

how the nineteenth-century public saw the North? As Potter admits, the painting was not popular in its day. John Millais' *The North-West Passage*, in contrast, was frequently exhibited. Yet Potter does not mention *The North-West Passage* at all, let alone reproduce it. This seems especially odd considering that Millais' picture was first exhibited in 1874, right at the end of the period covered by *Arctic Spectacles*. Given its great popularity, it would have provided a very suitable subject for the book's conclusion.

Overall, then, this is a disappointing treatment of a very promising theme. Potter presents some important new information on Arctic panoramas and similar shows, and anyone with a serious interest in the cultural history of exploration will want to browse through the illustrations he provides. The appended list of Arctic shows is a useful resource. But in the end, what could have been an exceptionally engaging work of historical reconstruction is little more than a glorified coffee-table book.

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Settlers on the Edge: Identity and Modernization on Russia's Arctic Frontier. By Niobe Thompson. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008. xiv + 289 pp. Notes, bibliography, index.

Niobe Thompson, himself from a *priezzhi* (newcomer) family to the Canadian North, has produced a wonderful ethnography of settlers to one of the most distant and isolated territories of Russia. The vast and sparsely populated Chukotka region in the northeast corner of the country is remote even for Siberia. Thompson spent a substantial amount of time in the region in the early 2000s studying and intermingling with various social groups. Supplementing this ethnographic research with wide-ranging secondary literature, he presents his work as a corrective to the neglect and negative portrayals of non-indigenous migrants to northern regions common within Arctic anthropology. When they have not been ignored outright, settlers like the ones he studies have often been portrayed as agents of imperialism or transient exploiters disconnected from native life and the local environment. By contrast, Thompson's work responds positively to recent calls by some anthropologists to include a wider cross-section of residents in the study of the North, while simultaneously addressing important theoretical issues of indigeneity and nativeness. Indeed, *Settlers on the Edge* presents a sophisticated account of how practical interactions with the tundra landscape engendered a sense of belonging among certain

groups of Soviet-era migrants, revealing their transition from colonizers to native opponents of a new colonial project. Proceeding chronologically, the study is analytically-rich and poses important questions about identity, everyday life, and modernity throughout.

Although Thompson himself does not make this claim, Chukotka can be viewed as a region where the economic changes that have characterized Russian history over the past half-century have been particularly extreme. Arguably, the comparative prosperity of late socialism, the devastating poverty of the 1990s, and the economic revival of the past decade all occurred in the area in more acute forms than in other parts of the former Soviet Union. In the late Soviet era, the region was a primary target of state colonization efforts that sought to draw outsiders to the north with enticements such as longer vacations, higher salaries, and greater access to consumer luxuries. Thompson argues that the migrants who arrived as a result of these incentive programs developed a sense of purpose as modernizers of a naturally recalcitrant territory and, somewhat paradoxically, a feeling of freedom in the realm of experienced “statelessness.” As the population of Chukotka rose rapidly from under 40,000 in 1959 to over 160,000 by the Soviet collapse, these migrants came to outnumber local Natives (primarily Chukchi, but also Yupik, Evens, and others). Moreover, they increasingly partook in what literary critic Vera Dunham has called the “Big Deal”—a compromise between the state and bureaucratic and technical workers in which loyalty to the regime was exchanged for material benefits and middle class status—on a broader scale than in most other Soviet-controlled regions.

During the 1990s, this situation for settlers—what Thompson calls the “Arctic idyll”—was destroyed by neo-liberal reform efforts in Russia. Thompson does not explicitly define this era as another modernization project, but he should have. The restructuring toward a capitalist economy and the importation of a consumer culture from Europe and North America were aimed at making the country “modern,” just as earlier and later campaigns had been (even as these processes had a tumultuous “de-modernizing” effect on vast parts of the country and impoverished large portions of the population). Again, these destructive developments were arguably worse in Chukotka than in the rest of the country. In the absence of state subsidies for the region, market forces wreaked havoc on the local economy, which had never been particularly profitable and, as a result, lost virtually any capacity to compete. Exacerbating the situation, the corrupt administration of Governor Aleksandr Nazarov ruled the region by cultivating patronage networks among a limited group of primarily

urban clients. This desperate state of affairs resulted in a mass exodus from Chukotka, which lost more than half its population in the 1990s. As state services, including transportation, food, medicine, and education, receded and wages went unpaid for years, those who chose to stay or could not manage to leave struggled to survive. Such hardships were experienced by many regions of the post-socialist world, but Chukotka's lack of economic viability, the absence of concern for the region from a distant centre, and the prevalence of personal, dishonest, and inept rule made suffering in the territory particularly severe.

The transformation of Chukotka during the Putin era was perhaps the most remarkable development in the region's recent history. While Russia used oil profits to support the growth of a new middle class and the central government cracked down on political opposition, a savvy and phenomenally wealthy businessman, Roman Abramovich, led efforts to economically modernize Chukotka during his tenure as governor between 2000 and 2008. Abramovich invested over two billion US dollars of his own money in building new infrastructure, protecting "traditional" ways of life by supporting state reindeer farms and providing educational opportunities, and streamlining the regional economy. These activities, along with his loyalty to the Kremlin, helped him protect his wealth and freedom in an era when the government was targeting "oligarchs" who had become spectacularly rich through shady business dealings in the 1990s. Living through this era in Chukotka, Thompson vividly describes the dramatic changes in the appearance of local towns and villages and the attitudes and lifestyles of his informants over just a few short years. The transition of Chukotka from a region hit extremely hard by Russia's poorly executed switch to capitalism to one in which economic revival has been particularly pronounced further underscores the extraordinary nature of change in the territory.

For Thompson, these vacillations in Chukotka's economic situation serve as background for his examination of a number of complex problems concerning the structural similarities between successive modernization campaigns in the region, political and economic relations with the state and within social networks, and issues of identity and belonging. For example, the book goes to great lengths to highlight similarities between the modernization campaign launched by Abramovich and earlier Soviet efforts, referring to the former as a neo-Leninist five-year plan (159). As part of this effort, Thompson points to the patronizing assumptions of those involved in various regional development schemes and describes how a new cadre of Russian modernizers — young upstarts from the

centre who saw work in Chukotka as a path to career advancement — stereotyped Soviet-era migrants as “frozen” in time and excluded them from emerging economic opportunities in the early 2000s. Furthermore, Thompson shows how a situation of “two solitudes” (a concept he borrows from Hugh MacLennan’s writings on Quebec) developed between these groups, making interactions between them perilous.

While he stresses certain negative features of modernization and implies that another economic bust is likely in Chukotka in the future (148–149, 241–244), Thompson avoids making a clear statement on the overall desirability of modernization, dwelling instead on the ambiguities and contradictions it wrought in all periods. Still, he structures his narrative as a declensionist one for Soviet-era migrants by painting a surprisingly positive image of the late Soviet period, allowing the economic disaster of the 1990s to speak for itself, and emphasizing the negative sides of Abramovich’s efforts. Given the evidence he provides—especially regarding the marked improvement in the lives of many of the migrants he knew—one may wonder whether Chukotka would have been better off without Abramovich’s investments. This issue, however, is never raised by Thompson.

As a work of economic sociology, the book provides rich detail on how people made ends meet during the retreat of the post-Soviet state in the 1990s and in the Abramovich era. Framing this material with theories of social capital, the informal economy, gift giving, and patronage networks, it provides a vivid picture of the variegated experiences of settlers on the edge. For example, readers learn how a woman named Sveta in the remote coastal village of Meinypil’ gyno single-handedly found teachers from central Russia to educate her children and helped ferry people and food between distant towns by relying on barrels of diesel fuel abandoned by the military. They also hear about Grisha, who grew up in Anadyr and hunted for survival throughout the 1990s before procuring a job with the Red Cross in 2002. Finally, they learn about the Bogorev brothers, who arrived in the village of Vaegi in the 1980s and early 1990s after their military service ended, manipulated the vacuum in local authority to bootleg alcohol, poach tundra animals, and position their fire prevention service as a powerful predatory agency in the region. The brothers initially dreamed of leaving the village as soon as they had accumulated adequate savings, but one of them, Victor, eventually became mayor and his attachments to the North changed considerably. After marrying a Chukchi woman and starting a family, Victor launched a sobriety campaign that cut

off the distribution of hard spirits to Vaegi and persuaded the Abramovich administration to invest in the village instead of liquidating it.

Arguing against understandings of identity and community that regard these phenomena as exclusively symbolic, Thompson examines the development of a sense of belonging among settlers through an interrogation of the various myths and practices that shape this process. His discussion of the issue focuses on uses of romantic notions of the North, the importance of a practical rootedness as a constituent of identity when other forms of selfhood are unavailable, and the deep attachments formed through personal interactions with the tundra environment. Thompson also highlights how feelings of belonging to the north were different in rural and urban areas. For example, he found that urban residents in Anadyr were more likely than their rural counterparts to invoke notions of a pan-settler community and take advantage of the array of new conveniences—gyms, bars, discos, travel—introduced by the Abramovich modernization project to insulate themselves from the harsh conditions of northern life. By contrast, he discovered that rural residents were more likely to develop a sense of belonging similar to what members of groups typically seen as Native often feel.

This excellent monograph leaves little to criticize. However, one weakness involves the author's use of history. While it may be unfair for an historian to make such criticisms of an anthropologist, I found Thompson's analysis of the Soviet past unsatisfying. Many anthropologists working on Arctic Russia have made prodigious use of archival records because they saw value in putting contemporary ethnographic problems in historical perspective (see the work of Bruce Grant, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, and David Anderson, for example). By contrast, Thompson rarely uses primary historical materials, except for the recollections of his informants and Joseph Brodsky's writings. His analysis thus suffers from a lack of evidence documenting how migrants in Chukotka actually lived. Moreover, Thompson's attempt to make a critical intervention in the stale totalitarian/revisionist debate in Soviet historiography came across as particularly misplaced since he relied primarily on the writings of anthropologists, sociologists, and political theorists, and applied his arguments to the late Soviet era instead of the Stalinist years (about which the debate mostly occurred). More pedantically, the author at one point refers mistakenly to "Count Speranski's Petrine reforms" (107). This error, which suggests that the activities of an early nineteenth-century government minister took place during the reign of Peter the Great (1682–

1725), is egregious enough that the publisher of the book should fix it in future editions by simply removing the word "Petrine."

In the end, however, this minor deficiency does not detract significantly from the overall value of the book. *Settlers on the Edge* is a first-rate monograph that provides a sophisticated analysis of the experience of migrants to the north.

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***The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada.* By Liza Piper. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009. xviii + 403 pp. Illustrations, appendices, glossary, notes, bibliography, index.**

In this book Liza Piper captures with detail and insight an essential episode in northern environmental history. Between 1920 and 1960 the lakes of northwestern Canada—Lake Winnipeg, Lake Athabasca, Great Slave Lake, and Great Bear Lake—were thrown open to exploitation. Miners, fishermen, scientists, and pilots flowed north, imposing an imperfect colonization. Aboriginal treaties and the exercise of government and scientific authority cleared the way for a new economy based on the export of living and nonliving wealth: fish, gold, and uranium. One consequence was a transformed environment: mining wastes dumped in lakes, depleted fish populations, forests reduced to charcoal. But this was not just a story of despoiling a fragile landscape. Even as newcomers tied the region to the rest of the world, they were forced to adapt to many environmental challenges, from harsh weather to spring breakup. In this history the lakes themselves were essential participants, serving and shaping these efforts, functioning as travel routes, resources, and waste repositories.

In telling this story Piper provides an immensely valuable perspective not just on northern history, but on the practice of environmental history itself. Her book joins other recent accounts of the environmental history of western and northern Canada by Tina Loo, Kathryn Morse, John Sandlos, Bill Turkel, and others. Piper, like her colleagues, pays particular attention to evolving social and scientific ideas, and to the shifting relations and conflicts between government, private interests, and communities. In doing so, she draws on a remarkably wide range of sources, both published and archival. She also exhibits an impressive sensitivity for the meanings embedded in both action and language. But where she especially excels is in situating this history in a specific place, and in invoking its material