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HUMAN-RANGIFER CONVERSATIONS WITH POWER

Background

Reindeer husbandry in what is today the Lovozero District of Murmansk Region has been the object of numerous studies for well over a century by now. The proximity to Imperial Russian and later Soviet centres of power, as well as century-old links with western close and distant neighbours, a never-ending curiosity in respect of the indigenous Sami people, captivating imagination as the earliest living Europeans, all of these and other factors have been stimulating a lively interest in Kola reindeer husbandry. It is impossible to cover all the developments and shifts in the researchers' 'gaze' on the local situation in a paper of this size. I can only state here some of its main accents.

'Free' vs. controlled grazing of herds

The in-migration of Izhma Komi herders in late 19 c. [Konakov 1993] and their rapid asserting themselves as a decisive presence on the local scene has been reflected in the literature as a key theme whenever Kola reindeer husbandry gets mentioned. This concerns particularly the conflict between Sami and Izhma Komi methods of husbandry. Reindeer herding Sami are usually described as traditionally letting their herds graze freely after calving and 'biological' marking¹ of newborn calves, subsequently rounding them up during the autumn back migration to the inland forest-tundra winter range. By contrast to this summer 'free grazing' (*vol'nyi vypas*), newly established Komi and Komified Nenets herders introduced tightly controlled herding

¹ I.e. marking new-born calves according to the mark of the mother — or 'by the mother' (*vozle materi*), as herders say. To be distinguished from marking older calves, not necessarily following the mother's mark (arbitrary marking) [Beach 2007; Konstantinov 2007].

throughout the year, importing, in this way, methods characteristic of Nenets herding in the conditions of *Bol'shezemel'skaia tundra*.

The 'free' vs. 'controlled grazing' theme managed, in the course of time, to deflect attention from an earlier one, which can be only very briefly mentioned here. It concerned a wide-spread opinion among learned circles in Russia towards the end of 19–20 c. that the Sami people were not reindeer herders at all, being instead principally freshwater fishermen [Rozonov 1903: 81]. This motive, to be abbreviated as 'the Sami are fishermen, not herders' was intertwined with an evolutionary reading of the Sami vs. Komi/Nenets differences in husbandry methods, mentioned above. Namely, that tightly controlled Komi/Nenets herding was more 'progressive' in comparison to Sami 'primitive' subsistence- and seasonally fragmented methods [Engelhardt 1899]. With its strong focus on what amounted to Komi industrial (by contrast with Sami subsistence) production of meat, Komi methods appealed to the spirit of capitalist development in the context of Stolypin's reforms of the turn of 19th century. One may draw parallels here with the attempts — as a significant part of these reforms — to change 'primitive' agricultural methods in central and southern areas, characteristic of the Russian *mir*, to more 'progressive' and individual free-holding ones.

A certain paradox may be noted here though, dislodging somewhat the 'progressive' reading of Komi/Nenets 'reindeer husbandry capitalism', in the sense that it was nomadic in a way Sami herding never was. This feature of 'primitiveness' of Komi/Nenets husbandry had also some administrative consequences, as the Komi/Nenets settlers were not granted colonist status — allowed only to settled households — despite persistent attempts [Orekhova 2007]. The tension between 'progressiveness' of a meat focus and meat production of scale, on the one hand, and the nomadism that went with it, was destined to be preserved to this day. To this point I come below.

Soviet cooperative husbandry (1917–1928) and collectivized herding (1929–1992)

The process of changes in Kola reindeer husbandry after the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917 and till the onset of the First Collec-

tivization Wave in 1928–'29, is largely a blank period in the literature. What we know is that private ownership of herds was the exclusive form of property with, at the same time, a heavy reliance on existing cooperatives — co-ops — providing services in the financial, trading, and supply sectors [Voronin 1997; Osinovski 1927]. It might be added in parenthesis that today the still extant *Rybkoop*, which provided trading and supply services all through the sovkhos period, can be seen as a living link with the 'integral cooperatives' (*integralki*) of the 1920s.

About reindeer husbandry methods during this period we know mostly from Alymov [1927; 1928], towards its end — from the researchers of the 'Lapp Expeditions' of the late 1920s, led by Zolotarev [Samorukova 2007]. Among them stands out the work of Vladimir Charnoluski [1930a, b; 1931] from whom we get a very detailed, field-work-based picture of how herding was done in those days. Charnoluski's main attention was on Sami herding methods. He describes a highly intensive form of reindeer husbandry, save for the summer period. Komi/Nenets tightly controlled herding all through the year was seen to be functionally inadequate and ethically reprehensible. To this day Sami herders have retained memories of that controversy of days long past: they have often shared with me the view that 'the reindeer can never feed well enough, unless they are let to roam free during the summer' (*naguliat'sia letom*). Another strong reason for the summer free-grazing method was the importance of fresh-water fishing for subsistence and trading purposes. Tatiana Lukianchenko rightly observes that transposing reindeer-meat focused methods, sophisticated for the conditions of *Bolshezemel'skaia tundra*, with its vast distances and much lower relevance of fishing, adapted ill to the local Kola environment [Lukianchenko 1971: 33–34].

The meat-centred focus of Komi/Nenets husbandry was, however, what appealed greatly to Soviet planners from the very start — i.e. long before the collectivization drive of the late 1920s–'30s [Kertselli 1919]. As it turned out in the course of time, its usefulness for Soviet planning proved to be principally ideological and only in a second place — economic. Reindeer meat production of scale was thus a major constituent of the Soviet moral economy of self-legitimation through quantifiable increase of industrial production, and, in this par-

ticular case — ‘agricultural’ produce [Konstantinov 2014; Vladimirova 2006]. Meat for local subsistence needs was used, by and large, at the same level over the decades. Over and above that, produced reindeer meat would be wasted to a great extent by poor storage and transportation. It would eventually end up in the Murmansk meat-processing plant as a low-quality ingredient for sausages. That was of little relevance to planners and administrators however — what counted was demonstrating ever-increasing levels of meat-production [Ushakov, Dashchinski 1988; Kiselev, Kiseleva 1987; Fedotov 1955].

High meat-yield focus was consistent with Komi/Nenets methods of husbandry. That relied on tight control over the herd in all seasons, and this in turn, called for nomadic and fairly intensive herding. At this point the tension between conflicting ideological stances, mentioned above, raises its head. For while meat-focused production on an ever increasing scale was ideologically ‘good’, nomadism was ‘bad’. It may be recalled here that almost till the very end of the Soviet period, the issue of ‘completing the transition of the nomadic population to a settled way of life’ remained as a priority on the party and administrative agenda [Bogoiavlenski 1985].

Tight control over herds significantly increased what may be called the ‘ideological output’ of reindeer husbandry. Tight control facilitated calculability and general categorization of reindeer husbandry, making it more amenable to use by the positivist mind of the socialist competition management. ‘Tight control’ — called by herders ‘having the herd in hand’ (*derzhat’ stado v rukah*), in official ideological idiom translated as ‘fighting for good indicators’ (in socialist competition), *borot’sia za horoshie pokazateli*. This is not the place where full credit can be done to socialist competition in reindeer husbandry [but see: Vladimirova 2006; Konstantinov, Vladimirova 2006]. We need only to recall such categories as ‘achieving x centners of meat per 100 January head’, ‘real production of newborn calves at the rate of x calves per every 100 mothers’ (*dobitsia delovogo vyhoda molodniaka po x telenka ot kazhdykh sto matok*), ‘take down to the minimum unaccountable losses’ (*svesti k minimomu bezyzvestnye poteri*), etc., to get the flavor of socialist competition, thinking in terms of ‘fronts’, ‘fights’, ‘indexes’, and ‘campaigns’.

Return of free grazing

By the early 1960s the phrase ‘semi-free herding’ (*poluvol’nyi vypas*) begins to be frequently met in official statements. This goes hand-in-hand with a growing emphasis on building reindeer fences — a traditional Sami method [Charnoluski 1931]. A short report in the local paper of May 1962 noted that ‘the herding brigade of V. A. Galkin had achieved good knowledge of the grazing range, was advantageously making use of natural barriers, had built a (reindeer) fence and *had organized semi-free grazing of the reindeer* (emphasis mine)’ [V Lovozerskoi tundra 1962: 3].

Herders remember the time as one of change and experimentation in the ‘voluntaristic’ spirit of Nikita Khrushchev’s sweeping agricultural reforms. ‘It was only bee-keeping that we didn’t try’, as one of the older herders had summarized the period. It looks likely, however, that in the spirit of the poststalinist ‘thaw’, introduced by Khrushchev, local administrators may have officialized what had been already and for a long time a *fait accompli* in the tundra. Socialist competition categories captured these changes in the course of time, alongside prominence given to new developments. Among these was the introduction of heavy ATV machinery (*vezdekhodi*), of the first snowmobiles, of setting up ‘intermediary reindeer herding bases’. Among these, revival of ancient Sami practices, like summer free-grazing and fence-building, was added to the socialist competition arsenal, thus passing off as new forms of improvement.

Promezhutochnaia olenevodcheskaia baza

In the context of this overview, *baza* requires special attention. Its official designation contained the important attribute ‘intermediary’ (*promezhutochnaia*) — a detail that is often forgotten today by herders and outsiders alike. It may be in need of reminding, thus, that the usage made sense in relation to what still used to be nomadic herding of the Komi/Nenets traditional type in the 1950s–‘60s. Adapted to the short distances of Kola migration treks, *promezhutochnnye bazi* in the principal reindeer-husbandry area of Lovozero District, got to be situated about half-way between the main reindeer herding villages of Lovozero and Krasnoshchel’e, and the Barents Sea coast. This was

some 70–100 kms to the NE of the villages, with as much to go till one reached the coast. The idea was that food and other necessities would be carried over to the bases and stored there, the bases thus functioning as tundra depot stations. They also provided more comfortable living quarters compared to the classical Komi/Nenets portable tent (*chum*), boasting storage huts and a bath-hut, apart from a main log-cabin. Some part of the reindeer herding team, as well as the female camp workers (*chumrabortnitsi*), would stay over at the base, while a smaller detachment of herders would follow the herd on a shift basis. Upon completion of the shift they would return to the intermediary camp for rest, with the already rested shift assuming controlling tasks over the herd.

In the course of time, this system of herding had come to be substantially eroded. By the early 1960s we begin to hear of brigade leaders' organizing *poluvol'nyi vypas* — semi-free grazing of herds mentioned above. It is somewhere around this period that ferality of herds began to be an issue, or, in herders' talk, that the herd was no longer 'in hand', (*stado uzhe ne v rukah*).

The gradual return to pre-Komi/Nenets methods of herding is to be explained by the determinants of the received local ecology. It had put its formative stamp on what is now described as traditional Sami herding methods. These determinants have been briefly sketched out above as characterized by relatively short migration routes, as also by the significance of fishing in Sami subsistence and trading economy. Thus Sami forms of adaptation included as an important component temporary residence by lakes, rivers, or coastal waters during the summer [Rikkinen 1983], having let go of their herds immediately after calving and calf-marking. An important detail to notice here is that kolkhoz/sovkhoz intermediary bases came to be built on the locations of such former summer settlements. On the one hand that answered the intermediary purpose of the bases while full control over the herd still held. On the other — which has remained valid to this day — the bases have become principally fishing stations both during the summer and winter, herding activities being mostly abandoned. Of the last, as it shall be said again further down, only sporadic rounding up activities have remained as a routine practice. The main loci for

such activities have come to be the few and far between corral camps (*korali*), however, not the brigade bases themselves. It may also be added here that until the liquidation of the coastal summer villages (Varzino, Ponoï, Lumbovka, etc.) and the consolidation of their *kolkhozy* into the collective farms of Lovozero and Krasnoshchel'e [Afanasiyeva 2013], as well as the parallel takeover of the coast by the military and the border troops [Babich 1991], the coastal villages performed very much like seasonal camps and thus as a version of intermediary bases. In the course of time, had it not been for the combined heavy-handed impact of administrative liquidation, sovkhos consolidation, and military occupation of the coastal areas, the villages may have quite likely lived on as enlarged versions of brigade camps. The present state of the tiny villages of Kanevka and Sosnovka — miraculously saved from liquidation — may be seen in this light. I shall have an occasion to say further down that current developments in the *de facto* 'privatized' Krasnoshchel'e cooperative 'Olenevod', indicate will to resurrect coastal villages in their former capacity of summer camps.

Private ('personal') deer

The issue of private deer of *kolkhoz*/*sovkhos* members remained as a central concern all through the Soviet period — from its very first beginnings to its end. This process I have followed in detail elsewhere [Konstantinov 2014; 2010; 2007] — here only its very basic outlines shall be given. First and foremost they consist in the fact that *kolkhoz* (later — *sovkhos*) employees enjoyed the right of having the use of a given number of reindeer — on the average between 30 and 50 head. A crucial element of this system of ownership of 'personal deer' (*lichnye olen'i*) was that they were not grazed in separate herds, but were mixed with the collective (brigade) herd. This arrangement, which I have called in previous work a 'private-in-the-collective' one, gave rich opportunities of compensating private losses at the expense of the collective herd, and stimulated what, in the context of command socialism agriculture, has been dubbed 'institutionalized theft' [Creed 1998].

Private-in-the-collective reindeer husbandry enhances opportunities for institutionalized theft proportionally to relaxation of control over

the herd. The lynchpin of the system is production of unmarked deer, which get subsequently marked in arbitrary (not ‘biological’) way at corralling sessions. The procedure redistributes a part of the collective herd according to the rank of employees in the sovkhos hierarchy, with the lion’s share going into the hands of tundra-based leaders. Running ahead, this explains the present situation in which an overwhelming percentage of private deer are in the hands of three or four tundra-based leaders (‘tundra bosses’).

Production of unmarked or ‘whole-eared’ deer (*tseloushnye olen’i*) is facilitated by abandoning of new-born calf marking and, ultimately, by virtually abandoning ‘calving campaigns’ as a whole. Marking had gradually moved to ever later dates and, in the course of time, has become part of harvesting corrals. Since these, in their turn, have come to take place in a long period stretching from about mid-December till mid-April, the age of unmarked deer has correspondingly increased. With overall relaxation of control, the incidence of whole-eared animals older than a year turning up at corral sessions is now common.

By the end of the sovkhos period — that is, by 1992 — both factors of ‘classical tradition’ (importance of fishing) and of ‘kolkhoz/sovkhos tradition’ (private-in-the-collective management) had contributed to increasing relaxation of herd control, as well as the practical abandoning of herding as such. The system had gone thus much beyond its classical Sami state, filing away, at the same time, all Komi/Nenets importations of herd management, that had so radically changed the local picture in the period between the end of the 19th century till about the late 1950s. The driving force of these changes may be considered to have been the strong will of grassroots actors to maximize advantages offered by the kolkhoz/sovkhos system for informal private entrepreneurship, based on selling ‘personal reindeer’ meat on the local ‘grey’ market. Local and ultimately — supreme power, tacitly condoned the resulting arrangement, setting, nevertheless, some official limits to it. These consisted in allowing up to 30 (later 50) head of deer ‘for personal use’, a limit often overstepped, but again within limits [Volkov 1996 [1946]: 127]. The condoning of the informal arrangement may be seen as based on the general compromise between power and the working people (*trudiashchiesya*),

in this case administratively conceived as ‘agricultural workers’ (*sel'skokhozyaystvennyye rabotniki*).

The logic of the compromise has been extensively discussed in the concerned literature. Its essence is perhaps best captured by Vera Dunham as the ‘Big Deal’ of Stalin’s compromise arrangement with the managerial class [Dunham 1990: 3]. This reverse side of the Soviet moon, whose popularly visible face is one of crushing totalitarian oppression, cannot, however, be given justice in this text [but see: Konstantinov 2014; 2007].

I can only state here that the ‘deal’ concerning my case was rationalised by authorities — in the context of the late kolkhoz/sovkhoz period — as prompted by recruitment and retaining in employment concerns of sovkhoz administrations. In other words, this meant that keeping people in reindeer husbandry dictated closing an eye to irregularities in personal deer management. As I shall show further on, with the advent of post-Soviet transformations, this formulation became explicit and official. At this point the interesting question is: how was the ‘conversation with power’ carried out in the idiom of reindeer husbandry management? To get into this we need to turn attention to the phenomenon known in local talk as ‘wildening’ of reindeer, i.e. their getting into a feral state.

‘Wildening’

In local talk ‘wildening’ of reindeer (*odychanie oleney*) came to be an increasingly pervasive theme soon after the transformation of local sovkhozy into allegedly ‘private cooperatives’, i.e. with the advent of the post-Soviet era. In the context of a rising nostalgia for the now past ‘Soviet times’, increasing ‘wildening’ of the reindeer herd would be contrasted to the former state in which the herd was ‘in hand’ (*kogda stado bylo v rukah*). The contrast was largely imagined. As I have pointed out earlier on, control over the herd had begun to relax as early as the late nineteen fifties, and probably even before that. The ideological contrasts of post-Soviet times had, however, constructed the period of Brezhnev’s rule (mid 1960s — early 1980s) as the ‘best times’ [Dubin 2011]. They ordered immediate history into a catastrophic progression from the ‘order’ and ‘prosperity’ of Brezhnev’s decade

and a half, to the ‘chaos’ and ‘misery’ of the 1990s — the decade of Yel’tsin’s stay in power. In reindeer husbandry, therefore, the catastrophic ‘order/chaos’ sequence was translated into ‘holding the herd in hand’ vs. its subsequent ‘wildening’.

A parallel theme, spelling lapse into chaos and ‘lawlessness’ (*bespredel*) was a dramatic fall of herd numbers (*umenshenie pogo-lov’ia*). Unlike largely imagined pasts as it concerned ‘wildening’, figures here tended to be quite real. In rough figures, from herd numbers of the total Kola herd in the region of 70,000 after-harvest head in the 1970s–80’s [Digurov 1987], by the late nineties the herd had dwindled to about 50,000 by official counts, and to not more than 25–30,000 by insiders’ opinion. The dramatic fall in herd numbers was laid at the door of the culprit responsible for all disasters — the deadly and anonymous poacher. This personage, sharing many — if not all of the characterizing features of the wolf in fairy-tales — was constructed in public discourse as a creature which was breeding in intolerable numbers during the new times. Rampant tundra poaching, alongside urban criminality, had thus come to form an integral part of the chaos and lawlessness of Yel’tin’s decade or ‘the ‘90s of abandon’ (*likhie devianostye*). Without going into the details of this part of the local story it is to be said that the fall of herd numbers has continued during the Putin epoch of ‘stabilisation’ and ‘return to normality’ since the beginning of the 2000s. Whatever else the time since the 2000s have brought to Russia, ‘normalisation’ of the microscopic and peripheral Kola reindeer-herding scene — in the sense of diminishing of poaching on reindeer herds — has not been one of its achievements.

This is more or less the picture when looked at from the outside. As always, when the situation is considered from the inside, it is rather different. What is more interesting, however, than this hardly surprising fact, is that the difference comes out at two levels. A first and the more transparent of them places the focus on ferality as driven by interests for increasing personal deer ownership. The less readily perceivable one, containing not a small degree of mystery around itself, seems to seriously question the reality of ‘wildening’. At the very least it suggests that ideas about it should be substantially qualified. Below I turn attention to these two readings.

The 'personal deer-ferality' linkage

Based on many years of fieldwork with reindeer herders (since 1994), by 2012 the personal deer-ferality linkage had begun to look to me like this. Its keystone appeared to be production of unmarked ('whole-eared') deer, as suggested earlier on. Production of unmarked deer assisted the process of arbitrary marking impossible in former years of relaxing, but still existing herd-control. Insofar that the 'calving campaign' (*otel'naya kampanaiya*) used to be given very high priority in Soviet times, its proper carrying out was a prominent target in the administrative and party gaze. The same went for other 'campaigns' following calving — that of (biological) calf-marking, as well as 'actual production and preservation of calves' (*delovoy vykhod teliat*).

With the changes of 1990–1992 socialist competition quietly vanished together with the whole system of command economy and the Soviet Union itself. All the 'campaigns' and 'indexes' disappeared almost overnight. Husbandry was left in the hands of the tundra bosses and brigade leaders. In the spirit of those days a new head of the newly registered Lovozero reindeer cooperative (ex-sovkhoz) 'Tundra' was elected and that was an enterprising and reform-minded local Sami woman. One of the first measures that the new head implemented was to abolish the upper limit of personal deer possession. Henceforth employees could have the use of — or, in practical terms, own — as many deer as they wished. The logic of the measure, as explained by the new head, was to give a powerful incentive to young people for joining reindeer herding and thus solve the endemic and very critical problem of poor recruitment and retention.

Today, over ten years after this momentous decision, problems of recruitment have, if anything, got graver. 'Tundra' has seven brigades now, instead of nine at the beginning of the period. At the same time, two new tendencies have become evident. On the one hand the ratio of private to collective deer has, according to some reports, reached the 50:50 stage. Secondly, distribution of reindeer within the private part of the herd has become heavily asymmetrical. Thus, according to herders' opinion, nearly two-thirds of the whole private herd of 'Tundra' has come to be in the hands of the three herding ('tundra')

bosses (*tundrovie nachal'niki*). All these changes have been happening against the background of a general fall in total herd figures.

Since arbitrary marking is a procedure managed by the tundra bosses — as all corralling procedures — it is not surprising that whole-eared deer would be marked according to their interests first and foremost. This redistribution of animals, at the discretion of those at the top of the herding hierarchy, may be seen as the principal reason for the overall diminishing of the herd. While the blame is put on the rapaciousness of urban poachers, a good deal of what is going on is to be attributed to redistribution as a form of internal appropriation by various means.

Production of unmarked deer is thus crucial to redistribution, and, in its turn, stimulates relaxation of control, as well as abandoning of the calving campaign and the biological marking that used to go together with it. A series of consequences follows from here, making gathering the herd in at the fall back-migration a progressively difficult exercise. This contributed, in its turn, to late beginning of harvesting campaigns — a feature swiftly attributed to climate change [Konstantinov 2010]. Harvesting corrals gradually came to end almost just before calving. Female deer in the last month of pregnancy would thus fear they may be rounded up once again and seek to give birth in the open tundra as far from human presence as possible. In result, a calf may happen to see a human being for the first time when it gets corralled in a year or more from birth. All of this and more herders are in the habit of summing up as ‘wildening’.

How feral is ferality?

This question arose in relation to events in the second biggest reindeer herding cooperative on the Kola: the reindeer husbandry farm in the remote tundra village of Krasnoshchel'e.

Some brief history of the farm is necessary at this point. Created as a consolidated sovkhos in the early 1970s, the farm lived under the name of *Pamiati Lenina* (In Memory of Lenin) till the reforms of the early 1990s whereupon it was renamed to *Olenevod* (Reindeer Herder). Following the general pattern of ‘re-registering’ sovkhosy into cooperatives it became at first a limited company (*TOO*), subsequently

an ‘agricultural cooperative’ (*SKhPK*)¹ [Filipchenko 2011; Konstantinov 1997].

By 2009, following the decease of its long-time serving director Dmitri Matrekhin, the farm’s financial health had seriously deteriorated. It had run into heavy debt to banks, as well as to its own employees: salaries had not been paid for months. The overall number of its once impressive herd of over 30,000 head, had fallen down to less than half that according to insiders’ reports. Meat harvesting figures had dropped accordingly, reaching an all-time low of some 30 tons of carcass meat a year. Such yields, naturally, could not help remove the crushing burden of debts the farm had accumulated and was continuing to grow.

At this critical point a local businessperson of scale, Reizvikh, offered to help the farm regain its feet by paying both its external and internal debts and turning it into a profitable economic concern. Needless to say, the employees — from the then acting and rather miserably performing director to the last herder on the tundra — jumped enthusiastically to the offer. Reizvikh was elected head of the managing board of the cooperative, and soon after he stood true to his word. Debts to banks were paid, and the backlog of salaries was covered. Furthermore, salaries were raised to 18,000 roubles (450 euro) a month, thus reaching a very attractive level by local standards. New snowmobiles for all brigades were bought — glittering *inomarki* (foreign makes), sets of snowmobile clothing for the herders, etc.

All of this came at a price, though, proving the adage that free is only the cheese in the mouse-trap. In November 2011 an order by the head of the now virtually private farm demanded a severe reduction of the number of personal/private deer which employees could keep. Furthermore, by imposing substantial fees for grazing of reindeer of all owners of personal/private deer who were not acting herders, the

¹ Wishing to get the cooperative into the most advantageous combination of governmental subsidy-yielding categories, the late director had given it an acronym defying any attempt of easy deciphering or remembering: *SKhPK OPKh MNS ‘Olenevod’*. This was to be read as *Sel’skokhoziaistvennyi proizvodstvennyi kooperativ olenevodcheskoe-promyslovoe khoziaistvo malochyslennykh narodov Severa* (Cooperative for agricultural production (and) reindeer-husbandry of the numerically small peoples of the North).

order made it prohibitive for such owners to keep deer in the cooperative herd. For acting herders the limit of grazing deer free of charge was set to 6 head per person [Prikaz 2011]. By the time of writing (June 2013) the stipulated limit was lowered to 5 head [Akty 2013].

What had happened amounted to a reversal of the known order of things to a state existing before collectivization. In effect, Stalin's formula for 'satisfying the personal interests of kolkhoz members', announced at the 17th Party Congress of 1934, and discussed in the literature as Stalin's 'agricultural compromise' [Mitrany 1951; Maslov 1937; Trotsky 1936] had been invalidated.

What followed was dubbed by many in the community as the advent of 'serfdom' (*rabstvo*), the new chairman/owner being likened unto a 'feudal baron'. The reaction reminded one of the early days of collectivization in the late 1920-'30s: reindeer owners found it better to slaughter their deer, rather than pay the fees. The difference with former collectivization times was that the slaughter was reported to higher authorities as fulfilling a modest meat plan of the farm of some 30 tons or so of carcass meat. In this way the farm was shown to be an acting concern.

A second outcome of the dramatic events taking place at '*Olenevod*' concerns its relationship with the neighbouring and central farm of Lovozero — 'Tundra'. Almost immediately after the measures for scaling down personal/private ownership at '*Olenevod*' to a minimum had been implemented, rounding up and subsequent corralling of reindeer at 'Tundra' showed an impressive reversal to a performance not remembered since days when the sovkhos herd used to be 'in hand'. In other words, much of the harvesting now came to be accomplished already by end of the calendar year and the practice of late rounding up was significantly curtailed. 'Tundra' brigades showed much better performance in respect of contacting and managing their herds in the fall, retaining control over them during subsequent months. Overall ferality of the herd had thus been spectacularly — and somehow instantly — reduced.

These facts, becoming evident during the last couple of years, raise questions that cannot be answered fully at this point, requiring very

focused and close-to-the-herd research in the following years. For the very intriguing question arises: what was the reality of growing 'ferality' that had been so much talked about in the last two decades?

The ferality riddle

As suggested in the first part of this paper growing ferality was explained by gradual relaxation of herd control, beginning to get felt by the late 1950s–'60s. It has been said earlier on that the drivers of such a process could be seen in terms of traditional ecological determinants of the pre-collectivization era (short migration distances, rich fishing resources, etc.), and, secondly, the traditions which evolved during the kolkhoz/sovkhoz decades and were centered on the maintenance and increase of personal/private reindeer contingents. Preoccupation with such interests dictated production of unmarked deer, which in turn was facilitated by relaxation of control and by virtual abandoning of the calving campaign and 'biological' marking 'by the mother'. Eroding the system of control and socialist competition 'campaigns' could not but stimulate ferality. This circle closed upon itself with ferality stimulating personal deer growth.

The growing of ferality, in this context, followed from the 'rubber-band' principle, described by Hugh Beach [Beach 1981]. The latter, it shall be remembered, metaphorically captured the fact of the fragility of the human-*Rangifer* link. This in the sense that *Rangifer* being only at a very initial state of domestication, having not as yet established a state of complete or even relative dependence on humans for survival, draws back the reindeer to a 'pre-contact' stage, as soon as the 'rubber band' pulling them in gets released.

The 'ferality-personal deer' linkage supported the thesis, captured by this vivid metaphor. The 'connected vessel' scenario that I have described above as taking place following the events in '*Olenevod*', whereby manageability of the '*Tundra*' herd improved all of a sudden, may be dislodging the ferality-personal deer linkage, and, alongside of that, may be suggesting some need of qualification in respect of the 'rubber-band' one.

Such a need comes from the facts presented. The overall Kola herd of some 50,000 head by official counts, and 25–30,000 by insiders'

ones, had shown sudden signs of manageability after decades of hardly more than occasional and mostly chance contacts with freely roaming fragments. Although this surprising state of affairs clearly needs further research, being only at an initial state of registering and observation, some early conclusions may be tentatively drawn.

Conclusions

Concerning the reindeer husbandry part of it, it seems that the environmental givens of the Kola Peninsula are such that they allow a rather large degree of relaxation of control. Before ferality (as a form of perceived return to a 'wild state' (*odichanie*)) becomes an irreversible process, human interference in the *Rangifer* life-cycle can be reduced to a minimum. The point of no return herders would describe as 'losing the herd'. A brigade which cannot contact significant fragments of its herd, would be described as one that has 'lost it' (*poteriali stado*).

This state of affairs, as suggested before, requires serious further study. This is not a small challenge to a researcher or (better) — a research team, as it requires extensive experience and full autonomy of tundra movement. The logistics of work with a loosely controlled herd and with herders, who have no interest in revealing their methods of extremely loose — but ultimately effective management, is a matter of daunting complexity. The situation requires a discussion which extends the purpose of this paper.

It thus remains an open question at the moment as to how effective management gets achieved in a state of maximum extensivity [Konstantinov 2010; Beach 1981; Whitaker 1955]. This should not prevent, however, some tentative conclusions to be made, even at this state of findings.

In the first place, it is important to note the political significance of ferality in grassroots' actors conversing and dealing with power. It is advantageous, from the herders' point of view, to represent an ecology which is on the brink of entropy. Ferality, as a theme, spells entropy. Interest in representational entropy can be discussed, in this sense, as an effective 'weapon of the weak' to borrow Scott's classical formulation [Scott 2008]. Constructing a representational ecology which defies controlling measures may be seen as an effective way of

removing superordinate interference. As research interests may be also interpreted as potentially facilitating superordinate interference, consequences for research-logistics and field methods may come to be correspondingly forbidding.

Furthermore, ferality as a theme can be discussed as part of the ‘nostalgic’, ‘capitalist-bashing’ grassroots discourse of post-Soviet times. Its apocalyptic, entropy-foreboding message came to express by the means of herders’ talk a protest against the social ills of the post-Soviet era. Ferality is thus a synonym of the larger, popular metaphors, satirizing the post-Soviet period. Here come labels like *bardak* (mess, chaos), *bespredel* (lawlessness), etc.

In the final account, the socio-political significance of ferality can be seen in a deep historical perspective to have been a ‘traditional’ weapon (in the sense of Scott again) in nomadic, or more generally — renewable land-use contexts. The task of the actor is to be able at one and the same time to employ entropy as a political instrument, and contain it. The skills, experience, and concrete measures that achieve such a balancing act require — as I repeatedly stress — further in-context research. They hold the potential, however, of revealing understanding and managing of entropy as both a day-to-day operational task and a representational construct.

The logic of self-legitimation of the Soviet condition was based, as it is well known, on positivist calculability and faith in evolutionary progress as the ultimate goal and value. The ideological institution of socialist competition had as its main objective not so much the achieving of economic efficiency and increase of production, but of legitimation of the regime by representational containment of entropy. In the case I have presented, the role of containing entropy came to be surprisingly performed by ‘capitalist’ management of the new owner of the former sovkhos ‘Olenevod’ (‘In memory of Lenin’). This is consistent with the current ideological drive for achieving ‘stabilisation’ and ‘normalisation’. It is to be seen as yet how these recent, ‘back-looking’ ideological accents shall achieve their expression in herders’ talk. I end on the note that as yet, in this part of the reindeer-husbandry universe at least, the motive of reindeer becoming ‘less wild’ has not asserted itself, but it is quite possible that it may do so.

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Abstract

This paper discusses dynamic adaptation of the Kola Human-Rangifer complex to shifting accents of centre-periphery political relationships. Two reindeer husbandry cooperatives are compared in their differential approaches to state power: as subsidized sovkhoist clientship [Konstantinov 2007] in the first case, and as a feud-like entity in the second [Shlapentoch 2007]. The very different tensions impacting on the local reindeer husbandry community, in result of the application of such contrastive sociopolitical models, have required stretching the Human-Rangifer relationship, enacted in a context of hyper- or over-extensivity [Beach 1981: 503; Whitaker 1955: 27]. These, in turn, tend to suggest possibilities of controlling ostensibly feral herds to an extent inviting serious reassessment of the very concept of ferality. It is concluded that Human-Rangifer responses

to power impositions, as well as the possibility to 'converse with power' in an advantageous way as regards grassroots' actors may be greater than supposed. Such a position tends to question received notions about the impact of collectivization on reindeer husbandry communities, as also of the liberal economic reforms of the early 1990s.