



**the current state
of Indigenous peoples
in russia and their struggle
against russian
colonialism and war**

*summary report, written by Independent
Indigenous and Decolonial activists,
researchers and members
of anti-war initiatives*

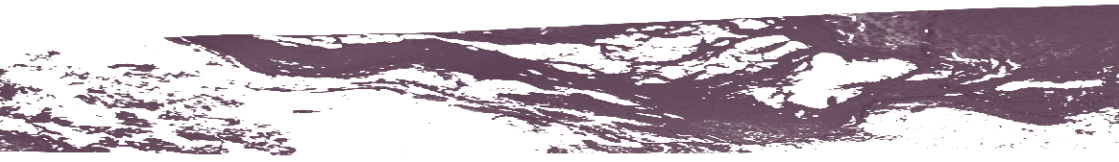
the current state of Indigenous peoples in russia and their struggle against russian colonialism and war

summary report, written by Independent
Indigenous and Decolonial activists,
researchers and members
of anti-war initiatives

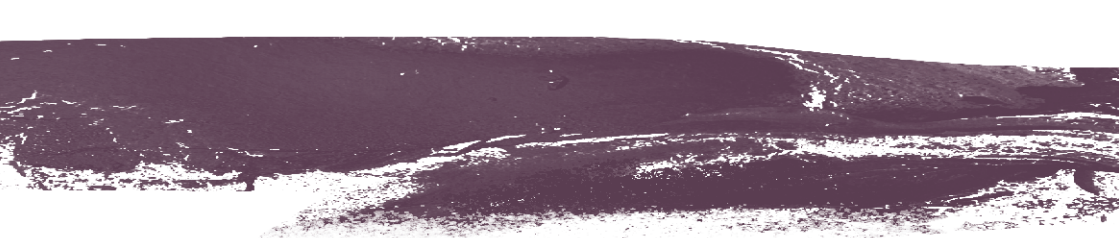
*the reports were written
as part of a roundtable discussion
at the German Foreign Ministry in 2024*

Berlin
August 2025





<i>p</i> reface	7
<i>r</i> ecommendations	11
1. decolonial initiatives in Russia and their work	17
1.1. main types of activities of decolonial initiatives	18
1.2. challenges and needs	20
2. economic inequality between regions and moscow	25
2.1. some statistical facts that reveal the picture of economic inequality	26
2.2. grant provision to the regions as a mechanism of colonial control	28
2.3. conclusion	29
3. unequal access to quality education	33
3.1. moscow-centricity of education	33
3.2. lack of mother-tongue instruction (the example of the Republic of Tatarstan)	35
3.3. propaganda and racism in educational programmes	36
3.4. children's education as a factor of pressure on parents to fight against Ukraine	37
3.5. boarding schools	37
3.6. bullying of Indigenous children and students	39



4. environmental situation in the regions	47
4.1. introduction	47
4.2. arson attacks on Indigenous peoples' settlements for the purpose of coal mining in the Kemerovo region	47
4.3. exploitation of Indigenous peoples' territories in the Republic of Sakha by mining companies	49
4.4. destructive gold mining in the Republic of Khakassia	51
4.5. exploitation of Indigenous peoples' territories by nornickel and rosatom state corporations	52
4.6. Basqortostan's struggle to preserve the Indigenous people's right to their lands	53
4.7. conclusions and recommendations	54
5. systemic racism	61
5.1. introduction	61
5.2. russia's invasion of Ukraine as the culmination of russian racism	62
5.3. hate crimes against Indigenous people and migrants in russia	63
5.4. police violence and migrantophobia/Islamophobia in 2024 ...	66
5.5. personal story of encountering racism	67
5.6. recommendations	68

6. forced russification (on the example of the Republic of Buryatia)	75
6.1. introduction	75
6.2. the systematic removal of mother tongues from general education schools	76
6.3. destruction of the infrastructure of Buryat culture	77
6.4. imposition of Orthodoxy	78
6.5. persecution of Buryat activists	78
6.6. colonisation of republics. Forced changes in the composition of the population	79
6.7. destruction of private capital and Buryatia's independent economy	80
6.8. the public side of russification	81
6.9. the decolonial fight against russification	82
6.10. conclusion	83
7. indigenous resistance and repression against activists and organisations in russia	91
7.1. non-violent resistance of Indigenous people.....	91
7.2. indigenous and ethnic minority political prisoners	93
7.3. the use of the extremism label against Indigenous peoples	96

7.4. recommendations	97
8. representation of Indigenous people in the russian media space	101
9. women's movement in the national republics of russia	107
9.1. the problem of domestic violence	108
9.2. risks for the feminist and women's movement	109
9.3. connecting with roots as a strategy against the patriarchy	112
9.4. feelings and hopes for the future	113



Gulnara Shuraleeva
editor



preface

The document you are reading is the result of collective volunteer work of democratic Indigenous and decolonial activists, researchers, and participants of ethnic organisations, migrant diasporas and anti-war initiatives from Russia. We belong to peoples who, at different times, have experienced Russian colonisation and its consequences, and we are united by one task: to tell the world the truth about our state in Russia and to work towards a future free from colonialism, authoritarianism and war.

We cannot rely on officials affiliated with the Russian state in terms of reporting on the problems of Indigenous people and ethnic minorities in Russia. As experience shows, Russia is powerful enough to fill international platforms such as the UN with ‘its own’ people¹, including fake Indigenous activists who paint a picture that is convenient for the Kremlin. To challenge this narrative, we need to counter the Russian state propaganda machine. It invests a great deal of resources in concealing the exploitation and violence against Indigenous peoples and migrant diasporas in the country. Nor can we rely on Moscow’s anti-Putin opposition to counter the propaganda. As evident in Yulia Navalnaya’s recent critique of decolonisation², this opposition has a poor understanding of the problems and needs of Indigenous people, as well as people from ethnic groups that have historically lived in Russia but are not Russian.

Russian propaganda seeks to portray us as extremists, terrorists, fundamentalists, nationalists and supporters of violence. In reality, we constitute a democratic and pluralist movement that is primarily concerned with dialogue, restoring justice and building consensus. Our chief desire is to see a peaceful future free from colonialism, authoritarianism, war and inequality. There are people from many different backgrounds, including mixed backgrounds, among us, and our work aims not at creating a new ideology of one nation's superiority over another, but at normalising good-neighbourly relations and respect among different peoples. A good example of this is the environmental protests in the Republic of Bashkortostan³. In 2023–2024, Bashqorts, Tatars, Russians, the Chuvash, Udmurts and representatives of other ethnic groups all stood together and side by side in Bashkortostan against the arbitrariness of the state and corporations, against police violence. Another example of such solidarity is the work of OVD-Info, the originally Moscow-based human rights project that helps those unjustly detained during protests. Over the past year, the project has started to care about making its services available not only in Russian but also in the languages of the Indigenous peoples of Russia, with the help of volunteer Indigenous translators.

In the context of our work, it is impossible to provide an 'ultimate' definition of the terms 'decolonisation' or 'decoloniality', and we do not attempt to do so. No definition will be sufficiently comprehensive because of the complexity of the social and political processes that these words signify. In the broadest sense, we could say that decolonisation means agentic resistance to colonial violence (e.g. the refusal of Indigenous people to participate in Russia's predatory war against Ukraine on ideological grounds) and the effort to restore what has suffered and is suffering from colonial violence (e.g. learning the language of an Indigenous people that is becoming extinct as a result of Russification). Decolonisation is not a doctrine and does not provide simple and definitive answers to questions about how best to resist and recover. Different people may have different views on this. Despite this, propaganda tends to ascribe unity of

opinion and dogmatism to us activists who identify with the decolonial movement. In reality, there are people among us with very different perceptions. For example, there is no consensus on how exactly the political structure in the Russian space would better reflect decolonial ideas: some advocate the independence of national republics, some prefer the federalisation project, and others wonder about alternatives to the concept of the state altogether. But this question is not the first to be addressed today, and we will not get closer to solving it unless we focus on commonalities rather than differences. We accept differences in each other's views and consider pluralism of opinion an important condition for the existence of a lively democratic debate.

With this report, we want to speak in the first person about our work, about the problems we see in Russia's current arrangement and about the connection between Russian colonialism and its military aggression and conflicts. We speak about our situation in the country not only to draw attention to our problems, but also because we see the inextricable link between the way Russia treats the Indigenous peoples and the diasporas in the country and the way its colonial influence spreads death and destruction around the world.

Colonial ideology is at the root of Russia's occupation of Ukraine's territories, but the problems do not end there. Through colonial ideology, Russia finds allies among dictators around the world. Not enough is said about Russia's destructive influence on neighbouring countries in Central Asia, the South Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Nor is there enough talk of Russian soldiers taking part in war crimes in Syria⁴, the Central African Republic, Niger and Burkina Faso, serving Moscow's colonial interests in these regions. These wars, this destruction, once started with our peoples. And our current situation is an example of what Russia intends to do by seizing more and more territory.

Many of the authors of the texts collected in this document are forced to write under pseudonyms and anonymously because under Russian law they can be sentenced to long prison terms as 'extremists' for these statements. We hope that the time will come when we will be able to name everyone openly. In this work, the authors have drawn on data from human rights organisations and independent media, their own experience and expertise as Indigenous people and first-hand information from our compatriots in the regions and republics of Russia. In this way, we hope to show you the Russia of today through our eyes.



recommendations

This text briefly summarises the main theses of the reports, which can be seen as recommendations for supporting decolonial policies towards Russia for foreign political leaders, NGOs, activists, experts, academics, cultural actors and other representatives of democratic countries interested in the prospects for a sustainable and just peace in the region.

1. Recognise and condemn the colonial and imperial nature of the current political regime in Russia as one of the root causes of Russian aggression against Ukraine and other countries.

Recognise the forced Russification of Indigenous Peoples and Russian systemic racism, the Russian-Chechen wars and other instances of Russian aggression in the countries of the Caucasus, the occupation of Crimea, the oppression of the Crimean Tatars and the practices of deportation of peoples as prerequisites for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Include issues of forced Russification, racism and forced mobilisation of Indigenous peoples and migrants in Russia, Russian-occupied Crimea and other temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories in strategic discussions on international relations.

2. Uncompromisingly support the right to self-determination of the peoples of Ukraine, including the right to resist Russian military aggression, occupation and forced Russification. Oppose forcing Ukraine to surrender the occupied territories to the abuse of the Russian state.

3. ***Support the right to self-determination of the Indigenous peoples of Russia, including the right to independence and autonomy, native languages and preservation and study of history (including the history of Russian colonisation), traditional cultures, arts and religions.*** Support the Indigenous languages that are disappearing as a result of forced Russification. Support educational and cultural exchange programmes that allow Indigenous talent, especially from remote regions, including students, scholars and artists, to study and work in safety from repression and without the intimidation of the Russian propaganda, which reigns at all levels of Russian education today.

4. Invite decolonial initiatives, activists and experts from Indigenous peoples and ethnic anti-war associations from republics and regions of Russia ***that are not affiliated with the Russian state and the official Russian institutions⁵*** to all discussions related to Russian-European relations. ***Include representatives of such initiatives and activists in decision-making and strategy development processes. Do not support the practice of excluding and silencing Indigenous people from Russia's regions and republics, when only Moscow-based politicians are entitled to a voice. Support the 'nothing about us without us' principle.***

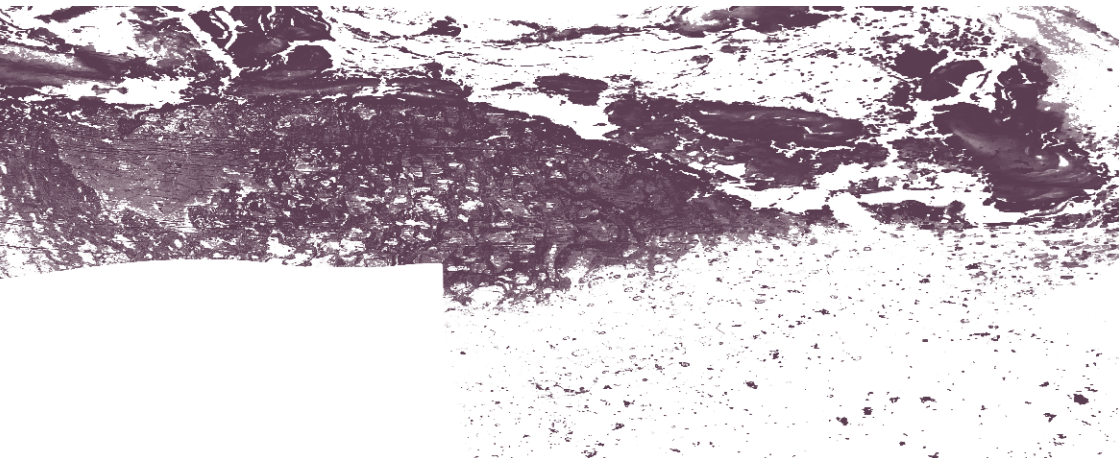
5. Abolish the purchase of Russian gas, oil and other fossil fuels as a practice that financially supports Russian aggression against Ukraine as well as promotes corruption, inequality and exploitation of Indigenous peoples in Russia and violates their rights to self-determination and a clean environment. Denounce the exploitation of Indigenous people and the destruction of the ecosystem in the areas inhabited by Indigenous peoples, which is the responsibility of Russian state mining corporations and the Kremlin.

6. Support the work of decolonial initiatives, activists and experts from Indigenous peoples and ethnic anti-war associations from Russia. ***Provide protection***

to Indigenous people and ethnic minorities who have been subjected to repression and risks of forced mobilisation by the Russian state. Stop the deportation of refugees from the North Caucasus republics to Russia, and recognise the risks of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial punishments and executions in the North Caucasus as a gross violation of human rights and a circumstance justifying the granting of protection.

7. Recognise and condemn the Russian state's practice of using the terms 'extremism' and 'terrorism' as a repressive measure and manipulation of international law, including as often based on racism and Islamophobia towards Indigenous people. Recognise that Russian law enforcement agencies massively classify as terrorists and extremists peaceful actors, human rights activists, anti-war activists from decolonial, Indigenous and ethnic initiatives, as well as bystanders not involved in any unlawful acts. Recognise that Russian law enforcement agencies also misuse these terms in relation to Crimean Tatar Muslims in occupied Crimea, and other residents of the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, as well as Muslims from Russian national republics and migrants from Central Asian countries. Recommend that migration services, law enforcement agencies and international security agencies be critical of the rulings of the Russian legal system, which assign the status of extremists and terrorists to refugees and dissidents, and not rely on them when making decisions on granting asylum, visas, residence permits, etc. Develop systems of protection from legal discrimination for refugees, political migrants and dissidents from Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine who have been illegally granted such status in Russia, as well as those involved in politically motivated criminal cases brought by Russia as a repressive measure.

8. Support Indigenous political prisoners and political prisoners from the regions and national republics of Russia, including in information campaigns and international advocacy. Strongly condemn the practice of using punitive psychiatry against Indigenous spiritual leaders and activists. ***Encourage the inclusion of Indigenous political prisoners and political prisoners from ethnic minorities in future exchange lists.***



1 *Are Indigenous Activists from Russia Being Shut Out of the UN? Several Indigenous activists have been refused attendance at this week's UN EMRIP. Is the Kremlin behind it? Leyla Latypova. The Moscow Times, 9 Jul 2024*



2 *Navalnaya's Decolonization Critique Proves That Russia's Liberal Opposition Hasn't Been Listening to Indigenous Voices. Gulnara Shuraleeva. The Moscow Times, 6 Sep 2024*


3 *Translator's note: as spelled by the Bashqort authors of this text, while the official spelling is 'Bashkortostan'*

4 *TN: These reports were compiled before the fall of the Assad regime on 8 Dec 2024*

5 *We specifically emphasise that activists and experts who claim to be representatives of the Indigenous peoples of Russia, yet are affiliated with Russian official structures and sponsored by state corporations, are corrupt individuals acting solely in the interests of the Kremlin, and therefore cannot and should not represent us*



Victoria Dorzhiin/Maladaeva
co-founder of the Indigenous of Russia Foundation



1. decolonial initiatives in Russia and their work

Throughout its existence, Russia has grossly violated the rights of Indigenous peoples, exploiting their resources and destroying nature through the power of corporations accountable to the state and oligarchs. In the last year alone, we have seen the State Duma authorise logging in Buryatia around Lake Baikal, oil producers in the Republic of Sakha pollute the Lena River, and a coal mining company in the Kemerovo region evict the Shor from their historic lands by burning their homes. There are hundreds of similar stories in every region, from the Caucasus to the Far East.

Indigenous resistance to Russian colonialism also has a long history. But today's Indigenous and decolonial activism is taking on a whole new stage of development: as a protest against the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, dozens of anti-war ethnic initiatives that expose the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and national minorities by the Russian state have emerged in Russia. These initiatives, as well as independent activists, operate autonomously, with no one leader or political programme. However, they are united by a critical view of the colonial character of the Russian state, which predates Russia's attack on Ukraine, as well as previous acts of Russian aggression against Chechnya, Georgia, Moldova, et cetera.

The Russian state puts enormous effort into preventing Indigenous peoples from having a voice on the international

stage. In the summer of 2024, Russia withdrew from the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities⁶ immediately after declaring 54 Indigenous and ethnic organisations as 'extremist'⁷, effectively criminalising their activities. The organisations added to the 'extremist' list are democratic and pacifist initiatives calling for public dialogue. Many of them are engaged in anti-war, cultural and research activities to preserve minority languages, Indigenous history and art, but even such work appears 'extremism' and 'hate speech' to the Kremlin.

Indigenous and ethnic initiatives and activists represent an important element of Russia's broader democratic society. Together, they contribute to the development of civil society and promote democratic principles such as equality, justice, pacifism and respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples.

1. 1. main types of activities of decolonial initiatives

1. Public initiatives of Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities have strongly criticised Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, from the first days organising anti-war rallies, protest actions against the participation of members of national minorities in the war, as well as campaigns against mobilisation and human rights violations. Some organisations have created their own media outlets to disseminate truthful information about the war in defiance of state propaganda. These materials are popular in the regions: for example, the independent decolonial media outlet Asians of Russia has over 140,000 followers on Instagram as of September 2024, and one of the Asians of Russia's most popular videos, showing the 'cargo 200' brought by plane from the war in Ukraine with the dead from the Republic of Sakha, has reached 1.5 million views⁸. Such content is crucially needed today to counter the propaganda narrative disseminated by the state from television screens to recruit more soldiers: that

the Russian army is defeating Ukraine, that casualties are low, and that the mobilised and contract soldiers are in no danger at all. Indigenous peoples' initiatives are both activist movements and media platforms that work to the best of their resources because local rather, which work to the best of their resources, because in the regions, they are local rather than federal media outlets that are always in demand.

These initiatives are counting the casualties among the Indigenous peoples sent to war with Ukraine. The data collected and analysed by Indigenous researchers, in particular Buryat researcher Maria Vyushkova⁹, has become an important source in documenting the disproportionate mobilisation and the increased likelihood of death at the front for Indigenous men of the North compared to Russian¹⁰ residents of central Russia. The disproportionate mobilisation further underscores the colonial nature of the policies of the Russian state, which values the lives of Indigenous people lower than those of the Russian population.

2. The initiatives also provide legal and social assistance to conscientious objectors and deserters from Indigenous people who, for ideological reasons, do not want to take part in the criminal war. We also support people who have been repressed for their anti-war views or participation in national movements. Campaigns have been organised in support of these people, such as the simultaneous protests in many countries around the world in support of the people repressed in Bashqortostan¹¹.

Decolonial organisations hold online conferences¹², webinars and discussions to raise awareness about war and resistance to mobilisation and empower national minorities and Indigenous peoples in the country. Activists pose questions about the systemic discrimination and exploitation of Indigenous peoples and migrants in Russia, fostering a critical view of the

events.

3. Links are being established with international organisations, human rights movements and foreign activists in order to draw attention to Russia's decolonisation issues on the international stage.

Indigenous and ethnic minority initiatives from Russia are communicating and standing in solidarity with Crimean Tatar human rights activists and activists from Central Asia, Armenia and Georgia who are trying to remove Russian pressure and influence on their countries.

The new wave of the decolonial movement is closely linked to other democratic human rights movements: migrant diaspora, feminist, LGBTQA, disability, environmental, and other movements. Many decolonial activists identify themselves as belonging to more than one of these movements at once. This allows us to broaden our lens and find common ground for working in solidarity with different communities suffering under the Russian regime today.

1. 2. challenges and needs

Today, decolonial and Indigenous initiatives from Russia face serious challenges, one of which is a severe lack of finances. With limited funding, activists are forced to rely on minimal resources to carry out their activities. This situation makes it difficult not only to organise events and campaigns but also to carry out the day-to-day work of investigations, education, research and information support.

Increased state repression, including censorship and harassment of activists and their families, and Russia's exploitation of the 'terrorist' and 'extremist' labels for Indigenous people, which mean risking years in prison for working inside the country, also make the work much more difficult. The Russian state also uses the terms 'extremism' and 'terrorism' as a method of settling scores

with disfavoured activists who emigrate in an attempt to escape persecution. The state places undesirable individuals on 'extremist' lists, sometimes together with their families, whereupon the activists face problems in obtaining visas and/or political asylum in democratic countries. Russia exploits xenophobia and Islamophobia, so that asylum-seekers in Europe who have fled the North Caucasus are unfairly denied protection and deported¹³ back to Russia, where they face law enforcement violence and extrajudicial executions¹⁴. But even while living in EU countries, activists and politicians risk their health and lives to continue their public work. In Europe, for example, the Russian regime has organised the assassinations of Chechen public figures who openly criticise the Putin-accountable Kadyrov regime in Chechnya¹⁵. In Austria, France and Germany, three Chechen opposition figures¹⁶ have been killed in this way in the last five years. Chechen and other North Caucasus activists are in particular need¹⁷ of international protection.



6 *Russia withdraws from Framework Convention for Protection of National Minorities – MFA. TASS, 14 Aug 2024*

7 *Russia Lists Organizations Associated With Nonexistent Anti-Russian Separatist Movement As ‘Extremist’. By RFE/RL’s Idel.Realities, 26 Jul 2024*



8 *[A whole planeload of dead was brought to Yakutia. The author of the video says that all the dead are from Yakutsk]. @asiansofrussia Asians of Russia Instagram account, 12 Jan 2024*

9 *Indigenous Peoples of Russia and the Russian War in Ukraine. Presentation at the 2024 ASN Convention. Maria Vyushkova, May 2024*



10 *TN: in the Russian language, there are two separate words for ‘ethnic Russians’ and ‘citizens of Russia’, which both translate as ‘Russians’ into English. Here, the word ‘Russian’ refers to the former.*



11 *[Indigenous peoples of Russia stand with Fail Alynov and Bashqortostan]. Decolonize Russia, 19 Jan 2024*

12 *[Russian war in Ukraine: Counterpropaganda activities: from activism to sustainable planning. An online conference with decolonial activists]. Decolonize Russia, 16 Sep 2023*



13 *Europe: Halt returns of people from the North Caucasus to Russia where they are at risk of torture and abuse. Amnesty International, 17 Jan 2024*



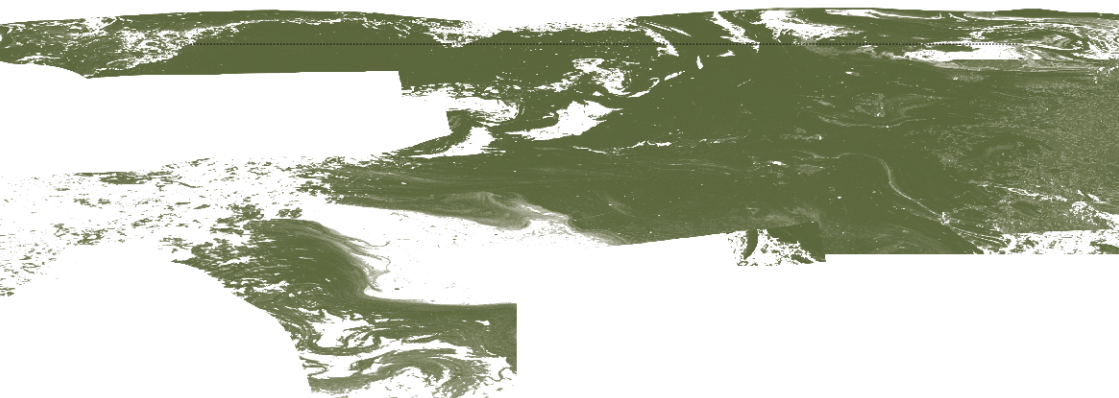
14 *New Investigative Report On Alleged Extrajudicial Executions In Chechnya. RFE/RL, 15 Feb 2021*

15 *Targeted Killing of Chechens in Europe and Ramzan Kadyrov. Aleksandre Kvakhadze. Georgian Foundation For Strategic and International Studies*



16 *[Killings of Kadyrov's critics in EU countries]. Caucasian Knot, 16 May 2023*

17 *Chechen Blogger Tumso Abdurakhmanov Assaulted. Council of Europe, 30 Dec 2022*





anonymous activist, economist
Republic of Sakha



2 economic inequality between regions and moscow

Russia is a hyper-centralised¹⁸ country in many key parameters: government administration, politics, education, culture, transport, economy and much more.

In Russia, one often hears the expression ‘Moscow is not Russia’ and when people say it, they mean the universally recognised gap between the wealth and splendour of the capital and the misery of the regions. Russia, formally considered a federation, consists of 83 subjects (not counting the illegally occupied Ukrainian territories of Crimea, Sevastopol, Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, which we do not recognise as Russian regions)¹⁹. Despite the constitutional ‘equality’ of all the constituent territories of the Russian Federation²⁰, the gap in income levels and quality of life between Moscow and the regions is enormous²¹ and continues to grow²².

Why is it important to talk about economic inequality in Russia? The income gap between Moscow and the regions creates serious social and economic disparities in the country. Economic inequality is one part of the systemic inequality in Russia. In the context of the war unleashed by Russia in Ukraine, the Kremlin benefits from misery, the lack of opportunities for a decent life in the regions, and the population’s high debt load. Poverty drives people to sign military contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defence. The money that people are promised for taking part in the

war is more than most of them could ever make at home in their native land. For example, according to a popular Russian online job aggregator, the median salary listed in job adverts in the Republic of Kalmykia in 2023 was 355 euros a month²³ (here and below, roubles are converted to euros at the autumn 2024 exchange rate for ease of comparison with the situation of people in other countries). According to RIA Novosti, typical salaries in the region range from 199 to 389 euros, with 22% of working residents of the republic earning less than 200 euros a month²⁴. For signing an annual contract with the army, the state²⁵ and the regional authorities of Kalmykia²⁶ provide a one-off payment of ~8700 euros and a monthly salary of ~1900 euros. Such money in the Russian context, especially for the residents of small towns and remote villages, means an escape from misery and a decent future for the whole family²⁷. Recruiters use the false propaganda trope that Ukraine is the aggressor and the signatory will perform the noble task of ‘defending the motherland’. Doubters are also promised not to be sent to the front lines and that their job will only be to serve the army in maintenance positions in the rear, which usually turns out to be a lie. Unfortunately, this results in Indigenous people being disproportionately killed in war.

2.1. some statistical facts that reveal the picture of economic inequality

According to the data for 2022–2023:

- Gross regional product (GRP) per capita in Moscow is about 3–4 times higher than the average for Russian regions.
- The average salary in Moscow is 2 times higher than the Russian average.
- Moscow accounts for about 25% of Russia’s GDP.
- About 25–30% of the total number of legal entities

in Russia are registered in Moscow, reflecting the high concentration of business and commercial activity in the capital. Many corporations engaged in the development and extraction of mineral resources in the regions are registered in Moscow and have large offices there, generating tax revenues for the Moscow city budget in the form of personal income tax and part of the profit tax.

· As for the population's debt load, the ratio of debt to average annual income of Moscow households is about **25–30%**, which is one of the lowest values in the country. In most regions, the level of the population's debt load is higher than in Moscow. The debt-to-income ratio in some regions may reach **50–70%** or even higher. This is particularly relevant in low-income regions, where loans are often used to maintain living standards. Examples of regions with a huge debt load are the Republic of Tuva, the Republic of Buryatia, the Republic of Kalmykia, the Altai Territory and the Republic of Ingushetia.

Such parameters of over-centralisation of economic activity and regional inequality are unique compared to other countries, and this is a completely unhealthy situation. We can also see that the Russian state has not attempted to decentralise the Russian economy; on the contrary: during the years of Putin's rule, the contrast in development between Moscow and the regions has continued to worsen.

This disparity creates a vicious circle of economic development: Moscow, with its high growth rates, huge budget and high quality of life, continues to develop and attracts internal migration from the regions to Moscow. At the same time, the regions – already far behind in terms of quality of life and level of economic and business activity – lose human capital and continue to lag.

2.2. grant provision to the regions as a mechanism of colonial control

Grant provision from the federal centre is the key mechanism of the Kremlin control over regional authorities. It effectively deprives the regions of the ability to manage their taxes independently. The main sources of tax revenue, such as mineral extraction tax, oil and gas tax, customs and excise duties and VAT – all this money collected in the regions is sent to the federal budget and then the federal centre decides where and how to spend it.

Thus, 60% of all the country's taxes collected in all the regions go to the federal budget to be further allocated for state spending. Of the remaining 40%, 23% go to the budget of the city of Moscow, and only 17% stay in the budgets of the more than 80 other regions. This money is obviously not enough to provide for the population and maintain infrastructure.

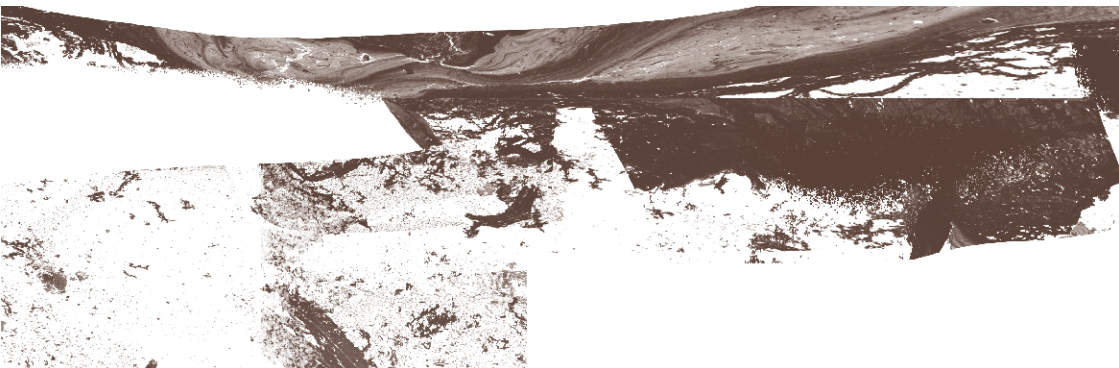
As a result, most Russian regions (88%) are grant-receiving, and their survival depends on the goodwill of the Kremlin, which decides how much to allocate in the form of grants to a particular region. Coupled with the fact that the institution of democratic elections in the constituent entities of the federation has been destroyed in Russia over the past decade, with the power to appoint the head of the region placed in Putin's hands²⁸, the Kremlin is the primary voter for the regional authorities. The extent to which a region is loyal to Putin determines whether that region will get enough money and whether the local officials will be able to stay in office. The authorities and the inhabitants of the regions have no mechanisms or power to change the status quo and no other way to survive but to bow down to the Kremlin.

For example, my home republic, the Republic of Sakha, produces 25% of the world's diamonds and is also rich in other natural resources. At the same time, according to the data for 2022, the Republic of Sakha is the

third region in Russia in terms of grants received from the federal centre. The quality of life and the level of infrastructure are many times worse than in Moscow, and we can also see that people in the regions are heavily indebted. Our republic is still unable to build a bridge over the Lena River, we do not have a year-round road that would connect half of the republic with the rest of Russia.

2.3. conclusion

Russia needs a major transformation: real political and economic powers must be transferred to the regions, tax reforms are needed to distribute income fairly, and more work is needed to ensure equality for all groups in Russian society, including Indigenous and ethnic minorities.





18 *Moscow is Trapped: Centre-regional Relations in Russia After the Invasion of Ukraine.* By Irina Busygina, 15 Jun 2022. *Zentrum für Osteuropa und internationale Studien*

19 *Russia – administrative divisions. Washington, D.C. : Central Intelligence Agency, 2009*



20 *The Constitution of the Russian Federation. Chapter 1. The Fundamentals of the Constitutional System*

21 *Hyper-Centralization of Russia Threatens Its Development and Survival.* By Paul Goble, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 2017



22 *Moscow vs Regions: Who “Feeds” Whom?* By András Tóth-Czifra, *The Institute of Modern Russia*, 04 Feb 2021

23 *Statistics of salaries in Kalmykia in 2023. Gorod Rabot*



24 *[Ranking of Russian regions by salaries – 2023]. RIA Novosti*

25 *400,000 roubles: Putin doubled the amount of payment for signing a contract to serve in the army and participating in the war against Ukraine.* RFI, 31 Jul 2024




26 *Kalmykia increased the one-off payment to the contract soldiers to 500,000 roubles. RIA Kalmykiya*




27 *For Some In Russia's Far-Flung Provinces, Ukraine War Is A Ticket To Prosperity. Mike Eckel. RFE/RL, 11 Jun 2024*

28 *Putin signs law to allow him to pick Russian governors. Alissa De Carbonnel. Reuters, 2 Apr 2013*



An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing intricate patterns of water and land. A white rectangular overlay is positioned in the upper left quadrant, containing text. The text is in a serif font, with the first line in bold and the following two lines in italics.

anonymous decolonial feminist activist
working on accessibility and inclusivity
in education and academia work



unequal access to quality education

3.1. moscow-centricity of education

Russian experts have been talking about the ‘parentocracy’ of Russian education for the second decade²⁹, but this does not change the situation³⁰ – in contemporary Russia, the quality of a child’s education depends on how affluent and educated their parents are and how ‘fortunate’ a region in which they live is³¹.

Territorial barriers make quality education inaccessible for most people. Pre-school and general school education is financed by the municipalities, so the quality of education is inevitably lower in the grant-receiving regions, as not enough money is allocated for it. According to the data of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation for 2019³², 70 out of 83 regions (72 out of 85 regions, as per the documents of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation, but we do not recognise the illegally occupied Ukrainian territories as regions of the Russian Federation) are subsidised. Almost all national republics with Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities belong to these 70 regions³³.

In Russia, in order to enter a higher education institution, students must pass the all-Russian Unified State Examination (USE). The more prestigious the university and the specialisation, the higher the score required for admission. However, regular schools do not provide a level of knowledge that allows students to pass the USE with a high score, so students study with private tutors at their parents’ expense. According to several studies conducted by Russian

educational platforms, about 50% of parents³⁴ hire private tutors for their children³⁵ and this practice is encouraged even by school teachers³⁶.

Parents spend an average of 30 to 50 euros per week on private tutors³⁷. At the same time, according to the official state statistics cited in the RIA Novosti study, the typical salary in more than half of the national republics in 2023 was between 165 euros and 485 euros per month³⁸. According to the same official data, in the four national republics of the North Caucasus (Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia), more than 30% of the working population earns less than 200 euros a month. In Moscow, the proportion of those earning less than 200 euros per month is 3%, and typical salaries range from 485 to 1369 euros per month.

If parents cannot afford private tutors, the child's chances of admission are reduced. The most high-quality and prestigious education is considered to be in Moscow and St. Petersburg. But they are mainly middle- and high-income families who can send their children to study in the capitals' universities. Another entry trajectory for talented children is winning school Olympiads, which usually give them an advantage in admissions. Preparing for Olympiads also often involves the help of tutors.

Those educated in Moscow and St. Petersburg are more relevant in the labour market and can expect higher salaries. The RAEX rating agency annually publishes a list of the 20 universities in the country whose graduates are most sought after by employers: according to the data for 2024, 15 out of 20 such universities are located in Moscow³⁹. The constant outflow of educationally-oriented students from the regions to Moscow creates a vicious circle and exacerbates the inequality between the centre and the 'periphery'. The inaccessibility of quality education locally and the forced abandonment of education for children among residents of remote small towns and settlements⁴⁰ increasingly reinforces Moscow-centricity.

3.2. lack of mother-tongue instruction (the example of the Republic of Tatarstan)

According to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, there are between 277 and 295 languages in Russia, of which about 80 are Indigenous⁴¹. The Ministry's website also states that 24 languages are used as the language of instruction in the education system. In 2019, the Russian UN Association reported on creating spaces to 'respect the right to be educated in one's mother tongue'⁴². We will analyse how this works in the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the most affluent and successful national republics, where Russia's most numerous Indigenous people (approximately 3% of the country's population), the Tatars, live. Tatarstan's general prosperity has not helped it to protect its Indigenous language: Tatar has been replaced by Russian in education. According to the official census of 2021, Tatar is the second most common language among those that Russians claim as their mother tongue (Russian – 111.5 million people, Tatar – 4.07 million). But only 10% of schoolchildren in Tatarstan study in Tatar. Republic officials report that in 2019–2021, 70 first classes were formed in new schools in the republic's two largest cities of Kazan and Naberezhnye Chelny (Yar Challa), but only one class studying in Tatar⁴³. In 2018, learning Tatar in schools became optional, leading to a sharp drop in the number of students. The problem is not just that children do not want to learn Tatar, but that the system discriminates against students who choose it. Learning one's mother tongue requires time and effort, and parents often feel that it is irrational to spend it on Tatar instead of Russian because it is the level of a child's knowledge of Russian that determines whether they can get into a good university after school. It is impossible to take the state exam, compulsory for obtaining a school diploma and for entering university, in one's mother tongue: even if one has been taught in Tatar, one must take the USE in Russian. There are no universities where education is conducted in Tatar, and in recent years Tatar scientists have been officially banned from writing their dissertations in Tatar – even postgraduate Tatar linguists are

obliged to write and defend their dissertations in Russian⁴⁴. The situation is the same in the country with all other Indigenous languages, even if they are recognised as state languages of the republics. Tatarstan is an oil-rich, affluent donor region, which means the situation in the other regions is worse than here.

3.3. propaganda and racism in educational programmes

The very subjects studied in schools and universities were also influenced by colonial and racist policies. Biology classes in schools teach a racist theory (the division of human beings into 'Europeoids, Mongoloids and Negroids' (sic)⁴⁵ not supported by the current scientific consensus⁴⁶ – see the example⁴⁷ of the InternetUrok website, which claims that their 'educational content has been vetted by the Ministry of Education and recommended for use in accredited schools and colleges'. History was rewritten: national republics that had been conquered as a result of Russian colonial wars in the new compulsory textbooks are referred to as having 'voluntarily joined Russia', and Stalinist repression of Indigenous peoples is justified as a defence of the state against its enemies⁴⁸. Similarly, histories of the past were altered in the context of political repression: the deported peoples are referred to as the Fascists and Nazis' allies, who were subjected to 'collective punishment'⁴⁹. The sections on the period between the 1970s and the present day were completely rewritten to suit contemporary Russian politics⁵⁰. The Russian-Chechen wars are described in the textbook in terms of 'fighting radical Islamists and terrorists who receive funding from abroad'. The textbook also explains the activities of the Chechen independence movement⁵¹ as 'the West's attempt to weaken Russia'. Russian troops who stormed and bombed the civilian population of Chechnya are called liberators and defenders of Russia, while the fact that they killed about 50,000 Chechen civilians⁵² is not mentioned. Much attention is paid to anti-Ukrainian propaganda, starting with the denial of Ukrainian statehood and ending with the justification of the occupation of Ukrainian territories and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine⁵³.

3.4. children's education as a factor of pressure on parents to fight against Ukraine

After the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian state introduced quotas for higher education for military personnel and their families⁵⁴. This meant that ordinary applicants with high scores and winners of Olympiads could not get into universities, because all the places were taken⁵⁵. Many students under the military quota had lower USE scores than those required for admission⁵⁶. The opportunity to get an education, even at prestigious universities and even without training, is used as a lever to pressure people in the regions, pushing them to take part in the war and putting those who refuse at a disadvantage. The system of inequality creates tension and conflict among young people⁵⁷.

The Ministry of Education encourages universities to involve the military in educating both school and university students. The educational space is being turned into a place for propaganda and recruitment into the Russian army⁵⁸. Students are used in promotional activities and carousel voting. There are almost no independent student unions.

3.5. boarding schools

Russia still has the institution of boarding schools, organised on the same principle as the Indian boarding schools of the 17th-20th centuries in the USA and Canada, now recognised as a measure of forced assimilation of Indigenous people⁵⁹. In Russia, children from Indigenous families living in remote settlements are taken to such schools (sometimes by force) for long periods, completely depriving them of contact with their families and communities. A helicopter is sent to pick up the child when they reach the age of seven. Children usually cannot call or write home from school because

the government does not provide cellular coverage for settlements and nomadic communities in the tundra and steppe. A child has nowhere or no one to complain to if they are treated badly at school or if violence occurs. Children are bullied in schools and threatened with sending to psycho-neurological dispensaries for disobedience.

Russian journalism and metropolitan anthropologists⁶⁰ universally cite the forced placement of children in boarding schools as a good practice, justifying it on the grounds that children cannot be educated in other ways⁶¹. In Indigenous schools, children are often taught by people who do not speak their mother tongue, they are given new Slavic names instead of their real names, and they are force-fed food that is unfamiliar and unpleasant to them, because they eat differently in their native land.

Russia also has an extensive system of boarding schools for children who, for various reasons, have been left without parents or legal guardians. All types of such institutions for children in the country are similar in their closed nature and the practice of isolating children from society, which often leads to violence against children⁶². We know of cases of sexualised violence⁶³ in boarding schools, and there are also cases of indoctrination. The latter affects not only Russian children, but also children abducted and deported by Russia from Ukraine⁶⁴. In some regions, such as the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District, almost all boarding school students are members of the Indigenous Minorities of the North⁶⁵. Russification, loss of roots and ties with the family, and psychological and physical pressure on the child are the reality for children in boarding schools. Children run away from boarding schools and staff are reluctant to report a missing child⁶⁶.

3.6. bullying of Indigenous children and students

Bullying and racist and xenophobic harassment in regular educational institutions is a major problem overlooked by the government. The situation is aggravated by the growing popularity of white supremacist and far-right ideas in Russia. Bullying of school and university students on the basis on nationality comes from both peers⁶⁷ and school staff⁶⁸. In August this year, a 17-year-old schoolgirl from the Altai Republic committed suicide in Novosibirsk, citing in her suicide note peer bullying for her ethnicity⁶⁹. This applies not only to people with Russian passports but also to migrants. Racist and migrantophobic themes are present at both secondary and higher education levels. The state's support for far-right ideologues promoting the idea of Russian and white supremacy, such as Alexander Dugin⁷⁰, signals to society that xenophobic expressions and actions are permissible and approved.



29 [*Two Faces of Educational Policy*]. Vadim Ovanesov. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 Oct 2000

30 [*Sociologists of SFU conducted a study “Socialisation and education of university students in Rostov region”. Portrait of students in the interior of problems*]. *South Federal University*, 6 Dec 2012



31 [*Experts assess the inequality of chances of Russian schoolchildren to study at universities*]. Sergey Mingazov. *Forbes*, 13 Dec 2021

32 [*Bulletin of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation. Regions and grant reception*]. *Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation*, 2020. Archived by *Wayback Machine*



33 [*List of constituent entities of the Russian Federation that are recipients of grants for fiscal capacity equalisation of constituent entities of the Russian Federation in 2019*]. Annex 2 to the Order of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation dated 14.11.2018. *ConsultantPlus*

34 [*49% of Russians use tutoring services*]. *Skillbox Media* citing *Rambler&Co* and *Sber Service*, 14 Sep 2021



35 [*More than half of Russian schoolchildren use tutors - study*]. *D-russia.ru*, 16 May 2024

36 [*About 70 per cent of teachers believe tutoring is essential for academic success*]. Anastasiya Mayer. *Vedomosti*, 16 May 2024



37 [From ₺5,000 per week. Expenditure on tutors for schoolchildren has doubled. And every second high school student in Russia already needs them].
Elena Kolesova. RBC Life, 02 Mar 2024



38 [Ranking of Russian regions by salaries – 2023]. RIA Novosti

39 [Best universities by the level of demand for graduates among employers (2024)]. RAEX Rating Review, 19 Jun 2024



40 [Experts assess the inequality of chances of Russian schoolchildren to study at universities]. Sergey Mingazov. Forbes, 13 Dec 2021

41 [277 languages and dialects are used by the peoples of Russia].
Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation,
21 Feb 2021



42 [Regions of Russia and UN sustainable development goals]. United Nations Association of Russia, Issue 6, 'Report 2019'

43 [Lessen of mother tongue]. Kirill Antonov. Kommersant-Kazan,
12 Apr 2024



44 [30 years without Tatar University: is the project buried or transformed?].
Timur Rakhmatullin. Realnoye Vremya, 16 Jan 2020

45 TN: We quoted loaded expressions as they are and masked hate speech, which often appears in the original sources unaltered, with asterisks. In case of a reader's ambiguity, one can retrieve the original phrases via the respective links.



46 *Scientific racism. Wikipedia*

47 *[Human races, their kinship and origin]. InternetUrok*



48 *Back in the USSR: New high school textbooks in Russia whitewash Stalin's terror as Putin wages war on historical memory. Anya Free. The Conversation, 23 Jan 2024*

49 *[In Chechnya, Medinsky's textbooks were announced to be withdrawn from schools]. Oleg Sokolenko. DW, 24 Sep 2023*



50 *[A new history textbook for high school students. What has been rewritten in it and how it will affect education in Russia]. Nataliya Zotova. BBC, 8 Aug 2023*


51 *The Road to Democracy in Russia Runs Through Chechnya. Botakoz Kassymbekova. Foreign Policy Magazine, 11 Mar 2023*




52 *RUSSIA / CHECHNYA: A LEGACY OF ABUSE. BACKGROUND. Human Rights Watch*

53 *Ukraine/Russia: New history textbook is a blatant attempt to unlawfully indoctrinate school children in Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Amnesty International, 1 Sep 2023*




 54 *[Universities have almost doubled the quota admission of Special Military Operation participants and their family members over the year]. Interfax, 22 Aug 2024*

 55 *[Olympiad students did not have enough budget places in Sechenovka due to the growing number of beneficiaries]. Kasparov.ru, 07 Aug 2024*

56 *[Media: More than 2,000 people got into universities under the 'Special Military Operation quota' this year. Some got admitted without exams and passing grades – even to medical schools]. The Insider, 2 Aug 2024*



 57 *['I don't want to be like Dad'. How preferential admission to universities becomes a chance for a new life for the children of Special Military Operation participants – and deprives other graduates of opportunities]. Dmitry Shishkin. Radio Echo, 31 Jul 2024*

58 *['Young men and girls, you can solve part of your problems'. In Russia, contract service has started to be advertised in schools]. The Insider, 2 Oct 2023*



 59 *The History of Native American Boarding Schools Is Even More Complicated than a New Report Reveals. Olivia B. Waxman. Time, 17 May 2022*



60 [Yamal experiment: how to make a school for nomadic children].
Elena Lyarskaya. Arzamas

61 [Chum or boarding school: What is the best education for nomadic
Aboriginal children?] Elena Maciong. Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 18 Aug 2020



62 [‘Slept in doorways’: the story of a boy who ran away from
an orphanage because of sexualised abuse]. Stepan Balmond. Afisha Daily,
22 Mar 2021

63 [In Yakutia, a boarding school teacher was accused of violence against two
students]. Valeriya Kornienko. Afisha Daily, 22 Mar 2021



64 Ukrainian children recount horrors of being kidnapped by Russian soldiers.
Margaret Brennan, Richard Esobedo. CBS News, 27 Feb 2024

65 [A child’s escape has uncovered a terrible problem in boarding schools
in the YNAO]. Elizaveta Ivanova. URA.RU, 3 Dec 2021



66 [Serious violations were found in the boarding school in the YNAO
where a teenager went missing]. Vladislav Bedukh. URA.RU, 22 Nov 2021

67 *['You'd be better off working in your mountains': stories of Russians who were persecuted for their ethnicity]. Elvira Asmakiyan. Postnews, 11 Jan 2023*



68 *['Na***w-eyed, z*g h**l.' This is how teenagers greeted children from Yakutia at Putin's Sirius Centre]. RFE/RL, 7 Nov 2023*

69 *17-year-old athlete from Altai committed suicide. She left a suicide note about being bullied because of her nationality. Anti-imperial Block of Nations, 26 Aug 2024*



70 *Alexander Dugin: who is Putin ally and apparent car bombing target? Pjotr Sauer. The Guardian, 21 Aug 2022*



Yana Tannagasheva

Shor Indigenous activist, International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR)

Tjan Zaotschnaja

Itelmen woman, Indigenous rights and environmental activist, International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR)

Viliuia Choinova

environmental engineer, Sakha



4. environmental situation in the regions

4.1. introduction

The lands of the Indigenous peoples of Russia are rich in oil, natural gas, coal, iron ore and other minerals⁷¹, and the exploitation of these resources is a major part of the country's prosperity. For many years, Russian extractive companies have been extracting minerals in the North, Siberia and the Far East in barbaric ways, destroying the environment and negatively impacting the traditional way of life of the Indigenous peoples living on these lands⁷².

Exploitative treatment of Indigenous peoples' lands, corruption and indifference to the lives of people living in the regions leads to critical air pollution, oil spills, deforestation, destruction of natural monuments and other crimes⁷³. In this report, we will give some examples of such situations.

4.2. arson attacks on Indigenous peoples' settlements for the purpose of coal mining in the Kemerovo region


Indigenous peoples of the Kemerovo region, the Shor and Teleuts, are being robbed by the authorities and coal miners of land for mine sites, where it is impossible to continue their traditional way of life (hunting, fishing, gathering wild fruits). The Shor, of whom there are only about 10,000 people left according to data from 2020⁷⁴, have been fighting for years against coal mining companies that want to extract minerals



from their lands. In late 2013, the Shor village of Kazas in the **Kemerovo region** was burnt down by coal company Yuzhnaya (Sibuglemet Holding⁷⁵). Prior to that, the company had systematically created conditions that made it impossible for the Shor to continue living there. The company forced people to sell their houses and leave the village, and five houses of those owners who refused to do so were set on fire one after another. Today, due to surface coal mining, as well as gold mining and the upcoming manganese mining, there is an environmental catastrophe⁷⁶ in the entire Kemerovo region.

4.3. exploitation of Indigenous peoples' territories in the Republic of Sakha by mining companies

The Republic of Sakha



In the **Republic of Sakha**, the homelands of **Indigenous peoples such as the Even, the Evenki, the Dolgan, the Luoravetlan (Chukchi), the Yukaghir, and the Sakha**⁷⁷, vast areas have been destroyed by diamond and gold mining. The mining process leads to deforestation⁷⁸, soil erosion and heavy metal and chemical contamination of reservoirs, which disrupts the fragile Arctic ecosystem and worsens the health of Indigenous people⁷⁹.

Tyanya village, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)

The village of Tyanya in Olyokminsk ulus of the Republic of Sakha is a place where the Indigenous Evenki people are actively resisting the encroachment of mining companies on their traditional lands. The Russian-British gold mining company Nordgold is expanding its operations in the region, threatening the Evenki's way of life⁸⁰.



*Tyanya village, the Republic
of Sakha (Yakutia)*

The Tyanya Evenki have written an open letter⁸¹ appealing to the authorities, signed by 164 villagers. In interviews with local media⁸², people point to the devastating effects of the company's activities on their lands:

'In summer, yellow, chemical dust from the gold mining plant settles on the yagel [reindeer moss], the reindeer move further away, and the reindeer herders have to walk longer distances. In winter, the same picture – all the snow is covered with yellow dust, and the reindeer will not dig for forage and will not eat the yagel. The company "took over" Rodilnya [Maternity Place], where vazhenkas [female reindeer] have been giving birth for centuries, so we had to move away from these places. The fish are dying, the forests are being cut down, and our ancestral places are being "nicked" [forcibly taken] – this contributes to the disappearance of the traditional way of life, and this is a direct path to the extinction of the people'.

In response to these complaints, Nordgold branded the Tyanya Evenki 'foreign agents' and 'extremists'⁸³. Nordgold's subsidiary, Neryungri-Metallik, accused Arseniy Nikolaev, a public figure and activist, as well as the head of the nomadic Tyanya tribal community, of extortion. The villagers believe that the criminal case against Nikolaev was filed because he was defending

Indigenous lands from the corporation. In 2020, the activist was detained and placed under house arrest⁸⁴. After 11 months of house arrest, the regional court released Nikolaev but did not dismiss the charges against him. In November 2021, Nikolaev passed away. According to his family and friends, his health had suffered from unjust charges, searches and imprisonment⁸⁵.

Despite protests from the inhabitants of these lands and legal challenges, gold mining companies continue their operations there. The **right to self-determination**, a fundamental right of Indigenous peoples, is ignored by the authorities, and its principle of **free prior informed consent** (FPIC) is not respected.

4.4. destructive gold mining in the Republic of Khakassia

The principle of FPIC is also being violated in the **Republic of Khakassia**. Here, the lands of the Indigenous Shor and Khakassians have been declared territories of traditional nature use⁸⁶, which means that they should be protected by the state. But gold mining artels continue to extract gold, pollute rivers and destroy the ecosystem⁸⁷. The people of the Neozhidannyi settlement, located on the very territory of traditional nature use⁸⁸, suffer in particular. In general, gold mining artels across Russia have stopped paying attention to any environmental restrictions, as the potential profit pays for any fines. Indigenous peoples, environmentalists and experts are sounding the alarm about massive river pollution in Siberia and the Far East. In June 2024 alone, 231 cases of river pollutions from alluvial gold mining were recorded⁸⁹.

4.5. exploitation of Indigenous peoples' territories by Nornickel and Rosatom state corporations

The Indigenous Sámi people of the **Kola Peninsula** are concerned about Nornickel and Rosatom entering their land. These state corporations operate more subtly, falsifying consultations with Indigenous peoples and sponsoring experts who report on compliance with the principle of free prior informed consent. The Sámi believe that the future development of the largest lithium deposit on their lands would be disastrous for them. The procedures of interaction with local inhabitants, as well as ethno-expertise, are conducted by GONGO⁹⁰ Indigenous researchers favourable to the state, Nornickel and Rosatom.

People have many reasons not to entrust their lands to state corporations. For example, on 29 May 2021, a spill of 21,000 tonnes of diesel fuel⁹¹ occurred at one of Nornickel's thermal power plants near Norilsk. The pollution area totalled 350 square kilometres⁹². The incident was the largest oil spill in the Russian Arctic and posed a threat to the Arctic Ocean ecosystem. The spill caused irreparable damage to the living environment of the Indigenous peoples of the Taymir (the Dolgan, the Nenets, the Enets and the Evenki)⁹³ and negatively impacted⁹⁴ their health and psychological state. However, after the accident, Nornickel and the Russian authorities are trying to paint a picture of positive interaction between state corporations and Indigenous peoples. They do so by advertising the implementation of the FPIC principle, which was carried out with the help of expert centres sponsored by the very corporations themselves. Those Indigenous peoples who live on the land report only negative experiences of their interaction.

Rosatom, a state corporation with which the European Union⁹⁵ still co-operates⁹⁶ to this day while claiming to support the sanctions, is another source of anxiety and fear for Indigenous peoples. The company is the heir to the

Soviet nuclear industry and must deal with the negative consequences of the Soviet nuclear programme. As we now know, between 1965 and 1988 the USSR carried out 124 underground nuclear explosions ‘for the needs of the national economy’, 42 of them in Siberia and the north of Russia⁹⁷. The sites of the explosions are still contaminated with radiation and pose a danger. In recent years, the inhabitants of the Republic of Sakha have reported that annual forest fires have come within 30-40 kilometres of the site of one of these explosions, called ‘Kraton-3’. A fire at the site of the explosion would potentially spread radiation and could have catastrophic consequences not only for Russia but also for other countries. It is almost impossible to find out what the situation is like at other radiation-contaminated sites, as mining companies and the military prevent access to them.

In the Republic of Sakha, all underground nuclear explosions were carried out in gross violation of global standards for decontamination and radiation protection. But Rosatom, like its Soviet predecessors, did not support the agreement to dispose of the uranium residue. The uranium ore is not disposed of.

4.6. bashqortostan’s struggle to preserve the indigenous people’s right to their lands

It is worth remembering the positive results of Indigenous peoples’ struggle for their lands and rights. In 2020, the protests for the preservation of Mount **Kushtau** triggered by the environmental degradation in **Bashqortostan** provided an example of solidarity, unity and victory for environmental activism in Russia.

Kushtau, a shihan (limestone hill) in the republic, was threatened by the plans for limestone mining of Bashkir Soda Company (BSC), which intended to use the mountain’s minerals to produce soda. Mount Kushtau is not only a unique natural monument, it has cultural and spiritual significance for the Bashqort⁹⁸ people. Plans for mining at Kushtau resulted in widespread protests in which thousands of local inhabitants, activists, environmentalists

and representatives of Indigenous peoples united to protect the site⁹⁹. The movement attracted national attention and eventually forced BSC to abandon its plans. However, the republic's corrupt authorities were able to suppress the people's unrest under the guise of concessions by merely replacing one mining company with another. The protests in Kushtau may not have proved successful for environmentalists, but they emphasise how important it is that local and Indigenous people participate in environmental decision-making, and how powerful grassroots movements are in defending natural and cultural heritage.

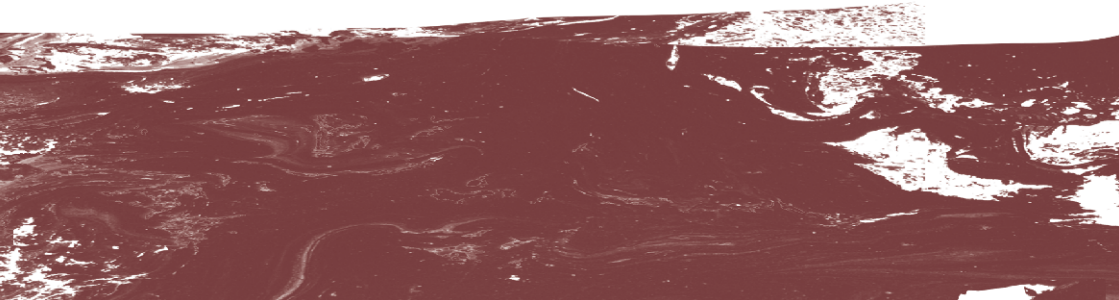
4.7. conclusions and recommendations

The abovementioned examples of environmental offences in the territories of the Indigenous peoples of Russia are only a small part of the picture. Numerous violations are observed throughout the country. They lead to the destruction of ecosystems, traditional economic activities and traditional places of residence of Indigenous peoples.

Russian authorities and extractive companies manipulate the representatives of Indigenous peoples and use their vulnerable position to promote policies and propaganda both internationally and domestically.

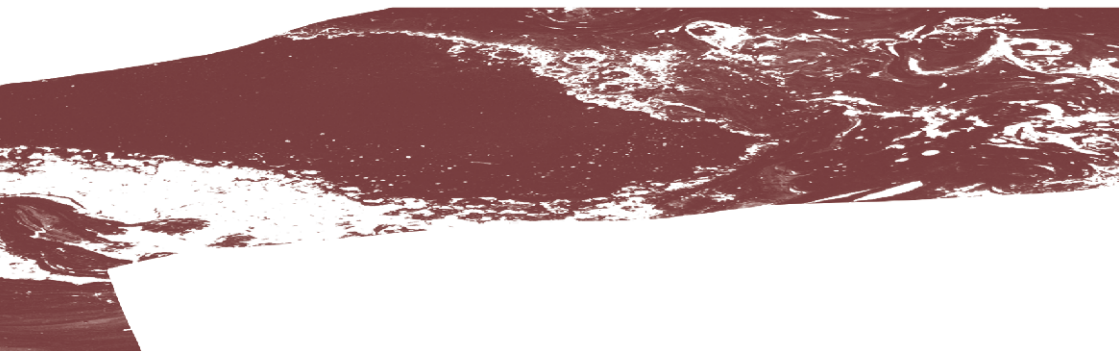
Russia's lack of environmental and human rights organisations and institutions, the impact of militarisation on Indigenous peoples, corruption and affiliation [of the corporations and false NGOs to the state] are all bringing us closer to a global climate crisis.

European countries should stop using Russian gas. They should also cease all business relations with Rosatom.



We urge you to similarly encourage other democratic countries to stop using Russian coal and oil. By continuing to use Russian commodities, countries are financing Russian aggression and the continuation of the war in Ukraine.

Supporting the Indigenous peoples of Russia in their struggle for their rights is an integral part of the path to sustainable peace.





71 *Sedimentary basins and major oil and gas fields of Europe, Russia, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

72 *Indigenous peoples and extractive industry encounters: Benefit-sharing agreements in Russian Arctic. Liubov Sulyandziga. Polar Science, 2019*



73 *Industrial pollution in the Russian Arctic is an environmental nightmare: A list of the dirtiest places. Bellona, 21 Nov 2023*

74 *Shors. General information. Interactive atlas of indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East of the Russian Federation: languages and cultures*



75 *Kuznetsk Basin: Indigenous Peoples Threatened with Extinction. Eugenia Andreyuk. ADC Memorial, 9 Aug 2019*

76 *Russia's Kuzbass coal region is on the verge of an ecological catastrophe. Elizaveta Pestova. openDemocracy, 23 Nov 2017*



77 *Letter from indigenous peoples of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Indigenous Russia, 23 Oct 2022*

78 *"From 2001 to 2023, Sakha lost 24.7 Mha of tree cover, equivalent to a 21% decrease in tree cover since 2000, and 2.23 Gt of CO_{2e} emissions". Global Forest Watch*



79 *Mining Industry of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and Problems of Environmental and Social Security of Indigenous Peoples. Evdokia Burtseva et al. Land, 2022*



80 *Their Ancestral Traditions Under Threat, a Village in Russia's Far East Stands Up to Gold-Mining Giant. Leyla Latypova. The Moscow Times, 30 May 2024*



81 *Open letter from the residents of Tyanya. Aartyk.ru*



82 *[The Tyanya residents are outraged by Nordgold's information labelling them as foreign agents]. Grigoriy Semyonov. Sakha Life, 25 May 2024*



83 *Gold miner calls complaint to Putin about yellow dust 'undermining dialogue'. RBC Life. 27 May 2024*



84 *Indigenous Peoples' Community: Arseniy NIKOLAEV became a victim of imperfect legal issues. Maya Dmitriyeva. Aartyk.ru, 29 Aug 2020*



85 *The man died, and the criminal case lives on..... Aartyk.ru, 7 Aug 2023*



86 *In Khakassia, a territory of traditional nature use for Indigenous minorities – the Shor – has been created. Official portal of the executive bodies of the Republic of Khakassia, 9 Nov 2016*





87 *Gold mining in Khakasia and its impact on the lives of the Shors.*
International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 28 Nov 2021

88 *Alluvial gold mining is destroying the lands of the Shors, a Siberian
Indigenous people. Debates Indigenas, 1 Nov 2021*



89 *Greed wins: gold miners massively pollute Russian rivers. Ekaterina.
Batani, 4 Jul 2024*

90 *Government-organized non-governmental organization. Wikipedia*



91 *“The Next Chernobyl”: Giant Diesel Spill in Siberia’s Norilsk.*
Warsaw Institute – Russia Monitor, 9 Jun 2020

92 *Norilsk Nickel: Mining firm pays record \$2bn fine over Arctic oil spill.*
BBC, 10 Mar 2021



93 *The human cost of oil: How Indigenous and ethnic minorities bear the
brunt of disasters. Olesya Vikulova. Greenpeace, 26 Jun 2020*

94 *Rosprirodnadzor: MPC of harmful substances in water in Norilsk exceeded
tens of thousands of times. TASS, 3 Jun 2020*



95 *Putins Atommaschinen in Möbellager. Reimar Paul. TAZ, 28 Jun 2024*



96 *'Scandalous'. Why Europe continues to work with Rosatom. Anna Roze. RFE/RL, 13 Nov 2023*

97 *Radioactive and Other Hazardous Contamination in Arctic Siberia. Masami Fukuda. The Slavic Research Center, 1998*



98 *TN: While 'Bashqort' or, in other spellings, 'Bashkort' and 'Bashkurt', is an endonym, the adjective 'Bashkir' in 'Bashkir Soda Company' is its Russified version*



99 *Hundreds of protesters clash with police in Russian republic of Bashkortostan. The Guardian, 17 Jan 2024*



Sholbaana Kuular

anti-war and decolonial activist, 'New Tuva'



systemic racism

5.

5.1. introduction

Since the 1990s¹⁰⁰, international organisations¹⁰¹, including, for example, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), have regularly reported on manifestations of racism, xenophobia¹⁰² and related discriminatory practices in Russia. Today, Russian racism is closely linked to the political course of the country¹⁰³. As Indigenous people, we affirm that racism in contemporary Russia is systemic and manifests itself at all levels of social, economic and political institutions. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government has embarked on a course of radical conservative public policy, taking systemic racism to a new level. In Russia today, racism is supported, normalised and has become an ideology at the state level¹⁰⁴.

It finds its reflection in the unequal distribution of income, taxes, wealth, injustice in justice, inaccessibility of education, housing, employment, health care, simply put – in all stages of life for Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities and migrants in Russia.

5.2. russia's invasion of Ukraine as the culmination of Russian racism

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was, on the one hand, the culmination of Russian xenophobia and hatred towards Ukrainians, which [xenophobia and hatred] are embodied in the form of Putin's anti-Ukrainian ideology that denies Ukrainians the right to their national identity, and on the other hand, it heightened the level of intolerance, xenophobia and chauvinism within the country itself towards all other non-Russian ethnicities.

The wartime state racism can be witnessed in the example of mobilisation into the Russian army. From the first months of Russian [full-scale] aggression against Ukraine, people from the national republics, Siberia and the Far East region began to speak out about the authorities forcing Indigenous men to go to war. All forces were thrown into the mobilisation of 'non-Russians'¹⁰⁵. There are known cases of non-Russian men being taken to the army at night and literally dragged out of their beds in front of their families¹⁰⁶. Helicopters were sent to pick up some men living in remote settlements that were difficult to reach by car in order to get them to the front as quickly as possible. However, the authorities are usually unwilling to send helicopters to these regions when it is necessary to provide medical assistance to the inhabitants, even to those who are seriously injured or critically ill.

Men of non-Slavic origin are the first targets of Russian forced mobilisation, as well as coercion to sign contracts with the military. The Russian state appears to view non-Russian men as less important and valuable than ethnic Russians, especially Russian residents of the central region of Russia¹⁰⁷. Independent investigators from the BBC Russian Service and Mediazona, who collect data on Russian army casualties, report that a man from the Republic of Tuva or the Republic of Buryatia is 30-40 times more likely to be conscripted and die in Ukraine than a man from Moscow¹⁰⁸.

5.3. hate crimes against Indigenous people and migrants in Russia

The independent research centre SOVA, which has been studying racism, xenophobia and the activities of far-right movements in Russia since 2002, recorded 121 racist attacks in the country in 2023¹⁰⁹. Three people died as a result of the attacks. SOVA notes that its data most probably does not include all cases, as it is difficult to record attacks in Russia. The recorded attacks are mostly committed by groups of young people who aesthetically and ideologically reproduce the image of Nazi skinheads, a movement popular in Russia in the 1990s. The victims of attacks are usually people of ‘non-Slavic’ appearance, many of them migrants from Central and East Asia and African countries. Other victims are representatives of the Indigenous non-Russian peoples of Russia. For far-right Nazis, there is usually no difference between migrants and Indigenous Russians, as their ideology prescribes hatred of all non-white people. While both xenophobia towards migrants and chauvinism towards Indigenous people should be eradicated, this non-distinction leads to absurdly appalling cases of Indigenous people of Russia being told to ‘go home’ as will be shown below.

In its report for 2023, the SOVA centre also reveals that the number of hate crimes rose sharply in this period compared to previous years. Previously, SOVA had only recorded similar levels of violence in the mid-2010s, when the neo-Nazi movement in Russia was much more active than in recent years.

We can assume that current Russian policies aimed at militarising the population and justifying the war against Ukraine¹¹⁰, economic instability and the general atmosphere of distress in the country are contributing to the radicalisation of young people and the strengthening of racist and xenophobic attitudes. It is known that neo-Nazi groups from Russia, such as the Sabotage Assault Reconnaissance Group (DShRG) ‘Rusich’, which

operated as part of the PMC Wagner, are taking part in the war against Ukraine. By taking part in military operations on the side of the Russian state, neo-Nazis gain authority and political weight¹¹¹ and thus receive the opportunity to influence large audiences of people loyal to the regime. The [*Rusich*] group is active on its Telegram channel¹¹², which had more than 236,000 subscribers as of October 2024, and publishes many calls for violence against Ukrainians and non-white people of any ethnicity. In August this year, for example, the group published the following text: *‘We ask allied units to provide us with one captured Kho***l [an insult for a Ukrainian person] (preferably not entirely Slavic, but **lightly smoked, Crimean Tatar** or something similar) for a ritual sacrifice’¹¹³.*

There are no official statistics on racist and xenophobic hate crimes in Russia, and the Russian state is apparently not interested in a policy of transparency at the moment. Independent researchers, journalists and grassroots decolonial activists record and publish the most notorious cases of domestic racism against Indigenous people and migrants. Here are some examples from the last two years:

In January 2023, a local media outlet in St. Petersburg published a story about the first baby¹¹⁴ born in one of the city’s maternity hospitals in the new year, with a photo of the mother and child. The journalists probably assumed that it would be a kind and pleasant Christmas publication. But subscribers, instead of wishing health to the new mother and baby, began to resent the fact that the baby’s mother turned out to be a Tuvan – a representative of Indigenous peoples from the North Asian part of Russia. The audience, in fact, organised a cyberbullying campaign, commenting insultingly on the appearance of the woman and child, calling them ‘na***w-eyed’, demanding that they be ‘sent to their homeland’ and threatening violence against the woman.

In March 2024, a resident of the Republic of Sakha was attacked¹¹⁵ by a group of far-right young men at a Moscow metro station. The men aggressively shouted ‘Russia for [ethnic] Russians!’ in her face, and ‘Glory to Tesak’ (Tesak is the nickname of Maxim Marcinkiewicz, a neo-Nazi blogger and activist who died in 2020 and was known for hate crimes against migrants, LGBTQA and Indigenous people). They also displayed a Nazi salute to frighten her. None of the many passers-by reportedly came up to help her, according to the woman who recorded the attack on video.

In September 2024, an elderly woman of Slavic appearance attacked a Dagestani girl¹¹⁶ on the street in Moscow. The attacker tried to hit the girl, knocked her mobile phone out of her hands and shouted: ‘This is my country, not yours, get out of here’.

In August 2024, 17-year-old sambo wrestler Ksenia from the Altai Republic committed suicide¹¹⁷ after being racially harassed by her peers. The girl was involved in sambo training in Novosibirsk. According to reports from those close to her, she was bullied because of her Asian appearance. Ksenia left a suicide note with the following words: *‘I don’t understand what is my fault? Is it that I was born with narrow eyes, or that my skin is dark? I was never ashamed of my nationality until some people started to turn it into a joke’.*

On 18 August 2023, 32-year-old Francois Ndjelassili¹¹⁸, a postgraduate student from Gabon, was murdered in Yekaterinburg on racist grounds. On the evening of that day, a group of strangers clashed with Njelassili at a fast-food restaurant and, according to witnesses, began calling him racist insults. They then went outside, where one of them stabbed Ndjelassili with a knife. According to press reports, the attacker may have been linked to far-right groups: a telegram channel that spreads calls for hate crimes against non-white people was organised to raise money for a lawyer for Ndjelassili’s killer¹¹⁹.

5.4. police violence and migrantophobia/ Islamophobia in 2024

Following the terrorist attack at the Crocus City Hall concert hall in the Moscow region in the spring of 2024, in which 145 people were shot dead by terrorists allegedly belonging to the [*so-called*] Islamic State, Russia launched a campaign of persecution against Central Asian migrants¹²⁰, as well as anyone who may have looked insufficiently Russian or may have been practising Islam. The Russian law enforcement agencies did not just fail to prevent hatred and violence, but gave it the green light: after being detained in a police station, a Chechen man, Askhab Uspanov¹²¹, was killed (more likely killed by torture) under mysterious circumstances. The police detained him on suspicion of involvement in a terrorist attack, most likely on the basis of their Islamophobic and racist views, simply because of his Caucasian¹²² appearance and name. The investigation later confirmed that the man had nothing to do with what happened at Crocus. His death was labelled a ‘suicide’¹²³, and the perpetrators have not been punished. Following the detention of other suspects in the terrorist attack, security forces published photos and videos of the torture of two of them, Tajik migrants Saidakrami Rajabalizoda and Fariduni Shamsiddin¹²⁴. In the published footage, one of the men has his ear cut off while the other is tortured with electric shocks applied to his genitals. In court hearings, other suspects also appeared with signs of brutal torture on their bodies¹²⁵. Despite outrage from human rights activists¹²⁶ and criticism from Tajikistan¹²⁷, no investigation into this siloviki’s crime has been organised in Russia, and the officers responsible for the torture have not been punished because the dignity, health and life of a Central Asian migrant, as well as that of a person from the Caucasus republics, have no value in Russia.

5.5. personal story of encountering racism

I first encountered racism as a child, during a school trip when I went to a camp in the south of Russia outside my native Tuva. It was at the Abakan bus station. I remember sitting with other children, eating our boorzaks and dalgans (traditional Tuvan dishes), and chatting in our native language. Older people sitting nearby started to express their displeasure and make grigrimaces, and then remarked to us about our speaking in our own language. I didn't realise at the time that it was racist.

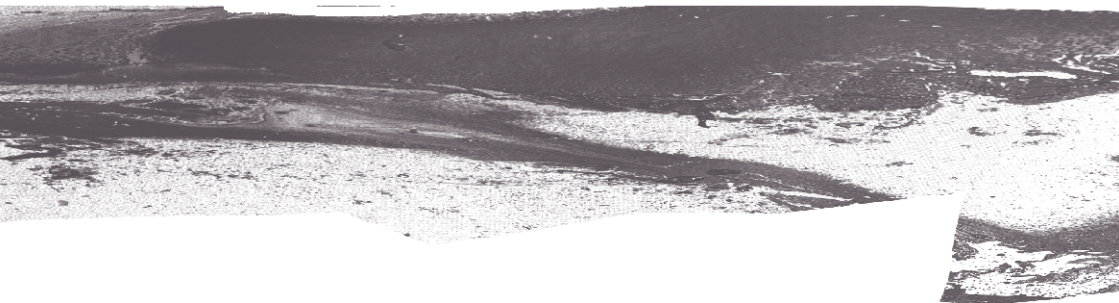
Later in my life, there were many such incidents. The scariest thing is that I got used to that attitude. I started to resist and talk about the problem of racism only when my own child faced racial discrimination when he went to kindergarten in Chernogorsk (a town in the Republic of Khakassia). There, he was bullied and ridiculed by the teachers because of his Tuvan name and because he spoke Tuvan. In the kindergarten documents, his name was changed to a Russian name; the teacher said that she and the nurse could not remember the child's real name. When my family and I moved to St. Petersburg, in the new kindergarten, my son was attacked by other children, they called him racist insults, and the teachers did not prevent this in any way. My child is now bearing a scar on his face after one of these beatings. He is now being treated by a psychiatrist because of the psychological trauma of racial discrimination; he has been diagnosed with PTSD, and even numerous psychological counselling sessions have not helped him to recover.

5.6. recommendations

The problem of racism and discrimination in Russia is extensive and systemic, inextricably linked to the current political course and actions of the authorities. Systemic racism and xenophobia are at the root of Russia's military aggression and military ideology, Russian colonialism, and must therefore be combated comprehensively.

I would like to list what I consider to be the most important tasks that civil society and democratic countries face:

- recognising and highlighting the situation of racism in Russia at the state and public level;
- supporting activists from Indigenous peoples, migrant diasporas, ethnic minorities, grassroots ethnic movements and NGOs by international democratic institutions in the fight against racial discrimination and xenophobia;
- strengthening the solidarity of Indigenous peoples from different countries in the fight against racial discrimination and xenophobia;
- representing Indigenous peoples without exoticisation and stigmatisation, inclusion of independent (not accountable to the Russian government) Indigenous activists in the discussion at the international level.



100 *First report on the Russian Federation Adopted on 26 January 1999. European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance*



101 *Russian Federation: Ethnic Discrimination in Southern Russia. Human Rights Watch, August 1998*

102 *Xenophobia, racism and antisemitism parameters in present-day Russia. Levada Center, 2018*



103 *“Russia for Russians!” Ultrnationalism and xenophobia in Russia: from marginality to state promoted philosophy. Sergey Sukhankin, Associate Expert, International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS). CIDOB, Sep 2015*

104 *Ethnic tensions on the rise in Russia, as government attempts to divert attention from war. Anna-Maria Tésfaye. The Kyiv Independent, 13 Apr 2024*



105 *TN: In the sense of ‘ethnically non-Russian’ although Russian by passport; ‘a non-Russian’ or ‘non-Russians’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term and the author of this report reclaims it.*



106 *Son-in-law, husband, son, father. First days of the special mobilisation operation in the Republic of Buryatia. Alla Konstantinova. Mediazona, 1 Oct 2022*

107 *Russia’s ethnic minorities disproportionately die in the war in Ukraine. Nick Schifrin, Sarah Cutler. PBS 11 Dec 2023*





108 [45,000 dead: what is known about Russia's casualties in Ukraine over two years of war] Olga Ivshina, BBC Russian Service 21 Feb 2024

109 [The new generation of the far-right and their victims. Hate crimes and countering them in Russia in 2023]. Nataliya Yudin. SOVA, 8 Feb 2024



110 The Role of Russian Neo-Nazi Groups in the War Against Ukraine. Dzenyaslava Shcherba. Ukraine World International, 12 May 2023

111 [Who is actually 'denazifying' Ukraine?]. Veniamin Volin. Activatica, 15 Apr 2022



112 DShRG 'Rusich' Telegram Channel

113 RF army neo-Nazi group SARG 'Rusich' wants to conduct ritual sacrifice of captured Ukrainian. Censor.net, 19 Aug 2024



114 [A Tuva woman was scorned for 'daring' to give birth to her son in a St. Petersburg maternity hospital]. @new_tuva New Tyva Instagram account, 4 Jan 2023

115 [On 24 March 2024, a resident of Yakutia encountered racism at a Moscow metro station]. @asiansofrussia Asians of Russia Instagram account, 26 Mar 2024



116 [*“This is my country, not yours!?”*]. @freeyakutiafoundation Free Yakutia (Sakha) Foundation Instagram account, 4 Sep 2024



117 [*“On 17 August, Ksenia Cheponova committed suicide”*] @asiansofrussia Asians of Russia Instagram account, 21 Aug 2024

118 *Postgraduate Student From Gabon Stabbed To Death In Russia. RFE/RL’s Russian Service, 21 Aug 2023*



119 *An African Student’s Murder Sheds Light on Russia’s Race Problem. Mack Tubridy. The Moscow Times, 29 Sep 2023*

120 *Moscow attack: Central Asian migrants hit by backlash in Russia. Laura Gozzi. BBC News, 27 Mar 2024*



121 *Terror suspect dies of cruel torture. Nachrichten. Kronen Zeitung, 3 Apr 2024*

122 *TN: In Russian, ‘Caucasian appearance’ is a set expression and part of the police racial profiling language. It generalises dozens of peoples of the Caucasus and even their neighbours. In English, ‘Caucasian’ has a second meaning ‘of European ancestry/white’. However, many activists from the Caucasus insist upon abolishing it as some Caucasian peoples have been racialised and even enslaved by different surrounding empires, Russia being a case in point, and applying their demonym to a racially far more privileged group erases their history and ongoing struggle. It is also worth saying that many Caucasian people are brown-skinned, have Islamic names and/or practise Islam and face racialisation in the EU, as this report partially reveals*



123 [A Chechen native was taken to Moscow police on the day of the terrorist attack at Crocus. He committed suicide the same day]. Anastasiya Novikova. *Gazeta.ru*, 4 Apr 2024

124 *Russia: Shameful Pride in Torture of Terrorism Suspects. Human Rights Watch*, 29 Mar 2024



125 *Moscow attack suspects appear severely beaten as they're charged in Russian court. Yuliya Talmazan, Larissa Gao and Caroline Radnofsky. NBC News*, 25 Mar 2024

126 [Human rights activists have condemned the torture of suspects in the terrorist attack]. Vitaliy Kropman. *DW*, 25 Mar 2024



127 *Tajik foreign minister hits out at Russia's apparent torturing of terrorism accused. bne IntelliNews*, 14 Apr 2024



Bulat Bazarov
public activist from Buryatia

forced russification (on the example of the Republic of Buryatia)

6.1. introduction

We call Russification the process of systemic destruction of non-Russian cultures on the territory of the Russian Federation, the forcible imposition of the Russian language and culture, discrimination against Indigenous and other non-Russian peoples living on the territory of the Russian Federation, and persuading them to assimilate and lose their identity. Western sources often describe Russification exclusively as a historical phenomenon, a policy of the Russian Empire or the USSR (see, for example, the page in the Encyclopaedia Britannica¹²⁸ devoted to Russification or the BBC historical reference¹²⁹). These sources miss the fact that Russification was and is still practised as part of the state ideology towards Indigenous peoples, as well as peoples who have historically lived in Russia and who were originally brought into its territory by deportations, mass resettlements and other upheavals. The Russian regime today is also particularly active in Russifying the territories of Ukraine it occupies¹³⁰, violently suppressing Crimean Tatar, Ukrainian and any other non-Russian identities¹³¹. The same policy of Russification, albeit with different, more sophisticated methods, is being pursued by Russia in neighbouring countries with which it is officially on friendly terms: for example, in Belarus, where the Belarusian language is increasingly being replaced by Russian¹³², and where school curricula are being introduced jointly with Russia. Russia is also attempting to influence the language policies and cultures of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries

by criticising and even threatening¹³³ states for protecting national languages or initiatives to rename settlements so that their names reflect local national identities.

For the purposes of this report, we will examine the process of Russification using the example of the Republic of Buryatia, where, according to the 2021 census¹³⁴, 32 per cent of the population is Buryat. On paper and in reports on international platforms, Russia often declares its support for and measures to preserve national cultures. In practice, the situation is quite different.

6.2. the systematic removal of mother tongues from general education schools

We can roughly divide Russification into two directions: state and public.

One of the elements of state Russification is the language policy that destroys the Buryat language and replaces it with Russian. In 2014, through the efforts of pro-government public figures and in the Russian prosecutor's office, Buryat language ceased to be a compulsory study subject in the republic¹³⁵. Since then, it has begun to be removed from schools, and in those that still have it, it is insufficient for proper learning¹³⁶.

The number of hours devoted to the Russian language in schools far exceeds that of the Buryat language. For example, in 7th grade, a student receives at least 4 hours of Russian per week, as well as at least 2 hours of Russian literature, where the knowledge of Russian solidifies. Buryat literature is not included in the curriculum, nor is the study of Buryat history. In some schools, the history of the native land is offered as an optional subject, but it is presented in a colonial way, with an emphasis on the history of Russian colonisation of the region and the Soviet period. There is no mention of significant Buryat political and public figures.

Thus, from first grade until graduation, children are indoctrinated with ideas about the inferiority of the Buryat people and that our language is not as important as Russian. The school programme creates the impression that Buryats and Buryat culture have given nothing to the world. Most schoolchildren, as well as adult Russians, know nothing about Buryatia's period of independence and experience of statehood. The Russian inhabitants of Buryatia know nothing about our values, culture, history and everyday life and do not challenge this state of affairs.

6.3. destruction of the infrastructure of Buryat culture

Up until 2013, the National Humanities Institute¹³⁷ existed at the Buryat State University in Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia. The NHI organised Buryat language courses open to all comers and events to popularise Buryat culture. It was a talent factory for teachers of Buryat language, as well as researchers of the cultures of the Indigenous Soyot and Evenki peoples, who number several thousand inhabitants of the republic. In 2013, NHI was liquidated, and its departments became part of other institutes in a reduced form. Without professional teaching and research staff, we cannot develop our language and culture.

Since Buryats have almost no scholars of their own, people who have no connection to Buryat identity, do not understand the specifics of Buryatia, and do not view colonisation and Russification critically, often speak on behalf of Buryats. This is why we are often forced to observe openly racist and anti-Buryat statements by Russian opposition figures and journalists.

6.4. imposition of Orthodoxy

In 2010–2011, a new compulsory subject – ‘Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture’ – was introduced in Buryatia’s schools. Buryats traditionally practice shamanism and Buddhism, but there are no lessons devoted to our native faith in schools.

The Russian Federation actually bans the Dalai Lama from visiting the country¹³⁸. This means that Buryat believers are deprived of the opportunity to meet the spiritual leader and head of their confession, which is a manifestation of discrimination¹³⁹. In 2023, the Russian government added the Dalai Lama’s honorary representative in Russia, the Supreme Lama of Kalmykia, Telo Tulku Rinpoche¹⁴⁰, to its list of foreign agents; whereupon he was forced to resign due to the risks of persecution posed by the foreign agent repressive status.

Buddhist shrines in Russia have been attacked by vandals¹⁴¹; the only Buddhist monastery in the Urals was destroyed by a mining company¹⁴². But the state only actively supports the preservation and construction of Orthodox temples.

6.5. persecution of Buryat activists

In 2017, a well-known Buryat journalist Yevgeny Khamaganov was killed¹⁴³, being only 35 years old. He had been attacked and threatened for several years in a row for criticising the authorities; in 2015, unknown assailants broke the journalist’s neck, causing him a long recovery¹⁴⁴. His death was officially labelled a natural death from diabetes, but people who knew the journalist believe he died as a result of an assassination attempt¹⁴⁵. Yevgeny created an independent Buryat portal ‘Site of the Buryat People’, was an editor of several Buryat media outlets, engaged in investigations, as well as opposed the liquidation of the Buryat autonomous districts.

In the same year 2017, the Buryat public activist Bulat Shagzhin had to urgently flee Russia. The activist ran private courses of Buryat language, held Buryat cultural evenings, and opened an editorial office and printing house for books in the Buryat language. Shagzhin openly criticised the actions of the Ministry of Education and the administration of the Republic of Buryatia, which made him perceived as a threat¹⁴⁶. It was during these years that the mass exodus of Buryats from the country occurred. Many Buryats had to flee the country because of political persecution.

In 2024, the Russian state added more than 50 initiatives of Indigenous peoples to the list of extremist organisation, mainly human rights organisations, cultural initiatives, media and independence movements¹⁴⁷. The status of ‘extremist organisation’ creates serious risks for the participants of the initiatives, as any association with an organisation on this list can lead to long prison sentences (up to 10 years).

6.6. colonisation of republics. forced changes in the composition of the population

The territory of Buryatia has been massively settled in every iteration of Russia. This process continues even now. The Russian government offers every Russian a free hectare in the Far East of the country¹⁴⁸, encouraging the Russian population to move.

Buryatia is one of the Far Eastern regions designated by Putin as ‘territories of priority settlement’¹⁴⁹ under the ‘resettlement of compatriots’ programme. Under this programme, former USSR citizens and their relatives living abroad¹⁵⁰ are invited to move to Buryatia. Participants of the programme receive a one-off payment of 2200 euros, family members – 1100 euros each, and are offered a range of benefits and assistance in the process of resettlement from abroad to Buryatia.

In Buryatia’s capital, Ulan-Ude, the Russian state is building a giant prison for 3,000 people, despite protests from locals

who are appalled by plans to cut down forests for the sake of construction¹⁵¹. Given that current Russian policy is built on repression and the use of prisons as places of punishment for the unwanted, and that the Russian penitentiary system does not perform the task of reintegrating people who have committed crimes, but works as a torture system to control and maintain power¹⁵², the construction of giant prisons in the regions looks like the authorities' desire to remove inconvenient people away from the federal centre. Perhaps, the construction plans also include a design that some of the people released from prison will stay and live in Buryatia.

At the same time, the Russian state is also using the current war against Ukraine as a means of reducing the number of Indigenous people. Numerous investigations show that Indigenous and other non-white men from poor regions are disproportionately subject to forced mobilisation¹⁵³, and are also the first target of contract service propaganda. As a result, Indigenous men are disproportionately killed on the front lines¹⁵⁴.

6.7. destruction of private capital and Buryatia's independent economy

Throughout the entire period of the current regime, the federal government has struggled with large private entrepreneurs in the republic. New and profitable enterprises such as BaikalBank¹⁵⁵, the liquor and vodka company Baikalfarm, the gold mining company Buryatzoloto and many other independent businesses were destroyed during the period of the country's economic growth. The Evenki community Dylacha, which owned jade mining enterprises, a brick factory and other real estate, was raided in 2012 and subjected to unprecedented pressure from the police, FSB and other security agencies¹⁵⁶. Their lawyer was killed¹⁵⁷, criminal cases were opened against them, the main witness in the case was kidnapped by the police, and for several months he could not contact either his family or his lawyers¹⁵⁸. A

large part of the former owners had to flee the country. Jade development in the region is now being carried out by companies linked to the state corporation Rostec¹⁵⁹.

The destruction of the republic's economy was the first step towards the domination of the state as the main employer, which was intended to incentivise loyalty among the population and deprived the Buryat national movement of its economic base.

6.8. the public side of russification

While it is difficult to draw a clear line between state measures of Russification and societal processes (the former obviously influences the latter), it is possible to list several aspects of societal processes that at least do not emanate directly from the state.

There are numerous right-wing Orthodox activists and organisations such as the Sorok Sorokov Movement¹⁶⁰, nationalist and openly Nazi public organisations such as Russkaya Obshchina [The Russian Community]¹⁶¹, the Spas TV channel, and far-right bloggers, who shape public discourse in Russia and engage in discriminatory behaviour¹⁶². Ordinary Russians who do not belong to radical right-wing movements observe almost daily the caricatured and racist portrayal of non-Russians on television, the absence of positive non-Russian heroes on screens and the caricatured and negative portrayal of Asians, which feeds a culture of white supremacy¹⁶³.

State Duma deputies allow themselves to use insulting epithets towards Indigenous peoples, migrants and non-Russian citizens of the Russian Federation. Nazi attacks on non-Russian citizens and migrants have become the norm in Russia¹⁶⁴.

Unfortunately, even the Russian public opposition often allows itself to make blatantly racist and xenophobic statement, and demonstrates a complete lack of understanding and

unwillingness to listen to decolonial and ethnic activists. For example, such as the well-known opposition political scientist and publicist Fyodor Krashennikov, who said in a recent interview¹⁶⁵ with an independent Russian media outlet that he had ‘not come across any fundamental works on this subject [decolonisation in Russia] written in recent years’ and that “‘decolonisers’ in Russia now are vulgar activists, vulgar agitators who use decolonisation as a pretext’.

6.9. the decolonial fight against russification

Russification is part of a state policy to destroy free nations and Indigenous peoples in the territories that Russia now occupies, as well as those it wants to keep under its influence. Russification helps to siphon resources from Indigenous peoples’ lands, to send Indigenous people to war, to make money for weapons production – because it is the gas and oil extracted from Indigenous lands that Russia sells wholesale and for next to nothing to the rest of the world.

Russia sets up anti-separatism committees to silence activists with threats of imprisonment, and lobbies for its interests at the highest international level at the UN, installing its people in organisations such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Decolonial activists from Indigenous peoples and independence movements seek to resist this and publicise the most egregious cases of colonial aggression. Without any support or funding, activists fight propaganda, create educational programmes and courses and work to promote national languages through independent media and projects. To support their work, democratic countries, organisations and activists can provide assistance in the following areas.

1. Efforts to create and support independent decolonial and national media;

2. Funding for independent research on the history of Indigenous peoples;
3. Education and language programmes;
4. Cultural projects;
5. Creation of small initiative groups and communities among Indigenous people fleeing war and persecution, representatives of migrant diasporas and ethnic minorities from Russia.

We would be pleased to co-operate with democratic states in these areas.

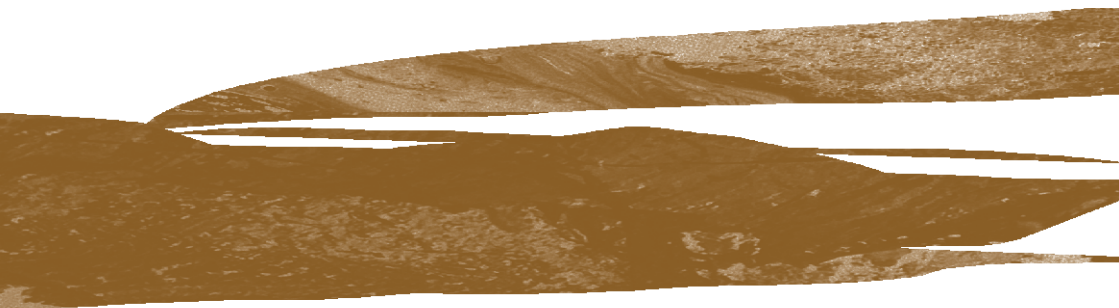
We seek to create an economic base for our national movements. Indigenous peoples' political groups, with a wide variety of views but sharing a democratic orientation, are establishing co-operation with each other. We lack independent and secure platforms where we can communicate with each other, and for this, we also need the help of democratic free countries.

6.10. conclusion

I talk about Russification to make the world community realise that without confronting the colonial Russian ideology, the problem of Russia will not end with the departure of Putin and the end of the war with Ukraine. Russification is not just an internal Russian problem, it is the cause of war and Russian aggression, and therefore it is necessary to listen to the emerging movements for the liberation of peoples. I hope that I will also be heard by Indigenous peoples in other countries that have suffered Western expansion and colonisation in their time. We know that Russia has positioned itself as a force in opposition to Western colonialism, the US and Europe, as a stronghold of traditional values. I can list those values: genocide, xenophobia, corruption and Nazism. Those who sympathise with Russia as a supposed fighter against colonialism should also listen to the representatives of

the post-Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries and ask them what they experienced under the heel of the USSR and Russia.

I call on the world to be principled on the issue of humanity. Dealing with Russia today is a pact with the devil. Even if such a pact is made, Russia in its present form will throw all its resources into degrading your societies, in order to strengthen itself at your expense. You will need courage and strength to stop evil, or it will come to your house, just as it came to mine.





129 *The Russification of National Minorities. Bitesize by BBC*

130 *Russian policy of linguicide in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Ukrainian World Congress, 6 Jul 2022*



131 *Russia/Ukraine: A decade of suppressing non-Russian identities in occupied Crimea. Amnesty International, 18 Mar 2024*

132 *Belarus endures Russification as native language fades away in schools. Euronews with AP, 14 Sep 2024*



133 *Russian Rhetoric Toward Central Asia Grows Increasingly Hostile. Nurbek Bekmurzaev. Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume 21 Issue 23, 14 Feb 2024*

134 *Buryatia – Ethnic groups. Wikipedia*





135 [*Buryatia became the first republic within Russia to voluntarily abandon the compulsory study and teaching of the second state language*]. *Novaya Buryatiya*, 3 Mar 2014

136 [*Buryat language is not taught at all or partially in schools of 14 districts*]. *MK in Buryatiya authors. MK*, 22 Sep 2017



137 'BSU.News'

138 *Why Cant the Dalai Lama Visit Russia? Tibeter Gemeinschaft in der Schweiz & Liechtenstein*



139 *Challenges to Freedom of Conscience in Russia in 2022. Olga Sibireva. SOVA, 13 Apr 2023*

140 *Dalai Lama's Russia representative resigns after 'foreign agent' accusation. James Kliner. The Telegraph, 29*



141 [*Russia's Buddhist leader outraged by the destruction of a shrine in Altai*]. *Vadim Emelyanenko. Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 22 May 2022*

142 *Only Buddhist Monastery in Ural Region of Russia Demolished*



143 *Russian media reports say a journalist who has criticized the government has died in unexplained circumstances in the Siberian region of Buryatia.*
Lyudmila Klasanova. Buddhistdoor Limited, 2 Apr 2022



144 *[Journalist Khamaganov died in Ulan-Ude. His friends claim that he was beaten up]. RFE/RL, 17 Mar 2017*



145 *[In Buryatia, the main opposition activist was killed. Ikramutdin Khan].*
Golos Islama, 16 Mar 2017



146 *'Shagzhin said he got himself into trouble by forming an organization that focused on reviving the Buryat language, which is close to extinction. He said the Russian government began to see his group as a threat, forcing him to flee'. An asylum seeker vowed never to return to Russia. His death in ICE custody sent him back. Lilly Fowler. Cascade PBS, 10 Jun 2019*



147 *Russia: Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples' and national minorities' rights organisations in the list of 'extremist organisations'. OMCT World Organisation Against Torture*



148 *Far Eastern hectare: how to get free land and money for development.*
Nataliya Gustova. RBC Realty, 24 Nov 2023



149 *[Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 24.07.2019 N 354 'On additional measures to implement the State Programme to assist voluntary resettlement of compatriots living abroad to the Russian Federation']*
Consultant Plus





150 [The Russian Government simplified the conditions for resettlement of compatriots living abroad to Russia]. Mikhail Shichanin. *Garant.ru*, 19 Feb 2024

151 Plans to Fell Forest for Mega-Prison in Siberia's Ulan-Ude Roil Public. Lana Koralova, *The Moscow Times*, 16 Jan 2024



152 Russia behind bars: the peculiarities of the Russian prison system. Jan Strzelecki. *Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW)*, 7 Feb 2019

153 Buryatia and the High Toll of Russia's War in Ukraine on Ethnic Minorities. Kennan Institute. *The Wilson Center*, 24 Jan 2024



154 RFE/RL Reveals Spike In War Deaths From Russia's Ethnic Regions. RFE/RL's Tatar-Bashkir Service, 25 Sep 2024

155 [Vitaly Avdeev: 'BaikalBank' will try to get its licence back through the courtb.]. Sergey Kiselev. *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 30 Aug 2016



156 [Historical tragedy of the Evenki people]. Alexander Latkin. *Baikal24*, 22 Oct 2012

157 [The murder of a lawyer of the Dylacha community was punished with a 12-year sentence]. Ekaterina Eryomenko. *Kommersant-Irkutsk*, 10 Aug 2017




158 [DYLACHA family and ancestral community: the truth will be established]. Eduard Barinov. Infopol, 7 Dec 2012



 159 [Russian Technologies State Corporation continues to seek a privileged position in the mining and export of jade to China]. Mosmonitor Information Agency, GAZETA-N1.RU, 5 Mar 2014


160 Sorok Sorokov Movement. Wikipedia



 161 [‘We are Russians, God is with us’. How the new far-right appeared in Russia and in what ways they differ from the old ones]. Amalia Zatari. BBC, 7 Jun 2024

162 Racial Politics in Putin’s Russia. Cornell University Press



 163 History professor’s book examines racism in Russia. Jodi Heckel. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign New Bureau, 10 May 2022

164 Russia’s migrants and ethnic minorities shiver at new Putin terror crackdown. Denis Leven. Politico, 9 Apr 2024



 165 [Social media scandals or defence of Indigenous peoples? Sociologist, political scientist and decolonial activists answer three questions about decolonisation]. Horizontal Russia, 25 Sep 2024



bashqort Solidarity collective

indigenous resistance and repression against activists and organisations in russia

7.1. non-violent resistance of Indigenous people

Despite escalating repression by the Russian authorities, residents of the ethnic republics of Russia and members of Indigenous and ethnic minority communities continue to use both direct (protests, rallies) and indirect (petitions, media campaigns) methods of non-violent resistance to defend their human and indigenous rights.

In September 2022, women-led rallies against mobilisation for the war in Ukraine took place in the Arctic Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)¹⁶⁶ and several republics of the North Caucasus region¹⁶⁷, namely Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechnya.

Following the so-called ‘partial’ military mobilisation for the war in Ukraine in the autumn of 2022, the Kremlin switched to employing covert soldier recruitment tactics¹⁶⁸ and the focus of protest actions waged by minorities and Indigenous populations has overwhelmingly shifted to defense of environmental and resource ownership rights, as well as the fight against corruption.

Most protest actions in ethnic republics or Indigenous and minority communities elsewhere in Russia rely on pre-existing civil society or clan and kinship networks to mobilise

supporters, while their participants overwhelmingly resort to non-violent methods of resistance.

One example of indirect non-violent resistance action is the media campaign against illegal gold mining by Russian giant Nordgold waged by an Evenki village¹⁶⁹ of about 470 people in the Republic of Sakha's southeastern Olyokminsky district.

Residents of the Evenki village of Tyanya issued an open letter to President Vladimir Putin and the head of the Republic, Aysen Nikolayev, asking them to bar Nordgold from developing a fourth mine in the area.

The letter states that unchecked gold mining leads to deforestation and water pollution while airborne chemical dust particles from the mines settle on moss eaten by reindeer, shrinking the community's traditional reindeer-herding grounds.

The most striking example of direct non-violent resistance was protests in support of jailed Indigenous Bashqort activist Fayil Alsynov that took place in the mountainous town of Baymaq in the southeast of the Republic of Bashqortostan, as well as the capital Ufa.

More than 10,000 people united in peaceful rallies in support of Alsynov, making it one of the largest protests seen in wartime Russia yet.

The protests led to **the largest wave of repression recorded anywhere in modern-day Russia**. At least 76 people have faced criminal charges in connection with the protests. One of them, Rifat Dautov, died as a result of his arrest, while another, Minniyar Baiguzkarov, committed suicide due to threats from law enforcement. Dim Davletkildin suffered a spinal injury during his arrest, and several other people complained about the use of excessive force by both riot police and investigators.

Unlike protest actions in Moscow and St. Petersburg, those led by the Indigenous peoples and minorities

of Russia receive little attention from both pro-government and metropolitan opposition (so-called ‘independent’) media. The limited coverage that does exist often employs racist and xenophobic tropes, with peaceful protesters frequently labeled as terrorists, nationalists, separatists or extremists (sometimes even ‘extremists disguised as environmental activists’).

In its initial report on the protests in the city of Baymaq in the Republic of Bashkortostan, the prominent metropolitan opposition media outlet Meduza used the term ‘Bashkir nationalist’ 10 times. Other independent media followed this trend, simultaneously attempting to heroize Bashqort political prisoner Fayil Alsynov while anonymizing thousands of protesters by referring to them as ‘Russia’s deep nation’ (the term from the doctrine of far-right politician and Putin’s ally Vladislav Surkov¹⁷⁰), or framing the protest as simply anti-Putin and anti-war. Furthermore, coverage of the Baymaq protests in independent media largely ceased after January 2024, with few outlets – apart from OVD-Info and Mediazona – reporting on the subsequent repressions in the republic.

In a similar vein, activists hailing from Indigenous and ethnic minority communities have either limited or no access to qualified legal help due to a lack of independent legal assistance in their area, limited knowledge of the Russian language and a lack of financial means to pay for professional services.

This means that most minority activists are forced to face Russia’s repressive judicial machine alone.

7.2. indigenous and ethnic minority political prisoners

There are more than **240 Indigenous and ethnic minority** political prisoners in Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories, with at least 167 of them being persecuted for their religious beliefs (sources: ADC

Memorial, Mediazona). Most of their cases are unknown to the general public in both Russia and the West due to a lack of coverage and campaigning by mainstream human rights organizations.

Yet, Indigenous prisoners routinely report being subjected to verbal and physical abuse from fellow inmates and prison staff including on the basis of racial and religious differences. Many of them are also being routinely denied access to qualified medical assistance.

Here are some of the most high-profile cases:

On 26 September 2018, in the city of Magas, the capital of Ingushetia, the head of the republic, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, and the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, signed an agreement ‘On the Establishment of the Border between the Republic of Ingushetia and the Chechen Republic’. The agreement involved the transfer of tens of thousands of hectares of land to Chechnya and was prepared in secret, with the public not being informed of its content. A significant portion of Ingushetia’s population deemed it unjust and damaging to the republic, and protests arose. These events led to political repression. Hundreds of protesters were held administratively accountable under ‘protest’ articles, and dozens were criminally charged with violence against law enforcement. Protest leaders who helped mediate the conflict became the subject of criminal cases. Among the convicted Ingush public figures were:

Malsag Uzhakhov, chairman of the Council of Taips of the Ingush People (9 years of penal colony); **Ahmed Barakhoyev**, a member of this Council (9 years); **Zarifa Sautieva**, former deputy director of the Republican ‘Memorial Complex to the Victims of Repression’ (7,5 years); **Musa Malsagov**, chairman of the Ingush branch of the Russian Red Cross (9 years); **Ismail Nalgiev**, head of the election monitoring organisation ‘Choice of Ingushetia’ (8 years); **Bagaudin Khautiev**, head of the Council of Youth Organizations of Ingushetia (8 years);

and **Barakh Chemurziev**, chairman of the public association ‘Opora Ingushetia’ (8 years).

Zarema Musaeva is the spouse of federal judge Saydy Yangulbaev and the mother of Ibrahim and Abubakar Yangulbaev, both human rights activists and lawyers for the ‘Committee Against Torture’. In 2022, Zarema was kidnapped by Chechen police, later falsely accused of attacking police officers and fraud and sentenced to 5.5 years in prison. Considering her health condition (she has severe diabetes and a progressive cataract) and the lack of medical care in prison, many view this sentence as potentially deadly.

The Musaeva’s family has been persecuted by the Chechen government since 2015, facing torture of Saydy, Ibrahim and Abubakar, raids, imprisonment for ‘incitement of ethnic hatred’, and direct threats from Ramzan Kadyrov. In 2022, her sons, Ibrahim and Abubakar, were declared ‘terrorists’; they both live in exile.

Alexander Gabyshev, a native of Sakha, calls himself a ‘warrior-shaman tasked by God to expel Putin’, whom he views as ‘a demon’. He planned to walk over 8,000 kilometres from Yakutsk to Moscow on foot and perform a shamanic ritual in Moscow in August 2021. Beyond the religious aspect of his actions, Gabyshev advocated for democracy and reforms in Russia. He made four attempts to begin his journey, gaining widespread attention during his second attempt (March to September 2019), with thousands of people following his progress and some joining his march. Many Indigenous people considered him a holy person and prophet. As his fame grew, the authorities intervened, halting his second and third attempts through arrests. His fourth attempt was stopped in May 2020 when he was forcibly committed to a psychiatric hospital. According to lawyers and human rights activists, the doctors in the psychiatric hospital did not find that Gabyshev was suffering from any mental problems, but they were pressured by the police to keep

him in the hospital and to give him strong antipsychotic medication. Gabyshev is currently charged under Article 280 ('Public calls for extremist activity') and faces up to 4 years in prison, with an additional case under Article 318 ('Use of violence against a government official'), which carries a potential 10-year sentence.

Abdulummin Gadzhiev, a journalist and editor of the Dagestani newspaper Chernovik was arrested in June 2019 on charges of financing terrorism and participating in a terrorist organisation – charges widely seen as politically motivated – Gadzhiev's prosecution is believed to be linked to his reporting on sensitive issues in the North Caucasus. He has consistently denied the charges and reported that he was tortured during detention to extract confessions. On 12 September 2023, he was sentenced to 17 years in a high-security colony, with the first 7 years to be served in prison.

7.3. the use of the extremism label against Indigenous peoples

In addition to more 'mainstream' methods of repression, the Kremlin has also relied on the tactic of using the 'extremist' label to hinder the fight of minorities for their rights.

This oppression tactic dates back to Russia's wars in Chechnya when, following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Moscow skilfully exploited the Global War on Terror discourse and rising Islamophobia to disrepute the Chechen independence movement and justify military intervention in the republic.

Kremlin-directed narratives that exploited the image of 'savage Chechen terrorists' carried far beyond the Russian media space, and the 'terrorist' tagline became the bane of the entire nation.

Similarly, the Kremlin today uses the label 'extremist' to hinder the work of activists in their native communities by criminalising cooperation, association or any display of support for them.

7.4. recommendations

International human rights organisations and governments should:

- Enhance their monitoring of human rights violations against Indigenous activists in Russia. Special attention should be paid to the persecution of Indigenous political prisoners and the excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies. Independent investigations should be carried out, and local and international campaigns for the release of Indigenous and minority activists should be supported.
- Facilitate partnerships between international legal aid organisations and Indigenous organisations.
- Strongly condemn the Russian government's use of the 'extremist' label to suppress legitimate Indigenous human rights movements. By highlighting this misuse of anti-extremism laws, international organisations and democratic countries could build international pressure on Russia to stop criminalising peaceful resistance and to recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples to freely organise and advocate for their rights.



166 [Women in Yakutsk protest against mobilisation]. Daniil Sotnikov.
DW, 22 Sep 2022

167 *Mobilizing dissent: interpreting the protests in the North Caucasus.*
Adam Lenton. *Russia.Post*, 27 Sep 2022

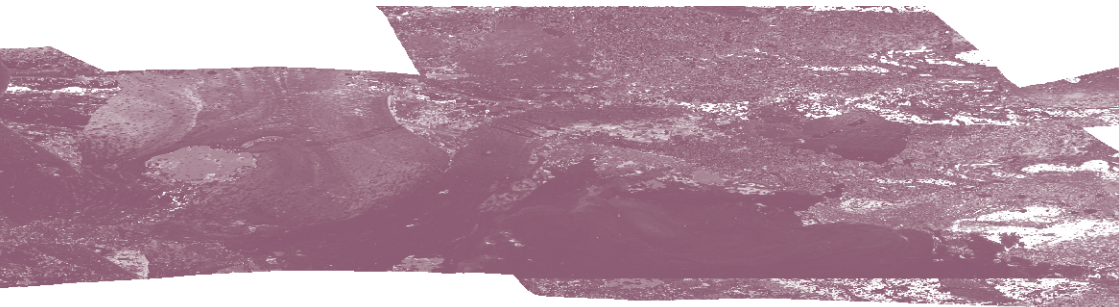


168 *How Russia's Diamond Republic Finds Manpower for Putin's Army.*
Free Yakutia Foundation and Leyla Latypova. *The Moscow Times*,
26 Aug 2024

169 *Their Ancestral Traditions Under Threat, a Village in Russia's
Far East Stands Up to Gold-Mining Giant.* Leyla Latypova. *The Moscow
Times*, 30 May 2024

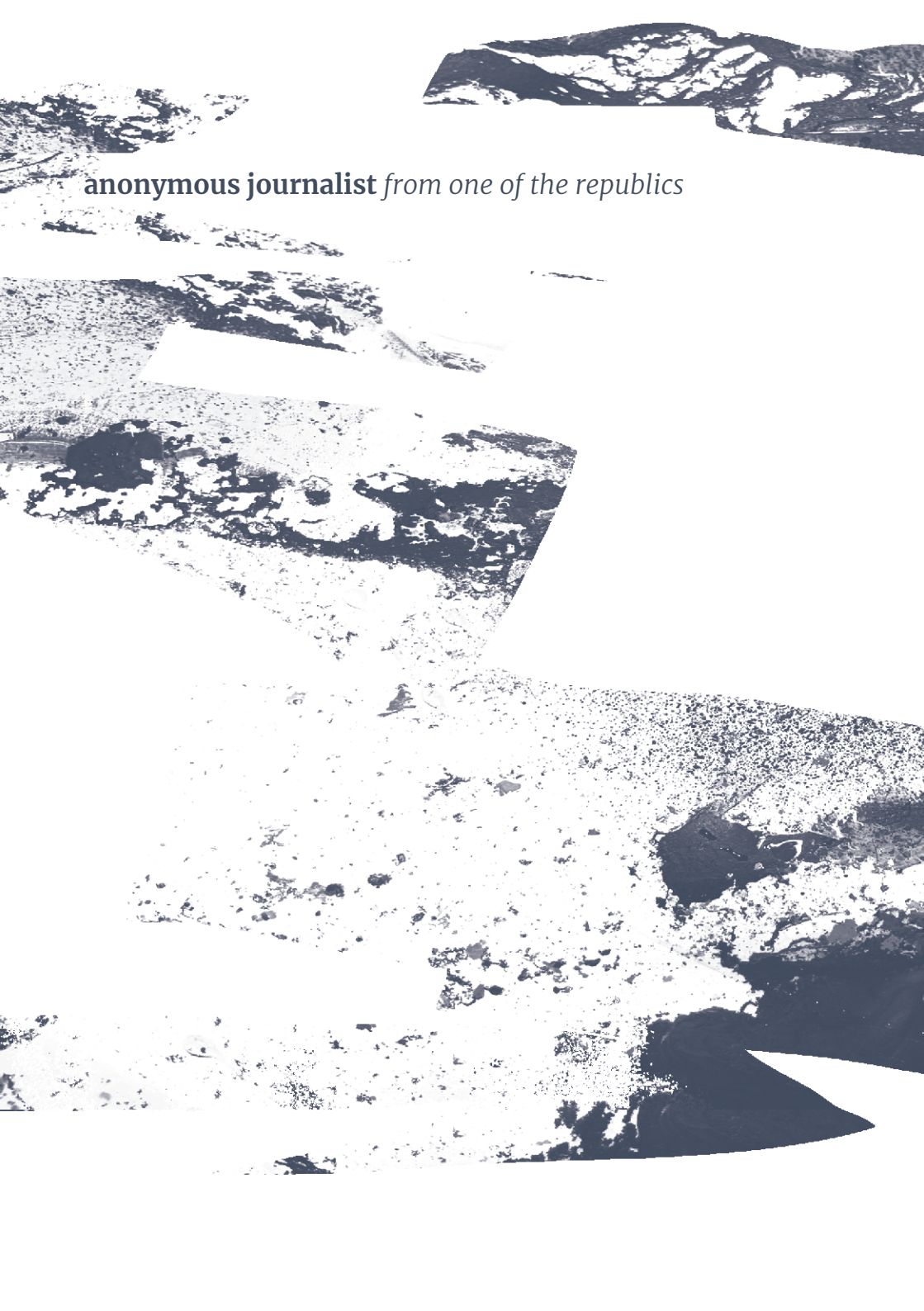


170 [Vladislav Surkov: Putin's long-term state]. Vladislav Surkov.
Nezavisimaya gazeta, 11 Feb 2019





anonymous journalist *from one of the republics*



representation of indigenous people in the russian media space

Whether we are talking about cultural, political or journalistic media, there is virtually no adequate representation of Indigenous peoples in the Russian media space. This is partly due to the fact that there are disastrously few journalism professionals among Russia's Indigenous peoples. There are several reasons for this:

- the **dire economic situation of the national regions** and the associated difficulties in obtaining quality journalism education 'inside' and reaching the federal level;
- the **high level of ethnic hatred** that many Indigenous people have to face in the country's big cities, which offer a wider range of educational and professional opportunities;
- the public memory of the dangerous 1990s and 2000s, when **far-right groups** flourished in major cities, targeting non-white people;
- the **'glass ceiling'** that Indigenous people face in their careers due to system racial and national discrimination.

As a consequence, in the Russian-language media, materials about Indigenous people are not created by Indigenous people themselves, but by specialists from outside, who often have very little knowledge of Indigenous peoples, their cultures and important aspects

of life. Because of their privileges, such journalists reproduce marginalising, colonial exoticising prejudices and stereotypes.

One can still see blatant cases of journalistic unprofessionalism in **news stories** in the form of **emphasis on nationality** in a situation where the perpetrator of an incident is a non-Russian person:



· *In Kamchatka, a Buryat killed a local resident.*

· *An armed jealous Chechen kidnapped a St. Petersburg female student from her classes.*



Journalists also often **refer to the national republics through the prism of negative statistics**, which, taken out of context, sounds as if they are equated with the characteristics of the peoples themselves:



· *The Court of Patriarchy. Tuva leads in the number of rapes in Russia. Justice here is as loyal as possible to the accused, especially if the victim 'gave a reason'.*

The other side of the coin is the **exoticisation of Indigenous and national regions** and the promotion of simplified and clichéd images for clickbait headlines and high-profile stories:



· *Kalmykia and Elista. Tibetan Buddhism, fire water, desert and saigas – eastern exotica in southern Russia.*

· *No Reindeer – No Even. Reindeer, hunting, fishing, weddings and ordinary life – traditions and modernity of Yakut reindeer herders in Holod's photo-history.*



These trends are especially noticeable **in the materials devoted to the participation of persons belonging to Indigenous peoples in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine**:

· *‘We will all die, but the people will live’ There are more Buddhists living in Kalmykia than anywhere else in Europe. Many of them willingly go to war with Ukraine. ‘Verstka’ found out how those whose religion rejects any violence justify the war.*



· *‘Now they are our gods’. In the Buryat town of Kyakhta, the military men killed in Ukraine are ready to be honoured as saints.*

· *They’re mostly after loans. How Twans are dying in someone else’s war, trying to climb out of poverty – and how they ask shamans and Buddhist monks to protect them. Meduza report.*



Meanwhile, there is little media **coverage of systemic Indigenous attempts to resist the regime and the war**. Indigenous activists help soldiers terminate military contracts so they can avoid participating in the war against Ukraine, support anti-war protesters and people persecuted for political reasons, and fight state propaganda in the regions. Most major independent Russian media also do not cover the results of decolonial activists’ work, such as organising regular anti-war rallies in different countries, participating in UN thematic panels and other international human rights events, and advocacy work that led to the PACE adopting resolutions on Russia’s decolonisation, et cetera.

As a result, media readers see only negative images of Indigenous people. This material feeds into the general xenophobic atmosphere in the country, reinforcing the existing stigma and chauvinistic attitudes (often unconscious) towards Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous activists have made many attempts to argue the stigmatisation issue in their stories to the Russian journalistic community, but unfortunately, we rarely see a constructive response.

The existing gaps in coverage are being filled by anti-war foundations, decolonial and human rights media created by Indigenous peoples, and individual Indigenous journalists, despite increasing Russian repression and discriminatory laws. Here are some of these projects:



← *Asians of Russia Media*

Indigenous of Russia Foundation →



← *Free Yakutia Foundation*

Free Buryatia Foundation →

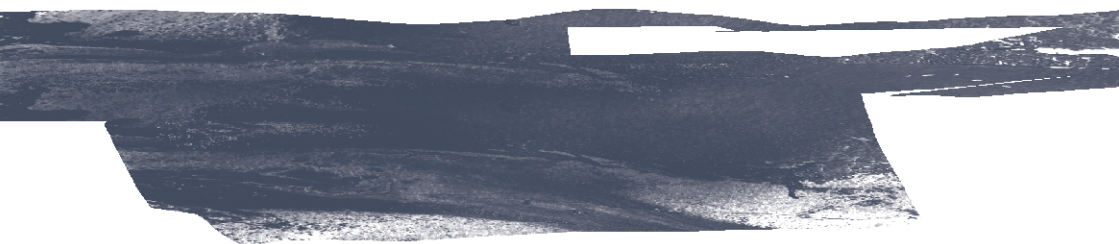


← *Oirad Jisän Movement*

New Tuva Movement →



← *Bashqort Solidarity*



*Totqondar (media project about the detainees
in the 'Baymaq case') →*



← Podcast 'Republic speaks _'

Feminist media 'Chavaga' →



← Human rights project 'Kost'

TODO media →



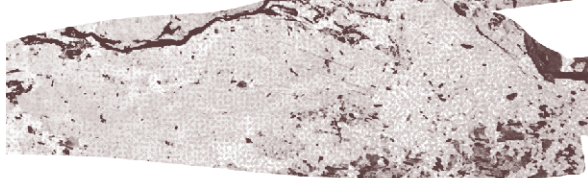
← Komi Daily

Voices of Nations held captive by Moscow →



← From the Republics

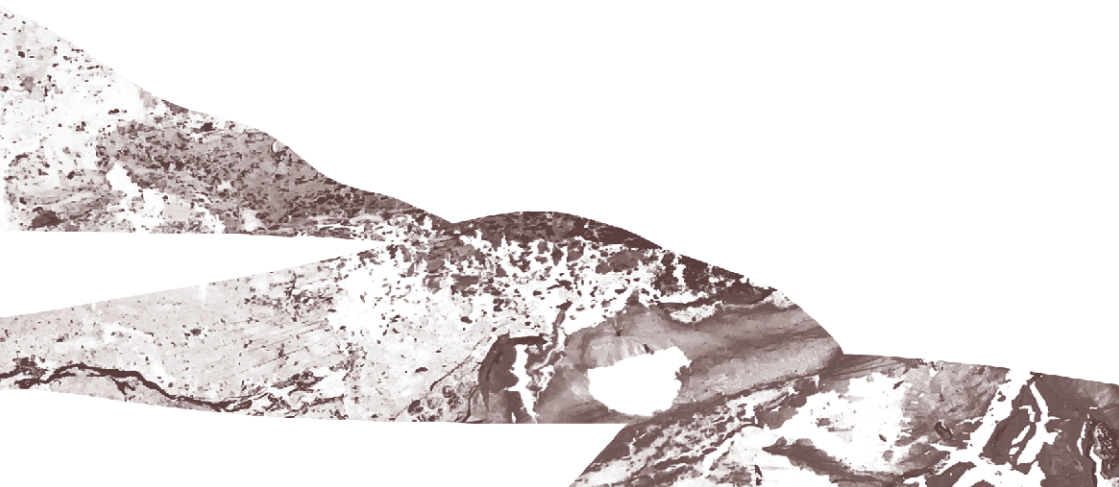




authors of the report: anonymous activists
from republics and regions

interview with activists prepared by
Seseg Jigjitova

editor **Gulnara Shuraleeva**





9. women's movement in the national republics of Russia

Women's (feminist) movements have always played a significant role in anti-war and anti-authoritarian movements around the world¹⁷¹, and Russia is no exception in this regard. For example, during the wars in Afghanistan and during the Russian-Chechen wars, the women's association 'Soldiers' Mothers' pushed to stop the conscription of students into the army and campaigned for an end to the war. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, in Russia, there emerged. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, in Russia ther emerged the Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement. But even beyond public activism and direct action, women in crisis phases of history are simultaneously threatened but also remain subjects of history.

To compile this report, we spoke (on condition of anonymity) with both activists and women who do not call themselves so but who are visibly engaged in active social work from five [six] national republics of Russia: Buryatia, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Tuva, Kalmykia, [Chechnya and Ingushetia]. The report should not be taken as a sociological study on a representative sample, as we do not have the capacity to conduct such a study due to lack of resources. Rather, it is a documentation of selected views on the situation that is developing for the women's movement in the national republics of Russia.

9.1. the problem of domestic violence

One of the most cited problems among those tackled by the contemporary feminist movement in the republics is the problem of domestic violence. Most often it is violence against a woman by her partner or husband, as well as by her older relatives. Activists note that this problem is acute in Russia, and the state is not interested in solving it. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the situation has worsened: soldiers returning from the front are abusing their family members; many of those returning had been formerly imprisoned for acts of violence and were pardoned under Putin's programme to send prisoners to the front¹⁷². There are no programmes to rehabilitate such ex-prisoners, and many of them also clearly show signs of PTSD, but no psychological work is carried out with them.

In the republics of the North Caucasus, the region most affected by Russian colonisation and Russian military aggression during the Russian-Chechen wars and their aftermath, the situation with women's rights and domestic violence appears to be particularly dire. The region is subjected to a particular form of conservative propaganda supported by the Kremlin. Activists working in the Republic of Ingushetia and the Republic of Chechnya say that women are often subjected to domestic violence, both by blood relatives and husbands. For some, the only way to survive is to flee the region, and several foundations and organisations help these women, but recently they have faced unreasonable and impracticable reporting requirements from Western donors. For example, a donor foundation may stipulate that assistance is provided only to those women whose stories have been reported on social networks or in independent media. Apparently, donors thus seek to single out only the most vulnerable and most victimised women, and in practice harm them by demanding publicity: *'They demand that cases of beatings be proven through*

publication on social networks or in the press. But there have already been several cases where, after a case was published, the police in the region illegally arrested all the men of this woman's family, her husband, and kept them in police custody with all the consequences [potentially such detention could mean torture]. In this way they put pressure on the women to return'. It is very difficult for organisations helping women in the North Caucasus to find financial support within the country because their activities are not encouraged by the governments of the republics. It is impossible to organise evacuations and help women without funding. At the same time, Western donors' lack of understanding of the context of their work and the serious risks faced by women and LGBTQA people who have suffered domestic violence in the North Caucasus complicate the work of activists in the region.

9.2. risks for the feminist and women's movement

The feminist movement in Russia today faces censorship and repression, and the situation in the republics is no exception. The movement is heterogeneous, with grassroots activists and groups working unofficially, often anonymously, and activists and organisations cooperating with state bodies and organisations, most often in assisting women who have suffered domestic violence. **This division should be considered tentative and schematic, as the boundaries between the two types of work are often blurred, and some people are involved in both types of activism and may also help each other in certain situations.** Nevertheless, the more informal part of the movement probably has more ties to other movements, such as LGBT¹⁷³, which today is labelled in Russia as extremism. The same is true for the decolonial movement, which law enforcement agencies call the 'Anti-Russian Separatist Movement' and label as extremism. Activists at the intersection of several movements are at greater risks of being targeted for repression. Quote from the interview: *'Often, feminists are also, for example, LGBT activists charged with "LGBT+*

propaganda”; [the authorities] *find some old posts, saved videos* [social media content on topics on topics banned in Russia, which activists had posted before the repressive laws were passed – in Russia, such laws punish Internet posts regardless of when they were published] *and so on, write denunciations against them and create some criminal cases*’. Because of the persecution, many activists have had to flee Russia, and those who cannot afford to do so because of their financial situation or other circumstances are forced to censor their public work. Nevertheless, many stay because they feel they are needed in the region, and their work can only be carried out locally. Those who have ‘left’ and those who have ‘stayed’ keep in touch, and where possible, mutually support each other via the internet.

The respondents believe that the attitude of the state and officials towards the feminist and women’s movement deteriorated after the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Women actively spoke out against the war, with women’s street protests against the war and mobilisation taking place in several republics in 2022 (see, for example, women’s protests in Yakutia¹⁷⁴ and Dagestan¹⁷⁵, which were violently dispersed by security forces). Quote: *At the very beginning of the [full-scale] war, it was feminist activists who became the first mouthpieces of truth and anti-militarism. On the other hand, they also became a kind of human rights activists. That is, they helped to actually evacuate people* [those who were subject to mobilisation but did not want to participate in the war against Ukraine]’. The Russian political course after the start of the war has become even more conservative than before: any talk of women’s rights or feminism provokes a negative reaction from officials. Pressure on reproductive rights has been steadily increasing, probably due to the state’s desire to raise the birth rate in the country; proposals are often made to restrict or ban abortion, to remove it from the list of procedures covered by universal state health insurance and to introduce measures that make access to safe abortions more difficult. In 2024, the country banned the ‘childfree and the ideology of childlessness propaganda’¹⁷⁶. Of course, the concept of ‘childfree propaganda’ has no legal meaning, nor can it be called a real phenomenon:

there is no organised movement or organisation in Russia that would publicly promote the ‘ideology of childlessness’. Consequently, feminist movements that advocate the right to choose in matters of childbearing, as well as egalitarianism in the family, equal division of labour, responsibilities and rights of men and women, are in disgrace. Apparently, by repressing feminism and LGBT, the state hopes to reinforce the conservative strategy of rigid gender roles in the nuclear family, where the man is supposed to be dominant, aggressive and involved in war, and the woman is supposed to give birth and raise children, as well as work in the rear. This model of society is much more convenient for a militarised warring state.

Individual organisations and initiatives, usually those working with women who have suffered domestic violence, are attempting to continue to provide open, systemic support on the ground, so that any woman in the region can contact them. In order to continue this work, such as providing women with legal counselling in the courts and communicating with the local media on particularly high-profile cases, these organisations have to self-censor: not to opine out about the war, not to speak out in the media against military men who have returned from the front (while many such military men commit violence against their wives and partners). **If organisations do not censor their statements, they may face harassment, forcing them to stop working and leaving women in difficult situations without support and protection.**

The state does not support local independent women’s organisations that advocate on behalf of women’s interests, but funds accountable organisations that discourage women from divorcing abusive husbands or persuade them not to have abortions. Such initiatives, activists say, cannot be called part of the ‘women’s movement’ because their work is organised ‘from above’ in line with the government values and objectives. Quote: *If this foundation can somehow be considered as an organisation that supports women’s rights by banning abortion*

and pretending to support women who have refused abortion, then they [women's organisations] are flourishing'.

Independent initiatives, organisations and feminist/women's activists in the republics often have to work without funding because grant support from foreign foundations now means greater risks of being recognised as 'foreign agents' and further persecution, while state grants for feminist initiatives are not allocated. Some initiatives manage to raise small donations, but more as symbolic support. Nevertheless, activists strive to seek new opportunities to fund and support their work.

9.3. connecting with roots as a strategy against the patriarchy

Some activists from the national republics see the importance of traditional indigenous culture and history in the feminist struggle, appealing to the fact that many patriarchal customs and violence are not typical of their people, such as Kalmyks and Tuvans.

A quote: 'I attribute the unusual emancipation of Kalmyk women to the fact that Kalmyks were nomads of the semi-desert steppes and had to travel up to a thousand kilometres each year. It was a harsh life in which people had to survive, and therefore, every man and woman played a crucial role in the family and household'.

Feminists from the republics are engaged in recovering the memory of pre-colonial gender regimes and talking about the much more egalitarian nature of their historical tradition in relation to women. This strategy is a kind of resistance to the state narrative of 'traditional values', which presuppose conservatism and the patriarchal family and are actively enforced by the Kremlin all over Russia through propaganda.

9.4. feelings and hopes for the future

We noticed that one of the most frequently repeated epithets in the interviews is the word ‘difficult’. Activists talk about fatigue and burnout, the need to work in constant tension because of the fear of repression. It is impossible to predict what is going to happen in the next moment and what you might be subjected to in administrative or criminal proceedings; you have to constantly be aware of the possibility that in case of persecution, you will have to flee the country. Quote: *‘It’s hard to preserve sobriety of consciousness and reason. Because fear sometimes grips you. On the other hand, you still want to do something and keep doing it, but you want to find some safe sphere’.*

The activists are nevertheless sustained by their belief in the possibility of a better future without war and repression, a sense of the importance of what they are doing, and a feeling of support from others: *‘We are really supported by the population, and there are real volunteers involved in the work of our movement, which is not the case with state-sanctioned organisations’.* They speak of the possibility of noticing sometimes a reaction from audiences who, as a result of the work done by the feminist movement, have become much more critical of violence against women and interested in ideas of equality and justice. Quote: *‘More and more women are beginning to realise that their situation in Tuva is far from ideal. Tyvinians have begun to advocate for financial and bodily independence, women’s support and pacifism’.* The activists see hope in the preservation of the feminist movement in Russia and in the possibility of developing cross-border and international links. Quote: *‘There are prospects in the development of some cross-border, interregional, international projects, where those who remained in the regions could “feed” on experience, resources, and financial resources. And plan their activities’.*

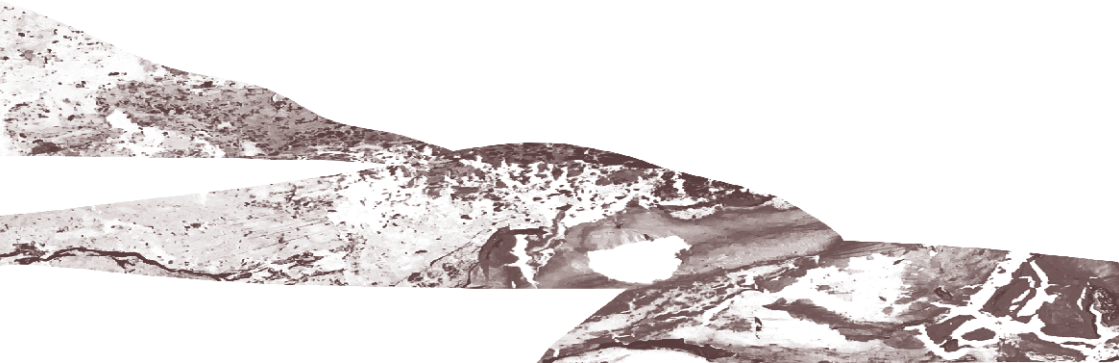


171 *Women and the language of peace protest. Ruth Rosen. openDemocracy, 24 May 2013*

172 *A UN expert says Russian convicts sent to war in Ukraine commit crimes when they return. The Associated Press, 23 Sep 2024*



173 *[The Supreme Court has recognised the 'Anti-Russian Separatist Movement' as extremist. Who does this threaten and how?]* BBC News Russian Service, 7 Jun 2024

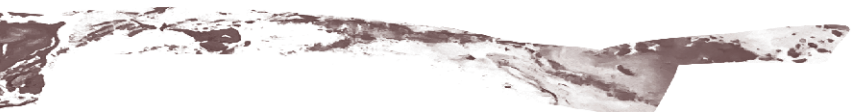


174 *Women protest against mobilisation in Yakutia: police break up protest, authorities claim it was held ‘in support of mobilised men’.*
Novaya Gazeta Europe, 25 Sep 2022



175 *Women in Dagestan and other regions protest mobilization ‘Our children are not fertilizer!’. Meduza, 26 Sep 2022*

176 *Russia mulls ban on ‘childless propaganda’.* AFP 2024



colophon

authors:

Victoria Dorzhiin/Maladaeva, co-founder of the Indigenous of Russia Foundation
Yana Tannagasheva, Shor Indigenous activist, International Committee
of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR)
Tjan Zaotschnaja, Itelmen woman, Indigenous rights and environmental activist,
International Committee of Indigenous Peoples of Russia (ICIPR)
Viliuia Choinova, environmental engineer, Sakha
Sholbaana Kiular, anti-war and decolonial activist, 'New Tuva'
Bulat Bazarov, public activist from Buryatia
bashqort Solidarity collective

English translation:

Hanna Otchyk

also:

anonymous independent Indigenous and decolonial activists,
researchers, and participants in anti-war and decolonial initiatives

editor-in-chief:

Gulnara Shuraleeva

preparation and coordination of publication:

Nomads
de_colonialanguage
initiative group

The reports were written as part of a roundtable discussion at the German Foreign
Ministry in 2024.

this publication was supported by:

design + illustrations:

Olesya Gonserovskaya

publication:

de_colonialanguage

garnitures:

Baskerville, Merriweather

DIALOG
BÜRO

DIALOG
BÜRO

