

Personhood and companionship among Evenki and their reindeer in Eastern Siberia



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Prologue



Picture P.1: Nosy companions in a forest life:

The reindeer herd roamed around the small hunting hut. Zhenya had gone out earlier to collect his herd and put it inside the small corral around the hunting hut. He does so every other day, to remind the reindeer of his existence. He put a halter around three leading females and one bull and led them to the hut. The remaining herd of more than 50 animals followed leisurely, without haste or force, took one turn around the hut, acknowledged the salt trough nearby and settled down in the snow. I had followed the herd in, going last on skis and was surprised about this unspoken relationship of trust that allowed Zhenya to bring in the reindeer so easily.

I wanted to take pictures of these big reindeer, but ended up photographing every time their heads and noses. As soon as I got my camera out of my pocket the nearest reindeer came running towards me, eying me, licking my jacket and particularly my camera. Zhenya was standing nearby and started laughing. ‘It’s the cover of your camera in which they are interested. It looks like the pouch we use to give them salt. They love salt. That’s why they come running.’

This aroused my curiosity. What kind of relationship did these people have with their reindeer, who casually strolled by and enjoyed the company of people? In the following months I found myself many times very surprised.



Pictures p.2-p.3 show two manifestations of human-reindeer relations in my research area.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction of research question and area

This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of human-reindeer relations among nomadic hunters and reindeer keepers and is based on a discussion of manifestations of personhood in Siberia. I then relate these to contemporary theories in human-animal relations and argue that in the case of this research setting, these relations exceed notions of symbiotic domestication (Beach & Stammler 2006) and social contracts (Vitebsky 2005).

I discuss this topic within the context of Evenki hunters and reindeer breeders living in Katangskiy Rayon, the northernmost district of Irkutskaya Oblast, Russia (see maps 1, 2 & 3). They live and work in the taiga forest in a landscape that is predominantly flat with meandering rivers and extended bog areas with multiethnic populations in small villages. The Evenki are among the most widespread indigenous peoples in the Russian North living as far south-east as the Amur region and northern China¹. In this particular district (outlined by red lines in maps 1 & 2) very few Evenki still pursue a forest live and keep reindeer. Three extended families migrate with their animals along the river of Kochema and three more in the vicinity of the river and base camp Teteya (see map 3). The number of domesticated reindeer in the entire district has dwindled down to roughly 150 animals.

Traditionally the Evenki in this area were nomadic hunters with small herds of domesticated reindeer used primarily for transport in these boggy, densely forested areas. My predecessor in this area, Russian ethno-historian Anna Sirina (2007) gives a historical overview of livelihoods, hunting and herding in this area and also outlines the dealings of the Evenki still living in the forest in the 1980s and 1990s with the local authorities situated in the central village (see map 2, 3 & 4). The local *kolkhoz* had started to collectivise reindeer and brought hunting matters within the realms of centralized structures; a process which was continued when the *kolkhoz* was eventually transformed

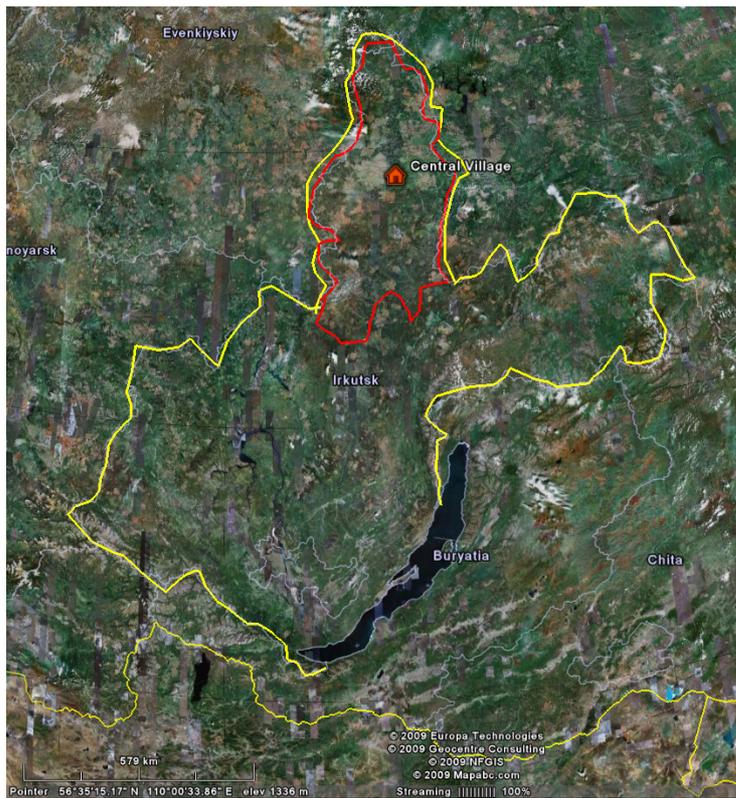
¹ Several researchers have worked with Evenki in different parts of Siberia. For an overview of history and culture see among others Sirina (2006), Lavrillier (2005), Anderson (2000), Forsyth (1994), Ssorin-Chaikov (2002), Turov (1975 & 1990).

into a *promkhoz*², which dealt with hunting, reindeer herding and farming matters in the area. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the *promkhoz* was transformed into a series of semi-private enterprises, but was still talked about and conceptualized as a *promkhoz* by the Evenki. One change, though, introduced by the post-soviet *promkhoz*, had profound effects on the Evenki still living in a forest setting. Only those migrating along the river Kochema (see map 3) remained so-called state hunters who received equipment and ammunition from the *promkhoz* and in return delivered the pelts only to them. This also meant that they were going to be beneficiaries of a much higher pension than those hunters who lost their status as state hunters. This happened to the Evenki living at the Teteya, who were demoted to so-called sports hunters and thus lost the right to a higher pension. Effectively, this generated a kind of class system among the Evenki population in this area. One were considered by the company and the state as being ‘more Evenk’ (Kochema) than the others (Teteya).



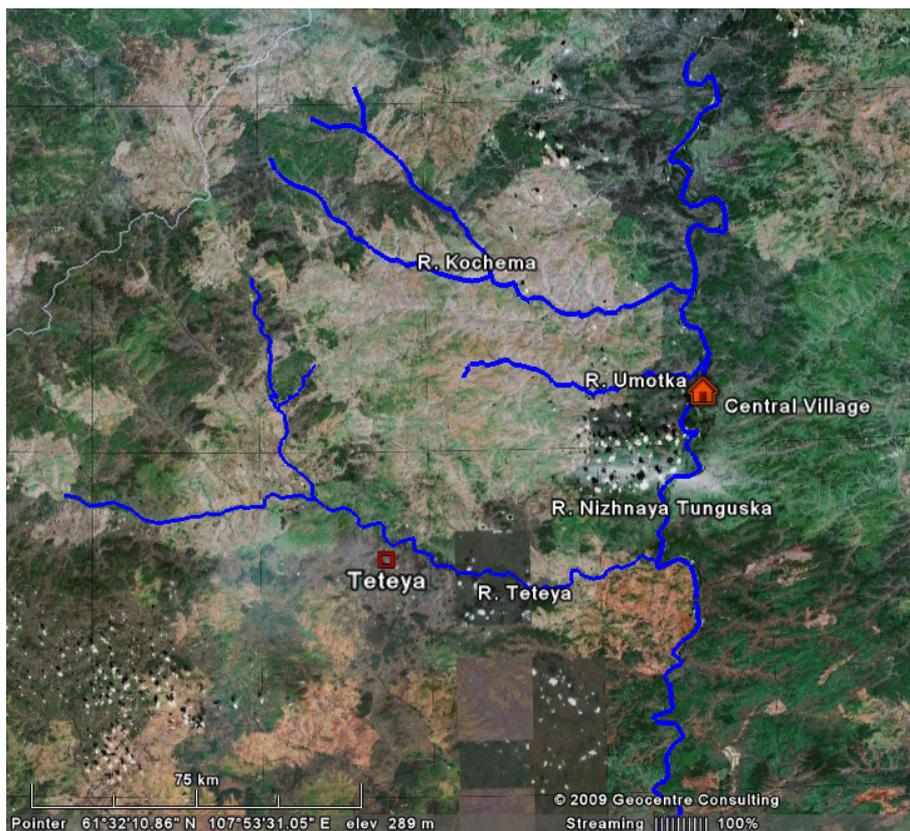
Map 1 (Landerer 2009, p. 5): Google satellite image (2009): Overview Russia, drawn yellow lines show borders of Irkutskaya Oblast, drawn red lines the ones of Katangskiy Rayon, the symbol shows the central village of my research area.

² For an overview of *kolkhoz* and *promkhoz* history in the research area see Sirina (2006) and for a general outline see Lavrillier (2005).



Map 2 (Landerer 2009, p.6): Google satellite image of Irkutskaya Oblast (drawn yellow lines) and Katangskiy Rayon (drawn red lines)

This decline in people living a mobile or semi nomadic life outside of villages is mirrored in many other settings among indigenous reindeer-herding peoples in the Russian North (cf. Vitebsky 2005, Ventsel 2005, Stammler 2005, Habeck 2006, Ziker 2002), where Soviet sedentarization processes idolized village life and tainted forest or tundra life as uncivilized. Additionally wage earning jobs were often provided in the villages for women, which led to a spatial separation of men and women in many areas of Siberia (Landerer 2009, Vitebsky 2005, Vitebsky&Wolfe 2001, Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).



Map 3 (Landerer 2009, p.6): Research area outlined on a satellite image from Google Earth (2009). Drawn blue lines signify the river system of Nizhnaya Tunguska and its tributaries Teteya, Umotka and Kochema

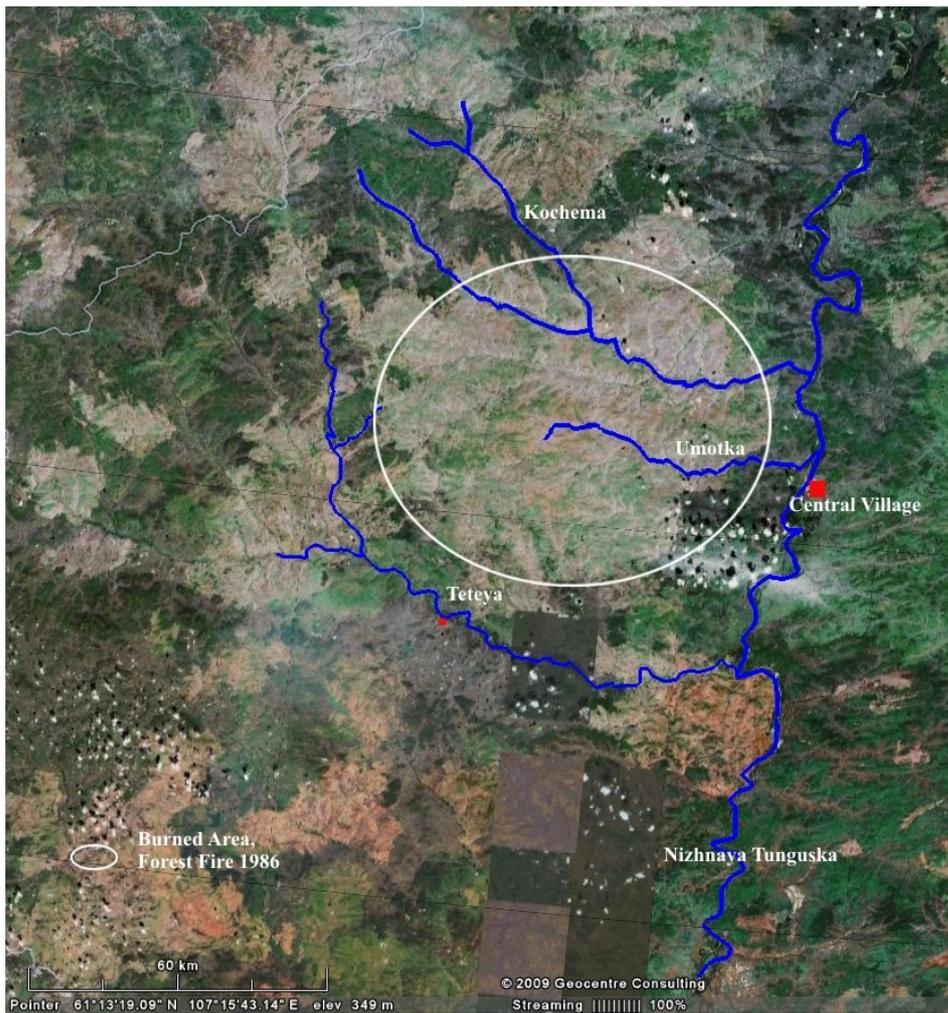
While these processes in the research area are similar to other researched settings, there is one aspect that differs profoundly. Large scale, unified and intensified reindeer husbandry with herds of several thousand head kept for meat production was never introduced to this taiga setting during Soviet times. Likewise, the system of a brigade with mainly men working under an appointed *brigadier* (cf. Kwon 1993, 1997 & 1998, Anderson 1991 & 2000, Vitebsky 2005, Stammler 2004 & 2005, Stammler & Ventsel 2003) was never established. Even though in the area of Teteya (see map 3) small scale collectivised reindeer husbandry was introduced in a *kolkhoz* in the 1940s and as part of a *promkhoz* from the 1960s until mid 1980s (Landerer 2009), they remained family based with one family taking care of a herd of up to 500 animals bred for transport purposes. Reindeer as transport were needed for topographical and geological expeditions taking place in the area, which were reindeer aided until the mid 1970s. Later the *promkhoz* decided to abandon state reindeer husbandry in the mid 1980s (cf. Landerer 2009).

Interestingly, and very different from other settings, those Evenk reindeer breeders whose meeting grounds used to be at the river Umotka (see map 3) and who are now migrating

along the river Kochema were never collectivized and always owned their herds privately. They were, however, part of the *kolkhoz* and later *promkhoz* as state hunters with hunting related matters being at least partly centrally controlled, but reindeer related matters being completely under their own control.

It is with these two settings in mind that I will explore human animal relations, where one community has never been collectivized, while the other has been, but was kept family based with small scale reindeer husbandry. Both of these settings differ thus from other researched areas regarding herding and hunting (Beach & Stammler 2006, Anderson 1991, Vitebsky 2005, Willerslev 2007, Golovnev & Osherenko 1999, Habeck 2005 & 2006, Jernsletten 2002, Jordan 2003, Klovov 2004, Konstantinov 2004 & 2005, Vorob'ev 2004, Ziker 2002, Fondahl 1998, Pika 1999).

A major influence on the livelihood and mobility of the Evenki in the research area were and are not only Soviet sedentarization and reindeer husbandry processes but also natural impacts such as forest fires which have altered patterns of reindeer keeping as well as patterns of movement. One of the biggest forest fires in 1986 altered drastically the landscape in which the communities around the river Umotka (see map 3) hunted and herded and caused lasting disruptions in their way of living. Map 4 shows the extent of the forest fire of 1986 (highlighted by the drawn white line). In this area all the reindeer lichen had been burned thus rendering the area unsuitable for reindeer keeping for several decades. In the years following the fire several of the families had given up reindeer keeping and the forest style of living (due to the fire damages, but also due to old age and lack of successors) and moved into the central village (see map 3).



Map 4: Extent of burned area caused by the forest fire of 1986, highlighted by a white line on a Google Earth image (2009)

At the time of my fieldwork in 2008 two main groups remained living fully or partly in the forest. The first group consists of those who originally migrated to and from the river Umotka with their reindeer (before the fire), had never been collectivized and now live at the river Kochema, still fully immersed in forest life. The second group lives partly in the forest and partly in a base camp-type small village (Teteya³). The common base camp Teteya is shared by hunters and their families who still own reindeer and by those who do not. The three families with reindeer are direct descendants of those families running the

³Even though Teteya was considered a small village during Soviet times with regular transport (boat, snow machine, helicopter) to the central village, with a shop, a club and a post and radio office, it has eventually changed into a base camp with no transport connections, no club house, no post or radio station and a poorly and irregularly stocked shop (see Landerer 2009).

kolkhoz based small scale reindeer husbandry until the mid 1980s (cf. Landerer 2009). I will discuss the reindeer-related impact caused by having both hunters with and without reindeer in one community in Chapter 3.2.

1. Kochema (have always owned private reindeer): families Sichegir, Galin and Kaplin, 10 Evenki, no children, 120 reindeer. The reader will be introduced to Ivan (47) and his sister Lena (50), Sina (22) and her cousin Zhenya (33) and his aunt Maria (60) (see pictures 1.1 – 1.4)

2. Teteya (were heavily influenced by the *promkhoz* setting of having state reindeer that were rented out to hunters): 27 Evenki (9 children, 5 of whom stay 9 months a year in boarding school in the central village)



Picture 1.1 Ivan (Kochema)



Picture 1.2 Lena (Kochema)



Picture 1.3 Sina (kneeling) and Maria (Kochema)



Picture 1.4 Zhenya (Kochema)

My main focus will be on the people at the Kochema (non-collectivised, still living fully in the forest) and their relationship with their reindeer with additional comparative analysis of certain aspects of human-animal relationships in Teteya.

Since the reindeer herds kept in the research area were never used for a large scale meat production, the number of animals was and is held small to accommodate a forest lifestyle of hunting and reindeer keeping with reindeer as a source of transport and milk. Therefore, movement and human led migration of domesticated reindeer in this particular taiga setting is unusually more based on hunting and trapping and less on the needs of a large domesticated reindeer herd (Landerer 2009). The people hunt both for meat (mainly moose and wild reindeer for subsistence) and pelt (mainly sable as their main cash income) with the domesticated reindeer giving transport, milk and occasionally skins (they are not intentionally slaughtered for meat or skins). Additionally, as Sina and Zhenya from the river Kochema often stated, 'life in the forest without the reindeer is simply unimaginable; it would not be a forest life'.

As such they might be classified according to Ingold (1980, p. 24-25) as 'milch pastoralists', who extract resources from the live animal, as opposed to 'carnivorous pastoralists' (e.g. tundra reindeer herders), who keep larger herds for meat production. In 'milch pastoralism' animals are rarely slaughtered with the main source of meat being wild animals. Animals are very tame which allows milking easily.

Literature is ample on reindeer herding and breeding processes, but less so on hunting communities (Willerslev 2007, Jordan 2003, both researched pure hunting communities with no domesticated reindeer involved), and even less so on settings that combine both hunting and herding contexts (cf. Lavrillier 2005, Ventsel 2006) with the reindeer being both the quarry of the hunt and the subject of herding. This thesis aims to contribute to this dual field of hunting and herding and its different manifestations of human reindeer relations and different aspects of personhood that it entails. I argue that not only do these spheres of hunting (see Chapter 2.2) and herding (see Chapter 2.3) co-exist in this particular research area, but that the lack of collectivisation during Soviet times together with the removal of reindeer herding from any form of cash-related market economy has brought forth (or perhaps re-instated from pre-socialist times) a way of living with reindeer that I will call companionship (see Chapter 2.3). In Chapter 3 I will explore additional interpersonal relations occurring in this particular research setting, such as the

transition from riding reindeer to only leading them (see Chapter 3.1) and the two notions of **keeping** versus **using** reindeer (see Chapter 3.2).

1.2 Methods and my role in the field

‘My role in the field as well as my main method was that of a taiga-apprentice, one who not only observed what I was seeing and experiencing, or participated in daily life, but also one who had to run through the different stages of skill and knowledge production necessary to work on my own in the forest, first under the strict supervision of my teachers’ (Landerer 2009, p. 11). Later on, as a next phase I was partially working on my own walking with the reindeer, searching for them in the forest or preparing a camp in the forest. It was then that I realized that only through working and experiencing on my own could I truly begin to understand the ways of the taiga. This method of going off on my own to hone skills⁴ learned from members of the community (e.g. harnessing reindeer, driving reindeer sleds, packing reindeer, felling trees, searching for reindeer, trapping) allowed me to grow in my understanding of the land and of the ways of living on it⁵ in addition to living with, interviewing or observing a community. This approach is to my understanding rather unusual and expands the general concept of participant observation. Willerslev (2007) perhaps described something similar, when he wrote that he went out hunting and trapping for the sake of learning it.

This approach was, perhaps originally unintentionally, established by the fact that I had visited the research area twice, once in 2003⁴ and for this fieldwork in 2008. During my first stay I was not a researcher but only a very curious foreigner who wanted to learn the ways of the taiga and to spend a season trapping with some hunters and reindeer keepers. During my second visit I informed them that my status had changed by then and I wanted to write about life there, but they mostly continued to see me as the curious foreigner who wanted to learn the skills necessary for a taiga life.

At the beginning though, I had to work hard to establish my desire and my ability to leave the villages or camps and move about in the forest, which has become unusual for the women in this area, who either stay in the base camp all year (Teteya) or only move

⁴ For instance, ‘understanding the ways in which reindeer herders go looking for their deer in one thing, but only while practising it on my own with my having the responsibility for the deer, did I truly understand what was involved and moreover started to get a feeling for the taiga’ (Landerer 2009, p. 12).

⁵ This is in the sense of enskillment (Ingold 2000).

along well defined migration routes with their animals (Kochema), but never go out hunting. During Soviet times there had been female hunters, but by now there is only one left who is about to retire. Once the people recognized my determination to go into the forest, they started teaching me, if only for my own safety at first. Thus I was mainly working among male hunters and reindeer keepers and only joined the women on short stays in the main camps. As such my role was perhaps reversed to that of Kwon (1993) during his fieldwork among Orochen on Sakhalin who acted in a predominantly female world as a Soviet *chumrabortnik* (tent worker, usually women) and waited until the men returned to camp to listen to their stories (Landerer 2009). Maintaining my position as an apprentice in a predominantly male setting sometimes required hard work and was usually based on my adequate ability to move in the forest both in winter (on skis, the challenge is the cold) and in summer (on foot, the challenges are the tricky boggy terrain and the insects).

In many ways my position resembled that of a teenaged Evenk boy who learned his trade of hunting and reindeer keeping from his older relatives (there are few such apprentices in Teteya and at the moment none in the Kochema area due to lack of children). However, my constant writing was seen as an interesting skill, which 'changed my perceived position from that of a young teenaged Evenki apprentice, who would yet have to acquire one or several special skills, to that of an apprentice with mastery in one field, wanting skills in another' (Landerer 2009, p. 13).

As part of my work as an apprentice I accompanied (on reindeer sled and on skis) hunters on their usual rounds during hunting season (October till February), on restocking trips (March, April) and finally on visiting, fishing or reindeer exchanging trips in summer (on foot), which proved to be vital to understand the relationship between the reindeer, who are pivotal in all these activities, and their owners. Additionally I spent time in the camps talking with the women and men. These talks were not formal interviews but were conducted while sitting around a fire, preparing food, seeking shelter from the insects, while building smoke fires and while doing menial chores around the camp. Thus the talks became part of everyday life and did not stand out as anything unusual.

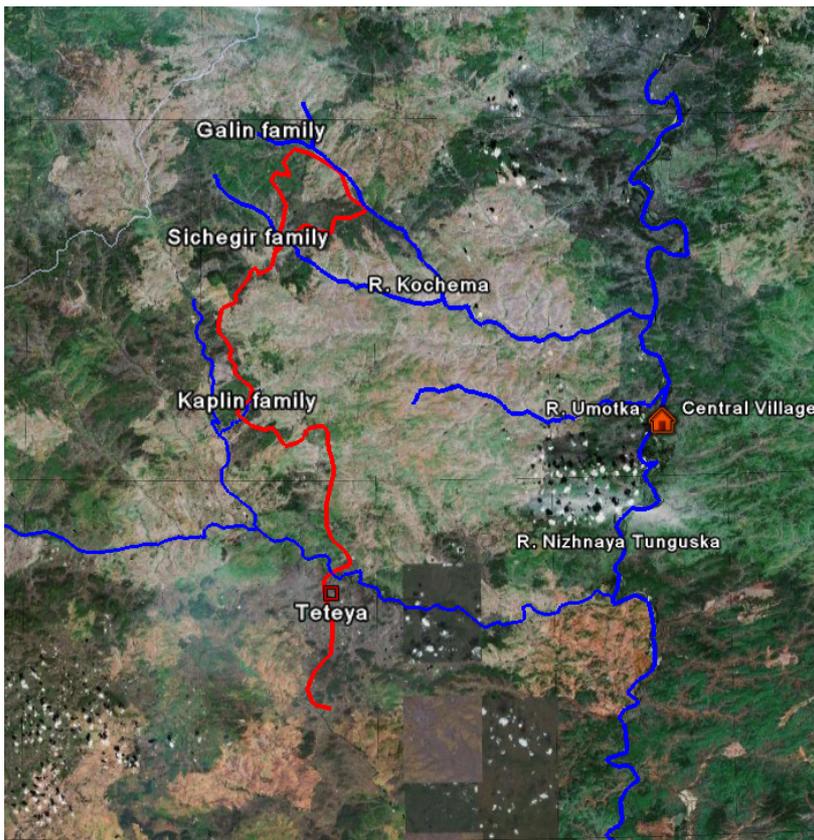
I always carried with me maps of the area which I showed to all of them, asking them to point out and draw places of special interest, camps or migrations routes, extents of burned areas or trails used. This proved to be mutually beneficial as they got the use of a

map (they do not own one) and I began to understand the land and the attitude of each individual towards it.

Due to the allotted time frame of my fieldwork (late spring and summer) I was able to observe the periods of restocking and refurbishing of base camps and winter huts in late spring, the calving season and the ensuing summer season of rest, fishing and visiting neighbours. However, hunting activities in summer have ceased almost completely nowadays due to lack of transport and partly lack of skills regarding the rapid drying of meat processes necessary in summer immediately after the kill. Traditionally summer hunting would have been done with the aid of reindeer as mounts and pack animals or with birch bark canoes along the river. With the introduction of relatively cheap and readily available mechanized transport in Soviet times, skills related to constructing such canoes and training reindeer have often been partially forgotten. Now, when neither boats nor fuel are easily and cheaply available, hunting has stopped to a large degree in summer and people rely on fishing and buying provisions for food.

I was therefore not able to observe or take part in hunting rituals, but focused my observations on daily dealings between humans and their reindeer. During period of reindeer aided refurbishment in spring I observed the human-animal relationship when the humans needed their reindeer most and the reindeer worked most, while when the reindeer are dependent on smoke fires against the insects during summer, I was witnessing the time when reindeer were mostly resting and co-inhabiting the same summer camp as the humans.

I was also able to join one hunter who set off in summer from the river Teteya and visited his niece at the river Kochema (see map 5). This trip was done on foot with a small caravan of reindeer carrying the equipment and food. When leading such a reindeer caravan, I was able to notice first hand the peculiarities involved in communal walking with the reindeer (see Chapter 2.3.2). During this very strenuous walk of 6 weeks I got first hand experience in how reindeer in their capacity as transport animals get trained and are respected.



Map 5: Google map of the area; blue lines are rivers. The walking route is displayed as a red line.

I was to spend a total of 8 months in the research area in late winter 2004 and spring/summer 2008.



Picture 1.5 The author leading a short caravan of loaded reindeer during fieldwork.

Chapter 2 Interpersonal human-animal relations: Personhood and reindeer in Siberia

Western thinking indulges in many dichotomies based on old Greek thinking. One of the fundamental dichotomies is the splitting of the world into an inner one of mind and meaning and an outer one of matter and substance. This division is fundamental in the western conception of personhood, as Ingold discusses in 'Becoming Persons' (Ingold 2006). This line of thought splits the human or 'humanness' into the two categories of organism and person, the first being seen as belonging to a realm of 'nature', the second lifting humanness into the realm of culture through the merging of human individuals into higher-order collectives. Such a split also implies that the person exceeds the organism with the at least potential power of influencing nature, whereas the human organism rests within nature and differs only in degree from other organisms such as animals.

Thus if one follows this line of thinking, animals and the concept of 'animalhood' are firmly placed within nature, and thus lack any aspects of the kind of personhood ascribed to humans. 'Personhood as a state of being is not open to non-human animal kinds.' (Ingold 2000). Dealing with animals, as for instance in the activities of hunting or herding, implies a form of manipulation of nature, of persons dominating organism to their liking.

In this chapter I would like to look beyond gaping dichotomies at different ways of thinking and dealing with animals. Many indigenous peoples do not see personhood as a manifested form of humanity, but rather humanity as one of many outward forms of personhood (Willerslev 2007, Ingold 2006). Thus personhood becomes the centre with humanity as one manifestation and animalness as another. The difference between an animal and a man is not that between an organism and a person, but one in degree between one organism-person and another (Ingold 2000).

There is a fundamental difference in approach between 'western' thinking and this kind of organism-person one found among certain indigenous cultures. Whereas the former has an assumed dichotomy as its premise that then allows us to look for (limited) analogies between humans and animals, the latter assumes a fundamental similarity that leads to differentiation within. Relationships between humans and animals then become

dealings between persons that have to follow certain interpersonal rules. Hunting or herding processes in particular become transformed from persons manipulating nature to persons dealing with other intentional persons. This intentionality becomes a centrepiece of personhood together with language and reasoning (Willerslev 2007, Pedersen 2001). Instead of only allowing intention to humans, this concept allows for intentional non-human personhood.

Within this concept of animal-intentionality I would like to look at the relations and perceptions of both human and non-human persons within the processes of hunting and herding in Siberia, the former involving wild animals, the latter domesticated ones.

Willerslev (2007) describes a group of Yukaghir hunters whose only domesticated animals are dogs. In this they are very unlike most Siberian indigenous groups, whose lives are largely based on domesticated reindeer. They consider everything to have 'ayibii', a soul or essence, but distinguish between anything that moves, grows, or breathes as having three 'ayibii' and thus being truly alive and a person, and inanimate objects that are alive but immovable or static only having one 'ayibii'. Thus animals, trees or rivers would be seen as truly alive, whereas stones or skis are only static. Hunters for instance would only engage with the first category in an interpersonal dialogue. It is interesting to notice that there, parallel to western thinking, also seems to be an exclusion principle at the core of this concept with a category of non-person objects forming the contrasting backdrop for human and non-human persons, even though it excludes different categories from being persons than western thinking does.

Parallel to the concept of 'ayibii' among the Yukaghir is that of 'bayanay' among the Eveny, a people that both engages in hunting and reindeer herding (Vitebsky 2005). Hunting is a dialogue with the spirit 'bayanay' who is a keeper of wild animals, but also a good hunter can have 'bayanay'. Yet there is a difference between those two concepts; among the Yukaghir both the animal spirit itself and the master spirit are involved in the hunting dialogue (Willerslev 2005), whereas for the Eveny it is only the master spirit 'bayanay' that is central. The relationship between the Eveny and wild animals is complex and differs from that of domesticated animals and humans.

In the following sub-chapters I want to first discuss the concept of personhood for wild animals within hunting processes, and then look into interpersonal relationships within a herding context (Vitebsky 2005, Beach & Stammer 2006, Russell 2002) and finally

analyze the distinct setting of my research area where the dominating element is an interpersonal companionship between humans and reindeer that seems to exceed that of the hunting and herding contexts.

2.1 Hunting

For Yukagir hunters personhood can be applied to a variety of forms of being including humans, animals, rivers, trees, or spirits. Mammals, especially ones that are hunted for food such as moose, reindeer or bear, are categorized as ‘other-than-human persons’ (Willerslev 2007), whereas other animals, insects or plants are attributed a different personhood if one at all. Does that mean now that the concept of personhood is only enlarged to include certain animals while excluding others or is there a truly different underlying notion involved? Willerslev (2007) states that animism among the Yukaghirs is not an explicitly articulated doctrinal system for perceiving the world, but it is a flexible one, that emerges in certain situations and at certain times within particular contexts which emphasise practical involvement. Personhood is not fixed in time and space onto certain categories, but is created through interpersonal dialogues. The crucial point herein is that the animal-person is attributed the same ability to relate as a person to the hunter as vice versa. For the Yukaghir, the ability to change appearance and perceive the environment as well as persons from the perspective of another person, including non-human persons, is central to being a person.

Two things are inherent in this model, on the one hand perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998, Willerslev 2007) which involves both the ability and the need to allow a shift in perception and consciousness, and on the other hand a relational concept of personhood. Willerslev discusses this personhood as a potentiality of Heidegger’s notion of ‘being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger 1962), a personhood that is not always manifesting itself but is determined within a relational context such as surroundings or activities. Personhood is discussed, not as an inherent property of people, animals or things, but as relational to fields of activity and relationships. Thus animals are not necessarily and at all times self-sufficient persons but they may become so through practical involvement with for instance humans. Western dichotomous notions are substituted with a relational, fluid concept that does not easily allow categorizing and in fact only becomes a concept through western academic discourse.

Personhood within hunting contexts is seen quite differently by the Eveny. For them, the ways of wild animals are complex and mysterious (Vitebsky 2005). Hunting constitutes also a dialogue, but not so much with the personhood of each animal as with the master spirit Bayanay who governs wild animals. Bayanay is seen as the ‘keeper’ of wild animals who governs them but he ‘also *is* those animals: they are his incarnations, manifestations, or refractions’ (Vitebsky 2005, p. 262). The intentional offering of an animal for killing by the hunter is also central here, but it is less based on the intention of an individual animal than on the will of Bayanay who decides whether or how to give an animal. Within this hunting context, animal personhood becomes different in quality to that among the Yukaghir. The hunter must not enter in a mimesis-dialogue but in a dialogue of being worthy of the spirit ‘Bayanay’ by pleasing his creatures and performing spiritual rituals (ibid). Vitebsky gives the example of how a younger hunter, when asked, tried to explain a ritual performed on the carcass of a moose within the framework of both spiritual thinking and western scientific one. He still performed the ritual as part of hunting but a shift in perceiving and understanding the spirit and personhood had already taken place. Krupnik and Vakhtin (1997) observed a similar tendency among whale hunters among the Chukchi and Siberian Eskimo. Whereas older generations perform actions on the whale’s body in order for it to be reincarnated and offer itself to the hunter next time round, younger generations perform that same actions but give a modernistic ‘environmental’ explanation. We see here how the quality of the whale’s personhood undergoes a change, to something close to a ‘western’ viewpoint.

Within the category of wild animals the bear has special status as being perceived as a person with the most ‘bayanay’ power, whereas the wolf is talked about in a negative way as a competitor with human persons for wild reindeer (Vitebsky 2005). Reindeer are afforded a special position, since they are both part of ‘bayanay’ as wild animals and part of a special contract with humans as kept reindeer (see Chapter 2.2).

This hunting concept is quite different from what Willerslev describes as perspectivism. According to this, a hunter has to perceive his prey from the viewpoint of the prey, in fact change into it, in order to allow an interpersonal hunting dialogue, as opposed to enacting a manipulative killing of an organism (as in a ‘western’-style hunt). One has to almost become the prey, but still be aware of that line that divides one’s person from that of the prey. The way to do so, Willerslev argues, is through the concept of mimesis, ‘as a

meeting place of two modes of being-in-the-world – ‘engagement’ and ‘reflexivity’ (Willerslev 2007, p. 9). This mimesis, involving both a notion of ‘copying’ and ‘sensuous contact’, is the practical, everyday way to achieve perspectivism which in turn is central to the hunting dialogue between persons, the dialogue in which the non-human person eventually offers itself intentionally to the hunter. Yet this is not just a one-sided act of mimicking. As Willerslev points out, a metamorphosis of the non-human person is just as intrinsic to that model as is that of the human person.

‘Similarly, humans and animals are locked in a pattern of mutual replication. Animals and their associated spiritual beings are thus said to take on human shapes and live lives analogous to those of humans when in their own lands and households. Likewise, when the hunter seeks to bring an elk out into the open by mimicking its bodily movements, he is inevitably put into a paradoxical situation of mutual mimicry. As a result, the bodies of the two blend to a point that makes them of the same kind.’ (Willerslev 2007, p. 11)

Yet another aspect is vital in the perspectivism-mimesis concept; imitation should not only represent but also take power over that of which it is a copy. Again we have to come back to a dualistic concept of mimesis, of similarity and difference. Imitation would merely be similarity, but maintaining the difference within the similarity gives the hunter the power. That is by mimicking the elk, the hunter strives to copy it, to *be* the elk, yet, by still being aware of what he is, he maintains his difference from the elk. Herein lies the danger of the hunter being too successful in his mimesis and thus entering the realm of animal-personhood too completely. If he loses this awareness of difference, he risks not being able to turn back into human personhood (ibid.). In a way it makes this interpersonal hunting dialogue all the more that of equal partners in personhood as not only intentionality exists on both sides, but also the risk of losing a distinctive kind of personhood; for the animal this constitutes the potential loss of his person-life, just as much as it does for the hunter as regards to his human-personhood.

In my research area hunting is the central factor of food procurement, since the domesticated reindeer are never slaughtered on purpose, but used for milking and harnessing (‘milch pastoralism’). This would put the reindeer in the special position of being important for the people as both domesticated and hunted animal. Yet, the situation is not that clear-cut, since wild reindeer are not plentiful and no big wild reindeer herds periodically migrate through the area. Thus the practice of hunters to expect herds to

migrate through certain regions at particular seasons and to intercept them (Ventsel 2006, Burch 1991) is applied here in a limited way. The main hunting prey is moose (whenever hunting for food is mentioned in my research area, it is clear to everyone involved that it will be hunting for moose).

According to my informants (hunters), they know in which area a moose 'lives', which makes hunting a more static endeavour. A good hunter, they claim, has a map in his mind, where moose live in relation to the outlines and features of his hunting territory. When hunting for moose, he leaves from one of his hunting huts (usually each hunter maintains up to 8 small huts positioned in strategic places within his hunting territory (which was originally allotted by the *kolkhoz* in the late 1940s)) and walks on foot with his hunting dog into the area, where he 'knows' the moose will most likely be. He then relies on his dog to take up the trail. When there is deep snow, on the other hand, he sets out on skis without a dog, which cannot run in deep snow, and tracks down footprints visually in the area where he expects the animal to be. Silence is of utmost importance as the moose have very good hearing. Therefore the hunter wears not only skin clothing (they not only protect against the cold, but are noiseless and mask to a certain degree human smell), but puts carefully sown skin covers around his skis (usually reindeer or dog skin) in order to be able to move noiselessly on skis.

It is important to notice that even though wild reindeer are not the main prey in this area, domesticated reindeer have traditionally been vital in the hunting context as mounts and/or pack animals. Thus within the hunting context the relationship between domesticated reindeer and humans has been important. This, though, has changed during the past years due to several factors. Fewer and fewer domesticated reindeer provided less possibility of choosing a suitable bull for training; consequently skills related to this training have been lost. Additionally, the availability of snow machines and boats during Soviet times created an attitude of regarding well trained animals as less important. And finally, intense forest fires in the area (see map 4) altered the characteristics of the forest and made hunting with reindeer cumbersome in intense thickets and in areas with burned lichen (see Chapter 3.1).

Hunting, however, can be divided into two phases. The first one consists of transporting oneself and goods into the hunting area; the second one is the actual stalking and killing of the prey. Both are vital to the hunting process. The first part is mostly done with

reindeer aided transport in winter (sled), but rarely in summer (mount and pack animals). With regard to the second phase, however, I observed and have been told by the hunters that the status of the domesticated reindeer as a partner in forest life, very pronounced in other situations and context, has lost much of its previous importance. Hunting is done on foot and skis with the hunters either walking more and faster than they used to or succumbing to hunting only in smaller areas.

During the allotted time of my fieldwork (late spring and summer) the focus of the people was on fishing and sharing a forest life with their reindeer. Their main hunting season starts in October and is divided into the first part, which they call the most important and most exciting phase, where they would hunt with dogs until the snow gets too deep for the dogs to run, and the second, which is mainly trapping with additional hunting by following tracks without the aid of dogs, ends in February. Due to my time restrictions I was not able to observe and participate in hunting procedures and possible rituals and will therefore focus on interpersonal companionship between humans and reindeer that manifests itself in the daily comings and goings of a shared life in the forest. The relationship of humans and reindeer in this setting in a hunting context would be an interesting further research project.



Pictures 2.1–2.2 show ski-covers made of dog-skin (left) and reindeer skin (right)



Picture 2.3: Dog-skin covered skis



Picture 2.4: Hunter with dog

It is important to note that the main animals hunted or trapped for both subsistence (moose) and cash income (sable) are more ‘stationary’ in their behaviour than the more migratory wild reindeer and squirrels. Until the sable moved into the area the main pelt animal hunted was the squirrel. The sable, which was not native in the area of Katangskiy Rayon until the 1950s, had played an important role in the times of *kolkhoz* and later *promkhoz* planning (cf. Sirina 2006). Not only was its pelt more sought after by the market than that of the squirrel, but the sable is much more fixed in its habitat and migrates less. Therefore hunting and trapping sable instead of squirrel fit much better into the Soviet concept of allocated hunting territories and eventually narrowed down migration routes of the Evenki and their reindeer.



Picture 2.5: Hunter in reindeer parka checks sable trap with his harnessed (riding) reindeer waiting
Lazor Petrovich (ca. 83) and his sister Anna Petrovna (ca. 80) are the last ones to remember the times before allocated hunting territories and the advent of the sable in this particular area. The sable replaced the importance of the squirrel, whose pelt had been sold previously.



Picture 2.6 shows Lazor Petrovich (ca. 83) (left), the eldest at the river Kochema, sitting in a *chum* (conical tent) in one of his summer camps. This photograph was taken 3 weeks before his death in 2008. Picture 2.7 shows his sister Anna Petrovich (ca. 80) (right).

When I met Lazor Petrovich in summer 2008, he was approximately 83 years of age and the esteemed eldest of the people at the Kochema. He was ailing, but adamant in his desire to stay in the forest and not live the rest of his life in the central village to die in the hospital. His children took care of him and managed to bring him along on their seasonal migrations with their reindeer. Until the previous year Lazor had still been able to ride a reindeer, even though he was hardly able to walk more than a few steps. When riding became impossible too, his son transported him on a sled, which is very difficult in taiga terrain in summer. As a consequence their migration routes became shorter and the stays in the camps longer.

In the summer of 2008 Lazor kept talking about the squirrels, and told me that that year there were so few squirrels and asked where the squirrels had gone. I could not make out much more of what he said, but his children filled me in. 'He longs for the squirrel. In the old days he was hunting squirrels and migrating to where they were plentiful. They would roam much further with their reindeer than we do now, and every year the distances and destinations would vary.'

Three weeks before his death at the end of July 2008, Lazor was longing for these old ways and reasons for moving about.

2.2 Herding

The reindeer belongs to a different category of persons depending on whether it appears within a hunting or herding context. Of what nature is personhood in a reindeer-herding context, especially with reindeer being potentially both prey and domesticated animals? The relevant literature does not seem to be written from a perspectivist viewpoint. The need to transform into a reindeer in order to dominate it does not seem essential within a herding context. As with local ideas of hunting, in herding too the relationship is not one of domination by a person over an organism or thing (as according to 'western' notions, including the book of Genesis). The personhood involved in domesticated reindeer manifests itself in another, quite different way.

The intentionality of personhood is less that of offering itself to be killed than of offering itself to be worked with, in the full range of ways in which this is actually done by herders. It takes on the form of a social contract (Vitebsky 2005) between non-human persons and human ones, and this is often represented in legends of origin where a group

of reindeer intentionally traded the freedom of the wild for the benefits of human protection and kindness.

For Eveny (Vitebsky 2005) their relationships with both wild and domesticated animals are complex and manifold. They, too, engage with an animate world where animals, trees or rivers have some degree of consciousness, and locate 'the divine inside the phenomena of the world, as part of their composition and nature' (Vitebsky 2005, p. 259). Here again, personhood can be seen and defined in a relational model where wild and domestic non-human persons relate quite differently to human persons. Dominion over animals, as often found in western thinking, is not the defining aspect. Domesticated animals intentionally chose dependence and cooperation with humans in a very different dialogue, albeit not less interpersonal than in the hunting context.

The description of human keepers of domesticated reindeer, as caretakers and decision-makers as far as feeding, migrating or breeding are concerned may be seen as paralleling the role of bayanay with wild animals.

Personhood among domesticated reindeer can take on very different forms and intensity of social meaning depending on the role the animal has been given, the size of the herd or the way the herd is managed. Western ideas of domestication and husbandry have moved from the concept of sheer domination in every aspect (similar to master/slave relationship) to concepts including a more symbiotic and reciprocal viewpoint of domestication (Beach and Stammer 2006). This model of reciprocity brings in notions of equality and intentionality that can be seen from an ecological-functional viewpoint emphasising control over the animals and intimate knowledge of reindeer by humans as well as knowledge of humans by the reindeer, but can also be related to a more personhood-oriented concept. Reindeer benefiting from human contact by getting protection against predators or insects can also be seen as part of an interpersonal intentional contract between humans and animals.

In order to look at aspects of domesticated animals, one has to inquire into yet another dichotomy, that between wild and domesticated. Russell (2002) points out the pitfalls of such a dualistic view and instead argues for a spectrum of human-animal relationships, where domestication is but one form among many. Beach and Stammer (2006) argue along the same line regarding reindeer as a species that comes in many shapes including wild members, domesticated ones that have gone wild again, domesticated ones that are

loosely controlled within symbiotic domestication or yet others that are tamed as saddle or sled reindeer.

This leads to another distinction to be discussed, that of domestication and taming. Seen from an ecological-functional point of view taming involves a relationship between a particular person and a particular animal without long-term effects beyond the life time of that animal (Russell 2002), whereas domestication has implications for a whole herd of reindeer with morphological and behavioural changes (ibid) or meta-genetically-encoded consequences of human-animal relation irreversible for any individual animals as Beach and Stammler (2006) describe it.

Even in western thinking a shift has taken place to allow the notion of humans and animals as equals in a reciprocal system. I would now like to look at the concept of symbiotic domestication including taming processes from the very personalized viewpoint one can find in reindeer herding cultures. Vitebsky (2005) describes a group of Eveny who keep larger reindeer herds for meat production but also train animals for riding and sled pulling. As part of an enterprise within a market economy large proportions of the herd will have a less explicit personhood, but others by sharing a working life with humans attain a different kind of individual identity setting them apart from wild reindeer and their master spirit. Among those are ‘uchakhs’, trained reindeer who have their individual names, and ‘kujjai’, consecrated reindeer who are able to stand as a surrogate for a human person in general, and especially at crucial moments of life or death. ‘It might mirror the human, reflecting something that happened to them, by a kind of sympathy; or it might act as a substitute or surrogate, even saving a person’s life by dying in their stead’ (ibid, p. 275). Since wild animals are seen more within a ‘bayanay’ collective personhood they cannot carry the same social meaning as individual tamed reindeer can. ‘Kujjais’ are consecrated to certain humans in order to protect them; maybe the most personal relationship between humans and reindeer that mirrors in a way the protection offered by humans towards the reindeer within the context of the social contract.

One group (Teteya) of the Evenki hunter-herders in my research area live and breed reindeer in a hybrid village- forest setting rather than a purely forest one. Unlike Vitebsky’s Eveny, they only keep very few animals, all of them for transport purposes. In this community, the identification with every single animal can be very strong; every

reindeer is named and often responds when called. Reindeer personhood within such small-sized herds can take on quite interesting forms. With only a herd of less than 30 reindeer left, interpersonal relationships between humans and reindeer are very intense, with the human dwellers calling their reindeer-co inhabitants ‘village reindeer’ or simply ‘villagers’.



Picture 2.8: Reindeer villagers running among the houses of Teteya.

Since the number of human inhabitants in the village has dwindled from 70 to 20 people, several houses are empty and in summer lived in by the reindeer who seem to share the human preference for village life in general and the generator house in particular. Human and reindeer persons alike share paths between the houses. Even though the reindeer are sometimes herded to a summer camp in the forest if predators are near the village, they usually return by themselves to the village within a week, taking up their positions in the various houses. Every reindeer is called by a name and is trained as a sled-pulling reindeer. Herding aspects in this setting have been minimized by allowing the reindeer themselves to choose when to come into the base camp. This intentionality of the reindeer is supported by the natural phenomena of intense insect harassment in summer. Therefore, the reindeer long to share the base camp with their human fellow persons. In 2008 every single reindeer had been born near the base camp and has never experienced summer migration to different pastures (which were performed until the mid 1990s). As such they resemble many of their human co-villagers who also have a strong preference of living in the base camp as opposed to the forest.

The other group at the Kochema, who still live in the forest, ascribes personhood to their reindeer in a way that they are deeply concerned with not letting the reindeer work too hard. After a short summer migration of 5 kilometres with their reindeer, Maria would look at each animal and claim that they need a rest as they have already worked too much. The effect is like the Eveny focus on an inner circle of named, trained reindeer who act as working partners, but without the penumbra of the larger mass herd (in Vitebsky's case around 2,000 animals per herd) who are kept for meat and breeding and never develop the same degree of personhood.

Especially in summer the reindeer are regarded as co-inhabitants of a camp which is shared at very close quarters (see also Chapter 2.3) and given their rights to choose their surroundings up to a certain degree. Personhood in this context is not only related to the individuality of each reindeer, but also to the intentionality of each reindeer and the whole herd. The reindeer are free to come and go as they please and the humans only give the incentives (smoke) to return to the camp, but there is never any forcing of will onto the animals involved. This intentionality of the animals seems to be accepted by the humans in much the same way as they would accept each others' of their human neighbours' intentionality.

This special interpersonal companionship that I have outlined here is conducted not only on a very individual and intense basis, but also, most importantly, does not require the keeper of the reindeer to constantly switch his emotional and perceptual frame of mind between some very tame animals (as in Vitebsky's lumpen herd) and a bulk of herd that needs to be herded instead of kept. In the context of this interpersonal companionship I use the term keeper instead of the term herder to describe the human part of it. Herding implies a setting where a bulk of a herd needs to be managed and directed on a daily basis. It also includes means to so as herding dogs, lassos or specially trained mounts. It also includes a certain frame of mind on behalf of the herder, who is usually well aware of his position of exerting influence on the herd which often generates stress among both herd and herders.

The term keeping, on the other hand, I apply to this setting of small-numbered herds in which each animal is tame, trained, named and treated individually. There is a minimum of stress involved and relations sometimes have a close resemblance of peaceful negotiations. No herding appliances are needed other than salt and smoke. When a keeper

wants to assemble his animals, he calls them. When he puts an arm around a bull's neck, it is not to forcibly hold him, but to guide him gently into the direction the human would like to go.

I was able to observe these dealings between reindeer and humans as hands on experience during my apprenticeship. During the beginning of my apprenticeship, I was sitting one day in a spring camp at the river Kochema on a reindeer skin and was writing. Zhenya had brought in his reindeer from the forest and they were roaming about in the little corral around the hut. One bull with the name Karman came over to where I was sitting, seemingly inspecting me and my reindeer skin, then started licking my trousers. I came to realize that he was interested in the layers of dirt and sweat on my clothes that he was interested in. later on I made a fire to make some tea and immediately reindeer were running towards me from all directions of the corral, gathering around me and standing in the middle of the smoke the fire generated. Even though there was still a lot of snow on the ground and the time of the mosquitoes still far away, the reindeer were drawn to the smoke, checking out the smoke fire and engaging with the person who made it, in this case me.

In the late afternoon Zhenya went over to one bull, calmly caught him around his neck and put on a halter. He did the same with two does, then tied them together one after the other. He opened the corral and led them outside across a stretch of open land and into the area where he wanted them to graze for the next few days. The rest of his herd leisurely got up from their lying positions in the snow, took a last look at the little hut and the salt trough in front of it and calmly followed Zhenya and his three leading reindeer.

Two days later it was the first time that I went off on my own to look for the reindeer and bring them salt. I followed their fresh track which led me further into the forest and strained my ears in order to hear the tinkling of their bells among the dense forest, as I had seen Zhenya do. Since the forest only allows seeing very short distances, bells are important for the reindeer keepers, especially in summer with the dense foliage and the lack of snow to see the tracks.

I was walking on skis between the trees. Big lumps had already formed under my skis, since that day the temperature was again around zero degrees which produced conditions not ideal for moving on skis. Then, even before I was aware of the animals nearby, Karman, the bull who seemed to have taken a liking to me, waded through deep snow

towards me, licking as usual my clothes and mistaking my camera bag for a salt pouch. Soon others joined him and started licking and clawing with their hooves at my skis. I then led them a little further on, gave them some more salt and returned to camp.

Once, when I had joined the hunter Sanya and his reindeer, we arrived in an area, where food for the reindeer was ample, as Sanya pointed out. Every afternoon instead of us having to go look for the reindeer and give them salt, they would come to the hut and lazily hang around nearby until the evening. When I stood outside the hut to brush my teeth, some of them joined me. A little white calf licked my tooth brush and tasted the paste; the rest was standing around me in a semicircle watching. Then they walked single file around the hut, looked into the tiny window, which was covered by a bit of plastic, and then marched on into the forest to graze, only to return the following afternoon to repeat the ritual.

These daily incidents highlight the interpersonal characteristics involved in this particular way of reindeer keeping.

Having discussed concepts regarding reindeer herding I would now like to come back to the perspectivism-hunting-model and to the question in which ways, if at all, it can be applied to domesticated animals. One of the differences of the hunting as opposed to the herding context is in the individuality of the animal. The hunter is confronted with usually one particular animal that has been singled out for the hunt, either through the ways of 'bayanay' or through the more individual personhood model of perspectivism-mimesis. The hunting inter-personal dialogue is thus one between two partners, though in the Eveny model at least, this animal does not necessarily have an individuality of its own, but is more a refraction or manifestation of 'bayanay'. In this sense, we can see 'bayanay' as a spirit of an entire species, and the personhood of that wild animal as no more than a fragment of 'bayanay's' personhood. When we look at a herding context, personhood and dialogue manifest themselves differently, with more potential persons involved. There is no focal representative of the species, but rather numerous reindeer, each with a more or less specific personhood of its own. Both the Eveny and the Evenki example show us that this personhood is most fully developed where there is an intense 'interpersonal' relationship between reindeer and human, with a shared work-life. Herders do not try to intercept previously unknown animals, as a hunter does, but to

guide and manoeuvre known, familiar animals. The identification, or ascription of personhood, therefore works in a different way: an almost complete transformation, as in the Yukaghir way, does not seem to be necessary in order to communicate with an individual reindeer-person and might indeed be even a hindrance at times within a large herd.

How can humans reconcile these different aspects of animal personhood as they switch between hunting and herding? Vitebsky draws a very explicit Eveny contrast between wild animals as aspects of 'bayanay', and domestic reindeer as either close (if trained) or distant (if in the mass herd) partners in a human enterprise. How might this situation change if the only domesticated reindeer involved are tamed individuals with names and distinct functions in a shared working life, as among my Evenk? An Evenk hunter, having perhaps only ten tamed reindeer used for transportation during the hunting process, is not only working on a more individual basis, but does not have a large, mass herd to worry about while going hunting. The Yukaghir hunter, never faced with a large herd or even with taming processes, does not have the need to switch between different aspects of animal personhoods, and thus follows the idea of mimesis further and more completely than the other two. In short, it seems likely that the very act of extending one's relationship with animals beyond hunting to include domestication and herding inevitably transforms concepts of animal personhood.

2.3. Companionship

In my particular research setting, the division between a small herd of selected tame reindeer and a larger herd of animals for meat production does not exist. Consequently the shift in personhood between dealing with tame harnessed animals and a penumbra of less tame animals does not have to be taken into account by the human partner involved. There is a profound difference in attitude of the human partner whether he approaches a herd animal with a lasso (stress) or when he calls upon a tame animal and puts his arm around his neck (calm). The human partner comes to see himself relate and react to these two types of reindeer differently. If all the reindeer of a small herd belong to the tame type of personhood, the human never has to change his perceptions. I argue that this leads to a very distinct form of interpersonal companionship which can be observed in my research area.

It is particularly important to notice in the setting (Kochema) of my research area that reindeer are not seen or treated as goods, neither in times of Soviet central planning (they were never collectivised) nor in times of transition towards a market economy. They are neither bred nor sold for their meat nor for transport other than that of their owners. They do not form part of the market economy of the groups at the Kochema, who mainly gain their cash income through hunting with only the occasional extra income of selling skins of domesticated reindeer⁶. Thus the partnership with the reindeer is almost completely set apart from consideration of market economy, cash income or profits and put into the realm of companionship in the forest. Maria, for instance, is always very adamant that the reindeer should not work (i.e. carry) too much or too long when they migrate, even though the work her reindeer are needed for is minimal any way compared to that of the people in Teteya (cf. Landerer 2009) who draw heavily on their few reindeer as transport animals during hunting season and refurbishing season.

Likewise, Sina verbalized her attitude towards the reindeer clearly. I met Sina in a summer mobile camp (*stoybishche*), when she was cooking over the fire in front of the conical tent (*chum* (conical tent)) and the smoke fires for the reindeer herd were smouldering nearby. It was early morning and not yet all the reindeer (60 animals in total) had come back from the night's grazing. The place between the smoke fires looked empty with only 15 animals lying around. Sina let her eyes roam over the smoke fire place, then turned to me and said:

'Now the smoke fireplace looks forlorn with only so few animals. Just imagine what it would be like if there were only so few reindeer around you. Living in the forest without reindeer, this is something I cannot imagine at all. What kind of life would that be?' Sina had grown up in a reindeer herding family, but moved into the central village in her late teens when her family died. After a few years in the central village, she returned into the forest to live with her cousin Shenya, his aunt and their reindeer.

⁶ In this particular area wild reindeer are rather scarce (compared to the mainly hunted animal, the moose) and there would be a certain demand for reindeer skins for clothing, while moose skins are more easily obtainable.



Picture 2.9: Sina with her favourite yearling

Thomas, a hunter and reindeer keeper who has lost his reindeer, displays a similar attitude towards reindeer as companions integral to forest life. When I first met him, he was walking on skis and expressed his desire to having reindeer again. First I thought he was referring to not having to walk so far, if he had reindeer. But I soon realized that it was more complicated than that.

He had lost his last reindeer a couple of years before, most of them had run away over the period of many years, so that the numbers in his herd rapidly dwindled. ‘One has to care and love the animals’, he told me, ‘to be there for them, they are the most important here in the forest. I know that, but I had a new young wife, she was Russian, and my attention on my reindeer got less. I was stupid. Now I am in the forest again, alone, without wife or reindeer. What shall I do here; it is boring without reindeer in the forest. I can walk everywhere on skis, sure, I can even carry a lot of equipment on my shoulders, but I need company, I need the company of reindeer. Yes, it is boring here without reindeer.’

Thomas clearly emphasized the most important aspect for most people in the research area regarding reindeer. Reindeer and reindeer keeping have been removed from any market economical aspects. They do not form a commodity, but are individual partners and companions in the forest. Even though they are used for transport, there is never any

monetary value attached to them. In that respect this setting fundamentally differs from others where big herds are bred for the production of meat. The keepers of the reindeer in Katangskiy Rayon never seem to think about money and reindeer in one context. In fact, once when I suggested that maybe it could be interesting for tourists to go on reindeer rides and thus provide further income for the family, the reaction was unanimously something akin to disgust. ‘Reindeer and money should never go together. We do not want to make money out of our reindeer’, they told me.

I argue that this very clear division line between anything related to market economy or money and reindeer keeping is central to this very special companionship between humans and reindeer. Aspects of their lives related to market economy are hunting goods and transfer money in the form of pensions. Reindeer keeping is done purely to guarantee transport and companionship for the keepers.

2.3.1 The reindeer’s choice

It is early morning and Ivan is the first to leave the *chum*. His daily task is to tend to the smoke fires in front of the *chum* which he lets die down every night to rekindle them in the morning. All his reindeer are still out; they graze during the night and run back to the camp with the onset of the heat and insects which each day in the forest brings along. Ivan walks to each set of conical poles in which the smoke fires are lit (see picture 2.10) and checks the stability of the poles and the intensity of the smoke. Sometimes the reindeer get so frantic with the insects, particularly the horseflies, that they would lie right in the fire and burn their coats. To prevent that, a circle of poles is put around the fire places in order to keep the reindeer at a distance.



Picture 2.10 shows an empty smoke fire place in the early morning before the reindeer return. The conical poles around each fire place prevent the reindeer from lying in the fire and burning their coat.

Ivan has to check 11 fire places, positioned between shade-providing pine trees (see pictures 2.10 and 2.13) in a way to accumulate the smoke screen in the camp and allow all his 60 reindeer to benefit from it. Each smoke fire is fed by roughly 2 pine trees every 24 hours and if more smoke is needed, Ivan additionally puts moss onto the fires. This is Ivan's main task in the summer: to fell, carry to camp and saw enough pine trees for 11 smoke fires during almost 3 months.

When the reindeer return from grazing, Ivan tells me, they first look around the camp and the smoke fires. If they find everything satisfactory, they lie down among the smoke fires; if they consider the smoke not adequate or feel that the place is too muddy (if it is a rainy summer) or feel that they have already grazed enough in that particular area, they do not return to the camp but collectively take off and are gone.

One day during my stay we were greeted by an empty smoke fire place in front of the *chum*. The reindeer had not returned from grazing, even though the smoke was adequate in Ivan's opinion. He remarks 'We have been in this area for too long, they have eaten all the fresh green fodder and have decided to move on. This is not a very good area for them, too much burned forest around us; but we cannot move as often as we used to, since our ageing father cannot walk or ride a reindeer anymore and we have to transport

him on a sled in summer. It takes time and effort to prepare the trails to allow driving on them with a sled in summer.’ Ivan accepted the reindeer’s decision and went off to walk after them. ‘They often walk to our next camp, where I hope to find them. It is about 4 hours walking from here.’

In the evening Ivan was back with all his reindeer, but he knew that they had to move within the next two days. ‘Once the reindeer get restless, we have to listen to them and move on. Otherwise I will have to walk everyday to bring them back.’

The reindeer in this instance had made a decision, they chose to move on by themselves, anticipating the migration to the next camp and forcing their human partners to move along with them. It seems to be a very equal relationship at work here between human and animal persons. If the animals initiate migration, the humans follow; if, on the other hand, the humans decide to move on to the next camp, there is a similar partnership visible. Ivan, for instance, packs 15 reindeer with their gear and ties them together one after the other in a caravan (*argish*). He leads the first animal and starts walking towards the next camp. Not only do the other 14 animals of his caravan follow effortlessly exactly in the footsteps of the previous reindeer (and so avoid wrapping themselves around trees), but the other 40 odd animals of his herd follow voluntarily this caravan. Ivan shouts a sonorous ‘WHOA WHOA’, imitating the calves’ cries when they are agitated, and his herd assembles at the camp place and takes off after him, running in front of him, falling back, running circles, but always keeping up with Ivan and his caravan, until the next camp is reached.



Pictures 2.11-2.12 show the caravan of loaded reindeer and a few animals of the free running herd who look curiously, wait and then overtake the caravan only to stop and watch or feed again.

Upon arrival in the new camp Ivan immediately starts building smoke fires, before he puts up the *chum*, before he does anything else. The reindeer appreciate the smoke and stay. Once, when I moved with Ivan and his reindeer to the next camp, I could observe how the reindeer would run through the new camp, seemingly enjoying the new surroundings, the little swampy creek, and all the green grass and buds near the camp. Seeing this Ivan was satisfied and happy.



Picture 2.13: A new camp is reached with pine trees as shelter from the sun, smoke fires and the *chum* in the background

Both these processes, the reindeer initiating movement with the human partner following along and the human deciding to move with the reindeer voluntarily following them, free of stress or coercion, are not only examples of a truly equal and respectful partnership in the forest, but are also very unique within the world of reindeer breeding, where herding techniques such as using dogs and lassos and herding technology such as snow machines, all terrain vehicles or helicopters, have become vital in both Russia and northern Scandinavia (Pelto 1987, Helander-Renvall 2007, Stammmler 2005, Konstantinov 2009, Vitebsky 2005, Anderson 2000). Even in settings where a chosen ‘lumpen herd’

(Vitebsky 2005) is trained as sled or ridden animals and given names, the bulk of the animals still remains an element to be herded by using dogs and lasso, a method which is time consuming, strenuous and stressful for both the humans and the animals involved. Konstantinov (2009) describes the change in attitude of reindeer herders when they move on from being part of the reindeer drawn the brigade to the snowmobile one; the latter having the possibility of reaching the village faster and more frequently and without the obligation of living in the tundra with their trained sled reindeer. The former, on the other hand, still form a bond and a partnership between them and their chosen sled reindeer, but again the bulk of the herd is left to be herded in a more stressful, coercive way.

In the case of the Evenki in the research area, a lasso has not been used or needed in many years; their dogs are exclusively hunting not herding dogs. Every animal of their herd (as opposed to only a lumpen herd) is named and considered a person of his or her own with whom a partnership has been introduced. Everyday forest life is shared between humans and reindeer; especially in summer this communal life is very close with the animals dwelling right outside the *chum*'s entrance, sometimes sharing the same fireplace with the humans.



Picture 2.14 shows Zhenya and his reindeer during communal camp life in summer. Heavy rainfall has turned the smoke fire place for the reindeer (in the far back to the left) into mud and caused the reindeer to move into the fireplace area of the humans.

The daily chore of milking is done with minimal stress involved. The does do not have to be caught and held tightly during the milking process by the man of the camp (while being milked by the woman), but are simply haltered and tied to a tree.

There is a mutual agreement between reindeer and humans that exceeds, I argue, the social contract described above (Vitebsky 2005). It not only encompasses every single reindeer of the herd, but allows reindeer to make choices and decide which fodder they want. Additionally, both reindeer and humans share a very close symbiotic living in the forest. The reindeer offer companionship, milk and transport, the humans also offer companionship, salt in winter and smoke in summer. These two, salt and smoke, are the strongest incentives for the reindeer to seek and enjoy human companionship together with limited protection from predators. Additionally, every reindeer calf gets cuddled for the first time a few days after it is born until it gets used to close human contact. As a result of cuddling, salt and smoke, reindeer sometimes come when they are called by their names, or if they do not, they stay calmly until the human keeper comes to them, puts an arm around their neck and leads them to wherever he or she wants to, harnessing them or milking them.



Picture2.15 shows a herder leading a bull with the arm around his neck.



Picture 2.16: Zhenya gives salt to a reindeer bull in front of one of his winter huts.



Picture 2.17: A young Evenk apprentice cuddles a 3 day old calf for the first time in order for the calf to get used to and enjoy human contact.



Picture 2.18: Human and reindeer partners share a smoke fire during a summer trek.

2.3.2 Communal walking

Once, during a migration with Zhenya, his aunt Maria and his cousin Sina, Zhenya turned towards me, handed me the leash to the leading reindeer of his caravan and told me to walk on first towards the camp. The last animal of his caravan had gone missing and he had to go back to look for her and her load. All of a sudden my position in this human-animal migration changed from walking last (I was usually the slowest walker) to taking up the front position and I began to understand that I am not my own boss anymore while walking but am subject to the wishes and needs of the caravan behind me and the playful disturbances of the free running herd. One cannot walk at one's own speed, but has to adapt to that of the caravan. If I walked too slowly the bull behind me would ram his antlers into my back. I also could not carefully choose my way through boggy area like I would on my own, but had to plunge right through, especially since the reindeer love that kind of terrain and often even speed up. The free running herd, on the other hand, loved to run very closely past me and my caravan, almost getting their antlers entangled in the bushes and trees on one side and myself on the other, then cross my path right in front of me, causing me to halt or falter in my step, then they ran on, only to wait for me further down the trail letting me pass, and to repeat the whole procedure.

Thus not only living with reindeer reinforces an equal companionship with shared smoke fires and shared decisions, but walking, moving from camp to camp, re-establishes this partnership, where not necessarily the humans dictate speed or rhythm, but accept the reindeer's ways of doing it. The humans worry about heavy loads on the reindeer as if they had to carry them themselves; the free running bulk of the herd decides to move along with their partners on their own will.

Similarly in winter some of the leading sled-pulling reindeer (there are always two reindeer in front of a sled, several sleds tied one after another, with the reindeer on the right in front of the first sled being the most knowledgeable one that forms the closest partnership with the driver) know the ways and layout of traps so well that they stop on their own accord when a trap is nearby to let the driver get off the sled and check it.

The people of the Kochema have made and are constantly remaking an important decision regarding their lifestyle and their reindeer, which is in a way opposite to a general trend in the Russian North. This trend involves many indigenous peoples moving into villages, from which mainly the men would venture in the taiga or tundra to work as hunters or herders thus creating a spatial separation with the women living and earning wages in the village (Vitebsky 2005, Stammler 2005, Rethmann 2001, Kwon 1993, 1997 & 1998, Vitebsky & Wolfe 2001). The people of the Kochema, on the other hand, have consciously decided to remain in the forest with their animals, staying mobile all year round. Additionally they have resisted the general trend of this and other areas to abandon the tents and live year round in a series of small huts. Even though they do prefer huts in winter, they live in tents between May and October, sharing their life very closely with their animals, sitting, eating, sleeping, and cooking at one level (the ground) with the animals. Even though each family owns a house in the central village, given to them by the *promkhoz* during Soviet times, they never live there, but only use it for a week or two while selling pelts and restocking goods for the coming year. Additionally, it is usually only one person, the delegate from the family, who goes into the central village to sell and buy.

This refusal to give up mobile forest life with their reindeer has led to the situation that no one currently living in the areas around the river Kochema has a human partner or children, since this lifestyle is regarded as 'uncivilised' and not desirable by most potential partners (this is very much in accordance with the general difficulty of finding

partners for a forest or tundra life in the Russian North and a result of Soviet sedentarization processes).

Chapter 3 Changes in interpersonal relationships

Some aspects of this interpersonal companionship have undergone changes in the research area. I intend to focus on two of these changes, one has evolved within the last 20 years and concerns the custom to ride reindeer (Chapter 3.1), the other deals with effects of Soviet policy and manifests itself in the two notions of keeping reindeer and using reindeer (Chapter 3.2).

3.1 To ride or not to ride

A particular aspect of the relationship as partners in forest life between reindeer and their human keepers can be seen in the use of reindeer as riding mounts. This practice is most commonly found in taiga areas of reindeer keeping and demands special, strong reindeer who have undergone intensive interpersonal training with their owners or trainers.

In the research area reindeer were traditionally used as mounts both on hunting forays and on seasonal migration-movements. My predecessor in this area, Russian ethno-historian Anna Sirina (2006) describes, for instance, a migration-movement that was defined in its length by the maximum time the strongest bull could carry the female boss of one family, who was renowned for her enormous and speedy skills in making skin clothing and rather large in size. Thus the movement was limited to two hours.

One of my informants told me another example of how important riding reindeer was as part of a forest life among the ancestors of her husband. Not only did they train special reindeer to allow pregnant women to ride, but they constructed a special saddle that would go over two reindeer, who in turn needed to be very carefully trained, in order to make it possible for one esteemed lady around the year 1900 to ride. A single reindeer was not able to carry her.

On the other hand, the son of my informant claims that nowadays he does not dare to ride his reindeer anymore. 'They have become smaller and men have become taller. I am afraid to break their back.' This statement which he made in 2003 made me curious to investigate into riding aspects and potential changes these might elicit in the human-reindeer relationship. Is it really only the size of the reindeer that created a tendency to abandon riding?

By the end of May 2008 the last snow had melted and all the rivers were flowing ice free. Soon the time of the mosquitoes would come and the Evenk reindeer keepers would start their summer migrations through the forest with their herd. I was hoping to join them and see them load up some reindeer with their gear and ride themselves on others to the next camp through often difficult and very boggy terrain, in which the reindeer walked much more at ease than the humans.

Lena's and Ivan's reindeer were lying in front of their *chum* sheltered from the relentless insects by a smoke cloud and from the sun by pine trees. The saddles used for loading the reindeer were stacked neatly in front of the tent beside a collection of saddle bags made of reindeer skin.



Pictures 3.1-3.2 show stacked up saddles (left) and saddle bags (right).

I asked Lena, if these were the saddles they also used for riding the reindeer. Lena turned, looked up from her work of packing the saddle bags in an even way and laughed, 'You know, we do not ride any more.' Surprised I enquired further, 'But you have enough strong reindeer to choose a big riding bull from among. And you yourself are not heavy. Surly it is nicer to ride than to walk in the swamp.' She smiled again and enigmatically said, 'It has become the newest fashion (*moda*) among us to walk instead of to ride.' This was the last she said regarding this topic.

Later in the summer I joined Maria, Sina and Zhenya on their migration with the reindeer. Maria was a small and agile woman of 60 who commandeered the packing and loading process. The caravan needed to transport all of their equipment and food including the tent was made up of 13 animals.



Picture 3.3: Maria and Zhenya loading a reindeer

After all of them had been packed, Maria walked to one whitish bull lying undisturbed in the smoke nearby and started saddling him, but did not put any bags on him. ‘This is my riding reindeer’, she explains to me, ‘he was still trained by my late husband. He was very good at this skill. It takes some time of course and one has to select the right animal. This one here is already 11 and soon he will get too old. What shall I do then? Walk all the way? No one really has the skills anymore to train them properly. You know, in the early days they trained bulls especially so that pregnant women can ride them.’ She then stepped on a tree lying alongside the trail and with the aid of a riding pole effortlessly glided into the saddle. ‘You know, a reindeer walks faster than a human, it takes less time like that to reach the next camp’ she said and rode off.



Picture 3.4: Maria riding her reindeer bull and leading a caravan to the next camp

We did a short migration that day of only about 11 km; as soon as we arrive, Maria hurried to immediately relieve all the reindeer of their load. ‘They have worked hard’, she claimed and looked at each one before she releases them into the waiting smoke fires.

Thus it seems that another reason of not riding reindeer anymore is the lack of skills, time, patience and determination to train a riding mount. The fashion of the day seems to be to walk and use time on other things than forming a training relationship with a reindeer, a training relationship that would be much more intense, personal and time consuming than that needed for training sled-pulling animals. By not engaging in this very interpersonal relationship of trainer and reindeer bull, the trainer perceives a different personhood of his reindeer and consequently fails to engage in this most intense form of relationship with his reindeer. The reindeer, on the other hand, fails to develop not only his skills as a mount, but also his trust into the human trainer, and is not able to enjoy a very distinct position in the human-reindeer companionship. Additionally, and maybe most importantly, the reindeer loses the position of the one leading the way through the taiga.

This last aspect I have found to be particularly important in human reindeer relations. A reindeer that is used as a mount goes first. He first steps foot on different terrains of the

forest, he decides which swampy area is better to walk on, and he gets first ‘foot-on’ experience and information about his surroundings. The riding human, on the other hand, knows about the reindeer’s superior skills and abilities of walking and navigating in this terrain and trusts him to do so well. Particularly in swampy, boggy areas, the reindeer would choose a different path than a walking human, a path that might be harder for the human to walk, but faster for the reindeer. The reindeer thus gets the authority of choice and decision making, an authority he has much less when walking as a loaded pack animal in a caravan behind a human. The practice of people who ride would be such that they mount the animal when bad terrain lies ahead, on which the reindeer walk much better, and walk in between on drier terrain to allow the reindeer some rest and thus expand their radius of action. This practice was and partly still is done both during hunts and migratory movements.

Pictures 3.5-3.13 show historical photographs of reindeer used as mounts in different contexts (hunting, migrating and transporting goods). These pictures form part of private archives of the Evenki in Teteya and Kochema. Most of them were made by the herders and hunters themselves, when they were given a camera by the Soviet photographic club in the central village. (Courtesy of the Kaplin, Zabrodin and Sichegir families)



Pictures 3.5-3.7: ca. 1970

on a hunt, 1960s

in a summer camp, 1960s



Pictures 3.8-3.9: during summer migrations to the next camp, left early 1980s, right 1962



Pictures 3.10-3.11: Reindeer caravans for transporting goods, left 1975, right 1968



Pictures 3.12-3.13: left on a hunt, early 1980s, right preparing for a hunt, shows the layers of the saddle used



Picture 3.14: Maria on her 11 year old very knowledgeable mount who had been trained by her skilful late husband.

Nowadays, only Maria has a reliable mount. The mount of another woman, the hunter Natalya had been shot the previous winter by drunkards from the central village who had spent a few weeks in the taiga to hunt and had mistaken the tame bull for a wild reindeer. For Natalya, who endorses very much the way of the forest life and who considers riding as an essential part of it, this was very tragic. She is now in the process of painstakingly training a young bull who is only 3 yet and has a long way to go. Her husband always walks on foot or skis. He comes from a family that had had no reindeer of their own (see Chapter 3.2) and thus has not come accustomed to the companionship of reindeer in a way his wife takes for granted (including riding).



Pictures 3.15-3.16: Natalya has started training her young bull (left). Natalya brings her young grandson who lives in a village to her camp for the summer. This is the only way for the toddler to reach his grandparents in summer. Note that the bull he is sitting on is not castrated and is not trained as a mount, but needs to be led by someone in front of him.

Even though both Zhenya and Ivan would have a good choice of very strong bulls in their herds to train as mounts, they only have bulls that are not trained well and hardly ever used. I had joined Zhenya during part of the summer migration and intermittently asked

him about riding reindeer. During the first weeks he only told me the two factors that I had already heard from other informants, the decreasing size of reindeer compared to the increasing one of humans and the time and skill it needs to train a mount. But eventually I began to grasp a third factor that has changed the riding habits of the people, in particular of hunters.

The whole research area is prone to forest fires and extensive burned areas form part of particularly Zhenya's and Ivan's respective hunting territories. Especially the big forest fire of 1986 has altered the landscape dramatically (see map 4 in Chapter 1 for the extent of burned area). These burned areas, called *gar* by the locals, exhibit very different characteristics from the surrounding forest. First, all lichen, the fodder needed by reindeer, in particular in winter, has been destroyed and it needs many decades for it to re-grow. Thus *gar* areas are unsuitable for reindeer keeping. Secondly, burned areas tend to re-grow into a thicket with extensive bushes and birch trees often to an extent that make them almost impassable on foot, certainly when riding a reindeer. If one needs to cross such a thicket, one needs to hack one's way with an axe to create enough room for oneself and a reindeer caravan to pass. Since this is tiresome and slow work, burned areas are avoided as much as possible. Furthermore, Zhenya explains, 'Gar is bad for the reindeer and hard to pass for us, but the animals we hunt do not mind as much. They even like these burned areas because everything is so green and good to eat. The moose and the sable feel comfortable there.' Thus while he as a mounted hunter is at a disadvantage, his prey is not and is often to be found in these burned areas. Since it is cumbersome for him to ride on hunts in living forest and to then leave his mount to walk in burned forest, he has mostly given up riding and got used to walking everywhere. By doing so he has also given up on the expertise that a knowledgeable mount might bring into the partnership.



Pictures 3.17-3.18: A bull who is usually not ridden is saddled for my benefit.

Thus a main factor in the abandonment of riding reindeer in my research area turns out to be ecological, caused by a change in the character of the forest the Evenki live in. Even though the effects of the fire may be only temporary (lichen does re-grow after decades), the time span might be too big to avoid a huge loss of skills and knowledge as well as attitude towards the reindeer.

3.2 Keeping reindeer versus using reindeer

Interpersonal companionship takes on a different form among the people of Teteya, in whose area two state reindeer herds existed until the mid 1980s which were taken care of by one family each. The remaining people in the community were hunters without own deer who borrowed a small number of animals from the *promkhoz* to use for transport during their hunting season from October till March and were used to enjoying the summer as a time of rest with no need to worry about a reindeer herd.

Ventsel (2006) describes a similar model in northwestern Sakha, where Soviet agriculture consisted of having large reindeer herding brigades and hunters who owned and used a small number of reindeer for transport, but left the animals in care of the brigade in summer, a practice which was kept up until the snow mobile revolution in 1996. He argues that this continuum between herding and hunting resisted general reindeer herding standards based on Komi commercial reindeer herding and furthermore eased the shift from Soviet to post-Soviet economy.

While this model is in many ways similar to that of Teteya, there are three crucial differences that manifest themselves in interpersonal relations between the reindeer and their keepers.

1. The hunters in Teteya never owned their own reindeer, but exclusively used *promkhoz* reindeer (with the exception of the two families in charge of the state herds). Consequently their relationship with the animals was limited to a working context, not a living with reindeer context as I have outlined regarding the people of Kochema.
2. Additionally the state reindeer herd was already disbanded in the early to mid 1980s, when Soviet administration decided that no state reindeer husbandry was needed anymore. Thus the disruption of economic and social life already took place well before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, already during Soviet times, reindeer herding was taken out of the economic picture of the area, returning reindeer keeping into the realm of private transport in the forest, a fact that remained so in post-Soviet times. The economic purpose of the state reindeer herds focused mainly on renting the animals out for transport (to hunters, but mainly for topographical and geological expeditions).
3. The mentioned snow mobile revolution in the 1990s never took place in my area. On the contrary, while Soviet made snow mobiles and enough fuel was available in the 1980s, the situation changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when fuel became very scarce and almost unaffordable for most people living in the forest. Additionally the use of helicopters or all terrain vehicles became an impossibility, which in turn made the reindeer the main means of private, family based transport, especially during hunting season.

I argue that through this Soviet model of having state reindeer, taken care by two families, and reindeer-less hunters who borrowed them, two very different attitudes towards not only reindeer but life in the forest in general were created, which I call keeping reindeer versus using reindeer.

The animals would be rented out by the *promchoso* to hunters or geological expeditions as pack and transport animals. Most of the hunters and expedition-workers would have a certain degree of experience with reindeer, but without keeping their own animals. Thus persons using reindeer during hunting or expedition time would not live year round with reindeer and do not know well the distinctive features of the herd or individual reindeer. They would get different reindeer every year and develop less attachment to them, since the bond with the reindeer, made through the shared experience of seasonal cycles, is not there. People borrowing the state reindeer for their work as hunters or members of expeditions considered them working animals only. They were not part of the yearly

cycle of life with reindeer and returned them after use. An apt analogy would be renting a car for a specific purpose, then hand it over until you need a car again.

The focus of a person 'using' reindeer is on how they might facilitate his/her life and work, especially regarding transport, whereas that of a person 'keeping' reindeer is primarily on the reciprocal companionship with his or her reindeer who in turn share his/her life and workload.

Soviet policy has created a functional and psychological difference (cf. Landerer 2009) within the community of Evenk hunters and reindeer keepers by singling out two families to keep reindeer and the majority of the community to only use them. To the majority of the hunters seasonal cycles of travel and work in the forest were detached from the need to care for a herd of reindeer (especially in summer) thus lacking the intense interpersonal relationship described above.

Hunters became used to having 'reindeer-free' time (see also Konstantinov (2009) who describes a similar effect when herders change from reindeer drawn sled to snow machine for transport), where neither their daily work considerations nor their seasonal ones were influenced by constantly having to care for reindeer. What then happened, when in the mid 1980s the *promkhoz* decided to abandon state reindeer husbandry in Teteya?

The remaining reindeer (numbers had dwindled drastically from over 800 kept by the two reindeer herding families to 70 in the late 1980s) were divided and given to each family living in the Teteya area. If hunters still wanted to use reindeer for transport during hunting season, they would have to care for them themselves. Unused to keeping reindeer (as opposed to merely using them), many hunters and their families lost or butchered the reindeer. Only members of the two former reindeer keeping families, who knew well how to care for them, who were used to 'keep reindeer', continued to do so. But since the amount of reindeer in the Teteya area had been reduced to a very small herd (in 2008: 30 animals), every single reindeer had to work much harder and longer during hunting season (October till March). For instance, one hunter-herder from Teteya, owned, kept and used 6 reindeer in 2008, two of which were only yearlings. In the hunting season 2007/8 he travelled 1600 km on two reindeer sleds using the same four draft reindeer. He remarked that during the *promkhoz* system of renting out reindeer, he had been allotted at least 15 reindeer every season to do the same amount sled pulling. It is here that the

intrinsic difference of keeping versus using reindeer as an attitude can be seen. During *promkhoz* times he was used to travel back to the base camp as often as possible, to meet family and friends, to stock up in the shop and to enjoy communal space. This was the driving force and with a big enough number of working reindeer, this could be done. Now, with only so few reindeer left, his rationale is the same, namely often going back to the base camp. Had he changed his attitude from predominantly using reindeer to 'keeping' them, he would have altered his movement patterns and minimized the distance for his draft reindeer by returning less often to the base camp. Instead, he still adheres to the *promkhoz*-encouraged principle of maximizing the use of reindeer, while minimizing the work and commitment attached to keeping them.

It is important to notice that these two notions of **keeping** and **using** reindeer are not mutually exclusive and usually coexist (as is the case at the Kochema), since if one wants to use reindeer as transport animals, one also has to keep them. In this particular setting in the research area, however, some hunters (Teteya) were allowed and encouraged to exclusively use reindeer for transport during hunting time (late autumn, winter) and forget about them and not care for them the rest of the year. Even though the state herd and the practice of renting out reindeer were abandoned in the mid 1980s, the attitude of using reindeer prevailed. Hunters whose prior relationship with reindeer was work related only, were not prepared, neither in skills nor in willingness, to suddenly keep reindeer themselves. As a result in 2008 the only people still keeping reindeer in Teteya are descendants of the two families who cared for the state reindeer, who were used to keep reindeer as partners and not just as working animals.

In order to describe these two concepts further, I divide work in which reindeer are part of into two categories:

1. Reindeer facilitated work or movement comprises activities in which reindeer are used to help the hunter-herder, such as using them as transport animals.
2. Reindeer induced work, on the other hand, signifies work that is aimed at the well being of the herd and includes building corrals, overseeing the rutting and calving seasons, making smoke fires in summer, guarding the animals against predators.

Thus in the pre-1980s at the time of the *promkhoz*, reindeer induced work was minimized for everyone excluding the two reindeer keeping families, while reindeer facilitated work was intensively practised by everyone. Thus by dividing these two work types the

promkhoz has caused an attitude in the hunters of using the reindeer like rental cars. Not only does that affect the attachment to and identification with the reindeer, but it also damages the extent and transfer of knowledge related to reindeer keeping.

Persons **keeping** reindeer, on the other hand, are involved in both types of work, reindeer induced and reindeer facilitated. They have formed attachments to both the reindeer and the forest life they are part of. Life is more organically rooted in the forest and its seasonal cycles and people see themselves more as leading a life with reindeer as partners (as seen for instance in Sina's remarks about life with reindeer).

Their responsibilities keep them in the forest and if need be to visit the central village, they have to pick the time of the year carefully ensuring that someone stays behind watching the animals. Reindeer keeping knowledge and skills are passed on, and together with hunting related knowledge form the basis for choosing trails, pastures and dwellings.

Since neither the reindeer nor the herders of the Kochema people have been collectivised, the separation of reindeer herders and pure hunters and of reindeer induced and reindeer facilitated work was not practised in that region, which lead to a different situation from that in the Teteya area.

Even though the people of the Kochema were part of the *promkhoz* as state hunters or geological expedition workers, every single family remained responsible for their own reindeer. The idea of **only** using the reindeer, without a sense of keeping them, has never developed there. (In Teteya, on the other hand, most of the hunters practised 'reindeer **using**' between 1960 and mid 1980s).

The two attitudes of **keeping** versus **using** reindeer, brought forth by the state through a division of reindeer-induced and reindeer-facilitated work, can also be seen in the notions of 'being in the forest' versus 'going into the forest'.

'Being in the forest' describes a way of life intrinsically coupled to experiences in the taiga and always includes the notion of 'keeping reindeer', without which life in the forest does not exist. A person keeping reindeer has to stay close to his animals and has to care for them within a forest setting. Such a person does not switch regularly between a forest setting and a base camp of village setting. Therefore his frame of mind is firmly set on the forest and the reindeer.

A hunter used to only ‘rent’ reindeer for his hunting endeavors during Soviet times has got used to changing his frame of mind between being in the forest for work and being in the base camp or village in other contexts (resting, fishing, repairing). ‘Going into the forest’ is based on the assumption of a division line between the forest and something else, a place of dwelling and a place of work, (it forms a special variant of a widespread notion linked to the Soviet policy of sedentarization (cf. Stammer 2005, Vitebsky 2005, Anderson 2000)), but also an attitude, which is not forest related. For the people of Teteya, this has resulted during Soviet times in constant travel, both physically and mentally, between ‘being in the forest’ (while out hunting) and ‘going into the forest’ (when in the base camp). This attitude is still kept up in Teteya and travel is still executed with the help of reindeer that are ‘being used’. For the people leaving the base camp and going into the forest means to mentally adapt from a place of dwelling with a fixed layout and a clearly marked separation between ‘more civilised’ space and the engulfing forest (see picture 3.19) to a place where constant attention, skills and knowledge are needed to successfully live in the forest.



Picture 3.19 shows Teteya base camp with the clear cut line between camp and forest.

In this chapter I have analyzed changes in human-reindeer relationships that have occurred in the research area and affected the interpersonal companionship that I have introduced in Chapter 2. These changes are nature-related (forest fires that changes the characteristics of the forest) and culture- or attitude-related, which includes considering riding reindeer and the skills involved in training them less important (Chapter 3.1) or creating an attitude where reindeer are rather conceptualized as ‘cars for rent’ (Chapter 3.2). In both cases the personhood of reindeer has been affected and the authority has

been changed that reindeer display when dealing with their human keepers in their function as transport providers.

Chapter 4 Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed relations between humans and reindeer in Siberia with a focus on the notion of personhood, which does not necessarily underlie western notions of a dichotomy between mind and matter or organism and person, but manifests itself in humanness and animalness. I have looked into different manifestations of interpersonal relations regarding hunting, herding, and the combination of both.

My research area gives particularly relevant insights, since the people there have formed a special way of companionship with each animal in their very small herds. One group (Teteya) treats them like fellow inhabitants of their base camp, while the other (Kochema) forms very close living and working relationships with their animals, who are seen as equal partners in their forest life.

Additionally, since the reindeer at the Kochema had never been collectivized during Soviet times, notions of larger herds aimed towards meat production and formal systems of brigades were never introduced. I argue that this factor together with the lack of the notion of reindeer as commodity aimed towards a centralized (Soviet times) or market economy has led to this development of interpersonal companionship in the forest. I have pointed out that small herds, a very high individuality of each reindeer and a total lack of attaching monetary values on the reindeer are the focal points of this companionship.

The literature on reindeer people in Siberia deals more with reindeer herding aspects where large herds bred for market economy are central. Literature on hunting aspects in Siberia, on the other hand, does usually not combine aspects of herding and hunting with regards to personhood manifestations. I have linked these two aspects and added to the existing knowledge of human animal relations a unique form of companionship in the forest.

I have pointed out that non-western concepts of personhood often lack the dichotomies that western thinking indulges in and consequently offer more relational aspects of human-animal relations. Also, models of human-animal relationships have undergone a shift from models of coercion and domination to those of symbiotic domestication. I have added the model of interpersonal companionship, the central feature of which is the lack of dealing with a herd bred for monetary purposes. Instead, this companionship focuses

on a communal life in the forest with the reindeer being equal partners and with respect for the intentionality of the reindeer, both of each reindeer and of the whole herd.

Personhood manifests itself differently in hunting, herding or companionship contexts. While the concept of mimesis and transformation is applicable to hunting processes in certain areas of Siberia, it is less useful with regard to herding aspects. These are often described as forming part of a social contract between humans and reindeer with a distinction between a small herd of highly trained animals and the penumbra of a large herd. Notions of reciprocity, equality and intentionality are attached to this model, which are enhanced in the model of companionship due to the absence of monetary intentions on behalf of the humans.

Furthermore I have discussed recent changes with regard to human-reindeer relations which were caused by nature (forest fires), forced upon from the outside (*promkhoz* policies) and formed within the community (change of skills and practicalities (riding)). I have introduced the division between using reindeer and keeping reindeer which was introduced by Soviet policies of separating reindeer induced and reindeer facilitated work. I have argued that this division has brought forth a split between 'being in the forest' and 'going into the forest'. These two attitudes define a forest life with reindeer as companions on the one hand and a life with constant travelling between forest and village setting with reindeer as rental cars on the other.

Thus this particular setting in my research area has given me the opportunity of looking into aspects of human-animal relationships that are very distinct from other settings and have allowed me to introduce new concepts. This uniqueness of the area is due to lack of collectivisation (Kochema) and due to the removal of reindeer keeping from any monetary economical realms (both Teteya and Kochema), which have brought forth this interpersonal companionship in the forest.

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