People won’t dance if they have nothing to eat: do economic transformation and centrally planned cultural revival fit together?

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1. Introduction: the story of obshchina

Before starting my field work I met in Moscow a young man who was engaged in the movement of Siberian indigenous minorities. Discussing the state of affairs of native policy, I expressed my disappointment in some native leaders regard organizing folklore singing and dance groups as ‘revitalization of indigenous culture’ and the solution for the problems of natives. And then my companion said: ‘People won’t dance if they have nothing to eat!’ This paper focuses on the reorganisation of Siberian native economy and to what extent it should be understood as ‘returning back to the roots’.

The year 1991 was important for the indigenous people of the Russian Siberia. That year, several indigenous organisations and associations gathered in the capital Moscow and established the Russian Association of the People of the North and Far East (RAIPON), and the same year the Russian president Boris Yeltsin passed a decree where he ‘ended the second serfdom’ (Van Atta 1993). Yeltsin in his various decrees and laws gave individual state or
collective farm (*sovkhоз* or *kolkhoz*) workers the possibility to leave the enterprise, establish their own farm and get a share (so-called pai) of the enterprise property and land to start his or her own private enterprise (Wegren 1998).

Siberian indigenous minorities had had already in the Tsarist state a special status (so-called *inoorody* or strangers, not full citizens) which continued by the Soviet state (Forsyth 1992, Mote 1998, Slezkine 1994). While before the revolution, the Siberian indigenous peoples were treated as aliens and had no access to many state offices and were freed from army service, then in the Soviet Russia they became an ‘endangered species’ who were too ‘backwards’ in their development to bridge the gap between their own hunter-gatherer-nomad and the ‘developed’ socialist society. As a rule, such ‘backward’ groups were numerically small. Already the 1926 census in the Soviet Russia determined group of ‘nations’ which were smaller than 50,000 and received therefore status of Indigenous Less Numerous People (*korennye malochislennye narody*). In 1930, their number fixed on 30 and most such groups lived in Siberia (Hirsch 1997). The list of the Less Numerous People grew in time and by 2000 it contained 45 ethnic groups. Those groups, living in Siberia, were in most cases outnumbered by the immigrant population and had become a minority in their historical territory. Moreover, they were economically and socially marginalized. The Communist Party stated already at the beginning of the Soviet era that small Siberian ‘nations’ should be treated with care and that they are not ready to participate fully in the life of the socialist state (KPSS 1953). Therefore, members of such small indigenous groups were seen as ‘incapable’ of working in the heavy industry or occupying other ‘modern’ professions. Up to date, a large part of the Siberian natives (30-70%, depending on the region) are living in remote settlements and engaged with so called ‘traditional branches of economy’ (*tradtsionnye ottrasli ekonomi*) i.e. hunting, fishing, sea mammal hunting and reindeer herding. These activities belonged (and still belong) officially to ‘agriculture’ (*sel’skokhoziaistvo*) and are subordinated in most regions to the local Ministry of Agriculture. Hunting, reindeer herding
and fishing were collectivised all over Siberia in the 1930s and 1940s. Collective enterprises were not only economic actors but, similar to factories, so-called ‘total social institutions’ (Clarke 1992, Humphrey 1995). State and collective farms had their own shops, clubs, schools, and kindergartens, their workers were entitled to free medical care and in many cases enterprises supplied settlements with transport, supported students who went to study in another city with grants, sent their workers to the holiday at the Black Sea. Besides that, members of the Less Numerous Peoples were entitled to many privileges, such as becoming a student without having to compete with other, the right to own rifles and vehicles without licenses. Of course, agricultural enterprises were not able to support all this of their own income but were, \textit{en gros}, subsidised from the profit of industries (Humphrey 1998).

In the collectivised agriculture, the nature of hunting and reindeer herding changed. Hunters and herders became workers of the brigades and were paid for fulfilling the plan. At the same time, this policy changed the family model. In most regions in Siberia, hunting and reindeer brigades contained mostly men whose wives, with few exceptions, stayed in the village to take care of the children and worked in the enterprise shops or local administration. In many regions in Siberia, after the 1960s hunting and reindeer herding became modernized. In the case of reindeer herding, ‘mechanization’ meant that workers were transported in the tundra by helicopters, their supplies were brought to camp by tractors or all terrain vehicles, brigades were equipped with modern means of communication (portable radio station). In the 1980s took place the ‘snowmobile revolution’, snowmobiles came in use and changed the pattern of migration and moving around (Liely 1979, Pelto 1987).

With the perestroika, the indigenous rights movement, supported by sympathetic Russian anthropologists and intellectuals, emerged. After the economic collapse and dismantling of state-owned agricultural structures and withdrawal of subsidies, the situation in Siberian indigenous villages worsened. State and collective farms were unable and unwilling to fulfil
the social functions they carried in the Soviet time, and people were stranded in remote
cSettlements without income, transport, electricity, decent education or functioning social and
medical care. The indigenous movement (and their supporters) raised the issue of
‘revisalising’ the indigenous cultures and improving the living standards of native minorities.
This approach was called ‘neotraditionalism’ (Pika and Prokhorov 1994) and involved a
slightly schizophrenic combination of the ‘back to the roots’ ideology with a return to the
Soviet time state subsidies. Voices, demanding Siberian native minorities rights on their land
and legal space for their activities to support their life, grew in volume. In 1992, the
government of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) passed a law on ‘Clan based nomadic
communities’ (O rodovykh kochevykh obshchinas) (O-kochevoi... 1992). This law permits
Siberian natives and ‘other persons who are engaged with traditional branches of economy’ to
establish new institutions, clan based communities, which have, according to the law, both
cultural and economic functions: to revitalise and maintain ‘traditional cultures’ and to trade,
as every other enterprise, their produce. In 2000, the Russian federal government passed the
law on obshchina on the federal level and legalized this institution in the whole Russia.

From the very beginning, obshchina was greeted among many anthropologists and activists of
the indigenous movements with great euphoria. Especially at the beginning in the 1990s when
the obshchina movement grew rapidly and the number of established enterprises increased in
fast tempo, obshchina was seen as a solution to all the problems the Less Numerous Peoples
had (Belianskaia 1995). These new enterprises were seen by Russian and Western researchers
not only as a way out of the post-Soviet economic crisis but as a tool to revitalize the
‘traditional’ culture and indigenous identity. As a last hope for natives, obshchina was seen as
an institution which had, besides the economic function, self-government and engaged in
cultural activities (Fondahl, Lazebnik, and Poelzer 2000, Osherenko 2001, Oshrenko 1995,
Popova 2001). New transformation processes were often linked to the spirituality of Siberian
natives and their special tie to the land and animal; it was believed that Siberian natives had maintained their own ecological culture (even within the state farm) which was not yet ‘spoiled’ by the urban and industrial culture (Novikova 2000, Sokolova 1995, Vitebsky 2000). On the other hand, there have been critical analyses on obshina movement, too. Sirina analysed obshchina in Sakha, in the region where the movement started, and compared the status of obshina in various regions. While in Sakha, obshchina was by law a social institution (emphasis on ‘clan based’ and ‘traditional’) then in other regions it is often a territorial-economic institution, whereas by the federal law obshchina should be a non-commercial organisation (Sirina 1999, Sirina 2000). Fondahl et. al show differences between federal and local obshchina law; land as a basis of obshchina existence is mentioned in the Law on Obshchinas of the Republic of Sakha but not in the federal law, which emphasized the main principle of ‘obshchina’ as aboriginality and life style (Fondahl et al. 2001: 552-553). Sirina, on her side, criticised the government of Sakha for attempts to link the obshchina to the nation-building process and de-ethnisation of the concept, i.e. passing laws which make it possible for also non-Less Numerous Peoples to establish obshchinas (1999). Gray shows that obshina, although praised in the corridors of power, is not necessarily so successful and popular on the ‘grass roots’ level. Ziker and Ssorin-Chaikov demonstrated in their works that the establishment of obshchina and other private enterprises was connected with the general political and economic situation and in some cases the costs of the legal action are too high (transport to centre, paper work, etc.) and people prefer not to register themselves (Gray 2001, Ssorin-Chaikov 1998, Ziker 2002). Gray and Ziker argue that obshchina, when it was established, remained sometimes only on paper, and even in the case of active enterprises people not always fully understand the function and status of the obshchina. There were also critical voices about obshchina, especially among local economists who argued that this institution as a form of enterprise was unable to survive and maintain reindeer herding as an economic branch. According to these authors, reindeer herding and preservation of the
indigenous life style was possible only in big enterprises, like sovkhoz (Iadrikhinskii 1998, Syrovatskii 2002). What is common for all these works is that obshchina is seen as the only way for aboriginal reorganisation and the alternative to sovkhoz.

2. The Region

I conducted my field work in the Anabarski district of the Republic of Sakha. This district is the most north-western district of the republic, located by the coast of Arctic Ocean and shares a border with the neighbouring Krasnoiarski Krai. The district’s territory is ca. 50,000 square kilometres, i.e. it is a little larger than my native Estonia, and the population is ca. 4000 people. With the exception of the southern fringe of district, the whole territory is covered with plain tundra on both sides of the Anabar river. The Anabarski district contains three villages: the district centre Saaskylaakh, Uurung Khaia, my field site for eight months in 2000 and 2001, and Ebeleekh, a diamond mining village. One third of the district’s population are Russians who live either in Ebeleekh and are engaged in diamond industry or in Saaskylaakh and work at the airport. The rest was local population and a few immigrant Sakhas. Saaskylaakh was populated mainly by the Evenki and Even, Uurung Khaia by the Dolgan. The local population spoke the northern dialect of Sakha. Local administration was dominated by natives, even the head of the district was a native Even. Both villages were bases for state farms. Directly professional hunters and reindeer herders who ‘worked’ out of tundra, were ca. 20% of districts population but every native hunted for wild reindeer and Arctic fox and fished seasonally in tundra.
3. Dismantling the sovkhoz and new forms of property in Anabar

In this section I want to give a short history of the changes in the ‘agricultural landscape’ in the Anabarski district. There the breakdown of the old Soviet agricultural structure took place later than in other parts of Russia or even Sakha. The Republic of Sakha passed the law on peasant farms or households (khrestianskoe khoziaistvo) already in 1991 (O-krest’ianskom... 1991) and gave kolkhoz and sovkhoz workers a chance to break from the enterprise, get their share, land plot and start their own farming enterprise. An important aspect of the law was that it defined the peasant farm as an economic unit which has rights to sell its products and hire labour (Article 5). According to information of my acquaintances, in agricultural districts, populated by ethnic Sakha, the establishing private households was fast and in most central districts sovkhozes and kolkhozes vanished shortly after the law on peasant farms were passed (cf. Bychkova Jordan, Jordan-Bychkov, and Holz 1998).

3.1. Local context

In the Anabarski district, as in most other reindeer and hunting state and collective enterprises, the former two sovkhozes were turned into MUPs, i.e. municipal unitarian enterprise (munitsipal’noe unitarnoe khoziaistvo) and turned over to district ownership. This way, the state freed itself of the burden of agricultural subsidies. Fortunately, the Anabarski district is among the so called ‘diamond provinces’ i.e. has some diamond mines on its territory and received a percentage of their income, and could afford to support its MUPs. The state farm of Saaskylaakh, ‘Arktika’, maintained its name whereas the state farm ‘Severnyi’ of the village of Uurung Khaia was named to ‘Il’ia Spiridonov MUP’ (MUP imeni Il’ia
Spiridonova⁶). These changes took place in 1996-1997⁷. New enterprises were established already in 1996. Few reindeer brigades went over to the khozraschet status, i.e. became independent units within the state farm with their own budget and bank account, and the legal right to decide how to use the profit, a process which in other district started already at the end of 1980s (Vitebsky 1989). At least one of such brigades changed in 1998 its status and was re-registered as the subsidiary enterprise of MUP Il’ia Spiridonova ‘Erel’ (dochernoe predpriiatie ‘Erel’). Erel belonged to the structure of MUP but was allowed to market their produce independently, while they received certain fuel, ammunition and other supplies from MUP. The enterprise was located at the Arctic Ocean, on the northern part of the district, and engaged mainly in reindeer herding and to limited extent also hunting on wild reindeer and trapping the Arctic fox.

In 1996, another brigade broke off the MUP Arktika and established the peasant farm ‘Buolkalaakh’ in the southern part of the district. This enterprise kept reindeer and Sakha horses and was engaged also with hunting wild reindeer and Arctic fox. In 1998, the enterprise was re-registered as a rodovaia obshchina ‘Uotaakh Khaia’, i.e. seven years after the law on obshchina was passed. Uottaakh Khaia was the first obshchina in the district and received their share (pai) and financial state support help and some equipment, for example trucks. The sate help motivated other brigades to establish obshchinas. Thus, in 1998, another obshchina ‘Udza’ was established, also in the southern part of the district. The end of the 1990s was a period when many other new forms of enterprises were established. When I conducted my fieldwork in the Anabarski district, there were already six registered obshchinas. During that time, many small scale enterprises (maloe predpriiate) were established in the district. Most small scale enterprises were engaged with production (sausage factory) or commerce (importing different goods and exporting fish and/or reindeer meat) but two of them were hunting and fishing enterprises. Small scale enterprises were
independent of the MUP and, after obtaining necessary licenses, were free to market their produce.

One new actor on the ‘agricultural landscape’ in the district was the ‘family enterprise’ (semeinoe khoziaistvo). There were three of these in the district and all of them were based on extended family, i.e. there worked the father (who was the director of the enterprise) and his several sons with their families. Male siblings were in payrolls registered as hunters and women were ‘tentworkers’. Family enterprises used to be registered as obshchinas but re-registered themselves a few years ago. When I asked why they did it, people answered that because of the new policy in the district. Namely, the head of the district administration, who supported establishment of new private enterprises, started in 2000 a policy focused on family-based enterprises. Family enterprises had no clearly defined legal status neither on republican nor federal level which did not hinder them in selling their produce nor the head of the administration in supporting these new institutions financially.

3.2. General Context

Many local people that I discussed the issue of obshchina with, complained that state officials are extremely hostile to the of new independent agricultural enterprises and especially the privatisation of reindeer. Indeed, domestic reindeer breeding is a less privatised sphere in the Sakha agriculture, compared to other fields like cattle and horse breeding (Tichotsky 2000: 216). The number of reindeer in the Republic of Sakha decreased within 10 years almost two times, from 361,600 in 1991 to 165,070 in 2000 (Klokov 2001). Only last year (2002), the decline stopped and the situation stabilized at 136,000 heads. The opinion of some officials was that the trend ended because in few last years no reindeer herd was handed over to obshinas.
This is difficult to explain, but all state reindeer specialists I met felt negatively about the idea of private reindeer herding. It is a wide-spread opinion in the ‘corridors of power’ that only large scale reindeer herding has a chance of surviving. The official point of view to new forms of property is slightly schizophrenic. On the one hand, state agricultural officials are convinced that large state enterprises should be maintained and made profitable. On the other hand, the same officials want to help natives in ‘maintaining their lifestyle and traditional economy’ not in the sense of efficient economy but as a cultural revitalization. My impression is that people who are working in the state reindeer herding planning and controlling are sincerely sympathetic with the natives (many of these officials are from indigenous minorities themselves) and the stereotype about the egoistic and ignorant Soviet nomenklatura official who does not care about the fate of his subordinates is not true – at least in the Republic of Sakha. The difference of their views from the views of most Western and Russian anthropologists and some (but not all) native activists is in that the state officials see the sovkhoz reindeer herding and hunting as a ‘traditional economic activity’. One young reindeer specialist told me once that ‘everything which is connected to reindeer herding is considered traditional here’. Because of the lobby of such officials (and not because of the pressure of native activists) the Republic of Sakha introduced in 2000 a so called ‘reindeer herder’s wage’ which was nearly doubled in 2003. The same state reindeer herding specialist pushed through the program of subsidizing the trade with products of wild reindeer in order to prevent people slaughtering domestic reindeer.

In 1997, the Republic of Sakha passed the Law On Reindeer Herding (Ob-Olenevodstve 1997). This law said that all reindeer in the republic are ‘national treasure’ (natsional’noe dostoinstvo) and the slaughtering of reindeer is under state control. While the products of reindeer remain in property of the animal’s owner, the state has the right to fix prices on these and the monopoly to buy the products. For the last 5-6 years, there has been given no
permission to slaughter reindeer, moving thus domestic reindeer herding out of the economic sphere.

### 3.3 Marketing the produce

The moratorium on the slaughtering of domestic reindeer meant that only sources of income were the meat of wild reindeer and fish. Therefore the number of new enterprises engaged with hunting was bigger than the number of reindeer herding enterprises. Hunting is a risky business. While reindeer enterprises received stable income in the form of subsidies and ‘reindeer herder wage’, hunters received less help from the state. On the other hand, when the migration of reindeer was numerous and the fishing season was successful, the hunters earned many times more money than reindeer herders.

All enterprises received from the Ministry of Agriculture, via local administration, a ‘goszakaz’ (state order). This was similar to the Soviet centrally distributed production plan, and it was called a plan on the popular level. In theory, the goszakaz meant that the state ordered from the enterprises a certain amount of meat and fish and bought it, or at least guaranteed the marketing of that amount of produce. In reality, the state supplied only the order, the enterprises had to find a buyer for their produce on their own and bring the paper, which proved the transaction, to the administration. When an enterprise managed to sell during the season the amount of meat and fish ‘ordered’ by the state, the plan was considered as fulfilled which entitled the enterprise for subsidies.

To sell their meat, there were several possibilities.

On the basis of former agro-industrial complex (agro-promyshlenny complex – APK), the state established two state concerns – ‘Taba’ (Reindeer) and ‘Sakhabult’ (Sakha Hunt) – that have the official monopoly on trade with meat, hides, young velvet antlers etc. and the
obligation to help hunters and reindeer herders. Both enterprises are less engaged with support
for hunting, fishing and reindeer herding than the trade itself. At least my informants claimed
that neither enterprise makes an exceptionally good trade partner compared to any other.
Despite of *de jure* monopoly, Taba and Sakhabult are *de facto* only two players among others
in the market for fish, meat and hides. In trading velvet antlers, Sakhabult maintained near-
monopoly, while in all other products the state enterprises compete with numerous private
entrepreneurs and private or state enterprises.
One of the most popular business partners is the diamond company Alrosa. Alrosa pays good
money and supplies its partners for free (thanks to its social programs) with groceries, fuel
and equipment. For some hunters, Alrosa built underground ice chambers (*bul-uus*) or hunting
cabins. The problem was that Alrosa needed meat in big quantities.
Bedside big enterprises, there were several private entrepreneurs who bought, or rather
bartered, meat and fish for cash, groceries, TV sets, snowmobiles and spare parts, clothes,
hunting and fishing equipment, etc.
Reindeer herders who also hunted for extra income had a centrally organised network of
partnership or *shefstvo*. *Shefy* were some village based enterprises, often construction or
mechanic brigades. Partnership was established by the administration and was voluntary.
Reindeer herders supplied *shefy* with meat and hides and as a ‘countergift’ received
construction material, timber, fuel, ‘who has what and can give away’.
To support new enterprises, the Ministry of Petty Entrepreneurship (*Ministerstvo Malogo
Pred’prinimatelstvo*) gives loans to the enterprises. One more important factor in the post-
socialist ‘agrarian’ transformation in the Republic of Sakha is the social programs of the
diamond concern Alrosa. Alrosa supports financially and logistically various enterprises in
the districts which belong to ‘diamond provinces’\(^\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\). These facts and processes is necessary
knowledge in order to understand the current situation and development in the ‘agriculture’ of
the Republic of Sakha.
4. Ethnography of transition

The head of the Anabarski district was a supporter of a private reindeer herding. Only, he had a very special idea how it should look like; according to his plans, the reindeer should remain in the ownership of the district and the management be transferred into private hands. In April 2001, he collected reindeer herders of Uurung Khaia in the office building of MUP and announced his decision to lease reindeer herds to new enterprises. Also, he encouraged brigades to split from the MUP and establish new independent enterprises. Already at this meeting, some hunting brigades announced their departure from the MUP and registered as rodovaia obshchinas; young reindeer herders of the fifth brigade, for their part, re-registered as a reindeer obshchina and announced their plan to lease a herd they had been taking care of up to that moment. When I talked to them afterwards, they were very excited and told me that ‘now we start to work for ourselves’. Because obshchinas are freed from several taxes in the first five years and the herders were supposed to receive some reindeer as their share (pai), the chances for the enterprise to increase the number of their reindeer in order to slaughter some animals were not bad.

Not all people were so enthusiastic. In this evening I visited my friends from the 3rd brigade of the MUP. They were frightened of the plans to ‘destroy sovkhoz’ and frustrated with current developments. When visiting my friends, I often met a hunter from a small scale enterprise Elden. When I asked him what he thinks about the plans of the head of the district, he replied that ‘it does not interest me, this is another organisation’.

When I visited a subsidiary enterprise Erel in the tundra, I noticed that reindeer herders and the director of the enterprise had absolutely contradictory views on the enterprise’s present situation and future. One reindeer herder told me once: ‘Our boss is bad (kuhakhan toion)."
When we established the enterprise we thought it will be better. But now, there is no difference between us and the sovkhoz brigades. The boss should do more good contracts, with Alrosa and village organisations.’ The director told me that he tries to make his deals with ‘Sakhabult’. They pay less than other enterprises but in cash and within two weeks. To make such a deal, he has to travel to the capital of Yakutsk, but then he has a chance to buy cheaper equipment as well. His plans were to focus more on hunting wild reindeer because there was hardly any chance to earn with domestic reindeer herding. He hoped that when the herd grows the enterprise will be able to sell the meat of their own animals.¹¹ According to his opinion, the herd should be privatised because in the current situation the reindeer herders do not look after animals carefully enough: ‘When they [reindeer] are own animals [i.e. owned by the herders themselves] then people work better.’

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

As mentioned already, some reindeer herders were sceptic about the privatisation of reindeer herds. When Erel split from the MUP and when obshchina was established during the meeting in the office of MUP, both times some reindeer herders left the enterprise. When I asked them why they did this, they all responded that they ‘do not want to quit with the sovkhoz’. One of these herders said to me that the former state enterprise still ‘gives you something for free’. Also, there were older men sceptic about the idea of how new private enterprises can survive without centrally organised and managed veterinarian and zootechnical services. Many of these men used to be Communist Party members before the collapse and they represented the belief that ‘In Communist times everything was better, there was law and order’ whereas new enterprises have no working moral and the private reindeer herding can only perish.
People from Elden had every right to ignore the attempts to privatise reindeer herding in the district. They had recently signed a good contract with Alrosa that not only offered good prices and was ready to transport the meat out of tundra by their own helicopters, but wanted to equip and finance a new hunting base. Elden was from the beginning oriented to large-scale production; they had even more hunters than when they had been a state farm brigade and could hunt on a larger territory.

Many other enterprises had been not so lucky. Another small scale enterprise, Tsökördeekh, had its underground ice chamber full of reindeer carcasses and the director tried unsuccessfully to find a buyer. It had to be somebody who had its own means of transport because the enterprise did not possess any trucks. Economically, it was not beneficial to hire a truck and bring only few carcasses out of the tundra while several dozens were left in the ice chamber. The enterprise had another brigade, a reindeer-herding one. Luckily, the wages of the herders were paid by the state but the enterprise still had to take care of supplies.

At the time the director of the family enterprise Tiisteekh, father of a big family, frequently visited their base with one of his sons and every time brought some reindeer carcasses with them, which they sold to local the canteen and music school kitchen. The old man combined his visits with checking the trap lines and brought some Arctic fox furs with him from every trip. His oldest son managed to hire a cheap truck and they brought two tons of meat out of the tundra. For this money and some credit from the district administration, the enterprise bought a used truck in order to become independent. Because many workers of the enterprise, especially the wives of sons, stayed in the village between the hunting seasons and earned money by doing various jobs, the enterprise was able to finance itself. In this sense, the enterprise was a network of activities which was based and regulated over the kinship ties within one extended family. There was a feeling of unity in the family and people often arranged or worked for the enterprise without expecting any pay. They saw it rather as helping the family and acting in its interests.
5. Conclusion

As shown in this paper, there are different views on what is ‘traditional’ and how the revival of indigenous cultures in Siberia should look like. The aim of my paper is not to show that the issue of the revitalization of Siberian indigenous cultures with the help of legislation and centrally introduced concepts has no relevance, but rather to argue that in some regions the ways of coping with the post-Socialist reality can be quite different. Since in the Anabarski district, as in many other parts of Siberia, the indigenous identity is not in danger and reindeer herding and hunting compete minimally with industry *obshchina* is viewed as one possibility among others to survive in the post-Socialist transformations.

The hypothetical ‘traditional culture and social organisation’ cannot be revived artificially by ignoring the reality. On the one hand, the concept of a clan-based community is too different from the traditional pre-collectivisation situation and the environment has changed during the last 50-60 years. Therefore, to be successful, the new *obshchina* must function differently (Fondahl 1998: 78, 79, 120). One the other hand, the social structure and networks of Siberian natives have been shaped by decades of Soviet policy and have been adapted to the reality of collectivised agriculture. Symbolic is the fact that when the kinship structure infiltrated into the brigade structure and management of reindeer herding and hunting, the new officially registered ‘clan based’ enterprises grew out of brigades of former state farms. Kinship structure did not discontinue to exist and through this network, the management of common resources, distribution of commodities and reciprocal help on the local level is still alive.

The *obshina* is not the universal and only solution to all existential troubles of Siberian natives. The fact that many natives want to maintain their affiliation with the *sovkhоз* at any cost is not uniquely characteristic of the Anabarski district (cf. the attitude in Yamal
Osherenko 2001: 729). This also illustrates the fact that there are other forms of entrepreneur­ship beside of obshchina and that in some situations it is more useful to be not an obshchina.

I argue that official categories are needed in the activities toward ‘outside’ partners. In trading meat and fish to various enterprises, the choice for a certain status is not related to whether the person is a native indigenous or not, but to the goal, structure and strategy of the enterprise. I discovered that the choice for legal status depended heavily on the state credit policy: certain enterprises can only receive certain kinds of loans. Thus, bigger hunting-oriented enterprises has less interest in being an obshchina than a reindeer enterprise: their land use pattern was different and the need for additional finances to buy equipment stronger. On the other hand, for an enterprise that was small enough to make use of local privileges, the status of ‘family household’ was optimal. In this situation, in the Anabarski district the obshchina was reduced to one possible form of economic institution which has lost its ideological status.

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### 7. Notes

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1 Here and further I use both forms – English and Russian – in the text without any difference in their meaning.

2 There are many ways to translate the term ,malochislennye narody’ into English. I use the form which Anderson uses in his monograph – Less Numerous People – because I believe it conveys the meaning of the Russian term better than other translation (Anderson 2000).

3 The fact that such ,incapability’ had social not cultural reasons, was overseen. In most cases, the schools in the remote indigenous villages had either lower standards than industrial town schools where the immigrants’ children studied, or lacked some teachers. Therefore, indigenous children could possible not compete with the immigrant children in passing exams to become a student in technical schools which prepared workers for heavy industry.
4 Some of my friends told me that the motivation to pass the law on peasant farms so quickly after the federal law was passed in the traditionally conservative Sakha was political. At the beginning of the 1990s, ethnic Sakha were struggling with Russians for power and they needed support from the districts where most ethnic Sakha lived these days.

5 In the Republic of Sakha, former reindeer sovkhozes still existed during my field work. They had changed their names and formally also status, but maintained the structure. Some of these enterprises went through many names. Thus, also, the former state farm ‘Tomponskii’ (one of two Sakha millionaire sovkhozes) that I visited in July 2001, was reregistered as an obshchina and turned then to the Agricultural Production Cooperative-Trading Post (sel’skokhoziaistvennaia proizvodstvennaia(faktoria) kooperativ SP(f)K) whereas the director, main officials and functionaries, structure and brigade plan remained unchanged. The enterprise went bankrupt and reindeer herders accused the director of stealing their wage. Ironically, in the 1980s this enterprise was visited by Hugh Beach who predicted that, with the right restructuring policy, this farm can become an independent flourishing reindeer breeding enterprise (Beach 1986).

6 Il’ia Spiridonov was an inhabitant of Uurung Khaia and the first Hero of Socialist Labour who received that title in reindeer herding in 1957.

7 Despite the changes of status and name, people in the district still speak about the former sovkhozes as ‘sovkhoz’, a tendency not unusual in Siberia (cf. Gray 2000, 2001).

8 To explain the policy of the head of the district administration, Egor Nikolaevich Androssov, is beyond the scope of this paper. In the middle of the 1990s, he strictly opposed the idea of obshchinas. When he saw that obshinas in Yamal are prospering and the number of reindeer is increasing, he, as a local inhabitant who wanted to raise the district’s ‘traditional branches of economy’ on the feet again, begun to support new ‘traditional’ institutions. During my field work period, he wanted to bring native families back to tundra and therefore started programs to support the family enterprises.

9 This was the topic of quite a few discussion during my field work period. Hunters told me that the state policy of supporting the hunting activity was designed for the taiga regions, where hunters often worked between the hunting seasons as workers in peasant farms or other enterprises and therefore had an additional income. ‘We here in the tundra have no other chance to survive but by hunting,’ one old man told me ‘The state should take more care of us!’

10 The reasons why Alrosa subsidises various enterprises are beyond the scope of this paper will be not treated here. Just to inform the reader, Alrosa has several political and economic interest on the local, republican and
federal level and also has the need to maintain and rise its international reputation. Also, I would not exclude humanistic views among the top of Alrosa management.

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

8. Maps