

## The Great Divide: Contested Issues of Post-Soviet Viliui Sakha Land Use

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THE MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THIS ARTICLE is to inform the larger discourse on post-Soviet property rights by discussing the land issues of agropastoralist Viliui Sakha, a Turkic-speaking people of northeastern Russia. I argue that Viliui Sakha are struggling to find a place in the drastically changed post-privatisation context not by accessing land through the official allocations made after state farms were dissolved but by pooling land with kin in their home and adjacent villages. I begin with an overview of Viliui Sakha subsistence and land use from pre-Soviet to Soviet and now to post-Soviet times. I next describe how local actors decided the post-Soviet land allocations of the Elgeei state farm sector when that farm disbanded. I then illustrate with case studies the three central Sakha modes of post-Soviet food production: the private household, the kin-based smaller *baahynai khahaaiystyba* (S.—peasant farming operation)<sup>1</sup> (hereafter *BKh*) and the larger *BKh*. I conclude by explaining how a return to ancestral lands or the sale of land would actually work to disadvantage most inhabitants and that perhaps there is hope in new laws to encourage collective or common property land regimes, depending on how they are translated on a local level.<sup>2</sup>

Two moments come to mind as I reflect on the local land issues of Viliui Sakha villages. The first was on 13 April 1993, when, at 9 a.m., as I sat down to tea with my host family, the Petrovs, the Elgeei village land specialist knocked at our door. He came to speak with Kolya, the Petrov's eldest son, to solicit his help in dividing up the Kuol Elgeen fields, one of the former state farm tracts adjacent to the village centre, into hay allotments for village households. The village administration wanted Kolya to oversee the allotting because 'everyone trusted him'. We reached the Kuol Elgeen fields at 10 a.m. to find a gathering of inhabitants standing ready to stake out their 1.5-hectare claims. Kolya, the land specialist and the household members worked diligently to measure and stake out the plots. I later learned that this was one of the final former state farm areas to be divided up as *pai* (R.—shares) into household allotments for hay to fodder privately and collectively owned cattle and horses. What struck me was the sense of desperation as the inhabitants vied for Kolya's attention to give them the biggest and best plots.

The second moment was a few months later, during the summer haying season, in which I was participating as a fictive member of Kolya's extended family. We had already cut, stacked and secured the hay from the various plots his kin group uses

near the village. In the last few weeks we were working a distant plot that took an hour and a half to reach by motorcycle. When we turned off the main road and passed through the first field, the road led into a wide flat expanse with lush green grasses, at which point Kolya remarked: 'This field should have been ours—it was my great grandfather's but the present administration claims it was going too far back to give it to us and we would have to make do with Kuchukanga. My great grandfather's fields are now used by other locals'. Later I asked him about the lush field and how it could be that some local inhabitants got hold of it when it obviously had ancestral linkages to his family. He explained that the local 'mafia' took all the high quality land that was close to the village and that they had just made the excuse about going too far back. The plot Kolya's family did get, Kuchukanga, was a distant swamp with poor grasses. It seemed incongruous to me how the village authorities could at one moment enlist Kolya's services in dividing up lands adjacent to the village and, at the next, assign his family distant and unproductive hay plots.

I have revisited these two moments many times in the past decade while trying to understand the issues surrounding land resources in relation to the environmental challenges and the transformations of contemporary subsistence survival strategies for post-Soviet Viliui Sakha communities.<sup>3</sup> Viliui Sakha are challenged by land issues, not unlike most rural inhabitants of the former Soviet Union (FSU) who, in the post-Soviet context, have come to rely more and more upon household-level production for their daily subsistence. Recently there has been a groundswell of discussion on property relations among post-Soviet and post-socialist peoples.<sup>4</sup> For aboriginal peoples,<sup>5</sup> who practise reindeer herding, hunting and gathering, post-Soviet land use either still follows the state farm brigade assignments of the Soviet era or has turned to some form of communal or kin-based land tenure system, reminiscent of the pre-Soviet *obshchina*.<sup>6</sup> In other areas where groups practise agriculture and/or sheep, cattle and horse husbandry, inhabitants have either formed independent collectives<sup>7</sup> or divided the local state farm resources into shares for individual households. In most of the post-Soviet collective farming ventures that do continue, the objective is not profit but rather to provide a mean subsistence for their members, often paying in farm products that are only enough to feed their households. In all cases, the only resource not transferred to private hands is land.

#### *Pre-Soviet and Soviet Viliui Sakha land use practices*

Historically, human habitation of the Old World taiga regions, adjacent waterways and coastal areas was dominated by reindeer-herding and foraging cultures, due to the limitations of the high-latitude ecosystem for land cultivation and domestic animal breeding. Tungus (Even and Evenk) and Tumat, who preceded the Sakha as inhabitants of the Viliui regions, subsisted by means of a mixture of reindeer herding and foraging (hunting, gathering and fishing). Sakha, whose Turkic agropastoralist ancestors migrated north along the Lena River from Lake Baikal between 1300 and 1500, were the first to introduce, adapt and maintain an agropastoralist subsistence mode in the sub-arctic ecosystem of Siberia.<sup>8</sup> Sakha social structure was highly stratified, with wealthy Sakha *toions* (S.—elite clan heads) maintaining large herds on extensive pasturelands and hay fields. To use these lands *toions* exercised rights to

keep others off their lands and to pass them on to their kin, and reaped 'rents' from smaller herd owners who used parcels in return for a percentage of hay or animal produce. The rest of the population either worked for these *toions* to earn their household keep or developed a mixed subsistence relying more on the indigenous Tungus strategies of hunting, fishing and foraging.

Beginning in the late 1920s and culminating in the late 1950s, Soviet-era collectivisation transformed the Sakha land use strategy from extensive to centralised. In the early years of collectivisation all inhabitants were either overtly or covertly forced to turn over their land rights and privately owned resources to the collective farm. This was the common pattern across the FSU at that time and dealt particular challenges to the Sakha and other non-Russian non-agriculturist peoples who depended on the extensive use of lands and resources for their subsistence.<sup>9</sup> With the final consolidation efforts of the 1950s, which resulted in the establishment of state farms, all collective resources, including land, were made the property of the state.

The protocol of the 1950s established Elgeei state farm, a consolidation of nearby collective farms covering an area the size of Indiana, to supply the nascent diamond industry and urban centre with meat and milk products. Three decades later the USSR restructured its economy and became linked to global markets. According to Gorbachev's 1987 reforms, collective and state farms were given more freedom to make decisions internally, including engaging in wholesale trade and international business.<sup>10</sup> The diamond industry found cheaper sources of meat and milk from farms located in the more temperate regions of southern Siberia, most commonly Novosibirsk, and put an end to their business with the Elgeei state farm. Although Gorbachev introduced measures to allow farm members to acquire land for independent farming, his focus maintained the centrality of the state and collective farms.<sup>11</sup> Those who endeavoured to farm privately encountered major obstacles. Despite the reforms, collective and state farms continued to decline as wages dropped drastically in 1990 compared with other sectors.

### *The post-Soviet period: dividing the land*

The end of the Soviet period is perhaps most significantly marked by El'tsin's reorganisation of centralised government control, with all that was formerly controlled, monitored and allocated by the central Moscow body 'turned over' to be administered by regional authorities. In the Sakha case this authority was assumed by the Sakha Republic administration, which gained sovereignty and became responsible for all the Republic's internal economic affairs.<sup>12</sup> Several months after the demise of the USSR El'tsin passed major legislation to privatise collective enterprises and farmland.<sup>13</sup> The result was the transformation of the Republic's 178 massive Soviet-period state farms into 4,569 agricultural endeavours, including approximately 100 *gosudarstvennye unitarnye predpriyatiya* (GUP) or state-subsidised agricultural enterprises, 150 collectives, eight agro-farms, four horse farms, two poultry farms, five agro-manufacturing plants and 4,116 *BKh*.<sup>14</sup> It was the acting state farm directors and administrative heads of the various state farms and village centres who were responsible for overseeing these transformation processes.

According to an official Republic-wide protocol,<sup>15</sup> when a state farm disbanded, the

village authorities were to allocate use of the farm's lands to inhabitants according to state norms. First priority was to delegate land to groups of individuals interested in forming a *BKh*, a peasant farming cooperative intended to produce surplus products for local sale. Each *BKh* member was allotted a 10-hectare total consisting of a 1-hectare agricultural field, a 5-hectare hay field and a 4-hectare pasture. The next priority was to designate 10–15% of a village's total hay and pastureland as village reserve lands for emergency use. The remaining land was to be divided equally among private households for subsistence production.

Our point of entry to understand how local decision makers carried out these protocols is in 1992. It was at that moment and soon thereafter that state farm officials determined the access to and allocation of land within all seven branches of the Elgeei state farm. In addition to Elgeei and Kutana, there were five more branches located in the main villages of Kuukei, Sheia, Khoro, Toloon and Kundeie (Fig. 1). At the time of state farm dissolution inhabitants of the seven villages went from being secure in the government-subsidised state farm for their employment, welfare and food products to massive unemployment, shrinking social services and empty shop shelves. Collectives and state farms across Siberia faced a similar fate, but most chose to retain their collective/state farm status if for no other reason than to maintain the expected social services that proved so crucial to their communities.<sup>16</sup>

Although state officials gave local actors the option to remain a collective, each administrative body of the Elgeei state farm's seven branches chose instead to follow a similar path: discontinuing farm work and liquidating the farm assets to their members and local inhabitants over a 1–3 year time span. The process was rapid and, because it resulted in disproportionate allocations favouring administrative officials and their relatives, considered by most to have been corrupt. These local officials transferred state farm resources, including machinery, animals, land allotments and other capital reserves, first to those actively holding upper-level positions in the state farm, ostensibly to form *BKh*, and then divided the remainder among village households. The result was an uneven allocation of resources and land among inhabitants that left many without sufficient resources to generate household-level subsistence.

The following chronology of protocols surrounding the Elgeei state farm's dissolution provides insight into how local officials made these unequal transfers.

*Stage 1.* In 1992 local officials reorganised the Elgeei state farm into the Elgeiisky collective enterprise.<sup>17</sup> This meant that the farm now operated economically independently of state support and was run by a small faction, mostly state farm managers, their relatives and farm specialists. Following this redesignation, the active Elgeei state farm director appointed a committee to reallocate the state farm *pai*, first to the actively employed state farm workers, based on their seniority and rank, many of whom formed *BKh*. After the committee had made these allocations to the active work force they then allocated what was left to the farm's previous employees, contemporary elderly pensioners.

*Stage 2.* On 11 January 1993 the local administrative representatives of all the enterprise's branches agreed to liquidate Elgeiisky and reorganise it into seven new enterprises based in each of the former farm villages. By 9 February 1993 the seven villages had registered a total of ten *TOO* or *tovarishchestva s ograniichennoi*

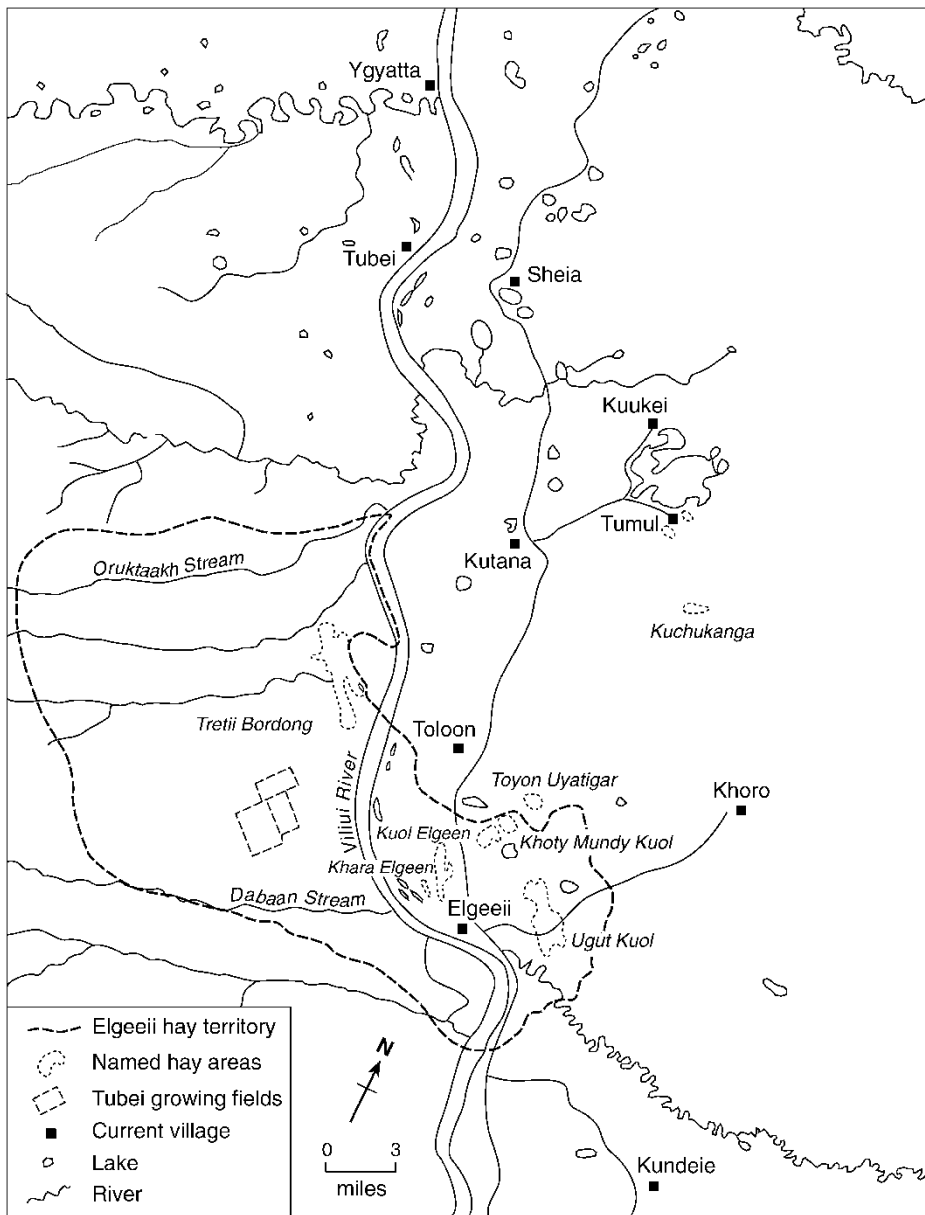


FIGURE 1. FORMER ELGEEI STATE FARM TERRITORY WITH CONTEMPORARY ELGEEI HAY AREAS.

*otvetstvennost'yu* (*TOO*).<sup>18</sup> Although some villages registered two *TOO*, to accommodate the diversity of each company's focus, only one *TOO* was formed in Elgeei village, called Dabaan, which operated for a year. In 1994 the Dabaan *TOO* folded and a committee of 22 members of the *TOO* gathered and decided how to divide the

remaining state farm inventory among themselves. All the land was reallocated to form the Tubei *BKh*.

During these years (1992–94), after land was allocated first to existing state farm employees (most of whom received larger parcels to form *BKh*), then to state farm pensioners, what land was left was divided among cow-keeping households to provide fodder for home food production purposes.

### *Post-Soviet access to land: the three modes*

In Elgeei and Kutana villages in 2000 there were three modes of village-level food production: the private household, the kin-based ‘down-sized’ *BKh* and the large *BKh*, each with a correlating system of land access. Private households are designated a hay allotment (1.5–2 hectares), kin-based *BKh* use the 8-hectare allotments remaining from their original designation as a *BKh*, and large *BKh* use 8-hectare allotments plus larger pasture and agricultural field access. As the cases that follow will show, players within each mode have found ways to adapt their designation of land resources to maximise utility. It also becomes clear that private households often harbour resentment towards kin-based *BKh* due to their inflated land resource.

I begin with a case illustrating the adaptation within the most common of the modes, the private household, then describe how the full-fledged *BKh* operate and finally explore the middle ground or best-of-both-worlds adaptations of a kin-based smaller *BKh*.

### *Private households*

In Elgeei and Kutana, as well as in most rural villages in the Viliui regions, the key to post-Soviet survival is a mode of household-level food production I term ‘cows and kin’, focusing on keeping cows and interdepending with kin households.<sup>19</sup> Access to sufficient hay land is crucial to over-wintering cows for 9 months in the subarctic. Although pre-Soviet Sakha settlements were dispersed across the landscape, allowing households ready access to hay and wild forage resources, in the post-Soviet context Sakha inhabit densely populated village settlements, making access to sufficient land problematic. Households need to constantly negotiate movement out to and back from outlying areas for haying, pasturing and foraging resources.

Issues of scale determine the extent to which a household struggles to gain access to land. As village population increases, per capita hay land area and ease of accessibility decrease. Elgeei’s regional administrative centre, Suntar, has a large and mostly working class population with land only sufficient to provide household yards. Only 10% of Suntar households have cows and most of them rely mainly on access to kin’s hay land in adjacent smaller villages. As a result, in the regional centres, home food production is generally low and households are most dependent on regular salaries.

In the average-size regional villages (population over 1,000 as in Elgeei, Kutana and Sheia) all households receive hay land allotments averaging 1.5–2 hectares. In these villages households are more involved in home food production than in the regional centres and rely on a mixed economy including salaries, subsidies, pensions,

barter, crafts and reciprocity. In villages with a population of 1,000 or less, unemployment is high and households are largely dependent on home food production. Household hay allotments in these villages average about 10 hectares per household, and often more.<sup>20</sup>

In Elgeei, with a population of 3,500 in 2000, land was a highly coveted resource and not available to all. According to official regional protocol, all household heads, whether they own cows or not, qualify for a hay land allotment of 1.5–2 hectares. However, in 2000 only 70% of private households had a land allotment through the village administration. The remaining 30% were either told that they were not natives of Elgeei and so needed to gain access to land through their former village, were not interested in the land available because access to it required a river crossing and extensive travel, or were simply told that there was no land left for them to use.

Even if a private household has an allocation of hay land, annual weather fluctuations determine the productivity of that land. Owing to abnormally wet weather, in the summer of 1999 70% and in 1998 60% of all Elgeei hay land was under water. Of the 70% of households with land through the village administration, 40% could not use their designated plot owing to a series of rainy years (from 1998 to 2001) and the resulting waterlogged fields. The local policy in this instance is for the household head to write a *zayavlenie* to the village land officer to obtain access to hay land in the village reserve. However, in 1999 no household chose this option because reserve lands are poor in quality and access involves a river crossing. In 1998, in an effort to assist households in harvesting enough hay for their herds, the Elgeei village administration allowed anyone to hay on whatever hay land still had harvestable hay on it after 15 August. This effort was discontinued after the first year, officially documented as a ‘change in law’ and unofficially explained by a high volume of local complaints about stealing hay and cutting in areas that were clearly marked as off limits.

How *do* households obtain sufficient hay harvests from insufficient and often unusable hay land allotments to over-winter their herds? Even if a household is able to harvest all the hay from their Elgeei allotment, most cow-keeping households need more hay than they can harvest from a 1.5–2-hectare plot. Many households either intentionally maintained extra hay reserves from one year to the next, bartered, or bought the hay they needed. In a few instances households contracted to use hay land for 1–5 years in one of the smaller adjacent villages. Only 3% of households said they would slaughter if they could not cut sufficient hay. Half of all households depended on the pooling of resources with kin in adjacent villages where hay lands were more plentiful. These households relied on an intricate web of kin networks to garner hay allotments and labour.

#### *Gaining access to hay lands: the case of the Petrovs*

By participating in the Petrov family’s summer hay-harvesting regime I learned first-hand about the intricacies of networking with kin for hay land and labour. The extended Petrov family was made up of an elderly mother, Maria, and father, Ivan, six daughters, four sons, and 23 grandchildren. The parents lived in Elgeei with their eldest son, Kolya (who later became my husband). Next door lived their youngest

son, Makar, with his wife and four children. On the other side of the village lived one of their daughters Jana with her husband, Nikolai, and their four children. Three daughters, Sardana, Toma and Valya, and one son, Stepan, each with their own families, lived in households in the regional centre, Suntar. The youngest daughter, Lana, lived with her mother's sister in Tumul, a small settlement outside Kutana. The remaining son, Alesha, and daughter, Natasha, resided in the capital city of Yakutsk. The aunt raised Alesha, like Lana, but he had moved to the capital to work as a professional jeweler and support his family of four children. Natasha was a single career woman. In Elgeei both the sons' and the daughter's households kept cows. The elderly parents kept cows up until 1992, at which point they gave them to Makar, the son next door, in exchange for daily milk and meat.

The mother and father (Maria and Ivan) had a 2-hectare hay allotment in Toyon Uyatigar, one of the outlying hay land areas (all hay areas are located in Fig. 1). Their oldest son, Kolya, acquired a 2-hectare allotment at Ugut Kuol through his work helping with the *sir tungetige* (S.—division of land). Kolya also appealed to the Khoro village administration, an adjacent village where his parents had lived and worked just prior to their move to work in Elgeei in the late 1950s, for hay land for his parents' and their 10 children's families. From this they received 8 hectares in Kuchukanga, part of their ancestral lands but also the most remote and waterlogged parcel of the ancestral tract and 90 minutes away by motorcycle. As mentioned in the introduction to this article, Kolya had requested the lands that his great grandfather had used, which were easily accessible rich and fertile hay lands, but the Khoro administration argued that that claim went back too far in history for them to honour. The household was also offered hay land in Tretii Bordong but declined this since access required crossing the river and the quality of the hay land was very poor.

The two of the elderly parents' children living in Elgeei with their own households, Makar and Jana, had the standard allotment of 1.5 hectares in Khoty Mundy Kuol and Ugut Kuol respectively. Jana also had 2 hectares in Kuol Elgeen which she received as *pai* for her work as a state farm nurse up until the farm's dissolution in the early 1990s. In total the three Petrov households resident in Elgeei pooled 17 hectares. The hay harvested annually among these three physical households is sufficient for the two cow-keeping households and keeps all three households in meat and milk products.

The only Petrov household in Suntar with cows was Sardana, who kept one milk cow and had a standard 1.5-hectare hay allotment. For 5 years running the land had been continuously waterlogged but, because hay land was so scarce in the regional centre, she continued to pay annual taxes in the hope that the land would either someday be productive or she would be able to exchange it for other land. She was a widow and her second husband was from a region 200 miles away, leaving her household with no kin on the spousal side to access other hay lands or to help with the harvest. She had a well-paid job and used her financial resources to buy hay from year to year. Stepan's household requested hay land in Suntar but was turned down because Stepan's parents were from Khoro. The advice for him in Suntar was to go and ask in Khoro.

*Ejiiy Anya* (S.—'older sister' Anya), the sister of the elderly Petrov mother, lived in a small village 7 kilometres outside Kutana. *Ejiiy Anya* had never married and so,



TABLE 1  
THE PETROV FAMILY HAY LAND ALLOTMENTS AND WORK SCHEMA

Household name	Household residence	Cows	Hay land allotment	Hay work schema <sup>a</sup>
Maria	Elgeei	No	10.0 hectare <sup>b</sup>	
Kolya	Elgeei	No	2.0 hectare	TU, UK, KE, KK, TM
Jana/Nikolai	Elgeei	Yes	3.5 hectare	TU, UK, KE, KK, TM
Sardana	Suntar	Yes	1.5 hectare	KK, TM
Stepan	Suntar	No		ST, KK, TM
Alesha	Yakutsk	No		TM
Toma	Suntar	No		
Natasha	Yakutsk	No		
Valya	Suntar	No		
Makar	Elgeei	Yes	1.5 hectare	TU, UK, KE, KK, TM
Lana/Anyia	Tumul	Yes	2.0 hectare	TM

Notes: <sup>a</sup>TU = Toyon Uyatigar, UK = Ugut Kuol, KE = Kuol Elgeen, KK = Kuchukanga, TM = Tumul, ST = Suntar. <sup>b</sup>This includes the 8-hectare parcel for the family.

when her sister had 13 children (two died in infancy and one in adulthood), she shared the care by raising one son and one daughter, Alesha and Lana.<sup>21</sup> Lana lived with *Ejiiy* Anya full time and helped daily with care of her herd of 15 cows. Alesha lived in the capital city, Yakutsk, and came with his family every year to harvest hay in exchange for a year's supply of cow products. *Ejiiy* Anya won many medals and prizes for her hard work during the collective and state farm periods. Tumul, the small community where she lives, was the centre of the Kihil Kekke *kolkhoz* and later a sector of the Kutana branch of the Elgeei state farm. *Ejiiy* Anya cared for hundreds of calves and helped the sector win the title of 'Hero Farm' for its high levels of meat and milk production. After the farm broke up, *Ejiiy* Anya continued to keep a large private herd. She currently has six milk cows, averages from four to six 2-year-olds and several assorted others to make a total of 15 head in all. To support these cows she has to harvest an average of 30 tons (15 large stacks) of hay annually. *Ejiiy* Anya had a 2-hectare allotment from Kutana and supplements this by renting from the Tumul *BKh* groups. She hand cut their 'bad' land, where the hay grows poorly and/or can be cut only with a hand scythe. She paid her rent through barter by giving either cow products or half of the total hay she cut from their lands. The haying season is a time not only of intense activity but also of intense interaction with kin, near and far. This is evident in the Petrov's extended kin haying system, described below with reference to hay land areas in Fig. 1 and specific data pertaining to household allotments and hay work schemas in Table 1.

On 12 July, the beginning of the haying season, the Elgeei male heads of household,<sup>22</sup> Kolya, Makar and Nikolai, began the daily cutting of their various hay plots in and around Elgeei. A week or so later their brother, Alesha, and his four children passed through Elgeei on their way from Yakutsk to Tumul. Soon after that Stepan arrived from Suntar, after having helped his wife's kin cut their hay, along with Sardana's husband. They helped Kolya, Makar and Nikolai finish the cutting and stacking of hay in and around Elgeei, after which they all went to cut at Kuchukanga.

During this time *Ejiiy* Anya, Lana, Alesha and family were cutting and stacking

*bugullar* (S.–small waist-level high stacks) on the various plots in Tumul. As the days neared the end of August and 1 September (beginning of school) the Elgeei crew finished the haying at Kuchukanga and headed to Tumul. *Ejiiy* Anya had already contracted with one of the Tumul tractor drivers to help for 2 days in making the final stacks. A total of 15 people worked for 2 days from early morning to late at night and made 16 large stacks.

This summer regime of harvesting hay by pooling hay land and labour with their kin, based on household allotments between kin members and across geographical space, represented by the Petrov family's pattern, is characteristic of how the majority of cow-keeping households have adapted in the post-Soviet context to get ample hay for over-wintering their herds. The prevalent land policy, designating each household 1.5 hectares for hay harvesting (enough only to feed one cow) is insufficient since cow-keeping households keep an average of three cows and there is no suitable back-up in years when the hay crop is poor. Nonetheless, private households continue to struggle each hay season to harvest enough hay for their needs.

According to the Republic-wide statistics, private households have 70% of all cattle and pigs and over 50% of all horses and reindeer. The private sector produces about 70% of all meat and 75% of all milk, potatoes and vegetables. However, private households are designated only 18% of available agricultural land.<sup>23</sup> Considering these numbers and the local deficit of hay land for private households, it is understandable that there would be animosities toward the large land holdings of the *BKh*, especially since the majority of *BKh* operate no differently from private households. Before looking at the specific workings of larger and kin-based *BKh* I will describe the formation of *BKh* overall.

### *The BKh*

The objective of forming *BKh* was to produce meat and milk products in excess of members' own needs for sale in local shops to supplement supplies previously available through the state farm system. To these ends *BKh* received larger hay allotments, access to machinery, government subsidies and a 5-year release from taxes. In 2000, after almost a decade of operation, the *BKh* held the majority of the land but produced only for their immediate household and their kin.

In 2000 there were 24 *BKh* operations in Elgeei, most of which began operating in 1993. Only a few sold their products and only to village-level state-run operations. Producing for a common market is problematic. There is little local demand since most inhabitants either have their own cows or work out a barter system with their kin who have cows to supply the meat and milk products for their household. Even if some are in need, the majority of households have no monetary resources to purchase meat and milk products. As a result, the only local market a *BKh* group can produce for is limited to village-level state-subsidised organisations. Four *BKh* hold such contracts, one with the hospital, one with the three village pre-schools, one with the geriatrics' home and one with the Molochnyi-Myasnoi Kombinat. Although *BKh* could gain access to markets beyond the immediate village, in the regional centre, Suntar, or even in the capital city, Yakutsk, the short shelf life of their products and both the high cost and relative lack of transport make these ventures problematic.

Perhaps because of this difficulty in securing markets, many of the original Elgeei *BKh* have contracted in size and now work in smaller groups on a household level, with adjacent kin households. Two of Elgeei's biggest *BKh*, Mechika and Telma, disbanded into smaller units based on immediate kin relations in 1998. After contracting, individual *BKh* members retained their former *BKh* land allotments despite the fact that they no longer produced excess products for village shops. The result is that there are many former *BKh* members with a land allotment of 8 hectares operating exactly like private households who only have 1.5–2 hectares.

In 2000 state policy renamed the smaller kin-based *BKh* '*malye predprinimateli*' (small proprietors), while the larger *BKh*, having eight members and more, remained *BKh*. Despite the name change, they all pay the same taxes and receive state subsidies. In 2000 the tax rate for land was 7.58 rubles per hectare. The rate triples to 22.74 rubles per hectare if a *BKh* rents land.

Elgeei and Kutana each have one 8+ member *BKh*, Tubei and Martinov respectively, and in 2000 none of those members received pay for their work. Their time was compensated with a portion of the *BKh* profit in the form of meat and milk products, similar to the compensation of early Soviet-period collectives. Unlike the early collectives, these contemporary operations provide their members with many additional perks including ample hay for their private household herds, tractor services, firewood and fuel. On top of the monetary value of these perks there is a substantial pay-off in the time and energy saved within these members' households by not having to locate and contract for these subsistence necessities.

Given the worsening economic situation and problems with access to sufficient land for private households, there are obvious advantages to being a *BKh* member. Many contemporary inhabitants regret not having the opportunity to form a *BKh* but most lacked the inputs necessary to do so. Most *BKh* were formed in 1992–93 by active state farm employees who got the most substantial *pai* allotments to form *BKh*. The more recently registered *BKh* are most often the result of the contraction that has taken place, during which some *BKh* chose to change their names and membership.

#### *The case of the Tubei BKh*

The only remaining Elgeei *BKh* that had not contracted to a smaller kin-based *BKh* by 2000 was the Tubei *BKh*, which had 36 members, including 20 active workers and 16 pensioners. In the Soviet period all these members were employed at the Dabaan horse farm located in the Tretii Bordong area of the Elgeei branch of the state farm. As detailed earlier, the Tubei *BKh* was formed after the Dabaan *TOO* folded in 1994.<sup>24</sup> Their collective *pai* included all the buildings, animals and land of the Dabaan farm, six tractors, two jeeps, one three-axle truck and a sawmill.

Prior to the 1999 November slaughter the Tubei *BKh* had 154 head of cattle, including 54 milkers, and 275 horses, including 150 productive mares (120 of which were foaling), 25 stallions and 100 yearlings up for slaughter. All of the cattle, officially registered as the Tubei herd, were held at the *BKh* members' private homes in Elgeei. The farm at Tretii Bordong was exclusively for Sakha horse breeding and the recent addition of a sector for Sakha aboriginal cattle.

The practice of Viliui Sakha horse breeding is highly seasonal, with horses grazing

year-round in the open field and without a daily milking regime. To monitor the 275 horses Tubei had five full-time *sylgyhyts* (horse watchers) living at the Tretii Bordong farm year-round. There were two periods of intensive work. All Tubei members spent summers at Tretii Bordong cutting hay, the majority of which was used for members' cows since horses need only a minimal supplement in late winter. Another period of intensive work, and which brings in the annual profit for the *BKh*, is the late November slaughter of yearlings. During the rest of the year Tubei members worked from their homes in Elgeei in various facets of *BKh* operation, bringing hay in to the village from Tretii Bordong, harvesting and transporting firewood, and working at the *BKh* facilities within Elgeei village.

The amount of annual 'pay' each member got was dependent on how much *pai* a member had to start with and the profits for that year. When the state farm broke up each member got between two and four mares as their *pai*. On average, each member took one yearling for their private household's use and gave one to the collective, which it then sold in Suntar markets.<sup>25</sup> These monies were used to pay the *BKh* overheads, including 9,171 rubles in rent for 403.3 hectares and the taxes on the *BKh* allotted land. Although not a source of income, most Tubei members felt that the many other perks they received via their affiliation with Elgeei's remaining large *BKh*, including priority for credit, preference for newly arriving equipment, excess fuel stores and extensive agricultural land, made it worth remaining affiliated.

In an effort to generate wages for its members, in 1999 the Tubei *BKh* directors took on two projects to diversify their operations. One involved taking part in a government programme to bring back the cattle indigenous to the Sakha Republic. During the Soviet period Sakha aboriginal cattle populations had plummeted from 494,000 in 1928 to 40 in 1989, largely due to the Soviet-period preference for European cattle breeds, especially Simmental, favoured for their high milk and meat production. Although the native breed was discounted during the Soviet period, in the post-Soviet context Sakha aboriginal cattle have been re-evaluated for their resilient features contributing to contemporary utility. The government began a breeding programme in the Eveno-Bytantaisky district of the Sakha Republic in 1989. Ten years later there were three farms in different microclimates of the Republic and the numbers of Sakha cattle were reaching 1,000.

To add an incentive to begin breeding programmes to preserve the genetic stock of Sakha aboriginal cattle, the government offered compensation at a rate of 1,500 rubles per head annually. In 1999 the Suntar *ulus* (S.-region) began a Sakha aboriginal cattle-breeding programme in the Tretii Bordong area under the auspices of the Tubei *BKh*. Sakha cows were flown into the Suntar regional airport on 16 January 1999 and transported to Tretii Bordong the next day.<sup>26</sup>

Two of the Tubei *BKh* members began living at Tretii Bordong full-time to watch the herd of 20 Sakha aboriginal cattle. By spring 2000 the Tubei Sakha aboriginal cattle breeding operation or Tubei *plemennoe khozyaistvo* was annually receiving 2,000 rubles per Sakha cow, or a total of 40,000 rubles a year. These monies pay selected salaries and the overheads for raising the cattle. The operation also received supplemental monies from the Suntar *ulus*, the legal owner of the cattle.

The second project to diversify Tubei *BKh* was the 1998 redesignation of the Tretii Bordong area as an *osobaya okhranyaemaya territoriya*. This status enclosed all

56,000 hectares located between the Dabaan and the Oruktaakh streams (Fig. 1), an area that represents what several described as an oasis: 'The land within this territory is largely cut off from other land areas with its border to the east by the Viliui river, and to the south and north by the Dabaan and Oruktaakh streams respectively. The areas immediately to the west are sparsely populated'. These geographical features made the area ideal for maintaining the genetic purity of the Sakha aboriginal cattle breeding activities.

However, most local inhabitants considered Tubei's efforts to redesignate the area as means to gain an exclusive licence to exploit the hunting resources in Tretii Bordong. It is hard to deny the truth of these assertions after visiting Tubei *BKh* households and witnessing the abundance, relative to other households, of wild food resources consumed. Tubei *BKh* officials argue that they have legal licences for all their hunting pursuits, including a *kultovoi* licence (a licence permitting taking of wild animals for immediate use when working in the woods and fields) and a bear licence. They maintain their right to cut hay on the reserve lands provided their tractors do not damage the earth. Locals insist that owing to the close ties between the *BKh* and the regional government and the Republic-wide Ministry of Ecology, their own needs take precedence over the ethic of conservation and protection. It may be an ominous sign that the *BKh* hired one of their own members to enforce control of the area. On a more optimistic tone, it may be possible that the reserve could become a successful common property management system.

Although these two projects were initiated to diversify and make sustainable the Tubei *BKh*, in reality they only advantage the *BKh* directors, the workers who care for the cattle and those who police the reserve lands. This leaves about 30 members continuing to live on lesser perks—hay, wood and one yearling's worth of meat. When asked, all Tubei members confided that they received no monetary gains but nevertheless continued their *BKh* affiliation in order to have hay for their household's and kin households' cows and a horse-worth of meat annually, which they used for household consumption and to barter for needed goods.

In contemporary times most of the larger *BKh* are fraught with similar problems, including uncertain employment and benefit status among members, internal struggles with labour resources (i.e. many members not pulling their weight), and with not making a profit from marketing their products. They also do not use their land base efficiently. It is for these reasons that most consider household-level production the most sustainable mode. The former director of the Elgeei state farm, Alexander Petrov (no relation), explained:

*Ketekh* (S.-private) households cut small amounts of hay land and do a good and thorough job of using the land well. The *BKh* have large land tracts and manage them poorly. For example, the Tubei *BKh* cut an area half the size of Ugut Kuol (approximately 350 hectares) in 1 or 2 days and then it rained the next 2 days rendering the hay useless. Small is better. Now people have more time and concern for their hay and the use of their resources. I worked as *sovkhos* director from 1986 to 1990 and all the time my main activity was agitating people to get up and work—and now I see that their apathy was due to the lack of ownership of their own production. The household-level focus is better. People have ownership over their own production and so they care, are productive, and use their resources efficiently.

Kin-based *BKh* operate more like private households than the larger *BKh*. In the next section I will illustrate what is different about them, mostly relating to their larger land base, and draw out the issues surrounding their contemporary status.

*Kin-based BKh: the best of both worlds?*

In 2000 in Elgeei there were 23 *BKh* with fewer than eight members, here referred to as 'kin-based' *BKh*. Although the majority began in the early 1990s with the objective of higher production to supply local markets, today most operate no differently from private households with a significantly larger land base. Like private households, they depend on a mixed economy of salaries, subsidies, pensions, barter and reciprocal exchanges. Unlike private households, *BKh* members are, from the state's perspective, considered employed and fully qualifying for a pension. In many ways, their existence represents the best of both worlds, enjoying a larger land base and qualifying for pensions but not burdened with a high membership that needs to be compensated.

Of the 23, at least one of these kin-based *BKh* relies solely on market production and, because of the lack of local markets, their life is a daily struggle to find buyers for their goods. Vara and Sergei are commercial producers whose sole source of income is from the sale of vegetables, flowers and animal products. They keep six milk cows and two mares, annually slaughtering two or three cows and one or two yearlings, which supplies meat for their household with plenty left over to sell and use in barter and gifts. They also send a leg to each of their children who are students in the capital city, Yakutsk.

Sergei heads and is the sole remaining member of Emis, one of the village *BKh* operations, which provides their household with access to all the land they need for commercial production. Between Vara and Sergei they have 35 hectares of land: Sergei received 25 hectares in Tretii Bordong through his *BKh* affiliation and Vara received 10 hectares in Toloon and areas adjacent to Elgeei as state farm *pai*. A lot of their success in supporting themselves is because Vara worked at the state farm greenhouse up to the day the farm dissolved and is a prize-winning gardener. Their big cash crops are tomatoes, cucumbers and potatoes. In summer 1999 they harvested 140 sacks of potatoes from the various plots of land they use through their *BKh* allocation. They cut an annual average of 40 tons or 20 stacks of hay and give eight stacks to various kin who help in the haying process. This leaves them with 12 stacks, which is ample to over-winter their herd of six milk cows, each with a newborn, and five or six cattle.

Both of them are open about their reasons for registering as a *BKh* in the early 1990s; as Sergei commented: 'We're in it for the land, lots of land—that is the only good of it'. In recent years they have been reassessing the situation: 'It is so much paper work and taxes—so much bureaucracy—if they change the law so private farmers can qualify for pensions (like *BKh* farmers do now)—I am going to change to private'. If they do this, they will still retain their extensive land rights.

As with private households, interdependence and reciprocity with kin are central to Vara and Sergei's success. Vara's household's kin in the village consist of Vara's two brothers and her aunt and family. Sergei is from a central region with no kin in the

TABLE 2  
VARA'S HOUSEHOLD'S 1999 HAYING ACTIVITIES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Work hours</i>	<i>Location, for whom, and type of work</i>	<i>Number of workers</i>	<i>Who worked</i>	<i>Method of compensation</i>
17–22 July	250	Ugut Kuol, for kin, tractor cutting, raking, stacking	5	Male head, two brothers and two elder kin	$\frac{1}{2}$ hay = 5 tons
23–28 July	300	Elgeen, for kin, tractor cutting, raking, stacking	5	Male head, two brothers and two elder kin	None
2–22 August	600	Tretii Bordong, for selves, tractor cutting, raking, stacking	3	Male head and two brothers	$\frac{1}{2}$ hay
7–9 August	120	Tretii Bordong, for selves, tractor cutting, raking, stacking	4	Male and female head and two brothers	$\frac{1}{2}$ hay
10 August	40	Tretii Bordong, for selves, tractor cutting, raking, stacking	4	Male head, two brothers and one kin from other village	$\frac{1}{2}$ hay
16 August	50	Tretii Bordong, for selves, raking, preparation for stacking	5	Male and female head, two brothers and one kin from other village	$\frac{1}{2}$ hay
22 August	40	Tretii Bordong, for selves, finished haying, return home	4	Male head, two brothers and one kin from other village	4 tons to kin who helped, 12 tons for selves
Total hours	1,175				

Elgeei area. The Nikolaevs, Vara's aunt's household, are elderly cow-keepers who depend on Vara's household for hay land access, tractor help and minimal hay labour and on the two brothers for hay labour in exchange for an annual supply of meat and milk. The elderly Nikolaevs keep three milk cows and split all the products three ways among their household and the two nephews. This hay team works the elderly couple's allotted fields, consisting of 4 hectares on the outskirts of the village, after which they join up with Sergei to help on his hay lands. Sergei does all their hauling with his tractor and also shares some of the hay his larger hay allotment produces.

After finishing the harvesting of the Nikolaevs' plots, Sergei and the brothers head to his 25 hectares of hay land in Tretii Bordong for the final 3-week period of cutting. In the last 3 years kin have also come from a distant village called Kempendiai, since their allotted hay fields have been flooded. Vara comes to help hay for a few days in-between a heavy schedule of berry foraging. Table 2 charts their 1999 hay work. In total they cut 21 tons or 11 stacks of hay and invested 1,175 work hours. This totals 107 work hours for each cow and new calf or 2 tons of hay harvested.

Although Sergei has a tractor and uses it freely in the summer months, they bring most of their hay in during the winter months, which requires much more experience

TABLE 3  
VARA'S HOUSEHOLD'S 1999 WINTER HAY HAULING ACTIVITIES

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of hay stacks</i>	<i>For whose household</i>	<i>By Sergei with whose help</i>	<i>Compensation for that help</i>
17 December	1	Selves	one experienced tractor driver	Fresh vegetables including 2 kg beets, 2 kg carrots and 2 kg cabbage
21 December	2	Selves	one experienced tractor driver	200 rubles and a full tank of fuel
25 December	2	Kempendiai kin	one experienced tractor driver	200 rubles
3–4 February	4	Selves	one experienced tractor driver	2 sacks of potatoes
12 February	3	Kempendiai kin	one experienced tractor driver	300 rubles

and skill. For this they 'hired' an experienced tractor driver, whom Sergei accompanied, to haul hay from Tretii Bordong. Table 3 details the trips and the compensation paid.

The working of Vara and Sergei's operations also brings to light the lack of community support found in contemporary villages. In late February Vara and Sergei hired a man to come and move their haystack 10 metres to improve access to their backyard. As pay the man wanted vodka, so Vara gave the man 40 rubles since she had no vodka on hand. She commented: 'Now everyone wants vodka for everything they do; we could easily have helped each other—but he had to get vodka ... so I do a lot of things myself that I would normally ask men to help me with—like haul the ice myself and the soil for the greenhouses'. Despite such hardships, Vara and Sergei, unlike the majority of kin-based *BKh*, manage to generate an income sufficient to fully support their household.

#### *The three modes in sum*

Sakha land issues are in a state of flux. If what has happened in the last decade in Elgeei is representative, characterised by original *BKh* having contracted to resemble private household operations with many considering going private, and the remaining big *BKh* teetering on the brink of contraction, there is reason to argue that the time of the *BKh* may be coming to an end. The original policy in support of *BKh* initiatives, which designated them as collective-type operations that produced a surplus for sale in local village markets, has not been (and never was) realised. This is due not only to the lack of demand for those products in villages where households have moved towards their own production and operate largely outside a cash economy



but also to the universal lack of trust in working with others outside kin and former colleague networks.

Also, private households overwhelmingly resent kin-based *BKh*, because they operate in all ways like private households but enjoy a significantly larger land parcel.<sup>27</sup> In both Elgeei and Kutana, as well as in most rural settings in the Viliui regions, private household production versus *BKh* is a major point of contention for most villagers and is directly related to the unequal division of land. No private household is amply provided for by the prevalent land policy, designating each household 1.5 hectares for hay harvesting. In the first place, the size of the allotment produces at most enough to over-winter one cow. This is little, considering that cow-keeping households keep an average of three animals. Secondly, there is no suitable back-up in years of a poor hay crop. As a result most private households are forced to seek hay land resources in adjacent villages and via their nearby kin networks.

### *The question of ancestral rights*

Like the Petrov family clan, the overwhelming majority of Elgeei and Kutana kin groups know the location of their ancestral lands. The question then becomes: what is preventing the reallocation of those lands to their original users? There are many issues that make this seemingly obvious answer to the land dispute an impossible one. To begin with, distance is a major problem. As many as 90% of Elgeei and 55% of Kutana kin groups currently live 15 kilometres or more from their ancestral lands. Similarly, many of these parcels were abandoned during the early years of collectivisation and would take substantial work to bring them back to productive hay fields. If the parcels are not overgrown, it means they are actively being used, and the problem of negotiating to find a settlement with current owners (who got that parcel as their *pai*) would be extremely complicated.

These issues aside, what point of reference do inhabitants have for their ancestral lands? In both villages 18% reported that they were actively using their ancestral lands and 9% reported that their kin used the land. Half of all inhabitants in both villages complained that they could not use their ancestral land because other locals had been given it as *pai*. When asked how they would use it if they had the opportunity to recover it, half commented that they would take it since they needed the hay land, one-quarter said they could not use it because it was too far away and 10% said they would not take it because it was not fit for use. Another 10% said they would take it regardless of distance or quality because the lands their ancestors used drew them. Only 3% said they would go to live there.

Returning to pre-Soviet home sites was a popular conversation piece following the dissolution of the state farm but many now realise they are not prepared for the reality of such a move. One household in Elgeei attempted to do so. They researched and located their ancestral home site, built a small cabin and moved there. They explained that they returned after a year because *abaahi* (S.—bad spirits) were living at the site and frequented their cabin over the winter months, which they took as a sign to return to the village. Sceptical villagers interpret this as an excuse, commenting that no one in contemporary times was prepared to live without the conveniences of electricity,

refrigeration, television and a community base. In sum, ancestral rights to land promoted by village inhabitants as one answer to the land problem in rural Sakha villages would result in further disadvantages for the majority of residents.

*The second village factor: an argument to return to smaller settlements?*

Perhaps there are creative solutions to the land issue if we compare the contemporary trends in Elgeei with Kutana. According to 2000 research results, Kutana households are wealthier, with 20% more households keeping cows than in Elgeei and an average of one more cow per household. This difference is directly related to the fact that Kutana households, although subject to the same 1.5 hectare hay land quota, have closer and more abundant access to hay lands in even smaller adjacent settlements. Additionally, Kutana family clans are more local than in Elgeei and so there is more interdependence among kin groups, which is essential to pooling hay land and other subsistence resources.

The most sustainable (in terms of households being able to produce enough to subsist) models of the cows-and-kin system are in the smaller settlements where there is not only sufficient land available to support a herd that supplies household needs but also more intact kin networks that are essential in providing the labour to harvest the substantial amounts of hay needed. For these reasons many Elgeei inhabitants consider Tretii Bordong as a potential area for half of the Elgeei village to relocate. After all, from the early 1950s to its demise in the late 1970s it was a thriving farm complex with two village centres. Many contemporary elders recall both the vibrancy of the community there and the remorse felt by the majority of inhabitants when the protocol arrived to close the villages and relocate to Elgeei proper. What are the obstacles now? There would have to be some way to settle with Tubei *BKh*, which currently uses most of the Tretii Bordong area, and there would have to be sufficient resources and subsidies to actually relocate and support a population in Tretii Bordong until the settlement could hold its own.

*Conclusion*

In the post-privatisation context rural Viliui Sakha maintain three modes of subsistence production, the private household level, kin-based *BKh* and larger *BKh*. The majority of Viliui Sakha are involved in private household-level food production and are challenged to find sufficient land to support their agropastoralist subsistence. Like that April 1993 morning when Kolya was called to divide land parcels, most inhabitants are pushed to desperation in search of land to support their families and kin. Currently larger *BKh* are failing, mostly because of their inability to generate sufficient income for their large memberships and the lack of work incentive that results. Kin-based *BKh* are, for the most part, prospering but face strong opposition from private households owing to their inflated land resources. Private households negotiate constantly to support their subsistence production by pooling their hay land, labour and other necessary resources within their kin groups.

How can the land be allotted more equitably? A return to pre-Soviet lands, in the case of Kolya, regaining rights to his great grandfather's lush pastures, at first appears

an equitable option. But settlement patterns are no longer extensive as in pre-Soviet times and re-establishing ancestral land rights would work only to favour those with ancestral tracts adjacent to their home village. Similarly, privatising land would also work in favour of a few, those wealthy enough to purchase land. There needs to be a more equitable redistribution plan for land that ensures convenient access and equal lot sizes for all inhabitants. It does not appear that such an equitable allocation will evolve on the local level, given the dynamics of land access described in the cases above. One hope is that new laws could address the inequities in land allocation by resorting to a collective or common property regime system. However, even if such policies are introduced, the determining factor will be how local actors follow through or disregard such nascent policies.

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign words are either Sakha (S.) or Russian (R.) as noted accordingly.

<sup>2</sup> In late July 2002 Russian President Vladimir Putin signed into law a bill on the sale and purchase of agricultural land. This new land code establishes private ownership of agricultural land and regulates relations arising from the ownership, use and disposal of these lands, their purchase and sale as well as share in the right to common property.

<sup>3</sup> See Susan Crate, 'Cows, Kin and Capitalism: The Cultural Ecology of Viliui Sakha in the Post-Socialist Era', Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2001; Susan Crate, 'Silent Spring in Siberia: The Plight of the Sakha', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 20, 4, 1997, pp. 14–16; Susan Crate, *Kwek Teen (Green Spirit)* (Yakutsk, Bichik Press, 1995); Susan Crate, 'Environmental Problems in Sakha, Siberia', *Surviving Together*, 13, 4, 1995, pp. 17–19.

<sup>4</sup> See Gail Fondahl *et al.*, 'Native "Land Claims," Russian Style', *The Canadian Geographer*, 45, 4, 2001, pp. 545–561; Gail Fondahl, *Gaining Ground? Evenks, Land and Reform in Southeastern Siberia* (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1995); Patty A. Gray, 'The Obshchina in Chukotka: Land, Property and Local Autonomy', *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Papers*, Working Paper 29, 2001; Chris Hann, 'Not the Horse We Wanted! The Demise of Cooperative Property in Tazlar', *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Papers*, Working Paper 26, 2001; Gail Osherenko, 'Indigenous Rights in Russia: Is Title to Land Essential for Cultural Survival?', *The Georgetown International Environmental Law Review*, XIII, 3, 2001, pp. 695–734; Katherine Verdery, 'Fuzzy Property: Rights, Power, and Identity in Transylvania's Decollectivization', in Chris Hann, Caroline Humphrey & Katherine Verdery (eds), *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 53–81; John P. Ziker, 'Assigned Territories, Family/Clan Holdings, and Common-Pool Resources in the Taimyr Autonomous Regions, Northern Russia', *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Papers*, Working Paper 32, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term 'aboriginal' like Fondahl *et al.* to refer to the 'numerically small peoples of the North', a legally distinct sub-set of indigenous people who, owing to their status, can qualify for communal use lands. In the Sakha Republic, Sakha, although not 'aboriginal' according to this description, can also apply for aboriginal lands for use as a commune (Fondahl *et al.*, 'Native "Land Claims"...', p. 552).

<sup>6</sup> See Fondahl *et al.*, 'Native "Land Claims" ...'; Fondahl, *Gaining Ground? ...*; Gray, 'The Obshchina...'; Osherenko, 'Indigenous Rights ...'; and Ziker, 'Assigned Territories ...'.

<sup>7</sup> See Chris Hann, 'Foreword', in Susan Bridger & Francis Pine (eds), *Surviving Post-Socialism: Local Strategies and Regional Responses in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (London, Routledge, 1997); Caroline Humphrey, *Marx Went Away—But Karl Stayed Behind* (Ann Arbor,

University of Michigan Press, 1998); Katalin Kovacs, 'The Transition in Hungarian Agriculture: 1990–1993', in R. Abraham (ed.), *After Socialism: Land Reform and Social Change in Eastern Europe* (Providence, Berghahn Books, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> There is only one other case in the world of cow-keeping in a sub-arctic climate and they have long vanished; see Thomas McGovern, 'Cows, Harp Seals, and Churchbells: Adaptation and Extinction in Norse Greenland', *Human Ecology*, 8, 3, 1980, pp. 245–275.

<sup>9</sup> See David Anderson, *Identity and Ecology in Arctic Siberia: The Number One Reindeer Brigade* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000); Marjorie Mandelstam Balzer, *The Tenacity of Ethnicity: A Siberian Saga in Global Perspective* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999); Fondahl, *Gaining Ground?*; Andrei V. Golonev & Gail Osherenko, *Siberian Survival: The Nenets and Their Story* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1999); Bruce Grant, *In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995); Humphrey, *Max Went Away*; John P. Ziker, *Peoples of the Tundra: Northern Siberians in the Post-Communist Transition* (Prospect Heights, Waveland Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> See Stephen K. Wegren, *Agriculture and the State in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> Under Gorbachev the most important document on land use in the USSR was the 'Fundamentals of Land Legislation' (February 1990), which indicated that USSR citizens could lease land for peasant farming (no ownership). After December 1990 Russian legislation allowed members of state and collective farms (and their families) to leave the farm and granted them a land plot free of charge from the parent farm. But Gorbachev continued to hold out against private property and to maintain the state and collective farm structure; see Wegren, *Agriculture and the State ...*, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> See John Tichotsky, *Russia's Diamond Colony: The Republic of Sakha* (Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> For an invaluable primer on privatisation see Wegren, *Agriculture and the State ...*

<sup>14</sup> These numbers are on a Republic-wide level.

<sup>15</sup> Described to me by both the former director of the Elgeei state farm, Alexander Petrov, and the director of the Sakha Land Committee, I. O. Pakhomov.

<sup>16</sup> See Cynthia J. Buckley, 'Back to the Collective: Production and Consumption on a Siberian Collective Farm', in Stephen Kotkin & David Wolff (eds), *Rediscovering Russia in Asia: Siberia and the Russian Far East* (Armonk, M. E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 224–229.

<sup>17</sup> In accordance with the 29 April 1992 central resolution of the representatives of the Elgeei state farm and of the 1 June 1992 order of the Sakha Republic Minister of Agriculture 'On the decentralisation and reorganisation of the Ordena Lenina state farm Elgeei into the Ordena Lenina collective enterprise Elgeiiskiy'

<sup>18</sup> These details are enumerated in archival documents: Suntar Regional Archive (SRA), f. 33, op. 1, 'Introduction and historical chronology to *fond* 33 of the Elgeei SKh'.

<sup>19</sup> For an extensive explanation of 'cows-and-kin' see Crate, 'Cows, Kin and Capitalism ...'.

<sup>20</sup> Many households in nearby Khoro have 30 hectares.

<sup>21</sup> Sharing the care of children and even giving children to relatives who are unable to have their own is a common tradition of Sakha. These 'adopted' children also are help for the new parents who need hands tending the herds, hauling and chopping wood and all the other subsistence chores.

<sup>22</sup> The actually scythe cutting of the hay is traditionally and currently a male-dominated task as it is considered most labour-intensive. My experience was not so—I found the scything to be relaxing as opposed to the raking and stacking, the traditional females' hay work.

<sup>23</sup> This figure is based on the fact that private households are allocated 1.5 hectares and *Bkh* members 8 hectares.

<sup>24</sup> They also changed the name Dabaan to Tubei, the original Sakha name for the Tretii Bordong area, meaning 'a thick primaevial forest, usually by a river'.

<sup>25</sup> Tubei *BKh* members do not have a good relationship with the director of the wholesale meat operation in Elgeei, the MMK, so they usually sell their horsemeat in Suntar.

<sup>26</sup> Inhabitants still reminisce about how one of the cows escaped while being transferred from the aeroplane. It was found the next day and in perfect condition after being out all night in  $-50^{\circ}\text{C}$  conditions. It was one of two pregnant cows and had a strong and healthy calf that spring.

<sup>27</sup> Private households also strongly disfavour absentee hay land holders. Although the Elgeei village hay land official denied that this went on, I learned through household surveys that there were at least ten cases of absentee hay landlords in Elgeei, mostly former communist bureaucrats, who have resettled in Yakutsk or Suntar and retain the hay lands in Elgeei, either 'renting' their allotment to locals in exchange for meat or allowing local kin to use their land. One absentee landlord lives in Yakutsk and lets a resident Elgeei household use his hayland in exchange for one leg of meat. He pays taxes equal to less than US \$1 on the land and receives rental payment equaling the value of US \$100.