

PLACES OF SIGNIFICANCE IN ITELMEN COUNTRY:
SACREDNESS, NOSTALGIA AND IDENTITY IN KAMCHATKA, RUSSIA

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A
THESIS

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By

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Abstract

This research was conducted among Itelmen people, a small indigenous group who live on the Kamchatka peninsula in the Russian Far East. The thesis explores places of significance and sacred places of Itelmens who traditionally occupied most of the peninsula. At present the majority live on the Western coast of Kamchatka on the Okhotsk Sea shore. Providing some historical background, outcomes of colonization and western presence, and description of contemporary Itelmen worldview, this study offers an overview of Itelmen concepts of perceiving, knowing, appreciating and “animating” places. These concepts are formed primarily on the basis of a sense of loss of the villages during the relocations of 1950s-60s, a sense of admiration of nature, a sense of respect of ancestral knowledge associated with their lands, a sense of fear and respect of the spirits inhabiting the places and other aspects of landscape animation. Through the examples of indigenous peoples’ initiatives this thesis also provides the groundwork for demonstrating the usefulness of the study of places of significance and sacred sites as negotiations take place between Itelmens and the government over native lands.

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First of all I want to acknowledge my grandmother who inspires me to move towards great achievements, who traveled with me to Kamchatkan villages and showed me the beauty of my people, and my mother who gave me the freedom of choice in my work. I am grateful to David Koester for helping me to become a scholar and caring for Itelmen people, and to the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North for providing me with their support. I also want to thank those people who generously shared their knowledge and memories with me and let me interview them.

Introduction

“Grandmother was cutting fish by the river when a fish scale got stuck to her hand. I exclaimed: ‘Granny, you are our fish now!’ And she almost seriously replied: ‘Oh. I am in fact a fish...’ And then she told me a story which greatly impressed me:

Her homeland [rodina] is here in this area, in Utkholok, where high mountains host sea-gull nests and thousands of migratory birds. She was born here and my ancestors lived here. Finally, I, a city girl, visited the land of my great-grandfather Vasilii Yakovlevich Lastochkin and his beautiful wife Maria who was from Sedanka Osedlaya. Grandmother’s mother, Lastochkina Tatiana, lived in Utkholok as well. My sister was named after her, and later they found out that great-grandmother was also Tatiana. This appeared to be a name passed down in the family [Russ. Rodovoe imya]. In May the men of Utkholok settlement floated down in their baty¹ to the mouth of the Utkholok River [Ust-Utkholok] and got ready for fishing season. Fish is the main subsistence food for Itelmens. A huge school of smelt was the first to enter the river from the Okhotsk Sea. They were caught with fishing weirs. Later hunchback salmon, keta, king salmon and then royal silver salmon [Lat. Parasalmo Mykiss] entered the river. Silver salmon was the population’s main

¹ Bat – Itelmen dugout canoe

subsistence food. It was caught from November throughout the entire winter. Silver salmon was easy to preserve. It was thrown with cold water on the river shore during strong frosts. Then it was brought to the village upstream and stored in a shelter made of logs. Or it might have also been stored in cellars [Russ. nozpe6] until the fish started to come again. Out of all the smelts my granny will immediately recognize the smell of silver salmon. This is our story..." (personal communication Vasilieva Daria, 2008)

This story was written by my younger sister Dasha when in the summer of 2008 she, my grandmother, Viktoria V. Petrasheva, and I visited our homeland, the mouth of the Utkholok River. It was the first time when all three of us came together there to reunite with our ancestors. The village of Utkholok where my grandmother was born does not exist anymore and she has not been to this site of the former village in many years. It was an extremely emotional time filled with our realization of the spiritual value of homelands.

With this story I want to introduce a non-standard understanding of the notion of sacred places which is widely recognized among Itelmens – a small indigenous group living on the Kamchatka peninsula in the Russian Far East. The story of my sister teaches us that when a person visits his or her ancestral grounds the knowledge of a people associated with those grounds is remembered; it starts to live again when the place is visited. With this story I wanted to stress the fact that the sacredness of a place is not necessarily connected with supernatural forces or religious ideas. It is priceless

knowledge and memories about the distant past along with a strong yearning to go back to those places that animate Itelmen lands with a special degree of sacredness. Without having visited the place, my grandmother would not have remembered all those details about fishing traditions. Neither would she have shared those memories with us, her grandchildren.

My research on sacred places was inspired by my people. I grew up hearing stories about the life in the relocated villages, about Itelmens losing their lands, and about Itelmens' initiatives to legally obtain their ancestral grounds. Then I realized that we do not have enough knowledge about our lands anymore. Many people think that Itelmens struggle for their lands simply to acquire access to natural resources. But a few understand that the land is important for the Itelmen nation for the historical, spiritual attachments which built up over hundreds of years on our ancestral lands. Our identity as a people is built in the landscape supported by the associations and knowledge which our lands hold.

There is a lack of studies dedicated to the subject of landscape sacredness in Russia. No academic research about Itelmen sacred sites or places of significance has been conducted in Kamchatka whatsoever. I hope that my research will also be helpful to Itelmen leaders in order to substantiate the prior rights of Itelmens to their lands. Moreover, I hope that young people after reading this thesis have a better understanding of what it means to live on the ancestral lands and what it means to be an Itelmen.

Field Research

My study is based on extended research of literature and on field work which was conducted during the summer of 2008. I interviewed Itelmens who live in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski, the main city of the Kamchatka peninsula, and in the village of Kovran which is located on the Western coast of Kamchatka. The most exciting part of the

fieldwork was in Kovran. Today this settlement is believed to be the capital of Itelmens. This small

village has the highest concentration of Itelmen population of any village or settlement. At present many

Itelmens also live in the village of Tigil, where I did not have a chance to go because of

transportation problems, and Verkhnee Khairyuzovo (or

Khairyuzovo). The rest of the

Itelmen population which is about 3000 people is spread around Kamchatka and the globe.

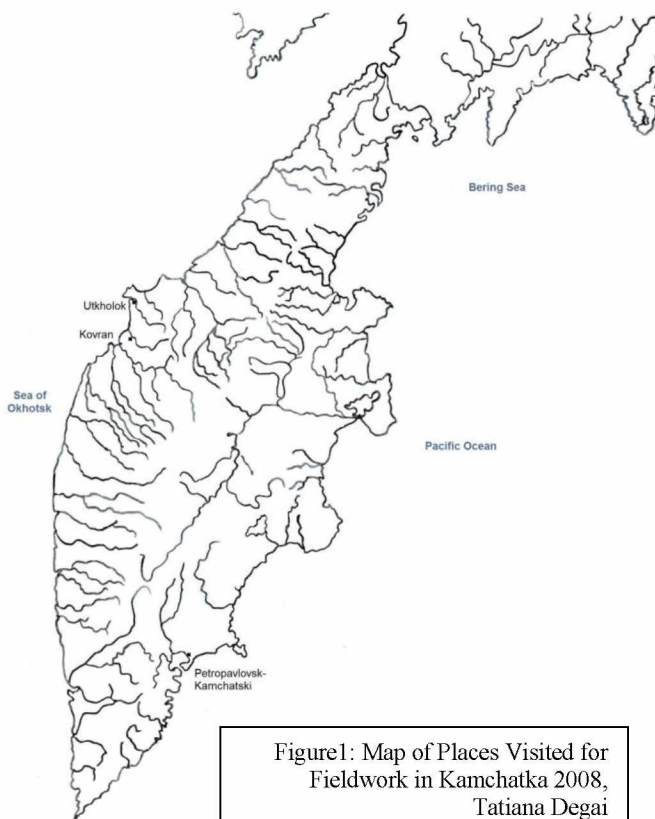


Figure1: Map of Places Visited for Fieldwork in Kamchatka 2008, Tatiana Degai

From the logistical point of view it was quite easy for me to organize my fieldwork route as I am from Kamchatka, I have been to the places of my fieldwork and I know about the challenges I can face while traveling in Kamchatka. But the main difficulty was that my field work appeared to be mixed with the organization and heading the ethno-ecological youth camp “Salmon Keepers”. This camp is aimed at teaching indigenous youth to appreciate salmon resources with which nature generously provides us. A part of the camp was planned to be in Utkholok where my sister and grandmother went as well. As I mentioned earlier, the Utkholok area is my ancestral territory. There I had a first hand experience of being on the lands of my ancestors. Utkholok is about 80 kilometers North of Kovran. One can get to the mouth of the River Utkholok, which used to be a summer camp for Itelmens of that area, by a big truck following along the Okhotsk Sea shore.

The experience of my field work taught me not to mix academic research with leadership activities. My study would have been richer if I dedicated the entire time in Kovran only for the research. Nevertheless the camp helped me to look at the Itelmen’s sense of place from a generational perspective. It helped me to research how elders perceive their lands and how young people sense places. In Utkholok I had a chance to observe young people’s behavior and talk to them of how they feel about the ancestral lands. I tried to look at the evolution of Itelmen sense of space. For that reason I interviewed both Itelmen elders and youth.

Outline of the Thesis

The first chapter provides the theoretical background for the study of sacred and significant places. First I describe the importance of sacred sites from the perspective of global indigenous rights legislation and the necessity of indigenous peoples to speak out about their sacred places. This chapter also introduces the discussion of the sacred versus the profane, the attributes of landscape sacredness and the main features of sacred sites which are recognized internationally, in Russia, and among Itelmens.

In the second chapter the discussion is dedicated to the understanding of the sacred as supernaturally dangerous. Mythological understanding of geothermal activities in ancient Itelmen society provides us with the idea that those places are animated with special sacredness based on fear of the unknown powers. At present, this fear of the unknown of supernatural power is changed into the scientifically known. At the same time the discussion of the significance of Christian cemeteries illustrates the case when the fear of the unknown is switched into the religiously known. Danger is not the only attribute of the landscape sacredness. Itelmen holistic perception of the universe exists together with spiritually inhabiting the entire landscape with various supernatural residents (spirits of the forests, spirits of the mountains, spirits of the rivers, etc). This coexistence is based on mutual respect which is expressed in certain rites, mainly in the rite of the offering to the spirit of the place. The first chapter observes a sacred place from the point of view of mythology and traces the evolution of the perception of those legendary places in the present.

The third chapter is dedicated to understanding of the concept of homeland, or '*rodina*' in Russian, as a sacred place. A brief historical background on Itelmens' life after contact touches mainly upon the period of the 1950-60s when most Itelmen villages were relocated, closed and united into larger ones. This event created a great sense of loss which is at the basis of the homeland being perceived as a sacred place. In post-soviet Russia, where economic support from the state has collapsed, new villages which were engineered by the state appeared to be at the stage of disappearing as well. Through their dramatic history, Itelmens have developed a notion of the 'special significance' of their 'homeland' which contemporary Itelmens identify as sacred.

The appearance of symbolic places described in the last chapter is also a result of Russian policy towards Itelmens. Those special places became the symbols of Itelmen culture, orienting the sites for revitalization, and markers of renaissance of Itelmen nation. Symbolic places are a good example of how and under what circumstances new sacred places appear. In conclusion, I illustrate how significant and sacred places can have new life by the example of the Itelmen initiative of legally organizing the territory of traditional land use. What can people do with the places of significance? How do sacred sites live on in Itelmen country? These are the main questions of my research.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Background

Genealogies of “Sacred Site” Research

Over the past century the concept of sacredness of places has been widely discussed by anthropologists, archeologists, folklorists, politicians, and lawyers. Indigenous peoples around the world use the notion of ‘sacred site’ as the main argument in resolving land tenure issues during negotiations with governments. In this chapter I am going to explore a) what is the place of the sacred sites in modern societies; b) why is this subject important within academia; c) the practical value of the research for the indigenous community through providing various definitions, and d) history and examples of sacred sites and places of significance.

By the end of the 20th century, the aboriginal population of the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and many other countries had reached such a level of activism that governments could not ignore the presence of sites of significance in the territories of their countries anymore. In some countries this recognition started in the 19th century and in others it came much later. For political purposes it became useful for indigenous peoples to “raise many voices together, to be better heard by those who threaten the safety of sacred sites in many parts of the world” due to economic and commercial development (Carmichael et al. 1994:2). Most of the contemporary activities of humanity such as building dams or houses, drilling for natural resources or timber industries result in the destruction of places which are significant to local people. Currently a range of legislation to protect special sites of aboriginal populations has been instituted both at the international, regional and local levels.

In Australia, for example, the government has three categories of law for protecting Aboriginal sites: 'relicts legislation', 'culture significance legislation', and 'general heritage legislation' (Ritchie 1994:229). In addition, each of the Australian states has its own legislation which is applied to land issues. This results in a complexity of statutes across the country. The most important laws are the Australian Heritage Commission Act of 1975, the Commonwealth's Aboriginal Land Rights Act of 1976 and Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act of 1989. The presence of these legal frameworks indicates that the sacredness of the places is a significant part of the aboriginal life of Australia.

Australian law is comparatively developed in the sphere of protection of sacred sites. David Ritchie in 'Principles and Practice of Site Protection Laws in Australia' (1994) explains that sites there are designated and publicly marked. He gives examples of signs which indicate the presence of a sacred site and the limits of access to certain categories of people to this site. Unauthorized entry can bring a penalty of up to \$20,000 (Ritchie 1994:240). The Australian government acknowledges the presence of sacred sites in the coastal waters as well as on land. These examples suggest that aboriginal Australians are advanced in terms of site protection. It was unexpected to hear during the meeting dedicated to the Convention on Biological Diversity² from an Aboriginal Australian woman that the state legislation does not meet the interests of the indigenous population. They still feel that they are being oppressed on their land and that state laws

² The Conferences on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are a United Nations' meetings which aim at creating better conditions for protection of our environment and nature. Indigenous leaders actively participate in those meetings as the Convention recognizes traditional knowledge as one of the ways of biodiversity conservation. This particular meeting was the 9th Conference of the Parties on CBD, Bonn, Germany, 2008.

are far from understanding the customary laws of native peoples. Such cases appear in many parts of the world.

The Maori people of New Zealand are also known to be a strong nation. Since the very beginning of their relationships with colonial Britain they had land problems based on a misunderstanding of the treaties. In 1800 the Treaty of Waitangi was signed by numerous Maori chiefs and the Queen of England. This treaty was written in two languages, English and Maori, which inevitably resulted in different interpretations and confusion. According to Matunga “Within seven years of the signing of the Treaty the Maori people became a minority in their own country and their land has been gradually taken from them” (Matunga 1994:221). After long negotiations the 1980 Historic Places Act established the Historic Places Trust to preserve the historical heritage of New Zealand. It specified three types: archeological sites, historic areas, and traditional sites (Matunga 1994:222). However there is a major conflict in the Act: it values archeology over native knowledge. In New Zealand, sites would not be recognized without archeological evidence. In addition, the Act and Trust do not recognize the right of the Maori to “control, protect and manage their own heritage and their own sacred sites” (Matunga 1994:223). These acts of the government require further negotiations and actions to ensure Maoris’ sovereignty rights over their sacred sites and places of significance.

From the Maori and Australian examples several questions arise of what is the “ideal or best” language to translate or verbalize indigenous people’s attitude towards the land? Is the language of colonizers appropriate enough for this purpose? What would be

a proper definition of heritage and sacred sites in the context of state legislation? What are the best mechanisms in attaining better understanding between the governments and aboriginal peoples in the negotiations over the sacred sites?

Like these Pacific peoples, Native Americans have a long history of land and sacred site disputes with governments. By the end of the twentieth century Native Americans managed to win numerous lawsuits. Stuart Banner, in 'How the Indians Lost their Land', argues that the reason for this transformation "was not a change in the law. It was a change in the relative political power of Indians and whites" (Banner 2005:292). American Indians have a rich history of fighting over their lands both physically and vocally. They were either removed from their traditional territories and put onto reservations or they were forced to sell their lands.

In some cases indigenous peoples were expatriated from the lands for settlement and development of nature parks and reserves. Many examples reveal the negative impact of the creation of parks on indigenous communities' lands throughout the world. During one of the CBD meetings I had a chance to hear stories of how some African tribes with the help of widely known ecological organizations were removed from their homelands in order to create nature reserves. People from a rival tribe would be hired to look after the park so the relocated people (in this case Bakka) do not have any chance to hunt on their traditional grounds³.

³ This story has been shared with the participants of the Workshop on Customary Use of Biological Resources: Implementing Article 10(c) of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Workshop on Customary Sustainable Use Indicators, London, England, which I attended in 2006.

Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek (1998), in their study of the relationships between National parks and American Indians, describe the creation of some parks in the USA and the results of these intentions. “Congress in creating the park ‘for the benefit and enjoyment of the people’, destroyed the livelihood of another people” (Keller and Turek 1998:239). From the very beginning of the national park system it “rested not only on the lofty ideal of preservation, but also on exploitation” (*ibid.*). It is quite often that when parks are established the native population is not considered as being residents of those territories. Those areas are called “wilderness” without the concept of people inhabiting the lands for centuries prior to the Western civilization having reached them. The concept of wilderness is alien to aboriginal cultures. However it often forms the basis of the legislative acts connected with lands⁴.

Recognition of the fact that indigenous peoples have rights to the lands came to Russia only during the last decade of the 20th century. Galina Kharyuchi, a native scholar, remarks that public discussion of the protection of sacred sites and places of significance happened in the mid-1990s (Kharyuchi 2004:167). Russian aboriginals are still disfranchised in this area. Numerous attempts have been implemented by both indigenous leaders and scholars in order to create territories of traditional subsistence, ethno-ecological areas/territories/refuges or ethno-natural parks (Kharyuchi 2004;

⁴ Klein (1994) discusses the concept of wilderness versus homeland and the history of the formation of this idea. Western ideology views itself as separate from nature. What we truly see today is that “wilderness became antithetical to the development of Western societies” while for indigenous peoples it is their home.

Murashko 2000a; Shulgin 2004). None of these endeavors have been achieved successfully.

One of the features of the Russian indigenous land rights movement is that national or nature parks are considered to be a means of protecting native lands from outside influence and in many cases the creation of parks is strongly supported by indigenous peoples. This kind of land organization prevents oil extracting or mining companies from coming to those territories. Indigenous peoples are usually allowed to subsistence hunt, fish and gather. At the same time, there is the problem of park management. These territories are managed by non-native people who treat the protected areas as wilderness, not as a cultural landscape and this again brings other difficulties to both sides. It is usually up to the park management to decide where indigenous peoples can fish and hunt and if the indigenous people have the right to subsistence activities. The cases when parks practice mistreatment of indigenous population are not uncommon in Russia. When the parks are at the stage of formation administrators exhibit high interest in negotiating with the local population in order to acquire their support, but when the park is finally established and aboriginal people are willing to further cooperate, the management quickly forgets about native people.

Examples of political issues and dilemmas over native territories urged indigenous peoples to be vocal about the spiritual value of their homelands. The concept of the land being sacred has become the main argument indigenous peoples raise in negotiations over lands. Tribes and ethnic groups have relations with places of significance where they either come to pay tribute to the gods and spirits or to the

ancestors. Along with the “politicization” of the aboriginal population came a necessity to “verbalize their worldview” in words accessible to non-indigenous people’s understanding. This verbalization made it possible for the natives to participate in legislative procedures and sometimes be heard. Verbalizing the indigenous worldview brought new terms into the language. “Sacred sites” is one of the most important notions created in this process as the spiritual aspect of the landscape became the central issue during negotiations, forcing spirituality to be more visible to outsiders.

Mikhail Todishev, a Russian indigenous leader and scholar, highlights that “all the [land] spirits in spite of their function had a great significance as a power uniting a people” (Todishev 2004:27). The presence of spirit residences or special places of significance has had a political impact because it can indicate the “ownership” of the territory by a given ethnic group. At the same time, territories can be shared between several ethnic groups in contact areas. For the indigenous population, sacred places represent key sites of their spiritual life (Todishev 2004:27). Indigenous groups nowadays realize that with the high speed of assimilation it is important to preserve their knowledge and use this knowledge to protect their lands from outsiders. Jane Hubert noted that “When the land comes under threat then the sacred sites, sacred places and sites of special significance become identifiable, even to outsiders, by the extent to which the communities concerned will fight to preserve and protect them from disturbance, interference or destruction” (Hubert 1994:18).

What is the place of scholars in this process? Political development of indigenous thought resulted in the appearance of a large amount of research conducted by

anthropologists and archeologists on places of significance and sacred sites. The idea of landscape having high spiritual value attracted scholars around the world. At the same time, Basso who worked among Apache people, noted that not enough attention is paid to the study of the “sense of place” (Basso 1996:53). “What do people make of places?” is one of the key questions for cultural anthropologist while studying the “relationships to geographical space” among native societies (Basso 1996:53). Why places are important to indigenous peoples is another significant question for this research.

Significance of Land in the Cultures of Indigenous Peoples of the North and in Russia

The characteristics of the sacredness of the land and features of sacred sites can be applied to a number of ethnic groups. Arctic people are no exception. Less theoretical research has been done in the Arctic region but there are a number of ethnographic works that mention the importance of the landscape in the worldview of the indigenous peoples. A strong emphasis is placed on the legends which are used as teaching material for younger generations.

Arctic peoples in Russia are primarily nomadic people who travel year round following their reindeer herds, though many live by hunting and fishing. Ovsyannikov and Terebkhin in their article ‘Sacred Space in the Culture of the Arctic Regions’ note that sacred sites are found along “the migratory routes, at the dwelling sites, in the hunting grounds and by the fishing waters” (Ovsyannikov and Terebkhin 1994:123). Golovnev (2001), a visual anthropologist, points out that every place a reindeer stops to rest is believed by Nenets people to be “sacred”. Ovsyannikov and Terebkhin, in

describing Nenets' traditions note that any part of the landscape which looks unusual acquires spiritual meaning (1994:58). This concept is seen in Sámi tradition as well: "every significant mountain, lake or stream would have holy places and sacrificial places" (Mulk 1994:125). An important question arises from these ideas – Does the appearance of specific features to the landscape contribute to them being marked as special places of significance? What are the characteristics that are associated with being marked as sacred or significant; is it size, shape, color, or vegetation? Is this pattern of understanding special places also present among Itelmen people? If not, how is the landscape valued and appreciated in Kamchatka?

In my research on Itelmens' relationship to landscape I look at a broader understanding of cultural landscape. I am focusing on the places of significance rather than sacred places because I want to consider various kinds of significance of which sacred places constitute an important part.

In the study of Arctic traditions it usually makes sense to divide any particular native worldview into two time periods – pre-Christian and Christian. This historical boundary brought about a shift in types of sacred places. Christianization has an enormous influence on the world perception of indigenous peoples of the North. In some places cemeteries and churches became more sacred than the traditional places of significance and in some we have examples where Christian religious markers overlap with indigenous people's markers. Chavchaven Koryaks, nomads of Kamchatka, for example maintain the strong traditions of their cremation ceremony but at the same time cemeteries are significant places among Christianized Koryaks.

Ovsyannikov and Terebkhin (1994:44-810) describe the spiritual significance of the *choom* – the Nenets dwelling which can be observed as a sacred site in itself. The *choom* was divided in two parts, one of which was a living area and the other was an area for ancestral spirits. With Christianization this division was banned and forgotten. Instead cemeteries with crosses today indicate a special place where people can communicate with their relatives and ancestors who passed away through their memories of them.

Similar changes happened in some Alaskan cultures. One of the sacred places of the Sugpiaq (Alutiiq) today is Spruce Island in the Kodiak area. It is a place where Father Herman (St. Herman) is buried – a priest who in 1794 brought Christianity to Sugpiaqs (Golder 2004). Not a long time ago Kodiak Sugpiaqs found caves with ancient drawings. I had a chance to talk to a native elder who said that he was afraid to go inside those caves because he did not know the meaning of those drawings. Being a strongly Russian Orthodox person he is afraid to disturb Alutiiq spirits by entering those caves. This tendency of mixing pre-Christian and Christian religious values is clearly seen in native cultures.

In the Russian North a few studies have focused on the significant places of the indigenous populations. In the Soviet literature there was a tendency to call sacred sites archeological monuments. The perception was that sacred sites of aboriginal peoples existed in the past and everything in the present was connected with the building of a “bright socialist future” which meant all peoples living together, collectively, without any pagan or religious ideas (Slezkine 2008). Nevertheless, in the Soviet period scholars

were able to get strong support and funding from the government for conducting archeological excavations at the ancient sites of the native peoples. Therefore a significant amount of literature is available on the archeological sites of almost every region of the former Soviet Union. The Soviet government supported ethnographic research as well, but that research rarely focused on the study of the indigenous religious and ecological worldview, or indigenous identity and relationships with the land. Ethnographical investigations were mainly about the past life of the aboriginals and modern life of “happy” kolkhoz natives. After having done some analysis of the ethnographic works published during the Soviet period it became quite obvious to me that the structure of most of the work is the same no matter what ethnic group we read about. Usually the book consisted of the following contents: physical description of the people, place of habitat, traditional dwellings, archeological data, subsistence activities, food, crafts, clothing, ways of transportation, dances, and songs. Along with archeological study ethnographical investigations of material culture were also “frozen” in time.

Today Russian scientists have freedom in their studies, but no proper support from the government. As a result there is little contemporary literature on Russian indigenous peoples of the North and almost no research has been done or published recently by Russian scholars on places of significance or on land being central to the aboriginal perception of the universe.

Recently, indigenous peoples themselves started to conduct research on sacred sites. In 2004 RAIPON⁵ and CAFF⁶ published a joint work, “Significance of Protection of the Arctic Sacred Places: the study of Indigenous Peoples of Russian North” (Murashko 2004) in Russian and CAFF Technical Report No.11 on “the state of Sacred Sites and Sanctuaries” in English (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna 2004). These two publications are based on the same fieldwork, but they vary in contents. The entire research was conducted by indigenous experts. They collected unique memories of Nenets and Koryak people about sacred sites. These are the first and perhaps the only publications where Russian indigenous peoples voiced their point of view on the definition and significance of sacred sites. Significant portions of my work was based on the methodologies provided in these publications.

The works of non-Russian anthropologists John P. Ziker (2002) and David G. Anderson (2000) consider the question of significant places in the landscape. Both did research with Dolgan people in the Taimyr peninsular. Known to be people of the tundra, or in the Dolgan language *Tiajono*, they are nomadic people. Their lifestyle is connected with the land and migratory routes. Ziker discusses sacred places about which Dolgan people talked, but which they never visited. Those places were marked by their ancestors with fur strips on the trees. Today when a reindeer herder visits a new place in the tundra he makes a sacrifice at that place. Dolgans have a clan system and each clan and family has its own sacred places. Ziker suggests the idea that the Dolgan who works in the

⁵ RAIPON - Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North

⁶ CAFF – Conservation of Arctic and Fauna

tundra will most likely have special places while a person who does not go to the tundra will not (Ziker 2002:117).

Anderson also suggests that: "...*pastukhi* have preserved a pristine relationship to the land" (Anderson 2000:117). The concept of knowing is the main concept of surviving in the tundra. Perceptions are changing, however, and with the new political context native people "are coming to know the land in an increasingly possessive manner" (2000:130). This is happening throughout the entire world. Murashko observed that "the loss of connection with nature is not just people's sin, but it is their misfortune. Sacred places are those places where it is worth considering that"⁷ (Murashko 2004:14).

These concepts stated by Ziker and Anderson can be applied to nomadic societies in general. Reindeer peoples are known for having a considerable amount of sacred places. During the entire year they follow reindeers' cycle of life. Those migratory routes acquire special significance as each of them represents the history of the people and their religion.

In case of river and maritime peoples such as Itelmens, Unangan (Aleuts), Sugpiaq (Alutiiqs) and others, the sacredness of the landscape is less obvious and it is less researched than, for example, among Khanti, Nentsi or Koryak peoples of the Russian North⁸. Besides the study of toponymy and the toponymic maps created by Kasten, Durr, Longinov and Khaloimova (Michael Durr 2001:68-79) the question of

⁷ "...потеря связи с природой это не только вина людей, но и их беда. Священные места – это как раз те места на земле, где стоит об этом задуматься" (Murashko 2004:14).

⁸ Some research has been conducted particularly on the sacred sites in Khanti-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and Koryak Autonomous Okrug. Those studies are described in the works of Wiget and Balaeva (2004), Galina Kharyuchi (2004) and Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (Murashko 2004).

Itelmen relationship to the landscape has not been seriously investigated. These are uniquely precise maps of six Itelmen settlements and their surroundings. Four of the villages described in their work (Utkholok, Belogolovoe, Sopochnoe, Moroshechnoe) are now closed, but they are regularly visited by former residents as traditional hunting and fishing grounds. Does this mean that those areas are of special significance to the native people? What makes them so significant for Itelmens and how do those places live in the present? These are the main questions of my study.

The Concept of Landscape Sacredness and Its Features

The Sacred and the Profane

Can we say that there are “sacred” sites in contemporary Itelmen territory? Or, for sites that are of particular significance, is it better to use some other term than sacred? In order to answer this question we should look at what “sacred” really means. Given the history of religious practices of indigenous peoples the notion of sacredness has been complicated by Christianity and it is difficult to say specifically what constitutes the sacred for modern aboriginal societies.

Theoretical study of the sacred begun in the early 1900s by European social theorists still influence contemporary researchers on the topic. Durkheim presented the opposition of sacred versus profane in order to understand the common foundations of all religions: “All known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which

men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by the words profane and sacred...the first have been put into an ideal and transcendental world, while the material world is left in full possession of the others” (Durkheim 1965:53). Mircea Eliade also based his explanations of religions on these two domains where he describes the sacred as “something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world” (Eliade 1987:11).

This distinction can be explicated if we compare “civilized” worlds and “native” worlds. The profane prevails in the life of so-called developed societies; they tend to believe more in the material world and fully depend on commodities. In the case of indigenous peoples the sacred is the main realm of their existence. The history of colonization shows that the impact of Christianity has brought new definitions to the concept of sacredness. It has become more separated from the profane. Hence, while talking about religions of aboriginal peoples, it is in many cases difficult to separate the sacred and the profane. They are so tightly connected and interwoven with one another that one will not exist without the other and one can easily transform into the other while in the western societies they are alienated from each other and often not connected at all. “Although indigenous understandings of the sacred may not put it in opposition to the profane, it is nonetheless considered a different realm with other rules and issues at stake” (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna 2004:chapter 7, 4).

Like any other layer of our existence, space is constituted with sacred and profane realms. Mircea Eliade affirms that sacred space is not uniform (1987:20). Religious

space⁹ is structured with various layers and each has its own unique meaning and function. Under worlds and upper worlds are represented in numerous religions. This dichotomy partially exists in the Itelmen culture. In pre-Christian Kamchatka of the 18th century, according to the accounts of the first Kamchatkan explorers Krasheninnikov and Steller, Itelmen people believed that the world or universe consisted of three cosmic levels: the sky, the land and the sea, and the underworld (Krasheninnikov 1994a:72). The land was flat,¹⁰ it was a reverse of the sky and it covered the underworld which was considered the world of the dead (Steller 2003:204) . All Itelmen worlds communicated with one another. As the underworld was believed to be the reverse of the profane world, when a poor man died in our world, he would be rich and happy in the underworld (Steller 2003:205). That is why Itelmens were not afraid of the death. Itelmen values concerning life were different from Western values. An Itelmen man was glad to reunite with his wife/wives and ancestors after his death in the underworld (Volodin 2003:55). Every world had its own spirits. The sky is the home for the Creator, the rain and wind spirits, the underworld is a home for the spirit of the deceased who, according to the myths written down by Krasheninnikov and Steller, was the first human who died on the Kamchatkan land (Krasheninnikov 1994a:78). The earth is a home for a variety of spirits as well. Contemporary Itelmens being Russian Orthodox believe in a standard idea that

⁹ In this discussion I identify sacred space and religious space as interchangeable notions. An individual can have his/her own sacred spaces without being a religious person. In my research I am observing indigenous peoples' perception of the landscape which is often combined with indigenous religions. For this reason sacred space and religious space are synonyms in the context of the thesis.

¹⁰ "...if it were round, they say, all the people would have to live around the upper center of the globe or else they would fall from the world" (Steller 2003:204)

the universe is constituted of earth, heaven and hell. Very few possess deep knowledge about the old beliefs, but still there are stories told about various spirits.¹¹

While religious space is non-homogeneous and constructed of different layers, profane space is homogeneous. It does not suffer any breaks, or interruptions. It constitutes only one level – a level of our physical being. This neutral space is called by Eliade ‘geometrical space’ (1987:22). It can be calculated, divided, and changed by humans. It can be marked on the map or it can be described in metrical system. The profane world is a space where only humans exist. In this space we are not a part of nature, we are separated from it and in many cases we have no respect for it. Nabokov mentions that California Indians used to live in two worlds. There was a practical world where they did profane activities such as hunting, raising children and other activities. And there was the “equally real” world of spirits (Nabokov 2006:xi). Every single object of this world that exists in nature: mountains, forests, rivers, oceans, animals and others - - was inhabited by a spirit or spirits.

For this reason the entire earth is considered sacred. It is fairly common that Indians of North and South America, Eskimo groups, Australian aboriginals, Asian peoples, African tribes and others would talk about the Mother Earth with its heart on their lands. Many indigenous peoples do not detach the world of humans from nature – the world of spirits and the supernatural. Eliade pointed out in his work that religions locate their land in the center of their cosmic worlds (1987:36). Talking about religions, it is common that the center of the world would be in the area where the religion was

¹¹ The discussion of the various spirits will be provided in the chapter 2.

born, and then developed. It would be cultural and ritual centers for world religions (Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, or Christianity), and for other religions it would be the area of their existence.¹²

Eliade suggests that “for many human beings sacred can be manifested in stones or trees” (1987:11). These objects are worshiped because “they show something that is no longer stone or tree, but the sacred...” (1987:12). This idea can be applied by the extension to the whole landscape. Once a sacred object is located, some meaning is attached to this place and it becomes significant. It will be respected by those who animated it and it will most likely have special value to them. For instance, on the Western coast of the Kamchatka peninsula there is a small forest of noble silver fir tree.¹³ This species is endemic to Kamchatka and it grows only at one place. This was one the reasons why this forest was seen as sacred in the times of early contact with Russians. The elders said that anybody who touched those trees would die. Another legend explained that during one of the Itelmen campaigns against the Russian enemies, they got extremely hungry and had to eat larch bark for some time. They all died on the river shore. “Those trees grew up on the dead bodies of Itelmens” (Krasheninnikov 1994b:44). This example illustrates how an object, in our case an unusual tree, can fill up a place with “sacredness” and then transmit this quality to the whole area.

¹² One of my Samoan friends once told me: “When a child is born we bury his belly cord into the special place so wherever he is he knows that his home is here. There will always be a strong connection with this place and this is the holy center for him”.

¹³ Noble Silver Fir (Lat. *Abies gracilis* Kom, Russ. Пихта грациозная) is an endemic species of Pinaceae which grows only on the Eastern coast of the Kamchatka peninsula in the Kronotski Nature Reserve. The total area of the Noble Silver Fir forest covers 20he. This unique tree is considered to be disappearing species. Only forest and environmental specialists are allowed in the area (Kamchatski Krai 2009).

Durkheim mentions that “there are sacred things of every degree” (1965:53). The recognition of sacred sites is not necessarily shared by all the members of the community. For somebody one place would be more sacred than the other, for another individual those places may have no significance whatsoever (Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna 2004:chapter 7, 4). This diversity in sacredness indicates that there are no strict frames to define sacred sites. A place is significant as long as an individual believes in the story of this place.

In Kamchatka a more general concept of “places of significance” is often used as an alternative to “sacred sites”. It may include sacred places; it can be a religious space and at the same time a profane place where people have special memories which are not necessarily connected with religious ideas. It was mentioned earlier that for an indigenous person it is difficult sometimes to separate sacred and profane world. This division is quite vague and not strictly distinct. My goal is not to divide those realms, but to see what role those places play in the lives of indigenous peoples, how the view on the significant places have been transformed, and in what state it is now.

Wisdom of Landscape

In *‘Wisdom sits in places’* Keith Basso (1996) explains that places are perceived by people “unselfconsciously”. Places become an important object of awareness for people without them realizing that fact. Once people start to attend to places self-consciously, then relationships to the landscape become deeper (Basso 1996:54). When places are sensed the ‘complex of attachments’ links individuals with the physical world.

It is quite common that sensed places bring along certain amount of thoughts and knowledge about other places, people or time through a “whole network of associations” (Basso 1996:54).

Usually the images and beliefs associated with one particular place are based on the previous knowledge that people acquired from their ancestors and experienced throughout their life. Depending on their cultural and traditional experience, people “socially animate” places. In other words, they socially inhabit places with supernatural living beings. In Itelmen mythology a good example would be the Central Mountain Range of Kamchatka which is said to be Kutkha’s ski track. Kutkha (or also Kutkh) is the Great Raven who supposedly created Kamchatka, its landscape, mountains, rivers and tundra. Myth says that when Kutkha was travelling along the peninsula his skis left the tracks which resulted in the formation of the mountain range. This practical explanation is based on the people’s general worldview which is also supported by their knowledge about the environment.

Alaskan anthropologist Holly Cusack-McVeigh supports the idea of animation of places and she sees a deeper connection between the humans and nature by saying that human beings are a part of natural world. She stresses the fact that “the sense of place includes the world of spirits and other beings who inhabit the tundra, the waters, and other features of the world around them” (Cusack-McVeigh 2008:27).

Places animate people’s ideas as well. In the example, mentioned above, the mountain range people would not have composed a story about the creation of the mountain range without the mountainous landscape. And if the range did not look like a

ski trail, if it was not straight, the story might have been entirely different. Basso calls this mutual process of animating places and ideas the process of “interanimation” - “places animate the ideas and feelings of persons” while at the same time same ideas and feelings animate the places” (1996:55). As a result of this strong connection “the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind” (Basso 1996:55). Basso supports a statement of Jean-Paul Sartre who said that it is impossible to mean what we do not know (1996:55). The place can have only the knowledge an individual possesses. At the same time these relationships with the place usually do not live outside the group of people. They are usually communal. In this case they become visible to foreigners. Animation relies on religious and ritual practice as well and it presupposes an animistic conception of the world. Religion itself is “something eminently social” (Durkheim 1965:22).

There are a number of significant places which are visited by contemporary Itelmen people without them thinking about their special significance, especially by younger generations. People will visit special places without understanding that those places are sacred. The meaning of many of those sites is lost for young Itelmens and this influences the entire Itelmen culture. Some people might say that places were significant a long time ago and today they are just pieces of land or marks on the map. Does this mean that landscape has lost its significance and that the people have become completely assimilated?

The loss of landscape sacredness in most cases is connected with the loss of lands. When an indigenous group is losing its lands and is removed to another place, all

its knowledge is placed into a vulnerable position of being forgotten. Without the knowledge that is attached to the place of ancestry and experience of those places, people forget who they are. Attachment to place expresses a person's identity. Once the connection is lost, indigenous identity can be threatened, though losing your land does not necessarily mean losing your connection to this land. Basso noted that it is better to be from somewhere than to be from nowhere (1996:88). Sense of place and belonging is an important dimension that Itelmen people should not forget. Being from a place, having your own language, sharing the same history and religion are the main components of identity. In this list, being from a particular place is the most important part of person's self-identification.

In 'Anchoring the Past in Place' Peter Nabokov highlights the fact that attachment to the land expresses Indian identity. The Navajo nation, for instance, "is bounded by four sacred mountains (and embraces thousands of other sacred places, 'homes' of sacred entities and locations of mythic and historical actions that remain vital to Navajo identity)" (Nabokov 2002:141). Nabokov believes that Native Americans demonstrate their close relationship with the land and strong connection with the indigenous identity by sacralizing their residence. The land is crucial for preserving cultural knowledge.

By observing different places, people acquire knowledge and along with it deep wisdom. Basso mentions that being a part of traditional culture, sensing of place is a "way of appropriating portions of the earth" (1996:83). This also implies activity, "something people do". Place can not have sense without an activity associated with this

place – it might be a hunting ground, gathering ground, place of celebrations, shaman dwelling, fire and many other spaces.

Giving examples of Apache myths and legends, Basso stresses the fact that places bring more than just stories and memories. These places make native people think about their ancestors and their wisdom. Dudley Patterson – an Apache informant of Basso – once told him: “Wisdom sits in places. It’s like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive...well you also need to drink from places” (1996:70). The complex of associations that place brings cannot be replaced by books or stories. Sacred places bring the significant set of memories and knowledge. These are usually places with a long history and deep traditions. It is when they visit those places people think about their ancestors, those who own the nation’s wisdom, those who told the first stories, and those who were truly and deeply connected to nature.

Wisdom is also a tool for survival. People upon seeing a site connect it with a story of behavior which teaches the proper actions in the area. This prevents humans from warping themselves. Schneider notes that sacred place is also a “reminder of the moral order” (Schneider 2008:11). For instance, a place called “Giant footprints” in Hooper Bay reminds young girls that they are not allowed to perform Yupik dances during their menstruation and the importance of listening to the elders (Cusack-McVeigh 2008). In non-indigenous societies, the Christian church reminds us of the Ten Commandments and a proper way of living, a monument to Abraham Lincoln represents the victory of freedom over slavery and tells us about its outcomes. The given examples indicate that significant and sacred places exist not only among native societies, but

among western civilizations as well (church, cemetery, the Great Wall, Statue of Liberty, etc.).

Among indigenous people knowledge is usually passed from generation to generation. Children will learn it from their parents through everyday practices such as hunting, gathering, dancing, migrating with a reindeer herd, elder-youth meetings, participating in the village events and other activities. In some cases, one is not supposed to transmit this knowledge to anyone outside the family or a tribe. This knowledge is their heritage. Not sharing those stories and the location of the places with everyone keeps the sacred places from being visited and disrespected. On the other hand, access to the “sacred” knowledge helps to save the place from being damaged, polluted or overexploited.

The Notion of Sacred Space Among Itelmens and a Place of Toponymic Knowledge in the Study of Sacred Sites

In Russia one of the definitions of sacred sites provided by an indigenous scholar and an expert in international law on indigenous issues, Michael Todishev, states that: “A sacred site is a special territory, where our reaction to this territory becomes sacred, where supernatural force is radiated with which sacred memories of a man are connected. This is a place given for religious aims, it is a respected place that cannot be destroyed or mocked. Places can be considered sacred when they have the following features:

- a place mentioned in an oral tradition;
- a place where something supernatural happened;

- a place where one can get herbs, minerals or waters which have some healing power;
- a place where a man communicates with a supernatural world by means of a prayer and offerings”¹⁴ (Todishev 2004:26).

This short definition describes standard idea of sacred sites as they are typically perceived in Russia by indigenous peoples. The discussion of theoretical study provides us with an understanding that a variety of meanings define a sacred place depending on the situation, geographical area, and ethnic group. Those places are located in the profane world. They can be seen, described and marked on the map.

Some aspects of this definition are helpful for understanding traditional perspectives on the landscape in Itelmen country where sacred places are believed to signify something extraordinary that attributes this geographical area with a special value. Further discussion of Itelmen understanding of sacredness however will lead us to more unusual definitions of sacred places.

The ideas of sacredness may be divided into those that existed before contact with Europeans and modern industrial technology, and those that appeared during and after contact. In Kamchatka, as elsewhere, this categorization also might be organized as pre-Christian and Christian. Unfortunately, the pioneer scholars who worked on the

¹⁴ “Святое (священное) место» - особая территория, где наша реакция на нее становится священной, где излучается сверхъестественная сила, с которой связаны сакральные переживания человека. Место, выделенное для религиозных целей, почитаемое, то, над чем нельзя глумиться и разрушать. Святыми могут считаться следующие участки: 1) место, упомянутое в устной традиции; 2) место, где произошло что-то сверхъестественное; 3) место, откуда можно взять растения, минералы и воды, обладающие целительной силой; 4) место, где человек общается со сверхъестественным миром посредством молитв и приношений” (Todishev 2004:26).

peninsula¹⁵ did not discuss the question of the sacredness of the landscape among Itelmens. Most of them were Russian Orthodox who looked at the local people as pagans without paying enough attention to their spiritual life. For this reason we can only try to interpret how the aboriginals perceived geographical space on the basis of short descriptions of pre-Christian rites and different stories of early accountings.

Nevertheless, the works of early scholars have an enormous value because of the detailed descriptions of the Kamchatkan landscape including toponymic accounts and legends connected with those names. Through these ancient place names we can trace the history of Itelmen people, their pre-contact area of habitat, and partially understand Itelmen relationship with the area. Currently, a lot of those names have been changed into Koryak or Russian ones and most of the legends are forgotten by the majority of Itelmens. For this reason it is never superfluous to recollect those memories.

Tyushov (1906) in his description of Kamchatka noticed that both Kamchadals¹⁶ and Russian often name places “according to some unimportant event or according to the form of the most visible element of the place” (Tyushov 1906:113). For example: “Stepanova Pad’ (Stepan Cliff) on the left inflow of the right side of the Karimchina is named after one of the hunters who fell while sheep hunting and whose name was Stepan” (Tyushov 1906:113); the name for the Icha settlement came from the word *icha* -

¹⁵ Krasheninnikov - 1737-1743; Steller - 1740-1741, 1742-1744; Lesseps – 1787, 1788; Ditmar 1853-54; Tyushov - 1884-1886; Dobell – 1812, 1813; Jochelson - 1900-1901; Bergman - 1920s.

¹⁶ Until the 20th century Itelmens were called Kamchadals and in all the early records Kamchadal is a common word for this people. There is still a discussion whether Itelmens and Kamchadals are the same group. Currently, Kamchadals are recognized by Russia as a separate ethnic group from Itelmens. They live mainly along the Kamchatka River and have a mixture of Itelmen and Cossack culture. Often citizens of Kamchatka also call themselves Kamchadals no matter which ethnicity they belong to. In this thesis the word Kamchadal is used to mean Itelmen, following historical practice.

meaning “birch wood” as the first location of the village was in the birch forest (Tyushov 1906:267). Tyushov visited Kamchatka nearly two centuries after Russians started exploring it; in 1880s he has seen already assimilated Itelmens and his stories about places are having both Itelmen and Russian roots which became native to the peninsula citizens by that time. For instance, the name Zubiya – rock range on the right side of the Karimchina River - reminds one of a gigantic cheek with “teeth” (zubiya) in Russian) (Tyushov 1906:112-113).

Later, Starkova (Starkova 1976:36) also noted that the settlements were named as follows:

- according to the names of the rivers they were located at. In some cases those names were adopted to fit Russian pronunciation. For example Kirganik came from Kirgen, or Utka from Uutu;

- after the names of the elders or Toions (chiefs): Nalachev, Nachikin, Kharchin.

Tyushov also mentions naming after heroes:

They say that by the Tolmachyovskaya mountain there once lived a “pagan” Tlomach who had silver gags (кляп) for his dogs (he mined silver himself from the surrounding areas). The exact place of his dwelling is not known. Another ‘pagan’ named Sakhach live at the same time somewhere on the Opala River. As both of them were “osilki” meaning “hero” (богатырь) the constant competitions between them ended with the victory of one of them who killed the other. It is not known how the second one died. Such stories, as well as anything about the heroes and

competitions between them, are to some extent supported by the fact that everywhere where there is a story about such a hero the remains of a former dwelling are seen. I've seen it myself - on the lower stream of the right side of the Tolmachyovo River there are signs of ancient yurts (Tyushov 1906:90).

- or by Russians, according to the features or some events that took place there. For example, Vorosvskoe (in Russian – place of robbery) settlement (modern Sobolevo) was called by the Russians because Itelmen used to attack and rob them over there. Kozirevsk settlement is named after the Cossack Ivan Kozirevskii who fought with Itelmen revolts and helped Russia obtain Kamchatkan lands together with the native population.

In many cases Itelmen toponymics serve as reminders of past events (both positive and negative) and evoke a special appreciation of those places. The knowledge about the place is often connected with sacredness. That is why in the study of sacred places it is important to know the original names of the places along with the stories connected with them for better understanding the nature of special sites.

Sacred Sites in the 21st Century

Sacred place refers to space where religious persons have connections with the gods and spirits. In the world religions and other major religions such sites are temples, mosques, churches, cathedrals, basilicas. For most indigenous religions such sacred

spaces are represented by places which are not attached to buildings or embraced in architecture, they are attached to land. Those places might be manifested in any part of the landscape.

Having mixed with Christianity, indigenous religions maintained great appreciation of the nature and strong sense of place. The works of Durkheim (1965) and Eliade (1987) who did significant research basing on the opposition of sacred and profane introduce to the study of sacred places. Both scholars explained that sacred space is non-homogeneous and that it can be constituted of various layers. From Basso (1996) we know that places animate peoples' ideas and that people animate places according to their experiences, and this animation is unselfconscious.

Examples provided in this chapter support the idea of the land being crucial for indigenous peoples because it maintains traditional knowledge, wisdom and identity. The focus on sacredness stresses the moral importance that the land and environment have for indigenous peoples. This knowledge is a significant part of oral history and it is mainly transmitted to younger people through myths and legends. Besides myth, a big layer of knowledge about the land is hidden in the toponymy of the region from which indigenous people learn more about their ancestral grounds.

In the 20th and 21st centuries the political importance of "sacred places" acquired strong significance for indigenous peoples. In order to protect their lands, aboriginals started vocalizing their political and historical relations to lands which go along with spiritual and cultural values. In some parts of the world those movements were successful.

In Russia the research on sacred sites, as well as the political movement towards the reinstatement of historical truth of the land ownership, is comparatively young. Itelmen's' thinking about sacred places is still encompassed within a stereotypical understanding of this notion, that is, a religious space connected with supernatural forces.

In the following chapters I will make an attempt to explain that apart from the typical conception of a sacred place, Itelmens also developed their own sense of place, which is slightly different from the standard Russian idea of sacred sites.

Chapter 2: Itelmen Places of Significance

Sacred spaces for many religions are associated with myths or legends of origin. Durkheim noted that “beliefs, myth, dogmas and legends are either representations or systems of representations which express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers which are attributed to them, or their relations with each other and with profane things” (1965:52). Myths and legends help in the process of explanation and interpretation of various natural phenomena, of the creation of the world, of animals’ lives, of shamanism, of proper behavior in different circumstances and of many other aspects of human existence. Ancestral accountings are significant because they come from the times when gods were creating the land, and when people had more connections with spirits. Myth is an important aspect of religion. Ancient stories are an important source of information and wisdom which is hidden in the places as well.

Since late 19th century broad theoretical discussion has been going on among scholars about the meaning, origin and function of myth. Tylor, Frazer, Lévy-Brühl, Malinowski, Lévi-Stauss, Eliade, Smith, Freud and many others have been suggesting their “theories of myth” by trying to explain the relation between myth and science, philosophy, religion, ritual, literature, psychology, and society (Segal 2004). In my research on Itelmen perception of religious space I agree with Tylor, Frazer, and Eliade who insist that myth provides the explanation of phenomena of the world (Segal 2004). At the same time I also want to stress the fact that my research materials indicate that ritual is more important for contemporary Itelmens than myth.

Oral tradition is a significant area to look for the stories about significant places and acquire sacred knowledge. Peter Nabokov, for example, has written widely about American Indian sacred places, Indian lifestyle and worldview. He describes Indian attitudes towards nature, religion and environment. Nabokov puts a great emphasis on the myths, legends, and songs which tell the truth about the Indian past. He points out that “myth was the first, last and the only diplomatic discourse” of Hopi (2002:37). Basso’s explanation of the “senses of place” is built upon Apache legends, and William Oquilluk - an Inupiaq writer - tells the entire history of people of Kauwerak on the basis of legends that were told to him by his father (Oquilluk 1973). In order to better understand the nature of the sacred sites among Itelmen people I also paid some attention to myths recorded by Steller, Krasheninnikov, Tyushov and Ditmar.

Supernaturally Dangerous Places – Pre-Contact and Early Contact Ideas of Volcanism

Kamchatka is a land of volcanoes. Being located on the Pacific Rim we have over 200 volcanoes, 29 of which are active. It is recognized by UNESCO as one of the most outstanding volcanic regions in the world. The Valley of Geysers, for instance, is the only geyser field in Eurasia and it is recognized as one of the seven wonders of Russia. Every year one of the numerous volcanoes erupts. It is a beautiful scene to watch bright orange, yellow, red lava flowing down a volcano. The entire tourist infrastructure is based on the volcano tours. In pre-Russian times the attitude about volcanoes was completely different. Itelmen people had various explanations and stories connected with the smoking mountains. They were seen as something extraordinary dangerous and evil.

For the first explorers volcanoes were *rara avis*. They had never seen anything like that before. Each of them tried to explain the phenomena scientifically. At the same time they wrote down some native explanations. Even though these stories were recorded after contact, to a great extent they represent views that existed in pre-contact Itelmen society.

Krasheninnikov admired Itelmen's gift for making stories and explanations connected to places. "Like ancient Greeks, Kamchadal people are great artists of creating fables. They attribute something extraordinary to the most famous and visible mountains and to supposedly horrible places such as boiling waters and smoking mountains. Thermal waters are inhabited by "evil spirits" (вредитель) and volcanoes by the spirits of those who passed away" (Krasheninnikov 1994b:12). Itelmens were surrounded by volcanoes and thermal waters and they created many interesting legends to understand these natural phenomena.

Volcano Legends: Shevelich (or Sheveluch) and Alaid

A long time ago Shevelich Volcano was located on the place of contemporary Kronotskoe Lake. It had to move because it could not handle the disturbance from ground squirrels (Krasheninnikov 1994b:12). Not far from the Lake there is a mountain which does not have a top. The legend says that when Shevelich started to stand up from its place it leaned against this mountain and broke off the top (1994b:46). Shevelich had to make three steps to be at its current place. As a result of the move of the volcano two more lakes appeared: Kainach and Kul'hkolyangin (1994b:14). Krasheninnikov

compares this legend with Greek mythology by calling the mountain a local Pegasus whose steps turned into a spring on the Elikon mountain (1994b:14). Later Ditmar speculated that the Kronotskoe Lake's name came from the Itelmen word "*krom*" – larch - which grows all the way from the Kamchatka River valley to the lake (Ditmar 1901:642).

Krasheninnikov notes that Kamchadal stories sound silly but at the same time they tell about the geographical changes that happened throughout the peninsula. Volcanic activity, constant earthquakes and floods impacted the landscape and researchers assume that perhaps there was a volcano on or near the contemporary Kronoskoe Lake. Supposedly, Shevelich volcano was at its place since ancient times but it became more visible as it remained all alone when the rest of the mountains fell down into the earth or flooded (Krasheninnikov 1994a:15).

Later Ditmar and Tyushov heard a similar story about Alaid Volcano. It begins with an island in the middle of the Kurilskoe Lake which appeared as a result of the volcanic activity. It was believed that Alaid Volcano used to be located on the place of the lake. In old times the volcano "got so tired"¹⁷ of its surroundings that "it moved from there into the sea and its place was occupied by the lake with the heart or a belly cord in the middle" (Ditmar 1901:684). Tyushov added some toponymic elements to this story: "Sea shells live in the lake and sea weed grows over there. In its center there is a big stone – the "Heart of Alaid" and to its North there is a big island which is inhabited by

¹⁷ Сделалось неприятно

bears. This island is called “Samang.”¹⁸ An exit from the lake to the Ozernaya River is called “Spukhchanakhchak”¹⁹ or “Spukhchak”.²⁰ A tall stone pole is named “Aak”.²¹ According to Krasheninnikov, this is the “bat” (бaт) which the Creator Kutkha stuck into the Ozhernaya River shore when leaving Kamchatka” (Tyushov 1906:70).

These two legends were recorded in the settlements located along the Kamchatka River where the peninsula’s largest volcanoes are to be found. According to Dolitsky these stories fall into the category of “magical-mythical tales” (Dolitsky 2002:xii-xv). These narratives possibly came from the distant past as they tell us about the creation of the world and the formation of the landscape. Considerable size and unexplainable activity makes the smoking mountains significant characters of various stories and systems of beliefs. Animated by local views, active volcanoes are alive in Itelmen stories, and therefore they may be considered sacred places or they were considered sacred places.

Steller noted that “Itelmen are afraid of all high mountains, but especially of the ones emitting smoke and flames, and of all hot springs. Therefore they put up markers on the slopes identifying the most dangerous...in order to avoid them, because they are certain that all kinds of giant spirits, named Gamuli²², dwell there” (Steller 2003:32). The story about Kamuli was written down by Steller when he was travelling along the Opala

¹⁸ Саманг

¹⁹ Спукхчанахчак

²⁰ Спукхчак

²¹ Аак

²² “Gamuli” is a word used by Steller. Krasheninnikov spelled the word “Kamuli.” At present, both are used.

River in the Southern Kamchatka and visiting two Itelmen settlements located along its shores. The main volcano of that area is Opala Volcano which was a good hunting spot with lots of foxes and sables, but Itelmens were afraid to go to the bottom of the mountain as well as to climb it. When they passed by they would give some offering to the mountain spirits (Krasheninnikov 1994b:75). On its top there is a lake surrounded by numerous whale bones. It was believed that volcano spirits subsisted from whales which they easily brought up with only one finger. Kamuli traveled at night in the air over the sea to hunt whales.

Krasheninnikov recorded another story about volcanoes. Itelmen people, he said, believed that volcanoes were a dwelling for their dead. When smoke came out of it, it meant that the deceased were stoking their yurts. The spirits subsisted from whale meat which they got in the sea and brought to the dwelling from under the ground. They used fat for light and whale bones as timber. Some of the Itelmens said that they were inside the volcanoes themselves and saw everything with their own eyes (Krasheninnikov 1949:177). Krasheninnikov supposed that Steller's stories vary because the natives tend to tell different stories and they usually do not match each other (Krasheninnikov 1949:177).

It is difficult to say the origin of the variability in explanations, but in these stories we can trace a difference between "nature" spirits and spirits of the deceased. Both subsist in the same way as Itelmens, from the sea. Similarly, they live in yurts and fire them just like humans fire their own yurts. The major difference between Kamuli and the deceased people is the way of travelling. According to Itelmen pre-Christian beliefs,

all the deceased go to the underworld and Krasheninnikov's story tells us about the life underground. To a non-Christian mind it makes complete sense to parallel volcanoes with spirit dwellings and volcanic activity with some supernatural life. This is a clear example of the process of interanimation about which Basso (1996) writes. People create explanations based on their worldview and at the same time unexplainable phenomena add to the stories its unique flavor.

The story of Kamuli is relatively famous among modern Itelmens in part because of this legend having being staged by the native dance group "Elvel." It is a powerful male dance which creates an atmosphere of "scary spirits". Presently these beliefs are gone. Itelmens know scientific explanations of volcanic activity and they believe them. For this reason the traditional spiritual value of these places is gone. Itelmens still have special feelings towards the volcanoes, but they are more connected with the appreciation of the magnificent beauty and of the natural powers of those mountains.

Changing Ideas of the Landscape

As volcanoes and thermal waters are such a significant and unusual part of Kamchatkan landscape almost every early scholar paid some attention to the native relationship with these wonders. Thus we have a unique an opportunity to look at the evolution of the Itelmen perception of those places.

Krasheninnikov was the first person who informed us that Itelmen people were more afraid of thermal waters than volcanoes. They would not guide the Cossacks to

thermal waters as they were terrified by those geothermal phenomena. In his work he mentions a case which happened with the people of Shemyachinskii settlement²³ who tried to conceal the place location of thermal waters. At one point they had to reveal the place to the Cossacks, but they never themselves came up close to that place. It was a horrifying scene for Itelmens to see the Russians swimming in those waters and boiling meat there. Itelmens truly believed that Russians would die for doing that. When the team returned back to the settlement they told everybody about what had happened. This made Itelmens wonder who those Russians were if even their “enemies” can not harm them (Krasheninnikov 1949:185). Steller mentions a similar situation: “There are examples that people will gladly give up everything if they can get out of going close to these places, or when they are forcibly pressured, they died shortly thereafter from fear and imagined danger” (Steller 2003:32). Bergman who visited Kamchatka in the 1920s already saw a completely different situation. He talks about the Semyachik Springs where Itelmens of those times were telling stories about the healing powers of those waters. He recalls that Kamchadals would make trips to the distant springs which lasted for over three weeks. During this period they would stay the entire day in the spring mainly to cure rheumatism (Bergman 1927:153).

During a period of two hundred years the native view about the geothermal activity has completely changed. Fear of the unknown transformed into the value of the

23 Shemyachinskii or Semyachinski settlement was located along the Kamchatka River. This settlement does not exist anymore. According to the archeological evidence, Ditmar supposed that this settlement used to be one of the largest among Kamchadal settlements. He was able to see the ruins of the church (часовня), school and a lighthouse on the sea shore (Ditmar 1901:655).

known. Knowledge of the sacred changed into knowledge of science. Currently, thermal waters have become popular among Kamchatkan citizens. Some businesses own health resorts using the healing powers of the springs. Itelmens are presently at the stage when beliefs connected with the hot springs are almost forgotten and in many cases they do not attach religious significance to those places. This may be explained by the fact that hot waters are located in the most populated area of Kamchatka where the majority of the population is non-indigenous and the assimilation of Itelmens played its irreversible role.

However, I was surprised to find out during my fieldwork that memories of those beliefs are still alive. One Itelmen woman told me that a long time ago Itelmens used to live in the Ezzo area – a settlement which is located in the central part of Kamchatka and which is surrounded by thermal waters. They had to move from it to the western part of the peninsula to Sopochnoe settlement because they were afraid. “They thought that the spirits were getting angry and getting out” this way²⁴ (Kvasova I.M., interview 2008).

This brings us to the conclusion that volcanoes and thermal waters have all the characteristics of sacred sites. Places of geothermal activity are animated, the animation is passed through oral tradition, and those places are a piece of religious life. In pre-Christian Kamchatka volcanoes and thermal waters were an important component of religious landscape and they could be considered as sacred places. It was extremely important for a passerby to give an offering to the spirit of the place in order to escape troubles. Nowadays those highly active places are not scary anymore. We have scientific

²⁴ Irina Kvasova might have acquired this information from her grandmother Maria Zhirkova, who was raised in the old Itelmen style and who knew their aboriginal religion.

data of when the volcano is going to erupt and why it erupts, as well as why thermal waters are hot and the precise explanation of their healing qualities. Does this mean that a place loses its spiritual value when we stop thinking of it as a dangerous place or when we can explain the unexplainable realities that happen at that place?

The example of Itelmen's relations with geothermal places support the ideas of Tylor and Frazer according to which science replaces "primitive" religious views of the physical world (Segal 2004:15). At the same time, abandoning the religious views associated with such places can also be explained by the "demythologizing" impact of Christianity on native religions (Segal 2004:47). In order for the myth to exist, "one must continue to believe in God" (Segal 2004:51). Ancient Kamchatkan beliefs about volcanoes and thermal waters show that Itelmens were forced to change their mythical views and to adopt Russian Orthodoxy. Contemporary Itelmen worldviews reveal new conceptions of "God" (and sometimes no conception of "God" at all). Neither Christianity nor science have place for ancient myths and legends, and this may be a reason why volcanoes and thermal waters are not considered sacred.

While many myths have been forgotten, some rituals still exist in Itelmen society and are widely practiced. The following parts of this chapter will demonstrate that despite many external influences, Itelmens were able to maintain their native science, which goes beyond simple explanations of phenomena of physical world.

Dangerous as Sacred. Contemporary Perceptions of the Sacred in Itelmen Landscape

When we say sacred place do we mean a dangerous or a daunting place? In part of my research I asked people explicitly about sacred places. Many of my interviewees responded by talking about the unexplainable things or something scary. For them, it seemed that the idea of sacred is referred to some unknown or unexplainable power or force. For example Evgenii Danilov, a young hunter, offered his definition of a sacred place:

*It is hard to explain. Sometimes there is some fear to go there. Like Indians there is some ritual over there. Here none of the elders told me about sacred places. Maybe somewhere upstream.*²⁵

Evgenii's idea of a sacred place covers the major and most important characteristics of sacred sites which are commonly recognized by Itelmens: it is a dangerous place; it is a place where a ritual is conducted; we know or in this case do not know about those places from elders. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter indigenous people attach stories to dangerous places in order to save the following generations from troubles they can face while passing by those places.

Itelmen stories are often attached to mountains. These places attract more attention because of their prominence or with the dangers associated to them. For example, Krasheninnikov shared a belief he learned about "Verblyuzhee Gorlo" (Camel Throat) valley which is located not far from Zhupanovskii volcano. It is known for its

²⁵ "Даже не могу объяснить. Иногда бывает какая-то боязнь туда заходить. Как и у индейцев тоже там получается какой-то обряд. Ну, здесь, по крайней мере, мне никто из стариков не говорил про священные места. Может, в верховьях где-то" (Danilov E. V., interview 2008).

rocky mountains which during winter are dangerous to walk through. The snow base is very unstable and avalanches can be caused by the slightest disturbance. From any noise the snow falls down on those who pass by.²⁶ “Itelmen people who identify everything dangerous as a sin believe it to be a crime to talk loudly while going through this valley” (Krasheninnikov 1994a:42).

According to Krasheninnikov, different spirits live on tall mountains which always have snow on the top. The most prominent spirit is called Bilyuchei or Pillyachuch (Krasheninnikov 1994a:177).

He is the one who thunders, makes lightning flash, and makes it rain...; and the rainbow is the hem of his garment. Sometimes he descends with the clouds to the mountains and travels in a sled pulled by ptarmigans...Whoever comes upon [his] tracks is said to be lucky, especially in hunting, and good years to follow...The people believe that in storm winds he sometimes has their children kidnapped by his kamuli and uses them as lampholders on which to place lamps in his yurt... (Steller 2003:203).

Itelmen people were afraid to come close to tall mountains because they believed that the mountains were spirit residences. Today Itelmens know that ancient beliefs used to exist, but nowadays there is doubt in the hearts of Itelmens about the existence of the

²⁶ “Верблюжье горло знатна по опасному падью ея проезду: ибо она падь весьма узка, и простирается между высокими и столь крутыми каменными горами, что на них снег едва держится, так что от самого малого ударения, каково бывает от громкаго голоса, складывается слоями и подавляет проезжих, чего ради Камчадалы, которые все опасное за грех почитают, за великое вменяют преступление будучи сею падью говорить громко” (Krasheninnikov 1994a:42).

“supernatural.” However, stories and teachings of the “other world” live in the villages. When something unusual happens to a person, Itelmens remember stories about spirits and try to explain the event both from the religious and scientific points of view.

Unlike in the case with the places of geothermal activity, when the beliefs connected with those places are completely forgotten, the rest of the landscape (forest, tundra, rivers, oceans, etc.) is still believed to be inhabited by various spirits. The Itelmen shaman woman²⁷ Olga Zaporotskaya teaches us that we should be more careful with our words in the forest, because the forest is inhabited by the spirits and they can hear us:

*When you enter the forest you must be quiet, do not shout and especially do not curse... We are not alone. I often see them. They sometimes follow us.*²⁸

Itelmens also tell stories about forest spirits. The most prominent figures of those stories are the White men and Karalkas. Those are some creatures or spirits who live in the forest. Meeting with one of them is a sign that something unpleasant might happen. A White man is portrayed in the image of a hunter on skis. He is wearing white reindeer clothing. He does not talk. Itelmen elder Evdokia Sadovnikova shared a story about a hunter meeting the White man. It was November when this man went hunting upstream on the Kovran River where he had a dwelling:

²⁷ Itelmen shamanism is different from the shamanism we used to hear about. Traditionally Itelmen shamans were women or transvestites. There is no drum involved in the shamanic rituals. Itelmen shamanism is based on the excellent knowledge of the healing powers of various plants, chiromancy and on the interpretations of people’s dreams. There are two Itelmen shamans left. Olga F. Zaporotskaya might be the last Itelmen woman shaman and Boris Zhirkov might be the last Itelmen male shaman.

²⁸ “...входишь в лес, надо, чтобы тихо было, чтоб не кричали, особенно нельзя ругаться... потому что мы не одни. Я их часто вижу. Они иногда сопровождают” (Zaporotskaia, O. F., interview 2008).

During one of the hunts he saw the White man skiing in front of him. He started calling him. He called and called; the man did not turn back and then he disappeared. Somehow he appeared behind the hunter. This action happened several times until the hunter decided to go back to his hut...Back in the hut he was heating a tea pot and when he opened the lid he heard a voice telling him to go back home. He packed and returned home to the Upper Kovran. They still had a settlement over there. And he managed to see his mother still alive. [She died soon after he got back].²⁹

Evdokia also remembers a story about Karalkas – small people who live in the forest and take people away:

They say that Karalkas walk in the forest and scare children, so they don't go to the forest, because if they meet Karalkas they will take them somewhere. We believed in that when we were kids.³⁰

There are no accounts about White men or Karalkas in the works of the Kamchatkan explores. Both Krasheninnikov and Steller mentioned forest spirits named

²⁹ “Вот однажды он пошел на охоту и вышел на тундру. Идет на лыжах. Вдруг, видит, впереди него белый человек тоже на лыжах идет. Он начал его окликать. Окликал, окликал, тот не поворачивается. Потом раз исчез и почему-то оказался сзади этот человек. И так несколько раз было. Ну, и он решил вернуться к себе в землянку. Вернулся, поставил чайник, вместо воды снег насыпал туда, поставил на печурку, ну и снег же добавлять надо. Он вышел, снег набрал, только открыл чайник, а оттуда там уже вода кипит и голос такой: «Константин, быстро возвращайся домой». Он быстро собрался, приехал в Ковран, в Верхний Ковран, у них тогда еще село было, и застал свою мать еще живую...” (Sadovnikova E. M., interview 2008).

³⁰ “...у нас говорят, что они ходят по лесу, пугают детей, чтоб как попало не ходили в лес, потому что встретятся Каральки и уведут вас куда-нибудь. В детстве, конечно, мы этому всему верили” (Sadovnikova E. M., interview 2008).

Ushakhchu who “bewitched” people, made them lose their way and get crazy (Krasheninnikov 1994b:75; Steller 2003:202).³¹

Another widely known spirit that inhabits the Itelmen area is Kanna. It is believed that Kanna lives in the old tree. Steller mentioned: “The Itelmen postulate a devil whom they imagine to be very cunning and deceitful and therefore call Kanna. Around Nizhnoi Village, they show a very old, large alder tree in which, the Itelmen claim, Kanna lives. Every year they shoot so many arrows into it that it is said to be absolutely bristling with them” (Steller 2003:203). The memory of Kanna is one of the very few that Itelmens kept since the times of Steller. Unlike White men or Karalkas there is no description of Kanna. However, the stories connected with it are rather fascinating:

This [meeting with Kanna] happened to me. It was a normal birch tree. I used to travel a lot on horses, reindee, on foot all along the Koryak mountain range. Once I was travelling with a reindeer herder on a horse and some one of the highest branches snagged me and I was hung up by my pants. A horse stopped over there. The herder was going in the front and I was afraid to shout because he would have laughed at me. I am hanging there in rubber pants, it is hot, trying to escape and can't do anything. The horse is waiting. The herder is far away already and I am still hanging. Finally I somehow pushed myself with the help of my leg

³¹ “Лесных богов называют они Ушахчу, и сказывают, якобы они походят на человека. Жены их носят младенцев к спине приросших, которые непрестанно плачут. Они по камчатскому суеверию людей с пути сводят, и делают их глупыми” (Krasheninnikov 1994:75).

*and fell down. Nothing happened to me.*³² (Suzdolova N.D., interview 2008)

It is interesting to mention that Nelly Suzdolova is a strong Russian Orthodox believer, but at the same time she believes in the native spirits. Nelly as well as other Russian Orthodox Itelmens often call Kanna an “impure” spirit stressing its “evil” or “malevolent” characteristics. Contemporary Itelmens would most likely talk about Kanna living in the birch tree, but it also seems that contact with Kanna can appear anywhere.

*I remember when we arrived to Ptichii Island, there were high cliffs over the very dangerous sea from where one could fall down. They said that we are not allowed to go there because of Kannu.*³³ *I remember this word very well. Later I was looking to find what this word means. Devil. It is very dangerous there; they can take you away.*³⁴ (Petrasheva V.V., interview 2008)

This abstract indicates the multiplicity of Kanna and that people would talk about it when being in a dangerous area. It seems that Kanna spirits are those who take the life of a person.

³² “А это со мной произошло. Обыкновенная береза была. Я много на лошадях ездила, на оленях, на лошадях, пешком по хребту коряжскому. И вот я с пастухом ездила на лошади и самая какая-то высокая ветка меня за штаны вот так вот зацепила, и я повисла. Лошадь остановилась там, и я боюсь, пастух впереди едет, боюсь кричать, что засмеет меня. Я вишу там, штаны резиновые, жарко было, легенькие штанишки. Я и там и сям и ничего не могу. Лошадь стоит. Потом пастух уже далеко отъехал, а я все там вишу. Потом я взяла ногой вот так вот оттолкнулась каким-то чудом и упала” (Suzdolova, N. D., interview 2008).

³³ Viktoria Petrasheva calls Kanna “Kannu” (several times in her interview). This might be explained by the difference in the dialects.

³⁴ “Я помню, когда мы приехали на остров птичий, там есть выступы к морю, прямо в море опасные, там можно сорваться и упасть. Говорили, что туда ходить нельзя, потому что Канну. Я это слово Канну помню очень хорошо. Я потом искала, что же это слово обозначает. Ну т.е. дьявол. Опасно очень там, тебя могут унести они” (Petrasheva V. V., interview 2008)

Nowadays, nobody knows exactly what spirits are like and what they want from humans. There is always some degree of uncertainty in the discussion of these supernatural powers, that makes those powers so supernatural and the supernatural so powerful.

The belief that we are not alone in nature and that we are a small part of it is still a strongly held belief. This belief in many cases is the main component that transforms a piece of land into a sacred place. When people know that a place is a spirit residence they would pay their respects to the host by exhibiting appropriate behavior and the rite of offering.

Controlling the Dangers. Places of Offering

Ecology is an important part of Itelmen culture, especially for Itelmens who rely on subsistence activities. There is no other way to survive in nature. One should be careful when being in the “wilderness.” This “psychology” is developed in a child since his birth. Murashko notes that Itelmens maintained “animistic perception of the surrounding world” (Murashko n.d.). Those people, who are connected with nature, practice special rituals when being in nature outside a settlement. Despite the fact that Itelmen spiritual culture is threatened there is still an existing belief that we are not the only ones living in nature. Each place has its spirit. To pay respects to the spirits of the place, some Itelmens feed those spirits with whatever they have with them. Olga

Zaporotskaya mentions: *“When we eat in the forest we leave some part of the food there. This is a rule. We are not alone. Ours always must do that”*³⁵ (2008).

Itelmens know this rule and some try to follow it. An offering usually consists of a piece of bread, some sugar, some salt, fish, other food leftovers, tea or tobacco. Sometimes people would spit some drops of vodka in case they have nothing else to offer. The offering is based on the general list of products which an average Itelmen would bring with him when going out into nature. Nowadays this small ceremony does not require special practices such as special dolls, masks or burning of particular plants.

Inhabiting the place with the supernatural brings a certain degree of sacredness to the piece of land where an offering is taking place. The ceremony is conducted in order to show respect to the local spirits, to share with them what one has, and to positively communicate with the other worlds. Itelmens are aware that if one mistreats the spirits something bad might happen. This awareness is expressed in the respect we pay when we are out communing with nature. The spirits might warn us about something coming if they are treated and listened to in a proper way. Through the rite of offering Itelmens establish communication with supernatural beings at specific place and this place becomes significant.

An offering may be conducted in different ways and circumstances. In the 19th century Tyushov was taught to feed the fire. During one of his travels he could not find his knife which is an essential part of equipment for any hunter or traveler in Kamchatka.

³⁵ “Когда кушаешь в лесу, мы оставляем какую-то часть. Положено. Мы же не одни. Оставляешь. Всегда наши должны так делать” (Zaporotskaia, O. F., interview 2008)

Seeing my efforts in searching for a knife the dog team driver (musherer)... remarks as if for himself: ‘Well, it seems like this place is ill-fated. Perhaps, because we ‘did not give to the ‘local’ (не дали здешнему).’ I ask about the meaning of these words and I say that I know about a tradition they have further to the North of throwing pieces of yukola (dried fish) to the ‘local’ into the fire, that is, to the spirit of the area. Only then the guide in a clearer manner said that they also have a habit of throwing to the local [spirit]: ‘We, he says, honor it because fire exists’ (Tyushov 1906:237).

Feeding the fire is one of the most common traditions that is maintained up to date among many indigenous peoples. When Itelmens go out for subsistence activities it is common for them to have a small picnic with hot tea when resting. On long trips the fire becomes more crucial for surviving - it is used for cooking full meals, warming up, and drying clothes. Itelmens usually try to make fire on the location of old fireplaces. In order to have access to fresh water the fire is often made by the river or a stream. As with many other traditions, the custom of feeding the fire was handed down to Itelmens from the elders.

*The elders used to [feed the fire] and we followed...I don't know [why we feed it]. May be for the gods not to get offended or angry.*³⁶ (Zaporotskii G. D., interview 2008)

³⁶ “Старики раньше тоже как-то, ну и мы тоже... Не знаю. Чтоб боги, наверное, не обижались, не сердились” (Zaporotskii G. D., interview 2008).

Practice of feeding the fire is important for the life of sacred places. For Itelmens the fire itself is a bridge into the other world and the ceremony makes it visible to our world. It can be considered as a sacred place for the same reasons as the church with the addition of a native flavor of paying tributes to the multiple local gods and spirits. The rite of offering may be slightly paralleled with the rites conducted in the church when a person reunites with his ancestors, remembers his parents, and thinks of a proper behavior. The research of RAIPON and CAFF on sacred places, mentioned earlier, indicated that in many cases indigenous people parallel their sacred places with churches. For example, Valeri Parovikh, a Nenets person said:

A sacred place for Nenets is like a church for Russians. We go there to ask the spirits for luck during hunting and fishing, well-being of our families...we go there to get more spiritual energy and powers to overcome hardships... (Murashko 2004:56)

However comparison with a church would not be common in the modern Itelmen society. Many Itelmens are Russian Orthodox and there is strict division between the church and native beliefs. In many cases while being out Itelmens follow traditional ways of behavior which are based on the indigenous religion, and while being in the settlement they are more Russian Orthodox.

Each Itelmen interprets the reasons for feeding the fire in his own unique way.

[We] certainly [fed the fire]. It is kind of uniting and joining. It is very peculiar. Rituals like that help to keep the thread of continuity and interconnection.³⁷ (Petrasheva V. V., interview 2008)

[I give an offering] To the spirit of fire. So we don't have fires, so it loves us...I make fire in the places of Kutkha, so I can sit by the fire and address Kutkha... I know where they are located here.³⁸ (Zhirkov B. A., interview 2008)

It is interesting to mention that this tradition was conducted by Itelmens even when they were not on the Itelmen lands. Irina Kvasova who grew up in Tatarstan shared her memories about her grandmother Maria Zhirkova who would come and visit her grandchildren over there:

We went to the forest both in Tatarstan and here [in Kovran]...She [grandmother] was talking to the fire in Itelmen. When I arrived here I did not understand in Itelmen anything. She also fed [the fire]. I thought she was a witch, when I came, because she was exorcising something and she never told me. I asked: 'Granny, what are you saying?' And she would answer: 'Nothing'. She did not tell me. She truly believed in it. She also fed the river. She believed in our gods and in our ancestors... She was

³⁷ “Обязательно. Это как бы воссоединение-приобщение. Очень своеобразно. Такие ритуалы как бы помогают сохранять ниточку преемственности взаимосвязи” (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008).

³⁸ “Духу огня. Чтоб пожаров не было, чтоб любил нас... Я делаю там, где Кутха стоит, чтоб когда у костра сидишь, обращаешься что к Кутхе... Я-то тут знаю уже, где стоят ” (Zhirkov, B. A., interview 2008).

*saying that we have to insinuate the favor of the spirits. In order for the fish to come they would also conduct some rituals.*³⁹

Irina's grandmother, Maria Zhirkova, was bringing a similar kind of spiritual life to Tatarstan by practicing her religious ceremonies. This shows that the change of a person's physical location does not mean that a person is separated from sacred places or from the world of spirits. The ritual moves together with a person to the new place. Our memory and knowledge make the place alive and sacred no matter where we are located linearly. This example supports the idea that religious space is non-homogeneous and flexible and it exists independently of geographical space.

Another interesting dimension of this offering is that neighboring Koryak people also feed the fire and in some cases Itelmens borrowed the Koryak tradition of this offering.

My mother used to throw something [into the fire]. I saw several times. She even threw for Nataime. In place where a forest had burnt [she would say]: 'Let's put to Nataime. Remember him.'... It is a Koryak name. 'Mother, what should we put?' 'Put everything that is left' Since then

³⁹ “Да. И в Татарстане и здесь в Ковране тоже ходили... Она вообще по-ительменски очень много разговаривает. У костра. Когда я приехала, я же по-ительменски вообще не понимала. Она и еду тоже. Я раньше думала, что она колдунья, когда приехала, потому что она что-то заговаривала и никогда не говорила мне. Я спрашивала: «Бабушка, что ты говоришь?» Она говорит: «Ничего». Не рассказывала мне. Она верила в это. Она и в речку и все она. Такая была верующая именно в богов наших, в предков... Она говорит, надо одобрить. Получается, чтоб рыба была, они тоже какие-то обряды должны были сделать” (Kvasova, I. M., interview 2008).

*everywhere we go we leave something to the uncles [spirits]*⁴⁰

(Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008).

The mixture of Itelmen and Koryak tradition can be easily traced in this abstract. There is no doubt that Nataime is a Koryak name, though it is difficult to understand who exactly Nataime is. In this case Nataime might be the spirit of the fire, or a person who died in the fire, or a person who was cremated. At the same time offerings were made everywhere to “the uncles”. This gives the idea that Nataime is just one of the spirits that lives in nature or that represents ancestors. This abstract also suggests that different types of offering are made by Koryaks to Nataime and by Itelmens to other categories of spirits.

This situation is in part a result of the variable Russian influence on native beliefs. Many young people today have heard of such offerings, but they would not conduct the ceremony themselves, as they were not raised following the “traditional” worldviews.

*We don't feed the fire. All our traditions are dead.*⁴¹ (Tomenyuk A. M., interview 2008)

I know of course that there are Itelmen traditions and customs, but I never conducted them...first of all I don't know them and I don't know how to

⁴⁰ “Это мама раньше что-то подкидывала. Несколько раз я видела. Она даже там же Натайме там, где горелый лес, там похоронили ее. «Ну, давайте положим Натайме, чтоб он не ругался на нас. Пойдем, помянем его», - говорит... Натайме. Корякское. «А что, мама, положить?» «Все, что осталось, положи». С тех пор мы сами тоже где-нибудь, если бываем, дядюшкам там” (Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008).

⁴¹ “Нет. [Костер не кормим]. Умерли традиции все наши” (Tomenyuk, A. M., interview 2008).

*conduct them the right way. I think it will not be right if I just perform some ritual or ceremony.*⁴² (Tomenyuk I. M., interview 2008)

Young adults are suspicious as Itelmen traditions have become alien to them. They were raised in the Soviet Union where the religion was forbidden. This situation is not hopeless however. Our Koryak neighbors managed to maintain some of their traditions, they have more elders, and when contemporary Itelmens get in contact with Koryaks they borrow some of those traditions. Evgenii Danilov is a young Itelmen hunter who spent some of his time in the North hunting with Koryaks:

Here [in Kovran] they don't, but in the North they feed the fire. In the North [Koryak people] throw Inelvut.⁴³ I [also] feed the fire when there are no silly people around. From one point I think that it is funny, but from the other I have heard of many stories that support the practice of offerings. Elders in the North watch the fire and the fire offers guidance. Fire warns them. Sometimes, when dry timber is in the fire, the fire whistles. Then the elders say: 'We have to leave this place'. We left a little further and later a bear came there. It appeared that it buried something

42 “Я знаю, конечно, что есть традиции ительменские, обычаи, но сам этим никогда не занимался... Ну, во-первых, я не знаю этих обычаев, и не знаю, как они проводятся правильно. Никогда не пробовал. И думаю, не правильно будет, если я просто возьму и проведу какой-нибудь обряд или церемонию” (Tomenyuk, I. M., interview 2008).

43 Inelvut is a ready made offering that Chavchaven Koryaks carry with them in a small bag. The offering is a mix of reindeer fat and fur of white rabbit. This kind of offering is used by Koryaks in various occasions including feeding the fire ceremony (Plattet 2005:157 note 86). In case of Itelmens Evgenii Danilov borrowed the Koryak word for offering, but the offering itself consists of any kind of food which he has with him.

*at that particular place where the fire was and it came there and dug everything out of there.*⁴⁴

This portion of the interview indicates that young Itelmens represent two overlapping worlds. One is the stereotypical world of Russians where primitive beliefs are considered funny and shameful. Another is the native world where by gaining experience one gets the appreciation and value of the traditional rites. It sounds that Evgenii was not raised by Itelmen elders, but when he had a first-hand experience with Koryak elders he started following the native way of behavior in nature.

Feeding fire is a way to pay tribute to the spirits, remember your parents, remember your relatives, remember those traditions which are gone, and join our ancestors. It may seem that heat and fire are associated with the supernatural, but a lot of sacredness of landscape comes from what people do for a particular location: it may be an offering, saying a prayer, conducting some ritual or some other action. In many cases the fireplace and places of offering are not recognized as sacred, but they are certainly significant places. From the theoretical perspective, however, places of offering have all the attributes of sacredness. This indicates that the notion of sacred as introduced by the theory sometimes is not appropriate to describe the indigenous peoples' worldview. In

⁴⁴ "Ну как здесь-то нет, а на Севере все время... Там инелвут кидаетшь... Ну, я стараюсь, когда нет таких придурков, как эти шпана. Пацаны вот бегают, они же не понимают. С одной стороны тоже вот так вот подумаешь – смешно становится, с другой стороны там вот много было таких историй тоже. По костру они смотрят старики. Костер же тоже предупреждает. Иногда бывает сухие дрова кидаетшь – он почему-то свистит. Потом старики говорят: «Надо уходить отсюда». Вот мы ушли чуть дальше, потом там медведь лазил. Оказывается, он там закопал чего-то именно на этом костре прямо и он пришел там, разрыл там все" (Danilov, E. V., interview 2008).

the cases of places of offering it is more important for people what they do with the place rather than what the rite means.

Cemeteries and Other Places of Transition – Sacred and Secular Significance

They said that when you pass this place you should give to the spirit of the place. We have places like that. Visokii Bereznyak [Russian - tall birch wood] is located over the Upper Kovran about five km., then the Talnichnaya River also a little further up from the Upper Kovran. Various things happened to people over there. The elder generation always was telling to us that long time ago Koryak people cremated their deceased. And they have a tradition that if you establish a tent on this place, something will definitely happen to you. Even I experienced this once with my students. In November during autumn break we went camping there. There was no snow, so we spent the entire break on the Talnichnaya River. We were fishing and gathering cranberries. There was an Itelmen yurt and we set up a tent inside it. There were ten of us. During the first night we...stayed up late telling stories as usual, laughing. Zhen'ka Kaisarov who was born in 1975 said: 'Quiet everyone'. We stopped talking and heard a man's heavy snoring. He was snoring half of the night. We got scared of course...The snore came from above... In August my sister Olga Novak came to my place and told me that she stayed there with her family and they also heard snoring... (Sadovnikova E.M. 2008)

Cases like this are not extraordinary to Itelmens. It is common for native hunters to tell their stories as they are the ones who stay in the tundra or forest for long periods of time. Strong 'notion of passage' (Plattet 2009 (in press)) develops together with the intimacy with nature and its creatures which is crucial in the harsh hunting conditions. They truly know the laws of the life outside of a settlement and they have to follow them in order to survive. Some people do not believe in the stories and try to go to the place to experience the "supernatural" themselves. Some avoid those places trusting the knowledge of the elders.

A significant number of places acquired their spiritual meaning because of the neighboring pastoral Koryaks. Bordering with each other they used to trade reindeer herding products (skins, sinew, etc.) for Itelmen fishing and sea mammal hunting products (seal skins, sinew, meat etc.). Itelmen elders remember that their families had Koryak friends who would come every year when their reindeer migratory route was not far from the settlement in order to exchange native commodities. While sharing the land with Itelmens, Koryaks created their own sacred places on those lands. In her story Evdokia Sadovnikova mentions Koryak places of cremation. These places are currently recognized and respected by most Itelmens as sacred places, but they would usually say that those are Koryak sacred sites, not Itelmen.

The farewell ritual of the reindeer herders has deep spiritual meaning and it is a significant stage in the existence of the soul of a deceased person. King notes that for Koryaks "being dead is a liminal state. One is not alive, devoid of breath, but one's soul has not yet traveled to the land of the dead" (King 2006). It is believed that after the

cremation a soul has a very dangerous journey to the “other world”⁴⁵, but according to various stories of hunters we can assume that the other world is not blocked from the world of the humans. The soul has an afterlife in our world. The place of cremation is a space where these two worlds come together and where life meets afterlife. It becomes a border between the sacred and the profane, the “real” and the unexplainable or unknown. To let the soul be in peace, people prefer not to go back to the place of cremation.

Sometimes, Itelmen hunters unintentionally might put their tent on the place of cremation. This causes an unpleasant night visit of the spirit of a deceased person. Following is a fascinating story where an Itelmen hunter, Pavel Khaloimov, shares his experience of staying at such a place. It happened in 1978 when Pavel went hunting with the elder Aleksei Petrovich. They accidentally put their tent on Koryak burial grounds:

...I woke up from a great noise. As if somebody was drumming. Drumming and drumming. I woke up and could not understand anything. It seemed that they were dancing around the tent. Louder and louder! My first reaction was that probably I have been so tired from walking the whole day that something was wrong with my head now. That was my first thought. But then I saw that my grandfather was not sleeping either. He was tossing and turning around and pushing me on my side: ‘Go to the toilet’ – he said. ‘I don’t want to.’- I replied. I thought he did not hear those sounds and I did not tell him anything. But then he said: ‘Oh, that

⁴⁵ The “other world” is a common phrase used in Kamchatka in the meaning of a post-mortem space. Modern Itelmens are strongly influenced by Russian Orthodox and currently “other world” can be described as the “upper world” or “heaven” (*nebesa*).

singing!’ And they really were singing away. And I asked: ‘What is this?’ He answered: ‘We got into the wrong place’. What place – he did not say. So they came closer and closer. The circle became narrower. When I was lying in my sleeping bag it was like somebody was tossing me in the sleeping bag. I am not lying. You may believe it or you may not, like somebody poked me with a stick in my back. I jumped up and ran away and granddad ran after me... I grabbed this sleeping bag under my armpit and ran towards the dog sled. We had two dog sledges. What was interesting is that none of the dogs barked. No reaction at all. So we ran to the dog sledges, freezing, the moon was shining. My hair stood up. I did not know I could be so scared. The dog sledges were about forty to fifty meters from the tent. So we spent the rest of the night in the dog sledges in our sleeping bags. And then it stopped. Later he was showing to me - they [Koryaks] hung marks on the branches of the trees. Maybe those marks had fallen down or something. But that was an experience I had. And it was impossible to sleep. We did not sleep till the next morning. In the morning we were too scared to go back to pack the tent. I am serious. We could hardly pack it. But then granddad said: ‘Don’t worry’. (recorded by David Koester, Kamchatka, 2004)

This story of Pavel describes that contact with the world of spirits sometimes can have strong physical connection which can be felt as quite real. It is not just hearing or seeing the spirits, but feeling them which strengthens peoples’ believe in those spirits and

fear of them along with respect to the spirit residencies. The dogs play an important part in this story. Itelmen hunters rely considerably on their dogs and the fact that the dogs did not react to the presence of the spirits might have helped the hunters to calm down and feel safer by the dog sled.

As we can see from the examples each spirit has its own unique story of contact with the humans. Koryak spirits make their presence known in place in their own way by doing different variations of activities: snoring, dancing, having tea, singing, attacking and others. In order to stop the contact a person should simply go a little away from the spirit's residence. Even a few meters from the place of cremation is enough not to bother the spirit and not to be bothered by it. These places can not be marked on the map, but they are marked on the land. Itelmen hunters know about those places of transformation from the elders, other hunters or from their personal experience.

Itelmens are not known to have cremated their deceased. Archeological records suggest that burial goes back to the earliest times of inhabitation. Dikov, an archeologist of the 20th century, found a burial ground in one of the Paleolithic settlements on the Kamchatka River, an area later inhabited by Itelmens. It was located deep in the ground between the two dwellings (Dikov 1979:31). He also found the burial of a dog (1979:57, 61). Nothing is mentioned about dog burials in any other resources. There is not enough information of ancient Itelmen farewell burial rituals. There were certain beliefs related to afterlife and of how a person goes there. But there is no full description of locations of burial grounds or of any special ceremony connected with the death of a person.

According to Steller, the “other world” of Itelmen people was not divided into heaven and hell. It was a place to where every person departs after death for a better life. Itelmens believed “that in the lower world each man receives his wives again, and the old people look forward to this paradise as much as Christian believer may ever long for heaven or even more so” (Steller 2003:206). Steller mentions that life in the underworld was much richer and abundant as “it was on Kamchatka in the beginning of Kutkha’s time” (Steller 2003:206).

A common theory of Itelmen burial ceremony is that Itelmens left a deceased person in the dwelling where he passed away and moved to a new one so that the spirit of death would not find those who are alive. Another was that the body of the dead person was given to the dogs (Krasheninnikov 1994b:135). The beliefs held that if a dog ate a deceased person, it means that he would have a dog sledge in the other world and a dog-sledge was worth everything for an Itelmen. If a newborn died, the Itelmens would bury him in the hollow of a tree (Krasheninnikov 1994b:135-137). In the materials which were not included by Krasheninnikov in his publication, he talks about variation of funerals depending on the way a person died. There was a ritual of burying Itelmens into the ground. During this ceremony the deceased were wearing their dresses with the grass woven cloth on top. He also mentions that a person’s body would be given to the dog if he died from a disease from which his entire body decayed. It was a sin to bury such a body in the ground (Krasheninnikov 1949).

It is difficult to say whether those burial grounds were identified by the Itelmens as special places. We can assume that they were sacred sites, considering the beliefs

described by the first explorers. We can call the dwelling with a deceased person that has been left a sacred place because, similar to Koryak, it was a space where our world meets the supernatural.

Christianization introduced an entirely new funeral tradition to Itelmens with the cemetery at its center. It is interesting to note that Steller, who visited Kamchatka in the 1740s during the Second Kamchatka Expedition of Vitus Bering, heard an explanation of why Itelmens did not want to be baptized when the Russian Orthodox Church reached the peninsula. They explained that if they got baptized they would go to Russian heaven after their death, where they would be again oppressed by Cossacks who were definitely welcome there. In this case the spirit of a deceased person would have no opportunity to go to the indigenous underworld to unite with its people (Steller 2003:204). As most of the young Itelmens got baptized, the elders said that choosing which of the worlds and beliefs to follow was the choice of the young generations. Currently, the Russian Orthodox cemetery is one of the most recognized sacred places in Kamchatka. In this context I would call the cemetery a holy place⁴⁶.

What makes this place so special? Itelmens stress the fact that a cemetery is a place where a person's body has peace:

⁴⁶ The words "*sacred*" and "*holy*" are similar in the meaning they imply, but in the context of my work there is certain difference between these notions. One would not use the word "holy" when talking about polytheistic religions. Holy is usually something, connected with Christianity and church: "Holy spirit", "Holy water", etc. Holy identifies something that is more recent while sacred indicates something very ancient. For example, the expression "*sacred scripts*" is used to the scripts which were written in the times when people believed in different gods, in the times, when religions were forming into modern ones, in the times of pagan religions. In the Russian language "holy" and "sacred" is the same word and in English there is no strict distinction. In the frame of my thesis I talk about sacred as of more traditional or native while holy is more likely to be applied to Christianity.

*A cemetery is a special place anywhere you go.*⁴⁷ (Sadovnikova, E. M., interview 2008)

*[A cemetery] is a place where a person who used to live is resting.*⁴⁸
(Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008)

*It is a place where there are many good people resting including my parent.*⁴⁹ (Tomenyuk, I. M., interview 2008)

*A cemetery is consecrated by the Father. I don't even know. It is hard to say [why a cemetery is a sacred place]. Earlier we were afraid to go there...In early days we would not go there any extra time. This is a sacred place. According to our beliefs they have left to the other world.*⁵⁰
(Zaporotskaya, O. F., interview 2008)

Independent of one's religion or beliefs, our memories about the deceased make the cemetery a sacred place to us. Cemetery is animated by the knowledge and memories about the person whose body is resting there. For a Russian Orthodox person the fact of consecration is important. It adds to the meaning a special degree of holiness when the holy water purifies the souls of the deceased and keeps the cemetery clean from the evil spirits.

⁴⁷ “Ну, кладбище – оно везде особое место, наверное” (Sadovnikova, E. M., interview 2008).

⁴⁸ “...там покоится человек когда-то живший” (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008).

⁴⁹ “...там, наверное, много хороших людей лежит в том числе и мой родитель” (Tomenyuk, I. M., interview 2008).

⁵⁰ “Кладбище освещается Батюшкой у нас. Не знаю даже. Тяжело сказать, потому что раньше же это было для нас, мы боялись туда ходить. Там грязи никакой не было, а сейчас приходится ямы выкапывать для того, чтобы отчищать кладбище. А раньше у нас лишний раз туда не ходили. Это считается же священным. По-нашему считалось что в мир иной они ушли” (Zaporotskaia, O. F., interview 2008).

The cemetery, being a liminal location between the worlds, is subject to superstitions and scary stories. There is a common fear to go to the cemetery at night, because people feel more vulnerable at night over the other world. We believe that if we go to the cemetery at night we definitely meet the souls. Nowadays this fear is also supported by the vampire and ghost movies and horror stories, but I cannot recall stories about actual meetings with the souls at the cemeteries in Kamchatka.

Visitation of the cemetery seems to be of concern for the elders. Some elders are saying that they do not remember going to the cemetery so often.

*Here we usually go once a year. We also recently went there to plant the flowers. Perhaps we will go again in autumn. Right after it draws, and then with time it is not that strong. In early days they did not go there so often.*⁵¹ (Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008)

*No. They bury and that is it. There were no forty or nine day's visitations.... May be they commemorated. I do not remember commemorations.*⁵² (Kile, S. I., interview 2008)

Perhaps, this difference in the frequency of visits can be explained if we look at the era the elders are talking about. Their memories cover the Soviet Union period when religion was banned in Russia. Burial ceremony consisted in placing the body into the ground. It was somewhat similar to the ceremony military people conduct when their

⁵¹ “Здесь обычно мы один раз ходим в год. А потом, ну, вот недавно мы ходили поправляли там, цветы садили там. Наверное, еще осенью ийдем. Это в первое время, когда как-то тянет, а потом уже как-то это не так. Раньше вообще никогда не ходили” (Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008).

⁵² “Нет. Похоронят и все. Никаких этих 40 дней, 9 дней, ничего не отмечали... Ну, так, может, поминали. Я не помню, чтобы поминали” (Kile, S. I., interview 2008).

soldiers pass away. More effort would go to honoring the person for being a good communist. No spiritual value was attached to it. Currently, the cemetery is visited in accordance with Russian Orthodox traditions: during the ninth day commemoration, fortieth day and then once every year. In addition to that, people would usually go to the cemetery on Parents' Day and on the birthday of the deceased person. We visit the graves of the people we love in order to remember them. No specific rituals are required at the graveyard. Relatives and friends of the deceased would usually come to clean the grave and commemorate with some food and drinks. Russian Orthodox Itelmens believe that the soul of the cared one is watching us and celebrating the visit with us.

I myself have never been to the funeral ceremony in any of Itelmen villages, and I find it difficult to analyze, but I would assume that being Russian Orthodox those ceremonies are similar to the ones I saw while living in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski. At the same time, I suspect that in the villages those ceremonies have their regional specifics and differences. Georgi Zaporotski, for example, recalls that when he was a small boy they burnt wild rosemary (Lat. *Lédum*). He does not know what the reason for it was. Perhaps, the smoke of the plant could have purified the deceased or helped protect from the spirit of the death coming to our world and taking more people with it. Georgi has never seen such a ritual since, but there might be some other regional traditions followed during the contemporary burial ceremony.

In the discussion of places of significance, burial grounds are definitely places which are given a high degree of sacredness and holiness. There is no disagreement between people in defining the cemetery as a sacred place. This is perhaps one of the

only places which nobody would dare disrespect or mock. The reason for that might lie in the close physical connection with the spirits of close relatives who can come to our world through the bridge provided by the cemetery.

Multiple definitions and perspectives on sacred sites make it perfectly possible for people to have a range of conflicting and reinforcing feelings about places. In this chapter I have tried to explain that a place is considered sacred when there is some unknown or unexplainable power and how this power can be managed or at least communicated with to prevent negative consequences. Once religious beliefs are turned into scientific facts like in the volcano examples - the place loses part of its sacredness. Itelmens today have become accustomed to believing in science or in the ideas of the Russian Orthodox Church rather than their old traditions. Ideas of sacredness came to follow a broader social standard and this influences how Itelmens describe what sacred means to them today. But independent of that fact, many Itelmens conduct rituals through which they apprehend the landscape with a native perception of sacredness.

Chapter 3: A Place of the State in the Formation of Sacred Places in Kamchatka.

New Ideas of Special and Sacred

“What would happen to the fabric of social life if some force were to snip threads throughout the weave, leaving behind a set of connections that seem random without their previous supports”? (Koester 2003)

The Concept of “Rodina” Among Itelmens

In Russia, the word “homeland” evokes warm feelings. It is a place of birth, a place of growing up, most likely a place where your grandparents spent their lives, a place where most important events happened. For indigenous peoples, homeland is often said to refer to a place of origin, a place of ancestry, or a place of the indigenous nation’s history. With some exceptions, Kamchatkan people identify their homeland with their place of birth and growing up and it is common that this place is considered sacred.

In this chapter, I want to talk about the concept of “*rodina*” (родина) in Itelmen society which from the Russian language is translated as “homeland”, but it has a slightly different connotation. The word is based on the root “*rod*” – birth, kin. It implies a place of birth and familial ties. For this reason in many cases *rodina* is sometimes considered a sacred place or at least significant. For all Russian citizens whether ethnically Russian, indigenous or otherwise, *rodina* implies the part of the country where one was born or one’s family’s place of origin. From a historical perspective when Russia was engaged in various wars in different periods this word became equated to the Motherland (Russ. *Matushka Rodina*) or Fatherland (Russ. *Otechestvo*) stressing the fact that a place of birth

is the source of national identity. This expression raises stronger patriotic feelings, extending the meaning of *rodina* not just to a particular place of birth, but to the entire country of Russia.

For people in general the concept of *rodina* is often mixed with attachment to the place of the ancestors which adds the sense of sacredness to the meaning. In many native languages the word for *rodina* is “my land” or “our land”. In Itelmen it is “*mizvin semt*” (our land). Itelmens also like to use the word “*mizvin atnom*” meaning “our village”. For many Itelmens the Russian word *rodina* refers to our land, our homeland, without which we would lose our identity. It has a special significance for us because without geographical and topographical reminders of our ancestry, native people can become lost as a nation. Indigenous peoples throughout the world have a long history of losing their lands. Without the land, the holism of the native mind, about which Oscar Kawagley has written (Kawagley 2009), can fall apart and this can result in various sorts of social problems (drinking, laziness, egoism, greediness).

In the studies that have been done to date, the idea of *rodina* has not been understood to mean a sacred place. But in many ways the concept of sacredness is relevant for discussions of *rodina* in Kamchatka. My conclusions about this idea come in particular from considering the relocations forced by the Soviet government in the 1950s and 60s.

Closed Villages as Sacred Places

Russians came to Kamchatka in the 17th century. Since this time Itelmens have suffered from major influences. Each era has been characterized by different kinds of migrations and changes in native settlement. When the Cossacks first came Itelmens occupied most of the peninsula. The Itelmen scholar Nadezhda Starkova in her book *Itelmens: Material Culture of XVII-60s of the XX century* (1976) provides a precise description of the relocations Itelmens suffered throughout the period of Russian presence in Kamchatka. In the 17th – first half of 18th centuries the most Northern border of Itelmen settlements was the Tigil River on the West and the Uka on the East, the Southern border reached almost the Southern tip of the peninsula (Starkova 1976:36). Now three settlements located on the West coast are left which can be called Itelmen: Tigil, Verkhnee Khairyuzovo and Kovran.

Using various sources Starkova provides the following data on the rapid decrease in the number of villages (Starkova 1976:27-37):

Table 1: Table of Data on the Decrease of Itelmen Villages from the 17th Century to the 1950s (from Starkova 1976)

Period	Number of settlements
17th century	120
1730	91
1770	74
1897 all-state census	31
1940s-1950s	7 - Sopochnoe, Moroshechnoe, Khairyuzovo, Kovran, Utkholok, Napana, Sedanka Osedlaya

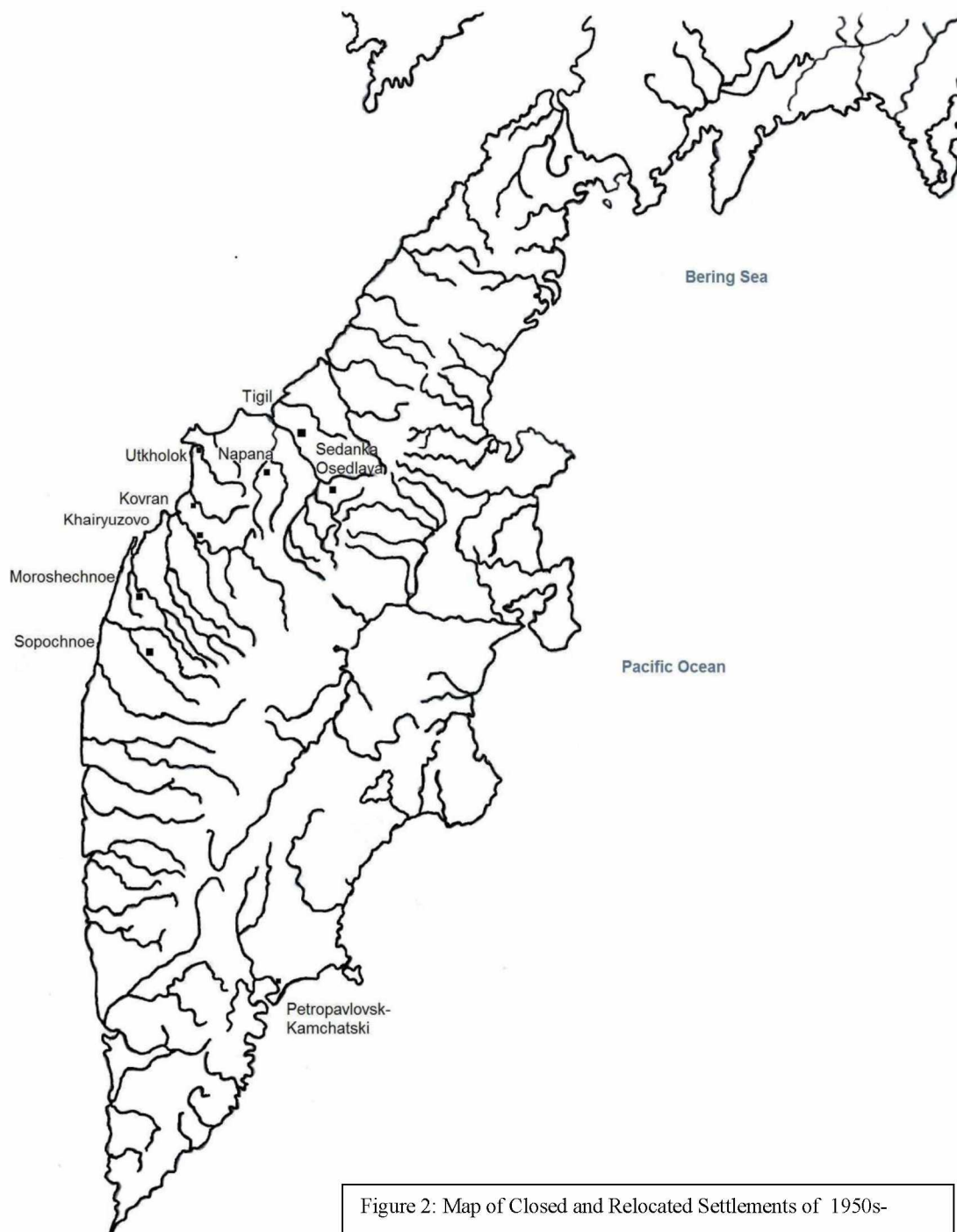


Figure 2: Map of Closed and Relocated Settlements of 1950s-1960s

This significant decrease of the settlements was caused by various factors which are common when outsiders appear in native societies. These include assimilation, introduction of diseases, wars and even starvation.

In discussing sacred sites and places of significance I want to focus my attention on the second half of the 20th century. This period has not been well described in the contemporary literature, yet it was an extremely traumatic period for Itelmens and indigenous peoples of Russia in general as native villages were closed and relocated by the Soviet government. By the 1980s most of small native villages of Russia were relocated into bigger ones. Slezkine notes that out of 650 villages in Khanti-Mansiisk Autonomous Okrug only 126 native settlements left, all eleven Nivkh settlements in Sakhalin were closed and only one Saami village remained on the Kola peninsula (Slezkine 2008:385). In Itelmen country during the period of 1956 to 1965 inhabitants of Sopochnoe, Moroshechnoe, Utkholok and Verkhonii Kovran⁵³ were moved to new Kovran and Verkhnee Khairyuzovo, and Napana and Sedanka Osedlaya citizens were relocated to Tigil (Starkova 1976:27).

These resettlements made it more convenient for the government to develop Soviet collective farming (sovkhoz) based economies in the area.⁵⁴ The new settlements were located in more accessible areas where supplies for the sovkhozes could easily

⁵³ Itelmens used to live along the rivers, their winter settlements were located upstream and summer camps would be closer to the mouth of the river. For this reason the names of the settlements have the adjectives *verkhonii* (upper or upstream) or *ust* (mouth) meaning particular parts of the river. For example Verkhonii Kovran means upper Kovran river and Ust-Kovran means the mouth of the Kovran river.

⁵⁴ The relocations occurred throughout the Russian North in conjunction with the Decree NO. 300 adopted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Soviet Council of Ministers 'On Measures for the Further Economic and Cultural Development of the Peoples of the North'.

reach the destination and be coordinated (Slezkine 2008:385). The political reason of relocations was to achieve a ‘bright socialistic future’ which was to be based on the sedentary way of life. “Effective and productive” labor of “happy” farmers was supposed to be the basis of the economies in the North. This “meant that on the new [sedentary] places of residence, native northerners had to either abandon traditional activities or change them in favor of increasing the productivity” (Slezkine 2008:385).

Soviet literature provides us with rich descriptions of the “brilliant” outcomes of the program: literacy is spread among the native population, “barbarian” ways of life are forgotten, people are united, each village has a “club” as a center of Soviet cultural education, sovkhoz productivity is high, etc. What the Soviet literature does not mention is that these events created a great sense of loss. Many elders passed away because they were not able to adapt to the new environment, it was not their land. Nobody even asked native peoples if they were willing to move in order to build their future. They did not have anything that would tie them to the new place. People of Verkhni Kovran were not asked if they wanted more citizens on their river. From the point of view of subsistence resources, the relocation caused overpopulation of the river as well as surrounding hunting and gathering grounds.

In those times when the familial ties to a place were interrupted, the memories of the past connected with the place of ancestry became a significant part that kept the nation alive. I remember when I was a child and visited Kovran, villagers held what were called Kovranskie vechorki (Kovran evenings). People would get together and remember the old times, tell stories about their homelands, sing songs from their villages, perform

dances, and exchange jokes. A number of native composers and authors wrote poems, songs and legends where pain and nostalgia are interweaved with the happiness of remembering about the times when Itelmens lived on their homelands. (Koester 2003) notes several dimensions of nostalgia that are reflected in the artistic expressions of Itelmens:

- "Appreciation for the village derives from the practical way in which people make their lives there". Home is where people learn how to live the Itelmen way. They knew every hill, stream, tree in the surrounding area. With the relocation people did not know the best places to go hunting, fishing or gathering. They had to adapt to the new environment. The loss of place resulted in loss of traditional culture associated with those specific places.
- "Ties to relatives-in-the-place" is also an important dimension. Pre-soviet Itelmens were Russian Orthodox and cemeteries became an important part of native culture. When people remember closed villages they talk about the cemeteries and who is buried there. This gives closed villages more significance. The generational continuity "affirmed by life and death on the land" (Koester 2003) raises special feelings when remembering a homeland. It is in this and other contexts that the word *rodina* can have the meaning of "sacred place."

Despite yearning for the homeland, the choice of new places of living was appalling. Orlova noticed that Itelmens were particularly precise in the choice of the place for their settlements. "...they knew well the landscapes which create microclimates most suitable for the life of river fishing and hunting. As a rule the settlements were

located in the forested area on the right elevated shores of the Kamchatkan rivers which flow into the Okhotsk Sea” (Orlova 1999:38). The settlements were usually located by the mountains which protected them from cold northern winds. When elders talk about their villages they stress the fact that it was extremely warm in the summers. Modern settlements are located closer to the sea and for the most part they are not surrounded by woods. This makes the area windy and cold. The village of Kovran, where my fieldwork was conducted is situated four kilometers from the Okhotsk seashore on the left side of the river in the middle of the tundra. As the village is located at the lower side of the river, floods occur once in a while. There is no timber near the village, no mountain protection – the cold wind is a permanent component of the weather. The elders recall:

*It was an unwise decision of the government. The place is blown through like a tube. Verkhniy Kovran was such a great place. The climate is entirely different. Here even in the summer in the afternoon the wind starts blowing from the sea; but there it was very good in the summer. On good days it was hot upstream.*⁵⁵ (Sadovnikova, E. M., interview 2008)

Utkholok is my homeland...It was such a great place. First of all it was hot in the summer and everything grew, not like here. It is colder here. I

⁵⁵ “А это вот неразумное решение такое было. Начальство решило. Место продуваемое со всех сторон, как труба. А в Верхнем Ковране, там же место такое. Климат другой совсем другой. Даже летом вот здесь летом после 12 все, начинается ветер с моря, а там очень хорошо летом. Если хорошие дни, там жарко, тепло в верховьях” (Sadovnikova, E. M., interview 2008).

*would rather live there in Utkholok, even though it is far.*⁵⁶

(Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008)

The wound of the relocations was so incredibly deep that it is still healing in the hearts of modern Itelmens. The few elders who are left still like to remember those good times, when they lived in the best place in the world.

*For me Moroshka is a sacred place as well as Kipkhshishin. I have a different feeling towards those places than towards others. When I get there I feel great happiness and yearning at the same time, all at once. Every time I come I greet everyone. Go, visit a cemetery... When Valerka, my brother, was alive he wanted to establish a monument there saying: 'Former Moroshechnovtsi [Moroshechnoe people] are buried here'. Nothing is left over there now.*⁵⁷ (Zaporotski, G. D., interview 2008)

In this part of the interview the emphasis is on the cemetery. Georgi Zaporotski is the only male elder left in Kovran who is originally from Moroshechnoe. Now he has come to understand that his culture is going away and he is one of the very few left who knows the old ways. As his hunting buddies and relatives passed away his feelings towards Moroshechnoe became stronger. This feeling is strengthened by the bond with his father who is buried there. All these reasons account for a powerful sense of place

⁵⁶ “Я все Утхолок считаю своей родиной, но никак не могу туда попасть... там такое место. Там жарко, во-первых, летом и все, конечно, росло. Не так, как тут. Здесь холоднее. Ну, я бы конечно, там бы лучше жила в Утхолоке. Далековато, конечно” (Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008).

⁵⁷ “Морошка только священное, да Кипхшишин. Я так к тем местам вообще отношусь как-то не так, как к другим. Туда попадаю, у меня какая-то радость и тоска и все на свете. Каждый раз приеду, здороваюсь там со всеми. На моглику схожу, там крест поставлю... Все хотел Валерка, брат, живой был, хотел там бетонную сделать, да там написать: «Тут похоронены бывшие моросечновские». А то ни одного памятника, ни креста ничего не осталось” (Zaporotskii, G. D., interview 2008).

connected with great loss. A closed village can have a high degree of sacredness where every plant, tree, branch, berry, or spring is appreciated or felt to be precious.

Kamchatka natives, especially hunters, tend to use a diminutive-endearment (уменьшительно-ласкательный) suffix when talking about places and some other things. For example, the Rososhina river is often called the Rososhka where *-ka* is a diminutive suffix, *Tilishka* or *Tilkzhik* is used for naming Tikzhi range, *Moroshka* is used instead of *Moroshechnoe*. This unconscious use of endearment suffixes stresses the familiar relations with places which are developed on the ancestral grounds. It shows that people know the landscape as a familiar and important part of their every day life.

In many cases the sacredness and the meaning of the homeland is spread to the entire Kamchatka peninsula. The beauty of the peninsula contributes to its significance and there is an aesthetic component in discussions when the question of sacred places is raised among Itelmen people.

*If you go on the other side of the (Utkholok) river, it is very beautiful there. There are also beautiful places in the upper river where the soul rests.*⁵⁸ (Danilov, E. V., interview 2008)

*The landscape is sacred. Such a beautiful nature, such a territory!*⁵⁹
(Kvasova, I. M., interview 2008)

⁵⁸ “В верховьях там тоже есть места такие красивые. Там, где аж душа отдыхает. Где красиво, там вот да” (Danilov, E. V., interview 2008).

⁵⁹ “А ландшафт он священный. Такая красивая природа, такая территория. Такого, наверное, нигде нету” (Kvasova, I. M., interview 2008).

The admiration of the land adds to the sacredness of the place. One meaning of sacred is that the sacred object is not to be touched. When Itelmens see that their lands are harmed it hurts the very heart of the nation. Itelmen writer Nelly Suzdolova who is from Sopochnoe settlement wrote a poem expressing her grief for the loss of homeland.

We have grown up and died on our land

And expected always to live here ...

At the whispers of the forest,

We stood still in happiness,

There was no time to grieve.

But the time arrived – bad news,

The river became a mere legend,

In a foreign region, in a cold place

Centuries came to a halt.

Farewell warmth, goodbye, mountains,

And you too, moon, above our homeland,

An evil alien pushed a button,

And the strand broke.

(Nelly Suzdolova translated in Koester 2003:272)

The relocations that occurred in the 1950 drastically affected Itelmens. These relocations have even touched the modern young generation. Itelmen youths know that their grandparents were forced to move, they grew up hearing sad stories and memories about a better and more traditional life.

*My grandmother missed a lot according to her stories. No matter where we were there was always nostalgia for the homeland (родной краі).*⁶⁰

(Tomenyuk, A. M., interview 2008)

The elders never accepted the fact that they were relocated. When they talk about their homeland it is always better than the new place. It has been over 40 years since the relocations and Kovran still has not acquired any significance for them especially for those who grew up in the other village. They still differentiate between the ancestries by saying something like “this place is significant for Kovran people, but I am from ... We have our special places”. The new place never became perfect enough for the elders to be accepted as a home.

Sometimes young people identify themselves as being from a closed village even though they have never been there. “I am Moroshechnovskii/Sopochnovskii/Utkholonskii/Kovranskii” is a common expression among contemporary Itelmens. It means my family -- parents and grandparents -- are from Moroshechnoe, Sopochnoe, etc. These common statements stress the ancestry of an individual associated with the resettled villages. I myself was born in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski (the main city of Kamchatka), but I know that my ancestry is from Utkholok, which was relocated to Kovran. So I consider those settlements my homeland. It is extremely pleasant, when people in Kovran call me Utkholonskaya stressing my identity and a place of origin.

⁶⁰ “Бабушка, да. Судя по рассказам, скучала. Где бы мы не были, все равно ностальгия по родному краю, месту” (Tomenyuk, A. M., interview 2008).

Existing Villages as Sacred Places

The era of Perestroika and the Soviet Union's collapse brought another period which had dramatic circumstances for the remaining Itelmen settlements. Russia's "transition to a democratic, market-oriented society" caused changes that "have actually created greater restrictions and hardships for indigenous peoples" (Gray 1998:vii). With the loss of state support the economic basis of the villages was ruined and it caused great depression and another wave of decreasing population. People from rural areas started leaving the villages for bigger cities in order to get jobs and more sustainable life. Itelmens had lost a sense of community, a sense of being a united group of people where the concepts of sharing and helping those who need help were the main aspects of social life in the settlement. With the changing politics people became more individualistic and self oriented. After a while Itelmens started to realize that they were losing the existing villages. That is when the living villages which were at the stage of being lost acquired special significance.

Nowadays Kovran is a sacred place to many young people. Besides it being the place of their birth and their youth they understand that it is a place where they see the "death"⁶¹ of their culture. Kovran is a home village for twin brothers Ivan and Alexander Tomenyuk. Both brothers grew up in the village, and then left for the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski to continue their education. Ivan stayed in the city and Alexander returned to the village. The brothers call Kovran their sacred place, but it

⁶¹ Most young people would say that their culture is dying without understanding that they are the holders of modern Itelmen culture. For the outsider's perspective the culture is distinctively noticeable in Kovran. Without doubt this village can be called Itelmen.

seems that their reasons for that are slightly different. Ivan's sense of the sacredness is based on his memories of the past life and Alexander's is based on the sense of being able to survive in modern circumstances.

Ivan precisely remembers how they lived as a community going all together on a tractor to gather wild plants and berries.

*...earlier in Kovran it was so awesome. Only now do I understand and I regret that everything is lost now. There were so many people. Back then a lot of people lived in Kovran and it was very fun. This was such a stable and integrated village. It was the time of kolkhozes. We would always go out for wild garlic [cheremsha], berries, mushrooms in different periods, like in spring, summer or autumn. The gathering lasts the entire summer starting from the spring and ending in the autumn. The entire village would gather. We would go with our families on the tractors. It was so much fun. As I remember we had so many children.*⁶² (Tomenyuk I.M. 2008)

Ivan has lived in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski for a while and his love for Kovran is complicated with nostalgia similar to that of Georgi Zaporotski when he is surrounded by the circumstances that keep him away from his fondly remembered home place.

62 “...раньше в Ковране просто это было так здорово. Я вот только сейчас понимаю и жалею, что сейчас это все потерялось, все утратилось. Сколько народу было. Раньше в Ковране жило очень много народу и было весело очень. Это был такой сплоченный поселок. Это все еще при колхозах. Всегда выезжали за черемшой, за ягодой, за грибами в разные периоды: весной там, летом или осенью. Сбор все лето, начиная с весны и до осени все это происходит. Всегда собиралась деревня целая. Тракторами выезжали куда-нибудь семьями. Было очень весело. У нас сейчас, насколько я вспоминаю, помню, детей много было. Нам-то что – беситься, веселиться. Это очень замечательно помню это хорошо” (Tomenyuk, I. M., interview 2008).

*For me now Kovran has a special significance. I live here [in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski] too long for me. I think too long, a year continuously. I really miss Kovran. And even more I long for the natural surroundings there. I grew up there. I grew up in nature and it is calling me.*⁶³ (Tomenyuk, I. M. 2008)

Alexander in contrast, returned to Kovran after seven years of travelling. He has a wife there and a baby. Kovran is sacred to him as well. He talks less about the past. Alexander is more concerned about the present and the future.

*It is hard to realize that the village is perishing. It is hard to know our problems, hard to think about it.*⁶⁴ (Tomenyuk A.M. 2008)

The speech of Alexander is filled with great pessimism and doubt about the future of the village. From Ivan we know that they grew up in a happy community and now “everybody is for himself.” While Ivan’s sense of place is based on the memories of a merry past, Alexander’s is based on the idea of being able to live on the lands of his ancestors, to stay alive living on the homeland, to be a good provider for his family during hard economic times where obtaining money is a priority.

⁶³ “Для меня сейчас в данный момент сам Ковран имеет особую значимость, потому что я уже здесь живу (в ПК) для меня уже долго. Я считаю для себя долго – год. Я имею в виду сейчас непрерывно. Год. И очень сильно меня тянет. Очень сильно в Ковран. И еще больше меня тянет природа туда. Я очень скучаю. Ну, повторюсь, потому что я вырос там. В природе вырос и это меня очень сильно тянет. Может, кто-то не понимает. Может, у кого-то есть свои какие-то такие вот привычки, которые в течение жизни своей привык делать. Кто-то, может, поймет” (Tomenyuk, A. M., interview 2008).

⁶⁴ “Трудно осознавать, что пропадает деревня. Зная проблемы наши нынешние тяжело. Трудно подумать” (Tomenyuk, A. M. interview 2008).

*The life is hard now. It is hard to stay here (in Kovran), because everything you need you have to find a way to get from somewhere. It is not that easy. I want my child to be born here, I was born here and I want my descendants to be born here as well. I want to establish such a tradition.*⁶⁵ (ibid.)

The experience of the Itelmens raises a number of questions in the study of sacred places: Does the realization that the place is significant come when a person leaves this place? Does the place acquire special significance when tremendous changes take place? Is it only now, after being taken away from their homeland, that people start to realize how precious it is? Or does the value of the place grow with a person's maturity?

Itelmens had a dramatic history of contact with the Western world, but there is still hope. Many of us want to go back to our lands, to our traditional way of life, and to our nation.

[The idea of 'sacred place'] is, of course, connected with the memory that we lived here [closed village], my ancestors lived here, my mother was born here, and I was born here. When I graduated in 1989, first of all I went over there [toward my ancestral home]. I reached Kovran and then got to Utkholok, because there is always a strong yearning for those places. I think of course, we won't revive Utkholok, but in Moroshechnoe

⁶⁵ “Ну, сейчас сложно. Хотелось бы, конечно, сложно здесь продержаться, потому что все, что надо приходится заказывать, доставать где-то. Не так легко, а так да. Я бы вообще хотел что бы и мой ребенок здесь родился, так как я здесь родился и последующие потомки. Такую хочу традицию” (ibid.).

*Gosha lives and Klavdia Khaloimova lives in Sopochnoe. In spite of the fact that she is a professor of education, every year she tries to go there to live for an extended period of time... Suzdolovi also live on the river by Sopochnoe.*⁶⁶ (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008)

Viktoria Petrasheva stresses the fact that no matter where we are our homeland will always live in our memories and we would always desire to go back home at least for some time. While knowing about the place of origin supports our identity, our identity keeps the place alive. As long as we remember where we come from and as long as our memories of the villages of our ancestors are alive, those sacred places will live and along with it Itelmen spirit will live as well.

⁶⁶ “Священное место – это, конечно, связано с памятью о том что мы здесь жили, здесь жили мои предки, здесь родилась моя мама, здесь родилась я. Когда я закончила в 89 году аспирантуру, первым делом я поехала туда, в ту сторону. Добралась до Коврана, а потом добралась и до Утхолока, потому что на тем местам всегда есть такая тоска. Мне кажется, конечно, уже не восстановить Утхолок, но в Моршечном дядя Гоша живет, в Соночном – Клавдия Халоймова, не смотря на то, что она кандидат нед.наук. Она каждый год надолго уезжает в это Соночное... Суздоловы тоже живут на речке вблизи Соночного” (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008).

Chapter 4: Symbolic Places

The policy of relocation has brought some new senses of landscape where yearning for the past life influenced people's perception of their homeland. It has become sacred. Along with that every geographical reminder of that past acquired some degree of significance. In the frame of this discussion it is important to mention symbolic places which are recognized to be significant sites. The 20th century opened those places to the wider audience. Places which became symbolic acquired new and stronger meaning. They became reminders of the Itelmen past, keepers of the Itelmen present and possibly symbols of the Itelmen future. In this chapter I focus on three places which are famous for the legends connected with them and the activities that take place there: Babushka Mountain, Elvel Mountain and Balagannaya Clearing. All of these places have different histories and stories but their meaning to the culture is equally important and symbolic.

Babushka Mountain

At the end of the 19th century Tyushov witnessed a ceremony of offering to Babushka Mountain that was held every time an Itelmen person was passing by. People of Sopochnoe believed that one should throw something to the mountain spirit in order to escape bad luck. Tyushov shares an interesting fact: "In support of their belief they were telling about some Cossack (исправник). When he was told about the tradition he did not throw anything, but swore at it. After he got back to Sopochnoe he got sick. The Cossack was cured only because of the incantations (наговор) of the old women-healer (shamanka) who happened to visit the settlement" (Tyushov 1906:298). There was also a

common saying when somebody's clothes got burnt or deformed while being dried by the fire: "it is the old woman who has sewn it for you"⁶⁷ or "that old woman likes to sew"⁶⁸ (Tyushov 1906:322).

Babushka Mountain is eleven kilometers from the site of the former village of Sopochnoe. Its original Itelmen name is Tkhloai or Tkhloaian (Tyushov 1906:297) meaning "old lady" (старуха). The modern word Babushka came from the Russian language which has a meaning of a "grandmother" or "granny". Tyushov was the first one who mentioned the stories connected with Tkhloai and the origin of this name. While travelling he noted seeing the mountain from different locations in the area starting from Sopochnoe all the way until Moroshechnoe. He provides two drawings of the mountain which were made from different positions (Tyushov 1906:322, 335).

It is interesting to note that closer to Sopochnoe there is another mountain called Dedushka (grandfather) which does not have any legends connected with it and I have not heard of any ceremonies conducted for Dedushka. It makes sense though that there is a mountain of the opposite sex as Itelmens enjoy stories about love and people's relations. Sopochnoe is a place located between the mountains but Babushka is the only one in the area which has significance. There might be a possibility that the story of Dedushka is forgotten or it has never had a story, but it seems that when the area is abundant with similar salient places the most prominent and beautiful will be animated

⁶⁷ "Ладно, у тебя «старуха» зашила"

⁶⁸ "Любит эта старуха подшивать"

while the others would just have some unimportant names or secondary parts in the stories.

At the end of the 20th century the Babushka tradition was still remembered. Tatiana P. Lukashkina remembered that she had an unpleasant experience with this mountain:

We had this ritual or a custom....Shura (daughter) was two years old. When you come by Babushka you must make an offering to Babushka mountain - candies, sugar, bread, fish, balik (smoked fish), yukola (dried fish). 'Here Babushka, treat yourself so that my daughter would not be sick, so my daughter would not cry, so that she would be kind and good, so that she would love people, her parents her father and mother'. While saying that, make an offering to it. But when I arrived I did not make any offering, and during the night Shura was crying and crying. My husband Stepan Grigor'ich was holding her the entire night. He was already tired of holding her, but she was still crying. My grandfather asked: 'Did you make an offering to Babushka?' I replied: 'No'. 'That is why Shura is crying. Go make an offering right now'. Stepan Grigor'ich gave me sugar, butter, bread... 'While making the offering say: so my daughter would not be sick any more, would never cry, so that my daughter would be as kind as her father'. I said all that and she stopped crying immediately. He put her in the tent and she slept the entire day without crying...That's the

*story of Babushka Mountain.*⁶⁹ (recorded by Jennifer Syron, June 1995, recording number K95-4, paragraph 28)

The ceremony of offering in this case, as in the examples given above, implies that the place is in some measure sacred. The making of the offering and the description of consequences for not doing so recognizes that something “supernatural” inhabits this mountain. This supernatural, nearly-sacred aspect was recognized forty years earlier in a story told by Tyushov. Without a background story connected with it the ceremony would not have taken place. Tyushov wrote down a legend about Babushka which was shared with him by Sopochnoe elder Ivan Semyonovich Pavlutskii who was a hundred years old and who remembered as far back as 1811:

In ancient times there appeared a malevolent/impure power there (нечистая сила) in the image of an old man or more often a decrepit old woman. In the former good and nice times this old woman fixed torbasa⁷⁰ and other things secretly from the seal hunters who stayed at the mouth of the river near the mountain for the night. They of course had to leave

69 “Еще ритуал какой-то или обычай. Помнишь я тебе рассказывала Сопка Бабушка. А Шура два года было. Когда поезжаешь к Бабушке – обязательно надо угостить Бабушку, Сопку Бабушку: "Конфеты, сахара, хлеб, рыба там, балык, юкола - на Бабушка тебе, угощайся, чтобы моя дочка не болела, чтобы моя дочка не плакала, чтобы она добрая, хорошая выросла, чтобы она любила людей, чтобы она любила родителей - папу и маму". Все сказала, угостила. А я тогда приехала - ничего не делала, ничего не угощала, а ночью Шура плачет и плачет, и плачет, а Степан Григорьевич – муж мой – целую ночь качал, качал - он уже устал держать, а она все плачет и плачет, а дедушка Николай сказал: Ты угощала Бабушку? Я говорю - нет. - Вот почему Шура плачет. Сейчас же угощай. Степан Григорьевич сахар дал, потом масло дал, хлеб дал, булочку, печенье дал, юколу там, рыбу. Отдаешь и скажешь - чтобы моя дочка больше не болела, не плакала, чтобы дочка была ласковая как папа. Все это сказала сразу же перестала плакать – он уложил в палатку и целый день спала и не плакала... Вот что такое сопка Бабушка...” (Lukashkina, T. P., recorded by Jennifer Syron, June 1995, recording number K95-4, paragraph 28)

⁷⁰ Torbasa - native word for skin or fur shoes.

some treats for her. Since those times came a tradition of leaving something for the mountain («в зомунеу»). Something bad will happen to one who laughs at the tradition and would not leave anything: she will definitely do something with this person. (Tyushov 1906:322)

In the 21st century this legend is remembered by elders, and the ceremony of treating Babushka is still widely known and practiced. Contemporary Itelmen hunters will always treat the mountain when passing by. It is still a significant place. When former Sopochnoe people remembered their village they would always talk about the mountain which in fact used to be a volcano. Today it is a dead volcano which does not display any volcanic activity. That is why no legends connected with Kamuli spirits the description of which was provided in the previous chapter are associated with Babushka mountain.

Itelmen poetess and writer Nelly D. Suzdolova shared her memories about her homeland:

My most favorite place was letov'e (summer camp). It was where two rivers come together: the Suzvai and the Rososhka. There is a small volcano over there, too. It is called Babushka. When we were small this was such a small volcano, we could have run across it and climbed up real fast. Very small. And then many years later we came there and the volcano became big, the top became big and covered with Siberian dwarf

*pine (Lat. Pinus pumila, Russ. Кедроч), berries over there and everything.*⁷¹

Perhaps, the size of the mountain changed along with the growing appreciation of Babushka as a symbolic and significant place. Nelly Dmitrievna remembers the same legend about Babushka Mountain. An invisible old lady sustained by the treats of passersby and for that she would take care of their clothes during nights. Nobody saw her. In the case of not being fed she would mistreat those people. The elder heard this story from her grandfather who also shared other Sopochnoe stories with her. Nelly Dmitrievna incorporated those stories in one long legend called “*Shamanka*” (shaman-woman). All the action takes place around the mountain where Babushka is the center of the stories and the center of the lives of the characters.

This mountain was the center of people’s lives in Sopochnoe as well. Their summer camps were located there, children would play there, people would go pick berries on top of it, and do many other activities. Babushka Mountain would also count as one of the dangerous places discussed above; it has a spirit which plays unpleasant tricks on people. Along with that it has gained symbolic meaning in the present and acquired modern significance. Today it symbolizes the village of Sopochnoe. Over the 20th century the reasons for the sacredness of the mountain have changed from it being considered a dangerous place, or a place of impure or malevolent powers, into a place of

⁷¹ “Самое любимое место – это летовье. Называется летник. Там, значит, две речки соединяются. Соединяется Сузвай и Росошка в этом месте. И там стоит вулканчик. Бабушка называется. Когда мы были маленькие, это вулканчик был такой, можно его оббежать быстро и подняться туда, оббежать. Очень маленький. А потом много лет прошло, мы приехали туда, вулкан стал такой, там верхушка стала такая огромная за много лет и обросла вся кедрочом, и ягода там и все” (Suzdalova, N. D., interview 2008).

memories connected with ancestors. The mountain awakens special nostalgic feelings and descendants of that settlement hold onto the image of Babushka as a remembrance of the people of Sopochnoe and a past way of life.

Elvel (Elvelik) Mountain

Elvel Mountain is located not far from modern Kovran settlement. It is also a dead volcano. Its perfect cone shape and loneliness in the tundra make this mountain prominent compared to the other surroundings. Elvel is seen from Khairyuzovo as well, which is eighty kilometers from Kovran.

The word “elvel” is translated from Itelmen as “mountain ear”. Famous Itelmen choreographer Boris A. Zhirkov created a more poetic translation of the word – a “shell” (раковина). When contemporary Itelmens pronounce this word it brings a deep and wide range of associations connected with the revitalization of Itelmen culture and nation. It started in the latter part of the 20th century when an Itelmen writer, Tatiana E. Gutorova, wrote a beautiful legend about Elvel Mountain (Gutorova 1995). It talks about a girl named Elvel and two brothers who fell in love with her and started fighting over her. Because of the dark shaman, the father of Elvel -- who was a white shaman -- had to make his daughter into a mountain and the brothers into the rivers which have their beginning from the mountain. This legend became famous in Kamchatka.

Staging of the native ballet “Elvel” was the beginning of the Itelmen dance group with the same name - “Elvel.” From this ballet the group started its way towards developing Itelmen artistic and ritual traditions. That was the time when the whole Itelmen culture started to rapidly transform and evolve (Kravchenko 2007:83). In the

1980s the dance group became an organizer of an annual Alkhalalalai celebration which is a thanksgiving holiday during which native people pay tribute to nature for its gifts. The festival became so popular that representatives of other ethnic groups of the peninsula started their pilgrimage to Kovran every year to share the celebration with Itelmens. It became a symbol of the union of Kamchatkan cultures.

Young Itelmen people of Kovran state that they have got knowledge about Itelmen traditions from participating in Elvel's dance group and in the Alkhalalalai festival.

We have a dance group which every year conducted ceremonies during big festivals, where they showed everything [rituals], demonstrated various spirits, communicated with the fire...I learned about it [traditional culture] only when I participated in the dance group.⁷²

(Tomenyuk, I. M., interview 2008)

Itelmen youths learn traditional culture while being members in the dance group and also show and transmit this knowledge themselves to the others by performing with Elvel dancers. While Kovran has become the capital of the modern Itelmen "nation", Elvel Mountain, similar to the Babushka case, became a center of village cultural life. As the village had a new life where many Itelmens were united into one permanent settlement, the mountain acquired a new life and new mountain stories were created as

⁷² "У нас есть ансамбль, который каждый год проводил церемонии такие на праздниках больших наших, где это все наглядно показывалось, демонстрировали духов всяких разных, общались с костром... Я это узнавал только, когда танцевал в ансамбле" (Tomenyuk, I. M., interview 2008).

well. Elvel Mountain presence and existence became more developed and complicated. Even though there are no accounts of ancient legends connected with the mountain, modern legend made the mountain visible to the wider world and formed it into a symbol of the Itelmen cultural revitalization process. Elvel *“is a symbol of a high level, striving to retain, revitalize and exist on this earth”*⁷³. (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008)

According to Tyushov’s account, citizens of Old or Verkhni Kovran believed that Elvel saved Itelmens from the great flood and that there are remains of a larch dugout canoe (Itel. Tkhtem) on the top of the mountain. He himself did not have a chance to go there, so he did not see the remains,⁷⁴ but he noted that Krasheninnikov was talking about a big flood in 1737 (Krasheninnikov 1994a:171; Tyushov 1906:389). In the 18th century Elvel saved Itelmens from physical extinction caused by flood. In the 20th century Elvel is saving the spiritual well-being of Itelmens. Every year during the Alkhalalalai celebration there is a communal hike to the top of the mountain as a way to join with the ancestors and with the nation’s spirit.

Stories that happened during those hikes add to the sacredness of Elvel. There is no specific name for a spirit that lives on the mountain. People do not talk about offering treats specifically to Elvel. It is possible, however, that this ceremony is conducted. What people talk about in connection with Elvel is that there are some bad places over there where people lose their way. In 2001 a group of Alkhalalalai guests got lost on the

⁷³ “Это как символ высоты, стремлений сохраниться, возродиться и быть на земле” (Петрашева В.В. 2008).

⁷⁴ Later Tyushov notes that there are no remains of the bat on the mountain, but this can be explained by the fact that the flood was at least 100 years before Tyushov and the boats could have naturally disintegrated (Tyushov 1906: 390).

mountain. Two people got lost from the team and the whole team itself was not able to find the way back. Three days later the last of the lost were finally found. Everybody was fine. But since then the stories about the spirits living in nature which make tricks on people had a new life in Kovran.

There are various explanations of why people lose their way and how to handle that. The most interesting and widely told is the story about Karalki – the small people I mentioned earlier. They would go in front of the person without the person noticing them and make him lose his way.

My grandfather saw them and my grandmother saw them too. Small people. They are very small running all over like in the cartoons about elves...My grandmother told me that my grandfather got lost how many times on his way home from hunting. There were times when the evil spirit was leading him in circles till he got exhausted and fell down. Later the elder taught my grandfather to change insoles and shoes and then conduct some ritual. Only after that one can find his way home...he was walking – a Radio-3 correspondent [one of the lost in the mountain] - and thinking that someone was in front of him. Maybe it was them. He heard noise and foot steps, so he thought the he was following members of his group. They [Karalki] were misleading him.⁷⁵ (Kvasova, I. M., interview 2008)

75 “Говорят их дедушка видел, и бабушка говорит, что она видела их. Маленьких человечков. Они очень маленькие бегают, как в мультиках, наверное, показывают эльфов совсем маленькие...А дедушка мой, бабушка рассказывает, сколько раз он терялся с дороги, по которой он домой шел с охоты. Говорит, прямо бывало, что его злой дух водил прямо по кругу вот так вот, что они с сил сбивался, падал. Пока дедушку старики не научили, следки меняли, обувь переобували, потом надо

It is a widely known Itelmen tradition that when one loses his way he should change his insoles – left would go on the right side and right on the left. The event of the entire team of people getting lost on the mountain reminded Itelmens about the spirits and about the ancient Itelmen beliefs. The mountain proved that it is a residence of spirits who like to “play” with people. Because of this event the symbolic meaning of the mountain is once again enriched with the sacred meaning. Nowadays there is no doubt among Itelmens that Elvel is a sacred mountain to which every Itelmen should go.

Balagan Clearing

In Kamchatkan context the word “balagan” is used in the meaning of a native dwelling built for drying fish.⁷⁶ Those were common structures at the summer camps. Balagan Clearing is located in Kovran settlement by the river shore at the bottom of the rocky mountain. Those rocks used to have the shapes of faces. Now with the soil deformations those faces are almost erased, but other figures appeared such as the figure of a biliken.⁷⁷ The magnificent view surrounding the Clearing raises special feelings of admiration and creates the atmosphere of being on a place of a distant past.

The first balagan was established in 1987 together with the first idol for the first celebration of the Alkhalalalai festival. Starting from that year the Balagan Clearing

было какой-то обряд сделать там в лесу, потом только могли домой попасть... Он же шел наш корреспондент-то из Радио3, тоже думал, что впереди кто-то идет, а может, они и вели его. Шумели и топот, и он шел спокойно, думал, что кто-то впереди идет по следу. Вот они его и вели” (Kvasova, I. M., interview 2008).

⁷⁶ Traditionally balagans were used as a summer dwelling, under which fish were dried – later they were constructed solely for drying fish.

⁷⁷ Biliken – small wooden doll. In Kamchatka they say that one will have fortune if he/she rubs its belly. The tradition of making Biliken’s has been borrowed by Kamchatkan artists from Chukotka. Today, it is a mass produced souvenir.

became a public place where village holidays are celebrated. Those celebrations are not necessarily traditional Itelmen. A lot of them are Russian ones, for example Russia Day, Fishermen's Day, Navy Day, Youth Day, and numerous other celebrations.

The Alkhalalali festival is the most important Itelmen celebration of the year. It is celebrated as a New Year when all the crops, gatherings, and winter preparations are done.⁷⁸ The festival was recreated by Boris A. Zhirkov based on the accounts of the first explorers Krasheninnikov and Steller. He was the initiator of the establishment of the Clearing and along with it of the renaissance of Itelmen culture. Mr. Zhirkov recalls that when the first Alkhalalalai was celebrated nobody knew about that festival; even to the elders it was alien. The following year he was giving lectures at school telling people about the original traditions. Nowadays Itelmens do not imagine themselves without this holiday.

Balagan Clearing became a place where ancient traditions were remembered and revived. As well as Elvel Mountain this place symbolizes a process of recovery of Itelmen culture from the Russian repressions.

*Everyone is attracted by this place. I see that even Ust-Khairyzovskie [citizens of neighboring village of Ust-Khairyzovo] always go there and relax. This is our place for holidays, I think it is permanent.*⁷⁹

(Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008)

⁷⁸ A detailed description of the celebration is provided by Krasheninnikov (1994b:84-108).

⁷⁹ “Ну, это уже Балаганное место туда притягивает всех людей. Я смотрю даже усть-хайрызовские эти вечно туда приезжают и там отдыхают. Ну, это как у нас уже это место для праздника постоянное, наверное, уже” (Slobodchikova, L. I., interview 2008).

While Elvel Mountain is the center of Itelmen culture, the Clearing became a center of cultural life in the village. With the disappearance of the club house (it burnt down) this place unites the villagers from all Itelmen closed settlements into a nation or a tribe where the guests from all over the world are welcome to join in as well. Celebration itself consists of a range of sacred events filling the Clearing with the sense of sacredness. I would say that during the celebration the Clearing becomes a place where profane and sacred worlds meet each other and where contact with the “other world” is most likely to appear. All the objects used for the ceremonies are taken from the profane world but they become sacred during the rites.

There are three particular rites which can be considered on the order between our world and another world. First there is a fire ceremony when the girls and shaman⁸⁰ are trying to get rid of the bad spirits with the help of the fire and then the shaman contacts with the world of gods and ancestors through talking to the fire. Then everybody goes through the rim of purification made of birch branches. This ceremony symbolizes that while passing through this rim we leave all our sins in the last year and bring only good to the following year. Another important rite which is conducted during the opening ceremony is establishing an idol. Each year a new idol appears on the Clearing and according to the number of idols one can say how many celebrations took place over there. The all these rites created a sacred space on the Balagan Clearing location. “*Of*

⁸⁰ Boris Zhirkov is the only Itelmen male shaman. He has been actively participating in reviving Itelmen rituals, dance and culture. Usually he is the one who conducts the opening ceremony of Alkhalalalai. If he is unable to participate in the festival, a respected person is asked to represent the shaman for this rite.

*course [it is sacred]. When you have such a celebration this place is more or less consecrated.”*⁸¹ (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008)

After the Alkhalalalai celebration is over, the sacred significance of the place still remains. Even though the villagers do not think of the spiritual value of the Clearing they would unconsciously go there to let their spirit relax. Itelmen shamaness Olga F. Zaporotskaya once explained:

*This [supernatural] happens often over there. That is why Ust-Khairyuzovtsi always come there in the middle of the summer for rest. Ours [Itelmens] don't pay attention, but Ust-Khairyuzovtsi relax there by balagans. The idol is a kind of a reminder, so we won't forget.*⁸²

The stress on the presence of idols is important. Placing of idols used to be a common tradition among Itelmens. These wooden poles, or as Volodin call them, sacrificial poles (Volodin 2003:60), embody various gods and spirits. These ritual objects were “worshipped” in order to pay tribute to some supernatural beings, not ancestors. Idols organized ritual life around themselves, rather than around clans or families. Information provided by Krasheninnikov and Steller about the idols comprises the knowledge of contemporary Itelmens about the poles which is rather basic. Nowadays the idols exist only on the Clearing where the Alkhalalalai celebration is being held.

⁸¹ “Конечно. Когда празднество какое-то образуется, то это место обязательно как бы освящается” (Petrasheva, V. V., interview 2008).

⁸² “Дело в том, что там часто это происходит. Оно может таким стать. Почему усть-хайрюзовцы всегда приезжают туда среди лета и они там отдыхают. Наши внимания не обращают, а усть-хайрюзовцы там отдыхают, где балаган. Идол – это своего рода напоминание, чтобы не забыли” (Zaporotskaia, O. F., interview 2008).

In the old times there were several variations of the idols. The idol to Duekhstitch was established in the tundra. Volodin believes that Duekhstitch is closest to the Western understanding of God (Volodin 2003:60). Both Krasheninnikov and Steller give the same description of the traditions around this god: “They establish a pole on the vast and tundra-like fields, tie it up with tonshich⁸³ and do not pass by without throwing a piece of fish or something else; they do not gather berries which grow around, do not hunt either animal nor bird close to the place, and they think that conducting this sacrifice is prolonging their life which without this would be shorter”⁸⁴ (Krasheninnikov 1994b:74). This tradition was observed on the Eastern part of the peninsula. Volodin noted that in the western dialect Duekhstitch is called Nustachkh (Volodin 2003:61).

The idols were located in Itelmen dwellings as well. Krasheninnikov noticed this tradition particularly among the Northern Itelmens. There used to be two types of idols in each dwelling. First was in the shape of a mermaid and it was named Hantai. The function of the idol is not known, but every year Itelmens used to erect a new one during the “purification from the sins” (or modern Alkhalalalai). The number of Hantai idols indicated the age of the dwelling (Krasheninnikov 1994a:26). Another house idol was Azhushak. It was a small pole with the human-like carved face on top. The pole was located by the crockery and was guarding the house from the forest spirits. In

⁸³ Tonshich - dried grass (Volodin 2003:60).

⁸⁴ “Ставят столб на пространых и тундристых полях, обвязывают его тоншишем, и не проходят мимо не брося куса рыбы или чего другого; не собирают ягоды, которые растут в близости, и не бьют около того места ни зверя ни птицы, и думают, что сею жертвою жизнь их продолжается, которая бы без того умалилась” (Krasheninnikov 1994b:74).

recompense for protection Azhushak was fed as if it was a member of the family (Krashennikov 1994a:27). The tradition of keeping an Azhushak pole was noticed only on the Eastern part of the peninsula.

In the 20th century Itelmens started to remember their idol traditions together with the Alkhalalalai festival. An idol of contemporary Itelmens is a syncretic figure which unites all these three idols described by the first explorers into one. During the Alkhalalalai festival they place a large idol named Hantai in the festival area which commonly has a shape of Azhushak (a pole with the carved face on top). Sometimes an idol has a zoomorphic figure of the raven. Itelmens decorate Hantai with dry grass and feed it with fish, seal fat, and berries. The number of Hantai idols shows the number of years the festival has been celebrated. This is one of the most important ceremonies during the festival. The above mentioned attributes of the idol make it into a sacred object that is used as a window to the “other world”. It becomes one of those multiple bonds that connect past and present, ancestors and descendants.

It is not common that Itelmens would think of an idol as of a sacred object because most of the times we think that sacred can be applied to the ancient past only or to Christian tradition. In most cases people would think of sacred places in connection with sacrificial places. However, the idol became an emblem of the Itelmen nation. An image of an idol is associated with the Balagan Clearing, Alkhalalalai Celebration, Elvel Mountain, shamanic stories, and knowledge of the ancestors associated with those places.

Itelmens have lost a significant part of their traditional culture together with the sense of non-Christian spirituality. Nevertheless, symbolic places bring back a specific

native way of sensing the world where places like Balagan Clearing, Elvel Mountain or Babushka Mountain are believed to be sacred and meaningful. Those places, in their own unique way, keep the bond between modern Itelmens and unite them into a small nation. Being spirit residences, these places also became powerful remedies that try to cure Itelmens from the wounded past and continue their history as a people.

The Dawn of Existence for Itelmen Significant Places

Many Itelmens are leaving Kovran, because the economic situation is extremely sad and it is difficult to survive living in such distant Kamchatkan villages. But places are not necessarily losing their significance. On the contrary, they are becoming more sacred to those who have an opportunity to leave. What do people do with those places in the present? How do those places live after being abandoned? Itelmen separation from homelands resulted in the expansion of sacredness from one particular place of home into the entire area of Itelmen former territories. In the 20th century Itelmens united their efforts into organizing a Territory of Traditional Land Use “Tkhsanom” (Russian abbreviation is “TTP”) where they want to have priority to do subsistence activities and to protect their lands legally by themselves. This initiative was preceded by the Council of Itelmens “Tkhsanom” which was established in 1987 by Kovran citizens. ‘*Tkhsanom*’ is the Itelmen word for ‘dawn’ symbolizing that this organization wants to bring new, brighter life to Itelmens. They were the ones who helped revive the Alkhalalalai Festival and support Elvel dancers in their projects. And this organization is the strong opponent of the government in the struggle over the rights of indigenous peoples.

Tkhsanom was the first native organization in Russia that started the movement towards obtaining Itelmen lands of origin in order to continue to exist as a nation. Due to the hard work of Tkhsanom leaders and experts of RAIPON in 1998 the TTP was recognized by the government and officially established. The idea of TTP was to be a special protected territory of traditional subsistence which would have a status of co-management between the communities and the administration (Murashko 1998). Its territory covers the area of the villages which were closed in the 1950-60s on the Western coast of Kamchatka - Moroshechnoye, Sopochnoye, Utkholok, Sedanka, Napana, and Belogolovoye. Kovran also is included in the list. The overall size of Tkhsanom territory is 2,762, 700 hectares (Murashko 1998:14). The TTP area includes all the significant and sacred places of the Western coast mentioned in the previous chapters.

The aim of the creating of this special territory is to allow indigenous people to live according to their traditional values by conducting their traditional activities. According to their program, the Tkhsanom Council is working on the problem of Itelmens being treated as a minority without any prior rights to subsistence activities. The TTP idea is also important to biodiversity conservation. When such a territory is established and enforced the companies and salmon poachers can not come to the lands to ruin them. Tkhsanom “program had some projects aiming at providing nature protection posts with ecologically clean transport. Those were regeneration and development of sled dog breeding and transportation, restoration of transport horse breeding, regeneration of tkhtem (dugout canoe) production and their use on the rivers.

Creating alternative power supply in Tkhsanom area is also part of the program” (Degai T. S. n.d.). A significant emphasis was placed on demonstrating alternative power sources which were contrary to development of oil and gas deposits on the continental shelf of the Okhotsk Sea (Murashko 2000b).

Unfortunately, the Russian government changed along with the policy towards the rights of indigenous peoples. In 2001 a new governor signed an executive order that closed the Territory of Traditional Land Use “Tkhsanom” (Rodnik 2009). The shock to Itelmen people did not last long; they applied to various international institutions for justice. Sadly, in 2006 the European Court of Human Rights where Itelmens applied in 2003 sent a letter to RAIPON which said that they did not find any indigenous peoples’ rights to be violated in the actions of the Russian government (Rodnik 2009).

In the present, the Tkhsanom Council with Oleg Zaporotsky as head, and other indigenous organizations are still trying to reinstate the TTP. Itelmens do not want to lose hope that one day we might have a prior right to be on the lands of our ancestors, to subsist off our lands, to protect them and to raise our children on our ancestral grounds applying traditional and spiritual values. As long as Tkhsanom symbolizes the dawn of our culture, Itelmens will move forward toward the renaissance and revival in spite of the government and other agencies’ efforts of limiting and diminishing the lives of indigenous peoples in Kamchatka.

Conclusions

Research on landscape sacredness is important for the scholarly world, for politicians and for indigenous peoples. Land, being central to the life of aboriginals, became one of the main dilemmas between the governments and indigenous peoples that has not been resolved effectively enough to meet the interests of both. The issues connected with sacred sites in the US, Australia and New Zealand clearly indicate that there is no efficient and simple way to resolve this complicated matter. At the same time, these examples support the idea that along with the land being a subsistence provider of the native population, sacredness of the land is a core component of indigenous people's spiritual well-being and identity, which is also closely connected with the maintenance of language and of the entire culture.

In the Russian political context it is still not clear what is considered to be a sacred site and the mechanisms for the protection of places of significance are rather vague. Similar to many other countries, archaeology in Russia is the main instrument that is considered definitive for recognition of the level of significance of a place. In the Russian political context sacred places are frozen in time: they have a past, but they do not have a future. The Russian government does not understand that places continue being culturally and historically significant to indigenous peoples.

Broad discussion has been conducted among scholars concerning the definitions, functions and nature of sacred sites and places of significance. Basso (1996) described "senses of place" among Western Apaches and the idea that places are sensed by people "unselfconsciously". According to Basso, an important part of sensing a place is the

“interanimation” that occurs when places are perceived by people based on their knowledge and worldview, while at the same time places animate people’s stories and ideas. The works of Nabokov, Schneider, Cusack-McVeigh and other contemporary researchers emphasize that knowledge about places is important for native peoples because of deep ancestral wisdom those places carry. Landscape and the knowledge associated with it provides people with guidelines of proper behavior. This knowledge is an important component of oral tradition. In many cases, toponymics of the area is a significant portion of the study of sacred places.

While the subject of landscape sacredness has been widely discussed by foreign scholars, there are few materials dedicated to sacred sites in Russia. The only fundamental work on landscape significance has been conducted by experts of RAIPON and CAFF among Koryaks in Kamchatka and Nenets in Khantii-Mansiiski Autonomous Okrug. This work provides definitions of sacred sites articulated by indigenous peoples.

An overview of Russian indigenous peoples’ perception of space clearly indicates that it is difficult to give a definition for “sacred place.” Having analyzed theoretical discussions provided in the literature and having conducted fieldwork I would propose the following categorization of places of significance in Itelmen society:

- traditional resource areas: rivers, seas, oceans, forest, tundra, etc. – these places are a significant part of Itelmen life, but they are not recognized as sacred;
- legendary and mythological places – definitely significant places, but not necessarily sacred;
- ceremonial areas - definitely significant places, but not necessarily sacred;

- places where offerings are made – are not identified as sacred, might be significant;
- spirit residences – recognized by the majority as sacred places;
- symbolic places - recognized by the majority as sacred places;
- places of transformation: burials, cemeteries – recognized by everybody as sacred places;
- places of origin: closed villages, homeland - recognized by everybody as sacred places.

This categorization is not complete and it can be arranged according to other factors. My categorization is organized according to the degrees of sacredness. Significant places are the least sacred, but it does not mean that they are less important in the lives of Itelmens.

The definitions of Itelmen informants which were collected during my fieldwork in Kamchatka provide new perspectives on sacred places. There is a standard understanding of a sacred site as a highly respected religious place (cemeteries or spirit residences). But in many cases Itelmen sacredness of place rests on the feeling of admiration of the beauty of the land, or on the sense of loss, feeling of nostalgia and yearning, caused by the governmental controlling of the landscape, or a sense of the loss of community, again caused by the governmental transformations. In this case the role of the government is enormous in the formation of an Itelmen sense of place. Itelmen examples of symbolic places indicate that a place does not need to have a long historic significance to become sacred.

There is still much research left to be done on Itelmen places of significance. Contemporary Itelmens have interests in and stories to tell about the places of revolts against Russians, archeological sites, resource areas, and some other places. More attention should be dedicated to places described in the unpublished and less famous Itelmen myths and legends. My research covered a small part of Itelmen places of significance, but I consider this part the most important for Itelmens today and especially important as the process of negotiation over the Territory of Traditional Land Use “Tkhsanom” continues.

List of Abbreviations

CAFF - Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna

CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity

RAIPON – Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East

TTP – Territory of Traditional Land Use

UNESCO – United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**List of interviewees, fieldwork conducted in summer 2008 by Tatiana S. Degai on
Significant Places of Itelmens**

1. Danilov Evgeni Valerievich, 2008, July, Utkholok
2. Galyan Mikhail Valentinovich, 2008, July, Ust-Khairyuzovo
3. Kvasova Irina Mikhailovna, 2008, July, Uthkolok
4. Kile Svetlana Iosifovna, 2008, July, Kovran
5. Petrasheva Viktoria Vasilievna, 2008, June, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski
6. Sadovnikova Evdokia Markovna, 2008, July, Utkholok
7. Sisoeva Svetlana Yurievna, 2008, July, Kovran
8. Slobodchikova Lyudmila Iosifovna, 2008, July, Kovran
9. Suzdolova Nellya Dmitrievna, 2008, June, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski
10. Tomenyuk Aleksandr Mikhailovich, 2008, July, Kovran
11. Tomenyuk Ivan Mikhailovich, 2008, July, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski
12. Zaporotskaya Olga Filimonovna, 2008, July, Ust-Khairyuzovo
13. Zaporotskii Georgi Dmitrievich, 2008, July, Kovran
14. Zhirkov Aleksei, 2008, July, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski
15. Zhirkov Boris Aleksandrovich, 2008, July, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski

List of Additional Interviews Used

Lukashkina Tatiana Petrovna, 1995, June recorded by Jennifer Syron, recording number K95-4, paragraph 28; archives of David Koester

Khaloimov Pavel, 2004, recorded by David Koester

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