



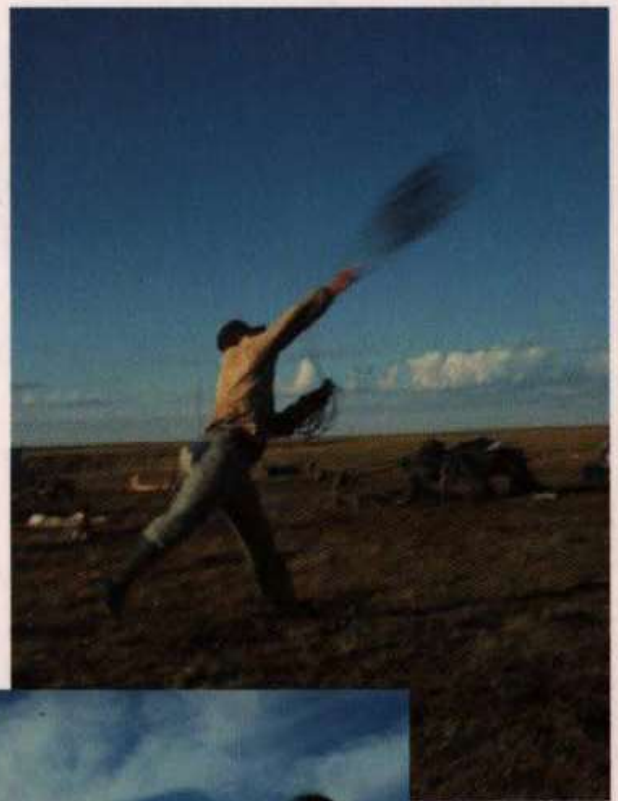
Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

# Reindeer, *Rodina* and Reciprocity

Kinship and Property Relations  
in a Siberian Village

*Aimar Ventsel*



LIT



## **Reindeer, *Rodina* and Reciprocity**

### **Kinship and Property Relations in a Siberian Village**

Kin-based social networks are the main focus of this study of a hunter–herder community in the northwest of the Republic of Sakha, Russian Federation. Aimar Ventsel gives a clear account of the formal organisational changes which have taken place since the demise of socialism and shows how informal relations help local people to cope with increased insecurity, both inside and outside formal structures. Documenting the strategies used to extend kinship, the author draws attention to their relevance for understanding the new system of property relations. While certain features are the products of a specific history and the local environment, the work will appeal to all scholars of Siberia and of postsocialist societies. It also contributes to the wider field of herder-hunter studies by showing how this combination of roles could persist throughout the Soviet era down to the present day.

The ownership and use of land have been prominent themes in the anthropology of postsocialism. Ventsel shows that, in this district of Sakha, the institution of the ‘master’, disposing of widely recognised rights over ‘his’ lands and making them effective through kin-based social networks, has regained its central importance. Notions of homeland (*rodina*) are rooted both in pre-socialist modes of land tenure and in structures of territoriality established in the Soviet era.

Kinship emerges in this book as a structure that does much more than organise household and familial relations and land use. It serves to link different modes of production and also different regions and social groups. Kin-based social networks are used to distribute various commodities and services, sometimes across long distances. They can also be observed in human-animal relationships. Ventsel shows that domestic reindeer have multiple roles and meanings: they can be transacted as gifts, some become working animals, many are made objects of differentiated usufruct rights in accordance with the norms and practices of the local communities. Kin-based social networks also regulate access to wild reindeer.

Ventsel demonstrates the continued importance of pre-Soviet norms, e.g. concerning reciprocity, but his study also shows that indigenous traditions have incorporated Soviet social values, some of which have persisted in the postsocialist era. Indigenous traditions of reciprocity and the ethnic categories associated with them have been liable to manipulation and instrumentalisation. Ethnicity can be used to exclude others but Ventsel finds that local understandings of identity are highly situational and have defied the attempts of both the Soviet state and the Republic of Sakha to impose fixed classifications.

Finally, this study also addresses another important but neglected issue in postsocialist Siberian studies—contemporary mechanisms of social control at community level. As in other fields, here too the vacuum left by a diminishing state has been filled in part by kinship networks. Ventsel explores local understandings of crime and punishment in the context of property relations and control over the means of coercion. He shows this to be very much a product of the postsocialist conjuncture and concludes that common images of Siberian indigenous people as ‘wild’ or as ‘noble savages’ conceal a complex field of norms and strategies.



# **Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia**

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Aimar Ventsel

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Photo 2 (bottom): A lasso-throwing competition at the base camp of the herders of the Number Five Reindeer Brigade of uurung Khaia, Anabar tundra, 2005.

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# Contents

	List of Illustrations	ix
	Preface by Chris Hann	xi
	Acknowledgements	xv
	Note on Transliteration	xvii
	Glossary of Russian and Sakha Terms	xix
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Field Region	2
1.2	Fieldwork Setting and Methods	14
1.3	Literature Review	17
1.4	Overview of the Structure of the Book	42
<b>2</b>	<b>History</b>	<b>47</b>
2.1	Introduction	47
2.2	From the Seventeenth Century until the Beginning of the Revolution	49
2.3	The First Soviet Years: 1917–1930	62
2.4	Building Soviet Society in Anabar: The Late 1920s to 1930s	70
2.5	Living under Socialism: 1945–1991	75
2.6	Conclusion	85
<b>3</b>	<b>The Agricultural Landscape</b>	<b>87</b>
3.1	Introduction	87
3.2	The Municipal Enterprise (MUP) 'Hero of Labour Il'ia Spiridonov'	97
3.3	A Subsidiary Enterprise of the MUP	105
3.4	The <i>obshchina</i> (Clan-Based Community)	110
3.5	A Family Enterprise	116
3.6	A Small-scale Enterprise	120
3.7	Conclusion	122

<b>4</b>	<b>The Ethnography of <i>Rodina</i></b>	<b>125</b>
4.1	Introduction	125
4.2	The Tundra as Backyard	131
4.3	Time as a Paradigm	135
4.4	' <i>He Knows it...</i> '	140
4.5	The Borders	144
4.6	Conclusion	146
<b>5</b>	<b>Traditions of Reciprocity</b>	<b>149</b>
5.1	Introduction: The 'Law of the Tundra' and Kinship	149
5.2	Kinship Networks and Family Structures	152
5.3	Cooperation among <i>tundroviki</i>	161
5.4	Relations between Tundra and Village/Town	171
5.5	Non-Kin Reciprocity	180
5.6	Conclusion	185
<b>6</b>	<b>Reindeer and Social Relations</b>	<b>187</b>
6.1	Introduction	187
6.2	Domestic Reindeer	189
6.3	The Reindeer Brigade: A Microcosm of Social Relations	201
6.4	State Reindeer	216
6.5	Privately Owned Animals	220
6.6	Conclusion	230
<b>7</b>	<b>Ethnicity and Local Identity</b>	<b>231</b>
7.1	Introduction	231
7.2	The Dolgan of the Republic of Sakha	234
7.3	Two Faces of Local Identity	254
7.4	<i>Myn sakhabyň!</i> (I am Sakha!)	261
7.5	Conclusion	267
<b>8</b>	<b>The Structures and Methods of Social Control</b>	<b>269</b>
8.1	Introduction	269
8.2	The Male Age System in Uurung Khaia	273
8.3	Non-violent Methods of Social Control	277
8.4	Individual and Group Violence	284



8.5	Exclusion from the 'Moral Space' of the Community	295
8.6	Conclusion	298
<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>301</b>
9.1	Summary	302
9.2	Tradition, Reciprocity and Kinship	309
	Bibliography	313
	Appendix 1: The Family of Spiridon Ivanovich Tuprin (Moigo)	351
	Appendix 2: Kinship Tree of the Tupriny Family	353
	Appendix 3: Резюме на русском языке	355
	Index	359





# List of Illustrations

## Plates

1	Migration of the reindeer brigade	10
2	The 'main street' of the village of Uurung Khaia	83
3	Oleg, a reindeer herder, playing the accordion on a sunny spring day	106
4	The author with members of the family hunting enterprise in Tiistaakh, Yöle River	117
5	Repairing a dead fall trap ( <i>paas</i> )	145
6	Digging coal	168
7	A helicopter picks up people from the reindeer brigade	169
8	Carcasses of sick and injured reindeer that were slaughtered after the corral	217
9	Cutting antlers at the corral	228
10	A boy with a Dolgan winter hat from Krasnoiarskii Krai	247

## Maps

1	Russia and the Republic of Sakha	3
2	The Anabarskii District	7
3	Yöle River region and the author's main field sites in the tundra	12

## Figures

1	Reindeer ownership in the Anabarskii district in 1926	67
2	Reindeer ownership among the Dolgan in 1926–7	68
3	Reindeer numbers in the Anabarskii district	82
4	Reindeer numbers in the Republic of Sakha	82
5	Genealogy of the Tuprin extended family, drawn by Uibaan (Ivan) Tuprin	250

## Tables

1	Agricultural categories in Sakha, numbers of units, 1990–2001	92
2	Ownership of domestic animals in 2002	92
3	Enterprises and activities in the Anabar tundra	93
4	The number of reindeer in MUP 'Il'ia Spiridonov' reindeer brigades, 2000–1	100



## Preface

This study documents how reindeer herders and hunters in the far north of the Russian Federation have coped with radical changes to their institutional environment in the wake of the collapse of socialism. Aimar Ventsel's project in a remote district of Northern Sakha, one of the coldest inhabited locations on the planet, invites comparison with those of Joachim Otto Habeck and Florian Stammler, whose monographs were published earlier this year in this series. The most obvious distinctive feature of this study is the ethnic dimension: Ventsel is the first western-trained anthropologist to carry out sustained fieldwork among the Dolgan population of the Anabar district. Yet ethnicity is by no means the most prominent theme: Ventsel concentrates rather on everyday economic practices, paying special attention to cooperation and reciprocity. In this region, the organisation of the new district enterprise displays much continuity with the old state farm. Nonetheless uncertainties have increased and Ventsel shows how villagers have adapted a range of strategies to help them adjust to the new conditions, notably reliance on kinship networks. He thereby makes important contributions not only to the Siberianist literature but to the literature on postsocialist societies more generally.

The study will also be of interest to specialists in hunting-herding communities, especially for its data concerning relationships between people and animals, and between people and the harsh natural environment that is their homeland, their *rodina*. The inhabitants of this region have a long history of combining herding and hunting that defied the concepts of the Soviet planners as well as the standard classifications of the anthropological literature. Ventsel (whose earlier training in his native Estonia was in history) documents this historical context from the seventeenth century onwards. He draws on a wide range of Russian sources and supplements them with fieldwork data, e.g. when casting doubt on Soviet scholars' claims concerning class distinctions in the pre-socialist period. The narrative concentrates on issues pertaining to political economy and property, since this was the main focus of the *Projektgruppe* to which the author belonged at the MPI for Social Anthropology.

Following the collapse of the USSR the Republic of Sakha was relatively quick to implement decollectivisation and create new legal categories of enterprise. The head of the Anabar district would apparently have liked to emulate the privatising, 'neo-traditionalist' blueprints which Florian Stammler has documented for Yamal, but Ventsel's villagers showed little inclination to form either (clan-based) *obshchiny* or to experiment with other



new forms of private enterprise. This is more a case of what Yulian Konstantinov has termed '*sovkhoism*'. Ventsel himself speaks of the persistence of the old 'social relations of responsibility' (p. 88). Neither the land nor reindeer were privatised. Even when villagers did begin to form new legal enterprises, they maintained close links to the dominant ex-socialist organisation and expected it to maintain its full range of social guarantees, which extended well beyond the payment of minimal salaries. Ventsel shows that the precise reasons for adopting a particular legal form are highly contingent if not arbitrary: decisions depend on calculations of instrumentality which can vary greatly from one moment in time to the next. The decisive factors are access to information and one's connections, especially kinship ties. The new market economy is hardly developed, and so the norms and practices of the socialist past continue to shape the present.

Longer-term continuities dating back to the pre-socialist era become evident in the author's analysis of property rights over land. He approaches the subject by showing how the tundra is transformed by its inhabitants into a social space: individuals and families acquire rights over particular locations not simply by virtue of having lived there for a long time but by inheriting specific knowledge of this land from their ancestors and becoming 'masters'. The Soviet system of assigning specific territories to brigades strengthened earlier forms of exclusive 'ownership'. Theoretically, Ventsel's analysis builds heavily on the work of David Anderson in neighbouring Taimyr. Ethnographically, his most telling example shows how trapping lines are a form of private property which also function to demarcate territory. Legally there is still no private property in land, but *de facto* many exclusive rights are observed. In some territories, however, it remains open to all (according to 'vernacular rules') to hunt and share the spoils (*dobyvat*) with the collectivity, even when this activity is illegal in the eyes of the state. This reflects continuity with the disregard shown for hunting limits set by the state farm in Soviet days.

Ventsel shows that the 'law of the tundra' is a romantic misnomer, used by activists and anthropologists but not by local people in the Anabar district. Instead, he draws attention to informal adaptations and emphasises how people are compelled to share (in the town as well as in the countryside, and between the two) in order to cope with crisis, or simply with routine shortages. The creation of fictive kin and the high incidence of adoption are plausibly interpreted as mechanisms to open up new networks, while an increase in goose and wild reindeer hunting are examples of how cooperative activity has recently been intensified for economic reasons. Ventsel provides examples of brazen corruption: even the purchase of a driving license can become a matter of reciprocity when the connection to the corrupt official is

mediated by an urban relative. He also illustrates forms of non-kin assistance, ranging from survival aid in the tundra to food-sharing and tea rituals in the village. Some persons give extravagantly in order to increase their political and/or social capital.

Ventsel spent several months in the field working alongside reindeer herders in the tundra. He shows that they have intimate knowledge of their animals, even those that lack earmarks. The reindeer brigades have never been fully 'industrialised', and the position of women has perhaps not changed as radically as some earlier accounts have suggested. Ventsel's data on how animals are gifted and cared for by the herders, serving as the most 'visible part of ... social relationships', bear out the findings of Florian Stammler, as presented in the preceding volume in this series.

The ambiguities of Dolgan identity in Sakha and elsewhere have posed challenges to scholars and politicians/administrators ever since the original implementation of Soviet nationalities policy. Dolgan ethnicity has been consolidated in recent years, yet it is interesting to find that the villagers often denigrate the manifestations of tradition as signs of 'backwardness'; and that different local Dolgan groups all suspect that Dolgan elsewhere can provide deeper genealogies. Ethnicity is not a key factor in explaining patterns of help and cooperation. In this context it seems significant that the villagers of Anabar have become more exclusive (i.e. less cooperative, especially in the younger age groups) vis-à-vis the population of the larger centre of their own district, where they nonetheless have kin ties. It seems that postsocialist conditions are fostering 'local patriotism' rather than unbounded reciprocity, but this localism is not rooted in ethnicity. What matters more is the distinction between local and incomer, and this seems to have been strengthened by postsocialist nation-building in Sakha. These policies have undermined the status of Russians and other immigrants, while indigenous non-Sakha continue to embrace multiple identities: both Dolgan and Sakha at the same time.

The new exclusion, indeed the brutal harassment of incomers who are not readily adopted into the community, is graphically illustrated in Ventsel's final chapter, which deals with the 'structures and methods of social control'. There is a general pride (apparently shared by women) in the reputation for being 'wild'. It is not clear whether this was already the case before 1992, when the removal of a large contingent of border guards seems to have induced a security vacuum. This gap has been filled not by the solitary police officer, nor by other state structures, but primarily through 'non-state law' and norms of deterrence. Gossip plays a role, and the elders are respected: but so too are men who have been toughened through a stint in gaol. 'Macho' behaviour by younger men has become a serious social prob-

lem in recent years. Ventsel tells us that the category of 'quiet children' has disappeared: you have to be aggressively assertive in order to survive in this postsocialist environment, otherwise you will lose not only social esteem but your physical property as well. One way of dealing with a serious crime is the *razborka*, an interesting form of 'court' in which most participants are intoxicated. This form of 'planned institutionalised collective action' is interpreted as a mechanism which enables the community to protect its integrity.

Aimar Ventsel aims in this work to persuade us that the Dolgans of Anabar district are 'average, normal people'. He does not romanticise but shows throughout his study how it is possible to combine sympathetic observation with a hard-headed account of the harsh everyday realities. In addition to careful documentation of the new institutional landscape, every part of the work is enriched by insights into individual lives. Although these Dolgan are evidently not by nature loquacious, plenty of space is found for the 'local voices'. In the final pages, after giving further insight into widening social inequalities, the author revisits the theme of tradition. Contrary to the implications of much Soviet scholarship, and of the messages conveyed by a new generation of postsocialist indigenous activists in Siberia, Ventsel argues convincingly that local notions of tradition depend more on fluid interpersonal loyalties than on concepts of an unchanging cultural essence.

Chris Hann

Halle, September 2005



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In the West, my greatest appreciation and gratitude goes to Chris Hann for offering me the opportunity to take part in this research project, for his theoretical guidance in choosing literature for my dissertation and for his useful comments on this book. I thank Richard Rottenburg for agreeing to be my contact person at the Martin Luther University in Halle. Numerous discussions with Günther Schlee, Patty Gray, Deema Kaneff, Alexander King, John Ziker, Florian Stammeler, David Anderson, Joachim Otto Habeck, Steve Reyna and Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov helped me to formulate my ideas in the later writing process. Technical staff and student assistance at the MPI freed me of many small but time-consuming tasks. Many thanks to Jutta Turner for preparing maps, Oliver Weihmann and Tobias Köllner for technical assistance and Berit Westwood for dealing with formalities concerning

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## **Note on Transliteration**

For transliteration of Russian words throughout the text I follow the Library of Congress system. With few exceptions, I have transliterated Sakha words as they are written in Cyrillic. In the case of Sakha toponyms, however, I use their original version as used among native speakers and not the Russianised form generally found on maps (hence Uurung Khaia instead of Iuriung Khaia, Saaskylaakh instead of Saskylakh, and Chöchördaakh instead of Chokurdakh).





## Glossary

Sakha	Russian	English
	<i>avtoritet</i>	a respected person, informal authority in the village
<i>balokh</i>	<i>balok</i>	cabin built on a reindeer sledge. Used by hunters and reindeer herders in Sakha and on the Taimyr Peninsula. A <i>balokh</i> has a floor, is warmer than a <i>harkass</i> , and is therefore used mainly as a winter dwelling. Size differs: families with many children have big dwellings (c. 4 x 8 x 3 m), while the smallest may be only c. 1.5 x 2 x 1.5 m.
<i>balyk</i>	<i>ryba</i>	fish
<i>brigadir</i>	<i>brigadir</i>	brigade leader i.e. the leader of a herding or hunting working unit
	<i>Buran</i>	1) most widely used brand of snowmobiles in Russia 2) snowstorm
<i>buluus</i>	<i>lednik</i>	underground ice chamber
	<i>chumrabortnitsa</i>	'professional housekeeper': a female member of the hunting and herding brigade whose task is to cook, sew, etc. She receives a regular salary and is entitled all social services.
<i>emeeksin</i>	<i>starushka, babushka</i>	old woman; sometimes a familiar term for a wife
<i>eterbess</i>	<i>torbasa</i>	high, thick reindeer fur boots, used only in the tundra
	<i>dochernoe predpriiatie</i>	a subsidiary enterprise
<i>harkass</i>	<i>karkass</i>	light cabin built on a reindeer sledge, without the floor, for use in summer
	<i>pokazately</i>	Index that measures the efficiency of the brigade. For reindeer brigades, it shows the percentage of newborn calves or

		adult animals that have survived since the last headcount; in hunting brigades it measures the tonnage of meat 'produced'.
<i>khapkan</i>	<i>kapkan</i>	leg-hold arctic fox trap made with a light metal frame
<i>ketekh</i>	<i>lichnye oleni</i>	privately owned reindeer
<i>kharal</i>	<i>koral</i>	Corral to enable a headcount of reindeer in the tundra. There are two variants: permanent and mobile.
	<i>kolkhoz</i>	collective farm
<i>kös</i>	<i>argish</i>	Migration of a reindeer camp; also denotes the caravan of sledges and <i>balokhs</i> .
<i>kyrssa</i>	<i>pesets</i>	arctic fox
	<i>MUP (munitsi-pal'noe unitar-noe predpriatie)</i>	municipal enterprise
<i>ogonn'or</i>	<i>starik</i>	elder or old man; sometimes a familiar way of addressing a husband
<i>paas</i>	<i>past</i>	deadfall arctic fox trap
<i>pöhyölök kihi</i>	<i>poselkovyi</i>	villager; a person whose main job and residence is in the village
	<i>patsan</i>	teenager or young adult
	<i>razborka</i>	group punitive action in the village
	<i>rodovaia obshchina</i>	clan-based community
<i>sakhyyr</i>		base camp for reindeer herders in the tundra, where they leave their summer equipment in winter and winter equipment in summer
	<i>shefstvo</i>	The barter of produce between agricultural and an industrial enterprise.
	<i>sovkhoz</i>	state farm
<i>syarga</i>	<i>narta</i>	reindeer sledge
<i>taba (kyyl taba)</i>	<i>olen (dikar o. dikii olen)</i>	reindeer (wild reindeer)
<i>tabakhyt (1)</i>	<i>olenevod</i>	reindeer herder; someone who practices pastoralism as a life style i.e. migrates with reindeer herds (not <i>pastukh</i> )
	<i>oleneemkost'</i>	carrying capacity of reindeer pastures

<i>tabakhyt</i> (2)	<i>pastukh</i>	reindeer herder as an occupation, i.e. a person who works in the reindeer brigade
<i>tochka</i>	<i>tochka</i>	hunting or fishing base in the tundra, containing at least one inhabitable dwelling and storage facilities
<i>tya kihi</i>	<i>tundrovik</i>	tundra people, professional hunters or reindeer herders who spend most of their time in the tundra
<i>tys atakh</i>	<i>unty</i>	knee-length boots of reindeer fur, used both in the tundra and village
<i>uutsak</i>	<i>verkhovyi olen'</i>	mounted reindeer i.e. reindeer used for riding
	<i>uvazhenie</i>	respect
	<i>yntyka</i>	Dolgan fur winter hat
	<i>zakon tundry</i>	'law of the tundra', a complex of social norms that regulates mutual support with kin and non-kin
	<i>zek</i>	ex-convict



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

This study is an examination of a former state farm (*sovkhos*) in the Siberian Arctic. The aim is to explore and understand the strategies that people have adopted to cope with the changes to their daily lives during the period of postsocialist transformation. The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a shift from the socialist planned economy to a market economy, a shift that has been seen by some as the greatest peace-time economic transformation ever to have taken place (Bernstam and Rabushka 2000). Although this shift has brought new opportunities and a feeling of freedom, it has also brought economic and social inequality, increased isolation for inhabitants of remote districts, and a fall in living standards among people who, in the Soviet era, had had no difficulty in satisfying their basic needs. Understandably, the economic and social transformation caused frustration and anger among those people who were hit hard by the reforms.

In this study I aim to demystify two things: the notion of Siberia and people's frustration in the postsocialist era. I want to show that the Siberian community with whom I lived for almost one year is not a group of hunters and reindeer herders who, according to the romantic notions held in Russia and the West, live in 'harmony with nature' and in relative isolation from 'the rest of the world'. I also want to show that these people are actors actively seeking solutions to their contemporary problems and developing strategies to make the best of their current situation. This study is also a contribution to ongoing debates about postsocialist social transformation at the grassroots level, and provides links with various community-level studies from all over the former socialist bloc.

In this book I explore many levels of human social behaviour and examine how these levels are interlinked. I aim to show not only how the structures and hierarchies of former socialist agriculture have shaped people's later activities, but also how people actively participate in looking for new ways of surviving in times of postsocialist transformation. The main focus of this book is on networks, both formal and informal, and how people

create and use kinship in order to gain access to and distribute resources. Property and its role at various levels of the postsocialist transformation are given special prominence, with emphasis on the fact that property relations are much more than just officially determined categories. And last but not least, I look at the people's traditions because, according to popular opinion, Siberian indigenous populations are seen as people who enthusiastically maintain their 'traditional' way of life and who are guided by their traditions. However, this is not a study about a traditional community but rather about how tradition is (re)created and instrumentalised when official institutions fail to function.

This chapter begins with an introduction to my research region. I then review different fields of anthropological literature that I found to be useful when working on my field data and finally provide an outline of the structure of the book.

## **1.1 Field Region**

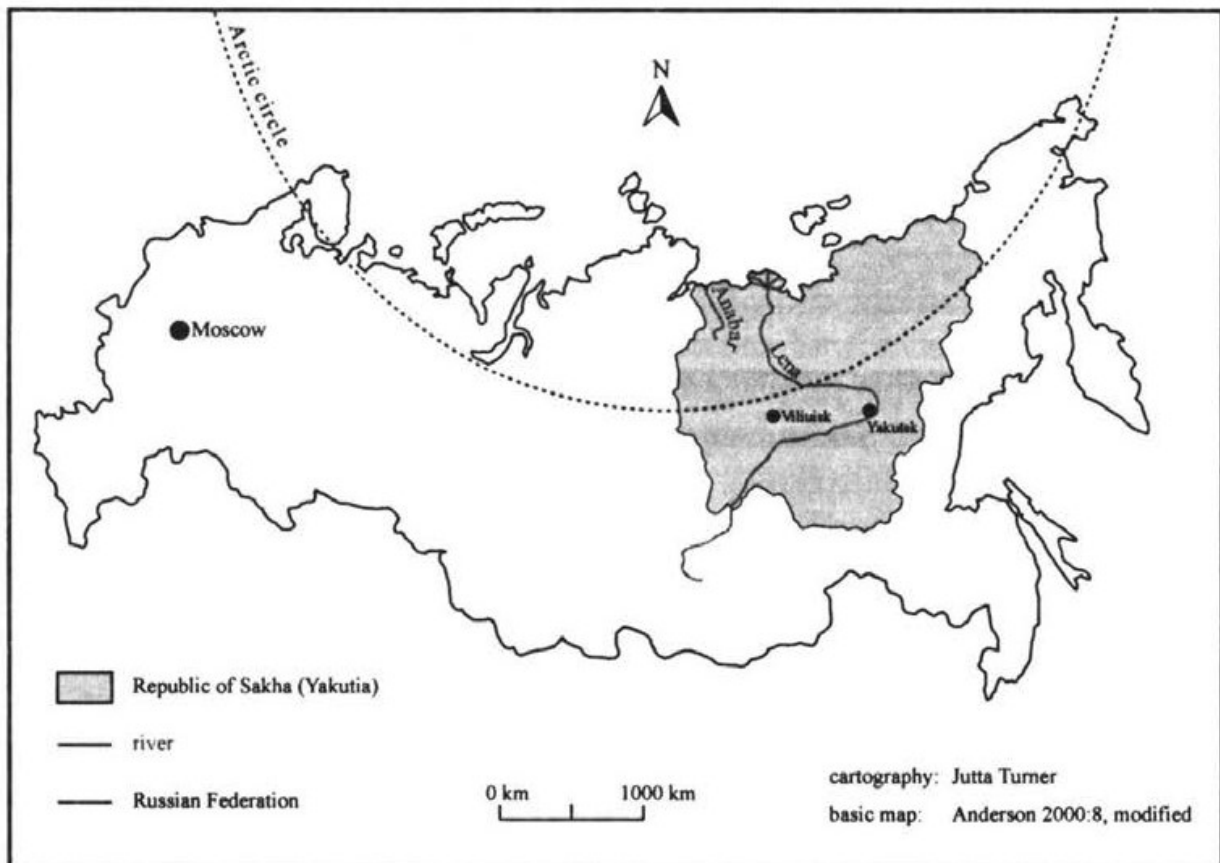
### ***1.1.1 Overview of the Republic of Sakha***

According to popular view, Siberia is a cold and unfriendly region beyond the Ural Mountains. In fact, Siberia is not a uniform region. To understand recent developments in this area, it is important to know that Siberia is divided into different climatic, economic and ecological zones, that it includes many administrative and political units and that it is populated by different ethnic groups that differ from each other not only by language and physical type, but also by position in political and social hierarchies, by professional occupation, and in their histories. In Soviet times Siberia was part of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic and today it still belongs to the Russian Federation. In contrast to the popular perception of Siberia as the domain of hunters, reindeer herders and political prisoners, some regions of Siberia are industrial areas, and this is the main reason why Siberia is important to the Russian state. Although in some parts of Siberia the natural resources had been exploited in pre-Revolutionary times, the importance of the region beyond the Urals increased markedly in the 1960s when, along with industrialisation, the so-called 'appropriation' campaign (*osvoenie*) picked up speed. With this campaign, the economic and ethnic map of Siberia changed as new economic activities were introduced (mainly the extraction of oil, coal, gold, silver and diamonds) and huge numbers of migrant workers and their families, mostly from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, moved to the new industrial regions (Tichotsky 2000: 44–9).

In Soviet times Siberia was divided into different administrative units such as *krai*, *oblast*, *raion*, *okrug* and autonomous republics. The differences



between these terms are complex and need not be explained here (see Hirsch 1997: 260–72). What is important in the context of the present book is the fact that all of these units can be translated into English as either ‘district’ or ‘territory’. After *perestroika* in the early 1990s many regions renamed themselves and thus changed their relations not only with other administrative units but also with Moscow. In 2000 the Russian Federation was divided into seven regions (*okrug*i), with the aim of improving control of them through the special institution of Representatives of the President. The largest Russian region is the Far East Region, which comprises 10 smaller units. The largest of these is the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), which declared its sovereignty on 27 April 1991, and is where I conducted my field-work. I will therefore describe it in some detail, referring to it simply as ‘Sakha’.



Map 1. Russia and the Republic of Sakha.

The territory of the republic covers 3,103,200 square kilometres, but the population in 1999 numbered only about 1 million (Pakhomov 1999: 4). The size of the republic is a source of special pride for its inhabitants—they love to remark that their republic is ‘nine times larger than France’, ‘almost the same size as the whole of the Indian subcontinent’ or ‘13 times the size of Great Britain’. Sakha is located in the northern and Arctic areas of Eastern



Siberia (see map 1) and has two major ecosystems: taiga forests and tundra. The climate is characterised by cold winters and relatively warm summers. Although winter temperatures are about around  $-50^{\circ}\text{C}$  most of the time, it is not unusual for temperatures to fall below  $-60^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Most people in Sakha are very proud of the fact that the northern hemisphere's negative temperature pole, the spot at which the lowest temperatures have been recorded (here  $-72^{\circ}\text{C}$ ), lies in the eastern part of the republic in the Verkhoyansk Mountains.<sup>1</sup> The average summer temperature in Sakha varies between about  $+38^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the central part of Sakha and  $+25^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the north on the coast of the Arctic Ocean (cf. Tichotsky 2000). Summer is short in central Sakha and is even shorter in the northern tundra, where my field site was located. In central Sakha the snow melts in early May and winter starts at the end of October, while in the north the last snow has usually gone by the middle of June, only to return in the middle of September. Therefore the timing of the seasons is slightly different in the north and the south. The whole period without snow in the north is referred to as summer (independent of the temperature). The autumn begins with the first snow and changes to winter when the polar night starts in November. The polar night ends around the end of February or first half of March, when daylight begins to lengthen. With the complete end of the polar night in April, the spring begins in the north and lasts until the snow melts. The polar day, when the sun shines 24 hours a day, begins in April and continues until the beginning of September.

Another fact that people stressed proudly in conversation with me was that the Republic of Sakha contains 'every element in Mendeleev's table' (the periodic table of elements). Indeed, the Republic of Sakha is famous for its diamond industry and produces about 99% of Russia's diamonds and about 30% of the world's diamonds. At the beginning of the 1990s, Yakutalmaz, the former state enterprise engaged in diamond mining, became a joint Russian-Sakha company called ALROSA (*Almazы Rossiі-Sakha*—Diamonds of Russia and Sakha). This company was also operating in my field site and will be mentioned several times in this book. Additionally, Sakha produces 4% of Russia's coal, and has reserves of antimony, tin, niobium, rare earth metals, iron, lead, zinc, manganese, molybdenum, silver, gold and precious stones (Tichotsky 2000: 23–4). Natural gas and oil are produced for local needs, but in recent years the big Russian oil companies have been eager to obtain licences to start large-scale oil exploitation (Obedin 2001; Shcherbakova 2001). Since the early 1990s, industrial expansion has caused tensions in the centre-periphery relations between Moscow and

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<sup>1</sup> The place with the world's lowest temperatures is in Antarctica at the recently closed Russian research station of Vostok, where the temperature can fall below  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  (Kallis 2003).

Yakutsk, but has also had an impact through awakening the indigenous movement (Duncan 1994).

The Republic of Sakha is divided into 35 administrative units. Of these, 33 units are districts, former *raions*, now referred to as *ulus* (the pre-Revolutionary Sakha term). The two remaining administrative units are cities and their adjoining territories (Pakhomov 1999: 6–9). One of the cities is Yakutsk, the capital of Sakha. In the Republic of Sakha nearly all the ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union are represented—some 80 groups in all (Vorob'eva and Spiridonov 2003). In 1994, incomers, mostly Russians, Belorussians and Ukrainians, formed approximately 55% of the population. The titular ethnic group, Yakuts or Sakha (their own ethnonym, which has gained popularity in the last ten years), were the second largest group comprising about 39% of the whole population (c. 350,000). The rest were so-called northern indigenous minorities (Argunova and Habeck 1997). By law there is a difference between Sakha and other northern minorities: Sakha are not considered an indigenous group (*korennoi*) due to their relatively 'late' arrival in the region.<sup>2</sup> Nor are Sakha seen as one of the 'official' minorities (the 'small-numbered peoples', or *malochislennye narody* in Russian) with all the privileges and special status this entails (see chapter 3 below), because the upper limit of such groups was set at 50,000 registered members (Vitebsky 1996: 94). Sakha were historically cattle- and horse-breeders and they continued these activities during Soviet rule (in collective and state farms). Cattle and horse breeding became even more important after decollectivisation in the early 1990s when it gradually became a subsistence activity based on small private households (see Bychkova Jordan, Jordan-Bychkov and Holz 1998; Crate 2002, 2003). The ethnic groups that are registered today as 'small-numbered peoples' lived in the territory of the republic long before the Turkic-speaking Sakha arrived and pushed them to the north and east. The largest group among the indigenous minorities are Tungus-Manchurian speaking Evenki (15,100 or 1.44% of the population according to 1996 data) and Even (10,532 or 1%). The communities of Chukchi (a Chukotka-Kamchatkan language), Yukagir (a linguistic isolate) and Dolgan (a northern Sakha dialect or an independent Turkic language—see chapter 7) all have fewer than 1,000 people each (Narody 1994; Argunova and Habeck 1997). They were traditionally hunters, fishers and reindeer breeders and most of the indigenous people lived in settlements

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<sup>2</sup> The question of the indigenesness of Sakha people is a matter of wider and ongoing political discussion in Siberian politics, and is connected to access to economic resources and political structures. Sakha see themselves as 'indigenous' peoples in the region. In contrast to the view of Sakha politicians, many activists within the minority rights movement argue that Sakha people do not belong to the indigenous groups.

officially classified as 'agricultural' (*sel'skokhoziaistvennyi*), because hunting, fishing and reindeer herding are all officially understood as 'agricultural' activities.

The central and southern districts of the Republic of Sakha are the most densely populated. Whereas incomer populations inhabit mostly the coal- and diamond-mining districts, Sakha people predominate in the capital of Yakutsk and in the central parts of the republic. The indigenous minorities live in quite compact communities in the eastern and northern regions along the Kolyma River and along the coast of the Arctic Ocean, a region where cattle- and horse-breeding is ecologically difficult, if not impossible. The population of the Republic of Sakha is highly mobile: at the end of the 1990s, 61.7% of the people born in the republic did not live in the district in which they were born. Statistically, the urban populations are the most mobile, with 70.8% of town dwellers having come from elsewhere compared with 43.3% of rural dwellers (Fedorova 1999: 83–91; Sukneva and Mostakhova 2002: 18, 93–104). This high mobility of the population is linked to networking and reciprocity, which I will discuss in chapters 5 and 6.

### ***1.1.2 The Anabarskii District***

Located on the coast of the Arctic Ocean, the Anabar district lies in the far north-west of the Republic of Sakha. It is named after the Anabar River, which flows through the entire district. The district is locally referred to as 'Anabarskii district' or just 'Anabar', and both expressions will be used here interchangeably. The territory of the district covers 55,600 square kilometres and the population in 2000 (when I conducted my fieldwork) was 4,187 people. Some 37 % of the population in the district were registered as Sakha, 20% as Dolgan, 27.8% as Russians, and 9.2% as Evenki (*Nekotorye* 2000).

Local districts in the Republic of Sakha are relatively independent administratively. The pyramid-like structure of power described by Benedict Anderson for Indonesia fits the political hierarchy of the Republic of Sakha perfectly (Anderson 1999).



Map 2. The Anabarskii District.

The highest official of the republic is the president. The local heads of the administrations are subordinate directly to the president and so their decision-making is almost absolute within their own districts. Their apparatus copies fully the structures of government in the capital, with local district parliaments and different departments as ministries echoing republican



organs. While theoretically all the heads of districts are equal, in fact they have different informal positions in relation to each other. The head of the Anabarskii district, Nikolai Egorovich Androsov, was one of the most respected among his 'colleagues', sitting at the president's right-hand side in presidential meetings with district heads. He was considered a very successful leader, whose economic policy had raised the standard of living in his district. Androsov managed to attract well-qualified professionals (doctors, teachers, etc.), which is unusual for a northern district located 'on the edge of the world'. He had good connections with ALROSA and was successful in encouraging ALROSA to invest money in the district (mainly in transport, education and communication). All of this gave him more freedom in making decisions on his 'home turf'. Androsov was also successful because he enjoyed great popularity among the local population and because almost all of the important positions in the district and village administrations were occupied either by local indigenous people or intermarried Sakha who supported him.

The agricultural policy set forth by the head of the district covered the entire district and is an important focus of this study. Nikolai Egorovich Androsov was very enthusiastic about bringing native people back to their 'roots'. His ideal was the Yamal Peninsula, where, as he argued, the number of reindeer had increased because of privatisation and the establishment of independent private enterprises, which he interpreted as embracing a return to a traditional way of life.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, he has supported private initiatives and the establishment of new hunting and herding enterprises, to the vexation of state agricultural officials. He even started his own programme of so-called 'family enterprises' (*semeinoe khoziaistvo*), discussed in detail in chapter 3. Credits and subsidies for new enterprises were financed using ALROSA money, and such sound financing, in conjunction with support from the administration, produced 'an agricultural landscape' in the Anabarskii district that is unique within Sakha. Androsov also supported my research, for example by providing me with transportation, seeing in this work a further way of helping to improve life in the tundra.

There are three settlements in the district. The village of Saaskylaakh is the physical administrative centre of Anabar. It is the largest settlement in the district, with over 2,000 people, and boasts an airport, a meat-processing facility, and full services ranging from a hospital to a music school. The distance between Saaskylaakh and Yakutsk is 2,621 kilometres by winter

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<sup>3</sup> The success of Yamal reindeer herding relative to that in Sakha and Chukotka is discussed by Florian Stammer in several publications, where he draws rather different conclusions to those of Androsov (Stammer 2000, 2003; Gray and Stammer 2002; Stammer and Ventsel 2003).

road, or less than 2,000 kilometres by air. The second largest settlement in the district is the village of Uurung Khaia (1,145 people) while the smallest and southernmost is the village of Ebeleekh (214 people). Ebeleekh is a so-called industrial (*promyshlennyi*) settlement, engaged only in diamond mining. Although this village is part of the district, Ebeleekh is more or less left to the management of the Udachnyi Mountain Enrichment Factory (*Gorno-Obogatitel'nyi Kombinat—GOK*), a branch of the ALROSA diamond company.

Ecologically, the northern part of the Anabarskii district, where I conducted my fieldwork, is open tundra, while the southern part is mixed forest tundra: huge open tundra dotted with strips of small and thin fir and larch trees growing beside streams. The district's main natural resource, besides diamonds, is wild reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*), which migrate twice a year through the district. Local people told me that there are actually two different populations of reindeer: one 'wave' comes from the west, from the Taimyr Peninsula, and the other from the east, from the Arctic coast of Sakha. People explained that the two populations have different hair colour and the taste of their meat is different. There are two wild reindeer hunting seasons, coinciding with the herds' migration through the district. In January–March the reindeer migrate to the north, towards the Taimyr Peninsula. At this time, the tundra is covered with snow and hunters either seek out animals in the tundra and, once located, wait hidden on hills until the animals are near enough to shoot them, or travel to the south to hunt reindeer in the taiga. The summer reindeer hunt takes place from June to early August, when herds migrate to the south. Animals are shot at river crossings and then taken away by boat. In addition to the wild reindeer population, fish and arctic foxes are important sources of food and income for the inhabitants of the district. There are two fishing seasons, in November and in June–July. In November, nets are put under the ice, whereas in summer, fishing nets are tied to sticks and left in the river or lake over night. Arctic fox are trapped in the winter-time when they have snow-white fur.



Plate 1. Migration of the reindeer brigade.

There is only very limited means of transportation in the tundra—apart from reindeer, which are used for transport throughout the year. In summer the most common way to move is by motor boat but in some areas the only option is by helicopter. In winter a winter road (*zimnik*) between settlements is the main link with the outside world: the winter road between Uurung Khaia and Yakutsk is the main artery for all of western Sakha. The winter road is mostly travelled by heavily loaded trucks but is also used for short-distance trips by Soviet (and Russian) ‘UAZ’ jeeps. The winter road is the cheapest way to transport goods and so most necessities, from groceries to construction materials, are brought into the district during the winter. Traveling the winter road depends very much on the mercy of the weather; periods of great snowstorms in autumn and spring sometimes bring all movement to a halt for several days. A snowstorm (*purga*) can often begin without warning, burying trucks on the road until the arrival of a bulldozer. To travel between Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh (150 km) has sometimes taken me just a few hours in good weather, sometimes up to three days in heavy snow.

Outside the three villages, there are few settlements in the tundra. Several hunting bases dot the district, some of which are brigade houses and comprise a number of storage buildings and garages. But mainly these are single-family homesteads with one house, some sheds, a garage and underground ice chambers. Most hunting bases are located on big rivers navigable by motor boats in summer and it is the degree to which the rivers are navigable that has determined the geographical distribution of hunting bases in the district. On the coast of the Arctic Ocean, at the mouth of the Anabar River, there is a meteorological station, and in the western tundra of the district there is a small oil-drilling station, which supplies Saaskylaakh’s heating



plant with crude oil. The Chöchördaakh trading post (*faktoriia*), on the Yöle River, belongs to a district trading organisation, 'Anabar Food' (*Anabar-As* in Sakha), which barter groceries and some commodities for reindeer meat with hunters and reindeer herders.

*The Village of Uurung Khaia and its People*

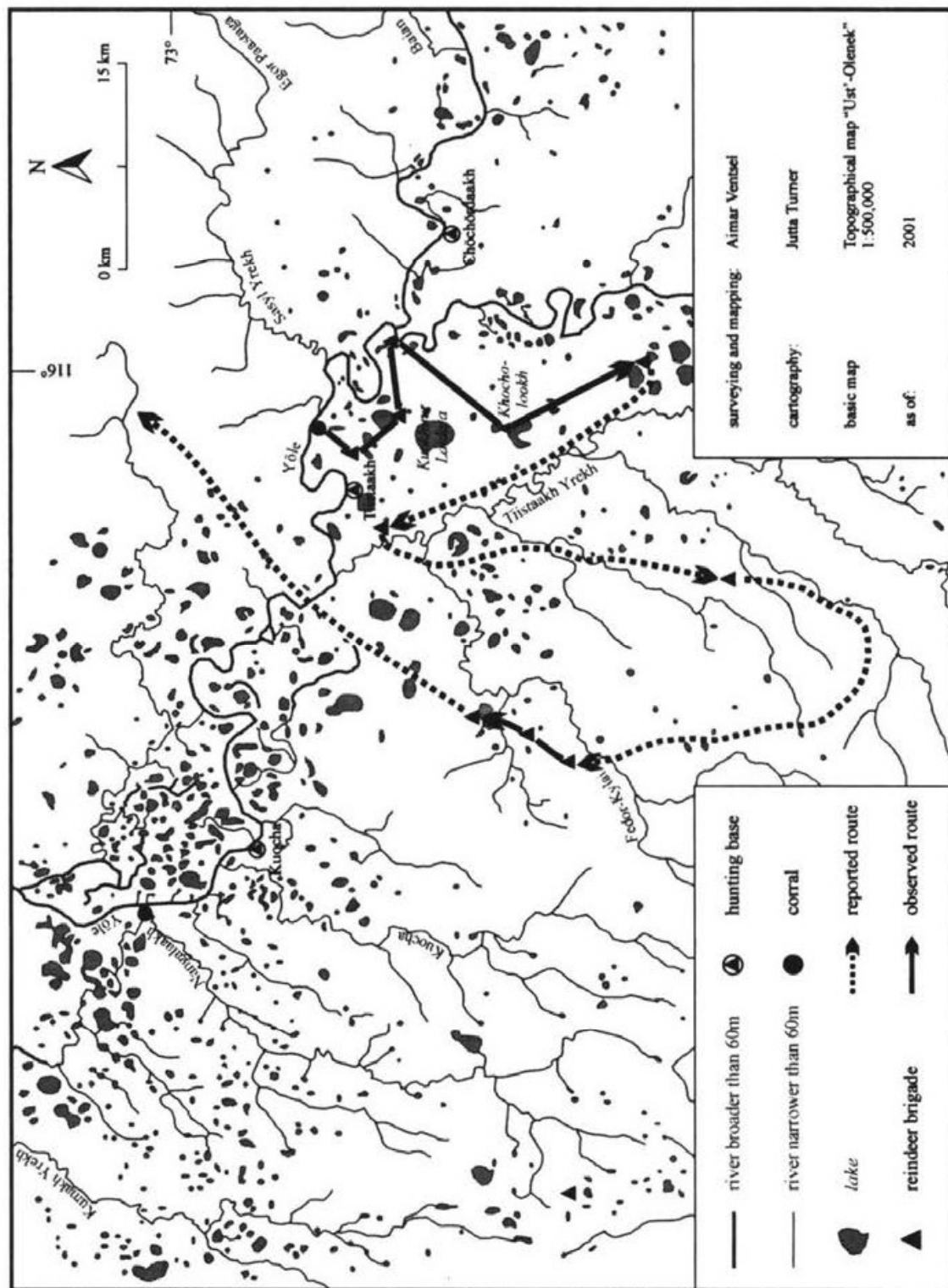
Uurung Khaia is a small settlement on the banks of the Anabar River, 40 kilometres upstream from the ocean. The village of Uurung Khaia is centred around the office building of the village administration and former state farm. In the village square in front of the building stands the bust of the village's most famous son, Il'ia Spiridonov, the first hero of Socialist Labour in the district. Although referred to as an agricultural settlement (*sel'skokhoziaistvennyi poselok*) most of the village's inhabitants are employed in a service role, whether in the administration, school, kindergarten, fuel base, the few shops, the transport enterprises of ALROSA, the heating plant or other facilities.

Uurung Khaia was the centre of the former state farm which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. This state farm (*sovkhov*) was reformed as the district farm or, more precisely, as a municipal enterprise owned by the district—MUP 'Il'ia Spiridonov' (*munitsipal'noe unitarnoe predpriiatie imeni Il'ia Spiridonova*).

It was primarily engaged in reindeer herding, hunting and fishing, but also included a fur farm and a shop where fur clothing was made and sold (*masterskaia*), mainly employing women. In addition to employees of the MUP, there were a few dozen hunters and fishermen who were not involved in this enterprise. The importance of the village in the district's economy rests not in producing meat and fish but as being a fuel base for the whole district: in 2000, during my fieldwork, there were 30-tonne tanks of petrol, oil and diesel fuel on the shore. This fuel was shipped to Uurung Khaia in the summer by tankers, which came up the river and unloaded the fuel into the tanks. This fuel was then transported to other villages by trucks in the winter.

The village is seen as an ethnic peculiarity as it is the only Dolgan settlement in the Republic of Sakha—almost 1,000 of the 1,145 inhabitants were officially registered as Dolgan in 2000. In the pre-collectivisation period, Dolgan people bred reindeer for transport and also hunted wild reindeer and fished (Gurvich 1949, 1977). The aim of Soviet policy was to bring the nomads to a more 'advanced level', which meant sedentarising the tundra people.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The sedentarisation of nomads, as shown by Daniel Bradburd (1996), applying the insights of Charles Tilly (1975, 1985), belongs to a common process of state building. At this time the



Map 3. Yöle River region and the author's main field sites in the tundra.

Soviet Union was just beginning to consolidate its territory and by limiting nomads' freedom (similar to other colonial states) they were transformed into a wage labour force. The forcible 'modernisation' hit the economic system of Siberian nomads as well. This was a classic conflict between state and native models of using the tundra's resources (Paine 1996: 128). In the case of the Anabarskii district, the socialist state used its 'hegemonic' position and the minority 'was forced to take alien form' and adapt the state model (Taylor 1994: 43).

Since nomadic pastoralism was considered 'economically irrational' (Slezkine 1994: 205), new systems of reindeer herding, hunting and fishing were introduced. Hunting and fishing brigades were based in the tundra in permanent log cabins. These settlements (*tochka*) contained, apart from living facilities, storage sheds, underground ice chambers and garages for snowmobiles. Reindeer brigades became a fixed unit with between three and six employed reindeer herders, a clearly defined structure (brigadier–reindeer herder–tentworker), and a territory for their herd. Although reindeer brigades continued to migrate, it was a different form of organisation and activity. Hunters and herders were subordinated to a planned economy and expected to fulfil the annual plan. Migration routes and hunting territories and seasons were determined by state institutions. Changes included new technologies: snowmobiles, radios, and greater use of the *balokh* (a Sakha word loaned from the Russian *balok* meaning a cabin built on reindeer sledges, with a floor) and the *harkass* (from the Russian *karkas*, 'frame', meaning a cabin on reindeer sledges but without a floor). All of these affected the radius, mode and speed of their movements.

The model of 'socialist agriculture' itself was not static either: over time, state specialists introduced small cooperatives which were eventually developed into state farms. Parallel to this, the village of Uurung Khaia grew as more and more people settled permanently in the new apartment houses being built. Full sedentarisation took place relatively late. Not until the 1980s were all people settled in—and residing for most of the year in—the village of Uurung Khaia (see chapter 2).

Reindeer herders and hunters, usually called 'tundra people' (*tundroviki* in Russian, *tye kihiler* in Sakha), enjoy a high degree of respect in Uurung Khaia, contrary to many other regions of Siberia. That does not mean that these tundra-based jobs are highly valued; in fact most of the youths raised in the village, although familiar with tundra life, prefer jobs in the settlement because these are 'clean' and 'easy'. However, here I did not find such a negative attitude toward *tundroviki* as in other regions of Sakha. *Tundroviki* are the main providers of meat, furs and fish—essential staples in the postsocialist era—and most of the local people have either grown up in the tundra or have spent lots of time there with relatives in their childhood. Another reason could be that *tundroviki* are not seen as being 'backward' owing to the frequent use of industrially produced equipment, engines and clothes in the tundra, thus making for little differentiation between village and tundra in terms of material culture.



## 1.2 Fieldwork Setting and Methods

I first arrived in Yakutsk, the capital of the Republic of Sakha, in July 2000. This was not my first visit to Siberia. While a student of the Free University of Berlin I had conducted fieldwork in western Siberia in 1995 and 1996 for my MA research on the urban identity of indigenous Khanty. However, the situation I met in Sakha was markedly different: in western Siberia the indigenous population was a tiny marginalised minority whereas in eastern Siberia the indigenous Sakha urban culture was very strong. Not only do indigenous people predominate on the streets of Yakutsk but there is also a large network of indigenous scientific institutions that produce publications in Russian and Sakha, local Sakha language media and a political structure dominated by Sakha. My earlier experience of fieldwork in Siberia was of great help, however, in terms of proficiency in speaking Russian and my understanding of Russian administrative organisation.

I had already established contacts with the Institute of the Problems of Small-Numbered Peoples of the North. I flew to Saaskylaakh, the centre of the Anabarskii district, with the head of the Department of the Economy, Dmitri Innokentevich Syrovatskii, and then we flew by helicopter to the village of Uurung Khaia. From the helicopter, the first thing I noticed in Uurung Khaia was a blue, brand new, two-storey school building with a red roof. Other buildings in the village included various housing blocks and the state farm administration facilities. Then I noticed a barge lying in the tundra some distance from the river. I was later told that it had been carried there some 15 years previously by an extraordinarily high spring flood.

The village looked shabby from the air and this impression was confirmed when we landed. A few hours later I was in the office of the administration head, a local man in his thirties. After some introductory small talk, he informed us that a boat was leaving for the tundra the very next day. It was time for the annual autumn reindeer head count (corral) and we were offered a place on the boat. The next day I watched as huge sacks of flour, rolls of fabric (to make a temporary fence for the corral), huge logs and many boxes were loaded onto the barge, which, pulled by one old motor boat, sailed downstream to the Arctic Ocean and then entered another river, the Yöle, towards my future field area, where I would stay for many months. About 30 men travelled with us to the tundra by barge. They included a corral team (*koralisatsiia*) under the supervision of the chief livestock expert (*zootekhnik*), Grigorii Konstantinovich Tuprin, and reindeer herders and hunters, who were returning to the brigades. There were also some young women, one of whom was being sent out to my future host brigade in the capacity as a veterinarian.

On the barge I was the only person who was not able to speak Sakha, which excluded me from many conversations. On the way, men occasionally deposited timber and sacks of flour and salt on the river bank, and explained to me that these would be picked up by reindeer herding brigades. The following day we reached the first camp of reindeer herders, where the 5th brigade of the Uurung Khaia MUP (still widely referred to as the 'state farm') waited for us. During three days of hard work we built a fence, drove the herd into it and counted the animals. Most animals were vaccinated and released, but some 100 sick animals were slaughtered. Reindeer were let out through a narrow gate in the fence, around which stood several people, pens and paper in hand, who noted down the number, age and sex of each animal. After the counting process I noticed that every one of them had reached a different total, which was then balanced by the chief livestock expert, who decided that the herd contained 1,504 head of reindeer. On the final day the camp was dismantled and the barge and the reindeer brigade left in different directions. After a few days' travelling we met the next brigade, the 3rd, and when the head-counting process was finished, I stayed behind. By the time I came back from the tundra at the beginning of October, I had visited two different reindeer brigades and two hunting enterprises. In mid-October, I left Anabar to attend a conference in Germany.

Just before Christmas 2000 I returned to the Anabarskii district. Apart from three breaks totalling a few weeks, I stayed in this district until the beginning of June when we returned from the tundra to the village of Uurung Khaia using the last of the snow. A few days later I left the district by helicopter, heading to the town of Udachnyi, one of the main diamond-mining settlements in the Republic of Sakha. Altogether I spent eight months in the Anabarskii district, five months of which were in the tundra, visiting at various times three reindeer brigades (the 3rd, 5th and 6th), two hunting enterprises (Tiistaakh and Chöchördaakh) and one fishing settlement (Koché). The rest of the time I spent in the villages of Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh, where I participated in the hunters' and reindeer herders' everyday lives in the village, and worked in the archives of the village and MUP administration. During my fieldwork period, I spent one week in the city of Udachnyi, three weeks in the city of Mirnyi and three months in the capital, Yakutsk. Whereas in the first two places I was forced to stay until I could buy plane tickets in order to leave, I stayed on in Yakutsk intentionally to work in the library of the Institute of the Problems of Small-Numbered Peoples of the North and in the library of the government of the republic.

I was also able to visit two other regions of the Sakha Republic. In the beginning of July 2001 I visited Even reindeer and horse herders in the Verkhoiansk Mountains, in the village of Tompo, eastern Sakha, and subse-

quently I visited the village of Myndygaai, central Sakha, which is inhabited by ethnic Sakha cattle breeders. These two field trips allowed me to collect comparative data about decollectivisation and helped me to understand how this process took place within the borders of one republic but in different ethnic, cultural, economic and social settings.

The most significant part of my fieldwork, following anthropological tradition, was participant observation. I lived for weeks, sometimes months, with people in cabins, village homes and *balokhs*. My main goal was to participate in all of the everyday activities as much as possible in order to understand the meanings, hardships and joys of different activities. Therefore I not only participated in men's work but also tried my hand at 'women's' work, such as fur processing or preparing certain meals. Soon I found my own niche in my host family's daily life. Thus my tasks were commonly chopping wood, helping to pack gear for travel to the next camp, digging coal in the tundra and so forth. These tasks expanded as I learned new skills such as harnessing animals or throwing a lasso. I noted down each day's activities, and also referred to my discussions with people. Parallel to taking notes, I filmed and took photographs at every opportunity, especially those concerning collective activities. Besides the corral, catching reindeer, preparing for a hunting trip and different festive events, I followed my friends and informants even when they were alone to take extra pictures or shoot videos. During such individual tasks we discussed life extensively and I collected a lot of important data through these spontaneous, unstructured interviews.<sup>5</sup>

I can say that approximately one-third of my working time in the tundra passed in absolute silence, when everyone (myself included) was too busy or exhausted to talk. On the other hand, most of my conversations and interviews took place either while working or travelling. In most cases these were spontaneous discussions that were impossible to record—trying to record an interview in a strong wind, while riding a reindeer, when the tape recorder is hermetically packed on the sledge, is a rather complicated operation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> At the beginning of my fieldwork most interviews and discussions were in Russian, which was neither my nor my informants' mother tongue. Therefore these interviews were in many cases conducted in 'pidgin Russian' and parts of these discussions will be presented in this book in Russian transliterations. When my Sakha skills improved we conversed in this language.

<sup>6</sup> I recorded very few structured interviews, in total less than two hours, for many reasons. In addition to the technical problems I quickly learned that most people were unwilling to be formally interviewed with a tape recorder and microphone on the table. They felt uncomfortable and reluctant to speak freely and I soon dropped this way of collecting data.



For most of my informants, I was not the first anthropologist they had met. The Anabarskii district has been visited by various Sakha and Russian ethnographers, and the German linguists Jana and Otto Turza spent some weeks in the district in 1996. Therefore many of my informants expected me to be interested either in the 'old culture' or language. However, I encountered only positive reactions when I explained that I came there to document people's current life situation. People gladly took me with them on their trips and patiently explained to me things I did not understand. By participating fully in their lives and demonstrating that I sincerely wanted to understand their life, they saw that I took my work as seriously as the hunters, herders, and village workers took theirs. I always brought with me pictures I had already developed or showed my video recordings. In doing so, I not only received further valuable comments about my work methods and organisation, but I was also demonstrating my desire to share the results of my own work with the community. This is in contrast to people's experience with many other scholars, who tend to leave after a short field trip without any follow-up on the outcome of their work.

In my historical and statistical data, there are quite significant gaps. Although I spent many months in villages and in the city of Yakutsk, I could not get access to all the information I needed. There were many problems, but the problem common to all Western scientists—the reluctance of officials to provide access to information—was only a minor problem for me. Although I experienced negative attitudes from officials and was refused access to certain documents, this happened only two or three times during my entire fieldwork. In the city of Yakutsk, I discovered that many archives and libraries were closed for the summer break or did not allow copying of certain statistical books, and I had to copy data by hand. In Saaskylaakh and Uurung Khaia the main hindrance to accessing the local archives was that I often arrived during holidays when these institutions were closed. Also the director of the statistical archive of the district administration was sometimes away on long business trips or off sick, which affected my ability to gain access to certain archives.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

In this section I discuss the various fields of anthropological literature that I found useful in exploring current survival strategies in northwestern Sakha. I used studies dealing with Siberia, Russia and also postsocialism more generally, but expanded my theoretical framework beyond these topics and geographical areas. My research links to several current debates in anthropology, and I wish to bring together different issues relating to hunter–herder



studies with debates about the management of the 'commons' and territorial entitlements inside and outside Siberia.

### ***1.3.1 Siberia***

#### *Pre-Soviet, Soviet, Russian and Sakha Scholars*

Dolgan people inhabit a large area from the Yenissei River to the Laptevite Sea. Therefore this ethnonym recurs in various records of Russian officials, travellers and explorers. Since David Anderson has already analysed the literature connected to Dolgan 'ethnogenesis' (2000a: chapter 4) and the ethnic development of Dolgan is not the topic of this study, I will only briefly mention a few works from this field which were important for my own research.

In the nineteenth century the Baltic German scholar Alexander Theodor Middendorff visited Turukhansk Territory twice (1843, 1846) with scientific expeditions to document the population, ecology, flora, fauna and geography of the territory (see Middendorff 1956). Besides the nature and geography of the region, Middendorff also documented the ethnography of the indigenous and incomer populations of Eastern Siberia. It was Middendorff who, according to Anderson, first saw Dolgans 'as an object of ethnological interest' (2000a: 79). Middendorff also described other groups he met, such as the Samoyed, Evenki and Yakut. In his book, Middendorff classified the Dolgan people as a subgroup of Sakha (Yakut) but also stated that they have a mixed origin.

The same area was visited by the English anthropologist (of Polish origin) Maria Antonia Czaplicka at the beginning of the twentieth century. She came with the goal of researching the native population and collecting ethnographic data from them. Czaplicka left behind well-documented records (1999 [1916]) in which she described the customs, language, economy and also the social organisation of Siberian natives, as well as their relations to the state apparatus. She attended so-called clan meetings and analysed individual policies of various 'clan princes'. Czaplicka was one of the first scholars to express the opinion that the clan structure of Siberian natives was in fact created by the Russian administration in order to collect taxes (1999 [1916]: 158–60). She also made very valuable observations about property relations among the Evenki and Dolgan and about the concept of men's and women's work (see chapter 2). Having met the Dolgan people, she expressed the widespread local opinion that they are 'Yakutised Tungus' (Sakha-ised Evenki), a concept which was developed further by Soviet researchers, who said that the Dolgan are basically Tungus reindeer herders and hunters who have shifted to the Sakha language. Czaplicka's critical views on the role of individual Evenki and Dolgan 'princes' in pursuing Tsarist policies and

manipulating 'tradition' distinguishes her work from later Soviet works, where the 'tribal upper class' was seen as a homogenous group.

Because Dolgan pre-collectivisation material culture and social relations were comparable to Tungus (or Evenki and Eveny),<sup>7</sup> I found the work of the Tsarist researcher Shirokogoroff very helpful. He had published his main books (1929, 1999 [1935]) in exile, comparing various Evenki groups, including the so-called Reindeer-Tungus, their social relations, religion, economy, trade, relations with other groups and so forth. This allowed me to compare the religious and social significance of reindeer among nineteenth-century Evenki nomads with data I collected in 2000. However, I am sceptical of Shirokogoroff's clear-cut structures of Evenki social groups, suspecting that what he presents is a rather idealised description, similar to Shternberg's (1999) analysis of Gilyak social structure (see my critique of Shternberg in chapter 5).

When working in Siberia one cannot ignore works by Soviet ethnographers. Early Soviet ethnographers drew in many cases on a large number of intensive fieldwork periods, sometimes covering several years and decades, which provided them with a deeper and broader variety of data than a western anthropologist is usually able to collect within one year of fieldwork. Particularly valuable for my study were the works of Aleksei Aleksandrovich Popov, who conducted extensive fieldwork among Dolgan in today's Krasnoïarskii Krai. His articles on reindeer herding (1935), techniques, skills and work patterns (1937b), and family life and social relations (1946) offer not only brilliant comparative data but are also classics of Soviet ethnography. Another scientist who spent decades in the field was Boris Ossipovich Dolgikh, who focused more on the 'ethnogenesis' of the Dolgan, analysing their kinship structure and family origins as well as the origins of Evenki, Nganasan and other Siberian indigenous peoples (1950, 1952a, 1952b, 1960a, 1960b, 1963). Also important is the co-authored article by Dolgikh and Levin (1951) because this is one of the few works of Soviet ethnography where trade and exchange relations with Russians and other groups were seen as an important factor in changing native social structure through history. These works are less ideologically constructed than one might expect from a social scientist of the Stalin and Khrushchev era. Moreover, both Popov and Dolgikh had the courage to criticise some aspects of

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<sup>7</sup> Tungus was a general ethnonym for groups that after the Revolution came to be named either Evenki or Eveny. Many people from both groups that I met in eastern Sakha villages claimed that the linguistic, economic and cultural distinction between those two is artificial and created by scholars. Since this is not a topic of my study, I will not go into it further. In the text, I will use this ethnonym that was used either in the literature or by the people themselves. For the development of the ethnonyms Tungus, Evenki and Eveny see Vasilevich 1969.

Soviet policy (see chapter 2). Nevertheless, these scientists used Marxist-Leninist social theory as the basis of their analysis, which means that in their works different social and economic groups were defined very clearly and put in 'their place' in the 'tribal hierarchy' with the rich exploiters (*kulaki*) at the top and the oppressed poor (*bedniaki*) at the bottom. In chapter 2 I show that the dichotomy of rich *kulak* versus oppressed poor is problematic and was essentially constructed by state officials. The importance of the studies of Popov and Dolgikh is also related to the impact these scholars had on the definition of Dolgan culture and tradition, which is used to this day by Russian scholars and indigenous activists.

Another approach is visible in the writings of Il'ia Samoilovich Gurvich. Gurvich was a long-time head of the Department of North at the Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnography and Archaeology of the Academy of Science in Moscow, which is now the Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology of the Russian Academy of Science. His task was not only to organise ethnographic research in the Soviet North but also to supervise the maintenance of the 'right' theoretical materialist Marxist focus. In many of his works the attempt to reconstruct class society among indigenous people in pre-Soviet times is easily recognisable. Moreover, Gurvich tried to demonstrate in his analysis that present society was only 'a passing way station en route to an ideal though distant future' of Communism (Fischer 1967: 15). In his later works particularly, Gurvich emphasised the material well-being and tremendous development of Siberian indigenous minorities under Socialism (see for example Gurvich 1987). Nevertheless, I could not ignore Gurvich because he was the only Soviet researcher who had conducted extensive regular fieldwork in the Anabarskii district and he had written the only existing monograph on the region (1977). Since his analysis of indigenous culture and social life is problematic due his wish to show everything in the light of class struggles, I mainly used his statistical data (reindeer head counts, population statistics, income) in chapters 2 and 7 when discussing history and ethnic processes in the pre-collectivisation and early collectivisation period.

Besides the works of Dolgikh, Gurvich and Popov there have been some studies on Dolgan physical anthropology (Zolotareva 1965), language and folklore (Artem'ev 1992, 1999, 2001; Ubriatova 1966, 1985), life in villages with other ethnic groups (Tugolukov 1963; Gracheva 1978, 1980) and others, but all with a focus on the western Dolgan in the western part of Krasnoiarskii Krai. I know of very few scientific works on the eastern Dolgan after the 1970s. However, I know from personal communication that there has been some field research in the eastern part of Krasnoiarskii Krai and also in Uurung Khaia (for example by A. A. Savvinov, a scholar from



Yakutsk) but the results have never been published. There may be two explanations for this. On the one hand, Soviet ethnography uses different measures of success than its Western counterpart. Many Soviet ethnographers and linguists collected 'materials' for archives and museums, presenting them sometimes at conferences but never hurrying to publish. The scarcity of journals was only partly to blame for the fact that field data remained unpublished; scholars understood their professional goal to be collecting and 'saving cultures from extinction' which meant filling archive and museum files.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, from the beginning of the Soviet era, state interest in Sakha was focused on the central and eastern districts because of their rich mineral resources (see Obrutchev 1957), and science followed economic expansion. When in the 1970s and 1980s the diamond industry in Sakha 'appropriated' supposedly 'empty' regions in eastern Sakha, academic interest in the region was already focused on the indigenous minorities in the eastern part of the autonomous republic.<sup>9</sup>

When looking at Evenki material, I found the monograph by Vasilevich (1969) useful for comparing my contemporary data on kinship-related strategies, like borrowing and adoption, with old pre-Revolutionary practices described by Vasilevich. In my analysis I challenge the position he takes, and also that of Dolgikh, Gurvich and Popov, who, from my point of view, simplified these practices and showed borrowing and adoption as tools for exploitation. I argue that the picture, when considered in a broader context, was more complex.

Another study on Evenki is that of Tugolukov (1969), which proved useful not only for the broad pre-Soviet ethnographic data on which he draws, but also for his comments on Evenki as members of collective and

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<sup>8</sup> For example, I have seen thick volumes of 'expedition' reports, containing data from complex ethnographic, linguistic, sociologic and economic field research about Small-numbered Peoples' communities of one village or even district, which were never published. Only a few copies of each work were given to members of institutes' scientific councils for accounting purposes. Here the reader should know the particularity of the functioning of the scientific structures in the Soviet Union that is still alive in most Russian scientific institution. Every member of the institute or academy regularly has to present his or her working results for the institution's scientific council that valued it. This process is called 'accounting' (*otchet*).

<sup>9</sup> I consulted with my older Estonian colleagues who had conducted fieldwork in Siberia in the 1970s and 1980s to clarify the question as to how economic expansion was linked to ethnographic research. The explanation was that this had much to do with transport availability: regions undergoing or near to industrial activity were easier to reach, and ethnographers were often included in geological research expeditions in search of new mineral resources. In addition, according to my colleagues, Siberia was in Soviet times divided into different tariff zones (Sakha included four such zones) and in zones of industrial expansion per diems were often many times higher than in non-industrial regions, encouraging scholars to work more in areas of industrial importance.

state farm hunting and reindeer brigades. But, although I appreciate this book as one of the few Soviet works to touch on the topics of 'brigade life' and changes in the economy after collectivisation, I disagree with the author's belief that there were no changes in economic and social relations after collectivisation (cf. Tugolukov 1969: chapter 4). Tugolukov's book is in this sense typical of Soviet Siberian ethnography, where state and collective farm brigades were seen as examples of 'traditional culture'. This approach, which sees Siberian reindeer herding and hunting culture throughout the Tsarist and Soviet period as static, is represented also by some post-Soviet scholars, who saw decollectivisation and the post-Soviet crisis in the state agrarian economy as the demise of a 'traditional lifestyle' (see also Boiko and Kostiuk 1992; Turov 1997; Shcheikin et al. 2002).

The first scholar to address openly contemporary problems of Siberian indigenous minorities was Alexander Pika (Pika 1993; Pika and Prokhorov 1994; Pika et al. 1996). His writings and activity had a great impact, not only bringing new topics such as health care, violence in indigenous communities, conflicts with industry, and preservation of indigenous inheritance onto the academic and public stage, but he also significantly shaped the contemporary indigenous movement in the Russian Federation. Pika formulated the concept of 'neotraditionalism' which became a programme for indigenous organisations and activists in their cultural revival, and also, in reaction to it, the research agenda of many Russian and Western scientists. In my study I want to pose the question whether the process of cultural revival, as designed by the native intelligentsia, has the same meaning for the people the activists claim to fight for. To answer this question I show in chapter 3 that the so-called 'clan-based community' (*rodovaia obshchina*), an institution established 'from the top' with the intention of revitalising indigenous cultures, is for hunters and herders just one form of enterprise among others. Contrary to most scholars' opinion, for indigenous people in the Anabarskii district cultural and social practices are not connected to the economic policy of the state and so establishing an *obshchina* is just an economic strategy favoured by certain but not all native people.

In the context of Russian ethnography on northern indigenous peoples, I must also mention Sakha scholars. In Yakutsk, the Institute of the Problems of Small-Numbered Peoples of the North, part of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science (*Institut problem malochislennykh narodov Severa SO RAN*, or 'IPMNS'), has existed since 1991. I used many of the Institute's publications as sources of data in my research for this book. The Institute's research focuses on northern indigenous minorities in the Republic of Sakha. Many scholars in the institute come from the groups they study. A main goal of the Institute is the 'preservation' of indigenous cultures and



assistance in addressing problems faced by indigenous minorities. Therefore, the publications of the scholars from the institute often carry a strong sense of advocacy, dealing with the loss of native language (Robbek 1998), the crisis of the 'traditional economy' (Donskoi 2001; Syrovatskii 2002), or complex analysis of the decline of the social security network, the declining quality of education, cultural degradation, and the crisis in the indigenous economy (F. S. Donskoi 2002). However, in this study I challenge some key tenets of the Institute's scholars, showing that the dichotomy between the state farm and *obshchina* is oversimplified: there are many links between the two but also many other forms of legal and informal institutions. Also I show in chapter 7 that peoples' perception of their ethnicity and ethnic language is more flexible than indigenous scholars suggest.

### *Western anthropologists*

One of the first Western anthropologists to work in Siberia was Majorie Balzer. In her dissertation of 1979 she applied Western anthropological theories of ethnicity and identity in a Siberian context for the first time. Balzer's work was not only the first study of identity and ritual life among West Siberian Khanty, but was also the first attempt to look at connections between changes in ethnic identity and development of politically managed socialist agriculture. Her study supports my argument that despite a centrally planned structure and policy, the existing differences in socialist reindeer herding and hunting were closely dependent on local economic policy and on the will of local political decision-makers to integrate natives into Soviet social, economic and political structures. Balzer shows that while Khanty hunters and fishers were successfully sedentarised, reindeer herders were able to continue their family-based nomadic lifestyle through the Soviet period (Balzer 1979: 440–60).

Another pioneering work is Caroline Humphrey's study of a collective farm in Buryatia (1983, 1998a).<sup>10</sup> This is the only anthropological analysis of a Soviet agricultural enterprise and therefore provides a valuable comparison

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<sup>10</sup> The two main kinds of agricultural enterprises in the Soviet Union were the collective farm (*kolkhoz*) and state farm (*sovkhoz*). In reality there was not much difference in living standards or management styles between these two, the differences being more those of ideology and position within state structures. A state farm was considered state property, similar to factories or other enterprises, whereas a collective farm was theoretically a cooperative, i.e. a collective enterprise of its members. While directors of state farms were appointed by the state, chairmen of collective farms were (at least theoretically) elected by the members of the enterprise. Owing to the fact that the state farm was considered to be a 'higher' form of property, it had better access to state subsidies. While wages in collective farms were linked to the enterprise's profit, state farm workers had fixed wages like factory workers. There were also some differences in subordination to the Communist Party structures and Ministry of Agriculture (cf. Humphrey 1998a: 13–4, 75).

with the former state farm in Uurung Khaia, and is also useful for understanding recent developments in the light of 'path dependence' (Stark 1992). Humphrey discusses multiple layers of the collective farm, describing the role of kinship affiliation within the formal structures, and also examines how categories of 'local' and 'incomer' were flexibly understood in the local community. Humphrey's analysis of the 'total social institution' (outlined in another article, see Humphrey 1995: 7) explains how resources were re-allocated and managed in the collective farm and shows that the sense of *kollektiv* helps us to understand people's nostalgia for the 'good old days' (Hann 1994, 2001). Although some scholars stress the emotional quality of the socialist *kollektiv*, which was 'like my second family' for the workers (Ashwin 1999), I discovered that people's nostalgia for the former state farm was more closely connected with economy and discipline. Following Konstantinov and Vladimirova (2002), I interpret people's reluctance to leave the former state farm structure as an expression of a form of 'sovkhozisation', i.e. their wish to retain social security and access to resources and benefits.

Gudeman (2001: 154) argues that in a socialist enterprise borders between the state, public and private property often become unclear. Humphrey (1995, 1998a) shows how in the socialist agricultural enterprise resources of the enterprise are used to private ends but also distributed by the management to motivate workers to work better. She calls these resources 'manipulable' and discusses how these resources were used to establish informal networks inside the enterprise and a bond of loyalty between the management and workers, which together created the sense of the *kollektiv*. Moreover, the existence of this grey zone of resources not only enabled but also brought about private entrepreneurial activities within socialist enterprises throughout the socialist countries (e.g. Hann 1980; Creed 1998; Eidson 2003). In Anabar these private economic activities were and are family based and have strongly affected the establishment of the current 'agricultural landscape' (see chapters 2, 3 and 4). In the Anabarskii district, I show that in the post-Soviet market economy resources are manipulated not only as land-use rights or fuel among hunters and herders but even as credits and subventions at the level of the district management. This practice relies on the strength of loyalty between people of different social layers who still have a sense of responsibility towards old colleagues from the state farm era, a bond linking people in complex ways across various sectors of the post-Socialist economy.

After *perestroika*, the situation in Siberian studies changed. Western scholars were able at last to enter the region to conduct fieldwork. They covered different regions and explored different topics. Bruce Grant's (1995) research on forced traditionalism in Sakhalin, David Anderson's (1998b,

2000a) work on territorial patterns and identity in Krasnoïarskii Krai, John Ziker's (1998, 2002a, 2002b) on resource management and networks in Taimyr, Emma Wilson's (2002) study on similar topics in Sakhalin, and Patty Gray's (1998, 2000, 2001) analysis on institutional change and its reflection in reindeer herding in Chukotka all supplied me with comparative approaches and helped to outline general similarities of the postsocialist transformation in Siberia, but also regional differences in the institutional landscape, the position of natives within it, the importance of herder-hunter as an official profession, the legal situation and last but not least ecology. As Gray and Stammeler (2002) and Stammeler and Ventsel (2003) have demonstrated, the image of a coherent system of state agriculture in the past and a general crisis in Siberia now is wrong: both under Socialism and in post-socialist times the various regions had specific policies and courses of development. In chapter 3 I show that institutional change in local agriculture is affected by the policies and programmes of the Sakha government, of the diamond company ALROSA, and of the head of the district administration who has his own ideas about how to reform reindeer herding and hunting. In this and later chapters (4, 5 and 6) I show that it was these local regional policy-makers who offered indigenous people a platform for institutional change that saw the development of new forms of property in regions across Siberia.

Among contemporary researchers I much appreciate the work of John Ziker (1998, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2003a, 2003b) and David Anderson (1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2000a, 2000b). Both scholars have worked among the Dolgan but in different settings: for example, of the institutional background, natural environment, ethnicity and (in part) the modes of subsistence are different. Since native people in all three communities—Khantaika (Anderson), Ust-Avam (Ziker) and Uurung Khaia (Ventsel)—consider themselves relatives and even visit each other on rare occasions or meet in other villages, works by Ziker and Anderson provide a good basis for comparison. In all of these communities, people have quite different strategies of coping with postsocialist reality, especially concerning resource management. This illustrates not only the theory of regional 'path dependence' but also the construction of ethnicities and traditions by the Soviet state, as analysed by Ssorin-Chaikov (2003) in neighbouring Evenkiia.

I also gained much help and inspiration from the works of scholars who have conducted fieldwork in Sakha. These studies prove first hand that even within one administrative unit—the Republic of Sakha—there are considerable variations in the historical development of ethnic identity (Takakura 2001), the structure of brigades and decollectivisation (Vitebsky 1989; Vitebsky and Wolfe 2001), and institutional restructuring (Fondahl



1998; Sasaki 2003; Ikeda 2003). The field report of Turza and Turza (1996 / 1997), the only foreign anthropologists to have published work on the Anabarskii district, has also proved very helpful in my research. Their article is the first publication based on fieldwork carried out after the 1950s (the last period described in Gurvich's works). Turza and Turza visited the Anabarskii district in 1996 when state farms still existed, but a comparison of their description with the situation in 2000–1 reveals some remarkable differences (see chapters 3 and 6). Their work also demonstrates that the 'snowmobile' revolution reached the Anabarskii district quite late; the Turzas saw hunters using reindeer sledges instead of Buran snowmobiles, suggesting that snowmobiles were adopted very late compared with other Siberian regions (cf. Stammeler 2004).<sup>11</sup>

### *The Contemporary Research Agenda*

The appearance of a Western theoretical approach in the literature and new research topics also affected many Russian scholars, who shifted to contemporary topics (ethnicity, property relations, territoriality, decollectivisation and so forth), employing Western modes of analysis. It is therefore difficult to speak now about a specific Western or Russian approach in Siberia. The grouping instead tends to take place more thematically and theoretically than geographically, i.e. 'classical' ethnography is no longer the domain of Russian ethnographers (see Bychkova Jordan and Jordan-Bychkov 2001) and among Russian scholars we can find those who critically analyse questions linked to tradition, indigenous identity or language maintenance (Vakhtin 2001; Sirina 2002; Liarskaia 2003)

One topic addressed by many scholars is identity and ethnicity. In contrast to the older Soviet approach that saw ethnic identity as fixed and unchanging (cf. Afanas'eva 1990), ethnicity is seen by contemporary authors, following Barth (1969a), as a relational identity—a construct which changes over time. Vakhtin (2001) describes language skills as a monopoly of the older generation which is transmitted to the next 'non-skilled' generation, thereby challenging advocacy anthropologists who argue that Siberian minorities are doomed to extinction in the post-Soviet crisis (Pika et al. 1996). Barth's (1969a) and Elwert's (1995) argument that there are several emic and etic categories for defining borders of ethnic groups supports my

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<sup>11</sup> But among the Nentsy of the Yamal Peninsula, snowmobiles lost favour quite quickly despite being adopted earlier—they proved to be noisy and mechanically unreliable. Reindeer are still seen as being more efficient and so are the preferred form of transport on migrations and for herding activities. The difference is that whereas Stammeler's Nentsy do not *want* to use snowmobiles, the Dolgan are passionate snowmobile users (sometimes even using them for herding). Thus there are also cultural differences in how far snowmobiles are accepted (personal communication, Mikhail Okotetto, 1 April 2003; Stammeler 2004).

discussion of Dolgan-Sakha identity in chapter 7 and links to further general discussion about whether the Dolgan are a distinct ethnic group or part of Sakha (see also Artem'ev 2001; Ubriatova 1966, 1985). My field data show that the usual academic approach often differs from the views of local people, who see no contradiction not only in 'switching boundaries' (cf. Elwert 1995, 2002) but also in having multiple identities (cf. Anderson 2000a).

The view that ethnic identity and changes in ethnic identity are directly or indirectly linked with the economy and can be either a conscious or an unconscious strategy has been discussed in the context of South America, Africa and Asia (Barth 1969a, 1969b; Eidheim 1969; Haaland 1969; Golte and Norma 1987; Schlee 1994). In the Siberian context, many works show that ethnic stratification is also linked to economic stratification and that the economic survival strategies of indigenous minorities are directly influenced by state 'national' policy (e.g. Fondahl and Sirina 2003; Bloch 2004; Gray 2005). This mirrors the established debates in anthropology (cf. Shibutani and Kiwan 1965; Royce 1982; Bourgois 1986; Nash 1989; van Schendel 2002). David Anderson (1996, 2000a) shows that ethnicity does not only affect economic strategies but, on the contrary, ethnicity can be manipulated for economic ends. His research area was similar to the ethnic setting in the Anabarskii district. In both regions there exist minority groups officially registered as Dolgan and Evenki. In the Khantaiskoe Ozero, despite the ethnic tensions and competition of the early 1990s, Evenki and Dolgan families were historically so mixed that members of one family could be registered under different ethnonyms. My data show that in addition to Evenki and Dolgan identity, Sakha identity also existed among the indigenous people in the Anabarskii owing to the pattern of regional historical development. I show in chapter 7 that switching the identity—'tuning in' in the sense of Anderson (2000a: 106–7)—implies a situation where ethnicity is important for establishing informal kin-based networks. At the same time, at the village level, ethnicity can be 'forgotten' and other categories, like 'local' or 'incomer', are more important (chapter 7; cf. Ziker 2002a). Discussing the interplay between ethnic identity and economic strategies I want to contribute to the already extensive debate in anthropology about ethnicity as a social and political construct.

Since the beginning of the 1990s the issue of decollectivisation, and with it land, property and indigenous reorganisation, has become important in Siberian anthropology. Tuisku (1999, 2002) and Konstantinov (1997, 2000) discuss what motivates reindeer herders to maintain their connection with the state farm in European Russia among Nentsy and Saami. Both show convincingly that reindeer herders link the advantages of a 'total social institution' with the opportunity to follow one's interests 'under the um-



rella' of the state farm (Konstantinov and Vladimirova 2002: 8), a strategy similar to that of hunters and reindeer herders in the Anabar tundra (chapters 3 and 6). Konstantinov (2000) and Stammeler (2004), in discussing private activities inside big state farms or its successors, focus on ownership regimes in reindeer herding. Stammeler shows how the categories 'private' and 'state' reindeer are successfully manipulated in favour of reindeer herders. I add to this discussion by widening the object of study. I show that besides vaccination of private domestic reindeer, the maintenance of links with the former state farm is also motivated by access to fuel, ammunition and other supplies as well as permission to hunt and fish, all of which are granted 'under the umbrella' of the state farm (see chapters 3 and 5).

This topic links closely with that of the reorganisation of indigenous peoples. In the last decade the anthropological focus has shifted to a new indigenous institution—the clan-based community or *rodovaia obshchina* (Fondahl 1995; Fondahl and Poelzer 1998, 2003; Sirina 1999; Osherenko 2001; Robbek 2001). The *obshchina* is also important for my study because Sakha was the first region to legalise this new form of property in 1992. In the Russian literature, one very popular view is that Siberian indigenous people will only have a future if they preserve their 'traditional' way of life (e.g. Boiko 1992, Golovnev 1997, 1999, Iuzhakov 2000, Khariutschi 2001, Martynova 2001, Pivneva 2001). Therefore the *obshchina* was hailed as a tool for preserving native traditions, for bringing people 'back to their roots' (Vinokurova 1992; Belianskaia 1995; Robbek 2001). Although anthropological studies of the *obshchina* provide a picture of a large variety of institutions (Novikova 1997, 2002; Sirina 1999; Fondahl, Lazebnik and Poelzer 2000; Gray 2001), the *obshchina* is usually understood as the only alternative to the state agricultural collective enterprises and is seen through the prism of land rights and land use. Here I want to question this dichotomy and show that people in Anabar did not necessarily choose the *obshchina*—it stands as just one among many possible strategies for establishing private enterprise. I also show that the *obshchina* should be seen not as a means of revitalising indigenous culture or as a social unit, but rather as an economic way of adapting to the market economy and the legal setting (chapter 3). Here there exists a certain dichotomy between scholars' and native activists' notions of indigeness and peoples' self-perception. Stammeler (2004) discusses 'Nentsyness' in his dissertation and explains it, using Ingold (2000: 162), as 'people's involvement with others and their environment' (Stammeler 2004: 15). In chapters 3, 5, 7 and 8, in discussing *obshchina* and people's strategies, I show, as elsewhere (Ventsel 2002, 2003), that 'Dolganness' and 'tradition' means doing things 'our way' i.e. through participation in kinship networks and following certain social norms.

The main focus of my research is, not, however, on legal changes in postsocialist transition society but people's strategies of coping with reality. Beyond legal frames, there is much more going on in patterns of land use. In the Anabarskii district I did not document any examples of the spiritual and ritual meanings of the land (cf. Vitebsky 1992, 2002; King 2002a, 2002b), but this does not mean that land has no sacral importance for some of my informants.<sup>12</sup> In Anabar, land ownership and resource monitoring is regulated by social means, often ignoring official legal frames, similar to Taimyr hunters (Ziker 2002b, 2003a). This similarity shows the efficiency of kin-controlled resource monitoring models and supports my main argument about the relevance of informal networks in resource distribution and government.

### ***1.3.2 Postsocialist Studies***

In 1991 Steven Sampson asked in *Anthropology Today* 'Is there an Anthropology of Socialism?' In his article, Sampson pointed out the many different sides and layers of socialist society, as well as the possible impact of 'national' differences on the further development of ex-socialist states (1991: 17–18). He also outlined some issues, such as the importance of kinship and other networks (p. 18), which indeed became important for further research, and are also relevant to the present book.

Scholars are divided on questions of interpreting historical and future trajectories of these countries. Pickles and Smith (1998b) have shown that most of the former socialist countries gave up the idea of the 'third way' and switched to 'shock therapy'. This statement was questioned by Gustafson (1999), who argued that there was, for example, a 'capitalism Russian-style' which meant neither remaining socialist nor becoming fully capitalist in the Western sense but 'muddling through' (p. 234). Looking at Russia, researchers found various explanations for problems connected with reforms in agriculture: the vast distances that separated producers, buyers and markets (Lynch 2002); a lack of clearly established rural elites (Wegren 2000); the inertia of informal rules (Hedlund 1999); and the lack of channels through which to sell food products, thereby affecting the cooperation between big food processing enterprises and peripheral farmers (Ioffe and Nefedova 2001). These analyses did not discuss how far these characteristics can be applied to other regions outside the region of analysis or outside European

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<sup>12</sup> One possible explanation for this may be that Soviet control in Anabar successfully eliminated shamans as social institution so that they played no role as regulators of social relations within the community and were mainly engaged as healers. Thus, there is no longer an institution that can regulate land use via religious rituals.

Russia in general. One study that has attempted to do this is that by Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy (2003) which shows that the specific development of Siberian regions is not comparable with that of European Russia. Their argument is that Siberia, with its harsh climate and long distances, is overpopulated. These geographical factors make any kind of human activity inefficient and the only way to keep so many large, scattered settlements intact is through subsidising the Siberian regions. Hill and Gaddy's work helps to explain many of the reforms of the Sakha government and the social programmes of ALROSA, but it does not clarify why people choose one local strategy over another.

These predominantly economic and political studies differ from the approach of anthropologists through their emphasis on transparent social and economic structures and analysis of the economic efficiency of such structures. To give but one example, the book *Romanian Agriculture and Transition toward the EU* (Davidova and Thomson 2003), written by a number of economists and political scientists, concluded with a rather pessimistic assessment of economic shortages arising from the lack of transparency and gaps in the law. Many anthropologists have demonstrated that transparency and clearly-defined borders are difficult to achieve in the transformation process of former socialist countries and are in many cases unwanted by the actors themselves (see Bridger and Pine 1998; Creed 1998; Cartwright 2001; Kaneff 2002a; Torsello 2003). Lack of transparency does not necessarily hinder the (quasi-) capitalist activities of farmers and other agricultural enterprises. They use methods and networks which evade hard and fast rules and are difficult to describe, giving rise to unexpected changes in the course of their development.

Since 1991, a broad variety of anthropological works have been published based on extensive fieldwork in former socialist countries. These studies present a fine-grained picture of the similarities and differences in postsocialist transformations. There have been numerous works which show how the transformation process in former socialist agriculture was and is connected directly to privatisation and consequent changes in property relations. Stark (1992, 1996; cf. North 1990) uses a 'path dependency' approach, while others are less easily categorised in their particular analyses of the different contemporary political and economic settings, which shape the regional variations of privatisation and changes in property relations from Bulgaria and East Germany to Mongolia and Vietnam (e.g. Pickles and Smith 1998a; Alanen et al. 2001; Cartwright 2001; Hedlund 2001; Abrami 2002; Davidova and Thomson 2003; Eidson 2003; Eidson and Milligan 2003; Morrison and Schwartz 2003).



However, my field data show that that these models cannot be applied everywhere inside the Russian Federation. In other words, regional differences within the Russian Federation are as great, if not greater, than between the states of the former socialist bloc: these models are based on a situation where there are big former agro-industrial enterprises at one end and small farmers at the other, and where local markets do not exist. In north-western Sakha, the setting differs from many regions in European Russia. In Sakha there is a local market both in the village and outside the district. There are also several large and small buyers who operate both inside the district but also far away in the capital or other districts, supported by diamond money. As a result, multiple levels in the market economy have emerged, where small-scale business is focused on local buyers and large quantities of produce are shipped out of the district. Also many thousands of kilometres do not hinder small entrepreneurs from spending up to two weeks on the road in order to barter with village people for furs, meat and fish. These multiple forms of trade exist without a clearly defined local elite regulating local production and relations with trade partners; whole businesses are often regulated informally (chapters 3, 5 and 8).

Former collective and state farms provide a useful starting point in analysing the transformation process in postsocialist agriculture, because in many cases they represent the core of social and economic relations. These enterprises have decreased in number, become poorer, and lost membership but have persisted in Russia and in many other countries (e.g. Verdery 1998; Hann 2001). Wegren calls the agricultural policy of the Soviet Union unique: even weak farms were supported by the state (1998: 25). However, this was the case in other socialist countries too (cf. Szelényi 1998: 13; Finke 2000: 7). The contemporary situation of former state and collective farms is such that in many parts of Russia even bankrupt farms continue to work (Humphrey 2002: 12). Although the state dismantled its planned and subsidised agriculture sector in an attempt make it cheaper for the state, socialist forms of property relations have persisted (Hann 1996: 8–9; Kaneff and Leonard 2002: 2).

To a certain extent, the former social and political embeddedness of agriculture, which made collective and state farms so special, has been maintained (Hann 1998; Hivon 1998). Perrota argues that in Russian former collective farms the 'responsibility for the social sphere still rests with the old management' (1998: 152), Humphrey (1998b) sees it as a kind of domestic mode of production and Gambold Miller (2003) even as a feudal relationship. What is common to all three statements are the multiple responsibilities and dependencies that extend from top to bottom and bottom to top. I go one step further; in chapter 3 I show that the new formal hunting and herding

institutions, which are the outcome of 'privatisation' policies, retain many elements of the former state farm brigade structure, combined with strategies and social norms of pre-Soviet times. Also I show in chapters 4 and 6 that social relations of responsibility between the former state farm, district administration and new institutions have maintained their old character: thus, unregistered hunting grounds are recognised by the district farm management and district administration, and the administration still feels obliged to supply private hunting enterprises with forms of credit or to lend them rifles. For their part, enterprises still feel obliged to fulfil the district plan, and all private reindeer are vaccinated by the district farm veterinarians along with the brigade animals. In these chapters I also show that the model dichotomy of private farmer/state farm does not apply in every region of Russia, even though for hunters and reindeer herders in the Anabarskii district the collapse of state agriculture along with its social institutions and the crisis of successor institutions was as traumatic here as it was for peasants in other regions and countries (Bridger and Pine 1998: 9; see also Leonard and Kaneff 2002: 4).

Nevertheless, decollectivisation was a process that rearranged property relations even when former state farms retained their central role within the community. Chris Hann (2000) sums up the post-collective situation in agriculture as the 'tragedy of privates'. Indeed, more or less everywhere in postsocialist countries, privatisation and restitution caused the appearance of new forms of property and new kinds of property relations. These relations were fuzzy, especially at the beginning of the 1990s. The decollectivisation process in the Anabarskii district differed from that in European Russia and other former socialist countries because the focus was more on redistribution of state farm property and finances than on land tenure. Despite this, I found several case studies of privatisation in Eastern Europe to be useful (e.g. Kaneff 1998; Verdery 1999, 2000; Cartwright 2001; Kaneff and Yalçın-Heckmann 2003). All of these property regimes offer a similar range of social entitlements (Hann 2000: 18). The thrust of my argument is that the nature of collectivised agriculture produced many similar strategies in the postsocialist period throughout the former socialist bloc and we cannot explain everything in terms of local tradition or specific ecological, political and social settings.

In many postsocialist countries after the collapse of former collective and state farms, people were not at all eager to start their own private farming enterprises. They tended to maintain their affiliation with the collective farm in one form or another (e.g. Cartwright 2000; Kaneff 2002b; Torsello 2003). Kaneff argues that labour was a shared experience which created social relations between people (2002b: 4). In the North, I also encountered



an emphasis on the *local* (local labour, local resources, local land). In chapter 4 I describe how locality was not only a means of access to resources but personal locality was also something that regulated control over particular resources. I show in chapter 8 that locality in terms of being a member of a community also embraces the community's support in cases of property violation. Like outsiders in Talpa, Bulgaria (Kaneff's field site), who were seen as threats to the community's lifestyle, in northern Sakha outsiders were seen as people who harmed the community by cheating people and bringing alcohol into the village. Hostile emotions toward strangers, common to both Talpa and Uurung Khaia, made the latter community a dangerous place for outsiders, where violence and theft towards strangers was tolerated.<sup>13</sup>

Another process typical of postsocialist transformations is the recreation of social relations within the community itself. Verdery (1996a, 1998, 1999) links new property relations in Transylvanian communities with 'old' power relations. She shows how the former collective farm management makes use of its position in order to keep land-use rights 'fuzzy' and 'elastic' to profit from the situation. Verdery also observed that 'land privatisation means conflicts' (1999: 67). To avoid such conflicts, official land privatisation did not take place in the village of Uurung Khaia. The 'elasticity of lands' was expressed in informal boundary discussions where different factors determined an individual's entitlement to hunting grounds. At the same time, like the Transylvanian cooperative management, the Anabarskii district administration maintained its control over ongoing land-use disputes in a situation where 'postsocialist property [was] overlapping' (Verdery 1999: 75). The local district and village administration regulated land use only in the last instance (see chapter 4), and did so by making use of their Soviet-era 'patronage model' (Beissinger 1992: 143) and the fact that in a small agricultural district all 'producers' are interlinked.

Nevertheless, we should pay attention to the fact that similarities between European postsocialist agriculture and Arctic hunting and reindeer herding are limited due to the differences in land-use models and ecologies. Arctic land use and its associated conflicts are more similar to the seasonal herding practices in Western Mongolia (Finke 2000) than to farming by European agriculturalists. Of course, there are also differences: in Mongolia competition was rife between Kazakh and Mongol herders who relied on different pre-collectivisation traditions to justify their herding models rooted in socialist collective farm practice, while in the Anabarskii district the conflict is between reindeer herders and hunters over access to wild reindeer

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<sup>13</sup> This differs markedly from all of the small villages in Kamchatka investigated by Alexander D. King (personal communication).

herds (chapter 5). However, the ecology and the specific nomadic economy links the topic of land use among former socialist reindeer herders more closely to herder-hunter studies (i.e. discussions about pasture degradation and 'optimal' herd size), than to peasant-related studies. As I show in the next section and throughout the book, ecological and economic particularities determine the establishment of social networks and choice of strategies in a similar way to groups living in different political systems (see section 1.3.3; and cf. Humphrey and Sneath 1999 in relation to Tuva, and Stammeler 2004 in relation to the Yamal Peninsula).

Networking is one topic of postsocialist studies that is independent of ecology or the mode of production. Networks of urban and rural kin, and ties between the state and producers, are the means by which resources are distributed among people and at least minimal living standard are guaranteed for all parties involved (e.g. Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Czeglédý 2002; Kaneff 2002b). There have been studies which show that food production in Russia was markedly decentralised during the 1990s due to the lack of cash, a decrease in the purchasing power of the population, shortfalls in the output of big food producers and many other factors, all of which contributed to greater self-sufficiency in food production through more extensive use of household plots (Gustafson 1999; Helanterä 1999).

The Arctic North follows a similar model, with one exception: food and other resources are distributed unequally over space. Reindeer meat and fish are products that are produced in the North, whereas people in southern urban centres have better access to industrial goods and in southern villages to goods such as milk products, cattle and foal meat. This was the main reason in Sakha for establishing large kinship networks covering huge distances and uniting several households. Goods and services which circulated in such networks were one focus of my research, and I show how different ethnic, kinship and other social categories are manipulated to create such networks (chapters 5, 6 and 7). Typical of the networking in other postsocialist settings, it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between cash-based business, barter, and reciprocal help (Seabright 2000; Mandel and Humphrey 2002).

At the beginning of my fieldwork I planned to study 'informality' in a postsocialist setting, assuming that dysfunctional formal networks would be extended and replaced by unofficial structures (Ventsel 2001). Only in the course of my fieldwork did I realise that the core of such networks is kin-based reciprocity cloaked in an ideology of tradition. The main focus of my study was not individual, institutional and collective marketing strategies, as is the topic of many similar studies, but more household-centred 'grass roots' survival strategies. My main argument is similar to that of Humphrey

and Hugh-Jones (1997) who saw that there is not always a clear distinction between barter and exchange, and when researching transactions we must always look at the social context (pp. 2–3). Similar to Slovakian reciprocal networks, the model of reciprocity among the Dolgan of Uurung Khaia has ‘its roots in pre-Soviet survival strategies’ (cf. Smith 2002: 236), but it is also clear that this return to ‘traditional’ models of sharing and helping was a forced strategy in postsocialist times because of a lack of any alternatives. Analysing such networks in chapter 5, I want to demystify this ‘traditionalism’, which was not something natural and essential to Arctic peoples’ ‘culture’ but the most rational strategy in a concrete social, political and economic setting.

My interest in postsocialist transformations lies not only in groups and collectives but also in the ‘smallest unit of society’ in socialist ideology, the family. Although the family was not fully controlled by the socialist state and retained a certain independence and function of mutual support, especially when state institutions were unable to provide certain services (for example, child care for pre-school age children, canteen catering, etc.) (Dunn and Dunn 1988: 76; Buchowski 2001: 124), the family was nevertheless embedded in the social, political and economic structures of the state.

The Arctic former state-farm community occupies, in my view, a different position to those in industrial areas. Officially, the ideology of the socialist state was to ‘liberate women’ (Holmes 1997: 251). Wood (1997: 3) argues that the aim of the state was not to ‘liberate’ women from the ‘exploitation’ of men but to break the patriarchal subordination of extended families and to bring women into the public service sphere. In this way, the state created ‘worker-mothers’ (Ashwin 2000: 9). In the Arctic North, women were integrated into the ‘labour force’ but maintained their traditional scope of activities, i.e. they were paid to be ‘tentworkers’ (*chumrabotnitsy*), whose task was to cook, sew and clean. This avoided, on the one hand, the development of a sense of female *kollektiv* which was formed in the factory, the ‘second family’ for workers (Ashwin 1999: 246–9), and, on the other hand, maintained the continuation of traditional spousal relationships from pre-Soviet times. Here I join with Gal and Kligman’s criticism of ‘teleological assumptions and causal weight of “path-ways”’ (2000: 12). They argue that the shift of women in postsocialist times from the public sphere into a more ‘traditional role’ has much to do also with ‘less salient but no less important continuities in many areas of social life’ (Gal and Kligman 2000: 12).

As in all the former socialist countries, female unemployment in the Anabarskii district has increased (cf. Holmes 1997: 256–7). But there has been no increase in unemployment among women who worked in the tundra



because of the continuing shortage of hunters, herders and tentworkers. Owing to the incorporation of features of pre-Soviet social life into the Soviet model of agriculture, the social role of women retained its 'traditional' place. Therefore the postsocialist crisis did not cause such social frustration among female tundra workers as it did among women previously employed in industry, then forced to withdraw into the family sphere (Holmes 1997). On the contrary, I argue in chapter 6 that the maintenance of family-based brigade structures supported a family-oriented informal social hierarchy in reindeer brigades. Furthermore, in chapter 8 I argue that institutionalised 'traditional' gender roles in the community have supported a continuing consensus of social values about masculinity, male honour, violence and crime.

### *1.3.3 Hunters, Gatherers and Herders: Property and Territoriality*

This book draws on studies of hunter, gatherer and herding cultures from many different continents. It is not only about postsocialist social transformations, but also about a community whose main source of income is hunting and herding. Therefore I found such works on similar cultures in other political settings to be very useful, especially those focused on relationships between the state and pastoral peoples, and also those addressing the impact of the market economy on changes in hunting and herding cultures.

The tundra is a unique ecological and economic zone where the main resource for nomads is a single species—reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*). This is a regime that differs significantly from other nomadic and pastoral cultures who have many species to rely on (Wissler 1923: 230–8; Galaty and Johnson 1990: 7; Khazanov 1994: 41). However, the wide variety of studies on hunting, gathering and pastoral cultures suggests that we can find general traits in social relations among these groups independent of geographical setting (see e.g. Salzman 1982b; Khazanov 1994; Schweitzer, Bieseke and Hitchcock 2000; Klovov and Jernsletten 2002). In theoretical considerations I draw upon studies focused on Arctic hunting groups, but I also use works on Asian and African pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. Comparisons of nomadic cultures in different settings helps to identify not only the particular traits of the Dolgan–Evenki hunting and herding economy but also the similarities it holds with other hunting, gathering and herding cultures.

In the former Soviet Union we speak about former state agricultural enterprises, but nomads everywhere have gone through different phases and forms of sedentarisation, influences from the market economy, and state indigenous policies (e.g. Salzman 1982a: xii–xiii). We cannot speak about a 'pure' nomadic culture in the contemporary world since they have all undergone some kind of transformation under the impact of the 'outside world'

(cf. Khazanov 1994: 3, 17). This book aims to provide an important contribution to hunter-herder studies by providing a comparative analysis of the adaptations and changes in the social relations of nomads during the periods of collectivisation and decollectivisation.

However, societies of nomads are generally viewed as being 'outside' the industrial world. Polanyi's ([1944] 1985) division between traditional and industrial societies excluded any kind of overlapping. Each 'world' had its own moral, ethical and behavioural systems in accordance with its economic system. Gellner relies on a similar kind of opposition, although more in the context of a mental *esprit d'analyse* (1983: 21–2). Such a dichotomy was not unknown in Soviet theoretical approaches. Soviet ethnographers often looked only for traditional culture (see Slezkine 1991) and saw Siberian natives before the Revolution as being members of static, traditional communities. Nevertheless, some scholars recognised that trading relations had impacts on native social relations even before the beginning of Russian colonisation (Dolgikh and Levin 1951; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).

Nurit H. Bird-David (1983, 1995) shows that the gap between industrial society and the hunter-gatherer world can be bridged without assimilating the latter. I am far from arguing that work in reindeer or hunting brigades was a means of 'wage-gathering' for Dolgan people, or that buying from a shop or an entrepreneur should be interpreted as 'food collecting' (Bird 1983). However, Bird-David's point that in terms of social organisation hunting societies were 'isolationist' and then through contact with trade became 'integrationist', i.e. organised for outside trade, is useful for understanding the situation in Anabar (1995: 19). Similar to the south Indian Naiken described in Bird-David's ethnography, the Dolgan maintained their hunting and herding economy in the pre-collectivisation period, but also were engaged in extensive trade with the Russians, as I show in chapter 2. In Soviet times, Dolgan economic activities were integrated into state agriculture but continued to exist in the same natural environment, using similar techniques and skills as before. Bird-David argues that one reason the Naiken were able to exist in two economic regimes was that their 'traditional base of livelihood was not destroyed and at the same time Naikens were needed by the plantation' (Bird 1983: 81). Even more interesting is her later analysis, where she shows that an individual was integrated in two structures at the same time: while at work the person was a wage labourer and member of the trade union, then at home he occupied a particular position in the kinship structure (Bird-David 1995: 29).

My field data show that the village community of Uurung Khaia always had multiple layers; extended kinship and state farm structures were embedded within each other but maintained a certain social distance and



independent nature. As Bird-David shows, by including non-Naikens in the Naiken social world and adopting non-Naiken social codes, hunter-gatherers in southern India have persisted and used these 'outside people' as 'social and economic' resources (1995: 29–30). Dolgan were, unlike Naiken, forced to integrate into radically different political, economic and social structures. But a comparison with the Naiken case explains how the shift from official formal structures in Soviet times to informal kin-based structures in the postsocialist era was possible. As I show in chapter 6, kin-based structures were activated inside the official state farm structures in order to follow family interests, and in chapter 7 I discuss how incorporation of other people into Dolgan kinship did not change social relations in the kinship network but was used as a form of capital to gain access to certain resources.

At the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, I was a doctoral student within the Siberia Project Group which was itself part of a larger unit, the Property Relations Department. Both the project group and the department focus on property relations in postsocialist transition societies in a comparative manner. Therefore, the analysis of property relations among the Dolgan of Uurung Khaia has an important place in my study, as well as links to hunter, gatherer and herder studies. Land and property issues are equally important in the anthropology of hunter-gatherer and pastoral societies and in the anthropology of postsocialism. In my study, I focus on both land and animals as property, but also on other 'things' as property, and how these aspects of property relations are interconnected. However, my main interest was on property relations following the concept of Hann (1998). I focused not only on economic aspects, exploring the importance of social relations to the means of production in the Anabarskii district, but looked at social relations inside and outside the community. This is what Hallowell defined as a 'bundle of property rights' (1943: 123).

Although there is a broad range of literature about hunter-gatherers and herders, I found that these are generally handled independently of one another. In north-western Sakha, hunters and herders were already co-existing in the seventeenth century. This mode of livelihood continued in the Soviet period and, because of state subsidies for reindeer herding, hunting wild reindeer and herding domestic reindeer are part of local agriculture even today. Theories of hunting and herding societies are quite different, sometimes even contradictory. This offered me a good opportunity to choose between various theoretical approaches to find models which fitted with my data; and these theoretical differences forced me to look for bridges between models of hunting/gathering and herding economies.

Here I found support in the work of Barnard, who doubts that the divide between hunters and herders is quite so clear (1993: 34f). He is not the

only one. Ellen, for example, sees as 'problematic' the distinction between hunting and herding as productive practices (1994: 211). Nevertheless, she refers to North American plains Indians as 'pastoralists-hunters' (p. 212). Here, the fact that Indians did not eat horseflesh (unless in extreme hunger) and lived off buffalo meat seems to be the main reason for classifying plains Indians as hunters (Ingold 1980: 162). This supports the main tendency in the anthropological literature to make a separation between the cultures of herders and the cultures of hunters. Reindeer culture is exceptional in this sense in that the same animal is not only hunted and bred but the domestic reindeer is also used to hunt its wild counterpart either as a decoy or a transport animal (e.g. Vasilevich 1969; Gurvich 1977; Ingold 1980). And even within the reindeer culture, this complexity seems to be problematic. Stammer, when talking about the hunter-herding continuum in the context of reindeer herding (2004: chapter 2), admits, citing Pohlhausen 1954, that domestic reindeer can be used to accompany wild herds. But for Stammer the hunter-herding continuum is a temporary phase in the domestication process in which 'herd following' becomes 'herd leading' (i.e. he maintains the polarisation between hunting of wild reindeer and the herding of the domesticated animal). The starting point in my analysis is the general hypothesis that in nomadic societies we expect to have communal ownership of pasture and hunting lands (Ingold 1987: 199–200; Gellner [1981] 1994: xii). In a 'classic' pastoral setting it would mean opening up the discussion about the 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin 1968). In the Anabarskii district, the situation is far from being 'classic'. Although there is not much competition among herds of domestic reindeer, there is competition between wild and domestic reindeer who use the same pastures, a situation also found in other regions of the former Soviet Union (e.g. in Kazakhstan, see Robinson and Milner-Gulland 2003). Furthermore, because both reindeer herders and hunters hunt wild reindeer, the monitoring of hunting grounds has become more important than the regulation of pasture use. This combination of herding and hunting is not unique (see examples in Dyson-Hudson and Smith 1978; Layton, Foley and Williams 1991). On the basis of my field data, I disagree with Ingold's hunting/gathering vs. herding distinction (Ingold 1987: 11, see also his comments to Layton et al. 1991) and argue that we can see cattle as a predictable, defensible resource whose well-being is closely connected to another resource, grazing lands, which are shared with game animals (Dyson-Hudson and Smith 1978: 35). I agree with Layton et al. (1991) that hunting and reindeer husbandry cannot be seen as 'an evolutionary progression from one distinct type of society to another'. However, my data show that hunting wild reindeer and reindeer herding in the Anabarskii district are not 'alternative strategies', as Layton et al. argue,

but they existed in one setting and in the same social space at least until 1996 when 'full mechanisation' changed the situation (i.e. when intensive use of snowmobiles and other means of mechanical transport freed hunters from their dependence on transport animals). Until the late 1990s all reindeer brigades contained at least one hunter, and hunting brigades had their small herd for riding and hauling sledges (see chapter 2). Both hunters and herders were interested in access to two kinds of resources—pastures and wild reindeer herds. Therefore I aim to show that it is only when we see hunters and herders as extensions of each other rather than as diametrically opposed groups, that we can move Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' out of the herders' exclusive domain.

The debate that started in 1968 with Hardin's famous paper spawned a rich literature about the monitoring of common pool resources. Land-use issues are gaining importance in the Anabarskii district as the number of new hunting, fishing and herding enterprises grows. The strain on resources, which has occurred with the increase in wild reindeer herds, the growing number of people wishing to hunt, and the degradation of pastures, has created a need for institutions to regulate the use of common resources (cf. Anderson and Hill 1977; McCay and Acheson 1987, Acheson 1996; Ziker 2003a). Although Baxter (1990: vi) expressed scepticism about the tendency to explain changes in land-use regimes in terms of the impact of the market economy, informal land-use monitoring mechanisms in the Anabarskii district are nonetheless directly linked to the spread of commercial hunting.

In contemporary discussions about the 'commons' we cannot ignore the fact that the state and the capitalist market economy, coupled with technological changes, have in one way or another shaped all hunting and herding cultures. Therefore, I found especially useful works on contemporary Arctic hunters and herders outside Russia and their land-use monitoring institutions. I was also interested in analyses of the various aspects of state intervention, which allowed me to compare settings with similar ecological conditions and economies as my field site (e.g. Paine 1964, 1994; Nuttall 1992; Beach 1993; Jolles 2002). One interesting approach in these works was the notion that the state has everywhere failed to take complete control of hunting and herding economies. State interventions typically follow the standard view of economists, namely that only formal governmental structures can adequately regulate commons use. Some have argued that privatising these resources follows a more efficient model of control over resources (cf. McCay and Acheson 1987: 4–6; Dietz et al. 2002: 11). This concept has been criticised by anthropologists, who argue that there are various 'rational choice' models for commons management which can and do exist infor-



mally, even in the case of strong state power (see Acheson 1996; Wiber 2000: 282; McCay 2002: 363).

It needs to be understood that 'common property is not everyone's property' (Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975), i.e. there always exist institutions to control access to commons. Recent developments in the Anabarskii district prove the efficiency of informal structures and their supremacy over formal and legal forms. Jarvenpa (1977) and Snow (1968) argue that even under capitalism the management of hunting grounds shifts at certain moments into the sphere of kinship ties. Dyson-Hudson and Smith (1978) claim in their 'economic defendability model' that territoriality occurs when the benefits of resources outweigh the costs of boundary defence. Casimir (1992a: 166–9; 1992b: 10) distinguishes two models of resource defence: 'spatial boundary defence' and 'social boundary defence'. Agrawal (2002: 56) argues that in the case of mobile resources it is too costly to control resource use using state institutions, and Rose (2002: 234) adds that in such cases communities tend to manage commons rather informally, based on their own institutions. In the Anabar tundra, where the state is neither in the position nor willing to control boundaries between different hunting groups (see chapters 4 and 5), the less costly model of controlling access to resources efficiently is similar to that described in Cashdan's (1983) classic study: it is kinship based.

When collecting data on common pool resource management in the Anabar tundra, I posed a question about the management regime. Although there were visible markers of land ownership or control, like graves, traps and hunting cabins (see chapter 4), they were not as important as in some other hunting economies (cf. Leacock 1954; Snow 1968; Jarvenpa 1977). In foraging and herding cultures the landscape is meaningful often through religious and spiritual symbols (cf. Descola and Pálsson 1996b; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1996), but the identity and the ties of belonging to a physical area can also be connected to social entitlements. David Anderson's concept of 'knowing the land' (1998b, 2000a) demonstrates how land entitlement was constructed in the pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and post-Soviet eras. He shows how 'knowledge' is a symbolic umbrella which includes knowing more than just topography and ecology. Skills of resource harvest and knowledge about all beings in that land also served to legitimise property claims to a territory. Ziker (2002a) builds upon Anderson's (2000a) concept of 'sentient ecology' by demonstrating that efficient resource use is also related to the spiritual meaning of land, i.e. knowing and following resource use norms prescribed and enforced by spirits/ancestors/elders. Myers (1988, 1989) applies a similar approach: he shows how knowledge and property rights are interconnected among Australian Pintupi. The difference with Evenki and Dolgan



herders and hunters is that the knowledge is transmitted not from the older generation to the younger but given by spirits, which in Australia means knowing legends and dreams connected to the land. Myers's study is relevant to the situation in the Anabarskii district in that knowledge of the land can be shared with other people, like other resources, but all this does not impinge upon a person's ownership of a territory.

When we talk about survival strategies in the post-Soviet period, land is not the only asset to be examined. I discuss broad sharing networks in chapter 5 and show that resources are not only to be found out in the tundra. Industrially produced goods in the village shops, services and the help of town-based relatives, and even agricultural products (milk, foal meat) are shared and distributed resources. The nature of such networks, based on extended kinship, is similar to that in postsocialist Mongolia (Sneath 1993), where rights and obligations were shared and divided among related people. I show, with reference to networks that cover huge distances from the tundra to the urban environment, that what looks like 'negative reciprocity' (Sahlins 1972), when considered from the perspective of just two people, can be interpreted in a wider context as 'delayed return' (Woodburn 1982) where goods and services are provided to persons who usually do not return these directly to the people who 'helped' them but to their relatives and friends (chapters 5 and 7). This structure, which monitored the 'flow of goods' and family support, has been documented also in capitalist Arctic communities and shows that even in societies with well-established formal legal and social security structures, actors prefer kin-focused reciprocity under certain circumstances (Bodenhorn 2000; Jolles 2002). I do not share Paine's (1974) view in the earlier hunter-herder debate that this 'transactionalism' approach is overly formalistic; rather I found it fruitful for analysing the networks. A postsocialist former state farm community can activate 'traditional' strategies and use them in a new environment despite the fact that such strategies might appear to have been long forgotten.

## **1.4 Overview of the Structure of the Book**

In chapter 2 I describe the social, ethnic and economic development of the Anabarskii district from the seventeenth century to 1991, the beginning of the postsocialist decade. It focuses on the development of the Anabar region from a hunter/nomadic reindeer herding society into a socialist state farm community. The main transformations in social and property relations in the pre-collectivisation period are important because some traits and patterns were incorporated into the collective and state farm economy, both at an informal and formal level, and were relevant for establishing informal structures after the socialist agricultural system collapsed. I also give an overview

of the different stages of agricultural collectivisation. Communist pressure to join collectives began at the end of the 1920s but the 1940s was the period when the district's agriculture was fully collectivised. Uurung Khaia became a 'civilised' village with social service institutions such as the village administration, school, kindergarten, library, sauna, shop and medical station. Socialist structural development reached its climax in the 1980s when Uurung Khaia became the location of the independent state farm (*sovkhoz*), *Severnyi* ('Northern' in Russian), and was no longer just a 'backyard' of the Saaskylaakh-based enterprise. This process and further technical development (e.g. mechanisation) had an impact on the nature of new post-Soviet hunting and herding enterprises. Chapter 2 provides the main historical account, although other chapters will also provide historical context as required.

In chapter 3 I refer to the processes of restructuring former socialist agriculture in the district and show how development of the 'agricultural landscape' (the variety of institutions engaged in agriculture) was connected with the legal and marketing situation. I analyse different forms of new enterprise and link their appearance to legal and economic developments in the Republic of Sakha. I show that the variety of new actors on the 'agricultural landscape' is much broader than the dichotomy of state farm versus clan-based community (*rodovaia obshchina*) that is usually analysed in contemporary Siberian studies. New forms of property and their relation to different niches in the market are the official and visible side of the transformation process as well as the umbrella of the informal networks I focus on in this study. Knowing what connects different institutions to the local administration and governmental structures, as well as their marketing strategies, helps us to understand informal networks, especially with regard to the control of tundra resources and cooperation.

In chapters 4 and 5 I analyse how access to resources (especially wild animals and fish) was managed in the village community and how informal networks were structured. In chapter 4 I focus on the institution of the 'master' (*khoziain*). I show that land-use entitlement (both formal and informal) has a two-fold origin. During collectivisation, hunting, fishing and reindeer husbandry were not only reorganised on a brigade basis but these brigades were given designated territories by state ecologists, so called *exclusive territories* (Anderson 2000a: chapter 7). The activities of reindeer herders, hunters and fishers were limited within the borders of their 'own lands' and they were forbidden to use resources outside their territory. At the same time, Dolgan land ownership categories were incorporated into the brigade territory system because many families continued to live in regions that their ancestors had occupied in the pre-Soviet period. The Soviet land-use struc-

ture, combined with Dolgan tradition and practices, established an informal institutional setting which pooled the use of common tundra resources. This chapter discusses how human activity in the past and present has established the institution of the 'master' and how this institution is visualised in the landscape.

In chapter 5 I discuss the extended kinship network as a basis for informal reciprocal networks. Comparing my Anabar data with other post-socialist regions, I show how kinship becomes an important strategy for the distribution and exchange of goods and services in a setting where official structures are less efficient. These networks cover many different geographic locations and link different social groups. I show how this strategy of relying on one's kin is understood and interpreted as tradition, but in fact is caused by economic necessity.

While chapters 4 and 5 focus on how the use of wild animals and fish as a resource was regulated, in chapter 6 I turn to the property relations concerning domestic reindeer. I spent four months in a reindeer brigade, and its members were my main hosts when I lived in the village. Basically, there are two categories of domestic reindeer: private and district farm (the successor of the former state farm). Both kinds of animals reflect the social relations of the people who own or use these reindeer. Using historical data, I show how Dolgan and Evenki traditions concerning the meaning of animal ownership and gifting build social relations between different groups of people.

In chapter 7 I discuss ethnicity and its link with economic and political processes. The ethnic issue in the Anabarskii district has been controversial since the arrival of Russians in this part of Siberia in the seventeenth century. As I show in chapter 2, the local population, who since the eighteenth century have spoken the same language and have made a living by fishing, hunting and reindeer herding, were classified in different ethnic and legal categories. In the Soviet era, the special status of northern minorities or 'small-numbered peoples' in Siberia was maintained (Gitleman 1992; Hirsch 1997; Mote 1998; Anderson 2000a; Fondahl, Lazebnik, and Poelzer 2000). The ethnic origin of a person is stated in their passport and, on the basis of this origin, individuals and communities have different access to resources such as education, medical care and subsidies. But ethnicity, as will be shown in chapter 7, can be a game played using different identities (Dolgan, Sakha or local village), each using different networks. In the Anabarskii district, the official ethnic identity of indigenous people is strongly connected to the 'nationality' (*natsional'nost'*) noted in their passports and surname, and also to their Sakha language, culture and relatives. As a consequence, depending on whether they were interested in contacts with their



Dolgan relatives in neighbouring Krasnoiarskii Krai or with their Sakha relatives in the south, people would stress either their Dolgan or Sakha origin. Therefore, although Uurung Khaia was officially referred to as the only Dolgan village in the Republic of Sakha, being a Dolgan was only one side of local identity.

Chapter 8 is essentially a response to a colleague of mine who asked what happens when people do not accept the authority of persons who govern the resources and want to ignore local unwritten laws. Although Uurung Khaia is generally viewed as a lawless place within the district, I found there quite complex ideas of 'right and wrong' with regard to which people should be included and which ones excluded from the local 'system of justice' and how conflicts should be regulated and criminal acts punished. In this chapter I refer to different non-violent and violent methods of maintaining order and conflict resolution. My observations in Uurung Khaia show that the community is able to find a structure of establishing 'law and order' by using pre-collectivisation ideas of kinship solidarity, the authority of elders, and the integrity of property and honour, and combining them all with the solidarity of the collective (brigade) or social groups (for example ex-convicts).

As well as showing the historical perspective behind economic development and state involvement through trade, collectivisation and sedentarisation of the Anabarskii district (chapter 2), and as well as outlining changes in the post-Soviet period (chapter 3), I go beyond the formal structures to show how people create informal institutions and networks which monitor land use at a time when state structures are weakening (chapters 4 and 5), and how these informal networks provide access to industrially produced goods, information and jobs (chapters 5 and 6). People compensate for the absence of state structures by using their Dolgan or Sakha identity to enlarge networks with relatives beyond the district (chapter 7) and by establishing informal structures of social control to keep order and stability in the village (chapter 8). As I emphasise in the final concluding chapter (chapter 9), this study identifies the key processes involved in coping with postsocialist realities in a remote tundra community and shows that in the transition society there are many different ways of reacting to the collapse of the former state socialist system. My aim in writing this book is to show the extent of people's flexibility and their active participation in building their own future.





## **Chapter 2**

### **History**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the history of the Anabarskii district based on available historical sources. Economic development after the collapse of state-controlled agriculture is linked to historical forms that existed both before and during the Soviet period, and it must be noted that property relations and economic strategies at my field site were not suddenly imposed after the Soviet structures disappeared but were essentially 'reactivated' from different periods in history. I will show that the so-called 'traditional' modes of economy and social relations have been shaped by general political and economic developments over the previous two centuries and existed parallel to or within formal political and economic structures even in the Soviet era.

The historical development of the central districts of Sakha (better known by the Russian name Yakutia) has been well documented in many publications. In the Western hemisphere, especially in anthropology, the development of the Sakha region has mostly been analysed in the context of the colonisation of the whole of Siberia. Most Western historical works do not view Sakha as a region *per se* but as part of the process of incorporating Siberia into the Russian state (Forsyth 1992; Mote 1998; Tichotsky 2000). Although Western anthropologists have studied changes in the central and eastern parts of Sakha; little has been written about western and north-western Sakha. Soviet and Russian researchers, however, have published widely on the history and development of Sakha. One reason for this is that Sakha, as the main diamond producing area of the Soviet Union and Russia, has been an economically important region. Soviet literature very often characterised Sakha as an isolated region and tended to see Sakha only in the context of other more central places. The Republic of Sakha has a strong body of local scientists and scholars, concentrated mainly in the capital of Yakutsk. In their works, local anthropologists and historians—mostly but not only ethnic Sakha or people of native minorities—have focused primarily on

their own home region (cf. Alekseev 1988, 2000; Egorov 1990; Lukovtsev 1990; D'iachenko and Ermolova 1994; Poiseev 1999; Kalashnikov 2000; Safronov 2000). This is the case in nearly all Russian regional studies so finding a general overview is difficult, though not impossible (Pika et al. 1996).

My aim has been to bring together as much historical information about the Anabar region as possible. Although I managed to find a few works that deal with the history, economic development and ethnography of the region in the context of the past and present of the Republic of Sakha, historical sources are scarce. Material describing the Anabar region's links to Krasnoiarskii Krai is particularly scarce, and therefore the focus is more on the historical processes that connected the Anabar and Olenek basins with Sakha. Historical events in Sakha are included only where they help the reader to understand the development of the Anabarskii district.

This chapter covers the period from the seventeenth century to 1991, the end of the Soviet era. I outline different periods and changes in the social dynamics of the human population—their economic activity, social structure and property relations as far I was able to reconstruct these. It becomes apparent that in order to understand the postsocialist transformation process in the Anabarskii district, we need to understand not only the social, political, and economic changes during the Soviet era but also those that occurred much longer ago. Many social and economic practices are rooted in far earlier periods and existed informally throughout the tenure of collective and state farms. The historical, political and economic transformations of the 1990s form the focus of other chapters.

The purpose of this chapter is not to discuss Dolgan ethnicity (see chapter 7) but to show how out of the mixture of different ethnic groups and their economic strategies established a coherent life style that today is viewed as distinctive Dolgan 'material culture'. This Dolgan economy combines elements of both tundra and reindeer herding with extensive hunting of wild reindeer and fur-bearing animals. As I will show in chapter 5 the Dolgan adopted Sakha kinship structures, but in this chapter I show how Evenki social structure was adopted as the Dolgan way of regulating control of resources and property relations in various areas of the economy. Migration of different ethnic groups and transfer or assimilation of skills and economies affected the shaping of what ethnographers call Dolgan culture across a large territory stretching from the Anabar River to the eastern Taymyr Peninsula. At the end of this process the Dolgan had become Sakha-speaking tundra reindeer herders riding mounted animals, living in *balokh*,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A *balokh* (Russian *balok*) is a cabin built on sledges. The wooden frames are covered with reindeer hides and textiles. The size of a *balokh* varies and depends on the age of a family's

hunting wild reindeer and being heavily involved in trading. For Soviet ethnographers, these elements together form a distinct Dolgan culture.

## 2.2 From the Seventeenth Century until the Beginning of the Revolution

The territory of what is now the Republic of Sakha was already populated in the Paleolithic in the 5th millennium BC. At this time the population comprised dispersed groups of hunters, but in the Neolithic era (4th millennium BC) the population began to increase. Those first settlers belonged probably to Paleoasiatic peoples but their exact origin is still unknown (Alekseev 1996a). Scholars suppose that at the beginning of the Iron Age (1st millennium BC) these people were ancestors of Yukagirs and Evenki. These were hunters without reindeer, on account of which these ancestors of Evenki have even been called 'pedestrian' Tungus (Alekseev 1996b). A new wave of Tungus had arrived at the end of the 1st millennium or beginning of the second millennium AD, who already possessed reindeer, which they used as a transport animal, and soon occupied a territory that extended up to the Arctic Ocean. By moving north in the search of better hunting opportunities, reindeer Tungus arrived in the Anabar and Olenek regions in the first half of the 2nd millennium AD. They separated the ancestors of Samoyed (Nenets) from early Yukagirs (Alekseev 1996b: 43, 64, 66).

The collapse of the Siberian Khanate opened up the wide territories of Siberia to Russian expansion. Although Russians had crossed the Ural Mountains by the ninth century in search of fish, salt, pearls, walrus tusks and furs, Russian expansion intensified only after the sixteenth century, when the Cossack leader Yermak destroyed the state of the Siberian Tatars (Mote 1998: 41). In 1632 Russian Cossacks established a fort at the Lena River, not far from the current capital of Yakutsk, which became the centre for Yakutskii *uezd* (an administrative unit). That year is considered the date that marked the incorporation of Sakha into the Russian state (Kalashnikov 2000: 16). At the beginning of Russian colonisation, the territory of Sakha was populated by many different ethnic groups, including different clans of the Turkic-speaking Sakha people, who lived along the Lena River. Sakha

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children. The smaller the children, the bigger the cabin to provide space for playing. The *balokh* was adopted from Russian traders and used especially among the Dolgan. In contemporary times, the *balokh* has become associated with 'Dolganness' and Dolgan culture; a picture of a *balokh* on the wall of the Institute for the Problems of Small-Numbered Peoples in Yakutsk bears the caption 'A traditional Dolgan dwelling'. Owing to the migration between tundra and taiga, where tents are better suited to the needs of migration, *balokhs* came into use relatively late in Anabar, in the period of socialist industrial reindeer herding.



were traditionally cattle-breeders, keeping horses and cattle on open places (*alaas* in Sakha) in the taiga forest. In addition, they were engaged in hunting, for meat and furs, and fishing. Sakha were semi-nomads who lived in permanent villages but sometimes moved away when resources around their villages were exhausted (Gogolev 1993). They travelled with, or moved in the vicinity of, groups of Manchu-speaking Tungus who migrated with their reindeer and hunted. Further to the north, mostly in tundra and forest tundra regions, were the camps of the Yukagir and Tavgi, ancestors of the Nganasan people. Exactly when the Sakha people arrived along the middle course of the Lena River is unknown. Some scholars argue that they arrived in their present territory in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, others support the theory that their arrival was at least a century earlier (Okladnikov 1945, 1955; Gogolev 1993). Sakha probably came from the region of Lake Baikal, where they shared lands with Tofalar people, until Buryats most likely drove the Sakha groups to the north (Mote 1998: 37). The ancestors of the Sakha assimilated the Yukagirs, who populated the banks of the Lena (Safronov 2000: 124). It is not known exactly when Tungus groups arrived in the territory of what is now Sakha, but according to Vasilevich (1969: 4–7), Tungus hunters and reindeer herders have been migrating across a large territory from the Ob River to Sakhalin since the seventeenth century. It is believed that Sakha at this time already had their feudal noble elite (*toion* in Sakha) whereas reindeer nomads and hunters in the region did not have such clear social stratification.

The main activity of Russians at this time was collecting imperial fur taxes (*yasak*) from natives. To control their taxpayers and defend *yasak* collectors, Russian Cossacks established small forts in Siberia. Very often nomadic native groups were forced to surrender hostages, who were kept by Russians in forts as guarantee that their relatives paid *yasak* (Fisher 1943: 57–8). The natives heavily resisted the intruders' attempts to govern them. In 1642 a widespread Sakha-Tungus uprising against the Russian tax-collectors took place, although it did not secure a lasting victory (Kalashnikov 2000: 25). Russians quickly expanded military control and in 1637 were already receiving *yasak* from Tungus groups living in Olenek. In 1643 the first *yasak* collecting party of 'state servants' (*sluzhilye liudi*) appeared in the Olenek region from the Russian settlement of Mangazeia in western Siberia to collect sable furs (Gurvich 1949: 4). Other sources indicate that there were already some Cossacks who were collecting *yasak* from the Tungus living near the mouth of the Olenek River in 1633–7 (Safronov 2000: 127). Adult men were registered on the tax rolls and all those aged over 16 were obliged to pay three sable furs per year (Dolgikh 1952a: 25). The Russians had thoroughly explored the basins of the Olenek and Anabar Rivers by the

middle of the seventeenth century. According to their records, there were no Sakha people in this region at that time. The majority of the population consisted of different Tungus groups (Adzan and Sinigir clans). The Tavgi (ancestors of Nganasan), who had hostile relations with the Tungus, lived on the coast of the Arctic Ocean, downstream on the Anabar River (Gurvich 1949: 4, 1950a: 151; Dolgikh 1952a: 81; Fedorova 1999: 14). It appears there were Yukagirs as well in earlier days, because the name of the Anabar River comes from the Yukagir language and means 'river' (Siulbe 2001: 29–31).

The *yasak* taxpayers were registered in Mangazeia *uezd* (administrative unit), which is in western Siberia not far from the Enisei River (Gurvich 1950a: 150). However, Dolgikh argues that by the first half of the seventeenth century there was already a Cossack outpost (*zimov'e*) in Olenek, where the Tungus population was registered and paid their *yasak* (1960b: 443). The so-called Anabar Tungus (*Anabarskie tungusy*) paid their *yasak* in Essei from 1653 onwards. This was a small group, only six *yasak* payers and two under-age boys (younger than 16). In addition, there lived a group of rebellious Tungus in Anabar, the so-called 'children of Kokui' (*Kokuevykh deti*), who numbered 30 adult men in 1643. The head of the clan group (*rod*), Kokui, was taken hostage by service men in Olenek, and two of his sons taken hostage by service men in Mangazeia. But the group continued to resist paying *yasak*. The Tungus from Anabar freed their kinsmen and attacked the Russians in 1644. In 1646 the 'children of Kokui' were attacked by Tungus from Olenek, were then deported to the south and forced to live and pay *yasak* in Olenek. In 1653 the chief of the Mangazeia service men, Ivan Sorokin, brought the remnants of the group back to the Anabar region, and afterwards they paid their *yasak* in Mangazeia. The number of adult men in the Kokui group fell from thirty in 1653 to six in 1682 (Dolgikh 1960b: 447–9). This story demonstrates the rivalry between Russian service men from Yakutsk and Mangazeia *uezd*. The Anabar region fell under the jurisdiction of Mangazeia, but the Russian *yasak* collectors from Olenek tried to force them to bring their sable furs to Olenek. *Yasak* collecting was a profitable business and tax collectors often kept part of the furs to trade with natives. Therefore, conflicts between different tax-collectors were not uncommon (Fisher 1943: 89).

The Anabar and Olenek regions were sparsely populated in the seventeenth century; between 1645 and 1655 there were only 85–110 registered *yasak* payers, which suggests that a maximum of 1,200 native people lived in the Anabar and Olenek basins. Gurvich believes that together with hunters from outside the region, who arrived to hunt seasonally, there were not more than 1,500–1,600 people using the resources of the Anabar and Olenek

basins (Gurvich 1949: 5, 1977: 9). The local population was engaged in hunting wild reindeer, using their own small reindeer herds only for transport. Gurvich believes that the main reindeer hunting season was in autumn when the wild reindeer migrated south from the tundra. People concentrated their activities in the forest taiga and rarely migrated to the tundra (Gurvich 1977: 10). There is hardly any data about property relations among the Anabar Tungus from this period. The fact that they travelled to Enisei and paid their *yasak* in sable furs proves that they were mobile and travelled to the forest tundra in the area of present-day Saaskylaakh to hunt for sables. Many people had the necessary number of reindeer to travel long distances to the trading posts. The shift to non-subsistence hunting with the advent of *yasak* payments and the fur trade brought about an intensification of hunting and trapping activities. People had to change their hunting strategies and spend more time hunting fur-bearing animals.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, according to *yasak* books, the region became dominated by different Tungus groups, whereas Tavgi and Yukagir groups slowly disappeared. Nevertheless, a group of so-called Anabar Tavgi are recorded in the area until the middle of the seventeenth century, which was a period of increasing conflict among different Tungus groups and others. In legends from Anabar and Olenek, but also in Russian written sources, there are stories about skirmishes between Viliui Sakha and Tavgi, mostly over competition for hunting grounds (Dolgikh 1952a: 56–7, 83; Gurvich 1977: 10).

Russian hunters, categorised as ‘productive men’ (*promyshlennye liudi*), started to visit this region in the 1630s. The difference between ‘state servants’ and ‘productive men’ was that the former were state officials. The latter were state subjects, in contrast to native people who were seen as aliens (*inorodtsy*), but still had to pay *yasak* (Safronov 2000: 136, 141). Russian hunters often arrived with families or they married local women. Many of these Russians fled from Zhigansk or Yakutsk to the Anabar and Olenek basins to avoid state control and taxes. In the second half of the seventeenth century Russian hunters in the region numbered 41 men. They lived like the local natives, in small groups of four to six people, and hunted mostly for wild reindeer (Gurvich 1950a: 155–7; Fedorova 1999: 22). The ethnic composition of the region changed after the 1652–3 smallpox epidemic, which killed many locals. Of the 156 *yasak* payers, 85 vanished from the records (Gurvich 1950a: 154). In his later work, Gurvich states that only 30 of the original *yasak* payers remained alive, and some families decreased to one-fifth their size (Gurvich 1977: 10). After that, many Sakha came from the Viliui region and many remaining Tungus were forced northwards by Sakha who escaped Russian *yasak* collectors and Cossacks. All those groups



populated the now empty hunting grounds (Vasilevich 1969: 17; Gurvich 1977: 12–3). After the uprising in 1682, several hundred Tungus from Essei escaped to the Olenek region and remained there for ten years (Gurvich 1977: 14). The migration to the region from different parts of the country made Anabar and Olenek a meeting place for Tungus groups from Yakutsk *uezd* and Turukhansk krai and for Sakha from Viliui and the Lena River.

In the eighteenth century more than half of all taxpayers registered in the Olenek base outpost (*zimov'e*) were so-called 'newcomers', mostly Sakha from central districts. In 1723 there were only 144 registered 'local' *yasak* payers; 408 were 'newcomer' Tungus and Sakha, and the total population of the region numbered no more than 1,800–2,200 people. The number of Russian hunters increased as well. Although only about 40 lived permanently in the region, the number of hunters from Turukhansk and Yakutsk hunting there seasonally was around 150 at the end of seventeenth century (Gurvich 1977: 13).

Siberian history is full of conflicts between Russians and natives, and among different native groups themselves (Fondahl 1993: 482). The Anabar and Olenek regions were no exception. During the wild reindeer migration, the Anabar and Olenek regions received Tungus, Sakha and Russian hunters from neighbouring regions and there are documented cases of Enisei Tungus attacking and killing local hunters (Gurvich 1949: 5). There were also conflicts with Russian hunters. Tungus elders sent protest letters to Yakutsk many times, complaining that the Russian hunters stole sables from their traps and hunted on the Tungus hunting grounds (Gurvich 1977: 14). Fur-bearing animals were important in terms of income, but the population depended directly on the herds of wild reindeer as a major source of food. When the wild reindeer herds changed their migration routes in 1702, many hunters from Olenek moved northward to the Anabar basin to avoid starvation (Gurvich 1977: 15).<sup>15</sup>

Sakha traders started to visit people in Anabar–Olenek regularly in the 1770s, and trade intensified in the nineteenth century. The need for traders increased at the end of eighteenth century, when *yasak* had to be paid in money, not with furs as previously. Traders exchanged gunpowder, metal tools and even cash for furs (Gurvich 1949: 7, 1950a: 160). According to records, Russian hunters were more 'productive' than the natives, selling to the traders 13 times more fur than the Tungus or Sakha. When the sable had almost disappeared, the most sought-after animal became the arctic fox.

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<sup>15</sup> Using archaeological and historical evidence, Spiess argues that wild reindeer migrations tend to change every 30 years, as animals avoid old routes for a certain time (Spiess 1979). In Siberia, this naturally meant that people changed their migration routes to follow the deer (cf. Bogoras [1904–9] 1975: 132).



Russians introduced a new type of dead fall trap (*past'e* in Russian or *paas* in Sakha) (Popov 1937a: 11; Dolgikh 1963: 132) which played an important role in marking land entitlement two centuries later. Also in this period, reindeer herding increased and became one of the main occupations in this region during the eighteenth century (Gurvich 1949: 7–8). The herders in the Anabar and Olenek basins used reindeer, typical of classic taiga reindeer herding, as a draught animal, did not slaughter them for food and had relatively small herds (Vasilevich 1969: 52; Gurvich 1977: 18; Gulevskii 1993: 20). However, the tundra reindeer herds were bigger than in the forest and people sometimes slaughtered their own animals for food (Gurvich 1952a: 81).<sup>16</sup>

Researchers agree that changes in the character of reindeer herding happened due to the immigration of ethnic Sakha, but their opinions diverge on the role of Sakha in Olenek and Anabar. Terletskii argues that the Sakha people monopolised the trade, were richer than local Tungus and tended to exploit them. Dolgikh and Gurvich, who represented the other side of the debate, argued that Sakha who came to the Olenek and Anabar regions were poor people who were escaping the oppression of rich Sakha feudal lords (*toion*). They argued that although there were rich Sakha traders who were 'exploiting' average hunters and reindeer herders, it is incorrect to say that all Sakha were rich '*kulaks*' (Terletskii 1950; Gurvich 1952; Dolgikh 1963). While Dolgikh (1963) uses the more neutral term 'Sakha from beyond the tundra' (*zatundrennye yakuty*), Gurvich (1952, 1977) labels these Sakha as 'Reindeer Sakha' (*yakuty-olenevody*) and explains that they could not be taken for rich when, according to the local legends and the oral histories he collected in the 1940s, people had until the nineteenth century (two or three generations earlier) only transport animals, sometimes only two or three reindeer per hunter (1977: 50–1).

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<sup>16</sup> Gulevskii (1993: 27) shows that statistically Dolgan reindeer herds were not large in comparison to the 'average' herd size of other Siberian groups, and were more suited to the taiga. So an 'average' Dolgan household possessed 66 head, an Evenki household 46, Koryak 367, and Nenets 208. The two last groups were large-scale herders in the tundra. On the other hand, Dolgan lived and continue to live on a huge territory (500,000 square kilometres) and regionally have slightly different economies. To classify an average household is a theoretical leap and this construct does not represent the situation in any one particular Dolgan territory. Other researchers stress that Dolgan reindeer herding was and is a mixture of several reindeer herding traditions: the use of mounted reindeer comes from the Tungus tradition, whereas the use of dogs comes from Nenets tradition, the construction of the sledges from Samoyed tradition and elements of harnesses from Enets and Nganasan (Popov 1935; *Narody* 1994). The sledges, equipment and techniques shown and described in Popov's article (1935) are similar to those I observed in Anabar, but this does not mean that the reindeer herding culture was necessarily as coherent in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

The economy of Siberian native peoples had probably been affected by trade relations well before the Russian period. However, historical data about trading in the Anabar region begins with the Russian colonisation and establishment of trading posts along the Lena River and in the later southern Krasnoiarskii Krai. As early as the seventeenth century, flour and alcohol (home-made *samagon*) were regularly being imported by traders from Yakutsk, Essei and Mangazeia. Imported commodities and groceries soon became a standard part of everyday life in the northern Arctic and were exchanged for precious furs. This led to changes in the population of the local fauna, especially the demise of the highly prized sable, and a shift towards trapping other, less valued fur-bearing animals such as the arctic fox. Because arctic fox furs were cheaper than sable, hunters were forced to hunt intensively for wild reindeer to feed themselves and to buy the goods they needed. Hunting fox and reindeer requires more transport animals to follow wild herds and to monitor long trap lines.<sup>17</sup> Even Russian hunters, who in the seventeenth century used only dog sledges, shifted slowly to reindeer herding (Gurvich 1977: 21). The mobility of people in the region must have increased with this shift. Commercial hunting, combined with reindeer herding, intensified land use. The hunters must have had large territories to collect enough furs and find pastures for their reindeer.

The shift to more intensive commercial hunting also brought a change in the nature of hunting and its relation to land use. Above I refer to the complaints brought by Tungus elders to the Russian officials about incomers hunting in Tungus hunting grounds. There is no historical evidence for the development of a concept of hunting territories in the pre-Soviet period in the Anabar and Olenek region. Here we can rely on comparison with other trapping societies. Eleanor Leacock (1954) argues that among North American Montagnais at the time of the developing fur trade, the notion of land entitlement and land use regulations changed. As in Siberia, indigenous hunters had become accustomed to industrial goods and become dependent on them. In order to secure a constant supply of furs, Montagnais began to restrict other hunters' activities over land that a hunter claimed for himself. She argues that predictability of resources is important in any concept of exclusive territories. In section 4.5 I refer briefly to the discussion in anthro-

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<sup>17</sup> Domestic deer were used as decoys for hunting wild deer. This technique is well described in the case of the southern Evenki and Sakha. The decoy animal was tied to a tree by a rope and when a wild deer came near, the decoy reindeer was slowly pulled by the hunter until the wild animal was lured close enough to be shot. This way of hunting was particularly popular among taiga Evenki and was widespread among all taiga reindeer herders in Siberia (D'iachenko and Ermolova 1994: 40).

pology about how 'traditional' and 'old' were elements of the regulations that defended exclusive use of the trapping territories of fur-bearing animals.

Dependence on imported goods among the population of the north-western Sakha is also mentioned by Gurvich (1977: 77–8). It is highly likely that in the period of intensive animal trapping for fur in the taiga of Anabar and Olenek there existed the concept of exclusivity over territories and/or trapping lines—and violation of such rights was a source of conflict. With the decreasing importance of trapping and a shift to hunting of wild reindeer land-use patterns changed and this appears to be why Gurvich does not mention any conflicts. Interdependence of mode of land use and exclusivity of territory in a situation of minimal state involvement is comparable to the situation of hunters of the pre-Soviet Anabar and Olenek, the North American Indians and postsocialist hunters. As I show in chapter 4, arctic fox trapping territories and river crossings of wild reindeer were considered to come under the ownership of the hunting family or enterprise whereas regions used for winter hunting (when reindeer are scattered and hard to find) were open to all hunters. Also I show in chapter 5 that, like the Montagnais, subsistence hunting in Anabar was tolerated whereas commercial hunting on the same hunting grounds was regulated by informal rules.

In 1775 the Yakutsk *voevodstvo* (county) was incorporated into Irkutsk Province (Safronov 2000: 170). The entire Sakha province became a distant periphery of the new administrative unit. The governors in Irkutsk had no intention of getting involved in aboriginal affairs, and they delegated tax, police and judicial authority to native chiefs (Stephan 1994: 24). In this period, the Anabar and Olenek regions were incorporated into Turukhansk Province and thereby separated administratively from Sakha. Although under the jurisdiction of Turukhansk, the people in Anabar had strong economic links with Sakha. The Sakha traders were their main partners; the Sakha language united them with people in Sakha, and they had relatives living there as well. People were constantly settling from the central regions of Sakha; besides Sakha, there were always new Russian hunters coming in and staying in the region. Sakha became the lingua franca in the region and in the nineteenth century all the different social and ethnic groups communicated in this language (see chapter 7; Gurvich 1950a: 1977). When the sable had nearly vanished from the region and people were forced to hunt squirrels and fox, the Yakutian administration lost interest in the Anabar and Olenek basins (Gurvich 1950a: 159; Vasilevich 1969: 60), which explains why there is not much data about the history of Anabar in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Besides mentioning the visit of the Second Kamchatkan Expedition, the historian Kalashnikov gives only one fact from the eighteenth century history of the region: a Russian trader



The highlight of the history of the Anabar region in the eighteenth century was the visit by one section of the Second Kamchatkan Expedition in 1735. The primary goal of the expedition was to explore the Arctic coast of Eastern Siberia and map the coast between the Lena River and the Kamchatkan Peninsula, but one ship, the *Yakutsk*, was sent to investigate the Arctic coast between the Lena and the Enisei to the west.

When the leader of this expedition, Lieutenant Pronchishchev, died in an accident in 1736, another ship, the *Irkutsk* was sent to the region and Captain Laptev took command of the expedition. Moving onward, he gave his name to the Laptevite Sea at the mouth of the Anabar River. The expedition lasted seven years; the crew spent two winters on the coast and produced maps and a detailed record of the population, nature and climate of the region (Safronov 2000: 66; Gurvich 1950a: 159–160; Kalashnikov 2000: 82).

The crew under Captain Laptev discovered a settlement at the mouth of the Olenek River, where 20 families of Russian hunters lived. Sailing further to the west, the expedition discovered small permanent Russian and Sakha settlements along the coast. According to expedition records, many Russian hunters (*promyslovniki*) in these settlements were married to Christianised Sakha and were ‘similar to them in their character and customs’ (*na ikh prirodu i obychai skhozhi*) (Gurvich 1950a: 159). In addition to the Russians, ‘settled and half settled Sakha’ also lived in these settlements. It is interesting that Captain Laptev named these settlements ‘winter camps’ (*zimov’e*) (Gurvich 1950a: 159). Although other authors do not comment on it, the use of the expression ‘winter camps’ could mean that the settlements were occupied only seasonally and the hunters lived in other locations at least during the hunting season. When we consider that the Russians were ‘similar in their customs’ to natives, it is not surprising that they had adopted the indigenous people’s annual cycle.<sup>19</sup> Captain Laptev mentioned that the whole population participated collectively in the wild reindeer hunt when the herds crossed rivers (Gurvich 1950a: 196). This shows that Russian-Sakha-Tungus ways of life in the region showed no big differences. Moreover, ethnic divisions had lost importance when it came to exploiting the tundra’s resources.

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in 1750 found a mammoth tusk between the Khatanga and Anabar Rivers (Kalashnikov 2000: 92).

<sup>19</sup> According to Gurvich, the government tried to limit the flow of Russian hunters, who were mostly tax refugees, to Anabar. From Zhigansk and Olenek, Cossack parties were sent either to bring back ‘moving/wandering’ (*guliashchie*) Russian hunters and Cossacks or to collect taxes from them. He states that Russian hunters, who were often ‘old settlers’ from taiga forest regions, quickly adopted a tundra economy and the local language, and ‘brought Russian culture into the peripheral regions’ (1950a: 158).



In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, according to Vasilevich, a 'technical revolution' took place among the Tungus in northern Siberia. They began to use rifles instead of bows and arrows and adopted Russian-style traps called *kapkan*<sup>20</sup> and *past*<sup>21</sup> (Vasilevich 1969: 54). In Anabar *past* were generally used in the tundra and much smaller *kapkans* in the forest, because the arctic wind tends to cover the smaller *kapkan* with snow (Zykov 1992: 62). In Soviet ethnography there were attempts to show that 'capitalism did not influence the way of life' of the indigenous people (Pechenkin 1989: 16). The Polish-English anthropologist Czaplicka and the Russian scientist Shirokogoroff argued that native social organisation before the Revolution had begun to be modified with the appearance of Russians in Siberia (Shirokogoroff 1929; Czaplicka 1999: 158). In terms of the development of trade and the shift in hunting towards fur-bearing animals, it is obvious that with newer, more effective tools and weapons local dependence on the trading system grew, and hunting became more market-oriented. People were therefore able to afford more imported goods, became accustomed to them and sought new opportunities to trade for them regularly.

The year 1822 saw the passing of Speranskii's famous law on the 'governing of the Siberian aborigines' (*Ustav ob upravlenii inorodtsev Sibirii*). According to the law, natives were put into three categories: settled (*osedlye*), nomads (*kochevye*) and wandering (*brodiachie*). The Sakha belonged to the 'nomads' and the Tungus groups to the 'wanderers' (Safronov 2000: 177). The commission that classified different Tungus and Sakha clans in north-western Sakha acknowledged that there were no clear differences among them. The only reason why the Sakha received a higher status than the Tungus was that the Sakha spent their winters fishing in one place, whereas the Tungus reindeer-breeders migrated throughout the year. The 'wandering' groups were free to migrate into different regions and were not obliged to stay in the vicinity of their 'winter base camps'. This legalised the Sakha incomer reindeer-herders in the Anabar and Olenek regions, who until this law were legally registered in other regions and were supposed to live there. It also gave 'wandering' Tungus a chance to enter the region legally. Although the administration of neighbouring Zhigansk opposed the migration of Tungus clans into Anabar, because of the loss of taxpayers, they were not successful (Gurvich 1977: 22).

In the nineteenth century the Anabar region was connected to the network of post routes (for mail and goods). The local population served this

<sup>20</sup> A *kapkan* is a steel leg-hold trap; the basic version is just an angle of wire, whereas more complicated versions are industrially produced, steel-framed traps.

<sup>21</sup> A *past* is a fall-trap, usually built of a log and a corridor made of sticks. When an animal enters the corridor to take the bait, the log falls and kills it.

traffic by providing transport animals, but according to Gurvich 'never used the service themselves and felt no need for it' (Gurvich 1950b: 114).<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the appearance of regular trading-post traffic and stations made the Anabar and Olenek regions more accessible to traders. Further development of property relations shows that Soviet scholars who denied the ability of trade to change social relations ignored essential changes in Anabar's native society. According to Popov, the eastern Dolgan people were more trade oriented than the western Dolgan.<sup>23</sup> They had a stronger sense of individual and family property and they limited sharing among relatives to the fourth generation, whereas among western Dolgan even distant relatives were allowed to take reindeer and tools without asking (Popov 1934: 131). In his work based on later ethnographic research, Popov shows that sharing among kinsmen and neighbours was common for the Dolgan. It could be interpreted as borrowing (*hajmuu* in Sakha) or exchange (*yllyy*—'taking' in Sakha). In these cases the giver expected return either immediately or at some point in the future. One mode of sharing was the obligation of wealthy people to feed their poorer relatives and help them when their reindeer died or were exhausted. Poorer relatives had a right to kill the reindeer of wealthy people without the permission of the owner (Popov 1934, 1935, 1937b). Based on this evidence, Popov believed that 'not so long ago' the Dolgan people had a system of common property (1935: 199). When reading Popov, it is impossible to say whether 'not so long ago' was in the nineteenth century or earlier. Dolgikh and Levin (1951) argued that the indigenous people of Siberia belonged to the fur trade network even before the Russians came, and it is impossible to imagine that this trade, which reached China and Central Asia, would have had no influence on social and property relations. The authors argue that private ownership of reindeer first appeared in Siberia with the beginning of the fur trade (Dolgikh and Levin 1951: 98). Czaplicka (1999), on the other hand, gives a more complex picture. She writes that Tungus 'princes' (*kniiaz*) or 'elders' (*starshina*), who were responsible for overseeing the tax payments of their *uprava* (territorial group consisting of several clans), usually lent reindeer to their poorer relatives who had difficulty paying their state taxes. In cases where a person was unable to pay the whole tax, the 'prince' had to come up with the rest. These leaders, who were at the

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<sup>22</sup> Gurvich explains that the local population began to use postal services only after Soviet power was established and argues that in Tsarist times trading posts and a postal service were part of a system which helped to exploit poor people (1950b: 114).

<sup>23</sup> Dolgan were sometimes seen in Soviet ethnography as petty traders who were either assistants of Sakha and Russian big traders or independent small-scale entrepreneurs (*Narody* 1994: 150). This was one reason, in addition to the presence of Russian names and Christianity, why Dolgan were officially interpreted as 'more advanced' than their neighbours (see chapter 7).

same time state officials, had a 'very high sense of their responsibilities' (Czaplicka 1999: 166). However, when collecting taxes, these 'princes' often kept the surplus reindeer when people turned in too many (Czaplicka 1999: 166–7). According to Czaplicka, Tungus reindeer herders had a very strong sense of property with regard to reindeer, and every reindeer that joined a strange herd was supposed to be returned (Czaplicka 1999: 170). Shirokogoroff (1929: 296) was convinced that reindeer among the 'Reindeer Tungus' were a 'means of accumulation' and were loaned or given as a gift only in special cases.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the Sakha territory changed its administrative status. The Yakutian Province (*guberniia*), independent of Irkutsk, was established in 1852. The governor of the province was subordinated to the governor-general of the Main Administration of Eastern Siberia (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Vostochnoi Sibirii*) (Safronov 2000: 172). The population of the Yakutian Province numbered 257,814 in 1890 (Fedorova 1999: 27). The Anabar region was incorporated into the Eniseiskaia Province, which itself was subordinated to Turukhanskii Krai. As Dolgikh points out, there were three groups of natives who permanently used the Anabar and Olenek basins: people who were subordinated either to the Zhigansk and Viliuisk districts of Yakutian Province or to the Nizhne-Zatundrennyi district of Turukhanskii Krai (1952b). All of these people were engaged either in reindeer or cattle herding. They spoke similar dialects of Sakha, but were registered in different administrative units either as Sakha or Tungus. The ethnic and administrative division on paper separated families and kin groups who used resources and lands in the same region (Dolgikh 1950).<sup>24</sup>

In the nineteenth century remarkable differences in wealth among the population of the region appeared, and in Stalinist-Marxist ethnography this was seen as the beginning of exploitation (Gurvich 1950a: 167; Terletskii 1950: 94–5). Soviet ethnography has had a long tradition of interpreting Siberian natives' ways of life in terms of class conflict (see, among others, Kertselli and Khudadov 1919; Popov 1934; Gurvich 1950a, 1977; Dolgikh 1963; Vasilevich 1969). It is questionable whether the reciprocal relationship between richer and older relatives and even unrelated neighbours could be defined in terms of exploitation. The fact is that wealthy reindeer herders, when they had no available labour in their family, used to hire people to take

<sup>24</sup> In 1854, the Anabar region was visited by the Viliui Expedition under the command of the teacher of the Irkutsk high school (*gimnaziia*), R. K. Maak. The task of the expedition was to conduct comprehensive research on the little-known region of the province, and it included scholars from different fields (Safronov 2000: 205). As the members of the expedition noted, Sakha was the language used for general communication in the region. Also there were no remarkable differences in the way of life among Tungus, Sakha and Russians, who still had different legal statuses (Gurvich 1950a: 161).



care of the herd as a herder (*pastukh*) or gave their herd to somebody to look after over the summer. In the latter case the hired 'master' of the herd received a salary of two or three reindeer for a season (Popov 1935: 199–200). It remains unclear whether the hired herders were allowed to kill reindeer for their own food. They probably had usufruct rights to milk and to the transport use of the reindeer.

Whether these hired herders perceived this as wage labour themselves is another question. Along with the custom of 'borrowing' or 'taking' as described by Popov, the concept of mutual help, referred to in the older Soviet literature by the Evenki word *nimat* (Dolgikh and Levin 1951: 104), whereby people shared their property with other people (mainly relatives), could have formed a network of 'delayed return' (Woodburn 1982). Here, services and goods were valued equally, a fact not recognised or perhaps simply neglected by early Soviet ethnographers. Instead, they were convinced of the existence of 'class division' among the Anabar population. The difference was only in the nature of the classes. While Terletskii believed in ethnic oppression, whereby rich Sakha exploited poor Tungus, Gurvich, who propagated the idea that the whole Anabar population should be classified as Sakha, supported the 'classical' idea of 'rich (*kulaki*) vs. poor people (*bedni-aki*)' without any ethnic colour. He states that most households each had 20 reindeer at the end of the nineteenth century, whereas *kulaki* had herds of many thousands of animals. So a rich Olenek reindeer owner, Khristoforov (Yragan), had 4,000 head and an Anabar *kulak* Vladimir Nikolaev had about 10,000 animals (Gurvich 1950a: 107).

Adoption, which was very common among Sakha and Evenki, was seen as another form of exploitation. In the Marxist–Stalinist tradition it was argued that adoptive parents took orphans or children from poor families in order to obtain free labour. Ssorin-Chaikov demonstrates that adoption was indeed a natural part of the Evenki tradition of creating kinship networks and helping one's relatives (Ssorin-Chaikov 1998). On the other hand, among Evenki, when a child was adopted by a family that needed additional labour, the biological parents received one reindeer as the child's salary (Semenov 2000: 175). Bogoras shows that in reindeer cultures wage labour existed with different wage categories ([1904–9] 1975: 83). Probably different systems of reciprocity and paid wage labour existed at the same time and were interconnected. Neither Soviet scientists who saw exploitation everywhere nor modern neo-traditionalists who try to show Siberian natives as 'children of nature', helping each other out through pure altruism, have explained this complex question in a sufficient and satisfying manner.

It is interesting that Russians were left out of the discussion of property relations. In his works, Gurvich (1950, 1977) mentions a few times that



Russians were poor hunters but in the debate over 'class relations' he excludes the Russians. The appearance of Russians in the North was seen in Soviet ethnography as a generally positive factor, even when they were Tsarist officers or traders-'exploiters'. Since Russian culture was regarded as a 'more advanced' culture, it was believed that the contact between Russian hunters and the indigenous population enriched the latter's culture and relations between the two groups were seen in terms of 'class solidarity' against Tsarist officials and local wealthy people (Kuoljok 1985: 50). Gurvich also follows this model, but only when writing about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (1950a: 158; 1977: 21). Without going into detail, he mentions the 'enrichment' of local culture by Russians, which should be understood in terms of adopting certain technologies and consumer goods. In the nineteenth century, when 'class differences' appeared, Russians were assimilated into the local population and differed only by their status as one category of taxpayers.

When we look at the role of Russian hunters in the Anabarskii region they came as competitors for hunting grounds. At the same time, by introducing new consumer goods which the natives were able to acquire only through trade, they influenced the shift to more intensive commercial hunting. Russian hunters were also historically important in establishing the ethnic consciousness of Anabar natives: people in Anabar today are proud to have 'Russian blood' (see chapter 7).

### 2.3 The First Soviet Years: 1917–1930

In this section I focus on the historical development of the Anabarskii district and Yakutia at the beginning of the Soviet era. During these years the first Soviet institutions were established in the district, and the territory of Anabar was incorporated into Yakutia. The remoteness of the Yakutian Province made it a suitable place for the isolation of political prisoners. The influence of these 'criminals' was that liberal and anti-imperial ideas became popular among Sakha intellectuals. The result was the Sakha national romantic movement, which had as its goals representation in the Duma and control over all of the territory and resources of Yakutia (Forsyth 1992: 167–8).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century Sakha had many educated people who came mainly from wealthy families. Many of these were intellectuals with national romantic views. During the 1905–7 Revolution they established a party, the 'Alliance of Sakha' (*Soyuz Yakutov*), which had regional organisations in Sakha's populated districts. The party demanded that all lands in the province be turned over to the Sakha people, that there be Sakha representatives in the state Duma, and self-governance for all Sakha. This Alliance was declared illegal by the Governor in 1906. The successors of the Alliance of Sakha were many cultural organisations which played an important role in creating a modern Sakha identity.

These ideas probably did not spread all the way to the Anabar basin, but these national romantic ideas of educated Sakha people were the beginning of a long line that ended with the establishing of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and indirectly also led to the concept of the *rodovaia obshchina* for Small-Numbered Peoples in the 1990s.

In 1917, on the eve of the Revolution, the Yakutian population was 275,000. The Yakutian Province covered 3,699,000 square miles, almost the size of the territory of European Russia. The remoteness of the province remained: there were only two roads that united the province with the rest of Russia. The difference between Yakutia and other Siberian provinces and divisions was that Russians still remained a minority (only 26,000 or 10.5%). The Yakutian Province was predominately rural, with only 4% of the population living in urban settlements; the rest were cattle-, horse- or reindeer herders, hunters or fishers, and in some southern districts were peasants engaged to a certain extent in agriculture (*BSE* 1957: 541–3). Yakutia had a well-educated native class, who held to the idea of sovereignty, even independence, for their home country.

Among other political forces, the Sakha nationalistic organisation *Sakha aimak* ('Sakha kindred') was active. They managed to organise a rebellion against the Bolsheviks and with the help of some Evenki (or, in those days, Tungus) groups and White Cossacks, in 1922 in Churapcha, central Sakha, formed the 'Provisional Yakut Provincial administration' (*Vremennoe yakutskoe oblastnoe upravlenie*), which controlled a large territory extending to the Verkhoiansk Mountains and Srednekolymst in eastern Sakha. The Bolsheviks liquidated this attempt to create an anti-Bolshevik state within a year, but were confronted with other rebellions and skirmishes (Forsyth 1992: 253–7). Plans to create an autonomous republic appeared after the beginning of the Revolution. There were supporters and enemies of the idea among both the Yakutian and Russian Communists.<sup>26</sup> But after a long discussion, the Communist government in Moscow passed a

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Although most of these organisations, established after the October Revolution (*Sakha Aimakh* 1917–20, *Sakha Omuk* 1920–8, *Yraas Olokh* 1924–37, *Sakha Keskile* 1925–30), were more or less controlled by the Communist Party and sometimes even belonged to the party (*Manchary* 1921–2), the works of scholars like M. Ammosov, P. Oiunskii, A. Safronov, G. Ksenofontov, etc. were extremely Sakha-oriented (Forsyth 1992: 167–8; Kalashnikov 2000: 261–3). Many of these books were forbidden and not published until 1991 because their approach to the history of Sakha was radically different to the official version (see, for example, Ksenofontov 1992). In many cases these authors became sources for the rewriting of Sakha history.

<sup>26</sup> In this case I use the term 'Russian Communists' to refer to Communists from European Russia.

decree establishing the Yakutian Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (YASSR) on 27 April 1922 (Safronov 2000: 226–7).

With the formation of the YASSR, the Anabar and Olenek regions were incorporated into Yakutia (*Anabar-60* 1990). In regions that saw military action, the number of domestic reindeer fell markedly (in some regions by about 80%), or the nomads withdrew into remote areas (Alekseev 1988: 200, 2000: 224; Forsyth 1992: 275). Whereas there were 166,343 domestic reindeer registered in Sakha in 1912, in 1917 the number had fallen to 120,000 and in 1928 to about 110,000 (Gulevskii 1993: 10; Poiseev 1999: 117; Tichotsky 2000: 39). The takeover of power by the Bolsheviks meant that they were confronted with the issue of the native population. The Tsarist attitude toward the Siberian natives as a backward and underdeveloped people continued, only this time it was decorated with Marxist and evolutionist rhetoric about different levels of economic, political and cultural development (Kuoljok 1985: 37).

Across Siberia, Committees for Helping the Northern Peoples were created (*Komitet sodeistviia narodnostiam severnykh okrain*—KSNSO). Although the official reason for these committees was to help and enlighten nomads, another motivation was to organise the indigenous population under Bolshevik control (Balzer 1999: 101–3, Safronov 2000: 232). Indigenous nomads and hunters were often used by White Russians as scouts or drivers of sledges or even gave their assistance voluntarily (Alekseev 2000: 224). The KSNSO established so-called *khlebno-zagotovitel'nye magaziny* (bread stores) in the areas where native nomads lived. They helped poor people to buy reindeer and bought two ships to reach the Lena, Olenek, Yana, Anabar and Khatanga Rivers (Alekseev 1988: 200–2). The Yakutian KSNSO had 35,000 people to look after, distributed among 7,009 households (Alekseev 2000: 225). Another tool for controlling the natives was to tie them to the political system by incorporating them into the political structures via clan soviets (*rodovye sovery*). The clan soviets were a first step on the way to stricter governance structures. After the establishment of Soviet power, the Bolsheviks realised that their knowledge of Siberian native societies was minimal, so the KSNSO decided to make use of pre-existing structures. Besides having administrative functions the clan soviets also held courts to deal with minor conflicts. Because clan elders were already part of the administrative structures in Tsarist times, many natives 'did not see new Soviet rule as a radical break with previous governance' (Balzer 1999: 102; see also Kuoljok 1985: 73).

Parallel to establishing clan soviets, people throughout Siberia were divided into classes. Using the Leninist model of society, party and government officials divided the population into three classes: rich (*kulak*), middle



(*sredniak*) and poor (*bedniak*) (Anderson 2000a: 47).<sup>27</sup> These classes had different statuses in the eyes of the Communists; the official policy was to lean on *bedniaki* and *sredniaki* in building the new society, and in the long run to 'liquidate' the rich 'exploiters'. This process was more difficult than Communist officials anticipated because the wealthy people frequently enjoyed a high reputation among the indigenous population in Siberia (Kuoljok 1985: 99–101; Slezkine 1994: 194–204). It was difficult to 'construct' class conflicts and the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Even if Communists interpreted social practices of reciprocity as exploitation (see the previous section) it does not mean that indigenous discourse overlapped with it. Thus Anderson tells a story about an old Evenki man who recalled how his father helped poorer people by lending them reindeer (Anderson 2000a). And one of my informants, Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin, remembered stories about a rich reindeer owner who, as he got older, needed help to care for his animals. Young men from poorer families worked for him: 'He was a nice man. My father told me he never said a bad word to anybody and treated his reindeer herders (*pastukhi*) fairly.'

Anabar and western Khatanga were joined to form a single administrative unit in the 1920s—the Anabar-Khatanga Raion—and a clan soviet was established in the Anabar region on 25 March 1926. The chairman was Vladimir Trifonovich Tuprin, a local rich reindeer herder (*Anabar-60* 1990). After Stalin's infamous speech of 1928, which started a wave of restructuring of the Soviet political system (Stephan 1994: 189), the clan soviets were abolished at the beginning of the 1930s. The Anabar soviet was soon accused of being under the influence of the 'upper class' and reformed (*Anabar-60* 1990). The next step in the reorganisation of the indigenous people was the establishment of territorially defined districts (*raionirovanie*). On 21 February 1931, Anabar and Olenek were divided from the Turukhanskii Krai to form separate districts with new district centres. The *raionirovanie* caused serious disputes between Turukhanskii Krai and the Yakutian ASSR as to where exactly the western border of the Anabar district should be placed. Like the rivalries among seventeenth-century tax collectors, competition for wealthy subordinates broke out among administrative districts. The officials of Turukhanskii Krai wanted to keep the regions with more wealthy reindeer herders and were afraid of Sakha expansionism. Before the border was finally agreed, the administration of Turukhanskii Krai established that the Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) National District had a

<sup>27</sup> Here I use the term 'Leninist' instead of 'Marxist–Stalinist' (used earlier in the text). The purpose is chronological: V. I. Lenin was officially in power until 1924, *de facto* until 1922. The concept of the three-level agrarian society is a product of the Lenin era; I do not see any principal differences between Lenin's and Stalin's policy in Siberia.



right to the lands around Lake Essei and in so doing institutionalised the ethnicity of the Dolgan people. The border dispute was resolved in favour of Turukhanskii Krai (Anderson 2000a: 155–6; see also chapter 4). The importance of the Sakha region increased when gold was found along the River Aldan (Fondahl 1993: 497). The young Soviet state needed mineral resources, and this need influenced local national policy; and the gold industry needed labour, and immigration of Russian workers soon followed. The proportion of indigenous people in Sakha decreased from 59.9% to 49.2% in the period 1939–55 (Fedorova 1999: 85).

The process by which new districts were established was named 'About the practical district building of the regions populated by the small peoples of the YASSR' (*O prakticheskom raionirovanii mestnostei osvoennykh malymi narodnostiami po Y.A.S.S.R.*). The new organs of power were district soviets, elected by the local population. Unlike the clan soviet, the district soviet had no juridical power. The district soviet had only an administrative function (Safronov 2000: 246).

In their discussions of the ethnic identity of the Anabar and Olenek regions in the 1950s, Terletskii, Gurvich and their colleagues often used economic statistics which they gathered from household records (*khoziaistvennye perepisi*). This provides us with valuable data on the wealth and income of people in the region (Dolgikh 1950; 1952a; Gurvich 1950a, 1950b; 1952, 1977; Terletskii 1950; Suslov 1952; Dobrizheva 1998). Unfortunately, no-one mentions the size of the general population at the 1926 census, but using different works I found that in 1926–7 there were about 1,940 Sakha and Evenki, 200 Russians and 100 Dolgan living in the region (Gurvich 1950a: 163; Terletskii 1950: 90). According to Terletskii, in 1926 eleven semi-nomadic, reindeer-owning Russian families were living on the lower courses of the Anabar and Olenek Rivers. Each household—according to Terletskii, on average seven people—owned 75 reindeer and 75–90 *paas* traps. Other Russians (unfortunately Terletskii does not give a number) were settled and used dog sledges instead of reindeer. These settled Russians were mostly trappers who hunted arctic fox and fished seasonally. Some Russian families had horses and cows (1950: 93). Terletskii, who supported the idea that Sakha in the region were rich while Tungus (or Evenki) were poor reindeer herders, gives us the number of reindeer and households: 129 Sakha households owned 12,170 head of reindeer and 130 Evenki households owned 3,375 deer. Twelve Sakha households had more than 251 head of stock—all together 6,342 animals, which makes an average herd size of 527—whereas only one Evenki household owned as many animals, namely 320. In terms of percentages, 9.3% of Sakha and 0.8% of Evenki households were later classed as *kulaki*, while 114 Evenki households (87.7%) and 86

Sakha households (67%) had fewer than 50 deer. Some 31 Sakha households (24%) and 15 Evenki households (11.5%) had between 51 and 250 reindeer. The 12 biggest herds were owned by Sakha and the biggest one numbered 2,300 animals. Terletskii argues that about 75% of Evenki animals were transport reindeer, whereas Sakha were 'market-oriented' reindeer herders, who slaughtered their animals for food as well (1950: 93–5; see figure 1).

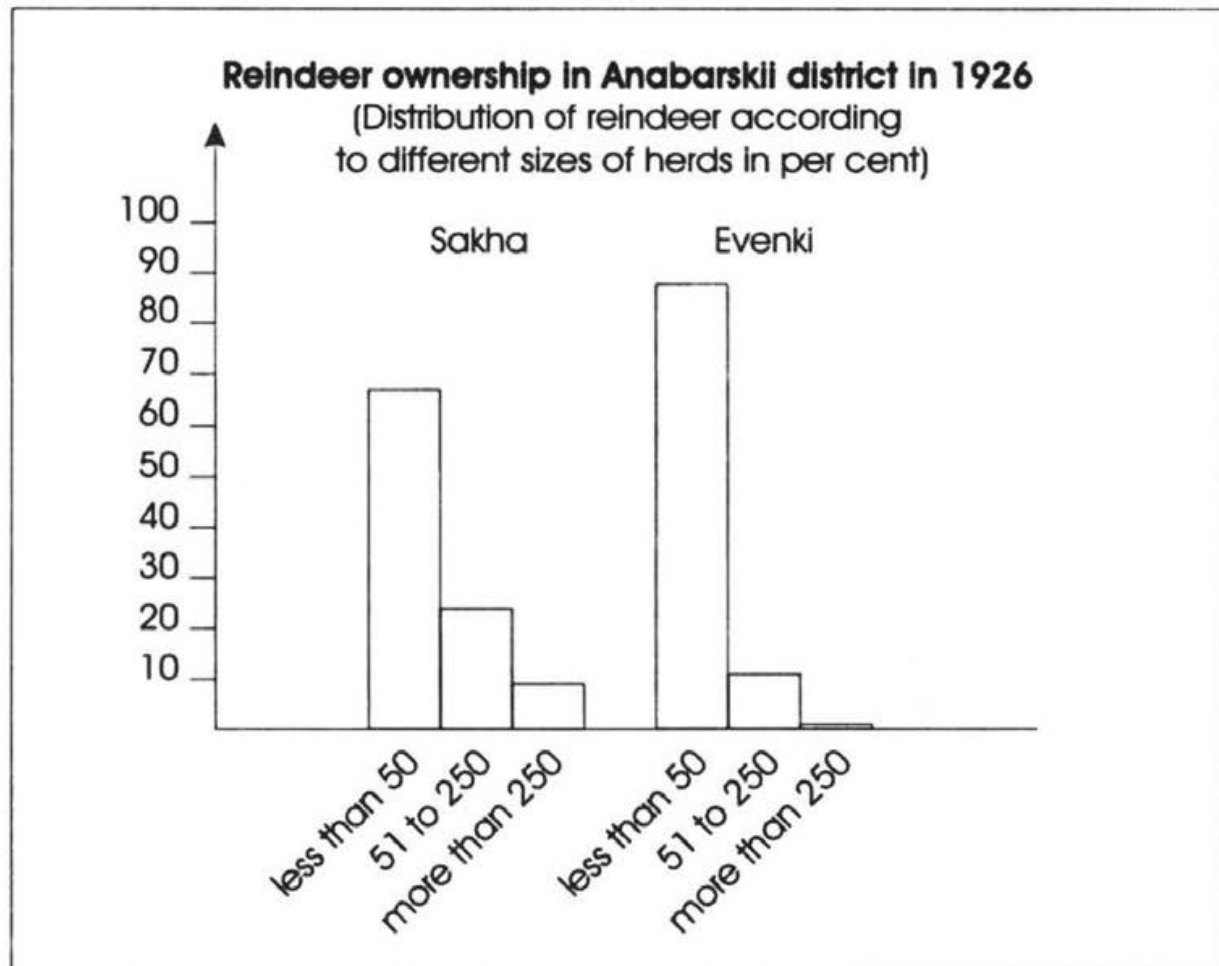


Figure 1. Reindeer ownership in the Anabarskii district in 1926.

Source: Terletskii 1950.

Although Terletskii does not describe the regional distribution of rich and poor, it is likely that people classified as Sakha were predominantly tundra reindeer herders and so-called Evenki trappers and hunters migrated in the forests of Olenek and the southern Anabar regions. This is possible to surmise also from Terletskii's observation that reindeer Sakha hunted arctic fox with *paas*, owning 60–70 traps per household, while Evenki hunted squirrels, which are forest game, and the arctic fox hunt was not important to them. Terletskii states that the Evenki herds were too small to produce the number of harness animals needed and therefore Evenki were forced to buy reindeer regularly from northern herders (1950: 94–5). Gurvich (1952), who

uses the same data from the 1926 census, argues that the picture of Sakha exploiters and their Evenki (Tungus) dependants is unreliable because the main income activity in both the tundra and taiga was hunting reindeer, not arctic fox or squirrels. He mentions that it is impossible to live off of 30 squirrel hides a year, which Evenki hunters supposedly did if one is to believe Terletskii (Terletskii 1950: 95; Gurvich 1952: 83). Gurvich argues that in the regions of Anabar and Olenek there were many different 'types of reindeer-keeping (*olenevodcheskie*) households varying according to natural zones' (1952: 81). However, when comparing the distribution of animals among the indigenous households in the Anabar and Olenek regions with the 'average' number of reindeer owned by the Dolgan (figure 2), the differences are not remarkable. Also in Anabar and Olenek, the majority of households (200) had fewer than 50 head of reindeer, the middle range of 50–250 head per household was quite tiny (46), and the big reindeer owners, who owned more than 250 animals, formed an even smaller segment of society (13). I believe this to be one argument to support the hypothesis that we cannot speak about ethnic divisions but rather about regional divisions when analysing historical data.

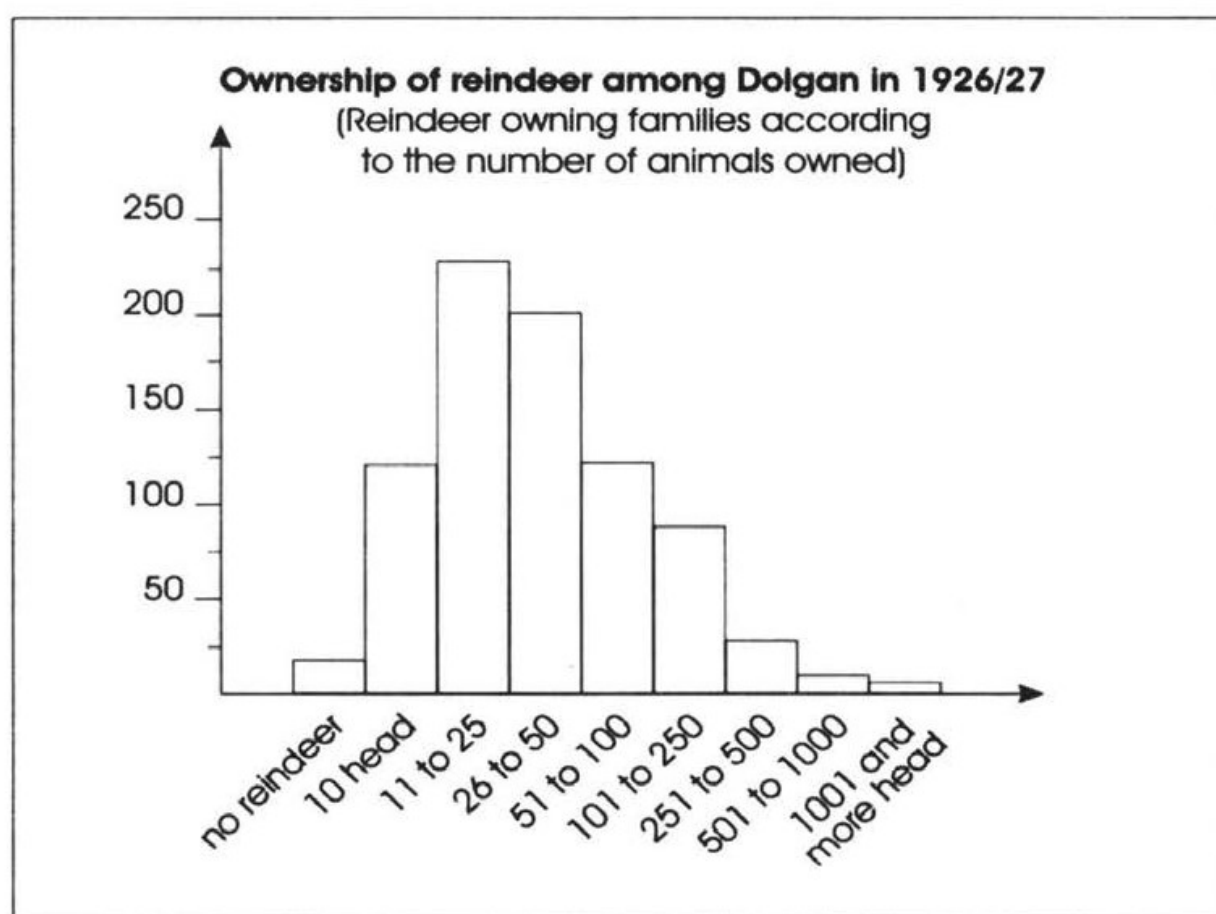


Figure 2. Reindeer ownership among the Dolgan in 1926–7.

Source: Dolgikh 1963.

When reading carefully the works of writers who took part in the debate on the hypothetical Sakha–Evenki class struggles (Dolgikh, Gurvich, Terletskii), I found some remarks that made me question the data and the picture presented about social relations in the Anabar and Olenek regions. One of Gurvich's arguments against an Evenki–Sakha dichotomy was that the reindeer were never counted—the officials relied upon what people told them and it is therefore likely that head-count numbers were manipulated. Many *kulaks* hid the fact that they owned large herds by presenting these as the collective ownership of many households. The rich *kulaki* had between 250 and 320 reindeer, and the biggest herds comprised between 400 and 700 reindeer, but in the statistics we can read that although the herd was registered as the possession of one person, his family contained three or four households (Gurvich 1952: 82). When reading the works by Gurvich, Terletskii and Suslov, it is also apparent that the size of the herds varies. According to Terletskii, the biggest herd, 2,300 head, belonged to one Sakha reindeer herder who migrated, like other Sakha, in the tundra and the forest tundra of Anabar and Olenek. Unfortunately, he does not give the name of this reindeer herder (1950: 94). Gurvich claims that the biggest herds were still less than 1,000 head (1950a, 1952). In another article he states that at the end of nineteenth century there were rich reindeer herders in the region who owned from 4,000 to 10,000 reindeer (Gurvich 1950b: 107). The question remains as to why the herds were four times smaller only a quarter of a century later. In the Anabarskii district, there are many legends about rich reindeer herders who possessed up to 10,000 head (but more often 5,000), and many of my informants claimed to be direct descendants of these people.

Whether this is local folklore or fact is difficult to discern owing to the lack of data. There are many reasons for the differences in reindeer head numbers in the Anabar and Olenek regions. Possible manipulation of the recorded herd size, mentioned by Gurvich, seems very plausible. If the state officials never actually counted the reindeer themselves, they had to believe what people told them. On the other hand, reindeer herding is a risky business where population surges and crashes are common. After my fieldwork in the Anabarskii district, the wild reindeer migrated from the Taimyr Peninsula to the south in such large herds that they took with them at least one domestic herd and many domestic deer from other brigades. There are many examples in Siberian history when an especially hard winter, dry summer or an increased number of wolves has reduced the size of the domestic reindeer herds dramatically. Still, Gurvich, who documented changes in property relations in his monograph and many articles, never mentioned 'natural causes' that might have changed the regional reindeer numbers and thereby affected people's social position (1950a, 1952, 1977).



From earlier Soviet works we know that scholars linked discussions about property relations and resource use with possible ethnic distinctions. There is no ethnographic evidence about how sharp the distinction was between different 'ethnic' groups in the region before collectivisation. Moreover, I doubt, although I am not able to prove it, whether the sharp distinction between hunters (either with or without reindeer) and reindeer herders ever existed. Probably many people worked seasonally as herders for rich reindeer owners and hunted for wild reindeer and arctic fox at the same time, or concentrated on hunting in the following season. Layton, Foley and Williams (1991) suggest that hunting, gathering and animal husbandry are a kind of 'symbiosis' where one activity can gain or lose importance according to changes in climate, social relations, technical development and population growth (Layton et al. 1991). In the Anabar and Olenek regions, there were different 'modes of production' which may have existed at the same time, side by side or replaced each other.

## 2.4 Building Soviet Society in Anabar: The Late 1920s to 1930s

Collectivisation in Sakha started following the decision of the 5th Congress of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (VKP(b)) in 1927. The task that confronted the Yakutian Communists was ambitious: they had to fight against 'the multi-levels (*mnogoukladnost*) of agriculture, [and] elements of patriarchal-feudal, in some regions kinship, relationships' (Safronov 2000: 247). Collectivisation did not progress rapidly: in 1927 there were only 18 collective farms (*kolkhozy*), in 1928 there were 34. Most of them were *tovarishchestva* (cooperatives) formed to cultivate land together. By 1929 the number of such collective farms had risen to 198. Most farms were small, containing about 11 households (Safronov 2000: 247–8). Among the native nomads, the collectives were first established in those regions where the male population had decreased due to the military actions during the Revolution (Alekseev 1988: 203).

The *tovarishchestva* (in Sakha) or *arteli* (in western Siberia) were enterprises that did not change existing property relations.<sup>28</sup> The reindeer still belonged to the different owners, but were herded together. This form of collective made it easier for the state to control and supply people with food

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<sup>28</sup> On paper, collective property did not exist in *tovarishchestva*, whereas there was a combination of private and collectivised property in *arteli*. In the 1940s, *tovarishchestva* were reorganised into *arteli*. On the basis of *arteli* the first collective farms were established (see Habeck 1998). However, the literature and memories of my older informants demonstrate that these two types of enterprises had no significant differences. The collective farm changed property relations and the organisation of agriculture into a centrally controlled mode of production (Kuoljok 1985: 110; Balzer 1999; Tuisku 1999).

and commodities like ammunition and clothes. One goal of the *arteli* was to remove peoples' dependence on rich traders. The state provided loans and technical help to these enterprises, and the only obligation of the *tovarishchestva* was to sell their produce to state organisations (Kuoljok 1985: 103–6, 110; Balzer 1999: 103–5; Tuisku 1999: 72). The first *tovarishchestvo* in Sakha was established in 1924 and the first reindeer collective farm (*kolkhoz*) in 1929 (Gulevskii 1993: 55). The collective farm was considered a more advanced form of enterprise and the *tovarishchestva* were planned only as a first step in reaching the goal of socialist agriculture. To bring people up to a 'more developed' (i.e. collectivised and state-controlled) stage, the transformation of *tovarishchestva* into collective farms was undertaken in many parts of Siberia without any local consultation and without consideration of local traditions or the existing local economy. In some places the entire property of the indigenous population was collectivised and the situation became so critical that central Communist Party officials had to interfere and slow the process down (Kuoljok 1985: 153; Slezkine 1994: 206–7). In other regions the enthusiasm of local Communists was calmed down by Moscow, and full collectivisation was halted. In Sakha, where party structures were dominated by ethnic Sakha from central districts (Forsyth 1992: 259), the pressure to collectivise small enterprises remained high. The tempo of collectivisation quickened after 1930, a year which historians define as 'revolutionary' (*perelomnyi*). In 1931 in Yakutia there were already 900 collective farms; in 1933 there were 991 (Safronov 2000: 248). Still, in 1937 in Sakha only 19% of reindeer had been collectivised, which meant that the collective farms had small herds or no animals at all, and the process was not completed until after 1939 with enforced mass collectivisation (Forsyth 1992: 318).

In discussing collectivisation, I will now focus on Anabar in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1930 there were 1,500 people living in Anabar. The centre of the district, the village of Saaskylaakh, was established in 1931 and the village of Uurung Khaia shortly afterwards (*Anabar-50* 1980). When the Anabarskii district was established, there were 58 Sakha (344 persons) and 'many Dolgan households' (Spiridonov 1992). The number of Russians cannot have been high: the majority of the population are likely to have been Evenki, Sakha or Dolgan. Collectivisation started with the *tovarishchestvo* as in other regions of Sakha. In the district three *tovarishchestva* were established, 'which united the nomadic households engaged with reindeer herding, hunting and fishing' (Neustroeva 1995: 4).

Although the collectivisation of Dolgan people was reported to be successfully completed in 1938, the eastern fringes were a few years behind (Popov 1952: 142). It was only in the 1940s that the *tovarishchestva* in the

Anabar region were reformed and turned into four collective farms: *Kyhyl Sulus* ('Red Star' in Sakha), and the Voroshilov collective farm (*imeni Voroshilova*) in Uurung Khaia. In Saaskylaakh, there were *Tabahyt kyhata* ('The Future of the Reindeer Herder' in Sakha) and south of Saaskylaakh, the Cheliuskin collective farm (*imeni Cheliuskina*). As is the case today, every collective farm was based in a village which was a centre of the administrative sub-unit *nasleg* (county) (Neustroeva 1995: 4). In this period, Anabarskii district went down in the history of Sakha as the place where the last battle with the 'white bandits' on the territory of YASSR took place. In February 1931, a bloody fight took place in Siikei Talaakh, where nine Red partisans were killed and ten wounded, among them the first Young Communist (*komsomol*) of the district, Nikita Semenovich Betiunskii.<sup>29</sup> After the battle, the 'white bandits', led by some 'Yakutian nationalists', escaped over the border to Turukhanskii Krai (Neustroeva 1995: 3; Anderson 2000a: 155). There is a memorial tombstone at the place of the battle today.

Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin, one of my informants, described the evolution of the collectivisation very clearly: 'In the beginning, before the state farms (*sovkhozy*), we had brotherhoods (*bratstva*). From them came collective farms (*kolkhozy*). And the collective farms were joined to form the state farms (*sovkhozy*). Everything went from small to larger. The *bratstvo* was established because the old people didn't understand the Soviet idea (*stariki ne poniali sovetskuiu ideiu*).' Even the first step of collectivisation, the establishment of the *tovarishchestvo*, met resistance. As was the case in many regions, the Bolshevik policy led to a decrease in the number of domestic animals. *Kulaki* slaughtered their animals or drove the herds to remote areas, and encouraged poorer people to follow their example. Gurvich, loyal to the Party line, criticised the *tovarishchestva*, not only for their inability to prevent reindeer slaughtering, but also because the first collective enterprises were formed on a kinship basis and under the influence of 'honoured elders, very often former *kulaki*, who ... tried to use *tovarishchestvo* in their own interests.' (1950b: 111). Therefore, the collective farms were seen as being a step ahead.

The division of work was reorganised. With the establishment of specialised reindeer brigades with big herds, there was some free labour which was channelled into specialised hunting or fishing brigades. Because collective members were to settle down and every collective farm was to have its own village centre, local people took up new professions such as carpentry or construction work. In these first enterprises, women's lives changed less

<sup>29</sup> According to Forsyth, the Bolsheviks in Sakha were especially successful in incorporating young Sakha into their organisations, first of all into the Young Communist League (*Komsomol*) (1992: 259).



than the men's. They remained caretakers of the household; fur farms and other enterprises to engage women's labour were established later (see below). Pastures around the settlements were soon exhausted and horses were introduced as draught animals. Attempts to introduce the raising of cattle and pigs were not successful. Gurvich mentions that these activities resulted in a reduction in the number of hunters and reindeer herders (1950b: 111). There were also problems of providing hay, because local people lacked the skills to make it, and fodder for the cattle had to be brought from southern districts using reindeer transport. The main goal of the northern collective farms was still to supply the state with meat and furs. The collective farms had big herds and in the 1940s animals from the Olenek-based enterprises were regularly sold to the reindeer collective farms in southern Sakha (Gurvich 1950b: 111–3). Whereas in some more accessible districts collectivisation was carried out quickly and brutally by the Sakha Communists, this process was slower in the Anabarskii district.<sup>30</sup> Reindeer herders were mobile and their movements were difficult to control. It was a tradition in the region to have contact with different trading posts which were often many thousands of kilometres away. Therefore, although Gurvich reports great 'progress' in establishing socialist agricultural and political systems in the region, Communists were not able to tie all nomads to the settlements.

'Civilisation' arrived in the district in the early 1930s.<sup>31</sup> On 5 January 1931 the first school in the district was opened, in a place called Kuruktuur. The next year the school was removed to the village of Saaskylaakh. There were many schools in the district during the 1930s. Those schools were mostly two- or three-year schools and were located in small permanent settlements in the tundra. At the beginning of the 1940s the schools were closed and transformed into a seven-year school in Uurung Khaia. In the 1940s the first teachers to be recruited from the local population appeared, all having graduated from the pedagogical high school in Yakutsk (Neustroeva 1995: 6). The Uurung Khaia seven-year school was established as a boarding school; a special building for a children's dormitory was built in 1940–1 (*Anabar-50* 1980). Health care was introduced into the district in

<sup>30</sup> After my fieldwork in north-western Sakha, I spent four weeks in the reindeer and horse brigades of the former state farm Topolinskii, in the Tomponskii district of eastern Sakha in June and July 2001, where Even reindeer herders lived. Elderly people told me that all people followed the order to give their reindeer to the collective's herd under threat of severe punishment. Local Even were allowed to keep only 25 head of private reindeer, but their slaughtering was forbidden as well, with the threat of 25 years' imprisonment.

<sup>31</sup> 'Civilisation' (*tsivilisatsia*) and 'culture' (*kul'tura*) in Soviet rhetoric have different meanings to those in English. The terms are popularly understood not as 'high culture' but rather as social services, values and access to a certain living standard. See the analysis of the Soviet concept of *kul'tura* in Anderson (2000a: 188–91).



1934. The first medical professional in the district was the assistant doctor (*fel'dsher*) Gavril Danilovich Slepov, educated in Yakutsk. The first proper doctor arrived in 1940, the same year that a medical station with one assistant doctor was opened in the village of Uurung Khaia. The first silent movie was shown in the district in 1948 (*Anabar-60* 1990). Besides that, the state took care of the 'enlightenment' of the tundra population as well. Elderly people told me with warmth in their voices how the Communist agitation brigades (*agitbrigady*) arrived in the 1940s and 1950s from Yakutsk to hold lectures and make propaganda. They had to travel for weeks on reindeer sledges to reach Anabar.

In 1946 the first library was opened, the so-called readers' cabin (*izbachitatel'ia*) (*Anabar-50* 1980). All this was part of a process called 'appropriation of the North' (*osvoenie Severa*). Building materials and equipment were transported to the northern districts via sea routes (*Morskoi Put'*). The official goal was to turn the subsistence economy into a commodity economy (*iz natural'noi ekonomiki v tovarnuiu*), ignoring the fact that people in Anabar had already had a trade-oriented economy for centuries (Fedorova 1999: 53).

During World War II northern native people were exempted from army service. This was in part a continuation of the Tsarist policy, which marked the Siberian indigenous peoples as backward and unsuitable for 'developed' (*razvitoe*) life and duties. This attitude was masked with rhetoric about taking care of and maintaining the ethnically small groups (Tokarev 2000: 210–1). On the other hand, the state needed furs and meat. Although many Evenki, Even, etc. joined the army as volunteers, the arctic fox and reindeer furs were what the army needed first of all. The population of the Anabar district supplied the state during the war with warm clothes. The people collected money and sent the soldiers parcels (Neustroeva 1995: 9). The vice director of the village archive of Saaskylaakh proudly gave me two copies of hand-written letters. One, in Russian, dated '14.04.1942', was a letter from the Committee of the Young Communists League (Komsomol) of one Red Army motorised division, expressing gratitude to the Komsomol Committee of the Anabarskii district. Another letter, in Sakha, was signed by the secretary of the district soviet and reported how many furs, fur clothes, money, etc., the people in the district had voluntarily collected and sent to the Red Army from 1941 to 1945. During the war, many men who had been conscripted into the army escaped into the northern districts, including Anabar. Tokarev's remark that in the Arctic districts the enrolment lists were virtually non-existent shows that the Communists were not able to control the population until the end of 1940s (Tokarev 2000: 211). Obligatory army

service for the northern minorities was introduced after the war (Tokarev 2000: 17).

Before the war, the presence of the Soviet state in the Anabarskii district was established in the form of various political, economic and cultural institutions. Although the Communists were not able to control the entire district's territory and its people, the lives of native people were significantly changed through new settlements and institutions. The first attempts at sedentarisation and collectivisation were successful in linking people to state structures, but not only that. People's activity during the war years showed that they identified with the Soviet state.

## 2.5 Living under Socialism: 1945–1991

In this section I look at the period between the end of World War II and the collapse of the Soviet state and its economy. In this period, the Anabarskii district became a 'normal' Soviet northern region with all its attendant institutions. The economy and property relations were restructured and patterns and structures were established which would affect life well into the postsocialist period.

In 1949 the first diamond in Sakha was found. In 1956 the Mirnyi diamond fields were discovered, marking the start of the diamond industry (Tichotsky 2000: 102). The flow of Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian workers turned into a flood. Whereas the native population (Sakha and the Small-Numbered Peoples) had previously formed around 60% of the population, in 1955 this share had fallen to 50% and by 1989 had sunk to 35%. The industrial sector was dominated by the newcomers, but the administrative and political structures have remained in the hands of native peoples since the 1950s.

As many researchers have pointed out, a person's ethnic background was not important when it came to securing a position in government. More significant was their loyalty to the system—in particular, *nomenklatura* and Party members had to be demonstratively 'Soviet patriots before all else' (Zaslavski 1993: 37; Fedorova 1999: 85). Inter-ethnic relations after the war were friendly. Although the number of Russians rose steadily, indigenous people still had a strong presence in politics, education and everyday life. Inter-marriage between Sakha and newcomer Russians was quite widespread in the 1960s, and, as people explained to me, the first incomer generation differentiated themselves from later ones through their respect for local people and nature. In these years, people in Siberia were filled with enthusiasm for the 'industrial appropriation' of Siberia and the youth were especially convinced that they were building something new and important. These sentiments were noticed even by foreigners who in many other cases,

distanced themselves from the Communist rhetoric (see, for example, Mowat 1970).

In 1956 306,000 domestic reindeer were registered in the Yakutian ASSR and fur and meat production increased. In the 5th Five Year Plan period (1951–5) furs worth 261.7 million roubles were produced. Fur farming output (*produktsiia zverovodstvo*) increased from 4.6% of all domestic and wild fur production in 1946 to 23.5% in 1955 (*BSE* 1957: 543). This meant that hunting and reindeer herding had to be partly restructured in order to meet the production needs of the fur-bearing animal farms. Arctic foxes and sables were fed with the meat of poor quality or dead animals, and this had to be transported out of the tundra. Producing fodder for the farms was also included in the production plans of hunters and fishers.

Although the 'industrial revolution' took a long time to reach the Anabarskii district, the district was closely incorporated into the Republic's structures and life. In 1952–3 regular air traffic started between Saaskylaakh and Yakutsk (*Anabar-50* 1980). As a result, the incomer populations increased dramatically, with the Anabarskii district being one of the districts where migration after the end of World War II was most intensive (Fedorova 1999: 102–3). A variety of 'specialists' (*spetsialisty*), from engineers to veterinarians, came to help establish 'Soviet society'. We must not forget that in Soviet times people who went to work in Siberia were paid more money on the basis of a 'Northern index' (*severnnyi koeffitsient*), and those people who went to the North received even higher salaries because of the so-called 'Northern extra' (*severnaia nabavka*). Therefore, there was a steady flow of people who were prepared to work in what they perceived as harsh conditions. Where there were no native 'specialists', so incomers even worked in the tundra. Elders told me how they taught young female Russian veterinarians how to ride reindeer and other skills that are still needed in the tundra today. Apparently the first incomer agricultural specialists, according to local memory, adapted to the local lifestyle quickly: 'They learned to ride reindeer and in a few years spoke fluent Sakha. They were like real reindeer herders!'

The division of labour into hunting and reindeer brigades must have taken place soon after the beginning of collectivisation because Gurvich mentions both of these 'occupations' in the early 1950s. Although Forsyth argues that with such reforms in Siberia the 'lifestyle was reduced to a job' (1992: 400), the division of labour was not so dramatic if we take into account local traditions. As in other parts of Russia and other socialist countries, many existing patterns were incorporated into socialist agriculture (cf. Konstantinov 1997: 14; Smith 2002: 236). According to the elders I interviewed, this was a time when families lived together in the tundra and the



lifestyle did not change much. Dmitrii Vinokurov, an old hunter with the nickname Kupaa, told me:

We lived in the tundra—here, in these lands where my ancestors are buried. In the 1960s and earlier, all our people were born and raised in the brigade. In the one brigade you had only relatives and our children grew up together. Uurung Khaia at this time was a small settlement and we went there for groceries or for meetings and so on. In those days life was slower because we did not have snowmobiles. Every hunting brigade had more or less 200 reindeer and in summer we gave animals to a *staada* (reindeer brigade). Summer was for fishing and a little bit of trapping so you did not need so many reindeer. In winter reindeer were kept close to the house in a small herd.

This 'new order' did not necessarily conflict with the Dolgan practices I discuss below, where those households with few or no reindeer relied more on hunting, and households with larger herds were more occupied with animal husbandry. In Anabar, hunters maintained their small reindeer herds until the middle of the 1990s (Turza and Turza 1996–7), and continued to hunt for wild reindeer and arctic fox just as they had done before collectivisation. I got the impression that people did not see the establishment of different kinds of formal categories of 'hunter', herder' and 'fisherman' as a shift from 'lifestyle nomadism' (*bytovoe kochevanie* in Rus.) to 'industrial nomadism' (*proizvodstvennoe kochevanie* in Rus.). Nevertheless, so-called 'industrial nomadism' was criticised by some scientists. Dolgikh argued that this kind of nomadism destroyed the family (1960: 96) because in many regions women with children remained in villages without their spouses. He also warned against the monetarisation of these nomad's lives and suggested paying herders in goods and groceries (*naturalnyi vydach*) instead (1960: 95).

A source of special pride for the inhabitants of Uurung Khaia is Il'ia Konstantinovich Spiridonov. In 1957 he became the first reindeer herder to receive the honour of Hero of Socialist Labour in the Soviet Union. He worked for 18 years as a brigadier, maintained the number of reindeer above the obligatory 90% (*delovoi vykhod*) for several years and 'gave to the state' 21,600 reindeer. In the socialist inter-brigade competitions, his brigade consistently won first place (Neustroeva 1995).<sup>32</sup>

Harding (1992: 88) observes that different territorial regions in the Soviet Union were supposed to develop 'according to those specialized areas

<sup>32</sup> A bust of Il'ia Spiridonov was later put in front of the administration building in his home village of Uurung Khaia. There is an Il'ia Spiridonov Street in Saaskylaakh and a few years ago the village administration of Uurung Khaia established an Il'ia Spiridonov grant for the best student from Uurung Khaia (Neustroeva 1995: 4–5).



of production, climate, indigenous resources etc'. The official policy of the Communist Party was to develop industry across the whole country, and agriculture in the North was meant to produce food for industrial workers (Pechenkin 1989: 5). One elder who was an agricultural official told me that the main goal of the 'sovkhozisation' of the reindeer regions in Sakha was to increase meat production in order to supply the new diamond, gold and coalmining industries. As part of the general wave of consolidation, the collective farms (*kolkhozy*) of the district were combined into the 'Anabarskii' state farm (*sovkhoz*) in January 1961. The number of domestic reindeer had increased from 14,347 in 1940 to 21,700 in 1960 (*Anabar-50* 1980; Neustroeva 1995, see figure 3). The state farm, like any Soviet enterprise, was tied to a structure which was more bureaucratic than economic (cf. Hedlund 2001: 214 for industry). The state farm had less autonomy in its decisions than the collective farm. For example, wages were scientifically planned and linked to productivity (Morrison and Schwartz 2003: 553).

The *sovkhozisation* (establishment of state farms) substantially changed the lives of reindeer herders. In the 1960s, most of the indigenous population still lived in the tundra and were only registered in the village. Uurung Khaia was more a small trading post than a village, with its administration building, a few apartment houses, a boarding school and some storage sheds. Elderly people told me that in the collective farm (*pri kolkhoze*) there were 'family brigades' (*semeinye brigady*), which were made up mostly of relatives, and children were taken out to the tundra as soon as school finished. To maximise the number of deer and the 'production process', the officials created brigade boundaries (Fondahl 2003: 29). Within these, brigades were given full autonomy in planning their migration routes. Reindeer and hunting brigades had enjoyed relative freedom in part because the collective farms were not able to provide all the services the state farm did. For example, collective farm brigades had to collect their winter firewood themselves. For this purpose they migrated in the late spring to certain tundra lakes that had 'ancient trees' (forests which covered the region before the ice age) in the bottom mud. These tree trunks were drawn out with hooks and placed to dry. By contrast, the state farm began to supply brigades centrally with wood and coal. A few times a year, special brigades were sent to the coast to collect driftwood, or dig coal, which in certain places in the Anabarskii district lies almost on the surface. Because there was more wood available (construction material was brought via the sea route), in the 1980s reindeer herders and hunters began to adopt the *balokh* instead of conic (*chum*) or industrially produced tents (*palatka*). *Balokhs* had been in use among the Dolgan since the beginning of the twentieth century (Popov 1931), but according to my informants, in Anabar people mostly lived in

tents and used *balokhs* for storage purposes (*khoziaistvennye balki*). The use of *balokhs* in the winter and the lighter *harkass* (from the Russian *karkas* 'carcass') during the summer reduced the mobility of brigades. As one elder told me, they used to move 40–50 kilometres in a day, whereas in the summer of 2000 we moved a maximum of just 7 kilometres and in the winter 15 kilometres each day. The reduced mobility made reindeer brigades more easily controllable. Centrally planned migration routes and land-use regulations were also introduced and controlled. 'We were the last family in the brigade to live in the tent,' Zina, the wife of the oldest reindeer herder in the Uurung Khaia 3rd brigade, told me. 'My old man [husband] built a *balokh* when I was in hospital with my third child in the 1980s. I told him I did not want to live in a tent with the small child—and before I returned to the brigade, he had built our first *balokh*.' Zina told me that in those days even many educated women gave up their work to go to the tundra. She herself was a primary school teacher from Uurung Khaia but at the time she met her future husband she was working in Saaskylaakh boarding school. 'My husband worked in [around] Uurung Khaia and I did not want to be far away from him. There was no chance of getting a job in Uurung Khaia. And we had no problems in the tundra. We had canned vegetables and pork there, like in the village!'

Zina's comments require us to look deeper at gender issues in the tundra. One reform introduced with the establishment of state farms was the institution of the 'tentworker' (*chumrabortnitsa*). This was a paid female housekeeper, whose task was to sew, cook and otherwise take care of male herders. The 'tentworker' was seen not as a housewife, subordinated to patriarchal kin structures, but as a labourer. Other women were encouraged to remain in the village and pick up jobs. In this way, nomadism as a 'life style' was turned into a mode of 'production'—and with these changes Communist officials saw the destruction of patriarchal kin structures. In many Siberian regions this kind of reform meant changes to family structure, because the average brigade contained one female tentworker to five male members (cf. Konstantinov and Vladimirova 2002; see also Vitebsky and Wolfe 2001; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). In Anabar, where families lived in separate tents or *balokhs* and almost every herder took his wife as a tentworker with him in the tundra, the impact of this reform was not felt until the end of the 1980s, when many women preferred to stay in the village with their children. The reason for the unsuccessful separation of the sexes and 'liberation' of women was simple: before the 1980s there were only limited opportunities for women in the village of Uurung Khaia. Facilities where indigenous women 'traditionally' work in the Soviet North (schools, fur farms, canteens and so forth) were not established until the 1970s and 1980s,

and even then there were severe housing shortages in the villages. Today, then, many adult women are still working in the tundra, many with vocational qualifications (Zina was a primary school teacher, the spouse of another reindeer herder had been a telephone station operator—*telefonistka* in Rus.—while another woman in the 3rd Brigade had been trained as a kindergarten assistant).

Under the state farm system (1960s–1980s), the number of private reindeer fell dramatically. By order of the state farm administration, a reindeer brigade could contain only a small number of private animals. At different times, and according to different informants, this number varied between 50 and 100. Although people still do not want to talk about it, the actual number of private reindeer was higher. Private reindeer were hidden among the state reindeer and their real number was kept secret. On paper, all reindeer were counted twice a year during the corral and marked. The ear marks (*imner* in Sakha) of every brigade were registered at the *sovkhos* administration, making it nearly impossible to hide reindeer. The contradiction between theory and practice was (and still is) that it is also nearly impossible to catch, count and mark every animal. Even during my fieldwork, the main livestock expert of the Uurung Khaia MUP admitted that the goal of catching all reindeer is an illusion. When the herd is driven into the corral many animals run away, and young reindeer can panic and jump over the 3-metre fence. It is possible that many private reindeer wore the ear marks of the brigades' animals or were not marked at all. For the reindeer herders themselves, who know each and every animal, working out which animal belongs to whom is no problem. On the other hand, I doubt that the number of privately owned reindeer was ever very high, with probably no more than 50 animals owned by one person. Nikolai Pluzhnikov, a Russian reindeer economy researcher from Moscow, told me in a private conversation that even in Soviet times the main income in the Anabarskii district was from hunting wild reindeer, and in contrast to other regions like Yamal (Stammler 2004), domestic reindeer herding was not as important for the state farm as a source of income. Therefore the domestic reindeer herds were relatively small and not strictly controlled. It also means that the number of illegal reindeer, easy to hide within relatively small herds, was never high. It is difficult to prove, but reindeer herders themselves were seemingly never interested in owning huge numbers of private reindeer. As I have shown in previous sections, in the Anabarskii and Olenek regions the number of reindeer per household was historically low with most households owning fewer than 50 animals. Local tradition required relatively large numbers of tame animals for transport but not big herds. On the other hand, reindeer herders were allowed to use state farm animals for their own purposes either



as draught animals or for meat. This also reduced the need to own many animals.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s a huge resettlement of people from the village of Uurung Khaia to Saaskylaakh took place. Reindeer herding in the southern tundra of the district needed skilled workers and many Communist Party members from Uurung Khaia were sent to Saaskylaakh to raise the 'production success indexes' (*pokazateli*). When I asked one of my informants from Uurung Khaia why people in Saaskylaakh needed such help, he proudly stated that reindeer herders from Uurung Khaia were more skilled: 'The people from Saaskylaakh are so ... strange. Our men, they just come and do the work. People in Saaskylaakh were always lagging behind us.' Along with the reindeer herders, a few thousand reindeer were sent to the Saaskylaakh brigades. The real reason for this may be a change in the wild reindeer migration. One incomer Sakha woman, who married a local livestock expert in the 1960s, told me that when they visited tundra brigades in the 1960s and 1970s, they ate only domestic reindeer meat. There have been such 'dry years' in reindeer migration in the district before. It could be that the Saaskylaakh brigades had difficulty fulfilling the plan because there were fewer wild reindeer migrating to the south, and even these were shot by hunters in the region of Uurung Khaia. But one result of all this is that many people of Uurung Khaia origin now live in Saaskylaakh—a fact that is reflected in the village telephone directory which is filled with typical Uurung Khaia surnames like Tuprin and Spiridonov.

In 1983 the big state farm, which covered the whole territory of the district, was split into two. Before the split, the state farm 'Anabarskii' was wealthy enough to present itself as one of the most successful enterprises in the YASSR (*Anabar-50* 1980). Breaking the state farm into two parts was, according to my informants, an attempt to make production more efficient because management structures were too complicated. The centre of the state farm 'Anabarskii' stayed in Saaskylaakh, whereas a new state farm, 'Severnyi', was formed in Uurung Khaia (Neustroeva 1995: 4). The number of reindeer remained stable until the beginning of the 1990s. In 1987 there were 23,000 reindeer registered in the district (*70-letiiu* 1987). The number of reindeer in the YASSR in the 1960s was 352,000, rising to 380,000 in 1980. This was the peak, because after 1980 reindeer numbers began to decline and fell to 361,600 in 1990 (Iadrikhinskii 1998: 7–9, and see figures 3 and 4).

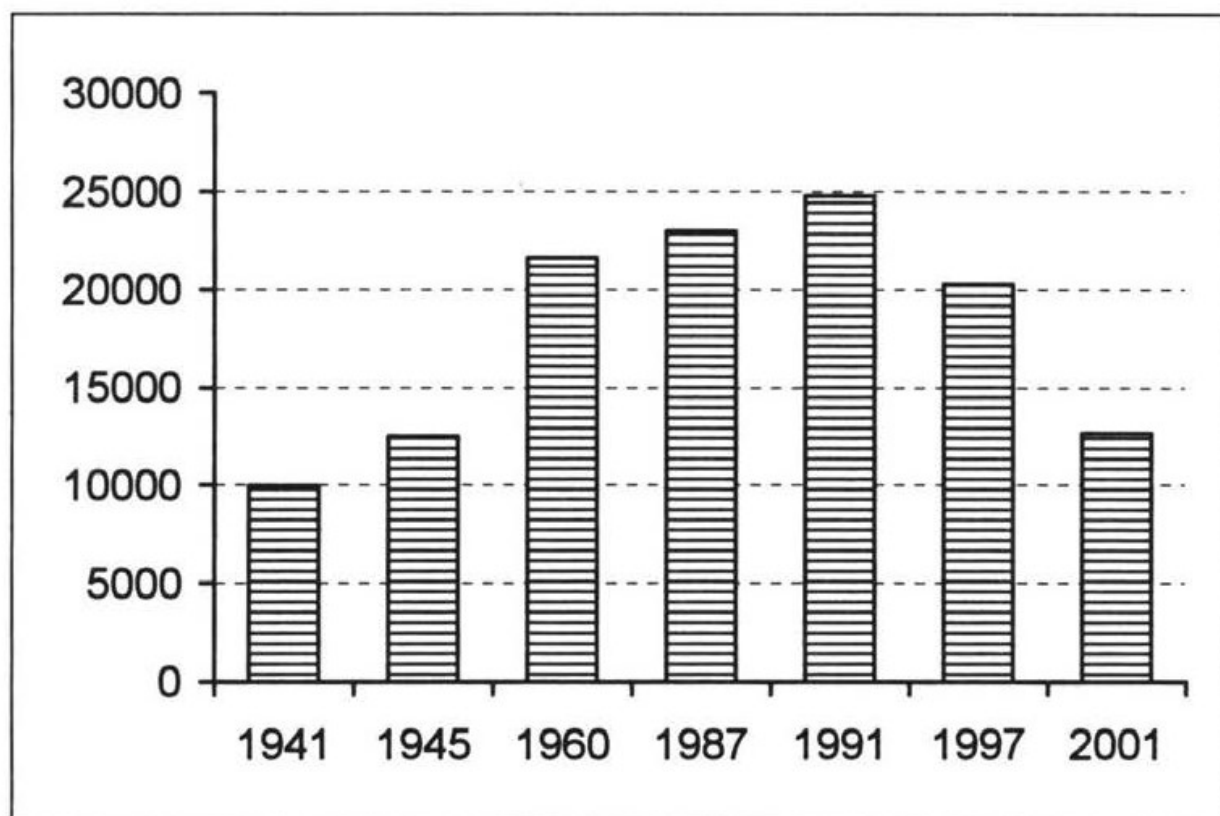


Figure 3. Reindeer numbers in the Anabarskii district.

Sources: Iadrinkhinskii 1998, Syrovatskii 2000 and Report 2002.

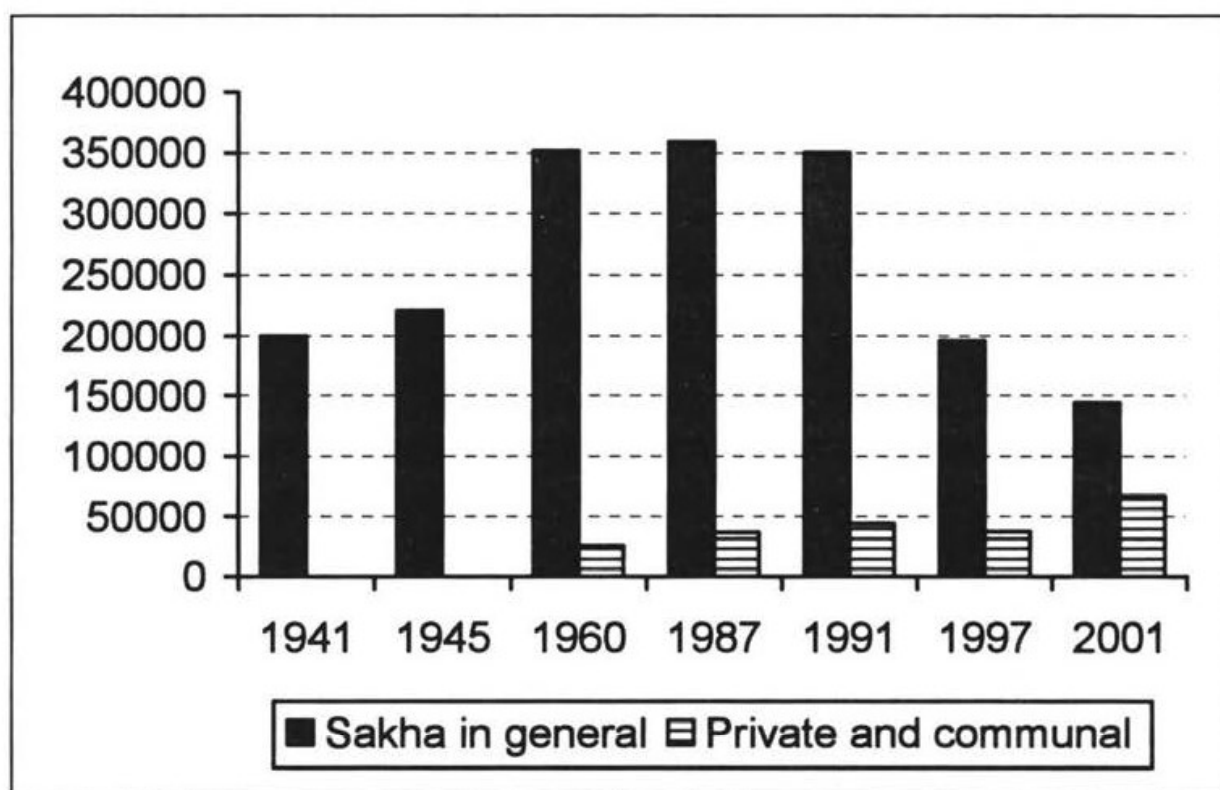


Figure 4. Reindeer numbers in the Republic of Sakha.

Sources: Iadrinkhinskii 1998, Syrovatskii 2000 and Report 2002.

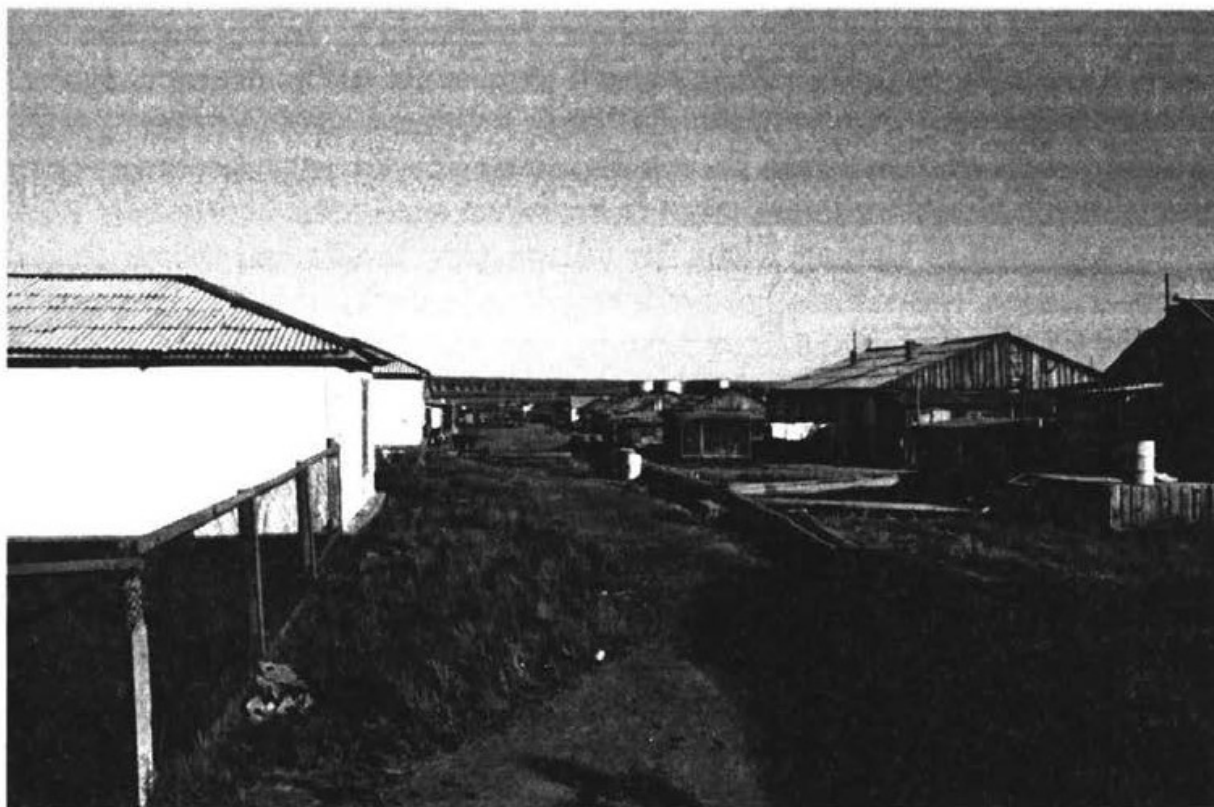


Plate 2. The 'main street' of the village of Uurung Khaia.

Owing to the immigration described above, and the attempts to sedentarise the indigenous population, the settlements of the Anabarskii district started to grow. In the 1960s a music school, a kindergarten and some small industries were established in the village of Saaskylaakh (*Anabar-50* 1980). The village of Uurung Khaia developed as well. In 1977 the district was connected to the TV network via satellite (Neustroeva 1995: 2). Access to TV was probably the first major factor that distinguished life in the village from the life in the tundra. My informants told me that in terms of access to imported consumer goods, there was hardly any difference between the tundra and village population. 'In those days shops in the North were even better supplied than those in central districts,' recalls Zina. 'In the Soviet Union, there weren't the differences in prices that you get today. Here, maybe everything was one or two kopecks more expensive. Reindeer herders came to the village a few times each year to receive their salary in bundles of bank notes. Then they went to the shop and bought everything they wanted. Alcohol, of course, first of all. But we could sometimes buy the sort of goods that city people can only dream of.'

Until the 1980s children from Uurung Khaia had to go to the boarding school in Saaskylaakh. But in the 1980s they got their own village school and the boarding school in Saaskylaakh was transformed into a normal day school. The village school was important for establishing a more strongly community-focused identity, as we will see in chapter 7. While the older



generation of indigenous people in the district went to school together and knew each other well, this changed with the closure of the boarding school. Although contact between the two villages remained close, younger people tend to have more friends in their own village and do not necessarily know many people in other villages, even in their own age group.

Although in Uurung Khaia the village grew in size and the process of sedentarisation was officially completed, many *tundroviki* still lived out in the tundra all year around. According to my informants, this situation changed in the middle of the 1980s, when all the hunters and reindeer herders were given apartments in the village. Still, it meant that in many cases more than two generations had to share accommodation and the lack of living space continued to be a problem. However, the connection to the tundra remained strong for the indigenous population. All local people older than 20 told me that they grew up in the tundra and during their school years spent a considerable time in the tundra. According to my observations, this tradition has continued because all the young indigenous people I met in Uurung Khaia have had the experience of living regularly in the tundra and are keen to develop specific tundra skills such as throwing the lasso or sewing fur clothes. Seemingly because of their later 'enculturation', the reindeer herders from Uurung Khaia are considered 'better' than the *tundroviki* from the Saaskylaakh, even by the people of Saaskylaakh themselves.

In 1980 the first caravan of trucks arrived from the diamond-mining town of Udachnyi loaded with heavy industrial equipment and machinery. In 1987 the new village of Ebeleekh was opened in the southern part of the Anabar district (*Anabar-60* 1990). It was (and is) an industrial village, with small diamond mines located all around it. The village originally belonged to the state company 'Yakutalmazy' but when the company became Almaz Sakha Rossii (ALROSA) in 1992, Ebeleekh was subordinated to the enrichment factory of Udachnyi.

With this industrial development the ethnic make-up of the district changed.<sup>33</sup> In 1959, 90.1% of the population was of local origin and this percentage was still high in 1979 (86.7%). In 1989, the indigenous people comprised only 49.1% of the district's population (Fedorova 1999: 89). In the 1970s and 1980s the economy of the Soviet Union was stable: scholars agree that state subsidies and the ineffective use of inputs followed political rather than economic interests (Gregory and Stuart 1986). In the 1980s,

<sup>33</sup> Because of Ebeleekh and the inflow of non-Sakha speaking newcomers, the district paper, established in 1954 as *Leninizm znamiat* ('Banner of Leninism'), was renamed *Kyhyt Sulus* ('Red Star') and then *Anaabyr Uottara* ('Fires of Anabar'), and finally became the bilingual Sakha-Russian newspaper *Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara* in the 1980s.

private agricultural production was legalised (Gregory and Stuart 1986: 285), i.e. people were allowed to grow vegetables, raise animals and sell their produce. While in other regions this decision had some impact on the food market, interestingly I found no historical data in Anabar to support the view that private reindeer owning was tolerated more openly at this time than in earlier periods.

In the 1980s, reindeer herding and hunting were very 'civilised' in the Russian sense. The reindeer herders were flown into the brigades by helicopters. Snowmobiles became increasingly popular, although the main means of transport for *tundroviki* still remained the reindeer. The brigades were supplied with radio stations and generators, and people became accustomed to having a broad variety of imported food in the tundra. According to my informants, even pork and beef were cooked in tundra brigades and canned vegetables and fruits were part of everyday meals. Most people in the tundra had portable transistor radios and listened to the news. The helicopters brought newspapers, and agitation brigades (*agitbrigady*) arrived several times a year to entertain hunters and reindeer herders with lectures and films. The order, given by the Communist Party at the 27th Congress in 1987, to modernise and civilise the lives of the northern indigenous peoples (Vasil'ev and Donskoi 1990: 82), had been fulfilled.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Although the establishment of collective and state farms was based on the ideological 'axiomatic starting point' that 'as a mode of production socialism is superior to all others', this step was motivated by the need to control a region's people and resources (Harding 1992: 83). It is difficult to analyse the development of property relations in Anabar. Systematic ethnographic fieldwork among the Dolgan and especially in Anabar was begun only in the 1930s. Because scholars were interested in material culture, folklore and kinship structures, there are gaps in the works of early ethnographers. Marxist ethnographers also defined social relations from the perspective of *kulaki* vs. poor people and ignored complicated sharing and exchange networks. In order to present their point of view, ethnographers often manipulated data (Terletskii, Gurvich), and this manipulation continued in the collective and state farm official reports. Thus 'successes' such as fulfilling the plan, opening a new TV station, and building new houses were duly reported, but the reports neglected to mention that until the 1980s a large part of the native population lived in the tundra without permanent accommodation in the village. It is impossible to reconstruct a complete picture of the past from fieldwork alone. Anabar's history should be read as consisting of different layers of reality. Together, the ethnographers' reports, statistical data, and

peoples' memories and stories form a complex mosaic in which some pieces are still missing or do not fit.



## **Chapter 3**

### **The Agricultural Landscape**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

'Yeltsin Decree finally ends "second serfdom" in Russia' is Van Atta's assessment of the 1991 law reorganising collective and state farms (Van Atta 1993). This legislation was followed by another important law on peasant farming (Wegren 1998: 76), and together these two laws introduced a process of transformation in post-Soviet agriculture which snowballed into a total reorganisation of 'the agricultural landscape'. In this chapter I discuss the changes to the 'agricultural landscape' in Arctic Russia which followed these reforms.

The use of the term 'agriculture' (*sel'skokhoziaistvo*) with reference to reindeer herding, hunting and fishing may sound strange, yet under the Soviet Union, these activities were placed in that category. Northern reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen were everywhere subordinated to state (*sov-khoz*) and collective farms (*kolkhoz*), and these farms were in turn subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture. Thus the word 'agriculture' is still widely used when referring to these livelihoods. The collective and state farms were a central institution which in most cases influenced the whole infrastructure and social life of the village. Not only was the production of fur, meat and fish part of everyday life in a village but, as Caroline Humphrey (1998a) describes in her book *Marx Went Away, But Karl Stayed Behind*, the management of the collective farm determined the whole public sphere in the community, and was a so-called 'total social institution' (Humphrey 1995: 7, 1998a: 4–5). Indeed, in the villages of rich collective and state farms, movies were regularly shown in the cinema, the sauna was new and hot, reliable transportation was available to take children to school, and the shops had a wider variety of goods than in many towns. After the collapse of the Soviet Union this Huxleyesque perfect small world vanished.

Verdery (1999: 54) suggests that in order to understand property in the postsocialist context one must go beyond its definition as a 'bundle of rights and obligations' and look at the whole system of social, cultural and political

relations. These relations were restructured when the whole institutional setting changed after the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union. But, as Stark (1992) has shown, in the transition process changes in the institutional setting are influenced by prior economic, political, institutional and cultural constraints, so that every system followed its individual course of development. This 'path dependence', i.e. rootedness in the old state farm structure and culture, was remarkable in the Russian North. In the neo-institutionalist theory, 'path dependence' as a transformation process requires stability which makes evolution of institutions predictable. Obviously, this discourse has been developed in another setting—in relatively stable capitalism—which differs from a postsocialist environment where one economic and political system transforms into another in a quite unpredictable way. Unlike those cases described by the classic neo-institutionalist approach, in Anabar the lack of stability brought about 'long run' continuous change (cf. North 1990: part 2).

Changes in agriculture in the post-Soviet North ended in 'insider privatisation' (i.e. privatisation by the members of the working collective). As in Russian industry in the same period, but contrary to industrial enterprises, privatisation led to a partial splitting up of former state and collective farms although remnants of their old structure lived on in the new enterprises (cf. Blanchard 1998: 88). It is nearly impossible to interpret the process of this institutional and organisational change in terms of Stark's 'recombinant property' (1996). While in Stark's case the breaking up of old structures and the establishment of semi-autonomous enterprises was a conscious strategy of 'risk spreading' for large Hungarian enterprises, in Anabar the state farm management did not have such a conscious policy (see Stark 1996: 1004–5, 1019). Different individuals and brigades broke with the former state farm on their own initiative, not according to plans from the management. However, successor organisations and splinter enterprises continued to cooperate informally. In this chapter, as well as in the chapters 5 and 6, I show how hunters and reindeer herders have worked together to establish a complex reciprocal network to monitor tundra resources, and how private fishers sell their produce various enterprises. This kind of networking and reciprocity is mirrored by activities at the management level: for example, splinter enterprises use MUP's facilities and equipment, and private and non-MUP reindeer are vaccinated by the MUP veterinarian. Borrowing the term *sovkhoism* from Konstantinov and Vladimirova (2002), I discuss how beyond the 'landscape of agriculture' there exists a bond of loyalty to the old collective and 'social relations of responsibility' that are strong enough to prevail over considerations of short-run utility maximisation. Nevertheless, there are features of the neo-institutionalist approach that show that 'path dependence'

shaped and narrowed further development and actors' choices (North 1990: 48; Stark 1992: 20–1). I agree that 'interaction between institutions and organizations shapes the institutional evolution of economy' (North 1994: 361) and show that development in the 'agricultural landscape' of the Anabarskii district was affected not only by changes in agricultural policy and law but also by the 'constraints' of the former state farm culture and structure (North 1990: 73). Like the cases analysed by neo-institutionalist theorists, in Anabar the involvement of third parties (i.e. local administrators) shaped the relations between economic players (hunting and herding enterprises and buyers) (see North 1990: 63). North (1990: 73ff, 1994: 360) links the decisions that actors make with 'knowledge and skills' but also with the learning process in general.

Because changes to the economic, political, legal and institutional settings in Sakha were extremely rapid and unpredictable, people in the north still felt unsure about the ongoing process and the right strategy for them (cf. North 1990: 76–7). One aim of this chapter is to show how former state farm workers used the 'opportunities' that the 'existing constraints and changes' offered to develop their strategies of survival (North 1990: 100).

### *3.1.1 Economic Changes in Sakha and Anabar Agriculture*

After the collapse of the Soviet planned agricultural economy or the 'Big Crash' (Krupnik 2000: 53) and throughout the transformation and restructuring process in the 1990s, institutional structures in the northern tundra became increasingly heterogeneous. As the command structures and the planned economy melted away, schemes for a return to a pre-Soviet way of life became popular among many intellectuals and scholars. Yeltsin's Decree in 1991 on the restructuring of Soviet agriculture and the creation of peasant households opened the door to new forms of institutions. The return to 'bush life' (Krupnik 2000: 53) had to be legalised.

The Republic of Sakha was the first region in Russia where the reorganisation of northern minorities was legalised. In the context of Siberian Small-Numbered Peoples, researchers tend to emphasise the central role of one type of new enterprise: the clan-based community (*rodovaia obshchina*) (Sirina 1999; Fondahl, Lazebnik and Poelzer 2000).<sup>34</sup> Although Sakha had long been a peripheral region throughout the Tsarist and Soviet periods, and according to Balzer this situation remains unchanged (Balzer 1995: 140), since 1992 this region has been a forerunner in the move towards legal reformation of the economy of northern minorities. In 1992 a law was passed

<sup>34</sup> In this work I do not discuss how clan-based or community-oriented the *obshchina* 'really' was. For different concepts of *rodovaia obshchina*, see Gray (2001: 4).



on 'clan-based pastoral communities' (*rodovye kochevye obshchiny*). The *obshchina* was almost exclusively designed for Small-Numbered Peoples and it is argued that the law on the *obshchina* was passed because the minorities needed some basis on which to build their reorganisation (Piliasov 1998: 11). In this chapter I will review the colourful landscape of agriculture in the Anabarskii district and argue that the *obshchina* is not necessarily 'the most common form of aboriginal reterritorialization' (Sirina 1999: 404; Fondahl, Lazebnik and Poelzer 2000), a position I have presented elsewhere (Ventsel 2002).

The monopoly that collective and state farms possessed over the use of natural resources and land was broken by new forms of property and organisations. A wide variety of institutions have entered the agricultural landscape in the Republic of Sakha. Because the legislation changed constantly, there were always new actors coming on the scene, enterprises converting to a different status, and old enterprises splitting up or going into liquidation. Thus, at the beginning of the twenty-first century there were 13 different kinds of official agricultural enterprises in the Republic of Sakha (Tichotsky 2000).

Reorganisation happened very quickly. The main reason for this was a federal law of 1991 which declared that all state and collective farms that were unable to pay off their debts and were incapable of existing independently were to be declared bankrupt and liquidated by February 1992. At the same time, the Law on Peasant Farming was passed which allowed the establishment of private enterprises. The Republic of Sakha adopted this law in 1991 (*O-krest'ianskom* 1991). In the first half of the 1990s, in rural areas populated mostly by ethnic Sakha, the establishment of peasant farms and the breaking up of former state and collective farms was swift. This reorganisation meant that former collective and state farms became smaller and were renamed but remained either directly or indirectly (as municipal or 'corporatised' enterprises) in state ownership.

However, in 1996 only 14% of land in Sakha was controlled by peasant enterprises, while 78% of land belonged to enterprises under either direct or indirect state control; the rest was controlled by various commercial enterprises (cooperatives, joint stock companies, private firms). One consequence of this process was that large agricultural enterprises and local authorities, like those in the Transylvanian case, gained more power because most decision-making was carried out at a provincial level (Verdery 1998: 170; Tichotsky 2000: 210–16). According to my observations, in northern districts the change was not that big. As I have shown in the previous chapter, villages in the Anabarskii district were artificially created by the Communists in order to consolidate the indigenous population around collective

and state farms. Since the enterprise was the centre of economic and social life in the village and was also responsible for supplies and transport connection to the 'outside world', the borders between spheres of the state farm management and village or district administration have been always fuzzy. For a long time the district comprised more or less one state farm, and other enterprises and institutions (canteens, schools, airport) were either directly or indirectly economically linked to it. The postsocialist period saw changes only in the holder of power; the dominance of one institution in controlling the district economy and social life remained unchanged. In Soviet times the state farm director literally ran the district; with the weakening of the former state farms and appearance of new enterprises, power shifted to the head of the district administration who gained almost absolute control over the economy and social life in the district. However, it was generally the old and experienced heads of district administrations (i.e. those who had worked within the district economic and Communist Party structures for many decades) who gained wider support and acceptance in government circles and among the district population than the younger directors of former state farms.

The picture of the 'agricultural landscape' became rather more muddled in 2001. A report by the Ministry of Agriculture on land use in 2002 lists agricultural enterprises (*sel'skokhoziaistvennye khoziaistva*), part-time farms (*lichnye podsobnyye khoziaistva naseleniia*)<sup>35</sup> and clan-based communities (*rodovye obshchiny*) (*Report 2002*: 66). According to the statistics, only 10% of registered enterprises had state involvement and the rest were private (*Report 2002*: 65). The authors of the report do not differentiate between agricultural enterprises with or without state ownership—as a group these enterprises used 20% of agricultural lands. Peasant farms used 9% and *obshchiny* 0.03% of agricultural lands; no data were given for private households (*Report 2002*: 66). Under the category of agricultural enterprises the report listed three state farms, 153 agricultural cooperatives, 24 limited companies (TOO), 73 GUPs (*gosudarstvennoe unitarnoe predpriiatie*—'state unitary enterprises', i.e. state owned), three agricultural companies, two horse farms, four experimental-production households (*opytno-proizvodstvennoe khoziaistvo*), two poultry farms, and one collective farm. To explain the various differences in status and organisation is beyond the scope of this research, but, according to my experience of Sakha agriculture, many of these enterprise categories (joint stock enterprise, experimental-production household, poultry farm) could be either private or have state involvement, irrespective of their registered name.

<sup>35</sup> This category means private plots which were used mainly by non-rural inhabitants to grow some additional food or to make hay for privately-owned animals.

The numbers concerning land use given in the report should be viewed with some scepticism. The definition of agricultural land in Sakha was unclear, and (as will be shown in this chapter) enterprises also used lands outside their registered territory. More important than registered lands were the contributions of different enterprise categories to overall agricultural production. In 2002 private households provided 71% of all agricultural production in the Republic of Sakha; agricultural enterprises 17%, and peasant households 11.6%. No data were available for *obshchiny* (Report 2002: 66).

Category	1990	1995	1999	2000	2001
Agricultural enterprises <i>Sel'khozpredpriiatiia</i>	166	254	269	266	265
Part-time farms <i>Podsobnye khoziaistva</i>	369	236	142	142	145
Peasant farms <i>Krest'ianskie khoziaistva</i>	41	3,353	4,110	4,141	4,178
<i>Rodovye obshchiny</i>	—	178	256	272	254

Table 1. Agricultural categories in Sakha, numbers of units, 1990–2001.

	Agricultural enterprise	Part-time farm	<i>Rodovye obshchiny</i>	Peasant household	Private household
Cattle	12.7	1.2	0.1	13.8	72.2
Pigs	15.0	8.0	0.1	18.2	58.7
Horses	39.6	1.3	1.6	15.9	41.6
Reindeer	52.7	0.6	27.4	0.5	18.8
Poultry	42.3	22.4	0.0	3.2	32.1
Sheep and goats	-	1.0	-	9.0	90

Table 2. Ownership of domestic animals in 2002 (%).

Source: Report 2002.



Enterprise	Reindeer herding	Hunting	Fishing
MUP			
1. Il'ia Spiridonov	X	X	X
2. Arktika	X	X	X
Subsidiary enterprise			
3. Tundra	X	X	X
4. Erel	X	X	
Small-scale enterprise			
5. Terpiia		X	X
6. Elden		X	X
<i>Rodovaia obshchina</i>			
7. Udza	X	X	X
8. Ulakhan-Kyol	X	X	X
9. Uotaakh-Khaia		X	X
10. Gereenn'e	X	X	X
11. Bagana		X	X
12. Begichev		X	X
13. Suolima		X	X
Family enterprise			
14. Tiistaakh		X	X
15. Aryylaakh		X	X
16. w/o name		X	X

Table 3. Enterprises and activities in the Anabar tundra.

Source: *Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara* 17 April 2001, 21 April 2001, 24 April 2001.

In the Anabarskii district, as in other tundra regions of Russian Siberia, people who work and live in the tundra are called *tundroviki* in contrast to the village population who are called *poselkovye* (cf. Anderson 2000a). In the anthropological literature about Siberia, scholars have discussed the different strategies adopted by indigenous and incomer *tundroviki* to establish and maintain territorial entitlements, a process that in some cases has resulted in struggles between different groups (see Anderson 1998b, 2000a; Ziker 2001). On the Taimyr Peninsula, for example, the people of aboriginal descent created family/clan holdings (*semeino-rodovoe khoziaistvo*), while incomers were allowed to register their households as peasant-hunting holdings (*krest'iansko-promyslovoe khoziaistvo*), and each group had a different legal status and a different tax burden (Ziker 2001: 54). The peculi-

arity of the Anabarskii district is that the *tundroviki*, with two exceptions, are all local people. There is no legal difference between users of the tundra in terms of their origin. In Anabar, as I will discuss below, the legal form of the enterprise depends on when it was registered, the personal politics of the head of the district administration, and on state loans that were available at the time of registration.

The past ten years have seen the appearance of many new actors on the agricultural landscape. The first change in the Anabarskii district occurred in 1996 when two state farms were handed over into district ownership and became MUPs (*munitsipal'noe unitarnoe predpriiatie*, 'municipal unitary enterprise'). Soviet agriculture in the Anabarskii district, as in all northern districts, had flourished only because of subsidies, and in order to prevent a social catastrophe from total unemployment, agricultural property had to be municipalised first. Another change was the appearance of private initiative in order to break from the former state farm and establish new agricultural enterprises. Following the course of general development in Sakha, peasant farms (*krest'ianskie khoziaistva*) were the first private agricultural institutions, which appeared in the Anabarskii district as early as 1994. Other forms of property, such as subsidiary enterprises and small-scale enterprises, followed peasant farms. *Obshchina*, as the most hailed indigenous institution, only became part of the transformation process many years later. In following sections I outline the broad variety of enterprises that existed in the district half a decade later.

I also show how the appearance of new enterprises was affected by the 'shadow of the state farm' and challenge the view of some of my Sakha colleagues who see the establishment of new forms of property as a process wholly independent of the Soviet institutional past (F. S. Donskoi 2001, Syrovatskii 2002). In fact, two former district state farms were transformed into MUPs and their workers and units (brigades) 'gave birth' to all the other forms that have been established since 1991. As Stark says, the new actors in the postsocialist context were rebuilding their organisations and institutions not *on the ruins* but *with the ruins* of the old economy (Stark 1996: 995). This explains why new institutions have maintained many features of the state farm structure and the organisation of its working processes. Not only is the MUP still called a 'state farm' (*sovkhos*) by the villagers, but when people talk about *obshchiny*, subsidiary enterprises and other institutions, they still refer to them as 'brigades'. In this chapter and in chapters 5 and 6, I explore how the new enterprises have maintained links with each other and with the MUP inherited from the state farm structure.

In the socialist context the distinction between different types of large-scale property (communal, state, district) were in practice usually meaning-

less (Hann 1998: 21) and the constantly changing laws in the postsocialist period meant that people found it difficult to understand supposed differences in the status of new institutions.

People in the Anabarskii district do not appear to have been eager to establish *obshchiny* or any other forms of private enterprise, and many people were unwilling to quit the former state farm. As they told me, they were used to the state farm structure and the new enterprises seemed rather too risky. A commonly voiced opinion was that 'the state farm is broke and poor, but we know it well!' (i.e. better the devil you know). As mentioned by Konstantinov and Vladimirova, it was not only the economic efficiency but the aspect of collective social security that motivated people to retain their affiliation with the former state farm (Konstantinov and Vladimirova 2002: 9). Besides the economic profits, people knew how the MUP's structures worked, who was responsible for what, and they understood the inner hierarchy of the enterprise. The MUP, as an enterprise, not only carried the old state farm legacy by keeping the buildings, equipment and structure of the state farm but it was also subordinated to the district administration and had the highest security guarantee against possible bankruptcy. Despite being unprofitable and periodically unable to pay salaries, the MUP continued to exist and maintained its workers' entitlement to social security and pensions.

Although the head of the district administration, Nikolai Egorovich Androsov, was a passionate supporter of the *obshchina* and of the private family household idea, his 'neotraditionalist' ideas (Pika and Prokhorov 1994) were not popular with everybody. In particular, the older generation of *tundroviki* were sceptical about the new forms of property and explained to me that they did not see how the new enterprises could avoid bankruptcy in the near future. Androsov's goal was to break up all the agricultural MUPs in the Anabarskii district, privatise all reindeer herds and decentralise the 'traditional economy'. His model was the Yamal Peninsula, where the majority of domestic reindeer are in private ownership and are growing steadily in number (see Androsov 2000, 2001). Therefore he channelled part of the district's money into supporting these new enterprises.<sup>36</sup> Such a personal economic vision of the future of the Anabarskii district by its leader is certainly one reason why five *obshchiny* were registered during my fieldwork period.

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<sup>36</sup> It was not only through the donation of rifles and equipment that the administration helped the new private or collective enterprises. The administration organised, whenever possible, helicopters to transport hunters to the tundra and to bring them back with their meat to their villages. There was one working 'pastoral school' (*kochevaia shkola*) and one was under construction, both projects financed by the district.



There are a few other aspects that are crucial to understanding the activities, policies and connections to state structures of the various enterprises. The basic 'means of production' were not privatised in the Anabarskii district during my fieldwork period. As everywhere else in the Russian Federation, land was still under state ownership. Not many people were interested in official private ownership of land anyway. First of all, land-use conflicts were not sufficiently serious to motivate people to think about owning land. Besides that, many people in the Arctic who may have had informal entitlement to some lands normally used other lands outside their 'own territory' seasonally (for fishing, wild reindeer hunting, etc). They suspected that if land was privatised, it would lead to conflict and competing claims by users (cf. Verdery 1999: 67).

Reindeer herds belonged to the district, which placed these under the guard of two MUPs—'Arktika' and 'Il'ia Spiridonov'. Because of their legal status, other new enterprises did not own reindeer but leased them from the MUPs. The ownership and use of reindeer was more complicated because the Republic of Sakha put a ban on reindeer slaughtering and therefore changed the economic status of domestic reindeer. Instead of selling products of domestic reindeer husbandry, the reindeer herders' main income came from their salaries (paid by the state) and from state subsidies for reindeer herding, hunting and fishing—a situation I have described elsewhere (Ventsel and Stammeler 2003).

Another factor was a 'state order' (*goszakaz*), which was very similar to the 'plans' of the Socialist era. The 'state order' was introduced to support agriculture in times of crisis by requiring a certain level of production from agricultural enterprises. At the same time, the state was obliged to buy this production to guarantee income to the enterprises.<sup>37</sup> In reality, plans for meat, fish and other products were directed to districts from above and the district administration in turn allocated a specific task to each of the enterprises. The enterprises in the Anabarskii district were required to sell certain amounts of meat and fish to 'fulfil the plan'.

However, the state did not guarantee the marketing of the produce. Enterprises had to find buyers themselves and then file the receipts documenting the transactions with the administration. When enterprises failed to fulfil the 'state order' the administration could cut their subsidies or give preference to other, more successful, enterprises when buying meat and fish for schools, kindergartens and other such institutions. Through this policy of the 'state order' the district administration maintained its powerful position within local agriculture.

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<sup>37</sup> Personal communication with several officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Sakha.

### 3.2 The Municipal Enterprise (MUP) 'Hero of Labour Il'ia Spiridonov'

The MUP 'Hero of Labour Il'ia Spiridonov' (MUP *imeni Geroia Truda Il'ii Spiridonova*) was established in 1996 when the former state farm 'Severnyi' was reorganised as a district farm. This transformation did not change the MUP's structure or economy. After municipalisation the economic wealth of the enterprise steadily decreased because there were problems in obtaining subsidies and in marketing the produce. The MUP now faced competition from other enterprises for buyers.

The directorship of the MUP changed a few times in the 1990s and during my fieldwork the position was occupied by a young (24-year-old) man, who had recently finished agricultural vocational school in Yakutsk and returned to Uurung Khaia. The director of the district farm still sees his enterprise as an agricultural one, the goal of which is to 'produce' fish, meat, reindeer and arctic fox furs. But, in contrast to the state farm, which once employed all the hunters, fishers and reindeer herders in the village of Uurung Khaia, the MUP is only one, although the largest, of several agricultural enterprises in the village.

The MUP has its part of the district *goszakaz* to fulfil, which means that the director distributes the 'plan' among the brigades according to their profiles (hunting, reindeer herding, or fishing) and resources. The MUP has business relationships with several bigger institutions, of which the diamond enrichment factory in Udachnyi (Udachnyi GOK—*gorno obogatitel'nyi kombinat*), a branch of ALROSA, is the most important. Udachnyi GOK buys almost all of the MUP's meat 'produce', and also sponsors the enterprise through ALROSA's regional social programs, providing groceries, fuel, construction materials and transport.

During my fieldwork period only 154 people were listed on the MUP's payroll. Dominant among the workers were *tundroviki*: the MUP officially employed 35 reindeer herders, 28 *chumrabortnitsy* and 38 hunter-fishers. Most village-based workers were tractor and truck drivers, mechanics and other technical personnel. Furthermore, the MUP management included a secretary, some veterinarians and livestock experts (*zootekhniki*). Apart from these the MUP hired seasonal labour, especially at corral times or for reindeer herding in the summer months. As the director explained to me, the number of *tundroviki* employed was more or less stable, but the fluctuation in drivers, transport workers (whose task was to load and unload trucks and barges), etc., was high. I suspect that this was due to the management's problems in paying salaries on time. The villagers changed their jobs often, preferring to take on work that promised a regular cash income.

At the end of my research period the number of workers had decreased because many hunters had established *obshchiny* and some garages with trucks were rented out to private enterprises.

Still, many hunters and especially reindeer herders preferred to maintain at least some level of formal involvement with the district farm. The motivation to stay within the structures of the MUP often comes from uncertainty about the future of other forms of enterprises. The MUP, as a former state farm, maintained all the old structures from the socialist collective and people at least understood its structure and ways of operating. As Ziker has demonstrated in Taimyr, many hunters often had no clear idea how the family or clan holding was supposed to work (Ziker 1998: 76). The situation was no different in the Anabarskii district, even though other institutions had been in existence for as long as six or seven years.

Although the director stressed to me several times that the MUP should simply operate as an economic enterprise, people, like those in other regions (see Tuisku 1999: 139), supported the idea that the MUP should maintain the social functions that were a legacy of the state farm era. So reindeer herders and hunters have retained their social insurance with the state company SAPI Polis, managed through the MUP. In addition, the enterprise distributes groceries to its tundra workers a few times a year. Another reason for staying with the MUP is the pension. If an employee's work record (*stazh*) is continuous, he or she is entitled to a full pension. This strategy, called *sovkhoism* by Konstantinov and Vladimirova (2002: 3), where people seek 'maximum personal security and a maximising of personal gain at the expense of a public resource' managed by a state, collective or district farm, is common in those regions in Russia where big state farms still maintain their function as a 'total social institution'.

The director of the 'Il'ia Spiridonov' MUP maintains quite a loose relationship with the brigades. The members of brigades are allowed to hunt and fish for their own purposes and are only required to sell enough produce to the MUP to fulfil the plan. Therefore, although being in the MUP might not mean immediate economic gain, a worker is secured socially for the period worked with the enterprise and the MUP tolerates workers taking on additional jobs and activities that promise extra income, like hunting or short-term construction work in the village. Another advantage of working for the enterprise is access to its equipment or supplies (snowmobiles, transport to the tundra, ammunition, traps, radio) which can be used for private activities.



### 3.2.1 *The Reindeer Brigade*

The reindeer brigade is a unit of the MUP. It is subordinated directly to the management of the enterprise and, at least theoretically, all its activities should be confirmed with the management.

Before my fieldwork, the MUP's reindeer brigades used to have work contracts that were agreed with the management and in which the obligations and rights of reindeer herders were clearly formulated. The main task of the brigade was to maintain 90% of the adult reindeer and 60–70% of the newborn calves. The task of the MUP was to supply the brigade with fuel, timber, firewood, reindeer furs and ammunition. In practice, reindeer herders kept the hides of slaughtered animals but received extra hides when needed from the MUP. During my fieldwork period, brigades located on the shore of the Arctic Ocean collected their own timber and transported it either using their own sledges or using tractors from neighbouring non-MUP enterprises. Inland brigades had their timber delivered at certain places along rivers. Fuel and ammunition was provided according to management policy a few times each year—and in most cases the supply was inadequate (see further discussion in chapter 5). The year of my fieldwork (2001) was the first year that the reindeer brigades did not sign work contracts. The head livestock expert explained to me: 'We can't afford anything, because we can't give them [reindeer herders] anything. That is the reason we don't have contracts this year.' Despite this, not much appeared to change. The management continued to supply the brigades with everything they had to distribute, without written contracts. Also the maintenance of a certain percentage of female animals and calves based on the previous year's head count was still relevant for measuring the success of the brigade and the success of individual brigadiers. The brigadiers I met therefore took this aspect very seriously, claiming that their reputation was linked to the results of their work. The MUP's informal hierarchy of brigadiers was tied to this index (*pokazately*). Here I again observed a marked difference between outsiders' opinions of reindeer herders and the herders' own attitudes. Similar to what Anderson (2000a) describes, many villagers, officials and Russian and Sakha scholars told me that reindeer herders have lost their motivation and have become careless with their animals, but the impression I got in the tundra was the complete opposite.

Every brigade is assigned its own territory (*zakrepiť*) by government officials. In 1991 after ecological research, officials of Goskomzem RSFSR (Land Use Committee of the Russian Socialist Federative Republic) from Novosibirsk distributed the territory of the state farm 'Severnyi' among six brigades. Borders were drawn according to the principle of *oleneĭmkost'* (the capacity of the land, how many reindeer should be kept there, and for what

period of time). Every brigade had a map where this *oleneĕmkost* was marked with numbers in different colours. The territories of the reindeer brigades were divided into three parts: summer pastures (*letnie pastbishchi*), winter pastures (*zimnie pastbishchi*) and reserve lands (*zapasnye zemli*). This last group was to be used only if (on account of environmental conditions) the ordinary pastures were insufficient to feed the animals. Reindeer brigades were, in this sense, the only actors in the 'agricultural landscape' to have a formally determined territory within officially fixed borders. According to the view of state representatives (reindeer breeding specialists, ecologists, etc.) brigades should be passive actors who accept the land parcels given to them. But it has never been like this: in the Soviet era and afterwards the land use regulations were perpetually violated (see chapter 4). Furthermore, as I discuss in chapters 4 and 5, in the Anabar tundra the management's inability to control its tundra workers led to the establishment of complicated informal networks to monitor land use.

	2000		2001	
Brigade	State	Private	State	Private
1	1,413	456	1,536	456
2	1,243	289	1,508	289
3	1,432	456	1,264	456
4	1,588	180	1,276	156
5	1,386	4,03	940	354
6	1,360	283	1,303	265
Total	8,422	2,067	7,827	1,976

Table 4. The number of reindeer in MUP Il'ia Spiridonov reindeer brigades, 2000–1. Source: *Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara*, 10 January 2001 and 18 May 2001.

During my fieldwork most reindeer brigades had similar annual cycles: they spent the winter in the southern part of their territory and moved northwards in spring to spend the summer in the northern regions of the district. In the southern parts of the district the reindeer herders have easier access to the villages, where they spend a lot of time travelling to and fro on their snowmobiles. On most holidays (Christmas, New Year's Eve, 1 May, etc.) almost all the reindeer herders are in the village and only a few men stay in the tundra to take care of the reindeer. Also, cold winds and fog from the Arctic Ocean reach the southern regions less frequently than in the coastal north. Female tentworkers (*chumrabortnitsy*) spend their spring and summers in the tundra and leave in September to be in the village with their children. Only a

few women, mostly those whose children have already grown up, stay in the tundra all year around (see further discussion in chapter 6).

In summer, when travelling to the village is difficult, the brigades move towards the coast.<sup>38</sup> The cold winds from the north give the deer some measure of relief from the mosquitoes and flies (*yrgakhta* in Sakha, *ovod* in Rus.), which lay their eggs under the animals' skin and drive them insane. The summer pastures are better in the north, where the climate is damper. For transport during summer migrations, the brigades use only reindeer, either harnessed or as mounted animals.

The annual migration route usually takes the form of a figure of eight. The crossing point where the two circles meet (*sahyyr*) is where the brigade changes its winter equipment for summer equipment. In summer Dolgan live in so-called *harkassy* ('frames'). This is a kind of mobile cabin of wooden frames covered with reindeer skins and canvas. The *harkass* is lighter and usually without a floor, in contrast to the *balokh* which has a floor and is covered with thicker winter furs under the canvas.<sup>39</sup> Besides the winter dwelling, all the winter clothes and winter sledges, snowmobiles and most of the produce are left at the *sahyyr*. In turn, during the winter all the summer equipment awaits its owners at the *sahyyr*. Some brigades have a permanent *sahyyr* while others move it every year, depending on the condition of the pastures.

The average reindeer brigade in the tundra has between 1,200 and 2,000 animals, and to keep them together, at least three, normally six to eight, herders (*pastukhi*) are needed. In summer the brigades move campsites every fourth or fifth day; in winter we sometimes stayed at one place for as much as two weeks, depending on the pasture conditions. In summer reindeer eat the lichen and grass faster than in winter when they have to dig for it. Therefore pastures are trampled faster in summer than in winter when the snow is deep. Normally a brigade travels five to seven kilometres between campsites, both in winter and in summer.

<sup>38</sup> In summer often the only way to reach people in the tundra is by motorboat. Those reindeer brigades that are too far away from the main rivers are more or less isolated from the beginning of June until September, when the corral takes place. Helicopter traffic is irregular and dependent on the big companies sending their helicopters to the north either to ship in meat or (in the case of biologists) to bring research parties to their bases. The most common means of transport in Siberia, the passenger tank (*vezdekhod*), was not available in the Anabarskii district during my fieldwork. The only *vezdekhod* in the district was to be found in Uurung Khaia, but without an engine. Even if it had been working, the use of these tanks in summer is forbidden by ecologists. A *vezdekhod* (*vezde*—'everywhere', *khod*—'to go') is similar to a real tank, heavy and powerful, and destroys exposed reindeer moss.

<sup>39</sup> To cover one *balokh* about 40 reindeer hides are needed. If a family has a lot of small children, the *balokh* can be really big (c. 6×15×5 metres). The average *balokh* and *harkass* are roughly 3×6 metres in area. Usually eight, in some cases twelve, reindeer pull the cabin.



The reindeer herders in Sakha receive a so-called reindeer herders' salary from the Republic's budget, which is part of a policy to support so-called traditional economic activities (*traditsionnye otrasli ekonomiki*) (Ob-Oplate 2000). The money for the salaries is transferred to the MUP, which pays the herders. The cost of any reindeer slaughtered or lost is deducted from each herder's salary. According to law, a herder receives his monthly salary when he works a minimum of three shifts per month. *Chumrabortnitsy* also receive a state salary which, unlike that of male herders, is paid according to days spent in the tundra.

A record of shifts worked and the number of animals is kept by the brigadier who usually fills in tables every week. Reindeer herders receive between 2,500 and 4,000 roubles a month and *chumrabortnitsy* usually about 1,500–2,000 roubles a month. The salary is paid twice a year, as in Soviet times. In autumn, when the reindeer herders return from the tundra, they receive their salary in cash; in spring, before they leave, they are paid in groceries. In addition to their salaries, the reindeer herders receive extra groceries and cigarettes from the MUP.<sup>40</sup>

Reindeer herders supplement their salaries by hunting, fishing and trapping arctic foxes commercially, i.e. to barter or sell to entrepreneurs (*kommersanty*). Most of their snowmobiles and other expensive tools are paid for in meat, fish and furs.

### 3.2.2 The Fishermen's Brigade

The Il'ia Spiridonov MUP has only one remaining fishermen's brigade, which I briefly visited before the spring fishing season. The members of the brigade mainly comprise men who have just reached pensionable age. Other people have described this brigade as a collective where elders who do not want to return to the village spend their time working. But the brigade was not just some club for retired people. It operated on a commercial basis and caught and sold fish in order to meet its 'state order'.

The brigade is located on the River Yöle in the small settlement of Koche, which contains some eight or ten wooden houses and cabins, a few storehouses and 10–12 *balokhs*. The settlement is big enough to be called a 'village' (*posëlok*). It was established in the 1950s and is therefore considered an old 'village' (no-one could tell me the exact date of its founding). Nearby, I saw ancient Dolgan graves in the tundra, but there was only one

<sup>40</sup> These extras do not amount to much. Usually the reindeer herders receive sacks containing flour, sugar, vegetable oil and some other items in small amounts. As one reindeer herder commented, 'The state farm does not have many groceries to give away, and they try to distribute them to everyone who works in the tundra. So we receive this small sack, it is like a present! (*Kak podarok!*)'.

elderly man who 'might know who was buried there' (I never had a chance to ask him).

During my brief visit, all the buildings were used as dwellings. Apart from the fishermen, a few other people lived in this settlement—mostly retired men, and a few younger men who came to help their relatives seasonally and hunt goose or fish over the spring and summer. The small settlement of Koche is permanently inhabited and can in fact become quite crowded in springtime during the fishing season. Young men who come to fish also help brigade members and are often allowed to use the brigade's equipment, clothing and fuel. The last time I visited Koche, one of those young men, Semion, told me that they were going to build an underground ice chamber during the summer of 2001. Despite its official status as the base of the fishermen's brigade, the settlement is a centre of a kin-based network in which many non-brigade members participate in order to get access to fishing places in exchange for their labour.

The settlement also has two big wooden buildings, which are to house a boarding school in the near future.<sup>41</sup> The district had planned to establish a so-called 'pastoral school' (*kochevaia shkola*) in the settlement for the children of *tundroviki* in order to keep families in the tundra. The construction of a pastoral school in Koche was begun in 1998 but the village administration ran out of money and was unable to complete the project. The head of the administration of Uurung Khaia told me he had a plan to find more money and would open the school in 2002. It was to be a small primary school with only two or three teachers. In the meantime, the two big wooden school buildings stood empty and were used, with the permission of the teachers, as dormitories for travellers.

The fishermen's brigade, as part of the MUP's structure, has to catch five tonnes of fish every year to fulfil its plan, an obligation that is usually met. Because the settlement did not yet have a big underground ice chamber, they had to transport their spring fish catch to the village of Uurung Khaia. As the brigadier complained to me, they delivered the fish to the MUP only because there was no other way to sell it in the summer. The MUP paid only 7 roubles per kilo, which was three times less than the entrepreneurs paid, but the entrepreneurs arrived only in winter. The fishermen do not have a fixed salary; they are paid according to their catch. The Il'ia Spiridonov MUP supplies the brigade with fishing equipment (nets, hooks, ropes), fuel and sometimes with working clothes (rubber boots, waterproof jackets,

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<sup>41</sup> However, some women in the reindeer brigades told me that they were sceptical about the idea of a school in Koche. 'Uurung Khaia is not far away. Why should I give my children to Koche when in the village they have a much better school with a lot of teachers and hobby circles (*kruzhki*)?'

working gloves). However, this has not been enough to motivate young people to join the brigade as full-time fishermen. From my point of view, the interdependence of the MUP's structure, which Gambold Miller (2003) describes as feudal, becomes particularly clear in the case of the Koche fishing brigade. It is hard to believe that the MUP makes any profit from the brigade's operations, but it is important for the enterprise to maintain jobs in the face of high unemployment and to keep the settlement in the tundra. In cooperation with the village management, the MUP even tried bringing more people to the tundra by planning to establish a school in Koche.

The fish are caught in the river and lakes within a radius of 20 kilometres around the settlement. Most of the members of the brigade were born and raised in this settlement and know the landscape and fishing places well. In north-western Sakha, there are two fishing seasons. In autumn (October–November), when the river and the lakes are frozen, the nets are put under the ice. The spring season starts in June or July, when the ice has gone. In both cases the brigade, which comprises about 10 men during the active fishing season, has to check around 100–150 fishing nets almost every day. The fish must be collected and then shipped to the settlement. In autumn the fishermen use snowmobiles for this purpose, in summer they use motor boats.

The fuel provided by the MUP, is, as the brigadier told me, one reason for remaining within the MUP. Fishermen sometimes have fuel left over for private use, for example for travelling to the village of Uurung Khaia. The brigade's relations with the management are pretty loose; they are free to decide how much fish they would sell to private entrepreneurs after fulfilling the plan, and how much they would deliver to the MUP.

The MUP had on its list of workers many more fishermen than those actually in the brigade. A large number of fishermen, mostly young men, fished for their own ends, delivered a few sacks of fish to the MUP to fulfil the plan, and sold the rest to private entrepreneurs. This was considered more profitable than being in the brigade because a lone fisherman could be more flexible in selling his catch. Many such lone fishermen have their own underground ice chambers and therefore are not forced to sell their catch at a low price with the onset of warm weather.

Such lone fishermen usually live in log cabins in the tundra on a riverbank and fish alone, or are helped by their children during the school holidays. They have maintained their affiliation with the MUP mainly because of pension entitlements, but also in order to receive free supplies (groceries, fishing nets, special clothing). These fishermen do not have fixed salaries but are paid according to the amount of fish they deliver. Nikul, one fisherman whose *tochka* was on the Yöle River, said to me when I asked



why he still works in the MUP: 'What else can I do? I don't gain anything but it doesn't cost me anything either.'

### 3.3 A Subsidiary Enterprise of the MUP

The subsidiary enterprise (*dochernoe predpriiatie*) Erel (Sakha for 'hope') is an autonomous unit of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP established in 1997.<sup>42</sup> In the district's economic statistics (for instance in the local newspaper, *Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara* 21 and 24 April 2001) Erel is always listed after the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP but as an independent enterprise, a model which I have adopted in this chapter.

Erel is the former 6th reindeer brigade of the MUP, and though it was converted into an enterprise, Erel is still informally called the '6th brigade'. In 2001, Erel's reindeer herd contained 1,395 head: 1,130 were reindeer leased from the MUP Il'ia Spiridonov and 265 were privately owned animals.<sup>43</sup> This was the number before spring calving in May, which added 300–500 calves. Five men and three women work in the enterprise: a director, two herders, one 16-year-old herder's assistant-trainee, a hunter and three *chumrabortnitsy*, who were wives of the herders and the hunter. Whereas the herders are in the tundra all year around, their director spends most of his time in Uurung Khaia and the hunter visits the brigade seasonally during the reindeer hunting and fox trapping seasons in May–June and January–March.

After the status of the enterprise changed, some reindeer herders left the brigade.<sup>44</sup> Because of the small number of workers—only three herders—every third day each of the herders has to go off to guard the herd. This creates a very exhausting work schedule and means less time to rest and carry out work in their own households (e.g. building *balokhs*, taming harness animals, hunting for their own ends). But it is difficult to find new reindeer herders. The director told me that he wanted to hire at least two more men, but no-one wanted to apply because the herd moves far to the north for most of the year and is rather isolated. The brigade's campsite was

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<sup>42</sup> This subsidiary enterprise ceased to exist after my visit because the reindeer herd ran off with some wild reindeer. One of my friends told me in November 2002 that 'The wild reindeer came out of the sea and filled all the tundra. They took the [Erel's] herd with them. There were some attempts to find them, even with helicopters. The men of the 6th brigade were looking in the tundra and tried to find their herd. They exhausted themselves and even lost those animals that did not run away.'

<sup>43</sup> Head count taken on 1 April 2001, *Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara* 18 May 2001.

<sup>44</sup> When I asked one of the former members of that brigade why he had changed to another brigade, he answered: 'I didn't want to quit the state farm. They still give away some things for free. Groceries and things like that.'

attacked by polar bears in 1999, and as a result many women do not let their husbands join Erel.

One of the reindeer herders is a brigadier and responsible for the well-being of the animals. Two other herders—Aponia and Nikita Tuprin—are brothers and in Socialist times there were two more brothers working as herders in this brigade. The trainee, Kostik, is a distant relative of the herders and was sent to the tundra by his parents because he refused to go to school. According to the herders, they asked Slava Popov, who is not a relative, to take up the post of director. Slava Popov used to be the director of the state farm 'Severnnyi' in the early 1990s, and the head of the Uurung Khaia administration. After a failed bid for re-election, he established some small-scale enterprises which were not successful. Slava's main task in Erel was to organise the marketing of the produce and the delivery of supplies.



Plate 3. Oleg, a reindeer herder, playing the accordion on a sunny spring day.

Erel is one of the northernmost reindeer breeding units, and this fact influences its annual cycle. This region lies directly on the path of migrating wild reindeer herds. Tens of thousands of wild reindeer come twice a year from the west (Taimyr Peninsula) and from the east (tundra regions of Sakha Republic). The migration of wild reindeer always means losses within the herds of domestic reindeer because the domestic ones run away with their wild relatives. According to Erel's director, every year they lose about 300

domestic reindeer in this way. For a herd of 1,400 head this is a significant loss which erodes any extra income earned when the herders manage to produce more animals than the number fixed in their contract with the MUP.

The migration of wild reindeer forces the brigade to move to the south in summer, although northern pastures are better. Erel's members hunt more than average reindeer herders do. They supply themselves with meat but also occasionally help the enterprise's only hunter. In the north, near the Arctic Ocean coast, the herders have built permanent arctic fox trap lines (*paastar*) and use them frequently. This is one reason why the reindeer herd migrates northwards to the coast in wintertime. The other reason for the herders to go north is to collect timber as the northern shorelines are covered with driftwood. The reindeer herders collect this timber every spring and make huge piles which are transported to future campsites with the help of a tractor belonging to a neighbouring hunters' *obshchina*. In summer the herd moves south more than 200 kilometres, to the Yöle River, where the herders can reach the village by motor boat, if necessary.

As in every other reindeer brigade, the herders spend the winter without their families and bring their wives and children to the tundra in the second half of May.<sup>45</sup> All the herders in this brigade have sons aged between 11 and 13 years, who participate in the daily herding process when they are in the tundra. The children's help is particularly important when catching reindeer. Because there are not enough adults, catching the required number of working animals is always a big problem. The boys help by driving the reindeer back when they run out to the tundra. In May, with the last snow, relatives arrive on snowmobiles from the village. People come to hunt geese and then return before the snow melts completely in the first half of June. This is the last time before October that outsiders come to visit.

After converting to a subsidiary enterprise, Erel remained on the former brigade's territory on the coast of the Arctic Ocean. The enterprise has free use of the land and, at least theoretically, it must use the former territory of the state farm brigade. In practice, the brigade expanded their area of migration in 2001. After one MUP brigade was relocated to the island of Bol'shoi Begichev (the 5th brigade) and another (the 3rd brigade) began using pastures on the southern side of the Yöle in order to remain as near to Uurung Khaia as possible, Erel began to use their former pastures. Obviously, neither the village administration nor the MUP management is in a position to control fully the migration of Erel's herd. Erel reindeer herders stopped providing information on their migration routes for the MUP's

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<sup>45</sup> I once asked one of Erel's reindeer herders, 'Isn't it boring without your family and children in the tundra?' He answered: 'There is so much work. I do not even notice that they are not here!'



officials, and since part of Erel's income is independent of the MUP, the MUP management has less influence over Erel's decisions.

The subsidiary enterprise has a contract with the MUP management, identical to those contracts held by state farm brigades in the Soviet era, which specify that they are obliged to maintain 90% of the adult reindeer and 70% of the calves. If they manage to produce more animals, they are free to slaughter or sell them. This last condition is more theoretical, because the reindeer herd is not big enough to have animals for slaughter and the Sakha Republic, as mentioned above, has put a ban on the slaughtering of domestic animals. The meat 'produced' by the enterprise is therefore from wild reindeer harvested during the hunting season.

Erel's herders, like all reindeer herders in Sakha, receive a state salary, and selling meat is a source of extra income for them. The enterprise is self-accounting (*khozraket*),<sup>46</sup> has its own bank account and is free to make its own economic decisions. It receives less help from the management: Erel's fuel limit is less than that of an ordinary reindeer brigade and the salaries are paid in cash by the management of the MUP, not in groceries. The herders do not receive extra groceries or special clothing as the MUP's reindeer brigades do.

The opinions of Erel's director and his reindeer herders differ regarding this arrangement. The director told me that the MUP charges too much for groceries and in any case it is good to receive some cash. 'If there are surplus groceries, you cannot change them back into cash, but with money one can always buy groceries, if necessary', he told me.

When the herders chose to change the status of the 6th brigade to become a subsidiary enterprise and called on Slava Popov to be their director, they imagined that their life would be better than that of the average MUP reindeer herder. Slava had management experience and the herders hoped to profit from this. But he did not fulfil the herders' expectations. They believed that the director spent too much time away on business trips, often in the capital, and therefore could not make any good deals in the village; other sellers would snatch those offers away. When I asked one herder, Nikita,

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<sup>46</sup> 'Self-accounting' (*khozraket*) enterprises and brigades were introduced in the middle of the 1980s with the first economic reforms of Gorbachev. This meant that the enterprise must balance its books and pay wages and other costs out of earned profit. Self-accounting enterprises did well in reindeer herding at the beginning of the 1990s because they made a lot of money by selling *panty* (fresh velvet antlers). Due to this policy, brigades were allowed to choose their own brigadier, and taking or giving up a job in a brigade became easier. At the beginning of the *khozraket* era good reindeer herders were able to earn two to three times more money than even white-collar high-ranking officials in the village (Vitebsky 1989). After a few years, when there was a tenfold decrease in the price of *panty*, the good life vanished abruptly.

how Popov was as a director, he replied: '*Kuhakhan toion!*' ('Bad boss!' in Sakha). He accused the director of not being able to find loans when the enterprise was starting up.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the herders' enthusiasm declined and they are disappointed by the situation they now find themselves in. As one herder told me, in terms of quality of life there is no difference between the MUP and an independent reindeer brigade. Nevertheless, despite the scepticism it seemed to me that there was unspoken hope that Slava will be able to improve the situation and make the enterprise profitable. The herders of Erel were not supportive of their director's ideas but, on account of their hopes, were not sabotaging Slava's plans either.

This tacit approval by the herders probably stems from the fact that the enterprise has profited from the director's contacts with the MUP's management and district administration. Slava was on good terms with the young director at MUP Il'ia Spiridonov and was sometimes able to exploit this. I was present when he took a new portable radio from the MUP office for the tundra brigade telling me, 'They have one here and do not do anything with it. So I have decided to borrow it.' Slava was very often present at MUP management meetings and therefore was able to plan the migration of the brigade so as to catch the supply barge or send a load of meat to the village. The district administration paid for most of his business trips to Yakutsk or gave him a free ticket for the plane,<sup>48</sup> thereby saving the enterprise's money.

Erel tries to make maximum use of all the available ecological resources, earning money through the sale of meat, fish and arctic fox furs. The majority of its income, however, comes from selling wild reindeer meat and *kamysy* (thick parts of reindeer skin, taken from the legs and used to make *unty*—fur boots). This is one reason why the director of the enterprise was often absent—he was away trying to find trading partners who offered the best possible prices.

After some negotiation, the director managed to sign a contract with the state enterprise Sakhabult, which agreed to buy reindeer meat in large amounts.<sup>49</sup> During a cigarette break, the director told me that Sakhabult was

<sup>47</sup> The confused situation with regard to legal statuses and differences among various types of enterprises is illustrated by what Nikita told me in the beginning—that they were an *obshchina*, not a subsidiary enterprise.

<sup>48</sup> Most people in the Anabarskii district cannot afford the plane ticket to fly out of the district. A return ticket cost over 5,000 roubles at the beginning of my fieldwork, and the price rose steadily, reaching 7,000 roubles by the end of my fieldwork. Therefore most seats in the plane were paid for by institutions for their own staff or by the district hospital to bring patients to hospitals in Yakutsk.

<sup>49</sup> In the Sakha Republic agricultural production is highly centralised. There are different state enterprises which are supposed to buy different kinds of produce from enterprises and private

the best buyer at the moment and he could not understand why the MUP and other enterprises did not sell their meat to it too. It paid for the produce within a few days and mostly in cash, if desired. The only problem was that to secure contracts one had to travel to Yakutsk. On the other hand, on such a business trip (*komandirovka*), the director usually purchased hunting and fishing equipment, which was cheaper in the capital where one can choose between different sellers. From his days working as the head of the village administration and director of the Uurung Khaia state farm, Slava Popov had contacts with high-ranking officials at the big enterprises which were potential buyers of meat.

Although the three reindeer herders were sceptical about the idea, the director was planning to take out a loan and buy a truck. This would allow him to gain more independence from the MUP, which at the moment was the main transport provider. He wanted to sell reindeer meat to earn money for the truck. The lone hunter in the enterprise could not shoot enough animals, even if the reindeer herders assisted him as much they could. Therefore, the director offered a contract to the reindeer herders of a neighbouring brigade. This brigade migrates in a region which lies on the migration route of wild reindeer, and Slava wanted to persuade this brigade to hunt wild reindeer for Erel. He planned to supply the reindeer herders with ammunition and to share the profits with them. The neighbours turned down the offer because of a lack of time.

### 3.4 The *obshchina* (Clan-Based Community)

The *obshchina* movement in the Sakha Republic has a ten-year history and, as mentioned above, Sakha was the first to introduce the movement into the Russian North. The first three *obshchiny* in the Republic of Sakha were established as early as 1990, before the law on *obshchiny* was passed (Belianskaia 1995: 123). Although the *obshchina* as a concept exhibits all the features of an indigenous cultural revival (Belianskaia 1995; Sirina 1999; Androsova 2000), and this feature is even mentioned in the law (*O-kochevoi* 1992: Article 1), the *obshchina* takes on a variety of forms across the Russian North.

Whereas in some regions (Magadan, Chukotka) these institutions are seen as territorial units, which could possibly even replace local government, in Sakha the law emphasises the social (clan-based) character of the

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producers. Sakhabult is one of two state enterprises that buy reindeer meat. It also has the state monopoly on buying furs. Sakhabult either cannot control the whole market or it has no capacity to do so, but even official sources admit that only 60% of furs are purchased by the enterprise (Donskoi 2002b: 22; Nikiforov 2002: 76.)



*obshchina* (Sirina 2000: 201; Gray 2001: 4). In Sakha some scientists have recently begun to view these new actors in the 'agricultural landscape' as primarily economic institutions (Iadrikhinskii 1998; Donskoi 2001; Konstantinova 2002, 2002a; Popova 2001; Syrovatskii 2002).

To form an *obshchina*, people had to leave the state farm or its successor, the MUP. People who did this received their share (*pai*) in the collective enterprise either in money, animals or equipment and machinery. As an enterprise engaged in a traditional economic activity (*traditsionnye otrasli ekonomiki*), the *obshchina* received some financial and technical support from the Republic of Sakha. Furthermore, *obshchina* members had the right to get a free hunting licence and hunt for their own purposes (*dlia svoego kotla*: 'for one's own pot') outside the hunting season (Pravila 2001 Articles 19a and b).

The *obshchina* has been described as an enterprise which has the status of a cooperative but operates more as a peasant farming enterprise (Sotnikova 2000). The cultural aspects of the *obshchina* movement (i.e. the view that the *obshchina* is an institution to revitalise and maintain vanishing traditional culture) were first introduced in the Anabarskii district in the late 1990s.<sup>50</sup> *Obshchiny* do not have to pay taxes, and initially they received financial support from the state and the district. This was, according to some of my informants, a strong argument for transforming the peasant enterprise into an *obshchina*.<sup>51</sup> The *obshchina* legally has access to the market, i.e. as an enterprise it has the right to sell and buy as a 'legal person'.<sup>52</sup>

I argue that in the Anabarskii district these new enterprises had, from the outset, more economic than cultural significance. The first *obshchiny* in Anabar were transformed from peasant farming enterprises (*krest'ianskoe fermerskoe khoziaistvo*) in the mid-1990s. People made use of the legislation and tried to find the best legal basis for a new enterprise that would fit the

<sup>50</sup> One *obshchina* in the district, 'Udzha', practises *tungehe* (Dolgan for sharing). It announced openly that the *obshchina* aims to support poorer and lone community members by giving them meat and fish (see Udzha 2001). Interestingly, the director of the enterprise is an incomer Sakha and Udzha is the only enterprise in the district manifesting its cultural policy (see the discussion in chapter 5). Since I did not visit Udzha, this enterprise is not presented in my book as a case study.

<sup>51</sup> The peasant household has to pay taxes on land depending on how many hectares are in agricultural use. The enterprise also has to pay income tax on non-agricultural income (13%; personal communication with Syrovatskii) and tax on agricultural income, introduced by the Ministry of Agriculture, Sakha Republic (*O-krest'ianskom* 1991: Article 21).

<sup>52</sup> In Russian legislation there are two categories relating to economic activities: the 'physical person' (*fizicheskoe litso*) and the 'legal person' (*iuridicheskoe litso*). The first category is a real person, the second one may be any kind of enterprise, i.e. more than one person. The status of being a legal and physical person gives an actor the right to participate in economic activities, open a commercial bank account, produce stamped official documents, etc.

current economic situation. As mentioned above, the status of the *obshchina* was fuzzy in the early 1990s. Because there was no federal law regarding the *obshchina*, these enterprises were unable to engage in economic relations on a federal level, i.e. with institutions registered in other Russian regions or subordinated to Moscow, and had to follow federal laws (like big gold and oil companies, and some transport enterprises) (Sleptsov 2000: 12). Therefore most *obshchiny* were forced to limit their economic activity to a regional level, which was not a problem in itself considering their economic weakness and limited capacity. Legal problems were compensated by state moral support, tax freedom, occasional subsidies and, last but not least, enthusiasm to establish something new. Given all of this, the number of *obshchiny* sky-rocketed in the early 1990s. In 1992 there were 70 *obshchiny* registered in the Republic of Sakha, 103 in 1993, 198 in 1997 and by 2001 the number had increased to 214 (Belianskaia 1995: 125; Sirina 1999: 3; Sotnikova 2000).

The most successful *obshchina* in the Anabarskii district, 'Uottaakh Khaia', was founded in 1996 by re-registering the former peasant enterprise 'Buolkalaakh'. The other, 'Udzha', was established in the same way in 1998. Both enterprises are located in the south of the district and are engaged in hunting, reindeer and horse breeding, and in fishing (Udzha 2001, Uottaakh 2001). Uottaakh Khaia was the first and only *obshchina* to receive two trucks as initial capital. The trucks and other equipment were handed over as the share (*pai*) of the members of the *obshchina*. This of course motivated other people to establish their own *obshchina*, but since state farms of the district were bankrupt, they 'had nothing to share' and no significant property transmission took place.<sup>53</sup> Some of the new *obshchiny* obtained financial support from the district, but this depended on good relations with members of the district administration, who distributed money and technical equipment as part of the district program of supporting private entrepreneurship (*chastnoe predprinimatel'stvo*)—i.e. as a matter of personal involvement.

Not every *obshchina* was wealthy, as I demonstrate in the following section, where I present an *obshchina* hunting brigade whose hunters held rather pessimistic views about their future.

<sup>53</sup> At least this is what the director and chief livestock expert told me. It seems a plausible explanation because the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP was bankrupt in 2000 and existed at the limits of its resources. There were a few trucks and some facilities left; the rest was either sold or leased out to private entrepreneurs. The director even planned to move out of his office into his secretary's office and rent his bigger office to the head of the village administration. To give away any more equipment or buildings would have paralysed the whole enterprise; besides, the *obshchiny* were in need of smaller facilities and thus had little use for the buildings left in the village under the MUP's ownership.

### 3.4.1 *The Hunting Brigade in Chöchördaakh*

The *obshchina* I studied is a successor of a former state-farm hunting brigade, located in Chöchördaakh (see map 3). Their home is a huge wooden house in the tundra, built in the 1970s as a base (*tochka*) for hunters. Surrounding the house are storage sheds, a sauna, a bakery, a helicopter landing pad and a huge underground ice chamber. The environment was clean and equipment was carefully stored, with snowmobiles parked neatly near the wall of the building. This is in contrast to many other hunting bases where equipment and snowmobiles are often left strewn around the main brigade dwelling. A little further away there is a big *balokh* where an old man lives with his wife and a young male relative. This man runs a trading post (*faktoriia*) which was part of the state trading organisation 'RAIPO'. The trading post sells groceries and tools on credit to the *tundroviki*, and debts are paid in meat and fish.<sup>54</sup> I still remember how I first arrived at Chöchördaakh in September 2000. We drove with reindeer sledges through the tundra, which in this part of Anabar is covered with little hills and were a mosaic of autumnal greens and browns from the lichen and other tundra plants. On the way we noticed tracks of a *buran* (snowmobile). This told us that there must be hunters in the settlement as only hunters use snowmobiles even when there is no snow. Reaching the top of the hill, I saw a settlement that looked like a small fort or trappers' settlement straight out of an American Western. There was not a soul outside and when we rode closer through the strong tundra wind, no-one ventured out to welcome us. But just as we stopped outside the huge log cabin, the door opened and a young woman came out to greet us. She simply nodded and then turned her attention to the reindeer and our sledges, ignoring us completely. It was just as I had read in Jack London books, only here there were no forests around us.

When I first visited Chöchördaakh I did not know that it was a hunting base for an *obshchina*. I had come there to see the trading post for myself and find out how it functioned. I knew that there must be some hunters in the settlement, but this was all I had been told. I discovered that the hunters belonged to an *obshchina* only by chance—not an unusual occurrence with the new forms of property in Siberia, where in many cases people themselves do not know the status of the collective in which they work (see Gray 2001: 8). In the evening we put seats around the table and I interviewed the brigadier, 69-year-old Dmitri Egorovich Vinokurov (nicknamed Kupaa), and

<sup>54</sup> Many *tundroviki* preferred to take their grocery supplies from a trading post and not from private *kommersanty* (entrepreneurs) as by so doing they avoid transport costs and delays caused by transport problems. The elderly manager (*khoziain*) of the trading post was a local person and unlike the incoming *kommersanty* did not try to cheat the buyers because he had a fixed salary and was not obliged to make a big profit.



his son Petka. When Kupaa said that all the hunters in the brigade were his relatives, I asked: 'But does this mean that you are actually a family brigade (*semeinaia brigada*)?' Kupaa nodded and said: 'Yes, that's it!' Suddenly his son interrupted: 'No, actually we are a *rodovaia obshchina*!'

Such uncertainty about the status of the enterprise in which one works is not unusual in Anabar. As mentioned earlier, most new enterprises are formed on the basis of former state farm brigades and therefore people still use the old brigade numbers when referring to the enterprise (for example, 'I was recently in the 6th brigade' not 'in Erel'). Another reason for this fuzziness is that many enterprises have changed their status via re-registration quite a few times and most people, both in the enterprise and outside it, are unfamiliar with terminology such as 'MUP', 'small scale enterprise', '*obshchina*' and so forth. I believe that people were not only confused but also ignorant. In practice, the average hunting enterprise continues to function as a brigade in the state farm, carrying on its hunting and reindeer breeding activities just as it had in the Soviet period, and often on the same territory. The MUP continues to vaccinate all reindeer in the district and hunters are able to use its barges. The most important fact was that there was hardly any discernable difference in the wealth and income of the average *tundroviki* no matter which enterprise they worked for. Given this, it hardly seemed surprising to me that people paid so little attention to the official designation and status of what, to them, was still 'their brigade'.

The Chöchördaakh hunters, who formerly made up the MUP 'Arktika' hunting brigade in Saaskylaakh, are part of a bigger *obshchina* which has leased a reindeer herd from the Arktika MUP. The hunting brigade contains five hunters and three *chumraboitnitsy*. The *obshchina* was established in 1999 by the former chief livestock expert of Arktika. The brigadier, Kupaa, had worked as a brigadier of the hunting brigade in the state farm. In the Soviet era he was a very respected Communist Party member and a deputy of the Higher Soviet of the Yakut ASSR. He was born, grew up and spent most of his life in the tundra and was honoured for his good work as a reindeer herder and hunter with the Medal of the Red Working Flag (*Krasnaia Trudavaia Znamia*). Kupaa looked back fondly to Soviet times when 'everything was better'. He explained that in the state farm era he was able to afford a radio and later a TV in the tundra. Nowadays, even batteries for an old Soviet VEF-radio are scarce and difficult to find, and a new radio is too expensive. Kupaa was one of many people of his age who missed the 'good old days' and who were confused about the future. Nevertheless, he did his best to support his brigade, which essentially comprised his own family, even though he did not really understand how the new market economy was supposed to work.

When the hunters joined the *obshchina*, they stayed at their old base, where many generations of Kupaa's ancestors had lived, hunted and were buried, and Kupaa is believed to be the person with the power to decide on activities in these territories (see the discussion about the institution of 'master' in the next chapter).

Three of the hunters in the brigade are Kupaa's sons and one is his son-in-law. Their wives work in the brigade as *chumrabortnitsy*. Kupaa himself is very disappointed about the whole *obshchina* movement. He explained to me that they had joined the *obshchina* because they had hoped to get trucks and snowmobiles from the MUP as their share, but they did not get anything. The director of the *obshchina* lives in the village of Saaskylakh and the reindeer brigade is far away in the southern parts of Anabar tundra.

Within the *obshchina* the reindeer herders and the hunters are treated as separate economic units. The former receive a reindeer herder's salary from the state like all reindeer herders and with the same conditions as an MUP brigade. By contrast, the hunters earn their money entirely from the sale of meat and fish. Kupaa criticised the state policy on 'traditional economy':

It is very good that the state supports reindeer herders. They receive a lot of help and can survive with it. But hunters do not receive anything. We have to buy our ammunition, clothes and other equipment with our own money. When the state argues that the government does not help hunters because hunters work only seasonally and then do other work [this explanation was also given to me in the capital, Yakutsk], this is true for the forest tundra where, between hunting seasons, hunters work at haymaking or do some other work. But here, in the tundra, we can only fish and hunt and have no other source for income.

The hunting brigade's base lies on the bank of the Yöle River, on a migration route of wild reindeer. The first wild reindeer hunting season is in February–March. The brigade in Chöchördaakh spends the next period, early summer, fishing. Then, in June–July, the summer reindeer hunt takes place, followed in autumn by the start of the second fishing season. The hunters of the *obshchina* have permanent arctic fox traps (*paastar*) in the tundra, and the traps are monitored from time to time during the winter months. Because of the scarcity of fuel and the low prices obtained for the furs, it is not profitable to go to the tundra to collect trapped arctic foxes too often. All of these activities take place in the vicinity of the hunting base and, as a result, Kupaa and his hunters have a strong sense of 'their own territory'. They have hunted in this region for many generations and they claim that the territory

around their hunting base in Chöchördaakh has 'always' been their family territory. Therefore, Kupaa is very restrictive in allowing other people to hunt, fish or dig coal on 'his lands' (see the more elaborate analysis of the idea of one's 'own lands' in the next chapter).

The Chöchördaakh hunters live in the tundra seasonally, spending their time between hunting and fishing seasons in Saaskylaakh, where they have apartments. The *obshchina* has to lease trucks for them to travel between their tundra base and the village, transporting necessary supplies, meat and fish. This must be done in May or in the first weeks of June, because once the snow melts it is impossible to drive loaded trucks in the tundra.

Until it is sold, the meat and fish is stored in the underground ice chamber in Chöchördaakh. When I visited the hunters in September, Kupaa told me that they already had approximately 100 reindeer carcasses in the ice chamber. Their own facilities were already full and they had stored some of the carcasses in the trading post's underground ice chamber. One reason why Kupaa was so sceptical about his brigade's affiliation with the *obshchina* relates to the logistics of actively marketing the produce. The director in the village had little time to get involved with this because he was occupied with the reindeer herd. Kupaa himself had no opportunity to leave the tundra because he was responsible for the late summer wild reindeer hunt. Therefore hunters had to take groceries from the trading post on credit. As the trader told me, the hunters already owed him 20,000 roubles for groceries which they were supposed to pay in reindeer meat. Many months later, in March of the following year, I heard from Kupaa that the director had managed to find a buyer for the meat and trucks had left for the tundra heavily loaded with next year's equipment.

### 3.5 A Family Enterprise

About 40 kilometres to the west of Kupaa's cabin there is another log cabin on the river bank. This is the residence of a hunter's family who were registered as the family enterprise (*semeinoe khoziaistvo*) 'Tiistaakh', which is also the name of the place. A few years ago the household of the old hunter Spiridon Ivanovich Tuprin, known as Moigo, broke with the state farm and established an *obshchina*. In 1999 he re-registered his enterprise as a family enterprise. Before that, there was another family living at the base with his family, but they left and so he decided to reorganise the enterprise.





Plate 4. The author with members of the family hunting enterprise in Tiistaakh, Yöle River.

During my fieldwork in the Anabarskii district, there was only one other family household registered as an enterprise. The family enterprise has no clear legal status: as officials in the administration told me, this was a 'private initiative' of the head of the administration and no law yet exists for it. The family enterprise of Tiistaakh enjoyed the same tax freedom as an *obshchina*. The main difference between the family enterprise and the *obshchina* seemed to be in the number of people involved. The *obshchina* is bigger and the members are not necessarily of close kin. The family enterprise of Tiistaakh had a statute (*ustav*) and a business plan like every other enterprise. Yet it had no right to open an account. Moigo explained, 'An *obshchina* is in the state budget [i.e. obliged to give information about its activities and income to the Ministry of Agriculture]. They get a bank account. As a family enterprise, we do not know [anything about our status] yet. We do not have to pay tax for five years. There is no law yet [for us].'

The inspiration for establishing the 'family enterprise' came when Moigo heard about the policy of the Sakha Republic's president 'to strengthen (*ukrepit*) families'. Within the framework of this campaign, families who established private enterprises were to be financially supported by the state. The state's policy was championed by the head of the district administration, who was a big supporter of the idea to bring families 'back to the tundra'.

Moigo's household received a loan of 100,000 roubles, and the district lent them rifles to hunt reindeer in order to be able to pay back the loan. In the winter of 2001, the district administration donated two brand-new 'Buran' snowmobiles to Moigo's family. It is likely that the administration was keen to use Moigo, who was a close relative of the head of the administration as well as head of a clearly successful household, as a showcase for the 'strengthening the families' campaign. The district administration's support gave Moigo greater independence and respect from the local village administration.

Moigo lives in a big log cabin, where I also met his wife Maria, their daughter and her three-year-old son, their younger son Nikolai, and one male relative. Both adults are pensioners (Moigo 59 and Maria 60) but that does not restrict their activities in the tundra nor undermine their position as leaders of the family. In fact, Old Moigo is the absolute patriarch of the household and all the hunting and fishing activities take place according to his plans and orders.<sup>55</sup> The old man had worked all his life as a professional hunter (*kadrovyyi okhotnik* in Rus.) and reindeer herder. Moigo was one of those Uurung Khaia Dolgan Communists who were sent to Saaskylaakh to improve the standard of local reindeer herding. After that, the family lived in Saaskylaakh, in the so-called 'upper village' where only indigenous people live. Moigo and Maria have ten children who seasonally live at Tiistaakh (especially May–June for the fishing and reindeer hunting season) but work in low-paid jobs when in the village. The fourth daughter, Agnia, for example, was a cleaner in the administration or in the school when she wasn't at Tiistaakh. Only the eldest daughter, Zina, and the youngest daughter, Asia, worked in prestigious high-paid jobs. Zina was a principal veterinary officer in the Anabarskii district and Agnia was a teacher at the Saaskylaakh secondary school. This family has a strong sense of unity and they support each other at every opportunity. All of his sons work officially in the family enterprise as hunters and at least one daughter as a *chumrabortnitsa*. Their work place (Tiistaakh) and professions (hunter or *chumrabortnitsa*) are noted in their work records (*trudovaya knizhka*). At the same time Zina is also registered as a bookkeeper in her father's enterprise. During the hunting seasons in summer, three sons and some male relatives live in Tiistaakh with their families. The heart of the Tiistaakh hunting base is a big log cabin built by Moigo himself high on the banks of the River Yöle. It is a one-room house with a huge metal stove in the centre and beds laid out along the walls. Around the cabin are *balokhs* where the children's families live. A little

<sup>55</sup> Many times, when I asked Moigo's son Nikolai about their future plans (for example; 'when will you go off to hunt?'), he would reply, 'Father knows. It will be as he says!' (*Otets znaet. Kak on skazhet, tak i budet!*).

further away is a shed for the snowmobiles and even further away in the tundra is a small toilet (I never saw anybody using it, preferring just to run down and use the gullies along the river bank). Every day we had to carry drinking and washing water up the river bank along a narrow and difficult path that was frozen in winter. To reach the top with two filled buckets in deep winter created something of an acrobatic spectacle. A little further away was Moigo's pride and joy—the huge underground ice chamber that could contain nearly 200 reindeer carcasses. This had been built by AL-ROSA under a scheme to assist small enterprises. Nearer to the main house was a smaller but deeper three-floor underground ice chamber where fish were mainly kept. Moigo also had a petrol generator and sometimes he turned it on in the evening to work with Nikolai by the light of the electric bulb when listening to Russian and Sakha pop music tapes on a small but sophisticated recorder with flashing lights. Moigo had six Buran snowmobiles and one Polaris all-terrain vehicle, which demonstrates that he was a wealthy man. When big herds pass by during the migration season, animals are shot from the front door step. Between the seasons, the hunters drive snowmobiles and the small 'Polaris' all-terrain vehicle across the tundra, looking for small herds or individual reindeer to shoot.

In October, in parallel with the hunting, the hunters start to fish and in November they focus solely on fishing. After the autumn fishing season, all the inhabitants of the base return to the village. During the winter months Moigo and some of his sons occasionally return to the tundra base for a week or two to check their arctic fox traps, collect meat to take back to the village, or repair the *balokhs*.<sup>56</sup> In February and March Moigo goes off to the taiga area in the southern parts of the district. The youngest son, being the best hunter, always goes with his father on hunting trips; the other sons either come to Tiistaakh later or stay in the village for the whole season. In total, the family enterprise of Tiistaakh has a licence to shoot 50 wild reindeer a year, but as Moigo said to me: 'They [the administration] allow us to shoot reindeer but they do not guarantee that they take [buy] it' showing by this statement that the main problem for the enterprise is marketing its produce.

There is a division of labour within Moigo's family. The two oldest sons and the son-in-law (who is the head of the heating station in the village and is married to the eldest daughter) work at finding means of transporting meat and fish from the tundra to the village where it is stored in the big

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<sup>56</sup> To make a profit trapping arctic fox, the hunters have to check the traps as often as possible because the foxes usually eat their trapped relatives. However, as noted earlier, with high fuel costs and low prices for arctic fox furs, it makes little sense to drive out to the tundra too often.



unheated front room of their village house. The oldest son, Ivan, looks for buyers and makes deals. The son-in-law explained to me jokingly why Ivan happens to be the 'businessman of the family': 'Ivan is very big, with an enormous body and a weight of around 100 kilos. To transport him to the tundra and back would take too much fuel. It is better to leave Ivan in the village, let him make the deals and bring back an extra sack of fish or carcass of wild reindeer instead of him.' In fact, Ivan prefers village life to being in the tundra. He was extremely reluctant to leave the village and disappeared sometimes for weeks on end to avoid being taken out to the tundra. Therefore the business side of the enterprise had shifted into Ivan's hands.

Moigo's family do not sell meat in big amounts. Usually they sell a few tonnes to one entrepreneur, one and half tonnes to the village sausage factory (*tsekh*), one tonne to the airport canteen and so forth. Big buyers, such as local branches of the ALROSA diamond company, Sakhabult, had contracts with bigger enterprises and were rarely interested in 'small suppliers'. On the other hand, to find a buyer among big organisations one needs first of all to have good personal connections at management level, something that the average hunter and his sons rarely have. However, as mentioned above, Moigo was successful. Before I left the district, he had bought himself a truck, so as to be independent of private truck owners who transported his produce for money.

### 3.6 A Small-scale Enterprise

The small-scale enterprise (*maloe predpriiatie*) 'Elden' ('Northern Lights') was set up in 1998 to hunt and fish in the northern tundra near the coast of the Arctic Ocean. The director of Elden used to be the head of the Uurung Khaia village administration and director of the state farm in the 1980s and early 1990s, and enjoyed high respect among the *tundroviki*.

The members of Elden openly ignore the MUP and village administration. As a small-scale enterprise, Elden has a right to state support and they received loans from the Ministry of Small-Scale Entrepreneurship (*Ministerstvo malogo predprinimatel'stvo*). This makes them independent of the local administration. Another reason for their independent behaviour is that the director of Elden, an old and respected party veteran, doesn't have much respect for the much younger head of the village administration and the director of the MUP (respectively aged in their thirties and twenties). When necessary, he contacts the head of the district administration directly. Additionally, many members of the local Soviet elite, such as the former chief livestock expert and many respected hunters and reindeer herders, work in

Elden. Elden's business networks are used by many private hunters and fishers, who sell their produce only through Elden.

Elden has a licence to hunt and fish in the region of Lake Pschanniyi, but the borders of this territory are not fixed. However, the hunters have a sense of the territory that they consider to be 'their' hunting and fishing grounds. Slava Popov, the director of Erel, told me that Elden's director once wanted to close the lakes within 'his territory' to outside fishers. But the director of the MUP, the head of the administration, Slava Popov and some brigades who also used to fish in this region called for a meeting in the MUP's office and convinced the old man not to do it.

Elden's annual cycle is similar to other hunting and fishing enterprises. The members hunt and fish from June until November around their base. Early in February, Elden sends two trucks with hunters to the southern part of the district near the border of Krasnoiarskii Krai to hunt wild reindeer. There the hunters stay in the *balokhs* of the reindeer herders from Saaskylaakh and Krasnoiarskii Krai. From March onwards, Elden sends many truckloads of supplies and construction materials to its base in the tundra; the hunters arrive with the last truck and stay until the following November.

Elden's main income comes from selling wild reindeer meat and fish to Udachnyi GOK. Their contract with Udachnyi GOK provides Elden with access to the company's helicopters and they are able to send some extra supplies to the tundra, even in summer. Trapping arctic fox is not economically important for the enterprise and the members do so mainly for their own ends when they are near trap lines.

The diamond company agreed in 2001 to buy almost all of Elden's produce for a good price: 28 roubles per kilogram of reindeer meat. The deal was very lucrative because the diamond company promised to transport the meat out of the tundra on company helicopters without charging Elden. In addition, the contract obliged the diamond company to finance the building of a new underground ice chamber and supply the enterprise with free construction material and fuel. This was part of the social programmes of ALROSA and its sub-branches to support the local economy in districts where the diamond company is active.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> ALROSA was obliged to invest part of its profits in the regions where the diamond mines were opened, in the so-called 'diamond provinces' (*almaznye provintsy*). It is not unusual in Siberia for large extraction companies (coal, oil, diamonds) to support the local economy and develop social programmes to improve living standards. Big companies have many reasons for doing this, for example, to improve their image at the international level and to ensure the loyalty of local governments or maintain their 'own' deputies in the regional or Russian parliament, which was the case in Anabar. The second president of Sakha and former presi-

The son of one of the leaders of Elden, Fedya, works as a mammoth-bone carver in the art work factory of Udachnyi GOK and makes souvenirs which the company's management give to their visitors. Moreover, older members of Elden know many high-ranking officials of Udachnyi GOK personally and when something is needed (scholarships for students, financial help for the widow of a hunter killed in an accident or an apartment for someone who has moved to Udachnyi), they send a personal letter to the director of UGOK through Fedya.

The members of the enterprise are not close relatives. Elden's hunting territory is in a region which people describe as 'empty', i.e. there was no commercial hunting and fishing during Soviet times and there are no bases for hunters or fishermen. As I show in the next chapter, Elden does not transport a lot of construction material to the tundra each season but therefore it has to apply other strategies to make its territory 'its own'. When I visited the hunting base of the enterprise, even after three years there was a lack of living space. At the base there were only a few *balokhs*, one small underground ice chamber and no garage for trucks or snowmobiles.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In the discussion of the postsocialist transformation of Siberian indigenous communities, the appearance of new enterprises takes a central position. However, the main focus in this discussion is placed on the dichotomy between the (old) state farm and the (new) clan-based community *rodovaia obshchina*. In Siberia, it is too early to speak of a 'take-off', a situation where a new system gains momentum and overcomes the old (Rostow 1960: 7). Since the late 1990s, new institutions have appeared following the structural break-up of Soviet state farms. Within a decade these state farms had been transformed and entirely new enterprises established. In this chapter I have attempted to show the variety of enterprises that today makes up the 'agricultural landscape' of the Russian Arctic.

Although many *obshchiny* were established in the Anabarskii district at the end of my fieldwork period, I do not argue that the *obshchina* dominates the transformation process here. Because of the changing legal situation, there are plenty of collective and municipal enterprises active in the tundra. One similarity between these enterprises is that they were created on the basis of former state farm units. In the recent developments in the Arctic North we can speak about 'path dependency', where the actors' choice and activity was limited by the existing institutional settings (Stark 1992: 20–1)

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dent of ALROSA, Nikolai Shtyrov, used to represent the Anabarskii district in the parliament of the Republic of Sakha.



in a local context (former brigades and their territories) but also on a larger scale (state structures, subordination to the Ministry of Agriculture, business possibilities and credits/subsidies). Another term, relevant to the transformation process in the Anabar tundra, is *sovkhoism*. People have made a big effort to maintain the social relations that developed during the Soviet era within one enterprise and between different enterprises and institutions. People at the top and workers at the grass-roots level have mutual rights and obligations towards each other. The importance of this social bond can be demonstrated in situations noted above: for example, the vaccination of non-MUP reindeer by the MUP veterinarians, old brigadiers like Moigo feeling morally obliged to fulfil the 'plan' set for his family enterprise, and the head of the district administration still believing himself to be responsible for well-being of private enterprises. Long-term loyalty is demanded from both sides and in practice this has created complex networks of economic cooperation between private hunters and fishers and enterprises, and between MUP and new enterprises, and between enterprises and the village or district administration. Parallel to this is the increasing importance of kin relations. Although I address this topic in the following chapters it is important to keep kin relations in mind when talking about establishing new enterprises.

The result of this transformation process is that different institutions are engaged in the same activities and use the same resources within the same region. The tundra economy is seasonal: one person performs a variety of economic activities throughout the year by switching from hunting to fishing and back again, while some people are engaged in reindeer herding as well.

However, similar economic engagement—fishing, hunting, reindeer herding—and being the successor of a former state farm do not produce similar institutions under other names. Enterprises differ from each other in terms of the social relations within their collective and also in their patterns of land use. Formal hierarchies exist more in big enterprises like MUP or the big *obshchina*. While a small family enterprise has to keep people constantly in the tundra, big enterprises, which have large-scale buyers for meat and fish, can send personnel out to the tundra later and return earlier in the year. The bigger enterprises do not actively hunt arctic foxes, but rely more on selling meat in large quantities. This chapter demonstrates that there are many factors that determine an enterprise's profile—size, legal status, marketing options—and that people do indeed have a choice when they seek to cope with the post-Soviet life.



## Chapter 4

### The Ethnography of *Rodina*

#### 4.1 Introduction

The first time I came across the notion of land ownership in Anabar was as I was taking a short walk with my host Vasili Kyltashov, the brigadier of the 3rd reindeer brigade of Il'ia Spiridonov MUP, on a sunny day in late summer. We were looking for sick reindeer calves left behind as the herd moved on. The tundra was covered with dark green and brown lichens and, as usual, there was a light wind blowing. We came to the small hill where a reindeer herder (*pastukh*) had reported seeing a sick calf, but the calf was no longer there. After walking for some time, we ascended another hill. There I saw an object that one often sees in the tundra. It was a huge log lying on the ground, surrounded by small sticks stuck into the ground. I asked Vasili what this was. 'This is an arctic fox trap (*paas*)', he explained. He went to the log, lifted it and quickly demonstrated how the trap worked. The main principle of the *paas* is simple: the sticks form a corridor and when the fox enters the corridor to get a small piece of meat, the log falls and breaks its neck. I asked Vasili who was actually hunting with these traps. 'Moigo, the old man from Tiistaakh', he said. We were not far from Tiistaakh, maybe some 7 kilometres.

'Could you put your traps anywhere you want?' was my next question. 'No, the land where your traps stay is yours. No one can put the traps here! And no one can touch your traps!' answered Vasili. My next question was a bit provocative: 'But what happens then, if somebody touches the traps?' Vasili answered with a serious face: 'The thief should be punished. You cannot touch others' traps!' (*Vora nado nakazat'. Chuzhie lavushki nelzia trogat'!*).

This example contains the principal elements of land entitlement as understood among native people in Anabar. The hunting territory of Spiridon Ivanovich Tuprin, also known as Moigo, is his 'possession' (*vladenie* in Rus.). He is the master (*khoziain*) of these lands and has moral legitimacy to hunt there. The borders of his lands are fixed and marked ('as far your traps



lie'). If someone violates the 'master's' rights in his territory, understood as *rodina* ('homeland' in Rus.), the master has, according to general opinion, the right to punish him. This tie to a particular area organises social relationships between people. It gives certain people the power to decide who has access to local resources and who does not.

In this chapter I discuss the institution of 'master' (*khoziain* in Rus., in Dolgan *kus'aain*; Ubriatova 1985: 35), how such land entitlement is established and the basic features of 'moral possession' to lands. I had heard the expression *khoziain* only in relation to hunters and their permanent hunting spots. Although I also heard reindeer herders using the word *rodina*, I never documented a case where pastoral reindeer herders were referred to as 'master'. In everyday discussions, people of Anabar tend to use the Russian word *khoziain* more than its Dolgan equivalent. Since Russian words are often used in local Dolgan speech it does not necessarily mean that the institution of the master is a recent phenomenon. Dolgan people from the neighbouring Krasnoiarskii Krai use even more Russian words and phrases and the word *khoziain* was probably in use before administrative borders separated the Dolgan groups.

*Khoziain* is an expression in Russian which can have various meanings. Watts (2002) describes how the notion of *khoziain* changed over time during the post-*perestroika* period in Archangelsk. He states that the word *khoziain* is an 'ancient and rich one, grounded in the world of the peasant household and feudal estate, and means variously owner, proprietor, master, boss, manager, husband, and host' (Watts 2002: 62). There are two different meanings of the word *khoziain* which are relevant to understanding popular conceptions of economic and political change. The 'real *khoziain*' (i.e. 'master' as a positive connotation) was an entrepreneur or peasant farmer who was a hard-working and honest man, who could trace his roots back to the region's Pomor<sup>58</sup> history. He built up his enterprise or farm by working 16 hours a day and traded quality goods at fair prices (Watts 2002: 59–68). Another meaning is a negative one and referred to a 'bazaar' entrepreneur who traded imported poor quality goods at high prices. This other *khoziain* is related to the Stalinist definition of *kulak* or expropriator (Watts 2002: 67–9). On the Taimyr Peninsula, a *khoziain* was understood as a brigadier who was the 'caretaker' of the territory of a state hunting enterprise (Ziker 2003b:

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<sup>58</sup> The term 'Pomor' generally refers to the first Russian settlers who lived on the coast of the Arctic Ocean. They were hunters and traders who sailed along the coast and rivers of the Russian North, seeking both new hunting grounds and a means of escaping the burden of state taxes. Pomor began to move eastwards from the eleventh century starting at the White Sea and reaching the coastal areas of Sakha in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (BSE, [www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)).

374). In this case, the brigadier was either appointed by the state enterprise or worked on a contract basis on the reallocated territory, and the expression *khoziain* was connected with a formal status. In this chapter I demonstrate that the institution of *khoziain* (which I translate as 'master') is rooted in formal status but has ceased to be merely a formal category.

The institution of 'master' in the Anabarskii district was closely connected to a territory which one usually called *rodina*. *Rodina* is translated as 'motherland' and it is not unusual for people in Siberian regions to call their home town, district or republic '*malaia rodina*' or 'little motherland' in contrast to the 'big' or real 'motherland' of (European) Russia (see Watts 2002: 58). In this last sense, *rodina* is a political and cultural expression which emphasises the superiority of Moscow and European Russia and the connection of a 'dispersed' community to it.<sup>59</sup> Dolgan in Uurung Khaia used the word *rodina* in another sense, referring to their primal 'homeland', a concept not unique in Siberia. Gail Fondahl (1995: 14) mentioned that lands distant from the village were often considered 'home' (*rodina*) by Evenki in Evenkiia in northern Transbaikalia. The Dolgan native word for *rodina* in Sakha was *doidu*, which means both 'home' and 'homeland', and was used to describe both places in the tundra and the house in the village, depending on the context and situation. Thus, native and Russian understandings of *rodina* are conceptualised differently, both geographically and emotionally.

In order to analyse the notion of 'masterhood' we must look back to recent history. It is nearly impossible, due to the lack of data, to track this construct beyond the collectivisation period. Early ethnographic information mentions certain families or groups which authors have associated with the Anabar region. As early as the seventeenth century, Tungus elders from Olenek and Anabar regions were complaining to Russian officials that Russian hunters were exploiting *their* hunting grounds. Dolgikh (1960b) describes the Kukui family who lived in the Anabar tundra, and the Laptev expedition encountered settlements of semi-nomadic hunters on the Arctic Ocean coast (see chapter 2). These groups certainly had some sense of defined land ownership and mechanisms to regulate resource use. However,

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<sup>59</sup> The debate about the notion of Siberia as a general wilderness where 'civilised' islands were created by incomers who still feel themselves emotionally, socially and culturally more closely related to European Russia than to their region is beyond the scope of this book. The concept of 'little motherland' among Siberian incomer Russians is an ambiguous one. Although Russians may have no intention to return to European Russia and may have lived in Siberian regions for two or three generations, they still keep calling the other side of the Urals either '*materik*' ('mainland, continent') or '*bol'shaia zemlia*' ('big land'), referring to their home district as an isolated island. Etymologically such expressions as 'little' or 'big (mother)land' are connected to the Stalinist period of Siberian discovery and rhetoric from World War II.

we do not know how land ownership and 'masterhood' were constructed in these times.

Relying on general Dolgan and Evenki ethnography and theories of hunter-gatherers, I argue that the 'masters' were partly a product of Soviet policy and partly a consequence of incorporation of old pre-collectivisation values and hunting practices into a Soviet model of agriculture. Feit (1993) criticises the widespread concept of hunting and gathering societies as static cultures. He shows that hunting societies react to the changes in their environment, and various North American and African hunter-gatherer communities have undergone change during European colonisation under the influence of the trade and market economy. However, Feit describes hunting societies which were not incorporated into a state-managed and restructured economy but maintained relative independence in their decisions. Feit's concept of 'social temporality' is still useful because he sees production and knowledge as being connected. According to his view, changes in social relations are continuous as they are reproduced through time with the reproduction of hunting practice and knowledge. His main critique focuses on Meillassoux (1973: 201, in Feit 1993: 426), who states that hunting is 'unable to develop into any other mode of production'.

As Fondahl (1995) has shown, the introduction of socialist patterns of hunting and reindeer herding did not completely change the old ways. Often old strategies and concepts were adapted and incorporated into collective and state farm hunting and reindeer herding. Ingold (1996) points out that hunting strategies are not tied to particular economic and political settings. They may change when the economic situation changes, but not necessarily.

Formal and informal land entitlement in Anabarskii district was based in most cases on the territories of hunting spots, i.e. a Soviet reorganisation of territories (*zemleustroistvo*). The aim of the *zemleustroistvo* was not only to maximise the efficiency of land use<sup>60</sup> but also to control the indigenous population by giving certain groups and organisations (hunters, reindeer brigades, state farms, collective farms, *arteli*, etc.) fixed territories (cf. Anderson 2000a; Sannikov 2002). Several researchers have stressed that despite their nomadic economy, Siberian native people had strong emotional ties to their hunting and pasture lands (e.g. Fondahl 2003; Ziker 2003b). In

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<sup>60</sup> I will not go into the discussion of how efficient Soviet agriculture was, especially with respect to the so-called traditional economic activities. There are authors who argue that Soviet agriculture was not efficient at all (Humphrey 1998a). Others present the view that reindeer herding in particular, but sometimes even hunting, was the cheapest way to make a good profit (Vitebsky 1989; Takakura 2001). Probably the best way to address the problem is to acknowledge that Western and Soviet categories do not necessarily coincide (Gregory and Stuart 1986: 279).



Anabar these emotional ties and the sense of *rodina* were created through the activities of hunting and fishing in the territory.

At the beginning of my analysis I want to discuss the concept of social space. There is a widespread view both in Western and modern urban Russian culture that landscapes used for hunting, gathering, fishing and pastoralism are 'wilderness' whereas agricultural and urban landscapes are 'cultural landscapes' (e.g. Dahlström 2003: 166; see also Nash 1982). I show that the tundra is not wild in the eyes of its dwellers but is rather 'an open-ended symbol system' (King 2002b: 65) where social space is defined through toponyms related to persons and events, and changes over time (c.f. Ziker 2003b: 380). There is no 'absolute' landscape; the landscape must always be seen in its historical and cultural context (Hirsch 1996: 23). 'Wilderness' was converted into 'lived space' and 'lived places' were transformed into 'wilderness' through common and individual activities, but also through a lack of activity and through human forgetting (cf. Gow 1996; J. N. Gray 2000).

In the following section I look at personal ties to lands and how they were connected to the length of time lived in the region, which determined land ownership and the transmission of this ownership among natives of the Anabarskii district. Besson (1979) describes the symbolic meaning of Jamaican land ownership not as a basis for production but as a significant part of resistance to the plantation system and maintenance of family unity. Sorabji (1995) describes how land ownership in former Yugoslavia was connected to restoring a 'moral order', and Leutloff-Grandits (2003) shows how land ownership is connected to regional identity in Croatia. In all of these works land was also important for livelihood, as it is in the Anabarskii district.

For Ingold, tenure is a property of social relations (1987: 136–7), which is expressed through the institution of *khoziain* in Anabar. Subsistence rights and other rights to a particular 'tenure' (cf. Ingold 1987: chapter 6) were linked to family and regional identities. At the same time, Ingold describes the common nature of hunting land tenure, explaining that hunters had no or little means of storing food and relied on each other through survival strategies (Ingold 1987: 198, 199; see also Ziker 2002a). In contrast, the institution of the *khoziain* in the Anabarskii district was individualistic and focused on the family because all hunting spots had a complex of facilities, including underground ice chambers (*buluus* in Sakha), to store tonnes of meat. Anabar Dolgan families are more independent because they are able to store large amounts of meat and fish. Limited food supplies also help to keep reciprocal networks smaller, thereby reducing the number of relatives included in active reciprocity. This made resource use and territorial identity

more kinship-centred and linked land ownership, as with sedentarised Kipsing pastoralists, to the buildings and land around it (Saltman 2002).

Besides the present activities, the tundra landscape also reflects past events and persons. It is populated by the 'ghosts of ancestors' (to borrow the expression from Verdery 2000). Australian aborigines believe that sacred beings created the land and people in the Dreamtime and symbolise the social relation to land (Myers 1988). In the Dolgan case, the ancestors were real people whose past activities made the landscape 'ours' and excluded other people. Like Scottish mountain sheep farmers, parents did not transmit the land to the next generation but instilled social and emotional bonds to it (J. N. Gray 2000). Among Scottish farmers such transmissions of the farm were also shaped by external factors in the form of laws and other state institutions (title deeds, regulations of nature use and so forth). As I demonstrate below, not only were Dolgan family traditions crucial for the Anabar hunters (Anderson 1998b, 2000a, 2000b) but also the specific 'Soviet domain' of the agricultural organisation (Hancock 2002: 234).

The legacy of the institution of the 'master' was expressed through 'knowledge' (see section 4.4). My theoretical frames dealing with the concept of 'knowledge' come from the works of David Anderson (1998b, 2000a). Like Khantaika hunters and reindeer herders, a 'master' accumulated 'the knowledge of lands' and this knowledge gave him authority over it. This knowledge included not only the 'personalized landscape' (Basso 1984) but ecological knowledge of the region—its pastures, fishing and hunting places, the habits of game and the skills to harvest them. Swindler and Arditì have analysed how authority, knowledge and organisation are interconnected and argue that social authority shapes the 'authoritativeness of knowledge' but also the 'authority knowledge can effectively claim' (1994: 322). In the case of 'masterhood' in Anabar, 'the knowledge of lands' with all its elements is a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986, 1994) connected to the social construct of land ownership and the authority of the institution of masterhood. I argue that knowledge, both transmitted and collected personally through one's experience and activity, is crucial for creating emotional ties to the 'homeland' and reproducing the institution of 'master'.

In the final section I discuss the importance of trap lines. Dead fall traps for arctic fox are visible markers of territorial ownership, i.e. the trap is a 'tool ... whose use marks its user in the social space' (Certeau 1988). Trap lines are private property in Anabar, as in Taimyr, and are inherited from father to son (see also Ziker 2003b: 379). In this section I look at the concept of hunting territories and give some explanation about why trap lines specifically were so important in symbolising hunting grounds.

## 4.2 The Tundra as Backyard

In post-Soviet Russia the land belongs by law to the state. Formally, no private ownership of land exists. Although the 'public' (state) status of land remains, the decision-making authority was in most cases shifted from the federal centre, Moscow, to the territory, province or republic government (Osherenko 1995: 229). Regional governments, for their part, delegated most decision-making, especially regarding agriculture, to the local district administration.

In the case of the Sakha Republic this meant that the president and parliament delegated part of their decision-making power to districts (*ulus*). A distinctive feature of the Republic of Sakha was that, within the administrative hierarchy, there was a type of unit that lay between the village and district—the *nasleg*. The *nasleg* was introduced in 1995 with the reorganisation of administrative-territorial structures (Pakhomov 1999: 3). In Central Sakha the *nasleg* contains more than one village, but in the Anabarskii district the village and *nasleg* are the same administrative unit.

The head of the *nasleg* administration in the Anabarskii district performs the same functions as those that were usually undertaken by the head of the village soviet. The introduction of the *nasleg* and giving 'industrial villages' (*rabochie posёлki*) the status of 'urban-type villages' (*posёлki gorodskogo tipa*) were the only changes in the administrative structure of Sakha that distinguished it from the old Soviet structure.<sup>61</sup> Local authority was given to village administrations, except the responsibility for agriculture which was allocated to the successor of the state farm, the MUP. In the 1990s, as new institutions in the tundra appeared, the MUP's monopoly over 'the agricultural tundra' disappeared, although the MUP's officials maintained the closest connection to the village administration and through it retained an influential position concerning decisions over land use.

The fact that throughout the Soviet era there were structures to govern the tundra did not mean that this control was absolute. David Anderson (1998b: 67) mentions that the large territory of the Khantaiskii state farm prevented the administration from having total control over what was happening inside and outside its borders. This weak control encouraged the illegal activities of hunters and the establishment of an informal local 'masterhood' which was, of course, *de facto* and not *de jure*. The territory of the Severnyi state farm in Anabar was not as large as the lands of the Khantaiski

<sup>61</sup> The power structures of the Republic of Sakha are undergoing more radical restructuring. Plans were under way to change the Sakha parliament Il Tumen into a two-chamber parliament, though at the time of my fieldwork this reform had not been completed (interview with the deputy of the parliament, V. P. Ivanov, 28 October 2002).



state farm. Nevertheless, the hunters often pursued their own private interests and informally divided the territories. Illegal hunting and fishing over the quota was widely practised in Soviet state farm brigades.

One elder hunter told me that in the Soviet period the limits on how many wild reindeer one was allowed to shoot were low. After the brigade gave its required amount of meat to the state farm, there was not much left for its own consumption. And the hunters, of course, were too proud to buy back this same meat. They always killed more wild reindeer than was permitted by the quota and hid this meat in secret underground ice chambers. To prevent such activity, control raids were frequent, especially in the 1980s. As I was told, in the 1980s the 'ecologists' (state agents monitoring the use of natural resources) often flew in by helicopter without any warning. Fortunately for the hunters, in most cases the control party did not discover the illegal ice chambers containing the meat and so punishment did not follow. Here we see that there were different, sometimes even contradictory, approaches to how the tundra landscape and the exploitation of its resources were understood. Hunters believed that they had their own right, despite limiting regulations by the state, to decide about hunting and even about building on the land. State officials, on their side, pursued strict regulations and planning of the activities of *tundroviki*, giving them no opportunity (or so they thought) for independent decisions.

#### 4.2.1 *Wilderness and the Social Landscape*

In the North, I can't remember hearing the word 'tundra' (*tuundra* in Sakha: in this chapter, all terms are in Sakha if not otherwise indicated). People in the capital of Yakutsk and in the villages in Central Yakutia used to say 'going to the tundra', 'being in the tundra' (*Tuundrahha taksyehha. Tuundrahha syldzyehha*). In Anabarskii district, people use the word '*tya*' for tundra, which in Yakutian means 'forest' (*Iakutsko* 1972: 417–8). But in vernacular use *tya* actually means 'village' or 'countryside'. A Russian–Yakutian phrasebook gives *tya* as the equivalent of the Russian word *derevnia* ('village') (*Pogovorim* 1987: 100). 'Agriculture' (*sel'skokhoziaistvo*) in Yakutian is *tya khahaiystabata*, using the word *tya* as 'countryside'. In a Russian–Yakutian dictionary, one can even find the pair *kuorat uonna tya*, translated as 'town and village'. (*Russko* 1968: 131). Tundra dwellers are called *tyetaghy kihi* (*kihiler* in plural) and people who live in a village are *pöhyölek kihite* (also *kihiler* in plural), which means simply 'village people'. When people in the Anabarskii district go to the tundra, they do indeed go to the countryside, which is not the same as the tundra. The meaning of the word 'tundra' has connotations of something isolated, outside the normal

social sphere of everyday life. The use of the word *tya* means that the tundra is for native people a social space, more or less equal to the village.

From the official point of view, the tundra 'lives' when it is covered with *tochkas*, reindeer brigades and other marks of human activities. This discourse is symbolised through huge maps, which decorate the walls of the offices of the head of the district administration, the director of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP and the head of the district land commission. Coloured points mark the location of the reindeer herds and log cabins. From the officials' point of view, the landscape lives when it is made 'alive' on paper with settlements and roads (cf. Gow 1996). That 'wilderness' is a social and cultural construction is supported by the fact that this concept is not absolute and general (see Descola and Pálsson 1996a). Many officials of the district administration in Saaskylaakh wondered how I, a Westerner who must need showers, good food and TV, could survive in the 'wilderness' where even they have never been. On the other hand, I heard *tundroviki* saying that soon there would be no space left in the tundra. And this at a time when we were driving on snowmobiles or reindeer sledges through the tundra, seeing no other signs of human beings for hours on end!

In recent years the needs of village dwellers to use the natural resources of the tundra have increased. Unemployment and low salaries in the village have forced people to hunt and fish more extensively. Going to the tundra does not mean that people enter an empty and meaningless place. Places in the tundra hold meaning for most people in Uurung Khaia as landmarks or as sources of food and money; there were useless or, on the other hand, very highly valued territories, depending on their ecological resources and climate conditions. Here I agree with Ingold's (1996) approach and demonstrate below that the practical activities of human beings, their engagement with the environment, make nature part of the social world, not something that lies outside of it.

The 'social landscape' in the Anabar tundra is created by connecting real people and events with the landscape (cf. Casimir 1992a; Gow 1996; Ziker 2002a). The most beautiful place name for me in the Anabarskii district is *Golub Tölüür Aryyta* ('The island where the dove is born'). This island is where the early summer bird hunt takes place, but there are also many person-related place names in the district. One day in late summer we were mounted on reindeer and looking for some lost animals. When we passed a small lake, Vasili, my host, mentioned, 'This lake's name is Boris'. I asked: 'Why Boris?' Vasili replied: 'There [in Uurung Khaia] used to be a Russian. He fished here often. But I do not know exactly. Moigo was here in these times, you should ask him.' The lake was named after a real person and the name symbolised his activities in this region.

One of my key pieces of fieldwork equipment was a map of the Anabarskii district. This map, a very good one from the Russian military, always caused excitement when I spread it out. People could spend hours looking at it, trying to find places they knew. They measured distances between locations and pointed where one or another hunting spot was located. Even at a brief glance it is obvious that in the Anabar region there are many person-related toponyms. When we drove north from the camp of the 3rd brigade of Uurung Khaia we had to cross Ivan Salaata (Ivan's Path). Feodor Kylaia ('Look at Feodor's [Place]' or 'Lights of Feodor') was on the way to the village of Uurung Khaia (which itself means 'White Hill') from Tiistaakh. The first place is connected to the memory of the trap lines of the hunter Ivan. The other river got its name from the hunting cabin of Fiodor, whose hunting grounds used to be there. Egor Paastaga, another place not far from old Moigo's hunting spot, means 'Egor's fox trap'. Other toponyms like Börölökh ('Full of Wolves'), Sasyl Yrekh ('Fox Stream'), or Khaia D'ieelekh (from Khaia Kurduk D'ie—'House Big as Mountain') hint at human activities.

Places where one can expect to see and hunt foxes or which should be avoided because wolves are likely to attack your reindeer are known only after one visits these regions regularly. The activities of hunters and reindeer herders are thus mapped on the landscape and those features have meaning for others who share the same way of life. Of course, there are many place names that refer to some visible marker in the landscape, such as Kholocholookh (*kholo* means curve, the name of a crooked-shaped lake), Ulakhan Kumakh Yrekh ('Stream of the Big Sand'), or Bulgunn'akhtaakh ('Covered with Hills'). The 'story' of some place names has almost been forgotten. For example, it was difficult to find someone who could explain to me the origin of the toponym Hetta Heddem ('Seven Brothers'). Finally Aponia, the brigadier of the Elden reindeer herd, explained: 'There used to be seven brothers who migrated. They were Tupriny. I think they were relatives of Pavel, our MUP's director.'

Mark Nuttall (1992) argues that Danish maps of Greenland are the explorers' and colonisers' layer of perception of the landscape. He draws a distinction between official maps and the 'memoryscape' of local Inuit topography, which is a landscape related to real and mythical events and persons (Nuttall 1992: 55). In this sense the Soviet Army maps I used were different. They used mainly local toponyms, although in Russian transliteration, and these toponyms were in wide use in Sakha pronunciation and people recognised them easily. Drawing routes on the map with a finger, my informants showed me their hunting and pasture lands, as well as those of others now dead, demonstrating that 'memory' is what 'writes subsistence



and other activities on the landscape', and 'articulates the relationship between the landscape and the community, or between the landscape and individual' (Nuttall 1992: 57).

Social space in the Anabarskii district is not necessarily bound to old stories, nor is it static. The 'implication in a landscape' focuses also on an active relationship among living people, and a person and the land (Gow 1996: 51–2). Gow also shows how territories unused for a long time become 'wilderness' as memory connected to them fades away. In the Anabarskii district I observed the opposite process. There were places which have recently been turned from wilderness into social space. Basso (1984: 27) cites one Western Apache informant who said, 'That name makes me see that place like it really is.' In the northern edges of the district were a few territories that had been 'empty'. One area was the hunting territory of the small-scale enterprise Elden (see chapter 3). After the beginning of Elden's activity there appeared a few places named after the enterprise's hunters or hunting events (for example Kyyl Yrek—'Wild Reindeer Stream'). This was the beginning of the 'socialisation' of this region.

### 4.3 Time as a Paradigm

#### 4.3.1 *Hunting Spots and the Rodina*

At the end of my fieldwork season in April 2001 a new *obshchina* was established in the village of Uurung Khaia. This *obshchina* was located a long way from the village, on the remote island of Bol'shoi Begichev, around 300 kilometres from Uurung Khaia. Because people whom I knew were involved in the process of building up the new *obshchina*, I convinced them to take me with them to the island. When one of the village inhabitants heard about this, he asked: 'Are you going by invitation of the 'master'?' I asked who the 'master' of the island was, and he explained to me that one old man had been living on the island since the end of the 1970s and was considered the master of that place. When I asked why, he replied: 'He has been there for such a long time!'

When, as among the Greenlandic Inuit, the 'lands' are inhabited and used on a regular basis, 'no other person can establish claim' to them (Nuttall 1992: 46). Hunters' permanence in the region is symbolised by hunting cabins, storage sheds and sometimes also underground ice chambers. These buildings were in most cases built in Soviet times and the hunting families or enterprises which live there have done so since the state farm times.

Agnia, Old Man Moigo's daughter, once explained to me the relationship of her father to the Tiistaakh hunting base and other hunters: 'There

used to be a [hunting] brigade in Tiistaakh. Our family and another family hunted here. Then this other family went away and Father remained here. Everybody knows he has always been here. These are his lands'. (*Zdes' byl v Tiistaakhe okhotnitsnaia brigada. Nasha semia i drugaia semia zhili zdes'. Togda eto vtoraia semia uekhala i nash otets ostalsia zdes'. Kazhdyi znaet, chto on vseгда byl zdes'. Eti ego zemli!*).

Anderson (2000a: chapter 7) shows how, through establishing hunting and fishing spots (*tochki*) on the Taimyr Peninsula, the notion of territory was narrowed from large spaces used by nomads in pre-collectivisation times to 'exclusive territories'. These 'exclusive territories' became objects of land claims and entitlement in the later privatisation period, but also objects of struggle between indigenous and incomer populations; both sides arguing that due to long-term use the territories belong to them (Anderson 1995; Ziker 2001).

In the Anabarskii district, neither land privatisation nor ethnic division of resource use was a serious topic of concern. However, the case of Tiistaakh and statements of other people I have documented prove that identification with a particular region and establishing a *rodina* relationship to these lands was strongly affected in Anabar by the Soviet agricultural land-use policy. Tim Ingold argues that indigenous relationships with the land are based on the 'business of dwelling' which 'unfolds their history' (2000: 139). I argue that in Anabar the native hunters demonstrate a similar process of establishing a relationship with their hunting lands. As we will see later, activity over a long period of time on a territory creates the 'dwelling perspective' (Ingold 2000: 189, 199) of an individual actor, which entitles him to sovereignty over a particular territory. Under current circumstances, as I showed in chapter 3, such informal entitlement is also recognised by the authorities.

The fact that his entitlement is not necessarily fixed on paper does not prevent the 'master' or other people from recognising the *khoziain's* superiority over certain lands. What makes the 'elasticity of the lands' (Verdery 1996) in the Anabarskii district so special and interesting is that even if the officials do not support such entitlement, they tolerate it. Thus the head of the Uurung Khaia village found it strange when I wondered why the MUP's reindeer herders respected the land use rights of the Tiistaakh hunters, who did not have any legal status at the time. He said, 'But probably this is so everywhere!'

As already mentioned in chapter 1, local people dominate the local government and administration in the Anabarskii district. The head of the administration, Nikolai Egorovich Androsov, was born there and supported local people and the revitalisation of the so-called 'traditional economy'. As

long as there were no serious conflicts over land entitlement (for example with the gold industry), Androsof did not interfere and force people to legalise their entitlement. As long as the head of the administration tolerates the situation, the officials of the district land commission follow suit. The authorities' *laissez-faire* attitude is certainly a carry-over from the Soviet practice of tolerating semi-illegal activities by *tundroviki*. In order to keep people working in the tundra, the state farm management had to turn a blind eye to hunting and fishing for people's own purposes (Anderson 2000b: 235–6) or to slight deviations from approved migration routes. In this way, hunters and reindeer herders became accustomed to managing resources on their own and following their own norms to regulate usufruct rights. The community also accepts these 'wild' activities. Hunters and reindeer herders do not break vernacular rules; and what is more, *tundroviki* distribute their illegally obtained (*dobyvat'* in Rus.) meat and fish in the village among relatives and friends, and consider this act as 'feeding the village' (cf. Anderson 2000b: 236)

#### 4.3.2 'My Parents are Buried here': Ancestors' Legacies

Driving through the tundra on snowmobiles in April, when the polar night is already over, was fun. Even though the sky was grey and the wind was blowing, I always enjoyed the ride. Usually we moved in a small caravan of three or four snowmobiles with sledges. When we stopped to change drivers, I realised how silent it is in the tundra. The birds had not yet arrived, and nothing was moving on the white endless landscape. After a short break the ride continued, up and down small hills. Sooner or later our route would cross a river. As far as possible we followed the river, where one can travel at top speed. From time to time the traveller notices a cross on a hill on the riverbank, alone in the white emptiness. After five minutes there is another cross, a black cross in the middle of nowhere. The caravan circles around a small hill and there is a third cross on the riverbank. Behind it are houses and barns.

In almost every settlement where more than two families live, crosses on the surrounding hills are a frequent sight. The Dolgans throw all the necessary tools and favourite items around the grave of the dead person, breaking them before the burial. Besides reindeer sledges, kitchen utensils, clothes and work tools you can see beads, toys, books and journals lying around the graves. The best reindeer will be slaughtered for the burial; the meat will be eaten and the bones put onto the grave as well. After 40 days (following Russian tradition) another reindeer will be slaughtered, eaten and the bones left on the grave. This procedure is repeated after one year. According to Dolgan tradition, after three years the relatives of the dead person



build a small wooden box over the grave. Relatives regularly come to the grave 'to remember' (*pomilut'*) the deceased. They drink vodka on the graves and eat a little food, leaving the empty bottle there. A shot of vodka and some food is left on the grave for the dead. In addition to the crosses there are often red star monuments, or Russian-style gravestones with black-and-white pictures of the dead person. But even in the new graveyards I saw traditional symbols. Affixed to a log or even a cross were a small bow and an arrow for a man, a knife and a needle for a woman, or a small wooden bird for a child. Thus, Dolgan burial customs are a mixture of traditional beliefs, Russian Orthodox and Soviet traditions.

Although one goal of the Soviet collectivisation policy was to break 'backward' kinship ties (Gurvich 1963: 86; Slezkine 1994: chapter 6), this policy met with no success in the Anabarskii district. The reindeer brigades had always been made up of close relatives, and hunting brigades very often had the father as a brigadier and his sons as hunters working for him. Many people remembered with warmth the 'good old times', before the 1960s, when whole brigades contained only close relatives; some people called them 'family brigades' (*semeinye brigady* in Rus.; see chapter 2). In the 1960s, when the collective farm was transformed into the state farm, the number of non-kin persons in the brigades increased, but close relatives always made up a good proportion. The brigades were placed in the tundra and log cabins were built at these spots. It was still a widespread practice for the dead to be buried in the tundra not far from the *tochka*, rather than bringing them back to the village.

One day I was sitting in the kitchen of the hunting brigade's cabin in Chöchördaakh and drinking tea with the brigadier Dmitri Egorovich Vinokurov, known by his nickname Kupaa, and his son. It was a hunting base with a trading post (*faktoria*).

*Author:* Is the trader your relative?

*Kupaa:* The trader is our relative but not one of us. He is a Dolgan, we are Even. Of course, we have already forgotten our language, but we are Even.

*Author:* How do you happen to be here, in this *tochka*?

*Kupaa:* We have been living here for generations. Our family has always hunted here.

*Author:* Even in Soviet times all of you worked here in the same brigade?

*Kupaa:* Yes, my sons and I were here in the brigade. I buried my parents here. They wanted to be buried in their homeland (*rodina*).

After leaving Kupaa's hunting base, I returned to the reindeer brigade. In the winter we again migrated close to the area where Kupaa's base was located.

Sometimes we even talked to him on the radio. Near the trading post was a place where good quality coal lay on the ground along the riverbank. The reindeer herders of the 3rd Uurung Khaia brigade wanted to go and collect that coal but they needed Kupaa's permission first.

After a radio session one evening in a *balokh*, the mother of the family, Zinaida Tuprina, put away the radio microphone and said: 'Kupaa is a stingy person!'

*Author:* Why?

*Zinaida:* We ask him constantly for permission to dig coal near Chöchördaakh, but he always avoids the subject. When we ask him on the radio, he never says a word. Neither 'yes' nor 'no'. If he would have answered, Ivan (the oldest son) could go off to dig the coal.

*Author:* But why must Kupaa give you permission? Is it his coal?

*Zinaida:* He is the 'master', these lands are viewed as his own! (*On khoziain, schitaetsia, shto eti ego zemli!*)

I will not go into a discussion here about ethnicity (see chapter 7), but focus further on the institution of *rodina*. The brigade of Dmitri Egorovich is not atypical; the members of the brigade are closely related and had hunted in the region for a long time. Although the *tochka* was established in the 1970s, the people tracked their family history in the regions back for many generations. These people had established a strong, emotional relationship with the particular region where they had grown up hunting, typical of other Siberian state farm hunters (cf. Ziker 2003b).

The entitlement of 'master' rights to a region is often based on the notion that 'we have lived here for generations'. The graves of the ancestors are an important symbol defining the institution of the 'master'. In symbiosis with the Soviet state farm framework, this symbol became even more powerful. In Soviet collectivised agriculture, the organisation of collectives was static, and their territories closed to other people (see Anderson 1998b: 167, 204). Thus, particular families lived at their hunting bases for many generations, even under Soviet rule, and became accustomed to this relative independence which allowed them to operate within the borders of the hunting territory. According to my informants, after collectivisation many brigades that included close relatives chose as their brigade territory land where their ancestors used to hunt, fish and graze their reindeer long before collectivisation. This facilitated incorporation of pre-Soviet land-use norms into state farm ideology. For example, Nganasan on the Taimyr Peninsula considered certain places, such as wild reindeer migration routes or some especially good fishing places, as clan possessions and had the right to limit access by other clans to such places (Chard 1963: 109–11). Some of my older infor-

mants remembered their parents speaking about similar traditions in the Anabarskii district. Today, in the Anabarskii district, hunters' *tochkas* are located on the riverbanks where the main waves of the wild reindeer migration cross the river. In this way, the exclusivity of hunting places has been continued and institutionalised under Soviet rule and gave birth to the notion of *rodina* and *khoziain*.

Association, indication and identification with a particular region means more than some kind of present 'ownership' for the Dolgan (Woodburn 1982: 437). Social relations to the landscape were transferred among kin from generation to generation. This process of transmission of land entitlement was a conscious process among Dolgan hunters, similar to the process described for sheep farmers in the Scottish borders (J. N. Gray 2000: 220). For example, Kupaa told me that he would retire soon and leave all of his *balokhs* and trap lines to his son: 'He will hunt here soon; I have done it enough.' The transmission of territoriality in Dolgan practice means that the youngest son, after all the older sons have received their share, inherits all of his father's reindeer and other property like arctic fox traps with the obligation to be a primary supporter of his old parents (this tradition is discussed in more detail in chapter 6). Transferring ancestors' space over to the children gives to that act an historical dimension and maps the family onto the landscape, reconstituting the younger generation as formal heirs to particular places.

Ingold's (2000) genealogical model of land ownership stresses the fact that 'dwelling unfolds history'. Remembering the performance of ancestors is connected to the enskilment of youth through sharing similar activities with elders. He argues that through this dwelling, forms of landscape are constituted (Ingold 2000: 133, 199). Ingold holds the view that language and tradition are for indigenous hunting communities the *object* of memory which relates people to the landscape. In the Dolgan case, traditions of dwelling and land use are constituted in memory and place names, but the ancestors' presence is also made visible by graves on the landscape. The activities of people now dead, which live on in the memory, have two functions: establishing a domesticated landscape and linking real people and families to concrete places.

#### 4.4 'He Knows it...'

In this section I focus on 'knowledge' (*znanie* in Rus.) and how this was connected to the institution of 'master' in the Anabarskii district. In his study of Scottish sheep farmers, Gray argues that by passing the farm onto the next generation, farmers not only passed on the farming assets and management, but they also transmitted the relationship between family and farm, and the



knowledge of how the farm functions (J. N. Gray 2000: 19). Klubnikin et al. (2000) argue that certain ecosystems themselves are carriers of knowledge. Although their article has a clear political agenda of ecological conservation, the authors convincingly show that the 'sacred and cultural landscape' was connected to certain geographical places that symbolised for the natives of Altai their identity and tradition. Important for my purposes is that Altai people and Russians saw 'traditional ecological knowledge' as part of the sustainable development and 'natural resource planning' of the region (Klubnikin et al. 2000: 1304).

As Ingold has pointed out, a man who wants to become a skilled hunter must go 'through the process of enculturation' (Ingold 1996: 37). He must learn to find and read tracks, how to move on the land, and many other skills. This process is social and individual (Ingold 1996: 38). Elsewhere, Ingold argues that social relations with the landscape are established by investing labour and time (lived experience) and through interaction with nature but also through ancestral experience (2000: 199, 133–6). Ingold discusses ancestral experience and landscape in terms of identity and 'cultural memory' (2000: chapter 8), and the same categories are useful when discussing 'knowledge of lands' as a social institution.

David Anderson defines knowledge as a part of land-use skills (1998b: 65). He tells a story about a 'wild cooperative' (*dikaia artel*), which used the lands officially allocated to three neighbouring collective farms. When the officials wanted to drive the 'wild cooperative' away, their leader said: 'We have nowhere else to go!' (Anderson 1998c: 150). They knew the region and the geography of its resources. In another place they would have been both intruders and persons lacking the necessary knowledge of the land. Knowledge of the land gives a person the feeling of 'being at home' in this particular region.<sup>62</sup> Kerttula provides a story about a Chukchi woman who wears house slippers (*tapochki*) in the tundra because she feels that the tundra is her home (Kerttula 1997: 216).

Gray has pointed out that 'space is not an abstract phenomenon—empty, neutral, homogenous, and a priori—onto which humans map their action in the form of meaningful places' (J. N. Gray 2000: 7). According to Casey, place and placedness are 'lived-experience' which creates a sense of 'being-in-place' (Casey 1996). Orochi in Sakhalin transmitted this experi-

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<sup>62</sup> I have been asked many times by my academic colleagues what happens if there is more than one person who wants to be the master. I don't know because I did not experience such a situation during my fieldwork. I can only guess that such a situation is very unlikely. The institution of 'mastership' is based on many different factors and there could be hardly several persons who meet the criteria. But if a conflict situation arises in Anabar, there are many ways of resolving them (see chapter 8).

ence as knowledge, expressed through hunting and embodied in tradition, both orally, by telling stories, and also symbolically by gifting a saddle to a young hunter, who through this act became fully recognised as a hunter (Kwon 1988: 121).

Almost all *tundroviki* are passionate hunters. The most important periods in the North are when the wild reindeer (*kyyt*) migrate to the forests in the south (July) and then move back north to the Arctic coast (February–March). David Anderson argues that although it is impossible to prove, the same reindeer most likely use the same migration routes each year. Collective hunting was organised so that every brigade had ‘its own’ population of wild reindeer to hunt (Anderson 1998c: 146). This ‘knowing the deer’ was part of the hunting strategy of the Khantaika Evenki, who successfully ‘took the deer’ (*brali oleni*) (Anderson 1998c: 147; 2000a: 127).

My friend Nikolai, the son of a hunter I lived with in the tundra (see chapter 3), visited me in the village hotel. In accordance with local tradition, I had made tea and we were sitting, drinking tea and smoking cigarettes.

*Author:* You are going hunting [for wild reindeer], aren’t you?

*Nikolai:* Yes, we will go off soon.

*Author:* Your father invited me to come down to the South with you. But when are you actually leaving?

*Nikolai:* I don’t know. The old man (*starik*) knows. As he says, so it will be! (*Kak on skazhet, tak i budet.*)

*Author:* But where are you going actually? Is it far away from Novyi [the place where the tundra becomes forest]?

*Nikolai:* I don’t know! The old man knows where the wild reindeer (*dikari*) are!

Nikolai relied completely on the knowledge of his father. His father Moigo is an experienced hunter and fisher whose hunting skills are respected throughout the whole district. Many of my friends argued that Moigo is so successful because he is a good ‘master’ of his lands. Due to long residency, he is familiar with the territory and able to predict good hunting places.

Knowledge about the geography and ecological resources of the tundra is necessary for everyone who lives there. To the outsider, the tundra seems pretty much the same wherever one looks. I never understood how the reindeer herders could distinguish which place offered good pasture, and which did not. The ground is covered everywhere with the same green or brown grass and lichens. In some places the picture is more green, in others more yellow-brown. As far as I understood, the plants here and there were the same. But the reindeer herders know even in winter where the good pastures are, despite the fact that everything is covered with snow. Once I asked Uibaan Tuprin, the son of the oldest reindeer herder in the 3rd Uurung

Khaia brigade: 'How do you know, now in winter, where the good places for the reindeer are?' He answered: 'When we migrate in summer, we look for where good pastures lie. And then we tell it to the brigadier. He remembers it and when we come together to decide our winter migration route, we work it out so that those pastures will be used.'

Like the Khantaika Evenki in Anderson's study, 'knowing the lands', i.e. being a good *tundrovik*, means that the hunter or reindeer herder is able to find his way in the tundra and has skills to locate game and pastures (1998b: 68–9). The people with whom I lived in the tundra knew the geography of their region brilliantly. Travelling around on snowmobiles, we never got lost.<sup>63</sup> Once, when leaving the village to return to the brigade with the elder reindeer herder Balyksyt and his son Oko, I again witnessed the trust implicit in tundra life. We stopped a few times on the way, unloaded our sledges in the tundra and left a barrel of gasoline, a sack of groceries, once even an entire sledge, all of which were to stay in the tundra. When I asked why we did this, the old man replied: 'When we migrate back in the spring, we'll pass by and pick the things up.'

Knowledge of lands' is the sum of accumulated and transmitted information and experience about a certain region; it personalises the landscape and makes it 'home'. Knowledge about the tundra helps one use resources in a more effective way. In Anabar, transmitted knowledge includes pre-Soviet Dolgan hunting skills and experience with Soviet-organised agriculture. Not only were Dolgan ways of fur processing, butchering, tools and clothes of pre-Soviet origin but also the techniques of dead fall use, harnessing reindeer, division of male and female methods of driving sledges, the pre-Soviet diet which determined the choice of fishing places and equipment, and the tradition of having many tamed reindeer and long caravans, which affected mobility (cf. Popov 1935, 1937b, 1952; Gurvich 1977; Sokol'nikova 2000). The Soviet period added the large industrial forms of wild reindeer hunting, the use of snowmobiles and motor boats, and a new focus on the brigade's territory. The 'ghosts of ancestors' not only transmitted the legacy of land use but, using their hunting grounds and skills, the mode of resource use as well. One begins to see why in Siberia it was never possible to transform hunting and reindeer herding into a single, centrally configured economy.

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<sup>63</sup> Especially during the spring snow storms (*purga*), even experienced *tundroviki* sometimes get lost. During my fieldwork period in Anabarskii district this happened a few times. Once an experienced hunter was on the way out to the tundra when a snowstorm started. Unfortunately his old snowmobile broke down. He could not start the engine again and decided to return back to the village on foot. But he lost his way in the snowstorm and wandered for two days in the tundra. When he found the village, he was exhausted and his face was frost-bitten. To avoid freezing to death, he kept himself awake the entire time he was in the tundra.



## 4.5 The Borders

One evening in January 2001 in the tundra, we were talking about land use rights. So, I put forth the question: 'Does the land we are migrating on now belong to Moigo?' Before answering me, the old reindeer herder asked his wife: 'Are Moigo's arctic fox traps around here?'

As I mentioned earlier, the area where a person places his arctic fox traps (*paastar*) marks his hunting territory. In this section, I want to discuss the issue of marking hunting territory and the importance of dead fall traps. The discussion about private land ownership among Arctic hunters started with Frank G. Speck, who conducted extensive fieldwork among Algonquian Indians in Canada and the United States in the early years of the twentieth century. In a series of publications, he argued that many Algonquian hunters had institutionalised 'family hunting territories'. He wrote that 'these territories were known and recognized, and trespass ... was summarily punishable'. These 'family hunting territories' were a 'family inheritance' and operated only by the family (Speck 1915: 290, 293).

Speck is seen as the initiator of the concept of 'family hunting territories', which was supported but also criticised by other scholars. Snow (1968) argued that, although family hunting grounds obviously existed among Algonquian Indians, there were different systems. Speck ignored the fact that the main activity on these territories was trapping, not hunting, and because of this the term 'family hunting territory' was a 'misnomer' (Snow 1968: 1144). The concept of land as private property was questioned by Eleanor Leacock (1954, 1989), who argued that such hunting grounds developed in response to European colonisation. She stated that before the arrival of Europeans, property among Algonquian hunters was not focused on land but on beavers, criticising Väinö Tanner, who argued that a total lack of private property was caused by European colonisation (Tanner 1947: 647; Leacock 1954: 2;). Leacock used historical data to show that the 'beaver economy' began with the European fur trade and before that beavers were hunted for meat, similar to other animals, and strictly guarded family hunting territories were not suited to hunting for food (1954: 25). She supported her theory using the fact that having permanent trap lines was called 'trapping like the white man' by the Indians because Indians had 'fluid territory' where the locations of trapping lines were changed periodically and exclusive hunting territories developed as the importance of commercial hunting increased (1954: 30, 34). Leacock's approach was supported by Harvey Feit, but from another angle. Feit (1991) argued that Leacock did not pay attention to the historical context when Speck wrote his main works: Speck, who was befriended by the Indians he researched, was defending their land rights.

Irrespective of whether hunting territories were private property and trap lines permanent (Speck 1915; Cooper 1939) or territories fluid and trap lines temporary (Leacock 1954, 1989), and whether the aim was to trap for money (Ziker 2002c) or for social prestige (Jarvenpa 1977), trapping lines were private property and the owner had a right to limit their use by others. For Tim Ingold, trapping is a different kind of predation because the trapper has to know the region where he sets up his traps but also the way there and back (Ingold 1987: 93–4). Following these scholars, I argue that trapping lines are symbols of land and resource ownership (even when temporary or fluid).

Andrei Tuprin, who used to work on Begichev as a hunter at the end of the 1970s, told me: 'It is not so easy with traps. You must know where the arctic foxes (*kyrssa*) are. You cannot build the traps everywhere. You must know the landscape ... And what the weather is like there ...' Arctic fox traps encapsulate all that I have mentioned here: accumulated knowledge about the landscape and its resources, which determined activities of real people on the landscape and turned the lands into a personalised space.



Plate 5. Repairing a dead fall trap (*paas*).

Arctic fox dead fall traps are sturdy constructions, which can be used for generations. To build the traps, a person needs to transport the material (logs) into the tundra and expend considerable time and effort building them. To keep arctic fox traps intact, they must be looked after and repaired regu-

larly. For the whole summer the logs lie on the ground and the grass around them must be cut or the logs will rot. In the winter, the owner must keep the traps baited and collect the trapped animals before other arctic foxes eat them. While in Soviet times the state farm supplied hunters with materials and paid extra money for building and repairing the traps, in the post-Soviet period all of these caretaking and construction jobs were left to the hunters themselves. With the abandonment of organised trapping and the increase in hunters' independence, the traps became valuable private property, as did the resources of the territory where the traps are located as well.

By inheriting trapping lines, sons also inherited territory and the right to consider this territory as their exclusive hunting area. Oleg, a brother of herders in the former 6th Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade, now the subsidiary enterprise Erel on the Arctic Ocean coast, showed me long trap lines there. 'These traps belonged to my father. Now my brothers use them,' he said. The territory of Erel is located between the territories of other reindeer brigades and the hunting enterprise Elden (see chapter 3). 'This is my *rodina*. My brothers trap here and Elden is more to the east where their lands lie. These lands belong to us.' When I asked whether hunters from Elden were allowed to hunt in the territory of Erel, Oleg thought long and said, 'Why should they? Their trapping lines are somewhere else. Here is no place to put new trapping lines and we need to hunt for wild reindeer too!' The last sentence reflects the knowledge of local ecology by finding optimal places in the tundra for trapping lines.

With Soviet state farm organisation, i.e. the shift to fixed brigade territories, dead fall traps became symbols of the permanent occupation of a territory. At the beginning of this chapter I referred to Vasili, who said that 'touching other people's traps' was seen as stealing. The combination of traps and trapped game as private property and the brigade hunting territory system mean that traps link their owner to the lands in which the traps are located. The practice that sons use the same traps that their fathers had built and use them in the same locations provides a continuity of occupancy, transmission of land use and the right to exercise control over a certain territory.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the institution of *khoziain* ('master') and the concept of *rodina* ('homeland'). My main argument is that landscape is a socially constructed space (Zukin 1992) and that hunting is a social process (Ingold 1980: 159–60; 1987: 252–6) which has developed within historical, ecological and cultural constraints. The notions of 'master' and 'homeland' are a symbiosis of pre-Soviet and Soviet practices which were used to regu-



late control over tundra resources. To symbolise 'ownership' of lands, there developed a complex system of place names, memoryscapes, ancestors' graves and arctic fox trap lines.

To 'domesticate' the tundra it had to be turned into a social space where people's activities defined the landscape. These activities were connected to real people who could trace their personal and family history in a certain region. Thus individuals and families developed emotional ties to particular tundra regions.

Success in hunting and fishing and the entitlement to territories depended upon an accumulation of knowledge, i.e. familiarity with the territory's ecology, but also the skills to use those resources. Knowledge and success are linked in the Anabarskii district to one's 'own' land and 'own' wild reindeer population and have encapsulated the superiority of the master over the resources of the hunting territory. The transmission of knowledge means for hunters and reindeer herders the transmission of territorial rights that in many cases go back to pre-Soviet hunting grounds.

The Soviet state farm policy of dividing lands into fixed parcels and relating individual production units (brigades) to territories institutionalised a division of the tundra into concrete 'ownerships', and thus territorial entitlements of some families were strengthened by locating family brigades on their ancestors' territory. The state farm also created new masters by establishing hunting and reindeer brigades and allocating land to such brigades, which has been important for establishing and transferring land entitlements in the post-Soviet era.

Ancestors' graves and permanent trap lines are visible markers of territorial ownership. These symbolise the life and work of real individuals. With the collapse of Soviet agriculture, hunting bases and trap lines became the private property of families and the land around them came under informal ownership of the master—his homeland. With the help of the ancestors' memory, the homeland also received an historical dimension, uniting a living master with past generations and increasing his authority to decide upon access to the resources of his homeland.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Traditions of Reciprocity**

#### **5.1 Introduction: The ‘Law of the Tundra’ and Kinship**

While I was in the village of Saaskylaakh, I often visited Moigo’s home (see chapter 3). Visiting friends in the North means that you are invited to eat or, as people say, to drink tea (*Chai dakh* in Sakha). An advantage of spending time with hunters is that one is offered the choicest parts of fresh reindeer meat and fish, and many dishes that normally one cannot even buy, like bone marrow. After I had enjoyed the best home-cooked food in the world and played with the children I always exchanged news with my hosts and chatted with Moigo and his family in the living room of their big house. Moigo lived here with his wife Maria and their youngest son Nikolai and daughter Asia when they weren’t at their family enterprise at Tiistaakh (see chapter 3).

The house is located in the so-called ‘upper village’ or the northern part of Saaskylaakh where only local indigenous people reside. It comprised half of a huge single-storey building containing two large apartments. Moigo’s home was one of the nicest I have visited during my fieldwork, having walls covered with wood or carpets, and being tastefully furnished and always welcoming. The house was always crowded because all Moigo’s married children would bring their own children at noon each day and spend the afternoon planning hunting trips and exchanging news. Once, his eldest son Ivan asked me why I did not come to their home every day for lunch. ‘You go to eat in the canteen and pay money. Here you can eat for free.’ I really did not know what to say. ‘Hmm, I just thought, maybe it is not so good,’ I managed to say. ‘What do you mean, “not so good”?’ wondered Ivan. ‘Uh, I think, um ... perhaps I am disturbing you or something,’ I said, not knowing how to put it exactly. ‘Don’t be stupid,’ said Ivan ‘You were in the tundra with us. When you have lived with us, worked and hunted with us, then you are one of us. So, you have to come here every day to eat!’ This was an order that I followed gladly because the canteen food was no comparison with the homemade food cooked by Moigo’s wife Maria. Thus I was



introduced to the world of informal mutuality and its norms among Dolgan of the Anabarskii district.

Although I met people in the capital Yakutsk who used the expression 'the law of the tundra' (*zakon tundry*)<sup>64</sup> and I had even read about it before the start of my fieldwork (Anderson 1998c: 132), I never heard people in the Anabarskii district using it. The 'law of the tundra (or taiga)' has the same basic meaning all over Siberia and in other hunting societies. It means that a hunter should not overuse natural resources, and hunters should help one another with food, labour, services and by lending materials and equipment (Snow 1968: 1149; Feit 1989: 80; Bodenhorn 1993: 177; Fondahl 1998: 74; Ziker 2002a: 139). During my visits among Khanty, Dolgan and Even people, I noticed that, to ensure the sustainability of tundra resources, the hunters would always spare the last of the game or wild reindeer they were hunting.<sup>65</sup>

Speculation about such 'native laws' brought many native activists and anthropologists to the conclusion that indigenous hunters do have, to use Pálsson's terminology, either communalistic or paternalistic models of nature use. The first means that hunters do not see themselves as living outside of nature but are in spiritual unity with other living creatures. For example, hunting is seen as a process where a hunter 'seduces' the game. The second model describes hunters' and foragers' attitudes to nature as those of a 'noble savage' who loves nature and takes care of it (Pálsson 1996).<sup>66</sup> In Russia, both interpretations are popular among native anthropologists and activists who want to emphasise the 'otherness' of indigenous populations in contrast to the 'spoiled' incomers (e.g. Vinokurova 1994: 98; Krivoshepin 1997; Poiseev 1999: 120–2).

The intention of this chapter is to show that reciprocity on an informal level is a forced strategy to cope with economic hardship and changed realities after the collapse of Soviet social and economic structures. In the case of Anabarskii district, the tendency to return to traditional skills, strategies and tools is not necessarily straightforward, as exemplified by a comment from one hunter: 'There are constant problems finding spare parts and fuel for snowmobiles. Soon we will have to start using reindeer sledges again. This is something we have almost forgotten already.'

<sup>64</sup> A term mainly used by native activists or local ethnographers.

<sup>65</sup> This strategy is, of course, a matter for discussion. How far can we speak of 'taking care of natural resources' when, after shooting 49 reindeer, the hunter leaves the last one to escape?

<sup>66</sup> See Feit's (1991: 118) criticism of Speck (1915), who argues that the Indian 'instinctively ... understands that Providence by a wise law that a man has no right to amend or change... never kills all the animals of the beaver family'.

Grant demonstrated in his study of native survival strategies in Sakhalin that old, traditional ways of hunting and fishing might be less efficient, but they are less dependent on imported supplies (Grant 1995). This shift into 'traditionality' means in many regions the shift back to the local subsistence or 'survival economy' (Ziker 2002b) because it is too costly to operate as a free-market actor. In parallel with this economic strategy, people have to shift back to 'traditional' strategies of mutuality and rely on informal networks because official state structures no longer reach them (cf. Sneath 1993; Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Ziker 2002a). In the post-Soviet transformation period it was necessary to expand one's reciprocal network to gain access not only to goods but also to transportation services, to have contacts with government and administrative institutions and so forth. Like the situation in the Taimyr tundra, the export of the 'tundra law' into the city environment to create the 'city law' helps people to survive in post-Socialism and provides networks with a variety of resources (Ziker 2002a: 147–9).

Radcliffe-Brown defined networks as the set of social relations within concrete reality (Radcliffe-Brown 1968: 190). In the anthropological literature, network analysis has linked the topic with reciprocity and made much use of 'the reciprocity networks' (Lomnitz 1977: 209). The role of informal networks is as a 'shock absorber', monitoring resource use and access to goods and various services (Scott 1976: 27). In discussing reciprocity and networks, there are many works that stress the importance of kinship as the backbone of networks in the postsocialist environment (e.g. Humphrey 1998a; Brandtstädter 2001; Kaneff 2002b; Pine 2002). Kinship was treated in Soviet ethnography as a 'cultural form', which changed with 'progress' (Dragadze 1984), and some scholars still see kin structures as a part of 'traditional culture' (Shcheikin et al. 2002). In fact, the extended family network functions in the 'new era' largely as socio-economic cooperation for survival. Kinship is able to react flexibly to new situations and change its nature and strategies (Kaneff 1998), and in the postsocialist society becomes an 'important orienteering technique' for cooperation (Anderson 1998a: 59). As I will demonstrate below, the 'ideology' of the Dolgan family includes not only the nuclear family, but also relatives up to the fourth generation, 'fictive relatives' and adopted children. Different categories of relatives are tied together and their networks are linked to the kinship net. According to Laughlin (1974), when analysing networks in the context of reciprocity flexibility is an important quality of those networks. Laughlin argues that the nature of cooperation within the network is determined by the lower limit of 'production output', which I interpret as dispersed 'resources' in the context of the Republic of Sakha, which caused networks to expand socially and geographically. Although this network is not as clearly structured as the

Barotse hierarchy (Gluckman 1965), we find in Anabar a similar system of obligations and rights which people hold with respect to one other according to their position (i.e. access to resources)

In Anabar, the monitoring of tundra resources is one part of the cooperation that I discuss in this chapter. The network also secured the distribution of goods and services. I mentioned earlier that due to the economic situation, the concept of reciprocity was 'exported' out of the tundra. The obligation and expectation of mutual support united people from the tundra with people in the villages and towns. In the case of the Latin American *compadrazgo*, the network was created vertically, uniting several classes (Romanucci-Rossi 1973). In the case of Uurung Khaia the network of reciprocity that binds tundra, village and town is also vertical in the sense of the administrative status of these places. Common to both is that networking is explained through tradition.

## 5.2 Kinship Networks and Family Structures

### 5.2.1. *Family Structures in Pre-Soviet and Soviet Times*

All the native families I met in Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh comprised large networks of nuclear families which included relatives and inter-married members up to the third or fourth generation. This network was 'ideologically' patrilineal (Anderson 2000a: 176), i.e. the grandfather was the head of the family and his home was the social centre of it (see Appendix 1).

Historically the family pattern and structure in the region is similar to that of other Siberian pastoralists and hunters, but was influenced especially by Evenki, Sakha and Dolgan traditions. Dolgan families in pre-Revolutionary times existed as kin-based networks whose main function was to support and help each member. Dolgan reindeer herders herded their animals collectively in winter, whereas in summer the groups were smaller and contained fewer families. The head of such kin-based nomadic groups was a respected elder who knew the region well (Popov 1934: 124–6).

This pattern was also used by the reindeer herders in the Anabar and Olenek regions: before collectivisation a father and his children would migrate in close proximity to each other and join together in groups seasonally (Gurvich 1977: 110). According to the works of early Soviet ethnographers, Dolgan families were patrilineal. When a daughter-in-law married into the family her reindeer became her husband's property; but other items, like kitchen utensils, embroidery and sewing tools, remained her own (Popov 1946: 71). This was similar to reindeer Evenki families, where the animals belonged to the husband but the tent and domestic tools belonged to the wife (Vasilevich 1969: 155). All researchers stress the leading role of



elders, usually grandparents, who as carriers of tradition and knowledge determined the economic and social policy of the family (cf. for Evenki see Shirokogoroff 1929: 258; for Dolgan see Popov, 1946: 61; for Gilyak see Shternberg, 1999: 17).

While in Soviet ethnography traditional family structures were seen as part of indigenous traditional culture and valued positively (cf. Afanas'eva 1990), some particular kinship traits were perceived as carriers of pre-Soviet conservatism. Therefore, the general attitude to the older kin organisation was rather ambivalent. In his book on changes in the family structure of the 'nations' of Sakha, Boris Nikolaevich Popov, professor of humanitarian sciences, discusses—in true Soviet style—the opinion that the family network with its 'patriarchal' traits has no place in the new society (1994: 67). He admits that traditions are important for the maintenance of northern indigenous identities, but he classifies 'social-kin ties' (*obshchino-rodovye svyazi*) and 'precapitalist features' (*dokapitalisticheskie iavlenia*) of family life as negative traditions, survivals (*perezhitki*) which still exist (1994: 52). To support his theory, Popov tries to define 'good' and 'bad' traditions and sometimes has difficulty showing how pre-Soviet 'bad' traditions were transformed into 'good' ones in the Soviet era. For example, he sees native language skills and maintenance of traditional economic techniques and ways of life as positive, whereas pre-Soviet family and kin structures are strictly blacklisted. At the same time, Popov values traditional kin structures as carriers and keepers of the 'spiritual culture'.<sup>67</sup>

Popov is correct in arguing that due to sedentarisation and collectivisation the kinship structure and modes of its functioning have changed. According to him, in pre-Soviet times kinship structures had multiple functions—transmitting traditions and world views, serving as structures for education, social and economic security, but also a bridge to the 'outer world'. But then, in Soviet times, a state institution took over these functions (Popov 1994: 35–6, 94). Indeed, in Uurung Khaia in the Soviet era the first big change in family life was the separation of parents and children, with children being sent to the boarding school (*internat*) in Saaskylaakh. Accord-

<sup>67</sup> In his writing, Popov seems to have a firm idea of what is 'good' and what is 'bad'. He classifies various aspects of indigenous culture and social life according to his value scales. For example, he distinguishes three types of families among the indigenous people in Sakha. The 'traditional family' is monoethnic, living in a rural settlement and speaking the native language as its first language and forming the core of the group. The 'intermediate' type of family combines a mixture of 'international' and 'traditional' cultures. These families can be both monoethnic or mixed, live mainly in towns, but use two languages for everyday communication. The 'cultural-assimilated' type of family is characteristic of younger (thirty-something) urban indigenous families where Russian is the primary language and 'national' traditions are long forgotten (Popov 1994: 65, 91).

ing to my informants, until the beginning of the 1960s the hunting and reindeer brigades contained mainly close relatives, and children spent their free time in the tundra. With the growing importance of school and vocational education, the introduction of mandatory army service in the 1950s, the new professional possibilities and the entrance of native people into political structures (government and Communist Party), the geography of the family expanded. People left their home villages for study and work, mainly in Yakutsk, but also in other settlements in Sakha and Siberia, in some cases also European Russia. This process not only enlarged the 'geography of kinship' but also linked through intermarriage new people and their kin with families in the Anabarskii district.

When brigades were constituted during the sovkhosation or consolidations of state farms in the 1960s no attention was paid to kinship ties.<sup>68</sup> With sedentarisation, social life became focused on smaller kin units in the 1970s and 1980s. In this period, families were allocated apartments in the village but, because of a shortage of housing, often two or three generations shared this accommodation. As house construction increased in the district, married children were usually able to move out and create their own households. In the 1970s and 1980s, when every adult person had a place of work and each household its own source of income, the extended family became less important as an economic unit.

This does not mean that social ties through kinship disappeared, but they were economically not as relevant as previously (cf. Humphrey 1998: 286). When visiting other regions, people stayed with their relatives, bringing with them from the North delicacies such as fish, bone marrow and reindeer meat. Townspeople supplied their relatives with articles that were hard to get in the North, such as books and fashionable clothes.

However, according to my older informants, people in the North in the Soviet period were wealthier than those in southern districts, and shops in Saaskylaakh and Uurung Khaia were often better stocked than those in the capital. Hence the need for direct economic assistance was not very pressing; kin ties were more important. On the other hand, as with the Buryat collective farm workers, the rural family maintained its social ties not as a production unit but as a consumption unit. The situation where households existed as different units only on paper, as shown by Caroline Humphrey (1998a: 269–70) in Barguizin, was (and still is) a reality also in Uurung Khaia:

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<sup>68</sup> Although I cannot prove it, this could have been a conscious policy on behalf of the state, as in other regions. My informants explained this in terms of increasing centralisation and control in state farm structures in order to make the brigade system more efficient. They did not see it as part of a conscious political agenda.

married children and in-laws visit their parents every day, grandchildren are left there and meals for members of the family take place every evening.

### 5.2.2. *The Family in 2000–1*

#### *Family, Clan, Descent*

When I conducted my fieldwork in the Anabarskii district the situation had changed quite dramatically from that of the Soviet period. A certain 'revival of traditional kin structures' (cf. Sneath 1993) had taken place: family structures became important in economic terms as a network for redistribution of goods and in terms of access to resources. In many cases, as with Moigo or the father of my main host, Vasili Kyltashov, the extended family had even become a production unit again. For example, it coordinated the activities of children and close siblings while hunting in the tundra or received licences from the village administration for trading produce.

According to another Popov, Andrei Aleksandrovich, 99% of Dolgan kinship terminology is of Sakha origin (1934: 132). The two-page list of terms he appended to his article on Dolgan family life (1946: 73–4) contains many terms which I heard in the Anabarskii district. Sakha people have a very rich kin terminology specifying different degrees of relatedness (for example, the older brother of one's mother or father, the husband of a parent's sister etc., see Popov 1994: 85–8). Many of these terms are no longer in use among Sakha in the central districts, but kin terms continue to distinguish older siblings from younger ones.

Dolgan in Uurung Khaia had reduced their classification of kin people (*aimakhtar*) to basics. 'Father' (*aaga*) and 'mother' (*iie* or Rus. *mama*) are used when referring to one's parents. Grandchildren address their grandparents usually as 'grandfather' or 'grandmother' (*ehee*, *ebee*). The expression for daughter or granddaughter, and for son and grandson is the same as for 'girl' or 'boy', or simply a 'child' (*uol*, *kyys*, *ogo*). Usually both younger and older brothers are called '*byraat*' and only occasionally did I hear the expression for an older brother, '*ubaai*'. While in the Sakha tradition there are different terms for younger and older sisters (*balys* and *ed'ii*), in Uurung Khaia every sister is referred to only as *ed'ii*. The same expressions are used for both maternal and paternal uncles (*taai*) and aunts (*hangas*), whereas Sakha still distinguish between maternal and paternal lines. For 'husband' and 'wife' Sakha words are used (*er kihi* and *dzaktar*). In everyday conversation, spouses more often use expressions for 'old man' (*ogonn'or*) and 'old woman' (*emeeksin*), but, according to a tradition shared with other Siberian groups (cf. Shternberg 1999: 23), these expressions are used without any negative connotation.



More interesting than the terms people use is the actual meaning of these expressions. The Dolgan family (*yeI*) in Uurung Khaia is a broad conception, the definition of which depends on the specific situation. In chapter 7 I describe how ethnicity in the Anabarskii district is connected to surnames. In the village of Uurung Khaia there are four native families—Tupriny, Potapovy, Kyltashovy, Spiridonovy—who are considered to be local Dolgan. The transmission of the surname is, as in the Soviet and Russian traditions, patrilineal and connected to the family of the husband; sons are carriers of the surname whereas daughters take the surname of their husband when they get married.

In pre-Soviet times many Siberian indigenous peoples had clans which were not tied to specific surnames. According to Popov (1934: 132), Dolgan had three clans—Dulgaan, Dongoot, and Edzeen—and clans were also common for Evenki (cf. Shirokogoroff 1929: 123–45). Discussion of the extent to which clans were linked to Tsarist administrative clans is not directly relevant in this chapter (see Dolgikh and Levin 1951; Anderson 2000; Ssorin-Chaikov 2003). More important is that in Anabar the Russian expression *rod* is nowadays, as with the Khantaika Evenki, which is seen as being almost synonymous with ‘surname’ (cf. Anderson 2000a: 177). When asked ‘What is your *rod*?’ people either do not understand the question or give their surname as an answer, whereas native peoples in other regions (Even in the Tomponskii district) still distinguish clans from surnames.

But, the word *rod* can have narrower or broader meanings for native people in Uurung Khaia. On the one hand, all people with the same surname were seen as kin people from one *rod*. On the other hand, there were different lineages among people with the same surname. During the last reindeer race on the Day of Hunters and Reindeer Herders, I discussed this with Uibaan (Ivan Onufrevich Tuprin), a reindeer herder from the 3rd Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade. A young reindeer herder with the nickname Khara Uibaan (‘Black Ivan’) won the race and took the prize—a brand new Buran snowmobile. ‘Uibaan is not Potapov,’ said my companion ‘He took his wife’s surname. He used to be Tuprin. And so, the *rod* died out—there are no more Tupriny.’ When I said that half of the village are Tupriny, Uibaan, himself a Tuprin, said, ‘They are not these Tupriny.’ On another occasion, my host in the village of Uurung Khaia, Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin, he told me that ‘We and Balyksyt [the nickname of Onufri Ivanovich Tuprin, who worked in the 3rd brigade and was Uibaan’s father] are from one *rod*. Our ancestors come from the Salga River.’

*Rod* in the narrower sense means people whose direct ancestors lived in a certain region in the district. But the notion of *rod* is not only connected to biological descent. I was told that in recent years in Uurung Khaia it had

become the 'fashion' for husbands to change their surname to that of their wives, an action that was unacceptable in Soviet times. When I discovered that the former brigadier of the 3rd Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade, Andrei Spridonov, was born as Kyltashov but took a new surname after his marriage, I asked him why he did so. He said: 'Our *sovkhos* (i.e. the MUP) carries the name of Il'ia Spiridonov. He is my distant relative and I wanted to have his surname.' My host in the tundra, the brigadier Vasili, commented jokingly, 'Andrei betrayed his family. I would never do that.'

Later I was told that Vasili was actually born as Potapov but his mother registered the children under her maiden name, Kyltashov. When I wanted to know why, Balyksyt explained that Vasili's father used to be a heavy drinker, 'Apparently the mother did not want her children to have their father's surname.' A surname is connected to certain moral qualities which die out as soon the name is not in use any more. This seemed have been effective as Vasili and his brothers were very modest alcohol consumers. What is more, fellow reindeer herders respected him as an extraordinarily good brigadier whose decisions helped make the 3rd brigade one of the best in Uurung Khaia. It lost very few reindeer and newborn calves, and the reindeer were always healthy and fat. Vasili was quite young to be a brigadier, only 35, and he and his incomer Sakha wife, Natasha, had one (adopted) son and two daughters. They lived a comfortable and relatively wealthy life, having a nice flat in the village and a carefully built and painted *balokh* in the tundra. Vasili and his brothers were quiet but sturdy men who followed their goals and did not let other people divert them from their purpose. Some ten years ago, their father abruptly overcame his drinking problem, this apparently being typical of locals who consume large amounts of alcohol. The duration of the abstinence was, of course, individual, but Vasili's father stayed 'dry', leading his family as any other elder.

In a family, the male is expected to carry his father's surname and with it the legacy of the family. The female, who as a rule changes her surname to her husband's, has less obligation in this sense. To be an alcoholic or a hero of socialist labour—or to portray various other qualities—are seen as part of one's personal identity which is transferred along with the surname. I believe this is one reason why some men have taken the surnames of their wives. A good example here is Andrei who was proud of being related to the hero of socialist labour. Another man I met in the tundra was believed to have taken the surname of his wife because his father-in-law was a 'very strong man' who led his family to economic prosperity by being able to make a good profit when trading fish and meat, and by organising successful hunting trips. The son-in-law was very well integrated in the family business and in time became a close assistant to the head of the family.

However, changing one's surname was not general practice. It was not usually condemned but people did not support the idea. Like Vasili Ky-latasov, they argued: 'You have your family and your name is also the name your grandfather and other ancestors had. They were good people. They worked hard and had many children. People who have my surname are my closest people.' Keeping one's surname was linked to loyalty to family and respect to father, not unimportant in the frames of patriarchal family ideology. On the other hand, Dolgan kinship ideology was not only fixed within formal registered categories, but had many other facets.

*Extended Kinship: In-Laws, Fictive Kin, and Adoption*

Esther Goody has compared northern Ghanaian Gonja families with English families and argues that in both cases the family is a group whose limits are unclear but the sense of unity is important (Goody 1973: 217). Dolgan families in Uurung Khaia were not different; all families were extended groups containing not only blood relatives and in-laws but also persons who sometimes had no formal connection to the family itself.

I was told by older people that it is forbidden to marry someone with the same great-great-grandparent. This is an old tradition which goes back to pre-Soviet times. This prohibition was classified by B. N. Popov as a survival from ancient times, which fortunately has now died out (1994: 59). I argue that this prohibition is still well known in the Anabarskii district, although not always followed. One young woman told me, 'We have this law that one is not allowed to marry someone as closely related as four generations [having a common great-great-grandparent]. But the problem is that everybody is related to every one else here, and sometimes people just have problems finding spouses. When the young couple are third-degree relatives [having a common great-grandparent] then elders [*stariki*] sometimes even allow it [marriage]. But see, my [second] cousin [*tvoiurodnaia sestra* in Rus.] married one of our relatives. I used to call him 'brother' and now I must get used to calling him 'our son-in-law' [*nash ziat* in Rus.].' According to my observations, in-laws are usually incorporated into the family on an equal basis and their households are part of the kinship and distribution network, and sometimes in-laws carry out even more important tasks than biological relatives. This is the case with one of Moigo's in-laws, the husband of the eldest daughter and an incomer Sakha himself, who managed contacts with the district and village administration. The man worked as head of the district heating department and knew personally all the important officials of the administration. He always had access to exact information on the movement of helicopters in the tundra and coordinated the trade of reindeer meat to the village school and hospital, and also to



incomer Russian merchants. The in-law often used his Uazik-jeep, his working vehicle, to transport fish and meat from the airport to its destination or found the necessary transport vehicle by hiring some administration driver with his work Uazik or minibus. Vasili's wife Natasha, an incomer Sakha herself, was a respected family member in her husband's large Kyltashov family and her sewing skills had further heightened her reputation because she had learned to sew Dolgan clothes better than many other local women. Her advice on trading matters was well-regarded by Vasili's father, brothers and sisters.

A person who moves from the status of relative to in-law changes first of all his/her 'terminological' status. No matter what a person's prior relation to the family, after the marriage only the term 'in-law' is used. When all in-laws are called 'son-in-law' or 'daughter-in-law' by all members of the family, then terms like 'brother' or 'sister', 'grandfather' or 'grandmother' go beyond biological ties and often mark emotional connections.

Shternberg wrote that although the Gilyak of Sakhalin had an elaborate kinship terminology, an individual tended to call all people of his or her generation 'brothers' or 'sisters', using more specific terms only when there was a direct need to classify the relationship between two people (Shternberg 1999: 17). In Sakha-speaking culture, people describe each other also as 'brother' or 'sister' when they have close emotional ties to the other person, irrespective of their biological relationship. Both in the Anabarskii district and Yakutsk, I was introduced many times to the 'brothers' and 'sisters' of the person I was staying with, only to find out later that they were not biological (*rodnoi* in Rus.) relatives at all.

The most common way of becoming a non-biological brother or sister is for two people to grow up together, either as schoolmates, best friends or in a family which has adopted other children. For example, Balyksyt once told me in the tundra that Old Moigo was his brother. When I asked more about it, he then explained that when he was young, his parents died and he was looked after by Moigo's parents, who were distant relatives. Other brothers and sisters were distributed among close relatives and grew up in other households. Growing up with the children in Moigo's parents' family, Balyksyt felt himself emotionally connected to them. Another case was Dzhingis, the best friend of Nikolai, Moigo's youngest son. Dzhingis's parents were incomer Sakha and during my fieldwork Dzhingis lived with his mother not far from Moigo's house. The young 18-year-old man is well integrated into the local community: he spoke local dialect and was known as a good hunter in the *rodovaia obshchina* Udzha. Dzhingis and Nikolai are close friends, and Dzhingis spends nearly every day at Nikolai's home. When needed, he helps Nikolai with domestic chores like unloading snow-

mobiles, collecting ice or repairing snowmobiles, but sometimes also squares up to weekend-disco fights to 'defend' Nikolai's family honour (see chapter 8). The first time I met Dzhingis he was introduced to me as Nikolai's brother.

In a similar way, grandparents, like brothers and sisters, do not have to be biological kin. One woman, Lia, introduced me to an old woman, saying: 'She is my grandmother.' I knew that the old woman could not have been Lia's grandmother because she was a biological grandmother of one of my informants who was a distant relative of Lia's. When I asked about it, Lia explained, 'She is my grandmother. When I was a child, she took care of us when my parents were not home.' Lia calls this woman's children her brothers and sisters and has the same emotional attachment to them as to her biological brothers. She is also included in the distribution network of her fictive relatives: her fictive brother supplies Lia regularly with reindeer meat.

Another avenue of affiliation with a kinship network is via adoption. Adoption was historically practised by Dolgan and also by Evenki (Popov 1934: 133; see also Shirokogoroff 1929: 248), but in the Sakha Republic it seems to be practised in modern times only by Sakha and Sakha-ised indigenous peoples.<sup>69</sup> B.N. Popov (1994) had difficulty describing modern Sakha adoption in a good light, which he classified as an anachronism. His problem was that, according to his concept, adoption was motivated by religious reasons. He solves the dilemma with the sentence 'Today adoption has other reasons', without explaining what these 'other reasons' are (1994: 61).

Adoption in Uurung Khaia is not like European adoption where the child is usually totally separated from its biological parents (E. N. Goody 1971: 342). Children are aware that they are adopted and know and communicate with their biological parents and brothers and sisters. The formal reason for adoption is usually that one family wants to have a child and the other already has several. Zina, Balyksyt's wife who has given birth to ten children, told me that she gave one of her sons to Dima, Balyksyt's younger brother: 'He was here and asked all the time, "give me a child, give me a child". Then I became pregnant and after the birth gave them this son.' In fact, many families who have adopted children sometimes give away their own children for adoption. This is also not unusual when families with adopted children often already have many of their own and in some cases after the adoption will have two or three more biological children. So Dima, the young brigadier of the 5th Uurung Khaia brigade, 'gave' one of his sons to Vasili Kyltashov, who worked in the same brigade with Balyksyt and used

<sup>69</sup> When I told reindeer-herding Even people in the Tomponskii district, who were Russian speakers, that Dolgan practiced adoption, they were shocked. 'How could you give away your child like a pup?' one woman said to me.

to work in the Dima's brigade before switching to the 5th brigade. Dima himself had a son of his own, and two years later Vasili's wife gave birth to a son too.

Esther Goody argues, using Roman adoption policy as described by Taylor, that adoption was used to create alliances between the 'true' and 'pro-parent' household after this act (in Taylor 1966: 34; E. N. Goody 1971: 335, 340). In the case of Uurung Khaia Dolgan, the adoption confirms already existing relations. As Zina told me: 'We knew the family already, and therefore we gave them the son.' On the one hand it means that she wanted to be sure that her child was in good hands. On the other hand, both families were already part of one kin network and cooperated with each other. Balyksyt's sons were aware that some of their brothers lived in other families and when Uibaan draw me a table of their kinship tree, he included the adopted children among Balyksyt's other children. When I asked Natasha, Vasili's wife, if Dima showed any interest in his biological son, she said: 'Not much, he [Vasili's son] has been here a long time already.' But Dima and Vasili visited each other often in the village and Dima took care of Vasili's reindeer, which were left in Vasili's old brigade. In this way one had the opportunity to be affiliated with different extended kinship networks using different strategies. In the next section I look at how these networks functioned as informal economic channels.

### 5.3 Cooperation among *tundroviki*

I start my analysis in the tundra setting. While in Soviet times reindeer pastures and hunting grounds were (at least on paper) distributed centrally, today the state has lost control over territorial entitlement. The district land commission has hardly any means of controlling who hunts where; officials have neither the money to hire a helicopter nor the personnel to patrol the tundra effectively. The policy of local officials is to let the hunters negotiate the boundaries among themselves. 'We register only the hunting base (*tochka*), because we do not want to cause any quarrels. The hunters can then discuss the borders among themselves,' explained the head of the district Land Commission. Such a situation where internal regulation of hunting territory boundaries is left to the hunters is not specific to Anabar; it is also practised, for example, in Evenkiia (cf. Vorob'ev 2001: 8).

The weakness of formal structures made such territorial entitlements and regulation of their use a 'public good' (Dietz et al. 2002: 20). In discussions about the 'commons' it is widely assumed that common property does not mean that everybody has access to it (see e.g. Thompson 1975; Hunt 1998) and the users had to develop a 'web of use rights that identified who had a long-term interest in the resource and thus an incentive to try to avoid



overuse' (Dietz et al. 2002: 12). In the community, where individual members were interested in the monitoring of common-pool resources, the informal regulation was generally practised on a community level (McCay 2002: 384–5). Elisabeth Cashdan (1983) argues that in the case of large territories and dispersed resources, the least costly way to defend perimeters is through social means. Michael Casimir's (1992b) social boundary defence model shows that in the case of unpredictability and low density of resources, the control network is most efficient when based on kinship.

In this section I focus on cooperation among the *tundroviki* themselves. Different groups in the tundra have unequal access to various goods and tundra resources. This situation is connected to their different institutional backgrounds and supply sources, as well as to their different economies.

I was once interviewing Moigo about kinship relations among the Dolgans, but because my Sakha language skills were not very good at that time, his daughter Agnya translated for me. When the interview finished, i.e. when Moigo felt he had said everything that he wanted to say, he stood up and left. Agnya and I continued speaking about their relatives.

*Agnya:* Our father has such a good heart. Some relatives really exploit it. Our father can give a reindeer [carcass] away if asked. And it is not only relatives who are using him. Sometimes young people come from the village to hunt here. They do not even bring their own bread with them. Our father doesn't say a word when they come and eat all our bread. Once they [people from the village] didn't even say that they were coming. My father went to hunt and they did not notice him. They shot at the reindeer and almost killed father. Then they claimed that the reindeer that father shot was theirs. Such are the youth we have today! That is why father does not permit people to hunt here anymore. Only relatives and friends—to avoid problems!

*Author:* What kind of problems?

*Agnya:* Why can't you understand? I told you a second ago! When they are people he knows, there will be no trouble, they will respect father. It is important that you get along with them. My father permitted the 3rd brigade to enter our lands because we know them well. Andriano is our relative. And Vaska, the brigadier, as well.

These few sentences from Agnya were my introduction into the topic of land entitlements and how land resources are monitored. Very often the interests of reindeer herders and hunters in a certain territory will overlap. The conflict between domestic reindeer and wild ones, and the people who used both as a resource, already existed in the Anabarskii district in pre-Revolutionary

times and was expressed in the competition for pastures and the decrease of the number of wild reindeer (Gurvich 1977: 52). In Soviet times, reindeer herders were not dependent on the wild reindeer. Every year one reindeer herd (c. 2,000 animals) was slaughtered. As my informants told me, part of that meat was distributed among reindeer herders. Also *kamusy* (very thick and warm hide from the legs of the reindeer, used to make fur boots) were distributed among people in the village although *tundroviki* were given the chance to take the best ones from the slaughtering places in the tundra. During Soviet times there was very little illegal trade in reindeer meat. Legally, only hunters were entitled to shoot wild reindeer and the illegal trade was limited because of police control of the airport. Occasionally truck drivers, who transported goods on the winter roads, would buy a carcass. Every reindeer brigade, as we saw in chapter 2, included one hunter, and members of the brigade were keen that they fulfil the quota because salaries of the whole brigade depended on it. So, in the state farm times, *tundroviki* were more interested in increasing the amount of 'legal' meat in order to receive a bigger salary and for reindeer herders the main part of the 'legal' meat was the meat of domestic reindeer. This changed in the post-Soviet period when hunting of wild reindeer increased, i.e. all groups of the population began to hunt for food and trade. In the case of Anabar in post-Soviet times, 'the economy of the nomadic reindeer herders disrupted the ecological foundation of the economy of hunters' (Khazanov 1994: 42), with the reindeer herders becoming more interested in getting access to the main resource of the hunters. Hunters had built their bases in those places where the main waves of migrating reindeer cross the rivers and they considered the territory around the cabin to be 'theirs'.<sup>70</sup> The reindeer herders, who hunt wild reindeer for food, trade and to pay debts with meat, move into these areas too. The hunters usually do not like this because the domestic reindeer herd has a tendency to drive the game away, and so they try to limit the movements of reindeer brigades inside their hunting grounds. To resolve such conflicts, land use has to be discussed among all competing users.

When asked about land use rights, people said that everybody should be free to hunt where they want. However, it is obvious that by planning hunting trips hunters make sure that the 'master' knows when they plan to hunt on his territory. I never heard of a case where the 'master' expelled someone from his hunting grounds, but I know of cases when entry to the territory was not welcome. As I discuss in chapter 8, ignoring the 'master's'

<sup>70</sup> Dolgan in the Anabarskii district wait for the herds to cross the rivers. When the reindeer step up onto the banks on the other side they are shot. This is why hunters have their settlements on the riverbanks. The second reason is that the only means of transport in summer is by motor boat.

opinion can have serious consequences when back in the village and, as I witnessed, many (especially older) hunters avoid commercial hunting unless permission has been granted by the 'master of these lands'. Consent to or denial of someone's wish to hunt on land that another hunter or hunting enterprise considered to be their 'own' was not necessarily given in direct form. What I noticed during my fieldwork is that the Dolgan way of communicating avoids giving clear negative or positive answers. Neglecting to give a positive answer means an objection,<sup>71</sup> and telling someone where the fishing lakes were or mentioning that the wild reindeer moved in a particular direction which makes them easier to shoot could be interpreted as implicit consent to undertake such activities.

For example, on one occasion Vasili, our brigadier, went hunting and killed four reindeer. When I asked how it was possible that he hunted on Moigo's territory, he replied that Moigo himself had told him about the deer on the radio. 'He let them through [*propuskal ikh* in Rus.] and told me in which direction they were moving.'

I will not argue that without the 'master's' permission he not would have killed the deer. But Vasili assured me that Moigo placed no obstacles in his way. Reindeer herders hunt constantly, and mostly only for food. There is an unwritten agreement among people who hunt in the tundra that when one shoots a reindeer on somebody else's hunting grounds he informs the 'master' at the first opportunity. Usually it is done that same evening during the regular radio session. The radio communication between Moigo and Vasili had thus a symbolic meaning. Moigo demonstrated to everyone listening to the radio (basically the whole tundra) that he is the person who controls his hunting territory and only he can entitle Vasili to shoot wild reindeer on it.

The case is different when reindeer herders need to shoot wild reindeer in greater numbers in order to pay for groceries, clothes and snowmobiles.<sup>72</sup> Often people from reindeer brigades would join a hunting brigade during the winter hunting season in February and March. Many reindeer herders I knew took a snowmobile trip to the northern tundra and stayed with their relatives at hunting bases, which automatically meant that their hunting activity was tolerated. I recall a discussion with a man called Edik. On a sunny day in March I met him in his yard where he was packing his snow-

<sup>71</sup> The case described in the last chapter, when my hosts tried to get permission from Kupaa to collect coal, was not resolved because in their daily radio communication Kupaa avoided any mention of the topic.

<sup>72</sup> Tolerance of hunting for food when one is in need and on strange hunting grounds is common in hunting societies. For an analysis of the difference between hunting for food (subsistence) and for commercial purposes in different settings, see Leacock 1954.



mobile sledge. He put boxes of ammunition and sacks of groceries onto the sledge and I helped him to rope everything together. 'I go to Suoleima [River]' he said. 'When do you go? Today?' I asked. 'Yes, I think there will be good weather for a while and guys said on the radio that they have seen some wild reindeer. So I took a week off.' 'Is there this new *obshchina* [see chapter 3],' I asked while pulling on a reindeer hide rope. 'Yes. I asked if I could come for a hunt and they said that there is plenty of wild reindeer, and told me to bring some vodka with me,' Edik laughed. 'The boys have been there for weeks and miss news and people from the village. And some good shots too!'

But there were other strategies as well. Balyksyt, from the 3rd Uurung Khaia brigade, hunted with his three sons in those regions which were outside the recognised hunting territories and near enough to be reached from the reindeer brigade's camp. He explained that when a person wanted to go on a large-scale hunt without joining a hunting party he had to negotiate with hunters and receive their permission. The problem is that there are not many good reindeer hunting territories that are in communal use. This kind of hunt is most efficient in the spring when wild reindeer are in small groups and scattered over the tundra. The summer reindeer hunt takes place at river crossings, which in most cases are the territory of some hunting enterprise. Also the spring hunt is more time and work consuming because hunters have either to hide in the tundra to wait for reindeer to come closer or to follow animals on snowmobiles. It is less efficient because a hunter kills fewer animals than in the summer over the same time period. The advantage of the spring hunt is that it can take place far away from the hunting bases with their underground ice chambers because, after butchering, the reindeer carcasses can just be left in the tundra, where they freeze in the minus 25–35°C temperatures, and collected later by snowmobile, truck or reindeer sledge. Balyksyt is therefore one of few who can have his brigade as a hunting base to return to in the evenings because the reindeer brigade is near enough to such territories.

While the wild reindeer hunt is important for subsistence, and its trade is regulated and controlled inside the community, hunting for other non-vital species such as geese and grouse (*kuropatka*) is free. The goose hunt takes place over a short period in spring and there are usually enough birds for everybody (see below). The most important thing is to be in the right place at the right time because the geese arrive first in the southern regions and spread north. In each locality, the time for active hunting is measured in days and within 10 days of the birds' arrival the hunt is usually over. Grouse are too small and unimportant to be a staple food. They are hunted by the *tundroviki* as a dietary supplement but people do not bother to travel to the

tundra to shoot these small birds. Arctic fox were occasionally trapped with steel traps and shot by reindeer herders and by visitors from the village, but the main means of trapping—permanent trap lines—is only permitted by authorised owners and therefore the arctic fox hunt is a 'closed' activity and not open for discussion.

But, although monitoring of wild reindeer hunting is a crucial issue for different interest groups in the tundra, it is not the only one. When I lived at Moigo's hunting base, we went to visit the reindeer herders of the 3rd brigade with one of his sons. Agnya sent with me a letter for Natasha, the brigadier's wife. We spent a night with the reindeer herders, and the next day Natasha gave me a parcel for Agnya. When Agnya opened it, there was a letter and patterns for decorating *untty* (fur boots) in it. Then Agnya said to me in quite an angry voice: 'I asked Natasha to send me some dark and white *kamusy* (fur from reindeer legs). But she neither sent these nor mentioned them in the letter.' When I asked why she needed *kamusy* from Natasha, Agnya explained to me: 'The reindeer herders have the best dark and white *kamusy*. We hunters only have grey furs and *kamusy* from the wild reindeer.' The 'problem' was that the best and prettiest *untty* are made from white and dark reindeer *kamusy*. 'I have begun to sew *untty* for Vladik [Agnya's three-year-old son] but have run out of dark *kamusy*,' she complained.

Besides the *kamusy*, there are other things the reindeer herders have and are able to exchange with the hunters. There were periodically shortages of fuel in the village. Fuel was brought to Uurung Khaia either by ship during summer or by trucks in November and December. After February fuel became scarce. Whereas reindeer herders receive an annual supply of 5 tonnes of fuel and 1 tonne of diesel oil (*saliarka*), hunters must buy their own fuel. Because some reindeer brigades do not use snowmobiles for weeks, herders can sometimes spare many barrels until the spring. The prices for a 100-litre barrel can vary from 1,500 roubles to 4,000 or even 4,500, if one is lucky enough to find someone who wants to sell it. Fuel for snowmobiles is a crucial commodity, because these days, after the 'snowmobile revolution' (Pelto and Müller-Wille 1987), the main means of transport for hunters has become the Russian Buran snowmobile.

In one such period of fuel shortage Moigo contacted Vasili over the portable radio. Afterwards he filled the tank with the last of his petrol and invited me to go with him to find fuel. We drove out to the tundra and after an hour's drive arrived at the *sakhyyr* of the 3rd brigade.<sup>73</sup> It was a place in the tundra where loaded reindeer sledges and carcasses of summer *harkasy*

<sup>73</sup> *Sakhyyr* is a place in the tundra where reindeer brigades leave any superfluous equipment: in summer they leave their winter sledges, fuel, clothes, groceries, dwellings (see chapter 3).

would wait for the next summer. (The hides that usually cover these dwellings are taken away to avoid destruction in winter snowstorms.) Everything was covered with snow and at first sight looked like the remains of a nomad camp after warfare, with ragged cloths on the sledges flapping in the wind. We loaded one barrel of petrol onto the snowmobile sledge and tied it with reindeer hide ropes. I asked Moigo if he had bought this fuel from Vasili but he said, 'No, I just borrowed it. I do not want to drive two days to the village and buy petrol for 4,500 roubles. It is too expensive. When fuel prices go down in the summer, I can give it back to him.' Moigo did not have to wait that long. After a few weeks a private entrepreneur arrived in Saaskylaakh with trucks selling cheap fuel. Moigo's oldest son, Ivan, who was always in the village, bought a few barrels from him and sent one to Uurung Khaia to Vasili's sister.

One other commodity of common interest to both hunters and reindeer herders is timber, which is used for heating and constructing sledges and *balokhs*. Balyksyt told me once: 'Earlier, during Communism, everything was better. There were special brigades whose task it was to supply us with timber and coal. But today we have to organise this ourselves.' Those brigades located on the Arctic Ocean coast usually collect driftwood, where plenty is driven ashore. For the brigades that migrate or hunt far away from the sea, the management of the MUP sends logs by ferry once or twice a year. These logs are unloaded at the river bank and the brigades arrive with reindeer sledges to take it away. Before doing so, however, members of the brigades distribute the timber equally among themselves (*po rovno* in Rus.), as Vasili explained to me.

One difficulty is that different types of wood are needed for different purposes. So-called 'Russian wood' (*nuucha mas*), which is a wood of poorer quality and often wet, is used for heating. Better and drier 'Sakha wood' (*hakha mas*) is used for building sledges, *balokhs*, cabins and furniture. For some parts of a reindeer sledge it is better to use wood stripped of its bark, but for others it is better to use the timber with the bark intact. I was surprised by the many functions and characteristics possessed by a single tree trunk and how different one trunk can be from another. Hunters or herders can drive many hours to the next camp to change a piece of wood. I learned the difference between wood types through hands-on experience. Once when I was in the tundra with the 3rd brigade I tried to fulfil my daily task of chopping wood. Not far away from me, Baahyi, son of Balyksyt, was making runners for the reindeer sledge. In the time that it took me to break quite big and wet pieces of the *nuucha mas* into four or five pieces to chop into smaller parts, Baahyi, despite his small light axe against my heavy ranger axe, almost finished making one runner from dry *hakha mas*. Where



timber is assigned a special purpose, people do not hesitate to travel long distances to acquire a trunk of distinct quality and shape. When Balyksyt needed some trunks with the roots on them to build runners for a sledge, he exchanged logs with Moigo. Vasili also told me that he once got some logs from Moigo but had to give a few boxes of bullets in exchange.



Plate 6. Digging coal.

Under socialism the state enterprise had distributed ammunition in quantities sufficient for hunting and even poaching. The distribution of ammunition was strictly controlled, but because getting a licence to buy a rifle was relatively easy, every hunter possessed many of these in different calibres and always had enough ammunition for the coming season.<sup>74</sup> With the beginning of the post-Socialist economy, enterprises had less ammunition to distribute, and because free market prices on it increased, ammunition became scarce.

<sup>74</sup> Here I would like to cite one discussion. The chief doctor at Saaskylaakh district hospital, Ivan Innokentievich, had previously worked for almost 20 years in Estonia and—through the irony of history—his working place was close to my home in Tallinn and his home close to my grandmother's home where I spent much of my childhood. When recalling memories about Estonia, he said: 'It is absurd how difficult it was to get permission for a rifle in Estonia during the Soviet times. You had to be a member of the Association of Hunters, bring certificates from psychiatrists, pass exams, etc. Here in Sakha you just had to obtain confirmation from the police that you had no criminal convictions, write an application and justify why you needed that rifle!'

Reindeer herders are supplied with large calibre ammunition to keep wolves away from the reindeer herd. In years when there are not many wolves around they might use this ammunition either to hunt for wild reindeer or to trade for meat with hunters. In Sakha, there were limits on how many boxes and which kinds of ammunition a person was legally allowed to buy. Then in 2000 hunters had to buy ammunition with their own money, and now they suffer badly from lack of easy access to ammunition. Buying ammunition legally is cheaper than buying it illegally, but due to the small amounts available, hunters cannot obtain enough to last the hunting season. They are often forced to buy ammunition from merchants illegally and pay double the price or hope that someone from a reindeer brigade can sell or trade ammunition. Because wolves have been scarce in recent years in the Anabarskii district, my hosts from the 3rd reindeer brigade used their bullets to shoot reindeer or barter for timber and sometimes did not even take their full ammunition quota from the management of the MUP. After being in the village, Uibaan told me: 'I went to the office of the MUP and got some bullets. They gave me 49. Father got 65 bullets last month. I think this is enough for this winter, so we don't need anymore. We could get more ammunition but I don't think we will take it from the MUP.' So, many reindeer herders had plenty of large calibre bullets and used these sometimes to trade for timber as noted above.



Plate 7. A helicopter picks up people from the reindeer brigade.

One resource that hunters have better access to now is transportation. I was picked up by helicopters from a hunting spot on a number of occasions during my fieldwork, and then I had to take with me sacks of fish for the relatives of the *tundroviki* in the village. When hunters manage to find a buyer for their meat, their trading partner often has to take it out of the tundra. Big companies like ALROSA regularly send a helicopter, while local enterprises send trucks. People in the tundra, no matter what their occupation, regularly need additional supplies like flour, sugar or salt. Whenever possible, relatives from the village send such groceries out to hunting bases aboard helicopters and trucks to be picked up later by herders. Cigarettes, sweets and alcohol are constantly in short supply and relatives in the village will send these to the tundra at every opportunity.

Helicopters and trucks are also used to carry meat and fish as well as passengers to the village. Since the collapse of the Soviet economy, transportation has become extremely irregular and unpredictable (cf. Vitebsky 2000). Sometimes people may wait for weeks to fly out, and then sometimes many helicopters all come at once. Those reindeer brigades that migrate in the vicinity of hunting bases have the advantage of being able to arrange the use of hunters' trucks and helicopters. Such arrangements are usually made via radio. Initially, reindeer herders contact hunters, and if a helicopter or truck is coming, they then radio relatives in Uurung Khaia. The role of hunters in convincing pilots to take private parcels and people with them is crucial because, owing to regulations, helicopter crews are reluctant to take with them anything other than official cargo.

Cooperation is also necessary to monitor access to hunting and fishing grounds. In the Anabarskii district some individuals or groups have a recognised entitlement to hunt and fish in certain regions and an exclusive right not to tolerate others' activity in the region. The inclusion of other people as resource users is regulated through extended kinship. This does not mean that a person has only one option if he wants to fish or hunt. As is often the case in small, intimate communities, one person can be part of a number of kinship networks (either through marriage, adoption or friendship) and therefore have access to various hunting and fishing grounds (cf. Myers 1989). These networks have been adapted to tundra life and regulate not only the use of resources but, in situations where access to different goods and services is unequally distributed, also the flow of goods and services. Cooperation among *tundroviki* is only one part of informal networks. In the next section I explore the connections that link the tundra with the village and town.



#### 5.4 Relations between Tundra and Village/Town

In this section I discuss the reciprocal relationship between tundra inhabitants and village and/or city dwellers. Although the shops in the villages of Anabarskii district are well stocked and basic articles are available, we can still describe the reality of the Russian Arctic as an 'economy of shortage' (Verdery 1993). The goods are unequally distributed individually and regionally. Therefore, constant exchange is necessary. Barbara Bodenhorn has studied Alaskan Inupiat networks and stresses that for the people themselves such sharing is seen as something they 'never keep track of' (Bodenhorn 2000: 44). When one observes the flow of fish, meat and *kamusy* (reindeer leg fur) out of the tundra to the village or to Yakutsk, people tell the same story: they just share what they have with their relatives. But, this is not a one-way flow of items because, like post-Mao extended kinship exchange networks in China, such investment provides security, and the 'symmetry' of the network becomes obvious only in the larger context of the long term (Siu 1993; cf. Sneath 1993: 196).

Another theoretical approach that I find valuable when discussing network-based reciprocity is the analysis of (post-Socialist) bartering. Ssorin-Chaikov (2000) shows that in the post-Socialist situation the boundary between barter and reciprocity can sometimes be fluid and the actors themselves do not always make the distinction in practice. Clarke argues (2000: 199) that in the context of post-Socialist bartering, giving and receiving is often connected to reciprocity. Scholars stress that bartering is influenced by the cultural and political context (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1997: 2; Humphrey 2000: 72). Common to both kinship and barter networks is embeddedness in social networks and the meaning of trust (Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1997a; Clarke 2000; Seabright 2000a). Humphrey (2002: 15) states that 'barter establishes pools of trust and mutual help' and this is also how kinship networks function. Useful to my main argument is the concept of 'information islands' developed by Seabright (2000b). Seabright relates 'information islands' with production and marketing by companies who have little knowledge and connections in regions outside their prime area. To market their produce or buy goods they have to link up with other enterprises in the target regions and establish networks. In Sakha 'resource islands' exist where different social groups in different geographical locations have unequal access to resources, as revealed when analysing reciprocal networks that link the tundra, village and towns. Another feature that links post-Socialist kinship reciprocity with the post-Socialist barter system is that both sit under the shadow of commercial activity and are largely carried out at an informal level (cf. Ledeneva 2000).

Fishing illustrates very well the nature of reciprocal networks and the thin line between sharing and reciprocity. November is an important period in the annual cycle in the Anabarskii district. Although the fishing season starts at the end of September the most intensive time is in November, when the polar night commences. There are 24 hours of darkness as people drive from one lake to another or travel along the frozen rivers by snowmobile to check fishing nets and collect fish. This is hard work because the temperature is about  $-50^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the fishermen may be out for 10–14 hours at a stretch. Winter fishing itself is exhausting work: the nets are under the ice; the holes need to be opened up, the nets pulled out and the fish collected and stored in huge sacks. But the fish that are caught are important elements in non-commercial sharing and reciprocity.

A reindeer herder from the 3rd brigade, when asked what he was going to do with the catch from the coming fishing season, told me: 'I need to pay some debts. And then I must give some of the fish to my countrymen (*zemliakam*).'<sup>7</sup> *Tundroviki* are well stocked with meat, *kamusy* and fish, which are brought to the village by snowmobiles and very often given away to relatives or friends. Vasili said to me once, 'When you shoot a reindeer, you give the fur to your partner (*partnër*). Sometimes you give only fur, but sometimes a whole carcass.' Very occasionally the sharing of meat and fish leaves the network of the extended kinship and becomes general sharing with the community. For instance, Old Moigo was famous for his generosity in distributing meat among village people who were going hungry. Agnya mentioned to me, 'Father is sometimes so naïve. He gives away a whole carcass. You can just come and ask and you get meat.' Another time Moigo's son Nikolai told me: 'When we go to the tundra for meat, father says, "that's enough, that's enough." He takes only a few carcasses to the village, and then just gives them away.'

Some of the fish and meat is sold and the rest is distributed among relatives or friends. Twice a week, when the flights to Yakutsk come in, a huge crowd carrying big sacks of frozen fish and reindeer meat will gather at the local airport. These sacks are sent to Yakutsk to be picked up by people when the plane lands, and the fish and meat become a good which circulates in the network that starts in the tundra, moves out to the village and then all the way to the city (in most cases Yakutsk). Food and fur production is 'a joint project through which kinship relations are constituted and reproduced' (Kaneff 2002a: 43), and the 'circulation of food', similar to that among Alaskan Inupiat, 'is paralleled by circulation of many other things: equipment, mutual help, children, political support' (Bodenhorn 2000: 40). This chain of exchange has two levels: produce from the tundra flows in one direction and assistance and industrially produced goods move back in the

other. Similar to Zapotec *compadrazgo* networks, the extended family networks in Uurung Khaia link people beyond social limits and geographical boundaries and have an ideological justification through symbols. In the community of Uurung Khaia, like Zapotec as discussed by Cohen, it was couched in terms of 'tradition' or 'this is what we always have done' (cf. Cohen 1999: chapter 4).

Other forms of food shared with relatives include industrially produced butter, milk powder, flour and vegetable oil. Besides fuel, reindeer herders receive food and cigarettes once a year. This comes in huge quantities because the MUP gives these supplies in lieu of three or four months' salary. The director often secures a good deal by getting cheap supplies from enterprises in Yakutsk or Udachnyi. Also truckloads of groceries are sent to Uurung Khaia as part of the state subsidy to reindeer herders and these groceries are distributed as well.

I remember one sunny morning in May when I visited the MUP office building. The usually empty village square in front of the building was packed with 'Buran' snowmobiles hitched to sledges and the air was filled with shouts and the sound of revving engines. Men were loading their supplies (their 'salary') into sacks and boxes and tying them onto their sledges and driving away. After chatting for a while, I went to visit Balyksyt. His kitchen was filled with sacks of flour, boxes of macaroni and oil bottles. At lunch time Zina, Balyksyt's wife, suddenly said, 'At one time we were poorer than the villagers. Village people used to find groceries and send them out to us. Now we have groceries to give away. Vaska and Uibaan [sons of the couple working in the same reindeer brigade] are counted as independent households and so we receive groceries for three people. People are poor now in the village. They have less to eat. So sometimes we help the villagers.'

Sharing food in times of scarcity is for Anabar people, like the Inupiat, an enactment of 'being related' (Bodenhorn 2000: 40). This was explained to me in terms of tradition: kin people have to take care of each other, and whereas in Soviet times *tundroviki* were helped by their relatives in the village, now it is the other way around. Sharing groceries and meat with older relatives and supplying parents with the choicest fish are an important part of kinship networks among the Dolgan. Balyksyt and Zina, for example, shared flour and vegetable oil with some close relatives in neighbouring houses and even sent some groceries to Syndassko in Krasnoiarskii Krai. According to my observations, it was the women who discussed and negotiated the sharing process among themselves. Because cooking is largely a woman's task, women were well aware of shortages in their supplies. When meeting other women in the village or speaking to them via the radio, they



would tell each other about any shortages and negotiate food sharing. Wives would often seek their husbands' agreement before giving away supplies, but because the families involved in such food sharing were close relatives, the men usually agreed easily.

When I asked Zina if they had relatives in the Dolgan village of Syndassko, in Krasnoiarskii Krai, she said: 'There is one old woman who is our relative. For the last few years we have sent Uibaan to Syndassko by snowmobile. We send her groceries and other things. The old woman (*emieeksin*) is alone; her sister died a few years ago. Uiban goes to Syndassko almost every year—he should know the way there pretty well by now!' Zina felt personally responsible for the well-being of this old woman and stressed to me many times afterwards that 'she is alone and therefore we must support her'.

One element that is included in the sharing network is money (cash). An absence of cash is typical of the post-Soviet economy. Anderson writes that in Evenkiia in the middle of 1990s only a third of all transactions took place using 'living money' i.e. cash. He shows that enterprises relied mostly on the barter of goods (Anderson 2000c: 321). During my fieldwork, agriculture in Anabar was predominantly part of the 'non-monetary market economy' Clarke (2000). Because of this, inflows of cash were limited and in the village of Uurung Khaia, only a few groups had regular access to cash: the ALROSA workers, pensioners and reindeer herders. All reindeer herders in the Republic of Sakha, as mentioned in chapter 3, receive a salary from the state budget, which means that their cash income is quite stable. Many people in the village receive their wages in goods and groceries or have credit in a village shop. Most entrepreneurs (*kommersanty*) who come to the North to sell their goods accept only barter deals. They exchange commodities like clothes, groceries, ammunition, alcohol and spare parts for snowmobiles for meat, fish and *kamusy* and often refuse to take money.<sup>75</sup> In this sense, cash is a 'luxury commodity' in the village. But people still need it sometimes. Helicopter tickets, some communal services like electricity, and goods like alcohol and cigarettes purchased at night (whether in legal or illegal shops)<sup>76</sup> have to be paid for with cash. Parents whose children study in the city also regularly send them money. Anderson (2000c: 343) argues that in the mid-1990s 'financial crises ... disqualified the rouble from the

<sup>75</sup> I suppose this had to do with the manipulation of the prices; it was seemingly more profitable not to pay cash but to barter.

<sup>76</sup> Parties stoked by vodka often take place at night. To buy another bottle, one has to purchase it from an illegal bootlegger (*v tochke*). To try to combat the illicit alcohol trade, one shop in the village of Saaskylaakh has received a licence to sell vodka, beer and cigarettes at night.

role of an instrument of social integration'. In 2000 and 2001 the strength of the rouble increased and only once during my fieldwork did people refuse to accept my money and insist that I paid in goods.<sup>77</sup>

Although cash is often lent it is given away only in particular cases and in small sums. Since most people in the village have only an extremely limited cash inflow, even lending money requires a high degree of trust that one day the money will be returned. Lending cash to someone therefore only happens where there are strong bonds of trust. I sometimes saw Balyksyt give his older relatives a few hundred roubles when they needed money to buy cigarettes, vodka, some minor household tools or bread. Those members of the family with access to cash are a source for the whole family, but sharing cash in this way has strict limits: in most cases it must be returned at the first opportunity.

I now want to discuss villagers' roles in the distribution networks. Whereas hunters and reindeer herders always have fish, furs and meat to distribute, people in the village have better access to shops and the commodities sold there. Basic groceries and industrial goods are almost always available in three shops in the village. Nevertheless, the prices differ, and prices for groceries in particular depend on the merchant. There are some goods, for example flour, sugar, tea, milk powder, cigarettes, potatoes, sweets and different sauces, that people consider to be the necessities of daily life and these are bought in large amounts when on sale at lower prices—and when people have the money. Sometimes entrepreneurs will bring into the village fruit, eggs, fashionable clothes, VCRs, TV sets, music cassettes, ammunition and spare parts for snowmobiles. These articles are not often available and so are snapped up straightaway. When these scarce commodities are for sale, *tundroviki* often ask their relatives (via radio) to buy them. The scarcest commodity in the tundra during my fieldwork period was cigarettes. Several times we were down to our last cigarettes when suddenly a helicopter would land and a box of cigarettes would be thrown out, sent by relatives from the village.

Cooperation between tundra and village is more than the exchange of groceries. Just as reindeer herders may visit their relatives in hunting brigades during the reindeer hunting season (described above) so the villagers use *tundroviki* as a basis for seasonal hunting. People classified as belonging to the Small-Numbered Peoples are allowed by law to hunt for food outside the hunting season—'for their own kettle' (*dlia svoego kotla* in Rus.)

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<sup>77</sup> This was a very special case, because my hosts, to whom I owed money for accommodation, knew that I would shortly be travelling to Moscow for a few weeks. So instead of asking for money, they asked if I could bring back certain goods that are cheaper in European Russia and of better quality.

(*Pravila* 2001: §19a). In winter, village men often take the opportunity to join a relative when he goes to the tundra to shoot a reindeer or two. But the time when villagers most use the hospitality of their tundra relatives is during the goose hunting season in May and June, when the village of Uurung Khaia is almost empty of adult men. Most of them are in the tundra stocking up on their supply of meat.

In post-Soviet times the importance of goose hunting has increased. Goose hunting had been popular in the Soviet era but it was viewed more as a way of adding variety to the diet. Today it is seen as a relatively cheap and easy way of collecting meat supplies over a longer period. Goose hunting is easier than hunting wild reindeer as it needs no special skills or techniques. It takes place at a time when brigades in the tundra are easy to reach across the last snow of the season but it is not as cold as during the spring reindeer migration season. The hunt for geese has been subordinated to 'the law of tundra', with each hunter being limited to a quota of 99 geese. Many village men do not leave the tundra until they fill that number and they stay with the tundra brigades for weeks. During the hunting season, guests from the village are fed and are also often supplied with rifles and ammunition.

Another form of kinship-based mutual support in the Anabarskii district is the taking care of each others' children. Village relatives who receive meat and fish from the tundra are expected to look after the children of *tundroviki* when they are in the village attending school. When adult *tundroviki* are out in the tundra, children either live at their parents' home or with relatives but are fed by village relatives. These relatives also are responsible for the health of the tundra children. Conversely, in recent years villagers have started to send their children to the tundra to relatives during the summer school holidays. As Zina said to me once: 'I don't know what's happened to our children. They never used to want to go to the tundra. But now ... as soon as school is over, they ask to be sent to the tundra!' There is an obvious reason why children should find the tundra more interesting these days. Since the collapse of Soviet social service structures, the village has become a very boring place during the summer. In Soviet times there were several interest groups at the village school: children had the chance to play music, engage in the arts and play sports, or they were sent to Young Pioneer camps all over the 'Great Homeland' (*Velikaia rodina*). In post-Soviet days, the village has become a virtual ghost-town during the summer. Most teachers who were incomers to Sakha leave for a summer break. Also there are fewer children in the village because the *tundroviki* take their families to the tundra. Apart from watching television and playing football, there is hardly any entertainment for children left in the village. In the tundra children have more activities to engage themselves in—not least the daily activities associ-



ated with the migration. The boys help to catch reindeer, go fishing and hunt with their elders, while the girls spend their days picking berries, collecting bird eggs, and also helping with the herding.

Looking after relatives' children is normally a woman's responsibility. In the village they feed them, send them to school and supervise their studies. I remember an April day in Uurung Khaia when I was visiting Balyksyt. Suddenly the door opened and three young children aged between seven and thirteen came in. Zina prepared their food and put it on the table, explaining 'These are Djökka. Their parents are in the tundra and we keep an eye on their kids.'

The reciprocal cooperation network between tundra and village is extended to the city as well. Almost every family I knew had some relatives in Yakutsk and people from Anabar often travel to the south and vice versa. Every plane I took to the north during my fieldwork was full. Although plane tickets are generally beyond the reach of most indigenous people, many passengers have their tickets paid for by some enterprise or the district administration. And numerous institutions pay the travel costs of business trips, schooling for specialists, visits to hospitals, student vacations and so on. On flight days, twice a week in both directions, the area in front of the gates for the Anabar flights becomes a scene of great chaos. Travel company groups and single travellers try to press themselves through the gates, dragging with them huge cases. In this human cattleyard I learned why it is strategic to travel in groups. My field assistants and I adopted the same technique as everyone else: I would use my greater bulk to push through the gate past dozens of people, pass in front of the bored policeman, and then, before I was bundled past the second security gate, I would take the luggage handed to me by my colleagues through the gates and grab my colleagues' hands and try to pull them through the first gate. To get past the second gate was easy because it was under the guard of heavily armed police officers who in this case were willing to maintain order. Nobody could ever explain to me why these people—all of whom have tickets—must act in this way and why none of this fighting and scrabbling ever took place in front of other gates for flights to other parts of Sakha. In many cases, when I made my last push through the mass of people, somebody would grab my hand and ask me to take a small parcel or letter for someone living in Uurung Khaia or Saaskylaakh. In time I learned that using this kind of mail service is usual in Russia and even strangers can ask you to do them this favour: the human postal service is faster and also cheaper. People from Anabar also prefer this kind of mailing instead of relying on state institutions. For example, I was often asked to take letters and small parcels with me to the older sister of Old Moigo's wife, Maria. She had married after vocational school and stayed in

the city. Vasili also had an uncle living in Yakutsk and I was obliged to visit him when in the city to tell him news from Uurung Khaia and pick up letters for the Anabar relatives.

There are many young students from Uurung Khaia who study in Yakutsk. When people go to study outside their home district (Yakutsk, Udachnyi, Mirnyi), they usually stay with their relatives. Families from rural districts regularly supply their children with fish and meat and sometimes articles which are scarce in the city or seen as a delicacy—*kamusy*, bone marrow, caviar. Relatives living in Anabar often sew *unty* and arctic fox fur hats for their friends and family and send these items with their children to the south. City people are obliged to feed their relatives and help with other services if needed during their stay. In August, before school starts, whole families of *ulusnye* (people from rural districts) come to Yakutsk to buy new clothes, new school books and other supplies. This makes August in Yakutsk the most interesting but also the most dangerous month of the year. It is interesting to observe how families, all dressed in the village style i.e. cheaply and less stylishly than those from the town, walk slowly down the pavements admiring the city architecture and the people. In shops, rural families are easily recognisable by the way the whole family discusses loudly the pros and cons of the items they want to buy. In the evenings, men join their city and village friends in bars and discos—which then become the most violent places in town. Both the town's inhabitants and the newspapers of Yakutsk consider young male students, who come to the town to study and are beyond the control of their authoritarian fathers, as a social problem. As my informants, many of them failed students, told me, August is the best time of the year for them. They fly to the city and stay with friends who have empty apartments because their city relatives are visiting relatives in the central districts to help on the land and pick berries. Young men hang out all over the city, drinking beer and making passes at girls. Often fights break out between groups of men from different districts, and such youngsters will harass people on the streets to get money for alcohol. Here a different notion of crime (as I discuss in chapter 8) appears. Parents prefer that their children stay with relatives in August in order to be under some kind of control. At the beginning of September, rural relatives—both families and those students who failed to pass university entrance exams—return to their home districts and city life quietens down again.

Some people from the Anabarskii district have cars and even apartments in Yakutsk. To buy a car on hire purchase (both Russian Ladas and used Japanese cars) is not difficult and not too expensive either. Therefore young men who travel at least once a year to the capital prefer to own a car, though more for reasons of prestige than practicality. These cars are usually

then loaned to city relatives who own a garage on the understanding that they can use them but must keep them in good condition. The apartments tend to be rented out.

City relatives not only offer accommodation to their village relatives when they travel to Yakutsk, Udachnyi or other places. The flow of food is two-way and relatives from the cities supply their kin in the district with groceries which are much cheaper in the south. Sometimes relatives barter groceries for the tundra produce, although both sides operate on the basis of cheap 'friendship prices'. For example, I once asked Balyksyt where he was going to buy his groceries for the next summer season. He answered, 'I do not need any groceries. My son-in-law from Yakutsk came here with a truck and brought me enough stuff.' The son-in-law, who lives in Yakutsk, leased a truck with his friends and filled it with groceries. They drove to the north and exchanged the goods with Balyksyt and his friends for reindeer meat and fish. It was more profitable for both sides to barter than for either to buy groceries from entrepreneurs or meat and fish on the city market.

More important than the average 'shop food' are those products that come directly from the agricultural villages of central Sakha. On account of the long history of contacts with Sakha people, the inhabitants of the North have learned to enjoy special Sakha foods which are nowadays hard to get even in central districts and are generally considered by the indigenous population to be a delicacy. Families with in-laws in these Sakha villages and towns have the best access to such food items. When their in-laws go to visit their families or when kin from central villages come north for a visit, they bring as presents frozen cow's milk, colt's meat, and various herbs and mushrooms prized by Sakha people for use in traditional dishes. Because the native people of Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh have adopted various Sakha customs for weddings, birthdays and funerals, kin people from central districts send or bring with them *kumys* (a lightly alcoholic drink made from fermented mare's milk) to celebrate weddings and anniversaries of respected elders.

Very much appreciated are town relatives' connections with various institutions which can provide vital documents. The usual practice is to ask relatives 'with connections' to arrange plane tickets in and out of the Sakha Republic for the summer travel period (June, August and September) when many people travel either on holidays or to and from their places of study. However, sometimes more 'serious' documents are produced via informal channels. Many young men I met during my stay in the Anabarskii district had obtained their driving licences in Yakutsk using the help of their kin people. One man related a typical experience. 'I failed the exam. Then I tried once more and I failed again. Then I had enough. I thought, "Fuck it; it's



easier just to pay for it". And I bought a driver's licence for 3,500 roubles. (*Ia dumal, nakhui eto lekche platit' za eto. I ia kupil prava za 3,500 rublei.*)' Another man, a high official in the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP gave me a similar explanation as to why he had bought his driving licence illegally: he had failed the test and found it faster and easier to buy it, only in his case the price was 5,000 roubles.

A constant worry and headache for parents of sons is the compulsory military service that every young man must do. Parents often sought various ways to exempt their sons as it was no secret that many young men from the northern districts were sent to Chechnya as snipers. As one young man said to me proudly: 'We grew up in the tundra and therefore we shoot well'. For young 17–19 year-olds, army service is often the only chance they may get to travel and the only way to get out of their isolated district because of the high costs of transport. Most parents had another opinion: 'My son is stupid. He wants to go into the army', a close relative of an 18-year-old man told me flatly. 'He is really good at sport. He is already a district champion in ethnic sports. We will arrange papers for him so that he is not conscripted.' In such a situation relatives in Yakutsk or in the local administration with good contacts with medical institutions can help young men avoid army service by putting them into hospital and producing papers which prove that the person is too ill to be drafted into the army. This is a highly risky activity because in Russia control over officials has strengthened in recent years. One must have very good connections at the top of the hierarchy in medical or administrative institutions to pursue such 'unpatriotic' goals without being afraid of the consequences. As I was told, one can no longer simply buy the necessary papers that will free a son from military service. Strong bonds of trust are needed on both sides to procure such papers. In many cases, the family of the young man will have to pay for the necessary documents but I know cases where papers were fabricated as a favour to family members at no cost.

Like the reciprocal networks in the tundra, networks that connect the tundra with villages and towns give people access to unequally distributed resources. These latter networks not only provide access to food resources but also to a wide variety of services such as accommodation and contacts with officials. So far we have looked at reciprocity within the kinship network; in the next section we will look at how reciprocity at my field site was limited not just to relatives but in some cases went beyond the kinship line.

### 5.5 Non-Kin Reciprocity

Sharing is not always related to kinship networks. Here I would like to discuss some aspects of non-kin cooperation which make this reciprocity socially relevant. In a small, intimate community there are many other ties

between people than simply kinship relations: people are friends, colleagues, classmates or neighbours. Such relationships often include a moral obligation to help one another and a right to expect support when needed. In the tundra a person is often in the situation where he or she has to rely on other people despite the fact that they do not belong to the family. For example, offering shelter from a snowstorm or lending tools are common practices among *tundroviki*. In the village, with increasing unemployment and decreasing flows of money, people in many cases are forced to seek help, i.e. to ask for favours such as helping with food or transport.

In May 2001 we had a picnic in a *balokh* not far from the village with its owner, Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin. I asked him how the use of his *balokh* was regulated. 'Everybody can use it. If someone comes in a snowstorm and needs shelter, he can stay here. Therefore I leave it open. When people know that they are going to stay here, they tell me. The main thing is that they do not do something bad.'

Sharing shelter and allowing other people to use *balokhs* in the tundra is not unusual in the Arctic (see Ziker 2002a: 142). But there is an unwritten obligation (rule) 'not to do something bad'. Once during a hunting trip with three other men, our old Buran snowmobile broke down. They managed a temporary repair of the engine and we were able to drive about ten kilometres up to a hunting cabin on the Salga River. We arrived quite late, but because of the summer polar day we were able to find fish, reindeer meat, tea, sugar and frozen bread in the cabin and cooked a meal. The next day my companions found the top of a snowmobile engine in the storage shed next to the cabin and replaced the broken parts of the snowmobile engine. While they repaired the engine, I cleaned up the cabin and chopped wood to replace what we had used for heating and cooking. When we arrived at the next reindeer brigade, my companions sent the owner of the cabin a message saying that we had used the place and borrowed engine parts. This kind of survival aid in the tundra excludes no-one and, as I was told, there is no reason for it to be otherwise. Most *tundroviki* in the district know each other and with few exceptions they are all local native people who meet each other regularly on hunting trips, migration, at the corral head count or at social events in the villages of Saaskylaakh and Uurung Khaia. Stealing or otherwise violating property rights is usually perpetrated either in the village or close to a settlement; far away from the village it is simple to track someone's movements (see chapter 8). Although many facilities at tundra hunting bases are kept locked, it is always possible to find shelter and food when needed.

Besides letting people use their cabins and *balokhs* in the tundra, sharing food and hides with non-kin people is practised in the villages of Uurung

Khaia and Saaskylaakh. This practice is explained as a Dolgan custom of helping people who are in need—*tüngehe*. This custom has recently been heralded by the village administration as part of a revival of 'traditional culture'. This 'revival' is supported by the Anabar AKMNS (indigenous peoples' association). In their public speeches and in school classes on native culture, activists in the local indigenous movements love to emphasise sharing and hospitality as one feature of the 'indigenous mentality'. These activists are only very marginally involved in sharing networks and have little chance of demonstrating their 'Arctic hospitality'. One reason for this is that they don't have any resources to distribute among the broad sector of the poor in the community. Thus the AKMNS encourages other institutions to practice *tüngehe*. In the past few years the *rodovaia obshchina* Udzha, the only *obshchina* with a cultural orientation, has started to practice *tüngehe* openly, helping poorer and old community members by providing them with meat and fish (Udzha 2001). The director of Udzha was interested in Dolgan traditions and was an active supporter of the indigenous political movement. The 'traditional' activities of Udzha can therefore also be indirectly linked to the political ambitions of its director, who stood for a seat on the village council in 2001.

The old Dolgan custom *tüngehe*, described in the 1930s by Popov (1934: 130), means that one has to share one's possession, especially food, with people who need it. The tradition of sharing was common among almost all natives of Siberia (Dolgikh and Levin 1951: 104). As is known from the ethnographic record (Popov 1937b: 98), selling and buying among Dolgan was also practised with non-Dolgan people. It was generally accepted that one should help one's 'own people' without expecting money, but, like pre-Revolutionary practices, *tüngehe* sharing was not necessarily focused on relatives (Dolgikh and Levin 1951). Moigo, for example, helped many poorer non-kin people. One day I saw Nikolai with his friend Dzhingiz driving by on a snowmobile. On the snowmobile's sledge lay a reindeer carcass. When they later came to visit me, I asked where they had taken the meat. Nikolai answered, 'There is a grandmother in the lower village. She has no relatives and my father sent her a reindeer.'

Moigo's practice of sending meat and fish to lone elders and poor families who had little possibility of being sent fresh food for free was rather an exception than a rule, powered by his generous personality. In this period of shortages and inequalities, there were not many people in the community who could show such generosity and build their social capital in this way (cf. Woodburn 1998; Bodenhorn 2000). But some limited sharing with non-kin people takes place all the time. During periods of high unemployment and delayed payment of salaries, almost every household periodically suffers a



shortage of groceries or other necessities. Neighbours constantly borrow bread, flour, sugar, salt and oil from each other. Often when a husband is away in the tundra, his wife will ask a neighbour to help with chopping firewood or bringing in ice to melt for water.

According to my informants, this form of leaning on one's community members when food is short is quite a recent phenomenon. As one Russian official in the Saaskylaakh administration told me: 'Something is going wrong with these northern people. Once they were proud and did not need to ask for everything. Last week my neighbour came to ask me for money for bread. He of course drank it. Next day the mother sends a daughter for the bread. I gave it to her. Next day the mama herself came to ask for more money and food. Then I threw her out.' This is an extreme example, but there were families in both villages who regularly suffered from a lack of basic foodstuffs. In many cases they were lone mothers with many children who asked neighbours and relatives not only for food but also for help in chopping wood, bringing in ice or repairing something in the household. Refusing to help when there was no food to feed children or there were old people was generally condemned within the indigenous community. Although most people did not volunteer to share food with others, unlike Moigo, general opinion is that every human has the right to eat and to have shelter. I suppose this approach is a continuation not only of the long tradition of interdependence among indigenous people but also the centuries' long experience of how quickly death comes when one is left without food or help. I recall one evening at the home of Vasili's sister when I sat with her father in the kitchen. The old man was complaining to me about the increasing 'lumpenisation' of villagers together with the growth of alcoholism and poverty. 'Some families do not even have bread to eat,' the old man told me 'In the Soviet time, people went to work but now many people don't have work and do not even try to find it. They have no money, nothing. Thank god the village administration heats all apartments centrally. And so they have to live by asking for food from others. How can you refuse to help when there is a bunch of hungry children? Of course people give bread, flour and meat even if they don't have enough for themselves.'

One form of sharing is 'tea drinking', i.e. the custom of offering food and tea to every visitor. Visiting is seen as an important form of communication and a leisure activity in the village. As one hunter told me when he came to visit me one evening, 'Today, I have drunk tea six times already!' Ziker (2002a: 139) writes that in Ust-Avam offering food to visitors was one form of food sharing and that people consciously established networks in order to have access to food when they had nothing to eat at home. I doubt whether tea drinking was a conscious strategy in Uurung Khaia. Offering

food through socialising is rather a demonstration of a person's interest in maintaining good relations with the visitor and showing respect to them. People who are marginalised because they drink too much alcohol and cannot take care of their family or go constantly to neighbours to beg for food and other favours, are not welcomed as guests and are usually not included in the network of 'tea drinking' guests, i.e. they are not offered tea and food when do go visiting. Here, 'tea drinking' can be seen as an investment in building and strengthening networks by showing respect and interest in the other person.

Only in the case of friendship does non-kin reciprocity extend beyond providing basic survival needs to providing professional/social advantages. My host Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin, a hunter employed in the enterprise 'Elden' (see chapter 3), had a big family and therefore was periodically in need of fresh fish and reindeer meat. He often received it from his colleagues and there were some private fishermen who brought Stepan Fiodorovich fish when they were in the village. For his part, Stepan Fiodorovich helped these fishermen to sell their catch through 'Elden' when the enterprise found a buyer who was willing to pay a good price. I heard accusations in statements by AKMNS activists about people who distributed government grants not only among their relatives but gave them to the children of their best friends. Such non-kin relationships can also be significant when distributing resources within formal structures. In chapter 3 I described how the director of the hunting enterprise 'Elden' would contact the head of the district administration Androsof when he needed documents or credit rather than following the formal path of first asking the director of the MUP or head of the village administration. Humphrey uses the concept of 'manipulable resources' and 'mastery of organisation' when discussing how private property is linked to collective property (1998a, 1998b). In Anabar, this kind of manipulation takes place not only within one institution (as discussed in the example of the reindeer brigade in chapter 6) but more commonly between formal institutions which still maintain links with the MUP as the former state farm and with the village administration, whose role has increased in recent years with the failure of the successor enterprise of the state farm. Anderson (1998b, 2000a) calls this kind of practice 'gathering intelligence'—where former socialist leaders still maintain contacts that help them to gain access to resources. 'Informal' lubrication of formal structures is quite similar for people with long-term connections and for relatives. A son in an *obshchina* may receive economic help from the district administration in the form of a new all-terrain vehicle because the head of the district administration is the uncle of the enterprise director, or another enterprise may receive credit because the director is a long-time friend and former colleague of the head of

the district administration. A young man can receive a job in a reindeer brigade because his uncle has been a brigadier there or some lone fisherman can sell his produce through another enterprise because he is a friend of a particular hunter. But this does not mean that such people are inextricably embedded in the 'social relations of obligation'. A person is not automatically obliged to help all his friends or the distant relatives of his friends, and I know cases of a request for help being politely but firmly refused. One informant of mine refused to sell a piece of mammoth tusk to the son of his old-time colleague explaining that this young carver does not want to pay as much as merchants do. But during this time, both men visited each other regularly and used each other's transport vehicles to send supplies to the tundra.

As I have shown above, non-kin reciprocity and sharing is generally limited to satisfying primary needs and only in the case of friendship does it go beyond that. Sharing with non-kin people happens for a variety of reasons. In Arctic life, an individual's survival depends on the will of others, and the help of non-relatives is especially important during emergencies, where shelter, food, fuel and hides can be essential to survival. In the village, according to the local ethos, every community member has the right to food when in danger of starvation. In the village, the moral obligation of sharing with poorer community members, as mentioned also by Scott (1976: 6), can today sometimes be converted into political capital or exploited as part of the campaign for a 'revival of roots' as shown above. Constant borrowing of food and other commodities among neighbours is one form of social interaction but it is also caused by increasing social inequality and is for many families a strategy for meeting one's basic needs. Wider reciprocal non-kin sharing takes place only when the people involved are close friends and the relationship is comparable with that between relatives.

## 5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the way reciprocity and sharing are constructed in the postsocialist Arctic. The transformation processes in the postsocialist economy generally require the development of new, often informal, structures to survive under new conditions. The negative side of a market economy and capitalist industrial society—the danger of starvation—arrived with the collapse of the old Soviet economic and social structures (Polanyi 1985: 163–4). According to the substantivist concept, expressed by Karl Polanyi in his essays in his co-edited book *Trade and Market in the Early Empires* (Polanyi et al. 1971), reciprocity and redistribution are practised in pre-industrial whereas industrial society is dominated by impersonal mechanisms of the market economy. Post-Soviet reality in Russia shows that



with the appearance of the market economy the importance of personal mechanisms (i.e. networks) has increased and sharing and reciprocity have become more prevalent. The core quality is trust, which makes possible barter and reciprocity—two economic practices which in many cases are overlapping.

Although sharing among non-kin was and still is practised, the kinship-based network was more secure and better provisioned than an individual household to meet the basic needs of each individual (Sneath 1993: 205). The decision to rely on kinship structures is a 'situated rational choice' (McCay 2002: 363), because a single household within it is able to rely on the 'corporate social capital' of the whole network (Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur 1989: 36).

The bureaucratic division into smaller family units in Soviet times was an artificial one for Siberian indigenous communities (Gracheva 1980: 138). The extended family network existed throughout the Soviet period but became more important in this transition period. Exchanges were not only in food and other goods, but also in services. Even children flowed 'through a sharing-network', as has been noted for the Alaska Inupiat (Bodenhorn 1993: 177). The network is thus a system of 'social relations of obligation', where people are expected to help others when needed (Sneath 1993: 205).

I do not want to define such cooperation within the extended family or outside it as either 'altruistic' or 'selfish' (Casimir 1992b: 12). The tradition of mutual aid connected to resource management (the law of the tundra) has long been a part of Arctic culture, although not unique to it (see, for example, Taylor 1996). Using this concept of sharing as 'tradition', indigenous people in the Arctic have been able to channel and organise reciprocity. Unlike the 'classic' case of the commons, the monitoring of the use of hunting and fishing grounds was only one function of the network, which included village and town populations, as well as *tundroviki*. In the post-Soviet era, the 'law of the tundra' has been extended beyond the tundra, and the flow and exchange of goods and services is not only connected with survival in the tundra but with survival in general.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Reindeer and Social Relations**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I analysed how reciprocity and kinship networks function in general terms of linking different social layers and geographical spaces. In this chapter I focus on a smaller social unit, its internal relations and its linkages with the community. It deals with the formal, legal and informal ownership rights surrounding domestic reindeer at my field site in the Anabarskii district, and in the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP, Uurung Khaia. When the Soviet state collectivised the reindeer herds of Arctic nomads, the whole sector was centrally organised according to the model of industrial production. The collective and state farms (*kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy*) were created in the form of hierarchical industrial enterprises, with directors at the top and tundra brigades at the bottom (Humphrey 1998a: 2–3, chapter 3). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation in agriculture changed, but reindeer herding in the Anabarskii district went on much as it had before. The majority of reindeer still belong to the district farms and only 25% are in private ownership. What interests me is how these official categories are seen at the informal level of everyday life and what they tell us about social relations among different people.

I also focus in this chapter on reindeer–human relations and their importance for social and property relations. Tim Ingold distinguishes three practices relating to reindeer: *taming* as a social relation between man and animal, *herding* as an ecological relation between human and animal, and *breeding* as a technique of human-controlled selection (Ingold 1986: 5). While in Soviet times the two last practices were controlled by state structures through regulations, plans and fees, taming depended on the individual skills and choices of herders. Nowadays, the decision-making power of the brigade in herding and breeding has increased, which makes these practices more informally social. To Ingold's categories I would like to add *keeping*, the practice by which somebody takes care of reindeer belonging to other people. I will show below that reindeer keeping reflects not only social ties

between these people but also a brigade's connections with other hunting and herding brigades.

I start my analysis by discussing social relations within the reindeer brigade. The reindeer brigade is the lowest level of the centralised reindeer economy. It is essentially a small collective which has, besides its formal structure, informal ways of regulating the entitlement to reindeer. In the Soviet reindeer brigade model of agriculture, traditional cooperation among households and families was mixed with strategies 'of control of wealth and capital' (Nash 1967: 4). In the postsocialist period, reindeer brigades became increasingly self-regulating collectives because the MUP structure had no power or even the will to control them. The freedom given to the reindeer brigade was a means of maintaining reindeer herding while indirectly supporting the establishment and strengthening of informal structures and practices which went beyond the official roles and practices. Because 'technical activities are organised socially' (Ingold 1980: 9) in the brigade collective, the position of individual herders and their family members depends on the individual skills and qualities of brigade members. At the same time, reindeer herding is a social activity where everyone, independent of their social status, must cooperate in order to achieve particular goals (Paine 1964: 86; Beach 1993: 63) and where exclusion of an individual herders is impossible.

When discussing the role of reindeer in the network of social relations I begin with state-owned animals that form the dominant part of every reindeer herd. Anthropological research shows that in a pastoral society user rights can be formally institutionalised (Popov 1935; Wolde 2000). In this formal sense, the main body of the reindeer in the brigade's herd belongs to the district. But in the centralised 'agriculture' of Uurung Khaia, reindeer brigades use 'unwritten' ways and hierarchies to regulate entitlements to animals alongside the official labels and rules. In such transactions, which take place in 'non-localised institutions', profit is not necessarily direct or tangible (Lévi-Strauss 1996: 19) but in many cases expresses itself in the accumulation of social capital that makes some families more influential or is invested into social networks. The difference between the pastoral household and the reindeer brigade is that the latter is formed of several households that have shared responsibility of herding state-owned deer and have too few animals to be independent. In this situation, ownership rights are established through the taming of state reindeer for transport and sharing these animals with colleagues.

In addition to state-owned reindeer there are also privately owned animals. The importance of private reindeer is that they directly reflect social relations with people outside of the brigade. A reindeer given as a gift or



placed in the care of someone else marks social bonds between different persons. As with East African cattle pastoralists, giving a reindeer as a gift establishes social obligations between individuals and also symbolises the existence of such bonds (e.g. Ingold 1980: 185). In the second part of the chapter, I discuss how the social nature of private ownership of reindeer is manifested among the people of Uurung Khaia.

## 6.2 Domestic Reindeer

The number of domestic reindeer in the Republic of Sakha is steadily decreasing. In 1991 361,500 domestic reindeer were registered in the territory of the Yakut ASSR; by 2001 there were only 143,900 domestic reindeer in the Republic of Sakha (Syrovatskii 2000: 11; *Report* 2002: 65). Tichotsky (2000: 222), like most reindeer specialists and reindeer herders, sees this crisis in the reindeer industry as being due to the collapse of the 'old system' of subsidies, which helped state and collective farms to transport meat from remote villages to the city. Subsidies had been crucial for the development and growth of reindeer herding in Sakha in Soviet times, and this is true today.

When looking at the statistics we see that the number of domestic reindeer in Sakha grew from 239,300 in 1927 to 356,300 in 1971, i.e. by more than 100,000 head in less than 50 years, and reached its peak in 1981 (380,000). This growth was made possible by the introduction of supplementary fodder, new medicines and vaccines, regular monitoring by livestock experts and the use of new means of transport. With these new methods of production, it is possible that the number of reindeer in Sakha reached its ecological limit in many regions and when these methods were no longer subsidised the number of reindeer decreased.

In Sakha, reindeer herding has remained very centralised. All animals, irrespective of who owns them, are counted carefully at least twice a year and the statistics from Sakha are therefore more trustworthy than those for other regions. According to a report for the president of the Republic in 2002, 52.7% of the reindeer belonged to (former) state farms, 27.4% belonged to *obshchinas*, 18.8% were privately owned (*lichnye podsobnyye khoziaistva naseleniia*), 0.5% belonged to peasant holdings (*krestianskie khoziaistva*) and 0.6% belonged to the extended subsidiary ownership (*podsobnyye khoziaistva*) (*Report* 2002). The proportion of reindeer owned by *obshchinas* and by private owners grew rapidly: in 1991 80% of reindeer were owned by state and collective farms whereas only about 9% were privately owned, but in 1995 the proportion was 60% state-owned reindeer compared with 20% in *obshchinas* and 10% in private ownership (Tichotsky 2000: 216). Nonetheless, reindeer herding was the least privatised branch of

formerly collectivised animal breeding in Sakha (Tichotsky 2000: 216). The reason could be that by distributing herds, the share for every individual would have been too small to start private reindeer herding (maybe 10–30 head). Another reason was that at the beginning of the 1990s the hunters and reindeer herders were a minority in the indigenous villages. Few indigenous people want to give up a village-based, 'cultured' (*kul'turnaia*) life and take up a nomadic lifestyle.

According to the Sakha Republic Law on Reindeer Herding, all the domestic reindeer in the territory of the Republic of Sakha are a 'national treasure' (*natsional'noe dostoinstvo*)<sup>78</sup> and the government of Sakha has the legal right to count them, to set minimum prices for reindeer products, and to control the trade in young velvet antlers (*panty*) and meat. Despite all of these regulations, the products of reindeer herding remain the possession of the reindeer owners (*Ob-Olenevodstve* 1997: Article 5, §1 and 2). This is a rather contradictory law, where the state's involvement in reindeer herding is legalised but not put down in concrete terms. The officials interpret it thus: privately owned deer might be slaughtered at the will of the owner, but the state and communal reindeer (for example in the *obshchinas*) are under the supervision of the government, who have passed to local administrations the responsibility of giving permission to slaughter (personal communication with state officials).

The officials' opinion is that any large-scale slaughtering needs permission from the government. Since fewer than 20% of deer are privately owned and most of these are work animals, it is possible to say that the production of domestic reindeer meat in the Republic of Sakha is controlled by the state. For this purpose, the state established two companies on the foundations of the former agro-industrial complex: Sakhabult and Taba. These enterprises had, at least theoretically, a monopoly to buy and market reindeer products (Nikiforov 2002). But, as private entrepreneurs told me, one could always 'negotiate' with the management of these enterprises and find 'your own way' to stock meat, antlers and furs.

The centralisation of reindeer herding in the Republic of Sakha intensified when the state salary for reindeer herders was introduced. Since 2000, all reindeer herders in Sakha, independent of their employers, have received a state guaranteed salary from the Ministry of Finances (*Ob-Oplate* 2000). The salary is paid through the local district administration (Article 3), is not

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<sup>78</sup> According to my information, this is the only case where a rather literary and romantic expression *natsional'noe dostoinie* has been legalised formally in a reindeer economy. The metaphor 'reindeer as a national treasure' of indigenous Siberian minorities is quite popular and used both by indigenous activists and reindeer economists (see, for example, Bryzgalov 2000; Sokol'nikova 2000).

taxable and is supposed to be ten times above the actual minimum wage. During my fieldwork period, the reindeer herders received 2,500–3,000 roubles (max. US\$100). By this law, all districts were divided into four zones (tundra, taiga, forest tundra and mountain taiga). The Ministry set norms for job positions and salaries in different zones. The number of paid jobs depended on the number of reindeer. According to the law, there should be one reindeer herder per 180 head of reindeer in the taiga zone, 150 head in the forest tundra zone, 120 head in the mountain taiga and 90 head in the taiga zone (Article 1).

Although these norms are presented in the law as recommendations, officials at the Department for Traditional Economy in the Ministry of Agriculture told me that in practice the guidelines have been adopted as law, i.e. reindeer herders' wages are fixed in relation to reindeer numbers as set out in the law. In other places, linking the number of herding jobs to the number of reindeer would cause an exaggeration of reindeer head count figures, but in most regions in Sakha there is a lack of reindeer herders. Almost anyone can register himself as a reindeer herder and take up work in an enterprise.

'Rights to use and manage in pastoral societies are often exercised by parties other than legal owners' (Hann 2003: 24) and this is also the case in reindeer herding. Stammeler shows in his dissertation that on the Yamal Peninsula legal ownership of reindeer does not imply a specific use regime in practice (2004: chapter 4). According to statistics for the beginning of 2001 in the Republic of Sakha, 26.2% of reindeer belonged to *obshchinas* (Dinamika 2001). It is doubtful whether the *obshchinas* in fact own all of these reindeer. By asking officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and reindeer specialists in Yakutsk, I established that they do not distinguish between an *obshchina* owning or leasing its animals, what matters is that the herd is *managed* by the *obshchina*. If this is the case, the animals are counted in the *obshchina* section of the statistics.<sup>79</sup> As we will see below, ownership

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<sup>79</sup> To find out whether the *obshchinas* all over Sakha own or only lease their reindeer, one would have to visit these collectives personally and not rely on the official statistics. Because enterprises with very different management styles can each call themselves an *obshchina*, comparisons should be treated with caution. When I visited what was formerly one of the two richest *sovkhosy* in Soviet Yakutia (Tomponskii in eastern Sakha), I found out that the whole enterprise had been re-registered at the beginning of the 1990s as an *obshchina*. In the summer of 2001 two other *obshchinas* existed in this district, which were established by people who had separated from the former state farm. They received a number of reindeer as their share (*pai*) and were struggling with the former *sovkhos* to register their land entitlement. While the former state farm just renamed itself, the other *obshchina* herds were composed of members' private reindeer.



of reindeer in the Anabarskii district has remained the same and it is only use rights that have been transferred.

In January 2000 there were 16,213 registered domestic reindeer in the Anabarskii district (*Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara* 10 January 2001). After the spring head count in 2001, the number of reindeer had fallen to 12,669 (*Anaabyr Uottara/Ogni Anabara* 18 May 2001). The MUP based in Uurung Khaia had 9,894 domestic reindeer in 2000 (including 2,067 private reindeer) distributed among six different brigades. The herd size varied from 1,386 to 1,588. Every herd contained around 20–25% privately owned animals, which are pastured together with the district reindeer. Between three and six reindeer herders (*pastukhi*) usually work in each brigade and they own most of the private deer. Many hunters or villagers have their own animals as well.

In the Anabarskii district, the policy of the administration (which was clearly unsuccessful in this regard) was to increase the size of the herds. The reasons for the declining numbers of reindeer were similar to those in Sakha more generally: the lack of money, which meant a lack of supplementary fodder, tools, equipment, fuel and basic groceries. Older informants explained to me that young reindeer herders did not take care of reindeer as well as in the past. In Soviet times there were two herders per shift, which guarded the herd round the clock; in 2000 the most common practice was to have only one herder who would spend part of the day in camp and leave the herd in the tundra alone. Many brigades also lost animals to wild migrating reindeer whose numbers increased.

Another widely held explanation for the decrease in the size of reindeer herds (one articulated by all—from the head of the district administration to the average herder) was the unsuitability of the Khargin breed, introduced into Anabar in the 1980s (see chapter 2). One of my informants, a reindeer herder and chief livestock expert during the Soviet period, explained to me that Khargin reindeer are a forest-tundra breed with different feeding habits—they are believed to destroy pastures because they eat whole lichens whereas the local Even breed move faster when grazing and therefore leave some lichens behind, allowing the population to renew itself. Some reindeer herders explained that having a mixture of both breeds results in an extremely long calving period; Khargin deer begin to calve in April which is the time of snowstorms, while Even deer calve in May. Many Khargin calves freeze to death and the herd is unable to migrate this early in the year and thus tends to exhaust its pastures.

### 6.2.1 Reindeer and Brigade Work Cycles

In the Anabarskii district the tundra and forest-tundra pastures are used by about 17,000 domestic and (according to hunting specialists) 40,000 wild reindeer. Reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) live in the whole circumpolar area of the American and Eurasian continents either as domestic or wild animals; in Eurasia and Alaska we find both. Wild and domestic reindeer are similar to each other in diet and habits and reindeer in different regions differ only slightly in colour and size (Paine 1994: 31, App. 1). For centuries or even thousands of years the reindeer has been a versatile animal in terms of the products it provides: shelter, transport, food, tools and clothes. Hunting for reindeer dates back at least to the Neolithic (c. 3000–2000 years BC in northern Eurasia), and scholars believe that people have been engaged in domestic reindeer herding since the seventeenth or eighteenth century (Krupnik 1993: 9). Today, reindeer herding provides labour and products such as furs, antlers (fresh antlers are used for medicines, old for tools, souvenirs), meat, blood, bones, bone marrow, intestines, eyes and much more. In many cultures reindeer also have religious significance (cf. Bogoras 1975 [1904–9]; Khazanov 1994; Shirokogoroff 1999). According to my observations, almost all parts of a reindeer's body, besides the hide, bones and old antlers, are edible, but are eaten in various regions differently. For example, Dolgan do not drink reindeer blood but Khanty, Evenki and Nentsy do; I have never seen Khanty eat reindeer sexual organs which the Dolgan do eat.

The reindeer is a social animal and lives in herds. There is no general agreement whether the term 'herd behaviour' only applies to groups of several thousand animals or includes smaller groups (Paine 1994: 201). In practice, I have observed 'herd behaviour' in herds with fewer than 2,000 head: when the herd is disturbed the animals tend to move towards the centre of the herd, and, when panicked, they start to run in a circle, counter clockwise.

This herd behaviour is exploited both by herders and hunters. I was told that in Soviet times, when reindeer were to be slaughtered, the animals were brought together into one herd and made to keep running in a circle whereupon they were shot using small calibre rifles. Herd behaviour is also useful when lassoing reindeer because in the open tundra the herd will start to move in a circle and will not scatter across the landscape. Even where herds are as small as 8–12 animals, herd behaviour can manifest itself to the advantage of hunters. Because the animals stick close together, hunters use their snowmobiles to follow them and pick them off one by one until the whole group is either killed or the last few manage to escape by scattering.

Many authors agree that there are two main types of reindeer—tundra and taiga animals—but even within these categories experts distinguish different breeds (for example Beach 1990: 257–8; Paine 1994: 201; Syrovatskii 2000: 24). In Sakha there are three recognised reindeer breeds: Evenki, Khargin (Chukchi) and Even. Khargin is seen in Sakha as a meat animal, which is not suitable for work, whereas the Evenki breed is a taiga work animal and the Even breed a tundra animal suited for both meat and work. Researchers' opinions are split on where to draw the line between different reindeer breeds, but from the perspective of types of reindeer breeding there is a certain degree of agreement. According to the general view, the main difference is between taiga and tundra reindeer herding. The former involves using reindeer as transport animals only, while the latter means keeping reindeer primarily for food and additional deer for transport purposes. In the taiga, herds are smaller, reindeer are milked and ridden, and only in cases of urgent need are they slaughtered for food. Tundra herds are larger, the reindeer are harnessed for transport, and are also slaughtered for food (Klokov and Jernsletten 2002: 26–8).

Klokov and Jernsletten distinguish four types of reindeer husbandry: in Saami or 'loose' reindeer herding, herds are left untended for certain seasons in the tundra. The Nenets and Komi-Izhem herding regimes use reindeer year round as a sledge harness animal. This type of herding also uses dogs. In the Chukchi type of husbandry, herds are followed in summer on foot, with sledges only being used in winter. The Tungus-Yakut is the only husbandry type that is carried out within the taiga region. It is distinguished by the use of reindeer as sledge harness animals alongside saddle and pack reindeer. Because of the taiga forest, pastures are sometimes fenced (Klokov and Jernsletten 2002: 25–6). However, there were and still are regional differences concerning details of construction and usage of sledges, saddles, harnesses and the positioning of the leading bull (see Vasilevich and Levin 1950).

Syrovatskii (2000) distinguishes two levels of reindeer husbandry. The first, a historical typology (*istoricheski slozhivshie tipy olenevodstva*), overlaps with Klokov's and Jernsletten's typology. His second classification, 'systems of reindeer keeping' (*sistemy soderzhanii olenei*), is a typology of different modern industrial reindeer husbandry methods. 'Free reindeer keeping' (*vol'noe soderzhanie olenei*) is, according to Syrovatskii, practised in Alaska, where one to three reindeer herders follow the herd, keep it together and drive the herd from one pasture to another. Herders stay in tents or shelters which are scattered over the tundra. 'Free-camp (half-free) reindeer keeping' (*vol'no-lagernoe (poluvol'noe) soderzhanie olenei*) is practised in the taiga zone in Sakha, Evenkiia, Chita and Irkutsk Oblast, where



the reindeer are trained to gather once a day in the camp to get salt and fodder, and in summer the reindeer are gathered around a smoky fire which protects them from mosquitoes. 'Keeping reindeer within fences' (*soderzhanie olenei v izgorodakh*) is practised in different mountain-taiga areas and means that in summer and autumn reindeer are kept in fenced pastures before the snow period. The 'herding system' (*sistema stadnogo soderzhaniiia olenei*) is typical of tundra reindeer husbandry where herders migrate constantly with the herd from one pasture to another. This type of reindeer husbandry, according to Syrovatskii, allows for optimal use of pastures, herd management and veterinarian skills (2000: 17–23).

In Anabar, reindeer husbandry has been of a mixed form since its beginnings in the region (see chapter 2). Herds are large and sledges are used throughout the year, as is typical for the tundra type, but reindeer are also ridden and milked as in the taiga. The daily work schedule for reindeer herders is similar to the state farm schedule but since control over brigades has decreased, it is no longer strictly followed. Although according to the regulations the reindeer should be watched 24 hours a day by two herders (*Attestatsiia* 1988; Syrovatskii 2000, 2002), this was not practised in the Anabarskii district. One herder guards the herd for 24 hours following this approximate timetable: between 10 and 11 a.m. the herd is brought to the camp; the herders catch the required number of work animals, and then another herder (*dezhurnyi*) takes the animals back to the tundra. At midday he leaves the reindeer herd and returns to the camp for lunch. Around 6 p.m. he returns to the tundra pasture and brings back the whole herd after 10 p.m. Following dinner and some rest, the herder drives the animals to the tundra, returns around midnight for a few hours' sleep, and brings them back at mid-morning, when a new guard takes over.

When nothing exceptional happens, guarding reindeer is an easy task. In the tundra, the herder usually watches the herd and if the animals scatter too far over the landscape, he drives them together, riding a reindeer (in summer) or on a sledge (in winter). The herd moves slowly when grazing and the guard's duty is to keep them moving in the right direction. The herders usually have plenty of free time, which they use to read magazines or make new tools while sitting and keeping an eye on the herd. The basic cycle of work in the reindeer herd is similar throughout the year. The only difference in winter is that during the polar night the beginning of the work shifts a few hours to coincide with the time when the moon is at its brightest.

When not on watch, the other members of the brigade are busy with their 'home tasks'. Men repair sledges, build new sledges or boats, carry ice,

wood and water, train reindeer,<sup>80</sup> go hunting or move their property to the next campsite. Women prepare hides, sew new clothes and cook constantly. Cooking is an activity which is always done in parallel with other activities; as soon as when one meal is ready and eaten preparations for the next meal begin. Besides breakfast, which has to take place before the herd is driven to the campsite in the morning, meals tend to take place in different households at different times. Generally tea, fish and reindeer meat are consumed with bread, macaroni, buckwheat porridge or rice, sometimes even potatoes.

The brigade has two or three dwellings in winter, rather than the four or six in summer. Every *balokh* is considered a household in its own right, where meals are cooked separately. Children under school age are in the tundra continuously but once they are old enough to go to school they spend only the summer and sometimes the winter school breaks in the tundra. Herders bring their wives and children into the brigade at the end of May, after the schools break up, and the families remain in the tundra until school starts again in September. Some families send children to the village in September by helicopter or corral barge, and wives and any pre-school aged children stay in the tundra until October. During the summer married herders live separately with their families in *harkassy* (a light dwelling on sledges but, unlike the *balokh*, without a floor and with only one ply of reindeer hides). Unmarried herders live either with relatives or have a separate *harkass* shared with other bachelors. In the latter case they either cook separately or eat with the brigadier. In autumn and winter most brigades consist only of men as very few have their wives with them in the tundra. During winter, friends or relatives in the brigade usually cooperate and move into one *balokh*.

During my stay with a reindeer brigade, our migration consisted of regular moves between campsites—about once every five to seven days in summer, and once every second week or up to once a month in winter. The average distance was, according to my GPS, five to seven kilometres, and it took one whole day to move camp. The interval between moves depended mainly on pasture conditions. In wet places where the grass and lichens were covered with water, we stayed only for a few days, whereas in hilly regions we sometimes stayed more than a week. In the wintertime, the need to move

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<sup>80</sup> There is not much time for taming and training the reindeer because of the demands of all the other tasks. As a result, this process is short but brutal. The animal must first be made to get used to the rope. The reindeer is tied to a lasso and the lasso is tied to a stick. Usually the animal tries to free itself, and thereby nearly strangles itself by pulling on the rope too heavily. The next step is to tie the animal to a sledge and teach it to get used to the close proximity of humans. Then the reindeer is harnessed to the sledge with other animals and after several rides is considered tamed. I have never seen how Dolgan break reindeer for riding, so I cannot comment on this.

was not so urgent because it took longer for the reindeer to dig through the snow, reach the grass and lichens and exhaust the pastures.

Migration (*argish* in Rus., *kös* in Sakha) itself is only one (although the main) event in a chain which aims to keep the brigade moving. Dolgan families have, depending on their wealth and number of children, in addition to their living *balokh*, perhaps as many as three enclosed sledges (*khoziaist-vennyi balokh*), between three and five heavily loaded sledges, and in winter a portable toilet in their caravan. Unmarried men or those whose families are in the village normally have fewer sledges—only one or two sledges with groceries and clothes. Additionally, every household has its timber (both for construction and heating), boxes of coal, tanks of petrol and oil, some extra but non-vital groceries, and in wintertime snowmobiles and in summer light boots. All of this is too much to move in one go. When we set off for a new campsite, we usually left many possessions behind. In the following days men would drive back with sledges to bring these things 'into the brigade'. By the time everything arrived, we had already started to transport loads to the next place. Transporting possessions either from the previous campsite or to the next one was an activity which occupied much of the herders' free time.

Each household (i.e. those living in one *balokh*, either as a family or a number of unmarried men) is responsible for packing and transporting its own possessions. As a rule, while the men are busy catching reindeer, the women and children pack everything up. The brigadier Vasili told me once that he needs 64 reindeer for a migration—and for the whole brigade, about 240 reindeer had to be caught. This is work which requires three to six hours, depending on how fast the reindeer are caught. One task that is especially long and complicated is the lassoing of harness animals in spring (April and May) when animals become 'uncatchable' (*tutarvattar* in Sakha). In springtime, even women and children participate in the catching process by running around, shouting and driving the animals towards the men with lassos. When the lassoing is finished—and after a meal break taken in each family's dwelling—everyone helps to complete the packing. The brigadier leads the train of reindeer sledges and the unmarried herders follow with the herd. This procedure mirrors the pre-Revolutionary pattern of collective herding and migrating, where different households joined to form a big herd but every household maintained its status as an independent unit (Popov 1934: 124–6; 1935: 184).

Although the basic daily cycle and equipment used remains the same throughout the year, there are still certain differences between the husbandry regimes for winter and summer. Reindeer herders in the Anabarskii district have different *balokhs*, sledges, lassos and clothes for winter and summer



use. In summer, people live mainly in *harkassy* or in light *balokhs*. The winter *balokh* has two or three layers of reindeer hides, the summer dwelling only one. Summer dwellings tend to be smaller because people spend a lot of time outside. The average *balokh* is 3–4 metres wide and long and 2–3 metres high; those families with small children build very big *balokhs* for winter and springtime. I have seen *balokhs* that were 10 metres long by 5 metres wide and 5 metres high. To move so big a dwelling was possible only in winter when snow is on the ground.

Winter sledges are lower and wider than the high and narrow summer sledges because in winter the loads are heavier. Summer lassos are thicker and made from smoked hides, and therefore brown in colour; winter lassos are longer, thinner and not smoked. No matter their sex or age, people wear fur clothes in winter made from the hides of adult reindeer, calves and arctic fox. In summer the men wear light fur jackets and hats when it is too cold at night, but typically people wear the universally available industrially produced clothes in summer. As we saw earlier (chapter 5.3) winter or summer equipment is stored in the tundra at a *sakhyyr*, where every brigade has its dwellings, sledges, fuel and groceries. Some brigades have a permanent *sakhyyr* place, while others change it each year depending on the condition of the pastures.

In summer, all adults and older children, according to old Evenki tradition (Popov 1935: 189), ride mounted reindeer (*uutsak*) and harnesses are used only for cargo sledges; in winter, reindeer herders ride only sledges. Snowmobiles are seldom used in herding owing to the shortage of fuel. Only when animals get lost during the polar night or in spring snowstorms will herders use snowmobiles to search for them. In winter, the herd is divided into two parts: a small herd of working male animals is kept in the vicinity of the brigade campsite and the main herd is watched some 10–12 kilometres away in the tundra. The purpose of this division is to protect does with small calves. In the winter, the herders with whom I stayed returned to the brigade only to hand the shift over to another herder and they guarded the main herd for 24 hours to protect the calves from wolves. For this purpose all the brigades use a small heatable *balokh* where the herder spends the night. This practice of a divided winter herd goes back to pre-Revolutionary reindeer herding (Popov 1935: 184) and is also practised in other tundra regions where reindeer herding has been influenced by the 'Sakha type' (cf. Anderson 2000a: 40).

When in late May the brigade changes from winter equipment to summer equipment the two herds are driven together again. Shortly before that, the first corral (*kharral* in Sakha and *koralisatsiia* in Rus.) of the year takes place. This involves counting, marking and vaccinating reindeer con-

fined in a corral. It is organised by the district administration twice (sometimes three) times a year. As male elders told me, the counting of reindeer in a corral was introduced in Soviet times.<sup>81</sup> The special counting brigade, which includes state farm officials and workers who build the portable fences, travels to the tundra and counts all the animals in each brigade, noting also the age and sex of the individual reindeer. The MUP's veterinarian and chief livestock expert also accompany this counting brigade.

Winter corrals are permanent ones, built in the 1970s and 1980s. The summer corrals in late August use a portable fence of canvas, which is transported to the tundra by barge with a team of corral workers from the village of Uurung Khaia. Often hunters and reindeer herders from neighbouring brigades also participate. The final count of the year is undertaken in October, but does not involve using a corral. Instead, the herd is driven slowly through a narrow valley to be counted. Sick and weak animals are killed, and the healthy ones are marked and vaccinated. In contrast to other regions in Sakha, all the reindeer (including private ones) in the Anabarskii district are vaccinated.

Even in Soviet times the corral was more than the physical counting of reindeer—it has always been an important social event too. Herders and their family members, who may have spent many weeks or months in the tundra, are eager to socialise, meet friends from the village and other brigades, hear news and drink vodka in the evenings.

### **6.2.2 Earmarks and Animal–Human Relationships**

The usual practice in domestic reindeer husbandry is to use earmarks and bells as a means of recognising individual animals (Paine 1994: chapter 2). Marking animals is one function of the corral. In the Anabarskii district, all reindeer brigades and private owners have their own specific earmarks that are known and recognised by all other herders. Official brigade earmarks are even registered at the office of the chief livestock expert. Private earmarks are passed down within the family, and unlike the old Dolgan custom where only the youngest son inherited the family earmark (Popov 1935: 198), all males of the family use the same earmarks today. The number of private deer is nowadays relatively small, so members of one family know very well who owns which particular animal.

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<sup>81</sup> Besides the counting, another goal of corralisation (*koralisatsiia*) was to control the migration of reindeer herders. This form of state influence has been used by Scandinavian states as well. When the Norwegian state introduced this practice in 1988, it met with resistance from Saami reindeer herders, who were afraid that the state had plans to count animals in order to reduce the number of reindeer (Paine 1994: chapter 14).

However, only part of the domestic reindeer herd carries visual marks that prove its status. The chief livestock expert of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP told me: 'We try to mark all reindeer but we can't catch all of them.' I have seen during *koralisatsiia* how many young bucks jump over fences or escape when let out of the corral gate. *Koralisatsiia* itself is an extremely noisy event that starts in the tundra when herders and the corral brigade drive the animals towards the camp. People shout and yell to separate the animals, as do the men who guard the gates or cut antlers. When an animal escapes, there are loud hoots of laughter and yelling, and people scream in a bid to drive the animal closer to the lassomen. Children run around adding to the general frenzy and noise level. In a few hours the whole herd is in a state of panic, moving counter-clockwise within the corral, with some animals trying to break through the fences. Given this commotion and apparent chaos, it is not surprising that many animals slip beyond the reach of the earmarkers. Interestingly, the herders themselves do not appear to be too concerned about the consistency of their earmarking. As well as those reindeer that are in a wild or half-wild state, many tamed or private reindeer that are caught daily very often remain unmarked as well. The herders tie different pieces of cloths to reindeer antlers and I assumed that these must be some sort of personal mark as well. When I asked Vasili about it, he laughed and explained that these markers are to distinguish particular work animals. To catch reindeer when the animals are running around, the herder has to react quickly. The cloth markers are especially helpful in the polar night when the reindeers' distinguishing spots and hair colour are difficult to see.

Ingold (1987: chapter 2) argues that, in contrast to taiga reindeer herding where the herds are small and used only for transport, in 'carnivorous' reindeer husbandry in the tundra the herders recognise only their tame animals, which are a tiny minority of their herd. I disagree with this. Reindeer herders in my host brigades were able to recognise animals belonging to their brigade even from pictures I brought with me. Every morning, before catching the work animals, men agreed which reindeer should be caught and for which household. The practice of non-consistent earmarking in the Anabarskii district speaks against Ingold's theory that earmarking developed because the relationship of 'carnivorous' pastoralists to their animals is 'less intimate' and they do not know their animals as well (Ingold 1980: 114-6). I documented many cases which show that the reindeer herders in Anabar do not need earmarks in order to distinguish particular animals.

One of my herding friends told me: 'I used to go on business trips to Nizhnaia Kolyma (north-eastern Sakha). They have cows there. I can't understand how people distinguish cows. They have no antlers and are so



similar to each other. It is so easy with reindeer: every animal has a different shape of antlers and colour.'

And Oko, Balyksyt's youngest son, said to me once, 'A reindeer is like a human. Each one is different. They have different spots and hair colour and their antlers are different too!' A reindeer herder from the 3rd brigade, Uibaan Tuprin, illustrated the extraordinary capacity that herders have to identify individual animals by recounting the following: 'Andriano [who had the shift before him] told me that two does have vanished. One of them belongs to Grigori Konstantinich, you know [the chief livestock expert of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP]. So I went to take a look. I did not go close, so as to not disturb the does, and took binoculars with me. And then I saw the does, they hadn't gone away at all.' This was in May, when a doe herd of 1,000 head was spread across the tundra!

When I joined Vasili in his shift in the summer of 2000 we had to drive the herd to the next pasture. We rode behind the reindeer, using dogs to make sure that the herd kept together while moving. Suddenly a reindeer about 100 metres away from us stopped and attacked one of the dogs. The dogs gathered and drove him back to the other animals. Observing this, Vasili said: 'He cannot move fast, this bull was castrated a week ago.' Vasili had recognised the animal only by colour and shape of horns because it was too far away to see its earmarks. His remark proves that professional reindeer herders, who work side-by-side with many thousands of animals every day, remember and know most of them—they know which one was recently castrated and which animals they harnessed the day before and so should not be caught for a few days to avoid exhaustion.

In this section I have sought to demonstrate that the importance of earmarks, although an important element of the property regime in other tundra reindeer cultures (e.g. Stammler 2004: sections 5.5, 5.6), is not absolute and may play only a minor role in determining ownership here.

### **6.3 The Reindeer Brigade: A Microcosm of Social Relations**

#### ***6.3.1 The Reindeer Brigade within the Structure of the MUP***

In this section I aim to explore the formal connections that bind the reindeer brigade to the institutional framework. When the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP was reformed as the district farm, it not only took over the facilities and office building of the former state farm 'Severnyi' but also its structural organisation. Caroline Humphrey dedicates a whole chapter to the description of the state farm structures in Barguzin, and there are marked similarities with what I saw in Anabar (Humphrey 1998a: chapter 3). In the Soviet era, agricultural enterprises had a standard vertical organisation all over the Soviet Union—

and this has survived largely unchanged. At the top of the enterprise is either the director (state farm) or the chairman (collective farm) and at the bottom are the productive units—brigades.

Caroline Humphrey describes the division of the Selenga collective farm into sheep, horse, horticultural and maintenance brigades. The Il'ia Spiridonov MUP has, as mentioned earlier, six reindeer brigades, some hunting brigades, a fishing brigade, a fur shop and one 'mechanisation' brigade. The last is staffed by four drivers, two tractor drivers, one assistant driver and one odd-job worker. These *mekhanizatory* are responsible for those few MUP tractors and trucks that are not leased to private enterprises. The director at the top is responsible for all general decisions. Contrary to the situation in Soviet times, he has neither the Communist Party nor the formal state farm committee to advise him. The enterprise committee still operates because the director regularly organises meetings of the brigadiers (brigade leaders), in which the chief livestock expert and chief veterinarian also take part. These meetings are held only a couple of times a year, when all the brigadiers are in the village and meet together in the director's office, but are rather informal in nature as no minutes are kept.

Next to the director in the MUP's hierarchy are the vice-director of marketing, the chief livestock expert, the chief veterinarian, the head mechanic, the senior hunting specialist (*starshii okhotoved*), the head of the fur workshop and the main bookkeeper. Their tasks are identical to those in Soviet times: to maintain the condition of the animals, the production, the MUP's equipment and finances. The state farm administration also includes a few other people like bookkeepers, veterinarians, an economist, secretaries and radio operators. On account of its Soviet legacy, Uurung Khaia is a typical agricultural village, where the distinction between the tasks of MUP officials and those of the village administration are sometimes quite unclear. Thus the chief livestock expert is also in charge of vaccinating private reindeer. The only fuel station in the village belongs to the village administration, but fuel is given to people with the written permission of the MUP's director. The MUP brings technicians into the village who often work on the village infrastructure (for example, electricians employed by Udachnyi GOK repaired the village's electrical grid). This fuzziness in subordination and responsibility for tasks is accepted by people in the village, and I was the only person who wondered about it and tried to distinguish the clear structures and boundaries of the MUP's domain from those of the village administration. In Soviet times, the whole social and economic life in the village was centred around the state farm and was dependent on it. In the post-Soviet period, as I observed, the village administration is more independent in its decision-making and can draw on financial sources other than those of

the district administration. But as we saw in chapter 3, connections between enterprises and between enterprises and the village administration remain strong. One reason for this interlinkage is, of course, that it would be too costly to separate the embedded infrastructures. On the other hand, in the Soviet era the village and its agricultural enterprise were more or less one entity and people are still comfortable with the way this was managed. MUP, as the biggest enterprise in the village and bearer of the state-farm legacy, is not fully separated from local administrative structures and it would seem that such separation is not actively sought.

These structures have to guarantee fulfilment of the 'state orders' (described earlier in chapter 3), which means organising production and finding ways of selling the MUP's farm produce. The state order, similar to the Soviet plan (and still called *plan* in Rus. and Sakha), no longer carries the serious 'ideological' content as described by Humphrey for a Soviet state farm (1998: 8), but is taken seriously by the MUP's workers. The task of the reindeer herders is to fulfil the head quota, the hunters have to provide a certain amount of fish and meat, and the fishers have their own 'plan'. At the time I was there, the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP had a state order for 151 tonnes of reindeer meat but only 31 tonnes of this came from domestic reindeer. The brigades I visited were only required to 'produce' live animals, not meat, under the plan.

According to the personnel lists of the MUP that I was shown, reindeer brigades typically contain five or six reindeer herders and three or four tentworkers (*chumrabochnitsy*). Every brigade has its own veterinarian and one hunter appointed to them. Formally these workers are not members of the brigade but are listed in the bookkeeping accounts as hunters and middle-level officials.

The reindeer brigade is a product of industrialised agriculture; a factory production structure has been imposed on the agricultural sphere (cf. Humphrey 1998a: chapters 3, 5). But reindeer herding has a distinct characteristic which sets it apart from most industrial agriculture regimes: the animals must move constantly from one pasture to another. The Soviet policy to weaken or eliminate nomadism ended with a reorganisation of reindeer herding (Vitebsky 1989: 213). From family-based 'nomadism as a way of life' (so-called *bytovoe kochevanie*), it became 'industrial nomadism' (*proizvodstvennoe kochevanie*). Officially, one aim of this reform was to reduce the number of people in the tundra and thereby reduce the need for transport animals and so increase the number of meat animals (see Druri and Mitiushev 1963: 51–3). Economic goals went hand-in-hand with political goals in a bid to keep the local indigenous population in stable villages under state control (see chapter 2). The 'industrial' reindeer brigade contained



many men and only one or two women, whose task was to be a housekeeper—*chumrabotnitsa*. This meant a radical restructuring of family life: men in brigades were without their families for months, and at the end of their shift returned to the village (Vitebsky and Wolfe 2001: 83). This kind of structure was introduced in many regions of the former Soviet Union; from the Kola Peninsula to Chukotka (Beach 1986; Ssorin-Chaikov 1998; Tuisku 1999; Anderson 2000a; Krupnik 2000; Konstantinov and Vladimirova 2002). But the new organisation was not introduced successfully everywhere. As Syrovatskii points out, in some regions the reindeer brigades maintained features of *bytovoe kochevanie*, i.e. reindeer herders took their wives with them as tentworkers into the tundra. In such cases, brigades tended to be bigger, with more male herders and of course more female tentworkers (Syrovatskii 2000: 229). In the Anabarskii district the shift to 'industrial nomadism' was never complete, and today at least half of the men have their wives with them in the tundra (especially over the summer) as tentworkers. In the last few years in the Anabarskii district the term '*chumrabotnitsa*' has changed to the more 'progressive' term 'sanitary instructor' (*saninstruktor*) in official records because there are no tepee-like tents or *chums* anymore.

Despite all state attempts to reduce 'industrial nomadism' to the status of an ordinary 'job', the people who are engaged in it still retain strong emotional ties to the tundra and to the animals. Reindeer herders have no fixed retirement age but have the right to retire after working for 20 years. This is the second shortest working-age in the Republic of Sakha; polar pilots (pilots who fly routes north of the Arctic Circle) are allowed to retire after 15 years. Because of this, 'retired' reindeer herders are often in their late forties. Retirement does not mean that people leave the tundra, and in many brigades retired reindeer herders continue to work, receiving a salary in addition to their pension.

Even those people who give up formal work may spend months in the brigades where they previously worked or where they had close relatives. Younger people also frequently expressed their emotional ties to tundra life. As Oko, an 18-year-old reindeer herder who did not work formally in the tundra but spent most of the year there, declared, 'We have the most beautiful job in the world!' Vasili's wife Natasha, herself an incomer Sakha who came to the tundra 15 years ago after marrying in her twenties, told me that 'it is boring in the village in one place'. Baahyi, Oko's older brother, said to me once, 'I cannot live without reindeer. It is boring.' Besides economic reasons—for example, 'in the tundra you don't need money' and 'we still get something from the *sovkhos* [i.e. MUP]'—people expressed their preference for tundra life, stressing qualities such as the freedom to hunt, fish and move

around, quietness, being part of nature and, in one case, the healthy lifestyle. The reindeer herder Oleg told me, 'In the tundra you move a lot. You run after reindeer all day; this is like gymnastics, keeps you in shape. This is healthy. And you don't drink.'

Despite industrialisation, the reindeer brigade has not become a formal production unit. In the next subsection I want to discuss the 'traditionality' of modern reindeer husbandry, which today is referred to as a branch of the 'traditional economy'.

### 6.3.2 *Maintaining Tradition*

Although one goal of the state farm was to 'stamp out family solidarity' (Vitebsky 1996: 105), Soviets did not have universal success with this. In many regions of Siberia brigades often consisted of relatives (personal communications with Stammeler and Konstantinov; see Vitebsky 1989: 216) and family solidarity was also maintained outside the brigades. As I have shown in the previous two chapters, family loyalty and cooperation outlived the Soviet era and is flourishing under post-socialism. The workers' lists of the MUP reindeer brigades indicate a tendency among *Anabar tundroviki* for relatives to work together. In my host brigade, the 3rd brigade, there were six reindeer herders. Three of them were members of one family: old Balyksyt and his two sons Uibaan and Baahyi (Sakha version of Ivan and Vasili). The former brigadier, Andrei, was a close relative on their mother's side and so was one other reindeer herder, Egor. Balyksyt was the eldest brother in his family. His two brothers, Andrei and Dima, worked in the 5th brigade. Andrei's eldest son, 15-year-old Petia, was a reindeer herder in the same brigade. At the end of my fieldwork period, the 5th brigade was re-registered as an *obshchina* and Andrei came to us, to the 3rd brigade. In the 5th brigade I met Oleg.

Oleg's two brothers were the core of the subsidiary enterprise Erel, which I have described in chapter 2, and Oleg invited me to visit them. When the enterprise was still the 6th brigade of the state farm Severnyi, one other brother worked there, but he left when the enterprise was established. During my fieldwork period, a young veterinarian, Makha (the Sakha version of Masha) Tuprina was sent to the 6th brigade. She had finished her studies in Yakutsk the year before and was obliged to work in the district for three years. When I asked the herders in the brigade why Makha, a young woman, had come to the brigade that moves the greatest distance from the village, I was told: 'We do not have any veterinarian. Makha is our little sister (*sestrënka*).' I learned that Makha was a member of the extended family, the daughter of a close relative.

In the case of Uurung Khaia reindeer brigades it is important to note that reindeer herding among Dolgan was traditionally a kinship-related activity where close relatives used to pasture their reindeer together. During summer many families migrated together and chose one elder to lead them (Popov 1934, 1935, 1946). In this regard there was little deviation from traditional practice when relatives worked in the same brigade. Looking at ethnographic data, most of the technical tools and skills used in modern reindeer herding in Uurung Khaia brigades are similar to those used in pre-Soviet reindeer herding: winter clothing, lasso throwing techniques, sledges, saddles, tools to prepare furs, even children's toys (see Popov 1935, 1937b; Gurvich 1977; Sokol'nikova 2000). As I have stressed in chapters 2 and 3, due to the fact that the introduction of 'industrial nomadism' was never completely successful in the Anabarskii district, many features of older reindeer herding practices and the regulation of the brigade's social dynamics have been incorporated into the brigades' everyday life.

Balyksyt said to me many times that 'during Communism the order was stricter' (*pri kommunizma byl poriadok zoshche*), and people were appointed to brigades by order of the state farm management. The paradox is that even in Anabar during the Soviet era a lot of relatives worked in one brigade, as used to be the case in other regions as well (Vitebsky 1989: 216; Iarmenko 2000: 40). There are authors who argue that state and collective farm hunting was a continuation of an older 'traditional' way of life, especially when brigades contained relatives and were located on their old clan territories (Egorov 1990; Fondahl 1995; Androsov 2000; Boiiakova 2001). Another opinion is that pre-Soviet culture was 'crushed by the pressure of the Soviet welfare state and by the modernization it enforced' (Krupnik and Vakhtin 2002).

I think that both views should be taken seriously. The very fact that Soviet reindeer brigades had migration routes that were planned by ecologists, and that the brigade had economic plans to fulfil, made these brigades much more similar to industrial production units than to those of a traditional community. Contrary to the traditional migrating group, the brigade was not free in its decision-making but had to follow the general policy provided by the state farm administration. Also the exclusion and inclusion of brigade members was not fully under the control of the brigade itself, as was the case with pre-collectivisation herding groups. In chapter 2 I described in some detail the development of agricultural brigades. Here I only want to mention the fact that the autonomy of the brigades was steadily reduced and, according to interviews with older people, significant changes took place in the 1960s when centralisation of the state farm structures was consolidated. The state farm management began to interfere more vigorously in brigade affairs:



the formation of brigades and planning of migration routes and work cycles began to be ordered more from the 'outside'.

Maintaining pre-collectivisation traditions in the reindeer brigade is both a result and cause of the dominance of families in brigades. A fur farm and a shop for hide tanning and sewing, which were common in the tundra villages of the Taimyr Peninsula in order to provide work for the wives of *tundroviki* (Gracheva 1978: 93–4), also exist in Uurung Khaia but here it is mainly for *poselkovye* (village) women from families who live permanently in the village. Wives of particularly young couples often prefer not to go to the tundra. However, in all the brigades I visited, married couples predominated in the summer and there were always some wives in the tundra in the winter. Of course, the decision to stay in the tundra as a *chumrabortnitsa* is in many cases influenced by the fact that unemployment is growing in the village of Uurung Khaia. But to explain the family orientation of tundra life only through unemployment is too simplistic: there are many women who take on temporary work in the village during the winter as cleaners, school cooks or assistants in the radio station, but who return to the tundra with their children each spring. Women with advanced job qualifications, such as kindergarten or school teachers, who would have no problem finding a job in the village, can also be found living in the tundra.

When visiting a reindeer brigade as an outsider, one cannot hope to understand the lives of the brigade members simply by relying on ethnographic studies undertaken long ago; the modernisation and adoption of elements from other reindeer cultures, documented in other regions of Sakha and Krasnoïarskii Krai (Gurvich 1963: 89; Anderson 2000a: 38), has been taking place in the tundra of the Anabarskii district too. During Soviet times, the importance of industrially produced tools and clothes in the everyday life of *tundroviki* increased markedly (see chapter 2). Also, when visiting other state farms or attending special courses, herders learned new technical skills; similarly women have adopted many new techniques through exposure to Sakha and Russian cuisine and sewing.

The question of how far the sexual division of labour and the social position of women and girls have changed remains open. Gurvich (1977: 111) argued that despite the relatively high social position of women (women have their own property and hold a certain degree of decision-making power within the family), the division of labour between the sexes among the 'Reindeer Sakha' in Anabar was strict: chopping wood, carrying ice and water, butchering reindeer carcasses and work inside the tent were strictly women's tasks, and everything linked to hunting, herding and fishing and preparing tools for these activities was men's work (1977: 113–4). Popov, on the other hand, argued that although among Dolgan the sexual

division of labour was strict in theory, it was not so in practice: chopping wood, catching and harnessing reindeer, even hunting and fishing was practised, when needed, by both sexes (1934: 127). During my fieldwork, physically heavy tasks like carrying water and ice or chopping wood were always performed by men, and in Vasili's household it was specifically my work. In a few cases, men helped their wives with fur processing, although when our neighbour did so, it was met with sarcastic comments from the other men. I remember one sunny autumn day in August, when the 3rd brigade had camped at a small lake. While other *balokhs* were placed quite near to the edge of the lake, our dwelling was a little bit higher at the base of a small hill. We returned from the herding shift with Vasili and stopped at the door for a cigarette. Looking down on the other *balokhs* I saw how Egor, another reindeer herder, who lived in the smallest *balokh* of the brigade, had laid a processed reindeer hide on a sledge and was starting to scratch away a dry but rather smelly mixture of liver and flour that Dolgan people use to cover the underside of the hide when processing reindeer hides. To scratch the dry layer of the mixture is quite hard and boring work and is usually a woman's task. Having noticed Egor doing this I remarked on this to my companion. Vasili laughed and said: 'Egor does women's work.' But fur processing was not the only 'women's work' I saw men engaged in. The men had to do the cooking when the women were in the village: their diet was not as 'monotonous' as in the Ust-Avam tundra (Ziker 2002a: 43), but very similar to the food we ate when the whole family was in the tundra—bread was baked, soups made, and meat prepared with noodles or potatoes. I also saw men repairing clothes even when a woman was in the camp. Still, physically heavy work and work 'outside' was generally a male domain whereas 'domestic' work was the female domain.

Leacock has argued that Naskapi women in their traditional hunting society were 'autonomous', they had their own domain of work but were socially equal with men (1989: 165). There is a lack of good ethnographic data on power relations in the Anabar region in pre-Soviet and Soviet times. Therefore it is hard to state how 'traditional' the women's position was in the reindeer brigades I visited. Given that wives can decide either to stay in the tundra through the winter or live with their school-age children, and that wives are often responsible for negotiating with entrepreneurs on the delivery and prices of supplies, women have visible positions of responsibility in their families. For example, I discussed prices for my reindeer fur winter clothes only with the women who sewed these clothes for me, without any involvement of their husbands. On the other hand, women cooked and served food, poured tea during meals and cleaned up afterwards. Here I

should note that this is not an act of 'enslavement' of women as, out in the tundra, it was also work for which they were paid.

Women in the brigade have an important social role in integrating the family into this micro-collective. During the day when men are out in the tundra, women spend a large part of their time visiting each other to 'drink tea' and socialise. They not only come together to chat but also to plan and coordinate tasks which need to be done together. They also discuss the personal affairs of the brigade, and teach new female members with little experience of the tundra. According to my observations, a wife's skills and personal qualities affect the family's reputation well beyond the brigade.<sup>82</sup> Certain tasks, such as cutting ropes for lassos with a sharp knife or removing hair from raw reindeer hides, are not jobs every woman is able to do well. Possessing such skills can make a person known throughout the tundra, even to the extent that other families will order cleaned hides or certain specific fur ornaments for reindeer fur boots (*unty*) from especially skilled women.

The quality of fur clothes was one topic that is discussed even by men. For example, one reindeer herder commented that my reindeer fur coat *kopo*, sown by another brigade member's wife, was of poor quality both in fur and execution. 'They [the family] have good furs and they can sew. Why did they make such a bad *kopo* for you? I would have expected something better!' It is often the case that women raised in the village never learn basic tundra skills (such as riding reindeer), although they may have already spent several years in the tundra. Inside the family circle, other people make jokes about such people, arguing that some village women never become *tundroviki*, that their *balokhs* are uncomfortable and that other women have to spend time advising such 'unskilled' colleagues. According to my observations, such families are treated with disdain as being 'too lazy' to be proper *tundroviki*.

It is not only tundra skills that are a key element of a woman's reputation—her personal and social qualities are also important. Zina, Balyksyt's wife and a long-time member of the 3rd brigade, said, 'Vasili is a very quiet man. Never talks to anybody. If it weren't for Natasha [his wife] then nobody would ever visit him and talk to him. Natasha is joyful and open.' In tundra life, visiting each other is not merely a means of communication or leisure. Visiting, or choosing not to visit, a particular *balokh* is a mark of the social integration of the family and is important to that family's prestige.

<sup>82</sup> The importance of the personality of the *chumrabortnitsa* for industrial reindeer herding was recognised even by state specialists. Thus Dmitri Syrovatskii, who supports the valuing of reindeer herders' work on the basis of different coefficients (*koefitsenty*), has recommended introducing a special coefficient of 'psychological climate' for *chumrabortnitsy*, i.e., the ability to 'maintain warmth, cleanliness, and cosiness at home' (Syrovatskii 2000: 261–2).



Natasha's open personality made the family's dwelling an enjoyable meeting place for the brigade, where women gathered in the evenings and later their husbands as well. I remember quite a few such evenings when many people had squeezed into a small *balokh*. The teapot was constantly boiling on the stove and people sat on beds and small chairs. There is at least one guitar in every brigade and when the mood is right, it is taken out and people play and sing popular songs in Sakha. Air is filled with warmth and happiness when people laugh at jokes and anecdotes. More often than not, people do not gather as a whole brigade in one dwelling but visit each other during the day. The importance of the visiting was made me clear by Vasili when he asked why I hardly visit Egor. Egor was a shy man and usually I felt uncomfortable when talking to him; I always had the feeling that I have to drag words out of him and he would gladly be alone. Months later I learned how to cope with his silent mood and recognised that it does not mean unfriendliness. 'It is not good that you do not go to him to drink tea,' Vasili explained to me. 'Other people here in the brigade think you have something against him. And Egor has already asked why you do not come—it looks like you do not respect him.' Again, what made it easier to break the ice with Egor was his wife, Sveta, a talkative village woman who filled uncomfortable silences with her unstoppable chat.

It is far from easy to define how 'traditional' the social life of reindeer husbandry actually is in modern times. These activities have retained many skills and social roles from pre-Revolutionary reindeer husbandry. Paradoxically, 'maintaining the tradition' was supported by Soviet policy when women were kept in the tundra as paid tentworkers. And the fact that women have an important function in incorporating their family into the social world of the brigade shows that Leacock's argument about the 'autonomy of the sexes' can be readily applied to post-Soviet reindeer husbandry.

Traditional social relations or skills were not something that Soviet policy wanted to keep and maintain. On the other hand, it would have been too costly to restructure the whole tundra economy. Stammeler argues that on the Yamal Peninsula 'informal agreements and symbiotic relationships existed between local authorities and the reindeer herding economy', which enabled incorporation of Nenets reindeer herding culture into the Soviet state farm economy. In Anabar the situation is similar. Reindeer herding is a social activity and technical reindeer herding skills have been incorporated into local indigenous social norms and behaviour patterns. But, in speaking about 'tradition' in modern reindeer herding, one must realise that the brigade did not exist as a pre-Soviet social unit and many Soviet social norms and fragments of hierarchy have been accepted by herders themselves and become part of their everyday life.

### ***6.3.3 Decision Making, Social Relations and Kinship***

In a village where almost everyone is related to everyone else it is not difficult to find related people in nearly every collective. But, as I showed in chapter 5, people distinguish between 'our' relatives, i.e. those who are members of an extended family, and 'others'. The first are relatives within four generations or persons married to such relatives. According to my informants, the concentration of close relatives has increased since the beginning of the 1990s because movement between brigades has been made easier. In my analysis of brigade enrolment lists dating back to the beginning of the 1980s, I established that in most brigades a larger group of relatives was working—either brothers or a father with some sons—and this 'core family' remained employed in the brigade through the 1980s and 1990s. The 'core family' for the 3rd Uurung Khaia brigade was Onufri Tuprin (Balyksyt) and his wife, who have worked in the brigade since the beginning of the 1980s. In many discussions over tea I sensed that Balyksyt had strong emotional ties to the herd he has spent so long with and regarded the other herders as 'incomers'. Indeed, all the other herders were sent or shifted to the brigade at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Employment lists show that there has been a degree of shifting between brigades when people related to the core family came to the brigade in the 1990s and other herders went away and joined those brigades where some of their close kin worked. When I asked how free people are to change or join a brigade nowadays, Vasili replied, 'It is up to the brigadier how many people you take. You can take as many as ten if you want!' Anna, the wife of former brigadier Andrei, explained the official attitude to the growth in the brigadiers' powers of decision: 'They [the management] tolerate it now, or there would be no people in the tundra. There are so few villagers who want to live in the tundra. Because of that they made it easier for people to change brigades.' Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin, my host in Uurung Khaia and a long-time livestock expert, told me that 'in Communist times there was no discussion; you were appointed to the brigade and you had to obey'. The formation of brigades may not have been as dictatorially managed as Stepan Fiodorovich described, but there were definitely fewer possibilities to join the brigade of your choosing.

In economically and politically difficult times it is not unusual for people to rely on a kinship network rather than on formal structures. Schweitzer (1989), following Granovetter (1977), argues that so-called 'strong ties' guarantee higher 'emotional' and other support from the persons involved (Schweitzer 1989). In the case of reindeer brigades in the Anabarskii district, having relatives in the same brigade means that one is sure to get the help and support one needs. This support might be relatively minor,

such as bringing groceries to the tundra by snowmobile and thus saving on fuel. Borrowing reindeer, groceries or tools from brothers or other relatives is uncomplicated; sometimes it is done even without being asked. Women too are very appreciative of having close relatives in one brigade: 'Your children know each other already from the village; they play together and go together to school. When you need flour or oil, it is more convenient to ask relatives. With other people you have to think before asking them.'

Having one's relatives in the brigade also means being able to discuss brigade affairs on a more informal level and to shape decisions more easily in one's favour. For example, one of my informants convinced his close relative, who was a brigadier, to redraw the brigade's migration route so that he could bring fresh meat to his wife and children in the village more easily. Family connections also motivated herders and their families to change brigades, not only to gain support from relatives but also to help them. For example, Balyksyt used to be brigadier of the 3rd Uurung Khaia brigade but after reaching pensionable age he gave the job to Adriano's father. In time, Andriano became brigadier after his father was pensioned, and a few years ago the job was given to Vasili. Andriano moved to the 6th brigade, because, as he told me, the people there were his relatives and needed help due to a lack of herders. The 6th brigade had at that time only two herders, as the rest had either left or were on vacation. The 6th brigade was known for its 'wild reindeer' and therefore needed at least three herders permanently in the tundra. There were rumours that Andriano had only 'lent' his position to Vasili and they had an agreement that when Andriano returned, he would be able to have the position of brigadier back. But Vasili refused to leave this well-paid and prestigious job. The matter was not discussed openly, at least not in my presence, and other members of the 3rd brigade avoided the topic, but it seems that Vasili called on his good connections with the MUP management and so maintained his position. Adriano had officially relinquished the job to take up the herding position and, because the agreement between the former and present brigadier was informal, he had no case to argue. Vasili, on his side, took his bachelor younger brother to the brigade as a hunter.

This tendency to move to the brigade where older relatives were already working was confirmed by Stepan Egorovich Tuprin, the head of the Uurung Khaia village administration, who said to me: 'I think this is what happens everywhere. Now that we are free [to choose a brigade], people work with their relatives because they know them.' After the reform of one brigade (the 5th) as an *obshchina*, Balyksyt's younger brother Andrei, joined our 3rd brigade. His explanation was: 'The old man [Balyksyt] is my brother. I did not want to go to the island [of Begichev] with the 5th brigade.'



So Balyksyt called me here. He knows this region and can introduce me to these lands.' The older brother was a link not only to the new region but also to informal social relations in the new brigade.

The reindeer brigade is clearly a very different form of organisation compared with the old migrating nomadic group. Every brigade I visited contained distant kin as well as unrelated members but differed in the share of closely related members and people of different ages. Brigadiers were also of different ages and experience. All of this mattered when it came to negotiations on further migrations or the length of stay in a particular place. According to my informants, there are essentially only two ways to lead a brigade: the brigadier can negotiate with his fellow herders about the next move, or he can make a unilateral decision. I have documented cases of both strategies. The extent to which the brigadier involves other reindeer herders in the decision-making process depends largely on his personality and his willingness to accept the opinions of his colleagues. I was told, 'How much the brigadier listens to the advice of other people depends on how strong he is. Some people do everything on their own; some ask the opinion of others.' The experience and reputation of fellow herders also play a role in the degree to which others are involved in decision-making. In general, experienced reindeer herders with a long work record expect that their opinion will be asked even if not always followed. Anna, daughter of Old Moigo, told me once about the 3rd brigade:

Vasili is a brigadier now. When Andriano used to be a brigadier, he always asked the opinion of others. But Vasili does everything on his own. Andriano is still in a brigade and he has a lot of experience. I think people in the brigade are a little bit offended that Vasili never asks Andriano for advice. Andriano's father used to be there as a brigadier. He knows a lot [about reindeer herding]. And Balyksyt works in a brigade. He is very experienced as well.

This example highlights the gap between the official, professionalised image of the brigade and the traditional, native worldview, which emphasises respect for older and more experienced people. This does not mean that respect is only found among the traditionally minded. While older people are generally respected among the indigenous population (see further analysis in chapter 8) and this respectful behaviour is even more obvious among *tundroviki*, the opinion of some elders was especially valued when discussing reindeer herding, hunting, weather and other tundra-related topics. In the context of respect for elders I again encountered a symbiosis of Soviet legacy and traditional categories. Balyksyt used to be a respected Communist Party member and was still very proud of it. Andriano was also a former party member and once even a low-level official. I still remember the respect

in Vasili's voice when I first talked with him about other members of the brigade, as he stressed that 'Old Man [Balyksyt] used to be a Communist'. This respect for former Communists and honoured workers was not limited to the generation of people who had careers in the Communist Party. The 24-year-old director of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP explained to me once why he was especially proud of one of his hunting brigadiers: 'The old man knows better, he is an Honoured Worker of Agriculture' (*zasluzhennyi rabotnik sel'skokhoziaistva*).

To become a party member, the candidate had to be recommended by two other Communists who were valuable workers with a good work record and thus respected community members. During the Soviet era in Anabar, not everyone who wanted to join the party was allowed to do so. Being a party member was widely seen in the village as a sign of prestige—and indicated that the person was a skilled hard-worker.<sup>83</sup> Similarly respected by other *tundroviki* were those who had been awarded Soviet medals and titles for good work, such as 'Honoured Worker of Agriculture', 'Order of the Red Flag of Labour' or 'Hero of Socialist Labour'.

The reason people hold these awards in such high esteem is that they were presented to honour excellent performance and achieving beyond their prescribed quota in reindeer herding, hunting and fishing. In chapter 4 I discussed the importance of knowledge within the informal social hierarchy. A reindeer herder or hunter who met his quota by making full use of his professional skills would also be seen as 'knowing the land'. Here we can see another symbiosis of indigenous and Soviet categories of prestige and honour that made Soviet titles socially acceptable within the indigenous community.

In everyday situations this respect is expressed by giving such people seats of honour at the table and listening in silence when they speak. In

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<sup>83</sup> When discussing the Communist Party, even in the agricultural sector, scholars tend to confine their analyses to the structures and persons at the top, as did Caroline Humphrey (1983) when analysing a Buriat collective farm. Little attention has been paid to the bottom levels of the Communist Party or on the 'average' member and his or her life as an ordinary Party member in a collective or family. Margaret Mead (1966) argued in her analysis of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, which denies any 'choice or opinion from bottom' [sense unclear] and was based only on newspapers and other official written sources that generally in the Soviet Union the Party was respected and it had such a great influence that even families were affected by Party subordination [sense unclear]. She connects this it to the Russian tradition of Tsarist absolutism and a strong bureaucracy (Mead 1966: 28, 32, 56). Almond (1954) stressed that the Communist Party was popularly held always to be right, the result of its success. He stressed that the 'gospel of the October revolution' was used by the Party to create its powerful position and to attract members. Bauer used psychoanalysis to argue that Soviet people were New Socialist Men, products of conscious 'extensive programs of character training' (Bauer 1953: 634).

decision-making, old Communists and honoured workers expect appreciation of their experience and expect to be asked for advice. Even when the brigadier has already decided the next step in the migration, his fellow workers expect him to consult with the 'elders' about the location of the best pastures or best river crossings. This kind of negotiation is done in a very informal way. Thus Balyksyt visited our *balokh* to 'drink tea' every morning after the early radio session. It took me a long time, and improvement of my Sakha, before I understood that he came to speak with Vasili about reindeer and pastures.

'Elder' brigadiers usually maintain the reindeer herders' respect even when have been long retired (perhaps 10 years or more) and live permanently in the village. I met a legendary old reindeer herder with the nickname Baldhead,<sup>84</sup> who was also an Honoured Worker of Agriculture. He still visited his old brigade where he 'pushed the boys' (*dodgonial parnei*), as Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin told me, to work. The new brigadier, one of Baldhead's close relatives, respected the old man's opinion, and even if he did not always accept it, seldom opposed it publicly. Thus, on an informal level, elders still had an impressive potential to affect the decision making process.

The role of family ties and the accumulation of knowledge are important not only for concentrating relatives in one brigade but also in another respect. In the reindeer brigades of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP it was not unusual for one family to monopolise the better-paid and influential positions within the brigade. I documented four cases in the period from 1990 to 2001 in six brigades registered in Uurung Khaia where the office of a brigadier was given over to a son or brother. In Soviet times the brigadiers were, at least theoretically, appointed by the farm management. Nowadays the brigade often elects a new brigadier, or an old brigadier suggests the name of a successor and the MUP management confirms the candidate. The work of a brigadier is indeed better paid and more prestigious, but with this comes the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of the herd and meeting the plan. Because the brigade members' salaries depend on the number of animals maintained within the herd, the brigadier is thereby directly responsible for the income of his colleagues.

A brigadier is expected to be experienced. It is generally accepted that a brigadier's son learns much by working with his father. An experienced brigadier accumulates wide-ranging knowledge and passes this on to his sons—just like the transmission of knowledge in relation to the 'master' that we saw in chapter 4. Therefore colleagues do not generally resist when a brigadier announces that the role will pass to his son. In every case I wit-

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<sup>84</sup> Baldhead was frostbitten in a snowstorm and lost all of his hair and beard.



nessed where the role had passed to close kin, the old brigadier continued to work in the same brigade and influenced the decisions of the new brigadier. Uibaan, Balyksyt's son, became brigadier of the 3rd brigade in the winter of 2001. He told me that his father had always helped and influenced him: 'The old man pushed me hard. (*Starik menia zdorovo dogonial!*) He is very critical. Always knows what to do. In the beginning I was very nervous, I had no experience and I didn't know if I could do it or not!' When I asked former brigadiers why they gave up their position in favour of their sons or younger brothers, a typical answer was that the work was becoming too difficult and it was time to let someone younger shoulder the burden. Passing on jobs to the next generation was seen as a continuation of the family occupation and way of life. Not only in Anabar, but all over Siberia, older people tend to complain that young people do not show any interest in living and working in the tundra. I heard several times that a reindeer herder must have a sense of responsibility towards his reindeer and that young herders do not have such a sense. When a reindeer herder's sons work with him, and step into his shoes when he retires, it demonstrates that he has successfully bred a sense of responsibility into the next generation, i.e. he has transmitted to them the knowledge of his occupation and of the social bonds with animals and landscape (J. N. Gray 2000).

The decision-making process in reindeer brigades in Anabar is thus strongly affected by informal hierarchies. Although the brigadier is the person who is formally in charge of choosing new pastures and making decisions about other aspects of brigade life, informal decision-making is often a collective process. Because the position of the brigadier is negotiable and connected to kinship structures, the importance of the informal dimension in affairs of the brigade has become more obvious in the postsocialist period.

#### 6.4 State Reindeer

All reindeer in Uurung Khaia, with the exception of one enterprise—'Erel'—were pastured by the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP's brigades. The former state farm has five reindeer brigades that use territories which were marked on maps and planned by ecologists 10 years ago. In the Anabarskii district, according to statistics, about 75% of the reindeer belong to the district, including deer leased by other enterprises.

As mentioned above, at the time of my fieldwork state-owned reindeer were no longer being slaughtered. The purpose of reindeer herding was to increase the number of animals, not to produce meat and other products. In this sense, for local people there was no noticeable change from Soviet times, when the aim of industrial agriculture was not to provide for local

people's subsistence but to fulfil quotas (Anderson 2000a: 38). The only product of reindeer herding was therefore fresh velvet antlers (*panty*). There are certain regional differences in the profitability and attitudes towards the antler business. Stammeler (2004: 8.5) shows that antlers provide a significant part of the income of Nenets reindeer herders and this trade is practised despite the widely held belief among herders that it is not good for the animals' health. The antler trade is not a lucrative business in the Anabarskii district. Every year the head of the district administration chooses a brigade where the antlers will be cut and flown out by helicopter. Like the Nenets herders, people generally hold a negative view about the collection of antlers. This is based not only on concerns about the declining health of affected reindeer but also on falling economic returns. One brigade had received around 15,000 roubles for *panty* each year. Divided among the herders, this meant about 2,500 roubles (c. US\$85) per herder. This is perceived as being too low to make it a worthwhile activity and the reindeer herders in 'my' brigade were understandably glad when they heard that they had not been chosen for antler cutting by the head of the administration.



Plate 8. Carcasses of sick and injured reindeer that were slaughtered after the corral.

For the MUP, it still made sense to keep reindeer, because the state paid the herders' salaries and therefore provided jobs for people in the village, where unemployment is a problem. But reindeer are more than jobs to the indigenous population—the people have either grown up in reindeer brigades or

have spent a lot of time working with them. The emotional tie to the reindeer among the local indigenous population is strong and many native people in the district, from the head of the administration downwards, firmly support the opinion that reindeer have a very special place in the tundra.

In chapter 3 I showed that reindeer herding in MUPs has not only inherited but consciously maintained the structures and methods of planned agriculture from Soviet times. The most important feature (*pokazatel'*—‘index’) for evaluating the quality of the brigade is its ‘economic output’ (*delovoi vykhod*), i.e. how many calves in relation to female animals are born and stay alive in a particular year. The brigades have an obligation to keep 90% of the female animals and 75% of the calves based on the autumn count. Reindeer herders must not merely take care of the brigade’s deer but must tame and train 30 of them in each brigade. At the same time the herders are allowed to use the herd’s reindeer labour ‘as much as they wish’. Usufruct rights to state-owned deer last only so long as the herder works in the brigade. When a herder leaves the brigade, he must leave these animals in the brigade’s herd.

Normally herders do not receive the full amount of their salary. When reindeer herders lose animals to wolves or to illness, the cost of these losses is deducted from their salaries. When reindeer herders slaughter an MUP animal, they must pay for it. Thus there are detailed price lists indicating the value of the different parts of the carcass: the head, heart, liver, etc. The reindeer are divided into different categories according to sex and age. Each category has a standard weight, and when the reindeer is slaughtered, the amount of meat, as described in the list, has to be paid back to the MUP. When a 3-year-old male reindeer, which on paper has 75 kg of meat, is slaughtered and divided up among the herders, the brigadier makes a list of who got the head, the hide, how much meat, etc. The price of a kilogram of reindeer meat was 25–27 roubles in the winter of 2001. The lists of ‘eaten’ deer are given to the MUP’s veterinarian and he deducts the value from their salary. Therefore, as people told me, when one has a lot of private deer and there are no wild reindeer around, it makes economic sense to eat one’s own animals rather than those of the MUP. But herders were sometimes forced to spare their own trained reindeer and eat those of the MUP because their own reindeer were too valuable as work animals.

#### **6.4.1 State Reindeer as Moral Property**

The average reindeer herder’s household needs around 40–60 reindeer for one migration. There are few herders who own this many tamed private reindeer. To tame a reindeer is a difficult task and therefore the *pastukhi* develop a sense of ownership towards those state reindeer that they con-



stantly use for work and migration. They call such animals 'our reindeer' (*bihigi tabalarbyt* in Sakha) in contrast to 'other reindeer' (*atyn tabalar* in Sakha). Taming, and the work that such animals are then trained to do, creates a social bond between the human and animal (Ingold 1980: 110). Oleg told me about 'his own' animals: 'Once I had many reindeer. I worked at one time in the 3rd brigade, but then I changed brigades because my brothers worked in the fifth. In the 3rd brigade I lived quite well. I had a big *balokh* and many reindeer. In winter the wind destroyed my *balokh*. When I left the brigade, I left the reindeer there.' I encountered the concept of 'own' versus 'other' reindeer when the young herders Uibaan and Baahyi slaughtered some state animals whose wounds on their legs had failed to heal. One of the reindeer lay on the ground with its legs tied and I asked Uibaan if this was a privately owned animal. 'No,' he responded, 'it is a state reindeer (*staada taba* in Sakha). This is your reindeer.' In fact, it was a state reindeer that was tamed and used by my host brigadier, Vasili Kyltashov. In saying that the reindeer was 'mine', the young herders had counted me as a member of Vasili's household because I lived in his *balokh*, worked to keep this *balokh* supplied with water and firewood and rode 'Vasili's' reindeer.

Reindeer herders have to catch reindeer every day. While on duty, a herder needs reindeer for his sledges or for riding, while other workers in the brigade need them to carry wood, ice or their possessions to the next campsite. The reindeer is not a true 'beast of burden', and after it has worked for a couple of days it needs a few days' rest. Therefore it is necessary to have several times more trained working animals than are actually being used at one time. Not every reindeer herder is able to tame and train the 30 animals that they are obligated to train. Therefore people depend on the goodwill of their colleagues. Those herders and their families with fewer animals and who are therefore unable to fulfil their own needs are constantly forced to borrow work animals.

When somebody wants to use a reindeer which another herder has tamed and trained, the 'owner' must give permission. Such permission is usually granted, but herders who do not have enough work animals of their own tend to have a bad reputation. Zina, Balyksyt's wife, told me about Egor, another herder in the 3rd brigade: 'Our boys must always catch some reindeer for him. Egor is lazy; he always lies in the *balokh* and does not train reindeer.' Other herders had to help Egor to catch his deer and lent some of their own when needed; when the brigade migrated, they could not leave Egor behind. Catching reindeer is a collective process where men with lassos have to cooperate to drive the targeted animals towards the person ready to bring the animal down with a lasso. Tame animals become used to working with a particular herder every day and will let themselves be caught more

easily. Catching work animals for others means that the half-tamed animals, which are not used often, must be caught, a process which consumes much time and energy and delays departure of the caravan.

In this way a brigade, like a pastoral camp, becomes a 'place for social relations' (Ingold 1987: 176). To avoid tiring out the reindeer and wasting time with multiple trips, people have to cooperate to move all their households in one go. Through cooperation, different people assume different positions with respect to each other. Herders who have too few tamed reindeer are forced to have fewer possessions with them in the tundra and their *balokhs* are smaller. All of this decreases the prestige of such herders, who are seen as 'lazy'. When a brigadier negotiates with his colleagues he listens to the opinion of skilled herders. A 'skilled' herder will possess all the signs of success: many mounted and harness animals, and a good supply of meat, furs and fish for trade. Like the nomadic northern Pathan in Barth's classic study, wealth is converted into prestige, giving that person more influence in the brigade's affairs (Barth 1969b: 122).

### 6.5 Privately Owned Animals

In this section I will focus on private reindeer (*ketekh* in Sakha) and how the animal as an object reflects social relations. Baxter (1975: 186) writes about a 'mobile bundle of rights' in cases where one animal has multiple owners. In the Anabarskii district, the ownership of an animal remains with one person but many people have use rights over that reindeer. These user rights are 'mobile' and can change and vary over time.

About 25% of each reindeer herd in the Anabarskii district comprises privately owned animals. Unlike the Yamal Nenets case, where people consciously obscure the real number of animals they own (Stammler 2004), this appears to be pretty accurate. The number of private reindeer is relatively small and their economic importance is, compared with Nenets reindeer, marginal. Every brigadier keeps a book where he lists separately the animals in his 'own' herd and the private reindeer. According to the lists, most *ketekh* belong to the herders themselves. The average number of privately owned animals per herder is 20–30, in rare cases up to 60 animals, and a few people have fewer than 20. I was told that before *perestroika*, only 50 to 100 *ketekh* were allowed to be kept in one herd although unofficially the number was higher (see chapter 2). Today 'you can have as many as you want'.

In addition to the herders' own deer, every brigade's herd contains animals which are owned either by hunters or villagers. Here the herder–hunter continuum (discussed in chapter 2) shows itself again. In Anabar it is quite usual to shift between two official job categories—hunter and herder—

and many men I know have practiced both during the past 20 years. Many hunters used to work as reindeer herders and then changed their occupation. Since 1994–6, when snowmobiles were introduced and used by hunters in the Anabarskii district, reindeer are no longer needed as work animals. Only in rare cases, for example when a wild herd comes close to a hunter's base, do people sometimes borrow some reindeer to use for short trips for a day or two. In every hunting base I visited in Anabar, I saw reindeer sledges, which indicates that reindeer transport has not been wholly abandoned by hunters. The villagers who have reindeer live permanently in the village where they work either legally or illegally. Most of them do not intend to become *tundroviki*. In Anabar, the only way you can look after your own reindeer is by becoming a reindeer herder and joining a reindeer brigade. It is impossible to become a lone and independent reindeer herder because the optimum herd size is beyond the scope of individual ownership (my informant estimated that, in order to be on continuous migration and to have some extra animals for slaughter, a family would need to own at least 60 head of reindeer). Furthermore, it is impossible to keep small numbers of reindeer in the vicinity of the village because reindeer must move around to find fresh pastures, and the land close to the village is quickly exhausted and degraded by vehicles. Because of the ecological characteristics of the tundra in Anabar, it would be impossible to introduce fences, as has been done in the taiga. In any case, even small herds need constant supervision to protect them from thieves and dogs. For these reasons then, people in the village hand their animals over to the brigades to look after. To these villagers, their reindeer constitute renewable capital which can be consumed when food is scarce or when they need the hides, but the animals are not the basis of their lifestyles.

### **6.5.1 Inherited Reindeer**

As mentioned earlier, private reindeer belonging to reindeer herders are mostly draught or riding animals. Sometimes in winter, when there are no wild reindeer around, reindeer herders will slaughter and eat an old animal or one unsuited to training, but on the whole reindeer herders place greater value on their own animals. Even villagers try to keep their animals alive and only go to the tundra to slaughter an animal when there is no other way of obtaining meat. Private reindeer are a form of property and, as will be shown below, this gives them other qualities than just being objects for direct consumption.

Like every other kind of property, animals are also passed from one generation to the next and inheritance is one main way of obtaining domestic reindeer. Among the Uurung Khaia Dolgan, reindeer are inherited by the



youngest son, as is other valuable property such as *balokhs* and snowmobiles.

Popov writes in the 1930s that the youngest son inherited the specific earmarks belonging to his father, but he says nothing about the reindeer themselves (1935: 198). Gurvich argues that so-called Reindeer Sakha in Olenek and Anabar bequeathed their reindeer and other property to the youngest son. According to local custom, older children would have already received their share of animals and other property, like sledges, when they married and left the family to establish their own households. The youngest son remained with the parents and so was under an obligation to feed them (Gurvich 1977: 110).

The first time I encountered this custom was when I visited a trading post and hunters' base in Chöchördaakh. In the yard, Kupaa waved towards the *balokhs* that stood behind his log house, and said: 'When I retire, my youngest son will get all of this.' This is a continuation of a Dolgan practice whereby family identity is entrusted to and carried by the youngest son.<sup>85</sup> The herding dogs are inherited with the reindeer as well.<sup>86</sup> Balyksyt told me, during a discussion about death and Dolgan customs related to it: 'When I die, I will not need reindeer. One is enough [to be sacrificed on the grave]. Oko gets everything else and the *balokh*.' All of his three sons lived in the brigade and two of them worked with him as professional herders. All three had their own reindeer that Balyksyt or other people had given to them. However, while the youngest son Oko possessed only a few animals, his brothers, like all self-respecting herders, had many dozens of reindeer to satisfy their need for transport.

Inheritance is also the way many villagers become owners of their own private reindeer. Where a father is a reindeer herder in a brigade and the youngest (or the only) son has already settled down in the village, then, on the father's death, the reindeer are left in the brigade herd, usually in the brigade where the father worked or in the brigade where the private reindeer are currently herded. Because the number of private reindeer is so small, the

<sup>85</sup> This practice of inheritance is different from the traditional Evenki/Even practice where the reindeer of the deceased were distributed among family members (Shirokogoroff 1929: 302).

<sup>86</sup> There is a widespread opinion that in large-scale reindeer herding east of the Enisei River, dogs are not used (Vasilevich and Levin 1950: 76; Ingold 1980: 109; Baskin 1991: 219). The only exception in eastern Siberia seems to be the Dolgan (Popov 1935: 186). I am sceptical of this generalisation. The reindeer herders in the Verkhoyansk Mountains (eastern Sakha) used dogs for herding. But I was told that some reindeer herders in Nizhne Kolyma do not use dogs. And in Chukotka, where according to Bogoras (1933) dogs were not used, the Nenets breed of reindeer dog was very popular in the nineteenth century. Indeed, Chukotka was the last stronghold of this dog breed, which was considered extinct until 1985 when it was discovered that Chukchi reindeer herders had maintained the breed (Bogoslowskaia 2000).

number of inherited deer is also small. After everyone has received his share there are often fewer than ten animals for the youngest son. According to the household records, most males (of various ages) and many women in Uurung Khaia own reindeer. In contrast to *tundroviki*, village people own on average no more than five reindeer; only in very rare cases do people own more than ten.

The question that must be answered is: why do village people still keep reindeer? Unlike *tundroviki* and especially herders, village dwellers are not economically dependent on domestic reindeer. Reindeer as a means of transport do not have any importance for non-herders, and as a source of food, domestic reindeer come into play only in extreme situations. I demonstrated in chapter 3 that reindeer, including domestic reindeer, have always been part of the local indigenous culture. However, I rarely met the opinion voiced by the Khanty (Ventsel 1998) and also documented among the Koryk people by Alexander D. King (2002) that 'without reindeer there is no culture'. In the next chapter I discuss the notion of 'modernity' in relation to the indigenous people in Anabar and show that their identity is not dependent on pre-Revolution lifestyles. However, village people have consciously maintained their possession of a few reindeer and passed them on to the next generation. In my view, possessing reindeer not only carries cultural significance but also an important social meaning. In the next two sections I describe how giving reindeer as gifts and giving people the rights to use certain animals while still retaining ownership of the mare strategies for creating and confirming social ties within the community.

### 6.5.2 Reindeer as Gifts

One other way of becoming a reindeer owner, besides inheriting them, is to receive them as a gift. Reindeer are only very rarely sold and only then to people outside the village community (for example, to newcomers who have no other source of meat) or when the owner badly needs the money. Among friends and relatives, reindeer are transmitted only as gifts, a custom seemingly widespread among Siberian reindeer cultures (cf. Shirokogoroff 1929: 35–6).

People receive an animal as a gift on joining the army, on returning from the army, on marriage, on the birth of a child and so on. For the indigenous people of Anabar, to present someone with a reindeer as a gift is a symbol of the highest respect. As I mentioned above, indigenous people in Uurung Khaia do not have many private reindeer, and thus such gifts are all the more valuable. But it is important to stress that reindeer are valued in the community much more highly than other objects with the same monetary value. I have already described the emotional tie of reindeer herders to their

animals. Because all adult indigenous people of the village of Uurung Khaia have grown up in the tundra with reindeer, reindeer represent their culture and their everyday life: 'What would we do without reindeer,' said an adult villager in his fifties. But in general, I did not hear much discussion about reindeer and the deeper meanings attributed to them. When going through my field notes, I found very few comments about reindeer made by younger people. Furthermore, the adults who expressed deep concerns about the steady annual fall in reindeer numbers were all *tundroviki*. Nevertheless, almost all indigenous men owned at least one reindeer, and being a reindeer owner is definitely the norm in Uurung Khaia. In this community, which only two decades ago had broken with full tundra life, most of its social life still flowed around reindeer. Uurung Khaia itself is a village whose economic justification used to be—and supposedly still is—as a producer of reindeer meat. To be honest, I was surprised to find that reindeer herders and hunters are not marginalised in the village but are still well-respected members of the community. This is in stark contrast to my fieldwork with the Khanty and forest Nentsy in 1995, and in Even villages in the Verkhoiansk Mountains in 2001, where reindeer hunters were clearly at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The status of *tundroviki* in Uurung Khaia is explained partly by their position in reciprocal networks, discussed in the previous chapter. However, the community is also tied socially to the tundra and to Dolgan herder/hunter culture. Through kin ties, almost everyone spends part of their youth in the tundra brigades. Close social ties to the tundra also implants values of tundra culture into village culture. In the tundra, reindeer herders repeatedly stress that 'it is good to own many reindeer' and that this ownership is connected to prestige (see 6.4.1 above). I believe that it is their close social ties to a still vivid reindeer-based tundra culture that makes ownership of reindeer among villagers so important to them. Reindeer are their link to a way of life that they have left behind physically but not emotionally. In practice, the donation of a reindeer happens so rarely that it symbolises the high regard in which the receiver is held by the giver. The most valued present is a white buck, a rarity. 'A white reindeer is born maybe only every other year or so,' explained one experienced reindeer herder. 'And usually when white calves are born, they are weak and die soon afterwards.' Among many Siberian peoples white reindeer are considered holy (as I observed among Pim River Khanty in 1995; Shirokogoroff 1999: 198). A white reindeer is also seen as special in the Anabarskii district, although not in so specifically a religious sense as in pre-Revolutionary times. 'When people want to give you a special gift, they give you a white reindeer,' said Fiodor Tuprin, the son of my host in Uurung Khaia, 'Giving a white reindeer is seen as a sign of the highest respect [*uvazhenie* in Rus.]'.



Besides the white colour, I did not document any other categories that would create a 'reindeer hierarchy'. When not white, neither colour nor sex of the animal was significant. The most important thing is that the donated reindeer is a fine animal i.e. healthy and young enough to work well. Untamed animals are seldom presented for practical reasons: it is difficult to catch and transport an untamed animal. Fiodor showed me a box of photos. Among pictures of his friends were some black and white pictures of reindeer. He picked up a picture of a white reindeer and said, 'This was sent to me when I was in the army. A cousin from the 2nd brigade gave me this reindeer to celebrate my army service and took this picture of the reindeer. This is our custom.' It is a very common practice to send a photograph of the gift deer to the recipient when he is far away and not able to see his reindeer. I have seen many such photos in family albums and on the wall.

I also documented cases that prove that the old custom of giving reindeer to valued guests is still alive. For example, it was traditional to give a reindeer when a respected person revisited a reindeer brigade after a long absence. To celebrate this, his good friends would give him one of the best reindeer they owned, a tradition observed by Popov in the 1930s (Popov 1934: 30). When the people from the subsidiary enterprise Erel visited the 3rd brigade (where I lived) on the way to their home camp, there was a huge party to honour them. The reindeer herders stopped at our camp to spend the night and to pick up four reindeer they had left with our brigade. When they left the 3rd brigade's camp, they had twelve reindeer instead of four with them. Each member of the 3rd brigade had given them one animal, and even the 18-year-old son of a *pastukh* gave away one of his deer. When I asked why they gave away their reindeer, the young man's older brother said, 'They have not visited us for a long time.'

Zina, Balyksyt's wife, told me one day. 'Once we would give a reindeer to almost every visitor. But nowadays there are not many reindeer left. Because of that we give reindeer only on special occasions.' Vasili's wife Natasha explained: 'Very respected visitors receive reindeer, but this is rare today. People are too poor to give reindeer away. Usually we give an arctic fox fur or a wolf skin.' The chief livestock expert of Il'ia Spiridonov MUP told me that 'reindeer are not given very often. This is a sign of respect (*uvazhenie*) or a sign that people love you. Usually you leave the reindeer in the brigade it came from. It means you have friends there.'

According to data I collected about gift giving, reindeer were the only high-value gift given to people who were not close kin. Older people told me that in the 1970s and 1980s a reindeer was presented to visitors more often than now. They especially stressed that relatives from Syndassko, after visiting relatives in Uurung Khaia, 'drove home many animals' (*goniali*

*mnogo zhivotnykh domoi*). There are multiple causes for this change. In the 1970s and 1980s living standards were relatively high and people had a guarantee that this kind of life would continue. Reindeer in this period were the only asset a *tundrovik* was able to give as a sign of honour—there were no or few snowmobiles; and TV sets or other household appliances were expensive, had to be ordered and took a long time to arrive. Reindeer were the only privately owned renewable resource—and one that was also able to reproduce relatively fast (see Ingold 1980: 188). On the other hand, relatives from Uurung Khaia and Syndassko could seldom meet each other because visiting the other village meant three or four days' travel by reindeer sledges instead of the one or two days by snowmobile today. Therefore, such guests were 'rarer' and the respect shown to them more elaborate. In post-Soviet times, the economic situation has changed and, as many people have told me, 'there are too few reindeer to give away'. Today people select more carefully the person to whom they will give a reindeer.

When analysing this custom, it is important to consider whether this social act is selfish or altruistic (Hodgson 1993: 43). Many scholars have analysed the relation between creating social networks and giving animals away as gifts (Baxter 1975; Ingold 1980; Khazanov 1994). As Gluckman (1965: 176) wrote, 'relationships are established by handing over gifts'. Gift giving is, as a rule, voluntary and a sign that the giver values the personal relationship (Cheal 1996: 89). During my fieldwork, I noticed close relations between the 3rd Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade and the former 6th brigade, known now as the subsidiary enterprise 'Erel'. The enterprise tried to motivate herders of the 3rd brigade to help 'Erel' hunt wild reindeer (chapter 3.3). These two reindeer brigades were also neighbours when the 3rd brigade migrated to its northern pastures in summer and developed close connections with the former 5th brigade, which had been reorganised as *obshchina* during my field work period (chapter 3.1.1). My host Vasili had adopted a son of the brigadier of the 5th brigade, Dima, who was brother of the oldest member in the 3rd brigade, Balyksyt. Andriano, former brigadier of the 3rd brigade, was closely related to some of the 'Erel' people. For example, Oleg, former colleague of Vasili when he worked in the 5th brigade, was also the brother of some 'Erel' reindeer herders. All three reindeer units were linked via a bond of friendship and trust that also was expressed in reciprocal relations, as discussed in chapter 5.5.3. During migrations or other journeys in the tundra, tired reindeer were left in each others' herds and sledges were stored in *sakhyyr*. In winter, I noticed sporadic borrowing of fuel from barrels that were left in the tundra at the sites of former and future camps. Because these three units were all neighbours on the east side of the Anabar

River, people also used visits to the village to send meat to relatives there or ask relatives to send back supplies and spare parts for snowmobiles.

Reindeer form part of a reciprocal network that unites people of different brigades, occupations and social status. Receiving a gift, of course, incurs the obligation to reciprocate, especially when the need arises (Mauss 1990). Based on my observations, reciprocal exchange and cooperation are practised in conjunction with confirming social ties through the gifting of animals.

### 6.5.3 *Private Reindeer of Non-Brigade Members*

Since all private reindeer are pastured with reindeer brigades, there are a number of reindeer in the herds of the Anabarskii district that belong to people outside that brigade. When the reindeer herders from the 5th Uurung Khaia brigade received their gift of reindeer from their colleagues in the 3rd brigade, the herders took the animals with them. However, I was told that it is more common for the new owner to leave the animal 'where it is', i.e. in the giver's herd and asks him to take care of the gifted animal(s). In this case, the reindeer and any calves will be noted in the personal list as the property of the new owner.

According to Kuznetsov and Missonova (1993) in the Eveno-Bytaiskii (eastern Sakha) district, the only people without private deer (*lichnye oleni* in Rus.) were incomer teachers, medical personnel and other 'specialists'. The number of deer owned privately by people of Sakha or Even origin in the Eveno-Bytaiskii district varied from three to 70 animals, with up to 20, mainly transport animals, being the most common (Kuznetsov and Missonova 1993: 19). The difference with the Anabarskii district is that most villagers here do not tame their reindeer because almost every family possesses a snowmobile.

Living in reindeer brigades I noticed that a reindeer belonging to someone from the village is always under the personal guard of the herder who 'has brought this reindeer in' (*bral olenei suda* in Rus.) and is obliged to look after its health and safety within the herd. Generally the reindeer herders have lists of whose reindeer they are responsible for. Descriptive notes such as 'Ivan's black, Maria's two riding animals (*uutsak*), Grigory's red bull, etc.' are added to these lists. Many of these *ketekh* (private reindeer) are unmarked, but, as I observed, the herders know by sight each animal for which they are responsible (see section 6.2.2). Brigadiers keep a detailed list (usually in the form of a table) which includes the names of everyone whose reindeer are kept in the herd. In these tables there are also rows for calves born to these reindeer. Private animals are added to the general district



statistics and when brigadiers send their accounts to the MUP management they report changes in private reindeer numbers too.



Plate 9. Cutting antlers at the corral.

A 'bundle of rights' exists around such private reindeer, where non-owners have certain rights and responsibilities towards the reindeer and their owner. The keeper of a reindeer is allowed to use its labour when it is tamed. If a reindeer dies, the herder is obliged to give the owner its hide ('or he will not believe that his reindeer is dead,' Vasili told me jokingly), as was also the custom in pre-collectivisation times (Popov 1935: 199). A herder obtains no other profit from the reindeer since the owner does not have to pay for the herding of the deer. The calves belong to the owner but if a newborn calf dies, as often happens in the spring, the herder is free to use the fur and feed the meat to his dogs. When other reindeer herders want to use the labour of such reindeer they need to ask the herder who has main responsibility for that animal. In this sense, the responsible herder is the person who delegates usufruct rights to other herders.

I came across the social meaning of such 'reindeer relationships' when I tried to obtain more information about informal monitoring of land use between the 3rd Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade and the hunting enterprise in Tiistaakh (described in more detail in chapter 5). I had heard from Moigo and later from Balyksyt that the old men see each other as brothers. When I asked Natasha, the brigadier's wife, if this was connected to the fact that we had entered the hunting grounds of Tiistaakh, she said 'Why shouldn't we go

there? Moigo himself has his reindeer in our herd. Balyksyt brought them in.'

Listening to stories about reindeer, it is possible to trace personal histories and find the strands that make up the networks. The lists of private reindeer told me much about the informal networks that exist among the inhabitants of the Anabarskii district. Stepan Fiodorovich, who had already retired by the time I did my fieldwork, said that he had his private reindeer in the 2nd Uurung Khaia brigade. He used to work in this brigade as a livestock expert and still visited it. The brigadier of the 2nd brigade was his relative, and when Stepan Fiodorovich went to the tundra to hunt geese or to hunt reindeer in winter, he stayed at his relative's *balokh*. The brigadier also supplied Stepan Fiodorovich's son, who worked as a souvenir carver in Udachnyi, with pieces of mammoth tusk. To reciprocate, Stephan Fiodorovich sometimes sold his relative's fish through the small-scale enterprise 'Elden' where he worked. The chief livestock expert in Uurung Khaia, Grigory Konstantinovich Tuprin, grew up as an orphan in the family of one reindeer herder, Egor, from the 3rd reindeer brigade. When I studied the *ketekh* lists of the brigade I discovered that Grigory Konstantinovich had many reindeer in the herd under Egor's care. Their families communicated actively in the village and when Grigory Konstantinovich visited the brigade he stayed with Egor. Egor, as a *tundrovik*, had reindeer meat and fish available on a seasonal basis to share with his 'friends'. Grigory Konstantinovich, as a high-ranking official, was in turn able to bring scarce goods back from his business trips when needed. His wife was also a shopkeeper in Uurung Khaia where Egor was probably able to obtain credit. During my fieldwork, Egor gave a reindeer to Grigory Konstantinovich when he came to inspect the reindeer herd. As Egor told me, it was a sign of respect to his 'brother'. In chapter 5 I described the close connections between the 3rd Uurung Khaia brigade and the family enterprise in Tiistaakh. I got the impression that much of this cooperation was the result of the fictive kinship that existed between Moigo and Balyksyt. Balyksyt visited Tiistaakh whenever the brigade was close enough to reach Moigo's base. He also stored some of his fuel barrels and timber at Tiistaakh to be picked up when the brigade passed by on its winter migration. In return, large-scale hunting of wild reindeer and trapping of arctic fox by the members of the 3rd brigade was tolerated by Moigo who had become quite protective of his hunting grounds on account of the 'bad experience' with other hunters (see 5.3).

Private reindeer belonging to non-members of brigades are not only objects of property relations but they are also markers of social relations between people. Reindeer are sometimes the most visible part of the social relationships and networks that connect people together.

## 6.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the entitlements, rights and obligations that surround reindeer. In addition I have discussed how the social structure of a reindeer brigade is relevant to understanding its inner life. Reindeer are not simply 'meat on the hoof' (Baxter 1975: 211) but the focus of multiple practices and reciprocal networks. Multiple rights and obligations linked to domestic reindeer create 'the system of social relations through which men reproduce their material existence' (Ingold 1980: 6) and reflect cooperation between different enterprises and their units, and the regulation of land use patterns and resource management. Both privately owned and district farm reindeer are part of the networks that unite different people. The concept of a 'bundle of rights', as used by Hann as a complex of social norms around animals (Hann 1998), refers to the formal and informal networks of the people who live in the districts of the northern tundra. The management of herds and the circulation of particular animals depend on personal contacts and the reputation or importance of real actors.

Within the reindeer brigade, 'core families influence the informal distribution of tasks, usufruct rights to reindeer, the distribution of work places, the movements of the reindeer herd and also relations to the 'outside world'. The ability to tame reindeer and increase the number of private animals is part of an informal network within the reindeer brigade. Families who are more 'successful' in reindeer herding usually have more influence in a brigade's inner affairs. The influence of one family can lead to a situation where the family monopolises a highly paid and prestigious position in the formal structures, for example by keeping the brigadier's job in the family. This combination of informal and formal interests affects the brigade's annual migration cycle and cooperation with other brigades.

More than any other object of various social entitlements, private reindeer reflect informal networks among different actors. Reindeer are presented, borrowed and given to look after. Moral entitlements to the state reindeer also reflect the herder's ability to tame reindeer, which is proof of his skills. In a wider perspective, the moral ownership of state animals is linked to the inner affairs of the brigade where more skilled members have more power to shape the brigade's policy. Donating reindeer is an act of showing respect and building personal networks. Borrowing and giving personal reindeer to somebody to look after demonstrates trust between people and is usually part of a larger network of reciprocal cooperation. Giving reindeer as gifts and 'bringing the reindeer in' to the herd highlight the importance of reindeer as a cultural symbol of close social relations.



## **Chapter 7**

### **Ethnicity and Local Identity**

#### **7.1. Introduction**

On my return from my first research visit to Anabarskii district, staff at the Institute of the Problems of Small-numbered Peoples in Yakutsk invited me to talk about my research. After my short presentation one respected ethnographer asked me, 'In your opinion, who are the people you visited—are they Dolgan or Northern Yakut?' I answered, 'All the people I met are convinced that they are Dolgan!'

In this chapter I aim to show that the identity of the Dolgan population in the village of Uurung Khaia is not at all clear. Despite the tendency to analyse ethnicity as something clearly definable, even if constantly changing, my data show that ethnicity in Anabar is ephemeral (cf. Nash 1989). Dolgan is defined as an ethnic group with mixed origins and Dolgan people have never defined themselves in terms of one group (Anderson 2000a: chapter 4). However, the Soviet state made many attempts to 'make a Dolgan nation', and collectivisation had a great influence upon common identities because loosely connected groups were more strongly unified (and mixed) in the collective and state farms (Gracheva 1978; Anderson 2000a). Dolgan language classes, introduced in 1998, were just another attempt to create the modern identity of a 'small nation' (Vakhtin 1994).

Dolgan people are clearly 'a community of fate' (Barth 2000), whose creation was strongly and actively influenced by the Soviet state through shaping the process of classification and defining the boundaries between ethnic groups. David Anderson (2000a) discusses the process of the 'ethnogenesis' (in Russian *etnogenez*) of the Dolgan in chapter 4 of his book *Identity and Ecology in Arctic Siberia*, i.e. how the Dolgan people were partly created by the Tsarist and Soviet authorities and partly born of the mixture between different ethnic groups—Russians, Sakha, Nentsy and Evenki. In his chapter he uses the work of prominent Soviet ethnographers who are the most respected Dolgan specialists: Dolgikh, Ubriatova and Popov. These researchers worked among the Dolgan in the central and

western ranges of the Taimyr Peninsula, which is seen in Soviet ethnography as the heartland of the Dolgan territory. The eastern Dolgan, the people in this book, were viewed as a different group from other Dolgan, divided by a different dialect (Artem'ev 2001: 4), and by certain traits in their culture and economy (Popov 1935, 1937b). To complicate matters even more, some researchers never categorised people in the Anabar and Olenek basin as Dolgan but as either Sakha or Evenki/Eveny (Terletskii 1950, Gurvich 1952, Suslov 1952).

In the Soviet theory of ethnicity, ethnic identity was seen as primordial and unchangeable (Tishkov 1997: 1–2, see also Slezkine 1991). This approach, which was strongly influenced by the work of Shirokogoroff, was adopted from the Russian tradition at the beginning of Soviet ethnography (Tishkov 1997: 1–3). Ethnicity as a primordial identity was formulated into the Soviet theory of 'ethnos' in the 1960s by Yulian Bromley, who argued that every ethnos must have a clearly recognisable membership, distinct territory, language, culture and economy (1974, 1981, 1983). Although not all ethnographers supported this theory (Pimenov 2003: 17), these 'master-codes' (Mbembe 1992) were incorporated into state ethnic and cultural policies. Another trait of Soviet ethnography was its firm belief in the evolutionary hierarchy of ethnic groups. This Marxist approach was introduced in the 1920s by the linguist N. Ia. Marr and it expressed itself in placing 'more advanced' and 'less advanced' groups onto different steps of the evolutionary ladder (Slezkine 1991), a concept still current up to the end of Soviet ethnography. State and scholarly views overlapped on the point that ethnicities were fixed, primordial and hierarchically ordered, where bigger and more 'advanced' groups had higher status than smaller and more 'backward' ones. In practice it meant that the Soviet state continued the Tsarist practice of fixing one's ethnicity in official documents, later inscribed in passports as 'nationality' (*natsional'nost* in Rus.) and giving a different social status to different groups.

Another scholar who influenced the Soviet and post-Soviet approach to ethnicity was Lev Gumilev, who added biological elements to Bromley's categories, stating that every 'nation' was linked to some 'biosphere' (territory and its ecological characteristics) which shaped its culture and created the 'nation's particular path' (Gumilev 1989). The 'use and abuse' of these theories not only expressed itself in official policies but also in the enormous popularity of such identities among various Russian and non-Russian ethnic intelligentsia, who saw themselves called to preserve and carry on the 'culture', i.e. the identity of the ethnic group (Tishkov 1997). This 'national intelligentsia' of various ethnic groups used (and still uses) Gumilev's concepts of biosphere and 'life power' to create and propagate features of the

'national culture' which were seen to symbolise the particularity of the group.<sup>87</sup>

The Communist Party itself institutionalised the manipulation of the identities of Siberian indigenous minorities when the party decided that northern indigenous people were not capable of reaching the level of full social development without outside assistance (*KPSS* 1953). This is why small indigenous groups were given special status as 'Small-Numbered People' and became the subject of a paternalistic state policy, a policy Espiritu (1997) calls creating 'nations within'. On the one hand, those people who were recognised as members of such an ethnic group had privileges in many spheres of everyday life to support their development, yet on the other hand, they were officially and unofficially viewed as being incapable of making independent decisions because they still were not developed enough. This policy created an identity of ethnic groups who would always be less developed and perpetually engaged in backward (i.e. non-industrial) occupations such as reindeer herding, hunting, fishing and sea mammal hunting. However, because of the privileges it offered, this status was sought out and used for improving individuals' standards of living (see, for example, Kuznetsov and Missonova 1993: 23).<sup>88</sup>

We know that when identifying themselves people usually mark their 'we-group' borders by choosing some identity markers and ignoring others (Barth 1969a). When I went to Uurung Khaia, I knew that it was the only Dolgan village in the Republic of Sakha. In Uurung Khaia I found that the Dolgan people in Uurung Khaia have multiple identities instead of one. Barthian 'multiple identities' (Barth 1969b) means that people switch between different identities and I found that Dolgan from Uurung Khaia shifted between different 'we-groups' by maintaining links to other 'we-groups' and saw no problems in doing so (Elwert 1995). When people in Uurung Khaia

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<sup>87</sup> For a discussion of the role of non-Russian intelligentsia in ethnic and political processes, see Tishkov 2001.

<sup>88</sup> The backward reputation of Siberian natives was promulgated by both scientists and indigenous activists. At the beginning of the 1990s, the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), a non-governmental international organisation, organised a survey among 121 specialists of Siberian indigenous minorities about the current situation and the future of these groups: 58% of the respondents declared that the only alternative for northern indigenous groups to continue their existence as an ethnic group was to return to reindeer herding and other traditional activities. Only 1% stated that indigenous groups could have a future in the urban industrial environment (Pika et al. 1996). People who represented this majority view did not wish to harm northern indigenous people; on the contrary, the 'conservation' of 'indigenous cultures' is often supported and organised by scientists and activists who are full of good intentions. Some of them were critical of Soviet state policy towards Siberian indigenous peoples and they were fearless enough to make their opinions public even in the Stalinist period (Popov 1931).



choose to be Dolgan, or inhabitants of the Uurung Khaia village, or part of the bigger Sakha nation, they not only manipulate the borders of their identity but also change their membership of ethnic or territorial communities. This decision is perhaps not as conscious as it is among the Yupik people studied by Krupnik and Vakhtin, who argued that the Yupik make 'conscious decisions' as to their choice of one ethnic identity or another, or their choice of whether to be 'modern' or 'traditional' (Krupnik and Vakhtin 1997). In the case of people in Uurung Khaia, this switching is situational, like the 'segmentary identity' of the Nuer reported by Evans-Pritchard (1940). But, unlike the Nuer, Uurung Khaia inhabitants do not 'choose a side' so as to draw borders between 'us' and 'them', but rather they use identity to create alliances and regulate access to the necessary resources.

In the first section of this chapter I analyse the connections with the Dolgan in Krasnoïarskii Krai, mostly with the village of Syndassko. People in Syndassko are related to the inhabitants of Uurung Khaia. The loose cooperation and communication networks between the two villages exist among kin and through an ideology of common Dolgan heritage. In the second section I look at relations between the villages of Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh, where ethnicity seems to be less important. A common background and a sense of local identity determine why people prefer to cooperate with people from the same village rather than from another. The last section shows that Uurung Khaia Dolgan have little difficulty acting and feeling as Sakha as well. Among the indigenous groups of Sakha (Yakutia), the process of Sakha-isation started as early as the seventeenth century through assimilation of the Sakha language and elements of the culture (Forsyth 1992). So far there has been little discussion about how much the small indigenous groups in the Republic of Sakha have their own consciousness and to what extent they already have a Sakha identity. The fact that many Evenk, Even and Dolgan children attend Sakha schools and Sakha is their first language gives people, especially among the younger generation, a basis for a common identity. The role of the written word is another means of creating a common identity, as is already known through the work of Benedict Anderson (1999), but in the Sakha Republic a state-created 'Sakha'-identity is used also for economic purposes.

## **7.2. The Dolgan of the Republic of Sakha**

### **7.2.1. *The 'Ethnogenesis' of Anabar Dolgan***

The Dolgan constitute an ethnic group whose existence is accepted with a degree of unease by scholars and the state. Popov, one of the most prominent Dolgan researchers, was unwilling to recognise their existence as an inde-

pendent ethnic identity. David Anderson, who has studied Popov's manuscripts, writes that in various raw versions of his later published articles, Popov avoided using the word 'Dolgan' as a synonym for the ethnic group. He used terms like the 'Dolgan-Yakutian population' or the 'Dolgan-Tungus population'. According to Anderson, there is clear evidence that Popov was put under pressure by his editors to make Dolgan fit into the concept of an ethnic group i.e. to define Dolganness according to the concept of the Marxist-Leninist ethnography (2000a: 83). The so-called Marxist-Leninist concept of ethnicity required that every ethnic group must have its own territory, its own 'material and spiritual culture', and its own language, all of which must be distinct from other ethnic groups (Tishkov 1992: 378). In Soviet historical scholarship, ethnography is often used as part of a political exercise and the Dolgan were no exception. Anderson shows that fixing Dolgan as an independent ethnic group was a result of the power-play between the administrations of the Turukhansk County and Yakut ASSR: by apparently establishing that Dolgan are not part of Sakha but an 'independent group', the Turukhansk government could claim their Dolgan territory, which would otherwise have been added to the territory of the 'mother group' (Anderson 2000a: 82–90). This also helps to explain the relatively late emergence of the Dolgan 'nation'.

The tendency to link certain languages and groups of people in Siberia with certain territories did not begin with Soviet power. Many Russian and Western researchers have acknowledged the historical fact that kinship lists, introduced by the Tsarist administration, served the purpose of organising Siberian natives into a clearly definable structure in order to facilitate *yasak* collecting and did not reflect real kinship organisation (Fisher 1943: 56; Dolgikh and Levin 1951: 95–7; Dolgikh 1963: 109; Bogoras 1975 [1904–9]: 543; Czaplicka 1999 [1916]: 158). The artificial nature of administrative clans was known to the many indigenous people themselves. For example, Evenki argued that before the arrival of the Russians they had no clans; i.e. these 'were created by Russians' (Shirokogoroff 1999: 99). Ssorin-Chaikov shows that those clans created by bureaucrats were treated by Soviet ethnographers and officials as if they exhibited true kinship structures. Later, Soviet ethnographers came to view this kinship structure as 'traditional' and researched it as such (Ssorin-Chaikov 1998: chapters 4, 6; 2003: 53–64). In the same way, the Dolgan clans were nothing more than *yasak* lists (Anderson 2000a: chapter 4).

But still the Dolgan did not fit comfortably into the Marxist-Leninist framework. Their material culture is overwhelmingly of Evenki origin (Popov 1935, 1937), their language is a northern dialect of Sakha (Popov 1966), and physically they look sometimes 'too' much like Europeans,

unlike their more 'original Asian'-looking Evenki, Even and Nganassan neighbours (Zolotareva 1965). There were hardly any traits that could be defined as 'pure Dolgan'. I have had many discussions with ethnographers in Moscow and Yakutsk who used the same arguments to make clear to me that there is no Dolgan 'nation', and a half-breed (*metis*) group cannot be seen as an ethnic group because of a 'lack of history and originality'.<sup>89</sup>

This helps to explain why it is difficult to find any recent works on the Dolgan—ethnographers have generally shown little interest in engaging with such an 'atypical' group. Thus, when we compare how much is written on Siberian minorities, we notice that the list of publications on Dolgan ethnography and language is considerably shorter than the lists for ethnic groups that have much smaller populations. The Dolgan comprise a population of about 7,000 but the studies on groups such as the Kety (c. 1,300 people), Oroki (c. 450) and Entsy (c. 350) outnumber Dolgan studies. Other ethnic groups of more or less the same size as the Dolgan—Mansi (c. 8,400) and Koryak (c. 9,300—can proudly present a much longer list of works written about them (cf. Funk and Sillanpää 1999). Within the Sakha Republic the Dolgan are often ignored as well. In official statements by the government about its minority policy, the Dolgan are often not mentioned. Yukagirs and Chukchi, who have much smaller groups living within the territory of the Sakha Republic, are better known and more prominent than the Dolgan. One reason for this low profile is that the Dolgan do not have working among them such prominent cultural and political activists as other groups.

Although Dolgikh and Popov had already written articles in the 1930s about Dolgan culture, official recognition did not come until 1959. That year the Dolgan were included in the official list of nations (Dolgikh 1963: 106) that had existed since 1927 (Hirsch 1997). Only after 1959 was it possible to have one's nationality as 'Dolgan' stated in one's passport. But still, according to my informants, many children from the Anabarskii district who received their passports in the boarding schools (*internat*), especially those outside the district, automatically became Sakha or Yakut at the will of the officials. The situation was not much better on the other side of the Yakutian ASSR–Krasnoiarskii Krai border. Dolgan from Popigai village told me that until 1993 they had their 'nationality' noted only as Sakha in their passports. After 1993 it was possible to receive 'Dolgan passports' and most people changed their official ethnicity. In Uurung Khaia, most people who are now

<sup>89</sup> Other scholars had little problem with this mixture. Dolgikh (1963: 92–4, 96, 103) shows in his article 'Proiskhozhdenie dolgan' ('Origin of the Dolgan') that Dolgan are a culturally and linguistically mixed group (1963), but praises them for their 'progressiveness' because the Dolgan were the only ethnic group in Siberia in 1926 to consider itself as one 'nation' (1963: 105).



registered as Dolgan were Even or Evenki in official records until 1992–3. In December 1992 the First Dolgan Congress took place in Uurung Khaia and only after that, as my informants told me, were the officials willing to reregister people as Dolgan.

### ***7.2.2 Historical Overview of Dolgan in Anabar***

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was considerable movement of peoples in Eastern Siberia between the Lena and Enisei rivers. The Evenki people moved northwards and then westwards, and the Sakha followed them. Gurvich (1977) describes the generally accepted story that the Sakha pushed the Evenki westwards, and most of these migrants moved through the Anabar and Olenek River basins. Gurvich also argues that the rich hunting resources attracted incomers to the Anabar and Olenek region (1977: 9). Evenki and Sakha reindeer herders migrated to the Olenek River from the east and west to spend the winter hunting wild reindeer. Russian settlement had been established by the seventeenth century and this enriched the ethnic landscape with the permanent presence of Russian tax collectors and hunters. The Anabar–Olenek region seems to have been the nexus where all the main components of a future Dolgan identity met together for the first time (see chapter 2). However, there is little convincing evidence that different ethnic groups were constantly competing for pastures or hunting grounds. Although some authors argue that ethnically organised armed conflicts took place in the region when north-western Sakha was populated by the Tavgi, ancestors of the Nganasan (Dolgikh 1952b: 81, 83), nothing excludes the possibility that the ancestors of contemporary Sakha and Evenki people shared the northern Sakha hunting grounds and cooperated with one another, especially since their economies were similar.

Although the Evenki language was in use in the Anabar and Olenek region, the northern dialect of the Sakha language has become the most dominant language for communication since the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Regardless of any official status (either as nomadic Sakha/Evenki or Russian peasant), most inhabitants of the area were engaged in hunting wild reindeer and fishing and seasonally moved around using reindeer as transport animals. The region itself had long been subordinated to Yakutsk, until it was united with Turukhanskii Krai and existed as the Khatango-Anabarskii *raion* in the nineteenth century (see Spiridonov 1992). On 10 December 1930, following the decree of the Executive Committee of the Communist party (VtsIK) signed by Kalinin, the Anabar and northern Olenek regions were subsumed into the Yakutian ASSR.

There are two scientific views on the ethnic identity of native people in the Anabar and Olenek basins—and no one argues for ‘Dolgan’. Gurvich,

the unofficial 'king of Anabar ethnography', believes that the reindeer herders and hunters in the region belong to the Northern Reindeer Sakha (*severnnye iakuty-olenevody*) (Gurvich 1950a, 1952). He was supported by other prominent Soviet ethnographers who worked in this region—Dolgikh, Suslov and Popov. The main opponent of Gurvich was Terletskii, who argued that the people living in the region are Evenki who have partly adopted the Sakha language (1950).

Gurvich's main argument was that the ethnonym 'Tungus' (Evenk) does not correspond to an ethnic identity but refers to any reindeer herder irrespective of his ethnic origin. Gurvich himself never used the term Dolgan when speaking about Anabar. He tried to demonstrate a historical process in the region whereby a local group of reindeer herders and hunters of Sakha origin, who migrated mostly along the Anabar River and spent their winters in Olenek, where they were registered, paid their taxes and traded, and became established as they are now (Gurvich 1977). Gurvich argues that the ethnicity of the peoples in the region on both sides of the Yakutian border was usually registered incorrectly in the household rolls (*podkhoziaistvennaia kniga*) and should be 'critically analysed' case by case (Gurvich 1952: 84–5). He states that even the ethnicity of the Dolgan in Popigai (on the other side of the Yakutian ASSR border) should be revised, because many people there consider themselves to be Sakha and their mother tongue is Sakha (Gurvich 1952: 83–4).

Dolgikh, although supporting Gurvich contra Terletskii, argued that in addition to Sakha families there are many families with Evenki origins in the Anabar region, the descendants of the so-called 'Kokuiev children' (see chapter 2; Dolgikh 1952b). The ethnonym 'Dolgan' appears only briefly in Terletskii's article, when he mentions that according to the 1926 census in Anabarskii *raion* there were no Evenki households but there were 42 Dolgan households (264 people), who had migrated with 33 Sakha households (201 people) (Terletskii 1950: 96). Terletskii does not go into the origin of these Dolgan and so we do not know whether these were local families or seasonal migrants from Krasnoiarskii Krai. When the inhabitants of the region supported the idea of dividing this *raion* from Turukhanskii Krai to join the Yakutian ASSR, it seemed that the Gurvich party won (Suslov 1952).

It is not difficult to explain why the inhabitants of Uurung Khaia chose to register themselves as Dolgan in the early 1990s. As one of my informants told me: 'What Evenk are we? There has never been Evenk! Evenk live in the south around Saaskylaakh. We have always been Dolgan!' Since the 1940s, there has been no study of the self-identity of the indigenous people of Uurung Khaia (the later writings by Gurvich are all based on his fieldwork undertaken in the 1940s). However, the fact that the first Dolgan

Congress took place in this village shows that people of the village maintained a strong Dolgan identity even when their official 'nationality' was something else. In this section I show that Dolgan identity was linked with kinship connections and common surnames with Dolgan elsewhere. 'We Dolgan have lived here since ancient times,' one woman told me, and this belief is quite common in the villages of Anabar. Local Anabar historian Viacheslav Spiridonov (1992), from Saaskylaakh, argues that in the seventeenth century a so-called Anabarskii group of nomads established themselves in the area. He relies on Gurvich's (1977) monograph but tries to link nomads who migrated mostly in the basin of the Anabar River with current Anabar Dolgan. Spiridonov writes that this group was a mixture of Tungus and Sakha reindeer herders and consisted of four clans: Galal'chy, Sedem-minghy, Barakhsy and Krest'iane. These clans were the ancestors of the Uurung Khaia Dolgan families: the Kyntashovs, Tuprins, Spiridonovs and Popovs. These four Dolgan clans moved to the Anabar region from various places in eastern Krasnoyarskii Krai (Khatanga, Popigai), spoke Sakha, but used a lot of Russian words and were physically more similar to Russians than Asians. 'This was the brave and mixed Dolgan nation—ancestors of the current population of the Uurung Khaia village!' (*Eto bylo muzhestvennyi i smeshannyi dolganskii narod—predki sovremennykh zhitelei Iuruung-Khaiiskogo poselka*, in Rus.), writes Spiridonov as a concluding flourish to his popular article in the local district newspaper *Anaabar Uottara*. This article was published in honour of the First Dolgan Congress in 1992 (Spiridonov 1992).

### 7.2.3 Going Native: Institutionalised Dolgan

It was in late October 2000 when activists of the Anabar indigenous association contacted me in the village hotel at Saaskylaakh. They wanted to show me their 'centre' and talk to me. So one sunny day I made my way through fairly deep snow from the lower village to the upper village trying to keep pace with two elderly women, both leading figures in this association. Anna Gol'derova and Khristina Sokol'nikova were quite short but nimble, and again I wondered how it is that these local people, no matter their age, can move so much faster than me with my long legs. It seems that slow walking is something that the people here simply do not do. We didn't slow down till we reached a strange-looking building next to the school in the upper village. It is a stone version of the ancient tundra dwelling called a *urassa*, similar in shape to an Indian tepee or the reindeer herders' *chum*. This *urassa* was coloured yellow, with zigzag lines along the wall. One of the women took out a hefty key to open a solid lock hanging on the door. Inside, the building was quite roomy and was decorated like a small hall for festive events, but it



was also clearly a museum of ethnography. This was the centre for indigenous culture, a place that virtually every Soviet settlement in Siberia possesses (see Gray 2005). In the middle of the room was a fireplace with wooden benches around it. The walls were decorated with indigenous handicrafts, including beaded clothes, wall carpets and artefacts of bone and wood. Our first task was to light a fire and make tea. After discussing the aims of my research and the work of the local indigenous activists I asked permission to take photographs. They took an old Dolgan national costume from the wall and dressed up in the fur clothes typical of Syndassko (the Dolgan village in Krasnoiarskii Krai, some 200 km west of Uurung Khaia). I had already seen Syndassko clothes in the tundra brigades because the wives of some of the reindeer herders were from that village and had sewn Syndassko clothes for their children. The clothes from the 'other side' (i.e. of the border between the Krasnoiarskii Krai and the Republic of Sakha) are more elaborate, made more carefully, and both men and women wear beaded hats, fur boots (*untty*) and jackets. This was not the first time that I had to confront the opinion that the Dolgan from the 'other side' are 'more real' (authentic) and more aware of their culture and origins than the Dolgan Anabar. This 'greater authenticity' has many expressions, one of which is wearing winter clothes like those that were worn in 'olden times', i.e. following all the rules of decoration. Fiodor Tuprin, one of the three bone carvers in the district, told me:

The people of Syndassko are excellent (*molodtsy* in Rus.). The girls still sew as in olden times. They still honour the old handicraft. Our girls are lazy. They want to wear city clothes [i.e. bought from shops]. They have already forgotten how to make traditional clothes! When the *Syndasskie* [inhabitants of Syndassko] come to visit us, they are not ashamed to wear their national costume in the village.

When I asked people in my brigade why they do not wear beaded fur clothes, Zina Tuprina, the wife of the oldest reindeer herder in the brigade, said, 'We don't make these clothes anymore, because it is too much work. We became lazy, ha-ha-ha!' And Natasha, the wife of the brigadier Vasili, said to me once, 'I do not like beads. I have seen the *Syndasskie* wearing beads. It doesn't look nice. The men who wear beads ... they look like women. (*Dzhaktar kurduk!* in Sakha)' When speaking about 'national costume' people stressed that this is what they used to wear in the past or is what children still wear during festivals. 'Now that life has moved on, there is more civilisation and culture', they added to explain why the traditional clothing is no longer worn.

There are still people in the Anabarskii district who are interested in the 'traditional' Dolgan identity. The district had an active branch of the

Association of the Indigenous People of the North of the Republic of Sakha (AKMNS) with Anna Aleksandrovna Gol'derova as its chairwoman. Anna Aleksandrovna was the main editor of the district newspaper *Anaabar Uot-tara/Ogni Anabara* ('Fires of Anabar') and acted as the liaison between the district administration and the diamond company ALROSA. The office of the AKMNS is in the main building of the district administration in Saasky-laakh; it is funded from the district budget and publishes paperbacks of short stories and poems by local writers.

The main goal of the Anabar branch of the AKMNS is to 'preserve' and 'organise' the 'traditional' Dolgan, Evenk and Even cultures. As Gol'derova (2000) explains, she supervises school students who want to collect autobiographical memories of local war and work veterans. The activists support the work of the children's folk dance and singing group 'Heiro', they support the 'masters of national handicrafts', and they also organise competitions for the best tent worker (*chumrabortnitsa*), popular music (*estrada* in Rus.) competitions, and sports, etc. The Association selects local artists to participate in various Republic-wide festivals and sponsors their travels. Financial support from the district administration and ALROSA are key factors that make AKMNS socially important. In contrast to similar institutions in other regions of Siberia (cf. Gray 2005), Anabar indigenous activists have money and contacts to develop their plans—from publishing books to finding jobs for local people outside the district. Although the scope of this book does not include a discussion of indigenous politics in Sakha, it seems to me that AKMNS holds an ambivalent position in local life. It is quite powerful in terms of distributing resources, yet AKMNS's reliance on the sources both the district administration and the diamond company, who both use the activists to mobilise people's opinion.

A good financial and political base is one reason why Anabar AKMNS has a reputation within the Republic of Sakha AKMNS of being one of the most active branches of the republican indigenous association. The activists of the AKMNS co-organised the First Dolgan Congress in 1992 in Uurung Khaia, which attracted delegates of various Dolgan communities from the Krasnoïarskii Krai. Gol'derova and her colleagues were also the main organisers for the Congress of the Indigenous Minorities held in the new school building in Uurung Khaia in the winter of 2001 (during my fieldwork period). Most topics discussed during this congress were related to 'traditional economic activities' (*traditsionnye otrasli ekonomiki* in Rus.), i.e. reindeer herding, hunting and fishing. The first speaker was the head of the district administration, who spoke about the situation in reindeer herding and hunting and touted his plans for privatising all reindeer herds and hunt-

ing grounds.<sup>90</sup> After that Gol'derova and other high-ranking functionaries of the AKAMNS gave their speeches. They spoke about the crisis in reindeer herding and the decline in arctic fox hunting and fishing. After that, the head of the Uurung Khaia village council praised the development of the village, especially construction of the new heating system. This was in the same vein as the Communist Party accounting conferences of the Soviet era, where delegates would gather to declare what they had done and to pass resolutions for future plans. When I later showed the videotape of this congress to my colleagues who work in various regions of Siberia, they told me that this pattern of indigenous official meeting was indeed very similar to those they have seen all across Siberian Russia from Chukotka to Yamal—it is a party congress structure that was used in the former Soviet Union for any kind of conference or formal gatherings.

Delegates were requested to appear in national costume (which most people did not do). They were divided into two groups: on one side of the hall were the people who had the right to vote (by holding up their delegate ID cards) and on the other were the non-delegates. From my video recordings I can see that neither of these two groups was overly enthusiastic about the speeches—people were reading newspapers, distributing books or chatting with each other. When the formal part of the conference was finished, people became more attentive and energetic. The after-conference reception included a fashion show of national dress, which presented stylised Evenk and Dolgan outfits. Like every social event, this congress also included a dance and singing performance in which children danced 'national dances' accompanied by recorded music with a modern disco beat, and in the school gym there was an exhibition of traditional handicrafts. For my friends this event represented an important social occasion for people from neighbouring villages, and, for many, the informal part of the event with music and eating and drinking was more much more popular than the speeches. However, this was also a celebration of indigenous identity in the Soviet tradition, supervised by cultural workers with a heavy emphasis on 'tradition' in the form of handicrafts, hunting and reindeer herding and 'authentic' spiritual culture, and a chance for local activists to salute the efficiency of their work through the the passing of resolutions and planning future programs.

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<sup>90</sup> One anecdote is linked with the dress the head of the district administration wore at the congress. Nikolai Egorovich Androsov was wearing a dark red jacket, a hunting knife, a red hat with fur fringe and a Sakha whip made of horse hair, i.e., containing elements of Evenki, Sakha, and Dolgan national costumes as they are usually represented on festive occasions. After his speech we met at the door of the school. I asked him which costume it actually was, Dolgan, Evenki, Even or Sakha. He replied, 'This is a national costume for heads of the district administration!' (*Eto natsional'naia odezhda glav ulussov!*).



On every occasion the activists of the AKMNS stressed the native identity of the inhabitants of the Anabar district and their connection to the tundra lifestyle. Although most Evenki, Dolgan and Even of the district are village-dwelling people, as are the AKMNS activists themselves (with a few exceptions in the Uurung Khaia branch), listening to their speeches or reading their articles one could easily believe that the population of the Anabarskii district is overwhelmingly made up of reindeer herders, hunters and fishers. In their ideology, these activists see themselves as saviours of the 'indigenouness' of local people. Very typical is one answer from Gol'derova. When she showed me a local handicraft, stored in the *urassa*, I asked whether people still remember the meaning and names of the zoomorphic decorations on the clothes. 'It was almost forgotten but we taught it to them again.' There is no doubt that the AKMNS activists have done great work to support poor families or to find study and job placements for local youth, but in some cases they clearly overestimate their role in improving or changing people's lives. When I asked them why the head of the district administration, who in the early 1990s had been critical of the breaking-up of state farms, now supported the idea of *obshchiny*, Golderova declared: 'Because we told him so [i.e. to support indigenous reorganisation]!'

The fact is that indigenous activists have success because the AKMNS's policy of 'preserving the traditional culture and lifestyle' is supported by the local administration, especially by the Saaskylaakh-born head of the district, Nikolai Egorovich Androsov. Androsov, who was highly respected among the district's inhabitants and Sakha state officials as the patriot and successful patron of the district, saw his goal as improving local living standards but also maintaining local traditions. He emphasised in speeches and public letters in the Republic's newspapers the special character and lifestyle of the northern people, and argued that because of the norms and practices of the traditional lifestyle, the people in Anabarskii district are 'psychologically not ready to take an active part in the market economy, especially in entrepreneurial and business-oriented activities' (Androsov 2000). This is why the process of establishing private enterprises in the Anabarskii district has been slow and has had to be supported financially by the state (Androsov 2000: 24, 26). Androsov on his side has actively supported various branches of the 'traditional economy'. Despite his unwillingness to privatise reindeer herds to form new collective enterprises,<sup>91</sup> he gave

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<sup>91</sup> Androsov shared the widespread opinion held by post-Soviet Sakha economists and politicians who were suspicious of new private and collective enterprises with small herds and believed that reindeer herding can survive only within big enterprises with large herds (see Syrovatskii 2005).

credit to new hunting enterprises (e.g. section 3.5), and made available equipment such as vehicles to other enterprises (not included in this study).

Besides financing the work of the AKMNS, the district administration also started some other projects. Special 'traditional culture' classes were introduced in Uurung Khaia's school. A course on reindeer herding was organised for the boys, with the students being taught about reindeer herding, followed by practical participation in the spring corral. The course's main teacher was the head veterinarian of the Uurung Khaia MUP. For the girls, classes on Dolgan handicrafts and cuisine were introduced, taught by workers from the Uurung Khaia fur shop (*masterskaia* in Rus.).

The district administration gives grants to students of indigenous origin to study in schools and universities outside the district. These grants are distributed by the AKMNS leaders. With the cooperation of the AKMNS, the district administration finds work outside the district for local people and has even bought flats in Udachnyi (the centre of the Udachnyi GOK, which is a branch of ALROSA and the main sponsor of the district) for two families who moved there to find employment (Gol'derova 2000: 7).

The symbiosis of AKMNS cultural policy and the economic policy of the district administration has given the activists of the indigenous movement resources and influence, and this has also increased the importance of 'Dolganness'. Because of her position as the ALROSA representative, Gol'derova was able to influence the choice of workers who applied for positions in the diamond mines. Summer jobs there are in great demand because of their relatively high pay. Having good contacts with the leaders of the Anabar AKMNS was clearly an advantage. A daughter of one respected district indigenous poet, whose wife was also an indigenous activist, was given a place as a trainee at ALROSA in Yakutsk. Fiodor Tuprin, a bone carver and son of the Uurung Khaia AKMNS activist Stepan Tuprin, was given the opportunity to present his handicrafts at various exhibitions in and outside the Republic, and he underwent training as an indigenous cultural worker in Norilsk and ended up in Udachnyi as one of the ALROSA souvenir carvers. There was also a young man who received a summer job at ALROSA because of a good word from Anna Gol'derova. As she explained to me: 'He is a real Evenki. He grew up in the [reindeer] brigade and knows everything about the tundra. He sings well and attends our meetings as a singer. He is good at traditional sports and does not drink. He will be a good *tundrovik* one day. Good for him to go and work to earn money.' One other indigenous activist explained that she supports the idea of giving summer diamond jobs to hunters so that they can have a break in their activities. She argued, 'Village people drink their money but *tundroviki* use money to buy snowmobiles or other goods. They still maintain a traditional lifestyle and

therefore it is important to help such people.' In short, it can be argued that being seen to be a 'good' Dolgan or Evenk (for example, by attending AKMNS events, or being good at traditional skills) has become important in winning access to certain resources and has therefore encouraged people's acknowledgement of their Dolgan identity.

#### 7.2.4 *Real and Unreal*

Uurung Khaia is known among scholars as the only Dolgan village in the Republic of Sakha and has even been accorded the status of the 'national Dolgan village' (*dolganski natsional'nyi posiolok*). The people of Uurung Khaia who have always lived there, especially those aged over 30, identify themselves as Dolgan (*My zhivëm zdes' s drevnikh vremën!* in Rus.). But I have also heard different people of different ages say, many times, 'We here are not real Dolgan! We are mixed with Sakha. Real Dolgan live in Krasnoïarskii Krai.'<sup>92</sup> In this section I analyse the vernacular understanding of Dolganness and how it has been instrumentalised for economic ends.

The dialect spoken in Uurung Khaia differs somewhat from the dialect spoken in Saaskylaakh (the district centre) and is defined in the district as the Dolgan language. On the other hand, when I asked about the difference between the Dolgan and Sakha languages, people answered, 'Our language is mixed with Sakha. In Syndassko they speak Dolgan. But they mix it with Russian.' Specifying the exact characteristics of the Dolgan language is a complicated linguistic problem and the Dolgan language has not yet been fully recognised as an independent language. There are some differences in Sakha in terms of grammar and spelling, and some words are different. But there are also remarkable differences within Dolgan itself when spoken in villages from Uurung Khaia to the western Taimyr.

The Dolgan language was 'legalised' in 1973 when a written language was officially created by linguists. Further recognition followed with the publication of the first primer in 1984 (*Fol'klor* 2000). However, scholars have long debated whether the Dolgan people have a separate language or not. The most prominent researcher of the Dolgan language, E. I. Ubriatova, first denied the existence of a separate language and defined Dolgan as a northern dialect of the Yakutian (Sakha) language (1966). But in her monograph 'The language of the Norilsk Dolgan' (*Iazyk norilskikh dolgan*), published in 1985, she came to the conclusion that Dolgan is an independent

<sup>92</sup> Alexander D. King came across the same discourse of 'unrealness' among Chukchi in Kamchatka, who lived far from the Chukchi core territory and had adapted the Koryak language, but fewer traits of religion, material culture or social organisation (cf. King 2002a: 135, note 5).



language, established on the basis of the Sakha language, which had incorporated Evenki words, morphology, syntax and phonetics to the degree that it could be defined as a new Turkic language (Ubriatova 1985: introduction). The theory of Dolgan as an independent language is supported by Artem'ev (2001), but in his dissertation he uses rather questionable arguments to prove this approach. In discussions with Sakha linguists and ethnographers I got the impression that they were reluctant to recognise Dolgan as an independent language or to see the Dolgan people as a distinct ethnic group. Informally I have heard remarks like 'There is no Dolgan language!' or 'Dolgan have no culture of their own!' One man from Syndassko told me an anecdotal story about the attitude of Sakha scholars: 'It was a few years ago. Some Sakha scholar, a professor, arrived in the village to give a lecture at the House of Culture. He told people that there are no Dolgans and that Dolgan people are in fact Sakha. Men didn't like it. After the lecture in the village, when they [local men] were drunk, they caught the professor and beat him up.'

The Dolgan in Uurung Khaia have no notion of these discussions and are not interested in textbooks. The Dolgan literary language, based on the central and western Dolgan dialects, is too far removed from the dialect spoken in Uurung Khaia, which has become, because of the influence of the Sakha primary school, very similar to the modern Sakha language, maintaining some ancient features in grammar and words. But there is still a general consensus within the district that the dialect spoken in the village of Uurung Khaia is the 'Dolgan language', although less Dolgan than western dialect. It is ironic that people from Uurung Khaia tend to classify western Dolgans as Russians because most of them, especially the younger generation, do not speak Dolgan anymore (at least that is what Uurung Khaians believe).

It is hard to define what it means to be a Dolgan nowadays. Among the native population in the Anabarskii district there are seven surnames which are considered to be local (*mestnye* in Rus.) or indigenous (*korennye* in Rus.). Most Spiridonovs, Kyltashovs, Popovs and Tuprins live in Uurung Khaia and are considered Dolgan. Akakievs, Androsovs and Vinokurovs come from Saaskylaakh, the other village, and are considered Even, sometimes Evenk. The same 'Dolgan' surnames exist in Krasnoiarskii Krai as well. In Syndassko there are also Kyltashovs, Spiridonovs, and Popovs, but on account of some bureaucratic mistake Tuprins have become Chuprins. People with the same surname consider themselves relatives, and visit each other in winter, travelling by snowmobile back and forth between Uurung Khaia and Syndassko. Marriage relations between the two villages are also strong. There is a so-called Krasnoiarskii Kvartal ('Krasnoiarskii block') on

the south side of Uurung Khaia where men who have married women from Syndassko mainly reside.



Plate 10. A boy with a Dolgan winter hat from Krasnoiarskii Krai.

Relations between Syndassko and Uurung Khaia have multiple layers and are sometimes not immediately evident. Although people define Dolgan from Krasnoiarskii Krai as the 'real Dolgan' (*nastoiashchie dolgany* in Rus.), they often add, 'but they are Russianised; in school they learn only Russian. That's why they can neither read nor write Sakha.' The people from Syndassko are often considered backward (*otstalye* in Rus.): 'They drink a lot. *Syndasskie* [inhabitants of Syndassko] wear national clothes even in the village. We use it [fur clothes] only out in the tundra. They swear left and right! (*materiatsia tuda-suda* in Rus.)' Everybody agrees that people in Syndassko drink more than is customary in Uurung Khaia, as expressed in this typical conversation:

*Baaska*: 'I was in Syndassko last year. I visited relatives there. They nearly killed me! (*Chut'-chut' menia ne ubili!* in Rus.)

*Author*: 'What do you mean?'

*Baaska*: 'They drink so-o-o much! I can't drink in such amounts. But they drink heavily and do not get drunk! (*ne napivaiut'sa* in Rus.)'

Although relatives in Krasnoiarskii Krai are seen as more 'real' or 'authentic', this 'authenticity' is viewed as un-modern. Wearing 'national costume'

i.e. fur clothes in the village is seen as inappropriate in Uurung Khaia. Each time we returned to the village from the tundra, the first thing people did was to change into 'city' clothes (i.e. shop-bought fashionable items).

To 'follow old customs' generally means following those customs relating to the tundra, to the 'traditional' environment where people still live very much as they did in pre-Revolutionary times. Since the economic collapse, *tundroviki* no longer have access to symbols of modernity like radio, television, electricity or VCRs and so the tundra has become even 'more traditional' and 'un-modern'. *Tundroviki* told me that village people in their modern, quasi-urban environment have forgotten the knowledge of old rules and customs, as well as old skills. But even *tundroviki* do not want to give up all the fruits of technical development. In general, people in Uurung Khaia are proud of their 'modernity' and are not at all eager to return to 'their the roots'.<sup>93</sup> On many occasions I witnessed a sceptical attitude towards a return to the 'old times', which most people saw in terms of economic scarcity, discomfort and trouble. Once a hunter complained to me that because of the shortage of fuel, people would soon be forced to abandon snowmobiles and take up harnessed reindeer again: 'We have almost forgotten how to travel by sledges. This is like in the olden days.' In another case, when we had to go for ice in the tundra, the father of the family discovered that the chainsaw used to saw ice blocks was out of order. We had to take a crow-bar and axe instead. The mother referred to this dismally as being equipped as in 'ancient times' (*pervobytnoe vremena* in Rus.). *Syndasskie* are categorised according to the same values; they are more 'real' but their authenticity is double-sided. On the one hand there is their perceived tendency to drinking, swearing and criminality; on the other hand, there is their hospitality, their following of old customs, and their consciousness of their own culture and kinship. So Dolganness means following 'old' customs but also being less 'civilised'. The denigration of tradition by the Uurung Khaia inhabitants makes their ethnic identity as Dolgans seem less 'real' to themselves.

*Egor*: People in Syndassko are so friendly. They meet you on the street and invite you to their home. When you are in Syndassko, you drink and eat all the time. Everyone wants you to come to visit them. So you start on one side of the village and visit one house after another. And when you leave the house, they go with you to the gate.

<sup>93</sup> Such an attitude is in sharp contrast to the 'romantic' views of local anthropologists in town. One folklorist, herself Even, told me that she was against the use of snowmobiles by the indigenous population. When I asked her why, she replied that harnessed reindeer were better because snowmobiles 'are not traditional' (cf. also Grant 1995 about the forced return to tradition).



Our people here [in Uurung Khaia] do not do that anymore. They come with you to the door and sometimes in the evening to the gate. But in Syndassko they still have this old custom and they come with you to the gate even during the day. But on the other hand, when you go to visit someone, you must leave your snowmobile in front of the window. If you don't do that, it will be stolen. Or they'll take parts from it.

Here my informant expresses a notion widespread among Western and Russian scholars and indigenous activists, who link 'authenticity' with 'following traditional customs', including 'Northern hospitality'. In the literature it is often mentioned that 'unspoiled' natives are, according to Northern tradition, ready to share their possessions and shelter with everyone (Boiko and Kostiuk 1992; Vinokurova 1994; Pika et al. 1996; Turza and Turza 1996/7; Golovnev and Osherenko 1999; Gol'derova 2000) but along with this comes a lack of ability to control oneself, higher alcohol consumption and criminality, a mixture of qualities that people in Uurung Khaia relate to being 'real' Dolgan and sometimes define as 'wild' (*dikii* in Rus.). Another feature of local ideas about 'realness' is knowledge about kin history. It is believed in Uurung Khaia that people from Syndassko are still aware of their roots. 'In Syndassko every child knows his relatives many generations back. When they meet you, they know immediately how you are related to them. We do not know this anymore,' Egor told me.<sup>94</sup>

The old hunter Moigo said to me once: 'It is good that you are asking questions about our relatives [i.e. kinship]. We have Russian blood, because we come from Syndassko. But my children are not interested in this anymore. I would like to know more about my relatives in Syndassko. That's why I want to go to there. But people from Syndassko are interested in their kin. They have come here to Uurung Khaia many times to find and meet their relatives.' According to my observations, the situation is in reality quite different. Although older people in Uurung Khaia believe that young people have no knowledge about their ancestors, the youngsters, when asked, are in fact well aware of their living relatives and also how they are related. Whether adults or young people, the memory of kin relations seldom goes back further than three generations although, of course, adults and older people have much more detailed knowledge. But there are also exceptions: when I asked Uiban, son of Balyksyt, to draw a tree of his kinship I did so just to fill in time before our soup was ready. But in fact we sat for many hours at the table in the *balokh*, with Uibaan using my notebook to draw

<sup>94</sup> Ironically, the Dolgan people in the village of Ust-Avam on the Taimyr Peninsula, according to John Ziker who worked there for a long time, believed that people from Uurung Khaia are especially aware of their kinship relations (personal communication).

links between names and telling me stories about people, and me recording it all—and we forgot all about the soup (see figure 5 and appendix 2).



Figure 5. Genealogy of the Tuprin extended family, drawn by Uibaan (Ivan) Tuprin.

But these virtues do not make Syndassko as a place interesting for younger people. Whenever I spoke with young people about their 'neighbours', they would say that there is not much to do there. 'It is boring in Syndassko,' said a young bride who had grown up there: 'In Syndassko there are no more young people left. The youngsters are all in Khatanga or somewhere else. There is a new club, but not much is happening. All the incomers left Syndassko. You only have Dolgan there. There is more going on in Uurung Khaia!'

Once I mentioned jokingly to Baaska, a young reindeer herder, that since he lived near Krasnoiarskii Kvartal, he should marry some girl from Syndassko as well. According to my observations, I said, the girls in Syndassko are prettier than in Uurung Khaia. His reaction was unexpectedly aggressive:

There are not many girls left in Syndassko. Someone who marries a Syndassko girl must be an idiot. I will never marry a girl from there. Girls in Syndassko are dumb (*tupye* in Rus.). The smart and pretty girls left Syndassko long ago and went to study. There are no pretty girls in the village. The pretty girls get married and go abroad: to America or France. I will marry a girl from Uurung Khaia.

Here we see the related notions of 'modernity' and 'entertainment and fun'. For the younger generation 'real' means 'traditional' but also 'boring'. The village of Uurung Khaia is viewed as more modern because entertainment facilities are available and more young people live in the village. The contrast in economic situation between the two villages has made a more 'modern' village lifestyle attractive to the younger generation. This process confirms the general opinion that being a 'real Dolgan' also means being 'backward' with no chance of improving one's life.

### ***7.2.5 Cooperation between Syndassko and Uurung Khaia***

Syndassko and Uurung Khaia have many reciprocal relationships. Until the 1960s, Dolgan from both Uurung Khaia and Krasnoiarskii Krai used the same pastures and exchanged scarce goods such as clothes, ammunition and other commodities (Ubriatova 1966: 66; Turza and Turza 1996/97: 23).

According to older people, communication between the two villages decreased when the boundaries of brigade territories were drawn to match the boundaries of the administrative units, thus separating the reindeer herds of both villages geographically. But communication never stopped completely. In Communist times, i.e. in the 1970s and 1980s, relatives from Syndassko visited Uurung Khaia reindeer brigades and traded vodka for reindeer. I never found out what the price of a reindeer used to be because, according to who you asked, it varied between one and five bottles of vodka.



The traffic between the two villages became especially active in the 1980s when snowmobiles came into use. Before that people had to travel two to three days by reindeer sledge to reach the other village. On the way they stopped at the brigades of the other village. Hunters from the north-western fringe of the Anabarskii district and the island of Bolshoi Begichev were closer to the Syndassko brigades and to the village itself than to the Uurung Khaia brigades. Many men from these brigades married Syndassko women because during the winter they visited Syndassko more often than Uurung Khaia.

When supplies became scarce after 1990, people from Uurung Khaia, where wages were higher until recently, started to support their relatives in Syndassko by sending meat, groceries and industrial goods (such as ammunition). In Soviet times and especially after the economic collapse, Anabar Dolgan were considered to be wealthier than their Krasnoiarskii relatives. Every winter many caravans of snowmobiles went to Syndassko, mostly to visit relatives but also to bring 'gifts'. Because of the district's status as a 'diamond province', Anabar *tundroviki* received more supplies and financial help from administrative sources than people from the 'other side'. These goods were shared with relatives in Syndassko. 'We have one grandmother in Syndassko,' Zina told me once. 'Every winter Uibaan [her oldest son] takes a sledge fully laden with groceries and meat to Syndassko. Her [i.e. the grandmother's] daughters are dead; she is alone. We have always supported people from Syndassko'. 'In Syndassko, there are visiting merchants too,' said another man who often goes to Syndassko to visit his wife's family, 'But they [Syndasskie] had no money. And merchants brought only clothes and vodka. In Uurung Khaia, we have a RAIPO shop [state trading organisation] where you can find spare parts for snowmobiles. You can buy quite cheap groceries and ammunition. Before Norilsk [a nickel extracting company] began paying ecological compensation, people had little cash to afford such goods. When I drove to Syndassko, I always tried to take with me these things, as gifts you know. Sometimes the whole sledge.'

The higher living standard encouraged many reindeer herders and hunters from Syndassko to move to Uurung Khaia in 1992–4 and take up jobs at the state farm. Typical is a story of Igor Zharkov, a young man aged 22 who married a 17-year-old Uurung Khaia girl shortly before I arrived to the village:

I came to Uurung Khaia to visit relatives. 'My sister said to me, take only your passport with you; if you do not like Uurung Khaia then you'll come back anyway, if not you can always come and pick up your stuff. So I came to Uurung Khaia and stayed here. At first I stayed with relatives and then I met my wife. Then I moved here [the

couple were living with her family] and they supported us and helped me to buy clothes and find a job. Now I am here and haven't been back to Syndassko in all this time. There is more going on here, discos and so on. And you can always find some illegal job (*khal-tura*) either in construction or loading trucks.

Another young herder explained to me: 'I came to Uurung Khaia because here they pay money to reindeer herders. In Syndassko, there is no money when you work in the brigade. It is more like surviving (*sushestvovanie* in Rus.), not living.'

Visits to Syndassko take place during the festivals, especially during the Days of Reindeer Herders and Hunters (*Sled olenevodov i okhotnikov* in Rus.) in May and are combined with intensive barter trading. *Syndasskie* are famous for their handmade tools. There is a widespread belief that the best lasso makers in the region live in Syndassko. These men are commissioned to make reindeer hide lassos and are well paid. There are different types of lassos (winter, spring or summer); some people prefer thin, others thick ropes. Depending on the type of lasso, the buyer has to pay up to three reindeer for a lasso. People in Uurung Khaia also appreciate certain types of knives from Syndassko. Unlike lassos, knives are seldom bought and sold but are given as presents. A knife is not an article of trade itself but, according to what I heard, exchange of this kind of 'friendship' tool is accompanied by the barter of imported goods that are often handed over as gifts. Snowmobile spare parts, as mentioned, are bartered alongside groceries and other goods that have different prices in both villages. However, talking to people who had close ties with Syndassko, I got the impression that cooperation in the tundra is more important than bartering goods, especially when prices and supplies change many times during the winter.

The 'tradition of reciprocity' (discussed in chapter 5), which regulates the use of tundra resources, exists between relatives in Syndassko and Uurung Khaia. People travelling between villages stop at brigades on the way and also visit their relatives in reindeer brigades during hunting trips. In the Soviet era, the land bordering the district was considered to be peripheral by officials and therefore territories of hunting brigades were not located there. It also meant that in these border areas there were almost no hunting cabins or brigade bases for emergency use in bad weather. Krasnoiarskii hunters from Syndassko and Popigai, which are closer to the administrative border than Uurung Khaia or Saaskylaakh, transport *balokhs* to the tundra in the hunting season, and apart from the camps of reindeer brigades, these dwellings are the only shelter for hundreds of kilometres. When there are many hunters in the tundra and people's income depends on the success of wild reindeer hunting, hunters from Uurung Khaia go to hunt in the border area of

the Krasnoiarskii Krai, as do hunters from the 'other side'. I have described increased autonomy of *tundroviki* in chapters 4 and 5. Cooperation in sharing shelter and information about the movement of wild reindeer is important for fulfilling the plan, as in the Soviet period, but it is essential in an area that has very few hunting spots and formal brigade entitlements. 'In the Soviet time we did not hunt there [in the border area and in Krasnoiarskii Krai],' explained Stepan Fiodorovich Tuprin after such a hunting trip. 'But nowadays hunting parties are bigger and kill more. Sure, hunters sometimes go over the border. We know people in Syndassko, people visit Syndassko often. Then if possible we stay at Syndassko reindeer brigades or *balokhs* in the tundra. We are friends, all Dolgan!' The network between Uurung Khaia and Syndassko is especially important because hunting without a licence in another administrative unit is illegal. The administration of Krasnoiarskii Krai recently began active enforcement, pursuing illegal hunters from the Republic of Sakha, searching the tundra with the help of helicopters and the armed special police forces (OMON). A few hunting groups were arrested and their game and rifles were confiscated. One illegal hunter told me, 'The officials of Krasnoiarsk came with OMON soldiers. They found a hunting party and took away their meat and rifles. When we heard about it, we turned around and went to the nearest *staada* (reindeer brigade). Krasnoiarski officials were looking for other hunters with helicopters and asked for information on the radio. We waited until they had flown back and returned over the border.' In such situations, the help and information given to hunters from Uurung Khaia by Syndassko reindeer herders and hunters is vital. Illegal hunters are warned about enforcement activities and are even hidden when possible.

I have heard people complaining that since the Norilsk nickel factory started paying the inhabitants of Syndassko compensation for ecological damage, some of the formerly poor relatives have become 'arrogant'. These complaints seem to be limited to only a few families, because during my fieldwork, several parties from Syndassko came to Uurung Khaia and many hunters attended the feasts of reindeer herders in Syndassko.

The 'Dolgan connection' of Uurung Khaia inhabitants is part of the 'tradition of reciprocity' networks. Although it existed during the Soviet era, it has become especially crucial in the postsocialist era. Stressing their Dolgan heritage, people have created structures of long-term mutual support between the two villages.

### 7.3 Two Faces of Local Identity

In this section I focus on local identities. Irrespective of ethnic affiliation, 'local' district and village identity are important when it comes to coopera-



tion within the district. Again, kinship networks play an important role as the framework within which people are mobilised and find common interests.

Ethnic affiliation was hardly an issue when I spoke with people about their relations with the inhabitants of their own or neighbouring village. Only once did I come across explicit ethnic differentiation during my fieldwork. As I was speaking with the old hunter Kupaa in the tundra, he said about his neighbour, 'He is our relative, but not one of us [*nash* in Rus.].' When I asked what he meant, he explained, 'He is a Dolgan, we are Eveny.' I tried to get more information about the meaning of ethnicity at the local level, but the answers were similar to what the old *chumrabortnitsa* of the 3rd Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade told me when I asked her whether there was any difference between Evenki and Dolgan locally: 'No, we are already so mixed [*smeshanny* in Rus.]. There is no difference. Everyone has relatives in Saaskylaakh.'

According to official statistics, Uurung Khaia is mostly a Dolgan village (800 out of 1,200 inhabitants), but the Saaskylaakh statistics show a greater mixture. Traditionally the native people of the village were referred to as Evenk or Even, which was the 'nationality' noted in the passports of 37% of the population. Because of its status as a district centre, Saaskylaakh contains many newcomer Sakha from central districts, Siberian Russians (*sibiriaki* in Rus.) and European Russians. In Saaskylaakh many families have 'Uurung Khaia surnames', like Tuprin, Kyltashov, Spiridonov and Popov. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Communist Party sent the best reindeer herders from Uurung Khaia to Saaskylaakh to help the local state farm restructure that branch. And of course, many people came to Saaskylaakh to work in the district administration. The outcome of such migrations was that every native person in Uurung Khaia had some relatives in the centre.

A person may be unsure of their official ethnic affiliation and such affiliation can even vary within one family. In Saaskylaakh some of the ten children of the old hunter Moigo (who is officially Dolgan) are registered as Evenki, and some are Dolgan. When I asked the oldest and youngest sons and the youngest daughter what their ethnic affiliation was officially, they answered 'Sakha', being unaware of their real 'passport nationality'. On another occasion I put the same question to two other daughters, but they didn't know. Later, by examining village administrative records (*podkhozai-stvennaia kniga*), I found out that in this family the sons were registered as Evenki and the daughters as Dolgan. By chance I asked the third oldest son, Misha, why he is an Evenk. 'Father gave me that "nationality",' he answered. When I asked him why his father had chosen Evenk and not Dolgan, he said, 'I don't know. Maybe because of privileges.' By this he meant the privileges enjoyed by members of northern minorities in Soviet times (and

partly still today). I never had the chance to ask Moigo about that kind of gendered ethnic affiliation but children seemingly had no problems with such 'nationality' and looked at it more or less as a bureaucratic necessity. Although Moigo and his wife, Maria, were registered as Dolgan, Maria had Evenki ancestors so they had the right to register their children under two different categories. This family was not the only case I met of such ignorance concerning official ethnic affiliation. On another occasion I asked one inhabitant of Saaskylaakh what his ethnic affiliation was. He said 'Even. No, I think Evenk ... I don't know.' I take this as evidence that he didn't care.

### 7.3.1 'Local' and 'Newcomer'

This ignorance of one's own ethnic affiliation among the natives in the Anabarskii district is in sharp contrast to the opinions of ethnographers in Yakutsk, who try to identify every single person as a member of a particular ethnic group. Living in Anabar, I noticed that ethnicity was not always important in establishing a common identity. At the level of everyday communication in the district, the single factor that mattered most was whether or not the person was a newcomer or a local, or even more to the point, whether he was believed to be a local or not.

'The Sakha from here are similar to us, there is no difference. But the newcomers are different,' said Igor when I tried to find out whether he thinks that there is a difference between Sakha and Dolgan. The Sakha from the central districts of the Sakha Republic speak a different dialect and look different physically. The general opinion is that 'Sakha are black' (*Hakhalar khara* in Sakha), which means that their hair is very dark, in contrast to the inhabitants of Anabar, who mostly have light brown or reddish hair. Also the people from central Yakutia appear more Asian than northern people. More important than physical type is the way incomers and locals dress. Those incomer Sakha who are not recognised as part of the community are young people who recently (perhaps two to three years ago) arrived in the district as teachers, specialists in the district administration or doctors who work on a contract basis (*kontraktniki* in Rus.). On the streets they are distinguishable by their expensive, fashionable 'city clothes'. When visiting these young Sakha specialists, I observed that their diet was different too—since they had no good friends who supplied them cheaply with meat, they cooked more vegetables and canned food. They are also distinguished by their coffee-drinking habit.

Such people are often excluded from local life. They are visited less often by locals and they form small groups in Saaskylaakh (mainly on the basis of their home district), spending their free time together and often sharing an apartment. Distance is thus created on both sides. Incomers

complain about the 'bad manners' of local people: they come to visit without an invitation, or without even knocking on the door, are constantly drunk and seem introverted. In the same vein, locals complain about the newcomers' unwillingness to go to social events like the weekend disco, which they interpret as arrogance. Newcomers often do not know the local norms of hospitality—for example, the compulsory offerings of tea and food to visitors—and therefore have a reputation for being cold and unfriendly.

The contract workers are resented because they earn two to three times more than local people in the same jobs. They are seen as people who come to the North 'to make big bucks': they receive a free apartment in the village, two paid flights home per year and the district will purchase a flat in Yakutsk for a successful *kontraktnik* after three to five years' work. All of this simply serves to make the gulf even wider. Many of these contract workers make no secret of the fact that they came to the Anabarskii district only to earn money and plan to leave as soon as they get their apartment in the city.

But this separation is not total: in Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh I met many newcomer Sakha, mostly women, who had married locals and had begun to speak the local Dolgan dialect. One such woman is the wife of the brigadier of the Uurung Khaia 3rd brigade, Natasha. She spoke the 'Dolgan language', dressed in a local manner and was known as a skilled worker. People appreciated that she, although not native born, had learned tundra work and was more proficient in skills such as sewing fur boots (*eterbes* in Sakha) and processing hides for lassos than many local women in the brigade. Natasha had adapted culturally, but, more importantly, socially as well. She was a full member of her husband's kinship network, which linked her to the village community.

Another example is Lena, the wife of my host in Uurung Khaia. She had married her husband, Stepan Fiodorovich, thirty years ago. Since then, she had worked at the fox farm as a livestock expert and later as its director. When she arrived in the village, she learned from her mother-in-law not only how to cook local dishes but also the local customs and beliefs. Local people say that Lena followed Dolgan customs more strictly than many natives. Lena was linked to the village not only through her husband's relatives but through her own work network. She was on good terms with many people who had worked with her at the fox farm or during her time in the village administration, when as director of the farm, she had to work alongside the main veterinarian and chief livestock expert of the state farm. One of my informants told me, 'Lena has done a lot to put the [fox] farm on its feet. She literally built it up and made it successful. After her, her son was director



and she always gave him good advice. And now we have this incomer woman who has spoiled everything.'

The accused person was an incomer Tuvan woman, who, although she spoke fluent Sakha, has earned only antipathy from the villagers. She restructured the management of the fox farm and fired many people. Not surprisingly, she was blamed for the decline in fur production, the unfulfilled plans and even the sickness of the animals. In this light, Lena, as one of 'our own people', was glorified as one who had been able to manage the fox farm successfully because she cared for local people and 'her' farm.

The above examples show that it is possible to cross the boundary between 'newcomer' and 'local'. Gaining community acceptance depends very much on the individual. The local community maintains its distance from those newcomers who come only for a limited time and keep themselves socially apart. When a person demonstrates the will to adapt culturally and shows an intention to stay for a long time, he or she is readily incorporated into the social networks of local people.

### 7.3.2 *Two Villages*

Here I focus on the relations between the villages of Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh. Although these two communities are closely related, there is a certain social distance between them. There are many examples of cooperation between families of both villages (for example, the Saaskylaakh-based Moigo family and members of the Uurung Khaia 3rd brigade) but over time, with increasing isolation and poverty, the communities have become increasingly exclusive. I show that there are certain reasons for this process, which is commonly expressed and understood in certain ways of behaviour or even ethnographic details.

The most obvious expression of 'local patriotism' is competition for the favour of girls. The following conversation provides an example. After the district Feast of the Reindeer Herders and Hunters in April 2001, I met Pavel Tuprin, the 24-year-old director of the Uurung Khaia MUP, and Oko (the youngest son of Balyksyt), who was then a 19-year-old reindeer herder from the 3rd brigade, in the centre of Saaskylaakh. Both were quite drunk. We were hanging around in the stairway of the local hotel and discussing what we should do next. Suddenly the director said, 'Look at this boy. [He nodded in Oko's direction.] What can he do? Imagine that he has found himself a girlfriend here in Saaskylaakh. He comes here and wants to visit her and go out (*guliat* in Rus.) with her. He goes along the street and meets some local guys (*patsany* in Rus.). Usually they [guys] walk in gangs of about five people...'

*Oko*: 'What five people. Ten!'

*Pavel*: 'When the local guys meet him, they know that he is after the Saaskylaakh girl. What are they gonna do with him? They beat him up!'

During important holidays, when young people arrive from the other village, there are often huge fights between young men from both villages at the weekend disco. Men 'defend their village honour' by showing who are the toughest fighters. But this is only one side of the coin: violent conflicts are also an expression of the sense of belonging to a 'we group'. Below I will discuss some cultural nuances at the core of distinct community identities, which distinguish the villages from each other.

Despite the fact that people in both villages speak a northern dialect of Sakha, there are some small differences in pronunciation and vocabulary. In Uurung Khaia the consonants are pronounced in a Dolgan way: 'h' as 'kh' or 'k' and 'gh' as 'g'. The vowels 'ä' are often pronounced as 'äe' and the whole melody of the speech of Uurung Khaia is, according to common opinion, 'harder' (*tvërdyi* in Rus.). Hunting and reindeer herding terminology also differs somewhat from one village to another. Dolgan dialect in Uurung Khaia also differs in that people use some expressions which are considered archaic in Sakha and are no longer used in Saaskylaakh, for example the word *ebe* ('grandmother') for 'river', *atakh* ('foot') for 'shoe', or *uruuga* (from Russian *ruka* 'hand') for 'glove'.

In the tundra, there are many differences in the way reindeer fur clothes are made. For example, in Uurung Khaia long winter boots (*eterbes*) are made of the fur from a reindeer's legs (*tys* in Sakha and *kamusy* in Rus.). Saaskylaakh reindeer herders can be recognised by their reindeer skin boots and the way they wear reindeer skin hats (*untyka*) often back to front. Only Uurung Khaia reindeer herders use home-made reindeer skin lassos. In the Saaskylaakh brigades, people prefer to buy rope in the shop and make lassos from that. Uurung Khaia inhabitants are considered quieter and more 'provincial' whereas the status of Saaskylaakh as the 'capital' of the district encourages a degree of arrogance and a sense of superiority towards the inhabitants of Uurung Khaia, who in Saaskylaakh are sometimes called *lapaikar* or Laplander (referring to their 'peripheral' origin).

It appears to be the younger generation (under 30s) who are stronger carriers of this 'local patriotism'. When the boarding school closed in Saaskylaakh in the 1980s and both villages received their own day school, communication between youngsters is limited to visits to the other village on holidays in winter and spring. While adults often stress a common background with people in the other village ('we lived together in the boarding school and were in one state farm ... although we live in different villages,

this is one district'), youngsters from both sides told me that 'the others' are different. Ironically young people of both sides consider their own people to be more open. People from both Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh told me that, although they like to visit the other village, they prefer the life and people of their own village. One reason given is that 'we know people from our village better' and therefore there are fewer problems.

'Local patriotism' in both villages causes regional separation in the economy. Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh reindeer herders and hunters, with few exceptions, use tundra resources in different regions, and thus have little need of economic cooperation.

As people told me, since 1983, when the independent state farm was restored in Uurung Khaia, brigades from both villages started to migrate and hunt further away from each other. Pasturing techniques for reindeer herds also differ between villages. Saaskylaakh reindeer herds contain mostly Khargin (Chukchi) reindeer and Uurung Khaia reindeer herds are overwhelmingly a mix of the Khargin and local Even reindeer. Both breeds calve at different times (Khargin in April, Even in May) and so the annual cycle of the reindeer brigades is slightly different. Saaskylaakh reindeer herders reunite their herds of does and bucks at the end of April and set out on longer migrations. Uurung Khaia herders do not start their active migration before the second half of May (see section 6.2.1). Therefore Saaskylaakh herds are already in the southern tundra to avoid the wild reindeer migration, and hunters begin their hunting season when Uurung Khaia reindeer brigades are still not ready.

Hunters and reindeer herders from one village used to work together in Soviet state farm brigades. Each state farm had its own hunting and reindeer herding brigades, which shared the same hunting grounds. After the collapse of the state farm system, hunters and reindeer herders continued to work and communicate with the same people as before. Thus a privately owned reindeer is almost always given to reindeer herders from the owner's village to be looked after. During the wild reindeer and goose hunting seasons, people stay at the brigades of their own village. Hunters and reindeer herders from both villages occasionally cooperate in hunting and reindeer herding (see section 5.3), but this is more complicated across village brigades since each village has a different central radio. Thus 'others' are often unreachable in bad weather. The transport of goods between Uurung Khaia brigades and Saaskylaakh brigades can also be complicated. Since *tundroviki* are regionally separated, and their economic base is their home village, it is easier to bring supplies from the home village than it is to drive across the tundra. Similar problems occur in bringing supplies from one village to another and then shipping meat and hides out of the tundra. Trouble with



transport was one of the reasons why an attempt to organise a reindeer *obshchina* combining one Uurung Khaia and one Saaskylaakh reindeer brigade failed. In regions where brigades from both villages meet, as in the area to the north-east of Uurung Khaia, informal cooperation continues, especially in hunting seasons, as described in chapter 5.

The main economic cooperation in the tundra between brigades from Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh can be found among close adult relatives who were schoolmates in Soviet times and had worked in neighbouring brigades in the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequently life in both settlements became more village-focused due to separate schools and the history of each local state farm. Because of this social separation and because of dialect and cultural differences, along with the increasing sense of the village as a community, the main economic activities took place inside more introverted village communities.

#### 7.4. *Min sakhabyñ! (I am Sakha!)*

Before my first migration with the 3rd brigade the brigadier Vasili asked me, 'Can you ride a reindeer?' I said that I had never done this. 'It doesn't matter, within a month we will make a Sakha of you!' (*Nichego, v odin mesiaty my iz tebia eshchë yakuta zdelaem!* in Rus.). I knew that Vasili and all the other members of the brigade must be Dolgan. So why the 'Sakha' now?

In the last section I described how people's cooperation is not limited by formal ethnic boundaries, but is strongly influenced by their village origin. However, in various situations ethnic labels are used. Ethnic labels are used, especially in conflict situations where one side is an incomer Russian. In discussions or conflict situations, people of the Anabarskii district describe themselves as Dolgan, Evenki or more often Sakha. Russians, whether those who have lived for a long time in the district or those who just come on short business trips, tend to sum up all the indigenous people in the district as Yakuts (Sakha). The switching between self-identification as 'Dolgan' and 'Sakha' is constant, and, according to my experience, a person can speak about himself as a Dolgan in one sentence, and as a Sakha in the next. In this section I want to discuss this double Sakha-Dolgan identity.

In chapter 2 I indicated that Anabar indigenous populations have had contact with Sakha people for many centuries. The Sakha language was a *lingua franca* from the seventeenth century, not only in Anabar but also in a large area from the Enisei River to Chukotka (Forsyth 1992: 55). According to early Soviet ethnographers, Sakha was the language of communication from the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century in the Anabar and Olenek basins (Dolgikh 1952a; Gurvich 1977). The local

Anabar population had kinship and economic relations with ethnic Sakha, especially in the Viliui region, and even when the Anabar region was part of present-day Krasnoiarskii Krai, they preferred to trade with Sakha. After the Anabarskii *raion* was incorporated into the Yakutian ASSR it became one of the Sakha-speaking districts.<sup>95</sup>

After the Revolution, the Sakha people were very active within the new power structures and also in establishing schools, mainly in the Sakha language (Forsyth 1992: 319). This is why a large part of the Yakutian native minorities took over the Sakha language and today consider it their first language. Nearly all Evenki (90.8%) and 35% of Even consider Sakha as their first language (Argunova and Habeck 1997). After visiting the Even village of Topolinoe and talking to indigenous activists in Yakutsk, I got the impression that older people blame Sakha teachers for the loss of their native mother tongue. Galina, an old woman from a reindeer herder family in the mountains of Topolinoe, told me: 'Before collectivisation [in the 1930s and 1940s] everyone spoke Even. But at home we started to speak Sakha when the children were sent to boarding school.' The Anabarskii district, especially Uurung Khaia, is also dominated by the Sakha language, supported by Sakha education. Today students in Uurung Khaia start their school education in Sakha, switching to Russian only after the third grade in some, but not all, subjects. Everyday communication among the natives of the district is in the Sakha language. People in Uurung Khaia read and write in Sakha, and most private letters, labels in family albums and even announcements made by the local village administration are in Sakha. The local district newspaper used to be completely in the Sakha language. Only since the end of the 1980s, after the village of Ebeleekh was established and the number of Russians increased to one-third of the district population, has the newspaper been published in both Sakha and Russian. Indigenous people regularly tune into Sakha radio and TV programmes. So, someone born into an indigenous family in Uurung Khaia will remain in the sphere of the Sakha language and only seldom come into contact with Russian.

Because of this Sakha-isation of minority groups, neither Sakha nor Russians in the Republic of Sakha are aware that Dolgan, Evenki, Eveny and Yukagir are groups with a separate ethnic origin. I have met people who explained to me that all these peoples are actually subgroups of Sakha.

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<sup>95</sup> The neighbours in southern Olenekskii and eastern Bulunskii districts were, despite their Even and Evenk origin, Sakha speakers as well. The Sakha-speaking district includes not only the central districts, which are populated by ethnic Sakha, but also the most 'agricultural' northern and eastern districts, which besides the ethnic Sakha are populated by Eveny, Evenki and Yukagirs (for example Allaikhovskii, Oimiakonskii, Eveno-Bytalaiskii and Sredne-Kolyma districts).

Because of the increase in communication and migration of people between districts, the meaning of the indigenous minorities' ethnicity has been devalued.

According to local folklore, the word *Tungus* used to mean simply 'non-Sakha' (Gabyshev 2002: 54); in the nineteenth century it referred to an occupation, i.e. reindeer herding (Dolgikh 1950, 1963; Gurvich 1952, 1977; Suslov 1952); nowadays it means people from the north in general. *Tungus* (*Tongus* in Sakha) has a negative connotation, much the same as American 'redneck'—dumb, violent and conservative village boys—and the term can fuel fights in discos in Yakutsk where youths of different districts meet.

Sometimes Sakha people refer to the whole Asian population in Arctic districts, independent of their ethnic affiliation, as *tongustar*. Therefore, being an Evenk, Dolgan or Yukagir usually means just being a *tongus*, which has geographical and occupational meanings (someone not from the central districts and a hunter/reindeer herder), and often also pejorative connotations. According to my observations, among people in Uurung Khaia there was no contradiction in using Dolgan and Sakha labels together, whereas Dolgan from Syndassko make a clear distinction between themselves and Sakha and do not like to be identified as Sakha.

Once I asked a herder from the 5th reindeer brigade, Oleg, about the ethnic identity of people living in Taimylyr. Taimylyr is a small settlement of herders and fishermen on the other side of the eastern border of the Anabarskii district, in the Bulunskii district, where many Anabar girls have married. Oleg answered, 'They are the same people as we are—Yakuts-Dolgan (*iakuty-dolgany*)'. The term Yakuts-Dolgan was used in a book title in 1899 (Aleksandrov 1899). The book 'Yakuty i Dolgany' ('Sakha and Dolgan people') was published in a series of children's books *Narody Rossii* ('The Peoples of Russia'). This book describes the lifestyle and culture of the horse- and cattle-breeding Sakha people, with no reference to reindeer herders. Only at the beginning is it mentioned that Yakuts live in an area from the upper Lena River to the Arctic Ocean (Aleksandrov 1899). The word 'Dolgan' is never used in this book except in the title. This was neither the first nor the last time that I came across this double ethnonym, which highlights the fact that there is no contradiction in putting Dolgan and Sakha under one label.

Talking to people in Anabar, their loyalty to the Republic of Sakha is obvious. In the homes of every indigenous family, there are symbols of the Republic, such as small flags and coats of arms, in kitchens and living rooms. President Nikolaev and the government in Yakutsk are referred to as 'our president' and 'our government'. People in the Anabarskii district see Yakutsk as the centre of their world. It is here that people move to make a



career and to attend university or an institute. Adults (especially high-ranking officials) often go to Yakutsk on business trips. By contrast, Moscow holds little interest, being as far away as any other city outside the Republic of Sakha.

Most families of Uurung Khaia not only have institutional but also kin ties to Sakha-populated settlements in the central districts and Yakutsk. During their university studies in Yakutsk or while at vocational schools around Yakutsk, many local young people marry ethnic Sakha. In most cases, men tend to come home with their brides whereas the women remain away. During my stay in Saaskylaakh and Uurung Khaia, I met a lot of people with relatives in central Yakutian villages. Many Sakha from the central districts also live in the Anabarskii district; like the son-in-law of Moigo they came to the north to work, married and stayed either in Uurung Khaia or Saaskylaakh (for example, the district senior physician, the director of the House of Culture in Uurung Khaia, the director of the village hotel in Saaskylaakh, who used to be a teacher for twenty years, and the whole staff of the hotel, to name but a few). In section 5.2 I demonstrated the incorporative nature of Anabar extended families. In-laws, whether male or female, are full members of their new family and have the same rights and duties as other family members, i.e. rights to participate in decision-making and an obligation to contribute to the well-being of the family. On the other side, marrying into an Anabar family usually meant that the Anabar family was also incorporated in the Sakha family and both sides considered themselves relatives.

Sakha relatives also bring with them elements of Sakha culture. Everyday culture in Uurung Khaia is strongly influenced by Sakha culture but it is not completely taken over by it. Features of Sakha culture are especially obvious in festive events. Weddings in Anabar are usually held according to Sakha customs; in some cases the wedding begins with drinking *kumys* (a light alcoholic drink of mare's milk), usually brought to the horseless Anabar by relatives from the central districts. Long and elaborate speeches, which seek to greet or praise either the bride or groom, are also part of Sakha wedding customs. My wife Tania, whom I met in Anabar during my fieldwork, told me about the wedding of one of her colleagues at the district hospital. Most of the senior staff in her department were incomer Sakha and they chose a young woman, Aita, to represent the department and make a speech. 'Aita gave one of the prettiest speeches,' Tania told me. 'She can speak old Sakha (*uurankhai sakhalyy* or ceremonial Sakha) which use long sentences. Another good speaker was Elisaveta Dmitrevna [a director of the Saaskylaakh village hotel, an incomer Sakha who has lived in the district for more than 20 years]. Local people only give short speeches, they do not

know how to do it.' One of my friends also admitted that incomer Sakha are the main speakers and masters of ceremony at weddings and other such events: 'They know how to do it [i.e. customs] and language [i.e. *uurankhai sakhalyy*]. We [the locals] usually do things more simply.' Among the greeting speeches there is also a song called a 'musical greeting'. Such songs praise the beauty of the northern tundra and Uurung Khaia, but many guests, and not only incomer Sakha, perform songs that praise nature, beauty or richness of 'our homeland, Big Sakha Land' and its villages in the taiga, far away from the Anabarskii district.

Sakha influence is also apparent in the Dolgan diet. The Dolgan drink tea with milk (or more usually with powdered milk), as the Sakha do, and bake typical Sakha meat pies, which are eaten with melted butter. There are also typical Dolgan dishes like boiled reindeer meat with soup, frozen raw fish (*stroganina*) or fish boiled in big pieces (*kös balyk*).

Indigenous people in the Anabarskii district have, over decades and maybe even over centuries, incorporated elements of Sakha culture into their own culture and, in their turn, have been incorporated into Sakha kinship structures to such an extent that ethnic boundaries are unclear and unimportant. In section 5.4 I discussed the part of the reciprocal network that links the district with other regions of Sakha. Owing to general poverty and unequally distributed resources, geographically distant relatives are important in providing shelter and help when a person travels outside the district. On my travels inside the Republic, I was initially astonished that my Sakha companions were always able to find a place for us to sleep. They would simply say, 'I have a relative, or friend of a relative here.' Sometimes they called in advance, other times we just turned up and asked for shelter. The same strategy applies to the people of Anabar, who stay with relatives while on their business trips or while studying, people of the 'same kin and nation' as Zina said to me. A common language, knowledge of manners and social values are all linked with kinship strategies to establish a network based on the notion of a 'we-group'.

The process of enhancing awareness of Sakha identity among northern indigenous people was intensified by the establishment of the Sakha state. Sirina argues that the Republic of Sakha has a policy of nation-building and cites as an example the 'de-ethnicisation' of indigenous legislation where the law does not recognise any distinction between indigenous minorities and the Sakha titular group (Sirina 2000: 199). Since the declaration of Sakha sovereignty, the government has created and used new ethnic symbols everywhere, from the state seal to names of public institutions, which are either in Sakha (the parliament *Il Tymen*) or contain the word 'Sakha' (*Sakhabult*, *Sakhaavia*). Sakha roots are emphasised at every public event, for

example the opening ceremony of the Sakha-Asia Children's Olympic Games in 2000 or the central New Year's celebration.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the government has sponsored strongly Sakha-oriented cultural and educational programs. It has become easier for young people in the village to get a government grant to study in the capital or in other cities in the Republic. In school programmes and government statements, the unity of the different peoples of the Republic and the unity of all 'Land of the Sakha' (*Sakha sire*) are constantly emphasised. Although in speeches the President and other government officials use the word *yakutiane* ('people of Yakutia'), there are strong sentiments among the Sakha that the titular nation must have the main say in the Republic and that Russians should be viewed as intruders.<sup>96</sup> All this has led to a raised Sakha ethnic consciousness, which in many cases has transformed into nationalism (Duncan 1994; Balzer 1995; Khazanov 1995; Mote 1998).

The rise of Sakha nationalism has also taken place in Anabar. Many older people complain that since young people have started to study in Yakutsk, anti-Russian feelings in the village have increased. 'Maybe the people have heard that Russians beat up Sakha people in Yakutsk and they want to take revenge,' explained one of my informants. When in conflict situations with Russian workers, people in the Anabarskii district stress that they are Sakha (see chapter 8 for a discussion of the manipulation of ethnic categories in crime). Visitors of European appearance are warned not to walk the streets at night because young people can 'become nationalistic'.

In every discussion about the ethnic conflicts and tensions between Sakha and Russians, peoples' sympathy lies with the Sakha. Sakha are seen as 'countrymen' (*zemliaki* in Rus.), whereas Russians are strangers and intruders. Both in the Anabarskii district and the Republic as a whole, the Sakha-speaking native population and Russian-speaking incomer population prefer to communicate within their own language group.<sup>97</sup> So, in some cases subconsciously, people foster ethnic consolidation along the lines of language and physical type.

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<sup>96</sup> I have not analysed the speeches and statements of Nikolaev, the former president of the Republic of Sakha, given in the Sakha language, but I have the impression that they are more Sakha oriented (he speaks only about the *sakhalar*) than his speeches and statements in Russian. The reason for this could be that since few non-natives are able to understand Sakha, statements of a more general character are made in Russian.

<sup>97</sup> There are a few exceptions among old Russian-speaking Eveny and Evenki and Sakha-speaking Russian settlers along the Lena River and in the north-eastern part of the Republic of Sakha, but they are not the topic of this research.



## 7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on multiple identities in the Anabarskii district. This situation is rooted in the historical and political developments of the Tsarist and Soviet eras, and has been influenced by economic and administrative developments of ethnic consciousness in the region. Tsarist influences on the establishment of clan structures, which were the basis for later ethnic classification, were presented in chapter 2. In the pre-Revolutionary period this typically colonial policy had the primary purpose of facilitating tax collection and territorial control (cf. Price 1982). In Soviet times ethnicity was transformed into a means of determining access to resources.

This process had two sides—an official one and a vernacular one. On the one hand, ethnicity or ‘nationality’ was created by the state through so-called ‘mastercodes’, namely language, material culture, folklore and the various forms of ‘traditional’ economy. Consolidation around these official markers was seen as an ‘increase of national consciousness in the Soviet era’ by Soviet ethnographers (Terletskii 1950: 89). On the other hand, the state was in many cases unsuccessful in controlling people’s identities. In Stalinist times, Dolgikh discovered that members of the same kin group had different ‘nationalities’ on opposite sides of the Krasnoiarskii Krai–Yakutian ASSR border (1952a). Such a fact possibly confused researchers but was accepted by the people themselves even in 2000. The Soviet state created and institutionalised ethnic identities through historical processes (industrial development, school education, administrative restructuring), but people nevertheless manipulated and reconstructed these identities as it suited them.

My goal has been to show why and when certain identities matter. Commonality with other people is defined culturally (customs, food habits, etc), through kinship ties, through a ‘speech community’ (Schlee 1989: 8), locality, occupation and common background. In this chapter I referred to various levels of local identity. When building networks with relatives from Krasnoiarskii Krai, a common Dolgan origin was stressed. Although my informants did not consider themselves to be ‘pure’ Dolgan, Dolganness was an important part of village self-consciousness. The village of Uurung Khaia became more self-focused after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, inhabitants of Uurung Khaia preferred economic cooperation with their relatives and immediate neighbours, feeling that people from the other village in the district were ‘strangers’. The third level of identity was the Sakha identity of the Anabar native people. Sakha identity is connected to the role Sakha played in the Soviet apparatus but also to the policy of nation-building on behalf of the leaders of the post-Soviet Republic of Sakha. Sakhaness is important both as a tool to exclude non-Sakha (Russians) and to link kin with resources outside the district. Embracing multiple identities

or simply ignoring them has been for the people in Uurung Khaia a way of including themselves in a changing matrix of networks and, by definition, of excluding others.

## ***Chapter 8***

# **The Structures and Methods of Social Control**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the mechanisms of social control at my field site. My main interest is in analysing how social order is maintained by informal mechanisms and norms which operate outside state legal and governance structures. There are state laws, but in such remote villages they are not necessarily effective. The state as a power is publicly visible only on very rare occasions, when people in the village have committed serious crimes. This is the opinion not only of people living in Saaskylaakh and Ebeleekh but also of those living in Uurung Khaia, who proudly told me that their village is 'even more dangerous than Chicago' and that there are no laws. Foreigners are very often surprised at how people in Sakha can be proud that their village or city is 'so crime-ridden and dangerous'. Pride in coming from a dangerous place/region/district was often expressed by men, especially young men, as part of their masculinity—it is important to be seen to be a tough guy. This pride was also shared by some women (again mainly young women), as an attempt to emphasise the hard living conditions and the special qualities of their community. I encountered this seemingly strange 'pride' in Yakutsk and the various villages I visited during my fieldwork and found it to be shared by people in the tundra, students in town and even skilled workers in villages.

In this sense, all the non-industrial settlements I visited in Sakha are dangerous places to be in the evenings, with alcoholism a major social problem. In the wealthier industrial towns (Mirnyi, Udachnyi, Neringri) and villages there are more police officers, and they were better paid. Many of these industrial towns and villages are 'closed', i.e. travel to 'closed' towns and villages is strictly regulated by the state security apparatus. Most industrial settlements 'belong' to a particular diamond or coal-mining enterprise (i.e. they are the base for a factory or mine) and most of the inhabitants are company employees. Importantly, these employees risk being fired for even



minor infractions and so modify their behaviour in order to retain their jobs.<sup>98</sup>

So-called 'agricultural settlements' and ethnically Sakha-dominated towns are 'open'—and unemployment is higher and wages are lower than in mining settlements. But even in Sakha, the northern districts were seen as especially dangerous and rough, where people drink a lot and carry weapons (mostly knives). I mentioned in the previous chapter that the inhabitants of northern regions were called 'Tungus' (*tongustar*) in the central districts irrespective of their ethnic background, a term which denotes people who are seen as particularly 'wild'.

State power is weakly represented in such villages, including the village of Uurung Khaia. I have been in small indigenous villages where was no local police officer. In situations of conflict or crime, police had to be called from some neighbouring village which in cases many hundreds of kilometres away. In other cases, local policemen were corrupt and unreliable when it came to solving crimes. Therefore, in such villages people often preferred to solve conflicts themselves rather than go to officials. The police had a bad reputation also in Uurung Khaia. There was one local policeman (*uchaskovyi militsioner*), but he was neither able nor wanted to maintain 'order' in the village. According to what I saw, he tried to keep out of trouble in the community. There was little motivation for a lone police officer to get involved in local conflicts or to take sides because he knew he risked being accosted and beaten up on the street during the long polar night. It had happened quite a few times and therefore the village police officers were popularly called 'kamikaze' (*smertniki*). As one of my friends said to me, 'Cops won't survive here!' (*Mentam u nas ne vyzhivat'!*) The state's presence is more obvious in the district's central village, Saaskylaakh, where a small post of police officers is located. Saaskylaakh also has the district court and a district attorney. The court and the police force are present in Uurung Khaia's daily life only when a violation of the law is especially severe, for example fights involving weapons, stabbings, murders, rapes and similar crimes. In these cases, police officers are flown in from Saaskylaakh by helicopter and the arrested persons transported back to Saaskylaakh.

According to public opinion in both Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh, the former has always been a dangerous place, but the situation became worse in the early 1990s, when the border-guard station left the village and

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<sup>98</sup> In the diamond mining bases, alcohol is strictly forbidden and a worker caught consuming alcohol is immediately fired. ALROSA used to fire its workers who fell foul of the law even in cases which required only a fine (for example, disturbing the peace—*khuliganstvo*). When fired, the person lost not only a well-paid job but in some places the right to live in the settlement.

with it all the incomers.<sup>99</sup> Villagers feel that before *perestroika* the social life of the village had a more 'more meaningful structure and an aura of social well-being and *communitas*' (Turner 1969 cited in Gambold Miller 2003: 15). Many institutions were dismantled after 1991: the canteen, border-guard station, police station, regular cheap transport, the guest house, and agitation brigades which provided regular entertainment. People were less able to leave the village (both in terms of business trips or holidays) and, with the economic crisis, fewer new people visited the village (both state officials and entertainers). Uurung Khaia became more remote and transport to Saaskylakh became less frequent. I have shown in previous chapters that *perestroika* brought with it growing poverty and an unequal distribution of goods. While some families and individuals maintained quite a good standard of living, the number of poor people increased. Even in a village like Uurung Khaia, those individuals who held high positions in various enterprises, who were entrepreneurs (*kommersant* in Rus.) or who were good hunters with big families were able to live quite comfortably with nicely furnished homes, many snowmobiles, a solid income and the support of the administration. Other households, however, suffered from a lack of basic foodstuffs, shared their apartment with family members from many generations, and their cash income was irregular and unpredictable. With rising prices and increasing isolation, the social life in Uurung Khaia became rougher. The older generation blames videos and TV for the crime and violence in the village. 'In earlier times we had no TVs. The first TV sets came in the 1980s, and the colour TVs at the beginning of the 1990s. They show only action movies (*boeviki* in Rus.) on TV. It is no wonder that the youth have become wild,' said Vasili Kylvashov one evening.

Although Uurung Khaia is generally considered a lawless place across the district, there are, as in every community, concepts of what is right and what is wrong. In other chapters I have looked at topics such as informal land use rights, reciprocity (the 'law of the tundra'), and property rights with regard to traps and the game caught in them. The norms of how a person should behave or what he has a right to are fixed in common understanding, indeed they are treated as *common sense*. There are some generally accepted unwritten rules that should not be broken. Many of these relate to property: the traps are sacrosanct and nobody should touch another person's traps;

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<sup>99</sup> According to the opinion of adults and elders, the border guard was, besides the police, the one institution which maintained peace and order in the village. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were about 200 border-guard soldiers in the village and military patrols were one means of controlling crime on the streets. Although local folklore is rich with legends about fights with border-guard soldiers, such a big military contingent itself made the village a 'strategically closed zone', which was strongly controlled by the police and military forces.

there are certain people who have a greater right to use resources in a certain region than others (masters or *khoziain*); stealing from a *balokh* in the tundra is a crime; private reindeer should not be used without the permission of the owner, etc. These generally accepted rules are similar to the prohibitions fixed in the Criminal Code, only with a certain local colour: some misdeeds are not so heavily condemned as they are under the law, and sometimes, as I will show below, violent and criminal acts are classified by the community as evidence of masculinity and therefore tolerated.

In Uurung Khaia indigenous autonomous formal structures do not exist, nor is there any formal indigenous legislation. The Dolgan today have no council of elders as there has been, for example, in the Khanty region of western Siberia since the early 1990s or among Yukagir people in eastern Sakha (Krivoshapkin 2001: 6).<sup>100</sup> Also, there are no clearly fixed legal concepts which everyone knows and adheres to. Many norms and their violation are a matter for discussion, and in many cases peoples' opinions depend on their own point of view in any particular case or on how closely they are related to the persons involved.

In the following section I present an overview of the 'male age system' and the current social hierarchy in Uurung Khaia. I then focus in the third section on non-violent ways of keeping or restoring order. In many cases this involves kinship structures and the high degree of respect given to elders, both of which are important among natives in the Russian North. The elders are the keepers of knowledge and the heads of families. It is they who decide the best time to set out on a hunt, for the placement of fishing nets, even the ethnic affiliation of their children.

Such networks are carriers of commonly recognised norms and maintain stability in the village where the state is unable to control the situation. Yet there were always cases where respect for the elders or the threat of getting into trouble with the family does not deter violation of common rules. I focus on these methods of control and different uses of violence in the community in the next two sections.

In many conflicts it is not always clear whether the victim should enjoy the support of the community or even whether the wrongdoer should be punished. The decision whether acts such as theft or blackmail are crimes often depends on whether the victim is a local or an incomer. As a rule, the property and health of strangers are not the concern of the community as long as incomers have not built up personal contacts with local people. In the

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<sup>100</sup>In 1995 and 1996, when I was conducting fieldwork in western Siberia, indigenous reorganisation was under way and included the establishment of new 'old traditional' structures (see Ventsel and Dudeck 1998).



final section I will focus on the 'we versus them' concept and the exclusion of strangers from the local legal space.

## 8.2. The Male Age System in Uurung Khaia

The 'male age system' relates to the different age categories and social groups that must be understood in order to then understand the methods of social control in the villages of the Anabarskii district. The male population of Uurung Khaia can be divided roughly into three categories: the elders (*stariki* in Rus.; *ogonn'orror* in Sakha), adult men (*vzroslye muzhiki* in Rus.; *d'onnor* in Sakha) and youngsters or kids (*patsany* in Rus.). These groups are not comparable with the classic East African age groups (e.g. Spencer 1963; Legesse 1973; Bernardi 1985; Bassi 1996), where membership of a particular age category and entry into or out of the group is strictly fixed and ritually celebrated, and where the whole structure functions as a 'discrete kind of political organisation' (Bernardi 1996: 9).

When a person becomes a pensioner, he usually leaves the 'adult' category and will be referred to as an elder or old man (*starik*). Because different professions have different rules as to the age at which one can retire, the 'elders' group contains people of different ages. In Russia women normally retire at the age of 50 and men at the age of 55. In the North, some professions have the right to retire earlier. Polar pilots have the shortest working career before retirement—15 years of work. Reindeer herders and hunters have the second shortest 'working life'. They need to work for 20 years to have the right to a full pension. So, in theory, a reindeer herder who starts his full-time career at the age of 15 is entitled to retire at the age of 35. Still, most pensioners in Uurung Khaia stop work at the age of 40–50 and are then called either 'old man' (*ogonn'or* in Sakha) or 'old woman' (*emeeksin* in Sakha).

The borderline between adults and kids is less clear than that between elders and adults. Young males leave the category of 'kids' usually after their army service, i.e. after the age of 20–22. Even when they do not go into the army, young people tend to get married in their early twenties (young women even earlier, at the age of 17–19) and it is this change in their status that transfers people into the group of adults. Although people convinced me that the community does not tolerate unregistered couples, there are many young people who live together, have children and are not officially married. Such a situation is described in the Russian expression 'civil marriage' or *grazhdanskii brak*. Many such young couples share their parents' flat, either on the man's or the woman's side. They were seen as being already adult, mature enough to have their own life inside the extended family. However, a person of 20–25 years of age can sometimes belong to the 'kids' category,

sometimes to the adults, especially when he or she is unmarried. They hang around with the unmarried boys and girls (*patsany*), drink more and have more freedom in their daily life. As an adult, one is expected to have more responsibility, contribute more to the household's income and show initiative in looking for possibilities for extra income, which in many cases means illegal short-term jobs (*khaltura*) like private construction work or loading and unloading trucks. It is generally accepted that a person leaves the status of being a kid when he gets married, especially when he becomes a parent (usually this happens soon after marriage). At this stage a man is expected to be 'serious', i.e. to focus on the well-being of his family (and extended family). It also means that the adult man must stay away from 'kids' entertainment', especially petty crime and hooliganism. Adults are the main stabilising social group who maintain at least some kind of order in the streets and other public spaces of Uurung Khaia. One reason that they feel obliged to keep the 'kids' under control is probably their status as 'family men'; they have an obligation to support their children and older parents and take care of their security. Also, adults have considerable property to lose if stealing and robbery become uncontrollable. As Vasili told me, 'We people over the age of thirty keep the order here in the village. We make sure that the kids don't do anything really bad.'

Among the adults there were a group of men who enjoyed great respect (*uvazhenie* in Rus.) though mixed with fear (*strakh* in Rus.). This group is called *zeki*, i.e. men who have been in prison. Life in a Russian prison is hard, and a man who survives many years of imprisonment has experienced many tough situations.<sup>101</sup> The *zeki* are easy to recognise by their use of specific slang, their behaviour and their tattoos. The more cruel or violent the crime a person is sentenced for, the more respect he engenders in his home village. For many adults, this respect has negative overtones, i.e. it is respect born out of fear. *Zeki* usually keep together and support each other, and so few people enter into conflict with them. The social position of the *zeki* in Uurung Khaia differs markedly from that in Saaskylaakh.

In Saaskylaakh, few local people communicate personally with *zeki* when they are not part of their immediate social network, i.e. either as relatives or friends or friends of friends. Uurung Khaia is smaller and therefore former convicts are more strongly embedded in different social networks. In

<sup>101</sup> One Russian friend, who spent five years in prison, told me that the grouping in a prison takes place on an ethnic basis. Russians, Sakha, gypsies, Ukrainians, etc. try to live in one cell with people of their own ethnic group and create so-called families. He told me that the relations in Sakha 'families' were especially brutal, where the boss had absolute right over the property and health of his 'family-members'. One's position in the 'family' depended on the kind of sentence and the length of time one had already spent in prison.

a small community it is nearly impossible not to interact with a person, either in private or in public or at work. Therefore *zeki* are not seen as an immediate danger. But the fact that they have spent many years in prison in a violent environment makes most people cautious when interacting with them, especially when they are drunk. On the other hand, for young men, *zeki* often have a positive notoriety as outlaws, because the former convicts are generally avoided and feared by state officials (including the local police officer) and other adults. This 'romantic' image is not shared by the local girls, however. Some of the *zeki* complained to me that girls are reluctant to go out with someone who has served a prison term: 'Girls think that when you were in prison (*sidel* in Rus.) you are automatically some kind of dangerous and lower person. This is unfair. In prison I paid for my crime, it's over. People don't know that in prison you have the same kind of people as on the outside; there is no difference.'

However, *zeki* as a group have grown in importance in the social life of the village. In Soviet times, most ex-convicts were not allowed to return to the Anabarskii district, which was then a closed border zone. If they were allowed in, they were obliged to work and report periodically to the local police station. With the dismantling of state control structures, the authorities are no longer in a position to supervise local ex-convicts and punish them when they do not work. Nowadays, there are more ex-convicts in Uurung Khaia than before and they are able to exercise an impressive degree of power over the community through fear, and, more particularly over the *patsany* through hero worship.

Leaders among the adults who take it upon themselves to maintain order are very often *zeki* or a few so-called *avtoritety* (thuggish wheeler-dealers who use bribery and corruption to maintain control).<sup>102</sup> The institution of *avtoritety* developed with the appearance of private businesses in the post-*perestroika* period. In this period, corruption in the state structures increased mainly because state officials, including the police, were underpaid. Wealthy entrepreneurs could bribe state officials to get licences and also to make sure that local authorities over-looked their semi-illegal operations in the tundra villages.

Every village has its *avtoritety*. They are mostly well known as cruel thugs or borderline criminal entrepreneurs with not-so-honest business methods. One *avtoritet* in the village of Uurung Khaia was a man called *Tsempion* (Champion). He was a successful entrepreneur, owned a shop,

<sup>102</sup> In Russia, many words in informal social terminology have a broad meaning which differs from region to region and have various connotations depending on the particular situation. Thus, *avtoritet* in town was often understood as a mafia leader who usually had no social obligations to people outside the criminal fraternity (Volkov 1999: 746).



traded bootleg alcohol and supplied people with guns and ammunition. Tsempion used to be the kick-boxing champion of the Republic of Sakha and was famous for his ability to knock out much larger opponents with a kick to the face. In Saaskylaakh, one of the *avtoritety* was Moigo's oldest son, Ivan, who had been convicted of assault and battery. He told me once, 'You know, I used to hold the entire village in my hand (*derzhal v kulake*). And I still do a little bit.' According to what I heard elsewhere, Ivan was not lying.

Like the 'bosses' in the 'street corner society' (Whyte 1998: chapter IV), the *avtoritety* in Sakha villages do not simply control and influence life in the village in order to guarantee space and resources for their own business. *Avtoritety* also have social obligations towards the community. These obligations are linked to taking care of general welfare and order in the community. Thus, one friend of mine told me how local *avtoritety* in Chersk, the centre of the Nizhne-Kolymskii district in north-eastern Sakha, organised a supply of basic groceries for the settlement in the middle of the 1990s, during the general economic crisis and collapse of transport networks: 'Our *avtoritety* take care of people in Chersk. In those years there were no groceries in the shops and so they organised transport for groceries. Prices in Chersk were much cheaper than in Yakutsk for a long time.' Such activities are useful for all sides; the community accepts and supports the rather illegal or semi-legal business of the *avtoritet* and he profits by it.

'Kids' (*patsany*) are young males aged between 17 and their early 20s. Young females are usually called 'girls' (*kyrgyttar* in Sakha) and are a different social group. These young people are usually either high school students or dropouts, but in terms of social behaviour and values *patsany* form a homogenous group. Young men are seen by adults and by older people as the group that causes constant trouble. Drinking, violent behaviour and the criminal activity of 'kids' is condemned by the wider community but is seen as leisure and 'proving themselves' by the 'kids'. These different notions about the violation of norms frequently result in conflicts between 'kids' and adults. 'Girls' are seldom involved in a direct violation of social norms; usually they do not participate in fights (although I witnessed a few female fights at the weekend disco) and do not commit robberies or thefts. According to my observations, because of their personal relations with 'kids' and their similar age, 'girls' share the same views on the meaning of 'improper behaviour' as males and in conflict situations with adults, they will actively support and assist the 'kids', as I will show below.

### 8.3. Non-violent Methods of Social Control

In this section I look at non-violent forms of social control. First, I analyse the use of rumours as one method of social control. In a small, intimate community one's reputation depends on how well one is thought of by one's peers, neighbours, relatives and closest friends. Gossip is generally of interest to everybody and thus gossip is a tool that can be used to threaten someone's reputation and change their behaviour.

In the second part of this section, respect for elders, especially for fathers of large families, is viewed as a stabilising factor. Elders are respected as people who know how life should be organised. Their knowledge and experience goes more or less unquestioned among local native people. But the opinions of elders can also be influential because they are heads of families which are related to other families through extended kinship networks. The opinions and reputations of elders are a 'social fact' that can mobilise males in the family to take action towards a person who is believed to be harming the family in one way or another. However, local social norms are not clearly fixed, contributing to a kind of 'amoral familism', where members of a family act in the interests of their own family despite the fact that a violation of norms was not approved of by the community (Romanucci-Ross 1973: 45). I conclude this part of the section by arguing that the notion of family cohesion and unity can prevent other people from taking action that could harm that family's interests.

#### 8.3.1. *Gossip and Reputation*

Max Gluckman argues that gossip is a means of maintaining unity, cohesion and the social values of the group (Gluckman 1963: 308). Scott shows, with the help of Kaufman, how every segment of society in an Asian peasant community had to mould its behaviour in order to avoid 'malicious gossip' and how the impact on one's reputation influenced one's social position (Kaufman 1960: 36 in Scott 1976: 42). Scott argues that gossip was a means of social control of the poor against wealthy people. While he observed gossip as a tool which forced wealthy people into reciprocal relationships with their poorer village members, I want to show how gossip plays a role in maintaining order in the Arctic community and sometimes may prevent people from taking the 'wrong actions'. In the same way as Scott argues that the existence of social norms of reciprocity did not automatically push wealthy people to 'live up' to these norms completely (Scott 1976: 42), I do not want to argue that gossip in Uurung Khaia is something which can prevent all crime and violence. Gluckman argues, using as an example a small community of Makah Indians on the north-west coast of the USA, that

gossip is a 'culturally determined process which has its own customary rules' (Gluckman 1963: 308). In Uurung Khaia, not all crime and violence was condemned (as we shall see below) but mostly a certain kind of 'dishonest behaviour'. In this sense, gossip in Uurung Khaia followed its 'customary rules' in determining the difference between accepted and non-accepted forms of 'crime'. Here again we come across the widely recognised point of view in legal anthropology that there is not necessarily an 'exclusive connection' between the law and the state. Because legal concepts are embedded in social relations, gossip and rumours are in a position to undermine one's reputation and therefore impact on one's behaviour (see *Legal* 2001: 148, 152–3).

When I spent a few weeks with the 6th reindeer brigade of the Il'ia Spiridonov MUP, I spoke one night with a young reindeer herder, Oleg, about the people in the village. He told me that he studied in the same class with the MUP's director, Pavel, and they used to be good mates. He continued:

But now Pavel has become arrogant. After he returned from Yakutsk [where Pavel studied agriculture], he became cocky. He never wants to talk to old friends. After he started as director [of the MUP], I met him in a disco. Pavel was completely drunk and came to me and said that he is tougher than me. He wanted to have a fight with me. I said to him, 'Bring another bottle of vodka. It is not fair, because I am sober. If I beat you up then people will say afterwards, "Oleg is such a bastard, he beat up drunken Pavel. It wasn't a fair fight!"' And Pavel hung around with the girls and then disappeared. He said he was going to bring the vodka. He is so obnoxious (*naglyi* in Rus.). He simply didn't return. When I go back to the village, I will punch him on the nose! (*ia dam emy po mordu!* in Rus.)

The social norms of Uurung Khaia dictate that even when caught up in violent behaviour one has to be 'fair'. There are certain rules to fighting, which, according to public opinion, should not be violated. To beat up a drunken person is shameful and to use weapons is generally condemned. Oko said to me once, 'Only psychopaths fight with knives!'

Another case is when a person has a reputation for being 'weak'. Men are therefore forced to behave as tough as possible in any conflicts where witnesses are present. A reputation for being a coward can cause social marginalisation: from being laughed at on the street to a lack of success with girls or harassment in the disco. I go into more detail on 'being tough' and 'fighting back' in section 8.4.2 below, but to be recognised or 'taken seriously' by the community one has to avoid becoming an object of malicious gossip. Gossip is relevant insofar as being 'weak' is linked with being 'unre-



liable' (*nenadėzhnyi* in Rus.), and in a wider context it means that the person is not worthy of respect. Therefore males in any public situation try to avoid the impression that they cannot cope with problems of any kind. Being 'weak' not only means being unfit for physical conflicts but also a lack of skills or strength to do hard or complicated work. I have seen sick men with a high fever catching reindeer and others repairing their snowmobiles in the freezing cold through the night instead of resting in bed. By acting in this way they show that they are strong and in control. I must admit that at the beginning of my fieldwork in the Anabar tundra, coming from my 'softer' Western background, I tended to withdraw from communal tasks when I felt ill. I still remember the comment of Natasha after I refused to go out because I thought I had a fever. She looked at me carefully and said: 'We do not consider this an illness.' And the same afternoon, when Balyksyt dropped in for a tea, he said: 'I heard you are ill. You do not look like it!' I came to realise that rumours spread quickly in the brigade and that my health and behaviour are also a public matter. Thereafter I always tried to be 'like the others' and, when for example chopping wood or shovelling snow in freezing cold during the polar night, I would motivate myself by repeating: 'If they can do it then so can I!'

Very critical gossip is spread about a person who has 'lied'. A 'real man' is expected to keep his promises; promising something and not fulfilling it is interpreted as lying in Uurung Khaia. A 'liar' is also 'unreliable' and this means that no 'serious business' (*serėzhnye dela* in Rus.) can be conducted with such a 'weak' person. Such a person is often excluded from common fishing or hunting trips, and sometimes people are also reluctant to trade with him. In the community of Uurung Khaia, when somebody is looking for company to travel to the tundra he will ask around for possible travelling companions. Then he is warned not to cooperate with an 'unreliable' person. I documented a case of a fisherman who wanted to sell a large quantity of fish to an entrepreneur. The potential deal was very lucrative because the *kommersant* promised to pay a good price. The only condition was that the trader wanted to buy several tonnes of fish at once. The fisherman did not have this quantity of fish and so he asked people in the village if they wanted to come in on the deal with him. However, he told me later that he was given the names of many fishermen in the village whom he should not cooperate with. 'People told me that they are unreliable. They promise a lot and then do not fulfil their promise.'

Gossip and the consequent possible social marginalisation are also connected to one's sexual behaviour in a small community. In Uurung Khaia, the 'question of morals' is relevant to both sexes. When I discussed with one young man, Igor, the sexual relations in the village community he

said, 'But the man should not sleep around too much. When people get to know that, no-one takes you seriously.' It was difficult to define what 'sleeping around too much' actually meant, but the older the person became, the less promiscuity was accepted. Having many sexual partners especially affected the reputation of married people. 'Not to be taken seriously' meant in many cases that the person was not welcome in others' company, especially in drinking parties at home. During my fieldwork I documented a few cases when somebody was not taken along when we went to a party in the village because he was not welcome. In the case of one woman, my companion who arranged the party said, 'She is one who sleeps around [*Ona guliashaia!* in Rus.]. People say that a few years ago she was really into drinking and sleeping with men.' In another case, when refusing to invite a young man to his home, my friend said, 'I do not respect him!' When I later asked what was wrong with the man, he told me, 'He always drinks around and has parties [*guliaet* in Rus.] with different girls. I did not want to have such a person at my home.' In both cases, rumours played an important role in creating the person's reputation.

People gossip a lot in Uurung Khaia and with passion. There are many other topics to gossip about than fights, personal business, drinking events and sexual behaviour, but these were the topics I encountered most often as reasons for 'not taking someone seriously'. Exclusion from social events was one consequence of rumours. To counteract rumours one has to prove that these are not true. One way of doing this is to act publicly in an accepted manner in order to convince others that the gossip is false. Another way, used especially by males but sometimes by females too, is to provoke a fight with the person who spread the rumours.

### ***8.3.2 Respect for Elders, Family Solidarity and Violation of Norms***

The respect that elders enjoy in the North has been described by many Soviet ethnographers (Popov 1946; Dolgikh 1960a; Vasilevich 1969; Gurvich 1977; Boiko and Kostiuik 1992; D'iachenko and Ermolova 1994; Piliarov 1998). This respect has a stabilising and mobilising power in conflict situations as I will demonstrate below. I mentioned in chapter 4 how the young hunter Nikolai let his father decide when it was the right time to go to the tundra for the seasonal wild reindeer hunt: 'What he says, will be,' (*Kak on skazhet, tak i budet!*) he used to say on such occasions.

I came across many situations where respect for elderly people was clearly demonstrated. When elders speak, all younger people are expected to listen and not to speak until the speaker has finished. At the beginning of my fieldwork, when I was not yet proficient in the norms of communication and wanted to ask some questions about stories old men told me, I was reprimanded.

manded by other people: 'Let the old man finish, listen to him!' So, learning through mistakes, I adopted local conversational patterns which demanded absolute silence until the older man or woman had finished what they had to say.

A situation I experienced when I visited Moigo in April 2001 provides a useful example. There I met a legendary old reindeer herder who was known by the nickname Baldhead. Baldhead had just arrived from the tundra and was still heavily tanned by the spring sun. He was very drunk and, to be honest, unable to understand what was happening around him. I was introduced to the old man, who was an Honoured Worker of Agriculture and used to be a deputy in the Higher Soviet of the Yakutian ASSR. Baldhead tried to start a conversation with me but was only able to produce some garbled sentences in mixed Russian and Sakha. Nevertheless, the crowd of Moigo's children and grandchildren and some family friends let the old man speak and listened to him with respectful faces. Although no-one understood what Baldhead was saying, they listened without any interruption and only after the man put his head onto the table and fell asleep, was he carried away. The behaviour of the grandfather and other older relatives clearly demonstrated to the children the general norm of respect for elders; the alternative would be the sort of social sanctions I had experienced.<sup>103</sup>

In many large families, the children gather at least once a day in the house of their elders. Almost every evening Moigo's kitchen was filled with his sons and daughters-in-law who brought with them their children. Those who had finished eating either watched TV or talked to each other. In this way the pattern of sociability both kept people informed about what was happening in and beyond the community and linked people to one other. In such meetings, family affairs were negotiated and plans for the future were made. I observed that the father had the last word in cases of a general nature, i.e. when his children's families were involved. Selling meat, buying a new truck, deciding who gets a new snowmobile—in these cases the patriarch made the final decision.

My host Vasili Kylvashov had five brothers and one brother-in-law. Like every other family in Uurung Khaia, they met up each day (at least in winter when everybody was in the village) at their father's place. I also spent a lot of time with this family and observed how they supported each other in domestic affairs, such as repairing a house, fixing snowmobiles, and trans-

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<sup>103</sup> Llewellyn and Hoebel, who researched mechanisms of social control among Cheyenne, argued that in addition to the social sanctions for disobeying elders, young people had to face punishment from supernatural powers which was embodied in bad luck (1967: 246). Since I found little evidence of belief in the supernatural during my fieldwork I cannot say how important supernatural sanctions might be in the everyday lives of most of my informants.



porting meat. As with Moigo, the 'communications centre' was their father's home, or when in the tundra, their father's hunting base, where the sons who worked as reindeer herders dropped in when their brigade was in the vicinity, and other male relatives regularly visited to hunt and fish.

There are also people constantly coming to visit and 'drink tea'. This was the favoured leisure activity of elders. I often observed when older men came to visit Moigo or old women dropped in to have a chat with Moigo's wife or Vasili's mother. When younger people were around and were invited to eat and drink tea with old people, the younger generation usually remained silent and responded only when addressed. In these gatherings and visits, all the events in the village are discussed, whether matters of minor gossip or serious issues such as fights. I have attended such tea-drinking evenings and know from my own experience that in a semi-isolated village even minor events are a matter of great interest. So, when visiting Moigo in Saaskylaakh, I was asked about new visitors in the village hotel and had to describe every each visitor and his daily schedule in detail. But if nothing exceptional has happened then internal events offer a topic for discussion over the tea. Many times these discussions end with critical comments about people who had 'misbehaved'. People who 'forgot their friends and relatives', were not eager to share their meat or fuel with relatives, or stole were criticised.<sup>104</sup> By attending these informal tea-drinking sessions, younger family members heard elders' opinions about local happenings and learnt whether they condemned or applauded particular incidents. Traditional values and norms are transmitted through these discussions, i.e. younger people are either encouraged or discouraged to behave in certain ways and they hear how their actions (in cases where the elders want to 'punish' somebody) would be assessed.

Moigo's family functioned as a unit in which every member had his or her task to do. As described in chapter 3, Moigo himself was the head and, according to my observations, in his silent way the absolute patriarch of the family. Three of his four sons were hunters and lived with Moigo in the tundra during the hunting season. The oldest usually stayed in the village and sought buyers for meat; the oldest daughter and her husband were responsible for bookkeeping and legal problems. The family was judged (as was every other large family) by the support each member gave to the others by using all the available formal and informal connections and opportunities. In Moigo's case, a potential enemy would likely keep in mind that his four sons were infamous thugs, whose bad reputation was known even outside the district. Moigo's family presents a perfect case study for examining the

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<sup>104</sup> 'Stealing' encompassed a wide variety of activities, from taking things from hunting cabins or store houses in the tundra to unauthorised hunting and fishing.

mechanisms of social control. Two of his four sons were ex-convicts (the oldest had been in prison for causing actual bodily harm and the third son for group murder), two others were well known for their aggressive behaviour and readiness to start a fight. The youngest son had a few friends who had also befriended other members of the family, and they were sometimes encouraged by Moigo's other sons to 'solve problems' on behalf of the family when needed. The whole family is a social unit supervised by the old man.

Even when a couple do not have many sons, the family will have a large network of extended kin to rely on. The tradition of 'fictive kinship', where people who grew up together or were good friends over a long time and consider themselves as brothers and sisters, was described in chapter 7. This family network is often expanded through adoption. To find oneself in conflict with a large family is often serious as members of big families also have many friends and marriage ties with other families. Conflict with such a big network can invite physical retaliation and/or rumour-mongering. The latter is often more invidious as it can undermine one's reputation throughout the village.

Large families can easily mobilise their male members in an emergency. Brothers and sons often get involved in a conflict when, for example, land-use rights are violated or valuable property, like a snowmobile, is stolen or a close relative is seriously injured. In such cases the violation goes beyond the level of one's personal affairs and becomes the problem of the whole family, and all members of the family may go after the transgressors. A snowmobile is a very valuable piece of property, an investment of money and labour, and the resources of the tundra are crucial to the families who hunt professionally. Also hunters have emotional ties to their hunting grounds, which makes the violation of land-use rights a personal offence.

The theft of a snowmobile presents an excellent example of mobilisation of a family network in reaction to an emergency. A relatively new Buran snowmobile was stolen from a garage in Uurung Khaia. Word of this spread quickly and even relatives in Saaskylaakh were informed. Because people can easily recognise their own or their friends' snowmobiles, thieves usually take them apart to sell for spare parts. Therefore, the owner of the stolen Buran had to act fast. One person involved told me the story:

Mitia, a friend of Petka F. [the brother of Andrei, whose snowmobile was stolen], observed how his neighbour, who was a known thief, started spending evenings in his friend's garage. It was strange. What was he doing in his friend's garage? So, the next time he went to the garage, Mitia called Petka, and Petka then called all the others [brothers], and we went over there. This guy had locked the door,

but Andrei knocked on it and said we knew he was in there and wanted to talk to him. So, finally he opened the door. And there was the Buran. Andrei immediately recognised it. His Buran has this long scratch on the right side. They [the thieves] had already almost taken it apart.

The thieves were beaten up right there on the spot. 'They had no chance. They were two against the six of us,' I was told. They were then ordered to reassemble the snowmobile and return it the next day, which they did. There was no chance of the thieves fleeing the village because it was late May, when snow and ice on the river had already melted enough to prevent travelling, and the helicopter transport season had not yet started.<sup>105</sup>

I was told this story once more by a young hunter who was at pains to explain why, when he plans to fish near the hunting base of Andrei's older brother Dima, he wants to make sure that Dima knows about it and has nothing against it. 'I do not want to get in trouble with them. They stick together and you always meet one of those brothers.' Thus the potential threat of violent action has the power to deter a person from breaking the rules, or at least motivates him to solve his conflicts in a peaceful way.

## 8.4 Individual and Group Violence

### 8.4.1 *Everyday Aggression*

Newcomers and visitors, especially Russians, tend to view the native peoples of the Anabarskii district as 'wild people'. One of the main characteristics of 'being wild' is the aggressive behaviour of locals and the violent atmosphere of local social life. Newcomers and strangers simply cannot understand the sense of such interaction. But, as demonstrated by some scholars, violence is not 'senseless', it has cultural and social meaning, but this meaning is not automatically similar across societies (Yablonsky 1962: 4; Blok 2001: 104). Bourgois defines the term 'street culture' as a 'power-charged belief system' that organises the 'common sense' of the street (1999: 316). He describes many 'cross cultural confrontations' which are caused by the difference between concepts of good behaviour and gender roles in Puerto Rican immigrant working-class and white middle-class culture. One part of the Puerto Rican male attitude is the need to demonstrate masculinity, toughness and virility through a readiness to violence, a certain 'body culture', and the harassment of women (Bourgois 1999: 319–20).

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<sup>105</sup> I was told that with the return of the stolen vehicle the case was not closed. The following autumn there were conflicts and fist fights between Andrei (and his friends) and the thief (and his friends) in the local weekend disco, which ended with broken jaws and ribs.



In Uurung Khaia, I was able to find similar cross-cultural confrontations because of the different ideas of what it means to be a 'real man'. It was difficult for me to ask about these local concepts because 'being born in a social world, we accept a whole range of postulates, axioms' and especially in terms of attitudes toward categories of violence in the Anabarskii district, these axioms 'go without saying and require no inculcating' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2004: 273). Some of my informants had problems formulating reasons for their actions and speaking about categories that everybody else in the community understood intuitively. There is another difficulty, too. When speaking about violence and aggression in the Russian North, as among Puerto Rican immigrants in New York, the researcher risks generalising the situation too much and 'exoticising' the community by highlighting the violent minority who 'exercised hegemony' over the public spaces as a dominant group (Bourgois 1999: 317). So I do not mean to argue that the streets of Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh were always filled with fighting groups. Most of the time I spent in both communities, the streets and homes were peaceful and people were extremely hospitable. But aggression and violence as a mode of social interaction exists and is used by people as part of everyday life (cf. the analysis of honour, drunkenness and fun among Australian Aborigines by Tomsen [1997]).

John Ziker has collected data about violent deaths in Ust-Avam and shows that 'violent deaths of various types are more common than natural causes of death' (2002a: 97). Ziker counts not only violence- and alcohol-related deaths in this category but also all accidents. I do not have similar statistics for Uurung Khaia. However, my data show that during my fieldwork there was approximately one violent death per month. There were three suicides, one drowning, one freezing to death while intoxicated, and two stabbings. Actually, the rate of violent armed crime was higher than that because there were also a few knife fights where at least one participant was seriously wounded but not killed. As in Ust-Avam, gun-related violence is extremely rare in this heavily armed village (Ziker 2002a: 98), and again like Ust-Avam, alcohol is seldom present in the tundra. Because alcohol is ever-present in the village, rifles and ammunition are kept locked in steel cabinets. Many herders and hunters leave their rifles in the tundra at the brigade's base when they return to the village. Thus, spontaneous armed fights are usually limited to hunting knives that many men carry even in the village, and every family has dozens of these in the home.

Aggressive behaviour in the Anabarskii district and across the whole Republic of Sakha appears to be part of everyday male life and bound up with a local understanding of masculinity. In this sense, the attitude does not differ from that of Georgian street youth or Cheyenne Indians, where the

man has to be loyal to his family and friends and to 'outface any man' (Koehler 2000: 28–9; Llewellyn and Hoebel 1967: 267–8). The ideal of a man in Uurung Khaia is a 'tough guy', who is able to defend his reputation and has no fear of physical conflict. A 'good reputation' usually means that the man is reliable in a conflict and is able to 'take a stand' even when he is clearly outnumbered, i.e. he does not run away but 'fights back'. He supports his family and friends when they need help, whether in work or in a fight.

The virtue of having no fear was often publicly demonstrated (in discos, bars, on streets and during festive events) and therefore provides material for numerous rumours, which might increase or decrease the reputation of the person in question. The virtue of being 'tough' (*krutoi* in Rus.) was valued not only among young males. Women (and girls) discuss these qualities in various men and support the idea that a 'real man' must fight when needed. One young woman referred to a discussion she had had with a German anthropologist she met outside the district. 'We talked about violence and fights. I asked him what he would do if someone provoked him (*pristavit*) and wanted to beat him up. He answered that he would run away. Then I told him that you cannot run away. You have to fight! (*Ty dolzhen drat'sia*).' Violence is not categorically condemned by adults or elders. Over tea or vodka, adults told me stories about their past confrontations or expressed their opinions about the violent deeds of other people, and their judgement was not always negative. The tolerance of a certain kind of violence is expressed already in the fact that parents in general laugh when their young children have sham battles and hit each other. The crucial point is which kind of violence is 'bad' and which is 'good', and I will explore this in the following sections.

Contact with violence starts at an early age. Children hear parents, other adults and older children discussing recent violent encounters. The violent past of former convicts or some especially 'crazy fighters' are also a frequent topic of discussion. When adults come to visit their parents to drink tea, the events of the past weekend are thoroughly discussed. Since adults often drink alcohol at home in the kitchen, and such events occasionally end in a fight, children witness these, too. At every large event (holidays, discos, sporting contests, etc.) alcohol is present and, as a rule, at least some minor quarrel will break out. Children are always present at these events, even late into the night. And some children may have experienced violence towards themselves. People in Uurung Khaia, as a rule, are very patient and gentle with children. During my fieldwork, for example, I saw only one young mother shouting and hitting her five-year-old son, but there are certainly some other cases too, although my informants argued that serious crimes

against children were rare.<sup>106</sup> Teachers of the Uurung Khaia had established a school committee to supervise and help poor families (or 'asocial' families according to the teachers' definition). Some teachers told me that on their visits to families they have witnessed behaviours of neglect towards children that include verbal abuse, not feeding or washing children properly, and a lack of interest in the child's school studies.

Children themselves start to wrestle and have sham battles at an early age, when they are four or five years old. Every household in Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh now has at least a TV, and often also a video recorder. The most popular tapes circulating in the villages were either kick-boxing competitions or action movies. The videos are watched often, in some households every day. When playing, the boys often imitate kick-boxing and karate and hit each other just for fun. As the children grow older, this aggressive manner does not dissipate. It is common for the older boys to slap younger ones and the younger boys to defend themselves.

But it is the all pervading social environment in which violence is tolerated and alcohol consumption is rife that probably contributes more to violence among teenagers than TV and videos. As teenagers, boys start to behave according to masculine ideals. I once asked a local school teacher in Uurung Khaia whether there are some pupils who sit at home and read all the time instead of going to the disco or drinking vodka. The teacher said that since the beginning of 1990s the number of such quiet children had decreased, and 'now there were no such teenagers'. This statement was confirmed by 18-year-old Oko who said that 'no-one reads books at home'. Probably the picture in reality is not so black and white, but the interest of youngsters certainly appears to have shifted to other activities. At the age of 12-14, youngsters start smoking and drinking alcohol clandestinely. Boys aged 15 smoke openly at home. Fuelled by alcohol, boys start to get involved in fights. Young boys often have conflicts among themselves, especially at the weekends when, either before or after the discos, they drink at somebody's house while the parents are out. Minor fights are common when youths are intoxicated, are considered normal and usually do not spoil a friendship. One day Nikolai, Moigo's youngest son, showed up at my hotel room with his right hand swollen and wrapped in a bandage. When I asked what had happened he told me that some friends had asked him for money the night before and this had ended in a scuffle. When I expressed surprise that friends would fight with each other, Nikolai said, 'They were just drunk. It's no big thing. The next day everything is forgotten!'

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<sup>106</sup> During my fieldwork period, one man was convicted for attempted child molestation. My friends told me that a previous similar case took place 12 years ago.



Teenage experiences of violence can also involve the aggressive behaviour of adults. The story I heard from Oko, Balyksyt's youngest son, is fairly common:

Sometimes the adults themselves start a fight. It's not always the youths' fault. Last summer, I was still at school, and we were playing football in Uurung Khaia. Suddenly a drunken adult man came to us and started to provoke us. He said, 'Now I'm gonna show you, you bastards! [*Ia vam pokazhu, urody!* in Rus.].' We, us boys, were a little drunk as well. Then we taught him! [*My ego nauchili!* in Rus.]

I want to stress that Uurung Khaia is not a jungle where danger can appear at any moment from any direction. Nevertheless, life in the Anabarskii district demands that a man be ready for sudden confrontation, and running away is seen as shameful. Children and young people see and experience violence from an early age and grow up sharing the community's values of masculinity.

#### **8.4.2 Violence, Masculinity and Reputation**

The most brutal fights take place during holidays, when drunken people gather in the club building. Before one particular holiday, which was to be celebrated with a disco, a young female dentist who had come from Saaskylaakh to work in Uurung Khaia for a couple of weeks, said to me, 'I will not go back to Saaskylaakh after the holiday. There will be too many broken jaws and teeth to take care of.' To have a reputation as a 'softie' means that a man receives little respect from others and risks harassment—for example, being accosted by local drunken youths who demand money to buy alcohol and cigarettes.

Showing courage and being tough is practised by the youngsters at school with their peers and even with older people. The reputation a boy builds up in his late school years can follow him through his entire life. Failing to be a 'real man' affects one's social position in a group and in the wider community. Some of my adult informants believed that after the beginning of the 1990s, young people, both males and females, had begun to take the ideals of acting 'tough' more seriously. 'Something's wrong with the youth. I really cannot understand this,' a 35-year-old hunter told me:

When we were young, we too went to the disco. And we took a sip of vodka, just a whiff, to show that we drink and are tough. But my 18-year-old brother and his friends, they get really drunk before the disco. We just went there and played at it to impress the girls and look grown up. These youngsters, they drink and fight seriously, and girls seem to like that.

Criminal violence among young people in Uurung Khaia is therefore partly seen as a contemporary problem. Another reason for this perception is the different notions of violence among different age groups, mentioned above; the concept of 'doing harm' is not really connected with outright violence for young males and females, who see provocative and aggressive behaviour often as a way to 'show off' and keep a good reputation (cf. Riches 1991: 283–4).

This opinion was supported by some interviews I did in Yakutsk with former Sakha contract workers who used to work in the Anabarskii district in the 1970s. When they heard about the current level of street crime in Saaskylaakh and Uurung Khaia, they were surprised. According to them, consumption of alcohol was also high in the 1970s, but stealing and violence were rare. One person told me that people did not lock their doors when they went away in those days, and another emphasised people's readiness to share with strangers:

My children were small then. Those days imported meat was expensive, and no local reindeer meat was sold in shops. And so it often happened that when I opened the door in the morning a parcel of frozen fish or meat would be lying there. I never found out who left these there.

During my fieldwork a generation later, all property is locked up at night. Food tends to be stolen by teenage patsany who consume it during their drinking parties. I heard people complaining many times that somebody had stolen meat and fish when they had accidentally left it outside on sledges overnight. The woman quoted above could not recall any instances of serious fights in the streets or at discos twenty years ago.

The conclusion that aggressive behaviour and criminality is a demonstration of masculinity to create one's reputation is supported by a development in the second half of my fieldwork period. The opinion of my adult informants was that since a new gym had opened in Uurung Khaia, established by ALROSA as part of the election campaign to encourage local people to vote for the company's candidate,<sup>107</sup> and youngsters now played basketball every evening, the streets had become quieter. This change was obvious even to me when visiting the village after a long period spent in the tundra and in Yakutsk. I noticed fewer groups of youths on the streets of Uurung Khaia in the evenings. Youngsters started to visit the gym regularly and when I was there I saw that the building was crowded. Boys played basketball and girls sat next to the wall, watching them and chatting with each other. After the gym opened, several basketball matches were organised

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<sup>107</sup> This candidate was president of the diamond company Viatcheslav Shtyrov. He was elected as President of the Republic of Sakha in 2001.

between different village teams and also with teams from outside the village. Good players whose teams were successful either in the intra-village 'home games' or with 'outsiders' were not only proud of their efforts but also found themselves to be the centre of positive public attention and became the pride of their friends and families.

### 8.4.3 *Property and Reputation*

The concept of 'being tough' and 'fighting back' is relevant to property relations in the village of Uurung Khaia. Every male person in the village is expected to maintain and defend not only his good reputation but also the well-being of his family and their property. This situation, where the defence of property is primarily the private business of the individual, is a consequence of the mistrust of state structures, which are unable to maintain public order in the village.

Possessions that people leave in the tundra, such as winter or summer equipment, snowmobiles, stored meat and fish, are usually safe. My hosts insisted that things never disappear from tundra caches, but sometimes some property is stolen from the storehouses and sheds near the village. Therefore, people try not to leave valuable and easily movable things on their sledges when they are only one or two hours' snowmobile ride away from the village. Houses and sheds in the village itself are always locked, especially where snowmobiles and petrol are concerned. The impression my informants gave me is that anything which is left unguarded or in an open place is liable to be stolen immediately. I noted that people often left tools and other things outside unguarded in daylight near their houses but they did not leave these things outside overnight. Most property violations (stealing and vandalism) took place in darkness, when there were fewer people around.

Earlier I described how a hunter always informs the family on whose territory he plans to hunt. In chapter 5 I cited Agnya who told me that her father does not like it when strangers hunt on his hunting grounds: non-relatives mean trouble. They do not respect the 'master' of the land and his unwritten rights to it. Hunting and trapping without permission are seen as theft, and no different from taking game from someone else's traps. In chapter 4 I cited Vasili's opinion that 'the thief should be punished' (*vora nado nakazat*). Theft in any form was understood not only in terms of taking away another's property but also as an offence, as Agnya told me when some young hunters from the village almost shot her father during a hunt: 'Young people do not respect old people anymore. This is the kind of youth we have nowadays!' (*Vot takoi u nas molodëzh!* in Rus.).

This kind of disrespect demands a response from the person whose property is violated. I was surprised to be told that it is possible to find the



person who has been poaching in the tundra on someone else's hunting grounds. Igor, one of my younger informants, said to me once:

Even in the tundra you cannot hide yourself. If you want to know who emptied your traps or fishing nets, you can find out. When somebody leaves for the tundra, people know in which direction he was heading. And you can't stay in the tundra forever, you have to return to the village.

Also, the thief has to be careful in the village. In such a small community, where most people recognise the property of others, stealing is risky. The thief must take care to hide the stolen item out of sight of anyone who might recognise it and report back to the owner. This is quite difficult given local patterns of sociability, when one can receive a dozen guests a day. The most commonly stolen goods are food, fuel and tools, and in one case I was told about, kitchen utensils—all items that are either easily consumable or not easy to recognise.

The victim's family usually tries to track down the perpetrator through friends and relatives without involving the police. Theft is an occasion where the reputation of both sides is involved: the victim's and the thief's. Admitting to a crime means a lowering of the thief's reputation in the eyes of the community. For the victim, not 'solving' the problem means showing that he is not able to take care of his problems and is weak. When teenagers are involved, one way of resolving the conflict is to involve the parents. I know of a case where a man was robbed in the street by 'kids' who took his money and vodka. Afterwards, the parents returned the money and some bottles of vodka, and apologised. When a peaceful solution is not possible and the thief still denies everything, the only way to restore one's reputation and 'make the other pay' is to fight him at the weekend disco or at some other event. When we keep in mind that at such events most participants are intoxicated, these fights are rarely calmly calculated actions but more often emotional and spontaneous arguments that explode into violence. Often friends and relatives are unable to stand by and watch but instead dive into the fray themselves, thereby making it a general brawl.

#### ***8.4.4 Group Violence and Social Order***

It is difficult to distinguish different levels of social control and categorise specific examples of problem resolution. Non-violent means (discussion) can grow into violent action (fights). An individual fight can suddenly become a group fight when friends come to help, but organised group violence is usually used as a last resort to solve conflicts. In this section I discuss the dynamics of organised group action in conflict situations.

Here I seek to analyse the informal institution of punishment and maintaining order in the village, which is called *razborka*. The name comes from the Russian verb *razbirat'*, 'to make things clear, to sort out'. In Sakha, *razborka* is vernacularly understood as a (group) fight between persons who have some conflict to resolve. Very often *razborka* is used for spontaneous fights in pubs, clubs and restaurants between groups of (rather young) males who have (or think they have) some conflicts to clear up. Often such fights are connected to 'injustice' (insults, loss of a girlfriend to another boy, the owing of money, etc.) or 'pride' (restoring the 'pride' of the district, for example, i.e. a gang of youths against a group from another district), and alcohol is inevitably involved. In Uurung Khaia, *razborka* has a specific meaning as planned, institutionalised, collective action.

When I was in the tundra I was talking one day with my host Vasili about the violence in the village of Uurung Khaia. He told me that one New Year's Eve there had been a big fight:

A brother of mine and two of his friends, all adult men, were at the house of one of these friends. They were drinking vodka and celebrating the New Year. There was a disco in the club; and some kids came from the disco to this house. They were drunk and rude. As far as I know, they wanted money to buy vodka. The men told them to go to hell. But the kids began mouthing off (*Nachinali vystupat'* in Rus.). My brother and the other men wanted to throw them out and there was a small fight. But the kids (*patsany*) had some girls with them and they ran over to the club and brought other [kids] in [to the house]. So, the boys came with Druzhba [chainsaw] chains and beat my brother up. They didn't touch one of the men, the owner of the house, because they knew him. But my brother and the other man were badly beaten up, as I said. My brother was in hospital for many months with concussion.

Then we *tundroviki* [young reindeer herders from different brigades] told these boys we wanted to talk to all of them and told them to be at the club next week. Next week all the kids came. We talked to them and warned them that next time we would punish them severely.

This was the first time I came across an example of collective action *razborka*. I learnt from other friends that *razborka* was quite common in remote Sakha villages as an informal means of keeping order and punishing violators of communal norms. But *razborka* is not a modern 'invention' to compensate for the inability of state structures to maintain public order. One of my friends who grew up in a Sakha village near the town of Lensk (Upper Lena River, southern Sakha), told me that certain conflicts were solved

within the community even in Soviet times. When the involvement of officials was not wanted, people took justice into their own hands. But even he admitted that the importance of *razborka* had increased in the 1990s when 'the order collapsed' (*poriadok rasvalilsia* in Rus.). *Razborka* is a collective community answer to a crude crime, organised only in extreme situations when a group of youngsters has brazenly violated commonly accepted norms and endangered public order or someone's life or destroyed someone's economic basis of survival. Only in such cases is it possible to mobilise most of the community, because the need to survive in the tundra is so vital that they understand the need for collective punitive action. According to my informants, such action was warranted for crimes by groups of boys such as the beating up of women or old people, breaking into a store or private house and ransacking it, or brutally beating up someone.

There was only one *razborka* during my fieldwork (described below). The year before that, in Uurung Khaia two *razborkas* were organised: the case described above and before that when a group of youngsters broke into the private store and ransacked it, leaving the director, who was the wife of the village's chief livestock expert and respected and beloved in the community, with debts to pay to the owner. Closing the store for weeks affected the whole village because the store was the cheapest of the three village grocery stores where villagers were able to take goods on credit. In Uurung Khaia, *razborka* is considered to be an intra-community affair, humiliating for some of the families involved, and not to be discussed outside of the village. Therefore people are, as a rule, extremely reluctant to speak about such events. The following information was collected from short remarks and comments and two interviews I conducted after one such event.

There seem to be two groups of men in the village who act as the keepers of order and therefore show initiative in organising *razborkas*: *tundroviki* and *zeki*. Both groups have a strong sense of belonging to their particular group. The *tundroviki* share a common physical space, the tundra, where they can survive only by helping each other. The *tundroviki* have a separate group identity from village people (*poselkovye* in Rus., *pöhyölök kihi* in Sakha), as described in chapter 4. The sense of belonging to a group is not only connected to a different economy and way of life but also to culture and social responsibility. *Tundroviki* often say that village people no longer know or appreciate their old customs, have little respect for old people and try to get their money as easily as possible. On the other hand, like the *tundroviki* in Khantaika, hunters and reindeer herders in Uurung Khaia feel that they 'feed the village' (Anderson 1998a). This mutual tie and the group identity persists when *tundroviki* are living in the village. Another group with enough inner solidarity to organise *razborke* are *zeki* (as we saw



above in section 8.2). In Russia, criminals have a strong tradition of sticking together. The informal networks and cooperation of criminals is infamous and a topic of many novels. In Uurung Khaia, their common background—prison—unites them even in freedom. This sense among ex-convicts of being part of a group is reinforced by their marginalisation. They are feared, avoided by many and admired by others. Men from both groups are mostly married adults with children and heads of independent households which gives them a vested interest in maintaining some level of security in Uurung Khaia.

People from both groups told me, 'If we do not look after the kids, then nobody will do it!' This sense of responsibility has different roots. The main reason is just a need to maintain some order in the village and guarantee a peaceful environment for their families, parents and relatives. Both *tundroviki* and *zeki* obey the authority of elders and share their opinion that order in the village has worsened since the 1990s.<sup>108</sup> Elders, who in many cases have little authority over kids (*patsany*), especially when the youngsters are not members of their families, are able to convince adults to interfere when the kids get out of hand. I believe that mobilisation of *tundroviki* for a collective action is often inspired by the old men, who use their influence to bring teenagers back under control. It is logical that, in the environment of *tundroviki*, where old people are highly respected and listened to, the remarks of fathers can start an initiative to call for a *razborka*. *Zeki*, on their part, demonstrate through their initiative in a *razborka* that, despite their marginal position in the community, they have power as a group and that, like all other men in the village, they have a sense of responsibility to the community.

The *razborka* does not hand out lynch-mob justice, where a group of people decides spontaneously to punish somebody. Rather it acts as a self-organised court. When the kids beat up an old man on the streets in January, the *zeki* organised a *razborka*. They collected the whole gang in the club and invited their fathers as well. There were lots of people there from both sides. Because I knew people from both sides and because the *razborka* was understood to be a humiliating event for the 'criminal' youngsters and their parents, I did not attend, but I questioned people afterwards. Igor told me:

People came together and they questioned everyone involved. The men asked the kids why they beat the old man. The boys explained their point of view. Then the victim was questioned. Some fathers of the boys were there, but not all of them, only those who wanted to

<sup>108</sup> I witnessed a heated discussion between a sister and her *zek* brother. When the discussion became very emotional, the brother hit his sister twice, after which their old father ordered him to leave. The man left the house without any attempt to protest.

come. It is a great shame when your son is judged this way. And then they are punished.

Gosha had this to say:

I was there and I was pretty drunk. Then there was this huge discussion. People asked the kids why they did it. And some fathers of the boys were there but they were in the background and only listened. Then people decided that the kids must be punished. Then they beat them. I did it too [laughs]. Just from the side where I stood.

This time the boys were not warned but beaten up. How fair and objective such a 'court' can be is a matter of debate. Many people who turned up that evening were already drunk. I can imagine that despite all the intentional 'neutrality', this 'process' was not as fair as a formal court. Many people were already of the opinion that the boys were guilty and should be punished before the discussion. The decision about who should be punished was made by all the people in the room, not just the organisers, and therefore the decision of the collective was widely accepted by other families in the village.

I asked my friends why the boys go to the *razborka* when they know that they will probably be beaten up by drunken men. Igor explained to me the local code of honour:

The kids have their pride. When you have done something bad you have to answer for your deeds. They know it and are ready to accept the punishment. And you cannot hide yourself here in the village anyway. There is no place to hide. Even when you go to the tundra, people know which direction you went and where you are.

*Razborka* is seen as humiliating for the kids involved, but their reputation and social position in the community would have suffered even more if they had tried to avoid it. That would have been 'running away'. To show that they are tough they have to face the beating by the crowd. When youngsters are openly presented in front of gathered villagers as criminals then, ironically, they demonstrate their masculinity according to the local ideal. *Razborka* is used by the community as a warning against further extreme violations of behaviour and of property. Through such 'constructive' violence the community protects its integrity, and 'reproduces the order characteristic to the state' in a situation where the state itself was incapable of doing so (Bowman 2001: 30–1).

### 8.5 Exclusion from the 'Moral Space' of the Community

In previous sections I have discussed crime and punishment inside the community, where judge and judged are all local people. But there are also different categories of crime that involve strangers and illustrate that the community will not defend all people and their property. This is especially

apparent in the case of minor crimes like theft or street violence where the victim is a stranger.

A few years before my fieldwork, a brigade of Armenian construction workers was sent to Uurung Khaia to build a fox farm. One night some drunken local men went to the place where the Armenians lived. They had hunting rifles with them and wanted to get money. When the Armenian workers refused to give them money they were threatened with guns. The Armenians managed to escape. Some of them attempted to walk across the tundra 150 kilometres to Saaskylaakh; some got lost and had to be rescued by helicopter. The men from Uurung Khaia were sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

I was talking about this event with Oleg, a reindeer herder from the 6th brigade, and Oleg finished his story by saying: 'They said in court that these men came to the North to build a new farm for us. And that we are so ungrateful!'

*Author:* 'Do you think so too?'

*Oleg:* 'They said it in the court!'

From his face and voice I could read that he did not feel sorry for the Armenians. People usually made jokes about this case when they spoke of it. The Armenians were seen as weak men who were not able to defend their property and were so stupid that they ran away and got lost in the tundra.

Asking strangers on the street who they are and demanding money or vodka is a common practice in the villages of the Anabarskii district. It is not viewed as negative behaviour to harass incomers for money; rather, it is seen as their own fault for coming to such a dangerous village as Uurung Khaia or Saaskylaakh. Truck drivers are constantly harassed. Many truckers work for ALROSA and it is rumoured that the company pays them high salaries. Because of that, truckers are expected to be rich and always have a lot of money with them. Some of my friends claimed that the drivers themselves cause the trouble of which they accuse the local population. Oko, a young reindeer herder, told me during the migration when riding a reindeer:

All the troubles are the drivers' own fault. They bring vodka with them and then they exchange vodka for fish. You think the people don't know that they've been cheated? The drivers give only three or five bottles for a sack of fish!

It is a well-known fact that the drivers make a profit out of this business. A bottle of vodka costs 45–50 roubles in the city and a sack of fish, caught in the tundra rivers and considered a delicacy in the south, is worth 700–900 roubles. The Anabar locals automatically make the stranger a scapegoat for any trouble, believing, as Girard says, 'that all initiative comes from him' (1986: 43). Therefore local people are of the firm opinion that drivers and



other incomers cause problems and deserve their mistreatment. Like the Hindu woman who argued, when witnessing the killing of Sikhs, that 'they are doing it to us' (Srinivasan 1990 in Sorabji 1995), Anabar villagers accuse strangers of ripping off locals through unfair trade or just being too weak to survive in the North. Strangers were scapegoated 'beyond a certain threshold of ethnocentrism' (because they were nearly all Russians or Ukrainians, and did not belong to the harsh Arctic) but also due to the 'negative reciprocity which brings people into opposition with each other' (Girard 1969: 13, 32).

Schwandener-Sievers (2001) discusses, using data of her own and those of Mjedia (1901), Gjeçov (1989) and Durham (1985), the development of the *besa* code of honour and *kanun* local self-government structure in different periods in Northern Albania. She argues that the *kanun* network protected only those strangers who came from villages which had a ritualised friendship (*mik*) bond with the community. When these strangers suffered any harm from a member of the community, then it was understood as a breaking of the *besa* bond, and the criminal was seen as 'dishonoured' in the community. The protection of the Albanian community did not embrace 'other' strangers, and robbery or violence against them was not simply allowed, it was an honourable act (Schwandener-Sievers 2001: 101–2).

Harassing, beating and robbing truck drivers and other strangers in Uurung Khaia are ways by which adults and youngsters can show their masculinity, be aggressive and avoid the community's criticism. People who are not tied to local social networks will have no friends in the village and therefore will have no help to call on when in need. This makes them easy targets. Yet I observed a different attitude to 'our' strangers, for example, when people were dealing with me. Native people both in Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh knew that I had spent months in the tundra living with the family of the brigadier of the 3rd Uurung Khaia reindeer brigade, Vasili, who had many brothers and several friends in Uurung Khaia, and with Old Moigo, whose sons were described as local *avtoritety*. They were part of 'my network' and I was told a few times by male members of both families that in case of any trouble 'we will look after you'. Generally, local people expected that if I fell victim to robbery or violence, these families and their friends would support me. With one exception, in the few cases when I was stopped on the street and asked for money, the people involved did not know me. When they recognised me by my accent ('You must be that German who lived in the 3rd brigade/Tiistaakh/etc.'), they let me go and even apologised.

Travelling between Uurung Khaia and Saaskylaakh on ALROSA trucks, I heard totally different stories from the drivers of how they experienced the attitude of local people. To most drivers, Anabar residents are wild

and drunken savages who incite crime because they are not civilised enough. 'They are used to getting everything for free,' was the common explanation of the locals' propensity to demand money and alcohol from visiting drivers. Racist arguments are also common among Russians: 'Sakha should not drink at all. Asians cannot drink because their bodies cannot process alcohol! It should be forbidden to sell vodka in the North!' Ethnic or 'nationalistic' arguments were usually the last card to play when conflicts were being discussed. When speaking about locals and incomers, one local hunter shouted at the end of our discussion: 'This is our land. I am Sakha and they [Russians] have nothing to say here!'

When strangers opposed harassment, it was interpreted as a sign of disrespect that entitled young (and drunken) men to attack such persons. Because strangers had no protection from the community, such behaviour essentially made them outlaws.<sup>109</sup> In this sense, violence (and other crime) toward strangers in Uurung Khaia was 'surrounded by cultural elaborations and preparations, which focus the mind away from the idea of violence as a simple, natural expression of individual aggression' (Sorabji 1995: 82).

## 8.6 Conclusion

The reason why social control became dominated by informal methods in the Anabarskii district after the 1990s is not that 'small-scale, morally cohesive communities mistrust formal, state-run legal institutions' and avoid 'washing dirty linen in public' but rather it was due to the inability of formal institutions to control order in the community (Just 1991: 107–9). In order to challenge racist and ethnocentric explanations of local 'disorder' and violence, I have shown that there are other modes of conflict resolution apart from naked violence. My aim in this chapter has not been to discuss violence *per se* but to examine the informal structures for maintaining order in the Arctic community.

However, even when discussing non-violent means of informal governance, violence is always present, even if only in the background. In this chapter I demonstrated that violence, although having a traditionally important position in Siberian indigenous peoples' cultures (Batianova 2000: 31), increased only after the collapse of state-governed control and punishment mechanisms. Although many non-locals believe that the indigenous population is criminal and violent and 'has no laws', I can cite only Robarcheck

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<sup>109</sup> I do not know of any case where strangers were perpetrators of petty crime. During my fieldwork period one Sakha artist was stabbed at the New Year celebrations because it was believed he offended a local man. But I can imagine that in the case of starting a fight or when accused of stealing, violent vengeance against such a stranger would be fully accepted and gathering a mob for such an attack would be an easy task.

and Dentan's (1987) comment on violence and non-violence among Semai: 'There is no need to postulate a biologically rooted, repressed, universal human drive to explain their behaviour' (1987: 361-2).

Lederach (1991) shows that conflict is a cultural event, and knowledge of what is right and wrong is included in the world, and provides methods for how to proceed. In this chapter I discussed how cultural norms and practices were incorporated into the new social relations of postsocialism. The Dolgan in Uurung Khaia and their relatives in Saaskylaakh have developed several modes of conflict resolution, and there are different categories of crime in the Anabarskii district. These different categories are reflected not only in the interpretation of what a crime is, but also in who is entitled to which kind of treatment by the community.

The local understanding of crime and punishment differs from legal and institutional forms of understanding and this itself has been a source of conflict with outsiders and formal structures. Local notions of right and wrong are based on family unity and the belief that one must solve one's own problems in order to maintain one's reputation in the community and protect or enhance one's social position.





## Chapter 9

### Conclusion

Before I left for fieldwork in 2000, I asked my colleague Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, who had worked in Evenkiia for considerable periods of time, how he responds to queries about the purpose of his research. He explained that he tells people that he wants to write a book about them to show how they really live. 'I tell them that "people outside of Evenkiia think that those who live deep in the taiga are just bums (*brodiagi*), but I want to portray you as average, normal people" (*obychnye normal'nye liudi*).<sup>7</sup> Everyone who works among indigenous people in Siberia is asked the same question: 'Why are you here?' I was asked this several times both in the north, at the Arctic Ocean, and in the south, in the capital of Yakutsk. Another common question was: 'Why is Germany interested in Dolgans?' Thanks to Nikolai I had my answers prepared. Not that Germany has a particular interest in a Dolgan village, but there is growing interest in the people who live in Siberia, especially given globalisation and the opening up of the former Soviet Union. 'The average citizen in a European state, even here in Russia, has no idea who you are and how you live,' I would explain. 'In the West they think that Indians live in Siberia [that's true!] and to people in Russia you are alcoholics and savages, as this is what they see on TV [unfortunately true as well—if indigenous Siberians are shown on TV programmes at all, it is mostly as children of nature suffering from the 'expansion of civilisation']. I just want to show that you are average, normal people like everybody else.' This was my standard answer to the standard question.

The academic purpose of this study was of course somewhat deeper. I wanted to document the modern-day lives of these people in an increasingly complex world. The key question I sought to answer was: how do former state-farm workers cope with postsocialist reality in a situation where all resources are distributed so unequally? After the collapse of the Soviet Union, life in small tundra villages changed tremendously. Globalisation brought to the remotest villages VCRs, Chinese chilli sauces, Canadian snowmobiles, Brazilian coffee, German yogurts and American chocolate, but

also unequal market relations and a decreasing ability to afford these commodities. As one of my informants said bitterly, 'Now we know what we cannot buy!'.

## 9.1 Summary

In my research, I investigated the symbiotic development of formal and informal structures over a long period of time. My ethnographic arguments seek to draw links between different domains of social life. I started with the historical developments of the Tsarist and Soviet periods (chapter 2) and changes in the agricultural landscape in postsocialism (chapter 3) to explain the development of informal institutions of land use (chapter 4) and the importance of kinship networks for reciprocity and the distribution of resources (chapters 5, 6, and 7). I also looked at how human-animal relationships and ethnic categories reflect social relations (chapters 6 and 7) and which mechanisms have been developed within the community to replace crumbling state governance structures (chapter 8). In doing this, my aim has also been to contribute to theoretical concepts of 'path dependence' (chapters 2, 3, 4), monitoring the 'commons' (chapters 4, 5), hunter and herder studies (chapters 5, 6), the meaning of ethnicity in postsocialism (chapter 7), and social control (chapter 8), and also to contribute to economic and social anthropology in general.

This book seeks to explore the meaning and function of kinship beyond formal structures. Soviet anthropology has had a somewhat schizophrenic approach to the topic of Siberian kinship: on the one hand it was seen as a carrier of conservative values and exploitation, especially patriarchal relations (Dolgikh 1960b; Popov 1994), while on the other hand, knowledge of kinship was seen as a part of a person's heritage and interpreted positively (Boiko and Kostiuk 1992). Another controversial issue is sharing; it was interpreted both as 'primitive communism', having a paradoxically negative connotation in the system which claimed to follow Communist ideology (Dolgikh and Levin 1951), and yet also as an indigenous virtue, especially the hospitality and generosity exemplified by the 'law of the tundra or taiga' (e.g. Vinokurova 1994). The first interpretation is usually found in earlier works, while the second is connected to more recent applied anthropology and a romanticisation of Siberian 'natives'. What many Soviet and Russian anthropologists ignored was the connection between kinship and sharing/reciprocity as a strategy for survival and social relations.

Western studies of Siberian indigenous people and postsocialist transformations in the former Socialist countries began in the early 1990s. Since then, many Russian and Eastern European scholars have entered this field of investigation, and now we have a solid number of works analysing various



aspects of life in these transition societies. Most of them stress the importance of informal networks and particularly kinship as being crucial for establishing social guarantees (Humphrey 1998a; Konstantinov and Vladimirova 2002; Kaneff and Yalçın-Heckmann 2003). Using Western theories and approaches, these scholars show that a strategy to create kinship-based networks is dynamic: networks are activated, reconstructed and changed as needed.

In my historical analysis (chapter 2) I show that hunters and herders of the Anabar region have always had extensive economic relations with other Siberian regions. Historical processes support Khazanov's (1994) approach that the 'outside world' matters: trade, barter and tax-collecting have modified the economy and social organisation of Anabar people over several centuries. Their herding and hunting practices changed in line with changes in trade relations and political and economic structures within the region and even outside it. In this chapter I showed that the romantic view of the cultures of Siberian hunters and reindeer herders as stable and unchanging throughout time is far from historical reality. I also challenge some interpretations by early Soviet ethnographers of the regional economy and offer an alternative explanation of property relations in Anabar. I argue that what was seen by scholars in the 1940s and 1950s as 'exploitation' and 'class conflicts' can be seen, by carefully reviewing ethnographic data and comparing it with other regions, as large-scale kinship cooperation and reciprocity. Connected with this, I show here and throughout the book that any kind of economic data for the Soviet and post-Soviet periods should be treated with caution and in the final analysis should be evaluated in the light of how the data were collected.

When discussing the Soviet period, I argue that changes in the indigenous economy and social structure took place over long periods of time, were continual and were not as tragic as some native rights activists tend to assert (see Androsova 2001; Poiseev et al. 2001). I show how Dolgan ways of hunting and reindeer herding, both in terms of skills and organisation, were incorporated into the state reindeer herding and hunting economy. This tendency was not unique; in most regions of Siberia local skills were used in state agriculture, which thereby maintained regional differences (cf. Stammler 2004). There has been much continuity from pre-Soviet times through the collective and state farm phases to the current postsocialist period, and thus 'path dependence with late socialism' (Szelényi 1998: 14) should be extended to 'path dependency' in the Tsarist time.

The path dependency of social and economic practices is important for my central argument about the meaning and continuity of kinship strategies. In many cases it means that kinship organisation maintained its central role

in social life; it also 'infiltrated' the state and collective farms where many relatives continued to work in one brigade on old family territories (Vitebsky 1989; Fondahl 1998; Syrovatskii 2000). Networks of kinship ties existed throughout the Soviet era and, in much the same way as Humphrey's (1983) Buriat kin network, existed within formal structures. But I have also shown that the development of the Soviet state and Soviet economic structures in the Anabarskii district changed the specific strategies and characteristics of kinship relations, and also affected local property relations and land-use patterns in the Soviet and postsocialist periods.

In chapter 3 I discussed the variety of institutions that appeared in the 'agricultural landscape' after the collapse of Socialist planned agriculture. My aim was to critique some of the arguments used in the discussion about the 'revitalisation of traditional culture' in Siberia. The contribution of this book to the ongoing debate about the concept of 'neotraditionalism' lies in the analysis of the 'grass roots' strategies which differ from the 'indigenous revival' designed by scholars, native activists and politicians, a situation not specific to Siberia (cf. Kuper 2003). Since the beginning of the 1990s, several scholars have suggested ways of improving the social, economic and legal status of Siberian indigenous minorities (e.g. Krupnik 1992; Pika and Prokhorov 1994). The Republic of Sakha was the first region in Siberia to pass laws giving indigenous people the opportunity of establishing 'their own native' economic institutions. By continuing the Soviet policy of 'nations within' (Espiritu 1997), Sakha politicians followed populist goals and a humanistic approach shaped by the Soviet concept of 'dying-out nations' (*vymiraiushchie narody*).

However, in the field I discovered that the clan-based community (*rodovaia obshchina*) had not achieved the success and importance that I had expected when reading works of other scholars prior to my trip. Many local people were suspicious of the *obshchina* strategy and they preferred to stay with the state farm or its successor enterprise (in the Anabarskii district, the district farm or MUP). In addition to the state farm versus *obshchina* polarisation, I identified other formal institutions that were elements in the 'agricultural landscape' with the aim of showing that indigenous people do not necessarily establish 'indigenous' institutions. There were multiple reasons for this variety: historical legal developments, marketing strategies, and social actors' positions vis-à-vis the local MUP and district administration. I showed that the *rodovaia obshchina* is only one of a number of possible strategies for coping with the current legal situation and market economy in the Russian Arctic: the choice of whether to establish one enterprise or another is strongly affected by the size, manner of production and marketing goals of the institution. In this book I demonstrate that indigenous people use

and manipulate various legal structures for economic ends, and, in the life of the average hunter or reindeer herder, the legal status of the enterprise often plays a secondary role.

Old structures and hierarchies play an important role in the creation of new enterprises. The heritage of the brigade system has had an obvious influence on the formation of the agricultural landscape in the Anabarskii district. Both formal institutions and informal networks and strategies owe much to the state farm past. Here, the theoretical approach of 'path dependency' can be used on many levels. I showed in chapter 4 that informal land ownership in my field region is based on what Anderson calls 'sentient ecology' (2000a).

The institution of the 'master' (*khoziain*) was partly a product of former Soviet state farm policy and structure. Allocating brigades to territories with fixed boundaries made certain individuals 'masters' of these hunting lands. Kin ties were important in identifying one with a landscape and positioning a person in a territory. Land entitlement was inherited from generation to generation as a form of social relationship with the landscape. I show that various aspects of marking territory—giving names, constructing and giving fur traps, and collecting knowledge about resources—were also mediated through kinship. But it was the state farm brigade system that settled certain families into particular regions or continued their activities in their old hunting grounds. Talks with my informants made clear to me that long-term activity on a brigade's assigned territory establishes emotional ties to lands and is a basis for the feeling of 'homeland' (*rodina*). I followed the process of constructing the *rodina* and understood that it is closely linked among my informants to the notion of social space. A person's activity is physically marked (e.g. as cabins, trap lines, graves) and also symbolically marked (e.g. as place names, memories) on the territory. Here I agree with Nutall (1992) and Ingold (2000) on the construction of social space in nature through various kinds of human activities in present and past generations. Only sustained experience with the geography and ecology can provide proper decisions about resource use. Here I also refer to Anderson's (1998b) argument of 'property as a way of knowing' and show that knowledge and optimal resource use are also connected to informal property claims to land.

In my study I share Laughlin's (1974) position that reciprocity is an adaptive strategy which requires flexibility in the network. According to Laughlin, the cooperative nature of a network is determined by the lower limit of 'production output', which I interpret as 'resources'. Because resources are widely dispersed in the Republic of Sakha, kinship has had to be extended far beyond the district's borders in order to link different social strata and geographical regions into the kinship network. This has brought



the 'law of the tundra' into the 'law of the city' (Ziker 2002a). In chapter 5, I cite one informant who says that one purpose of fishing is to share fish with one's extended kin or 'countrymen' (*zemliakam*), and I discuss the different goods and services that 'flow' in these networks (Bodenhorn 2000). Laughlin shows, with the help of Sahlins (1971), that the nature of networks is directly linked to 'minimal subsistence requirements' (Laughlin 1974: 392–3).

Dolgan people have established and maintained extended kinship as a social guarantee in the postsocialist transformation economy after the legal social and economic structures collapsed. I go deeper into the social meaning and construction of kinship and deeper into its economic activity. Mutual obligations and rights to give or receive are masked among Dolgan by the notion of 'our custom' or 'our way', which I interpret as 'tradition', to support each other, and these rights and obligations are related to commonly shared concepts of prestige. This makes Dolgan networks similar to those of the Southeast Asian communities studied by Scott (1976), where richer people were put under pressure to share their wealth with poorer community members. Franz von Benda-Beckmann discusses the state's role in defining and regulating property relations (2001: 294–5). In the Anabarskii district, the state has dismantled several of its institutions and the return to a 'traditional way of life' is, as in other Siberian regions, rather unwanted (cf. Grant 1995). Therefore, people in north-western Sakha have had to 'constitute crucial social resources' (Benda-Beckmann 2001: 294–5) to replace missing state institutions, not to create alternatives, as in Scott's study (1976).

Chapter 6 focused on social relations within a reindeer brigade. Living for a considerable time in a reindeer brigade, I discovered a complex system regulating property relations and use rights to animals, and also learned how the brigade functions as a social unit. Beyond the official categories and hierarchies, informal structures exist that determine the inner life of the brigade at a time when the district farm's control over its production units is steadily decreasing. In this chapter I discussed how human–animal relationships, prestige, informal social hierarchy and kinship all overlap.

I show that, in addition to the categories of state-owned and privately owned reindeer, there exist more complicated user rights. Here my data conflict with Ingold's hypothesis (1980) that multiple property rights to animals do not exist in reindeer-herding societies. Ingold is also contradicted by the practice I call 'reindeer keeping', when a herder 'brings into' the brigade a reindeer belonging to someone else and for which he is responsible. Ingold was of the opinion that reindeer do not pass between families. In the Anabarskii district, private reindeer, as in other regions of Siberia (e.g. Stammer 2004: 5.4), may have different owners and users, and I demon-

strate that this is not a simple commercial transmission but reflects the social relations between hunters, herders and villagers. I also show that this physical transmission of reindeer and of use rights to them is closely connected with kinship networks.

One reason that urban-based ethnographers speak about reindeer and hunting brigades as a 'traditional social organisation' is that in a small community there is no avoiding having many relatives in one brigade. I have shown that a concentration of relatives is a conscious strategy. 'We came to help our relative', was usually the comment when I asked why people changed brigades. In postsocialism, having relatives in one brigade has meant fewer problems during the migration, and has also allowed them to influence brigade migration routes. In addition, it provides a way of keeping certain well-paid jobs within the family. Here I found that 'knowledge' is an important part of internal affairs within brigades. When I asked people why brigade members and the MUP management accept the eventual appointment of a brigadier's son or brother to that position, my informants justified it on the basis of 'knowledge': by growing up in the brigadier's family a son acquires knowledge (experience—*opyt* in Rus.) from his father. In this way, jobs become informal family entitlements in the same way as hunting territories. Knowledge as 'skill in the tundra' has determined not only the wealth but also the position of individual herders in the brigade's hierarchy. Here again, my data prove the 'embeddedness' of property relations in human social relations (Hann 1998).

In chapter 7 I introduced the issue of ethnicity. In the Soviet Union, Siberian indigenous minorities had a special legal status that has been discussed in Russian and Western works (Boiko and Kostiuk 1992; Kuznetsov and Missonova 1993; Sleptsov and Robbek 1994; Fondahl 1998; Balzer 1999; Anderson 2000a; Krupnik and Vakhtin 2002; Vakhtin, Golovko and Schweitzer 2002). Ethnicity has been used to marginalise Siberian minorities but it has also been a tool in the struggle for native rights (Slezkine 1994; Pika, et al. 1996). My contribution to the discussion of Siberian ethnic issues is to show how ethnicity was used in the Anabarskii district not as a tool of resistance but as a tool to build bridges and create networks. In so doing I have built on the theory of 'segmentary identity' of Evans-Pritchard (1940), but from the opposite angle: looking at how people sought to include, not to exclude, other groups. The practice of manipulating ethnic categories is not unusual in Siberia, nor in other regions of the world (cf. Schlee 1989; Anderson 2000a). Anderson (2000a) showed how ethnic categories were used on the Taimyr Peninsula to use and defend resources—from job positions to tundra lands. My ethnographic data show how, through strategic use of kinship networks and following a particular ethnic ideology, people have

established access to resources *outside* the village, a strategy that intensified after 1990. Multiple identities among Uurung Khaia Dolgan are a consequence of the pre-Soviet multi-ethnic composition in the region, Soviet state-building and the processes of nation-building in the Republic of Sakha over the past decade. Special status as a recognised minority and status as a member of the Sakha nation are not necessarily contradictory. Presenting my ethnographic data, I have demonstrated how these identities not only exist together but overlap, resulting in the general identity of Anabar *Yakut-Dolgan*. In this way, I want to move away from Barth's (1969b) approach to 'multiple identities' and show that a multiple ethnic identity does not necessarily mean shifting between different identities but having more than one at the same time.

Mechanisms of violence and conflict resolution in Siberian indigenous villages have been little discussed in modern anthropology, or in other social sciences (see Pika et al. 1996; Batianova 2000). In my attempt to outline and analyse methods of social control (chapter 8), I have relied mostly on case studies from Asian, African and Latin American countries (for example Gluckman 1963; Romanucci-Ross 1973; Wyszomirski 1975). During my fieldwork I found that kinship is important not only for reciprocity, help and resource monitoring but also for activating power mechanisms that control these networks. I began my analysis by looking first at non-violent methods and then at violent methods of social control. Rumours and the defence of reputations are topics of anthropology that have been researched at different times and in different regions and settings (see Gluckman 1963; Romanucci-Ross 1973; Just 1991; Nash 1994). Uurung Khaia is a typical, small community, a village where rumours circulate quickly. Avoiding rumours and keeping one's reputation intact are strong motivations for adhering to social norms. In analysing non-violent modes of social control, I discovered that the boundary between non-violence and violence is very thin. Violence is closely linked to crime prevention and methods of social control. By drawing links between the two and interpreting non-violent and violent behaviour I have tried to provide an understanding of violence in the village.

Uurung Khaia has a reputation as a lawless place. During my fieldwork I came to understand that outsiders tend to view this lawlessness as stemming from an absence of state institutions. But the apparent 'lawlessness' hides a system of informal kinship-based social control, which is frequently misunderstood by outsiders. Individual and group weekend disco fights, and also collective punishment actions like the *razborka*, are connected to alcohol consumption. At first sight, it may seem that alcohol is the initiator of violence and that is what many outsiders, as well as some in the community, think. I show in chapter 8 that the violence goes much deeper



than this and that beyond individual and group fights there is a structure of social behaviour. Putting my data into a wider context, I found a link with the regulation of trap placement, illegal hunting and fishing, and stealing property in the tundra. The 'informal male age system' in Uurung Khaia and the kinship networks mobilise menfolk as the backbone of the informal structure for maintaining order in the village. In chapter 8 I have provided ethnographic data on how the community was self-organised and on how certain groups of people (especially incomers) were excluded from the community's defence against crime. This demonstrates the social potential of an Arctic community to self-organise and also supports the hypothesis that kinship-based structures are the most reliable networks for a community in a time of weakened formal legal structures.

## 9.2 Tradition, Reciprocity and Kinship

More than once during my fieldwork I came across contradictory positions on 'tradition'. Practices which urban scholars and native activists have interpreted as positive are likely to be seen in the North as 'primitive' (*per-vobytnyi*) and 'backward' (*otstalyi*). In explaining the tradition behind kinship, and the values and social norms it carries, I discovered a combination of traditional and Soviet practices. This has allowed me to challenge the concept of tradition by showing that 'tradition' is not 'tradition' *per se* but it is brought into use in situations where it is the best and most reliable alternative.

I never heard people use the word 'tradition'. Instead they stressed that certain ways of behaving or interacting are 'Dolgan' or 'our' and go back to 'old times'. Nevertheless, I demonstrate that people use these as a way of referring to 'tradition'. For people in the North, 'tradition' is not the 'way of doing things' but is embodied in social relations and structures of sharing. Obligations and practices of sharing would place the Dolgan of Uurung Khaia into the category of 'classic' hunting societies, where material wealth was converted into prestige and where the accumulation of economic capital was not important (Woodburn 1982). But this is a picture I do not want to present. I remember a discussion I had with one reindeer herder when I visited his brigade. According to local custom, I had to 'drink tea' in every *balokh* upon my arrival. After returning from the tiny dwelling of one herder who lived there with his wife and two children, my host asked, 'So, how was it there? (*Nu, kak tam bylo?*). I thought about the small *balokh* where there was hardly space for the mattress, the small iron stove and the reindeer hide where the children slept, and I decided not to be impolite about that host. That's why I answered, 'It was okay' (*Normal'no!*). My current host smiled ironically and said, 'How can it be OK? There are no comforts!'

(*Chto za normal'no! U nikh nekakikh usloviakh netu!*). He himself lived in a big *balokh*, had a bed for every member of his family, a table at the window, and a stove which could hold two or three kettles. He also possessed several rifles and a good snowmobile, in contrast to the other man who had only two rifles and was forced to repair his unreliable snowmobile throughout the migration. Obviously, material accumulation of goods is important to these pastoralists and hunters.

I have also sought to contribute to contemporary debates about the development of semi-pastoral people in situations where they cannot or do not want to avoid intervention by the state nor the influence of commodity trade and consumer goods on their lives. As I discussed in chapters 2, 5, 6 and 8, wealth has mattered historically among the Dolgan and continues to be important under postsocialism. However, prestige is required in order to gain control over property—and one way of gaining prestige is to create and maintain kinship networks. In this book I have outlined how different kinds of capital (social, symbolic, economic) have been converted from one to another and how the structure for this process was shaped (cf. Bourdieu 1986, 1994).

Several studies, especially those from Latin America, show how kin-based reciprocity is constructed and works in rural and urban settings as a social guarantee network and also how these networks operate in the face of globalisation and the opening up of local communities (Romanucci-Ross 1973; Nash 1994; Schweitzer 2000). I have combined these two approaches to show the importance of kinship in a post-Soviet Arctic community and how kinship networks link tundra, village and townspeople.

Kin relations are constantly recreated through marriage, adoption and by establishing fictive kinship. In the period of 'total social institutions' and when state control structures were more or less intact, such networks were not as critical. The situation changed in the early 1990s when kin relations became dominant in struggles for survival. How kinship networks took over various aspects of social and economic life in Uurung Khaia is one the key themes in this book. The Soviet era increased people's mobility and people from the Anabarskii district moved to other districts and cities in Sakha. The Soviet economic and educational policies also brought a lot of people from other Sakha regions into the district. These people nowadays form a structure of 'fellow countrymen' and expanded kin networks over a large territory. Because I often enjoyed the advantages of being befriended by people who knew somebody in the 'right' place to provide me with shelter, assistance, transport, food and so forth, I cannot underestimate the value of such networks. In the end, I lived the reality behind the popular saying in Sakha that 'everybody here knows everybody'. Such an impression indeed can

arise when reindeer herders in the Anabarskii district have relatives and classmates not only in the capital of Yakutsk but also in remote districts more than 2,500 kilometres away.

In chapter 5 I showed how such a network starts in the tundra, where different people's competing interests are regulated via kin relations, the most important of which is access to hunting grounds. Although I included village and townspeople in my analysis, the main focus of the book has been the people of the tundra and their strategies. The tundra resources (meat, fish, furs) are important to everyone no matter what their occupation or place of residence. Traditionally, in order to survive, a man had to hunt enough not only to feed his family but to have a surplus for trade and sharing with people in village and town. Modern hunters and herders do not live in such an isolated world—and in the same way that they need goods and services from the 'outside world', so villagers and relatives in the towns need products from the tundra. Reciprocity as a strategy implies multiple layers and directions, with goods and services being transmitted from the tundra via village to town and vice versa. At this point, kinship, subsistence, mutual assistance and trade meet each other.

The tundra economy in the Anabarskii district is based on two kinds of reindeer—wild and domestic. Historically, this region has always had a mixed economy of hunting and reindeer husbandry. I have repeatedly mentioned (chapters 5, 6) that reindeer herders and wild reindeer hunters cooperate in the Anabarskii district. Cooperation between hunters and herders, and both of these with settled agriculturalists, is not unknown in anthropology. My own special interest was to explore the distinction between herder-hunter worlds, and I ask, as does Barnard (1993: 34), whether the divide between these two is as big as anthropologists suggest. Layton et al. (1991) argue that hunting and herding are alternative but separate strategies and that, when the situation requires it, groups can switch from one to the other. Paine lists 15 characteristics of the difference between hunters and herders (1971: 167–9). Ingold (1980: 13–25) divides hunting and herding in terms of man–animal relationships. I discovered during fieldwork that these theoretical models, although probably reflecting clear-cut differences in some reindeer herding regions, are not universally true.

Anderson (2000a: 34) describes his confusion when he discovered that the reindeer herders in the Khantaika tundra were using a mixture of different herding techniques and no longer had a 'pure style' even in minor work activities. Living among people in the North, I learned that theoretical models should be applied with care. For me, the key concept which links all the different economic models and social patterns together is kinship. The main goal of kinship reciprocity in the Anabarskii district is to create access to as



many different resources as possible. Therefore the kinship network is also linked to different geographical locations as well as different strategies. Relations based on sharing, typical of hunters, are confirmed through the fixed ownership and use regimes of domestic animals among herders. This way of doing things may not fit the classical approach in the literature to hunter-herders, but it has a single key aim: to guarantee people equal access to unequally distributed resources.

Here I want to cite my colleague Florian Stammler (2004: 339) who warns that our Western way of thinking in dichotomies can hinder our understanding of complex processes. The complex strategies I observed during my fieldwork bridge the established dichotomies of old and new, urban and rural, herding and hunting, formal and informal. The people I met are all trying to find the best possible ways of living and raising their children in the situation we call the postsocialist transformation. As an anthropologist I admire their skill at combining these strategies and as a friend I am sympathetic to their efforts to improve their living standards and so to prosper.

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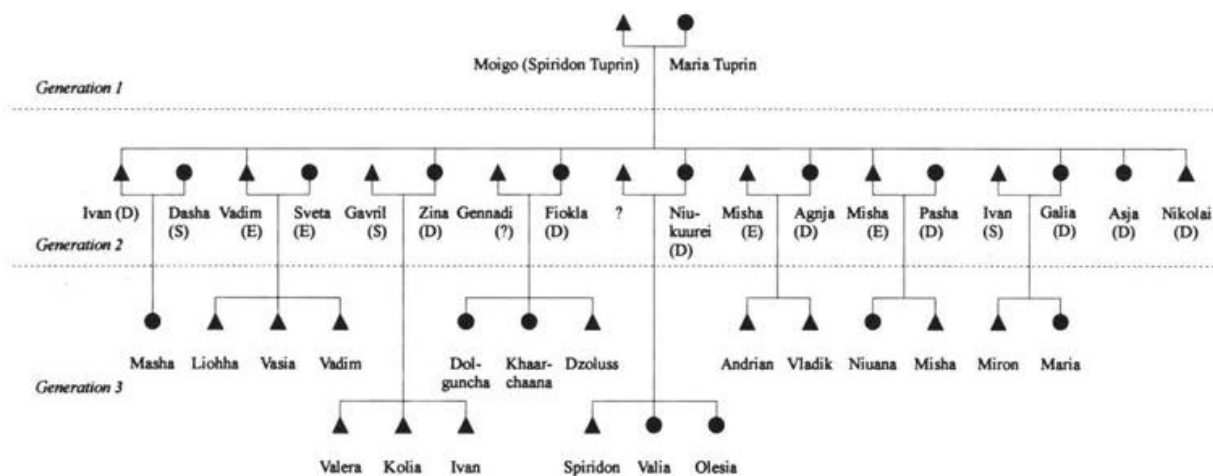
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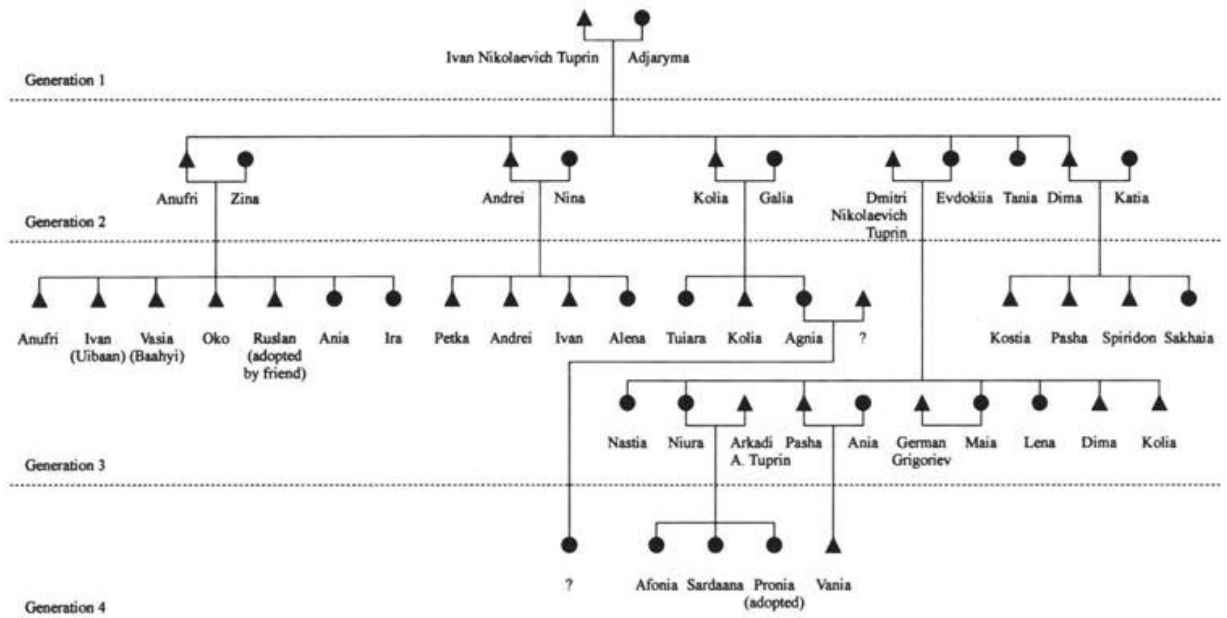
# Appendix 1 The Family of Spiridon Ivanovich Tuprin





## Appendix 2

### Kinship Tree of the Tupriny Family







## Appendix 3

### Резюме на русском языке

*Родина, олень и взаимопомощь – родственные связи и отношения собственности в сибирском поселке.*

Данная книга представляет собой этнологическое исследование социальных связей и отношений собственности в поселках, расположенных примерно в 40 км от Ледовитого океана на северо-западе Республики Саха (Якутия). В книге автор рассматривает стратегии, к которым прибегают люди в ситуации, когда старая социалистическая система и экономика разрушны, а новые государственные структуры не в состоянии обеспечить социальную и экономическую стабильность. В своем анализе исследователь исходит из положения, что в «смутные времена» в целях выживания люди используют разные неформальные структуры, и что, именно структуры родства могут сохранить стабильность и гарантии доступа к различным ресурсам.

Данная книга – попытка соединить сибиреведение и антропологию постсоциалистических обществ. Основной целью было задокументировать и проанализировать жизнь современных охотников и оленеводов в изменяющемся обществе с точки зрения экономической антропологии.

Представители местной интеллигенции и многие этнографы часто относят народы Сибири к традиционным. Во всех главах этой книги автор демонстрирует, что традиция означает не только дореволюционные обычаи, но несет в себе и много элементов социализма. Эти два звена традиции сосуществуют и играют огромную роль во многих сферах жизни северных народов (например, в регулировании вопросов землепользования, собственности, в манипуляции этническими категориями при создании социальных сетей и в механизмах поддержания общественного порядка). Данные были собраны преимущественно в Анабарском улусе Республики Саха (Якутия). Автор провел четыре месяца в поселках Юрюнг-Хая и Саскылах и четыре месяца в тундре у оленеводов и охотников.

Первая глава содержит описание Анабарского улуса, обзор методов исследования, а также критику используемых теоретических подходов. Одной из целей данного исследования была документация комплексного и многообразного процесса изменений и развития в постсоциалистическом обществе. В первой главе автор определяет причины региональных различий, а также и общих черт в постсоциалистическом мире. Далее автор доказывает, что

используемое в антропологической литературе разделение на охотников и скотоводов на практике является условным. Он также указывает на то, что разные модели использования земли, собственности на животных и социальных отношений могут сосуществовать в одной общине одновременно. В этой же главе он объясняет, что в антропологии постсоциалистических обществ есть темы, которые в академических исследованиях играют лишь маргинальную роль, к примеру, влияние статуса рядового коммуниста при социализме на его статус в настоящее время, или же симбиоз дореволюционных и социалистических представлений о ролях мужчин и женщин в постсоциалистическом обществе.

Во второй главе анализируется развитие социальных взаимосвязей и отношений собственности в Анабарском улусе, начиная с 17-ого века до распада Советского Союза. В сибиреведении уделяется довольно много внимания вопросу, как советская власть изменяла культуру, образ жизни и экономику коренных народов Сибири. Однако, автор утверждает, что подобное влияние не было односторонним, и что даже в период советской власти не существовало стандартизированных форм оленеводства и охоты, но сохранялись региональные особенности, которые были включены в систему плановой экономики советского сельского хозяйства. Важен и факт того, что при социализме роды продолжали неформально существовать внутри совхозной структуры и сейчас являются носителями многих черт социалистической идеологии (например – лояльность к директору, уважение к Героям труда, ветеранам труда).

В следующей главе рассматриваются изменения в сельском хозяйстве после развала государственной плановой экономики. исследователь доказывает, что родовая община является не единственной формой новых сельскохозяйственных предприятий после деколлективизации. В то же время, во главе многих новых предприятий, созданных на базе бывших оленеводческих и охотничьих хозяйств, стоят те же люди, которые были в советском руководящем аппарате. Таким образом, общее социалистическое прошлое играет важную роль при объяснении трансформации экономики.

Если в третьей главе рассматривается формальная структура тундровой экономики, то в четвертой главе внимание обращается на неформальные структуры контроля над территориями и ресурсами. В Анабарской тундре автор исследовал различные интерпретации таких категорий, как «родина» и «хозяин». Первая категория означает родной регион в тундре, а вторая – неформальное право контролировать использование ресурсов в этом регионе. Хозяином региона местные



жители признают человека, достаточно длительное время проживающего в нем. Этот статус хозяина во многих случаях передается из поколения в поколение. Следует учитывать, что в этих случаях предки нынешних хозяев жили в данном регионе еще до революции и продолжали жить в советское время, работая семейными бригадами и сохраняя свой статус в структуре совхоза.

В пятой главе анализируется значение родственных связей во взаимодействии между людьми. В постсоциалистическое время семьи имеют разный доступ к ресурсам в зависимости от социального положения и места проживания (тундра, поселок, город). Многие сибиреведы пишут о законе тундры, подразумевая под этим благородство и великодушие коренных жителей, как часть традиционной культуры. В этой главе автор показывает, что традиция – не столько гармоничная часть коренной культуры, сколько сознательная стратегия доступа к ресурсам.

Тема шестой главы – социальные отношения, построенные вокруг домашних оленей. Существует две категории оленей – частные и государственные. Право на использование и собственность на частных и государственных оленей отражают социальные взаимосвязи между членами оленеводческой бригады, а также связи между тундровиками и жителями поселка. На основании собранных материалов показывается, что собственность на оленя – гибкое понятие. Жители Анабара используют долганскую и эвенкийскую традицию дарения оленя как стратегию создания социальной сети в настоящее время.

Одной из популярных тем в сибиреведении является разнообразие подходов к этническому самосознанию коренных народов. В седьмой главе анализируется многогранность самосознания жителей Анабара. В зависимости от обстоятельств они могут воспринимать себя долганами, саха, или же просто местными жителями. В ходе наблюдений оказалось, что люди подчеркивают разную идентичность в зависимости от социальной сети, к которой они принадлежат.

Теме насилия и преступности в сибиреведении уделено мало внимания. Тем временем, общественный порядок, его отсутствие или поддержание, являются важнейшим вопросом для жителей отдаленных поселков Сибири. В восьмой главе утверждается, что в ситуации, когда государство не может выполнять правоохранительную функцию, община сама обращается к неформальным методам разрешения конфликтов. Система неформальной охраны правопорядка в Юрюнг-Хая опирается на структуру рода. В роду каждый член имеет

определенный статус, который зависит не только от возраста и пола, но и от официального положения в формальных структурах. Эта социальная иерархия опять-таки является симбиозом дореволюционных долганских и советских социальных категорий, в итоге которого уважаются и старики, и бывшие члены компартии. Поддержание порядка может проявляться в разных методах, начиная от распространения сплетен и доходя до группового насилия. Преступление и наказание есть условные категории, в отношении которых община и государство могут быть на разных позициях. Родственные связи гарантируют человеку охрану со стороны общины, а их отсутствие ставит его в позицию потенциальной жертвы.

В итоге данная книга дает читателю представление о том, как рассмотренная община коренных жителей Сибири проходит процесс саморегулирования социальных связей. Постсоциалистические изменения означают для жителей уменьшение функции государственных структур. Вместо этих структур строятся неформальные сети, организованные на основе родственных связей. В ходе исследования, автор пришел к выводу, что неформальные сети способны сохранять общественный порядок, регулировать использование тундры, гарантировать людям минимальные ресурсы для выживания. Родственные сети соединяют разные регионы, источники ресурсов и социальные слои. В контексте проведенного исследования становится, что за формированием социальных сетей стоят сознательные стратегии. В рамках этих стратегий люди используют как традиционные представления о семье, взаимопомощи, так и современные структуры рыночной экономики и администрации.

# Index

- Abrami, R. M. 30  
 Acheson, J. M. 40-1  
 activists *see* intellectuals  
 administration 7, 91, 184, 190;  
     district 8, 91, 95-6, 112, 118-9,  
     123, 136-7, 190, 192, 199, 217-8,  
     241-4, 304; village 120, 131, 155,  
     182, 184, 202-3  
 'administrative clan' *see* identity  
 adoption *see* kinship  
 Afanas'eva, G. M. 26, 153  
 age 272-4; adults 249, 259, 261, 273-  
     6, 286, 288-9, 294, 297; elders  
     102-3, 113n, 127, 132, 140, 143,  
     152-3, 157-8, 177, 179, 182, 206,  
     213, 215, 271-7, 280-6, 294; gen-  
     eration 26, 42, 54, 58, 75, 84, 95,  
     115, 127n, 130, 138-9, 145, 147,  
     151-2, 154, 158-9, 211, 214, 216,  
     221, 223, 246, 249, 251, 259, 271,  
     273-7, 305; youth 140, 162, 263,  
     271, 273-6, 287-90, 292  
*agitbrigady* 74, 85  
 Agrawal, A. 41  
 agriculture 13, 23, 25, 29-32, 37-8,  
     69-70, 75, 77, 87-90, 94, 96, 117,  
     123, 128, 131-2, 139, 143, 148,  
     174, 187-8, 191, 203, 214-6,  
     262n, 270, 302-5  
 alcohol 157, 166, 170, 174, 178-9,  
     184, 249, 269, 276, 285-7, 289,  
     292, 298, 308 *see also* violence  
 ALROSA 4, 8-9, 11, 25, 30, 83, 97,  
     119-21, 122n, 170, 174, 241, 244,  
     270n, 289, 296  
 Anabarskii district 6-13  
 Anderson, B. 6  
 Anderson, D. 18, 24-5, 27, 40, 43-4,  
     64-5, 71-2, 93, 99, 128, 130-1,  
     136-7, 139, 141-3, 150-2, 156,  
     174, 184, 198, 204, 207, 231,  
     234-5, 293, 305, 307, 311  
 Androsov, N. E. 8, 95, 110, 137, 184,  
     196, 206, 242n, 243, 246, 303  
 Arditi, J. 130  
 Argunova, T. 5, 262  
*artely see* rural economic institutions  
 Artem'ev, N. M. 20, 27, 232, 246  
 Ashwin, S. 24, 35  
*avtoritet* 275-7, 297  
 backwardness 13, 63, 73, 138, 232,  
     247, 251, 309  
*balokh (also balok)* 13, 16, 47, 48n,  
     77-8, 101-2, 105, 113, 118-9,  
     121-2, 139, 157, 167, 181, 196-9,  
     208-10, 215, 219-20, 222, 229,  
     253-4, 272, 310  
 Balyksyt 143, 156-7, 159-61, 163,  
     165, 167-8, 173, 175, 179, 205-6,  
     211-5, 222, 228-9  
 Balzer, M. M. 23, 64, 70n, 71, 89,  
     266, 307  
 Barnard, A. 38, 311  
 barter *see* economy  
 Barth, F. 27, 220, 231, 233, 308  
 Baskin, L. 222n  
 Bassi, M. 273  
 Basso, K. H. 130, 135  
 Batianova, E. P. 298, 308  
 Baxter, P. T. W. 40, 220, 226, 230  
 Beach, H. 40, 188, 194, 204  
*bedniak* 20, 61, 65  
 Belianskaia, M. K. 28, 110, 112  
 Benda-Beckmann, F. von 306  
 Bernardi, B. 273  
 Bernstam, M. 1  
 Besson, J. 129  
 Bird, N. H., Bird-David, N. H. 38  
 Blanchard, O. 88  
 Blok, A. 284  
 Bodenhorn, B. 42, 150, 171-3, 182,  
     186, 306  
 Bogoras, W., Bogoraz, W. 53n, 60  
 Boiko, V. I. 22, 28, 249, 280, 302,  
     307  
 Bourdieu, P. 101, 130, 285, 310  
 Bourgois, P. 27, 284-5  
 Brandtstädter, S. 151



- brigade (work unit) 10, 13, 22, 25, 31-2, 35, 37, 40, 43, 68, 71, 75-80, 84, 187-230; and kin relations 77, 201-16; changing of 108n, 205, 211-3 *see also* rural economic institutions
- brigadier 13, 76, 108n, 197, 202, 211-6, 220, 226-8, 230, 307
- Bromley, Y. 232
- Cartwright, A. L. 30, 32
- Cashdan, E. 41, 162
- Casimir, M. J. 41, 133, 162, 186
- Cheal, D. 226
- Chukchi 5, 141, 194, 222n, 236, 245n, 260
- Chukotka 6, 8n, 25, 204, 222n, 242, 261
- chumrabortnitsa* 35, 79, 97, 100, 102, 105, 114-5, 118, 203-4, 207, 209n, 241, 255
- clan 50, 57-8, 63, 206, 235, 239, 267, 287, 304
- Clarke, S. 171, 174
- collective *see* *kollektiv*
- collective farm *see* rural economic institutions
- collectivisation 43, 69-74, 76, 127-8, 136, 138-9, 152-3, 231, 262
- Committee for Helping the Northern Peoples (KNSO) 64
- commons 40-2, 137, 139
- Communist Party 23n, 62n, 69, 70n, 77, 80, 84, 91, 154, 213-4, 233, 237, 255; Communists 62, 64, 69-74, 90, 118, 211, 213, 215, 251, 302; of Sakha 62, 70-2; Komso-mol (Young Communists) 71, 73
- conflict 96, 137, 141n, 162-3, 259, 261, 266, 270, 272, 276, 278-80, 283-4, 286-7, 291-2, 298-9, 308
- Congress of Dolgans 238-9, 241-2
- Cossacks 49-50, 52, 56n, 63
- culture 17-8, 20-2, 28, 35-6, 39, 41, 56n, 61, 72n, 128-9, 151, 153n, 159, 232-6, 240, 242-4, 246, 264-5, 267; *kul'tura* 72n, 190; traditional, tradition 8, 21-2, 24, 28, 34, 37, 42, 48n, 54, 60, 111, 136, 141, 150-2, 182, 186, 198, 206-7, 210, 213, 234, 241-3, 248-9, 251, 253, 272n, 304, 306, 309; *see also* Dolgan
- Czaplicka, M. A. 18, 58-60, 235
- Descola, P. 41, 133
- D'iachenko, V. I. 48, 55n, 280
- Dietz, T. 40, 161-2
- Dolgan 25, 27, 47n, 58, 263; ethnogenesis 17-20, 34, 231-9; culture 19, 47-8, 130, 137-8, 151, 234-5, 240-1, 248; identity 17-8, 27, 47n, 48, 231-68; language 20, 231-2, 235, 242-6; in Uurung Khaia 11, 231-68; in Anabar 6, 231-9; and reindeer herding 26n, 37, 47, 53n, 67, 76, 206, 213; re-settlement 80; *see also* kinship
- Dolgikh, B. O. 19-21, 37, 49-51, 53, 58-60, 65, 68, 76, 128, 157, 183, 231, 235-7, 262-3, 267, 280, 302
- Donskoi, F. S. 23, 85, 94, 111
- Donskoi, R. I. 22
- Dragadze, T. 151
- drinking 157, 178, 269, 276, 285-9, 292, 298, 302
- Dudeck, S. 272n
- Duncan, P. J. S. 5, 266
- Dunn, E. 35
- Dunn, S. P. 35
- Dyson-Hudson, R. 39-40
- earmark *see* reindeer
- ecology/ecologists 25, 33-4, 36, 43, 54, 99-100, 101n, 109, 130, 132, 141-2, 146-7, 163; sentient 41, 43
- economy 18-9, 21-5, 28, 31, 33-4, 36-8, 54, 64, 70-4, 79, 83, 188, 190n, 191, 205, 210, 232, 243, 260, 267, 293, 303-4, 306, 311; barter 35, 57, 102, 169, 171, 174n, 179, 186, 253, 303; market

- 1-2, 24, 28-9, 31, 34, 36, 40, 43, 57, 66, 85, 96-7, 106, 110n, 111, 114, 116, 119, 123, 128, 151, 168, 174, 179, 185-6, 243, 302, 304; inequality 1; subsistence 25, 55, 73, 198, 217, 311
- Elden *see* rural economic institutions
- Elwert, G. 27, 233
- Enets 54n
- entrepreneur, entrepreneurship 24, 190, 208, 243, 271, 279; Ministry of Small-Scale Entrepreneurship 120
- Erel *see* rural economic institutions
- Espiritu, A. A. 233, 304
- ethnic/ethnicity 2, 5-6, 11, 15, 17-8, 20, 23, 25-7, 51, 53, 55-6, 59-61, 65, 67, 69, 74, 83, 136, 139, 153n, 176n, 231-69, 272, 274n, 298, 302, 307-8 *see also* identity, kinship
- Eveny 5, 19, 72n, 138, 150, 156, 160n, 222n, 224, 227, 232, 236-7, 242n, 243, 248n, 255-6, 260, 262, 266n, 271
- Evenki 5-6, 18-9, 21, 27, 48-54, 56-60, 62, 65-8, 70, 73, 127-8, 142-3, 146-7, 160, 193-4, 198n, 222n, 231-2, 234-9, 241-6, 255-6, 261-3, 266n, 270, 301; kinship and social structure 19, 21, 47, 152-3, 156; and reindeer 36, 41, 53-4n, 59, 65-7, 198
- family *see* kinship
- Fedorova, E. N. 6, 51-2, 60, 66, 74-6, 84
- Feit, H. A. 128, 144, 150
- Finke, P. 31, 33
- fish/fishing 6, 9, 11-2, 40, 57, 87-8, 93, 96-8, 102-5, 109, 115-6, 118-9, 121-3, 132-3, 151, 170-2, 188, 204, 207-8, 214, 233, 241-3, 272 *see also* kollektiv, Koche, barter, trade
- Fisher, R. H. 49-50, 235
- Foley, R. 39, 70
- Fondahl, G. A. 25, 27-8, 44, 53, 66, 78, 89-90, 127-8, 150, 206, 304, 307
- Forsyth, J. 47, 62-4, 71, 72n, 76, 234, 261-2
- friendship 84, 137, 149, 159, 162, 170, 172, 178-9, 181, 184-5, 196, 199, 223, 225-6, 229, 253, 265, 283, 286-7, 297, 310
- Funk, D. A. 236
- Gabyshev, E. S. 263
- Gaddy, C. 30
- Gal, S. 35
- gender 36, 79, 207, 256, 284
- Girard, R. 296-7
- Gluckman, M. 152, 226, 277-8, 308
- Gol'derova, A. A. 239, 241-4, 254
- Golovnev, A. 28, 249
- Goody, E. N. 158-60
- Goody, J. 159-60
- gossip 277-80
- Gow, P. 129, 133, 135
- Gracheva, G. N. 20, 186, 207, 231
- Grant, B. 248n, 306
- Gray, J. N. 216
- Gray, P. A. 8n, 25, 27-8, 241-2
- Gregory, P. R. 83-4
- Gumilev, L. N. 232
- Gulevskii, A. N. 54, 64, 71
- Gurvich, I. S. 11, 20-1, 26, 39, 49-53, 55-61, 65-8, 71-2, 75, 84, 139, 144, 153, 167, 206-7, 222, 232, 237-9, 262-3, 280
- Habeck, J. O. 5, 70, 262
- Hann, C. 24, 31-2, 38, 95, 191, 230, 307
- Hardin, G. 39-40
- herding 87, 89, 93, 96-7, 107, 108n, 118, 123, 128, 143, 160n, 177, 187-200, 203, 206-18, 222, 228, 230, 233, 241-2, 243n, 244, 259, 261, 263, 303, 306, 311-2; annual cycle 193-4, 198, 200; industrial

- and lifestyle nomadism 76; index (*pokazatel*) 99; migrating/migration routes 13, 26n, 47, 48n, 49, 51-2, 57, 78, 101, 107, 110, 137, 143, 192, 195-7, 199n, 206-7, 213, 215, 218-9, 221, 226, 229-30, 237-9, 255, 260, 263, 296, 307, 310; headcount (*koralisatsiia*) 79, 198-200; salary of reindeer herders 96, 174, 191; types of 194-5; *see also* reindeer
- Hill, F. 29
- Hirsch, E. 41, 129
- Hirsch, F. 3, 44, 237
- Hitchcock, R. K. 36
- Hoebel, E. A. 286
- household 5, 34, 53, 60, 63, 65, 67-8, 70, 72, 76, 80, 89, 126, 154, 158-9, 173, 175, 182-3, 186, 188, 196-7, 218, 222
- Hugh-Jones, S. 35, 171
- Humphrey, C. 24, 31, 34, 88, 129n, 152, 155, 172, 185, 187, 201-3, 214n, 303-4
- hunting 6, 9, 11-2, 36-41, 54-5, 57, 67, 87-9, 95-7, 113-22, 132-3, 150-1, 161-6, 175-6, 188, 193, 202-4, 206-8, 214, 221, 224, 229, 233, 237-8, 241-3, 254, 260, 272, 290-1, 303, 307, 309, 311
- hunters 12-3, 36-42, 47, 49, 53, 72, 76, 87-8, 97-8, 105-22, 149-50, 152, 161-73, 190, 192-3, 199, 203, 248, 252, 254, 273, 280, 282-3, 303, 307, 310-1
- identity 129, 141, 157, 231-67, 295-8; ethnic 231-54, 261-7; indigenous 190, 203, 210, 213-4, 217-8, 223-4, 233-4, 238-54, 262n, 263, 265, 298, 303-4, 307; multiple 234-9, 247, 261-9, 308; shifting 245-67; local 256-61; village 254, 258-61; administrative clan, Speranskii's classification 18, 59, 63; and education 231, 244, 262, 266-7, 310; and territory 232-5, 251-4; *see also* Sakha, Dolgan
- incomer 93, 111n, 127n, 136, 150, 157, 159, 176, 223, 255-8, 284, 295-8, 309
- Ingold, T. 28, 39, 128-9, 133, 136, 140-1, 145-6, 187-9, 200, 219-20, 222n, 226, 230, 305-6, 311
- intellectuals 61-2, 136, 190n, 233n, 239-45, 249, 262, 304, 309
- Jarvenpa, R. 41, 145
- Just, P. 298, 308
- Kalashnikov, A. A. 48-50, 56-7n, 57, 63n
- Kaneff, D. 30-4, 151, 172, 303
- Khantaika *also* Khantaiskoe Ozero 25, 27, 130-1, 142-3, 156, 293, 311
- Khanty 14, 23, 25, 27, 150, 193, 223-4, 272
- Khargin *see* reindeer
- Khazanov, A. M. 36-7, 163, 193, 226, 266, 303
- kinship 2, 19, 21, 24, 28-9, 38, 40-1, 47, 71, 78, 103, 117, 123, 138, 140, 152-61; adoption 60, 155, 158, 160-1, 170; clan 89, 116-7, 122-3, 135, 139, 155-9, 165, 182, 184; domestic reindeer 220-7; ethnicity 27, 245-54, 261-7; 'extensive/extended' 38, 44, 152-75, 177, 186, 211, 215, 229, 251-67; family 103, 107, 114, 116, 118, 120, 127, 129-30, 136, 139-40, 147, 151, 178, 188, 197, 199, 204-5, 208-9, 211-2, 215, 222, 230, 264, 274, 277, 280-6, 290-1, 299; 'knowing' 142-3, 149; marriage 74, 157, 159, 170, 223, 246, 273-4, 283, 310; network *see* social networks; surnames 156-78, 239, 246, 255; entitlement and land use 114, 116, 136, 144, 188,



- 191n, 228, 230, 254, 271, 302, 305  
 King, A. 29, 33n, 223, 245n  
 Kligman, G. 35  
 Koche 15, 102-4  
*kollektiv* (collective) 23-4, 35, 70-2, 74-6, 88, 91, 98, 123, 139 *see also* rural economic institutions  
 Konstantinov, Y. 24, 27-8, 76-7, 79, 88, 95, 98, 111, 204-5, 303  
 Krasnoarskii Krai 19-20, 25, 45, 48, 55, 121, 126, 173-4  
 Krivoshapkin, A. V. 150, 272  
 Krupnik, I. 89, 193, 204, 206, 234, 304, 307  
*kulak/kulaki* 20, 54, 61, 64, 69, 72, 85 *see also* *bedniak*, *sredniak*, kinship, *kolkhoz*, rural economic institutions  
*kul'tura* *see* culture  
 Kuoljok, K. E. 62, 64-5, 71  
 Kupaa 77, 113-6, 138-40, 164n, 222, 255  
 Kuznetsov, A. I. 227, 233, 307  
 Kyltashov, V. 125, 133, 146, 155-7, 159-60, 166-7, 172, 197-201, 208-14, 226, 261, 274, 281-2, 292  
 land 27, 32-3, 39, 42, 62, 76, 92, 96, 125-48, 162-4; allocation 65, 78, 99-100, 127; master (*khoziain*) 125-47, 215, 232, 272, 290, 305  
 landscape 129-30, 132-5, 140-1, 143, 145-7; description of 131-5; *see also* territorial formation  
 land use, property on land 28-9, 32-3, 38, 40-1, 54, 59, 91-2, 99-100, 123, 128, 131, 136, 144, 146, 163 *see also* pastures, herding  
 Laughlin, C. D. 151, 305-6  
 'law of the tundra' 149-52 *see also* kinship, reciprocity  
 law and order 269-300; concept of 272-3, 279, 285-6, 296-300; punishment 285, 291-6  
 Layton, R. 39, 70, 311  
 Leacock, E. 41, 55, 144-5, 165, 208, 210  
 Levin, M. G. 19, 37, 51, 61, 156, 182, 194, 235, 302  
 Llewellyn, K. N. 286  
 Lomnitz, L. A. 151, 186  
*malochislennye narody Severa* *see* small-numbered peoples  
 manipulable resources 24, 184  
 marginal/marginalisation 14, 224, 279, 294, 307  
 marriage *see* kinship  
 Marxism 20-1, 60-1, 64, 85  
 masculinity 269, 272, 284-5, 287-9, 295, 297  
 master *see* land  
 mastercode 232  
 Mauss, M. 227  
 Mbembe, A. 232  
 McCay, B. J. 40-1, 162, 186  
 Meillassoux, C. 128  
 Middendorf, A. F. 18  
 migrating/migration routes *see* herding  
 Gambold Miller, L. L. 31, 104, 271  
 Missonova, L. I. 227, 233, 307  
 Moigo 116-20, 123, 125, 133-5, 142, 144, 149, 155, 158-9, 162, 164, 166-8, 172, 177, 182-3, 228-9, 249, 255-6, 281  
 Morrison, C. 30, 78  
 Mote, V. L. 44, 47, 49-50, 266  
 MUP 11, 15, 187-8, 192, 200-5, 212, 214-6, 218, 225, 244, 258, 278, 304, 307; structure 188, 201-4; imeni Il'ia Spiridonova 11, 201-4; work contracts 99, 107-8; *see also* rural economic institutions  
 Myers, F. 41-2, 130, 170  
 Myndygai 16  
 Nash, J. 308, 310  
 Nash, M. 27, 188  
 Nash, R. 129, 231

- nationality (*national'nost'*) 232, 236, 239, 255-6, 267-8 *see also* ethnicity  
 Nentsy/Nenets 48, 53, 64, 194, 210, 217, 220, 222-4, 231  
 networks *see* social networks  
 newcomer *see* incomer  
 Neustroeva, I. M. 71-4, 77-8, 81, 83  
 Nganasan 19, 50-1, 54n, 139, 237  
 Nikiforov, A. G. 110n, 190  
 North, D. C. 30, 88  
 Novikova, N. I. 28  
 Number Three Reindeer Brigade of Uurung Khaia 107, 125, 139, 156-7, 162, 166, 205, 208-9, 211-2, 216, 226-8  
 Number Five Reindeer Brigade of Uurung Khaia 107, 160-1, 205, 212, 226  
 Number Six Reindeer Brigade of Uurung Khaia 105, 108, 114, 146, 205, 212, 226  
 Nuttall, M. 40, 134-5  
  
*obshchina see* rural economic institutions  
 O'Hanlon, M. 41  
 Osherenko, G. 28, 131, 249  
 Ostrom, E. 40  
 outsider *see* incomer  
  
 Paine, R. 12n, 40, 42, 188, 193-4, 199, 311  
 Pakhomov, E. A. 3, 5, 131  
 Pålsson, G. 41, 133, 150  
*panty* (velvet reindeer antlers) 108n, 190, 217  
 Party *see* Communist Party  
*pastukh see* reindeer herder, herding, *kollektiv*  
 pasture 34, 39-40, 72, 100-1, 107, 128, 130, 142-3, 163, 192-7, 201, 203, 215-6, 221, 226, 237, 257  
 Pechenkin, M. D. 58, 78  
 Pelto, P. J. 166  
 pension/pensioners 95, 98, 102, 104, 122, 174, 204, 212, 273  
 Perrotta, L. 31  
 Pickles, J. 29-30  
 Pika, A. A. 22, 26, 48, 64, 95, 249, 304, 307-8  
 Piliashov, A. N. 90, 280  
 Pimenov, V. V. 232  
 Pine, F. 30, 32, 151  
 Poelzer, G. 28, 44, 89-90  
 Poiseev, I. I. 48, 64, 150  
 Polanyi, K. 37, 185  
 Popov, A. A. 19-21, 54, 59-61, 71, 78, 143, 152-3, 156, 160, 182, 188, 197-9, 206-7, 222, 225, 228, 231-6, 238, 255, 280, 302  
 Popov, B. N. 155, 158, 160  
 Popova, A. 111, 194  
 prestige 92, 144, 209, 214, 220, 224, 306, 309-10  
 privatisation *see* rural economic institutions  
 productivity 78  
 Prokhorov, B. B. 22, 95, 304  
 property/property relations 2, 24-7, 30-3, 38, 40-1, 43, 46-7, 51, 58, 68-70, 74, 87-8, 90, 94, 112, 129, 140, 145-7, 152, 161, 181, 184, 187, 220, 229-30, 274n, 290, 303-4, 306-7  
  
 Rabushka, A. 1  
 Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 151  
*razborka* 292-5, 308  
 reciprocity 6, 34-5, 42, 58, 60-1, 64, 161-86, 252-3, 271, 277, 297, 302-3, 305, 308-11; and identity 245-67; and land 164, 171, 176; and state institutions 161, 180-1; and wild reindeer 115, 142, 163-5; tea drinking 183-4; *see also* barter, 'taking'  
 reindeer 8, 36, 51, 69, 82, 193, 200; breeds 192-4; behaviour 193, 195; domestic 54n, 80, 189-92; earmark 79-80, 199-201, 222; im-

- porting Khargin to Anabar 192;  
 pastures 34, 39-40, 54, 72, 192-7,  
 201, 203, 226; private 79, 199,  
 220-30; state 77, 216-20; trans-  
 mission of 223-30; wild 9, 33, 48,  
 52, 54n, 81, 106-7, 115, 119, 139-  
 40, 142, 163-5, 193, 212, 218,  
 221, 226, 229, 237, 253-4, 260,  
 280, 311; and inheritance 221-3;  
 and reciprocity 216-30; *see also*  
 herding
- reindeer herders 11-2, 25, 28, 33, 38-  
 40, 42-3, 59, 69, 76-84, 87, 96-  
 102, 105-10, 126, 152, 162-73,  
 175, 192, 218, 225, 259
- respect/reputation 210, 213-5, 223-6,  
 229-30, 272, 274, 277, 279-84,  
 290, 293-4
- Riches, D. 289
- Robarcheck, C. 298
- Robbek, V. A. 23, 28, 307
- rodina* 90, 125-48, 176, 305 *see also*  
 land use, kinship
- Romanucci-Ross, L. 152, 277, 308,  
 310
- rural economic institutions 23-4, 28-  
 32, 40, 76-7, 91, 128, 187-92; *ar-*  
*tel* 55, 70-1, 128, 141; collective  
 farms (*kolkhoz*) 71-2, 77, 87, 90,  
 98, 102, 128, 154; consolidation  
 (*sovkhozisatsiia*) 76-8; family en-  
 terprise (*semeinoe khoziaistvo*)  
 93, 95, 116-20, 123; privatisation  
 88-9, 136; *rodovaia obshchina*  
 22-3, 28, 63, 89-90, 93-5, 189-91,  
 205, 212, 226, 261, 304; subsidi-  
 ary enterprise (*dochernoe pred-*  
*priatie*) Erel 93, 105-10, 114,  
 121, 146, 203, 205, 216, 218,  
 225-6; small-scale enterprise  
 (*maloe predpriatie*) Elden 93,  
 120-2, 134-5, 146, 184, 229;  
*tovarishchestvo* 70-2; *see also* bri-  
 gade, brigadier, fishing, hunting,  
 reindeer herding, *sovkhoz*, timber  
 collection
- Russians 5, 19, 37, 49-52, 54, 57-62,  
 66, 207, 231, 235, 237, 239, 249,  
 261-2, 266-7, 297-8
- Saami 27, 194, 199n
- Saaskylaakh 8-11, 71-4, 76, 77n, 79,  
 81, 83-4, 234, 236, 245, 255, 257,  
 259, 270
- Safronov, F. G. 48, 50, 52, 56-8, 60,  
 64, 66, 70-1
- Sahlins, M. 42, 306
- Sakha, people 21-5, 47-9, 51-3, 55-7,  
 61-2, 65-7, 71-2, 74-80, 261-7,  
 308; Reindeer Sakha 53, 65-9,  
 210, 218, 238
- Sakha, Republic of 3-6, 47-8, 189-91,  
 204, 232-6, 240-5, 251, 254, 256,  
 262-7, 276, 285, 304-5, 308
- Saltman, M. 130
- Salzman, P. C. 36
- Sampson, S. 29
- Schlee, G. 27, 267, 307
- Schwandener-Sievers, S. 297
- Schwartz, G. 30, 78
- Schweitzer, P. P. 36, 307, 310
- Schweitzer, T. 211
- Scott, J. C. 151, 185, 277, 306
- Seabright, P. 34, 171
- sedentarisation 13, 23, 36, 75, 84
- sharing, *nimat*, *tüngehe* 162, 171-83,  
 185-6, 218-20, 254, 302, 309,  
 311-2
- Shcheikin, I. I. 22, 151
- Shirokogoroff, S. M. 19, 58, 60, 153,  
 156, 160, 193, 223-4, 235
- Shternberg, L. I. 19, 153, 155, 159
- Sillanpää, L. 236
- Sirina, A. 26-8, 89-90, 110-2, 265
- Sleptsov, P. A. 112, 307
- Slezkine, Y. 13, 37, 65, 71, 138, 232,  
 307
- small-numbered peoples 5, 44, 175-6,  
 231, 233, 235-7, 241-5; Associa-  
 tion of the Indigenous People of  
 the North of the Republic of  
 Sakha (AKMNS) 241-5; *see also*



- Chukchi, Dolgan, Evenki, Eveny, Enets, Khanty, Nentsy, Yukagir  
 Smith, A. 29-30, 35, 76  
 Smith, E. A. 39, 41  
 Sneath, D. 34, 42, 151, 155, 171, 186  
 Snow, D. R. 41, 144, 150  
 snowmobiles 13, 26, 40, 77, 85, 98, 100-2, 115, 118, 143, 164, 175, 181, 197-8, 221-2, 226-7, 248, 252, 281, 283, 301  
 social networks 24, 27-30, 33-5, 38, 42, 60, 84, 89-90, 111, 149-86, 188, 226, 258, 274, 282-4, 297  
 Sokol'nikova, K. N. 143, 190n, 206, 239  
 Sorabji, C. 129, 297-8  
 Sotnikova, T. I. 111-2  
*sovkhos* (state farm) 21, 23n, 24, 31, 77-82, 85, 87-91, 97-8, 111-2, 128, 131-2, 187, 189, 191n, 195, 199, 201-3, 206-7, 210, 216, 231, 243, 252, 255, 257, 259-60, 303-4; Anabarskii 77, 80; Severnyi 80, 97, 101; structure 37, 201-4; as total social institution 24, 27, 83-4; *see also* rural economic institutions  
*sovkhoism* 88, 98, 123  
 Speck, F. G. 144-5, 150n  
 Speranskii, A. 297  
 Spiess, A. E. 53n  
 Spiridonov, V. 5, 71, 237, 239  
*sredniak* 65  
 Srinivasan, A. 297  
 Ssorin-Chaikov, N. 25, 37, 61, 79, 156, 171, 204, 235, 301  
 Stammner, F. 8n, 25-6, 28, 34, 39, 80, 96, 191, 201, 205, 210, 217, 220, 303, 306, 312  
 Stark, D. 24, 30, 88-9, 94, 122  
 Stephan, J. 56, 65  
 Stuart, R. C. 84-5, 128n  
 Suslov, M. 66, 69, 232, 238, 263  
 Swidler, A. 131  
 Syndassko 225-6, 234, 240, 245-9, 251-4, 263  
 Syrovatskii, D. I. 14, 23, 82, 94, 111, 189, 194-5, 204, 209n, 243n, 304  
 Szelényi, I. 31, 303  
 Taimyr 9, 25, 29, 48, 65, 69, 93, 98, 106, 126, 130, 136, 139, 151, 207, 232, 245, 249n, 307  
 Takakura, H. 25, 128n  
 'taking' 59, 61, 142  
 Taylor, L. 186  
 tentworker *see chumrabortnitsa*  
 Terletskii, P. 54, 60-1, 66-9, 85, 232, 238, 267  
 territory/territorial formation 12-3, 25-6, 40-1, 43, 53n, 54-5, 58, 92, 96, 99, 107, 115-6, 121-2, 125-6, 139, 144-6, 206, 216, 232, 234-6, 245n, 251, 253, 267, 290, 304-5, 307, 310 *see also* land use  
 Thompson, E. 161  
 Tichotsky, J. 2, 4, 47, 64, 75, 189-90  
 Tishkov, V. 232, 233n, 235  
 Tokarev, P. 74-5  
 Tomsen, S. 285  
*tongus* (*tongustar*) 263, 270 *see also* Dolgan, Evenki, Eveny, Sakha, Reindeer Sakha  
*tovarishchestvo* *see* rural economic institutions  
 Tiistaakh 15, 93, 116-9, 125, 134-6, 149, 228-9, 297  
 timber collecting 15, 99, 107, 167, 229  
 Topolinoe, Topolinskii state farm 73n, 262  
 Torsello, D. 30, 32  
 trade 19, 31, 37, 45, 48n, 50-8, 61, 73, 116, 126, 128, 138, 144, 158, 163, 165, 168-9, 174n, 185, 217, 220, 251, 262, 276, 279 *see also* barter, trapping  
 tradition *see* culture  
 transition/transformation 1-3, 28, 30-1, 33, 35-6, 38, 42-3, 47, 70, 89-97, 111, 122-3, 129, 138, 143, 153, 185-6, 302-3, 306

- trapping/traps 9, 51-7, 65, 67, 76, 98, 102, 105, 107, 113, 115, 119, 130, 134, 140, 144-7, 166, 174, 229, 271, 290, 305
- Tugolukov, V. A. 21-2
- Tuisku, T. 27, 70n, 71, 98, 204
- tundra (*tuundra*) 4, 8-11, 36, 41, 48n, 49, 53, 56n, 57, 75-6, 78, 83, 88-9, 125-35, 149, 161-7, 172, 175-6  
*see also* landscape
- tundroviki 13, 84-5, 93-5, 97, 103, 113-4, 120, 132-3, 137, 142-3, 161-3, 165, 170, 173, 175-6, 181, 186, 205, 207, 209, 213-4, 221, 234, 241-4, 248-9, 252-4, 272n, 304, 306, 309
- Tungus *see* Evenki
- Tuprin, Onufri *see* Balyksyt
- Tuprin, Spiridon *see* Moigo
- Turner, V. 271
- Turza, J. 17, 26, 77, 249, 251
- Turza, O. 17, 26, 77, 249, 251
- Ubriatova, E. I. 20, 27, 126, 231, 245-6, 251
- Uurung Khaia 9-13, 73, 76-8, 82-3, 202, 207, 221, 223-4, 231, 233-4, 239, 245, 252-3, 259 *see also* Dolgan
- Vakhtin, N. 26, 206, 231, 234, 307
- Van Atta, D. 87
- Vasil'ev, I. T. 85
- Vasilevich, G. M. 19n, 21, 39, 50, 53-4, 56, 58, 60, 152, 194, 222n, 280
- Ventsel, A. 8n, 25, 28, 34, 90, 96, 182, 214, 222-3, 234, 272n, 306
- Verdery, K. 31-3, 87, 90, 96, 130, 136, 171
- Vinokurov, D. I. *see* Kupaa
- Vinokurova, U. 28, 150, 249, 302
- violence 22, 33, 36, 178, 284-300
- Vitebsky, P. 5, 25, 29, 79, 108n, 128n, 170, 203-6, 304
- Vladimirova, V. 24, 28, 79, 88, 95, 98, 204, 303
- Watts, J. 126-7
- Wegren, S. 29, 31, 87
- Whyte, W. 276
- Williams, E. 39, 70
- Wolfe, S. 25, 79, 204
- Woodburn, J. 42, 61, 140, 182, 309
- Yakut Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) 64, 75 *see also* Republic of Sakha
- Yakuts *see* Sakha
- Yakuty-dolgany 263
- Yamal 8, 26n, 33, 80, 95, 191, 210, 220, 242
- Yeltsin, B. O. 87, 89
- Yukagir 5, 49-52
- Zaslavski, V. 75
- zek 274-5, 293-4
- zemleustroistvo 128
- Ziker, J. P. 25, 27, 29, 40-1, 93, 98, 126, 128-30, 133, 136, 139, 145, 150-1, 181, 183, 208, 249n, 285, 306
- Zolotareva, I. M. 20, 236



*"... anthropology needs a broader vision. It needs to shake off its strong association with the primitive and the exotic and become genuinely global in its comparisons. From this perspective, more sustained attention to Eurasia and a renewed focus on its underlying unity might launch the transformation of our parochial scholarly traditions into a mature cosmopolitan science."*

– Chris Hann, in his Preface to this series

## **Reindeer, *Rodina* and Reciprocity Kinship and Property Relations in a Siberian Village**

Kin-based social networks are the main focus of this study of a hunter–herder community in the northwest of the Republic of Sakha, Russian Federation. Aimar Ventsel gives a clear account of the formal organisational changes which have taken place since the demise of socialism and shows how informal relations help local people to cope with increased insecurity, both inside and outside formal structures. Documenting the strategies used to extend kinship, the author draws attention to their relevance for understanding the new system of property relations. While certain features are the products of a specific history and the local environment, the work will appeal to all scholars of Siberia and of postsocialist societies. It also contributes to the wider field of herder-hunter studies by showing how this combination of roles could persist throughout the Soviet era down to the present day.

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