

Saving the Sacred Sea: Baikal Environmentalism from Iron Curtain to Global Modernity

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*For Bill*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A bonfire blazed and crackled, casting its orange glow on the twenty-plus faces clustered around it. The heat from the flames warmed our fronts, while a chill threatened our backs from the cool Siberian night. Although it was mid-August, birch trees were already beginning to yellow, and we would wake in the morning to find a crust of ice over any standing water. Summer was ending, and autumn would soon begin. The smell of frost mingled with wood smoke on this, our last, night in the *taiga*, the boreal forest that covers much of Siberia.

Although it was cold and late, no one was willing to leave the fire, as though the night and our time together might not end if only we kept the blaze burning and the guitar strumming. We had come together in this place as strangers only two weeks before, but since then had become fast friends.

Now we sat together around the fire, on benches that we had made ourselves, watching as the remainder of our wood was consumed in the conflagration. An invisible thread seemed to bind us together that night, and we communicated freely – English, Russian, gesture, facial expression – the myriad ways we had learned to read one another over the last two weeks.

The night crept on, and the songsters were beginning to exhaust their repertoires. Eyelids were drooping, and the woodpile was low. There was a pause in the joviality as each sat quiet.

“It’s midnight,” Olga said.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Except for organization leaders, whose full names are provided, the names have been changed to protect the subjects’ identity. All translations from the original Russian are the author’s own.

“What time exactly?” Larisa asked her.

“Exactly midnight,” Olga answered. “It just turned.”

“We should sing the national anthem,” Larisa replied, half-joking. She was referencing Radio Russia, the principle radio station in the country, which goes off the air at midnight and ends its broadcast with the national anthem.

“Yes, we should!” agreed Polya, and soon they were rousing the group to stand and sing. We all obliged; the twenty of us, standing around the campfire, began a rousing variation of “*Rossiya – svyashchennaya nasha derzhava...*,”<sup>2</sup> a multitude of voices carrying out into the night. Our non-Russian speaking companions stood and smiled in appreciation and support. As the final strains of the hymn echoed in the tall pines, we laughed and seated ourselves again.

“Hey, we should sing *all* our national anthems,” Olga suggested.

“Yeah, what does your anthem sound like?” Larisa asked the brother and sister from Portugal.

“Sing it!” several others urged them on.

They began a very enthusiastic (albeit not always in key) rendition of the Portuguese national anthem.

Next was the German national anthem, sung enchantingly by Silke.

Then I followed with the “Star-Spangled Banner,” mustering more patriotism than I knew I possessed.

Thomas and Emilie stole the show with the merry opening of “La Marseillaise,” with everyone clapping along.

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<sup>2</sup> “Russia – our holy homeland,” is the opening line of the Russian national anthem, formally named the State Hymn of the Russian Federation.

Antonio sang the Italian national anthem, which none of us knew, but all were glad to hear.

“Now for the British!” Vadim said.

Peter and Jane exchanged glances. “I don’t know it, do you?” they both muttered between themselves, outing their lack of interest in the monarchy.

“Oh, we all sang, you *have* to sing it,” and similar lines of encouragement came out of the crowd. Obliging, they managed between the two of them to sing the first two lines of “God Save the Queen,” and then hummed the rest.

“Is that all?” Larisa asked.

“I think so,” Katya answered.

“Do you know the Buryat national anthem?” Polya asked Roma, a young Buryat man living in the Irkutsk *oblast* [region]. Roma shook his head.

“I do,” said a small voice. We all looked, surprised, at Fedya, a dark, quiet man from Moscow.

“Well, sing it!” Olga said. There was a pause, and then Fedya’s thin voice carried forth a hauntingly beautiful hymn to the Republic of Buryatia, an ethnic state within the Russian Federation. The slow, lyrical, minor key was a sedate contrast to such rousing hymns as “La Marseillaise” and the “Star-Spangled Banner.” Roma listened, his eyes down on the fire, his face looking pleased.

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This anecdote tells one story of globalization. It reflects the optimism of a world united, where individuals from many different cultures and backgrounds could come together in peace for mutual benefit. The twenty-three people around the fire were all volunteers with the Great

Baikal Trail project, a nonprofit organization based in Irkutsk, Russia, whose goal is to promote sustainable eco-tourism by building a network of hiking trails around Lake Baikal. Recruits from around the world to participate in two-week “volunteer vacations” to help build and maintain wilderness trails. In the process, as the above anecdote suggests, participants receive the bounty of cultural exchange and form bonds of friendship, breaking down prejudicial barriers and expanding the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) to peoples worldwide.

But this is not the only story. The ease with which these international volunteers came to Russia, to join an ecological trail-building project, is a testament to another process of globalization, one which has its roots in the ever-expanding reach of the capitalist marketplace. International tourism is a major industry, and it is one that the Great Baikal Trail seeks to channel into its own backyard, albeit as sustainably as possible. The frequency and affordability of international travel and the communicative reach of mass media have both played a role in “space-time distancing” (Giddens 1984) and in the global reach of projects such as the one described above.

Yet, according to some scholars, many economic benefits of this process have accrued to the already developed world (Dowrick and Golley 2004, Reinert 2007). While there is a surprising array of countries represented amongst the volunteers in Siberia’s *taiga* that night, they are uniformly European or American. These are the individuals best poised to take advantage of all that globalization has offered. As free trade and foreign direct investment replaced the previous import substitution models of development, ownership of productive enterprises has concentrated still further in the Global North (Harvey 2005). Meanwhile, financialization in Western countries has maintained national economic growth and high purchasing power among their broad middle classes, even as their economies de-industrialized

(Krippner 2012). That the people around the Siberian bonfire have used their disposable income to volunteer their time, energy and resources in helping another distant country is certainly to their credit. But the economic globalization that has brought it about has other effects on distant lands that may be less benign.

Meanwhile, the political realm has also become more attuned to the tides of global social forces. Global governance institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which formed in the wake of World War II to support national economies, have since become instrumental in setting national policy, often to the benefit of international financial institutions and to the detriment of national sovereignty (Stiglitz 2002). Non-state actors, such as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) likewise operate for changes in state policy, irrespective of national borders (Keck and Sikkink 1996). Institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, the World Trade Organization, and the International Criminal Court have continued to problematize the relationship between the unitary state and supra-national governance bodies which simultaneously hold sway.

Globalization is not one process, but all of these at once. All of these forces – transnational migration, cultural interconnection, economic integration, and global governance – become instantiated in the everyday lives of local citizens, who confront the particularities of their unique circumstances in dialogue with intersecting global trends. In so doing, the public must orient itself to the interconnected world that is unfolding, subjectively determining their pathway to the good society that is made both more and less feasible by these multiple intersections.



This dissertation explores globalization at the ends of the Earth. It follows chains of ownership and ideology that cross continents, and it traces the footsteps of individuals along similar transnational trajectories. Reaching from San Francisco, South Lake Tahoe, Seattle, London, Berlin, and Moscow, these pathways finally touch down in Irkutsk, the city by the Sacred Sea, the capital of Siberia.

The pin-point on the map that holds these global chains in place is theoretically important. Not only is Siberia geographically distant, it was also politically isolated for decades under Soviet rule. The Iron Curtain that blockaded East from West ensured that foreign influence would have only the slightest effect on the ideas and activities of Siberia's denizens. To that extent, the arrival of global forces to Eastern Siberia is not only a testament to the power and reach of our contemporary interconnection; it also can give a precise date to its origin. The opening of the Soviet Union to the West in 1989 and the Union's subsequent collapse in 1991 provide a before-and-after image of globalized modernity that is not readily available in most other contexts. To that end, while many dimensions of Siberia's introduction to globalized capitalism are idiosyncratic to the region, certain tendencies may be generalizable and illustrative of processes that are affecting areas throughout our increasingly globalized world.

## **Data and Methods**

To explore the terrain of local environmental civil society in post-Soviet Russia, I spent ten months conducting field work in Irkutsk, Russia. My primary method was ethnographic, but it is an ethnography that takes time seriously and is invested with a historical imagination (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). At the same time, I draw upon Michael Burawoy's ethnographic methodology, which pays attention to broader social structures operating on

multiple spatial scales, all of which act upon and become visible in the local context (Burawoy 2000). My analysis goes between local observations, national and transnational intersections, and the historical moment in which events are taking place.

I selected Irkutsk because of its proximity to Lake Baikal, the world's deepest, oldest and most voluminous lake. Baikal has fostered a unique ecosystem and is home to thousands of rare endemic species. As such, it is a focal point for activist attention. The city of Irkutsk is the regional capital of Eastern Siberia, home to multiple scientific institutes and a youthful, highly educated population. It has a long history of dissent, as it was the home for hundreds of Imperials exiles, including the Decembrists and their wives. That edge of dissidence carries over today, and makes Irkutsk a hub for environmental activism to protect Lake Baikal. This activism stretches back to the Soviet era, and continues through the present. Finally, because of the importance of Lake Baikal, the city has attracted myriad international actors who collaborate with local activists. These relatively permanent networks render Irkutsk a transnational activist space, which contrasts with Irkutsk activism as it existed under the Soviet Union. It is a site that well captures both the historical and transnational dimensions in the development of local environmental civil society in Russia.

I traveled to Irkutsk for ten months, immersing myself in the multi-organizational field of environmental activism throughout the region, focusing particularly on the three strongest organizations in the community. The bulk of my data come from participant observation. I supplemented these with 52 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders: environmentalists, government workers in the system of protected territories, corporate sponsors, and transnational supporters. In addition to this fieldwork, I traveled to partner organizations in Moscow, Seattle, San Francisco and South Lake Tahoe, following the footsteps of people and the flow of resources

from these distant sites to the shore of Lake Baikal. Additionally, I draw upon archival data to illustrate the contours of environmentalism in the Soviet Union. I gathered newspaper data from four local newspapers from the late Soviet period through 2012, and I examined the archives of the All-Soviet Society for Nature Protection (VOOP) in Irkutsk from 1980 through the mid-1990s. The data collectively tell a story of activism invigorated and imperiled as activists find themselves pulled by the strong tides of an ever-shifting political economic structure: one that is now unrelentingly global in scope.

### **The Question and the Case**

The question that animated my journey to Irkutsk was this: what is the effect of globalization on local civil society? In what ways does the global impact how ordinary citizens imagine and work toward “the good society?”

This question I pose is one that could be asked in many contexts, and it is of both theoretical and practical import for societies that are increasingly pulled into the orbit of globalization. I have chosen to examine this interaction amongst environmental activists in Russia. There are several reasons that justify my choice. First, there is the clearly demarcated time period for the advent of globalization in Russia. While much of the rest of the world evolved slowly toward a more integrated global community, in Russia the global was thrust upon it, pre-formed and well-developed. The fall of the Soviet Union represents a temporal break, by which previously isolated communities were thrown suddenly and dramatically into the waves of transnational activist networks and multinational corporations. Secondly, the history of state repression in Russia would show contemporary changes in civil society in stark relief. The long shadow of authoritarianism offers a conservative bias to the subjective dispositions of

contemporary Russians. After decades of ingrained perceptions of personal powerlessness and state dependency, any role that globalization might play in fostering civil society would be more evident in post-Soviet Russia, where civil society is historically much weaker (Howard 2003).

To operationalize civil society, I focus on local environmental non-governmental organizations. Of all the sectors within civil society, why do I study environmental organizations specifically? There are three reasons. First, the environment, more so possibly than any other social cause, knows no national boundaries. Climate change is a global problem. Regardless of its source, carbon dioxide mixes freely in the planetary atmosphere and its effects are felt worldwide. Even end-of-pipe pollution seldom stays comfortably near the sullyng enterprise, as problems such as acid rain have shown. Use of one of the few remaining global commons – the open sea – has caused dangerously low levels of fish stock and a floating island of garbage in the Pacific Ocean that is larger than Australia in size. The political realities of transnational pollution have resulted in an increasing number of treaties and international cooperative agreements aimed at addressing the disconnect between cause and effect when one country's practices impact another country's ecosystem (e.g. The Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area; the Kyoto Protocol; the Great Lakes Compact). In the study of transnational movements, there may be no cause as transnational as planet Earth.

Secondly, the environment is one of the few movements that can, at least symbolically, overcome the particularist interests of various groupings in civil society. The environment exists materially outside of human divisions. And the unarguable material dependence that humanity has upon the air, water and food that the natural environment alone can provide gives it a kind of ideological transcendence in activist claims-making.<sup>3</sup> Should any group in civil society be most

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<sup>3</sup> However, just because the environment provides the *opportunity* to transcend ideology does not mean that it necessarily does. Environmentalists in the Soviet Union were able to use this quality to bypass the ideological

articulate in imagining and promoting the common good, it would be environmentalists, whose chief constituent is both non-human and ubiquitous.

My final reason for honing in on environmental organizations specifically is the world-historical importance of their subject matter. Simply put, environmental issues are, I would argue, the defining issues of our time. Since the dawn of industrialization, the ability of humans to impact the natural world has increased dramatically, and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the legacy of this damage has reached crisis levels on multiple fronts. Global climate change as a result of burning fossil fuels is currently set to raise temperatures an average of 4.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century – more than double the number of degrees of warming that is considered ecologically safe by climate scientists. Industrial pollution and toxic chemicals remain untested and under-regulated. Deforestation and desertification continue at alarming rates, impacting carbon sinks, biodiversity levels, and access to fresh drinking water. Meanwhile, the world is facing the greatest mass extinction since the dinosaurs, due largely to anthropogenic habitat loss. Human civilization cannot continue at its present pace, using present means, without undermining its material existence and posing an existential threat to itself and the natural world that surrounds and supports it. There is no social realm that is as in-need of a flourishing civil society as this one.

The source of the contemporary environmental crisis is in the production of goods for the fulfillment of human needs and wants. However, the solution to environmental crisis is not likewise simply a matter of the mode of production. The wanton environmental destruction perpetrated by the Soviet Union should put to rest any suggestion that ecocide is solely a

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repression the Communist Party normally reserved for dissidents (Weiner 1999). The environment was also the common cause of both Republicans and Democrats in the United States until the 1970s (Dowie 1995). However, in the contemporary United States, the environment is so ideologically divided that one's belief in the science of climate change is predicted more strongly by political party than by any other indicator (McCright and Dunlap 2011).

property of capitalism. But neither need we seek explanations for Soviet environmental degradation strictly within its own, unique productive system. In their exhaustive review of Soviet environmental crimes, Feshbach and Friendly (1992) list a relentless stream of crises in land, water, air and, subsequently, human health. In many instances they claim, along with their native informants, that the problem stems from the command economy. Without market prices, they explain, there is no way to assess the value of those squandered natural resources.

What Feshbach and Friendly (1992) conveniently forget is that the capitalist West had functioning market prices throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century and still managed to degrade its environment and bring forth its own ecological catastrophes. The market did not save the West from the errors of the Soviet Union. If nature was less ravaged in the United States and Western Europe, it was not due to the market, but rather to the collected efforts of committed individuals, determined to prevent the wanton abuse of nature and its gifts. It was civil society's intervention in the normal "treadmill of production" (Schnaiberg 1980) that ebbed the speed of environmental destruction in the capitalist West, not market mechanisms. Nearly every progressive environmental action taken in the United States and Europe came at the behest of environmental activism. When we contrast the state of the environment in the Soviet Union with that of the "Free World," the principle variable at play is not production, planned or otherwise. It is the relative weakness of Soviet civil society that sets it apart, environmentally, from the West.

Given the importance of civil society in the protection of nature, its ecosystems, and its resources (whether for human use or for its own intrinsic value), we now must ask: how does the current globalized political economy impact local movements that seek to protect the

environment in the name of the common good? In endeavoring to answer this question, I critically engage theories of civil society.

In the face of social resistance to authoritarianism in Eastern Europe and Latin America, scholars began to discuss “civil society” as a political phenomenon that exists outside of the state. Cohen and Arato (1992) were among the first to attempt a major theoretical codification of this revived concept. They propose a triadic model that separates civil society from the economic and political spheres. Civil society, in their view, is institutionalized by means of individual rights. The system of political rights creates a perpetuating, protected civil sphere, that then can self-reflexively operate to contain the overreach of the economic and political spheres.

Jeffrey Alexander (2006) critiques Cohen and Arato (1992) as actually undermining the autonomy of civil society by suggesting that it is created by the state through the institution of rights. Instead, Alexander (2006) puts forward the civil sphere as a “social fact” in the Durkheimian tradition. It is a sphere of solidarity that can be delimited by the shared meaning that members ascribe to it. It finds its identity in the “Other,” the out-group that can only be incorporated via civil repair. The bulk of his empirical analysis hinges on boundary negotiation *within* the civil sphere; he addresses the slow extension of the American civil sphere to include women, blacks and Jews. One concern with Alexander’s (2006) theory of civil society is that, in his desire to emphasize the existence of an autonomous civil sphere *sui generis*, he neglects its relationship between the economy and the state that was so central to Cohen and Arato’s (1992) model. While Alexander (2006) recognizes that there must also be negotiated boundaries

between the civil and “uncivil” spheres such as the economy and the state,<sup>4</sup> the negotiation of these boundaries remains largely un-theorized in his text.

## **My Contribution**

Like Alexander (2006), I view civil society as a social fact, but unlike him, I grant the sphere less autonomy. Instead, I return to Cohen and Arato’s (1992) triadic model, precisely because it calls for an analysis of interaction *between* social spheres. The boundaries between various social spheres, civil or “uncivil,” are necessarily overlapping and interpenetrating. Indeed, these spheres are analytically inseparable. When we consider the interpenetrations of social spheres, the question of power becomes suddenly of greater concern.

These various spheres within society – the economic, the political and the civil – are not simply social spheres; they are also spheres of power. The power inherent to these spheres is well-known, and an exhaustive review of the careful considerations scholars have given to their influence and capacity for action is not necessary here. A brief summary will suffice:

- *Economic Power*: The ability to produce or withhold goods and services from the market, and to exercise influence via the distribution of wealth.
- *Political Power*: The ability to enshrine the law and to exercise the legitimate use of force.

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander (2006) would place a number of institutions that are normally considered within civil society as “uncivil” and outside the civil sphere. These include: the family, religious organizations, professional associations, for example. While I concur with Alexander that these are not spheres of solidarity, neither do I examine their relationship to civil society as alternate spheres of power. They do not operate as power spheres in environmentalism in Russia, and therefore they fall largely outside the purview of the present study. That being said, religion, especially, is a sphere of power and it is very clearly global in scope. (Indeed, religion was among the first globalizers). One might imagine the question of globalization and civil society looking very differently when examining Islamic microfinancing in the Middle East, or the anti-poverty work of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Russian Orthodoxy has made a tremendous resurgence in Russia, and it operates as a pillar of support for the Putin regime, provisioning the symbolic arsenal of Russian nationalism. The state helps the church by limiting evangelism by other denominations within Russia – and some of these missionaries had made strong inroads during the 1990s. Fascinating as this case is when considering globalization, civil society and power, religion was simply not a variable in my data, and so I constrain my analysis to the market and the state.



- *Civil Power*: The ability to mobilize bodies and change minds renders civil society, not just a phenomenon *sui generis*, but also as a sphere of power in its own right.

The strength of these forces together make up a totality, which I will be analyzing as a “field of power,” following Bourdieu (1989, 1993, 1998).

In this dissertation, I will be examining a local group of environmental activists based in Irkutsk, Russia, as they seek to preserve and protect Lake Baikal, a natural, environmental wonder of local, national and global significance. Groups have coalesced around this goal repeatedly since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, when Soviet industrial projects began to raise the specter of irreparable anthropogenic harm to the lake. These activists were attempting to use social power to curb the environmentally destructive activities of the economy and the polity, once conjoined as a single power sphere in the Soviet Union, and separated as two semi-autonomous spheres in the decades following. Through a close examination of this local site in the heart of Siberia, I explore the cultural, ideological, organizational, and legal arsenals of competing players in the field of power over time, from the end of the Soviet Union through the globalized present. I also examine the different spatial levels at which power is acquired and manifested in the relationship between the economy, the state and civil society. The data show the interpenetration of spheres of power, and they emphasize the problematic status of autonomy for the civil sphere, beyond a system of checks and balances.

In presenting this case, it is not my intention to repudiate what many others have claimed is the emancipatory potential of civil society (e.g. Kaldor 2003, Smith 2008); but by reintroducing power into our conceptions of Cohen and Arato’s (1992) triadic model, and into Alexander’s (2006) cultural constitution theory of the civil sphere, we can appreciate the very

real constraints placed upon civil society, even in liberal Western regimes. The point is not to consign away civil society as inherently corrupted or as incapable of overcoming the powers of the market or the state. Instead, these findings clarify the operation of civil society within the field of power,<sup>5</sup> bearing in mind that the field of power itself is layered in multiple spatial scales. Finally, these findings also point to a new normative theory of democracy, one that recognizes power differentials in the allocation of rights.

### **About the Chapters**

After reviewing extant literature on globalization, activism and the environment in Russia in Chapter 2, and introducing Lake Baikal and its history of environmental struggle in Chapter 3, I begin my empirical investigation by examining the role of transnational activism on the ideological terrain surrounding Baikal environmentalism. Chapter 4 examines the creation of three principle transnational activist organizations in Irkutsk, Russia, and their relationship to the power forces at play over time. Chapter 5 shows how these organizations become nodes in the global network, bringing the experience of cosmopolitanism to denizens of Siberia and, in so doing, expanding their perceptions of possibility.

In the next section, I show how the field of power operates as a counterbalance to the expansive imaginative capacity brought by transnational activism. Chapter 6 describes the emergence of Russian oligarchs as a unified class that operates for its own interests, and in accordance with the logic of global capitalism. Enterprises may enter the field of environmental protection to acquire symbolic capital that can be transferred into economic capital in the field of global business. Chapter 7 continues the examination of the nexus between the fields of business and the environment, paying particular attention to the effect of this intersection on the scope of

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<sup>5</sup> And perhaps clarify the operations of the field of power itself in the process – a concept that is under-theorized.

legitimate action within the field. Chapter 8 examines the reconsolidation of the Russian state under Vladimir Putin and how this change in the field of power impacts environmental civil society. My conclusion discusses the implications of these findings, suggesting a normative theory of democracy and rights.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation aims to expand the scope of investigation into the concept of civil society through an investigation of environmental activism around Lake Baikal in Russia. The rich and ancient examinations of civil society have presented a number of different definitions for the concept and delineated various roles that it plays in the body politic. However, much of the contemporary conception of civil society views it as a check on the concentrated power of political and economic elites. I argue that, rather than emphasize a Montesquieuan system of checks-and-balances, it is more apt to analyze civil society as a player in a Bourdieuan “field of power” (Bourdieu 1989, 1993, 1998). Doing so has several benefits: 1) it considers civil society to be a source of social power in its own right; 2) it allows us to look at the strength and weakness of this power source relative to other power sources *over time*; and 3) it brings multiple spatial scales into play in the field of power when examining the strength and weakness of civil society.

By examining environmental activism as a case study of the relationship between players in the field of power, my research also makes important contributions to additional scholarly literatures. I encourage the literature on social movements to move beyond questions of the “how” and “why” mobilization, and instead to look at social movements as embodiments of larger, historical processes, such as globalization and modernity. Moreover, I encourage the literature on transnational activism to consider more carefully the unique contribution of the “transnational.” Current scholarship on transnational activism generally suffers from a lack of

comparison: there is no “non-networked” or “non-globalized” Other in such studies to provide contrast, such as my case provides in Soviet environmentalism.

Finally, I add to the empirical literature on environmentalism in Russia, which has traced the movement – its organizations, tactics, motivations, and outcomes – over the course of the last century and a half. From Imperial hunting ground parks, to scientific preservation, from forest management to youth nature clubs, from the formation of national parks to the rise of “green” national separatists, from the political ecology of social collapse to the social ecology of environmental civil society, scholars have provided a wealth of data on the state of the environment in Eurasia, and especially Russia. My work contributes to this long tradition, bringing back detailed, in-depth ethnographic description of activism around Lake Baikal, and the larger political-economic processes in which the fate of the lake is bound.

### **Civil Society**

The concept of civil society is a very old one, and it has been expressed in many forms. Ancient Greek philosophers regularly debated the appropriate structure for the polity. Chief among these debates for theories of civil society is that between Plato and Aristotle. In response to Plato’s idealized image of the perfect state with a unitary conception of “the Good,” Aristotle argues that states arise out of people, who are inherently social and political in nature (Aristotle 1995). Governments can take a wide array of forms, but people acting in groups will strive toward creating the state as a space that allows for their own flourishing. The best government is the one that people build together with broad, and generally disinterested, participation, for the betterment of the common good.

However, despite these deep philosophic roots, civil society as it is discussed today is a concept intimately connected to the rise of modernity. Civil society filled the minds of intellectuals seeking to explain and to justify the liberal transition that was taking place in governments and economies during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rejecting absolutism, but wanting to avoid anarchy, political thinkers of the Enlightenment accepted the rational state and the rule of law as necessary to provide for the free flourishing of individuals' private lives. These aggregated private interests were collectively considered to be "civil society." As such, early theorists of civil society placed the economy within the civil sphere (Locke 1980, Smith 2003).

The conflation of economic interests with civil society persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but not without some dissenters. Adam Ferguson (1995) accepted human sociability and altruism as innate; these moral sentiments acted throughout history to preserve and enshrine a calling toward a common good. Presaging Durkheim's (1979) concern with anomie, Ferguson worried that the division of labor and the reduction of relationships to a series of contracts would eventually prove more powerful than the norms and ethos of civil society, losing for the modern era the moral progress that had helped give rise to modernity itself.

Eventually, study of civil society reached its 19<sup>th</sup> century empirical peak in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville (1981). After his extensive "fieldwork" exploring American political culture, Tocqueville emphasized Americans' tendency to form civil associations as one of the principle reasons for their successful democratic revolution. Extra-political associations foster the practice of self-sufficiency, public discourse, and affective ties amongst fellow citizens. In so doing, they create "habits of the heart" that carry forth into public life within the polity. Association creates a taste for liberty and the disposition to sustain it.

Despite this rich early history, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century civil society as a concept had fallen out of favor in scholarly circles. Perhaps the strongest intellectual influence that would consign civil society to a dusty back shelf was Karl Marx. According to Marx's theory of historical materialism (Marx 1998), the dominant mode of production in a given society fosters particular ideological structures to justify its existence, and these would have their homologues in all social spheres – from the state, to religion, to the arts, to the education system, and so forth. Civil society is not autonomous, but is rather a reflection of the economic base and its inherent inequalities. Civil society, in Marxist thought, would be an ideological tool of elite domination and highly suspect for that reason.

Although civil society was not a primary subject of scholarly attention in the mid-twentieth century, there were still important intellectuals making in-roads into a greater understanding of the concept, and these would prove vital for the concept's recovery in the last decades of the century. Arguably the most important was the Italian Marxist and political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971), who, although retaining a Marxian analysis, made a critical breakthrough by acknowledging the semi-autonomous status of civil society. Gramsci noted that the absorption of elite ideology amongst the lower classes is not automatic. Instead it is a project geared toward creating hegemony through consent. To that end, the work of social change is possible precisely in the civil sphere. It is in civil society that these cultural and ideological projects take place, and these can become loci of revolutionary contention.

Another important work in the "proto-civil society" literature of the mid-twentieth century was Almond and Verba's (1963) study of political culture or "civic culture." In their cross-national comparison, they find that membership in voluntary associations correlates to more robust citizenship outcomes, such as participation, trust, and a sense of political

competence. Essentially, a strong civil society outside the state does result in stronger democratic outcomes within the state, as Tocqueville had theorized over a century prior.

However, these two important works stand out largely as exceptions to the tide of social thought in the twentieth century. The rise of Marxism in the twentieth century combined with other important intellectual movements to edge out civil society. New governments that arose in Europe after the First World War provoked interest in strong state theory; the “end of ideology” postwar consensus in the democratic West fostered a technocratic approach to policy and statecraft; and the creation of the European welfare state likewise pointed to the structural dynamics of human outcomes. For much of the twentieth century, civil society was largely ignored as epiphenomenal.

It was not until the last decades of the twentieth century that civil society experienced its intellectual revival. Propelled by the anti-authoritarian movements taking place at the time in Eastern Europe and Latin America, civil society experienced a dramatic resurgence in the 1980s as a subject of study in its own right. Civil society was the language used by these dissidents to describe themselves and the rights that they yearned for in their home countries. Vaclav Havel made an impassioned appeal to the need for “the independent, spiritual, social and political life of society,” and the belief that government should arise up from the grounded experience of human life rather than be imposed as ideological structures (Havel 1978). Ernest Gellner (1994) likewise described free functioning civil society as the very “condition of liberty” in Eastern Europe and in the world.

In the wake of these outpourings of participatory fervor in authoritarian regimes, many scholars began to acknowledge that civil society may be a necessary condition for democracy. Following Tocqueville (1981), and Almond and Verba (1963), Robert Putnam (1994) conducted



studies of social capital in Italian provinces, showing their relationship to pro-democratic outcomes. He then carried this same formula to the United States, and uncovered a similar effect (Putnam 2000). More troubling for Putnam was his concomitant finding that social capital – by which he meant the amount of membership in civil association in the United States – was on a steady decline since the 1950s, with worrying implications for the future of American democracy. Bellah et al. (1985) expressed similar concerns with the role of individualism in American culture, noting that the cultural and discursive underpinnings for “the common good” may be less accessible now than they had been previously. Theda Skocpol (2003) studied the history of American membership organizations, finding that the broad base of their membership had two important democratizing outcomes. First, members could form affective ties and identities that spanned other social fissures, most notably that of class. Also, these federated membership associations schooled individuals from all walks of life in the operation of meetings, procedures, and federated structures – all of which are transferable skills in the realm of citizenship. Essentially, it was becoming increasingly apparent that cultural dispositions and social norms were necessary for functional, stable, democratic governance.

But civil society is not synonymous with democracy itself, and there are good reasons that the concept is separated from that of the state. Not only does this allow a better analysis of the boundaries between citizenship and statehood, it also helps transcend what some have termed the “dark side” of civil society (Alexander 2013). Alexander (2006) defines the “civil sphere” culturally, as a shared meaning system of inclusion and exclusion. Bound up in his concept of the civil sphere are norms and beliefs that appear to exist *sui generis*, but that are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. But there is always an “out-group” to Alexander’s civil sphere, and those deemed outside the sphere of solidarity renders solidarity itself partial at best. In its

more ugly variants, scholars point to voluntary association in, for example, the Ku Klux Klan as a rather doubtful guarantor of democratic governance. Nationalism and religious fundamentalism are also movements that take place within the civil sphere, but their contribution to the creation of the “good society” is highly questionable.

It is here, however, that Cohen and Arato (1992) enter with their theory of civil society. While positing the civil sphere as separate and opposed to the economic and political spheres in the broader social order, they also fundamentally describe civil society as derivative of the state, to the extent that it is constituted through a system of legal rights. Civil society can overcome the social anxiety of rampant associational factionalism because of the general rights that are enshrined in law. Civil society can remain civil as long as the state maintains the legal space for such pluralism.

The problem with a legally-constituted civil society is that it cannot account for what is called “global civil society” (e.g. Clark 2003, Friedman, Hochstetler and Clark 2005, Kaldor 2003, Laxer and Halperin 2003, Walzer 1995), “transnational civil society” (Florini 2000) or “international civil society” (Colás 2002). As Jackie Smith (2008) has shown, there is a dramatic, exponential increase in social organizations that operate across borders. Activists make use of transnational networks and appeal to global institutions much more so than ever before. How can civil society exist as a global phenomenon if it is created by democratic governance and legal rights regimes at the national level?

Kaldor (2003) answers this question by emphasizing the use of global norms. She returns to the language of “social contract,” by which social relations are negotiated, re-negotiated, and reproduced. These shared agreements on behavior need not be tied to the nation-state. Indeed, they are produced at any and every level of social interaction, and can thus constitute a global

civil sphere. For Kaldor, these norms do not constitute a legal contract, but rather a “‘good-tempered’ conversation” (Kaldor 2003: 45). In this, she follows a Habermasian (1990) notion of deliberative democracy, but from her perspective, the ‘conversation’ is socially emergent rather than normative.

In these debates over civil society, there are several key questions at stake. One central question involves how civil society is to be defined. What gets to count and what does not? How one answers this question is often influenced by the answer to a second question, which is: what is the purpose, or the role, of civil society in society as a whole? In briefly addressing how others have answered these two questions, I will also address the definition of civil society that informs my research and the problematic of its role in society that I seek to engage.

Kaldor (2003) defines five types of “civil society” in the scholarly discourse, and I generally agree with her schematic, although I disagree with some of the actual terminology she employs.<sup>6</sup> I will address each definition in her schema in turn:

1. *Societas civilis*: The oldest approach to civil society, the term *societas civilis* is found in two strands of ancient and early modern theories of society and the state. The first concerns the civil society as the society that best produces civil human beings. It is chiefly concerned with the creation of virtue and the subjective disposition of members

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<sup>6</sup> Specifically, I think it is misleading to refer to a “Neoliberal” and “Postmodern” conception of civil society because it puts the cart before the horse. Yes, neoliberal theorists hold up the voluntary association as an alternate, and they would say better, means to address the general welfare than the state; but there are ample scholars working in the tradition of voluntary association who preceded this particular ideological agenda. I would probably refer to this stream as the “Social Capital” approach to civil society rather than “Neoliberal.” As for “Postmodern,” I do not think that there is anything particularly postmodern about acknowledging the existence of exclusionary associations. I would refer to this strain of scholarship as the “Dark Side” of civil society, following Alexander (2013), or perhaps simply the “Exclusionary” approach. “Activist” is an appropriate moniker because it is descriptive and does not tie the phenomenon of social movements or advocacy groups to the political end that they may individually be striving to achieve, such as is done in the use of “Neoliberal.” A precise, descriptive term is more analytically useful, and it saves us from the dangers of terminology creep, whereby concepts like postmodernism lose their meaning in vague overuse.

within the social body. This definition of civil society emerges in Aristotle (1995), but also includes Ferguson (1995) and Kant (1991). Alternately, thinkers in the vein of *societas civilis* are wholly uninterested with the subjective disposition of virtue, believing that individuals are corrupt at best, and instead emphasize the rule of law as the best means to foster a “civil” society. Such thinkers include Augustine (2009), Thomas Hobbes (1982), and James Madison (Madison, Hamilton and Jay 1987). Despite the fact that modern theories of civil society have developed in a very different direction, aspects of these early ideas still permeate modern thought, for example in communitarian theorists, such as Etzioni (1993) and MacIntyre (1981) for the former and Dewey (1984) and Bellah et al. (1985) in the latter.

2. *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*: Following Tönnies (2011), there is a definition of civil society that demarcates it as the space between the family and the state. Civil society is more than a purely personal life, and less than the dictates of structural authority. In this perspective, the economy remains within civil society. At the time of early liberalism, the practice of trade was bound up in the concept of civil society. There are still scholars who would retain this notion – that the economy and free society are, in fact, synonymous (c.f. Friedman 2002). Because of the importance of the trading class in the creation of modern liberalism, and their long-standing call for *laissez faire*, it was more intuitive for early modern thinkers to posit a state-society binary. Breaking the economic out of civil society was an important development in the modern conception of civil society, but one that is analytically necessary to explain many dynamics within modern civil society.
3. Activist: The activist approach to civil society emphasizes the non-structural attempts by members of the public to bring about change in the society around them. Civil society

from this perspective is most clearly embodied in social movements and in other types of advocacy association. Contemporary scholars working in this vein include Cheema and Popovski (2010), Florini (2000, 2003), Kaldor (2003), and Taylor (2004) for example.

4. Neoliberal: If the activist view of civil society is symbolized in the social movement, the neoliberal view is enshrined in the voluntary association. From this perspective, civil society is mostly an antidote for a bloated welfare state. Charity and volunteerism are heralded as better, leaner, more personal means to alleviate social suffering than direct, state-based redistribution of wealth. The thought and writings of Eberly (2008) and Cahoon (2002) most clearly exemplify this model. But there are many scholars that are precisely interested in volunteerism and altruism, without the neoliberal political edge. These scholars frequently operate from a religious or quasi-religious perspective (e.g. Wuthnow 1996, 2004; Berger and Neuhaus 1996) and are concerned with the erosion of morality when people detach themselves and their personal actions from the needs of others. Giving through charity and volunteerism not only produce betterment in the social body, but also in the moral dispositions of the individuals themselves.<sup>7</sup>
5. Postmodern: The postmodern approach to civil society is one that emphasizes the “dark side” and views association as a force, but not one necessarily promoting the “good society.” The postmodern approach to civil society discusses the rise of fundamentalist and nationalist groups, who may have high levels of social capital but put it to use in projects of exclusion and often violent extremism. Concerns with exclusionary association in the civil sphere have animated thinkers for centuries (e.g., Alexander 2006, 2013; Hobbes 1982; Madison, Hamilton and Jay 1987)

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<sup>7</sup> The neoliberal thinkers who would replace the welfare state with personal charity also frequently cite this moral argument as well, which is likely why Kaldor lumps these two threads together under the same title.

My research is most aligned with the activist stream of civil society. The present work also takes its roots from the same discourse that witnessed the revival of the “civil society” concept during the waning years of authoritarianism in Latin America and Eurasia. Civil society was posited as something lacking in these regimes, and something without which tyranny could flourish (Gellner 1989). While voluntary associations and homophilous groups can be considered parts of civil society, the active attempt to bring about change, as is characteristic of activist groups, more clearly sets civil society apart from the state *on the state’s own turf*. It is in activist society that the relationship between civil society and the state can be most clearly defined.

Among the oldest and most established approaches to the problem of tyranny in administrative governments is Montesquieu’s theory of the separation of powers (Montesquieu 1989). In many respects, scholars working in the triadic model of civil society examine the interrelationship between the economy, the polity, and civil society as a Montesquieuan system of checks and balances. Because the concept of civil society was revived in the wake of democratic organizing in authoritarian regimes, its power was seen principally as a check. Civil society holds the power of the state at bay. Work on the spread of human rights around the world via non-governmental organizations is a testament to this role for civil power (Tsutsui and Wotipka 2004). Civil society has also been analyzed as a check on the power of corporations in the economic realm. The success of social movements in forcing the enactment of global standard practices in the environment and labor rights, and, as we will discuss later in the book, the ubiquity of Corporate Social Responsibility, all point to the power of the civil sphere as a check on the power of economic elites (Bartley 2007).

And the system of checks and balances can operate in both directions. The power of the civil sphere need not be benign. There is a “dark side” to civil society (Alexander 2013). Early democratic theorists were as frightened of the ability of willful majorities to trample the rights of minorities as they were of the despotism that preceded democracy (Madison, Hamilton and Jay 1987, Mill 1978). The state, then, serves as balance against the power of the civil sphere, preserving the social body from the “dark side” of civil society – lynch mobs, pogroms, populist movements, and so forth – by the legal preservation of individual rights.<sup>8</sup>

These Montesquieuan theories of civil society are not inaccurate – but they are also incomplete. “Separation of powers” is a principle in the *constitution* of a state; governments may be designed according to the principle of checks and balances. But spheres of power are not created according to a pre-designed constitution; they exist *sui generis*. For this reason, I suggest that a better approach is to analyze these spheres as operating in a “field of power” (Bourdieu 1993), where each jockeys with or against the other in a battle for greater control over social outcomes.

### **Bourdieu’s “Field of Power” and Civil Society**

Bourdieu’s theory of “fields” was his solution to the problem of structure and agency in social analysis. Humans are not trapped in a lock-step march of structured determinacy; but it would be equally erroneous to pretend that each individual is fully free for pure agentic action to create one’s life and circumstance. Instead, Bourdieu examines particular arenas of social action: art, education, literature, etc. These he likens to games: there is a field, and on the field there are various players. The game operates according to certain agreed upon rules that

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<sup>8</sup> For this system of spheres to fully enact a kind of “checks and balances,” one would expect economic power to serve as some kind of check on civil society run amok, but I cannot see how it might do so, without reverting to the state. Perhaps the calculus of exchange-value can serve as a check on the normative appeals of civil society.

constrain activity within the field. However, unlike typical games, one of the plays that players can perform is to attempt to alter the rules of the game while in action. The outcome of any game is indeterminate (agency), but the field and its rules are beyond the dictates of any one particular player (structure). Bourdieu also recognizes that the stakes within a field are sources of power and influence that he refers to as “capital.” But monetary capital is only one “species”—others include cultural capital, social capital, and myriad other forms that an individual may possess in greater or lesser amounts. Players may strive to collect greater amounts of capital, or they may try to change the relative value of the capital that they presently possess. The competition over capital guides most of the activity within a particular field.

According to Bourdieu, the limits of a field coincide with the end of that field’s influence. But there is one field that does not face such limits: Bourdieu talks about a “field of power” that exists above and beyond the power struggles within any solitary field. The field of power is a kind of meta-field that encompasses all other fields.

“The field of power is a *field of forces* defined by the structure of the existing balance of forces between forms of power, or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a *field of struggles for power among holders of different forms of power*. It is a space of play and competition in which the social agents and institutions which all possess the determinate quantity of specific capital (economic and cultural capital in particular) sufficient to occupy the dominant position within their respective fields...confront one another in strategies aimed at preserving or transforming this balance of forces” (Bourdieu, unpublished



lecture,” *The Field of Power*,” University of Wisconsin at Madison, April 1989,  
as cited in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* pg. 76 note 16).

Bourdieu suggests that the dominant actors in any particular field are players in the field of power, but here I disagree. Not all species of capital are equally generalizable. In fact, in many cases, capital is highly field-specific.

I suggest that it is not the players that are important in a field of power, but the arsenal at their disposal.<sup>9</sup> Herein lies the rationale for the common reliance upon the economy and the state as powerful actors in social analysis: the generalizability of their power sources. The state holds the legitimate use of force (Gerth and Mills 1958) and the ability to determine the law. These act upon all other players, regardless of the field, up to the geographic limit of the state’s domain. The dominant players in the field of politics are then also players in the field of power because of the generalizability of their power source. So, too, for dominant economic players. Money is an abstraction of exchange; it has the power to acquire in any context. To quote from Karl Marx, “As money is not exchanged for any one specific quality, for any one specific thing, or for any particular human essential power, but for the entire objective world of man and nature, from the standpoint of its possessor it therefore serves to exchange every quality for every other” (Marx 1964: 169) Therefore, those who dominate the economic field are also those in possession of the greatest wealth. This abstraction of exchange can and must play a role in every social field, rendering the economic elite players in the field of power.

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<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu would use the term “capital” rather than “arsenal,” but I am abandoning the “capital” metaphor because it serves to confuse how different species of capital may have intrinsically distinct properties. The analogy to capital is useful to highlight the homologies of action in very different fields of action, and to emphasize their convertibility, one to another. But when discussing the field of power, I claim that not all “capitals” are, in fact, exchangeable therein. In this case, a better analogy is an arsenal, where different weapons serve different purposes depending on the context.

Enter civil society. Actors in civil society spend most of their time playing in smaller, issue-specific fields, such as the field of environmental preservation, or homelessness alleviation, or HIV/AIDS prevention, and so forth. But all these disparate actors have the knowledge, ability and infrastructure to mobilize the public. Actors in civil society can alter public opinion, get bodies on the streets in protest, produce signatures on the page for petitions, or foster boycotts. Civil society is a power source that involves human capital, or what Foucault (1990) called “bio-power.” But its power goes beyond these concepts, because it also has a power that comes to it by virtue of *virtue*. Tilly’s (2004) first requirement of a social movement is that it display “Worthiness.” There is a symbolic power that comes from social engagement, a kind of morality for modernity. Civil power is the combination of the ability to influence minds and bodies both through capacity and virtue. Because there are minds and bodies in all social fields, civil power also plays a role in the meta-field: the field of power.

Because civil society is a power in itself (as well as a collection of smaller, more specific fields), there are other players on the field who have an interest in altering the balance of power within the field. To accomplish this, other power spheres may colonize civil society. Civil power may then be used for “uncivil” purposes. Alternately, these players can work to suppress civil society and limit civil power within the field at large.

Viewing civil society as a player in a field of power has a number of advantages that elucidate problems in existing models of civil society that are more static in structure: 1) it considers civil society to be a source of social power in its own right; 2) it allows us to look at the strength and weakness of this power source relative to other power sources *over time*; and 3) it brings multiple spatial scales into play in the field of power when examining the strength and weakness of civil society. Civil society is not simply a “check” on the authority of the state or

the power of concentrated capital. Neither is it a cultural artifact, a sentiment of belonging. It heralds more agency than the latter construct would allow, but neither is it purely an embodiment of intention and will. Civil society is in a delicate dance with other social actors, and the dance floor can be crowded at times.

The field of power need not be globalized, but ours is a global age. In the chapters that follow, I show that civil society, even local groups contending with place-based problems, are necessarily bound up in national and transnational phenomena, and the intersections of these spatial scales allow for the entry of new sources of power – which may operate for the benefit or to the detriment of civil society within the field of power. To that end, it is time to discuss how scholars have grappled with the increasing importance of these scalar intersections – namely, in the literature on globalization.

## **Globalization**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented for many, not just the end of communism in Russia, but the end of the “short twentieth century,” as Hobsbawm (1994) aptly names it. Beginning with World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917, this abbreviated 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by competing visions for human society that often took the form of all-encompassing ideologies. Each of these was both a response to and a prescription for the problems that had arisen out of the social epoch called “modernity.” Chastened by the Great Depression, free-market capitalism gave way to regulated capitalism in those countries that continued to ascribe to the ideology of liberal democracy. Nationalism reared its head as an alternate path out of an economic and political wasteland, before it was put down, along with its shadowy racism and chauvinism, after the Allied victory in World War II. But the more durable

ideological opponent to welfare capitalism was communism, which first found its political reality in Russia in 1917. The geopolitical terrain that emerged from the Second World War was bipolar, demarcated by two superpowers and their attendant ideologies: the United States, champion of democracy and capitalism, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, purveyor of the planned economy and universal social provision. Each worked tirelessly to court or compel other countries into its sphere of influence. Despite the ideological imperative toward internationalism, the Soviet Union under Stalin pulled back to an aim of “socialism in one country,” avoiding an all-out conflict with the West. And capital, for all its potential valorization in new markets, was held in check geographically by the Iron Curtain and the regulatory mechanisms of the post-Depression era. There existed an open ideological struggle throughout this period between these competing visions for the organization of society.

Thus, the degradation and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was hailed as the victory of liberal ideology over that of state socialism. And with this political fall, so too fell the artificial constraints that had dammed up the flow of international and transnational connectivity.<sup>10</sup> Suddenly, it seemed as though countries around the world were on the same page: no longer would there be an ideological counterweight to liberal capitalism. There was only one way forward – into a new, fully globalized, capitalist political economy.

In these heady days, social observers rushed to theorize the meaning behind the creation of the new geopolitical landscape, a phenomenon which has come to be called *globalization*. For some, the narrative was unabashedly triumphant. The collapse of the Soviet Union represented the “end of history,” as Francis Fukuyama (1992) titled his book on the subject, ironically twisting Marx’s prediction into a paean to the victory of liberalism as the only viable or

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<sup>10</sup> To paraphrase Marx: the legal and ideological constraints that had been put into place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to prevent class warfare and economic depression became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder.

legitimate economic and political system.<sup>11</sup> The end of the Cold War, with its supposed consensus of rational liberalism would also bring forth a new era of perpetual peace. This viewpoint was trumpeted most loudly by the public intellectual Thomas Friedman (1999). Noting that no two countries with a McDonald's restaurant have ever gone to war with one another, he suggests that economic globalization not only promotes prosperity and development, but actively discourages conflict and instability, since these interrupt the integration that enables participation in the global system of wealth creation. Moreover, Friedman (2005) views the advent of globalization as an era of unfettered opportunity for individuals willing to make the most of the new integrated circumstances. "The world is flat," he argues, and anyone with access to the Internet can bypass traditional confines of geography and become players in the global economy *as individuals*. Globalization 3.0, as he terms it, is not a story of corporations seeking new markets and bringing the world closer through trade. Rather it is a liberal utopia, ushered in by a technological revolution, where each man or woman becomes an entrepreneur, equal in access, unequal by merit. It is individualism triumphant in the form of a modem.

However, not all social thinkers drew the same conclusions as the early apologists of the new world economy, presaged by the Soviet collapse. While acknowledging that individuals were indeed free to compete with one another, unimpeded by geographic location, this more critical voice focused on the competition rather than the freedom. For scholars working in the tradition of Marxian analysis, globalization was the not-entirely-unexpected fruition of capitalism's natural trajectory. The "short 20<sup>th</sup> century" may have slowed capital's natural

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Fukuyama's chief concern with the advent of historylessness is his fear of boredom, the obviousness of rationally calculated action precluding a diversity of options or opinions. One is reminded of the liberals of yesteryear who lamented the growth of the middle class society for fear it would enshrine mediocrity (Mill 1978). Indeed, Schumpeter (2008) expresses deep concern that human civilization will no longer be beautiful, should income inequality be mitigated, since it will lack palatial estates which require maintenance by a servant class. (And to which Lenin might answer, 'Beautiful for whom?' And to which an industrial laborer might add, 'We want bread, but we want roses, too!')

tendency toward expansion, but it could not stop it. And just as Marx's "reserve army of labor" operated to keep wages to a minimum in relation to the profits of capital within a national economy, so now would reserve armies abroad operate to depress wages in developed countries. From this general perspective, critics discuss globalization as a "race to the bottom," whereby countries, in competition for the employment possibilities opened by rootless multinational corporations, would continuously undercut one another on labor costs, workers' rights, environmental protection and so forth (Chan 2003, Mazur 2000, Rodrik 1997).

For others, also working in the Marxian vein, it is not merely cold competition that brings valorization to capital in the global era, but also a return to primitive accumulation through a full-on pillaging of resources in under-developed countries, justified by the philosophy of neoliberalism. Globalization may be a movement of capital, but it requires transnational institutions of global governance to ensure seamless trade.<sup>12</sup> Geographer David Harvey (2005) shows how, repeatedly and in many different contexts, pressure (or even coercion) by global governance institutions on to sovereign states to conform to a state-model that benefits freer trade has resulted in windfall profits to Western financial institutions and a drain on the national wealth in underdeveloped economies. In the name of markets, states are transformed, and the transformation often entails a fire-sale of national industries to private companies of the developed West. For Harvey, this transfer of wealth is not an unintentional effect of global integration, but instead is its very purpose.

These economic processes are only one aspect of globalization, however. Another dimension exists in our transformed relationship to space and place. The nation-state did not

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<sup>12</sup> Although the Bretton Woods global governance organizations – the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization – have been roundly criticized for their role in neoliberal globalization, their origin was far from neoliberal. The organizations are the brain-children of John Maynard Keynes and were conceived as a sort of global safety net.

“wither away” as globalization advanced. Instead, states determined the variable means by which globalization proceeded (Basinger and Hallerberg 2004). But the role of the nation-state in this new era is decidedly ambivalent. The nation-state wanes in importance as “global cities” emerge and become the key locus of new transnational power centers (Sassen 2002).

Globalization represents a new ways of thinking about space and time, the latest advance in modernity’s time-space compression (Giddens 1990). Technology has linked distant geographies into networks that play an increasingly important role in the construction of society (Castells 1996). We conceive ourselves as connected to people around the world in a “globalization of empathy” that fosters a subjectivity of cosmopolitanism (Beck 2006).

But the local is not lost in the wide berth of cosmopolitan feeling. The local becomes the site of expression of globalization in diverse and idiosyncratic encounters (Appadurai 1996). It is in localities that ordinary citizens must confront the changes wrought by globalization, and, in some instances, organize against them as activists in social movements.

### **Social Movements and Society**

The field of social movement studies was indelibly altered in the 1960s in response to the Civil Rights Movement. Prior study of collective behavior was steeped in social psychology, emphasizing the “strain” that affected certain groups in society or the relative disparity that encouraged radical revolt. In light of the Civil Rights Movement, such theories lost their applicability: the strain of racism and discrimination were certainly not new in the 1950s, and the organized, nonviolent character of the protest belied the “irrationality” of reaction that was predicted by functionalist approaches to collective action. Young scholars began to put forward new approaches to social movements that represented nothing less than a paradigm shift in the

discipline. Social movements became a normalized practice in a pluralist society where varied interest groups compete to achieve their aims outside official channels. Movement participants were rational actors whose success was based upon the mobilization of financial resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977), the building of organizational structures (Minkoff 1995, but see also Piven and Cloward 1977), and the recognition and use of political opportunities (McAdam 1982).

This paradigm shift produced a flourishing and lively scholarship while the various dimensions of mobilization were unpacked and explored. But, as Andrew Walder (2009) points out, this new emphasis on mobilization came at a cost. “In a way that very few appear to have recognized,” he writes, “the emerging resource mobilization tradition did not simply offer a different perspective on social movements; it changed the question that was being asked, radically narrowing the intellectual horizons of the field” (Walder 2009, pp. 398). Once the subjective political and ideological orientation of movements was made relative under an assumption of normalized interest-group politics, and also once the overarching social structure was removed from the theoretical scope of social movement studies, the field necessarily limited itself to questions about which conditions spur or inhibit mobilization.

After several decades of research in resource mobilization and political process, the field of social movements made another major shift in focus. The new dramatic flourishing in social movement scholarship came to be called the “cultural turn,” because its emphasis was on the symbolic work of movement activity. Principle among these was framing theory (Snow et al. 1986). Framing theory borrowed its principle idea from Goffman (1974), that people use interpretive schemata to make sense of new encounters or information. Snow et al. (1986) made the connection between the claims that movements make and their ability to recruit participants.



This connection gave new life to social movement studies, as the dimensions of movement rhetoric could now be taken apart and examined for resonance and subsequent probabilities of success. Framing studies became the new dominant paradigm in social movement studies and the bulk of new studies incorporated framing theory into their analyses.<sup>13</sup> Moving beyond framing, other scholars used narrative analysis to explore the cultural work of activists, seeking the meaning in the plot line that activists tell themselves (e.g. Polletta 2006).

Continuing into the cultural turn, scholars looked at the role of identity in the formation of movements. With the rise of the New Social Movements (Melucci 1980, Pichardo 1997), which formed around identity issues like gender, sexuality, ethnicity and disability, the notion of mobilizing identity became increasingly topical (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Moreover, as the Regan Democrats left scholars of class analysis wondering why people were not motivated to vote according to their economic interests, the motivational power of identity, particularly identities held in common – collective identities – became of analytic importance. The interest in identity led from there to an interest in emotions in protest (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001). Attachment to identity is affective, and some scholars looked to other affective responses in the mobilization, such as neighborhood affiliation (Gould 1995) or moral shocks (Jasper and Poulsen 1995).

Framing, narrative, emotions and identity have been thoroughly explored to explain who joins movements, how movements mobilize and why they succeed. Often, these cultural analyses focus upon “micro-mobilization,” which considers the appeal of particular movements to particular target groups and distinguishes itself from the “macro-mobilization” of shifting opportunity structures. But whether the object of analysis exists at the macro or micro level, the

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<sup>13</sup> The literature on movement framing is far too exhaustive to list and review here, but several key sources include: Benford 1997, Benford and Snow 2000, Clemens 1996, Johnston and Noakes 2005, McCammon et al 2004, Steinberg 1998, Zald 1996.

question still centers upon mobilization. The fixation on mobilization has limited the sociological imagination of social movement studies, such that there has not been a major theoretical advancement since the cultural turn a quarter century ago. The nuances of framing and identity work have been so thoroughly exhausted that one critic has proclaimed that “the field needs new questions more urgently than it needs new answers” (Walder 2009, pp. 407).

There have been some key exceptions, however, from the mobilization paradigm since the 1970s. Haines’ (1984) study of the radical flank effect in the Civil Rights Movement took the ideological position of movements seriously as a point of analysis. Polletta (2002) has explored the organizational form of consensus as a symbol with a shifting representation over time. McAdam’s (1988) book *Freedom Summer* and Isaac’s (2009) research on the labor problem novel have paved the way for the possibility of important innovations in the effect of social movements on the larger national culture and on cultural production. We are just beginning to see the cultural importance *of* movements, but there has been little study of the importance of culture *for* movements; in other words, how the shape, form and expression of movements may be derivative of larger social practice. Swidler (1995) made a similar point in her review of social movements and culture, saying:

“Rethinking how culture might work from the outside is a large task...But I am convinced that if interest in culture is restricted to studying the inner meaning systems of deeply committed activists, or if culture is relegated to a vague – or “constitutive” – penumbra, we will sacrifice more incisive ways of thinking about its power” (pp. 39).

The current literature only studies movements as vehicles of cultural expression; but movements exist within societies, and can be studied *sui generis*, as historically contingent expressions in

themselves. The absence of such studies represents a sizable gap in the current literature on social movements, one which this dissertation aims to fill.

### **Transnational Activism**

When we bring to mind civil society in the context of globalization, the study of transnational activism is natural to follow. The term “transnational” has become the established sub-disciplinary jargon (e.g. Tarrow 2005), but what exactly is “transnational” about transnational movements? When immigration scholars discuss “transnationalism,” they are referring to individuals whose lives take place in two different countries. In their personhood, they straddle borders, their lives affected by and affecting both countries simultaneously (e.g. Levitt 2001). Transnational movements often do have their roots in particular individuals, who have the capability to mobilize in one location but a conscience tuned to another locale. Tarrow (2005) calls these “rooted cosmopolitans,” in an ironic inversion of Stalin’s anti-Semitic campaign. But what is “transnational” in the study of movements is not any particular individual who straddles borders, but rather the project or goal that is held in common amongst actors in multiple countries.

One of the seminal works in the field of transnational activism was Keck and Sikkink’s (1998) book *Activists Beyond Borders*. They showed how groups in different countries formed networks around their shared interest, be it environmental issues, women’s issues or human rights. Once united, these networks could use their different geographic locations to overcome barriers that were insurmountable alone. They describe the “boomerang” model, whereby activists in non-democratic regimes can ask their peers in more democratic states to lobby their own governments to put pressure on the non-democratic state to bring about change.

By the late 1990s, it was clear to scholars that more and more movements were involved in these transnational networks. But the scholarship of transnational activism exploded following the 2001 “Battle of Seattle,” where coordinated activist groups from multiple countries, representing diverse constituencies, came together to protest the annual convention of the World Trade Organization. This protest gave new meaning to the phenomenon of transnational activism. While there were historical examples of transnational advocacy work in the abolitionist movement, for example (Stamatov 2010), the dramatic increase in these linkages now had a new urgency and origin – global movements were necessary to fight a global foe (e.g. Foust 2010, McDonald 2006, Smith and Johnston 2002). Additionally, the creation of the European Union, and the rise of the World Trade Organization, suggested that movements now must appeal to institutions of supra-national or even “global” governance (Fox and Brown 1998, Graubart 2008, Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997, Waterman 2004). Finally, the creation of the World Social Forum as a civil society counterweight to the World Economic Forum in Davos gave embodiment to the transnationality of protest in the modern globalized era (e.g. de Sousa Santos 2006, Escobar 2004, Fisher and Ponniah 2003, Smith and Reese 2008).

To a large extent, though, the study of transnational activism uses the same theoretical roots as its progenitor, social movement studies, and has been constrained by the same limitations that currently affect that field. Its central organizing questions remain the “how” and “why” of mobilization, and it answers these questions with variations on resource mobilization (Bagic 2006, Coy 1997, Pagnucco 1997), political opportunity structure (Lewis 2000, Marks and McAdam 1999, Passy 1999), framing (Alvarez 2000, Olesen 2006, Smith 2002), tactical repertoire diffusion (Ayers 2005, Chabot 2000, McAdam and Rucht 1993), and the creation of collective identities (della Porta 2004, Dufour and Giraud 2007, Ferree and Pudrovska 2006) and

other coalition-building practices (Bandy and Smith 2005, Nepstad 2002). In other words, transnational activism is social movement activism with some necessary adaptations to accommodate greater cultural divides and a supra-national opportunity structure. Social movement theories, therefore, are usefully employed in order to tell us more about transnational activism; but the transnational dimension of transnational activism provides us little value-added theoretically.

Studies of transnational activism would be helped by examining a comparative case – one where the contrast between a purely national and a globally interconnected movement would be clearly delineated. Such a contrast can be found between the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia.

### **Social Movements in Russia**

The stamp of Communist rule weighs heavily on the literature of citizen action in post-Soviet area studies. Frequently, scholars isolate the importance of historical communism by contrasting the experiences of Eastern Europe to those of the West. The prevailing view is that a “Soviet legacy” has placed a damper on movement activity and civic engagement (Dawson 1999, Laitin 2000, Howard 2003).

Among the more empirically robust of these studies comes from Howard (2003) who used a large data set to compare social engagement in Russia, the former East Germany and the former West Germany. He found that former East German’s participation in voluntary associations and civic activities was significantly less than their Western counterparts, despite having the same opportunity structure. Instead, East Germans more closely resembled Russians in their level of activity. He attributed the low levels of engagement to the “Soviet legacy.” He

suggests that the forced participation that was demanded by the Soviet government in the form of “work weekends” [*subbotniki*] or union membership has resulted in a mentality that sees volunteerism as exploitation. Gill and Markwick’s (2000) study is also emblematic of the common claim that a Soviet legacy stifles the development of civil society. Their version of the Soviet legacy is the historical lack of democratic institutions. But these authors also argue that civil society is necessary as a check on authoritarian power. Without a robust civil sector, democracy in Russia is “stillborn.” Other “legacies” that are criticized as hindering civil society include: the Soviet personal patronage system (Rose 2000) the “good-tsar” mentality, which predates even the Soviet era in Russia (Bova 2003) and the dual-state repressive apparatus (Sakwa 2011).

Soviet legacy is not the only culprit in the literature for the lackluster state of civil society. Among those studying social movements, an oft-repeated refrain is that foreign funding diminishes the vitality of civil society by divorcing activists from the population at large. The seminal work in this vein is Henderson’s (2003) study of women’s organizations in Russia. She finds that the reliance on foreign funding reduces the need to reach out to local populations and convince them to support women’s issues. Moreover, activists who receive foreign funds are often required to focus on issues that are important to foreign granting agencies, which may leave neglected those concerns that actually matter to the population that is ostensibly being served. It also leaves activists open to attack by the state as being “un-Russian” or in foreign employ (Henry 2010). Hence, the legacy of the past is only half the story, as new conditions, such as transnational activism, also alter dynamics on the ground for activists seeking change and must be taken into account.

## The Russian Environmental Movement

Although contemporary scholars may bemoan the lackluster state of Russian civil society today, there was great excitement amongst observers at the outpouring of civic activity during *perestroika*, and at the vanguard of this outpouring of activism was the environmental movement. More so than many other contemporary social movements, environmentalism has a long history of continuous activism in Russia. By the nineteenth century, Russian nobles had begun preserving large tracts of land, mainly for game reserves, but also with a sentimental consideration for the natural world (Weiner 1988). Following the 1917 revolution, environmentalists, who mainly drew their ranks from the natural sciences, began to lobby key Bolsheviks on behalf of environmental preservation. This resulted in the *zapovedniki*, the largest system of pristine preservation lands in the world. The justification for the *zapovedniki* was not on behalf of nature in and of itself, but rather on behalf of science. Ecosystems needed to be studied as contained systems in themselves, without human interference, or so the scientists argued in order to gain Bolshevik support for their environmentalist endeavor. Science, unlike environmentalism, fit the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the time and worked to preserve the natural world from wanton domination and rapid industrialization.

Environmentalism preserved itself in the Soviet era, also, by attaching itself to the official state apparatus. Activist scientists established the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP), the Moscow Society of Naturalists (MOIP), and the All-Union Botanical Society. For the most part, the Soviet government allowed environmentalists to continue their activism because protecting the environment was not viewed as politically threatening to the elite, as other dissident groups were. Environmental activists could frame themselves as patriotic and as being good communists, since they were defending the motherland and working for the

greater good (Weiner 1999). While environmentalists did not completely escape Stalin's purges, and the *zapovednik* system faced major threats and incursions during the 1950s, the movement continued its low levels of activity. It succeeded in preserving large tracts of pristine lands from human encroachment, but it remained a fairly elitist movement, peopled with scientists and sympathetic members of the intelligentsia and it generally did not interact with or engage the public at large.

This began to change in the 1960s and 1970s as the movement again began to grow. These years saw the formation of the student-led nature protection brigade, called the *druzhiny*, under the auspices of the Komsomol. This student club involved itself in many activities geared toward nature protection. It was particularly known for its efforts to end poaching and to enforce hunting, fishing and lumber licensing. Through Komsomol publications and congresses, the student movement fostered a national campaign for environmental protection (Weiner 1999).

Despite the efforts of committed activists, the Soviet Union could hardly be called a good steward of the Earth. Rapid development often came at the expense of nature. Marxist-Leninist ideology, as it was painted during the Stalin years, suggested man's mastery over nature, bending the physical world to the proletariat's will (DeBardeleben 1985). Dams, river diversions, clear cut logging, industrial effluvia and nuclear waste dumping were only some of the examples of Soviet development projects undertaken without thought to environmental consequences (for more information on Soviet environmental mismanagement and exploitation, see Feshbach and Friendly 1992, Jancar-Webster 1987, Peterson 1993, Pryde 1991)

Because of these legitimate and pressing environmental problems, it is not entirely surprising that environmental movements became the mouthpiece for social discontent in the late Soviet period. By the time Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist



Party in 1985, a large number of problems simmering in the background of Soviet society – from corruption, to economic stagnation, to military breakdown, to the environment –came suddenly to the fore. Gorbachev shocked the nation by initiating his program of *perestroika*, or “restructuring” to address the problems in the fraying Soviet system. A critical component of this plan was his call for *glasnost* – or openness and transparency – in a society that had been controlled by censors for decades. For the first time in modern memory, critics could vocalize their dissent without reprisal; political prisoners were pardoned; corrupt officials were exposed and removed; the press finally published what had previously been repressed (Hosking 2001; see also Yurchak 2006). These were heady days of hope and uncertainty, and it proved a good climate for environmentalism to grow.

In the wake of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, a civil eruption took place calling for environmental protection, and environmentalism became the first truly mass movement in Soviet Russia (Pryde 1991, Yanitsky 1993). When the liberalizing Soviet government under Gorbachev decided to allow citizens to form informal organizations independent of the state, hundreds of local groups appeared in cities across Russia for the protection of nature (Yanitsky 2002). Environmental public meetings and rallies saw participation figures in the tens of thousands (Green 1990). In 1989, the Socio-Ecological Union mobilized the first Soviet nationwide protest that successfully prevented construction of a planned canal (Weiner 1999). During this time, environmental protest successfully closed or prevented the construction of more than fifty nuclear reactors, as well as a number of hydroelectric stations and gas pipelines (Henry 2006). When the Soviet Union held its first open elections in 1990, environmentalists put forward candidates and won offices (Pickvance 1997, Rihoux and Rudig 2006).

Scholars have put forth a few theories to explain the sudden explosion in environmental activism in the 1980s. Historian Douglas Weiner (1999) makes a strong case for what social movement scholars call “indigenous organization.” After tracing the environmental movement in the Soviet Union from the revolution to the collapse, he suggests that environmentalists became the voice of discontent mainly because they were there; the authoritarian Soviet government made an effort to quell and dispel other dissident groups, but left the environmentalists alone as they were seen as eccentric and non-threatening. Their very presence allowed them to be in the right place at the right time.

Political scientist Jane Dawson (1996) studied environmental groups in Ukraine, Lithuania, Tatarstan and Russia and determined that environmental claims often cloaked and gave legitimacy to another movement that was building at the time: nationalism. Again, it was the safety of environmentalist claims that allowed other movements that were more politically threatening to the Soviet government to “piggy-back” on the environmental movement to reach their own ends. She calls this “eco-nationalism,” and she shows how these movements used the language of nuclear waste and environmental hazard to express outrage at Moscow’s imperial-like control over their allegedly national resources. But Dawson (1996) notes that eco-nationalism was less likely to explain environmental movements in Russia itself, since Russians were less likely to feel ethnic hostility toward the Soviet government, which was dominated by ethnic Russians.

Nevertheless, Russia, too, witnessed an explosion of environmental activism in the 1980s. Nationalism and indigenous organization themselves cannot fully account for this activity. Not to be dismissed among the causes of the sudden growth of the environmental movement is the very legitimate concern among Soviet citizens with environmental problems and the existential

threat that environmental degradation posed. Within six months of Gorbachev's speech announcing *glasnost*, unit four of the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl exploded, releasing a cloud of radioactive particles that spread from Western Europe to Japan (Petryna 2002). Additional disclosures of industrial pollution and its effects on public health also made environmental protection a top priority among the public at large. Among the most pressing was the radioactive waste released from the Mayak nuclear facility near Chelyabinsk (Dalton, Garb, Lovrich, Pierce and Whiteley 1999) and the disease-causing effluvia from a factory in Kirishi (Weiner 1999). These disclosures sounded the bell-weather for Soviet-style industrialization and, indeed, for the Soviet system itself.

The end of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era as the government attempted the largest transfer of ownership from public to private hands ever attempted in modern history. Called "shock therapy," the theory was that sudden and total privatization would be the quickest route to a functional market-based economy. The result was a near total economic collapse. But the economy was not the only part of Russian society to begin a downward spiral: environmental activism, too, faced a rapid decline in the post-Soviet years. The momentum that had reached a crescendo during *perestroika* suddenly came to a halt. The decline in movement activity was certainly not due to improvements in environmental conditions after the Soviet Union dissolved. While rates of pollution fell precipitously during these years, the change can be entirely attributed to industrial collapse. But pollution as measured per unit of GNP actually increased during the 1990s (Oldfield 2005).

In exploring the decline in environmentalism, one must account for the political and economic changes in Russia at the time. Russia in the 1990s was characterized by industrial decay, massive unemployment, hyperinflation, speculation, profiteering, fraud, tax evasion,

mafia capitalism, and finally bankruptcy, default and currency devaluation in 1998. For this reason, it seems reasonable to assume that the sudden decline in environmental activism is related to the economic crises of the 1990s and the existential insecurity that comes from problems of unemployment, hyperinflation and payment arrears. Russians in the 1990s would fall very low on the scale of Inglehart's "postmaterialist values" (Inglehart 1995<sup>14</sup>) Few seem to question that environmental issues would take a backseat to putting food on the table and keeping a roof over one's head. In a country plagued by economic woes such as Russia in the 1990s, one could only expect environmental movement decline.

However, political scientist Stephen Whitefield (2003) has refuted this easy answer. He has suggests instead that it is a problem of poor movement framing. Using survey response data, he finds that willingness to pay for environmental protection fell 20 percent between 1993 and 2001, from 58.5 percent to 38.3 percent, and that willingness to trade environmental protection for employment opportunities tripled. This would seem like evidence for the postmaterialist values hypothesis, but he dismisses this claim because environmental values declined for *all* segments of the population, including those who saw their standard of living *increase* after the fall of the Soviet Union. He suggests that the movement has suffered because it could not successfully reframe environmentalism for the post-Soviet context. Previously, the Soviet government had been the target of the movement; and once the target was removed, there was no enemy to blame for continuing ecological degradation.

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, Russia confounded Inglehart's models of environmentalism as a post-materialist value in the early 1990s because support for environmentalists and concern for environmental issues were equally high for people ascribing to materialist values as to postmaterialist values in Russia at the time (Inglehart 1995). He attributes this to Chernobyl, but it also reinforces the importance of the environmentalist explosion that took place in the period of late *perestroika*. To emphasize the disastrous consequences of the Soviet collapse in the 1990s, it is also worthwhile to consider Inglehart's value surveys, where he found a significant and precipitous drop in subjective well-being among Russians between 1985 and 1995, to the extent that Russia and other post-communist countries held the lowest levels of subjective well-being ever recorded.

Still others suggest that actions by the Russian state have worked against environmental activism. While the Soviet government was no friend of the Earth, the post-Soviet Russian government has made environmental activism more difficult. State hostility towards environmentalism has been especially virulent since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. In that year, by presidential decree, Putin abolished the State Committee for Environmental Protection as well as the State Forestry Committee, placing their duties under the auspices of the Ministry of Natural Resources. Putin argued that this was necessary to minimize bureaucracy and eliminate redundancy, but the eliminated committees were focused on protecting natural resources, while the ministry that was empowered was geared toward their extraction and exploitation (Massa and Tynkkynen 2001, Peterson and Bielke 2001, Henry 2002, 2006). And, indeed, heavy resource extraction and export has become the linchpin of the post-Soviet Russian economy (Turnock 2001).

The state has tried to paint environmentalists and other progressive activists as “un-Russian” and in the employ of foreign governments (Henry 2010). The state has also shown a willingness to prosecute those who speak out against environmental misconduct, as the trials of Alexander Nikitin and Grigory Pasko, two environmental whistleblowers, clearly show. Both Nikitin and Pasko had spoken to foreign media about nuclear waste dumping, and both were charged with treason (Henry 2002). On a local level, environmental groups have reported harassment by the state through police break up of demonstrations and bureaucrats intentionally causing difficulties with tax inspection and registration filing (Henry 2010). Signatures on petitions or referenda supporting environmentalism are routinely disqualified by the Central Election Commission (Henry 2002). A law on nonprofit funding has made it extremely difficult

for organizations to raise money from abroad, which has been a chief source of revenue for many environmental groups (Crotty, Hall and Ljubownikow 2014, Henry 2010).

Meanwhile, the government's manipulation of nature protection on the international scene is often described as cynical, at best. The Soviet government actively sought environmental cooperation with the West, but in the post-Soviet era, treaties with the West are a kind of "smokestack diplomacy" (Darst 2001), where governments in Eastern Europe hold nature hostage, only agreeing to clean up cross-border pollution in exchange for western financial resources, facility upgrades or technology sharing. Unlike the United States, Russia ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2004; however, this support came less from concern about global warming than from financial self-interest. The Protocol stated that participating countries should cut their greenhouse gas emissions to 5.2 percent their 1990 level. Because of the post-Soviet industrial collapse, Russia had already achieved this reduction without altering any infrastructure. Additionally, by threatening to walk away from the Kyoto Protocol, Russia successfully negotiated to double its allotted number of carbon "sinks" from the 17 megatons per year stipulated at Bonn to 33 megatons per year granted at Marrakesh (Raghunandan 2003). Carbon "sinks" can be used to offset a nation's emissions or may be traded to other nations for carbon credit. Russia could thus continue its industrial development while also earning revenue through the sale of its high carbon credits, all within the rubric of the Kyoto Protocol. Meanwhile, Russian submarines have planted flags under the ice sheet in the Arctic Ocean to claim the off-shore oil and gas deposits that will open up once the polar caps melt (Zarakhovich 2007).<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the most cynical move by the Russian government was its plan to import approximately 21,000 tons of radioactive nuclear waste from foreign governments for storage in

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<sup>15</sup> To be fair, the United States, Canada, Denmark and Norway have also been struggling to claim deposits under the Arctic ice sheet (Krauss et al. 2005).

Siberia to earn a sum of US\$ 20 billion. This plan was phenomenally unpopular with the Russian people and environmental activists initiated a nationwide campaign to hold a referendum. With 93 percent of the public expressing disapproval for the plan, the legislation was finally withdrawn (Henry 2010).

Sociologist Oleg Yanitsky (2000), the foremost authority on the Russian environmental movement provided a more structural analysis for the plight of environmental activism. He would agree with those who, like Inglehart, would expect activism to subside during periods of crisis, but Yanitsky suggests that two forces operated simultaneously to make the situation in Russia in the 1990s much worse. He draws upon the “risk society” theory of Ulrich Beck (1992) to describe Russia as the “society of all-encompassing risk.” In the risk society, risk is produced for the advancement of wealth, but in the society of “all-encompassing risk” the production of risk has so outstripped the production of wealth that risk becomes the dominant currency. He also theorizes the existence of an “energy of collapse” that began with the original failure of the Soviet system, but then took on a life of its own and became exponentially worse, as one collapse started a chain reaction. He describes it as the inverse of resource mobilization. When the energy of collapse begins to spiral, it cannot but drag the environmental movement down with it.

Yet Yanitsky’s analysis also places blame at the feet of the state, or at least of the elites in the *nomenklatura*. He sees the 1991 reform as a lost opportunity for ecological revolution. The consciousness was there, the demand for an environmentally sustainable state was there, but elites, eager to shore up their own power and position, only morphed the Soviet regime so far as they absolutely had to in order to maintain their power and privilege. What might have been a green revolution, Yanitsky claims, ended up being the same wolf only now in sheep’s clothing.

However, Yanitsky also presents a typology of green activists in Russia that crosses the spectrum of ecological dispositions. He lists them as: the conservationists, the alternativists, the traditionalists, the civil initiatives, the ecopoliticians, the ecopatriots, and the ecotechnocrats. Each has a disposition toward the new post-Soviet regime that affects its valuation of the ecological crisis and what can be done about it.

In her recent book on the Russian environmental movement, political scientist Laura Henry (2010) provides an organizational analysis of the contemporary environmental movement in Russia. She separates movement organizations into a typology of grassroots, professional and governmental-affiliate organizations. Each fills a niche in post-Soviet society, but the lack of cooperation between them keeps them all weak. Grassroots organizations have the support of the local populace, but they have few financial resources and seldom tackle large initiatives. Professional organizations raise money from international donors to tackle large or abstract environmental problems such as biodiversity loss or climate change, but they have little support from the general population and have a hostile relationship with the state. Government affiliates work closely with the state, but for that reason lack the critical edge that is needed to bring about change. Henry goes on to suggest an elective affinity between organizations, their leaders' background, their funding sources, and their tactics.

The legacy of socialism and totalitarianism are ever-present tropes in the study of Russian civil society in general, and in the turbulent history of environmentalism in particular. However, the journey of this movement from one context to another opens the door for scholars to explore how civil society acts and interacts, and what this, in turn, means for human freedom, in the past and in our globalized present.



## CHAPTER 3

### LAKE BAIKAL AND THE HISTORY OF BAIKAL ACTIVISM

This chapter introduces us to the case that will ground this investigation into civil society and its relationship to the structures in which it is embedded. Lake Baikal, located in Eastern Siberia, is the oldest, deepest and most voluminous lake on Earth, filled with exceptionally pure freshwater. Activists have been struggling to protect the lake since the 1950s and have continued to do so across rapidly changing political and economic terrains. In the Soviet Union, civil society was largely constrained by a state that desired to control all the social fields of action – not just the field of power itself. Environmental civil society managed to coalesce to confront this force when its environmentally destructive tactics threatened to encroach upon Baikal. However, without more ability to access power, the public outcry of environmental civil society had little influence on developmental outcomes.

#### Lake Baikal

While visiting Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia, to interview environmental activists on the lake's eastern shore, I stopped into a *poznaya*<sup>16</sup> for dinner. The little café was about 15 feet by 10 feet and had only eight tables that were flimsy contraptions. I went up to a window in the far wall to place my order: two *pozi* and a cup of black tea. The lady behind the window informed me that it would be a 20 minute wait for the *pozi*, but I assured her I was in no hurry. I

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<sup>16</sup> A *poznaya* is an eating establishment that serves Buryat cuisine, particularly the regional specialty – *pozi*. *Pozi* are beef dumplings. While there are a number of ways to prepare *pozi*, the most common is to steam the dumpling. The proper way to eat steamed *pozi*, as every local will inform you, is to nibble a small hole in the pastry and suck out the fatty juices within before eating the meat and pastry together.

chose the smallest of the tables against the wall and began scribbling notes from my recent conversation.

The *poznaya* was not empty. There was a party of five men, ranging in age from early 20 to late 40s, two Russians and three Buryats. It was evident that they had been drinking and were still at it. Their jocularity and frivolity were also entwined with bouts of anger, and the volume of their ejaculations was consistently increasing. A *babushka* with grey hair cast hateful glances in their direction each time their noise level increased. A mother with two small children finished her meal and scurried her brood past the raucous table, scolding the men for their language as she passed. I was also beginning to wish that I had not agreed to wait the 20 minutes for the *pozi*.

One of the men at the table began to call out in my direction, “*Devushka! Devushka! Ty menya ni znaesh, chto li?*” [Girl! Girl! Don’t you know me?] I buried my face in my field notes and pretended not to hear. The calling continued, and I continued to ignore it. Suddenly, the voice was standing beside me – a Buryat man with a large build, in his late 30s. He swayed slightly and spoke too loudly for comfort, his drunkenness showing through. “Why didn’t you call me?” he demanded.

“Leave me alone,” I replied.

“Don’t you remember me? You promised you would call and you never called.”

“I don’t know you,” I said. “We are not acquainted.”

“Yes, we are. We met at the discothèque in November. Don’t you remember me?”

“Here in Ulan Ude?” I asked him.

“Yes,” he said.

“That is impossible,” I told him. “Today is the first time I have ever been in Ulan Ude. I have never been here before.”

“Really? Today is your first time in Ulan Ude?” I nodded, and began to worry I had said too much. “Forgive me. You look just like a lady I met in November. So what brings you to Buryatia?”

I told him that I was a graduate student and that I was studying environmental protection around Lake Baikal. His eyes suddenly widened.

“Baikal? You are here to study Baikal?”

“Yes.”

“Let me tell you about Baikal!” He said, now seating himself beside me, his tone suddenly very serious. “People come from all over to study Baikal, but they will never know it. It is immeasurable! They try to measure it, but they can’t. It is always changing. Do you know how deep it is? You can’t even imagine it, it’s so deep!” His slurred speech punctuated certain words with enthusiasm and wonder. “Baikal is incomprehensible! So you should just go home. You came here to study Baikal, but you will never know Baikal. Never.”

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Baikal occupies a unique place in the Russian psyche. Everyone knows Baikal, and increasing numbers of Russians make the pilgrimage to see it. It is a landmark of national pride. The name “Baikal” is affixed to various Russian products, from computer chips, to vodka, to firearms. For those who live near its shores, the lake is regarded with reverent awe, bordering on religious mysticism. The lake is frequently personified and treated as a kind of god or supernatural entity. Themes about the lake’s unknowability and its life force weave through discourse about Baikal. In addition to the ecstatic drunk quoted above, a number of other conversations about Baikal that I observed during my time there reiterated the very special

attitude locals hold for this treasured place. The following are two more such examples I recorded, from a teacher in Irkutsk and a librarian in Baikalsk:

*Teacher:* For me, Baikal is that place where all life's worries and internal stresses [disappear]. Thanks to Baikal, I can quickly calm them. So, for me, first and foremost is the living essence that is Baikal. For me, Baikal is alive. Not only that, he is my friend, with whom I come to talk, and who will understand, who will support me and give me strength and energy. Baikal is many things for me. Most importantly, when I travel places, when I am abroad, I am always connected to it. I always want to return to it. Because, when you spend time at Baikal, you will never see the same thing. It is always different. It is, for me, something incomprehensible. It is impossible to ever really know it, to the end, because it is always changing. This is his character.

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*Librarian:* The idea [behind shamanism] is that there are different spirits that reside in nature and in particular places. On Baikal, this is particularly obvious and visible [*yarko i vidno*]. Baikal is a living thing, a living organism. He thinks, he understands. The Buryats and the Evenks understood this. No matter how much we study the Lake, we can only understand 1/1000th of it. Baikal is patient and loving, but he also has power. And he has great patience with us for our stupid acts. So far, Baikal has been patient with us, but maybe not forever. He hasn't punished us yet, but he is great and he could punish us. But so far he is patient.

If Baikal looms large in the public mind, there is good reason. Lake Baikal is like no place else on Earth. The lake and its environs are ecologically unique, unmatched in the natural world. Baikal bears an enviable list of superlative titles. It is the oldest, deepest and most voluminous lake on the planet. Its water is amongst the purest in the world. It is home to thousands of endemic species. The lake is a source of local legend and historical lore, a definitive aspect of Eastern Siberia.

Baikal was formed approximately 25 to 35 million years ago when the Indian subcontinent collided with Asia. The impact caused a split between two fault lines, fracturing the earth just north of Mongolia. The same process that gave rise to the Himalayan mountains also brought forth Lake Baikal. And just as the Himalayans continue to rise, so does Baikal continue to widen, growing at a rate of 2 centimeters per year. However, it is not the width of Baikal that astounds, but rather its depth. Its present depth reaches more than 2 kilometers to its sediment floor – the deepest lake on the Earth. Scientists estimate that the sediment alone continues another seven kilometers beneath this. The astonishing depth of Lake Baikal allows it to pool water from more than 330 inflowing streams and rivers, rendering it the most voluminous lake on Earth. Twenty percent of all the Earth’s unfrozen surface freshwater can be found in Lake Baikal; it is a freshwater reservoir of global proportions.

Not only is Baikal shockingly deep, it has still another surprising secret that is not repeated elsewhere on the planet: Baikal’s water is oxygenated all the way to its maximum depth and supports life even at the lake floor, some 5,387 feet below the surface. No other deep lake can make such a claim. Other deep lakes show that water below 650 feet is “dead” – it lacks oxygen and cannot support life. Baikal defies this rule. While scientists have some theories to

explain the hospitality of Baikal's depths, no one can say conclusively the answer to this geological, biological and hydrological mystery.<sup>17</sup>

The secret of Baikal's purity can be found in one of its astonishing array of endemic species – nearly 3,000 in all. The *epischura baykalensis* is a microscopic shrimp that lives exclusively in Baikal. The lake holds literally billions of these tiny creatures who filter-feed for organic matter and, in so doing, remove impurities from the water. The power of these countless miniscule crustaceans, and the speed at which they feast on organic matter, defies expectation: a carcass of a dead cow that was thrown into the lake would be reduced to a skeleton in a week. The result is a water purity that is almost unmatched. Frozen Baikal water is as transparent as glass. The lake's water is so clean that it is not even recommended for use as drinking water: it lacks the vital minerals that human drinking water normally contains.

While the water of Baikal is miraculously clean, the biota that enacts this miracle is decidedly not. Any harmful toxins, the effluvia of modern industry and development, that find their way into Baikal's watershed are quickly consumed by the *epischura*, and other small crustaceans, and subsequently conveyed into the food chain. As bigger fish eat the smaller fish, in increasing quantities, pollutants build up in the bodies of the animals. The health effect of these accumulated pollutants becomes especially consequential in Baikal's other famous endemic denizens: the *omul'*, the *golomyanka*, and the *nerpa*.

*Omul'* is a relative of the salmon and is a Baikal delicacy. *Omul'* is a "must-eat" for pescaterian tourists to the region. Train stops and bus stops are host to kerchiefed *babushki* [elderly women] hocking their family's catch – steamed or smoked. Fishing for *omul'* is

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<sup>17</sup> Although the cause of Baikal's thorough oxygenation is not known for certain, most scientists agree that the intense cold of Siberian winters, which annually causes meter-thick ice to form at the lake's surface, likely plays a role. For this reason, climate change poses a significant threat to Lake Baikal and its thousands of endemic species who are uniquely adapted to its oxygenated depth (Thomson 2009).

regulated, although poaching is still a common occurrence. Locals fish for personal consumption, as one dimension of subsistence homesteading, and many also fish commercially for the resale value. Because of the heavy human consumption of *omul'*, and other Baikal fish, the toxins and industrial effluvia that find their way into the lake, and subsequently into the food chain, become problematic, not only for the environment, but also for human health.

*Golumyanka*, another important Baikal endemic, is a highly unusual fish in many respects. It lives throughout the entire depth of Lake Baikal – even a mile below the surface. The fish can survive this intensity of water pressure because it has no swim bladder. Also, its body is made almost entirely of fat. The fish is so translucent that a person can read newsprint through its body. Local fishermen claim that, if you bring the fish to the surface and leave it in the sun, it will melt into a puddle of oil. The *golumyanka* is also one of the few fish in the world that gives birth to live young. This fatty, deep-swimming fish is the staple diet of the *nerpa*, and the toxins that build up through its own feeding get passed along in this manner to the lake's largest endemic predator.

The Baikal seal, known locally as the *nerpa*, is a freshwater seal that is the virtual emblem of Lake Baikal. The *nerpa* is a close relative of the northern ringed seal, but it resides in a freshwater lake that is literally hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean. No one knows for sure how the *nerpa* arrived in Lake Baikal, but it is believed that their ancestors swam up the Yenisei and Angara rivers from the Arctic sea – a journey of some 3,000 miles. Now permanently ensconced, the *nerpa* are a veritable totem for Lake Baikal. Their face and likeness adorn souvenir stands: embroidered onto tee-shirts, molded out of clay, stuffed as plush toys. Seldom seen in the wild, there are two “Sea World” style aquariums near the lake where tourists can watch trained *nerpa* frolic and play. While they are still hunted for meat and fur, the seals

are also protected and their populations are regulated by the government. But the effects of built up toxins in seal blubber has been a greater worry for the species in recent decades than the threat of hunting. Toxins are thought to have caused a massive die-off of *nerpa* in 1986. With immune systems weakened by toxins, hundreds of these unique animals succumbed to an epidemic in canine distemper that year. The epidemic helped establish the *nerpa* not only as the face of Baikal, but also the frequent face of Baikal environmental activism.

### **The History of Environmental Activism around Lake Baikal**

The public reverence for Baikal is both a cause and a product of decades of struggle by committed environmentalists to protect the lake from anthropogenic harm. When Soviet industrial projects first began to encroach on the Baikal basin in the mid-1950s, the lake already held a significant sway on the public mind. The indigenous peoples who had lived in the region for centuries had a religious reverence for Baikal that provided a cultural appreciation for the lake. The many scientific institutions in Irkutsk were steadily producing greater knowledge that confirmed the lake's ecological uniqueness and scientific importance. Moreover, the region already had faced the consequences of human overindulgence; in the early 1900s, the Baikal sable was hunted to near extinction for its fur. In response, the Imperial government established the first *zapovednik*,<sup>18</sup> or state nature preserve, on the shore of Lake Baikal in 1917 so as to protect and preserve the endangered sable. Baikal was considered both beautiful and sacred – it was a gift, something wondrous, with which rational science and industry should not meddle.

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<sup>18</sup> *Zapovednik*, which translates roughly as “territory where it is forbidden to go,” is one of several designations for protected territory in Russia. Others include national parks, state forests, game reserves and natural monuments. *Zapovednik* is the highest level of preservation and the strictest form of protection, with the aim of completely isolating ecosystems from any human interference. Under the Soviet government, the *zapovedniki* became the largest system of nationally protected lands in the world. For a thorough history of the *zapovednik* in Russia, see Weiner (1999).



When the long arm of Soviet industry reached the shore of Baikal, it faced, for the first time, massive public opposition, making the lake the national symbol for nature protection.

Writes historian Nicholas Breyfogle:

From the late 1950s on, Lake Baikal became the centre of one of the most visible, powerful and successful environmental movements in the Soviet Union, which deeply influenced environmentalism throughout the USSR (and now Russia). Until Chernobyl' in 1986, and in many respects even after that too, Baikal was the environmental cause of the post-World War Two period. Others may have been worse in terms of their impact on the natural world (such as the draining of the Aral Sea or Chernobyl'), but none grabbed the Soviet imagination more strongly or deeply than Baikal (Breyfogle 2015: 147).

Baikal represents a unique case in Soviet history where public opinion came out actively *against* the state. As historian Douglas Weiner writes:

Unlike any previous environmental struggle, the fight to protect the vast lake from physical alteration and industrial pollution embraced not only the various branches of committed nature protection activists but a broader public as well. Such public participation imbued the struggle around the lake with a larger meaning as an incipient general protest against the rulers' abuses of power (Weiner 1999: 356).

The first fight began in 1958 over increasing water flow out of the lake to better feed the Irkutsk hydroelectric station. It was only the first of many.

### *The Grigorovich Plan*

Over 330 rivers flow into Lake Baikal. Only one flows out: the Angara. According to Buryat legend, Baikal has 330 sons, but only one daughter, named Angara. She fell in love with Yenisei, and eloped with him. That is why Angara flows away from Baikal and eventually joins the Yenisei river, which then continues to the Arctic Sea. Baikal was so angry that Angara had run away, he threw a rock after her. “Shaman rock” is at the mouth of the Angara, a few feet jutting out above the water’s surface, just visible, in the middle of the river.<sup>19</sup>

The Angara joins the Irkut River at the city of Irkutsk. The Soviet government built the first dam on the Angara at Irkutsk in 1950 to provide power to the city. N.A. Grigorovich was the chief engineer of the Angara Sector of *Gidroproekt*, the hydrological planning commission. In 1958, he proposed to detonate an explosion at the mouth of the Angara river in order to increase the water flow to the hydroelectric dam in Irkutsk. The proposed explosion – intended to be 50 percent larger than at Hiroshima (Weiner 1999: 357) – would lower the water level in Baikal by several meters.

Soviet history is rife with “projects of the century,” whereby humanity would show its mastery over nature: diverting rivers, creating canals, building atomic energy stations, and so forth. Often these would result in catastrophic destruction of human life and natural ecosystems. Geo-engineering Baikal proved to be the limit to Soviet attempts at “mastery over nature.” In Irkutsk, with its rich regional culture and history, there was a population already primed to speak out against the proposal.

Chief among the local campaigners was Grigorii Ivanovich Galazii, head of the Limnological Institute at the Siberian Academy of Sciences, who would, decades later, be

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<sup>19</sup> More of the rock was visible before the construction of the hydroelectric dam in Irkutsk, which raised the water level of the Angara several meters, also submerging the train tracks that had connected the historic Circum-Baikal Railway to Irkutsk.

elected to the Supreme Soviet and pass the Law of Baikal, which would enshrine the Lake's protection at the highest level. In these days, however, he was a young scientist who was passionate about Lake Baikal and the delicate balance its ecosystem maintained. Galazii joined two other local writers who were against the project in crafting a letter to *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, a major national newspaper. Their letter, "In Defense of Baikal," described the potential negative environmental impact of the Grigorovich plan. Within a month, a thousand letters of support came in from across the Soviet Union (Weiner 1999). Meetings were held, conferences were organized; the outpouring of public sentiment against a planned industrial project was unprecedented in the Soviet Union.

In this instance, the activists succeeded. The Grigorovich plan was scrapped. However, this was only the beginning in the public fight for Baikal.

### ***The Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill***

In 1958, the Soviet government announced the planned construction of a cellulose plant on the shore of Lake Baikal. The Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill (BTsBK),<sup>20</sup> as it would eventually be called, became the lightning rod for environmental concern in the region. BTsBK and the Selenginsk pulp and paper mill that would be built on Baikal's largest tributary, the Selenga River, were commissioned as part of the Soviet military-industrial complex. In the 1950s, tires for fighter planes and bombers were made of cellulose cord. To produce high-grade cellulose, plants needed large quantities of timber and water. Other lakes in the Soviet Union

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<sup>20</sup> Although the acronym "BPPM" would be easier on English readers, I am retaining the Russian acronym "BTsBK" because this is how the Russian public always refers to the mill (pronounced <beh-tseh-beh-kah>) following its Russian name: *Baikal'skii Tsellyuznii i Bumazhnii Kombinat*. In the field, this acronym was referenced so often that to call it by any other name would be like calling a famous historic personage by an anglicized name.

had already been clear cut, but the Baikal basin was still flourishing with timber. Moreover, the clean, pure water of Baikal was argued to be necessary to produce the highest quality cellulose.

The outcry against the proposed plant was enormous. The all-union presses again picked up the story and helped foment widespread dissent. Pressure was so intense that the Soviet state felt compelled to respond to citizen concerns. In April 1960, the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a law on water pollution that would require the latest pollution abatement technologies in all new factories. Then on May 9<sup>th</sup>, the RSFSR went further and passed a law delaying the start-up of the Baikalsk and Selenginsk factories until waste purification systems were put in place.

But even these concessions could not quell the outrage. Letter-writers reminded the public that Baikal is seismic; even the most advanced water purification system would be irrelevant if the factory faced a major earthquake. Meanwhile, as the fight raged on, the product that the mill was designed to produce becomes increasingly obsolete. Nylon and polyethylene cord had replaced cellulose as the industry standard. So, too, then was the necessity of pure Baikal water for the creation of military-grade cellulose. Instead, BTsBK would simply make paper – as it could do anywhere – only to put Baikal at greater risk. Repeated public letters, proclamations and conference proceedings re-iterated opposition to the mill, with long lists of signatories, including respected scientists and various professional associations.

Certainly there were countervailing opinions: workers were beginning to flock to the small fishing village that would eventually become the city of Baikalsk. There were jobs to be had in the construction of the factory and the city that would surround and support it. Eventually there would be jobs in the mill itself. Claims were made on behalf of the mill from a developmentalist standpoint, arguing that the economic benefit would outweigh the potential

harm, and that the sheer size of Baikal would quickly dissipate the pollutants from the mill. But these did not outweigh the increasingly aggressive stance of Soviet science and letters against the development. Baikal would be their line in the sand.

As the mill's opening date grew closer, the flurry of activity reached a fever pitch. The Moscow Society of Naturalists held a major conference, replete with militant resolutions. Once again, the large newspapers joined the fight. Yet, for all this action, the battle was lost. The Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill began operation in 1966.

### ***Repression of Baikal Activism***

The state had its mill, and environmentalists succeeded in pressuring the government to build it with the highest pollution abatement techniques of the time. But critical voices continued to speak out against the mill and industrial encroachment on the Baikal watershed. The state was growing impatient with its green patriots and took measures to stifle the dissent. Censorship of the media was simply standard operating procedure in the Soviet Union, and it is widely suspected that criticism of the mill was eventually suppressed in the national media. After chasing the story regularly for some time, articles on the mill were difficult to find for a number of years, at first in the late Khrushchev period, and again under Brezhnev. There was a brief resurgence in critical publications during the power changeover, suggesting some editorial flexibility during the transition, followed by a second clamp-down. While historians have not found a "smoking gun" that confirms an official gag order on the mill, there is reason to suspect that limitations on Baikal protest – at least at the national level – were in place.

However, local presses and scientific venues remained relatively open to local dissent, and those passionate about protecting Baikal still insisted they be heard. Grigori Galazii was one

who would not keep quiet about the fragility of Baikal's unique ecosystem and his deep concern that human damage would eventually render the ecosystem unrecoverable. Galazii was, by this point, the head of the Limnological Institute, a prestigious research center affiliated with the Soviet Academy of Sciences. It had a large laboratory, and Galazii used it to produce scientific measures of pollution in the lake and its negative consequences for the organisms therein. It was pure science, but it produced inconvenient facts for the administration. Galazii could not be fired from his position, but he could be "re-distributed." The government relegated Galazii to a single room, without a laboratory, that they dubbed the "Baikal Museum," and placed him in charge. Without access to a significant laboratory and a team of researchers as he had previously had at the Limnological Institute, Galazii could not produce the studies that were implicating industry in Baikal's degradation. He continued to speak out for Baikal, but the illustrious title of the Academy of Sciences was no longer attached to him.

### ***Soviet Environmental Civil Society: VOOP***

In addition to these spontaneous social outpourings, which were always in response to some immediate threat, Irkutsk had the same stable environmental organization as existed throughout the Soviet Union. The All-Soviet Society for Nature Protection (VOOP) was an official organization, under the auspices of the Communist Party, and collected the common efforts of scientists, teachers, naturalists and nature *aficionados* to press for environmental protection. They were able to persist, despite state suppression of other forms of activism, because of the apparently "apolitical" appearance of nature protection. The Irkutsk branch of VOOP carried the banner locally. A brief investigation into the organization in the 1980s can

give a sense of what local environmental civil society looked like around Lake Baikal during the Soviet Union.

VOOP was a Party organization and, as such, was modeled on the organizational culture within the Party itself. It had five-year plans with targets for the number of members, the number of raids conducted, the number of school activities organized, and so forth. Outcomes were not set by any particular improvement in environmental conditions, but simply by output of activity. The activities planned and conducted by VOOP were broad – ranging from placard competitions, to workshops on preventing forest fires. In content, the message was similar to those of contemporary environmentalists. They believed nature should be preserved for future generations and that it enriches the human spirit. But they were also clearly aware that the state placed a priority on production, and they were not to question that. Instead, they emphasized “rational use” of nature’s resources and the need to preserve them for the sake of more efficient productivity.<sup>21</sup>

VOOP members would sing the praises of the state in their official proclamations, conferences and reports. Sometimes the ideology opened the door to discussions of nature protection. But more often than not, the need to pander to the ruling elites bordered on absurd. Conference speakers would begin a speech with paeans to the ruling elite, such as: “Questions of environmental protection have stood at the center of attention of the Soviet government since its first days of existence” (VOOP Archive, 1980, Delo 510, pg. 28). School children would take part in activities organized by VOOP with titles, including: “For a Lenin-like Relationship to Nature!” “To love nature is to love your motherland,” and “To love nature as Lenin loved her.” (VOOP Archive, 1980, Delo 337, pg. 24-26). Activities were framed in accordance with the

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<sup>21</sup> At moments, the minutes of a VOOP meeting resemble exegesis from ecological modernization theory (Buttel 2000) – emanating from the Soviet Union, it reminds us, perhaps, that “actually existing state socialism” is still modernity by other means.

semiotics of the power structure at the time. During one meeting, a VOOP representative encouraged the committee to work harder to propagandize environmental protection in the media. Her colleague agreed, saying, “Not just propagandize it, but give it a Marxist-Leninist position. That way it will garner more [visibility]” (VOOP Archive, 1988, Delo 613, pg. 40). Nature protection was only valid insofar as it worked in accordance with the Soviet state and its larger agenda.

There were benefits, however, that accrued to a Party-sponsored environmental organization within the Soviet Union. First, the organization never hurt for membership. Soviet citizens were expected to sign up for a number of clubs and associations, and VOOP was a box on a list that workers could easily tick. Membership was in the thousands, but these were “paper members,” of whom nothing was required. Second, it had a steady stream of ready income for its activities. Dues for memberships in official organizations were automatically deducted from payroll. Eventually, in the post-Soviet years, nonprofits bemoaned the payroll deduction practice as having lost the culture of philanthropy amongst the Russian public, forcing independent civil society organizations to look abroad for funding. But during the Soviet Union, nature protection activities had ready money to put to use in its activities. Third, the press was a willing supporter in its efforts to propagandize environmental protection. The largest regional paper, *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda*, regularly offered VOOP a full page of its newspaper to fill with content related to environmental protection in a section called “*Rodnik*” [Well-spring]. Within a censored society, VOOP had a regular megaphone.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The VOOP archives contain a letter from *Vostochno-Sibirskaya Pravda* to VOOP in 1991 explaining that, now that the newspaper must earn its revenue by advertising, it can no longer provide regular space to their organization, but that they were welcome to purchase a full-page ad if they would like to continue to spread their message to the public (VOOP Archive, 1991, Delo 735, pg 45-47).



However, without in-roads to power itself, VOOP was more of an outlet for activity than a force for social change. Members of VOOP occasionally expressed frustration at their own ineffectuality. “The Factory Council of VOOP, its social-technical committee, has no influence on the answers to questions of environmental protection. Regardless of required state inspections, there is no organized regulation of toxic air pollution from auto-transport.” (VOOP Archive, 1986, Delo 518, pg. 33). The Irkutsk All-Soviet Society of Nature Protection played by the rules. They would praise the state, frame their work in accordance with ideology, mimic the organizational culture of the Communist Party, and still they were denied influence on the decision-making powers.<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Baikal Movement***

Environmentalism remained a prominent concern in the public mind, and deep frustration was simmering below the surface, ready to erupt again when the state loosened its reins during *perestroika*. The trigger for renewed environmental activism turned out to be the *nerpa*: the totem of Baikal, its unique, endemic freshwater seal. In 1986, *nerpa* began dying by the hundreds. Animals would be seen heaving themselves upon the lake shore, sick and blinded. The diagnosis turned out to be an epidemic of canine distemper that had infected the seals and spread like wildfire. But, despite the official diagnosis, all eyes looked toward the paper mill.

For decades, the mill had dumped its toxic effluvia into the lake, trusting in the water’s volume and purity to absorb and disperse this waste. But these toxins entered the food chain and were found to have bio-accumulated in *nerpa* blubber. Environmentalists claimed that toxic

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<sup>23</sup> However, it is worth noting the diffuse effect that the attention paid to environmental protection may have had on the public mind. Baikal and the importance of Baikal were repeatedly pronounced on the pages of “*Rodnik*.” Although their ability to directly act to effect change was minimal, the eventual outpouring of environmental sentiment during *perestroika* was no doubt helped by its consistent presence.

exposure had weakened the seals' immune system, rendering them susceptible to distemper in epidemic proportions.

The state, meanwhile, had conceived a plan to construct a pipeline that would ferry waste out of the Baikalsk paper mill and into the Irkut River, where it would be carried, untreated, along the Angara, to the Yenisei, and eventually out to the Arctic Sea. Environmentalists deemed this “solution” to be even more dangerous than the current waste disposal reservoirs. Baikal is a seismic region, and pipeline fractures and spill were the expected norm. Not only would this endanger Baikal, but it would taint the rivers from which Irkutsk residents drank, fished and swam. The proposed plan to pipe the waste for dumping in the Irkut River was met with scorn and indignation. Members of the public decided to put their newly granted freedoms to the test.

A collective of active citizens began planning a protest march. They called themselves the “Baikal Movement” (*Baikalskoye Dvizheniye*). The leaders were drawn from the intelligentsia and were active in the democratization movement during *perestroika* – forming new local elected councils. They announced an independent protest march to prevent the BTsBK-Irkut pipeline, which proved to be the first independent protest in the Soviet Union following *perestroika*. One person described it thus:

*Baikal Movement participant:* There was a large group gathered, and the KGB was standing by watching them. People were very uncertain – ‘Are they really going to let us march?’ And so we took a few steps, and a few more steps, and no one was arrested! And so we just kept walking, all the way to [Kirov Square]!

And so marched the first picket in the country held independently of the Communist Party. The protest was against the pipeline that would dump BTsBK's waste into the Irkut River; but it was

also, at its heart, a political protest. As one observer described it to me: “The problem was environmental – defending Baikal, but it criticized only one organization, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.” As *perestroika* progressed, questions of democratization overwhelmed environmental issues. But environmental activism to protect Lake Baikal was midwife to these.

Leaders of the Baikal Movement generally moved on to electoral politics. When this happened they generally abandoned environmentalism; it was a green wave that they rode to power, but not a driving personal mission for them. Among these, however, was Grigorii Galazii, whose passion for Baikal never faded. He was elected to the Supreme Soviet, where he pushed and pushed for a law to protect Baikal, until he finally succeeded in passing the Law of Baikal.

### ***Baikal Watch***

With *perestroika*, the Iron Curtain began to dissolve and the Soviet Union allowed its borders to become more porous for people flowing out and in. Environmentalists in the Soviet Union and the West sought one another out and began to build transnational advocacy networks. One of the first eager participants to reach out across this long-closed border was David Brower.

Brower was a legendary environmental activist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century United States, the veritable creator of modern American environmentalism. Former president of the Sierra Club, Brower went on to found Friends of the Earth, the League of Conservation Voters and Earth Island Institute. In 1988, at the invitation of environmentalists, Brower travelled to Moscow to attend a conference. He listened to reports on the state of the environment in Russia, which were

typically lengthy and dry, but Brower was a man of action and would urge them to cut to the chase.

*Gary Cook:* He would always ask them, ‘Well what’s most important environmental problem? What is the place you want to save the most?’ And with one voice they would always answer: Baikal.

In 1989 and again in 1990, Brower led teams from Earth Island Institute to Baikal. In 1990 a group of 25 people came, toured the lake, and held a conference in Barguzinsky Reserve. They were impressed with the beauty of Baikal and all agreed that it should be targeted for preservation. Earth Island Institute created an off-shoot organization, Baikal Watch, to serve this purpose, and Brower recruited a young activist named Gary Cook to lead it. Cook had been active in the Earth Island Institute’s campaign to protect dolphins from tuna nets. He held a PhD in economics from UC-Berkeley and spoke some Russian, which he suspects is the reason he was tapped by Brower for the position. Cook knew what he had to confront.

*Gary Cook:* I travelled [to Russia] for the first time in late 80s early 90s and there were scenes there resembling Bosco: his vision of hell. There were cities that were so polluted, you’d come up a hill and you couldn’t see the other side of the town from the top of the hill. We’re talking two miles and it was basically black. They said it was always like that. For our poor, pathetic Western lungs it was like, how am I going to survive this? That was a bit extreme, but the more places you went, more corners you turned, the more amazing scenes there were, [environmental] impacts you couldn’t imagine. We were in the forest and we knew we were in oil-drilling land. But we’d come over the hill and there would be

a lake of oil that had been there for who knows how long. It wasn't a lake the size of Tahoe but it was a lake, 3 to 4 miles across. Woah!

Baikal, by comparison, was actually quite clean. But industrial effluvia into the Selenga River and within the Baikal watershed were still significant concerns for environmentalists in the region. Baikal Watch saw its mission, not to solve these problems, but rather to teach Russians how to solve them.

Gary Cook: [In Russia at this time] public or community activity of any sort without the government's permission or stamp of approval was very novel. There were no environmental groups. But there were environmentalists. Scientists. Teachers. But they were never able to get together to form even a nonprofit, non-governmental group.... The idea was to help the movement start.... Help people understand what it means to be an activist, how to start activist groups, or even community groups, and to work with other sectors of society: the government, the press, lawyers, scientists, anybody and everybody; to become a valid player. Literally that is what we have been doing for the last 25 years, helping groups get on their feet. But also to help other sectors of society to interact with community groups, to respect them, to see them as an equally valid player.

Without a history of independent activity, there was not even a social space to acknowledge the validity of community input. The Soviet Union and its sprawling administrative apparatus also segregated and compartmentalized knowledge and expertise. The public was assumed to have no pertinent expertise in matters such as the construction of dams, the operation of nuclear reactors or the placement of paper mills. Those avenues by which the public may have impacted the direction of development in an environmentally positive manner were closed to them.

Cook went on to play a very important role as a “broker” (Tarrow and McAdam 2004), mediating the relationship between Baikal environmentalists and Western activist networks. His work will be discussed more in the next chapter. But his role began at this early moment, at the tail end of the Soviet regime, and his view of civil society as he found it at that moment reflects the larger problems inherent when one group achieves a near monopoly within the field of power.

## **Conclusion**

Bourdieu writes that “a field is simultaneously a *space of conflict and competition*...in which participants vie to establish monopoly over species of capital effective within it” (Bourdieu 1992: 17-18). The Soviet Union represents an instance in history when the state managed to achieve a near monopoly on the multitude of fields within its sovereign territory. More so even than the autocrats who preceded them, the Communists sought to bring all public activity under the dictates of the Party (Lewin 1994). Civil society existed in Soviet Russia, but it did so primarily under the auspices of the Communist Party and its sanctioned organs. Those few instances when the public rose up in defense of Baikal spontaneously were able to gain some concessions, but fundamentally they had little impact on the state agenda.

Barricades were put in place throughout the Soviet apparatus so that different sectors of society would be prevented from influencing one other. The general public especially was presumed to have no lay knowledge or expertise that could influence the course of development. As environmental problems compounded, there were no mechanisms by which the lay public could easily act to alter the course of events. Civil society as a power source capable of acting in

the world was confined to such a constrained sphere that it served mainly as a functionary of the commanding authority in the country: a dominating political elite.

## CHAPTER 4

### CREATING BAIKAL AS A TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVIST SPACE

Social movements scholars have lately turned their attention to organizational form as an empirical variable in their analyses and as a principal topic of study in itself (e.g. Clemens 1993, 1996; Minkoff 1995, 1997, 1999), but the question of organizational form is often explored ahistorically. Traits of successful organizations and activist decision-making are viewed as stable through time. Organizational form is seen as either instrumental or expressive, but it is usually considered a matter of activists' agentic choice. Organizational form is seldom examined in relation to the role of broader historical forces – exogenous pressures that still exert influence over and shape the form of local activist organizations. When organizational form is examined through an historical lens (e.g. Skocpol 2003), the role of supra-national forces and actors is similarly ignored. And yet, social processes are necessarily historical – and our historical moment is one of ever-increasing transnational interconnection. Global forces may indeed shape the form of local organizing.

This chapter examines the process by which Baikal environmental activism moved from a local movement, with national sympathizers, to a space of transnational activism. In the period immediately following the opening of the Soviet Union, local environmental civil society in Irkutsk developed permanency and strength, becoming an influential force in the community. However, the powers that helped to structure local civil society were not purely local in scope. Through key actors, working across borders, ideas and resources from other countries and from global environmentalism more generally were brought to Irkutsk and became interwoven into the



configuration of local civil society. Importantly, as local civil society transformed over time, it did so in relation to the condition of other actors in the “field of power,” (Bourdieu 1989, 1993, 1998) nationally and internationally.

In the following section, I will examine three key environmental organizations operating in the region and show the dialectical relationship between the indigenous and the exogenous in the creation and maintenance of a permanent, organized, transnational space in Irkutsk. I find that the role of exogenous support also must be examined relative to the field of power. When the economic and political spheres are weak nationally, transnational activism has its most profound impact on the fostering of an independent and autonomous civil sphere. When the economic powers recover, transnationalism can be supplanted by national actors or even rendered a liability in the eyes of the general public. Moreover, transnational actors are themselves relatively empowered by the national configuration of the global field of power. Finally, the organizational form itself is impacted by the field of power, becoming more aggressive when civil power is high, and more accommodating when civil power is low. But despite the shift in the role of transnational actors over time, the long-term effect of transnational involvement in civil society has staying power in the region, which can be found in the many domestic organizational off-shoots that grow from its roots.

### **The Social Movement Organization**

Previous scholars generally considered organization in movements as a given; they only debated the question instrumentally: is permanent organization good or bad for mobilization? (e.g. McCarthy and Zald 1977, Piven and Cloward 1977). A dramatic step forward occurred when scholars began to examine organizational *form*. Clemens began the debate, explaining

that, just as movements have tactical repertoires (Tilly 1978), they also have “organizational repertoires” (Clemens 1993). Organizational form could then be viewed as a matter of activists’ agency and choice. For some scholars, the question of form is essentially strategic: organizational permanence is desirable, but short-lived grassroots mobilizations also have their place depending upon activists’ stated intentions and goals. Minkoff (1993) shows the correlation between activists’ goals, strategies and identities and their ability to build permanent, self-perpetuating organizational forms. Clemens (1996) builds upon the strategic approach to organizational form, showing that, not only can the choice of organizational form be strategic, it can also be expressive. Organizations, she explains, are like frames: they are crafted to reflect collective identity and to communicate/interact with the broader public.

Minkoff, Aisenbrey and Agnone (2008) find a variety of extant organizational forms that vary according to the goals the organization aims to achieve. Their focus is upon available forms – they do not ask about the variation in forms over time. They also imply that, because the form seems linked to the agenda, that it is principally a choice made by activists themselves without taking recourse to the larger social structure and power structure in which these groups operate at any given time. Organizational forms are diverse just as human beings have different personalities.

Some scholars, however, have given careful consideration to history and the change in organizational form over time. For some, the question is of the role of movements in shaping organizations through history. Schneiberg, King and Smith (2008) examine social movement activism as the independent variable, affecting the form that other social institutions take, such as the formation of cooperative associations rather than corporations during the Grange movement.

McAdam (1998) shows how the movement for communal living found inspiration from Freedom Summer in 1964.

But there is also a question of how movements themselves may be shaped by their presence in particular historical moments. In the literature on civil society especially, the concern with historical change in organizational form reflects a concern on the part of some scholars that the professionalization of movements and associations has cut off the activity and activism of a lay public that previously formed the basis of America's robust third sector. Robert Putnam (1995) argues that "paper membership" in large advocacy organizations dampens the more active citizenship that builds social capital and the positive political and social benefits that accrue to dense network ties. Theda Skocpol (2003) examines the historical rise and fall of federated membership organizations, arguing that they cut across class boundaries and, in so doing, not only built affective ties amongst a diverse populace, but also taught important civic skills to members of the working classes. The reasons for the rise of national, professional advocacy organization are varied, and include such processes as the growing concentration of power in the federal government, legal regulations on lobbying, and competition for financial resources (Berry 2005, Jenkins 1998, McCarthy, Britt and Wolfson 1991, Minkoff 1994). But the growth of this national-professional organizational form and its rise to dominance over previous forms that offered fewer barriers to entry adds a critical historical dimension to the study of social movements, and to civil society more generally.

However, while these critiques add the important element of historical change to questions of organizational form, they remain in dialogue with purely national forces and processes.<sup>24</sup> Yet, increasingly, local choices are influenced, informed, and even sometimes constrained, by forces that extend to global levels. The growing literature on transnational

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<sup>24</sup> For a notable exception, see Stamatov (2010).

activism has also raised the question of organization, in part because the phenomenon of transnational activism often eschews the traditional organizational model, relying instead upon network ties built around issue-specific concerns (Bennett 2005, Keck and Sikkink 1998, Smith 1997). Making use of new technologies of communication, groups can cooperate, coordinate and share with one another on an unprecedented scale – altering the geographic scope of activists’ purview and pull. Recent findings have shown the continued importance of structured, permanent organization, despite the looser requirements of network-based movements (e.g. Fisher, Stanley Berman and Neff 2005). The move toward increased integration itself may be considered the result of larger processes of globalization (Coleman and Weyland 2006, Mercea 2012), but otherwise organizational form is largely unexamined. In the remainder of this chapter, I will be examining the formation of three key environmental organizations in Irkutsk, Russia, showing how they were influenced by time and space, and always in relation to important changes in the overarching field of power.

### **Organizational Formation in Baikal Environmentalism**

Three key organizations developed and grew in Irkutsk during the years following the opening of Russia in 1989, and these three have helped to establish Irkutsk as a space of transnational activist attention and action. The first, Baikal Environmental Wave (the Wave), is a nonprofit organization geared toward environmental education and advocacy work that officially incorporated in 1992. The second, Tahoe-Baikal Institute (TBI), was formed as two sister organizations, in the US in 1989 and in Russia in 1992, to carry out environmental educational summer exchanges between American and Russian youth. Finally, the Great Baikal Trail (GBT), which formed in 2002, is a volunteer-based nonprofit that builds and maintains

wilderness hiking trails in order to promote sustainable, low-impact eco-tourism. These three organizations provide insights into the role of transnational actors in the formation of local civil society, but also how this role alters in response to the broader field of power. Below, I will take each organization in turn, describe its founding, and analyze the implications for transnationalism and organizational formation.

### *Origin of Baikal Environmental Wave*

Jennie Sutton came to the Soviet Union in 1973 through an exchange program for language instruction that existed at the time between Great Britain and the USSR. Britain and Russia each undoubtedly hoped to gain geopolitical advantage by training its citizens in the language of its ideological enemy; but the individuals involved in such an exchange can find their own lives impacted by the experience in ways that are unanticipated by the state which sends them. Such was the case for Jennie Sutton, who signed up for the program and was placed at the Academy of Sciences in Irkutsk. Sutton soon fell in love with her new home; she was fascinated by the Russian people and their culture. Although she was originally placed in Irkutsk for three years, she requested an extension, so as to complete a new textbook she was co-authoring. Eventually, she secured a position teaching and translating English at the National Academy of Sciences in Irkutsk. It was her position as a transnational actor at a major scientific research center that eventually led her to become a passionate and deeply committed environmental activist.

When discussing social movement participation, scholars often point to the “biographical availability” of individual activists: they must have the time to devote to their cause and little to personally risk in the process (McAdam 1986, see also Beyerlein and Hipp 2006, Schussman and

Soule 2005). As such, the typical activist is young, unmarried, without children, and engaged in some form of flexible employment. In the experience of Jennie Sutton, I would add another dimension to her “biographical availability:” she was positioned at the intersection of two different societies and was, therefore, “available” to receive input from one context that could be applied to the other. From a social network analysis perspective, Sutton was a node between two geographic networks. While that transnational status was not a sufficient condition to produce her as an activist, it was, by her own accounting, a necessary one.

Although Sutton had always appreciated nature and the outdoors aesthetically, she came to environmental activism in her early 40s principally by virtue of her transnational status.

*Jennie Sutton:* I was aware that society was having an adverse impact on the environment, but, like most people, I had no idea to what extent this was happening until the end of the 1980’s. I came across the Brundtland Report, which was the United Nations report on the state of the planet and of natural resources, and it happened to come into my hands because it was in English. I was teaching at the Academy of Sciences in those days, working with scientists on their English. I read [the Report], and that was probably in 1988. At that time, this was the height of *perestroika* here, which was an extremely interesting period.

Sutton felt, aptly, that she was living through history as she watched the changes brought by *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, environmental issues were tightly tied to emerging anti-authoritarian sentiment in the crumbling Soviet regime (c.f. Dawson

1996, Rihoux and Rudig 2006, Weiner 1999, Whitefield 2003) Sutton had her ear to the ground during these local environmental outpourings. She was working closely with scientists during the *nerpa* epidemic. She knew Grigorii Galazii personally, and she eventually published an English language translation of his book on Baikal. She paid close attention to the development of the Baikal Movement. She even marched in their demonstrations, although she did so only after asking the KGB for permission to march, so as not to risk her Soviet visa.

Still, it was not until a trip home to Britain that Sutton was inspired to devote herself fully to the environmental cause and to begin organizing the group that would eventually become Baikal Environmental Wave.

*Jennie Sutton:* In 1990, my mother was still alive, and I use to visit her in Britain every year. I just turned up there in May. It was after the Brundtland Report so the world community was becoming more and more aware of the facts, that [environmental problems] were on a different scale...that if we don't take steps to curb our use of natural resources and pollution, we are basically destroying what we depend upon – the planet.

While I was [in Britain], there was a series of television programs and films and discussions on these questions over a period of a whole week. I followed them avidly – I don't think I missed a thing. With the result [being] that I was convinced that this was Question Number One, that it needed to be taken seriously and that I had to take this message back to my colleagues here in Russia. So that is what I did.

I came back here...and in those days we had an English language club. We used to meet once a week and discuss things in English, as much as possible, and I said, “You know the situation is very serious. It is not just the Baikal region, it is the whole planet and we’ve got to turn our English club into an Eco-English club” ...They accepted the information; some left, so some didn’t continue in the English club. Some stayed, some people came and went. Over the next couple of years, some people came from outside [the Academy] – they weren’t my students, but people who heard about us. Basically, the first couple of years [there] were weekly meetings where we were, I would describe it as, basically [doing] self-education as to what was happening.

Among her students was Marina Petrovna Rikhvanova, a young scientist working in the Limnological Institute. She was one of those who stayed in Sutton’s English Club after the shift to “Eco-English.” It proved to be a decision that would change the entire trajectory of her life. She eventually became a leader of Baikal Environmental Wave and developed her career in nonprofit environmental advocacy, winning the Goldman Prize and earning the ire of the Russian state.

*Marina Rikhvanova:* I began studying English, and I really wanted to join Jennifer Sutton’s group because she is British. And it happened that I was placed precisely in *her* group, and I was very pleased. But Jennie also led a club of English aficionados where we would discuss various topics: poetry, writers,



artists, and such. Then later Jennie returned from England and said, “Everyone, from now on we will only be discussing environmental issues. Who wants to?”

But it was not long before English fell to second place among those who decided to stay in the group.

*Marina Rikhvanova:* When studying environmental problems, we immediately started to want to do something practical [to solve them]. Once you are doing practical work, you want to discuss things quickly...so we dropped speaking in English.

Leaving English behind, and branching out beyond the Academy, the group formed an officially registered independent organization called the Baikal Environmental Wave in 1992. Baikal Environmental Wave was among the first environmental organizations to register as an official NGO in the region following the Soviet collapse in 1991.

From its earliest years, Baikal Environmental Wave had a strong transnational component, and this proved to be an important draw for locals into the organization. The first members were recruited from an English language club, and the ability to interact with Jennie Sutton and other foreigners continued to provide a strong magnet for involvement. Shortly after its formation, the Wave became a host site for the European Volunteer Service (EVS), bringing in a steady stream of international volunteers. Curious locals, especially students, soon followed, eager for the opportunity to meet people from abroad, which was a rare occurrence for Siberians at the time.

*Nastya:* We had a department of foreign languages where Jennie Sutton, our star, was. And she is the reason for our interest in the movement...So I came to Baikal Wave through the English language. It turns out that I came to [environmentalism] not through biology, but through English, and Jennie, and everything around that.

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*Masha:* I was studying at the Institute for Foreign Languages and a family friend, a biology schoolteacher (and so knew the Wave), told me that there is this interesting organization and there are foreigners there with whom I could socialize.

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*Sasha:* [I was taking an exam in English and was sent to Jennie.] She would approve the quality of my translations; we had to give her a minimum of 1,000 translations. She gave me environmentalist texts, so I got into it that way...And I saw that there was a group that met with Jennie in her office to discuss them.

Although originally attracted to Jennie Sutton and Baikal Environmental Wave for the language practice, people stayed because of what the organization taught them about the environmental crisis, and they found themselves transformed in the process.

*Masha:* When I only just started at the Wave, I sat, doing some translation, and they had a planning meeting. They were discussing an activity they were

planning: to make rag bags to use in place of plastic ones. I sat and thought, “My God, what nonsense! What they are talking about is just nonsense!”...I really did love nature and I wanted to protect it, but like many of our people who love nature, I had no understanding that in your everyday life you can live in such a way (or not in such a way) so as to cause less harm. Those little things, like energy efficiency, where we get energy from and how it all works, how waste works. How it all begins with these little, simple, most basic things. I learned all this from the Wave. And in general, about social movements, about different political processes occurring in this country and in the world. I learned so much, and now, because of that, I think differently and perceive things differently.

For many of the Wave’s early members, their attraction to cosmopolitan difference became the door to a shared environmental collective identity.

As an official organization, the little band of Irkutsk environmentalists began their journey – learning what it meant to be an independent organization within a global environmentalist community. In a nation with virtually no modern history of independent organizing, they emerged from behind the Iron Curtain, ready to get to work.

*Jennie Sutton:* The Wave, right from the beginning, was a great learning experience. My feelings were acutely that this was all very exciting. *Perestroika* had been exciting. Then in the 1990s you have this collapse of everything around you, nothing in the shops, people losing their work, people going on the streets to sell things. One of our colleagues (who is now in Canada) was selling ice cream

in the street because she wasn't being paid at her institute. She was a scientist, and she was selling ice creams in the street... Society was collapsing around you, and yet we were *building* something! You felt you were doing something positive. You were creating something in the midst of this collapse. And I felt it was exciting, inspiring.

In the 1990s, Western governments and private sector foundations were eager to engage nascent nonprofit organizations in the former Soviet Union. Many of my informants spoke of conferences, seminars and trainings during the 1990s, where Western organizations would provide opportunities to local activists in "capacity building." The Soros Foundation, the Ford Foundation, ISAR, and USAID were only a few of the most notable bodies that were regularly cited by locals as operating in this endeavor. They would sponsor workshops to instruct young nonprofits in Eurasia on how to fundraise, how to work with the mass media, and how a nonprofit organization might be organized.

What is important to note about this flurry of international support for organizational development is that Russia had virtually no history of independent organizing. The Communist Party was the sole sponsor of any official activity within the Soviet Union. When Clemens (1996) discusses activists as *bricoleurs* in the creation of an organizational form, she assumes they are drawing upon an extant "repertoire" (Tilly 1978) or "toolkit" (Swidler 1986) that Soviet citizens simply did not possess. To that end, local Wave members were glad to learn Western modes of organization, to acquire new "tools" for their "toolkits." However, they did not adopt organizational forms from the West wholesale. Instead, they took advantage of their liminal position to fully explore the possibilities, carefully debating the implications of their choices.

In the 1990s, emerging from the heavy hand of the Communist Party, Irkutsk environmentalists were at their most free to imagine and implement organizational democracy – indeed, the Wave’s resulting organizational charter suggests that the shadow of the Soviet control system was their most operative influence – a “repertoire” that they were keen to avoid. The Wave’s organizational charter instituted the deeply democratic ideals of its membership. To prevent any one individual from dominating the Wave’s activities and direction, the charter dictates that there would always be three co-directors at any given time. Also, for any decision requiring a vote, a quorum comprising two-thirds of the membership must participate to ensure that the taken decision would reflect the preferences of a majority. Prior to any vote, the membership would debate the issue at hand, and, while not always achieved, the group strove for consensus.

*Lyuba:* The Wave always had clear positions. They were, of course, born with great difficulty, since all decisions were made collectively. That is, they were all discussed until they came to some coherent outcome. We sometimes had seminars that lasted the whole week. We could discuss things from morning till night. My husband used to say - God, you will die from all of these conversations!

While the Wave membership had many opportunities to participate in trainings and seminars, learning Western-style NGO professionalization, they carefully weighed what they learned against their local knowledge to craft an organization that reflected their needs and desires. With a nearly “blank slate,” they both imported knowledge from abroad and produced new forms from their own imaginings. Not only was the result structurally democratic, it also enshrined education

and advocacy as the means to social change. For some, this was considered naiveté: “We thought if the politicians just knew about these problems, they would do something about them,” as one member said to me. But that naiveté is itself suggestive of the social empowerment former Soviet citizens felt in the wake of state and economic collapse. The 1990s were a terrible time for most Russians, but for those involved in the Wave, they had never felt so free.

During the 1990s, while political institutions were in shambles and so-called “New Russians” fought their internecine battles for control of the various privatized economic assets of the old regime, members of Russian civil society used their ability to connect to supporters abroad, and to mobilize local interest in “the Other,” to create a space of social alternative at the local level. But as the country stabilized, the strength that had accrued to Baikal Environmental Wave by virtue of its cosmopolitanism<sup>25</sup> came into conflict with the growing might of economic elites within the broader field of power. When this happened, what had been civil society’s greatest asset became a threat to its public persona.

In 2002, the privately-owned oil giant Yukos was attempting to construct a pipeline to bring oil from Angarsk to the east along the southern edge of Baikal. Many people in the environmental community were against the pipeline, and the Wave stepped into the fray to try to prevent its construction. This protest was the beginning of what has since become a hostile, adversarial relationship between the organization and Russia’s economic and political elites. Sutton was still a co-leader of the group, which now vocally opposed the pipeline. But her position as a British national gave fuel to the fire of pipeline proponents.

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<sup>25</sup> Sutton rejects the interpretation that Baikal Environmental Wave was strengthened by virtue of its “cosmopolitanism,” largely because the word “cosmopolitan” carries a negative connotation in Russia. However, whether the organization would call itself cosmopolitan or not, I maintain that the attraction professed by virtually all the early members to working with international volunteers and practicing foreign language skills indicates that 1) the organization had a cosmopolitan character, and 2) that it was a powerful draw in fostering its local membership.

*Jennie Sutton*: The media in Angarsk were totally bought by Khodorkovsky.<sup>26</sup> It was just awful. And they managed to latch on to *me*, and were writing that a *foreigner* was trying to use environmentalism to prevent Angarsk from developing economically. I realized then that I could be a liability to the Wave, and I intentionally stepped out of a leadership position.<sup>27</sup>

As national industry recovered from the collapse of the 1990s, it once again emerged in the field of power to counter the push by environmental civil society against economic activity deemed damaging to Lake Baikal. Despite the evident allure that Baikal Environmental Wave garnered by its cosmopolitanism, which helped it when recruiting local support, their transnational character became suspect when pitted against economic recovery and growth. The force that allowed the Wave to develop to the heights it achieved by the late 1990s proved less forceful than an oil tycoon with deep pockets and a profitable agenda.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mikhail Khodorkovsky was once the richest man in Russia. He worked in banking and finance before acquiring Yukos, the nation's second largest oil producer, in the loans-for-shares program under Boris Yeltsin. He and his business partner were eventually imprisoned by Vladimir Putin for fraud and tax evasion, and the Russian state seized Yukos and sold its assets to state-owned Rosneft at fire-sale price. It is widely believed that Khodorkovsky was imprisoned because of the political threat he openly posed to Vladimir Putin (Zolotukhina 2013). After his arrest, trial and conviction, Khodorkovsky was considered to be a political prisoner. His case was supported by the global community and Russian civil society who generally opposed the authoritarian shift in Putin's government. However, before his imprisonment, he was himself considered a villain by many members of Russia's intelligentsia. After 11 years in prison, Khodorkovsky was pardoned by Putin in December 2013, in advance of the winter Olympic Games at Sochi. He quickly relocated to Switzerland, where he is now a permanent resident.

<sup>27</sup> Sutton's activism against the Yukos pipeline and additional pipelines that were then proposed by Transneft and Kovytko kept her in the forefront until 2005. On other occasions, Sutton cited different reasons for her resignation as co-leader of Baikal Environmental Wave, and her concern for the image problem created by her "foreignness" was only one among several considerations.

<sup>28</sup> The Yukos pipeline out of Angarsk was finally prevented by a representative of the State Committee on Environmental Protection who refused to sign off on the project's environmental impact report – a requirement for any new development at the time. She was dismissed from her post within a few months, leading local environmentalists to suspect retaliation by the power elite.

## *Summary*

The beginning of a permanent, organized environmentally-focused civil society in Irkutsk was the result of key transnational linkages. Jennie Sutton's position as an English-speaking foreigner within a scientific academy near Baikal brought a global discussion of sustainability into contact with local concern for the lake. The original members of the Wave were brought together, not principally because of environmentalism, but because they wanted to learn English from a native speaker. And later, the regular presence of Jennie Sutton and other foreign volunteers continued to draw local interest and involvement. Local attraction was to the experience of cosmopolitanism at a time when such exposure was still rare. Foreignness was the main allure; it was only through discussing environmental problems and learning about sustainable development that committed activists were made.

In the liminal space of political and economic collapse, civil society had the unique opportunity to invent itself, creating an organizational form that was radically democratic, expressing deep concern with concentrated power. Local activists learned from transnational actors and borrowed from their knowledge base, but at the same time were constantly discussing each organizational choice. Activists in the 1990s were constrained mostly by their own recollection of the Soviet past; in their ability to imagine and implement an organizational form as a "frame" (Clemens 1996), they were at their most free.

At the same time, there is the potential for foreign connections to hinder the organization. Jennie Sutton felt she could not continue in a leadership role out of fear that her "foreignness" could be framed negatively in the media to discredit the organization. However, these problems did not plague the organization until the Russian economy had begun its rebound in the 2000s,



and Russian oligarchs such as Khodorkovsky began to set their sights on new development projects. When economic power was unstable, transnational connectivity was a source of organizational strength; when that strength was sufficient to threaten a rising economic giant, it became a liability.

### ***Origin of the Tahoe-Baikal Institute***

The Tahoe-Baikal Institute began in 1989, largely thanks to the efforts of a single individual: Michael Killigrew. Killigrew was a passionate and energetic peace activist and environmentalist who was eager, not only to dream solutions to the world's problems, but also to make them into reality. He was involved in a youth conference organized by Direct Connection US-USSR that aimed to bring peace to the Cold-warring superpowers by building relationships between young people in these two countries. The conference took place in Helsinki in 1988; participants were asked to come up with ideas to promote peace, and one idea was a summer exchange for the purpose of scientific study and environmental protection.

Upon returning from the conference, the Soviet youth were able to win an audience with Mikhail Gorbachev, who supported the idea for an environmental youth exchange program. Ronald Reagan also stated his approval for the project, as did Perez de Cuellar, then Secretary General of the United Nations.

With these powerful endorsements, Killigrew proposed the program to George Deukmejian, who was governor of California at the time.<sup>29</sup> Deukmejian, in turn, recruited Bud Sheble, who headed the California Conservation Corps, and Gordon Van Vleck, who ran the California Resources Agency. The team in California considered Lake Tahoe to be their own version of Lake Baikal: a crystal clear mountain lake that residents considered a point of regional

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<sup>29</sup> According to some tellings, President Regan himself called Deukmejian and recruited him to the project.

pride in need of protection. Between themselves, the three men pulled together a board of directors and a mission statement, and the Tahoe-Baikal Institute came into existence. Sheble served as the first chairman of the board and the organization was run out of his home office in Belmont, California, overlooking the San Francisco Bay.

Killigrew, Sheble and the board of directors were prepared to develop an environmental education program at Lake Tahoe. However, for the program to be a cross-national exchange, one that would foster learning and mutual understanding on both continents, there had to be Russians willing and able to build a similar summer program near Lake Baikal. Killigrew used his contacts in the Soviet Union to seek out like-minded individuals in Irkutsk, and a delegation from the United States traveled to Irkutsk to draft a Memorandum of Understanding and to plan the first summer exchange.

An enthusiastic group from various branches of local government and scientific institutes met the American delegation at the Irkutsk airport.

*Bud Sheble:* And from that point on, the vodka started flowing. Every meal, every meeting we had, breakfast, lunch, dinner, they brought out the vodka. I like gin, but I never liked vodka. But I drank it so much over there that I started liking it! [laughs] We'd be meeting, and then someone would stand up and say, "My dear friends..." and then we'd all have to stand and drink, and then we would go on with whatever we were doing.

The Russians quickly endeared themselves to the Americans who visited them. The society and culture that the California contingent encountered in Irkutsk was truly different, and very

foreign, but the good nature, kindness and hospitality that their hosts displayed moved them deeply. Sheble recounted one occasion when the delegation was visiting a small lake in the Baikal region, looking for a site for the summer work camp.

*Bud Sheble:* They took us out to a little lake, just the tiniest thing, you could walk around it, where they thought they could make a camp for us...They took us there, the prettiest little place. There were four or five Soviet gentlemen and an interpreter. I asked the question, “What’s the name of this lake?” And they all looked at each other. Then they gathered together and you could hear them mumbling. Finally they stopped, and turned to us, and one of them said, “Tahoe!” It was absolutely hilarious.

The Russians’ hospitality remained legendary to this group of Americans, even through to their very last moments in Irkutsk.

*Bud Sheble:* At the conclusion of our meeting in the Soviet Union, we said goodbye to everybody at a breakfast, drinking their vodka, and they loaded us into a van to go the airport. And we took off. We got just outside of town and we turned a corner on this road – and there they were again, standing on the road, waving and stopping us! We pulled over and they broke out the bottles again, and we all had a drink again. And I was told at the time that was a tradition that they did that with guests. That they would run and meet them as they were going out of town, too! So as you can see we were becoming very fond of these people.

With the hard work of volunteers in Russia and the United States, the first Summer Environmental Exchange (SEE) program took place in 1991. Fifteen young people, half Russian and half American,<sup>30</sup> came together for a summer of environmental scientific study at Lake Tahoe, and then at Lake Baikal. The logistics were difficult to arrange, and at times there was worry that the visas for the Russian students to come to the United States would not be processed in time; but in the end, all the pieces came together and the program was considered to be a great success. While the object of the project was environmental and educational, the overarching interest in the program, coming out of nearly a half-century of Cold War, was the sheer novelty of bringing together young people who had been taught to think of each other as enemies, and to see how the other lived first-hand.

*Bud Sheble:* It was an incredible experience because here were these Soviet kids, and we all feared the Soviet Union, but you had Soviet kids and American kids who find out that they are the same! They cared about each other, they cared about us. It turned out to be a fabulous thing.

Against the backdrop of caring for the environment, young people were taught to care for other people living half a world away.

It was widely acknowledged that, when TBI got started in 1990, the Russians that had been recruited to the organization were ignorant as to what a nonprofit was, how a board of

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<sup>30</sup> TBI participants were not uniformly American across the years. It accepted applicants from other countries as well, although all participants were required to speak either English or Russian. However, the Russian participants (except for one) were always drawn from the Baikal region.

directors worked, or what it did; but they had enthusiasm for the idea and a strong desire for the program to succeed. Those involved spoke with evident pride of their work in building TBI-Russia.

*Nina Rzhebko:* We tried to raise the level of the program every year. To that end, we tried every year to do projects that were a little bit more difficult and a little bit more interesting... We tried to do projects that were geared toward the future not just the present. We did lots of types of projects. And we tried to do these various projects in different territories. So there were ornithological projects, soil science projects, hydrological projects, all separate. So there were projects in Buryatia, and some in the Irkutsk region, in different counties [*v raznikh raionakh*]. Sometimes we weren't even on the shore of Lake Baikal. We took a group to the wild regions of the Sayan Mountains, for example... So we had a sufficiently wide program.

From 1995 to 2005, the Russian side of the Tahoe-Baikal Institute was run by Nina Rzhebko with the support of a Board of Directors that was made up of scientists, government officials and alumni of the program. All of them gave their support and effort voluntarily, just as the board in Tahoe did.

But the SEE program of 2005 had a number of problems that proved to be a tipping point in the relationship between the US and Russian branches of the Tahoe-Baikal Institute. There were conflicts between the students and the Russian staff. Rzhebko admits that she may have outgrown youth culture and could no longer relate to the students in her charge. "I no longer

understood their jokes, their humor, their interests. And that is serious,” she said. “When you have already graduated, when you hold a high position of authority, when you have your own children, and then to see that kind of humor, dropping one’s pants and showing one’s bottom, I simply...I saw that, as time went on, I started to look down on that [*eto razdrazhat*].” When the students asked for a day off, she would scold them, telling them that they weren’t on vacation. When they wanted to buy and cook their own food rather than what had been prepared, she was offended.

*Nina Rzhebko: So we wrote a sufficiently harsh letter to the directorate of Tahoe-Baikal. I think from our perspective it was righteously harsh. Americans don’t like to be treated with strictness, we came to understand. [Amerikantsy ne lyubyat kogda s nimi rezko obrashchayutsya, a my tak i ponyali]*

The Board of Directors in the United States, who raised the funds for the Russian coordinators, announced that, rather than simply renew their contract with Rzhebko and her assistant, they would re-open the job as a competitive position. Rzhebko could give an application, but the board would be considering others for the job. Rzhebko declined to apply, as did her assistant.<sup>31</sup> In the end, another program alumna in Russia was hired by the American board of directors, and she had a vision for the program that was more in agreement with their own. This individual was presented to the Russian board as the new coordinator without their input or consent.

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<sup>31</sup> She went on to say: “I still have very, very, very warm feelings in relation to everyone in the (U.S.) board of directors. For Bob Harris, and Charles Goldman, and John Gussman, and Karen Fink, whom I really love...In general I don’t have any hard feelings for anyone.”

For the Russian board of directors, the insult was multifaceted and the injury cut too deep to be easily repaired. First, Rzhebko was beloved and respected by the TBI community in Irkutsk. The Russian board felt that, especially after all her years of service to the organization, she had been poorly treated to be dismissed so suddenly and casually. Second, there was the added insult that they, as TBI-Russia, an independent nonprofit organization, had not even been consulted in the decision to dismiss Rzhebko, nor in the hiring of the new coordinator.

*Dima:* You can ruin things in trying to improve them. There was a decision made in total that, in my opinion, was incorrectly taken. If you are talking about a private company, where the leader works for a paycheck, then you can take that person and fire them. But if you are talking about an organization where people are working fundamentally from their own good will, to take those people and say, thanks, see ya. Then those people will say, to hell with you, too! So, without any consultation, [for them] to say thank you but we don't need you anymore, the whole board left.

From the Russians' perspective, TBI-Russia had been an independent organization with its own vision and its own ambition. Its members were proud of what they had built. When Rzhebko was let go and a new coordinator was hired, they felt that their vision had been repudiated by the American side of the organization, and the American vision had been unilaterally imposed upon them. In response, the group chose to disband and to no longer volunteer their time and effort in support of TBI. While the organization remains registered within Russia as a nonprofit, it ceased to exist *de facto* after 2005.

From the perspective of the American board of directors, it was not simply a matter of whether the students were scolded for dropping their drawers in jest. The board had long been concerned about the wide dispersal of students around Baikal. There had been some instances of individual safety and security far afield that worried the American directorate. They knew that they would be held responsible for any problems that took place in Russia. Having liability without accountability worried them. They felt that they could no longer risk ceding control of the program at America's borders. For them, the dissolution of the Russian board of directors was unfortunate, but necessary. In their minds, the original vision of having two separate but cooperating national organizations was inherently flawed. From their perspective, the US was not dictating its terms to Russia imperialistically, but was reacting realistically to a flawed organizational structure. The extent to which that outcome – which Americans might call pragmatic – won the day does not equate to the correctness of one program vision over another. Rather, it suggests the sizable power differential between the efficacy of American and Russian organizers within a transnational partnership.

However, the board of directors and alumni who had been the principle organizers for TBI-Russia prior to 2005 did not simply vanish. When you follow their individual paths after the dissolution of TBI-Russia, it becomes apparent that these disparate persons have gone on to further the development of environmental science and environmental protection in the Baikal region on their own initiative. They have started new organizations and new research centers. They remain firmly committed to preserving the Baikal watershed; and now, thanks to them, there are many more groups in the local community striving toward this end. They have their own students, their own colleagues and peer networks, and many attribute their ability in crafting such initiatives to the skills they learned at TBI.



*Dima:* I am very grateful for the experience that I gained there. The experience of organizational management and international program participation. Sure, it wasn't colossal, but still significant. And the experience of organizing projects, of project management, all that has played a major role in my future career. I now run a nongovernmental science center, which I founded. I am a professor, and I run a scientific laboratory. I have a ton of people there, and a ton of projects going on. And obviously, the roots of all that grow precisely out of Tahoe-Baikal.

### ***Summary***

The Tahoe-Baikal Institute was conceived jointly by Russian and American students. It was founded as a cooperative program between two, separate, nonprofit organizations – one in California and one in Irkutsk – working on two branches of a single summer scientific and environmental research exchange program. In structure, it suggested equality between members and participants in two national contexts. But the inequality of these contexts subverted this original intent. The U.S. and Russian versions of the Tahoe-Baikal Institute had different visions for the program. But more importantly, they had differential abilities to enact that vision. Russian activists could create the program that they desired on the ground; but they were relatively powerless in their ability to counteract the vision of their international allies.

However, despite what might be called the failure of the parallel sister-organization model of the Tahoe-Baikal Institute, its implementation had a profound effect in fostering the general field of environmental activism in Irkutsk, and for the creation of Irkutsk as a space of transnational activism. Each summer for over 25 years, students from the United States and

other countries would travel to Baikal for five weeks, to become intimately associated with the lake: its geology, geography, ecology, and history, its threats, fragilities, endurances and beauty. Travel, tourism, and educational exchange breed place-based affective ties between dispersed individuals and distant points in foreign lands. Tourism is such an effective means to build transnational allegiance that foreign governments may intentionally sponsor tours to encourage these strategic affective ties (Kelner 2012). Through TBI, Baikal gained hundreds of “conscience constituents” (McCarthy and Zald 1977) – supporters worldwide who are ready, willing and able to evangelize in their own countries on the lake’s behalf.

Moreover, each year for a quarter century, a handful of local students from the Baikal region would gain the opportunity to travel abroad, and to experience environmental science and protection in the United States. They would build relationships and social networks with like-minded individuals, both in their own region and abroad, which would serve them throughout their continuing careers. My interviews with Russian participants of TBI witness repeated references to a colleague met who later sponsored a research visa abroad or who wrote a letter of recommendation for an international grant. Participants from Irkutsk forged network ties that would alter the professional landscape of Baikal environmental science and advocacy. Also, for those alumni who became involved in the planning and implementation of TBI, the experience was cited repeatedly as enormously influential in their ability to further the development of science, environmentalism and transnational collaborative work independently and autonomously, with skills that continue to serve them well into the future. TBI alumni have spawned an impressive number of new organizations and environmental initiatives in Irkutsk and Buryatia. Although the joint-project showed the negative repercussions of geographic power imbalance between partners in transnational activist collaboration, the participants in the

transnational exchange program itself nevertheless acquire important experience, skill sets, and social capital that they then use to alter their domestic environment, as they work to build a stronger civil sphere inside Russia.

### ***Origin of the Great Baikal Trail***

Although the Great Baikal Trail<sup>32</sup> organization was founded in 2002, the idea of building a long-distance hiking trail around Lake Baikal is not new. A number of Soviet writers discussed the possibility of a long-distance trail that would circumnavigate the lake: most notably Oleg Gusev and Valentin Bryansky. Some intrepid outdoor-enthusiasts during the Soviet era actually did hike, skate, ski or boat around the lake without the help of a pre-existing trail. What was new in the creation of GBT was the notion of hiking trails as an environmentalist project geared toward localist, sustainable, economic development. The Great Baikal Trail was created to organize and advocate for this environmentalist work.

This new idea owes its origin to a small handful of individuals, and chief among them is Andrei Suknev. A native of Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia, Suknev was an active youth in the late Soviet period, participating in what was then known as “do-it-yourself” tourism [*samodeyatel'nyi turizm*]. The small clubs of outdoor enthusiasts would train and equip themselves for wilderness survival. Suknev admits that even his own first reaction, when he heard of building a trail around Baikal, was that the idea was idiotic. “What would you need to build? Geez, we’re Soviet people, after all! We can hike without trails!”

But after the Soviet collapse, Suknev began to work as a tour guide. It was only as he watched and participated in the development of tourism in the Baikal region that the Great

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<sup>32</sup> The Russian name for the organization is *Bol'shaya Baikalskaya Tropa* – literally, the Big Baikal Trail – but I follow the English name by which the organization refers to itself.

Baikal Trail seemed to him to answer two pressing problems at once: low-impact eco-tourism could help to protect Baikal without sacrificing local economic development. However, it would take a dramatic shift to turn what had been a marginal do-it-yourself hobby club into the kind of tourist industry that would bring some economic self-sufficiency to the villages around Baikal, while remaining environmentally sustainable.

When he first began to proselytize the notion of building hiking trails, Suknev said, he encountered resistance from locals who were unclear what exactly he meant.

“They would say, ‘A path?’ [*marshrut?*]. And I would say, no, a path is a path. A trail is *infrastructure*; and it is specially done so that people won’t hurt themselves, and won’t hurt nature...It [represents] a better quality of life.”

Suknev converted several of his friends to the idea, but it did not progress further until it found a catalyst in Gary Cook at Baikal Watch.

*Gary Cook:* This one lunatic friend of mine came to me and said, ‘I want to build a trail all the way around Lake Baikal.’ And I said, ‘You’re a lunatic!’ But he said, ‘No, listen to me. We’d like to try this out.’ It was interesting because he and his colleagues theoretically understood what they wanted to do, but to get from the idea to actually building the trail was a quantum leap. So I felt that there has to be a very light velvet glove that [Baikal Watch] applies to this from the outside. We were going to have to give them lots of support to understand what this needs. How do you build a trail? How do you design it? How do you work with local communities and local parks? [How] to get that trail built, to make

sure it's the trail you actually want. And most importantly, how to build a trail when you have *very limited resources*.

Cook's philosophy toward American involvement in Russian environmentalism has always been that of assistance and support. Baikal Watch involves itself only upon invitation from local Russians, and it always asks the locals to take the lead. 'How can we support you, so that you achieve what it is that you want to do?' is the question that Cook poses to his Russian collaborators. He is cognizant that he is working in a foreign country and he considers Russian environmental problems and, to a degree, their solutions to belong to Russians themselves. He strives to avoid the potential for an imperialist approach to international aid and development, hoping instead to empower local activists to become leaders in their home communities.

Nevertheless, as his comment about the "light velvet glove" in the quote above indicates, Cook does have a vision for what needs to be done to see projects succeed, and his vision does guide the trajectory of the endeavor in his capacity as a helper and supporter of Russian environmentalists. When it came to the creation of the Great Baikal Trail and the shape it eventually took, Gary Cook played a central role. Suknev is rightly called the "father" of GBT, but Gary Cook is undoubtedly its "godfather."

His first action was to bring together powerful players in the Baikal region, to show them the vision, and to explain how it might be made a reality. The hope was to produce collective buy-in and to garner support for the project amongst power figures and key stakeholders in the region. With a grant from the Foundation for Russian-American Economic Cooperation, Cook and Suknev began to build their case through two cross-national exchange programs. First, in the fall of 2002, American experts working in national parks, the forest service, eco-tourism and

trail-building came to Irkutsk for two weeks to talk to their counterparts about potential and possibility for the development of eco-tourism in the Baikal region. A few months later, in January 2003, a similar delegation from the Baikal region came to the United States. The grant covered an all-expenses-paid educational trip up and down the West Coast, where the Russian representatives met with groups like Earth Corps in Seattle, and the Tahoe-Baikal Institute in South Lake Tahoe.

Toward the end of the visit, the Russian delegation was taken to a classroom in an old school near Lake Tahoe. Gary Cook instructed them that they were to talk amongst themselves and then decide whether they would try to create such a thing as the “Great Baikal Trail.” The decision to proceed, and the responsibility for the project’s implementation, would be theirs alone. Gary left the room, locking the door behind him. When the group emerged a few hours later, it did so having planted the seed for GBT.

The next question was how these trails were going to be built. Based upon American experience in trail construction, Cook had a ready answer. “I said, ‘You are going to have to introduce something very novel in Russia and that is the concept of volunteerism’ [laughs].”

The Russian word for a volunteer is *dobrovolets*, literally meaning: someone who does something in a spirit of good will. However, in the Soviet Union, citizens were “volunteered” by the government to do work projects outside of their regularly paid hours to supplement the state’s need for additional labor at particular intervals, for example during harvest season. While the word translates literally as people motivated by their goodwill, it took on an ironic, negative connotation in the Soviet Union of begrudged work, forced upon an unwilling populace. The dreaded *subbotniki* [Saturday volunteer work] helped discredit volunteerism as a concept in Russia’s post-Soviet “cultural toolkit” (Swidler 1986).

There were individuals in Russia who were ready and willing to give their free efforts toward a good cause, but they lacked an obvious outlet for their energies. As an American long-accustomed to the power and possibility that can be harnessed in volunteerism, Gary Cook was confident that such a massive infrastructure project as the Great Baikal Trail would never get off the ground without volunteer labor. The question, from his perspective, was how to overcome the cultural mismatch between Andrei's vision and the negative connotation associated with the *dobrovolets* in the Russian mind. To surmount this obstacle, Cook again turned to the enticement of cross-cultural exchange.

Gary Cook: "I said, 'Listen, let's try to be imaginative. What if we brought a bunch of international volunteers [to Baikal] and advertised it as: Come see Siberia!' Even in 2000 there weren't a lot of Westerners who had been there...[Westerners] not only want to see Baikal and do something positive, they want the real Russian experience and what better way than to hang out in a camp with a bunch of Siberians?"

Thus, foreign volunteers could compensate for the general absence of volunteerism in Russian culture as a whole. They would also serve as an incentive to recruit Russians who might not otherwise volunteer to help on the project. Locals were told they would get a two-week, all expenses paid trip to Baikal and the opportunity to meet people from all over the world, as they worked side by side to build a hiking trail in the woods. In the end, they succeeded in recruiting locals – primarily students – to join the project, and the first summer trail-building program took place in 2003. To help overcome the negative connotation associated with the word

“*dobrovolets*” and the forced free labor it implied, GBT referred to its helpers by the English word – calling them “*volontyory*.”

Although the closed-door, Russians-only discussion that took place in the school outside Tahoe had come out in favor of creating the Great Baikal Trail project, the commitment to this endeavor was still hesitant. Although convinced of the model’s efficacy within the United States, most still viewed the possibility of its success on Russian soil with skepticism. But some participants were converted to the idea and embraced it with enthusiasm. Among them was Ariadna Reida, who would eventually serve as the organization’s first executive director. At the time of the Russian delegation, she was serving as the group’s translator. She was one of the few who believed in its success. Most of the others simply could not comprehend volunteerism as a concept.

*Ariadna Reida:* The people of power who got together [in Tahoe] said, okay, we want to give it a try next summer, the summer of 2003, to do international camps, to actually build trails. They said, ‘We will give it a try,’ but nobody believed that people would actually come and volunteer for free.

With the willing, if skeptical, agreement of key stakeholders in the Baikal region, the first GBT work trip took place in the summer of 2003. To the surprise of the skeptics, the program succeeded. Volunteers showed up, and trails were constructed. Certainly there were problems and difficulties, but the response from all involved was positive. In fact, according to *Reida*, the volunteers’ chief complaint was that they were not able to work more. The paid employees in the protected territories around Baikal were so doubtful that volunteers would actually come and



work, they did not provide sufficient tools for all the volunteers. When tools were available, staff tended to monopolize them and would not share them with volunteers, because they were “tourists” and were not expected to work. But trail-building was accomplished, and those who had been skeptical of the project were falling in line behind Andrei’s vision, acknowledging its potential.

At the end of the summer, the group met again to assess the summer program, and *Reida* again served as a translator and group facilitator.

*Ariadna Reida:* There was a lot of interest and a lot of excitement about the project. It was really funny because locals were saying, ‘They actually came! These crazy foreigners, they actually paid to work!’ ...So there was some publicity, and the excitement that people came. And they came not only for the two weeks [of the work camp], they would stay and go as tourists somewhere else on the lake. So [people could see that] it was building the economy.

The group decided to continue the projects into the future, making improvements in planning and execution so that the next summer would be even better.

Young Russian students who participated in 2003 kept the spirit of camaraderie and volunteerism alive by forming a club. They began holding weekly meetings to share stories, reminisce, drink tea, eat cookies, laugh, and eventually to develop new ideas and projects. This pool of steady, volunteer-supporters changed the shape and spirit of GBT. Unlike the Wave, it would not be primarily a professional organization, relying on paid staff and grant funding. And unlike TBI, its activities would not be mostly confined to the summer months. The club became

the springboard for a new collective of steady membership. Members would work year-round, developing and conducting trainings for crew leaders and translators, planning summer projects, and getting involved in environmental education and clean-up projects wherever such opportunities arose. The pool of *volontyory* continued to grow, largely by word of mouth. The years 2005-2007 saw a huge spike in club membership. Club meetings would see upward of 40 people. Friends drew one another in, and once a part of the organization, friendship kept them there. Members would happily cite for me the marriages and the couplings that occurred through GBT. It is a thriving community of hard-working volunteers, eager to help others, to be out in nature, quick to laugh and to have a good time – their eyes on the future with optimism.

### ***Summary***

The Great Baikal Trail was long a dream of local residents around Lake Baikal; and yet its founding was closely bound up with transnational activism. Gary Cook was instrumental in the creation of the Great Baikal Trail. He was the catalyst that brought together the various parties whose support and cooperation were necessary for such a project to succeed. Key figures were lured by the free trip to the United States and, once in the U.S., they were shown repeatedly the success of an eco-tourist model of sustainable development. Although, at the final moment, Cook made it abundantly clear that neither he nor any organization in the United States would be playing a leadership role in the Great Baikal Trail, he also made possible the conditions for important gate-keepers in Russia to publicly state their commitment to Suknev's project.

Still more importantly, it was Gary Cook who pushed for what has become a central aspect of GBT's organizational character: volunteerism. It is widely acknowledged by GBT members that the project could never have gotten off the ground without the presence of

international volunteers. There was little doubt in anyone's mind that as of 2003, Russians would not have volunteered in sufficient numbers simply for the joy of building a trail, and they certainly would not have paid money to do so. The money paid by foreign volunteers allowed Russian students to attend for free. Some of the organization's most committed and involved volunteers today first attended for free and would not likely have participated without that bonus. Some even reported that they went on two projects their first summer: there was not sufficient recruitment for all the free slots available to Russians – so after completing their first project, they could immediately join another. But every year, more and more Russians have been signing up – and there are even projects where Russians significantly outnumber the foreign volunteers, despite the fact that they are now required to pay their own way. Although critical at the outset, once established, the dependence on foreign participation was diminished.

### **Organizational Form and the Field of Power**

The creation of these three organizations in Irkutsk, Russia, shows how the transnational shapes the formation of civil society. We can also see another set of influences acting upon local organizations and acting upon their life-course. The field of power operates in each of these three organizations in different ways across the post-Soviet period.

The field of power acts indirectly in the experience of the Tahoe-Baikal Institute. In any transnational collaboration, individuals and organizations participating in collaborative endeavors cannot fully ignore the inequality in their own power relations by virtue of their embeddedness in a global power structure. Members in Tahoe were not superior in commitment, scientific knowledge, or organizational skill to their counterparts in Irkutsk; but they possessed another type of power that accrued to them simply by virtue of their temporal position. Activists

in Tahoe were relatively empowered to their counterparts in Irkutsk, not by any virtue of their own, but because the field of power has a geographic dimension that spills over onto civil society. The United States, as the strongest economy in the world, provided the money needed to run the entire operation of TBI. The endorsement of American donors and participants was necessary for the program, to such a degree that unilateral action by the Tahoe board of directors was seen as entirely justified, even if it dissolved the very existence of TBI-Russia.

Transnational activist collaborators, even with the best intentions, must contend with the field of power and the geographic inequalities that it engenders in contemporary globalization.

The field of power acts more directly, albeit more subtly, on the other two cases under study here: Baikal Environmental Wave and the Great Baikal Trail. When the Wave was founded, the political and economic structures within Russia were in shambles. Yet domestic civil society was buoyed by support from abroad. The very newness of democracy and independent organizing gave individuals a sense of personal empowerment that strengthened the claims they would make upon businesses and political leaders. The 1990s were a high point for social power within the field of power, and during this period, Baikal Environmental Wave was founded and flourished.

However, the organization has suffered in the years since the early 2000s, which is also the period associated with the re-emergence of economic and political power within Russia. Some of this weakness is the result of suppression by the re-emergent political and economic forces. The example with Khodorkovsky's pipeline and the media accusations against the Wave are one example of suppression by economic elites. More examples of the Wave's confrontations with the state and the repressive tactics used against them will be discussed in

Chapter 9. But there is also reason to suggest that the recovery of the economic and political forces in Russia also altered the social desirability of strong advocacy organizations.

During this same period when Baikal Environmental Wave began its descent from its high-point in the late 1990s, we witness the emergence of the Great Baikal Trail, which proceeds to flourish. The mission of GBT is economic development through eco-tourism, and as Suknev explains above, it was the direct result of his own observations of the apparent conflict between preserving Baikal and developing economically. As the country began to establish itself in the global economy, including the international tourist industry, Baikal was facing new pressures. The Great Baikal Trail works synergistically with economic forces – making accommodations rather than demands. This style of activism is more popular and attracts more support in Russia of the 2000s.

Not only is the model of volunteerism and economic accommodation more popular with power elites in the political and economic spheres (and this will be addressed in later chapters as well), but it also resonates more with the population, particularly youth. Most of the Wave's current members are of an older generation. Their younger members often joined through their prior involvement in radical politics; already on the social fringe, they are willing to take on more confrontational advocacy work. But young people make up the majority of GBT. I asked one member of GBT why she did not volunteer regularly with the Wave. She replied:

*Katya:* The Wave has a position, and GBT... well, GBT has a family. We have all kinds of things that we do, and we don't necessarily have a stand on them. One day we are helping kids get office supplies, the next we are building trails, and then someone asks us to pick up litter and we do that, or to organize an event at a

fair. We just help each other out. And the Wave needs to have a position on whatever they do; they know what it is they are against. You know, *that* is what it comes down to: the Wave is “against,” and GBT is “for.”

But the tables were turned only 15 years prior, when the Wave was a strong and flourishing organization, while still taking their advocacy with utmost seriousness. The flexibility of GBT’s organizational model, which is perceived as positive and proactive, comes at the expense of stricter demands on the behalf of nature. The same GBT volunteer quoted above went on to commend the Wave as the better *environmental* organization, even if it is less pleasant, in her view.

Katya: They practice what they preach... They have a motion sensor to turn water in the sink on and off, and they are good about turning off the lights and unplugging computers. At the GBT office, I feel a little hypocritical, because it is an environmental organization, but the office is not environmental at all. There is even this big crack right in the front window. Have you ever noticed it? Here we are supposed to be handing out brochures on saving energy, and we ourselves have a big crack in the window going outside.

It is also worth noting the similarities between GBT and the Soviet environmental protection activities described in Chapter 3. Planting trees, cleaning litter, holding events at a fair – these were the quintessential activities of the *druzhiny* and VOOP. They are feel-good activities, and certainly very helpful. But they lack the critical element that the Wave has possessed since its early years. The success of GBT in the 2000s attests to the changed

environment within Russia – where accommodation to the current powers is preferred over assertive alternatives. The Communist Party allowed only certain types of environmentalism in the Soviet Union – those which were considered non-threatening to their power and agenda. It is telling that the organizational form that is ascendant today bears a strong resemblance to the student environmentalists of the Soviet era, while organizations emphasizing advocacy and confrontation seem increasingly untenable.

Other scholars could take an inventory of different types of organizational forms in Irkutsk from one particular year and claim that this diversity represents a proliferation of organizational niches (e.g. Minkoff, Aisenbrey and Agnone 2008). But a closer examination of the conditions during the time periods when each were founded, when they flourished and when/whether they have foundered, tells a different story. Activists do make organizations, but, to paraphrase Marx's oft-repeated aphorism, they do not make them just as they please. Activists are relatively empowered in relation to other power sources in society and in the world. When the economy and the state are weakened, civil society is at its most free for organizational formation and experimentation. They may be in such a position to create stronger advocacy-based organizations that make demands upon other powers to produce change. When economic powers are ascendant, organizations may be more accommodational, emphasizing non-threatening, cooperative projects. And activists may be relatively disempowered in what might otherwise be considered a bilateral relationship with other activists abroad by virtue of the geographic concentration and distribution of economic and geopolitical power.

## **Conclusion**

Organizational form is strategic and expressive. But it is also something that is historically contingent. Types of organization rise and fall over time, and the dominance of one form over another can tell us about the larger social structures in which movements are embedded. In this chapter we examined three of the strongest environmental organizations in Irkutsk, Russia. In their founding and in their development, these organizations were influenced by transnational actors and opened Irkutsk as a permanent transnational space, ferrying individuals between the Baikal region and the wider world. Importantly, local activists and their transnational partners are helped or hindered in their efforts by the overarching field of power.



## CHAPTER 5

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE POSSIBLE

Among the goals of transnational activism is the sharing of “best practices,” which are methods or templates for action that have repeatedly proven successful (c.f. European Commission 2014). The hope is that, in sharing best practices, weaker, younger, or less experienced organizations can avoid the pitfalls of trial and error, and in so doing, more quickly establish themselves and achieve their ends. The goal is benevolent; but good intentions do not necessarily produce good results. Scholarly investigation into the sharing of best practices has yielded important criticisms. At the extreme, the best practice paradigm has been accused of foisting particular structural conditions on the Global South that are conducive to Western neo-imperialism (Goldman 2001, 2005). But more often, best practices are faulted for ignoring local conditions and imposing a cookie-cutter solution to contextual problems that often require more subtlety in their solution (e.g. Wareham and Gerrits 1999).

In the present chapter, I will be examining an attempt at the sharing of best practices between communities around Lake Tahoe and Lake Baikal. While these two lakes have a historical relationship and have been designated “sisters,” their differences far exceed their similarities. Replicating Tahoe’s success at Baikal may be quixotic, given their unique and divergent contexts. Such an interpretation of events supports the critical literature on transnational NGO collaboration. However, I will show that the attempt to share “best practices” transnationally has a major, if frequently unacknowledged, *unintentional* effect, beyond activists’ stated goals.

In the case at hand, no particular method or skillset was diffused through the interchange between Tahoe and Baikal. What did change, though, was how local residents around Baikal thought about their own circumstances and efficacy. Transnational collaboration helped to create the “cosmopolitan vision” (Beck 2006) in the most rural of places. Russian villagers, who prided themselves on skepticism, and whose social imagination ran up against the barriers of the tried and true, experienced a mental shift when brought into contact with activists abroad. Transnational collaboration became the portal to the progressive reflexivity that is commonly associated with modernity (Giddens 1991). By their exposure to a different culture and to a milieu that respected progressive thought, Russian villagers expanded their sense of what was possible. In a country with weak civil society (Howard 2003) and a highly skeptical public (Goodwin and Allen 2006, Mishler and Rose 2005), transnational exchange created the space to imagine alternatives. Civic engagement, which had previously been eschewed, was now brought into the realm of possibility.

### **A Tale of Two Lakes**

Lake Tahoe and Lake Baikal sit on opposite sides of the world. And yet, as we have seen in Chapter 4, there is an invisible line that binds them, made manifest by the annual migration of young people from one lake to the other through the Tahoe-Baikal Institute (TBI).<sup>33</sup> The connection between Tahoe and Baikal was originally contrived by the founders of TBI: Baikal was a national priority for Russian environmentalists, and, for the purposes of building a cross-cultural cooperative environmental endeavor, their American counterparts in California thought

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<sup>33</sup> As of this writing, the Tahoe-Baikal Institute has suspended its operations, after nearly a quarter-century of coordinating its environmental education and cultural exchange schools. The invisible line that binds Baikal and Tahoe has become more tenuous with its passing.

of Tahoe as a lake in their home state that was also both beloved and in need of environmental preservation and rehabilitation.

Once the decision was made to link Tahoe and Baikal, a number of similarities became apparent to justify the selection. First, both lakes were formed through tectonic processes. They are both located in mountainous terrain that hosts many similar flora and fauna, such as coniferous forests, bears, moose and foxes. Indeed, many TBI participants I spoke with told me that the lakes are so similar in appearance that they find it difficult to tell which lake is which in their own photographs. Each lake is located on the border of two different governing authorities: Tahoe is split between California and Nevada, while Baikal lies between Irkutsk and Buryatia. Both lakes are prized for their clarity. Both lakes have seen mining and logging activities in their watersheds, although for Tahoe this threat is now only historical. And both lakes are host to recreational tourism.

At this point the similarities end. Most obviously, Baikal dwarfs Tahoe in size, as it does most lakes on Earth. When comparing the volume of Tahoe to that of Baikal, TBI members hold a golf ball next to a beach ball. Tahoe is small enough in circumference that a car can circumnavigate it in a day, whereas a trek around Baikal is not only impossible by car (because there are no roads around most of it), it would also take several days to travel the 800 miles mapping its circumference. The difference in size gives rise to different environmental hazards. Roads and development have made erosion the chief concern at Tahoe, with silt destroying water clarity and upsetting ecological balance in the relatively shallow body of water; erosion of Baikal's islands is a problem for its residents (human and non-human), but silt has little impact on the mile-deep waters and its profound clarity. Baikal, on the other hand, has been forced to face the hazards of industrial and agricultural effluvia, which Tahoe has never faced. While

Tahoe is host to some endemic species, it is not the “Galapagos” that Baikal is, with endemics by the thousand.

In addition to these ecological distinctions, there are still more profound differences in the human societies that surround each body of water. Although both lakes are dotted with cities and towns, the level of development one can expect to find in each location varies dramatically. While there are locals who make Tahoe a permanent home, the lake is better known as a rustic retreat for peripatetic, jet-setting, urban elites. Only an hour from Reno on the Nevada side, and three hours from San Francisco, with its major international airport, Tahoe is embedded in a rich network of First-World recreation. Paved and well-maintained highways connect the towns around Lake Tahoe to cosmopolitan capitals, and a steady stream of traffic in both directions render Tahoe, for all its rustic charm, a place of urbanity. As a vacation home hub for Bay Area residents, real estate around the lake can range from a median of \$150,000 in South Lake Tahoe to a median near \$630,000 in Incline Village in the north (Carey 2013). The latter also has the notorious distinction of being a tax haven for shell companies and for wealthy Californians, who claim this Nevada address as a permanent residence (Liu 2008). Even in South Lake Tahoe, where the working class congregates, and which has a poverty rate close to 20 percent, one can expect a basic level of development, which has become standard in the United States: plumbing, running water, stable electricity connections, Internet hook-ups, central heat and air, gas stations, convenience stores, and grocery stores.

In contrast, the villages and cities surrounding Baikal lack Tahoe’s sense of connectedness. There is no quick access from Moscow or St. Petersburg to the shore of Baikal. Most of the population centers along the lake are villages that seem to have changed little across the decades. Many lack plumbing. In the summer months, electricity is only sporadically

available. Accessing villages on Baikal often involves long, bumpy rides on dusty roads, in a crowded minibus [*marshrutka*] according to a set schedule, which can run as infrequently as once or twice a week. Some villages are only accessible by boat. There are two cities on the shore of the lake (Baikalsk and Severobaikalsk), but travel between them takes two full days by train. To live on the shore of Baikal is to be, not merely rustic, but remote.

Not only do the regions vary considerably in their levels of economic development, they also exist in very different political cultures. Americans have a long history of democracy, civic engagement and responsive government (Tocqueville 1981). Russians, on the other hand, hold onto certain legacies of Communism and Empire, which range from bureaucracy to corruption. Russians generally have ambivalent feelings about democracy and little faith in their government (e.g. Goodwin and Allen 2006, Mishler and Rose 2005). More often, the state is something that is to be bypassed and avoided. Given their profound economic and political differences, the human ecology of Tahoe and Baikal create two very different and distinct “life-worlds” (Habermas 1981). That they could share common strategies for addressing social problems is perhaps surprising, yet that is just what two local NGOs at each lake aimed to achieve in a joint collaborative project.

### **A Project for Mutual Assistance**

In 2012, Baikal Environmental Wave and the Tahoe-Baikal Institute received funds from the Eurasia Foundation for a year-long project that would link together three communities around Lake Baikal with organizations in South Lake Tahoe for the sharing of best practices and cooperative development. The Wave and TBI planned to reinvigorate the historic relationship

between Tahoe and Baikal while conducting research to uncover which local resources could lead to environmentally sustainable development in each of these communities.

The stated purpose of the exchange was for communities that have faced a similar situation – the need to develop sustainably due to their proximity to a protected lake – to share best practices. The grant application states that the project’s goal is “to form mechanisms for international mutual assistance for local communities, facing complex socio-ecological and economic conditions, through a vision of sustainable development in communities based in preserving the eco-systemic condition of two lakes - Lake Baikal in Russia, and Lake Tahoe in the United States.” The language of the grant suggests cooperation and the exchange of information and expertise.

In this endeavor, TBI and the Wave were enacting a strategy for development that has become paradigmatic amongst the nonprofit community in the West and amongst transnational activist networks. As problems have become globalized, so too have attempts to solve them (Smith 2008). There is a strong desire to find what works, and to share that knowledge with others in the hope that they can replicate past success (Seidman 2007). The evidence of transnational sharing of practices can be found in the “isomorphism” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) that replicates similar norms across the globe, in policy and practice (c.f. Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett 2007). Scholars have shown that NGOs are as responsible as global business or national governments for the growing isomorphism (Schofer 2003, Schofer and Hironaka 2005, Schofer and Meyer 2005). As norms become isomorphic, they then can change the practical strategies of those people whom NGOs aim to serve, furthering the hegemony that Western organizations themselves began (Elyachar 2006). Activists have encouraged the spread of certain “best practices” for labor and environmental standards amongst businesses worldwide,

although what works best for activists in achieving this outcome can vary greatly by country (Bair and Palpacuer 2012).

However, NGOs and members of the development community who are responsible for pushing global change are seldom themselves under scrutiny in scholarly inquiry (Viterna Forthcoming). There is a growing concern among scholars that, what is commonly deemed a “best practice,” may fail in ways that are culturally specific, or they may be transnationally coercive. AIDS advocacy organizations in Ghana that attempted to follow the successful media campaigns of Western nations could not convey their message in a built urban environment that differed from that of the U.S. and Europe. (McDonnell 2010). Attempts to provide clean drinking water in the Global South effectively restructure national governments and local institutions toward openness to Western corporations (Goldman 2001, 2007). Whether the problem is Western neo-imperialism or simply contextual ignorance of local processes, there is a growing concern that the “sharing best practices” may not be a particularly useful practice in itself.

This chapter will evaluate this attempt at transnational development work in accordance with the goal of mutual assistance – and will show the shortcomings of suggesting strategies irrespective of contextual differences. However, I will also show that the attempt to unite communities of difference for mutual assistance has an arguably beneficial, yet unintentional, side effect that is potentially more profound than the sharing of best practices itself might have been.

The Wave-TBI project for mutual assistance was primarily devised and developed by Marina Rikhvanova at Baikal Environmental Wave, and it was clear that her own hope in the cross-national component was to encourage Baikalsk and the villages of Goloustnoye (Boshoe

and Maloye<sup>34</sup>) to emulate South Lake Tahoe and its success in fostering sustainable geo-tourism. When I first discussed the project with her, as it was just getting started, Marina explained it this way:

*Marina Rikhvanova:* People in Baikalsk are very concerned about the paper mill closing because it has been the center of their economy. But Bolshoye and Maloye Goloustnoye had a similar situation. Most people worked for the *leskhoz* (state forestry company) that operated in that region. But when the national park formed, it became illegal to harvest wood in the territory of the park. The *leskhoz* had to scale back and many people were laid off. People in these towns generally think that a good job is a job in a big factory, like the *leskhoz* or the paper mill. They often don't see the resources and the potential that they have to develop economically in their region without some big industry. But in Tahoe, they have an economy built around tourism. They have managed protect their lake and their forests, and they still develop economically.

For Rikhvanova, Tahoe is a success story. Her aim in connecting the towns around Lake Baikal to groups in Tahoe was education and emulation. Tahoe had things to teach Baikalsk and the Goloustnoye village about the economics of sustainable tourism. Over the decades, Lake Tahoe had recovered from environmental degradation while maintaining economic viability. Residents living near Baikal needed to hear that such an outcome was possible and learn how it could be done.

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<sup>34</sup> Bolshoye and Maloye are adjectives that translate as “big” and “small.” They designate two villages: Big Goloustnoye and Small Goloustnoye. Curiously, Maloye Goloustnoye is larger in population than Bolshoye Goloustnoye (1200 and 600 people respectively). The name Goloustnoye roughly translates as “naked mouth” and it is generally presumed that the name refers to the river delta on which the two villages sit. Bolshoye Goloustnoye is situated directly beside Lake Baikal where the Goloustnoye River flows into it. Maloye Goloustnoye is located about 20 minutes upriver from Bolshoye Goloustnoye in the Pribaikalskiy mountain range surrounding the western edge of the lake. The river delta is wider near the lake, hence the designation “big naked mouth” for the village near the shore, and “small naked mouth” for the village further upstream where the delta narrows and becomes smaller.



As the project developed, however, it was clear that much more was going on than merely the sharing of “best practices.” While prior activist involvement in Baikal villages ran ashore on the apathy and skepticism that have become emblematic of post-Soviet society, the opportunity for transnational communication broke down the mental barriers that villagers had erected and opened them to the very possibility of a more active version of citizenship and engagement.

### **Cultivated Disinterest in Bolshoye Goloustnoye**

The Irkutsk *oblast* [region] was in the process of setting up two Special Economic Zones (SEZ) on the shore of Baikal. The SEZ would be an area where developers and investors could receive tax breaks and other incentives for establishing tourism and recreation enterprises in the region. Bolshoye Goloustnoye was one suggested site for the SEZ, and Baikal Environmental Wave wanted to make sure that villagers’ interests were represented in the process. They generally feared that SEZ-sponsored tourism would be environmentally harmful rather than sustainable, and hoped that Bolshoye Goloustnoye villagers would work with them to ensure that outside developers would not run roughshod over Baikal and its indigenous people. Villagers were aware of the planned SEZ. They were told that it would bring running water and a sewer system to the village, which sounded quite nice from their point of view. Mostly, they were irritated that the land that was slated for development – which, when “seeing like a state” (Scott 1998), looked like empty space – was actually prime grazing land for the village cattle. The SEZ would essentially be enclosing the commons.<sup>35</sup> While activists and capitalists disputed the best means for economic growth, the people of Bolshoye Goloustnoye simply wanted to know where

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<sup>35</sup> The SEZ planned for Bolshoye Goloustnoye was relocated to Baikalsk, to ease the economic shock to the region when the paper mill was finally closed. The Bolshoye Goloustnoye villagers may yet elide their once seemingly inevitable economic development.

they could feed their livestock. The Wave looked with foreboding at big business's appropriation of local livelihood, and they wanted to assist the residents to find a secure path forward in this brave new world.

In September 2012, Baikal Environmental Wave made a research expedition to Bolshoye Goloustnoye, and I followed to observe the process. Bolshoye Goloustnoye is a village of about 600 people the shore of Lake Baikal, approximately two hours from the regional capital city, Irkutsk, by mini-bus along a bumpy, dusty, tortuous road. I traveled there with Artur, a thin, taciturn man with dark hair, a short beard, and piercing blue eyes. With us was Tanya, a sociologist that the Wave had contracted to perform the focus groups and interviews. The country road to the village of Bolshoye Goloustnoye was beautiful, with rocky cliffs rising up on either side. The road would often follow the small Goloustnoye River and the autumn leaves that adorned the surrounding trees were golden.

The van lumbered along the winding road, lifting over one of the high hills and then descending into the river delta that opened out onto the shore of Lake Baikal. Nestled beside the delta, in a wide valley of steppe, sat the village of Bolshoye Goloustnoye. The town was made up of wooden, one-story houses, often with outhouses and small agricultural plots beside them, surrounded by wooden fences. Painted crenulations adorned some of the windows and eaves, in traditional Siberian fashion, but such sporadic decoration did little to mitigate the general dilapidated ambience of a village that mostly survives on subsistence agriculture. Cattle and stray dogs roamed freely on the dirt roads and children would ride along amongst them on bicycles, sometimes with another child sitting on the handlebars or perched on the back.

The Wave planned to conduct two focus groups and a community meeting over the course of several days in the village. The first focus group was to take place amongst students in the oldest grades at the local school (8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders; those wishing to complete their high school diploma must travel to Irkutsk to do so). Since many villages in Russia currently face the problem of depopulation, the Wave hoped to learn from the students themselves what they liked and disliked about village life, and whether they planned to return to Bolshoye Goloustnoye after completing their education.

The schoolhouse had several classrooms, each imbued with a homey feel. The walls were wood-paneled, with floor-to-ceiling windows to allow in the natural light. Back walls were adorned in potted plants. Students – boys and girls – sat in their white shirts and grey uniforms; most were alert, with straight backs and pleasant expressions, eager to please their out-of-town guests.

The focus group proceeded, and the students described the positive aspects of village life: being close to nature, on the shore of Baikal, with fresh air and homegrown food. Most still planned to leave the village, saying that there was nothing to do and nowhere to work. Among their chief complaints, which was also repeated frequently by adults in the interviews I had observed, was the lack of a pre-school in the village. When students brought up the fact that Bolshoye Goloustnoye had no pre-school, Tanya ask the students whether there was anything they themselves could do to fix the problem.

“No,” several answered, shaking their heads.

“The administration [government] should do something about it,” said a girl in a grey jumper, sitting in the front row.

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When we left the school, it was obvious that Artur was in an irritable mood. The school housed the only computer in the village, which had a slow, dial-up Internet connection. Artur told the principal he planned to keep her informed as the project developed and to invite her, the faculty and the students to future events that the Wave planned to hold. He asked for an e-mail address where he could contact them. Artur had also explained to the principal that the Wave would be building an interactive website where people living near Baikal and Tahoe could communicate with one another to share best practices and to mutually solve local problems. The principal replied that she did not have an e-mail address and that she did not see the point of an interactive Internet site.

“How can I help them develop if they themselves don’t want to develop?” Artur asked rhetorically, in a huff. “How can you not want to use the Internet?” Tanya countered that she herself did not own a television, but Artur dismissed the comparison. “A television is just a television, but the Internet...!”

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In the evening, we headed toward the village clubhouse for the adult focus group. Artur and Tanya had been on the phone for the past several days recruiting participants. Tanya wanted a minimum of ten people to attend. Tanya said, while we walked down the dirt road, that she hoped the turn-out would be better than it had been at the neighboring village, Maloye Goloustnoye, the previous week, when only five people attended. She went on to criticize the villagers as *sovki* – those Russians who are trapped in a Soviet mentality, who expected the government to do everything and showed no personal initiative.

“There was a villager in Maloye Goloustnoye who complained that the fences had not been painted in thirty years,” she told me. “So no one has painted the fences – then paint them!”

They expect everything to be done for them. And that is how it was in the Soviet Union. There was the *leskhoz* [state logging company], and it provided people with homes, it built the school, it gave people vacations. So people came to depend upon the company. It was the whole life of the town, and then it just vanished. The *leskhoz* probably built that fence 30 years ago, painted it, and since the *leskhoz* shut down, no one has touched it.”<sup>36</sup>

We arrived at the clubhouse, which was a long wooden building, painted in fading blue and green. Although it was almost 5 p.m., when the focus group should begin, the building was still locked. Only one of the invited participants showed up to wait with us by the front door. A town magistrate arrived on a motorcycle with her two year old daughter tucked into a sidecar. She opened the clubhouse for us and we all went inside.

The interior of the clubhouse was old and dilapidated. We were shown into a very small auditorium that doubled as the local discothèque. It has red plush theater seats lining the outside walls: some missing arms, others missing seats, some with torn upholstery, and all of it dusty and degraded. There was a proscenium and a stage that looked to be about two meters wide and deep.

We waited past the 5pm starting time, hoping more people would come. Slowly, a few more people trickled in. One woman, a recent retiree with short white hair, kept looking around and wiggling in her seat as though at any minute she might get up and leave. It seemed all she could do to sit there and wait. “How can we just be sitting here when there are potatoes to be dug?” she asked aloud to no one in particular.

Tanya was clearly dissatisfied with the low turnout, but tea and cookies could only occupy the guests for so long, and Artur decided to begin. He made a brief presentation about the project that the Wave was undertaking. I had heard his opening remarks shift over the course

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<sup>36</sup> I then proceeded to tell her about “company towns” in the United States, but she dismissed the possibility that America might have had anything so similar to the Soviet system.

of the trip. While he had usually begun in a respectful and upbeat tone to express the Wave's desire to help and support villagers, the resistance he had encountered hardened his approach. Now he stood before them and explained his point of view in no uncertain terms:

“The economy is changing,” Artur began. “Either the village will develop or it will dry up. Usually development happens when some fat cat [*bogataya dyadya*] comes in and pays a ton of money to build something. But we want to know what we can do here with what we have, so that you don't have to wait for the fat cat, who may or may not put money back into the village.”

After Artur's introduction, Tanya began her focus group protocol. As the focus group continued, a few more stragglers came in. All told, seven people showed up to the focus group. The last member came 30 minutes into the focus group discussion (and 50 minutes after the originally planned starting time.) She perched on the edge of the chair closest to the door. When Tanya tried to include her in the conversation, she motioned with her hand to suggest that she was only there to observe, not to participate.

Like the youth focus group, there was much complaining about the state of the village, the prospects for development, and a general pessimism about the possibility for improving the situation. These individuals were specifically invited to the focus group because they were considered to be the most “active” members of the community. But even these frequently reverted to a refrain of fatalism.

“The administration doesn't listen to us,” said the woman who had been bemoaning her un-dug potatoes earlier. “We can't do anything. We are powerless.”

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The following month, Baikal Environmental Wave held another seminar, this time in the neighboring village of Maloye Goloustnoye. The Wave members planned to bring

representatives from the Small Business Administration in Irkutsk, the regional capital, to talk about various programs and opportunities that the villagers could access to help develop small businesses. Villagers from Bolshoye Goloustnoye were also invited to attend the seminar, but all declined.

“They said it was too cold to wait for the bus,” Katya said.

“They have a point,” I replied, as the Siberian winter was now in full-swing. She shook her head dismissively.

“So we offered to have a van pick them up in front of their houses,” she went on. “We would drive around to people’s doorsteps and collect them from their homes. They wouldn’t have to wait outside at all. But they still said no. Now they said it was because the cow had to be milked in the morning.”

Until the advent of modernity, human society changed very slowly. Practices, behaviors and beliefs were passed down through the generations relatively unchanged, and authority accrued to venerable traditions. Whether it is driven by scientific revolution (Kuhn 1962), the Enlightenment’s call to critical thought (Kant 1784), or capitalism’s “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 2008), constant change is a defining feature of modernity (Berman 1988).

By contrast, villagers in Bolshoye Goloustnoye seem to have stepped out of another era. Efforts at creating change were viewed with suspicion and doubt. Even the schoolchildren believed that only the government could bring about change in the village, as in the case of the nonexistent pre-school. Not only were the open meetings poorly attended, but those who did attend put on a display of disinterest: sitting near the door and complaining that they had much better things to do than discuss economic development: they had to dig potatoes.

The activists from Irkutsk, the regional capital, brought with them their own urban “habitus” (Bourdieu 1977): one that views change as inevitable. For the Wave, one needed to keep one’s ear to the ground, to keep an eye out, to protect nature from those who would exploit it for profit. The busy bustle of modernity required constant vigilance; and networks of like-minded supporters were an important weapon for countering the agendas of the powerful. What was perhaps most incomprehensible to the modern sensibilities of Irkutsk’s activists was the disinterest their rural counterparts expressed at joining the global march of modernity. There is probably no tool as emblematic of the cosmopolitan ethos as the Internet, and yet the school principle practically rebuffed it. When discussing the tourist economy in the focus groups, most residents viewed tourists with distain. They were glad of the extra income, but expressed displeasure with the myriad ways that tourists disrupted their village life. They would not turn down the opportunity for running water, but hoped the price for such luxury would not come at the expense of their daily patterns and practices. Faced with the intransigence of nonparticipation in this rural community, Artur essentially declared to them at the start of the focus group that development was inevitable: modernity was coming to Bolshoye Goloustnoye, whether the villagers wanted it or not. The only question was whether they would be proprietors of their own guesthouses or scrubbing the floors of a large hotel owned by a Moscow oligarch.

### **The Sister-City Webinar Project**

In January, Baikal Environmental Wave and TBI embarked on the second half of their project: a series of webinar sessions to take place between groups in South Lake Tahoe, Baikalsk, and Bolshoye and Maloye Goloustnoye. Because there is only one computer in Bolshoye Goloustnoye, and the dial-up connection is too slow for video, interested participants



from the two Goloustnoye villages were picked up in a minivan and driven to the Baikal Environmental Wave office in Irkutsk for the webinar event.

*February 5, 2013*

It was still dark when I arrived at the Wave office at a quarter to nine for the very first of the webinar series. Marina and I greeted each other as I shed my layers and hung them on the coat stand.

“We have only two people from Bolshoye Goloustnoye and no one from Maloye Goloustnoye,” Marina told me, with a grin. I was perplexed as to how I should react, as I often was when Marina would deliver bad news with a cheerful smile. She then directed me to the classroom in the back of the office. I saw a number of chairs set up in a semi-circle facing a computer monitor, with a microphone and speakers attached. There was an embarrassment of staff in the Wave office: three times the number of employees as there were program participants. In addition to the regular Wave staff, two scholars from the Center for Independent Social Research (CISR) were on hand to assist, and a journalist had been recruited to document the event. Marina encouraged everyone to help themselves to the coffee, tea, muffins and cookies brought for the occasion.

The two guests from Bolshoye Goloustnoye sat in the chairs, facing the computer uncertainly. One was a woman – Zina – in her late 60s probably, with short, spiked, white hair. Beside her sat a man named Pyotr who looked to be in his 50s. His long black hair was streaked with grey and was pulled back in a ponytail. He had dark rimmed glasses and a goatee.

Olga, a sociologist with CISR, was serving as moderator and translator. She thanked the two from Goloustnoye for coming and explained to them what the webinar would be about. She

told them of the similarities between Baikal and Tahoe. “Thousands of people live in Tahoe, and they get millions of tourists. Two million people live on Baikal, and we get thousands of tourists. But tourism is something that we have in common. So we can talk about tourism here and tourism there.”

“It will be interesting to listen to it,” Zina told Olga, although she looked very far from interested, her face buried in a gardening tabloid she had brought with her.

“Before we begin, let’s talk about the questions that will be raised during the webinar,” Olga continued. “What are the key assets or tourist attractions in your region that you can discuss during the webinar?”

The two guests sat mute for a moment. Then Zina shrugged and said, “The Dry Lake.”

“What is the Dry Lake?” Olga asked.

“It’s a lake in the forest that appears every four years,” she answered, and then was silent.

“So, every four years there is a lake. What happens the other three years?” Olga prompted.

“It’s just a field.”

“So it’s pretty?”

“Well, yes, it’s pretty.”

“Ok. There is the Dry Lake. What else? What other things would attract tourists to Bolshoye Goloustnoye?” Olga asked.

“Lake Baikal,” Pyotr said. “In the winter, you can ice skate on the lake.” Given his prosaic answer, one might have countered that Baikal is not unique to Bolshoye Goloustnoye. Nor did the village have any particular corner on the market for ice skating. Olga’s expression and tone suggested disappointment and mild frustration with their disinterest, but she proceeded

with the project program and prepared to begin her role as moderator and translator for the Irkutsk site of the webinar.

The Wave had selected Google Plus as the hosting software for the webinar. All three locations could be seen at once as small, inset panels at the bottom of the screen, and users could take turns enlarging them to the full screen size. Olga opened the screen from Tahoe, and the two guests from Goloustnoye inhaled sharply.

“So many people!” Zina murmured, and indeed, with about eight attendees, there were noticeably more Americans seated around the table in Tahoe’s conference room than in either Irkutsk or Baikalsk, which had two and four people respectively. There was also a small squeal of delight when one of the Russians noticed a large map of Lake Baikal on the wall of the conference room in Tahoe.

The conversation got started. We began with introductions, going around to each individual at each site. Dialogue was understandably slow, since everything needed to be translated into either English or Russian by the translator that each site had on hand for that purpose. But despite the continuous need for translation, the conversation soon became more involved.

The Tahoe residents came in with an agenda. They had a model of development that they clearly wished to convey. The head of a local nonprofit, a woman with long, silver hair, described Tahoe’s program for sustainable tourism.

“Our region is embracing geo-tourism as a way of life,” she explained, without defining what geo-tourism is.<sup>37</sup> “First, you have to identify those assets that are unique to your area.” Here she produced a map of Tahoe with several points indicated upon it. “Then we develop

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<sup>37</sup> Geo-tourism is defined by the National Geographic Society as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.

these places on the ground, so we can show tourists these particular places.” Here, she showed information about a number of “adventure tracks” that had been developed for tourists to follow. “We use a trinomic model in developing these tracks that includes social organizations, private businesses and the government. Nonprofit organizations host the adventure and provide the guides, the state provides access to these special places, and then the local businesses benefit by providing the food, equipment, and transportation. And everything we use in an ‘adventure track’ showcases the local – it’s all local. Local food, local transportation, local kayaks, local businesses, local biologists. Everything is here. Nothing is imported. There are no cars [involved].”

While she listened to the accented Russian proceeding from the translator in Tahoe, Zina nodded her head vigorously.

“Visitors have incredible experiences,” the woman in Tahoe went on. “It’s fun, it’s educational, and it’s low-carbon... It’s sustainable.”

Next, the conversation turned toward tourism potential in Baikalsk. There was a doctor in attendance, employed by the local ski resort, who harbored dreams of developing medical tourism in Baikalsk through alternative spa therapies. The Baikal watershed is seismic, with hot springs throughout the region. This doctor planned to develop thermal springs therapy, and blue clay spa treatments with local muds in Baikalsk. He presented this as a means to sustain tourism outside of the regular ski season, but noted that it would be a major economic undertaking and would require a great deal of collaboration and capital to succeed.

After hearing about the well-developed program of adventure tracks in Tahoe, and a thermal spa in Baikalsk, it was time for the two villagers from Bolshoye Goloustnoye to speak of their own tourist attractions. They spoke of the Dry Lake and the skating trails, as they had with

Olga before the webinar; however, this time they did so with more enthusiasm. Zina described the Lake as a magical, mysterious place that everyone should come and see. She talked about its healing properties and the legends surrounding it. She seemed to think the site more worthy now than before the webinar. Pyotr talked positively about the idea of creating an ice skating trail, and continued to speak about the potential of ice skating tracks even after the conversation had turned to the difficulties of tourism and the problems it can bring. Their pessimism had morphed into interest, positivity, and participation.

The conversation proceeded nicely until this point, and it seemed that the three sites were glad to listen to one another's issues and ideas. But discussion then took a sudden turn for the worse. One of the pre-designated questions asked of each community was to discuss various environmentally-friendly technologies that they used in tourism, and the drawback to cross-nation collaboration became immediately apparent.

"Embassy Suites is a 400 room hotel in South Lake Tahoe," explained one of the community leaders there. "They managed to cut costs by \$500,000 per year based upon environmental upgrades." She explained that the hotel now composts all its food waste, and how it instituted a recycle-reuse program that helped save to money.

"But one of their biggest expenses was laundry," the woman went on. "So they bought new, efficient, ion cleaners, which are modern washing machines that use little energy, little water, and no soap. They use no soap and no dryers!"

The participants in Russia looked back at the screen blankly. The "best practice" offered by Tahoe in this instance was so divorced from their own experience that the conversation seemed to shrivel and die. The villages of Goloustnoye have no plumbing –the schools and hospitals have outhouses. Washing machines themselves were fanciful, let alone ion cleaners.

Even in Baikalsk, which is an industrial city, one can see clothes hanging out to dry in sub-zero temperatures.

Someone in Baikalsk muttered something about a solar panel somewhere in the city.

“Our technology is simpler,” Zina answered when it was her turn to talk about “alternative technologies” in Bolshoye Goloustnoye. “Our leftover food is given to the cattle. And we use only fallen trees for heating the house, rather than cutting trees down.”

No one in the webinar was directly helping anyone else at this moment in any way. Bolshoye Goloustnoye had no use for Embassy Suites and its ion cleaners. People in Tahoe only heat their homes with fire for the aesthetic, and they certainly would not be giving food waste to non-existent livestock. Baikalsk hovered somewhere in the middle. As a factory town, they had central heating, so felling trees was not a chief concern of theirs. But neither would their solitary solar panel do much to impress the Americans.

To bring the conversation back onto mutual footing, one of the Russians in Baikalsk asked the Tahoe residents to tell him about snow-shoeing, which is a sport seldom seen in Russia. The Americans obliged, talking about their adventure tracks, and how local businesses will rent out snow-shoes.

“What about ice skating in Tahoe?” asked Pyotr, seeking to include Bolshoye Goloustnoye in the conversation.<sup>38</sup>

“Tahoe never freezes,” the Americans answered in once voice, resulting in raised eyebrows from the Russians who live by Baikal, where winter ice is more than a meter thick.

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<sup>38</sup> The ecosystems surrounding Lake Baikal vary substantially. Baikalsk has a great deal of snowfall. In the winter, it mounds up for several feet. Baikalsk is home to a mountain ski resort because of the quantity and quality of its snowfall. Bolshoye Goloustnoye, on the other hand, receives the greatest number of sunny days for any place in all of Russia. When snow does fall, it is often powdery and quickly blows away, off the dry steppe, on the strength of Baikal’s wind. Ice skating is a common sport Bolshoye Goloustnoye, but skiing and snow-shoeing are impossible there.

“We have ice skating in Truckee,” said one woman referring to a city not far from Tahoe.  
“But it’s indoor.”

“Come to Bolshoye Goloustnoye!” the two residents invited their foreign correspondents with enthusiasm. “We have the biggest ice skating rink in the world!”

And with this friendly invitation extended, the first international webinar between Baikal and Tahoe drew to a close.

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Bolshoye Goloustnoye had a reputation amongst the Irkutsk activists involved in the project for its passivity and intransigence. Invitations to participate in events were inevitably met with reluctance and questions like: “Why are we having a meeting when the potatoes need to be dug?” or, “How can we travel to Irkutsk when the cows must be milked in the morning?” There were a few active members of the community, but the general public in this village of 600 souls tended to enact an almost ritualized avoidance of involvement. It was that performance of disinterest that brought Zina to press her nose to her magazine and to tell Olga that the conversation would be interesting “to *listen* to,” as though to emphasize that she was there to hear and not to participate. She would attend, but still keep herself at a distance. Such insouciance is also the likely reason that there were so very few people from Goloustnoye in attendance for the first webinar.

But during the webinar, there was a marked change in the participants from Bolshoye Goloustnoye. Their cultivated disinterest failed them when faced with the active interest of Baikalsk and South Lake Tahoe. In the village, one garners a degree of respectability from suspicion and stubbornness, but during the webinar, respect was conferred on those who were progressive: to those who were attempting to improve their communities – and especially to

those who had succeeded in some small way to make change. Suddenly, members from Bolshoye Goloustnoye felt the need to tout their potential skating trail, to talk about their Dry Lake with more gusto. It was the only thing that saved them from the mortification of having nothing to say when, in a new social milieu, the standard for respectability had shifted dramatically *toward* involvement.

However, the transformation that occurred amongst the participants in Bolshoye Golousnoe was not merely one of lip service, nor was it solely geared toward saving face. Simply being exposed to another context, one where progressive thought was validated, seemed *to alter the legitimacy of activism and community involvement* for the villagers. Both participants listened attentively, and Zina would nod her head on occasion, signaling that she heard what the other participants were saying, and that she liked what she heard. By the end of the conversation, both participants from Bolshoye Goloustnoye were fully engaged, offering an enthusiastic farewell.

After the webinar, Zina behaved differently. She had long since tucked her newspaper away, and now she wanted to talk, to work through the ideas and the experience. The two guests from Bolshoye Goloustnoye showed a reluctance to leave the Wave's office after the seminar. They wanted the conversation to keep going, telling the staff what they thought of all they had just heard. Indeed, the desire to de-brief was so evident that the Wave decided in future webinars to formalize it and hold a post-webinar discussion as part of the webinar process.

Importantly, the effect of this cognitive transformation extended beyond the webinar itself. The sense of interest and efficacy did not stop at the door of the Wave's office. Reports of the webinar spread, and at each subsequent meeting in the series, more and more people were in attendance on the Russian side of the screen. There were six webinars altogether between



Irkutsk, Baikalsk and Tahoe, and the general trend was toward increasing attendance in Russia. Essentially, transnational contact altered the thought-processes of those participating, shifting mind-sets away from fatalism and apathy and toward possibility and involvement.

In addition to raising interest in participation, the project also influenced people's sense of efficacy in the face of social problems. The webinars became spaces where stumbling blocks that had seemed insurmountable became collectively conquerable. Once in a mindset of efficacy and agency, problems got solved. During the webinar that discussed poverty, a woman with a guesthouse in Bolshoye Goloustnoye, Galina, talked about putting in a new pit toilet and then being fined 130,000 rubles (US\$4,334) because she did not have proper documentation for it. She described her difficulties with the state bureaucracy that regulates business and concluded, saying, "I'll have to work on the black market, because I just can't deal with what it takes to work officially."

This type of comment is common in Russia. Anthropologist Nancy Reis (1997) refers to this discursive category as a "lament." In her ethnography of discourse in the late Soviet period, she documented the cultural tendency to describe at length the problems and difficulties people face, particularly at the hands of an incompetent and unresponsive state. An important quality of the "lament" was its divorce from any discussion of problem-*solving*. This litany of suffering was not geared toward finding an avenue to relieve the suffering – it was simply a discursive ritual: to proclaim a lamentation. The lament has continued to persist in Russian culture well past the *perestroika* period wherein Reis documented it, and normally, Galina's complaint would have fallen squarely in this tradition.

What was different was what happened after her lament. The Russians in the room began to try to help her overcome the obstacles she described. They asked her questions about how her

business was classified and made recommendations for what she could do. Among those present was a woman from the Irkutsk Small Business Administration, and she passed her card to Galina, saying she would be glad to help her work out her documentation problems and point her in the direction of grants and resources geared toward small entrepreneurs to make the toilet and other improvements more affordable. The two met up and continued talking after the webinar.

In another occurrence, during a post-webinar de-briefing, participants from Bolshoye and Maloye Goloustnoye began to discuss about the growing litter problem that has accompanied the rise of Baikal tourism.

“I’m ashamed of the mentality in our country,” another woman piped in. “We have volunteers come to pick up litter. And not just volunteers: international tourists will pick up litter and bring it to me. But our Russian people just drink and toss the bottle.”

Again, despite the tone of the comment, which suggested a lament (and to which the appropriate response is a sad shake of the head, a click of the tongue or another lament), those at the webinar began to think of ways that the problem might be fixed.

“My souvenir shop could start a program: bring a bag of trash and get a free souvenir!”

The webinars provided a space apart from the everyday where possibilities could be envisioned and expanded. In the third webinar on poverty, a woman attended in Baikalsk who owns her own restaurant.

“We started with four people, and we now employ between 70 and 100 people, depending on the season. It is hard to do business because of high taxes and expenses, but we pay good salaries. We also do charity work. We built a church with our contributions. We also regularly provide free meals to children in a local school. We are Russian, we are a strong people, and we just have to work to believe in our work.”

At the end of this speech, the participants in Irkutsk from Bolshoye and Maloye Goloustnoye burst into applause. They had been listening with rapt attention throughout, exchanging nods or approving glances with every point the speaker raised. They were impressed, not only with the success of the restaurant, but especially with the apparent civic virtue displayed by the local entrepreneur – providing wide employment, with a “good salary,” feeding local school children for free, and building a community church.

During the group discussion following the webinar on poverty, the very first comments were about the restaurant.

“Let’s organize an exchange so we can meet in person,” someone from Bolshoye Goloustnoye said. “At least between us and Baikalsk. We can send delegates there, and they can come here. Especially the woman with the restaurant.” The others nodded energetically and added that they also would like the opportunity to see the restaurant and learn more about it. For a population that in previous circumstances would find a multitude of excuses to avoid attending seminars or meetings, it was a radical departure for the same group to suggest such an exchange of their own initiative. For a group that would often complain of the difficulties in traveling to Irkutsk, or even the next village over, the excitement about a field trip to distant Baikalsk was out of the ordinary, and was only made possible by the inspiration provoked by the transnational webinars.

### **Consuming the Other**

The promise of transnational collaboration is in the creative thought that such interchange can bring. However, not all parties come to the table with the same expectation for benefitting from the experience. Indeed, in this respect, the most developed country can be at a

disadvantage. Inequality in expectation was most evident at the fourth webinar, which covered the topic of food.

When the Tahoe participants discuss food, they are chiefly concerned with issues of environmental protection, and it derives from the American intelligentsia's growing distaste for agribusiness. The combination of chemical pesticides and herbicides, the mechanization of farm work, advances in trucking and shipping, the volatility of land and food prices, and vertical integration of the food sector allowed for the rise of massive industries in food production. A century ago, the United States was mostly agricultural, and many Americans worked the family farm. Today, only 2 percent of Americans claim to be farmers. Books like Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* have become best-sellers, driven by the growing insecurity that Americans feel, being divorced from the production of their sustenance.

For environmentalists especially, agribusiness has worrying side effects. Agricultural chemicals have repeatedly raised alarm due to their negative ecosystemic consequences, from DDT for the bald eagle in the 1960s (Carson 1962), to Gaucho for bee colony collapse in the present (Suryanarayanan and Kleinman 2014), not to mention their potential impact on human health (e.g. Horrigan, Lawrence and Walker 2002). Moreover, many U.S. environmentalists are concerned about the carbon footprint of their diet. "Food miles" is a term used to encompass the distance travelled by the beef or broccoli or rice that ends up on a person's plate (e.g. Weber and Matthews 2008). To counter the negative effects of agribusiness and food mileage, a movement has grown up in cities in the Global North to bring food production closer to home. Urban agriculture and community gardens are growing in popularity as the educated elite strive to eat organically grown, local produce. Farmer's markets have seen a renaissance in recent years.

Community-supported agricultural cooperatives are on the rise. Such were the food concerns that motivated the webinar participants at Lake Tahoe.

Russia has followed a similar trajectory as the United States, moving from an agricultural nation at the turn of the last century to an industrial/post-industrial economy at the beginning of the present; however, there is a major difference between the two countries when it comes to the production of food. Although the Soviet industrial project required the creation of a proletariat from the peasantry, the practice of domestic agriculture was not lost in the Soviet Union as it was in the United States. Collectivization and food production *po planu* [according to plan (as opposed to the market)] resulted in problems that ranged in severity from famine to waste, from scarcity to spoilage. To address food problems, and to serve as an incentive to the state's citizen-employees, companies began to distribute a parcel of land to workers of certain tenure: a *dacha*. Usually an hour or two from the city by commuter rail, these rural plots would host a primitive cabin and garden that would grow flowers, vegetables, berries and sometimes even fruits. Soviet Russians would spend their summer evenings and weekends working the land, and the yield would produce enough both to feed themselves for the summer and to preserve food for the winter.

About 40 percent of urban households possess a *dacha* (Clarke 2002). Thus, even urban residents maintain the art of subsistence agriculture. *Dachas* served to maintain fresh food supply regardless of the vagaries of planned production or periods of economic crisis in the market economy. The extent to which Russians make use of subsistence agriculture generally follows the rise and fall of economic well-being in the country as a whole (Southworth 2006). Residents in Baikalsk and Bolshoye Goloustnoye are no different in this regard. When the paper

mill suspended its operations in 2008, many people began selling dacha-grown strawberries<sup>39</sup> on the side of the road to bring in extra money. While villagers of Bolshoye Goloustnoye had always maintained their own agricultural plots, these were not their main subsistence in the Soviet Union, when most residents worked for the *leskhoz*. When Bolshoye Goloustnoye was incorporated into the Pribaikalskii National Park, the logging industry shut down, and what had been the villager' supplementary agriculture changed to their chief occupation.

When the Russians and the Americans came together to discuss food, their unique histories limited the kind of assistance that could be offered. The Tahoe interest in food was philanthropic and philosophical, but it was not existential. Their approach to food was that of a conscientious consumer. For the Russians, self-sufficient food production was considered both necessary and good. Given the short growing season, Russians are also accustomed to buying food that has travelled many miles. Any fresh produce purchased in winter has been shipped in from China or Central Asia – and with winters that can reach forty degrees below zero, there is no easy way to shorten those food miles. Instead, Russians emphasize that, while it is necessary to ship food in winter, one's own produce is always preferable.

Given their preoccupation with food miles, the participants in Tahoe began the webinar by stating their desire to grow food in Tahoe, but the impossibility of such an endeavor.

“Almost no one up here grows any food,” one Tahoe resident explained. “Quite a few people have tried to grow veggie gardens, but they don't succeed.” The residents of Tahoe were convinced that the heavy environmental regulation protecting the lake from erosion and run-off

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<sup>39</sup> The climate in Baikalsk is uniquely beneficial for strawberries in that region. In one of its many attempts to help Baikalsk find alternate revenue to operating the paper mill, Baikal Environmental Wave helped Baikalsk start an annual Strawberry Festival, that is now a proud tradition, attracting visitors from Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude and neighboring towns.

would render domestic agriculture impossible. But they went on to say that Tahoe makes up for this lack with farmer's markets and CSAs, where food only travels 50-200 miles.

Russian participants were pleased to learn about CSAs and ways to organize the sale of rural produce to nearby urban dwellers. However, they also wanted to share their own knowledge of domestic agriculture with the Americans in Tahoe. Russians in both locations talked with enthusiasm about their fresh eggs, chickens, berries, and vegetables. Residents of Baikalsk even brought examples of fish, nuts and homemade jams to show proudly to the Americans in Tahoe. They explained how to start seeds indoors in late winter to circumvent the short growing season and how to preserve freshly grown produce to eat in the winter.

One man from Baikalsk discussed his permaculture garden, which he framed as useful to the residents of Tahoe and their environmental difficulties.

“We have the same problems as Tahoe, with little top soil and a cold climate,” he said. “But I read an American magazine a few years ago about gardening, and there was all this information on permaculture. Now I have an organic garden, making use of an organic landscape design. Fruit trees are not common in Siberia, but I have managed to grow apples and pears, apricots and cherries. They produce fruit for us, and more left over, so we can feed our friends. I also use the garden to educate people about organic gardening and permaculture. I invite people from the local campgrounds and hotels. Every year, the students at Tahoe-Baikal Institute come as guests to my house and tour my garden. We also grow saplings and flowers that are used for landscaping in the city. We do all this organically, and we only have 1/3 of a hectare [less than an acre].”

This man combined the Russian tradition of domestic agriculture with ideas on permaculture that he imported from an American magazine. His experimentation had proven

successful, and he was eager to share his knowledge and experience with the representatives in Tahoe. However, they did not seem interested in learning from Russia's experience. Despite their rare access to expert domestic gardeners and subsistence farmers in a similar ecosystem, they continued to write off the very possibility of homegrown produce. The usefulness of this best practice was as lost on their sensibilities as ion cleaners had been for those in Russia.

Instead, the food webinar served to reinforce the axiomatic expression of multicultural appreciation: an exchange of recipes. In multicultural America, the Other is domesticated and incorporated via gastronomy (e.g. Appadurai 1988). Urban dwellers can display their worldliness and tolerance through adventurous cuisine. They can imagine themselves partaking of a culturally authentic experience when ordering Vindaloo or Pad Thai, from the safety of a restaurant that is expressly created for the purpose of Western consumption (Long 2004). Food offers a "banal cosmopolitanism" (Beck 2006:10). So too did the Tahoe residents seek display their appreciation of Russian culture by reducing it to food. The one question that Tahoe residents asked of Russians with the intention to learn a "best practice" from them was: how do you cook cabbage?

"We would like to know how to cook cabbage," a woman in Tahoe asked. "I think cabbage would grow well here, but Americans don't eat cabbage, mainly because we don't know how to prepare it." Were she ever in Russia as a guest or tourist, she said, she would like to eat Russian cabbage.

The grant project that supported the webinars was based upon the principles of exchange and cooperation. But as the project progressed, it became increasingly evident that the concept of mutual benefit was itself not mutual. American participants were glad to talk about their own



work, and they were always glad to hear what their colleagues in Russia were doing. But there seemed an implicit expectation that one party was there to provide the best practice, and the other was to receive it. Whether it was the trinomic model of geotourism or the establishment of CSAs, Americans came prepared with programs to impart. There was less evidence that they brought any expectation of *receiving* help from Russia. While that may be an accurate assessment, given the different levels of development between the two regions, the expectation itself may have forestalled learning; it may have prevented a similar expansion of mental horizons in Tahoe, such as happened in Bolshoye Goloustnoye. While transnational activist collaboration was able to bring to rural villages the experience of cosmopolitanism, the routinization of cosmopolitanism in the developed world prevented them from experiencing the opportunity for wonder that comes with encountering difference.

### **What Is In It for Them?**

While webinar participation in Baikalsk and Irkutsk continued to grow, it was waning in Tahoe. It became clear that the participants on the Tahoe end of the conversation were almost exclusively composed of individuals who spearhead local nonprofit organizations and who were invited to participate for one particular subject of discussion. Certainly the same was true for individuals in the Russian sites as well – the man with the permaculture garden did not come to the food webinar by chance – but there were also those people who kept coming back to the webinars regardless of the subject matter. These were people eager to learn what was going on in other locations and excited or inspired by the ideas that were shared. In Tahoe, it seemed the only repeat attendees were the organizers from the Tahoe-Baikal Institute, and this gave the impression that while these participants were glad to talk about their own programs, they were

otherwise uninterested in their sister lake across the ocean. The lack of comparable “repeat attendees” on the American side was noted by Russian participants with concern. Were the Americans engaging in exchange, or was it merely a paternalistic charity they offered, sharing their assumed greater wisdom with their imagined inferiors?

The penultimate webinar discussed the problem of retaining young people in the towns, of developing activities and employment opportunities for youth so they would not move away to larger cities. This session was the most populated of all the sessions in Baikalsk, and was attended by a number of young people themselves who had learned about the webinar from their teachers or parents. One attendee was a pretty, blonde girl in her late teens. In the post-webinar discussion, she said that she wished students in Tahoe had attended the call on the American side so that they could have talked. Everyone else nodded and agreed.

“We had young people here, why didn’t they have young people there?” asked one of the adults with a critical tone, who had been a repeat participant in the webinars. “They just brought their NGOs and teachers. If you want to talk about problems of young people, then you have to talk *to* young people.”

Again, in the spirit of the webinar and its active, problem-solving and initiative-seizing ethos, participants began brainstorming ideas to connect young people in Tahoe and Baikalsk. Someone said that a youth exchange should be part of the sister-city relationship. Others thought it would be cheaper to have a display in each of their schools where they could post photos and stories about one other. One popular idea was to have groups of students in each village plant a tree on the same day in honor of each other, then send images and information about the trees back and forth as they grew: that way, students would be caring for nature locally while imagining their brethren globally.

While the post-webinar discussion carried forth the optimism and initiative that the webinar space tended to foster, doubts lingered over whether the wealthy, progressive, democratic Americans were actually interested in their Siberian counterparts, other than as a fleeting curiosity.

*February 25-26, 2013*

Our hotel in Baikalsk resembled a warehouse from the outside. The inside did little to mitigate the resemblance. The lobby was white and open, only sparsely furnished with a sofa and concierge desk. The lights were kept off in any part of the hotel that was not in use, and the corridor that sank back from the lobby was black and forbidding. After checking in, it was down this corridor we went, stopping at the one door that radiated light from the inside. The room contained four twin beds with mismatched sheets in flamboyant designs.

“Ooo, I was the zebra bed!” Katya announced with enthusiasm, claiming the animal print sheets as her own. The rest of us lumbered in and dropped our belongings. We pulled two chairs together and improvised a table to quickly eat dinner. We had homemade *blini* [Russian pancakes] with ground beef and rice stuffing, a spicy carrot salad which we ate out of the jar, sesame seed bars, and bread with jam. For dessert, Katya bought cookies that were molded into the form of cats.

“I thought you were a vegetarian,” Artur teased her, as she gleefully bit the head off one of them.

It was in this hotel that the Wave was holding a closed meeting in preparation for the last videoconference in the sister-city project. The last webinar was supposed to discuss the “sister-city” relationship between Tahoe and Baikalsk, and how that relationship could be reinvigorated.

The Wave invited select individuals who had been active in the formative years of the relationship between South Lake Tahoe and Baikalsk as “sister cities”<sup>40</sup> to talk about their experiences. When visits to Russia were cheap and grant money flowed plentifully to help integrate societies long separated by an Iron Curtain, there were repeated delegations sent in exchange between Tahoe and Baikalsk. The alumni of these various exchanges gathered on the second floor of our small, warehouse-style hotel in Baikalsk to discuss that period.

The second floor lobby where the meeting took place was cold and dimly lit, but very large with a high ceiling. We set up chairs to form a circle with the couches and armchairs already in the pink pastel room, and guests started trickling in. There were 12 individuals from Baikalsk, joining Marina Rikhvanova, Katya and Artur from the Wave. At first there was simply pleasant discussion and reminiscences about past exchanges. Then Marina Rikhvanova brought the group to order. She organized the conversation around four questions: what they did in the past, how they had benefitted, why the relationship ended, and what they might like to see happen in the future? For each question, she posted a sheet of flip-chart paper and stood ready with a magic marker to list the group’s responses.

The members described four exchanges that took place. One was geared toward school children, one was for city administrators, and two were professional exchanges, including for local artists, two of whom were among the 12 people present.

“It was the 1990s, so people had never seen anything like it,” said one of the men. “No one went abroad back then.”

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<sup>40</sup> In Russian, the term is “brother-cities,” and the conversation began with the group musing on the culturally distinct gendering of inanimate objects, such as cities.

“I remember how shocked those Americans were when they saw Siberia for the first time,” said one woman who had hosted exchange guests. “They learned three new words: *salo*, *vodka* and *moroz*! [lard, vodka and frost!]”

“I also remember the shock *we* had when returning to Russia after our trip to the United States,” a soft-spoken man added.

“Ugh! Yes,” another woman chimed in. “The airport! As soon as we arrived in the airport in Russia, there was this smell, and everyone was dressed in black, and no one smiled.”

“I remember when the school kids came back, they came to me because I worked in the city administration, and they asked me, ‘Why is it not like that for us here?’” The small woman with short hair and glasses seemed overcome with emotion remembering those young people who wanted answers to questions about their country’s unequal development. Marina turned to the posted paper and wrote: “Kids see the world,” on it under the list of benefits resulting from sister-city exchanges.

“What were the other benefits of the exchange?” she asked the collective.

“Learning a foreign language,” one participant said.

“It improves the image of the city,” said another. “Baikalsk could be known internationally.”

“And not just as a place with the smelly paper mill!” the black-haired woman added.

After a pause, one of the artists spoke up. “It created a new level of discussion,” he said. “It fostered a more intellectual level of discourse.”

The other artist, a thin man with a bristly brown moustache, then spoke up. “And there were even financial benefits. Several of my colleagues and I showed our work at a gallery in America and we even made some money on the event.”

The question was asked what happened to the partnership, and the consensus opinion was that the economic crisis in 1998 and the election of Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush in 2000 altered the priorities of both countries and made financing such trips and exchanges more difficult.

Then Marina asked what they would like to see out of a renewed sister-city relationship, and people made many suggestions on various activities would enjoy. But when Marina asked for more concrete steps that individuals might take to bring such activities to the next level, the conversation became stilted. The hesitancy did not result from laziness, lack of faith in efficacy, or an unwillingness to take responsibility for implementing the projects. Instead, it seemed directly tied to a concern amongst those present that the Americans in Tahoe were actually uninterested in a long-term relationship with the people of Baikalsk.

“What I want to know is: do they, in Tahoe, really want brotherhood, or do they just want to look at each other on the computer screen?” asked the small woman who used to work for the city administration.

“Is this conversation happening over there, too?” another man wanted to know.

The people of Baikalsk were unwilling to get their hopes up or to put effort into continuing the project if the Americans did not also take it seriously, and the Russians were skeptical that the people in Tahoe had the interest or ambition to do so.

For the residents of Tahoe, the sister-city relationship to Baikalsk in Eastern Siberia is one of the many ways their community is linked in to the global imaginary. There is a group in Tahoe that is firmly committed to Lake Baikal and their brethren in Eastern Siberia – the Tahoe-Baikal Institute – but for others in the community, the link is barely noticed. Tahoe does not need recourse to a sister-city relationship to affirm its cosmopolitan identity. For Baikalsk, on

the other hand, it *matters* that they are known abroad, and that they have a tenuous lien on South Lake Tahoe in the symbolic relationship of sister-city. This connection provides hope for a wider horizon for themselves, their children, and their community. But from the late 1990s until the webinar project, this symbolic capital had not been tested to see what returns it might bring. Connecting to Tahoe via the webinars enabled the local residents to dream big; but the reality of their unequal status, given Tahoe's routinized cosmopolitanism, threatened a rude awakening. They were loath to learn how little their sisterhood was worth.

### **So What Is the Point?**

After the final webinar, members of Baikal Environmental Wave gathered for lunch in the cozy upstairs kitchen in the Irkutsk office. Seated behind the heavy hardwood table, the Wave members talked about a concern that was repeatedly raised by the residents of Baikalsk: were the Americans in Tahoe really interested in collaboration? It was a question of collective self-esteem for them: people in Baikalsk did not want to put their hearts and minds into a cooperative project only to have the Americans reject or neglect them.

“They are worried that they will work toward creating a partnership, only to find that the other side doesn't want a partnership with them and isn't going to work for it,” Artur explained to the group at the table.

The Wave members sat in silence, each lost in thought.

“So what *is* the point of including America?” I asked.

The members exchanged glances, waiting to see who would speak first.

“It seems to me that the most important thing is to unite Baikalsk and Goloustnoye,” Artur said. “America is the catalyst to bring them into dialogue. They come because they are interested in talking to America, but they end up talking to each other.”

Elena Alexandrovna spoke up next.

“The point is to see that there are problems everywhere and to see how local people solve their problems [differently]. To paraphrase the great Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, we think all happy families are the same, but our unhappy family is totally unique. We say, ‘Oh, in America everything is perfect, everything is fine, but *we* have all the problems.’ Once you interact with people in other places, no matter if those places are thousands of kilometers away, you see they have their own problems. But you also see what they are doing to fix those problems. And it gets people thinking of other ways they can be fixed. In a lot of these villages, you see people stuck in problem-thinking. They just see: we have problems, they are awful, these people are to blame, and so forth. If you are sitting, stuck in a problem-mindset, it becomes a vicious cycle and you get nowhere. The key is to move people away from problem-thinking and toward constructive-thinking. So they say, ‘Ah! We could try this. Let’s start a small business that fixes this problem. Or let’s start a group working to defend our rights,’ or whatever. But the important thing is that they are thinking constructively, not just waiting for manna from heaven. When you look at other people’s problems and see what they are doing [about them], it can be inspiration. You might think, ‘I wouldn’t do it *that* way, I’d have done *this*.’ But you are already thinking now in a different way, that you would not have done otherwise.”

In answering my question above, Elena Alexandrovna cogently described what might be considered the most fundamental benefit of transnational activist collaboration. While activists may indeed benefit from foreign financial resources, organizational support, or an opportunity



structure that is translocal, these are all, fundamentally, strategic means to an end – geared toward achieving some predetermined collective goal. The webinars suggest, however, that there is a deeper contribution that transnational activism can make, one that is more than a means to an end, but rather is an end in itself. To wit: *transnational connectivity can change how we think*. It can spur creative thought, altering our approach to social problems and the means for solving them. It overcomes limits to imagination and expands perceptions of the possible.

As the experience of the American webinar participants in Tahoe shows, this creative thinking does not happen automatically by exposure to cross-national communication. Groups who consider themselves to be occupying a more privileged position relative to their collaborators may assume they have nothing to learn from exchange and thus close off the opportunity to alter their thoughts *a priori*. However, this predisposition to closed-mindedness could be mediated by the duration of the cross-national contact. American participants in Tahoe-Baikal Institute's exchanges were much more likely to think of some contribution Russia could make to American environmentalism than Russians were themselves. Foreign GBT participants also described positive attributes of Russian culture they were ready to adopt and ways their minds were changed by their experiences in Siberia.

But for those occupying positions in the periphery of the globalized world, transnational activist collaboration can be one of the rare opportunities to experience that which is taken for granted in more cosmopolitan centers. For them, exposure to transnational activist networks can have a profound cognitive effect. In the case of the Wave's webinars, the effect may, in fact, be a short one. It would likely take prolonged involvement to truly change ingrained habits of thought and culture. But the experience of the webinars shows how impressive that change might be, were it carried forward.

## Conclusion

There are many paths into modernity. Not all of them lead to reflexivity, cosmopolitanism and personal empowerment. As Baikal enters into its next phase of development, with all trends indicating a post-industrial tourist economy, there is no guarantee that the dispositions that foster civic engagement and a robust civil society will automatically come with it. Indeed, previous attempts to bring modern progress to the rural population in Russia through education and outreach have failed throughout history.

The Russian Empire was heavily involved in what popular writer Thomas Friedman refers to as “Globalization 1.0” (Friedman 2005). The aristocracy was transnationally networked in terms of political alliance and trade,<sup>41</sup> and yet the bulk of Russia’s people remained peasants. Peasants were the tools of Empire, but they were not its beneficiaries (Lewin 1985). Russian intellectuals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century formed the Populist movement (*Narodnichestvo*) to rally the agrarian masses to fight for their rights against autocracy; however, their “going to the people” movement ran ashore on the general disinterest and conservatism of the Russian peasantry (Belfer 1987, Pipes 1964). For all their attempts to mobilize the peasantry to fight for their own interests, very few minds were opened by this mission of Enlightenment. After the fall of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union began its own efforts at modern state-building, which to their mind rested upon ideological evangelism and disciplinary state authority. The Soviet state brought industrialization to Russia *en masse*, and oversaw revolutionary gains in literacy, health, science and technology. But this move toward modernity did not produce a subsequent leap forward in progressive thought or a sense of personal efficacy in the general population,

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<sup>41</sup> Indeed, much of the Russian aristocracy spoke French as a primary language.

particularly among the rural population. Indeed, the Soviet path to modernity rested upon even more thorough state control of peasants' lives than the Empire had ever achieved (Lewin 1985).

The question that remains to be seen is whether and how the introduction of large-scale investment projects with absentee ownership in the modern capitalist era differs significantly from those of the Russian Empire and the Soviet State in the extent to which they promote the progressive thought that is so commonly associated with modernity (Beck 2006, Giddens 1991). For neoliberal theorists, the answer would be a resounding yes. It is the institution of the market economy that fosters political freedom (Hayek 2007, Friedman 2002). But political freedom is more than a set of institutions. Democracy relies upon citizenship. A subjective sense of powerlessness can nullify citizenship regardless of institutional democratic freedoms (Gaventa 1980). There is reason to suspect that the move from subsistence agriculture to “(formally) free labor” (Weber 2002:xxxiv), cleaning bed sheets in a large hotel, in a Special Economic Zone, owned by an investor from Moscow, would not necessarily cause a cognitive leap toward agency in Bolshoye Goloustnoye.

The data I have presented here show that transnational activism can be a conduit to cosmopolitanism for people occupying peripheral positions in the modern world-system (Wallerstein 2004). Exposure to the Other, renders Otherness in one's own circumstances plausible. When activists from the Wave would reach out to villagers in their own region, the endeavor was reminiscent of the Populists two centuries prior: idealistic intellectuals foundering upon entrenched conservatism and rural resistance to progress. Baikal Environmental Wave was not succeeding alone in its effort to spur engagement in Bolshoye Goloustnoye. Transnational webinars were.

The Russian literary critic Victor Shklovsky (2009) coined the term “defamiliarization” to describe how an author can make the familiar seem strange in order to alter the reader’s perception of everyday events. We can think of transnational activist collaboration as a process of defamiliarization. Familiar social problems seen through the eyes of a foreigner, who is facing those same problems in a different context, can alter the apparent permanency of one’s own environment. Defamiliarization can then spur inspiration and creative thought, in such a manner that individual efficacy becomes plausible, and, eventually, possible.

Despite the difficulty that domestic NGOs may face in trying to produce change in their home environments, the importance of their continued presence cannot be understated. Their influence cannot be judged solely by the success of their particular campaigns or actions, but also from the opportunity they provide to others to immerse themselves in transnational discourse, if only briefly. GBT offers this opportunity to its volunteers; TBI to its students; and the Wave to the villagers and town residents outside of Irkutsk. The organizations are nodes in a social network existing at the nexus of two planes – the local and the global. Their persistent presence in a locality offers a continuous portal to the wider world. Individuals may drift into and out of contact with this portal by means of the organization; people may have a life-changing, thought-altering experience as a result of that contact, and then carry the experience forward into their future lives, whether or not they continue to associate with the NGO itself. To this extent we can think of civil society organizations, and the service they provide to the social body, separately from their stated causes and goals.

In conclusion, cross-cultural activist collaboration may provide new political opportunities, new financial resources, or broader bases of support. It may be a means to tackle those problems that extend beyond borders, such as global climate change or economic

globalization. But there is an unintentional effect that transcends more instrumentalist accountings of movement activity, and that is the cognitive effect that can be found in populations exposed to new ideas, experiences and dispositions. Amongst those participating in the webinars that were the subject of this study, this alteration in thought patterns shifted the mental landscape towards activism itself. Such an effect of transnational activism cannot be constrained to the outcome of any particular movement campaign. Neither was it merely representative of tactical diffusion, since the webinars did not directly equate with the adoption of any particular practices from abroad. Instead, simply by opening the space for sharing diverse perspectives, transnational activism in and of itself helped lay the foundation for social change, even in the smallest villages of Eastern Siberia.

## CHAPTER 6

### PUTIN'S FAVORITE OLIGARCH

*Deripaska: The Russian consumer market is growing and we can sell as much as we can produce.*

*Saragosa: Do you ever worry about being too big?*

*Deripaska: We're investors.*

*Saragosa: At what point do you say that's enough?*

*Deripaska: Not at the moment.*

*-- Interview between Oleg Deripaska and Manuela Saragosa of the BBC World Service, May 9, 2013*<sup>42</sup>

*"This summer I re-read again Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand. Atlas Shrugged is a legendary series ... In the US the series is regarded as the second most important after the Bible. This masterpiece made Ayn Rand a global literary star."*<sup>43</sup>

*-- Oleg Deripaska, on his website regarding books he recommends*

This chapter discusses the economic transition in post-Soviet Russia and the rise of the oligarchs as embodied by the biography of Oleg Deripaska. Called "Putin's favorite oligarch," (e.g. Reguly 2011), Deripaska began his career as a poor student in theoretical physics in the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1990s, he used his financial acumen to accumulate a diverse portfolio of Russian industrial enterprises, while warring openly with other oligarchs during the well-documented days of fraud, corruption, and mortal danger that followed "shock therapy" and privatization (e.g. Appel 2004, Frye 2002, Shelley 1995, Shevtsova 2007, Varese 1997). However, although Russia touts the greatest income inequality in the world<sup>44</sup> (Credit Suisse 2013), the role of the oligarchs in contemporary Russia may also be considered as beneficial;

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<sup>42</sup> [http://www.deripaska.com/in\\_focus/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=691#.UikuSj\\_fIug](http://www.deripaska.com/in_focus/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=691#.UikuSj_fIug)

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.deripaska.com/in\\_focus/lets\\_discuss/knigi-kotorie-ya-chitayu#.UikN2T\\_fIug](http://www.deripaska.com/in_focus/lets_discuss/knigi-kotorie-ya-chitayu#.UikN2T_fIug) Accessed on September 5, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> With the exception of a few, small Caribbean islands.

they are credited with helping return Russia from the chaos of economic collapse in the 1990s to stability and profitability in the 2000s (e.g. Gorodnichenko and Grygorenko 2008, Guryev and Rachinsky 2005, Treisman 2010). Oleg Deripaska was a chief architect in the transition from mafia-style capitalism to the re-emergence of Russia as a global economic powerhouse. Yet, as Deripaska and his peers seek out global markets, they must adapt to global business norms that include efforts at “corporate social responsibility” (c.f. Carroll and Shabana 2009; Margolis and Walsh 2003; Wartick and Cochran 1985). In conforming to this global norm, Deripaska and his enterprises, collected in a holding company called the En+ Group, must enter into the sphere of local environmental civil society.

Local environmental activists in Irkutsk are suddenly confronted with the meaning of this new corporate partnership in environmental preservation. Motives are suspect, autonomy is questioned, and one organization even chooses to reject corporate funding. But local activists, despite their ambivalence, overwhelmingly decide to accept En+ money and don its corporate logo. The involvement of En+ in environmental projects around Lake Baikal displays the central role of branding in the siphoning of symbolic power from the civil sphere and into the realm of economic power.

The growth of “cause marketing” is more than greenwashing and less than environmental stewardship. It is a play within the field of power (Bourdieu 1989, 1993, 1998). Civil society holds power in its own right; the creation of Corporate Social Responsibility norms at the global level are a testament to successful struggle by civil society to push back on the ideology of economic self-interest. But when Russian businesses accept the global mandate to begin social responsibility programs, they soon find that the benefit of such branding can be an end in its own right – and environmentalists are the means. Cause marketing is an attempt to adopt the glamour

of civil society for the further accumulation of power, or, to use the language of business, competitive advantage, in the economic realm. The cultural power of society's shared allegiance to the norms of the "civil sphere" (Alexander 2006) can be borrowed or bought by economic elites, and then exchanged for economic power in their own struggles for dominance.

*August 14, 2012*

The 23 members of our eclectic volunteer work crew hiked for an hour from the platform where the train had stopped, through the *taiga*, and finally we arrived at our work site. For the next two weeks, we would be living in this spot in the woods, building a switchback trail from the river valley to the ridgeline several hundred feet above. But before getting to work on our main project, we first had to build the base camp. We split up into teams: two volunteers dug a pit to bury organic food waste, several worked constructing a large table that twenty people could sit around for meals; some people were gathering fire wood, while others built the rack that would suspend our cooking pots over the camp fire. When all these tasks were finished, we got to work setting up tents.

GBT provided tents for the volunteers, and we slept two people to a tent. These were nice, big, new tents, and we pitched them close together in the small clearing. The forest was soon home to a clump of green and yellow domes, like mutant mushrooms growing from the pine straw floor. Each tent had a small "foyer" made by the outstretched rain fly, and the door to the foyer bore the GBT logo in white. Beneath the logo, in extremely large script, I read the word *Ent*.

After the chores were done, we gathered in a circle. Katya passed out favors to thank us for participating. We all got matching blue bandanas that quickly became a collective badge of



honor amongst the members, who donned them daily as we set out for the trail. The triangular bandanas were made of synthetic material and covered with small GBT logos printed in white. And alongside each GBT logo, written in large lettering, was that funny word *Ent* again. Clearly it was some kind of brand, but nothing I had encountered before.

In the evening, I was sitting around the campfire with a number of Russian volunteers and I ventured to ask: “What is Ent?” My question was met with confused faces and some shrugs.

“What is *what*?” one of them asked me, and I repeated the word and then pointed at the logo on the tents.

“Oh, I know this!” one of them suddenly announced. “I know these people.” She made a sour face. It was Polya, an environmental scientist from Moscow. She corrected my pronunciation error – what I had seen as the letter *t* was, in fact, a plus sign. The logo was that of a large corporation called the En+ Group. “En+ is an energy company and they build hydroelectric dams,” she explained to me. “China wants to develop in its northern region and they need a lot of power. So En+ is talking about damming rivers in Russia in the Far East and sending the power to China. But who will profit from this? En+ will get all the money and China gets all the power. But what does Russia get? Nothing. And what does nature get?”

She ended there, as though the answer to this question were obvious.

“So, they are not good stewards of nature?” I asked.

“Not at all,” she shot back. “They are only interested in money and profit. But they give money to organizations like GBT so they will look environmental even though they are not. They only care about money...They give a few tents and then drown rivers and build dams.”

Such was my introduction to the En+ Group.

## **Oleg Deripaska and the En+ Group**

En+ Group Ltd. is a holding company that operates mining, metals, energy, and logistics businesses throughout Russia and abroad. Headquartered in Moscow, although registered for tax purposes in Jersey, En+ was founded in 2002 by Oleg Deripaska as a privately traded collection of assets in a wide range of natural resource extraction and energy production enterprises. The centerpiece of its assets is a controlling share of United Company RUSAL, the result of an aluminum industry consolidation that Deripaska began in the early years of privatization. Through acquisitions and mergers, Deripaska and his partners have developed RUSAL into the largest aluminum producer in the world. Additionally, En+ owns the coal company VostSibUgol, which mined 16.8 million tons of coal in 2011, most of which En+ consumes in its own factories and plants, and EuroSibEnerg, which builds and runs numerous hydroelectric dams and nuclear power plants. EuroSibEnerg is the largest independent power producer in all of Russia. Employing more than 100,000 people worldwide, En+ Group reported revenues in 2011 of US\$15.3 billion.

To better represent the vast energy and material empire that exists under the auspices of En+, the following portrait comes from *BusinessWeek's* investment summary of the privately traded company:

“En+ Group Ltd... produces alumina, aluminum, and bauxite; and smelts aluminum for consumers in defense, aviation, transportation, ship-building, packaging, and construction industries. The company also generates hydro and thermal power; provides engineering services to projects in the fields of power

generation, grid infrastructure, housing facilities, metallurgy, and oil industry; distributes energy raw materials, including coal, gas, and oil to consumers of the wholesale electricity market; produces energy coal; and supplies solid fuels for thermal plants. In addition, En+ Group Ltd. produces ferromolybdenum, which is used in the manufacture of stainless and certain other steels, and heat-resistant nonferrous superalloys; and steel, oil, industrial machinery, chemical, defense, electrical, and electronic industries. Further, the company engages in the integrated process of ore mining; ore processing to produce molybdenum and copper concentrates; and molybdenum concentrate roasting for ferromolybdenum production through smelting.”<sup>45</sup>

The majority of En+’s plants and facilities are located in Eastern Siberia, which, although remote, is touted loudly as the company’s greatest asset. “Close to fast-growing Asian markets,” is the oft-repeated refrain in En+ promotional materials. The company has ambitious plans to develop and exploit the natural resources of Siberia, viewing the region as the linchpin of Russia’s continuing economic growth. En+ points to the geographic proximity of Siberia to China as a vital comparative advantage over mineral producers in Africa and South America.

“Asian nations already consume more than 30% of the global energy output, more than 50% of steel, aluminium, copper and other metals, and about 2/3 of global iron ore. Asian consumption will only grow [in order] to fuel rapid industrialization and urbanization. New Chinese cities alone have seen an inflow of 100 [million] people from rural areas over the past ten years, which has created a huge demand for housing, roads, infrastructure, and transportation system

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<sup>45</sup> <http://investing.businessweek.com/research/stocks/private/snapshot.asp?privcapid=34947186>

construction – which in turn requires more and more resources. A further 250 [million] people are expected to move to new Chinese cities by 2020 – and a similar transition will be witnessed in India, [w]hich has a population of over 1 [billion], Indonesia, Vietnam and other emerging regions of the world. The Asian economies are going to develop most rapidly in the next few decades – and the demand for resources needed to maintain the economic growth rates will constantly grow.”<sup>46</sup>

En+ aims to meet this exponentially growing demand with the buried wealth of Eastern Siberia. As the company explains: “Eastern Siberia is blessed with some of the world’s most abundant stocks of natural resources, where 90% of the Russian platinum group metals (PGM), about 70% of nickel, copper and other metals, 80% of coal reserves, substantial hydrocarbon reserves are stored... All these riches have been left almost intact, with the region being socially and economically underdeveloped.”<sup>47</sup> En+ intends to unleash the potential of Siberia’s latent resources, piggy-backing off Asia’s emergence as a major player in the global economy. Siberia can be tapped to meet the growing consumer demand fostered by urbanization and capital penetration into China’s interior. Such is the strategic development plan laid out by the President and founder of En+, Oleg Deripaska.

Oleg Deripaska is among the richest men in Russia,<sup>48</sup> with a net worth of nearly US\$9 billion. His life is a rags to riches story that could only have been possible at a particular juncture in Russian history – he was one of the few individuals to seize the moment in an era of mass privatization and a burgeoning capitalist economy.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://eng.enplus.ru/about/strategy/> Accessed on September 5, 2013

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

<sup>48</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> richest as of 2012.

In the late 1980s, Oleg Deripaska was a student, studying quantum statistics at Moscow State University in hopes of entering the field of theoretical physics. At the time, in the late Soviet period, there was still no financial market, but change was in the air. *Perestroika* had opened the Pandora's Box of Western ideas and practices long forbidden by the Communist Party. As censorship loosened its hold, debates about democracy and liberal economics found their way into the newspapers and magazines on shelves throughout the country (c.f. Yurchak 2006). Deripaska says that he became interested in investing after reading an article about securities exchanges in the late 1980s. After the formation of the Moscow commodities exchange, Deripaska bought a seat, where, according to his telling of it, he began applying the principles of physics to calculate the buying, selling, and trading of commodities in association with his partners.<sup>49</sup>

Russia in the 1990s was a country buffeted by crisis and chaos. The transition from the state planned economy to the market was not the slow, controlled, phase-in that reformers in the vein of Gorbachev might have imagined. Instead, the country faced “shock therapy” and the immediate privatization of state-owned enterprises.<sup>50</sup> Without the Soviet state to strong-arm production or police the population, companies ground to a stand-still (Kotkin 2008). With a mounting debt crisis and hyperinflation, the bankrupt state left millions of workers' wages in arrears (Desai 2001). The entire Russian economy was privatized virtually overnight through a process that has been widely disparaged as corrupt and without sufficient regulatory oversight (Hoff and Stiglitz 2004). Most Russians gained nothing from privatization, while a few who were well-connected or nefarious walked away rich (Appel 2004). Managers and owners of the newly privatized firms began an epidemic of asset stripping. Pyramid schemes erupted, and

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.deripaska.com/about/biography/> Accessed on December 31, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> For an interesting personal reflection on the various forces at play in Russia's economic transition, see Jeffrey Sach's 2012 essay “What I Did in Russia.” <http://jeffsachs.org/2012/03/what-i-did-in-russia/>

gangs of mobsters were terrorizing the streets for “protection money” (Varese 2004) Corrupt dealings, fraud, insider trading, rigged auctions: all of these and more characterized the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The young investor Deripaska was not immune to this history; his meteoric rise in the 1990s could not have been accomplished without shaking dirty hands. He was only 26 when he took control of his first aluminum smelter in 1994. He continued to consolidate his hold on the aluminum sector throughout the 1990s, during a period that is known as the “aluminum wars.” Throughout the decade, there were multiple contenders who fought for control of Russia’s aluminum industry, its fourth largest export, and the fighting was not in the variety of clean competition. Indeed, the battles were often brutal, crime-ridden, characterized by financial fraud and physical violence, which cost many individuals their lives. As oligarch Roman Abramovich describes it, “someone was murdered every three days” (Peck 2011). By the end of the “aluminum wars,” more than 100 people were dead, including industry managers, bankers, traders, politicians and mafia men (Ahmed 2012).

Deripaska’s individual role in the dirtier side of Russian business appears ambivalent from the outside. He has been the subject of multiple lawsuits in Russia and abroad connected with allegations against him for bribery, extortion, and nefarious business dealings. He was investigated by several countries for money laundering and links to organized crime. In 2001, associated with these allegations, he was uninvited from the World Economic Forum conference in Davos (which he otherwise attends regularly), and in 2006 he was embarrassingly denied entry to the United States. While Deripaska has never been charged with a crime and strenuously denies any wrongdoing, as one journalist wrote, “it will probably take years to

dissipate the stench of criminality surrounding the industry he now controls.”<sup>51</sup> Deripaska admits to paying organized crime for protection in the lawless decade of total institutional collapse after the fall of communism. In this, he claims he was not unique; it was the only option for those doing business within Russia in the 1990s. Times have changed, business in Russia is much cleaner, and Deripaska played a leading role in that transition.

In 2000, the same year that Vladimir Putin ascended to the Presidency, Oleg Deripaska sat down at a table with rival oligarchs Lev Chernoi, Iskander Makhmudov and Roman Abramovich. At the invitation of Abramovich, the group hammered out a merger of their aluminum companies, signaling an end to the violence and a new regime for the commanding heights of the Russian economy. Their various competing regional interests were joined into RUSAL (Russian Aluminum), a single company, under the management of Deripaska, that would collectively control 70 percent of all Russian aluminum production. No longer would the captains of industry battle each other in internecine struggle; instead they would unite for the creation of a national industry that would springboard them to a wider, global marketplace. The meeting has since come to symbolize the end of *dikii* [wild] capitalism in Russia with its mafia-style business dealings, and a shift toward an established, stable, national corporate monopoly.

The accomplishment of these oligarchs, coupled with Vladimir Putin’s efforts to stabilize the political sphere, offers a new perspective on the meaning of Russian privatization. The 1990s were socially catastrophic, but Russia’s economic profile a quarter century later can be viewed as a legitimization of “shock therapy” and “loans for shares.” A number of scholars have recently conducted empirical studies show the high productivity and efficiency in those industries owned by the oligarchs compared to those retained or managed by the state. Treisman (2012) has shown that the companies that were auctioned in the “loans for shares” deal have

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2001/1126/107.html>

since significantly outperformed those that remained in state control. Gorodnichenko and Grygorenko (2008) found in Ukraine that oligarchs were more likely to invest in productivity-enhancing up-grades to their facilities and to vertically integrate their production, resulting in greater profit and efficiency. Rather than greedy gangsters, the new outlook on the oligarchs suggests that of the reform-minded “citizen employers” (Haydu 2008), responsible for bringing Russia into its present era of stabilization and progress.

Oleg Deripaska personifies this new conception of Russia’s “responsible oligarch.” Deripaska states that he is interested in building business rather than simply making money.<sup>52</sup> Under his control, the Sayanskogorsk aluminum smelter increased its output even beyond Soviet levels. However, when aluminum faced a global crisis in overproduction and a significant drop in its commodity price, Deripaska became the darling of global investors by agreeing to keep his factories operating below capacity. Deripaska is active in the World Economic Forum at Davos, and has been a longtime crusader for a more transparent, rationally organized, Western-style business community in the Russian Federation. Among his adopted practices is the phenomenon of management stock-options, as an incentive to align company leadership with investment outcomes as in American-style “shareholder capitalism” (Dore, Lazonick and O’Sullivan 1999, Fox and Lorsch 2012, Gordon 1998). In 2013, Deripaska received much positive press by forgoing his \$3 million bonus and using the money to purchase \$25,000 in company stock for 120 of his 72,000 employees (BBC 2013).

Moreover, he has been involved in extensive charity work and public service. Deripaska, along with several of his peers, has come to regard the question of his legacy as one of great importance. He sits on several Boards of Trustees, including the Bolshoi Theatre, the School of Economics at Moscow State University, and the School of Business Administration at St.

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<sup>52</sup> [http://www.deripaska.com/about/Deripaska\\_Oleg/](http://www.deripaska.com/about/Deripaska_Oleg/) Accessed on December 31, 2014.



Petersburg State University. He has also donated more than \$8.5 billion to charities and social causes through his private foundation, Volnoe Delo. Deripaska, along with several other major Russian oligarchs, has been aggressively seeking a more positive image for himself and his companies abroad. In the end, they say, it is not how their fortunes were created, but how they shaped the country, that is the metric by which posterity shall judge them.

### **En+ as Corporate Philanthropist**

*August 21, 2012*

Back in the *taiga*, half way through our work trip, my GBT crew had again gathered in a circle before heading off for the trail.

“Before we get back to work,” Katya began with a mischievous smile, “I have a little surprise gift for you!” She opened up the potato sack she was holding and pulled out a blue tee-shirt.

“Clean clothes!” exclaimed one of the Americans in the group, and people laughed, since clean clothing was truly a novelty after a week in the woods. Katya showed off the new shirt. It had the En+ logo on the left breast. The back of the shirt bore the GBT emblem. We each came and claimed a shirt in our size.

“What’s this?” Yegor asked, pointing to the En+ logo. He looked at the back and the front, flipping it over twice. “It’s like advertising,” he announced and then laughed loudly.

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En+ became a major player in the environmental scene in Irkutsk in the fall of 2011. Representatives for the corporation’s new Sustainable Development division showed up in Irkutsk and sought out all the local environmental nonprofit organizations with a single message:

we want to be your corporate sponsor. By the next year, Irkutsk was awash in En+ sponsored environmental activities. Some of these were projects initiated by the company itself; others were conducted in partnership with local nonprofits. In the case of GBT, En+ simply offered money for material supplies to support the projects they were already conducting.

In late January, I travelled to Moscow and visited the corporate headquarters for En+ Group. I was there to interview the head of their Sustainable Development division, which manages all their corporate social responsibility work. The building was tucked away on a small, winding street, close to several national consulates. From the outside, the headquarters was fairly nondescript. Even the interior, at first pass, seemed uninviting. There was only a tiny foyer with tightly packed and uncomfortable seating, fluorescent lighting, and a dirty white ambience that reminded me more of a clinic than a corporate office. The desk personnel, a young man and a young woman, struggled mightily to speak to me in English, even though I had greeted them in Russian. They were expecting me, they said, and haltingly tried to explain that I had to wait. When I assured them they could speak Russian, a look of gratitude swept over their faces. I was given a visitor's pass that I could swipe at the turnstile to allow entry, but only after my host came to greet me.

Soon another woman, a secretary, came to collect me and usher me upstairs. Again, I was unimpressed by my surroundings until we left the stairwell and entered through a main door. Suddenly the ambience shifted, I was in what has become the standard décor for a corporate office. Gone were the uncomfortable clinic chairs and dirty white walls. I was directed to a small conference room and seated at an oblong table. I came to think of this as the "Green Room:" the walls were key lime, the chairs Kermit green, on a forest green industrial carpet. A large potted tree was growing in the back. My escort gave me a set of En+ promotional

materials and told me that my interviewee was running behind schedule. She then ordered me tea, which was brought to me on a silver tray with two chocolates in En+ wrapping.

After about ten minutes, a representative of En+'s Sustainable Development department arrived. She had a bright smile and sunny, blonde hair that fell in waves around her face and shoulders. Her green eyes were bright and engaging. I asked her to tell me about her programs and, evincing great pride, she launched into a detailed description of the many activities that take place under the auspices of En+'s Sustainable Development division.

The entry of En+ into Irkutsk environmentalism was as sudden as its money was abundant. The general motivation for the company's philanthropy is two-pronged: first, social responsibility has become the established norm for multinational corporations; second, environmental philanthropy helps to counteract the stewardship balance-sheet for a company with a less-than-stellar environmental track-record.

When I asked the representative about the creation of the En+ Sustainable Development division, she immediately pointed to Deripaska's study of business, particularly international business, and his longtime participation in the World Economic Forum at Davos.

*En+ Representative:* Deripaska... is a person who learns things for himself and participates in a variety of foreign programs – he has studied in America and in Switzerland, he has various degrees – he is always learning. [His studies on] international management systems gave him the idea that he should split his businesses into two groups. One group would be those businesses that must steadily develop, grow, and provide growth to the country. The other would be investment businesses that he would buy, develop and sell, in order to make

money. The first business group is...En+, and it includes those companies that he will always own, that will continue to develop for a long time and will develop Russia as a country. It is heavy industry... The company was eventually ready to start developing on social issues and sustainable development, because it should eventually do this. Business can't start on day one, or maybe they can but not in Russia...Therefore, it is just in this moment, a couple years ago, we came to such a level of development ourselves that we were ready to begin implementing such a complex and encompassing social project. So we created this separate division.

The global influence on corporations such as En+ was confirmed by another informant I spoke with in Irkutsk who is close to both local nonprofits and the business community.

“It’s quite a change for big business. Russian big business is still very young; it’s literally only about 20-25 years old. In such a short space of time it’s hard to become a civilized business. And so Russian business usually does its own thing. [But] when a business enters the international market, it discovers that [the international sphere] has its own rules of the game and certain standard requirements to ensure that you and I can negotiate on equal terms. Simply put, you have to meet certain criteria, including how socially responsible you are, how you act in those areas where you do business, how much assistance is provided to charity, and so on and so forth. And our business understands that it must be done. Not because you want to, or don’t want to, but because that is what is expected. And since it is expected, now we’ll do it.”

Essentially, En+ did not invent the model it has adopted for its corporate giving, nor was it instigated by conscientious members of the company. Instead, it was a new division, with orders from the top, that was created in the image of Davos.

En+ Group's interest in environmental partnership also comes admittedly out of the company's past and present sins against nature. The corporation and its CEO Deripaska have been at the embarrassing center of a number of environmental fiascos. Most notably, in the early 2000s, Deripaska's other holding company, Basic Element, acquired the Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill, which has been a source of popular ire since it was first constructed in the 1960s. In the 2000s, local environmentalists again built a major campaign to close the factory. In 2008 a court determined that the plant was breaking the federal Law of Baikal and had to cease production until it could operate with a closed wastewater system. The plant stopped operation. Initially, the company refused to pay wages to its furloughed employees, resulting in massive labor unrest with workers also pointing the finger at Deripaska. After Putin intervened, Deripaska offered a personal loan of 150 million rubles to cover worker compensation. Meanwhile, Deripaska pleaded to Putin that the legally required environmental upgrades would render the mill unprofitable. In 2010, Putin overturned the court via presidential decree, granting an exception to the Baikalsk mill and allowing it to continue production at status quo ante, as long as it instituted the closed wastewater system by 2012. The decision to reopen the mill without environmental upgrades created a new wave of environmental protest, and Deripaska once again became "public enemy #1." He sold the mill in 2010.

The head of corporate giving for En+ repeatedly strove to disassociate Deripaska from the infamous paper mill. During our discussion, the En+ representative described their work on "mono-cities," the Russian term for a company town, and she brought up Baikalsk as an

example. Then she added that it was a bad example, since En+ does not own the mill. Somewhat disingenuously, she went on: “A long time ago, like ten years ago, Deripaska bought it, and then sold it. I mean, he didn’t build it. But people continue to have the sense and the belief that it is his business. And because of this, Deripaska’s negative image here has remained. Although he only controlled it personally for 2 to 3 years – not very long. It hasn’t been his for ten years. But because the city is in our region of influence we decided to include it also.”

At the same time that Deripaska was dealing with the fallout of the paper mill, En+ was the target of another environmentalist campaign, this time on the detrimental effects of the massive Boguchansky dam on the Angara river. This massive hydro-electric dam was originally planned and designed under the Soviet government, but was not constructed due to lack of funding. In 2005, En+ joined with state-owned RusHydro to complete the dam. One of the largest dams in the world, Boguchansky would power a massive aluminum smelter that En+ planned to construct nearby. Environmentalists were adamantly opposed to resuming work on the dam. They claimed it was poorly designed, with few of the modern safeguards normally required for maintaining a healthy river system. They also claimed that its construction was nonsensical, since the dam was located far from any population center with no infrastructure for transmitting the power it generated. While En+ plans to construct a large aluminum smelter, the plant does not yet exist, and neither is there a working population to support it. Finally, whole villages of indigenous Siberians were displaced by the flooded reservoir with hectares of uncleared forest submerged. The Boguchansky dam is now complete and running, but only after years of vocal opposition from local and national environmentalists.

These are the two most notorious examples of environmental harm resulting from industries under Deripaska’s control, but the very act of mining, metal processing and

conventional energy production may also harm the environment to greater and lesser degrees. To this extent, En+ will always have a conflict of interest with environmentalist organizations. True to the model of corporate social responsibility, the company is attempting to bring environmentalists in as community stakeholders while simultaneously giving to environmental causes to bolster their public persona as environmental stewards.

The director of corporate giving for En+ was straightforward in her explanation of this fact in response to my question as to why they were giving to environmental causes in Irkutsk.

*En+ Representative:* Large industrial enterprises always affect the environment. Always . [Whether they are] good, bad, American, Russian, European, from a certain point of view, any industrial undertaking is harmful to the environment, despite the fact that there are economic advantages. Therefore, in order to develop more appropriately, we have to make sure these industries take into account environmental factors, risks and dangers. So, in environmentalism, we can say that there is a technical side, like, say, the environmentalism in the business, factory modernization, installing various filters. That is the technical part of the enterprise, which is done there [in the factory]. And there is a second part, which is global, and has to do with the issue of environmental development of the region. This is what is included in our social program... To say it rudely, industry inflicts the most damage on the environment in any situation, whether it is good or bad. That means that, in making money, [industry] absolutely should try to fix those problems that are bringing harm. And a conscientious company understands that. A non-conscientious company will try to fight with environmentalists using various means. We try not to fight, but to find some

common ground and partnerships to address these environmental challenges, whether our production is guilty or not.

Unable to avoid the tarnish of environmental culpability, En+ has developed a proactive approach that seeks out relationships with environmentalist organizations. They offer support and engage in partnerships, meeting the needs of environmentalist organizations and seeking input on their own industrial development. This new approach to relations between industry and environmentalism could be said to be cooperative or co-optive, and whether it is one, the other, or possibly both, can be in the eye of the beholder. How it was perceived by the environmentalists themselves is the subject of the next section.

### **Environmentalists React to En+**

It was my day to cook for the GBT work crew. Our worksite was at a camp ground [*turbaza*], which had a cook shack with a gas oven and range. While most of our cooking was done in pans over the campfire, I slipped into the cook shack to chop vegetables. When I came in, I realized that I was not alone. Polya and Katya were already in the shack, seated on the wooden benches behind the table drinking tea. Polya was questioning Katya about GBT's relationship with En+, something that seemed to bother her deeply.

“We talked about it for a long time,” Katya explained. “The club discussed it, because we know they are a big corporation and we didn't want them to control us. But in the end, we decided that taking the money wasn't giving them control. We are still independent. We still decide what projects we are going to do. No one is telling us what to do.”

“But it isn't about whether En+ will control you,” Polya objected. “It's that it is so little money for them and they get so much for it.”



Katya did not register Polya's comment that En+ is actually gaining something from its donation to GBT, and instead fixed on the size of the donation compared to the corporate budget as a whole.

"Yes, it is only a little money to them, but for GBT it is enormous!" Katya said

"But they make that money hurting the environment," Polya countered.

"And we talked about that," Katya insisted. "But we decided that we could use this money for good. Why not take money that came from bad and turn it toward doing good? And we are not the only ones. Defend Baikal Together – which is another nonprofit that does environmental education in schools – they get money from En+ and now they have a new monthly bus tour that brings children to Baikal who might not otherwise go. They could live their whole lives two hours from Baikal and not know about it. And it isn't just En+! Lots of nonprofits take money from corporations. When I worked for Earth Corps in Seattle, they took money from big corporations, like Boeing and Microsoft. And they also discussed whether they would lose their independence, whether the corporations were using them, but they decided that taking the money didn't mean the corporations were using them, because they were going to do the work anyway, only now they had better equipment." She started to list the things that we had on our trip that was paid for by En+: pick-axes, tents, shovels, t-shirts. Polya still seemed unsatisfied.

"Baikal Wave might have a different perspective," Polya ventured to suggest.

"Yes," Katya agreed. "They likely would have a different perspective. They probably wouldn't take money from En+."

"And En+ would not give it to the Wave!" Polya retorted.

Polya's assessment proved to be incorrect: En+ did seek out Baikal Environmental Wave for a partnership, but they were met with a cold shoulder. Jennie Sutton mentioned the encounter briefly on my first day as a volunteer with Baikal Environmental Wave. The organization had recently become involved with One Percent for the Planet, a movement to connect nonprofits with companies committed to donating one percent of their profits to environmental causes. Sutton stressed that the Wave would not take money from just any company that wants to give.

"We are very selective with whom we work," she told me. "Very particular. We require that there be some environmental component to the business. For example, there was one company that really wanted to work with us and support us. They have their sights set on some big damming projects on some rivers in Siberia and selling the energy to China. They would like to get us, an environmental organization, under their thumb, but that is *not* going to happen!"

Later, in another context, Jennie and Marina were discussing Oleg Deripaska. While I was familiar with En+ from the logo that was plastered on so many environmental projects in the region, I was still unfamiliar with the man behind the curtain.

"Who is Deripaska?" I asked.

"He's an oligarch who owns lots of various energy and mining companies," Jennie said. "His company tried to come here and sponsor us. What were they called? Something-plus? It doesn't matter, it's all Deripaska."

Baikal Environmental Wave was the only organization in Irkutsk to reject En+'s offer of partnership. They were also the only nonprofit that virtually never referred to the corporation by name. In the Wave's office, the companies under the control of En+ or Basic Element were called by their metonym: Deripaska. He became the personification – the active and culpable agent – for environmental harm committed by the companies he owned. The Wave's apparent

refusal to adopt the corporate moniker seemed intentional, as though the brand were a smokescreen to hide the puppeteer. While the En+ name and logo found its way onto many environmental projects throughout the region, in the Wave's office, it was a non-entity; they only discussed the oligarch Deripaska, naked without his brand.

The Wave was unique among environmentalists in the region in their firm stance not to associate with En+. Most others, while not conceding their right to criticize the company, were nonetheless glad for the money and the partnership. Elena Alexandrovna Tvorogova from the organization Reviving Siberian Land hoped that the interaction would not only help her organization, but might even spur new ways of thinking in the minds of Russia's elites.

Tvorogova: En+ appeared at the end of the year before last, toured around, met with practically all of our environmental organizations. And to each organization they proposed that they were ready to support any of our projects, so what projects do you have? Obviously, every organization then had to make a decision: do we wish to enter into such a relationship with such a business? For example, Baikal Wave decided no, we are not going to play these games. [But Revising Siberian Land] has been working with business for a long time, already for many years. We have done projects with money from Yukos and money from Polyus Gold, and now with money from En+. Because I think it's better to do a little bit of good work with money from business, than not to do any work. Because business will spend the money somewhere anyway. They will find somewhere to spend it. But they could spend it on something stupid. So I think it is much better to use this opportunity for good... I don't want to overstate our

influence on the minds of our oligarchs. Still, some of these business representatives, experts working in this field, coming into contact with these themes and problems, you will see them, just a bit, a little bit, maybe two to three percent, turn Green.

At GBT, members were ambivalent about the relationship, but finally came down on the side that it was better to accept the money than to not. There was only one member – Lusiya – who was adamantly opposed. The sponsorship proceeded over her objections and she has made her peace with it. But in an interview, she explained her concern.

*Lusiya:* When Lena asked us about this last year, it was in the fall I think, she just said that it is possible to get such a grant, and she asked ‘What do we think of this?’ I was the only person who was strongly opposed. Very much against it. And I’ll explain why. I said that an organization, especially if it is a social organization, it must be consistent in its actions. And I thought that it is inconsistent when we, say, go to a protest for preserving Lake Baikal and demand that something is not built, that they do not re-open the paper mill owned by [the CEO of] En+, and, I mean, I think it is just unethical. You need to differentiate whose money to accept. But since the question was asked to all, and most people agreed, the decision was taken. And ... I still think it's such a double standard. Because, on the one hand, we are an environmental organization, and to take money from an organization that pollutes the environment – that’s bad. On the other hand, I think it's better if the money goes to something good, than if they spend it on something else. Because at least I'm sure that the money that is given to GBT will be well spent. I know that it will be for educational projects, I know

that it will be for the trails ... I know it will be helpful to a variety of environmental initiatives. So, let En+ at least do something good. I mean, this is their chance to do something good. And ... well, I cannot say that I am completely 'for' it, but at least I think that it's, you know, as a lesser evil (laughs). But in any case, I think that GBT is compromising its conscience.

However, Lusiya was singular in her unilateral opposition to En+. More often, comments from GBT members resembled those offered by Pavel. He described the debate over whether to accept their sponsorship as a "hot topic," but fundamentally decided that he was in favor of the relationship.

*Pavel:* I know all about [En+] and what they do. And I don't hold deep, positive feelings for them, like, "Ah, how good! What a great company!" I understand that for them it is just PR, I guess. Because they are trying to be like a Western company, right? But I think it's good, and you shouldn't reject these companies simply because it's PR for them. Let all these companies do it for the purpose of public relations, but they are giving money for good activities... I think it's also payment for how they harm nature, and pretty strongly at that...But! Here's another additional point. That said, I believe that if they give money, then that does not mean that they can affect our activities. Or tell us what to do or not to do. Or that we can no longer talk about them using unfriendly words. So that am I supposed to say, "En+ Group is a wonderful company." No. That is, I believe that it is not. There are certain concrete decisions that I have not liked. For example, t-shirts. I believe that this t-shirt is for GBT, not for En+. But for some reason I see En+ and I don't see GBT [on the front]. That is, if I had the chance, I would

not myself accept this shirt because that's not what I need. I think this is the wrong approach, precisely in this concrete issue. And the same thing with the signage, when they made badges, emblems where you can't see GBT, but there is En+, I wouldn't have agreed to that. I mean, I think it's just a little bit too much.

The ubiquity of the En+ logo made it an easy target for environmentalists to suggest that the company was only interested in its image. But logo battles reflected a greater concern amongst participants that En+ would threaten the autonomy of GBT. The fear of corporate domination would creep up in GBT as random shows of autonomy that were arguably overblown.

One such example was GBT's ten year anniversary that was held in December of 2012. GBT had incorporated as a nonprofit in 2002, and the anniversary was seen as a real triumph and reason to celebrate. Few nonprofits in Russia reach ten years, I was repeatedly told, and the collective wanted to plan a self-congratulatory bash. However, big celebrations take discretionary funds that volunteer organizations seldom possess. Lena Chubakova, the executive director, went to En+ to ask for money for the party. En+ immediately agreed and told her not to worry, that they would take care of everything: the Emcee, the program, the venue and so forth.

"I told them, no, we are a nonprofit organization and we are completely capable of throwing our own anniversary party," she told the club meeting one night. "Because what if they invited all their own people and not ours? What if we ended up with the En+ logo all over everything and nothing about GBT?"

The same refrain was repeated for the next two weeks as Lena worked on the details of the event. When discussing the program, she told the group, "We have two options: 1) we have En+'s designers put together the program, which I'm not too keen on, because who knows if they will put a giant En+ logo over everything; or 2) we do it ourselves." Lena was certainly thrilled

to receive En+'s financial support, both for the party and for the many other aspects of GBT's work. But her fixation on the omnipresent En+ logo expressed her underlying fear that En+'s self-promotion comes at least in part at the expense of GBT's autonomy. Her fierce stance on the anniversary party, in itself not a dire issue, displays a territoriality on the part of an organization that fears being subsumed by its wealthy benefactor.

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As can be seen above, environmentalists were mostly concerned with three issues in their interactions with En+: 1) they were concerned that their autonomy would be undermined, that En+ might imperialistically control their activities; 2) they were worried that En+ was only doing it for the sake of self-promotion; and 3) they were worried about their own reputations, or perhaps at a deeper level their organizational souls, being sullied by association with a large, profitable corporation that has been known to harm the environment.

All of the local organizations except for Baikal Environmental Wave were able to reconcile themselves to these three concerns. First, while the blatant self-promotion of corporate giving was met with rolled eyes, there was general agreement that it is better for corporations to make an effort toward a having a social conscience than to do nothing at all. Second, they were generally satisfied that they retained their autonomy; indeed, many claimed that the added resources only enhanced their ability to achieve what they planned to do anyway. Third, and finally, environmentalists in Irkutsk came to the conclusion that rather than tainting themselves by association, they were instead doing greater service by helping to turn ill-gotten gains toward a socially and environmentally beneficial end.

## **Cause Marketing: The Cost and the Benefit**

Corporate social responsibility is a business ontology. The “presentation of self” (Goffman 1959) that an enterprise adopts in relation to this ontology is known in the trade as “cause-marketing” (c.f. Earle 2002, Smith and Alcorn 1991, Varadarajan and Menon 1988). The principle behind cause-marketing is that a for-profit and non-profit organization can enter into a partnership for mutual benefit: the non-profit receives aid and the company garners positive attention to its brand. Cause-marketing is more than corporate philanthropy. Philanthropy is described in the literature as a donation whose benefit to the company lies in the tax-deduction. The goal in cause-marketing is broader: cause-marketing aims to create an associative link in the public mind between the company and the good cause. The return to the company is in image, reputation, and public goodwill, as well as increased sales. Studies have shown that cause-marketing is both cheaper and more lucrative than traditional marketing campaigns (e.g. Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller and Meza 2006, Krishna and Rajan 2009, Smith and Alcorn 1991). A cursory glance through journals of marketing and business will show the great effort that has been put toward research that aims to maximize returns to a company in cause-marketing: assessing the relative impact in choosing one’s cause, or the type of support (e.g. Ellen, Mohr and Webb 2000, Nan and Heo 2007). Essentially, cause-marketing is an investment, upon which corporations expect to see a profitable return.

Despite the general recognition that En+ was motivated to fund Irkutsk’s environmental scene as a public relations coup, there was little acknowledgement, or perhaps even understanding, by my informants that sponsorship can be viewed as just another market transaction. For the activists, the money is still viewed as a donation; the activists and En+ are operating on different planes and from widely divergent perspectives. For the environmental



activists, the money donated is contrasted to their income *before* the sponsorship. From their perspective, the question is one of *money vs. no money*. This “either-or” approach to sponsorship helps explain why the environmental activists focus principally on whether or not to associate with En+ as a partner, and do not discuss the amount they receive. When they do discuss the size of the corporate sponsorship, it is considered in relation to the organization’s regular income; from this perspective, Katya could say that GBT is receiving an “enormous” sum from En+.

Yet, for En+ the transaction is different and amounts matter. By its association with myriad environmental causes, En+ is investing in its image. The company is essentially purchasing the right to associate itself with various environmental groups. When associating with a nonprofit like GBT, the question for En+ is not *money vs. no money*, but rather what is the price of GBT’s reputation? En+ receives increased name recognition, and has its brand associated with a positive, feel-good cause, both directly, through volunteers, and indirectly through the mass media. The affiliation raises the positive profile of En+ locally in Irkutsk, nationally – given the importance of Baikal, and even internationally through GBT’s global volunteer base. From this perspective, affiliation with GBT is an enormous bargain. For the price of a tent, they reach countless people sleeping in those tents, trip after trip, year after year. For the cost of a silk-screen logo imprinted on a blue T-shirt, En+ imprints its brand on the minds of multitudes, from pedestrians passing volunteers on the street to those viewing GBT trip pictures on the organizational website. Environmentalists in Irkutsk see their work as a cause; En+ sees it as a commodity: one which they managed to purchase at a terrific bargain.

Moreover, when the image of environmental stewardship becomes the primary point of an activity, the cause itself is liable to suffer. The quest for a positive headline or an eye-

catching photo opportunity can result in activities whose cost may not equal the benefit environmentally. To this extent, environmentalists in Irkutsk may be correct in suggesting that it is better for them to accept corporate funds for their own projects rather than to allow En+ to spend its money on “something stupid,” as Tvorogova stated above. And indeed, En+ does conduct its own environmentalist projects in addition to those it sponsors with local organizations. As the next section shows, the emphasis on publicity can lead to ambivalent environmental outcomes.

### **360 Minutes for Baikal**

Litter has become a major concern around Lake Baikal. As the region has developed into a major domestic outdoor tourist destination, the traffic to Baikal has increased, while the infrastructure around much of the lake remains primitive. Much of the territory around the lake is protected – including some territories with the highly restricted *zapovednik* status.

Where villages and outposts dot the lake, there is no trash collection. Residents are supposed to haul their trash to a landfill, but since many lack transport, they also frequently burn it or bury it in the woods. Such a transgression by villagers would not amount to vast environmental damage except for the advent of two phenomena: tourism and globalized mass consumer production. The amount of packaging waste arriving into the villages has grown exponentially since the Soviet era; and now, with the influx of tourists, this trash has only increased.

“Packing out what you brought in” has not yet become standard outdoors etiquette for Russian tourists. Vacationers will boat up to the lake shore, picnic or camp, and leave their beer bottles, tin cans and plastic bags behind them. Some people will even dump their broken lawn

chairs or tents. The more conscientious will dig a hole for their rubbish in an improvised, and unregulated, mini-landfill, but these accumulate and expand with remarkable rapidity, leaving many of Baikal's beaches sullied. Litter will also wash up on the shore, dropped or tossed into the water by boaters. In the Soviet era, the forests may have been able to absorb what little was left behind. Today, with the plastic packaging of mass consumer production, and with the greater number of visitors, the sheer amount of waste renders these practices unsustainable.

Since litter has become a visible blight on Baikal's shores, it is also an easy target for environmentalist concern. Many list it just behind the paper mill as the chief threat to Baikal. Even those who are not active environmentalists generally recognize the problem of accumulating litter. Lately, a number of initiatives have arisen to collect rubbish. Schools in the region regularly organize clean-up projects. In the city of Irkutsk, a coalition of nonprofits, state agencies and businesses called "We Will Make Irkutsk Eco-Logical" [*Sdelaem Irkutsk Ekologichnii*] coordinated a massive work day to rid the city of illegal dumps and litter.

En+ joined the litter collection effort with its event "360 Minutes for Baikal," an annual clean-up project that takes place in association with Baikal Day. At its inaugural event in 2011, 100 volunteers traveled to the shore of Baikal to gather trash. I attended the 2012 event as a participant observer. I had been recruited by members of GBT. En+ had enlisted the help of GBT members as crew leaders, who would each direct small teams of volunteers. Although it was not a GBT project, they were glad to lend their enthusiasm and expertise.

I had only been in Irkutsk for a month when I was recruited to 360 Minutes for Baikal. The summer was nearly over, and many people were glad for an excuse for one last trip to Baikal while the weather was still warm. I was encouraged to go at least in part as an opportunity for a free trip to Olkhon Island, where the litter clean-up was to take place. Olkhon is the largest

island in Baikal and is also a major tourist destination. The island, with its unique topography of rock formations, ice caves, forest, and steppe, as well as its endemic flora and fauna, has long been sacred to the indigenous Buryat shamans. Dina, one member of GBT, said she had signed up to participate specifically so she could visit Olkhon, a place she had never been. I had also heard of Olkhon and was eager to make its acquaintance; helping keep it clean and observing local environmentalists in action would be an added bonus.

*September 9, 2012*

I awoke before sunrise to go, as I then thought, to Olkhon to pick up litter. There were a surprising number of people congregating on the corner of Kirov Square, and lots of taxi-vans and buses to take the volunteers to their destinations. In all, En+ had recruited 400 people to volunteer for the day – a four-fold increase over their number from the previous year. I quickly found the GBT folks amongst the crowd, and there were happy hugs all around.

“Where are you going?” Vasya asked me.

“To Olkhon,” I answered.

“Ah, nice,” he replied. “We are going to a campground on the mainland, but across from Olkhon, just about 15 kilometers away.”

Anatoly from GBT was one of the crew leaders. He came up to me and said, “You are in a group with Yanna and Pavel. Stay with them, and you will be in the right place. Your group is standing over there.” He indicated a small cluster of people nearby.

“That’s my group,” said Vasya.

“But if I am in your group, then I’m not going to Olkhon either!” I realized out loud.

I was not the only one disappointed. Dina from GBT came up to me later and said, “Remember how I told you that I had signed up for this because I had never been to Olkhon in all my life? Well, it turns out I’m still not going to have been to Olkhon. They have me in a group that is on the mainland.”

Our crew leader was a young man named Vova. He had to check us in before loading us on the bus. We were the last group on the bus, but there were still plenty of seats. We sat and waited. Then a young woman named Tamara, who was the leader of another crew on our bus, announced: “If anyone needs to use the bathroom, you need to go now because you won’t get another chance for two hours.” I asked where we could go to use the toilet, but Tamara didn’t know. Pretty soon people were pulling out their cell phones, calling around to see if local businesses were open yet so we could use the restroom. Pavel turned to me and said, “That building there is Irkutsk Energy.” He indicated the formidable cement structure, whose door was flanked by two security guards, next to which the buses were parked. “It is owned by En+, the company that is organizing this action, and yet they won’t let us inside to use the toilets.” I was confused and mildly irritated that someone would say that “you should use the toilet now,” when there wasn’t a viable toilet available. Eventually Irkutsk Energy relented and opened its doors to volunteers who needed the restroom.

Finally the bus and began its long, arduous journey. At first, it was a pleasant morning drive through the country, watching the world turn from city to forest, and forest to steppe. Little grey marmots kept popping up and watching us drive past in our caravan of buses.

On the way, the crew leaders addressed their teams and gave out the schedule. The trip from Irkutsk to the work site should take four hours. We would eat breakfast at a campground at 11 a.m., spend four hours (360 minutes) collecting rubbish, return to the campground for supper,

and then leave on the buses again, arriving back at Kirov Square around 10 p.m. However, according to the schedule, we were already 40 minutes late in departing from Kirov Square.

The crew leaders also passed out baseball caps and windbreakers to the volunteers, each bearing the En+ logo and an emblem for the project: “*360 Minut Radi Baikal*” [360 Minutes for Baikal].

“There will be news media and television cameras filming, so you must wear the windbreakers and hats at all times,” Tamara told us. “Do not take them off.”

“What if I get hot?” someone asked.

“You cannot take them off,” Tamara repeated. “Maybe take off what you are wearing underneath.”

Now for a word about the bus we were on: it was a Korean bus, decorated with drapes and tassels in the windows. Ornaments hung from every other window that either had the image of the playboy bunny or that made some other allusion to sex. We were part of a caravan of six buses, with a police car in the lead and in the rear. I was unsure of the purpose served by the police car because it certainly was not helping us reach our destination more rapidly. The trip seemed interminable. First, the paved road turned to dirt. Then the dirt road turned to bumpy rock. And eventually, the road disappeared entirely when forced our caravan to take an off-road detour. The bus had virtually no shocks, so in addition to a bumpy ride, we also were traveling at a snail’s pace. According to the schedule it should take no more than four hours to reach the work site, but four hours came and went, and still we were driving.

At 5.5 hours into the trip, I learned forward to Yanna and Pavel, who were sitting ahead of me.

“What do you think, are we going to stop sometime?” I asked them.

“Yes, sometime,” they both responded.

“The bus will run out of gas eventually,” Yanna added.

She was right, though. After more than 6 hours of travel, we did eventually stop at a campground called Danko. We disembarked and were ushered to the cafeteria. According to the schedule, we were supposed to have “breakfast” at 11am. Now, it was 1 p.m., and we were sitting down to rice kasha with salami and bread. One of the GBT volunteers complained later about the bad food: “Those tiny slices of bread that were, as my grandmother would say, cut like in a restaurant!”

Outside the cafeteria, there was a porch set up like a stage. Large, banners of bright orange bearing the En+ logo waved in the breeze. All the volunteers were asked to gather on the stone steps as makeshift risers above the improvised stage. The media were instructed to set up around this stage in a semi-circle. There were multiple television cameras and several reporters from print media. I found myself standing beside a woman in her thirties from Krasnoyarsk, another city in Eastern Siberia. She introduced herself as a journalist. She was wearing the obligatory hat and windbreaker, and I learned I was not the only person volunteering and working at the same time.

“En+ did a similar project in our city,” she said, “so I am here as a follow-up story.” I asked what she thought of the project. “It is fine and all to pick up the trash. But it would be better if people didn’t litter in the first place.”

After a staged event where representatives from En+ thanked participants and partners, talked about safety, and made short speeches for the cameras, we were sent off for the day’s mission. We were all given orange drawstring bags with logos on the outside and lunch on the inside: bottled water, three *pirozhki*, an apple, and two granola bars. Each work crew also

received gloves, trash bags, shovels, rakes, and a wooden sign that read, “Please don’t litter.” Then, we piled into yet another vehicle to be driven still further away to our respective work sites. Fortunately, our team’s work site was only about five minutes from camp.

Despite the stress of the day, it was impossible to miss the beauty of the Olkhonskii *raion* [county]. The campground where we gathered was one of several tourist bases on the Western shore of Baikal, in an area named Maloye More, or “Small Sea,” after the shallow channel between Olkhon Island and the mainland. Baikal water is warmer here, and it has become a popular spot for tourism. The landscape was full of fascinating shapes; the treeless steppe accentuated the contours of its undulating topography. There were strangely shaped rock islands sprouting up from the water amidst the many peninsulas and bays. There were horses grazing by the bank where the van dropped us off.

We uncovered several trash pits, mostly filled with glass bottles and burnt cans. One volunteer spent a great deal of time fishing disintegrating plastic out of the water, joking sardonically that it was a bag from the previous year’s litter clean-up. He also pulled up what looked to be motor oil. Someone left an old raft and a broken lawn chair by one camp site. The trash truck came by early and we were able to get some of the bigger stuff hauled away. Undoubtedly, the foulest thing we uncovered was several used baby diapers. From then on, no matter what we were pulling out of a trash pile, we would say, “At least there are no diapers!”

While we worked, picking up glass, plastic bottles and metal cans, I asked about recycling and why there was no recycling in Irkutsk. I said that I heard someone say that there used to be recycling, and I wondered why it stopped.

“They had recycling in the Soviet Union,” Pavel explained. “But the thing was that, back then, there just were not that many products. Not like now. You maybe had three kinds of



drinks, and they were all made locally, or at least regionally. So back then, the companies would take the bottles back and you would get a deposit. Not a lot of money, but something. Now, bottles are coming from far away, from all over, and it is just cheaper and easier for companies to make new bottles than to collect and reuse the old ones. But we've never had the kind of recycling where you could just bring any glass or plastic or metal. It was just those specific bottles going back to that particular company.”

We kept collecting trash until we ran out of plastic bags. At the end, we planted the wooden sign on which En+ kindly asked visitors not to litter. The work was over and the silliness ensued. Two boys started swinging bags of trash at each other. Yanna came up behind me and pretended to brush my hair with a rake. We took some group photos and then all clambered back in the van to return to the campground. We left the bags of trash piled up and were told a truck would come collect them. There were some looks of skepticism exchanged, but there was nothing for us to do but hope that they would, in fact, be collected.

When we arrived back at the campground, volunteers were being stopped by a videographer from En+ wanting to take footage for an in-house promotional video. Each volunteer was asked to say his name, where he was from and why he was there. Some of the television stations were also continuing to collect interviews with volunteers. We returned to the cafeteria for supper: soup, salad and pirog. After supper, we piled back in the bus for our long journey home.

On the road back to Irkutsk, I talked briefly to Pavel, a geographer working on his PhD. His dissertation studies the effect of large businesses like En+ working in remote regions, like Bolshoye Goloustnoye or Olkhon. I asked what his results were and he made a face.

“It’s mixed. More negative than positive, though. The thing is, they may do some little things that are good, but usually all of the local wealth will be sent out of the region. Big businesses do not actually create good jobs for local people, just bad, service kinds of jobs.”

Despite the many problems, though, he was pleased that large businesses are now making an effort at doing something positive. “Like this event,” he said. “It’s all about PR, but still, five years ago this kind of thing would never have happened. There were no kinds of volunteer opportunities and no one picking up trash five years ago.”

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Trash on Baikal is a real concern. But “360 Minutes for Baikal” did far more to benefit the company that created it than it did the lake it was ostensibly supposed to serve. Even the name was something of a misnomer; because of the many delays, volunteers were only actively gathering trash for about two hours. The effect on the lake was minimal; there was less litter, but only by a very small percentage. And yet the positive publicity that this event generated for En+ was clearly substantial. The story reached local, national and international (English language) media outlets. Footage and photographs clearly displayed the En+ brand on banners, backpacks, and especially on the windbreakers and hats that volunteers were forbidden to remove. The story was a positive one of a company making an effort to clean up a beloved national treasure.

En+ was clearly willing to pay a great deal of money for the publicity stunt. They hired buses, vans and drivers to haul hundreds of people from Irkutsk to the Olkhonskii *raion*, and then paid for hundreds of volunteers, staff and media guests to eat two hot meals at a campground and a picnic lunch. They provided apparel and souvenirs to all participants, not to mention the necessary tools and equipment, the police escort, and the vehicles to haul away the collected

rubbish. Had the principle concern of En+ been the state of Baikal, one might imagine many more cost-effective means to achieve comparable, or even superior, results.

Given the amount of auto transport involved – 12 hours of driving, with multiple vehicles that were not always full to capacity – it is arguable that the environmental footprint of the event exceeded the benefit of the litter collection, a fact not lost on the environmentalists involved. In particular, the members of Great Baikal Trail bemoaned the cost-benefit of a one day trip. Their organization, with its “volunteer vacations,” also has a practice of carting volunteers to distant locales for environmentally beneficial projects. But the environmental cost is weighed against two full weeks of labor. In the case of 360 Minutes for Baikal, participants spent 6 times as much time in transit as they did volunteering. When I asked later what he thought of the event, one GBT member said, “For all the money they spent on it, you would think they would have let us spend the night and actually get some work done!”

But En+ was not paying for the work; they were paying for the publicity, and that could be accomplished just as easily with two hours of work as it would two days, and the former would not involve overnight accommodations of hundreds of volunteers. In a publicity stunt, the size of the event is more important than the quality of the experience. Had trash collection been their major motivation, En+ could revamp the annual event to that end. However, when I discussed the project with the Director for Sustainable Development, she said that her plan was to expand the project so that volunteers were cleaning trash all around the circumference of Lake Baikal. And, indeed, the next year, the number of volunteers more than doubled to 1,000 and the trash collection took place at sites all around the lake – an increase in quantity, but not necessarily in quality.

The En+ Representative admitted in our discussion that trash collection was not really the goal, but rather it was one of education. “If kids, especially teens, spend one day picking up trash and see how hard it is, then they will no longer litter. And they will tell their friends and family not to litter...The goal is that eventually [the event] won’t be necessary.” She also hoped that participants would be introduced to volunteering and would continue to do so.<sup>53</sup>

These two goals are in accordance with the environmental movement that the company aims to serve. Jennie Sutton would dismiss local litter clean-ups as “feel-good” measures that produce no real structural change. But most of the local environmentalists were glad that litter clean-ups were taking place. As one pointed out, in order for structural change to take place: “First, people have to *see* the litter.” En+ aims to help the public to see the litter – as long as they, and the mass media, see the En+ brand prominently alongside it.

## **Conclusion**

Revolutions offer ruptures in time, and the resulting quake may upset the maintenance of systems of social stratification. As Fitzpatrick (2008) has shown, the 1917 Russian Revolution opened a space for social mobility, but the stratification structure again solidified, as those individuals newly occupying higher rungs of the social ladder sought to secure their position. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented another social quake, jostling individuals who then had to vigorously maneuver for social gains, and, in the process, several reached heights of economic prosperity that had previously been unimaginable.

As long as the fight for position took place amongst contenders within the economic sphere, the civil sphere retained relative autonomy. While few in Russia would return to the

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<sup>53</sup> Although, I did not see great enthusiasm amongst the recruited participants nor did I hear expressions of how excited they would be to participate again.

three-headed terror of violence, instability and insecurity that characterized life in the 1990s, as we have seen in previous chapters, there was, at the same time, a blossoming of possibility. While Oleg Deripaska fought the “aluminum wars,” he was not concerned with what environmentalists were doing. It was only with the emergence of the Russian oligarchs in 2000 as a unified class with shared goals and objectives that their relationship with civil society became more complex.

The entry of Russian business into the global economy is at once an economic necessity and a power play. Becoming global economic players expands the economic power and dominance of the oligarchs, both at home and abroad. As Sun-Woo (2010) has noted, Russian business may also have chosen to integrate more fully into the Western economy so as to gain alliances abroad to counter the ever-increasing power of the Kremlin. But the logic of global capitalism also compels growth and expansion, and Russian oligarchs operate according to the same logic as governs any other multinational corporation. But these power plays operate within the same semi-autonomous field: that of business and economy.

Access to the field of global business came with new rewards, but also new obligations. As Russian industrial magnates moved into a more prominent position within the global economic sphere, they found themselves beholden to previously established norms of global business. Amongst these was an insistence upon corporate social responsibility. While late in coming to the social responsibility mandate, companies such as En+ have since moved full throttle forward, seizing the opportunity to align with nonprofit partners. Amongst environmental activists in Irkutsk, the affiliation with a corporate partner amounts to a windfall, opening new opportunities that would have been otherwise beyond their reach. But to

corporations such as En+, the relationship is expected to have long term economic payoffs. The expense is minimal and the rewards are potentially vast.

The rewards come through cause-marketing. Cause-marketing is not greenwashing, whereby a company engaged in environmental harm seeks to advertise better stewardship than it actually conducts. Neither is it pure philanthropy, as a one-time tax deductible donation. Instead, cause-marketing is how corporations purchase access to civil power. Most often, that power is used to better the image of the company for the sake of higher profits. Civil power is used for purely economic struggles between various companies and their brands. The emphasis on branding may be so great that the “cause” itself becomes window-dressing, as in the case of 360 Minutes for Baikal. The environmental impact of this environmental clean-up project is arguably less than positive.

But purchased civil power need not be constrained to use in the economic sphere, building the brand of a particular company. Civil power operates in the field of power at large; when corporations acquire civil power through their social responsibility programs, this power can be employed for the benefits of economic elites in the field of power as a whole, a subject that we will turn to next.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISEMPOWERING EMPOWERMENT IN THE CIVIL SPHERE

The previous chapter emphasized corporate environmentalism as a vehicle for publicity. Through cause-marketing, corporations can adopt the aura of civil society to more successfully compete within their own field of business. However, large corporations who have had success as players in the field of business can then become players in the field of power. From a field of power perspective, civil society is a threatening opponent. Thus, the “worthiness” (Tilly 2004) that gives civil society its symbolic force becomes a double-edged sword for business elites. To perpetuate the efficacy of cause-marketing, civil society must be independent and honorable. But an independent civil society, buoyed by the strength of conviction, holds social power; and that can be used against business in the field of power at large.

However, the relationship between the civil sphere and the economic sphere within the field of power can be managed using the same means by which each is strengthened in its respective field through cause-marketing. When businesses expand the capacity of partner organizations in civil society through giving, they also gain entry into the activities of the civil sphere. Not only can business borrow the glamour of the civil sphere for power in their own economic field of struggle, they can also bend civil power toward ends that benefit business in the larger field of power.

Drawing upon Gramsci’s (1971) work on *hegemony* within civil society, this chapter discusses how corporate sponsorship employs civil actors to propagate a pro-business style of environmentalism. As it embarks upon its program of Sustainable Development, En+ chooses

particular programs to fund, and eschews others, such that civil society becomes the purveyor of ideological programs that reinforce contemporary power relations and the dominance of the contemporary capitalist model of production.

### **Economic Hegemony in Environmental Activism**

Writing from an Italian prison, the Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1971) puzzled through the complicity of the working class in its own economic exploitation and political domination. He accepted the basis of historical materialism, with its base-superstructure model of society.

However, he decided that the superstructure could be further sub-divided between the state and the mass of other human institutions that can be called “private life” or “civil society.”

Economic relations were enforced by a state, so the power of economic elites could be clearly identified. But how does one enforce domination without the force of law? Gramsci’s answer was: *hegemony*. A range of soft-power tactics operated within the civil sphere to support the dominance of the economic elites – the hegemon – without the threat of force. Ideological justifications and economic incentives encourage individuals to choose domination. Hegemony can then be seen as domination by attracting the willing participation of the dominated.

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In the 1970s, the environmental movement in the West was at an apogee. Strict regulations were put into place. That these were initiated in the United States by a Republican president underscores the power of environmentalism as a movement. But by the 1980s business was pushing back against the tide, now under the ideological banner of neoliberalism. The collapse of the Soviet Union helped further the ideological dominance of market capitalism to near uniformity.



Consequently, the market logic has become more than one tool in the modern toolkit – a means to an end. It has become a social good in its own right. “Market fundamentalism” (Polanyi 2001) has gained new traction, with cut-backs on regulation becoming increasingly popular worldwide. In this ideological environment, traditional regulatory means for protecting nature have foundered. The result is “fourth wave” environmentalism: the greening of capitalism (Dowie 1996).

The first wave of the environmental movement focused upon preserving wild spaces and it had broad social appeal. With the rise of the “second wave,” though, which emphasized industrial pollution, business and the environment began a more confrontational relationship. With business chafing at state-imposed end-of-pipe pollution regulation, business began fighting back against the green movement by enlisting the working class. Protecting the environment would hurt business, which would slow the economy and cost working people their jobs. In the United States, the conflict between the economy and environmental protection was symbolized by the spotted owl – an endangered species whose protection was used to justify an end to logging of old growth forests in the Pacific Northwest (Foster 2002: 104-136). The spotted owl fight proved a turning point in public opinion; no longer would the environmental movement see the widespread support that characterized the creation of Earth Day in 1970. With waning public support, this latest wave in the green movement has changed its call away from state regulation and toward a reimagining of the capitalist economy itself. Industry has been the problem – but could it also be the solution? Proponents of the “ecological modernization” school emphasize the mutual benefit of environmentalism and capitalism (e.g. Huber 2000, Nordhaus and Shellenberger 2007, Young 2001). “Greening” business helps the bottom line; courting business achieves environmental gains without a fight.

“Fourth wave” environmentalism<sup>54</sup> and the theory of ecological modernization can be seen as an attempt to harness the power of markets for environmental purposes. However, “command-and-control” regulation may, in fact, be a more effective means to pollution abatement than market-based measures or voluntary actions.<sup>55</sup> In light of this fact, the strategic switch of the modern environmental movement toward green business reflects the ideological domination of capitalism in the public sphere and the present weakness of regulation-based environmentalism. It is a relationship of hegemony.

In the entry of En+ into environmental civil society in Irkutsk similarly bears the hallmark of domination by consent. Activists receive tangible benefits by their association with En+. As Katya proclaimed in the previous chapter, the sum provided to GBT is “enormous” and goes a long way toward increasing their capacity. They feel their own power in the environmental sphere is increased and their horizon of efficacy is expanded. As we also saw in the previous chapter, there was considerable concern within GBT that the relationship would not infringe upon the organization’s autonomy. Aside from small, territorial skirmishes, GBT was satisfied that it only gained from its relationship to En+: they wear the corporate logo, but otherwise continue doing the work they always have.

However, as discussed in Chapter 4, GBT’s principle activity and organizational form is already accommodationist towards business. Its spirit is non-threatening to elites in the sphere of power. Its projects need no interference to ensure positivity and mitigate threat. The same cannot be said for all organizations within the sphere of environmental civil society. In their

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<sup>54</sup> “Third wave” environmentalism focused upon environmental justice issues and, although important in its own right, is not pertinent to the discussion here.

<sup>55</sup> A classic comparison is the alternate responses to the ozone hole and acid rain. Regulation, albeit with strong industry buy-in, effectively ended trade in CFCs and has largely solved the problem of the ozone hole. The market-based cap-and-trade approach to acid rain slashed the rate of acidification in forests, but it has not prevented its continuation.

wielding of civil power, social organizations have the capacity to exert threat against economic elites within the sphere of power. Hegemony, by means of corporate social responsibility programs, allows business to steer the activities of civil society with their consent because of the expanded power they are granted through this cooperative relationship. How businesses might use this influence is the subject of the next section.

### **Disempowerment by Design**

The process by which these symbolic systems are acquired and accepted has long been studied as the phenomenon of “socialization” (e.g. McFarland and Thomas 2006, Hyman 1959, Merelman 1969). Educational programs are often primary mechanisms of socialization. Public school systems assimilated immigrants, socializing them into a common American culture (Graham 2005). Youth culture socializes schoolchildren into appropriate class-based dispositions (Willis 1981). Even programs aimed to counteract these socializing mechanisms through “empowerment” projects face a dilemma because there is a contradiction embedded in youth empowerment projects: teaching young people to navigate and command the society around them necessarily involves socialization into the terms of that society.

Civil society organizations are frequently engaged in socializing projects. When business gains access to the operations of civil society through sponsorship, it acquires the ability to put civil power to work for economic ends within the field of power. Socialization projects then instantiate the episteme of business; they become the means to governmentality, disciplining the populace into the perpetuation of particular power relationships. Civil power is diverted from civil projects and used to strengthen the position of economic elites in the field of power as a whole.

In the next section, I will give a lengthy description of one of the educational programs sponsored by En+ in cooperation with a local environmental organization, and then I will discuss its role as an agent of socialization into the values of business at the expense of a more robust environmentalist agenda.

### ***The School for Environmental Entrepreneurship***

The School for Environmental Entrepreneurship, or SHEPR, as it is called according to its Russian acronym, is a recent initiative launched as a partnership between En+ and a local nonprofit organization called Reviving Siberian Land.<sup>56</sup> SHEPR is an entrepreneurial boot-camp for budding entrepreneurs. Admission is via application, and, while the majority of participants are in high school or university, there were also some working adults in the program, mostly in their 20s or 30s. Over the course of five days, participants are involved in nearly non-stop activity, all geared toward developing and refining the business plan for an environmental enterprise. The school takes its participants and their business proposals through a series of intensive learning and evaluating mechanisms, culminating in the presentation of a final business plan before a jury of potential investors. What begins as a very loose, undeveloped idea grows into a defensible, implementable, entrepreneurial venture.

The school also functions as a competition. Each team seeks to garner the most points by means of participating in and successfully fulfilling a variety of events and benchmarks. At the end of the school, points are tallied and a grand winner is announced. Winning the competition

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<sup>56</sup> The actual organization name in Russian is *Vozrozhdenie Zemli Sibirskoi*, which literally translates as the Renaissance of the Siberian Land. I thought this translation cumbersome, and that Reviving Siberian Land was more apt for their intentions, catchier as an organization name, and easier on the tongue for English speakers – just as the name *Vozrozhdenie Zemli Sibirskoi* is for Russian speakers. Still, I have seen the organization’s name written in English elsewhere according to the more literal translation. In case one is looking for the organization in other sources or venues, I wanted to be clear that Reviving Siberian Land and the Renaissance of the Siberian Land are, in fact, the same organization.

also has very real, as well as symbolic, rewards; the winning team leader is awarded 4,000 rubles with the hopes that the funding will be used to further the project and move it toward implementation.

The inaugural session of SHEPR was held in August 2012. I attended the second session in February 2013 as a participant observer. I will recount below several occurrences from my experience there to illustrate how the values of business repeatedly trumped environmental stewardship, despite the intention of environmentalists involved in the project.

### *Day 0*

Despite its name, SHEPR largely presumed knowledge of environmental issues and green business. No aspect of the program actually taught environmental practices or mindsets. The only such instruction occurred the night before the School actually began. Not all students were yet present, and no points were offered for attending the presentation. It also took place at the end of a busy day, filled with travel and orientation. But, despite these drawbacks, the activity clearly had an impact on those who attended and participated. The presentation involved a lecture and educational game by Zinaida, a volunteer from the environmental advocacy nonprofit, Baikal Environmental Wave. Zinaida, a professor of pedagogy in her 60s, had designed and developed the game, which she called: “Eco-Footprint of Commodities” [*Eko-sled Tovary*<sup>57</sup>].

Zinaida began by laying a hand-drawn map of the world on the floor. “There are about 7 billion people in the world” she told us. “So let’s have seven volunteers get up and stand on this map. You can each represent a billion people.” Several students obliged. “But of course you can’t stand everywhere on the map. You don’t have a billion people in the ocean.” The students

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<sup>57</sup> Literally, “Eco-Footprint of a Commodity,” but I changed it to the plural form for the sake of stylistics.

bunched up on the land masses. “So everything that comes from the earth, all the land, the trees, the farms, the forests – this is all we have for all these seven billion people. There is nowhere else they can go. Nowhere else we can get resources from. How do you feel?” She asked.

“Pretty crowded,” someone replied, and there was mild laughter.

“Look at your feet on the map. Think of this as your environmental footprint. You are taking up a certain amount of the Earth’s resources. So this is how it would be if we all shared the Earth’s resources evenly amongst the seven billion people. But that isn’t the case, is it? Some of us take up more than others. Some of us have bigger footprints.” Here she retrieved a pair of giant “shoes” made out of cardboard that were covered with magazine clippings of advertisements and products. She handed them to one of the students.

“Here put these on,” she instructed, and the young man did so. “Now what happens?” The young man with the shoes took up most of Eurasia and Oceania, and some of the others started to tip over and fall off the map.

“We have less,” said one of the girls astride North America.

“There are fewer resources for everyone else,” Zinaida confirmed. “But what if it were equal? What if all of you had shoes like that?”

“It would be impossible,” several people said.

This led to a lecture and slide show about resource use and waste that was pointedly critical of consumption. It was after 9 p.m., and it was clear that not all students were equally present and alert, but a cluster of them were engaged, and occasionally, I heard a comment or a reply to a question that showed that critical connections were being made.

Zinaida then held aloft a Kinder Egg. This is a common children’s treat in Russia: a hollow chocolate egg, wrapped in foil, with a plastic toy inside. The chocolate is enriched with

extra milk and vitamins, so it is considered healthier than other candies, but to kids it is still chocolate.

“You all know what this is,” Zinaida began. “It is likely a part of everyone’s childhood. Maybe you once collected the prizes inside. Now we will take this one product and look at its environmental footprint. What are the resources that it takes to make this one little egg?”

Here she pulled out a box and set it on the table. The box was filled with cards showing pictures of either raw materials, such as water, wood, sun, animals, or processing centers such as mines and factories. Some cards had forms of transportation, like trucks, trains, planes, boats. Students clustered around the table. They were instructed to take every component of the egg – the chocolate, the foil wrapping, the plastic toy, and the paper instructions – and create four threads that traced the piece from raw materials to finished product. They needed to think of where the rubber came from, how it got to Russia, what went into chocolate, how many stages to make the foil, how many times products had to travel, how much electricity was needed at each stage. At the end, students could see the long chains they have created, and how much is necessary for that piece of candy, sitting as an impulse buy beside the cash register of most grocery stores. There was only one table and one set of cards, so only about eight of the 40 people in the room were actively interacting in building the eco-footprint. The attention of those in the back waned early. But the exercise seemed to impact a few of the more participatory students who looked at their work and said, “Wow!” or “I had no idea!”

After the game wrapped up, we returned to our seats and Sasha, SHEPR’s second-in-command, stood up to tell us what to expect tomorrow. But before discussing logistics, Sasha encouraged students to think about the “amazing egg.”

“Isn’t it incredible how many things go in to making this one tiny egg? Businesses all over the world contribute to it. Lots of enterprises play a role. There are farmers, truckers, factory workers, and your business can be just one part of that whole.” What had been a lesson in unsustainable consumption was shifted into praise of supply chain economics. Zinaida, who had spent the last hour conducting students through the game, stood nearby, tight-lipped.

### *Day 1*

Elena Alexandrovna Tvorogova, the director of Reviving Siberian Lands, gave the opening remarks to a seated crowd of students before her.

“Welcome to the winter session of the School for Environmental Entrepreneurship!” she cried, and we all applauded. She went on to describe the school and what we could expect to gain from it.

“Only those projects that receive a certain number of points and can attract enough people to the team will get to move forward in the competition. If your idea turns out not to be successful, that isn’t failure – that is *experience*. Your job, then, is to think up an even better idea based upon what you’ve learned. This is what you have to do in the real world as an entrepreneur. So your business idea doesn’t work? Think of another idea.”

Elena Alexandrovna continually emphasized that the school would mimic the “real world” as much as possible, particularly in the final activity. “At the end of the school,” she said, “you will stand and present your idea before a panel of investors. These are *real* investors from Sberbank and the Small Business Administration. They are not used to gushy, emotional language. They think: quick, precise, and serious. This is not a game. This is a real conversation with serious people. They will determine who wins the competition.”



There were several talks scheduled before we could begin working on our own business proposals. One of these was given by a representative from En+ named Ksenia. Her fair skin was adorned in pastel cosmetics. Ksyusha began her talk with a smile.

“What is sustainable development?” she asked us, pushing her long blonde hair behind her shoulder. “What do you think when I say ‘sustainable development?’”

Students began to call out possible definitions: “When you don’t lose any money,” one said. “Working within the law,” answered another. “Monopoly,” another added. “It’s about stability,” guessed another. “The quality of your products, and your workforce,” was the last guess.

Maria smiled again. “I am going to tell you now about what En+ is doing for sustainable development and hopefully when I am done explaining, you can have a better answer for the question: what is sustainable development?”

“Whether small or large, a business’s image is what guarantees its success long-term,” she told us. “One’s image or reputation is extremely important. You can spend years building it up, and in a single moment it can be destroyed. When we talk about image we are talking about it with a wide lens. We are talking, not just about your product, but how you show yourself in the territory where you work, whether that is in a small village or worldwide.

“Many companies, especially new ones, think only about profits. But 30-40 percent of the success of a business is due to its reputation,” she continued. “Twenty to 25 percent of the stock market price of a company is due to its reputation. Sometimes that number can even be as high as 80 percent. Think of reputation as the price of the materials that go into a product relative to the price of the brand. For Coca-Cola, the ratio is 4:96 – four percent materials, and 96 percent brand.

“So let us apply this to the sphere of social responsibility. Your business is spending money when it works on social responsibility, but you *should* spend money on it. This is an investment in your image.” Ksenia then went into detail about the various programs and projects that En+ supports in Siberia, including SHEPR. “Anyone can earn a profit,” she concluded, “but you have to work hard to have a positive image and a good reputation.”

After this talk, we moved on to the main event of the day: the project fair. Students spent the two hours before lunch preparing posters about their projects that they would display at the fair. Students and staff were given stickers to affix to posters of projects they liked. Stickers represented “points” and only those projects garnering a certain number of points could advance into the competition. Any team with fewer than five members also would not make it to the next round, and soon my roommate Veronika and her brother Pyotr recruited me to their team and I agreed. We were then joined by two more individuals who did not have projects. So now we were a team of five, and had collected sufficient stickers. Eco-Field passed into the competition.

“Clarify for me what this project is all about,” I asked Veronika and Pyotr, as we sat down at the table that we claimed as our work-space.

“So the idea is that we would employ about 150 people to go into an area of the *taiga* to live in tents and gather raw materials,” Pyotr explained. “There is an herb that people use to make tea that grows wild in the *taiga*. People would live in the woods for four months, cutting and drying this herb. Right now each person can gather up to 5 kilograms for personal use, but we could get a lease or agreement to take more. And then we would sell these herbs to a wholesaler in Angarsk. Right now there is a deficit of raw materials in forest products and the price is really high. These are natural forest products, and brands, like Taiga Products, Evalar

and Shalfei, sell natural teas and pine nuts. So there is a market for it. In the summer, we gather this herb, and in the winter we can gather pine nuts and *sera* [a sap that can make natural chewing gum]. Maybe we can also gather mushrooms and berries – all kinds of forest products. My dad runs a business like this near Olkhon. So I've done this before. My plan is to start my own operation near Baikalsk, only bigger. I already have the contacts at the wholesaler in Angarsk. I know the raw materials that they want and how much they pay per kilogram.”

We were soon joined at our workspace by Marina Petrovna Rikhvanova from Baikal Environmental Wave. She instructed us on the next activity, which was called: “Dreamer, Critic, Realist.”

“So, when it comes to your business plan, what are your dreams?” Marina Rikhvanova asked.

“To be a famous Russian brand,” Veronika said with confidence. “So that when people think of getting a Russian souvenir, they want to buy our product.”

“Now for the Critic,” Marina asked. “What are the critiques?”

There was silence. Veronika shrugged lightly and said, “I don't have any,” then flashed a proud smile.

“I do,” I said, and the group's attention turned toward me. “So you go into the *taiga* and collect your herbs. And you sell them and your brand becomes famous.” Veronika smiled at this acknowledgement of her dream. “Now more people want your products, so you collect more of this stuff. And people love it, they go wild, they want more, so what do you do?”

“So we get more, and then more!” Pyotr said, egging me on this line of thought.

“Yes! That is what we want!” said Veronika excitedly.

“This isn't a critique, this is a dream,” Pyotr said, smiling.

“What I want to know is whether you have a mechanism to make sure you don’t take too much.”

A confused silence met my query.

“When you gather everything from one area, you go somewhere else,” Pyotr answered.

“But when do you stop? How can you guarantee you won’t harm the environment?” I asked.

“Because you don’t kill the bush,” Pyotr said. “This herb grows really fast. If you cut it all the way to the base, in four years it will be big and bushy again like before. So you clear everything in an area, but if you come back four years later, you can’t even tell that you cut anything!”

“Okay,” I said. “That’s great that it grows back, but how can you guarantee you aren’t harming nature? How do you know you aren’t taking too much?”

“You can never take too much,” Pyotr replied. “Siberia is endless! You can’t even imagine it, it’s so big.”

This word must have gotten Marina Petrovna’s attention. She entered the debate, saying, “Nothing is endless. People always think that natural resources are endless, but everything has an end.”

“And even if you aren’t using up all the tea in all of Siberia,” I went on, “you might decimate it in a particular region.”

“But we don’t kill the bush,” Veronika explained to me with a patient smile.

“Okay, the bush will come back, but what if there were an insect that lives on that particular bush and now it has nowhere to live in that whole region? What if there is a type of bird that lives off that insect that is no longer there, and the bird can’t eat? I’m not saying that

this *will* happen, I'm just asking how you are going to make sure that it *doesn't*." Veronika's smile faded.

"Good brands for environmental products usually have some way of showing that they do not negatively impact the Earth," Marina Petrovna said, cleverly steering the conversation back to branding and their concern to have a "good" business plan.

Veronika looked at me with awe. "I never thought about it like that. I never would have thought about birds." She looked as though a little LED light bulb were flickering over her head. Its illumination never reached her brother, however. Over the course of the school, Pyotr continued to insist to me that it was impossible to deplete the *taiga*.

### *Day 3*

The chief event of the third day was the "expert conveyor." Each team had to go before a series of experts and defend its project according to a particular measure. The expert would then award the team up to three points for that measure. There were 12 expert stations with the following themes: 1) Attracting new people to your team; 2) Media-kits; 3) Website design; 4) Attracting resources to your project; 5) The case; 6) The break-even point; 7) Competence profile and plan of development; 8) Risks and their minimization; 9) Marketing; 10) Location; 11) Eco-certification; and 12) Preparing your presentation. Teams were required to defend their project before at least 6 of the 12 stations to successfully complete the conveyor, although the more stations completed, the more points the team receives; consequently, most teams strove to complete the entire conveyor.

I was invited to observe our team's Eco-certification, although I was not defending it myself. Pyotr sat across from Marina Rikhvanova and explained that the resources they gather replenish themselves in four years.

“What will you do to ensure that this project won't damage the ecosystem?”

“We will get an ecologist to certify our project,” he told her. “We will pay an expert to assess the territory, tell us how much we can collect, and give us their certification.”

“What does that mean, a certification?” Marina asked, smiling. “How will that protect the ecosystem?”

Pyotr looked confused. “The specialist will know that the ecosystem is being protected. We will consult with experts who know and can provide certification.”

“Certifications can be bought. You can pay someone; get a stamp on a piece of paper. But I want to know how you will ensure that this project won't damage the ecosystem.” Pyotr looked helpless.

“Here is what I will do,” Marina said at last. “I am going to give you one point.” She marked a “1” on the score sheet and Pyotr's face fell and darkened. “I can't give you any more than that. I am worried that you go to the *taiga* and all you see is your raw materials. You don't see the system and how it all fits together. *You* need to be the expert. You are the one responsible, so you have to know *more* than the experts.”

At the end of the day, all the projects were listed with the points they received at each station. Of all projects, Eco-field had the second lowest score for eco-certification.

#### *Day 4*

Today was the culmination of all our hard work – the Big Day – presentations before the final jury. In the morning, the restaurant was still in disorder. People with disheveled hair and dark circles under their eyes were frantically finalizing their slides or practicing their presentations before their fellow group members.

At noon, the final jury was brought in and introduced. These were five new faces, individuals who were unfamiliar with our projects and how they had developed over the course of the school. For that reason, it was said, they could be expected to provide an unbiased assessment of our business proposals. The jury included local investment bankers, a member of the Small Business Administration, and the director of public relations from En+.

Each team took turns making a presentation before the jury. Our team presented last. Generally, our performance proceeded as the others had, but one moment stood out. The eighth slide showed the project's budget. All the other projects had anticipated annual net profits that ranged from 500,000 to 1.5 million rubles, but Eco-Field's estimated net profit read 5 million rubles annually. When this slide appeared on the screen, all five judges leaned forward intently, almost in unison, physically reacting to a profit margin that was five times that of the other contestants.

We took a recess while votes were tallied. Marina Petrovna and I found each other, and she asked how I had enjoyed the school.

“It was very interesting,” I said. “But I am curious why there are no environmentalists on the jury.” She looked surprised, as though this had not occurred to her.

“I wonder why?” she asked aloud, and peered over at the jury for a moment. There was a pause, and then she answered herself. “We ask uncomfortable questions.” She gave me a tight-lipped smile.

We all gathered back in the restaurant to learn the final results. Elena Alexandrovna gave a small, congratulatory speech.

“The future of the planet depends upon you,” she reminded us. “No investor can tell you what you can do. Whatever you decide to do with your project after the school, keep believing in it. Put your heart, your soul, and your time into it.”

And then the results were announced. First, they displayed the results from the previous night. A bike trail project was in the lead, followed by a souvenir shop, and then Eco-Field. Once the jury points were added, though, Eco-Field handily won first prize.

### ***Analysis of SHEPR***

SHEPR is built upon the “fourth wave” of environmental activism that emphasizes the creation of a “green economy.” Although operating in the same vein as this international shift toward “green capitalism,” the School for Environmental Entrepreneurship offers much more “entrepreneurship” than it does “environmentalism.” Despite its name, and despite the involvement of committed and knowledgeable environmental activists, SHEPR offers only the most rudimentary acknowledgement of environmental concerns. Those entering the school without an environmental consciousness can “graduate” with their ignorance fully intact.

What is at stake in in the School for Environmental Entrepreneurship is a *stratification of values*. Environmentalists and corporate interests come together to enact a project such as SHEPR. When working together by mutual consent, environmentalists’ and corporations’ value-



systems are not considered to be in conflict. But as the description above makes clear, these values are not shared evenly in the socialization project of environmental entrepreneurship.

Examples of the weighting of business concerns over environmental ones are numerous. Business experts who taught business Master Classes generally did not integrate environmental concerns into the subjects they were invited to address. Division of the two topics was the norm rather than the exception. There were only three events that took place over the course of the five-day school that were explicitly environmental. Importantly, none of these activities awarded any points, which further underscores their lesser value. Student projects were rated according to a pre-determined list of measures. At every reckoning, the environmental impact of a project comprised only one measure, while the entrepreneurial topics ranged from 6 to 11 different measures, each of which awarded points. A project that received no points for environmental stewardship could still outperform a project that received the highest markings for protecting the environment.

To understand the level of entrepreneurship's dominance over the environmental in SHEPR's design, it is helpful to imagine what the school might look like if the tables were turned. It is possible to conceive of a program that would take a potential business plan through an intensive incubator to strengthen its environmental record while giving a tip of the hat to its profit-generating potential. Rather than looking at the plan's budget, marketing, personnel and logistics, the school could study its effect on water, air, carbon, toxics, and habitat destruction. Points awarded to a successful environmental business could be based upon metrics such as those in the hypothetical column of Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Actual and Hypothetical Balance between Environmental and Business Metrics</b>	
<i>Actual Expert-Conveyor Metric</i>	<i>Hypothetical Expert-Conveyor Metric</i>
Human Resources	Material Usage & Reduction
Media Kit	Energy Usage & Reduction
Website	Water Usage & Reduction
Attracting Resources	Minimizing Transportation
Risks and Risk Minimization	Carbon Neutrality
Marketing	Greening Office Space
Case	Pollutants
Location	Toxics
The Break-Even Point	Other Waste
Competences and Plan of Development	Environmental Justice Considerations
Environmental Impact	Overall Business Plan

Perhaps the most important factor driving home the stratification of value between the environmental and entrepreneurial was the composition of the final jury. There was not a single environmentalist or environmentally-knowledgeable individual on the final jury. As the program designers explicitly stated on the evening of the penultimate day, the final jury determines the outcome of the competition. The final jury collectively awards hundreds of points, more than enough to counteract the points earned during the school itself. The jury's composition, crafted solely of bankers and marketing executives, silently signaled to everyone present what is most important.

The result of this design structure dictated the outcome of the school, as well as the lessons students likely learned. Eco-Field was a raw materials extractive enterprise that received among the lowest marks for environmental sustainability and whose co-leader continued to insist through the end of the program that Siberia's *taiga* was an inexhaustible resource. The project's projected profits alone (exemplified by the jury's physical reaction to them) solidified its status as the best business proposal in the school. Its poor environmental credentials paled in comparison to the projected 5 million rubles it would garner in its first year.

When I asked Tvorogova about the jury composition, she replied that she wanted students to know what they would be facing when they actually look for investors. “If they want to start their own business, they have to make their case before investors and before banks,” she told me. This same pragmatism percolates up in her talks during SHEPR. As can be seen in her remarks on opening day, Tvorogova is always referencing the “real world” and what “real” entrepreneurs and investors are doing. Since environmentalists hold no sway in determining which businesses are funded in the “real world,” neither would SHEPR grant them that privilege in their final jury. The unintentional effect of training individuals to navigate the “real world,” however, is socialization into and perpetuation of extant social structures that may be less than beneficial even to environmentalists’ own goals.

### **Variable Socialization: Ideological Degrees of Freedom**

Programs of socialization, education, and empowerment differ from one another in the basic assumptions under which they operate. *Socialization projects are always ideological; but they have greater or lesser degrees of freedom.* To better articulate this difference, let us consider two other environmental socialization projects being conducted in the Irkutsk region: an environmental summer camp designed and executed by En+ and “Eco-Schools,” which is part of an international environmental education program hosted at Baikal Environmental Wave.

#### ***En+ Environmental Summer Camps***

The En+ Department of Sustainable Development designed a summer camp for children from its “mono-cities” [*monogoroda*], which are, essentially, “company towns” such as existed in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In acquiring old Soviet industries,

En+ also became the chief employer in several Soviet-era mono-cities, and the company has created an environmental summer camp for these youths. The Director of Sustainable Development at En+ described it for me thus:

“This is not your usual kids’ summer camp,” she said. “It’s a social game. They create an environmental city... We hold elections, for mayor, or president, ministers, legislators: that is, all government, business, courts, society and so forth. So the goal is to form a proper model of a city where each person plays a particular role [*gde kazhdii zanimaetsya svoim delom*].

“Last year, our camp had an environmental theme. That is, businesses had to do an environmental project, like a waste treatment plant. First the kids come up with the idea, then they have to draw up the design of the plant. Next, they go before the legislature or the mayor and present it to these administrators [who have to approve the project]... The administrators should earn money from it – they receive taxes from each project. If they approve the project, the kids have to make a real construction of it. The constructs are made of large wooden sticks. For this, they are trained in tying knots and in how to build a model... So we get a big exposition of these real constructions. Of course they are schematic models, but the kids explain what it is. They learn skills such as making a presentation.

“All these projects have some skill involved that they will learn. For example, when it begins, the camp doesn’t have anything. No discothèque or entertainment. Someone will become the PR director of the camp, and he will put on the discothèque. To do this, he needs to create a project – a business project – that includes the list of participants and explains their roles, bring it to the

government for approval, and then they can begin to earn money. Because you get paid to conduct an activity and coordinate it. [He gets paid] with virtual money, not real money. It goes in his account. And each project, like if they want to go on an excursion to the shore of Baikal, they can't just go, someone has to be the initiator. He has to make a project on how to take the trip, where to go, how many people, for how long. All this is to describe it and defend it before the government officials who have to approve the project. Next he assembles a team. And then, when the project is completed, he receives a salary which he distributes to his employees, and so everyone accumulates points. There is a Minister of Sport who conducts exercises every day. There is a guard – police – who monitors safety in the camp and prevents fighting. In the event that there is suddenly some conflict between students, they go to court... So it's a direct model of contemporary society.”

The Director of Sustainability explained the camp to me by saying that, when students arrive, the camp has nothing. The students themselves must create the “environmental city” in which they will live. And yet, the terms of that city are already laid out for them by the camp organizers. They are told they must elect an executive, legislators, judges and bureaucrats. There is no opportunity to re-imagine government, to experiment with different forms of rule, or even to divide the camp into different groups that select different governing structures for each group.

Similarly, they are told that whatever they wish to do – be it a discothèque or a vacation to Baikal, it must be a profitable business that provides the service. Notably absent from En+'s “environmental city” are nonprofit organizations or public goods and services. Neither are

students free to re-imagine economic structures, to brainstorm how goods and services might be supplied to their “environmental city” other than through the capitalist marketplace.

Economic inequality is written into the camp’s very structure through the virtual money students receive for their initiatives, given first to the “businessman,” who then disperses the earnings to his “helpers” and to the administration. Curiously, “taxes” from these businesses go into the administrators’ accounts. Although some sardonic observers may agree that this is, in fact, a direct model of the Russian state, it does not show its young participants the redistributive role of taxes in the economy. Finally, the system of “virtual money” that is allegedly merit-based has very real rewards. As the En+ Representative explained to me:

“At the end of the camp, we want to give gifts to the children, but so as not to just give them stuff, we hold an auction. We teach them the skills of an auction: what it is and how it is properly done. So at the auction, those kids who earned some money – virtual, not real money – have the opportunity to win something.

Someone will get a notebook computer, someone will get a pen.”

The camp re-affirms and rewards the virtue of capital accumulation and, in so doing, reinforces a meritocratic outlook on economic inequality. Meanwhile, the most tenuous component of the “environmental city” summer camp that En+ created is its environmentalism.

### ***Eco-Schools***

Eco-Schools is an international program that grew out of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. Overseen by the Foundation for Environmental Education, the program operates through nonprofit organizations in 33 countries, including Russia. Baikal Environmental Wave is a host-site for the Eco-Schools

project, and Zinaida serves as the liaison and certifier for projects in the Irkutsk *oblast* [region]. There are 70 Eco-Schools in her jurisdiction, approximately half of the total number for Russia as a whole. She described the program for me as follows:

“[Once the school signs up for the program], they choose a topic. There are four topics: Water, Energy, Climate Change and Waste; but if the school wants to choose some other topic, they can. Many choose "Healthy lifestyles," some choose "Biodiversity." .... So, essentially, there are seven steps in this program. There is nothing specific spelled out, the program just stipulates that you need the first step to be the creation of an Environmental Council. That is, the whole school should be involved, but you need an Environmental Council with representatives from students, teachers, parents, sponsors; basically, there just need to be some kind of council. The Council selects the topic on which the school will work: for example, Water. Then, they study the situation: what happens to water in the institution, how does the school use water? So, kids learn where water is leaking, where it drips, where they use too much, these kinds of studies. Next, they draw up an action plan - what they can do to reduce excess water loss, that is, to reduce water use. Drawing up an action plan is not only necessary to know what has to be done to reduce water usage, but it is also the educational part. So the third and fourth steps, once the plan is already underway, is monitoring and evaluating the plan, that is, they constantly keep track of how it is working, evaluating where it is successful or unsuccessful, whether there is some component that should be added or taken out. Obviously, there should be

some outcomes. Then, there is the integration of the selected topic in all educational courses. For example, you have to look at water in mathematics and physics and chemistry - what is it, and in biology and physical education and in some extracurricular activities. Water, water, water. That is, they, they need to study it a little bit. And then they need to share it with others, that the school is dealing with this topic, what they learned, and with whom they cooperated. That is, they have to share with others about what they are doing. Maybe someone will be interested and something else will come out of it. And the last, seventh step is to prepare an environmental code for this topic. So they draw it, how to save water, or write about it, some have written poetry, some list concrete steps of the different ways [to save water]. They can do it however they like. And that's it!"

Participating schools are instructed to create an Environmental Council, but how it is structured, its means of decision-making, and its role in the school-wide project is left to the schools themselves. There is even flexibility on the choice of topic under the large umbrella of environmental concerns. The project attempts to empower youth by showing them their ability to tackle concrete problems and to enact measurable change – but how they choose to do so is self-directed. The terms of nature protection, or even for collective self-management, are not laid out *a priori*, but are in service of the overarching goal, for instance water-use reduction.

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Both the summer camps and the Eco-Schools project are geared toward youth socialization and empowerment. Both claim to be teaching young people important life skills,



and both profess an environmental focus.<sup>58</sup> Each may be considered an ideological project; but they differ dramatically in the *ideological degrees of freedom* they offer their young charges in crafting their respective projects.

Eco-Schools allowed variance in the *means* to further the environmental *end*. This contrasts with the En+ summer camp, which offered little coherence on the *end* of their environmental city, but regimented the *means* – stratified class economies, capitalist business enterprises and bureaucratic government. Environmentalism at the En+ summer camp is something that exists within the confines of its pre-established set of social structures, which are presented to students as immutable.

Eco-Schools has built into its design wide latitude in the choice of theme, the structure of oversight and stated ends. The flexibility does not necessarily mean that the project will be better or that students will actually take on the opportunity provided to them to reimagine their structured environment. Teachers at various schools could dictate terms to the students, even if the program itself does not. But ideological flexibility is built into the program's structure.

### **Bringing Hegemony Back In**

Through its sponsorship, En+ gained access to the operations of environmental organizations, and this power play granted them influence to steer the direction of environmental activities. Specifically, this hegemonic role for En+ in shaping the form of environmental activism can be seen in what they did *not* fund. In an interview I conducted with the Tvorogova after the conclusion of SHEPR, we addressed the topic of “unfunded” projects.

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<sup>58</sup> Although “motif” might be a better word for the En+ summer camp.

*Kate:* So you already had the idea [for SHEPR] before En+ [came], and you said, ‘Here, I have an idea that I would like [to do].’

*Tvorogova:* Actually, we suggested to them a choice of several ideas. They chose this one.

*Kate:* That means that you had other projects that you wanted to do, but did not get the money for.

*Tvorogova:* Yes.

*Kate:* For example? Shall we dream?

*Tvorogova:* Let’s dream. There is a long-standing dream that is shared by everyone in the [organization]...[to create] a Center for Alternative Technology. That is when, on an actual plot of land, there stands an actual house, which uses functioning alternative technologies...So this center – on the one hand, it’s a testing ground, on the other hand it’s an educational center, where people can come and hear all about it, see it, hold it, touch it. This is a very important point. They can see the calculations: so if we cultivate the land in this way, then what we get here is such-and-such results. And it costs this much. Same with the building itself: [this is what happens] if we stand solar panels and use energy-efficient materials there and such. [In Russia] such experience is catastrophically lacking. That is, we already have a business structure on the market that could be promoting this economy. But we can’t just coerce businesses to do it, so it is necessary to create these Centers. Because to promote these technologies and these ideas to consumers – that is, to actual purchasers – people need to see for themselves with their own eyes that it works, and that it is sufficiently effective.

[The Center is necessary] so people can come once, have a look, leave, think about it more, then come back again. Do you understand? It's a complex process to change consciousness, to change priorities, etc. So my idea was precisely such a creation – one of the projects that I proposed – was the creation of a Centre for Alternative Technology somewhere in the southern Baikal area.

Like her “fourth wave” counterparts in the West, Tvorogova’s environmentalism seeks to harness the power of the market to shift practices of production and consumption into something sustainable. Her greatest dream is a socialization project that would allow consumers to gain hands-on experience with alternative energy and energy efficiency. With a wide array of products and real-time comparisons in outcomes, her vision would have ideological degrees of freedom while drawing attention to environmental protection.

En+, on the other hand, was not ready to support this type of socialization. The company is glad to make minor accommodations for environmentalism, but to re-imagine power sources or to limit the use of natural resources is not a positive goal for them, a fact that was made clear to me in my interview with the Director of Sustainable Development at En+ in Moscow. Throughout our conversation, the Director was bright, pleasant, and enthusiastic as she described the multitude of programs sponsored by En+, both in Irkutsk and elsewhere. There was only one moment when this sunny façade was broken.

*Kate:* Of course, there is a huge international conversation about global warming.

I’m curious how you would answer environmentalists who said that your company was selling coal to China and...

At this question she visibly bristled and shot back:

*En+ Representative:* Where do you live? In a building? Do you use light? Do you use dishes? Cups? Spoons? Do you want to live in a tent? We produce light. We make, what? Coat-hangers! Everything that is metal. It seems to me that the real question is that large industrial enterprises are the main source of environmental harm; that's alright, that's understandable. In order to do this business correctly, we're going to engage environmentalists from the point of view of industry. How can we properly industrialize, so that plants can work better? And we are trying to build these processes at our factories from a more correct environmental point of view. For that reason, we call in [environmentalists]... To an environmentalist who says – “Close the plant!” I say, “Fine, go live in a tent. Eat with your hands. You’re not doing that.”.... So, I believe that you must be reasonable.

The En+ Representative essentially breaks down environmentalism into two camps: the reasonable and the unreasonable. In so doing, she defines the boundaries of legitimate environmentalism. Environmentalism is good when it works to help En+ make its practices more efficient; but environmentalists are not to call into question what those practices should or could be. They can “green” what is already being done, but they have no legitimate voice if they question whether contemporary practices *should* be done. Promoting alternative pathways toward economic development is beyond their legitimate sphere of influence, according to the representative from En+. Environmentalists can assist, but cannot hinder, the course of action that En+ chooses on its own, for its own purposes.

Yet, because En+ is footing the bill for environmentalist work, its definition of legitimate environmentalism becomes dominant. In activism as elsewhere, the question is not simply whether resources matter in movement mobilization; less acknowledged but equally important is the question: *whence* those resources? The source of one's money has an impact on the ideological content of one's activities (see also, Berman 2014, Oreskes and Conway 2011). In the classic model of Gramscian hegemony, civil society consents to this dominance because the partnership offers them empowerment and expanded capacity in their own field of action. But the expansive empowerment that comes through this consensual contract is simultaneously constrained in scope.

## **Conclusion**

Civil society has the power to mobilize bodies and shape minds, and that ability can be threatening to other elites within the field of power. Alternately, civil power can be beneficial to these other power holders. In their interactions with civil society, therefore, they can work to encourage civil society to uphold rather than counter their own power sources. In the case of the economic power elite, financial aid to civil society organizations operates to further their hegemony in the field of power as a whole. Civil power is strengthened, but not deployed against its benefactors. Instead, economic elites are granted access to help guide the direction of civil power.

One of the more effective directions toward which economic elites may steer civil society is toward the enactment of "empowerment" programs that encourage young people to become leaders in society, while simultaneously socializing them into the values of that society. These socialization programs can vary in the amount of social imagination they allow their participants:

they have different *ideological degrees of freedom*. Those programs put forward by En+ have minimal flexibility; they further a symbolic power system that reifies extant power relationships as normative. Corporate sponsorship produces hegemony within civil society, which leads to the promotion of certain types of socialization programs over others – namely, those less threatening to the hegemon.

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Hegemony is a necessarily ambiguous form of power because it lacks the weight of law. Power in physical force, and power in legal determinism, is more visible and direct. Bourdieu recognized that power may be executed in myriad ways – hence his claim that capital comes in many different “species.” However, even he came to the conclusion that plays in the field of power were, fundamentally, struggles over the right to control the state. He writes:

“A good number of struggles within the field of power are of this type, notably those aimed at seizing power over the state, that is, over the economic and political resources that enable the state to wield a power over all games and over the rules that regulate them”(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 99-100).

Just as bodies, minds, and money have currency in all social fields, the power to set the rules and to mete out rule enforcement offer the state a privileged position in the sphere of power. It is this power and the interaction between the state and civil society to which we shall turn our attention next.

## CHAPTER 8

### STATE SUPPRESSION OF BAIKAL ACTIVISM

The state occupies a unique place in the social world. It is the sole sovereign over a particular territory, and all actors within it are accountable to its dictates. The state sets the rules that govern all social fields within its purview. When considering the field of power, and the arsenals available to actors within the field of power, control over the apparatus of the state may be the ultimate trump. Economic elites seek to use their power source – money – to alter the legal system by financing political campaigns or buying off corrupt state officials. Actors in civil society likewise seek to control the legal apparatus, by using civil power to mobilize movements and encourage the public to withhold its consent. But these tactics are, at best, a mere proxy to wielding power over the rule-making machine.

But state power is limited by geography. While civic and economic power may be strengthened by globalization and its concomitant access to transnational networks of people and resources, the state has a more ambiguous relation to the global field of power. External political players do seek to influence or pressure a state, either through treaties or incentives; but a state's territorial sovereignty generally remains inviolate. With the rise of globalization, however, there is greater need to legitimate state authority in the global community, and citizens are more likely to judge their leaders based upon global benchmarks. The resulting "isomorphism" in governance may be seen as a boon or a burden for domestic subjects, as these isomorphic laws

can be seen in such a wide array of areas as human rights laws (Tsutsui and Wotipka 2004) and austerity measures (Babb 2003).

In this chapter, we will examine a play in the field of power by the Russian state in response to the growing power of civil society. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, access to transnational activism strengthens and enlivens local civil society. Increased civil power becomes threatening to the state within the broader field of power. In response, the Russian state, under President Vladimir Putin, used its legal authority to curtail access to these strengthening forces from abroad. The “Foreign Agent” law rendered transnational ties a liability for local NGOs, and was used to specifically target those organizations most threatening to its regime.

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Every year, Irkutsk is host to the “People and Nature” film festival, an international festival that specializes in documentary and popular science films involving the natural world. At the close of one of the round-table sessions at the festival in 2012, one of the featured directors of a documentary on alternative energy – a man from Germany – asked to say a few words. He addressed the audience in English, and Lusiya, a volunteer with the Great Baikal Trail, translated his comments into Russian.

“If I may, from my experience, offer three pieces of advice,” he said. “First, decrease demand for energy. This is something we all can do, it is a way we can all participate, especially the poor. Decreasing demand also saves money on energy, and everyone can do it. Second, focus on coal. This can be done where you have district heating, such as you have here... Finally, if you are going to go the political route, then you need to have a feed-in tariff law. You must



elect representatives who support this law. Those countries where you see change,” he went on to say, “are those where the people voted *for* people who work for change and voted *out* those who did not!”

His comment was met with chuckles, smirks and exchanged glances in the audience. Lusiya, while translating this well-intentioned advice into Russian, looked embarrassed. She added her own addendum to the translation: “I know that there are some people smiling out there, and we all know why. But in Germany they have a very strong Green Party, and they were able to vote for them and create these laws.”

The director then closed with an emphatic line: “If you believe in democracy, you have to do this.”

With a pained expression, Lusiya translated his closing statement. People in the audience started to laugh. One young man laughed ostentatiously, slapping his knee, and then got up and left the auditorium. Lusiya turned to the director and said in English, “In case you are wondering what is going on here, you have to understand that democracy is a painful question in Russia.”

## **Democracy in Russia**

Democracy has never successfully taken root in Russian soil. For some observers, this is due to an intrinsic aspect of Russian national culture that demands a “strong leader” rather than wide participation (Keenan 1986). For others, authoritarianism is like a bad habit that Russian society keeps returning to for want of alternate experience (Figs 1996). It is a well-trodden path to which it is easy to find one’s way (Paxson 2006).

Russia was the last autocracy in Europe. Beginning with the Magna Carta in England in 1215, European monarchs were slowly pulled, prodded and pushed into accepting some form of

formal citizen input into the government of the state. Not so in Imperial Russia, which, aside from a few abortive reforms under Alexander II, held tight-fisted to its absolutism, even as the pillars of its power crumbled beneath it with the growing pressure of modern social forces (Figes 1996). With no democratic structures in place, the Provisional Government was ill-prepared to wield authority, and unable to counter the Bolshevik coup. Lenin saw democracy as an instrument of the bourgeoisie (Lenin 1917) and the new Soviet government would be run by Party faithful and under Party control. Thus did Russia fall again under an emperor, where it would remain for seventy more years.

While the Russian Federation that emerged from the ashes of the RSFSR was democratic in constitutional form, the state was mired in dysfunction. State capacity in the newly transitioned country was insufficient to meet the multitude of problems brought about by privatization, hyperinflation, asset stripping, payment arrears, corruption, fraud, and a massive sovereign debt crisis (Hamm, King and Struckler 2012). A majority of Russians were optimistic about democracy in the last years of the Soviet Union, but it did not take very long for bitter experience to sully its reputation.

From Yelstin's dissolution of parliament, to the re-written constitution, and loans-for-shares campaign funding scandal, democracy stood on shaky foundations even before the rise of Vladimir Putin to the Presidency, unelected and seemingly out of nowhere on New Year's Eve 1999. Once in power, Putin began the process of reconsolidating state power under the Kremlin. First came the creation of the United Russia party in 2001 through a merger of two large centrist parties to provide a majority party in parliament to support Putin's agenda. Next, Putin streamlined the bureaucratic structure of the government to eliminate waste, red tape and duplication of services – although, critics noted, some of the eliminated departments were among

the more independent voices, such as the State Committee on Environmental Protection (Henry and Douhovnikoff 2008). Oligarchs were brought to compliance, both through an enforceable flat tax (Gorodnichenko, Martinez-Vazquez, Peter 2009) and by a spate of criminal cases, which signaled to oligarchs the new limitations of their reach. Oil and gas were brought largely back under state control with the seizure of Yukos. Putin eliminated elections for regional governors, creating a system of appointments, beholdng to the Kremlin. And, as years passed, international election monitors became more and more concerned with fraud and abuse (Mendelson 2008). Today, Russia is best described as a “managed democracy” (Colton and McFaul 2003), where elections are used to legitimate an essentially authoritarian regime. Regardless of whether Russians prefer democracy or a strong leader, only the latter is now an option for them.

### **Threats from Below**

On December 4, 2011, the Russian Federation held its quinquennial legislative election amidst simmering, albeit subterranean, political discontent. Putin’s popularity was falling, although still well above the 50 percent mark. Frustration with corruption and bureaucracy was percolating through a middle class now grown accustomed to Western business practices. At the United Russia party convention, one-term president Dmitri Medvedev announced that he would not seek re-election so that Putin could take on the title for a third term. The back-door decision to have no primary election in the overwhelmingly dominant ruling party suggested that the presidential election was already over before the campaign, and Putin’s re-ascendancy was a *fait accompli*. Whatever their personal feelings about Putin, the move angered many Russians who felt they had been denied the right to select their own president. These feelings of dissatisfaction and betrayal were brought to the ballot box in December 2011.

In a fair contest, there is little doubt that United Russia would still have taken the majority of seats in the legislature. Nonetheless, the election was highly suspect. There was ample evidence of elections fraud and over a thousand official reports were filed citing voting irregularities (Schwartz and Herszenhorn 2011).

Opposition groups began protesting on Election Day and continued throughout the week, culminating in a massive demonstration on December 10, 2011. Tens of thousands poured onto the streets of Moscow for what was the largest protest since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The demonstrators were a diverse group, coming from different age levels, social classes and political affiliations, but they were united in their call for fair and transparent democratic elections and the end of Putin's long reign (Barry 2011).

Moscow's reaction varied. Elites in United Russia, including Putin and Medvedev, made crude and disparaging remarks about the protestors and their leadership in an attempt to ridicule them and undermine their legitimacy (Elder 2011). But these comments only seemed to further enrage the movement. United Russia began calling on its supporters to pose countermovement mobilizations (Schwartz 2011). Anti-Putin demonstrations continued through the winter, with protestors braving sub-zero temperatures to publicly display their discontent. The state did make some (short-lived) concessions to the protestors, but demobilization in March 2013 was not the result of victory. Putin handily won reelection for a third, six-year term, and demoralized protestors simply stopped showing up to scheduled rallies. As opposition numbers diminished, the monthly demonstrations became increasingly marred by violent confrontations between protestors and police (Elder 2012). Leaders' homes were raided (Lally 2012). Mass arrests, including of opposition leaders, also worked against the continued mobilization. New laws

curtailed the freedom of assembly (Bryanski 2012). By mid-summer, the “Russian Spring” was over with little to show for its efforts.

### **Threats from Abroad**

For some, the winter protests in Russia were reminiscent of the “color revolutions” that swept through the former Soviet bloc in the early 2000s, a comparison particularly pointed when demonstrators adopted the color White as their unifying symbol. In 2002, pro-democracy protestors overturned the established ruling regimes in the “Orange” (Ukraine), “Rose” (Georgia), and “Tulip” (Kyrgyzstan) Revolutions. Many remaining post-Soviet governments, including Vladimir Putin’s, were concerned that their regimes could meet a similar fate.

Importantly, ruling elites in the former Soviet Union did not think that the color revolutions were simply the expression of domestic discontent, but rather that their citizens were being manipulated and motivated to action by foreign elements. Namely, they professed that Western governments were making use of NGOs to enact their values and preferences domestically (e.g. Traynor 2004). Nonprofits became suspect in the minds of elites as geopolitical stool pigeons. Among the main culprits called out were George Soros’ Open Society Institute and USAID, both well-known for funding pro-democracy and human rights organizations in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Partly in response to the color revolutions, the Putin government passed a law in 2006 that sought to restrict foreign influence on the NGO sector. In its original form, the law would have created a separate status for registering and monitoring NGOs that received foreign funds, but in the face of domestic and international pressure, the law was softened. Still, it imposed tough audits and reporting requirements on domestic civil society organizations and gave the

state the right to deny official registration to organizations whose mission appeared threatening or whose personnel were deemed problematic by the state. It also allowed the federal government to tax grants from foreign entities at a rate of 26 percent, which severely limited the number of foundations willing to operate in Russia<sup>59</sup> (Crotty, Hall and Ljubownikow 2014). Several of the more restrictive aspects of this law were repealed in 2009 under the Medvedev presidency, but registration and auditing have remained a complicated bureaucratic difficulty for many Russian NGOs in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The 2012 Foreign Agent Law**

One of the more lasting effects of the pro-democracy/anti-Putin demonstrations that began in December 2011, and the embodiment of the Putin regime's apparent fear of threats from abroad, was the so-called "Foreign Agent Law." The law was adopted by the Duma on July 13, 2012 and approved by the Federation Soviet on July 18, 2012. President Putin signed it on July 20, 2012 and it went into effect 120 days later on November 17, 2012.

The text of the law requires non-profit organizations "receiving cash and other assets from foreign sources...and participating in political activities carried out in the territory of the Russian Federation" to register with the state as a "foreign agent."<sup>60</sup> Doing so gives the state far more reach and oversight into the operations of that organization. Nonprofits in Russia already have strenuous reporting and auditing requirements, but "foreign agents" would be subject to additional scrutiny. They must report to the state: "the amount of cash and other property

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<sup>59</sup> There was a list of foreign foundations who were except from the tax, but the requirements to join this list were highly restrictive. Small sums could be re-named "charitable donations" rather than "grants," and circumvent the tax, but these restrictions still limited the power, strength and growth of the nonprofit sector in Russia.

<sup>60</sup> The text of the law can be found at: [http://ntc.duma.gov.ru/duma\\_na/asozd/asozd\\_text.php?nm=121-%D4%C7&dt=2012](http://ntc.duma.gov.ru/duma_na/asozd/asozd_text.php?nm=121-%D4%C7&dt=2012) (Accessed November 17, 2013). The translations are the author's.

received from foreign sources..., the purposes of expenditure of these [assets]..., and their actual spending and use...”

These reporting requirements not only give the state a great deal of insight into the operations of particular NGOs, they also add a significant burden in time and organizational resources. As the law states:

“Non-profit organizations that act as a foreign agent shall submit to the competent authority: documents containing a report on their activities and on the personnel composition of its governing body every six months; documents on the goals of expenditure for the use of cash and other assets, including those received from foreign sources – quarterly; and, finally an annual statutory audit.”

These various reporting schemes – quarterly, semiannually, and annually – greatly exceed the already strenuous reporting requirements for regular NGOs, with money, time and resources diverted from projects toward the bureaucratic maintenance of the organization itself, which can itself dampen mobilization and protest (Piven and Cloward 1977).

More troublesome than the bureaucratic reporting of income and expenditure is the increased governmental oversight of organizational activities outlined in the new law. The law states that, for registered foreign agents “to participate in political activities in the territory of the Russian Federation, [they] shall, prior to attending said political activities, apply to the [regulatory authority].” In other words, the state has essential veto power over the activities and actions of NGOs, particularly those that may be deemed “political,” broadly defined. The law gives the state an ability to suppress assembly and speech that is unprecedented since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In addition to these significant concerns, there is also an undercurrent to the law that seems deliberately designed to portray civil society as the Other: it portrays certain independent associations as “un-Russian.” Not only are these domestic groups classified as “*foreign agents*,” but they are required by law to have the moniker attached to all their public materials. As the law states:

“Materials published by a non-profit organization acting as a foreign agent, and/or distributed by it, including through the media, and/or by use of the information and telecommunications network called ‘the Internet,’ must be accompanied by an indication of the fact that these materials are published and/or distributed by a non-profit organization that fulfills the functions of a foreign agent.”

Organizational representatives of designated nonprofits cannot speak publicly without making it known that they are agent of a foreign interest. In such a manner, Russian citizens’ groups can have their voice de-legitimated in the domestic public sphere.

The law is also sufficiently punitive. It establishes certain conditions that entitle the state to conduct unscheduled checks and audits of NGOs who are suspected of acting as foreign agents. If a nonprofit is found to be in violation of the law it can have its operations suspended for up to six months. Organizations and their leadership who do not comply with the law governing the registering and monitoring of “foreign agents” are subject to a fine of up to 300,000 rubles, up to 400 hours of compulsory work, or imprisonment for up to 2 years.

### **The Turn of the Screw**

Despite this potentially worrisome and problematic new legal framework, the nonprofit organizations I studied in Irkutsk were surprisingly unconcerned with the new law when it went



into effect in the fall of 2012. To the extent that they thought about it at all, it was scoffed at as a paranoid reaction to the anti-government protests six months prior. It was generally assumed that the law had been created to target Golos, the election-monitoring organization whose work helped spark the December uprising with evidence of widespread election fraud. Although I knew that both GBT and the Wave were recipients of foreign funding, neither considered the law to apply to them.

The reason was a paragraph in Article 2, Section 2 of the law that listed certain exemptions and exclusions. Some organizations were simply not covered by the law, and these included: religious organizations, political parties, government-affiliated organizations (e.g. VOOP), corporate-affiliated organizations (e.g. Volnoe Delo, Defend Baikal Together), chambers of commerce, and international nonprofits that are registered abroad (e.g. WWF, Greenpeace). Other exclusions are found in the definition of “foreign funds” and “political activity.” While the definition of foreign funding is fairly self-explanatory, the definition of “political activity” is both broad and vague. The law defines political activity as: activities conducted with a goal “to influence the decisions of public authorities, aimed at changing their work on public policy, as well as to influence public opinion for the same purpose.” Essentially, organizations who receive any money from abroad cannot also attempt to influence public opinion or policy without being designated a “foreign agent.” However, the law also states that certain activities are excluded from the definition of “political activity,” and one of these is “the protection of flora and fauna.”<sup>61</sup> The organizations I studied in Irkutsk, as environmental organizations immediately concerned with the protection of flora and fauna, saw themselves as

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<sup>61</sup> The full list of exemptions is as follows: “By political activities, not included is activity in science, art, culture, health care, prevention and protection of public health; social support and protection; protection of motherhood and childhood, and social support to the disabled; promotion of healthy lifestyles; physical culture and sports; protection of flora and fauna; charity activities, as well as activities to promote philanthropy and volunteerism.”

exempt from its oversight. For at least one organization in my study, this self-assurance in the apolitical nature of nature protection proved to be a dangerous delusion.

*March 26, 2013*

“I heard on the radio this morning that they are cracking down on NGOs,” Jennie said to me from behind her computer while we were working at the office of Baikal Environmental Wave. “They had a representative from three organizations on a talk show. The prosecutor is accusing them of being foreign agents. There are some others, too. Only one is an environmental organization – one I’ve never heard of in Krasnoyarsk.”

“You think the Wave will be next?” I asked her.

“Maybe!” she answered laughing. “We’ll see,” but her tone suggested that her concern was more intellectual than existential.

*April 1, 2013*

In the afternoon, the Wave received a phone call from the prosecutor’s office altering the staff to a coming fax. The fax, which arrived at 3:44 p.m., stated that, in fulfillment of the law “on combating extremism” in public, religious and other noncommercial organizations, the nonprofit was being “checked.” The letter demanded that the Wave provide the prosecutor’s office with a copy of 1) their organizational charter, and 2) “documents confirming the sources of funds and other assets (from which organizations, from which actual persons), their nationality, the general purposes for which these funds were allocated, the total amount of money raised by the organization in 2010, 2011, and 2012, and on which goals the funds were spent.” The letter stated that the documents were to be delivered to the prosecutor’s office by April 2,

2013. The date was printed in bold and underlined. “By 11 a.m.” was scrawled in pen beside the date.

With less than 20 hours to collect the requested paperwork (and most of those after business hours), they set to work, prepared to burn the midnight oil. The Wave staff was up until one o’clock in the morning photocopying documents, but managed to compile the needed materials in time for the 11 a.m. delivery.

“Success,” the Wave announced on its website, following the midnight photocopying frenzy. The posting even took the occasion to sympathize with the staff at the prosecutor’s office, reminding readers that: “They, too, are now hard at work and facing sleepless nights.”

*April 4, 2013*

In the office, everyone was back at work, as though the *proverka* (check) had never happened. The Wave’s staff was already busy focusing on its latest projects. Marina was planning the conference that would be the culmination of the Tahoe-Baikalsk-Goloustnoe grant. Artur and Zinaida were busy hauling pieces of the Interactive Education program to the Siberian Convention Center for an education fair to which they had been invited.

“Are you worried about the *proverka*?” I asked Jennie as we sat behind our respective computers.

“No,” she replied. “I don’t think they will call us foreign agents.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because they know that if they do, it will make a big stink!” she said smiling.

*April 11, 2013*

At noon, the prosecutor's office called after sending a fax to the Wave office, requesting additional materials. Specifically, the Wave was to collect and copy:

1. Grant agreements, invoices, payment orders, and reports provided to foreign funders
2. If the money was spent on workshops, their goals and objectives must be specified (provide handouts, presentation material, and presentations made at the workshop)
- 3 . Specify whether Baikal Environmental Wave conducted public events (actions, protests)
- 4 . Indicate whether Baikal Environmental Wave carried out the preparation and publication of printed materials, published articles in the media, including on the Internet, and other media projects (indicate which documents were produced by which activities), and submit a copy of the published material
- 5 . Copies of orders for business trips make by the Wave staff
6. Accounting documents confirming the costs incurred on business trips, and all travel reports
7. Reports to foreign funders on the progress of project implementation

Baikal Environmental Wave was given five hours to assemble and deliver the above list of documents for the years 2011, 2012 and 2013.

When I arrived at the Wave office there were three heads bent down over three desks, keyboards tapping, papers shuffling, and otherwise an unusual and tense silence. For the first time in all my visits to the Wave office, the overhead lights were on during the day.

“I brought some sugary energy,” I told Marina, offering her a package of merengue cookies.

“In a moment,” Marina smiled, and I set them on her desk.

Upstairs, Katya, Artur, and Jennie were sitting around the table, having just finished lunch.

“I think Putin is crazy. I can’t explain it otherwise,” Jennie said to me in English. “How does he think this will go over in this modern world? Is this really how a serious country acts, spending its time, resources and energy on small nonprofits like the Wave? How can anyone take this seriously, take Russia seriously? I heard on Ekho Moskvu someone suggesting that NGOs simply register as foreign agents and be done with it. But I don’t think that is the right track to take.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because it is not true!” she answered emphatically. “It’s a lie! I don’t want the Wave to sign something that is a lie! And besides, what happens the next time they want to put an oil pipeline by Lake Baikal, and when we say no, they will say we are foreign agents, sabotaging Russia’s advancement!”

At this point, Zinaida came up and asked for help finding a receipt for one of her projects. We all headed downstairs.

“Marina, you still haven’t eaten lunch,” Jennie said. “Go eat something.”

“I’ll eat at home,” Marina answered placidly.

Now there were seven heads bent over seven desks. Sounds resumed: the whir of the printer, the chink-chink of the Wave's official stamp on duplicate documents.

"I can't find the report on the bio-toilets," Artur called out. Meanwhile, there was a trading of places while Zinaida moved to Artur's computer in order to print. Temporarily displaced, Artur paced the room. It was a tense game of musical chairs.

Suddenly, the office was filled with the electronic tones of a Beethoven sonata – Vera's phone was ringing.

"Hello? No we are still working, gathering everything," she said to what was evidently the prosecutor's office on the other end of the line. "There is no way we will finish by 5 p.m. That's in fifteen minutes. How late will you be in the office?"

The prosecutor's agent apparently suggested the Wave just bring them the originals, but Vera would not allow it, saying the originals were not to leave the office. Artur said he would be willing to take the originals and stay all night watching the prosecutor's staff photocopy them. At a quarter after five, Vera and Artur left with what they had managed to collect thus far, planning to finish the rest the following morning.

*April 12, 2013*

Jennie was still smarting from the *proverka*. She continuously bemoaned the waste: the wasted paper, ink cartridges, and the wasted time. It was evident that she was fighting her natural instinct toward civil disobedience, and not to comply with the prosecutor's demands.

"I wanted to fight," she said, "but I had to step back. I can't put my neck out there because, at the end of the day, I'm not the one who would get hurt. Vera, Artur and Lev are the

co-directors, so if it comes down to it, they would be the ones to go to jail, not me. They would be the ones with a huge fine. Of course, the organization will support them with that, but still.”

When she learned later that certain other organizations in Russia in her social network had, in fact, decided not to comply with the *proverka*, she worried that she would be judged harshly by her NGO peers for capitulating.

“[But] there is a big difference between submitting documents and registering as a foreign agent,” she said, comforting her conscience. “We’ll never do the latter.”

Vera, meanwhile, had been helping a woman from the prosecutor’s office create a table of the Wave’s various grants. Apparently, the woman informed Vera that the FSB was unhappy that the Wave had been discussing the *proverka* on its social media websites.

*April 15, 2013*

A three page letter arrived by post to the office of Baikal Environmental Wave. It was from the office of the prosecutor. Its conclusion: the organization is a foreign agent and must register as such. The Wave was given one month to respond.

*April 16, 2013*

I learned about the letter the next day from Jennie.

“I thought you said they wouldn’t do such a thing because of the big stink it would cause,” I said.

Jennie paused for a moment. “I was mistaken.”

*April 18, 2013*

When I arrived at the Wave office today, I noticed something unfamiliar about the building front and did a double-take. Scrawled across the building in black spray paint were the words: “Foreign Agent ♥ USA”<sup>62</sup>

I hurried inside where I was greeted by Jennie and Yulia.

“Did you see our new decoration?” Jennie asked, with a laugh.

“I did!” I said “It’s incredible!”

“You saw it?” she confirmed, “Because we all walked right by it. Zinaida was the one who noticed it.”

“I took a picture of it,” I said.

“So did we!” she said. “It’s already up on the Internet. We called the police, and they were here, writing everything down. And the TV station has been out. And another is coming. Of course we will paint over it, but we have to wait until it is all reported.”

I handed her the cookies I had brought as a gift, and Artur said, “Uh-oh. That’s help from a foreign agent,” with a mischievous grin.

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<sup>62</sup> Literally: “*Inostanii* [sic] *agent* <heart> USA” [roughly: foreign agent <heart> USA]. “Foreign” was misspelled, and while “foreign agent” was written in Russian Cyrillic letters, “USA” was written in Latin lettering, as opposed to the Cyrillic translation: “США.”





Photo Credit: Author.

I learned later that the exact same phrase had been spray-painted on the front of Memorial, a nonprofit organization in Moscow.

*April 25, 2013*

When I came into the office today, I heard that Reviving Siberian Land is now being checked by the prosecutor. While everyone sat at the table for tea, Elena Alexandrovna came into the room looking pale and exhausted. She was invited to sit, but she refused, saying she had been sitting all day. Instead she stood, rocking back and forth, foot to foot, while she nibbled on

sliced fruit. We talked about her son and his work on robotics until the rest of the Wave headed downstairs, back to work. Once we were alone, I asked her about the *proverka*.

She said she had finally finished delivering a stack of papers “this big,” holding her hands about two feet apart and making a frustrated face. I asked whether she had counted the cost of all that paper and ink.

“It’s not the paper and the ink,” she dismissed with a wave of the hand. “It’s the time! All those things that I couldn’t do while I was having to do that.”

“What do you make of it all?” I asked her.

She paused, then said, “It isn’t pleasant. I love my country, my region. I love Baikal. And to have the prosecutors spending their time and resources looking at me... There are *real criminals* out there, people doing really bad things, but the prosecutors are looking at me.”

She was staring out the window while she spoke with a sad expression, as though it sat heavily on her shoulders that the country she loved and worked for would repay her efforts thus.

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Its text alone suggests that the “foreign agent” law is intended to curtail the power of resurgent civil society. But the manner in which the law was implemented and enforced also signaled the power of the state and the relatively powerless position of civil society *vis a vis* the law. The *proverka* seemed designed to repress and intimidate, rather than merely implement a federal law. The Wave was asked to compile three years’ worth of documents overnight, and then in five hours’ time. There was no legal justification for requesting such a quantity of materials with such a short turn-around; the timeframe alone guaranteed that the organization would fail to fully comply. The prosecutors’ reference to the FSB is suggestive, as is the comment’s unveiled attempt to limit the Wave’s public voice on the foreign agent law.

Perhaps the most disturbing of these intimidation tactics was the slogan sprayed across the office storefront. While no hard evidence can be mustered to tie this act of vandalism to the state, the Wave was convinced that it was not the work of a rogue hooligan. First of all, the Wave had only been notified of the prosecutor's decision two days before, and they had not reported it online or in the media. Public knowledge that the Wave had been determined a "foreign agent" was limited. More telling still is the fact that the exact same phrase had been spray-painted on the office front of another targeted NGO thousands of kilometers away from Irkutsk. If indeed conducted by the state, such a tactic would suggest extra-legal intimidation and harassment, designed to persecute or frighten the Wave members into conformity with the state's agenda.

### **Theater of the Absurd**

While Irkutsk NGOs struggled to understand and comply with the new law and the accompanying *proverka*, there were a number of questions that were circulating among activists that could only be answered by authorities. For example, why were NGOs required to provide documentation of foreign funding that occurred prior to the passage of the new law in 2012? Why were environmental organizations being checked at all if activities "protecting flora and fauna" were considered exempt? I had questions of my own, also, regarding the order that organizations were checked, and why some were organizations were checked and others were not. Amongst the NGOs and their online discussion boards and list-serves, stories fluttered around, full of rumor, speculation and supposition. If answers were to be found, it was not amongst the NGOs, but with the prosecutor.

May 6, 2013

I walked to the city prosecutor's office, arriving just as it opened at 9 in the morning. The office is located in the center of town on a pedestrian street surrounded by shopping boutiques. Pulling the heavy outside door, one is immediately greeted by dark, heavy stairs with a thick wooden railing. At the top of the stairs, a heavysset young woman in uniform was perched in a guard booth. I explained to her who I was and what business I had there. Her eyes did a fluttering roll when I mentioned the *proverka*, but she took my passport information for her record. The windowless lobby for the city prosecutor was small, dark and drab. Old brown sofas lined the beige walls. More than half the bulbs were out of the overhead chandelier and the wall lights. After logging me into the directory, the security guard directed me down a dim corridor and to the second door on the right.

Entering, I met three women, in their 30s, chattering happily as they removed their coats. The room was somewhat cheerier than the lobby, with two long windows illuminating cheap desks and tables covered with boxes and stacks of papers. The women looked up at me with surprise. I repeated for them who I was and why I had come. At the word "*proverka*," they also rolled their eyes. They told me to return in an hour.

When I returned, I was taken to a different room that was occupied by two other women who sat at desks that were facing one another. The woman on the left had dyed blonde hair and a uniform with shoulder boards. The other had light brown hair and wore feminine, flowing professional attire. I told them that I was a researcher, studying environmental movements around Baikal; that a few of the organizations in my study were now being checked as foreign agents; that there were many questions that local activists were asking, and I hoped to hear how the prosecutor's office would answer them.

The meeting lasted approximately 25 minutes and was only productive as a lesson in evasion. Much of the time, the three of us were all talking at once. I would start a question, but before I had finished, the two women would interrupt and speak back at me. When I asked a question, they would give an answer that did not fit the question. When I would repeat the question, they would say that they could not answer it. When I insisted that they could, they would direct me elsewhere. While it is difficult to capture such an awkward encounter in text, I have reproduced parts of our discussion below.

Kate: I wanted to know how it was decided which organizations would be checked?

Clerk: Any organization that collects money from abroad and that participates in political activity is deemed a foreign agent.

Kate: Yes, I know, but I want to know how you decided which organizations were to be checked, because not all nonprofit organizations in Irkutsk were checked.

Clerk: You can go to the federal prosecutor's website and there you can see a list of those organizations that have been designated as foreign agents. They are all posted online.

Kate: I don't need to know which were designated foreign agents, but rather how you decided which ones check.

Clerk: We are not at liberty to discuss the particulars of any organization. We can only discuss information about an organization with that organization itself. Which organization do you represent?

Kate: I don't represent any organization. I don't want to know about any particular organization. I want to know about the process. How did you decide who to check?

Clerk: You would need to talk to the Oblast prosecutor's office. It is the Oblast prosecutor that is ordering the check.

Kate: But it is the city prosecutor that is actually doing the check, right? The check is being done here in this office?

Clerk: Yes.

Kate: So then you had to have a process and you would have to know what that process was. I just want to know the process of how you decided who would be checked first, who second...

At this point, the woman in uniform got a little flustered. "I'm telling you, you would need to ask the Oblast prosecutor. All we do is fulfill the orders of the Oblast prosecutor. We received a list of organizations and we checked them." And I quickly jotted in my notes that there was a list provided to the prosecutor of which organizations to check. But the origin of the list remained obscure.

Kate: Some activists are suggesting that the checks are illegal because the documents they had to submit are from times before the law was in effect. How would you answer them?

Clerk: The job of the prosecutor is to fulfill the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which is the law. So whatever the prosecutor does is fulfilling the Constitution, so it is legal.

And so the dance continued with questions and deflections for some time. Usually, the two women talked to me pedantically, as though everything were a legal matter far above my comprehension, or with some annoyance, hinting that my questions were stupid and a waste of their time. Suddenly, the woman with the shoulder boards switched personalities and began to speak to me in a sweet and conciliatory voice.

“There is nothing wrong with being a foreign agent,” she said, smiling and talking gently, as though to a frightened child. “It is just a legal term. It isn’t bad. No one is saying that it is wrong to be a foreign agent, that organizations shouldn’t do it. It is just one legal designation as opposed to another. There is nothing wrong with registering as a foreign agent.”

I left the prosecutor’s office in a daze. I turned my steps toward the river, trying to process the conversation that had just taken place. I walked, lost in thought, along a street named Dzherzhinsky, which, at that moment, seemed perfectly appropriate.

### **Legal Nihilism**

Corruption has long been a part of Russian bureaucracy. Rule of law was not an accepted tenant of the Imperial autocracy (Hosking 2001); and systems of exchanged favors greased the gears of Soviet society throughout the regime’s life (Ledeneva 1999). In the 1990s, with its concomitant institutional collapse, corruption blossomed into a scale and form unprecedented in Russian history. Bribery, graft and kickbacks became the accepted norm. The law was, as one Russian lawyer once told me, “artificial,” because there was always a means to meet your desired end. Enormous fortunes sprang out of lawless activity, and such actions often went unpunished. Foreign companies seeking to do business in Russia have complained or even withdrawn in the face of stifling corruption (Meyer 2011).

After succeeding Putin to the Russian presidency in 2008, Dmitri Medvedev continued an anti-corruption campaign that he began in his days as First Vice President. He vehemently railed against the problem of “legal nihilism” in Russia, by which he meant the epidemic of corruption and bribery in the state bureaucracy. Taking up the issue, legal scholars have examined

Russians' willingness to disobey laws to measure the mood of "legal nihilism" in the country (e.g. Hendley 2012).

However, the phrase "legal nihilism" may be differently and better applied to the application of law, rather than its reception. Nihilism is a strong word. As a philosophy, nihilism suggests that life is inherently without any value, object, or purpose. Legal nihilism, then, would be belief that the rule of law has no inherent value, object or purpose. For individuals on the receiving end of law's authority, their actions constitute a choice – to follow or not to follow the law; but individual disobedience does not necessarily equate to any obvious answer to the question as to whether the rule of law is of value or serves a purpose. Indeed, anyone with a speeding ticket and any activist committing civil disobedience would, by this definition, be considered a legal nihilist.

More appropriate to the term "legal nihilism" is the *production* of law. Are laws produced with the intent that they govern as the highest authority? To what extent is the law of the land expected to be universally applicable? The value of the rule of law is first and foremost found in the creation of law and its expected intent. In the case of the law on "foreign agents," it is manifestly clear that the law was created to serve as a weapon of the powerful against the insurgent powerless. In addition, the law was not executed by the state in accordance with universal applicability.

The *proverka* was accompanied by a great deal of uncertainty, confusion, and rumor amongst non-governmental organizations. One question loomed especially large: why were some organizations checked and others not? The letter of the law states that, if an organization received funds from abroad and took part in political activity, then they would be considered



foreign agents, but many Russian NGOs who receive foreign grants were not checked, and the definition of political activity was sufficiently vague to warrant confusion both by those who were checked and those who were not.

In April, I traveled to Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia, which borders the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. Ulan-Ude is also home to environmental organizations and initiatives, and these frequently cooperate with groups in Irkutsk. I found myself in the tiny office of an environmental advocacy group that occasionally partners with Baikal Environmental Wave. There I spoke to Yegor, an older man with salt-and-pepper hair and a heavily lined face.

While we were speaking, the subject of “foreign agents” came up without my prompting, and I asked whether his organization had been affected by the checks.

“No, no one has made any such mention of us,” he answered. “Of course, if you look at the law and what makes foreign agents – getting foreign funding and political activity and such – then we meet all those requirements. We are the perfect candidate for such a law, but no one has said anything to us. Which is why I think that they didn’t just look at all organizations that fit the categories, but instead had certain organizations in mind who for whatever reason they found bothersome, and they targeted those.”

Reviving Siberian Lands was checked and received an official warning. While not prosecuted as a “foreign agent,” the organization was told that it was at risk should it continue to conduct its affairs as it has. The rationale, Tvorogova explained, was that they held a workshop and invited local representatives to attend, and that it receives money from En+.

“What?!” I exclaimed when I heard the news. “But that is a Russian corporation.”

“Yes, it is a Russian business, owned by a Russian oligarch, and its headquarters are in Moscow,” she said. “But like all big businesses, their bank account is in some island

somewhere. But the prosecutor just sees the black and white.” Here she acted the part of the prosecutor, pretending to read documents with squinted eyes and a sour face. “They say, ‘Registered in such-and-such island.’ So, we have this situation where a Russian nonprofit can be troubled for taking money from a major Russian corporation.”

But if association with En+ were the source of their trouble, it raised a new quandary. Every environmental organization in Irkutsk except for Baikal Environmental Wave received funding from En+, and yet only the Wave and Reviving Siberian Land, were subject to the checks. Where were the others?

Not only was GBT among the most visible of En+’s partner organizations, it also receives support from many of the same foreign channels as the Wave – particularly since both organizations receive assistance from Gary Cook (see Chapter 4). Money from the US Forest Service supported one of the main winter projects that GBT undertook in 2012, developing brochures and interpretive materials for two of its most popular trails. It also has received funds from Pacific Environment and GlobalGreen Grants. Were one to consider the donations that foreign volunteers make, which are bundled into the cost of a summer trip, then GBT receives most of its operating expenses from abroad.

One afternoon, shortly after the Wave had its first notice from the prosecutor, I had lunch with Marat from GBT and I mentioned the *proverka*.

“What do you think,” I asked him, “will GBT be checked?”

“No,” he said. “GBT is not that kind of organization.”

“What kind?” I asked.

“The Wave is a protest organization,” he said. “They are always against something, against some development. GBT...I don’t know how to say it. We aren’t really *against* anything.”

Marat was not alone in his assessment. In Irkutsk, the Wave had a reputation as a rabble-rouser. GBT was generally perceived as kind, fun-loving, outdoorsy volunteers, largely young people, doing work projects in the spirit of the Soviet *subbotniki*. However, had the prosecutor’s office actually audited the organization – as it did Baikal Environmental Wave and Reviving Siberian Lands – there would have been ample evidence to brand the Great Baikal Trail as participating in “political activity.”

GBT has, as an organization, signed petitions and published open letters on political topics, including closing the paper mill, rerouting the planned oil pipeline, and for the creation of new regional protected territories. GBT is also on an official list of nonprofit organizations who may participate as organizations in political campaigns. They have been involved in conferences and workshops with government officials. Had the prosecutor’s *proverka* been non-discriminatory, GBT could have been easily caught in a dragnet. Instead, there is reason to suggest that the law was designed to target particular nonprofit organizations who had been especially meddlesome in the affairs of the state and business elites.

The only organization in Irkutsk that was determined to be a “foreign agent” was Baikal Environmental Wave. And the two organizations who were checked and received official “warnings” were their close collaborators and associates: Reviving Siberian Land and the Center for Independent Social Research. Baikal Environmental Wave has long proved to be a thorn in the side of the state and corporate interests. They were often the frontrunner and coordinator of

protest actions against the paper mill, planned oil and gas pipelines, and other threats to Baikal and its watershed. All told, the Wave has not been endearing itself to the state.

Unsurprisingly, the Wave is also no stranger to state suppression. Since it took on protest activities in addition to its educational work in 2000, the Wave has been on the radar of powerful interests. During the protest against the Yukos pipeline, Jennie Sutton came home to find her apartment ransacked, and several days later, her car was stolen. While it is not known that these were done by the government, Sutton clearly believes they were, and similar tactics have been reported by other dissidents in Russia. Around the same time period, the organization's bank account was frozen. The tax office sent a letter to the bank to shut down the account, and the bank briefly complied, despite the fact that the letter bore no signature.

In 2002, the FSB raided the office and confiscated the Wave's computers and its Internet server. The pretext on this occasion was the claim that the Wave possessed classified maps. The organization had hired two geologists to help them create maps of radioactive pollution in the Angarsk region. Baikal Environmental Wave insists that the information used was already available to the public, but their computers and internet server were taken all the same.

The Wave's computers were confiscated again in 2010, this time under suspicion of copyright infringement. The organization provided the boxes of their version of Microsoft's product, including the sticker showing it was legally purchased, but again lost their computers for a period of six months. Jennie Sutton tells the story thus:

*Jennie Sutton:* There was one police officer from the Extremism division, and three from the commercial police. What was the officer from the extremism bureau doing there, if this was about Microsoft? We even had the boxes showing the software was purchased legally. And you could tell that the three from the

commercial division were uncomfortable. They knew that what they were doing was illegal. But the one from the Extremism division seemed to be in charge and was telling them what to do. They sent the case to the police in the Sverdlovskii district. We went to the police station and they gave us a good moral scolding about copyright infringement, and then we showed them that we had bought our software legally and that this was all cooked up. And after that, [the chief of police] was on our side! The prosecutor was working for the higher ups and he said, ‘We have to continue this case,’ and the police chief said, ‘You have no case. I’ve already given them back their computers.’ Which is why I think, at certain moments, everything depends on the individual: how an individual decides to behave in a certain moment.

Importantly, despite the legal nihilism of the Russian state in the enactment of the foreign agent law, the position of those caught in its net remains, fundamentally, a *legal* problem.

Regimes of legal nihilism may not abide by the rule of law, but neither is it rule *without* law.

Once the Wave was determined by the prosecutor to be a foreign agent, the organization began a lengthy process of legal battles. Members were constantly consulting lawyers and seeking for legal precedent in crafting their defense.

At the same time, there were additional difficulties that the Wave faced beyond the most basic question of whether or not it was, in fact, a foreign agent. Once the prosecutor’s original decision had been made, the Wave held two meetings – a staff meeting and a general assembly for all the membership – to discuss options. At both meetings, members affirmed that registering as a “foreign agent” was off the table. The group decided that they would “fight till the end,” as

Artur stated, to give the Wave “a beautiful finish,” as another long-term member put it. Having made this choice, adherents faced the very real possibility that Baikal Environmental Wave, one of the oldest environmental advocacy organizations in Siberia, may be forced to close. This led to another legal problem, one which had immediate implications: what to do with the Wave’s property.

Baikal Environmental Wave received bountiful support in the mid-1990s from the Heinrich Böll Foundation of Germany, which enabled them to purchase a spacious, two story office in the Akademgorodok section of Irkutsk. As real estate and rent skyrocketed in the city in the 2000s, the Wave was able to stay afloat with its permanent residence intact. Moreover, it was able to rent office space on the second floor for added income in lean times. In many ways, the Wave office was its life-support. Should the Wave refuse to register as a foreign agent, this property would undoubtedly be lost to it.

“I’m thinking of starting a new organization,” Jennie announced one day over tea, about a week after the prosecutor’s letter. I raised my eyebrows enquiringly. “I already know what I’m going to call it,” she said, with a sparkle in her bright blue eyes that suggested something mischievous.

“What will you call it?” I asked, taking the bait.

“*Vtoraya Volna!*” she said: the Second Wave.

The prospect of a new organization was brought up at the Wave staff meeting as they considered their options in light of the prosecutor’s decision. There seemed to be much enthusiasm for the possibility. The new organization could write a charter that would be less susceptible to prosecution for political activity, or it could strive to possibly eschew foreign funding. There was even some discussion of creating a commercial organization, rather than

another NGO, that was geared toward micro-credit for environmental businesses. Marina was the most excited about getting into the business of environmental entrepreneurship.

“But where would we get the money for financing loans?” Jennie asked.

“From foreign grants,” Marina answered.

“Then we would be a foreign agent again,” Jennie replied.

“But we would be a business, not a non-profit.”

“So businesses can get money from abroad and be involved in politics, but social organizations cannot?” Jennie asked incredulously.

“Yes,” Marina and Masha answered simultaneously. Jennie dropped her pencil.

“Arghh!” she exclaimed shaking her two small clenched fists in frustration.

The principle question revolved around whether the Wave could form a new organization and transfer its property to that new organization so as not to lose what had been the Wave’s greatest asset.

At first, members were counting days – what was the maximum amount of time that it would take to officially register a new organization, and what was the minimum amount of time that the Wave could extend its legal battle in court before the property would be confiscated. Could such a property transfer be possible given the legally-stated time frames for each process? More research yielded additional legal and bureaucratic constraints on this potential trap-door solution to the “foreign agent” problem. The new organization, whatever it would be, would have to pay sales tax on the property it received from the Wave at market price – money that simply was unavailable. Finally, the office would likely have to be sold anyway to pay the fines that would be levied on the organization and its leadership – possibly 300,000 rubles each – should the court uphold the prosecution’s claim.

Despite the evident disregard for the rule of law in the *proverka*, law still defines the rules, and organizations are constrained in their own actions by legal requirements. The necessity of democratic representation in legislation becomes obvious when the power to yield law is contrasted to the state of being bound by law. There is no civil disobedience that would allow the Wave to retain its property – and obey it must, even if the law was unequally applied.

### **Back in the USSR**

For those contemporary activists who remember the Soviet government, the new “foreign agent” law felt frighteningly familiar. As one person put it:

In the Soviet Union there was no independence. Just like what they are trying to do today. They are trying to get their arms around social organizations again. In the Soviet Union, there were no independent organizations. Then in the 1990s they started to appear and this was helped with financing from the West. So now you have government-sponsored organizations and independent organizations. This law is aimed at bringing those independent organizations back into the fold.

Another organization that went through the prosecutor’s *proverka* and emerged with a warning was a research center that produces reports for scholars, businesses, nonprofits and others who commission their work. The organization also conducts some local projects on its own, organizes conferences, and maintains an active research profile. Baikal Environmental Wave is among their regular clients. When I discussed the *proverka* with one of their lead researchers, he was also reminded of the Soviet period. “I think [the *proverka*] is a prophylactic



[measure]. The result will be that social organizations will be more careful about what they do and say regarding the powers that be.”

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Baikal Environmental Wave fought the designation of “foreign agent.” On October 17, 2013, a judge heard their case, and upheld the prosecution. The Wave would have to register as a foreign agent or close its operations. The organization immediately appealed, but again lost in a higher court. Despite these rulings, the organization continues on. Court battles draw out, and the prosecutors check in occasionally to ensure the Wave does not lose sight of the sword of Damocles that hovers precariously above it.

## **Conclusion**

The Soviet state maintained its supremacy by attempting to monopolize the field of power. It sought to control the production of goods and services, the opportunities for social and civic engagement, and the power to dictate and enforce law. The monopoly of power was made possible by a two-pillared system of apparatus and force (Kotkin 2001). The immense bureaucracy ran the state institutions and the Communist Party, backed by the secret police, provided incentive for its proper functioning under threat of force.

In the final years of the Soviet Union, this dual structure was weakened, and then annihilated in 1991; the consequence was state collapse. The implosion of the Soviet Union and outlawing of the Communist Party left a power void – but simultaneously opened opportunities within the newly released social and economic fields. In 2000, with the ascension of Vladimir

Putin to the presidency, the Russian state set about regaining its strength within the field of power.

The government of the contemporary Russian Federation has divested itself the large and cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus that was required to run a national economy and provide myriad outlets for sanctioned social activity in the populace. Allowing the existence of competing powers in the overall field of power is risky, but the Russian state maintains the knowledge base for widespread social control. Oligarchs were allowed to dominate the economic field and enjoy limited play in the field of power, but these were soon disciplined to refrain from threatening the state by the arrest and exile of over-reaching oligarchs such as Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

But civil society is also a power that threatens political elites. The ability to mobilize bodies and sway minds can accumulate to such a degree that control over the legal apparatus can be taken from the hands of those who wield it. The passage of the Foreign Agent Law is a play within the field of power, directly targeting the source of civil society's growing strength: transnational connections. We have seen in Chapters 4 and 5 how important these global ties are for the creation of a robust civil sphere; the Foreign Agent law changes this strength into a liability. Importantly, the law is not actually intended to remove access or influence from abroad. It is only in place to curtail the reach of civil society within the field of power. Like the oligarchs before them, key figures are singled out to serve as examples to others: Golos, Memorial, and Baikal Environmental Wave.

In the transition from the Soviet regime to Putin's Russia, the political elites learned an important lesson: they do not need to dominate the social and economic fields in their entirety to maintain their position: they need only dominate the field of power.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

In order to conduct extended research in the Russian Federation, an American scholar must receive visa sponsorship from a research institution. As I planned to embark on the present study, I sought affiliation with a major university in the region. Everything appeared to be proceeding as planned. I had a faculty collaborator, a department that agreed to host me, and the necessary documentation was working its way up through the bureaucratic channels of official affiliation. Then, one day, I received a message from a colleague with distressing news: somewhere higher up in the administration, my proposed affiliation had been denied. The reason was that my research “might pose a threat to Russian national security.” What was so threatening, apparently, was my proposed intention to study “civil society.” Fortunately, I found affiliation with another research university (after omitting the offensive term and replacing it with “environmental protection”), and soon I left for Irkutsk with a visa in hand.

“Civil society” is a freighted word in Russia; the government views the very concept as threatening – so much so that visa affiliations can be denied on the basis of it. In the Western world, civil society is viewed as generally benign; Americans especially pride themselves on their personal initiative and their volunteer spirit. But for Vladimir Putin and his government, the term “civil society” brings up unpleasant connotations: on the one hand, it reflects discourse coming from the Solidarity movement in Poland and other dissidents of the 1980s, whose words and deeds helped the Soviet Union reach its ultimate end; on the other hand, promotion of “civil

society” is the stated aim of many Western aid organizations, and this adds a foreign connotation to contemporary perceptions of the civil sector. With this legacy in mind, “civil society” is not seen as a contributor to a functional, productive society, as it is in the West; “civil society” is a vehicle for government overthrow. Every time a group speaks out against the state, it is not only an irritating impediment; it represents a chink in the armor of a government that rules by hegemony.

Despite a tendency in Western scholarship to herald civil society as the purveyor of democracy, and extol the rise of transnational connectivity amongst actors in the civil society optimistically as a united front against the powerful, it is worth remembering that democracy is not always welcome in the eyes of political elites, and transnational connectivity has limited efficacy in a world still governed by sovereign nation-states. Moreover, members of civil society are not the only parties globalizing, strategizing and learning; so too are political and economic elites, who sometimes stand in opposition to their aims. Civil society, made up of a complex web of associations and initiatives, is highly contingent – partially dependent upon the institutional environment in which it operates. Tracing this contingency has been a central aim of this dissertation.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

This dissertation studies civil society through an in-depth examination of environmentalist communities in the Lake Baikal region of Russia. Russian civil society is generally described as anemic, but in Irkutsk environmental groups have built a rich network of organizations, institutions, and practices geared toward citizen involvement in the realm of nature protection. Nourished by the pure water of Lake Baikal, an indigenous environmentalism

sprung up in its rocky soil, adapting and evolving to meet the changing opportunities and constraints that surround it. Beginning in the Soviet Union and persisting into the present day, environmentalist communities coalesced around the shared goal of protecting Lake Baikal, a natural wonder of the world, from anthropogenic harm. This dissertation has considered the formation of environmental civil society in Irkutsk over time, from Iron Curtain to globalization.

### *Civil Society through the Looking Glass*

The Soviet Union was described as “totalitarian” because the Communist Party sought to insinuate itself throughout the entire social fabric. Only the most intimate level of social life, the proverbial “kitchen table,” was free from its oversight. Individuals could form groups or associations to advocate for particular causes, but only under the auspices of the Party. While the Party could outright forbid certain issues from gaining public attention, environmentalism was permitted because it was generally seen as apolitical. As discussed in Chapter 3, the All-Russia Society for Nature Protection (VOOP), as an officially-sanctioned organization, reaped the benefits of wide membership, abundant resources, and access to the government presses. However, despite the presence of these factors – which would signify strength in the context of Western organizations – VOOP was constrained and channeled by the hard and firm ideology of Soviet communism. Presses were censored, knowledge was compartmentalized, and the levers of power were outside the influence of all but a few.

However, there was also some independent organizing within the Soviet Union in response to industrial overreach that threatened Lake Baikal. Although this movement did not form as an official organization, it made use of several opportunities that lent it advantages. First, it was primarily a movement of scientists and intellectuals. Although science was not free

from the grasp of ideological correctness, it held a privileged place in Soviet society. Scientists in the Soviet Union had resources and respectability. Their regular conferences and publications allowed for a space in which to question state decision-making when it came to Lake Baikal. Also, scientists and supporters could leverage the uniqueness of Baikal when pressing for its protection; it is worth bearing in mind that few other environmentally-degraded locales in within the Soviet Union could replicate such a powerful claim.

Despite the spontaneous activism that erupted around the protection of Lake Baikal in the mid-twentieth century, little progress was made in hindering the creation of polluting industries in the Baikal watershed. Those scientists most committed to documenting the human impact on Baikal's unique ecology, such as Grigori Galazii, found their careers halted. Importantly, however, these voices were never completely silenced, especially on the local level. The persistent presence of environmental civil society – either in the Party-guided VOOP or in the community of activist science – helped to maintain public awareness of the uniqueness of Baikal and its endangerment so that when *perestroika* and the right to protest finally arrived, the Baikal Movement would be the first group in the Soviet Union to act and utilize this newfound freedom.

### ***“Evangelical” Transnational Civil Society***

As the Soviet Union began its collapse, what had been a closed society opened up. Environmental activists in Russia and abroad wasted no time in reaching out to establish ties between their formerly closed-off countries. Because of the Party's dominance over all social activity within the Soviet Union, Russians had no experience in forming independent organizations, and other sectors of society similarly did not know how to relate to them. Chapter 4 shows how, in such an environment, transnational civil society actors provide knowledge to

help create a nascent nonprofit sector. Importantly, without a history of philanthropic giving – and in a period of economic collapse – foreign supporters can fill the niche, allowing new organizations to weather crisis and even thrive.

However, Western models cannot be simply transplanted to Irkutsk wholesale; and even well-meaning attempts to transmit cultural practices from one context to another can fail dramatically. As Chapters 4 and 5 make clear, cross-national exchange, particularly from the democratic West to post-, semi- or fully authoritarian countries not only face the usual barriers of cultural mismatch, they also must overcome entrenched fatalism and a perceived lack of efficacy. But even if an actual technique, organizational form, or social practice from one country does not take root in its new soil, the very act of sharing across borders has value. Cross cultural exchange can spur creative thought, shifting mental boundaries, spurring new local organizations, practices and possibilities. Interaction with transnational activists can inspire individuals to create their own organizations, putting new skills and ideas to work, broadening the boundaries of citizen activity.

### ***Globalizing Hegemony in the Civil Sphere***

As the Iron Curtain rapidly corroded, it was not only activists who began to straddle the borders between East and West. Business and capital likewise began to seek out markets and opportunities. And just as transnational activism brought the knowledge of a nonprofit sector to local Russian activists, Russian businessmen, whose eyes turned to the horizon of the global marketplace, were learning the already established norms of global corporate capitalism. As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, the oligarch Oleg Deripaska, head of the En+ Group, has striven to bring the practices of Western business to his home soil. Among these practices are those of

Corporate Social Responsibility and a cause-marketing campaign to align his enterprises with environmental civil society. The relationship between corporations and civil society benefits the image and reputation of the corporate brand; while environmentalists must justify to themselves that their financial gain does not come at the expense of their own reputation and “brand.”

Moreover, corporate philanthropy in the environmental civil sector affects the type of social programs and public demands that are offered. Environmental activists find themselves passing over more progressive projects that they would prefer in order to conduct the relatively tame projects put forward by their corporate sponsors. Transnational social learning occurs in both directions: just as local activists are strengthened by their peers abroad, so do Russian oligarchs learn from the battles already fought by Western corporations how to maintain dominance through hegemony in civil society. The rapidity by which Corporate Social Responsibility came to Irkutsk, and the form that it took, show that the window of opportunity that opens to civil society in the post-Soviet world may only open as far as it does in Western world, which is itself still constrained by the counterforce of corporate hegemony.

### ***Globalized Politics, National Politics***

Interconnectedness defines the lived experience of citizens in a globalized world. Transnational civil society and multinational capitalist enterprise weaves between spatial scales; local activity occurs in dialogue with transnational actors, in response to extra-local trends, and in concert with a multitude of players worldwide that each exerts its own influence. In an era of globalization, politics, too, become globalized. And yet, there remains a critical actor whose relationship to the global is more ambivalent: the national state. As a territorial sovereign, the modern state represents the limits of globalization for its subjects. How this limit is negotiated



differs across countries; in Russia the state has taken transnational connectivity to be a threat to its power and has used legal means to curb its influence domestically.

The “foreign agent law” discussed in Chapter 8 shows how, in a globalized world, the state can still exert its authority against influence from transnational forces. Although embedded in a web of interconnections, local civil society still subject to a territorially-bounded legal system, and horizons of activity are differentially delimited by political borders. Environmental activists in Irkutsk now confront a hostile state that works to curtail expansive citizen efficacy, reminiscent to some of the previous Soviet regime. Control over law provides a means to target and taint individuals and organizations within civil society when they deviate too greatly from the Kremlin’s desires and dictates. The Putin regime does not seek to win the war of ideas in the public sphere, but aims to avoid the battle altogether by eliminating its challengers *a priori*. The “marketplace of ideas” is too risky when one is striving to “manage” democracy.

### **What Does Civil Society Do?**

The Soviet Union and the neoliberal reformers who structured the post-Soviet transition each made their bids for legitimacy based in the classic poles of 19th century ideology: socialism and liberalism. Each of these ideologies proposes a competing vehicle for societal betterment: the regulatory state and the free market, respectively. Socialism and neoliberalism each had an ascendant moment in Russia, and neither proved effective in producing anything that could be called the “common good.” The societal catastrophe that resulted from Russia’s turbulent transition rendered “ideology” a dirty word. The public was to be won, not by any powerful idea, but by an effective executive who could return the country to a semblance of stability. Vladimir Putin provided this leadership. Putin’s unexpected appointment to the presidency on

New Year's Day of the new millennium represented a shift in national direction. Putin's government reconsolidated power that had been diffused by the transitional period. Rights and freedoms were rolled back, but at the same time the standard of living rose, the economy grew, and crime fell. The specter of instability buoyed the Putin presidency even as the authoritarianism of his state continued to increase.

From Soviet socialism, to transition neoliberalism, to Putin's "civic authoritarianism,"<sup>63</sup> the collection of citizen initiatives that is generally referred to as civil society has faced different opportunities and constraints. Its actions within these various versions of Russia, and its role within them, suggest more generalizable knowledge that can be gleaned from this case about civil society.

The Soviet Union was ideologically premised upon the creation of the common good; and yet, from gulags to shortages, from suppression to pollution, the regime spectacularly failed to live up to its promises. One reason for this failure was the difficulty that citizens faced in their attempts to act independently of the state. Individuals living in the Soviet Union, whether they were biologists working in the field, industrial workers in a factory, teachers in a school, or construction workers building skyscrapers – people going about their daily lives – were aware of problems, but the Soviet Union offered no legitimate means for them to fix these problems. There were few opportunities for public initiative. Knowledge and expertise was compartmentalized, and the levers of power were highly concentrated, with long, cumbersome, and often self-interested bureaucratic channels standing between daily life and the means for change. Without the openings for individual input into society, problems that might have been fixed in a freer regime compounded, producing more destruction and difficulty than the optimistic ideology professed, particularly when compared with its Western opponents.

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<sup>63</sup> The credit for this term belongs to Francis Weiso.

The freedom that came to Russia in 1991 took the form of chaos and collapse; neoliberal ideology offered little emphasis on strong institutions, relying on the market to re-make the region in the image of the West. But despite the social collapse, local civil society groups in Irkutsk were able to leverage this opportunity to build local organizations that flourished. Combining resources and support from peers abroad – an opportunity unavailable in the shadow of the Iron Curtain – local groups fleshed out new mechanisms for citizen input in the society in which they were embedded. The decade of neoliberal structural adjustment in Russia is generally perceived as a disaster: a free-for-all of unregulated capitalism in which the nation's wealth of natural resources and industrial infrastructure were carved up among a small handful of ruthless oligarchs while the vast majority fell victim to poverty, unemployment and crime. And yet, this same period also saw the nascent formations of new civil mechanisms, whose activities would bear real fruit in the coming years. Environmental activists in Irkutsk were no longer as impotent as their Soviet predecessors. Among their notable accomplishments: the designation Lake Baikal a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996; the creation of "Baikal Day" as an official holiday in 1999; the prevention of proposed pipelines through the Baikal watershed, including against Yukos in 2002 and against TransNeft, a struggle that continued from 2005-2008; the suspension of the Baikalsk Pulp and Paper Mill in 2008, and its final closure in 2013.

And these large accomplishments are only the beginning: their offices show evidence of myriad day-to-day victories. One example comes readily to mind. During my first month in Irkutsk, a volunteer with GBT asked me to translate a few paragraphs of nature interpretation into English. I later saw my translation on large, permanent signs that were to be placed within Pribaikalskii National Park. Realizing that trails were sometimes difficult to find and navigate, and to heighten visitor appreciation and experience, GBT began a program to create interpretive

signs. The national park office – hamstrung by tight budgets and federal dictates – had not itself provided these. Great Baikal Trail members saw a problem, and they acted to resolve it. It may be only one small deed, but all of these actions taken together provide a dynamic social ecology, that, while perpetually changing, provides stability in a dynamic world. Capitalism has been called a mechanism for “creative destruction” (Schumpeter 2008); civil society may be considered a mechanism for “creative alteration,” as members of the social body work toward fixes, large and small to myriad problems that are differentially defined.

While the empirics of this study support a beneficent role for civil society in the co-construction of a common good, the worldview that governs the Kremlin does not share this conclusion. Those voices that heralded civil society in the Soviet Union were the same ones that cried for the government’s dissolution. Civil society is not a partner in a perpetual project for societal betterment for Putin – it is a force that ends governments. From this perspective, permanent social organizations would be the equivalent of “sleeper cells,” awaiting the opportunity to rise up and topple existing authorities. Civil society as a social sector is not to be trusted.

However, unlike its Soviet predecessor, Putin’s government does not outlaw independent activity outright. Rather, the state uses legal regulation to monitor the terrain of civic activity and then root out those individuals and organizations that might bring trouble to the regime. At the time of this writing, reports on Russia’s civil sector are not encouraging. The state has continued its legal campaign to root out “foreign agents” and to bring charges against its more outspoken critics.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Recently one of Putin’s more vocal challengers, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, was assassinated in Moscow. Putin announced that he would personally oversee the investigation, which does little to quell the suspicions of Russia’s dissident community.

Moreover, the Putin government has made it difficult for transnational linkages to assist Russian social organizations. Long-standing restrictions on foreign funding remain in place, and the foreign agent law symbolically taints organizations receiving help from abroad. Meanwhile, the regime has begun actively espousing a nationalist ideology that was largely absent from the early years of Putin's presidency, when his legitimacy rested on the return to stability. While whipping up anti-Western sentiment at home, Putin also sparked a rift with Europe and United States by annexing Crimea and supporting separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine. Relations between East and West have reached their lowest point since the Cold War. Stigmatizing the West, and suppressing those groups who look abroad for help, the Russian government under Putin have developed a strategy to meet the threat posed by globalization, internally and externally. Despite many euphoric claims that are made about the power of transnational civil society in Western literature, Russian activists must suffer the consequences of their territorial embeddedness alone.

The question that remains for the future of independent activity inside Putin's Russia involves the progression of globalization more generally. Putin has signaled that he intends for Russia to be a major player on the global stage. At one time, this meant seeking entry into the World Trade Organization and participating in the G8. More recent moves hint that Putin hopes to place Russia in the role of hegemon to other, parallel multilateral political and trade groups. The Eurasian Union, enrollment in whom sparked the recent Ukrainian revolution and subsequent civil war, is an example of Putin's vision for a Russia-led regional power coalition to rival Europe. However, it could be that the benefits that accrue to playing in the pre-established fields of global economic and power will be too enticing to keep Russia isolated for long. Russian business will still be reaching across borders. Study and scholarship abroad are key to

the scientific advancement and recognition. International tourism is unlikely to abate simply by virtue of ideological nationalism. Linkages will remain, and their ability to inspire agency and imagination will also continue. All these forces will impact the potential for domestic activism within the Russian Federation. And Baikal specifically will continue to draw a disproportionate amount of international attention. Despite its rhetorical hostility to the West, the Russian government should not wish to curb the inflow of tourists to the “Pearl of Siberia.” The lake will continue to draw researchers and scientists from around the world. Perhaps a young social scientist will be denied a visa to study environmentalism there, but an in-flow of people, ideas and resources will keep portals open between Baikal and the global community.

However, should the current Russian government succeed in constraining civil society to such an extent that only the safe, non-threatening organizations survive, the story of environmental activity to protect Lake Baikal can offer some limited hope. Although unable to prevent the construction of the paper mill or to alter the course of industrial development pushed by the Soviet state, even at its most limited, environmental civil society kept the conversation alive. Hands tied and speech censored, Irkutsk environmentalists in bygone years used what voice they had to say again and again that Baikal was special and worthy of protection. They maintained Baikal’s prominence of place in the public mind, so that, when new opportunities finally arose, people were ready to meet it.

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