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Towards a Model of Comparing Transitional Forms in Russian Reindeer Herding¹

Yulian Konstantinov²

Abstract

The state-chosen reform model relevant to Russian reindeer herding is characterized by a policy of allowing the preservation of Soviet organizational forms (i.e. *kolkhoz*, *sovkhov*, etc.), alongside a recommendation for creating cooperative structures (*TOO*³, *SKhPK*⁴, etc.), as well as introducing clan-communities (*obshchiny*) for the numerically small peoples of the Far North, Siberia, and the Far East. As a result a great multitude of organizational forms have appeared in a formerly unitary terrain, dominated by varieties of the state farm.

A gap seems to exist in the literature as to a general model for the analysis of this diversity of cases marked by a dynamic reformulation in search of more effective adaptive strategies. Here a suggestion for a model will be proposed. It is based on the premise that the paths of specific development are determined by how the former state property is being transferred to new forms of ownership. Two extreme points can be postulated as ideal types: residual adherence to a state farm-like structure (“para-*sovkhov*”) at the one end of a hypothetical gradient vs. full private ownership at the other. The case of reindeer herding in the Russian European North (Murmansk Region, Kola Peninsula) is of a para-*sovkhov* slowly moving towards some form of informal redistribution of extant collective property. The driving mechanism behind the process operates by using the residual para-*sovkhov* for promoting informal private entrepreneurship (“crypto-entrepreneurship”, Konstantinov 2002). A given regional case can be analysed in terms of correspondence or relative distancing from a para-*sovkhov* (*sovkhoist*) state towards a private one. The issues of intra- and inter-herding team (brigade) hierarchical order, use of para-*sovkhov* infrastructure and the problematic around private (personal) deer, are seen as central, ethnographically observable variables for determining relative positions in this comparative model.

¹ I am grateful to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Germany) for supporting the fieldwork necessary for the study of a dynamic and critical period in NW Russian reindeer herding. My gratitude goes especially to Joachim Otto Habeck, coordinator of the Siberian Studies Centre, for the support of the “Belaya Golovka” field-trip (February-April 2004), and to Agnieszka Halemba and Tatjana Thelen for their careful reading and commenting on the manuscript.

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³ TOO - *tovarishchestvo s ogranichennoi otvetsvenosti*, Limited Liability Company.

⁴ SKhPK - *sel'skokhoziastvennaia proizvoditel'naiia kooperatsiia*, Cooperative for Agricultural Production.

“Shock Therapy” versus “Gradual Transition”

Reforms concerning agriculture in the Russian Federation differ in an important way from what happened in some other parts of the former Soviet Bloc, particularly in Poland. In schematic outlines, this is a difference between “shock therapy” versus. “gradual transition” post-state socialist reform models; the first term being most of all associated with the Polish model of pro-market reforms. This type introduced radical and swift change and, in the majority of cases where collective ownership had existed, it was transformed to fit the demands of a decentralized and pro-market environment.

In comparison to the “shock therapy model”, we observe something different in the rural sector of Murmansk Region, and specifically in reindeer herding. Here we see reforms of the “gradual transition” type – a type which has produced a great multitude of current organizational forms in the former collective/state farm sector.⁵

The political rationale behind this kind of reform in the rural (including tundra and taiga) region was to lengthen over time the impact of change or, as was the phrasing of the period, to carry out the reforms at a lower “social cost”. An important part of this policy was the chosen approach in respect of the cost of infrastructural services – like energy supply for central heating, electricity and, ultimately, – fuel costs. The upshot of the policy has been that the reaching of critical limits of state subsidies for covering a very large percentage of such costs was prolonged by more than a decade. In result, during the last several years regional and municipal administrations have had to resort to desperate measures not to let whole towns and villages go without heating, and, in some cases – even without electricity – in the face of long and severe winters.

In the context of such a creeping crisis, slowly reaching the limits of the attempt to reduce the “social cost” of reforms, rural-based low level actors have found themselves at a relative advantage in comparison to town-based ones. Murmansk Region, with a dominant presence of urban migrant labor from the south, is an especially good example of the case. A rapid deterioration of the mining-processing sector of the regional economy has trapped great parts of the population in ill-heated or, periodically, unheated blocks of flats with little prospects for escape. Against such a background, rural actors, with access to a renewable resource base

⁵ By 2000 the statistics were the following: “In the Northern regions there are registered and functioning 30 kolkhozi; 202 *sovkhosi*; 128 shareholding companies; 177 TOOs, 199 SKhPKs. Collective forms of ownership account for 55.5% of herd numbers; private ownership – 37.6% farmers’ enterprises (FKh) – around 7%.” (Savirskii 2000: 15).

in terms both of food and fuel for heating, have more room for maneuvering out of existential extremes.⁶

This is occurring in a context of “gradual transition” which in many cases is marked by a lingering presence of residual state socialist structures in the rural sector. These structures, irrespective of their name – i.e. *kolkhoz*, *sovkhov*, TOO, SKhPK, etc. – are still very much “state farmist” (“sovkhoist”) in structural spirit, in the sense of retaining and residually reproducing basic tensions characteristic of state (command) socialism. These are tensions, first of all, between a command centre and commanded, which, in this setting, is realized between a village-based administration and a tundra-based workforce⁷. On another level, this is the tension between interests governing a politically-oriented public enterprise, often in conflict with those of economically-oriented private households. A corollary conflict emerges as one between public formal and private informal economies. A blanket term for all state-farmist (sovkhoist) structures bearing such tensions, can be offered as the “residual post-Soviet state farm” or, for short, the *para-sovkhov*.

State Farm and Cooperative

The term “*para-sovkhov*” attempts to capture, on the one hand, characteristic features that connect an entity with the previous period of state socialism, but, on the other hand, takes into account a lot that has changed. In the first place, even when an entity has retained its name as “*sovkhov*”, “*kolkhoz*”, “*lespromkhov*”, “*goskhov*”, etc., two essential and critical ingredients have effectively disappeared: state subsidizing and state marketing. The state as an owner of the Soviet state farm had arrived at the curious situation of both ensuring production and buying from itself, and thus the life of the state farm had more political and social meaning, than a strictly economic one. In this sense, in accordance with the general structural principle of state socialism, the *sovkhov* had developed more as a socio-political institution (Humphrey 1983; 1998), than as a strictly economic enterprise.

Here a look from a deeper historical perspective is instructive. The period 1917-1932 can be seen as the period during which the pre-revolutionary (“old”, “bourgeois”) cooperative (*kooperatsiia*) was gradually pushed aside in favor of the collective and state farm (*kolkhoz*

⁶ Cf. the discussion of the advantages of “peasant-workers” in comparison to “pure workers” in Szelenyi (1988: xiff); Konstantinov and Simic 2001; Lockwood 1973.

⁷ Cf. similar terms for this binary opposition in Habeck (2003) as “*kontora* (office) vs. *brigada* (herding team)”; “office vs. forest” with Ssorin-Chaikov (2003: 113); Vitebsky and Wolfe’s analysis of the village/taiga divide (2001: 88-89).

and *sovkhoz*) (Voronin 1997: 181ff). A central issue here is the Bolshevik vision of creating huge “factories for grain and meat”, Bukharin’s “nationalized grain factory” (1988: 143), in which peasants become salaried workers, while the state undertakes marketing tasks, in the sense of centralized redistribution of the total product. Chaianov’s repeated warnings that there were limits to rural agglomeration (1991: 69ff; Thorner et al.1966) were not heeded, and the “old cooperatives” were liquidated by the beginning of the 1930s, in the name of achieving total political control, with the implied sacrifice of economic efficiency.

From this perspective, one might ask what is happening today. The case of former reindeer herding state farms in Murmansk Region, as well as a rich and diverse array of analyses of other local situations, suggest the strong presence of forces attempting to preserve or revive a state-farmist model amid the vicissitudes of pro-market reforms⁸. In this type of environment the members of the *kolkhoz*, *sovkhoz*, or post-Soviet cooperative, continue to be salaried workers of an enterprise. The former type of property relations according to which all assets belong to the enterprise, and how they are used is decided primarily by an administrative elite, with the director at its pinnacle, tend to persist. Members cannot break out and take a share of the property with them, and, for all realistic purposes the “cooperators” are still very much hired hands.

While these reflexes from the former order can clearly be felt over a decade after the onset of reforms, the state has largely withdrawn both in the sphere of motivating production by administrative measures and subsidization, as well as from taking responsibility for the product, once it has been produced. The most palpable effect of this state of affairs is that salaries are often not paid for months, and that the enterprises tend to find themselves uncomfortably dependent on the new phenomenon of middlemen.

For comparative purposes, the second issue – that of marketing – deserves special attention. The void left by the exit of the state as the dominant trader has been filled by private entrepreneurs of various magnitudes. By now it has been largely erased from public memory that the main reason for the existence of the pre-Soviet “bourgeois” cooperatives had been to protect the interests of the members against rapacious entrepreneurs and that these aims had been achieved to a surprising extent (Voronin 1997: 30ff). A pervading sense of helplessness against the “mafia”, which can be felt today, reveals a continuing tension and conflict between workers and administrations, and not between primary producers and traders

⁸ Cf. for instance Gray’s detailed analysis of creating municipal companies (“*municipalization*”) in Chukotka (2001: 13f), Anderson’s presentation of “non-privatization” in Taimyr (2002: 160f); Ssorin-Chaikov analysis of the construction of the *obshchina* as an antithesis of the *sovkhoz* (but in reality filling this role more on a discursive rather than substantive level (2003: 166-167)); Donahoe’s discussion of recycling of *obshchinas* in Tyva into state enterprises – GUP (2004: 128; 195-200).

(middlemen). The cooperative, as it was in pre-Soviet Russia, or as it is in Fennoscandia today, is still, in this sense, a memory of the future.

In the context of the main action taking place between workers and administrations, while the marketing/trading sphere is open to virtually unbridled private entrepreneurship, the cooperative – as a protective mechanism, can be said to exist only on an informal level, following established traditions of cryptic existence from the era of state socialism. The “slow transition” type of reform has had thus, as a consequence, the effect of sustaining a discrepancy between overt (formal) and covert (informal) representations and acts. (In an aside it could be said that an apparent mystique of this state of affairs is popularly sustained by adages of the type “Russia boggles the mind” [*Rossiiu uma ne poimiosh*], and the like.)

The workings of cryptic institutions – like informal mechanisms for communal protection and solidarity (“crypto-communality”)⁹, or informal entrepreneurship (“crypto-entrepreneurship”) – are, indeed, not immediately apparent. A residual struggle with superordinate bureaucracies motivates actors to use at its greatest advantage the system of dynamic horizontal links, experimenting in human networks, and realizing effective – mostly informal – economic action.

The latter has as its immediate reference point the para-*sovkhos* administration, and within this framework, the “slow transition” type of reform motivates the realization of informal, or “hidden” privatization. An effective lowering of the social cost of reforms indeed lies hidden here. It can be argued that this form of privatization – by informal (“hidden”) redistribution of public assets into private hands – is accessible to the best degree not only to members of higher elite groups but also, very importantly, to lower level elites, an issue which shall be discussed below.

The Significance of Herding Hierarchies – “higher”, “lower” and connecting elites

An observable – “surface structure” – working of a given transitional type, can be registered ethnographically by sharpening the attention towards hierarchies at the workers’ level, in our case that of the herders. In the concerned literature, especially of the applied kind, one can often see references to the “herders”, as an undifferentiated community, which, as it were, has “a voice”, that “has to be heard”. Such well-intentioned recommendations seem, sadly, to often ignore the realities of the situation on the ground entirely.

⁹ I am grateful to Agnieszka Halemba for suggesting this term in her perceptive and valuable comments on the original version of this paper.

These, I claim, tend to be characterized by sharply differentiated hierarchical levels, inherited from the state farm. Actors, having to positions in them, may have – and as a rule do have – interests specific to a particular position in the hierarchy and do not belong, in this way, to any “common voice”. A brief presentation of a local case distribution shall illustrate my point.

“Higher” Herding Elites

In the present context of reindeer herding cooperatives in Murmansk Region, by “higher actors” are meant persons in the top administrative positions in the hierarchy of the respective herding enterprise. The “higher elite”, in this sense, is represented most of all by the director, who should more properly be called Chairman of the Board of Managers (of the Cooperative), but no one really refers to the position in this way. A firm and lasting link with the old appellation “Director of the *Sovkhoz*” remains. It should also be noted, in passing, that the director is one of the prominent figures among the local dignitaries and usually a deputy of the rayon (municipal) council (*deputat raionnogo Soveta*). Hardly a day goes by without the name of the director/deputy, alongside other prominent local figures, appearing in the local paper, in standard congratulatory editorials to various “workers” on account of their “festive day”; the workers of the meat-processing industry; the medical workers, the builders, the militia, the submarine fleet personnel, etc. The calendar of the Soviet occupational festive days (somewhat reminiscent of Catholic saint’s days), has remained virtually unchanged. With almost every day being someone’s occupational holiday, in addition to the great national holidays like 1 May (Labour Day), 9 May (Victory Day), 8 March (Women’s Day), etc., the administrative elite/masses divide is sustained by congratulatory mentions in the media, very much reminiscent of the politbureau elite waving to the marching masses from the balustrade of the Lenin Mausoleum. The director of the former *sovkhov* (current cooperative) certainly belongs to this waving-to-the-masses elite, cementing his position by deferring to the “workers”.

The other members of the reindeer herding “higher elite” are a number of vice-directors. In our particular case they are responsible – respectively – for general reindeer herding management, transport and supply of spare parts, and security and protection (of reindeer herds). At this top level, the interest in direct ownership of reindeer is not great. In the particular case, only one of the vice-directors is known to own deer. The positions are associated with interests in commanding or appropriating assets of higher proportions, such as

real estate formerly owned by the *sovkhos*, financial assets, new operations (e.g. nature tourism) etc.

“Lower Elites”

“Lower elites” are those that lead among the rank-and-file herders. The critically significant groups here are the brigade-leaders (*brigadiri*). A figure that can acquire serious influence at this, or even higher level, is the vet-assistant (*zootekhnik, olen'tekhnik*). In some cases, he may be responsible not only for a single brigade (like the brigade-leader), but for several brigades.

Another position of serious importance – at the brigade level – is that of a senior herder, who may be connected by kinship to the brigade-leader or may be a long-standing friend and partner, revealing a close kinship or para-kinship bond. The position forms an inner circle which can function as the stable and decision-making nucleus of a brigade. For realistic purposes, the elusive “voice of the herders” is best found here, with, however, at least one important qualification – decision-making is very often not revealed as a verbal text to be ethnographically recorded. An organized discussion is a rare thing to see and hear, and the outsider is confronted with a rather hermetic system of implied meanings and expected or allowed action according to intra-brigade status¹⁰. This discursive specifics of the rather closed all-male life of the brigade shall be taken up further below in connection with how decision making is exercised at round-up (corralling) sessions. It may be noted, however, at this point, that the communicative specifics of brigade life, completely contrasting discursive rules, accentuate the distance between herders and superordinate urban administrations (the “*kontora/brigade*” divide, Habeck 2003). In the same way that herders feel helpless at organized administrative meetings, administrators experience the brigade environment as silently hostile and hermetic. It could be suggested, therefore, that a movement away from an inherited silent conflict between administrations and workers (herders), characteristic of the state farm, shall be expressed by an increasingly vocal presence of herders’ representatives in settings where herders’ interests have to be protected against currently unchecked interests of middlemen.

The common case at present is, more often than not, that “the voice of the herders” comes from the higher elites, or even beyond – from activist organizations, very far removed from

¹⁰ Discussing gender problematics, Vitebsky and Wolf provide the following very illustrative comment: “Village girls say that they cannot imagine marrying a reindeer herder because they have no conversation, that herders communicate as if by telepathy” (2001: 89). Cf. also Ssorin-Chaikov’s perceptive discussion of “the landscape of abbreviated speech” (2003: 153f) in reference to teaching herding skills to village (*internat*) raised youths.

herding. The fact that lower brigade elites are often mute stems from the received conviction that it is beyond their competence to negotiate successfully with urban middlemen. Their competence is perceived to be exclusively connected with life in the tundra, or, in other words they perceive themselves to be superbly competent (“agentive”) only in herding, whereas urban matters remain within the sphere of competence of the higher administrative elites (cf. Habeck 2003).

The Head/Vet Dyad

A special note needs to be made of the positions of the head of the Reindeer Herding Department, and that of the veterinarian. These two persons work very closely with the herders, usually own large herds of private deer themselves, and are at the same time members of the Board of Managers and thus fairly close to the higher administrative elite. This – in short “head/vet dyad” – is the connecting link between the administration on the one hand and the herders on the other. It is, thus, the connecting link between the two prominent and distinct tiers of current sovkhoist hierarchical stratification.

How a specific pattern of post-Soviet reindeer herding management develops can be critically connected with the management behaviour of this head/vet pair. Further below, when the activities in the working chamber of corrals are discussed, I shall turn again to how this management pattern is expressed, and how it can be observed ethnographically. At this point it needs to be noted that the head/vet dyad is – *ex officio* – the controlling arm of the director over the brigade leaders, and ultimately the herders of various rank. What could be called “management policy” – or “reindeer herding political will” – and how it flows along this chain determines how a case develops. The proposed model discusses such scenarios as a continuation and re-assertion of the *sovkhov*, at the one extreme, or as a progressive departure from it on the other. Along such a gradient, the head/vet dyad may exercise a firm controlling function, may progressively depart from such a stance, and, in a fully privatized scenario become redundant.

“Rank-and-File Herders”

Upon closer examination it may turn out that no such group exist. A brigade composition turns out to be a finely graded hierarchy, including, to compound the picture, quite a number of auxiliary positions, as well as *extra officio* presences. A brief listing is needed here.

Herders are graded according to work experience (*stazh*) into senior herders, herders, junior herders and students (*ucheniki, praktikanti*). Auxiliary positions here are connected to three sectors: transportation, domestic camp duties, and corral duties. Accordingly, we find the all-purpose-vehicle drivers (*vezdekhodchiki*), each with a co-driver (*naparnik*); the male or female camp cooks (*chumrabortnitsi*); and the corral workers (*koral'nie rabotniki*). This latter group may include the more specialized sub-groups of carpenters (*plotniki*) and slaughterers (*zaboishchiki*), but, in reality, the corral workers are assigned the heavier corral jobs during the round-up irrespective of specialization. An auxiliary position of relative prominence is the counter of private deer or *schiotchik*.

At least three systems intersect to determine the standing of a person in reference to the positions enumerated above. These are the official position itself, as well as the factor of work experience, both significant in determining a worker's salary. This intersects with kinship or para-kinship proximity to the brigade leader, and importantly, with marital and what could be called alcohol-related status. The latter has absolute abstainers at the one end of a gradient and desperate alcoholics on the other. A fragile intermediate ground may be said to be occupied by the category of the "encoded" (*zakodirovannye*), or persons with implants preventing alcoholic consumption. In the final count, there will be a very great difference in social and economic status between, say, a senior herder closely related to the brigade leader, married with a family and an abstainer, and, on the other hand a corral worker, unconnected with a member of lower, higher or connecting elites, single and a heavy drinker. As a rule the first person will also have a good-sized herd of private deer (within the collective herd), while the worker often has nothing.

The list of positions is not complete without mentioning *extra officio* representatives at tundra camps. These fall into a variety of groups: immediate kin or relatives of active herders, former herders as old age pensioners, para-kin or members of mutually supportive networks and, finally, traders who may have only informal trading links with the brigades.

The Use of Infrastructure for Resource Extraction

Tundra Log Cabins

The *extra officio* periphery is recognized by the fact that they are allowed to live in brigade premises – tundra log cabins (Rus. sg. *domik*, pl. *domiki*) – for given periods of time. This time is used for winter or summer fishing, taking care of private sled-bucks or of private deer at corralling time, as well as for other extractive purposes – hunting, collecting berries,

collecting mature (“wooden”) antlers, mushrooms, birch tumour (*kap*), scrap iron (*makulatura*), or whatever else the tundra may offer for foraging.

The person in charge is the current brigade leader, who is responsible for the numerous log cabins strewn around the brigade territory. In a sovkhoist state-of-affairs all these assets of the former state farm (*sovkhov*) were transferred to the form that has succeeded it. This can be a cooperative of the SKhPK type, or any other of the numerous new organizational forms – collective or private (see footnote 5). Due to strong residual similarities with the former state farms, I generalize them here – despite their respective current labels – as para-*sovkhov* forms.

Use-rights to the cabins are relegated to currently employed personnel. This personnel – and in the first instance, its leadership – have discretion over extending such use-rights to members of the infinite mass of “outsiders” (*postoronnye*). As said above, this mass has its “in-group” circles, depending on kinship and para-kinship links, supportive networks, trade interests and, significantly, former herder status. It may be said therefore, that a less-sovkhoist state-of-affairs would be reflected in a clearer and sharper sense of property and norms about who can and who cannot use the huts as well as other parts of still functioning former *sovkhov* infrastructure.

Transport Infrastructure – the *vezdekhod*

One of the most prominent material presences connected with the *sovkhov* state, is the all-purpose track vehicle or *vezdekhod*. There are other relics too: the biplane An-2 (“*Anushka*”), the helicopter Mi-8 and most of all, the ubiquitous Soviet snowmobile “*Buran*”; but still the *vezdekhod* retains a special place. The An-2 biplane and especially the Mi-8 helicopter have become prohibitively expensive to charter (especially the latter) and had to be given up for the most part by herding cooperatives. The snowmobile (*buran*) can be replaced by bucks and sled if necessary. The *vezdekhod* has remained, by contrast, irreplaceable to this day. Why is this so?

The answer is twofold – technical and, on a more general level – systemic. The technical part is connected with the carrying capacity of the machine – two to six tons according to type –, its amphibious qualities, the low-grade diesel fuel it uses and a form of maintenance and repair in which a primary role is assigned to the sledge-hammer (*kuvalda*). The systemic explanation, reflecting local ways of economic practice, is that the *vezdekhod* is a publicly maintained vehicle that services private informal economies. Viewing the *vezdekhod* as a metonymic representation of the *sovkhov* contains a generative element – it may be predicted that its disappearance shall signal the final end of the state farm. As suggested by the

ethnography, a systemic change in property regimes (from state to private ownership) will be characterized by removal of the whole machine park – *vezdekhods*, tractors, and other heavy machinery – from the structure of the cooperative, and its transfer into private hands. We may observe a process similar to the privatization of fixed wing or helicopter transport, or, if we look further afield the way in which such machine parks were “liquidated” in other parts of the former Soviet Bloc.

Private Deer and the Working Chamber

The *vezdekhod* may be seen as the mechanical metaphor of the *sovkhov* and the ultimate symbol of sovkhovism itself, the physical carrier of crypto-entrepreneurship. Crypto-entrepreneurship, in turn, is perhaps most graphically seen in the working chamber of counting/harvesting enclosures (corrals).

The enclosures are of the well-known type – complex structures, composed of a receiving “hall” (*zal*), into which the herd is funneled, guided by two outer wings. Most of the halls are designed to take in a herd of approximately two to three thousand head. From the receiving hall, groups of several hundred head at a time are separated and moved into a smaller partition, from where smaller groups of ten to twenty head at a time are led into the working chamber (*rabochaia kamera*).

In this chamber a careful look is taken at the animals, while they are stampeding around a small group of herders. The chamber is not big – about some ten metres in diameter on the average. After examining the animals, they are let into a number of other pens, depending on whether they go back into the herd and are let free, or are destined to be slaughtered (*brakovka*). The slaughter group (*zaboinii kusok*) is divided into a collective (“*sovkhov*”) and private part, and these go to separate pens. These animals are subject to differing slaughtering procedures and, subsequently – trading, a topic I shall not pursue here.

From the point of view of a comparative model of types of development, a critical activity observed in the working chamber is the decision-making process. This is almost completely opaque and thus not open to direct observation. The nearest to some form of discussion would be an interchange between the head/vet dyad on the one hand and the brigade-leaders on the other, prior to corralling. These are closed-door affairs. But even then, from what can be discerned at present, critical questions like whose private deer are to be protected, whose to be redistributed either into the collective or into other private herds, and whose private herd is to be increased at the expense of other private owners, or from the collective herd – all these sensitive, but vital questions, seem not to enter the discussion at least in an open manner. This

is the classified information of sovkhoist herding. Arrangement is, as it were – *by default* – i.e. according to a well-enculturated sense of rank. The rank of a herder within a brigade determines his appropriating rights. Making explicit statements about who can take how much from the collective herd becomes, in this way, conveniently redundant, and avoids the awkwardness of making open statements about informal activities.

It could be suggested therefore, that a departure from the sovkhoist type will exhibit a different discursive procedure, characterized by greater openness within concerned circles. We may expect implicit arrangements, reflecting a received hierarchical order from the *sovkhov*, to be substituted by ranking order of another kind. State bureaucratic arrangements of position may be expected to recede in favour of family, kin, or para-kin arrangements, connected with overt and not covert private herding (“crypto-entrepreneurship”). A comparative model would therefore look for types of hierarchical ordering, revealed in the redistributive discourse which determines action in the working chamber.

Unmarked (“whole-eared”) deer

In a sovkhoist arrangement, hierarchical ordering is fairly clearly reflected in reference to the sensitive issue of unmarked deer (“whole-eared” deer, *tseloushnie olen’i*). Unmarked deer appear increasingly in the working chambers of various corrals, due to the fact that calving campaigns and calf earmarking, dependant on them, have become, as a practice, almost a thing of the past (Vladimirova 2002). Another consequence of this process of alienation between herd and herders – or, as the herders put it – of “the deer going wild” (*odichanye olen’ei*), is the current absence of small brigade herds migrating over well-defined brigade territories (ibid.). Former brigade herds have merged during the recent decade into huge composite herds, reaching over ten thousand head in some cases. One of the consequences of this tendency is that those herders who are custodians of either brigade or private herding interests have to be present at, ideally, all corrals or send their representatives to them.

Omitting various technical features of the situation, it can be said that a para-*sovkhov* (*sovkhoist*) arrangement in reindeer herding is moving towards arbitrariness of calf-marking, i.e. arbitrariness of legitimization of ownership. Arbitrariness here is understood as a departure from the norm, according to which a calf is marked according to the ear-mark of the mother, and thus belongs to the brigade (or private person) whose mark the mother bears. This, as it were, “natural” order of legitimization of ownership, has always seen aberrations, but currently, arbitrary and not natural legitimization has become the dominant pattern. “Now”, the herders would say, “you can see a calf with a brigade mark running by a ‘private’

mother, or vice-versa. Such a thing was never seen before.” The system of legitimization of ownership has thus shifted from a past order perceived as “natural”, and moved to one of informal inter-brigade redistribution of both the collective and the private stock. The technical means by which this process is effected – a process tantamount to hidden privatization – is a reversal of other received norms of reindeer herding management. Instead of seeking domestication of the herd, inter-brigade arbitrary redistribution of stock is assisted by the opposite – by progressive alienation between herd and herders, and, by the same token, by regressive calving care and calf-marking (by the mother). Further features are connected with abandoning clearly delimited brigade herds and brigade territories.

As an inherently desirable result – within the particular sovkhoist system discussed here – increasing numbers of virgin deer appear in counting/harvesting corrals, as said above, and arbitrary decisions are to be taken as to whom they should belong. There are various ways for dealing with this situation, reflecting systemic features of a given reindeer herding environment. In describing how this used to be done among the Skolt Sami in NE Finland, Ingold, for instance, says that virgin deer (*peurat*) would be set aside and sold at an auction, the proceedings going to covering expenses of the herding association (Ingold 1976: 22, 52).

In contrast to such public dealings, a sovkhoist state-of-affairs is characterized by informalized arbitrariness of arrangement, which reflects existing hierarchical order. The ethnographically observable “surface structure” expression of this is as follows: the head/vet leadership indicates to brigade leaders, which brigade ear-mark is to be put on virgin deer on a daily basis. In other words, on each day of counting, brigades who have deer in the corral, would have a “day”: say, Brigade 8 – the first day, Brigade 1 – the second, etc. During “his day”, the leader of a given brigade may allow part of the virgin quota to receive private marks, according to his standing within “his brigade”. It should be noted here, that going by current experience, while the head/vet pronouncement is typically overt (about who has the “day”), intra-brigade distribution is not explicated and is performed implicitly (“by default”). The latter reflects an acute shared sense of intra-brigade rights, and also, significantly, a sense of balance in respect to how much can be taken from the collective herd without infringing dangerously on the stability of the overall cooperative structure. In the Kola case, currently this sense tacitly dictates that the overall private herd should not exceed half that of the cooperative, i.e. that the 50-50 proportion should be maintained. The tacit agreement is that for the cooperative to be able to assist the process of hidden privatization – not least the residual functioning of the *vezdekhod* pool – a given limit is not to be overstepped. A sense of hidden privatization having not reached critical mass levels yet pervades the terrain.

One can sense this spirit of the times in numerous jokes and flippant remarks. A brigade leader was thinking aloud about whether to go on using his *sovkhos* snowmobile, a much battered ancient *buran*, just shy of breaking down completely, or buy from his own pocket a foreign machine (*inomarka*), the much coveted Finnish-made *Lynx* (*lunks*). “Why should you be spending good money?”, the head of the Reindeer Herding Department asked him, “while it still holds, scrape along on it” (*poka derzhit, tyrkaisia*).

Conclusion

In an attempt to create a basis for comparing the great multitude of reindeer herding situations that have arisen during the recent decade, it has been suggested that a gradience be used, rather than a listing of fixed types. Such fixed types would be listed according to ethnic tradition (i.e. “Sami reindeer herding”, cf. Jernsletten and Klovov 2002: 23ff), habitat (“taiga reindeer herding”, *ibid.*), current organizational form (*sovkhos*, SKhPK, TOO, *obshchina*) etc.). While ethnic, geographical or organizational forms are and shall always be of legitimate interest in their own right, from the point of view of comparison of current dynamics of a pronounced multitude of mostly unstable types, they prove to be only of background relevance.

It has been suggested, instead, that, insofar as Russian reindeer herding is concerned, we use the overarching factor of the former reduction of a great multitude of cases to a generic command form. This form can be said to have emerged in opposition to private herdings, on the one hand, but also in a negation of cooperatives, which are not directly administered by the state. Thus, as it has been convincingly demonstrated in recent studies of the pre-Soviet cooperative (notably Voronin 1997) that by the early 1930s the collective and state farm was pushing from the scene not only private entrepreneurship of the previous type but also the cooperatives as associations of private producers. The concept of the nationalized “meat and grain factory” was seen as the only one consistent with state socialism. Whatever the surface structure in the realization of the “meat factory” (in the reindeer herding case), the underlying motivational force (“deep structural driver”) is fairly unitary and is predicated on maximization of redistribution (Verdery 1991: 76) for the benefit of a hierarchy of command layers. In this sense, a generic term for surface representations can be the state farm (factory), or, in other words, it can metonymically stand for state (command) socialism.

Kornai (1992) has shown us that a redistributive system like state socialism creates a discrepancy in the overall economy between “soft budget constraints” for state commanded enterprises, and “rigid budget constraints” for their employees. A two-tier economic activity

is the result, in which the rigidly constrained employees have to resort to an inner informal, “crypto-entrepreneurial” economy for promoting their own day-to-day interests. The reduction of this discrepancy is thus a most interesting feature of departure from the state socialist model. How each local case behaves in reference to a hypothetical diminishing of the formal/informal gap, following the officially professed pro-market direction, can provide the true strength of a comparative model.

The second general conclusion concerns specificity of ways of departure from the imposed agricultural matrix and its norms. Here departure occurred by decrees “from above” in two main varieties: “shock therapy” and “gradual transition”. The post-Soviet model is of the second type. This fact has expressed itself into a great variety of organizational forms – ranging between residual attempts to sustain the former structures of socialist command economy (sovkhoism) and overt private ownership.

Types may be therefore seen as forming various relative positions between these two ends. The question then arises: how can such a typology be ethnographically ascertained?

A potentially useful suggestion may be seen in using current *para-sovkhoz* (sovkhoist) systemic features and their surface structure ethnographic expressions. This paper has focused on the ways in which sovkhoist hierarchical arrangement informs use-rights of infrastructure as a means of resource extraction, and, critically, how it manages inner redistributive mechanisms – i.e. the whole issue of private deer. It is posited that sovkhoism increases crypto-entrepreneurial tendencies inherent to state socialism, while not overstepping critical limits, which could lead to an untimely expiry of the *para-sovkhoz*. Other regional ethnographies may show other relative speeds in the departure from the original matrix (Bukharin’s “nationalized factory”), or tentative reversals in its direction (i.e. Gray’s discussion of the creation of municipal companies in Chukotka [2001]). In overall schematized terms, ethnographies may thus be expected to reflect departure from or cleaving to sovkhoist forms. To observe how such processes work, it seems most useful to study hierarchically distributed management of crypto-entrepreneurship in the context of inter- and intra-brigade positions and relationships.

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