

## Whose Homeland is It? Shifting Boundaries and Multiple Identities in the Russian Federation North

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Sitting in the highrise mayor's office overlooking the bleak river town of Srednekolymsk, in the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), I listened in 1994 to a tirade from the former Communist, ethnically Sakha mayor about the importance of American, preferably Alaskan, investment in the region. I then asked him the question I had been asking everyone, in towns and villages alike: "What do you consider your homeland?" He hesitated: "Well, I guess the Sakha Republic." He continued that in certain contexts he might say "The Federation of Rossiia," or the Srednekolyma district (*ulus*), but that his key loyalty was to the republic.<sup>1</sup> His answer was interesting for its sensitivity to multiple contexts of identity and loyalty, and also for its atypicality. Most people, out of over fifty asked this question in the same way in the Sakha Republic in the 1990s, did not stress the republic, but rather district or lakeside farmstead identities.

In 2003, one of the West Siberian Mansi founders of the Association for the Salvation of the Yugra, Khanty-Mansi parliament deputy Tat'iana Gogoleva, discussed the shifting politics of identity, land rights, self-governance, and self-determination in a far less optimistic mood than a decade earlier. President Putin's rhetoric encouraging "self-rule" for local communities has not been matched by appropriate budgetary control or recognition of the rights of indigenous groups to compensation for, or veto over, local energy development. While Gogoleva views the Yugra homeland as having formerly covered the whole Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug and some areas of nearby Sverdlovsk Oblast, this homeland is no longer theirs. She explained: "The Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug is supposed to be one of the wealthiest of the 89 regions of Rossiia, a so-called donor region, but the wealth never reaches the village level, or the indigenous people."<sup>2</sup>

As economic, political, spiritual and military crises inside the Russian Federation worsen, debates intensify over whether central Moscow policies and practices aggravate the fissures of federalism and nationalism. To understand this unfolding drama in the North, it is necessary to examine the diverse responses of indigenous minorities, republic, and regional representatives to chaos and attempts to reassert control. Painful economic and ecological ripple effects reveal much about the dynamics of ethnic polarization and the politics of social and cultural identity. Understanding

how groups shape and reshape their identities in times of national travail, on multiple levels, involves listening to how politicized voices shift and adapt within various social and cultural contexts.

One controversial third millennium change has been President Putin's attempt to consolidate federal boundaries administratively, creating seven mega-regions run by presidential representatives. Concomitant calls to abolish some ethnically based districts, such as the Evenki National Okrug, and the Taimyr Okrug, have come "from above," or from middle-level Russian authorities, not "from below." The goal of territorial reform, proclaimed Saratov Oblast governor Dmitri Aiatskov on January 12, 2001, possibly speaking as a proxy for President Putin, is "instead of 89 regions, no more than 50 but no less than 30" (Interfax). As debate rages concerning which specific "autonomous *okrugs*" should merge with their encircling *oblasts* and *krais*, indigenous leaders argue that the mergers are mostly to the advantage of the larger regions, rather than the residents of districts potentially being abolished. Resource-rich *okrugs* with "donor" status within the federation, whose leaders have not been Native, such as Yamalo-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi, are coveted (*Nezavisimaia Gazeta, January 10, 2001, p.1*). The mergers are likely to further disempower indigenous minorities, just as they are trying to activate recent laws meant to protect their lands and communities.<sup>3</sup>

Debates about political and territorial reform have created a context for assessing the influence of legal status upon group identities. The complex relationship among changing state structures, laws, and ethnonational formation needs to be better understood, particularly in post-Soviet transition societies sometimes described as struggling toward "civic (civil) society." The term "transition" is itself problematic for postsocialist peoples recently zigzagging away from meaningful indigenous self-determination. I argue here that to develop "civic society" in the North, conditions for group rights as well as individual rights must be stimulated.

The theory behind "civic society" is more developed than its realization at local levels. "Civic society" (*grazhdanskoe obshchestvo*) is conceived here as providing a social-political context that enables a multileveled development of citizen psychology, through ethnic, social and professional associations separate from state control, as well as the networking of these associations and their interaction with state institutions. This broadly defined "civic society" differs from more narrow definitions of "civil society" widespread in Eastern European usage, that typically focus on the development of interest-group associations, ("*neformaly*").<sup>4</sup> We cannot study indigenous peoples in a vacuum, in isolation from the political cultures and power contexts that surround them (Kasten 2002).

“Civic” identity is often contrasted with that of more narrow and chauvinist “nationalism.” But whether a contrast exists depends on the kind of nationalism. The idioms of many different (ethno)nationalisms influence group politics. Many social analysts have had their consciousness raised by the peoples they study, and by transnational theorists such as Yael Tamir (1993), Partha Chatterjee (1993) and Arjun Appadurai (1996; 2000). Their message is that (neo)colonial legacies both matter and can be transcended, that nationalism can be emancipatory under certain conditions, and that the politics of culture, of “imagined communities,” can be passionate, syncretic and multidimensional without being hate-filled (Anderson 1991; Gellner, 1983, 1994). Post-Soviet experience adds new dimensions to comparative theorizing on all of these points.

This essay examines several contrasting cases of recent political disruptions and their consequences for indigenous identity discourse and group mobilization. The main examples selected are the Mansi (Vogul), Khanty (Ostyak), Nenets (Samoyed), Yukagir (Odul), Even, Evenki (Tungus), and Sakha (Yakut). This range includes both minorities with minimal group recognition and groups currently endowed with greater rights and therefore with more to lose in current recentralization processes. In addition I make a comparison between West Siberian and Far Eastern “homeland-enabling conditions.”

### **Contested homelands: West Siberia**

In 2001–2003, soon-to-be-beleaguered energy company executive Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the founder of Yukos, denied that his company had any development projects on Khanty or Mansi land. However, much of Yukos’s development has been in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug.<sup>5</sup> Energy company executives reason that land contracts and special arrangements with the *okrug’s* administrative authorities have already freed development space from indigenous peoples. They, like the district governor and other local, mostly Slavic, officials, do not perceive the land of the “Khanty-Mansiiskii Avtonomnyi Okrug” to be indigenous, but rather Russian land available for privatization under federal laws recently passed by the Duma. They rationalize that, with Russians comprising over 80% of the population of the Russian Federation, ethnic-based territories are really nothing more than Soviet propagandistic anachronisms. Relations have become particularly tense with the election of Tyumen’ Oblast Governor Sergei Sobyenin, who was elected with the support of the *okrugs*, but later put pressure on them, reputedly at President Putin’s behest.

Specific homelands on a smaller scale, available for indigenous collectives (*obshchiny*) or clan territories (*rodovye ugody*), have been shrinking at

an alarming rate in the past two decades, especially in the 1990s (Balzer 1999; Wiget and Balalaeva 1997). As the West increasingly needs gas, oil, and anti-terrorism cooperation from the Russian Federation, it becomes less likely that defenders of indigenous-ruled territories (homelands) will be heard. Nonetheless, the governor of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, Aleksander Filipenko, is sensitive to world opinion on indigenous human rights issues. In 1997, he and Yamal-Nenets Governor Yuri Neelov explained at a U.S. business-bolstering appearance that minorities of the North have a special, “traditional way of life” that should be protected. In 2003, he proclaimed that he supports changing the name of the district to “Khanty-Mansiiskii Avtonomnyi Okrug-Yugra,” in a symbolic gesture to the indigenous Yugrian peoples.<sup>6</sup> The gesture coincides with increased efforts to call special, as yet undeveloped lands “nature parks,” under jurisdiction of district authorities rather than local indigenous-led collectives. Governor Filipenko and energy company executives are sweetening blatant land grabs with public relations efforts and jargon. As in the Soviet era, when lip service to words like “autonomy” meant little, official terminology disguises the real relations of identity and power.

Tat’iana Gogoleva explained in 2003: “So as not to give [more] land to any ethnic-based land units, such as *obshchiny* like that of the East Khanty Yaoun Yakh territory of [Khanty leader] Vladimir Kogonshin, the local government has tried to call chunks of land ‘nature parks.’” Such parks have less restricted use than the more rigorously protected federal-level “ecological preserves” (*zapovedniki*). Gogoleva elaborated: “Places like the East Khanty territory or [mixed Nenets and Khanty] Num-to Lake are becoming parks, but under district, Khanty-Mansi, control. This means that energy workers, if they find gas or oil, can be given leases, right in the parks, from the local government, with no possibility for indigenous people to interfere. They let the gas people in. If there were *obshchiny* there, they would have to be given compensation. This is what Filipenko is trying to do, to subvert the federal-level legal protections.” It is all done “under the banner of ecological preservation. But the *okrug* leaders still keep their power.”

A sense of disempowerment, combined with more positive ethno-national affirmation, led the Mansi writer Yuvan Shestalov in the early 1990s to try to establish a “Mansi Republic” joining part of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug with a neighboring portion of Sverdlovsk Oblast. Shestalov and other Mansi had discovered backwoods “Lozginsk Mansi” in the Sverdlovsk region. Mansi intellectuals in the Association for the Salvation of the Yugra were excited that articulate, Mansi-speaking Lozginsk families had preserved many of their traditions. Shestalov’s St.

Petersburg-based newspaper *Bely Zhuravl* (White Stork) and the Khanty-Mansiisk based *Novosti Ugry* (Yugrian News) covered the identity-affirming connections. Reunions, including weddings and bear festivals, made Mansi contacts across *oblast* boundaries joyous, and provided a context for a politics of hope that some officials in the Sverdlovsk Oblast decided they could exploit. Yuvan Shestalov seriously discussed the secessionist, irredentist effort with Sverdlovsk and Moscow authorities. But he became disillusioned when they were not able to offer him more than abstract promises of cultural autonomy (Balzer 1999, 154).

Mansi leader Tatiana Gogoleva recalled that they had briefly wanted Kandinsk, Beriozovsk, Lozginsk and other Mansi groups to be joined, all within Sverdlovsk Oblast (not Tyumen' Oblast, where the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug is currently located) because "Tyumen' has been less forthcoming to Yugra in general." She added: "It was a dream, to reconnect our people, a dream to have our own republic. Our people had always been strong, self-sufficient, getting their own food, making their own clothes." In the end, the Mansi leaders realized, "it was unrealistic to expect to create a precedent, to change borders like this. It was not the time for negotiated boundary change." Gogoleva sighed: "It was a romantic dream. Yuvan Shestalov wanted a place where the Mansi would have self-determination, including the ability to stimulate our own Mansi language before it is too late, to choose our own school programs, control our own budget."

In addition to the failed Mansi Republic, both Khanty and Russian leaders in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug tried to prize two Khanty areas from the neighboring Tomsk Oblast in the mid-1990s. Moscow authorities blocked this attempt, since boundary changes at the *oblast* level might be publicized and create dominoes. In the Yamal ("edge of the land") Nenets National Okrug, local leaders have chafed under a system that enables Tyumen' Oblast pressure on the *okrug*, despite the 1993 Russian Federation Constitution that gives each separate status as "federation subjects" (Golovnev and Osherenko 1999, 8–9). The Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) Okrug has, in turn, had frictions with Krasnoyarsk Krai that flared in 1992 and again a decade later, influencing gubernatorial politics within Krasnoyarsk. Indigenous ethnic solidarity in such a mixed region becomes situational and contingent, at times coinciding with the political purposes of local Russians, some of whom are themselves long-term residents, *Sibiriaki* (cf. Anderson 2000, 155). Perhaps the most publicized attempt at territorial absorption has been the ongoing saga of the Evenki Autonomous Okrug, within Krasnoyarsk, which Russian authorities, including the late Governor Lebed and the current Governor Aleksandr Khloponin, have thus far been unable to abolish, despite repeated attempts.<sup>7</sup> The Evenki are among

the most dispersed (diasporic) groups of the Siberian minorities, including outlying communities located farther east as well (Fondahl 1998).

The examples cited demonstrate diverse visions of ethnic-based homelands. Each case reveals legacies of early Soviet internal boundary demarcation, since blurred ethnic (or more accurately, linguistic) distinctions fit uneasily with sharp outsider-imposed political ones. Do these reflect a divide-and-rule plan by Joseph Stalin's administrators, naïve ethnographic ignorance, or the penchant of ethnographers for neat categories despite identity complexity? Each of these potential explanations warrants examination. In any case, incipient diasporas were created and indigenous groups consolidated within territories nominally termed their own. Territorial recognition came to stimulate ethnonational, politicized identity, becoming an identity "fait accompli," as Ron Suny (1993) and Mark Beissinger (2002) have argued for other Soviet areas.

Given the messy ramifications of the Soviet "matrioshka doll" territorial nestings, more manageable local homeland orientations in the form of kin-based community collectives (*obshchiny*), and clan territories (*rodovye ugody*), have appealed to Khanty leaders like Vladimir Kogonshin and the Nenets poet-reindeer breeder Yuri Vella-Aivaseda, who is married to a Khanty woman. Rejecting a more communal *obshchina*, Vella established his family-based territory in 1993, when indigenous rights to traditional territories were permitted through an early version of complex federation land codes (Vella, personal communication 1997). Legal disputes have followed, but even more vulnerable are those who did not take the time to obtain deeds, or those who got caught in bureaucracy and land thefts. By 2000, legal terminology had shifted at the federal level to protecting "territories of traditional natural resource use."<sup>8</sup> Tat'iana Gogoleva explained in 2003: "At best this is a next step and not a step backward. We are hopeful this will afford more protection for indigenous families, and larger groups. It will if it works the way it does in Canada. But people worry about having to give up what they already have in favor of the new system."

Throughout the North, the ability of indigenous minorities to express their identities and priorities through local legislatures has been weakened by demographic realities. Indigenous peoples are often scattered and represent far less than 10% of the populations their districts. The reformed Khanty-Mansi legislature includes 25 elected deputies, only four of whom are indigenous. A full 17 have ties to the local gas industry, plus one road-builder who is dependent on energy company support. The indigenous representatives have larger districts, quadrants of the whole *okrug*. Deputy Gogoleva clarified: "We are almost like governors of specific territories."

In sum, after 1991, political conditions for building indigenous self-confidence at first improved and then were undermined but not destroyed. Indigenous local advocacy associations like the Nenets' "Yamal Potomkov" (*Yamal Progeny*) and the Khanty and Mansi "Association for the Salvation of the Yugra" are admired by their own peoples, but are weak and often mired in interethnic tensions. They are supported by the Moscow-based umbrella organization Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), headed by the erudite Nenets president Sergei Khariutchi, who is also a deputy in his local legislature. RAIPON is in turn in communication with other indigenous rights groups, such as the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Saami Nordic Council. But RAIPON, representing over 33 minorities, is dependent on international funding and structurally unable to provide the land-based security that indigenous groups yearn for and need to ensure multiple levels of identity affirmation in a flexible civic society (cf. Vakhtin 1994; Balzer 1999; Ziker 2002). As Association for the Salvation of the Yugra co-founder Tat'iana Gogoleva told me in 1991: "Land is the most important thing. We still have many people scattered, living in small encampments, traditionally [...] degradation comes when people must move, when they are forced to move."

### Contested sovereignty: Far East

The Sakha (Yakut) of the Far East are in a comparatively stronger demographic and political position than any of the northern minorities of Siberia. The Sakha Republic (Yakutia) comprises greater expanses of territory than the *okrugs*, with the Sakha "titular nationality" having relatively more control over it. Sakha, northern minorities and Russian *Sibiriaki* have all considered republic territory to be their ancestral homeland(s) since well before the Soviet period. These territorial expressions of identity sometimes overlap and compete, but more often coexist. In the early 1990s, a few Sakha extremist-dreamers also made claims to the full *Yakutiia Guberniia* (tsarist administrative territory), which had extended to the Sea of Okhotsk. But responsible Sakha and Russian leaders then announced a moratorium on demands to change republic borders. President Putin's post-2000 calls for a "strong state," with a more unified and symmetrical federation, have made many republic citizens (Sakha, indigenous minorities and Russians alike) wary and worried.

The multiethnic Sakha Republic (Yakutia) of the Far East is a homeland for its "titular" people, the Turkic-language speaking Sakha, as well as for many indigenous peoples of the North (Even, Evenki, Yukagir, Dolgan, and Chukchi), plus the two demographically dominant Slavic groups,

Russians and Ukrainians. By 2003, the Sakha were about 38% of their republic, down from 86% in the first Soviet census of 1926, but up from their 33% in the last Soviet census of 1989. In a republic of approximately 1 million people, about 400,000 are Sakha, while about 500,000 are Russians.<sup>9</sup>

Faced with ethnic and occupational diversity, leaders of this huge northern republic, more than three times the size of France, have had little choice but to appeal to multiple constituencies. This includes current President Viacheslav Shtyrov, a Russian executive from the country's leading diamond company, ALROSA, and twice-elected President Mikhail Nikolaev, a Sakha veterinarian of Communist background, turned reformist supporter of privatization and cultural revival. Far from advocating virulent or chauvinist nationalism, many Sakha have been hoping to achieve an improved form of federalism, both at home and within "Rossiia." But leaders increasingly say that their ardent search for a negotiated federalism, based on mutual respect with central Moscow authorities, has been unrequited. They fear that the transition from President Yeltsin to President Putin, far from easing the federal relationship, has in some respects made it worse, as an increasingly hard line emanates from Moscow on the issues of constitutional conformity and greater fiscal uniformity (see also Argounova-Low, *this volume*).

Within the republic, a flexible politics of multiple and situational identities combines with broad-based, embryonic citizenship stimulation. But both the Sakha and Russian "pluralities" sometimes fall into mutual misunderstanding, leading to dangers of exacerbating ethnic polarization. Post-World War II trends of greater-than-average interethnic marriage were reversed in the 1990s. Each group within the republic has combined a renewal of endogamy with patriotic, natalist rhetoric. In this complex context, post-Soviet identity for Sakha and non-Sakha alike becomes a delicate, high-stakes balancing act, a matter for contention and debate. Two significant crucibles of identity are outlined here – the politics of the cultural and economic elites in the capital, Yakutsk, and the politics of regions (*uluses*) within the republic. Everyone has been shaken by the crises of the late 1990s, the country-wide economic collapse in August 1998 and the Lena River flooding of 1998 and 1999. These events led to increased concerns about federal relations.

### Capital trends

In 1997, a young "New Yakut" representative of a Sakha diamond processing firm explained, "my politics are basically the same as the idea of

[the movement] *My (We) Yakutiany*. This is the concept that we, multiple nationalities, are all in this republic together, and need to pull together in it." Although the movement, led by a former Sakha Minister of Education, is not a political party, it is a growing voice of Sakha (Yakut) moderates, who feel it is crucial to build a sense of republic patriotism that transcends ethnonational distinctions. They signal inclusion by using the Russian-oriented term "Yakutiany." Such moderates helped elect President Shtyrov.

This message of moderation coexists, sometimes awkwardly, with diverse manifestations of Sakha nationalism. Some of these, including increased chauvinist nationalism, are tied to radicalizing, polarizing processes that stem from the centralizing politics of the Moscow-based Russian administration. Identity reactions triggered by wounded pride are visible in a multileveled dynamic of ethnonational interaction. Before he was maneuvered out of office by President Putin, the populist President Nikolaev had become increasingly authoritarian and, in some of his speeches, overtly nationalist. His successor President Shtyrov, in reaction, has shifted some funding for cultural programs and print media away from the Sakha intelligentsia and toward more multicultural or Russian groups. In 2002, propaganda banners lined the streets of Yakutsk proclaiming "Yakutia-Rossia Together."

Sakha cultural identity has been shaped since the 1980s by an initially exuberant revival led by writers, linguists, ethnographers and artists. Groups such as *Sakha Keskile* (Sakha Perspectives) and *Sakha Omuk* (The Sakha People) constituted a movement that, in the early 1990s, had the potential to coalesce into a Popular Front or an ethnic-based political party, but did not. Smaller groups, specifically oriented to spiritual, religious revival, remained popular in the republic through the 1990s, and have an interconnection with revived Sakha nationalism (Balzer and Vinokurova 1996). Since 1991, options have opened on the question of where to orient identity priorities: toward the Northern Forum and general cross-border issues of northern economics and survival; toward other Turkic republics (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) and countries (especially Turkey); or toward neighbors in the Far East and Siberia, for example the regional association Siberian Agreement. Many of my urban interlocutors said that all should be explored. They found less resonance in federation-wide parties, and feared Russian chauvinism, often referred to in code as "the Russian idea" (*Russkaia mysl*), implying rightful hegemony.

Between 1991-1997, over 700 community organizations were registered, with about 100 of them having "national-cultural issues as their goals and the basis of their activities" (Bravin 1998, 67). Over half were Sakha.

Former deputy minister Anatoly Bravin explained in a 1999 interview that, while formal symbols of sovereignty were in place at both republic and country-wide levels, conditions for pride were not. As an ethnoscologist attuned to republic trends, he warned that a sense of republic citizenship transcending ethnicity was difficult to instill, and that, within the republic, the success of this effort differed greatly by region. To encourage multiculturalism, several 1990s "Assemblies of the Peoples of Sakha Republic" were funded by the republic's Ministry of the Peoples' Affairs and Federal Relations, a ministry abolished by 2001. Republic efforts to stimulate civic society "from above" have been plagued by some of the same problems of managed pluralism as President Putin's famous 2001 "Civic Forum" (cf. H. Balzer 2003; Nikitin and Buchanan 2002).

Potential political forces have been republic-focused movements, such as the nascent political party *Novaia Yakutiia*. At their "scientific-practical" conference in 1999 on "National Economics: Theory, Practice, Problems," the word "national" meant republic-wide trends, however heavily influenced by "federal" policy and broad regional (Far East) practices. Businessman and movement founder Fedot Tomusov critiqued the republic's lack of well-trained economic cadres, its dangerous reliance on the diamond industry, and its tendencies toward authoritarianism. Citing Adam Smith on free economic choice, he urged an "economic ideology" for the republic. He openly acknowledged the dangers of criminalization and "tendencies toward disintegration of Rossiia." He lamented the crises of modern civilization, of "people torn from nature," and of interethnic tensions. He singled out serious spiritual-cultural threats that harm the Sakha people and the minority peoples of the North, and quoted the early twentieth century intellectual Aleksei E. Kulakovskiy on the dangers of Sakha language demise. As a quasi-academic campaign speech, complete with an appeal for return to family values, it went over well with his mixed ethnic followers.

In conversations conducted in 2000, 2002 and 2003, people acknowledged loyalty first to their extended families (upon whom all are increasingly reliant), then to local *uluses*, then to the republic, and only last, with misgivings, to the federal, Moscow-based central government. Many of the Sakha intelligentsia in the capital describe a waning of their earlier hopes for "democracy" at the federal and republic levels. Yet they have not relinquished the ideal of a freely elected, publicly accountable president and parliament in the republic. Under Presidents Nikolaev and Shtyrov, the local press has been heavily subsidized by the government and less than free to criticize their leadership. However, protests over closings of opposition newspapers have led to some loosening of purse strings.<sup>10</sup> Although freedom of expression has been variable, both presidents have been sus-

ceptible to public opinion. President Shtyrov maintains a small group of sociologist-advisors who take the pulse of ethnic tensions, among other issues, throughout the republic once a month.

The most crucial and delicate issue is how far sovereignty should be allowed to go. Are people angry or nationalistic enough to yearn for full independence? Before 1999, secession was nearly a taboo topic; rather, residents carefully explained the difference between independence and wanting a negotiated degree of sovereignty within the federation, an honoring of the 1995 Bilateral Treaty. But by 1999, Sakha (not Russians) mentioned republic secession more often, without prompting. For example, rumors were circulating about a survey done in the republic by a young Sakha sociologist indicating that as many as 14% of republic residents (presumably mostly Sakha) were ready for full secession from the center. However, the survey, at least its printed version, indicated only that 14% felt aggrieved that their interests were not understood by other nationalities (Spiridonova 1998). Nonetheless, a moderate university professor argued: "Rossiia is still too big. Within the next twenty or so years, it is likely to break up into more congenial regional parts, with the North Caucasus the first to go, but with the Far East eventually following." One advisor to President Nikolaev suggested privately in 2000 that the federation had a one-in-three chance of breaking up in the next ten years. Each of these Sakha made a distinction, however, between what they would like to see (continued federal relations) and what they thought might occur. Analysts should be sensitive to their distinction.

### **"Ulus mentality"**

The Sakha Republic consists of 36 sub-regions (*uluses*), each with its own interethnic mix, economic priorities, and historical orientations. Most are legacies of the early Soviet period, although the Turkic term *ulus* was also used in the tsarist period. In 2002 and 2003, the republic capital's summer *yhyakh* festival featured mini-territories that mirrored the *ulus* composition of the republic. The physical division of the festival grounds communicated a Sakha version of "unity through plurality," but it also provoked jokes about *ulus*, or provincial, "mentalities" and loyalties.

The *uluses* are grouped, in both informal and official discussions, into three main areas: the relatively southern industrial zone; the central, rural, cattle-raising zone; and the northern mixed economy zone. In ethno-national terms, the southern *uluses* are dominated by Slavic groups, southeastern areas include Evenki and Sakha, the central areas are predominantly Sakha, and the northern regions are of mixed ethnic composition, although some had indigenous majorities as recently as the turn of the

twentieth century. The northern *uluses*, for example Olekminsk, Tompon, Mom, Allai, Srednekolyma, Verkhnekolyma, and Abyi, have too eclectic a composition and economic base to presume any dominant ethnic loyalty. Yet the politics of northern dependency have led to widespread resentments in the area. In the winter of 1998, some of the northern “villages of the town type” had to be evacuated on an emergency basis by helicopter when energy supplies were not delivered. The scandal caused large out-migrations of Russian-speaking “temporary workers”, mainly those whose alternate homelands are in the Russian “mainland.” Huge amounts of World Bank and republic funds went into their resettlement and safety (Heleniak 1999). The situation has exacerbated ethnic tensions, and, like other economic-demographic crises, has caused people to rethink their patriotism and orientations. The Sakha North, like all of the country’s northern lands, is a zone of poverty, soaring unemployment, industrial over-extension, and instability (cf. Hill and Gaddy 2003). Energy resource extraction in Sakha has not (yet?) paid for itself. The North has been the focus of constant appeals to Moscow, especially to the recently downgraded Goskomsevera (State Committee of the North), whose administrative jurisdiction in Moscow has changed several times in the past decade. Frustration with lack of Moscow assistance, especially the loss of previously regular northern supply subsidies, led by the late 1990s to the organization of a northern coalition of regions and republics, based in St. Petersburg. Orientation abroad through the Northern Forum is also perceived as a possible route to relief, as meetings from 1999–2003 have indicated.

Just as many Sakha feared Russification during the twentieth century, so have indigenous northern minorities feared Sakhaization (or “Yakutization”). Probably the most threatened by both Sakha and Russian influences have been the Yukagir (Odul), whose numbers have been dwindling since well before the Soviet period. Two separated groups of Yukagir form isolated communities, Chaila and Teke Odulok, in the Northeast of the republic. Their Paleo-Asiatic language has been nearly extinguished, as has their extended-family-oriented hunting and fishing tradition. However, in 1998, the Sakha parliament, *Il Tumen*, finally passed a law enabling, at least in principle, an ethnic-based territory called Suktul to be established by and for the remaining Yukagir, who number fewer than 2,000. Their bylaws state that Suktul land is to be set aside “for self-rule on questions of social-economic, cultural and ethnic development.”<sup>11</sup> Funding for this “special case” has never been provided, and the fascinating Suktul experiment in local self-determination may end in court.

One relatively new district, the Eveno-Bytantsk Okrug, was created in 1989 from parts of the Sakkyrsk region as a political gesture towards

the minority Even people. Some claim that it was authorized by President Mikhail Gorbachev as a precedent for future internal border changes throughout the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup> The diaspora Even (earlier called Lamut) are still divided among numerous *uluses*, and have had less control over the politics of their nominally titular district than they had hoped. In a 1999 interview, the head of the district, the Even-Sakha economist Vasilii V. Gorokhov, indicated that the Even component of local leadership had risen somewhat since 1989. Although far from enough, district policies had enabled increased official support for Even language and cultural programs. Like Yakutsk officials, Even leaders are also interested in more direct foreign investment, and in the export of their special breed of cattle. Their traditional reindeer-breeding livelihood has in part been supplanted by cattle raising, usually associated with the dominant Sakha culture. A brief follow-up interview in 2002 reinforced my initial impression of this district as genuinely multiethnic, with higher-than-republic-average rates of intermarriage.

The Even and Evenki are widely scattered Tungusic peoples, numbering in the republic roughly 10,000 and 20,000 respectively, whose traditional lifestyles of reindeer breeding and hunting were curtailed but not entirely destroyed in the Soviet period (cf. Humphrey and Sneath 2001). Most Even and Evenki live outside Eveno-Bytantsk in small village communities and camps. Their discussions of cultural and political revitalization include hopes for local governmental support for scattered community collectives (*obshchiny*), similar to those in West Siberia, as well as for special language programs, where warranted by their numbers. The lifestyle of some Even, Evenki and Chukchi families of the Sakha North remains dependent on increasingly precarious reindeer breeding. While the reindeer breeders have formed their own federal-level association, most still look to Yakutsk for their main political and economic support (cf. Gray 2001). The Even deputy Andrei Krivoschapkin declared in a passionate speech to the Sakha parliament in 1999: "Reindeer breeding has had a sharp demise because it became a hostage and sacrifice to Yeltsin's policies of so-called economic reform." He noted that only the northwestern Anabar *ulus*, near Krasnoyarsk Krai, had enjoyed some reindeer breeding success in the 1990s. Identifying himself as a "natural Northerner," he explained that the only way to save reindeer breeding was to support, by republic law and presidential decree, family nomadism and the nomadic culture of the indigenous peoples of the North, whom he described as "whole disappearing peoples." He reminded the parliament that the reindeer breeders of the republic have their own political Association of the Indigenous Minorities of the North, and their own "brain trust," the Insti-

tute of the Problems of Northern Minorities, based in Yakutsk, where programs of emergency aid can be worked out.<sup>13</sup> For A. Krivoschapkin, the key to recovery of ethnic identity is a combination of land security and political mobilization, buttressed by government legal support and economic subsidy. In a 2002 interview, he stressed the need for indigenous minorities to have an “Arctic quota” representation in the republic parliament, as well as protected lands.

Evenki deputy Avgusta D. Marfusaloova, from the southeastern Aldan *ulus*, near the republic’s border with Khabarovsk Krai, explained in a 2002 interview that “the major mechanism for minority self-rule has been the *obshchiny*, and to some extent this has been working. It depends on where and what kind of leadership they have.” By January 2002, 208 *obshchiny* were registered in the republic, and more were attempting to register. Some are extended-family-based Evenki reindeer breeding brigades of Aldan. But, Marfusaloova continued in a familiar lament: “The reindeer are dying at a rapid rate, or have been killed for food in crises, and at nearly the same time, the breeders themselves are dying. In some places, local former state collective (*sovkhos*) directors will not allow separate Evenki *obshchiny* to take animals and function independently, even when people in effect have been doing this.” The head of the Aldan *ulus* is an impressive but politically vulnerable Evenki woman, Avgusta A. Diachkova, who has been trying to pressure Yakutsk authorities for more coal deliveries, service support and *obshchina* registration in return for vast concessions of gold extraction in the Aldan area.

A relatively positive example of local self-rule, with the potential to become a mixed economic and mixed ethnic model, involves the registered company of Nizhnelensk, an auction company supporting the exploration, extraction and processing of gold and diamonds. With holdings in three adjoining *uluses*, including Aldan, they are wealthy enough to support Afanasy G. Koriakin, an Evenki who has organized his own *obshchina*. The company is training workers and giving them jobs, and it also subsidizes some reindeer breeding. This has enabled Koriakin to register his “self-rule territory” called “Kystatyam,” or Winter Stopping Place in Evenk. Here, Marfusaloova explained in 2002, “Evenki really are living compactly, with about 400 people, or 70% of the population of their local area. They have a strong tradition of family reindeer breeding, multigenerational.” The whole territory constitutes about one third of Aldan *ulus*, where pockets of reindeer breeding continue to be viable.

A more controversial *obshchina* of 800 people is called “Anamy,” or Elk in Evenk. It is run by Genady S. Moronov, who is a local Sakha leader with about 60% Evenki in his community. Anamy supports hunting, cattle and

horse-raising, some mineral extraction, as well as reindeer breeding. With an airstrip near their hay fields, and paved streets in their main village of Kytana, Anamy was formed from a wealthy Soviet *sovkhoz*. But when Moronov registered it as a collective, he “forgot” to put the word “Evenki” in their title, to the consternation of local Evenkis. Another mixed Evenki-Sakha *obshchina* is “Ugoian,” or Crossroads in Evenk. Headed by a local Evenki school director, and with a governing council, it has yet to acquire a registered land base. It thus serves as an example of an embryonic “self-rule” *obshchina*.<sup>14</sup>

These cases exemplify the politicization of homeland identities. Commenting on each of the indigenous minority attempts at self-rule, whether Evenki collectives, the Yukagir Suktul, or the Even Okrug, Marfusaloova concluded in 2002: “Without funding and administrative support, territorial names do not mean much. We have to find a way to preserve traditional land use in territories of compact Native populations.”

Aldan, Mirny, Niuringri, and Lensk are major and relatively southern areas dominated by the diamond and gold industries. Lensk was the site of the worst Lena River floods of the twentieth century in 1998. In Lensk, the elected Russian head of the *ulus*, Victor I. Samoilov, defensively proclaimed to me in 1999: “We are not secessionist.” I had not raised the issue, but knew he meant “secessionist from the republic.” He was referring to rumors and political rhetoric that surfaced periodically in the 1990s concerning the possibility that the Slavic, industrial core of the republic’s economy would be better off with direct support from Moscow, bypassing Yakutsk. The Moscow orientation of Lensk and Mirny was expressed symbolically in the special plane that delivered Moscow musicians to a 1999 City of Lensk celebration of thirty-five years of the Lensk-Mirny diamond industry tract. Local Sakha from the older, founding village part of Lensk called *Mukhtuia* (an Evenk word), felt that the Russian authorities could have saved money by bringing in musicians from Yakutsk. They also expressed concerns about celebrating at a time when people were still trying to recover from the devastating flood of 1998. Samoilov touted the positive recovery efforts, though he admitted that they had received less aid from Moscow than they had hoped. He stressed a “special Lensk character, brave, strong and resilient.”

This proud pioneer-Slav theme was a refrain that sustained many of the Russians interviewed in Lensk, some of whom considered themselves long-term residents, *Sibiriaki*. The *Sibiriak* identity historically has been non-chauvinist, easily accommodating indigenous cultural aspects and based on interethnic marriages (cf. Balzer 1994; Soin 1993). However, the recent political rhetoric of some local leaders, including Samoilov, has had

a chauvinist edge to it. Before his 1997 election, he allegedly stirred up local Russian youths against the dangers of too much Sakha “nationalist” rule from Yakutsk.

Most administration officials in Lensk and Mirny are Russian, although a few elected deputies to the Sakha parliament are Sakha. In 1999, this included an effective woman lawyer, Fedora N. Zakharova, who was my host in Lensk. Zakharova’s popularity and election represented a tribute to the voters who crossed ethnic boundaries to support her, to the Sakha and Evenki voters of her home district (Mukhtuia), and also to those Russians who calculated that a Sakha advocate might be useful for their *ulus* in the Sakha-dominated parliament. Many talented Sakha from the area leave to go to Yakutsk, and so Russian predominance becomes a self-renewing process. One impressive exception is a Sakha economist in the Lensk administration, Platon P. Oshepkov, who explained that half the city of Lensk is tied to servicing the diamond industry. Only 8% of the *ulus* are Sakha, most of them struggling in outlying villages to maintain their traditional cattle breeding in the face of industrial and demographic pressures. These villages are the poorest in the *ulus*, with the highest percentage of unemployed.

The Sakha sociologist, former parliament deputy Uliana Vinokurova, views Lensk as a microcosm of the situation in the Sakha republic as a whole – indigenous peoples surrounded by Russians, with the local Sakha and others having to fight for their political and cultural rights. But if the “*ulus* mentality” of Lensk is predominantly Russian and Moscow-oriented, that of the central regions (Nam, Kandalask, Megino-Kandalask, Churabcha, Tatta, Suntar, Viliuisk, Niurbe) is decidedly less so. These are the core areas of Sakha cultural revival, where the capital is situated, but also where the Sakha intelligentsia derives its roots, energy, and emotional ties. Former President Nikolaev is from Kandalask, and many noticed that this *ulus* received considerable economic and educational support during his regime (cf. Nikolaev 1999). Megino-Kandalask is known for its artists, Tatta for its writers, Viliuisk for its musicians, Niurbe for its wrestlers, and Suntar for the preservation of its spectacular rituals (*okhuokhai*, *yhyakh*) despite Soviet repression (cf. Argounova 2001).

While over-generalization about the talent of each *ulus* is unwise, the lesson of these stereotypical reputations may be that Natives of these areas find specific symbols and historical figures to revere and valorize. They shape their local patriotism and the socialization of their children around these specific symbols and values. A striking 1990s social phenomenon was the establishment of *ulus* community groups, non-land-based *obshchiny*, for those outside their homelands, living in the capital or other

cities of the republic. These enable self-help networks to coalesce along more formal lines than just casual, extended-family ties.

An important dimension of the central zone “*ulus* mentality” is its all-Sakha patriotism, extending at times even to the point of chauvinism. The greatest support for, and identity with, the republic as a whole is found in these areas, and in *uluses* such as Niurbe the Sakha-focused political group *Sakha Omuk* remains active. Deputies from some of these areas initially blocked parliamentary ratification of the Northern Yukagir enclave Suktul. One of the founders of *Sakha Omuk*, Vladimir Nikolaev, explained to me in 1997 that he feared that supporting Suktul would create a precedent for other areas of the republic to change internal boundaries on the basis of ethnicity: Russians in the South, Even and Yukagir in the North.

To summarize, the strength of *ulus* loyalties and coalitions points to under-studied processes of identity formation within the Russian Federation. Yet *ulus* leaders are well aware of their dependencies, on the republic and on the federation.<sup>15</sup> They declared themselves ready for new “self-rule” regimes in 2002, but begged for more support. They are searching for new connections and organizations, ones that could in turn stimulate new political, especially ethnoregional, associations and identities (cf. Bravin 1998; Vinokurova 1999).

### Conclusions: pathways to reform?

This essay has reviewed diverse ways that land has become territory for various peoples of the North, as concepts of “homeland” are politicized, contested, and revised. Individuals and groups are more or less “indigenous,” depending on their interethnic histories. Conditions for constructing self-esteem and liberal ethnonationalism differ widely within the poorly balanced “matrioshka doll” that is the Russian Federation (cf. Kolstø 2000). Rather than conceptualizing this doll as composed of distinct ethnonational parts, she might be better seen as harboring nesting nationalisms and different levels of identity options for individuals inside “Rossiia.” Yet the smallest, least recognized groups, such as the Yukagir, who have yet to attain a functioning ethno-territorial community, have been nearly absorbed in the belly of “Rossiia.”

As the Russian Duma has debated and fought over land privatization laws in the past decade, the potential for disempowerment of non-Russian indigenous groups, especially those without their own republics, has increased. During 2001 Duma committee hearings on special rights for indigenous peoples, one poorly informed Russian deputy asked the Siberianist Olga Murashko “why can’t Siberian Natives just buy their own land?”

(Murashko, personal communication 2002). Leaving aside the economic absurdity of expecting those who live below country-wide poverty levels to buy their homelands, this question is especially chilling for those who know the divisive and destructive history of U.S. "Indian family allotment" policies (cf. Wilkins 2001).

The minimal negotiated conditions of hope for indigenous peoples throughout the North are: group ownership of land (including a portion of subsurface wealth), local community self-rule, and control over cultural resources. Crucial culturally appropriate health and education policies follow (cf. Kasten 1998; 2002).

Historically, those larger Siberian groups that gained their own so-called "autonomous" republics within the Soviet system, the Sakha (Yakuts), Tyvans (Tuvans), Khakass, Altais and Buryats, have fared relatively better. They were regarded by the smaller minorities and by the Russian newcomers as being in a different category of privilege and dominance (Balzer 2003; Humphrey 2002). A schematic continuum depicting degrees of Russification for various Siberian (including Far East) groups would place the Khanty somewhere near the center, and the Sakha and Yukagir at either end of the spectrum. A Khanty leader poignantly recalled for me her resentment and astonishment when she first saw confident "Yakut" individuals speaking loudly at her St. Petersburg pedagogical institute. She added: "It hit me years later that psychologically, the Yakut had been brought up to have a better confidence in their whole people's survival and importance. They know they are significant in the historical scheme of things. And now I understand – we are important too. We almost lost this sense of self-worth. This is what we must teach our children."

From West Siberia to the Far East, efforts to abolish or diminish "*okrug*" level territories have left indigenous peoples vulnerable once again. This is particularly evident in the Tyumen' Oblast, and in Krasnoyarsk Krai. Throughout the North, "territories of traditional land use" are being undermined by illegal mining, drilling or sham designations as "natural parks." Diasporic minorities, such as the Even outside Eveno-Bytantaik or the Evenki outside the Evenki districts of Krasnoyarsk and Buryatia, find their best identity-building, mobilization options at the local, *obshchina*, level. The indigenous minorities of the Sakha Republic are relatively more secure, but often feel themselves economically, socially and politically unequal to the "titular" Sakha. Sakha Republic authorities are in a potentially better position, compared to some regional governments, to legally help their minorities. Yet their track record on sharing the mineral wealth of the republic has been mixed. In turn, President Putin's retreat from the 1995 Sakha-Russia Bilateral Treaty has undermined Sakha confidence, as

have Moscow's machinations during Sakha presidential and parliamentary elections. The Sakha Republic currently is led by a Russian president, who was born but not raised there, and does not know the Sakha language. Under V. Shtyrov, presidential control has been strengthened, and efforts at Sakha ethnonational assertion are discouraged. Interethnic tension, periodically present in the republic through the Soviet period, has flared in street incidents since his election. A telling example is the Russian tough who threatened an elderly Sakha academic after a car accident by yelling: "Who do you think you are? It's my homeland now."<sup>16</sup> Sakha dominance has also been undermined by the 2002 reform of the republic parliament, including redistricting that resembles gerrymandering, forcing some indigenous deputies out of office. Still, the relative confidence of larger ethnonational groups like the Sakha has enabled them to take advantage of an expanded range of identity options within their own republic, including stress on the concept "Yakutian" – the multiethnic people of Sakha Republic.

A theoretical premise underlying this essay has been that once ethnonational territories of any size are established, they may eventually serve indigenous interests. Soviet history illustrates the unintended consequences of this, as argued in Ron Suny's (1993) cleverly titled "Revenge of the Past." But other fissures of federalism are also possible. President Putin's administrative reform, based largely on existing military districts, imposed seven mega-regions onto the complex asymmetrical semi-federal structure of "Rossiia." It has already had unintended consequences. Leaders in the Sakha Republic are resentful that they often must go through Khabarovsk rather than directly to Moscow for lobbying. The structure has created new personnel frictions, including ethnonational competition. A further long-term danger may be the entrenchment of these mega-regions as socio-political realities that could presage viable states. President Putin is reputed to view the mega-regions as a solution to the serious problems of republic and Russian-region-based corruption and legal discrepancies involving the federation's constitution (Herspring 2003). Appointed governors are expected to deflate, manipulate, and oversee locally elected officials' power. The main mega-regions of the North are the Far East, Siberia, and Urals, headed by Lieutenant General Konstantin Pulikovskii, Consul Leonid Drachevskii, and Colonel General Petr Latyshev, respectively. Although these officials, most of them formerly from the security apparatus, are ostensibly "administrative" and "temporary" appointees, the centralizing momentum of the reform is clear. However, changes that transcend the administrative sphere require amendments to the 1993 Russian Federation Constitution. This includes the modification of *okrug*, *oblast* or *krai* bound-

aries. For the sake of interethnic harmony and the indigenous minorities, one can hope that President Putin's appetite for imposed territorial restructuring will be sated with the establishment of the seven mega-regions. However, the president has endorsed 2003 negotiations to merge the Komi-Permyak Autonomous Okrug with Perm Oblast. The extent to which these negotiations exemplify reforms "from above" or "from below" is in question, since local opposition has emerged (Ratiani 2003).

A related destabilizing danger exists in the crystallization of nationalism through polarized interethnic relations. An embittering "expectation gap" has followed the hopes that prevailed during the early 1990s. "Has the central government created or abetted rogue Russian energy companies?" many Khanty ask. "Where is the central government when help is needed to evacuate Northern villages?" many Sakha ask. "How can we push for increased indigenous language training in the schools, if children are hungry?" Yukagir, Even, and Evenki representatives ask. "Why are our youths committing suicide?" Natives throughout the North ask. These problems are not themselves caused by ethnic tensions, but all can be exacerbated when the idioms of ethnicity and scapegoating are employed. Identity, especially nationalism, develops not in isolation, but in relation to other, politicized groups. As Russian nationalists have become entrenched in the Duma, Sakha nationalists with chauvinist proclivities (still a minority) have had their prejudices confirmed. An unhealthy series of miscommunications, featuring mutual accusations of corruption and some election campaign "dirty tricks," led to a confrontational atmosphere and the sharpening of politicized ethnonationalism on all sides just before Sakha President Nikolaev withdrew as a candidate for reelection. Disillusioned with Moscow, Nikolaev's administration looked for solidarity throughout the North and with other Turkic republics and states. Within the republic, Even, Evenki and Yukagir leaders also became disillusioned with Yakutsk, although their concerns have made them "cultural entrepreneurs" trying to defend minuscule homelands, not rabble-rousing "ethnic entrepreneurs" (Balzer et al 2001).

Without respectful engagement by authorities in Moscow and various northern centers, moderate responses to crises of identity, economics, and politics could be drowned by more irrational, reactionary, and insecure voices of chauvinist nationalism. Without a well-managed federalism that accommodates the asymmetrical, multiple and situationally sensitive ethno-political identities described in this essay, President Putin risks creating the very instability and chaos that he claims his government is trying to avoid.

## Notes

- 1 The term “Rossiia” is maintained here to stress the multiethnic composition of the Russian Federation, especially when non-Russian perspectives are described. My fieldwork in Yakutia was begun in 1985–6 through the US-USSR cultural exchange program, and continued periodically from 1991–2003, with sponsorship from the International Research and Exchanges Council, the Social Sciences Research Council, and Georgetown University. I am grateful to the Vinokurov family for facilitating my fieldwork in Srednekolyma, and to my coauthor Uliana Vinokurova (1996). I am grateful to the Ivanov-Unarov and Gogolev-Diachkova families for hosting me in the 1990s, and in the summers of 2000, 2002, and 2003.
- 2 My fieldwork in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug was begun on the US-USSR cultural exchange in 1975–76, and continued in 1991. I am grateful to Tat’iana Gogoleva for insights beginning in 1991, continuing in Moscow in 1997 and at my home in 2003.
- 3 See for example the generic July 6, 2000 “law on ethnic communities” passed by the State Duma; see also Wiget and Balalaeva, *this volume*.
- 4 Compare H. Balzer 1996, 300–3; Levada (1996); Hann and Dunn 1996; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Berdahl, Bunzl, Lampland 2000; Humphrey 2002.
- 5 Data on former Yukos Chairman Mikhail Khodorkovsky’s views come from two Washington D.C. Carnegie Endowment appearances, in 2002 and 2003, as well as earlier informal statements made to a mutual acquaintance. His arrest in 2003 changes the equation of which elites control resources, but does not alter basic strategies for exploitation of indigenous lands.
- 6 A letter from Governor Filipenko and *okrug* legislature speaker Vasili Sondykov was sent to President Putin requesting the name change, as reported in *Kommersant-Daily* 2/10/03.
- 7 Governor Aleksandr Bokovikov, in *Novaia gazeta* December 28, 2000, complained that Moscow and Krasnoyarsk controlled all property worth having despite the *okrug* designation (Corwin 2001). See also Malyakin (2003).
- 8 For example, *Federal’nyi zakon ot maia 2001 g. No. 49-FZ “O territoriakh traditsionnogo prirodopol’zovaniia korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri i Dal’nego Vostoka Rossiiskoi Federatsii.”*
- 9 Demographic estimates are from preliminary returns of the 2002 census, from the republic’s *Goskomstat* of January 1996; and from *Natsional’nyi sostav naseleniia SSSR* (Moscow: Finansy i Statistiki, 1991).
- 10 Laments about closed Sakha-language opposition newspapers changed to cautious optimism when President Nikolaev allowed one (*Sakhaada*) to reopen in 1999, after a protest letter circulated without being published. Sakha Republic (Yakutia) ranked low on a 2000 “media freedom” scale compiled by the Glasnost Defense Fund.
- 11 See Balzer (1997) on the Suktul ethno-territorial project. Data come from the bylaws passed in 1998 by the *Il Tumen* and several interviews with Yukagir leader and linguist Gavril Kurilov.
- 12 This was the opinion of the late democratic politician and human rights activist Galina Starovoitova (personal communication 1989), as well as leaders within the Sakha Republic.

- 13 A. V. Krivoshapkin “Vystuplenie” July 6, 1999 to the X session of the *Il Tumen*, Sakha Republic (Yakutia), ms. given by author.
- 14 A. Marfusaloova explained these cases in response to questions about model ethnic-based *obshchiny*. A contrasting case, in Ust-Maisk *ulus*, illustrated interethnic tensions and active blockage of registration for the collective Belkachi, organized by the Evenki Vladimir I. Abramov. On Evenki reindeer breeding and history, see N. Ssorin-Chaikov (2003).
- 15 They jointly expressed their concerns and obligations to the “population of Sakha Republic (Yakutia)” in April, 1999 (*Obrashchenie glav administratsii ulusov* 1999).
- 16 This may sound like a parody, but the Sakha academic is a friend, who told me the story soon after it happened in 2002.

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