same indifferent stupid and stubborn condition with a mixture of the Yakut incomprehensible bitterness. If these conditions are present, the possibility of the assumption of desertion will be quite acceptable.³⁷³

Mobilization of the Yakuts on rear works did not happen. It was *de jure* canceled by the government at the request of the Lena River goldmine partnership, which motivated its request by the fact of a potential reduction in gold production.³⁷⁴ However, *de facto* the Russian administration was afraid of an explosion of the imperial situation in the Northeast that might repeat the Central Asian revolt of 1916. The uncontrolled flow of nationalist rhetoric that “had been imbued in all publications and speeches”³⁷⁵ dramatically affected the unstable relations between internal colonizers and colonial elements in the Northeast.³⁷⁶ Russia’s imperial crisis reinforced by the First World War and then by the Russian Revolutions was, therefore, the period of global history when at the same time Russia’s *external* colonies intersected the *internal* ones, while the *imperial* moment was transformed into the *post-imperial* stateless condition.

Thus, due to the peculiarity of the imperial situation before the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Northeast was imagined by the Yakut intellectuals as the homogeneously Yakut

³⁷³ National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection* 145, *Inventory* 10, *File* 463 “Obrashchenie zemskogo zasedatelia 3-go uchastka Yakutskogo okruga Solov’eva k ispravniku Yakutskogo okruga ot 12 iul’ia 1916 goda” [The address of the Zemsky assessor of the 3rd site of the Yakut district Solovyov to the district police officer of the Yakut district of July 12, 1916], 90-91.

³⁷⁴ Vasily Fedorov, *Yakutiia v epokhu voim i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 225-227.

³⁷⁵ The Archive of the Yakut Research Center of Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science, *Collection* 5, *Inventory* 1, *File* 92 “Vospominania Nikolaia Afanas’eva” [The memories of Nikolai Afanas’ev], 29.

³⁷⁶ Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*; Jonathan D. Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years that Shook the World*, 173-175.

region within the Russian ‘nation-state’, not an empire. Due to the support of the Siberian regionalists and the lack of alternative political power (for example, the Social-Democrats, who at the time of the War had no serious influence due to the small number), the Yakut intellectuals positioned themselves as the only one real political power in the Northeast, who could lead the Yakut region to its post-imperial existence in potentially restored Russian *imperial* (federal) project. With some radical exceptions, the intellectuals used the nationalist rhetoric and symbolic language in order to unify the native population. The progressive explanatory politics, according to the intelligentsia, had to eventually lead to the growth of self-governmental and even autonomous understanding of the region among locals. To implement these post-imperial ambitions, they, as many other regional representatives, passionately ‘waited for the day’ that would transform the old political order by bringing the interests of diverse populations prior to the elitist ones.

2.2. “To Achieve a Full Principle of Self-Determination” – Discussions, Ideas, and Projects of the Yakut Autonomy

The February Revolution of 1917 as a period of political improvisations and experiments marked the introduction of new political environments which were shaped by the practices during the imperial crisis and the Great War.³⁷⁷ These environments included the issues of social and political order, economic reforms, sovereignty, and regional self-organization that overall represented a tectonic shift in the scope and scale of politics in post-imperial space.³⁷⁸ The military and food recession and the revolutionary events of February 1917 led to the accelerated development of the regional initiative, which resulted in the activation of social and national groups, political parties, and previously marginalized local

³⁷⁷ Peter Holquist, “What’s so Revolutionary about the Russian Revolution? State Practices and the New-Style Politics, 1914-21,” in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices*, 88.

³⁷⁸ Ilya Gerasimov, “The Great Imperial Revolution,” 24.

actors that testified to the heterogeneity in the imagination and the formation of political spaces. The problems of finding forms of government and state structures of the post-imperial order, as well as the uncertainties in the legal status of the regions in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state, resulted in the formation of several independent political projects.³⁷⁹ The Revolution nourished anti-colonial nationalist sentiments in Finland, Poland, in the former Western borderlands, Siberia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Volga region, and other regions of the former Russian Empire.

In the case of Siberia, since the First Russian Revolution, one of the main demands of the Siberian regionalists was to establish a regional parliament, the Siberian Regional Duma, to ensure the autonomous status of Siberia from the center. Siberian autonomy was also supposed to include various non-Russian Siberian regions³⁸⁰ which, according to the regionalist Ivan Serebrennikov, were incorporated in Siberian space due to “the printed word, because under the terms of the old time, they could not have a different way.”³⁸¹ According to Alexander Semyonov and Jeremy Smith, “for the Siberian autonomists, autonomy was largely a practical response to the size and diversity of the empire; while for representatives of smaller nationalities, autonomy was an existential matter, necessary as the only guarantor of the survival of languages and cultures.”³⁸² That is why the Yakut national intellectuals perceived the February Revolution to some extent as a way to implement the fundamental civil rights, freedom, national equality, regional self-government, and social justice, which led to the growth of public activity in Yakutsk.

³⁷⁹ Alexander Semyonov and Jeremy Smith, “Nationalism and Empire before and after 1917,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 17, no. 3 (2017): 371; Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism, and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*, 67-68.

³⁸⁰ Nikolai Yadrintsev, *Sibir’ kak koloniia*, 158-73; Grigorii Potanin, “Nuzhdy Sibiri,” 93-100, 107-16.

³⁸¹ Ivan Serebrennikov, *Inorodcheskii vopros v Sibiri* [The Indigenous Question in Siberia] (Irkutsk: Avtonomnaya Sibir’, 1917), 4.

³⁸² Alexander Semyonov and Jeremy Smith, “Nationalism and Empire before and after 1917,” 372.

An extended period of colonial oppression and the expectation of changes resulted in lively discussions and statements on the potential Russian political structures. The *Yakut Committee of Public Safety* (the YAKOB), which became the leading platform for debates on potential social and political life in the Yakut region, was created after a meeting of Yakutsk's citizens on March 4, 1917. At this meeting, a Provisional Executive Committee of the YAKOB was formed; it included the Bolsheviks Petrovskii, Yaroslavskii, and Oyunskii; the Mensheviks Ohnyanskii, Oleynikov, and Akulovskii; the SRs Pivovarov, Solov'ev, and Blankov; and other independent members.³⁸³ According to the Resolution of Executive Bureau of the YAKOB, the composition of the Committee of Public Safety was to consist of

representatives of revolutionary political parties, who have taken over the initiative in the organization of the new Russia and who have sided with the people, the army, the political exiles, who have rendered every assistance to the revolutionary movement, all workers unions, cooperative and cultural and educational public organizations, and the organizing social elements, who have strongly joined and give decisive support to them. The Committee considers unacceptable the representation of such persons, institutions and societies, which have caused all kinds of obstacles to the creation of *a new order* and which are unable to submit to the current sincere and consistent measures to strengthen the democratic system. As for the representation of all citizens of Yakutsk and the representation of free assemblies of national groups, such rights of the people or a separate territorially and nationally related parts are strictly observed.³⁸⁴

As a former deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Empire, Petrovskii was elected Chairman of the Committee, and Ammosov was appointed the secretary of the YAKOB. One of the subdivisions of the YAKOB was the *Peasant-Indigenous Commission* headed by the Yakut intellectuals Ksenofontov, Nikiforov, Novgorodov, and Shirokhih.³⁸⁵ In addition to the socio-economic, cultural and educational activities,³⁸⁶ the Commission's tasks included the organization of the First Congress of Yakut and Russian peasants, which was held on March 26, 1917.

³⁸³ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutia v epokhu voim i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 319.

³⁸⁴ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 3* "Rezoliutsiia Ispolnitel'nogo biuro YAKOB ob osnovakh predstavitel'stva delegatov v YAKOB, 6 marta 1917 goda" [The Resolution of the Executive Bureau of the YAKOB on the basis of representation of delegates in the YAKOB, March 6, 1917], 3.

³⁸⁵ Al'bina D'yachkova, G.V. *Ksenofontov: uchenyi i obshchestvenno-politicheskii deyatel'*, 51.

³⁸⁶ The Commission adopted a special resolution on the introduction of universal primary education in the Yakut language in the Yakut region, and also regulated the printing of the primer edited by Ionov. See, *Yakutiia. Khronika. Fakty Sobytiia. 1632-1990* [Yakutia. Chronicle. The Facts of The Event. 1632-1990] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2012), 265.

The population of Yakutsk was well informed about the events in Petrograd and other centers of the former Empire through the newspaper *Bulletin of the Yakut Committee of Public Safety*. On 6 March, the Bulletin of the YAKOB published an appeal by Petrovskii to the Minister of Justice Kerensky, stating that “the YAKOB was appealing to the new government to formally recognize the Committee of Public Safety.”³⁸⁷ The representative of the Yakut intellectuals Novgorodov emphasized the necessity of the “upcoming preaching of the high doctrine of socialism” and the establishment of “the state system based on the broadest democratic foundation, providing distinctive prosperity of tribes and nationalities living in vast Russia.”³⁸⁸ The Yakut intellectual drew attention to the transformation of the status of the Yakuts from “the indigenous people” to “the full citizens of the Russian state” with their own national characteristics. Ksenofontov also stressed that the Yakuts, like other national groups, freed themselves from the “national oppression”, standing on the same civil level of renewed Russia.³⁸⁹ The socialist sentiment was very powerful in the region due to the presence of the exiled SRs in the Northeast, as well as due to the general popularity of socialists in Siberia because of their projects of federalist reconstruction of Russia.³⁹⁰

The same rhetoric of the old oppression was presented in the Social-Democrat (the Bolshevik) periodic press. The author of the article “Party Comrades, and You All Citizens!” published in *Social-Democrat* declared the birth of moment of something “new, free, great!” igniting the flame of socialism in Yakutia and new Russia.³⁹¹ Warmly welcoming the

³⁸⁷ *Vestnik Ispolnitel'nogo Komiteta Obschestvennoi Bezopasnosti goroda Yakutska*, March 6, 1917.

³⁸⁸ Semyon Novgorodov, “10 Marta v yakutskov soznanii” [March 10, in the Yakut consciousness], *Vestnik Ispolnitel'nogo Komiteta Obschestvennoi Bezopasnosti goroda Yakutska*, March 12, 1917.

³⁸⁹ Ksenofontov Gavriil, “K voprosu o yakutskom upravlenii” [To the Question on the Yakut Governance], *Vestnik Ispolnitel'nogo Komiteta Obschestvennoi Bezopasnosti goroda Yakutska*, April 22, 1917. The same democratic and socialist political statements circulated around post-imperial Siberian space, being a center for aspiration among Russian and non-Russian intellectuals.

³⁹⁰ See, David Rainbow, “Siberian Patriots: Participatory Autocracy and the Cohesion of the Russian Imperial State, 1858-1920” (PhD diss., New York: New York University, 2013), 334-36; see also Norman G. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 29-49.

³⁹¹ “Partiinym tovarishcham i vsem vam, grazhdanam!” [Party comrades, and to you all, citizens!], *Socialdemokrat*, March 18, 1917. In fact, for the Bolsheviks it was extremely important to articulate an idea of national equality due to their own diverse imperial background. Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Revolution, Petrovskii called the newspaper “not to get neither military nor national chauvinism: the slogan of revolutionary socialism should be – through the European revolution to a democratic Republic, to peace, and socialism.”³⁹² The Social-Democrats also actively campaigned members of the Yakut community to join this party: “The oppressed classes – proletariat and peasants, – oppressed nations – the Yakuts, Buryats, Tatars and so on – powerless estates, limited in rights and subordinate to the exceptional laws of the outskirts – all these groups will find the protection of their democratic rights in the Social Democratic party.”³⁹³

In general, the Yakut Bolsheviks had no a clear project of regional post-imperial transformation right after “the Great Russian Revolution,”³⁹⁴ and followed to the central course of the Bolsheviks on “the full equality of all citizens regardless of gender, religion, race or nationality” and unification of (the Yakut) workers, soldiers, and peasants as a revolutionary vanguard of socialist revolution. However, the future first Secretary of the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of RCP(b) Ordzhonikidze contradicted Lenin’s April Theses and the decisions of The April conference of the RSDLP(b) on the attitude to the Provisional Government. He warmly welcomed the admission of the socialists in the Provisional Government and recognized that “the new government should be treated with trust, as it furthers the revolution.”³⁹⁵ Seeing the results of the intellectuals’ activity, the Bolsheviks decided to adopt the same rhetoric of self-government, applying it not to the Yakut nation exclusively, but to all citizens “who have reached 20 years, whether it is male or female, rich or poor, Russian,

³⁹² Grigory Petrovsky, “Moya radost’ i moe zhelanie” [My Joy and My Desire], *Socialdemokrat*, March 18, 1917.

³⁹³ “Nasha programma i yakuty” [Our Program and the Yakuts], *Socialdemokrat*, May 21, 1917.

³⁹⁴ Before the October 1917 in the Yakut Social-Democrat’s newspapers circulated this name of the February Revolution.

³⁹⁵ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 1* “Protokoly zasedanii YAKOB ob ustanovlenii vozrastnogo tsenza dlia vyborov v KOB, o vyborakh predsedatelei YAKOB, delegata ot Yakutskoi oblasti na Vsesibirskii s"ezd, 8 marta – 10 oktiabria 1917 goda” [Minutes of meetings of the YAKOB on the establishment of the age limit for elections to the KOB, the election of the chairmen of the YKOB, a delegate from the Yakut region to the all-Siberian Congress, March 8 – October 10, 1917], 71.

Yakut, the Jew or the Tungus, the cattleman or the farmer.”³⁹⁶ To achieve these goals, the Bolsheviks offered a wider political representation of Social-Democrats in the Constituent Assembly.

During the first months after the Revolution, the YAKOB was a space for discussions on various topics of the Yakut self-government. For instance, Nikoforov discussed the issues on the Financial Commission which should have the following self-governmental duties: “a) control over the regularity of the use of administrative persons and institutions in the field of loans granted to them; b) the decision on all costs not included in the estimated assumptions; c) the provision of information to the Commission on the excess and use of loans of one authority or institution at the expense of another authority or institution; d) general information on the estimated assumptions of authorities and institutions of the region.”³⁹⁷ Another decision concerned the autonomy of the Yakut doctors’ office as part of the internal self-government of Yakut corporations.³⁹⁸ Although unlike the Baikal and Central Asian regions the religious question that was not so decisive in the Northeast, it was closely connected with the autonomy of school. Ordzhonikidze declared that “the school, which is in the hands of the clergy, is a powerful weapon in the fight against light, science, society”³⁹⁹ and proposed to accelerate the separation of church and state. This decision caused the approval of all participants of the YAKOB. Nevertheless, reports on the introduction of Zemstvo in the Yakut region began to actively debate only by the middle of the spring of 1917.

In order to strengthen political control in the Northeast, the Yakut national intellectuals decided to unite in one political institution called *The Union of Freedom*. This name, firstly, referred to *the Union of the Yakuts* of 1906, and secondly, emphasized its revolutionary

³⁹⁶ “Nasha programma i yakuty”.

³⁹⁷ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 7* “Kopii i chernoviki protokolov zasedanii YAKOB o rabote komissii YAKOB, 25 aprelia – 4 maia 1917 goda” [Copies and drafts of the minutes of the YAKOB meetings on the work of the YAKOB commissions, April 25 – May 4, 1917], 18.

³⁹⁸ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 1*, 9.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

character.⁴⁰⁰ The purpose of the Union repeated the requirements of the Yakut intelligentsia: the organization of the Zemstvo self-government in the Yakut region.⁴⁰¹ The Zemstvo self-government institutions were considered as the future institutions of the Yakut autonomy.

The program of the Union was not preserved in the original but was published not in full in the newspaper *Free Siberia*. In the very first paragraph, the authors of the program, referring to the ideas of Kulakovskii, set the task to ensure the preservation of “our tribe” from the invasion of a “strong nation” by “raising the spiritual and material well-being.”⁴⁰² In matters of state-building, the Union of Freedom considered “its immediate task the federal autonomy of Siberia.” The Yakut region, according to the project of the Union members, in this autonomy should represent “a separate Zemstvo self-governing unit built on the broadest democratic principles.”⁴⁰³ The author of newspaper article under the pseudonym ‘Sakha’ attributed to the organizers of the Union the idea that “if we, the Yakuts, will successfully pass through the first school of our political development and will honorably hold the Zemstvo self-government, it will be possible in the future to strive for the ideal of full autonomy.”⁴⁰⁴ In the field of culture, the authors of the program put the printing (*pechat*) and “general national education” in the first place, considering that the main condition for their implementation was the teaching of subjects in the mother tongue of students. Like Novgorodov, the authors considered the importance of *Rodinovedenie* (homeland studies), by which they understood “a comprehensive study of the historical and modern conditions of life, nature, and culture of the *ulus*, as well as the awakening of the population love for their native places and the desire to bring them all

⁴⁰⁰ See, Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Yakutskaya avtonomiya: postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922,” 97-100.

⁴⁰¹ “Yakutskaya hronika” [The Yakut Chronicle], *Vestnik Iсполnitel'nogo Komiteta Obschestvennoi Bezopasnosti goroda Yakutsk*, April 22, 1917.

⁴⁰² Sakha, “Sredi Yakutov (ob obschestvennom dvizhenii sredi yakutskogo naselenia posle perevorota 1917 g.” [Among the Yakuts: On the Public Movement among the Yakut population after the Coup of 1917], *Vol'naya Sibir*, April 7, 1918.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

possible benefits.”⁴⁰⁵ Thus, the Yakut leaders reproduced the pre-revolutionary autonomist program, including the Yakut region in an ample all-Siberian political space.

The representatives of the Union of Freedom proposed the project of the Yakut self-government for consideration in the YAKOB. Sergei Shirokhih declared that on August 12, 1917, the Tomsk Siberian Congress discussed the issue on Siberian autonomy and that the YAKOB needed to consider the same issue applied to the Yakut region. The Yakut intellectual suggested to develop the idea of federation, not autonomy for Siberia and the Yakut region due to the following reasons:

...the remoteness of Siberia from the Central Administration at its vast land area, located as on another continent, under its climatic conditions utterly different from the rest of the Russian Empire created such a situation that Siberia was seen as a colony, and then as a place of exile of people. This situation, with the low level of the industry, has determined Siberia in such conditions that, with the means of communication that it has, it not only did not develop industry but also wholly killed any independence of the initiative, under the existing system, in which every originality has always been suppressed. There was no serfdom and large landowners in Siberia, and, according to calculations, the occupied land area of the earth is one twenty-fourth percent of the total area of Siberia. <...> Only Siberia can resolve such issues as the settlement of Siberia, and not the Central Government remote for tens of thousands of miles. With the backwardness of Siberia in terms of productivity, the plunder of all its wealth in one way or another, it can become at the proper height of the productivity of culture, when it is allowed to develop its legislative provisions and have its own budget and self-determination. <...> These features of Siberia were reflected in the Siberian thinkers. Since the time of Yadrintsev, the question of isolation, inequality, and exploitation of Siberian natural resources was widely discussed, and the way out of this situation, according to the proposals of the Siberian intelligentsia and publicists, was the creation of the Siberian regionalism. The idea of Siberian regionalism could not be suppressed, it should be connected with Siberian Federation, territorial autonomy, regional Zemstvo self-government, and a large budget.⁴⁰⁶

The speech caused a lively discussion about the federal structure of Siberia and the possibility of self-government or autonomy for the Yakut region. The representatives of the SRs unanimously agreed with Shirokhih arguing that Russia never understood the needs of Siberians and that a colonial status could lead Siberia to a solution in a federative political organization as it was in North America. However, the representative of the Social-Democrats Oleynikov doubted that Siberia could find enough financial resources to maintain itself. He also added if because of “selfish interests,” Siberia would become independent, weakened after the war,

⁴⁰⁵ Sakha, “Sredi Yakutov (ob obshchestvennom dvizhenii sredi yakutskogo naselenia posle perevorota 1917 g.”

⁴⁰⁶ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 1*, 100.

Russia lose its status as a great united power.⁴⁰⁷ The discussion was concluded by Ksenofontov who pointed that “a federation is a developed self-government, which first of all wants to implement the Provisional Government, and the objection to it is an objection to the covenants of the great renewed Russia.”⁴⁰⁸ He also stressed the importance of national self-determination of Siberian minorities and the need to establish Zemstvo in the region to reinforce revolutionary transitions in the Northeast. Even though this discussion did not have tangible results, it revealed various ideas from different political unions on the question of post-imperial order that during the time of the Russian Empire was impossible in the Northeast.

Political destabilization in Petrograd in the summer of 1917 led to the reorganization of power in the Yakut region.⁴⁰⁹ Based on The Union of Freedom, a political party of the Yakut national intellectuals *The Yakut Labour Union of Federalists* was created during the Second Congress of Yakut and Russian peasants on June 25, 1917. Uniting the ideas of the Siberian regionalists, national identity, and social equality, the program of the party drew the potential post-imperial Russia as a parliamentary republic headed by an elected president. Representation in Parliament, according to the program, was based on an equitable extension of the selected population through the direct, secret, and equal vote of the deputies, without distinction of sex, age, and nationality.⁴¹⁰ The Yakut intellectuals declared a type of the regional territorial separation on the principle of “cultural-historical, national, and economic” existence, which was given a right of self-government and control of internal affairs. The program also considered the opportunity of the oppressed tribes and nations in acquirement of national rights to a “complete cultural self-determination, the use of native language in public life and public

⁴⁰⁷ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 1*, 102.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁰⁹ See more, James Forsyth, *A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia's North Asian Colony, 1581-1990*, 253-259.

⁴¹⁰ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 115* “Programma i vozzvanie Yakutskogo trudovogo soiuza federalistov, 1917 god” [Program and Appeal of the Yakut Labor Union of Federalists, 1917], 1-2.

law institutions, the opening of national schools, unions, institutions aimed at the preservation and development of native language, literature, culture and identity of each nation.”⁴¹¹

As in the case of the Alash party,⁴¹² the Federalists prepared a report-appeal *To All Citizens of Yakutia* for a public explanation of the program, tasks of the party and nomination of the Yakut representatives to the Constituent Assembly:

The interests of the nation require that we have sent to the Constituent Assembly, the men who would firmly stand for the people, for their blood needs. We must entrust our destiny to non-random people and cast our votes. Our representatives can only be those whom we indeed trust, know well and who fully know us and the conditions of our life in the remote, cold and harsh borderland.⁴¹³

Ksenofontov and Nikoforov were chosen as candidates-representatives for both the YAKOB and the elections to the Constituent Assembly.⁴¹⁴ Later the Yakut intellectuals created the National Committee for the coordination of all institutions of the intelligentsia including cultural society *Sakha Aimah*, the Yakut Labour Union of Federalists, and the newspaper *The Yakut Voice*.

This episode with the Yakut Labour Union of Federalists’ creation reflected in the periodic press of the Social-Democrats who accused the national intelligentsia of “deviation from revolutionary ideals.” The Social-Democrats argued that Federalists used the Revolution for their aims to seize political control over the whole territory of the Northeast. Besides, they critically observed recent newspapers of the intellectuals emphasizing the fact that Federalists wanted to imitate the Yakut *toyons* and rob the locals. According to them, “the Union of Yakut Federalists is a result of economically powerful, oppressive elites of the Yakut people,”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹¹ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 115, 2*; see also, “Ot redakcii” [From the Editors], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

⁴¹² The program of the Alash party indicated the need to declare publicly the ideas of the Kazakh intellectuals. Ahmet Baitursynov and Mirdzhakip Dulatov wrote an appeal to the people of the Steppe Region, see N. Martynenko, ed., *Alash-Orda: Sbornik Dokumentov* [Alash-Orda: A Collection of the Documents] (Alma-Ata: Maloe izdatel'stvo ‘Aikap’, 1992), 65.

⁴¹³ “Ot redaktsii” [From the Editors], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

⁴¹⁴ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 72* “Postanovlenie sobranii yakutskogo trudovogo soiuza federalistov o delegirovanii svoikh chlenov v YAKOB, 1 maia – 2 avgusta 1917 goda” [The Resolution of the Meetings of the Yakut Labor Union of Federalists on the Delegation of its Members to the YAKOB, May 1 – August 2, 1917], 3.

⁴¹⁵ “Pod maskoi ‘trudovikov’” [Under the Mask of ‘Labourers’], *Socialdemokrat*, November 2, 1917.

which could lead to the total devastation of the Yakut region. That is why the Social-Democrats called the Yakuts to join the Social-Democratic party to overcome all possible social and political catastrophes in the region.

At the Congress of the Yakut deputies on September 13, 1917, Ksenofontov thanked the Yakut Labour Union of Federalists for the opportunity to be elected for the Constituent Assembly and then declared the tasks of the Yakuts in the transformed social and political conditions:

You all hear and well know the general meaning of the Revolution: it destroyed fetters that bound the hands and feet of the Russian people, it liberated the will of the great people, hundreds of years captured by autocratic tsarism, and returned to its original source, that is themselves. Now in the coming days, this creative thought and the will of the people, its unwavering desire to organize a new bright and free life, will be fully reflected in the decisions of the Constituent Assembly. The great Russian revolution brings with it the creative work and will of our little people. Also, we, the Yakuts, as an equal particle of the Russian people, have two seats in the Constituent Assembly. So, dear citizens, if the will of all the Yakut people will follow the path outlined by You, if the people please to call my name in the upcoming elections, I will consider it my sacred and indispensable duty to serve You with my last strength.⁴¹⁶

The Central Committee of the Yakut Labor Union of Federalists also appealed to the residents of the Yakut region, pointing to the role of Russians who proclaimed equality, freedom, and brotherhood of all tribes and nations living in Russia. Calling for unification mainly to the Yakuts, “the Yakut Union does not aim at narrow national isolation, on the contrary, cultural reunification with the great fraternal Russian people and the assimilation of the principles of democracy proclaimed by them are the only way to the revival of the Yakut nation.”⁴¹⁷ Unlike the SRs or the Social-Democrats, the Federalists paid much attention to the Yakut nation to strengthen support from the Yakuts taking advantage of their national activity before the Revolution. Although the Yakut intellectuals always underlined the ‘international’ character of their political activity, the question of the small peoples of the Northeast was not evident in the Federalists’ program.

⁴¹⁶ “Obrashchenie G.V. Ksenafontova k yakutam” [The Appeal of G.V. Ksenofontov to the Yakuts], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

⁴¹⁷ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 72, 3*.

The claims of ‘indigenous’ people on political representation in Siberia was taken into consideration by the regionalists, and three delegates from the Yakut region were the representatives in the First regional Congress in Tomsk, held from 8 to 17 October 1917. The Congress defined the state status of Siberia as a federal entity within Russia with a representative Legislative Duma and proclaimed the executive body, the Siberian Regional Council headed by Potanin.⁴¹⁸ In the case of provincial autonomy, the regionalist adhered to the following principle concerning ‘indigenous’ people:

...if a nationality strengthened its national consciousness, if it had consciousness of a community of the interests, and there are cultural forces capable of organizing management of local needs and benefits of ‘indigenous’ people, then there is no need to interfere with self-determination of this nationality, it is possible to grant to such nationalities the right of provincial autonomy.⁴¹⁹

The Yakut intellectuals, Novgorodov and Sabunayev, agreed the adopted measures, highlighting the relationship of the Yakut region with Siberian polity. Nevertheless, the main task of the Yakut intelligentsia was to be elected on the Constituent Assembly that, according to the intellectuals, could legally grant the rights of the Yakuts to be an equal part in the new political order.⁴²⁰

The October events in Petrograd transformed dramatically the aspirations of the Yakut intellectuals as well as political disposition in the Yakut region. The Federalists sharply condemned the forcible seizure of power and the *coup*, publishing articles about the inevitability of the election of the Constituent Assembly. They highlighted the inability of the Yakuts to interact with representatives of the Social-Democrats, “ignoring the interests of the working agricultural population and the democratic intelligentsia, the party is above all the

⁴¹⁸ *Pervyi Sibirskii oblastnoi s'ezd 8-17 oktiabria 1917 goda v gorode Tomske. Postanovleniia s'ezda* [The First Siberian Regional Congress on October 8-17, 1917 in Tomsk. Resolutions of the Congress] (Tomsk: Gubernskaya tipografia, 1917), 2-3.

⁴¹⁹ Ivan Serebrennikov, *Inorodcheskii vopros v Sibiri*, 12.

⁴²⁰ Elections to the Constituent Assembly were held within three days (12-14 November), and their first results were published in the newspaper of the Kadets *People's Freedom* on 20 November 1917. According to these results, the votes were distributed as follows: M. T. Popov (the Menshevik) – 7,2%; D. A. Kochnev (the Kadet) – 17,9%; V. S. Pankratov (the SR) – 32,2%; G. V. Ksenofontov (the Federalist) – 42,7%. By a majority votes, the deputies to the Constituent Assembly were elected Ksenofontov and Pankratov. “Itogi vyborov v Ychreditel'noe Sobranie” [The Results of the Election to the Constituent Assembly], *Narodnaya volya*, November 20, 1917.

interests of the only one proletariat, representing negligible in comparison with the entire population of the state, a handful of people, thus suggesting to workers that they can lead the state construction without education, without knowledge, and any political experience.”⁴²¹ In contrast, the Yakut national intellectuals perceived the interaction with the Russian people and the development of public institutions as the essential task of political activities in the Yakut region.⁴²² The Federalists noted the importance of interethnic interaction with the oppressed former ‘marginal’ national groups; they paid particular attention to the issues of post-imperial governance in the Buryat-Mongol environment.⁴²³

As practical methods of achieving their goals in the region, the intellectuals considered the Yakut populism (*Yakutskoe narodnichestvo*), the analog of Russian populism, which ideals were transferred into the Northeast through political exiles. A practical example of public initiative, social and cultural activities was necessary for the involvement of the “dark mass of the Yakuts” in the new conditions. According to the intellectuals, the Zemstvo institutions were necessary as a school in which “the Yakut spirit will be hardened and where both the new local figures and public feeling will emerge. This forthcoming activity must be inspired by the idea of the *common good and justice*.”⁴²⁴ The organization of social forces of the Yakut people was

⁴²¹ “K vyboram v Uchreditel'noe Sobranie” [To the Election to the Constituent Assembly], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

⁴²² “Ot redakcii” [From the Editors], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

⁴²³ The Intellectuals drew attention to the matters of concern to them, in particular, the legal case: “the Buryats and the Kazakh-Kirghiz have made the right to introduce *aimak*, *hoshun*, and rural municipal national courts, the proceedings will be in the local language. In anticipation of this important act, we need to prepare for printing translations into the Yakut language of various new circulars, laws and old provisions on the structure of the life of indigenous people, then it will not be so difficult for us to move to a life built on new legal principles.” See, Semyon Novgorodov, “Yakutskaya gramota i yazyk v kachestve neobyazatel'nyh predmetov v programme vyshih uchlisch Yakutskoi oblasti” [The Yakut Literacy and Language as Optional Subjects in the Program of Higher Schools of the Yakut Region], in *Pervye shagi yakutskoi pis'mennosti: stat'i i pis'ma*, ed. E.I. Korkina (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 56.

⁴²⁴ Budget, education, medicine and health, the development and improvement of agriculture and transport, concerns about local crafts, food, population, the issues of agriculture and so on were the main potential issues of the Zemstvos in the Yakutsk region. Their solution, in the opinion of the Federalists, dependent on the requirements of the Yakut life and money, the collection of which was made on the basis of the *rational principle of taxation*. “O zemstve” [On the Zemstvo], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

thus the main task of the Yakut intelligentsia, and the development of social life and the achievement of universal ideals were the main goals.⁴²⁵

As a result, the regional Zemstvo Council was formed in January 1918 at the First Extraordinary Yakut regional Zemstvo Assembly. It established commissions on the road, medical, postal affairs, public education, budget, and agriculture. Nikiforov was elected Chairman of the Council. The territorial network covered all five Yakut counties, including *ulus*, city, and district territorial units (County-level cities had their own Zemstvos). The implementation of the Zemstvo system turned the Federalists in the eyes of the general population from educators and activists into representatives of the authorities.

However, the unstable political situation and the vast distances hindered the development of new Zemstvo institutions. An unsuccessful attempt of the Bolsheviks to seize political control in the Northeast in the mid-November helped to redevelop regional power – the Yakut Bolsheviks were expelled from the *oblast'* until the end of 1919. During the Civil War in Russia, the Yakut region was almost peacefully existed based on the self-governmental (semi)autonomous principles. Public experience and local knowledge allowed the Yakut national intellectuals to establish the Zemstvo institutions that they imagined as the first step toward autonomy. Thus, as a variant of post-imperial order intellectuals proposed the decentralization, federalization, autonomy for the former Russian Empire, and broader regional political representation in the future all-Russian democratic parliament. Imperial legacy, according to the Yakut intellectuals, was supposed to be divided according to the principles of social equality and justice.

⁴²⁵ “Ot redakcii” [From the Editors], *Yakutskii golos*, November 7, 1917.

2.3. Civil War in Siberia and the End of National Activism?

Most of the recent historiography on the Civil War in Siberia still explores the war relations instead of the regional social, economic, and political conditions in the time of fratricidal war. One of the exceptions to this trend is a documentary novel by Leonid Yuzefovich *Winter Road. General A. N. Pepeliaev and Anarchist I. J. Strod in Yakutia, 1922-1923*. Although the military events in Yakutia still play the central role in the author's narrative, the juxtaposition of two archetypes, the White movement commander, Pepeliaev, and the Red one, Strod, who, despite different ideological views, had similar destinies and goals in Yakutia, is the main point that can transform the traditional perception of the Civil War.⁴²⁶ Indeed, this book reveals the importance of local, even personal analysis of the actors' goals in order to understand more general tendencies in this period.⁴²⁷ The historical 'significance' of the Civil War in post-imperial Russia is that it "marked a transition from one historical epoch to another"⁴²⁸ through a period of ongoing violence and cruelty carried out by all sides of the conflict the main of which was the so-called White and Red movements.⁴²⁹ In this regard, the history of the Yakut Zemstvo self-government during the Civil War is not just a story of post-imperial governance of the Yakut intellectuals. It is also an example of (personal) power relations in the context of military conflicts and confrontations of the parties in order to hold power in the Northeast.

The Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917 split the short-lived Russian Republic into several separated parts. The movements on independence in many parts of the

⁴²⁶ Leonid Yuzefovich, *Zimnaya doroga. General A.N. Pepeliaev i anarchist I.J. Strod v Yakutii, 1922-1923: dokumental'nyi roman* [Winter Road. General A. N. Pepeliaev and Anarchist I. J. Strod in Yakutia, 1922-1923: A Documentary Novel] (Moscow: AST, 2017).

⁴²⁷ On the local examination of the Civil War in Russia see, Liudmila Novikova, *An Anti-Bolshevik Alternative: The White Movement and the Civil War in the Russian North* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018) and her articles "Red Patriots against White Patriots: Contesting Patriotism in the Civil War in North Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 2 (2019): 183-202 and "The Russian Revolution from a Provincial Perspective," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 4 (2015): 769-85.

⁴²⁸ Jonathan Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shocked the World*, 4.

⁴²⁹ On the violence during the revolutions and Civil War in Russia see recent book by Laura Engelstein that claims to be a modern classic in revolutionary studies, *Russia in Flames. War, Revolution, Civil War 1914-1921*.

former Russian Empire legitimized their intentions based on Woodrow Wilson's national self-determination's principle that had a global impact after the Great War.⁴³⁰ Since the primary demand of these newly established regional governments hostile to the Bolsheviks was national self-determination, the pragmatic decision of the Bolsheviks was an appropriation of the language of national self-determination proclaimed by Lenin in order to establish Soviet control over the post-imperial space.⁴³¹ The Bolsheviks also adopted persuasive anticolonial rhetoric to promote their power to the regions of Asiatic Russia. However, they faced the dilemma of how to combine the categories of class and nation.⁴³² Nationality had to be coincident with class in colonial situations.⁴³³ As the Civil War reached the non-Russian regions, the Red Army soldiers were sent in to establish control and promote the development of Soviet institutions in regional dimensions with the involvement of local supporters of the Social-Democrats.⁴³⁴

Another major force in the Civil War was former generals of the tsarist army, the proponents of the old tsarist slogan "one and indivisible Russia" who like the Bolsheviks intended to 'restore' imperial project over the post-imperial space.⁴³⁵ With the dissolution of the imperial army, these generals became the leaders of local military groups that always demanded political participation claiming the leadership in the post-imperial Russia. One of the most uncontrolled and bloodthirsty consequences of such military 'self-government' was the so-called warlordism that after the October of 1917 spread across many imperial borderlands creating space for local military units or even 'republics'.⁴³⁶ However, unlike the Bolsheviks,

⁴³⁰ On the notion of global self-determination and anti-colonialism see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*.

⁴³¹ Theodore R. Weeks, "Separatist Nationalism in the Romanov and Soviet Empires," 207.

⁴³² Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan. Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, 121.

⁴³³ Alexander Semyonov and Jeremy Smith, "Nationalism and Empire before and after 1917," 369.

⁴³⁴ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*, 3.

⁴³⁵ Ilya Gerasimov, "The Great Imperial Revolution," 24.

⁴³⁶ On the phenomena of warlordism after the collapse of the Russian Empire see Willard Sunderland, *The Baron's Cloak. A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution* (Cornell, Cornell University Press, 2014); Joshua Sanborn, "The Genesis of Russian Warlordism: Violence and Governance during the First World War and the Civil War," *Contemporary European History* 19, no. 3, (2010): 195-213; Jamie Bisher, *White Terror: Cossack Warlords of the Trans-Siberian* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

the White movement did not have organized and coordinated center and, what is more important, did not have enough flexibility regarding the separatism of national movements. In the course of the Civil War, these national movements, thus, placed themselves in highly contested spaces of military control between the ‘old’ and ‘new’ imperial projects.⁴³⁷ Regional national governments, including the Yakut one, were forced to choose between these projects in order to preserve national self-government. Thereby, in the context of the Civil War, the question of how to retain power was crucial in the post-imperial regions.

Intending to unite all Siberian peoples in the struggle against the Civil War in Siberia, the All-Siberian Extraordinary Congress organized by the Siberian regionalists on December 6, 1917, in Tomsk established a new government consisting of the Zemstvo and municipal self-government. Calling to unite Siberia from the Urals to the Pacific, the Siberian regionalists proposed to arrange the All-Siberian Constituent Assembly in order to legitimize newly created the Siberian Regional Council and Siberian Regional Duma. At the same time, like the Yakut, Buryat-Mongol, and Alash intellectuals, the regionalists did not cancel the recognition of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly as the only legitimate authority in post-imperial Russia.⁴³⁸ One of Congress’s decision was to propose Siberian Autonomy as the core of state consolidation around the project of the Russian Federative Republic.⁴³⁹ Due to the enormous size of Siberia, the first meeting of the Siberian Regional Duma that, according to Smele, can

⁴³⁷ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*, 3.

⁴³⁸ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 1, Inventory 1, File 76* “Dokumenty/postanovleniia, otnosheniia, telegrammy o vyborakh v zemskie uchrezhdeniia Yakutskoi oblasti, 10 marta 1917 – 10 ianvaria 1918 goda” [Documents/Resolutions, Telegrams on elections to the Zemstvo Institutions of the Yakut region, March 10, 1917 – January 10, 1918], 172-75; Norman G. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*, 52; Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building*, 84-86.

⁴³⁹ “Deklaratsiia chrezvychainogo Obshchesibirskogo S"ezda po tekushchemu momentu” [Declaration of the Extraordinary All-Siberian Congress on Current Affairs], *Biulleten' Vremennogo Sibirskogo oblastnogo soveta*, December 12, 1917.

“properly be regarded as the first Siberian government of the Civil War”⁴⁴⁰ was held only in early 1918.

The main representatives of the Duma were the SRs and the so-called ‘fraction of nationalities’, consisting of the Yakut, Buryat-Mongol and other ‘national’ deputies. In addition to the land question according to which “private ownership of land in Siberia must not exist in the future”⁴⁴¹ and the issue of preventing the emerging divisions of political parties, the problem of the admission of the Bolsheviks to power in Siberia demanded an immediate reaction from both Siberian and regional actors. Given the fact that by the beginning of 1918 the Bolsheviks and the Central Executive Committee of Siberian Soviets (*Centrosibir*) *de facto* controlled power in Tomsk, the year 1918 marked the period of the democratic (anti-Bolshevik) counter-revolution in Siberia. Soon it shifted toward conservative military leadership of Alexander Kolchak, the Supreme Leader and Commander-in-Chief of All Russian Land and Sea Forces in Omsk.⁴⁴²

The period of *Kolchakovshchina*, as Lenin referred to it, among other things characterized by the local self-government in the Northeast that sought to find financial and military support and even international recognition from countries which recognized the power of Kolchak. The First Extraordinary Yakut Regional Zemstvo Assembly, which was the final stage of the formation of the Zemstvo self-government in the region, began its work on January 30, 1918. The Congress was opened by the Chairman of the Executive Bureau Vasilii Popov who congratulated the participating by saying that “at last the aspirations of the sufferers for the will of the people and the land were realized, throughout its history, Siberia suffered a lot,

⁴⁴⁰ Jonathan Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18.

⁴⁴¹ *Pervyi sibirskii oblastnyi s'ezd: postanovleniia s'ezda* [The First Siberian Regional Congress; The Decisions of the Congress] (Tomsk: Gubemskaiia tipografiia, 1917), 8.

⁴⁴² Norman G. Pereira, *White Siberia: The Politics of Civil War*, 116-21; Jonathan Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920*, 183-217.

suffered from the metropolis, which looked at us as a place of exile and profit.”⁴⁴³ On behalf of the National Committee, the meeting was welcomed by Nikiforov, who said that

Now there are critical events. Economic devastation and terror will hinder and hinder the productive work of the Zemstvo. The Yakut *narod* believe and hope that You, his elected representatives, will save the Yakut *narod* from economic and civil devastation and perform to the end the work entrusted to you.⁴⁴⁴

The populist’s rhetoric of Nikiforov was an important instrument of growing popular support of the Zemstvo activity. The Yakut intellectuals attempted to discursively connect the Yakut issues with all-Siberian one in order to prepare people for a potential shift in hierarchy after the All-Russian Constituent Assembly.

Nonetheless, the Zemstvo explanatory activity was no less significant for them. For instance, Timofeev-Tereshkin published a long educational note to explain the task of the Zemstvo self-government in the Northeast:

The concerns placed on the young Zemstvo are incredibly diverse and numerous and cover almost all aspects of public life. Now our *ulus* self-government will be the really independent owner of the social and economic life of *ulus* conducting the economy on the personal means extracted by self-taxation. Participating in the construction of local life, we will gain the necessary experience, knowledge, and the Zemstvo work will be a school for us in the field of public activity. In fact, there are efforts of paramount importance: 1) the management of people’s medicine; 2) the management of sanitary measures and housing; 3) the care of public education; 4) the organization of veterinary care; 5) the dissemination of knowledge on agriculture; 6) the care of the regional post system; 7) road business; 8) the organization of all kinds of insurance; 9) food business; 10) concerns about the emergence of consumer societies and cooperative institutions; 11) public charity; 12) concerns about the local economy, trade, and industry; 13) work question; 14) care of a cash loan; 15) protection of public order and security; 16) legal assistance to the population; 17) care of the tax system.⁴⁴⁵

According to Timofeev-Tereshkin, the public responsibilities of the Yakut Zemstvo self-government *de facto* covered much more functions that were prescribed to the Zemstvo institutions in the Russian Empire. Although the Yakut intellectuals did not officially proclaim the Yakut autonomy either as a part of Siberian Autonomy or as a part of the Russian Federative

⁴⁴³ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 24, Inventory 6, File 3* “Protokol I Chrezvychainogo Oblastnogo zemskogo sobraniia” [Protocol of the First Extraordinary Regional Zemstvo Congress], 4.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁴⁵ “Predlozhenie glasnogo Suntarskogo volostnogo zemskogo sobraniia M.N. Timofeeva-Tereshkina o zadachakh volostnogo zemstva, 1917 god” [Mikhail Timofeev-Tereshkin's Proposal on the Objectives of the Volost Zemstvo, 1917] in *Na rubezhe dvukh epokh: vospominaniia, nauchnye trudy, stat'i, pis'ma, proizvedeniia*, 332.

Republic, the logic of their activity demonstrated the gradual introducing of the autonomy's functions in the Zemstvo self-government.

Moreover, the Zemstvo Congress transferred the right to dispose of all lands, forests, waters, and subsoil (nationalization of the land) in the Yakut region to the regional self-governmental institutions. In fact, it was Nikiforov's dream because even in the program of the Union of the Yakuts he set the task to achieve "recognition of all lands, that are in the use of indigenous peoples but owned by the Treasury, the monasteries, churches, and exiles, settled by order of the government without the consent of indigenous peoples, the property of indigenous peoples themselves."⁴⁴⁶ The Congress condemned the old way of governing the Yakut lands, demanded "the complete destruction of the class system of land use," and introduced a uniform *per capita* allocation of land and detailed development of all other types of land use on an equal basis in the interests of the working population.⁴⁴⁷

The approval of the local population of the Yakut intellectuals grew in the wake of the 'successful' implementation of the Zemstvo institutions, but the unstable political situation in Siberia did not allow the rapid growth of the Zemstvo activity.⁴⁴⁸ The low level of education threatened the implementation of public institutions in potential autonomy. According to Novgorodov, "a poor nation from morning to evening struggling for existence cannot prosper both physically and spiritually, all intelligentsias' forces should come to the rescue, if they value their people, if the possibility of extinction of their native people is undesirable for them, the Zemstvo should spread education, and this requires schools, schools, and schools."⁴⁴⁹ The intellectuals adhered to the same educational activities that they developed during the period of the nationalization of the Northeast. However, the lack of military forces (created militia's units

⁴⁴⁶ Vasilii Nikiforov-Kolumnur, *Solntse svetit vsem: stat'i. Pis'ma. Proizvedeniia*, 365-66.

⁴⁴⁷ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutia v epokhu voim i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvukh knigakh*, 452.

⁴⁴⁸ Aleksandr Korobeinikov, "Yakutskaya avtonomiya: postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922," 100-101.

⁴⁴⁹ Semyon Novgorodov, "Zemstvo i natsional'naya yakutskaya kul'tura" [The Zemstvo and the Yakut National Culture], *Yakutskoe zemstvo. Organ Yakutskogo oblastnogo zemstva*, February 22, 1919.

barely coped with the problems of civil order in Yakutsk) and disruptions in the supply of food to the Northeast made the Yakut intellectuals to take the decisions that undermined the trust of the population and the *toyons*.

The situation was also complicated by the underground activities of the Yakut Bolsheviks, expelled from the region. They continued the struggle for the establishment of Soviet power, conducted underground work under the leadership of local party organizations for the overthrow of the Kolchak regime in Siberia and its regions. For example, Ammosov crossed the Eastern front three times, collecting data on a number of people in the White movement in the Krasnoyarsk region. He reported directly to the Central Committee on the partisan movement in the rear of the Kolchak regime as well as to the Sibburo of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) on the political situation in Siberia.⁴⁵⁰ Oyunskii also participated in the underground anti-*Kolchakovshchina*, for which he was arrested in May 1919 and almost became a victim of White Terror. Thanks to the connections of Maria Vilenskaya, a well-known revolutionary who knew Oyunskii personally, he was expelled from prison 15 days later. In the context of the Civil War and during the formation of the Soviet regime on the post-imperial space, the practices of surveillance, collecting information about people's mood in the region and the possibilities to shape people's reaction towards one or another conflicting side was indeed crucial for the Bolsheviks to establish control over certain areas.⁴⁵¹ For the Yakut Bolsheviks, such activity was not only a chance to promote the Bolshevik movement in Siberia

⁴⁵⁰ See, "Pis'mo M.K. Ammosova K.N. Atlasovoi o politicheskoi obstanovke v Krasnoiarskom krae" [Letter from M. K. Ammosov to K. N. Atlasova on the Political Situation in the Krasnoyarsk Region], in *Maxim Ammosov: publikatsii, vospominaniia, dokumenty, fotografii*, eds. L.M. Ammosova, A.N. Zhirkov, P.A. Sleptsov (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2012), 145-46.

⁴⁵¹ The early Soviet state inherited a lot of practices of state control from the Russian Empire. According to David Hoffman, "the Soviet government continued and expanded surveillance and propaganda efforts and made these practices permanent features of governance. In fact, it used these tools not only to monitor political opposition but to try to transform people's consciousness and create the New Soviet Person." David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 19. See more on the Bolshevik politics of surveillance, Peter Holquist, "'Information Is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 3 (1997): 415-50.

but more than that it allowed them to ‘reserve’ their personalities as the Yakut fighters against *Kolchakovshchina* for potential independent work in the Soviet Yakutia.

However, even outside the Bolshevik actions, the political and social environment inside the Yakut Zemstvo was not stable. In March 1918, after a two-day discussion on the decentralization of the budget, the Zemstvo Congress adopted a resolution on four branches of the Zemstvo economy (public education, medicine, agronomy, veterinary medicine), and adopted an annual regional budget. Although the participants of the Congress decided to give the right to Tatar and Jewish schools to teach in the native language appealing to the principles of the Yakut intellectuals on recognizing the regional diversity, at the same time they denied the right to teach in Tatar at the Russian-Tatar school in Olekminsk.⁴⁵² On March 2, 1918, Nikiforov made a report on the Food Committee. The situation with the importation of goods, including food, was complicated. Pointing to the fact that the Soviet power was established in Irkutsk, he declared:

You have heard in the Food Committee about the possibility of delivering goods to the port of Ayan from America. Therefore, we must pay serious attention to this tract, we now have neither tea nor manufacture, and we are faced with the issue of importation of goods from the port of Ayan to the region.⁴⁵³

Nikiforov was well aware that the current political situation in the region did not provide the opportunity to import goods through Irkutsk, and he urgently demanded the allocation of funds for repairs and equipment of the Ayan-Nelkan tract. Given the fact that the financial situation was also on the verge, the only possible way for Nikiforov was to conclude an agreement with the Kolchak government that for most of the national actors was not beneficial because of nationalist’s rhetoric of Kolchak.⁴⁵⁴

Due to the activity of the Yakut national intellectuals, the voice of the *toynos* had no power among the locals, which was unacceptable among the *toyons*. The Social-Democrats

⁴⁵² The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 24, Inventory 6, File 3*, 51.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁵⁴ Jonathan Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918-1920*, 25-30.

who remained in the region also criticized the Zemstvo policy of the intellectuals. The newspaper *Voice of Labor* openly wrote that the Yakuts “were absolutely indifferent to who would be in power: the Russians, as was the case under tsarism, appointed from the center, or the Yakuts, their brothers, who are elected annually, are not less strict in relation to the subject to the poor.”⁴⁵⁵ Therefore, the mass anti-zemstvo movement led by the *toyons* M.S. Shelomov, S.S. Ignatiev, S.S. Inokentiev, V.G. Popov and others spread from Boturussky to Dyupsinsky, Borogonsky, and Namsky *ulus* and threatened the existence of Zemstvos in the Northeast.⁴⁵⁶ They also opposed the election of a deputy from Yakutia to the Constituent Assembly arguing that it could only increase the power of the intellectuals but not the standard of living in the region.⁴⁵⁷ The anti-Zemstvo movement spread rumors about the restoration of the Russian Empire and the proclamation of Mikhail Alexandrovich as a new tsar. Moreover, in 1918, the Bolsheviks joined the anti-Zemstvo *toyons*, organized a ‘red’ squad and attempted to seize the Zemstvo council in Churapcha, the center of the Boturussky *ulus*.⁴⁵⁸

The Yakut Zemstvo self-government was condemned not only by the Bolsheviks in the Northeast but also outside the region. The main objections regarding the activities of the Yakut Zemstvo propagated by the Bolsheviks were separatism, the cooperation with the Kolchak government, and the unification with Japan. In order to raise public awareness about the “unjust condemnation of the honor of the Yakut Zemstvo Committee,” the newspaper the *Yakut Zemstvo* published a compilation of articles and reports which represented the wrong image of the Yakut Zemstvo for Russia. For instance, according to this compilation, the *Working Newspaper* published allegedly that “the Yakut Zemstvo Council declared about full autonomy

⁴⁵⁵ “Zemstvo i yakutskaya bednota” [The Zemstvo and the Yakut Poor], *Golos truda*, December 4, 1918.

⁴⁵⁶ The National Archive of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), *Collection 12, Inventory 2, File 168*, 35.

⁴⁵⁷ “Churapcha. Antizemskoe dvizhenie v Boturusskom uluse” [Churapcha. Anti-Zemstvo Movement in Boturuss Ulu], *Yakutskoe obozrenie*, February 2, 1918.

⁴⁵⁸ “Doklad predsedatelya Boturusskogo volostnogo zemskogo sobraniya E.M. Egasova yakutskomu oblastnomu komissaru” [The report of the Chairman Motorpsycho volost Zemstvo assemblies E. M. Egasov Yakut regional Commissioner], *Golos truda*, September 27, 1918; Ehkho, “Boturusskie tojony-antizemcy i ih podruchniki v dni bol'shevistskogo zasil'ya” [Boturuss Anti-Zemstvo-Toyons and their Henchmen during the Days of the Bolshevik Dominance], *Golos truda*, November 2, 1918.

of the Yakut region, tied intercourse with America through Okhotsk.” At the same time, the newspaper *Morning* reported that “the Yakut Zemstvo Council decided... and declared Yakutia as an autonomous and independent republic.”⁴⁵⁹ Eventually, the *Yakut Zemstvo* concluded that “thanks to the helpful information of the Yakut postal workers on the orders of the Yakut Bolsheviks, Petrograd had false information from Yakutsk.” In fact, these and other accusations were a predominantly incorrect propaganda attempt. The Zemstvo Council was established by democratic institutions as a temporary body of the regional government, which did not recognize and therefore did not obey the power of Soviet Russia, before the convening of the all-Russian or Siberian Constituent Assembly. The documents on the establishment of the Zemstvo self-government were published during the first wave of post-Stalinist (unsuccessful) attempt to examine the role of national intellectuals before the Bolsheviks came to power in the Northeast.⁴⁶⁰

Because of the activity of the Bolsheviks in some *uluses*, the Yakut intellectuals, who hopefully sought to hold out power until the fall of Soviet power in Russia or Siberia, aimed at strengthening political control in the region. Indeed, there was a situation in the Northeast in which the growth of public criticism or manifestation of weakness on the part of the Yakut intellectuals would mean the loss of power or the emergence of dual power, which with the help of the *Centrosibir* would lead to the overthrow of the Yakut Zemstvo. In the resolution of the Zemstvo Council, the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies⁴⁶¹ was declared a political organization, “which aimed to seize power in Yakutia...”⁴⁶² The logic of the struggle for power led to the arrest of members of the Soviet of Workers’ Deputies. Despite concerns of the Yakut

⁴⁵⁹ “Hronika” [Chronicles], *Yakutskoe zemstvo*, September 7, 1918.

⁴⁶⁰ See, *Bor’ba za ustanovlenie i uprochnenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Yakutii: (Sbornik dokumentov i materialov)* [The Struggle for the Establishment and Consolidation of Soviet Power in Yakutia: (Collection of Documents and Materials)], Part 1, Book 1, eds. D.A. Tebekin, V.V. Nikolaeva (Yakutsk: Yakutskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1957).

⁴⁶¹ By mid-1918 the Bolsheviks seized power in several *uluses* of the Yakut Zemstvo and created local Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.

⁴⁶² Cited from, Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutia v epokhu voyn i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvuh knigah*, 475.

intelligentsia, public support was on the side of the Yakut Zemstvo. All members of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, except Chairman N. S. Ershov, who managed to escape, were arrested. Under the decision of the Zemstvo Council of the municipal militia launched an armed guard at the post office and regional printing. The *Centrosibir* became known about the arrested members of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies by the beginning of April 1918. It telegraphed demanding the immediate release of all arrested, otherwise, warned the *Centrosibir*, all goods prepared for rafting in the region could be detained in an ultimatum order. The *Centrosibir* also issued another ultimatum, if the notification of the release of all arrested is not received, the order on the termination of postal and telegraphic messages with the Northeast would be given.⁴⁶³ In addition, the soldier's detachment of the red army was sent to the Yakut region from Irkutsk, which could lead to undesirable consequences for the Yakut intelligentsia.

In May 1918, Soviet power was established in Bodaibo, a border area with the Yakut region, which contributed to the transition of the population of the neighboring stations and villages on the side of the Soviets. After the arrest of members of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies and the adoption of measures to combat possible unrest in Yakutsk, the authority of the Zemstvo noticeably fell, the attitude from the population towards it also weakened. The Zemstvo Council lost any possibilities to defend the Zemstvo borders. Unable to withstand the coordinated attack of the detachment of A.S. Rydzinskii leaving part of the militia in Yakutsk, the Zemstvo Council was evacuated to a prepared base on the river Kenkeme. Soon the main forces fled, many people were captured. On June 1, 1918, the Soviet power was established in Yakutsk.⁴⁶⁴

Despite the failure of the first stage of the Sovietization of the Northeast (the beginning of August 1918), in which, according to a contemporary, Ammosov played a significant

⁴⁶³ Vasilii Fedorov, *Yakutia v epohu voin i revoliutsii (1900-1919): v dvuh knigah*, 477.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 481.

organizational role,⁴⁶⁵ the democratic forces of the region could not resist the onslaught of the military power of the red army. At the final meeting, on September 19, 1918, the Yakut Zemstvo Congress elected Novgorodov and Popov as deputies to the Siberian Regional Duma. However, at the suggestion of the SRs, at a meeting on November 10, 1918, the Siberian regional Duma made a decision to terminate its activities as a body of regional administration of Autonomous Siberia, “based on the common interests of the Motherland and the achievements of the revolution, the full unification of all the disparate parts of one state center.”⁴⁶⁶

During almost one year the situation in the Northeast was neither controlled by the Yakut intellectuals nor by the red forces. The only possible way for the intelligentsia was to recognize the authority of Kolchak and attempt to give military support from the White movement. From the one side, it was a strategically beneficial decision for the Yakut Zemstvo because of the money loan and international help. However, from another side, the Yakut intellectuals knew that such a decision could destroy accumulated results created by the national intelligentsia during the several years. Nevertheless, Nikiforov’s trip in June of 1919 to Omsk, the agreement on economic assistance with the government of Kolchak, potential relations with the markets of China and America did not help the Yakut intellectuals to keep power in the region.⁴⁶⁷

The Siberian front of the Civil War, as well as the superiority of the Bolsheviks in Siberia, transformed significantly the initial plans and activity of the intellectuals:

On the night of December 1, 1919, quite unexpectedly, a Soviet coup was carried out in Yakutsk. The underground organization of local Bolsheviks conducted work among the Yakut garrison and, with the

⁴⁶⁵ Grigorii Popov, “Interesnoe vremia my perezhivaem... (iz dnevnikovykh zapisei 1917-1919 gg.)” [Interesting Time We Are Experiencing... (From Diary Entries 1917-1919)], *Ilin* 7-8, no. 1-2 (1996), <http://ilin-yakutsk.narod.ru/1996-12/40.htm>.

⁴⁶⁶ See, “Ot redaktsii: vnimaniu Sibirskogo obschestva” [From the Editors: To the Attention of Siberian Public], *Sibirskie zapiski: literaturnii, nauchnii i politicheskii zhurnal*, no. 4 (1918): 96-99; *Golos socialista*, February 27, 1919.

⁴⁶⁷ Nikolai Popov, “O poezdke Nikiforova na Gosekonomsoveshanie v Omsk i vstrecha ego s Kolchakom” [Nikiforov’s Trip to State Economic Meeting in Omsk and His Meeting with Kolchak], *Ilin* 2, no. 2 (1991), <http://ilin-yakutsk.narod.ru/1991-2/09.htm>.

assistance of the arrested local co-workers, seized power there. There was no bloodshed. The officers were arrested, some ran away. The next day was already the power of the Military-Revolutionary Staff, headed by commander Gladkov.⁴⁶⁸

Those Yakut intellectuals who remained in Yakutsk were arrested by the new authorities and expelled from the region to Irkutsk. Returning to Yakutsk, the Yakut Bolsheviks immediately began the formation of local authorities of the Soviets. However, the lack of support from the population forced them to resort to the experience of the national intelligentsia. Ultimately, the second generation of the Yakut intelligentsia became not only ‘supporters’ of the first one, but also actively used them to form a common *Yakut* goal, the Yakut autonomy.

2.4. Concluding Remarks

Interest in the intra-regional activity of the Yakut intelligentsia was intensified by (global) imperial transformations, which led to the emergence of the Yakut autonomy project within the potential Russian Federal Republic. The activity of political exiles, the Siberian regionalists, regional characteristics, and circulation of national, educational, and democratic discourses created a number of projects, implementation of which involved a group of the Yakut intellectuals.

Since the First Russian Revolution, the project of the Yakut intelligentsia on post-imperial order in the Northeast included the question of the cultural and educational growth of the Yakut population, their involvement in the social (public) sphere, as well as the introduction of the Zemstvo self-governmental institutions. The First World War and the collapse of the Russian Empire redefined the development of this project, which became recognized as an independent governmental institution within the Siberian federation or autonomy. The project of the future Yakut autonomy was several times discussed both at the meetings of the YAKOB, at the congresses of the Union of Freedom, and the congresses of the Yakut Labor Union of

⁴⁶⁸ Cited from, Grigorii Popov, “Interesnoe vremia my perezhivaem... (iz dnevnikovyx zapisei 1917-1919 gg.)”.

Federalists. Despite the change of policy, the main cultural, educational, and social line of the project remained unchanged.

The formation of the Zemstvo institutions, print and cultural authorities, as well as the establishment of the National Committee, characterized the desire of the intelligentsia not only to modernize the Yakut society but also to become national representatives, holding positions of power in the Northeast. The support of the population allowed intellectuals to gain public confidence, which was the basis of governing during the Civil War in Siberia. However, the lack of governmental experience, material and military resources did not allow the project of the Yakut Zemstvo to have a long existence. Nevertheless, until 1919, the Yakut region was *de facto* governed autonomously, which could not but affect the further perception of the Yakut intelligentsia among the local population. Eventually, the discussions about potential post-imperial order in Siberia and Yakutia, cooperation between party representatives in the YAKOB, as well as the experiences of the Yakut intelligentsia in governance during the revolutionary period, were the key for the formation of the Soviet autonomy in the Northeast.

Chapter 3. The Soviet Power and Local Authorities in the Formation of the RSFSR

Despite the Soviet mythmaking according to which the Bolshevik elites namely Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin almost personally established various republics of the RSFSR and the USSR, it was local actors who played a crucial role in the formation of Soviet power in regional dimensions. What is often missed in modern historiography on Soviet nationalities politics is how and through which ways new nationalities were represented in the RSFSR. Unlike the Russian Empire, the federative structure of the new state allowed local actors to officially demand broader political rights in order to institutionalize national aspirations resulted from both the logic of imperial transformations and Soviet practical strategy during the Civil War. Thereby, autonomy as a form of post-colonial and post-imperial political self-organization in Soviet Siberia was established by the former ‘indigenous’ intellectuals who were involved in transcultural intellectual spaces during the crisis of the Russian Empire. For that reason, the history of the formation of the Soviet national republics in Siberia and the dominant role of the Bolshevik elite in them needs a comprehensive revision.⁴⁶⁹

To a large extent, the Soviet Union succeeded the (post-)imperial legacies in terms of territory, resources, and, of course, people.⁴⁷⁰ During the first decade of the Soviet power, the Bolsheviks sought the ways of reconceptualizing the legacy of both the Russian Empire and the Provisional Government. They immediately produced a revolutionary myth representing their victory over the tsarism as an object of military achievement.⁴⁷¹ Practices important for all countries during the Great War, for instance, health measures, economic regulations, state

⁴⁶⁹ Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” 443; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 2.

⁴⁷⁰ Jane Burbank and Mark von Hagen, “Coming into the Territory: Uncertainty and Empire,” in *Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930*, 4, 7-9.

⁴⁷¹ Graeme Gill, *Symbols and Legitimacy in Soviet Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 26-29, 274.

violence, propaganda, and indoctrination also became an inseparable part of the early Soviet politics.⁴⁷² Even the seemingly obvious Soviet symbols, such as the hammer and sickle, were adopted by the Bolsheviks as a universal marker of the unification of all peasants and workers.⁴⁷³ Despite the rejection of colonial rhetoric, Soviet social engineers proceeded to apply such concepts of imaginary geography as ‘the North’ and ‘the East’, and to some extent continued the civilizing mission discourses regarding the small peoples of the North established in the Russian Empire.⁴⁷⁴ Discursive practices themselves were essential in early Soviet politics. Indeed, discursive legacies of the imperial transformation – the spread of anticolonial and nationalist rhetoric, the demands of political representation and regional self-government, the need to have independent national life – encouraged the Bolsheviks to take into account regional specifics promoting the development of federative republic instead of a unitary state.⁴⁷⁵

Although the federal structure was not a primary goal in the Bolshevik program before the Revolution, regional demands for independence and autonomy during the Civil War made the Bolsheviks drastically change their visions towards federalism which became a means of re-unifying peoples of the former Empire.⁴⁷⁶ In official Soviet language, the federative structure was understood as a way of uniting Soviet people characterized not as a ‘nation’ but as ‘community’ of distinctive nationalities.⁴⁷⁷ While Lenin argued that the Soviet state should be

⁴⁷² David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914-1939*, 12.

⁴⁷³ The ‘classic’ Soviet image of the hammer and sickle appeared on military banners after the February Revolution, moreover, this image was used as a decoration in the Mariinskii Palace, the place of residence of the Provisional Government. See more, Boris Kolonitskii, Orlando Figes, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 62.

⁴⁷⁴ Oksana Sarkisova, *Screening Soviet Nationalities: Kulturfilms from the Far North to Central Asia* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 13; see also Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, 131-86.

⁴⁷⁵ Ivan Sablin, “National Autonomies in the Far Eastern Republic: Post-Imperial Diversity Management in Pacific Russia, 1920-1922,” *History and Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (2017): 445-60; Ivan Sablin, Alexander Semyonov, “Autonomy and Decentralization in the Global Imperial Crisis: The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in 1905–1924”; Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Yakutskaia avtonomiia. Postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922 gg.”; Mark Von Hagen, “Federalisms and Pan-Movements. Re-Imagining Empire,” 494-510.

⁴⁷⁶ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*, 14.

⁴⁷⁷ Peter Blitstein, “Nation and Empire in Soviet History, 1917-1953,” 197.

a federation of equally independent republics,⁴⁷⁸ Stalin had its own vision of Soviet development. He proposed to establish the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic that had to include all republics based on the autonomous principles.⁴⁷⁹ However, the uncertain situations on the ground, as well as the anti-colonial rhetoric and the proclamation on the right of nations to self-determination led to the USSR's project as a combination of autonomist's and federalist's state structures. In legal terms, the Bolsheviks created a multiethnic state in Northern Eurasian space with its critical feature of providing an official opportunity for political self-organization among newly established autonomies and republics.

The very process of establishing control over territories conquered by the Bolsheviks assumed to approach different ways of ruling in any regional case.⁴⁸⁰ Due to the lack of knowledge, the challenge of the early Soviet policy in regional dimensions was to be met by the mainly improvised cultural, social, and language measures. The problem was also complicated by the fact that the early Soviet period was characterized by the absence of the prevailing model of diversity management. Therefore, regional intellectuals and the local Bolshevik cadres played a crucial role in such cases. On the one hand, they became the mediators of the official Soviet politics, and on the other hand, they initiated their own local projects promoting the development of ethnic (national) difference.⁴⁸¹ In some cases, the activity of national communists resulted in the development of national language, culture, and political structure even before the indigenization (*korenizatsia*) started.⁴⁸² According to the

⁴⁷⁸ According to Lenin, it had to become a transition to socialism through the "inevitable merging of nations" by passing the period of "complete liberation of all the oppressed nations." In Lenin's view, the federation was "a transitional form to the complete unity of the working people of different nations. <...> In recognizing that federation is a transitional form to complete unity, it is necessary to strive for ever closer federal unity, bearing in mind that there is a tendency towards the creation of a single world economy." See, Vladimir Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 3rd ed. (Moscow: Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, 1931), 624.

⁴⁷⁹ Alexander Semyonov and Jeremy Smith, "Nationalism and Empire before and after 1917," 376.

⁴⁸⁰ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations. The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*, 3.

⁴⁸¹ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*, 5.

⁴⁸² On the politics of *korenizatsia* see, Ronald G. Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 86-90; Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 129-46.

recent historiographical accounts, it signified the so-called indigenization before indigenization,⁴⁸³ which served as a practical model for the future steps of the Soviet *korenizatsia* that began in April 1923.

Although Lenin thought that bourgeois intelligentsias were a threatening obstacle “imagining themselves the brains of the nation,”⁴⁸⁴ the Bolsheviks indeed treated seriously the opportunity to attract regional intellectuals (nationalists) to promote Soviet projects.⁴⁸⁵ This policy was justified through the analysis of growing national sentiments among oppressed groups in borderlands as well as through the necessity to have more reliable cadres in regions. The latter was a practical decision of the Bolsheviks to get loyalty from the non-Russian intellectuals strengthening the rhetoric of nation- and autonomy-building in regions.⁴⁸⁶ Another justification could be found in the personal experience of prominent Bolsheviks who survived “national oppression” being natives of non-Russian regions or being exiled to non-Russian regions during the imperial period. Natives of national minorities – Stalin, Ordzhonikidze, Mikoyan, Kaganovich – represented the Soviet national politics, being directly in its center, while national communists carried out the government program in the regions.⁴⁸⁷ To some extent, it is possible to say that the idea of national communities unified by a shared destiny was based on the Bolsheviks’ personal experience of the ‘otherness’ in the Russian Empire.

One of the main instruments of providing the Soviet nationalities politics was granting autonomous rights to nationalities through the People’s Commissariat for Nationality Affairs

⁴⁸³ It also challenges the view that the Bolsheviks created Soviet nationalities from ‘above’. See, Serhiy Hirik, “Indigenization before Indigenization: The Integration of “National Cadres” into the Party and State Apparatus of the UkrSSR and BSSR (1919–1923),” *Russian Studies in History*, 56 no. 4 (2017): 295.

⁴⁸⁴ In a letter to Gorky Lenin pointed out that “the intellectual forces of workers and peasants are growing and strengthening in the struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and its accomplices, intellectuals, lackeys of capital, imagining themselves the brain of the nation.” See, Vladimir Lenin, “A.M. Gor’komu,” in *Lenin V.I. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Vol. 51 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970), 48.

⁴⁸⁵ Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, 181.

⁴⁸⁶ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations. The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*, 62.

⁴⁸⁷ Alfred Rieber, “Stalin, Man of the Borderlands,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (2001): 1664. See also Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire*.

(*Narkomnats*) ruled by Stalin.⁴⁸⁸ Unlike the other People's Commissariats, the *Narkomnats* controlled the activities of several subordinate commissariats of major non-Russian nationalities; smaller nationalities had a special section for minorities.⁴⁸⁹ The developed network of the People's Commissar of the RSFSR allowed representatives of non-Russian national groups to demand autonomy through both direct contacts with Stalin and departments (there was a department of Soviet nationalities politics in Siberia). In this sense, personal connections and horizontal interactions between Soviet leaders and representatives of nationalities played a significant role in the growing geography of Soviet nationalities.

In the Soviet administrative system, autonomy implied granting authorities to national representatives of the region. It, in turn, meant that the titular nation *a priori* received more political, social, cultural, and other possibilities compared to other national groups in the region. By creating more national autonomies, the Bolsheviks hoped to get loyalty from natives to promote establishing proper Soviet order in the post-imperial space.⁴⁹⁰ For natives, in contrast, it was an opportunity to declare officially about their nations in order to protect national rights and promote the development of cultural and social life in regions within new authorities. The first experience of making Soviet autonomy that immediately became a basic model for all autonomous projects was the "Proposal on the Tatar-Bashkir Soviet Republic" of March 22, 1918.⁴⁹¹ In addition to the Bashkirs, the first autonomist cohort in the RSFSR included the Tatar, Turkestan, Kirgiz, Mountain, Dagestan, and Crimean autonomous republics.

In this regard, the example of the Yakut ASSR that was established on April 27, 1922, is representative because it was one of the first national autonomy in the RSFSR and, in fact,

⁴⁸⁸ On the history of the Narkomnats see, Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994); Jeremy Smith, "Stalin as Commissar for Nationality Affairs, 1918-1922," in *Stalin: A New History*, eds. Sara Davies, James Harris (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45-62.

⁴⁸⁹ Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*, 31.

⁴⁹⁰ Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations. The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*, 51.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 48-49; Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Question, 1917-1923*, 44.

the first autonomous republic in Siberian space. In this chapter, I will examine the history of the YASSR's creation being a synthesis of the activities of both the Yakut Bolsheviks and the national intelligentsia, whose ultimate goal was to establish autonomy. I argue that the imperial experience of the Yakut intellectuals and ethnographers who were in the territory of the Northeast, the Yakut Bolsheviks' national rhetoric as well as the Soviet nationalities politics resulted in the project of the YASSR.

3.1. Oblast', Guberniya or Republic? The Formation of the Yakut ASSR

The Bolshevik government, concerned in the all-Russian power representation, attempted to establish political control over the post-imperial borderlands, the Yakut region was no exception. The case of Sovietization of the Northeast is curious because of a certain homogeneity in the ethnic (more than 80% of the regional population was considered as the Yakuts), socio-political (all actors who struggled for political representation in the region were familiar with each other, discussing the projects of regional reconstruction and debating within the Yakut Committee of Public Safety)⁴⁹² and communicative (the lack of a railway connection prevented the penetration of external forces) terms. To a large extent, this homogeneity was portrayed by the Yakut intellectuals during and after the imperial crisis in order to prove the national aspirations and self-governmental ambitions.⁴⁹³

After returning to the Yakut region, the leaders of the Yakut Bolsheviks took part in state-building in the RSFSR acting as intermediaries between the older generation of the

⁴⁹² After the February Revolution, Oyunskii warmly thanked for the support of a whole group of non-Marxist intellectuals: district commissioners Solovyov and Shirokikh, Chairman of the city Duma Ksenofontov, doctor Sokolnikov and others. He wished all social and political organizations of the Yakut region to work "fruitfully and successfully for the prosperity of the life of all the disadvantaged and oppressed of the vast and harsh region." Viktor Gulyaev, "Trudnaya doroga k znaniu" [The Hard Path to Knowledge], *Yakutia*, June 29, 1993; Egor Antonov, "Ob otnoshenii P.A. Oiunskogo k natsional'noi intelligentsii" [On the Attitude of P. A. Oyunskii to the National Intelligentsia], *Sibirskaya zaimka. Istoria Sibiri v nauchnykh publikatsiyakh*, accessed May 12, 2019, <http://zaimka.ru/antonov-oyunsky/>.

⁴⁹³ Aleksandr Korobeinikov, "Yakutskaya avtonomiia. Postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922 gg.," 103.

national intelligentsia and the new all-Russian political regime. The establishment of Soviet power in the Northeast took place in several stages: on December 15, 1919, Soviet power was peacefully recognized in Yakutsk, in January 1920 Soviet power was in most parts of the Yakut region, however, military operations covered some regional parts until 1923.⁴⁹⁴ The national intelligentsia was excluded from management and administrative positions of the region,⁴⁹⁵ the Zemstvo self-government institutions were dissolved, which is why the question about the future administrative structure of the Northeast arose already in early 1920.

On March 10, 1920, at the meeting in Irkutsk, a representative of the older generation of the Yakut intellectuals, Ksenofontov, for the first time proposed to create national or cultural-national autonomy in the Yakut region, while Ammosov attending at the meeting was neutral on this issue.⁴⁹⁶ After the experience of discussing in the YAKOB and at the First Congress of the Yakuts and Russian Peasants (April 1917), the Irkutsk meeting was the first discussion on the future structure of the region by representatives of both the Yakut national and the Bolshevik intelligentsia. However, the non-Yakut Bolsheviks A.D. Metelshin and N.S. Ershov proved that the idea about the autonomy or, for instance, *gubernia* status was a premature conclusion, and in turn, proposed to unite the Yakut region with the Irkutsk *gubernia*. While the non-Yakut Bolshevik actors did not allow the possibility of creating the Yakut autonomy within the RSFSR, the “Regulation of the Provisional Yakut National Committee” of 1917 already included a point on the formation of a permanent administrative body that would contribute to

⁴⁹⁴ Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shocked the World*, 118; Leonid Yuzefovich, *Zimnaya doroga. General A.N. Pepeliaev i anarchist I.J. Strod v Yakutii, 1922-1923: dokumental'nyi roman*.

⁴⁹⁵ The leaders of the intelligentsia were expelled from the region (mainly to Irkutsk), some members remained in Yakutsk. See, Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Yakutskaia avtonomiia. Postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922 gg.,” 99-103.

⁴⁹⁶ Ludmila Vinokurova, *Maskim Ammosov i obschestvenno-politicheskie sobytia v Yakutii (1920-1928)* [Maskim Ammosov and the Public and Political Events in Yakutia (1920-1928)] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2007), 42.

“national unification among the Yakut population.”⁴⁹⁷ In theory, this meant the introduction of self-government throughout the region and the development autonomy’s institutions.

At the same time, the representatives of the Yakut national intelligentsia, who managed to stay in the region, began to propagate the idea of self-government among locals through the cultural and educational society “Sakha Aimakh”. Timofeev-Tereshkin who immediately learned the conjuncture of the Soviet bureaucratic language declared about the Yakut cooperation and collectivism which could be achieved only through establishing the Yakut self-government:

Before the revolution, the Yakut self-government was strangled by administrative and police custody. All the good sides of the Yakut original social system were flattened by the heavy boot of the autocrats. However, after the revolution, the Yakut society depends on what kind of self-government and social order should it have after all: the organization of the people’s court, the order of land use and the Zemstvo building will depend on public initiative, thought and so on. Going behind the tail of European public thought on this issue, our Yakut public figures find that the deliverance of the population from the bondage of exploitation and other things is possible only in cooperation. In order to be viable and powerful, the Yakut cooperation must follow the paths that encounter the Yakut life, turn into the Yakut life and awaken those dormant principles of collectivism that are in the character of the Yakuts.⁴⁹⁸

Moreover, while being a student of the historical-philological department of Tomsk Teacher’s Institute in August 1917, one of the future leaders of the YASSR Oyunskii talked about “our necessity in autonomy both national and cultural.”⁴⁹⁹ That another time proves the crucial role of Tomsk social environment in the formation of the Yakut intellectuals’ political declarations.

Another telling example is Ammosov himself, who became more concerned with the issues of nation- and autonomy-building after the Irkutsk meeting. After getting acquainted with the main works of the Bolsheviks’ leaders on the national question, Ammosov demanded the execution of the central thesis of the right of nations to self-determination, in this case, to

⁴⁹⁷ “Polozhenie vremennogo yakutskogo natsional’nogo komiteta” [The Regulation of the Provisional Yakut National Committee], *Yakutskoe Zemstvo*, August 28, 1919.

⁴⁹⁸ “Pis'mo upolnomochennogo suntarskogo otdeleniia viliuiskogo filiala kul'turno-prosvetitel'nogo obshchestva “Sakha-Aimakh” M.N. Timofeeva-Tereshkina v Viliuiskii filial “Sakha-Aimakh” po voprosu sozdaniia narodnykh obshchestvennykh lavok, 11 apreliia 1920 goda” [Letter of the Commissioner of the Suntarskii department of Vilyui branch of cultural society “Sakha Aimakh” M. N. Timofeev-Tereshkin in the Vilyui branch of the “Sakha Aimakh” on the establishment of the people’s public benches, April 11, 1920], in *Na rubezhe dvukh epokh: vospominaniia, nauchnye trudy, stat'i, pis'ma, proizvedeniia*, 334.

⁴⁹⁹ Viktor Gulyaev, “Trudnaya doroga k znaniu”; Grigorii Okorokov, ed., *Stat'i i vospominania o P.A. Oyunskom. 1893-1968 gg.* [Articles and Memories of P.A. Oyunskii. 1893-1968] (Yakutsk: Knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1969), 9, 102.

organize the Yakut national life and form territorial autonomy inside the Soviet state.⁵⁰⁰ In fact, the influence exerted on Ammosov by the older generation of the Yakut intelligentsia and their projects of self-government was expressed during the time of actual Soviet state-building. Speaking Bolshevik, Ammosov proceeded the Yakut autonomous project of the revolutionary period (which was also a hybrid phenomenon, formulating the local Yakut interests in the language of the imperial public).⁵⁰¹

The small number of the Yakut educated elite remained in the region did not allow to discriminate the Yakut intellectuals on political grounds; they were necessary for the Yakut Bolsheviks to implement the national autonomy's project.⁵⁰² Ammosov appealed to the Irkutsk party Committee with a request for the return of the Yakut intellectuals, exiled to Irkutsk, to perform "the Yakut huge tasks of Soviet power in the Yakut region."⁵⁰³ Also at the meeting of the Presidium of the RCP(b) on June 20, 1920, Oyunskii said that Nikiforov's invitation to work in the region would be of excellent agitation value. As a result, the Presidium instructed Oyunskii to "invite Vasilii Vasilyevich Nikiforov" to participate in the building of the Soviet order in Yakutia.⁵⁰⁴

In this regard, the decision to abolish the status of the Yakut region and attach it to Irkutsk *gubernia*, which followed in April 1920 after the meeting of the *Sibrevkom*, led to the indignation of the mass of the Yakut population. According to Alexeev, the abolition of the region was the result of *Sibrevkom*'s unwillingness to support the virtually self-governing

⁵⁰⁰ Elena Ammosova ed., *Maxim Ammosov: publikatsii, vospominaniya, dokumenty, fotografii* [Maxim Ammosov: Publications, Memories, Documents and Photographs] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2012), 133-135.

⁵⁰¹ This interpretation is close to Adeeb Khalid's interpretation of the origins of nation-building in Soviet Turkestan; it removes the rigid opposition between the local initiative and the influence of the Central government. Adeeb Khalid, *Making Uzbekistan: Nation, Empire, and Revolution in the Early USSR*, 116-118.

⁵⁰² Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations. The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR*, 56-59.

⁵⁰³ "Obrashchenie M.K. Ammosova v Irkutskii partiinyi komitet s khodataistvom ob otzyve v g. Yakutsk Yakutianam, rabotaiushchikh v irkutskoi gubernii" [The Appeal of M. K. Ammosov in the Irkutsk Party Committee with the Petition to Withdraw the Yakuts, working in the Irkutsk province, to the city Yakutsk], in *Maxim Ammosov: publikatsii, vospominaniya, dokumenty, fotografii*, 149.

⁵⁰⁴ Natalia Stepanova ed., *Platon Alekseevich Oyunskii. Zhizn' i deyatel'nost': sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov* [Platon Alekseevich Oyunskii. Life and Activity: A Collection of Archival Documents] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2015), 111.

region in 1918-1919 due to the danger of rebellion and rejection of Soviet power.⁵⁰⁵ Thus, at another meeting in Irkutsk on May 9, 1920, the Yakut Bolshevik-intellectuals, namely Ammosov, Oyunskii, G.S. Efimov, K.P. Atlasov, A.I. Mordvov, N.E. Oleynikov, K.E. Andrievich openly opposed the lowering status of the region. Ammosov proposed to restore the independence of the province, emphasizing the presence of knowledgeable personnel in the region. Mordvov saw in the status of the province the opportunity to resist the attempts of the federalists to annex Yakutia to Japan. In response, the representative of the Irkutsk provincial committee Belenets declared the possibility of foreign states to enslave Yakutia, regardless of the provincial or regional status.⁵⁰⁶

Before the meeting, on May 1, 1920, Ammosov made a note in *Sibrevkom* “on the provision of provincial independence to Yakutia,” in which he pointed to a reproach for the lack of personnel for the implementation of the Yakut autonomy’s project underlining the typical nature of such a situation for all non-Russian regions.⁵⁰⁷ He recalled the long-term struggle of the Yakut national intelligentsia for the introduction of the Zemstvo self-government between 1912 and 1919 and said that “in administrative terms, the Yakut region has long been autonomous in its self-government institutions.”⁵⁰⁸ Later, referring to the right of nations to self-determination, he wrote about the impossibility of developing the independent Yakut culture together with Irkutsk indigenous cultures, since the distinctiveness of the Yakut regional

⁵⁰⁵ Egor Alexeev, *Natsional'nyi vopros v Yakutii (1917-1972 gg.)* [The National Question in Yakutia (1917-1972)] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2007), 91.

⁵⁰⁶ Grigorii Makarov, *Severo-vostok RSFSR v 1918–1921 gg.*, 10, 103.

⁵⁰⁷ Ammosov published an article where he listed the main methods of action of the Soviet power in the Yakut region: “all the agitators who know the Yakut language were directed to the remote corners. The impression made on the Yakut population by visiting agitators, organizing meetings and rallies was enormous. In January, the party week was held in Yakutsk. The number of the city organization doubled, and the working and red army mass joined the party. Yakutsk city has 442 members and 54 candidates.” See, “Ammosov M.K. V Yakutskoi oblasti (1 aprelya 1921 g.) [Ammosov M.K. In the Yakut Region (April 1, 1921)], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, ed. G.G. Makarov (Yakutsk: Kn. Izd-vo, 1987), 39-40.

⁵⁰⁸ “Dokladnaia zapiska M.K. Ammosova Sibrevkomu o predostavlenii Yakutii gubernskoi samostoiatel'nosti. Ne ranee 1 maia 1920 g.” [Memorandum of M. K. Ammosov to the Siberian Revolutionary Committee on the Granting of Yakutia Provincial Autonomy. Not earlier than May 1, 1920.], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 23-27.

life depended on the Yakut population, which was the main creator of national life.⁵⁰⁹ Thus, the Yakut Bolshevik not only legitimately recognized the activities of the Yakut national intelligentsia but also announced the continuation of their autonomists course. Moreover, the language of regional self-determination used by the Yakut national intellectuals was also adopted by the Yakut Bolsheviks to achieve the project of the Yakut autonomy.

Another difficulty was in the lack of the unified Soviet policy towards “indigenous peoples” in the early years of the Soviet regime: the authorities of different levels and even different administrative bodies sometimes had opposite positions. The all-Siberian authorities rather sympathized with the Yakut figures, whereas Irkutsk sought to subordinate Yakutia, while Moscow did not have a particular position. As during the revolutionary times of experimentations and opportunities, the issues usually resolved by coincidence as in the case of the so-called “Orosin Conspiracy” in August 1920. The Yakut Extraordinary Commission revealed an underground organization, the purpose of which was “national independence, up to the formation of an independent state under the slogan ‘the Yakut region – to the Yakuts’.”⁵¹⁰ Almost all representatives of the pre-revolutionary Yakut intellectual movement were arrested, 13 of them, including Nikiforov, Orosin himself, and Novgorodov, were sentenced to death. Oyunskii and Barakhov immediately went to Omsk and insisted on deciding the humane attitude of the authorities to the national intelligentsia. However, the Yakut Provincial Party Committee supported the decision to execute the conspirators and sought from *Sibburo* the imposition of party penalties to Oyunskii and Barakhov.⁵¹¹ The last word remained for Sibrevkom, an influential member of which at that time was Yaroslavskii. The fact that he had

⁵⁰⁹ “Protokol mezhdovedomstvennogo soveshchaniia po voprosu o tom, dolzhna li byt' byvshaia yakutskaia oblast' samostoiatel'noi gubernskoi edinitsei ili raionom Irkutskoi gubernii (14 maia 1920 g.)” [Minutes of the Interdepartmental Meeting on the Question of whether the Former Yakut Region Should Be an Independent Provincial Unit or a District of the Irkutsk Gubernia (May 14, 1920)], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, ed. M.M. Fedorov (Yakutsk: Knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1982), 42-45.

⁵¹⁰ *Bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochnenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Yakutii: (Sbornik dokumentov i materialov)*, 33.

⁵¹¹ Egor Antonov, “Ob otnoshenii P.A. Oiunskogo k natsional'noi intelligentsii”.

his own idea of the situation in Yakutia and close ties with the Yakut leaders turned out to be a happy accident, thanks to which a large-scale massacre of the Yakut intelligentsia did not take place and even those sentenced to death by the tribunal were amnestied.⁵¹² The failed case of the “Orosin Conspiracy” allowed Ammosov to threaten the loss of “the Bolsheviks of any soil under their feet” as a result of ignoring the national interests of the Yakuts.⁵¹³ This threat directed to Irkutsk and the Yakut Extraordinary Commission (and, apparently, addressed to the Moscow authorities), since *Sibrevkom* had previously supported the Yakut leaders.

Exiled to Irkutsk in 1919, the former head of the Yakut Zemstvo order Nikiforov held a responsible position in *Sibnats*.⁵¹⁴ On the eve of the arrests on the “Orosin Conspiracy” on June 17, 1920, he prepared a report for the People’s Commissariat for Nationalities. The former leader of the Yakut region demonstrated the successful mastery of new rhetoric for the formulation of local interests. He, for the first time, stated the need for revision of the ‘indigenous’ question for the Soviet power due to “the complexity of the task to approach indigenous peoples and win their sympathy.”⁵¹⁵ Declaring that indigenous people are “great material for the creation of public life,” Nikiforov suggested paying attention to the low cultural level of them, to their “national oppression” by a policy of tsarism and economic decline.⁵¹⁶ The solution to the problem was to give the ‘indigenous’ populations cultural autonomy to “approach the Soviet autonomous bodies because of the cultivation of their economic

⁵¹² Egor Alexeev, *Natsional’nyi vopros v Yakutii (1917-1972 gg.)*, 139-43.

⁵¹³ *Bor’ba za ustanovlenie i uprochnenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Yakutii: (Sbornik dokumentov i materialov)*, 34.

⁵¹⁴ The Siberian Committee for Nationalities (*Sibnats*) in April-June 1921 was reorganized into the Siberian representative office of the Moscow People’s Commissar for Nationalities. See, Vladimir Shishkin, *Revoliutsionnye komitety Sibiri v gody Grazhdanskoi voiny (avgust 1919 – mart 1921 g.)* [Revolutionary Committees of Siberia during the Civil War (August 1919 – March 1921)] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1978).

⁵¹⁵ The State Archive of the Russian Federation, *Collection R-1318, Inventory 1, File 435* “Protokoly zasedanii s"ezda natsmen'shinstv Viatskoi gub., kollegii Komiteta po delam natsional'nostei Soiuza kommun Severnoi oblasti, kollegii Ufimskogo gubernskogo otdela po delam natsional'nostei, predstavitel'stva Narkomnatsa pri Sibrevkome, otchety ob ikh deiatel'nosti za 1920-1922 gg.” [Minutes of Meetings of the Congress of National Minorities of Vyatka Province, the Board of the Committee for Nationalities of the Union of Communes of the Northern Region, the Board of the Ufa Provincial Department of Nationalities, Representation of the People's Commissar at Sibrevkom, Reports on their Activities for 1920-1922], 192.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 193-95.

system.”⁵¹⁷ The final point of the Nikiforov’s project was the proposal to organize the all-Siberian “Congress of Indigenous Peoples” under the auspices of the *Narkomnats* and *Sibrevkom* either in Omsk or Irkutsk to raise and resolve issues of local cultural and national self-determination.⁵¹⁸ This proposal clearly reveals the former self-perception of the Yakut autonomism as an integral part of the all-Siberian regionalist social and political space.

In the autumn of 1920, the head of the Siberian Department of nationalities A.E. Skachko presented another report on the ‘indigenous’ question to the *Narkomnats*. He pointed to the “deep social reasons” of the issue of Siberian ‘indigenous’ people the decision of which would affect the growth of loyalty to the Soviet power in neighboring Asian countries.⁵¹⁹ Like Nikiforov, Skachko called for the granting of self-government to the Siberian peoples; “the most cultural” of them (the Buryats and the Yakuts), according to Skachko, should have autonomous political institutions.⁵²⁰ Such reports testified the uncertainties in Soviet national politics toward ‘indigenous’ peoples of Siberia giving more opportunities for local activism.

The possibilities of solving the ‘indigenous’ issue and demands to grant autonomy for specific social and cultural groups in Nikiforov’s report signified, on the one hand, the intellectual authority of the Yakut actor, on the other hand, provided opportunities to use the imperial experience in the context of the Soviet order. Moreover, personal relations between the Yakut national and Bolshevik intellectuals played an important role in the development of the issue of autonomy in the Yakut region.⁵²¹ Oyunskii attempted to use the experience of the national intelligentsia in the struggle for statehood in the form of autonomy. In 1921, he presented in *Sibburo*, where he stressed that “the whole policy of the Yakut Soviet power still

⁵¹⁷ The State Archive of the Russian Federation, *Collection R-1318, Inventory 1, File 435*, 197.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵²¹ For instance, on May 19, 1921, on the meeting of *Sibrevkom* Ammosov declared that Nikiforov and Orosin could continue their work in both the Yakut region and *Sibnats*. See, *Bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochnenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Yakutii: (Sbornik dokumentov i materialov)*, 111.

conditioned by the policy of the Central Committee of *Sibburo* and by *Sibrevkom*” aimed at the curtailment of rights gained by the Yakut people in previous years.⁵²² Like Ammosov Oyunskii criticized the way of Soviet nationalities politics:

Sibburo and *Sibrevkom* have the crazy apparatus, which shoots Yakut autonomists at the time when the Central Soviet authorities, the People's Commissar for Nationalities and the Central Executive Committee enqueued the question of the Yakut autonomy when the Buryats are getting autonomy. The telegram of the *Narkmonats* and *Sibnats* on the Yakut autonomy and on attracting the masses and intellectuals to the Soviet-building are not publishing by a decision of the local authority and creating a burning atmosphere of the national movement based on false soil.⁵²³

Despite the recognition by the Yakut provincial party meeting of the prematurity of the question of the Yakut autonomy, on January 27, 1921, Oyunskii, a Chairman of the Yakut *gubernia*,⁵²⁴ announced its desirability. Summing up the first year of Soviet power in the region, he came to the conclusion that there were no particular changes in the life of the Yakuts, moreover, many decrees of the Central Government “adapted to the life of the Russian population, do not correspond to the regional situation, and their full implementation is difficult.”⁵²⁵ Therefore, in addition to the early establishment of the autonomous authorities, Oyunskii called for the creation of the Yakut Department in the Narkomnats for solving the issues of the Yakut life and increasing Soviet sentiments in the Yakut masses.⁵²⁶

Since the beginning of 1921, the idea of autonomy has been firmly entrenched among the leaders of the Yakut Bolsheviks. Ammosov called to be more attentive to the development of the thoughts of the Yakut autonomy among the masses.⁵²⁷ On February 26, following a joint meeting of *Sibnats* and the Yakut Bolsheviks, a telegram was sent to Yakutsk with a request to

⁵²² Egor Antonov, “Ob otnoshenii P.A. Oiunskogo k natsional'noi intelligentsii”.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ In the autumn of 1920, the Yakut Bolsheviks achieved the right to the gubernia status of Yakutia, which was the result of numerous protests against the accession of the Yakut region to the Irkutsk gubernia.

⁵²⁵ The State Archive of the Russian Federation, *Collection* R-1318, *Inventory* 1, *File* 124 “Polozheniia o Narodnom komissariate po delam natsional'nostei, doklady chlenov polnomochnykh komissii VTsIK i SNK po delam Kryma, oblastnykh ispolkomov, avtonomnykh Chuvashskoi i Iakutskoi oblastei STO i Narkomnatsu o prodovol'stvennom polozhenii Kryma, ob ekonomicheskom sostoianii Iakutii i Chuvashii i drugie” [Provisions of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities, the Reports of the Members of the Plenipotentiary Commissions of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars on Affairs of Crimea, Regional Executive Committees, the Chuvash and Yakut Regions and the Narkomnats on the Food Situation of the Crimea, on the Economic Condition of Yakutia and Chuvashia and other], 3.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵²⁷ Maxim Ammosov: *publikatsii, vospominaniia, dokumenty, fotografii*, 179.

attract “the largest number of Yakut figures” calling for tolerance for former opponents of the Soviet power.⁵²⁸ In addition to the Chairman of the Yakut *gubernia* Oyunskii and the Secretary of the provincial Bureau of the RCP(b) Barakhov, the telegram was signed by the main person involved in the “Orosin Conspiracy” Orosin himself, which emphasized the solidarity of the Yakut national and party intelligentsia in the issue of autonomy-building. In April, Oyunskii presented a report to *Sibburo* and *Sibnats*, stating “the immediate granting to the Yakut gubernia the rights of the Yakut Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic.”⁵²⁹ It led to a number of criticisms from non-Yakut representatives of the meeting, who advocated the refusal to grant autonomy due to the weak cultural and economic development of the *gubernia*, as well as due to the possibility of seizure of territory by Japan and the United States.⁵³⁰ Oyunskii argued his position by the need to strengthen the borders of the territory from external invaders and from the white guard activity, which captured more and more areas due to the “silence and delay in solving the national question” by the Soviet authorities.⁵³¹ The final decision was not made, as, according to the members of the meeting S.E. Chutskayev and V.N. Yakovleva, the denial of the right to cultural autonomy was contrary to Soviet policy on the national question, which could lead to increased dissatisfaction with the Soviet order on the ground. However, all agreed with the opinion of the Yakut actor about the lack of organizational and party personnel. The refusal to grant autonomy rights by non-Yakut party leaders and the persistent demand of the latter by the Yakut Bolsheviks testified to the influence of the ideas of the national intelligentsia

⁵²⁸ *Bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochnenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Yakutii: (Sbornik dokumentov i materialov)*, 101-2.

⁵²⁹ “Iz doklada delegata sibirskogo soveshchaniia predstavitelei tuzemtsev P.A. Sleptsova-Oiunskogo v sibirskoe biuro TsK RKP(b) i Sibnats o iakutskoi avtonomii (13 apreliia 1921 g.)” [From the Report of the Delegate of the Siberian Meeting of Representatives of Natives P. A. Sleptsov-Oyunskii to the Siberian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) and Sibnats on the Yakut autonomy (April 13, 1921)], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 55.

⁵³⁰ The same rhetoric of preventing autonomy because of allegedly social ‘instability’ inside the region circulated also in various non-Russian regions. See, for instance, the example of making Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, Arsene Saparov, “Why Autonomy? The Making of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region 1918-1925,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 2 (2012): 281-323.

⁵³¹ “Iz doklada delegata sibirskogo soveshchaniia predstavitelei tuzemtsev P.A. Sleptsova-Oiunskogo v sibirskoe biuro TsK RKP(b) i Sibnats o iakutskoi avtonomii (13 apreliia 1921 g.),” 56.

on the Yakut Bolsheviks, but Ammosov and other leaders also followed the trend of granting autonomy to other people living in the RSFSR.

Referring to the report Oyunskii, on April 26 Ammosov wrote a statement to the People's Commissar for Nationalities in the name of Stalin on the question of the formation of the Yakut ASSR. The Yakut leader called on the Soviet government to grant the rights of autonomy not only to the Yakuts but also to "the Buryats and other large Siberian nationalities."⁵³² The solution of the 'indigenous' issue for Ammosov was rather a practical task of the Soviet authorities in Siberia, which directly correlated with Nikiforov's report on the same issue. The urgent need for personnel, according to Ammosov, was the only obstacle to the refusal of the establishment of autonomy, therefore "the practical declarative implementation of the Yakut autonomy is entirely dependent on the arrival in Yakutsk of new personnel, now heading to Yakutsk and on the establishment of telegraphic communication after the arrival of comrades."⁵³³ The requirement of the republican status, which gave more power to local figures, testified not only to the symbolic and practical equation of status with other autonomous republics but also demonstrated the continuity of the national policy (nationalization of the Northeast) of the Soviet state project. However, these circumstances still did not satisfy some non-Yakut party leaders who believed that there was a possibility of "creating only the Yakut Autonomous *oblast'* not a republic."⁵³⁴

Such activity of the Yakut Bolsheviks, as well as personal acquaintance and approval of Ammosov's activities by Stalin, led to the publication of an order on the preparation of the Yakut autonomy's project and the clarification of the difficulties in the implementation of the

⁵³² "Zaiavlenie M.K. Ammosova v Narkomnats I.V. Stalinu po voprosu ob obrazovanii yakutskoi avtonomnoi sovetskoi respubliki" [The Statement of M. K. Ammosov to the People's Commissariat for Nationalities I. V. Stalin on the Formation of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Republic], in *Maxim Ammosov: publikatsii, vospominaniia, dokumenty, fotografii*, 190.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵³⁴ "Iz protokola zasedaniia Sibbiuro TsK RKP(b) o vozmozhnosti sozdaniia Yakutskoi avtonomnoi oblasti" [From the Minutes of the Meeting of Sibbiuro of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) on the Possibility of the Yakut Autonomous Region's Creation], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 71.

Yakut and Buryat autonomies.⁵³⁵ On April 26 the project of the Yakut ASSR was prepared as part of the RSFSR with the inclusion of the People's Commissariats for the regulation of financial and economic policy of the republic.⁵³⁶ On the same day, *Sibrevkom* made the declaration to the Yakut people stated that the project of the Yakut ASSR was submitted for approval of the Executive Committee, underlining the importance of "political amnesty of the Yakut intelligentsia."⁵³⁷ The official announcement of the amnesty of the national intelligentsia meant a return to legal activity and the opportunity to hold positions in the autonomy-building. Knowing about the contradictions between the Yakut and non-Yakut local party elite, however, Stalin took the side of Ammosov and instructed him to defend the point of view of the *Narkomnats* on granting autonomy to Yakutia.⁵³⁸

In the autumn of 1921, Ammosov launched a press campaign in support of the Yakutia autonomy's project. He talked about the benefits of cultural, economic and national development of Yakutia in the RSFSR, argued that "the power of the Yakut region will be entirely concentrated in the hands of the poor and will be based on the cooperation with the brotherly Russian proletariat."⁵³⁹ He called for the dissemination of autonomist ideas throughout Yakutia for the preparation of the working masses.⁵⁴⁰ Ammosov was satisfied with

⁵³⁵ "Iz protokola zasedaniia kollegii Narkomnatsa o yakutskom otdele (24 apreliia 1921 g.)" [From the Minutes of the Session of the Narkomnats Collegium on the Yakut Department (April 24, 1921)], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 56.

⁵³⁶ "Proekt polozheniia ob Avtonomnoi Yakutskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Sovetskoi Respublike (26 apreliia 1921 g.)" [Draft of the Regulations on the Yakut Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (April 26, 1921)], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 58.

⁵³⁷ "Proekt deklaratsii Sibrevkoma k yakutskomu narodu (26 apreliia 1921 g.)" [The Draft of the Declaration of Sibrevkom to the Yakut People (April 26, 1921)], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 60.

⁵³⁸ "Iz protokola zasedaniia kollegii narodnogo komissariata po delam natsional'nostei o neobkhodimosti vydeleniia yakutskoi oblasti v avtonomnuiu edinitsu (16 maiia 1921 g.)" [From the Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of the People's Commissariat for Nationalities on the Need to Allocate the Yakut Region in an Autonomous Unit (May 16, 1921)], *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 61.

⁵³⁹ Maxim Ammosov, "Krasnaya Yakutia (7 noyabrya 1921 g.)" [Red Yakutia (November 7, 1921)], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 43.

⁵⁴⁰ "Protokol pervogo zasedaniia gubernnskogo s"ezda predstavitelei uездnykh i volostnykh revkomov Yakutskoi gubernii (3 oktiabريا 1921 g.)" [Minutes of the First Meeting of the Provincial Congress of Representatives of District and Volost Revolutionary Committees of the Yakut Province (October 3, 1921)], in *Obrazovanie Yakutskoi ASSR (1917-1923 gg.): Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 52.

the “cohesive work of the Yakut intelligentsia” which gradually moved to the side of Soviet construction.⁵⁴¹ The result of agitation was the circulation of the autonomist ideas “in the Soviet sense” both among the general population and in the ranks of higher authorities.⁵⁴²

The organization of Yakut personnel on the ground, the insistence on autonomy, personal support of Stalin, as well as the “use of amnestied representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia” in the power structures of the Yakut region led to the so-called March *coup* of 1922. It characterized by the complete transition of power to the Yakut party leaders instead of the previously managing Russian internationalists.⁵⁴³ In April 1922, the Declaration on the formation of the Yakut ASSR within the RSFSR was proclaimed. However, the administrative center of the autonomy was Irkutsk, and the issues of foreign affairs, foreign trade and security were removed from the competence of the autonomy.⁵⁴⁴ The borders and administrative structure of the Yakut ASSR also had to decide later. Nevertheless, the declaration of autonomy, according to Ammosov, fulfilled the basic requirement of the Yakuts, free national development “after the exhausting years of oppression of Russian tsarism.”⁵⁴⁵ He stressed the importance of the Yakut national intelligentsia able to convince the masses and apply “public” methods of working with the population during the formation of the Yakut autonomy.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴¹ Maxim Ammosov, “V avtonomnoi Yakutii (pis'mo iz Yakutska)” [In the Autonomous Yakutia (The Letter from Yakutsk)], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 47.

⁵⁴² “Pis'mo M.K. Ammosova predsedateliu Sibrevkoma I.N. Smirnovu po povodu telegrammy B.Z. Shumiatskogo o faktakh repressii sredi mirnogo naseleniia yakutskoi oblasti” [The Letter from M. K. Ammosov to Chairman of Sibrevkom I. N. Smirnov about Telegrams of B. Z. Shumiatskii on the Facts of Repression among the Civilian Population of the Yakut Region], in *Maxim Ammosov: publikatsii, vospominaniia, dokumenty, fotografii*, 150.

⁵⁴³ Aleksandr Korobeinikov, “Yakutskaya avtonomiya: postimperskie politicheskie proekty yakutskoi intelligentsii, 1905-1922, gg.,” 109.

⁵⁴⁴ “Ob avtonomnoi yakutskoi sotsialisticheskoi sovetskoi respublike (27 apreliia 1922 g.)” [On the Yakut Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (April 27, 1922)], in *Konstitutsii i konstitutsionnye akty RSFSR (1918-1937): sbornik dokumentov*, ed. A.Y. Vyshinskii (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo vedomostei verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR, 1940) 128-9.

⁵⁴⁵ Maxim Ammosov, “Tezisy o stroitel'stve avtonomii Yakutii i oborone ee ot napadeniia khishchnikov vostochnogo imperializma” [Theses on the Construction of The Yakut Autonomy and its Defense against the Attack of Predators of Eastern Imperialism], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 48.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

In an open letter published in the newspaper *Autonomous Yakutia*, the group of “labor non-party intelligentsia” declared about unconditional loyalty to the Soviet power:

There is no third way for the Yakut nation, there are only two: either the free federation of nationalities of the RSFSR or the imperialist powers. The first way leads the Yakut nation to its revival, while the second – to its enslavement and destruction. The Yakut labor national intelligentsia openly declares that it has embarked irrevocably on the path of cooperation with the federation of the RSFSR.⁵⁴⁷

Ammosov agreed that the unity “of the Yakut people and the Soviet government” should lead to “a common consonant and a friendly work under the banner of Soviet power.”⁵⁴⁸ The rhetoric of “unity” and “common cause” for the construction of autonomy only intensified and promoted throughout the YASSR.⁵⁴⁹

Summing up the results of the establishment of autonomy, the Yakut party leaders pointed out that the circulation of Soviet national policy was necessary for the national revival of the Yakuts which, in turn, was possible only with the functioning of autonomy.⁵⁵⁰ Implementation of autonomy, according to Ammosov, was a consequence of the struggle with the archaic structure of social, cultural, and economic practices based on ignorance and oppression. The participation of the national intelligentsia and its experience made it possible to improve the domestic, economic, and national characteristics of the Yakuts in an autonomous form.⁵⁵¹ The support of the Yakut masses for the national intelligentsia, the autonomist (self-governmental) discourse, which circulated in the region until 1919, forced the Yakut party leaders to interact with intellectuals to achieve a common goal – national autonomy.

⁵⁴⁷ “Otkrytoe pis'mo Maximu Ammosovu predstavitelei yakutskoi bespartiinnoi intelligentsii” [An Open Letter to Maxim Ammosov from the Yakut Representatives of non-Party Intellectuals], *Avtonomnaya Yakutia*, August 27, 1922, 2.

⁵⁴⁸ Maxim Ammosov, “Polosa povstanchestva zakonchena” [The Insurgency Course is Over], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 51-2.

⁵⁴⁹ They also added the idea of national unity based on the binary oppositions of us (the YASSR and the Soviet power) and others (Western imperialists, White guards). See, Maxim Ammosov, “Edinym frontom (14 oktyabrya 1922 g.)” [United Front (October 14, 1922)], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 55.

⁵⁵⁰ Maxim Ammosov, “K sozyvu oblastnoi partiinoi konferentsii” [To the Convening of a Regional Party Conference], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 69.

⁵⁵¹ Maxim Ammosov, “Natsional'naya politika RKP” [The National Policy of the RCP], in *Ammosov M.K. S pomoshch'iu russkikh rabochikh i krest'ian. Stat'i, rechi, vospominaniia, pis'ma*, 72.

However, to avoid possible accusations in “national bias”, in their speeches to the Moscow audience, the Yakut party leaders sought to emphasize the forced nature of support for the project of national autonomy. Thus, speaking at the Fourth Congress of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) with the responsible workers of the national republics in June 1923 (the meeting decided the fate of the leading ideologist of “national communism” Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev), Barakhov justified the formation of the Yakut autonomy precisely by the presence of a national movement initiated by the national intelligentsia:

the national movement, mainly among the intelligentsia, which has a great influence on the Yakut masses, began to take too large size, we began to raise the question for the center that Yakutia should also give national autonomy.⁵⁵²

According to his version, fears of mass discontent with Soviet policy in the region convinced the Yakut Bolsheviks to invite the national intelligentsia to work, which led to an increase in the number of sympathetic to Soviet power in *uluses* and cities of the Yakut autonomy.

Thus, the question of autonomy, initiated by the national intelligentsia in 1920, contributed to the development of the project of the Yakut ASSR among the Yakut the party elite. The low concentration of the educated elite in the vast territory of the Northeast did not allow talking about the “great influence on the Yakut masses” by the old intelligentsia (which, allegedly, opposed the Bolsheviks). Interaction and personal relationships between the Yakut national and Bolshevik intelligentsia led to the birth of the Yakut autonomy: political amnesty of the national intelligentsia, Nikiforov’s draft on the ‘indigenous’ question, and the same rhetoric of national equality, justice and self-government were a common place for the representatives of both generations of the Yakut intellectuals. The involvement in the Soviet project of nation-building and the lack of personnel on the ground allowed the Yakut party leaders to officially return the national intellectuals expelled from the region, who played a

⁵⁵² Yan Gibadulin, ed., *Tainy natsional'noi politiki TsK RKP. Chetvertoe soveshchanie TsK RKP s otvetstvennymi rabotnikami natsional'nykh respublik i oblastei v g. Moskve 9-12 iyunia 1923 g. Stenograficheskii otchet* [Secrets of the National Policy of the RCP. The Fourth Congress of the Central Committee of the RCP with Senior Officials of National Republics and Regions in Moscow June 9-12, 1923: A Verbatim Report] (Moscow: Insan, 1992), 206.

direct role both in the project of the YASSR and in the creation of new institutions in the Northeast in the early Soviet period.

3.2. The Yakut Way of the Socialist Autonomy: Intellectuals and the Soviet Order

The established politically and administratively Soviet order did not mean the simultaneous switching of loyalties and the automatic cultural and social Sovietization of people. Instead of direct, coercive subjugation of society and forcible transformation of people's 'self', Soviet authorities strived to cultivate, educate society to approach new harmonious social order.⁵⁵³ At the same time, as a part of the early Soviet utopianism Soviets became widely propagate the idea of a New (Soviet) man.⁵⁵⁴ However, as the Bolsheviks always intentionally underlined, to think about a New man and the new world order was achievable based on knowledge about the old order. Accordingly, the Bolsheviks sought to gather information about peoples and cultures they wanted to change that was impossible to realize without considering the authentic evidence and demands of the population. Soviet authorities and specialists shared a belief in the rational management of people and in a reliance on statistics, local languages, and traditions to represent newly institutionalized national groups.⁵⁵⁵ While the disciplines of social science had to adjust conceptual apparatus and vocabulary to Marxism-Leninism paradigm, data, knowledge, and information including those gained before the Bolsheviks came to power were already used by the Soviet authorities for their transformational aspirations.⁵⁵⁶ Therefore, imperial experience and local and expert

⁵⁵³ For studies emphasizing both the productive and repressive aspects of the early Soviet regime, see, for instance, Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 21-22; Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5-14.

⁵⁵⁴ On the early Soviet utopian visions see, Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 17-19; see also Yuri Slezkine, *House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution*.

⁵⁵⁵ Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, 26-29.

⁵⁵⁶ On the Soviet Union as "a new type of scientific state," see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet System*, 312. Hirsch concludes that the USSR as "a new type of scientific

knowledge played one of the leading roles in the building of what some historians called “state of nations” or “transnational state.”⁵⁵⁷

The place of Siberia in the making of the Soviet state was, to a certain degree, crucial. The Bolsheviks were proud that they were able to keep the pearl in the crown of the former Russian Empire. Indeed, possession of Siberia was not only symbolic but also practical. In particular, the Northeast of Siberia contained unique natural resources necessary for the USSR’s forthcoming industrialization.⁵⁵⁸ However, the access to these natural resources in harsh climatic condition was only possible through the knowledge of local peoples. It, in turn, raised a question toward the small peoples of the North because the disappearance of the natives could turn a potentially rich country into a frozen desert. Therefore, according to the reports of experts and ethnographers, denying them assistance would be a colossal economic crime.⁵⁵⁹ The authors of the reports on the Northeast’s situation insisted that despite the small number and political insignificance, the native peoples of Siberia hold in their hands the keys to the economic development of almost one-third of the country. Borrowing the rhetoric and arguments from the imperial missionaries of the Il'minskii school, ethnographers and local activists assured the Soviet officials that the protection of the “backward tribes of the North” is not an act of mercy or even a manifestation of class solidarity, but a matter of extreme urgency

state” used the experience of imperial ethnographers, sociologists, and anthropologists for ‘shaping’ social development and for making national distinctions more evident in a new state.

⁵⁵⁷ Yuri Slezkine “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”; Terry Martin, “An Affirmative Action Empire: The Soviet Union as the Highest Form of Imperialism,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, eds. Ronald Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67-90; on Soviet transnationalism, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, “Transnationalism in One Country? Seeing and Not Seeing Cross-Border Migration within the Soviet Union,” *Slavic Review* 75, no. 4 (2016): 970-986.

⁵⁵⁸ On the history of the early Soviet Siberia see, James Hughes, *Stalin, Siberia and the Crisis of the New Economic Policy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8-17; Igor Naumov, David Collins, *The History of Siberia, 196-202*; Alan Wood, *Russia’s Frozen Frontier: A History of Siberia and the Russian Far East, 1581-1991*, 191-200.

⁵⁵⁹ See, Grigorii Lebedev, “Vymiraiushchie brat’ia” [Dying Brothers], *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei*, no. 19 (1920); Vladimir Vilenskii-Sibiriakov, “Inorodcheskii vopros v Sibiri” [The Indigenous Question in Siberia], *Zhizn’ natsional’nostei*, no. 30 (1920); see also, Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, 162-69.

and supreme state importance.⁵⁶⁰ For instance, Bogoraz argued that the recent experience of the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and Germany demonstrated the need for a physical separation of “strong” and “weak” cultures. In Siberia, “merging with the Russian, without any reservations, is death to the natives.”⁵⁶¹ ‘New’ Soviet experts and ethnographers frequently referred to imperial categories and applied some models of new ethnographic schools which were less prevalent in late imperial Russia in work for nation-building within the new order. According to Bogoraz, the Soviet Union needed not only a state organ responsible for the welfare of its natives but also local specialists who could provide the new policy through a language accessible to the illiterate population. Their task would be to study the lifestyles of natives and the holding of an enlightened policy aimed at the protection of indigenous peoples, rationalization of their economic activities, environmental issues, and “betterment of the entire economic life of the natives and the application of appropriate elements that give the possibility of smooth progress.”⁵⁶²

It is not an accident that the national intellectuals returned to the Yakut region was a part of cultural and educational work in the Yakut ASSR. Some of them partook in the *Ulus* Soviets aimed at carrying out significant work on account of the population, census of deer, grassland and their distribution among the poor, the involvement of local communities in cooperation, clarification of the new governmental policy. During the early Soviet period, the native population of the Yakut autonomy was actively involved in public life which was facilitated by the policy of the Soviet state to assist the peoples of the Northern borderlands of the RSFSR.⁵⁶³ The priority tasks of the Soviet government were the issues of trade provision,

⁵⁶⁰ Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*, 167; Vera Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, 134-40.

⁵⁶¹ Vladimir Bogoraz-Tan, “O pervobytnykh plemenakh (Nabroski k proektu organizatsii upravleniia tuzemnymi plemenami)” [On primitive Tribes (Sketches to the Project of the Organization for Management of Native Tribes)], *Zhizn' natsional'nostei*, no. 1 (1922). It is noteworthy that in later editions of this article the imperial category “indigenous peoples” (*inorodtsy*) was replaced by “borderland peoples” (*okrainnye narody*).

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ See, Dennis Bartels, Alice Bartels, *When the North Was Red: Aboriginal Education in Siberia* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

the fight against hunger among the natives, bringing natives to ‘civilized’ standards of life, eradication of disease and illiteracy. The initiators of the movement in the cultivation of the Northeast peoples were representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia, as well as former political exiles and ethnographers interested in preserving the unique material and spiritual culture of the natives. On October 24, 1924, the Committee for Promotion of Nationalities of the Far North, which dealt with all issues related to the North, including the Soviet state building, administrative and territorial structure, development of communications, was established in the Yakut region. The first Chairman of this Committee was the current Chairman of the Yakut Central Executive Committee Oyunskii. As in the case of the Yakut autonomy’s establishment, the early Soviet time of experiments and local initiatives helped both old and new intellectual figures not only acquire positions in Soviet institutions but also recommend measures for cultural, educational, and social policy in the Northeast.

No less important was the personal role of the Yakut autonomy’s leaders. Oyunskii was the organizer and head of the research society for local lore (*kraevedenie*) study “Sakha Keskile”. *Kraevedenie*, in this period, was an independent and powerful mechanism for mobilizing national spaces becoming a tool for creating the original language of their description. In the national republics, the development of local history was directly related to the growth of the national movement that could unite people in making a common cause for the region.⁵⁶⁴ That is why Oyunskii controlled almost all spheres of cultural and national life within the region. Greeting the First All-Yakut Constituent Congress another Yakut leader Ammosov underlined that “as long as there is a Communist party, the fate of backward peoples is in the right hands.”⁵⁶⁵ For Ammosov, it was essential to link new Soviet course with the activity of

⁵⁶⁴ Ekaterina Melnikova, “‘Sblizhalis narody kraia, predstavitelem kotorogo iavliaius ia’: kraevedcheskoe dvizhenie 1920–1930-kh godov i sovetskaia natsionalnaia politika,” 211, 218-20.

⁵⁶⁵ “Ob otkrytii Pervogo Vseyakutskogo uchreditel’nogo s’ezda Sovetov 27 dekabrya 1922 goda” [On the Opening of the First All-Yakut Constituent Congress of Soviets on December 27, 1922], *Avtonomnaya Yakutia*, December 28, 1922.

the Yakut national intellectuals because “the population does not believe in the pursued policy <...> the prestige of the intelligentsia among the population is extremely high... Until all fled intelligentsia returns, the work is very complicated.”⁵⁶⁶ He also stressed the importance of joint activities of representatives of the Soviet government and the national intelligentsia in the interests of the Yakut autonomy:

The duty of the national intelligentsia is to actively and fervently undertake the construction of the autonomous Yakutia. There is no and there can be no justification for anyone from the national intelligentsia in the desire to stay away from the autonomous Yakutia, especially those who go against it. The time for a decisive reassessment of the political line of the national intelligentsia has come. Enough hesitation! Into action! To creative work!⁵⁶⁷

Due to interpersonal relations, experience, professional knowledge, and support of the Yakut masses, the national intellectuals were able to work in the Yakut autonomy as experts, occupying power positions in the Republic. Despite the rejection of the power of the Soviets in 1919, the Yakut actors did not abandon their educational intentions moving away from the political struggle; “new legal conditions” and loyal relations on the part of Ammosov gave them the opportunity to continue educational and reformist projects to form the basis of the Yakut national life. For example, Timofeev-Tereshkin turned from a semi-legal person into a delegate of the First Constituent Congress of Soviets and then a member of the Yakut Central Executive Committee of the third convocation. Gradually, he became a Soviet economic worker, a constant adviser to the leaders of the Yakut Republic on trade, finance, and industry. Ammosov, in his letters, repeatedly wrote about Timofeev-Tereshkin as an invaluable actor, a professional and a patriot.⁵⁶⁸

The program of educational reforms initiated by Novgorodov acquired a new impetus in 1919-1920 with the reforms on the Yakut language. Being among the party members of the

⁵⁶⁶ Cited from, Nataliia D'iakonova, *Yakutskaia intelligentsiia v natsional'noi istorii: sud'by i vremia (konets XIX v. - 1917 g.)*, 168.

⁵⁶⁷ Maxim Ammosov, *V gushche sobytii: stat'i, pis'ma, telegrammy, rechi, besedy (1920-1928)* [In the Thick of Things: Articles, Letters, Telegrams, Speeches, Conversations (1920-1928)] (Yakutsk: Bichik, 2007), 66-67.

⁵⁶⁸ Mikhail Timofeev-Tereshkin, *Na rubezhe dvukh epokh: vospominaniia, nauchnye trudy, stat'i, pis'ma, proizvedeniia*, 7.

Yakut Federalists Novgorodov in 1919 created a declaration of the Yakut labor intelligentsia in which he “expressed recognition of the existing Soviet power since December 15,” evaluating the new political order as a “coalition of all living forces of the country against the counter-revolution.”⁵⁶⁹ Soon the intellectual made a report on the Yakut education and national ‘revival’: the regionalist rhetoric on the preservation of the cultural value of the Yakut people through the written word in his speech correlated with the desire for national self-determination.⁵⁷⁰ In this case, the ‘indigenous’ issue in the ideological program of Siberian regionalism correlated with the early Soviet nationalities policy, which allowed the Yakut intelligentsia to interact with party leaders within the new order. As Novgorodov noted, “we need to use this transitional time to determine our own forces and abilities: such moments, when there are favorable conditions for keeping historical exam on the title of the high cultural tribe, are repeated extremely seldom.”⁵⁷¹

The reform of the printed language contributed to the occurrence of the Yakut primer (*Bichik*) and the first books in the Yakut language, but the lack of funds special plates with a new font did not allow to publish more books. In this regard, on the initiative of Ammosov, a special Commission on the compilation of books and textbooks in the Yakut language headed by Novgorodov was established in February 1920, Ammosov also allocated funds for the casting of new printing plates and (re)publication of the Yakut primer of 1917.⁵⁷² Such a way of the nationality’s issue in the Yakut region resolved by the organization of people’s “readings, discussions, and meetings, as well as by spreading of literature on the Yakut language in both

⁵⁶⁹ Semyon Novgorodov, *Pervye shagi yakutskoi pis'mennosti: stat'i i pis'ma*, 38.

⁵⁷⁰ Earlier, Potanin wrote about the example of the cultural revival of the Kyrgyz speaking about the fixation of oral creativity of natives of the Steppe region. See, Grigorii Potanin, *Izbrannye sochineniia v trekh tomakh. Trudy po istorii, etnografii i fol'kloru* [Selected Essays in Three Volumes. Works on History, Ethnography, and Folklore], Vol. 3 (Pavlodar: TOO NPF ‘ECO’, 2005), 110-14.

⁵⁷¹ Semyon Novgorodov, “Yakutskaia gramota i iazyk v kachestve neobiazatel'nykh predmetov v programme vysshikh uchilishch Yakutskoi oblasti” [The Yakut Literacy and Language as Optional Subjects in the Program of Higher Schools of the Yakut Region] in *Pervye shagi yakutskoi pis'mennosti: stat'i i pis'ma*, 47.

⁵⁷² Semyon Novgorodov, *Pervye shagi yakutskoi pis'mennosti: stat'i i pis'ma*, 94.

Yakutsk and outside of it.”⁵⁷³ Terry Martin suggested that such actions in the territories with a small Russian population was a small linguistic perspective on huge policy on indigenization.⁵⁷⁴ However, it can also be considered as a part of “indigenization before indigenization” when local intellectuals attempted to provide linguistic, cultural, and educational policies in the time of experimentations and uncertainties.

The tendency to the reform of the education and cultural systems in the ‘indigenous’ environment influenced inter-ethnic or transnational interaction.⁵⁷⁵ The development of national languages, the translation of literature, and the saturation of various borrowings led to frequent comparisons of the development of other nationalities’ linguistic and cultural experience. Novgorodov noted the creation of “laconic scientific, philosophical, pedagogical, elegant and other kinds of literature among the Kalmyks, Mongols and Trans-Baikal Buryats, as well as among the Kazak-Kirghiz.”⁵⁷⁶ Having the opportunity to trace the cultural and national development of the Siberian natives, Novgorodov was especially underlined merits of the Buryat-Mongol actors because the Baikal region was the nearest to the Yakut ASSR national territory. In his letter dated 1923, the Yakut actor welcomed Elbek-Dorji Rinchino and Tsuben Zhamtsarano in their “manifestations of the Buryat-Mongol national revival.”⁵⁷⁷ Hence, emphasizing the role of the Buryat-Mongolian actors in the cultural, political, and anti-colonial spheres, the Yakut intellectual built his name into a number of ‘indigenous’ figures who had a political career in the early Soviet period.

⁵⁷³ Semyon Novgorodov, “Yakutskaia gramota i iazyk v kachestve neobiazatel'nykh predmetov v programme vysshikh uchilishch Yakutskoi oblasti,” 50.

⁵⁷⁴ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, 133.

⁵⁷⁵ Ivan Sablin, Aleksandr Korobeynikov, “Buryat-Mongol and Alash autonomous movements before the Soviets, 1905-1917,” 214-15; Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, “Transnationalism in One Country? Seeing and Not Seeing Cross-Border Migration within the Soviet Union.”

⁵⁷⁶ Semyon Novgorodov, “Yakutskaia gramota i iazyk v kachestve neobiazatel'nykh predmetov v programme vysshikh uchilishch Yakutskoi oblasti,” C. 49.

⁵⁷⁷ Semyon Novgorodov, “C. Zhamtsaranu i E. Rinchino” [To Tsuben Zhamtsarano and Elbek-Dorji Rinchino], in *Pervye shagi yakutskoi pis'mennosti: stat'i i pis'ma*, 238.

The basis of educational reforms created by the national intelligentsia was continued in the early Soviet period which testified to the role of local creativity in the Soviet nationalities policy. The same continuity can be traced in the case of cultural and educational societies created by the Yakut intellectuals during the time of imperial crisis. For instance, the educational society ‘Sakha Aimakh’ headed by Novgorodov lasted until 1920 when it was replaced by another cultural and educational society ‘Sakha Omuk’. During this time, specialized courses of Yakut literacy were opened, the teaching staff expanded, the number of people who could read and write in the Yakut language increased significantly.⁵⁷⁸ Recalling the significant events of his political career Nikiforov wrote about the impact of the created educational and public spaces on the Yakuts. The former leader of the Yakut national intelligentsia emphasized the role of the Yakut actors in the involvement of the Yakuts in public and political life through publications, translations, declarations, and manifestos⁵⁷⁹ that created conditions for the functioning of public space similar to those in the capital:

If the information is presented in the form of a letter or a story, it will become available only to a close circle of friends close to me, and a wide range of people will remain in the dark. If the information is presented in the form of a simple story, the story will be available only to the reading public. That is why I decided to write it in the form of a play, as many Russian writers did it usually.⁵⁸⁰

One of the telling examples of continuity of imperial practices within the new order as well as the cooperation between the two generations of the Yakut intellectuals is the Complex Expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences to Study the Productive Forces of the Yakut Republic, 1925-1930. The idea of the scientific study of the territory of the Republic arose during the work of the First All-Yakut Congress of Soviets. The initiator was Ammosov himself who as the main aim of the expedition put economic and cultural growth of the peoples of the Northeast. According to Ammosov, only scientists could give accurate information about the

⁵⁷⁸ On the activity of the Cultural and Education Society ‘Sakha Aimakh’ and ‘Sakha Omuk’ see, for instance, Egor Antonov, *Kul'turno-prosvetitel'noe obshchestvo 'Sakha omuk': 1920-1928*.

⁵⁷⁹ Vasilii Nikiforov, “Pochemu i kak napisana p'esa ‘Manchary’?” [Why and How was Written a Play ‘Manchary’?] in *Solntse svetit vsem: stat'i. Pis'ma. Proizvedenia*, 368.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 369.

state of natural and human resources of the region, as well as about promising areas of the economy.⁵⁸¹ In addition to Soviet academicians and ethnographers such as Sergei Ol'denburg, Alexander Fersman, Franc Levinson-Lessing, and Vladimir Komarov who alternately led the work in the Yakut region, the expedition consisted of the Yakut intellectuals including Ammosov, Nikiforov, Ksenofontov and other. In total, 386 people were involved in the Commission for the study of the Yakut Republic. The main areas of study were the following: geomorphology, hydrology, agrometeorology, aquatic science, hunting and fishing activities, agriculture, statistical and economic development, forest economic development, ethnographic studies, and health activities.⁵⁸² As a result of the research, the expedition personnel pointed to the existence of prerequisites for the transformation of the Republic from agrarian to industrial-agrarian. In addition to research tasks, the Commission of the USSR Academy of Sciences for the study of the Yakut ASSR also dealt with the training of scientific personnel and the creation of scientific institutions. The first scientific institutions in the territory of the Soviet Northeast appeared as a result of the activities of this Commission. Thus, as a combination of imperial and Soviet scientific experience and cooperation, the expedition laid the foundation for the future network of scientific institutions of the Republic.

During the time of the expedition, Nikiforov wrote the stories in which he captured the early Soviet experience of social interaction in the Yakut region. One of the features of the intelligentsia was the reflection of their images on antagonists of literary work,⁵⁸³ on the example of *Malasyn* Nikiforov illustrated his personal experience of participation in the political life of the Yakut region in the imperial period and the role of the national intelligentsia

⁵⁸¹ On the plans and discussions around the expedition, see Pavel Vittenburg, *Yakutskaia ekspeditsiia Akademii nauk* [The Yakut Expedition of the Academy of Sciences] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1925).

⁵⁸² More on history of the Yakut Complex Expedition, see Julia Ermolaeva, *Yakutskaia kompleksnaia ekspeditsiia 1925–1930 gg. Razvitie nauki v Yakutii* [The Yakut Complex Expedition of 1925-1930. The Development of Science in Yakutia] (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 2001).

⁵⁸³ Marina Mogilner, *Mifologiya "podpol'nogo cheloveka": radikal'nyi mikrokozmos v Rossii nachala KhKh veka kak predmet semioticheskogo analiza*, 12-14.

in the early Soviet period. In the first part of the story, the author ‘reconstructed’ the events of 1905: the problems of social inequality – the struggle with the toyons, “who took the clear sun from the poor” – dominate the protagonist who decided to challenge the circumstances.⁵⁸⁴ Nikiforov repeated the main storyline of the play *Manchaary* adding new events to the life of the protagonist, who embodied the life of the intellectual himself after 1919. The second part described the construction of a large Yurt, which was created by the efforts of the younger generation of the Yakuts (meant Ammosov and other ‘young’ Yakut party leaders). Then Nikiforov illustrated the dialogue aroused from the question on the role of old men (the national intellectuals). One of the story characters responded:

How can anyone be against it, whether he is young or old, if only he wants to benefit his people? All conscious and loving people should unite among themselves and make efforts to improve the situation of their people.⁵⁸⁵

Putting in the character’s speech such words, Nikiforov justified the activities of the national intelligentsia in the construction of the Yakut autonomy and the development of the Yakut nation. However, the Soviet cultural and educational process in the YASSR puzzled Nikiforov, who through a literary work, criticized the excessive number of circulars and decrees that had no practical response from the population. He wrote that “before opening schools in the native language, it is necessary to make and publish a sufficient number of good textbooks, to prepare experienced teachers, to establish a certain solid transcription.”⁵⁸⁶ Nikoforov not only created a narrative of intellectuals’ unification but also criticized uncertain bureaucratic practices of the central authorities which, in his view, impeded “healthy national development.”

Ksenofontov, who publicly abandoned political activity in 1920, played an important role in the creation of the Yakut national narrative in the Soviet Union. After the establishment of Soviet power in the Northeast, he engaged in scientific activities in Irkutsk under the

⁵⁸⁴ Vasilii Nikiforov, “Malasyn. Rasskaz iz yakutskoi zhizni” [Malasyn. The Story from the Yakut Life], in *Solntse syetit vsem: stat’i. Pis’ma. Proizvedenia*, 121.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

supervision of Bernqard Petri, a student of Radlov and Shternberg.⁵⁸⁷ Ksenofontov devoted himself to the study of the Yakuts' origin. Participating in numerous expeditions, he relied on the ideas of the regionalists and on the views of Novgorodov on the importance of fixing the oral tradition, which stores information about the traditions, culture, and beliefs of the ancient Yakuts. Hence, the intellectual began to collect materials on ethnography, folklore, and shamanism and study object found in archaeological expeditions. The result of Ksenofontov's scientific creativity was the publication of more than 20 ethnographic works on ethnogenesis, beliefs, and everyday life of the ancient Yakuts. The author published some works before his death. The example is *Urianghai-Sakhalar. Essays on the Ancient History of the Yakuts*, in which Ksenofontov 'investigated' the history and issues of the origin of the Vilyui and Northern Yakuts, finding the reasons for "ethnographic merger of the two-part Yakut tribe" and systematized the historiography of the study on the Yakuts, denoting the existing theories and ideas.⁵⁸⁸ Ksenofontov's studies formed the basis of the Soviet narrative of the Yakut region.⁵⁸⁹ However, some of his essays could be read as an attempt to write a post-colonial history of the Yakut people.

Thus, the activity of the Yakut intelligentsia in the early Soviet period was closely related to cultural, educational, and scientific activities. Interpersonal communication and transcultural interaction between the first and second generations of the Yakut intellectuals influenced the way of the Yakut autonomy development. The local creativity of the Yakut intelligentsia affected the acceleration of the construction and development of the Autonomous Republic that the intellectuals sought to achieve as a part of the potential Russian Federal

⁵⁸⁷ Ekaterina Romanova, "G.V. Ksenofontov: mif o stranstvuyuschem geroe" [G.V. Ksenofontov: The Myth of the Wandering Hero], in *Repressirovannye etnografy*, ed. D.D. Tumarkin, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Vostochnaya literature, 2003), 89-90.

⁵⁸⁸ See, Gavriil Ksenofontov, *Uraangkhai-sakhalar. Ocherki po drevnei istorii yakutov* [Urianghai-Sakhalar. Essays on the Ancient History of the Yakuts] (Yakutsk: Natsional'noe izdatel'stvo Respubliki Sakha (Yakutia), 1992).

⁵⁸⁹ Ekaterina Romanova, "G.V. Ksenofontov: mif o stranstvuyuschem geroe," 101-3.

Democratic Republic. The post-imperial projects and ideas of the Yakut actors were reflected during the period of the YASSR's development: the involvement of the Yakuts in public life, cultural and educational intentions, social initiative, even some political ideas (primarily the solution of the 'indigenous' issue and the impact on the policy of the center in relation to the East)⁵⁹⁰ were essentially important for the Yakut intellectuals. The personal initiative of the Yakut national and party actors influenced the fate and development of the state project in the region. The Yakut party leaders used the basis of the self-governing region created by national intellectuals, as well as the ideas of the intelligentsia after 1919 in order to acquire the status of an Autonomous Republic. Acting within the framework of the Soviet national policy, the Yakut actors not only initiated the issue of acquiring the rights to the Yakut autonomy, despite criticism of the lack of economic, economic, and cultural development but also defended their ideas by implementing the YASSR project.

3.3. Concluding Remarks

As I illustrate in this chapter, the Yakut autonomy that was established in 1922 was a synthesis of both the Soviet state design and the experience and activities of the Yakut intellectuals. Uncertainties in the early Soviet nationalities policy opened many opportunities for local moments as it was during the revolutionary period. The Yakut Bolsheviks who did not have a plan for national autonomy before 1919 was concerned with the issue of the Yakut region as it might disappear as an independent regional unit. Ammosov and other Yakut Bolsheviks turned to the rhetoric of the Yakut national intelligentsia on regional self-government in order to prove that the region had the possibilities for an autonomous existence. The lack of

⁵⁹⁰ The Buryat-Mongol actors also led the policy influenced the change in the center's vision. In September 1920 Rinchino made the report *The Indigenous Question and the Task of Soviet Construction in Siberia* which affected the policy of Lenin regarding the Eastern territories.

experienced personnel and distrust of population to the new order were an official reason to invite the Yakut intellectuals to work on the Yakut autonomy.

Although non-Yakut Siberian party members did not see the Northeast as an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the language of the nationalities politics perceived by Ammosov played a crucial role in defending the rights to the Yakut gubernia and then autonomy. Numerous references to the work and activity of the Yakut national intellectuals was not an obstacle for the autonomy-building in the Northeast; instead it was an issue that helped the Yakut intellectuals to act together for the common goal of the development of the Yakut people. Cultural, educational, scientific activities allowed many of the Yakut national intellectuals' representatives to return to the Northeast legally and to promote the Yakut life in the new political order. Thus, the post-imperial project of the Yakut intellectuals to have self-government in the Northeast was achieved in the form of autonomy. Local initiative and horizontal relations made it possible to demand the autonomous status for the Yakut region within the dynamically driven early Soviet state project.

Conclusion

The post-imperial transformations of the Russian Empire that started after the February Revolution of 1917 was a direct result of paradoxical and unpredictable character of the imperial situation during the beginning of the twentieth century. The Great Imperial Revolution revealed various forms of social and political diversity that were previously hidden from the eyes of ‘official’ politics. 1917 was a key year in a long-term period of post-imperial reorganizations of the heterogeneous population seeking new forms of government. The development of post-imperial political imagination and social mobilization, the spread of the discourses of socialism, nationalism, self-government and self-determination, the growth of national aspirations, the emergence of new forms of government and many other novelties were the products of entangled relations between actors, imperial institutions, and global discursive encounters across the former imperial space. At the same time, the very nature of the Great Imperial Revolution created conditions for restoring the original imperial project in the new social and political order. It not only left the possibilities for including regional representatives to partake in all-Russian political discussions but also provided the space for the nonlinear way of Russia’s post-imperial development.

As I have shown in this thesis, the example of the Northeast demonstrates the nonlinearity in the formation of post-imperial projects among local actors and various trajectories of political and public actions during the crisis of the Russian Empire and the imperial transformation. Although there were two generations of the Yakut intelligentsia which had different causes and contexts of occurrence and, accordingly, different ideas and views on the Northeast’s development, the peculiarity of the imperial situation in the Northeast ultimately contributed to the unification of the intelligentsias basing on the Yakut autonomy’s idea. Being a part of imperial structures of power, the Yakut national intellectuals gained a social and scientific experience before the Revolution of 1917, and, thus, they had a clear vision

of their actions that included national self-determination, creation of the Zemstvo self-governmental institutions, and the ability to represent the Yakut region politically in potential All-Russian Parliament. At the same time, the new group of the Yakut Bolsheviks used the rhetoric of the national intellectuals to build their own program following the general course of the Social Democrats. However, the social conditions and lack of political resources did not allow them to seize power in the Northeast soon after the October *coup*. Public support and precise plan of actions stimulated the national intellectuals to rule the region and establish the Zemstvo self-governmental institutions in 1918. The local Yakut case allows us to see the dynamic of post-imperial transformation from below and to evaluate the nonlinearity of revolutionary narrative by analyzing the various directions, projects, thoughts, and ideas before and after the Great Imperial Revolution.

In addition to the general introduction of the Northeast to the modern historiography, my thesis also contributes to the existing field of global post-imperial studies. Although Yakut historians wrote many books on Yakutia filling factual lacunas in the history of the Yakut intelligentsia, I have examined the Northeast as a transcultural and diverse region in which globally circulated discourses and ideas impacted on the intellectual movements at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite a seemingly obvious peripheral position of the region with harsh climatic condition and lack of communication, the Northeast had importance natural and human resources during the revolutionary transformations and the formation of the Soviet Union. The Northeast and its intellectual movements are a great example of Russia's post-imperial transformation from a regional perspective.

Thus, this thesis confirm that The Yakut intellectual movement was a synthesis of imperial and global ideas combined with the needs of the local population. The activity of the Yakut national intelligentsia was due to the imperial crisis, in the context of which there was the 'Yakut question' initiated the formation of regional interest on the part of the intellectuals.

The languages of self-description, ideas, and projects of the national intelligentsia born through the acquisition of professional knowledge in the educational institutions of the Empire were formed at the time of the imperial transformation. Even though there was no specific, homogeneous course of activity among the intellectuals, the cooperation with ethnographers and exiles, as well as the use of the regionalists' rhetoric, contributed significantly to the understanding of 'self' of the Yakut national intelligentsia. Having no experience of working with the masses and not being able to conduct 'radical' propaganda, the Yakut Bolsheviks, on the contrary, resorted to the methods of the national intelligentsia to involve the population in social and political life through the press, speeches, and discussions. At the same time, ideas about the self-government of the Yakut region, as well as about the potential federal structure of Russia were several times articulated at meetings of the Yakut Committee of Public Security, during which representatives of different political unions were able to discuss the potential post-imperial order in Russia, Siberia, and the Yakut region. Therefore, the development of a post-imperial political imagination was not predetermined by contextual features of the Northeast but was rather an outcome of discursive encounters and cooperation between local and imperial actors.

As I have argued in the first two chapters, the imagination of post-imperial order among the Yakut national intellectuals had various trajectories. First, the emergence of the Yakut actors critical of the imperial administration occurred through interaction with political exiles, ethnographers, and Orientalists who participated in the Sibiriakov expedition which allowed to study the social, economic, economic needs of the Northeast. The involvement of Nikiforov and other Yakuts in the expedition, further interaction with political exiles and ethnographers led to the birth of the local intelligentsia crystallized around the revolutionary events of 1905-1907. The main problems of the newly-emerging Yakut intellectuals encompassed the land

issue, the establishment of the Zemstvo self-government, and granting the right to political representation of the Yakut region in the State Duma of the Russian Empire.

Second, ideas of social transformations, the demand for equality, anti-colonial rhetoric, educational intentions were associated with the circulation of the Siberian regionalists' ideas in the Northeast. The interaction of the Yakut national intelligentsia with the regionalists during the time of the imperial crisis, the opening of the Potatin's Educational Society in Yakutsk, and the representation of Ksenofontov and Novgorodov in the Siberian Regional Duma influenced the formation of federalist ideas in the political program of the Yakut Labor Union of Federalists. Besides establishing the Siberian Autonomy within the Russian Federal Democratic Republic, the program also included the institutionalization of the Zemstvo self-government in the Northeast with further right on the Yakut autonomy. As a result, as an option for post-imperial development, the Yakut national intellectuals proposed decentralization, federalization, and autonomization of the former Russian Empire with broader regional political representation in Parliament. Such views circulated not only in the center of the former Empire but also in various non-Russian regions that one more time underlines the importance of regional dimension in the examination of the imperial transformations.

Third, as a method of post-imperial imagination, the Yakut intellectuals preferred enlightenment and involvement of the local population in public life through the mechanisms of publicity. Being public intellectuals in the Northeast, the Yakut actors sought to organize the local population based on territorial, national, and cultural self-identification which created the preconditions for self-government in the region.

As I have demonstrated in the third chapter, the coming to power of the Bolsheviks in 1919 marked a new stage in the imagination of the post-imperial order in the region. Although the Yakut Bolsheviks did not have a clear vision of the Northeast's development, the cooperation with the national intelligentsia and the almost independent existence of the region

during the Civil War could not but affect the change in the views of the Yakut Bolsheviks. The leaders of the national intelligentsia expelled from the region continued to play an essential role in the reorganization of power in Siberia which, in turn, allowed them to influence the Soviet state-building in the Northeast. Since the economic, social, and cultural backwardness of the Northeast did not allow the region to have an independent status within the RSFSR, the idea of the Yakut autonomy was not a priority for the Soviet central authorities. However, the personal initiative of the Yakut Bolsheviks headed by Ammosov resulted in the emergence of the idea of the Yakut autonomy as a part of the Soviet nationalities policy. The intellectual influence of the national intelligentsia had a serious impact on the activities of the Yakut party intelligentsia. In addition to the very idea of national autonomy, the 'indigenous' issue was also 'returned' within the new political order. Despite the objections of non-Yakut Siberian party leaders who insisted on the provincial (*guberniskii*) or regional (*oblastnoi*) status of the Northeast, the project of the Yakut autonomy was finally approved by 1921. The lack of professional personnel and the distrust of the masses in the new political line prompted Ammosov, Ouynskii, and Barakhov to call on the national intelligentsia to work together for the Yakut autonomy. Thus, the involvement of the national intelligentsia, personal initiative, and local activities of the Yakut Bolsheviks led to the establishment of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922.

Horizontal interactions, imperial experience, as well as the joint activities of the Yakut intelligentsia of the first and second generations during the formation of the Soviet state order played a crucial role in granting the right of autonomy to the Yakuts. The same trajectories of post-imperial development could be traced in other non-Russian Siberian regions. It is, to my mind, very important to examine and compare political, cultural, and social transformations among different Siberian native populations between 1905 and 1925. In order to overcome one-dimensionality of linear transition from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union existing in

modern historiography, in my future PhD thesis I would like to study the mechanisms of post-imperial political imagination in ‘indigenous’ environments, the role of local actors in the formation of national-territorial spaces in the context of imperial transformations, as well as the nation- and autonomy-building during the early Soviet period. Indeed, each specific case of the formation of new political orders depended on the political imagination of local actors involved in the project of regional transformations. Thereby, historiographical models of the creation of post-imperial political spaces (first of all, the history of the USSR) need to be fundamentally revised.

My findings indicate that the binary opposition of the external factor (Bolshevik ideology, Imperial center) and local (national) projects in the explanation of the phenomenon of the early Soviet national policy seems incorrect. On the example of the Northeast, it is possible to trace that the Yakut intelligentsia was a result of intensive socialization of the local educated elite in the imperial political and social environment. On the other hand, the emergence of the anti-colonial and national movement was to some extent a ‘response’ of the Yakut intellectuals to such a ‘challenge’ of history as the imperial crisis and the Revolution of 1917. Although different aspects of the imperial situation influenced the first generation of the Yakut intellectuals (Siberian regionalism, political exile, literature, and science), these elements were comprehended by the Yakut intellectuals on their own and used for understanding and expressing local interests. It, in turn, could be described as ‘national’ due to the development of modern social imagination and language. The the Yakut Bolshevik intellectuals responded to the project of the Yakut autonomy formed by the Yakut national intelligentsia with a certain interest though not without questioning it. It should be underlined that a somewhat different intellectual and political context was relevant for them. They had to overcome years of resistance from both Russian imperial and Russian Bolshevik figures of different levels and imperial-minded part of the Yakut society to achieve the implementation of a modified version

of the Yakut autonomy (neither exclusively the Zemstvo institution nor a part of Irkutsk province, nor the narrow-national Yakut polity but an equal part of the early Soviet ethno-federalist project). The nationally-oriented part of the Yakut intellectuals (Bolsheviks and non-partisan) was able to attract the Northeast's population with their project of building national statehood in the form of an autonomous republic.

Besides, it is not necessary to say that the YASSR was the result of the intervention of Moscow politicians and experts-ethnographers. However, at a certain level, their role in this project was indisputable: as exiled political actors and researchers, authors of journal publications, speakers at congresses, and so on participants of the imperial intellectual and social spaces created an encounter place where the Yakut activists formulated their program. At the same time, it was the context of the early Soviet atmosphere of experiments and opportunities that allowed the Yakut actors to achieve their projects using assistance from both Stalin personally and the national intellectuals. Nevertheless, the examination of the personal initiative of the Yakut intelligentsia (both national and Bolsheviks) in the time of global political transformations reveals a more comprehensive analytical model. The continuity of imperial practices and languages formed by the Yakut national intellectuals, and transferred to the early Soviet period's construction of the Yakut nation and autonomy by the Yakut Bolsheviks reveals a synthesis of the Soviet state design and the complex processes of intellectuals' self-organization during the post-imperial transformation. Thus, the example of the Northeast's post-imperial development indicates another regional dimension explaining the significance of local actors in global and imperial transformations, and their crucial role in the formation of the Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic as a part of the Soviet state political order.

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