The week I arrived in Russia in August 2016, I was invited to visit a friend’s dacha (commonly translated as “country home”). Looking forward to a relaxing weekend in the countryside, I hardly expected to spend the next few days planning a fence, foraging for mushrooms, getting steamed alive in a bania, and falling asleep next to a tray of drying beans in a tiny, crooked, pink-wallpapered house that, according to its owners, was one of the few buildings in Novgorod Oblast to survive the German occupation. “This is your introduction to russkii fol'klor,” chuckled one of my hosts as his wife offered me plum wine (“We made it ourselves!”) and babushka showed me around the garden plot, picking fruits at every stop until I had a massive handful of white strawberries and glistening plums. Clearly, there is more to the dacha than its translation implies.

**Historical Meanings**

Over the centuries, “dacha” has encompassed a wide variety of meanings and manifestations in Russia. Dachas can be traced back to the era of Peter the Great; the eighteenth-century tsar insisted his noblemen build summer homes along the Peterhof Road just outside of St. Petersburg.¹ Orlando Figes pinpoints the dacha’s emergence as a “national institution” and a distinctly “Russian” space in the early nineteenth century, when officers returning from the Napoleonic Wars sought an expression of Russianness away from Westernized high society.² By the end of the century, dachas were no longer solely for the elite, as new railways made it possible for common people to escape increasingly crowded, unhygienic cities; the new urban

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¹ See Lovell, 9.
² Figes, 105–6.
middle class took to the countryside each summer, building dacha settlements and establishing a new leisure culture along with them. Although occasionally looked down upon as too “middle class” (i.e., unrefined), the dacha acquired further legitimacy when late-nineteenth-century intelligentsia identified it as a symbol of authentic Russianness and its closeness with the natural world. Despite its associations with “bourgeois” leisure and material comfort, the dacha survived the 1917 Revolution. Largely ignored in the 1920s, the dacha experienced a resurgence in the 30s as Communist Party elites abandoned early Bolshevik utopian planning projects and anti-materialistic ideals. The dacha lifestyle was reclassified as a “symbol of material progress” and became associated with “civilized” values, such as enjoying the rural “good life” while doing “purposeful work” (i.e., gardening). In 1930, the Great Soviet Encyclopedia asserted that the dacha was a “purely Russian phenomenon.”

While contemporary conceptions of dacha life certainly have been shaped by pre-1945 practices, the post-war period has most strongly influenced recent manifestations of the dacha. Two main developments distinguish post-war dacha life from pre-war: the convergence of dachas and garden allotments in definition and practice, and a staggering increase in the sheer number of dachniki (dacha dwellers). During the war and ensuing 1946–47 famine, the Soviet government employed what would become one of its signature strategies in times of food crisis: the creation and encouragement of allotment gardens with the hope that urban dwellers would feed themselves. Throughout the following decades, the meanings of the “dacha-plot dacha” (built under the supervision of a trade union or other organization) and the garden allotment

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3 See Lovell, 59.
4 Ibid., 94.
5 See ibid., 136, 138.
6 Ibid., 161, 149.
7 Ibid., 139.
8 See Ibid., 164–65.
(built by a garden co-operative) converged, as dacha owners became increasingly likely to “work the soil with their own hands” and allotment cultivators began to “refashion their plots in the manner of dachniki, to use or at least envision them as dwelling places.”\(^9\) By the mid to late twentieth century, the dacha was a place of food cultivation as well as a country dwelling.

The late and post-Soviet dacha boom was exacerbated in part by Gorbachev’s reforms in the mid-1980s.\(^10\) Hoping to boost food production in the midst of another crisis, the Soviet government relaxed building restrictions on garden plots and “pledged support to the garden-plot movement.”\(^11\) In 1987 more than 4.7 million Russians kept “second homes” on garden plots, and by the early 1990s 60 percent of city dwellers owned dacha plots where they grew their own produce.\(^12\) Through years of economic hardship, dacha numbers continued to increase: 15.1 million citizens of the Russian Federation owned a dacha plot by 1997.\(^13\) In 1999 the Russian federal government established Gardener’s Day (Den’ sadovoda) as a public holiday:\(^14\) the “ultimate recognition of the centrality of the garden-plot dacha to the nation’s experience,” according to Stephen Lovell.\(^15\)

**Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

As the historical moment when millions of Russians acquired and maintained their own dachas, the late and post-Soviet period is crucial to the study of dacha life’s evolution. To determine the cultural significance of the late and post-Soviet dacha, I will employ two kinds of

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\(^9\) Ibid., 211, 168.
\(^10\) I define the late and post-Soviet period as c. 1980 to the early 2000s.
\(^11\) Lovell, 213.
\(^12\) Ibid., 214–15.
\(^13\) See ibid., 216.
\(^14\) In this context, “gardener” refers to someone who cultivates food at a dacha.
\(^15\) Lovell, 216.
sources: oral history (especially Svetlana Alexievich’s Secondhand Time) and ethnographic data (i.e., interviews) taken from a variety of anthropological and sociological writings.

My research is influenced by the broader historiographical idea that “cultural history achieves most coherence and makes most sense when it is viewed as a kind of retrospective ethnography.”¹⁶ The ethnographies I use serve as both primary and secondary sources; interview quotes comprise the bulk of my primary source data, and interpretations and arguments by the ethnographers themselves constitute valuable secondary sources. This distinction is not always clear, however, since the presentation of interview data is undoubtedly filtered through the arguments of the ethnographer.

The ethnographic data comprising the bulk of my sources dates primarily from the 1990s and early 2000s and is invaluable for the understanding of post-Soviet dacha life. Useful ethnographic data on late-Soviet dacha life is severely lacking (mostly likely due to the Soviet state’s strong ideological influence on Soviet researchers and unfavorable stance towards foreign researchers). Secondhand Time, however, serves to illuminate aspects of dacha life in the 1980s, and anthropologist Nancy Ries’s book Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika includes some ethnographic data from the late 1980s. Due to the availability of sources, I will focus primarily on the post-Soviet dacha experience but will relate these practices and conversations about them to larger, historically-situated discourses.

Theoretically, the late and post-Soviet dacha can be understood via the discursive relationships between space, practice, and identity. I argue that, through the practices of

cultivating and building, *dachniki* construct the space of the dacha.\(^{17}\) The constructed socio-symbolic space of the dacha is, in turn, experienced physically, socially, and symbolically, influencing how people behave at the dacha and talk about it. How *dachniki* “do dacha,” as I call it, shapes and solidifies their identities as Russians and as gendered, moralized beings. These identities then influence how *dachniki* “do dacha” and how they physically and symbolically construct the dacha’s space to be full of cultural meaning and moral value. During the late and post-Soviet period, the meaning of “dacha” was increasingly tied to the practice of food cultivation and what it means to work the land, thus becoming situated among long-standing discourses on work, suffering, morality, self-sufficiency, and national identity. I argue that through the practice of “doing dacha,” the late and post-Soviet dacha became a space of real and symbolic security, solidifying the *dachnik*’s identity as moral, self-sufficient, and quintessentially Russian.

**Material Security: Food Security**

During the food shortages of the late-Soviet period, a dacha’s garden plot unquestionably served as an invaluable source of supplemental food and nutrition.\(^{18}\) One man interviewed by Ries recalled the shortages of the Gorbachev years: “The only things on sale at the store were three-liter jars of birch juice and sauerkraut.”\(^{19}\) Most dacha families invested substantial amounts of time into growing their own fruits and vegetables, foraging for other foods such as berries and mushrooms, and preserving the spoils of their labor (usually by canning, salting, pickling, drying, or curing).\(^{20}\) These practices and the view of dacha life as a “survival strategy” increased in

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\(^{17}\) For more on “practice” as a theoretical tool in cultural history, see Burke, 57–60, 77. For more on “practice” as a theory and critical lens, see de Certeau.

\(^{18}\) See Caldwell, 80.

\(^{19}\) Alexievich, 268.

\(^{20}\) See Ries, *Russian Talk*, 133. For more on mushroom gathering, see Ivanov.
significance during the supply crises and high inflation of the 1990s.  

One woman recalled her experience in the 90s: “Our little girl would say she was hungry, but there was nothing to eat in the house. […] We were happy if we managed to get our hands on a kilo of potatoes. At the market, they started selling press cakes [discarded solids of something pressed for its liquid], like in wartime.”

Between 1990 and 2000, Russia experienced “a profound, even historically unprecedented peacetime decline in the standards of living of the population,” as the average value of cash income decreased by 50 percent and the 1998 financial crisis destroyed any economic improvements made earlier in the decade. Since 2000, growth in GDP has averaged 6.7 percent per year, but even in 2006 about half of Russians “lived on the ruble equivalent of $10 or less in wage income per day.” While income and housing and utility costs were low throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, market prices for food were comparable to those in the United States and countries of the European Union. Dependence on homegrown produce consequently rose through the 1990s and has remained high ever since. In 2001, homegrown produce comprised 54 percent of Russia’s total value of agricultural production. Vladimir, a sixty-two-year-old former engineer, told sociologist Jane Zavisca in 2002 that after being laid off in 1999 he retired to his dacha, where he grows food with his wife: “Living only on our pensions, I can’t allow myself to buy delicacies like ham. So far we’re not suffering with respect to food

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21 See Lovell, 206.
22 Alexievich, 382.
23 Ries, “Potato Ontology,” 188.
24 Ibid.
25 See ibid.
26 See ibid., 189.
27 See ibid.
because we grow produce ourselves. I also hunt and fish. That helps a lot.”

The food security a dacha can provide, however, does not fully explain why so many Russians “do dacha.”

Evidence for Symbolic Meaning

“Urban household agriculture” (i.e., food cultivation at the dacha) is actually a drain on the resources of many families and does not contribute significantly to diet or income. Poor families are, in fact, the least likely to grow their own food at a dacha, “indicating that opportunity is more powerful than need in motivating self-sufficiency in basic foodstuffs.” As a survival strategy, the dacha thus does not make much “economic sense” for most Russians in the twenty-first century. But even as economic conditions have improved steadily since 2000, the amount of potatoes, for example, grown at dachas has remained at approximately 30 million tons per year (more potatoes than farms of the United States and the United Kingdom combined produce). “Regardless of whether people are literally surviving on their plots,” many Russians take great pride in their dachas and garden plots and “insist that their dachas are necessary, productive, and proper.” The “sense” of the dacha and dacha gardening lies in its complex symbolic meaning and relationship to identity.

Security in Control: The Self-Sufficient Dachnik

In addition to the topic of food security, the discourse of dachniki in the 1990s and early 2000s included themes of autonomy and self-sufficiency. The 1997 and 1998 residents of the Dmitrov dacha community, for example, spoke of a “sense of control and mastery in determining

28 Zavisca, 786–87.
29 Ries, “Potato Ontology,” 190.
30 Clarke, 171.
31 Ibid., 170.
33 Zavisca, 789.
the course of a garden or the shape of a house.”

Zavisca notes that when guests visit the dacha, the owners “proudly announce that the produce is [theirs] (svoi).”

Anton, a retired factory worker, explained why he gardens at the dacha: “I like digging. And what we grow is mine. […] The results are ours.”

The husband of a retired clerk does not share the same passion for dacha gardening and building but admitted, “The ours argument! There’s no response. That’s how she [my wife] forces me to while away every weekend at this place.”

Although he does not find satisfaction in dacha practices, he reaffirms the notion that the dacha is a place of one’s own.

The dacha is indeed considered by many an “autonomous realm,” where the food and land are healthier and where people can survive and thrive regardless of societal or political insecurity.

According to Vladimir, one of Zavisca’s interviewees, “Our potatoes are better […] If I grow my own food, I know it’s ecologically pure, without pesticides. I can calmly pick cucumbers, tomatoes, and potatoes, rinse them, and eat them freely.”

Another, Mikhail, agreed that the potatoes he grows are delicious but added that he does not grow food just because it is “healthier”: “[Gardening at the dacha upholds] a belief that we’re going to supply ourselves with food. So that if life gets worse, at least we have potatoes.”

A dachnik named Polina echoed this pessimistic sentiment: “At least I have all this. When prices go up and my money runs out, I can always open a can of preserves or boil some of my potatoes; I won’t starve.”

With the supply crises of the late twentieth century lingering in recent memory, the dachniki of the early twenty-first century continue to devote vast amounts of time and energy to

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34 Galtz, 188.
35 Zavisca, 800.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 801.
38 Ibid., 803.
39 Ibid., 786–87.
40 Ibid., 800.
41 Ibid., 803.
food cultivation and preservation, rituals engrained in cultural practice and believed to be absolutely necessary. Visiting her friend Tanya’s dacha in 2001, Nancy Ries noticed that she had filled her garage with “shelves of stewed tomatoes and peppers, pickled cucumbers and salted cabbage—a meticulously ordered shrine to the products of her labor, far more than her small family could use in the course of a year.”\textsuperscript{42} Despite the fact that Tanya, who also owns two apartments in Moscow, can afford to buy (and has bought) plenty of food from the store, she still feels the need to perform this labor and buys sacks of potatoes to “get through the winter.”\textsuperscript{43} Another dachnik and Moscow resident elaborated on the meaning of this practice: “You can trust that if everything really falls apart, you have the skills and habits to survive. And, you can look at your potatoes in the apartment hallway in dark November, and see your food for the winter. You can see your own ability to labor like a horse, right there before your eyes.”\textsuperscript{44} While the practices of cultivating and preserving food construct the dacha as an autonomous place of self-sufficiency, the act of displaying the fruits of one’s labor extends the sense of security provided by the dacha back to the city home.

**Creating Social Space and Security in Personal Relationships**

The cultivation of a dacha plot transforms a “geographical space into social place,” according to Naomi Galtz.\textsuperscript{45} Aside from building homes and cultivating gardens, late and post-Soviet dachniki often spent time nurturing relationships and socializing with their neighbors.\textsuperscript{46} The constructed space of the dacha often reflects and encourages these practices. After years spent clearing the land, building a dacha, and planting gardens in the 1980s, in the late 90s Raisa

\textsuperscript{42} Ries, “Potato Ontology,” 187.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 187.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 200.
\textsuperscript{45} Galtz, 182.
\textsuperscript{46} See Lovell, 228.
Alexeevna also added a recreation space with deckchairs, a sand floor, and a pit for cooking shashlyk.\(^{47}\) Even without designated recreation spaces, dachas have served and continue to serve as incubators of social networks. As one dachnik, Anna, described it:

> At the dacha, everything is different. […] The dacha would be more profitable if we didn’t bring along so much sausage, cheese, and vodka. Because you can’t show up empty-handed; the neighbors will drop by, and everybody brings something. Like a party. […] We wouldn’t let ourselves do that at home [in the city].\(^{48}\)

More so than the urban apartment, the dacha is a place of gift-giving and extended socializing, and the value of social exchange cannot be monetized.

Although the dacha is a uniquely social place, the sense of community fostered there often extends beyond its physical boundaries. On train rides back to the city, dachniki share advice on seedlings and other agricultural matters, strengthening “a belief in the garden plot as the main experience that post-Soviet citizens hold in common.”\(^{49}\) Dacha-grown food also contributes to the maintenance and growth of social networks. Grown by friends and relatives and harvested in groups, fruits and vegetables are given as gifts and are “powerful symbols of intimacy and trust.”\(^{50}\) These foods and the practices associated with them embody “the spirit of sociality that was associated with Russian economic activities and social life during the socialist period.”\(^{51}\) When “market forces” and commodity exchange were prioritized over “continuous cycles of gift exchange that characterized state socialist economies” in the 1990s, many people feared their interpersonal relationships would suffer.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{47}\) See Galtz, 186.

\(^{48}\) Zavisca, 801.

\(^{49}\) Lovell, 229.

\(^{50}\) Caldwell, 94.

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 87.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.
cultivation and subsequent gift exchange served to combat the perceived economic immorality of the transition to neoliberal capitalism.\textsuperscript{53}

**The Moral and Existential Dachnik**

The official “active leisure” (aktivnyi otdykh) discourse of the late-Soviet period contributed to the establishment of the dacha and the physical labor performed there as sources of morality, self-worth, and contentment. In contrast to “lounging” (rasslabukha), “active leisure” connotes pleasurable work or restful productivity (i.e., gardening at the dacha).\textsuperscript{54} Attempting to discourage bourgeois, individualistic, “consumerist meanings of [the] dacha,” the late-Soviet state promoted “active leisure” through advice columns, satirical pieces, and the popular magazine *Priusadebnoe khoziaistvo* (Personal agriculture).\textsuperscript{55} In the 1990s Physical labor remained the “moral centerpiece” of dacha-devoted media, including numerous print publications and the television program *600 Square Meters*.\textsuperscript{56} Lovell notes that, although the term “active leisure” came from the Soviet sociology of leisure, due to its prevalence in dacha discourse the term “seems to have put down roots in the collective mentality” and continues to influence post-Soviet dacha practices and mentalities.\textsuperscript{57} In 2001, dachnik Tatyana told Zavisca, “I really enjoy digging in the earth. […] I can forget my cares through this simple work,” while Raisa described dacha work as beneficial to physical and mental health.\textsuperscript{58} Even those who do not engage in much physical labor at the dacha still assign it moral qualities. Galina admitted, “My

\textsuperscript{53} For more on the relationship between dachas, economic systems, social status, and morality, see Zavisca. She argues that dachas serve as “discursive arena for debating the rationality and morality of transition to a market economy” and that “debates about the rationality of dachas are simultaneously debates over the meaning and morality of capitalism.” 786, 809.

\textsuperscript{54} Lovell, 228.

\textsuperscript{55} Zavisca, 795.

\textsuperscript{56} Lovell, 227.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 228.

\textsuperscript{58} Zavisca, 798, 806.
husband and I are lazy; we don’t plant much.”59 while Sergei, who does not cultivate a dacha plot, confessed, “My neighbors think poorly of me. They see that we don’t work here, so they think we don’t work at all.”60 Laboring (or not laboring) at the dacha therefore defines the dachnik’s moral self-worth within the larger discourses of “active leisure” and societal ideals of productivity.

Working at the dacha also holds existential, even spiritual meaning. Septuagenarian Valentina, for example, explained to anthropologist Melissa Caldwell that her dacha garden was so important because it was “for the soul.”61 The time consuming, physically exhausting toil required to sustain a dacha garden (often without modern agricultural tools) may appear to be at odds with accounts of self-fulfillment, pleasure, and good health. As Caldwell points out, however, the “comingling of pleasure and pain is a recurring theme in Russian culture.”62 In the same conversation, Valentina insisted that “there is no relaxation at the dacha” before adding, “It makes no difference, you are relaxing with your soul and body.”63 “Soulfulness,” then, comprises both suffering and pleasure and is “fully embodied” by the gardening dachnik.64 Caldwell also observed dachniki lamenting the hassle of getting to the dacha and working there, often trying to outdo one another’s tales of woe.65 Suffering, then, is both something “to be borne proudly” and something that can bring “a sense of satisfaction and even personal pleasure.”66

59 Ibid., 799.
60 Ibid., 787–88.
61 Caldwell, 51.
62 Ibid. Accounts of bania (steam bath), another component of some dachas, also often feature this comingling of pain and pleasure. See Allen.
63 Caldwell, 52.
64 Ibid.
65 See ibid.
66 Ibid.
Encompassing the suffering and pleasure of physical labor, dacha gardening develops and demonstrates the dachnik’s moral and existential worth.

**Construction and Reproduction of Russian Identity**

The physical toil, self-sufficiency, and focus on interpersonal relationships found and practiced at the dacha all contribute to the construction of Russian identity. The positive self-image the dachnik acquires from physical labor and the “purposeful and productive cultivation” of a garden contains undertones of national pride and identification.\(^{67}\) As opposed to larger Western vacation homes with more amenities, the dacha is considered “quintessentially Russian,” since it is “authentically rural” and “representative of Russians’ inborn bond with the soil and appetite for hard physical work.”\(^{68}\) This is a national identity succinctly expressed by the phrase “We may be poor, but….\(^{69}\) Russianness, then, suggests an abundance of morality and spirituality in the absence of material wealth. Like Valentina’s account of soulful toil, this “sacralization of suffering” has long been central to “narod ideologies.”\(^{70}\) Loosely translated as “people, nation, or folk,” narod often expresses the meaning of true Russianness without specificity and is intermingled with the equally complex meanings of rodina (motherland) and dusha (soul or soulfulness). One of Nancy Ries’s subjects explained:

> Rodina is habitat, nature, soil—but it’s a very fermenting thing. Upon or within it history takes place; legends, values are born. Narod grows out of [this]. […] Dusha is some kind of inborn ability to feel what is right and what is wrong and to repent somehow. Also, dusha is some ability to feel very deeply. […] The Russian people think they have soul and they doubt that anyone else has. Russians have dusha because they are moral. Being moral—it is not just to be kind, generous, it is basically some kind of connection between individual and community and nature. […] [You feel] your own oneness with nature, and this whole feeling of being at one with the landscape means that you are part of the

\(^{67}\) Lovell, 228.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) Ries, *Russian Talk*, 160.
landscape, and that the landscape expresses the same kinds of feelings that you experience yourself.\footnote{Ibid., 29–30.}

As the “ability to feel very deeply,” dusha contains the mixture of pleasure and suffering Valentina described when she discussed working at her dacha.\footnote{See Caldwell, 52.} And, as an exclusively Russian moral force that connects Russians to nature and the land, dusha is linked to a “particularly Russian conception of geographic nationalism.”\footnote{Ibid. For more on nationalism in general and the construction of nations, see Anderson, and Gellner.} If Russianness is thought to be “a quality rooted in the physical landscape,” then the dacha is quintessentially Russian because the practice of working the land connects dachniki to Russian soil and, therefore, to Russian identity.\footnote{Caldwell, 88.} Both fifty-year-old graphic designer Sergei and retired factory worker Anton explained to Zavisca that they and others labor at the dacha because of “the pull of the land.”\footnote{Zavisca, 787–88, 800.} The dacha may be an autonomous, self-sufficient realm, but working the soil connects the dachnik with his or her fellow Russians and their shared Russianness.

Eating dacha-grown food also provides dachniki with a sense of national identity. They often contend that Russian soil contains “unique nutrients” that give produce its delicious taste, healthiness, and distinct Russianness.\footnote{Ibid., 89.} Even when they know the soil in a particular place is polluted, many Russians insist that food from the ground does not need to be washed.\footnote{See ibid., 88.} One university student told Caldwell, “Russian taste buds prefer foods grown in Russian soil.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Interviewee Vera agreed: “Our food tastes better, and foreign foods are less tasty [...] Everything is natural, yes. And everything is tasty.”

In Caldwell’s words, the idea that Russianness derives from the land is supported by “actual and imagined connections to a rural national heritage.” Working the land at the dacha connects many to this idealized peasant past. Dachniki have described the practice of food cultivation as “a national and familial habit,” a “way of life,” and even “a genetic memory.”

Scholar Caroline Humphrey observes that “at some deep level of identity many people will say that they are peasants, or that ‘ancestrally’ they are peasants, even if now they are not (living as) peasants at all.” Dachnik Sergei explained to Zavisca why so many people grow food at the dacha: “Most people in this city come from peasant stock. In their genes, they are drawn to the land; they need to work it.” Tatyana agreed, explaining that she “must truly be a peasant by nature” because she loves “digging in the earth.” Self-sufficiency at the dacha is also crucial to this peasant ideal and the construction of narod. When Ries visited a dacha around 1990, the owner, a computer scientist by profession, gave her a tour, drawing her attention to homemade furniture, toys, tools, a fence, and a well. By doing this, the dachnik symbolically associated himself with “traditional rural ideals and expression of the ability to make a whole world from scratch.” The practices of cultivating and preserving food also contribute to a sense of “peasant self-sufficiency” and connect dachniki with an imagined peasant past. Post-Soviet Russians

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79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 88.
82 Humphrey, 138.
84 Ibid., 798.
85 See Ries, Russian Talk, 133.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
believe that those who work at the dacha embody the same qualities of the *narod* as their idealized ancestral peasants. One woman explained to Ries, “Up there in their fancy parliament, they can do whatever they want. The *narod* will get by down here, as always.”88 Another *dachnik* interviewed in 2001 agreed with this sentiment: “Look at wild Russia, see the wild natives. See those potatoes? […] This is how we like to live! […] This is how we live, and power leaves us alone.”89 Russianness, as an ahistorical, moral quality tied to the land, is defined by the people who work it—the *narod*—not by the state. By gardening and laboring at the dacha, *dachniki* embody this spirit.

**Conclusion**

The practices associated with dacha life construct the late and post-Soviet dacha as a space of real and symbolic security. Defined by practices and constructed space, the late and post-Soviet dacha is also historically situated within and shaped by larger discourses of active leisure, morality, self-sufficiency, suffering, *narod*, and national identity. Through food cultivation and preservation, homebuilding, and socializing, the dacha becomes a uniquely social, autonomous, and Russian realm, and through “doing dacha” the *dachnik* constructs and reaffirms his or her identity as moral, self-sufficient, and quintessentially Russian. Far from the regime-centered accounts of late and post-Soviet history and its “great men,” a cultural-historical analysis of the dacha and dacha life provides invaluable insight into the lives, experiences, and identities of ordinary people, including my dacha hosts in Novgorod Oblast.

88 Ibid., 135.
89 Zavisca, 803.
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