

Transition Period in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug: Changing and Unchanging Life of Nenets People

TUULA TUISKU

In Russia the political, economic and social circumstances surrounding reindeer herding have changed rapidly around during the 1990s. In different northern areas herders have responded differently to privatisation, transition towards the market economy and political changes.

Economic and political circumstances have been changing throughout the 1990s. The control of the State on the everyday life of the herding units and families has diminished. The liberalization of entrepreneurship and prices together with the unstable economic situation has brought big problems to the reindeer herding communities. At the same time the reindeer herding units should have undergone privatisation. I will discuss how three different reindeer herding units in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug have responded to the changing situation during the 1990s.

The Nenets Autonomous Okrug is situated in the European part of the Russian Federation. The population of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug consists of Nenets (5.6% in 1998), Komi (9.5%) and Russians (over 70%), but altogether there are people of 75 different nationalities. The first Russian and Komi settled in the area in the 16th century, but the majority of Russians moved to the area starting from the 1930s. The majority of the population lives in the city of Narian-Mar (18,900), and the towns of Iskatelei (7,100) and Amderma (1,900).

The Nenets live mostly in rural areas. They are engaged in agriculture (including reindeer herding) or in education. Generally education is the biggest source of employment for the whole population (18.3%), followed by agriculture (12.3%) and industry, which is mainly oil and gas industry (12.3%) (Nenetski avtonomni okrug v tsifrakh 1999, 20). According to the census of 1989 agriculture was the biggest source of employment in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug for the Nenets population, whilst reindeer herding engaged the biggest number of Nenets (Itogi vsesoiuznogo perepisi 1990). The majority of reindeer herders are Nenets, but there are also Komi

herders, as well as mixed Komi-Nenets herders. Reindeer herding is considered to be the cultural core of Nenets identity even though only 14% of Nenets work directly in reindeer herding (Evsuigin and Vyucheiski 1997, 230).

Reindeer herding in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Privatisation in the sense of ‘reconstituting collectives as private companies and the allotment of a share of the farm’s assets to a household or group which then sets up as a ‘private team’ (Humphrey and Sneath 1999, 81) has not been a reality in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug on a big scale. In the 1980s there were 11 kolkhozes, 2 sovkhoses and 1 experimental station with a sovkhos structure, which were engaged in reindeer herding, combined with fishing and dairy farming. Some other collective farms were engaged only in dairy farming and fishing. 10 kolkhozes and 2 sovkhoses have been reorganized into joint-stock farms (*kollektivno-dolevoe khoziaistvo*, KDK), joint-stock enterprises (*kollektivno-dolevoe predpriiatie*, KDP) and agriculture production cooperation (*selskokhoziaistvenni proizvodstvenni kooperativ*, SPK), but their structure has remained almost intact and the experimental station continues with the same name. I will use the term ‘collective farms’ as a collective name for all these farms and enterprises. Two obshchinas had emerged: one kolkhoz has been reconstituted into an obshchina, called Kanin, in 1995, and one obshchina, Yamb-To, was established for a group of Nenets who were out of kolkhozes during the Soviet time and thus did not exist officially. Now the procedure of registering them as Russian citizens is in process, but still they are not allotted any special area for herding (Golovnev 2000). The association of reindeer herders (*soyuz olenevodov*) called Erv is a completely new formation. A group of herders separated from the Kharp kolkhoz in 1991–1992 and registered themselves as farmers (*fermery*) running a peasant household (*krest’ianskoe khoziaistvo*), but later in 1997 changed their status into entrepreneurs (*predprinimatelei*). Erv is a cooperation of these households. They hire an administrator to take care of selling their products, supplying them in the tundra, and handling juridical questions. In 1996 and 1997 I conducted fieldwork in three units: joint stock farms of Kharp and Vyucheiski, and in the association of reindeer herders, Erv, and thus will concentrate on these units. Vyucheiski is a special unit in the sense that it is a collective farm where only herders are in the

tundra while their families live permanently in the village of Nelmin Nos. Herding brigades are divided into two different shifts: one shift is one month in the tundra and one month in the village. In Kharp and Erv families are still in the tundra.

There are three different forms of ownership of reindeer in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug: collective, personal and private. Most reindeer are owned by collective farms, but the herders who are hired to take care of these collective reindeer are allowed to own personal reindeer. This was already the case during Soviet times when the State regulated the number of personal reindeer, but today it is the units who set the limit on the number of allowed reindeer varying from 75 to 240 in different units (Khrushchev and Klokov 1998, 19). Personal reindeer are kept in the same herd with reindeer of the collective farms, and herders do not need to register as farmers or private peasants or to apply for a piece of land. I will call private those reindeer, which belong to members of Erv who are registered as farmers with an area allotted to them for grazing reindeer. In Yamb-To households also own reindeer privately, but the situation differs from Erv. It does not have an area of its own, and the herders migrate in the area of other units, and, moreover, their reindeer were never collectivised so they cannot be privatised. The reindeer owned by people in Yamb-To are not shown in official statistics of the agricultural committee. In Erv the number of reindeer owned by a household is also limited, a person (male or female) can own 125 reindeer. The limit based on the carrying capacity of the area allotted to Erv's members. In the Kanin obshchina there is both collective and personal property: the obshchina owns the majority of reindeer while herders have their own personal reindeer.

Collective property of reindeer still prevails in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. In 1997, 70.6% of reindeer were owned by collective farms, 20.1% were the personal stock of herders of collective farms and only 2.3% belonged to independent herders (Khrushchev and Klokov 1998, 16). In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug there has not been a drastic loss of reindeer like in many other northern areas. Between 1992 and 1997 the number of reindeer diminished by only 2.77%, which is within the frame of natural change (Khrushchev and Klokov 1998, 16), but from 1997 to 1999 the loss was higher at 15.4% (Nenetski avtonomni okrug v tsifrakh 1999, 47). Climatically the past few years have been difficult resulting in a high loss of new-

born calves, and the number of predators, especially wolves, has increased. During Soviet times wolves were culled by shooting them from helicopters, but today the farms do not have the money to do this. There have also been problems obtaining vaccinations and medicines for reindeer. But still, the number of personally owned reindeer has increased throughout the 1990s according to the statistics of the agricultural committee. However, there are big differences in the loss of animals among different units. The easternmost collective farm has lost more than 10,000 reindeer in 9 years, and the number of personal reindeer has decreased as well between the years 1991 and 1995 (Khrushchev and Klokov 1998, 16). One collective farm has lost half of its reindeer (almost 7,000 reindeer) while the number of personal reindeer has increased only by 1,000 reindeer. The decrease in collective reindeer has also taken place in obshchina Kanin.

In Kharp and Vyucheiski the number of collective reindeer has decreased, by 21.1% in Kharp and 33.6% in Vyucheiski between 1995 and 2000. The number of personal reindeer in Kharp is quite high, in 1997 it was 7,170 while the collective farm owned 11,044 reindeer; in Vyucheiski there were 1,935 personal reindeer and 11,736 collective reindeer. During most of the 1990s the number of reindeer owned by members of *Erv* increased, but during 1999 and 2000 it decreased. According to local statistics the number of personal or private reindeer per household is quite low: in 1997 the average was 50, and only three households owned more than 250 reindeer (two of them in *Erv* and one in Kharp). In 2000 there were still herders who did not own any personal reindeer (*Vyborka iz statei gazety 'Nar'iana Vynder' ob olenevodstve* 2000). In Kharp households owned on average 98 reindeer, in Vyucheiski 18 and in *Erv* 242. In the statistics the number of personal or private reindeer is often per household, which can include more than one person (usually a husband and a wife but sometimes also children) who is eligible to own reindeer.

How reliable are the statistics on reindeer herding? I argue that they might not give the exact numbers of personal reindeer, but they do provide guidelines. During my fieldwork in 1996–1997 people were not hiding the number of their and their neighbours' reindeer even though I never asked for numbers. Each unit keeps statistics on the number of collective and personal reindeer, and forward figures to the agricultural committee. In the statistics not only the number of reindeer is announced, but the results of each year:

how much meat was produced, how many adult reindeer and calves survived the year in percentage, how many reindeer were lost and different reasons for loss. The agricultural committee publishes the results of each brigade and unit in the local newspaper.

Even though the reindeer herding units should be independent units, the agricultural committee continues to act in the old way. It controls the units and criticizes their actions. It mostly sees reindeer herding as production of meat and antlers, but it has noticed that for productivity the well being of herders is very important. Thus, a specialist of the Committee told me in 1996 that one of the problems of reindeer herding is clothing, 'If a herder has not got adequate traditional clothes to keep him warm he is not able to tend reindeer properly'. Still, the Committee continues to blame herders for the high loss of reindeer and sees the tundra as a place for making a living where 'the workers of the tundra live in harsh northern circumstances'.

The Committee pays subsidies to reindeer herding. There have been two different kinds of subsidies; one for sold reindeer meat per kilo and one to cover 80% of costs for the transport of meat. To get these subsidies, the units have to have good documents showing the amount of reindeer meat sold, and the amount of meat transported. These subsidies are often delayed: for example in 1997 units were getting money for 1996.

The privatisation of land has not occurred in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. In 1996 I was told in the Land Use Committee that it is not possible to privatise grazing land. Each unit has got a right to use land for grazing reindeer, but the owner of the land is the State represented by the Land Use Committee, which can give the right to use the same piece of land for other purposes, usually for the oil and gas industry.

Land usage has not changed since the Soviet period. The tundra area is divided between different reindeer herding units, and reindeer herding units from the Komi republic also have their summer pastures in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, while the Nenets reindeer herding units graze in the Komi republic during the wintertime. Within the collective farms each brigade has its seasonal migration route, which is determined by the Land Survey. This is also the case in Erv. Erv members live together in five camps, and each camp follows the migration route of the former brigade established during Soviet times, even though the right to use the land is not given to camps but to individuals. Andrei Golovnev argues that the appearance of

Erv is a revival of traditions rather than a modern invention (Golovnev 2000, 139), but I argue that Erv is a modern invention. Members of Erv did not return to the pre-kolkhoz days of family camps, but remained in previous brigades retaining the same migration routes established by the Land Survey (*izyskatel'naia zemliana ekspeditsiia*). There is also a limit on the number of reindeer per household, established by the Land Use Committee and supported by herders because the limitation enables more herders to continue herding as private herders. Reindeer are still herded collectively by male camp members. Moreover, families place great trust in the hired administration that they pay for the work and consider that they could not survive without a strong organization, whose task is to sell their products, supply them, and take care of legal questions.

The latter task is now getting more and more important as the oil and gas industry has a strong presence in the area. The same land resources are used by oil and gas developers, and to fight for the rights of herders is a demanding task for the units as well as for the organization of Nenets, Yasavei.

Economics of reindeer herding

Liberalization of prices and entrepreneurship has had significant consequences for reindeer herding. We have to remember that reindeer herding involves the production of meat and antlers while securing the basic needs of herding families. Reindeer provide the material for fur clothes, footwear and portable dwellings in the tundra while reindeer meat is the basics of nutrition. Although there are snowmobiles in the tundra, reindeer are the most important means of transportation.

To secure the high production of meat and antlers reindeer are vaccinated against the reindeer disease anthrax (in June) and treated against warbler insects in September. In the past years there has been a shortage of vaccinations and other medicines, which has increased the number of sick animals. In June during the round up reindeer's antlers are also cut for selling. The antlers are used for medical purposes, and the price of antlers has been relatively high.

Local markets for meat exist in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Antlers are usually bought by a local firm or sometimes by firms coming from outside the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, but the number of buyers has not

been high. The local population consumes reindeer meat, partly because the price of reindeer meat is lower than the price of pork or beef. During the Soviet times all meat was transported to Narian-Mar, but today several units seek markets closer to their pastures in the Komi Republic and Arkhangelsk Oblast. For Erv, Vyucheiski and Kharp the closest markets are in Narian-Mar.

For the units' economy it is crucial to successfully organize slaughtering and the sale of products. Slaughtering takes place in late autumn or early winter. In Kharp slaughtering takes place in the corral next to the village of Krasnoe, which is along the migration routes of brigades. In the village there is a cold store, where meat can be kept for several months, but the slaughtering takes place outside, and for that the unit has to wait for a cold period. Because the units slaughter reindeer themselves and has storage rooms, they can sell meat in small quantities, as well as sell valuable entrails like heart, kidneys, liver and tongue separately for higher prices. Other entrails are used in the fur farm. The village of Krasnoe is connected by road to Narian-Mar, which makes it easy to transport meat to the consumers. Kharp has also sold skins, which have been transported by surface transport to the Komi Republic.

Erv has also organized slaughtering independently on its pastures, which are located a long way from Narian-Mar. Until 1996 it could sell most of its meat to the adjacent village of Varandei, which is an oil company village. But because the village is in the process of being closed down, it is losing the close markets and now it has to transport meat to Narian-Mar. Erv has no cold storage facilities. Therefore it has to sell its meat immediately after slaughtering. To transport meat by helicopter to Narian-Mar is very expensive. Even though according to local law the local administration should reimburse 80% of the transport costs, the units cannot be sure whether they will get this compensation. Sometimes Erv has been able to use helicopters hired by oil companies that have also bought meat from Erv. It is too expensive to transport skins from the tundra, and those skins, which are not used in family households, are left to rot in the tundra.

Part of the Vyucheiski's pastures are located far away from the village of Nelmin Nos, which is located on the opposite side of the Pechora River to Narian-Mar. It does not have freezers or slaughtering facilities and has continued to organize the sale of reindeer in the same way as during the Soviet times: reindeer are driven to Narian-Mar and slaughtering takes place in the meat factory. During this drive the unit always loses reindeer. The meat factory

buys reindeer alive and slaughters them itself. The price of reindeer per kilo sold this way is lower compared to how Kharp and Erv sell reindeer meat.

Generally, only the meat factory can buy reindeer in big quantities, but there are also other buyers, who can buy small amounts. They pay a better price, but to find these buyers one has to start looking well before the slaughtering period. One must also be sure that the buyer is also able to pay. One problem has been that there has been a shortage of cash, and the buyers have given food and other products in barter. In 1997 the local administration even gave loans to those organizations, which bought reindeer from units to ensure that units got money. While the units cannot get money for reindeer and antlers they sell but only products, they have to pay their members in kind. This also happens in Erv: it gets products that it then delivers to herders as payment for meat and antlers. Among all herders there is a continued lack of cash. However, the units have been able to supply their members with basic food items. In some units families can run into debts with the unit: they take more products than they earn in salary. The number of collectively held animals in the brigade determines the salary of herders.

The economy of the collective farms is very heavily dependent on reindeer herding. Alongside reindeer herding there are other branches, but they have not been very profitable during past years. Fishing and hunting do not play any significant role. The number of cows in dairy farming has decreased, but it is considered important to produce milk locally. In both farms there is a workshop for handicrafts. In Kharp there is also a fur farm. But according to the chairman reindeer herding is the only profitable branch. However, all other branches employ people, who would otherwise not have any job opportunities in the villages.

The economic situation of collective farms is very unstable. Most of them have run into debts. Most of their incomes from meat and antlers go directly to the private companies in exchange for products. Many units have not paid taxes to the State. The tax load of collective farms as well as private herders is quite heavy. I was told in the Department of Agriculture that collective farms have to pay taxes of up to 30% of their incomes. Despite the difficult economic situation the local administration has not been very keen to reduce the load on collective farms and private herders. According to a Russian law on reindeer herding units have had not to pay rent for land use since 1992 but in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug they were exempted from this tax only in 1997.

One of the factors that have caused problems for reindeer herding units is the rise in oil prices in the middle of the 1990s. The reindeer herding units used to hire helicopters to transport people and products to the tundra and back. They also obtained tractors and all-terrain vehicles. In the 1990s transporting reindeer products to the market and people to the tundra and back by helicopters become very expensive. Erv could not itself pay for helicopters, and became very dependent on oil companies active in the area.

Because of their economic problems collective farms have decreased the number of workers and cut some of the public services. Vyucheiski has handed over the village sauna to the communal service company, which also takes care of supplying firewood. Kharp has continued to maintain services: the village sauna, the central heating system (the village is heated by gas) and the bus commuting between the village and Narian-Mar still belongs to the Kharp KDK. But still in both settlements the village administrations, former village *soviet*, now bear more responsibility for the life of villagers. Erv, as a new purely herding unit, has no tasks, which do not directly support reindeer herding. The units own a car and a truck, as well as two-way radio stations, which are needed for communication between the village and the tundra.

Collective farms are the biggest employers in the villages. In Kharp 312 people work, including 70 herders. Kharp has not reduced the number of workers as much as Vyucheiski, where in 1996 there were 230 people working for the farm, while a year later there were only 130 people. The State sector is a big employer in both villages: there is the school, the kindergarten, the health centre, the library, the House of Culture and the village administration. In Nelmin Nos there are almost no other employers beside the collective farm and state, and the official unemployment rate is high, at 17%. Unofficially, about half of the village population is without a job. In Krasnoe the situation is a little bit better, because the collective farm employs more people, and there are more jobs in the State sector too. Still, for the village economy the economic situation of the collective farm is very important.

Basically, both villages were established as central farms for kolkhozes. They grew around the farm, and most of the villagers worked for the kolkhoz. Gradually kolkhozes, which were established as reindeer herding and hunting kolkhozes, added new branches: dairy farming, fur farming, a skin workshop. They also provided services: central heating or they supplied firewood or coal to villagers, organized transport, built houses for kolkhoz

members, opened museums, provided financial help for building schools and for a kindergarten. There were also jobs available for people who settled from the tundra and other villages in the area.

In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug it is considered that Erv and Kharp are economically successful units while Vyucheiski is not doing well. The units were not very eager to speak about their debts, so I do not have any figures on them. All units are coping with big difficulties, but in some units the difficulties are bigger than in others. One reason for this is the chairmen's varying skills and contacts. Vyucheiski has not been very lucky with chairmen: during the 1990s there have been several chairmen. In 1996 the chairman was a Russian who had run the farm (KDK) for several years. During the last couple of years before his retirement he did not have much interest in changing the system of selling or other things on the farm finding it difficult enough to run the everyday life of the farm. He had run the farm in the old way before the economic changes and was not able or willing to try new methods during the economic turmoil. The next chairman was a veterinarian, who moved to Narian-Mar after a couple of months finding the situation in Vyucheiski too difficult. After him people elected a Nenets man who despite his economic skills was not able to run the farm and spent more time in Narian-Mar than in the village of Nelmin Nos. Finally, in 1997, people in Vyucheiski had enough of the continuous changes of chairmen and elected a lady from the village. She used to be main clerk on the farm, she was born in the village and her husband and son were herders. At least she would not run away because the village was her home. This time the members of the farm did not wait for the agricultural committee to suggest a candidate but looked for their own.

Kharp has had the same chairman since 1991. He is a Russian whose father was once a chairman in Kharp. Erv has had the same general director since it was established. He is a former chairman of Kharp who was not re-elected because he spoke in favour of private reindeer herding.

Kharp and Erv have been lucky in the sense that their chairmen are well-known and skilled persons. The chairman of Kharp has been lucky in the sense that his preconditions are much better than for many others chairmen. The kolkhoz storage was already built in the 1980s, and the migration routes pass near the village, so it is easy to drive reindeer to the slaughtering corral in the village. Moreover, thanks to the road connection it is easy to sell products.

Vyucheiski and Erv lack all of this, and moreover Vyucheiski also lacks an experienced chairman.

Even though the reindeer herding units have to survive from day to day, many of them make long-term plans. Many units are planning to obtain better facilities for slaughtering and storing meat and to build a meat-processing factory. For example, Kharp built a small meat-processing factory in 1997. Erv is planning to build a slaughterhouse in its pastures with a meat-processing factory, but it has not been able to find funding for it. Some units have searched closer markets and more profitable means of selling their products. Vyucheiski has not made plans to change its slaughtering system.

Families in reindeer herding

During the Soviet period the lives of kolkhozes and sovkhazes as well as herders were controlled very much by the State. Generally, during the Soviet time reindeer herding was seen only as the production of meat and hides, and tundra was only a place to produce these items, not a place to live normal family life. This policy leads to the sedentarization of part of the nomadic population. Families, women, small children and retired people were settled in the villages, and only working men were allowed to stay in the tundra. To ensure the continuation of reindeer herding, a system of shift herding was developed. A brigade was divided into two shifts, and one shift worked one month in the village and then one month in the tundra while women, retired people, and children lived permanently in the villages. In Vyucheiski the shift was changed by helicopter every month, but today the units cannot afford to pay for helicopters often and reindeer sledge, tractors, all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles are used, but the shift is often delayed for 2–4 months. Salary is paid only for those months, which men spend in the tundra because they do not work for the collective farm in the village. However, many wives have permanent jobs in the village, thus providing an income for the family.

On those farms, which refused to adopt the shift herding system, there were restrictions on the number of women in each brigade and dwelling. In Kharp there could be one woman for two herders, and in each brigade there should be only one dwelling. Retired family members could not stay in the tundra after retirement, but they had to settle in the village of Krasnoe. Some-

times this control was not as tight as the Party and Soviet officials would have hoped, for example in Kharp family dwellings were liquidated only in brigades close to the kolkhoz centre, the village of Krasnoe, while in the remote brigades (today's *Erv*) each family could keep their own dwelling. These restrictions have been lifted, but they have had serious consequences for the life of the herders. In Kharp in every brigade there are one or more families, but also single herders, who are not always related to any of the families sharing one dwelling. In Vyucheiski the brigades are more exclusively working units of men, who live in one tent during their shift.

The collective farms are giving more autonomy to brigades and families. In Soviet times kolkhoz administration often determined the composition of brigades without negotiations with herders in the brigade. Today it is the brigade, which makes the final decision on composition, and herders are not moved easily from one brigade into another as happened previously. It is now recognized that for successful herding 'knowing' the migration route well is essential.

The fact that the units cannot get money for the products they sell, and then pay salaries in cash on the collective farms or pay for reindeer herding products in *Erv*, has forced reindeer herders to find new sources of cash. One such source are pensions and child benefit paid by the state. In 1996–1997 these payments used to be quite regular. Those herders who have enough personal reindeer are able to sell reindeer meat outside their own household. They can get the best price by selling to private buyers in Narian-Mar, but for that they have to look for buyers and negotiate the price. While most herders cannot visit villages during the period of slaughtering to find buyers, they are dependent on relatives living in the villages and in Narian-Mar to find a buyer, or they have to sell through the unit. In this case they have problems getting paid in cash. Reindeer are also used to barter for fuel for snowmobiles, sealskins and other commodities.

Families also seek other means of getting cash. Men hunt for fur animals to sell fur in the city and women sew reindeer boots. Skin from reindeer legs has become a kind of currency in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Many women in the villages sew reindeer boots for market, and they buy or exchange leg skins. Women in the tundra also sew boots, but they have more difficulties marketing them while spending most of the year in the tundra. In the last few years big differences in family wealth have appeared. Some families

with more reindeer are able to sell and barter more personal reindeer, and thus they are able to buy more goods. Other families have been successfully selling fur and reindeer boots, which has allowed them to get more cash. However, there are families who have not been able to increase the number of their personal reindeer or to get extra income by hunting and making boots.

In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug there are significant differences in the numbers of personal reindeer of collective farm members. During Soviet times the number of personal reindeer was low, partly because of limitations but partly because the herders had no need to have large personal herds. Today, most herders are increasing the number of personal reindeer. Today personal reindeer are needed to secure the basic nutrition of family members in the villages, to barter and to sell meat. In the tundra it is more profitable to eat meat of collective farm reindeer: the price per kilo is less than what one gets when selling meat of personal reindeer. Some families have succeeded in increasing the number of their personal reindeer quite significantly in a short period, while others have hardly increased the number.

The economic differences between families can cause conflicts, especially in Kharp, where two families can share the same dwelling. One family can have abundant supplies of food while the other family can afford only basic food items. In Vyucheiski the difference is not seen in the tundra where the members of the brigade share products and in the village each family has their own household. The expenses between families can also vary significantly. A family with all members in the tundra does not spend as much as family with members living in the village, especially if some of the members are studying.

Compared with other rural populations reindeer herders are economically quite well off. People in rural areas earn less than town dwellers; salaries in agriculture and the state sector are relatively low being only less than half of the salary in industry (Nenetski avtonomni okrug v tsifrah 1999, 31–2). On the collective farms the well being of the whole farm is dependent on herders so the farm tries to secure herders with products in the first instance. Herders will not suffer from hunger because they have meat to eat and to barter for other needed products.

Today herders spend quite a lot of time in the villages. In Vyucheiski each herder spends half of the year in the village, having a house and family members

in the village. In Erv those men who are married have their families with them in the tundra but can have family members in the village (grown up children, school age children during the school year), while the family members of unmarried herders live mostly in the village (mother and sisters). Married herders usually have a house or a flat in Krasnoe while unmarried herders stay with their mothers or sisters when in the village. In Vyucheiski and Kharp brigade members from different families, who often live in the same tent sharing the same tundra household, live together only in the tundra. In the villages they have a separate household and families. In Erv families have a family household both in the village and in the tundra.

It is remarkable that most herders have a house or a flat in the village, also in Kharp and Erv where families live together in the tundra. The houses of herders from Kharp and Erv in Krasnoe can be uninhabited most of the year, but sometimes retired parents or grown up sisters or children can live permanently in them. Most herders have to maintain two households, one in the tundra and one in the village. They visit the villages often. Herders in the collective farms have an annual vacation, which they are supposed to spend in the village. Health care or other public services are not available in the tundra and to see a doctor herders have to come to the village. The majority of the Nenets population lives in the villages, and to see relatives and friends, herders have to come to the villages, which have become a centre of social life. Parents, who have school age children and want to see them during the school year, come to the village for a month or more almost every year. Herders have to come to the village to obtain products and clothes.

During Soviet times the kolkhozes and sovkhoses took care of transporting people and products to the village and back using helicopters, tractors and all-terrain vehicles. Today the units do not have money to hire helicopters very often, and sometimes they do not have fuel or spare parts for tractors and all-terrain vehicles. Herders have to count more on themselves to organize transport between the village and the tundra. However, the units have not stopped organizing completely transport, but do so less frequently. In Erv organizing transport of people is still an important task of the administration. Herders are forced to think more about transport themselves. In the tundra the main means of transport during migrations, hunting and fishing trips or while visiting neighbours is the reindeer sledge. From the closest brigades herders can come to visit the village by reindeer as well.

Herders can secure transport either by obtaining a snowmobile or by increasing the number of draught animals. Snowmobiles are expensive, there are also problems with fuel and spare parts, and snowmobiles in the tundra are very impractical. Thus, herders have to increase the number of draught animals. Draught animals are male reindeer, and increasing the males leads to a decrease in does which are producers of calves, which are slaughtered for meat. Decreasing the number of female reindeer means decreasing the amount of meat produced. In the collective farms draught animals are usually tamed from the stock of the farm, and it is the farm, which suffers from the decrease in meat production. Throughout the 1990s the number of female reindeer has decreased in the units. In Erv it is up to each household to decide how many draught animals they will have.

Generally, the attitude of local officials towards reindeer herding differs from the Soviet attitude. If in Soviet times the nomadic way of life was seen as backward and people were prevented from living in the tundra by various regulations, today the tundra is accepted as a place to live for women and children. In 1997 the local administration granted money for women living in the tundra, as well as canvas for dwellings. Recently, the young Nenets generation has a new interest in tundra life, mainly, because there are no jobs available in the villages and their parents cannot afford to support them. Many unemployed young people go to the tundra after finishing school: even though they do not get paid in the tundra, there are things to do and meat to eat.

Nevertheless, the general attitude of non-native villagers has not changed significantly. They still consider the life in the tundra to be backward and worse than life in the villages. However, many villagers think that the solution to the problems of Nenets people is the return of at least those who feel attached to the tundra.

Conclusion

In the Nenets Autonomous Okrug privatisation of kolkhozes and sovkhoses has been mostly nominal, they have been renamed but their structure is mostly intact. Only three new units have emerged, two obshchinas and one union of reindeer herders. Privatisation of land has not even started, the land still belongs to the State, and the units have only the right to use the land. The

land use, division among different units and brigades, has remained. The collective ownership of reindeer still prevails.

The fixed system of selling reindeer herding products has been demolished, but the old structures still exist. The general economic problems, for example the shortage of cash, have caused problems to the units.

The units have had different ways of responding to changes. The collective farm Kharp has totally rejected the old Soviet system of selling and acts independently. Having its own cold store is a big advantage as it allows it to sell meat in small quantities. Kharp has no problems transporting meat from the slaughtering place to the consumer because it is connected to Narian-Mar by a road.

Erv as a union of independent herders is a new formation. Despite its remote location from markets it has been successfully organizing the selling of products. Both Erv and Kharp are acting quite independently, and are trying to improve their productivity. The collective farm of Vyucheiski has continued in the old way by selling reindeer to the meat factory, which was the main buyer during the Soviet period. The farm does not have plans to change.

Families in the different units also act differently. Some of them are increasing the number of personal reindeer to get more income and secure family nutrition. They are also making handicrafts to sell, and they hunt animals for their fur. Some families have relied on the units and have not increased the number of personal reindeer.

However, reindeer herding is an important livelihood in rural areas, and despite problems, reindeer herders are continuing their life in the tundra.

References

- Evsyugin, I.E., and A.I. Vyucheiski 1998. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie problemy malochislennykh narodov Severa v Nenetskom avtonomnom okruge. In *Gorod v zapoliar'e i okruzhayushchaia sreda: trudy vtoroi mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii, 10–12 sentiabria 1997 g., Nar'ian-Mar*, pp. 229–33. Syktyvkar: Komi respublikanski ekologicheski tsentre po izucheniiu i okhrane vostochnoevropeiskikh tundr.
- Golovnev, Andrei V. 2000. Letter from Varandei. *Polar Research* 19 (1): 135–42.

- Humphrey, Caroline and David Sneath 1999. *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Itogi vsesoiuznogo perepisi 1989 g. 1990. *Raspredelenie naseleniia ot del'nykh natsional'nostei po otrasliam narodnogo khoziaistva i zaniatiam po NAO*. Moskva.
- Khrushchev S.A., and K.V. Klokov 1998. *Nenetskoe olenevodstvo: podkhody k razrabotke kontseptsii ustoychivogo razvitiia*. Etnograficheskie i etnoekologicheskie issledovaniia vyp. 7. Sankt-Peterburg: NII Geografii Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta.
- Nenetski avtonomni okrug v tsifrakh, 1999. *Kratki statisticheski sbornik. 70 let*. Arkhangelsk: Arkhangelski oblastnoi komitet gosudarstvennoi statistiki.
- Vyborka iz statei gazety 'Nar'iana Vynder' ob olenevodstve. http://www.raipon.net/yasavey/russian/reindeer/info_11_08_200.htm. 15.12.2000.