

Economic View from the Tundra Camp: Field Experience With Reindeer Herders in the Kola Peninsula

by Dessislav Sabev

Introduction

The sharp deterioration of the Russian economy in 1998 has strongly affected the northern periphery. This paper follows a ten weeks fieldwork conducted during the spring 1999, mainly at the reindeer herding camp No. 1, belonging to the former state farm *Pamyat' Lenina* ('Memory of Lenin'). My concern is how the economic relationships in the very periphery are redefined in response to centre's pressures. During Soviet rule, the traditional reindeer husbandry was reorganised into collective farms (*kolkhoz*) and later into state farms (*sovkhov*). Created in 1921 in the village of Krasnoschelie, the Kolkhoz has progressively formed what will be later called 'agrocentre'. Classed as *perspektivnoe* ('with good prospects')¹ the village of Krasnoschelie became a local agrocentre after the fusion with two other *kolkhoz*' (Ponoy and Sosnovka) in 1962. Then the improved Kolkhoz was renamed *Pamyat' Lenina*. It was transformed into a state farm (*sovkhov*) in 1971. In terms of reindeer husbandry, *Pamyat' Lenina* has been the second biggest state farm after the sovkhov '*Tundra*' in Lovozero. It consists of four operating brigades with 10 herders each one and nearly 20 000 reindeer. The '*Tundra*' state farm was reported to include 25 000 reindeer in 2001 (Jernsletten & Klovov, 2002). Both state farms are situated in the eastern part of the peninsula, encompassing nearly the entire tundra region of Kola, administratively defined as Lovozero District.

The tundra camp of brigade No. 1 is located on the Lokanga River 350 km. away from the municipal centre Lovozero. Its economic centre, though, is in Krasnoschelie, which, despite of the status of 'agrocentre' is in fact a remote village not connected to the road system of the peninsula. The social environment of the reindeer herders has definitively changed after president Yeltsine and prime minister Chubais started reforms on privatisation (*Zakon "O privatizatsii gosudarstviennyh i munitzipial'nyh predpriiatii v RSFSR"*, 1991). In this paper I argue that the economic crisis during the transition in Russia is investing the geographical isolation of the tundra regions into a syncretic network of heterogeneous economic models which relates the reindeer herding brigade as a 'convergence point'. Indeed, the tundra-camped brigade has to manage both its inherited Soviet-like relationship with the centre(s) and its informal deals with the new tundra actors. The main actors in the agrocentre and the tundra are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. The main actors in the agrocentre and the tundra, as well as their economic and social relationship. The paper focuses the periphery and emphasise the "tundra perspective".

	AGROCENTRE		PERIPHERY
Location	Village administrative centre	(ex)State Farm economic centre	Tundra camps
Actors	<i>Lovozero</i> (District centre) ----- <i>Krasnoshcheliie</i>	<i>Sovkhov Tundra</i> 8 brigades ----- <i>Pamyat' Lenina</i> 4 brigades	reindeer herders; military, geologists, hunters, poachers
Relationship	<u>Substantial</u> Family network	<u>Vertical relationship</u> Sovkhov administration - Brigades	<u>Informal horizontal relationship</u> Brigades - other tundra actors

As for the ethnic landscape, there is a great deal of ethnic variety in the brigades with no clear distinction, due to the many mixed marriages and the industrial migration from the south in Soviet times. However, one could say that the Sami represent the majority in "Tundra" brigades, whereas the Komi are predominant in "Pamyat' Lenina" herding collectives. The Nenets, though, are represented in all the brigades, as well as Russians descendants of the 1930s labour migrants. Brigade No. 1 of

¹ Regarding the methodology of classification, see Palloit (1990: 655).

Krasnoscheliie consists of ten herders including six Komis, two Nenets, one Sami and one young Russian herder. The chief brigadier and his deputy are Komi brothers.

According to the Soviet organisation of the reindeer herding, the brigade consists of ten herders and two female *chum-rabotnitsi* (tent helpers), usually relatives (wives) to some of the brigade's herders. A particularity of Krasnoscheliie's herding brigades is the lack of female tent workers after 1991. This is not the case in Lovozero's tundra camps, nor to other herding brigades in the Russian north. Comparing to Lovozero, Krasnoscheliie is a very remote settlement, cut from all communication system, with a poorer farm as unique economic actor. Its herding camps are too far from either the village and the slaughter house near Lovozero. May be the geographic isolation and the absence of cash for the tundra workers are the main reasons why the herder's wives don't work in the tundra camps. This is the case in Brigade No. 1 where a former construction worker from the sovkhos has been working as a tent helper ('*polar*') since 1993 when the chief-brigadier asked him to join the brigade. At 53, he is the oldest in the brigade and uncle to one of the herders. His ethnic history could be representative of the current identity issues, although these are not the subject of this paper. He is the descendant of a great and famous Nenets family of reindeer herders from Yamal (Nenetskiy okrug, north-west Siberia). They came to the Kola peninsula during the great Komi-Nenets migration in late 19th century when a disastrous epidemic was killing the reindeer herds in north-west Siberia. His father was a herder and owner of 300 animals expropriated during the Soviet 'collectivisation campaign' in the north in the 1930s. His mother was tent helper and artist of traditional Nenets herder's clothes represented at exhibitions in Moscow. He married a Komi girl from Krasnoscheliie and they had four children. Despite his well-known Nenets family and his marriage with a Komi woman, his passport says that he is ... Sami. He has never explained this point to me but as described also by Konstantinov (1996: 54), ethnicity in the region is "to a large extent self-ascribed and arbitrary".

This paper is thus based on field notes usually taken during our daily activities in the tundra camp (mostly feeding the transport animals, making and preparing the sledges, searching and stocking wood, hunting; fishing in June) or during group discussions². No formal interviews were done during the field-work. Only informal talks and mostly oral history was taken into account; a few written texts were consulted.

Issues

The present situation in the tundra of Kola Peninsula is being determined by the intertwined interests of a few pairs of actors:

1. Reindeer herding brigades in relation to the Sovkhos Administration;
2. Herders in relation to hunters and other independent tundra actors;
3. All of the above, exploiting renewable resources, versus the town-based industries in the Kola, exploiting non-renewable resources (such as underground ores).

In my view all of these three relationships are interdependent and it is impossible for each one of them to be understood without understanding the influences of the others.

Chapter 1

Memory of Sovkhos

In 1994, the sovkhos officially ended as a state economic unit and the "Memory of Lenin" became *Tovarishество s Ogranichennoy Otvetstvennost'yu*, a kind of Ltd. company through the so-called "insider privatisation" by the "Workers'-and-managers' collectives". In this form of privatisation, managers and employees of the concerned state firm get the majority of the shares at a state-subsidised price (stressed also by Nikula, 1998: 155). "Memory of Lenin Ltd." is a representative product of that system. In late 1998, it was formally transformed into a 'cooperative' named '*Olenevod*' ('Reindeer herder'). These name changes didn't imply structural ones in the economic relationship between the administrative centre situated in Krasnoscheliie and the tundra collectives.

This chapter discuss how the social meaning of the former state farm has been perpetuated into the new "private" form. One real change that herders feel in their relationship to the farm's administration is their lack of money and social security. It is however significant that they continue to

²In some way, these group discussions have been provoked by the process of taking notes itself. As usually happens with anthropologists living for a while in local communities (Stocking, 1983), I was myself object of interest for them, and especially while writing. This interest was very stimulating because it generated a real informal, and informative, exchange.

call the Farm '*The sovkhov*', and so do I in this paper, emphasising an old model perpetuated in a new form. Hence, the brigade is still managed by a planning-economy relationship with the ex-sovkhov, and there are more than one planning: one for the kilograms of slaughtered meat, another for the number and the inner structure of the herd (percents of females, males, castrates, calves). All reindeer meat is sold by the farm, which pay the herders mostly with products and services in the village (but not in the tundra camps): electricity, health care, children care, etc. Brigade workers are also supposed to receive salary, which happens less often during the last years. Here is a representative discussion with herders:

" - It was much better before, of course (collective approval).

- What was better? (I asked).

- There were salaries, regularly paid ... and *advances* at the beginning of the month. We had paid vacancies, could go to the sovkhov' villas (recreational centres belonging to the Soviet 'professional unions'), you could travel, go to the Black Sea, to Bulgaria³ ! - Now, you can't go anywhere... You have no money... And they don't pay salaries anymore, you live just on the *advance* ... What a bloody misery!"

Economic and geographic isolation have reinforced each other since the deterioration of the Soviet economy and this created an anxious feeling of social insecurity among the tundra collectives. The periphery feels abandoned by the centre(s). This context of isolation is reinforced by the lack of female workers in the tundra camps in the last years, so herders feel isolated from both the decision-makers and the family. The response to this is a stronger and valuable relation to the ex-sovkhov, the only conceivable source of security. Even the relation with the family pass through the sovkhov, as many of the herder's wives work in there and children go to the sovkhov' school or kindergarten.

" - So when did the 'misery' begin ? I asked.

- With this fucking *perestroika*, you know...

- With Gorbachev ?

- No, later ... In 1990 ... (others:) - In 1991 (the beginning of the privatisation of the Russian state farms).

- How this changed things here, in the brigade ?

- In no way. As it has ever been, so it is (This is a Komi proverb and was said in Komi, while all the discussion(s) was done in Russian) ... The only difference is that there's no money now... ”.

The main structural change operates indeed beyond the herder-administration relationship, as it concerns the relation of the farm to the buyer. After the 'privatisation', the state ceased to provide subsidies and a market for the reindeer meat. Consequently, the farm administration is left to find a market for its production, as well as to negotiate the deal with the buyer. Thus, beyond the substantial economic relationship of the brigades to the ex-sovkhov, the private Buyer appears as a new economic actor in the tundra. The Swedish slaughter-house "*Norfrys-Polarica*" serves as the unique buyer of reindeer meat in the whole Peninsula. Located near Lovozero, it deserves both Lovozero' and Krasnoschelié' ex-sovkhov's. Paradoxically, this new, western, and private enterprise has not changed the economic relations between the herders and the sovkhov (Fig. 2).

³ Because I am originally from Bulgaria, herders did this *clin d'oeil* on the former vacancies on the Bulgarian sea coast, which was part of the international recreational infrastructure inside the Socialist Bloc.

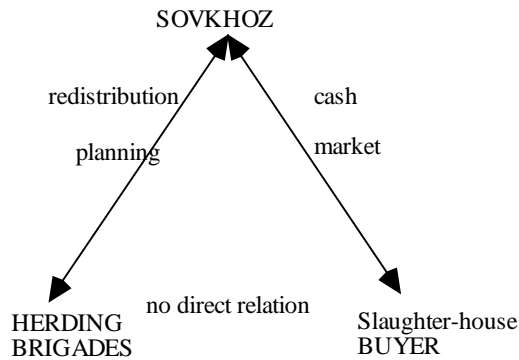


Fig. 2. The economic relationships between the producer, the farm administration and the buyer in the current reindeer husbandry in Krasnoschelië. Despite the "insider privatisation" in 1994, the ex-sovkhoz has perpetuated its middleman's role between the reindeer herding brigades and the buyer of their production. Hence the brigades continue to relate to the farm in a "central-planning" fashion while the latter is in a market relationship with the Swedish buyer. The sovkhoz redistributes goods, services and sometimes salaries to the brigades.

The herding collectives have no (economic) relation to the buyer. Preserving the crucial role of mediator, the sovkhoz' administration continues to control the flow of goods between the Producer and the Buyer through a Soviet-like system of redistribution that is practically cash-free. Even more, the Western private buyer took some of the roles played before by the former State. Being in a monopoly situation, it provides at the same time a non-market economic 'security' to the reindeer husbandry production, and through this, a precious social security to the tundra collectives.

The brigade workers legitimise this system by refusing to become independent economic actors outside the sovkhoz. The brigade is still the basic social unit for the reindeer herders in the Kola Peninsula. After 'the privatisation' of the sovkhoz, one can notice the increased solidarity within the herding collectives as a response to perceived threats, or abandonment, from the outside. From herder's perspective, the brigade remains even the only imaginable herding unit. As in some other regions of the Russian north (Fondahl, 1998), the anticipated initiatives for private reindeer herding after the adoption of the law for the privatisation of the Russian state-owned enterprises (*Zakon O privatizatsii gosudarstviennyh i munitzipial'nyh predpriyatii v RSFSR*, 1991) did not happen. Brigade workers are reluctant to the idea of private herds sold directly to the buyer. Even they consider this project as "impossible". Almost each herder has indeed some 'private' animals which are grazed together with the sovkhoz' herd on the summer pasture. These 'private' reindeer are bred for subsistence only. They are very useful especially in the village, for both transport and meat. But there is no market-oriented private herding as well as there are no private owners. And this despite of the appearance of a private buyer and a kind of market. Herders don't look excited by the possibility to sell own production to the buyer. They feel certainly more secure being managed by a familiar middleman as the sovkhoz and are not enthusiastic about any entrepreneurship. I looked strange with my 'fix-idea' of possible private herding, while initiating discussions again and again with the herders on this subject. I was making efforts to understand their point, so were they regarding my question. This makes me say that from the tundra perspective, the private herding is a hardly imaginable option in the region. The main reasons are social, indeed:

1. "The Sovkhoz would not accept this."

This statement expresses not just a power relation between the centre and the periphery. It also stresses a necessity of co-operation between the tundra camps and the village. The sovkhoz is still the main and even the only economic actor in Krasnoschelië. According to the herders, "no sovkhoz - no village".

The Soviet concept of 'agrocentre' has been built on this concentration of all the rural economy in a big centre. Consequently, the sovkhoz has been managing, controlling and securing all the

activities in the village. Even after the significant "April decree" ("On the programme for the social development of the village", Pravda, 1989), the key-role of the state farm in the village was perpetuated, as reported by Palloit (1990: 663)

"Despite the enhanced role envisaged for regional and republic bodies in the development of collective and state farm villages, the April decree perpetuates the assumption made since the 1960s that these settlements are a farm's responsibility [...]"

In this way the farm encompasses the social universe of the village. Even habitants non employed by the farm "must rely on farm management for the provision of a whole range of services. [...] Reforms since 1960s have attempted to extend local authority power in rural areas but farms have continued to exercise the decisive role in village development." (Palloit, 1990: 663).

After the so-called "Chubais' privatisation" in 1991, state farms on the Kola peninsula continued to exercise, with less cash, this decisive role. They were financially abandoned by the state but enjoy support from both the village and the tundra brigades. The latter are socially connected to the sovkhov by their family and social networks: their relatives, friends and neighbours work there. This network of mutual support is hardly thinkable out of the centralized social institution.

2. "You'd have big problems with the other herds."

The second reason for the unwillingness to begin private herding is the complicated structure of the reindeer herds in the area. Contrary to other parts in the Russian north, the herds in this sovkhov' area are situated relatively close to each other, especially in the winter pastures. This makes them mix quite often, which is a constant problem in the tundra camps. The extensive reindeer husbandry practised during the sovkhov was based on the Komi principle of a year-round herding. Since 1990 it has been replaced by the practice of *volny vipus'* (leaving the herd on its own from June to October), which is close to the Sami pre-revolution model of husbandry. Since the brigades don't herd year-round, they mark less often their reindeer with the brigade's mark (in spring 1999, for instance, there wasn't any marking coral for the herd No. 1). In this way the herds increasingly fall out of the brigades' control and become mixed with neighbouring herds. Hence, when the reindeer populations get mixed, it is difficult to separate "ours" from "the others". Historically, there are two different traditional approaches to deal with this situation. Until the end of the 19th century, Sami herders, who were leaving the herd on its own in the summer, were regulating this frequent problem by a kind of ethical code. Each owner finding 'foreigners' in his herd had to catch them and give them back to their herder. But this code changed after the arrival of the Komi at the end of the century. Practising the year-round herding, they tried to control permanently the herd. In terms of ethics, this resulted in the responsibility of each owner to take care for his herd. 'Immigrants' were considered as part of the herd.

In some ways this conception is still acting nowadays. The difference is that there is no private ownership. Somehow "everybody is equal in the eyes of the sovkhov" so the migration of animals from one herd to another doesn't change the ownership. In this sense it is an administrative problem rather than a social one. Regarding the management of the herd, brigade workers deal with the village-based administration accountancy through more or less abstract numbers; and not with other tundra actors. This is one more 'security' point supporting the sovkhov. Herders consider their current situation as already exposed to too much risk to leave the farm and take alone the whole responsibility for the herd. A change in the ownership would totally change the present status. For example, the herd No. 1 of Krasnoschelie is now in contact with the herds No. 1 and No. 8 of Lovozero in the north and with the fourth herd of Krasnoschelie to the east (as well as with the already non-existent fifth herd, 50% of which disappeared mysteriously⁴ during the economic crisis in 1998). So, if the herd No. 1 become private, there would be serious problems with the (already mixed) neighbouring herds belonging to the sovkhov. This would create a tough deal between two actors with different status: sovkhov' workers and private owners. A situation like this could deteriorate the social network in the both tundra camps and village. Furthermore, it would threaten the social structure because one would get cash but not access to the services, while the other will continue to work underpaid but with access to the sovkhov' services, products and network. So this potential 'social differentiation', or rather social 'disintegration' is perceived as the worst scenario. The sovkhov, as a unique owner, is a warranty against such kind of social insecurity.

3. "You cannot cope yourself with this."

⁴There are contradictory rumors about loss, some of the herders said the animals were poached by military people.

There is neither adequate infrastructure nor economic environment to develop private herding. A private herder could not rely on any help from the so-far existing institutions, neither formal (administration, brigades, municipality) nor informal (networks). Unlike the herders from Lovozero, brigades from Krasnoscheliie are situated too far from the Swedish slaughterhouse, so they have even less physical possibility to direct access to the buyer. All of this makes them highly dependant on the sovkhov as mediator. The case of Sosnovka, another remote village in the area of "*Pamyat' Lenina*" sovkhov, has been often reported as an example during our discussions in the camp. One brigade there tried to begin private herding. The next year "those guys returned with awful shame to the sovkhov, begging the administration to forgive them and to accept them again".

Nikula (1998: 157) stresses the specific non-market relationship between managers and workers in the Russian 'insider privatisation':

Managers are not interested in ownership as such, but they are interested in maintaining their power to control the distribution of profits and benefits. Workers are also not so much interested in ownership, but care more about economic gains and secure employment.

Based on the above, one may argue that the structure of the insider privatised 'Memory of Lenin' is significantly charged with the memory of the Soviet economic system⁵. Fig. 3 shows the "security environment" seen from the reindeer herders.

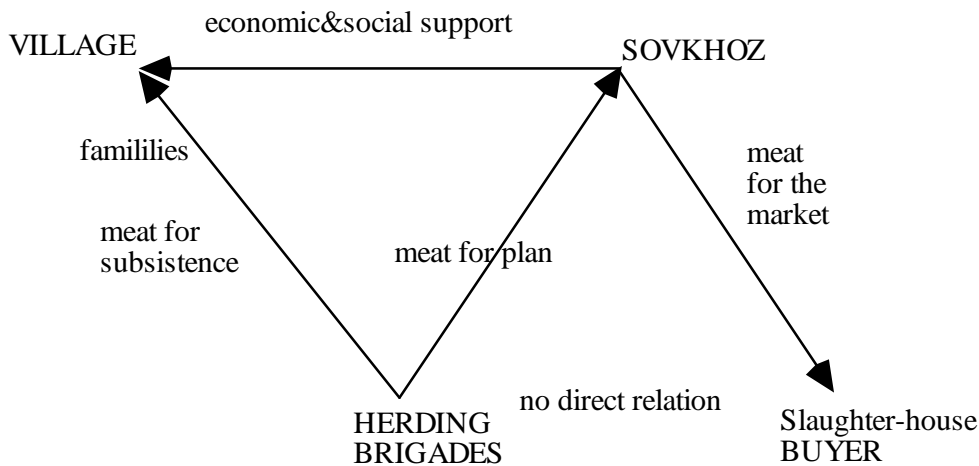


Fig. 3. "Security environment" as seemed to be perceived by the reindeer herders. It emphasises the substantial links between the tundra-located brigade, the village-based administration and the village social network (relatives, friends, neighbours). This triangle acts as a "redistributive system", the sovkhov supporting both the brigades and the village. The figure shows one of the main reasons for the brigades to continue herding the sovkhov' herds instead of starting private herding and selling meat directly to the buyer. In their view, this scenario would deteriorate the social network in the village and would even threaten the existence of the latter.

Chapter 2

⁵ The title of the article '*Memory of Lenin Ltd.*' (Konstantinov, 1997) express in my view the same idea.

Survival after the sovkhos: Herders and hunters in the tundra

Against the formal vertical relationship with the village-centred administration, herders raise informal types of horizontal relations with other tundra actors, such as hunters, militaries or geologists. The reindeer herding brigades hardly do any hunting. When a need arises, they kill a reindeer from the herd for meat. A majority of the hunters are poachers who come from the industrialised or military towns. Propelled in the tundra by the changing social context, these new actors have rapidly taken place and provoked a reinterpretation of the traditional social relationships. Arriving on tracked vehicles or on snowmobile (usually in its Russian version, *Buran*), they are the guys who recreate the tundra's connection with the town. Contrary to my expectations, I witnessed hunters and herders working together and helping each other after being "abandoned by the State", according to their expression. Their collaboration took the form of a series of informal negotiations and barter deals.

Herders sheltered hunters in the camp while hunters were helping herders with their tracked vehicle, especially precious for collecting wood. They also used it while returning to the village - because in a lack of vehicles, the Farm sent just one vehicle to assist the return of several brigades. The meeting point was the traditional winter camp (*pogozd*) of Semyostrovie, situated between the lokanga camp and the village of Krasnoshchelié. Hence, the herding brigade No. 1 joined Semyostrovie with the vehicle offered by the hunters.

Following this implied agreement with the herders, and maybe because of a "researcher's" presence in "witness" position, the hunters never shut reindeer during our stay, even after we moved from the tundra camp in June. Before the thaw of the lokanga river at the beginning of June, they were hunting mostly geese and ducks, and preparing for the fishing season, especially for the June's salmon fishing. During our stay near the area of the brigade No. 4 and No. 5 (called "brigade 45" by the herders), they managed also to kill one elk (moose, *Alces alces*), which was their only poaching apart of the salmon fishing (the legal season to hunt elks and fish salmon is from September 1 to November 15). Their dream "to meet the bear" failed unrealised.

Hunters bring meat back to the town for various subsistence purposes. Meat is used mostly to feed the hunter's families; then it is redistributed to the informal network of relatives, friends and neighbours. Finally, it is given to local key-employees against some services (such as having access to military vehicle, obtaining easier hunting permits, for the direction of the school their children go, etc.). In any case they don't sale the meat (there is no market) and so participate in the dominant cash-less economy of the tundra region.

During our daily discussions hunters have been expressing a strong desire to escape the industrialised town unable to provide them "a normal living". One of them had worked for 19 years as a coal miner in the town of Revda. "There, you are in the very 'system of Mendeleiev': *Cobalt, Radium, Uranium, heavy water...*". One year before reaching retirement age he had left the mine to devote himself to a hunting life in the tundra. The following discussion was done while we two were salting the first 60 kilograms of fish caught by our nets in the semi-thrown lokanga river on May 27, 1999:

" - My brother is a great hunter. Look at this... I have this knife from him. He has made it himself. Look at this, the handle is made from birch, so your hand doesn't freeze in winter. Hey, try it (to clean the fish), give me your silly knife, yours is for herding, not for fishing... See the difference?..."

- Do you have other brothers?

- I have three of them. But the two others don't hunt often. They work in the mine. I have also a sister, in Chelyabinsk, our mother left an apartment there for us but I have nothing to do in the town. There is no job, no food, no freedom. What can I do in the fucking town? To stay on the little balcony (*na balkonchike*) and admire it? Or maybe to angle those chemical fish at the little river? ... No, I can't imagine to live without the tundra. Tundra is everything for me, you know... Food, freedom ... There is nothing of this in the town, just radioactivity, the system of Mendeleiev (*sist'ema Mendel'eeva*) ..."

The other hunter, 40, born in Byelorussia, is still working as driver in Revda but "can't food the family with one salary". His wife, daughter of a Komi reindeer herder who has been chief-brigadier of Krasnoschelié brigade No. 4, is unemployed. They have four children, three of them go to school, the youngest is one year old. "If I don't go hunt and fish in the tundra, we'd eat nothing but this (showing our dry 'soldier's bread'). In the tundra, I am depending of no one but myself".

This is the way town hunters live the wilderness paradigm which leads them to the tundra camp. After 1991, escaping to the wilderness quickly evolved and became a reality for the both town population and tundra reindeer husbandry. Military, geologists and miners from the town lost their jobs and were forced to reorient themselves towards accessing the resources of the tundra in order to

make a living (Honneland & Jorgensen, 1999). According to their own definition, they are following “the call of the wild” and for them this is a kind of survival strategy.

However, the situation is different regarding the military staff neighbouring the reindeer pastures. Although isolated from the centre and in lack of money since the post Cold War reforms in the Russian army, the military bases on the eastern Kola inherited good internal infrastructure and equipment. In the informal economy of the tundra, this enables them to provide services and goods for barter deals. In this context reindeer herders have often to deal with militaries. As mentioned above, the latter cause sometimes serious poaching problems, but the relationship with the herders in general is not an antagonistic one. Beyond the practical reasons for establishing good relations with the militaries, herders have in my view also a kind of ‘sentimental’ reasons for this. In the first chapter I mentioned the impact of the ‘syndrome of isolation’ on the herders’ “quest for security”. The idea of overcoming the geographic and social isolation has also been many times expressed through the herders’ ‘individual military story’. Each of the nine herders in the tundra camp No. 1 has done his military service for at least three years in the Soviet army, so everyone told me his military story. Since I also did my military service in an army of the Warsaw pact and I did not appreciate it too highly, I was surprised by the very positive way my brigade mates were talking about their military experience. The idea behind these stories was ‘escaping the isolation’, travel to the south and living with other people. Two of the brigade had been soldiers abroad, in the Soviet bases in East Germany, so they were the most nostalgic about the years spent in the army. The army, as the Sovkhoz, have been meant to provide both social security and social network, as well as one’s feeling to “participate in the real world”, which is “go to the centre” (Sabev 2002: 35-36). Somehow the Memory of the army has joined the Memory of the Sovkhoz.

This perception has certainly impacted on the herder-military relationships in the tundra. Today, the main poaching problems come from the military. Herders are directly concerned by the loss of animals and someone even reported that the reason for the sharply decreased number of animals in herds No. 4 and No. 5 in fall 1998 was due to military poaching. This loss was so important that the sovkhov was forced to fusion the two herds in order to obtain the planned number of animals for one herd. This automatically implied a fusion of the two brigades, reducing the number of the tundra workers. Nevertheless, herders are in rather good relationship with the neighbouring military communities (Honneland & Jorgensen, 1999). Perceived as abandoned by the state in the same way that herders are abandoned by the regional centre, military still enjoy a good infrastructure: helicopters, tracked vehicles, fuel, and often help herders with transport. In absence of the sovkhov, the military complex could provide a kind of security to the tundra collectives.

In this way surviving strategies and informal network interact with the Soviet type of reindeer-herding management, and so produce a social syncretism in the tundra. This ambiguous position of the reindeer-herding brigade between a formal and an informal economy, between old and new actors is represented by Fig. 4.

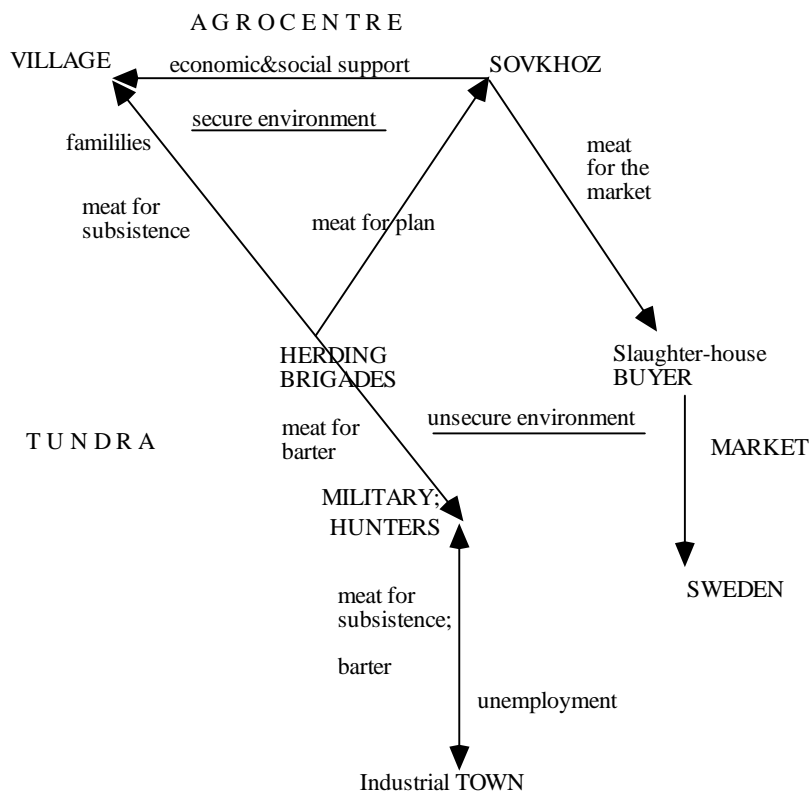


Fig. 4. The ambiguous position of the reindeer herders between an old and "secure" central-planning system and new actors in the tundra. The arrows follow the way of the reindeer meat which go through various economic relationships. The meat comes from one and same source in the tundra but changes its social meaning and economic "raison d'être" depending of the actors dealing with it. Hence it express respectively central-planning system, market relationships and subsistence economy in the Kola peninsula.

At the same time both hunters and herders feel threatened by the invasion of several large industrial enterprises, which are destroying the living resources in the tundra. The area is rich with underground ores. Almost all towns on the Kola Peninsula were created during the "industrial colonisation" in the 1930s. The town of Revda for example was created and survived thanks to the rare metals. It developed itself around the geological survey base *Alluaivstroy*, transformed into the metallurgical plant *Lovozero ore mining and processing enterprise*. Since the 1930s, it has been progressively filled with labour migrants from the south working in the mining industry. Even its ethnography museum emphasises more the local ores than the traditional reindeer herding. In the early 1990s, while the subsidised industry failed, new joint-stock mining companies began to enter the tundra and became major players in the fight for resources. This threat is perceived as constant in the tundra collectives and so increase the feeling of "insecurity". Finally, the ideological discourse of both herders and hunters in the tundra, directed mostly against some centres of power located in the town (as Lovozero, Revda, *Voronya Minerals Ltd.*, Murmansk, even Moscow), often contributes to unify, this time at a political level, otherwise antagonistic tundra actors.

Looking for solutions

As the previous two chapters have shown, the complicated situation with the reindeer husbandry in the Kola Peninsula results from several interconnected issues involving different types of social and economic actors.

1. There is an urgent need of investments in order to **(re)create the market** for reindeer products: meat, antlers, skins. Because of the specific political and legislative climate in Russia nowadays, western investors are confronted to a "non-favourable" environment: rather reluctant to

foreign investors (World Bank Report, 1996), Russian legislation has emphasised the “insider privatisation” by the “Workers’-and-managers’ collectives”. By helping the continuity of social relations and maintaining collective economic actors this privatisation scheme avoids painful social imbalance in remote communities. Therefore, for such a collective economic activity as the reindeer husbandry, it might appear as a “good” strategy for many social points of view, except for the most important one: the market. Indeed, the reindeer husbandry is condemned without markets for its production. Today, there is no internal market for reindeer products. Reindeer meat is practically absent from the formal market in the Kola peninsula out of the tundra. After surviving exclusively on reindeer meat in the tundra camps, I have never seen reindeer meat sold in Revda, Kirovsk, Apatity, or Murmansk. Lovozero is maybe the only settlement connected to the communication system where reindeer meat could be found, because of the sovkhos “*Tundra*” and the Swedish slaughter-house there. The reasons for this situation are economic (people have no cash for the expensive reindeer meat) and cultural (the great majority of the population on the Kola peninsula are labour migrants from the south, so they have not habitudes to eat reindeer). The situation with other reindeer products (antlers, skins) seems to be even worse.

On the other hand, potential western investors are confronted by the recently increasing “anti-western” public discourse, especially after NATO’s attack on Yugoslavia⁶. Despite all these problems, the *Norfrys-Polarica* case shows that foreign investments are possible and could work in this complicated system.

As for relying on local resources for recreating a market, this implies a kind of local initiative and entrepreneurship of which I have not seen (m)any signs so far. Therefore it would not be realistic to rely on a private initiative in the short term, but rather on more autonomic self-managed collectives based on a kinship-like structure and using the infrastructure of the former sovkhos. I think this is a tendency bound to increase when favourable socio-economic circumstances will eventually appear. However, that higher level of autonomy could not be expected before the resolution of the following two points:

2. Regulation of the **indigenous rights** of the tundra-located people.

In my view, there is an urgent need of more appropriate regulation of the rights on the traditional reindeer-herding territory, actually threatened and maltreated by some powerful industrial enterprises, military and other smaller poachers. Even if there is a (blurred) legislation on this matter, it doesn’t actually work because of the informal character of the economic relationships based exclusively on barter deals. Corruption in the centres of power complicates the situation. According to the rumours in the tundra, “the inspectors of hunting and fishing are the greatest poachers”. Hunting permits are readily obtained especially for those occupying key-position in administrative centres. As for the industrial actors, they usually apply strong lobbying on the political powers at regional or central level. In these cases, the powerless herding collectives are not able to maintain the fight for tundra resources and are threatened with the loss of traditional territories for reindeer herding.

Based on the above, I believe that these small and remote communities need extensive external assistance to give them both an effective infrastructure and more political power. Only then could one expect to see them become real economic actors. In that sense, the aboriginal property-rights experience from Scandinavian and North American Arctic could be useful for the economic development of the reindeer husbandry in the region.

3. Finally, the **economic stabilisation of the urban centres** is of a great importance for the solution of the problems in the tundra. As I mentioned in the second chapter, the massive loss of jobs after 1991 in the military complex and in the mining industry is the major cause of the poaching problem. It involved new actors in the tundra, some of them able to threaten whole herd(s) (according to the herders). For many of these actors poaching is a survival strategy. Therefore it is not expected they could change strategies in the present socio-economic context. Far from favouring the emergency of a market, this process only redefines the informal social relationships based on barter deals. The paradox is that the only imaginable economic growth in the Kola peninsula by now is related to the mining industry. So the question is: Would an adequate industrial revival in the region be able to help the reindeer herders in the tundra?

⁶The expedition on which this paper is based was held during the War in Yugoslavia (Spring 1999). Therefore I was witness to both herders’ and Russian hunters’ anxiety, based on the news of “Radio Russia” from the only transistor in the tundra camp. Despite their isolation, the increasing anti-western discourse of my informants corresponded exactly to what I had been heard in Moscow.

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