

PEOPLE WON'T DANCE IF THEY HAVE NOTHING TO EAT: DO ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND CENTRALLY PLANNED CULTURAL REVIVAL FIT TOGETHER?

Aimar Ventsel

Estonian Literary Museum, Vanemuise 42, 51003 Tartu, Estonia

Abstract: The Sakha Republic has played an important role in indigenous reorganization policy of the post-Soviet period. In 1991, a law on nomadic clan-based communities (*kochevaya rodovaya obshchina*) was enacted that attempted to provide a legal platform for the “cultural and economic revival” of small indigenous groups. This law was followed by others that reorganized reindeer herding, hunting, and self-governance of indigenous peoples. This process is viewed by both the state and indigenous activists as an attempt to maintain “the indigenous cultural heritage.” Not only Sakha and Russian, but many Western scientists, have praised the *obshchina* movement as the main form of indigenous reorganization. Shortly after the relevant legislation was adopted, the number of *obshchiny* increased to 400, but since then have decreased greatly. This paper discusses the concept of *obshchina* and shows that this new institution is only one of several new forms of property in the transition, which is treated on a vernacular level as an economic rather than a cultural institution. People themselves often prefer to establish other types of enterprises depending on the goals they pursue. Recent field research in Anabarskiy Rayon demonstrates that there is a discrepancy between centrally planned cultural revival and people’s understanding of their culture and identity.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF OBSHCHINA

Since the creation of the Soviet Union, one goal of the Communists was to “enlighten indigenous peoples” and “develop their cultures.” To these ends, the government established written languages and “houses of culture” (*dom kultura*) that in time produced a “national intelligentsia,” educated intellectuals of native origin (Slezkine, 1994, Chapters 7 and 9; Grant, 1995, Introduction). These intellectuals acted as professional representatives of their people; many were cultural workers organizing native folk dancing and singing groups, whereas others wrote textbooks, literature, and poetry for their people. The native intellectuals participated in cultural festivals and political meetings, and visited non-native schools as representatives of their people, often wearing stylized folk costumes over European clothing.

According to the “Leninist concept of nation” (Tishkov, 1992, pp. 371-394) language and so-called “spiritual culture” within the Soviet Union were directly connected to the attributes of a nation; the language, songs, dances, and literature distinguished various ethnic groups from each other whereas the government structure, official hierarchies, living standard, and “material basis of life” were to be homogeneous across the entire country. Until today, most indigenous intellectuals on various levels connect the survival of their people with maintaining the language, songs, dances, and folk costumes (e.g., Boiko and Kostyuk, 1992, pp. 173, 201; Gol’dérova, 2000).

En route to my field work, I met in a young man in Moscow involved in the movement of Siberian indigenous minorities. While discussing current affairs of native policy, I complained that some native leaders regarded the organizing of folklore singing and dance groups as the key to the “revitalization of indigenous culture” and the solution for native issues. By way of agreement he commented, “People won’t dance if they have nothing to eat!” We next discussed at length the importance of improving the living standard and the economic and social situation of the Siberian peoples. This paper analyzes the reorganization of Siberian native economies and explains to what extent they should “return back to the roots.”

The year 1991 was important for indigenous peoples of Russia for two reasons. First, several indigenous organizations and associations gathered in Moscow and formed RAIPON, the Russian Association of the People of the North and Far East. That same year, Russian President Boris Yel’tsin passed a decree to “end the second serfdom” (Van Atta, 1993, pp. 33-39) by giving individual state or collective farm (*sovkhos* or *kolkhoz*) workers the possibility of leaving their enterprise, establishing their own farm, and obtaining a share of the enterprise property and land to start their own private enterprise (Wegren, 1998).

Prior to that time, Siberian indigenous minorities were considered *inorodtsy* (strangers, not full citizens), a legacy of Tsarist Russia continued by the Soviet state (Forsyth, 1992; Slezkine, 1994; Mote, 1998). Before the 1917 revolution, Siberian indigenous peoples were considered aliens with no access to state office and free from military service. In Soviet Russia they were too “backward” in their development to bridge the gap between their own hunter-gatherer-nomad existence and the “developed” socialist society. As a rule, such “backward” groups were numerically small. Already the 1926 census in the Soviet Russia identified a group of “nations” that were smaller than 50,000, conferring upon them the status of Indigenous Less Numerous People (*korennyye malochislennyye narody*).¹ In 1930, the number of such peoples was 30, and most lived in Siberia (Hirsch, 1997, pp. 271-278). In 2000 the list expanded to include 45 ethnic groups. Those groups, living in Siberia, were in most cases outnumbered by the immigrant population and had become a minority in their historical territory. Moreover, they were economically and socially marginalized. The Communist Party stated even at the beginning of the Soviet period that small Siberian “nations” should be treated with care and that they were not ready to participate fully in the life of the socialist state (KPSS, 1953). Therefore, members of such small indigenous groups were seen as “incapable” of working in heavy industry or occupying other “modern” professions.² Today most Siberian native populations (30–70%, depending on the region) reside in remote settlements and are engaged in so-called “traditional branches of the economy” (*traditsionnyye otrasli ekonomii*)—i.e., hunting, fishing, sea mammal hunting, and reindeer herding. These activities belonged (and still belong) officially to “agriculture” (*sel’skokhozyaystvo*) and are subordinated in most regions to the local Ministry of Agriculture.

¹There are many ways of translating this term into English. I use the form Anderson (2000) uses in his monograph, because I believe it best conveys the meaning of the Russian term.

²The fact that such “incapability” resulted from social rather than cultural reasons was overlooked. In most cases, schools in remote indigenous villages had either lower standards than schools in industrial towns where the immigrants’ children studied, or lacked teachers. Therefore, indigenous children could not possibly compete with the immigrant children in technical schools that prepared workers for heavy industry.

The state collectivized hunting, reindeer herding, and fishing across Siberia in the 1930s and 1940s. Collective enterprises functioned as both economic actors and as “total social institutions” (Clarke, 1992, p. 3; Humphrey, 1995, pp. 1-12). State and collective farms had their own shops, clubs, schools, and kindergartens; their workers were entitled to free medical care; and in many cases enterprises supplied settlements with transport, supported students who went to study in another cities, and sent their workers on holiday to the Black Sea. Members of the Less Numerous Peoples had special entitlements, including the right to be a student without having to compete with others, and the right to own rifles and vehicles without licenses. The agricultural enterprises were not able, on their own, to support these privileges but were, *en gros*, subsidized from the profit of industries (Gregory and Stuart, 1986, p. 280; Humphrey, 1998, pp. x, 100-101).

With the collectivization of agriculture, the nature of hunting and reindeer herding changed: the earlier “lifestyle nomadism” (*bytovoye kochevaniye*) was replaced by “industrial nomadism” (*promyshlennoye kochevaniye*). Hunters and herders became workers of the brigades and were paid for fulfilling a “plan.” These policies likewise changed the family model. Hunting and reindeer brigades were made up of men whose wives stayed in the village to take care of the children and work in the village administration or local enterprises. With the advent of “scientific reindeer herding,” men stayed with herds and women stayed in the village, except for the one female “tentworker” (*chumrabortnitsa*) needed to care for a typical reindeer brigade of 5–7 men (Tuisku, 1999; Vitebsky and Wolfe, 2001, pp. 81-94). After the 1960s, hunting and reindeer herding were fully modernized, with reindeer brigade workers transported by helicopters, their supplies brought to camp by tractors or all-terrain vehicles, and brigades were equipped with modern means of communication (portable radio stations). By the 1980s, snowmobiles were in common use, and changed the pattern of migration and seasonal rounds (Liely, 1979, pp. 401-416; Pelto and Ludger, 1987, pp. 208-241).

After the 1990s economic collapse, the dismantling of state-owned agricultural structures, and the withdrawal of subsidies, the situation in Siberian indigenous villages worsened. State and collective farms were unable and unwilling to fulfill the social functions they carried in the Soviet period, and people were stranded in remote settlements without income, transport, electricity, decent education, or functioning social and medical care. With *perestroika* emerged an indigenous rights movement, supported by sympathetic Russian anthropologists and intellectuals, who raised the issue of “revitalizing” the indigenous cultures and improving the living standards of native minorities. This approach, called “neotraditionalism” (Pika and Prokhorov, 1994), advocated a contrary combination of the “back to the roots” ideology with a return to Soviet-period state subsidies. Calls for granting Siberian native minorities rights on their land and legal space for their activities to support their life grew in volume. In 1992, the government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) passed a law “On Nomadic Clan-Based Communities” (O kochevoy, 1992), permitting Siberian natives and “other persons who are engaged in traditional branches of economy” to form *obshchiny*, clan-based communities, which, according to the law, had both cultural and economic functions: to revitalize and maintain “traditional cultures” and to trade their produce. As an incentive to form *obshchiny*, members were relieved of income taxes for the first three years. In 2000, the Russian federal government

enacted a law on obshchiny at the federal level, legalizing this institution across the whole of Russia.

In the 1990s, when the obshchina movement grew quickly, the number of enterprises established increased at a rapid rate; obshchiny were seen as a solution to all the problems faced by the Less Numerous Peoples, and were greeted by anthropologists and indigenous activists as the tool to revitalize the “traditional” culture and indigenous identity (Belyanskaya, 1995, pp. 119-136). The obshchina was viewed as an institution that had the potential to reinstate self-government and engaged cultural activities (Fondahl et. al., 2000, pp. 401-417; Osherenko, 1995, pp. 227-237; Osherenko, 2001, pp. 695-734; Popova, 2001, pp. 44-49). These new transformation processes were often linked to the spirituality of Siberian natives and their special tie to the land and animals, relationships maintained by their own ecological culture (even within the state farm) that were not yet “spoiled” by the urban and industrial culture (Sokolova, 1995, pp. 43-46; Novikova, 2000, pp. 212-220; Vitebsky, 2000).

There has been much critical analysis of the obshchina movement. Sirina (1999) analyzed the obshchina in Sakha, in the region where the movement started, and compared the status of the obshchina in various regions. While in Sakha, the obshchina was by law a social institution (emphasis on “clan-based” and “traditional”); in other regions it was often a territorial-economic institution. According to the federal law, an obshchina should be a non-commercial organization (Sirina, 1999, 2000). Fondahl et al. (2001) show differences between federal and local obshchina law; land as a basis of obshchina existence is mentioned in the Law on Obshchiny of the Republic of Sakha but not in the federal law, which emphasized the main principle of “obshchina” as aboriginality and lifestyle. Sirina (1999) criticized the government of Sakha for attempts to link the obshchina to the nation-building process and de-ethnization of the concept, i.e. enacting legislation that makes it possible also for non-Less Numerous Peoples to establish obshchiny. Gray (2001) has demonstrated that the obshchina, although praised in the corridors of power, is not necessarily that successful and popular on the “grassroots” level. Ziker (2002) and Ssorin-Chaikov (1998) demonstrated in their research that the establishment of obshchiny and other private enterprises was connected with the general political and economic situation, and in some cases the legal costs are too high (transport to an administrative center, paperwork, etc.) and people prefer not to register (Gray, 2001). Gray and Ziker further argue that the obshchina often remains a paper contract, and people do not fully understand the function and status of the obshchina. Local economists also have argued that the obshchina, as a form of enterprise, has not been able to survive when reindeer herding is retained as the basic economic activity. According to them, reindeer herding and preservation of the indigenous lifestyle are possible only in large enterprises, such as sovkhoy (Yadrikhinskiy, 1998; Syrovatskiy, 2002). Despite these contradictions, all commend the obshchina as the only viable alternative to the sovkhoy for aboriginal reorganization.

THE REGION

The following is my analysis of the reorganization of new forms of property, based on field work in Anabarskiy Rayon (district), northwestern Sakha Republic

populated mainly by the Evenki and Even, and Uurung Khaia by Dolgans. Local populations spoke the northern dialect of Sakha. The local administration was dominated by natives; even the head of the district was a native Even.

Both Saaskylaakh and Uurung-Khaia were bases for state farms. Professional hunters and reindeer herders who “worked” out on the tundra comprised ca. 20% of the rayon’s population. However, every native hunted for wild reindeer and Arctic fox and fished seasonally in the tundra.

DISMANTLING SOVKHOZY AND NEW FORMS OF PROPERTY

In this section I provide a short history of changes in the “agricultural landscape” of Anabarskiy Rayon, where the breakdown of the old Soviet agricultural structure took longer than in other parts of Russia or even Sakha. In 1991, the Republic of Sakha passed the law on peasant farms or households (*krest'yanskoye khozyaystvo*), giving kolkhoz and sovkhoz workers a chance to break from the enterprise, obtain their share (including land plot), and start their own farming enterprise (O *krest'yanskom*, 1991). An important aspect of the law was that it defined the peasant farm as an economic unit that possessed rights to sell its products and hire labor (Article 5). In agricultural districts populated by ethnic Sakha, state and collective farms vanished shortly after this law was enacted, and the establishingment of private households was rapid (cf. Bychkova Jordan et al., 1998, pp. 219-231; Crate, 2003).

Local Context

In Anabarskiy Rayon, as in most other reindeer and hunting state and collective enterprises,³ the two former sovkhozy, “Arktika” and “Il’ya Spiridonov MUP” were reregistered in 1996–1997 as MUPs, i.e., municipal unitarian enterprises (*munitsipal’noye unitarnoye khozyaystvo*) and turned over to rayon ownership, thus freeing the state of the burden of agricultural subsidies. Fortunately, Anabarskiy Rayon is among the so-called “diamond provinces” (has some diamond mines within its territory), and so received a percentage of diamond income to support its nascent MUPs. Few reindeer brigades went over to *khozraschet*,⁴ a process already under way in other rayons by the late 1980s (Vitebsky, 1989, pp. 213-218).

One brigade changed status in 1998 and was re-registered as the “Erel” subsidiary enterprise of Il’ya Spiridonov MUP. Erel belonged to the structure of MUP but was allowed to market its produce independently, while receiving a certain amount of fuel, ammunition, and other supplies from the MUP. The enterprise was located on the Arctic coastline, in the northern part of the rayon, and was engaged mainly in reindeer

³In the Republic of Sakha, former reindeer sovkhozy still existed during my field work. They had changed their names and formal status, but maintained the previous structure. Some of these enterprises changed their names several times. Thus, the former Tomponskiy state farm, which I visited in July 2001, was reregistered as an *obshchina* and then converted into an agricultural production cooperative–trading post (*sel’skokhozyaystvennaya proizvodstvennaya (faktoriya) kooperativ*), whereas the director, main officials and functionaries, structure, and brigade plan remained unchanged. The enterprise went bankrupt and reindeer herders accused the director of stealing their wages.

⁴In other words, they became independent units within the state farm with their own budget and bank account, and possessed the legal right to decide how to use any profits.

herding and to limited extent also the hunting of wild reindeer and the trapping of Arctic fox.

In 1996, another brigade broke from the MUP Arktika and established the peasant farm “Buolkalaakh” in the southern part of the rayon. This enterprise kept reindeer and Sakha horses and was engaged also in hunting wild reindeer and Arctic fox. In 1998, the enterprise was re-registered as a *rodovaya obshchina* “Uotaakh Khaia.” Uottaakh Khaia was the first obshchina in the district and members received their share (*pay*), state financial support, and some equipment (e.g., trucks). The state helped motivate other brigades to establish obshchiny. Thus, in 1998, the “Uzda” obshchina was established, also in the southern part of the rayon. By the end of the 1990s there were already six registered obshchiny in Anabarskiy Rayon. Many small-scale enterprises (*maloye predpriyatiye*) engaged in production (for example a sausage factory), commerce (importing different goods and exporting fish and/or reindeer meat), or hunting and fishing also formed at this same time. Small-scale enterprises were independent of the MUP and, after obtaining necessary licenses, were free to market their produce.

Amidst these developments with obshchiny and small enterprises, a new actor emerged on the agricultural landscape—the “family enterprise” (*semeynoye khozyaystvo*). All three in Anabarskiy Rayon were based on extended family, with the father serving as the director of the enterprise working with his several sons and their families. Male siblings were registered in payrolls as hunters and women as “tent-workers.” All three enterprises had formerly been obshchiny but re-registered because the district head, who wanted to bring native families back to the tundra, had introduced policy in 2000 that focused on family-based enterprises.

General Context

Many local people with whom I discussed the issue of the obshchina complained that state officials were extremely hostile to the new independent agricultural enterprises and especially the privatization of reindeer husbandry. Indeed, domestic reindeer breeding—together with horse-breeding—is less privatized in Sakha agriculture (both 60% in state ownership in 1996) than cattle breeding (35% in state ownership) (Tichotsky, 2000, p. 216). The number of reindeer in the Republic of Sakha decreased by more than half within 10 years, falling from 361,600 in 1991 to 165,070 in 2000 (Klovov, 2001). Only in 2002 was the decline arrested, and the situation stabilized at 136,000 head. The official opinion was that the downward trend ended because in the few last few years no new obshchiny had been formed.

All state reindeer specialists I met felt negatively about the idea of private reindeer herding; it is a widespread opinion in the “corridors of power” that only large-scale reindeer herding operations had a chance of surviving. On the one hand, state agricultural officials are convinced that large state enterprises should be maintained and made profitable. On the other hand, the same officials want to help natives maintain their lifestyle and traditional economy—not because it is an efficient economy but as a source of cultural revitalization. My impression is that people who work in state reindeer planning and control are sincerely sympathetic with the natives (many of these officials are from indigenous minorities themselves). These state officials see the sovkhos reindeer herding and hunting as a “traditional economic activity.” One

young reindeer specialist told me once that “everything that is connected to reindeer herding is considered traditional here.” Because of political influence of such officials (and not because of the pressure of native activists) the Republic of Sakha introduced in 2000 a “reindeer herder’s wage,” which had nearly doubled by 2003.⁵

In 1997, the Republic of Sakha passed the Law On Reindeer Herding (Ob olenevodstve, 1997), which specified that all reindeer in the republic are “national treasure” (*natsional’noye dostoinstvo*) and the slaughtering of domestic reindeer is under state control. Although reindeer products remain the property of the animal’s owner, the state has the right to fix prices on these and the monopoly to buy the products. For the last five to six years, other than to fulfill the “state order,” no permission has been granted to slaughter reindeer, thus moving domestic reindeer herding out of the economic sphere.

Marketing the Produce

The moratorium on domestic reindeer slaughtering meant that the only sources of income were the meat of wild reindeer and fish, prompting the number of new enterprises engaged in hunting in Anabarskiy Rayon to grow, and the number of reindeer herding enterprises to decline. Hunting is a high-risk business, dependent on ecological conditions and seasons. While reindeer enterprises received stable income in the form of subsidies and the “reindeer herder wage,” hunters received less help from the state. On the other hand, when the migration of reindeer was numerous and the fishing season was successful, the hunters earned many times more money than reindeer herders.

The Ministry of Agriculture, via the local administration, issued all enterprises a *goszakaz* (state order), similar to the Soviet centrally distributed production plan. In theory, the *goszakaz* was the state’s agreement to either buy meat and fish from the enterprise, or guarantee a market for it. In reality, the state supplied only the order, and the enterprises had to independently find a buyer for their produce, then bring the paper proof of the transaction to the administration. When an enterprise managed to sell during the season the amount of meat and fish “ordered” by the state, the plan was considered fulfilled, which entitled the enterprise to subsidies.

To sell their meat, the enterprises could turn to several possibilities. The state established two concerns, “Taba” (Reindeer) and “Sakhabult” (Sakha Hunt), based on former agro-industrial complexes. These concerns had both the official monopoly on trade with meat, hides, young velvet antlers, and other products and the obligation to help hunters and reindeer herders. Informants claimed that neither enterprise made an exceptionally good trade partner. Despite the *de jure* monopoly, Taba and Sakhabult are *de facto* only two players among others in the market for fish, meat, and hides. In trading velvet antlers, Sakhabult maintained a near-monopoly, but in all other products the state enterprises compete with numerous private entrepreneurs and private or state enterprises.

A more popular business partner was the diamond company Alrosa, which pays good money and supplies its partners with groceries, fuel, and equipment at no cost

⁵The same state reindeer herding specialist pushed through the program of subsidizing the trade with products of wild reindeer in order to prevent the slaughter of domestic reindeer.

(thanks to its social programs). For some hunters, Alrosa built underground ice chambers (*bul-uus*) or hunting cabins. One main problem for producers was that Alrosa needed meat in quantities that only the larger enterprises could supply, with many (7–10) hunters and workers to butcher the killed reindeer.

Reindeer herders who also hunted for extra income had a centrally organized network of partnership, or *shefstvo*, village-based enterprises, and often construction or mechanical brigades. Partnership was established by the administration and was voluntary. Reindeer herders supplied *shefy* with meat and hides, and as a “countergift” received construction material, timber, fuel, and other materials.

Because reindeer meat and fish were the primary and cheapest food in the district, there was always a market for them in small quantities. School cafeterias, kindergartens, the airport, local hospital, and people without hunting relatives (mainly immigrants) formed a stable market. The advantage of such transactions was that most of them did not ask for papers (veterinary license, etc.) which were obligatory for trading with larger enterprises or traders. The disadvantage was that, although it was a stable market, its capacity was quite limited.

To support new enterprises, the Ministry of Petty Entrepreneurship (Ministerstvo Malogo Predprinimatel'stvo) grants loans and credits. Although these typically are relatively small and require a lot of complicated paperwork, for many enterprises they afford almost the only means of financing for investments. Banks, as a rule, were reluctant to finance “agricultural” enterprises because of the risks and the low profit involved. Also, people in remote villages lacked experience in communicating with financial institutions and the money to fly to Yakutsk to file the papers. However, under the ministry program, enterprises needed only to contact local authorities, consult with them, and get help in completing the forms.

In addition to large enterprises, several private entrepreneurs (*kommersanry*) bought, or rather bartered, meat and fish for cash, groceries, TV sets, snowmobiles and spare parts, clothing, hunting and fishing equipment, etc. These private entrepreneurs arrived in Uurung Khaia in several trucks filled with goods and groceries for barter in winter months after the winter road was passable. Some, who visited Uurung Khaia regularly, had permanent trading partners in the village who sometimes received groceries cheaper if they had meat, fish, or hides to offer. With these trends and processes in mind, my discussion now moves to understanding the current situation of transitional organizational forms in Anabarskiy Rayon.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRANSITION

The head of Anabarskiy Rayon was a supporter of a private reindeer herding if it was done according to his plan—the reindeer would remain rayon property with management be transferred to private hands. In April 2001, he collected reindeer herders of Uurung Khaia in the office building of MUP and announced his decision to lease reindeer herds to new enterprises. He also encouraged brigades to split from the MUP and establish new independent enterprises. Several hunting brigades present immediately announced their departure from the MUP and registered as *rodovyye obshchiny*. Young reindeer herders of the fifth brigade, for their part, re-registered as a reindeer obshchina and announced their plan to lease the same herd they had been taking care of in the MUP. Afterwards, they told me excitedly, “now we start to work for

ourselves.” Potentially, the chances for the enterprise to increase the number of their reindeer in order to slaughter some animals were not bad, considering they were freed from several taxes in the first five years and herders received deer up front as their share (*pay*). Additionally, the state company Taba, one of the successor enterprises of the former Anabarskiy agro-industrial complex, was obliged to provide equipment and supplies to reindeer-herding obshchinas. Reindeer herders were therefore optimistic that they could survive the first years when the herd was not yet big enough to slaughter animals for sale.

Not all were so enthusiastic. One evening I visited friends from the third brigade of the MUP. They were frightened of the plans to “destroy the sovkhov” and frustrated with current developments. The plan to turn over all reindeer herds to private management was for them the collapse of the structure of “industrial reindeer herding” that remained from Soviet-era agriculture.

A hunter from the small-scale enterprise Elden, engaged in hunting wild reindeer and fishing in the northern tundra said, “the plans of the district head do not interest me, this is another organization.” In fact, people from Elden had every right to ignore the attempts to privatize reindeer herding since they had recently signed a solid contract with Alrosa, not only paying good prices and transporting the meat out of the tundra by their own helicopters, but also equipping and financing a new hunting base. From the beginning, Elden was oriented to large-scale production; they had even more hunters than when they had been a state farm brigade and could hunt on a larger territory. Because the hunting grounds of the enterprise were located far in the north, they were only in rare contact with other hunters and reindeer herders. Therefore they could act independently. Also, good contacts with Alrosa helped in maintaining the enterprise’s independence from the local administration and its subsidies.

Most other enterprises had not been not so lucky. Tsökördeekh, another small-scale enterprise, had an underground chamber full of reindeer carcasses that the director could not sell. The enterprise had no trucks and it was economically unfeasible to rent one to bring only a few carcasses out of the tundra while several dozens remained in the ice chamber. The enterprise had another brigade, a reindeer-herding one. Luckily, the wages of the herders were paid by the state; still the enterprise had to take care of supplies. This enterprise was once registered as an obshchina, but as its activities expanded the status was changed because of access to credits and market. Namely, some larger enterprises like the diamond mining company and aviation were reluctant to buy from obshchiny because of too much paperwork; the bookkeeping for such enterprises had to follow federal, not republic, rules and since obshchiny at this time had no status at the federal level, there was much more paperwork involved for the buyer.

At the time, the director of the family enterprise Tiisteekh, only a few hours by snowmobile from Tsökördeekh, and the father of a large family, frequently visited their base with one of his sons and each time brought back some reindeer carcasses with him, which they sold to the local cafeteria and music school kitchen. The old man checked his trap lines on the way and brought some Arctic fox furs to sell on every trip. Eventually, his oldest son managed to rent a cheap truck and they brought two tons of meat out of the tundra. With this money and some credit from the rayon administration, the enterprise bought a used truck in order to become independent. The enterprise profited from the supportive policy of the head of the rayon

administration; the rayon lent the enterprise rifles to start their own enterprise. Also, the Tiisteekh family received two snowmobiles from the rayon as assistance “to traditional branches of the economy”; when the rayon’s veterinarian checked reindeer herds in summer, the barge that transported the crew for reindeer corrals delivered timber for Tiisteekh.

Because many workers of the enterprise, especially the wives of sons, stayed in the village between the hunting seasons and earned money by doing various jobs, the enterprise was able to finance itself. In this sense, the enterprise was a network of activities based on and regulated by kinship ties within one extended family. There was a feeling of unity in the family, and people often arranged or worked for the enterprise without expecting any pay. They saw it rather as helping the family and acting in its interests. Every household in this enterprise was supplied with meat and fish, and helped relatives with labor when needed.

When I visited the subsidiary enterprise Erel in the tundra, I noticed that reindeer herders and the director of the enterprise had absolutely contradictory views on the enterprise’s present situation and future. One reindeer herder told me once: “Our boss is bad (*kuhakhan toion*). When we established the enterprise we thought it will be better. But now, there is no difference between us and the sovkhos brigades. The boss should do more good contracts, with Alrosa and village organizations.” The director told me that he tries to make his deals with “Sakhabult.” They pay less than other enterprises but in cash and within two weeks. To make such a deal, he has to travel to the Sakha Republic capital of Yakutsk, but then he has a chance to buy cheaper equipment as well. His plans were to focus more on hunting wild reindeer because there was hardly any chance to earn income with domestic reindeer herding. He hoped that when the herd grows the enterprise will be able to sell the meat of their own animals.⁶ According to his opinion, the herd should be privatized because in the current situation the reindeer herders do not look after animals carefully enough: “When they [reindeer] are own animals [i.e., owned by the herders themselves] then people work better.”

The director told me that it was a mistake to register the enterprise as a subsidiary one. The credit loans, which the Ministry of Small Scale Entrepreneurship offered to him, were too small to buy a truck. But it also made no sense to take a loan from an average bank, because the banks were not eager to finance such enterprises and the interest rates were too high.

As mentioned already, some reindeer herders were sceptical about the privatization of reindeer herds. When Erel split from the MUP and when an *obshchina* was established during the meeting in the office of MUP, both times some reindeer herders left the new enterprise. When I asked them why they did this, they all responded that they “do not want to quit with the sovkhos.” One of these herders said to me that the former state enterprise still “gives you something for free.” The fact was that at that time, no private reindeer herder was wealthier than the workers at MUP. Although there was hope for a better future, some reindeer herders preferred to remain in MUP to have those social guarantees (free supplies and equipment, fuel) that private enterprises could not offer. Also, there were older men sceptical about the idea of new

⁶These plans were not supposed to be needed. In spring 2001, the wild reindeer migration took all the domestic animals of the enterprise with them and Erel ceased to exist as a reindeer herding enterprise.

private enterprises surviving without centrally organized and managed veterinarian and zootechnical services. Many of these men used to be Communist Party members before the collapse and they represented the belief that “in Communist times everything was better, there was law and order,” whereas new enterprises have no working principle and the private reindeer herding can only perish. These men told me that in private institutions the link to the state is lost. Only large state enterprises are capable of breeding reindeer “in the right way,” they told me, referring to the fact that only in state enterprises can the reindeer breeding be sufficiently “scientific,” with work distribution, regular head counts, and vaccinations.

CONCLUSION

There are different views on what is “traditional” and how the revival of indigenous cultures in Siberia should proceed. The purpose of this paper is to show that on a local level, the ways of coping with the post-Socialist reality can be quite diverse. I argue that in Anabarskiy Rayon, as in many other parts of Siberia, the indigenous identity is not in danger of being lost. Reindeer herding and hunting compete minimally with obshchiny, and individuals are pursuing a variety of new production forms to survive post-Socialist transformation.

To be successful, the new obshchina must function differently from the traditional pre-collectivisation form of clan-based community and must adapt to the changed environment of the last 50–60 years (Fondahl, 1998, pp. 78, 79, 120). The social structure and networks of Siberian natives have been shaped by decades of Soviet policy and have adapted to the reality of collectivized agriculture, evident in the fact that the new officially registered “clan-based” enterprises grew out of brigades of former state farms. Kinship structure continued to exist, and through this network, the management of common resources, distribution of commodities, and reciprocal help at the local level is still alive.

The obshchina is not the universal and only solution to all existential troubles of Siberian natives. The fact that many natives want to maintain their affiliation with the sovkhoz is common across Siberia (cf. the attitude in Yamal; Osherenko, 2001, p. 729). There are other forms of entrepreneurship besides the obshchina that in some situations are more useful.

I discovered that the choice of legal status depended heavily on the state credit policy (certain enterprises can only receive certain kinds of loans) and marketing strategies of the enterprise. Thus, larger hunting-oriented enterprises have less interest in being an obshchina than a reindeer enterprise: their land use pattern is different and the need for additional finances to buy equipment stronger. On the other hand, for an enterprise that is small enough to make use of local privileges, the status of “family household” is optimal. In this situation, in Anabarskiy Rayon the obshchina was reduced to one possible form of economic institution that has lost its ideological status.

LITERATURE

Anderson, David G. *Identity and Ecology in Arctic Siberia: The Number One Reindeer Brigade*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000.

- Belyanskaya, M. Kh.** "Sovremennyye obshchiny evenov Yakutii (Current Obshchiny of the Even of Yakutia)," in: Z. P. Sokolova, ed., *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoye i kul'turnoye razvitiye narodov Severa i Sibirii: Traditsii i sovremennost'* (*Social-Economic and Cultural Development of People of the North and Siberia: Traditions and the Present*). Moscow, Russia: IFA, 1995, pp. 119-136.
- Boiko, V. I., and Kostyuk, V. K.** *Evenki basseyna Yeniseya (Evenki of the Yenisey Basin)*. Novosibirsk, Russia: Nauka, 1992.
- Bychkova Jordan, Bella, Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, and Robert K. Holz.** "Post-Soviet change in a Yakutian farm village," *Erdkunde*, Vol. 52, 1998, pp. 219-231.
- Clarke, Simon.** "Privatization and the development of capitalism in Russia," *New Left Review*, No. 196, 1992, pp. 3-27.
- Crate, Susan A.** "Viliui Sakha post-Soviet adaptation: A subarctic test of Netting's smallholder theory," *Human Ecology*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2003.
- Fondahl, Gail.** *Going Ground? Evenkis, Land, and Reform in Southeastern Siberia*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998.
- Fondahl, Gail, Olga Lazebnik, and Greg Poelzer.** "Aboriginal Territorial Rights and the Sovereignty of the Sakha Republic," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 41, No. 6, September 2000, pp. 401-417.
- Fondahl, Gail, Olga Lazebnik, Greg Poelzer, and Vasily Robbek.** "Native 'land claims', Russian style," *The Canadian Geographer*, Vol. 45, 2001, pp. 545-561.
- Forsyth, James.** *A History of the Peoples of Siberia. Russia's North Asian Colony 1581-1990*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Gol'derova, A. A.** *Opyt raboty Anabarskogo otdeleniya Assotsiatsii korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa Respubliki Sakha (Yakutia) (The Work Experience of the Anabar Department of The Association of Native Less Numbered People of the North of the Republic of Sakha [Yakutia])*. Yakutsk, Russia: Kuduk, 2000.
- Grant, Bruce.** *In the Soviet House of Culture. A Century of Perestroikas*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Gray, Patty.** "Chukotkan reindeer husbandry in the post-socialist transition," *Polar Research*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2000, pp. 31-38.
- Gray, Patty.** *The Obshchina in Chukotka: Land, Property, and Local Autonomy*. Halle, Germany: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Working Paper No. 29, 2001.
- Gregory, Paul R. and Robert C. Stuart.** *Soviet Economic Structure and Performance*. Cambridge, UK: Harper and Row, 1986.
- Hirsch, Francine.** "The Soviet Union as a work-in-progress: Ethnographers and the category nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 censuses," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 56, 1997, pp. 271-278.
- Humphrey, Caroline.** "Introduction," *Cambridge Anthropology* (special issue on "Surviving in Transition: Development Concerns in the Post-Socialist World"), Vol. 18, No. 2, 1995, pp. 1-12.
- Humphrey, Caroline.** *Marx Went Away, But Karl Stayed Behind*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998.
- Klokov, K. B.** *Olenevodstvo i olenevodcheskiye narody Severa Rossii. Chast 1. Respublika Sakha (Yakutia) (Reindeer Husbandry and Reindeer-Breeding Peoples of the Russian North. Part 1. Sakha Republic [Yakutia])*. St. Petersburg, Russia: Institut of Geography, St. Petersburg University, 2001.

- KPSS** (Communist Party of the Soviet Union). *KPSS v resolyutsiakh i resheniyakh s"yezдов, konferentsii, i plenumov TsK (CPSU in Resolutions of Congresses, Conferences, and Central Committee Plenums)*. Moscow, USSR, 1953.
- Liely, Helmut**. "Shepherds and reindeer nomads in the Soviet Union," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. XXXI, 1979, p. 401-416.
- Mote, Victor L.** *Siberia. Worlds Apart*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.
- Novikova, N. I.** "Traditsionnoye prirodopol'zovaniye—pravo i/ili otvetstvennost' (Traditional Resource Use—A Right and/or Responsibility), in: N. I. Novikova and V.A. Tishkov, eds., *Yuridicheskaya antropologiya. Zakon i zhizn' (Legal Anthropology. The Law and Life)*. Moscow, Russia: Strategiya, 2000, 212-220.
- O kochevoy.** "O kochevoy rodovoy, rodoplemennoy obshchine korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa Respubliki Sakha (Yakutia) (Law on Nomadic Clan, Clan-Tribal Communities of Indigenous Less-Numerous People of the North of the Republic of Sakha [Yakutia])," 1992.
- O krest'yanskom.** "O krest'yanskom khozyaystve. Zakon Yakutskoy-Sakha Sotsialistitseskoy Respubliki (On Peasant Enterprise. Law of the Yakutian Socialist Republik)," 1991.
- Ob olenevodstve.** "Zakon RS (Ya) ob olenevodstve (Law on Reindeer Husbandry of the Republic of Sakha [Yakutia]," No. 179-1, 1997.
- Osherenko, Gail.** "Indigenous rights in Russia: Is title to land essential for cultural survival?," *The Georgetown International Environmental Law Review*, Vol. 13, 2001, pp. 695-734.
- Oshrenko, Gail.** "Indigenous political and property rights and economic/environmental reform in northwest Siberia," *Post-Soviet Geography*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1995, pp. 227-237.
- Pelto, Pertti J. and Müller-Wille Ludger.** "Snowmobiles. Technological revolution in Arctic," in: H. Russell and Pertti J. Pelto, eds., *Technology and Social Change*, second ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1987, pp. 208-241.
- Pika, A. I. and B. B. Prokhorov.** *Neotraditsionalizm na Rossiyskom Severe i gosudarstvennaya regional'naya politika (Neotraditionalism in the Russian North and State Regional Policy)*. Moscow, Russia, 1994.
- Popova, A. G.** "Demograficheskaya situatsiya v rodovykh obshchinakh Respubliki Sakha (Yakutia) (Demographic Situation in Clan-Based Communities in the Republic of Sakha [Yakutia])," in: I. I. Poiseyev, I. N. Vinokurov, R. I. Donskoy, P. E. Tobukov, and M. K. Sleptsov, eds., *Problemy Kraynego Severa Yakutii: Sos-toyaniye i puti resheniya (Problems of the Far North: The Situation and Ways of Resolving It)*. Yakutsk, Russia: Severoved, 2001, pp. 44-49.
- Sirina, A.** *Rodovyye obschiny malochislennykh narodov Severa v Respublike Sakha (Yakutia): Shag k samoopredeleniyu? (Clan-Based Communities of the People of the North in the Republic of Sakha: A Step toward Self-Determination?)*. Moscow, Russia: Institut Etnologii i Antropologii, No. 126, 1999.
- Sirina, A.** "Zakon i zhizn' (opyt zakonodatel'nogo uregulirovaniya traditsionnogo prirodopol'zovaniya v Respublike Sakha (Yakutia) (Law and life [The experience with juridicial regulation of traditional resource use])," in: N. I. Novikova, and V. A. Tishkov, eds., *Yuridicheskaya antropologiya. Zakon i zhizn' (Legal Anthropology. The Law and Life)*. Moscow, Russia: Strategiya, 2000, pp. 196-211.

- Slezkine, Yuri.** *Arctic Mirrors. Russia and the Small Peoples of the North.* Ithaca, NY and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1994.
- Sokolova, Zoja.** "Finnougrovedeniye i finno-ugorskiye narody (Finno-Ugrian Studies and the Finno-Ugrian People)," in: Heikki Seilenthal and Tonu Leskinen, eds., *Pars VIII: Oratio Plenaria et commentarii. Congressus Octavus Internationalis Fenno-Ugristarum 10.-15.8.1995.* Jyväskylä, Finland: Gummerus Kirjapaino Oy, 1995, 43-46.
- Ssorin-Chaikov, Nikolai.** "Stateless Society, State Collectives, and the State of Nature in Sub-Arctic Siberia: Evenki Hunters and Herders in the Twentieth Century," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1998.
- Syrovatskiy, D. I.** "K voprosu o neobkhodimosti i merakh sokhraneniya olenovodstva (On the question of the necessity and means of maintaining reindeer husbandry)," in: Yu. I. Shcheykin, I. F. Lapparova, A. I. Savvinov, V. A. Petrova, M. P. Lukina, and N. D. Petrova, eds., *Tezisy vserossiyskoy konferentsii "Dukhovnaya kul'tura narodov Severa i Arktiki v nachale tret'yego tysyachel'iya" s 19 po 24 avgusta 2002 goda, Yakutsk (Abstracts of the All-Russian Conference on Spiritual Culture of the Peoples of the North and Arctic at the Beginning of the Third Millennium).* Yakutsk, Russia: RAN SO IPMNS.
- Tichotsky, John.** *Russia's Diamond Colony. The Republic of Sakha.* Amsterdam, Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000.
- Tishkov, Valery A.** "The crisis in Soviet ethnography," *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 33, 1992, pp. 371-394.
- Tuisku, Tuula.** *Nenetsien ankarat elämisen ehdot tundralla ja külässä. Poronhoidon sopeutumisstrategiat ja delokaloitumisprosessi Nenetsiassa (Nenets' Complicated Life Choices in the Tundra and Village. Adaption and Delocalization Strategies of Reindeer Husbandry in Nenetsia).* Rovaniemi, Finland: Lapin yliopisto, Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis, No. 23, 1999.
- Van Atta, Don.** "Yeltsin decree finally ends 'second serfdom' in Russia," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 2, 1993, pp. 33-39.
- Vitebsky, Piers.** "Reindeer herders of northern Yakutia: A report from the field," *Polar Record*, Vol. 25, 1989, pp. 213-218.
- Vitebsky, Piers.** *Coping with Distance: Social, Economic and Environmental Change in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Northeast Siberia. Report on Expedition Funded by the Gilchrist Educational Trust in Association with the Royal Geographical Society, 1999.* Cambridge, UK: Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, 2000.
- Vitebsky, Piers, and Sally Wolfe.** "The separation of the sexes among Siberian reindeer herders," in: Elaine M. Low and Soraya Tremayne, eds., *Sacred Custodians of the Earth?: Women, Spirituality, and the Environment.* New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2001, pp. 81-94.
- Wegren, Stephen.** *Agriculture and the State in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia.* Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998.
- Yadrikhinskiy, Vasili Vasilevich.** *Rezervy olenovodstva Respubliki Sakha (Yakutia) (Reserves of Reindeer Husbandry of the Republic of Sakha [Yakutia]).* Yakutsk: YaNTs SO RAN, 1998.
- Ziker, John P.** *Peoples of the Tundra. Northern Siberians in the Post-Communist Transition.* Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2002.