

**MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR  
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
WORKING PAPERS**



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

Working Paper No. 45

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CHAIKOV**

**MOTHERING  
TRADITION: GENDER  
AND GOVERNANCE  
AMONG SIBERIAN  
EVENKI**

Halle / Saale 2002  
ISSN 1615-4568

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## **Mothering Tradition: gender and governance among Siberian Evenki<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, I explore the re-invention of ideas about the traditional place of women in a Siberian society as they were culturally produced in the context of the Soviet/Russian indigenous governance. I examine two governance frameworks: the one of ‘political economy’ of the early-Soviet period, which constructed the position of indigenous women as a ‘surrogate working class’; and the other of the late-Soviet ‘theory of ethnos’ which biologised the gender roles and identities. I look at the cultural effects that these governance frameworks had on indigenous notions of gender, and, the other way around, I explore gender as a site of state governance over indigenous communities – and a site of culture change in both the meanings of being indigenous and meanings of the paternalistic state. In doing so, I discuss the limits of the ‘invention of tradition’ model, and argue for the usefulness of Slavoj Žižek’s notion of ‘surplus of signification’ in the understanding of cultural production of gender.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my research in Central Siberia, conducted in 1988-89 and 1993-95, and sponsored by the N. Miklukha-Maclay Institute of Ethnography of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Stanford University, the Wenner-Gren Foundation and the National Science Foundation (Anthropology and Arctic Social Science Divisions). Versions of this article were given in paper form in 2001 at the Social Anthropology Seminar at Cambridge University and the Annual Workshop of the Anthropology Group of the Study of Socialist and Post-Socialist Societies, University College, London. At these seminars, the paper benefited from discussion with Caroline Humphrey, Marilyn Strathern, Stephen Hugh-Jones, Victor Buchli and Ruth Mandel, and I am grateful to Chris Hann, Patty Gray and Pamela Ballinger for comments on the written version.

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## Introduction

Most of my conversations with indigenous intelligentsia and activists during my fieldwork in the Evenki District in 1988-89 were marked by our enthusiastic anticipation of a greater self-governance and cultural autonomy for Siberian indigenous groups that was inspired by perestroika and the resurgent ethnic nationalism across the Soviet Union. By the 1990s, however, the mood of many of the same people had changed. Evenki activists succeeded in forming a cultural revival movement Arun (from the Evenki ‘rebirth’) and making it politically visible in the Evenki Autonomous District, but in the mid-1990s their enthusiasm was considerably worn down as post-Soviet economic hardships came at too high a cost for any culturally authentic future than the reforms had promised. During my conversations with the activists in the Baikit office of the Arun in late October, 1994, I found myself in a paradoxical situation. While I was interested in what these activists thought of prospects for post-Soviet indigenous self-governance, they were interested in telling me about the relative wealth and stability of the Soviet era: ‘Forest life was hard under the Soviet power; yet it got much worse since then: no transport, no supplies. ... We need subsidies to maintain what is left [*ostatki*]. Before ... we had everything: helicopters were flying regularly; they even had a ‘flying shop’ [*lavka*], with goods like rubber boots and canned milk. The [collective farm] directors visited brigades regularly, ... they were interested to learn our problems; and as far as delays in salary payments were concerned – that was simply unheard of.’ In these nostalgic remarks, the Soviet development discourse was alive and well, and de-politicized, as James Ferguson put it in another context, by its own failures (1994: 256).

There was, nonetheless, a point at which our conversation turned to the issues of survival of ‘traditional culture’ and which did so on their, rather than my, initiative. One time, we were joined by a Sakha (Yakut) chair of the land-tenure committee for the Baikit region. Over tea with three Evenki women who worked in the Arun office, he mentioned another obstacle for ‘the preservation and development of cultures of Peoples of the North’ – the disintegration of the forest family. Complimenting his hosts upon the ‘very nice tea’, he said that it would be better perhaps if women who worked in the Arun ‘stayed in the tent and cooked as Evenki women should do’ rather than engaged in politics. In another conversation, an Evenki deputy secretary of the regional administration blamed the loss of traditional culture on Evenki women who ‘prefer to live in the village’ and ‘marry newcomers’. In order to ensure the very persistence of Evenki as a distinct ‘ethnos’, he told me, ‘one should adopt measures protecting the family’ and

start with ‘barring Evenki women from going out with Russians’. As he was saying this, he attracted my attention to yet another expression of this gender traditionalism – to an indigenous rights newsletter, of which copies were on the desks of both the regional administration and the revival movement office. In one issue of this newsletter, the Evenki writer Galina Ketupke summarized the current problems of ‘traditional reindeer economy’ with a question: ‘Where can the Evenki find a wife?’<sup>3</sup>

This paper charts the cultural production of such traditionalism. I read it as both historically contemporaneous and structurally analogous to modern nationalism which, according to the famous formulation of Ernest Gellner, ‘claims to defend folk culture while in fact it is forging a high culture’ and which ‘preaches and defends continuity, but owes everything to a decisive and unutterably profound break in human history’ (1983: 124-5). I shall argue that this traditionalism is a product of Soviet reforms in the North and that the ‘roots’ which it claims to recover are the cultural constructs of Soviet development discourse. The Russian indigenous rights law, adopted in April 1999, defines indigenous peoples of Russia as ‘small-numbered peoples ... that preserve traditional lifestyle ... – an historically formed mode of livelihood... based on historical experience of their ancestors, ... uses of natural environment, original [*samobytnoi*] social organization of livelihood, original culture, ... preserving their customs and beliefs’.<sup>4</sup> What do documents like this law understand by the ‘historical experience of ancestors’, and exactly how do some late-Soviet cultural forms become defined as continuous with this experience? In answering this, I look at what I call the ‘gender facts’ of (post) Soviet indigenous reforms and discourses. By ‘gender facts’ I mean both the statements about actual gender relationships as they were perceived by my interlocutors, as well as assumptions about a ‘normal’ state of affairs in social roles of men and women which underwrite these statements. There are two reasons for this choice of focus.

First, as the conversations that I had with the Baikit activists exemplify, gender constitutes one of the points where the Soviet development discourse spontaneously reveals a traditionalist one. The question ‘where can the Evenki find a wife’, for example, did not simply indicate the root of the current economic ‘problems’. It also transformed the subject of conversation from the ‘problems’ of northern economy to those of ethnic purity and cultural survival, and it did so in such a way that this change of topic went without saying – as a rupture that worked as discursive

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<sup>3</sup> *Slovo Narodov Severa*, N. 1 November 1933, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *O Garantiiakh Prav Korennykh Malochislennykh Narodov Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (April 1999) Article 1, Paragraphs 1 and 2.

continuity. I approach gender facts as a site of metaphysics of the real where ‘tradition’ becomes present in Soviet development discourse, and where complex processes of Soviet social construction lose their visibility in social facts that they produce. Taking my Baikit conversations as an entry point, this paper constructs a genealogy of this displacement as it is unfolded in the 20th-century history of this region’s indigenous identities and in Soviet ethnographic discourses on gender. It demonstrates that the widespread notion of the domestic ‘proper place’ for indigenous women reflects a relatively recent development both in ethnographic discourses and within the labor structure of Siberian collective farms. I argue that this notion signals a rapture in the earlier policies of ‘liberation of women of the North’ from such ‘traditional’ domestic and subordinate roles. I read this change as symptomatic of the significant modification of state policy frameworks in which indigenous societies, once the objects of radical ‘modernization’, instead now require protection as ‘endangered species’. In other words, I approach ideas about the traditional place of women in this Siberian case as culturally produced in the context of the Soviet/Russian indigenous governance. At the same time, I render gender itself as a site of state governance over indigenous communities – and a site of culture change in both the meanings of being indigenous and meanings of the paternalistic state. In this transformation, the gender facts articulate and naturalize assumptions about roles for men and women in a biologised vision of traditional culture as it presumably existed ‘before’ Soviet reforms, as it ‘still could be found’ at the margins or ruins of the Soviet institutions.

Secondly, my goal is to convey the complexity of the operation of ‘the factual’ or ‘the real’ in this process. The discourse on women’s proper place makes indigenous Siberia a case in point for the broader late- and post-socialist processes whereby ‘politics’ are ‘redefined as a distinctively masculine endeavor’ and new pressures for domesticity for women are created through cultural references to what men and women ‘really’ are (Gal and Kligman 2000a: 3; Verdery 1996: 61-81; Gal 1978; Gal and Kligman 2000b; Berry 1995; Funk and Mueller 1993; Pine 2002).

While supporting this observation, however, this Siberian case also complicates it, as the indigenous intelligentsia that gives voice to such a point of view is itself overwhelmingly female. In the mid-1990s, the Baikit office of the Arun was composed of two female teachers and a librarian, and it was subordinated to the central headquarters of the movement based in the town of Tura and headed by linguist Zinaida Nikolaevna Pikunova. The Arun board in Katonga where I did most of my fieldwork consisted of five women: a physician, a retired drug-store manager, two nurses, and a teacher. From Tura to Katonga, professional women were visible in

traditionalist politics. They seemed to participate in the discursive reinvention of indigenous tradition to almost the same extent that they did not pursue ‘traditional’ lifestyles in the forest, or purely domestic roles in families. In other words, paradoxically, throughout the 1990s, the ‘back to the tent’ and ‘back to the kitchen’ slogans were put up by indigenous women who formed revival movements and, under these slogans, marched into local politics, to regional administration, to NGOs, to Russian and Circumpolar indigenous ethnoscaples – in short, anywhere but the tent and the kitchen.<sup>5</sup>

This tendency does not remain uncontested. Nonetheless, it calls attention to the fact that domesticity as a symbol stands here for things other than itself. I argue in this paper that these notions of domesticity engender not only gender roles themselves but larger regimes of identity and governance. Furthermore, they apparently do so through an explicit disjuncture between identity and its designate – in this case, of ideas about female domesticity versus the social positions and practices of Evenki women that these ideas signify. Thus, I argue that these identity regimes are naturalized not in accordance with the ‘invention of tradition’ model, which assumes generation of practices that illustrate or follow an installed identity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), but precisely through this disjuncture which appears not so much to disrupt as to affirm the reality of women’s ‘proper place’ as it should ‘normally’ be by the very failure of being so in practice. In this chapter, then, I approach the ‘invented traditions’ of domesticity not as a result of ‘formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past’ and ‘by imposing repetition’ on new social forms (Hobsbawm 1983: 4). Rather, I examine these invented traditions as determined by a process of signification which, according to Slavoj Žižek, ‘ultimately always fails’, making ‘the real’ return ‘in the guise of spectral apparitions’ (1994: 21) – in this case, in the guise of a specter of traditional domesticity.

### **Surrogate Workers and Modes of Production**

Tungus women sometimes figure in the Russian colonial records as negotiators of shifting loyalties of local groups or terms of fur-tribute payment. However, it is hard to understand who exactly these women were in patri-local and patri-lineal Tungus societies and in tributary relationships with the Russian state in which key subjects were male ‘princes and their comrades’. The smallest tributary unit in these relations was a household (tent) that entered

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<sup>5</sup> See Petra Rethmann (2000 and 2001) for an insightful discussion of agency and claims to ‘modernity’ of Siberian indigenous women.

bookkeeping under the name of its male head or his widow. Several tents formed a community called a 'tax paying district' (*iasashnaia volost'*) or, after reforms of 1822, 'administrative clan' (*administrativnyi rod*). These communities were governed by state-appointed 'princes' and communal assemblies, usually called at trading posts where households submitted the fur tribute. Full participation in these assemblies was granted to adult males with the exception of widows of household heads (Rychkov 1922: 138; Stepanov 1939: 64 and further; Shirokogoroff 1929: 190, 262-72).

The apparently gendered hierarchy in these relationships was one of the key points of entry of the Soviet reforms. This was so not simply because of the general Soviet opposition to *partiarkhal'shina* – a Soviet term for the 'past' that signified both 'backwardness' and 'patriarchy' – but also because of a specific understanding, elaborated in Soviet anthropology, of how social inequalities in Siberian indigenous societies worked. They operated within indigenous societies by analogy with ways in which these societies were integrated into the larger Russian tributary and mercantile system.

By arguing that social arrangements in this 'past' worked in the material and political interest of 'princelings' – 'best clansmen' and shamans – and, ultimately, in the fiscal interest of the colonial state and the mercantile interest of the northern fur trade, Soviet reformers and anthropologists rendered these interests capitalist. In order to do so, however, they needed to explain how the capitalist mode of production of the Tsarist regime in northern Siberia operated by engendering seemingly non-capitalist social forms, such as kinship loyalties, and non-monetary transaction types such as gift exchange and bride-price payments. It is at this point that an observation by Engels proved useful. His contention that, within the modern family, the husband 'is the bourgeois, and the wife represents the proletariat' (Engels 1972 [1884]: 137) found convenient application in societies such as the Evenki where a visible amount of fur-hunting labor was done by women while the fur was sold or submitted as tribute almost exclusively by men. In this context, for example, bride-price payments – most frequently given in reindeer and, in turn, the most typical form in which families poorer in reindeer started up or expanded their herds – could be ethnographically understood not merely as 'backward' social practice but also as an 'alien to the Soviet power' form of indirect purchase of female labor power in exchange for reindeer. This, then, signaled class-like relationships between richer and poorer Evenki, structurally homologous with hierarchies within a household.



Illustration 1: Evenki female fur hunters having a smoking break (1930s).  
Courtesy of the Krasnoiarsk Kaievedcheskii Musei.



Illustration 2: An Evenki woman taking part in shooting competitions (1930s).  
Courtesy of the Krasnoiarsk Kaievedcheskii Musei.



When women are given voices in the early Soviet ethnography and reform narratives, they speak as exploited workers whose subaltern position in Evenki families also stands for the subordinate position of poorer Evenki in relationship to richer ones, and of all indigenous societies in relationship to the Tsarist traders and tribute collectors. In this regard, Siberian indigenous women played the same role in the Soviet reforms in the north as women in Central Asia did - the role of the 'surrogate working class' (Massel 1974). The soviet meetings of the 1920s were sites of intense clashes with the local rich (the *kulaki*) over the voting rights of the indigenous women. Let us look closely at the construction of women's voices and social positions in an ethnographic narrative of one such meeting on the Podkamennaia Tunguska river in 1926 conducted by reformer and ethnographer Innokentii Suslov (1980; see also Suslov 1928). Using the issue of women's participation in the meeting, an Evenki *kulak* accused Suslov of 'cheating the Tungus' and 'violating our faith' (the term 'faith' [*vera*] is used in these documents as synonymous with 'law' [*zakon*]):

According to our faith, only men can elect a prince, and women [baby] can only look and listen ... women's heads are empty – they have no brain. ... Your law about women is a bad one. ... According to your faith, the Angara [Russian] peasants rob our storage caches, steal foxes from our bags, shoot squirrel in our forest, and offend the Tungus ... Listen to me, men [*byel*]! The Russian master wants to consult with your women, and not with you. So let us not disturb him! Let ... him consult with them on how to build the new life. Let us go across the river, and let us have our own meeting there and elect princes, on our own and for our own (Suslov 1980: 60).

As he was saying this, the *kulak* stood up and walked toward the river bank, followed by other 'rich' and 'middle-wealth' Evenki men. At this point, 'the first meeting of the Clan Soviet among the Tungus' almost collapsed.

In a desperate attempt to stop them, Suslov asked whether a married woman should be punished if she committed a crime, for example, taking somebody else's property. 'No, she would not', replied the Evenki *kulak*, 'neither prince nor the meeting would try her; but they would try her husband, and they would punish him. The husband bought her, paid *teri* [bride-price] for her; so he himself would punish her, or give her back to her father and claim the bride-price back'. Then Suslov asked if exactly the same crime was committed by a widow, 'would a widow be tried?' – 'Of course', followed the reply, 'she is just like a man, she hunts squirrel by herself, and does everything by herself, with the children'.

'Did I understand you correctly?' asked Suslov, 'that... a woman hasn't any brains while she is a wife, and then she has if she is a widow?'

Evenki burst into laughter, and Suslov regained his hegemony over the meeting. He forced the *kulak* to apologize in front of the women present in the meeting, and pointed out that at the minimum the widows should vote together with men. Then an Evenki woman named Akulina took the floor and delivered a passionate speech reversing the accusation of Suslov by the *kulak* by pointing out the Tungus *kulak* himself ‘cheats the Tungus more than the [Russian] trader...’ and ‘violates our [Tungus] laws’. As a proof, she pointed out a malicious habit of Suslov’s accuser, who liked to ‘intercept a wounded moose’ from the hunter who pursued it. Note that here she speaks first and foremost as a hunter:

Tell me, Chikaren, in front of the meeting how you took my moose last spring. I was chasing it over the crust for the whole day, while you hid at the source of the Dzhagdaglia river and waited. When the moose ran by you, you stood on skis, caught up with it, and killed it with the spear. And I sat under the tree and cried. People! Many of you that winter bought meat in exchange for squirrel. You should know that it was my moose! Chikaren stole it! I am a widow and a poor woman, and I never traded meat. I gifted it to those who are sick and could not hunt, and to old people... (Suslov 1980: 60-2).

Suslov’s difficulties were partly caused by his task to establish local soviets ‘in accordance with the common law’ vested in him by the state Committee for the North and by the terms of the Provisional Statute of Administration over Native Peoples and Tribes of the Northern Borderlands, which provided the blueprint for the local soviet organization. Despite Akulina’s appeal, therefore, and ‘after a long discussion’, the meetings that Suslov conducted resolved that, ‘in accordance with the common law, the women present at the meeting should have a consultative (*soveschatel'nyi*) but not deciding (*reshaiuschii*) vote’ in the clan soviets.<sup>6</sup> The women’s voting rights were sacrificed for the immediate political gain of marking the presence of the Soviet state in the Siberian forest hinterland.

By 1929, what was sacrificed were references to indigenous common law altogether. Across Siberia as well as in the other areas of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party line on class differentiation in the village shifted the emphasis of Soviet reforms from accounting for indigenous common law to denigrating the very same things as survivals of the ‘traditional forms’ of exploitation. The liberation of women became a form of class struggle. In 1931, the Evenki District Communist Party Bureau formed a commission for ‘improvement of daily life of native women’ and the District Soviet formed a Women's Section (*zhenotdel*). These institutions,

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<sup>6</sup> *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Krasnoarskogo Kraia* (‘The State Archive of the Krasnoarsk Province’, thereafter GAKK), f. 1845, op. 1. d. 23, ll. 36, 55. This article uses the Russian abbreviations for archival references, such as ‘f.’ for *fond* (‘collection’), ‘op.’ for *opis'* (‘inventory’), ‘d.’ for *delo* (‘file’) and ‘l.’ or ‘ll’ for *list* or *listy* (‘page’ or ‘pages’).

together with the Committees of the Paupers (*komitety bednoty*), were to represent the indigenous population in terms of ‘class’ rather than ‘clan’ (Sergeev 1955: 294-311, 308; Bublischenko and Khonina 1980: 107).

With these changes, the ‘protectionists of tradition’ naturally came under fire not simply in the local soviets. The Evenki member of the Regional Executive Committee in Baikit, for example, even reported Suslov among those ‘alien elements’ who, by manipulating the common law norms and ideologies, ‘waged anti-Soviet propaganda and weakened the native population... by depriving all native women of their electoral rights’. Suslov managed to defend himself, claiming that in the context of the political struggle of 1926 it had been too early to force the liberation of women on the indigenous population.<sup>7</sup>

Put on the defensive, the Committee of the North nevertheless tried to continue its traditionalist line. The Krasnoiarsk branch of the Committee found Suslov’s line ‘correct’.<sup>8</sup> The Fifth Plenum of the Committee (1928) tried to defend its policies by insisting that forced marriages and the purchase of women did not occur in the North (Slezkine 1994: 159). Even in the middle of the Stalinist assault on the Committee during its Sixth Plenum in 1929 – as collectivization was gaining force across the country – former exile and veteran Bolshevik S. I. Mitskevich stated: ‘I spent six years in the North, traveled beyond the polar circle, slept in the Tungus tents and saw that the position of women there, while not ideal, was better than in Central Russia, at least with regard to battery’ (Slezkine 1994: 190). Nonetheless, in preparation for the new elections of the local Soviets, the articles of the 1926 Provisional Statute regarding the uses of indigenous common law in internal affairs of clan soviets were revoked, the ban on bride-price, which had existed on paper since 1925, was declared ‘enforced’, and voting rights were granted to indigenous women while they were stripped from indigenous *kulaki*.

These changes had a profound effect not only on the daily lives of the subjects of these policies (which I discuss further below) but also on ethnographic practices. As the view on indigenous women as a class was institutionalized in the policy frameworks, it simplified ethnographic approaches to gender in social contexts that these policies targeted. The reconstruction of hypothetical stages of family history displaced the discussions of the female labor power in the context of the Siberian colonial economy.

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<sup>7</sup> GAKK, f. 1845, op. 1, d. 199, ll. 38, 53-55

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Of course, evolutionary concerns have never disappeared in the early Soviet anthropology. Yet, as the political economy approach was put to practice in the 1920s, it frequently yielded results that were not merely contrary to the classical evolutionary schemes but also generated different modes of explanation in the field of kinship and gender relations. From the evolutionary point of view, for example, the lack of payments for a bride (the ‘bride price’) unambiguously signaled a more archaic identity of a given marriage pattern. Contrary to this perspective, Siberian ethnographic reports of the 1920s speak of a functional co-existence of different forms of marriage transactions. For example, reviewing indigenous common law practices of the lower Yenisei river basin, Dmitrii Lappo listed other transaction types alongside the ‘bride price’, including ‘bride exchange’ between different families, and ‘bride service’, a marriage transaction in which the bride was exchanged for labor of the groom. Furthermore, he also explained ‘bride service’ and ‘bride exchange’ as forms of disintegration of the ‘bride price’ in the context of the capitalist penetration of the north, and not as social patterns that historically preceded the bride-price payments.

In indigenous communities, he explained, ‘a good girl’ who ‘hunts squirrel, harnesses and loads the reindeer well, sews and embroiders patterns on clothes’, was a very valuable commodity. For such a bride, the Yenisei Tungus presently ‘paid up to a hundred reindeer, let alone the fur pelts’. However, in the conditions of economic dependency on the rich herders and Russian traders, the hunters frequently lacked a sufficient amount of wealth to afford these payments. Thus, instead, they were frequently hired in wealthier families, ‘surrendering completely their labor and its results’ for the possibility of taking a bride in exchange (Lappo, n.d.: 83). Field reports by Glafira Vasilevich reveal similar practices: ‘sometimes a groom is taken to the house of a bride where he pays his *kalym* by working, although nobody sets conditions for the time necessary for compensation’.

Furthermore, she also discusses the practice of ‘bride-swapping’ (*dav*) between Evenki families which was due, as she puts this, ‘to the final impoverishment and helplessness’ of the forest life throughout the 1920s. In her view, the exchanges of ‘bride price’ (*kalym* or *teri*) for dowry was presently substituted by reciprocal ‘bride exchange’ and by the practice of ‘bride service’.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Archiv Akademii Nauk* (‘The Archive of the Academy of Sciences’, St Petersburg, thereafter AAN), f. 135, op. 2. d. 75, pp. 48-9.

These interesting reports were, however, marginal in the increasingly evolutionary theoretical discourse in Soviet anthropology (Slezkine 1991; Solovei 1998). For example, by the time Vasilevich's materials make it to her key publications, they are trimmed to fit the evolutionary perspective:

Among different ways of finding wives among Evenki, war was the most archaic one... An equally wide-spread way... was bride exchange between two families ... [while] the third way, which appeared later than the first two, was gift exchange, *teri*, of ... the bride price and the dowry. Before, these payments were of equal value... Eventually, the gift of the groom became more expensive, and it was at that time when the concept of *teri* became synonymous to *taman*, 'payment', and the word *tama* ('to pay') acquired a meaning of 'pay for a bride' and 'to take a wife' (Vasilevich 1969: 156-8).

While some of the evolutionary statements in the Evenki studies were stronger than others,<sup>10</sup> they all used the blueprint of Engels' thesis in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* where 'gift payments in return for a girl' were a symptom of 'a ...change that have occurred' – that is, of the appearance of 'pairing family' as a result of 'progressive narrowing of the circle' of conjugal relations in the primal group marriage – and of changes which were yet to come and which culminated in the bourgeois family 'founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife' (Engels 1972 [1884]: 112 and 137).

### **Female Workers in Katonga Collective**

As functionalist and Boasian anthropology gained currency in the West, Engels' evolutionary approach became dominant in Soviet anthropology. It remained so between the 1930s and 1960s, shaping its theoretical concerns such as the evolutionary relationships between kin-based and territorial communities and between matrilineal and patrilineal descent, and overall, almost paleontological vision of method:

While the family undergoes living changes, the system of consanguinity ossifies; while the system survives by force of custom, the family outgrows it. But just as Cuvier could deduce from the marsupial bone of an animal skeleton found near Paris that it belonged to a marsupial animal and that extinct marsupial animals once lived here, so with the same certainty we can deduce from the historical survival of a system of consanguinity that an extinct form of family once existed which corresponded to it (Engels 1972 [1884]: 96).

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<sup>10</sup> Anisimov (1936 and 1958) provides an example of the evolutionary dissection of Evenki culture into different formational 'survivals'.

Yet, as the ‘ossified’ formational origin of Evenki gender constructs were displaced into this macro-evolutionary narrative, the roles of Evenki women in early Soviet collective farms underwent a very real proletarianization. In order to consider the social effects of these multiple displacements, however, we should keep in mind a relative weakness of the state institutions in the indigenous Sub-Arctic before the 1950s. ‘The state’ consisted in not much more than an archive of statistical and ethnographic information on local social stratification, or an occasional inspection or ethnographic expedition. The gender facts that these expeditions produced – that is, facts about class-like relations in Evenki communities, illustrated by the cases of bride-price payments or appropriation of a wounded moose – also were reported quite infrequently. Yet in the state files on the local wrong-doers, one such fact would contaminate the whole kinship network. This, then, set the stage for another form of state existence in this area – exemplary punishments like the purge of 1938 or public denunciations of wealth or ritual practices. I discussed the operation of these exemplary punishments elsewhere (Ssorin-Chaikov 2000a; and n.d.). A flip side of these punishments were exemplary promotions and socialist construction ‘success stories’. For example, two young wives of one of the richest herders of the Baikit area, Yakunia Gauil’skii, were encouraged to leave their husband in 1930. They both left him, with one making a transformation which was widely reported in Soviet documents of the time. Having received a hundred reindeer from her former husband, she handed the reindeer over to the collective farm, joined the Young Communist League, and was sent to Yeniseisk town to study.<sup>11</sup> Such examples of upward mobility were, however, very rare – and, in this case, the mobility of this former member of a local elite family was not exactly ‘upward’.

One important process was, however, set off by these infrequent interventions. If the reforms’ stated goal was to alleviate social effects of a hidden proletarianization of indigenous societies of the late Tsarist period, the results of these reforms themselves increased an overt proletarianization of Evenki in relationship to the new state institutions. They became wage earners in fur-trading and herding co-ops and collective farms, with minimal means of production left in their individual property and with very low wages received in the new collectives. If the early Soviet anthropology emphasized the worker-like position of women in indigenous societies of old regime, collective-farm employment for women reinforced such a role.

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<sup>11</sup> *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Evenkiiskogo Avtonomnogo Okruga* (‘The State Archive of the Evenki Autonomous District’, thereafter GAEAO), f. 3, op. 1, d. 3, p. 122; Forsyth 1992: 252.

In 1932, the registrar of the local Soviet and the Primitive Production Unit in Katonga recorded the category ‘hunters per family’ which was undifferentiated by gender.<sup>12</sup> From the 1930s to the 1960s, women were widely employed as hunters in Katonga. Like men, they were paid on the basis of ‘the amount of labor per day’ ratio. Nikolai’s sister Alexandra spent her life hunting for the collective. She was a widow who brought up a daughter alone. In 1989, Alexandra’s daughter recalled to me that her mother ‘always set her tent in the village, hoping that there will be something to do in the collective, and she took any job’. She was ‘glad’ to wash floors in the collective farm offices and in the school.

In the early 1930s, the poverty of such women made them eligible for the material help of the Women’s Section (*zhenotdel*) and the Committee of Paupers (*komitety bednoty*) of the District Soviet. As seen from nomadic forest camps or trading bases like Katonga, however, the District Soviet was very far away. In the early 1930s, Maria was a teen-age girl. Her family possessed only about twenty reindeer and belonged, therefore, to the ‘poor’ category targeted by this help. It was, however, very irregularly delivered and was hardly important for their family budget. It consisted of several old hunting traps (‘half of them broken’) and occasional boxes of tea. As Maria recalled in our conversations, it also included several linen bed sheets that Evenki women were supposed to start using in their tents. The sheets, as she told me, were quickly torn into smaller pieces and used to wrap things and, also, as ribbons to tie to trees in shamanistic praying.

This ‘help’ looked particularly insignificant in comparison to numerous gifts of reindeer that this family received from wealthier relatives and neighbors. When Maria married around 1935, her father received a bride-price of fifty reindeer. Since 1925, however, such payments had been made illegal as a sign of ‘trade in women’. On the ground of ‘persistent’ adherence to such ‘trade’, in 1938, members of wealthier families in that area were purged, and their reindeer collectivized.

From the 1930s to the 1960s, Maria was married and lived in the forest. Her work for the collective included so-called ‘cart duties’ – delivering mail and cargo by reindeer sleigh, or driving the state ethnographers or inspectors from one forest camp to another. She also took part in the most physically demanding seasonal work of that time – in hauling up the river those barges which delivered supplies to the Podkamennaia Tunguska trading bases. In addition to this, she continued to hunt, and she received her nickname ‘Military’ because she was wounded during one hunting season by the top of a dry larch that collapsed when she was striking it with

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<sup>12</sup> GAEO f. 5, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 80-94, 130-147.

back side of her axe in order to scare the sable and make him jump from the tree to the snow. This happened in 1944, when Nikolai returned from the front with one leg amputated (as a result of frost-bite in the forests north of Leningrad in 1943, where he served as a sniper). The locals joked that Maria was also ‘wounded in war’, and the nickname ‘Military’ has stuck to her ever since.

During the Second World War, women's labor became even more important for collective farms. Like other Siberian aborigines, Evenki were exempt from the military but many nonetheless volunteered. As the Military Grandma was married, her husband did not sign up. The couple worked, however, in the predominantly female reindeer brigade. After the war, one man joined this brigade, but until 1955 it had only three men (one of them a teen-aged apprentice) out of ten herders/hunters total. In the other two Katonga reindeer brigades the situation was not quite as unbalanced. Yet, female fur-hunting teams, even female herders, were nonetheless present, and their labor contribution remained important as the majority of men from Katonga (as well as from many other villages and cities across the Soviet Union) did not return from the war. The famous hunter Anna Vasilievna Yegorova, praised in the District newspaper in 1934 for ‘115 percent fulfillment’ of the fur-hunting plan, lamented: ‘My husband didn't come back from the war, as well as my brothers... And how much we had to endure during the war: we went hunting and fishing twice as much, hauled boats by rope, watched reindeer herds – all men’s work was left to us, and to children, too’ (Bublisenko and Khonina 1980: 115-6). Such labor retained its significance for the collective farm until the mid-1950s, when a state campaign to centralize and enlarge collective farms created new employment opportunities that were tied directly with the expansion of the Soviet welfare state and healthcare system.

### **The Making of Profession Housewives (1): Katonga**

‘Civilized’ healthcare was already used to mark the difference between ‘indigenous’ and ‘Russian’ lifestyles between the 1930s and 1950s. A public sauna and medical post were built in Katonga before any housing for the Evenki collective farmers. The Women's Section of the District Administration was quick to claim that, by 1931,

Women started to sweep floors in tents, and change [conifer] branches of the floor bedding more often. Many started to take out beds to shake out, to wash dishes, to do laundry. Some even came to the sauna. The Evenki woman Ievdokiia Ieldogir (grandmother Dunia, as we call her) is the most active [in this regard]. She spoke at the meeting once, and told Evenki: ‘Why are the Russians healthy, and we feel ill? Their



[houses] are warm and clean, and we should live like that' (Bublishenko and Khonina 1980: 110-11).

Yet it was only after the 1950s when healthcare and welfare institutions appear in this area on a much larger scale. Together with the enlarged collective farms, they make up sites of governance which, on the one hand, have a greater presence in the Evenki daily life, and, on the other, expand this governance through mass management of indigenous bodies and populations. Bodies of deceased forest Evenki were either flown to the village hospital for registration and funeral or were inspected on location by helicopter ambulance. Women who spent most of their lives in the forest were encouraged to give birth in the village hospital and then to sign up their children for professional care in village nursery and kindergarten, and, later, in boarding school. With the expansion of eight-grade education possibilities to the villages like Katonga in the 1960s, by the time these children finished school they could have spent up to fifteen years away from their nomadic parents.

At first, these institutions were staffed by newcomers, but from 1960s on they provided jobs for an increasing number of upwardly mobile Evenki. By the 1980s, more than half of the teachers, physicians, and nurses in Katonga were local Evenki, and practically all of them were women. This is in contrast to white- and blue-collar positions in the collective farm such as director, managers, economists, heating engineers, tractor drivers, etc., which were taken mostly by non-indigenous male newcomers. The majority of Evenki men were employed in hunting and reindeer herding or as the 'low-skilled' labor force (*raznorabochie*) at the social bottom of the collective farm, shuttling between low-paid jobs in the village – such as unloading cargo barges, working as haulers for the village shop and collective farm storage, or as night watchmen, etc. – and the winter fur hunting season in the forest.

These practices and institutions were aimed at the 'modernization' of indigenous lifestyles, yet, again, they had gender relations as one of their focal points. However, if in the previous decades relevant gender facts were facts about inequalities, now they were about hygiene, health, education, and, importantly, about encouraging higher birth-rates. These policies were a part of broader state concerns that targeted the Soviet population as a whole. First, the goal of the state was to recover demographically from the Second World War – and to do so by introducing financial benefits for families with more than one child and by encouraging tolerance of single mothers. Secondly, it was increasingly concerned with the massive flight from rural areas which started with the collectivization but continued after the war. The state dealt with this by extending to the rural areas the full Soviet social welfare system – from educational and

healthcare opportunities to sick leave and retirement benefits – for which collective farmers across the USSR were not fully eligible before 1965 (Lapidus 1978: 117-9, Madison 1968: 75-6, 308).

Yet there was another issue that was more specifically Siberian: given that not everybody could be employed in expansion of state infrastructure, and that in areas like Katonga it was not possible to do much beyond hunting and reindeer herding, there was also a question of what ‘modern’ Soviet hunting and reindeer herding would look like. Some suggestions came from experiments in large-scale tundra reindeer herding and from reindeer-herding manuals that were circulated among northern collective farm directors. The key to ‘modern’ herding lay in the organization of work in shifts so that forest nomadism did not appear as a ‘way of life’ (*bytovoe kochevanie*) but rather as a temporary ‘occupational nomadic condition’ (*proizvodstvennoe kochevanie*). Secondly, the brigade should look like a professional collective, as opposed to a family, so that several hunters and herders in the forest would be accompanied by a ‘professional tent-worker’ (*chumrabortnitsa*) who would do cooking and cleaning. Hence the appearance of the ‘professional housewife’, as Katonga Evenki put it, that is, a state-salaried occupational category.

In addition to welfare-state employees, after the 1960s we see the emergence of two other new social types which are different yet which make up a mirror-image of one another. The first is the village-based woman who works, for example, as a janitor in the collective farm office, but who is a Soviet equivalent of the US ‘welfare mother’ (e.g. Stack 1974). She stays formally single but has several children – which provides her with substantial addition to her salary. She is also a center of network ties among several Evenki males – possibly, although not necessarily, fathers of her kids who regardless share her welfare benefits and contribute meat from subsistence hunting. Another social type is a forest-based ‘professional housewife’ who receives a wage for her domestic labor, and, in this role, appears also as a center for a male network of hunters and herders. These two cases are, of course, ideal types: people change places, and there is a traffic of resources between these configurations. Meat and fur go from the forest to the village; and child allowances back to the forest – thanks to the boarding-school system, these matri-local networks don’t spend much on raising kids. In both cases, however, these social configurations are centered in the gender facts, which are now about reproduction and domesticity. During the late-socialist period, these gender facts are not what indigenous women ‘naturally’ are but about what they are paid for, that is, what the Soviet state economic sector recognized as important work: for example, female fur hunters disappear in collective farms

about the same time as ‘tent workers’ are introduced. This process exemplifies what Katherine Verdery calls ‘etatization’ of gender regimes under state socialism (Verdery 1996: 64). Only the collapse of the state economic sector in the 1990s, which had previously underwritten the maintenance costs of these occupational categories, naturalized them as ‘what people are’, as opposed to what they had been paid for in state collectives.

Katonga Evenki recall that ‘female tent worker’ appeared as an occupational category in the Katonga collective in 1971. Despite this, the number of women employed in the forest were on the steady decline ever since. The majority of the women who spent most of their time in the forest during my fieldwork in Katonga, such as Military Grandmother and Vladimir’s wife Nadezhda, were born before the mid-1930s. Ataman and Vas’ka are married but their wives spend only two or three months a year in the forest. Vas’ka’s wife Alena worked in the kindergarten in Katonga, and I saw her in the forest only in the summer of 1994. Ataman’s wife lived in the village most of the year, although she received a salary in the collective farm as a member of Ataman’s reindeer brigade. She came to the forest only during Spring and Autumn fence-construction periods, when she cooked for the collective farm construction team. During other times of the year, preparing meals and other ‘female’ duties in Ataman’s tent were performed by his eldest son and two apprentices. In the forest area where I worked, on the border between Katonga and Maiguchar collectives, there were between sixty and eighty adult Evenki who lived in this area more or less constantly during both of my visits (1988-89 and 1993-95). But there were only nine couples among them, and only three who were not elderly. The unmarried mass of forest hunters and herders is matched in size by the group of Evenki single mothers who live and work in the village. The children of Vladimir and Nadezhda offer a telling example. Their three sons all lived and worked in the forest while none of their daughters did. Two of their four daughters live in the village – one married and one single – and the other two moved to larger Siberian towns.

An example of the Soviet-style ‘welfare mother’ can be seen in Ewegenia. Mother of six, she has three boys dispersed in several forest brigades as apprentices, a girl who sometimes lives with her but sometimes in the boarding school, and two small children who go to nursery school. She works as a janitor in at school, and sometimes helps out in the village bakery, but her income from this work is neither significant nor regular. ‘I also receive children allowances’, she explained to me, ‘and, thanks to the state, my kids also get support in [reindeer] brigades and the nursery’. I knew her through one of her sons with whom I visited her on our trips from the forest to the village. On these occasions she hosted not only her own children from the forest, but also

other hunters and herders who supplied her with reindeer meat and fish and sometimes used her children allowances to buy supplies. In her forties by 1995, she had four long-term relationships that she called ‘marriages’, although only two of them were officially registered.

This matri-local pattern is actually not confined to the poorest of the Katonga women. Nadezhda, a welfare-state employee, had a similar situation with her three marriages. Her mother, Alexandra (old Nikolai’s sister), set her tent in the outskirts of the village when she washed the floors in the collective farm office. Another collective farm assignment could take her back to the forest for hunting or to the river for hauling. Nadezhda was born in the forest, but she grew up in the boarding school and settled in the village. She worked as a nurse at the medical post, which was transformed into a hospital in the 1960s. Nadezhda’s first husband was a skilled reindeer herder, and was appointed in 1958 as a deputy secretary of the Katonga Communist Party Organization. Within three years he became an alcoholic, and made a bad reputation for Katonga collective at regional Party conferences. He was discharged from his position, did not stop drinking, and died in the Baikit asylum. He and Nadezhda had two children, a daughter and a son. The daughter married and moved to Baikit, whereas the son became a collective farm ‘low-skilled worker’. He loaded cargo, helped out on collective farm construction during summers, and hunted sable in winter. In the mid-1990s, the son was married, and his wife worked in the Katonga hospital together with Nadezhda.

Nadezhda's second marriage was to a mechanic, a newcomer to the collective who came to Katonga to make a quick buck – ‘chasing the long ruble’ (*v pogone za dlinnym rublem*), as the Russian saying puts it. When he made his money, however, he left Katonga and Nadezhda in the 1976. The son whom he left behind with Nadezhda went on to study at a polytechnic college in Krasnoiarsk, but died there after a car accident. Eventually, Nadezhda settled down with a Russian who retired to Katonga.

Despite her two non-Evenki marriage partners, Nadezhda admittedly had never become close with the milieu of newcomers in Katonga, which is quite segregated socially from the Evenki. At the same time, her Evenki social milieu, like Evgeniia’s, extends far beyond that of her immediate relatives, although in these relationships she comes across more as a social worker than a welfare recipient. ‘I always liked to help other people’, she told me in one of our conversations,

but Evenki today are as poor as they always were. And it seems to me that they only get poorer. You see, in the past, they were skilled in what they did – in herding, they [also] could make their own tools and clothes. But now they don't know much of the old ways.

And they run around in torn shirts, asking me, ‘aunt Nadia [diminutive of Nadezhda, NSC], patch the shirt’, or ‘aunt Nadia, loan me some money’.

As a social worker and activist, Nadezhda provides occasional ‘help’ to practically all Evenki low-skilled workers almost all of whom, in turn, call her ‘aunt’. However, note that the ‘Evenki’ of her remarks are low-skilled men at the social bottom of the Katonga collective. Products of the Soviet educational system and of the guaranteed state employment – which the informants in another ethnography of the Russian indigenous North indeed call a ‘kindergarten society’ (Konstantinov 1997) – these men preserve, nonetheless, in their impoverishment, some traits of authenticity for Nadezhda.

But if the authenticity of Evenki men went almost without saying in her remarks – despite an obvious fact that they were hardly ‘unspoiled’ forest hunters and herders but boarding-school dropouts who, in Nadezhda’s view, could neither succeed in the village nor survive properly in the forest – the authenticity of women is something that she could not stop talking about if she had an occasion. In 1989, she introduced me to her cousin Sveta who worked in the forest. That year I was visiting Katonga for the first time and wanted to join forest reindeer herders, and Sveta and her relatives could give me a ride. ‘Sveta wants to go to the forest as soon as possible’, Nadezhda explained to me, ‘she is pregnant, and she wants to give birth in a traditional way (*traditsionno*) – in the forest rather than in the [village] hospital’. She added:

Sveta is a real Evenki: she lives in the forest and works as a professional housewife [*professional'naia chumrabortnitsa*]. She raises a good family – unlike all those [Evenki] mothers who live off welfare benefits that the state pays for their children (*posobiia po mnogodetnosti*). What normally happens? A girl graduates from school, starts going out with the [non-indigenous] newcomers, and gets pregnant several times. ... She never goes to the forest, and all these poor boys are stuck without wives... As a result, Evenki traditions (*traditsii evenkov*) soon will disappear completely.

I did introduce myself to Sveta, and soon followed her and her husband to the forest, but only eventually came to appreciate the full irony of Nadezhda’s statement.

First, Evenki forest households depended on state children allowances just as much as the village ones did. In fact, this dependency deepened as the collective farm in the 1990s practically stopped paying salaries to its employees due to Russia's economic crisis (also euphemistically known as the ‘transition’). Welfare payments made Sveta, by 1995 a mother of eight, one of the main cash providers in the otherwise demonetized forest camp of about ten adult herders and hunters. Even if her benefits were not regularly paid, they still were used, for example, as credit for her male forest camp companions to charge supplies in the village store. Secondly, the forest

‘professional housewife’ was hardly a traditional social role. This position was created in order to ‘modernize’ reindeer herding. It is arguable whether the institution of, ‘female tent worker’ actually served this purpose, but it most certainly contributed to the re-invention of ‘traditional’ forest roles along the lines of Soviet understandings of domesticity. Finally, Nadezhda’s approval of forest ‘professional housewives’ and disapproval of village ‘welfare mothers’ echoes the traditionalist remarks with which I began this paper, that is, the belief that the survival of Evenki traditions is threatened by indigenous women who go out with the Russians. In other words, these remarks highlight an important change in understandings of the nature of ‘tradition’ itself. Re-definition of female roles as exclusively domestic and reproductive recasts ‘tradition’ in biological terms.

### **The Making of Profession Housewives (2): Theory**

Nadezhda’s remarks reveal a discursive continuum between places like Katonga and larger fields of Soviet identity politics which reveal, as recent scholarship has demonstrated, the considerable investment that socialist states made in the construction of ‘traditions’ and ‘nationalities’, despite its proclaimed commitment to internationalist class ideologies. While observing that the Soviet Union ‘is as much a legatee of the prenational dynastic states of the nineteenth century as the precursor of the twenty-first century internationalist order’, Benedict Anderson finds himself in agreement with Eric Hobsbawm in that ‘Marxist movements and states have tended to become national not only in form but in substance, i.e., nationalist’, and have done so by grounding themselves ‘firmly in a territorial and social space inherited from the prerevolutionary past’ (Anderson 1983: 2 citing Hobsbawm 1977). Looking at Soviet Communist Party polemics on cultural differences within the former Russian Empire, Yuri Slezkine echoes these remarks with a plain statement: ‘Soviet nationality policy was devised and carried out by nationalists’ (Slezkine 1994b: 414). For the indigenous North, he and others have drawn attention to state practices which institutionalized ethnicity as a uniform signifier of difference in a social environment with historically much more fluid and mosaic identity regimes. Among such practices were systematic mapping of cultural differences in correlation with ethnic origin, creation of ethnic autonomous districts, literacy in indigenous languages, and mass schooling (Slezkine 1994a: 303-36; Anderson 2000: 74-96; Bloch 1996; Bartels and Bartels 1995; see Hirsh 1997 and Martin 2001 for broader Soviet context).

Before the 1960s, however, these nation-building policies had immediate social effects only for the few designated centers of such indigenous nation-building – in this case, for the Tura base which grew into a town and a capital of the Evenki District. The expansion of the Soviet welfare state took these effects to the smaller villages like Katonga much more recently, replacing early-Soviet exemplary punishments and infrequent inspections with minute ‘etatization’ (Verdery 1996) of Evenki daily life and producing mostly female indigenous intelligentsia as the main local agent of traditionalist ideology. This occurred, however, in a changing ethnographic climate of an increasing interest in Siberian indigenous ethnohistory (*etnicheskaia istoria*) which focused mostly on the Tsarist period. While scholars who were engaged in this field continued to cite Engels-style kinship studies, many saw the value of their contributions as empirical and historically-specific, rather than theoretical and macro-evolutionary. What did material culture and social institutions of Arctic hunters of the period before the spread of reindeer herding look like? Which families constituted the 17th-century tributary districts? As one of them remarked to me in 1989, ‘the purpose of ethnography is to create an historical archive’.<sup>13</sup>

Yet in the close attention to history and local variation (‘ethnic specificity’), a different understanding of research subject gradually came through. This new object of study was called ‘ethnos’ (*ethnos*), and it was defined by Iulian Bromlei, a historian of the Balkans and director of the Moscow Institute of Ethnography between the 1960s and the 1980s, as:

A stable intergenerational aggregate (*sovokupnost*) of people, historically formed on a particular territory. It possesses not merely common features, but a relatively stable specificity of culture (including language) and psyche, and also [characterized by] the consciousness of common unity distinct from other units of this kind, [and] which is fixed in the common name (the ethnonym) (Bromlei 1983: 58).

The focus on ‘ethnos’, which became emblematic in the Soviet ethnographic school after the 1960s, also marked significant changes in understanding of culture. Culture was no longer seen as an aspect of ideology, which naturalizes structural (formational) inequalities, but rather as a ‘relatively stable’ and unique (‘specific’) complex shared by members of a given ethnic group.

As recent historiography has demonstrated, viewing ethnic groups as bearers of unique cultural wholes was not new in Soviet/Russian ethnography. Via late-Imperial cultural geography and Orientalist scholarship, Russian anthropology incorporated the Romantic Nationalist thought of Herder and philology of Vico (Slezkine 1994a: 73-94; Knight 1995). Among Siberianists, Shirokogoroff (1923) offered an early version of ‘a theory of ethnos’ as a way to account for an

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<sup>13</sup> Yuri Simchenko, personal communication. For examples of such work, see Simchenko (1972 and 1976) Dolgikh (1960), and Tugolukov (1985).

equilibrium of shared cultural norms in the process of survival of a given population. This approach was echoed in the later work of two competing Soviet ‘fathers’ of this theory, Iulian Bromlei (1983) and Lev Gumilev (1993). More importantly, however, its prominence and the very identity of ‘ethnos’ and the subject matter of ethnography was a result of rethinking the ‘nationality question’ set out in Stalin’s ‘letters on linguistics’ of the late 1940s and early 1950s. These letters were addressed against an ‘extreme’ determinism in relationships between the socio-economic base and ideological superstructure which included language and culture. The French revolution manifested the transition from feudalism to capitalism, argued Stalin, but this did not lead to the development of new ‘bourgeois’ French language. In this line of thought, then, languages, as well as deep categories of thought, traditions and so on, were not parts of the ideological superstructure but rather autonomous phenomena that underwent slow ‘adaptation’ rather than revolutionary change (Stalin 1950 vol. XVI: 115-9; Slezkine 1994b: 449; Shnirel'man 1993).

This inaugurated a new vision of culture that the Soviet theory of ethnos articulated. Culture could be seen as an inter-related whole rather than as an ideological epiphenomenon, and as a living organism rather than a repository of fossilized survivals. And, most importantly, ecology gradually substituted mode of production as the overarching framework for a materialist cultural analysis. As Soviet ethnographer Sergei Arutiunov put this, ‘Ethnos and culture are elementary taxonomic units that are equivalent to biological species. From this point of view, ethnic cultures [understood] in relationship to general human development, and biological species in relationship to general biological evolution are isomorphous and iso-functional phenomena’ (Markarian 1983 in Arutiunov 1993: 41).

Arutiunov draws on this analogy to suggest that ethnic identities, with their emphasis on cultural specificity, provide an adaptive advantage to the group as a whole, while also preserving cultural variation within ethnic units – an ‘adaptive plasticity’ of an ethnos (1993: 41). In the context of Siberian indigenous studies, however, which had ‘numerically small nationalities’ (*malochislennye narody*) as their subject matter, this analogy worked even more literally – making it possible to posit demographic populations as subjects of ecological adaptation and survival, and to use demography as a language for indigenous policies. The indigenous problem ceased to be one of colonial or class exploitation and became a demographic one which was based not on policies of class differentiation but on those of ‘support [of] family life and family values’ and encouragement of ‘high fertility as a means to stabilize the population of the Small Peoples of the North’ (Pika 1996: 52).



This shift of focus and, indeed, of the subject matter in anthropology in general delineated differently the field of Siberian kinship studies. As one of the programmatic publications in this field puts this, rather than looking at kinship terms as ‘a conglomerate of categories which were formed in different epochs, in the process of evolution of social relations’, demography provided an emphasis on ‘actual norms of marriage and sexual partnership in a given population’ (Afanas'eva 1990: 201), thereby making kinship a source of a ‘more correct picture of social connections’ of living and functioning populations, rather than a window into previous evolutionary stages. In the 1980s, Soviet Siberianists developed highly formalized genealogical methods. These methods were designed to show ‘the build-up of a social collective’, as well as indigenous populations’ genetics and history (Afanas'eva 1995: 6-7: see also Afanas'eva and Simchenko 1986 and 1992).

Let us now look at the operation of the assumptions about gender roles in this vision. In his reconstruction of the culture of Arctic reindeer hunters, for example, Simchenko modeled his basic social unit after the predominantly male hunting brigades – the ‘spearmen’ of Nganasan and Yukagir who went out to kill wild reindeer in places where massive herds crossed rivers. He sites the Nganasan term ‘spear’ (*fonka*) both as a name for the team of hunters and as a name for lineage (Simchenko 1976: 186-7). The term ‘spear’ emphasizes here the substantive and political salience of a male core within Arctic social organization. Similarly, among the coastal mammal hunters of the Chukotka Peninsula, Krupnik reported that ‘the actual economic units within the communities were the aggregations of the smaller, constant groups of adult male hunters – the boat crews – whose primary task was the hunting of particular areas or resources’ (Krupnik 1994: 84). In such social groups, women transported and partitioned the bodies of dead reindeer or mammals, took care of the tents and clothes, raised children, and were objects of exogamous exchange between kin-based communities. The overall distinction between outer/inner and political/domestic spheres in this social organization is clearly gendered, and designated in ‘Arctic cultures’ by the male spear on the one hand and the female tent fire on the other (Simchenko 1976: 194 and further, the scheme on p. 205, and 192-3).

In the retrospective reconstruction of Arctic cultural archetypes, this social structure ‘existed’ in the imagined time of long-term adaptation, with low population growth and homeostatic (equilibrium-like)<sup>14</sup> relationships between indigenous population and environment. The theoretical emphasis in this argument was on reproduction rather than on change. From this point

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<sup>14</sup> From the Greek *homeo* (‘the same’) and *stasis* (‘condition’).

of view, indigenous cultures were seen as preserving themselves through rationing of natural resources – by economical hunting, for example, with taboos to kill pregnant reindeer, etc. – and through control of the size of their own population by institutionalized abandonment, or even killing, of ‘extra’ children, the old, and the ill.<sup>15</sup>

With the growing interest in ‘ethnic processes’ and ethnohistory, homeostatic theories of adaptation came under criticism. Out of Boris Dolgikh’s scrupulous gaze into indigenous demographic and social histories emerged a picture of populations which underwent rapid growths and declines, which experienced drastic changes in structure and existed in contact with outsiders rather than in isolation. Equilibrium, intuitive ecologism, and infanticide appeared, thus, as exceptions rather than rules, if not ethnographic inventions altogether (Pika 1986; Krupnik 1988). An alternative theory inverted the homeostatic equilibrium model with its emphasis on rationing of resources. Articulating this alternative vision, Igor Krupnik pointed out that Arctic hunters, far from being intuitive ecologists, ‘overkilled’ reindeer or mammals whenever possible in order to maximize their ‘surplus [of] food reserves’ – although the latter, he argued, had a ‘psychosocial’ rather than a practical character since lavish game on one occasion did not prevent hunger on another. Furthermore, he argued, far from being driven by traditions of rationing of population size, these hunters’ ‘sexual norms’ were ‘consonant with the desire to maintain as high a birth rate as possible’:

In the face of inevitable environmental disturbances, limiting the population would have been a luxury the aboriginal community could ill afford, especially at times when social and ecological circumstances supported a surge of growth. Out of this practical consideration stem many aspects of traditional Arctic community dynamics: tendencies toward territorial expansion, maximum resource utilization, and high birthrates which served to replenish the population rapidly in spite of ubiquitously short life-expectancy and high death rates (Krupnik 1994: 83-4).

This Malthusian logic of demographic expansion and maximization determined the need to have as many children as possible. It also explained the tendency to expand the ‘circle of marriage partners (*dem*)’ in order to prevent inbreeding: ‘the hunting and appropriating (*prisvaivaiuschaia*) economy is limited in their resources and population size. Being in conditions of relative isolation, such society should maximize variability of spouse selection, in order to avoid interbreeding among close relatives, when there is a danger of losing variability’ (Pika 1986: 39-44; see also Krupnik 1994: 223, 226, 227-39; Afanas'eva 1990: 214).

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<sup>15</sup> A review of the ‘equilibrium approach’ see in Krupnik 1994: 18-21, 223.

At this point, images of women enter the argument. Note that their roles are very different from the ‘inner’, purely ‘domestic’, and socially conservative ones of the homeostatic model. They appear as active agents of ‘ethnoecology’ rather than mere objects of exogamous exchange. But also note that, with this change, the argument leaves behind a ‘traditional’ past and comes closer to the Soviet contexts:

Changes in changing the [physical] anthropological composition of indigenous population practically does not influence ethnic consciousness. The children of mixed European-Mongoloid marriages [European-looking Russians and Mongoloid-looking aborigines] ‘inherit’ the nationality of the mother, that is, indigenous nationality... In some cases this may be explained by material privileges [associated with the indigenous ethnic origin, NSC] but there are other causes for this as well. It is quite natural for children of a single mother to be identified as indigenous, for this child grows up without the father and adopts the cultural traditions of the mother. But children assimilate their mothers' traditions even if they grow up in families of mixed origin. Mothers are mainly responsible for bringing children up, and it is they who influence the children most. It is interesting to point out that in mixed families of Chukchi and Koriak [and not just in mixed indigenous/Russian marriages], the nationality of children is identified after mothers (Kuznetsov and Missonova 1990: 65).

The equilibrium model did not, however, disappear from this ethnographic discourse. Krupnik argued, for example, that it was perhaps much more applicable to the forest Sub-Arctic with its much more stable scarcity of resources (Krupnik 1994: 339-40). In turn, Afanas'eva offers an ethnographic compromise between the theoretical extremes of homeostatic and anti-equilibrium models in the Arctic tundra. In a laborious attempt to relate demography and social organization by looking at the Nganasan of the Taimyr Peninsula, she shows that the population structure of the Nganasan during the period of collective farm enlargement (1956-75) appears similar to the one of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century. In both the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, she argues, the Nganasan underwent periods of intense mixed marriages on the one hand and periods of stabilization and ‘re-traditioning’ on the other. The former serve ‘the goal of overcoming a crisis’ of potential inbreeding or depopulation due to disease epidemics. ‘With the growth of the population’ as a result of mixed marriages and ethnic contacts, ‘the volume of mixed marriages declines, bringing back the norms of the matrimonial customary law, which stabilizes the blood-kinship ties in population to the optimal level’. The pendulum of change and stabilization constitutes, for Afanas'eva, a ‘complex of specific conditions of life in the harsh northern environment’. Combined ‘with a particular condition of culture and economy (*pri opredelennom kul'turno-khoziaistvennom uklade*)’, it makes up a feed-back mechanism that ‘...drives the population to the regime of optimal genetic-populational functioning’ (Afanas'eva 1990: 328-9).

No matter whether scholars supported the homeostatic or anti-equilibrium models, and whether they regretted that indigenous women do not marry indigenous herders or rejoice that the children of mixed marriages are ultimately indigenous, such an argument remained fundamentally Malthusian. This theory reduces indigenous social organization to population structure and indigenous politics to family planning. In doing so, however, it constructs new spaces for ‘tradition’ and ‘traditional’ ethnography. Echoing the methodology of the early Soviet anthropology, for example, Afanas'eva argues that a ‘modern scholar deals with groups of indigenous population which are organized in administrative territorial units’ (Afanasiyeva 1990: 323-4). But, unlike the early Soviet anthropology, she is not ethnographically interested in the operation of these administrative units. She emphasizes instead that by looking at genealogical structures, the ethnographer can recover ‘traditional means of reproduction’ that are analytically divorced from ‘modern’ administrative forms (Afanasiyeva and Simchenko 1986: 107). The role of the woman as a guardian of tradition figures prominently in this vision, no matter how passive or active this role is. No longer the ‘surrogate worker’ of the earlier Soviet anthropology; this woman is a ‘professional housewife’ or ‘tent-worker’ (*chumrabortnitsa*) whose agency is domestic and biological.

### **Social Space of Traditionalism**

This leads me to the question of social hierarchies which are constituted by these gender facts. The lens which separates ‘modern’ administrative forms and ‘traditional’ relationships in ethnographic theory assumes a distance between the observer and the observed. I argue that a similar distance is also produced within traditionalism as a social space in villages like Katonga. In order to demonstrate this, I consider several episodes and conversations that occurred during several days in June of 1994, when Vas'ka and I came out from the forest to renew our supplies in Katonga store and to collect Vas'ka's wife Alena to bring her to the forest. During such visits, the sociality in the village intensifies and reveals relationships which both connect and divide its residents.

I start with an episode which concluded our visit. Vas'ka asked me to go to the director's office to request a lorry to bring the sacks with flour, sugar, and noodles to the camp five kilometers away from the village, where we had left our reindeer and Churchill.

‘Go ask him, he will listen to you. Tell him that we don't want to bring the reindeer to the village. They'll get tired on the solid road, and they would get scared by dogs’.

So I went. The director told me that there was a car scheduled to bring a load of wood from the saw-mill. ‘Get your stuff on, and it will drop the load near to your reindeer’. I ran back to Vas'ka's house. We started to pack quickly. Soon a big Kamaz lorry turned into our street and stopped by the house, nearly hitting the wooden sidewalk. A tall Russian driver appeared in the doorway: ‘Shall we go?’

...‘So, Alena, [off you] go’, Vas'ka said turning to his wife. ‘Aren't we all going?’, inquired Alena. ‘No’, replied Vas'ka, ‘we'll finish the dinner, clear things up and join you later’.

...‘Liar’, objected Alena, ‘you are going to stay here and get drunk’.

...‘How are we going to get drunk? This is...’ Vas'ka pointed to a half-empty bottle – ‘this is it; and we have got no money left’.

...‘Are you going or what?’, the driver butted in. ‘What is the hurry?’ Vas'ka's voice sounded offended. ‘Sit down; have tea; here is some meat; take a shot’. The driver took a place by the table and poured himself a drink. ‘Alena’, Vas'ka turned back to his wife, ‘get yourself together and go’. ‘I am not going until it is clear that all of us are ready to go’. ‘A woman has to go with the sacks’, said Vas'ka, citing a ‘rule’ that many Evenki had told me about. When a couple changes camps, the woman leads the convoy of reindeer with the sacks loaded on them, and the man rides nearby. In other words, the woman takes care of the goods, and the man is free to ride around and examine the road.

‘All right, I'll go if you pour this vodka into the fire. All of it! Pour all of it! Round it up (*zakrugliaisia*)!’

Vas'ka made a tragic face and emptied the bottle on the stove. ‘All right. Let's go’.

We turn to the driver, but see his chair empty. He had left the room. In the ensuing silence we heard the sound of his engine starting up. The car left. Nobody ran after it. Nobody cared to stop it. We all turned back to cleaning the house after the feast and to packing our stuff.

This episode concluded our summer visit of the village. It also marked a moment of closure of meanings of being Evenki for the Russian driver and, by extension, for the Russian-headed collective farm. As the driver left without saying good-bye, what went without saying in his departure was the impossibility of ‘rational’ dealing with both Vas'ka and Alena. The driver's silent departure, thus, stamped a collective-farm economy with a meaning of indigenouness as a matter of indisputable fact. In turn, Vas'ka, whose unannounced departures I witnessed so many times and who was a skilled mocker and dodger of any ‘rules’, to my surprise insisted on one: ‘A woman has to go with the sacks’. However, this enunciation only marked the failure. Alena went with us to the forest for the summer, but her ‘sacks’ were permanently in the village, and she did

not drive Vas'ka's reindeer convoy, like an Evenki woman should do'. Thus, our departure to the forest did not so much affirm this rule as reveal a tension.

When we came out to the village several days before, Vas'ka hoped that he would receive payment for the last fur-hunting season. He finished hunting in December (1993), but the collective kept postponing the payment, first until March, 1994, then until summer, and then again. The reason for this was lack of funds which the collective farm received from the state and which became increasingly scarce after the Russian government reduced state sponsorship of northern collectives in the light of its new economic policies.

Irritated about this, Vas'ka promised me to go 'next time' to 'traders' – on private agents who paid immediately and 'gave a better price for fur anyway'. Vas'ka's wife Alena was more pessimistic: 'And who is the trader? – the former [collective farm] deputy director for hunting... This year, Bogdan sold [the fur] to him, but only for seventeen thousand [rubles for each pelt]'. In the winter of 1993-95, this amount – an equivalent of about six US dollars – was only two thousand rubles more than the price offered by the collective farm. 'In Tura', continued Alena, 'you can sell for twenty-five or thirty thousand; but here the trader is not going to offer that – and people are thankful to take the cash right away'.

It was a buyers' market, in which the interests of new private traders and collective farm directors collided. By keeping the collective farm monopoly over land – on several occasions, the director threatened to terminate hunters' licenses if they didn't sell the fur to him – both state collectives and private traders managed to keep the purchasing price at the minimum and, therefore, extract a higher profit by reselling fur in the mainland.<sup>16</sup> Alena suggested jokingly that Arun, the Evenki ethnic revival movement, should have its own trade agents. As we discussed this, Vas'ka came back and told us that he had obtained credit at the shop for the money that the collective farm owed him: 'We'll shop now, and they will subtract from my salary, whenever it arrives'. He sounded relieved: we could shop, pack, and go. On our way to the village store, Alena told me that it was just as well, because her cousin 'Bogdan got all his money at once and – surprise! – at once spent it drinking'. And she added that 'if they see cash, they spend it all on vodka, and then take credit in the store anyway'.

Let me highlight the differences between Vas'ka's and Alena's points of view. For Vas'ka, the satisfactory solution was to get credit, and to stop waiting indefinitely in the doors of the office,

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<sup>16</sup> This was one of the advantages of keeping the State collective and not 'privatizing' it, that is, splitting it into a number of smaller private farms. Another advantage was that it still received the State subsidies. No matter how delayed these payments were, collective farms were still eligible for these grants that they didn't have to return.

to 'pack and go', and to balance his account 'later'. For Alena, as for wives of other Evenki hunters, and for many Evenki women in Katonga, this very solution was part of the problem. It showed the ease with which 'they' (*oni*) – the Evenki men – went with the flow, postponed balancing their accounts, and lived in and for the moment. Binge-drinking on money that was supposed to last three or four months in the forest was the evidence of such a mentality. 'It would be better if they stayed behind in the forest, like Churchill', concluded Alena, 'I think that, among the young people, he is the only serious Evenki in the forest'.

Many Evenki women have strong opinions about the drinking in the village, which remains an essential experience of 'coming out of the forest'. I once witnessed the wife of a hunter who went to the house of the trader (formerly, the collective farm deputy director for hunting), where this trader and the hunter were having a party. She seized a bear skin that her husband 'gifted' to the trader instead of selling it to him. Furthermore, capitalizing on the moment of unambiguous moral authority, she immediately sold it back to the trader for 500,000 rubles worth of supplies (see Ssorin-Chaikov 2000b for discussion of this episode). On such occasions, both hunters and traders hide from their wives, although it is quite hard to do, since these trading/party places in Katonga are located in traders' own houses, rather than in shops.

But there is a difference between female authority in such situations and in the traditionalist context. When the fur-hunter's wife seized back the bear skin and re-sold it to the trader, she openly challenged her husband's authority and, in doing so, expanded the field of the social, that is, of relational and negotiable, as a location for trade. On the contrary, when Alena stated that it 'would be better if they stayed behind in the forest' or never 'see cash', she revealed a distance which in her case is a matter of a wish, but which already operates in Katonga as a topography of poverty and dependency.

Actually, before Vas'ka got the credit at the store, he went to one of the members of the Katonga board of the Arun, Nadezhda, old Nikolai's sister and Vas'ka's aunt. I do not think he seriously believed that the Arun could help in these circumstances, but he still gave it a try. He came back quickly and quite offended. His aunt did not even invite him inside, and quickly finished the conversation by saying that the Katonga board of the Arun was penniless and depended on the collective farm just like any forest hunter. 'She thinks I am hung-over, and am going about in the village asking for money in order to have another drink', commented Vas'ka.

As Vas'ka was occupied with finding money to buy supplies, I was interviewing the head of the Katonga board of the Arun, the chief physician of the Katonga Hospital Natalia Vladimirovna Ushakova. She told me about the obstacles to forming clan-based communities,

and then asked me, ‘How is life in the forest? How do they make their ends meet [in the current crisis]? Do Evenki speak Evenki or Russian in the brigades?’

As we discussed all this, I realized that she had probably never talked with Vas'ka and other forest hunters and herders, unless they were her patients in the hospital. She was Evenki, but not from Katonga. She was married to a Russian geologist, and they had a subscription magazine to the ‘Expanses of the North’ (*Severnye Prostory*). We were having tea in their urbanized apartment, and I noticed a stack of aboriginal food recipes clipped out from that magazine. There was also an issue of the District newspaper *Sovetskaia Evenkiia*, opened to the page with the following announcement:

“Needed: Marriage among the Evenki”

Some time in the middle of April, the Evenki District will host a group of documentary film makers. We happen to know that the Ostankino TV studio [the central Russian TV company] reserved them to shoot three ten-minute documentaries on ethnographic topics: Evenki national marriage, the Evenki house (with the national mode of life) and Evenki national clothing. All who would be willing to help the film makers to shoot truthful, but not ‘rehearsed’ data on these topics, please address your suggestions to the editors of the District newspaper.<sup>17</sup>

When Natalia Vladimirovna asked me about life in the forest camps, her question seemed odd to me only initially. Her traditionalism was more in dialogue with ethnographers and traditionalist publications than with forest Evenki. The fact that she asked me, rather than Vas'ka, about forest camps highlighted the distance upon which traditionalism was contingent – a distance between the iconic images of traditional hunters and herders on the one hand and, on the other, of people who were represented by these images.

Thus, it is no accident that the image of Churchill entered Alena’s remarks about the necessity for Evenki hunters to see cash as little as possible: (‘I think that, among the young people, he [Churchill] is the only serious Evenki in the forest’). Churchill is a name of a teen-ager who never wandered about the village drunk and in ragged clothes. In fact, he was never seen in the village. As one of the youngest in the forest camp, he always stayed behind with the reindeer, and thus was kept in sobriety and in general isolation from the seductive ‘modernity’ of Katonga. His invisibility is, therefore, crucial for designation of the last survivals of traditional lifestyles, just as, for Nadezhda, the infrequency of the ‘tent worker’ Sveta’s visits to Katonga allows her to cast authenticity at this state occupational category.

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<sup>17</sup> *Evenkiiskaia Zhizn'*, 28 March 1994.



## The Specter of Domesticity and the Invention of Tradition

How much did the woman of the North change, how much did she grow!  
 In her neat and clean two-room apartment in Tura, I am listening to Anna Vasilievna Yegorova ... while admiring the ornaments of kumalan [Evenki rug made of reindeer skin] which decorate the wall over the sofa. This rug, together with a big black skin of one of the ten bears that she killed, is all that distinguishes her apartment from anyone's in Tura: refrigerator, television, sewing machine... – the usual items of modern life [*byt*] that you can find in every house. From the kitchen comes the hum of the electric tea-kettle; a small pillow sits in the corner of the sofa; no single speck of dust, no single wrinkle on the door mats; a pretty cloth on the round table. Cozy and calm. As we talk, Anna Vasilievna is sitting in front of me, in a warm home house and soft slippers... (Bubishenko and Khonina 1980: 115).

This 1980 publication celebrates the fifty-years anniversary of the Evenki Autonomous District and the sweeping ‘leap forward’ of the Evenki from ‘primitive’ to ‘scientific’ socialism. This volume presents this ‘leap forward’, however, not as a linear (r)evolutionary change from ‘tradition’ to ‘modernity’, but as a socio-economic and technological development in which both co-exist. Anna Vasilievna Yegorova is a famous fur hunter. By noting ‘a big black skin of one of the ten bears that she killed’ on the one hand and ‘the usual items of modern life that you can find in every house’ on the other, the publication highlights her double position as both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ subject who can easily commute between these regimes of economy and identity. Another contribution to this publication conveys a similar message. It is the poem *Agitator* by the Evenki poet Ivan Udygir. The poem describes a visit of a district ideologist to Evenki forest camps. He travels in the reindeer sledge with fresh newspapers (‘Wise words/Dash through the forest’, as Udygir puts this) and spends the night in the tent of an Evenki ‘sharpshooter’ who listens to the news, without missing a single word’:

Agitator says,  
 ‘A glorious victory was achieved:  
 A [Soviet] rocket was launched  
 To go all the way to Venus’.  
 The hunter marvels  
 At this flight...  
 Tomorrow, with the morning star,  
 He will go out hunting (Ibid: 101-2).

By the 1980s, however, such celebrations of the co-evolution of hunting-gathering and reindeer-herding ‘tradition’ with rocket-launching ‘modernity’ were symptomatic of a failure rather than success. ‘Traditional’ economic practices were in decline. Collective farms were losing reindeer, indigenous men willing to work as herders, and woman as their ‘professional

housewives'. As the work and life of hunters like Anna Vasilievna Yegorova were celebrated, the existence of this problem was already acknowledged, with recent sociological study confirming the tendency of the several last decades:

in Evenki villages, there appears to be a 'shortage of brides' whereas in Russian villages [of the District] there are many more Evenki women than men. ... in Surinda – an Evenki village with a strong traditional economy [i.e., reindeer herding] – for forty potential grooms ... there are only seventeen potential brides of Evenki nationality whereas, in the neighboring regional capital Baikit, Evenki women outnumber by three times Evenki men [who live there]. For these women, mixed marriages offer the chance to have families, although such marriages are not long lasting. Hence, many families consist in just mothers and their children. For young men who remain in Evenki villages, to live without family is a real possibility. Furthermore, the economy suffers because it is difficult for the [male] reindeer herder without the [female] tent worker (Zolotorubov et al. 1992: 49-50).

I have argued that it was such a diagnosis that constituted a point of discursive displacement – the shift in terms of nature of 'indigenous problem' from that of class-like exploitation in the North to that of 'normal family life, as well as ... the reproduction of traditional economic practices and the ethnic specificity (*etnicheskaia spetsifika*) of the population' (Ibid.: 50). I also argued that the creation of the collective farm occupational category of the 'female tent worker' served the same purpose. It recognized the decline in a 'traditional' economic sector as a problem and, at the same time, reformulated the terms of this problem from those of class to those of ethnicity and cultural ecology.

Together with the employment of Evenki women as 'tent workers', the vision for co-evolution of 'tradition' and 'modernity' included plans for a more stationary reindeer herding in large fenced areas with small but fully functional housing sites in the geographical centers of the reindeer migration routes.<sup>18</sup> These farms would eventually include comfortable houses, a sauna, and a small school. 'Already, in the Evenki District there is a ratio of eight pupils to every teacher', wrote Tura-based journalist Yurii Shebalin, 'There will be practically no need for extra positions. What would be needed is to encourage young teachers, particularly of the indigenous nationality, to work in the forest'. Upon hearing this, the tent workers of a reindeer brigade that he had visited perked up 'with the happiness that sudden hope sometimes sparks': 'in this case, we would never leave the forest! ... what joy – to live with children ... and the teacher, we would cook for her [for the teacher], sew for her and do her laundry!' (Shebalin 1990: 78-9).

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<sup>18</sup> Large-scale fence construction was practiced not just in the Evenki District but across Siberia to manage forest reindeer herding (see Borozdin et al. 1990), and, in some places, to separate migration routes of wild reindeer from those of domestic ones (Kwon 1993: 21).

These plans, too, have never been fully realized. The construction of large stationary fences started in Katonga in the mid-1980s but never saw completion. The forest farms have not been built. Evenki women never desired to go ‘back to the forest’ as teachers, let alone as tent-workers. Mostly female indigenous teachers – produced, as Shebalin notes, at the amazing ratio of one teacher per eight indigenous pupils – preferred the ethnic politics of the village and upward marriages with newcomers. In other words, the success of these policies was not in the literal success of the proposed development programs. It was in shifting of the terms of meanings of being indigenous Soviet subjects, which was achieved by failures of these programs. These failures also had spatial effects within the specter of traditionalism that they helped institute. Among these effects are not merely territorial re-arrangements in the forest life around few ‘female tent-workers’ but, more importantly, social distance which appeared in (and, I argued, sustained) traditionalism as a field of relationships in the village. The projection of social relationships in the village against the background of the meanings of forest life constituted a social technology of this distancing.



Illustration 3: “The Second Congress of Evenki Women: the huntress T. F. Momol’, of the

Tungus-Chunski region, is speaking” (1974). Courtesy of the Krasnoiarsk Kaievedcheskii Musei.



Illustration 4: Vera Vladimirovna Khirgiz, the elementary school teacher. (Tutonchany 1974). Courtesy of the Krasnoiarsk Kaievedcheskii Musei.

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