

THE NATIVE SETTLER: CONTESTING LOCAL IDENTITIES ON RUSSIA'S RESOURCE FRONTIER¹

Niobe Thompson

*Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge,
Lensfield Road, Cambridge, CB2 1ER, United Kingdom*

Abstract: An anthropologist with unique knowledge of the current transformation of Chukotka, under its recently elected “oligarch” governor Roman Abramovich, presents an ethnographic analysis of local settler (indigenous) responses to the modernization program under way in this region. Drawing from 14 months of fieldwork over the first two years of Abramovich’s tenure, the author describes the objectives and methods of his reforms, emerging patterns of settlement and economic activity resulting from Abramovich’s project, and the manner in which local settlers understand these changes and their own role in the “new Chukotka.” As settlers express localist discourses of belonging as a form of resistance to outsider-led change, they are moving into the rhetorical space indigenous peoples in Chukotka have traditionally inhabited. The author consequently explores the concepts of “migrancy” and “indigeneity” and the possibility of non-native settlers legitimating claims of nativeness.

INTRODUCTION

In social investigations of the post-Soviet Russian North, settlers haunt the ethnographic stage from the wings.² Social scientists bypass the northern industrial town on the way to the native village, producing over the past decade a remarkable profusion of research on the indigenous experience. The assumed transience of settler figures, in contrast to the rootedness of native people, raises the question of their long-term importance to life in northern communities. The terms in currency—*priyezhiy* or “incomer” for settlers and *mestnyy* or “local” for natives—reproduce the idea that there are two kinds of people in the North, the recently arrived, and by implication the soon to leave, and the eternal native, who will always remain. Aware of the diverse and diasporic origins of the settler population, we also assume that, whereas native settlements are the site of fairly bounded cultures, with detectable senses of collectivity and community, for settlers, community and close cultural affinity are part of a mythic village past on the Russian “mainland” (*materik*).

¹This research was funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation and the Association of Commonwealth Universities, as part of a program of doctoral research at the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge.

²Borrowing a convention from the North American context, I use the term “settler” to denote a Rus-sophone non-indigenous resident of the North. English-language accounts set in the Russian North have avoided this word, preferring to translate the emic term *priyezhiy* literally as “newcomer” or “incomer”. Since the premise of this article is to question the outsider status of the *priyezhiy* population, I have chosen to use a term not explicitly associated with transience.

Native cultural identity emerges in many ethnographic accounts from a close, practical relationship not just with others in the settlement, but with the land itself. Accounts of northern native peoples in Canada, Greenland, and Russia have predominantly fixed landscape, and in particular land-use activities such as hunting and traveling, as a primary constituent of personal and collective identity in a manner consistent with writing on belonging and landscape in other regions (Brody, 1981, 2000; Nuttall, 1991; Vitebsky, 1992). Practical interaction with local environments decisively constitutes the concepts of “northern belonging” and “indigenous homeland,” which find their articulation in descriptions of “ecological senses of belonging” based on practices of “dwelling on the land” or “skills of dwelling” (Ingold, 2000; Anderson, 2000). When native peoples’ interests are threatened, they often invoke political claims of “indigeneity,” which derive their power from traditions of local interaction with a specific territory, practices of harvesting local resources, and the threat of cultural failure if that bond is severed.

Nothing therefore arouses our scepticism of northern settlers as a viable object of study as forcefully as their lack of connection to the land. The *priyezhiy* figure is “de-territorialized,” a product of “conditions of displacement that seem increasingly prevalent in the world” (Geertz, in Basso and Feld, 1996). Settlers in the North have emerged from the deracinating Soviet experiences of urbanization, dislocation, persecution, and hardship, all of which progressively eroded the old connections to a *place* of community. The Russian—or Ukrainian, or Armenian—village, with its extended family network, belongs to an unrecoverable past. Settlers carried with them to the North a suitcase version of imagined homeland, their *rodina*, which, it is assumed, precluded the possibility of adopting the real northern landscapes surrounding them. In most accounts, the *rodina* is a birthplace, not a living place. Anthropologist Anna Kertulla, who lived in a settlement on the Bering Strait in the late 1980s, remarked that settlers were “a group devoid of cultural and spiritual connection to the village and its surrounding environment. They were the perpetual outsiders” (Kertulla, 2000).

Although Chukotka was the most remote region of the Soviet Union, with the poorest infrastructure, it was a zone of relative abundance, home to cosmopolitan residents, able to fly to any part of the country on less than a week’s wage. Urban immigrant settlers enjoyed a sense of colonial agency, advancing a project of cultural and technological mastery (*osvoeniye*). But the conditions that created the Soviet settler population and provided a sense of shared community were dramatically cancelled after 1991. Soviet state collapse devastated the North, and props of the settler identity—abundance, cosmopolitanism and colonial agency—were ripped away as the idea and the material promise of communism failed at once. Although settlers abandoned the North in large numbers, and Chukotka in particular, there remained a large indigenous population, effectively trapped by distance and poverty in northern communities. Central Russia had cast the North adrift, leaving settlers and natives alike to adopt strategies of survival that hinged on *local* resources.

In December 2000, Russia’s second richest “oligarch,” Roman Abramovich, became Chukotka’s governor, initiating an administrative revolution and an ambitious program of modernization. The movement of a young, rich businessman from Moscow into high political office on the Russian periphery follows a remarkable pattern of landslide victories for resource magnates, also witnessed since 2000 in Taimyr and Evenkia. In all three cases, the character of reforms has, “merged legislative with

executive power and blurred the face of public administration with that of corporate governance” (Anderson, 2002, p. 106). Since 2001, Abramovich has spent over \$200 million a year to pay wages and arrears, build new infrastructure, and fund a raft of social initiatives. Chukotka is wholly reliant on state subsidies and, despite the small population, is a serious drain on the federal treasury. Abramovich’s program of economic modernization therefore is oriented toward achieving cost savings, by closing a series of “unpromising settlements” and resettling thousands of settler residents to central regions of Russia, or, in the candid words of one administration official, ridding Chukotka of its “human ballast.”³

To the extent that Abramovich’s modernization affects natives in Chukotka, his style seems to confirm a broader tendency of benevolent “oligarchic liberalism,” detected in Taymyr and other areas of the Russian North (Anderson, 2002; Campbell, 2004, this issue). Because his administration recognizes natives as the territory’s original peoples, inhabiting their traditional homeland, community closures and resettlement are aimed exclusively toward the settler population. Large investments are flowing into the traditional native economy, funding the resurrection of neo-Soviet state farms⁴ and the rebuilding of most or all of every native settlement in the region. Subsidies for the native economy are effectively becoming a much larger cost to the state, while the majority settler population (over 75 percent) is bearing the brunt of cost-saving measures. No settler is any longer “trapped” in Chukotka—the administration, uniquely for the Russian North, has created a high-capacity conveyor belt to shift large numbers out of the region (for details, see Thompson, 2002, 2004).

Quite unexpectedly, the settler population in Chukotka is proving less amenable to restructuring than the administration’s economic planners had anticipated. Contrary to predictions of massive “delayed demand” for out-migration (Heleniak, 1999; Kontorovich, 2000), Abramovich’s resettlement program was seriously undersubscribed in the first two years of operation. My ethnographic research revealed widespread hostility to the modernization program among established settlers in Chukotka’s largest community, Anadyr’, and a series of smaller Soviet-era industrial (settler) towns (Fig. 1). Many expressed a tenacious attachment to their local communities and landscapes, and in fact passionately contested the idea that “local” or *mestnyy* should be a term reserved for natives alone. “Homeland” or *rodina* was rarely a long-lost birthplace in central Russia; like natives, many settlers professed their attachment to Chukotka using exactly this term.

This article addresses the disagreement between conventional assumptions of settler transience, shared by social scientists and Moscow modernizers alike, and the evidence of local belonging in Russia’s most far-flung northern outpost. The effect of the modernizing challenge is a galvanization of local identity in the remaining settler population. Settlers, who formerly embodied the innovative technologies and cultural forms of the center, are now repositioned as the objects of a renewed colonial project,

³Current levels of state subsidy in the region can support a population of roughly 30,000, or half of Chukotka’s current total. Administration planners anticipate that the cost of resettling a resident to central Russia will be recouped within five years, by saving on the considerable subsidy cost of supporting him/her in the North. These calculations assume that the region itself will produce virtually no revenues from internal economic activity, which was indeed the case when Abramovich took office.

⁴Formerly *sovkhoz* (state farm), the new terminology is *unitarnoye gosudarstvennoye predpriyatiye* (consolidated state enterprise).



Fig. 1. General map depicting the relative location and major settlements of Chukotka.

this time representing distant resource and finance capital instead of the Soviet state. Settlers, who once constituted their “newcomer” (*priyезhny*) identity partly out of their transient lifestyles, are now occupying the moral position of the “local.” Indeed, faced with Abramovich’s modernizers, the idea of belonging locally and of having roots in the community is the only position available. But here settlers come into conflict with natives, for they are contesting the very meaning of local belonging and appropriating a very powerful element of native identity and distinction.

MIGRANT SETTLERS AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

In attempting to locate some sympathy for the predicament of Chukotka’s established settler population within current anthropology, two very different (and not entirely helpful) bandwagons come into view. The first I will call the “indigeneity debate,” generated by ethnographers, policy-makers and native-rights advocates, who have conflicting ideas on the *basis* for indigenous entitlements but who broadly agree that a set of special entitlements are due, if only to ensure the cultural survival of native peoples. The question central to this debate is “what makes a person indigenous to a piece of land—ethnically exclusive descent from a ‘first people’ or practical interaction arising from a tradition of rooted dwelling or land use?” The second theoretical bandwagon, to which I have already referred, focuses on the experience of global migrancy, which proponents now claim is a more universal condition than rootedness in the village. While maintaining the traditional anthropological felicity to the marginalized, powerless, and colonized, this school maintains that it is now people in movement and out of community who increasingly experience these conditions (Appadurai, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). But these two positions

are in conflict. Indigeneity hinges on primordial belonging to a place. Migrants, on the other hand, are in search of a place, and would almost always prefer something concrete on which to build their lives to a remembered but absent homeland.

“Diaspora” and “indigenous” are both identities of the marginalized, in competition for the same leftovers from the dinner table of expansive state and industrial interests. Both are politically valuable identities for mounting a defense and staking a claim, explaining why both labels are commonly appropriated by groups with widely divergent histories. William Safran attempted to provide a defining model of diaspora rather narrowly as “an expatriate minority community” displaying the features of historical dispersal, memories and myths of a homeland, and a collective identity defined by these conditions of life (Safran, 1991). In reality, many groups that might be considered diasporic fit only some of these criteria, and in his critique of Safran, James Clifford (Clifford, 1997) presents two classic diasporas, the Jewish nation and the “black Atlantic” (after Gilroy, 1992), neither of which have a historically discrete homeland nor have harbored a universal desire of return. Zionism is a relatively young movement in the Judaic world, and if there is a myth of return for Jews, it is eschatological or utopian-escapist. For blacks in the Atlantic region, the complex history of their displacement has destroyed any sense of African homeland. Yet the two groups possess a multi-located collective identity and a history of migration. They are both communities set apart from their host societies, and, historically at least, both have been disadvantaged and persecuted. Diaspora has also entered the intellectual field of post-Soviet studies, in reference to Russians marooned in the former Soviet republics. But what to make of settlers in Russia’s North, who found there a haven from the deracinating Soviet experiences of dislocation, persecution, and hardship that surely severed the link with pre-existing communities and kinship networks? The northern settler was simultaneously diasporic, carrying histories of loss, exile, and marginality, and a colonial state agent, bringing Soviet culture and technologies to the indigenous frontier in the project of *osvoeniye* (“mastery”).

Indigenous identity is likewise a term with political power in the contemporary world, which has become quite widely traveled with the aid of international intellectual debate and advocacy movements. In political terms, indigeneity is couched in the assumption of an “original people,” and a clear historical distinction between the colonized and the colonizers. Sometimes, as in the case of aboriginal Australia, this is an easy case to make. But as Andre Béteille observed in his critique “The Idea of Indigenous Peoples,” in North America, where native peoples both resisted colonization and were commonly displaced from their pre-contact homelands, the idea of indigenous claims to territory is altogether messier. Native peoples colonized and displaced each other, until they were finally fixed in their putative “homelands” by settler colonial regimes. In India also, a long history of warfare and usurpation between tribal and non-tribal populations has produced victories and defeats, territorial expansion and retraction, but any attempt to ascribe a territory to an “original people” fails as it travels back through history and myth (Béteille, 1998).

The political language of indigenous rights, which is voiced by both its advocates and the bodies of international legal and moral arbitration, nevertheless maintains the idea of first peoples. The United Nations, in a 1989 ILO convention, recognizes that “indigenous or aboriginal peoples are so-called because they were living on their lands before settlers came from elsewhere” (ILO, 1989, Art 1.b) Peoples “are

regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographic region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization.” (ILO, 1989, Art 1.)⁵ In this formulation, indigenous identity is *ethnically* defined and is passed down as an inheritance by descent. An indigenous person can, once this logic is accepted, lose neither the legal connection to his/her specific homeland nor the entitlements that arise from it.

But ethnographers of the indigenous experience have raised an eloquent critique of this political definition of indigeneity, by seeking to define how natives *belong* on the landscapes in which they live, while rejecting the notion that any people can ever be historically original inhabitants of a land. This argument both threatens the legal basis of contemporary indigenous movements and their claims, and opens up the possibility of reconciling migrant and native interests in a single geographic space.

Rejecting the “genealogical model” of indigeneity (Ingold, 2000), which posits the idea of land passed by descent through generations of natives, this ethnographically grounded interpretation of nativeness emphasizes the practical interaction natives have with the land they inhabit. This re-interpretation questions neither the colonial threat to native cultural survival, nor the entitlements that would ensure survival. While traditions of being on the land may be passed by descent, indigenous identity itself emerges from an intimate knowledge and interaction with a specific landscape.⁶ Anthropologists working in the circumpolar North have often encountered a native attachment to landscape that can only be described in these terms, where identity and community seem to organically interpenetrate human and natural features of the land equally.

Mark Nuttall, in his research on hunting practices and community in northwest Greenland, observed that individual and community experiences are written on the local landscape—the “hunting place” that locals use intensively—so that the land becomes a script of collective memory. “The locality is a memoryscape, a cultural landscape revealed through its place names, which are not merely descriptive but tell of subsistence activity and inform us of a multitude of other close human associations with the natural environment” (Nuttall, 1991, p. 39).⁷ The relationships humans have with features of their environment and other animals constitute, in many accounts, culture and landscape in a seamless whole. David Anderson, from his research with reindeer herders in the Taymyr, termed this neo-social entanglement of natives and their environment a “sentient ecology,” showing that personhood extends beyond the human realm (Anderson, 2000). Indeed, the personhood of rocks, hills, trees, and reindeer in particular native worldviews emerges quite widely, for example in accounts of the Eveny (Vitebsky, 1992), Dene (Sharp, 2001), and Cree (Brightman, 1993).

⁵This language is echoed in the language of the Indigenous Peoples Movement, which calls for rights of both entitlement and self-determination for native peoples on the basis of original inhabitation and the suffering they have endured on the losing side of colonial histories (Niezen, 2000).

⁶This is Ingold’s “relational model,” in which “cultural knowledge and bodily substance are seen to undergo continuous generation in the context of an ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings—human and non-human—that dwell therein” (Ingold, 2000, p. 133).

⁷Alexander King, writing about reindeer herders in northern Kamchatka, develops a remarkably similar idea—“culturescape”—“a physical landscape, which is enacted and expressed in terms of social relations and activities” (King, 2002, p. 65).

Returning to the problem of migrants and the de-territorialized identity, there is a definite possibility that, with land use the primary precondition of indigenous land rights, the migrant newcomer might practically and morally challenge the native on his landscape. Maintaining a clear distinction between the colonizing settler and the original inhabitant is difficult first because the colonization of a given territory is rarely a single event—the colonizers over time become the colonized. Second, with the passage of time, the dichotomy of local and newcomer, settler and indigenous, becomes blurry. Might not the children of settlers become the practical indigenous dwellers on a landscape, while the children of herders and hunters lose those skills and relationships, and thus their claim to the indigenous title? Evidently, indigeneity is a ductile identity, and for native peoples, there is always the danger of its dilution or appropriation.

Contact with colonial regimes first generated the idea of indigenous original peoples, and the concept only has meaning as a label of difference. The presence of settlers on native land necessitates terms that maintain distance and cultural integrity for colonized peoples, in particular because they are often up against brutally de-racinating and de-territorializing threats to their survival. Being on the land first is a simple but powerful claim, and in modern legal frameworks, it is a claim framed in the language that states and businesses understand. As Ingold (2000, p. 151) has observed:

We are left with the question of why people should feel the need to articulate claims to indigenous status in terms that, by their own accounts, are incompatible with their experience and understanding of the world. The answer, I believe, is that these people are compelled to operate in a modern-day political context in which they are also citizens of nation states. The genealogical model is deeply implicated in the discourse of the state: indeed it is the principal source of legitimisation for the state's sovereign entitlement to defend and administer its territory in the name of the nation.

As Ingold and other ethnographers have demonstrated, inhabitation of a landscape alone can be an expression of native belonging, employing the logic of “squatters' rights.” As I will attempt to show, for Chukotka's Soviet-era settlers, skills of dwelling on the land and claims to local, native identity are now quite plausibly part of the settler experience.

OLIGARCHS COLONIZE THE NORTH

Chukotka had reached such a perilous state by 2000 that descriptions seem to descend into hyperbole. After war-torn Chechnya, it was the most socio-economically depressed of Russia's 89 regions (*RFE News*, January 2001). Reindeer herders' wages had been unpaid for six years, the regional debt was three times the annual budget, several intermediate-sized industrial towns and settlements had been without heat, water, and electricity for years, and starvation threatened much of the rural population. Trauma and suicide were the principal causes of death (Goskomstat Rossii, 1999). Governor Nazarov and members of his administrative clique were accused of embezzling budget funds and the federal “gold credits” provided to restart the

region's gold-mining industry, while ordinary native and settlers alike survived on a combination of subsistence hunting and humanitarian aid provided by foreign donors.

In December, 2000, Roman Abramovich, a 35-year old resource "oligarch"⁸ and erstwhile "cashier" to the Yel'tsin family became governor of Chukotka in a landslide victory.⁹ The euphoria with which Chukotkans greeted him contrasts strikingly with the cynicism Russians typically direct toward the oligarchs and departs from traditions of Russian anti-Semitism. Abramovich spent an estimated \$80 million on his campaign, providing summer holidays on the Black Sea for 4000 children and chartering shiploads of food and fuel for Chukotka's settlements. It might be argued he simply bought the vote, but I detected more sophisticated justifications among voters, who tempered their ambivalence toward an outsider from the tainted world of Russian business with the hope that he alone could radically repair the crisis of administrative integrity. Ultimately they perceived Abramovich as a completely new political entity, offering a break with neo-Soviet governance in its devalued "transitional-era" forms and heralding the arrival of corporate efficiency as a model of administration. Sibneft, then Abramovich's oil company and the flagship enterprise in his corporate fleet, emerged after the 1998 ruble default as a defiantly new type of organization, modeled on Western management techniques that were felicitous to the idea of shareholder relations, far distant from the opaque world of 1990s Russian capitalism. Abramovich openly promised to import his business model to Chukotka, casting his election bid as yet another in a series of corporate takeovers and his regional administration another division of his business empire. The claim that Sibneft represented a new culture of administration, and that all previous models were merely derivative and neo-Soviet, charged Abramovich's election victory with a sense of revolution. Enraged by the brazen indifference of Nazarov's clique to the human disaster in the region, voters elected Abramovich *because* his outsider status and wealth insulated him from the influence of local patronage networks.

"A revolution sweeps clean, but a reformation points forward and backward at the same time," wrote Adam Gopnick, referring to French history, but making a point on social change just as relevant to Russia (Gopnick, 2000, p. 121). Political persecution and economic crisis generated such broadly felt anger in the Nazarov period that his administration and all those associated with it were morally discredited, leaving the edifice highly vulnerable to revolutionary change. Abramovich's election might be understood as the neo-Leninist arrival of an outsider, embodying an ideology of Western innovation, promising relief to a suffering population and offering a mystical formula for providing it (Abramovich's Swiss-piloted personal jet is the modern equivalent to Lenin's train in Finland Station). In Lenin's case, it was a mystical teleology of salvation, whereas Abramovich offered the Sibneft formula: the achievement of wealth through modern management and major capital investment. The logic of

⁸Roman Abramovich was listed by *Forbes Magazine* in its 2003 survey as Russia's second-richest citizen, with an estimated net worth of \$5.7 billion. He built his fortune as the owner of Sibneft, a major Russian oil company recently in merger talks with Yukos (*New York Times*, April 23, 2003, pp. C1, C11), and he has also held shares in some of Russia's largest aluminium, car, airline, and media firms (see profile of Abramovich in *The Economist*, July 5, 2003, p. 58).

⁹Officially, he won 92 percent of the vote, but rumors persist that, while his predecessor Alexander Nazarov manufactured election results to stay in power, Abramovich deflated his own polling numbers to create the illusion of a good democratic contest.

revolutions is of course predicated on the extinction of those implicated in the crimes of the former regime. But the broom typically sweeps wider than expected, as the purge-like terror following many revolutions clearly shows. It is in this context that many settlers in Chukotka, having voted for Abramovich to effect the removal of Nazarov's elite clique, are surprised to find themselves stigmatized as the embodiment of "old Chukotka"—targets of, rather than participants in, the Modernization.

In July 2001, six months after the regime change but still in the earliest stages of the modernization program, a young journalist recruited from central Russia to edit Chukotka's weekly newspaper wrote an article on her first impressions of Anadyr'. For publication outside the region, this piece described the city as a petrified forest, a cultural relic preserved since the Soviet period, a grey, oppressive town bearing none of the marks of capitalist dynamism increasingly familiar elsewhere in Russia. Most significantly, she described people in Anadyr', with its mostly settler population, as "frozen" (*zamorozhennyye*). Unfortunately for her, and for the entire modernizing program, this article soon turned up in Chukotka and began to circulate, along with the term itself, through local networks, emerging as one of the most enduring discourses now framing the character of local reform and resistance.¹⁰

Abramovich's Modernization is driven by imported specialists, most originating from within his company's or partners' corporate structures. As this episode illustrates, there is a schism of sympathy, as well as in values and experience, separating them from the local settler community. Recruited from Russia's biggest and wealthiest cities, Abramovich's *komanda* is intentionally comprised of people too young to have personally experienced Soviet life. The current regional administration is much like a branch office of Sibneft headquarters in Moscow. Employees shuttle between Moscow and Anadyr' on chartered jets, spending two or three weeks in the North at a time, and a large proportion of administration business is in fact conducted from a suite of offices on *Kursovoy pereulok* in central Moscow. Administration staff are employees not of the regional government, but of Sibneft.¹¹ The intention is to subordinate pre-existing power structures, particularly at the level of regional administration, to specialists embodying the values and habits of Abramovich's new-model business culture.

The modernizers scattered throughout Chukotka's administrative institutions tend to maintain a strict separation from the larger, local community. They are outsiders, and their shuttling lifestyle, in combination with a sense of coming to the North on short-term assignment, creates within their own community of colleagues the sense that Chukotka is a place for work, while their lives remain strictly on the *materik*. The administration works on Moscow time—phones go unanswered until early afternoon and business shifts into gear at 5:00 p.m., when the mother office in Moscow opens. Most imported specialists in Anadyr' live together in custom-built residences. Chauffeured Landcruisers and Volkswagen mini-buses move them along prescribed corridors between the administration, the town's principal restaurant, their prefabricated homes, and the heliport, linking Anadyr' to its airport and Moscow beyond.

¹⁰This article is not cited here, nor its author identified, for reasons of confidentiality. The information was obtained in a recorded interview with the subject.

¹¹Most have Sibneft email addresses and, for a time, their visiting cards bore the Sibneft logo rather than that of the regional administration.

Physical separation naturally generates a distance of understanding between local residents and Abramovich's *komanda*, but this alone does not explain the mutual resentment that I found to pervade conversations in both communities. The young modernizer not only embodies the lifestyle and values of the new capitalist Russia, he or she expresses a rejection bordering on hatred for the "Soviet," which in practical terms plays out as disdain for older people, for the backward Russian hinterland, and for the emerging lower classes. Outsider specialists confided to me many times their conviction that locals, especially the "Soviet generations," were frozen in time and of little use to the present. One young recruit expressed this problem in pedagogical terms:

We often find, as psychologists, that when we have children with special needs who we want to remove from special classes and integrate into mainstream learning, we just can't pull it off. Once they've spent time outside the mainstream system, they can't re-integrate—they will always be behind.¹²

Another senior figure remarked that the administration should in principle be recruiting locals wherever possible, but he had found that skills and work habits in the local workforce did not meet his standards. This was the usual justification for outside recruitment—a 22-year-old Moscow university graduate was preferable to a 40-year-old local with two decades of work experience. Administration figures described an ingrained "Soviet mindset" in locals, who combined a mistaken sense of pride in their abilities with complete ignorance of the tempo and technologies of the modern, post-Soviet workplace. In the words of another young reporter from Nizhny Novgorod:

Reporters here think they have the right to leave for home at 5 p.m., even with unfinished stories. At home in my old newspaper office we worked until late at night as a matter of course. People don't understand how to work here—they're spoiled and lazy. People really are frozen (*zamorozhennyye*).

The pride and independence of local settlers mystifies and frustrates modernizers imported into management positions in Anadyr' and other communities. Their project after all hinges on the obedience of local teachers, accountants, tax collectors, and state farm directors, and the material generosity attending the program of change should be met, these newcomers expect, with gratitude.

Local resentment in the settler community has a complex psychological basis, largely connected with the loss of status resulting from Abramovich's modernization by corporate takeover. But across kitchen tables in Chukotka's towns, complaints focus on a range of concrete indignities. Locals often feel excluded from the Chukotka taking shape today, partly because power now rests in the hands of people brought in from outside who, despite being decades younger than their local subordinates, command a great deal of authority. Abramovich's networks are insular—the administration recruits from within its own networks in Moscow and other cities, but

¹²Quotations from interviews in this article were selected from transcripts based on interviews conducted by the author between February and December 2002 and August and September 2003 in the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug, as well as interviews with former Chukotka residents resettled in parts of central Russia in January and February 2003.

not from Anadyr'. The physical separation of modernizers living in Chukotka, the conspicuous privileges of their lifestyle, and their much larger incomes create a visible class boundary between outsiders and locals. But the modernizing program is also producing administrative changes that impact on local lives directly, and there is a sense that untested 25-year-old mandarins with no understanding of northern life are experimenting on the local population in deeply damaging ways. This is nowhere more strongly felt than in school education, which is exclusively administered by a team of specialists from Syktyvkar, Abramovich's childhood city.

Local settlers, concentrated in Anadyr' and a small number of other towns, are also recognizing that one pillar of the Modernization is a very expensive program of native development. Funding for the Agriculture Ministry has risen from 5 million rubles in the form of material gifts in 2000, under Nazarov's administration, to almost 250 million rubles in budget funds in 2002. The greatest improvements in standards of living have been in the rural sphere, which under Nazarov suffered most. Abramovich is rebuilding entire native communities, with Canadian-built schools and comfortable detached houses (*kottedzhy*). Meanwhile, as "unpromising" industrial settlements close and their settler residents are relocated to central Russia, the huge volume of construction work in the region is undertaken by Turkish, Canadian, Ukrainian, and Russian laborers flown in on short-term contracts. A new regional economy is under construction, but from the perspective of the permanent settler, it is an arrangement best suited to native herders and hunters, and to imported shift-workers. The tenor of media advertising for the administration's resettlement programs, which in 2001–2002 saturated the local TV, radio, and press, seemed to many locals like a redundancy notice, a signal that their era in the North has ended.

CONTESTING LOCAL IDENTITIES

My parents came to Chukotka about 25 years ago. My sister and I were born here. My friends Rustam and Zhenya were born here too. So it's funny to talk about the Chukchi as the *mestnoye naseleniye* [local/native population]—we grew up here and we know everything there is to know about this place. And we've done a fair bit for this place, we've represented Chukotka in competitions, and when we're outside the region, they call us "Chukotskiye." We like it, we live here.

—Denis, a 23-year-old Russian living in Anadyr'

The Soviet-era settler population in Chukotka derived its sense of collective identity largely from its place in the colonial order. Settlers selected for jobs in the North considered themselves a Soviet labor elite, but in Chukotka, they also defined themselves in opposition to the local indigenous population, and transience was an important feature in their plans and self-image. The term *priyezhiy*—"incomer" or "new-comer"—aptly described the typical settler in Chukotka, a member of a "flowing population," recently arrived and soon to leave (Leksin and Andreeva, 1994, p. 307). Soviet air transport effectively collapsed the Soviet Union's huge distances, and both the ability to regularly imbibe at the cultural spout in Leningrad and Moscow and the relative ease of transporting metropolitan cultural life to the North were perceived as vitally important to the northern settler lifestyle. Cultural power was also projected

onto local natives, and mastery of the North was in part a project of acculturating primitive peoples—the penetration of “great Russian” *kulturnost*. Like Soviet research colonies (Akademgorodok, Tomsk-7) and *nomenklatura* networks, Chukotka was one type of “closed distribution system”—a zone of superior consumer goods and food supply relative to the wider Soviet deficit economy (Osokina, 2001; Ledeneva, 1998). So abundant supply, the Soviet version of prosperity, was another key prop of settler identity.¹³

This section explores an unexpected outcome of the Modernization, one that may run contrary to the administration’s desires—the emergence of a strong *local* sense of identity in settlers. Abundance, cosmopolitanism, and colonial agency—these attributes of the old Soviet settler idyll are largely lost, although residual northern benefits still accrue, including longer holidays and early retirement. Abramovich’s Modernization is now completing the emasculation of the old colonial identity, by excluding locals from the community of core modernizers and, critically, positioning settlers as targets, rather than agents, of this most recent *osvoeniye*. Localist claims to authority are emerging, and they offer a means of resisting modernization, which many view as a project to disrupt the settler community and its forms. This localism has largely abandoned its former colonial features, not for altruistic reasons, but because the layering of a new neo-colonial modernizing population on top of the established settler population leaves only a local moral claim available. Settler senses of group identity are thus reconstituting themselves in reference to land use, local kin and friendship, and long tenure in the North. What follows is an exploration of the discourses and behaviours that define group boundaries and set locals off from incoming modernizers, while valorizing northern life.

Chukotka is one of the harshest inhabited environments on the planet (this is certainly local opinion), and the extreme climate, the isolation, the vast distances, and the myriad peculiarities of working and living there are cast as a kind of exclusive code, locally referred to as *severnaya spesifika* (“the special circumstances of the North”). A member of the regional Duma (legislative assembly) who spent three decades working as a construction engineer in Provideniya and Anadyr’, warned that replacing local builders with flown-in construction workers was a recipe for disaster in northern conditions. A Turkish company contracted to pave Anadyr’s streets with concrete was still pouring as the Arctic winter began in October, and this deputy was not the only one convinced that the new streets would crack apart in the next spring thaw. (They did.) Building on permafrost is considered rather a black art, on which long-time locals often claim a monopoly. When a team of summer camp volunteers from Moscow chose a patch of tundra outside Anadyr as their new “ecological” camp territory, they leveled the area by stripping the turf with a heavy army surplus tracked vehicle (*vezdekhod*). This peeled the insulating layer from the permafrost below and created a vast meltwater pond, an episode wryly remarked upon across local kitchen tables the following winter. A cameraman in the local television studio described the frequent visits of documentary film crews from Moscow and abroad, who invariably arrived without special polarizing filters for filming in the harsh Arctic light—he

¹³Elena Osokina, a Russian cultural historian, has argued that class and privilege in the Soviet economy of shortage depended not on income, but on access to goods, or rather access to superior zones of state distribution. In the hierarchy of privilege, “closed distribution systems” (for example the Soviet North) were structural props of class difference (Osokina, 2001).

keeps a private collection of camera equipment, and makes a tidy profit equipping naïve visitors. There are many other such stories in circulation, having to do with building to withstand winds roaring off the Bering Sea, wearing the proper type of fur hat while ice-fishing, protecting the eyes while traveling over snow in the spring, and the best cure for nausea during the massive barometric pressure shifts that affect the coastal areas.

The idea that life in extreme circumstances produces a better breed of person, more generous, forgiving, and trustworthy, is another enduring northern self-perception. A typical statement runs “Northerners are better people; they always help each other; they never refuse a friend in need.” For long-time settlers, framing this sentiment as part of their personal arrival narrative is an important, recurrent device for explaining the uniqueness of a northern community. A geodesist and 30-year veteran of Chukotka recalled:

When I came to Anadyr’, it was February, it was a sunny bright day, we got in a little van and the second I got in, I immediately noticed a different atmosphere. People talked to each other, asked each other questions. Someone straightaway explained to me where to get off, so it would be most convenient for me.

A sub-genre of the “forge of the North” discourse relates to the close, intimate friendships people form, as they draw together to resist the hostile environment. Social boundaries imported from mainstream Soviet life dissolve by necessity in northern conditions. A former geologist and Communist Party member described surviving an autumn blizzard on the tundra with only a former convict for company:

A terrible blizzard hit and they couldn’t get a *vezdekhod* out to us. We had gone out to visit a drill site for a 12-hour shift, but it turned into five days. We were in a canvas and wood shelter with no roof, since the drill tower was too high to accommodate—our tower just rattled in the wind and I’m amazed it wasn’t carried away. The two of us were stuck there, slowly burning the wood walls for heat, burning our sample trays, the peat insulation between the walls . . . in the end, we had to cling to each other for warmth. Before this incident, he’d said about me, “I’ll kill that red shitbag”—I was in the Party since I’d been recommended during Army service. And in the end, he and I worked together for two years and I wouldn’t have anyone else for a partner.

Settlers came from all corners of the Soviet Union, leaving kin behind. But close friends came to replace siblings and cousins to form a surrogate northern kinship network. A group of men resettled from the liquidated settlement of Beringovskiy to Voronezh in south-central Russia nostalgically recalled:

We northerners are a good people [*narod*]. We came from all over Russia, from all paths and destinies and even ethnicities. But in the North, we became one people. The North forged us. We forgot differences that we might have noticed on the *materik*. Take Ivan—I never wrote him off because he was a

Georgian. To me, he was just a damn good underwater welder. To this day, we're still a northern people, even living here in Voronezh.

One common old-timer narrative focuses on the moment, having returned to old homes on the *materik*, when settlers realize how much nobler human relationships are in the North. This is an important threshold, past which settlers begin to understand themselves as true northerners. Another former geologist in Anadyr' recalls his first trip back to Ukraine, after three years working on the tundra:

I understood even then, on my first trip back that I would never be able to return to life there . . . my discomfort was not physical, it was psychological—I was permanently annoyed and bothered. Everyday life irritated me. I noticed that my old friends couldn't even believe my stories from the North, about my life there. They couldn't conceive of the kind of simple, honest relationships we had in our geological parties.

The valorization of northern life is thus paired with a disdainful disregard for the lifestyle and values of the *materik*, the other half of a superiority discourse. Moscow, significantly for the Moscow-led modernization project, epitomizes the worst: Muscovites are venal, grasping, insincere, self-important, and lacking in community spirit. Relationships are transactional, in contrast with the unconditional generosity that northerners ascribe to the Code of the North. As one gold miner who came to Chukotka in 1972 put it, "In Chukotka, relationships are built on friendship rather than on money (*bolee druzhestvennyye chem finansovyye*)." A settler photographer in a small industrial town north of Anadyr remarked:

The further you get from the center, the less selfish people are. Even in Anadyr', a more mercantile frame of mind has taken hold, but in Moscow, it's all about power. Why do you think no one likes Muscovites? It's their arrogance, their snobbism—they come from the capital and tell us we live in the middle of nowhere, that it's all provincial and second-class here. In reality, the people who came here to settle were the most dynamic, the most energetic.

The demonization of the *materik*, beset by the myopic mass psychology of the late-Soviet stagnation era, coupled with materialism—a phenomenon the Russian social historian Sheila Fitzpatrick termed the "embourgeoisement of Soviet society" (Fitzpatrick, 2000)—reaches back to the early days of Soviet settlement in Chukotka. These discourses are rooted in the possibilities of escape that the prosperous North offered to a displaced and exhausted post-war people. Many older settlers in Chukotka remember very difficult childhoods, growing up in the late 1940s and early 1950s in areas decimated by the German invasion. For many younger settlers, Chukotka, with its strictly enforced restrictions on access and movement, was quite literally an escape from abusive husbands and failed marriages. A drama teacher fled to the settlement of Bilibino, the site of the world's northernmost atomic power station, to protect herself and her daughter from a violent husband—the border-zone restrictions in Chukotka meant this was one region to which he could never follow her. Another culture worker remarked:

People from all the corners of the country came here—it was a United States of Russia. Chukotka was a new beginning. A man would divorce his wife, he'd have nowhere to go, he'd come to the North to work in a gold-mining enterprise, to earn money, to get away from his wife, to earn enough to pay the alimony and still have a little left over.

Discourses of “northern patriotism” were powerfully recharged by the state’s collapse in 1991, when the irritations of mainstream Soviet life were overtaken, for northern settlers, by tangible dangers. Although many settlers left the North as the economy collapsed, many in fact later returned to its safe and tightly knit communities. The social Darwinism of post-Soviet life, in particular violence and mistrust, repelled many northerners, and although Chukotka could provide no insulation against poverty, its isolation and strong community traditions were an effective bulwark against the intrusion of crime and the mafia. In the minds of locals, who claim Chukotka’s border-zone controls prevent a flood of illegal Chinese traders and Chechen *mafiosy*, there is a sense that despite the socio-economic disaster of the Nazarov period, Chukotka escaped the worst of the “transition.” The “collapse of society” that locals witnessed from a distance powerfully renewed the negative narratives about life on the *materik*. Here are sample descriptions of social collapse that settlers escaped by coming north:

In Moscow, you could only survive [in *perestroyka*] if you had a head on your shoulders. When *perestroyka* began, enterprises started closing down and young people were left on the streets—people my age, aged 25 to 30 at that time. They just started to drink. From my class of 18, five are still alive. Of the rest, they were either murdered or they drank themselves to death. They’re all in the ground.

—Singer-songwriter and actor in Anadyr’, aged 41.

From my class, 90 percent of my mates were involved in crime—I lived in a bad part of town, and there was a kind of subculture there. Looking at my contemporaries now, many of them are dead—I can count 15 from my old neighbourhood who are dead. They killed themselves, they were murdered, or they died from drug overdoses or alcohol poisoning.

—Pastor of a small Pentecostal church in Anadyr’, early 30s.

I have no real *rodina* on the *materik* any more. The community I was born and grew up in has been closed down—it was reliant on a timber mill. All my friends left for different parts.

—Director of Chukotka’s forest-fire fighting service, 43.

One constituent of settler “localism” is thus a highly valued sense of Chukotka as a place apart. But ironically, while Abramovich’s modernizers agree that locals have existed outside developments in Russian society, their interpretation is less sanguine. Far from preserving a precious social balance, modernizers contend that isolation has made of local communities a petrified remnant culture un-suited to the new Russian reality.

I have already referred to the anthropological consensus that practical and intimate relationships with a landscape underpin indigenous senses of belonging, but it is troubling that some of these ethnographic formulations are so ethnically exclusivist. Alexander King, drawing from research in northern Kamchatka, posits a dichotomy of native Koryak and settler Russian perceptions of nature: for the settler, nature is wild, an emptiness, an alternative to civilization, whereas for Koryaks, nature itself is a civilization, a “figure as people are figures,” marked and named through practical engagement (King, 2002, p. 77). According to King, in “othering” nature, settlers can never properly use it as a source of identity and belonging in a fully native way. Ingold (2000) expressed a similar idea, describing characteristically *indigenous* spiritual relationships with a landscape, whereby aboriginals project ideas of personhood onto natural features and animals, and thereby construct a kind of supra-human culture of landscape, instrumentalized through reciprocal exchange. There are two ways of using land, in his view—“occupation” or “inhabitation.” The first is colonial in mindset, and commodifies, parcels out, measures, and exploits. The second is a rooted practice, whereby personal attachments to a landscape translate into aspirations of sustainable use. But Ingold, unlike King, does not hold with ethnic exclusion and concedes that the descendents of colonial settlers can *inhabit* a land just as easily as ethnic aboriginals can become the most short-term proponents of practices of *occupation* (Ingold, 2002, p. 248).

Many settlers in Chukotka are intimately attached to the landscapes they live in, drawing not only food but also emotional sustenance from their natural environment. Unlike in wealthier territories of the circumpolar North—Canada, Greenland, Alaska—harvesting local food resources is a central part of the settler lifestyle in Chukotka, reaching back into the Soviet period. Living off the land became a matter of survival in the 1990s, as northern supply collapsed. While a small minority of settlers based in the larger towns were able to entrepreneurially exploit connections with Moscow and Vladivostok, the typical pattern as wages failed and transport to the *materik* became exorbitant, was to turn to harvesting activities—hunting, fishing, berry gathering—in a more or less full-time manner. Formal jobs, if maintained, were often a shell. A middle-aged marine parasitologist at the Anadyr’ branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences went unpaid for much of the 1990s and could not present her research outside Chukotka over an eight-year period, but she remained on staff. She spent most of her time fishing for wild salmon and smelt on the Gulf of Anadyr’, and her colleagues describe her preternatural talent for reading the waters “like a native.” Many less fortunate settlers were compelled to abandon their careers entirely in order to harvest the tundra. A 39-year old concert accordionist, who abandoned studies at the Vladivostok Academy during *perestroika*, recalls his efforts to support his family in the 1990s:

I fished for smelt in the winter months, I went out on the tundra, and it wasn’t rare that we went hungry—famine, not to mince words. Our family was on very limited rations. I counted every kopek, we had practically no money. My wife worked cleaning floors, but she made almost nothing—\$30 a month. We got by, but we ate what I caught or gathered, and there were lean months in every year—early winter and late spring. For ten years, twice a year, we went on bread and sugarless tea.

Members of the local bureaucratic elite rarely faced these hardships, but even these figures spent much of their available time on the land, gathering berries, fishing, and hunting. In part, this is because fresh and nutritious foods have always been difficult to obtain in Chukotka's shops for any price—everything, from cabbage to yogurt, must be flown across nine time zones from Moscow or shipped 4500 kilometres from Vladivostok. The fact that harvesting the land transcended social classes in Chukotka suggests, however, that land use was not purely a utilitarian pursuit. In local accounts, going out on the land is “good for the soul” (*dusha*), it “ennobles and renews” and for many, it is a movement to the *natural*, as opposed to the *artificial*, environment. I encountered a Ukrainian builder supervising the rebuilding of Amguema, a remote Chukchi settlement in the interior, who had lived in the area since the 1960s:

They sent me to Moscow to learn about building these *kottedzhy*, and I had to live in a flat for three months—it was utter hell. How can people live like that? Russians have returned to their troglodyte origins, living in those concrete caves. I couldn't cope anywhere but here, this is my home. When I fish these rivers I feel like a whole person.

A former high Party official, who remains in Chukotka when his wife visits the *materik*, described the existential bliss he experiences when travelling on the tundra. His own account echoes remarkably Tim Ingold's ideas of “skills of dwelling” in a landscape:

When I'm walking, I always stop to listen. I lie down in the gorse and listen to the silence until my ears ring. You realize you are alone—if you never got up, no one would come to your aid. You realize your human powers, but also your true weakness. You're relying completely on your own skills and familiarity with the land. I live for that sensation.

One of the more dominant discourses framing settler land-use in Chukotka, and one evidently alien to native perceptions of the environment, is the “romance of the North.” Settlers almost universally carried with them to Chukotka an imagined North, constructed from stories of heroic exploration and exotic tribal peoples in popular literature, songs, and film.¹⁴ In the context of the “bourgeois North”—a zone of superior pay, supply, and working conditions—the romance discourse provided a distinctly anti-materialist justification for settling in Chukotka, one grounded in self-realization and the rejection of mainstream Soviet values. Borrowing from a ballad valorizing geologists in the 1960s, many settlers say they came north “for the smell of the taiga,” not the cash. Nature plays a leading role in romantic images of northern life, its “ecological purity” and “extreme” character a foil to the degraded human landscapes of central Russia. It is this essentialized view of nature as “out there” on which Alexander King (2002) bases his rejection of local settler belonging in Kamchatka.

But essentialized views of nature collapse as intimacy with nature grows. The rooted settler in Chukotka often maintains the romance narrative in his/her own accounts, perhaps due to its power to retroactively erase materialist motives for at first migrating north. But in practice his close and pragmatic relationship with the

¹⁴See, for example, Diment and Slezkine (1993) and McCannon (1998).

land has long since destroyed the two-dimensional romantic image of nature the settler might have once held. To illustrate, conservationism, in contrast with sustainable practices of being on the land, originates and is most fiercely worshipped in urban populations, which are accustomed to putting their most valued objects under protective glass, beyond touch. Conservationism, in its more extreme variations, saves whales but ignores traditional whalers—it is essentially a misanthropic philosophy, and it is very romantic. But like in any other part of the North—a predominantly rural zone—love of nature combines with harvesting practices without falling into moral contradictions. The conflation of utilitarian and emotional interactions with the land in settlers might be viewed in parallel with the practical and spiritual interactions with land that anthropologists typically describe in accounts of native land use.

In contrast with Chukotka's long-time residents, the new generation of modernizers has a very limited relationship with the natural environment. This cohort imports the entertainments of distant urban life. There is now a karaoke bar, fitness gym, luxury sauna, cinema complex, internet café, and ice hockey rink in Anadyr', built at least partly for their benefit. Meanwhile, locals speak rapturously about fishing in the Gulf of Anadyr' during the salmon runs, a form of recreation that involves wading far out into the frigid waters in Soviet-era chemical warfare suits to set shore-fast nets (people drown every season when water enters through puncture holes and anchors them out from shore in a rising tide). When the modernizing elite venture into nature, they are not—like the existentialist hunter—in modest solitude. The Vice-Governor celebrated his birthday in 2002 by flying with 100 colleagues in a fleet of helicopters upriver for a day of fishing.

I have described how settlers stake their moral claims in localist terms, using both discourses and behaviors that mark the boundaries of a distinct northern identity. They claim they are a special breed, and through their intimate relationship with the landscape, many of them indeed substantiate this. But in Chukotka, settler identity is not confederate; there is little sense of a regional, pan-Chukotkan identity. Attachments are in fact strictly local, based on solidarity within a single community. "Community" is perceived in literal rather than imagined terms, just as relationships with the landscape are practical, and therefore local, rather than mediated by romantic images of nature.

This finding became apparent in interviews with settler migrants who have "cascaded" from smaller settlements to larger ones, usually ending in Anadyr'. In the Nazarov era, cultural workers, teachers, heating systems engineers, telecom experts, and reindeer veterinarians were all drawn to the capital's small but still functioning labor market. These people now complain that Anadyr's "nature" is a pale version of the natural environment of their "home" regions, and that Anadyr has no sense of community spirit to compare with what they left behind. One migrant from Mys Shmidta, on the Arctic Coast (Fig. 1), complained:

Here it's not the same. Here the berries aren't great and the mushrooms—I don't know. The bushes are skimpy—it's not worth going around here. But there in Shmidt you leave town and the jeep (Ural) is just buried in the bushes. There you have mountain streams with carp Anadyr' is nothing much to look at. You know what they don't have here? Sunsets. In Shmidt you have the most amazing colors. . . .

For people still in rural areas, a common manner of professing local attachments is to direct some sort of slight at the regional center. Residents of smaller communities commonly portray Anadyr' as a parasitic city of bureaucrats, and this view deepened in the 1990s when Governor Nazarov cut services and wage payments in the settlements and concentrated state resources in Anadyr', his true patronage base. Residents of Beringovskiy, whose coal mine supplied Anadyr' with fuel for heating and power, were themselves without utilities for several years. A Beringovsky police officer explained that Anadyr' "eats the fat off our backs, those parasites just eat the settlements away." On one journey up the Anadyr' River to visit remote settlements, I traveled with the head of small vessel inspections, who regularly tours the region extracting license fees and fining boat-owners for "safety infractions." As far as I could discern, he returned no training or material good to rural boaters—there was no public service, only public rent collection. Echoing the enmity Chukotkans reserve for the mega-center, Moscow, rural Chukotkans view Anadyr' as both morally and ecologically tainted. A geographer and hydrologist in Egvekinot (Fig. 1) reported that he never visits Anadyr' because the polluted water gives him rashes and indigestion. But the water of Egvekinot, in his words, extends the human lifespan.

Settlers typically came to Chukotka without family networks, but since the Soviet period, many of the most rooted settlers have developed extensive kinship ties to local communities. Piers Vitebsky (2002) has described the marriage of settler laborers to native women in rural Siberia as a corrosive force, denaturing native communities by marooning native men, often migrant herders, in a purgatory of bachelorhood. In the settlement of Vayegi (pop. 300), 700 kilometres upriver from Anadyr', the roughly 30 settler men are almost all married to native women. Yet these are settlers with strong attachments to the village, remaining there after a decade of settler out-migration. Most have children in the community. Few planned to leave in the future. These figures are often deeply proprietorial of local resources, even at the expense of natives. Inter-marriage roots settlers in communities, but it also shifts their cultural center of gravity, as a Chukchi broadcaster in Anadyr explained:

There is this man . . . he's head of the Chukotskiy Rayon [district]. He was brought to Chukotka very young, just after birth. When he gives interviews in our native language, he doesn't identify himself as a *privezhiy* [newcomer]. He says, "we Chukchi . . .," and so on. In other words, this is a man who has learned our language like a native speaker, he is located within our culture, and he judges Russians as a Chukchi—he doesn't mince his words! Absolutely not! When he is explaining how things are, he speaks about *privezhiye* as something separate from himself.

Kinship, as so often in Russia, is also felt with the deceased—Russians visit the graves of their friends and relatives to commune and remember. The need to identify a *rodina* (homeland) partly arises from the practical concern that one should be buried in one's true community, where the living can visit and care for your grave. Anxiety about burial thus continually haunts Russians in a state of migrancy, and burial choices are a clear indication of primordial attachments. When settlers died in Soviet Chukotka they were almost always flown back to the *materik* for burial. But in the 1990s, this practice virtually ceased, as the cost of a single ticket to Moscow

surpassed the value of a two-room flat in Anadyr'. The small local cemetery suddenly reached its capacity, and within a decade, a new field of graves sprouted in the tundra beyond the town. Now settlers in many parts of Chukotka observe a ritual which, according to my informants, was never much part of Soviet life in the North: on "Parents' Day," Russians visit the graves of their loved ones to drink, eat, and care for the spirits. The former Party official related to me that after a week of hunting he was walking back to Anadyr' through the new cemetery. He stopped for a drink and looking about the tombstones, each bearing a face, he was struck by the fact that almost everyone was known to him. His gaze then fell on the face of a good friend, exactly his age but dead now for five years, and he noticed how well the grave was cared for. He was struck by the thought, almost unthinkable in the Soviet past, that:

Morally, I'd be better off lying out there in the cemetery (*Mne moral'no budet' normal'no esli by ya lezhal tam*). What do I have on the *materik*? I grew up there, but then I came straight to the North after service. As they say, I spent my best years here.

CONCLUSION: STAKING CLAIMS

Across the circumpolar North, descendent populations of former colonial peoples are joining with aboriginal populations in claiming a degree of nativeness. The Métis of Canada, an organized population with an emerging claim to nationhood and a history of resistance to colonial invasion itself, is one example. In the former Soviet Union, the abandoned colonial diaspora of the Far North is, I have argued, another population with legitimate claims to local, native identity. The aboriginal self-determination movement and the democratic legal space in contemporary Russia has not yet matured to the point when historical claims to territory might be transferred into property rights, material compensation, and ultimately self-determination arrangements, as witnessed for example in Greenland and Nunavut. But this is the inevitable trajectory, as legal precedents and native rights movements cross international boundaries. The assertions of belonging raised by settlers in Russia's North could seriously threaten these claims.

As Andre Bétaille (1998) has remarked, the very idea of indigeneity is a response to external threats, and the indigenous identity firms up and marks its boundaries when it becomes necessary to stake a claim to what is "ours"—territory, for example, or hunting rights. In the Russian North, a new pattern of colonial development is beginning to emerge, in which maturing forces of private capital based in the metropolitan heartland are extending their interests to the "resource frontier."¹⁵ Chukotka is among the first regions to experience a modernizing project of this type, but since its natural resource wealth is not unique in the Russian North, it cannot be the last. But

¹⁵Chukotka was the first of three autonomous okrugs in the Russian North to elect an oligarch as governor and thereby sanction the replacement of a locally based administration with corporate government. Similar elections took place in Taymyr and Evenkia in the following months. Commenting on the situation in Taymyr, David Anderson claimed that "with the election of the oligarchs we can identify a political context that is no longer ambiguously 'post-socialist' and 'transitional' . . . but suggests very strongly the type of corporatist politics, which now predominates in resource frontiers the world over" (Anderson, 2002, p. 119).

Roman Abramovich has found in Chukotka a settler population that, perhaps contrary to his expectations, cannot be manipulated and allocated as an “economic factor” to suit his aims of management expediency. Nativeness has achieved a clear material utility in the new Chukotka, where major development initiatives are securing the Chukchi and Yupik population in their own villages, while settlers are encouraged to leave for Voronezh and elsewhere. “If I’m not native (*mestnyy*), who is?” ask settlers. It should come as no surprise that long-term settlers are appropriating the rhetorical weapons of indigeneity in reaction to Abramovich’s corporate modernization.

Leaving the domain of legal entitlements and language politics aside, can the idea of a settler sense of local belonging and rootedness, of “dwelling on the land,” withstand ethnographic scrutiny? Merely harvesting the tundra to survive—knowing how to shoot a moose—hardly compares with the rich engagement of a Chukchi reindeer herder or an Koryak hunter with the land, in which acts of consumption are only one side of a relationship of continual reciprocal exchange and animals, trees, and rocks are imbued with animating personhood. This spiritual perception of the natural environment, or some variation of it, is the anthropological prerequisite for truly inhabiting a landscape and being its native person. Settlers, as natives in Chukotka sometimes remark, have little sense of the spiritual complexity of the landscape surrounding them. These are the words of an urban Chukchi intellectual:

The worldview of the Chukchi considers nature a living thing, with which you can have a conversation, which you can go to for help, with which you need to cultivate a relationship. And *priyezhiye* [newcomers] don’t consider nature to be alive—it’s just a location, a place.

I was part of an overland expedition to visit the abandoned city of Iul’tin, once a massive tin and tungsten mining centre, located in the high Arctic mountains of the Chukotka Peninsula. Connected by an old disused gravel road to Egvekinot, a port town 300 kilometres south, the most dangerous obstacle in our path was the Amguema River, once spanned by a long trestle bridge. We knew we could cross by fording, but the currents continually rebraid the river’s channels and in the summer when we made our attempt, two gold miners had already drowned in their swamped vehicles. We arrived at the river in three five-ton military trucks—Urals—having hired as their drivers three *vezdekhodshiki*, local settlers whose job it is to drive tracked transport vehicles over the local territory and provision the reindeer herders. No one knew the ford better. As we were stopped on the near shore, to seal distributor caps and change the air-intake valves for the crossing, a bottle of vodka emerged. We each threw back “100 grams,” no doubt to steel the nerves, but then the eldest driver, a Ukrainian born in the local village, offered a libation to the river, pouring a glass and tossing it into the waves. We got across.

The Russian term *perestrahovka* means “double insurance”—living in a place of such uncertainty, contending with the fickle temperament of the northern environment, it is always comforting to have the spirits on your side. The Ukrainian driver probably learned this from his Chukchi friends. The ford over the Amguema is a dangerous, invisible path, constantly changing in the current, and locals know it is futile to read its mind. In some part, even for the descendants of Slavic migrants, it is a creature who appreciates a drink.

LITERATURE

- Anderson, David.** *Identity and ecology in Arctic Siberia*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Anderson, David.** "Entitlements, identity, and time: Addressing aboriginal rights and nature protection in Siberia's new resource colonies," in: E. Kasten, ed., *People and the Land: Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin, Germany: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2002.
- Appadurai, A.** *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Basso, Keith, and Steven Feld, eds.** *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996.
- Beteille, A.** "The idea of indigenous people," *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1998, pp. 187-191.
- Brightman, R.** *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationships*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.
- Brody, H.** *Maps and Dreams: Indians and the British Columbia Frontier*. Vancouver, Canada: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981.
- Brody, H.** *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers, and the Shaping of the World*. London, UK: Faber and Faber, 2000.
- Clifford, J.** *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Cohen, R.** *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London, UK: University College London Press, 1997.
- Diment, Galya and Yuri Slezkine, eds.** *Between Heaven and Hell: The Myth of Siberia in Russian Culture*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Fitzpatrick, Sheila, ed.** *Stalinism: New Directions*. London, UK: Routledge, 2000.
- Gilroy, P.** *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Gopnick, A.** *Paris to the Moon*. New York, NY: Random House, 2000.
- Goskomstat Rossii.** *Demograficheskiy yezhegodnik Rossii 1999 (Demographic Yearbook of Russia 1999)*. Moscow, Russia: Goskomstat Rossii, 1999.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson.** "Discipline and practice: 'The field' as site, method, and location in anthropology," in: Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.
- Heleniak, T.** "Out-migration and depopulation of the Russian North during the 1990s," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1999, pp. 155-205.
- ILO (International Labour Organisation).** "Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples," adopted at the International Labour Conference, Geneva, Switzerland, June 1989.
- Ingold, T.** *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill*. London, UK: Routledge, 2000.
- Ingold, T.** "Epilogue," in: Erich Kasten, ed., *People and the Land: Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin, Germany: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2002.
- Kertulla, A. M.** *Antler on the Sea: The Yupik and Chukchi of the Russian Far East*. London, UK: Cornell University Press, 2000.

- King, A. D.** "Reindeer herders' culturescapes in the Koryak Autonomous Okrug," in: E. Kasten, ed., *People and the Land: Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin, Germany: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2002.
- Kontorovich, V.** "Can Russia resettle the Far East?," *Post-Communist Economies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2000, pp. 365-383.
- Ledeneva, A. V.** *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Leksin, V. and E. Andreeva.** "Environmental, social, and legal issues in Russia's northern policy," *Polar Geography and Geology*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1994, pp. 296-326.
- McCannon, John,** *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Niezen, R.** "Recognizing indigenism: Canadian unity and the International Movement of Indigenous Peoples," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2000, pp. 119-148.
- Nuttall, M.** "Memoryscape: A sense of locality in northwest Greenland," *North Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1991, pp. 39-50.
- Osokina, E.** *Our Daily Bread. Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927-1941*. London, UK: M. E. Sharpe, 2001.
- Safran, W.** "Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return," *Diaspora*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1991.
- Sharp, H. S.** *Loon: Memory, Meaning and Reality in a Northern Dene Community*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.
- Thompson, N.** "Administrative resettlement and the pursuit of economy: The case of Chukotka," *Polar Geography*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2002, pp. 270-288.
- Thompson, N.** "Migration and resettlement in Chukotka: 2003 Update," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 2004, pp. 73-81.
- Vitebsky, P.** "Landscape and self-determination among the Eveny: The political environment of Siberian reindeer herders today," in: E. Croll and O. Parkin, eds., *Bush Base Forest Farm—Culture, Environment and Development*. London, UK: Routledge, 1992.
- Vitebsky, P.** "Withdrawing from the land: Social and spiritual crisis in the indigenous Russian Arctic," in: C. M. Hann, ed., *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia*. London, UK: Routledge, 2002.