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4 CONNECTIONS THAT CANNOT BE FRACTURED: RESPECT, TRUST, AND GRATITUDE THAT TRANSCEND A FRACTURED NORTH

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Anthropology, fieldwork, and relationships

I was introduced to anthropology when I was a sophomore in college, and I recognized immediately that anthropology was the best academic route for a sincere, empathetic interest in people different from myself. From my first sojourn in Kamchatka in the summer and autumn of 1995 to my most recent trip in July 2018, I found many people very different from me in various ways, and yet they were often similar in key respects.

The 1990s were a heady time: the new Russian Federation was not even four years old, freedom was aplenty but food and household goods, not so much. During that first trip, I made friends with people with whom I remain in contact to this day, friends who are some of the closest to my heart even if farthest from my abode. My wife Christina studied Russian literature in college and lived in Moscow and St. Petersburg. As I was deciding what part of the western Pacific I wanted to focus on, she stated that she wanted to continue traveling to Russia. I wanted to continue traveling with her. We were married in May 1995, and traveled to the Russian Far East on Alaska Airline's second flight from Seattle, in July 1995.

Initially, my Russian skills were rough. With her experience and musical ear, Kamchatkans sometimes took Christina for Polish (not quite Russian but close), whereas I was sometimes thought to be Estonian (notoriously bad Russian speakers). I understood somewhere between one half to three quarters what people were saying and was limited in my expressive ability, but still I was able to connect to several people during that trip, people who became lifelong friends and colleagues. My Ph.D. research topic evolved over the course of the five years between that first trip and defending my dissertation, but the constant was always a keen interest in other people's lives, their traditions, and how they live in the modern world with grace and dignity. Field research in Kamchatka was a collaborative process, from my first trip. The production of anthropological knowledge often requires researchers and subjects to become entangled with one another in deep moral relationships (Handler 2004a; Kan 2001). These relationships and the critical role they play in producing good anthropology need more discussion: anthropology at its core is a moral science. Not only does it study morals, but moral relationships form the foundation of its greatest contributions to our knowledge of human beings.

From 'Natives' to colleagues

Those I worked with and learned from included not only close friends and acquaintances, but also many colleagues – fellow ethnographers. Academic anthropology operates with an implicit assumption that consultants and colleagues are two separate categories of people (Rabinow 1977, Smith 1999). Much of my work in Kamchatka has involved a level of intellectual collaboration which is collegial. As Tim Ingold (2018a: 251) put it, the aim of anthropology is "not to catalogue the diversity of human lifeways but to join the conversation. It is a conversation, moreover, in which all who join stand to be transformed." These conversations certainly transformed me for the better. People in Kamchatka were also transformed, for better or worse. Some were interested in my perspectives and in my theoretically informed takes on what people were doing in Kamchatka. Others were simply excited to talk to an outsider who was so interested to hear everything they had to say about what they had learned from elders over the years and decades preceding my arrival.

My particular kind of anthropology is inspired by Franz Boas and his students, especially Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, and Benjamin Lee Whorf, although my work includes more than collecting texts. Two ideas fundamental to Boasian anthropology is that "lesser studied" societies and cultures are no less interesting for their obscurity and that such peoples are particularly interesting precisely because of some of the radical differences in language, lifeways, and values from our own European perspectives. This kind of anthropology is participatory not in the Malinowskian sense of participant-observation (1922) – which normally looks for other aspects of culture – but in the sense that fieldwork is something we do with people we want to get to know (Ingold 2018a, 2018b; Rabinow 1977). This practice of working *with* and not *on* people is best exemplified by my exchange of language with my Koryak friend and colleague, Valentina. As I was working on my Ph.D. thesis and seeking to learn Koryak (and improve my Russian), she was working on her Russian *Kandidat Nauk* degree and sought to learn English. Such language exchanges are more common than it may seem; many anthropologists tell similar stories, but few write about such relationships.

Indigenous Kamchatkans have been conversing with anthropologists for a long time, and throughout the Soviet period became used to ethnographers from Moscow coming to visit during the summer to learn "our culture and customs," as I was told. So when I first showed up on the scene in 1995, most Kamchatkans knew exactly what an ethnographer was, what they studied, and how they should comport themself. At least they thought they did. I did not work with a specific questionnaire in a formal interview, as was expected. Local people in Kamchatka supposed I would ask a set of detailed questions about how one properly herds reindeer or hunts bear, prepares skins or makes snowshoes, performs a ritual or sings a song. Kamchatkans expected ethnographers to focus on material culture and on those aspects of spiritual culture which seem clearly bounded as rituals or myths.

Although these questions interested me, my primary goal was discovering what was most important to local people, in learning their subjectivity. This was something completely new for most people in Kamchatka; they had difficulty understanding how my research constituted ethnography. I just wanted to chat and listen to their stories, either over tea or during other kinds of formal or semi-formal visits to their home, or (better) in the course of sharing in their daily life and work while they fished at the summer camp, or while teachers took a break between classes in the faculty lounge of the Teacher's College, or museum employees on mid-morning tea break.

At first, I think I was not taken seriously as an ethnographer/anthropologist, because I did not fit local people's expectations. I found the best way to learn what was important to Kamchatkans was to be quiet or to just chat and drink a lot of caffeinated or alcoholic beverages and let them say what was on their mind. This confused many people, but after I made friends, they enjoyed conversing with me. Initially, silences (sometimes awkward) were a major feature of my interview technique, but after a couple visits people found that I was interesting to talk with and an unassuming guest. Drinking a lot of tea with them I learned a lot about the lived world in Kamchatka this way. After they gave up the expectation that I would pursue a focused research agenda (in their mind), Koryaks found that they had a lot to tell me about themselves, their families, and their communities. This was especially true during my second, longer trip in 1997-98, as locals expressed surprise when I returned or stuck around for an extended stay.

Fig. 1 Drinking tea while our driver repairs the ATV. From left: Christina Kincaid, Aleksandra Urkachan, Erich Kasten. On the way from Palana to Lesnaya, 2001.

I have been educated by a broad spectrum of individuals and encounters. This includes people I met on the street, whose name I did not note down and those with whom I lived with for months and who consider me their little brother.[1] Some of these people in Kamchatka are also scholarly colleagues. The high profile that ethnography has played in the region means that many Koryaks themselves, whether college-educated or not, have taken an interest in documenting their own culture. They are folklorists, ethnographers, and linguists; many have published books of their own (e.g., Dedyk 2003, 2006; Milgichil 2018; Urkachan 2002).

The day after I first arrived in Palana in September 1995, the administrative center of the Koryak Autonomous Okrug, Christina and I went to the Teacher's College to meet the director and ask for her assistance. I used the name of Viktoria Petrasheva, the renowned Itelmen scholar living in the main city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii.[2] When the director heard that I was interested in Koryak language and culture, she called the Koryak language teacher into her office. A stern-looking native woman, neatly dressed in a sweater and skirt, her long black hair piled up in a tight bun, entered. We introduced ourselves and explained our interest in learning Koryak. She agreed to help us; we went upstairs to her classroom to discuss the terms. She stated that she was not comfortable taking my money. Rather, she wanted to exchange language instruction. She had recently started graduate studies in linguistics at Herzen Pedagogical University in Petersburg, and needed to learn English for her exams, which included an oral discussion of Edward Nelson's thick book, *Eskimo about Bering Strait* (1983). After two months of working with this teacher and socializing with her family, our two families started to become friends.

In the summer of 1996 my new friend and colleague flew to Washington D.C. and spent two months living in our house in Charlottesville. This period of our collaboration included a trip to New York city to visit the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). Our time in the AMNH was a more *ad hoc* project similar in spirit to the work that Ann Fienup-Riordan and Yup'ik elders were doing in Berlin's Museum für Völkerkunde (Fienup-Riordan 1998). We started by examining the extensive Koryak collection in storage at the museum. The AMNH may have the largest single collection of Koryak artefacts from the turn of the twentieth century due to Waldemar Jochelson's collecting during the Jesup North Pacific Expedition in 1900-1901 (Jochelson 1908). The teacher tasked me with photographing many objects she found particularly interesting, as she answered questions from the museum staff about their care and conservation as well as their use in traditional life.

We also spent several hours among other ethnographic exhibits, in the North American halls. In the 1990s many Indigenous Kamchatkan individuals and groups were forming contacts with Native Americans for cultural exchanges and to share

1 The essays in Kan (2001) provide similar examples of kinship relations emerging from anthropological fieldwork among Native North Americans.

2 More on the role of Indigenous gatekeepers to foreign researchers see Habeck, *this volume.*

a common history of colonialism and contemporary political strategies for social revitalization of small communities remote from political or economic centers. Such knowledge exchanges included distributing several copies of the seminal catalog of the Smithsonian "Crossroads of Continents" exhibit (Fitzhugh and Crowell 1988). Igor Krupnik reached out to me to work with a Koryak scholar to write a chapter for the Russian version of the smaller "Crossroads Siberia-Alaska" exhibit catalog (see Dedyk 1996).

Embedded in Kamchatkan relations

When I returned to Kamchatka, to the town of Palana in April 1997, I already had some friends there and several acquaintances. I did not understand it at first, but I also already had obligations and expectations to fulfill beyond that of being an ethnographer. Working closely with the Koryak teacher, I came to be thought of as her little brother, even though I did not experience formal adoption, as other anthropologists have (e.g., Kan 2001). She was only five years my senior, but being childless (at the time) and having (initially, at least) a limited command of Russian made me seem more juvenile than my 28 years of age.[3] She wanted to escort me on my visits about Palana and got angry when I wandered into the small regional museum in Palana and caused a misunderstanding with one of its staff, which amounted to nothing in the end. My wife and I accompanied her family to her home village in the Oliutroskii District, over 500 km away. I spent a fascinating month with her sister's extended family in the village and at the summer fishing camp, where they were drying salmon for winter. All of the conversations, however, were about reindeer. After a few weeks, I asked her brother-in-law if he would take me to his private herd. He readily agreed and we made plans to visit the herd for several days.

This independence from my "elder sister" really upset her, and resulted in a period of several days of anger between us. We patched things up, but it was not merely a case of an anthropologist learning the Other's cultural categories and understanding them. We were two friends with hurt feelings. We avoided one another for several days, then had some serious conversations about what was going on. Actually, Christina had the most serious conversations with her. In Kamchatka it is easier for sisters to have a heart-to-heart talk than for a brother and sister.

3 My ineptitude was not limited to my linguistic abilities. By the spring of 1998, I was fluent in Russian and could use a few words of Koryak. However, while living at the reindeer herd, a young man was surprised to learn that I was older than him by several years, no doubt because I was nearly useless. See David Anderson (2000) for a similar reaction by Evenki hunters to his tundra skills.

Fig. 2 Volokha Ivkavav with his three sons. His gruff demeanor was belied by his kindness when I stupidly injured myself. Middle Pakhachi, 1998.

Since then Christina and I have become only more deeply entangled with the Koryak teacher and her family. The cultural exchange broadened from swapping Koryak for English lessons to their sharing knowledge about the tundra, Palana politics, and local spirits and us sharing knowhow about computer operating systems, MIDI files, and using MS Word, after they bought a computer. Some anthropological colleagues have repeatedly counseled me to excise my wife from my ethnographic writing because they feel it makes me seem less authoritative. Maybe so, but with her help my limited Russian skills quickly developed into a functional fluency by mid-1997, with still 12 months of dissertation fieldwork ahead. She also provided an additional perspective on conversations, events, and people I worked with. It is important to provide an accurate accounting of the production of anthropological knowledge: in my case this knowledge was enriched by having my wife in the field.[4]

4 This resonates with the memories of some of my colleagues working in the 'Global South.' Peter Metcalf (personal communication) found himself not being viewed quite as an adult in Borneo because he had no children. As a single woman doing linguistic research in West Africa, Sophie Salffner (personal communication) had to record most of her material with male speakers outdoors, exposed to the sun and noise, to maintain decorum. I believe having my wife with me in my 20s gave me a kind of social respectability I might not have had without her.

Friends and family

The relationship between my family and the Koryak teacher's family is the most profound one I have in Kamchatka. My relationship with her sister's family examplifies the kinds of entanglements I have with several people. Although adoptive kin ties did not organize my social presence in Kamchatka as intensely as they have for many anthropologists such relationships shaped my research (Kan 2001, Uzendoski 2005). These relationships formed a foundation for a deep anthropology, an anthropology that strives to represent what is important to these people. They sometimes presented personal difficulties and unpleasantness, but more often were as much a source of joy as of data. I worked with numerous individuals who had been collecting material themselves for years. Relationships with them had a professional dimension in addition to a personal one; they have all published books based on their work. This professional dimension sometimes pulled me in an opposite direction to that required of being a professional academic in the United States.

Friendships and cooperation continued even without daily or even monthly interactions. Itelmen scholar Viktoria Petrasheva (1942-2021), for example, was a friend at whose house in Petropavlovsk I could turn up at after several year's absence; it was if we had seen each other only the week before. She continues to inspire me and others. David Koester organized a Festschrift in honor of her 75th birthday (Koester, et al. n.d.) and presented a ring-bound typescript to her at a conference in Hawaii. Her influence continues as Koester, David Bobaljik, and I continue to develop the volume for eventual publication with the added inclusion of a contribution by her granddaughter Tatiana Degai, now an assistant professor at the University of Victoria in Canada.

Fig. 3 Viktoria Petrasheva, Itelmen scholar, spent uncountable hours in serious and joyful conversation about Indigenous Kamchatkans and anthropology with dozens of other scholars at her table. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, 2018.

Challenges of representation

During my first post-doctoral sojourn to Kamchatka in 2001, I brought photographs, including three from a conference at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany, where I then worked. When I showed a photo of conference participants, one person asked, "*gde nashi*?" ("Where are ours?"). Feeling somewhat desperate, I pointed to a Sakha anthropologist from Yakutia, but she just laughed. She wasn't Kamchatkan…[5]

Change forced me to confront the privileging of academic theory making over that of Kamchatkans. These included unusually intelligent and insightful people, some with a college education and advanced degrees, others with little formal education, but who had been systematically recording aspects of their culture over years and decades, and publishing books on their own culture, their own social history.

Fig. 4 Nina Nikolaevna and Vasilii Borisovich Milgichil outside their house. They were instrumental in helping transcribe Bogoras's 100-year-old Koryak recordings and contributed their own stories and songs in 2013. Manily, 2001.

My thoughts on theory and social engagement have matured in the intervening twenty plus years. While anthropologists do craft sophisticated theoretical constructs

5 While the conference mentioned included only academics, other conferences organized at the time in Halle included mostly Indigenous scholars from Kamchatka and elsewhere in Siberia (see for example Kasten 1998)– *ed. Erich Kasten.*

about human life in turgid prose, that seems to be increasingly rare, especially among those of us working with Indigenous people and particularly in the Circumpolar North. Boas certainly did not see a contradiction between a clear-eyed science of humanity and political advocacy that championed human rights and governmental accountability (Stocking 1992: 95ff.; Boas 1974: 307ff.). Ingold (2018a, 2018b) provided a contemporary argument for a more subtle anthropology that privileges projects and perspectives working in allyship with Indigenous people. The disdainful critique against Boasian documentation of old traditions misses the point that communities such as those in Kamchatka want people to share their stories. Publishing a compendium of oral narratives is not a catalogue of culture traits, but a sharing of points of view, of histories, of stories with a wider world. Such an approach acknowledges the reality of the co-production of knowledge as something that emerges from the social interactions and human empathy between anthropologists and people they are interested in getting to know.[6] Wagner (1981) describes this blend of theory and fieldwork as the necessarily intersubjective production of knowledge that is inherent, if not always acknowledged condition of anthropological knowledge.

Theory and practice in language documentation

My youthful thoughts on the separation of theory from engagement with local intellectuals, activists, and even scholars were not only naïve, but condescending. As I drafted my book (King 2011), I found that the theory of culture implicit in my Koryak colleague's discussions of traditions and lifeways was as sophisticated as those of the headiest anthropologist (e.g. Wagner 1981; Handler 2004b; Bourdieu 1990).[7] While shepherding the book through production, I began to look for another large project connected to people in Kamchatka. Although many anthropologists choose to work in a second, distant region for comparative purposes, I wanted a research plan that would take me back to work with friends in places like Petropavlovsk, Palana, Manily, and Middle Pakhachi.

This second project shifted from social anthropology to linguistics and language documentation. Koryaks of all ages were asking me to do such work in the 1990s. At that time, I did not have the professional confidence or intellectual maturity to undertake such a project that would also be well regarded in the academy, and perhaps the academy had also changed in the intervening 20 years. I secured a project grant from the Endangered Language Documentation Program (King and Dedyk 2017).

Recording narratives in 2013, I was struck by so many individuals' generosity with sharing their time and the effort they put into working with us to make the

6 See Kasten (2024) and Kasten et al. (*this volume*) for further discussion on knowledge co-production – *eds*.

7 See King (2011: 191, 235, 262).

recordings. While some people refused to be recorded for sundry reasons, those who agreed were fully committed. Many relished the experience of speaking with Valentina, the rare opportunity to have a conversation in their Native tongue, the language of their youth, when they were at the peak of their vitality herding reindeer, raising small children, and making their way through the middle of the twentieth century. Our project benefitted from Valentina's adroit conversational skills. Not only a fluent speaker, she could also relate to these Elders, who were not so very different from the Elders she knew as a little girl growing up in a small reindeer herding village in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time I listened mostly uncomprehendingly. Now revisiting those recordings from over a decade ago with the Koryak transcriptions and translations into Russian transports me back to Kamchatka.

Mindfulness, the practice of focusing on the here-and-now in an intense and intentional manner, has become popular in the West. Upon reflection, fieldwork was the perfect experience of mindfulness. Not only was I paying attention to every detail of every experience; I often wrote down those experiences later in the day, and recorded my perceptions on high quality video and audio. The experience of fieldwork is often exhausting as well as exhilarating. I was cold, rarely washed, working long hours, and sometimes sick, in often unpleasant conditions. However, fieldwork stripped away ancillary distractions, such as assorted responsibilities to my employer, my bank, and other adult liabilities. While in the field I needed to gather the data, attend to the conversation or activity of the moment, take notes, and occasionally look after my own physical wellbeing. As I currently continue to work on the 2013 field recordings, I remain committed and connected to those individuals and their communities. I returned to Petropavlovsk and Palana for a month in 2015 and 2018, to work intensively with Dedyk on analyzing our recordings, but have not been back to Russia since August 2018.

Fig. 5 Nadezhda Mikhailovna Plepova at her house. The primary school teacher in the village, she taught Koryak and helped me understand stories discussed in King (2013). Paren, 1998.

Fractured from, and still connected to, Kamchatkans

The present tensions between the Russian Federation and the United States due to the Russian war against Ukraine are painful on several accounts. The death and destruction in Ukraine undoubtedly includes causulties among young Kamchatkan men, although I cannot learn anything specific. Despite using encrypted communication on the WhatsApp platform, my friends do not stray from the party line on the war or ignore my questions altogether about the direct impacts of the war on their lives in Kamchatka. I cannot travel to Kamchatka or sponsor their travel to the US or to colleagues in Japan. Last year one friend asked me to send RAM cards for an old synthesizer that he could not get, and I discovered such banalties are prohibited. Email exchange is even more fraught, considering Russian surveillance. In my writing, a principal demand of my friends and acquaintances in Kamchatka was and continues to be that I acknowledge them by name in what I write, which now may cause significant trouble to these friends.

While political topics are well neigh impossible for me to address, Koryak communities have long preferred that I simply continue telling the world about their lives, culture and traditions, and their stories. That is what I do. Perhaps the most mundane forum was at the Lancaster Story Slam, a public story telling event held monthly in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I now live. About a dozen times in the last four years, I have shared a five-minute story of my experiences in Kamchatka to a local audience. I keep doing it because audience members tell me afterwards that they enjoy the stories. A more significant forum is my ongoing analysis of gigabytes of data that Valentina and I collected in 2013 when we recorded the last generation of fully fluent speakers of Koryak in several villages. We share transcript and translation files via email and occasionally discuss them on WhatsApp. The (mostly video) recordings take me back to Vanya's one-room cabin in the village of Middle Pakhachi or Akaguk's kitchen in the town of Khailino. My experience documenting Koryak in 2013 led me to write a short methods piece aimed at all social anthropologists, hoping that others working with Indigenous people could be encouraged to document heritage languages before they disappear (King 2015).

Coming and going

My discussion of working in Kamchatka would be incomplete without mention of adventures with assorted federal authorities tasked with keeping track of foreigners in a previously closed zone. As I mentioned above, I first arrived in Kamchatka with my wife on Alaska Airlines' second ever flight to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. It flew to Khabarovsk, where we boarded an internal Aeroflot plane to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii chartered by Alaskan. Although we cleared immigration and customs in

Khabarovsk, upon arriving in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii we were ordered to remain on the plane while Russian citizens exited. Then a border guard officer, flanked by two teenagers carrying AK-47s, entered the plane and asked for the first foreigner's papers, declaring loudly, "We have special rules for living here in Kamchatka."

That dramatic introduction to the local security apparatus was indicative of many interactions to come with the Border Guard, Immigration, the FSB, and the *Militsia* (Police). The Border Guard were my bane on that first trip. I had a technical-scientific exchange visa, the appropriate one for conducting research, and I was sponsored by the institute in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii where Victoria Petrasheva worked. During the Soviet period, Kamchatka and other special security zones had been closed to all but those with special permission; even Soviet citizens needed permission to travel there. In the new Russian Federation all these closed lands were supposedly opened up to free travel by citizens and foreigners alike (Taplin 1997). In addition to hosting a major submarine base and other military installations associated with protecting the border, Kamchatka was the target for Soviet missile testing. It seemed like the authorities made up a lot the "special rules" as they went along. David Koester (personal communication) told me he often found himself explaining Russian visa rules to local officials, not always in vain. In August 1995 the head of the border guard unit in Ossora asserted that we had incomplete paperwork and sent my wife back to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii to sort it out though I was allowed stayed in town to talk to people. Only later did we figure out that a simple bribe might have smoothed over the paperwork. In September we flew from Ossora to Palana, where the border guard had a much warmer attitude. Americans were something special in 1995 Kamchatka, and we were invited to several parties hosted by an assortment of moderately important people, who were delighted to have Americans in their town and promised every aid in negotiating the bureaucracy.

By 1997 I thought I had figured out the border guards, but upon arrival in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii I learned that the FSB required approval of my "itinerary." I was planning on a year-long stay that would include travel to over half a dozen villages. That delayed me another two weeks despite the best efforts of my friends and colleagues in Petropavlovsk. Again, I made sure I had the proper visa, permissions, and registration. I registered in every place where I spent more than two nights. I followed all the rules, mostly. In the summer of 1998 I went north to Manily. Friends and colleagues in Palana had long urged me to go to the small village of Paren, on Penzhina Bay at the very top of the Sea of Okhotsk. It was described as "Kamchatka's Kamchatka," the edge of the edge. I had plenty of material on educated and professional Koryaks in Palana, and I also wanted to see if I could find someone to transcribe and translate the Jochelson wax cylinder recordings (see King 2013). Tilichiki is the main airport hub for the northern half of what was then the Koryak Okrug, and, following advice, I let it be widely known that I was going to Manily and interested in going further to Paren. That plan worked: a few days after I arrived in Manily, a group of "geol-

ogists" (gold panners) took me in their helicopter to Paren. I learned a lot about the history of Paren, the joys and difficulties of life there, and the special relationship that shore-dwelling *Parentsi* have long had with the reindeer herding Koryaks of Upper Paren across the border in Magadan Oblast. I spent a week in Upper Paren, traveling by motor boat up the Paren River with Paren's mayor, who was visiting relatives and building a Russian brick stove for the nurse. There I recorded stories, songs, and dances. I also met the Japanese linguist Megumi Kurebito, who flew into the village from Severo-Evensk the day after I arrived. Beyond the most obscure village, I was still running into foreign anthropologists!

Returning from Paren to Manily in the beginning of September 1998, I set about getting to Tilichiki, from where I could fly to my base in Palana. Upon landing in Tilichiki, I was helping to unload the baggage with the other men (aside from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii, Kamchatkan airports did not have baggage handlers in the 1990s), when a middle-aged man in a leather jacket walked up. He announced his name and his FSB rank while flashing his FSB identity card and badge and asked me to step aside for a chat. It was a nerve-wracking grilling. I had neglected to include Paren on my itinerary when I arrived a year earlier, most likely because I did not think it possible to get there with my paltry resources. He fired several questions at me. Scared, I did my best to answer, until I realized that he was not waiting to hear my answers. That calmed me down: it was then clear he was there simply to scold the American and was not interested in any kind of investigation. Once I promised to behave and follow rules from then on (and I have), I was allowed to continue my journey unmolested.

While not my only encounter with FSB officers, that was the most intimidating. More common was a phone call from the local police station asking me to come in because a certain person wanted to chat with me. This usually entailed a cheerful stroll about town with questions about my work, with whom I stayed, talked to, and what I was investigating. My hosts were well known to all in town, and although I was researching the political implications of Indigenous identity connected to okrug sovereignty, my conversations were mostly about people's sense of Koryak traditions in the contemporary world. Thus I could truthfully say that I was recording a lot of folklore, which was the answer every official wanted to hear. Katherine Verdery's (2018) discussion of her Romanian secret police file points out how anthropological work, even the most innocent documentation of folklore and lifeways, can seem like spying and might even share some techniques. Unlike Verdery, I doubt I will ever be able to see my Russian secret police file.

While the border guards were a bother in the 1990s and while I experienced some mild harassment and superficial surveillance by the FSB in 1998 and 2001, I found the Immigration officers the most obnoxious during trips in 2013, 2015, and 2018. In 2013, as I was leaving Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii with my two young sons, I was subjected to a clownish interrogation by immigration officials who asserted that I had violated the terms of my technical-scientific exchange visa because I had not given a seminar.

They sat behind a small table on a raised stage; I was put in an audience seat in the front row of a medium-sized auditorium. I explained that all the activities listed were not requirements but possibilities. I had given several seminars during my trip from December 2012 to May 2013. During the second visit, in the summer I co-authored an article instead of making formal presentations (King and Dedyk 2013). Although I never feared for my physical safety, I was very worried about being blackballed and not permitted back into Russia.[8] In the end, no real problems resulted from these worrisome interviews.

Fig. 6 Apunga recounts family stories in her kitchen. She said she enjoyed participating in the documentation project and proud that her words and stories would be preserved. Khailino, 2013.

I was subjected to similar shenanigans during my short trips in 2015 and 2018, but by then I was better prepared. I had proof of seminars delivered, technical exchanges made, and joint science conducted. The only time I feared for my safety was during a ride from the airport into Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. Minibus (*mikrik*) drivers would wait by the airport exit for people to fill the vehicle before departing for the city, a 45-minute drive. I found an empty *mikrik* and got in. The airport was in a bit of a lull at that hour, so after waiting for a bit, the driver suggested he just take me if I would be willing to pay about three times the normal ticket. This was still less than what a cab

8 This fear was based on the experience Patty Gray had in the Chukchi Okrug (personal communication). She was prevented from travelling to Russia for two or three years and subsequently was a *persona non grata* in Chukotka.

ride would have cost, so I agreed. As we drove into town, the driver and his friend in the passenger seat engaged me in conversation; I told them about my anthropological work, which they seemed to find interesting. As we went down a lonely section of highway, it occurred to me that these two athletic young men could easily rough me up or worse and take my field equipment. A bad feeling came over me and I wondered if I could jump out if they slowed to turn a corner onto a side road. However, they never did. They were ordinary, friendly human beings. I never had any direct threats to my safety, but I am now sincerely concerned that if I were to return to Kamchatka at this time, one of those FSB or Immigration officials would invent charges to have me arrested. Aside from the apparatchiki, I found most Kamchatkans to be good people. Like David Anderson (2000b) I found my status as a North American opened more doors and welcomed me to more tables than not.

Conclusion: Writing the connections

Though my last trip to Kamchatka was in the summer of 2018, I remain ensconced in social and moral relationships with individuals and communities thousands of miles away, although many of my Kamchatkan friends and aquaintances have passed on to the next world. The hallmark of anthropological fieldwork, *participant observation*, is not a scientific or objective gathering of data by pretending to live with people and participate in their regular lives only to turn one's back on them, detach oneself, and document their lifeways, but rather to participate in a correspondence of ideas and feelings as the anthropologist generates texts. This correspondence is a conversation, a working with, an intersubjective production of knowledge that is cooperative and from a particular point of view. Thus, I try in my "writing [to find] a way of opening up to the world, as we do in dreams, where imagination and reality are one… not just to inform but to inspire" (Ingold 2018a: 62).

The text artifacts are products of these conversations. To say that the world is constructed through language is not to deny the reality of the world, but to acknowledge the power of language. We are not deceived by the words we speak as long as we recognize the conversational relationships that are inherent to anthropological information and analysis (Silverstein 2004). The only view of the human world is from ground level; the view from within is all we have. The Elders we recorded were speaking in a language I could barely comprehend, and had lived lives that I still work to understand; they were 'other,' yet we did achieve a sort of understanding of one another through our conversations and the stories they told. I see my task a one of bringing their stories to wider attention.

The work of anthropology is the work of "Goethean science," where observer and observed merge into a relationship of mutual benefit and reciprocal transformation. It is a search for truth. This world remains alive and active in my life a decade later

and thousands of miles away, despite the current "fracturing" of the North due to the war. In a shamanic discourse, my body is present in Lancaster, Pennsylvania while my soul is free to travel to Kamchatka and communicate with Vanya, Uncle Misha, Aunt Tanya, and other storytellers who changed me for the better. I continue to follow their wishes and work to share their stories with the world.

Fig. 7 Chukchi speakers of Koryak watch Reindeer Herder's Day celebrations (2013). From left G'ig'en and Zoia Rul'tevneut. G'ig'en was a gifted storyteller and singer. Achaivayam, 2013.

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Figures

1 Drinking tea while our driver repairs the ATV. From left: Christina Kincaid, Aleksandra Urkachan, Erich Kasten. On the way from Palana to Lesnaya. Photo: Alexander King, 2001.
2 Volokha Ivkavav with his three sons. His gruff demeanor was belied by his kindness when I stupidly injured myself. Middle Pakhachi. Photo: Alexander King, 1998.
3 Viktoria Petrasheva, Itelmen scholar, spent uncountable hours in serious and joyful conversation about Indigenous Kamchatkans and anthropology with dozens of other scholars at her table. Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskii. Photo: Alexander King, 2018.
4 Nina Nikolaevna and Vasilii Borisovich Milgichil outside their house. They were instrumental in helping transcribe Bogoras's 100-year-old Koryak recordings and contributed their own stories and songs in 2013. Manily. Photo: Alexander King, 2001.
5 Nadezhda Mikhailovna Plepova at her house. The primary school teacher in the village, she taught Koryak and helped me understand stories discussed in King (2013). Paren. Photo: Alexander King, 1998.
6 Apunga recounts family stories in her kitchen. She said she enjoyed participating in the documentation project and proud that her words and stories would be preserved. Khailino. Photo: Alexander King, 2013.
7 Chukchi speakers of Koryak watch Reindeer Herder's Day celebrations (2013). From left G'ig'en and Zoia Rul'tevneut. G'ig'en was a gifted storyteller and singer. Achaivayam. Photo: Alexander King, 2013.