

INDIGENOUS JUSTICE

NEW TOOLS,
APPROACHES,
AND SPACES

Edited by Jennifer Hendry,
Melissa L. Tatum, Miriam Jorgensen
and Deirdre Howard-Wagner

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Preface

Spaces of Indigenous Justice began life as a workshop concept and rapidly transformed into an interdisciplinary academic project involving faculty and graduate students from multiple universities on several continents. This volume is a direct result of the first two Spaces of Indigenous Justice workshops, and we want to acknowledge and thank the World Universities Network, the University of Leeds School of Law, and The University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law for the financial and logistical support that made those workshops possible. We also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Rosemary Taylor-Harding for her excellent work copyediting the entire volume. Her calm unflappability and efficient demeanour were critical to the completion of the book.

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A Note on Terminology

One of the primary benefits of a project like the Spaces of Indigenous Justice is the involvement of scholars from different countries and different academic backgrounds. That diversity, however, is also a complicating factor in attempting to develop standard terminology. Accordingly, rather than try to standardise on one term—Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation, Native—we have opted to keep intact the convention used by the author, which is influenced by a number of factors, including the author’s home country and academic discipline.

J.H.
M.L.T.
M.J.
D.H-W.



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Googling Indigenous Kamchatka: Mapping New Collaborations

Benedict J. Colombi, Brian Thom, and Tatiana Degai

In 2013, the University of Arizona hosted an innovative workshop.¹ Unlike many academic workshops, this was not a forum for academics to pontificate on their latest theory. Instead, it was a collaboration between academics and members of the Itelmen community of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. The workshop was a direct result of actions by members of the Itelmen community, who were seeking ways to preserve their critically endangered language and related cultural information. This is the story of how that workshop came to be and of what happened after the workshop. It is our hope that this story will provide a model for future collaborations between academics and Indigenous communities.²

The Itelmen Community

The Itelmen are an Indigenous group who live in several villages on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula. As is true for many Indigenous communities around the world, the passage of time and changes in political boundaries have resulted in major impacts on the Itelmen way of life and in the number of native speakers of their language. Today, Itelmen, like many Indigenous

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languages, is critically endangered (UNESCO 2016). In 2016 only five fluent speakers remained, all of whom were over 70 years of age. An additional 10–15 individuals were raised hearing the language spoken and can understand the language, but do not consider themselves fluent speakers (Degai 2016).

Many of the Itelmen's younger generation are familiar with and enthusiastic about emerging technology, including cell phones, computers, and portable tablets, despite living in modest conditions in villages with limited infrastructure and which are reachable only by airplane. The older generation of Itelmen, seeking a way to preserve their history and language in a way that would connect with the youth, came up with the idea of a digital dictionary that also connected language with place. Similar projects are being pursued by other Indigenous groups around the world (Bryan and Woods 2015; Chapin et al. 2005; Eades 2015).

One of the project's objectives is to engage school-aged youth in conversations with elders about Indigenous language, tradition, and cultural heritage. In turn, goals of documenting and celebrating Indigenous cultural heritage knowledge for use in village schools and throughout the broader public benefits all Kamchatka residents, and most especially Kamchatka youth who are engaged in the contemporary resurgence of Indigenous cultures. By showcasing and translating places like historic and contemporary villages, fishing camps, hunting and gathering areas, reindeer migration paths, sacred sites, and place names, Indigenous language practices are anchored to the land. Moreover, it is well established that emplaced language practices can serve an important mnemonic function in reinvigorating and revitalising Indigenous language and cultural practice (Afafe and Beeler 1997; Moore and Tlen 2007). Sometime after 2010, members of the Itelmen community saw the remarkable virtual globe of Google Earth in action. While the satellite images for the western coast of Kamchatka were then of fairly low resolution, local people hoped to reach out to Google to get improved high-resolution satellite imagery for their own Kamchatka region, as well as training in how to use this free and easy-to-use software to leverage this powerful tool for their community's benefit.

The Academic Community

Colombi, one of the co-authors of this chapter, is a lifelong angler with an obsession for trout and salmon fishing. That obsession carried over into his academic work, which included dissertation fieldwork in anthropology and in

the Pacific Northwest with the Nez Perce Tribe along the Snake and Colombia rivers. His goal was to document the political ecology of dam building, Indigenous history and interaction with salmon, and the challenges to local and regional sustainability. Once he received his PhD, Colombi sought to expand his work to include Indigenous peoples and salmon geographies across the North Pacific as well as the North Atlantic. The result was an edited collection entitled *Keystone Nations: Indigenous Peoples and Salmon Across the North Pacific* (Colombi and Brooks 2012). The book served as a first ever look at salmon cultures, including both histories and futures. The chapters in the book covered the North Pacific, linking Japan and the Russian Far East with Alaska, coastal British Columbia, and the Pacific Northwest US, including Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

In putting the book together, Colombi made certain to invite scholars who had substantial experience working in Kamchatka, Russia. As part of his obsession with salmon and trout, Colombi had always heard about the Kamchatka Peninsula. According to the stories circulating in the angling community, Kamchatka is the last great place on earth for trout and salmon fishing—it does not have a single dam, the peninsula is roughly the size of California, and the fishing is supposedly as good as God made it. Among those invited to contribute to the edited collection were the anthropologists David Koester and Erich Kasten. Koester works largely with the Itelmen of Kamchatka, and Kasten works primarily with the Koryak, the neighbours of the Itelmen to the north and also in Kamchatka.

Koester has worked in Kamchatka since 1992 and has long-standing relationships with the Itelmen, including Tatiana Degai, one of the co-authors of this chapter (Koester 2003, 2005). Degai was about nine or ten years of age when Koester and her grandmother, Victoria (Vika) Petrasheva, travelled from Esso in Kamchatka to the village of Kovran across the mid-section of the peninsula by horseback. The trip lasted roughly a week and Degai, who was always gifted with languages, served as Koester's interpreter. Koester had been working with Petrasheva on Itelmen ethnographies and as the years passed it became clear that Degai showed promise in anthropology as well as linguistics. Degai eventually matriculated at Koester's home institution, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks to pursue a master's degree. Once she completed her degree, which included an examination of sacred geographies and ethnographic significance for the Itelmen people, Koester advised Degai to get a doctoral degree but to move into the area of Indigenous studies and linguistics where she could focus on language preservation and revitalisation topics for the Itelmen. Koester put Degai in touch with Colombi, who, after reviewing her impressive credentials, secured

funding for her for doctoral work at the University of Arizona. Degai majored in American Indian Studies (i.e., Indigenous studies) and minored in linguistics and received her doctorate in the spring of 2016.

About two to three years into her doctoral programme, Degai came to Colombi's office and said that she was interested in doing mapping work back home. When Colombi inquired about what kind of mapping, Degai responded that she wanted to map linguistic place names, areas of significance for the Itelmen people. Together, Colombi and Degai began to research who else was doing similar work, and in the course of that research, came across the work that Google Earth Outreach does with Indigenous partners. One of those partnerships was a project with the Surui of Brazil, and Degai noted that the partnership was initiated by one of the Surui leaders. Degai was impressed with Google's support for the Surui's proposed project (Google Earth Outreach 2016).

Colombi and Degai then began seeking contact information for the relevant project managers at Google, but were unsuccessful until Degai reached out to a colleague who was acquainted with the Surui leader who had worked with Google. Degai's colleague was able to put Degai and Colombi in touch with the Surui leader, who was in turn able to put Degai and Colombi in touch with Google Earth Outreach. Google responded immediately with a request for more information about the proposed project. Colombi and Degai explained the grave problem of Itelmen language endangerment, and also talked with Google Earth about the high biodiversity of the region, the importance it holds to world conservationists, and to Indigenous history and presence. In a very short period of time, Degai and Colombi forged a partnership with Google.

The Collaborative Process and Its Mutual Benefits

That partnership led, in 2013, to the first ever Indigenous mapping workshop at the University of Arizona, with two trainers from Google, one of whom was Brian Thom, a co-author on this chapter and an anthropologist at the University of Victoria, who is an expert in the Indigenous mapping methodology. Colombi also received funding from the National Science Foundation, Arctic Social Science Program to bring a delegation of Itelmen elders as well as the anthropologist David Koester to the workshop. The attendees spent several days planning how to proceed. As part of that planning, they learned the basics of how to use the software for the purposes of mapping Indigenous language as well as history and places of cultural significance, and they also

discussed any traps or concerns of doing mapping with Indigenous communities, with a particular concern of doing mapping with Indigenous communities in Russia. The final topic on the agenda was a discussion of intellectual property issues, including confidentiality of historic places, sacred sites, and hunting and fishing areas. By the end of the workshop, most of the preparations had been completed for field-based work in Kamchatka in 2014.

Early in 2014, Colombi received notice that he was being given a Fulbright Scholar Award to support his ethnographic work in Kamchatka and to help support the Google mapping work. Thus, in early September 2014, when Google sent Brian Thom to Kamchatka, Colombi was already there for his Fulbright exchange. Colombi and Thom held two workshops in September of 2014 in Kamchatka, one in the capital city of Petropavlovsk and the other in the remote Indigenous village of Kovran. Petropavlovsk is the only urban centre in Kamchatka and many people of Indigenous origin live there. The workshop was held at the public library, largely because it was one of few places that had internet accessibility. The Petropavlovsk workshop pairs Indigenous elders from the city with youth and they begin to learn how to work with the Google Earth software. The workshop successfully introduced urban Itelmen and several Koryak participants to the possibility of utilising the software for documenting and recording Indigenous heritage, including language, subsistence practices, history, and related topics.

After the workshop in Petropavlovsk, Colombi and Thom took a three-hour flight from the capital city via small aircraft to the coastal village of Kovran, located near the Sea of Okhotsk, along the west coast of the peninsula. Kovran is the cultural centre of Itelmen traditions. It also is the place where Koester and Kasten had conducted previous research. Moreover, Degai, who was present during the workshop, was living with her family in Kovran and conducting dissertation fieldwork. The Kovran workshops were focused on pairing elder knowledge holders with village youth and were held at the village school. The workshop included several excursions with the youth and elders to places of significance in Kovran and nearby areas, including Ust Kovran, the mouth of the Kovran river on the Sea of Okhotsk. Vika Petrasheva, Degai's grandmother, told a story during this outing of Elvel, the sacred volcano of Itelmen origin, which loomed in the background. The importance of these outings was to document those interactions by video and audio and then to populate the maps with those stories in Google Earth. The week-long workshop was followed by a reception in the school and the youth shared the maps they created with the elders. The maps were in both Itelmen and Russian and the training website was also in Russian and Itelmen, as well as English.

The two workshops in the fall of 2014 were the first ever attempt to digitise ethnographic and linguistic Itelmen heritage using mapping software. The goal is to continue to do more mapping work in the areas of linguistic place name mapping and also to articulate places of significance throughout the Itelmen homeland. Moreover, Degai, now with her PhD in hand, is back in Kovran and working with the community as the director of Kovran's Culture House. She is working with the school age children and teenagers on maintaining and populating the maps.

The goal is for Colombi to return to Kamchatka in the fall of 2017 and in 2018 to continue the mapping work and to initiate a new project that will focus on the importance of historic villages where the Itelmen once lived. As part of his Fulbright trip, Colombi travelled for five months expeditionary style along most of the west coast of the Kamchatka peninsula visiting historic Itelmen villages. Shut down after WWII, the historic villages were once places of great antiquity and in places that Indigenous peoples have always lived (Slezkine 1994). During the trip both his travel partner Vika Petrasheva and Itelmen elders remarked on the importance of these villages to Indigenous identity and history. For example, Petrasheva was born in the village of Utkholok and lived there until her family was relocated to Kovran when she was approximately 12 years of age. Today, Petrasheva is 75 and many elders of her generation have strong attachments to historic villages; it is where they were born and spent their childhood. They long to tell stories about those experiences and to share with the younger generations the significance of these places. Thus, the initial step of the historic village project will be to conduct survey work of two or three historic villages in reasonable proximity of Kovran. Colombi has been to all three of these historic villages during his Fulbright exchange, including visiting the historic village of Utkholok with Petrasheva, a memorable and emotional experience for her and Colombi.

The elders not only supported and saw value in the mapping project and workshops but had asked Colombi repeatedly to find researchers who could support the historic village collaborative research project. The project will be multiyear and multidisciplinary and include investigations in archaeology (i.e., non-invasive techniques), ethnography, mapping, and linguistics. The first phase is to conduct the ground penetrating radar survey to ascertain the extent of the three villages and to take core samples to investigate the chronological history of the area as well as cultural use. The ultimate plan is to conduct several years of fieldwork in these villages to reconstruct the past and to do so carefully and ethically with local Indigenous partners. What is important is that this project addresses the needs and recommendations of the Itelmen knowledge holders and leaders. It will document and record a valued

part of the Itelmen experience and the recent history of relocation and removal. It will also systematically collect data to support Itelmen use and occupancy of the area, which some claim goes back well into the past, possibly thousands of years of continued use and occupation in the region.

During Colombi's Fulbright travels, the elders commented on the importance of seeing the collections of Itelmen items housed in the museums of Saint Petersburg. Thus, Colombi sought and received funding from the University of Arizona and the National Science Foundation, Arctic Social Sciences Program to bring four fluent Itelmen speakers to Saint Petersburg to visit archived collections at two world renowned ethnographic museums: The Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology (also known as the *Kunstkamera*) and the National Museum of Ethnography. The Itelmen collections housed at both museums include material items of great cultural and historic significance, including Indigenous Kamchatkan items collected during the Bering I and II expeditions to Kamchatka and the Russian Far East during the first half of the eighteenth century. The museums also house extensive field notes and photographs from earlier ethnographies, such as those of the 1920s Russian Itelmen scholar Elizaveta Orlova and the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian ethnographers, Vladimir Jochelson and Vladimir Bogoraz, who worked in the Russian Far East and in Kamchatka under the direction of the anthropologist, Franz Boas.

Joining the elders were Colombi and two linguists, Jonathan Bobaljik from the United States and Chikako Ono from Japan. Koester helped Colombi with the planning of the grant but was unable to make the trip to Saint Petersburg for the museum work. The linguists, along with Koester, are constructing a detailed dictionary of the highly endangered Itelmen language, in both written and digital form. The point of the museum project was to facilitate connecting the elder speakers with the collections and to have the elders not only interact with the collections but to speak about those collections and their significance in the Itelmen language. Those exchanges occurred over a period of two weeks and were recorded digitally and with audio and video; the linguists remarked on how valuable the exchange was in terms of adding much needed cultural content to the dictionary. They also remarked on how rare it was not only to have the elders speak about the items in Itelmen but to do so between each other. In addition, the exchange was the first of its kind for the Itelmen and helps to initiate a reconnecting of those items with Itelmen knowledge holders.

Other outputs of the grant include a webinar that Colombi produced in mp3 format, including material about the museum exchange and the earlier mapping work and Fulbright exchange, for dissemination in Kamchatka with

Itelmen communities. Colombi also received funding to print and distribute 1500 copies of a book, with an accompanying DVD, authored by Colombi, Degai, and Petrasheva entitled *Remembering Lesnaya: Language, Culture, and History*. Copies of the book are being distributed throughout several Indigenous Itelmen and Koryak communities in Kamchatka.

The collaborative work between western researchers and Indigenous knowledge holders of Kamchatka is unique in that the research aims and objectives are largely driven by the community. They see the value in collecting the data for two reasons: to document, record, and celebrate Indigenous heritage; and to systematically collect data to support Indigenous claims to land and other resources in the future. Thus, what began with a question about a mapping project for the Itelmen community has already resulted in several additional projects benefiting both the Indigenous and academic communities.

Notes

1. The project described in this chapter is part of the Innovations in Ethnographic Mapping and Indigenous Cartographies project, funded by a Google Research Grant, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Insight Development Grant, with additional funding from the National Science Foundation, the Arctic Social Sciences Program, and the US Fulbright Scholar Program.
2. This chapter focuses on how the team was built and how the collaborative aspects of the project were built. We have previously published an article focusing on the methodological aspects of the project. (Thom et al. [2016](#)).

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