

Ideal Proletarians and Children of Nature: Evenki Reimagining Schooling in a Post-Soviet Era

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[with sarcasm] 'The October Revolution saved the small peoples [of the North] from physical extinction! ... It brought happiness and enlightenment! We lived in poverty and ignorance, in primitive ways and in darkness. We did not even have such words as club, school, and culture!'

—Alitet Nemtushkin, noted Evenk writer (1992: 5)

...They just don't know what to teach without the Leninist program.... today was Lenin's birthday but teachers cannot use their familiar materials for marking this event.... in terms of morale, people are just at a loss for the purpose of their teaching.

—Educator in the Tura residential school (4/1994)

Introduction

As I entered the residential school in Tura a young boy ran down the hallway taunting his classmate and yelling, “*Tayozhnyi!* (taiga kid!)”. On another occasion during a school picnic the same term was invoked by teachers as praise for an Evenk student who was particularly adept at lighting a campfire. During my 1994–95 research¹ in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug these and other instances involving popular concepts of tradition and modernity directed my attention to shifting images of what it is to be Evenki.² The case of the Evenki clearly demonstrates that identities are not static or drawn from some sort of primordial essences as Gumilev suggests (1990), but are instead rooted in concrete historical and social forces (Bhachu 1993; Gilroy 1987; di Leonardo 1984). This paper explores the historical and social context of Evenk identities and demonstrates how hierarchies of power interact with individual actions in the re-making of identities.

Residential schools historically have been instrumental in inculcating a sense of a collective “Soviet” identity in nearly three generations of indigenous Siberians, including the Evenki.³ A critical aspect of this “Soviet” identity

involved a specific version of the modernization myth propelling industrialization and acculturation of indigenous peoples throughout the world. This paper examines the role of the residential school as a key site for the transformation of Evenk identities both in the past and in the present when Evenk activists are becoming involved in mobilizing Evenki as a power base.⁴ The “internatskye”, or Evenki raised in residential schools, have a sharp sense of this experience as a shared, formative one which is significant for their sense of belonging to the former Soviet society.

Along with the collective identity forged in a Soviet past, new markers of identity are now emerging as Evenki, like other indigenous Siberians, seek to mobilize communities in the context of shifting political and economic access following the fall of the Soviet Union. As Conklin (1997) has noted for indigenous groups in Brazil, “markers of authenticity” become especially important when groups have little access to economic and political power. In a similar manner to Conklin’s work (1997), which focused on how Amazonian Indians adopt essentialized representations of “traditional” culture in accord with western expectations, the following analysis examines how Evenk elite are appropriating essentialized concepts thought to define belonging from a “Soviet” perspective. Thus, imagery drawn from Soviet ideas of “tradition” and “modernity” is invoked by Evenk elite in an effort to mobilize youth in the context of the residential school to interpret their collective experience and transform their actual conditions.

The paper first explores the concepts of “modern” and “traditional” which became defining features of a collective Soviet identity and continue to be drawn upon today. The paper then focuses on the contemporary context of the residential school, and ultimately reflects on the role of Evenk elite in transforming Evenk identities and invoking new markers of authenticity.

Legacy of Concepts: Children of Nature and Ideal Proletarians

In 1993–94 the residential school played a key role as the stage for discussions of “authentic” belonging in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug. I argue that one important reason for this was that Evenki were especially invested in the socialist “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1977) embodied in the school; the residential school had enabled two generations of Evenki to experience radical social mobility within Soviet society.⁵ As Benedict Anderson has written

about the Dutch school system influencing “Indonesians” (1983: 111):

From all over the vast colony...the tender pilgrims made their inward, upward way, meeting fellow-pilgrims from different...villages in primary school; from different ethnolinguistic groups in middle-school; and from every part of the realm in the tertiary institutions of the capital....They knew...that all these journeyings derived their ‘sense’ from the capital, in effect explaining why ‘we’ are ‘here’ ‘together’....their common experience...gave the maps of the colony which they studied...a territorially-specific imagined reality ... (1983: 111).

As in Indonesia, in the Soviet Union and continuing into the present, pyramidal education acted as a critical aspect of establishing a sense among minority groups of belonging to the larger society. Students could ascend from primary school, to high school, and finally on to universities in the widely esteemed metropole cities of Moscow and Leningrad. This trajectory was followed by many indigenous Siberian elite, including Evenk elite, and this “pilgrimage” forged a common sense of imbibing power from the central cache. Not all would go on to higher education, but this scenario of the path to the European centers is firmly part of a collective consciousness about what it is to be modern.

It would be inaccurate to label the Soviet project simply a “colonial” one parallel to the Dutch presence in Indonesia; however, similar ideas of displacing “tradition” with “modernity” did propel extensive social change among indigenous Siberians in the aftermath of the 1917 revolution (See Grant 1995: 68–89). In my experience the Tura residential school provided a vivid example of how Soviet concepts of modernity permeated the consciousness of indigenous Siberians and drew them into a sense of belonging to the Soviet collective. During my research stencil drawings decorating the walls of the main assembly room in the Tura residential school continued to reflect the Soviet modernization project in full force. These stylized stick figures with carefully slanted eyes and shaded skin were depicted in garb reminiscent of ideal professions of the late Soviet culture—that of pilots, doctors, engineers, and teachers. Reindeer herders were included in the imagery, but they were clearly emphasized as parallel to factory workers, as “ideal proletarians”; their task was that of building socialism and not part of daily subsistence. The decoration on the walls quintessentially represented the supposed enfranchisement of Evenki and other indigenous Siberians as partici-

pants in modern Soviet society.

While this imagery posed Evenki as “ideal proletarians” gainfully employed in professions viewed as crucial aspects of a modern Soviet society, it was countered by a prevalent theme in which Evenki were seen by society at large as “children of nature”. In this way indigenous Siberian cultures were essentialized and placed at the bottom of an evolutionary continuum where European society was at the pinnacle. This essentialization is reflected in a song that continues to be sung at nearly all festive occasions in the regional center of Tura; the chorus follows:

My father is a reindeer herder	<i>Мой отец—оленовод</i>
In a clear autumn day	<i>в ясный день осенний</i>
Even from far away	<i>даже издали</i>
He will find his reindeer.	<i>найдет он своих оленей.</i>

—Belanin (1990)

However, these days most Evenki are not directly involved in reindeer herding; in fact, in 1992 there were only 40 households (*khozyaistva*) recognized as engaged in reindeer herding in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug, and in 1993 there were only 28.⁶ In 1993–1995 Evenki were more likely to be otherwise occupied; men predominantly engaged in subsistence fishing, trade in western goods, or construction of houses and repairs for relatively well-off Russians, while women predominantly worked as nurses, daycare providers, secretaries, and store clerks, and increasingly as bookkeepers.⁷ However, there was also a significant number of highly educated Evenki, or elite. Some of these elite lived in Tura, but many of whom lived in urban centers such as Moscow and Krasnoyarsk, and worked as lawyers, politicians, writers, teachers, educational theorists, and linguists.

As these elite have become involved in re-making identities in this post-Soviet period, they have often invoked the dialectic between the “modern” and the “traditional”, or between the dissonant identities as “ideal proletarians” and “children of nature”. The dialectic of “traditional” and “modern” originally promoted by many Soviet social scientists and nurtured among the general public has been a driving force justifying the Soviet state and the Soviet project in the North. As market forces permeate the Evenk community in Tura, and images of Disney, MTV, and discotheque chic have come to occupy imaginations, particularly of youth, Evenk elite are reacting by

reinterpreting dominant images of belonging to a Soviet collective—the images of “ideal proletarian” and “children of nature” (See Grant 1995). Especially as state control over natural resources has lessened and access to these resources has become contested, Evenk elite are grappling with new types of collective identity to inscribe on youth and thereby solidify a power base. It is not by chance that the residential school serves as an important vehicle for this purpose; it has deep roots as a site for the transformation of identities in the North.

Histories of Mobilizing Collective Identities

The Soviet state increasingly entered into the daily lives of indigenous groups throughout Siberia from the mid-1920s onward. State presence was firmly pronounced through residential schools which were established at eighteen different sites around Siberia beginning in 1925 (GARF: f.1877). Two schools opened in 1926–1927 in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug (EAO) in the regional centers of Baikit and Tura. However, more than ten years passed before Evenk children began to attend residential schools en masse. According to one author, in 1932–33 only about 13 percent of Evenk children were studying in residential schools, but by 1937–38, 80 percent were studying in the residential schools (Trofimov 1965: 140–142, cited in Dunn 1968: 7). This radical shift corresponds to the Stalinist purges carried out throughout the Soviet Union and most often associated with 1937–1938.⁸

On the local level of the EAO the years of organized repression began even earlier and were marked by the rounding up and imprisonment of “kulaks” and about twenty Evenk shamans, along with the initial collectivization of reindeer herds.⁹ Beginning in 1932 in the EAO herds of reindeer which had been in artels were converted into regulated kolkhozes—*kolkhoznye khozyaistva*—or collective enterprises, where many of the original Evenk herders remained primarily in charge of their former herds with minimal direction from the state. Only in the 1950s and 1960s were reindeer herds fully collectivized and consolidated into sovkhozy—*sovetskie khoziastva*—at which point they became the full property of the state and came to be entirely supervised by government-appointed specialists (Krupnik 1997).¹⁰

These events must have influenced the degree to which Evenki felt incorporated into the Soviet project in general. Aside from pure repression, how-

ever, aspects of modernization—veterinary services, housing, medical care, literacy, and opportunities for social mobility—played an important role in influencing Evenki to participate in the Soviet project. In particular, the education of elites secured footing for Evenki as legitimate partners in the broader Soviet society. The following section further explores how this sense of belonging became firmly rooted in the consciousness of many Evenki and how it is now being transformed.

The Collective

Historical shifts in configurations of power highlight the temporal dimension of collective and individual reactions to the residential school. Soviet policies radically altered realities for Evenki from the 1920s onward and thus each generation had a distinct experience of the power relations involved. At various times the dynamic between “tradition” and “modernity” had varying degrees of significance in constituting Evenki identities; they also influenced generations of Evenki differently. An older generation of Evenki very much belongs to a Soviet culture where personal dedication in establishing an urban utopian society and dispelling a “traditional” one was prevalent. As Geoffrey Hosking notes for the Soviet populace at large,

Both in the macrocosm and the microcosm this dedication was achieved at the cost, not only of turning one’s back on a rural childhood, but also of denigrating it, devaluing it, as something to flee from at all costs. ...In a sense their years of individual dedication to the urban ideal replicated the total historical experience of the Soviet state, with its dedication to industry, technology, education, culture and mass media (1987: 122).

For the younger generation of Evenki growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, however, this urban ideal has been transformed; the semi-urban culture in which they have grown up is largely devoid of personal ties to the taiga, and therefore, lacking the same degree of oppositional imagery of “traditional” versus “modern”. Unlike the older generation, the younger ones are not necessarily compelled by the tensions between “tradition” and “modernity” as polar opposites. Thus, unlike for an older generation, for a younger generation the residential school embodies their incorporation into the “modern” Soviet or post-Soviet society in a very different way than it did for their elders.

Inside the Residential School: 'Santa Barbara' and Timeless Culture

When I first saw the residential school in 1992, I imagined it as some type of aging factory instead of a place where children lived and studied. The once robin-egg blue L-shaped, wooden and brick building was gradually disintegrating, and I wondered if it was about to be torn down. When I returned to Tura in 1993, the residential school building was in no better shape than it had been when I had first seen it a year earlier. On both floors of the building many windows were cracked and a few were boarded up. Inside the linoleum floors had heaved and left humps to stumble on in the dark hallways.

For several months I taught an English class in the residential school and on the first day of class I began by calling out the names of students and asking them to introduce themselves. I had two classes which met twice a week, grade 7 and grade 11. In the younger class we began with the alphabet, but in the older class we quickly moved to conversational practice. The students especially wanted to discuss their favorite rock-and-roll bands, including Michael Jackson, Ace of Base, and Abba. No one mentioned a Russian or Soviet band as they practiced English adjectives to describe their favorite groups. Later that week many of my students were to take part in a talent show called "*star tinaidzhr*" where they performed by dubbing songs played by these same Western groups.

The students' fascination with Western rock-n-roll and lack of interest in Russian or post-Soviet contemporary music made sense in that what they knew of post-Soviet society, like the residential school itself, was that it was suffering from dilapidation. While the residential school, the very embodiment of the collective, crumbled around students, the market imagery grew increasingly vibrant. For instance, in the class where I taught English water dripped from the ceiling for nearly six weeks, leaving large, splashing puddles where it missed the bucket; with each drop the former hegemony of the Soviet collective seemed to be sapped. Conversely, after class students packed into the television room located in their dormitory and were miraculously transported into a dripless, glamorous world of the Hollywood soap opera 'Santa Barbara' or the MTV videos broadcast nearly all day long.

Despite this thirst for Western media and entertainment, a portion of the students in the school were there partially because their parents perceived the school as representing their interests as Evenki. The students in the residential school were of two types: those who came from villages where there was

no school or no school beyond fourth grade, and so spent the school year living and studying in the residential school; and those who lived in Tura with their families, but studied at the residential school as day students. The second type consisted of Russian and Evenk students whose parents sent their children to the residential school instead of to the town school attended by most students residing in Tura. While some of these students attended the residential school as day students due to scholastic or interpersonal conflicts at the town school, a sizable group of the Evenk day students attended the residential school because their parents openly considered the residential school as a more welcoming atmosphere for Evenk students.¹¹

Evenk Elite and Curriculum

The decrease in centralized power from 1990–1993 brought about many changes in the curriculum. These changes indicated a shift away from a standard curriculum centrally controlled from Moscow to one involving more local input from Evenk intellectuals who did not normally teach in the schools. This segment of Turinian society almost exclusively had attended the residential school, either in Tura or Baikit, and then went on to study humanities or social sciences at either Moscow State University, Leningrad State University, or Herzen Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad. These “cadres” (*kadry*), as they were often referred to by Evenk intellectuals themselves, were predominantly trained in the 1960s and 1970s in the fields of linguistics, history, and literature, and returned to Tura to take up posts in the Communist party organs, the Komsomol, and local administration. Their intellectual training and political savvy ideally poised them to engage in transforming many areas of the residential school curriculum, and many have but with varying perspectives.¹²

When an Evenk woman trained in Leningrad at the Herzen Pedagogical Institute began to give lectures in Evenk ethnography at several educational institutions in Tura in fall 1993, her lectures reflected growing concern among Evenk intellectuals about representations of Evenki in the context of an emerging market economy.¹³ For the first time since the mid-1920s Evenk cultural history was making its way into the classroom, not as an aside meant to illustrate how successful the Soviet modernization project had been, but as a central subject. As the teacher explained to the multi-ethnic

class I sat in one November 1993 morning, “Evenki have lived in this region for thousands of years and yet most of us do not know about their history. ... In this class we will learn what makes Evenki unique.... [For instance,] Evenki never lied or stole.” The teacher made a conscious effort to emphasize how “in the past” Evenki had been pristine and honest but she stopped short of discussing specific historical social policy (like collectivization or kulakization of shamans and others) as factors in social change. In the ethnography course Evenki were “othered” through a decontextualized emphasis on their past spiritual traditions and no reference to contemporary lives and ritual practice. By preserving and promoting one view of Evenki as timeless “children of nature”, this ethnography course drew on the Soviet markers of authenticity of “traditional” and “modern” and thereby left questions about contemporary culture.

The teacher’s choice of a popular ethnography written in 1980 as the primary text, further reflected her own version of Evenk identity as rooted in a timeless past. The pre-perestroika material is primarily dedicated to quaint reflections on Evenk “traditional” practices and makes passing reference to the Soviet project of the 1920s and the turbulent 1930s. It provides no critical perspectives or comments and leads the reader to conclude that “real” Evenk culture is static.¹⁴ Like the author of that work, the ethnography teacher was more comfortable with presenting Evenk culture as something of the golden past instead of as in process and ever-changing.

For indigenous groups threatened by increasingly less access to economic and electoral power, imagery associating indigenous peoples with the timeless, pristine past carries symbolic weight. Groups such as the Evenki, which lack significant economic resources, can at least draw on symbolic capital to mobilize their constituents. Of course, indigenous elite are not bound to an unchanging set of “markers of authenticity”, as Conklin (1997) calls them. These markers can be reproduced without much transformation, or they can be actively re-made and reappropriated. The following sections provide illustrations of several ways in which Evenk elite are invoking markers of authenticity in their efforts to mobilize the community of Evenki.

Contesting Imagery of School and Nation

In late October, 1993, campaigning for the Russian Federation Duma began to gather momentum. The Evenk Autonomous Okrug had two slots to fill

for the Duma and more than ten candidates emerged. Instead of door-to-door campaigning and public debates or discussions of candidates' platforms—a format familiar to me—the campaigning largely took the form of appearances at different organizations. (In addition, candidates printed up handbills for broad dissemination with a description of their platforms and often a photograph). Thus, candidates would contact the administration of a given organization and arrange for the members of the work collective to gather for a meeting. This type of campaigning focused on place-of-work was familiar to Turinians since it was exactly how the Communist Party had conducted meetings.

Attending one of these meetings in the residential school I had a sensation of *dejà-vu*, as if I were at a former party gathering, only now several people actively challenged the candidates. The incumbent Duma representative, an Evenk man who had been in politics for many years, spoke about his innocence in connection with the storming of the Parliament (*Beli dom*) on October 4, 1993. [While most representatives exited the Parliament in protest of the military-backed attempt to oust Yeltsin from power, this incumbent and about 100 other representatives remained resolutely inside the Parliament.] Near the back of the room the Russians—teachers of physics, geography, literature and the head administrator—sat clustered. One of them bluntly asked the candidate, “If there was no change [in the social conditions] for all those years you were in office, what will change now?” This challenge appeared to be what the speaker was waiting for; he readily explained that his efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions in Evenkiya had been hampered by the parliament being half bought out by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency. At this point he looked toward me before once again energetically entreating the audience to vote for him in the upcoming elections. This Evenk politician rallied for his vision of a reestablished socialist collective by posing this in opposition to the C.I.A., a powerful local symbol for the bourgeois, market society of the U.S.A.

Arun, Natural Resources, and “Evenki”

The president of the local indigenous rights organization, called “Arun”, followed an alternate route in envisioning and mobilizing an Evenk collective.¹⁵ During the New Year's celebration in the residential school she gave

a rousing speech in Russian to the gathering of students, parents, and residential school staff in which she discussed her recent tour sponsored by the U.N..¹⁶ In her presentation she turned to me asking for affirmation of the fact that in the U.S. many indigenous groups were well-organized and among other issues, arranged for the education of their children in their “native” languages. In conversation with me later the organization’s president stressed increasing “*samosoznaniye*”, or consciousness-raising, as key to improving Evenk living standards and gaining access to natural resources. In contrast to the candidate for Parliament’s call for a return to Soviet markers of collective identity in the form of cold war rhetoric, Arun’s president underscored the need to focus on local group markers of identity in mobilizing the Evenk community. Access to and control over natural resources played a central role in Arun’s formulation of markers of authenticity for Evenk belonging.

As the state farms began to collapse in 1992, issues of land use became increasingly acute throughout agricultural regions of Russia, as well as in the North. For indigenous Siberians issues of land use were primarily related to herding, hunting, and fishing. During my research Arun was actively involved in organizing Evenki to claim their “*rodovoya zemlya*”, or roughly, their “clan land”. (Claiming these lands was not de facto privatization, but implied that these clans had primary rights over the use of the land). In this period the town archive overflowed with unusual interest as many sought documentation from the 1920s and 1930s to firmly establish the areas in which their clans had herded reindeer.

These land claims were complicated for several reasons. First, in many cases serious conflicts developed over Russian versus Evenk land use. In one case an area in which the Okrug game warden, who was an incomer Russian woman, had personally hunted for nearly 15 years was recognized in 1992 as the “clan land” of a powerful Evenk clan.¹⁷ The game warden was compelled, not by law, but by local pressure to give up use of the land to the clan contesting it.

A second cause for conflict was the definition of identity internal to the Evenk community. Those with mixed parentage who recognized themselves as Evenki usually had “Evenk” stamped in their passports at age 16; however, the community did not always recognize them as “true” Evenk. Especially if they grew up in town away from reindeer herding and hunting activity, conflicts arose when these town Evenki sought to lay claim to “clan land”. Also, if a clan—which was correlated by surname—was particularly large, there

often arose disagreements about which branch of the family should have use of the land.

Since many families did not have the resources to traverse the vast territory by helicopter in order to conduct a season of fishing hunting, by 1995 the debate over clan land had subsided somewhat, at least temporarily. However, the Evenk predicament raised difficult questions of ownership and community which directly involved the indigenous rights organization by challenging its claim to represent the rights of “indigenous” peoples. Many questions—such as, Who is Evenki? Who is “indigenous” to the region? And can you become Evenki?—further compelled Evenk elite to search for authentic markers of belonging to the Evenk community.

Anchoring Evenk Identities: “*Taiyozhnye*” and Cheerios

One characteristic of symbolic capital as described by Bourdieu (1977), is that it is not all-encompassing. In the re-appropriating Soviet markers of “traditional” Evenk cultural practices, there are inevitably other competing ones. Early in April 1994, one event clearly illustrated this dilemma faced by Evenk elite in their attempts to mobilize a new sense of collective identity. Although it had warmed up to about 30 degrees, there were still two feet of snow out beyond the town center when the students and staff at the residential school began setting up a winter picnic. As the school children unpacked their lunches, they pulled cookies from bright yellow Cheerios cereal boxes in which the residential school kitchen staff had packed them; the students then insisted on holding the boxes in their arms as I made several group photographs.¹⁸

While the popular Cheerios cereal boxes from the United States served as a striking reminder of how “local culture” is integrally tied to a global economy and to markers of global belonging (Appadurai 1991), the picnic had been intended as a practical lesson in “traditional” culture. The knowledge of the forest and necessary life skills such as building a fire were invested with unusual import as quaint skills unfamiliar to most of the students. The few who knew how to arrange the firepits and get a fire going for this winter picnic were quietly called “*taiyozhnye*”, or taiga kids, an appellation which simultaneously denoted respect for their skill and derision for their otherness. This winter picnic was one of many recent attempts to incorporate “traditional” ways into the residential school experience.

The picnic was reminiscent of efforts documented in photographs taken in mid-winter in the early days of the school in the 1920s. At this time teachers were organized separately to learn about tracking techniques and trapping so that they would be more in tune with everyday aspects of Evenk life.¹⁹ The difference, however, is that in the late 1920s Russian teachers were encouraged by the state to become knowledgeable about the livelihoods of the majority of Evenki in order to more effectively incorporate them into a Soviet society; teachers learned “traditional” cultures in order to inculcate their version of a more authentic “modern” one. Today teachers are leading applied lessons about “traditional” culture in an effort to reinscribe a vehicle of the Soviet collective, the residential school, with new symbolic power and thereby kindle a new sense of Evenk belonging.

Conclusion

While legacies of Soviet governance and educational practices established the conditions in which Evenk elite today formulate markers of belonging, the specific agency of individuals is key in how the Evenki may become mobilized as a group. It remains to be seen how markers of authentic belonging, which are rooted in the Soviet dialectic of “traditional” and “modern”, will be interpreted and re-made by a younger generation whose imaginations are strongly influenced by new markers of belonging to a broader, global community. It is clear that to some degree local identities will be combined with the more global ones brought on in the emerging market economy. These identities may be situational and invoked at opportune moments, but in any case the essentialist or “primordialist” markers of Soviet-defined identity are in the process of transformation; they are anything but timeless.

This paper has sought to emphasize the very constructed nature of identities and the way in which concrete actors interact with structures of power. Arjun Appadurai’s advice to ethnographers might also be consulted by those seeking to create markers of authentic belonging in local settings:

... the ethnographer needs to find new ways to represent the links between the imagination and social life....[By] embedding large-scale realities in concrete life-worlds...they also open up the possibility of divergent interpretations of what “locality” implies (1991: 199).

This approach highlights the multiple social forces which influence identities, while recognizing the role collective and individual resistance can play in the process of identity formation. From this perspective identities are not static, but they are also not just subject to megaprocesses in which humans play little or no active part.

Notes

1) This paper is based on fieldwork conducted between 1992–1995. The generosity and assistance of many people in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug and at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow made this project possible. Funding for the majority of the fieldwork was provided by the International Research and Exchanges Board (1993–94). Additional funding was provided by the University of Pittsburgh Nationalities Room (summer 1992) and the American Council Teachers of Russian (summer 1995).

2) Even though less than 20 percent of the Evenk population in Russia lives in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug, it has a more concentrated population of Evenki than any other similar administrative area in Siberia. In 1994 the population of the Evenk Autonomous Okrug consisted of 5,345 Evenki; they were largely concentrated in the more rural regions of the okrug. About 21,000 people, most of whom consider themselves Russian and Ukrainian—in addition to some Baltic peoples, Belorussians, Germans, and Sakha—live primarily in the more densely populated regional centers of Baikit, Vanavara, and Tura. Tura is the capital of the Evenk Autonomous Okrug and in 1994 Evenki comprised about 15% of the population, or about 900 of the 6,000 inhabitants.

The Evenki are one of the largest indigenous Siberian ethnic groups in Russia today; according to the 1989 census, there were 29,901 Evenki in the Soviet Union. Traditionally a nomadic people, most consider that they originated in the steppes of Mongolia; according to the 1989 People's Republic of China census 26,315 Evenki currently live in China. While both groups of Evenki speak a language belonging to the Tungus-Manchurian language family, the dialects are mutually exclusive.

3) Throughout the text the term “Evenki” in the plural form refers to the people. “Evenk” is used as a singular noun (such as “local Evenk”) and as an adjective (such as “Evenk language” or “Evenk children”).

4) Researchers in a number of cultural settings have referred to boarding schools for indigenous peoples variously as “Indian schools” (Lomawaima 1994; Bell 1995), “boarding schools” (Child 1995; Dobkins 1995), and “residential schools” (Armit-

age 1995; Haig-Brown 1995), depending on the time period and type of schools. I follow the latter choice—"residential schools"—as one which more strongly distinguishes between the Western version of boarding schools serving as a mechanism of reproducing an elite social strata and the schooling historically imposed on and used to control indigenous populations in various countries.

5) In the late Soviet era the Evenki had one of the highest percentages of Communist party members among indigenous Siberian groups. In 1989 nine percent of the Evenk population belonged to the Communist party (Miller 1994: 335).

6) There were a total of 80 people listed for all households herding reindeer in 1992 in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug and of those 27 were women. In 1993 88 people were listed as belonging to households herding reindeer and of those 32 were women (Okruzhnoi otdel statistiki EAO, Tura 1992).

7) The term "Russian" is used colloquially by both Evenki and others to refer to non-indigenous Siberians—whether they are Russian, Ukrainian, Belo-Russian, or Estonian—who are considered sufficiently "white". For instance, Azeri refugees and Tatars in Tura were excluded from this category "Russian". Within the category of "Russian" distinctions are made, depending on multiple factors. For instance, those "Russians" living for several generations and sometimes longer in Siberia could also be referred to as "*сибиряки*" or "Siberians". In contrast, those who arrive in the area and plan to stay only for a few years are referred to as "*приезжи*" or "incomers/new-comers". For an important discussion on concepts of race in Russia see Lemon (1995).

8) Alec Nove cites figures indicating the number of people executed for counter-revolutionary offenses in the USSR as a whole in this period varied radically. They ranged from 2,056 in 1934 to 1,229 in 1935 to 353,074 in 1937 (1993, cited in Grant 1995: 183).

9) The term "kulak", the Russian word for "fist", came to be used as a catchall label for anyone in opposition to state policy; it was also applied to those reindeer herders with hired laborers or with relatively large herds (of more than 30 reindeer or so). Early on those labeled "kulaks" were sanctioned in certain ways. For instance, in 1932 19 "kulaks" in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug lost their voting rights in native counsel meetings (Okruzhnoi arkhiv EAO 1932: 68). Those labeled as "shamans" were also harassed; for example, in Tura in 1932, 13 Evenk men who were accused of being shamans lost their right to vote in the "native counsel" meetings. By 1937 those labeled "shamans" and those labeled "kulaks" were being sent off to prison in Krasnoyarsk and sometimes killed. See Grant (1995: 68–89) for a discussion of early Soviet administrative structures, such as "native counsel" meetings, established in the north.

10) In the initial stages of collectivization in the 1930s some indigenous Siberians killed their reindeer rather than surrender their herds. One author estimated that the reindeer population throughout Siberia dropped by one third in just a three year period, 1934–1937 (Pika 1989: 320).

11) In 1993–94, the residential school student body for 7–18 year olds consisted of 332 students, of which 85 of the students, or about 25 percent, were Evenk day students. The town school, also located in Tura, had about 1,100 students, almost all of whom were registered as Russians or Newcomers.

12) There were 70 Evenki living in Tura listed on the membership roles of the indigenous rights organization in 1994. While this list is not equivalent to a complete list of Evenk intellectuals, it does adequately reflect this segment of Evenki in Tura; most members on the list were highly educated and few intellectuals in the community avoided interaction with this organization. In fact, if anything the organization had trouble attracting Evenki from other segments of the community.

13) The lectures were part of a broader effort sponsored by the local Institute for Teacher Development (*Institut usovershenstvovaniya uchitelei*). Another staff member, of the four at the institute in Tura in 1994, was also employed as an Evenk language teacher at the town school. As part of her efforts to incorporate more ethnographic material into her course, she created a traditional Evenk calendar which divides the year into five sections, each one related to the types of fish and game caught in a given time of year. Another staff member traveled to several Evenk villages giving lectures on Evenk toponymy.

14) The source was a work by the ethnographer Vladillen Tugolukov (1980). It presents a popular account of Evenk traditional culture; most notably he describes shamanism in a relatively sympathetic light.

15) Zinaida Nikolayevna Pikunova, a vocal Evenk educator who had gained in-depth experience organizing as a Komsomol member, was instrumental in the establishment of Arun in 1990. Along with her late husband, who was an editor in the local Tura newspaper, the Evenk educator sought to establish an organization which would champion the rights of native peoples (Evenk, Yakut, and Kety) living in the Evenk Autonomous Okrug. In 1993–94 the organization received most of its funding directly from Moscow, either through budget allocations lobbied by representatives to different Departments (*Ministerstva*), or through the Department of the North (*Komitet Severa*), an administrative branch akin to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States. The Department of the North was reestablished in 1989—following its disbanding in 1934—largely due to the pressure indigenous Siberian intellectuals brought to bear on the Soviet government. For the history of the *Komitet Severa* see Grant (1995) and Slezkine (1994).

- 16) The U.N. symposium marking the International Year of Indigenous Peoples included several indigenous Siberian leaders who took part in a speaking tour to four U.S. cities.
- 17) See endnote 8.
- 18) In 1993–95 in Tura it was common to find these boxes—like other colorful, typically Western packaging—preserved as keepsakes or for reuse.
- 19) Okruzhnoi muzei EAO, Tura, Kolleksiya Suslova.

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