

**Praise for *Settlers on the Edge*:**

*This highly original work rises brilliantly to the challenge of an extraordinary historical moment in the harshest and most inaccessible region of the Russian North. Niobe Thompson's analysis of social identity, self, agency, and moral economy reveals how successive changes of regime have engendered an accumulation of distinctive identities in which each identity is reinforced by differences of origin, generation, and class.*

*Among many powerful insights, the author shows how white settlers have used their practical and spiritual engagement with the local landscape to appropriate the widespread northern Native identity marker of belonging, thereby explaining their resistance to programs of resettlement to the south. By following resettled northerners back to their apartment blocks in Central Russia, he shows how, even here, their strategy of survival involves recreating their northern sense of belonging.*

*This book is a landmark in the anthropology of Russia, of the circumpolar Arctic, and of migration studies.*

PIERS VITEBSKY, AUTHOR OF *REINDEER PEOPLE:  
LIVING WITH ANIMALS AND SPIRITS IN SIBERIA*

*Niobe Thompson examines a dynamic period in northeast Russia, spanning its abrupt decline immediately following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the subsequent period of massive investment under a new governor. This is a groundbreaking study done with great insight into the phenomenal changes in Arctic Russia in recent decades. It makes a major, novel contribution to our understanding of identity formation by looking at the region's non-indigenous population.*

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*An impressive achievement – among this book's greatest strengths are its solid ethnographic grounding, its thorough grasp of historical process, its lucid and incisive presentation, and its near-seamless integration of description and analysis. It gives a fascinating account of a virtually unknown social world in a sophisticated, yet unpretentious, style.*

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*THE EYE OF THE WHIRLWIND, RUSSIAN IDENTITY  
AND SOVIET NATION-BUILDING*



# **Settlers on the Edge**

Identity and Modernization  
on Russia's Arctic Frontier

*Niobe Thompson*



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*To Linda*



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## Preface

Two aspects of the editorial method used in the book require clarification: the transliteration of Russian names and terms and the protection of informants' identities.

This book employs the US Library of Congress system for the transliteration of Russian names and terms, with some exceptions. Where the spelling of a word is already established in popular media and other accounts, I have opted to violate the transliteration system. Thus *Boris E'tlin* is *Boris Yeltsin*, a *Koriak* is a *Koryak*, and the city of *Anadyr'* is *Anadyr* (without the soft sign). When using a Russian term transliterated in the plural, I opt to reproduce the plural endings as they are used in Russian. Thus, a single *vezdekhod* becomes several *vezdekhody*, and a single *muzhik* sits down to drink with a few *muzhiki*. (For a glossary of Russian words, see Appendix 2.)

The identity of many of my informants has been protected using a coding system, in which individuals quoted or cited in the text are assigned the numbers [1] through [66] corresponding to brief descriptions of their gender, approximate age, ethnicity, length of time in the North, and profession (see Appendix 1 for a list of the informants). When the narratives of certain people provide the basis for extended textual descriptions, as, for example, in Chapter 5, surrogate names rather than number codes have been used for stylistic purposes. In certain cases, however, the actual names of informants are preserved in the text, reflecting their status as public figures: elected officials, senior public servants, and well-known media personalities. Furthermore, the names of settlements and towns mentioned in the text have not been changed.



## Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to the many people in Chukotka and central Russia who opened their doors and, with abundant patience and generosity, shared their knowledge of a world to which I was five years ago a stranger. From the warmth and enthusiasm I met almost without fail, and a great deal of practical assistance given without hesitation, I know that the “law of the North” of which northerners are so proud thrives today. In a part of Russia very difficult to access, I consider the freedom I was given to travel and ask questions without hindrance or conditions little short of miraculous. For this I extend heartfelt thanks and admiration to the administration of the Chukchi Autonomous Okrug and Governor Roman Abramovich, to the governor’s special advisors John Tichotsky and Aleksandr Borodin, former deputy governor Sergei Kapkov, and his assistants Aleksandr Eidelstein, Natal’ia Rakaeva, and Sergei Shuvalov. I am also grateful to the staff of the Chukotka branch of the Russian Red Cross, and in particular its director Ida Ruchina, as well as to the Chukotka branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences and its scientific director Tat’iana Godovykh.

Ultimately, in carrying out this research and making a life in Chukotka, my wife and I came to rely not on institutions, but on the friendships we made with local people, and I regard these friends with great fondness and everlasting gratitude. There would not be much of a story to tell if my fellow *parashiutisty* (firefighters) at Avialesokhrana had not taken us under their (literal) wings, making many journeys possible. In particular, I thank one of Chukotka’s most incandescent personalities, a true *severnyi muzhik*, the director of Avialesokhrana Albert Klimentiev (you owe me a liver). Of all the many people in Chukotka who befriended and helped us, I wish to especially thank Vladimir Sirtun and his family, and all the children of his Shkola Strantsvii, Aleksandr and Galina Ganze, Vladilen Kavry, Zoia Tagryn’a, Aleksandr and Nina Mosolov, Vasilii Yakovlev, Petr Klimov, Liudmila Ershova, Vladimir Pereladov, and Pavel and Irina Apletin. I reserve particular gratitude for the people of Vaegi, my adopted home in Chukotka. I also have all the brothers Bogorev, and in particular Viktor – mayor of Vaegi, parashutist, and riverboat captain – to thank for saving my life more than once, although I’ve asked myself why it so often needed saving when I was travelling in their company.

In central Russia, the difficult task of tracking down resettled former residents of Chukotka was made possible only through the kind assistance of Teodor Zvizda

(in Anadyr), and Vladimir Zakharov (Lipetsk), Stanislav Zhukov (Smolensk), and Mikhail Ivanov (Voronezh).

This book was born thanks to the collective effort and insight of many wonderful colleagues at the Scott Polar Research Institute and the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, and I thank them all. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Piers Vitebsky, whose intelligence and dedication was a guiding inspiration for this project from its inception, and whose passionate support is very much the reason for its final success.

For their sensitive and insightful comments, I also wish to particularly acknowledge Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Bruce Grant, Nikolai Vakhtin, Patty Gray, Mark Nuttall, Susan Crate, Finn Sivert Nielsen, Sarah Radcliffe, Emma Wilson, Elena Khlinovskaya-Rockhill, Gail Fondahl, and Marilyn Strathern.

In conducting field research and writing for this project over the past five years, I was supported by two Wenner Gren research grants, a Commonwealth Fellowship, and funding from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. I was free to concentrate on writing this book thanks to a Killam Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of Alberta. In Cambridge, the Scott Polar Research Institute provided a splendid setting in which to base my research over the years, affording informed critique, unparalleled resources, and the collegiality of afternoon tea in equal measure. I also thank Jesus College for numerous small research grants and for providing a home.

I reserve my deepest gratitude for three people. My mother and father took me with them to a little community in the Canadian North in 1979, where I spent the next seven years falling out of trees, tipping canoes on the lake, leaving my gumboots stuck in the mud, and wishing I were Cree like all my friends. We were newcomers there, but to my great fortune my parents chose to live outside the white cliques and their government-built compounds, and although they would probably not admit it, they inspired many by the way they invested their lives in their adopted home. The concerns at the heart of my research, and the original impulse to go to the Russian North, originate in the northern experiences my parents gave me as a child.

Finally, when my wife married me in 2001, she may not have seen coming a year of life in a struggling industrial town in the Russian Far North. But her patience, love, humour, and forbearance through blizzards, winter darkness, tundra mosquitoes, and my awful vezdekhod driving got me through it all. The work of research and writing was hers as much as mine, and so this book is dedicated to her.

## Settlers on the Edge

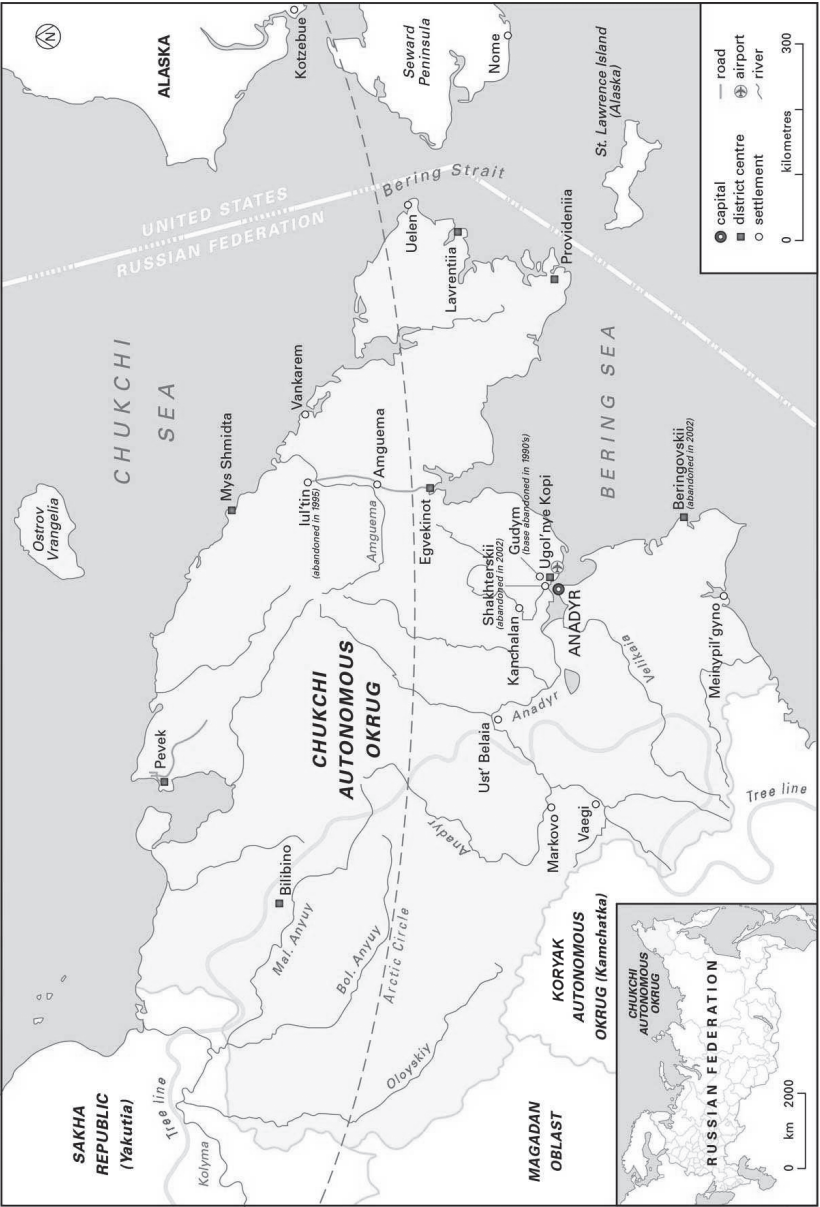


Figure 1.1 Chukotka (Chukchi Autonomous Okrug)

# 1

## Introduction

One of the great untold stories of the Russian North lies concealed behind the unexamined belief that we understand who in these regions is native and who is only visiting. This book is about the people who went to live in Russia's most remote northeast region – Chukotka – as willing participants in the Soviet campaign to master the North, and who to this day constitute its majority population. Although *Settlers on the Edge* is far from unique in choosing the post-Soviet North as a setting, it is the first research to focus entirely on this population and to place in question the assumptions of transience and rootlessness that cling to the northern non-native.<sup>1</sup> The terms normally attached to this figure – *priezzhi* or *prishedshii*, variously translated as either “newcomer” or “incomer” – hardly suggest the depth of history Soviet-era migrants now possess in the North, even in those regions most recently settled by Russians.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the experiences of migration have with time yielded palpable senses of belonging in place, and the “newcomer” of an earlier period has become the “settler” of the present day. Migrant workers who arrived with an expectation of their own transience in the North, but who remained there decades later, gradually responded to the opportunities and challenges of northern life by putting down roots.<sup>3</sup> Not all the original migrants to the North underwent such transformations; in fact, staying only briefly was more common. But the point, for those who might attach a stigma of eternal outsidership to the “newcomer,” is that though dislocation and rootlessness were common to all northern migrants, they were almost never an aspiration. Indeed, migrants, whether they left after a short stay or remained to build a life, were almost universally in search of that most elusive quality in Soviet life: a secure and *settled* existence.

In its final three decades of power, the Soviet state engineered a remarkable project of voluntary mass settlement in the Russian Far North. For migrants to these regions, the conditions of life were exceptional not only in the sense one might expect, beset by isolation and a harsh climate, but also, in the era after Stalin's death in 1953, the lives of northern settlers were exceptionally privileged. A regime whose ostensible purpose in building communism was to efface class antagonisms and eventually to eliminate class distinctions altogether, in fact created in the North a new formation of class privilege. Having turned its back on the prison-labour system, that regime found material incentives to be a much more powerful instrument than coercion for driving the settlement and development of the country's North. While the average citizen fought a losing struggle with chronic shortage

and meagre income during the years of “stagnation” (roughly 1965–85), newcomers to the North were protected by an excellent system of supply and were awarded a range of special benefits. In fact, by construing life in the North as a kind of sacrifice, the state could privilege northern workers twice over. Not only were they publicly celebrated as the avant-garde of socialist construction – civilizers and modernizers on the natural and cultural frontier – their purported sacrifices removed their material entitlements from scrutiny. Northerners thus enjoyed luxuries normally reserved for the Soviet nomenclatura: living in the “cognac zone,” they flew to Moscow to shop for furs and perfume, took their holidays on the Bulgarian coast, and retired in their fifties to custom-built colonies in the Baltics.<sup>4</sup>

The farther from the Soviet metropolis northern workers settled, the greater the privileges that accrued. So it was that in Chukotka, a region on the farthest northeast periphery of Soviet territory, settler prosperity reached a fabled extreme. Isolation and distance in this place – as far as one can travel from Moscow and remain in Russia – have always shaped the experience of settling there in extraordinary ways. So remote is Chukotka that it remained outside the effective control of the tsarist state, and the organization of its indigenous reindeer herders into state farms was completed only in the 1950s, two decades after Soviet collectivization began (Znamenski 1999). Unlike in more accessible regions of the North, settlement there did not take the form of a gradual history. As late as 1930, 96 percent of those living in Chukotka were indigenous, most of them

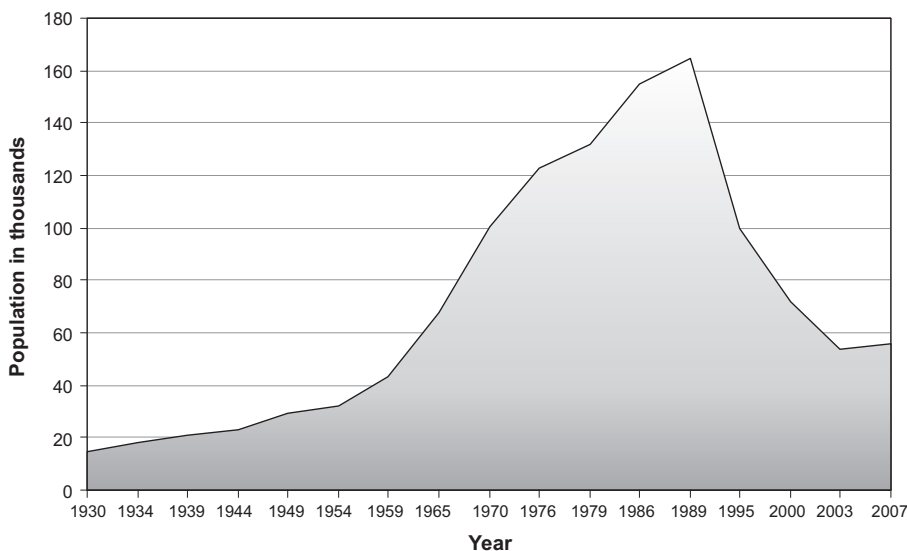


Figure 1.2 Total population in Chukotka, 1930–2007

Sources: Goskomstat CAO (1998); Goskomstat CAO (2001); Kotov et al. (1995); interviews with CAO administration officials, 2003

Chukchi. Only post-war mass settlement shifted the balance. Between 1959 and 1970, Chukotka boasted the highest rate of in-migration of any region in the Soviet Union (Kaiser 1994, 176-77), and by the time Soviet power collapsed in the late 1980s, native people comprised only 10 percent of the population (FSGS 2004) (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3). Underpinning this exceptionally concentrated wave of settlement was Chukotka's status as a kind of ultimate northern territory. Not only did it fall into the highest echelon in the Soviet ranking of north remoteness, which the state used to calculate the generosity of northern pay and other benefits, Chukotka's position on the very edge of the Soviet space, within sight of America, lent this place a particularly intoxicating aura of romance.

The Soviet state fell apart in 1991. The experience of daily life in post-Soviet Chukotka was so grimly in contrast to that of the years before this sudden fracture that we might think of this territory as preternaturally fated to extremes. The Soviet collapse extinguished the regime's belief in (and its capacity to support) mass settlement, and the exaggerated privileges of the newcomer were liquidated with merciless symmetry thereafter. In Russia's "era of transition," there was little sense of transition in Chukotka. Instead, the end of Soviet power seemed a conclusion. The entire edifice of modern industrial life fell apart, towns were abandoned, the northern supply system disintegrated, and people began, quite literally, to starve. The majority of the population fled to central Russia, so that now Chukotka had the highest rate of out-migration in the country. For a people whose

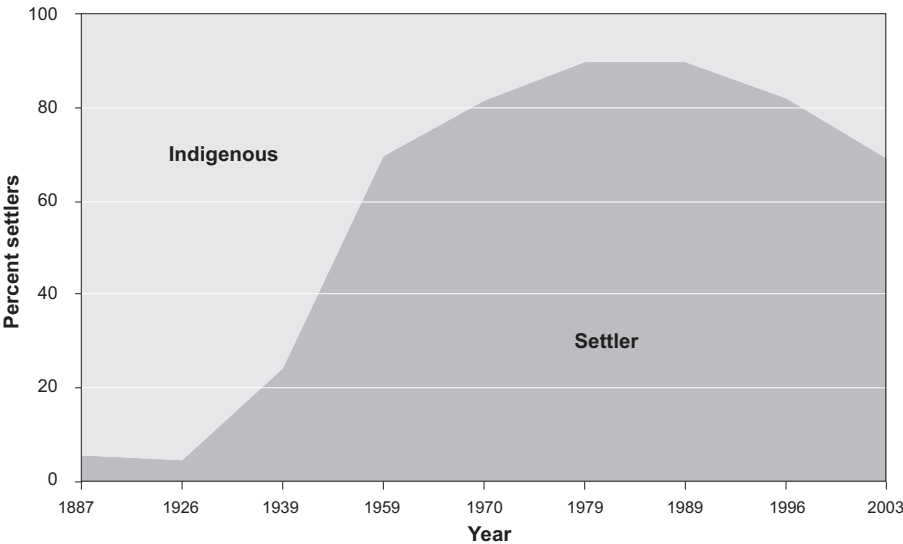


Figure 1.3 Settlers as a percentage of total population, 1887-2003

Source: Kotov et al. (1995); Gray (2005); interviews with CAO administration officials, 2003

sense of history was shaped by the teleological doctrine of technological and cultural progress, time seemed to reverse. For Chukotka's settlers, modernity had been an idea inseparable from the conveniences of central heating and air travel; life deprived of them felt like falling backward. And indeed, such was the case, for the energies of modernization – manifest in the institutions of acculturating and administrative change, technologies of transport and production, and optimism in the urban system – retreated out of this place, back into the core, like a tide.

That was the 1990s. By the time I began visiting Chukotka in 2001, the modernizing tide had come back in. In the way of this place, it had returned with exceptional and spectacular force, and the most “fallen behind” (*otstalyi*) of Russia's regions was leaping, in many senses, to its leading edge. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the forces of capital accumulation and selective westernization shaping urban Russian life, and defiantly redefining what it meant to be modern, suddenly chose Chukotka as their testing ground. The region became a stage on which oligarchic power contested presidential power, and where some of the marvellous profits of Russia's re-emerging resource economy came to rest. Just as outsiders had made of the local domain and all its inhabitants a construction site of modernization in the Soviet era, now a new generation of “experts” and “specialists” was arriving from distant cities to refashion local life. Perhaps this had little to do with the interests of local people, or even with the economic potential of this territory. It might even have been true that by calling this frantic project of change a “modernization,” outsiders were doing more to transform their own distant lives than those of locals. But clearly, the event of their arrival confirmed once again the susceptibility of a peripheral territory in a globalizing world to the oscillating tides of that phenomenon we call development.

We must continually return to Chukotka's geographical position to understand its contemporary fate. The frame of thought that names a territory “peripheral” stigmatizes the local as fixed in place and left behind by innovation. Correspondingly, what or who comes from the centre bears the modern identity. Identities slip, however, and that is the problem and the opportunity shaping the lives of settlers in Chukotka. Because a doctrine and project of Soviet modernization emanating from Russia's metropolitan core produced them, we might assume that Soviet-era in-migrants were indivisible from it. According to this logic, if modernizations have an ephemeral presence in the Far North, so do their agents; if they did not leave as the Soviet modernization subsided, this must have been because poverty prevented them. Those who remain from that period, it follows, are loyal not to the *place* they live in, but instead to the *idea* of modern life that for a time was lodged there, offering them all the blandishments of Soviet privilege. These ideas are fundamental to much of the received wisdom informing policy discussions on the population problems of the Russian North today. Many

commentators in Russia and abroad consider the settler presence in the post-Soviet North to be anomalous, a costly structural distortion inherited from another time.<sup>5</sup>

In reality, the newcomers of the Soviet era were *detached* from their modernizing roles and identities by the post-Soviet “demodernization.” The exigencies of survival largely emasculated the old Soviet settler sense of self. This is a notion quite foreign to citizens of the West, for whom participation in a history of progress toward modernity (if only an ideational journey) has rarely been in question. Nevertheless, it happens. As James Ferguson (1999, 243) warns, globalization “creates new, up-to-date ways of not only connecting places, but also of bypassing and ignoring them.” The demodernizing experience is relatively common outside the world’s most powerful metropoli, and in those places where these recessive histories are freshest, we encounter people who once defined themselves as modern, and indeed as makers of modernity, now disconnected from such projects.

In Chukotka, the newcomers of the Soviet era derived a sense of themselves from their participation in a mission to “master the North” – *osvoenie severa*. Newcomers were prosperous, skilled in modern techniques and ideologies, hypermobile, and situated as much outside the North as in it. They lived a suspended and transient existence, in which the challenges of life in remote arctic conditions were ameliorated by importing a remarkable diversity of goods and conveniences from far away. But as that way of life disappeared, they either left the North (a difficult process) or were forced to survive without the scaffolding of colonial privilege.

As the decade of post-Soviet crisis ended, the arrival of a subsequent tide of modernizing change revealed the extent to which the experiences of survival have transformed Chukotka’s settlers. As in the past, this newest modernization was animated by a binary logic of “newcomer” and “local,” “modern” and “left behind,” but now indigenous people were not alone in occupying the local category. Soviet-era migrants who still lived in the region had, to their own surprise, now joined natives in the ranks of the local and left behind. In this new era of outsider-led development, they now witnessed the projects of modernity with as much confusion and apprehension as, a generation earlier, their native counterparts in Chukotka had experienced. This uncomfortable, and quite new, sensation was a potent signal of passage over a vital threshold.

Stripped of the idea and the powers of colonial mission, these newcomers of the past had become the locals of the present. Having fallen out of the state of privileged suspension that Soviet policy had afforded them, they had settled into new lives in which, for most, getting by required a close attention to what support their immediate communities and landscapes could afford them. Yet, although the emasculation of their colonial identity was sudden, the accumulation of social capital and local knowledge in the North on which they based their survival was not; it

long preceded the Soviet collapse and it continued after. A careful examination of how, over time and through changing historical circumstances, these in-migrants gradually shifted their loyalties away from the ideas and practices of outsidership and came to root their lives in local, northern places, produces a picture of the settling process. This finding is profoundly important to our understanding of the contemporary Russian North: up to now, social scientists, and by extension state officials and planners, have argued that irrevocable senses of belonging are the preserve of the indigenous and métis populations of the Far North. But in recent years, increasingly ambitious attempts to depopulate these regions by removing the in-migrants of the Soviet era have encountered popular resistance.<sup>6</sup> I hope this book will supply an explanation.

### A Case for the Settler

Addressing a major conference of social scientists in 2004, British anthropologist Tim Ingold offered a “Manifesto for the Anthropology of the North” (2004), challenging the profession to engage with all residents of the region. He urged his colleagues to examine how *all* people of the North “are linked to landscapes and localities, in the formation of personal and collective identities.” Ingold’s challenge was certainly authoritative within the profession, but not singular. The same year, *Sibirica* published the proceedings of a roundtable meeting of Russian and Western anthropologists in Halle, Germany, proposing a critical reassessment of Siberian ethnography. One of its key recommendations is worth quoting in full: “This idea – that the social anthropology of Siberia should not only be limited to the indigenous peoples, that other categories of the population should also become objects of study, that even urban populations in Siberian cities should become a subject of social anthropological research to no less a degree than villages and nomadic groups – ran as a red thread through many of the discussions” (Gray, Vakhtin, and Schweitzer 2003, 204).

It might appear self-evident that anthropology should show interest in the full range of actors in any social field. Yet, in social investigations of the post-Soviet North, this is not so. Its non-indigenous population is rarely examined in any depth. In fact, the possibility that a settler population with lasting attachments to the Arctic might have emerged from among the many migrants who moved north in the Soviet era has until now never been seriously discussed.<sup>7</sup> Instead, social scientists have bypassed the northern industrial town on the way to the native village, producing over the past decade a rich and varied body of research on the indigenous experience. No doubt, the assumed transience of settlers, in contrast to the rootedness of native people, raises the question of their long-term importance to life in northern communities. The two most common terms in currency – *priezzhi* (newcomer) for settlers and *mestnyi* (local) for natives – reproduce the idea that there are two kinds of people in the North, the recently arrived, and by

implication, the soon to leave, and the eternal native, who will always remain. Moreover, Siberian ethnography is blinkered by its traditional tendency to judge human phenomena through the prism of ethnicity and to propose ethnic difference as the sole basis of northern identities.

Responding to this imbalance, Otto Habeck (2005b), in his introduction to a recent edited volume on identity in Siberia, urges an emerging generation of anthropologists to move beyond the “primacy of the ‘ethnic.’” The ethnicity fixation in northern research certainly helps to explain its traditional choice of subjects: with our eye on the ethnic, we miss the settler.<sup>8</sup> Aware of the diverse and diasporic origins of this population, we assume that, whereas native settlements are the site of fairly bounded cultures with detectable senses of collectivity and community, for settlers, close affinity with community and the land are mere ideas, remnants of nostalgia residing in a mythic village past on the Russian “mainland” – the *materik*. In the absence of ethnographic scrutiny, it is only natural that settler populations become reduced by default to aggregate formations, inchoate accumulations of transient labour, almost, dare we say it, without culture (although settlers are nevertheless somehow presumed to maintain hegemonic neo-colonial positions within northern societies).

We might have expected the collapse of Soviet ideology to have stimulated a reassessment of the “suitable subject” in northern ethnography. However, in this matter there has in fact been a remarkable continuity with the past. The entrance of foreign anthropologists into previously closed Russian field sites and, moreover, their collaboration with Russian colleagues, certainly represented a fundamental break from the Soviet ethnographic tradition. As Habeck (2005b) and Gray, Vakhtin, and Schweitzer (2003) observe, Soviet preoccupations with “traditional” cultural forms, problems of ethnogenesis, the categorization of fixed *etnos*, and the cataloguing of disappearing material and spiritual culture were superseded after the collapse by a dedication to *contemporary* issues in indigenous life, which naturally repositioned anthropologists as more activist and partisan figures within their respective ethnographic sites (Slezkine 1991; Schindler 1991; Basilov 1994). But, whereas Soviet methods and ideologies were challenged, the Soviet ethnographic tradition, shaped by its early founders Shternberg, Jochelson, and Bogoraz, and elaborated by such eminent scholars as Kreinovich, Popov, Prokof’ev, Dolgikh, Potapov, Bromlei, and Okladnikov, apparently succeeded in configuring the contemporary North as an *indigenous* social field.

Consequently, in the first post-Soviet decade, when the output of well-funded Western social scientists far outpaced that of Russia’s own academic community, interest in the indigenous subject monopolized the field. Among the most prodigious specializations were investigations of reindeer husbandry and herding cultures (Vitebsky 2005; D. Anderson 2000; Golovnev and Osherenko 1999; Stammeler 2004), gender relations in indigenous communities (Rethmann 2001; Vitebsky and

Wolfe 2001; M.M. Balzer 1992), property rights and indigenous entitlements (Fondahl 1995, 1998; Osherenko 1995; Schindler 1994), rural and indigenous political mobilization (Gray 2005; Wilson 2002), nationalism and ethnic identity (Argounova 2001; Balzer and Vinokurova 1996; Grant 1995), shamanism and indigenous religious revival (Vaté 2003; Vitebsky 2002; M.M. Balzer 1999), and postcolonial discourse and the meaning of indigenous tradition (Habeck 2005a; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003; Schindler 1997; Krupnik and Vakhtin 1997). This field of literature, though defined by a common geographic referent, is already too broad to review in detail. But, in the region with which this study is concerned – Chukotka – the domination of indigenous studies (or more accurately a lack of interest in the non-indigenous subject) is equally apparent. Anna Kerttula's (2000) fieldwork in the late perestroika period led to the first monograph on post-Soviet Chukotka, in which “newcomers” in the coastal community of Sireniki serve as a foil for her description of Yup'ik and Chukchi lifeways. Dire socio-economic conditions in Chukotka's indigenous communities were the focus of several studies, including those by Alexandr Pika (1996), Harald Finkler (1995), and Joëlle Robert-Lamblin (1993). Particular interest has attended the uneven record of indigenous “cultural revival” and indigenous politics, evident in articles by Igor Krupnik and Nikolai Vakhtin (1997), Debra Schindler (1997), Patty Gray (2000), and Petra Rethmann (2004), and culminating in Gray's 2005 book assessing native political resistance in the 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most powerful contributions to arise from the study of Russia's northern peoples concerns the way in which native belonging is situated in practical skills of land use. This vein of research has also strongly shaped our perceptions of the settler presence in the North. Accounts of indigenous ways of life point to landscape, and in particular activities such as hunting and travelling within it, as a primary constituent of personal and collective identity, in a manner consistent with writing on belonging and landscape in other regions (Brody 1981, 2000; Nuttall 1991; Vitebsky 1992). Here, practical interactions with local environments decisively constitute the concepts of “northern belonging” and “indigenous homeland,” which find their articulation in descriptions of “ecological senses of belonging” based on practices of “dwelling on the land” or “skills of dwelling” (Ingold 2000; D. Anderson 2000). When native people's interests are threatened, they often invoke political claims of “indigeneity,” which derive their power from traditions of local interaction with a specific territory, practices of harvesting local resources, and the threat of cultural failure if that bond is severed.

Nothing therefore arouses our skepticism of northern settlers as a viable object of study as forcefully as their purported lack of connection to the land. European incomers are invariably portrayed in this way, as aliens to the tundra, people who, if they move out of their urban environments at all, do so to harvest natural resources in a utilitarian and short-termist fashion. Anna Kerttula (2000, 29) describes settlers

as “a group devoid of cultural or spiritual connection to the village and its surrounding environment. They were the perpetual outsiders.” Alexander King (2002), drawing from research in neighbouring Kamchatka, posits a dichotomy of native Koryak and settler Russian perceptions of nature: for settlers, nature is wild, an emptiness, an alternative to civilization, whereas for the Koryaki, nature is itself a civilization, marked and known through practical engagement. According to King, because settlers essentialize nature in romantic discourses, they can never understand their natural surroundings as a source of identity and belonging in a fully native way. King himself connects his arguments to earlier northern ethnographies (Nuttall 1992; D. Anderson 2000; Ingold 2000), which identify in their native subjects a specifically indigenous manner of belonging in their homelands, landscapes they imbue with personhood, so that humans exist in a mutual neo-social entanglement with the mountains, streams, reindeer, and trees around them.<sup>10</sup> In Chukotka, Patty Gray employed the contrasting environments of the northern city (Anadyr) and the tundra as a framework for understanding the differences between settler and indigenous perceptions of nature. Gray (2005, 141) remarks, “Incomers, by contrast [with natives] longed to be anchored to one site and to walk among monstrous and immovable structures.” According to Gray, they viewed the tundra in purely utilitarian terms: “incomers saw the tundra as a source of mineral wealth, or as a vast ‘backyard’ for weekend hunting or fishing.”

These accounts provide an impressively fine-grained examination of the indigenous experience. But we should not expect to find ethnographic depth in their descriptions of the “newcomer.” That is not their authors’ desire; by enlisting a non-indigenous presence as a kind of counterfoil, they succeed instead in more clearly defining the true object of their attention – the native figure. In the process, this technique flattens and ultimately reifies the settler identity. In the way of ethnographic fieldwork, anthropologists rely on what their closest sources tell them, not only about themselves, but also about the kinds of people they define themselves against. Patty Gray, for example, cultivated relationships within the indigenous intelligentsia of Chukotka’s capital in order to develop her very thorough 2005 study of indigenous political mobilization in the region. It is precisely from members of this community that I later heard the most vociferous denunciations of the *priezzhii mentalitet* (newcomer mentality), the essence of which Gray records in her writing. These individuals openly shared their enmity toward the settler presence in Chukotka (which I usually failed to detect among non-elite natives in the villages), grounded in the belief that Russians lacked a meaningful affinity with the northern landscape. But as Gray (2005) observes, one of the features of modern life in Chukotka is that so many indigenous people no longer move over the tundra and sea, and now confine themselves to urban spaces. This is often particularly the case for members of Chukotka’s native intelligentsia, whose professional lives (and tastes) are far removed from those domains in which they might

observe settlers in direct contact with the land. So why should we invest in them the authority to speak for an experience and a way of life that is not theirs? That would be like asking Russians in the arctic town about reindeer herding: the answers would be stereotypical. What would we learn about settlers if we finally went directly to them, asked them, watched them, and lived with them in their adopted northern settings?

This was the task I set myself. My purpose was to consider the experience of settlers not as the embodied agents of modernizing change, nor as the “perpetual outsiders” that indigenous-centred accounts purport them to be, but as people with a measure of sovereignty from the colonial histories in which they participated. The “settler experience,” after all, has been one not only of privileged inclusion, but also of brutal exclusion. The tidal patterns of modernizing change have, in the end, generated among settlers a rather cynical regard for the promises of modernity in the Far North, alongside the ability to draw sustenance from local sources of security when distant ones have disappeared. As people charting a course through the vagaries of the modernizing cycle, settlers have responded in their own individual ways. One of the clearest benefits of this exercise, therefore, is the challenge it presents to the monotypic rubric the “newcomer” in the North presently inhabits. It permits us to understand the diversity of identities – of lifestyles, attachments to place, plans for the future – that breathe with life beneath the conflated idea of this population.

### **Settlement in Context**

Chukotka is a territory roughly the size of Sweden and Norway combined, culminating at the farthest northeast corner of the Eurasian landmass and separated by the Bering Strait from Alaska, a distance of forty kilometres at its narrowest (see Figure 1.1). Straddling the Arctic Circle, its warmest coast bordering the northernmost fringe of the Pacific Ocean, Chukotka has a severe climate. Annual average temperatures range from minus 4 to minus 14 Celsius, and winter temperatures reach minus 45 on the coasts and minus 60 inland. The eastern coast, on the Bering Sea, is the windiest region in Russia, with average winds above 55 kilometres per hour for almost six months a year and annual storms that bring sustained winds of over 140 kilometres per hour. Chukotka’s modern capital, Anadyr, lies on the mouth of the Anadyr River at the edge of the Bering Sea, and at 65 degrees north is roughly on the same latitude as Fairbanks (Alaska) and Oulu (Sweden), but farther north than Reykjavik (Iceland), Nuuk (Greenland), and Iqualuit (Canada). Low mountain ranges, dominated by the Aniusk-Chukotka uplands, which separate the Pacific and Arctic Ocean basins, cover most of Chukotka’s territory. The entire region is within the permafrost zone, tundra and transitional northern taiga cover the landscape, and though some hardy varieties of cabbage, potato, and onion will grow in open soil in the southern interior, farther north and along the coasts,

heated greenhouses are required to support vegetable growing during the short two-month summer (Kotov, 1995).

Although the Bering Strait region has witnessed successive human migrations dating back to 70,000 BC, and the Chukotka peninsula has been home to the Chukchi and Yup'ik for at least thirty-five hundred years, Europeans appeared in this territory only in the seventeenth century. Semen Dezhnev, a Cossack explorer, reached Chukotka by ship in 1649 and established a fortified camp for overwintering (an *ostrog*) on the upper Anadyr River, in the territory of the Chuwan Yukagir. Although his successors attempted to establish a permanent presence in order to collect fur tribute (*iasak*) from the native population, robust resistance from inland and coastal Chukchi, and the region's acute isolation from the closest Russian settlements, resulted in a century of violent setbacks and periodic withdrawal. Indeed, although the so-called Chukchi Wars (1729-64) visited a series of Cossack invasions of genocidal intent on the Chukchi, Yup'ik, and Koryak populations of the region, they cost far more to the state than they yielded in tribute. After successive sackings and razings, the Anadyrsk ostrog was finally abandoned in 1694. Thereafter, in an effort to bring peace to the territory (and in admission of the impossibility of subjugating such a remote and pugnacious foe), Catherine II granted the Chukchi both immunity from *iasak* and a unique status among northern peoples: "not completely dependent" subjects of the empire. The subsequent withdrawal of Russian forces compromised their allies the Yukagiry and created an inland vacuum into which the reindeer-herding Chukchi quickly expanded. Only in the middle decades of the nineteenth century did Russian missionaries and settlers again appear in the region, and a community named Markovo was established on the banks of the Anadyr River ten kilometres from the old Anadyrsk ostrog. By this time, permanent Russian settlements existed along the Kolyma River, to the west of present-day Chukotka, and by the 1880s, roughly four hundred Russian and métis settlers were living in a handful of settlements along the Anadyr (Dikov 1989; Vdovin 1965; Znamenski 1999).<sup>11</sup>

Chukotka was never fully part of the Russian empire; the semi-sovereign status of its native peoples was only one indication of the tenuous influence of the imperial state in this remote territory. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Chukchi reindeer-herding culture reached a modern apogee of influence and productivity on the lands that constitute present-day Chukotka. In their deer, nomadic herders possessed almost all the necessities for life on the tundra; trade with coastal peoples supplied other requirements (the fat of marine mammals, walrus tusk, whalebone). Living in a harsh and unpredictable climate, they moved across vast distances in response to changing weather and fluctuating pasture health. For the inland way of life, these qualities assured a degree of resilience, and indeed prosperity, far greater than the first Russian settlers enjoyed. The herding economy produced a more reliable and nutritious supply of food, and a fuller complement

of animal parts and furs, than the sedentary trading, hunting, and fishing lifestyle of the Russians and their *métis* descendants living in riverside settlements. The immobility of these settlements was a matter of weakness. Because their inhabitants were fixed in place, when arctic conditions affected the abundance of game and fish, and the Chukchi failed to visit them, they starved. Even at the turn of the twenty-first century, when the ethnographer Waldemar Bogoras (1904-9, 95) visited Chukotka, their vulnerability was evident: "The possession of reindeer herds makes the material life of the nomadic Chukchi more stable, especially when compared with the precarious subsistence of most of the fishing and seal-hunting tribes in this neighbourhood, not excepting even the Russians and Russianised natives."

Because of this, the gradual Russification of indigenous cultures evident in Siberia and other parts of the North did not occur in Chukotka; instead, it was the Chukchi who acculturated the Russians. Settler women married into nomadic herding families, at least partly to secure a reliable source of food and skins for their sedentary relatives. The Chukchi language served as a regional *lingua franca*, underpinning the trading economy in which Russians, Chukchi, Eveny, Yukagiry, Koryaki, and coastal Yup'ik participated (Krupnik 1993). Russian traders further west on the Kolyma pleaded with Chukchi herders to patronize their trading fairs, in competition with European and American trading posts on the coasts. And Russian Orthodox Christianity failed almost completely to penetrate Chukchi territory, where shamanist beliefs reigned until well after the arrival of the Soviets.

At the close of the nineteenth century, whaling ships, gold prospectors, and fur traders coming from Canada and the United States shifted the linguistic and economic centre of gravity still farther from Russian influence. When an overland journey from the imperial capital to the Russian settlements on the Kolyma still took years, whaling ships along Chukotka's coasts were hiring indigenous whalers and guides, and American traders were establishing a network of commercial posts. A pan-Bering whaling economy developed in the late nineteenth century, reaching as far east as the Mackenzie Delta in Canada's North. The US dollar and the English language soon became new media of exchange along the coasts, encouraging Chukchi herders to realign their trade away from the annual Russian markets inland. Thereafter, English-speaking agents monopolized Chukotka's entire commercial trade in furs until they were pushed out by Soviet authorities in the 1920s (Znamenski 1999).

Not until 1923, when Soviet power was finally consolidated across Chukotka, could Russians begin to challenge the economic and cultural autonomy of the reindeer Chukchi. This process was slow at first, lagging behind other regions of the North, and the European population remained a negligible minority for decades after the Revolution (it was 4 percent in 1930). Collectivization was completed only in 1949, and it took a further decade to fully appropriate the Chukchi herds and sedentarize their owners in collective farms (*kolkhozy*). During that time,

many herders successfully resisted Soviet authorities by driving their herds deep into isolated areas, and they were captured only when secret service troops (the Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del or NKVD) and warplanes were sent to suppress them.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as the state gained the upper hand, the powers of mobility over this isolated landscape that the nomadic Chukchi once possessed passed into the hands of European in-migrants.

Mobility was the hallmark and the instrument of domination on this landscape. Just as it gave the Chukchi the advantage over Russian settlers in the nineteenth century, the power of movement was vital for the consolidation of Soviet authority and settler privilege in the twentieth century. In the early years, steamships and motorized riverboats, powerful all-terrain vehicles (*vezdekhody*), and ultimately airplanes brought cultural commissars deep into Chukchi territory. Later, the technologies of transport supported the collectivization of herds and the sedentarization of herding families in new Soviet villages. Finally, as Soviet transport matured, and remoteness no longer presented an impediment to the flow of goods and people into and within Chukotka, a new generation of Soviet settlers assumed complete administrative and cultural mastery in Chukchi territory. Chukotka's nomadic people, whose mobility on the tundra a generation earlier guaranteed their economic and cultural dominance, now became dependent on a new kind of settler, more mobile than any the territory had yet seen.

Under Soviet administration, Chukotka's native population was targeted for "cultural enlightenment" and enlisted to support industrialization, supplying Russian settlements with reindeer and sea-mammal meat, fish, and furs from state farms. To maximize their contributions, Soviet authorities implemented a series of "rationalizing" measures, beginning with the sedentarization of nomadic herders up until the early 1950s and culminating in the mid-1960s with policies of amalgamation (*ukrupnenie*) that merged settlements into larger villages (Dikov 1989). In the process, a number of traditional coastal settlements along the Bering Strait were liquidated, partly due to their location in a sensitive border region near the Soviet Union's Cold War enemy across the water. As the traditional herding and hunting way of life was reorganized under state control, native people lost ownership and managerial authority over their reindeer and all other forms of indigenous property to settler specialists. Dispossessed natives became state employees under the supervision of settlers, and their children were taught by settler teachers in village schools, many of which were residential. One of the more devastating consequences of these changes was the systematic and intentional immobilization of the nomadic Chukchi. Now their movements were managed and facilitated by European outsiders, on whom they came to rely for survival. The Sovietized herding system destroyed the self-sufficient clan-centred mode of nomadism by separating male herders on the tundra from their female counterparts, who now lived and worked in the villages. The successor to the herding clan – the

mostly male herding brigade – now required a constant supply of food, clothing, medicines, and instruction from the village centre. Naturally, the skills of the settler specialist were vital to maintaining these arrangements, and Russian helicopter pilots, *vezdekhod* drivers, and *kolkhoz* managers ferried herders from tundra to village, supplied the brigades, and collected the meat.

As in the Soviet North generally, the industrialization of Chukotka progressed in two phases: by forced labour until 1955 and by voluntary labour thereafter. In 1941 (well after the emergence of slave labour camps in less isolated parts of the country), prisoners of the gulag system began to mine uranium, tin, tungsten, and gold, and built the port towns of Egvekinot and Pevek. After Stalin's death and the subsequent dismantling of the prisoner-labour system, Soviet authorities resorted to a regime of "northern benefits" (*severnye l'goty*) to incentivize northern residence and attract voluntary labour to Chukotka. Incentives included high pay, long holidays, early retirement, and, with time, far better living conditions in northern towns than in central Russia (Yanovskii 1969).

The mass settlement of Chukotka was concentrated and intense. During roughly three decades, beginning in 1960 when the geographic organization of northern benefits was formalized in state law and ending with Soviet collapse in 1991, the population rose by over four times, from 41,000 to a peak of 164,700 (see Figure 1.2). Not included in the peak population figure were large numbers of military personnel stationed in permanent bases throughout the territory. Although many settlers came to administer and teach Chukotka's indigenous peoples, these projects of cultural "lifting up" actually comprised only a small fraction of the work the growing settler population was recruited to carry out. The villages remained a predominantly indigenous domain, whereas most in-migrants settled in Chukotka's capital, Anadyr, and a rapidly growing constellation of district centres and industrial "towns of the urban type," where they worked in mining and geological exploration, marine and air transport, construction and food production, communications and the media, retail and distribution, and the security services. Supported by a complex and vastly expensive system of transport and supply bringing goods to the territory by ship from the eastern terminus of the Soviet railway in Vladivostok and by air from all corners of the Soviet Union, they enjoyed most of the perquisites of urban Soviet life. Yet, so remote did Chukotka remain, and so totally reliant on sea and air transport to maintain its growing urban population, that it could well have been an island. Indeed, that is precisely how its settler residents viewed their position on the edge of Soviet territory, and so they called the rest of the country "the mainland" – *materik*.

The territory remained a subordinate unit – an "autonomous okrug" – of Magadan Oblast until shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>13</sup> Then, local Communist Party elites led by the Chukchi head of government, Vladimir Etylin, grasped the spirit of federal devolution we know as the "parade of sovereignties"



Figure 1.4 Soviet Far North

Sources: Slavin (1967); Heleniak (1999)

by declaring Chukotka's secession from Magadan. Although Etylin's leadership held promise for the fulfillment of indigenous political hopes in Chukotka, his opposition to President Yeltsin's reformist administration soon dashed them. In late 1991, Yeltsin appointed a non-indigenous ally, Aleksandr Nazarov, as the reformist head of administration (a role later formalized as governor). Nazarov effectively ran the okrug administration from 1992 until 2000. Under his leadership, Chukotka underwent a severe crisis of living standards and witnessed an exodus of skilled labour, the failure of shipping deliveries upon which the okrug's isolated communities relied, and the mass liquidation of state enterprises. Nazarov's autocratic and corrupt administration simply compounded Chukotka's crisis. Federal loans to renew the gold-mining sector evaporated from administration accounts, and Nazarov introduced a virtual barter economy by withholding budget funds transferred from Moscow. By the late 1990s, Chukotka was suffering through a major humanitarian disaster, with starvation in the settlements, high suicide rates, and epidemic alcoholism (even while Nazarov supported a professional football team in Moscow). Little news of these dire conditions reached beyond Chukotka's borders, because access to the okrug for Russians and foreigners alike was strictly controlled, and independent organizations, many based within the indigenous community, were harassed or co-opted by Nazarov's administration and other state structures (Krupnik and Vakhtin 2002; Gray 2005). The region was trapped in a vicious circle: crisis fuelled out-migration, but out-migration only deepened

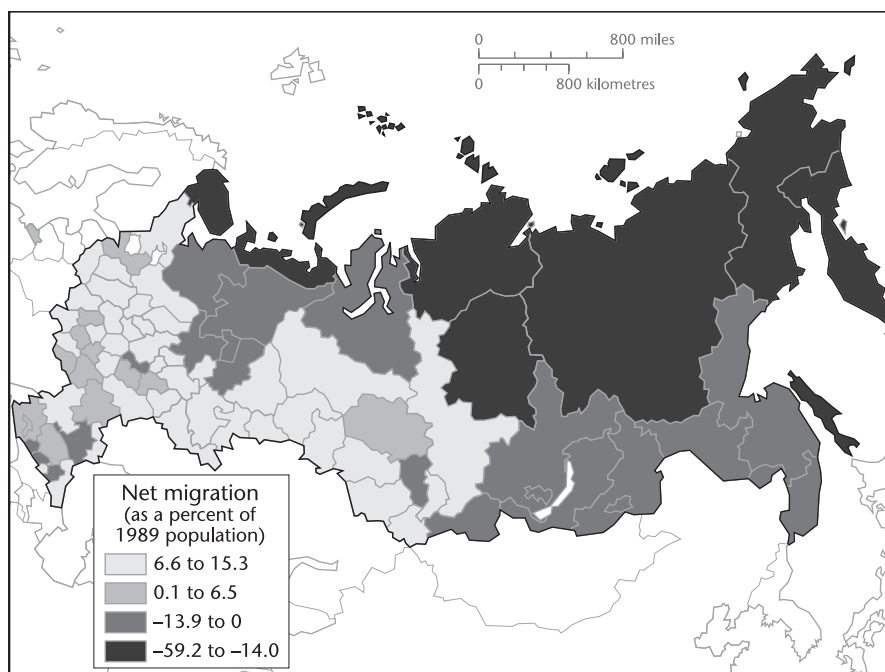


Figure 1.5 Net migration by region in Russia, 1989–2002

Source: Heleniak (2003) (used with permission of the author)

the crisis. By 2000, so many had left that Chukotka's population had dropped by over half, to seventy-five thousand (FSGS 2004), and among the eighty-nine regions of the Russian Federation, only in war-torn Chechnya were living standards worse ("Annual Ranking" 2000).

The post-Soviet crisis underlined Chukotka's marginal position, peripheral to the projects and attentions of the emergent Russia. The departure of so many skilled settlers constituted the draining away of Moscow's power and interest in the Far North: this was a *de facto* retreat of the state. But the Russian centre was not so thoroughly dismantled during this decade as it seemed at the time. Federalist devolution, the privatization of public assets, and the ruin of state institutions and prestige simply masked the ferment of countervailing energies, which by the end of the 1990s sat prepared for a new centralizing *dirigisme* under the leadership of President Putin. To revitalize the powers of the federal state, Putin of necessity confronted a group in whose hands wealth and influence had concentrated in spectacular abundance under his predecessor: Russia's new class of oligarch industrialists. Beginning in 2000, the movement of a large number of Putin's protégés into federal power structures rapidly eroded the oligarchs' ability to shape policy at the highest levels and thereby secure political protection for their large but

vulnerable business empires. Putin proceeded to persecute the oligarchy with *realpolitik* determination, penalizing any kind of political resistance by stripping its leading members of their holdings and forcing several of them into exile. Under siege at the centre, their lines of access to power crumbling, Russia's oligarchic structures began to search elsewhere for bases of support and protection. This triggered an oligarchic flight to the regions and, in parallel with President Putin's consolidation of power in Moscow, the capture of regional administrations became a defining feature of life across the Russian North. Chukotka – depopulated, isolated, and desperately impoverished – naturally presented an easy target. Chukotka had once offered a paradigmatic mode of life in the Soviet North – that of the hyperprivileged northern settler. Now, the arrival of oligarchic money and power in the post-Soviet era subsequently thrust Chukotka to the leading edge of a new era of northern development, another chapter in the tidal cycle of change.

In December 2000, one of Russia's wealthiest oligarchs, Roman Abramovich, was elected governor of Chukotka, initiating an administrative revolution alongside an ambitious and strikingly expensive program of modernization. This election, in which a young and wealthy businessman from Moscow moved into high political office on the Russian periphery, was the first in a series of landslide victories for resource magnates in other regions, including Taimyr and Evenkia. In all three cases, the character of reform followed the oligarchic pattern of conflating public administration with corporate institutions and methods, so that the divisions between government and the oligarchic companies that funded and animated them were blurred. In Chukotka, Governor Abramovich enlisted the resources of his Moscow-based oil company, Sibneft, to fill the absence left by the region's failed public administration and moribund economy. In his first five-year term in office, Abramovich's Sibneft and other allied companies funded virtually the entire regional budget, while his team carried out a program of complete social and economic renovation, promising to "return an acceptable way of life" to the region (Abramovich 2001). The capital, Anadyr, became the focus of an extraordinary rebuilding exercise, involving thousands of Turkish, Canadian, and Muscovite shift workers. Abramovich's rural development programs resurrected the indigenous economy by returning to the Soviet state farm system, while rebuilding villages, some in their entirety. To alleviate the burden of isolation, the aviation and the shipping-supply systems were revived, complete with subsidized helicopter flights linking remote villages with district towns and the capital.

This most recent modernization was, as in the Soviet past, a campaign of reformative investment whose energies originated in a distant metropolis. And, like past modernizations, Abramovich's project was vested with the interests and preferences of a new generation of newcomers, people of the city sent north to shape local realities according to their own interpretations of modernity. Young and well-educated "experts" and "specialists" left the Moscow headquarters of Sibneft and

sister companies to staff Chukotka's new regional administration. They assumed leadership roles within all the key reforming agencies and institutions, and proceeded to recruit a second and third layer of subordinate specialists from outside the North to support them. But, as in any project of development, the arrangements of authority and the nature of investment in fact elevated the "modernizer" at a much greater speed than the "modernized." So it was that for this modernizing cadre, and for Abramovich himself, the remaking of Chukotka was foremost a project of self-transformation. If this region became a vast philanthropic canvas upon which Abramovich and his followers could model a new way of life, their efforts were at heart self-directed. At the very least, Chukotka furnished a site on which Abramovich could shed his robber baron reputation and visibly clarify his loyalty to the Putin regime, which by 2004 had become a requirement of his own survival.

Outsider-led, technocratic in its culture, and neo-Soviet in its specific visions of progress, Abramovich's campaign did not include Chukotka's established settlers within its vision of reform. Yesterday's modernizers were the "left behind" of today. As Abramovich's followers saw it, the remaining settler population and the industrial settlements they inhabited constituted a final remnant of the failed and discredited Soviet brand of development (*osvoenie*). By extension, they believed that settlers stood in the way of a new, more efficient, and more sustainable mode of development. Living in a region with no functioning economy, so remote that the cost of living was the highest in Russia, settler-modernizers of the Soviet era had now become a kind of human ballast – in the words of Abramovich's senior planners, "the debris of the past" (*ostatki proshlego*). Their ties to the North were no help. Their participation in Soviet history simply marked them as remnants of the past and suggested their incapacity to participate in modernizing projects of a new era.

So it was that Abramovich's followers saw modernization as a project of two parallel objectives: building a new Chukotka for those irrevocably *of* the North (native Chukchi and Yup'ik), while cutting the costs of development by removing those northerners who, in the modernizers' view, had no home there. The new administration developed an ambitious strategy to resettle large numbers of non-indigenous residents to central Russian cities, while liquidating a series of "non-viable" settlements (*besperspektivnye poselki*). To reach a sustainable number, Chukotka's population of seventy-five thousand at the time of Abramovich's 2000 election would have to fall (his planners predicted) to roughly thirty-five thousand (the proportion of settlers to natives thus falling from 80 to 57 percent). Predictably, many settlers' own life plans differed quite radically from the role Abramovich's followers assigned to them. They contested the very terms of modernity, resisted their objectification as the human debris of a failed (Soviet) project, and, most forcefully of all, expressed their attachments to the North while pointing out the absurdity of "returning" to a life elsewhere.

This, more or less, is the history of recent settlement in Chukotka; these are the circumstances that first brought migrants there in large numbers and that have structured their lives to the present day. My narrative returns to this history in detail, teasing out the consequences for settler senses of self and place of such a tumultuous and disorienting ride through time. Indeed, the chapters of this book follow the structure of a chronology, because at the centre of its concern is the progress of settler identities through a series of discrete historical experiences. But, before setting off, I wish to provide some critical frames of understanding, with which a reader can begin to consider the settler experience in Chukotka in more universal terms.

### **Settlement in Theory**

I explained in the opening pages how recent critiques of Siberian ethnography, and indeed circumpolar ethnography in general, are issuing the salutary challenge to broaden the scope and to attend to the full diversity of northern populations. This is an important task, since it is precisely the examination of the *non-indigenous* experience in the Russian North that can help to mature and deepen this still nascent school of study. There are three distinct bodies of theoretical ferment within the larger anthropological discipline into which the figure and history of the settler in the North affords an entrée. The first relates to our understanding of modernization, a notion of progress that, under examination, fragments into a mass of questions on the subjectivity of modern and left-behind identities, the uses of the modernization discourse in the battle for domination, and the role of geographies of power and powerlessness in sustaining the “modernizing cycle.” The second ties into the debate on the nature of the Soviet everyday and the powers of the Soviet state occasioned by the vastly greater resources now available for producing social histories of Soviet life. In short, this is the revisionist questioning of hitherto dominant conceptions of Soviet statehood. The third area of theory moves over some of the most notoriously labyrinthine territory of anthropological inquiry: the problem of identity. Let us consider each of these in more detail.

### **Modernization**

This book could be read as an examination of successive campaigns of modernization and their human effects in a discrete northern territory. Unexamined, the term “modernization” operates as lexical shorthand for the diverse and numerous projects outsiders have imported into northern Russia’s local contexts, whether in the Soviet era or more recently. Under scrutiny, however, “modernization” pulls us toward its origins in an evolutionary paradigm, one that attaches to the imported manager a modern status and situates the local way of life further down a single continuum of progress. This study might also be considered an investigation of localism, a system of beliefs and a way of life that resist the authority of outsider

knowledge within the local domain and cherish forms of accumulated knowledge adapted to the immediate setting. As these two points of view meet, we find both the idea of modernity and the nature of modernization subject to starkly contrasting interpretations. Thus, what in recent years the followers of Governor Abramovich might have considered modernizing projects of bringing up to date, established settlers understood as competing, and even *regressive*, practices. Although the word *modernizatsiia* (modernization) circulated in all Chukotka's social domains after Abramovich's arrival, across local kitchen tables it often carried ironic and morally ambivalent meanings.

I can live with these contradictions. The power of this term lies precisely in its ambiguity, and its multiple meanings invite us to a closer inspection. Even at its surface, as an unquestioned rhetoric, modernization evokes a long history of social renovation and class conflict in Russia. Indeed, after the (apparent) rejection of Soviet ideology, Russians still remain steeped in teleological interpretations of the world. The fixedness of concepts such as *kul'tura* (culture), *obrazovanie* (education), *vospitanie* (cultivating or raising), and *osvoenie* (an imperial brand of mastery) is the product of a centuries-long self-perception of peripherality, of learning from the West, of challenging Western power on its own terms, and then wilfully diverging from standards of Western civilization.<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps why Russian literary and popular discourses betray an obsession with Russia's borderline position between Europe and Asia, and about its unsteady relationship with the West. Cycles of modernization and reform, punctuated by stagnation and backwardness, are *emic* Russian characterizations of their own history, particularly since Peter I. The very persistence of the Russian aspiration to modernity has solidified ideas of backwardness, progress, and falling behind within a mythical structure.

We should not view this as a purely Russian development. In his ethnography of industrial decline in Zambia, James Ferguson (1999, 14) underlines the universal appeal of the modernization idea: "the myth of modernization (no less than any other myth) gives form to an understanding of the world, providing a set of categories and premises that continue to shape people's experiences and interpretations of their lives." Paradoxically, in contemporary Chukotka, even those disadvantaged by a present-day modernization were, as the modernizers of an earlier era, still caught in its mythical grip. Those settlers who rejected the intrusions of the "expert" outsider often simultaneously narrated hierarchies of modern and backward in their characterizations of town and settlement, Russian and Chukchi, and the "cultured" and "cultureless." In a case of "nested orientalism" (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003), the targets of modernizing change perpetuated the teleological mentality of which they themselves were victims. The modernization myth itself did not trouble them; their only argument was with the possibility that they occupied the same primitive rung of development as their indigenous neighbours.

As an optimistic logic of progress, therefore, the idea of “modernization” opens our eyes to inequality, to differences in status between the *peredovoi* and the *otstalyi* (the “leading edge” and the “fallen behind”). The spectacular separation in cultural and economic power between Russia’s metropolises and its provinces is perennial, an imbalance duplicated in Russia’s historical position adjacent to, but not within, dynamic and industrializing Western Europe. If some historians have characterized Russia as the original “developing nation” (Shanin 1985; Gerschenkron 1970), others have identified campaigns of “catching up” and the pattern of “compressed development” as a resulting compensation (see Lewin 1987; Kotkin 1995; Tucker 1990). Accounts such as Aleksandr Gerschenkron’s view all of Russia in unitary terms as an undeveloped nation. However, I prefer characterizations of Russia (since at least the early eighteenth century) as a *differentiated* territory, a space within which are found both the agents and the targets of development.<sup>15</sup> Russia’s geographic disparities have always been mirrored in class separation, since it was the socio-economic resources deriving from extreme privilege that enabled the urban Russian elite to easily absorb nation-building ideas from the more developed nations of Western Europe (and latterly the USA). Turning to consider their provincial counterparts, whose way of life they found foreign to the point of unintelligibility, Russia’s urban elite have many times embarked (in a fitful way) on projects to implant “modern” lifestyles and technologies in their rural periphery. So, though some characterize modernizing efforts beyond the Russian city as a strictly colonial practice (Gray 2000), it seems that modernization in the provinces can more usefully be understood as a series of “catching up” projects, in which Russia’s urban middle classes periodically strike outwards, endeavouring to integrate hinterland populations into a more homogeneous Russian “civilization.” This is not to disregard the economic-extractive aspect of modernizing programs, but metropole-led *osvoenie* – or “mastering,” in a territorial and cultural sense – has been perpetually at the heart of Russian (and Soviet) state building.

As the diffusion of ideas, technologies, and “modern” people to a peripheral locality, the idea of modernization is inseparable from problems of distance and mobility. Chukotka, a periphery par excellence, affords a particularly vivid demonstration of this relationship. In a place of such marvellous expanses, where distance achieves an extreme and all-shaping influence over human affairs, we can see movement as power and immobility as dependence and vulnerability. The tidal cycle of modernizing change in the Russian Far North continually sets up polarities of the mobile and immobile (signified in modernization’s discourse as the “modern” and the “fallen behind”). Modernity is always a condition of, in one or another respect, fastest, easiest, farthest movement. This is only logical, because distance itself is conditioned by power. Zygmunt Bauman (1998, 12) puts it nicely: “far from being an objective, impersonal, physical ‘given,’ ‘distance’ is a social product; its

length varies depending on the speed with which it may be overcome (and, in a monetary economy, on the cost involved in the attainment of that speed).” When the first Russians settled on the banks of the Kolyma River, at the western edge of Chukchi territory, they lived as an underclass, dependent on the exquisite mobility of reindeer herders to periodically rescue them from starvation. And the destruction of this herding culture was finally effected only at the point that Soviet technologies of transport conquered the distances of the tundra (two decades after Stalin decided on this task).

In the last three decades of Soviet power – a time of mass settlement in Chukotka – mobility remained a critical diagnostic of power and a mark of modern identity. In the North, and everywhere in Soviet life, classes and communities defined themselves in part by the speed at which they moved. Soviet power may have liquidated the burden of distance in the Russian North, but not for everyone. In the process of assembling a sense of themselves as modernizers, newcomers seized a monopoly on the powers of movement. So extraordinary was the Soviet transport system that they could inhabit multiple settings, living in remote northern settlements but also in central Russian places and even, in a sense, in the airplanes, ships, and trains in which they so often found themselves. Many newcomers in fact *embodied* the technologies of transport because it was their job in the North to maintain and pilot the myriad vessels that, like the arteries of a body, oxygenated industrializing Chukotka. If modernity equalled mobility, the power of movement was also hoarded and rationed out with frugal care to the fallen behind, so as not to erode the exclusivity of the modernizing community. After all, an important aspect of Soviet modernization was the *immobilization* of native herders and hunters. Sedentarized in villages and made dependent on Russian helicopter pilots and barge captains, natives progressively lost the knowledge and the resources they once commanded to travel over their landscape independently.

Later, in the era of Roman Abramovich, modernity was refashioned and re-assigned to a new population – Abramovich’s followers – who arrived to make their own particular claims to modernizing authority. Once again, mobility operated as a key marker of power, but now in different and more extreme ways. The settlers of the Soviet era, regardless of their movements, had formerly built communities of place, possessed of a palpable sense of locality (a sense, in Ferdinand Tönnies’ [1957] formula, of *Gemeinschaft*). Theirs was in many respects a traditional society, in which much of the life of the community was face to face, unmediated by technology. But Abramovich’s followers operated almost completely “out of place,” almost always in a state of multiple locatedness. They represented, in Bauman’s (1998, 19) words, “the ‘dephysicalisation,’ the new weightlessness of power.” As I will relate in the last chapters of this book, Roman Abramovich epitomized the hypermobility of a new global elite, literally always in motion and living within high-speed vessels of transport. He also granted his followers, particularly

those in his inner circle, this speed of movement. His regional administration was in many places at once, both northern and metropolitan; its internal conversations formed webs across vast spaces, and its workers only “camped” in the North, flying on chartered jets and helicopters between the spaces of work in Chukotka, Moscow, London, and elsewhere. As an oil billionaire, Abramovich needed security and protection, and his ceaseless movement would make it difficult for his enemies ever to locate him. But the state of hypermobility was also an instrument for defining the boundaries of the group because no one in Chukotka who was not admitted to Abramovich’s circles could possibly travel at these speeds and over these distances. This shows, in the same way as the history of the mobile Soviet settler, that each social class has, quite literally, a speed of its own. As Pierre Bourdieu (1985) might observe, mobility amounts to a practice of distinction.

If a modernization is at heart an exercise of self-definition and boundary marking for its agents, how important is its *nominal* objective, namely, bringing a selected people and a place up to date? I give an answer in the final chapters of this book. But, before we read that far, it is useful to begin thinking of Abramovich’s modernization, in its immoderate scale, cost, and timelines, as really just another Soviet Five-Year Plan. It possessed that universal architecture common to any of the traditional Russian projects of catching up. Campaign-style modernization of this kind relies on a perception of local conditions as so disastrous that they must be improved *at all costs*. Once declared, a campaign sublimates the normal range of considerations to a single core measure of success (which was, in the case of contemporary Chukotka, financial viability). The prestige of the campaign – its charismatic appeal to those it seeks to enlist – derives from its transcendent claims, its promise to deliver more, and faster, than anyone thought possible. Yet, the impossibility of such claims should be obvious to anyone not deeply intoxicated by the spirit of the campaign. In a way that both James Ferguson (1994) and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003) have observed of other contexts, it is precisely the *inevitability* of failure that drives the modernizing-and-entropy cycle in places such as Chukotka. This is so because failures of modernization defer the moment of lasting improvement and thus postpone the point at which “development” assistance is no longer required. The failed development schemes of today will necessitate the development plans of tomorrow. This logic remains intact in the Russian North despite the outer shifts in regime and ideology. Indeed, if the grossly over-ambitious Soviet plans for industrializing Chukotka were impossible to sustain, the scale of Abramovich’s modernization (and in particular the costs) likewise seems to presage another failure.

I am not terribly concerned with the question of sustainable development; in comparison with the creative strategies of adaptation in the stories of rooted settlers, the very idea seems oxymoronic. What outsiders have brought to Chukotka in the name of development has perennially proved unsuitable until locals have

with time adapted imported innovations to *severnaia spetsifika* (the particular circumstances of the North). If modernization carries an implication of transience (transient people, transient projects, transient hopes), the more significant questions must lie in the ground effects of the modernizing cycle in the lives of local people. How, in other words, are these people at times attached and at other times detached from the projects of modernity, and what room does this turbulence leave for their sovereign efforts to claim an identity and a place to call home?

### Soviet State Power

A familiar obsession in the historiography of the Soviet period is to examine the potency of the Soviet state – the sources of its legitimacy and its organizational capacities. Originating in the work of historians and political scientists, the “totalitarianism-revisionist” debate later met with new and transcendent interpretations realigning the focus toward the experience of everyday life, which only a more anthropological approach to research could accommodate.<sup>16</sup> This innovation came just as the Soviet Union quite unexpectedly collapsed, and it reconfigured the landscape of inquiry to account for the apparent weakness of the state by the point of perestroika. Drawn from the very few on-the-ground ethnographies of late-Soviet life then in existence, a revisionist argument emerged to reject the idea of a unitary and effective Soviet state apparatus, characterizing it instead as a weak and uneven fabric sitting atop a society fragmented into neo-feudal domains.<sup>17</sup> According to this line of argument, the “shortage economy,” which the Hungarian economist Janos Kornai (1992) described as the inevitable and permanent result of central planning, engendered conditions that neither individual citizens nor the regime itself could survive without resort to the support of more or less sealed communities of mutual aid: a society of networks. For Caroline Humphrey (2002) and Katherine Verdery (1996), the institution – the *vedomstvo* – whether a collective farm, industrial enterprise, or bureaucratic agency, was therefore the basic organizational unit of Soviet life. The state above became, in this interpretation, an increasingly impotent force, emanating forms of symbolic power, espousing rhetoric in place of doctrine, recommending rather than commanding. But, as Finn Sivert Nielsen (2007) argues in his closely observed ethnography of urban survival in stagnation-era Leningrad, the formal institution was not the only building block of the “stateless” Soviet society. Protection was also afforded at the informal level by circles of acquaintance. Nielsen maps privilege and poverty within geographies of intimate and unmediated interaction, revealing an “archipelago” of social islands, each surrounded by a limbo of material scarcity impoverished of productive human intercourse. Nielsen (2007, 97) writes, “the whole country is segregated into Islands, enclosed by more massive Barriers the more benefits they give. One cannot simply move to Leningrad. Rural migrants are ‘hunters’ looking

for the Place where the good life is and hoping to work themselves closer to its wellsprings.”

Nielsen’s allegorical language of “islands,” “barriers,” and “hunters” finds a close relative in Alena Ledeneva’s (1998) account of informal network exchange, shaped by the rules of Russian *blat* (pull, or connections). Such practices of exchange have often been characterized as the perpetuation of peasant-village habits in the daily life of the new socialist city (see Kotkin’s “little tactics of the habitat,” 1995; Jowitt’s explanation of *pile* in socialist Romania, 1992). Taken as a whole, these accounts characterize Soviet society as intensely cellular – a Balkans of outwardly defensive networks – in which loyalties were immediate and personal, rather than patriotic and state directed. The formal structures of state power, in correlation, became increasingly distant from the lives of ordinary people. Thus, Nielsen (2007, 19) contends that as bureaucratic lines of command declined into terminal sclerosis, Soviet citizens were forced into a netherworld of informal exchange, a “society outside society.” The state, so goes this line of thinking, had lost its powers of large-scale organization, whether in the economic or the cultural domain, long before its symbolic edifice collapsed in 1991.

Such a Potemkin-village characterization of the late-Soviet state rests on the proposition that average Soviet citizens understood this and that they navigated the daily paradoxes of this reality by moving between two modes of being: official but mendacious involvement in public rituals of citizenship, and honest, candid participation in the private and confidential spaces of everyday life. To recite the doctrines of Soviet ideology in public fora – published writing, public meetings, academic examinations – had no meaning beyond the expression of membership, of obedience, and of knowing the rules. Whether or not so vivid a gulf between the public and the private, between unofficial “truth” and official “lies,” actually existed in the minds and actions of typical Soviet people remains open to question. A great deal of evidence suggests that daily participation in the rituals of public life actually exerted a friction. There was a discomfort with such hypocrisy that resulted, in the words of the émigré sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh (1989), in a mass “phenomenon of retreat” into private worlds immune to Soviet ideology.<sup>18</sup>

I do not propose to challenge the various orthodoxies of Soviet historiography, but I do point out that, as always, a view from the periphery can uncover remarkable insights into the problems of the centre. In so many ways, the experience of the northern settler in the stagnation era stands uncomfortably at odds with the ethnographic record of life in the Soviet city. The success of mass settlement appears to suggest that Soviet power could, until the very end, effectively operate in the High Modernist mode; after all, northern osvoenie was a spectacular example of large-scale social engineering. The enthusiasm of the northern settler for the tasks of industrializing the North and “lifting up” its peoples was surely incompatible with

mass cynicism toward the objectives of the Soviet project. Does this ethnography of the northern settler then overturn the conclusions of Nielsen, Verdery, Jowitt, and Shlapentokh on the weakness of the state? No. Instead, as the first chapters argue, the case of northern settlement reveals how this state recognized its own deficiencies, and with remarkable adroitness exploited them in the pursuit of those goals of state building it most cherished. The regime accomplished this not by banishing shortages and ameliorating the sense of anomie in mainstream Soviet life, but rather by harnessing the frustration of its citizens and recognizing this sentiment as, in fact, a desire for alternatives. That is what the late-Soviet North became: an alternative, in material, cultural, and moral terms. The success of mass settlement is thus, paradoxically, a testament both to the *power* of the late-Soviet state and to its quickly accelerating decrepitude.

### **Questions of Identity**

In Chukotka, the idea of northern belonging among settlers was forged in the crucible of a history of dramatic reversals. The chapters of this book thus alternate between the examination of this history, broken into three distinct episodes – late-Soviet, post-Soviet, and Putin-era Russia – and an ethnographic consideration of the effects of historical circumstances on the self-perceptions of settlers. This is also a study of collective identity, and moreover a diachronic portrait of an identity shifting through time. But caution is required, for the concept of “identity” can be so rich in meaning that it can seem at the same time meaningless. If the very term is to serve as anything more than, in the words of Roger Brubaker (2004, 61), a “suggestive oxymoron,” some qualifications are in order.

Let us start with the observation that people are usually busy characterizing and categorizing themselves, and are doing so in response to the efforts of others to project characterizations upon them. Settlers in Chukotka are the original products of the modernizing cycle, and their identities were in part produced and upheld by the structures of cultural and material privilege inherent to Soviet-era *osvoenie*. What then happened to those identities when the forces of modernization slackened? How did settlers perceive themselves when they ceased to participate in modernizing projects? To answer these questions, we must first recognize that there is always a degree of slippage between the way people view themselves and the circumstances in which they actually find themselves; self-perceptions are as vulnerable to nostalgia and dreams of the future as they are to the experience of the present. But just as self-understandings fall behind the times or race ahead of them, they also respond to the present in surprising ways. People do not necessarily accept assigned identities (for example, as modern Soviet civilizers), and sometimes the experience of being categorized within an identity animates altogether contrasting self-definitions. The terms “settler” and “newcomer” offer a case in point – both reify a fictitious homogeneity of experience and disposition, while

papering over the actual diversity of human trajectories within the population to which they refer. Ultimately, we require some understanding of that complexity in order to detect the particular trajectory of “settling” and coming to belong in northern places in a durable way.

Adrift in the turbulent ebb and flow of the modernizing cycle, the settler has been continually challenged to renovate and re-establish sources of self-understanding. One framework for understanding the settler response to historical events draws on a voluntarist conception of the self, able to shift through social identities and realign affiliations in an opportunistic fashion. This interpretation borrows from intentionalist interpretations of human agency, among them Ernest Goffman’s (1959) theorization of the person as an internal quality hidden behind a mask-like social face. This is a view of social identity as deliberate performance, with its roots in the work of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1957) and G.H. Mead (1934), and its modern incarnation in Anthony Giddens’ (1988) proposal that identities are created in public contexts by the accomplishments of intentional selves. These views are controversial, however, because the voluntarist interpretation is hounded by thorny questions about the limits of individual sovereignty in real-world contexts (the “structure-and-agency” debate).

To resolve this tension – to recognize both volitional sovereignty and the location of individuals within social textures constraining their performances – some have argued for making a clear distinction between “social identity” and “self.” According to Martin Sökefeld (1999), the self is the location of agency and reflexivity, which in a socialized individual is endowed with durability and sameness through time. In counterpoint to the unified self, social identities are faces turned to the social field. They are the plural and shifting presentations of an inner volitional agent. With a clear distinction between self/agent and social identities/presentations/performances, the possibility of both sameness and transformation in a single person becomes comprehensible. In Sökefeld’s account, identities are collective cultural constructs, and selves possess limited, but clear, opportunities for adopting and discarding them in particular social settings. Applied in Chukotka, such an actor-focused account offers a means of understanding how individual settlers might respond to shifting reifications of, for example, Soviet ideology or Governor Roman Abramovich’s promise of progress.

But, as anthropologists so often observe, the nature of the ethnographic method is such that you are unlikely to find in the field what you first expected. My own experience convinced me to set aside theories of the sovereign self and a methodology focusing exclusively on micro-social practice. Instead, the operation of *aggregate* identities – the cultural groupings within the ethnographic setting – and their influence on individual choice emerged as the most salient conceptual feature. As I returned to Chukotka over the span of five years, it became ever clearer that individual settlers, particularly those well established in their communities,

were deeply entrenched within enduring collective identities more or less invulnerable to major renovation. To shape-change, to cross boundaries between one collective identity and another, and to turn away from a public identity often built up over many decades, usually amounted to an impossible hypocrisy in the context of Chukotka's small communities.

For this reason, settler and modernizer identities are best examined within theories of *community* and *group boundary marking*. We could describe a community in practical terms as a population whose members are integrated within a network of reciprocity and mutual reliance, and who possess the means to understand their commonalities as constituting a cultural whole. This is not to say that settlers, or indeed incoming "experts" of the Abramovich era, have ever inhabited collective identities with fixed and structural permanence. Rather, as Fredrik Barth (1969) has observed, collective identities are produced and reproduced by interaction across group boundaries, a process of relational definition that itself constitutes the reality of difference. This interpretation of collective identities as social constructions, later elaborated by Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), offers a view of the individual as neither voluntaristic nor as "caught" in structure. The stock of attributes and behaviours that members of a community display are instead what Anthony Cohen (1985) refers to as "social symbols" and Barth terms the "idioms of identity," the expression of which constitutes either outsidership or belonging, or rather, the limits of the collective boundary. The internal attributes of a community – for example, its faculties of reciprocal giving and socio-economic self-regulation – are naturally supported by a sense of group identity, which could hardly exist without a knowledge of these limits. This leaves us with a dual theory of community, simultaneously characterized by internal similarity or "culture in common" and relational difference mediated by group boundaries.

The "remodernization" of Chukotka by Governor Abramovich challenged the legitimacy of vestigial and nostalgically informed settler identities (as modern people, as a cultural avant-garde, and even as "true" people of the North). The intrusion of the outsider expert into the local domain and the execution of modernization projects (such as community closures and resettlement to the south) sparked, in a reactive way, an emboldened sense of belonging among locals. This effect has been demonstrated in other settings, to be found in a range of ethnographies that have in common a concern for "peoples at the fringe" – communities contending with threats of effacement originating in distant metropolitan centres (for example, Vidich and Bensman 1968; Elias and Scotson 1965; Cohen 1985, 1987; Emmet 1982; Strathern 1981). Cohen (1982, 6), whose research was set in the Shetlands fishing settlement of Whalsay, observes that "practices of cultural identification" are particularly evident in "peripheral communities" located at the margins of industrialized metropolises. In places like these, threats from outside

become a vital constituent of self-awareness for the community. In their classic text on the nature of “community,” Colin Bell and Howard Newby (1978, 290) remark, “Our membership of communities is largely unconscious unless it is threatened; otherwise one just belongs, and generally irrevocably so.” They introduced the notion of “communion,” a heightened awareness of community membership, as a kind of *defensive* celebration of group boundaries. Sustained as it is by intense affective bonds, “communion” is related to the Weberian concept of charisma, whose effects recede as its emotional powers become routinized. It is this unstable and ephemeral aspect of communities on the defensive that bears most relevance to the situation of settlers in Chukotka, faced as they were (from 2001 onward) with a radical but momentary program of modernization.

It should be very clear that this study of settler identity concerns more than simply the moments of communion – the short-lived celebrations of collective feeling when under pressure from without. Just as meaningful a question relates to how, in more prosaic circumstances, communities are constituted and maintained by the practices of their members. There is no doubt that constructivist theories of community offer the best analytical toolbox for understanding collective identity in certain circumstances. Many anthropologists would eschew positivist descriptions of community altogether and attend only to the meanings people attach to membership. For example, Anthony Cohen’s (1985) epistemological questioning of the nature of community rests within an analysis of the symbols group members employ to signal, first, their own membership, and second, the boundaries delineating outsidership, which he characterizes as the internal and external “definitions” of community, respectively. Such theorizations are particularly helpful for understanding the social separation of local and outsider in Chukotka’s contemporary capital, Anadyr, which I characterize with a borrowing from Canada as a condition of “two solitudes” (MacLennan 1945).

But I do not agree that community life, and in particular the boundaries of a community, should be considered strictly in symbolic terms. Things and acts become symbols only when their referential meaning is recognized. Practices native to a community carry overtly symbolic meaning only at certain moments in the progress of community life (typically, when local people are contending with an outside threat). Yet, as long as the norms of community life – the routine practices of mutuality – are sustained, they alone constitute compelling grounds for membership. So we see that the forms of reciprocal support deriving from everyday “neighbourliness” animate the social life of the community and delineate its boundaries, while at the same time carrying the potential for the mobilization of an *idea* of the group and its boundaries in *exceptional circumstances*. It is for this reason that I give equal attention in this study of the settler to discursive boundary marking (symbolic differentiation) and the practices of day-to-day survival, including land use and practices of exchange.

The everyday logic of community life – let us say the “content” – is still best viewed from the perspective of exchange theory, for which we owe a debt to Marcel Mauss (1990), Michael Taussig (1980), and Marshall Sahlins (1972). Particularly relevant is Mauss’ characterization of gift-giving as an enactment of community, a practice symbolic of the cherished relationships within its social limits. If Mauss located his theories in studies of “primitive societies,” Caroline Humphrey (2000) and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2000) have helped to “deprimitivize” the gift (and barter) by demonstrating its salience within industrial societies (settings that Mauss and Taussig actually considered the province of commodity exchange). Because the gift holds a hidden presumption of mutuality, giving and helping are critical drivers behind the circulation of goods within any self-sustaining community. This was certainly the case within Chukotka’s settler communities, where participation in the practices of exchange served as a boundary marker and source of identity. In this regard, the notion of “generalized reciprocity” is particularly useful for characterizing the importance of exchange among settlers and for explaining its perpetual quality. Generalized reciprocity describes practices of giving that are on the surface unconditional but that nevertheless set up an expectation of return, albeit delayed, and are presented in a non-commensurate form (Bourdieu 1983). Reciprocity is “generalized” in the sense that participants in a community of exchange may give to one and get from another: there is a sense that what you put in comes back to you in the end.

Theories of social capital also enrich our understanding of exchange practices, particularly as a means of accounting for the *variable* intensity of community life. If social capital amounts to the stock of social connection within a population (Putnam 2000; Coleman 1988), it follows that communities can be variously well endowed or impoverished. Social capital theory also illuminates the relationship between the pragmatic activity of exchange and the symbolic life of discourses such as “trust” and “generosity.” Mutual trust and generosity are central aspects of the settler tradition, key tenants of the code of the North, for survival in the harsh and isolated conditions of northern communities relies on a continual resort to mutual help. But, in truth, the norms of generosity and welcoming have always to some degree been constrained by everyday scarcity in the North, particularly during the post-Soviet crisis. Because of this, there is a need to interrelate cultures of exchange and mutual aid to the persistence of boundary marking in settler communities. Again, Finn Sivert Nielsen’s (2007) ethnography of survival in late-Soviet Leningrad comes to the rescue, with its model of “islands” of intimate acquaintance, protective of their members and hostile to penetration, floating on the sea of shortage-plagued stagnation-era life. Similarly, the blat networks of Alena Ledeneva’s (1998) portrait of Soviet-era society testify to the density of exchange within informal networks. Although neither Nielsen nor Ledeneva employ the terminology of social capital theory, they effectively introduce this tradition to

the anthropology of Soviet life by demonstrating that Soviet society was never weak in social capital (*pace* Jowitt 1992), only that it was organized in an intensely cellular fashion.

A final and decisive aspect of “community” relates to the problem of *belonging*. Identity can be so many things, expressed so variously: it can, for example, relate to gender, age, social class, or occupation. But here, if we are interested in the problem of how people “settle,” we must look to the manner in which modes of social and geographic *location* become sources of self-understanding. In a process of settling, European migrants to Chukotka were able to discard their transient dispositions and their attachments to faraway homes and eventually situate their personal and collective identities firmly within their immediate environment. This conceptual realignment was vastly accelerated in Chukotka by the abrupt dislocations of historical circumstance. For example, hardship after 1991 winnowed the population, leaving more committed northerners in its aftermath. But because of the way of life it made necessary, the experience of survival also catalyzed a latent sense of belonging among settlers. In parallel with the end of transport, practices of survival in northern settlements *localized* people – whether indigenous or not – constricting and concentrating their everyday onto an immediate social canvas and the nearby landscape.<sup>19</sup> There ceased to be a resort or a reference of much meaning beyond the local, but fortunately the local could also be richly sustaining.

With this in mind, I cannot help but argue that the story of the settler, fixed on the northern landscape, has a place in the lively discussion of indigeneity within anthropology (indeed, within *Current Anthropology*).<sup>20</sup> The reader must decide whether to view this ethnography in such polemic terms as those in which these debates are voiced. But it should be read as open-minded interrogation of “native-ness,” one that attempts to transcend the deadening terms of debate that now shape the discourses of indigenous rights and that still assign identities of native and colonizer in a zero-sum fashion. I much prefer the wisdom found in deeply ethnographic questionings of indigenous identity, characterizing nativeness as no more than, but neither less than, practical *experience* in a particular landscape. This is not a controversial idea; many accounts of northern indigenous peoples in Canada, Greenland, Scandinavia, and Russia point to landscape, and moreover to land use, as a primary constituent of identity constructions (for example, Vitebsky 2005; King 2002; Sharpe 2001; D. Anderson 2000; Ingold 2000; Brody 1981, 2000; Brightman 1993) in a manner consistent with writing on belonging in other regions (Feld and Basso 1996; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995). In what we might simply call the ethnographic (as opposed to the political) approach to indigeneity, practices of hunting, gathering, worshipping, or travelling on the land lead to an entanglement of landscape features and personal histories, so that individuals become “written on to the land” (Nuttall 1992) and land becomes written in the minds and on the bodies of its people.

Although these accounts of embedded identity or belonging to place focus on indigenous figures in the North, there is no reason not to consider within the same rubric rooted practices of dwelling found among settlers. Indeed, my ethnography of the settler culminates in its final pages with a description of practical ties to land and local community life, arguing that senses of belonging spring from and are refreshed by such entanglements. A sense of settler belonging may, at certain times in Chukotka's history, have seemed more a discursive than practical characteristic – and is thus better examined in the light of those works on community emphasizing relational positioning, boundary marking, and hostility to the outsider (such as Cohen 1987; Vidich and Bensman 1968; Elias and Scotson 1965). But in Chukotka, as I predict is true elsewhere in the Russian North, “belonging” is also a property of the settler identity that both precedes and outlasts the effervescent sense of solidarity provoked by intrusions and threats from outside. My own “ethnographic present” in the Abramovich era may be just such an effervescent moment, but this is nevertheless a historical, diachronic account of changing collective identities. Just as I refer to a past in which the settler had less need to define the boundaries of the group, so I anticipate a future after Abramovich's modernization in which this is again the case.