

Is Trade Traditional? — Theorizing Economic Histories and Futures in the New Kamchatka

NELSON HANCOCK

The economic theory of modern capitalist society is a complicated system of economic categories inseparably connected with one another – price, capital, wages, interest, rent, which determine one another and are functionally interdependent. If one brick drops out of this system, the whole building collapses.

(Chayanov 1966 [1924], 3)

This article examines the contemporary predicaments of Kamchadals, a self-described hybrid ethnic group living on the Kamchatka Peninsula in eastern Russia. While they were recognized as an official indigenous group in 1991, this status is still marked by uncertainty as Kamchadals assert a colonial heritage with debts to both Russian settlers as well as indigenous Itel'mens of Kamchatka. Such a creole identity, also endorsed by Russian ethnographers, clearly has set Kamchadals in conflict with the timelessness so often associated not just with indigenous peoples, but with national cultures as well.

Here, I address the specific tensions between the actual traditions of such a hybrid people and the pieces of legislation meant to authorize and revitalize 'traditional' Kamchadal economy and culture. The central paradox that I examine is that while trade and commerce are arguably very 'traditional' elements of most local native economies, current legislation in the Russian north largely omits any effort to facilitate or enable trade. Instead, the economies envisioned in much of the existing legislation allow for small, autonomous subsistence units that do not produce any commodified surpluses such as pelts or caviar. Thus, with the current legislation largely ignoring actual patterns of native land use, both the theorization and practice of 'tradition' are surrounded by contradictions. A central point here is that the principle categories employed by state agencies in their efforts to organize and administer native economies do not correspond to local understandings of Kamchadal history and tradition. The existing legislation has essentially created a set of opportunities that tends to be exploited not by those who know

the most about the land and living on it, but by those who are the most adept at securing the right to do so. That is, instead of rewarding those with traditional knowledge of the landscape and the skills required to live on it and in it, current legislation rewards very modern forms of knowledge about pathways of bureaucracy and exactly how to properly 'harvest resources' that are available through those pathways.

In Russia as elsewhere in the world, the politics of indigenous identities and histories eventually make their way around to questions of economy. Typically, at the center of such discussions lies the prospect of land claims, privileged resource use, or some other form of reallocation of natural resources. Native land claims legislation is nearly always joined to the goal of fostering and facilitating traditional economies, and specific legislation designed to enable traditional economic activities can be found around the world. Comparative examples abound. In Alaska (Anders 1992; Berger 1985; Langdon 1986), Australia (Myers 1986, 1989; Povinelli 1993, 1999), Brazil (Ramos 1998) and elsewhere (Wilemsen 1989a), indigenous politics globally center on economic issues.

This is such a common trend in part because traditional indigenous economies, despite being linked in various ways to broader economic systems, are by definition rooted to particular landscapes and territories. In addition, the very category 'traditional' suggests economic practices that are distinctly different from those practiced by non-indigenous populations. Such expectations of rootedness and difference persist despite the much remarked upon hypermobility, transnationalism (Appadurai 1991, 1996), and globality (Jameson 1984) that characterize postmodernity. The history of Kamchadals in central Kamchatka is a testament to the fact that transnational movements of people and capital are by no means recent developments. Instead, these should be seen as constituent elements, even 'traditional' aspects, of native life in Kamchatka and throughout the Russian north (Fitzhugh 1988; Gibson 1969; Grant 1995; Slezkine 1994). Yet still there lingers a sense, typically voiced most clearly in legislation, that in order to qualify for sanctioned benefits, indigenous peoples must somehow demonstrate that mobility and the perpetual transformations that it brings, have not impinged on local 'traditions'.

Scholarly perspectives on hunter-gatherer peoples have shifted considerably in recent decades, yet such changes have for the most part not led to revised

perspectives in legislation or policy reform (Myers 1988; Wilmsen 1989a). While mainstays of popular imagination and social studies curricula such as the image of the isolated 'Bushman' tribe persist in mass-mediated imagery, scholarly attention to such peoples tends to dwell not on their isolation, but on histories of encroachment, colonial administration and social transformations. For example, recent studies from Alaska (Hensel 1996) Australia (Povinnelli 1993, 1999), central Africa (Wilemsen 1989) and northern Canada (Feit 1991) have all addressed dynamic relations between remote indigenous populations and the states, settlers, and courts with which they are imbricated. Teasing out 'traditional' elements of economies, belief systems, family dynamics and so on is relevant to these studies in part because it is precisely those features of indigenous lives that can be construed as 'traditional' that matter most in legal and legislative contexts.

Outside of legislative circles however, this situation is far more complex and clear formulations regarding the significance of 'traditional' economic practices are elusive. I came to my research in central Kamchatka with the assumption that because recognition and state benefits often hinge on questions of traditional economy, that Kamchadals as a group would tend to emphasize economy and land use in their descriptions of Kamchadal identity and history. What I found instead, was that Kamchadal life history narratives typically centered on topics that figured little, if at all, in current political debates. Life history interviews more often centered on experiences of rupture and discontinuity, and there was a conspicuous lack of the political overtones that I was expecting to be more common (Hancock 2001). Therefore, I have organized this chapter to begin with a discussion of the political significance of land reform in indigenous politics, and then to examine the particulars of Kamchadal economics today, both legal and otherwise. Finally, I discuss a few examples of less politicized experiences of subsistence economics today.

The Brick of 'Tradition'

In the epigraph to this chapter, Alexander Chayanov describes the interrelations between the various conceptual categories that form the core of economic theories of capitalism (price, capital, wages, interest, and rent). If any one of these elements is missing from an economic system, he argues, analysis of that system will require an altered set of categories. 'If one brick

drops out', he writes, 'the whole building collapses'. Chayanov was a Russian economist and a leading theoretician in early Soviet plans for socializing agriculture, and is best known for his work 'The Theory of Peasant Economy.' The quote above comes from an article first published in 1924 and entitled 'On the Theory of Non-Capitalist Economic Systems' (Chayanov 1966). In this short paper Chayanov argued that the conceptual categories most suitable for analyses of capitalism were inadequate for the study of non-capitalist systems, such as, he argued, the standard Russian peasant economy was. He emphasized that since many family farms did not pay wages, and were unaffected by certain market prices (because the majority of their production was being consumed by family members) it made little sense to try to understand them via the conventional categories of capitalism. While Kamchatkan farms were beyond the scope of his study, his argument was as pertinent to the case of the typical Kamchadal household in the 1920s as it was to the situation of peasants in western Russia. Neither 'peasant' nor 'stone-age hunter gatherer', Kamchadals were nonetheless measured by the same inadequate set of conceptual tools that was used throughout Russia in the early Soviet reforms. Remarking on such misapplied categories in other colonial contexts, Chayanov mused that 'Theoretical analysis with categories really adequate to their characteristics would contribute more to colonial policy than, for example, forcing the economy of Zambesiland into the Procrustean bed of the modern Manchester School's economic categories' (Chayanov 1966, 2–3). While he failed to convince the Bolshevik administrators of this point, it continues to ring true today as 'indigenous' groups are described by one or another set of inadequate categories.

Models describing an increasingly globalized, transient economy characterized by hypermobility of both capital and labor fail to adequately describe the actual case in Kamchatka, the Russian north, or many indigenous communities worldwide. Movement for jobs and education has only decreased recently for Russia's northern minorities, and while imported products including foods, clothing, films and television programs are noticeably present, there is a growing reliance on local food production to compensate for economic decline. To the degree that globalism and mobility have become features of life in the Russian north, it is largely a one-way street, with products coming in and industrial resource projects encroaching, and these trends accompanied by very little movement out.

On the other hand, overly romantic models of pristine indigenous social worlds also fail to describe prevailing conditions. Take, for example, a report published in 1993 by the World Bank. The report is entitled 'Indigenous Views of the Land and Environment' and described several bank-sponsored development projects. The point of the report was to outline the Bank's policy against funding projects that could have a negative impact on indigenous peoples and their subsistence-based economies. However, in justifying this prohibition, the report defines indigenous people according to a particular relationship to land and thus projects a widespread, collectively held vision of the difference that marks indigenous peoples:

What distinguishes indigenous peoples from other populations is their strong, collective attachment to their ancestral lands and the habitats where they live ... For most indigenous peoples, land is not viewed as a 'commodity' which can be bought or sold in impersonal markets, but rather a substance endowed with sacred meanings which defines their existence and identity. Similarly, the trees, plants, animals, and fish, which inhabit the land are not 'natural resources', but highly personal beings which form part of their social and spiritual universe. This close attachment to the land and environment (what some observers have described as a 'stewardship of the earth') is the defining characteristic of indigenous peoples (Davis 1993, 4).

This statement can be heard echoed throughout the globe today as different national governments (and international entities such as the World Bank) seek to incorporate indigenous peoples into future projects. In the Russian case, a similar sentiment underlies much of the legislation aimed at promoting indigenous economies and protecting resources for native use. However, for Kamchadals, as for many other groups, this emphasis on attachment to land with consequent expectations about a 'spiritual universe', poses a particular problem. After having been forced from the land and forbidden to practice an economy deemed obsolete by earlier reformers, Kamchadals must now demonstrate ancestral attachments and affective ties to their 'habitat' if they are to be counted as indigenous. Indeed, the word 'habitat' as it is used in the World Bank report conjures an animal-like quality to native economies (people are usually said to dwell in environments or landscapes). The World Bank's, statement portraying ancient traditions unchanged over

time, and people dwelling in 'habitats' outside of history, underscores the patronizing and controlling manner through which aid programs corral native peoples into limiting stereotypes of primitivism and tradition.

I introduce this argument here because so many attempts to understand and describe non-capitalist or 'traditional' economies continue to employ terms that are inadequate for the task. Indeed, to employ Chayanov's metaphor, with the brick of 'tradition' missing from indigenous economies, the entire structure is made precariously unstable. With the expectation that native minority communities could somehow inhabit the historical and cultural alterity suggested by the very concept 'indigenous', native revitalizations, and legal appeals for resource rights are automatically disadvantaged by unattainable expectations. Thus, at the risk of over-simplifying, it seems that the theories of tradition that prevail in the popular imagination, and are typified by the World Bank statement cited above, imply that indigenous economies, to be considered indigenous, ought to replicate with plausible fidelity an intact world of meaning outside of contemporary reality. Meanwhile, the indigenous peoples who seek the authority to pursue 'traditional' economies do so not because they aim to resurrect an irretrievably bygone lifestyle, but because such activities provide a common orientation for the community as they can be meaningful, collective performances. Economy is often an arena for the enactment of social relations and obligations and for the re-production of historical relationships to place. In addition, more prosaically, they often provide significant amounts of food. Nonetheless, misunderstandings surrounding the goal and meaning of indigenous economic activities are a principal source of tension in land reforms and are often at the center of failed revitalization efforts and failed land reforms.

Remarking on the same dynamic in Australia, Beth Povinelli has pointed out that the place of 'tradition' at the center of indigenous land rights legislation puts indigenous people at an immediate disadvantage because indigenous identities are posed in a unique and impossible relationship to time and space. The question here is not as much one of invention or imagination, to cite two popular metaphors used to describe revitalization projects. The question here is one of loss, of being irredeemably distant and dislocated from a time and space of authenticity called 'tradition'. Povinelli writes:

At its simplest, no indigenous subject can inhabit the temporal or spatial location to which indigenous identity refers – the geographical

and social space and time of authentic Ab-originality ... [this is] because the category of indigenouness came into being in relation to the imperial state and the social identities residing in [that state], and continues to draw its discursive value in relation to the state (Povinelli 1998, 29).

The concept of aboriginality is a product of what she calls the 'settler state', a term that suitably describes the history of Russian governmental presence in Kamchatka. Because it is constituted and defined in its relationship with that state, but is at the same time purported to embody a social space and time outside of such a relationship, there is an element of failure built into the concept of indigenous and 'traditional', and certainly built into the concept as it figures into state law.

Legislative Views of 'Traditional' Kamchadal Economics

Kamchadals seeking greater entitlements to natural resources have consistently confronted impossibly narrow conceptions of 'traditional' economy. The central tension in such efforts however lies in the fact that as limiting as the existing legislation is, it is via such legislation that Kamchadal identity was authorized in the first place. That is, as disenfranchised as they are, native peoples such as Kamchadals are constrained by laws, but are simultaneously authorized and legitimated by laws. However, because the status of 'indigenous subject' is quite literally produced via legislation, the benefits of the classification parallel the category's own logic. That is, with a few notable exceptions, the trend is to authorize only those practices deemed 'traditional' and to stop short of permitting broader land use patterns more characteristic of the present.

Here there is some confusion because while the principal benefits that Kamchadals receive from the state are economic ones relating to hunting and fishing permits, the terms by which those benefits are distributed are based not on economic factors but on cultural ones. Once they were recognized as an indigenous people, Kamchadals were simultaneously granted the right to continue pursuing the 'traditions', including their traditional economy. However, the relevant legislation concerning 'traditional land use', (*traditsionnoe prirodopol'zovanie*) fails to actually define the terms, though it appears in virtually every paragraph. In a 1997 law ratified by a Legislative Gathering

of the Kamchatka Oblast' (*Zakonodatel'noe Sobranie Kamchatskoi Oblasti*) no definition is provided for the central term 'traditional resource use'. The preamble states that the law 'Applies to relations in the area of traditional resource use (*pririodopol'zovanie*), including collective, open-ended use of areas of traditional resource use, including economic and productive activities, and carried out by native minority peoples, [who are] unified by blood relations and other indicators, given that such activities are related to general social and economic interests'. The stated goal of the law is the 'Development of traditional economies and cultures [and] the preservation of their way of life and areas of residence'.

As vague as such passages are, 'traditional land use' is not left entirely open to interpretation, since its meaning is outlined somewhat by various elements of the programs. According to the laws then, it is clear that *traditsionnoe pririodopol'zovanie* is centered around obshchina land holdings, which are bounded parcels of territory that are leased to family groups, thus emphasizing kinship in economy and family based actions. Since the program hinges on the allocation of specific parcels of land to given family groups, it places not private property at the heart, since in Kamchatka the parcels are leased, but territoriality is certainly made central to the administrative process. As a result, accommodating or subverting the idea of exclusive use rights over certain parcels of land is an issue and obligation that is automatically transferred to local communities and individuals. Also a part of traditional land use are certain activities, such as hunting and fishing which are emphasized over agriculture and trade, or commerce.

Arguably, trade and commerce are very 'traditional' elements in most local native economies. Legislation largely omits any effort to facilitate or enable trade. Instead, the economies envisioned in much of the existing legislation envisions small, autonomous subsistence units that do not produce any commodified surpluses such as pelts or caviar. This is not to say that native peoples do not do this themselves, outside of the law, but simply to point out that the existing legislation criminalizes certain undeniably 'traditional' aspects of local economies.¹ As a result, even within the confines of officially sanctioned fishing, the common practice of selling the caviar introduces illegality into the operation. Even on a two-day fishing trip with a family brigade, it was common to send one person back to town to sell the first caviar to cover the cost of gasoline, food and alcohol for the brigade.

With the collapse of the official agricultural economy and the infrequency of payments to state employees such as teachers and medical professionals, cash is very scarce in Mil'kovo and thousands of other towns like it around Russia. The two principal sources of cash for most families in Mil'kovo, Kamchadal and otherwise, were pensions and caviar sales. Caviar today has taken on the same significance that furs once had. Coveted commodities and markers of opulence in distant metropolises, furs and caviar have both offered such relatively high returns for local hunters and fishermen that they have ushered in dramatic changes in local economies. Throughout Kamchatka the trade in caviar represents both a viable job and a sign of the reckless excess so characteristic of the post-Soviet era. In the context of Kamchadal revitalization, the caviar economy introduces irresolvable tensions between generations and frequently appears at the center of disputes about Kamchadal history and the contemporary loss of morality and measure.

A Soviet 'Domain' at the Center of the New Kamchadal Economy

Despite the legal outlines that circumscribe a kin-based, non-commercial subsistence economy, the newly instated 'traditional' economy of Kamchadals actually operates much like the organizations that formed the core of Soviet economy and society. Soviet workplaces had sprawling responsibilities and capacities that starkly distinguished them from typical employers in capitalist countries. This explains why, throughout the 1990s, many workers stayed on at jobs even when they were not paid, because their workplace was providing numerous non-cash advantages. The Soviet and post-Soviet workplace played a very important role as a central organizational unit in society, and thus the term 'domain' is meant to allude to the centrality and scope of these organizations. It now appears that the various benefits and allocations currently associated with native economies do more to reproduce a traditional Soviet 'domain' than to encourage a return to any pre-Soviet Kamchadal practices. Seen in this manner, the contemporary Kamchadal response to the new legislative benefits can be said to closely mirror Soviet-era practices surrounding the re-distributive functions of the 'domains'.

In a recent article, Caroline Humphrey examined the discursive practices of people who had recently lost their jobs, migrated, or for other reasons lost their membership in a 'domain'. She refers to these people as the 'dis-

possessed' and her discussion provides insights into why the new traditional Kamchadal economy resembles so closely a Soviet domain.

The dispossessed are people who have been deprived of property, work and entitlements, but in a second sense we can understand them as people who are themselves no longer possessed. That is, they are no longer in the quasi-feudal corporations, the collective 'domains', which confer a social status on their members and which in practice are still today the key units disposing of property and people in Russia' (Humphrey 1996, 70).

In Mil'kovo, where I conducted my research, people typically referred to such domains as 'organizations', and conceived of them as operations that not only employed people, but provided services and guardianship, and thus well exceeded the simple function of employment.

For indigenous peoples throughout the north, the local Association of Minority Peoples of the North, AMNS (*Assotsiatsiia Malochislennykh Narodov Severa*) has taken the role of a 'domain', allocating a range of valuable items in addition to fishing permits. For example, in Mil'kovo, the local AMNS has distributed at various times apartments, health care benefits, scholarships and food. In this sense, all aspects of traditional economy have become intensely bureaucratized and operate simply as one more governmental privilege. Seen in these terms, it is easier to understand what struck me as a surprising lack of interest on the part of Kamchadals, in the new opportunities for securing permits for hunting, fishing and family homesteads. I found that it was an exceptional individual who could learn the laws and then successfully negotiate the labyrinth of agencies, forms, fees, licenses and travel which were required to establish a land lease. Most people simply knew the basics: who the game wardens were, what their work schedules were, and how to avoid them. And this sort of knowledge was traded among men, Russians and Kamchadals, wherever men gathered – places like the town's hockey rink on weekends or the unemployment office during the week.

Considering this, it was not surprising that I had trouble getting people to invite me along fishing. Because the regulations were so extreme, and nobody was proud of being a caviar seller, this was a situation in which everyone was breaking the law and mildly ashamed about it. Appropriately enough, my first invitation to go fishing came out of a conversation on precisely this

topic. I met a man outside of the office of the fish inspector. It was early June and the mosquitoes were already thick. I was preparing to walk the two kilometers back to town but he offered me a ride in his old Moskvich and we quickly found a common enemy through exchanging stories about our business with the warden. Soon he told me that he would love to show me in great detail all of the absurd intricacies of legal fishing, but first I would have to accompany him to his mother-in-law's 70th birthday party. This was all very serendipitous because at the party I met his entire extended family. It turns out that he had been sent to the warden's office in order to process the paperwork for this entire group.

The currently approved 'traditional' fishing centers on a brigade system reminiscent of the Soviet-era. Native residents receive an annual quota of salmon, with the size of the quota depending on where one lives, ranging from 10 kilos in the capital city of Petropavlovsk up to 100 kilos in the Koriak Okrug. In the Mil'kovo region, Kamchadals have an option. This man and his family had chosen to catch their own fish, so he and four other men would catch the allotment for all 25 members of the extended family, and all together they would get 600 kilos. Other families choose to let the region's Association of Native Peoples subcontract the limits out to a private company which catches the fish and delivers it to people in their homes, taking fifty per cent to cover costs. Thus, in an arithmetic familiar to nearly everyone, the twenty-four kilos that were the quota that year would be reduced to twelve for those who did not catch their own quota.

We began fishing exactly at midnight, as the license allowed, and during the next 24 hours caught less than 100 kilos, falling way behind schedule. The runs of sockeye and king salmon had trailed off and the chums were still a few hundred kilometers down river. We were hoping to catch a run of *ariabuch*, a type of sockeye that runs late. Presumably, luck did not play such a central role in 'traditional' Kamchadal fishing, as word would travel about the progress of the various runs of fish, and when the river was full, people would go out to fish. Also, without such strict bureaucratic controls, Kamchadals would have normally chosen a more comfortable location than the flooded sand bar to which this brigade had been assigned. It was away from the breeze and thick with mosquitoes. However, 500 meters down river we could see another brigade, the one that had been hired by the local native association to catch and deliver fish for everyone who did not want to do

what we were doing. Not only did they have a prime location, on a high grassy bank with a breeze and fewer bugs, they were given many weeks to catch their limit, and not surprisingly, they were much more productive than we were. The fish inspectors grant them these favorable terms because it is a much more orderly arrangement and with far less paperwork.

In Dolinovka, a small village downriver from Mil'kovo, the region's fish inspector decided it would be too much trouble to patrol and authorized a single brigade to catch and deliver fish to the entire Kamchadal population of the village. Out of 350 Kamchadal residents in Dolinovka, 6 were allowed to fish that year. One reason that people do not complain too loudly about this system and its orderly deliveries was that the alternative, the 48-hour gamble, was made to be so much trouble. On that muddy sand bar, the brigade leader was expected to weigh each fish individually, note the sex, species and time caught. The separate sexes and species were entered into a log book, each in its own column, and each day a new page. All entries were to be in black ink and all columns drawn in with a ruler, and most people did not want to bother with that. More importantly though, most people know that when they needed more fish they would be able to catch them illegally, or buy them from a neighbor.

Of the 600 kilos allotted to this brigade, only one half were supposed to be *ariabuch* (sockeye) and the rest were supposed to be chum and king. Therefore, after the brigade's forty-eight hour term had expired, we all retired to a friend's nearby cabin to fix the books. With all of the fish loaded into the trunks of cars our brigade leader adjusted his records so that everything was almost exactly right. We actually discussed just how 'off' the figures ought to be so as to seem authentic.

Fishing Outside the Law

While the various forms of legally sanctioned 'traditional' fishing are not marked by anything especially distinctive other than official permits, the far more prevalent poaching techniques were illegal largely in name only. This is not to imply that there were no serious penalties, or that nobody ever received significant fines, but simply that poaching was pervasive and routine and the market for caviar unregulated and open. What struck me as especially interesting about the poaching was the way in which Kamchadals have used

ironic metaphors to rename tools of a trade that has been changed almost beyond recognition. In doing so they have wittingly (or not) evaded the trick question of cultural authenticity which more self-consciously nativist projects have fallen into.

The most prevalent fishing implements that I saw in use were a certain type of net referred to as a 'television' and a gaffing hook called a 'computer'. Each of these devices can be made cheaply, often from scraps scavenged off abandoned construction sites. The terms cleverly incorporate modern electronic commodities into the context of subsistence fishing in what turned into an extended series of rather bitter puns, playing on the common pastime of the unemployed (television) and the requisite tool for modern business (computer).

Of these two devices, the television is easier to use than the computer and thus more common. It consists of a three to five meter length of iron bar, a similar length of net and about five floats made from styrofoam or wood. The iron bars can easily be obtained from the numerous abandoned construction sites that litter the landscape. The bar lies on the bottom of the river and the net is held vertically above it by the floats. It is important that the net is the appropriate height, because if the floats lie on the surface of the water they are easily seen by game wardens. A rope is tied to the bar and fixed to the bank, concealed under bushes or sand. The fishermen check these nets periodically, once a day, or every few hours depending on how the salmon are running. This pattern of use leads to ironic conversations between men who remark with bored resignation that they spent the day 'watching television'. Many of the men I met out on the river would have rather been working at their regular jobs and were fishing only as a last resort. Thus, the term television also served to mildly denigrate the activity, as if fishing in this manner were synonymous with unemployment. Others, however, seemed pleased to spend their days on the river, and rejoiced in what they considered decadent leisure: 'I watch my television all day, thanks to Perestroika!' The term's multivalence allowed for a continuous stream of such ironic commentaries.

The 'computer' is an even simpler device than the 'television', but, as in real life, it requires greater skill to use. It is made from a five-meter wooden pole, usually an entire sapling, which has a length of rope attached to the thin end with two fist-sized treble hooks dangling at the end of the rope. The first time I saw these being used, there were five men lined up in along

the river bank, roughly 15 meters apart and each was standing behind a tall blind made from piled shrubs. The hooks lie on the bottom of the river and the men stand watching through clear water, waiting for a fish to swim over. At the right moment, they quickly jerk the hooks up and in one motion haul the fish out of the water and up onto the bank. Unlike the television, which is essentially a trap, using a computer requires great concentration and quick reflexes. As with the television, the specific origin or meaning of the name was unclear, but people typically guessed that it came from the fact that staring at the water resembled working at a computer, sitting still and watching a blue screen all day long.

The men I met on my first encounter with the computer all worked together at the department of building repairs (*KommunKhoz*) doing plumbing and building maintenance. While this 'domain' still ostensibly employed them, it was notorious locally for unpaid wages. They spent their workdays fishing together. Explaining their employment situation, they joked about having gotten promotions, now they were working with computers. This is such a pointed remark precisely because the only people who actually do get paid well and on time at most of the local organizations were the administrators and accountants, people who sat at desks with computers. It was quite strange in fact to visit some of the ailing industries in the area, such as the collective farm, the chemical fertilizer depot, the heating plants or the timber mill, where deserted fields and rusting machinery belie a bustling accounting department. These people often sat in front of computer screens and many were busy using the organization's resources to operate sideline business ventures. In light of their virtual unemployment, the wry renaming of what is essentially an old fishing technique offered these men endless opportunity to vent, with fairly bitter sarcasm, their sense of disenfranchisement and their anxiety about being left behind in the transition.

Conclusion

Searching for an example of the difference between Russian and Kamchadal attitudes about nature, a forty-ish Kamchadal man described his former job at a lumber camp. Part of the job was to clear roads into the forests so that heavy machinery could make its way through. What this man could not get over was how many plants he had to destroy to get his job done. He drove a

bulldozer and described at length how awful it made him feel to plow over honeysuckle bushes (*zhimolost'*) which in a few months would have been covered with berries. His description of logging was essentially an account of the various plants (berry bushes, mushroom patches, fiddlehead ferns) that were ruined in the process of logging. He did not keep the job for long, but had since been back to those areas that he helped to clear and described them as 'like a desert'. He mused rhetorically 'how long does it take for a honeysuckle bush to grow in Kamchatka?' His defense of the local environment was not 'spiritual' in the manner suggested by the World Bank report cited earlier, nor was it econometric in the sense that he knew there was no shortage of berry bushes. However, it did reveal that he saw the woods in a significantly different way than typical timber industry workers did. He was attuned to different registers of productivity, seeing the shrubs as berry bushes, the mossy floor as a habitat for mushrooms, and the dormant creeks as places where wild garlic (*cheremsha*) would come up in the spring. He was content to return to the same areas throughout the year to gather a broad range of renewable, though unprofitable, plants.

A similar perspective came from a Kamchadal woman, also forty-ish, who had achieved a relatively high level of white-collar employment in the town. When I asked her what she thought about the 'revitalization' of Kamchadal economy she replied by talking about Russians. She felt that there were too many people collecting wild food, and especially too many people who did not know what they were doing. Berries were being picked while they were still green by carloads of people who came out from the city. For her, this phenomenon underscored her perception that the Kamchatkan Russians were driven by greed and lacked sensitivity in their dealings with the environment. The cluster of caviar buyers who spent their days in the town markets only added to these perceptions with their shady, desperate appearance. The distinction she drew was between people who harvested in order to make money, and those that did it of personal consumption and, crucially, because they enjoyed doing it. In one sense, she had internalized the official versions of 'traditional' and chose to look down on those who harvested commodities from the local environment. At the same time, her husband, who had lost his job, was a productive fisherman and like many others, sold caviar to support his family. She was ashamed of this, and repeatedly remarked that she enjoyed spending time in the woods, and if she did not have to work,

she would live the entire year in Kirganik, turning to the land to support the family. Unlike her Russian colleagues, she was not interested in taking a vacation to the Black Sea.

Me, for vacation, I would rather go back to my Kirganik. Let there be mosquitoes and biting flies, I'd rather be there ... I can swim in the cold water, and the kids jump in the river too, and nothing comes of it, we don't get sick. ... The forest is close there, the fishing and berries. For me, nature is the main thing, and in Kirganik it is so close. That's all I want. Tomorrow we're getting ready to go out in nature.²

She maintained her job in Mil'kovo because it enabled her to support her children and to facilitate their education. Also, it would provide her with a good pension when she retired. Her husband, who had lost his job as a driver at the collective farm, lived permanently in the family's house in the nearby village of Kirganik, with her visiting on the weekends. Thus, for her, there was a clear divide, both spatial and temporal, between her job and what could be called her engagement with 'traditional' Kamchadal economic practices. While she was as active and aware of ongoing Kamchadal politics as anyone, such activities did not figure into her enjoyment of going to spend a day in 'nature'. For her, the paperwork surrounding state interventions into indigenous identities were of interest largely because they offered her a chance to finance her children's education through scholarships. What struck me as interesting about her comments was that in a manner entirely absent from the models offered in legislation, she maintained a coherent appreciation of the competing demands that she faced. She easily reconciled her role as a mother and white-collar worker in Mil'kovo, along with her strong ties to the Kamchadal life she had grown up with in Kirganik. In her life, 'traditional land use' was parallel with vacation and weekends, and the combination of these two economic systems presented no contradictions. Returning once again to Chayanov's comments, cited at the outset of this chapter, it seems that understanding Kamchadal economy today depends principally on approaching it with an adequate set of conceptual tools. While the measures employed in legislation deserve scrutiny and consideration because of their considerable influence, more nuanced approaches with more complex conceptual schemes are required to grasp the inextricable links uniting the

'Kamchadal economy' with economic life in Kamchatka more generally. For example, the significance of land for indigenous peoples is often expressed in terms of the relationship between the people and the land. For Kamchadals, it was more typical for people to emphasize the family connections that were central to land use than to foreground relationships between people and the land. While some people expressed direct appreciation of the beauty of the landscape, or their personal pleasure of being 'in nature', it was more typical for narrative accounts to emphasize being on the land together with family whether for a picnic, to gather berries, or to go fishing.

In terms of the officially sanctioned 'traditional' economy, it was clear to nearly everyone involved that there was very little about the legal definitions of resource use that could be described as 'traditional'. The regulations tended to encourage the formation of Soviet-style brigades, and seemed to be organized in order to facilitate state surveillance. In their effort to create an easily monitored, and thoroughly administered set of 'traditions', legislators and bureaucrats have tended to ignore entirely any concern for the actual experience of the native peoples, whether that be their enjoyment of the activities, their sense of cultural significance or continuity, or even their efforts to be more productive. The ironies created by these dissonant emphases and the need to supplement the 'official traditional' system can be glimpsed in the ironic wordplay surrounding the use of 'televisions' and 'computers'. These devices are newly adapted to the current condition of intense surveillance, and have been named in such a way that their use continually recalls the context of 'dispossession' and economic ruin that prevail in Kamchatka today.

Notes

- 1 This is not the case everywhere in Russia. Programs differ considerably by region and Oblast' and especially within administratively demarcated 'native' regions (*Natsional'ny Okrug, Natsional'ny Raion*) there tends to be greater opportunity for native economies to include commerce.
- 2 Mil'kovo, April 25, 1997.

References

- Anders, Gary C. 1992. The Alaska Native Experience with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. In *The Struggle for the Land*, P. Olsen (ed.), 127–45. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun 1991. Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology. In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, R. Fox (ed.), 191–210. Santa Fe: SAR Press.
- 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Berger, Thomas 1985. *Village Journey: The Report of the Alaska Native Review Commission*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- David, Shelton 1993. *Indigenous Views of Land and the Environment*. World Bank Discussion Papers, Vol. 188. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Feit, Harvey 1991. Gifts of the Land: Hunting Territories, Guaranteed Incomes and the Construction of Social Relations in James Bay Cree Society. *Senri Ethnological Studies* 30: 223–67.
- Fitzhugh, William and Aron Crowell 1988. *Crossroads of Continents: Cultures of Siberia and Alaska*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- Gibson, James 1969. *Feeding the Russian Fur Trade: Provisionment of the Okhotsk Seaboard and the Kamchatka Peninsula, 1639–1856*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.
- Grant, Bruce 1995. *In the Soviet House of Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hancock, Nelson 2001. *Ethnicity and State Measures: Social and Political Constructions of Kamchadal Identity, 1700–2000*. PhD Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, New York.
- Hensel, Chase 1996. *Telling Ourselves: Ethnicity and Discourse in Southwestern Alaska*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Humphrey, Caroline 1996/7. Myth-Making, Narratives, and the Dispossessed in Russia. *Cambridge Anthropology* 19(2): 70–92.
- Jameson, Frederic 1984. Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. *New Left Review* 146: 53–92.
- Langdon, Steve (ed.) 1986. *Contemporary Alaskan Native Economies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America Inc.

- Langdon, Stephen 1991. The Integration of Cash and Subsistence in South-west Alaskan Yup'ik Communities. *Senri Ethnological Studies* 30: 269–91.
- Myers, Fred 1986. Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian.
- 1989 Burning the Truck and Holding the Country: Forms of Property, Time, and the Negotiation of Identity among Pintupi Aborigines. In *We Are Here: Politics of Aboriginal Land Tenure*, E. Wilmsen (ed.), 15–42. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 1999. Settler Modernity and the Quest for an Indigenous Tradition. *Public Culture* 11(1): 19–48.
- Slezkine, Yuri 1994. *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North*. Ithaca: Cornell Press.
- Wilmsen, Edwin 1989. *We Are Here: Politics of Aboriginal Land Tenure*. Berkeley: University of California Press.