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THE "END OF THE EARTH":  
SAKHALIN ISLAND IN THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL IMAGINATION,  
1849-1906

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Russian discourses concerning colonization of Sakhalin Island from the 1850s, when explorers claimed the island as innately Russian land, to 1906, when Russia withdrew colonists after surrendering southern Sakhalin to Japan. By examining not only the ever-changing state policies toward Sakhalin, but also the shifting place of Sakhalin in the Russian imagination, I investigate the changing meaning of Russianness itself as the state sought to transform Russia from a backward nation to a modern colonial power. By looking at Sakhalin before it was colonized, early Russian colonization of Sakhalin, the island's intended role in penal reform, and the resulting new Sakhalin identity, the dissertation explores the relationships between discourse and policy, science and its implementation, and Russian identity as defined from above and as experienced from below. Sources include not only the scientific data of explorers and statesmen, but also narratives of those who visited or lived on Sakhalin, from state officials to convicted criminals. Additional data derives from the European Russian mainland, where Sakhalin's discursive position as a colonial Other reveals the struggle of Russian society with its new Russian imperial identity and the European modernity in which it arose. This dissertation illuminates the processes of Russia's transition into modernity and Sakhalin's role in it. Challenging the prevailing assumption that colonization of Sakhalin represented Russian backwardness, I demonstrate that the same factors that generated the Great Reforms led to the colonization of Sakhalin Island and that the exile of criminals to the island was consistent with modern European values of science, humaneness and rational thought. Upon closer investigation, however, penal colonization of Sakhalin reveals shifting definitions of Russianness itself, as pure Russian land was redefined as steppe alone, rather than the contiguous Eurasian territory, thereby excluding Sakhalin, and the Russian citizen molded on Sakhalin needed no longer to speak Russian or worship a Russian God, but rather to labor efficiently and yield a profit for the state. The failure of penal servitude on Sakhalin, I argue, is a sign of the chaos and ambiguity that characterized this transition.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1899, medical doctor Sigismund Brodovich reported in a major Moscow newspaper on the poor conditions of the Sakhalin Island penal colony. In his article, Brodovich repeated a phrase introduced by Anton Chekhov which epitomized the island to many Russians. Explaining in detail the discomforts he experienced and horrors he witnessed during his short visit, he concluded that, “It is no surprise, that ... no one voluntarily travels to the edge of the world [*na krai sveta*].”<sup>1</sup> Located off the eastern shore of Siberia and the final port of a two-month voyage by sea, geographically, the island gave the impression of the end of the earth. As Chekhov had written after his 1890 travels, “this is where Asia ends.... It seems like the end of the world, like there is nowhere further to go.”<sup>2</sup> Yet only a half-century earlier, Sakhalin had been described as a “promised land” [*obetovannaia zemlia*],<sup>3</sup> an abundant land granted by God to his chosen Russian people. In a letter to his family, Lieutenant Voin Rimskii-Korsakov, commissioned to explore the Tatar Strait and the western shores of Sakhalin Island, wrote from his schooner, “It is unbelievable that we failed to devote attention to this golden land [*zolotoi krai*] for so long.... What forests, and in what abundance, how many fish in the rivers, salmon... I can’t think of anything that is not [plentiful] here!”<sup>4</sup> This fundamental shift in Sakhalin’s place in the Russian imagination illuminates not only the sweeping changes taking place on the island itself, but the evolution and negotiation of modern Russian identity overall. While in the 1850s, Russianness was a natural and organic category, defined geographically and characterized—in the view of some—by the effortless affinity of peasants for the Russian soil, by the end of the century, it had become a classification contested in terms of not only its practical definition, but its past significance, constitutive elements, and lasting destiny. In the colonization of Sakhalin, we witness the negotiation of a distinctly Russian modernity, at times sharing and at times rejecting the Enlightenment views of the West.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Brodovich, “Poezdka na Sakhalin,” *Russkie vedomosti* (Moscow), 11 Oct. 1899, 3.

<sup>2</sup> A.P. Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin (iz putevykh zametok)* (Moscow: Izdanie redaktsii zhurnala “Russkaia mysl’,” 1895), 8.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase “promised land” was used by physician F.M. Avgustinovich in 1874 to refer to the misplaced hopes for Sakhalin. F.M. Avgustinovich, *Zhizn' russkikh i inorodtsev na Sakhaline (Ocherki i zametki iz deviatimesiachnogo dnevnika)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia “Obshchestvennaia pol’za,” 1874), 8. A.P. Chekhov popularized the phrase. Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> V.A. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur: Povestvovanie v pis'makh o plavaniakh, prikliucheniiakh i razmyshleniiakh komandira shkhuny “Vostok”* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1980), 124.

While Russians had been aware of Sakhalin since the seventeenth century, only in the 1840s did the state begin exploring the region. This was part of a larger project of exploring Russia's eastern borderlands, itself spurred by Britain's 1842 victory over China in the Opium War. Following an abandoned attempt at Russian military occupation of the island, the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda declared Sakhalin a joint possession of Russia and Japan, and the Russian state increased its efforts to explore and exploit the island's resources. After Russia sold Alaska to the United States in 1867, attention to Sakhalin grew, and when attempts to attract free peasants and entrepreneurs were deemed unfeasible, the state imported convict laborers to mine coal and build permanent settlements. Finally, the 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg proclaimed Sakhalin exclusively Russian territory—no longer shared with the Japanese—and four years later, regular sea transport of convicts began from Odessa. Many in St. Petersburg were hopeful that establishment of penal settlements on the island would simultaneously solve several of the empire's problems: providing coal for the growing Pacific Fleet, securing Siberia from international aggression, and relieving overcrowding in Russian prisons.

It soon became apparent, however, that the island did not lend itself easily to colonization. Agriculture was extremely difficult on the island, despite the optimistic results of a preliminary expedition testing the quality of the island's soil. Sakhalin coal never produced the expected profit, as convicts proved inefficient as miners and the coal was difficult to export. Rather than rehabilitate the convicts, the island and its work regimen turned even some of the most docile into dangers to society. When Chekhov visited Sakhalin in 1890, he reported on the terrible conditions of its prisons and the brutality of its officials, drawing the attention of Russian society and inspiring both philanthropic efforts and state-sponsored reforms. The island never became profitable to the empire, however, and the 1905 occupation of the island by Japan led to the surrender of the southern part of the island, and in 1906, abolition of convict labor on Sakhalin altogether. In both Russia and the West, the failed attempt at Sakhalin colonization came to symbolize imperial Russian backwardness and brutality.

### **The Russian Context**

The initial optimism regarding Sakhalin, consequent attempts to settle and exploit it, and the eventual failure of the project were all elements of a broader negotiation of a Russian modernity, as the Russian state and society sought to not only keep up economically and militarily with a modernizing world, but to define modernity in a Russian context. It was the

opinion of the state—due in part to a devastating loss in the Crimean War of 1853-54—that Russia was backward, and that drastic steps needed to be taken to retain a place of influence in the world. It is no coincidence that colonization of Sakhalin corresponded chronologically with the Great Reforms of Tsar Alexander II, a multi-pronged, state-sponsored effort to bring Russia into line with more “advanced” Western countries. In addition to the 1861 emancipation of serfs, the tsar instituted an elaborate system of local self-government, reorganized the army and navy, reformed the penal code and legal procedures, and abolished capital punishment. Along with a burgeoning industrialization came urbanization, education and enlightenment, and the state exhibited its machinery and manufactured goods at world fairs even as Russians at home debated modernization in the mass-circulation press. Russian reactions to modernization were mixed, as some lamented the loss of a traditional way of life or the encroachment of European ways, while others celebrated advances in humanitarian values, technology and overall “progress.” All of these factors contributed to the state’s decision to settle Sakhalin Island with convicts, and each is evident as well in responses to the project scattered throughout the Russian press.

If imperial Russian modernization provides a key context of Sakhalin colonization, an element of particular importance is imperial expansion, as Russia staked its claims in the “Age of Empire” by strengthening its position in both Europe and Asia. This was not a new development, as Russian conquest of Siberia had begun in the 1500s. Yet the late nineteenth century saw Russian expansion in all directions. Russian conquest of the Caucasus took place between 1817-1864, concluding only when Caucasian leader Imam Shamil swore loyalty to the tsar, followed by the deportation of the majority of the indigenous mountaineers. That same year, the Russian army assumed control of Poland following the insurrection of 1863-64, depriving the kingdom of its autonomous status under the tsar. As loss in the Crimean War had thwarted Russia’s hopes for expansion southward around the Mediterranean, Russia competed with Britain for hegemony in Asia, a conflict known in Britain as the “Great Game.” After conquering Tashkent in 1865, Russia established the Governorate General of Russian Turkestan in 1867 and began sending settlers to populate Central Asia and subordinate its peoples. In the Far East, Russia took advantage of China’s weakness following the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60) and Taiping Rebellion (1851-64) by expanding in Manchuria to the Amur and Ussuri rivers. Only in America did Russia relinquish its territory, withdrawing from Fort Ross in 1841 and selling Alaska in 1867. Yet the loss of its American possessions played a significant role in the state’s

resolve to settle Sakhalin Island, threatened in the south by a modernizing Japan and in the north, so Russians believed, by American whalers and entrepreneurs.

Both imperial expansion and modernization had unanticipated effects on Russia's already taxed penal system, and the overcrowding of prisons added urgency to reforms that had been in process for decades. On the one hand, an increase—or perceived increase—in urban crime, as well as its new non-Russian possessions of Poland, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, led to an increase in the number of convicts, some of whom were sentenced to heavy labor, some to Siberian exile, and others to confinement in European Russian prisons. With the Great Reforms, the purposes of punishment had changed: convicts were to be reformed and made useful citizens of the state. A law of 17 April 1863 abolished branding and limited the use of lashing as punishment. Confinement in overcrowded prisons, however, failed to produce productive workers, and the Siberian exile system faced its own crisis, as depleted mines could not provide work for the large numbers of convicts sentenced to heavy labor. Escaped convicts roamed Siberia wreaking havoc and instilling fear in the local population. In this context, the transportation of criminals to Sakhalin seemed an attractive option. Not only would convicts become productive workers, but they would have an opportunity for correction. If rehabilitation failed, they would be safely isolated on an island, separated by the Tatar Strait from Siberia and European Russia. The failure of the island to serve these purposes forced Russia to reconsider its views of crime, punishment, and human nature, part of an overall pattern of questioning of what constituted modernity in a Russian context.

## **Themes**

In the Great Reforms of Aleksandr II, the Russian state consciously oriented itself toward Europe, aspiring toward a European, enlightenment modernity characterized by science, rationality, industrialization and progress, factors which combined to make colonization of Sakhalin both possible and desirable. Innovations in the chemical, steel and petroleum industries incited what is sometimes labeled the Second Industrial Revolution, which included growth in rail and steamship transport, making possible increased interaction between Sakhalin and the Russian capital and creating a market for coal on the Pacific Rim. Improved transportation also allowed scientists to categorize plants and animals worldwide, including systematic investigation

of Sakhalin Island, making its natural environment legible<sup>5</sup> and ready for cultivation and settlement. With the development of social sciences such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology, humans assumed control over not only nature, but human behavior, and with the invention of the penitentiary, the repair—rather than punishment—of social deviants became a science. Sakhalin was heralded not only for its potential for productive convict labor, but for its correctional function, providing a place to “train a convict for a settled live and peaceful citizenship”<sup>6</sup>

A key element of modernity evident on Sakhalin is Russia’s effort to discipline nature to meet the needs of the modern state. James Scott, in *Seeing Like a State*, describes the widespread proliferation of such processes as constituting a “high modern ideology” that saw science and technology as generating unlimited human potential. Such an ideology, according to Scott, was “uncritical, unskeptical, and thus unscientifically optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production.”<sup>7</sup> This often led to disaster, both ecological and human, as a centralized state could not comprehend or control the environmental and cultural intricacies of remote borderlands. While Scott focuses on failed projects of the twentieth century—social engineering, urban design, and the mechanization of agriculture—Russia’s late-nineteenth-century colonization of Sakhalin exhibits the same modern ideology, and likewise failed.

In Russia, the rapid changes of the modern epoch brought a sense of instability and fear of loss, inspiring efforts to preserve the past and to cling to—or invent—tradition. Ambiguity over Western modernity had been characteristic of Russia for decades, with its ongoing debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers, yet a growing urgency characterized the Reform period, as conservative publicists lamented Russia’s indiscriminate Europeanization and ethnographers set out to record Russian culture before it was lost forever. Just as it appealed to Westernizing reformers, penal colonization of Sakhalin was attractive to opponents of modernization for its connection to the historical Russian practice of Siberian exile and the presumed connection of

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I use the concept of “legibility” as employed by James C. Scott to refer to the process of classification, standardization, and surveying of land and people which make social engineering possible. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-5.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in “O reforme v sisteme nashikh ugovolnykh nakazanii,” *Birzhevye vedomosti* (St. Petersburg), 18 Aug. 1873, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.

the Russian peasant with the soil. On Sakhalin itself, this controversy was most clearly evident in the disputes between experienced and authoritarian prison overseers and Western-oriented humanitarian medical personnel. Yet for those in European Russia anxious about the crime and discontent caused by social reform, the exile of delinquents to Sakhalin provided reassurance that the state remained in control.

Not only was Sakhalin a linchpin in the shaping of a Russian modernity, but dialogue over Sakhalin's destiny also illuminates the negotiation of identities—national, imperial and regional—in prerevolutionary Russia. Historians associate the modern era with the birth of nations, cultural artifacts of profound emotional significance created through the interaction of historical forces, constantly changing despite their appearance of permanence.<sup>8</sup> In particular, ever since Sergei Uvarov's doctrine of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality, defining the nation had been a key element of Russian thought, interweaving aspects of political philosophy, religion, language, and landscape. As Mark Bassin aptly states, referring to the Eurasianist movement of the early twentieth century, "One of the great fascinations of studying nationalist ideologies is to follow the complex process by which foreign notions and perspectives are absorbed, rescripted and resignified, and then redeployed in a manner quite different from, if not indeed opposed to their original function."<sup>9</sup> On Sakhalin, cultures, ideas, languages and peoples were likewise brought together in a new place to mold model Russian citizens in whatever manners local, regional or imperial authorities saw fit. In the process, ideas were tested and adapted to local conditions, and local authorities challenged assumptions and instructions of the imperial center. Changing images of Sakhalin from a land organically Russian to an island at the "end of the earth" demonstrate the shifting meanings of Russianness itself.

Complicating Sakhalin's position was the fact that Russia was not only a nation, but likewise an empire, and settlement of Sakhalin was part of an imperial project of colonial expansion. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a "new imperialism" in which European powers competed for overseas colonial acquisitions, which they justified with doctrines of racial and cultural superiority that presumed indigenous peoples to be unfit for self-government. Crucial to the development of imperial identities was the presumed distinction

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 6-7; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 3-6.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Bassin, "'Classical' Eurasianism and the Geopolitics of Russian Identity," *Ab Imperio* 2003, no. 2 (June): 257.

between the metropole and the colony, the colonies assuming the role of an exotic Other to be studied, classified and civilized by the West. In Russia, such a distinction was problematic, as no clear boundary existed to separate the homeland from its colonies, and some of the empire's non-Russian territories were economically and culturally more developed than its ancient heartland. After the opening of a sea route in 1879 connecting Odessa with the Russian Far East, Sakhalin became an overseas colony at the "end of the earth," reached by sailing past Egypt, India, and China, and serving as the empire's Other; while Sakhalin islanders, both indigenous and transplanted, came to be seen as violent, hypersexualized, incompetent savages, some sentenced to the island for hideous crimes and others corrupted by Sakhalin itself.

As first the Russian state and then society inscribed on Sakhalin meanings foreign and offensive to the island's inhabitants, soon *Sakhalintsy* began to respond by asserting a regional identity apart from that prescribed by the imperial center. While similar to patterns often associated with the origins of nationalism, the process of identity formation on Sakhalin differs in that inhabitants shared no common language, culture, ethnicity, or religion. With twenty-five languages spoken on the island and large populations of Catholics, Lutherans, Muslims and Buddhists, Sakhalin Island was one of the most diverse regions of the empire.<sup>10</sup> Broadly speaking, historical scholarship on regional—as opposed to national—identities tends to either take regional solidarity for granted, as a self-evident category into which the world is naturally divided, or to view regions, like nations, as developing organically and inadvertently over time. In Russia, this period saw the beginnings of the field of *kraevedenie*, roughly translated as regional studies, a discipline founded on the idea of the region as an organic geographic unit influencing history at both macro and micro levels.<sup>11</sup> On Sakhalin, in contrast, the assertion of a regional identity was a conscious and remarkably fast process performed by individuals with little in common other than removal from their homeland to a remote island, generally against their will. *Sakhalintsy* had a choice of how to define themselves, and the decisions they made reflect their attitudes toward both their new home and old.

It was the perception of backwardness on a universal trajectory of European modernity that stimulated the Great Reforms and Sakhalin colonization, yet recent research has called into

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<sup>10</sup> N.A. Troitskii, ed., *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii, 1897 g.*, vol. 77, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, tetrad' 2 (St. Petersburg: Izdanie tsentral'nogo statisticheskogo komiteta Ministerstva vnutrennykh del, 1904), VIII.

<sup>11</sup> Emily D. Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself: the Russian Idea of Kraevedenie* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2006).

question not only the equation of modernity with Europe, but the existence of a singular modernity at all, with the “modern” emerging more in colonial interaction than in Parisian salons. Numerous scholars have demonstrated that colonialism was not only a *result* of modern thinking and power structures, but was a constituent element in modernity’s conception. Treating colonies as “laboratories of modernity,” scholars have identified in colonial settings many key artifacts of modern culture which later migrated to Europe, where they were embedded with new cultural and social significance.<sup>12</sup> According to Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranaham, “Perhaps one of the most important moves that colonial studies has contributed over the last decade is to reverse the trajectory that imagines the modern as a European invention.” It was in colonial interactions and the resulting tensions in Europe, they argue, that key elements of modern statecraft were born.<sup>13</sup> As Dutch anthropologist Peter van der Veer emphasizes:

Modernity has a global history. This does not imply a single origin of concepts and blueprints that are developed in the Enlightenment (both American and French) and exported and resisted, and adopted, elsewhere. Nor does it imply the dialectic between an already finished idiom of modernity that confronts an already existing idiom of tradition, out of which a synthesis emerges. Rather, it manifests a history of interactions out of which modernity, with its new historical problematic, arose, offering creative tensions, not solutions.<sup>14</sup>

As such, Sakhalin Island became a place for the negotiation of a Russian modernity distinct from the enlightenment projects of Europe. To the state, Sakhalin was a *tabula rasa* for the creation of a new Russian community free of the backwardness of the old Russia, yet building on its rich heritage, vast resources, and the innate abilities of the Russian people. Each decision on Sakhalin contributed to the negotiation of Russia’s future, from major concerns such as international treaties and round-the-world transit to minor details such as shaving of heads or celebration of a holiday. Far from the policymakers in the capital, Sakhalintsy themselves—a diverse population that included military officers, civil servants, entrepreneurs, criminals and

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<sup>12</sup> See discussion in Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's "History of Sexuality" and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 15-16.

<sup>13</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranaham, “Refiguring Imperial Terrains,” *Ab Imperio* 2006, no. 2 (August): 50. The reference to colonies as “laboratories of modernity” is from Gwendolyn Wright, “Tradition in the Service of Modernity: Architecture and Urbanism in French Colonial Policy, 1900-1930,” *Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987): 291-316.

<sup>14</sup> Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 160.

political exiles (although seldom the indigenous peoples)—navigated creative tensions to produce alternative modernities conveyed back to Russian society.

Unsurprisingly, given the converging emphases on science, industrialization, colonialism, and social engineering in the modern period, reform of penal practices led to increasing utilization of convicts as colonists. Banishment of criminals to islands was nothing new, nor was the use of convict labor for particularly difficult or distasteful work. But the combination of punishment, productivity, and the settling of recently-acquired territories demonstrates new understandings of both empire and criminals. Great Britain not only transported convicts to Australia from 1787 to 1867, perhaps the most well-known case of penal colonization, but also exiled Indian criminals to the Andaman Islands from 1858 to 1947. France’s penal colony on Devil’s Island (French Guiana) existed from 1852 to 1946, while criminals were sent as well to New Caledonia between 1864 and 1922. At the same time, “prison science” was asserting its place as a discipline, and the opening of the French Colonie Agricole et Pénitentiaire de Mettray (operating from 1840 to 1937 and located not overseas, but in a village north of Tours) is cited by Michel Foucault as representing the most significant transformation of modern penology.<sup>15</sup> A generation later, in 1876, Zebulon Brockway, father of the “new penology” focused on rehabilitation, opened New York’s Elmira Reformatory, introducing the “medical model” into American correctional institutions.<sup>16</sup> The penal colonies on Sakhalin itself were to be more than simply places of labor, but were designed to function as reformatories, exerting social control over convicts and molding them into law-abiding citizens. While scholars of colonialism have tended to focus on colonies that served the purpose of expansion, rather than settlement or confinement—such as colonies for lepers or epileptics—these are not chance homonyms, and on Sakhalin, they converged entirely.<sup>17</sup> Recent historiography on penal colonization includes Satadru Sen’s *Disciplining Punishment*, which looks at the Andaman Islands as a “thoroughly restructured version of Indian society,” although the British state was never able to govern with the absolute authority it envisioned; and Peter Redfield’s *Space in the Tropics*, which describes

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<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 293.

<sup>16</sup> See Alexander W. Pisciotto, *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory-Prison Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1994). Such developments were closely observed in Russia, with noted St. Petersburg jurist I.Ia. Foinitskii lecturing on *tiur'movedenie* [prison science] already in 1874. I.Ia. Foinitskii, *Tiuremnaia reforma i tiur'movedenie: Vsuptel'naia lektsia, pročitannaia v Sankt-Peterburgskom univesitete 8-go ianvaria 1874 g.* (St. Petersburg, [1874]).

<sup>17</sup> See discussion in Stoler and McGranham, “Refiguring Imperial Terrains,” 18-19.

French Guiana in terms of boundaries and reversals—of economics, moral behavior, and even race.<sup>18</sup> This dissertation builds on these foundations, exploring Sakhalin’s role in both imperial expansion and correctional institutionalization. Like the British on the Andamans, Russians strove on Sakhalin, albeit unsuccessfully, to create a new and improved Russian society, and like Devil’s Island, Sakhalin soon came to be seen for its inversion, rather than reinforcement, of social and societal norms. Unlike either, however, the failure of Sakhalin as a Russian colonial settlement, along with the scope of its discursive othering, led not only to the abolition of penal servitude on the island, but to rejection of the land itself.

## Historiography

In the past, the standard Western narrative of Russian history assumed an innate cultural and economic backwardness, periodically combated by reformers such as Peter I, Alexander II, and Vladimir Lenin. Shifting concepts of modernity emerging out of colonial studies and feminist theory have challenged those ideas, and much recent work views imperial Russia in the context of a multifaceted modernity. A major theme is the transformation of subjects of an autocracy into citizens of a modern state, the internalization of authority widely recognized as a component of modernity around the globe.<sup>19</sup> Another focus of study is the imperial Russian drive to know, classify, name, and control, demonstrated in the emergence of fields such as anthropology and *kraevedenie* (regional studies), as well as scientific expeditions throughout the Caucasus, Siberia and Central Asia.<sup>20</sup> Others have focused on the repositioning of identities and emerging notions of the self in the modern period, incorporating ideas such as individualism,

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<sup>18</sup> Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29; Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Historian Peter Beattie is currently working on a book project entitled *Penal Institutions and Penology in Slavery and Emancipation: Fernando de Noronha Island, Brazil 1830-1900*.

<sup>19</sup> This is a primary focus of David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis, eds., *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge, Practices* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000); and is treated explicitly in Austin Lee Jersild, “From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire,” in *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 101-114.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, *How St. Petersburg Learned to Study Itself*; Claudia Weiss, *Wie Sibirien unser wurde: Die Russische Geographische Gesellschaft und ihr Einfluss auf die Bilder und Vorstellungen von Sibirien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2007); Sergei A. Kan, *Lev Shternberg: Anthropologist, Russian Socialist, Jewish Activist* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

privacy, dignity, and self-fashioning.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, a component of the Russian modern is the feeling of crisis, urgency, or even despair foreshadowing the Russian revolution.<sup>22</sup> Each of these themes played a role in the imperial Russian colonization of Sakhalin with convicts, as the state sought to know and control both the territory and the people in response to a sense of crisis and changing relationships of criminals—and Russian subjects overall—to state and society.

Scholars in both Russia and the West have often excluded Russian colonialism from the broader “Age of Empire,” adhering instead to a paradigm of Russian exceptionalism, as Russia expanded over land rather than sea, interpreted as a natural process of resettlement rather than state-sponsored colonialism.<sup>23</sup> Russian expansion has been compared to the “settlement” of the North American frontier.<sup>24</sup> Recent developments in post-colonial studies have prompted a reassessment of Russia as a multi-national, colonizing empire, recognizing the interaction between colonizers and colonized as shaping Russian policies and identity. A pioneer in exploring the discursive role of Siberia as Russia’s colonial Other is the 1993 collection *Between Heaven and Hell*, edited by Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine. Likewise, volumes such as Brower and Lazzerini’s *Russia’s Orient* and Geraci and Khodarkovsky’s *Of Religion and Empire* address the broader field of colonial studies by exploring the empire not in terms of modernization theory, but in terms of the encounters between colonizer and colonized and the demarcation and naming of ethnicities, which guided imperial policymaking regarding the emperor’s non-Russian subjects.<sup>25</sup> Jeff Sahadeo’s *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent* examines the intricacies of imperial rule by looking at Russia’s process of ruling Tashkent,

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siecle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Mark D. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Roberta Thompson Manning, *Crisis of the Old Order in Russia: Gentry and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Susan K. Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> This was the interpretation of imperial Russian historians S.M. Solov’ev and V.O. Kliuchevskii. See S.M. Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, bk. 2, vol. 4 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960), 648; V.O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia v devyati tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow: “Mysl’,” 1987), 49-51.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Eva-Maria Stolberg, ed., *The Siberian Saga: a History of Russia’s Wild East* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005). The Library of Congress digital library “Meeting of Frontiers” also emphasizes similarities between the U.S. west and Siberia. <http://frontiers.loc.gov/intldl/mtfhtml/mfhome.html> (accessed 11 May 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Galya Diment and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *Between Heaven and Hell: the Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993); Daniel R. Brower and Edward Lazzerini, eds., *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, eds., *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

examining not only the accommodation and interdependence, but the violence and resistance in colonial Tashkent.<sup>26</sup> Chia Yin Hsu's 2006 dissertation, "The Chinese Eastern Railroad and the Making of Russian Imperial Orders in the Far East," looks in particular at how Russians sought to protect the Priamur region, considered an integral part of the empire, from the non-Russian—and believed non-Russianizable—Chinese and Koreans encroaching on Russian territory.<sup>27</sup> The 2007 collection, *Peopling the Russian Periphery*, emphasizes the diversity of Russian borderland settlement, referring to Russian "colonizations" in the plural, as "outside colonists, native peoples, the natural environment, and the world of the state and its representatives influenced one another in ever shifting combinations."<sup>28</sup> This study of Sakhalin considers many of these same issues in yet another context: attempts to medically differentiate incorrigible—i.e., non-Russianizable—criminals and to protect the Russian mainland; accommodation and resistance by both the colonized and agents of the state in the colonial setting; and the status of Sakhalin and its residents as an Other against which Russians defined themselves and their nation. In doing so, a picture of Russia emerges of a state modernizing, but afraid of modernity; an empire seeking simultaneously to be European and to demonstrate that it is not.

Russian expansion and resettlement cannot be separated from the environment in which they take place, and as Breyfogle, Schrader and Sunderland point out, "the interplay between colonizers and the natural environment ... unfolded as an essential dynamic wherever and whenever colonization occurred."<sup>29</sup> Attitudes toward and relationships with the natural environment are therefore an important aspect of Russian identity, the focus of a growing body of works on Russian history and colonialism. In *Taming the Wild Field*, Willard Sunderland explores what it meant for Russians to not only physically occupy the steppe, but how the steppe evolved in the Russian imagination from the antithesis of Russia to the essence of Russianness in the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Mark Bassin takes a similar approach in his study of mid-nineteenth-

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<sup>26</sup> Jeff Sahadeo, *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Chia Yin Hsu, "The Chinese Eastern Railroad and the making of Russian Imperial Orders in the Far East" (PhD diss, New York University, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas B. Breyfogle, Abby Schrader, and Willard Sunderland, "Russian Colonizations: an Introduction," in *Peopling the Russian Periphery: Borderland Colonization in Eurasian History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 7.

<sup>29</sup> Breyfogle, Schrader, and Sunderland, "Russian Colonizations: an Introduction," in *Peopling the Russian Periphery*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

century colonization of the Amur region, exploring the conflict between the pervasive myth of the region as Russia's "very own New World," a "vast, virgin, and essentially empty territory," and the need to construct the land as Asian and populated in order to grant Russia a civilizing mission among savages.<sup>31</sup> Christopher Ely, in contrast, explores not the colonial frontiers, but the landscape at home, using landscape painting to demonstrate how the vast open steppe, uncultivated and unrestrained, in the late imperial period came to represent the true, unencumbered Russianness of the people. He notes that Russians themselves viewed the land as essential to their Russian identity, quoting V.G. Korolenko, a prominent writer exiled to Siberia, who wrote in 1901, "We are Russian because we were born in Russia; from birth we have breathed Russian air and gazed upon Russia's sad and desolate but also sometimes beautiful nature."<sup>32</sup> Regarding Sakhalin, I argue, geographic determinism coexisted with a view of the land as empty, Russian, and free, which was soon reimagined as a land Asian and Other, factors in both the establishment of penal servitude on the island and its abolition.

An additional avenue for the exploration of Russianness is examination of the imperial Russian prison and exile systems, which, reinforced by frequent literary representation, signified to many Westerners the essence of Russia itself. Late imperial Russian/early Soviet criminologist M.N. Gernet's authoritative five-volume study of prerevolutionary Russian prisons was published in the 1950s, providing a detailed survey of laws and practices, but devoting disproportionate attention to the suffering of political prisoners and disregarding penal administration and reform.<sup>33</sup> His work perpetuates the image of the penal system as backward and oppressive. Likewise, Andrew Gentes' 2008 study of the Siberian exile system emphasizes the cruelty, violence, and backwardness of the system, claiming that Siberian exile "significantly retarded development in Russia of legal and judicial systems similar to those in the West."<sup>34</sup> Bruce Adams challenged this assumption in 1996, concluding that by the end of the century, prisons in European Russia were run according to the same standards and purposes as those in

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<sup>31</sup> Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10, 275.

<sup>32</sup> V.G. Korolenko, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3 (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 232, quoted in Christopher David Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>33</sup> M.N. Gernet, *Istoriia tsarskoi tiur'my*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Gos. Izdatel'stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1951-56).

<sup>34</sup> Andrew A. Gentes, *Exile to Siberia, 1590-1822* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 12.

Europe and the United States.<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Daly shares this view, using comparative data from French penal colonies to argue that Russia's penal system was comparatively enlightened, as were the imperial security police.<sup>36</sup> Abby Schrader places penal reform in a broader pan-European context by exploring how punishment was a means by which Russian officials understood and fashioned societal differences.<sup>37</sup> Julia Ulyannikova argues that in fact, Russian penal development was shaped by a compromise between imperial penal law based on European theories of penology and colonial practices guided by local conditions. As such, she contends that the binary distinction between modernization and backwardness is unhelpful in understanding the Russian context.<sup>38</sup> Like Schrader, Ulyannikova rejects the association of penal reform with unilateral modernization and progress. In this dissertation, I focus as well on the relationship between society and Russian penitentiary science [*penitentsiarnaia nauka*], which entails the prevention and punishment of crime and the treatment and rehabilitation of criminals. By looking at the conflation of penology and colonialism—Russia colonizing its criminals while the criminals colonized Sakhalin—we find not an empire in control of its land and people, but people and places that provoked the redefining of Russia itself.

Lastly, by situating Sakhalin in a global context of reforms, colonialism, and negotiation of identities, this dissertation challenges the standard narratives—Russian and Western—of Sakhalin's tenure as home to exile settlements, which treat the island as marginal, backward, and generally irrelevant to the more pressing issues of the time. In the Soviet Union, penal Sakhalin was employed to signify the ineptness and brutality of the tsarist regime, and scholarship emphasized either the suffering of exiled revolutionaries on Sakhalin or the incompetence of the administration. Research often focused on heroes such as Anton Chekhov, with his presumed humanitarian mission to rescue suffering convicts from an unjust fate, or Lev Shternberg, a political exile turned ethnographer who became senior curator of the St. Petersburg Museum of

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<sup>35</sup> Bruce F. Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996). See especially p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan W. Daly, "Criminal Punishment and Europeanization in Late Imperial Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, no. 3 (2000): 341-362; Jonathan W. Daly, *Autocracy under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866-1905* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998); *The Watchful State: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1906-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Abby M. Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Julia Ulyannikova, "Katorga of Empire: Placing Forced Labour within the Late Imperial Russian Penal System," (PhD diss, University of Melbourne, forthcoming 2009).

Anthropology and Ethnography.<sup>39</sup> Following in the footsteps of Soviet pioneers and using the limited resources available to Westerners during the Cold War, John J. Stephan portrayed the era as “Sakhalin’s Dark Ages,” while Andrew Gentes called Sakhalin a “manmade hell” which served as precursor to the Soviet gulag.<sup>40</sup> Since the onset of glasnost, scholars such as A.I. Kostanov, M.I. Ishchenko, and M.V. Gridiaeva have rejected the sensationalism and overtly political aims of Soviet scholarship to investigate the political and social history of imperial Russian Sakhalin, yet in their emphasis on regional developments, they downplay the broader context of which Sakhalin was a part.<sup>41</sup> Bruce Grant has explored imperial Russian understanding of Sakhalin and its people, a single chapter in a larger study on the indigenous Sakhalin Nivkh and their ever-changing relationship with the imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet state and culture.<sup>42</sup> My dissertation builds on these works, placing Sakhalin in the broader context of Russian imperialism and modernity, using Sakhalin as a lens through which to explore Russian beliefs and identities more broadly. Instead of a politically and economically insignificant—and indeed, failed—colony of a backward regime, I see on Sakhalin a reflection of the ambitions and ambiguities constituting late imperial Russia.

## Summary

Arranged chronologically, the chapters of this dissertation focus on the interaction of people, places, and ideas involved not only in creating a modern penal colony on Sakhalin Island, but in constructing a new Russian identity as both nation and empire. The first chapter examines the period from 1849-1869, when Russia claimed the island as its own and sought to turn what

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<sup>39</sup> I.A. Senchenko, *Revoliutsionery Rossii na sakhalinskoj katorge* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1963); N.I. Gagen-Torn, *Lev Iakovlevich Shternberg* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975); I.A. Senchenko, *Sakhalin i Kurily – Istoriiia osvoeniia i razvitiia* (Moscow: Moia Rossiia, 2006) [Virtually unrevised since it was written in the 1960s].

<sup>40</sup> John J. Stephan, *Sakhalin: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 65; Andrew Gentes, “Roads to Oblivion: Siberian Exile and the Struggle between State and Society in Russia, 1593-1916” (PhD Diss, Brown University, 2002), 515.

<sup>41</sup> A.I. Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina russkimi liud'mi* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1991); M.I. Ishchenko, *Russkie starozhily Sakhalina: Vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX vv.* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2007); M.V. Gridiaeva, “Demograficheskie protsessy, administrativnoe razvitie i stanovlenie sotsial'noi sfery na ostrove Sakhalin v seredine XIX – nachale XX veka” (Dissertation, Institut istorii, arkhologii i etnographii narodov dal'nego vostoka, Rossiiskaia akademiia nauk, Dal'nevostochnoe otdelenie, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: a Century of Perestroikas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 40-67. See also Bruce Grant, “Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primitivism in Late Imperial Russia,” in *Russia's Orient*, ed. Brower and Lazzerini, 292-310.

seemed to be an empty wilderness into an established and productive Russian land. In doing so, the state demonstrated its aspirations toward a European modernity while reinforcing a Russianness defined primarily by geography. Chapter 2, covering 1869-1889, focuses on Sakhalin's role in the Great Reforms of Aleksandr II, as those in power debated how to satisfy conflicting goals of various government organs competing for influence over Sakhalin's future. Sakhalin saw major change in 1879, when regular sea transport was established, connecting the island with Odessa and replacing the nearly two-year convoy of convicts through Siberia on foot with a round-the-world voyage of under two months. In the 1890s, following the famous visit of Anton Chekhov to the island, the island assumed new meaning in Russian society, as an Other, an antitype of what Russia was supposed to be. In the press, Sakhalin became a place of cruelty and darkness, within which Russian society could test liberal ideas and protest autocratic practices. This mental transformation is the topic of chapter 3. Chapter 4 steps back chronologically to look at how Sakhalinty themselves responded to the redefining of their homeland and consider the response of the Russian state to the pressure of society both on Sakhalin and at home. In chapter 5, I look at how the story ends, with Russia surrendering southern Sakhalin to Japan in 1905 and abolishing penal servitude on northern Sakhalin a year later. While a small group of Far Eastern intelligentsia worked valiantly to create a regional identity built on Sakhalin's rich natural resources and productive capacity, the state deemed the island no longer deserving of its attention, withdrawing most funding and personnel from even the north. Although nearly seven thousand kilometers from the Russian capital, Sakhalin illuminates the tensions, redefinitions, and power struggles of this tumultuous half-century in Russian history.

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**PROCLAIMING SAKHALIN RUSSIAN; MAKING SAKHALIN RUSSIAN,**  
**1849-1868**

In the mid-nineteenth century, Russian explorers and statesmen viewed Russianness as a property innate and organic, extending naturally across the Eurasian continent to the Sea of Okhotsk and its neighboring Sakhalin Island. Russian policies of a decade later, however, suggest insecurity about Russia's position and concern about establishing Sakhalin as part of Russia, which Tsar Aleksandr II was seeking to transform into a European imperial power. To naval captain Gennadii Nevel'skoi, it seemed only natural that Sakhalin Island—only four miles off the Pacific coastline and in fact visible from the mainland on a clear day—was to be Russian territory, together with the entire Amur region, a territory sparsely populated with indigenous tribes paying tribute to no one. Maps at the time even depicted the island as a peninsula connected physically to the Siberian mainland, although Nevel'skoi hoped to prove them wrong. After he determined Sakhalin's insular status in 1849,<sup>1</sup> Nevel'skoi not only declared the island Russian, but proclaimed that it had long been Russian, announcing to the surprised indigenous population on the Siberian coast that, although Russians had not set foot there for many years, the empire had always considered the region its own.<sup>2</sup> With that declaration, Nevel'skoi invented a discourse about Sakhalin not as a newly-discovered land to be conquered, but as a historically Russian land to be settled, cultivated, and protected. In response to reports of foreign ships exploiting the indigenous peoples, he announced in the name of the "Great Russian Tsar" that no unauthorized acts by foreign powers or abuse of native inhabitants would be tolerated. While the tsar's advisors sought to have Nevel'skoi demoted for acting without authorization, Tsar Nikolai I allegedly declared, "Where once a Russian flag has been raised, never shall it be lowered."<sup>3</sup> The following decades saw state-sponsored diplomatic, military, and resettlement efforts in an endeavor to strengthen Russia's claim to the remote territory. The process

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<sup>1</sup> Japanese explorer Mamiya Rinzo had determined Sakhalin's insularity as early as 1809, but his discovery did not reach the Russian press, nor was it depicted on western maps. See John J. Stephan, *Sakhalin: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 3.

<sup>2</sup> G.I. Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi russkikh morskikh ofitserov na krainem vostoke Rossii 1849-55 g. Pri-amurskii i Pri-ussuriiskii krai* (St. Petersburg: Izd. E.I. Nevel'skoiu, 1878), 110-111. The claim is false, as the Amur territory had belonged to China since the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689. In his memoirs, he explained this discrepancy in a section entitled "the appearance on our maps of an inaccurate boarder with China." (pp. 33-35).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

illuminates significant questions concerning Russian imperial identity. What did it mean to be Russian land? What was Russia trying to become? How was the definition of Russianness itself changing? Russia's Sakhalin policies and experiences on the island not only reveal Russian conceptions of Russia itself—nation, state, and empire—and its place in the world, but both reflected and shaped the transformations taking place in the imperial Russian center.

### **Russian Exploration of the Far East**

While a surprise to Manchu traders, who resisted until Nevel'skoi pulled a double-barreled pistol from his pocket, and an even greater surprise to Russian foreign minister Count Karl Nessel'rode, Nevel'skoi's pronouncement of Sakhalin and the Amur territory to be Russian demonstrated a geographic understanding of an organic Russianness with boundaries created by nature, rather than human force or negotiation. According to Nevel'skoi, the Chinese border depicted on Russian maps at the time had been thoughtlessly copied from European maps at the beginning of the century, trusting the authority of European cartographers and viewing the Priamur region as of no value to Russia.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the territory of Siberia and the Far East was no longer a neighboring Asiatic land, but as expressed by Mark Bassin, it was “a continuation or extension of the zone of Russian culture and society.”<sup>5</sup> Its territory, many believed, was destined to be Russian, for Russia to civilize and enlighten, and which in turn would enrich Russia with its resources.<sup>6</sup> As a civilized European nation, it was Russia's God-given duty to cultivate the land.<sup>7</sup> One of the earliest Russian explorers of Sakhalin Island, Lieutenant Nikolai Boshniak, demonstrated his belief in Russia's mission to civilize the Far Eastern territory with a comment on the three Russian huts he encountered across the strait in 1851: “Even though we were 100,000 versts from anywhere familiar and cultivated [*obrazovannoe*], it did the Russian heart good to see Russian life birthed in these naked wastelands.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 109, 113, 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Bassin, “Inventing Siberia: Visions of the Russian East in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 96 (June 1991): 766.

<sup>6</sup> See Mark Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 52-55.

<sup>7</sup> This concept is discussed more broadly in Willard Sunderland, “The ‘Colonization’ Question: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, no. 2 (2000): 221-222.

<sup>8</sup> N.K. Boshniak, “Ekspeditsiia v Pri-amurskom krae,” *Morskoi sbornik* 38 (Dec. 1858), sec. 3: 179.

Russian settling of Sakhalin—the furthest eastern border of the Eurasian continent—demonstrated a belief that it was Russia’s destiny to occupy the entire Eurasian steppe. Historian Sergei Solov’ev claimed in 1850 that Russia was an “organic” state, destined to expand until reaching natural barriers. Resistance to territorial expansion, he claimed, was futile, as “nature itself dictated at the outset [what] the broad borders of the state [were to be.]”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Solov’ev argued, just as Russia was destined to control the region, nature had ordained the indigenous peoples of the territory to assimilate. Geography itself necessitated a single ruler over the territory. Nevel’skoi considered his discoveries significant because they “proved the great importance of the Amur River as an artery, connecting East Siberia with the ocean, which had previously been considered separated by tundra, mountains, and huge empty spaces.”<sup>10</sup> Nevel’skoi’s discovery, therefore, annihilated any natural boundaries separating the Amur region and Far East from European Russia and Siberia. Such a vision continued to grow in popularity among Slavophiles, with Pan-Slav ideologue Nikolai Danilevskii in 1869 promoting a vision of a Russian empire stretching from the Adriatic to the Pacific, a successor to the Ottomans and Byzantines.<sup>11</sup>

It was this vision that led Nevel’skoi first to declare the Amur region Russian,<sup>12</sup> and later to found Nikolaevskii Post, both without authorization from St. Petersburg. To Nevel’skoi, it seemed a matter of national importance to explore, settle, and develop the land. Upon his return to St. Petersburg in January 1850, Nevel’skoi strove to convince Prince A.S. Men’shikov, head of the imperial Russian navy, to send seventy troops to occupy the mouth of the Amur River. While there was fear of angering the Chinese, based on a report from the Russian mission in Peking, Nevel’skoi argued that there were in fact no Chinese in the region, that the local Giliaks [Nivkh] considered themselves independent from China and were “absolutely not militant,” and that the territory could be taken with merely twenty-five men. Nevel’skoi was placed under the Governor General of East Siberia, N.N Murav’ev [later Murav’ev-Amurskii], with instructions to

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<sup>9</sup> S. M. Solov’ev, “O vliianii prirody russkoi gosudarstvennoi oblasti i na ee istoriiu,” *Otechestvennye zapiski* 69, no. 2 (1850): 229; cited in Mark Bassin, “Turner, Solov’ev, and the “Frontier Hypothesis”: The Nationalist Significance of Open Spaces,” *The Journal of Modern History* 65, no. 3 (Sept., 1993): 492.

<sup>10</sup> Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 95.

<sup>11</sup> N. Ia. Danilevskii, *Rossia i Evropa. Vzgliad na kul’turnye i politicheskie otnosheniia Slavianskogo mira k Germano-Romanskomu*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (St. Petersburg: Brat’ia Panteleevye, 1895), 532; cited in Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 270.

<sup>12</sup> See discussion of Nevel’skoi’s motivation for his exploration in the editor’s introduction to Nevel’skoi’s memoirs. V. Vakhtin, “Ot redaktora,” in Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, II. Also Bassin, *Imperial Visions*, 127, note 87.

explore and assimilate the region surrounding the Amur estuary and the Strait of Tatar. The expedition of approximately eighty men, lasting from 1851-1855, had impressive results: the mapping of the entire Amur River and its estuary; the discovery of a bay—soon to be named Emperor’s Harbor [*Imperatorskaia Gavan’*—of worth to the Pacific Fleet; the establishment of several military posts; and most importantly, the resolution of longstanding border disputes with China. As far as Nevel’skoi was concerned, however, his greatest accomplishment was the metaphorical erecting of “the final cornerstone and firm foundation for the acknowledgement of the Amur and Ussuri basins with Sakhalin Island as belonging to Russia.”<sup>13</sup>

To Nevel’skoi, Sakhalin Island was part of a larger Amur and Ussuri region centered on the waterways of the Far East. “Since the Priamur and Priussuri regions represent one indivisible whole [*odno nerazryvnoe tseloe*], where the rivers and sea constitute the only means of transportation,” he wrote, the region should be administered differently from other provinces of Russia. Its administrative center should be located on the Ussuri River, as the region, “all the way to the border of Korea, must form an inalienable possession of Russia [*dolzhni sostavliat’ neot’emlemuiu prinadlezhnost’ Rossii*].” His expedition generated the first systematic Russian exploration of both Sakhalin and the mainland shore of the Far East, and much of the information that later determined the island’s future was generated at this time. It was on this expedition that the first map of Sakhalin’s western shore was created, along with a map of the opposite shore of the Tatar Strait. The first exploration of Sakhalin by land was completed under Nevel’skoi’s orders by Lieutenant N.K. Boshniak, who traveled through Sakhalin by dogsled in February 1852, investigating coal beds and the indigenous population. Two military posts were briefly established on Sakhalin, along with three on the mainland across the strait, with the task of “gathering all inhabitants [of the region] and announcing to them that Sakhalin Island belongs to Russia, and that we are taking all its inhabitants under our defense and protection.”<sup>14</sup> In 1853, Captain-Lieutenant V.A. Rimskii-Korsakov was dispatched from Nagasaki to meet them and report back to General-Adjutant Count E.V. Putiatin, at the time conducting trade treaties in Japan, on their progress. Rimskii-Korsakov was enthusiastic about the region’s future—“in a word, it is not difficult to figure out that Sakhalin and the mouth of the Amur will one day soon be a center of trade in the Pacific Ocean”—and emphasized the urgency of Russian assimilation

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<sup>13</sup> Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 103, 106, 377.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 372-373, 139, 238.

of the region.<sup>15</sup> Such investigation created a picture of Sakhalin as a territory politically strategic, naturally rich, and organically Russian, in need only of settlement and cultivation.

Even after the Amur expedition ended in 1855, exploration of Sakhalin and the Amur region continued, with an expedition of the Academy of Sciences to the Priamur region from 1853-56 headed by L.I. Schrenk to study the indigenous peoples, and an expedition of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in 1859-1863 led by F.B. Shmidt and P.P. Glen, which included geographic, ethnographic, geological, and topographical research.<sup>16</sup> In 1857, Lieutenant N.V. Rudanovskii, who had participated in the Amur expedition, returned to explore the isthmus dividing northern and southern Sakhalin and to attempt again the establishment of a military post, this time declaring Russia's presence not to the Chinese, but to the Japanese, who claimed the southern half of the island as their own. Post Due, founded on the western shore of Sakhalin in 1856 near vast coal deposits, became a regular stop for Russian ships completing round-the-world voyages.<sup>17</sup>

Russian explorers at this time recognized no significant cultural or geographic differences between Sakhalin Island and the Amur region or even the Russian heartland itself. While explorers emphasized Sakhalin's emptiness, there was nothing alien or non-Russian about the "naked wastelands" described by Boshniak. Empty land indicated potential and possibilities and had the capacity to provide food, resources, and wealth.<sup>18</sup> It was a defining feature of Russianness out of which Russian character was created. Referring to the boundless yet melancholy forests of birches, firs, and aspens, presumed to be familiar to those who had traveled "in the Russian heartland" [*po Rusi*], zoologist and writer Nikolai Vagner mused in the early 1870s that "under the influence of this picture, the soul of the Russian *narod* [people/nation] was fashioned. To him [the *narod*], the scene is truly 'native' [*rodnaia*, related by birth]. It is the purely natural [*prirodnnye*] areas where she—nature herself—commands the forest. Wild,

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<sup>15</sup> V.A. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur: Povestvovanie v pis'makh o plavaniakh, prikliucheniakh i razmyshleniakh komandira shkhuny "Vostok"* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1980), 122.

<sup>16</sup> Leopold von Schrenk, *Reisen und Forschungen im Amur-Lande in den Jahren 1854 - 1856*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg: Commissionäre der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1858-1900); F.B. Shmidt and P.P. Glen, *Trudy Sibirskoi ekspeditsii imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1868). For a summary of these expeditions, see L.I. Galliamova, "Osvoenie Sakhalina v otsenke rossiiskikh issledovatelei vtoroi poloviny XIX—nachala XX v.," *Vestnik dal'nevostochnogo otdeleniia Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk* 2006, no. 3: 156-162.

<sup>17</sup> About loading coal at Post Due in 1856, see for example A.M. Linden, "Zapiski A.M. Lindena," *Russkaia starina* 122, no. 4 (April 1905): 129-132.

<sup>18</sup> See discussion in Sunderland, "The 'Colonization' Question," 217.

unpeopled, uncultivated, and unplanted, they are striking in their enormous space and empty, monotonous, untouched freshness.”<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant Nikolai Busse attributed it to this same “Russian character” that his men were well-suited to winter on Sakhalin in 1853-54, the first Russian settlement on the island.<sup>20</sup>

To travelers by sea, exploration of the east bank of the strait—Sakhalin’s western shore—was no different than exploring its west bank, although the weather and plant life were more attractive on Sakhalin. As their publications and briefings circulated among policymakers, the image of Sakhalin that emerged was of a place hospitable to Russian settlement and profitable to the state—not unlike the rest of the empire, except, perhaps, for its exceptional potential. Sakhalin seemed to be a pleasant island, especially in the summer, more pleasing than the Russian plains. After Boshniak’s exploration of Sakhalin in 1852, he described the difficulties of travel by dogsled in winter, but his exploration nonetheless left him with “nice impressions,” and he was pleased to report the island rich in coal.<sup>21</sup> Busse, who wintered at the newly-founded Murav’evskii Post in 1853-54 while under special assignment to Governor General Murav’ev, noted the surprise of the indigenous Ainu at the Russian capacity to travel long distances in bad weather.<sup>22</sup> Yet travel in harsh climates was something at which Russians were quite competent. Likewise, Rimskii-Korsakov had very good impressions of Sakhalin: the seas were calm; the sun was bright; the hills were green. According to him, “While there was no trace of homes or of cultivation, the locality didn’t look like a wilderness, and if someone were to be shipwrecked on the shore like Robinson Crusoe (of course, in the summer), at least the appearance of the surroundings would not arouse despair.”<sup>23</sup> On his May 1860 trip to Sakhalin, botanist P.P. Glen found Sakhalin much more favorable than the land across the strait. The mainland shore was characterized by cold fog and thick pine forests and lacked other vegetation. On Sakhalin, in contrast, “the sky was clear, the air was filled with fragrances, and the hills and valleys were covered with luxurious growth.” On the first day of his trip, he gathered more than one hundred kinds of flowers, while on the opposite shore, he had found only ten.<sup>24</sup> Another participant in the

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<sup>19</sup> N.P. Vagner, “Peizazh i ego znachenie v zhivopisi,” *Vestnik Evropy* 8 (April 1873): 762.

<sup>20</sup> Busse, “Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia 1853 goda,” *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 190.

<sup>21</sup> Boshniak, “Ekspeditsiia,” *Morskoi sbornik* 38, sec. 3, 193.

<sup>22</sup> N.V. Busse, “Russkie i iapontsy na Sakhaline,” *Vestnik Evropy* 5 (Oct. 1872): 518.

<sup>23</sup> V. R-K. [V.A. Rimskii-Korsakov], “Sluchai i zametki na vintovoi shkhune ‘Vostok,’” *Morskoi sbornik* 35 (May 1858), sec. 3: 2.

<sup>24</sup> Shmidt and Glen, *Trudy*, 22.

expedition, A.D. Brylkin, reported high grasses, flowering bushes, and beautiful, forest-covered mountains.<sup>25</sup>

After multiple expeditions, Russian officials concluded that settlement of Sakhalin Island would render great economic benefits to the empire, as the island was rich with coal, oil, timber, fish, and furs. Nevel'skoi noticed a Nivkh with a coal button on his coat on the Far Eastern mainland, and after enquiring about the provenance of the button, he learned the man had made it himself out of Sakhalin coal.<sup>26</sup> Tongue-in-cheek, Boshniak later remarked that “nature had so generously scattered coal [on Sakhalin], that it seemed she [nature] wanted to balance the difficulty of transporting it with the ease of gathering it.”<sup>27</sup> Likewise, Rimskii-Korsakov wrote in 1853, “In a small craft I was able to see for myself the abundance of coal on Sakhalin. On the open shore, at by no means the richest area [of the island], in twenty-four working hours twenty men mined and loaded thirty tons of the best coal, not costing the state a kopeck.” He judged that the island was “alone capable of reviving Siberia and providing everything Siberia needs by means of the Amur River.”<sup>28</sup>

To explorers, the indigenous peoples of the Russian Far East seemed no different from the *inorodtsy* of other Russian territories. To Nevel'skoi's great satisfaction in his quest to prove the region Russian, it seemed that some had even intermarried with Russians generations earlier, not only supporting his claim that Russians had visited the island before the Japanese but also demonstrating the indigenous people capable of civilization. The natives of this particular village, he reported, had brown hair, rather than black, and kept their yurts clean, tidy, and even comfortable. They claimed to be descendants of Russians who had intermarried with Orochon [Uil'ta] women in the seventeenth century.<sup>29</sup> Ethnographer Brylkin concurred that “neither the language nor the outward appearance of these tribes offers anything new compared to the other tribes settled on our fatherland.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A.D. Brylkin, “Pis'ma g. Brylkina s Sakhalina,” *Zapiski sibirskogo otdela russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* 7 (1864): 3.

<sup>26</sup> Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi* 135.

<sup>27</sup> Boshniak, “Ekspeditsiia,” *Morskoi sbornik* 38, sec. 3, 185.

<sup>28</sup> Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur*, 124, 122.

<sup>29</sup> Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 304-305.

<sup>30</sup> Brylkin, “Pis'ma,” 14.

Just as Nevel'skoi emphasized the mildness of Nivkh, Busse and Rudanovskii emphasized the peace-loving and modest nature of Sakhalin Ainu.<sup>31</sup> A drawing by Aleksei Vysheslavtsov, a navy doctor who traveled in the Far East in the late 1850s, portrayed the Nivkh as intelligent, approachable, and well-dressed (figure 1.1), accompanied by a description of them as the “Armenians of the region, industrious and expeditious traders.... They speak Russian well, [and] trade with Asiatic fervor, no worse than any trader from the trade rows [*gostinodvoretz*]. Their clothes are more dandified than other natives.”<sup>32</sup> He did not distinguish the Nivkh on Sakhalin from those living on the mainland, a distinction important to travelers a few decades later.



Figure 1.1: “*Giliaki*” (published 1862)<sup>33</sup>

In the early days of Sakhalin colonization, protection and defense of Sakhalin’s indigenous peoples played an important role in the language of colonizing the Far East, rejecting English and French models of colonialism which Russians saw as economic exploitation of innocent subject peoples. Solov’ev contrasted Russia’s “peaceful” expansion across Siberia with

<sup>31</sup> N. Rudanovskii, “Po povodu vospominanii N.V. Busse ob ostrove Sakhalin i ekspeditsii 1853 goda,” *Vestnik Evropy* 7 (Aug. 1872): 919. See also Busse, “Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia,” *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 172, 189, 195.

<sup>32</sup> Aleksei Vysheslavtsov, *Ocherki perom i karandashem iz krugosvetnago plavaniia v 1857, 1858, 1859, i 1860 godakh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Morskago Ministerstva, 1862), 265, 268.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

the “violent” European colonization of overseas colonies,<sup>34</sup> a view he shared with his predecessor at Moscow University, Mikhail Pogodin, who argued that establishment of a European order in Asia and Africa was the only hope for the peoples of the land. Pogodin insisted that “the happiness of mankind depends on it.”<sup>35</sup> Russians argued that the aboriginals were grateful to them for bringing civilization and a higher way of life and for freeing them from the “hated Japanese yoke.”<sup>36</sup> A sailor visiting Post Due in the 1860s made the comparison with European colonialism even more explicit, describing the hardworking Russians on Sakhalin in stark contrast to the “British capitalists” he encountered on his voyage, who used the native peoples as slaves, eventually working them to death. “We Russians do the work ourselves,” he bragged, emphasizing tongue-in-cheek that this made the Russians “bad colonizers [*plokhie kolonizatory*].”<sup>37</sup> Perhaps some of the natives did come to appreciate these efforts, as Bronislav Pilsudskii reported after the fall of the island to Japan in 1905 that “many of the elderly [Ainu] affectionately recollect ... the first Russians who, with their kindness, eloquence and wonderful promises, tried to convince the Ainu that the coming of the white race heralded nothing but good.”<sup>38</sup>

### ***International relations in the Far East***

While in 1849-1850 Nevel'skoi and Murav'ev were convinced of Russia's right, ability, and even need to possess Sakhalin and Amur region, this “right” was not recognized internationally, and a rapidly-changing global geopolitical climate forced Russia to strengthen its hold on the territory or risk losing it altogether. While Nevel'skoi had found few Chinese in the territory during his 1849 exploration, already in 1853 Murav'ev predicted that “the English war in China [the Opium War] and the presence of their sea power in those seas could have

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<sup>34</sup> Bassin, “Turner, Solov'ev, and the ‘Frontier Hypothesis’,” 499. See S.M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, bk. 1, vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959), 62-63; bk. 5, vol. 9 (1961), 311-313.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in N. Barsukov, *Zhizn' i trudy M.P. Pogodina*, vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1889), 17.

<sup>36</sup> Busse, “Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia,” *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 648. See also D. Afanas'ev, “Amurskii krai i ego znachenie,” *Morskoi sbornik* 1863, no. 11, pt. 3: 32; A.A. Panov, *Chto takoe Sakhalin i nuzhen-li on nam?* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia G.K. Skachkova, 1905), 10; Brylkin, “Pis'ma,” 19.

<sup>37</sup> B-ov, “V Due (Iz beglykh zametok proezzhego),” *Vostochnoe pomor'e* (Nikolaevsk-na-Amure), 15 Sept. 1866, 81. For a broader discussion of this issue, see Jörg Baberowski, “Auf der Suche nach Eindeutigkeit: Kolonialismus und zivilisatorische Mission im Zarenreich und in der Sowjetunion,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 47, no. 4 (1999): 490.

<sup>38</sup> Bronisław Piłsudski, “Selected information on individual Ainu settlements on the island of Sakhalin,” [1907], in *The Collected Works of Bronisław Piłsudski*, vol. 1, *The Aborigines of Sakhalin*, ed. Alfred F. Majewicz (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 330.

irreparably damaging consequences not only for our trade with China, but for our very possessions [*vladychestva*] in those distant lands, and could forever change the historic appearance of Russia.”<sup>39</sup> Fearing that England might extend its economic domination northward, Murav’ev proposed withdrawing from Russian America in order to focus on the Far East, a plan finally carried out in 1867 with the sale of Alaska to the United States. Even more important than military occupation of the territory was the power inherent in economic domination. Rimskii-Korsakov wrote from the Far East in 1853, “Now that we have in our hands a harbor, the mouth of the Amur, and Sakhalin, we can dominate trade in the entire north Pacific.”<sup>40</sup> Before that happened, however, the opening of Japan by Commodore Matthew Perry set Japan on a course to becoming a great imperial power, and an increasing number of English and American whalers were reported to be hunting in the Sea of Okhotsk.<sup>41</sup>

Fearing that an American expedition would soon land on the island, in 1853, emperor Nikolai I issued a decree granting Sakhalin to the Russian-American Company under the conditions that the company occupy the island and establish a Russian administration by 1854. While Tsar Aleksandr I had given the company permission to found settlements on Sakhalin as early as 1808, none had been established, but now the situation was urgent. The tsar promised troops to provide defense and allowed the company free access to the island’s resources.<sup>42</sup> The company, it was believed, would be capable of developing trade and industry, since it had experience in the region and was “more at home at sea than anyone else in Russia.”<sup>43</sup> Instructions were given that no foreign settlements, arbitrary or by mutual agreement, were to be allowed on the island. With a mining engineer, workers, and equipment from European Russia, the Russian American Company immediately established two small mining settlements, producing approximately seven thousand *puds*<sup>44</sup> of coal during their two years of operation.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in B.P. Polevoi, “Ekspeditsiia E.A. Putiatina i ee zadachi: Posleslovie,” in Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur*, 383.

<sup>40</sup> Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur*, 124.

<sup>41</sup> Busse, “Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia,” *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 753-754; Ivan Poliakov, “Sakhalin,” in *Zhivopisnaia Rossiia: Otechestvo nashe v ego zemel’nom, istoricheskom, plemennom, ekonomicheskom i bytomom znachenii*, vol. 12, pt. 2, *Vostochnye okraïny Rossii: Primorskaia i amurskaia oblasti*, ed. P.P. Semenov (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo M.O. Vol’f, 1895), 246; “Ostrov Sakhalin i ego kolonizatsiia,” *Pribavlenie k Zabaikal’skim oblastnym vedomostiam* 1892, no 2 (February): 3.

<sup>42</sup> A. Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin: Ego kamennougol’nye mestorozhdeniia i razvivaiushchiasia na nem kamennougol’naia promyshlennost’* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Transhelia, 1875), 67.

<sup>43</sup> Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur*, 122.

<sup>44</sup> A *pud* is a measure of weight equal to approximately thirty-six pounds (16 kg).

Due to military action in the Far East during the Crimean War, the company withdrew from the island in 1855.

In accordance with its promise to the Russian-American Company and in an attempt to strengthen its position, Russia also sent troops to occupy the island, founding Il'inskii Post on 30 August 1853 on the western shore of the island, under the command of Second Lieutenant D.I. Orlov. Orlov and his men abandoned the post, however, in less than a month due to lack of provisions. Three weeks later, on 22 September 1853, Nevel'skoi founded Murav'evskii Post on the southern shore of the island, raising the Russian flag to the sounds of salutes from the ship, toasts to the emperor's health, and merry singing and dancing. He presented the local Ainu and Japanese with a declaration in the name of the tsar, written in French and Russian, that the island had belonged to Russia since 1689.<sup>46</sup> Major N.V. Busse remained to winter at the fort with seventy sailors, during which time he became convinced that the Ainu desired Russian protection, resenting the oppression they faced under the Japanese.<sup>47</sup> Before he took action, however, he and his troops were recalled in May 1854, as Russia consolidated its Far Eastern defensive strength on Petropavlovsk on Kamchatka and the lower Amur due to the advent of the Crimean War.<sup>48</sup>

While Nevel'skoi's initial concern regarding the Priamur region had been the Chinese claim to the territory, on Sakhalin itself, the greater challenger was Japan, as became clear to Busse and his men during the winter of 1853-54 (figure 1.2). The Japanese who encountered Russian troops on the Sakhalin shore were skeptical when Nevel'skoi explained that Russians wished only to protect them and the Ainu from the Americans. Busse found that all locations suitable for settlements were occupied by the Japanese. Orlov, meanwhile, had been warned by local Ainu that the Japanese planned to capture him and his men, and Busse received threats that the Japanese were planning a spring attack. Busse realized that even if the local Japanese were disinclined to attack Russian soldiers, insistence on Russian possession of the island would devastate the Japanese fisheries, since Japan's policy of isolationism did not allow Japanese

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<sup>45</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 67-69. See also George Alexander Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan: Russo-Japanese Relations, 1697-1875* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 280-282.

<sup>46</sup> Nevel'skoi, *Podvigi*, 256.

<sup>47</sup> Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan*, 298.

<sup>48</sup> Busse's diaries from that winter on Sakhalin were published serially in *Vestnik Evropy* in 1871, and then in 1872 as N.V. Busse, *Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia 1853-54 gg. (Dnevnik N.V. Busse)* (St. Petersburg: Tip. F.S. Sushchinskago, 1872).

subjects to travel internationally. Admiral Evfimii Putiatin, meanwhile, was seeking to negotiate a delicate trade agreement with Japan, not yet “opened” by Commodore Perry’s 1854 expedition. Such negotiations could be undermined by Russian aggression against Japanese fisheries.<sup>49</sup>

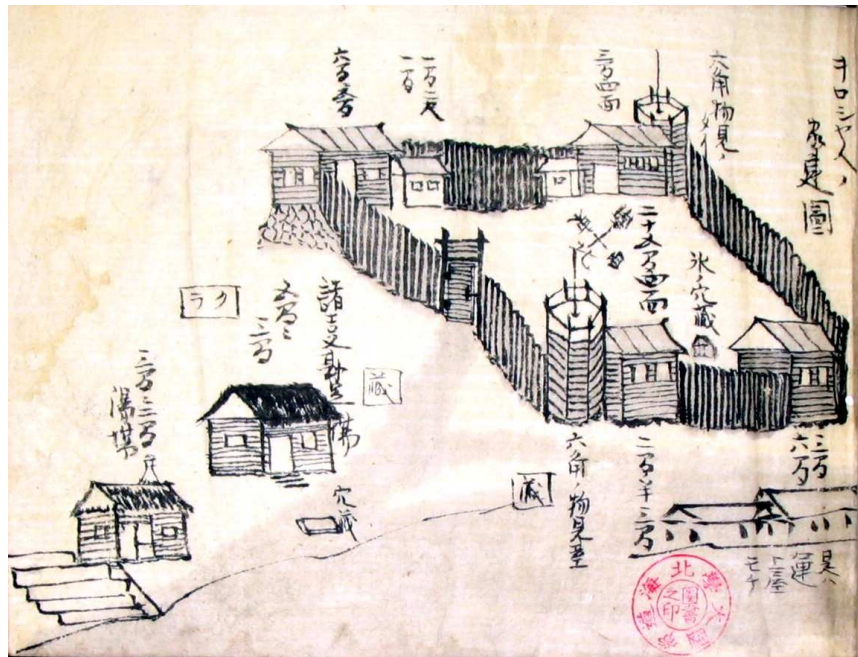


Figure 1.2: Muravev’s Post (1853-54), as depicted by a Japanese scout<sup>50</sup>

Already in early 1854, Putiatin, independent of Busse’s actions, sought to persuade the Japanese of Russia’s inherent right to the island, insistent that the tsar had no further territorial ambitions but desired only to protect territory naturally Russian. To Putiatin, the question of Sakhalin was relevant only in terms of the larger task of opening trade relations with Japan. In fact, Putiatin underscored Busse’s withdrawal from Sakhalin as an indication of Russian goodwill.<sup>51</sup> On 7 February 1855, the first treaty was signed between Russia and Japan—the Treaty of Shimoda—granting Russia status as most-favored-nation, opening three Japanese ports for trade, guaranteeing reciprocal extraterritoriality, and allowing the appointment of a Russian consul at Hakodate or Shimoda. In addition, the treaty clarified possession of the Kuril Islands—Uruppu and those to the north belonged to Russia, while those to the south belonged to Japan—and declared Sakhalin “unpartitioned between Russia and Japan, as has been the case up

<sup>49</sup> Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan*, 290-291, 293-295, 298-299.

<sup>50</sup> Yoda Jirosuke, *Karafuto-tō nikki* (Sakhalin Diary, MS, 1854), in Hoppō Shiryō Collection, Hokkaido University Library, Sapporo.

<sup>51</sup> Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan*, 326-327, 307.

to this time.”<sup>52</sup> In fact, since Putiatin was unaware of Nevel’skoi’s 23 September 1853 declaration of the island to be Russian, he led the Japanese to believe Russia would be willing to divide the island.<sup>53</sup> This miscommunication had far-reaching consequences. The Treaty of Portsmouth, which ended the Russo-Japanese War, granted the southern half of the island to Japan in 1905.

### **Sakhalin and the Great Reforms**

After the Crimean War, Sakhalin Island took on new significance both in terms of Russia’s image as an imperial power and the potential of the island’s resources to finance the empire’s modernization. During the Great Reforms, Aleksandr II instituted policies of political, economic, and social reorganization to turn an empire perceived as weak and backwards into a major European power, called by Theodore Weeks “one of the most impressive examples of attempted social and political engineering in the nineteenth century.”<sup>54</sup> Russia’s imperial status gained significance as Britain expanded its power in India and China and the United States made its presence felt on its Pacific coast, leading Russian society to reconsider its own identity and role in the world. John Randolph underscores this dimension of the reform period in his review of the memoirs of War Minister D.A. Miliutin, noting that, “Where often our conception of the ‘reform era’ centers on the imperial government’s attempts to recover from the Crimean War and to rationalize and ‘socialize’ imperial political institutions, Miliutin’s memoirs show his vision constantly turning toward Poland, Central Asia, and the Caucasus as well... [making it] a lot less easy to isolate ‘the reforms’ as a special object of study apart from the broader political life and expansion of the Russian empire in the nineteenth century.”<sup>55</sup> While Nevel’skoi *declared* Sakhalin to be Russian in the early 1850s, during the reform era the focus shifted to making Sakhalin Russian, a process of using the island to shape the empire’s destiny while seeking to Russianize the island itself.

With the ambiguity of the Treaty of Shimoda, Russia’s claim to Sakhalin became increasingly tenuous while Sakhalin’s economic and strategic value became more apparent. The

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<sup>52</sup> For an English translation of the Treaty of Shimoda, see Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan*, 475-476.

<sup>53</sup> Nevel’skoi, *Podvigi*, 397.

<sup>54</sup> Theodore Weeks, “Slavdom, Civilization, Russification: Comments on Russia’s World-Historical Mission, 1861-1878,” *Ab Imperio* 2002, no. 2 (July): 223.

<sup>55</sup> John Randolph, review of *Vospominaniia general-fel’dmarshala grafa Dmitriia Alekseevicha Miliutina*, ed. L.G. Zakharova, *Kritika* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 254.

emperor, therefore, relieved the Russian-American Company of responsibility for Sakhalin and placed it under the command of the East Siberian Governor General, Nikolai Murav'ev,<sup>56</sup> to be administered by the Military Governor of Kamchatka, which itself within a few months became part of a newly-established Primorskaia [Maritime] oblast. The first military governor of the Primorskaia oblast, Rear Admiral P.V. Kazakevich, assigned a party of twenty-five sailors to exploit coal deposits near the indigenous settlement of Due in June 1856.<sup>57</sup> According to Lieutenant A.M. Linden, who unwillingly oversaw the operation, mining was conducted using the most primitive methods and with no understanding of mining technology.<sup>58</sup> Linden was replaced in August that year by the more willing and experienced N.V. Rudanovskii, who had wintered on the island in 1853-54 and under whom more than 25,000 puds of coal were extracted over the next year.<sup>59</sup> The Governor General of East Siberia ordered that a military post be founded at Due in February 1857 with the purpose of providing a reserve of coal for the steamer Amerika and schooner Vostok in the case of war; in spring of 1858, oversight of Sakhalin mining was transferred to mining engineer Staff Captain A.A. Nosov with forty to fifty men, who began shaft as well as pit mining. Nosov resigned from service on Sakhalin in 1859, citing insufficient manpower and means.<sup>60</sup> In 1858, a small number of convicts was dispatched to aid the sailors, increasing the population of the post to 200. As agronomist M.S. Mitsul' later noted, providing for the growing post was expensive and difficult, so from the very beginning, soldiers grew their own potatoes, cabbage, rutabagas, radishes, and other vegetables, laying a foundation for the establishment of agricultural colonies which would play a role in the island's colonization for the next several decades.<sup>61</sup>

As the opening of Japan and the growing importance of the Far East in a world market made it increasingly important for Russia to maintain its hold on the island, it also became more

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<sup>56</sup> O peredache o. Sakhalina iz vladeniiia kompanii v vedenie nachal'nika V. Sibiri, 8 Aug. 1856. RGA VMF, f. 909, op. 1, d. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 13. According to local lore, the name "Due" was based on French explorer Jean Francois Galoup de La Pérouse's association in 1787 of the nearby cape, called Rui by the Nivkh, with the French town of Douai. "K 150-letiiu osnovaniia p. Due," <http://aleksandrovsk.tfd.ru/node/124> (accessed 1 July 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Linden, "Zapiska," 129.

<sup>59</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 71.

<sup>60</sup> [A.A.] Nosov, "Zametki ob ostrove Sakhaline i kammouogol'nykh lomkakh, na nem proizvodimykh," *Gornyi zhurnal* 1859, no. 1, 183-189; See also *Gornyi zhurnal* 1860, no. 7; Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 72-73.

<sup>61</sup> M.S. Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina v sel'skokhoziaistvennom otnoshenii* (St. Petersburg: [tipografiia A.E. Landau i Ko.], 1873), 69.

difficult to do so. Politically, Russia was weak while surrounding countries were gaining power. The Polish Insurrection of 1863-64 threatened Russia's ability to maintain stability even at home, while Western Europe was establishing colonies in Asia and Africa. Following the Opium War (1839-1842) and the Taiping Rebellion (1853-1864), China was beginning to implement Western technology and industry. The East India Company, meanwhile, controlled most of the Indian subcontinent, and Great Britain was threatening to expand northward toward Central Asia. The presence of American whaling vessels in Far Eastern waters led to rumors that the United States was seeking to expand into the Far East.<sup>62</sup> Americans were also making moves toward Sakhalin coal, leading state chancellor Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov to predict in 1868 that the "question of the Sakhalin mines may very soon take on great importance not only in terms of economics, but also politics," given the growing demand for coal in the Far East.<sup>63</sup> After selling Alaska to the U.S. in 1867, Aleksandr II did not wish to risk the loss of Sakhalin Island as well.<sup>64</sup>

Meanwhile, Japan remained a threat, as the Japanese had been fishing on Sakhalin for decades and legally shared possession of the island according to the Treaty of Shimoda. In response to instructions from the tsar to avoid conflict with Japan, Murav'ev (by now Murav'ev-Amurskii) wrote to Aleksandr II in 1859, "The Japanese right to Sakhalin is just as vague as our own, if not more so. There is nothing Japanese about its name (Sakhalin, Karafuto). Both of these ancient names testify that Sakhalin is related to the river Sakhalin-Ula (the Amur), which for the past 170 years belonged to China." Yet Japan itself was not Murav'ev's primary concern; rather, he feared that because of Japan's weakness, "any foreign state could take possession and gain a foothold on that part of the island." Murav'ev proposed that that a border be established at the La Perouse Strait between Sakhalin and Hokkaido, but nothing was resolved.<sup>65</sup> The next year, in an expedition to southern Sakhalin, the Japanese forced ethnographer Brylkin to return to the north, an action he considered illegal and which hindered his data collection.<sup>66</sup> Two years later, in 1862, General Nikolai Ignat'ev, a Russian envoy who shared Nevel'skoi's (and

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<sup>62</sup> Busse, "Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia," *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 753; Ia. Butkovskii, *O. Sakhalin i ego znachenie* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V.S. Ettingera, 1873), 6, 10.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 90.

<sup>64</sup> See Ia. Butkovskii, *O. Sakhalin i ego znachenie*, 6.

<sup>65</sup> GAIO, f. 24, op. 11, d. 10, ll. 12-12ob.; cited in V.E. Oleinik, "K istorii Sakhalina i Kuril'skikh ostrovov (po dokumentam diplomaticheskoi kantseliarii glavnogo upravleniia vostochnoi Sibiri)," in *Chिताia "Ostrov Sakhalin"*, vol. 2 (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskii oblastnoi kraevedcheskii muzei, 1990), 34.

<sup>66</sup> Brylkin, "Pis'ma," 25.

Murav'ev-Amurskii's) vision of an organic Russia, finally conducted negotiations with the Japanese, maintaining that the proper border between the countries was the natural one, south of Sakhalin at the *La Perouse Strait*. The Japanese, however, repeated their claim to the island south of the fiftieth parallel north and began intensive settlement of that region.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Making Sakhalin Russian***

In the 1860s, as European Russia saw the emancipation of serfs and the reform of the government and legal system, Aleksandr II's efforts to refashion the empire reached Sakhalin as well. Russia employed a variety of methods to strengthen its position on the island as part of an endeavor to define and demonstrate its place in not only Europe, but the world. The establishment of Russian military might in the Far East was a priority after conclusion of the Treaty of Aigun with China in 1858, which ceded the Priamur region to Russia—a territory claimed by Nevel'skoi all along—soon followed by the founding of the port of Vladivostok, which was granted status as a free port in 1862 to encourage foreign trade. Along with Post Due, the island's administrative center, approximately eleven additional military posts were established on Sakhalin between 1858 and 1870 for the purposes of both mining coal for the newly-established Pacific fleet and demonstrating Russia's strength to the Japanese.<sup>68</sup> While Post Due was established near large coal deposits in the north for the primary purpose of extracting resources—with hopes to profit from coal sold in Vladivostok or China<sup>69</sup>—Russians sought to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Japan by founding a second post at the narrowest spot on the island, considered as a place at which to divide the island between Russia and Japan. Post Kusunai was established for this purpose in 1858 with fifteen troops.<sup>70</sup> Over the next decade, however, as the Japanese continued to threaten Russian intentions on southern Sakhalin, Military Governor Kazakevich ordered Colonel F.M. Depreradovich, commander of troops on Sakhalin, to occupy all spots that had visible coal deposits, as a sign to the Japanese of Russia's claim to the territory and its resources. Many of these posts had primarily symbolic purposes, manned by only two soldiers. At some coal deposits, no troops remained at all, and signposts

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<sup>67</sup> Oleinik, "K istorii Sakhalina," 35.

<sup>68</sup> Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 51-77. The number is approximate due to the ambiguity surrounding the date certain posts were established, as well as the abandonment and later reestablishment of others.

<sup>69</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 101-102.

<sup>70</sup> A.A. Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia: ocherki kolonizatsii i sovremennogo polozeniia Sakhalina* (Moscow: Tipografiia T-va I. D. Sytina, 1905), 51.

alone were erected proclaiming the area and its coal to be the property of the Russian state. The Japanese, however, responded in kind, placing their own signposts throughout southern Sakhalin next to those of the Russians. At coal deposits near the Ainu village of Ochehpoko, the Japanese crushed 400 puds of coal into rice-sized pieces.<sup>71</sup> Difficulty in keeping posts supplied led to malnutrition and illness, as well as shame before the well-equipped and well-adapted Japanese.<sup>72</sup> Other Russian posts, however, were larger and more significant. After the founding of Murav'evskii Post in southern Sakhalin in 1867—in a different location than the Muravev'skii Post abandoned by Busse in 1854—the Military Governor dispatched the Fourth East Siberian Line Battalion to protect Sakhalin from the Japanese. The post had thirty-five buildings, a chapel, a bridge, a pier, and a paved road. With a rifle brigade of 146 men, along with battalion staff and soldiers of the commissariat [*intendantskoe vedomstvo*], the post accommodated a population of three hundred.<sup>73</sup>

While military units were used to strengthen Russia's claim to the island and position in the Far East overall, for economic purposes the state began sending small parties of exiles to Sakhalin to work alongside soldiers extracting coal. As the conditions of mining did not lend themselves to a prison regime, this was not a punitive measure.<sup>74</sup> The idea of using convict labor to exploit Sakhalin resources reportedly originated with a convict himself, the patricide Ivan Lapshin, who petitioned to serve on Sakhalin to escape the penal regime of mainland mines.<sup>75</sup> In the following decades, Lapshin gained mythic status as a repentant criminal “seeking to reconcile his conscience through solitude and labor” and was held as a role model of one who attained “true repentance” through patience and willpower.<sup>76</sup> Archival evidence indicates that Lapshin was indeed one of the first convicts on the island, dispatched to Sakhalin by order of the Naval Staff Commander of Ports of the Eastern Ocean in September 1858 to mine coal for the navy.<sup>77</sup> He was followed by small parties of exiles a few years later—eighty men dispatched to Due in

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<sup>71</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 88-89.

<sup>72</sup> Poliakov, “Sakhalin,” 248.

<sup>73</sup> Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 52-53; Poliakov, “Sakhalin,” 249-250.

<sup>74</sup> See N.Ia. Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin (Ocherki sakhalinskoi zhizni)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia doma prizreniia maloletnikh bednykh, 1903), 13.

<sup>75</sup> V.I. Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv, sushchestvuiushchikh na katorge* (n.p., 1873), 22; D.G. Tal'berg, “Ssylka na Sakhalin,” *Vestnik Evropy* 14, no. 3 (May 1879), 221; B.K. Kukul', “Iz epokhi prisoedineniia Priamurskogo kraia,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 65, no. 9 (1896): 670.

<sup>76</sup> Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv*, 22.

<sup>77</sup> RGA VMF, f. 909, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 3-8a.

1861, fifteen in 1862, and forty-one in 1863<sup>78</sup>—which generally worked on Sakhalin for one or two years before returning to the mainland. In August 1862, in an attempt to differentiate free labor from penal servitude, Governor General of East Siberia Korsakov decreed that all mining should be done by exiles, while soldiers and sailors worked outside the mines.<sup>79</sup>

Just as the Great Reforms incited chaos in European Russia, the employment of convicts at state coal mines—the first time this was done in Russia—raised issues which the state was not yet prepared to handle, leading at times to confusion and disorder rather than profit and progress. In 1863, overseers paid sixty-four exiles at Post Due two kopeks per pud of coal, out of which they purchased their own food, clothing, and tools. While this freed the navy from financial responsibility for the exiles' wellbeing, it led to a decrease in the quality—although an increase in quantity—of coal extracted. While mining large quantities of coal, exile miners failed to mine systematically or to extract large chunks of coal. Instead, larger pieces were crushed to facilitate transportation, and half-excavated quarries were abandoned for more profitable locations. According to mining engineer Ivan Lopatin, the work did not follow even the “first rules of the art of mining” [*pervyia pravila gornago iskusstva*]. The possibility of healthy financial remuneration, in particular due to the gathering of coal above ground in their free time, also led to allegations that exiles were profiting from their punishment, which undermined the punitive function of exile. It is reported that the average exile at Due earned approximately 175 rubles in 1863, more than average workers in European Russia.<sup>80</sup> Nor was the imperial Russian navy prepared to fulfill the role of an international trading firm. The Military Governor of the Primorskaia Oblast reported that in 1863, despite excellent coal quality, none was sold on the Chinese market because of the difficulties in transport.<sup>81</sup> With the 1864 arrival of mining engineer Petr Taskin, who had recently completed a trip abroad to visit mines in France, Germany and Belgium, steps were taken to ensure that coal deposits were mined properly, but since it had been impossible to sell Sakhalin coal in the Far East, he temporarily halted mining altogether, as Russia had enough to meet its own needs.<sup>82</sup> According to a sailor who loaded coal

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<sup>78</sup> A.I. Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina russkimi liud'mi* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1991), 89-90.

<sup>79</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 73

<sup>80</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 42, 73-74, 76, 77.

<sup>81</sup> 1864 Memo of the Military Governor of the Primorskaia oblast to the Minister of Internal Affairs, RGIA, f. 1281, op. 6, d. 82, l. 20ob.

<sup>82</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 49, 78.

at Post Due in 1866, weather conditions made Sakhalin coal difficult to obtain. He also noted that the commander of the post complained about problems forcing convicts to work. The same report provided the first sign of the abuse of authority that would become so prominent in later descriptions of Sakhalin civil servants and officials. According to this sailor's account, "Major N-v" bragged about the cruel measures he took to discipline the exiles,<sup>83</sup> a report corroborated by descriptions several years later of a cruel Captain Nikolaev, who commanded Due Post for seven years before himself being sentenced to penal servitude for murdering a convict under his command.<sup>84</sup>

The Russian state also negotiated its place in the world economy through the leasing of Sakhalin land to private firms for coal mining, a step many felt necessary in order to compete for economic dominance in an international world market, yet dangerous on a strategic borderland territory shared with Japan. This was a matter of debate in the Far East for both political and economic reasons. The first private mining operation on Sakhalin was that of A.S. Bourov [Buorov/Baurov], a merchant exiled to Siberia who had served with the Russian-American Company. In 1859, Murav'ev-Amurskii granted Bourov permission to lease what were called the Putiatinskii coal beds in southern Sakhalin, which he excavated with limited means, no knowledge of mining technology, and thirty untrained peasants from across the strait. His operations failed to make a profit, as he had few prospects of selling the coal overseas.<sup>85</sup> Military Governor Kazakevich, meanwhile, was uncomfortable with the idea of private mining, fearing that private entrepreneurs would either destroy the coal deposits or take advantage of their monopoly to raise prices, in either case undermining the interests of the state, which needed coal for its fleet. East Siberian Governor General Korsakov, who succeeded Murav'ev-Amurskii in 1861, disagreed with Kazakevich, arguing that mines would attract settlers to the region, and in 1863, he granted entrepreneurs temporary access to Priamur coal mining under conditions favorable to the state. While Russian consuls in Shanghai and Tian-Shan tried unsuccessfully to attract foreign workers to Sakhalin mines, in 1864, Bourov hired thirty Ainu laborers to extract

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<sup>83</sup> Lukashovich, "Moi znakomtsy v Due, na Sakhaline," *Kronshtatskii vestnik*, 1/13 May 1868, 193.

<sup>84</sup> Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 61-62. According to A. Ostashev, he did sell a small amount of coal in Shanghai, and a small amount to the Amur steamship company. See A.E. Ostashev, "Sakhalinskii ugol': ocherki istorii ostrovnoi ugol'noi promyshlennosti v seredine XIX – nachale XXI vv.," ch. 1, <http://alexsakh.narod.ru/GL1Pr1.htm> (accessed 3 July 2009).

surface-level coal, although he was forced to abandon the project when he was again unable to sell the coal.<sup>86</sup>

Gradually, foreign firms gained interest in Sakhalin coal as well, which to the Russian state was as threatening as it was promising. San Francisco merchant Otto Esche, living at the time in Nikolaevsk, partnered with Bourov to extract coal at Sortunai, on the western shore of the island. When in 1868, Esche concluded a contract with the firm Olyphant and Company in Shanghai, which he was unable to fulfill, the company sent their agent, a Mr. Ellis, along with eighty Chinese workers to mine the coal themselves. In order to maintain positive relations with the Americans and the Chinese, and since Ellis had already spent \$20,000 on the operation, the military governor granted him permission to begin his own mining operation, although the Russian state retained the right to terminate the agreement at any time.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, an American D. Crowley and Prussian named Lonker received permission from the East Siberian Administration to begin coal mining on Sakhalin.<sup>88</sup> Soon after this, Russia forbade the hiring of foreign workers, which it feared would undermine its project of strengthening Russia's position on the island. As state chancellor Gorchakov feared it would become impossible to prohibit foreign mining unless Russian entrepreneurs stepped in to meet the growing demand, he advocated the promotion of private mining, using state funds if necessary to keep Sakhalin out of foreign hands.<sup>89</sup> It was this fear that a year later led to the designation of the island as a place for penal servitude.

The designated role of Sakhalin as a land providing resources and as a politically strategic frontier is evident also in the lack of concern during this period for the island's indigenous peoples. The word "colonization" itself was seldom used to refer to Sakhalin at this time, replaced with talk of "expansion" or "settlement" of the territory, a focus on the land, rather than people. Protection of the indigenous population played a key discursive role in Nevel'skoi's declaration of Russian sovereignty over Sakhalin and the Amur, and during the Amur Expedition, Boshniak (in 1852) and Rudanovskii (in 1853-1857) were commissioned to investigate the island's native peoples. Yet Sakhalin's indigenous inhabitants soon disappeared almost completely from Russian discussion of Sakhalin. This was unlike other places of Russian

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<sup>86</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 83-84; Ostashev, "Sakhalinskii ugol'."

<sup>87</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 90; Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 71.

<sup>88</sup> Ostashev, "Sakhalinskii ugol'."

<sup>89</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 90.

colonization, as Russian soldiers in the Caucasus were at the same time fighting Imam Shamil, and military conquest of Tashkent in 1865 preceded the incorporation of Turkestan into the empire. On Sakhalin, the native peoples were deemed insignificant, as if their disinclination to fight made them irrelevant altogether. Busse referred to the island as “unpeopled” [*bezliudnyi*];<sup>90</sup> to Rimskii-Korsakov, it was “uninhabited” [*pustynnyi*];<sup>91</sup> and mining engineer Oskar Deikhman wrote in 1869 of coal mining on Sakhalin as a means “on this uninhabited island [to] ... bring about its gradual settlement.”<sup>92</sup> The only attempt to hire natives to work in the mines was that of Bourov in 1864, and while they proved hardworking and capable, the experiment was not repeated.<sup>93</sup> In fact, many Russians believed they were fated to extinction, made evident in an 1863 article in the a naval journal, which claimed that “in all likelihood, the [Nivkh] tribe will not increase, but on the contrary, with the increasing stream of settlers, will disappear completely, either dying out or mixing with the new population; already now they want to be Russian, i.e., to live like Russians [*byt’ russkimi, t.e., zhit’ po-russki*].”<sup>94</sup> Despite readily available data on the island’s 2000 Giliaks [Nivkh], 2500 Ainu, and several hundred Oroks [Uil’ta],<sup>95</sup> as late as 1875, mining engineer Aleksei Keppen described the island as uninhabited and unpeopled, “populated only by half-savage tribes,” a description often repeated in the press.<sup>96</sup> The only state effort to provide the promised care for the indigenous inhabitants came in February 1869, when the acting medical inspector of the Primorskaia oblast dispatched Nikolaevsk *okrug* doctor Vasil’ev by dogsled to treat the Nivkh population during a smallpox epidemic. The Nivkh did not trust the Russian doctor, however, and Vasil’ev complained that he had to pay husbands and fathers in tobacco, alcohol, or paper to gain access to ill family members.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Busse, “Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia,” *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 668.

<sup>91</sup> Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur*, 141.

<sup>92</sup> O.A. Deikhman “Ostrov Sakhalin v gorno-promyshlennom otnoshenii.” Prilozhenie k otchety Vysochaishe naznachennoi v Pri-Amurskom krae Komissii, RGA MVF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4179, l. 108; later published as [O.A.] Deikhman, “Ostrov Sakhalin v gornopromyshlennom otnoshenii,” *Gornyi zhurnal* 1871, no. 3, 529-557 (quote on p. 531).

<sup>93</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 62.

<sup>94</sup> Afanas’ev, “Amurskii krai,” 32.

<sup>95</sup> “Ostrov Sakhalin,” in *Geograficheskoe-staticheskii slovar’ rossiiskoi imperii*, ed. P. Semenov, v. 4 (St. Petersburg, 1873), 504-505.

<sup>96</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 10.

<sup>97</sup> Vasil’ev, “Poezda na o. Sakhaline,” *Arkhiv sudebnoi meditsiny* 1870, no. 2: 23. Vasil’ev’s unpublished report is preserved in RGIA DV, f.1, op. 1, d. 240, l. 10-16ob.

### ***“Temporary Regulations Relative to the Island of Sakhalin”***

As both Japanese and Russians stepped up their efforts to strengthen their position on the island in the mid-1860s, in 1867, the Japanese ambassador in St. Petersburg again initiated negotiations over the territory. During these negotiations, the Japanese continued to insist on their right to the southern half of the island, while the Russians insisted on the “most natural border” at the Strait of La Perouse, granting all of Sakhalin to Russia. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs promised that the Japanese could continue to fish on the island and that Russia would give them the nearby Kuril Islands in exchange. As the Japanese ambassador disagreed, the two sides compromised, concluding “temporary regulations relative to the island of Sakhalin” that reinforced Sakhalin’s ambiguous position.<sup>98</sup> The temporary regulations declared the mutual intentions of both sides to maintain “peaceful and friendly relations” and, perhaps even more importantly, specified that both Russians and Japanese had full liberty to travel and settle throughout the island, at least temporarily dispelling Japanese claims to the southern half of the island. It was agreed that further negotiation would take place at a later date.<sup>99</sup>

For the most part, the temporary regulations confirmed the terms of the 1855 Treaty of Shimoda, although Russia officially gave up its intent to possess the island in its entirety. The third article of the temporary regulations recognized the complete autonomy of the Ainu population, a provision which Russia used to its advantage. Minister of Foreign Affairs Aleksandr M. Gorchakov explained to East Siberian Governor General Korsakov:

The third article [of the temporary regulations] gives us the best reason and opportunity to spread our influence among the Ainu.... It goes without saying that it is only worth actually protecting the Ainu in those places where it is convenient and beneficial to us, since it would be highly disadvantageous to incite frequent complaints from the Japanese and to provoke them to conflict.... It would be good if you would draw the attention of the local Sakhalin administration to the true meaning of that third article of the temporary regulations. It gives us great rights, but along with those rights come responsibilities. It depends on the good sense and caution of our frontier officials to win over the Ainu natives to ourselves, and unnoticed, to draw them away from the Japanese, and in such a manner to lay the initial groundwork for the final peaceful fortification of all of Sakhalin for ourselves.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Zapiska ob ostrove Sakhaline” [1869], RGIA, f. 1315, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 85-93. See also l. 94ob.

<sup>99</sup> For the full text of the regulations, see Lensen, *The Russian Push Toward Japan*, 495-496.

<sup>100</sup> Appended to a letter from Minister of Foreign Affairs A.M. Gorchakov, December 1869, to General-Adjutant I.G. Skolkov, RGIA, f. 1315, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 79-79ob.

The Japanese, however, did notice the Russian attempts to strengthen their position on Sakhalin, and as noted by Sakhalin historian V.N. Elizar'ev, the temporary regulations led primarily to heightened competition over Sakhalin between Russia and Japan.<sup>101</sup> Whereas previously the Japanese had used Sakhalin for fishing, now the Japanese began a concerted effort to settle the island and claim the territory for themselves. Likewise, the Russians increased their efforts to strengthen their position on the island, sending more troops and founding several new military posts, including the large and well-supplied Murav'evskii Post.<sup>102</sup> The post's commander, Second Lieutenant V.K. Shvan, was told by Colonel V.P. de-Vitte, commander of troops, that the purpose of his fort was "to limit the tyranny of the Japanese toward the Ainu, and to show them that Russia will never give up its possession of [southern Sakhalin]."<sup>103</sup> While Nevel'skoi's declaration of the island to be Russian had been straightforward and authoritative, it was proving harder to support that claim.

With the heightened tensions following the 1867 temporary regulations, a shift is evident in the Russian state's views and policies toward its eastern borderland. Military occupation of the territory was no longer deemed sufficient to reinforce Russia's position on the island, and discussion turned to "colonization" [*kolonizatsiia*] of Sakhalin Island, a term referring in this case not to political and/or cultural domination of the island and its people but to the establishment of small and strategic Russian agricultural colonies on the island.<sup>104</sup> Peasants, rather than soldiers, were held up as the ideal colonizers, the ones who could confirm Russia's place on the island.<sup>105</sup> As the Governor General of East Siberia reported to Committee of Ministers in St. Petersburg, "the existence of military posts alone is insufficient for the achievement of our goal. Political and economic considerations demand the urgent founding of a settled agricultural population on the island."<sup>106</sup> A committee under Major General B.K. Kukel',

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<sup>101</sup> V.N. Elizar'ev, "Ot 'Vremennogo soglasheniia ob ostrove Sakhalin' (1867 g.) k Sankt-Peterburgskomu dogovoru (1875 g.)," *Rossiiia i ATR* 2007, no 1: 107.

<sup>102</sup> M.S. Korsakov, "Vtoraia chast' vspodanneishego otcheta po upravleniiu Vostochnoi Sibiri za 1868 g.," RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4184, ll. 93-93ob. See also Elizar'ev, "Ot 'Vremennogo soglasheniia'," 107-116.

<sup>103</sup> [V.K.] Shvan, "Zaniatie iuzhnogo Sakhalina," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1894, no. 8: 394.

<sup>104</sup> The first two references I found to "colonization" of Sakhalin were used in this context in 1869: *Kopiiia s vspodanneishego otcheta General Gubernatora Vostochnoi Sibiri po upravleniiu Amurskim kraem za 1869 god*, RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4184, l. 274; "Zapiska ob ostrove Sakhaline" [1869], RGIA, f. 1315, op. 1, d. 6, l. 89.

<sup>105</sup> Compare with Sunderland, "The 'Colonization' Question," 222-226.

<sup>106</sup> Memo of 19 September [1868] from Governor General M.S. Korsakov, Irkutsk, to the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, GAIIO, f. 24, op. 10, d. 206, k. 2108, ll. 358-358ob, on microfilm at GASO, MF 498.

military governor of the Zabaikal region of East Siberia, determined that at least twenty-five families should be settled on the island near indigenous villages in order to maximize influence on the local population.<sup>107</sup> Potential colonists were promised all of the advantages granted settlers in the Amur region; freedom from taxes for twenty years; release from required military service; reimbursement of travel expenses; a loan for the purchase of cattle and supplies, which would be forgiven after five years; and all provisions for the first year. In addition, instructions were given that the families were to be in Nikolaevsk, across the strait, by mid-July in order to arrive on Sakhalin in time to till the soil and build homes for the winter. They were to bring their own farm equipment and cattle, as well as buying cattle particularly suited for Far Eastern conditions at state expense. Likewise, they were to purchase seeds on the mainland.<sup>108</sup>

Despite the promises and plans, however, the ten families that arrived from the Amur oblast in September 1869, and eleven families from the Irkutsk gubernia who arrived later that year, faced great hardships. Upon arrival at Post Korsakovsk, they were housed in empty Japanese sheds and Ainu yurts, as no roads had been constructed to their new settlements. Snow in late October delayed completion of the road until December, at which time the settlers were left in the wilderness with their provisions with little time to build shelters before the onset of winter.<sup>109</sup> Some spent the winter in earthen huts, while others made their way to the coast to seek aid from the military. Twenty-five of the forty-two heads of oxen died on the journey due to insufficient feed; horses were left behind altogether for lack of space on board ship; low quality seed led to years of poor harvests.<sup>110</sup> The settlers were never able to sustain themselves apart from government rations, and by the time of Keppen's visit in the early 1870s, the communities were "in far from excellent condition" [*daleko ne v blestiaschem polozenii*].<sup>111</sup> While agriculture remained a crucial component of Sakhalin settlement in the eyes of St. Petersburg for years to come, there were no more attempts to attract volunteers.

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<sup>107</sup> Utverzhennyye gosposinom general-gubernatorum predlozhenii po ustroistvu ostrova Sakhalina, RGIA DV, f. 1154, op. 1, d. 5, l. 9.

<sup>108</sup> Izvlechenie iz doklada komiteta uprezhdennogo dlia obsuzhdeniia voprosov po ustroistvu ostrova Sakhalina, GAIO, f. 24, op. 10, d. 206, k. 2108, ll. 15-15ob., 23, on microfilm at GASO, MF 498.

<sup>109</sup> "Raport komanduiushchemu voiskami Primorskoj oblasti ot komanduiushhego otriadom na o. Sakhaline podpolkovnik de-Preradovicha," 13 Jan. 1870, RGAVMF, f. 909, op 1, d. 137, ll. 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 77-84.

<sup>111</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 124.

Meanwhile, as Far Eastern administrators worked to strengthen Russia's position on Sakhalin, officials in the imperial capital were occupied with broader efforts at reforming Russia's prison and exile systems based on western penology.<sup>112</sup> As part of these efforts, in December 1868, a committee was founded to discuss punishment of the most serious criminal offenders, a response to the utter disorganization of the systems of Siberian exile and penal servitude as they currently stood.<sup>113</sup> Given the danger to society posed by these criminals and the havoc wreaked in Siberia by escaped convicts, the committee argued that these most serious offenders should be either confined in prisons or "banished to a distant colony to be used for forced labor with the primary goal of settling in their place of exile." Sakhalin Island was chosen as the most convenient location for establishment of such a colony, although the committee recommended experimenting first with a small number of convicts.<sup>114</sup> On 18 April 1869, Tsar Aleksandr II approved the committee's proposal, ordering that eight hundred convicts be sent to Sakhalin immediately and assigning 120,000 rubles to cover the expenses of their travel, provisions, and the establishment of a temporary administration.<sup>115</sup>

With the state's failure to settle either peasant farmers or Russian entrepreneurs on the island, this decision to send convicts to settle on Sakhalin was welcomed by the East Siberian administration. Aleksei Keppen explained in 1875, "The acknowledged need to strengthen our possession of Sakhalin persuaded the state of the need to colonize [*kolonizirovat'*] the island, not limiting ourselves to military occupation alone. But since the vast distance of Sakhalin from settled parts of the empire makes voluntary settlement extremely difficult, it was considered more effective at the highest level of government to colonize the island with exiles."<sup>116</sup> Yet this was not understood as a permanent policy. "In view of insufficient data about the island," the committee deemed it impossible to concentrate the empire's 12,000 convicts there immediately. Instead, "as a type of experiment," the committee recommended sending only eight hundred convicts to the island while the rest were held in specially-constructed heavy labor prisons

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<sup>112</sup> On the broader prison reforms taking place at this time, see Bruce F. Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).

<sup>113</sup> On the crisis in the Siberian exile system of the 1860s, see Andrew Gentes, "The Institution of Russia's Sakhalin Policy, from 1868 to 1875," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2002): 15-20.

<sup>114</sup> "Kopiia s soobrazhenii, predstavlenykh kollezhskim sovetnikom Vlasovym general-gubernatoru Vostochnoi Sibiri, ob ustroistve katorkhnykh rabot na Sakhaline," BIGU, ruk. 345, ll. 1-4ob.

<sup>115</sup> *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, 2nd ed. (1873), vol. 44, no. 46984, 330-334.

<sup>116</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 80-81. See also Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 15.

[*katorzhnye tiur'my*] within Russia itself.<sup>117</sup> If all went well, this would simultaneously solve the problems of both the penal system and meet the needs of the military. From the very beginning, however, miscommunication and mismanagement plagued the experiment, as inadequate accommodations limited the number of exiles on the island to two hundred fifty, the rest being rerouted to clear roads on the Far Eastern mainland.<sup>118</sup> Nonetheless, the experiment was an important element of Russia's Great Reforms, offering a potential solution for the crisis within Russia's penal system while reinforcing Russia's position on not only Sakhalin but in the entire Far East.

## Conclusion

The fateful decision to establish penal colonies on Sakhalin was made after nearly two decades of exploration, occupation, negotiation, and efforts to attract entrepreneurs and free settlers, with an emphasis on a natural "*prisoedinenie*" of Sakhalin to the empire, a term referring to a peaceful and mutually-beneficial joining together, uniting, or "making one."<sup>119</sup> With the opening of Japan and increasing international trade in the Pacific, M.S. Korsakov, Governor General of East Siberia, argued to the tsar's Committee of Ministers that Russia's position on Sakhalin was becoming increasingly threatened, even as the Great Reforms and the shifting world economic and political conditions made it increasingly valuable to maintain.<sup>120</sup> The establishment of penal servitude on Sakhalin, therefore, was part of an empire-wide effort to refashion all of Russia as a modern imperial state, at the same time *making* Russian the land that Nevel'skoi had *declared* Russian two decades earlier. Recognizing Sakhalin's potential as a future supplier of coal, demand for which was growing in Chinese ports, the government decided to try forced settlement, using convicts to build roads, clear fields, and labor in Sakhalin mines. As mining engineer Aleksei Keppen explained a few years later, "recognizing the need to strengthen our possession of Sakhalin convinced the government of the necessity of colonizing the island, rather than relying on military occupation alone. Since the remoteness and distance of the island from the populated parts of the empire [made] voluntary settlement highly complicated,

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<sup>117</sup> Tal'berg, "Ssylka na Sakhalin," 221-222.

<sup>118</sup> "Sakhalinskaia kommissiia," *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 19 Dec. 1869, 3.

<sup>119</sup> E.B., Introduction to Busse, "Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia," *Vestnik Evropy* 6, 733-734.

<sup>120</sup> M.S. Korsakov, *Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska General-Gubernatora Vostochnoi Sibiri*, RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4178, ll. 21-22.

the central government found it more feasible to colonize the island with exiles.”<sup>121</sup> Sending convicts to Sakhalin would provide a means of extracting coal for the fleet while at the same time providing labor for exile-convicts. Rimskii-Korsakov’s dream of Sakhalin “reviving Siberia” and becoming a “center of trade in the Pacific” appeared to be coming true.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 80.

<sup>122</sup> Rimskii-Korsakov, *Baltika-Amur*, 122.

**CHAPTER 2:**  
**FORMING THE EMPIRE; REFORMING THE STATE; TRANSFORMING THE**  
**PEOPLE, 1869-1889**

In August 1869, 250 criminals arrived on Sakhalin from other sites in East Siberia to perform penal servitude, the result of an imperial decree of April 18 to settle convicts on Sakhalin as an experiment that would serve simultaneously the penal and political needs of the empire.<sup>1</sup> As part of a broader reorganization of the Russian system of penal servitude, the tsar decreed that eight hundred convicts be sent to Sakhalin. Since only 250 could be accommodated on the island, however, the rest had been reassigned to clear roads in Nikolaevsk and De-Kastri across the strait.<sup>2</sup> Even with the decreased number, soldiers at Post Due were forced to crowd together to share their barracks with the criminals. With the arrival of the convicts—*katorzhniki* sentenced to heavy labor as punishment, rather than exile-settlers like those who had arrived in the 1860s—came certain changes in coal mining operations, such as the fact that convicts received no pay for their work, and reform of the island administration. More importantly, Sakhalin took on a new significance to the Russian state. Previously, the island had been treated as a rich borderland abundant in natural resources, some of which were mined by criminals. Designation of Sakhalin as a place of penal servitude turned it into a penal island that happened to have coal. Conducted in the context of both penal reform and imperial expansion, the experiment of sentencing convicts to work in coal mines illuminates how the Russian state viewed the empire and its future, including both internal and external colonization. While the convicts colonized the land, the land would colonize the convicts, turning criminals into citizens. Part of the Great Reforms of Alexander II, planned penitentiary colonies on Sakhalin represented a solution to modern problems and a means of asserting Russia's position as an empire in the modern world. On Sakhalin, the period of 1869-1879 illuminated how modernity was understood and negotiated as the state charted its future direction.

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<sup>1</sup> *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, series II, vol. 44, no. 46984 (18 Apr. 1869), 268-274.

<sup>2</sup> A.I. Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina russkimi liud'mi* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1991), 92.

### *Sakhalin's First Convict Labor*

Although only 250 convicts were transported to work on Sakhalin, their arrival brought about significant changes in the island's governance and regime. First, as a branch of the Russian *katorga* system, a penal administration had to be established on Sakhalin. In 1869, Colonel F.L. Romanovich was appointed to a newly-created position of Director of Convict-Exiles [*ssyl'nokatorzhnykh*]<sup>3</sup> for the Primorskaia oblast, with responsibility for the penal functions of the island and many of the practical duties of colonization.<sup>4</sup> No longer did the military commander at Post Due, F.M. Depreradovich, hold primary authority, and convicts were divided between Post Due in the north and Korsakovskii Post in the southern part of the island. In 1870, 250 more convicts arrived and in 1871, another 165, bringing the island's Russian population to nearly 900 in 1872, counting free settlers and administration.<sup>5</sup> Two years after the arrival of the convicts, still no proper accommodations had been constructed.<sup>6</sup> While its punitive goals normally demanded that penal servitude consist in a strict regime of mining or factory work, convicts on Sakhalin worked in a variety of areas, including shaft mining, agriculture, road building and construction.<sup>7</sup> Exiles working in the mines alongside troops in the 1860s had received two kopecks per *pud* of coal; under the new penal regime, convict-miners received no wages and troops did not work underground at all.

For the first few years, the primary focus of the Sakhalin penal regime was development of an infrastructure that would make penal colonization efficient and profitable. More than two-thirds of convicts worked outside of the mines, in work little different from what that of peasants on the Russian mainland. Coal beds had not yet been significantly researched and there was no

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<sup>3</sup> *Ssyl'nokatorzhnye*, which I generally translate as exiled convicts or convict-exiles, refers to those criminals sentenced to penal servitude [*katorga*] and exile. *Katorzhniki*, normally translated simply as "convicts," refers to those sentenced to *katorga* in factories or mines, with or without exile. *Ssyl'nye* [exiles] or *ssyl'noposelentsy* [exile settlers] are exiles, but not serving penal servitude, generally having already completed their sentences. The criminals working in Sakhalin mines in the 1860s were *ssyl'noposelentsy* who had completed their terms of penal servitude and remained in exile in the Far East. The convicts sent to Sakhalin in 1869 were *ssyl'nokatorzhnye*, sentenced to penal servitude on Sakhalin itself, after which they would become *ssyl'noposelentsy*, or exiled settlers allowed to live freely and work for themselves while in exile, and four years later, *krestiane iz ssyl'nykh*, or exiles granted the status of peasants.

<sup>4</sup> Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> A. Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin: Ego kamennougol'nye mestorozhdeniia i razvivaiushchiasia na nem kamennougol'naia promyshlennost'* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Transhelii, 1875), 43; D.G. Tal'berg, "Ssylka na Sakhalin," *Vestnik Evropy* 1879, no. 5 (May): 238.

<sup>6</sup> "Sakhalinskaia kommissiia," *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 19 Dec. 1869, 3; Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> V.I. Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii, predstavlenykh kollezhskim sovetnikom Vlasovym general-gubernatoru Vostochnoi Sibiri, ob ustroistve katorzhnykh rabot na Sakhaline," BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 15ob.

harbor in which to load coal. One of their first tasks was the construction of barracks, roads and a pier. Plans were made to install “dead anchors” at which ships could dock out of danger of the rocks. When the pier was destroyed in a September 1871 hurricane, convicts constructed a new one. During the winter of 1873-74, it was improved, with railroad tracks added for transport of coal.<sup>8</sup> Officials also began investigating methods of coal distribution, including creation of a central warehouse in Vladivostok, where loading was more convenient, and even a storage facility in China. The 1869 sale of 90,000 puds of coal provided hope that the coal industry would soon turn profitable.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, administrative chaos, along with the unsystematic mining of the past, made extracting coal difficult. Lack of foresight in the 1860s, when mines were operated unsystematically and with little supervision, made restoration of mining operations complicated. Some coal deposits had been ruined by exposure to the elements; in some, coal was depleted completely; and others had been abandoned after only partial excavation, with no records indicating which was the case at any particular deposit. Poor communication led to disorder, preventing orders from reaching the island and hindering timely fulfillment of those received. Demand had been higher than could be produced and delivered. Not even sufficient coal had been extracted to serve the needs of the navy’s Pacific fleet.<sup>10</sup>

Alongside mining and construction, two farms were established for the purpose of exploring whether forced labor could be used profitably in agricultural pursuits. At the farms, exile-settlers worked alongside convicts serving their terms whose families had accompanied them into exile. In the early years, their labor consisted primarily in the clearing of forests for fields and the construction of homes for the one hundred convicts sentenced to farm work. At the Aleksandrovskaia farm [*ferma*], in the Due River valley in the north, initial results were meager, as the farmers experimented with grains—rye, buckwheat, oats, and barley—that would grow in the Sakhalin climate, as well as potatoes, cabbage and rutabagas. Likewise, quality seeds were difficult to obtain in the Far East, and the farmers had insufficient work animals. At the Untovskaia farm in the southern part of the island near Korsakovskii Post, women and children played a significant role in farm operations, successfully growing vegetables and raising

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<sup>8</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 39, 44, 80.

<sup>9</sup> “Sakhalinskaia kommissiia,” *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 19 Dec. 1869, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 77, 45, 43.

geese. Within a few years, grain also was introduced, and the Untovskaia farm was later highlighted as an “excellent example of the results that can be achieved in the shortest possible time.” The director of the farm projected that soon it would support itself entirely.<sup>11</sup> As M.I. Ishchenko notes, both farms were in fact successful in their broader purpose of training exiles for long-term settlement on the island. Decades later, the same convicts working at the Aleksandrovskaia farm in 1869 were recorded as free peasants, still farming on Sakhalin, and their children remained on the island into the twentieth century, long after the majority of Russians had left.<sup>12</sup>

### **Forming the Empire**

While convicts and overseers on the island were constructing homes, building roads, mining coal, and farming, statesmen and bureaucrats in St. Petersburg were discussing the future not only of Sakhalin, but of Russia itself—in particular its far eastern territories—and the state of its exile system. Sakhalin, it was proposed, could provide a solution to the political, economic and penal needs of the empire, which led the state to begin methodical exploration of the region. For the next six years, some of the empire’s top scholars and statesmen conducted systematic research on Sakhalin, seeking to make the island legible by mapping the territory, measuring the quality and quantity of coal, projecting agricultural capacity, categorizing plant and animal life, and recording diseases and other potential health concerns. Representatives of the Ministry of Finance considered penal servitude from an economic perspective, seeking to maximize the sales and distribution of Sakhalin coal and provide efficient transport and accommodation of convict laborers. The head of the Department of Executive Police [*departament politzii ispolnitel’noi*], in charge of prisons under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, studied the island’s suitability to become a place of penal servitude, part of a commission investigating the reform of *katorga* in Russia overall. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was consulted concerning the diplomatic implications of establishing convict settlements on a borderland territory shared with the Japanese. Agronomists and mining engineers investigated the island’s potential to provide natural resources.

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<sup>11</sup> M.S. Mitsul’, *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina v sel’skokhoziaistvennom otnoshenii* (St. Petersburg: [tipografiia A.E. Landau i Ko.], 1873), 94-107. (Quote on p. 107.)

<sup>12</sup> M.I. Ishchenko, *Russkie starozhily Sakhalina: Vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX vv.* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 2007), 33-34.

Members of these commissions recognized that past decade had seen poor results, yet remained convinced of the state's power to overcome past hindrances. They demonstrated a modern faith in the ability of humans to overcome the difficulties of distance and climate and to use technology to do what had previously been impossible. Agronomist Mikhail Mitsul', who traveled to Sakhalin in 1871, wrote about the military posts on the island: "If the buildings erected do not completely fulfill their purposes, we must not judge too harshly .... We must recognize [the Russian soldiers] as pioneers, preparing the land they occupied for colonization. But now a new era is beginning, and we have different needs. The new leaders will learn from past mistakes to create conditions better for village life, making colonization easier in places where it used to be even unthinkable."<sup>13</sup> To Mitsul', even experiences such as the unfortunate 1869 attempt at settling Siberian peasants could not hinder the inevitable progress. Mining engineer Aleksei Keppen agreed, reporting based on his own investigation that that the poor results of previous coal mining had been due to poor supervision and unscientific methods, rather than the quality or quantity of the coal itself.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Penal Reform***

The 18 April 1869 order to dispatch convicts to Sakhalin was the result of a "special committee" [*osobii komitet*] appointed by the tsar on 5 December 1868 to "consider the reasons for the decline of katorga labor," an issue that had occupied St. Petersburg bureaucrats for a number of years.<sup>15</sup> The decade following the 1861 emancipation of serfs and the Polish uprising of 1863 saw a forty percent increase in the number of criminals assigned to heavy labor.<sup>16</sup> With the closure of state factories and the depletion of minerals in Siberian mines, insufficient work was available. One potential solution considered was the use of convicts to quarry granite on Someri [Sommers] Island in the Bay of Finland. Yet this would have been a temporary measure, as the island is small, with a land area of only 1.5 sq. km.<sup>17</sup> The committee concluded that the

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<sup>13</sup> Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 51-52.

<sup>14</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 76-77, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," BIGU, ruk. 345. This date is a matter of confusion in some sources. Dmitrii Tal'berg, writing in 1879, gave 18 April 1868 as the date of the decision (Tal'berg, "Ssylka na Sakhalin," 223), which Nikolai Novombergskii repeated in 1903, citing Tal'berg as his source. (N.Ia. Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin [Ocherki sakhalinskoi zhizni]* [St. Petersburg: Tipografiia doma prizreniia maloletnikh bednykh, 1903], 14.) The statute on the restructuring of katorga was in fact approved by the tsar on 18 April 1869. The committee convened for the first time in December 1868. (*PSZ*, series II, vol 44, no. 46984, 268-274.)

<sup>16</sup> See Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 14.

katorga's punitive goals katorga could be fulfilled by either assigning convicts to work under guard in mines, where they would be accommodated in nearby prisons, or by exiling them to a location from which escape would be difficult. Because of the large number of convicts sentenced to penal servitude—approximately 12,000—it would have been impossible to concentrate them in one location immediately, so the committee decided to hold them in prisons on the mainland in the meantime. Working toward a long-term solution, the committee proposed immediately dispatching eight hundred convicts to Sakhalin, a proposal approved by the tsar on April 18.<sup>18</sup> The committee based its decision on assumptions that: 1) the island's geographic isolation would hinder escape; 2) exile to the island would be significantly punitive, since it would be lifelong; 3) the island had plenty of empty territory in which exiles could settle after serving their sentences; 4) the state would benefit from the settlement of exiles, since it was difficult to attract free settlers to the island; 5) the island's rich coal deposits could be profitably exploited, given the growing demand in China and Japan; and 6) the expenses of the katorga system would be reduced by concentrating all convicts at the same location.<sup>19</sup> While many of these assumptions would later prove false, at the time, all signs seemed in favor of establishing a katorga regime on Sakhalin Island.

### *Eastward Expansion*

Meanwhile, as those in prison affairs were discussing the reform of the Russian system of penal servitude, other Russian officials were meeting to consider the future of the Amur region and Sakhalin Island primarily from a diplomatic perspective. M.S. Korsakov, Governor General of East Siberia, was particularly concerned about the joint possession of Sakhalin by Japan and Russia, as the Japanese had increased their activity on Sakhalin ever since the 1867 temporary regulations.<sup>20</sup> Even more threatening, after the Meiji Restoration of November 1867 toppled the Tokugawa shogunate, Japanese officials had claimed Russian activity on southern Sakhalin to be illegal, the newly-empowered emperor refusing to recognize the treaty concluded before his ascension to power.<sup>21</sup> In response to this, and in contrast to the existing policies of recruiting

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<sup>18</sup> Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," BIGU, ruk. 345, ll. 1ob-4ob.

<sup>19</sup> Tal'berg, "Ssylka na Sakhalin," 220-221.

<sup>20</sup> M.S. Korsakov, Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska General-Gubernatora Vostochnoi Sibiri, RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4178, ll. 21-25ob.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from the commander of troops on Sakhalin Island, F.M. Depreradovich, to the Head of Japanese settlement on Sakhalin, Okamoto Kenske, 15 June 1869. Depreradovich also sent a copy to Skolkov, who included it in his report. RGIA, f. 1315, op. 1, d. 6, l. 31ob.

entrepreneurs and peasants to settle the island, M.P. Tikhmenev, commander of troops in the Primorskaia oblast, proposed that Sakhalin be colonized exclusively with convict laborers.<sup>22</sup> Another concern was the diplomatic implications of Sakhalin coal. Foreigners—in particular, Americans—who were refused coal mining rights by the Russians could obtain permission from the Japanese, who would permit them to employ laborers from China, leading to the “invasion of Sakhalin by yet another element, whose position on the island would be protected by the North American United States, [and] would hinder our consolidation and possession [of Sakhalin].”<sup>23</sup>

As a result of these discussions, ten days after the April 1869 degree on katorga reform, another commission was created under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, officially designated the Commission for the Exploration of the Priamur Region and Sakhalin Island, although often referred to simply as the “Sakhalin Commission.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than meeting in St. Petersburg, this commission was sent to the Far East to study local conditions and gather data on the region’s needs. Chaired by General-Lieutenant I.G. Skolkov, a longtime member of the tsar’s suite, the commission journeyed to Sakhalin and the Amur region in the summer of 1869, from which it reported to Minister of Foreign Affairs and State Chancellor A.M. Gorchakov on the region’s political and economic needs. In his instructions to Skolkov, General-Admiral Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, president of the Council of State, commissioned him to explore all aspects of the development of the Priamur region and Sakhalin, including international diplomacy, trade, industry, agriculture, and military needs, as well as to “consider the organization of a government on Sakhalin Island in respect to both the local population and troops stationed throughout the island.” Skolkov was also charged to report on the situation of the eight hundred convicts to be transported according to the recently-approved statute, “attesting personally to the degree to which the area suits the government’s purpose of setting convicts, and to comprise a detailed plan, based on local conditions and consultation with local authorities, for the continued transport of convicts to Sakhalin and for their settlement.”<sup>25</sup> Due to his high

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<sup>22</sup> RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4178, l. 46ob. See also A.I. Kostanov, “Istoriia osvoeniia Sakhalina v epokhu rossiiskogo kapitalizma” (Dissertation, Institut istorii, arkheologii i etnografii narodov dal’nego vostoka, Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1987), 113.

<sup>23</sup> Memo to Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince A.M. Gorchakov. RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4178, ll. 395ob-396.

<sup>24</sup> “Komissiia dlia issledovaniia priamurskogo kraia i o. Sakhalina,” founded on 28 April 1869 by order of the emperor. RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4178, l 282. Ishchenko, *Russkie starozhily*, 30; “Sakhalinskaia komissiia,” *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 19 Dec. 1869, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Instructions from Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, president of the council of state, to General-Adjutant I.G. Skolkov, 29 April 1869, RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4178, ll. 270-281ob. (Quotes on ll. 278ob, 275ob.)

position, Skolkov was granted authority to implement any measures necessary, without waiting for authorization from St. Petersburg.

In the end, Skolkov's commission had little impact on Sakhalin's future. Skolkov was hesitant to draw decisive conclusions, and although hopeful, he insisted that further investigation was necessary before establishing a permanent system of penal servitude on the island. He did report that, "with serious government cooperation, the development of [coal mining] could 1) provide a productive and economically profitable occupation for a large number of exiles; 2) serve to strengthen our possession of the island and to hinder any foreign aspirations to occupy coal beds, which would harm our interests; and 3) positively influence the conditions of the shipping industry in our eastern possessions."<sup>26</sup> "Because of its orographic and climatic conditions," explained mining engineer O.A. Deikhman, who accompanied Skolkov on the expedition, "Sakhalin will never be a rich agricultural colony, and ... exiles will always support themselves through labor in the mines, or over time, in factories."<sup>27</sup> Yet Skolkov asserted that exiling convicts to Sakhalin was likely the best solution under the circumstances:

There is no reason to doubt that exile to Sakhalin of convicted criminals for penal servitude, more than to anywhere else, would protect the state against the return at will of its depraved members, expelled for their crimes, to peaceful society, and make the designated criminal punishment more effective. The permanence [*bezvozvratnost'*] of exile to Sakhalin moreover serves as the most reliable method of suppressing the will of the criminal, who, being deprived of the hope of escape, will be forced to submit to the conditions of his existence, and little by little, through work and obedience, will enter the desired path of reform.<sup>28</sup>

The most important result of Skolkov's expedition was the decision of the committee on katorga reform to conduct further investigation. Since the potential for coal mining remained unknown, the committee decided to send a mining engineer along with two or three masters of shaft mining [*shteigery*] to estimate the capacity of Sakhalin coal beds, and based on that data, to design a new, broader system of employing convict labor to extract it. In December 1870, the

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<sup>26</sup> "Soobrazheniia vysochaishe naznachennoi v Priamurskii krai komissii po voprosu ob organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot na ostrove Sakhaline," RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4179, l. 155.

<sup>27</sup> O.A. Deikhman "Ostrov Sakhalin v gorno-promyshlennom otnoshenii," prilozhenie k otchety Vysochaishe naznachennoi v Pri-Amurskom krae komissii, RGA MVF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4179, l. 114ob; later published as [O.A.] Deikhman, "Ostrov Sakhalin v gornopromyshlennom otnoshenii," *Gornyi zhurnal* 1871, no. 3, 529-557 (quote on p. 556). See also Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina*, 60.

<sup>28</sup> "Soobrazheniia vysochaishe naznachennoi v Priamurskii krai komissii po voprosu ob organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot na ostrove Sakhaline," RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4179, l. 151.

Mining Department of the Ministry of Finance appointed to this task mining engineer Aleksei Keppen, who arrived on Sakhalin in June 1871.<sup>29</sup> Keppen's 125-page report on Sakhalin would become the first of his many books and articles, in Russian and English, on Russia's natural resources, the rights of miners, history of mining in Russia, and the development of the railroad. At this same time, a topographer, a certain Korzun, was appointed by the governor of the Priamurskaia oblast to survey the island.<sup>30</sup>

### ***The Collapse of Penal Servitude***

While Skolkov and his associates explored Sakhalin and the Amur in terms of its broader significance to the empire, emperor Aleksandr II, meanwhile, was concerned about the growing murder rate throughout the empire and the state's inability to carry out the punishment of murderers as decreed by law. In May of 1870 he ordered a review of the situation, for which a committee was formed under the Ministry of Justice to not only propose reforms, but more importantly, to determine the cause of the rising murder rate. In its findings, the committee attributed the increase in murders to the breakdown of the penal servitude system, which left murderers unpunished, as criminals themselves admitted. When the Minister of Justice reported this to the Council of State, the Council concluded that the discrepancy between the law and its enforcement could have "disastrous consequences on the public safety." The urgency of katorga reform was highlighted in a report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs stating that there was insufficient space in current prisons and penal servitude sites for convicts sentenced even during the next year, and that soon it would be impossible to protect society from criminals at all.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Minister of Internal Affairs, the primary hindrance blocking the much-needed penal reform had been the prioritization of the economic over the punitive function of convict labor, and hence the rejection of proposals to utilize criminals in industries that would serve a punitive function without rendering a profit. The Council of State agreed, concluding that it was necessary to "make exceptional efforts and take special measures" to ensure the quickest possible reform of the system, allocating funds to do so, while preparing additional prison accommodations in the meantime for the most dangerous criminals. With the emperor's approval, the Minister of Internal Affairs established a committee to implement this decision

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<sup>29</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Tal'berg, "Ssylka na Sakhalin," 223.

<sup>31</sup> Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," BIGU, ruk. 345, ll. 5-8.

consisting of representatives of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Justice and Finance; the Imperial Court; and the Second and Third Sections of His Imperial Majesty's Chancellery. After examining the reports, the committee confirmed the benefits of establishing penal servitude on Sakhalin, although expressing concern that agricultural work was insufficiently punitive to deter felons. Those convicted of the most serious offences should therefore be retained to work in the remaining mines at Nerchinsk and the Urals, while "less important" criminals would be sent to Sakhalin. The commission determined that more information was necessary in order to implement the desired system of penal servitude on Sakhalin.<sup>32</sup>

It was according to instructions of this commission that the most important investigation of Sakhalin was organized, an expedition under the Ministry of Internal Affairs led by director of prisons V.I. Vlasov in 1871 to "gather all information necessary to make a final decision concerning the future organization of penal servitude on the island."<sup>33</sup> The minister commissioned Vlasov to gather information about agriculture and coal mining on Sakhalin as well as inspecting the sites of penal servitude currently functioning in the Nerchinsk region. His team included physician F.M. Avgustinovich, agronomist M.S. Mitsul', and military topographer V. Semenov. After examining prisons, factories and mines of the East Siberian penal servitude system—Irkutsk, Kara, Stretensk, Blagoveshchensk, Sofiisk, and Nikolaevsk—Vlasov arrived on Sakhalin on 7 September 1871.<sup>34</sup>

According to his later report, Vlasov's stay on the island was difficult from the very beginning. For lack of accommodations, his team slept in a hut built to serve as a bathhouse for criminals. They lived in fear of the convicts, who were not confined to prison, but lived freely on the island. One of his men, Vlasov reported, feared for his life to the extent that, when he "found himself on the wild shore of Sakhalin, among convicts and people in despair, [he] was unable to bear the strong impressions of horror and went mad." He was transported to a ward for the mentally ill in an East Siberian hospital. In winter, the only form of transportation was by dogsled, which Vlasov discovered to be "one of the most unpleasant and dangerous means of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., ll. 9-13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., l. 13ob.

<sup>34</sup> V.I. Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv, sushchestvuiushchikh na katorge* (n.p., 1873), 21.

transportation,” in particular since it entailed spending the night in the open air at in temperatures some twenty-five degrees below zero.<sup>35</sup>

So important was the issue of katorga reform to the state that Vlasov’s team included some of the most experienced specialists in their fields. An 1835 graduate of the Vil’na Medical and Surgical Academy, physician F.M. Avgustinovich had published several books and articles on medicine over a long career, and in 1871, was appointed to the medical department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In this capacity he was commissioned to investigate the impact of the Sakhalin environment on settlers’ health. As well as studying Sakhalin’s climate and atmosphere—he was able to “state with certainty that the influence of climatic conditions has ... caused no harm to the health of the resident population”<sup>36</sup>—he devoted himself to the natural sciences. During his journey, he gathered 20,000 specimens of East Siberian flora. After departing Sakhalin in June, 1872, he traveled to Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Tobol’sk, and finally Iakutiia, where he spent three years above the Arctic Circle.<sup>37</sup> Avgustinovich published one of the first ethnographic accounts of the daily lives of Sakhalin convicts.<sup>38</sup>

At age thirty-five, M.S. Mitsul’ was already a prominent scholar, having published three books on agriculture. In 1870, he had been awarded a gold medal by the Free Economic Society “for his labor on behalf of the society and for his literary activity in the area of agriculture.” In 1871, he received the Order of St. Anna, third degree, and the same year, he was promoted to the rank of collegiate assessor.<sup>39</sup> As an agronomist, his research entailed travel in thick forests, and on one occasion, having gotten lost while studying soil conditions in the taiga, he survived for two days by eating a dog that had followed him from the post.<sup>40</sup> Yet Mitsul’ was optimistic about Sakhalin’s potential. According to Mitsul’, from 1869 to 1871, “out of a wild, impenetrable territory emerged a meadow and a field, the first traces of culture, making the Due valley even more picturesque than the nature surrounding it.” If the state implemented his well-researched plans, he indicated, much of the island would be converted into an agricultural zone

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 21, 24.

<sup>36</sup> F.M. Avgustinovich, *Zhizn’ russkikh i inorodtsev na Sakhaline (Ocherki i zametki iz deviatimesiachnogo dnevnika)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia “Obshchestvennaia pol’za,” 1874), 15.

<sup>37</sup> V.M. Latyshev, “F.M. Avgustinovich (1809-1891),” in F.M. Avgustinovich, *Zhizn’ russkikh i inorodtsev na ostrove Sakhaline*, comp. V.M. Latyshev (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskie knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 2007), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Avgustinovich, *Zhizn’ russkikh i inorodtsev* [1874].

<sup>39</sup> A.I. Alekseev, *Vtoraia rodina* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal’nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1986), 10.

<sup>40</sup> Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv*, 24.

comparable to the Russian heartland itself.<sup>41</sup> For his service to the empire, Mitsul' was decorated with the Order of St. Vladimir, fourth degree.<sup>42</sup>

While their personal experiences on the island were difficult, Vlasov and his team returned optimistic about the possibility of Sakhalin serving as a place for penal servitude. Vlasov reported that both scientific research and practical experience indicated that agriculture could succeed in southern Sakhalin, and that the climate was favorable for human habitation.<sup>43</sup> Avgustinovich and Mitsul' found the indigenous populations on the island to be mild, patient and reliable, indicating no tendencies toward violence or savagery.<sup>44</sup> Mitsul' concluded that, if conducted according to scientific principles, Sakhalin agriculture could feed tens of thousands of settlers.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Vlasov reported confusion and chaos at the other sites of penal servitude he visited in Siberia. Penal servitude on Sakhalin became even more urgent in light of the "disorder of katorga [which] is rooted in utter disregard for the law, in the inability or negligence of those in authority, in local condition which make it difficult to comply with the law, in irregular organization of labor, in the granting of convicts freedom and in poor administration."<sup>46</sup> Starting anew on Sakhalin Island, following the latest principles of science and penology, it was hoped, would solve many of those problems.

The proposal that Vlasov compiled for the establishment of convict labor on Sakhalin demonstrates his faith in the state's ability to overcome hindrances and transform the land into a secure and productive Russian territory. While convicts in 1871 were forced to eat salted beef [*solonina*] for lack of fresh meat—and even that was rationed—Vlasov emphasized that there were plenty of meadows that could provide hay for future cattle. Rather than viewing the thick woods as a hindrance, he noted that clearing roads would be every bit as difficult as current katorga labor at the mines of the Nerchinsk or Ural regions. Sakhalin's remoteness and insular status made exploration difficult for his team, but it would prevent convicts from escaping, and as current exiles and their wives confirmed, the threat of its remoteness and its arduous unpaid labor would deter crime on the mainland. When he learned from the commander of the Russian

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<sup>41</sup> Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 95-96.

<sup>42</sup> Alekseev, *Vtoraia rodina*, 50.

<sup>43</sup> Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Avgustinovich, *Zhizn' russkikh i inorodtsev* [1874], 34; Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 126-134.

<sup>45</sup> Mitsul', *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 111.

<sup>46</sup> Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv*, 50.

fleet of the demand for coal in Chinese and Japanese ports, Vlasov prepared to travel to the two countries himself to arrange for the delivery of coal from Sakhalin, his travel hindered only by “reasons beyond [his] control.”<sup>47</sup> Finally, and perhaps most importantly, transport of prisoners by sea, rather than land, would reduce transit time from twenty-one months on foot to under six months. As well as increasing the work force available on the island, the ship would deliver convicts in better physical and moral condition and allow their families to travel with them.<sup>48</sup>

A key aspect of the penal reform taking place throughout the empire, integral to Vlasov’s proposal, was the establishment of “penitentiary colonies” that would serve not only to punish, but to rehabilitate criminals. Since the opening in 1840 of the *Colonie Agricole Pénitentiare de Mettray* for juvenile offenders in France, penitentiary colonies were considered by penologists to be the most humane and effective penal institutions. The motto of the Mettray Agricultural Penitentiary Colony was “the moralization of youth by the cultivation of the soil,” as hard work in the open air was to replace the demoralizing atmosphere of crowded prisons. The Mettray Colony became a model institution upon which similar institutions were based, and the “reformatory principle” was applied not only to youth, but to “reclaimable adult offenders (juveniles in crime, if not in age),” as explained in an early-twentieth-century *Encyclopedia Britannica*.<sup>49</sup> Similar institutions were being established in Russia as well, such as the “shelter for teaching and correction” [*uchebno-ispravitel’nyi priiut*] of juvenile offenders established in 1873 in the Saratov gubernia by Governor M.N. Galkin-Vrasskoi, who six years later would be appointed director of the newly-founded Central Prison Administration.<sup>50</sup> As instructed by the committee under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Vlasov’s proposal focused in particular on the establishment of penitentiary colonies on Sakhalin.<sup>51</sup> Mitsul’s report on Sakhalin agriculture was also based on an understanding that “the state intends to choose Sakhalin Island as a location for the establishment of penitentiary colonies.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Vlasov, “Kopiiia s soobrazhenii,” BIGU, ruk. 345, ll. 48-50, 57, 34ob-36ob, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Vlasov, “Kopiiia s soobrazhenii,” BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 53ob.

<sup>49</sup> *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. 15 (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1911), sv. “Juvenile offenders,” 615, 613. See also discussion of similar institutions in Italy, Belgium, and Poland in Enoch Cobb Wines, *The State of Prisons and of Child-saving Institutions in the Civilized World* (Cambridge: University Press, 1880), 352-353, 472-473, 485-486.

<sup>50</sup> S.V. Zubov, *M.N. Galkin-Vrasskoi – nachal’nik GTU Rossiiskoi imperii (1879-1896 gg)*. Saratov: Izdatel’stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 2000), 16.

<sup>51</sup> Vlasov, “Kopiiia s sobrazhenii,” BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 43ob.

<sup>52</sup> Mitsul’, *Ocherk ostrova Sakhalina*, 90.

At the committee's request, on his return from Sakhalin, Vlasov stopped in Irkutsk, the residence of the Governor General of East Siberia, to present his proposal to Governor N.P. Sinel'nikov and the East Siberian governing council [*Sovet glavnogo upravleniia vostochnoi sibiri*]. The council found his proposal convincing, and Sinel'nikov passed a resolution on 13 October 1872, stating that "of all the proposals I am familiar with for the organization of penal servitude, I prefer the plan of Collegiate Councilor Vlasov.... In my opinion, it is satisfactory both as a punitive measure and in terms of its humaneness [*chelovechestva*], giving convicts hope to improve their future through correction."<sup>53</sup> Among other suggestions and comments, the East Siberian council made a significant addition to Vlasov's proposal in the area of Sakhalin administration: due to the difficulty of communication with the island, the council proposed appointing a "director of the Sakhalin colonies" [*nachal'nik sakhalinskikh kolonii*] with authority to make decisions independent of the mainland, a position similar to that of military governor.<sup>54</sup> Under these conditions, Sakhalin would not only meet Russian political and economic needs, but could meet the demands of penal reform. Penitentiary colonies on Sakhalin would relieve overcrowded prisons, and with time, replace penal servitude in Siberia altogether, while supplying coal for the Pacific fleet and protecting Siberia from foreign aggression.

Prison reform continued in St. Petersburg even as Vlasov and his team explored the Far East, with Count Vladimir Sollogub, recently returned from a tour inspecting Siberian prisons, appointed to chair a new commission on penal reform that convened in February 1872. To Sollogub, a former prison warden intimately familiar with the latest European developments in penology, labor was the crucial element in the correction of criminals. He had published a book on convict labor in 1866, and his own house of correction was described by prominent nineteenth-century criminologist Ivan Foinitskii as a model prison.<sup>55</sup> Sollogub represented Russia at the first International Prison Congress in London in July 1872, where he presented his commission's proposed reforms to an audience of international specialists. According to the proposal, agricultural penitentiary colonies were to serve as an intermediary stage between imprisonment and liberation. They were to be located in "in districts selected and set apart to be

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<sup>53</sup> Resolution of Governor General Sinel'nikov, 13 Oct. 1872, in "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 81.

<sup>54</sup> Kopiiia s zhurnala Soveta Glavnago Upravlaniiia Vostochnoi Sibiri, 13 Oct. 1872, in "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii," BIGU, ruk. 345, ll. 90, 94.

<sup>55</sup> Bruce F. Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 65, 70.

definitively peopled by liberated convicts,” and the criminals would be released for “colonization” of the land upon completing their sentences.<sup>56</sup> While he did not mention it officially, it was no secret that Sakhalin was the likely location for such colonies. Citing “rumors” as its source, the *Stock Market Gazette* in 1873 supported the “fortunate idea of establishing these colonies” on Sakhalin, in particular its “deviation from the old conviction that punishment should function only as a fear and a threat [*ugrozoi i strakhom*]. In our opinion, penal servitude will only achieve its punitive and corrective goals when it consists of labor that is within one’s power, compulsory, and constant...”<sup>57</sup>

### ***From “Penitentiary Colonies” to a “Convict Colony”***

In 1874, mining engineer Keppen returned from Sakhalin to European Russia, having spent three years investigating coal beds and implementing systematic mining practices on the island, as well as studying published materials and official reports from Irkutsk and Nikolaevsk. Keppen’s research indicated a high quality of coal and led to optimism about its potential profitability to the state. While during the 1860s, three specialists had come to three different conclusions about Sakhalin coal quality, Keppen resolved this discrepancy by noting that they had tested coal from different layers and only near the shore. In addition, much of the coal had been poorly mined, leading to a decrease in quality and price. Using the latest technology to judge chemical content, Keppen investigated several layers of coal in the area of Due, concluding that the Due mines could produce annually more than 36,000 tons of high quality coal. Moving inland, he found the coal to be of an even higher quality. With coal as good as that of Australia—much better than Chinese or Japanese coal—the major obstacle remained the poor conditions of the mines. Keppen anticipated that “the underground riches of Sakhalin would not remain hidden, but rather, their exploitation [*razrabotka*] will gradually develop and bring with it the enrichment and settlement of the region.” Entrepreneurs, he predicted, would utilize convict laborers. He expressed hope “to see on Sakhalin the flourishing of the mining industry and of deportation colonies [*deportatsionnykh kolonii*], as we see in Australia.”<sup>58</sup>

With its potential to bring economic as well as political gain, not only the Russian state was interested in Sakhalin colonization. Iakov Butkovskii, an official with the Ministry of State

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<sup>56</sup> E.C. Wines, *Report on the International Penitentiary Congress of London Held July 3-13, 1872* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1873), 107, 112.

<sup>57</sup> “O reforme v sisteme nashikh ugolovnykh nakazanii,” *Birzhevye vedomosti* [St. Petersburg], 18 August 1873, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Keppen, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 6, 49, 51, 90, 125.

Domains, had been eyeing the island for over a decade as a source of personal enrichment, as well as benefit to the Russian state. In 1869, he submitted a proposal to found a joint stock company to mine Sakhalin coal, the Sakhalin Mining Company, and petitioned for twenty-year rights to all underground resources on Sakhalin. M.S. Korsakov, Governor General of East Siberia at the time, supported the proposal wholeheartedly, declaring that the development of such a company was one of the most promising means of developing the coal industry using Russian—rather than foreign—investments, while supporting shipping and trade in the Pacific. Given the harsh conditions of work in the region, Korsakov proposed various incentives for the company, including guaranteeing the sale of its coal to the navy if the company utilized convicts in its mines, rather than Chinese or Korean workers. The proposal was put on hold, however, as Skolkov and his team set off to explore the island, including its potential for the development of private industry. As concerns were raised about the influence of private entrepreneurs on the newly-arrived convict population, his proposal—Butkovskii later claimed—was lost “in an administrative labyrinth.”<sup>59</sup> After Vlasov returned from the island, Butkovskii revised his proposal to meet the new concerns of the state not only about the land, but about the reforms in the penal system. He submitted it to the Governor General of East Siberia and the Ministries of Internal Affairs and State Domains in 1873. Governor General Sinel’nikov responded positively, while the Ministry of Internal Affairs failed to respond at all, and the Ministry of Finance suggested that more questions needed to be answered before any decision could be made, and turned the proposal over to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>60</sup>

Butkovskii’s new proposal addressed virtually all of the state’s remaining concerns regarding Sakhalin’s future and the establishment of penal servitude on the island. In the best-case scenario, Butkovskii pointed out, the abundance of coal—that “alpha and omega of manufacturing”—would attract manufacturers to build factories that would produce even more revenue and provide labor for more convicts. At the very least, income from coal sales would cover provisions for the convicts, who were otherwise a burden to the state.<sup>61</sup> He provided charts projecting market conditions, expenditures, salaries, and detailed descriptions of transport options. Due to increased trade in the Pacific, he pointed out, demand for coal as ballast was

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 91-92; Iakov Butkovskii, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 1882, no. 10 (October): 177.

<sup>60</sup> Zapiska po ustroistvu katorzhnykh rabot na ostr. Sakhaline [1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, ll. 39, 40ob.

<sup>61</sup> Ia. Butkovskii, *O. Sakhalin i ego znachenie* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V.S. Ettingera, 1873), 6, 11.

increasing. For these reasons, he proposed a central storehouse for distribution in Vladivostok, which would also supply coal to the Russian fleet, which had relocated from Nikolaevsk to Vladivostok in 1871. With the supporting data he provided, it would have been difficult to dispute his evidence that coal sales would be profitable if not immediately, then in the near future. After all, claimed Butkovskii, with an “inexhaustible source of coal of the highest quality—just as Newcastle and Australia supply the Atlantic and Southern oceans, Sakhalin is predestined (*prednaznachenno*) by nature to satisfy the demands of the Pacific shores.”<sup>62</sup>

Whatever decision was made regarding penal servitude on Sakhalin, the Ministry of Internal Affairs insisted that it be taken as a temporary measure alone. Any permanent decision was to be made after the Committee for the Final Discussion of the Project of Prison Reform in the Russian Empire, under Privy Councilor P.A. Zubov of the Council of State, had reached a conclusion regarding prison reform.<sup>63</sup> Founded on 19 May 1873 and including representatives of the Ministries of Justice, Internal Affairs, and State Domains, as well as the Second and Third Departments of the Imperial Chancellery, the Zubov Commission met thirty-eight times between 19 May 1873 and 14 February 1875. One of the issues the commission tackled was katorga reform.<sup>64</sup>

Until this point, plans for convict labor on Sakhalin had focused primarily on penitentiary colonies for less dangerous criminals living in freedom, rather than in prisons, but with the proposal of Court Councilor Butkovskii, along with the needs highlighted by the Zubov Commission, that changed to a broader focus on the establishment of penal servitude on the island overall. Just two weeks after the commission submitted its conclusions to the tsar, a new Commission on the Organization of Penal Servitude met on 1 March 1875, chaired by Senator M.R. Shidlovskii, a participant in the Zubov Commission and deputy [*tovarishch*] to the Minister of Internal Affairs, and including several other participants in the previous commission as well. A matter of significant contention was the proposal of the Ministry of Justice that penal servitude should consist of two parts: confinement in prisons [*ostrogakh*] followed by labor in penitentiary colonies. While the Ministry of Internal Affairs considered the establishment of colonies for penal servitude inconvenient, the Minister of Justice noted that the decision itself was significant

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<sup>62</sup> Butkovskii, *O. Sakhalin i ego znachenie*, 9, data on pp. 31-37.

<sup>63</sup> Zapiska po ustroistvu katorzhnykh rabot na ostr. Sakhaline [1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, ll. 39, 40ob.

<sup>64</sup> Adams, *Politics of Punishment*, 78-96.

not only to prison reform, but to the future of Sakhalin Island. Setting aside the unresolved question of penitentiary colonies, the committee noted that penal servitude overall demanded a location that allowed for discipline and supervision, hindered escapes and disorder, and provided a setting for the execution of arduous mandatory labor. All of these conditions pointed directly to Sakhalin.<sup>65</sup> At the March 1 meeting, the committee concluded that Sakhalin was in fact suitable for penal servitude, penitentiary colonies, and settlement of convicts after their terms had ended. The committee also determined to accept Butkovskii's proposal, and established a subcommittee of four members to work out the details. Two of its members, Vlasov and Deikhman, had participated in expeditions to Sakhalin and were intimately familiar with the situation.<sup>66</sup> From this point on, penitentiary colonies took second place to penal servitude more broadly in discussion of Sakhalin colonization. The Ministry of Internal Affairs expressed particular concern that the proposed colonies, if established in the southern part of the island, could lead to conflict with the Japanese.<sup>67</sup>

After years of hesitation, plans now began to move quickly for the colonization of Sakhalin with convicts. The subcommittee of the Commission on the organization of penal servitude met eight times in March 1875, thoroughly discussing the reports of Vlasov and Mitsul' and the extension of a reformed system of penal servitude to Sakhalin Island. Rather than limiting Sakhalin to less dangerous criminals, the committee determined that labor in Sakhalin's coal mines—where miners often worked on their knees or prone, crawling through mine shafts—was no lighter than work in silver or gold mines, and therefore a suitable punishment for convicts of the first category [*1-go razriada*]. Convicts of the second category could be sentenced to construction work or to clear roads, and those of the third category could be assigned to agricultural work. The subcommittee submitted a proposed statute of administration [*shtata upravleniia*] listing the needed civil servants and their proposed salaries and ranks. Yet their proposal, they insisted, should be implemented gradually and with utmost care, over a ten-year period, in light of the difficulties associated with creating “such a new establishment, in a distant, unpopulated, and wild locality.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Zapiska po ustroistvu katorzhnykh rabot na ostr. Sakhaline [1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, l. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Zhurnal Kommissii po organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot, 1 March 1875, GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, ll. 48-50ob.

<sup>67</sup> Zapiska po ustroistvu katorzhnykh rabot na ostr. Sakhaline [1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, l. 43.

<sup>68</sup> “Zhurnal soveshchaniia, uchrezhdenного pri Kommissii po organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot” [March 1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, ll. 51-64ob, 65-66ob. (Quote from 60ob.)

To discuss the logistical arrangements of private mining on Sakhalin, a committee under the Ministry of the Navy met ten times in April and May that year, prioritizing the coal industry over any penal purposes for the island. The committee was sympathetic toward Butkovskii's request to use foreign capital to develop his business, and expressed their conviction that free workers, rather than convicts, would "facilitate the development on the island of a reliable mining population."<sup>69</sup> The Council of Ministers then held two "special consultations on Priamur affairs" to discuss this. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance expressed concern about the potential influence of foreigners in the borderland, which had become Russian territory—rather than shared Russian and Japanese land—only weeks earlier with the 7 May 1875 Treaty of St. Petersburg between Russia and Japan. The Minister of Transportation responded that by that same logic, it would be better not to send criminals either, as they, too, could incite conflict in the border region. The committee concluded that its primary purpose was to strengthen Sakhalin and develop its coal industry, using convicts when necessary, while strictly limiting foreign involvement.<sup>70</sup>

While its significance was not evident at the time, perhaps the most important decision of the subcommittee on penal servitude was the plan to separate Sakhalin administratively from the Primorskaia oblast on the mainland and "make from it [Sakhalin] a new colony for the performance of penal servitude." While based on Sinel'nikov's proposal to establish a "Director of Sakhalin Colonies," this administrative restructuring defined Sakhalin as no longer part of an existing Russian oblast which happened to contain penitentiary colonies for the correction of criminals. Instead, it became a colony itself, and its administrators answered only to the Governor General of East Siberia. It would be up to the Sakhalin administration to decide whether to establish the proposed penitentiary agricultural colonies for convicts, or "agricultural settlements" [*poseleniia*], as they were now called, having lost their status as both penitentiary and as colonies.<sup>71</sup> This shift in Sakhalin's meaning was clear in the language of the Council of Ministers. At the May meeting on Priamur affairs, Minister of Internal Affairs A.E. Timashev

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<sup>69</sup> Zhurnal komissii uchrezhdennoi pri Morskom Ministerstve dlia rassmotreniia predlozheniia Butkovskogo, April-May 1875, GAIO, f. 24, op. 2, d. 715, l. 8, copied in GASO, microfilm 503. See also ll. 5-12.

<sup>70</sup> Zhurnal osobogo soveshchaniia po priamurskim delam, 27 May 1875, GAIO, f. 24, op. 2, d. 715, ll. 13-16, copied in GASO, microfilm 503. See also Zhurnal osobogo soveshchaniia po priamurskim delam, 16 June 1875, GAIO, f. 24, op. 2, d. 715, ll. 2-4, copied in GASO, microfilm 503.

<sup>71</sup> "Zhurnal soveshchaniia, uchrezhdenного pri Kommissii po organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot" [March 1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, ll. 56, 56ob, 57.

emphasized that Sakhalin was the only place suitable “for the establishment of a vast convict colony” [*ssyl’nokatorzhnoi kolonii*].<sup>72</sup> While the vast colony Timashev envisioned was *on* Sakhalin, to Grand Duke Konstantin, head of the Council of State, the proposed colony *was* Sakhalin, and he spoke of the “conversion of Sakhalin Island into a colony for convicts.” He insisted that this was still an experiment, though, and that penal servitude must not hinder the primary goal of developing the island’s coal industry.<sup>73</sup>

On 19 September 1875, a contract was signed with Court Councilor Butkovskii, leasing the Due coal mines to the Sakhalin Company for a period of twelve years. He was required to use exclusively convict labor, employing a minimum of four hundred convicts.<sup>74</sup> His request for permission to hire foreigners, or even to partner with foreigners or seek foreign investment, was denied, a condition on which he later blamed the company’s failure to make a profit.<sup>75</sup> Three days later, Senator Shidlovskii’s Commission on the Organization of Penal Servitude reconvened to establish guidelines for the administration of an official Sakhalin *katorga* system. Disagreeing with General-Admiral Konstantin, the committee agreed that, rather than as a temporary measure, Sakhalin penal servitude should be established as a permanent institution, independent of changes that may take place in the penal system. Rather than allocating labor according to categories of punishment, the committee decided that work assignments should correspond with the physical capabilities of the convicts, since “allocation of convicts ... to work that does not correspond to their physical strength would result in regular failure to carry out assigned work and the shortening of their lives.”<sup>76</sup> After a visit in 1876 by Governor General of East Siberia P.A. Frederiks—who had replaced Sinel’nikov in December 1873, and to whom island officials now answered—construction began on the first penal servitude prison on Sakhalin, providing accommodations for a growing number of convicts.<sup>77</sup> Negotiations began with the navy to transport convicts to Sakhalin by sea through the Suez Canal, upon which the future of Sakhalin

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<sup>72</sup> Zhurnal osobogo soveshchaniia po Pri-Amurskim delam, 27 May 1875, RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4272, l. 234ob.

<sup>73</sup> Zhurnal osobogo soveshchaniia po Pri-Amurskim delam, 27 May 1875, GAIO, f. 24, op. 2, d. 715, l. 15, copied in GASO, microfilm 503.

<sup>74</sup> Tal’berg, “Ssylka na Sakhalin,” 231.

<sup>75</sup> Butkovskii, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” 181.

<sup>76</sup> Zhurnal komisii po organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot, 22 Sept. 1875, GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, l. 73-73ob.

<sup>77</sup> K.K. Korablin, “Katorga na Sakhaline kak opyt prinuditel’noi kolonizatsii,” *Vestnik DVO RAN* 2005, no. 2: 73

penal servitude ultimately depended. The first transport would not take place until 1879 on a ship of the newly-founded Volunteer Fleet.<sup>78</sup>

## **Reforming the State**

In the Far East, the primary goal of Russian settlement was the transformation of Sakhalin, but in St. Petersburg, both settlement of Sakhalin and prison reform more broadly were part of a greater project of reforming the state, forging a world power that could compete economically and militarily with the standards of Western modernity. In Butkovskii's proposal, colonization of Sakhalin was a means of demonstrating Russian might in Asia and dominating the coal market in the Far East. While Russia was threatened by the expansion and strengthening of not only Japan and China, but also Britain and the United States, Butkovskii wrote in 1873, "Would not the tone of a hostile cabinet soften when it considered that, by preventing access to [Sakhalin coal], the Russian state could paralyze trade and destroy factories without resorting to bombs and battleships? ... Did not cotton contribute to the peaceful resolution of conflict between America and England?" He emphasized that trade and shipping in the Pacific were growing, the Far East was "waking up," and even Japan had joined the "path of progress." Militarily, Sakhalin would serve as Russia's advance guard, the position held by the island of Kotlin in the West. For this reason, Butkovskii argued, Russia's task on Sakhalin was not to be fearsome [*strashnyi*], but to become indispensable [*neobkhodomyi*] to countries wishing to develop trade and industry. Sakhalin coal would grant Russia "an honored place in the minds of the peoples of Asia, in line with the enterprising Americans, English, and Germans." Since coal, Butkovskii argued, was the "soul" of manufacturing," the future of Far Eastern trade would be in Russian hands.<sup>79</sup>

With the "New Imperialism" of the 1870s—European powers competing aggressively for territory in Africa and Asia—Russia's position on Sakhalin gained even greater political importance. Within three years of the first sea transit of convicts to labor in Sakhalin Company mines, Butkovskii changed his regarding the goal and means of colonizing Sakhalin. Exploitation of coal was inadequate, he said, in light of the colonial projects of America, England, Germany, and France. Sakhalin needed to become part of Russia itself. Pointing to the

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<sup>78</sup> Po voprosu vzbuzhdennomu Ministerstvom Vnutrennikh Del o perezovke ssyl'nykh na o. Sakhalin morem, correspondence beginning 28 Jan. 1876. RGA VMF, f. 410, op. 2, d. 4304.

<sup>79</sup> Butkovskii, *O. Sakhalin i ego znachenie*, 10-11, 6, 10. Kotlin was home to the naval base of Kronshadt.

threat of foreign expansion in Asia, as well as to Russia's recent sale of Alaska to the United States and transfer of the Kuril Islands to Japan, he insisted that Russia needed to "designate a point to serve as a border [*gran'iu*], past which foreigners cannot extend their aspirations." Sakhalin, he proposed, should be that "farthest bulwark of the Russian nation" [*oplot russkogo natsional'nosti*], and to fulfill that function, it

must be made a purely Russian land, with its faith, traditions, and language. Complete Russification [*obrusenie*] of [Sakhalin] is necessary, since it is wedged [*vzrezalsia*], so to say, in a completely foreign world, the world of deep Asia—China, Japan, and Korea—countries awakened, or which Europeans are trying to awaken, from centuries of slumber. All of European politics is oriented toward the East; each of its states is trying hard to demonstrate its might and influence to the East, and as a sign [of its power], to capture a patch of land, place consuls at its ports, and to send its fleet.<sup>80</sup>

An article in the St. Petersburg *Golos* expressed the same sentiment as early as 1875. The "most important question," it asserted, was not how to exploit coal or transport convicts, but "how to turn Sakhalin into completely Russian land." The writer argued that Sakhalin should be subject to the same laws that governed the rest of the empire, rather than treated as a separate colony, as was the case with Russian Turkestan.<sup>81</sup>

The question arose, however, whether such Russification could be conducted by convict laborers. Convicts and exiles, the writer for *Golos* noted, were "often morally depraved, with overtaxed energy and with extremely meager means. They are not the ones to turn Sakhalin into a continuation of Russia, to go to the grave comforted by the fact that they were the first Russians to give their lives as a sacrifice for their distant motherland, the first pioneers in the great movement forward to the Far East."<sup>82</sup> Butkovskii agreed, claiming that Sakhalin should be allowed to develop naturally, attracting free settlers, including intelligentsia and Old Believers. He wrote, "If it does not feel the pressure of bureaucracy and becomes accustomed to relying on its own strength, that Russian borderland will soon strengthen to such an extent there will be no more danger of it being cut off. Connected to Russia by kinship, it will be in a position to defend its independence and Russian national dignity." In fact, not only would Sakhalin protect itself. Butkovskii stressed that it could not remain a dependant child, but that "it needs to prepare to

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<sup>80</sup> Butkovskii, "Ostrov Sakhalin," 183-184.

<sup>81</sup> *Golos* (St. Petersburg), 11 Nov. 1875, 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

defend its mother.”<sup>83</sup> Expansion in the Far East was an important aspect of Russia’s self-fashioning as a strong and modern state.

Although *Golos* argued that the establishment of penal settlements on Sakhalin would hinder Russia’s modernization, to those concerned with penal reform, Sakhalin provided an ideal solution to the crisis facing Siberian exile and heavy labor, an important aspect of the reforms. To many Russians, Siberian exile had become synonymous with barbarism.<sup>84</sup> Colonel V.O. Iankovskii, chief of gendarmes of the Irkutsk gubernia, in 1875 described convicts exiled to Siberia as “wander[ing] miserably from one spot to another, never finding a cordial refuge, generally poor workers inclined to parasitism.” By sending them to Sakhalin, he claimed, not only would Siberia be rid of its unwelcome inhabitants, but “Sakhalin Island would transform into one of the most prosperous places not only in Siberia, but in the entire empire.”<sup>85</sup> Likewise, in the West, the Siberian exile system represented backwardness. An 1880 cartoon in the London humor magazine *Judy* depicted exiles in chains heading on foot into Siberia, led by a bear in a Russian army uniform from the Crimean war. In the smoke of his torch is written “the torch of civilisation” (Figure 2.1).<sup>86</sup> With the establishment of modern penal colonies on Sakhalin, that image, too, could change.

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<sup>83</sup> Butkovskii, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” 186, 185.

<sup>84</sup> See Jonathan W. Daly, “Criminal Punishment and Europeanization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, no. 3 (2000): 355.

<sup>85</sup> Donesenie nachal’nika Irkutskogo gubernskogo zhandarmskogo upravleniia V.O. Iankovskogo ob obshchem polozhenii del v Vostochnoi Sibiri, 31 October 1875; GARF, f. 109, I ekspeditsiia, 1875 g., d. 80, ll. 1-26ob; reprinted in A.V. Shavrov (ed.), “Dal’ nii Vostok glazami nachal’nika zhandarmskogo upravleniia,” *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 1993, no. 1: 95, 96.

<sup>86</sup> “Russian Civilisation,” *Judy, or the London Serio-Comic Journal*, 3 March 1880, 102-103.



Fig. 2.1: “Russian Civilisation,” from the London humor magazine *Judy* (March 1880)<sup>87</sup>

One of the additional benefits of penal servitude on Sakhalin over Siberian *katorga* was that punishment could be conducted in a humane manner, recognizing that, as emphasized at the 1872 Prison Congress, “Prisoners do not cease to be men when they enter the prison walls.”<sup>88</sup> While the 1863 reforms had abolished most corporal punishment, it was permitted in the context of prison or exile. Director of prisons Vlasov made explicit the connection of Sakhalin with the Great Reforms, remarking that the establishment of penitentiary colonies on Sakhalin would “make it possible, in time, to abolish the harsh corporal punishment used on people deprived of all rights when they commit a new crime, and in that respect, beneficially conclude the reform of our current tsar.”<sup>89</sup> Governor General Sinel’nikov agreed, expressing satisfaction that Vlasov’s proposal entailed both proper punishment of criminals and humaneness, giving criminals hope for the future.<sup>90</sup> To ethnographer and prison reformer Sergei Maksimov, who sat on the 1875 committee on the organization of penal servitude, changes in the system of prisons and exile had

<sup>87</sup> *Judy, or the London Serio-Comic Journal*, 3 March 1880, 102-103.

<sup>88</sup> Wines, *Report*, 178.

<sup>89</sup> Vlasov, “Kopiiia s soobrazhenii,” BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 76-76ob.

<sup>90</sup> Resolution of General-Governor Sinel’nikov, 13 Oct. 1872, in “Kopiiia s soobrazhenii,” BIGU, ruk. 345, l. 81.

become Russia's "sacred and urgent duty" [*sviashchennyi i neotlozhnyi dolg*],<sup>91</sup> a debt to humanity. On Sakhalin, such duty could be performed, the debt paid.

An issue discussed repeatedly regarding Sakhalin's potential for penal servitude was the need for a "rational organization of convict labor" [*ratsional'nom ustroistve katorzhnykh rabot*],<sup>92</sup> connecting Sakhalin to the enlightenment focus on reason and science. As Willard Sunderland demonstrates, by the end of the century, Russians advocated what they called "correct colonization" [*pravil'naia kolonizatsiia*], conducted, in Sunderland's words, "according to scientific principles and result[ing] in the harmonious pairing of people and resources."<sup>93</sup> On Sakhalin, as in reform of the Siberian exile system more broadly, the same principle applied, although colonization was of a different sort. The editor of *Vestnik Evropy* invoked the idea of "more rational convict labor" in his introduction to the memoirs of explorer N.V. Busse in 1872, which themselves were published to celebrate Russian accomplishments at a time when many strove toward Europeanization.<sup>94</sup> Such language was used by both advocates and opponents of penal servitude on Sakhalin. The above reference to a "rational organization of convict labor" was used sarcastically to mock the proposal to colonize Sakhalin with exiles, implying that such plans were anything but rational. Yet Nikolai Iadrintsev, a Siberian regionalist exiled to the far north for his involvement in a scheme to withdraw Siberia from the Russian empire, embraced the idea, proposing his own new "rational system of correction based on the claims of penitentiary science and the experiences of Russian prison communities." He wrote that his "sincere desire... was to develop a rational system of correction, which, while guaranteeing the safety of society, would to the extent possible favor the rehabilitation of the person and his moral improvement."<sup>95</sup> He was nonetheless a vocal opponent of *katorga* on Sakhalin.

There was concern, of course, over the fact that in the West, the tide had turned away from penal transportation. As one editorialist pointed out, British transportation of convicts to Australia had ended in 1868, and at the International Prison Congress in London in 1872, social reformer George W. Hastings had "conveyed the amicable counsel to all enlightened states

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<sup>91</sup> S.V. Maksimov, *Sibir' i katorga, v trekh chastakh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Transhelia, 1871), 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Golos*, 30 May 1873, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Willard Sunderland, "The 'Colonization' Question: Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48, No. 2 (2000): 218.

<sup>94</sup> "Ot redaktstii," in N.V. Busse, "Russkie i iapontsy na Sakhaline," *Vestnik Evropy* 5 (Oct., 1872): 514.

<sup>95</sup> N.M. Iadrintsev, *Russkaia obshchina v tiurme i ssylke* (St. Petersburg: Tip. A. Morigerovskago, 1872), vii. (The first quote is from the cover.)

[*prosveshchennym derzhavam*] which retained a system of criminal deportation, to follow England's example."<sup>96</sup> Yet Vlasov's proposal was based less on the example of Australia than it was on Mettray, a fact recognized by Iadrintsev, although he disagreed with Vlasov's conclusions. "What could science have in common with wild Sakhalin," he asked, "that 'falcon island'<sup>97</sup> which scares even the Siberian district police officer [*ispravnik*], as the newspaper *Sibir* [Siberia] informs us? What can there be in common between a European agricultural colony *a la* Mettray and the order [on Sakhalin] under Captain Nikolaev and Lieutenant Efronov?" He described the proposed Sakhalin colony sarcastically as a "New Icaria," referring to the fictional utopian society of French utopian socialist Étienne Cabet.<sup>98</sup>

### **Transforming the People**

Not only was settlement of Sakhalin a matter of strengthening the empire and modernizing the Russian state, but it also entailed colonization of Russian people, criminals exiled to Sakhalin not merely for punishment, but for moral correction and to start a new life. Enlightenment beliefs in the possibility of improvement and the human ability to shape the environment led to faith not only in mankind's ultimate mastery of the natural world, but in the perfectibility of people themselves through education and correction. No longer treating convicts as incorrigible or depraved beyond hope, New York's Elmira Reformatory, founded in 1876, pioneered the use of psychology to produce changes in inmates' behavior.<sup>99</sup> While the Russian prison system had previously been primarily an institution of punishment, with the Great Reforms, it was becoming a "corrective-pedagogical system" [*ispravitel'no-pedagogicheskaiia sistema*] that followed the latest ideas in criminology.<sup>100</sup> This was evident not only in the reforms of *katorga* and the Siberian exile system, but in the reform of prisons throughout the empire, such as the opening of an experimental correctional facility in St. Petersburg in 1868.<sup>101</sup> A commentator on prison reform in the *Stock Market Gazette* in 1873 insisted that "the true value of punishment is not in the tormenting of human nature, nor in human disgrace ... but in

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<sup>96</sup> *Golos* (St. Petersburg), 28 June 1873, 1.

<sup>97</sup> Sakhalin Island was often referred to disparagingly as "Sokolinnyi" Island, or "Falcon Island", a play on words that highlighted Sakhalin's reputation as predatory and dangerous.

<sup>98</sup> N. Iadrintsev, "Ispravitel'noe znachenie Sibirskoi ssylki," *Golos*, 12 December 1874, 2. Captain Nikolaev was in charge of *katorga* in northern Sakhalin, and Lieutenant Efronov in the south.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander Winter, *The New York Reformatory at Elmira* (London: Swan, Sonnenschein and Co., 1891), 40.

<sup>100</sup> Iadrintsev, *Rusaskaia obshchina*, vi.

<sup>101</sup> Zubov, *M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi*, 13. See also Adams, *Politics of Punishment*, 69-70, 198.

temporary deprivation of the convict's freedom, in systematic limitation and constraint of his customs, will, and actions, in moral correction, mental development, and finally, material provision for his future."<sup>102</sup> By 1879, most Russian penologists agreed that all but the most hardened criminals could be reformed.<sup>103</sup>

The goal of reforming convicts on Sakhalin was in fact little different from the state's project of turning subjects into citizens everywhere. Austin Jersild, for example, demonstrates that the *grazhdanstvennost'* [citizenship or civic-mindedness] promoted among the empire's Muslim peoples entailed a striving to instill high moral standards, honesty, proper behavior toward superiors, and the *obrazovanie* [education, cultivation] necessary for a "civil society."<sup>104</sup> *Obrazovanie* entailed more than formal education or acquisition of knowledge, but included the moral, cultural, ethical, and spiritual influences that "develop a person, give him [sic] a more extensive view of the world [*mirosozertsanie*]," the *Weltanschauung* of a productive subject of the tsar.<sup>105</sup> The correction of criminals had similar goals, and was likewise understood to take place through labor, discipline and education. Like the non-Russian peoples on the empire's peripheries, Sakhalin criminals, too, needed *obrazovanie* or even *perevospitanie*—re-education or rehabilitation. In his report, Vlasov repeatedly emphasized the importance of correction, rather than merely punishment of criminals. Avgustinovich complained in 1872 that "Post Due provides no nourishment for the intellectual [*umstvennyi*] life of the relatively developed person, and provides no moral and religious nourishment. If this is necessary for a developed [*razvitago*] person, just how much more necessary must it be for a dark [*temnyi*] person?"<sup>106</sup> He considered education to be as important as food in the moral and emotional development of the criminal.

On Sakhalin, not only the *correction* of criminals was emphasized, but the association of the penitentiary colony with *penitence*—demonstration of remorse and willingness to atone for crime or sin—was clearly evident. Although derived etymologically from the Latin "paenitentia" [penitence], in the West, the penitentiary was primarily understood as an institution for

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<sup>102</sup> "O reforme v sisteme nashikh ugovolnykh nakazanii," *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 18 August 1873, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Adams, *Politics of Punishment*, 134.

<sup>104</sup> Austin Lee Jersild, "From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire, in *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 101.

<sup>105</sup> L.N. Tolstoi, "Vospitanie i obrazovanie," in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. V.G. Chertkov, vol. 8 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo "Khudozhestvaia literatura," 1936), 214-215. See also *Novyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, vol. 29, ed. K.K. Arseniev (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1916), s.v. "obrazovanie," 124-125.

<sup>106</sup> Avgustinovich, *Zhizn' russkikh i inorodtsev* [1874], 25.

punishment and reform. Vlasov's emphasis on the story of Sakhalin's first convict laborer, however, designated Sakhalin a place of penitence as well. As Vlasov told the story in 1873, Sakhalin's first convict exile was a patricide, Ivan Lapshin, sentenced to work in the mines at Nikolaevsk, across the strait. He himself requested a transfer to Sakhalin as a means to atone for his sin. Vlasov explained: "Imbued deeply with consciousness of his horrible deed, [Lapshin] constantly felt the need for solitude, labor, and prayer. Nikolaevsk society, with its coarsened criminals prevented him from meeting his spiritual [*dushevnuuu*] needs. Knowing that on Sakhalin, at Due, lower-ranked military officers were mining coal, he petitioned the local authorities for permission to settle on Sakhalin Island for such labor, and in September, 1858, the first criminal was dispatched to Sakhalin."<sup>107</sup> Thirty-eight years later, Major-General B.K. Kukel' confirmed the story, Kukel' identifying himself as the official—at the time the commander of troops in East Siberia—who petitioned for Lapshin to be settled on Sakhalin rather than returned to the mines.<sup>108</sup> Lapshin's sentence had ended by the time the island was considered for the establishment of regular penal servitude, yet Lapshin's legacy remained strong. Vlasov wrote, "The person of Lapshin must not disappear from the history of Sakhalin katorga, not only because he represents one of the types of our folk legends and traditions—the *razboinik* [brigand] repenting in solitude, fasting, labor, and prayer—but because he is a live example of a person finding reconciliation with his own conscience in prayer, solitude, and labor, and should therefore remain in the sight of our convicts, inspiring them to the heroic deed of sincere repentance, which is possible through patience and tremendous will-power."<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps as a means of continuing Lapshin's legacy, Vlasov and his associates granted an important role to the Church as part of the correctional function of his proposed colonies on Sakhalin. On the ship transporting convicts to the island, he planned for priests to be present to provide "spiritual edification" [*dukhovnoe nazidanie*] for the convicts before they even reached the island. Vlasov insisted that the expenses and salaries of priests should be covered by the state. "The need is obvious," he wrote, "within a system of prison confinement, to give as much

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<sup>107</sup> V.I. Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv*, 22.

<sup>108</sup> B.K. Kukel', "Iz epokhi prisoedineniia Priamurskogo kraia," *Istoricheskii Vestnik* 65, no. 9 (1896): 670. The archives of the Administration of Ports of the Eastern Ocean confirm that Lapshin was dispatched to Sakhalin on the naval corvette *Amerika* on 12 September 1858 by order of the Staff-Commander of the Ports of the Eastern Ocean. Correspondence between Captain Trusevich of the 2nd company of the East Siberian line battalion and the Commander of the Siberian Fleet and Ports of the Eastern Ocean, 3 Oct. 1860, 8 Nov. 1860, RGA VMF, f. 909, op. 2, d. 23, ll. 3-10.

<sup>109</sup> V.I. Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv*, 22.

space as possible to the spiritual element, which can facilitate the moral correction of criminals.”<sup>110</sup> Avgustinovich shared Vlasov’s opinion, observing that in 1871-72, “These convicts, over the course of several years, have not heard a word of comfort or religion, which has led to a confused understanding of good, evil and the duties of a Christian.... It is necessary in terms of moral and religious interests (I speak of convicts in particular) to have at Post Due both a church and a priest. The clergy, when performing the liturgy on the Gospel reading, could provide a teaching... His words, perhaps, would not fall on fruitless soil. In his free time, the priest could attend to the children of convicts and settlers...”<sup>111</sup>

This view corresponded with the views expressed by Western penologists at the 1872 Prison Congress. The executive committee of the congress concluded that, “Of all reformatory agencies religion is first in importance, because it is the most powerful in its action upon the human heart and life. Education has also a vital effect on moral improvement and should constitute an integral part of any prison system... Work, education, and religion are consequently the three great forces on which prison administrators should rely.”<sup>112</sup> The reports of most countries at the congress mentioned the important role of clergy and religious education in prisons and reformatories. While the 1875 committee downplayed the creation on Sakhalin of “penitentiary colonies,” Sakhalin nonetheless became home to “penitentiary institutions,”<sup>113</sup> and hope in the correctional function of Sakhalin labor remained.

## Conclusion

After decades of study, negotiation, and preparation, the first transport of convicts by sea to Sakhalin Island was ready for departure in June 1879. The steamship *Nizhnii Novgorod*, purchased abroad by the newly-founded Volunteer Fleet and designed to safely transport up to seven hundred convicts, was docked in Odessa (Figure 2.2). Reporters from the St. Petersburg *Golos* turned its departure into a spectacle followed throughout the empire, reporting on May 27 of its planned departure with seven hundred convicts, already underway to Odessa from prisons around Russia. The newspaper reported that the fifty to sixty-day trip would replace the current method of exile, which could take up to two years on foot. The ship was equipped with

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<sup>110</sup> Vlasov, “Kopiia s soobrazhenii,” BIGU, ruk. 345, ll. 54-54ob, 64ob-65ob.

<sup>111</sup> Avgustinovich, *Zhizn' russkikh i inorodtsev* [1874], 25-26

<sup>112</sup> Wines, *Report*, 178.

<sup>113</sup> “Zhurnal soveshchaniia, uchrezhdenного pri Kommissii po organizatsii katorzhnykh rabot” [March 1875], GAIO, f. 24, OTs, d. 76, l. 60ob.

everything needed for the journey, including a chapel and priest, as well as an infirmary staffed by a doctor and a medical assistant. The ship was described in detail, including the infirmary, prison cells, and deck, where prisoners would be allowed to take regular walks. The day before its departure, reporters were allowed on board to view the convicts in their cells, ready for the journey. *Golos* reminded readers that England and France had long been transporting convicts to overseas colonies, and that “many now flourishing colonies owe their origin and future development to...the artificial colonization of distant possessions with convicts.” The article emphasized that this would solve the crisis of the penal servitude system, as a place from which convicts could not escape, and where the “virgin soil of Sakhalin, its favorable climate, and the geographic position of the island present all the convenience for creation of a colony.” With the journalists observing, well-behaved convicts were served vodka and a large meal.<sup>114</sup> On 7 June 1879, Archbishop Platon [N.I. Gorodetskii] offered a prayer of parting and directed the convicts toward “correction, attained through zealous work and obedience to the authorities.”<sup>115</sup>

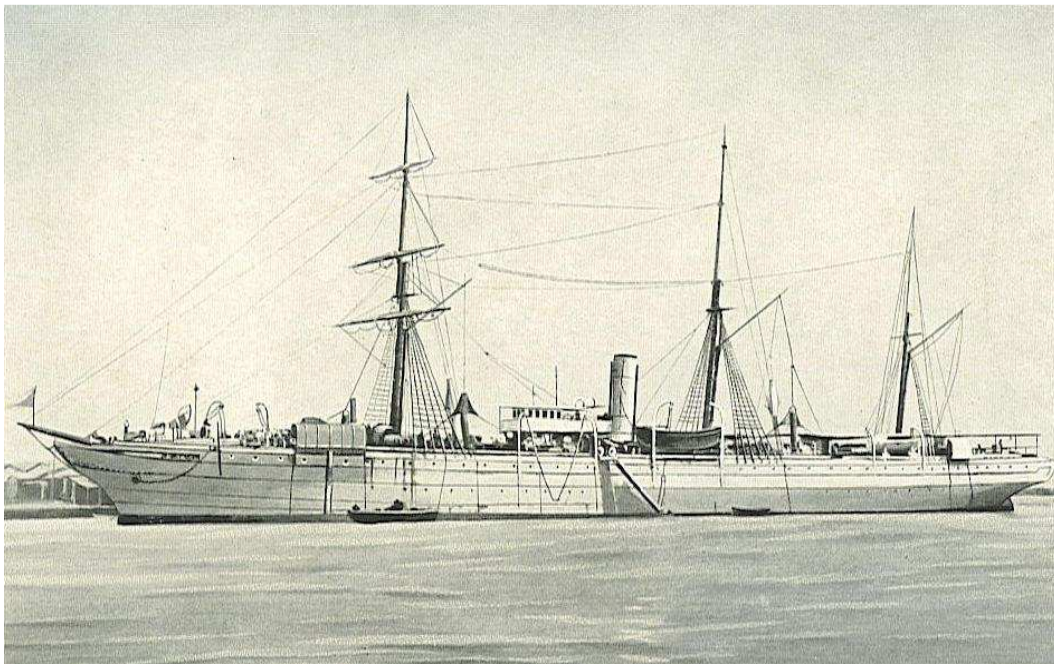


Fig. 2.2: The steamship Nizhnii Novgorod<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup> “Vnutrennie novosti,” *Golos* (St. Petersburg), 27 May 1879, 2; 3 June 1879, 3; 7 June 1879, 3.

<sup>115</sup> F. Avgustinovich, “Na ‘Nizhnem Novgorode’ ot Odessy do Sakhalina,” *Drevniaia i novaia Rossiia* 1880, no. 5 (May): 54.

<sup>116</sup> M. Poggenpol’, *Ocherk vozniknoveniia i deiatel’nosti Dobrovol’nago Flota za vremia XXV-ti letniago ego sushchestvovaniia* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Benke, 1903), 48.

Despite the rocky path leading to this point had been rocky, many Russians were optimistic, and those convicts turned away from the Nizhnii Novgorod in 1879 were disappointed, having looked forward to their new lives in the Far East.<sup>117</sup> Penal colonization was a modern European solution to the problems of European modernity. Sending convicts to Sakhalin would meet not only the political and economic needs of the state, but would prevent crime and restore the morally fallen to a position as productive workers. Of primary concern to the state were Russia's political vulnerability, economic weakness, the increase in crime, and the dismal state of the Russian prison system, all of which could be improved through the mining of Sakhalin coal by hardworking convict settlers. Sydney and Melbourne, Butkovskii noted, had "before our very eyes...transformed from places of exile into flourishing colonies." At the same time, he invoked the idea of returning to a natural organic Russianness, claiming that Sakhalin was in fact Russia's destiny, granted to the nation by fate itself.<sup>118</sup> Whether a symbol of progress and modernity or the essence of Russianness itself, many Russians derived in the colonization of Sakhalin a hope for a better future.

A decade later, despite numerous setbacks, the state chose Sakhalin to demonstrate Russia's innovative penology at the Fourth International Prison Congress, held in 1890 in St. Petersburg. In designing the exhibit, director of the Main Prison Administration M.N. Galkin-Vraskii expressed his desire that "foreign and Russian prison personnel...have the opportunity to become visually acquainted with the character and productiveness of convict labor."<sup>119</sup> Five months later he emphasized to Priamur Governor General Korf that the exhibit would "be of special interest to foreign specialists in terms of the unique character of Russian penal servitude and subsequent settlement."<sup>120</sup> D.F. Komorskii, prison inspector for the Priamur region, explained the role of the island in the Russian penal system to experts in penology from around the world:

Exile of convicts to Sakhalin, ridding the rest of the empire of the criminal element, does not entail those inconveniences born out of exile to the Siberian mainland. The island's isolation decreases the percent of escapes to a minimum. The opportunity to earn,

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<sup>117</sup> [S.I. Kazi], "Dobrovol'nogo flota kreiser 'Nizhnii Novgorod': Raporty komandira kapitan-leitenant Kazi," *Morskoi sbornik* 1879, no. 9, sec. "Morskaia khronika," 16.

<sup>118</sup> Butkovskii, *O. Sakhalin i ego znachenie*, 9, 6.

<sup>119</sup> Letter of M.N. Galkin-Vraskii to A.N. Korf, 16 Oct. 1887, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 4, d. 95, ll. 1ob-2. (Quote from l. 2).

<sup>120</sup> Letter of M.N. Galkin-Vraskii to A.N. Korf, 8 Mar. 1898, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 4, d. 95, l. 6.

although not without labor, a piece of bread, along with the assistance offered by the administration to the indigent and those beginning to settle [after completing their sentence]... and finally, more careful supervision of settlers than is possible on the mainland—all this significantly decreases the degree of repeated crime, i.e., recidivism.<sup>121</sup>

An article in the exhibit catalogue assured readers that recidivism on Sakhalin was rare, which it attributed to the isolation of the island, opportunities for former convicts to earn a living, state assistance to settlers, and better supervision [*nadzor*] than on the mainland. The catalogue provided data indicating that only 108 crimes were committed in the years 1885-1888, or a mere twenty-seven per year.<sup>122</sup>

The success of this exhibit in highlighting the “character and productiveness of convict labor” was mixed. Nikolai Iadrntsev, who had seen Siberian mines, was not fooled by the exhibits, reporting in *Vostochnoe obozrenie* that he himself did not find the mine exhibits nearly as impressive as did the high society visitors for whom they were designed.<sup>123</sup> Yet the congress did improve Russia’s image abroad. American judge C.D. Randall reported to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior that “few nations have taken a more intelligent interest in prison reform over the past 100 years, nor is there any country which in that time has made greater advances.”<sup>124</sup> By displaying Sakhalin to the world at the International Prison Congress, Russia projected an image of a humane Western nation concerned about scientific correction of criminals and the humane treatment of convicts. The reversal of that image in the eyes of the public was the result of disagreement over key issues such as prison discipline, structures of authority, and the nature of criminality, as well as shifting attitudes in the Russian metropole about modernity and Russianness itself. With the arrival of the *Nizhnii Novgorod* at Post Due in late July of 1879, the Main Prison Administration found itself in charge of not merely a modern penal facility, but an expensive overseas colony growing increasingly difficult to maintain.

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<sup>121</sup> *Katalog mezhdunarodnoi tiuremnoi vystavki*. Lit. X, *Otdel Rossiia*, Gruppy VI, *Ostrov Sakhalin* (St. Petersburg: Glavnoe tiuremnoe upravlenie, 1890), 5.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> N.Ia. “S tiuremnogo mezhdunarodnogo kongressa (Pis’ma iz Peterburga), *Vostochnoe obozrenie* (Irkutsk), 22 July 1890, 6-7.

<sup>124</sup> C.D. Randall, *The Fourth International Prison Congress Held in St. Petersburg, June 1890*, United States Bureau of Education Circulars of Information, 1891, no. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 12.

### CHAPTER 3: ORIENTALIZING SAKHALIN, 1890-1903

In 1890, writer Anton Chekhov undertook a long and arduous journey to Sakhalin to study the conditions of the island and its inhabitants, returning home with tales of roosters in chains, a large number of convicts with the family name “Not-remembering” [*Nepomniashchii*], and a prison warden with an “intense passion for the rod.”<sup>1</sup> While the motivation for Chekhov’s travels has been the object of much speculation, the consequences of his travel writing were extensive, boosting the island to a place of prominence in the minds and discourses of Russian society. Employing official statistics, broad knowledge of existing literature, his own medical training, personal interviews, and a comprehensive survey of exiles, Chekhov presented what seemed to be an authoritative picture of Sakhalin, concluding that the island was absurd and irrational, transforming what had been an *unknown* island into an *unknowable* one.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Chekhov, the island became “the end of the world.” He claimed authoritatively that “the prison is the antagonist of the colony,” undermining the rational conclusions of committees on penal reform and beginning a trend of attributing the island’s troubles to its penal regime.<sup>3</sup> To Chekhov and those who followed him, Sakhalin became no longer organically Russian as in the 1850s, or Russianizable through human effort, as assumed in the 1860s-70s. Sakhalin became Russia’s colonial Other, albeit an Other defined not through encounters with an “uncivilized” native population, but through encounters with the colonizers themselves. Portrayals of the island in books and newspapers, therefore, illuminate not only changing views of Sakhalin as a colony, but changing views of Russia itself. Emerging descriptions of Sakhalin as a “grave for the living,” an “inferno [*kromeshnyi ad*] where perish the last traces of goodness in a man,”<sup>4</sup> or a place “underground, where [there is] no sun and no joy,”<sup>5</sup> reflect angst over urbanization and social change, reinforcing nostalgia for an imagined tranquility and contentment of time gone by.

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<sup>1</sup> A.P. Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin (iz putevykh zametok)* (Moscow: Izdanie redaktsii zhurnala “Russkaia mysl’,” 1895), 46, 179, 191.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion in Cathy Popkin, “Chekhov as Ethnographer: Epistemological Crisis on Sakhalin Island,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (1992): 36-51.

<sup>3</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 8, 297.

<sup>4</sup> V. Doroshevich, “Za den’,” *Odesskii listok*, 4 (16) Dec. 1897, 3.

<sup>5</sup> A. Novitskaia, *Na kraiu sveta (geograficheskii ocherk)* (Khar’kov: Izdatel’stvo komiteta khar’kovskogo obshchestva rasprostraneniia v narod gramotnosti, 1902), 2.

Sakhalin convicts became the Other, often depicted in sensationalized forms not unlike those used to describe indigenous peoples of Africa or Asia. Not only convicts, however, but anyone—civil servants, intelligentsia, even women, Vlas Doroshevich noted—could fall victim to *osakhalinovanie*, or Sakhalinization.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the land itself became an Other, transformed not only from a land of plenty to an island of despair, but from a place awaiting cultivation to a land defying domestication. An article by biologist A.M. Nikol'skii declared that “If in Siberia, the taiga is hard to penetrate, on Sakhalin, it's impossible; if the [Siberian] forest consists of huge trees, here [on Sakhalin] they are gigantic.”<sup>7</sup> While on the ground, Sakhalin was used to test the limits of social and physical engineering, as a discursive space, Sakhalin became a laboratory for the challenging of boundaries governing modernity, morality, identity and culture.

## **Sakhalin in the Press**

### ***Anton Chekhov***

The publication of Chekhov's work on Sakhalin, first serially in *Russkaia mysl'* in 1892-93 and then as a book in 1895, not only drew the attention of Russian society to Sakhalin, but fundamentally resignified Sakhalin in the Russian imagination. Writing as a medical doctor, Chekhov's work on Sakhalin was not belletristic literature. He wrote before his departure, “If I have the time and ability to write about Sakhalin what I want to, ... it will be dull, for specialists, consisting of nothing but figures.”<sup>8</sup> He wrote a few days later to his publisher, A.S. Suvorin, that this work was not intended to contribute to literature or science—he was not a Humboldt or a Kennan—but that he was writing for the medical community.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence that Chekhov hoped to submit his work to the medical school of Moscow University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Medical Sciences. (The dean of the medical school allegedly laughed at the idea.)<sup>10</sup> Yet Chekhov remained convinced of the ultimate value of his work, if not to medicine, then to penology. He wrote to Suvorin in 1901, “*Sakhalin* will outlive me by one hundred years,

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<sup>6</sup> Vlas Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)* (Moscow: Tipografiia I.D. Sytina, 1903), pt. 1, 201, 208, 231.

<sup>7</sup> A. Nikol'skii, “Sakhalin,” in *Po dal'nemu vostoku: Sakhalin, Ussuriiskaia oblast', Man'chzhuriia, Koreia i Iaponiia: Sbornik opisatel'nykh statei dlia domashnego i shkol'nogo chteniia*, comp. V. L'vovich (Moscow: M.V. Kliukin, 1905), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to N.M. Lintvareva, 5 Mar. 1890, in A.P. Chekhov, *Pol'noe sobranie sochinenii i pisem, pis'ma v 12 t.*, vol. 4, *Pis'ma, iavar' 1890 – fevral' 1892* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to A.S. Suvorin, 9 March 1890, in Chekhov, *PSS*, vol. 4, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest J. Simmons, *Chekhov: A Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1962), 344-345.

as it will be a literary record and handbook for those working or interested in the study of prisons [tiur'movedenie].”<sup>11</sup> The book was foremost a work of medical geography, a discipline within the nineteenth-century medical sciences based on the assumption that human development and well-being were guided by environmental factors.<sup>12</sup> By painstakingly gathering statistics and referencing respectable research on Sakhalin’s physical and social environments, Chekhov assumed an air of objectivity as he demonstrated the miserable consequences of Russian attempts at the island’s colonization.

The lasting significance of Chekhov’s book, I would argue, was not its contribution to medical geography or penology, but rather its role in transforming Sakhalin from a “paradise” with a “brilliant future”—where corn and watermelon grow<sup>13</sup>—into a place not only non-Russian, but “the end of the world. You couldn’t go any further than this.”<sup>14</sup> Chekhov framed his narrative in terms of a journey to the underworld, and throughout the book described Sakhalin as hell, disregarding evidence that contradicted his chosen image. His descriptions of people and places support what Marina Ishchenko calls the theory of “universal flight” [*vseobshchego begstva*]<sup>15</sup>—the assumption that everyone sought to leave Sakhalin as quickly as possible—an idea promoted by Sakhalin bureaucrats but inconsistent with reality.<sup>15</sup> Chekhov himself expressed disdain for statistics and scholarship, although he nonetheless conducted thorough research before his trip. He wrote to Suvorin, who was helping with his investigation: “Believe me, Your Excellency, I’ve been punished enough for the work [I’m causing you]: My head is full of cockroaches from all the reading you’ve sent me.... Our geologists, ichthyologists, zoologists and the rest are horribly uneducated people. They write in such coarse language that you can’t just read them, but have to rewrite their phrases in order to understand them. But that detracts from their importance and seriousness. In general, it’s all piggishness.”<sup>16</sup> The next month, before leaving on his journey, he wrote, “I’ve begun writing about Sakhalin already. I wrote about five pages on the ‘history of exploration.’ It turned out OK, as if it were smart and

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to A.S. Suvorin, 30 Aug. 1891, in Chekhov, *PSS*, vol. 4, 266.

<sup>12</sup> Conevery Bolton Valenčius, “Chekhov’s *Sakhalin Island* as a Medical Geography,” in *Chekhov The Immigrant: Translating a Cultural Icon*, ed. Michael C. Finke and Julie de Sherbinin (Bloomington: Slavica, 2007), 299-314.

<sup>13</sup> Ochevidets, “Koe chto o Sakhaline i sakhalinskom piroge,” *Vostochnoe obozrenie* (St. Petersburg), 24 May 1884, 12; *Sibir’* (Irkutsk), no. 4: 4; *Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta* (St. Petersburg), 2(14) May 1884, 1-2; 3(15) May 1884, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 45.

<sup>15</sup> See M.I. Ishchenko, *Russkie starozhily Sakhalina: vtoraiia polovina XIX – vachalo XX vv.* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 2007), 40-49.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to A.S. Suvorin, 28 Feb. 1890, in Chekhov, *PSS*, vol. 4, 26-27.

authoritative. I began the geography with temperatures and capes... That worked well. I quote foreign authors in a different voice, and it comes out so detailed and in such a tone, as if I myself am fluent in all these languages. Total fraud.”<sup>17</sup> After his return, he wrote to Suvorin, “I spent all day yesterday working on the Sakhalin climate. It’s difficult to write about such things, but in the end, I took the devil by the tail. My picture of Sakhalin will make readers themselves cold. I detest writing with numbers!”<sup>18</sup> As Michael Finke demonstrates, to Chekhov, such portrayal of Sakhalin was not a spontaneous response to unexpected circumstances, but rather a planned trip to hell.<sup>19</sup> Chekhov seemed to be continuing in the tradition of Sakhalin explorers such as V.I. Vlasov, A.P. Keppen, or M.S. Mitsul’, participating in the process of what Popkin calls “known-making” or “own-making,” the “the intellectual correlative of the colonization project that is the real agenda of Russia’s exile system.” Yet unlike the previous explorers and scholars, the result of Chekhov’s work was not the making of an unknown place into a known one, but rather, the rendering of Sakhalin unknowable altogether. Popkin insightfully describes Chekhov’s utter failure to “demystify” Sakhalin as an “epistemological crisis,” yet it appears that the crisis itself happened before his travels, and the place, Sakhalin Island, was not the cause, although the book, *Sakhalin Island*, was the result.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Scientists Describe Sakhalin***

Chekhov’s prominence granted permission for others to question Sakhalin’s Russianness and legibility as well, and soon even scientists began to portray Sakhalin in terms of difference, no longer as a natural part of Russia, but as an eastern island far away. Zoologist and ethnographer Ivan Poliakov had visited Sakhalin in 1881 as part of an expedition of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society with a goal essentially the same as those of previous explorers: to make the island legible to the Russian state. As he explained at the time, his purpose was to “lay a so-to-say *natural-historical* foundation” which, along with his physical geography of the region, would provide a basis for future research.<sup>21</sup> His 1883 report was objective in tone and barely mentioned the island’s penal function. Yet in 1895, fourteen years after his visit (and

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<sup>17</sup> Letter to A.S. Suvorin, 4 Mar. 1890, in *ibid.*, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to A.S. Suvorin, 18 May 1891, in *ibid.*, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Michael C. Finke, *Seeing Chekhov: Life and Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 155-157.

<sup>20</sup> Popkin, “Chekhov as Ethnographer,” 38, 37.

<sup>21</sup> I.S. Poliakov, “Puteshestvie na ostrov Sakhalin v 1881-1882 gg.,” *Prilozhenie k Izvestiia imperatorskogo geograficheskogo obshchestva*, t. XIX [1883] (St. Petersburg, 1884), 4-5.

eight years after his death), a different type of article appeared under his name, this time a first person account of his experiences describing the chaos, confusion, neglect, and discomfort of Sakhalin life, along with the island's plant and animal life.<sup>22</sup> One can only presume that, if he did in fact write the later article before his death, it was not deemed publishable at the time. Following Chekhov's visit, however, such observations were consistent with public opinion about Sakhalin and had become the focus of respectable scholars as well as writers of popular prose. A similar shift is evident in the work of zoologist A.M. Nikol'skii, who had traveled with Poliakov in 1881 and completed a dissertation in 1889 on Sakhalin vertebrates.<sup>23</sup> Like Poliakov's later publications, however, articles by Nikol'skii in the weekly illustrated journal *Priroda i liudi* [Nature and People] from 1895-96 describe Sakhalin in terms of otherness.<sup>24</sup> Khar'kov University professor A.N. Krasnov, a geographer and botanist who traveled throughout East Asia in 1892, also wrote in the 1890s not only of his area of expertise, but described Sakhalin as an "island of banishment" and focused on the harsh and unjust fate of its criminal population. He was particularly disturbed by the destiny of the island's Muslims. The "foul Turkmens," he assured his readers, feared Sakhalin more than they did the death penalty.<sup>25</sup> He described those he encountered:

The crowd of those in chains, fettered, with wild physiognomies, where the beastly faces of Kyrgyz, Manchu, and Persians were visible in the crowd of those who had lost the image and likeness of Russian man, vividly reminded me of the "Walk of the Holy Mother of God over the Suffering" which I had read as a child, and which had left deep impressions. Just as there the sinners subjected to hell had different [levels of] punishment, so here the various criminals begged for their punishments to be lessened, reminding me of schoolchildren running after a teacher punishing them after he had left the classroom. They would have been funny, if ... they had not made an inexpressibly heavy, heart-wrenching impression.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ivan Poliakov, "Sakhalin," in *Zhivopisnaia Rossiia: Otechestvo nashe v ego zemel'nom, istoricheskom, plemennom, ekonomicheskom i bytomom znachenii*, vol. 12, pt. 2, *Vostochnoe okrainy Rossii: Primorskaia i amurskaia oblasti*, ed. P.P. Semenov (St. Petersburg: Tovarishchestvo M.O. Vol'f, 1895), 229-272.

<sup>23</sup> A.M. Nikol'skii, *Ostrov Sakhalin i ego pozvonochnykh zhivotnykh*, appended to *Zapiski imperatorskoi akademii nauk* 60, no. 5 (St. Petersburg, 1889), 1-58.

<sup>24</sup> A.M. Nikol'skii, "Na Sakhaline. Putevye ocherki," *Priroda i liudi* 1895/96, no. 1, 7-12; no. 2, 30-34; no. 4, 58-60; no. 5, 82-84; no. 11, 176-179; no. 12, 189-192.

<sup>25</sup> A.N. Krasnov, "Na ostrove izgnaniia," *Knizhki nedeli* 1893, no. 8 (August): 143, 167.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

While Krasnov, more than most, described positive as well as negative aspects of Sakhalin life, he emphasized to readers that life on Sakhalin was good only in relative terms, and that it should not be forgotten that the inhabitants were the “rabble” [*otreb’e*] of society.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Sakhalin in Fiction***

The resignifying of Sakhalin and its inhabitants was evident in prose as well, as writers capitalized on Sakhalin’s image as distant, fearsome and Other as a setting for works of fiction for the general population. V.G. Korolenko, later to become an editor of *Russkoe bogatstvo*, published a short story in 1885 entitled *Sokolinets*, which centered on an escaped Sakhalin convict, a familiar figure from his own exile to East Siberia.<sup>28</sup> Set in East Siberia, Korolenko’s *Sokolinets* made a strong influence on Chekhov, who wrote to the author in 1888, “Your *Sokolinets*, it seems to me, is the preminent work of recent times.”<sup>29</sup> It is likely that Korolenko’s story played a role in Chekhov’s decision to write about Sakhalin. Likewise, writer and ethnographer Aleksei Maksimov, who lived in the Far East at the time, wrote about an escaped Sakhalin convict in 1882, describing Sakhalin as a natural paradise, its warm spring sun and budding trees luring its convict-protagonist—nicknamed Greshnyi [Sinner]—toward freedom.<sup>30</sup> Yet his 1894 story of a Sakhalin priest described Sakhalin in a different light, as an uninhabited, empty, dead island, cut off from the world. To Maksimov in the 1890s, not only was the weather savage, but the people—civil servants and natives alike—were drunkards, sleeping away the dull days and long nights. The exception, of course, was his hero, Father Simeon, a “self-sacrificing and courageous missionary” who alone braved the Sakhalin storms to traverse Sakhalin on foot, delivering supplies to troops stranded in the south during the Russo-Turkish War. Upon his arrival, having faced starvation, hungry bears, and near drowning, he was greeted not with appreciation for his heroism, but with a reprimand: the money he delivered was wet.<sup>31</sup> While the story itself was not based in reality—Sakhalin had neither missionaries nor

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>28</sup> V.G. Korolenko, “Sokolinets: Iz rasskazov o brodiagakh” [1885], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, *povesti i rasskazy* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1953), 131-175.

<sup>29</sup> Letter to V.G. Korolenko, 9 Jan. 1888, in A.P. Chekhov, *Pol’noe sobranie sochinenii i pisem, pis’ma v 12 t.*, vol. 2, *Pis’ma, 1887 – sentiabr’ 1888* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 170. “Sokolinets,” rather than “Sakhalinets,” refers to the derogatory designation of Sakhalin Island as “Sokolinnyi” Island, or Falcon Island.

<sup>30</sup> A.Ia. Maksimov, “Obitateli o. Sakhalina,” *Niva* 1882, no. 23: 536-545; no. 24: 562-566; no. 25: 585-591; no. 26: 611-615.

<sup>31</sup> A.Ia. Maksimov, “Pop Simeon (Byl ob obnom zabytom podvige)” [1894], in *Na dalekom vostoke: polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9 (St. Petersburg: Izd. M.K. Maksimovoi, 1901), 21-75.

troops during the Russo-Turkish War—it reinforced the Otherness of Sakhalin in comparison to the brave, loyal, and moral Russian Orthodox priest. Another novel about Sakhalin, also portraying it as unknown and mysterious, was written in Romanian by Moldovan writer Constantin Stamati-Ciurea, entitled *Sakhalin Island, the Secret Land of Exiles*, and published in 1894.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Vlas Doroshevich***

After Chekhov, the writer who did the most to bring Sakhalin to public prominence was newspaperman Vlas Doroshevich, commissioned by the *Odesskii listok* to travel to Sakhalin in 1897 and report on his journey. His columns on Sakhalin, which appeared regularly in the newspaper beginning in late 1897, appealed to readers' emotions, rather than science or statistics, to create a Sakhalin very similar to that of Chekhov. By describing in colorful language the horrendous crimes, utter poverty, and shocking corruption he encountered, he left no doubt in readers' minds that Sakhalin was indeed an “island of despair, island of lawlessness, [and] dead island,” as it was called by civil servants he met.<sup>33</sup> His columns were continued in the newspapers *Rossiia* [published in St. Petersburg] in 1901 and *Russkoe slovo* [*The Russian Word*, Moscow] in 1902, before appearing in book form in 1903. Unlike Chekhov, who employed science and statistics to give authority to his work, Doroshevich derived his authority from personal testimony, emphasizing that he gained the trust of everyone from island officials to executioners, allowing him to see and hear for himself what Sakhalin was really like, unhindered by statistics or jargon. He later expressed appreciation to “all who worked to hinder my trip to Sakhalin. Thanks to you, I avoided the deepest misfortune, seeing through the eyes of others. I was not shown anything—I saw it for myself. I was not shown what I was supposed to see. I saw for myself what I needed to see. And for this reason alone I was able to write a book containing thousands of defects, but one merit: the truth.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Insula Sahalin. Țara misterioasă a exilaților*. I have seen a variety of references to the work, although I have not located a copy. See for example V.M. Gatsak, “Moldavskaia literatura v Rossii (vo vtoroi polovine XIX v.),” in *Istoriia vsemirnoi literatury*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), 189.

<sup>33</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 4.

<sup>34</sup> V.M. Doroshevich, *Kak ia popal na Sakhalin* (Moscow: I.D. Sytin, 1903), 141-142.

## Sakhalin as Russia's Other

While Chekhov served as a catalyst for the othering of Sakhalin, a variety of factors converged in the 1890s to make the island not only imaginable in such terms, but to spread the image rapidly throughout society. Not insignificant is the rise in literacy, which as Jeff Brooks describes, made possible a “common national experience” shared across regions and classes.<sup>35</sup> The thick journal *Russkaia mysl'*, for example, in which Chekhov introduced Sakhalin to Russian society, had a circulation of 15,000. National and international telegraph agencies dispatched news updates to subscribing newspapers empire-wide. The regional *Odesskii listok*, in which Doroshevich's columns appeared, was the largest provincial newspaper (circulation 10,000), and the reprinting in the capitals of articles from provincial papers, or alternately, the publishing of news and commentary from the imperial center in remote regions, created a shared Russian cultural and intellectual environment that reached even Sakhalin.<sup>36</sup>

An assumption has prevailed that it was the penal establishments—associated with crime, brutality, suffering and isolation—that gave the island its reputation as barbaric and cursed. Doroshevich and Chekhov spread this view by emphasizing the incompetence of prison guards and penal officials, brutality of corporal punishment, and depravity of the criminals themselves. This interpretation prevailed in the Soviet Union and has been accepted by Western scholars. Based primarily on Chekhov, American historian John Stephan concluded that the island “stagnated as a vast penal colony, a monument to human misery,” which he blamed on “one fatally erroneous calculation—that economic development could be achieved by convict labor.”<sup>37</sup> Others continue to limit their vision of penal servitude to its presumed backwardness and brutality, neglecting the broader social and cultural transformations that incited the mental shift in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

While an important aspect of Sakhalin's image, the island's penal function alone does not explain Sakhalin's othering in the Russian imagination. In the language of its founders, the

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<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned To Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), xiv.

<sup>36</sup> S.Ia. Makhonina, *Istoriia russkoi zhurnalistiki nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), online at <http://evartist.narod.ru/text1/93.htm>, <http://evartist.narod.ru/text1/90.htm> (accessed 6 July 2009).

<sup>37</sup> John J. Stephan, *Sakhalin: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 64, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Combating this image is an important element of the revisionist history of Australia, pioneered in Ian Duffield and James Bradley, eds., *Representing Convicts: New Perspectives on Convict Labour Forced Migration* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

Sakhalin colony was to provide a humane alternative for corporal punishment. While Abby Schrader demonstrates that in the eighteenth century, flogging served as a means to distinguish among upper and lower social classes, Sakhalin was far from Russia, with few witnesses to any punitive spectacle, and was established to serve a correctional function, as well as mining coal.<sup>39</sup> Penal institutions were not inherently assumed to be places of brutality and suffering. Australia, for example, was viewed in Russia as flourishing and productive, which provided hope that Sakhalin would in time prove to be the same.<sup>40</sup> Among penologists internationally, Sakhalin was discussed alongside Mettray and Elmira, the most modern and humane correctional facilities in the western world.<sup>41</sup>

A significant factor in the representation of Sakhalin is the reimagining of colonialism and the Russian empire itself. In the West, the 1890s saw the “Scramble for Africa,” as European nations raced to take colonies spurred by desire for economic and geopolitical dominance as well as nationalist pride and humanistic plans for the civilization of savages, grounded in a modern faith in the perfectibility of man. The “informal” imperialism of indirect military, cultural or economic dominance was superseded by the direct rule of a colonial administration. A crucial aspect of colonial domination at this time became the study of the colonial Other, the academic discipline of Orientalism growing in Western Europe and in Russia.<sup>42</sup> Orientalist knowledge created in these academic fields facilitated the “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,”<sup>43</sup> as Edward Said has influentially argued, particularly evident in settings in which the West sought power over the East. While the debate over Orientalism in the Russian empire has not been resolved—the primary issue being whether and how an empire itself orientalized by the West applied the same discursive practices to its own orient<sup>44</sup>—the discursive Sakhalin of the 1890s, functioning as Russia’s Other, differed

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<sup>39</sup> See Abby M. Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Ia. Butkovskii, *O Sakhalin i ego znachenie* (St. Petersburg: Tip. V.S. Ettingera, 1873), 5-6; “Kolonizatsiia Sakhalina,” *Vostochnoe obozrenie* (St. Petersburg), 20 Dec. 1884, 16.

<sup>41</sup> See for example the report of an American delegate to the 1890 International Prison Congress. C.D. Randall, *The Fourth International Prison Congress Held in St. Petersburg, June 1890*, United States Bureau of Education Circulars of Information, 1891, no. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891).

<sup>42</sup> 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 (Winter 2008): 53-81.

<sup>43</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Nathaniel Knight, “Grigor’ev in Orenburg: Russian Orientalism in the Service of Empire?,” *Slavic Review* 59 (Spring 2000): 74-100; Adeeb Khalid, “Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism,” *Kritika: Explorations in*

substantially from the island's representation of even two decades earlier as a natural extension of a historic homeland.

While Ivan IV declared himself emperor already in 1547, the Russian empire has been viewed both in Russia and abroad as different from the empires of Western European powers, the result of contiguous expansion rather than occupation of foreign lands. While the usefulness of such a distinction can itself be questioned,<sup>45</sup> a shift can be seen in the Russian state's perception of its own empire under finance minister Sergei Vitte. In office from 1892-1903, Vitte emphasized a formerly-insignificant distinction between "nation" and "colony," defining Russianness by language, culture, and "blood," rather than the land upon which one was raised.<sup>46</sup> Previously, as Theodore Weeks has noted, imperial and national identity developed "hand in hand" in the Russian empire, with little distinction between *russkie* (of the Russian nation) and *rossiiskie* (of the Russian empire). In the 1890s, the two concepts became separate.<sup>47</sup> Chia Yin Hsu shows that, instead of viewing the Far East as the natural territorial expansion of a land granted by God to the tsar, Vitte sought to "reconceptualize territory north of Manchuria as 'colonial,' rather than an integral territorial and administrative part of the empire." Under Vitte, colonization, or unification with the imperial core—the *prisoedinenie* so frequently evoked in earlier references to Russia's Sakhalin policy—was replaced with what in English would be categorized as colonialism, the building of non-Russian dependencies. Just as by examining Russian policies of the 1890s, Hsu finds that Russian officials distinguished between Manchuria and the Russian heartland, which she attributes to the "identification of the imperial state with ethnic Russians,"<sup>48</sup> my exploration of 1890s discourse about Sakhalin colonization finds that

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*Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 691-699; Nathaniel Knight, "On Russian Orientalism: A Response to Adeeb Khalid," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 701-715; Maria Todorova, "Does Russian Orientalism Have a Russian Soul? A Contribution to the Debate between Nathaniel Knight and Adeeb Khalid," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 717-727; Vera Tolz, "Orientalism, Nationalism, and Ethnic Diversity in Late Imperial Russia," *Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2005): 137-40, 144-45.

<sup>45</sup> I think in particular of Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranaham's assertion that "What scholars have sometimes taken to be aberrant empires—the American, Russian or Chinese—may indeed be quintessential ones, consummate producers of excepted populations, excepted spaces, and their own exception from international and domestic law." Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranaham, "Refiguring Imperial Terrains," *Ab Imperio* 2006, no. 2: 27.

<sup>46</sup> Chia Yin Hsu, "The Chinese Eastern Railroad and the Making of Russian Imperial Orders in the Far East" (PhD diss, New York University, 2006), 96-97.

<sup>47</sup> Theodore Weeks, "Slavdom, Civilization, Russification: Comments on Russia's World-Historical Mission, 1861-1878," *Ab Imperio* 2002, no. 2 (July): 224.

<sup>48</sup> Hsu, "Chinese Eastern Railroad," 155, 33.

Sakhalin, too—although settled primarily by ethnic Russians—had become a colony separate from Russia itself.

In the language of the 1890s, Sakhalin was no longer a nearby land mass organically Russian. Even botanist A.N. Krasnov emphasized after his travels that, despite differences in population, Sakhalin had more in common with Japan, Java and the Yangtze basin than it did with Europe.<sup>49</sup> Others portrayed Sakhalin as even more distant and remote, Maksimov's story of *Pop Simeon* describing the island as "completely cut off from the entire world."<sup>50</sup> Anatolii Koni, reminiscing about Chekhov, labeled Sakhalin "mysterious for its remoteness," as if "in the dark abysses of the earth."<sup>51</sup> A short story for beginning readers indicated that Sakhalin was "on the edge of the world, the end of the Russian empire, beyond the sea, [and] beyond the ocean."<sup>52</sup> English travel writer Charles Hawes in the same vein publicized Sakhalin as in the "uttermost east."<sup>53</sup> Exile Ivan Iuvachev wrote of his excitement about receiving his first letter "from Russia," explaining to readers that "on Sakhalin, as in the rest of the Amur region, in conversation, 'Russia' refers only to the European part of the empire."<sup>54</sup> Scholars, scientists, travel writers, novelists, lawyers and criminals themselves all agreed that the island populated by Russian convicts was not innately Russian territory, and was, in fact, nowhere near Russia, not even part of the known world. To literate Russians, Sakhalin was no longer an intrinsic component of their empire, an island conveniently located between Siberia and Alaska. It was further away than Africa, Ceylon, and Singapore, which travelers observed from the ship on their journey to the island, and nowhere near Russia at all.

In fact, Sakhalin became so far away that it was associated with the "other world," a metaphor supported by the "civil death" of condemned criminals, which entailed loss of property, family, position, and social status (estate).<sup>55</sup> Admiral V.S. Zavoiko, former military governor of

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<sup>49</sup> A.N. Krasnov, *Po ostrovam dalekogo vostoka: Putevye ocherki* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie redaktsii "Nedeli," 1895), 406.

<sup>50</sup> Maksimov, "Pop Simeon," 23.

<sup>51</sup> A.F. Koni, "Vospominaniia o Chekhove," [1924] in *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1969), 375.

<sup>52</sup> Novitskaia, *Na kraiu sveta*, 2. [Originally published in 1895.]

<sup>53</sup> Charles H. Hawes, *In the Uttermost East: Being an Account of Investigations among the Natives and Russian Convicts of the Island of Sakhalin, with Notes of Travel in Korea, Siberia, and Manchuria* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904).

<sup>54</sup> I.P. Miroljubov [Iuvachev], *Vosem' let na Sakhaline* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A.S. Suvorina, 1901), 72.

<sup>55</sup> See the explanation of D.F. Komorskii, prison inspector for the Priamur region, in Randall, *Fourth International Prison Congress*, 241-242.

Kamchatka, took for granted that people throughout Russia viewed Sakhalin exile as “worse than any death.”<sup>56</sup> Exile Iuvachev described himself as a “person deleted from life” [*vycherknutogo iz zhizni cheloveka*], as if life took place elsewhere, not on Sakhalin. He explained, “Between the island and the mainland, like between hell and paradise, there is an uncrossable abyss consisting not only of the expanses of the waters of the Tartar Strait, but of the temporal expanse of years of labor and settlement. Just as the rich man in the Gospel languished in hell, begging Abraham for a drop of water to soothe his tongue, convicts thirst for even the smallest greeting from the other world, from Russia.”<sup>57</sup> Doroshevich invoked the same imagery in an essay, “Man from the other world” [*Chelovek s togo sveta*], referring to a prisoner he had encountered in the “most sorrowful corner of that island of sorrow”—the shackles ward of the prison at Post Aleksandrovskii on Sakhalin—recently apprehended in St. Petersburg.<sup>58</sup> N. Sokolov, a civil servant under Sakhalin military governor M.N. Liapunov, described the island as a “penitentiary purgatory.”<sup>59</sup> The editor of the 1901 edition of Iuvachev’s memoirs likewise referred to the “Sakhalin ‘purgatory’” in his introduction to the book.<sup>60</sup>

The categorization of Sakhalin as a colony separate from Russia became evident in official language as well, demonstrating that the shift was not limited to popular discourse, but recognized by the state. The *Zabaikalskie oblastnye vedomosti* in 1892 published a six-page article on “our colony in the Pacific Ocean.”<sup>61</sup> While the 1860s-70s saw optimistic plans for the establishment of “penitentiary colonies” or “agricultural colonies” on the island, in the 1890s, the island was no longer seen as the home of contained institutions for the correction and treatment of criminals—*penitentsiarnye kolonii*—but as a single *shtrafnaia koloniia*, with a focus on penalty—*shtraf*—rather than penitence. Such language portrayed the island as a territory separate from Russia, rather than Russian land containing colonies established for distinct

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<sup>56</sup> Zapiska admirala Zavoiko “Ob ustroistve katorzhnikov na ostrove Sakhaline,” RGAVMF, f. 1365, op. 1, d. 22, l. 1. While the memo is undated, references within the text indicate that it was written in the late 1880s or 1890s.

<sup>57</sup> Miroljubov, *Vosem’ let*, 76, 75.

<sup>58</sup> Vlas Doroshevich, “Chelovek s togo sveta,” *Russkoe slovo* (Moscow), 17 Oct. 1902, 1.

<sup>59</sup> 20 Oct. 1899 essay by jurist N. Sokolov, serving on Sakhalin, cited in Lev Landau, “Iz proshlogo ostrova Sakhalina,” *Psikhiatricheskie analizy*, no. 6 (October 1913): 11.

<sup>60</sup> Foreword to Miroljubov, *Vosem’ let*, v.

<sup>61</sup> “Ostrov Sakhalin i ego kolonizatsiia,” *Pribavlenie k Zabaikal’skim oblastnym vedomostiam 1892*, no 2 (February): 6.

purposes of criminal reform.<sup>62</sup> It diverged also from the reformatory purpose the colonies on Sakhalin once had. Even the Main Prison Administration in 1901 distanced itself from the original correctional function of Sakhalin penal servitude, claiming that Sakhalin was and always had been exclusively a “penal [*shtrafnaia*] colony.”<sup>63</sup>

Often Sakhalin was excluded from Russia based on an abstract notion of otherness, without a clear articulation of what was recognizably different. “Here,” on Sakhalin, was contrasted to “there,” the homeland, meaning Russia. Upon nearing Sakhalin, Chekhov wrote that he felt “that I was not in Russia, but somewhere in Patagonia, or Texas,”<sup>64</sup>—which of course he had never visited, but assumed to be very non-Russian. Perhaps most offensive to Chekhov’s sensibilities as a literary figure, he found that “Pushkin and Gogol’ are meaningless here, and hence unnecessary; our history is boring; and we, who arrived from Russia, seem like foreigners.”<sup>65</sup> To Chekhov, local morality [*npravstvennost’*] was peculiar, “not ours.”<sup>66</sup> Even those who called Sakhalin home acknowledged that something was not quite the same. Pilsudskii reassured his worried father that Sakhalin was “completely different” from Russia.<sup>67</sup> Revolutionary Liudmila Vol’kenshtein wrote of Sakhalin’s “abnormal atmosphere” [*nenormal’naia atmosfera*].<sup>68</sup> A contributor to the official *Sakhalinskii kalendar’* in 1896 admitted that, while picturesque, settlements were “not in harmony,” having grown unnaturally and artificially, “as if with yeast.” Well-paved roads connected overly-quiet settlements with wide, empty streets and boarded up buildings.<sup>69</sup> The oft-repeated quote attributed to his convict coachman during Chekhov’s 1890 visit demonstrates the binary categories that existed in Russian minds—Russia and not Russia: “Here is dull, Your Honor. With us in Russia [or, in

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<sup>62</sup> On the convergence and divergence of these two types of colony, see Stoler and McGranaham, “Refiguring Imperial Terrains,” 17-23.

<sup>63</sup> “K voprosu o budushchnosti i ustroistve o. Sakhalina,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 9, no. 6 (Aug. 1901): 271.

<sup>64</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. While Chekhov was describing the Far Eastern Russian mainland, what gave the land its characteristics was its proximity to Sakhalin, which he had identified as “hell” even before his departure. Throughout much of his journey, he described Siberia, in contrast, in a very positive light.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Letter of Bronislav Pilsudskii to his father, 10 May 1888, cited in Koichi Inoue, ed., “Dear Father!” *A Collection of B. Pilsudskii’s Letters, et alii*. Pilsudskiana de Sapporo, no. 1 (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 1999), 84.

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Liudmila Volkenshtein, cited in V.S. Pankratov, “Pamiati L.A. Volkenshtein,” *Byloe* 1906, no. 2: 285.

<sup>69</sup> “Zhizn’ novykh selenii Aleksandrovskego okruga,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1896 g.: Sakhalinskii kalendar i materialy k izucheniiu o-va Sakhalin* (Post Aleksandrovskii: Tipografiia na ostrove Sakhalin, 1895), sec. 2: 56.

our Russia, *u nas v Rossii*] is better.”<sup>70</sup> Despite his long-term residence on the island, Chekhov’s coachman still considered Russia his home, and in his mind, Russia did not include Sakhalin Island.

### ***The Land as Other***

As a territory previously envisioned as part of Russia itself, the most significant aspect of the othering of Sakhalin was the othering of its land, including Sakhalin’s geological composition, climate, plant and animal life, and suitability for habitation by civilized peoples. The first attribute of Sakhalin that Doroshevich established for his readers was the roughness of Sakhalin’s shoreline. He wrote of impressions while still aboard ship of the “harsh, inhospitable cliffs ... still covered with snow” in mid-April. He clarified that this was where the convict ship “Kostroma” had perished on the rocks in 1887, establishing not only difference, but danger.<sup>71</sup> Such sentiments were shared by others as well. V.G. Korolenko, in the words of his fictional escaped convict, contrasted the steep cliffs and silvery blue haze of the Far Eastern mainland with the “rocky coasts of the wild island” across the strait.<sup>72</sup> According to the journal *Niva* in 1903, convicts “weep at the sight of the wild rocks and desolate mountains covered by the glow and smoke of raging forest fires.”<sup>73</sup>

As if his own observations were insufficient, Doroshevich fantasized about the prehistory of the island, comparing its likeness on a map to a hungry monster:

If you look at a map of Asia, you’ll see in the right-hand corner, extended along the shore, something that looks like a monster opening its jaws, as if ready to swallow the nearby island of the Matusmae [Hokkaido]. The sharp declines of the coal beds, the zigzagged, broken lines of bare slate, they all indicate that some kind of great revolution took place here. The spine of the “monster” twisted. The land shook in gigantic waves. The waves moved from the northeast to the southwest. It’s not by chance that Sakhalin mountains look like huge frozen waves, and the valleys—or “falls” [*padi*] as they are called here in Siberian [*po-sibirski*]—remind you of the precipices that open wide between waves during a hurricane.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 43.

<sup>71</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 3. On the shipwreck, see A.V. Shcherbak, “Perevozka ssyl’nikov na ostrov Sakhalin morem,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1893, no. 6 (June): 240.

<sup>72</sup> Korolenko, “Sokolinets,” 142.

<sup>73</sup> “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Niva* 1903, no. 7: 127.

<sup>74</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 4.

The sea as well became an adversary—no longer the symbol of progress envisioned by Peter the Great or the highway of explorers like Nevel'skoi and Busse, but an enemy of Russian life. An 1899 article in *Russkie vedomosti* portrayed the seas as battling civilization. “The waves appeared as mountains of ice.... One wave had hardly rolled off the foam-spattered shore when another took its place, even stronger, pushing against the island with great uproar and howls. It seemed like the elements had declared war on the land to the death [*ne na zhizn', a na smert'*].” A dock was destroyed in the storm and twenty Japanese schooners were tossed onto the shore.<sup>75</sup> The Russian Telegraph Agency noted in newspapers throughout Russia that a storm on Sakhalin had washed five corpses ashore.<sup>76</sup> The danger to ships was of concern to all, as shipwrecks remained common along the rocky coast. Sakhalin's lack of a natural harbor was repeatedly invoked as grounds for Sakhalin's unprofitability, causing discussion and debate over the construction of a manmade port. The fact that this was repeatedly deemed impossible by the state reinforced the image of the sea as victorious. To Doroshevich, “Here the sea is a traitor; but the shore is no friend to the sailor... Here one needs to fear the land and the sea. Sakhalin doesn't like it when [ships] stop along its steep, precipitous cliffs. Along its entire western coast is not a single roadstead.”<sup>77</sup>

While previous travelers had emphasized Sakhalin's pleasant and healthy climate, by the 1890s, both scientific and popular literature challenged such claims. Gone were the bright sunshine and calm seas encountered by Rimskii-Korsakov in his 1853 voyage. Chekhov described in detail the weather-related lack of vitamins, swarms of mosquitoes and lethargy. Most famously, Chekhov diagnosed what he called *febris sachaliniensis*—Sakhalin fever—the symptoms of which included a headache and pain throughout the body “caused not by infection, but by climatic influences.”<sup>78</sup> It was not until a century later, in 1987, that this was identified as a rare form of scarlet fever that broke out periodically in the Far East.<sup>79</sup> An article in a journal for self-education explained that the Sakhalin climate was anomalous and exceedingly harsh, corresponding neither to its (relatively southern) latitude nor to the (mild) weather patterns

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<sup>75</sup> S. Brodovich, “Poezdka na Sakhalin,” *Russkie vedomosti* (Moscow), 30 Sept. 1899, 2.

<sup>76</sup> “Telegrammy ‘Rossiiskogo telegrafnogo agentsvo’,” supplement to *Amurskii krai* (Blagoveshchensk), 31 Oct. (12 Nov.) 1899.

<sup>77</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 4-5.

<sup>78</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 306.

<sup>79</sup> See E. Meve, *Meditsina v tvorchestve i zhizhi A.P. Chekhova* (Kiev: Zdorov'ie, 1989), 119.

associated with islands. Rather, streams from the Arctic Sea caused both cold winters and cool summers.<sup>80</sup> Another article countered that while “it would seem that the climate of Sakhalin should not be particularly different than that of European Russia, in fact that is not the case: the pernicious influence of the Sea of Okhotsk destroys all favorable climatic conditions.”<sup>81</sup>

Not only scientists, but commoners as well began to report on Sakhalin’s weather, supposedly dangerous to one’s health. It was often repeated that “Sakhalin has no climate, but only foul weather.”<sup>82</sup> A convict folksong described Sakhalin as perpetually overcast, with no sun, stars, or songs of birds, but only a howling wind and roaring sea.<sup>83</sup> Pilsudskii accepted this notion, reporting that climate made people constantly tired. He appealed for permission to relocate to the East Siberian mainland for health reasons.<sup>84</sup> His and similar petitions made frequently by convicts demonstrate the power of such stereotypes over perceptions of the land, as East Siberian winters were in fact colder than those of Sakhalin. Such views found their way to European Russia, where they were repeated and embellished. Sakhalin’s climate was most certainly not Russian, emphasized Aleksandra Novitskaia, who herself had never visited the island. She contrasted the imaginary gray skies and constant fog of Sakhalin with the equally imaginary blue skies and bright sun of the homeland.<sup>85</sup>

With such an oppressive and unhealthy environment, it is no surprise that nature as well came to represent a negative force on Sakhalin. Described as rich, green and hospitable in the 1850s, by the early 1890s it was viewed as mysterious and dangerous. On Sakhalin, Novitskaia told readers, there was no “spacious steppe;” there were no grain fields, but only mountains covered with “miserable larches,” which looked “as if God were punishing them.” Even the rivers on Sakhalin did not flow joyfully and free, like those at home, she claimed.<sup>86</sup> This is very different from the story published by Maksimov two decades earlier, in which the convict finds on Sakhalin majestic cedars, slender larches, shaggy fir trees and “strong mountain elms, alders

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<sup>80</sup> P.Iu. Shmidt, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Vestnik i biblioteka samoobrazovaniia* 1905, no. 18: 560.

<sup>81</sup> Poliakov, “Sakhalin,” 230.

<sup>82</sup> “Na Sakhaline sovsem net klimata, a est’ lish’ durnaia pogoda.” “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Niva* 1903, no. 7: 127.

<sup>83</sup> “Kak iz ostrova,” in V.N. Gartvel’d, *Pesni katorgi: Pesni sibirskikh katorzhan, beglykh i brodiag*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Moscow: Universal’naia biblioteka, 1915), 52.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from B.O. Pilsudski to his father, 18 Feb. 1889; cited in Koichi Inoue, ed., “Dear Father!,” 89-90.

<sup>85</sup> Novitskaia, *Na kraiu sveta*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

and birches.” Streams, the earlier story emphasized, were bright, quick and energetic, in contrast to the 1902 image, in which not even rivers flowed freely.<sup>87</sup>

Works of nonfiction provide even more striking descriptions of Sakhalin’s natural environment, creating a dangerous landscape, unknowable and unconquerable. French traveler Paul Labbe, who visited in 1899, described the Sakhalin taiga, “known only to the natives,” as “full of mysterious gloom” and home to “bears, wolves, foxes, sables, and ermines.” Even tigers appear at times, he emphasized, as if bears and wolves were not dangerous enough.<sup>88</sup> An article published during the Russo-Japanese war depicted the Sakhalin forests as even worse, again portraying nature as hostile:

The Sakhalin taiga leaves an impression of oppressiveness. You can walk all day, or even all week, and in front of you will be gigantic trunks of fir trees, and above your head are dark green needles, through which not a single ray of light penetrates! Here in the taiga you see neither flowers nor grass; instead [you see] piles of dried fir boughs, and there are places where trees block your path, torn up by the roots and toppled over in a storm. You can only walk through the forest where bears have made a narrow, meandering path.... And there are often storms, the forest begins to howl and groan; trees fall, one, another, and a third. The entire forest shakes, howls, groans and rumbles loudly.<sup>89</sup>

Even botanist A.N. Krasnov, supported by photographs, portrayed Sakhalin as abnormal and unhealthy. He described the virgin taiga as too thick to be healthy, full of dead trees and “practically impenetrable.” Larch forests were dying out, he indicated, due to flooding that turned the land into a marsh [*zabolachivanie*], which then froze. There is nowhere better than Sakhalin, he reported, to trace the evolutionary connection between “luxuriant larch forests and dead tundra” (Figures 3.1 and 3.2).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Maksimov, “Obitateli,” *Niva* 1882, no. 23: 539.

<sup>88</sup> P. Labbe, “Pod nebom Sakhalina,” *Priroda i liudi* 1905, no. 33 (16 July): 520.

<sup>89</sup> Zh. Gaksbakh, *Sakhalin: Ocherk prirody i naseleniia* (Moscow: Izdanie D. Tutaeva, 1905), 11.

<sup>90</sup> A.N. Krasnov, “Iz poezdki na dal’nii vostok Azii: Zametki o rastitel’nosti Iavy, Iaponii i Sakhalina,” *Zemlevedenie* 1894, tom 1, kn. 3: 24, 28, 27.

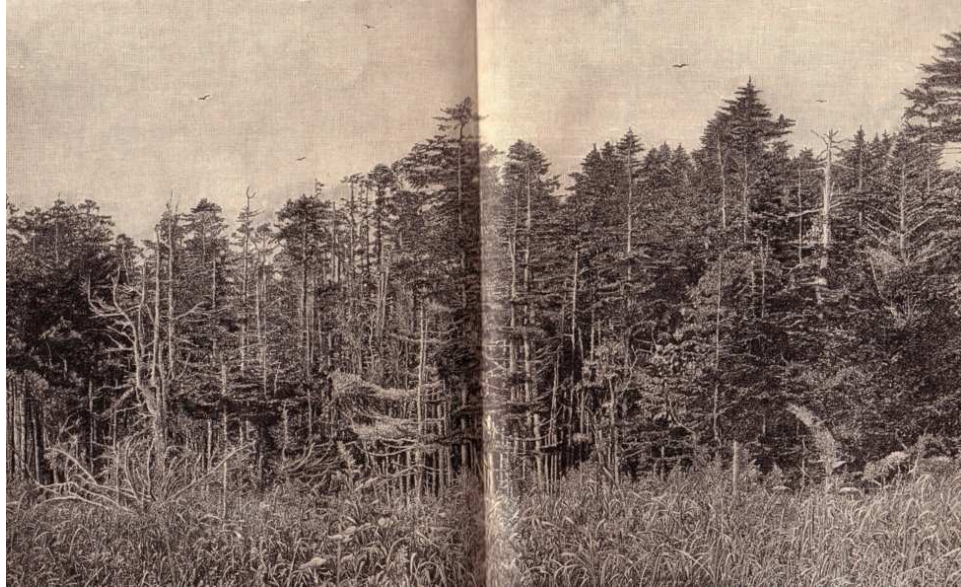


Fig. 3.1: Krasnov's "impenetrable" Sakhalin taiga (1894)<sup>91</sup>



Fig. 3.2: Larch forests dying out (1894)<sup>92</sup>

While Rimskii-Korsakov had suggested that Robinson Crusoe would feel quite at home on Sakhalin, by the 1890s, Sakhalin's suitability for human habitation was called into question. Agronomist M.S. Mitsul' had waxed eloquent about Sakhalin's agricultural potential after his 1869 visit, and in 1881 he returned to the island to implement his plans for the establishment of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 28.

model teaching farms. By the mid 1880s, many Russians had become cynical. With a vaguely veiled reference to Mitul', Poliakov insisted in 1895 that "it is ... best that local officials not place their personal interests above those of society and the state, that their personal fantasies do not replace the law. And it is necessary that reality not be idealized, that the truth not take second place. Only then will it be possible to heal the ailments and will there be a chance of achieving some kind of cultured results."<sup>93</sup> The truth, according to Chekhov, was that "when nature created Sakhalin, last in her mind was man and his needs."<sup>94</sup> In fact, so bad was the island's natural environment that freedom was no longer desirable to convicts. At least in prison they received regular meals.<sup>95</sup> The saying was often repeated that "true katorga begins after the prisoner's release."<sup>96</sup> Chekhov explained:

If the harshness of a punishment is measured by the amount of work and physical hardships, then on Sakhalin, settlers [released convicts] often face a harsher punishment than *katorzhnye* [convicts serving penal servitude]. The settler finds himself in a new place, usually swampy and covered with forest, having only a carpenter's axe, a saw, and a shovel. He chops wood, digs up stumps, digs canals to dry out the land, and during that entire time of preparation, lives under the open sky, on the damp earth...in dampness, almost daily rain, and low temperatures.<sup>97</sup>

### ***The People as Other***

Along with the othering of Sakhalin's natural environment, soon the human population of Sakhalin became Other as well. According to the influential theories of Charles Darwin, mankind was in fact a higher form of nature, the evolution of which depended on environmental conditions. Sergei Solov'ev applied these ideas to Russia and the Slavic world, blaming the natural environment for preventing East European development along the Western path of progress. Solov'ev wrote in his *Istoriia Rossii* in 1863, "For Western Europe and its peoples, Nature has been a mother [*mat'*]; for Eastern Europe and for the peoples who were destined to

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<sup>93</sup> Poliakov, "Sakhalin," 272. See also *Vostochnoe obozrenie*, 24 May 1884, 12-14. Iadrntsev had called Mitsul's bluff already in 1874: "There is testimony that one chinovnik of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, sent to survey Sakhalin, had to live in the bathhouse (if that is the case, where do the convicts live?), and one agronomist sent to explore ate his own dog. Yet Mr. Mitchel [sic], who published a book on Sakhalin, convinced us that in all aspects, the island is wonderful. N. Iadrntsev, "Ispravitel'noe znachenie Sibirskoi ssylki," *Golos*, 12 Dec. 1874, 2. That certain chinovnik who lived in the bathhouse and was forced to eat dog was Mitul' himself.

<sup>94</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 163.

<sup>95</sup> Labbe, "Pod nebom Sakhalina," *Priroda i liudi* 1905, no. 33: 520.

<sup>96</sup> Brodovich, "Poezdka na Sakhalin," *Russkie vedomosti*, 11 Oct. 1899, 2; P.Iu. Shmidt, *Ostrov izgnaniia (Sakhalin)* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O.N. Popovoi, 1905), 94.

<sup>97</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 305-306.

develop here, she has been a stepmother [*machekha*].”<sup>98</sup> Those planning the colonization of Sakhalin in the 1860s-70s sought to counteract that destiny, envisioning Sakhalin’s rich and fruitful natural environment as a place of correction and restoration. The *Stock Market Gazette* argued in 1873 that on Sakhalin, “Field and garden work [would] have a calming influence on the developed soul and on a man’s moral temptation, and bring forth feelings of sincere correction.”<sup>99</sup> However, as Sakhalin gained prominence as Russia’s Other, the Sakhalin population was depicted as the opposite of the civilized, Western society Russia strove to become. A civil servant used humor to represent both people and nature on Sakhalin as savage and uncivilized in a lighthearted poem from 1899: “Nature wild and severe you find / (especially that of the human kind).”<sup>100</sup> Whether he is referring to indigenous peoples or Russian settlers is strikingly ambiguous.

Earlier in the century, the indigenous peoples of Sakhalin had been viewed as no different from other northern Asian ethnic groups which had coexisted with Russians in Siberia for centuries. According to Russian romantics of the 1830s, they were “children of nature,” uncorrupted lovers of freedom, fearless and proud.<sup>101</sup> Busse’s 1852 diary—as published in 1872—evoked imagery of the noble savage to describe his encounter with Ainu villagers from the north of Sakhalin: “The scene was much like the pictures of the arrival of Europeans in America. Looking at the faces and the expressions in the black eyes of the Ainus who had arrived, I could not help but notice a great difference between them and the Ainus of surrounding villages. Their beautiful, healthy faces, thick hair, straight and open gaze clearly distinguished the more independent Ainus of the north from those in the south [who were oppressed by the Japanese].”<sup>102</sup> This changed within a few decades, an illustrated newspaper article employing the environmental determinism of Solov’ev to demonstrate that not Sakhalin natives were backward. “Sakhalin nature is more of a stepmother than a mother to man,” he wrote. “She has

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<sup>98</sup> Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, bk. 7, vol. 13: 8. Translated by Mark Bassin in “Turner, Solov’ev, and the ‘Frontier Hypothesis’: The Nationalist Signification of Open Spaces,” *The Journal of Modern History* 65 (Sept. 1993): 497.

<sup>99</sup> “O reforme v sisteme nashikh ugovolnykh nakazanii,” *Birzhevye vedomosti* (St. Petersburg), 18 Aug. 1873, 2.

<sup>100</sup> “Dika, surova tam priroda / (osobenno liudskogo roda).” Poem by P. Trifonov, 12 Mar. 1899, cited in Landau, “Iz proshlogo ostrova Sakhalina,” *Psikhiatricheskie analizy*, no. 6: 11

<sup>101</sup> See Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 73-74.

<sup>102</sup> N.V. Busse, *Ostrov Sakhalin i ekspeditsiia 1853-54 gg.* (*Dnevnik N.V. Busse*) (St. Petersburg: Tip. F.S. Sushchinskago 1872), 86.

not given him the chance to move forward, to progressively develop culturally, and the natives [tuzemtsy] ... to this day remain her backward half-savage sons or stepsons.”<sup>103</sup> In photographs from this time, the Nivkh appear unintelligent and unkempt, giving the impression they were “sleeping with their eyes open,” as noted Ivan Iuvachev, nothing like Busse’s noble savages of the 1850s (Figure 3.3).<sup>104</sup>



Fig. 3.3: Young Nivkhs at the turn of the century.<sup>105</sup>

After Friedrich Engels heard in 1892 about the work of exile ethnographer Lev Shternberg on the marital patterns of the Sakhalin Nivkh, or Giliak, whom he claimed exemplified the tribal stage in the economic development of human civilization as described by Marx, the Nivkh gained worldwide fame as “quintessential savages.” Their alleged system of shared wives, communal ownership of land and lack of agriculture were used to validate Marxist theory, demonstrating that communism and individualism coexisted in the earliest stages of

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<sup>103</sup> Poliakov, “Sakhalin,” 260.

<sup>104</sup> Miroljubov, *Vosem’ let*, 86.

<sup>105</sup> “Gilik [sic] children,” in “Sakhalin, the island of exile: Photograph collection of the Russian island penal colony during the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (created 1894-1905), New York Public Library, Humanities and Social Sciences Library, Slavic and Baltic Division, online at Humanities and Social Sciences Library. Online at <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1207817> (accessed 24 July 2008).

development.<sup>106</sup> Shternberg later revoked his premature findings about group marriage, yet the view of the Nivkh as the empire's most primitive savages remained. Chekhov and other Sakhalin visitors, the majority of whom spent little time with the group, described them in negative and absurd terms. While the multi-national Russian empire consisted of many tribes and nations under Russian dominion, the peoples of Sakhalin, it seemed, did not fit in, refusing Christianity and western-style civilization.<sup>107</sup> Their extinction was therefore inevitable based on the "universal law of the extinction of savages upon contact with cultured races."<sup>108</sup> On Sakhalin, mankind had simply failed to evolve, and the environment was to blame.

Soon the image of Sakhalin as backward and barbarian came to describe not only indigenous peoples but Russian settlers as well. The same "stepmother nature" that hindered the evolution of aborigines prevented Russian progress on the island, in fact leading often to moral and technological regress. Rather than civilized people transforming an empty wilderness, it appeared that Sakhalin corrupted the civilized. Doroshevich used the term "Sakhalinization" [*osakhalinovanie*] to refer to the observed physical and moral decay among the free population.<sup>109</sup> In language remarkably similar to that of Joseph Conrad—whose *Heart of Darkness* had been published serially in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in early 1899—Akif'ev was reportedly told by his guide in September 1900, "You know, I have not been here long, but already I feel myself turning into a beast [*zveret'*]; My supervisor has become a beast completely [*sovsem ozverel*]."<sup>110</sup> Some, it was claimed, went mad.<sup>111</sup> Others had nervous breakdowns or committed suicide.<sup>112</sup> And many—most, it would seem, according to stories

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<sup>106</sup> Bruce Grant, "Empire and Savagery: The Politics of Primitivism in Late Imperial Russia," in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 298-299. The original article by Engels appeared in *Die neue Zeit* 11 (1892), no. 12, Band 2, 373-375.

<sup>107</sup> For discussion of Russian views of the indigenous peoples and criteria for their Russianization, see Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors*, ch. 1-4.

<sup>108</sup> "K voprosu o budushchnosti," 273. See also D. Afanas'ev, "Amurskii krai i ego znachenie," *Morskoi sbornik* 1863, no. 11, pt. 3: 32; Shmidt, "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Vestnik i biblioteka samoobrazovaniia* 1905, no. 18: 565; Gaksbakh, *Sakhalin*, 8, 15.

<sup>109</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 207-208.

<sup>110</sup> I.N. Akif'ev, *Na dalekii sever za zolotom: Iz dnevnika krugosvetnogo puteshestviia 1900 goda* (St. Petersburg: Kommerch. skoropet. Evgeniia Tile, 1902), 171. It is possible that either Akif'ev or his host had read *Heart of Darkness*, as Conrad was well-known in Russia and English ships stopped regularly at Far Eastern ports.

<sup>111</sup> Doroshevich, *Kak ia popal*, 51-52.

<sup>112</sup> Jenny E. de Mayer, *Adventures with God in Freedom and in Bond*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1948), 174; Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 30-31.

circulating at the time—were corrupted morally, such as the former *Golos Moskvyy* editor V.N. Bestuzhev, whom service as a Sakhalin prison warden turned into an “Ataman Buria”—a fierce Cossack out of the lore of Ermak.<sup>113</sup> Chekhov linked moral downfall directly to Sakhalin’s dampness: “Each year has approximately 189 days of precipitation: 107 days of snow and 82 of rain... For entire weeks, the sky is covered with lead-colored clouds, and the bleak weather, which drags on from day to day, seems endless to inhabitants. Such weather disposes one toward depressing thoughts and melancholy drunkenness. Perhaps it was under the influence of the weather that many cold people became harsh and many kind people, weak in spirit, not seeing the sun for whole weeks or even months, lost forever any hope of a better life.”<sup>114</sup>

By the 1890s, the Sakhalin convict was a symbol of Otherness as well, as writers focused on sensational crimes and callous cruelty in the popular press. Earlier descriptions of convicts emphasized their suffering and sorrow, such as the alleged memoir of a vagrant sentenced to Sakhalin in the early 1870s published by the Siberian regionalists, which lamented as “future Sakhalintsy” the innocent settlers apprehended without documents, desperate and scared.<sup>115</sup> Sakhalin’s first exiled laborer, Ivan Lapshin served as the prototypical repentant murderer for whom Sakhalin provided hope and new life.<sup>116</sup> To Dostoevsky and, a decade later, Nikolai Iadrintsev, Siberian exiles represented the “strongest and most talented of the Russian people [*narod*].”<sup>117</sup> Later accounts in contrast focused on convicts’ brutality, escapes and imperviousness to beatings, hunger and cold. The most prominent writer to promote this new image was Doroshevich, who provided graphic descriptions of murderers and their crimes. Part two of his book *Sakhalin (katorga)* provides details of murders of family members and the brutality of convicts on the run accompanied by photographs of cannibals and “Ivans”—the “Sakhalin aristocracy” (Figures 3.4 and 3.5). Other publications followed suit. The Far Eastern

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<sup>113</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 108, 110-111; Memo from Sakhalin military governor Mikhail Liapunov in GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 2158, ll. 17-18.

<sup>114</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 116-117.

<sup>115</sup> “Vospominaniia brodiagi,” in *Sbornik istoriko-statisticheskikh svedenii o Sibirii i sopredel’nykh ei stranakh*, vol. 2, no. 1 (St. Petersburg: Russkaia skoropechatnia, 1875), 1-48. I found one exception to this generalization, the 1865 publication in the Russian Far East of an article about escaped convicts and exiles, some of whom had been working in the Sakhalin coal mines. M. Tolbuzin, “Temnye lichnosti,” *Vostochnoe pomor’e* (Nikolaevsk-na-Amure), 30 Oct. 1865, 130-131; 6 Nov. 1865, 133; 13 Nov. 1865, 142-144.

<sup>116</sup> V.I. Vlasov, *Kratkii ocherk neustroistv, sushchestvuiushchikh na katorge* (n.p., 1873), 22.

<sup>117</sup> F.M. Dostoyevsky, *The House of the Dead* [1862], quoted in N.M. Iadrintsev, *Russkaia obshchina v tiur’mе i ssylke* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A. Morigerovskago, 1872), iv.

*Amurskaia gazeta* in 1897 reported on the sensational murder of two traders by an escaped Sakhalin convict, Nikol’ka Nos (“Nicky the Nose”) who cheerily confessed to dozens of murders and nine escapes and promised lightheartedly to escape again.<sup>118</sup> Other notorious criminals whose stories circulated on the mainland included the “well-known hermaphrodite” Elena Bubelis, whose masculine looks and behavior required that she be held apart from both men and women;<sup>119</sup> and Fedor Shirokoliubov, described as an “inimitable master of the mutilation of corpses.” Shirokoliubov’s “Confession” (*Ispoved’*)—which, in contrast to that of St. Augustine, showed no remorse for his sins—was printed on the mainland three times.<sup>120</sup> Iuvachev, in contrast, tried to counter this portrayal, explaining instead that “the longer I lived on Sakhalin, the more I was convinced that the majority of people here do not have consciences that are asleep. You just have to relate to them warmly, sympathetically, as a person, and they will respond with all their hearts to your attention.” He wrote of a village lad whom he taught to read, who had never left his volost, and who, with fear and trembling, wanted nothing more than to please the warden.<sup>121</sup>

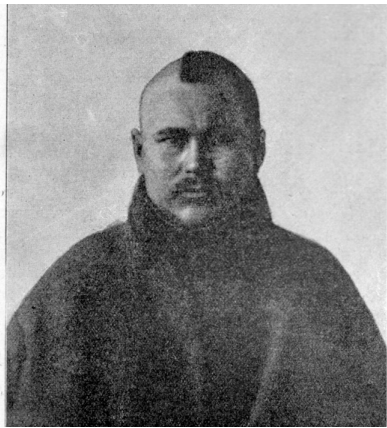


Fig. 3.4: Convict accused of cannibalism<sup>122</sup>

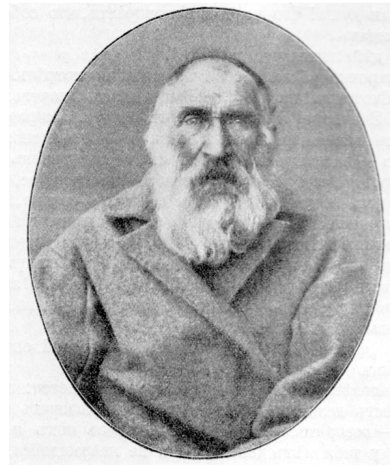


Fig. 3.5: A katorga “aristocrat”<sup>123</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Interv’iuer, “Geroi katorgi (Otkrytie dvoynogo zagadochnogo ubiistva v 1895 godu),” *Amurskaia gazeta* (Blagoveshchensk), 30 Nov. 1897, 1587-1588.

<sup>119</sup> P. Labbe, *Ostrov Sakhalin: Putevye vpechatleniia* (Moscow: Izdanie M.V. Kliukina, 1903), 33; Akif’ev, *Na dalekii sever*, 178.

<sup>120</sup> Fedor Shirokoliubov, “Ispoved’ sakhalskogo katorzhnika,” *Iurist* 1903, nos. 1-33. (Quote from introduction by Russian legal historian Nikolai Novombergskii in no. 1: 5). Reprinted as an appendix to N.Ia. Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin (ocherki sakhalskoi zhizni)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Doma Prizreniia Maloletnikh Bednykh, 1903); serially in *Vostochnoe obozrenie* (Irkutsk), Sept. 1903.

<sup>121</sup> Miroljubov, *Vosem’ let*, 38, 12.

<sup>122</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 2, 57.

## **Redefining Russia**

One function of this othering discourse about Sakhalin was the redefinition of Russianness itself. The establishment of penal colonies on Sakhalin had been part of Tsar-liberator Aleksandr II's redefinition of Russia by means of westernizing the empire, although the resulting chaos and social unrest led Aleksandr III and Nikolai II to reverse the policies of their predecessor, reasserting the conservative values of orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality. Sakhalin, therefore, became a constitutive Other that represented what Russia was not, a means to exclude undesirables—people, places and practices—from Russianness itself. Sakhalin ways were portrayed as antithetical to rather than representative of “real” Russianness. In the context of this struggle between East and West, backwardness and modernity, Sakhalin became a rhetorical place where values could be tested—or contested—as readers imagined brutal Russian prison guards, strict prison regimes and convicts hauling logs through the frozen tundra.<sup>124</sup> The applicability to Russia of Western enlightenment ideals was tested in biting satires on Sakhalin “humaneness” and “correction” of criminals. Ultimately Russian land itself was redefined, as the popular press evoked images of non-Russian Sakhalin in contrast to an ur-Russian heartland. While Said's Orientalism emphasizes the use of knowledge as a means of control, on Sakhalin Orientalist discourse legitimated powerlessness by creating rhetorically a land that could not be colonized, thereby shifting the blame for Russia's failure to exploit its colonial territory from a backward state onto the island itself.

## ***Characterizing the Russian***

As an Other against which a new Russian identity was being constructed, first and foremost came a reimagining of the Russian people. In describing *Sakhalintsy* as incompetent and immoral, the imagined “real” Russian emerged as honest, orderly, capable and trustworthy, in stark contrast to Russians thought to inhabit the streets of St. Petersburg.<sup>125</sup> If *Sakhalintsy*

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>124</sup> These ideas were inspired by John Bender's interpretation of the role of British literature and its portrayal of the penitentiary in shaping eighteenth-century England. John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>125</sup> For example, Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Mark Steinberg, “‘Chernye Maski’; Zrelishcha, obrazy i identichnosti’ na gorodskikh ulitsakh,” in *Kul'tury gorodov Rossiiskoi imperii*, ed. Mark Steinberg and Boris Kolonitskii (St. Petersburg, Evropeiskii dom, forthcoming 2010).

were known for their debauchery [*razvrat*],<sup>126</sup> Russians in contrast must be modest and proper. If prostitution was rampant on Sakhalin,<sup>127</sup> by implication it was rare in Russia. If women on Sakhalin were lazy and disreputable,<sup>128</sup> true Russian peasant women were noble and hardworking. If Sakhalintsy were alcoholics,<sup>129</sup> imagined Russians were sober. Frequent references to the incompetence, immorality and corruption of Sakhalin officials created a picture of Russian *chinovniki* as honest and competent, in stark contrast to the “*bednyi chinovnik*” [poor bureaucrat] of Chekhov or Herzen.<sup>130</sup> This was reinforced by claims that civil servants who had proven themselves incompetent or been disgraced on the mainland were sent to Sakhalin, not just prison personnel but teachers and even priests.<sup>131</sup>

### ***Criticizing the Russian State***

As an Other, Sakhalin also became a vehicle through which Russians could openly criticize the state, participating in a civil society that forced the state to respond. Doroshevich was skilled at this practice as he demonstrated in his *Tales and Legends*, a mockery of Russian officialdom in the guise of a book of Eastern fairy tales.<sup>132</sup> Main Prison Administration officials were aware of this tactic, noting in a confidential memo that Doroshevich “in the guise of humor portrays public figures in caricature form, comparing many in bright colors with characters from novels, comedies and dramas.”<sup>133</sup> Applying the same technique to Sakhalin, Doroshevich described Sakhalin prison wardens as “absolute nobodies, who suddenly have tremendous power, and ‘stuff themselves’ [*ob’edatsia*] with it.”<sup>134</sup> He was taken to court for libel by former Due

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<sup>126</sup> Akif’ev, *Na dalekii sever*, 167; “Patronat: Ocherk deiatel’nosti Obshchestva popecheniia o sem’iakh ssyl’no-katorzhnykh za 10 let,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 9, no. 10 (Dec. 1901), 506; D.A. Dril’, “Ssylka i katorga v Rossii. Iz lichnykh nabliudenii vo vremia poezdka v Priamurskii krai i Sibir,” *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii* 1898, no. 4: 157.

<sup>127</sup> Akif’ev, *Na dalekii sever*, 167; Dril’, “Ssylka i katorga v Rossii,” 154.

<sup>128</sup> For example, “O polozhenii ssyl’nykh zhenshchin i semeistv na o. Sakhaline,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 9 (August 1901), 277-295; Akif’ev, *Na dalekii sever*, 167; Dril’, “Ssylka i katorga v Rossii,” 155.

<sup>129</sup> Turist, “Zametki o Sakhaline,” *Vostochnyi vestnik* (Vladivostok), 19 Dec. 1903, 2-3; A.D. Davydov, “Meditsinskie ocherki sakhalinskoi katorgi,” *Ezhenedel’nik zhurnala “Prakticheskaiia meditsina,”* 1895, no. 31: 457.

<sup>130</sup> See for example A.P. Chekhov, “Smert’ chinovnika” [1883], in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 2, *Rasskazy; Iumoreski*, ed. M.L. Semanova (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 164-166. To Alexander Herzen, *chinovniki* were “one of the most miserable results of the Petrine revolution.” Aleksandr Gertsen, *Byloe i Dumy* [1854], in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8 (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1956), 252, 256.

<sup>131</sup> For example, Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 108, 110-111.

<sup>132</sup> See in particular Vlas Doroshevich, “Chego ne mozhet sdelat’ Bogdykhan,” [1902] in *Skazki i legendy* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhnika, 1983), 49-51.

<sup>133</sup> [M.N. Liapunov(?)], *Spravka po glavnomu tiuremnomu upravleniiu*. GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 2158, l. 16.

<sup>134</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 218.

prison warden Aleksei Feldman, whom Doroshevich had described as cowardly and brutal.<sup>135</sup> In response to the lawsuit Doroshevich wrote in *Odesskii listok*: “I knew in advance that I would be forced to undergo no small fight over my essays with all those gentlemen, whose ignorance, backwardness [*nerazvitie*], coarseness and at times brutality has transformed Sakhalin from a place of correction and moral renewal of criminals—the goal of the government, upon which millions [of rubles] are being spent—into hell.”<sup>136</sup> When the case went to court, Doroshevich was acquitted.<sup>137</sup> It was not libel to describe such behavior in the context of Sakhalin.

A Sakhalin practice that generated particular criticism was corporal punishment, which had been greatly limited in Russia by the 1863 reforms although still permitted in the context of exile. In Abby Schrader’s view, “officials hoped that, by circumscribing corporal punishment, they would keep floggings from disrupting the social order yet retain the ability to use differential penal languages to demarcate social boundaries.”<sup>138</sup> Yet on Sakhalin, neither order was maintained nor social boundaries defined, as officials flogged indiscriminately—occasionally even political and women exiles—and writers shared the details with the empire. Doroshevich’s sketches were full of sensationalized pictures of officials hungry for the lash, including Fedor Livin, who allegedly ordered a convict beaten early Easter morning (“While some are singing ‘Christ is Risen,’ others are beating me on the ‘mare’,” noted a convict), and physician V.A. Surminskii, who spoke of the rod as if he were adding spices to a meal. (“With what relish he spoke the word ‘*vzbryznut*’ [literally, ‘sprinkle’],” referring to the “sprinkling” of a naked body with a lash or rod).<sup>139</sup> Several years after Doroshevich’s visit, Staff Captain L. Merzhanov described the behavior of Sakhalin officials as even more violent: “People here flog [*sekut*] all the time for any sort of reason. For example, two carpenters are flogged for drinking vodka on a cold day.”<sup>140</sup> Chekhov made a similar claim, citing official statistics indicating 265 convicts had been punished with rods in 1889, but that “in fact, nowhere near all of those punished corporally are recorded.... In [Tymovsk and Korsakovsk] okrugs several people are

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<sup>135</sup> A. Feldman, “O Sakhaline g. Doroshevicha (Pis’mo v redaktsiu), *Novorossiiskii telegraf* (Odessa), 2(14) Dec. 1897, 1; Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 212. Doroshevich expressed his views of Sakhalin civil servants on pt. 1, pp. 189-225.

<sup>136</sup> Doroshevich, “Za den’.”

<sup>137</sup> “Sudebnaia khronika: Literatura i katorga,” *Smolenskii vestnik*, 1 Dec. 1900, no. 265: 3-4.

<sup>138</sup> Schrader, *Languages of the Lash*, 182.

<sup>139</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 2, 196; pt. 1, 55.

<sup>140</sup> “Chto delaetsia na Sakhaline,” *Russkie vedomosti* (Moscow), 4 Mar. 1901, 3.

beaten each day, in Korsakovsk sometimes even tens [of people]. Any ordinary offence can serve as grounds to give someone thirty or one hundred strikes with the rod: not finishing their daily work assignment, ... drunkenness, rudeness, disobedience..."<sup>141</sup> Flogging, reformers claimed, was an Asian practice, so it had a natural place in the Sakhalin of the Russian imagination.<sup>142</sup> Yet the fact that Russia could not—or chose not to—end corporal punishment on Sakhalin, made Sakhalin the victim of a weak or a cruel state.

The harshest attack on the Russian state resulted from an incident that took place deep in the Sakhalin forest in 1892. Vasilii Khanov, a former convict later hired as a prison overseer, and his assistant Egor Murashev, tortured and killed up to one hundred convict laborers in what became known as the Onor Road incident, which gained widespread attention in the international press. Under Khanov, convicts clearing a road near the settlement of Onor were overworked and deprived of food. As a result, they were unable to meet the demands of their supervisors, for which they were punished with beatings and further withholding of rations. Violence broke out among convicts over the meager food allotted, and there were reports of cannibalism to prevent starvation. (Doroshevich published photographs of several of the “Onor cannibals.”) After several convicts escaped from the work site and made their way through the woods to the nearest settlement, political exiles began a campaign to publicize the events and force the state to take action. While island authorities did their best to cover up the situation, the case was eventually brought to trial.<sup>143</sup> This single incident likely did more to shame the state and reform the penal system than did years of petitions by jurists and statesmen.

### ***Questioning European Modernity***

Emerging descriptions of Sakhalin reflect also the angst of urbanization and social change as Sakhalin became a laboratory of discourse in which the consequences of such changes could be imagined. The Orientalizing of Sakhalin corresponded with Vitte’s campaign for rapid industrialization and the resultant urbanization and breakup of families. While Sakhalin’s

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<sup>141</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 459-460.

<sup>142</sup> Schrader, *Languages of the Lash*, 150-151.

<sup>143</sup> See *Vladivostok*, 15 Aug. 1893, 7; *Obitatel’*, “Eshche ob onorskom dele,” *Vladivostok*, 21 Nov. 1893, 10; N.S. Lobas, *Katorga i poselenie na ostrove Sakhaline (neskol’ko shtrikhov iz zhizni russkoi shtrafnoi kolonii)* (Pavlograd: Tipografiia V.N. Shimkovicha, 1903), 54-63; Mikhail Finnov, “‘Mrachnoe onorskoe delo’: Po stranitsam knigi A.P. Chekhova ‘Ostrov Sakhalin’,” in *Ostrov Chekhova: Ot Melikhova do Sakhalina: liudi, sud’by, vstrechi* (Moscow: Kniga, 1990), 227-255. The records of the case are at RGIA DV, f. 1133, op. 1, d. 838, on microfilm at GASO, MF 253. Doroshevich’s description of the event, along with photographs of accusers and accused, are in Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 2, 54-67.

planned settlements with straight streets were modern and rational, observers found them artificial, springing up unnaturally, creating lifeless, constrictive and silent villages lacking even children or domestic animals.<sup>144</sup> As liberal society on the mainland spoke of equality and representative government, on Sakhalin social classes mixed and mingled regularly, baronesses and princes were deprived of their former status and murderers were in positions of power.<sup>145</sup> Even exiled revolutionaries served as advisors to the tsarist state.<sup>146</sup> Sakhalin was a place where liberal values could be tested in the imagination before being adopted at home. Referring to a concert in which engineers, civil servants, a convict's wife, murderers and administrators performed for an equally diverse audience, Ivan Akif'ev remarked that it was "strange, somehow even eerie [*zhutko*], but at the same time pleasant, knowing that there is something that can unite these [opposite] poles, that even for a few minutes the difference in position can disappear."<sup>147</sup> Yet not everyone viewed it as positive. The story is told of a prince, for example, serving as a naval officer, who voiced his disapproval by refusing to visit the ships' lounge during its stay at Sakhalin in order to avoid socializing with the educated exiles invited on board as members of Sakhalin society.<sup>148</sup>

Doroshevich's editorials from Sakhalin indicate his own ambivalence toward enlightenment modernity. Himself educated, his writing nonetheless mocks the enlightenment project, associating it with abuse and suffering in the name of progress. Referring to a convict desensitized to pain walking away from a flogging with a grim smile, he wrote, "Not long ago, on the porch in the early morning, I could hear cries and groans coming from the prison yard. But *tempora mutantur...* [sic]. The winds of our great humane era are seen even on Sakhalin." By using the Latin for "times are changing" he drew attention to the underside of progress, mocking the corporal punishment of the "great humane era." Nonetheless, he did not give up on modernity. In another editorial he lamented the departure from the island of many of those civil servants who were humane, educated and devoted to the cause, who had come with modern

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<sup>144</sup> "Zhizn' novykh selenii," 56.

<sup>145</sup> Doroshevich took particular interest in the abolition of mainland hierarchies and establishment of a "katorga aristocracy." Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 2, 67-76, 100-107.

<sup>146</sup> For example Bronislav Pilsudskii, commissioned to advise the Far Eastern administration on policy toward indigenous subjects. Bronisław Piłsudski [Bronislav Pilsudskii], "Wants and needs of the Sakhalin Nivhgu," [1898] translated in *The Collected Works of Bronisław Piłsudski*, vol. 1, *The Aborigines of Sakhalin*, ed. Alfred F. Majewicz (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 114.

<sup>147</sup> Akif'ev, *Na dalekii sever*, 158-159.

<sup>148</sup> Letter of Ivan Manucharov, 10 May 1910, OR RGB, f. 219, op. 1281, d. 8, ll. 10ob-11.

ideals about changing the world: “How many people have run away from here, people who had arrived burning with desire do all they could to help the suffering.... Such people, people of knowledge, people of action, enlightened people, humane people, honest people, with sensitive, kind and sympathetic hearts—these people are exactly what Sakhalin needs.”<sup>149</sup>

In the writing of Doroshevich, the word “humane” itself was applied in a multiple contexts as if the author were testing its applicability in various situations. Often the word itself, a variation of “*gumannyi*” [humane] or “*gumannost*” [humaneness] was used in quotation marks, evidence of Doroshevich’s questioning or skepticism. In his typical sensational manner, Doroshevich wrote about how prison officials described the doctors as “humane,” claiming that the word “humane” [*gumannyi*] was the most offensive word on the island! The word was used as a verb—“*gumannichat*”—to act in a humane manner. Doroshevich quoted a surveyor describing one of the Sakhalin doctors: “*Gumannichaet!*—The word sounds half-suspicious, half-accusing, as if the person were ‘ruining katorga’, and to a Sakhalin civil servant, there is no accusation more fearsome than the accusation that he ‘*gumannichaet*’.” According to Doroshevich, one prison warden bragged that he was a “born jailor,” a “*razgil’deevets*” whose father had also been a prison warden, and who remembered the Razgil’deev era at the Kara mines. “We’re not gentlemen [*bare*], who spread humaneness!”<sup>150</sup> Doroshevich leaves the readers to respond to the provocation, to decide for themselves whether a good prison warden could be a gentleman or humane. Chekhov as well, while less often and in a less sarcastic manner, called into question the “so-called humane measures” for treating criminals. For Chekhov the problem was not that they failed to work, but that the Sakhalin administration refused to apply them.<sup>151</sup>

### ***Defining Russian land***

The rhetorical rejection of Sakhalin signifies a change in the understanding of Russian land as well. As Christopher Ely demonstrates, in the late imperial period, to many Russians

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<sup>149</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 44, 27.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 197, 221. Ivan Razgil’deev was a mining engineer from East Siberia in charge of the Kara gold mines (1850-52) and the Nerchinsk factories (1852-56). He was known for his willfulness and the harshness of his regime, as well as keeping mines running day and night to increase productivity.

<sup>151</sup> Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 311, 495.

landscape was a means of “identifying and asserting Russian nationality.”<sup>152</sup> This argument is supported by the transforming imagery of Sakhalin against which one finds a striking change in how Russian landscape was understood. While in the 1850s Sakhalin’s rich, untamed taiga and wild shoreline indicated wealth and potential in its rich forests, abundant coal, and excellent fishing—just what Russia was looking for as it expanded eastward—three decades later, if Sakhalin was to Russia an Other, true Russianness was found on the steppe, not the taiga, farmed by traditional peasants rather than awaiting modern industrialization. The new version of Russia was seen as healthy, flat, temperate and safe, in contrast to Sakhalin’s roaring seas, sheer cliffs, and pernicious winters. With Sakhalin as its antithesis, Russianness implied that the skies were clear rather than gray, and that there were no dangerous beasts hiding in thick dark forests. Those listening would hear songs of birds rather than howling winds and rumbling trees.<sup>153</sup> Similar to Solov’ev, Korolenko and Chekhov, Nikolai Vagner argued in 1873 that the “national landscape,” inextricably linked to national character, consisted in “those locations in which [the nation] developed and took form.”<sup>154</sup> While at one time the entire landmass had been seen as belonging to Russia and creator of Russians, by the end of the century, the authentic Russian landscape was that of an imagined ur-Russia, the Russian steppe: harmless, hospitable, and open, untouched by imperial expansion.

Perhaps the most compelling redefinition of all was the labeling of Sakhalin as east, which made Russia—or at least European Russia—unquestionably west. Voyages from European Russia—Odessa—to Sakhalin reinforced in Russian minds the distance between the two, and by the late nineteenth century Sakhalin was frequently referred to as a “distant eastern borderland,” the “uttermost east,” and even the “edge of the world.”<sup>155</sup> While Solov’ev’s “stepmother nature” had granted the Slavs a vast eastern plain, as Russia’s antitype, Sakhalin’s “utter” easternness placed Russia, in comparison, in the West.

But Sakhalin was east not only in comparison to Russia; any direction from Sakhalin was West. Traveling westward from Sakhalin led to the West, as travelers arrived in Moscow or St.

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<sup>152</sup> Christopher David Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 194.

<sup>153</sup> Willard Sunderland discusses the process through which the steppe was transformed from an alien *okraina* to the core of the nation in *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>154</sup> N.P. Vagner, “Peizazh i ego znachenie v zhivopisi,” *Vestnik Evropy* 8 (April 1873): 760.

<sup>155</sup> Shcherbak, “Perevozka,” 240; Hawes, *In the Uttermost East*; Novitskaia, *Na kraiu sveta*, 2.

Petersburg. But those sailing eastward found themselves in the West as well when they arrived in San Francisco. Even Japan, Sakhalin's neighbor to the geographic south, belonged to the West, rapidly modernizing after its 1868 Meiji Restoration.<sup>156</sup> Brodovich noted in *Russkie vedomosti* that on Sakhalin "a cold, disparaging wind blew constantly [westward] from the east almost all year.... [so that] birch and cedar bushes grow, stretching their small branches to the west ... Everything on the island strives toward the west; and it is from the west that its inhabitants look to improve their fate."<sup>157</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite four decades of systematic exploration by specialists of all kinds, by the 1890s Sakhalin was to Russia a "terra incognita," a land left blank which Russians could fill in as they pleased. Such was the observation of Sakhalin physician V.Ia. Stsepenskii, who wrote in 1898, "Sakhalin to the metropole is a *terra incognita*, write whatever you want (and that has been happening a lot lately) and everyone believes it."<sup>158</sup> To those wishing to define Russianness in an era of change, Sakhalin became the Other against which Russia identity could be constructed. For those discontent with an antiquated state, Sakhalin provided a place for Russian policy or bureaucracy to be questioned, criticized, or condemned. For Russians struggling with European modernity, Sakhalin as a literary construct became a laboratory of discourse in which ideas could be imagined and tested in the minds of their readers. Rather than using Western knowledge to define and control its colonial space, Orientalist discourse created a land that could not be colonized, blaming the failure of the state on the island itself.

The result of such othering, of course, was an inaccurate portrayal of Sakhalin. A photograph of Post Aleksandrovsk accompanying an article on Sakhalin in *Niva* was mislabeled as *across from*—rather than *on*—Sakhalin Island, as if the St. Petersburg editors did not believe

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<sup>156</sup> Faced with the rapid modernization of Meiji Japan, Americans also viewed Japan as western, some even claiming that the Japanese were in fact white, like Anglo-Saxons. The Russians, in contrast, were grouped with the Ainu as backward. See Joseph M. Henning, *Outposts of Civilization: Race, Religion, and the Formative Years of American-Japanese Relations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 161-162. Already in 1873, *Golos* had identified Japan as economically Western, claiming that in an economic sense, Sakhalin, too, "gravitates toward the West, to industrial Japan, rather than toward the East, to little-settled Siberia." *Golos* (St. Petersburg), 28 Jun. 1873, 1.

<sup>157</sup> Brodovich, "Poezdka na Sakhalin," *Russkie vedomosti*, 11 Oct. 1899, 3.

<sup>158</sup> V.Ia. Stsepenskii, introduction to *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.* (Post Aleksandrovskii: Pечатano v Tipografii na ostrove Sakhaline, 1898), n.p.

the typical Russian village in the photo could be on Sakhalin itself (Figure 3.6).<sup>159</sup> As late as 1905, it was assumed that the mountains of Sakhalin hid not only coal and oil, but marble, granite and meerschaum; and that tigers could be spotted roaming the land.<sup>160</sup> (The island had no marble, granite, meerschaum or tigers.) An unforeseen consequence of such portrayal, in the West Sakhalin came to represent Russia in its entirety. Word of the Onor Road atrocities was transmitted to the European press, which reported the incident not as the backwardness or barbarism of Russia's distant colony, but as representative of Russia itself. The *New York Times*, which credits the St. Petersburg correspondent of the London *Standard*, deserves quoting at length:

The report of the commission of inquiry into conditions at the convict station at Onor, Saghaliën, reveals numerous instances of merciless floggings and of fingers and arms lopped off with sabres. Cannibalism, prompted by famine, is a common occurrence. Murder, followed by cannibalism, is frequently committed, solely with a view to procuring execution as a termination of the misery of life.... During 1892 almost a continuous string of convoys with mutilated corpses passed from Onor to Rykovskaya, where the officials reside. No inquiries were made, but the bodies were forthwith buried. Neither of the two doctors in Rykovskaya ever visited Onor.<sup>161</sup>

Likewise, the *Illustrated London News* used Sakhalin to demonstrate the “utmost brutality [of] a debased and corrupt officialdom,” where “murder is an every-day occurrence” and “the traveller's way is everywhere beset with perils from wandering bands of escaped convicts.”<sup>162</sup> Rimskii-Korsakov's 1853 paradise had turned all of Russia into hell.

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<sup>159</sup> “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Niva* 1897, no. 47: 1117. A reviewer on Sakhalin noticed the discrepancy. “Bibliografiia,” in *Sakhalinskii Kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. II, 200-201.

<sup>160</sup> Labbe, “Pod nebom Sakhalina,” *Priroda i liudi* 1905, no. 33: 520; Shmidt, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Vestnik i biblioteka samoobrazovaniia* 1905, no. 18: 562.

<sup>161</sup> “Fresh Horrors from Russia: Convicts follow Murder by Cannibalism and Are Anxious to Die,” *New York Times*, 10 Feb. 1894, 5.

<sup>162</sup> “The Russian Penal Settlement in Saghaliën,” *Illustrated London News*, 25 Oct. 1902, 610.

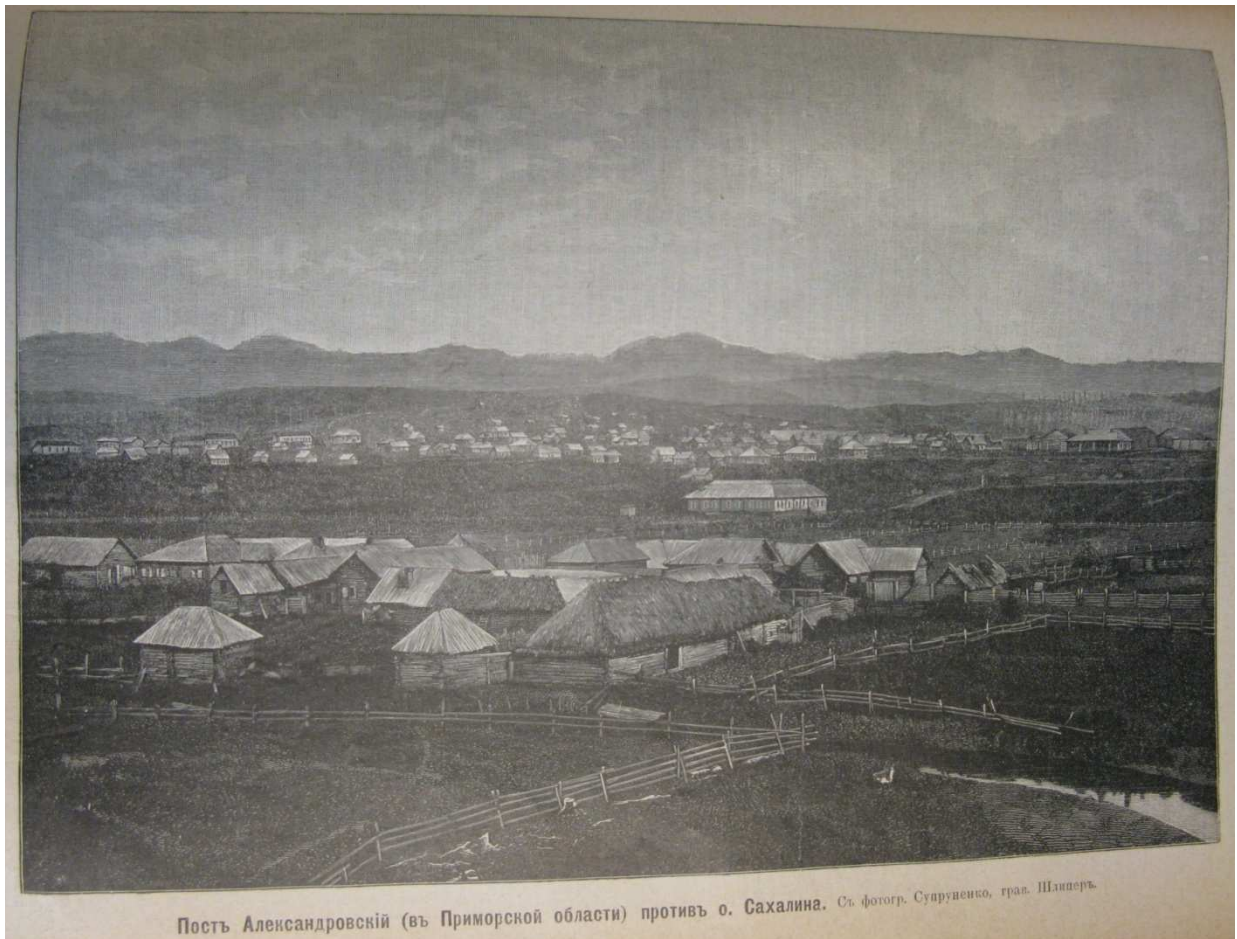


Fig. 3.6: Photo of Post Aleksandrovskii from *Niva*, mislabeled “Post Aleksandrovskii (in the Primorskaia oblast), across from Sakhalin Island.”<sup>163</sup>

<sup>163</sup> “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Niva* 1897, no. 47: 1117.

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**RE-ORIENTING SAKHALIN: RESPONSES OF THE STATE, SOCIETY AND**  
**SAKHALINTSY**

On the Russian mainland, Sakhalin fulfilled an important discursive role as a colonial Other by reinforcing Russia's position as a European power. Yet the reimagining of Sakhalin as wild and barbarian incited controversies over the identity, literary representation and politics of both Sakhalin as a colony and Russia overall. Some argued that the image was harmful to the state's reputation and strove to control the information circulating about the island and its regime. On the other hand, a widespread fear of Sakhalin served a distinct social purpose: the ever-present image of the "island of tears" deterred crime and reinforced compliance with social norms. Perhaps most remarkably, given the diversity of the population, Sakhalintsy themselves—penal officials, military officers, civil servants, entrepreneurs, and even educated convicts—united to assert their own claim on the island's representation, both countering the predominant images repeated in the press and subverting the power of the colonial discourse. Its imagined cultural and geographic inaccessibility made Sakhalin more significant, rather than less, as Sakhalin took on new meanings both in response to and in spite of the efforts of the state.

**Responses of the State**

The divergent and even contradictory responses of state and society to the image of Sakhalin in the press demonstrate diverse views in the Russian metropole itself, with simultaneous attempts to tighten and relax control of information and of its imperial subjects. The widespread reports of abuse, corruption, incompetence and misery on Sakhalin—some by authoritative sources based on eyewitness testimony, others perpetuating unfounded rumors and blatant embellishment of facts—spurred the state and society to action. Responses took a variety of forms, including increased efforts to make the colony legible and known, calls for reform based on notions of justice and human dignity, and control of information made available to the public. Yet just as internal disagreement over how to settle Sakhalin had delayed the establishment of penal colonies in the 1860s-1870s, disagreement over how to respond to the press hindered efforts to resolve reported problems.

### *Control of information*

The immediate response of the tsarist state in the 1890s to the proliferation of both truth and falsehood about Sakhalin was to assert its authority over information. It restricted travel to Sakhalin and pared print representations of the island, reinstating censorship and authoritarian control that had been relaxed since the Great Reforms. The regulation of mail from Sakhalin gained new importance as Sakhalin gained international visibility.<sup>1</sup> Letters from convicts to the mainland were to be submitted to the island administration unsealed and each envelope was marked “inspected” and signed by the civil servant who approved it.<sup>2</sup> Those providing information to the press went to great lengths to ensure that their material would reach its goal, smuggling correspondence off the island with sailors, merchants and sympathetic civil servants. In 1892, Lev Shternberg wrote a booklet detailing the suicide of fellow political exile Petr Dombrovskii, which an English sea captain smuggled abroad wrapped in an article of Ainu fish-skin clothing. To the consternation of the Russian state, the brochure was published in London, anonymously, the next year.<sup>3</sup>

After the publication of Shternberg’s booklet, along with reports of the Onor Road atrocities appearing in the foreign press in 1893-94,<sup>4</sup> the Sakhalin administration attempted to prevent foreigners on visiting ships from traveling inland or visiting government institutions and prevented some from disembarking altogether. After a British sea captain complained to Priamur Governor General Dukhovskoi about his sailors being refused permission to come to shore at Korsakovsk, N.I. Grodekov, Dukhovskoi’s deputy, ruled that while foreign sailors could not be prevented from coming ashore when their ships were loading coal, all visitors—Russian and foreign alike—were officially prohibited from visiting prisons or speaking to convicts.<sup>5</sup> The impossibility of enforcing these regulations became clear in numerous publications of the time,

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<sup>1</sup> Delo kantseliarii priamurskogo general-gubernatora o nadzore za korrespondentsiei gosudarstvennykh prestupnikov i ob izmenenii poriadka vydachi korrespondentsii ssyl’nykh o. Sakhalina (1899). RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 1, d. 120.

<sup>2</sup> See I.P. Mirolubov [Iuvachev], *Vosem’ let na Sakhaline* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A.S. Suvorina, 1901), 72-73.

<sup>3</sup> [L.Ia. Shternberg], *P.K. Dombrovskii: Revoliutioner-samouchka* (London: Izdanie fonda russkoi vol’noi pressy, 1893); See also N.I. Gagen-Torn, *Lev Iakovlevich Shternberg* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975), 79.

<sup>4</sup> See for example *The Sun* (New York), 25 July 1893; “Fresh Horrors from Russia: Convicts follow Murder by Cannibalism and Are Anxious to Die,” *New York Times*, 10 Feb. 1894, 5. The role of the foreign media in uncovering this abuse was emphasized in the journal *Obrazovanie* [Education] in 1903. M. Kamnev, “Novaia kniga o katorge,” *Obrazovanie* 1903, no. 7, sec. 2: 62.

<sup>5</sup> Telegram from N.I. Grodekov to V.D. Merkazin, 1 Sept. 1895; letter from N.I. Grodekov to V.D. Merkazin, 16 Sept. 1895, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 7, d. 23, ll. 25, 26-26ob.

in particular, anonymous correspondence from Sakhalin in Far Eastern newspapers.

The concern of prison officials about the spread of information is evident in state attempts to hinder Vlas Doroshevich's travels to and writing about Sakhalin. When Doroshevich began planning his journey, he encountered hindrances that had not previously been in place. In January 1897, exhibiting his typical flair for the dramatic, he petitioned "His Excellency Master Director of the Main Prison Administration Chamberlain of the Court of His Imperial Majesty Actual State Councilor Aleksandr Petrovich Salomon" for authorization to travel to Sakhalin and inspect whichever prisons and settlements the state deemed possible. "The goal of my journey," he wrote, "is the study of the step-by-step process of transforming convicted criminals into peaceful settlers, colonists and laborers. Such description... should counter the mass of false legends connected with views of 'katorga,' and bring to light the humane measures taken by law to transform criminal members of society into productive laborers, and I must hope, will serve the purpose of instruction, clearly showing the regeneration of the person through labor, ... patience, and obedience." He reassured Salomon that his writing would appear exclusively in the legally-published *Odesskii listok*, and that he was Russian, of noble heritage, Orthodox and had never been charged with a political or criminal offense.<sup>6</sup> Salomon responded that there was no law against visiting Sakhalin and that, therefore, no special permission was needed. By law, entrance to places of confinement could be granted only to those with philanthropic or scientific purposes.<sup>7</sup>

Doroshevich's petition probably did more harm than good to the cause of investigative journalism. Salomon realized that forbidding the journey or hindering Doroshevich's choice of ship would "give the newspaper cause to think that the government has reasons to cover up the real situation on Sakhalin, which in reality is not true." Instead, he placed no hindrance upon Doroshevich's travel, but forbade access to prisons, convicts, and any official records, allegedly out of concern for the criminals' privacy.<sup>8</sup> He wrote to P.F. Iur'ev, Chair of the Committee of the Voluntary Fleet, expressing concern that reporters in Odessa were gaining access to files concerning convicts transported on the ships and requesting that officers and crew be reminded that such documents were confidential and that no contact between convicts and passengers was

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<sup>6</sup> Letter of Vlas Doroshevich to A.P. Salomon, 9 Jan. 1897, GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 2158, ll. 9-9ob.

<sup>7</sup> Draft of letter of A.P. Salomon to V.M. Doroshevich, 12 Feb. 1897, GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 2158, ll. 10-10ob.

<sup>8</sup> Confidential letter to Odessa police chief P.A. Zelenyi from director of the Main Prison Administration A.P. Salomon, GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 2158, l. 3.

permitted. He wrote a similar letter to the inspector in charge of the transit of prisoners and informed the military governor of Sakhalin of the “unconditional prohibition against allowing any outsiders access to places of confinement, and Mr. Doroshevich in particular.” (According to a note in the Main Prison Administration file, it was never confirmed that the military governor actually received this message.)<sup>9</sup>

Doroshevich, however, like other journalists and writers of the time, took little heed of official instructions and found ways to access forbidden information. In a small book called *Kak ia popal na Sakhalin* [How I Got to Sakhalin], he described the measures he took to ensure that, as he explained, “If I do see the penal colony, I will see it as it is, and not as it pleases a public servant to show me.” Despite strict orders to avoid contact with convicts on the ship, he bragged about staying abreast of convict life on board, witnessing corporal punishment and even a burial at sea, both of which officials sought to conceal. Civil servants whom Doroshevich met in Vladivostok told him that authorities regretted granting Chekhov permission to visit the island and were unlikely to allow him to see it.<sup>10</sup> If denied, Doroshevich therefore planned to pose as a homeless, nameless vagrant in Vladivostok, the punishment for which, conveniently, was deportation to Sakhalin. Fortunately for him, he did not have to resort to such deception.

The Main Administration for Publishing Affairs also took steps to regulate what was published about Sakhalin. A 48-page brochure about Sakhalin published by the Kharkov Society for the Promotion of the Spread of Literacy was removed from circulation in libraries and reading rooms, deemed “undeserving of approval” and “unsuitable for school libraries or reading rooms for the people.”<sup>11</sup> The newspaper *Odesskii listok* was shut down for two months in mid-1897, allegedly for prior censorship violations, but the closure may have been in fact to hinder the publication of Doroshevich’s material on Sakhalin.<sup>12</sup> In 1902, the Moscow Censorship Committee confiscated the initial print run of 5000 copies of Doroshevich’s book, and the book’s circulation was forbidden in libraries and reading rooms, as well as marketplaces or bookstores,

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<sup>9</sup> GARF, f. 122, op. 6, d. 2158, ll. 5-7, 16a, 16a-ob.

<sup>10</sup> V.M. Doroshevich, *Kak ia popal na Sakhalin* (Moscow: I.D. Sytin, 1903), 5, 41.

<sup>11</sup> A.I. Kostanov, “‘Vospredit’ k obrashcheniiu...’ (k 80-letiiu vykhoda v svet knigi P. Labbe ‘Ostrov Sakhalin. Putevye vpechatleniia,’” *Molodaia gvardiia* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk), 26 Nov. 1983.

<sup>12</sup> S.V. Bukchin, *Sud’ba fel’etonista: Zhizn’ i tvorchestvo Vlasy Doroshevicha* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhnika, 1975), 110.

despite the positive reception of the work in many official publications.<sup>13</sup> In 1904, Nikolai Zverev, the conservative director of the Administration for Publishing Affairs, limited the circulation and sales of the Russian translation of a French book on Sakhalin.<sup>14</sup> As a translation of a foreign author, the 383-page volume had not required preliminary censorship, since regulations exempted translations of more than 320 pages from that requirement. Yet once published, it, too, attracted the attention of censors. Likewise, according to Arkhangel'sk historian Evgenii Ovsiankin, jurist Nikolai Novombergskii's largely critical discussion of the Sakhalin penal colony published in 1903 was removed from circulation and Novombergskii himself was temporarily removed from his position as a civil servant upon its publication.<sup>15</sup>

### *Studying the problems*

Even as attempts were made to hinder the spread of information to the public, interest in the island grew among both the state and society as commissions were created, meetings held and societies formed to address the problems. Soon after the publication of Chekhov's book, Tsar Nikolai II organized a secret conference with his advisors to discuss the issue of penal labor and Sakhalin in response to the attention paid to the issue in recent literature. Before the meeting, lady-in-waiting E.A. Naryshkina presented him with a memo by Sakhalin physician L.V. Poddubskii concerning the situation of women and children on Sakhalin, for which he expressed his appreciation, as official reports were dull and failed to portray the situation well. Naryshkina reported that the tsar was extremely concerned about the issue and remained interested after the meeting, often discussing it with her over breakfast. According to Naryshkina, these unofficial breakfast meetings led to plans for the "total transformation" of the island, interrupted before their implementation by the Russo-Japanese War.<sup>16</sup>

Several state agencies sent representatives to the island to investigate conditions for

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<sup>13</sup> Kostanov, "'Vospredit' k obrashcheniiu..."; Bukchin, *Sud'ba fel'etonista*, 95; S.V. Bukchin, "Kommentarii," in V.M. Doroshevich, *Sakhalin*, vol. 1, ed. S.V. Bukchin (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), 488.

<sup>14</sup> Circular letter to governors from N.A. Zverev, Director of the Main Printing Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 19 Feb. 1904, RGIA DV, f. 1, op. 2, d. 1659, l. 4.

<sup>15</sup> E.I. Ovsiankin, "Rossiiskii istorik Nikolai Novombergskii," in *Formirovanie professional'noi kul'tury budushchego spetsialista: Materialy X oblasnoi studencheskoi nauchnoi konferentsii i V mezhdunarodnykh pedagogicheskikh chtenii, sbornik statei i tezisov*, ed. M.Iu. Ananchenko and P.E. Ovsiankin (Arkhangel'sk: SGMU, 2003), [http://avpu.pomorsu.ru/proect/form\\_cult/p\\_3.htm](http://avpu.pomorsu.ru/proect/form_cult/p_3.htm) (accessed 31 May 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Manuscript of E.A. Naryshkina, Tsarskoe Selo, 1/14 June 1919, no. 1, IRLI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 498, ll. 39-43ob. See also Elizabeth Narishkin-Kurakin, *Under Three Tsars: The Memoirs of the Lady-in-waiting Elizabeth Narishkin-Kurakin* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1931), 157-160.

themselves, with discrepancies among their reports demonstrating conflicting views of the goals of penology and colonization as well as the effectiveness—or ineffectiveness—of the Sakhalin administration at controlling the image presented to the world. Already in 1893 a representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Prince N.S. Golitsyn, traveled to Sakhalin to investigate. The next April (1894), less than six months after the first installment of Chekhov's book appeared in *Russkaia mysl'*, N.I. Grodekov, deputy to the newly-appointed Governor General of the Priamur Region S.M. Dukhovskoi, set off from Khabarovsk. In August of that same year, M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi, director of the Main Prison Administration in St. Petersburg, himself traveled to Sakhalin. A year later, the Main Prison Administration was transferred from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Ministry of Justice, which commissioned prominent criminologist D.A. Dril' to conduct a study of exile as a penal method, including a visit to Sakhalin. A.P. Salomon, appointed head of the Main Prison Administration under the Ministry of Justice, traveled to Sakhalin two years later on a seven-month journey investigating Siberian and Sakhalin prisons, as well as Port Arthur, which Russia had recently obtained from the Chinese and was considering settling with exiles.<sup>17</sup>

Allegations of misconduct on Sakhalin had a very different meaning to the administration of the Priamur Region than they did to St. Petersburg officials. As a regional organ of power, primary concern was about the day-to-day administration of the territory rather than the penal, colonial or symbolic role of the land. To Grodekov the importance was in the practical details rather than the broader objective: Were settlers in fact hungry? Were convicts escaping from Sakhalin to commit crimes elsewhere? Were children on Sakhalin receiving a basic education? While past state visits had often been characterized by ritual or celebration, Grodekov's visit entailed detailed inspections and insistence on discipline and order.

In February 1894, Dukhovskoi commissioned Grodekov to travel to Sakhalin to investigate the “state of affairs” [*polozhenie del*] on the island as soon as travel became possible in the spring. Dukhovskoi insisted that an ordered system of convict labor on Sakhalin was of utmost importance, as was the rapid and permanent settlement of the island. He instructed Grodekov to inspect whatever necessary in order to obtain a “complete picture” of both the

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<sup>17</sup> For discussion of the various investigations, see V.M. Latyshev, “Sakhalin posle A.P. Chekhova (Reviziia sakhalinskoi katorgi generalom N.I. Grodekovym v 1894 godu,” *Vestnik sakhalinskogo muzeia* 7 (2000): 157-162. Salomon's decision to investigate Port Arthur as a destination for Russian exiles was reported in *Amurskaia gazeta* (Blagoveshchensk), 26 July 1898.

island administration and the state of its population, calling Grodekov's attention in particular to the condition of prisons, the preparation of convicts for settlement, and the frequency of escapes, as the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had filed a complaint about convicts fleeing to Japan.<sup>18</sup> Unlike most official visitors, Grodekov visited remote settlements, spoke to exile settlers personally, and even spent the night in a settler's hut. His report to Dukhovskoi confirmed many of the abuses outlined by Chekhov and others. Island director General V.D. Merkazin, he reported, claimed that families accompanying a convict into exile by law shared in his restrictions. "There is no such law," Grodekov reminded Dukhovskoi, who made a note in the margin to ask Merkazin for an explanation. In addition Grodekov suggested that Sakhalin peasants be allowed to sell their homes before resettling on the mainland, contradicting a law in place requiring each settler to build his own cottage. "If we demand that every exile settler builds his own home, then we must also fulfill the other requirement of the law, which says the state is to provide them assistance... The local administration is not providing such assistance to exile settlers... That is how the saying was created: 'True katorga begins not during katorga, but upon release to settlement.'" He also recommended repealing the law recognizing as peasants only those exiles who built homes with a roof of boards, rather than straw, a law that he claimed had no basis.<sup>19</sup>

Grodekov wrote specific responses to allegations reported in the press. He reported that not only were civil servants on Sakhalin given convicts as house servants, but so were military personnel, workers in the telegraph office, medical personnel and free settlers, with a total of 357 convicts serving individuals rather than the hard labor to which they were sentenced. He also investigated the claim that civil servants were heating their homes with coal while convicts were required to gather firewood to heat the prison, in particular since firewood was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain due to forest fires. Finally, he looked into the alleged abuse of the "colonization fund," which he concluded was functioning as a private enterprise, and a very profitable one, such that the manager of its shop needed no additional salary from the state.<sup>20</sup>

Grodekov also investigated allegations against Alimpii Khanov, the overseer whose abuse of convicts building the Onor Road in 1892 was reported as far away as New York.

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<sup>18</sup> Letter from Priamur General Governor S.M. Dukhovskoi to N.I. Grodekov, 18 Feb. 1894, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 1, d. 192, ll. 45-50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 102ob., 103-104ob.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 129-131, 139, 148ob-149.

Notwithstanding the protests of his hosts, Grodekov insisted on visiting Onor, slogging through knee-high mud to get there. Upon arrival he spent the night at the home of an exile, where he made himself available to hear settlers' complaints, rather than staying at the more comfortable cabin of Khanov himself, who remained in his position. Later he requested the file on the investigation, which the administration had been trying to cover up.<sup>21</sup> In his report to Dukhovskoi, he included an 1887 memo from the head of the Korsakovsk region (of Sakhalin) to the Director of Sakhalin Island complaining about Khanov's abuse and immoral behavior. Already at that time he had requested permission to deport Khanov.<sup>22</sup> According to I.P. Iuvachev, soon after Grodekov's departure orders were given to hasten the investigation.<sup>23</sup>

Despite—or more likely because of—his role in the establishment of Sakhalin katorga, the visit of Main Prison Administration director M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi in 1894 fulfilled more of a symbolic purpose than served as an actual investigation. This was Galkin-Vraskoi's second visit, having spent three weeks on the island in 1881 as the new director of the Main Prison Administration, and he chose to conduct a broad survey [*obozrenie*] of the island, rather than an official inspection [*reviziia*] which, he reported to Dukhovskoi, had been rendered unnecessary by Grodekov's detailed investigation.<sup>24</sup> Galkin-Vraskoi's reports on Sakhalin were primarily positive and he made few attempts to look beyond what he was shown. Regarding the living conditions of exiles released to settlement, Galkin-Vraskoi acknowledged that agriculture on Sakhalin and the well-being of settlers had "long occupied public opinion and ... often been the subject of debate," but insisted that there was no reason to continue such discussions, as the problem had been resolved. After describing the grain harvest, he reported that seventy-nine new settlements had been established in the past fifteen years, many of which were "reminiscent of our Russian villages."<sup>25</sup> In response, jurist Nikolai Novombergskii explained the health and well-being of the settlers Galkin-Vraskoi encountered by demonstrating that many settlers in those villages had been receiving state aid for up to fifteen years. Galkin-Vraskoi also

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<sup>21</sup> Miroljubov, *Vosem' let*, 217, 222.

<sup>22</sup> Report from N.I. Grodekov to S.M. Dukhovskoi, 9 June 1894, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 1, d. 192, ll. 195-196ob.

<sup>23</sup> Miroljubov, *Vosem' let*, 224.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi to Priamur General Governor S.M. Dukhovskoi, 18 Sept. 1894, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 4, d. 335, l. 28.

<sup>25</sup> M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi, "Ostrov Sakhalin: Neobkhodimye i zhelatel'nye meropriiatiia (Zapiski nachal'nika glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia M. Galkina-Vraskogo po obozreniiu o. Sakhalina v 1894 godu)," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1895, no. 5 (May): 237-238, 244.

emphasized that many settlers were remaining on Sakhalin rather than migrating to the mainland, some even returning to Sakhalin after having left. He neglected to mention the legal constraints hindering their departure, in particular the stipulation that they could not leave unless they had paid their debts to the state, accumulated through many years of state aid.<sup>26</sup>

Rather than expressing alarm at the disregard of the Sakhalin administration for Russian laws and penal codes, Galkin-Vraskoi defended the habitual departure from policy, arguing that it was necessary due to the island's unusual circumstances. Galkin-Vraskoi had been one of the first in Russia to develop the idea of agricultural colonies for the correction of criminals, one of the main initiators of colonization of Sakhalin with forced labor, and author of the administrative reforms of 1884 that gave the prison administration the power of local authorities.<sup>27</sup> In his report on his 1894 visit, he defended the situation by arguing that it may in fact be necessary to disregard the law so as not to squander the chance to combine penal servitude with colonization. "For that reason and because of the very particular conditions of Sakhalin ... it is necessary for now, at least temporarily, to allow in the business of fulfilling penal servitude those exceptions that, when comparing legal requirements with actual practice and available means, would do the least damage." Yet to those who suggested permitting free enterprise on the island, he emphasized that the primary function of the island was penal: "Above all Sakhalin Island is a convict prison [*katorzhnaia tiur'ma*, i.e., a prison housing convicts sentenced to penal servitude] and exile-settler colony, which is a direct result of serving terms of forced labor." Developing the island's resources by any other means, therefore, could not be permitted.<sup>28</sup>

Four years later, however, the new Main Prison Administration director A.P. Salomon, serving under the Ministry of Justice rather than the Ministry of Internal Affairs, visited Sakhalin himself, coming to very different conclusions about the condition of the island. Salomon's inspection sought to evaluate whether the objectives of Sakhalin penal colonization were being realized and whether the instructions of the Main Prison Administration were being carried out, the primary objective on Sakhalin being to "combine the task of criminal justice with the need of

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<sup>26</sup> N.Ia. Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin (Ocherki sakhalinskoi zhizni)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia doma prizreniia maloletnikh bednykh, 1903), 42.

<sup>27</sup> S.V. Zubov, *M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi – nachal'nik GTU rossiiskoi imperii (1879-1896 gg.)* (Saratov: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo Universiteta, 2000), 35-37.

<sup>28</sup> Galkin-Vraskoi, "Ostrov Sakhalin," 237-238, 254.

the state to settle the region.”<sup>29</sup> Unlike Galkin-Vraskoi, Salomon went out of his way to address specific concerns raised in the press. He conducted a detailed investigation and made his dissatisfaction known to the Sakhalin administration. In a speech to the Sakhalin administration at Post Aleksandrovsk before his departure, he emphasized:

I will say only that the prison system on the island, in terms of both internal order and discipline, concerning all aspects of management and supplies, and of course in terms of work arrangements, cannot be compared with even the poorest places of confinement in European Russia. I will say also that the colonization of the island does not even come close to corresponding to the intentions and plans of the central administration. Behind the beautiful window-dressing of prominent and at first glance well-established villages are hidden disorder and need, and the rotting shell of [the abandoned village of] Daldagan, standing miserably on the barren tundra, bears witness to squandered strength and money spent in vain on experiments in colonization, doomed in their very essence to inevitable failure.<sup>30</sup>

Salomon also addressed the allegations of corruption by emphasizing in his farewell speech two changes that would prevent further abuse of exiles or of funds. First of all, a process of inspection had been established which would help prison administrators not only avoid mistakes in accounting but, “most importantly, ensure the transparency of their actions, which would protect them against any suspicions.” In addition, legal reform was planned for the island which, he clarified, meant more than simply stationing jurists on the island. The new reforms were to “create and strengthen a legal consciousness among the Sakhalin population,” providing a foundation for permanent settlement. He reminded the administration that “the primary influence in this area will not be that of the officers of the court, but you, Sirs, have a large part to play in this important process.”<sup>31</sup>

Rather than drawing a final conclusion regarding the continuation of penal servitude on Sakhalin Island, Salomon’s report restated many of the views held by previous writers, questioning not the capability of Russians to colonize Sakhalin but their ability to know it. Despite thirty years of efforts, Sakhalin was simply not legible enough to rationally colonize it. After spending a month conducting a detailed investigation of all aspects of Sakhalin life, including administration, mining, agriculture, and the correction of criminals, Salomon

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<sup>29</sup> A.P. Salomon, “O. Sakhalin (Iz otcheta byvshego nachal’nika glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia A.P. Salomona) *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 1901): 20.

<sup>30</sup> A.P. Salomon, “Rech’ nachal’nika glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia na o. Sakhaline,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1899, no. 1 (January): 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

concluded only that it was not working. The number of convicts transported, he noted, did not correspond to the number needed for “expedient settlement,” nor did it take into consideration the agricultural capabilities or “suitability for colonization” of individual exiles. Food was bad, buildings were in poor condition, and hospitals were unhygienic. Lack of care for the mentally ill posed a danger to the nearby population. Prisons, mines, roads, and settlements were insufficiently and unsystematically developed. The climate was poor for the kind of agriculture that Russian peasants were familiar with. Not only individual crime was frequent, but that of organized gangs. Civil servants were unable to raise a family there, as the island lacked schools for their children. Yet with all of this data, he concluded that he was unqualified to determine whether the colony’s condition was “due to the impossibility overall of organizing a penal colony, or if the matter was simply poorly administered, and local personnel were incompetent and not always conscientious.” He conceded along with Priamur Governor General Dukhovskoi that it was simply too early to know.<sup>32</sup>

As well as drawing the attention of writers and bureaucrats, the growing prominence of the Sakhalin colony both nationally and internationally attracted scientists, many of whom saw in Sakhalin a laboratory for the study of both mind and body. Many scientists in Russia at this time exhibited an ambiguous relationship with the autocratic state, in service to the state as explorers, advisors or physicians, yet striving for scholarly objectivity free of political or social constraints. The government, likewise, believed science to be an indispensable element of progress and modernization, yet was skeptical of the rational capacity of individuals and wary of their criticism of those in authority.<sup>33</sup> In the decade following Chekhov’s attempt to quantify the island, a number of scholars were dispatched to the island. As they sought to use the island for the advancement of scientific knowledge, the government appropriated their results to advance state ends. At times these goals conflicted, as investigations led to information and interpretations that proved damaging to the state.

The classification and ordering of society was a key emphasis of modern thought in Russia as in the West, and classification of humans into types was just one way that Russians

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<sup>32</sup> A.P. Salomon, “O. Sakhalin (Iz otcheta byvshego nachal’nika glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia A.P. Salomona). Okonchanie,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 9, no. 2 (Feb. 1901): 78-79.

<sup>33</sup> See Alexander Vucinich, *Science in Russian Culture, 1861-1917* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970). The issue is discussed as well in Nancy Mandelker Frieden, *Russian Physicians in an Era of Reform and Revolution, 1856-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

strove to both understand and control the behavior of its deviants. A primary emphasis of Russian criminologists was the classification and control of “criminal types” [*prestupnye tipy*], a concept originated by Cesare Lombroso in Italy and explored by a number of Russian criminologists and physicians. Aware of the first international congress of Criminal Anthropology which took place in Rome in 1885, Galkin-Vraskoi expressed interest in the field if only for the “rich criminal-psychological material” criminal anthropologists gathered, which he hoped to use for the advancement of penology.<sup>34</sup> Russian physician Praskov’ia Tarnovskaia [Pauline Tarnowsky] published a book exploring female offenders through the lens of criminal anthropology already in 1889, classifying types of criminals according to physical characteristics such as deformities of the head and cranium.<sup>35</sup> She pioneered the application of criminal anthropology to female thieves and prostitutes, collaborating with Lombroso during frequent trips to Italy. Well before his 1896 travel to the penal colonies of New Caledonia and Sakhalin Island, leading Russian criminal anthropologist Dmitrii Dril’ published a study entitled *Psychopathological Types and Their Relationship with Crime and Its Different Forms*,<sup>36</sup> claiming that bio-psychological disorders could be transmitted genetically, creating over time a “criminal type” that was, in Lombroso’s terms, best understood as “a caste or race ... marked by certain organic features.”<sup>37</sup>

Commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, Dmitrii Dril’ completed a journey to Sakhalin, Siberia and the French penal colony on New Caledonia in the southwest Pacific in 1896, investigating the broader question of colonization as a penal practice. As a criminologist rather than state official, his investigation focused on the principles behind penal colonization rather than practical steps for penal reform. He concluded that on Sakhalin, there was in fact no labor that could be considered “katorga” [penal servitude] in a punitive sense, but that the most difficult work—mining, road building and hauling wood—was no different from that done by the free population in European Russia. What made labor on Sakhalin difficult was not its quality,

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<sup>34</sup> [M.N. Galkin-Vraskoi], *Mezhdunarodnyi tiuremnyi kongress v Rime, 1885: Otchet glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia ministerstva vnutrennikh del, 1886), 12.

<sup>35</sup> P.N. Tarnovskaia, *Etude Anthropométrique sur les Prostituées et les Voleuses* (Paris: E. Lecrosnier et Babé, 1889).

<sup>36</sup> D.A. Dril’, *Psikhofizicheskie tipy i ikh sootnoshenii s prestupnost’iu i ee raznovidnostiami* (Moscow: Tip. A.I. Mamontova, 1890).

<sup>37</sup> D.A. Dril’, *Prestupnost’ i prestupniki (Ugolovno-psikhologicheskie etiuudy* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Ia. Kanterovicha, 1895), 17.

but the conditions under which it was conducted.<sup>38</sup> More important to Dril', however, were the conditions in which exile settlers lived—former convicts who had finished their terms of “correction” and had been released to settle on the island. On Sakhalin, Dril' visited not only the larger towns such as Aleksandrovsk and Korsakovsk, but also some of the settlements recently built by released convicts in order to better understand the lives of convict-colonists.

Dril''s primary concern was not the physical state of the colony, but the moral and psychological condition of convicts that the exile environment produced. He noted that many criminals were assigned to labor they were neither physically capable of nor trained in, leading to discontent and hopelessness. Private entrepreneurs preferred to hire hardworking Chinese or Japanese laborers. According to G.A. Kramarenko, who employed forty-three Japanese and five Russians at his Sakhalin fisheries, economically it was not profitable for him to hire Russians, even if offered inexpensive convict labor. Even those settlers who seemed successful wished to leave, complaining to him that “You could never make it here without state rations,” and “If my hut were covered in gold, I still would not stay.”<sup>39</sup>

Of even greater concern to Dril' was the moral condition of settlers, in particular the frequency of alcoholism, gambling, prostitution and sexual depravity. He found children—both boys and girls—as young as nine years old being treated for syphilis, women who changed partners at their convenience, and that, in the words of a settler referring to men prostituting family members, “the ones [settlers] who live well are those who have a beautiful wife and daughter; they don't need two cows.” As a long-time exile told him, “People here are ruined, malevolent, they arrive and no one wants to stay... people are lewd. Now they have begun to steal and murder; that happened before, but less often. People here are dead; it smells like death.”<sup>40</sup>

Dril''s concern for penal colonization and the morality of settlers was significantly broader than Sakhalin alone, but was part of an international discussion of the cause of crime and whether convicts were in fact reformable. While most European criminal anthropologists—and many longtime Russian prison guards and overseers—argued that hardened criminals were

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<sup>38</sup> D.A. Dril', *Katorga i ssylka na ostrov Sakhalin, v Priamurskii Krai i v Sibir'* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, 1898), 12.

<sup>39</sup> D.A. Dril', “Ssylka i katorga v Rossii. Iz lichnykh nabliudenii vo vremia poezdki v Priamurskii krai i Sibir',” *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii* 1898, no. 4: 166, 132.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 154, 162.

incorrigible, and despite his own research in the biophysical causes of crime, Dril' argued for the viability of criminal reform. According to Dril', the primary goal of the penal system was to "protect society from the evil of crime," and the most effective method of doing so was correction. Based on his own experience and that of the recently-founded American penitentiaries, he concluded that the only effective means of protecting society from crime were life imprisonment, capital punishment and correction. Due to concerns about the morality of the death penalty and the impracticability of imprisoning large numbers of people for life, correction was the best option.<sup>41</sup> Yet he found that correction was not in fact taking place on Sakhalin, nor in Siberia or New Caledonia. Previously an advocate of exile in the abstract, his travels led him to conclude that in practice, exile seldom led to correction. As he explained, "I used to view it as if in a pure form, a form that can be reproduced in the imagination if you assume other, desirable conditions for its implementation, conditions which do not exist in reality. But the state... must work with exile as it really exists, historically developed under certain conditions of time, place, social development, and the qualities of its potential leaders."<sup>42</sup>

Another scholar concerned with the rehabilitation of criminals was N.S. Lobas, the chief medical doctor of the Aleksandrovskaia region on Sakhalin from 1892-1899, who collected physiological and psychological data on convicts he treated. While Dril' focused on criminal reform, Lobas used his medical training to investigate the cause of crime, believing that only when criminality was understood would it be possible to correct it. In summarizing his findings, he emphasized that his expertise was not in criminology, "in the illumination of which I participate only as an unskilled laborer [*chernorabocheho*]," but that he followed the criminal-anthropological school founded in Italy. Like criminal anthropologists, he regarded the criminal not as a person with a "free will" to commit good or evil, but as "as a degraded human being, psychologically and physically weakened, and therefore little able to withstand the dictates of his instinctive nature." He agreed with Lombroso that it was not evil desire that led to crime, but a "depraved psychological organization" caused by heredity, alcoholism, illness, malnutrition or a poor social environment. On Sakhalin Lobas studied eighty-one murderers, most of whom were so-called "profit murderers" [*korystnye ubiitsy*], whose crimes were for the purpose of robbery. He described profit-oriented murderers as a physiological type characterized by "moral dullness,"

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<sup>41</sup> D.A. Dril', "O primeneniі osnovnykh nachal prinuditel'nogo vospitaniia k vzroslym osuzhdennym," *Zhurnal Ministerstva Iustitsii* 1902 (Sept.): 102, 107.

<sup>42</sup> D. Dril', *Ssylka vo Frantsii i Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie L.F. Panteleeva, 1899), I.

at times even “moral idiocy” [*idiotizm*],<sup>43</sup> the result of a brain structure in which higher brain functions such as empathy were subjected to lower functions such as greed or instinct.<sup>44</sup> He diverged from Lombroso and his followers, however, by refusing to declare anyone a “born criminal,” convinced that when criminals seemed incorrigible, it was only because human knowledge of crime and criminality was limited.<sup>45</sup>

Because of Lobas’s eight-year tenure on the island, where he enjoyed an excellent relationship with many of the convicts he treated, he was able to obtain data unavailable to other scholars, including detailed life stories of many of his patients. The lives of criminals he interviewed varied: rich and poor, male and female, from good families and bad. Yet there were certain things they had in common, including hypersexualized behavior, generally starting at a young age; parents who were mentally ill or substance abusers; and an utter lack of remorse. Likewise, he found those who killed for profit to be generally poor at self-preservation, failing to think ahead to avoid getting caught, such as a murderer who gambled away his spoils before even wiping the blood off his hands. Physically many of the murderers Lobas studied had heart problems, which he suggested may have been connected to their parents’ alcoholism, and 66% had abnormalities in the formation of their skull. Based on these examples he concluded that criminality in fact had physical causes and was similar to mental illness. It did not surprise him that criminals and mentally ill often came from the same family. This did not mean, however, that criminals were untreatable. Emphasizing that every criminal has good traits as well as evil, he concluded that “the essence of the correction of criminals, in my opinion, consists in searching for the [good] qualities, and drawing them forth... and cultivating them... and then the criminals’ negative traits will gradually die away, atrophy (as the well-worn road existing for criminally-desired acts becomes overgrown).”<sup>46</sup> Yet Lobas limited himself to personal observations rather than proposing concrete methods of implementing his ideas.

Perhaps the scientist who best navigated the rocky path between service to science and to the tsar was psychiatrist Lev Landau, who worked on Sakhalin from 1896-1900. He is primarily known as the founder of a psychiatric ward on Sakhalin, the result of widespread allegations of

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<sup>43</sup> N.S. Lobas, *Ubiitsy (Nekotorye cherty psikhofiziki prestupnikov)* (Moscow: Tipografiia I.S. Sytina, 1913), 5, 11, 15.

<sup>44</sup> N. Lobas, “Nekotorye cherty iz psikhofiziki prestupnikov (predvaritel’noe soobshchenie),” *Vrachebnaia gazeta* 1904, no. 2: 49-50.

<sup>45</sup> Lobas, *Ubiitsy*, 15-16.

<sup>46</sup> Lobas, “Nekotorye cherty,” *Vrachebnaia gazeta* 1904, no. 1: 8; no. 2: 49-51; no. 3: 78-79.

the neglect of exiles who had gone insane. The issue of care for the mentally ill had been raised in 1894 after the visits of Grodekov and Galkin-Vraskoi and a committee was established in St. Petersburg in 1896 to study the problem. It was not until February 1897 that a psychiatric unit was established under Landau's supervision, treating 160 patients during its first year.<sup>47</sup> By all accounts, Landau was the most successful of the liberal reformers serving on Sakhalin.

According to S.A. Tsion, who visited for two months in the late 1890s, under Landau the mentally ill received better care than patients in any of the other medical wards on the island.<sup>48</sup> Landau founded a library for his patients, with 170 books, and private donations allowed them to enjoy Christmas and Easter celebrations. Some of the mentally ill were taken for walks around the settlement, and those who could work were employed in a special workshop established for them or allowed to do agricultural or other work.<sup>49</sup>

As a scholar and physician, Landau was devoted to science as well. While maintaining his official position as psychiatrist, he also conducted research on mentally ill convicts, as well as gathering ethnographic data such as photographs, models, and artifacts from Nivkh, Ainu and exile communities, which he donated to museums in St. Petersburg upon his return. A detailed report of his work with the mentally ill was published in the *Sakhalinskii kalendar* for 1898, compiling statistics and comparing them with rates of mental illness in Russia overall as well as various European countries, and discussing future plans, including possible establishment of a "psychiatric colony."<sup>50</sup> A response by an anonymous *Sakhalinets* in the newspaper *Vladivostok*, however, questioned his statistics and personal impressions, asserting that they were based on insignificant evidence and unscientific data, and wondering whether an outsider could know Sakhalin at all.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, during his three years on Sakhalin he collected data both on psychiatry and on Sakhalin life, including a guest book in which island personnel and visitors recorded their experiences and reflections, which he later published. He expressed regret that he had been hindered in the publication of larger work based on his diaries, the writings of the

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<sup>47</sup> Report of L.V. Poddubskii, acting director of the medical division on Sakhalin Island, 1896, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 3, d. 139, l. 45ob.; Lev Landau, "K voprosu o prizrenii dushevnobol'nykh na o. Sakhaline," in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.* (Aleksandrovskii Post: Pechatano v tipografii na ostrove Sakhaline, 1898), sec. II, 92.

<sup>48</sup> S.A. Tsion, "Dva mesiatsa na Sakhaline," *Vestnik znaniia* 1904, no. 9: 174.

<sup>49</sup> Lev Landau, "Prizrenie dushevno-bol'nykh na o-ve Sakhaline," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1899, no. 10 (October): 424-442.

<sup>50</sup> Landau, "K voprosu o prizrenii dushevnobol'nykh," 82-98.

<sup>51</sup> Sakhalinets, "K voprosu o prizrenii dushevno-bol'nykh na o. Sakhaline," *Vladivostok*, 14 June 1898, no. 24, 14-16.

mentally ill, notes on his patients and other exiles, archival data given him by the military governor, the testimonies of exiles and other documents he preserved.<sup>52</sup>

### *Solving the problems*

Once aware of the extent of the dysfunctionality of the Sakhalin penal colony—or no longer able to ignore it—the Russian state was pressured to implement changes in the administration of its colony.<sup>53</sup> Yet just as there were multiple diagnoses of the problem, a variety of potential solutions were proposed. Some reforms focused on increasing the profitability of the land while others concentrated on improving the lives of exiles. For some officials, the goal was the establishment of a lasting community on the island, with or without exiles. The person in charge of implementing these changes was the new *nachal'nik ostrova* [island director], appointed in 1893 when the previous director, General V.O. Kononovich was investigated for embezzlement of funds.<sup>54</sup> General V.M. Merkazin, who assumed the position, had a long and distinguished army career, and was known for his honesty, concern for those serving under him, and intolerance of bribery, laziness and other offenses. Merkazin's term in office was characterized by frequent travel throughout the island and the removal of civil servants whom he found inadequate.<sup>55</sup> In May 1894, Merkazin's post was elevated from *nachal'nik ostrova* to military governor [*voennyi gubernator*], a position which gave him immediate authority over both civil and military affairs in the region. While reputed to be extremely strict, he was also considered just, a man who looked out for the interests of settlers and dealt promptly with issues of poverty, injustice and exploitation.

The most sensational issue, which received the most attention of writers such as Chekhov, was the incompetence and even immorality of Sakhalin officials, known in the press for their

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<sup>52</sup> Lev Landau, "Iz proshlogo ostrova Sakhalina," *Psikhiatricheskie analizy* 1913, no. 6: 3. The guestbook entries are published in no. 6: 1-16; no. 7/8: 17-24; no. 9/10: 25-38; no. 11/12: 39-40.

<sup>53</sup> See A.F. Koni, "Vospominaniia o Chekhove," [1924] in *Sobranie sochinenii v vos'mi tomakh*, vol. 7 (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1969), 382; Latyshev, "Sakhalin posle Chekhova, 157-162; Leonard A. Polakiewicz, "Western Critical Response to Chekhov's *The Island of Sakhalin*," *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 81. Other sources confirm that the situation improved significantly in the mid to late 1890s: "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Niva* 36, no. 16 (23 Apr. 1905): 308, 310; Landau, "Iz proshlogo ostrova Sakhalina," *Psikhiatricheskie analizy*, no. 9/10, 35; Vlas Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)* (Moscow: Tipografiia I.D. Sytina, 1903), pt 1, 162.

<sup>54</sup> V.L. Podpechnikov, "Muchenik svoego dolga (O Vladimire Osipoviche Kononoviche)," in *Gubernatory Sakhalina*, ed. A.I. Kostanov (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Arkhivnyi otdel administratsii Sakhalinskoi oblasti, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sakhalinskoi oblasti, 2000), 29-30. He was later cleared of charges of personal involvement in the affair, but as governor he was nonetheless held responsible. He never returned to the island.

<sup>55</sup> V.M. Latyshev, "Surovyi general (O Vladimire Dmitrieviche Merkazine)," in *Gubernatory Sakhalina*, 36.

violence, tyranny, greed and corruption. The investigation of Kononovich and the appointment of Merkazin in his place was a significant step in correcting that problem, as Merkazin had little sympathy for incompetent officials. Along with the promotion of Merkazin to Military Governor, the emperor approved new regulations concerning Sakhalin administration, granting raises to prison wardens and limiting the number of convicts under one warden (one senior warden for every fifty convicts; one junior warden for every twenty-five).<sup>56</sup> As noted above, in June 1896 the position of auditor [*revizor*] was added to the Sakhalin administration, along with two assistants and two accounts clerks.<sup>57</sup>

The question of the mistreatment or neglect of convicts and settlers was more difficult to address, as it entailed not only physical punishment but also allocation of work assignments, distribution of aid, assignment of land for settlement and release of exile-settlers to work or settle on the mainland. Before Chekhov had published his experiences or Merkazin had replaced Kononovich as Island Director, a law of 29 March 1893 abolished the use of corporal punishment on exiled women and limited women's work assignments.<sup>58</sup> Two years later in 1895, laws were amended regarding the use of the lash on vagrants, exiled settlers and those convicted of crime while on Sakhalin.<sup>59</sup> Salomon, after his investigation, took even stricter measures, reportedly dismissing two prison directors for embezzlement and eighty other officials for cruelty.<sup>60</sup>

The unprofitability and in fact exorbitant cost of the penal settlement was another concern of the state, as the natural resources of Sakhalin had failed to offset the expenses of overseas colonization. Yet as with other problems, no single cause could be isolated. More capable administration, it was hoped, would increase the profit and decrease the expenses of the Sakhalin colony, as would, hopefully, more systematic settlement of released convicts and care for their wellbeing. Of course, as Dril' emphasized, the most important step was the correction of criminals, which was necessary in order to guarantee production and quality. Others blamed the failure of Sakhalin mines to make a profit on the lack of a natural harbor and unwillingness

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<sup>56</sup> *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, series III, vol. 14, no. 10695 (30 May 1894), 334-335.

<sup>57</sup> Memo of 5 June 1896 from the Office of Civil Accounting of the State Controller, GARF, f. 122, op. 7, d. 187, l. 3.

<sup>58</sup> *PSZ*, series III, vol. 13, no. 9460 (29 Mar. 1893), 169.

<sup>59</sup> *PSZ*, series III, vol. 15, no. 11447 (13 Mar. 1895), 130.

<sup>60</sup> "Russia's Exile Colonies," *New York Times*, 5 Jan. 1899, 4. It is unclear whether all of these were on Sakhalin or if these numbers include Siberian prison officials as well.

of the government to build a port, an issue raised regularly ever since Rimskii-Korsakov's 1853 exploration.<sup>61</sup> Others blamed the lack of productivity on poor management of the mines themselves, which were run privately. Assuming that the implementation of scientific principles would make mines more productive, the May 1894 administrative reforms mandated the positions of mining engineer, master of pit mining [*shteiger*] and master driller. Agricultural problems were addressed with the decision to include a surveyor (serving under the Ministry of Justice) and agricultural inspector (serving the Ministry of Agriculture and State Domains).<sup>62</sup>

Others were less confident that scientific methods alone would produce the desired results, believing that the primary issue hindering the island's productivity was its natural environment. Perhaps the most radical of these plans was the so-called "climate reform" [*klimaticheskaiia reforma*] proposed in the 1890s, which entailed constructing a dam connecting Sakhalin to the mainland, thereby cutting off the flow of icy water from the Sea of Okhotsk.<sup>63</sup> The existence of bamboo and other tropical plants and animals on the island indicated to botanists that the island had once been a peninsula and that the entire Far East had at one time had a tropical climate.<sup>64</sup> It would not be difficult to restore Sakhalin to its "primordial condition," it seemed to believers in the power of state-sponsored engineering of the natural environment. Construction of the dam would be a relatively easy task compared to the larger engineering projects of that period such as the Suez Canal.<sup>65</sup> Yet unlike the Suez Canal, which was fully functional by 1869, the proposed dam to Sakhalin was never constructed.

The issue of creating a permanent settlement on the island was a bigger one, and not everyone believed it was possible using convict labor. Dril', for example, attributed the economic failure of the Sakhalin colony to the "unchangeable characteristics of the vast majority of the exiles and their total incompatibility with the demands made on them by exile."<sup>66</sup> Realizing that permanent free settlement of Sakhalin was a long-term goal, both Galkin-Vraskoi and Salomon sought to resolve this problem. While the need for a children's home had been

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<sup>61</sup> V. R-K. [V.A. Rimskii-Korsakov], "Sluchai i zametki na vintovoi shkhune 'Vostok,'" *Morskoi sbornik* 35 (May 1858), sec. 3: 25.

<sup>62</sup> *PSZ*, series III, vol. 14, no. 10695, 334-335.

<sup>63</sup> "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Niva* 1903, no. 7: 127.

<sup>64</sup> A.N. Krasnov, "Iz poezdki na dal'nii vostok Azii: Zametki o rastitel'nosti Iavy, Iaponii i Sakhalina," *Zemlevedenie* 1, no. 2 (1894): 61-62.

<sup>65</sup> V.M. Doroshevich, "Dal'nii vostok," *Russkoe slovo* (Moscow), 30 June 1902, 1; 9 (22) Apr. 1908, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Dril', *Ssylka vo Frantsii*, 172.

recognized since 1876,<sup>67</sup> it was not until 1895 that money was allocated to even partially support such an institution, and this was due to instructions from the tsar himself. In 1897, a council was formed to provide stable oversight and ensure financial support.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, proposals were put forth to establish secondary schools on Sakhalin which would allow the children of civil servants to remain on the island for their education.<sup>69</sup> In an effort to create a gender balance on Sakhalin, in 1894 the Main Prison Administration began transporting to Sakhalin women not only sentenced to penal servitude, but those sentenced to the lesser punishment of exile-settlement. The results of this effort, however, were insignificant, since the ratio of male to female transportees was still 16:1. Salomon also noted that more than 18% of men sent to Sakhalin were vagrants or escaped convicts, unreliable for work and harmful to the cause of colonization. Many of those certified by doctors as healthy were incapable of the labor required on Sakhalin. Natives of Turkestan and the Caucasus, he noted “with few exceptions, die off.” Although Galkin-Vraskoi attempted to establish some order among the work assignments, Salomon found that his instructions had not been carried out, and neither the Main Prison Administration in St. Petersburg nor the local administration on Sakhalin was effective at coordinating the numbers of convicts transported with the work available.<sup>70</sup>

### **Society’s Response**

As well as alarming the state, Sakhalin’s position in the public eye served to stimulate responses from educated society, demonstrating the engagement of a civil society and changing views of citizenship, human dignity and human rights. Donations of time and money to relieve the suffering of Sakhalin settlers demonstrate what members of the educated society understood as proper, moral, and their responsibility as citizens. Others used the Sakhalin image itself as a means of molding the population, incorporating the threat of Sakhalin exile into self-education and literacy training promoted among the lower classes as part of citizenship. For much of society, Sakhalin became a way to cooperate with the state in the civilization of savage convicts and their miserable wives and children, all without leaving the comforts of home.

The reports on Sakhalin conditions stimulated philanthropic efforts directed toward

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<sup>67</sup> “Priiuty,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, 40; *PSZ*, III series, vol. 1, no. 185 (19 May 1881), 364-365.

<sup>68</sup> Decree of 6 Dec. 1896, published in “Sakhalinskii izvestiia,” *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1897 (April): 189; “Priiuty,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, 41.

<sup>69</sup> *Amurskaia gazeta*, 27 May 1901, 1130.

<sup>70</sup> Salomon, “O. Sakhalin,” 21-22.

Sakhalin exiles demonstrating not only the cooperation of state and society in the process of forming productive Russian citizens, but the value society placed on education, culture (i.e., being cultured or civilized) and industriousness [*trudoliubie*]. The most systematic efforts to address these concerns were by members of the Russian aristocracy whose Society for the Care of Families of Exiled Convicts [*Obshchestvo popecheniia o sem'iakh ssyl'nokatorzhnykh*] cooperated with the state in “civilizing” its exiled subjects. The Society was formed in 1891 by Elizaveta Naryshkina, lady-in-waiting to Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna, after Naryshkina and other aristocratic women heard about the difficulties facing wives and children who accompanied family members into Siberian exile.<sup>71</sup> The society’s purpose was to “aid families of convicts exiled to penal servitude, in particular their children, deprived of all charity and in need of moral and spiritual upbringing.”<sup>72</sup> In the tradition of patronage societies internationally, the Society cooperated with and served the Main Prison Administration, although it was not a state-sponsored organization. As in colonial situations worldwide, well-intentioned efforts to aid the needy entailed instilling in them respectable Russian values and molding settlers into productive subjects in service to the state.

A significant element of the work of the Society for the Care of Families of Exiled Convicts, as well as other prominent members of Russian society, was the education of exiles, demonstrating an understanding of schooling and literacy as key to moral and social reform. Upon his return from Sakhalin, Chekhov gathered books to donate to Sakhalin, sending two shipments to the island, one of which contained over 2200 volumes. Donors to this project included prominent lawyers, writers, artists and educators. For the civilization of fallen Russian subjects Chekhov and his wealthy donors included not only Russian literature such as Lomonosov, Pushkin, Chekhov, Tolstoy and Korolenko, but also Western classics such as Aesop, Shakespeare, Byron, Dickens and Mark Twain.<sup>73</sup> As of January 1896, the public library at Aleksandrovskii Post contained 2262 books, including 885 works under the category of belletristic literature, 540 periodicals, 79 works of foreign literature, 135 illustrated journals, and 231 foreign periodicals. Fewer than 400 books were about scientific or practical matters,

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<sup>71</sup> The society began its work on Sakhalin a few years later as a result of A.P. Chekhov’s efforts to raise awareness of the plight of Sakhalin exiles. See Koni, “Vospominaniia o Chekhove,” 382.

<sup>72</sup> “Obshchestvo popecheniia o sem'iakh ssyl'no-katorzhan,” in *Entsiklopediia Sankt-Peterburga*, <http://www.encspb.ru/ru/article.php?kod=2812380981> (accessed 10 June 2009).

<sup>73</sup> M.V. Teplinskii, *Sakhalinskie puteshestviia* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1962), 26.

demonstrating the importance granted to moral or cultural improvement rather than scientific or technical knowledge. By order of Sakhalin Military Governor Merkazin, a prison library was established at Post Aleksandrovsk in 1896 consisting of books donated to the prisons by the local Sakhalin intelligentsia, and Merkazin made a large donation of books himself in 1897.<sup>74</sup> Yet the libraries did little for the convicts and settlers, most of whom were illiterate in any case. Even those who could read had little access to the literature, which was concentrated in the larger settlements and generally too expensive for exiles. The island's two public libraries were housed in the police station at Aleksandrovsk and the office of the Korsakovsk District Head and were used primarily by the local free population. The prison library was soon abandoned since prisoners failed to return the books or returned them damaged.

Attempts to establish libraries were revived at the end of the decade. The Society for the Care of the Families of Exiled Convicts sent more than 3000 donated books and journals to Sakhalin in summer 1899.<sup>75</sup> A library of 2000 books was created at a House of Industry established by the Society in 1901. (Much of it was destroyed in a fire a few years later.)<sup>76</sup> Sakhalin schools had small libraries which they shared with the local population and the military posts had their own respectable libraries.<sup>77</sup>

Along with literacy, religious and cultural training were considered important components of the civilizing process. While six decades earlier Tsar Nikolai I had decreed Orthodoxy an essential element of Russianness, on Sakhalin there was little effort to prioritize Orthodoxy over other Christian or non-Christian religious traditions. On Sakhalin the focus was on the creation of obedient and productive subjects, and authorities recognized the potential of many religious traditions to contribute to that effort. Western-oriented Russian evangelicals and even foreign missionaries were allowed to preach and distribute literature on Sakhalin, while such teaching was limited or even forbidden in European Russia. Wealthy Muslim exiles funded a Shiite and a Sunni mosque.<sup>78</sup> English evangelist Friedrich Baedeker, with Russian Baptist Ivan

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<sup>74</sup> "Biblioteki," in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. I, 44, 43.

<sup>75</sup> "Patronat: Ocherk deiatel'nosti Obshchestva popecheniia o sem'iakh ssyl'no-katorzhnykh za 10 let," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 9, no. 10 (December 1901), 506; F.N. M-n, "Patronat: Otchet Obshchestva popecheniia o sem'iakh ssyl'no-katorzhnykh za trekhletie s 1 ianvaria 1902 g. po 1 ianvaria 1905 g.," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1905, no. 4 (April): 288.

<sup>76</sup> F.N. M-n, "Patronat: Otchet," 290.

<sup>77</sup> "Biblioteki," in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. I, 44-45.

<sup>78</sup> A.A. Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia: ocherki kolonizatsii i sovremennogo polozeniia Sakhalina* (Moscow: Tipografiia T-va I.D. Sytina, 1905), 83.

Kargel' serving as his translator, visited the island to preach and distribute religious literature.<sup>79</sup> Petr Smirnov, a murderer who repented and converted to evangelical Christianity in prison, distributed evangelistic tracts and taught the island's children during his exile.<sup>80</sup> Red Cross Sister of Mercy Evgeniia Maier, sent to Sakhalin by the Society for the Care of Families of Exiled Convicts, held regular Sunday religious and cultural meetings. While she herself was not Orthodox, she received support from the St. Petersburg Eparchy.<sup>81</sup>

Instilling a work ethic and providing training in skills was another issue of concern to the Society for the Care of Families of Exiled Convicts. The most significant accomplishment of Sister Maier was the establishment of a Sakhalin House of Industry [*Dom Trudoliubiia*] similar to Houses of Industry established in Victorian England and in the United States. The goal of the House of Industry was to provide income, teach a trade, and instill the virtue of industry in impoverished settlers, offering training in skills such as shoemaking, sewing, bookbinding, carpentry and weaving rugs. The enterprise was funded primarily by the society, along with donations from the Russian aristocracy, but also sold the wares produced in an attempt to gain financial independence.<sup>82</sup> Upon completion of training in the House of Industry, the society sought to resettle former criminals who had learned a trade on the mainland, although that was less successful, with many of the 2000 men resettled in 1898 returning to crime. There were twelve murders committed in Khabarovsk alone in April 1898 leading the administration to refuse additional Sakhalin settlers without guaranteed employment.<sup>83</sup> In response, Maier proposed opening a similar establishment across the Strait of Tartary in Nikolaevsk to provide income and assistance to former Sakhalin convicts.<sup>84</sup> In order to train Sakhalin children in trades,

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<sup>79</sup> Robert Sloan Latimer, *Dr. Baedeker and his Apostolic Work in Russia* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1907), 101; J.G. Kargel, *Zwischen den Enden der Erde Unter Brüdern in Ketten* (Wernigerode am Harz, Germany: Licht im Osten, 1928), 115-121.

<sup>80</sup> "Life of Criminal Smirnov," in *Interesting Details of the Lord's Work in Russia*, Pashkoff Papers, Buswell Library Special Collections, Wheaton College (Wheaton, Illinois), fiche 3/1; M.M. Korff, *Am Zarenhof: Erinnerungen aus der geistlichen Erweckungsbewegung in Rußland von 1874-1884* (Wernigerode am Harz: Licht im Osten, 1927), 35-40.

<sup>81</sup> "Patronat: Ocherk," 507. See also the file on the establishment of the Sakhalin Society for Aid to the Poor and the House of Industry, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 3, d. 178; Jenny E. de Mayer, *Adventures with God in Freedom and in Bond*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1948), 167-178.

<sup>82</sup> "Blagotvoritel'nost' v Rossii. Dom trudoliubiia na o. Sakhaline," *Trudovaia pomoshch'* 1902, no. 8 (October): 344-345. See also F.N. M-n, "Patronat: Otchet," 280; file on the establishment of the Sakhalin Society for Aid to the Poor and the House of Industry, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 3, d. 178.

<sup>83</sup> F.N. M-n, "Patronat: Otchet," 280-281.

<sup>84</sup> Letter of E.K. Maier to Priamur Governor General Grodekov, 28 Jan. 1901, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 3, d. 178, ll. 12-15ob.

she sought places for them to enter apprenticeships in Vladivostok and elsewhere on the mainland.<sup>85</sup> Some were taken to sing in the military choir and it was recorded that they received medals for their service in China during the Boxer Rebellion.<sup>86</sup>

### *Internal colonization*

While a primary goal of Sakhalin exile was the conversion of convicts into citizens, Sakhalin contributed to a similar project of internal colonization taking place in the Russian heartland as well. Societies promoting literacy and culture integrated Sakhalin in their educational materials. Capitalizing on Sakhalin's image as Other, they printed stories of the horrible fate awaiting those who committed robbery or murder and descriptions of the misery of forced laborers on Sakhalin. Such literature was used to form an image of Sakhalin in the imaginations of ordinary Russians—the *prostoi narod*—that reinforced the state's power and demonstrated the consequences of deviance or rebellion. The state itself had an ambiguous attitude toward such publications, which spread an image of cruelty and backwardness that the state wished to combat, yet played a valuable role in the education and civilization of the empire's subjects.

One work written in this vein was *Na kraiu sveta* [To the End of the Earth] by Aleksandra Novitskaia, which was published in 1895, recalled from circulation, and then released and reprinted in 1902 by the Khar'kov Society of the Spread of Literacy among the People.<sup>87</sup> The book tells the story of a “miserable-miserable” [*neschastnyi-preneschastnyi*] Ukrainian peasant Stepan who killed his wife and was exiled to convict labor “on the edge of the earth, the end of the Russian tsardom, beyond the sea, beyond the ocean, to Sakhalin Island.” Reliant on images provided by Chekhov, the book describes the island as gloomy, dirty and oppressive, and its hero Stepan is forced to mine coal in damp, narrow tunnels and haul logs through snow up to his chest. Yet to Stepan, the worst part was being far from home, separated from the *rodina* [motherland]. Stepan, however, unlike the majority of settlers encountered by Chekhov, is successfully rehabilitated, marrying an ugly old woman, settling in a clean hut [*izba*] of his own “*as if* in freedom” (italics in the original), with an icon in the corner. When a visitor asks whether he wishes to remain on Sakhalin, where he has a samovar, a farm, and three cows,

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<sup>85</sup> Letter of M.P. Shcherbina, office manager of Priamur Governor General Grodekov, 22 June 1902, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 3, d. 178, l. 38.

<sup>86</sup> F.N. M-n, “Patronat: Otchet,” 280.

<sup>87</sup> See Kostanov, “‘Vospretim’ k obrashcheniiu...’”

Stepan responds in the words of Chekhov's coachman: "It's dull here, your Honor. It is better in Russia."<sup>88</sup> The story not only warned peasants of the consequences of crime, but it also demonstrated the possibility of successful rehabilitation, reinforcing a vision of Russianness that entailed land, cows, samovars, icons and a hard-working wife, but could not be achieved on non-Russian soil. Sakhalin was not Russian soil.

Other articles for a popular audience were written by scholars who had completed research on Sakhalin such as zoologist P.Iu. Shmidt, or travelers to the island sharing their observations with the Russian people. With their publication in schoolbooks or journals of self-education, Sakhalin became accessible to the common people, no longer an unknown place rumored to be underground and inhabited by "*pesigolovtsy*"—people with heads of dogs—as Novitskaia's uneducated peasants believed.<sup>89</sup> Along with his many scholarly publications, Shmidt published a book about Sakhalin for a popular audience, part of a series of "Stories of different lands and peoples," and wrote for the weekly *Bulletin and Library for Self-Education*, a popular scientific and literary journal devoted to increasing knowledge among the common people.<sup>90</sup> While Shmidt's primary focus was on the animal and plant life of Sakhalin, his message was clear: exile of criminals to the "remotest part of the empire" had existed in Russia since ancient times, and Sakhalin was the farthest place of exile, completely cut off from the outside world. He emphasized that Sakhalin was a place of cruelty and injustice. "Not for nothing did the people call the island 'cursed'," he clarified.<sup>91</sup> Writer S.A. Tsion, after visiting Sakhalin, noted the poor conditions in which children lived in an article in *Vestnik znaniia* [Herald of Knowledge], a "literary and popular-scientific journal with appendixes for self-education."<sup>92</sup> An article with a similar educational purpose was published in a book on the Far East subtitled "a collection of descriptive articles for reading at home and school."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> A. Novitskaia, *Na kraiu sveta (geograficheskii ocherk)* (Khar'kov: Izdatel'stvo komiteta khar'kovskogo Obshchestva rasprostraneniia v narod gramotnosti, 1902), 1-3, 12-18, 47. This is a quote from A.P. Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin (iz putevykh zametok)* (Moscow: Izdanie redaktsii zhurnala "Russkaia mysl'," 1895), 43.

<sup>89</sup> Novitskaia, *Na kraiu sveta*, 2.

<sup>90</sup> P.Iu. Shmidt, "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Vestnik i biblioteka samoobrazovaniia* 1905, no. 18: 555-566; no. 19: 583-592.

<sup>91</sup> P.Iu. Shmidt, *Ostrov izgnaniia (Sakhalin)* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo O.N. Popovoi, 1905), 3.

<sup>92</sup> Tsion, "Dva mesiatsa na Sakhaline," 172-176.

<sup>93</sup> A. Nikol'skii, "Sakhalin," in *Po dal'nemu vostoku: Sakhalin, Ussuriiskaia oblast', Man'chzhuriia, Koreia i Iaponiia: Sbornik opisatel'nykh statei dlia domashnego i shkol'nogo chteniia*, comp. V. L'vovich (Moscow: M.V. Kliukin, 1905), 3-11.

## Sakhalintsy Respond

While state and society wrangled over Sakhalin's roles in the empire and in the imperial imagination, inhabitants of the island asserted their own claim on the island's identity, seeking to correct the images in the press and create a regional identity apart from that assigned by the center. While they had little in common besides location, penal system officials, military officers, civil servants, entrepreneurs and even educated convicts actively sought to resignify Sakhalin in a way meaningful to them, emphasizing that the island was knowable rather than unknown, and establishing on Sakhalin a social milieu modeled on that of the mainland. Ethnic, religious, and social differences were diminished by the shared experiences of Sakhalin life. This identity was fostered on a daily basis through formation of a local civil society serving to meet physical and emotional needs and provide educational and social opportunities for islanders and their children. More formally this regional identity was expressed through the publication of a yearbook to correct false impressions and disseminate the "truth" about their island, and the establishment of traveling museum displays to represent their homeland throughout the empire. Finally, by manipulating discourse about Sakhalin for their own purposes, some Sakhalintsy reappropriated the island's image so that the ultimate Other became Russia itself.

Perhaps the most frequent response of Sakhalintsy to the barbaric image so pervasive on the Russian mainland involved not dismissal of the representation as false, but acceptance of it, working to change not the depiction but the reality of Sakhalin life. Sakhalintsy of course were not immune to the power of the press; because of their physical distance from the mainland, they relied on it heavily to remain connected with Russia. Yet as more literature was available from the mainland, the more the image of Sakhalin as Other was reinforced. Sakhalin's educated society combined funds to subscribe to journals and newspapers, and the post office recorded subscriptions to 121 different journals, magazines and newspapers in 1895.<sup>94</sup> Political exile Ivan Manucharov, upon arrival in 1896, wrote to his brother that he did not need the journals or newspapers he had requested, nor the English textbook, since contrary to popular assumptions, they were all available on the island.<sup>95</sup> In an effort to recreate Russian leisure society in the east,

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<sup>94</sup> "Vedomost' periodicheskim izdaniiam vypisyvaemym na o-ve," in *Sakhalinskii kalendar' na 1896 g.: Sakhalinskii kalendar' i materialy k izucheniiu o-va Sakhalin* (Post Aleksandrovskii: Tipografiia na ostrove Sakhaline, 1895), sec. 1: 177-178. See also "Biblioteki," in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. I, 44.

<sup>95</sup> Letter of Ivan Manucharov to A.I. Manucharova, 10 June 1896, OR RGB, f. 218, op. 1281, d. 4, ll. 15-21ob, reprinted in Ivan Manucharov, "Pis'ma s katorgi," ed. G.P. Anikina, *Dal'nii vostok* 1989, no. 2: 131.

Post Aleksandrovsk had a social club [*obshchestvennoe sobranie*], a church, a choir, an orchestra, and held regular concerts and Christmas parties for local children. Dances were held at the club, which had a billiard table and a grand piano. Public readings and “magic lantern” shows, good enough to be the “envy of many cities in European Russia,” met with great success, serving the purposes of both instilling moral values in the population and improving relationships between exiles and state officials.<sup>96</sup> Two years later an anonymous correspondent from Sakhalin reported that the standard drinking bouts on Sakhalin were gradually being replaced by more noble forms of entertainment, including plays, ice skating and music.<sup>97</sup> Through these efforts Sakhalintsy strove to make Sakhalin not merely an open-air prison, as mainland society understood it be, but a colonial society reminiscent of European quarters in Hong Kong or Constantinople, which they visited on their voyages from Odessa.

In a more focused effort control Sakhalin’s representation, Sakhalintsy created museum exhibits to refashion themselves publicly, such as the 1890 exhibit at the International Prison Congress in St. Petersburg. In 1891, Tsarevich Nikolai Aleksandrovich as part of his round-the-world voyage viewed with interest an exhibit of goods produced on Sakhalin exhibited in Vladivostok, which he discussed with Island Director Kononovich and Priamur Governor General Baron A.N. Korf.<sup>98</sup> In 1894, following the serial publication of Chekhov’s book and public attention to the Onor road-building atrocities, the Sakhalin administration countered the negative publicity in Khabarovsk by funding an exhibit at the museum of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, placing on display the island’s native peoples, minerals, land, fauna, entomology and prison technology, “in the same manner as at the Fourth [International Prison] congress.”<sup>99</sup> In 1896 an official Sakhalin museum was founded in Post Aleksandrovsk, a joint effort of the island administration and the educated among its exile population. The purpose of the museum was to “serve as a living illustration of the island’s nature; natural resources; the daily life of the population, both indigenous and Russian; and to facilitate study of the island as a prison colony and serve as a visual aid for the education of Sakhalin youth.”<sup>100</sup> To fulfill this

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<sup>96</sup> *Vladivostok*, 14 Jan. 1896, 8-9; F.N. M-n, “Patronat: Otchet,” 288.

<sup>97</sup> *Vladivostok*, 8 Feb. 1898, 12-13.

<sup>98</sup> “Vystavka sakhalinskikh izdelii,” *Vladivostok*, 2 June 1891, 3-4.

<sup>99</sup> Letter to Director of Sakhalin Island Merkazin from Governor General Dukhovskoi, 30 May 1894, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 3, d. 120, l. 30-30ob.

<sup>100</sup> Memo of Sakhalin Military Governor Merkazin, 20 December 1896, RGIA DV, f. 1133, op. 1, d. 1500, l. 1, on microfilm at GASO, MF 221.

mission the museum had large collections on ethnography, birds, animals, plants, minerals, and in particular, the indigenous populations of the island: Ainu, Tungus [Evenk], Orochon, [Uil'ta] and Giliak [Nivkh].<sup>101</sup> A tremendous skeleton of a whale beached on the island was displayed in front of the building. (See figure 4.1.) It also exhibited goods produced by convict labor, models, sketches and charts, all designed to “represent prison affairs on Sakhalin in their true position.”<sup>102</sup> Rather than downplaying or concealing the island’s penal function, the museum portrayed it as rational, productive and scientific. A photography studio was opened to create a collection of photographs, primarily of convicts, but also of other areas of the island, to enhance the museum’s collection. An added benefit in the project of Sakhalin representation was the collection of multiple samples of many of the items, providing objects to exhibit in Khabarovsk or other museums on the Russian mainland.<sup>103</sup>

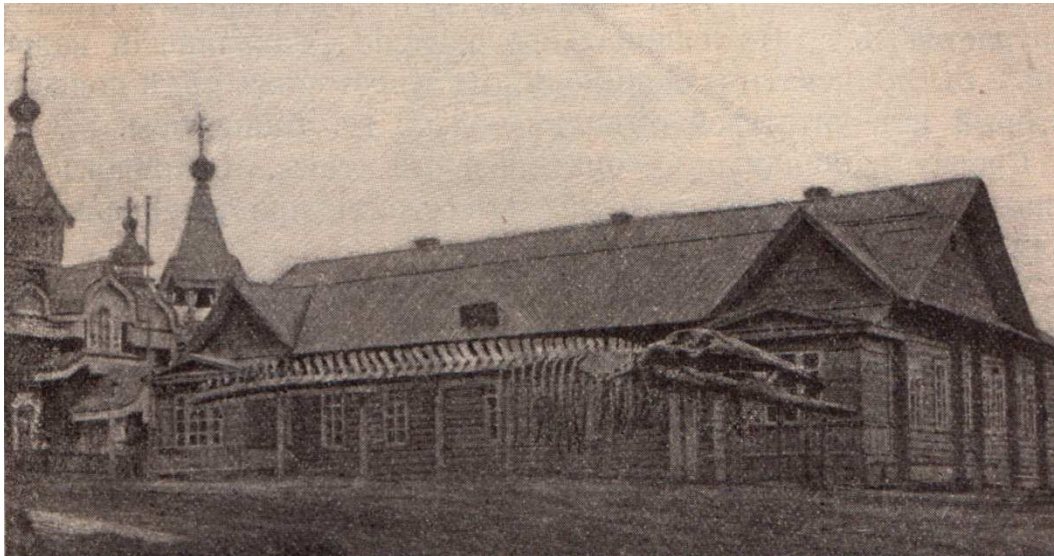


Figure 4.1: The Sakhalin Museum<sup>104</sup>

When visitors to Sakhalin visited the local museum, they were presented a picture of Sakhalin that contradicted the image produced in the press. The museum was open to the public on Sundays and the local population reportedly liked to visit it. For guests on the island it could be opened any day of the week, and it received Russian or foreigner visitors almost every day its

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<sup>101</sup> [Karl Landsberg], “Post Aleksandrovskii i ego zhizn’,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. II, 156.

<sup>102</sup> Order No. 226 of the Military Governor of Sakhalin, 6 Dec. 1896, on the opening of a public museum. RGIA DV, f. 1133, op. 1, d. 1500, l. 4, on microfilm at GASO, MF 221.

<sup>103</sup> [Landsberg], “Post Aleksandrovskii i ego zhizn’,” 156.

<sup>104</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 163.

first summer, including His Grace Makarii, Bishop of Blagoveshchensk.<sup>105</sup> Yet the overall impact of the museum in guiding visitors' impressions of Sakhalin was less successful than hoped. According to a Russian entrepreneur traveling through Sakhalin in 1900, the museum left "sad impressions" as the ethnographic and other materials were in good condition and well-ordered, but the building itself was crowded and in disrepair.<sup>106</sup> Doroshevich, in his typical satirical manner, wrote that the museum contained "all that the impoverished history and ethnography of the sad island had to offer ... here in several small rooms," and described primarily the dull, gloomy facial expressions in the Giliak exhibit and the intolerable stench of the Ainu fishskin clothing.<sup>107</sup> If Doroshevich is correct, the proposed exhibit on Sakhalin prisons may have never been constructed. English traveler Charles Henry Hawes wrote only of the "small ethnological and natural history collection," focusing instead on the sad fate of the political exiles who created it.<sup>108</sup>

The most ambitious project of self-representation was the publication of an annual Sakhalin almanac, in which local—rather than central—authorities determined how their island would appear in print. The *Sakhalinskii kalendar'* [Sakhalin calendar] was published specifically in response to what had been printed in European Russia, which Sakhalintsy argued had neither the right nor the ability to accurately represent them. In his introduction to the 1898 calendar, Sakhalin physician V.Ia. Stsepenskii explained, "In a word, Sakhalin to the metropole is *terra incognita*, write whatever you want (and that has happened a lot lately) and everyone believes it. So that those interested in Sakhalin can discard the weeds, a handful of those serving on Sakhalin are working, devoting their leisure time, to publish a Sakhalin calendar, with the goal of distributing reliable information [*vernnye svedeniia*] about the island."<sup>109</sup>

The lack of infrastructure on Sakhalin as well as the absence of an educated class made publication of the calendar a difficult process. Regarding one article in the first issue, the editors printed a disclaimer that "Since [this] is our first experience on Sakhalin and the editors had little

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<sup>105</sup> "Muzei," in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.* (Aleksandrovskaia Pechatana v Tipografii na ostrove Sakhaline, 1898), sec. 1, 46.

<sup>106</sup> I.N. Akif'ev, *Na dalekii sever za zolotom: Iz dnevnika krugosvetnogo putestviiia 1900 goda* (St. Petersburg: Kommerch. Skoropet. Evgeniia Tile, 1902), *Na dalekii sever*, 155.

<sup>107</sup> Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (katorga)*, pt. 1, 161-163.

<sup>108</sup> Charles H. Hawes, *In the Uttermost East: Being an Account of Investigations among the Natives and Russian Convicts of the Island of Sakhalin, with Notes of Travel in Korea, Siberia, and Manchuria* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 335.

<sup>109</sup> V.Ia. Stsepenskii, introduction to *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, n.p.

time, the above article is printed as it was received, although it should have been edited and shortened.”<sup>110</sup> Two years later, the editor found himself explaining that the issue was late because those who published it worked on it after completing their normal work and that it was difficult to obtain correct statistics, in particular from district administrators who were themselves overloaded with work. He himself, also a government official, had to “edit, read the proofs, bind, *et cetera*,” which made it “honestly speaking, more and more difficult to print the Sakhalin calendar.” They would likely have given up, had not information about Sakhalin recently appeared in the press “reminiscent of the stories of the ancient Phoenicians of travels to the lands where they procured their riches.” One writer, he claimed, wrote recently of Sakhalin pines—which Sakhalin does not have—while another claimed that there were only nine sunny days per year.<sup>111</sup> The calendar was printed on the printing press of the island administration on paper imported from the mainland. Yet by publishing the calendar on the island itself, it was not subject to censorship, and Sakhalinty were free to represent themselves and their home as they saw fit.

Two themes recur throughout the *Sakhalinskii kalendar*: the advancement of the state project of making the island legible and projection of a vision of Sakhalin as civilized, humane and utterly normal. The first section (*otdel I*) of the calendar provided quantitative information on the island, classifying and numbering everything from vegetable harvests to magazine subscriptions, prices of goods to the number of convicts sentenced for various crimes, as well as narratives describing various aspects of state affairs. This section included a calendar of religious and state holidays, including not only Orthodox holidays, but Catholic, Protestant, Armenian-Gregorian, Muslim and Jewish holidays as well. Tables listing state, regional and local officials—along with their ranks and salaries—made clear the hierarchy of island officials. A list of members of the Russian royal family occupied a prominent position, placing Sakhalin clearly within the Russian empire.<sup>112</sup>

The second section (*otdel II*) portrayed the island as normal, civilized and attractive, with articles on Sakhalin’s natural environment, indigenous peoples, agriculture, climate, and natural

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<sup>110</sup> “Zhizn’ novykh selenii Aleksandrovskogo okruga,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar’ na 1896 g.*, sec. 2: 55.

<sup>111</sup> Ststepenskii, introduction to *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, n.p. The comment about the weather is perhaps referring to Chekhov’s claim that an agricultural report indicated an average of only eight clear days on Sakhalin each summer. See Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 117.

<sup>112</sup> These examples are taken from the *Sakhalinskii kalendar’ na 1896 g.* Calendars were produced for 1897, 1898, and 1899 as well, and a fifth calendar for 1900 was compiled, but never printed.

resources. Rather than impassible trails through swamps, roads between villages were described as “excellently surfaced” [*shossirovana*] and “even,” making travel comfortable, especially by tarantass. The road between settlements, it was said, “would have been an object of pride even if it were not on Sakhalin.”<sup>113</sup> A new history was written for Sakhalin, as the anonymous author objected that “despite the mass of the most varied information about Sakhalin provided by people of science as well as popularizers [*populiarizatorami*], society to this day does not have even the vaguest idea about it, especially its historical fate.” The author encouraged readers not to “bury themselves in piles of old newspapers,” where information about Sakhalin previously would have been found, but to read the new history written just for them. No mention was made of the exile of convicts to the island.<sup>114</sup> Yet the island was not described in exclusively positive terms. Some projects had not succeeded as planned, such as hastily-built settlements in locations unfit for agriculture, or discord over the construction and function of the social club. Exile Karl Landsberg justified such misfortune by citing a Russian proverb: “The only one who makes no mistakes is the one who does nothing at all.”<sup>115</sup>

Book reviews were also printed in the calendar, giving local residents a chance to respond to what appeared in the press, asserting their right to represent their land in print. The 1898 calendar contained an eight-page discussion by Sakhalin agricultural inspector A.A. fon Friken of the seven pages on Sakhalin in a recent 117-page report on the fishing in the Far East. According to fon Friken, the author—medical doctor N.V. Sliunin, who had recently completed a journey to Kamchatka and the North Pacific—obtained information on Sakhalin from the police department and Japanese consulate at Korsakovsk along with official “statistics” [quotation marks in the original] obtained from the Japanese governor in Hakodate. Fon Friken concluded that the “rumors and reports” gathered by Sliunin were unreliable, and that Sliunin’s work at Korsakovsk did not deserve to be called “research” [quotation marks in the original] at all.<sup>116</sup> In the same issue the editor noted that the St. Petersburg illustrated journal *Niva* [The

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<sup>113</sup> “Zhizn’ novykh selenii Aleksandrovskogo okruga,” 55.

<sup>114</sup> “Novii istoricheskii ocherk otkrytii i opisaniia ostrova Sakhalin i pervykh na nem russkikh poselenii,” *Sakhalinskii kalendar’ na 1897 g.* ([Post Aleksandrovskii]: Tipografiia na ostrove Sakhalin, 1897), sec. 2, 179. After the revolution, political exile Boris Ellinskii identified himself as the author of the article. B. Ellinskii, *Sakhalin: Chernaia zhemchuzhina dal’nego vostoka* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1928), 6.

<sup>115</sup> “Zhizn’ novykh selenii Aleksandrovskogo okruga,” 56; [Landsberg], “Post Aleksandrovskii i ego zhizn’,” 162.

<sup>116</sup> “Bibliografiia,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. II, 193-200 (esp. p. 195). The subject of the review was N. Sliunin, *Promyslovye bogatstva Kamchatki, Sakhalina i Komandorskikh ostrovov, 1892-1893 gg.* (St. Petersburg: M.Z. i G.I., Departament zemledeliia, 1895).

Corn Field] reprinted, without permission, an article from the previous edition of the *Sakhalinskii kalendar*. While it was pleasant, the editor remarked, that “finally reliable information is printed about Sakhalin Island, and in such a widely-distributed journal as *Niva*,” the source of the article should have been acknowledged. He likewise expressed dismay about the mislabeled photograph accompanying the article which described Post Aleksandrovsk as *across from*—rather than *on*—Sakhalin Island (see figure 3.6).<sup>117</sup>

Self-representation of Sakhalin in exhibits and publications produced on the island itself describes a very different place than do the writings of Chekhov, Doroshevich, Novitskaia or even scientists such as Krasnov and Shmidt. Sakhalintsy embraced Sakhalin, rather than an imagined Russian heartland, as a new standard of normalcy, reframing discourse to place Sakhalin at the center of culture and civilization. Rather than an empty wilderness rescued from oblivion by the Russians, Sakhalin was home to a Paleolithic civilization that used flint implements, polished stone hatchets, decorative pottery and stone weights.<sup>118</sup> The island’s fauna was not wild or dangerous, but was described, displayed and cataloged in Latin by genus and species, including the common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), Singaporean vampire bat (*Philostoma spectrum*), Siberian flying squirrel (*Sciuropterus Sibiricus*), and seven species of seagulls.<sup>119</sup> Even its convicts were innovative and capable, producing fashionable furniture from the twisted trees of the tundra and strong rope out of stinging nettle [*krapiva*].<sup>120</sup>

The best description of life in the thriving colonial outpost of Post Aleksandrovsk—rather than Post Aleksandrovsk the open-air prison portrayed by most writers—was published in the *Sakhalinskii kalendar* for 1898, written by a well-educated Russian engineer, Karl Landsberg, who had been exiled to Sakhalin for murder but soon integrated himself into the island’s highest society. Refuting the predominant visions of Sakhalin as gloomy, backward, dirty and corrupt, Landsberg took the reader on a block-by-block tour of a Post Aleksandrovsk full of gardens blooming, children playing, a lively bazaar and majestic buildings. Everything was clean, orderly and up-to-date, such as the large fire station with men and machines ready to roll when signaled from the prison tower, and an infirmary with surgical instruments recently acquired

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<sup>117</sup> “Bibliografiia,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. II, 200-201.

<sup>118</sup> “Katalog sakhalinskogo muzeia,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. II, 176-177. See also Hawes, *In the Uttermost East*, 335-336.

<sup>119</sup> “Katalog sakhalinskogo muzeia,” in *Sakhalinskii kalendar na 1898 g.*, sec. II, 187-191.

<sup>120</sup> Akif’ev, *Na dalekii sever*, 154; “Vystavka sakhalinskikh izdelii,” *Vladivostok*, 2 June 1891, 3-4.

from Berlin. Landsberg's Post Aleksandrovsk was a cosmopolitan city visited by seafaring vessels from not only Odessa and Germany, but the Sandwich Islands and San Francisco. Even more importantly, according to Landsberg, this was not recent development, but was Post Aleksandrovsk's heritage. He emphasized that island's children's home—more an institute than a shelter—was originally the idea of M.S. Mitsul', who planned to open a home for *all* children of Sakhalin convicts before his premature death. According to Landsberg, Mitsul' felt that the “task of a true Sakhalin administrator-colonizer [was] not limited to the re-education of island's exile population, but consist[ed] also in care for the upbringing of youth, the local generation, who deserved to be removed from the direct and pernicious influences of their criminal parents.”<sup>121</sup> Likewise, the island's excellent public libraries and meteorological stations were not new—although they had been significantly improved in the past few years—but had been founded already in 1882. The city described by Landsberg was full of orchestras and choirs, with a conductor invited from Moscow performing weekly outdoor concerts in the garden of the island's administrative headquarters. The well-ordered prison, with its own kitchen, bakery, infirmary and workshop, was clean and spacious, since a tsarist manifesto had granted many of the convicts freedom to settle on the island. Even the “colonization fund” lampooned in various newspapers<sup>122</sup> became to Landsberg a well-run state enterprise, with ten branches throughout the island providing goods at prices lower than at nearby Khabarovsk.<sup>123</sup> In his description, Landsberg combated nearly all the stereotypes about Sakhalin, including its dreary climate, tiresome atmosphere, unspeakable prisons, and decrepit, out-of-date technology. The Post Aleksandrovsk he described could have been located in British India or Singapore, a flourishing beneficiary of Western civilization and culture.

### ***Subverting the colonial gaze***

Not all Sakhalintsy fought the image of Sakhalin as backward or brutal. Some of the most powerful applications of this discourse were by Sakhalin residents themselves who embraced the image and subverted it for their own purposes, turning it against the state in a manner that reinforced the backwardness of Russia, rather than Sakhalin. Such writing by civil servants, physicians, educated exiles and even military personnel employed images of violence,

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<sup>121</sup> [Landsberg], “Post Aleksandrovskii i ego zhizn',” 164.

<sup>122</sup> “Original'noe uchrezhdenie (Pis'mo s Sakhalina),” *Vladivostok*, 19 Nov. 1895, 12-14; Turist, “Zametki o Sakhaline,” *Vostochnyi vestnik*, 19 Dec. 1903, 2-3.

<sup>123</sup> [Landsberg], “Post Aleksandrovskii i ego zhizn',” 154-173.

depravity, poverty and chaos in a manner that blamed Russia, rather than Sakhalin, for the island's miserable conditions. The Russian state, it appeared, tortured its subjects and deprived them of basic food, lodging and medical care. Russian society failed to apply even the most fundamental principles of Christian brotherly love, instead profiting from the abuse and neglect of its neediest citizens and failing to recognize in them a shared humanity. Russia, not Sakhalin, was to be shamed for inflicting such conditions on its people.

Some Sakhalintsy appropriated the predominant image of Sakhalin as a means of protesting corporal punishment and advocating penal reform. While much of the work of physician N.S. Lobas consisted in scientific measurement, systematic observation and collection of data, he was also active in protesting the rod and lash, embracing the image of Sakhalin brutality for his cause. In the newspaper *Vrach* [The Physician], the most widely-read and influential medical publication in imperial Russia, he turned an ordinary—and court-ordered—instance of lashing into a public spectacle of darkness, oppression and death:

It is the dark and gloomy corridor 10 of the Aleksandrovsk prison, with log walls turning black and a strong smell of evergreen branches are scattered on the floor “as perfume.” At one end of the corridor is a table and several stools for the prosecutor, prison warden and doctor attending the punishment, and on the other end is a type of bench, the convict's “mare” [*kobyła*], and behind it, the sinister figure of the bailiff. The costume of this main character in this drama makes a striking impression: on his head he wears a white cowl; on his feet are not exactly *tufli* [shoes], but not exactly *oporki* [down-at-heel shoes]; a red shirt with sleeves rolled up and a lash [*plet'*] finish out the portrait of the master of the lash. Along the wall on one side is a row of shaved heads and gray work clothes, and on the other side is a chain of guards armed with revolvers. The deadly, oppressive silence is occasionally disturbed by the jangling of shackles...<sup>124</sup>

Lobas continued, describing the convicts being called to the bench, forced to lie down, and beaten, adding, “May the reader forgive me if, against his will, I led him to a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, a place with all the characteristics of a torture-chamber, if I forced him to look at a picture which he would have preferred not to see.”<sup>125</sup> In his appropriation of Sakhalin tropes familiar to the educated public, he pointed a finger at the Russian authorities and Russian law under which such abominations were not only permitted, but mandated by the court. In his dramatic narration of the lashing, complete with a set, costumes and audience, he annihilated the

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<sup>124</sup> N.S. Lobas, *Ostrov Sakhalin: K voprosu o telesnykh nakazaniakh* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Ia. Trei, 1898), 1-2; reprinted from *Vrach* 1898, no. 26. This article was translated into English and published in New York as “Flogging in Siberia,” by Dr. Lobas, *Current Literature* 24, no. 6 (December 1898): 553-554.

<sup>125</sup> Lobas, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 2.

distance—mental and geographic—separating Russian society from Sakhalin, as the reader became a spectator experiencing the sounds, smells and emotions of an orderly and well-performed beating. This was not, Lobas emphasized, an arbitrary occasion of Sakhalin-induced violence during which an overseer momentarily lost control, but was the legal order brought to Sakhalin from Russia and implemented methodically and with all necessary oversight and precautions. To ensure that the scene was vivid in the reader’s imagination, Lobas included a description of the lash—“The lash [*plet*’] is a whip [*knut*] with a thick wooden handle, to which is fastened a tightly-wound belt”—and noted that it was common for a person to be maimed or even die from the lash.<sup>126</sup> In a book published five years later, he included photos (figures 4.2 and 4.3).

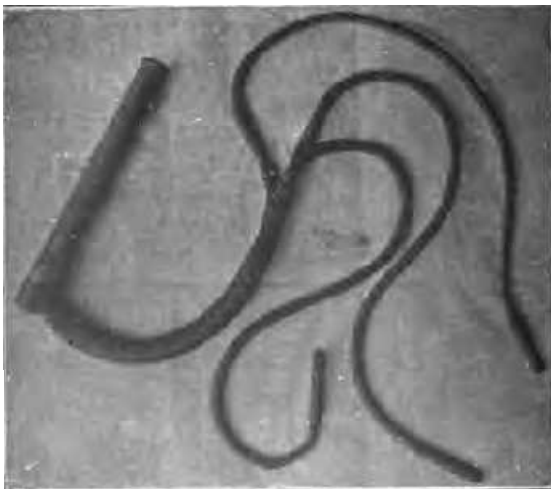


Fig. 4.2: The lash [*plet*’]<sup>127</sup>



Fig. 4.3: After the lash.<sup>128</sup>

Lobas and others also appropriated the image of “Sakhalinization”—the island turning even moral and civilized people into beasts—for their protest against the practice of state power. It was not the island itself that induced such a transformation, but the use of corporal punishment, which Lobas argued “degrades those people invested with the authority to administer it until they become beasts, reveling in their power.”<sup>129</sup> The argument that corporal punishment corrupts those forced to apply it was evoked frequently by physicians of that period,<sup>130</sup> but the connection

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> N.S. Lobas, *Katorga i poselenie na ostrove Sakhalin (neskol’ko shtrikhov iz zhizni russkoi shtrafnoi kolonii)* (Pavlograd: Tipografiia V.N. Shimkovicha, 1903), 84.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>130</sup> Frieden, *Russian Physicians*, 190.

of the process to the depravity of Sakhalin officials, an image familiar to readers of Chekhov or Doroshevich, transferred the blame from the conditions of the island to the Russian legal system itself.

Other Sakhalintsy appropriated the image of Sakhalin atrocities in arguments for basic human dignity and worth, often supporting their claims with Christian notions such as love of neighbor, creation of man in the image of God, and the spark of the divine in each individual, no matter how fallen. Such issues, they argued, were fundamental to Russia's identity as a civilized and Christian nation and were all too often neglected by those in power. Lobas, for example, cited Christ's teaching to "love your neighbor" in his argument against corporal punishment.<sup>131</sup> In an article on the effects of Sakhalin conditions on prisoners, Lobas concluded that "the housing and food, clothing and shoes, labor, and of course, the moral influence—all of this, as if on purpose, serves to lead the prisoner's body and spirit down a path of steady impoverishment. Instead of a person exiled in body and in spirit, cleansed of his criminal past through punishment, the artificially-created conditions create a maimed being not good for anything, whose colonizing mission on Sakhalin consists in a battle against harsh virgin nature, labor incomparably more difficult than penal servitude."<sup>132</sup> The "conditions of life" [*usloviia zhizni*] which Lobas invoked are not the severe nature or impenetrable forests experienced by visitors to the island, but the man-made environment, which led to the convicts' ultimate physical and moral demise, rather than correction and rehabilitation.

To Sakhalin physician V.G. Stadnitskii, who experienced severe conflict with the prison administration, Christian principles were a fundamental element of science and progress, around which the Russian state strove to define itself. In a diatribe against the abuse of power by prison officials, Stadnitskii invoked the familiar image of Sakhalin as dark, evil and barbarian, which he projected upon the Russian authorities on the island rather than the convict-victims. He wrote to the public prosecutor, "My protest against the power of darkness is a protest of good against evil, light against darkness, a protest of humanity against barbarism [*chelovechnosti protiv varvarstva*]," and accused the administration of ignoring "the principles of philanthropy

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<sup>131</sup> Lobas, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 1, 2.

<sup>132</sup> N.S. Lobas, "Usloviia zhizni sakhalinskogo arestanta i reaktsiia na nikh ego organizma," *Vrach* 1899, no. 13: 373.

[*chelovekoliubiia*] and Christian brotherly love.”<sup>133</sup> He called to replace the despotic and oppressive military officers overseeing Sakhalin prisons with educated and enlightened leaders, men of science who would serve the island and its inhabitants rather than their own interests. “Katorga should be led not by the unlearned, egoist or profiteer (*gesheftmakher*), but by men of society (*sveta*) and science, humane, enlightened and unselfish. They should be specialists with a higher education in one of the above-mentioned fields of mental and moral material re-education and the renewal of katorga... Only then would all the parts of this complex mechanism successfully and beneficially develop in harmony.<sup>134</sup> By invoking Sakhalin’s backwardness he drew attention to the failure of Russian society to keep up with European norms of education, science and progress.

A similar image was evoked by political exile Bronislav Pilsudskii in a report published by the Priamur division of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society and studied by both the Sakhalin and the Priamur administrations, another example of the not infrequent collaboration of the state with its antagonists on the frontier. Yet in this instance the argument was not for the human dignity of Russian convicts sent involuntarily to the island, but for the worth of the indigenous population suffering as their hunting ground was settled by ex-convicts and vagrants. Similarly, his concern was not about the abuses of individual officials but about the indifference of the state toward its weakest and most helpless subjects. In his memorandum “Wants and Needs of the Sakhalin Nivhgu,” Pilsudskii asked:

Can we, however, as cultured people, so proud of our civilization, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century so rich in humane and enlightened ideas, can we remain but indifferent observers of atrocities involving the aboriginal peoples which can partially be blamed on us? May we leave the Nivhgu exposed to those earthly tides that will mercilessly sweep away very many of the weak before allowing the rise and salvation of the stronger?

To remain at the heights proper for the representatives of Christianity and its elevated ideals, we have to bring relief to all, and especially to those who are the most helpless and, consequently, suffer more than others.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Petition of V.G. Stadnitskii, Acting Tymovsk Okrug Physician, to the public prosecutor [*Tovarishch Prokuror*] on Sakhalin Island, RGIA DV, f. 1145, op. 1, d. 127, l. 24, copied in GASO, f. 1038, op. 1, d. 25, l. 14, 13.

<sup>134</sup> Memorandum of Acting Tymovsk Okrug Physician Vladimir Stadnitskii, 4 March 1896, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 1, d. 5, l. 42ob.

<sup>135</sup> Bronisław Pilsudski [Bronislav Pilsudskii], “Wants and needs of the Sakhalin Nivhgu,” [1898] translated in *The Collected Works of Bronisław Pilsudski*, vol. 1, *The Aborigines of Sakhalin*, ed. Alfred F. Majewicz (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 114; see also V.M. Latyshev, “Sakhalinskie universitety,” in B.O. Pilsudskii, *Dorogoi*

Doctor L.V. Poddubskii evoked the image of Sakhalin poverty and oppression in his description of the conditions facing wives and children who had followed convicted family members into exile.<sup>136</sup> The success of such rhetoric was recorded by Naryshkina, who attributed the tsar's support of the Society for the Care of the Families of Exiled Convicts to Poddubskii's report.<sup>137</sup>

The image of Sakhalin as Russia's Other was also appropriated in anonymous correspondence appearing in Far Eastern newspapers in the late 1890s often describing Sakhalin life in absurd terms, the blame for which was projected onto the Russian state or society. *Vladivostok* published regular columns from anonymous Sakhalintsy, some who can be identified as political exiles and others who remain unknown. A prolific writer identified only as "Sovremennik" [The Contemporary] reported regularly from Sakhalin for a number of years, describing island life in a farcical manner that portrayed civil servants as either bumbling fools or crooks.<sup>138</sup> For example, an essay of September 1897 focused on one particular "anomaly of Sakhalin life," the fact that dirty water from the bathhouse emptied into a residential neighborhood, and the only thing residents did about it was purchase perfume. Even the wives of island officials feared the consequences if anyone complained.<sup>139</sup> Another essay, written in February 1898, portrayed the clerical office [*kantseliariia*] as a place of absurdities: Out of boredom on cold winter days, when no mail reached the island for months,

Civil servants are forced to survive on empty debates over unfinished issues left over from the last century; out of boredom irritable, short-tempered clerks are made even more ferocious, more malicious... All the existing organs insult each other to a lesser or greater degree with sharp written reprimands.... This telling off and exasperation, usually a harmless and most inoffensive occupation, can quickly turn into dangerous scheming since the cruelty and zeal of the office clerks is unbounded, and it seems in this case to be comparable to quicklime, which gets hotter when touched by a stream of cold

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*Lev Iakovlevich... (Pis'ma L.Ia. Shternbergu, 1893-1917 gg.)*, ed. V.M. Latyshev (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskii oblastnoi kraevedcheskii muzei, 1996), 21.

<sup>136</sup> IRLI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 319, ll. 49-70ob. (1898); later published as L.V. Poddubskii, "Sakhalinskie deti i ikh materi," *Pravo* 1899, no. 50 (5 December): 2349-2360. See also V.M. Latyshev, "Vrach L.V. Poddubskii i ego zapiski o sakhalinskoi katorga," *Vestnik sakhalinskogo muzeia* 11 (2004): 141-148.

<sup>137</sup> Manuscript of E.A. Naryshkina, Tsarskoe Selo, 1/14 June 1919, no. 1, IRLI, f. 134, op. 4, d. 498, ll. 39-43ob; Narishkin-Kurakin, *Under Three Tsars*, 157-160.

<sup>138</sup> This anonymous correspondent was likely political exile Sergei Khronovskii, a member of the People's Will party exiled to Sakhalin in 1887 for terrorist activity. Similar essays appeared in *Vladivostok* during the same time period identified with the initials "S.Kh.," also presumably Khronovskii's. I thank V.M. Latyshev for assistance in identifying the author of these columns.

<sup>139</sup> *Vladivostok*, 14 Sept. 1897, 5-6.

water, rather than cooling down. But, thankfully, everything on earth has its limits. Either nature or a fortunate coincidence, when creating various highly flammable substances, hindered their horrible destructive capacity with energy that does not last for long. One moment and their strength has disappeared, the dust settled, and their passions subsided.<sup>140</sup>

The days were short, and in the evenings, these same civil servants played whist and drank tea.

Even the military governors' archives were lampooned in the press, as no one, it seemed, could agree on Sakhalin's characteristics. From 1884-1888, "Sovremennik" reported, archival records portrayed the island as a "second Eden." After 1888 it was transformed into a "place of weeping and groaning for hundreds or thousands of hungry settlers." After 1893, however, it was cleaned up again "on paper" in response to accusations that it was unfit for settlement. In the same essay, the writer described the "passion for the grandiose" among Sakhalin officials, who build roads "for the sake of the road" rather than the "depraved, miserable dregs of society" who would travel along it, and mines for the sake of mines, fisheries for the sake of fisheries, and settlements for settlements' sake.<sup>141</sup> The absurdities of Sakhalin were not in the island itself, but in its colonial administration.

## Conclusion

Responses to the image of Sakhalin circulating in the Russian press during this period tell us as much about Russia, Russian society and a burgeoning Sakhalin society as did Russian colonization and representation of the island. State responses demonstrate an unsurprising desire to control Sakhalin's image while at the same time striving to make legible a place that had become unknowable just as it was unknown. Responses by civil society demonstrate popular support of Russia's civilizing mission as applied to the criminal population, including efforts to instill in them a work ethic, literacy and a cultured way of life. On the island, Sakhalintsy responded by assuming control of their image, responding in writing to the unpleasant rumors circulating on the mainland and creating a Sakhalin heritage and identity. Others embraced the island's othering for their own purposes, on the mainland using Sakhalin to instill fear and obedience in not-yet-civilized peasants, while on Sakhalin, directing the colonial gaze back toward Russia itself. While V.G. Korolenko claimed that Russianness was "a fact, so to say, primary, accompanying [a Russian] from birth and setting its imprint upon us, natural, inevitable,

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<sup>140</sup> *Vladivostok*, 15 Mar. 1898, 12.

<sup>141</sup> *Vladivostok*, 28 Sept. 1897, 7-9.

and unmediated,”<sup>142</sup> examination of Sakhalin colonization reveals a Russianness that was very much mediated, unnatural and unpredictable, a process of negotiation in which much was at stake.

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<sup>142</sup> V.G. Korolenko, “Neskol’ko myslei o natsionalizme,” in *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3 (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 232; originally published in *Russkoe bogatstvo* 1901, no. 5, under the title “Patriotizm, natsionalizm.”

## CHAPTER 5: A RICH WASTELAND ONCE MORE, 1904-1906

The advent of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 drew the world's attention to the Far East, rendering many of the conflicts over Russia's Sakhalin policy irrelevant as focus shifted from *how* to comprehend and administer Sakhalin as a Russian penal colony to *whether* Sakhalin was, should be, or could be Russian at all. While A.P. Salomon, director of the Main Prison Administration, had stated confidently in 1898 that "a matter on which we have spent more than twenty million rubles since 1879 cannot simply be abandoned,"<sup>1</sup> with war against Japan on the horizon and social unrest in St. Petersburg, Sakhalin became a financial drain rather than a "treasure island" in the eyes of some Russian policymakers. In 1904, the Viceroy of the Far East, Admiral E.I. Alekseev, declared the penal colony a failure in both penitentiary and economic terms, calling for abolition of exile to Sakhalin altogether,<sup>2</sup> while the occupation of Sakhalin by Japanese troops in July 1905 demonstrated the failure of the island's political mission of protecting the Russian Far East from foreign aggression. Sakhalin gained new significance as a locus of conflict between East and West as the meaning of Sakhalin was negotiated not only among the Russian public in the media, but between Russia and Japan, first on the battlefield and then at the negotiation table. In terms of the island itself, the conflict left no winners, as both Russians and Japanese viewed the division of Sakhalin at the fiftieth parallel as betrayal of territory rightfully their own. The Russian state not only abolished penal servitude on the island but withdrew most support of the remaining Russian population, rendering the island again an empty wilderness in Russian eyes, little different from the land described as "wasteland" [*pustyr*'] by explorer Boshniak in 1858.<sup>3</sup> As the state surrendered Sakhalin—diplomatically in the south, economically in the north—in the press, the island once again became rich and inherently Russian, characterized not only by its fertile soil and healthy climate but, as a Vladivostok official wrote, by its potential to be a "bulwark of [Russia's] lordship over the entire enormous territory of the Priamur."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.P. Salomon, "Rech' nachal'nika glavnogo tiuremnogo upravleniia na o. Sakhaline," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1899, no. 1 (January): 10.

<sup>2</sup> 18 August 1904, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 5, d. 634, l. 1; on microfilm at GASO, MF 48.

<sup>3</sup> N.K. Boshniak, "Ekspeditsiia v Pri-amurskom krae," *Morskoi sbornik* 38 (Dec. 1858), sec. 3: 179.

<sup>4</sup> A.A. Panov, *Chto takoe Sakhalin i nuzhen-li on nam?* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia G.K. Skachkova, 1905), 6-7.

## The Viceroyalty of the Far East

Even before the outbreak of war, the relationship to Russia of not only Sakhalin but the entire Far East was rapidly changing, the result of new Russian policies in the Far East, the strengthening of Japan and the othering of Sakhalin in the Russian press. In July 1903, as a means of “assuring the peaceful development of the country and satisfying urgent local needs,”<sup>5</sup> Tsar Nicholas II effectively divided the empire in two by appointing Admiral E.I. Alekseev, former commander of Russia’s Pacific fleet, as his Viceroy, with civil and military authority over a newly-created viceroyalty consisting of “all the Provinces now under the rule of the Governor General of Pri-Amur and the Kuantung Province,” in other words, everything east of Lake Baikal.<sup>6</sup> As demonstrated in a recent dissertation by Chia Yin Hsu, the creation of the viceroyalty redefined the relationship between St. Petersburg and the Far East as the Priamur Region was joined with non-Russian Manchuria as an administrative territory separate from the Empire itself. No longer part of the imperial core, it was a colonial space crucial to Russia’s development and industrialization, like the Viceroyalty of India to Great Britain.<sup>7</sup> Through this process, Sakhalin, a territory on the margins of the now-marginalized Priamur, became a step further removed from Russia, and a decade of public disparagement led many to question Sakhalin’s value to the empire altogether.

With the creation of the viceroyalty, designating Sakhalin and the rest of the Far East a colony rather than an integral part of Russia, Sakhalin’s othering was no longer limited to anonymous editorials, unconfirmed rumors, and politically subversive research or journalism. The viceroy’s August 1904 declaration that the current state of Sakhalin was “satisfactory neither from a penitentiary point of view nor in economic terms” was widely reported in the press and cleared the way for indictment of the colony publicly even by those in service to the Russian state.<sup>8</sup> For the first time it was officially reported that it may be “in the interest of the state” to

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from *Pravitel'stevennyi vestnik* in Kanichi Asakawa, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict: Its Causes and Issues* (London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1905), 301.

<sup>6</sup> Imperial Order of 30 July/12 Aug. 1903, in *Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894-1919*, vol. 1, *Manchu Period (1894-1911)*, comp. and ed. John A. MacMurray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), 122.

<sup>7</sup> Chia Yin Hsu, “The Chinese Eastern Railroad and the Making of Russian Imperial Orders in the Far East” (PhD diss, New York University, 2006), 154.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from the Viceroy of His Imperial Highness in the Far East to the Acting Priamur Governor General, 18 August 1904, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 5, d. 634, l. 1; on microfilm at GASO, MF 48. See also “Russkaia pechat’,” *Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta* (St. Petersburg), 9 Oct. 1904; S. Zh., “Nasha okraina. Novoe budushchee Sakhalina,” *Amurskaia gazeta* (Blagoveshchensk), 3 Nov. 1904, 2381-2382. The former report was based on

end Sakhalin exile, and the viceroy requested the cooperation of regional and local officials, in particular, representatives of the Departments of Justice, Finance, Agriculture, and State Domains, to resolve this question.<sup>9</sup> Somewhat ironically, the officials themselves turned to anonymously-published reports, Nikolaevsk tax inspector N. Shestunov referring the viceroy to recent anonymous articles in the St. Petersburg *Newspaper of Trade and Manufacturing* [*Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta*] and a series of editorials from *Russkaia mysl'*.<sup>10</sup> It is likely, however, that state officials had themselves authored these anonymous reports. The anonymous author of the essays in *Russkaia mysl'* was revealed a year later to be Shestunov's counterpart in the Vladivostok administration, tax inspector A.A. Panov.<sup>11</sup>

The viceroy's public admission of Sakhalin's failure as a penal colony, along with the February 1904 outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war which threatened Russia's very possession of the island, changed views of Sakhalin dramatically. State and society united against a common enemy—the Japanese—while the state no longer covered up the failure of the penal colony and individuals no longer risked punishment for spreading their views. Some who had previously withheld their memoirs or analyses of Sakhalin colonization published them now, taking advantage of the attention drawn to the island by the war. Tax inspector Panov published his series from *Russkaia mysl'* under his own name and six months later, as the situation in the Far East became increasingly dire, printed 8000 copies of a thirty-two page booklet with similar content to be distributed without charge. He considered it his “civic duty [*grazhdanskim dolgom*],” he wrote, to draw the attention of society to “the importance to us of this island that we have forgotten and disdained.”<sup>12</sup> He likewise spoke on the issue publicly, for example at an April 1905 meeting of the St. Petersburg Legal Society, with responses by others who knew the

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information from *Russkii listok* (Moscow), while the latter was received by telegraph from a correspondent elsewhere in the Far East.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from the viceroy to the acting Priamur governor general, 18 August 1904, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 5, d. 634, l. 1ob.; on microfilm at GASO, MF 48.

<sup>10</sup> Statement of N. Shestunov, tax inspector of the Nikolaevsk-Sakhalin tax district, 24 Sept. 1904, sent to the Priamur governor general on 31 Dec. 1904; RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 5, d. 634, l. 5; on microfilm at GASO, MF 48. The recommended articles were: A. Seich, “Sakhalin kak koloniia,” *Russkaia mysl'* 1904, nos. 6, 7, 9, 10, 11; “*Russkaia pechat'*,” *Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta*, 9 Oct. 1904; Tazhnyi, “Sakhalin, kak koloniia,” *Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta*, 23 Oct. 1904, 3.

<sup>11</sup> A.A. Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia: ocherki kolonizatsii i sovremennogo polozheniia Sakhalina* (Moscow: Tipografiia T-va I. D. Sytina, 1905).

<sup>12</sup> Panov, *Chto takoe Sakhalin*, 7.

situation well.<sup>13</sup> Zoologist P.Iu. Shmidt, whose previous publications—at least those under his own name—had focused on the fish and marine resources of Sakhalin, also began speaking and writing on the issue. In a November 1904 lecture at a museum in Blagoveshchensk, the administrative center of the Amur oblast, he focused on how much life on Sakhalin had improved since it gained its negative reputation and how it “is of utmost importance to the entire Far East,” in particular during this time of crisis.<sup>14</sup>

The issue took on greater importance both politically and discursively when unrest broke out in European Russia, with mass strikes and a demonstration at the Winter Palace on Bloody Sunday leading to more than one thousand deaths. Among other demands, strikers called for an end to the Russo-Japanese War and a representative voice in the government. In this context of upheaval and uncertainty, it is not surprising that the defense of a discursively Orientalized island in a politically marginal territory would be of low priority to the tsar and his advisors. Yet it was for precisely this reason that Sakhalin was significant, and as Russian military units struggled to defend Manchuria against Japanese invasion, the battle for Sakhalin—at least for the first fifteen months of the war—was one of words. Now writing freely without fear of state reprisal, some writers wrote of their own negative experiences or told stories of Sakhalin convicts or *chinovniki* based on rumors of questionable accuracy. Others such as Panov wrote of the island’s riches and wealth, including not only coal, but—so Panov claimed—lead, silver, iron, gold, oil, fish, caviar, whaling, seals, sea cabbages and forestry.<sup>15</sup> Equally significant to Panov’s campaign was the demand for representative government. “I consider [dissemination of information about Sakhalin] all the more necessary,” Panov wrote, “because if the question of war and peace is turned over to the discussion of people’s deputies [*narodnykh predstavitelei*], they would not have time to study Sakhalin based on primary sources, although they would need a firm and clear view of its importance.”<sup>16</sup> His fear was not of losing Sakhalin due to Japanese military superiority but of losing it due to misunderstanding by the people.<sup>17</sup> No longer were

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<sup>13</sup> “Iz deiatel’nosti iuridicheskikh obshchestv. S.-peterburgskoe iuridicheskoe obshchestvo,” *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii* 1905, no. 5: 162.

<sup>14</sup> V.V., “Nasha okraina: Ostrov Sakhalin kak koloniia,” *Amurskaia gazeta*, 1 Jan. 1905, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Panov, *Chto takoe Sakhalin*, 16-18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

disparaging works such as those of Chekhov or Doroshevich merely an embarrassment or annoyance. They could have long-term consequences.

The most important questions at this point became not whether Sakhalin was succeeding as a penal colony, but why it was not and what changes to make in the island administration. Some agreed with the viceroy that it was time to end exile to Sakhalin altogether. Shmidt concluded that the only rational decision was to end Sakhalin penal servitude. After twenty-five years, he wrote, the attempt at creating an agricultural colony remained “completely unsuccessful,” and having lost the confidence in human progress that characterized the 1860s, he doubted that it would be possible in the future to transform criminals into colonist pioneers. As the population on Sakhalin grew, it would be more and more difficult to provide food and supplies.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, the Sakhalin system had failed to bring about the “moral rebirth” [*npravstvennomu vozrozhdeniiu*] of criminals.<sup>19</sup> “What caused the failure of this at first glance attractive idea of correcting criminals through agricultural work, while at the same time providing a population of workers for a hitherto uninhabited frontier?” he asked. In Shmidt’s mind, the causes were many: poor climate and soil quality, the moral temperament of exiled criminals, the inexperience with agriculture of those exiles who were not peasants. But most importantly, “the idea of colonization in general tallies poorly with the idea of prison and exile: a pioneer colonist [*kolonist-pioner*] in a wild and remote land must have the energy of iron, needed in the war against the hostile elements of nature, and must believe in his own strength and believe in the brighter future ahead of him when he recaptures from nature the right to exist.” Finally, he noted, settlers feared for their lives and property: “It’s not for no reason that they say on Sakhalin, ‘The only ones who sleep well at night are those in prison!’”<sup>20</sup>

Even if colonization seemed incompatible with exile and penal servitude, that did not imply the impossibility of creating penal colonies on the island, as proposed by Vlasov and others in the 1860s-70s. The fact remained that Sakhalin was distant and unattractive to settlers, and that workers would be needed no matter what manner of colonization was employed. Jurist Nikolai Novombergskii in 1903, with a background in legal history and—unlike Panov and Shmidt—familiar with the latest developments in penology, proposed concentrating convicts

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<sup>18</sup> P.Iu. Shmidt, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Russkoe bogatstvo* 1905, no. 4: 183-185.

<sup>19</sup> Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia*, 184.

<sup>20</sup> Shmidt, “Ostrov Sakhalin,” *Russkoe bogatstvo* 1905, no. 4: 180, 181.

under strict surveillance in one area of the island, creating penal colonies with a strict penal regime, the island itself no longer serving as a large natural prison. He pointed out that in Tobol'sk, for example, where the penal servitude prison was directly across from the cathedral, many villagers had never encountered a convict.<sup>21</sup> This he concluded would allow productive settlement of free colonists throughout the island. Panov, perhaps doubtful that free colonists would choose to settle on Sakhalin, preferred not to give up the original ideas about Sakhalin as a place of rehabilitation and an opportunity for criminals to start a new life. To him the only convicts that harmed the purposes of colonization were those incorrigible or unfit for settlement, and they, he claimed, should be imprisoned on the mainland.<sup>22</sup> To jurist Pavel Liublinskii, who reviewed both books for the journal of the Ministry of Justice, the crucial factor ignored by both writers was that Sakhalin provided the only available place for the exile of criminal—as opposed to political—offenders, and hence the issue was crucial to not only Sakhalin in particular, but the entire exile system.<sup>23</sup> He noted that in Novombergskii's view, there was no reason to exile criminals to Sakhalin at all if prisons on the mainland would be just as effective.<sup>24</sup> If the convicts sent to Sakhalin were safe and hardworking, as Panov proposed, then they could remain “in the metropole itself.”<sup>25</sup> Shmidt, of course, opposed the use of any forced labor at all on the island and was uninterested in what would become of Russia's convicts or the historic precedent of Siberian exile.

### **Japanese Occupation of Sakhalin**

While the press and the Far Eastern administration debated Sakhalin's future, on the island itself residents were preparing for occupation by the Japanese. With the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railroad, Manchuria rather than the Amur River had become the primary connection between European Russia and the Pacific. The Liaodong Peninsula, of course, was the main object of Japanese aggression as well, having been granted to Japan in the 1895 Treaty

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<sup>21</sup> N.Ia. Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin (Ocherki sakhalinskoi zhizni)* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia doma prizreniia maloletnikh bednykh, 1903), 151. See also P. Liublinskii, review of *Ostrov Sakhalin*, by Nikolai Novombergskii, *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii* 1903, no. 9: 389-392.

<sup>22</sup> P. Liublinskii, “Literaturnoe obozrenie,” review of *Sakhalin kak koloniia*, by A.A. Panov, *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii* 1905, no. 3: 307. See also “Iz deiatel'nosti iuridicheskikh obshchestv. S.-Peterburgskoe iuridicheskoe obshchestvo,” *Zhurnal ministerstva iustitsii* 1905, no. 5: 162.

<sup>23</sup> Liublinskii, “Literaturnoe obozrenie,” 307.

<sup>24</sup> Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin*, 152.

<sup>25</sup> Liublinskii, “Literaturnoe obozrenie,” 308.

of Shimonoseki but lost again six days later in the Triple Intervention. Russian troops, therefore, were dispatched to protect Manchuria, rather than Sakhalin, and the defense of the island was left to the troops stationed as prison guards along with voluntary militia units [*druzhiny*] formed of convicts, promised amnesty in return for their aid in the defense of the motherland.<sup>26</sup> Overall, Military-Governor M.N. Liapunov had approximately 6000 troops available for Sakhalin's defense. When the Japanese attacked in July 1905, it was only a matter of days before the Russians surrendered.<sup>27</sup> According to an officer recruited to serve in Sakhalin's defense, the promised militias were unorganized and morale was low. The convicts "were not respected and were not recognized as a military unit by the officers and soldiers of the Sakhalin garrison. Civilians saw in them a gang of thieves, sly and cowardly robbers, or murderers. Everyone agreed that these were not soldiers capable of military action, which demanded men of honor and courage."<sup>28</sup>

Even before the occupation, the Sakhalin population faced shortages and hardships. Reports from the island no longer focused on the absurdities of the island administration or atrocities of the criminal population. Rather than invoking fear in others, Sakhalin itself was characterized as impoverished and afraid as residents awaited attacks by the dreaded Japanese. In February 1905 it was reported that prices were high for even the most basic necessities, such as sugar, soap and butter.<sup>29</sup> Due to a lack of medical supplies, physicians on Sakhalin were unable to treat the ill or those who may be wounded in battle. A ship evacuating the wives and children of Sakhalin officials and about 150 exile-settlers attempted to sail from Korsakovskii Post to Vladivostok in February, inching forward as passengers broke the ice with crowbars. The normally two-day journey took two weeks.<sup>30</sup> Once the island was taken by the Japanese, those exiles who had not escaped went hungry, as they no longer receiving their promised food rations from the Russian state, or so a priest explained to the Japanese commander in September

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<sup>26</sup> See "Uzakoneniia. Vysochaishee povelenie o novykh l'gotakh dlia ssyl'nykh, sluzhashchikh v vol'nykh družinakh po oborone ostrova Sakhalina," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1905, no. 5 (May): 311-312.

<sup>27</sup> John J. Stephan, *Sakhalin: A History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 78-79.

<sup>28</sup> P.V., "Komandirovka na Sakhalin v 1905 godu (Vospominaniia po pis'mam)," *Voennyi sbornik* 1906, no. 12 (December): 191.

<sup>29</sup> "Otvuki voiny," *Amurskaia gazeta*, 11 Feb. 1905, 328.

<sup>30</sup> "Nasha okraina. S Sakhalina," *Amurskaia gazeta*, 13 Apr. 1905, 821.

1905.<sup>31</sup> Even the convicts on Sakhalin were turned into heroes in the press, such as Gaksbakh's hypothetical description of happy convicts who "atoned for their sin by defending their oppressed fatherland in a difficult war.... Those who lay down their bones in battle against the enemy will stand before the Highest Judge with a pure soul, and those fated to finish their earthly life after the war will be granted great mercy declared from the Russian throne."<sup>32</sup> In contrast, the ever-irreverent Doroshevich lampooned the trend of empathizing with Sakhalin's suffering in a column sparked by the Japanese invasion. "That poor Port Korsakovsk and those poor Korsakovsk officials," he remarked sarcastically, referring to a report that cigarettes were so scarce that civil servants selling them were making tremendous profits.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Campaign to Resignify Sakhalin**

While triggered by Japanese claims to land once held to be Russian, the press war over Sakhalin was part of a broader redefinition of the Russian state, as not only the territory of the Russian autocracy but its very legitimacy was called into question. Restored attention to Sakhalin as a place of banishment and tyranny reinforced the societal discontent of the 1905 revolution, placing Sakhalin no longer at the margins but in the midst of the unrest. Writer P.S. Uvarov, who had served in the military on Sakhalin in 1901, drew attention to the corruption of civil servants and the desperation of impoverished peasants by publishing a series of stories about Sakhalin life that reinforced images of the island as sinister and terrifying, populated by brutal murderers and cruel oppressors. His story *Avvakum krovopiitsa* [literally Avvakum the Bloodsucker], subtitled "A Novel of Life on Sakhalin and in the Far East," reads like a thriller, holding the reader in constant suspense as to whether its hero, an escaped murderer, would kill those he encountered while on the run or be murdered himself.<sup>34</sup> Heroes of his other short stories include a corrupt and merciless prison guard, an alcoholic yet harmless nobleman convict, a Georgian prince driven insane by Sakhalin life, and a convict brutally beaten for stealing from

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<sup>31</sup> A. Kukul'shchikov, "Iz zapisei sakhalinskogo sviashchennika za 1905 g," *Vladivostokskie eparkhial'nye vedomosti* 1907, no. 11 (nonofficial section): 232.

<sup>32</sup> Zh. Gaksbakh, *Sakhalin: Ocherk prirody i naseleniia* (Moscow: Izdanie D. Tutaeva, 1905), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Vlas Doroshevich, "Sakhalintsy," *Russkoe slovo* 1905, no. 38, reprinted in V.M. Doroshevich, *Sakhalin*, vol. 2, ed. S.V. Bukchin (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), 366.

<sup>34</sup> P.S. Uvarov, *Avvakum Krovopiitsa: Roman iz zhizni Sakhalina i dal'nega vostoka* (St. Petersburg: Pastor, 1905).

the governor to feed his son.<sup>35</sup> The Western press, which supported the demands of Russian strikers for reforms and representation, also portrayed the penal colony at its worst, the *New York Times* translating and printing one of Doroshevich's essays alongside images of convicts "harnessed to a cart" and women sentenced to life imprisonment.<sup>36</sup> (See figure 5.1.) Other publications emphasized the horrors that were presumed to have ended on Sakhalin with the arrival of the Japanese.<sup>37</sup> (In fact, if the testimony of Russian observers is to be believed, the period of occupation saw brutal murders, rapes and dismemberment by the Japanese of both prisoners of war and Russian civilians.<sup>38</sup>) Even the popular American *Youth's Companion* magazine, an "illustrated family paper," published children's stories about Sakhalin convicts.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 5.1: *New York Times*, 16 July 1905, days after the Japanese invasion.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> P.S. Uvarov, "Nadziratel' Vorobei," in *Tipy i nrvy Sakhalina* (Moscow: D.P. Efimov, 1904), 3-21; "Markiz Ivan Kuz'mich Lambrozo," in *ibid.*, 22-43; "Psikhopat," in *ibid.*, 141-159; "Kiriusha-katorzhnik," in P.S. Uvarov, *Sakhalin i katorga: ocherki* (St. Petersburg: F.I. Mitiurikov, 1905), 1-44.

<sup>36</sup> W. Doroshevitsch, "Sakhalin: The Botany Bay of Russia," *New York Times*, 16 July 1905, SM1-2.

<sup>37</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 22 Oct. 1904; 29 Jul. 1905; 9 Sept. 1905, 1298-1300, 1320; *The Graphic*, 15 July 1905, 36.

<sup>38</sup> See Marie Sevela, "Chaos vs. Cruelty: Sakhalin as a Secondary Theater of Operations," *Rethinking the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05*, vol. 1, ed. Rotem Kowner (Folkestone: Global Orient, 2007), 98-101.

<sup>39</sup> *The Youth's Companion*, 21 Sept. 1905; 4 Jan. 1906.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Times*, 16 July 1905, SM1.

Other Russians opposed the vilification of the island, fearing it would lead to Russia's surrender of Sakhalin altogether, and a counter-image emerged reminiscent of the Sakhalin of the 1850s, an empty land rich in resources, organically Russian, "of great importance to the state,"<sup>41</sup> and waiting only to be made known and profitable. To Shmidt and Panov, leaders of the campaign to resignify and reform Sakhalin Island, the island was naturally Russian, needed by Russia, and had tremendous potential to rescue the empire from its political and economic woes. Their first task was therefore to refute the negative imagery of Sakhalin repeated in the press. Panov accused the press of deliberately disregarding the island's wealth and importance, as readers "greedily pounced on the lively, sometimes loathsome, graphic portrayals of lawlessness, violence and tyranny reigning on that island of banishment, their righteous indignation unjustly carried over to the island itself."<sup>42</sup> Shmidt likewise strove to refute predominant impressions. He noted, "We encounter many dark and hopeless pages in the descriptions of Sakhalin and Sakhalin life; the pictures of horrors committed on Sakhalin leave an indelible impression and are deeply imprinted on the soul. Thanks to such descriptions even the name Sakhalin has become fearsome: In it you hear the clatter of chains, the whistle of the lash, the groans of the punished, and you imagine horrible scenes of tyranny and violence."<sup>43</sup> A letter to the editor of *Amurskaia gazeta* commented on the efforts to reverse this picture, noting that while Sakhalin was Russian, Russia considered it a "dead island," while after its occupation by the Japanese, newspapers and publicists loudly maintained that "under no conditions ... should an island 'so necessary to us' be given to the Japanese."<sup>44</sup>

In a period of social, economic and political upheaval, the most important role granted to Sakhalin was to bring stability to Russia, possible due to its vast resources and strategic location. Emphasizing the island's natural wealth, Panov suggested during the war that "the loss of Sakhalin would be so bitter and painful that we have to wonder, will we always be such poor colonizers and propagators of culture, and will our colonizational politics in distant regions always have the character of Manilov-like experiments, absorbing thousands of lives and

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<sup>41</sup> Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Panov, *Chto takoe Sakhalin*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Shmidt, "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Russkoe bogatstvo* 1905, no. 4: 148. See also "Nasha okraina: Ostrov Sakhalin kak koloniia," *Amurskaia gazeta*, 1 Jan. 1905, 13.

<sup>44</sup> K.K., "Otdavat' li Sakhalin?," *Amurskaia gazeta*, 5 Aug. 1904, 1624.

millions of rubles of the people's money!"<sup>45</sup> More optimistic, Shmidt asserted that Sakhalin would no doubt "pay back one hundredfold all expenses connected with the breakdown of its current system and the improvement of its economic life. All the data suggest that with the removal of the negative influence of penal servitude, a colony will develop that is rich and important for Russia ... But that.... requires strong, free hands, not hands in chains."<sup>46</sup> Others joined the cause of resignifying Sakhalin as rich and valuable as well. A collection of articles on the geography of the Far East written for schoolchildren included an article by A. Nikol'skii, who traveled to Sakhalin in 1881 and wrote a dissertation on Sakhalin vertebrates. Not mentioning the penal settlement at all, the article described the island in comparison with Siberia and the Far East, sharing all of the positive attributes of the mainland—fishing, forests, furs, coal—but to an even greater extent.<sup>47</sup> Gaksbakh also wrote about the fishing and high-quality coal. He also reported rumors of "colossal" reserves of oil and that traces had been found of silver, lead, copper and even gold, all of which remained unexploited and unexplored.<sup>48</sup> A 1905 article in *Niva* claimed that according to G. Platonov, who investigated Sakhalin on behalf of a Baku oil company, "of everything he [Platonov] saw in America, nothing compared with what he found on Sakhalin, where oil fields... exceed not only those of America, but also those of Baku." Others, *Niva* reported, claimed that Sakhalin had more natural resources than anywhere in Europe: "This is what the 'godforsaken' island is really like. What El Dorado it could be in the right hands!"<sup>49</sup>

Its natural riches made Sakhalin attractive not only to Russia, but also to Japan and the United States, which Russian writers realized, and hastened to warn the public and the state about the looming threat. An unidentified commentator in *Priroda i liudi* [Nature and People] reported rumors that America wanted to buy Sakhalin as it had purchased Alaska, and that some Russians preferred selling Sakhalin to America to surrendering it to Japan. "Undoubtedly," he wrote, "for the entrepreneurial Americans, Sakhalin would be a valuable acquisition, but it would

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<sup>45</sup> P.Iu. Shmidt, "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Vestnik i biblioteka samoobrazovaniia* 1905, no. 19: 592. "Manilov" refers to a character in Gogol's *Dead Souls* known for his carelessness and lack of concern for others.

<sup>46</sup> Shmidt, "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Russkoe bogatstvo* 1905, no. 4: 185.

<sup>47</sup> A. Nikol'skii, "Sakhalin," in *Po dal'nemu vostoku: Sakhalin, Ussuriiskaia oblast', Man'chzhuriia, Koreia i Iaponiia: Sbornik opisatel'nykh statei dlia domashnego i shkol'nogo chteniia*, comp. V. L'vovich (Moscow: M.V. Kliukin, 1905), 3-11.

<sup>48</sup> Gaksbakh, *Sakhalin*, 13-14.

<sup>49</sup> "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Niva* 36, no. 16 (23 April 1905): 310.

be even more valuable to the Japanese.... Possessing Sakhalin is not simply satisfying the simple want or whim of one or another political party, but it must be the desire of the entire government that values its future.”<sup>50</sup> When Americans heard this rumor, they laughed, insisting they had no desire to obtain Sakhalin.<sup>51</sup> Uvarov likewise asserted that as important as Sakhalin was to Russia, it was even more important to Japan, where growing rice required a herring-meal fertilizer from Sakhalin. “If there is no *tuka* [herring fertilizer], there will be no rice, and the land of the setting sun will be threatened with hunger,” he warned.<sup>52</sup> Even Shmidt admitted that Japan would easily be able to take Sakhalin from Russia militarily if it so chose. On the other hand, some Russians, such as Lev Sternberg, expressed hope that Sakhalin would be turned over to the Japanese, believing that to be the best course for the island and its inhabitants. When asked about the future of the Giliak [Nivkh] people in a 1905 interview in New York, Sternberg responded that only “if the Japanese take [Sakhalin] or receive it by treaty, the Gilyaks may be saved... The Japanese are near; they are progressive and humane. These tribes will be helped, taught, attended to as they never can be by Russia.”<sup>53</sup> To Shternberg, who had spent seven years exiled to Sakhalin, concepts such as progressive and humane did not apply to tsarist Russia and his concern was for the island’s indigenous population.

Along with a revived emphasis on the island’s riches, as the island’s fate was uncertain, a growing number of publications began to portray Sakhalin once again as naturally, organically Russian. Gaksbakh, for example, described Sakhalin’s location on a map, conjecturing that “many [people] ... assume that Sakhalin is somewhere far to the north, near the pole in the Arctic Circle. But in fact it is nothing like that. One has to mentally transfer the island to us, to European Russia, or to western Europe.” He explained that the island extended as far south as Italy and as far north as Riazan’.<sup>54</sup> Panov made a similar comment, noting that “One only has to glance at a map of the eastern shores of our Asian possessions to see how closely the island is connected to the mainland and what major importance it has for the protection of the Priamur.... At places it comes so close to the mainland that it is as if they together make up one whole, and

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<sup>50</sup> P. Labbe, “Pod nebom Sakhalina,” *Priroda i liudi* 1905, no. 34 (23 July): 538.

<sup>51</sup> “We Do Not Want Sakhalin; Report That We Would Buy It Evokes Hilarity in Washington,” *New York Times*, 27 May 1905, 5.

<sup>52</sup> P.S. Uvarov. *Tipy i nnavy Sakhalina*, vol. 2 (Moscow: D.P. Efimov, 1905), 235-236. This view was published as well in the journal *Around the World*. “Sakhalin,” *Vokrug sveta* 1904, no. 42: 683-687.

<sup>53</sup> “The Search for the Origin of the Redskins,” *New York Times*, 2 July 1905, X6.

<sup>54</sup> Gaksbakh, *Sakhalin*, 6.

only the distance of a cannon shot separates Cape Pogibi on the island from Cape Lazarev on the mainland.”<sup>55</sup> Gaksbakh described Sakhalin as related by nature or even blood to the mainland: “By its very nature [*prirodoi*, which can refer to both nature and birth], the island is close to its mother, Asian Russia.”<sup>56</sup> A newspaper article commemorating the anniversary of Anton Chekhov’s death referred to the loss of Sakhalin as “a living part being torn from the Russian body.”<sup>57</sup>

The implications of the changing meanings of Sakhalin become most clear at the Portsmouth Peace Conference hosted by U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in August 1905, bringing the Russo-Japanese War to an end. It was in the interests of both sides to end the fighting, given the dire economic situation of the Japanese state and the almost total destruction of Russia’s Pacific fleet, so eight of the twelve Japanese demands were negotiated quickly. Yet there was little hope for agreement on the remaining points, at which time Roosevelt was called to assist in the negotiations and both sides halted negotiations to telegraph their respective governments and wait for instructions. Finally, the only questions remaining were those of Sakhalin, which neither side was willing to surrender, and the war indemnity demanded by Japan, which Russia refused to pay. In an effort to bring negotiations to an end, Japan agreed to Russian sovereignty over Sakhalin if Russia would pay the indemnity. Sergei Vitte, who was negotiating the treaty on Russia’s behalf, refused, and the tsar himself expressed his preference to surrender the island rather than suffer the humiliation of paying Japan for the expenses of war. Yet Tsar Nicholas soon changed his mind, instructing Vitte to continue the war.<sup>58</sup> Vitte disregarded this final directive and on 5 September 1905, Vitte and his Japanese counterpart, foreign minister Komura Jutarō, agreed on a compromise that divided the island between the two empires.

While the resulting treaty, signed by the Russian tsar and the Japanese emperor on 14 October, legitimized internationally the division of Sakhalin between Russia and Japan, the negotiations themselves shed light on the meaning Sakhalin held to the Russian and Japanese states and people. The Japanese occupation of Sakhalin in July 1905 had little significance to the

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<sup>55</sup> Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Gaksbakh, *Sakhalin*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> “Chekhov i Kabafuto (Pis’ mo iz Peterburga),” *Novosti dnia*, 2 (15) July 1905, 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> S.Iu. Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, *1894-oktiabr’ 1905: Tsarstvovanie Nikolaia II* (Tallinn: Skif Aleks, 1994), 412. Eugene P. Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth: An Adventure in American Diplomacy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1969), 112, 155.

war, since the major battles had already been fought and won. Yet by taking Sakhalin militarily, Japan gained a distinct advantage in negotiations over the island's future. To Vitte, however, acting on behalf of the tsar, military occupation was insufficient to justify permanent submission of the territory. Willing to surrender the Liaodong Peninsula and its prized Port Arthur, which were recent acquisitions rather than "historically Russian" land, Russia was unwilling to give up Sakhalin. Vitte later explained that Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, head of the Council of State Defense, set the condition that Russia was not to surrender to Japan "even an inch [*piadi*] of primordial Russian land." Likewise Admiral A.A. Birilev, head of the Ministry of the Navy, informed him that the tsar would not agree to any humiliating conditions, but only to surrender of territory "which we had stolen in better times."<sup>59</sup> Understanding Sakhalin to be historically and naturally Russian and therefore humiliating to lose, Vitte refused to surrender, insisting that the island was a continuation of Russian possessions in Asia and that ceding it would harm Russia's honor.<sup>60</sup> The Japanese in turn countered that "Japan's title to at least a larger part of Sakhalin can readily be traced to a period anterior to the Russian occupation and it seems to them that instead of being a natural continuation of the continental system of Asia, it forms a natural and necessary link in the chain of insular units of which the Empire of Japan is exclusively composed." Moreover, Japan was currently in possession of Sakhalin.<sup>61</sup> Vitte was forced to assign a value to Sakhalin when negotiations turned to possibly splitting the island and the payment of indemnities. He determined southern Sakhalin to be worth less than the sum demanded to cover Japan's war expenses.<sup>62</sup>

With the results of the treaty, it became apparent that the extent of the empire was no longer defined by the tsar alone, as it had been under Nikolai I when a proclamation in the name of the tsar was sufficient to make Sakhalin a Russian land. Now the people demanded a voice in the definition of their homeland. Panov's media campaign to convince Russians of the value of Sakhalin and its inherent Russianness had evidently succeeded, and Russians felt betrayed by the loss of what they considered to be naturally Russian territory. While Roosevelt won a Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the negotiations and Vitte was granted the title of count by the

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<sup>59</sup> Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 379.

<sup>60</sup> Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth*, 112, 136.

<sup>61</sup> *Protokoly portsmutskoi mirnoi konferentsii i tekst dogovora mezhdu Rossieiu i Iaponieiu, zakliuchennago v Portsmute 23 avgusta (4 sentiabria) 1905 goda* (St. Petersburg: Ministerstvo inostrannykh del, 1906), 35.

<sup>62</sup> Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 380; Trani, *The Treaty of Portsmouth*, 112.

tsar, right-wing newspapers mockingly called Vitte “Count Polusakhalinskii” [Count Half-Sakhalin] for his surrender of half of the island to Japan.<sup>63</sup> They claimed that Russia would have eventually won the war, had Vitte not given up. Characteristically Doroshevich, in response, published a satirical commentary mocking those who regretted the cession of southern Sakhalin, insisting that southern Sakhalin was not particularly valuable to begin with.<sup>64</sup> The Japanese response however, was even harsher than that of the Russian, with riots in Tokyo killing several people and wounding hundreds when they learned that northern Sakhalin was lost and no indemnity would be paid. National boundaries were now based on more than signatures and state recognition.

After the 1905 surrender of southern Sakhalin to Japan, Russia abolished penal servitude on the island with a decree of 1 July 1906 transforming an open-air prison into an unexceptional *Sakhalinskaia oblast’*. While Sakhalin military governor A.M. Valuev strove heroically to develop a strong Russian settlement in the north, the state had lost interest in the resources and was unwilling to invest in infrastructure for a region with fewer than 5000 Russian inhabitants. In 1906 Valuev proposed that along with complete and total restructuring, Sakhalin needed even a new name: “Since the 1890s, literature has covered in detail the dark sides of Sakhalin life, which has contributed to an increase in fear and hostility toward Sakhalin among all layers of Sakhalin society. Now, since exile has been abolished... it would be desirable to eradicate the name ‘Sakhalin’ itself, replacing it with another, in order to better attract a new free population.” Valuev proposed calling it the Nevel’skoi oblast, in honor of the admiral who had first proclaimed it Russian in 1850. Priamur Governor General P.F. Unterberger disagreed, insisting on the significance of the island’s “historic name.”<sup>65</sup> Two years later, Valuev appealed to Tsar Nicholas II in large, bold letters: “Your imperial Majesty! Support our neglected region at the end of the earth in its glaring needs!” among which he included mining, clearing of roads, and the construction of a port.<sup>66</sup> The significance of Sakhalin’s insular status diminished in 1914

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<sup>63</sup> Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 412.

<sup>64</sup> V. Doroshevich, “Dal’ nii vostok (okonchanie),” *Russkoe slovo* (Moscow), 10 (23) April 1908, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ob”iasnitel’naia zapiska k projektu polozheniia i shtata upravleniia Nevel’skoi oblast’i, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 1, d. 459, l. 145; Memo from Priamur Governor General P.F. Unterberger to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 24 Feb. 1907, RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 1, d. 459, l. 203; See also *Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska voennogo gubernatora Sakhalina Valueva o sostoianii severnogo Sakhalina za 1905-1906 gg. Tipograficheskii ekzempliar*, p. 15, GASO, f. 1038, op. 1, d. 34.

<sup>66</sup> A.M. Valuev, *Vsepoddanneishii otchet voennogo gubernatora o. Sakhalina 1908 g.*, p. 5, GASO, f. 20-i, op. 1, d. 29; l. 12.

with administrative restructuring that placed territory on the mainland within the Sakhalin oblast and relocated the governor's residence from Post Aleksandrovsk to Nikolaevsk-na-Amure, across the strait.

## **Conclusion**

While the efforts of intelligentsia—both on Sakhalin and in the imperial center—to refute stereotypes of Sakhalin failed to save the land from abandonment by the state and Japanese occupation, the Russo-Japanese War led to the resignification of Sakhalin as a rich and valuable member of the Russian “body” capable once again of bringing Russia wealth, protecting the Russian mainland, and demonstrating the modern empire's power over the whims of nature. As the chaos and turbulence that characterized the Sakhalin penal colony came to represent the broader unrest of Russian society, Sakhalin was also presented as a solution to the problems, with a healthy environment capable of providing food for its population and offering abounding riches to those who cared to take them. As the state placed Sakhalin under a viceroy who considered the colony a failure undeserving of military protection, society took the lead in a campaign to retain Sakhalin as Russian, focusing on Sakhalin as historically and naturally Russian land. The power of public opinion became evident when to many, Sakhalin remained rightfully Russian despite Japanese military occupation, instructions of the tsar to give it up, and state unwillingness to fund further development. Nor was a Russian population crucial to the island's Russianness, as the majority of exiles and free settlers fled to the mainland during the war. Previously Russian in political allegiance and population, discursively Sakhalin had been a distant colony, to the imperial core an Other that represented what Russia itself was not. With its change in political status—divided between Russia and Japan and divested of its Russian population—the island became mentally Russian once more, once again a symbol of hope, riches and a bright future.

## CONCLUSION: AN EPILOGUE

Sakhalin's affective meanings did not simply vanish with the end of penal colonization and loss of southern Sakhalin to Japan. It was with regret that some Sakhalintsy deserted the island and others chose to stay despite the destruction of war and the end of forced colonization. Several hundred remained in Japanese southern Sakhalin, called Karafuto, particularly those homesteaders who had done well and did not want to leave their new homeland.<sup>1</sup> In northern Sakhalin over five thousand Russian settlers remained.<sup>2</sup> After decades of exile, many had lost ties with European Russia or did wish to leave the graves of family members. For some who left, nostalgia developed for Sakhalin. Bronislav Pilsudskii wrote to Shternberg as late as 1917, "There have been times when I have wanted to go back to that poor, miserable Sakhalin, on which were buried the bodies of my friends and my own youth. But they have disappeared without a trace."<sup>3</sup> Political exile Boris Ellinskii published a book calling Sakhalin the "black pearl of the Far East," emphasizing not his pain and isolation but the island's wealth.<sup>4</sup>

Sakhalin's association with exile and suffering soon gained a broader use as a signifier of the barbarism of the Russian state overall. Songwriter Andrei Prokhorov, who used the pseudonym Andrei the Severely-Tried [Andrei Tiazhelospytannyi], published a collection of folk songs about Sakhalin in the popular press. The songs focused on the sad future of exiles in a foreign land far from their homes and destined to suffer, the criminals portrayed as victims of an unjust system and cruel fate: "Again I say, I will wither here / I will perish in the light of years / I say again that I suffer here / Such is my fate."<sup>5</sup> Soon after the Russo-Japanese War broke out, the *New York Times* published a letter to the editor explicitly connecting Sakhalin to corporal punishment and barbarianism, expressing concern that "if the barbarians win [the war,] the knout

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<sup>1</sup> See Sergei Fedorchuk, *Poliaki na iuzhnom Sakhaline* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Tsentr dokumentatsii noveishei istorii, 1994); S.P. Fedorchuk, *Russkie na Karafuto* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: n.p., 1996).

<sup>2</sup> M.I. Ishchenko, *Russkie starozhily Sakhalina: vtoraiia polovina XIX – nachalo XX vv.* (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 2007), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Letter of 16 April 1917, reprinted in *Dorogoi Lev Iakovlevich... (Pis'ma L.Ia. Shternbergu, 1893-1917 gg.)*, ed. V.M. Latyshev (Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Sakhalinskii oblastnoi kraevedcheskii muzei, 1996), 288.

<sup>4</sup> B. Ellinskii, *Sakhalin: Chernaia zhemchuzhina dal'nego vostoka* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1928).

<sup>5</sup> "Noch' v Sakhaline," in Andrei Tiazhelospytannyi [Prokhorov], *Pesni Katorzhnikov: Sibirskie motivy, Sakhalinskikh ostrovov* (Odessa: tip. "Izdatel'", 1910), 5.

will be freely used from Saghalin [sic] to Warsaw.”<sup>6</sup> Doroshevich in 1909 also used the image of Sakhalin to represent a general Russian brutality in his commentary on St. Petersburg children playing games of “hangman,” imitating what they saw around them. Children on Sakhalin, he noted, used to play games that imitated corporal punishment, “but now all of Russia has turned into one big Sakhalin. With one difference: Sakhalin no longer has penal servitude.”<sup>7</sup> Such a connection was made even clearer in the Soviet period. Former Sakhalin political exile Boris Ellinskii, who called Sakhalin a “black pearl,” emphasized in the foreword to a novel about his experiences that he was using Sakhalin to represent a greater evil. “It was not only on Sakhalin that the clanking of chains was heard,” he wrote. “The novel before you is just an introduction to the epoch of that gloomy clanging... The shackles ward [*kandal’naia*] of the Sakhalin penal servitude prison ... is the quintessence of the entire system of autocracy, the final chord of its tyranny (*samodurstvo*) and lawlessness.”<sup>8</sup>

As the attention of state and society was drawn to the discontent, poverty, crime and humiliation of the early twentieth century, Sakhalin again emerged as a potential savior, organically Russian and capable of bringing riches and glory. According to military governor Valuev, its climate was pleasant and healthy with a bright sun in both summer and winter. The average harvest was good despite the absence of “correct cultivation” and insufficient equipment and seeds. Gardens produced plenty of root vegetables as well as cabbage, cucumbers and pumpkins. Sakhalin coal, he predicted, despite decades of unprofitable mining operations, could supply all the Pacific ports. The biggest treasure was the “never-ending” supply of oil.<sup>9</sup> The Ministry of Trade and Industry sent a geological expedition to Sakhalin in 1907 led by mining engineer K.N. Tul’chinskii, who reported that oil deposits alone convinced him that “in the not-so-distant future, if the state takes the proper measures, a great oil industry may develop.”<sup>10</sup>

Modern faith in the Russian potential to not only exploit, but conquer nature rapidly reemerged as well, the failed colony and Russo-Japanese war proving only temporary setbacks.

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<sup>6</sup> *New York Times*, 30 May 1904, 4.

<sup>7</sup> V.D. [Vlas Doroshevich], “V strane igr,” *Russkoe slovo* (Moscow), 12 (25) May 1909, 2.

<sup>8</sup> B. Ellinskii, *Pod zvon tsepei: Roman iz zhizni sakhalinskikh politicheskikh ssyl’nykh* (Leningrad: Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo politicheskikh katorzhan i ssylno-poselentsev, 1927), part I, 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> *Vsepoddanneishaia zapiska voennogo gubernatora Sakhalina Valueva o sostoianii Severnogo Sakhalina za 1905-1906 gg. Tipograficheskii ekzempliar*, pp. 12, 3, 5, 7, 8, in GASO, f. 1038, op. 1, d. 34.

<sup>10</sup> K.N. Tul’chinskii, *Ocherki poleznykh iskopaemykh russkogo Sakhalina* (St. Petersburg: Ministerstvo trgovli i promyshlennosti, gornyi departament, 1907), 4. On the expedition see RGIA DV, f. 702, op. 2, d. 210 (1906-1909).

In 1908, Vlas Doroshevich revived the idea of Sakhalin's historical physical connection to Russia. Revitalizing the idea of building a dam between Sakhalin and Siberia, Doroshevich wrote: "This is not Jules Verne. Is this possible technologically? After digging the Suez Canal and finishing the Panama Canal if not today, then tomorrow, such questions need not even be asked. And I am making a huge mistake to even use such grandiose examples. This is a terribly narrow strait. Along it runs the tiny thread-like 'Sakhalin fairway.' . . . To construct a dam in such a narrow and shallow spot would not be very difficult." If Russia did not do so, he claimed, either the riches of Sakhalin would remain buried in their "island grave" or a port would be built by someone else. Future generations, he asserted, would connect Sakhalin to Hokkaido and beyond:

The future belongs to God-men whom technology will make all-powerful... Our children will find that the world was poorly created! All-powerful, they will rebuild it in their own way.... They will connect all of the Japanese islands with dams. They will build a huge pier along the eastern shore of Asia to deflect the cold. And then Siberia will burst into color and flowers. It will become the richest country in the world.... We will do what we can, what we need to do. We must do our duty.<sup>11</sup>

Responses to this proposal by members of the State Duma indicate how seriously Russians took this idea. Duma member V.V. Khoshchinskii wrote that "now is the right time to raise before the Duma the question of sending an expedition to Sakhalin to study the issue and to write a proposal for future work on this transformation. As Sakhalin has already been so expensive to us, I am certain that the whole Duma will find it necessary not to stop midway, but to continue with all possible exploitation of the region."<sup>12</sup>

Over nearly sixty years, Russian colonization—and decolonization—of Sakhalin demonstrates the complex interactions between discursive reality and events on the ground, between the language of policies and their implementation. The changing meanings of Sakhalin in the Russian imagination reveal transformations not only on the island but in Russia itself. The confidence, even arrogance, of naval officers such as Nevel'skoi and Rimskii-Korsakov, for whom Sakhalin was nearly paradise, gave way to the impotence of Tsar Nikolai II, who hesitated and changed his mind before deciding to surrender Sakhalin to Japan. In discussions of Sakhalin, the Great Reforms of Aleksandr II were negotiated, adapted, and ultimately rejected, turning the

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<sup>11</sup> V. Doroshevich, "Dal'nii vostok (okonchanie)," *Russkoe slovo* (Moscow), 10 (23) April 1908, 2.

<sup>12</sup> "Prevrashchenie Sakhalina iz ostrova v poluostrov (Proekt V.M. Doroshevicha)," *Russkoe slovo* (Moscow), 18 (31) May 1908, 4.

penitentiary colonies of modern penology into an extension of Siberian exile, called by Ivan Foinitskii “one of the few national [Russian] institutions of criminal law.”<sup>13</sup> The state that produced a rational and judicious statute of administration for a promising colony found its intentions subverted by civil servants who did not share its enlightened views.

Not only the state, but Russia as an empire was changing as well. The geographic changes are obvious: acquisition of the Far East by proclamation in 1849; obtaining Sakhalin by treaty in 1875; and loss of half of it to war in 1905. Yet a more abstract evolution of Russia as a concept was evident as well, as the state and people grappled with Russia’s identity as a nation and empire. In the 1850s Russia was an organic unit extending across the continent to natural borders, the entire land preordained by nature to serve the Russian tsar. Along with Sakhalin, the post-reform period saw the acquisition of Turkestan and the Caucasus, challenging both geographic and national criteria for belonging. Sakhalin during this period was transformed both legally and discursively from homeland to a colony. In the early twentieth century, not only Sakhalin but the entire Far East became a colony, administered separately from Russia, and Sakhalin was disowned altogether.

Sakhalin itself changed over more than fifty years of Russian colonization. Some of those changes are related to means of transportation and perceptions of distance. To explorers in the 1850s, Sakhalin was simply across the Tatar Strait and its exploration and settlement was no different than the exploration of the strait’s western banks. To not only convicts, however, but even colonial administrators, Sakhalin became a prison from which departure was difficult or impossible, as not even the strait was crossable six months of the year. Russian colonists imposed order on Sakhalin by building embankments, clearing fields, draining swamps, and constructing roads and tunnels, making Sakhalin not only knowable and productive, but aesthetically pleasing to the Russian eye. Yet the land resisted colonization in ways that called science into question as flooding and forest fires reversed so-called progress. Sakhalin’s status as an open-air prison made it not only difficult, but dangerous, to travel or even live in Sakhalin villages, some islanders complained.

To writers such as Ellinskii and Doroshevich and to many Russians since them, the failure of Sakhalin to become a productive colony can be attributed to the backwardness and

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Alan Wood, “Sex and Violence in Siberia: Aspects of the Tsarist Exile System,” in *Siberia: Two Historical Perspectives*, by John Massay Stewart and Alan Wood (London: Great Britain-USSR Association and the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1984), 24.

barbarism of the autocratic state. It was the tsar, after all, who signed the decree sending murderers and counterfeiters on a crowded ship through the tropics to an island that not even the hardiest Siberian peasants could farm. It was the Finance Ministry that refused to allocate funds for schools and churches and the Ministry of Internal Affairs that placed prison officials in authority over coal mines and peasant villages. The constrictive role of the centralized state was highlighted by Second Lieutenant N.M. Sokolov who served in the chancellery of the military governor in a tale he wrote to draw attention to the problem:

In the farthest East of Russia is a territory not very big but not very small; not a gubernia but not an oblast, and not a district [*okrug*], but something of a different sort, isolated and independent. Not very long ago that territory fell into the hands of the Ministry of Justice, but no matter which way you turn, you can't get it out of the hands of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Its population is of the most various calibers, but one notes that the public is admitted extremely selectively, giving clear preference to those arriving in chains...<sup>14</sup>

Others blamed Sakhalin's failure to prosper on its environment, with its harsh climate, steep cliffs and lack of sunlight. Sakhalin seemed too far away to serve the Russian capital. In the dreary weather even educated people went mad. Untreatable illnesses such as "Sakhalin fever" rendered the population lethargic and unproductive. The late-nineteenth-century view of the physical environment as controlling human development led to the disavowal of Sakhalin as a place different from Russia and incompatible with the Russian people. This was part of a larger process of questioning and redefining Russia's imperial identity. Perhaps unwittingly, by highlighting the weather's role in the development of the Russian people, writers called into question even the Russianness of the imperial capital.

These disagreements themselves are representative a larger issue, the grappling of Russia—and the world—with the implications and meanings of modernity. While enlightenment thought placed man over nature, to Russians on Sakhalin that assumption proved false. In the Age of Empire, Russia's colonization of a Pacific island led not to greatness but to shame. Sakhalin residents—not indigenous, but the colonizers themselves—rejected the identity given them by Russian society and sought control over Sakhalin's representation, some even reassigning the image of otherness to Russia itself. These incongruities are not merely the results

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<sup>14</sup> Lev Landau, "Iz proshlogo ostrova Sakhalina," *Psikhiatricheskie analizy*, no. 6 (October 1913): 9-10.

of backwardness and inept administration, but reveal multivalent and at times contradictory processes of redefining the nation, restructuring the empire and reforming the Russian state.

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