

'I should have some deer, but I
don't remember how many':
Confused Ownership of
Reindeer in Chukotka, Russia

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Introduction

As the title of this chapter implies, I seek to highlight the perspective of individual reindeer herders with regard to issues of ownership of the reindeer in their midst. If multiple, overlapping claims to reindeer are to be found in Chukotka, they are less likely to occur among the herders themselves than between the herders and the state. In the former Soviet Union as well as in post-Soviet Russia, reindeer herders in Chukotka have competed with state agencies for ownership and control of individual reindeer, and have come out the losers.

Russia's privatization programme of the early 1990s was surrounded by neoliberal rhetoric implying that private property rights for individuals would be secured, thus stimulating entrepreneurship and individual economic security all over the country (Wedel 1998). In Chukotka, the dissolution of the Soviet state brought a period of reorganization of state reindeer farms and denationalization of their property, a process that was accompanied by economic collapse. What began in the 1980s as a gradual decline in the stability of domestic reindeer herds in Chukotka, due to a variety of anthropogenic and ecological causes, accelerated into a collapse that saw the regional headcounts drop dramatically within just a few years. By the early 2000s, that collapse seemed to have been arrested, and data from the Chukotka department of agriculture painted what seemed to be a clear picture: all of the reindeer in the region were owned by a small number of municipal enterprises. Ownership appeared to be neither collective nor multiple; the reindeer herders were not listed as having any property interest in the deer, but were shown as employees of the enterprises that owned them. However, this neat and tidy picture obscured the complexities and confusions that have characterized the reorganization of reindeer herding in the region since 1991. In the subsequent chaotic decade, ownership became complicated and tangled, and most of the herders I spoke to expressed a sense of confusion and powerlessness with regard to their reindeer.

In this chapter I demonstrate that post-Soviet privatization of reindeer herding in Chukotka, rather than securing the herders' rights to ownership of the deer they

had been herding since long before the Soviet Union was created, actually served to alienate them even further from the deer they considered not only to be their property – their wealth on the hoof – but also their cultural legacy.

Pre-Revolutionary Reindeer Pastoralism

I begin with a historical snapshot of reindeer herding in Chukotka on the eve of Soviet collectivization, in order to provide a better understanding of the changes that occurred during and after the Soviet period. Although there were other indigenous groups herding reindeer in Chukotka, my focus is on the Chukchi. The practice of keeping large herds of reindeer for subsistence purposes developed (apparently quite rapidly) among the Chukchi in the early eighteenth century (Krupnik 1993: 173–74) and was still in force two hundred years later.¹ The deer in these herds were owned by individuals living in semi-nomadic camps composed of a few families, typically oriented around a single herd of about one thousand head. According to Krupnik (1993: 94), the most important social unit would have been a 'group of neighbouring herding camps', since it was this group that cooperatively determined pasturing territories and migration routes. The average size of this extended group would have been 120–180 people distributed among five to twelve camps (ibid. 95). Generally, a single wealthy herder owned most of the deer in the herd associated with one particular camp, while a few head in the herd might be owned by hired herders who work for him in the hope of earning enough deer to eventually start their own herds (Bogoras 1904–9: 83). The reindeer were considered to be the herder's wealth, while the size of his herd was a measure of his prestige and social status (Krupnik 1993: 171).

Each camp community was associated with a territory over which it had long-term use rights by common agreement with associated and neighbouring camps. For a group of the size indicated above – 120 to 180 people – the size of the territory would average 8,000–15,000 square kilometres, with a herd density of 30–90 reindeer per 100 square kilometre of pasture (Krupnik 1993: 97). A group territory would consist of certain standard elements: summer pasture (including spots for fishing on lakes and rivers), winter pasture, and calving and slaughtering grounds. These territories were used communally by members of a single camp (which could consist of several individual owners), and cooperatively with other neighbouring camps. Territorial boundaries could be flexibly altered by agreement among neighbours, and thus change from year to year depending on the condition of the pasture (which could vary in extremes of climate) (Krupnik 1993: 93, 96). According to Krupnik, the long-term stability of the pastoral land tenure system in Chukotka consisted in this very flexibility within and between groups to allow for shifts in patterns of pasture use (ibid. 96). Migration routes in Chukotka varied depending on the distance between the edge of the taiga and the Arctic sea coast. In western Chukotka, the focus of this chapter, annual migration routes averaged



Map 1.1 Russia showing Chukotka. Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.

200–400 km, although Krupnik points out a 'highly noticeable disparity in pastoral migration' in that 'wealthier families usually migrated much farther than did poorer ones' (ibid.).

Although one herder could accumulate substantially more deer than others, and they were unequivocally understood to be his exclusive property, this did not result in significant social stratification (Krupnik 1993: 170). The community nevertheless remained to some extent egalitarian, and mutual aid among kin and close neighbours was common. Although later, during collectivization, Soviet agents would characterize wealthier reindeer herders as 'kulaks' (thus likening them to rich peasants who exploited the poor) and persecute them as enemies of the people (Dikov 1989: 215), the Chukchis I spoke to about this insisted that these herders were wealthier and more successful simply because they had worked harder and were more skilful, not because they had exploited other herders, and that everyone in the local community respected them as such.

Reindeer herding among the Chukchi on the eve of Soviet collectivization (characterized as the 'tundra type') was always quite different from that found among the Evenki (characterized as the 'taiga type') in that the reindeer of the former were not milked, but accumulated as 'wealth on the hoof' and slaughtered for meat in the case of surplus. Milking requires a greater degree of tameness, and is generally associated with a small herd size. Since Chukchi herding practices involved large herds pastured extensively, the deer might better be described as only semi-domesticated. A few deer from the herd, usually castrated males rather than calf-producing females, would have been sufficiently tamed to pull a sled or carry a pack. Although Chukchis did not harvest reindeer antlers as a rule, Bogoras noted that a hungry herder might chop off

1. For a discussion of the general development of reindeer pastoralism in Northern Eurasia, see Khazanov (1994: 111–14).

Most of the research for this chapter was conducted in 2000 and 2001 with the support from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale, Germany.

pieces of the velvet for a snack (Bogoras 1904–9: 84). Reindeer were used as sources of meat for food, skins for shelter and clothing, and bone and antlers for tools and implements – all products of the slain deer. In this system, the live deer did not lend itself to multiple, overlapping claims on a single animal, such as rights to milk versus rights to harvest antlers versus rights to use for transport.

Tim Ingold (1980) discusses at length the issue of single-stranded (and exclusive) versus multiple rights in animals and herds of animals, and ties the distinction directly to the differences between what he terms ‘carnivorous pastoralism’ and ‘milch pastoralism’ respectively (ibid. 172). According to Ingold, this contrast ‘underlies practically every aspect in which the pastoral economies of the tundra appear to diverge from those of the grassland and semi-desert’ (ibid. 176). Judging from the available data, among the Chukchi, whose pastoralism is clearly classifiable as ‘carnivorous’, ownership was not multiple – any given deer belonged wholly to a single individual. Deer could be gifted, bartered, inherited, or earned through labour, and there may have been socially prescribed expectations for the receipt of such deer, but it seems nevertheless that ownership of the animal would pass in its entirety from one person to another. Nor does the data indicate collective ownership of deer in Chukotka. Although there was collective pasturing of a herd with multiple owners, each animal in the herd would have had an earmark indicating its owner (Bogoras 1904–9: 84), a practice that has survived up to the present. Here there seems to be a subtle nuance, depending on whether it is the individual deer or the whole herd that is being considered. A kin-based camp may very well have thought of the ‘herd’ as its collective property, and at the same time regarded the ‘individual deer’ within the herd as individual property.

Collectivization of Reindeer Herding in the Soviet Period

The Soviet state produced undeniably strong effects on the pastoralists under its sway in the course of the twentieth century. To a greater or lesser degree, I would argue that this very long-armed state effectively undid ‘traditional’ reindeer pastoral systems and transformed them into a remarkably uniform model, regardless of the original variables of culture, ecology, geography and the type of animals involved (Gray 2003). Indeed, Soviet reindeer herding gained a reputation abroad as a model to be emulated, one that was geared primarily towards the goal of meat production. It is perhaps because the form of reindeer herding practised in Chukotka already resembled a system that seemed conducive to high levels of productivity – large herds with sufficient deer annually available for slaughter – that Soviet managers focused their attention on Chukotka as a key site for implementing meat-producing management practices carefully worked out by newly trained ‘experts’ in specially created institutes. These practices stipulated that each herd should be tended day and night by two pairs of herders working 12-hour shifts in rotation. Whereas Chukchi reindeer herding originally bore a resemblance to a family business (and indeed, it was more than a subsistence activity, since trade in reindeer products was highly developed – cf. Bogoras 1904–9: 95–96), it was now patterned after the urban factory work brigade.

Property relations became a matter of state policy as well as ideology. In the early stages of collectivization, reindeer owners were obliged to bring their herds together and manage them cooperatively under state supervision. The reindeer remained nominally the property of the herders, but this does not mean that ownership patterns remained undisturbed. The ideological project of the Bolshevik revolution should not be forgotten, namely to depose wealthy exploiters and elevate exploited workers. The Chukchi system, whereby a successful, wealthy herder employed younger, inexperienced and comparatively ‘poor’ herders as hired hands, appeared to Soviet agents as a distinct case of bourgeois exploitation. Thus, they felt justified in dispossessing these ‘kulaks’ of their deer and distributing them more equitably to ‘poor’ herders as ‘their’ property. However, the ultimate goal of the Soviet state was to render as much as possible into the property of the state, particularly the means of production (cf. Verdery 2003: 51). Consequently, voluntary cooperatives (*kolhozy*) were replaced by state farms (*sovkhozy*), where reindeer became the property of the state and herders were compelled to work as mere state employees, tending state-owned herds and earning a monthly salary. Although these enterprises were devoted to meat production, they were not economically viable, and became entirely dependent on state subsidies for survival (Dikov 1989: 397).

This property picture is not as totalizing as it might seem at first. Even in state-run enterprises, individual herders were allowed to own a certain number of reindeer, which were pastured collectively with the state-owned herd. Over the years, the state set more and more restrictions on the number of deer that could be privately owned by a herder. In the ritual recitation of heroic statistics so typical of Soviet sources, reducing the portion of privately owned deer was portrayed as one of the system’s laudable goals. By the 1960s, private ownership of reindeer in Chukotka had dropped to about 5 per cent of the region’s total reindeer headcount (Dikov 1989: 348; Leont’ev n.d. 96), and stayed at that level through to the end of the Soviet period.

Almost all of the reindeer herders I spoke to in Chukotka mentioned that they owned one or more deer. The latter were frequently won in a socialist competition on the state farm or earned as a reward. Herders said they knew their own deer by sight and could pick them out of the herd. These deer, which were given nicknames, were often castrated males that the owner had tamed and trained to pull a sled; however, productive males and calf-producing females were also owned. Calves could be kept to increase the stock of personal deer or could be gifted to a friend or relative, or passed on as an inheritance. A clear distinction was made between deer trained for transport, namely for pulling a sled or carrying a pack (*ezdovye* or *priagovye*), and productive deer bred to increase the herd (*proizvodstvennye*). In some cases, a sufficient number of trained transport deer were accumulated by a brigade to warrant tending them separately in a small herd kept closer to camp than the main herd.

The small number of personal deer meant that they were not an important economic resource, and in fact their presence could easily go unnoticed by a casual observer. However, the more I questioned herders about their own deer, the more it became apparent that herders valued these deer as something closely associated with themselves. Chukchi families often showed me photo albums where there was

typically a photograph of a reindeer standing apart from the herd, close to humans; invariably I would hear the comment, 'Oh, that's so-and-so's deer', and sometimes there would be an ensuing story about the deer's character and conduct. I was also told that a deceased person's favourite deer would be sacrificed at his or her funeral to provide transport into the spiritual world. Moreover, all types of privately owned deer, whether transport or productive deer, were highly valued as personal property to which the state farm had no claim.

In my conversations with herders about privately owned deer, the slippage in terms used to refer to the latter resulted in some confusion on my part, a confusion often shared by other ethnographers working in the Soviet North. In some cases, the term 'personal deer' (*lichnye oleni*) was used, while 'private deer' (*chastnye oleni*) was used in others (where '*chastnye*' is the same word used in the phrase for 'private property': *chastnaia sobstvennost'*). Both terms appear in the Soviet sources that discuss collectivization of reindeer herding in Chukotka, and are used inconsistently. Sometimes the discussion focuses on deer held for personal use by members of collective farms, and sometimes on those held by herders outside of the collective farm system altogether. *Chastnyi* tends to be used to refer to the latter only, but *lichnyi* could be used to refer to both, or be combined with the word *sobstvennost'* (property) (cf. Dikov 1989: 249, 275, 348; Leont'ev n.d. 96).

While my evidence is so far anecdotal, I would venture to say that I most often heard Chukotkan herders use the term 'private deer' when referring to deer they had acquired since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reorganization of the state farms, while 'personal deer' more frequently denoted deer held in Soviet times. It is important here, however, to consider that Western neoliberal notions of property do not correspond perfectly with the property notions of these reindeer herders (cf. Hann 1998b), creating what feels like ambiguity where perhaps there is no local perception of such. Even when the discussion was clearly focused on the Soviet period, a 'personal deer' might denote a deer that was privately owned, or a state-owned deer that a herder had been allowed to train, and eventually came to think of as his own. One herder said that his father had allowed him to train a few of his privately owned deer, which then became his personal deer, albeit remaining the property of his father. Thus, it appears that a 'personal deer' was not necessarily one's own property, while a 'private deer' most certainly was.

Verdery (2003: 50) offers some insight with her discussion of four types of property recognized in socialist contexts: (1) state property, (2) cooperative property, (3) personal property, and (4) private property. The socialist state viewed private property 'as a residue of the bourgeois order' and as 'slated for eventual elimination' (Verdery 2003: 51). Personal property, on the other hand, was encouraged as a sign that the standard of living was being raised. However, personal property should not constitute the means of production – such property should ideally be state owned or at least cooperatively owned. One problem with applying this framework to 'personal deer' and 'private deer' is that, by some accounts, Soviet era 'personal deer' could technically be classed as the means of production when they were *proizvodstvennye* as opposed to castrated transport deer. However, this is where Soviet reindeer property relations become truly 'fuzzy', to use Verdery's own term

(1999). After all, even 'private deer' were pastured collectively with state-owned deer, and their productive capacity could be exploited to the benefit of the state farm when needed. Stories abound of state farm records being doctored to show losses equally shared by both private and state-owned deer, even when herders knew that their own deer had not been lost. By the same token, there are just as many tales of subversion involving herders fibbing in their own favour when it came to reporting deer losses. Hence the entire category of personal/private deer could be seen as a case of multiple, overlapping property, whose ambiguous status was continually negotiated by herders and state managers.

Post-Soviet Reorganization(s) of Reindeer Herding

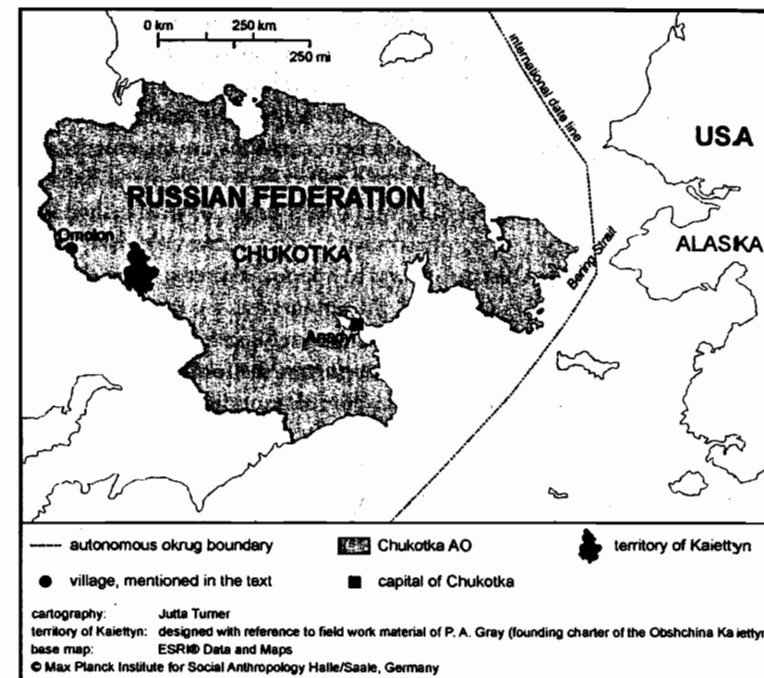
The collapse of the Soviet Union brought radical changes to reindeer herding in Chukotka, as well as throughout the Russian North. In the early 1990s, Russian President Boris Yeltsin mandated that all state enterprises – including reindeer-herding enterprises – had to reorganize themselves and reregister in a new legal form. While this meant that the enterprises would no longer be state owned, it did not mean in practice that they became fully privatized, which is why some prefer to call this process 'denationalization' rather than 'privatization' (cf. Wegren 1998 and Van Atta 1993 for fuller explanations of this process). In Chukotka, this initial period of reorganization was surrounded by a great deal of excitement among indigenous residents, judging by the recollections of herders and reports in regional newspapers. At the time, there were vague expectations that reindeer herding would once again become what it had been prior to collectivization, that is, an enterprise owned and managed by indigenous Chukotkans themselves. Reindeer, they said, rightfully belonged to the reindeer herders, and it was high time that they got their property back.

Reindeer enterprises had several options to reorganize. It should be noted that while all state farm members were given a vote on how their enterprise should be reorganized, for practical purposes this process was controlled and directed by upper management, that is, by people not directly involved in reindeer herding. Most state farms took the option of reregistering as a joint stock company, while essentially retaining the same form and function. With this option, employees received shares (*pai*) in the enterprise and could 'cash out' if they chose, collecting their share in cash or in kind. Most of the Russians working as professionals in state farm support services cashed out in this way and left Chukotka altogether, while most indigenous reindeer herders chose to remain in the tundra with the herds. In some cases, Russians 'privatized' state farm equipment, such as tractors or trucks, for other profit-making purposes. In a few cases, even deer were 'privatized' by Russians, who then immediately slaughtered them and sold or traded the meat. The end result was that numerous enterprises were depleted of their functioning equipment as well as of their key management personnel, and thereafter struggled to survive. These enterprises operated in essentially the same way they had in the past, that is, the herders were employees of an enterprise under a manager, who in most cases was a Russian outsider (although indigenous Chukotkans did occasionally become managers of reorganized enterprises).

The herds now consisted mostly of deer owned by the enterprises, but included personal deer privately owned by individual herders. In the Soviet period, careful accounting was carried out on herd dynamics, and the status of privately owned deer was continually tracked on paper (Kerttula 2000). In the 1990s, as herds were merged and herders moved around the tundra or migrated out in search of more stable employment, these vigilant accounting practices faltered. If a herder left the tundra to take a job in the village, it did not mean that he gave up ownership of his personal deer; yet it did mean that he became utterly dependent on others to tend these deer and to account honestly for their fate. This arrangement was not unprecedented; even Bogoras described coastal fishermen who owned reindeer kept by tundra relatives, which they would visit merely from time to time (Bogoras 1904–9: 71–72). However, since the ensuing economic crisis brought an almost total breakdown in infrastructure, including transportation, post-Soviet village-bound herders had few opportunities to visit the herd and personally monitor the condition of their own deer. If the owner received a report that his deer had been eaten by wolves, it might well have been true. On the other hand, it could in fact have been an enterprise deer that was eaten, and the herder's deer merely translated on paper into an enterprise deer. Although family earmarks still exist, I got the sense that marking was not being systematically practised, especially when owners were not physically present to ensure the marking of new calves.

Another option in Russia's privatization plan was to break up herding into smaller, independently run operations. In Chukotka, only a handful of herders went this route by taking their shares out of the state farm in the form of reindeer and striking out on their own. Their herds became 100 per cent privately owned, with property rights often shared by a kin-based herder collective. The results were for the most part disastrous for these herding operations; within a few years they had failed, almost without exception. These were precisely the cases where the reindeer were once again owned and managed by indigenous Chukotkans, descendants of pre-Soviet reindeer herders. Because the state had taken control of reindeer herding from the herders themselves for so long, the current generation had grown up with skills suitable only to tending deer in the tundra, but virtually no skills or resources for the transportation and marketing of large quantities of reindeer meat in a globalized economy. In some cases smaller enterprises rejoined the larger enterprise from which they had splintered. In most cases, however, the reindeer headcount simply dwindled until the herd was no longer viable, forcing these small, family enterprises to go bankrupt and dissolve.

Reindeer herding in Chukotka had experienced a gradual decline throughout the 1980s. After the initial period of post-Soviet reorganization, however, a mixture of economic, ecological, political and social factors precipitated a collapse. Reindeer headcounts fell dramatically throughout the region. In larger enterprises where there might have been up to twelve separate herds (tended by twelve individual herding brigades), shrinking herds were merged and herders laid off. More herders abandoned the tundra to seek non-herding jobs in the villages, or even beyond in the district and regional centres. The overall deer headcount in Chukotka dropped from 540,000 in 1980 to 85,000 in 2000 (Gray 2000).



Map 1.2 Chukotka showing location of Kaietyn. Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.

As confusing and chaotic as the situation was during the initial period of reorganization mandated by President Yeltsin, the situation became even more complicated in the late 1990s. Faced with the imminent collapse of reindeer herding in Chukotka, the regional department of agriculture was hard pressed to provide assistance, both to prevent further degradation of the reindeer herds as well as to provide social support for remaining reindeer herders, who for years had received virtually no cash salary whatsoever (as they had been accustomed to in the past). The plan devised to save reindeer herding – an approach that seems to have been taken up in several other regions in Siberia around the same time – was to put partial ownership and control back into the hands of the government, this time in the form of the municipal (i.e. district-level) administration. In Chukotka, it was known as 'municipalization' (*munitsipalizatsiia*).

The execution of this complex process appears to have been somewhat devious and not entirely legal, the full details of which are beyond the scope of this chapter (see Gray 2001). Although department of agriculture officials and regional administrators presented this to the public as a voluntary process recognized by the reindeer herders themselves as a step to improve the lot of Chukotkan reindeer herding (rhetoric reminiscent of the period of collectivization), there were many reports of herders having been tricked or strong-armed into signing over their enterprises to the control of the municipal authorities. The outcome was that the municipal (district)

administrations in all eight districts of Chukotka claimed to own a 51 per cent share of all reindeer herding enterprises, with 49 per cent held collectively by the herders (in some cases enterprises were registered as 100 per cent municipal property). The district held what officials called the '*kontrol'nyi paket*' or controlling share, which gave the municipal entity the right to impose management decisions on the enterprises. This was indeed an unprecedented form of multiple and collective property. Each district now acted as a kind of reindeer-herding mega enterprise, with branches scattered throughout the tundra within its administrative borders. Across the board, the first decision by the municipal administrations was to appoint a director to each enterprise that met with the administration's approval (in certain cases a compliant director was kept on). The few small herding enterprises that had refused to sign over were simply left out in the cold – cut off from access to support in the form of subsidies, credits, and even basic access to transportation and communication (controlled by the district administrations) – and were mostly dissolved.

Confusion about Reindeer Ownership – The Case of Kaiettyn

In order to illustrate the effects of this recent reorganization on reindeer herders and their property claims, I turn to the case of a former state farm in the western Chukotka district of Bilibin, based in the village of Omolon. The Omolon state farm had fifteen reindeer herds in its Soviet-era heyday, tended by as many individual brigades of herders. Table 1.1 (below) tracks the fate of each brigade, the key social and economic unit in the tundra. During the initial phase of reorganization in the early 1990s, the Omolon state farm became a 'limited liability partnership' with the name TOO 'Omolon' (*tovarishchestvo ogranichenoi otvetsvennosti*). At this time, all employees were given shares (*pai*) from the state farm's assets, and many herders told me they received reindeer as their share, having been assigned a specified number of deer on paper. One herder commented to me that people would ask each other, 'What's your share?' meaning, 'How many deer do you have?' These deer, newly acquired as private property, held a different kind of potential to the personal deer maintained in tiny quantities by herders during the Soviet period – these deer now represented quantities that could create a viable independent herd, if family members combined their shares. And that is precisely what some of the Omolon herders opted to do.

Three brigades were liquidated and six remained within TOO 'Omolon', but four brigades (Nos. 10, 12, 13 and 14 – see Table 1.1) chose to split off in 1992. They took their reindeer shares and formed four small, independent (essentially family-run) reindeer-herding enterprises, officially registered as the common form of *fermerskoe khoziaistvo* or 'farming enterprise'. These enterprises now ostensibly owned everything in their possession as private property. They remained on the same territory they had used as brigades of the state farm, but now leased this land directly from the district, and were free to use its pastures as they saw fit. Their herds were made up primarily of privately owned but collectively held deer, with each herder having a known share of deer. Most of these would have been productive deer, with a few used as sled or pack-trained deer, the latter being considered personal deer.

Table 1.1 State Farm 'Omolon' in Bilibinskii District, Chukotka

Soviet Period	First reorganization ('privatization')	Mid-1990s	Second reorganization ('municipalization')
Brigade No. 1	TOO 'Omolon'	TOO 'Omolon'	OAO 'Omolon'
Brigade No. 2	TOO 'Omolon'	TOO 'Omolon'	OAO 'Omolon'
Brigade No. 3	TOO 'Omolon'	TOO 'Omolon'	OAO 'Omolon'
Brigade No. 4	LIQUIDATED	-	-
Brigade No. 5	TOO 'Omolon'	TOO 'Omolon'	OAO 'Omolon'
Brigade No. 6	LIQUIDATED	-	-
Brigade No. 7	LIQUIDATED	-	-
Brigade No. 8	LIQUIDATED	-	-
Brigade No. 9	TOO 'Omolon'	TOO 'Omolon'	OAO 'Omolon'
Brigade No. 10	f/kh 'Pananto-Kaiettyn'	obshchina 'Kaiettyn'	OAO 'Ilguveem'
Brigade No. 11	TOO 'Omolon'	obshchina 'Kaiettyn'	OAO 'Omolon'
Brigade No. 12	f/kh 'Nembonda'	obshchina 'Kaiettyn'	f/kh 'Nembonda'
Brigade No. 13	f/kh 'Oloi'	obshchina 'Kaiettyn'	OAO 'Ilguveem'
Brigade No. 14	f/kh 'Kadar'	f/kh 'Kadar'	f/kh 'Kadar'
Brigade No. 15	TOO 'Omolon'	TOO 'Omolon'	OAO 'Omolon'

NOTE: f/kh = *fermerskoe khoziaistvo* (farming enterprise); TOO = *tovarishchestvo ogranichenoi otvetsvennosti* (limited liability partnership); OAO = *otkrytoe aktsionernoe obshchestvo* (open stock society).
Table compiled by Pattry A. Gray on the basis of data supplied by the Chukotka Regional Department of Agriculture as well as her own interviews of Kaiettyn *obshchina* members.

Three of these brigades (Nos. 10, 12 and 13) along with one other (No. 11) were situated within contiguous territories on the eastern edge of the state farm's territory, far from the central village and its services. Consequently, a makeshift resupply base was built during the Soviet period in a place centrally located in relation to these four brigades – a few wooden houses, a trading post, a bath house, and a medical station. This base went by the name of 'Kaiettyn'. Brigade Nos. 10, 12 and 13 were among those that broke away from the state farm, while Brigade No. 11 remained part of TOO 'Omolon'. As the infrastructure broke down in the wake of the first reorganization, all four of these former state farm brigades felt abandoned by the central village of Omolon, which still nominally administered their social services. Thus, in 1993, the four brigades – three of them independent, one still legally part of the main enterprise – banded together to form Chukotka's first *obshchina*, a communal territorial formation allowed for in Russian federal legislation since the early 1990s (Fondahl et al. 2001; Gray 2001). The *obshchina* was named 'Kaiettyn' after the tiny base at its centre.

The *obshchina* functioned as a means of local self-government for the residents within the territory of these four brigades; in essence, the organizers of the *obshchina* were trying to elevate the base to the status of an officially recognized village, one that would be entitled to the full range of social services stipulated by administration policy. However, by the time I interviewed Kaiettyn residents in 2000, several years after the creation of their *obshchina*, most of them were not even aware of its existence, or only vaguely remembered the fact that it had been formed. In their minds, the village of Omolon and the enterprise TOO 'Omolon' retained the most prominent roles in terms of the administrative structures they perceived around them. Moreover, the *obshchina* did not participate in the economic management of the enterprises. Brigade No. 11 was still being managed by TOO 'Omolon', based in the village of Omolon, while Brigades Nos. 10, 12 and 13 were on their own, and struggling in the context of new, supposedly market relations. In an effort to gain stability, and recognizing their own limitations, these three independent family enterprises pooled their resources and jointly hired an outside director. They chose a Russian who had been the economist of the former state farm at Omolon, and expected him to manage their finances and help them transport and market their reindeer meat in the district capital. However, in a scenario that became all too familiar across Chukotka, the Russian director embezzled enterprise funds and fled to Moscow within a couple of years. This left the three enterprises in truly dire straits.

In the late 1990s, the Chukotkan regional department of agriculture began to implement its plan for municipalization of all reindeer enterprises in Chukotka. In Bilibinskii District, five new municipal enterprises were created on the basis of existing privatized enterprises (including TOO 'Omolon'), with each given the label 'open stock society' (*otkrytoe aktsionerhoe obshchestvo* or OAO). Of the twenty-six various small reindeer-herding enterprises that had sprung up in this district after the first reorganization in the post-Soviet period, seventeen were liquidated, three remained in existence (at least on paper), and the rest were absorbed into the new OAOs. One of these new OAOs was located on the territory of the *obshchina* Kaiettyn, and was called 'Ilguveem' after a river that flowed through this area. OAO



Map 1.3 Detail of brigades at Kaiettyn. Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology.

'Ilguveem' was formed on the basis of two of the four independent enterprises, Brigade Nos. 10 and 13. The remaining reindeer of these two enterprises were driven together to form one herd, which now grazed on the territory of the former Brigade No. 10. Fewer people were needed to tend this consolidated herd of deer (the official ratio set for Omolon tundra was 1 herder per 360 deer). Surplus personnel were relegated either to the status of hunter-fishers, who lived separately with their families in camps along river banks, or to that of ordinary workers stationed at the base Kaiettyn (which served as the headquarters of the enterprise).

The man appointed by the district to become director of this newly formed enterprise was a Russian who had been a professional wage-earning hunter in the former state farm based in Omolon. When I interviewed him, he explained that his enterprise had inherited all property rights associated with the former enterprises based on Brigade Nos. 10 and 13. He said he was completely unaware of the existence of the *obshchina* that supposedly united these two brigades with Brigade Nos. 11 and 12, a fact that was clearly unimportant to him. This new director, now as an agent of Bilibinskii District, saw himself as taking on responsibility for supplying the material

needs of all those residents at the Kaiettyn base, and clearly expected the latter to be his employees. Although the few residents who disliked the new director and refused to work for him were not ostracized by the base, their future did seem uncertain. All in all, the picture had become hauntingly reminiscent of what had prevailed in the Soviet period, when the state farm dominated the lives of rural residents.

What of the property issues surrounding the remaining deer of these four brigades on the territory of Kaiettyn? Here is where the confusion becomes apparent. Everyone involved expressed varying degrees of uncertainty about these issues, from the regional department of agriculture officials to the heads of enterprises and all the way down to individual herders and workers living at the base. A review of three key periods may serve to clarify matters.

1. Late Soviet Era to 1991

There was a state farm based in the village of Omolon, which managed fifteen herds of deer. Fifteen reindeer herder brigades and their families tended the herds, and although the majority of the deer were owned by the state farm, each brigade member was likely to own a few head of deer, some of which were carefully trained and considered their 'personal deer'.

2. Reorganization, 1991–1998

Throughout this process, both people and deer stayed together as units, whatever legal organizational form they took. However, property in deer may have begun to look different to herders, depending on whether they stayed with the main reindeer enterprises or broke off on their own. Those who stuck with the main reindeer enterprise based in Omolon would have remained in a position similar to that in the early Soviet period – their shares of deer were pastured collectively in a large enterprise herd, and a small number of animals in the herd were considered their personal deer. Those who branched out to form independent enterprises could now consider the whole herd – what remained of it – their private property, held communally with their business partners (who were in almost all cases relatives). A few individual deer, more tame than the others, would be used as always for transport, and would be considered the personal deer of those who trained them. In fact, in the case of the former Brigade No. 12, the enterprise split even further, as individual family members took their shares – as few as a hundred head of deer – and went off to graze them separately. Because they were so small, these groups were ignored and effectively fell off the monitoring scope of the department of agriculture.

3. Municipalization, 1998–2001

In the case of the new municipal enterprise OAO 'Ilguveem', we see two small independent enterprises (Brigade Nos. 10 and 13) being taken over by the district and reorganized into one large municipal enterprise, with the district now claiming a 51 per cent property share. Many questions remain as to the ownership status of their deer. Does the district now own a 51 per cent share of each deer, or 51 per cent of the total number of deer? Or does the 51 per cent include other assets, such

as transport vehicles and buildings? I asked these questions, but even department of agriculture officials could not provide me with straight answers. The director of the enterprise was unable to tell me what percentage of either herd was privately owned by the herders, whom he considered as his employees. He seemed to treat the entire herd as 'his' property, or at least the property of 'his' enterprise, although he was aware of the fact that most current and former herders probably thought they held shares of privately owned deer.

Although this herd had previously consisted on paper of 100 per cent privately owned deer collectively managed by two independent family enterprises, it is not known whether the merger with the district was a genuine expression of the herders' will. Only a small number of people who had originally worked in the enterprises were now working directly with the herd in the tundra. The remaining deer owners were scattered in locations far away from the herd – some living in retirement at the base, some working in jobs at the base that were not related to herding, and others living in separate remote camps, engaged in hunting and fishing either as employees of the new enterprise or as disgruntled independents. These people no longer had any direct connection with the herd or with the deer they owned. How could they actualize their property rights over these animals? How could they monitor the condition of their deer – or even know whether the deer were alive or dead? Their confusion as to whether or not they still had any deer and if so, how many, as well as their lack of direct control, seemed to work to the new director's advantage. He was hired to manage a district-controlled reindeer-herding enterprise, for the purpose of which he needed a stable herd. He would not be able to do his job successfully if herders could easily take their own deer and split them off from the herd.

During my time at the Kaiettyn base, I conducted a house-to-house survey regarding property issues. One of the questions concerned the status of the deer that respondents owned as their personal property. In some cases people seemed almost bemused by the question, as if barely able to remember that they owned some deer. The answers I received are summarized in Table 1.2 below.

The responses also revealed something of the nature of what personal deer ownership had been like among these people. One base resident talked about how in winter the herd would be driven close to the base and people would be able to catch their tame deer out of the herd, keep them tethered close to the base, and hitch them up to sleds for work around the base or for trips into the main village of Omolon for supplies. People valued these deer highly – one base resident said, 'Without deer, we'd have to go on foot – where could we go?' Yet at the same time I sensed their distance – their alienation – from the deer as their property, especially when it came to the productive, non-transport deer. One young woman, who lived with her family at a remote riverside hunting and fishing camp, lamented the absence of deer, saying she had nothing from which to sew clothing or make a new dwelling (and here she pointed out the shabby condition of her family's canvas tent). The only people maintaining a close relationship with the personal (transport) deer were the herders – brigade members – who were formally employed by OAO 'Ilguveem' and worked in the tundra with the herd.

Table 1.2 Status of deer owned by residents of Kaiettyn

Owner	Residence	Employment	Number of deer once owned	Type of deer	Location of deer	Status
Daria	Base	Retired 'tent worker'	Not sure	Not specified	Brigade No. 11	Given to son but thinks wild deer took many away.
Varya	Base	Nurse	43	Not specified	Brigade No. 13	Divided between three siblings, but deer were lost when brigade fell apart.
Tolik	Base	Worker for enterprise / former herder	6	Productive	Not specified	Received as work bonus when he was a herder - he sold them for cash.
Nikolai	Base	Retired herder	Does not remember	Transport and productive	Brigade No. 13	Transport deer gift from mother's brother - also share from state farm. Current status unclear.
Kosya	Base	Retired herder	290	Transport (20) Productive (270)	Brigade No. 10	Deer were joined with OAO 'Ilgurveem' - not sure how many left.
Mira	Base / tundra camp	Unemployed	48	Transport (1) Productive (47)	Brigade No. 10	Was her share, 'my own herd' - does not know if she still has them or not. Considers she has no right to them because she no longer works for OAO 'Ilgurveem'.
Sergei	Base / tundra camp	Worker	69	Transport (19) Productive (50)	Brigade No. 10	Transport deer held in common with father. Had taken deer and formed own enterprise. Later joined them with Brigade No. 10. Not sure how many are left - 'maybe wolves ate them.'

Table compiled by Patty A. Gray on the basis of her own interviews of Kaiettyn *obshchina* members.

Conclusion

Overall, I encountered a sense of fatalism among reindeer herders and their families at Kaiettyn - many seemed to have given up any hope of reconnecting with their deer. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was an initial surge of self-confidence directed towards indigenous self-determination, accompanied by the hope that the tundra dwellers would become more fully masters not only of their personal deer, but of entire herds that had long ago been wrested from indigenous control. However, this initial optimistic mood turned into a phase of defeatism and depression among former reindeer herders. Some were angry, but few showed any sign of willingness to fight with the new local boss. He had their deer, and there was not much they could see themselves doing about it. They rarely if ever saw the deer they considered their own property and had to trust others - usually relatives who still worked with the herd - to tend their deer. Once proud of the deer they owned and had trained to pull sledges for transportation and sport, they now felt disempowered and alienated from their own property, more so than in the Soviet period, to the extent that many could not even remember how many deer belonged to them in the collective herd, and had no hope of ever being able to exert their rights of ownership over these deer.

Although some families were ready to strike out on their own to live in small, kin-based camps, supporting themselves by bartering fish and game meat, they considered it impossible without their deer. However, they saw no way either to untangle their own deer from the herd and claim them physically or to actualize and monitor their rights to these deer as absentee owners. Thus, what had once been a complex system of fuzzy, multiple property has been streamlined into a single, unambiguous strand that the herders have no grasp on.