

LIVING IN TWO PLACES: PERMANENT TRANSIENCY IN THE MAGADAN REGION

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ABSTRACT

Some individuals in the Kolyma region of Northeast Russia describe their way of life as “permanently temporary.” This mode of living involves constant movements and the work of imagination while living between two places, the “island” of Kolyma and the *materik*, or mainland. In the Soviet era people maintained connections to the *materik* through visits, correspondence and telephone conversations. Today, living in the Kolyma means living in some distant future, constantly keeping the *materik* in mind, without fully inhabiting the Kolyma. People’s lives embody various mythologies that have been at work throughout Soviet Kolyma history. Some of these models are being transformed, while others persist. Underlying the opportunities afforded by high mobility, both government practices and individual plans reveal an ideal of permanency and rootedness.

KEYWORDS: Siberia, gulag, Soviet Union, industrialism, migration, mobility, post-Soviet

The Magadan *oblast*¹ has enjoyed only modest attention in arctic anthropology. Located in northeast Russia, it belongs to the Far Eastern Federal Okrug along with eight other regions, okrugs and krajs. Among these, Magadan *oblast*’ is somewhat peculiar. First, although this territory has been inhabited by various Native groups for centuries, compared to neighboring Chukotka and the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), the Magadan *oblast*’ does not have a majority Native population or similarly distinct ethnic character. As of 2005 the regional population stood at 163,000 with 5,746 Natives² (Kokorev 2005). Second, the Magadan *oblast*’ has been occupied by non-Native people for only a short time. Although explored by Russians in

the mid-seventeenth century, the history of its *prishloye naseleniye*³ started in the 1920s when the Kolyma region became known for gold mining and Stalinist forced-labor camps.

These regional peculiarities—a small indigenous population and a distinct industrial Soviet history—partly account for the dearth of anthropological research conducted in Magadan. English-language sources, besides memoirs and travel logs, are limited to a few scholarly works on gulag history (e.g., Norlander 1998), Kolyma geography (Round 2005) and demography (Heleniak 2009). This lack of research also reflects a general interest among Siberianists in Native, rather than non-Native, history and

1. There are eight federal okrugs in the Russian Federation. Magadan *oblast*’ belongs to the Far East Federal Okrug and is a subject of the Russian Federation. An *oblast*’, like a *krai*, is an administrative unit subdivided into smaller units, or *raions*, and further to municipalities.
2. Members of eleven Native groups live in Magadan *oblast*’. They are, in descending order of population: Even, Koryak, Itel’men, Sakha, Kamchadal, Chukchi, Oroch, Yukagir, Chuvan, Eskimo, and Evenk. In 1855 some 4,662 persons lived in Magadan; 4,118 were Native people. The few Russians were mainly state administrators, Cossacks, traders and priests (Polyanskaya and Raizman 2009).
3. Literally, “those who came,” as compared to *korenniye narodnosti* (aboriginal people). The term *priezshkiye* (newcomers) has a different temporal connotation: they are still *prishliye* but arriving recently, which distinguishes them from *starozhilye*, who are *prishloye naseleniye* who have lived in the Russian Far East longer. These terms apply to Siberia more generally, as well.

experiences. In his book on white settlers in Chukotka, Thompson (2008:8) argues that “interest in the indigenous subject [has] monopolized the field” of northern studies. Among others, Anderson (2000), Ingold (2000); Kerttula (2000), King (2002), Krupnik (1993), Rethmann (2001), and Vitebsky (2005) have conducted research on reindeer husbandry, gender relations, property rights, shamanism, nationalism and ethnic identity—all focusing on indigenous people. Thompson (2008:213) maintains that European settlers “offer themselves as a foil against which are built rich descriptions of indigenous lifeways, identities and cosmologies.”

However, recent anthropological research into the life of non-Native populations in the Russian North has produced interesting data relevant not only to northern studies (e.g., studies evaluating the role of the Arctic in general, and viability of the Russian North in particular) but to wider theoretical frameworks, specifically political economy, identity, belonging, and the temporal aspects of human mobility. The geographic remoteness of the northern “peripheries,” climate, and the political rationalities of planned and market economies produced a distinct evaluation of the Russian North as a burden: “The return of market mechanisms, distance and climate took their revenge: much of the industrialization of the North... proved economically nonviable under market conditions” (Blakkisrud and Honneland 2006:193; Hill and Gaddy 2003; Kauppala 1998). Consequently, the North is considered to be “over-populated in relation to economic resource base” (Blakkisrud and Honneland 2006:195; Heleniak 2009; Kokorev et al. 1994; Round 2005). Yet, many local people would disagree with this evaluation, given the devastated landscapes of broken down houses and communities, the rapid depopulation of the Kolyma, and the ensuing shortage of labor.

This paper contributes to studies of the nonindigenous populations of the Russian Far North by demonstrating that many Kolyma inhabitants, like many people in other northern regions (Bolotova and Stammmler 2010; Stammmler 2008; Thompson 2008), feel ambivalent about the North as a home.⁴ I explore a lifestyle that some locals describe

as “permanently temporary,” where people came to the region to live and work temporarily but ended up spending much of their adult life there. This mode of living and state of being, which I call “permanent transiency,” involves constant movements and imagination, as inhabitants live between two places, the “island” of Kolyma and the *materik*, or mainland, a term that I discuss in greater detail below. Migration within the Russian Federation turns out to be similar to other types, such as transnational migration. For example, Wilson et al. (2009) studied reverse diasporas of New Zealanders in the UK and found some who intended to return to New Zealand and never did. I join Wilson et al. in calling for more detailed studies of “middling” forms of migration situated between studies of transnational elites and developing-world migrants.

THE PLACE ON A MAP

The Magadan *oblast'* is a remote region located in Northeast Russia, eight time zones from Moscow. Although geographically within Northeast Siberia and the Russian Far East, locally nobody thinks of the region as belonging to either. Most commonly locals call this region the “Far North” (Krainiy Sever), a term that also refers to Northeast Russia more generally, Magadan and the Kolyma. The Kolyma takes its name from the Kolyma River. Administrative borders of the region have changed throughout the twentieth century and have included portions of Chukotka and Kamchatka. On 14 July 1939, the Kolyma okrug within the Khabarovsk krai was created with its center in Magadan. On 3 December 1953 Kolyma okrug became Magadan *oblast'*.⁵ “Kolyma” refers to the whole of the Magadan *oblast'*, while “Magadan” is used as a metonym for Kolyma.⁶

Magadan *oblast'* is comprised of eight *raions*, covers some 462,500 km², and had a population of 163,000 in 2009. Magadan, a compact coastal city overlooking Nagaevo and Gertnera bays, is the administrative hub of the region and home to 106,400 people. The city is surrounded by hills, making the town feel small and landlocked. The main streets of old Magadan are still lined

4. This paper is based on ten months of fieldwork during 2007–2009 in the Kolyma Region. Using various techniques, I interviewed approximately ninety-five people of different ethnic backgrounds (Russians, Belorussians, Uzbek, Ingush, Ukrainians, etc), ages ranging between fifteen and seventy-six, and of different social and professional backgrounds (students, workers, drivers, administration officials, pensioners, etc.). All names have been changed due to promised anonymity.

5. Until 1991 it included Chukotka Autonomous okrug.

6. For example, Magadanskoye zemlyachestvo in cities in western Russia unite people not only from the city of Magadan but from the whole region. A *zemlyachestvo* is an official or unofficial organization of people who presently reside in one place but have all come from another place.

with stone buildings built by prisoners in the 1930s and 1940s, but wooden barracks and houses have been replaced by multistory apartment buildings. Magadan is expanding⁷ into nearby valleys, yet the remnants of the Dal'stroi period, small private wooden houses without amenities, still survive on the town's outskirts.

Transportation from outside the region is via air. The seaport is primarily for cargo. Magadan is connected with regional communities by a network of roads. The *Kolym'skaya trassa* (Central Kolyma Road), the 2000-km dirt road leading to Yakutsk, is used for transporting supplies and people, but not for regular automobile travel between the Kolyma and the *materik*. *Materik*⁸ is a peculiar concept that has been in circulation in colloquial speech since the 1930s (Shirokov 2009). The remoteness of Kolyma and the fact that at that time it was accessible only by ship⁹ made Kolyma "an island,"¹⁰ which nevertheless had been fully incorporated into the *materik*. There is no border between Kolyma and the *materik*, which is more conceptual than concrete. In most cases the *materik* is the Russian heartland, a territory west of the Ural Mountains, and (former) Soviet republics. In Soviet times, the Kolyma was peripheral to this center, an arm of the state projected to the east. In post-Soviet times this term is still in use, albeit not in such a totalizing manner, since the former republics became independent countries and open borders allow people to travel abroad, expanding possibilities beyond the *materik*.

PERMANENT SETTLEMENTS BUT SEDENTARY POPULATION: AN UNRESOLVED TENSION

The Kolyma has been defined by its natural resources. Its minerals currently constitute some 5% of the resource base in the Russian Federation (Pruss 2001). Seafood is the other major natural resource of the region. The development of the Kolyma territory was a product of Soviet eastward expansion and was integral to the Stalinist plan of forced industrialisation. As some historians of the region maintain, it was an internal resource colony (Rodoman

1996; Shirokov 2000, 2006), although others prefer the term *osvoyeniye* (exploration and development) (Batzaev 2002), which lacks allusion to the unequal power relations between a metropolis and a colony.

From the very beginning of its history, the Kolyma has been marked by ambiguities and contradictions, one of which is whether the population living in the North should be temporary or permanent. The contemporary tension between permanency and temporariness is rooted in the policy and practice of populating this area in the twentieth century, which I briefly examine next. The Soviet period of Kolyma history may be roughly subdivided into three periods: Dal'stroi, Soviet, and post-Soviet.

1930S–1950S: THE DAL'STROI PERIOD

This was a time of exploration and economic development of this scarcely populated region. Upon the discovery of industrial quantities of gold, the state set up a "super-organization" in 1931 (Batzaev 2002; Pilyasov 1993) called Dal'stroi,¹¹ the State Trust for Road and Industrial Construction, charging it with comprehensive development of the region and giving it extraordinary powers (Shirokov 2006). The main purpose of the Dal'stroi was the mining of precious metals and minerals, such as gold, tin, silver, wolfram, zinc, lead, copper, and coal. The Kolyma *trassa* (road) was constructed at this time, connecting Magadan and its seaport with numerous communities that were built around mining industry and geological surveys.

Massive exploitation of mineral resources required a substantial labor force which, during the Dal'stroi period, was comprised of *zakluychenniye*, or forced labor (criminal and political prisoners and former prisoners of war) and *vol'nonaemniye*, or people who volunteered to work in the Kolyma. This was a period of economic development but also of the utter destruction of human capital; thousands of prisoners, who were treated as disposable, died in the Kolyma labor camps. Living conditions even for the *vol'nonaemniye* were poor. Between 1932 and 1940 the capital investments in industrial

7. An apparent paradox, but population increase is due to considerable intraregional migration.

8. Also called Bol'shaya Zemlya ("Big Land"). The remoteness in other places of the North, such as Yamal, is also embodied in the term *zemlya* (Lipatova 2010).

9. Regular air transportation began developing only in the 1950s.

10. According to local historian David Raizman (personal communication).

11. Dal'stroi: *Gosudarstvenniy Trest po Dorozhnomu i Promyshlennomu Stroitel'stvu v Raione Verkhnei Kolymy*.

development were nearly sixty times greater than those in sociocultural development (Zelyak 2004).

The state developed incentives for *vol'nonaemniye*. The first law outlining material benefits to stimulate the moving of labor to remote regions was introduced on 12 August 1930, followed by the 1932 law designed “to attract and retain” highly qualified and experienced specialists to the North (Armstrong 1965; Etkina 1965; Stammeler-Gossmann 2007). The Dal'stoi-specific benefits were introduced in 1945; these included pay increases, extended vacations, guaranteed employment, an earlier pension,¹² and a reward for uninterrupted long-term employment. Within a few years the population swelled (Table 1).

The question regarding what kind of labor force should participate in developing this region dates back to the beginning of this era. The first director of Dal'stoi, Berzin,¹³ considered that by the 1940s only *vol'nonaemniye* should work in the Kolyma (Polyanskaya and Raizman 2009), but the use of forced labor ended only after Dal'stoi was reorganised in 1957. In 1953–1954 some 102,000 people left and were replaced in 1955 by only 13,677 *vol'nonaemniye* (Zelyak 2004). Hence much of the Dal'stoi population was transient.

1950S–1991: THE SOVIET PERIOD

This was a time of a relative stability, of further regional development, expansion of the state infrastructure and considerable investments into human and economic capital, but labor became a tangible problem. In 1960, the reduction of northern benefits by 35–40%, the slow rate of housing construction and sociocultural infrastructure resulted in labor fluidity, which proved very expensive for a state that spent millions of roubles bringing people to the region. Labor fluidity and labor shortage meant that without material incentives people did not move to the North in the numbers required by the state for effective economic development. Hence the issue of attracting and retaining a working-age labor force became a multifaceted problem subject to targeted policy and research in the fields of sociology, public health and labor management. Migration

became a managed process (Perevedentsev 1965) in order for the labor situation to improve, the population to increase (Gurvich 1965; Yanovskiy 1965), and the process of *prizhivaemost'*¹⁴ to be studied (D'yakonov 1965; Kokorev 1976). To increase *prizhivaemost'*, additional measures were suggested, such as job creation for spouses, investments and development of the sociocultural sphere (i.e., building more flats, day care centers, and schools), and increased benefits. These included northern wage increments,¹⁵ resulting in higher wages than in the *materik*, longer biannual paid family leave, a work contract, and *bron'*.¹⁶

It was also suggested that “the system of material stimulation must be supplemented by forms of moral stimulation, aimed at the increase in the public recognition of the work of those who dedicated themselves to working in the North” (Etkina 1965), necessitating a particular *image* of the North. For non-Natives, Kolyma—scarcely populated and industrially undeveloped before the Dal'stoi period—was, using Yi-Fu Tuan's conceptual framework, more “space” than “place”: “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (Tuan 1977:6). In the post-Stalin period, the meaning the Soviet government inscribed into this space was marked by two characteristics: Native ways of relating to the land were omitted (the government launched a project to “civilize” Native people and assimilate them into the dominant culture instead), and the issue

Table 1. Number of people working for Dal'stoi

Year	Number of people working for Dal'stoi	Free labor	Forced labor
1938 ¹	113,430	19,452	93,978
1939 ¹	189,826	26,351	163,475
1940 ¹	216,428	39,743	176,685
1941 ²	210,674	62,373	148,301
1945 ²	189,089		
1948	213,300 ¹	110,100 ³	103,200 ³
1950 ³	258,100		

¹ Polyanskaya and Raizman 2009, ² Batzaev 2007, ³ Zelyak 2004

12. Women could retire at fifty, men at fifty-five (compared to fifty-five and sixty, respectively, for *materik*).

13. Eduard Petrovich Berzin (1893–1938) fell victim to the Stalinist repressions. He was accused of being a counter-revolutionary Trotskyist and executed in 1938.

14. Factors that influence people's decisions to settle down.

15. *Severniye koefficient* and *nadbavki*.

16. The right to retain accommodation in the *materik* while working in the North.

of forced labor was submerged.¹⁷ What was created was the image of a frontier, stressing the spirit of “pioneer exploration” and development while clearly articulating its economic purpose. The Kolyma supplied the country with gold, was a place of hard work and harsh living conditions, and had an environment that forged people capable of overcoming difficulties together. For that they were compensated, although accommodation remained a problem. Magadan *oblast’* had the highest percentage of people in the Russian Federation living in communal flats: 17.7%, compared to the national average of 11.1% (Navasardov 1994). Still, those coming to the Kolyma knew that their lot would improve and the regional population started growing again (Table 2).

PATHS TO THE KOLYMA¹⁸

It was not easy to get to the Kolyma. The region was a “closed” border territory, where one needed an invitation issued either by employers or by individuals (i.e., relatives). The most typical paths included: (1) recruitment of young specialists; (2) private initiative after a person learned about earning potential; (3) Komsomol call (*Komsomol’skiy prizyv*) for young people to take up professional and unskilled labor; (4) job placement in the Far East and Northeast upon graduation from educational institutions, sometimes at the request of the graduate; (5) job transfers (i.e., as KGB officers); or (6) the curiosity, romance or adventure of working in the northern wilderness. The following examples illustrate each of the ways new entrants came to the Kolyma.

1. Tatiana, a weathered Kolyma veteran, recalls how in 1955 she visited a Moscow institute on a business trip. While waiting for her contact, she saw a job advertisement for an agricultural climatologist in Magadan. Two days later she was on her way to Magadan, leaving behind extreme poverty and a querulous extended family in the cramped house of her in-laws. The state paid for her and her family’s tickets and lug-

gage. Her employer even paid for her child’s nanny, who worked as a cleaner in the same place as Tatiana. This nanny, like many other employees, was a former prisoner. The family lived in a commune until 1962 when they received a two-room flat. They spent thirty years in Magadan and upon retirement at the age of sixty, Tatiana and her family moved to a town in the Moscow Region, having acquired a cooperative flat, a car, and enough money to settle in the new place and buy a dacha. This move was followed by the typical experience of post-Magadan retirement: Tatiana’s children and grandchildren remained in Magadan, visiting her and her husband every two years; in their cooperative flat they were surrounded by former “northerners” from the Magadan *oblast’*. They also enjoyed a higher pension and savings until, in 1991, both were devalued by hyperinflation during the

Table 2. Number of people in Magadan oblast’ (without Chukotka)

Year	Magadan oblast’	Magadan town	Urban	Rural
1954 ¹	207,700	48,400		
1957 ¹	252,700	57,800		
1959	188,889	62,200	164,176	24,713
1970	253,000			
1979	336,951		270,912	66,039
1980	345,400			
1989	391,687		328,293	63,394
1991	384,525	325,374	59,151	
1994	300,157	254,130	46,027	
1996	240,215	212,457	27,758	
1999	211,696	105,300	190,571	21,125
2007	168,530	159,697	8,833	
2008	165,820		157,558	8,262

1. Grebenyuk 2007. All other figures are from Statisticheskii Ezhegodnik 2008.

17. Both issues seeped into the public domain, the former (the native people) in an objectified form, the latter (forced labor) as rumors and vague references, mixing and co-existing with the dominant view on the region.

18. A number of interviewing techniques were used to gather the data presented here, depending on the situation. These techniques included formal taped (with permission) interviews with officials at municipal and state organizations. Where taping interviews was not possible or inappropriate, both formal and informal interviews were recorded by hand either during the interviews or shortly after. Some quotations are remarks in general, often unplanned discussions on the topic, since the issue of “staying or going” is a common conversational topic. Informants were first selected strategically from among municipal officials; members of the younger generation born in the region; members of the older generation, some of whom were free labor, some forced labor; and working-age residents. Additionally, I used the “snow-balling” method of sampling (Morse 2004) and informal interviews with random individuals who I met during my visits to many regional communities.

perestroika “shock therapy” period. “In the Kolyma I had the best years of my life,” Tatiana said in 2008, “I had financial independence, an interesting job, and my family.”

2. Sergei, a driver, was invited to Kolyma by his uncle, who informed him about the material benefits. In 1970, Sergei and his family came to Sinegor’ye (500 km from Magadan) where he worked on building the Kolyma hydroelectric station. Now pensioners, Sergei and his family still live and work there, hoping to move to Magadan where life is easier, but not to the *materik*.
3. Galina arrived to Kolyma in 1961 to work as a teacher, eventually becoming the director of a school in Seimchan (500 km from Magadan), where she retired. She now works in the *raion* administration and still visits her home town of Rostov. However, after fifty years in Seimchan, she said in 2009, “I feel this is my home; on vacations, when I rest a bit from Kolyma in Rostov, I soon realize it is time to go home.” She has no plans to move back to Rostov: “There is nothing left for me there. But there are not that many of us, the old-timers, left here either. We probably will die here.”
4. Upon graduation, Georgiy, a young geologist, chose to go to Chukotka. Later he moved to Magadan but travelled all over the Kolyma on geology trips. After twenty-five years he and his wife moved to Moscow, but their daughter remained in Magadan. He works at a Moscow research institute and regrets leaving Magadan, although he feels he had no choice since his state organization closed during the ruinous 1990s.
5. Ivan, a Federal Security Service (FSB; formerly KGB) officer, was transferred to Magadan from a Central Asian republic, spending some ten years in Magadan before being transferred outside Kolyma. Later he left the FSB, joining a guard and protection firm in Saint Petersburg. He regards his time in Magadan as some of the most interesting years of his life: “Where else can you see such a concentration of interesting people and places? A possibility to see events you would not have a chance to see in Moscow, like meeting Vladimir Vysotsky,¹⁹ for example. I made friends with some former labor force prisoners. I was privileged to hear such stories.”

6. Alexei came to Magadan from Crimea without any invitation, working first as an unskilled laborer in geological surveys. Later he acquired an education and moved to Magadan where he worked in a vocational school. In 2000 he moved to a town near Moscow.

Many people went to work in the Kolyma because of material incentives or, as they say, “to get a long rouble” (*za dlinnym rublem*). Some hoped to make enough money to buy a flat, a car, and a dacha back in the *materik* in the future. It is also important to consider what people were running *from*.²⁰ Many of my older informants reported that prior to coming to the Kolyma they experienced extreme poverty, death of their relatives from hunger in Ukrainian and Russian villages, hard work, a chronic lack of money, or life in postsiege Leningrad, all of which made them look for a way out. But solving one’s problems of survival and material incentives were not the only factors that were of consequence. First, the Kolyma offered an opportunity to work for a greater cause than just personal gain, to be useful to the country and the state. Retrospectively, one may see how conspicuous the labor management policy was that stressed the moral aspect of working in the North. As a result, people felt appreciated. A former Magadan resident said: “We were taking pride in developing this region, in overcoming difficulties, proud of ourselves, our collective spirit and camaraderie, helping each other.” Secondly, there was an opportunity for challenging, interesting and creative work in professions such as engineering, geology, the biological and biomedical sciences, agriculture, building construction and even party operations. The unique natural, social and economic environment of the region and the small size of its communities allowed for rapid career advancement. Many talked about the North as the place where they became fully fledged professionals and acquired personal and group characteristics that distinguished them positively from the people in the *materik*. I shall come back to this point later.

This “northern project,” then, seems to be a classic case of the technology of power Foucault (2007, 2008) called “biopolitics” and “biopower,” a conspicuous state policy managing population for state benefit, where nevertheless state goals often fused with individual goals for mutual benefit. The state offered inducements, but it was up to an individual to take advantage of them.

19. A popular Soviet-era poet, singer and actor.

20. Thanks to Miron Markovich Etlis for suggesting this point.

Most research endeavors and policies were concerned with immediate needs: attracting and retaining a labor force for industrial development, where “in the areas with favourable climate it would be expedient to create permanent population, while in the unfavourable climate it would not be expedient” (Etkina 1965). It seems that in the long run, whether purposefully or unintentionally, what was created is an *osedloye* (sedentary) but essentially temporary population, since after receiving their pensions retirees were encouraged to move back to the *materik*. In Yi-Fu Tuan’s terms, a historical time was created: “The intention to go to a place creates historical time: the place is a goal in the future” (Tuan 1977:130). This timeline had a clear starting point but an open-ended future. Working-age people dedicated a part of their lives to the North, this aspiration being embodied in policy and benefits, but there was no policy that stipulated that retirees must leave the North. Instead certain discourses circulated, constituting a particular view on what they should do: retire and move to the *materik*. The Far North was thought to be about doing and working, and not about just being. In the words of a former Magadan resident, it is “a place for the young and ambitious. The *materik* is for the experienced and tired ones.” It is only in the post-Soviet period that this diffused understanding of what people should do upon retirement coalesced into a policy of relocation targeting pensioners. Conspicuously or not, the message was clear: pensioners belong in the *materik*.

1990S—PRESENT: THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD

During this period, the state withdrew from all major industries, including gold production, leading to high unemployment and the death of many communities. The “northern provision,” the supplies of food, material goods and building construction were stopped, and the void filled with private businesses. Currently administrative, medical, educational and research facilities are funded from local and federal budgets, although the state holds an interest in many private enterprises.

The post-Soviet period once again raised the question about what kind of population should inhabit the Kolyma. In 1991, during his short visit to Magadan, Egor Gaidar, then the head of the Council of Ministers, stated that the North is overpopulated. He proposed to use shift labor

(*vakhtoviy metod*) for all major projects. This controversial suggestion was delivered at the time of political and economic changes, when it was most effective and destructive, setting off a massive wave of outmigration. By 2010 nearly 60% of the regional population had left for the *materik*. Owing to the new economic rationality, between 1990 and 2004 some seventy-seven communities along the Kolyma *trassa* had been categorised as *nepersepectivniye* (without a viable future) and closed down (Tseitler 2009). People were encouraged or compelled to relocate either to the *materik* or to other communities within the Magadan *oblast’*. Intra-regional migration, which flowed from rural towns to *raion* centers and to Magadan constituted 38% of all migration (Tseitler 2009:15). Current maps of the region are not available; the old Soviet maps show communities that are no more.

Post-Soviet relocation programs are aimed at groups considered to be noncontributing members of society—pensioners, the unemployed, and handicapped. The federal government still believes that the North should be populated by a working population, since a pensioner in the Kolyma costs the state three to four times more than a working-age individual. However, it was the young and enterprising who left while pensioners remained. In 1991, pensioners constituted 5.2% of the Magadan population, but in 2009 their numbers rose to 14.5% (Tseitler 2009). In some struggling places, the proportion was higher; in Srednekanskiy raion in 2007, for example, 1,380 (35%) of the 3,900 residents were pensioners.²¹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and its monolithic discourse of unity, of the country as a “whole,” the separation of the state into federal, regional and municipal levels resulted in regionalism and an adjustment in the relationship between the Magadan *oblast’* and the federal center. If in Soviet times Magadan was seen as part of a whole, a “frontier” of the center projected eastward, in post-Soviet times decentralization affected not only political and economic, but also psychological spheres; the center moved to Magadan. Because of the changes in paradigm (meanings inscribed into the place) and scale (country/region), the Kolyma became even more of an island. The crisis in transport and communications that affected this region more generally (Vitebsky 2000) led to the inability of residents to leave Kolyma for many years. Although tied to Moscow in many ways, people of the

21. Electronic newspaper of the Srednekanskiy Raion administration, online at <http://www.kolyma.ru/magadan/index.php?newsid=332>.

Kolyma began looking eastward to the Asian-Pacific region for economic cooperation and investments.

LIVING BETWEEN TWO PLACES

MOVING TO MAGADAN BUT LOOKING BACK TO THE *MATERIK*

One of the main characteristics of life in the Kolyma was the pervasive and inescapable issue of movement. Compared to many places in the *materik* where people live permanently, coming to the Kolyma was the first step to a lifestyle that implied a particular rhythm of periodic and temporary movement between the Kolyma and the *materik* before the anticipated final return to the *materik*. Dealing with distances in the remote Kolyma with its limited accessibility was a part of life. Geological exploration and the mining industry took many individuals all over the region. Acutely aware of isolation in the Kolyma, residents made an effort to stay informed and not to be provincial, which made places such as Moscow and Leningrad seem closer. There was no choice but to cross vast territories when going on vacations or business trips to the *materik*. In Soviet times air travel was affordable and regular, allowing people to reconnect with their homeland, visit places of previous residence, and go on vacations, all the while observing and experiencing a contrast between Kolyma and *materik* life. This involved constant comparisons and weighing up of what “they” have there and what “we” have here. The limited comforts of the Kolyma threw into relief people’s imaginative landscape of what the *materik* could offer:²² real seasons, warmth, light, tall buildings, “real trees” with lush green foliage, different landscapes, colors and smells, the availability and diversity of cultural life, fresher, cheaper and better quality food, access to many other places through travel on trains and ships. While on vacation, Magadan moved into the background, becoming another imaginative landscape, a confined space populated by networks of friends and relatives, a familiar rhythm of everyday life, cool air, subdued colors, dwarf trees and small buildings. It offered a different set of joys and problems.

This pattern was interrupted in post-Soviet times when, in the 1990s, many people could not afford vacations, re-

maining in Magadan for five to eight years, which many found very difficult. I heard people say, “We are prisoners of the North once again.”²³ Their children now constitute a younger generation that lacks the experience of regular trips to the *materik*, which are usual for their parents. As a result, the *materik* is a foreign land for them, distant and imagined. This process is exacerbated by limited sources of information; national newspapers are not available in this region on a regular basis and internet access is very expensive, often unreliable, and in some places not available at all. Some university students I spoke with have not been outside Magadan, not even to regional communities. Some dream about the *materik* but, as one young man put it, “They [young people] go to Moscow, thinking... New York! New York! But soon realize that in Moscow they [local residents] have enough problems of their own.” As one parent said, those who could send their children to study to the *materik* or abroad have done so. In 2008–2009, the federal government introduced subsidies for students and pensioners, covering the usual vacation period, May through September, allowing many hitherto “locked up” people to finally go to the *materik*. Some prefer to spend their vacations in China and Southeast Asia, which are often cheaper and of higher quality than resorts in the *materik*. Low-income people from regional communities can afford to go to Magadan only. Whatever the destination, long-distance taxi drivers make a lot of money during the vacation period. Since intra-regional state-funded bus and air transportation ceased to exist, people hire taxis to go between the Magadan airport and their respective communities on the trassa.

People react to coming back to Magadan differently. In 2009, a seventy-year-old female said:

I come back and feel depressed: not these horrible hills again! These grey buildings, everything is so small and run down. I want to sit and look into the distance. Where is distance here? You look one way and your glance stumbles upon a hill, you look another way and it is the same! Especially coming back in the fall knowing that soon there is this snow, this cold, these icy surfaces I can hardly walk on.

Irina, a forty-five-year-old second generation Magadan resident and a mother of two working in a state organization, feels very differently:

22. Here I summarized answers to my question, “What do you like in the *materik* that Magadan cannot offer?”

23. “*Opyat’ my kak zaklyuchenniye na Severe.*” The expression “We are hostages of the North” is also used. In 2009, I heard from a local multimillionaire, “the real hostages here are business people,” meaning that Magadan businesses are region-specific, keeping people tied to Kolyma. Both expressions are post-Soviet.

I don't mind living here provided I can leave once in a while. Last summer I went to Vietnam but after a while I started missing Magadan. I know everything here, every stone, and every street. It is home. When I came back, I felt energetic, ready to work. But if I knew that I might be locked up here, that I cannot get out... then I'll consider leaving for good.

Olga and Ivan spent nearly ten years in Moscow and Khabarovsk before finally returning to Palatka (80 km from Magadan): "It's bad everywhere," they said, "At least here we are at home."

Another change that occurred during the post-Soviet era, due to interrupted regularity and affordability of travel as well as state withdrawal from food provision, was that local people were able to participate in private food production to a much greater extent. Hence private *dal'stroi* houses with vegetable plots acquired a new significance. Owners sell root vegetables, cabbage, herbs, tomatoes, and cucumbers grown in their greenhouses and gardens. Although in Soviet times it was thought that the land could produce nothing but hardy vegetables, currently people grow broccoli, cauliflower and even strawberries. Imported food (i.e., frozen meat from Argentina, long-life dairy products with preservatives from the *materik* or produce from Vladivostok, where, people believe, it is grown by the Chinese and is full of chemicals) is plentiful but undesirable. Locally produced food is considered to be better but is significantly more expensive.²⁴ [Irina regards fresh sour cream and cottage cheese as luxuries.] The summer months become quite lucrative for some pensioners. One strawberry seller charging the equivalent of \$17 for a quart jar told me: "In Soviet times I was a teacher, I lived in a flat. In the 1980s I bought a house with a vegetable plot and now I grow strawberries to sell."

THE AMBIVALENCE OF LIVING IN-BETWEEN

In the Soviet era, moving to the Kolyma meant that homes and lives were left behind but people maintained connections through periodic visits to the *materik*, correspondence and telephone conversations. Living in the Kolyma in the present meant living in some distant future, constantly keeping the *materik* in mind, as high wages and benefits of the present ensure future material sufficiency elsewhere. Many difficulties (e.g., remoteness and

cold) were overcome precisely because people imagined that once they moved back to the *materik* these difficulties would disappear. This frame of mind affected those who had a short spell in the North as well as those who continued working there for many years. Stories abound of people who came for three years, bought beautiful china or expensive rugs for future enjoyment, and kept them in storage for years to be used when they moved back to the *materik*. Psychologists have described this as a "syndrome of delayed life" (Kuznetsov and Kuznetsova 2003; Serkin 2004). Life "here and now" was not believed to have as much value as the delayed, real better life in an undetermined future, maybe a few years from the day of arrival, maybe not until retirement age.

The "psychology of the temporary" (*psikhologiya vremenshchika*) becomes an explanation of negligence and is not conducive to the idea of sustainability, which presupposes an investment of various kinds on the part of citizens and the state in the community to keep it viable and to sustain its growth and development. Whether on the individual, governmental, or business levels, the "psychology of the temporary" results in lack of investment in the present, as people restrict their involvement, whether civic, professional, or personal, for future and more worthwhile places. A local government official described this phenomenon to me in 2008:

If it is temporary, you do not have to take care of anything. Here today, gone tomorrow. If I live in a flat with little furniture and eat from cracked plates, it's OK for now because I'll have it better in the future in the *materik* where I'll finally start living fully. Why bother repairing street pavement or reclaiming ground after gold-mining operations? We only work here; we are not going to live here. The same goes for the government that has no development policy of the North: they make short-term plans that are beneficial for them now. After that, they don't care.

Balancing short-term northern contracts was a higher pension at an earlier age. After working for three years, some extended their contracts, turning a temporary situation into a permanent one but with the understanding that it was temporary. While maintaining connections back home, Kolyma residents spent years in the Kolyma, working, raising families, obtaining flats, developing social and professional networks, and waiting for retirement, pushing their previous homes into the past.

24. In 2009, I observed that one can buy tomatoes from Vladivostok for 70 roubles a kilo, and local tomatoes go for 350 roubles a kilo.

Kolyma became what many people called their *Malaya Rodina* (lesser Motherland), producing second and third generations.²⁵ Often people move back to the *materik*—not to their home towns, but to places where buying accommodation became possible. This happened both in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, although a considerable post-Soviet complication was the dissolution of the Soviet Union as some people left for former republics, now new countries, to acquire and maintain new citizenships. Others remained in their homes in the Kolyma, where the absence of state guarantees and high unemployment increased reliance on family and social networks. Hence the center of gravity was moving from the previous home town to a new Kolyma one and back to the *materik*, creating a space of possibilities but rarely centering on one place, for other places were constantly kept in mind.

From the 1930s to the 1980s, the Soviet government encouraged permanency by instituting *propiska*,²⁶ or rewarding continuous employment in one place of work. In the North, towns were set up as both simulacra of *materik* towns and as hegemonic impositions by the state of the Soviet spatial regime in aesthetics and architecture (Low 1996). Older towns are scattered all over the Kolyma with 1950s Stalinist architecture (e.g., Houses of Culture) similar to those one sees in any Soviet city. Many have a Dal'stroy-era part of town, which looks much like a Russian village²⁷ with wooden houses and gardens. To make life more comfortable and retain specialists, many Kolyma towns, even those located in close proximity, had well-developed infrastructure with schools, day-care centers, heating plants, and hospitals. Currently, local governments consider paying for infrastructure as wasteful and people are thus compelled to move to larger towns. The destruction of these communities, which had become home for many, is perceived as a personal tragedy. People fondly remember how they lived so far away from Magadan and in close proximity to nature yet had such a comfortable life.

Vladimir and Katerina and their two adult children moved to Magadan from Kadykchan, a town of 15,000, when the town froze up due to a heating plant accident. Vladimir cried when he talked about raising their chil-

dren, remembering when they received their three-room flat and the opening of the town's kindergarten. Mikhail, a sixty-five-year-old mechanic, was relocated with his family to Tver' in central Russia. After a year, he returned to ruined Kadykchan, leaving his wife in Tver. He lives in a wooden shack on the outskirts of Kadykchan, left entirely to himself: "It's too hot in Tver', and uncomfortable. I feel much better here." Thompson (2008: 216), describing the sense of belonging among the non-Native settlers in neighboring Chukotka, describes Mark Nuttall's concept of memoryscape (Nuttall 1991), "a cultural landscape revealed through its place names... that tell of subsistence activities that inform us of a multitude of... close human associations with the natural environment." I would like to apply this concept to the built environment, for the inhabitants of the Magadan *oblast'*, specifically those living in its urban areas, do not seem to be engaged with the land to the same extent as settlers in Chukotka. Cityscapes are infused with individual memoryscapes on a nuanced level that Yi-Fu Tuan called "intimate experience of place" (Tuan 1977:137), producing emotional familiarity with place that some of my informants refer to. Not surprisingly, former forced labor camp survivors carry different memoryscapes. The shadow of gulag history still hangs over the Kolyma. An eighty-year-old former political prisoner still living in Magadan commented on the abandonment of Kadykchan: "Finally, the last [labor] camps are closing."

Despite attempts at permanency the issue of impermanence hovers in conversations. Two women share news on a street: "Their son is graduating from high school. The question is where he will attend a university. Should he enroll here or should they send him to the *materik* and be done with it?" A twenty-five-year-old Magadan resident, a geologist working in gold mining, does not want to settle in Magadan: "I want to buy a flat in Vladimir [near Moscow] and come here to work during the season. If I buy here, I'll get married, have children, and put down roots, it will be too difficult to leave later."

Staying temporarily, even for a long while, and then settling permanently outside the Kolyma is what many people think about doing. This affects even Kolyma na-

25. As of 2009, 46% of the regional population was born in Magadan *oblast'* (Tseitler 2009).

26. Housing registration with police.

27. Most Dal'stroy-era towns look alike. There is an old part of town made up of wooden houses, which now are partly abandoned, partly inhabited and partly used as dachas; there are spacious 1950s two- to three-story apartment buildings along with administrative buildings, and the distinctive Soviet-era apartment buildings built between the 1960s and 1980s.

tives or those of working age who have nothing left in the *materik* and who are not considering moving. But the issue is what they are considering, regardless of the outcome. Hence I found people who, having lived all their lives in the Kolyma, continue weighing the pros and cons of staying or leaving while counting years going by. If going on vacation is a clear issue because there is no finality involved, the overall duration of life in Magadan is wrought with ambivalence about whether to stay or leave. Previous certainties regarding temporariness of the present and a predictable future yielded to an uncertainty regarding both. These considerations are firmly connected to temporality. Since pension age no longer means retirement, many continue working after they secure pensions. It is easier to find work through local networks people built for years and this is where networks acquire temporal depth. Finding a job at this age is not guaranteed in the *materik*: “Nobody needs us there, they have enough people of their own,” echoes a sentiment strikingly similar to those heard in other Russian diasporas, e.g., Kirgizstan (Kosmarskaya 1999). Leaving before pension age is also problematic; people are afraid to lose higher pensions when there is no guarantee that one will find another job. Leaving the Kolyma also means leaving relatives, a prospect many find unacceptable. Embeddedness, not only in the network of friends (Round 2005) but also in a chain of relatives, keeps people in place. Irina says:

If I go, what about my boys? One is married and his wife’s parents are local. They are thinking about going, but not quite yet. Without them, she is not going to leave, so [neither] is my son. Without him I am not going.

These types of situations can be resolved very quickly, though. A middle-aged woman had been vacillating for years. One day she came back from vacation, packed up her things and left within a week for a *materik* town where she was offered a similar job, leaving her flat to be sold by her adult children. Her husband, a die-hard Kolyma resident, is now considering wrapping up his business and leaving as well.

Decisions of this kind are not made in a social vacuum. Living in the Kolyma is a story of how region-specific narratives of movement, uncertain homelands, and a unique northern environment and frontier made a place, but also how these narratives constitute normative

models that channel trajectories of individual lives. These narrative-models are what Margaret Somers, building on concepts of social epistemology and social ontology, called ontological narrativity. Somers (1994:606–607) demonstrates the discursive identity formation by linking identity and narrative:

It is through narrativity that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities... [T]his new ontological narrativity²⁸ provides an opportunity to infuse the study of identity formation with a relational and historical approach that avoids categorical rigidities by emphasizing the embeddedness of identity in overlapping networks of relations and shift over time and space (cf. Wodak et al. 2009).

Stories, Somers (1994:614) maintains, guide action and “people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity, but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives.” Next, I shall examine which ontological narratives influence individual actions in the Kolyma.

NARRATIVE-MODELS

The two aspects inherent in most Magadan inhabitants’ lives, imagination and movement, fuse into a mutually constitutive entity, a part of the local social environment. People’s lives are constructed in this social milieu consisting of additional discourses, which embody various mythologies that have been at work throughout Soviet Kolyma history. Some of these models are being transformed, while others persist.

The overarching narrative employed by the Soviet government was the value of individual participation in the common effort to develop a region of great significance for the whole society. The post-Soviet disintegration of this discursive sort of community is evident in the new discourse that scaled the Kolyma down from a national “frontier” to a modest regional level, leaving questions such as “What are we doing here *now*?” and adding more ambiguity to the already difficult dilemma of leaving or staying and attempts to rationalize each choice. A fifty-six-year-old man named Sergei said:

28. As compared to narratives as a mode of representation (Somers 1994:606).

We were proud to be people “from the North.” Now one is ashamed of it. When I go home [to Rostov], my acquaintances ask me, what are you doing there? You can make more money here than in the North. But we are used to living here; we have jobs, our flat and dacha. Nobody is going to hire us in the *materik*.

The policy of attracting a working-age mobile population created a narrative-model of the Kolyma as a place for the young and working, a place for doing rather than a place for being, which persists. Whether upon retiring one would have reasons to move to the *materik*, or could afford to, is an open question and some of my informants say they try not to think about the future, which sets this time apart from the Soviet period when the future was predictable. I asked Sergei and his wife if they would like to remain in the Kolyma much longer. They answered, “As long as we have jobs. If not, what is there to *do* here?” Many therefore reconcile themselves with the loss of pride of living in the region, rather than a frontier, but also with living in the present rather than in the future.

Another persistent narrative is that the Kolyma is a place where the health of the population is at risk. A memo from the state duma’s Committee for the North indicated that life expectancy in the North is shorter by some four to five years, and rates of child morbidity are twice as high as in the *materik*. At the same time, locally there is a strong belief that with time northerners physiologically adapt to the environment and that moving to warmer climates would result in a speedy death. This is partially why Nikolai, a taxi driver, does not want to return home: “At least five of my mates who moved back became ill or died within two years.” Although in the majority of cases these adaptations are cast in biomedical language and concepts, some admit that untimely death may be the consequence of the second translocation with ensuing socioeconomic problems.

The narrative-model of a “northerner” living in a frontier place where life is a series of hardships, hence populated by hard-working, strong and helpful individuals, is undergoing a transformation. Narrating a place is connected with self-narration. An identity that facilitated the rationalization of life in the Kolyma hardened in the process of territorialization (Delanda 2006) when it came into contact with those from the *materik*, the place where people are seen as being (negatively) different from “good” northerners. An idea was developed in Soviet times that this northern character was the result

of a few factors. Here is a summary of my informants’ explanations:

1. Material sufficiency, besides affecting economic aspects of an individual’s life, engendered such characteristics as generosity and kindness. Living in such a small place, Kolyma inhabitants’ shared experiences and discourses created a feeling of closeness and trust. A common story I have heard was of people lending a fellow Kolyma resident, a stranger stranded in the *materik*, money that they promised to pay back when they came home, a promise that was invariably fulfilled.
2. People who came to the Kolyma were young, mobile, enterprising, curious and adventurous—a state idea for a place of young people in society and an ideal match for the execution of the Soviet high modernity development projects throughout the country and in the North.
3. Those newcomers who could not match the lifestyle and requirements for northern living left the region quickly; thus I have heard people saying that “natural selection” ensured that “bad” people did not remain. The rest were expected to adhere to customs of helping each other. According to a former Kolyma resident, that was often the only way to physically survive, especially for those who lived in small rural communities along the *trassa*. In contrast to this, people from central Russia were seen as less dynamic. In the words of a fifty-five-year-old Magadan resident, they were “counting kopeks, living in their flats as if in a fortress, busy with their own little worlds.” For those in the *materik*, Kolyma residents became people “from the North” representing distant unfamiliar lands and symbolizing gold, prisons, prosperity and enterprise.

These regional legends are still subject to social reproduction. Yet despite the seeming “wholeness” of Kolyma and the way Magadan *oblast'* presents itself to outsiders (expressed in discourse, for example, as, “northerners are better than *materik* people”), the view from the inside reveals a certain fragmentation. Within Magadan *oblast'*, we see a replication of nested center-periphery relationships. For example, there are no administrative borders to separate *materik* from the North (i.e., the *materik* does not have a border). But as I have shown, this does not prevent people from developing regional identities, such as “northerners” and “people from the *materik*.” In the Kolyma, Magadan embodies the “center,” representing civilization, urban landscape, concentration of resources, administration, bet-

ter supplies, cultural life, variety and opportunities. The farther from the “center,” the farther from civilization and the closer to nature and only a step away from the wilderness in the literal sense, whether one speaks about Moscow and Magadan,²⁹ Magadan and Susuman—the administrative center of Susuman *raion*, and from there, to municipalities for which Susuman is the “center.” For a Magadan resident, a Susuman individual may be “from the trassa”;³⁰ for a Susuman resident, people from surrounding communities bring with them a certain foreignness. A small shop owner in Susuman told me:

There are fewer and fewer familiar faces around here. Who is coming here instead? Those alcoholics and *neblagopoluchniye*³¹ families with loads of children and no money, and what kind of town are we becoming, then?

In the neighboring town Kholodniy, with its population of only one thousand people, I heard similar complaints regarding newcomers from smaller communities that were closed down as a part of the state program of liquidating those communities considered not viable.

We are presented, then, with an identity that has been described as a multiplicity, whether fractured (Haraway 1991), hybrid (Elwert 1997), narrative (Somers 1994), or aggregate (Thompson 2008). Kolyma presents us with the case where the multiple and shifting identities include those of previous homelands, “northern” and local. Stammler uses Beck’s (2000) concept of hybrid identity and place polygamy to explain the process of emplacement in Yamal, in which the North becomes home (Stammler 2008). Sørensen and Olwig (2002) refer to studies of diasporas that describe multiple attachments (Clifford 1994), multiple homelands (Shuval 2000), and cultivation of affective-expressive links with past migration histories (Cohen 1997), all helping us to understand the sense of home among people defined by mobility. However, in the Kolyma, maintaining two homelands is difficult at best (except in seasonal gold-mining employment). When compared to the European Russian North where commuting by train or car are possible, the distance between the *ma-*

terik and the Kolyma is so great that even when collapsing the mental distance is possible, geographic expanse, lack of transportation infrastructure and travel costs preclude easy travel. Thus one has to choose.

MOVING TO THE *MATERIK* BUT LOOKING BACK TO KOLYMA

Leaving the Kolyma does not make one free of it, as I realized while studying former Kolyma inhabitants currently living in the *materik*. Where possible, people are trying to move to the same towns in the *materik* as others from the same community. Belgorod, for example, is a popular destination for people from Susuman. Kolyma is recreated through relationships and memories, including the material effects associated with living in the North. Visiting flats of my informants in Aleksandrov near Moscow is like going back to Magadan circa the 1980s: shipped from the Kolyma, there are recognisable rugs on the walls and crystal on the shelves, all part of middle-class Soviet living, but also wall hangings made of sea mammal fur and ivory, which are unusual for most locals. In many European Russian cities former Magadan residents created networks, meeting privately and also through two public organizations, the formal Council of Veterans of the Magadan Region, and a *zemlyachestvo*. *Zemlyachestvo* is an open-membership association that organizes events, meetings and celebrations, and trips to resort areas and helps those in need. It is important for former Kolyma residents to be a part of this network because, as various members told me: “It is a continuation of life in Magadan,” “These people are witness of my former might,” “It is a breath of fresh air, it is psychological support.” People use this network to share news, to look for jobs, and to help each other. Every August 31 they gather in front of Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow remembering old friends and meeting new ones. Most of my informants experience nostalgia for the first few years until they become settled and grow into their new lives. Some wondered if they left too early; whether under different circumstances they might

29. People away from the center are “lesser” people than those from Magadan. Similarly, Magadan people are “lesser” people than those from Moscow. Curiously, the close proximity of Magadan to the wilderness is what many people appreciate; one lives in the city but it is only a short drive to the seashore or the forest to get away from people and civilization. In regional towns like Kadykchan you could walk into the wilderness.

30. Meaning those living in regional communities outside Magadan.

31. These are families where parents have no jobs or money, who do not look after their children properly, who often abuse alcohol and lead an anti-social lifestyle by many.

have returned. There is always, however, something that prevents them from doing so, a job, lack of money, or the health of their relatives. Hardened Kolyma patriots find reasons to come to Magadan, such as celebrating the anniversary of the famous School N1, or the seventieth anniversary of Magadan city in 2009.

My research among former Kolyma residents who now live in Moscow yielded an interesting observation. While talking about the Kolyma, the region as a place did not figure strongly. There were a few usual references to its beauty and proximity to nature, but much more prominent were the reminiscences of what was going on within that place. In other words, although the place and their lives in that place were inseparable, the place seems to be incidental. That place contributed to the formation of their identity (they became “northerners”) but, in general, people were engaged with the local land in a very *materik*-like style. Much stronger were ties to the urban environment, which was imbued with memories and populated by complex social networks. This is in stark contrast to many anthropological studies that inextricably tie identity and natural environment, both in the North and elsewhere (e.g., Anderson 2000; Feld and Basso 1996; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; Ingold 2000; Vitebsky 2005), where individuals become “written” on to the land (e.g., Nuttall 1992:54–58). This makes me think that possibly social and physical environments could be separated.

Living in two places is not easy; this lifestyle is marked by constant separation and longing. Moving to the North and separated from their parents and siblings, migrants maintained extended family relations by correspondence and visits, which became complicated when spouses were from different parts of the USSR. Some parents moved away while their adult children and grandchildren stayed behind, now waiting for their pensions. Some have spouses, but many single and lonely people lost their savings, large pensions and other benefits due to post-*perestroika* reforms, when the market economy deprived them of opportunities to visit their families back in Magadan or even visit the towns where they spent their happiest years. They rely on the network of former Magadan residents living in the same city. One Alexandrov resident told me, “I had a wonderful youth, but my old age is awful. My daughter and grandchildren are still in Magadan, and I am here by myself.” But staying in Magadan does not mean that people are surrounded by the old network; friends and relatives move, leaving gaps. As one former Magadan resident

said, “I don’t want to return to Magadan. What is there to *do*? Everybody I know has left already.”

CONCLUSIONS

The data presented here sit comfortably within a wider frame of human mobility and diaspora studies (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1997; Shuval 2000). Whether reverse diasporas of New Zealanders in the UK (Wilson et al. 2009), returning Soviet German immigrants (Werner 2007), “Asian Russians” in Kirgiziya (Kosmarskaya 1999), or “northerners” coming back to the *materik*, living between places involves the physicality of a geographic place superimposed onto an imagined one.

Settling even temporarily in a new place creates not only a place out of space but also multiple identities. People in the Kolyma share one commonality: either personally, or through older generations, they all are recent arrivals from elsewhere and have previous affiliations with places. Having developed a “northern” identity they form “diasporas” elsewhere in the *materik*, but this identity seems to be for internal consumption rather than public display to non-northerners.

The possibly long-term temporariness engenders a host of issues individual actors have to deal with. One is the disjunction between the *idea* of temporariness, a habituated permanence, and the inability to leave, whether for health reasons, kinship ties, the foreignness of other places, or the lack of funds. These reasons are partly economic, but partly rooted in the specific understanding of the place embodied in local narrative-models. When it comes to what economists call “push and pull” factors that influence decisions regarding staying or leaving, neither identity nor “moral” factors (i.e., patriotism) are decisive in making this choice. More important seem to be a temporal aspect of economic well-being, familiarity with the place, and embeddedness. Embeddedness is a double-edged sword: social networks help but are also an impediment to mobility. Economic sufficiency and mobility also have generational boundaries. Young people are scarcely familiar with the *materik* but live in the environment permeated by mythologies of the *materik* as a desirable land. Middle-aged people are still working and are often afraid to lose jobs and pensions while at the same time, they are plagued by lack of funds and the increasing distance between their current lives and those of the *materik*. At the same time many are unsettled by the thought of spending their old age in the Kolyma. Pensioners are often attached

to the Kolyma through kinship, health issues and lack of funds. Expectations of leaving and settling in the *materik* come at a time in one's lifecourse (retirement) when in more permanent places people are expected to be settled. Hence "northerners" are being transplanted twice, at different ages but both times into an unknown.

Since Soviet times Magadan was a permanent place filled with an essentially temporary population leading a lifestyle where residents were neither completely here nor completely there. They lived in-between two places both physically, while moving between them, and mentally while keeping the *materik* in mind as they came to the Kolyma temporarily, expecting one day to return, but when and where was often undecided. Although many people have left, some postpone this final decision into an indefinite future; many temporary arrangements became temporarily permanent. This indicates that underlying the lifestyle of high mobility was the idea of permanency and rootedness revealed in both government practices and individual plans. This sets Kolyma residents apart from those Rapport and Dawson (1998) categorised as "migrants of identity" who live their lives in movement. The contradictory policy of mobility versus permanency resulted in years of indecision regarding staying or leaving and reveals a profound ambivalence characterized by "expansion of the space for personal and familial livelihood practices to two or more localities" (Sørensen and Olwig 2002:5). Whether this is ambivalence and the uncomfortable feeling of uncertainty is a product of Russia's agricultural past that presupposes rootedness and an attachment to the land with limited mobility, or is an unintended result of short-term Soviet migration policy, is open to interpretation.

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