

# Fourth World Journal



## Book Review

### **Living with Koryak Traditions**

Playing with Culture in Siberia

*By Alexander D. King*

*University of Nebraska Press*

*2011 Board of Regents, University of Nebraska*

*329 pages*

*[www.nebraskapress.unl.edu](http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu)*

As a lecturer in anthropology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland Alexander King has written a surprisingly realistic portrayal of the Koryak of Siberia. Instead of an observational monograph typical of academic renderings **Living with Koryak Traditions** depicts a living, dynamic and evolving society. Thoughtfully engaged in challenging discussions of the meaning of Koryak culture and traditional practices, the Koryak are adapting to changes in their lives today even as their ancestors were challenged in their day.

Carefully avoiding the temptation to romanticize, King and the Koryak's themselves who directly influenced the book's narrative consider the meaning of dance, song, and ritual feasting as parts of their lives in the present era. This

discussion is important to the Koryak since what had been the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and now the Russian Federation “standardized” indigenous peoples according to their dance, their song and clothing. The Koryak question themselves whether these dances and these songs are indeed necessarily Koryak or, perhaps they are no longer. In other words, the Koryak find themselves having to consider whether changes in the dances over time is indeed the natural way of things, or if keeping dances in a fixed fashion, as the Russians would have them do, is the best way. How the culture of Koryak is expressed over time is a critical focus of this important book.

Too often indigenous peoples are defined in a static condition to suit a bureaucratic necessity of a state government. The dynamic nature of culture, as the Koryak come to realize, allows for culture to become a place of play and experimentation—a changing quality of life and not a fixed, unchangeable condition.

King and his Koryak collaborators bring to light the lively attributes of this people’s cultural ways showing them to be flexible and adaptive. It is this quality, that assures the Koryak that they are modern people experiencing a living culture. King offers a refreshing and playful story that has a happy ending if the Koryak will have it—and they shall.

Anyone interested in the actual, living culture of a people will enjoy and learn from this wonderful book. Readers will go away knowing that indigenous peoples do not disappear, they transform over time—taking up qualities of value from early cultural practices and combining them with new practices. The best part about this book

is that it is so very accessible as are the Koryak who play with their culture.

## **Hushed Voices**

Unacknowledged Atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*Edited by Heribert Adam*

*Berkshire Academic Press*

*2011 Berkshire Academic Press Ltd*

*216 pages*

*[www.berkshireacademicpress.co.uk](http://www.berkshireacademicpress.co.uk)*

The harsh reality of the twentieth century is that it was bloody, horrific and terrorizing for millions of people. Indigenous peoples and metropolitan peoples have been the targets of an unrelenting genocidal violence that matches the better known holocaust experienced by Jewish peoples in Russia, Central Europe and in Europe as a whole. Benefiting from the research and careful scholarship of fifteen authors, Heribert Adam has edited a frightening, thoughtful and well-documented collection of state sponsored terror and genocide in the twentieth century.

Adam's authors tell their grim stories about the Biafrans of eastern Nigeria who sought their independence from an artificially created state to which they never consented. Patricia Kelly author's the chapter on the war for Biafra's independence noting that Igbos in the northeastern part of Nigeria became the first targets of attacks by members of other northern tribes in 1966 resulting in 5000 to 50,000 Igbo deaths. By 1968 the World Council of Churches estimated Igbo's

were being killed at a rate of 200 to 6,000 people a day by forces from the federal government. The battle for a separate political identity continues 45 years after the original war began with government forces continuing to kill Igbo. No high tribunal has come to the aid of the Igbo, though by all accounts genocide in the purest definition of the term has been systematically perpetrated against the Igbo by succeeding Nigerian governments to the present day.

In the summer of 1936 Francisco Franco's government killed more than 30,000 people characterized as communists and opponents of various kinds in Madrid and Catalonia and by 1939 more than one half million people were done away with. Facing an uncertain future crowds of people intent on preserving the empire and monarch, church and military that had been Spain turned on what they considered to be "liberals" supported by the middle class and trade unions. With the power of Franco's state behind them tens of thousands of people thought to be travelers with socialists and communists became easy targets. General Francisco Franco's coup of July 17, 1936 began the terror when Franco broadcast over the radio, "Spaniards! All those of you who feel a holy love of Spain; all of those in the ranks of the Army and the Navy who have made an act of profession in the service of the Motherland; those who have sworn to defend her against her enemies, until death, the Nation calls you in her defense."

As Franco used the state and its power to terrorize and violently kill groups because of their identity others would do the same. Robert Mugabe terrorized and killed with impunity thousands of Ndebele two years after he overthrew the South Rhodesian government. The stories presented like

dispatches from different times and different places over the more than 100 years since the beginning of the twentieth century report repeated horrors committed against peoples. The four-year Mau Mau rebellion resulting in an estimated 100,000 in Kenya's Kikuyu population after the British government sought to confiscate Kikuyu lands. The bombing of Germany's city of Dresden near the end of World War II had the Americans and British committing an enormous genocide with 35,000 to 50,000 people killed in a single night. Seventy of Germany's cities were leveled in this time and little or nothing has been said about the hundreds of thousands of civilians killed.

The editor and the authors seek to bind the wounds of senseless murder committed by state governments in the twentieth century by promoting reconciliation and truth commission. These are difficult ideas to embrace when the chambers of the international courts conducting trials of genocide is much preferred. Governments that were the "victors" are left to continue even as millions of people have been killed due to their opposition, or difference. Turkey continues to deny that it participated in genocide against Armenians. Britain and the United States have not taken responsibility for the consequences of creating the Israeli state yet, as Milan Kundera asks in *Israel Stillborn Nation*, "How can one condone the expulsion of one people from their homeland to make room for another?" The people of Palestine "suffered massacres, rapes and wholesale destruction of hundreds of villages" preceding the mass exodus that would become known as *al-Nakba*—the catastrophe.

While Adam and his colleagues could write fifteen books on what the book title calls

“Unacknowledged Atrocities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”  
there are many more that would fill even more  
books.

*Hushed Voices* contains the words of ghosts calling  
on us all to stop just talking, but let us now settle  
how the murders of millions more will be avoided.  
There are measures such as stopping the gun  
running, imposing sanctions early on state tyrants  
and systematically placing those charged with  
genocide before the world and punished for their  
crimes. The books by Adam and his colleagues  
angers and disgusts and horrifies and moves one to  
action. It must be read.