

## In the ‘House of Dismay’: Knowledge, Culture, and Post-Soviet Politics in Chukotka, 1995–96

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### Introduction

This paper charts a critical and volatile junction created by culture, environmentalism, and local politics in Chukotka during the mid-1990s, that is, by the middle of the first decade of the ‘post-socialist’ transition. We clearly understand our key problem as ‘fighting time’, as the status of indigenous people in Chukotka, the role of local powers, and the loyalties of the key local constituencies are continuously shifting these days. The situation, in fact, is quite typical in Chukotka as elsewhere in Russia. As this paper was being prepared, Chukotka elected a new Governor, a new regional government (Area Administration – *Okruzhnaia administratsiia*), and presumably adopted a whole set of new political slogans for its future.

To this end, our survey of 1995–96 in Chukotka has already become ‘ethnohistory’. Nonetheless, we believe that such a temporary snapshot of local social structures, political forces, and public interactions deserves special consideration. It incorporates the data of 1995–96 and our previous experience of almost two decades of research in the area, thus bridging the last years of the old Soviet regime and the first years of the post-Socialist transition. It also identifies several new components of this transition that are almost certain to persist in future, at least for some time. The list includes the dominant political motif of ‘survival’ and economic self-reliance (rather than that of the old-style unlimited economic expansion ideology of the Soviet state), the shifting loyalties and ascribed identities of all major political players; and a new ideological battleground of regional ‘*Chukotka-ness*’ contested by local indigenous people and resident newcomers alike, to name but a few.

This paper is based upon several sets of data. The first one comes from our earlier studies in cultures and languages of the native people of Chukotka, conducted between 1974 and 1990, that is, during the last decades of the former Soviet Union. During the next few years following the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991, our main source of information shifted primarily

to sources such as local newspapers, personal letters, presentations by local activists at international conferences, and to the network of personal communications delivered by local residents and/or visitors to the area. These data were matched by a pilot survey of the post-Soviet transitions in several native communities in Chukotka conducted by one of us in 1993 (Vakhtin 1993; 1994). The bulk of the information for this paper was collected in the course of a two-year project carried out in 1995–1996.<sup>1</sup> It included monitoring of local media and of social/political trends, interviewing local leaders, environmental workers, and native cultural experts during visits to Chukotka in 1995 and 1996 (Krupnik and Vakhtin 1995; 1997; Vakhtin and Krupnik 1999). Finally, we followed closely the most recent developments in Chukotka since 1996 – either through short-term visits to the area (Vakhtin in 1998) or via co-authored reviews and papers with other local researchers (Bogoslovskaja and Krupnik 2000; Bogoslovskaja, Krupnik, Mymrin 2000).<sup>2</sup>

As the present paper is a palimpsest of the various chronological experiences, its every section has a dominant historical motif. The introductory part outlines the social and economic situation in Chukotka as documented in 1995 and 1996; it was set up primarily by a deep industrial and infrastructural recession of the early 1990s. The core section discusses the attitude(s) towards cultures, knowledge, and identities, which the former Soviet system has left behind in both people's minds and in the present-day network of the area's social institutions. Finally, the last section discusses local attitudes towards the environment, knowledge, and indigenous cultural heritage, in connection with shifting identities, the role of traditional environmental knowledge in education, and grass-root environmentalism as documented during our survey of 1995–96.

### **'Social Environment': People and Economy of Chukotka in 1995–96**

*General Outlines*—This paper is based upon two surveys of modern culture change and transitions in indigenous environmental knowledge conducted in the Chukchi Autonomous *Okrug* (Area) in Northeastern Siberia in 1995 and 1996. The area is commonly called *Chukotka* (in Russian), both by its indigenous residents – the Yupik Eskimo, Chukchi, Even, and the Chuvan people – and by the so-called 'Newcomers', the Russian-speaking outsiders. *Chukotka* is the easternmost unit of the Russian Federation, the one farthest away from

Moscow, and also the closest to Alaska, which it faces across the International dateline in the Bering Strait. It is the part of Siberia that is most influenced by Alaska, due to its geographic proximity and to its recent exposure to contacts and exchanges.

During the time of our survey in 1995–96 and through the decade of the 1990s as a whole, the general social environment in Chukotka was determined by a painful, often agonising transition. The previous political and economic system created during some sixty years of Soviet policies collapsed, with almost no attractive model offered for its replacement. Under the former governmental strategy, Siberia in general, and Chukotka in particular, was regarded first and foremost as a precious mineral supply area and the 'frontier' zone for continuing industrial expansion. The region's economy was built up primarily to secure the supply of valuable mineral and strategic resources, such as gold, tin, gas, oil, etc., for the state-operated economy and military (see Armstrong 1965; 1966; Forsyth 1992; Vakhin 1992; Slezkine 1994). Within such a list of priorities set by both federal and local governments, native residents of Chukotka, with their cultures, economies, and traditions, occupied a fairly low position, the area's official status as an 'indigenous' administrative unit, *Natsional'ny* and later *Avtonomny Okrug* (resp. 'National' and 'Autonomous Area') notwithstanding.

As the first changes began to unfold between 1989 and 1991, this former Soviet ideology backed by a highly centralised state economic policy went through a brief period of confusion. The formerly rigid federal control was quickly eroding. This process was universal across the entire FSU; and almost everywhere it strengthened the role of the local administrations as opposed to the Federal government. Taking the lead, Chukotka seceded from the Magadan Province, to which it was subordinated since 1953, and signed the Russian Federation Treaty of 1992 as an equal 'subject' of the Russian Federation. This process enhanced the role of the area's government (and of the newly established office of the local Governor, in particular) in appropriation and allocation of local resources. It also softened formerly tight federal control over dozens of regional and village administrations. As its 'unwelcome by-product', it also stimulated an outburst of political, economic, and grass-roots activism that brought to life new forms of economic enterprises, local political associations as well as numerous social and environmental initiatives.

This post-Soviet 'thaw' and the peak of popular activism in Chukotka happened to be rather short-lived, and by 1995 it all but came to an end. On the one hand, the regional government quickly filled the short-lived power vacuum, at the expense of clumsy and now cash-stripped federal agencies. Regional government agencies, first and foremost the Governor's office seated in Anadyr, have become the source of an almost unlimited bureaucratic authority – just as the old Soviet federal agencies had been before. On the other hand, the general economic recession, cut-backs in supplies and money from mainland Russia, and the growing cost of living sank many hopes almost in the same way as the bankruptcy of major local industries drowned several new economic enterprises. This perspective is shared by many recent observers – locals and outsiders alike (e.g. Abriutina 1997; Gray 1997; 1998; Startsev 1997; Csonka 1998).

As a logical consequence of such transition of power from the last days of the Soviet regime to the 'post-socialist era', the vigour of local grass-root activism, including that of native associations and environmentalist NGOs, faded quickly. Overall, their role greatly declined between 1990 and 1996. By the time of our survey in 1995–96, former debates about self-government, public control, and local sustainability were becoming less and less audible. Several indigenous organisations established in 1989–92 were rapidly losing their membership and any local influence due to the lack of financial resources and established legal status.<sup>3</sup>

The status of the two Siberian Yupik (Asiatic Eskimo) NGOs, the 'Yupik' Society based in Provideniia and the 'Naukan' Society (Co-operative) based in Lavrentiia was to some extent an exception. Both succeeded in obtaining financial support from international Inuit organisations (such as ICC), Alaskan native corporations, and individual Alaskan native communities. Grants from the Alaskan North Slope Borough, the ICC General Council, and other Arctic indigenous organisations backed up Siberian Yupik international contacts, financial resources, and administrative facilities. It also allowed several ecological and heritage projects to be undertaken with foreign support or as parts of international programs. As an example let us mention shore based observations of bowhead whale migration patterns, a project which not only provided important scholarly information but also was, for several years, a considerable source of support for the Yupik native communities providing jobs for Yupik men and women (Ainana *et al.* 1995; 1997;

1999a; 1999b; Bogoslovskaja 1996; Huntington and Mymrin 1996; Zelenski *et al.* 1995). Thanks to this support, Siberian Yupik NGOs and local communities were able to send large groups of participants to the various indigenous conferences, meetings of elders, teachers' training sessions, festivals, and cultural events. This 'exceptional status' of the Yupik NGOs, compared to many other native associations in Chukotka, continued well into the late 1990s, until somewhat broader international contacts were established through the International Reindeer Herders Union, International Union of Whalers, International Whaling Commission, etc.

The growing public fatigue in Chukotka (as of 1995–96) was also marked by a sharp decline in public interest in ecological and environmental issues. These topics were highly popular in the area in the early 1990s (see below) and they were often co-opted as slogans for political mobilisation by the indigenous NGOs and non-native residents alike. The tightening of administrative control, decline in indigenous activism, and general ebbing in the grass-roots political movement in Chukotka saw these issues drop well to the bottom of the local public agenda and of the people's list of priority.

*Economic slump*—This slide in socio-political activism in Chukotka, as elsewhere in Russia during the mid-1990s, has to be seen against the backdrop of an increasing industrial slump and sharp decline in living standards. The speed of economic recession was particularly damaging in 1993–95, even according to the official statistics from the area. During the years 1993–94, in more than 60% of local industries the output plummeted (Bernton 1997); many large state-operated mines went bankrupt and were closed down (Golubchikov 1995, 5; Shmyganovski 1997, 3; Startsev 1997, 58). Some of the biggest industrial bulwarks of the old Soviet-era were officially designated for 'temporary closing' and abandonment (Postanovlenie 1995). The list included the Iultin mining and concentrating plant (together with the mining town of Iultin, population 5,300 in 1989), the Poliarninsky mining and concentrating plant (together with the town of Poliarnyi, population 4,700 in 1989), and others. In 1995, there was a real threat to the functioning of several other ecologically sensitive enterprises, including the Bilibino nuclear power plant in western Chukotka (Zakhoperski 1995, 1).

While unemployment was booming and salary payments were repeatedly delayed,<sup>4</sup> the cost of living increased considerably. For several years, Chukotka

and its main towns occupied the top lines in statistical tables showing the skyrocketing costs of living across the Russian Federation. In 1995, the area's capital, the city of Anadyr, was named the most expensive city in Russia, according to the Federal Living Cost and Prices Prognosis Centre. During the two years of our survey (1995–96) local food prices soared. In April 1995, the monthly subsistence wage per capita in Anadyr (the cost of 19 staple foods) was 388,000 roubles; in June 1995 it went up to 580,000 roubles<sup>5</sup> (KS,<sup>6</sup> July 20 and 25, 1995). Comparable figures for monthly subsistence wages during the same month of June 1995 were then put at 241,000 roubles in Moscow, 200,000 in St. Petersburg, and 100,000–150,000 roubles as an average for several medium-size cities in Western Russia. The food prices in local towns and villages across Chukotka at that time were even higher (see Shmyganovski 1997, 3).<sup>7</sup>

Since residents, especially in mining towns and native villages, were not receiving salary payments and had no currency available, the shops operated primarily with individual and family credit lines for food (each shop kept a list of local customers showing the amount of goods sold). This system worked for the basic staples only, such as bread, sugar, tea, pasta, salt, and a few others. The situation of state-run food supplies caused particular despair and apathy among the local residents, especially since the private trade introduced in 1992 offered a plenteous variety of imported foods unparalleled in the past. In local towns and particularly in the area capital, the city of Anadyr, dozens of private shops have opened, boasting a supply of American, German, Japanese as well as new Russian commercial food products (see more in: Bernton 1997; Gray 1997; 1998). During our visit in 1996, the city of Anadyr (population 10,000) had some 40 privatised and/or newly established shops, some operating 24 hours a day. In the Soviet era it barely managed a handful of larger state-owned food stores to serve there a much larger population of 17,000.

*The Population Exodus*—Since the 1950s, thousands of Russians and other outsider migrants had moved to Chukotka as well as to other formerly native areas across Siberia and the Russian Arctic. This population flow was driven by several factors. Generous wages (up to three times higher than for a similar job in European Russia) and better benefits were offered. Opportunities for professional mobility were another strong factor. In the 'old Soviet days' the

North often carried a popular image, idealised to a large extent, of being slightly more liberal, more affluent, and less bureaucratically regulated. For many people from impoverished towns in Central Russia, including educated professionals, such as engineers, teachers, administration and technology specialists, Siberia (and Chukotka, in particular) was a promising place to launch a career and to start a decent life.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the consequent economic crisis, the drain on the newcomers' population became massive. By 1994, the overall population of Chukotka had decreased by 28%: from 160,000, according to the last Soviet census of 1989, to some 110,000 (Zolototrubov, Popkov 1994, 5). By 1996, it had dropped to barely 100,000, and some later estimates showed the actual population to be as low as 80,000, that is, less than a half of the 1989 figure (Bogoslovskaiia 2000, 6; Chislennost' naseleniia 1998, 74; Csonka 1998, 28; Gray 1997, 97; Shmyganovski 1997, 1; Startsev 1997, 58).

Certain industrial areas and major towns were losing their residents at even greater speed. For example, the population of the Bilibino District in western Chukotka used to be 29,200 people at its peak in 1989; by 1996 it dropped to barely 14,000 (Abriutina 1998, 1). The population of two northernmost and highly industrial districts, Chaun and Shmidt, had dropped by almost three times: from 32,000 to 13,500 and from 15,800 to 5,800 respectively (Chislennost' naseleniia 1998, 75). In the town of Provideniia less than 3,000 residents remained in 1997 of the once booming community of 5,500 (Bernton 1997, C-1). Current estimates by present-day residents put the number at some 2,200. Even the area's capital, the city of Anadyr has lost about 30% of its population: from 17,000 in 1989 to 12,500 in 1998 (Chislennost' naseleniia 1998, 74). Several apartments remained vacant, old wooden framed houses are just left abandoned. People said that during the winter hardly half of the city apartments' windows brave the Arctic darkness with electric light.

The situation in many local towns and village communities was much worse than in the area capital of Anadyr where local government at the least kept heat, water, and electricity running smoothly (as of 1996). As a result, the population exodus usually occurred through a sort of domino effect. As residents from the area capital left for central parts of Russia, their positions and apartments were quickly occupied by people coming from the district

centres (who also moved in great numbers to Russia and other post-Soviet independent states, particularly Ukraine). Their positions and apartments in smaller towns were, in turn, taken by other people moving in from the village communities. Native villagers, particularly professionals and pensioners, were also fleeing in search of a more secure urban life in district and area capitals. And finally, the reindeer herders from the tundra were abandoning their nomadic camps to fill whatever residence and jobs were left in the crumbling villages (Gray 1997, 100; Abriutina 1997, 3; Startsev 1997, 57; Csonka 1998, 36).

This massive population flow was just unfolding during our survey years of 1995–96 but its consequences could be felt almost everywhere. The first to leave were technicians, teachers, doctors, accountants, and other qualified workers (Bernton 1997; Glebova 1992; Vakhtin 1993; Koravie 1994). As a result, all local industries and public services literally haemorrhaged, as remaining personnel were unable to keep schools, medical facilities, and public networks at their former operational level. Many village schools were ‘shrinking’ due to the critical shortage of licensed teachers. By 1996, the former high school (to grade ten) in the village of Sireniki became a six-grade school; the eight-grade school in the village of Yanrakynnot became an elementary four-grade school, etc. There was not enough trained staff for small rural hospitals and clinics in several villages. Former ‘flying’ medical teams that provided health services to distant villages and tundra camps were grounded because of the lack of personnel and the high costs of helicopter fuel (Abriutina 1998, 1). Later surveys reported that many native communities were literally abandoned by the authorities, with their housing, infrastructure, and public services quickly falling into disrepair (Csonka 1998; Gray 1997, etc.).

Whereas the symptoms of massive population drift and economic recession were clearly visible in 1996, its long-term impact remained uncertain if not controversial. As the ‘outsiders’ were fleeing the area and the public infrastructure was shrinking, the ‘locals’ stayed behind and suddenly became more visible. As in any ‘bust economy’ more and more native residents have assumed positions of local leadership and responsibility, once occupied primarily by the newcomers.

The example of the Yupik village of Novo-Chaplino, which both of the authors have frequented since the 1970s, is worth exploring. During the



Soviet years, the newcomers constituted about 1/4 of the village population of 460 (in 1986); but they did have a tough grasp on all top positions in the community, especially in the state farm, the village administration, and technical services. Their dominance was particularly obvious at the village high-school, where 25 out of the total of 50 employees (in 1986) were non-natives, including the principal, the boarding-school supervisor, the chief accountant, the administrative director, the book-keeper, and 11 out of 18 licensed teachers. By contrast, in 1995, almost all newcomer families were gone, and slightly over 30 non-natives remained in the village, mostly those married to the local Yupik and Chukchi residents. Several village industries and services have been shut down or severely reduced in personnel and operation. Out of the top twelve staff positions at the state farm administration, only three were now held by non-natives. The staff of the village high-school had shrunk from 50 to 29 people; but its principal as well as 11 out of 15 teachers were now local Yupik and Chukchi.

*The Status of the Local Reindeer Economy*—The overall gloomy impact of the recession and decreasing living standards in Chukotka during the mid-1990s was marred by another critical local development: a sharp crisis in the reindeer industry. Once seen as a 'glass window' of Soviet economic policies and a showcase for the advancement of native people under the Socialist system, it all but collapsed, with the demise of the Soviet regime. Between 1989 and 1994, the area's reindeer stock plummeted from 508,400 to 280,800 (KS, February 13, 1996); and it dropped further to some 208,000 in 1995, again down to 180,000 in 1997, and to barely 140,000 in 1998 (Etylin 1999; Gray 2000, 34; *Vedomost'* 1995). This catastrophic decline was of cataclysmic proportion even compared to the overall huge losses to the Russian domestic reindeer stock that declined from 2.3 million in 1970 to 1.8 million in 1994, and to 1.6 million in 1997 (KS, February 13, 1996; Krupnik 2000, 49).

By the time of our survey in 1996, evidence abounded that in certain districts and villages, the reindeer economy was all but ruined. In the village of Snezhnoe some 200 miles from Anadyr, only two herds totalling some 3,000 deer were left by 1996 out of the once booming stock of ten large herds of more than 2,000 reindeer each (Gray 1997, 100). In the Bilibino District hardly 30,000 reindeer remained out of 120,000; and less than 20 herding teams ('brigades') roamed the tundra pastures once used by 45 teams (Abriu-

tina 1997, 3). There were cases where entire herds of several thousand deer have been lost in one year through starvation, neglect, poaching, and selling off for liquor by native herders (Abriutina 1997, 2–4; KS, May 30, 1996; Startsev 1997, 58–9). By 2000, the situation had hardly improved; in many places, it actually deteriorated (Gray 2000). In all of the Providenski District, hardly 70 herders remained with their reindeer by 1997 (Ainana *et al.*, 1999, 267).

Many factors contributed to the collapse of the Chukotkan reindeer economy and several scenarios have been offered, particularly in the last few years (see Gray 1998; 2000; Etylin 1999; Zadorin 1999). First, the whole system of state subsidies, artificial prices, and rigid planning of the reindeer industry collapsed after 1991. Without state-funnelled money and supplies, many large but distant reindeer state-farms found themselves economically non-viable because of lack of markets and extremely high transportation costs. Second, the once developed network of supplies and services delivered to the tundra camps at government expense vanished, leaving few people with any enthusiasm about daily nomadic existence. Third, many of the so-called ‘new economic forms’ introduced in the early 1990s to substitute large state-farm herding, that is, family, clan, and co-operative (brigade) reindeer enterprises, failed under the harsh realities of economic dismay and unfulfilled romantic illusions (Abriutina 1996, 233–5). Fourth, local administrative policies contributed tremendously to the overall mismanagement, through the various conflicting schemes of ‘privatisation’, ‘re-privatisation’, ‘re-nationalisation’, etc. (see more in Gray 2000, 34–7).

During the early 1990s, both the district administrations and many native leaders were convinced that as soon as the cumbersome state-operated reindeer farms were dismantled, the indigenous Chukchi herding culture would recreate itself almost immediately and be all but intact. With this, all the former subsistence knowledge, individual herders’ initiative, and social support network would soon flourish again. The reality turned out to be quite different. The post-Soviet transition to private and communal native herding was conducted like any other political campaign of the old Soviet era. It was hasty, unconsidered, and it was insufficiently backed by the legal and economic instruments needed to support individual and/or group herding. Social and cultural realities of the preceding Soviet era were never seriously considered as factors to influence the modern people of Chukotka who were

now adhering to a completely different value system than their 'uneducated forefathers'. To almost everyone's surprise, the core and the 'soul' of the Chukchi herding culture was, in fact, crushed by the pressure of the Soviet welfare state and by the modernisation it enforced, as was recently argued by some native politicians (Abriutina 1997; Etylin 1999; Zadorin 1999).

For many native people, even for the leaders and owners of the private reindeer enterprises, it was often easier to interpret the interactions within the new economic units in terms of the familiar relations between a salaried herder (a wage worker) and the director of the old state-farm. One story we documented in 1996 reported on the failure of one 'clan' reindeer enterprise (*rodovoe fermerskoe khoziaistvo*) consisting of 18 people from the village of Tavaivaam. The leader of the 'clan' enterprise, a Native, complained that the herders, all his close and distant relatives, were completely indifferent to the needs of the common herd. They did not guard it properly, played cards all day, and dreamed of drinking sprees upon returning to the village. This complaint was sadly ironic if one noted that the leader himself resided in the city of Anadyr and used to visit his herd just to bring some supplies of food and clothes. In this pattern of 'leadership', he was exactly modelling the all too familiar functions of a Russian state-farm director but never an old-style Chukchi herd-owner.

### **The New Perspective on Cultural Heritage**

The official ideology of the Soviet era, though playing on universal socialist values and the unity of the Soviet people, staunchly maintained the specific niches it ascribed to certain segments of its population. From the start, the Soviet administration in Siberia allocated to newcomers the status of the 'vanguard of modernisation' and of the bearers of 'advanced' forms of ideology and culture. The indigenous people, on the contrary, were assigned to the role of the 'receivers,' those who are to be directed to a new and better life. This basic dichotomy was a pillar of the Soviet ethnic policy in Chukotka and elsewhere in Siberia for the seventy-something years of the regime (see Slezkine 1994, and also Forsyth 1992; Grant 1995; Vakhtin 1992).

To maintain this key ideological paradigm, certain manifest ethnic or cultural features were to be preserved by the Siberian indigenous people. The Soviet system not only permitted, but deliberately reinforced certain instru-

ments of native ethnicity under the general concept of ‘the Soviet nation’ (*Sovetski narod*). Several traditional economic activities (like reindeer-herding, sea-mammal hunting, fishing), specific forms of folklore, arts and crafts, public dancing and singing performances were actually bankrolled by the Soviet state via its various economic, cultural, and entertainment agencies. The recent study by Anna Kerttula (1997; 2000) illustrates how the old Soviet system actually advocated ethnic ‘ecological niches’ in Chukotka. It exploited the Chukchi attachment to reindeer herding and nomadic life, the Yupik longing for sea hunting, and the newcomers’ craving for better paid administration and maintenance positions in towns and villages, with their modern industry and infrastructure.

This policy provided the indigenous people with a certain social mobility, though mostly restricted by the limitations of the ‘niches’ allocated to each group. For instance, the Chukchi youth were encouraged to become reindeer herders and middle-level stock professionals, such as veterinary technicians, fur-farm workers, paramedics, etc. It was also considered ‘progressive’ for a young Yupik or Chukchi girl to go to college to become a school teacher – but only a teacher of native language or an elementary school teacher or a kindergarten nanny in some bilingual pre-school classes. Any promotion beyond these boundaries could only be accomplished with direct assistance from the administration.

Certain cultural niches, similar to the career niches, were also established. Each indigenous Siberian nation was supposed to have its ‘ethnic culture’ manifested through folklore (primarily fairy-tales, never historical narratives), songs and dances, arts and crafts. The state invested considerable resources in supporting and promoting these niches. Other forms of native cultures were ignored, neglected or openly suppressed – such as indigenous spiritual beliefs, shamanistic practices, and any other ceremonies that maintained ritual bonds with the old abandoned settlements, sanctuaries, and clan centres.

This official policy, which lasted for several decades, inevitably created matching attitudes among the indigenous people themselves. This ‘folklore-and-dancing’ mold of native culture was quite attractive to many as an established channel for social mobility and prestige. For an aspiring village youth, to join a successful dancing team meant a lot of travel to art festivals and performance competitions throughout the former USSR and sometimes even abroad. For an artistically gifted person, that was an approved way to express

oneself, and to acquire established status and social respect (Mitlianskaia 1996). Despite its obvious manipulation by both sides, village dancing groups and local folklore festivals attracted scores of enthusiastic participants, dedicated elders, gifted performers, and deeply thankful audiences. If this remained the only appropriate Soviet pattern for native people to keep their tradition alive and to enjoy their pastime, the 'folklore-and-dancing' niche managed to some extent to preserve traditional ethnic cultures and to pass them on to the younger generation – in Chukotka and elsewhere across Siberia.

Since the late 1980s, and especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the indigenous people and the newcomers alike were more eager to question the many old concepts of ethnicity. Following the collapse of the Soviet ideology system, many old taboos were broken, and many boundaries and borders were reinterpreted. This reinterpretation of identity was followed by the breaking of new ground in the distinction between the native and non-native populations of Chukotka. Consequently, the role of indigenous cultural heritage was also quickly reconsidered.

The demise of the old Soviet values and paradigms triggered a growing interest in ethnic roots, religion, alternative spiritual values, and in new identities. The newcomers were first to attack the basic dichotomy between the 'natives' and the 'outsiders' that was a cornerstone of the old Soviet ideology and of the many administrative practices of the regime. Thousands of 'outsiders' (*priezzhie*) left Chukotka after 1991 in search of a better life in other parts of Russia and in the newly independent states, and many others would be happy to leave but couldn't because they had nowhere to go. On the other hand, for many of those who stayed behind this was a free choice: they vowed to regard Chukotka as their legitimate native land. Due to the radical political changes of the 1990s, the very concept of one's 'homeland' underwent a dramatic re-evaluation. People were faced with a new reality, as their 'home' area(s) suddenly became highly special. One's 'home' was indeed the place of one's birth, the area where one lived as a child, got married or simply spent critical years of one's life. It was this highly personal and emotionally loaded locality that quickly replaced the previous image of the former Soviet Union that spanned 10 time-zones and was always considered the ultimate 'homeland' for all Soviet people. The new 'localism', the changing perspective on one's regional loyalty was now grounded in strong personal bonds rather than in the former empire stereotypes.

'*The attitude of the newcomers has changed*', one of our native consultants in Anadyr told us in 1996, '*They now say 'our land, Chukotka*'. To the surprise of native leaders and local educators alike, Russian and other non-native students suddenly became very enthusiastic about studying native languages, history, crafts and subsistence skills at school. Town and even village Russian parents often encouraged their children to attend such classes in native traditions, something they never did before (see Vakhtin and Krupnik 1999, 33–4 for more examples and quotations).

As a result, the new local institutions, public and individual initiatives aimed at maintaining indigenous cultural heritage, including its spiritual, artistic, environmental, and subsistence values were literally booming. The spectrum of some twenty new or substantially remodelled agencies and projects we encountered in Anadyr in 1996 was truly amazing. It included major local cultural and educational institutions, such as the newly established College of the People of the North and the Centre for Folk Culture, the Institute of Advanced Teacher Training, the Anadyr Pedagogical College, the Chukotka Regional Museum, the Regional Broadcasting Corporation, and two of the local newspapers, the official *Krainii Sever* (The Far North) and the independent, *Murgin Nutenut*, with a distinct native flavour. Staff workers at the governmental resource and environmental agencies, such as the Area Department of Agriculture and Natural Park '*Beringia*' were using the word (native) 'heritage' (*nasledie*) as one of their most common terms. Local scientific research was substantially reshaped and the newly established Research Centre *Chukotka* was very active in advocating indigenous subsistence rights, environmental knowledge, and conservation practices (e.g. Belikovich 1995). Last but not least, the list embraced numerous ongoing initiatives by local environmentalists and individual cultural activists, including efforts by a few native NGOs (such as the Yupik cultural centre, *Kiaghneq*, and the Chukchi language and folklore association, *Chechetkyn Vetgav*), etc. In Provideniia, the small local museum was running a cross-Bering Strait bowhead whale monitoring program, in collaboration with the Society of the Eskimos of Chukotka, *Yupik*, which was sponsored by a grant from the North Slope Borough (Ainana *et al.* 1995). This program was to remain at the core of local environmental and heritage activities for several years to come. And in the village of Tavaivaam, a tiny local team of Chukchi teachers

and cultural activists was engaged in a program of cultural revitalisation that targeted local children and youth.

In 1995–96, these initiatives primarily used 'soft' and/or opportunistic financing; many were undertaken and continued independently of similar official programs run by the area administration. They embraced a rather limited but highly dedicated pool of local *cadres* and they were focused on diverse and numerous aspects of native cultural heritage. The energetic and devoted non-native professionals and indigenous activists alike were quite anxious to expand the established image of indigenous culture, the old mixture of folk dances, fur and ivory souvenirs, and elementary classes in native languages.

Of course, as Patty Gray argues (Gray 1998; 2000, 36) some of these efforts were designated and managed by non-Natives, and were actively exploited by the area administration to raise its media appeal both locally and aimed at a wider audience back in Moscow. However, lip service paid by the local officials was too common a practice; as a result, several good initiatives did not endure through the following years and many more were commercialised and/or openly distorted for short-term political needs only (like the infamous '*The Days of Chukotka*' festivals in Moscow). However, among the almost universal economic grievances we encountered in the Chukotkan 'house of dismay' in 1996, the growing share of financial and human resources allocated to the cultural heritage of local indigenous people was impressive as never before (see also Csonka 1998, 33–4).

### **Transitions in Local Educational System(s)**

In a traditional (that is, prior to intensive contact with the Russians) native society knowledge was shared, transmitted, and controlled via a comprehensive system of channels, which can be rather imperfectly named 'community education'. In the early 1900s, this native-controlled community education in Chukotka experienced its first encounter with a European-style system of formal schooling, first missionary, later Soviet. During the 20th century, the relation between the two systems of child raising underwent dramatic transformations: from the comparatively modest role of the outsider-controlled school system in the 1920s and 1930s to its almost unquestionable and limitless domination in the 1970s and 1980s.

In addition, the relations between community and school education have changed not only in sheer numbers and power statuses but, more importantly, in their attractiveness to the local indigenous people themselves. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Soviet school was widely regarded as a symbol of progress and as a vehicle for economic and social modernisation. Many personal recollections reported in the 1970s focused on how native children and their parents accepted early Soviet schools and teachers with great enthusiasm. As formal schooling became compulsory (first for four years, later for eight and even ten years) and the people were deprived of any right to choose between the Soviet school and traditional family/community education, the attitude towards the school system changed. By the 1980s, native parents were openly expressing their frustration over effects of the state school system such as the loss of native languages, lack of self-sufficiency, and damage to traditional skills. Parents and school officials alike were also quite frank in their concern over what later became known as the 'dependency attitude' among native children raised at state boarding schools at full state expense.

The Soviet state-school system was fully instituted in Chukotka during the 1950s and it became established in its almost industrial form by the 1970s. As elsewhere in Siberia and/or Central Russia, it was very rigidly controlled and highly centralised. All town and village schools operated in accordance with the uniform teaching programs that were approved and adopted by the Ministry of Education in Moscow. With minor exceptions made for teaching in native languages, the programs did not include any specific cultural or local components. The bits of area studies, indigenous ecological knowledge, and subsistence skills found their modest place only on the curricula of the native language classes and of what used to be called 'vocational training' in reindeer herding and native crafts (Mitlianskaia 1983; Volfson 1987; Raskin *et al.* 1988).

As the economic crisis of the early post-Soviet era put the residents of Chukotka face to face with the issue of economic sustainability and mere survival, it became clear to many that the Soviet school provided a kind of education that was basically faulty and was offered in the wrong way. The kind of knowledge children were taught at school was generally aimed at opening a road to fixed jobs, such as secretarial and technical positions, and to a guaranteed salary under a state-controlled economy. The all but



neglected wisdom of traditional 'community education' developed by generations of subsistence reindeer herders and sea-mammal hunters, on the contrary, taught native children how to live with and how to survive on local resources. It comes as no surprise that with the changing economic realities local knowledge and traditional survival skills suddenly became important, because neither a state job nor a fixed salary was guaranteed any more. This triggered often nostalgic reminiscences about the lost values of the former 'tundra system of learning' (or similar 'sea-hunting system of learning') and of the old community education in general.

*How did I learn things when I was a child? – I watched what my mother was doing. My mother taught me a lot. I can sew, I can dress skins ... When I was a child we learnt things differently, in the tundra and in school. At school they taught us to work diligently. But what work is that?! Here in the tundra – oh yes: you have to fetch wood, we all got up at five in the morning, four in summer, we had some tea and went out fishing, and the women stayed behind, dressed the skins, stacked the woodpile. I remember it all. And from school textbooks, of course, I can't remember everything* (Elena Kosolapova, Chukchi-Language Broadcasting office in Provideniia, 1995).

In 1996, quite a few calls could be heard from native and outsider educators in Anadyr to reform the government school system; many people then were strong advocates of what they called 'ethnic schooling' (*natsional'naia shkola*). Whereas most of the attempts at school reform advanced by outsiders were focused upon the changing content of education, the approach advanced by native people concentrated more often on a different way of teaching. Many native parents and educators referred to their own experience as children and to lessons they learned in the 'tundra school system' from their parents and elder relatives.

One effort in local school reform deserves special attention. It was undertaken in the Yupik village of Novo-Chaplino and it was advanced by a group of local teachers led by the then school principal, Igor Zagrebin (a newcomer). This was how Zagrebin described the venture in 1995:

*It so happened that in Novo-Chaplino a group of teachers came together in about 1988, who held the same views on education. We decided to develop an 'area studies' (curriculum) in the broad sense of the term.*

*Area studies are, come to think of it, not only knowledge of nature and history of the land, but also the language, no doubt. We began by establishing and strengthening the classes in the native language. Native language was introduced from 1st to 11th grade (instead of the former two to three year classes).*

*The second step was 'working skills' training. Before, they had only taught reindeer herding skills in Chaplino. We changed that to sea-hunting. Who needed reindeer herding in Chaplino? This has always been a maritime Eskimo [Yupik] village! So we introduced sea-hunting for boys, and skin-sewing for girls. The third aspect was physical training: we introduced indigenous sports and games. English classes, natural sciences, even math – we merged those as much as we could with area studies. From the English classes we removed all political conversational topics, and introduced new topics like 'Edible Plants', 'Traditional Subsistence' and 'Geography of Chukotka'. We started to teach English from Grade 1 on [the recently re-established contacts with Alaska make English classes very popular among local children and parents]. We introduced a special class in 'History of Chukotka' (grade 5 to 11) and 'Geography of Chukotka' (grade 5 to 10). The teachers prepared the teaching programs all by themselves, all the teaching aids and all visual materials.*

*...Our main purpose was to bring the school education as close as possible to the real village life, without lowering the standard of teaching. The children were very enthusiastic about these changes. People in the village supported us, everybody realised that this was needed. But very few were active in assisting us directly and many parents were indifferent to their kid's education. If this initiative had not been undertaken by the school, well, nothing would have happened. The village community is passive, it is unable to produce such an initiative. On the other hand, many hunters told us that boys must be taught to hunt starting as early as possible; and women also said that girls should be taught to sew at an early age. So I can say that the pressure came from the village, in some ways ... We just helped to formulate and implement it (Igor Zagrebin, 1995).*

These grassroots experiments in educational reforms, along with other similar efforts like that of the village high-school in Uelen in 1987–92

(Raskin *et al.* 1988; Vakhtin 1993; Volfson 1987), encountered many troubles under the constraints of economic recession. Teachers' salaries were not paid for months, school buildings crumbled, and many non-native teachers left the villages, driven out by the harsh conditions. By 1995–96, several village schools, as mentioned, were forced to reduce their curricula to only six grades and even elementary education. As a result, many experiments in native- (or locally-) focused curricula, like the one described by Igor Zagrebin, were abandoned.

Nevertheless, as the non-native teachers left the area, the village schools were increasingly being staffed and run by local educators. These were trained primarily to teach Russian and native languages (Yupik and Chukchi), and elementary classes (grades 1–4). With this personnel profile, Chukotkan village schools quickly ceased to match the requirements of the unified state educational system, be it the old Soviet or the new Russian one. However, despite all the odds against them, native educators are usually more likely to shift school programs closer to village life. They are, or at least they could be, much more resourceful, including introducing their personal experiences and cultural heritage into the school curriculum.

As of 1996, the area government in Anadyr and its Office of Education was quite favourable to incorporating some components of the local cultural legacy and indigenous knowledge into school education activities. The regional *Institute for Advanced Teacher Training* offered special courses for teachers in native cultures. It also organised special seminars for authors of new regional textbooks, and it published several brochures, readers, and booklets to boost this type of education (*Regionalnye problemy* 1993, 1–3). In the three years following Chukotka's separation from the Magadan Province in 1992, it sponsored four conferences in native education. The list included sessions on 'indigenous pedagogy' (*natsional'naiia pedagogika*) of the people of Chukotka (1992); on native sports and games (1993); on the revival of Chukchi and Yupik cultures (1993); and on general issues in native cultures, languages, and traditions (1993, see *Regionalnye problemy* 1993, 3–4).

The changing attitude towards the indigenous heritage in the state-run educational system in Chukotka was another rare spark of hope amidst the generally grim economic and social environment of 1995–96. The financial situation of local education was of course extremely grim, and the resources were much more limited than in the old Soviet years. Still, changes for the

better looked at least possible, both at the village school level and in the new ideological context of regional education and schooling.

### The Natural Environment and the Environmentalist Movement

Public and grass-root environmentalism is a relatively new phenomenon in Chukotka as well as elsewhere across the Russian Arctic. Until the last years of the former Soviet Union, all information with regard to pollution, mining of strategic minerals, environmental disasters, as well as environmentally caused diseases was considered 'classified'. When the ban on information was finally broken, the reality turned out to be devastating. The following few examples were taken from the official data of the Area Committee on Environmental Protection that were made public in 1995, under the heart-breaking title, '*The White Wilderness Threatens to Become Blackness*' (Granatkin 1995). Less than 15% of the local industrial enterprises in Chukotka then had any equipment to control air-pollution. Several towns and almost all villages were discharging raw sewage directly into local rivers; of 22 existing sewage plants, half did not perform properly. Rivers and lakes around all major settlements were polluted with oil-products, and half of the area's nuclear power generators have worked beyond their time limits, thus becoming instead 'nuclear waste' and a source of nuclear contamination. The list goes on and on.

While data on pollution and the status of the environment were formerly kept under tight control, both native and non-native residents did worry deeply about the state of affairs. In fact, we recovered the first documented (though unpublished) appeal to fight environmental degradation in Chukotka as early as 1973 (*Tret'ia konferentsiia* 1973, 30). The anxiety, however, was commonly expressed in two strikingly different ways. Under the newcomers' perspective, the priority was always given to industrial development as the key avenue to the area's modernisation and overall improvement of living standards. Any damage to the environment was then considered rather as negative 'side-effects'. These were to be dealt with via tough regulations, strict environmental policies, and mitigation techniques. Native residents, though enjoying the many fruits of better housing and public services, regarded the environment as their 'habitat', as their place to live rather than a place to work. As such, it could not be continuously 'improved' through new equip-

ment, labour, and technologies. This fundamental discrepancy created conflicting sets of mutually held stereotypes.

The very perception of the 'inner space', of one's 'home' and of the appropriate means to maintain its 'cleanness' turned out to be radically different from the native and the non-native perspective. For the newcomers, their first concern was with the cleanness ('neatness') of their homes and apartments, secondly with that of a small strip of land surrounding their houses, and, to a much lesser extent, with the village/town streets. The land beyond the village or town limits, particularly the open tundra and sea-coast, was regarded as 'free terrain'. To the newcomers, this was an ideal space for picnicking, weekend hunting and fishing, as well as being a 'backyard' to dispose of garbage and refuse. For the natives, the situation was just the reverse. For the reindeer Chukchi, the open tundra was their virtual home, which was to be kept clean at all costs. For the coastal dwellers, it was the beach, the seashore that was regarded as people's ultimate home and the place of the most critical spiritual, social, and environmental interactions. To ensure the cycle of life, it had to be kept in perfect order (see Krupnik and Vakhutin 1997, 241–2). The cleanness of the tundra and of the coast was an integral part of indigenous culture(s), as was strongly supported by elaborate sets of rituals and beliefs.

These opposing cultural standards for the cleanness of one's house and of the surrounding territory were bound to collide. The difference in attitudes was clearly expressed by one of the native speakers addressing regional hearings on environmental protection in 1978:

*Look at the coast we have. It is scary even for a human to go out there, to say nothing of fish and animals. All the garbage is thrown out on the coast. In the old days, the people used to fish right from the shore, there were seals and walruses in the inlet. Now even the Gobi fish does not come in. This is what the negligent people have done (Piataia konferentsiia 1978).*

This is not to say that 'the negligent people', i.e., the Non-natives, did not talk about cleanness or didn't care about it. The problem was that they understood differently the very concept of cleanness. From the very first years of their presence in Chukotka, newcomers did their best to enforce their perspective on how to keep a house clean and what a 'neat' village

should look like. Already in the summer of 1960, just two years after the village of Novo-Chaplino was built at a new and almost pristine site, a campaign for a 'clean village' was announced (Protocols 1960, 6). Such campaigns, organised by the local Village Councils dominated by the newcomers, were carried out on a regular basis for the next thirty years. The village administrations made a point of checking the cleanness of private houses and apartments. Specially appointed 'sanitary squads' checked the condition of the houses, of the family kitchens and bedrooms. The violators of cleanness standards were then identified and exposed:

*In some apartments cleanness is neglected, floors are dirty, the walls and the ceiling are covered with soot, the necessary furniture is lacking, as well as the bed sheets (Resheniia 1965).*

It is quite possible that today's miserable condition of the many villages in Chukotka as well as of the adjacent tundra and the seacoast is a product of these conflicting perceptions of cleanness among the indigenous residents and the newcomers. Both parties blamed each other for 'negligence', careless attitudes toward the environment, and for innate slovenliness. The natives were continuously reproached for their inability to keep their houses 'properly' in order; the newcomers were blamed for recklessly polluting the tundra and the coast. Since for decades the two parties had had quite an unequal share of local political power, the newcomers were somehow able to enforce among the native residents certain efforts to keep the village streets and houses relatively clean: by 'sanitary squads', periodic 'cleaning campaigns,' and/or via improved municipal services. But the natives had no way to stop the ongoing littering of the tundra and the seashore, nor could they prevent industrial pollution and hazardous contamination.

Consequently, indigenous people were abandoning their former values of cleanness of the environment. A trip to the tundra, especially by native youth, is now often followed by the same careless littering with bottles, cans, and other waste similar to the picnics of the newcomers. The tundra and the coast around many villages are littered to the extreme. From an aircraft on a sunny day one sees the brilliant shining rings encircling every site of human residence: these are splinters of broken glass and bottles glittering in the sun.

Still, there were some signs of change in people's attitude towards littering and keeping the environment clean. All young native people we talked to in

1995–96 stressed that they ‘always clean up the site after themselves’. This may not be their actual behaviour pattern, but at least it is an indication that even the youth of today know what is considered the right thing to do, according to one’s old tradition and ethnic roots.

For the first time in decades native voices also share the same basic terms as the newcomer environmentalists; moreover they have advanced some new models and blueprints for actions:

*Provideniia Bay is now extremely polluted. We once had salmon runs at the bay's upstream: the chum used to come here as well as the coho salmon. Not anymore ... When we went to school, we could fish for cod, for smelt right from the pier in Provideniia. Not anymore. Because they now dump all the sewage directly into the bay – the military, the refinery station, the hide-processing plant. They all lack any sewage system whatsoever. They were fined so many times (for pollution) to no avail. It's easier for them to pay fees than to change anything. The entire bay is now polluted, almost dead. Well, you look at our neighbors on the (St. Lawrence) Island. The tundra is very clean there. When they go to the tundra, they always clean up after themselves and bring the garbage back. They respect their tundra a lot. And we used to be the same. But not anymore (Timofey Gaimissin, 1939–1999, retired Yupik navigator and boat mechanic; recorded in 1995).*

The people of Chukotka, both Native and non-Native, are thus aware that there was in the past a knowledge, an indigenous tradition of environmental balance which is now lost, or at least ‘rusty’, and regret the loss. There was, many believe, a golden age, a time when man and nature lived in perfect equilibrium. This awareness makes the emphatic drift towards indigenous pedagogy described in the previous section very pertinent. The ‘neotraditional’ ways of upbringing and educating children is seen as capable, among other things, to solve existing environmental problems, at least those caused by the local people themselves, by bringing back the respect for the tundra and the coast.

### **Knowledge and Politics in Modern Discourse**

Our survey has documented an obvious shift in public attitudes towards the environment, indigenous knowledge, and the reassessment of cultural

legacy. By 1995–96, it formed a definite and highly specific stream within the overall course of the post-Soviet ideological/political transformations in Chukotka. Most of the changes described above were, in all probability, a part of a broader process of '(re)invention of tradition' (see: Hobsbaum and Ranger 1983) and of the reclaiming and reinterpretation of traditional cultural heritage. The shift toward 'the roots' was unstoppable all across post-socialist Russia (Vedenin 1996, 6), and neither Chukotka native villagers nor the area's urban newcomers could ignore this overall public trend.

Still, every general process has dozens of specific regional 'faces' across the ten time-zones and almost 90 constituent units of the Russian Federation. In the Chukotkan 'house of dismay' of 1995–96, it was clearly wrapped up with much frustration and confusion. The causes were as obvious as they were numerous: severe economic recession, decreasing living standards, reconfiguration of power structures, and widespread public apathy. The newly entrenched regional bureaucracy in Anadyr remained as staunch an opponent to indigenous self-determination as were the old Communist bosses of the Soviet era – in fact, many of them *were* the former old Communist *apparatchiks*, including the then all-powerful Chukotkan Governor. The new regional elite did succeed in halting earlier attempts at native self-government, community activism, and land claims campaigns that grew up in Chukotka (as elsewhere in the Russian Arctic) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By 1996, native political activism clearly had been contained (see a similar observation in Gray 1998). Nevertheless, the consolidation of power structures under the Governor's office in Anadyr neither stopped native political mobilisation nor got it fully under control. It just put the basic issues of land, rights, and identity 'on hold' – at least, temporarily.

In a similar way, several of the many components of native cultural and political revivalism followed different scenarios. They also achieved, as of 1995–96, quite an uneven rate of success. For example, in 1996 public concerns about the preservation of indigenous ecological knowledge were still relatively muted compared to the booming interest in the revival of native languages and rituals, family roots, and ethnic history and memory. Nor did indigenous ecological knowledge become a significant source of political activism and debate – again, not by 1996. Very few native leaders then considered traditional ecological knowledge to be a valuable public resource, one that could be linked to and might once become an instrument for future political claims.



The ongoing re-evaluation of traditional knowledge and cultural legacy did succeed in creating some new arenas, like 'ethnic pedagogy' (*etnopedagogika*). By 1996, it became a fully legitimate local channel to preservation and advocacy of indigenous educational, behavioural, and child-rearing practices – as opposed to state-supported formal schooling. It may well become some day an instrument for political campaigning; and these days may, in fact, be coming soon.

Appeals to the group's indigenous legacy, however, bear the seeds of future controversies. On the one hand, 'indigenous pedagogy' is indeed a powerful tool for ethnic mobilisation. It interprets tradition as a fixed set of clear-cut regulations, prescriptions, and taboos, with the romantic overtone of an ethnic 'golden age'. In the world of 'indigenous pedagogy' all members of one's tribe are supposed to have once been equal, honest, industrious, and ecologically sensitive. This interpretation of indigenous culture that focuses primarily upon its 'knowledge component' (such as knowledge of popular medicine, edible plants, and old rules of hunting), can easily grow into a very attractive political doctrine. By 1995–96, it was already gaining popularity among indigenous political activists in Chukotka, and in the Russian Arctic in general (Dedyk-Ivkavav 1996; Gaer 1991, 70–2; Kimonko *et al.* 1996; Mongo 1991, 4).

However, there was also a different perspective and an alternative political motivation – still in its infancy in 1996. It sought its roots in the same set of values, though it focused primarily on its 'ecological' and resource-using side. Its advocates advanced indigenous economic traditions as a foundation for the future sustainable commercial utilisation of the Arctic environment and its natural resources (Etylin 1996, 20–1). The arguments here were as straightforward as they were powerful. We, the native people, have been living on this land for ages. This means that we know how to handle it and how to use its natural treasures. All we have to do is to combine our inherent knowledge of the land with modern technologies and economic rationalism. The Russians failed to do it because they had no feeling for the land, they lacked the roots and cultural heritage that the natives share. If (and when) the chance is given we will not fail. Advocates of such a doctrine often refer to the experience of the Alaskan and Canadian native people they got to know thanks to international indigenous people's contacts since 1990.

This point of view is expressed openly by the new generation of indigenous activists who are concerned about the future of their land and its

resources as well as about preservation of native cultures. For the first time in decades, this new understanding of what 'indigenous tradition' is about is more a product of the local socio-political and economic situation in Chukotka rather than a projection of ideological doctrines coined far away in Moscow. The new ideology actually stems from the dismal economic conditions in Chukotka as traditional subsistence skills regained their practical meaning for daily survival. The growing drive for traditional subsistence and ecological knowledge is vitally important these days and so are the efforts to document how to hunt, how to herd, how to fish, and how to preserve food properly in the native tradition (see: Avtonova 1994; Ainana and Zagrebin 1994; Bogoslovskaja and Aleinikov 1998; Huntington and Mymrin 1996).

Today's indigenous leaders and cultural activists are mostly highly educated people, so they are more accustomed to frame their efforts at cultural revitalisation within modern institutional and public formats. These are at odds with the basic traditional patterns of dissemination of indigenous knowledge. In the past, the continuity in native knowledge and subsistence skills was preserved mainly via mindful observation, the imitation of one's parents and other adults, via personal life experience, and last but not least, via the deliberate sharing of crucial information through story-telling, mainly by elders. Nowadays, 'the talking cultures' of indigenous people (see Golovnev 1995) are being pushed to express themselves primarily via alien written venues such as journal articles, school textbooks, scholarly papers or even popular books in Russian. Time will tell how effective these formats may be in keeping native tradition and knowledge alive and whether they are effective at all.

## **Conclusion**

We fully recognise that by addressing the situation of 1995–96 we are trying to pin down a reality, which, according to much evidence, is already gone or at the very least, is undergoing a very rapid transformation. During the time of our survey, both native activists and the newcomers in Chukotka were still breaking down the old Soviet stereotypes of 'indigenous (ethnic) culture' as being merely a whim of semi-professional dance performers, folklore singers, and souvenir makers. The then-new perspective, which was quite popular among the newcomers, had a clear taste of native 'superiority'. Native people were suddenly considered to be superbly adept at maintaining sustainable

economies through their inner environmentalism and subsistence skills, at keeping the land free of pollution, and even at upholding traditional religious and family values.

Likewise, the indigenous people were then charting a new and much broader public image of their native heritage, which for the first time included sustainable ecological expertise and the 'spiritual wisdom' of their ancestors. These two streams strengthened each other; in fact, both advanced and promoted a growing public interest in values, traditions, and environmental knowledge of Chukotka indigenous people. As a result, the name that was certainly the most popular in Anadyr in 1996, after that of the local Governor and the President of Russia, was of the long-gone Russian Siberian ethnographer, Waldemar Bogoraz' ('Vladimir Bogoraz' in Russian spelling). Similarly, the book that was most widely mentioned or referred to during our meetings in 1996 was his century-old classical volume on Chukchi ethnography (Bogoras 1904–09; 1991) recently reprinted and reproduced by sections in local newspapers. In 1996, it looked like almost every local teacher and cultural worker was either 'reading Bogoraz' or 'using Bogoraz' in his/her personal work or was collecting personal data to compare with those of Bogoraz from the beginning of the century.

The data as well as interviews and statements we collected in 1995–96 also reflected the growing concern for the survival and continuity of indigenous tradition(s) in Chukotka. This concern was clearly shared by many native leaders and sympathetic newcomers alike. Two conflicting motifs were documented repeatedly during our interviews in 1995–96. Many a time did we hear, mostly from people of the reindeer Chukchi origin, that '*if we could bring our folk back to the tundra we would remember all and every detail of our tradition, and restore everything*'. The other and a much more common statement claimed that ... '*Our young people have forgotten everything and our (native) culture is on the verge of extinction*'.

The colliding nature of the two statements is quite obvious. The two conflicting responses were focused on transitions, which represented different trends. They were controlled by different factors and they were unfolding at a different speed. In our view, the first attitude reflected a fundamental perspective, a paradigmatic response to culture change, whereas the second response stemmed from a pessimistic reaction to the political and social realities of Chukotka caught in the pains of post-socialist transition.

The first motif referred to some fundamental ethnic values and it addressed (though in an openly romantic way) patterns of cultural survival. It could neither be tested nor disproved; in fact, it was a projection of the far more general and slow-moving mechanisms of cultural transformation. The second motif, on the contrary, was clearly open to public debates as well as to an outsider's observation. It could easily be illustrated and documented with statistical data, media publications, and personal impressions. As we believe, it was also short-lived. It reflected to a great extent the ongoing public perception of social catastrophe caused by the general economic hardships across Russia and Siberia in the mid-1990s. Things have hardly improved in Chukotka since our survey of 1995–96, and we assume that such a motif is even more prevalent these days than it was five years ago.

Nonetheless, it remains unclear which of the two attitudes offers a more accurate perspective on post-socialist cultural transformation in Chukotka and which of the two gives a better evaluation of native cultural continuity. We are at present, as in 1995–96, unwilling to rely on either of these two motifs for any forecast, and will regard them as complementary, though sometimes contradictory perspectives. What is critical to know is that the two perspectives did co-exist in 1995–96 and that they most probably co-exist today. We also hope that our survey in Chukotka was to some extent reflexive of a more general pattern of transition. If so, we probably succeeded in grasping at least one component of the critical transformation: an apparent drift from ethnicity to territoriality and the (forthcoming?) transformation of cultural heritage into a marker of 'Chukotkan identity' for both Native and non-Native population.

### Acknowledgement

This paper was originally prepared as a report under the Project '*Environmental Change and Indigenous Knowledge in Chukotka*' supported by a grant from the British Social Research Council, UK. Its abbreviated version was first delivered at the Third International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences in Copenhagen in 1998 and it was later published as Vakhtin and Krupnik (1999). We want to thank the project team leader, Dr. Piers Vitebsky, at the Scott Polar Research Institute, who co-ordinated our research efforts in 1995–96. The hospitality of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge,

UK, and of its many staff members has to be specially acknowledged. In Chukotka, our work was greatly facilitated thanks to support offered by the Asiatic Eskimo Society 'Yupik' (Chair, Ms. Liudmila Ainana) in Provideniia and by the Scientific Research Centre, 'Chukotka' in Anadyr (then-Director, Dr. Alexandr Galanin, staff members Anna V. Belikovich, Nadezhda Vukvukai, Tamara Koravye, and others). People in many other local agencies in Anadyr were extremely helpful and supportive of our efforts to document the status of the then occurring efforts in support of native legacy, indigenous knowledge, and in protection of Chukotka's environment. Of those agencies, the Chukotka *Institute for Advanced Teacher Training* in 1996 ('Then-Director Ms. Margarita Lytkina') deserves special gratitude. Finally we want to thank many residents of Chukotka, who offered their generous support to our survey through interviews, insights, entries to personal and local networks, criticism, and good advice. All shortcomings in documenting the ever-changing realities of the undercurrent post-Soviet transition in this north-easternmost section of Russia are exclusively our own.

## Notes

- 1 The project '*Environmental Change and Indigenous Knowledge in Chukotka*', conducted by the present authors, was supported by British Social Research Council, UK, and was coordinated by Dr. Piers Vitebsky from the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.
- 2 We are very pleased that major outcomes of our 1995–96 survey have been independently confirmed by a far more thorough concurrent study of local politics and indigenous movement in Chukotka by Patty Gray in 1996–97 (Gray 1998; 2000). The advantage of having access to Patty Gray's insight into and account of the changing local situation as well as her continuous updates on the post-1996 transition was indeed a critical contribution to this paper.
- 3 See similar analysis (with a far more detailed argumentation) in Gray 1998.
- 4 The official statistics cited the number of registered unemployed in Chukotka as 2,152 by July 1, 1995 (KS, July 25, 1995). One just wonders how many people were among the 'unregistered unemployed' and underemployed in dozens of Chukotkan mining towns and native villages.
- 5 All these estimates were given in the pre-1997 roubles that were later converted as 1000:1.
- 6 The abbreviation KS – 'Kraini Sever' (the Far North) which is the name of the only daily newspaper published in Anadyr, is used here as a common reference to the many anonymous (and often untitled) articles and reports cited below.

- 7 According to figures supplied by the area government, the *minimal* monthly cost of living in Chukotka by fall 1996 was already up to 1,483,000 roubles, including 994,000 roubles for food supplies and 284,000 for other non-food commodities (Abriutina 1998, 3). By the summer of 1997, it was up to 2,000,000 roubles – with the average monthly salary below 1,200,000 and average retirement payments at 540,000 (Shmyganovski 1997, 3)

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