

# At the Margins: Political Change and Indigenous Self-Determination in Post-Soviet Chukotka

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*Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian North has undergone a profound process of political, economic and social change. Nowhere is this change more evident than in the Chukotskii Autonomous Okrug (Chukotka), one of the most remote regions in the Russian Federation. During the Soviet period, Chukotka was the recipient of considerable state support which, in turn, led to the economic development of the region and an influx of settlers from other parts of the Soviet Union. These developments, however, quickly overwhelmed the indigenous peoples of Chukotka, who became marginalized economically, politically and demographically.*

*The post-Soviet period has brought new and unprecedented changes to Chukotka and its inhabitants. In the 1990s, the decline in state support triggered an economic collapse and an out-migration of non-indigenous settlers. Although the economic situation stabilized in the 2000s under the governorship of Roman Abramovich, a powerful oligarch with links to the upper echelons of Russian state authority, the region still struggles to cope with the challenges facing northern regions in Russia and throughout the circumpolar world: remoteness, harsh environments, underdevelopment, size and a dependency on government support. The fate of Chukotka's indigenous peoples in this changing context has been mixed. Developments during the earlier stages of the transition rebalanced the demographic profile of the region, increasing the proportion of indigenous inhabitants in relation to the settler population, and provided some avenues for greater political autonomy, cultural regeneration and international collaboration. However, more recent changes, both at the federal and regional levels, have curtailed the activities of indigenous organizations, bringing them under the increasing control of the state.*

## Introduction

The governance of northern regions and communities is complicated by a number of factors, including remoteness, harsh environments, underdevelopment, size and a dependency on other levels of government for basic services and economic support. The challenges facing northern regions and communities in contemporary Russia have been exacerbated by the transition away from the Soviet communist system. Despite the authoritarian and controlling nature of this system,

it did provide substantial support in the form of infrastructure and economic subsidies. By contrast, the instability of the post-Soviet transition has caused a number of hardships and problems for people living in the north.

One of the most remote regions in the Russian Federation is the Chukotskii Autonomous *Okrug* (Chukotka). Located in the far eastern part of the country, across the narrow Bering Strait from Alaska, Chukotka is nine time zones and over 6000 kilometers away from the Russian capital, Moscow. Throughout most of the Soviet period, the region was supported by the central government. This support prompted an influx of migrants from other parts of the Soviet Union in search of good wages, housing and other state benefits. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, central largesse evaporated and Chukotka, like many other northern regions in the newly constituted Russian Federation, underwent a dramatic demographic and economic collapse. Although this collapse was stemmed by the intervention of Roman Abramovich, one of Russia's most powerful oligarchs and governor of Chukotka from 2000-2008, the region and its inhabitants are still struggling to overcome the challenges of governance and development in a northern and remote setting.

This chapter will examine the political and economic development of Chukotka with a particular focus on the fate of the region's indigenous peoples during the post-Soviet period. Controlled politically and economically by the communist state and overwhelmed demographically by the influx of migrants during the Soviet period, Chukotka's indigenous peoples have experienced both positive and negative changes as a result of the post-Soviet transition. While the wholesale collapse of state support in the 1990s caused severe economic hardships, the out-migration of non-indigenous settlers has rebalanced the demographic composition of the region, a change that could signal a resurgence of the region's indigenous identity, both culturally and politically. Despite the legacies of authoritarianism, the political transition away from the communist system encouraged the region's indigenous peoples to become active in a number of domestic and international organizations and initiatives. More recently, however, the return of centralization and state control, especially under Russian President Vladimir Putin, has limited the activities of indigenous organizations across Russia, thereby curtailing the political aspirations of indigenous peoples in Chukotka.

The chapter draws mainly on English-language research and secondary sources on the region. It uses some Russian language sources, mainly from the local media, but it does not include interviews with regional or local officials because of the political and logistical challenges associated with conducting fieldwork in such a remote and politically sensitive region. Part one situates Chukotka within the broader context of the Russian federal system and reviews its political transition in the post-Soviet period. Part two discusses the demographic and economic challenges that the region has faced since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Part three explores the impacts of development on Chukotka's indigenous peoples during the Soviet period. Part four examines the efforts by indigenous peoples in Chukotka, to self-determine and outlines some of the key political challenges that they face at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## The political evolution of Chukotka in the post-Soviet period

Observers of Russian federalism and regional politics have noted a series of important trends in the relationship between the federal and regional governments since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Under Russia's first post-Soviet President, Boris Yeltsin, the political system underwent a process of decentralization. In some respects, decentralization was planned and managed; it was part of a broader strategy to preserve the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation during the initial transition period towards liberal democracy. The bilateral treaties negotiated between the federal and regional governments in the mid to late 1990s were evidence of efforts to hold Russia together in the face of political disintegration and prevent the country from following the same fate as its Soviet predecessor. In other respects, however, decentralization was unplanned; it was a reflection of the collapse of the centralized Soviet state, the weakness of the federal government and the rise of powerful regions. Indeed, many regional leaders took Yeltsin at his word when he said "take all the autonomy you can swallow" and the result was an epic intergovernmental struggle over political authority and economic resources (Remington 2012).

Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the power relationship between the federal and regional governments has shifted dramatically. During the first decade of the new century, Putin introduced a series of reforms that were designed to strengthen the position of the federal government *vis-à-vis* the regions. These reforms, coupled with other developments such as the emergence of the national political party United Russia and the taming of the oligarchs, recentralized the Russian Federation by (re)creating the *vertikal*, the centralized hierarchy of political authority under the firm control of the executive branch of government (Remington 2012).

It is within this shifting context that Chukotka has undergone significant political, economic and demographic change. In 1991, the region declared autonomy from Magadan *Oblast*, a region to which it had been administratively subordinated since 1977. This move was consistent with the autonomy declarations of many other regions in the Russian Federation. That being said, Chukotka was the only autonomous *okrug* to formally separate from its "host" region.<sup>1</sup>

Politically, the 1990s were dominated by the iron rule of Aleksandr Nazarov, Chukotka's first post-Soviet governor. Although the Nazarov administration faced an extremely difficult and, arguably, unprecedented economic and demographic collapse, as outlined in more detail below, it has been noted by one observer that political criticism of the government or its activities was not tolerated during his term in office (Diatchkova 2010).<sup>2</sup> Despite the demise of Soviet communism, democracy had not yet taken root. Indeed, such authoritarian tendencies were common throughout Russia as regions and regional leaders attempted to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the centralized Soviet state.

Nazarov was followed as governor in 2000 by Roman Abramovich, a powerful oligarch with close connections to both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin. Abramovich served two terms as governor, during which time he transformed the economy and infrastructure of the region. It was rumoured that he invested \$2.5 billion of his own money in the region and, as a result, was very popular (Jensen 2013). After 2008, Abramovich continued to play a political role in Chukotka as the speaker

of the regional legislature. The current governor of Chukotka is Roman Kopin, a former advisor to both Nazarov and Abramovich, who had served as municipal leader in the region before being appointed governor in July of 2008. Kopin was reelected as governor in September 2013 with almost 80% of the vote (Noskov 2013).

### **Economic and demographic change in the post-Soviet period**

In the decade following the collapse of communism, Chukotka, like the rest of the former Soviet Union, underwent a series of profound economic, social and political transitions. Such changes were felt across Russia, as the country struggled to create a new political system. The effects of the transition in Chukotka (and in many other northern regions), however, were accentuated by the particular circumstances facing the region, namely its remoteness from other parts of Russia, its lack of development and the high degree of dependency that it had on the central government during the Soviet period.

Until the 1990s, Chukotka had been heavily supported by the central state. According to one source:

A high regional wage coefficient and the northern wage increment made the wage level considerably higher in Chukotka [than] those in the country in general and in the Magadan Oblast' in particular. It attracted [a] qualified workforce to the region and the population was increasing due to the influx (Chukotka 2014).

As a result, over the course of the post-war period, the population of the region grew exponentially from 20,787 in 1939 to 164,783 in 1989, largely through in-migration from other parts of the Soviet Union. This massive influx of outsiders made indigenous peoples a minority in their homelands. In 1939, indigenous peoples comprised 75.4% of the total population of Chukotka. By 1989, the region's indigenous population had shrunk to only 30.8% (Abryutina 2007a).<sup>3</sup>

The break-up of the Soviet Union brought about another demographic shift that was unparalleled, except in times of war and extreme civil strife. Within a decade of the Soviet collapse, the population of Chukotka had shrunk to 53,824, a decline of over 100,000 people (Heleniak 2001). While the sheer numbers and percentages alone are dramatic, what are even more significant are the imbalances such shifts create in the demographic profile of the remaining population. For example, the people who left the region tended to be younger, educated professionals who were more mobile (Hill & Gaddy 2003). This only exacerbated the political and economic challenges facing remote and northern regions such as Chukotka.

The outmigration also had a distinctly ethnic dimension in that the majority of residents who left Chukotka were Russians and Ukrainians, many of whom came to the region in Soviet times in search of career advancement, higher wages and housing (Thompson 2008). As noted above, over the course of the post-war period, the settler population gradually overwhelmed the indigenous populations of the region. As Thompson (2008: 113) noted in his study of settler-state relations in Chukotka:

The collapse of the Soviet Union stripped the settler of practically all those features of privilege that previously defined this population, and it did so with remarkable speed and thoroughness. Northern *osvoenie* [mastery] had been one of the Soviet regime's most cherished projects, but the suddenness of its end showed, finally, how little rationale it possessed beyond Moscow's fiat. Settlers once lived within a zone of remarkable abundance and earned far more than workers on the *materik* [mainland]. Now Chukotka suffered acute shortages of everyday goods and food, and by the mid-1990s, prices rose to the highest level in Russia.

As a result of the outmigration of non-indigenous inhabitants, the demographic balance between indigenous peoples and settlers has been partially restored to levels that have not been seen since the 1950s.

The post-Soviet demographic transformation was accompanied (and accentuated) by a socio-economic crisis in the region, as subsidized industries shut down because they were unprofitable in a market context. Basic services in areas such as healthcare and education were starved of resources and traditional activities, in particular reindeer herding and fur trading, went into decline (Chukotka 2014; Abryutina 2007a). Despite investments in infrastructure and services during the Abramovich era, such problems persist today. In a recent meeting between representatives of the regional government and senators representing Chukotka in the Federation Council, the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, Senator Aramays Dallakyan noted "the lack of funding for the implementation of the Strategy of socio-economic development of the Chukotskii Autonomous Okrug" (Chukotskii Avtonomnyi Okrug 2015). In a separate interview, the Head of the Okrug's Department of Social Policy, Anastasia Zhukova, commented on the importance of continued investment in infrastructure such as roads airports and seaports as a key component of the overall strategy to develop the region (Masalova 2015).

One area of particular concern is marine hunting, an integral part of the fishing industry in the region and an important part of the economic development of indigenous communities. According to the Deputy Head of the okrug's Department of Agricultural Policy and Environmental Management, Evgenyi Marochkin, it was unfortunate that marine hunting was not included in the list of activities targeted by the federal program on the development of the agricultural economy, the regulation of agricultural products, raw materials and food for 2013-2020 (Noskov i Omruv'e 2015). In response, the Head of the Regional Duma, Valentina Rudchenko, said that "[the region] must continue to work with federal agencies, for federal support is very important for us, as the district budget is clearly not enough for the implementation of government programs" (Noskov i Omruv'e 2015). These comments from regional officials demonstrate the hierarchical nature of politics in contemporary Russia. At the same time, they also reveal the underlying frustrations and dependencies that characterize Chukotka's relationship with the federal government.

## **Impacts of development on Chukotka's indigenous peoples during the Soviet period**

Chukotka's diverse indigenous population consists of the Chukchi, Yupik, Even, Kerek, Koryak, Yukagir, and Chuvan peoples (Diatchkova 2002, 2010; Leonova 2011). Before the Soviet era,

Chukotka's indigenous peoples maintained their independence from the Russian empire and traded freely with Russians, Americans and each other. In fact:

the Chukchi tribesmen were the only native Siberian tribe violent and warlike enough ever to fight the Russian invaders to a negotiated peace, concluded in 1778. Even after the Russian withdrawal from the *ostrog* of Anadyrsk<sup>4</sup> under the terms of the treaty, the Chukchi remained notorious raiders of Russian settlements and caravans (Matthews 2013. See also Znamenski 1999).

The Russian Revolution, however, ushered in the era of Soviet rule, initiating the subjugation of Chukotka's indigenous peoples and forever changing their relationship with the state.

The economic activity of Chukotka's indigenous peoples in the early Soviet era was intrinsically linked with the landscape. Coastal peoples such as the Yupik were sea mammal hunters, while tundra and inland dwellers such as the Yukaghir and Koryaks were reindeer herders. The Chukchi, the largest indigenous group in Chukotka, were comprised of both herders and hunters, depending on whether they resided on the tundra or the coast. Both occupations required a great deal of travel, and the indigenous peoples were either nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples (Diatchkova, 2010). Soviet authority was slow to penetrate Chukotka's indigenous peoples, likely because the great distance between Moscow and the region coupled with their nomadic lifestyles, but also because they had resisted political control during the Tsarist period. Indeed, the first step to managing Chukotka's indigenous peoples was sedentarization.

According to Pika (1999), there were three stages of state policy towards northern native peoples in the Soviet Union. Between 1929 and the early 1930s, the state offered "assistance oriented towards education, self-government, and the formation of cooperatives" (Pika 1999: 59). From the 1930s through the mid-1950s, the state's concern was the development and solidification of the "totalitarian administrative command system" and the exploitation of the indigenous labour pool to meet state planning objectives (Pika 1999: 59). Finally, the mid-1950s through the early 1980s ushered in the era of "state bureaucratic paternalism" which was characterized by the formation of "minor privileges, perks and ineffective aid" (Pika 1999: 59). In the formative years of the Soviet Union, the "frontline strategy for civilizing the North" was the *kul'tbaza* (culture base), a Soviet school for indigenous children (Gray 2005: 104). The first such school in Chukotka opened in Uelen in 1923. The *komsomol* (communist youth league) was instituted to lead the "cultural revolution," and in Chukotka particularly, to bring "literacy to the tundra" (Gray 2005: 101). A policy of *korenizatsia* (indigenization) was instituted to grant self-determination to Soviet indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples were recruited to key roles within state enterprises to create an indigenous elite, competent in Marxist-Leninist principles and loyal to the communist regime (Gray 2005). However, as Kertulla (2000: 10) argues, rather than "homogenize the Union," *korenizatsia* instead "institutionalized ethnic identity." Over the course of the post-war period, participation in state organs by indigenous peoples significantly decreased. For example, in 1945, 72% of Chukotka's *komsomol* members were indigenous, but by 1980 membership had dropped to 14.2% (Gray 2005). This decline may also have been a reflection of the significant decrease in the number of indigenous peoples as an overall

proportion of the population in Chukotka, due to in-migration from other parts of the Soviet Union.

By the 1930s, collectivization of reindeer herds had begun in Chukotka, although it would be the 1950s before the Soviet authorities completed the sedentarization of Chukchi herders (Thompson 2008). The Soviet policy of *ukreplenie* (consolidation) closed villages and relocated residents to permanent settlements for reasons of administrative efficiency in the provision of services (Gray 2001) and for strategic military purposes (Abryutina 2007b). The results were two-fold: post-relocation villages consisted of mixed Russian and indigenous populations (Krupnik & Chlenov 2007); and, control over the economic drivers of indigenous society was relinquished to outsiders (Pelaudeix 2012). Chukotka's indigenous peoples became state employees, losing authority over their herds to Russian specialists (Thompson 2008). Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the policy of *ukreplenie* was employed to consolidate residents into larger communities (Krupnik & Chlenov 2007).

Thompson (2002) describes the early post-war period as the era of "Soviet mastery" – the extraction of resource wealth and the enlightenment of indigenous peoples. The key feature of Soviet mastery was the establishment of large, permanent settler populations (Thompson 2002). This period featured the large-scale and rapid development of the industrial complex of the Russian Far North (Gray 2005; Silanpää 2008). A massive in-migration of new skilled workers occurred and these workers were tasked with organizing mining operations, consolidating state farms, preparing cadres, and searching for new ways to organize reindeer herding (Gray 2005). Substantial development and industrialization shifted the demographic profile of Chukotka from a largely rural to a largely urban population and, as in other indigenous regions in northern and eastern Russia, indigenous peoples became outnumbered by settlers (Gray 2005; Schindler 1996).

During the 1960s, infrastructure was built to support mining and nuclear energy development (Silanpää 2008). Indigenous peoples' employment in *sovkhozy* (state farms) was largely directed at supplying goods to the industrial development of the Soviet Union. They were underrepresented in the new industrial workforce, while traditional activities such as trapping, hunting and fishing were unprofitable and unsuccessful, as there was no infrastructure to support traditional economic activity (Silanpää 2008). Chukotka's economy was constructed to secure the supply of minerals and strategic resources for the development of the national economy (Krupnik & Vakhtin 2002); however, damaging and unsustainable practices in resource extraction resulted in multiple centers of industrial pollution and environmental degradation (Diatchkova 2010).

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought about another set of changes to the lives of Chukotka's indigenous peoples. Between 1985 and 2000, the already low employment rate of indigenous peoples dropped from 59% to 21.5%, and purchasing power to buy food decreased by 12.3% (Borodin et al. 2002). Soviet era social programs and subsidies ended, a reality that was felt particularly in remote villages where there was nothing to replace the lost structures. People became politically and physically disenfranchised. Inflation depleted savings and made pensions worthless and, as noted above, massive depopulation and out-migration ensued. Medical supplies and facilities were depleted, and unemployment increased while access to goods decreased (Kertulla 2000).

In the 1990s, Chukotka was in an advanced state of humanitarian crisis initiated by the exodus of non-indigenous skilled labour, the failure of shipping deliveries and the liquidation of state enterprises. As a result, starvation, suicide, and alcoholism became prevalent amongst the indigenous population (Thompson 2008). There was also a shift in the local administrative demographic. As settlers left Chukotka, they were replaced by villagers to fill positions in the administration of local government (Krupnik & Vakhtin 2002). Indigenous peoples were even more disadvantaged in terms of transitioning to the market economy. Traditional economic activity shifted from supporting industrial development to isolated economic activity, resulting in ethnic stratification and unequal access to goods and services (Schindler 1992). Perhaps the one positive outcome for indigenous peoples was that the increased reliance on traditional subsistence activities, necessary for survival, led to increased cultural awareness (Kertulla 2000).

### **Indigenous self-determination in Chukotka**

Against the backdrop of this socio-economic crisis, there were also some significant political and legislative changes that impacted indigenous peoples in Chukotka. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, new local and regional associations began to appear in Chukotka. In 1990, federal legislation entitled *Unhindered Ethnic Development of Citizens of the USSR who live Outside their Ethnic Areas or Have no Such Areas Within the Territory of the USSR* allowed for the creation of political associations based on nationality (Kryazhkov, 2013). The ‘Yupik Eskimo Society of Chukotka’ (YESC) and the ‘Association of Indigenous Peoples of Chukotka’<sup>25</sup> formed to promote indigenous rights and self-determination for Chukotka’s indigenous peoples. These new local indigenous institutions were supported by the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East (RAIPON), a larger national association with members from 35 regional organizations and 41 indigenous groups (Gray, 2007). RAIPON’s goals include greater self-determination for indigenous peoples through self-government, human rights protection, and the legal protection of indigenous social, economic and environmental interests (Arctic Council 2011).

The above mentioned collapse of central authority throughout the country reinforced the *de facto* autonomy of the regional government throughout much of the 1990s. In Chukotka, the Nazarov administration began to secure the region from outside influence. Indigenous organizations seeking political legitimacy were harassed and often co-opted by the regional authorities (Thompson 2008). Newly enacted federal legislation, such as the law *On Guarantees of the Rights of Small-Numbered Indigenous Peoples* was at odds with regional legislation, and enforcement by the federal authorities was problematic (Pelaudeix 2012), a reflection of the weakness of the federal government. While the indigenous rights movement in Chukotka gained some momentum in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods, the regional bureaucracy opposed and interfered with local attempts at indigenous self-determination (Krupnik & Vakhtin 2002). Indigenous peoples’ organizations sought the status of ‘political organizations’ in order to be taken seriously by regional authorities (Diatchkova 2010).

By the end of the 1990s, the Nazarov administration had successfully marginalized Chukotka’s indigenous movement by framing Russia’s new democratic principles of equality in opposition to ‘indigenous’ self-determination (Tennberg 2010). Funding for indigenous political organizations was

limited, and dispersed at the discretion of the regional authorities. In 1999, the Arbitration Court of the Chukchi Autonomous *Okrug* ordered the offices of YESC to be closed and its assets liquidated (Ainana, Zelensky & Bychkov 2001).

The rights of indigenous peoples are guaranteed by the Russian Federation's Constitution (1993). Article 69: "guarantees the rights of indigenous peoples in compliance with the universally recognized principles and norms of international law and treaties concluded with the Russian Federation." Article 69 is legally implemented with the formal adoption of three federal statutes: *On Guarantees of the Rights of Small-Numbered Indigenous Peoples* (1999), *On the General Principles for the Organization of Obsbchiny* (2001) and *On the Territories of Traditional Nature Use* [TTNUs] (2001). At the *okrug* level, the Charter of the Chukotka Autonomous Region (1997) protects indigenous peoples' rights in Articles 1, 3, 19, 43 and 63 (Kriazhkov, 2006). Indeed, on paper, indigenous rights in Russia have robust protection by law. In practice however, terms are defined broadly and often regional and federal statutes are misaligned, resulting in conflicting interpretations and application of the law.<sup>6</sup>

As outlined in more detail in the next section, the leadership of Chukotka's indigenous political organizations, made up of members of the former Soviet indigenous intelligentsia, sought outside help from the transnational indigenous rights movement, which was particularly evident throughout the circumpolar north (Gray 2007). Through collaboration with the Inuit Circumpolar Council and Alaskan municipal associations, humanitarian aid, funding, equipment, and various projects were established throughout the Russian Far East to help indigenous peoples survive the transition. However, the new millennium would bring a new centralizing force to the Russian presidency, eventually curtailing international aid and reframing the debate regarding indigenous self-determination as conflicting with nationalist principles of equality.

Despite the initially negative effects of the transition, the changes that have taken place over the last two decades could provide the basis for a reawakening of indigenous identity and control in Chukotka. At the same time, such a reawakening must be viewed within the broader context that shapes indigenous-state relations in Russia at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following section will outline a number of developments that have either facilitated or hindered the political status of indigenous peoples in Chukotka since 2000.

### ***The return of the Obsbchina***

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the issue of indigenous land rights in Russia garnered interest among both western and Russian scholars (Fondahl & Poelzer 2003; Fondahl, Lazebnik, Poelzer & Robbek 2001). In her work on land and indigenous rights in Chukotka in the late 1990s and 2000s, Patty Gray noted movement towards the return of the *obsbchina*, "or 'ancestral community,' a special category of land tenure defined in Russian law" (Gray 2001: 1). Although *obsbchiny* existed in other parts of the Russian Federation (Stammler 2005; Fondahl 1998), in Chukotka they were fewer in number because the "regional authorities [under Nazarov] were more reluctant to give up centralized control of local production and administration" (Gray 2001: 1). The rebirth of *obsbchiny*, however, was critical to the rejuvenation of traditional land tenure practices and

activities. In many respects, these territorial formations represent a form of indigenous self-governance. In 2001, a new federal law on traditional resource management and the end of the Nazarov's term in office brought new hope that the number of *obsbchiny* would grow. In practice, however, requests to establish TTNUs of federal significance have been rejected (Kryazhkov 2013). Furthermore, a December 2013 amendment to the Federal Act *On Specially Protected Conservation Areas* removed TTNUs from its purview, exposing them to the possibility of unmitigated industrial development and expansion (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 2014b).

### ***The Abramovich era and beyond***

In the early 2000s, Chukotka's second post-Soviet governor, Roman Abramovich, brought with him from Moscow a young and well-educated cadre of professionals to fill administrative positions in the regional government (Thompson 2008). He also made significant investments in infrastructure in the region. While ethnic stratification and state paternalism remained in regional decision-making bodies, an 'Indigenous Representatives Council' was established to resolve indigenous issues and reserve seats in the Regional Duma (parliament) for Chukotka's indigenous peoples (Diatchkova 2010). Despite these developments, however, there is still no clear indication that indigenous peoples have any meaningful representation in regional or federal government institutions. Survey research conducted through the international Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA) project found that indigenous respondents "[considered] the governorship of Roman Abramovich especially warmly" (Abryutina 2007a). At the same time, at the end of Abramovich's time in office, Diatchkova (2010: 226) noted:

The participants of the 2009 Congress of Chukotka's indigenous peoples also discussed the absence of any critical information on regional politics or indigenous issues in the media. This is the main reason for the lack of knowledge in respect of indigenous rights among current indigenous representatives.

Under current governor Roman Kopin, there have been some attempts to address the development of indigenous peoples in the region. As noted above, often this involves struggles with the federal government for resources to fund programs to support traditional livelihoods such as marine mammal hunting. In a recent interview, the Head of the Department of Social Policy, Anastasia Zhukova commented that "the government will continue to solve the problems of the indigenous population of the district" (Masalova 2015). Although the government's intentions are clearly worded, this top-down, paternalistic approach to development simply reinforces the power of the state over indigenous peoples in the region, rather than allowing them to have greater control over their lives and their land.

### ***Legislation on non-governmental organizations (NGOs)***

Although the Putin era has brought political and economic stability to Russia, it has also been characterized by increasing political repression, especially of political opponents and organizations that function outside the state. During the late Soviet and immediate post-Soviet period, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were an important means to develop Russian civil society, and could rely on external financial support from foreign organizations (Daucé 2010). By the mid-2000s,

however, civil society had been largely coopted by the state through the creation of bodies such as the Public Chamber and the increasing repression of NGOs. In 2006, the federal government passed legislation *On Introducing Amendments into Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation*, commonly referred to as the “NGO Law” (Crotty & Hall 2013). Among other things, this law required groups to register with the state and divulge personal information regarding their members and founders. It allowed state officials unrestricted access to group meetings including private policy and campaigning activities, and required reporting of foreign financial support, including how funds were being obtained and spent, effectively restricting funding to domestic sources (Crotty & Hall 2013). In July of 2012, additional legislation required NGOs with political activities and foreign funding to register as ‘foreign agents’ and submit a report of their financial activities every quarter (Crotty, Hall & Ljubownikow 2014). As a result, the state actively discriminates against internationally integrated NGOs and western-funded human rights organizations (Frohlich 2012). In fact, recently enacted legislation states that members of an NGO labeled ‘undesirable’ may be subject to fines and jail time (Tétrault-Farber 2015).

These changes have impacted the ability of indigenous organizations such as RAIPON and affiliated organizations in Chukotka such as YESC to operate and to engage with indigenous organizations outside Russia. In 2012 the Russian Ministry of Justice found “irregularities in [RAIPON’s] organizational statutes” and forced RAIPON to cease operations (Staaleser 2013). Both organizations were accused of failing to abide by the aforementioned legislation requiring NGOs to register with the state and secure themselves as ‘legal entities’ while obtaining funding from outside of Russia. As well, the suspensions of both organizations lasted about a year before the state determined the appropriate paperwork was submitted and they could return to their business. In 2014, an indigenous hunter’s association in Chukotka was asked to voluntarily register as a foreign agent because the association was using joint American and Russian funding to study walruses. Although the organization was not involved in political activities, the leader was a candidate for a seat in local government, which clearly constituted a political activity to the authorities (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 2014a). The association refused, but the authorities made it clear that they would be harassed, and in the end will be forced to register as a foreign agent.

### ***International collaboration***

The geographical proximity of Chukotka to the United States (Alaska) and Canada, coupled with historical connections between the indigenous peoples of this part of the circumpolar north has facilitated international collaboration since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, the representatives from YESC have become actively involved in the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), a transnational organization representing Inuit peoples in four different countries. During the socio-economic crisis in the early to mid-1990s, the ICC worked with the Canadian government and other organizations to deliver humanitarian aid to the indigenous peoples of Chukotka and the Russian north (Wilson 2007). Additionally, a number of bilateral projects dedicated to wildlife management, cultural preservation and environmental protection were initiated between Alaska and Chukotka including the Chukotka Walrus Harvest Monitoring Project and the joint US/Russia Polar Bear Commission (Diatchkova 2010). Such examples of collaboration between the indigenous peoples of

Russia and other regions in the circumpolar north are important because they open the region and its inhabitants up to the outside world after decades of isolation during the Soviet period, thereby allowing for the sharing of best practices and new ideas. The Inuit peoples of Alaska, Canada and Greenland, for example, have made great strides over the last several decades in their quest for political and economic autonomy. Their progress provides a benchmark for other indigenous peoples, not only in Russia, but also in other parts of the world.

Of course, there are many barriers to continued international collaboration on the part of Russian indigenous peoples. In addition to the controls that the state places on non-governmental organizations, indigenous groups that do engage actively in international collaboration are often very small in numbers and have limited human and financial resources to draw on. Tatiana Achirgina, the President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Chukotka, has commented that her organization simply lacks competent and persistent leaders who are able to attend international forums and work hard and consistently to preserve Yupik culture and traditions (Leonova 2015).

## Conclusions

As in other regions and countries around the world, indigenous peoples in Chukotka have suffered greatly at the hands of the state. After centuries of relative isolation within the Russian Empire, Soviet communism brought about a wholesale change in the political and economic circumstances facing indigenous peoples in Chukotka. Soviet development also brought an influx of settlers from other parts of the Soviet Union which demographically overwhelmed and marginalized the indigenous populations of the region. The demise of the Soviet Union brought new and unprecedented challenges; namely in the form of socio-economic collapse and a massive outmigration of people from the region. While indigenous peoples now form a very strong plurality in Chukotka, they still struggle to realize and assert their traditional indigenous rights.

As the indigenous peoples of Chukotka look to the future, there is some hope that they will be able to achieve some measure of self-governance and control. The stabilization of the region (at least relative to the chaos of the 1990s), coupled with other developments such as the prospects for developing *obshchiny* and connecting with indigenous peoples in other parts of the circumpolar north who have been successful in building self-governing indigenous regions, are signs that the future may hold some promise. As noted earlier, the indigenous peoples of this region have a long history of resistance and independence and, as leaders such Aleksandr Omrypkir and Tatiana Achirgina have argued, it is critically important that they preserve their traditions and remain united in the face of political and economic change. At the same time, it is important to note the very different and difficult political context in which indigenous peoples in Russia operate. Whereas indigenous peoples in Alaska and Canada have been able to work with other levels of government to achieve self-government, the federal and regional governments in Russia are still suspicious of and even hostile to any attempts to bolster indigenous autonomy. As a result, indigenous peoples in Chukotka still find themselves at the margins of Russian society, politically, economically and geographically.

## Notes

1. Chukotka was the only one of 10 autonomous *okrug*s to become independent from their host regions. Since 1991, several autonomous *okrug*s have been politically and territorially amalgamated into their host regions (Wilson 2003). For a more in-depth discussion of Russia's autonomous *okrug*s and their status within the federal system (see Wilson 2001 and 2003).
2. Popular discontent with the Nazarov administration and the extremely poor living conditions in the region was also reflected in a collective letter that was sent by the residents of Provideniya in eastern Chukotka to the President of the Russian Federation in 1999 (Bogoslovskaya 2000).
3. Similar demographic transitions were also experienced in other northern regions such as Khanty Mansiysk in western Siberia (see Wilson 2001).
4. An *ostrog* is a stockade town that served as a colonial outpost in Siberia, the Russian Far East and Russian America during the Tsarist period.
5. The Association of Indigenous Peoples of Chukotka just celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2015 (see Kopylova 2015).
6. Authority over lands protected for the traditional use of indigenous peoples is shared between the federal and regional governments. Often federal and regional statutes disagree or are in conflict. While the laws *On Obshinas* and *On TTUNs* were created to give indigenous peoples free and hereditary use and transfer of traditional lands, the Forest Code of the Russian Federation excludes indigenous peoples from holding land tenure rights (Laletin 2012).

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