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Hunting Caribou and Hunting Tradition: Aboriginal Identity and Economy in Canada and Siberia

David G. Anderson
University of Aberdeen

The hunt of migrating caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) occupies a privileged place in the history of anthropological thought as well as in the public mind. The phrase 'man the hunter' generally connotes the rugged image of a stoic, often lonely, hunter with a modest weapon aiming upon a large mammal. The first curious glimpses into mankind's Palaeolithic legacy, stemming from European archaeological digs in the 19th Century, are associated with skull fragments, stone tools, and masses of broken or burnt caribou bones [David 1993]. European political theory privileged the weighed the case of deer hunting as an example of primeval possessiveness [Barker 1982]. At the beginning of the 21st Century, anxious city-dwellers from Europe to the United States read with discomfort of the industrial assault upon the last great spaces where people and caribou meet. Within the embrace of the Conferences of Hunting and Gathering Societies, northern caribou hunters have figured prominently in discussions of religion, identity, property, and most recently, new social movements [Asch 1982; Scott 1988; Feit 1994; Sharp 1994; Feit 1999; Goulet 2000]. As overviews of this literature have shown [Bird-David 1983; Feit 1994; Schweitzer 2000], caribou hunters have also played a significant role in addressing the central myth of these gatherings that a far-away and primitive society somehow harbours an important message for urban and industrial populations. Although caribou hunting is clearly an activity confined to northern landscapes it is nevertheless intertwined in a complex manner with ecological and political processes world-wide. Much of the threat to this species comes from the fallout of global industrial activity ranging from nuclear testing in the United States and production the of heavy metals in Russia's Arctic nickel smelters. For this reason, caribou hunting may be identified as one of the 'front-lines' or 'hot-spots' between global corporate capitalism and rural Northern populations.

In this chapter, I would like to approach the image of caribou hunting from a different angle. Instead of placing the accent upon those aspects of the hunt which make it seem special from the point of view of an urban-based writer or reader, I would like to examine the way in which policy discussions surrounding the event are crafted or 'wielded' by hunters and environmentalists in order to make a political point. In this sense, caribou hunting will be shown to be a form of

'hunting tradition' in the active and positive manner identified by other authors in this volume, and prominently by Anne Fienup-Riordan [2000]. The chapter will concentrate upon examples taken from the Gwich'in Settlement Region in north-western Canada (overlapping the boundaries between the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, and the Inuvialiut Settlement Region) as well as from the Evenki Autonomous District and the Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets Autonomous District) in north central Siberia. These are two areas where I happen to have a long personal and professional connection with the local peoples. They also happen to be areas, although very distant, where two of the most well-known populations of caribou have become the focus of world-wide debate.[1)] The Porcupine caribou population, at the border between Alaska and Canada, has come of concern because of proposals to drill for oil in the so-called protected '1002 lands' set aside as their 'calving grounds'. The Taimyr caribou population, moving between calving areas in Northern Taimyr and wintering areas in the Evenki Autonomous District, has attracted attention due to the impact of Nickel mining and smelting on its traditional migration routes and for a large European-based movement to protect it as the 'last wild herd of Eurasia'. Through examining these two cases, this chapter will analyse how idea of protecting or preserving hunting, either in Canada, the United States, or in Siberia, remains a powerful way to make arguments about the human condition at the beginning of this century, as in the past.

"LIFE IS SHORT – STAY AWAKE FOR IT"

In a cafe in Ann Arbor, Michigan, freshmen students gather to discuss College football, read the recent newspapers, or just to listen to music while watching passers-by in a large picture window. The decor of the cafe is rustic with deliberate reference to the hand-hewn wood furniture and walls of a trapper's cabin. Along the walls, behind the counter are various types of 'gourmet coffee', one of which is called 'wilderness blend'. Every time a customer takes a sip of this coffee (as a pamphlet asserts), this chain called 'Caribou Coffee' donates one American dollar to efforts to save the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and purportedly the Porcupine caribou herd. I was told by a waitress that this chain of stores is one of the most popular in this part of the United States and is expanding rapidly. When I asked why it is called 'Caribou Coffee' I was proudly handed another pamphlet explaining the 'mission' of the firm's owners:

> Caribou Coffee was inspired by a long climb to the top of Sable Mountain in Alaska. When we reached the summit, we looked out over the vast Denali mountain range and watched a herd of wild caribou thunder through the valley below. As a result we felt pretty small in the scheme of things and so lucky to see such honest, natural beauty. At that moment, we realised that we had to do something really special with our lives. When we got home, we decided to create a place that would feel as good as the view from the top of

> that mountain. A place where people could take a break and enjoy the simple good things in life – a cup of coffee, the daily newspaper, a conversation with a friend. A place where employees could realise that the more challenging the climb, the more rewarding the view. So, if you have a moment for a quick break or the time for a longer retreat, we hope that Caribou can be a special place where you can stop ... and enjoy the view. (Kim and John Puckett, Founders: From a promotional pamphlet, printed on recycled paper)

In reply to the smiles of the cafe staff I quickly smiled back, still not really understanding the connection between coffee harvested in Kenya, New Guinea, and Costa Rica and the Porcupine caribou herd. Feeling I needed to do something to close the conversation I bought a plastic cup with the image of an anatomically malformed caribou leaping, as if it were a rabbit, over the phrase "Life is Short: Stay Awake for It" [Caribou 2000]. With this millennial message on my desk in front of me, I have been trying to deduce the value of caribou culture to the international political economy.

Photo 1. Writing about caribou hunting

The 'mission statement' of Caribou Coffee is rich in that ideology identified by Arturo Escobar [1996] and others as the recent and profitable interest in a ecological and sustainable structure of capital accumulation. Most striking is the ocular imagery whereby the founders and the clients stand above and away from the living landscape pondering their place in the 'scheme of things' – a global world

view that Ingold [2000: Ch.12] identified as being a form of alienation common to environmentalist discourse. By contrast, a Gwich'in hunter, with a less ponderous sense of place, would place himself at the bottom of the valley among the caribou. Perhaps, the most surprising statement here is the link of professional success to a continual climb away from the reciprocal exchange of food and of life itself to a more abstract place of understanding with a 'rewarding view'. Indeed, one can conclude that the farther that one is removed from living with caribou, the more profitable is your knowledge of them. The clarion call of awakeness catches the anxiety of urban life and tries to invest it with a sense of purpose. Hence, by sipping coffee branded with the promise of an ecological dividend, one both increases one's efficiency in the local *habitus* but also, with every sip, participates in the reproduction of the 'thundering wild caribou' in an indirect and mysterious way. Thus through a very interesting process of condensation, the most civil 'coffee house' in the urban public sphere, becomes wild, practical, and private thereby symbolically closing the ontological divide common to Western philosophy and felt by many city-dwellers. This is but one small but rich example of one of the successful points of contact between an international movement of solidarity with 'the caribou-people' (or at least the caribou) and a sharp illustration of the economic and spiritual value of traditional ecological knowledge.

The international movement to save the '1002 lands' in Alaska is a complex activity. Without going into detail, it involves professional hired 'lobbyists' who work out of the Gwich'in communities of Old Crow or Arctic Village. These professionals edit bi-weekly newsletters sent throughout the world by post or by electronic mail with updates on the plight of the 'caribou people'. Aged hunters make long journeys to the corridors of power in Washington to communicate directly to American legislators. Television producers have been kind to the movement. Caught by the graphic contrast between silver-haired hunters who live near the shores of the Arctic Ocean and the cynical power-politics of an Imperial capital, news makers have given the movement sympathetic coverage. While far from an everyday household event, environmentalists from Germany to Australia have heard of the Gwich'in people. Many people, including my students, take it as axiomatic that there is a contradiction between oil development and the health of migratory caribou. This movement has also communicated a larger philosophical issue that integrity of natural spaces created by nation-states is more sacred and valuable than the everyday pragmatic pressures of party politics. Sacrificing the majesty of a caribou migration for the sake of a non-renewable energy resource is seen as being short-sighted, while balancing capital accumulation within a sustainable ecological programme is understood as having a clear vision. At this level, 'staying awake' overlaps with that sense of awareness valued by many circumpolar societies, such as the Yup'ik as described by Fienup-Riordan [1990] or among the *tundroviki* of Taimyr [Anderson 2000].

It would be unfair to make too fine a critique of this movement. On the one hand, it is a rather magical example of how connections can be made between the

lives and concerns of a not-very-large First Nation and what often seems to be an atomised mass of urban-based consumers. The fact that the organisers have managed to carry world-wide a clear message of the contradiction between industrial development and the health of migratory animals is indeed a feat of projection on par with the legends of medicine men and shamans of the recent past. Yet, it is difficult not to note that this is a tender alliance forged with people who have little direct experience of living with caribou. Even if we restrict ourselves to understanding those who have some experience with the animal themselves, their view is limited to the view from the top of the mountain. One wonders how many lobbyists and coffee-drinkers would want to learn the intimate skill of how to tactfully remove the guts from a recently slaughtered caribou before they freeze and without piercing them. Environmentally based politics work at a sufficient level of abstraction that they support political currents which may work in conflict with hunting societies. The contradictions are based on two levels. The first is the conviction that ecologically legitimate forms of relationships between people, animals and space must be 'protected' at the level of nation-state politics. The second is the process of commodifying knowledge in order to argue the first point.

COMMODIFYING KNOWLEDGE

In making testimonies about animals or land to the international media or to land-claims organisations, aboriginal peoples are experimenting with a new method of defining their relationship with animals. Through these messages they are able to make metaphorical arguments about their place in the world, their political rights, and the way in which they prefer to make a living. At least within the circumpolar north, if not in all hunting contexts, the knowledge of elderly peoples is valued in particular for its attention to detail and especially for the fact that it was forged less on conjecture and more on primary, unmediated experience. In the arena of ecological politics, the statements of knowledgeable elderly hunters have become transformed into the authoritative voice of 'elders'. These statements remain valuable, but they are valuable in ways which are not so much directly connected to the hunting process itself. One might say that the speech-event itself becomes a source of value. To a certain degree, the valuable, authoritative speech act has for long been a central part of circumpolar societies who attended to shamanic insight (Evenki) or 'people-with-medicine' (Gwich'in) in day-to-day life. However, in the 1990s, we are witnessing an international traffic in 'talk about the land' which is not necessarily contextualised to the needs of healing a specific person or effecting a certain hunt. In some extreme cases, knowledge now carries a value calculable in de-contextualised units of cash or credits rather than sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, vodka, or tobacco.

The extent of the commoditised economy in knowledge is quite striking within the Gwich'in Settlement Region of the Richardson Mountains. Here, starting from the very first land-claims research associated with the impact study of a proposed

Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in the 1970s, Gwich'ins learned the new value of words. During the early stages of land claim research, land-claim organisations hired students to record the elderly in order to document their stories of their occupation of the land. The 'data' gathered by such a process was important in proving to the Canadian state that Gwich'ins (then part of the Dene Nation) indeed did use vast areas of land. It was important to document this use verbally and graphically on maps since the nature of Dene land-use was so refined and respectful that it was 'invisible' to the Euro-Canadian eye. Instead of leaving behind massive deserts of impact, as one might expect with forestry or agriculture, the material evidence of Gwich'in used was confined to a few stumps around camps and relationships with animals which were regular and predictable.[2)] The data, gathered mostly on 60 minute cassette tapes, then worked its way through a vast hierarchy of specialists engaged in talking about the land. 'Elders' often gave this information 'for free' while the students may have earned a decent summer wage. Lawyers and consultants then earned amounts unimaginable to most hunters in order to process these words in a manner understandable to the courts. The words of the elders as represented before a judicial inquiry successfully convinced the state of the need for special recognition of Dene rights to land and resources which was effected many years later through the Gwich'in Final Agreement [Canada 1988, 1992, 1993; Gwich'in Tribal Council 1992]. As part of this agreement, Gwich'in received two different types of land title and most interestingly for our purpose, the 'right' to co-manage lands, wildlife, and resources with state representatives. Presently, in the four Gwich'in communities which make up the settlement region, for many day-to-day life is invested in serving on multiple committees ranging from the land councils, to the water councils, to the renewable resource councils. It is an interesting and important detail for the local ecology of talking about the land that the management structure is federated such that there are 'councils' which are strictly fora for local debate within specific communities and 'boards' where the interests of the Gwich'in as a whole are aired before an audience of federally appointed representatives. Finally, there is the important and very successful Porcupine Caribou Management Board - an international assembly of Gwich'in managers who set quotas and plan strategy for the future of the caribou herds [Kofinas 1998]. The specific details of how each level works with the level below is a complex and interesting matter in itself, but beyond the scope of this chapter.

Talking about hunting within this landscape of multiple committees has both a material and symbolic side. Instituting the procedures that elders observed during the early judicial inquiry, it has become an expected marker of participation that each person serving on a council or a board earns a monetary honorarium. If a particular council, or an outside interest, requires an authoritative statement of what it is like to live on the land, 'elders' charge a remarkably stable rate of $120 CAD per 60 minute cassette tape for the interview. Most formal speech contexts in the settlement area have fixed rates ranging from $40 per hour for simultaneous translation to several hundred dollars a day for guiding. Most interesting, and

problematic, is the fact that these rates are charged equally to outsiders as they are to local actors. Thus Gwich'in language teachers who are trying to strengthen the use of the Gwich'in language organise community bingos to bring in money with which they can hire 'elders' to share their knowledge within the formal environment of the school. Similar, if not higher rates, are charged to the well-dressed administrators of the co-management boards who seeking data on harvest levels in order to conduct sustainable harvest studies as an 'insurance policy' against future impacts. A budget for 'talking to people' for one week for a Gwich'in organisation can quickly mount to tens of thousands of dollars, as testified by the recent field notes of a Robert Wishart in the Gwich'in community of Ft. McPherson:

> It has been explained to me by several members of a variety of bureaucratic boards and agencies which arose with the settling of the Gwich'in land claim that "people here are tired of their knowledge being taken for nothing and used by other people to get rich." In response to this perceived injustice a practice has been made into a prescription for elders and all other teachers of knowledge to be paid for "interviews". The term "interview" is used very broadly in the GSA to refer to any instances whereby people share knowledge or spend time on a subject of interest to others. ... For example even when a situation is presented in a way such as, "These guys have come to show us some stuff and get our reaction to it," it is referred to as an interview in the very next statement. So the complete utterance goes as follows: "These peoples have come from Inuvik, from the GRRB, to show us their work and we can tell them what we think, this crew of delegates has come for an interview". In this case each member of the RRC receives a $100.00 honorarium for each meeting that they attend so their input is paid just as an interview would be. Interviews are paid for on the basis that knowledge is no longer free in the GSA. Amounts vary considerably and I have heard figures from $100 to $500 a day and $25 to $150 an hour. These fees have been justified to me by a couple of people who stated that the council had a meeting where it was decided that the people have a "technical knowledge" about the land and the resources on it which is equivalent to a university degree that consultants have who are paid $500-600 per diem for similar work. This observation of high per diems may have arisen with the oil boom in the 1970-80's and during the study of the potential ramifications of the Gwich'in land settlement when a large number of lawyers and scientists where in the area charging huge consulting fees for northern expenses. [Wishart 1998]

'Talking about the land' in the Gwich'in settlement area is one of the most robust forms of local economy. With the failure of oil and gas development, the fall in world fur prices, and the fact that it is difficult legally to sell caribou meat, 'consultancy' fees no doubt come a close third to government salaries and social

welfare payments as a source of household income. Since most Gwich'ins eat their own meat and fish, the cash goes to buying toys and clothing for children and grandchildren, purchasing and maintaining trucks, or buying hunting equipment. As Cruikshank notes [1998], Arctic approaches to traditional ecological knowledge distinguish themselves from Latin American or Asian approaches precisely upon their hunger for a share of Northern research revenue.

There are several contradictions stemming from this local tradition. The greatest problem, which Gwich'ins themselves note, is that to be visible and part of the commodified economy in knowledge, one has to remain in the settlement. Thus, there is an identifiable division in the community in the young and middle aged generations between those who participate in committee work and those who are 'good bush men' spending long periods on land. Significantly, the elders tend not to be subject to this division. In this sense, 'talking about the land' has in some cases replaced actually being on the land. For many, one goes out to one's camp as if on holiday on weekends or simply overnight.

Linked to this punctuated pattern of time spent on the land versus time spent talking about the land, is a problem in the social reproduction of knowledge to the younger generation. The cost of imparting knowledge verbally makes it difficult for the school or the councils to employ elders in direct organised activities with youth. Most elders prefer to share knowledge on-site in a practical activity with their own grandchildren. However to do this one must have cash to purchase fuel to go out on the land, and one must forgo opportunities to earn future cash by withdrawing from the market for authoritative statements. In order to earn cash to support the high cost of travel and bush-life of kin, some elders charge for their authoritative statements before audiences in the school or the community language centre. The cost of these fees in turn limits the ability of these formal institutions to reproduce the language in these regimented environments. Hear-say accounts from the Gwich'in settlements are divided on the advantages and disadvantages of this inter-related system of circulating money for the reproduction of traditional skills. Many young and old alike insist that it is proper and necessary to be 'paid for what one knows'. However a vocal minority active in the Anglican Church or the School complains of a type of greed which is preventing the young from 'learning about their culture'. However, as if in direct answer to these criticisms, many whose families spend more time 'in the bush' do not particularly value the type of unmediated wordy knowledge which the schools try to instil in their students by having them paste Gwich'in words below pictures of rabbits, rather than snare and skin rabbits themselves.

Observations such as these suggest this particular experiment in self-administration is marked by elements of post-colonial practice which erode links of kinship and mutual aid, or at the very least, change the tempo and distribution of people out on the land and thereby the meaning of what it is to be Gwich'in. It would be easy to conclude that the entry of commodities into any economy immediately cause an erosion of social relations into the type common to industrial

societies. Although the 'marketing of knowledge' in Ft. McPherson may not be as abstract as the marketing of 'wilderness blend Caribou coffee', it is nevertheless part of the same economy when compared with actually 'camping' on the land without much verbal reflection on that fact.

Often Gwich'in youth speak harshly about their role in processing and articulating culture. In the words of one young Gwich'in woman, when working on the councils one must 'try to rob one's own people to make sure that you get something for your kids'. However, is this practice as cynical as it may at first seem? In this case one must remember that money for knowledge is taken from the Gwich'in *nation*, in the face of various committees created by the Final Agreement or from the Canadian or Territorial *governments*, in the form of various contracts; both of which being entities rather closely bound up with processes and identities ratified by the Canadian nation-state. These monies are then are shared with one's *own* kin – a very concrete set of people. This relation is not necessarily the same as robbing oneself.

In Euro-Canadian society the patriotic identity between individual and nation is axiomatic [Handler 1988]. Although the payments demanded for talk clearly weaken newly formed pan-Gwich'in civic institutions, they do not necessarily erode more modest but enduring units of identity such as extended family or a group of families 'camping' together. In settings such as a summer fish camp or at a mid-winter meat camp one feels more at home, or at least in control of the conversation. If the price of financing such a camp is by making a claim upon public monies, most would agree that it is a price worth paying. The Gwich'in nation, like the 'band society' of a different generation of Athapaskan ethnography [Slobodin 1962; Helm 1965], is not a seamless unit wherein the individual melts into the nation. Rather, the structures of the 'board society' of the Gwich'in appear to be a vaguely form of transitory hierarchy organised on a seasonal or task-by-task basis to achieve very personal goals. The rents claimed for talking about the lands might be a new form of 'wage gathering' [Bird-David 1983] but in the end it serves similar goals of supporting one's own kin.

Another, way of understanding the commodified economy in knowledge in this region is as a Robin Hood type of resistance. As Rob Wishart [1998] observes during his recent research in Ft. McPherson that the problem with the commodified economy in 'interviews' is not so much that elders ask to be reimbursed for knowledge, or that they ask too much, but that once paid they have no control over the appropriateness of the topic or the appropriateness of the forum. In many instances, as Wishart notes, elders barely tolerate insistent questioning on obvious or uninteresting topics, or chafe at the need to perform an action before a camera when it might be much more easily demonstrated out on the land. In this sense, 'robbing one's people' is more like taking an entitlement from a rather distasteful or alienating traffic in words. One wonders if the contradiction evident in commodified talk arises first with the money economy, or rather with the fact that the money economy is in turn embedded within certain expectations of what an

indigenous person is supposed to say and do. After all, Gwich'in people living within the Gwich'in Settlement Area of the Northwest Territories must obey strict regulations on how they take caribou from lands reserved for Yukon Gwich'ins to the west or Inuvialuits to the North, all of whom not so long ago used 'common' lands and may have been kinsmen themselves. This is not to mention the multitude of restrictions which govern travel and access to lands across the international boundary dividing Canada and the United States. Even if one examines exchange relationships of the Northwest Territorial Gwich'in living strictly within the Gwich'in Settlement Area, they are limited in how they share this meat by Federal restrictions of the sale of resources obtained on a 'license' arising from a comprehensive land claim agreement. When comparing these regulations and restrictions on how meat is shared with others to the 'new' economy of talking about the land, the matter no longer seems reduced to one of a material interest but instead a more complex symbolic strategy. In order to explore this aspect of how commodified talk works, it is necessary to take a broader look at how hunting is embedded certain expectations of indigenous peoples within a different part of the circumpolar north.

RATIONALLY MANAGING KNOWLEDGE IN TAIMYR

An interesting point of comparison to the Gwich'in Settlement Area is the Taimyr, where the same structure of authorised indigenous identity does not hold, and the nature of commodified exchange has taken a different path. Although Taimyr is the home of the world's second best known commodified caribou herd, the trajectory of commodification has been laid out such that local hunters are encouraged to exchange meat rather than be encouraged to talk about the herd. Indeed one might argue in this more regimented context that the words of knowledgeable elders about the health of the herd are not particularly welcome either to environmental organisations or to the state.

The Soviet state, in contrast to the Canadian and American states, put great pressure on local people to 'produce' wild deer meat. It is important to note that the production of meat in the Soviet Union, as in post-Soviet Russia, must be understood as an entirely distinct process from the marketing of meat in the sense that a cattle rancher might understand it in southern Canada. In Soviet hunting institutions, production implied a peculiar exchange relationship wherein abstract quantities of meat were 'given' or 'surrendered' to the state as an obligation. In return, the state 'gave' certain material necessities (clothing, weapons, fuel) and until recently a salary as well. Western economists and anthropologists have tried to discover a direct relation between the way that Soviet agricultural institutions traded their produce. The consensus seems to be that of the many relationship that existed, a 'buyer-seller' relationship was certainly not the best way of describing it, but instead political and symbolic factors tended to overshadow the transaction [Humphrey 1983; Lewin 1968; Seabright 2000]. In some cases, the production of

meat was a skill as abstract as the production of images of hunting. The skill lay in how numbers were produced and reproduced rather than in a 'factual' economy of protein transfers [Anderson 1995].

In Siberia, the production of caribou was initially developed in conversation with local peoples. In the early Soviet period, extended kinship groups were organised into 'work-units' (*artely*) and latter into collective farms (*kolkhozy*) with the explicit goal of providing wild produce to the Soviet people in return for the investment of the Soviet people in boarding schools, the construction of settlements, and the provision of a paternalistic social welfare net. In contrast to the parcelled way that subsistence hunting is thought of in North America, the hunt of wild caribou and the herding of domestic reindeer within these units was experienced as a patriotic endeavour. This can be observed in formal way that caribou and reindeer were presented for accounting purposes to the names of the institutions. For example, one of the most evocative early 'work-units' of Taimyr engaged in the wild meat trade was named by Dolgans as the "Marshal Budennogo Work Unit" featuring a surname of a patriotic military man which translates as 'Awakened' [Anderson 2000]. The later Soviet period is not so romantic with its history of forced resettlements, bureaucratic state farms, and the crude application of mechanised technology into hunting. Although the late Soviet industrial hunt features a string of slaughtering points with marksmen using automatic weapons to quickly mow-down a panic-stricken herd, the sites that they chose are at water crossings along the Piasina river much like those that were chosen by Dolgans and Nganasans for thousands of years.

These creolised hunting techniques, which first involved extended kin groups, and later involved an mechanised elaboration of traditional hunting strategies, nonetheless departs from the culture of respect common among Evenki or Dolgan hunters. First and foremost the quotas for the hunt, and the profiles of the caribou which are desirable to kill, were designed by a distant hierarchy of biologists and government regulators and not with the personalised tool of dreams and kinship. By comparison, the structures of co-management in the Canadian north look far more sensitive to local opinions. The Soviet industrial hunt was aimed primarily at harvesting quantity (measured in 100kg units) and not at reproducing the quality of the relationship between people and deer. Thus the marksmen aim at the groups of heavier bulls and not the fatty cows since on their record books they provided more weight and thus more credit according to their contracts. This strategy also tended to eliminate entire social units of migrating caribou, since the animals in Taimyr, as in Canada, tend to move in sexually segregated social groups. Aboriginal hunters in Siberia blame this aspect of the hunt for the fact that since the 1960s the Taimyr population of wild caribou has seemingly lost its memory of its traditional migration routes. Until recently, caribou hunting was not seen as an activity within which aboriginal people had a primary investment. Instead it was viewed as an exercise in 'rational management' in which the public could derive some objective social benefit from a resource which stubbornly resisted the five-year plan.

Although the logic of the way the hunt is effected is spoiled by the crude quality of its scale, buried within this example is an interesting conviction that the product of the land can and should be shared with a broader public and not just narrowly defined indigenous peoples. The subsidised Soviet system of reciprocity collapsed rapidly after 1992. Nevertheless, several generations of Evenki, Dolgan, and Nia hunters have grown up with rich vocabularies of how to conduct transactions. In the post-Soviet economy, where bureaucratic and exclusive allocation has been at least formally purged, the paper money economy has become even weaker since almost no agency has the facilities or the personnel to realise its product in cash. Thus in this 'transition' period, meat circulates through a variety of hands by means of various barter and credit operations. As described in Ziker's contribution to this volume, caribou meat is exchanged directly for fuel or is distributed by social welfare agencies to the elderly in exchange for bartered products given to hunters. This would be a 'subsistence' economy if these contracts were not drawn up and adjudicated by state agencies and for the fact that meat circulates well outside the boundaries of 'native' nationalities but includes Russians and various mixed-blood categories of people. Moreover, caribou meat is seen as something that should be shared with all and is not presently a symbolic marker of an exclusive identity. As Evenki elders often say, "everyone has to eat". Thus though here, as in the Gwich'in Settlement Region, the harvesting of caribou is conspicuous, it is not the prime dimension along which distinctions of identity are made. Instead, in this different political and economic context, the boundaries set up by state definitions of indigenousness do not serve to alter the way that meat moves through local communities. Siberia may bear a tragic history of often violent political change but young hunters tend to be on the land hunting and trapping. Further, they often trap with mixed-blood or immigrant Russian people, or at least include these neighbours in their exchange networks.

To put the accent on actual hunting is not to say that the commodification of talk is not absent in Taimyr. Instead, the Taimyr population of caribou, and the people who hunt them, are rather passive sources of symbolic capital in a media-battle being waged far away from their homes. According to a recent document published by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature, a multinational agency specialising in the sale of knowledge about pristine places, Taimyr is the home of the 'last great migratory herd in Eurasia' and thus one of the most deserving sites for European investment in the maintenance of protected park territories [WWF 1996].

The image of the 'last great herd' is a powerful symbol communicated mostly through images rather than through prose. In the publications of the WWF [1996], the reader and potential investor is treated with professionally composed landscape of droves of caribou spilling over the horizon as far as the eye can see. The one publication in question is composed in three languages, Russian, German, and English. In contrast to publications of Gwich'in environmental allies, the 'elders' are conspicuously mute and only appear dressed in out-of-season winter clothing

at the end of the document. The trilingual text appropriates these rather stiffly composed comrades as allies in the creation of a 'man-in-the-biosphere' reserve which would permit 'traditional hunting' but evidently not dressing appropriately for the weather.

Again, it is difficult to be too critical of this European-based initiative to draw attention to the politics surrounding a very complex society of people and caribou. On the one hand, the linguistic and logistical barriers presented to learning about Taimyr are great since the district has a very irregular air service due to market dislocations and very harsh blizzardy weather. Furthermore, the local Evenkis, Dolgans, and Sakhas do not have direct access to the 'market' for images about Taimyr given that this market functions mostly in European languages. The representation of the region to some degree must work through mediators and translators. Thus, it should not be surprising that the 'natives' are mute and that the central messages of solidarity come through the prism of wildlife biology from trained Russian intellectuals who speak some German or English. Although there is a significantly greater gap in Taimyr than in Canada between how caribou are represented and the lived experience of hunters, the process is nonetheless similar. The experience held by local hunters is portrayed as exotic, valuable, and as endangered. European readers are reminded of their kinship with these people since Paleolithic Europeans, as archaeology has testified, also hunted caribou in their day. Therefore, the best way to make a monument out of the lives of these peoples is to invest in a regime of protection (the phrase 'strict nature reserve' is very common in this literature) which would not only be the responsibility of the Russian state but of the world community. Thus if there is a difference between how hunting is represented here as to North America it is that the responsibility for keeping a strong balance between people and land is removed by one level above and beyond the nation state. It would seem that we have now abandoned the top of the mountain for a view from a Geographical Information System satellite orbiting the earth.

There is some deep and tragic irony in this protection movement. Without entering into the long, bitter-sweet history of people and caribou in this region in this century [Anderson 2000], suffice it to say that this epic migratory population of caribou is a recent *product* of industrialisation and not a remnant of it. Its million-strong population is an effect of several decades of forced resettlement and collectivisation which effectively severed the connection between hunters and the animals who they hunted for centuries. The end result of the process is that most local hunters today lack the means to actually hunt although their need is great. The unstable migration patterns of this irrupting population have in many communities stolen away the local herds of domestic reindeer that hunters used to harness for hunting. The more recent collapse of the regional economy has made it difficult to hunt with mechanised transport. With the exception of the few hunters who have privileged access to fuel and spare parts, or the skill to hunt on foot, the only way to secure resources is indeed to market their poverty

and disempowerment. The audience of these petitions is no longer the Soviet redistributive state but the international audience of non-governmental environmental organisations. The prosaic challenge that these ENGO's set before themselves of protecting the 'last wild herd of Eurasia' should be viewed in the context of a local history of environmental relations which understands the emergence of this great wild population as an unravelling of relationships between people and animals.

There are currently a wide variety of proposals for how the relations between people and caribou can be represented through the metaphor of protection. Indeed, since the ratification of the Big Arctic Nature Reserve, the Putoran Reserve, and the Central Siberian Reserve as areas of international importance, Siberian districts have been falling over themselves to allocate large portions of taiga and tundra as natural areas. The Evenki Autonomous District which is seeking international approval from UNESCO for the creation of single park of approximately 500,000 square kilometres corresponding to the boundaries Ilimpeisk county. According to the vision of an Assistant Governor of the district, the park, representing one of "earth's ecologically pristine frontiers" would be closed to all industrial impacts. When reminded about the local population, he added that the park would permit Evenkis to live the same traditional life that "they have lived for centuries". The proponents of the park remain silent about the fact that the mountainous valleys of the county are mostly empty of people since most local Evenkis were forcibly resettled to the banks of the Nizhanaia Tunguska River in the 1950s and 1960s. The Evenki district, with funding from the United Nations, would build a research station for foreign scholars to travel to study the botany and ethnology of this newly primitivised space.

The District was able to recruit the help of a cosmonaut in promoting their cause. Quoted in the district paper, *Evenki Life*, this space-traveller reminisced on how he lay confined in his capsule and gazed back nostalgically at the 'heart of Russia'. The spot that he focussed upon, the 'geographical centre of Russia', was the Evenki district where he saw no lights or signs of civilisation. Armed with this image he has set about trying to protect this wilderness.

The sudden enthusiasm for building and administering such spaces has its reasoning. With the collapse of central state funding to rural co-operatives and state farms, the three decades long commodified economy of trade in caribou products has completely collapsed leading all northern regions into an unprecedented social crisis. Although the creation of parks would be of great benefit to local producers, they would allow a recreation of Soviet-type economy of politically authorised redistribution embedded, as in Canada, within an incipient idea of aboriginality. The funds allocated to such projects are not enormous, but given the fact that in many regions salaries have not been paid in cash for years, they are significant. One unconfirmed report to the weekly newspaper *Moskovskie Novosti* alleged that US$76,600 were directed through one Dutch project to support the Arctic Nature Reserve in Taimyr [Ustiugov 1997]. A Norwegian feasibility study for a

international caribou management project in Taimyr projects a potential budget of 1,000,000 NOK in the first year of the project plus a supplementary US$900,000 over a three year period [Weihe 1997].

While it is at present unclear what trajectory the new Siberian indigenous identity will take, since 1991 it tends to articulate the following three elements. The political organisations of the Sparse Peoples of Siberia state that first and foremost they should receive state subsidies directed to indigenous families (instead of to northern regions). This first points implies a silent second point that there must be some agency for ascribing who is indigenous and who is not. The third point is that indigenous peoples would have some "priority access" to lands. These three points are generally defended by reference to the "centuries-old" knowledge of Evenkis of the land and may be further invigorated with a mystical or philosophical reflection on the capacity of native people to connect spiritually with the spaces around them.

What is striking about the rapid development of this new discourse of indigeneity is that it directly parallels the development of discourse about the 'free market' and 'environmentalism'. In the view of local activists, a strong indigenous identity would enable local peoples in Taimyr to directly bring their cases before international organisations, to make claims upon taking a share in mineral developments, and also defend local interests when confronted with the prospect of the creation of new authorised spaces such as parks. The 'free' market it turns out is not free at all. Instead in order to make the market work, local hunters must negotiate a new relationship to both the state and the international community through the idea of special access rights implied by their status of indigenes. Parks, it turns out, do not protect what exist but instead create new barriers to which people must adapt. As necessary as these semi-ethnic walls may be in terms of market conditions, they sadly spell the end of the rather cosmopolitan set of relations that local Siberians once enjoyed whether they were native or newcomer. This development implies that the well-being of rural hunting people in general within complex market conditions implies a controlled context wherein talk about the land entitles certain populations to share in the wealth of the land.

CONCLUSION

Caribou hunting, while an Arctic and sub-Arctic phenomena, carries with it a host of associations which implicate it in a new international economy of identity within which markets are nested. The commodification of the hunt can be both in terms of exchange commodities, with unhindered circulation, or it terms of verbal commodities, which implies that the animals are described and enjoyed by separated populations in different ways. In the latter case, talking about the land is often far removed from being on the land. The central question for anthropology then becomes to what degree these differing uses of the hunt are examples of assimilation to the world-system or the results of resistance. As this paper implies

the choice is not that simple.

Although the commodified knowledge economy of Gwich'ins in one sense undermines the robustness of newly created institutions, it still represents a pattern in which one can earn a livelihood by being connected to the caribou – a form of 'wage-gathering' as it were. However, as a form of economic syncretism or narrative it is less successful. As many people in Ft. McPherson today observe, the demands for remuneration stress local or even sub-local interests at the expense of Gwich'inness as a whole. This may be a general problem in land claim negotiations. As a reporter quoted an 'unidentified informant' from the Gitxan area, those individuals who control the institutions created by self-government hold unprecedented power – in his view, land-claims "are just like communism". These views on the contradictory side of collective power create an interesting sense of closure with the post-Soviet Taimyr district [Matas 1998]. Observations, such as these, are difficult to make for an anthropologist. The methodological position that I have tested out here is to try to avoid looking at First Nationness as a natural category and instead to try to pay attention to valuable local identities which may blur the distinction between aborigene and settler or members of the nation, and members of 'one's own' group.

Finally, in considering the way that caribou hunters establish connections with consumers in the industrial centres, I have tried to be critical of the principles on which these alliances are made. Here, it is clear that environmental interests are more clearly aligned around ideas of wilderness rather than hunting. However, the paternalistic side to these prescriptions lie in how park wardens and Parliamentarians then dictate to local peoples that they lead a pristine and primitive lifestyle. It would seem that at the end of this century, the choices that First Nations people have for developing alternate forms and government are becoming increasingly limited by stereotypes of what should be done on First Nations lands or in parks, and by what the ethical role is of an indigenous person. The role of anthropology here is to devote attention to understanding the implicit meanings in the 'hunt for tradition'.

NOTES

1) To avoid confusion, I will call all wild populations of *Rangifer* by the North American word 'caribou'. It is standard to refer to wild *Rangifer* in Eurasia as 'wild reindeer'. However this term becomes cumbersome when one has to also discuss the domestic *Rangifer* ('reindeer') which are raised in this region.
2) The ethnography of the Gwich'in land claim still waits to be written. However, a very good description of a similar judicial proceeding further south can be found in Brody [1981]. The approach of Gwich'in people to the land can be found in Wishart (*in preparation*) and by analogue in the lives of a neighbouring Athapaskan people in the work of Nelson [1983]. The statements of elders before the Berger Inquiry are summarised in Berger [1977] and can be consulted in transcript form in many northern libraries (Canadian Circumpolar Library; Library of the Scott Polar Research Institute; Public Archives of Canada).

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