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11 FROM IMPLEMENTED CO-PRODUCTION TO ENFORCED STAGNATION: REVISING METHODOLOGIES IN A CHANGING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT (1993–2023)

Erich Kasten

Introduction – How the idea of co-production came about for me

In a personal note, I will introduce how my later approach to coproduction of knowledge was born. In the mid-1980s, I arrived on Vancouver Island, Canada, on a post-doctoral research grant to study the potlatch system, according to a new theoretical paradigm elaborated during my university seminars in Berlin. But soon I realized that the Indigenous communities that I approached had other agendas on their mind. Frustrated that I could not complete the project I decided to quit anthropology and built a home on Salt Spring Island.

During my later visits to Victoria, I made friends with a member of the Dzawada'enuxw First Nation. When I mentioned what had brought me to the other side of the world, he replied: "Wait a minute, think about what you can do for us, not just in terms of money; we have also other matters in mind." Later, when we went fishing together, he told me in a remarkably exhaustive manner about the many brilliant artists of the Dzawada'enuxw First Nation and how that they were not attracting attention on the European art markets. In the following weeks, I developed an idea to organize an exhibition for these artists at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin.

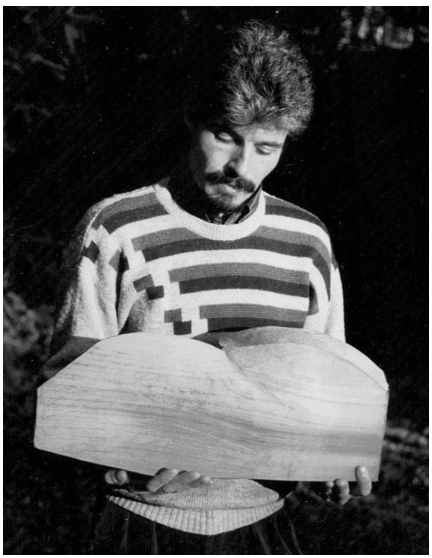

Fig. 1 E. Kasten holds a wooden block from which a raven mask was carved for the exhibition in Berlin. Gwa'yi (Canada), 1987.

After positive feedback from the museum, I turned again to my friend, who was immediately enthused of this prospect. He invited me to Gwa'yi (Kingcome Inlet) and to other Kwakwaka'wakw villages to document comprehensively, on video, their potlaches and other cultural practices to present a proper background for the exhibition, as well as for my own scientific analysis.

Eventually, that exhibition was successfully held at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin in 1989–1990, promoting Dzawada'enuxw artists, with the opening ceremony attended by some of them (Kasten 1990). For me, that chance acquaintance with my Dzawada'enuxw friend was a key experience for my later work with Indigenous communities in northeastern Siberia, for which I then began to design my next research project – now in the opposite direction, and different from my original perceptions of field research from a purely academic perspective.

Fig. 2 Map of Kamchatka.

Community-driven projects in Kamchatka, 1993–2014

Later in the 1990s, based on my experience of co-production work with Indigenous partners in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, I discussed innovative forms of community-driven research with a group of students[1] while teaching at the Free University of Berlin. Such field methods had been taken up eagerly and implemented by many of them in their work in various parts of Siberia. When I developed my proposal for the DFG (German Research Foundation) on the "Ethnicity Processes in Kamchatka" I kept it as flexible as possible, avoiding premature hypotheses on possible results, to leave room for community input in the initial planning and overall project design. After I arrived in Kamchatka in 1993, a community gathering was convened in Kovran, a west coast village, by *Tkhsanom*, the political organization of the Itelmen people, under the leadership of Oleg Zaporotskii. At that meeting, in collaboration with my initial project partner, Itelmen artist Sergei Longinov[2] I arranged that the Itelmen community members identify the most pressing issues for which we could support them with our research.

At that meeting, Itelmen language expert Klavdiia Khaloimova suggested the preparation of Itelmen language learning materials based on the various dialects, to pay attention to the local vernaculars still spoken in the area. This was the begin-

Fig. 3 Community gathering in Kovran with K. Khaloimova left from centre. Kovran, 1993.

1 I am most grateful to this group that included Stephan Dudeck, Otto Habeck, Michael Rießler, and Tsypylma Darieva, among others. See also the results of the project tutorium: Dudeck (2000).

2 Sergei Longinov lived at that time in Munich and sparked my interest in Kamchatka.

ning of a fruitful collaboration that lasted for several years. First, an illustrated textbook, "Historical-Ethnographic Materials for Teaching the Itelmen Language" (Khaloimova et al. 2012 [1997]) was produced; it was enthusiastically received by the Itelmen community during its presentation at the Alkhalalalai Festival in 1997. Subsequently, I organized an international symposium on "Bicultural Education in the North" (Kasten 1998) in Halle, which was attended by Indigenous educators from Kamchatka, Klavdiia Khaloimova and Marina Tarasova. Based on a children's drawing competition during the Alkhalalalai festival in Kovran, I developed an exhibition of drawings that was shown at several museums and other public facilities in Germany (Kasten 1998).

In the following years, I conducted further language recordings with the last remaining speakers of the Itelmen language in the northern part of the Tigil'ski District (*rayon*). The results were first made accessible as the CD-Rom, "Itelmen Language and Culture," prepared for learning purposes. It was presented at a conference in Lesnaya in 2000 and later became a part of the "Itelmen Talking Dictionary."[3] The CD was followed by the publication of Khaloimova's "Methodical recommendations [materials] for the teacher of Itelmen language" (Khaloimova 2015) and the collection, "Itelmen texts, collected by V. I. Jochelson 1910–1911" (Khaloimova et al. 2014). Significantly, these texts could be read for the first time by the Itelmen people in the new script they were accustomed to, with Russian translations for those who no longer fully mastered their native language. Another book, "Itelmen texts" (Kasten and Dürr 2015), contained texts recorded in the late 1990s from the last Itelmen speakers, in Itelmen with English and Russian translations. A DVD was also produced for use in Indigenous communities at the time; access to these materials is now provided more conveniently via the Internet.[4]

Another suggestion from the Kovran village assembly in 1993 was for an ecological study of local resources. People were worried about the extent to which they were impacted by industrial pollutants, and were interested in what economic potential the territory had for self-reliant economic development. Russian geochemist Elena Dul'chenko and I designed a project for which scientists at the Kamchatka Institute of Ecology and Nature Management produced a comprehensive resource study, funded by the EU-INTAS program. An abridged version was published in 1996 (Kasten and Dul'chenko 1996), to which Itelmen scholar Viktoria Sharakhmatova also contributed. The successful collaboration with the Institute in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii continued over the next decades, up to a recent collaborative project on "Environmental knowledge and sustainable nature relations of the peoples of the North" in 2021.[5]

3 https://userpage.fu-berlin.de/mduerr/ITD_E/itd_E.html [accessed 10.06.2024]
4 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/itelmenische-sprache/en [accessed 10.06.2024]
5 https://ek-north.org/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

Fig. 4 The Itelmen ensemble El'vel' in front of the *Franckesche Stiftungen*, Halle, Germany, 1996.

During these and other co-production efforts, I was also able to bring my knowledge of self-government-movements among First Nations in Canada to the discussion of similar developments among the Itelmen, promoted at that time by Oleg Zaporotskii and *Tkhsanom*. Tjan Zaochnaja, an Itelmen activist living in Germany, and I published excerpts from the work of Georg W. Steller, describing the brutal conquest of Kamchatka and the subjugation of the Itelmen by the Russians; these works were thus made available to local people for the first time in Russian translation. In 1996, I organized the participation of an Itelmen delegation in the exhibition "The Great Northern Expedition" at the *Franckesche Stiftungen* in Halle, for which I had prepared an additional special exhibit, "Steller and the Itelmen" (Kasten 1996). Afterwards, participants of the Itelmen delegation gave lectures at the Free University in Berlin. The delegation was accompanied by the Itelmen ensemble El'vel', which then continued its performances in Southern Germany. This trip had a long-lasting effect on Itelmen self-determination movements in Kamchatka (Kasten 2020).[6]

6 During my fieldwork with the Itelmen in the mid-1990s, I have been collaborating with my American colleagues David Koester and Jonathan Bobaljik. This collaboration on Itelmen language and culture has continued to this day. With D. Koester, we are currently editing Waldemar Jochelson's ethnography on the Itelmen during the Riabushinsky expedition, and important works by J. Bobaljik and his team, the "Comprehensive Itelmen-Russian dictionary" (Volodin et al. 2021) and "Bogoras's 1901 Itelmen Notebooks" (Bobaljik et al. 2023), have been published by the Foundation for Siberian Cultures.

Fig. 5 E. Dul'chenko and E. Kasten crossing the Icha River about 100 kilometers west of Esso, 1997.

The rumor of the new Itelmen textbook spread to Even settlements in the Bystrinky district in central Kamchatka. I was invited there to organize community-driven co-productions to preserve the local Even dialect in the form of similar learning tools. In Anavgai, the Even language schoolteacher Marina Tarasova and I designed a program and organized meetings with elders to record their unique local Even speech. The first outcomes of this joint initiative provided a base for mutual trust with other Even community members in remote fishing and reindeer herding camps along the Icha River. There I recorded more Even traditional knowledge in their own language during several expeditions with Elena Dul'chenko, with whom I'd earlier collaborated. In the following years, Marina Tarasova and another Even scholar from the Institute for Teacher's Training in Palana, Raisa Avak, transcribed and translated the comprehensive Even materials into Russian, from which I later produced DVDs and textbooks for community use (more recently made available via the Internet).[7]

A shared ride with *Or'yakan*, the Even youth dance ensemble from Anavgai,[8] to their performance in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii excited me about their dance traditions. In the following years, I often met with the dance pedagogue of that ensem-

7 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/evenische-sprache/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

8 https://dh-north.org/medien/videos/bekanntschaft-mit-dem-ensemble-or-jakan/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

ble, Valentina Zhdanova, who convinced me how important this work was to impart self-confidence and esteem among the youth for their Indigenous cultural heritage. A few years later, I organized a tour for the ensemble in Germany and Switzerland with cultural exchanges at schools and concerts at prominent locations and festivals.[9]

During my work with elders in the nearby village of Esso, I also met with the members of another Even dance team, *Nulgur*, who expressed their wish to perform abroad. Back in Berlin, the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* (House of Cultures of the World) approached me for possible contacts for their festival in 1999, "*Stimmen des Nordens – Spuren der Schamanen*" (Voices of the North – Traces of the Shamans). During my next visit to Kamchatka, I discussed with the *Nulgur* team whether they could consider a contribution that would address this special theme, shamans, in dance, and in a creative, artistic way, not just as part of the usual cliché folklore program. We decided that the ensemble would produce a dance theatre production based on various shamanic performances with the title "A shaman's journey into other worlds".[10] The Even artist Kyrill Ichanga wrote the script for this, after the members of the ensemble had consulted elders in the village to learn more about shamans' practices from the past, before these had been banned and persecuted in Soviet times. Thus, beyond the dance theatre performance the project had another, probably more important, significance, to make the youth interested and more knowledgeable about their cultural past.

In 2000, local cultural workers and I organized another workshop in Esso ("Children of the North – Cultural Exercises"), supported by the *Franckesche Stiftungen* (Halle/Saale). An important topic, addressed by local educators and artists, was how to implement song and dance more prominently in cultural work with young people (Kasten 2002a). During the workshop, a dance festival was organized with the participation of various (mostly youth) ensembles from Kamchatka. The ensemble *Shkolnye gody* (School Years) from Palana performed there for the first time. Later I organized a tour for them through Germany (2004).[11] All these tours were co-productions, with contributions from three sides: the cultural program was produced by the ensembles, the Russian Kamchatka Ministry of Culture covered travel costs to Germany, and I organized and raised funding through performances at concerts and cultural exchanges in schools within Germany and Switzerland.

It was revealing to monitor how the program was received in Germany, where part of the audience had expected "traditional" (that is, folkloristic) dances. However, our previous workshops had inspired these young artists to experiment with foreign dance forms. Thus, their hybrid performances actually could have flipped the present debate on "cultural appropriation" (Balzer 2022), as their dances incorporated foreign elements such as break dance, rock'n roll, flamenco, and samba. Most importantly, the

9 https://dh-north.org/medien/videos/das-ensemble-or-jakan/en [accessed 10.06.2024]
10 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/gastspielreise-des-ensembles-nulgur/en [accessed 10.06.2024]
11 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/gastspielreise-des-ensembles-skolnye-gody/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

Fig. 6 The Even ensemble Or'yakan and senior master dancers from Kamchatka at the Sanssouci park in Potsdam, Germany, 1996.

youth proudly showed their actual, lived hybrid culture as perceived by themselves, not as an imposed cliché of it.

Koryak dance artists and cultural workers from Palana, a town on the northern west coast of Kamchatka, also participated in the above-mentioned workshop in Esso in 2000. They were impressed by our activities to document and enhance Indigenous cultural heritage this way. They invited me to continue my work in Lesnaya, north of Palana, on Koryak language and culture. For the next several years, until 2012, this work became my primary focus. My main project partner Aleksandra Urkachan and I had designed a complex program that involved almost annual field work at different places all over northern Kamchatka. A particular focus was on documenting Indigenous knowledge on sustainable nature use (Kasten 2021a). The result of this work was a number of textbooks on Koryak language and culture in combination with electronic learning tools for educational use (with many more still in preparation).[12] Furthermore, while anthropologists often use Indigenous-produced research in their own monographs, I encouraged and supported that these works be published under the local partners' own authorship (e.g., Urkachan 2002; Khaloimova 2015).

Upon our arrival in the various villages, we usually presented our previous work, in form of video shows (most often in schools), lectures, workshops, etc.. Following such presentations, elder hosts invited us to document, among other activities, the prominent seasonal reconciliation festivals with nature, such as the *Ololo* and *Khololo* for the coastal Koryak in the fall and the *Kilvei* for reindeer herding Koryak and

12 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/korjakische-sprache/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

Fig. 7 A. Urkachan shows videos from our previous work at reindeer camps at the school in Achaivaiam, 2013.

Chukchi in spring (Kasten 2021b),[13] – to secure the events on video and make them available for community members. The festivals would soon change, they noted, with the passing away of elders.

During our fieldwork we also met with craftspeople and artists, familiarizing ourselves with their work. They were excited about the opportunity to have their works shown abroad; I later organized exihibitions for them in Münster (2003),[14] Berlin (2005)[15] and Stuttgart (2009).[16]

Digital sharing of project results

An important element of the co-production approach is providing relevant outcomes to the different participants – community members, researchers, etc. In the case of co-produced research products, aside from the exhibits and performances noted above, we initially provided printed publications in Russian and in Indigenous languages, which were greatly valued by our community partners. Our books were then also made available in electronic format, in the open access for free download tem-

13 https://ek-north.org/dossier/versoehnungsfeste-mit-der-natur/en [accessed 10.06.2024]
14 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/zwischen-tundra-und-meereskueste/en [accessed 10.06.2024]
15 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/offen-fuer-das-fremde/en [accessed 10.06.2024]
16 https://dh-north.org/dossiers/schamanen-sibiriens-magier-mittler-heiler/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

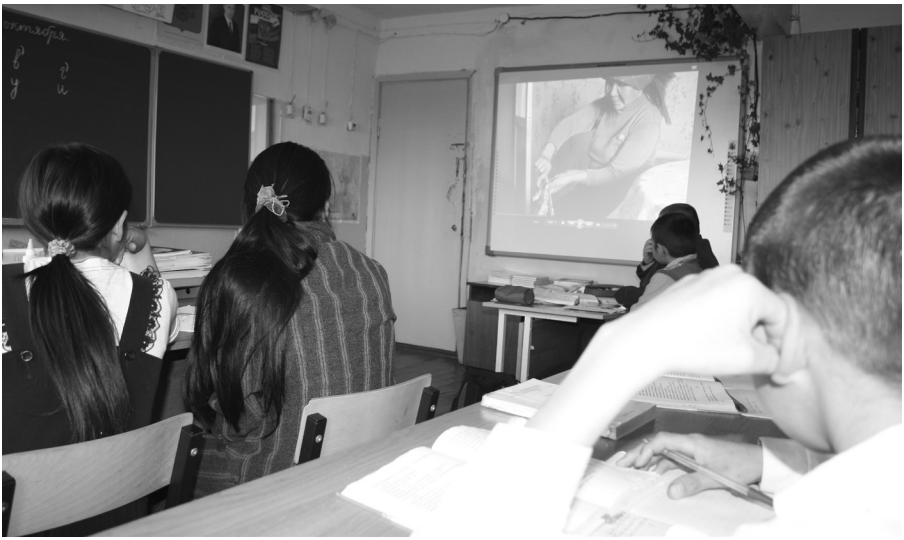

Fig. 8 Project outcomes used as learning tools on DVD in school classes in Kamchatka. Lesnaya, 2012.

plate, from as early as 2004.[17] Later, we produced DVDs with optional subtitles in various languages from video recordings, which could be used in schools and private homes in Kamchatka. These video recordings and all publications are now available as "open access" resources via the website of the Foundation for Siberian Cultures (Kasten 2024b).[18]

These documentations of Indigenous knowledge available virtually can now reach young people, due to the increasing use of smartphones. This timely changeover also proved to be beneficial in the current political environment, given that the shipping of books and DVDs to Russia has been severely restricted since 2022; parcels with copies of publications for co-authors often have been returned or lost. A cooperation with a publishing house in Russia that was secured in 2022, unfortunately had to be abandoned after the outbreak of the war. This publisher would have been able to print our publications in Russia and distribute them more cost-effectively, to the benefit of all parties. Our experiences over the past decades with the production and distribution of our collaboration's outputs via different modes and platforms illustrates that appropriate methods should be continuously adapted to new technical possibilities and changing political realities (see Leete, Panakova, *this volume*).

17 http://www.siberian-studies.org [accessed 10.06.2024]

18 https://dh-north.org/en; https://ek-north.org/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

Experiences from co-production revisited

Not all co-production collaborations proceeded as I had hoped. Various initiatives were thwarted by a variety of obstacles. These included the failure of partners to produce agreed-upon deliverables, despite being paid in advance for these. This, at times, was of advantage to avoid expensive bank transfers and because funds had to be spent within a given fiscal year. It such cases it was disappointing to see former relationships eroding that had been based on mutal trust before.

Sometimes expectations on the part of partners for financial arrangements or perks could not be met when these were not allowed by Western funding organizations (see Gross, *this volume*).

Problematic and unpleasant encounters with other visitors to Kamchatka (e.g. commercial filmmakers) also marred my work, when such individuals turned to me for help, given my knowledge of, and connections in, Kamchatka. In some cases I soon realized that their ethical standards were questionable, or at least that they were generally insensitive to local cultures and local interests.

I also continually contended with the required explicit focus of Western research funding agencies on academic outputs and outcomes.[19] Other organizations assigned less value to the products desired by the communities themselves, such as documenting their endangered languages and Indigenous knowledge, producing learning tools to support such, and promoting Indigenous crafts and performing arts.[20] This eventually led me to pursue work with museum and exhibition projects rather than academic organizations. With those activities I felt more on same grounds with my Indigenous partners in my appreciation and interest in their material and performative culture, and more comfortable with my inductive approach to their knowledge that is connected to these forms of expressive culture.

But even here I encountered mixed experiences. During the preparations for the well-received exhibition "*Schamanen Sibiriens*" at the *Linden Museum* in Stuttgart (2008–2009), there had been a number of unpleasant moments in the collaboration

19 For the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Germany) I had to test certain theories on property relations in the field. After arriving in Kamchatka, I had a déjà-vus from my first fieldwork on the Vancouver Island in the 1980s (see above) in that the Indigenous people were not interested in the given academic approach to that issue. But by paying informants and arranging community gatherings I could eventually collect the expected data and organize international conferences on this theme in Germany (Kasten 2002b, 2004, 2005).

20 For another project under the Endangered Languages Documentation Program (ELDP), I aggreed to deposit my data to the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR), although I was aware of its shortcomings. Awkward access to the archive, which was only in English, excluded many users from Russia and, most importantly, from Indigenous communities, our priority target group in addressing endangered language and culture. Later, funding for processing the data for community-oriented purposes, that is, the learning tools, was denied, although it was part of the initial agreement.

with our Russian partners from the Russian Ethnographical Museum (REM) in St. Petersburg.[21] The exhibition catalog (Kasten 2009) was soon sold out, but there was no way to produce a re-print because of the REM demanding horrendous photo fees again. Thus, I eventually decided to publish a new edition with the most important chapters by drawing on photos (free of charge) from German museum collections (Kasten 2021b).

With regard to implementing true co-production in the field, experience has shown how important it is to first listen and discuss the specific needs and aims of all partners, including those at the local level, and then produce an outline for a joint project. As Indigenous communities often favor different agendas, our academic interests should be brought in line with people's aspirations. It might not be always possible, as funding is usually granted for scientific and not for applied research. Still, one can be creative in designing the project in a way that different agendas can run side by side, as has been proven by the Foundation for Siberian Cultures established in 2010 (Kasten 2021c). It could hardly be possible at other institutions, as long they must be confined to exclusively academic needs.

A more challenging source of mutual misunderstanding and of a potential conflict is the amount of compensation or remuneration of partners in co-production, in particular in Indigenous communities. Here different cultural traditions and mentalities may clash openly (see Gross, *this volume)*. It is usually easier to "buy" the data that one needs for academic or public advancement at home, which can be achieved by simply remunerating collaborators (earlier called "informants) for their services. For this, project funding is usually available, and it does not require a researcher to build long-term and trustful relations with community members. But genuine co-production needs considerable input, creativity, and patience. Indigenous people are known for their often long-term thinking, such as in their connections to nature or in social relations. The elderly keepers of Indigenous knowledge with whom I had worked were often more interested in building a kind of "trading partnership" relation, which provided mutual beneficial exchanges with the outsiders, whom they called *priiately* in Russian (derived from the words "gratifying, favorable, enjoyable [partner]"). An immediate monetary payment would be uncomfortable for them. Instead, they often provided a list of what I should bring to them on my next visit.

In most cases, the best basis for balanced, equitable relations is when each side contributes with its labor or efforts (or its own funding) toward mutual benefits, like in creating community learning tools or a group dancing performance in Europe. Monetary payments often impair earlier trustful relations and turn them into com-

21 As when curators from REM demanded accommodation in a 4-star-hotel, which had been eating up our budget, allocated also for a group of young artists from St. Petersburg, preparing for their important section in the exhibition. In the end, the artists had to sleep on the floor in my small attic room in the museum – where we had lot of fun, except that I had to prepare for the opening speech next day.

mercialized contractor-client relationships. Such relations, unpleasant to both sides, are sometimes encapsulated by the Russian saying: "That kind of music is played for who pays for it" – a reversion to previous hierarchical system that should be overcome.

There is also thorough evidence that data obtained through true co-production is of different quality than those gained through business-like partnerships. The outcome of a project based on full community motivation is usually much richer, not only with regard to capacity building. It triggers additional synergies and can open a foreign researcher to insights into otherwise hidden realms of community's cultural thought, sentiments and ambitions.

When project funding was available for "informants," it needed to be spent in a well-thought and fair way. Even here, especially with elder community members, I avoided paying in cash, instead seeking what they might need, such as household appliances, sleeping bags, tents or renovating their house doors or windows. Remuneration with useful practical returns or gifts was closer to their tradition and was less embarrassing than being treated as "clients." Furthermore, the Indigenous knowledge that they shared, was often understood by them as communal knowledge or collective cultural property, thus embarrassing to be offered "for sale" by individuals (cf. Krupnik and Bogoslovskaya 2017). Therefore, I explored ways that the entire community could benefit from such returns, instead of individuals. It did not always succeed the way I expected. When I once provided a video player to a village for the local House of Culture, it soon became "privatized" by the club director. Therefore, one always has to be aware of corruption even in Indigenous communities, after two to three generations of Sovietization and having adopted related "ethics."

Conducting fieldwork in an increasingly difficult political environment, 2008–2014

While the use of fake news about the West in Russian state propaganda has intensified over the last years, this is not a new phenomenon. When I spent some time in 2010 with reindeer herders in the Tymlat area in northeastern Kamchatka, they asked me: "Erich, you know a bit about the Indigenous people in North America, is it really true that they are locked up in reservations there? Thus, we're better off being able to roam freely." Such frequently encountered misinformation gave often rise to rather humorous chats.

However, over time interference by Russian state authorities impeded our research in Siberia more seriously, a situation most Western scholars experienced. It was common practice for the FSB (Russian Secret Service) to harass the hosts with whom I stayed after my departure, by interrogating them as to my agenda. In one case, I was present when they interviewed my research partner, Aleksandra Urkachan, on why she worked with foreigners, while there are also excellent Russian

scholars studying Indigenous cultures. She responded quite frankly that "foreigners better understand our concerns" – which obviously merited a special note by the two FSB officials.

One always had to be aware to not step into traps set by the FSB. Upon my arrival at the Tilichiki airport I was once greeted by a man whom I didn't know. He offered me a ride to town, which actually is not so unusual in those remote places, due to the lack of public transportation. He then invited me to join him on a fishing trip the next day. When I mentioned that I first had to register, he responded that "here you do not have to register" – which raised my suspicions. Then, before my departure, the same man showed up, identified himself as a FSB official, and demanded to take a look at my video recordings. I organized them quickly so that exhaustive (and hopefully to him tiresome) recordings of sewing practices lay on top: indeed he got bored after a while and gave up.

While many of us had been somewhat blinded for many years in our illusion of "democratization" in Russia (see Gross, *this volume*). the KGB/FSB apparatus was still in place, if monitoring and operating more furtively and more sporadically the research activities of foreigners. This more erratic and thus less predictable approach was indeed more discomforting that the unfailing surveillance of the Soviet period.

On the other hand, I was occasionally given free rides in government helicopters on my way to the north, and sometimes upon my arrival at the main city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, a limousine of the Ministry of Culture was waiting for me at the airport. That reminded me of what Waldemar Jochelson had experienced 100 years ago in northern Kamchatka and what he addressed in his anonymous journal article "Double-Faced Janus" (in Jochelson 2017), in which he stated how his fieldwork was officially endorsed by the authorities, while at the same time hindered by the secret police.

In fact, my relationship with the Russian authorities was persistantly ambivalent. In holding exhibitions and workshops in Kamchatka and organizing tours for dance teams in Europe I was useful for the authorities to demonstrate that they entertained friendly foreign relations. During the *Or'yakan* tour to Germany in 2009[22] it dawned on me that I had been unknowingly instrumentalized for Russian state propaganda, when before the departure T-shirts with the label *Edinaia Rossiia* ("Unified Russia," the name of the party in power) were handed out to the young dancers, together with Russian flags to wave in front of the *Reichstag* building in Berlin, as the dancers reported to me. At that time, I was still amused about such antics.

Other uncomfortable incidents occurred. After I had prepared an exhibition on Indigenous arts and crafts at the *Museum für Naturkunde* in Münster (Germany), an expert commission in Kamchatka had to check whether the objects that I had purchased on behalf of the museum were authorized for export, according to the cultural

22 https://dh-north.org/medien/videos/das-ensemble-or-jakan/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

heritage rules (objects could not be religious nor older than a certain age). Although I had complied with all such rules, the shipping was halted. It was then communicated to me that commission members would have liked to be involved in the project, including travel to Germany. Only with the help of petition letters from the communities, whose members wanted to see the work of their artists shown in Germany, and with the support of the Ministry of Culture in Kamchatka, did the shipping eventually succeed at the last moment.[23]

Around 2017, after recurring fruitful collaborations on language textbooks with the Koryak educator Galina Khariutkina at the Foundation of Siberian Cultures, upon the wish of local communities we decided to apply to the Ministry of Education in Kamchatka to have a certain number of books ordered and distributed at village schools of the Kamchatka district. Our application was denied, although with such prominent support such an application usually would have been granted. Although the books had been heavily sought after, rumors circulated that the Ministry's take was "that it should not come to the point where foreigners produce our learning tools."

Fig. 9 Preparing language textbooks with the Koryak educator G. Khariutkina at the Foundation for Siberian Cultures. Fürstenberg/Havel, 2016.

Signs of "patriotic" trends thus became increasingly apparent (see Kasten 2024a: 109f.; Lajus 2024: 134f.). At some point I gave up the discussions with colleagues who claimed that Waldemar Jochelson was a genuine "Russian" ethnologist, although he had spent his formative years and most of his life outside Russia and should, in my

23 This is but one example of the occassional corruption encountered during my decades of research.

opinion, instead be seen more as a transnational scholar (Kasten 2022). Even the introduction to another collective volume puzzled me:

> This publication helps fill the vacuum of anthropological material about Russian indigenous peoples presented in English by a team composed largely of Russians", […] "the voices of these Russian anthropological colleagues have still been little heard in the West" [as it was assumed] "simply that western science is best" (in Beach et al. 2009: 17f.).

In a way, that reminded me of the complexes of some Russian colleagues during the first collaborations after Perestroika, whereas such reactions have been justified because of the often shown arrogance by Western partners (see Gross, *this volume*).

Along with increasing patriotic trends, a stronger emphasis on war rhetoric emerged already some time ago, i.e. since Putin had come to power again in 2012. This seems to have replaced an earlier feeling of rapprochement with the West. One example of this was the ramped-up memorializing of the "Great Patriotic War." Even twenty years ago, I was surprised to see how much effort had been put into renovating the war memorial in Palana, given the bumpy infrastructure of the town at that time. Even then, I wondered whether the wife with her child lovingly embracing her husband who had returned from the war (a frequent subjet in these heroic depictions) considered how many helpless women her husband might have raped in Germany?[24]

Even small children in Putin's Russia are inculcated with patriotism and a readiness to fight against perceived threats from the West. So, the following encounter with a little boy whose family I spent some time with in Tilichiki should come as no surprise. When he enthusiastically shot down enemies on his computer game, I observed that what he was doing wasn't so nice. He replied, beaming: "Those are just Germans!" (*Oni prosto nemtsy*). At that time, this episode has provoked a great laugh among all of us – and I was reminded of my double identity as a hostile German and a friend of the family (on the various roles one often has to comply with in politically convoluted situations, see Vasiukov 2024).

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, during my last social evening with friends from the cultural *intelligentsiia* in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, we discussed the events in a very unemotional, rational way. Many shared my concern that this would lead to the isolation of Russia in the long run, which indeed happened over the following

24 The soldiers of the Red Army behaved remarkably differently from those of the Western Allies in this respect. On this I had to recall the incident that happened the last days of World War II in Großmenow, near Fürstenberg, which witnesses from the von Trott family told me about. The young women of the settlement hid and barricaded themselves in a barn to avoid being raped by the soldiers of the Red Army. The soldiers set fire to the building, killing all women inside. But the commander was so shocked that he immediately executed the soldiers. In Germany, such true war heroes, are honored and memorialized today. Even in wars there can be "true heroes" who stand up against war crimes because of their strong moral stance (see Kasten 2024a).

years, and especially since the war of aggression against Ukraine. At that time, I was not aware that it would be the last evening that I would spend in the Russian Far East.

The next day, I experienced an unpleasant physical threat at the airport under the eyes of a police officer who, alarmingly, chose not to intervene. After that I decided to refrain from traveling to Russia.[25] Although I once loved these trips, especially because of the wonderful people, I did not feel safe anymore and was powerless vis-à-vis the hostile authorities. I decided that I would have to continue my co-production efforts remotely.

Post-February 2022 prospects for co-production

When traveling with ATVs (*vezdekhody*) in Kamchatka one regularly gets stuck, either due to vehicular breakdowns or sinking into swamps. A driver once said to me: "Erich, the next time you come to Kamchatka, bring one of your "Leopards" (tanks) along with you, then we can travel faster." What had been a joke at that time, around

Fig. 10 ATV (*vezdekhod*) breakdown during the travel to a reindeer camp. In the interior of Kamchatka west of Tymlat, 2010.

25 I made one more short trip to Russia in December 2019 for the 25th anniversary of the German Consulate General in Novosibirsk and a seminar in Yakutsk on the occasion of the establishment of a partnership between institutes. (https://dh-north.org/dossiers/25-jaehriges-jubilaeum-des-generalkonsulats-in-novosibirsk/en), (https://dh-north.org/dossiers/seminar-in-jakutsk/en). [accessed 10.06.2024]

2005, became a bitter reality after 2022, with the discussion about German Leopard tanks to be sent to Ukraine to defend from the Russian aggressions.

Since 2014, I was able to continue co-production with my partners in Kamchatka on a remote basis, by arranging workshops and writing retreats in Germany, at the Foundation for Siberian Cultures. After February 2022, these connections became impossible. This forced me to reconsider what had happened in the years prior, to which I had not given much thought so far. Once while watching the TV news about the war in Georgia in 2008 with local friends in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, I became increasingly irritated by their excitement about the (faked) heroic coverage of the events. When in Kamchatka after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, I met briefly with my former partners and friends in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, most of them of Ukrainian origin. The increasing political tensions had put them into a particularly uncomforatbale situation, as some hold property in that country, and had considered retiring there one day. After a few words about the political events I realized it was better to quickly drop this discussion and switch to other themes, as their viewpoint became immediately clear to me. I stayed in touch with some of them, until 2022, as I also did with former partners from local communities.

After February 2022, most of my local partners in Russia fell silent. Those with whom I still exchange sporadic emails or WhatsApp messages of course avoid addressing politics. I am afraid to ask how some old acquaintances are doing. I imagine that some might have volunteered to fight in the war. One former close partner invited me to come to Kamchatka, where they would provide me a home so that I do not have to "freeze" in Europe and to endure the economic hardships there. Their well-meaning offer reflects the spread of official propaganda to which people, especially in remote areas, are exposed.

In 2021, I completed what might have been my last project with partners in Russia.[26] Despite some critical content (see Tynkkynen 2021), the public presentation of the results could still be launched even in June 2022 in the town of Elizovo near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, by our parter from the Kamchatka Branch of the Pacific Institute of Geography.[27]

Currently, a project on Siberian museum collections on the Web (Kasten n.d.), funded by the German Foreign Ministry,[28] seeks to maintain the few remaining ties and communication channels with those parts of Russian civil society and Indigenous communites that share our values, without putting them at risk.

In sum, the methods of co-production need to be flexible, to allow to adjust to the changing situations, including generational and mentality changes within local communities, rapidly shifting political environments, and new means of information

26 https://ek-north.org/project/en [accessed 10.06.2024]

27 https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/noch-geografii-na-kamchatke [accessed 10.06.2024]

28 https://bolt-dev.dh-north.org/files/dhn-pdf/aa-oep-projektbeschreibung.pdf [accessed 10.06.2024]

Fig. 11 Presentation of project outcomes at the International action "Night of Geography" in Elizovo, 2022.

technology.[29] It is up to each scholar to apply the methodology that is viewed as best suited to fulfill a certain aim. But even those who might feel obliged to community concerns, usually do not pursue their work out of pure altruism, as everyone seeks recognition for one's work. For some, the recognition by local community can be even more rewarding than when it comes from academia.

Unfortunately, such indispensable encouraging feedback from our partners in Siberia cannot be received any more (or is very hard to get) since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the breakdown of the established communication links. To many of us, it might seriously affect the heartfelt enthusiasm that has driven three decades of our collaborative activities in Siberia since the Perestroika years.

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29 Similar methodological approaches to co-production with Indigenous communities have simultaneously and independently been practiced by my colleagues Igor Krupnik (Krupnik and Bogoslovskaya 2017), Alexandra Lavrillier (Lavrillier and Gabyshev 2017), and Stephan Dudeck (in Doering et al.)

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