

**MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY
WORKING PAPERS**



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

Working Paper No.38

BRIAN DONAHOE

**“HEY, YOU! GET
OFFA MY TAIGA!”
COMPARING THE
SENSE OF PROPERTY
RIGHTS AMONG THE
TOFA AND TOZHU-
TYVA**

Halle / Saale 2002
ISSN 1615-4568

Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, P.O. Box 110351,
06017 Halle / Saale, Phone: +49 (0)345 2927-0, Fax: +49 (0)345 2927-402,
<http://www.eth.mpg.de>, e-mail: workingpaper@eth.mpg.de

“Hey, You! Get Offa My Taiga!” Comparing the Sense of Property Rights Among the Tofa and Tozhu-Tyva¹

Brian Donahoe²

Abstract

The Tozhu-Tyva and Tofa peoples of southern Siberia are closely related ethnically, linguistically, historically, geographically, and in their “traditional” economic activities (reindeer herding and hunting and gathering). However, they have long been divided by administrative boundaries and by a superimposed system of ethnic categorization, which have led to drastic differences in their senses of property rights.

The Tofa have a much longer history of interaction with Russians than the Tozhu-Tyva, beginning in 1648. Centuries of encroachment pushed the Tofa higher and deeper into the Eastern Sayan mountains, forcing them to redraw the boundaries of their ever-shrinking *rodovye taigi* (clan hunting grounds). Then in 1927, when the Tofa first received special attention as one of the USSR’s “Small Numbered Minorities of the North,” the federal government set aside a territory of 27,000 km² for the Tofa. As part of the collectivization and sedentarization campaigns, all clan hunting grounds were declared state property and divided up into small hunting tracts. Many of the newly settled Tofa abandoned reindeer herding. Reindeer lost their cultural significance, and reindeer herding as a way of life lost its prestige. With the collapse of the USSR and the dissolution of the collective institutions, these hunting tracts have been reassigned, in many cases to non-Tofa families who came in with the establishment of the collective farms. Many Tofa now find themselves without taigas on which to make a living. This is leading to a tense situation characterized by undercurrents of ethnic resentment, as ever more people try to get a piece of a limited taiga.

¹ Originally prepared for the Conference “Family Organisation, Inheritance and Property Rights in Transition: Comparative historical and anthropological perspectives in Eurasia,” sponsored by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle, Germany, 5-9 December, 2001. Revised April 2002. Research leading to this paper was conducted in 1999-2000 with the support of a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship, and in 2000-2001 within the framework of the Altai-Sayan Language and Ethnography Project, funded by the Volkswagen-Stiftung’s Initiative for the Documentation of Endangered Languages (DoBeS). I gratefully acknowledge the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology for providing a generous visiting fellowship and stimulating atmosphere in Fall 2001, during which time the first draft of this paper was written. I’d also like to thank Drs. Lale Yalcin-Heckmann and John Ziker for their careful readings of and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

² Department of Anthropology, Indiana University, Student Building 130, Bloomington, IN 47405; Project Anthropologist, Altai-Sayan Language and Ethnography Project; e-mail: bdonahoe@indiana.edu

This situation is striking in contrast to the sense of property just across the border in the Tozhu province of the Republic of Tyva. Prior to being incorporated into the USSR in 1944, the Tozhu-Tyva people had minimal contact with and influence from Russians. Non-exclusivity is still the salient feature of Tozhu-Tyvas' sense of property today.

In this paper I will discuss the institution of *rodovye taigi* (clan hunting grounds) among the Tofa. I will draw comparisons between the Tofa people and the Tozhu-Tyva people regarding senses of property rights, suggesting that one of the principal reasons for the differences is degree of contact with and influence from Russia and Russians. I also suggest that these differences have in part been responsible for the Tozhu-Tyva people's retaining their native language and traditional way of life, while the Tofa have lost theirs.

Introduction

The Tozhu-Tyva and Tofa peoples of southern Siberia are closely related ethnically, linguistically, historically, geographically, and in their principal economic activities (reindeer herding and hunting and gathering). However, they have long been divided by administrative boundaries and by a superimposed system of ethnic categorization, which have led to drastic differences in their present-day circumstances in general and their sense of property rights in particular.

Starting in 1926, when they first received special attention as one of the USSR's "Small Numbered Minorities of the North,"³ the Tofa, like virtually all the nomadic herding and hunting peoples of the USSR, were subjected to massive and thorough social engineering programs such as collectivization and sedentarization. Ostensibly geared toward their social and economic development, the underlying goal was to "proletarianise" the nomadic hunters and herders and bring them more firmly under the control of the centralized Soviet state (Forsyth 1992: 291). Part of this effort was the formal codification of the previously customarily recognized institution of *rodovye taigi*, or clan hunting grounds. This, as well as pressure from encroaching Russian and Buryat hunters and trappers, led to a sense of exclusive access to hunting grounds and the natural resources on them that is striking in its

³ The Tofa, then known as the Karagassy, were one of 26 indigenous minorities designated as *Malye Narodnosti* (Small Peoples) by the "Provisional Statute on the Administration of the Indigenous Peoples and Tribes of the Northern Extremes of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic," 25 October, 1926. This designation was later changed to *Malochislennyye Narody* (Small-Numbered Peoples).

contrast to the sense of property just across the border in the Tozhu District of the Republic of Tyva.⁴ The Republic of Tyva was not incorporated into the USSR until 1944, and the Tozhu-Tyva have just recently been recognized as one of the Russian Federation’s “Small Numbered Minorities of the North.” They never were completely sedentarized, and have never had such exclusive rights to land, nor any real sense of exclusive property rights. In addition, the Tozhu-Tyva still engage in reindeer herding and still all speak Tyvan as their first language (although the Tozhu dialect appears to be on the wane). The Tofa have virtually completely abandoned reindeer herding and have almost completely lost their indigenous language.

In this paper I will discuss the institution of *rodovye taigi* (clan hunting grounds) among the Tofa and how it has changed. I will address the changes in the allocation of *rodovye taigi* that occurred with Soviet-era collectivization and sedentarization, and changes that have occurred since the collapse of the formal institutions of collectivization, as people scramble to reassert their rights to their clan territories. I will draw comparisons between the Tofa people and the Tozhu-Tyva people regarding sense of property rights, suggesting that one of the principal reasons for these differences is degree of contact with and influence from Russia and Russians. I also suggest that these differences have contributed to the Tozhu-Tyva people’s greater retention of their reindeer-herding way of life, while the Tofa have almost completely lost theirs.

The Tofa

The Tofa are a Turkic-language ethnic group in southwestern Irkutsk oblast’, with a population of 731 according to the 1989 census. In earlier literature they were referred to as the Karagas, and since the 1930s they have been more commonly referred to as the Tofalar.⁵

⁴ Tyva is more commonly transliterated as Tuva, which reflects the Russian pronunciation and spelling. I’ve chosen to transliterate it directly from the Tyvan as “Tyva,” with the “y” representing a high, unrounded back vowel (“ы” in Cyrillic, “u” in standard IPA, and “ɣ” in turcological convention). Likewise, I’ve chosen to refer to the people as “Tyva people,” which is a direct translation of the Tyvan “Tyva kizhi,” and is more satisfying to me than the more common “Tuvan” or “Tuvinian.”

⁵ Singular, *Tofa*. The *-lar* is a suffix marking the plural form in the Tofa language, as it is in all Turkic languages. However, in most Russian-language sources, the Tofa are referred to as *Tofalar* (singular), and *Tofalary* (the *-y* forming the plural in Russian). The Tofa are one of several closely related Turkic-language groups in the Altai-Sayan region with ethnonyms that are variations on the same name, including the *Tuba* (*Tubalar*) in the Altai Republic, the *Tyva* (*pl. Tyvalar*, also known as *Tuva*, *Tuvan*, and *Tuvinian* in English and *Tuvinets*, *Tuvinsti* in Russian) in the Republic of Tyva (Tuva), and the *Tuha* (*Tuhalar*, also known as *Dukha*, *Dukhalar*, or *Tsaatan* in Mongolian) in northwestern Mongolia.

Historically, their economy was based principally on hunting, and reindeer were raised to provide transportation, milk, and other necessary products.

The Tofa have a much longer history of interaction with Russians than the Tozhu-Tyva, beginning in 1648. According to B.E. Petri, who produced a series of excellent ethnographic studies on the Tofa (whom he refers to as Karagas) in the 1920s and 1930s, even prior to the arrival of Russians, the Tofa had been squeezed by other encroaching indigenous groups onto a fairly well defined, 49,000 km² area of heavily forested mountains in the Eastern Sayan range. This territory was subdivided along mountain ridges separating major watersheds into 5 unofficial but customarily recognized *rodovye taigi*⁶ (clan territories) (see Map 1). Within each clan, these territories were further divided up among lineages.⁷ One old informant told Petri, “Long ago it was, I do not remember how many generations (*kolen*) ago. The Karagas gathered all the people together at the *Suglan*⁸ and divided among them the taiga. Each clan received its own share, each household its own river” (Petri 1927: 21).⁹ Generally, the relatives of a single lineage hunted together (Petri 1927: 25; see also Mel’nikova 1994: 45). Rights to these hunting grounds were passed down through inheritance along the male line in a straight line of descent. The hunting territories were exclusive and inalienable. Petri notes that if, in a clan made up of several lineages, one lineage were to die out completely leaving no direct male heirs, then that lineage’s hunting grounds would not be divided up among the remaining lineages, but would pass on to the nearest relative from a different lineage but within the same clan. “Under no circumstances will the territory be divided up generally

⁶ Singular: *rodovaya taiga*. *Rodovaya* is the adjectival form of the Russian noun *rod*, meaning family, clan, kin. *Taiga* is a Turkic-language term that has been incorporated into Russian and refers generally to the heavily forested hilly and mountainous areas of Siberia. However, in both the Tofa and Tyva languages, it also often refers to a specific hill or mountain or cluster of hills or mountains, and often forms part of the toponyms of specific mountains, such as *Ödügen Taiga* or *Möngün Taiga*.

⁷ Here I’m translating the Russian term *familiya* as lineage.

⁸ The *suglan* was an annual gathering of all the clan leaders and as many other people as could make it. It occurred in late December. The principal business at the *suglan* was the election of a new *shulenge*, a sort of chief for all the Tofa, and new *ulug bash* or *darga* (boss) for each clan. In addition, punishments that had been kept track of all year were meted out, marriages were agreed upon, and “Affairs concerning all clans (questions regarding migrations, arguments over borders of hunting grounds, interrelationships among clans and their representatives) were decided” (Sergeev 1956: 534-535). See also Petri 1926.

⁹ In this quote, I’m translating the Russian term *khozyain* as household. However, Petri later states that “Each Karagas clan breaks down into separate lineages [*familii (aimak)*]. Clan territories are divided up only among lineages. Within such lineages there is no further division of territory among individual households, and all brothers, cousins, uncles, etc., hunt together.” (Petri 1927: 25). Thus there appears to be a contradiction between what this informant has told Petri and what Petri later asserts. I am inclined to go with Petri’s assessment, i.e., that the clan grounds were not divided up any beyond lineages, as this seems consistent with what my informants told me. However, it’s possible that there was an informal assignation of stream valleys to each household within the lineage, which would explain Petri’s informant’s comment. In addition, the line between household and lineage is often blurred, both in people’s minds and in the anthropological literature.

among the remaining lineages. In general changes in the hunting grounds among the Karagas are not known” (Petri 1927: 25).¹⁰

Centuries of encroachment into their territory by Russian, Ukrainian, and Buryat hunters, trappers, and gold miners pushed the Tofa ever higher and deeper into the mountainous taiga of the Eastern Sayans, forcing them to redraw the boundaries of their ever-shrinking *rodovye taigi*. In addition, the Tofa fled into the Sayan Mountains to escape the heavy burden of *yasak* (tax, or duty, in the form of sable pelts). But the Tsar’s forces pursued and managed to track them down anyway.

But the free life of the Tofa did not last long. People of the White Tsar came into the mountains and tracked down the small peoples. So it came to pass that the Tofa once again were forced to pay *yasak*, heavy, like a stone around the neck of a drowning man, and never-ending, like the Sayan taiga. But there was no place further to which they could flee, and thus the Tofa have remained forever in the Sayans. (Mel’nikova 1994: 42, citing V. Rasputin 1966).

Despite the relentless erosion of their territory and the seemingly strict division of property that resulted from it, Petri and other researchers noted that historically if one lineage’s hunting grounds were not productive in a given year, customary law of the Karagas (Tofa) dictated that all they had to do was request permission to hunt on someone else’s territory. This permission was almost always granted. Permission was not needed to fish on someone else’s territory (Petri 1927: 25).

But by the beginning of the 20th century, clan affiliation, while still important for marriage restrictions and other administrative reasons, had almost completely lost its significance with regards to territorial divisions and the distribution of hunting grounds (Petri 1927: 3, 14). This dynamic has been noted among other Siberian groups as well, including the Evenki (Fondahl 1998: 48-49) and others (Slezkine 1994: 173-174; Forsyth 1992: 296ff.).¹¹ Petri attributes this change to three factors. One was the competition for pelts resulting from the influx of Russian

¹⁰ Petri’s assertion here is most likely an overstatement of the stability of the clan territories, probably based on statements of informants who recollected the cultural norms of the past more accurately than actual behavior.

¹¹ It has been suggested to me that the fact of nomadic herding camps being composed of members of different clans is so common the world over that the concept of prior-existing “clan territories,” in which only members of a single clan lived, may simply be a historic invention (John Ziker, personal communication). Anderson’s (2000: 154) discussion of the artificially constructed nature of the national territories could be seen as support for this view, albeit at the scale of the entire ethnic group rather than of the clan.

and Buryat hunters and trappers, and the ensuing collapse in the population of fur-bearing animals, particularly in the eastern section of Tofalaria. This led some Tofa families to abandon their ancestral clan hunting grounds and go in search of new and more productive hunting grounds to the west, where Russians had not yet deeply penetrated (Petri 1927: 3-4). This factor was to a degree offset by an opposing west-to-east movement of Tofa families who wanted to be nearer newly established trading posts in the eastern section of Tofalaria. Finally, Petri notes that poverty, measured in lack of sufficient deer to migrate regularly, forced some families to remain in the same area year round, thus violating the seasonally variable clan and lineage-based boundaries (Petri 1927: 25-26). Thus territorial group membership changed annually, depending on different families' priorities, as those in search of better hunting moved west, those in search of satisfying certain consumer demands moved east toward trading centers, and those with insufficient numbers of deer tended to remain in one place, whether it happened to be their *rodovaya taiga* or not (Petri 1927: 4).

These pressures caused a general upheaval in the ages-old system of distribution of hunting territories. In response, new hunting regulations were established, and a new, late-summer *suglan* was instituted specifically to address the issue of annual redistribution of hunting grounds, no longer on the basis of clan and lineage affiliations (Sergeev 1956: 534; Petri 1927: 27-28). Petri summarizes, "Thus, from the former ownership-in-perpetuity the Karagas have moved to an annual redivision of their hunting grounds" (Petri 1927: 27-28).

Yet another development further depleted the land resources the Tofa could rely on. In 1915, in response to the collapse of the sable population in Eastern Sayan region, the 500,000-hectare Karagas Sable Preserve was established (see Map 2). This territory, which was in effect the entire southwestern part of present-day Tofalaria, was "completely withdrawn from the use of the local inhabitants and declared 'zakaznoi,' [given over to the sole control and possession of the state]" (Mel'nikova 1994: 206-207). At that time, five Tofa families lived, migrated, hunted and herded more than 500 deer on that territory.

In the early years of the newly formed USSR, the influx of Russian, Ukrainian, and Buryat newcomers into Tofa territory was even more overwhelming than it had been previously. Trappers came in and in some cases even ran Tofa off their ancestral hunting grounds. For Tofa with winter hunting grounds along the Gutara river in western Tofalaria, it was especially difficult to resist, as the newcomers had leases to fishing rights on the river. "In this way, the Gutara river and neighboring rivers came to be divided up among renters. When winter fell, the Karagas made their way to their ancestral hunting grounds. As they reached

their hunting grounds, Karagas . . . ran into new settlers, who did not allow them to hunt, saying, ‘Go – I rent here,’ and to prove the truth of their words, they would show a piece of paper” (Petri 1927: 27-28).

As the new Soviet regime began to survey all within its purview, there arose an increasing awareness of the plight of the indigenous minorities within the Soviet territory, and an interest in defining and protecting them (see Hirsch 1997; Anderson 2000, esp. ch. 4). This led to the creation of the Committee for the Assistance to the Peoples of the Northern Borderlands (also known as the Committee of the North) in 1924 (Slezkine 1994: 152; Forsyth 1992, ch. 12-13), and to enormous resources being poured into anthropological and ethnographic investigations to define these populations, and measures to protect their lifestyles. One of these projects – an expedition to the land of the Tofa in 1925 – was led by Bernhard Eduardovich Petri.

Partly as a result of Petri’s efforts, the Tofa were recognized as one of the USSR’s original “Small Numbered Minorities of the North” (see note 3 above). Petri, noting not only the decline in the game population upon which the Tofa depended, but also the degradation of Tofa culture that was rapidly occurring as a result of contact with Russian traders, who fostered a dependence on alcohol among the Tofa by trading alcohol for pelts at exchange rates very disadvantageous to the unsophisticated Tofa, suggested the official mapping out of a territory for the Tofa, as far as possible from the negative influence of exploitative Russian traders. This approach was consistent with efforts of the Committee of the North in other areas of Siberia and the Russian Far East, and with the concept of delineating regions of native administration as outlined in the 1926 act, “Provisional Regulations for the Administration of Native Peoples and Tribes of the Northern Extremes of the RSFSR”¹² (Kryazhkov 1999: 26-32). The territory suggested by Petri, meticulously mapped out on the basis of long and intensive fieldwork, and with great participation from the Tofa, covered 27,000 km² (see Map 2). Petri noted that this was only 56% of the 49,000 km² historically attributed to the Tofa. However, it is an area larger than the Tofa themselves had suggested, and given the small population of Tofa (416 at time of Petri’s writing), he felt that this area was large enough for the Tofa to thrive on. On September 10, 1927, the Soviet government agreed and created the Central Sayano-Karagas Enterprise to organize the hunting and other economic activities of the Tofa. The government likewise undertook the eviction of

¹² “*Vremennoe polozhenie ob upravlenii tuzemnykh narodnostej i plemen severnykh okrain RSFSR*,” 25 October, 1926. See Anderson 2000, ch.7 for a cogent discussion of the concept and formation of national territories; cf. Fondahl 1998: 53-57 to see how this played out in the Evenki case.

“parasitic”¹³ elements, and organized the protection of the territory from poachers (Sergeev 1956: 535-536). In 1930 this territory became the “Karagasskij Tuzemnyj Soviet” (Karagas Indigenous Council), which in 1934 became the “Tofalarskij Natsional’nyj Soviet” (Tofa National Council),¹⁴ and in 1939 the “Tofalarskij Natsional’nyj Raion” (Tofa National District), also called Tofalaria (Sherkhunaev 1978: 7).¹⁵

Meanwhile, the new Soviet government embarked on massive social engineering programs: collectivization of all property and settlement of the “nomadic” and “wandering” populations. Nowhere was this pursued more enthusiastically and with greater success than in Tofalaria. The entire Tofa population was settled in three villages between 1928 and 1932. Yuri Slezkine in *Arctic Mirrors*, his history of the indigenous minorities of the Russian North, notes that “the case of the Tofalar (the only northern group that had been subjected to wholesale forced settlement) was presented as an outstanding success story” of early Soviet collectivization and sedentarization policies (Slezkine 1994: 279). All clan hunting and grazing grounds were declared state property and carved up into separate, small hunting grounds, controlled by the three newly formed *kolkhozes* (collective farms).

The new system of land use in Tofalaria followed the pattern imposed by the Soviet administration throughout much of Siberia (cf. Ziker 2002a, 2002b; Fondahl 1998). Taigas directly adjacent to the villages were considered communal grounds and were used mostly by women and children for purposes of gathering berries, mushrooms, and medicinal plants. Russians involved with running the *kolkhozes* and other village operations were granted rights to hunt on certain taigas. The remaining hunting grounds were assigned to members of the *kolkhozes* on a family-by-family basis rather than on a clan or lineage basis. In many cases, these territories were the same taigas that these families had always hunted on, and the hunting grounds of related families remained adjacent to one another, effectively keeping

¹³ The original Russian uses the term *netrudovye*, which literally means, “not engaged in labor,” but in the ideologically imbued rhetoric of Soviet literature, this term carries connotations of parasitism.

¹⁴ Around 1930 the Karagas started being referred to as the Tofalar (Mel’nikova 1994: 22). While I haven’t found an explanation for this in the literature, I suggest that Karagas was a clan name, probably *Kara Khash*, analogous to two extant clan names among the Tofa, *Saryg Khash* and *Khash*. Alternatively, Vainshtein (cited in Dolgikh 1960: 259), noted the common ending in the ethnonyms *Karagasy* and *Tochigasy* (the name he suggests Tozhu derives from) and the fact that in the original Samoyedic language of the Tofa, the word *kasa* meant “man” or “person.” In either case, I suggest that it was a single clan name that in earlier literature became generalized to refer to the entire ethnic group, who may or may not have had a sense of themselves as a single ethnic group. *Tofa* is closer to the ethnonym that the Tofa use to refer to themselves, hence is more appropriate than the externally imposed ethnonym, Karagas. In addition, *Tofa* is a variant of the ethnonym *Tyva*. (In my experience, the Tofa in fact refer to themselves as *Tyva*, and refer to the Tozhu-Tyva just across the border as *Choodu* (which is another Tofa clan name), and the people of southern Tyva as *Soyot*.)

¹⁵ Tofalaria as an official administrative unit was abolished in 1951 and folded into the Nizhneudinskij Raion (District), but it is still referred to as Tofalaria by locals.

some lineage territories intact. Nonetheless, the Tofa were compelled to stop referring to the territories as *rodovye taigi*, or as “my taiga” (*miim taigam* in Tofa, *moya taiga* in Russian), terms which implied a sense of private property contrary to the socialist Soviet ideology. Somewhat paradoxically, however, the very imposition of socialist collectivization and the land-use dynamics it gave rise to – the formal delineation of these tracts on a family basis, the pressure to meet the kolkhozes’ quotas of sable and squirrel pelts, the strictness with which the newcomer Russians guarded their territories, and the logic of private property such an exclusive sense of access rights was founded upon – replaced the formerly flexible understanding of access to resources and led to a *de facto* sense of exclusive private property hitherto unknown among the Tofa.

For many of the newly settled Tofa, reindeer herding, with its extensive range requirements and demand for seasonal migrations, was no longer feasible under the conditions of a settled way of life. They abandoned reindeer herding and began to rely exclusively on hunting and gathering on their newly allotted tracts, using reindeer maintained by the collective farm only as a means of transportation during the fall sable and squirrel hunting season. Mel’nikova, noting the Soviet-imposed transition from reindeer herding as an integral and central aspect of daily life to simply raising reindeer for transport purposes, claims that

Beginning with programs to settle the nomadic population, the state machine very quickly destroyed the very basis of household economy that had arisen historically, giving nothing in return. . . .

As a result there arose a strange, perverted economic situation, in which the settled population had to engage in a form of economic activity that demanded a nomadic way of life (hunting and reindeer herding). By the middle of the 1960s, the adult male and female indigenous population spent the winter period hunting, and only a small number of people (herders and calf-raisers [*pastukhi, telyatniki*]) tended the reindeer herds, for a miserly payment. (Mel’nikova 1994: 278-79).

Reindeer, turned into a community transportation service, lost their cultural significance, and reindeer herding as a way of life lost its prestige. While images of reindeer and reindeer

herding are pervasive in the Tofa community's present-day efforts at cultural revitalization,¹⁶ the fact remains that reindeer and reindeer herding are no longer vital, active, and integral facets of the Tofa people's way of life. Today, there is only one full-time reindeer herder left in all of Tofalaria, and he told me he would jump at the chance to quit herding if there were any other employment opportunities at all.

With the onset of World War II, many young Tofa men were sent to the front, some of them never to return (Mel'nikova 1994: 235-237). This left a number of taigas without a rightful occupier. These taigas were reassigned, in most cases to Russians and other newcomers, further decreasing the amount of land the Tofa had to hunt and make a living from. The following figures illustrate the demographic shift in favor of Russians: In 1931, of a total population in Tofalaria of 551, approximately 420 (76%) were Tofa, and the remaining 131 (24%) were non-Tofa, predominantly Russian (Mel'nikova 1994: 36, 231). By 1970, the population in Tofalaria had increased to 1368, of whom 498 (36%) were Tofa, and 809 (59%) were Russian (Sherkhunaev 1975: 23). However, during Soviet times, this demographic shift and the consequent transference of taiga rights to Russians and other non-Tofa was not such a problem, as virtually all able-bodied adults were employed in some capacity or another by the *kolkhoz* (collective farm), so if someone did not have a taiga, they could get by on their salary.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the subsequent collapse of the *koopzverpromkhoz* (state hunting enterprise), the land that had come to be officially considered state property was redistributed in the form of hunting tracts which the Tofa are once again referring to as *nasha rodovaya taiga* ("our clan hunting grounds"). In many cases, the rights to these tracts have been given to the families who had been hunting on them for centuries on the basis of historically and customarily recognized prior occupation. However, much has changed over the course of the past century. Clan affiliations have broken down; individual Tofa families have moved away from their historically recognized clan territories; many non-Tofa families who came in with the establishment of the *kolkhozes* and their associated villages are staking their own claims to hunting tracts. In addition, many of the tracts no longer had a clear rightful heir, and others tracts were unoccupied and considered

¹⁶ The cover of the Tofa language primer for gradeschoolers, published in 1989, has a drawing of a schoolboy and schoolgirl in their Soviet school uniforms, standing next to a saddled reindeer (Rassadin and Shibkeev 1989); a book of Tofa legends, stories and songs likewise has a picture of a reindeer on its cover (Rassadin 1996); and the emblem of the recently reinvigorated Tofa summer cultural festival, *Argamchy*, also features a reindeer.

part of the common pool. These have also been doled out, more often than not to Russians.¹⁷ One young Russian boy, eager to show his knowledge of which taigas were whose, followed the Uda River on our map rattling off the names of the taiga occupiers. Of 14 contiguous, demarcated hunting grounds along the Uda River, only one was occupied by a Tofa family. The rest were Russian.

Many Tofa now find themselves without paid work and without taigas of their own. Not having one's own taiga in these uncertain times means dire poverty in Tofalaria, where, according to preliminary survey results, the main source of income for 60% of Tofa is from the taiga (predominantly selling pelts, antlers, and musk glands) and 100% of respondents said they gather berries, pine nuts, mushrooms, and medicinal plants for their own use. As one informant said, "You can't survive here without your own taiga." Those who do not have their own taigas cobble together a precarious existence, either relying on the goodwill and generosity of relatives and friends to be able to have a place to hunt and gather, thus potentially straining relationships and creating new tensions; or simply limiting themselves to the overexploited common pool areas immediately surrounding the villages, further degrading that natural resource base.

The importance of the *rodovaya taiga* to the Tofa people was driven home to me in two incidents I encountered during my first fieldtrip to Tofalaria in November 2000. The first and most dramatic demonstration came during an interview with an elderly Tofa woman living in a small village near the regional capital of Nizhneudinsk. In response to a question about her children, she hesitantly told us that she had had one son. After a thoughtful pause she explained that the taiga her son had grown up using had been her stepfather's taiga. When the stepfather died, no one used the taiga for a while. Then she married and had the son. The boy and his father (a Russian with no taiga of his own) hunted on the taiga. But then the brothers of the deceased stepfather lost the land they had always hunted on (in fact it had been within Tofalaria before, but with the redrawing of maps, no longer was within the official borders of Tofalaria), and laid claim to the land as the rightful heirs (closest relatives in male line). When the son returned from the army and found out that he no longer had a taiga to hunt on, he went up to the old family taiga, and shot himself.

¹⁷ This situation resembles what Fondahl terms the "socialist land enclosure" with regards to the Evenki (Fondahl 1998: 72), and has been noted also among the Nenets (Golovnev and Osherenko 1999: 117). It is interesting in contrast to the dynamic observed by Ziker among the Dolgan and Nganasan of the Taimyr Autonomous Region, where previously assigned exclusive hunting grounds are being transformed into common pool resources, thus increasing the area of commonly held territory and decreasing the area of exclusive usufruct (2002b)

The second instance occurred during our first field visit to Alygdzher, the largest Tofa village. I had enlisted the help of a local woman to administer a survey. She returned one evening and handed me a batch of completed surveys. From the middle of one fell a handwritten note, touching in its hopefulness, trustfulness, and naiveté. Briefly, it said that the family's hunting grounds had been taken away from them and given to a wealthy "newcomer" (Russian) businessman (*kommersant*). The tract in question was not ever part of this family's "clan" grounds (they had moved to Alygdzher from another area), but had been given to her brother after the collapse of the *promkhoz* (state hunting enterprise) for his years of good service to the *promkhoz*. Her brother died suddenly, leaving no heirs. Now her son, who lives in the regional capital, Irkutsk, but can find no work there, wants to come back to the village to make his living off this taiga, which they feel entitled to rightfully inherit. The newly established land commission agreed to give the son a different tract in exchange for the disputed tract, but, according to the petitioner, this tract is not very productive. She said she wanted to appeal to the United Nations, but did not know how.¹⁸

Further fieldwork uncovered yet more incidents, including the burning down of cabins on contested taigas. One informant, discussing the conflict he was having with another claimant to his taiga, said in a voice wavering on the verge of tears, "I'm afraid it's reached the point where we're ready to take up arms. But that can't lead to any good." While this particular incident was between two Tofa claimants, in many other cases this tension is characterized by undercurrents of ethnic resentment. The Tofa say the Russians are rapacious and greedy, overexploit the taiga, have no customary rights to it anyway, and that it would be better if they were not there. The Russians say the Tofa are lazy drunks who do not deserve their own taigas because they do not put in the necessary work to make the most of the resources on their taiga, relying on the dole to get by and spending all they get on alcohol.

The demographic and economic pictures indicate that the situation will get worse before it gets better. Dubbing it a "population explosion without the explosion," researcher V.P. Krivonogov (1998) noted that, after centuries of relative stability (hovering around 450), the Tofa population began to grow rather quickly in the 1960s. Since the 1960s, the number of mixed marriages has increased rapidly, leading to an increase in the number of *metis*, or mixed, children. In the 1970s and 1980s, 90% of all newborns were *metis*, and of these, 90% were officially registered as "Tofa" in their passports. In 1995, there were 158 children under

¹⁸ Further investigation into this particular case indicates that the plaintiff's claims are probably unfounded.

the age of 10 in Tofalaria. Of these, 134 were *metis*, and of these, 95.5% are registered as Tofa (Krivonogov 1998: 55) (partly in order to be entitled to hunting grounds and other privileges accorded the Small-Numbered Minorities of the North). Another factor is the lack of out-migration from Tofalaria. Of the five “small-numbered” minorities that Krivonogov investigated, the Tofa were least likely to have any desire of leaving Tofalaria, with upwards of 90% saying they have no intention or desire to leave. Krivonogov notes that one would expect the severe unemployment in Tofalaria to be an incentive for people to want to move out in search of work. On the contrary, it seems to keep people in Tofalaria. Very few people receive any kind of higher education or special training, so they lack the skills and training necessary to compete for jobs. In addition, most do not have relatives or any means of support outside of Tofalaria. At least in Tofalaria, they can always make ends meet, supplementing meager government subsidies by hunting, fishing, and gathering.

In fact, there may even be a net in-migration into Tofalaria, as many young Tofa women who leave Tofalaria end up marrying Russian (or other non-Tofa nationality) men, and then move back to Tofalaria to live off the taiga. In many cases, these Tofa women have no claim to a taiga, yet promise their Russian husbands that they can get one and then come back and try to get one. Several people I interviewed mentioned this as one of the main sources of tension.

All of this is leading to a very tense situation, as ever more people try to get a piece of a limited taiga. As one informant noted, “The taiga isn’t made of rubber. It can’t stretch.” At present, disputes are referred to a regional Commission for the Allocation of Hunting Territories, based in the village of Alygdzher. This commission is composed of 11 members. The *de facto* chairman of the commission is the former manager of the state hunting enterprise and currently the representative of the gold mining operation that bought out the state hunting enterprise and now runs its own private hunting enterprise.¹⁹ The commission settles disputes on the basis of a number of criteria, including traditional inheritance rights and historical occupation of certain lands (one of the oldest men in the village is on the commission exclusively to consult on matters of historical occupation of certain tracts). A newcomer with no inheritance rights can apply to the commission for a hunting tract, but at present there are no unoccupied tracts. A hunting tract can be taken away from someone if he does not use it for a period of time or if he does not supply enough pelts to the hunting enterprise. I heard

¹⁹ This is, in fact, the same Russian “newcomer” and businessman who currently occupies the disputed rodovaya taiga discussed in the previous section.

contradictory explanations of females' inheritance rights: One commission member told me his daughter (who is only 10 years old now) would have the right to take over his taiga if her future husband did not have his own taiga. Another commission member stated categorically that "We don't allocate *rodovaya taiga* to women."

The Tozhu-Tyva

The sense of exclusive access to hunting grounds in Tofalaria and the conflicts it is provoking is striking in its contrast to the sense of property just across the border in the Tozhu District of the Republic of Tyva. A historical note is in order here: Prior to 1727, the territory of the Eastern Sayan mountains encompassing both present-day Tofalaria and the Tozhu District of Tyva was entirely within the borders of the Russian Empire. However, in 1727 the Russian and Chinese empires signed a series of treaties establishing the border between the two empires.²⁰ Part of this boundary runs along the peaks of the Eastern Sayan mountains that divide the Tofa from the Tozhu. The Tofa fell on the Russian side of this boundary, while the Tozhu-Tyva came under the administrative control of the Manchu Ching Dynasty. This is perhaps the only reason the Tofa as an ethnic group have been distinguished from the Tozhu-Tyva (Serdobov 1971: 163). This border (and very rugged terrain) effectively prevented Russian encroachment into Tozhu territory. Then from 1921-1944, Tyva was nominally an independent state. Thus, prior to being incorporated into the USSR in 1944, the Tozhu-Tyva had had little contact with and influence from Russians, especially when compared to the Tofa.

Like the Tofa, the Tozhu-Tyva traditionally recognized clan-based territories. And like the Tofa, the clan basis for territorial division eroded over time. Vainshtein notes that, while the administrative divisions in the Tozhu region reflected the old clan territories, in fact by the beginning of the 20th c. the herder-hunters no longer divided themselves along clan lines. Nomadic herding camps became mixed, containing members from different clans (Vainshtein 1961: 37; Vainshtein 1959: 83). "According to older hunter-herders, their grandfathers hunted sable only within their own clan territories. Already by the turn of the century (19th-20th c), this custom was no longer being observed" (Vainshtein 1961: 43). While almost all Tozhu-

²⁰ The main agreements were the *Burinskij Traktat ob Opredelenii Granits Mezhdu Rossiej i Kitaem* (The Burinskij Treaty on the Delineation of the Border Between Russia and China), 20 August, 1727 (Dubrovskij 1995: 47-50), and the Treaty of Kiakhta of 21 October, 1727 (Dmytryshyn, Crownheart-Vaughn, and Vaughn 1988: 70-78), with additional amendments and minor changes.

Tyvans could (and still can) tell you which clan they belong to and where the land of their ancestors is, the salient feature of their sense of property is non-exclusivity. This comes out in writing about the Tozhu-Tyva from the turn of the century through Vainshtein's definitive monologue (1961), all of which note the openness and flexibility of access to resources on a given land. For example, Skabeev (1925) notes that while only members of a certain clan have the right to hunt sable within their territory, the prevailing custom was to allow members of other clans to hunt on one's territory if, for any reason, their own hunting grounds were short of sable. Vainshtein likewise notes that the practice of hunting on a different clan's territory was so widespread that it gave rise to the custom of *uzha*, in which the member of the foreign clan is supposed to give the highly valued rump (*uzha*) of the slain animal to members of clan on whose territory he hunted.²¹ He cites one Tozhu informant as saying that at the beginning of the 20th century, one hunter lodged a complaint against another, not because the latter had hunted and killed an animal on the territory of the former, but because he did not observe the custom of *uzha* (Vainshtein 1959: 85).

During Soviet times the Tozhu-Tyva people's experience with collectivization and sedentarization was significantly different from the Tofa people's, a fact that further contributes to the differences in their present-day attitudes toward property. During the early years of collectivization, when Tyva was nominally an independent state very much under the influence of the Soviet Union (1921-1944),²² the nascent government of the *Tangdy-Tyva Ulus Respublika* (Tangdy-Tyva People's Republic, later shortened to the *Tyva Arat Respublika*, the Tyva People's Republic, or TAR for short) tried to force a rapid transition from a nomadic way of life to a sedentarized one, much as was occurring in the Soviet Union. While many Tyva people welcomed the advances in education, medical care, and access to goods that came along with sedentarization and collectivization, many others resisted in a number of ways: shamans and other community leaders incited reindeer herders to resist collectivization (Mendüme 1984: 160); many reindeer herders hid parts of their herds in remote and inaccessible areas, thereby managing to underreport the number of head of livestock; others slaughtered livestock to avoid having to give them over to the state; finally, several Tozhu families fled to Mongolia to escape the forced collectivization.

²¹ Analogous customs have existed in almost all north Eurasian cultures (see Fondahl 1998: 32 and Forsyth 1992: 50 on the custom of *nimat* among the Evenki and other Tungusic peoples; Ziker 2002a and 2002b on the "Law of the Tundra" among the Dolgan and Nganasan).

²² From 1921-1944 Tyva was an independent state, recognized by the Soviet Union and Mongolia.

The government of Tyva recognized its mistake. Whereas among the Tofa, collectivization and sedentarization were externally imposed without due consideration of the role of the nomadic lifestyle, with disastrous results to the culture of the Tofa (as noted by Mel'nikova above), in Tyva generally and Tozhu in particular, the tempo of collectivization and sedentarization was slowed in recognition of the importance of the nomadic lifestyle to the economic and cultural vitality of Tyva (Grebnyev 1955: 28-31; Mollerov 1991: 55-58). This was due in part to simple demographics: in the 1930s there were some 90,000 Tyva people (among them approximately 2500 Tozhu-Tyva) compared to approximately 450 Tofa, so collectivization and sedentarization were much larger projects. But perhaps more important was the fact that the government of the Tyva People's Republic was made up predominantly of indigenous Tyvas who were more sensitive to the needs of their countrymen. As Mollerov noted, "Collectivization was realized on the basis of the workers who led a nomadic lifestyle" (Mollerov 1991: 57).

But once Tyva was assimilated into the USSR (1944), the pace of sedentarization and collectivization picked up. In 1949 the Tozhu-Tyva were, like the Tofa, collectivized into *kolkhozy* (collective farms), and many, but not all, were settled into villages that were built to serve as the administrative centers of the collective farms. Collectivization and sedentarization were considered almost complete in Tyva by 1955.

Among the Tozhu, however, what it meant to be settled was interpreted more liberally than in Tofalaria, where the Tofa truly were completely settled in villages. For example, while all Tozhu reindeer-herding families had been assigned to a *kolkhoz* and given houses in villages (hence were considered settled), many continued to nomadize with their reindeer (now officially considered the collective property of the *kolkhoz*), reflecting a recognition that nomadism was still an integral part of the production system. The fact that even now some 30 Tozhu families still nomadize with their reindeer herds may explain to some degree the differences between the Tofa and Tozhu with regards to their senses of property. The extensive grazing needs of the deer and the vagaries of weather and the natural resource base (mainly pasturage and wild game) demand flexibility in access to these resources and militate against exclusivity. In addition, there are several other reasons for these differences in sense of property: Tozhu is larger than Tofalaria (44,000 km² as compared to 27,000 km²)²³, and while there are more people in Tozhu (app. 7000) and hence a higher population density (1

²³ This figure doesn't include the 500,000 hectare (5000 km²) sable preserve (*zakaznik*) in the southwestern corner of Tofalaria, where people are forbidden to hunt.

person per 6.3 km²) as compared to a total population of approximately 1100 in Tofalaria (1 person per 24.5 km²), the proportion of Russians and other “newcomers” in Tozhu is smaller than in Tofalaria (20% and 40% respectively),²⁴ hence interethnic competition for and conflicts over resources with Russians and others is much less pronounced, and their influence on the understanding of property rights is likewise much weaker. Finally, the inhabitants of Tozhu District are on the whole less dependent on the taiga for their survival. The fact that the Tyva people (of whom the Tozhu-Tyva are a subset) make up the majority of the population of Tyva and are politically more powerful than any other ethnic group within Tyva allows for greater diversity of employment opportunities for indigenous Tyva people within Tyva. Tyva people have always controlled Tyva administratively, and schools, hospitals, etc., are predominantly Tyva-administered and staffed. During TAR times and later during Soviet times, young people who decided not to make a living off the land could get an education and pursue professions in state sectors such as local or regional administration, education, medicine, and law enforcement. In doing so, they became less dependent on the taiga, thus were more willing to relinquish any claims to land and resources they might have had, thereby reducing competition for these resources.²⁵ Such opportunities have historically been virtually non-existent for the Tofa.

Following the breakup of the USSR, the state farm system went into steep decline in the early 1990s and was officially abandoned in the Tozhu District in 1996. The responses of the herder-hunters to the institutional void left by the collapse of the state farm system fall into three categories, each of which has implications for property relations: 1) legally sanctioned, state-affiliated, kin-based communities (*törel bölükteri* in Tyvan, *rodovye obshchiny* in Russian); 2) officially and legally sanctioned private landholdings (*arat azhyl-agyi* in Tyvan,

²⁴ The population of Tofalaria is approximately 1100, of whom about 60% are officially registered as Tofa (however see p.8 above on children of mixed marriages) and 40% Russian and other non-Tofa peoples. However, my fieldwork was carried out in the largest village (of three) in Tofalaria, Alygdzher, which has a population of 554, of whom 274 (49%) are officially registered as Tofa and the remaining 280 (51%) are non-Tofa, predominantly Russian. By contrast, Tozhu has a total population of 6957 (1991 figures), of which approximately 65% are Tozhu-Tyva, 15% Tyva, and 20% non-Tyva, predominantly Russian.

²⁵ With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of these opportunities have dried up in Tozhu as well, forcing people to once again rely more heavily on the taiga for their survival. However, this is most pronounced in the most remote villages of Tozhu, namely Systyg Khem and Kham Syra, located in the far southwestern and northeastern corners of the district respectively, surrounded by the richest taigas in all of Tyva. With populations of around 150, of whom more than 95% are Tozhu, and given the difficulty of access to these villages, there still isn't much competition for or disputes over the natural resources in these areas. In the principal, closely clustered, and more accessible towns of Toora-Khem (pop. 2600) and Ii and Adyr-Kezhig (approximately 1300 and 1200 respectively), there is still a fair degree of access to salaried employment.

fermerskoe khozyaistvo in Russian); and 3) officially and legally unrecognized private ownership of livestock and usufruct of land.

Establishment of the *rodovye obshchiny* has been the reaction of the majority of Tozhu's herder-hunters for a number of reasons. In the first place, the process of applying for a private landholding is intimidatingly complex, bureaucratic, and time-consuming, effectively discouraging many herder-hunters from following it through (cf. Ziker 2002a: 128-134). In addition, most of the herder-hunters did not have enough private livestock to establish a private herd, nor the financial resources to purchase livestock when the *sovkhozy* (state farms) collapsed and sold off their assets, so private ownership of livestock was out of the question. The *obshchiny* were in effect built on the ruins of the *sovkhozy*, and were intended to fulfill many of the functions formerly performed by the *sovkhozy*. Officially, the livestock are still the property of the state, as is the land. The *obshchiny* initially offered the promise of continued state subsidization of basic necessities and payment of a monthly salary. Unfortunately, since the establishment of the *obshchiny*, this material support has never been provided, and now the herder-hunters have learned not to expect it. However, the *obshchiny* have given them a legal guarantee of sorts that they can continue herding and hunting on the territory officially recognized as *obshchina* territory. The herder-hunters creatively observe or ignore the letter of the law, using their status as *obshchina* members to their advantage without allowing it to restrict their activities. For example, all the herders of the Serlig Khem branch of the Ödügen *obshchina* treat the *obshchina*-owned livestock in their care as if it were private property, disposing of it as they see fit without getting permission from the *obshchina* director. If they sell an animal, they keep the money for themselves. When the *obshchina* director sent word that the herders were to contribute a few of the *obshchina* deer in their care to a large deer sale (to Mongolia), one of the herders stated flatly, "I just won't give them. I don't have enough deer." Another was willing to sell deer, but only if he were paid directly by the buyer and given 100% of the purchase price. "If they don't put the money right in my hand, I'll turn around and come back with the deer," he said. Likewise, the herder-hunters see no need to stay within the officially demarcated boundaries of the *obshchina*'s territory, and range their herds in effect wherever they want.

This sense of freedom and flexibility regarding hunting and grazing rights among *obshchina* members was demonstrated to me as I was trying to get a fix on how many herders there are and where they tend to live. Having heard that one of the largest groupings of herders migrated in the area of Ödügen Taiga, I expressed my intention to get there and spend

some time with them. I was informed by my hosts that they had all pulled up stakes just this past winter and moved into the Serlig Khem region – a completely different area that also historically was part of a different clan territory – because Ödügen was too far from the nearest village (see Map 3). I asked the director of the Serlig Khem *obshchina* if they needed any special permission to move, and he simply shrugged and shook his head, as if the thought had never occurred to him. In turn, the group in the Sorug River region on the north side of the Azas Zapovednik and part of a completely different *obshchina*, moved around to Ödügen Taiga on the south side of the Zapovednik to escape bears. However, the herder-hunters will assert their membership in the *obshchina* in order to guarantee their right to continued usufruct of the land and its resources, and to claim their share of the rare delivery of provisions from the *obshchina*.

Those few herders who had the financial resources to purchase deer from the state farms or who had managed to accumulate sizeable private herds during Soviet times,²⁶ and who had representatives (usually relatives) with political connections and legal savvy, have applied for and been granted official recognition as private operators (*arat azhyl-agyi* in Tyvan, *fermerskoe khozyaistvo* in Russian). One requirement is that they must have a legitimate historical claim to the territory, meaning that they can show that their family lived within that territory in pre-Soviet times. This gives them a free-of-charge renewable 5-year lease on certain land, explicitly mapped out, and complete freedom to exploit the resources on that land as they choose, which includes the right to exclude people from the land or to charge people who want to extract resources.²⁷ The actual territories, however, are much smaller than the herder-hunters have traditionally used, and are not large enough to meet the extensive range requirements of reindeer. This has not yet posed a problem, as the herder-hunters simply range over the territory they have always ranged over, not bothering to observe the limits imposed by the agreement.

Finally, there is one small but persistent group of herder-hunters who have always defied the authorities. These herders maintained private herds even when it was forbidden to do so,

²⁶ During Soviet times, herders were able to accumulate private livestock in one of two ways: If they exceeded their target in a given year, they were allowed to keep the additional deer as private deer. For example, if the state farm established a goal of 80 new calves per 100 bearing females, and a given herder managed to increase his herd by 86 per 100, then he could consider the 6 extra as private property. Also, the most successful herders were recognized by the state farms at annual festivals and given awards, sometimes in the form of livestock. The offspring of these private animals were also considered private, and in this way some herders were able to amass sizeable private herds even during Soviet times.

²⁷ When asked what he would do if he caught someone fishing on his territory, one young herder-hunter I interviewed first said, “Nothing,” then got a mischievous grin on his face and said, “No, I’d tax him. One fish!”

either by staying in such remote locations that authorities could not track them down, or by maintaining herds for the state institutions (the state farms, the state hunting operations, the state forestry operations) and also maintaining, but not reporting, their private herds. In addition, these few herders are the ones who have tended to keep to lands their parents and grandparents historically used. Now these herder-hunters have no official affiliation with the *obshchiny*, nor do they have officially recognized leases to land. They own their livestock and range them as they see fit, secure in their right to do so because of their family history of herding and hunting in a certain territory. This right is acknowledged and respected by all the other herders, although not officially recognized by the state.

Still the salient feature common to all three of these arrangements is non-exclusivity with regards to rights of access. In interviews, virtually all my Tozhu-Tyvan informants, from elderly people to younger current herder-hunters, vehemently denied that they have or ever had any sense of exclusive property rights. They would outline for me the territory that they considered “theirs” (territory they habitually ranged over), but when I asked them to outline the territory they felt they had a right to range over, most included the entire Tozhu *kozhuun* (district), and several included the northern section of the neighboring Kaa-Khem District as well. When I asked what they would do if they saw an unknown Russian (playing a bit on inter-ethnic tensions) hunting on what they considered their territory, a typical response was, “I’d help him. I’d put him up in my tent; I’d feed him; I’d show him where to hunt. What else can I do?” The traditional “Law of the Taiga” continues to be one of helping out guests and visitors.²⁸ On more than one occasion I heard Tozhu-Tyva people say, “No one owns the taiga. Whoever wants to can come and get what they can.” Simply undertaking the rigorous trip into the taiga seems to entitle those who do it to whatever they can get.²⁹

But all that may change if recent developments continue putting pressure on the herder-hunters’ natural resource base. Alternative employment opportunities have dried up, forcing everyone in the Tozhu District to rely more heavily on the natural resources of the taiga. Increasing numbers of hunters and fishermen – both legal and illegal – are invading the taiga in the Tozhu District, leading to noticeable declines in the fish and wild game populations. The two major gold mining bases in the Tozhu region, while providing a number of crucial

²⁸ Cf. Ziker on the “Law of the Tundra” in the Taimyr (Ziker 2002a: Ch. 6; 2002b:12).

²⁹ This sense of entitlement to resources for those who “know the land” (Anderson 1998) has been noted throughout Siberia. Cf. Anderson 1998, 2000; Fondahl 1998: 34. Curiously, in the Tozhu-Tyva case this entitlement seems to extend to anyone who can make it out to the taiga, whether they really “know the land” or not.

services to the herders,³⁰ likewise present a threat. The gold mining operations have clearly had a negative impact on the natural resource base upon which the hunter-herders depend. This is particularly evident in the undisputed decline in the fish population in the Kharaal and Oina Rivers due to riverbed scouring, pollution, and run-off. In addition, the gold mining bases provide a base of operations for non-indigenous hunters and fishermen from the capital city and other areas outside the region to come in and extract these resources. Finally, directors of one of the gold mining bases have tried to lay claim to and exclude herder-hunters from a tract of prolific hunting ground so that workers and guests of the gold mine (all non-Tozhu-Tyva) can exploit the game resources on that particular tract. And the gold mines will most likely expand in the near future. The director of the gold mines acknowledges that he plans to expand his operations even deeper into reindeer-herding territory, and another private individual has been granted permission to start up a gold-mining operation on the Bedii River, which is the lifeline for one group of reindeer herders.

In the first year I was conducting fieldwork for this research (2000), I observed another interesting development regarding land tenure and property rights. All the herders of the Serlig Khem group who had not yet done so decided to build small log cabins on “their” territories, at places where they habitually establish their fall and/or winter and/or spring camps. This investment in time and labor not only indicates a sense of property ownership – a way of staking a claim to a certain territory – but also has implications for the migration patterns and a variety of ecological factors associated with migration (e.g., pasture health, forest cover). Additionally, these houses all tend to be in close to populations centers or to the gold mining bases, indicating that these lands closer in are considered more valuable (for reasons of accessibility to consumer goods, basic necessities, and transportation to the capital). This, along with the very noticeable decline in game animals and fish population may cause the herder-hunters to develop a sense of exclusivity regarding their territory and resources, which could lead to an increase in conflicts and tensions such as has been occurring in Tofalaria since the early part of the 20th century.

³⁰ Since the collapse of the state farms and the subsidies they provided, the herder-hunters have turned to the gold mining bases as their principal trading partners. They trade fish, game meat, antlers, berries, and pine nuts for necessary foodstuffs (primarily flour, sugar, tea, oil, cigarettes). They also take in guns and axes to be repaired at the bases; pick up useful scrap metal, nails, boards, plastic sheeting; and get free transportation to and from the capital in the vehicles operated by the gold mines. Whenever they’re at the bases, they eat free of charge at the base cafeteria. One private herder even has a contract with the gold-mining base that allows the base to use some of his territory as cattle pasture in the summer in exchange for delivery of flour.

The imminent privatization of land is perhaps the greatest threat to the Tozhu-Tyva herder-hunters' continued rights of access to land and other resources.³¹ This is no idle threat, as the government has been talking about selling fishing rights to local lakes to the highest bidder. Tyva's old constitution (1993) explicitly forbade buying and selling of land. The new constitution, passed in 2001, simply says that in matters of land sales, Tyva will follow the Russian constitution. In fact, the Russian Federation has just this fall (October 2001) passed the new Land Code, which allows privatization of non-agricultural lands. Herding territories are still technically considered agricultural land, and this may buy some time for the herder-hunters, but President Putin has promised to address the issue of privatization of agricultural lands soon as well. Privatization of land will open up the taiga to private development for tourism, mining, and timber operations, while herders, operating in a virtually non-cash economy, will not have the means to purchase the vast tracts necessary to continue their livelihoods.

At present a fragile stability holds, but encroachment from gold mining, timber interests, even tourist resorts may begin to put pressure on the land and force the herder-hunters to more jealously guard their territory. However, without stronger legal claims to it, they may find themselves pushed off territory they consider theirs by these more politically and economically powerful players. Those who have been granted land holdings at least have the legal right to exclude others from their territory. But the fact remains that, if strictly enforced, the *arat azhyl-agyi* landholding territories are far too small to meet the reindeers' extensive range requirements and need for seasonal migrations, and the hunters' need to range widely in search of game. In addition, the landholding leases are only for five years at a time. Those private herder-hunters without recognized landholdings have no legal leg to stand on whatsoever if the state decides to run them off the land they and their families have been subsisting on for centuries. Privatization of land would give outsiders a legal means of prohibiting the herder-hunters from exploiting the resources they have always used.

³¹ Virtually all observers have commented on the threat of privatization to the indigenous cultures of Siberia. Cf. *inter alia*, Anderson 1996: 100; 1998; Fondahl 1998: 84ff.; Golovnev and Osherenko 1999: 114-115. Both Ziker (2002b) and Anderson (2000: 160ff; 1998) discuss the Dolgans's, Nganasans', and Evenkis' unwillingness to participate in the decollectivization and privatization processes.

Conclusion

In this paper I suggest that encroachment first from other indigenous groups, then starting in the mid-17th century, from Russians and Ukrainians, squeezed the Tofa into a defined territory and led to the establishment of their *rodovye taigi* (clan hunting grounds). As they were yet further squeezed into an ever-shrinking taiga, they were forced to strictly limit access to their taigas, which was contrary to their earlier form of flexible, fairly open access. After the formation of the USSR, the Tofa people's early recognition as one of the "Small-numbered Peoples of the North" led to an effort to protect the Tofa by codifying in law their reduced territory. The Soviet regime's highly successful collectivization and sedentarization campaigns settled the Tofa people in villages and further distorted their *rodovye taigi*, turning them into very small family hunting grounds, which had to be jealously guarded if a family was going to try to meet the quotas of the state hunting enterprise. This also made reindeer herding impracticable, and led to the decline of reindeer herding as a way of life and as an important component of the Tofa people's sense of ethnic identity.

The Tozhu-Tyva, on the other hand, have never been completely sedentarized, have never developed such a sense of exclusive private property, and still engage in reindeer herding as an active and important facet of their lives and sense of ethnic identity. The difference lies mostly in the Tofa people's longer contact with Russians and the sense of exclusive rights of access to resources within a given territory that have come about as a result of that contact, and the attention they received as one of the Small-Numbered People's of the North. In laying all this out, I am not suggesting that the formal establishment of Tofalaria was in any sense an intentional way of disempowering the Tofa. I believe that it was initially suggested and implemented with sincerely good intentions toward the protection of the Tofa. In fact, it probably saved the Tofa from complete annihilation, and has to this day guaranteed a modicum of protection and a source of food and income for the Tofa. The extant writings of B.I. Petri, who championed the Tofa cause (then known as Karagas) with vigor and dedication, attest to this sincerity, as does Petri's ultimate fate for his commitment – an "Enemy of the People" label and a firing squad in 1937. But with forced sedentarization and the formal establishment of clearly demarcated family-based hunting grounds came a sense of possessiveness and exclusivity not known previously. Such a sense of property proved

incompatible with a nomadic, reindeer herding and hunting existence, and thus contributed to alienating the Tofa from the basis of their unique culture and ethnic identity.

References

Anderson, David G. (1996) Bringing civil society to an uncivilized place: Citizenship regimes in Russia's Arctic frontier. In: C.M. Hann and E. Dunn (eds.) *Civil Society: Approaches from Anthropology*. London: Routledge, 99-120.

-- (1998) Property as a way of knowing on Evenki lands in Arctic Siberia. In: C.M. Hann (ed.) *Property Relations: Renewing the Anthropological Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 64-84.

-- (2000) *Identity and Ecology in Arctic Siberia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dmytryshyn, Basil, E.A.P. Crownheart-Vaughn, Thomas Vaughn (eds. and tr.) (1988) *Russian Penetration of the North Pacific Ocean 1700-1797: A Documentary Record*. Oregon: Oregon Historical Society Press.

Dolgikh, B.O. (1960) *Rodovoi i plemennoi sostav narodov Sibiri v XVII veke* (Clan and tribe composition of the peoples of Siberia in the 17th century). Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR.

Dubrovskij, V.A. (compiler) (1995) *Za Tri Veka: Tuvinsko-Russkie-Mongol'skie-Kitajskie Otnosheniya 1616-1915* (Across Three Centuries: Tuvan-Russian-Mongolian-Chinese Relations 1616-1915). Kyzyl: Ministerstvo Kul'tury, Kino i Turizma Respublika Tyva.

Fondahl, Gail (1998) *Gaining Ground? Evenkis, Land, and Reform in Southeastern Siberia*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Forsyth, James (1992) *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Golovnev, Andrei V., Gail Osherenko (1999) *Siberian Survival: The Nenets and Their Story*. Ithaca: Cornell.

Grebnyev, L.V. (1955) *Perekhod Tuvinskikh Aratov-Kochevnikov Na Osedlost'* (The Transition of the Tyvan Worker-Nomads to Sedentarization). Kyzyl: Tuvinskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo.

Hirsch, Francine (1997) The Soviet Union as a Work in Progress: Ethnographers and the Category of Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses. In: *Slavic Review* 56(2): 251-278.

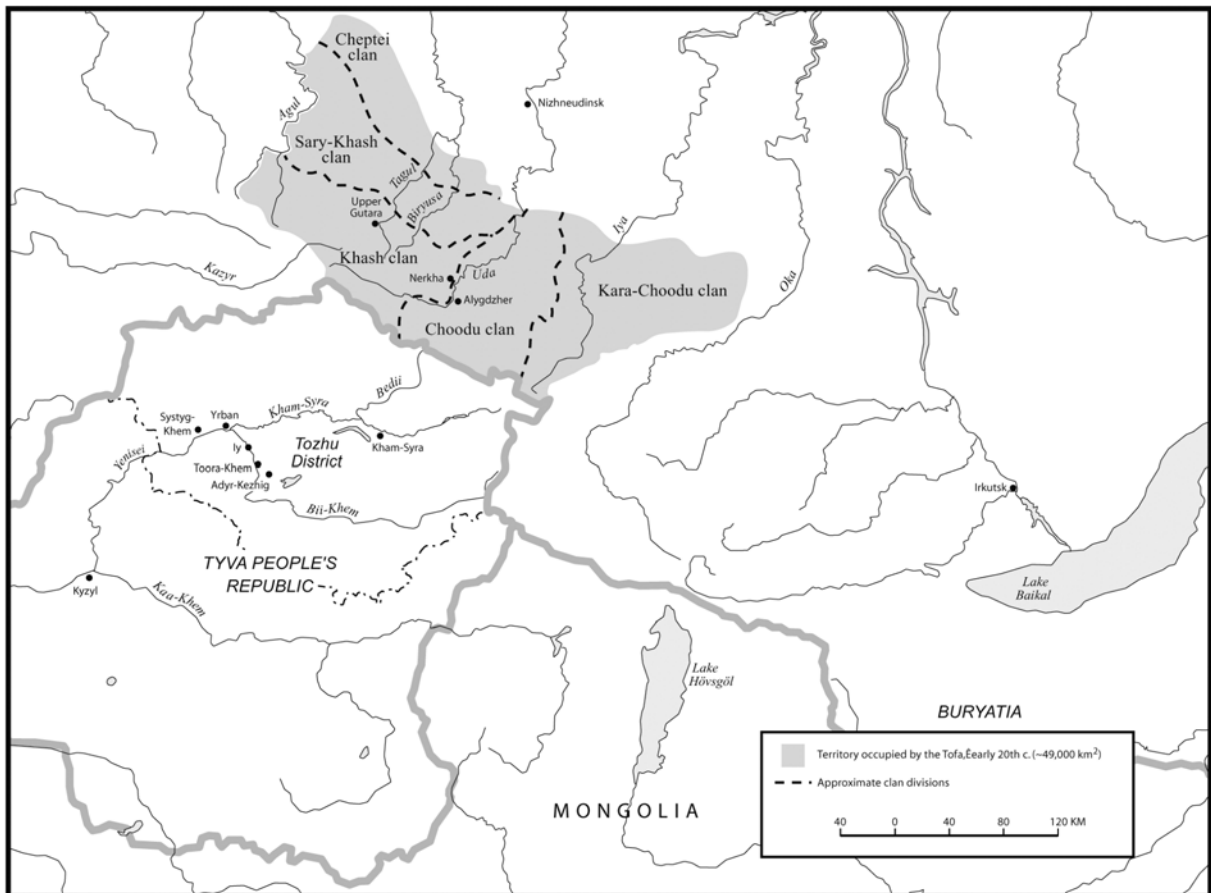
Krивonogov, V. P. (1998) *Etnicheskie Protsessy u Malochislennykh Narodov Srednej Sibiri* (Ethnic Processes Among the Small-Numbered Peoples of Siberia). Krasnoyarsk: Krasnoyarskij Pedagogicheskij Universitet.

- Kryazhkov, V.A. (1999) *Status Malochislennykh Narodov Rossii: Pravovye Akty* (The Status of the Small-Numbered Peoples of Russia: Legal Acts). Moscow: Tikhomirova M.Yu.
- Mel'nikova, L.V. (1994) *Tofy* (The Tofa). Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe Khizhnoe Izdatel'stvo.
- Mendüme, Mikhail (1984) *Orus-shöliü* (Russian Clearing). Kyzyl: Tyvanyng Nom Ündürer Cheri.
- Mollerov, H.M. (1991) Tyvalarnyng Chamdyk Changchylardarynyng Uttundurgan Chyldagaannarynyng Bireezi (One of the Reasons the Tyva People Have Forgotten Some of Their Customs). In: *Tyva Ulustung Changchylardy Bolgash Yozulaldary* (Customs and Traditions of the Tyva People). Kyzyl: Tyvananyng Nom Ündürer Cheri, 55-60.
- Petri, B.E. (1926) *Karagasskij Suglan* (The Suglan of the Karagas). Irkutsk: Shkola F.Z.U. Pechatnik.
- Petri, B.E. (1927) *Okhotnich'i Ugod'ya i Rasselenie Karagas* (Hunting Grounds and Distribution of the Karagas). Irkutsk: Irkutsk University.
- Rassadin, V.I., V.N. Shibkeev (1989) *To'fa Bukvar'* (A Tofa Language Primer). Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo.
- Rassadin, V.I. (1996) *Legendy, Skazki i Pesni Sedogo Sayana* (Legends, Tales and Songs of the Hoary Sayans). Irkutsk: Komitet po Kul'ture, Irkutskoj oblastnoj administratsii.
- Serdobov, N.A. (1971) *Istoriya Formirovaniya Tuvinskoj Natsii* (History of the Formation of the Tuvan Nation). Kyzyl: Tuvinskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo.
- Sergeev, M.A. (1956) Tofalary. In: M.G. Levin, L P. Potapov (eds.) *Narody Sibiri*. Moscow: Isdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 530-539.
- Sherkhunaev, R.A. (1975) *Skazki i Skazochniki Tofalarii* (Tales and Storytellers of the Tofa). Kyzyl: Tuvinskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo.
- (1978) Foreword. In: R.A. Sherkhunaev, V.L. Kenzyna, L.I. Morozova (compilers) *Sovietskaya Tofalaria: Bibliograficheskij Ukazatel'*. Irkutsk: Irkutskaya Oblast'naya Biblioteka, 4-9.
- Skabeev, M.I. (1925) Promyslovaya okhota v Uryankhajskom Krae i ee osobennosti (Hunting in Uriankhai Province and its peculiarities). In: *Severnaya Aziya: Obshchestvenno-Nauchnyj Zhurnal* 5/6: 115-122.
- Slezkine, Yuri (1994) *Arctic Mirrors*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Vainshtein, S.I. (1959) Rod i Kochevaya Obshchina u Vostochnykh Tuvintsev (Clan and Nomadic Communities Among the Eastern Tyva). In: *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* 6: 80-86.
- (1961) *Tuvinsti-Todzhintsi* (The Tuva-Todzhins). Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura.

- Ziker, John (2002a) *Peoples of the Tundra: Northern Siberians in the Post-Communist Transition*. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.
- (2002b) Assigned Territories, Family/Clan Holdings, and the Common-Pool Resources in the Taimyr Autonomous Region, Northern Russia. *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper Series*, No. 32.

Appendix

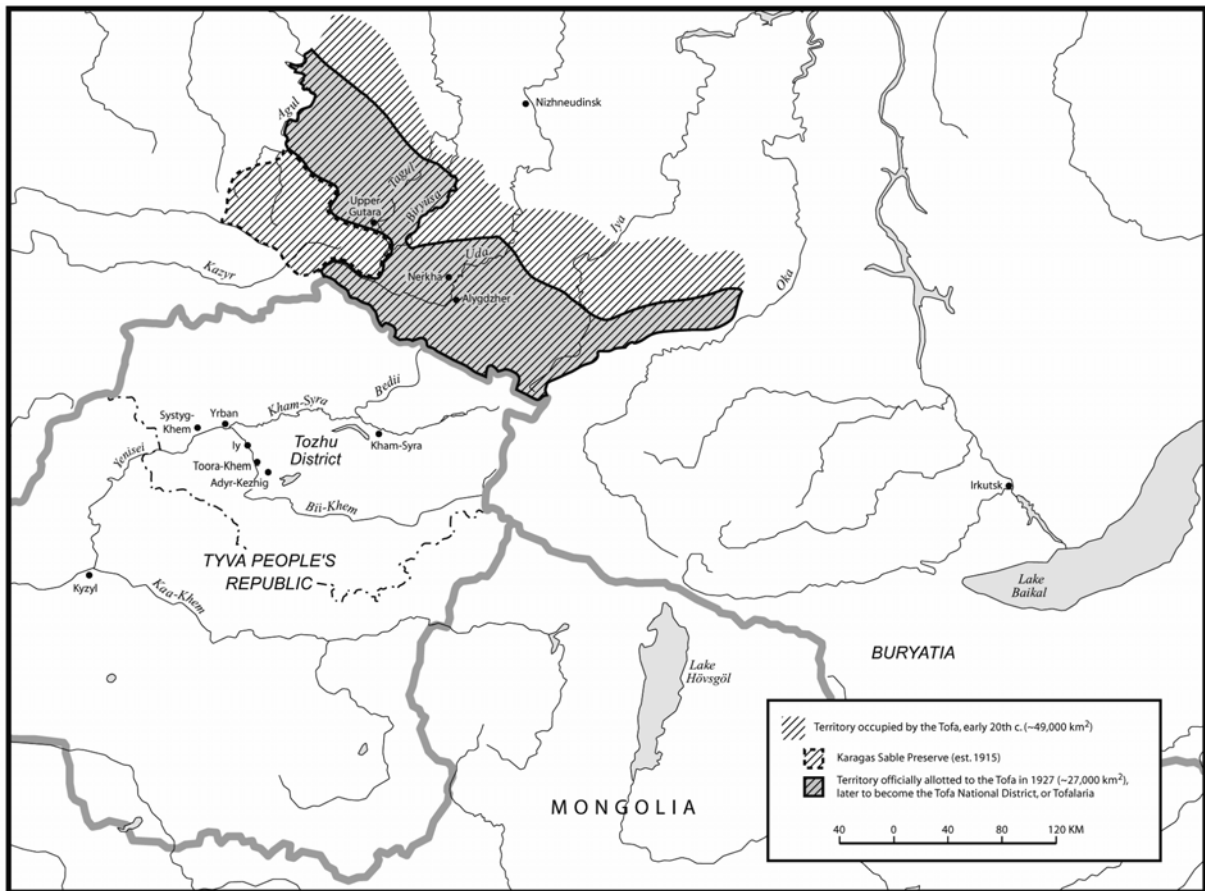
Map 1.



Territory occupied by the Tofa, early 20th century.

Source: Adapted from Petri 1927. (Map prepared by Indiana University Graphics Services.)

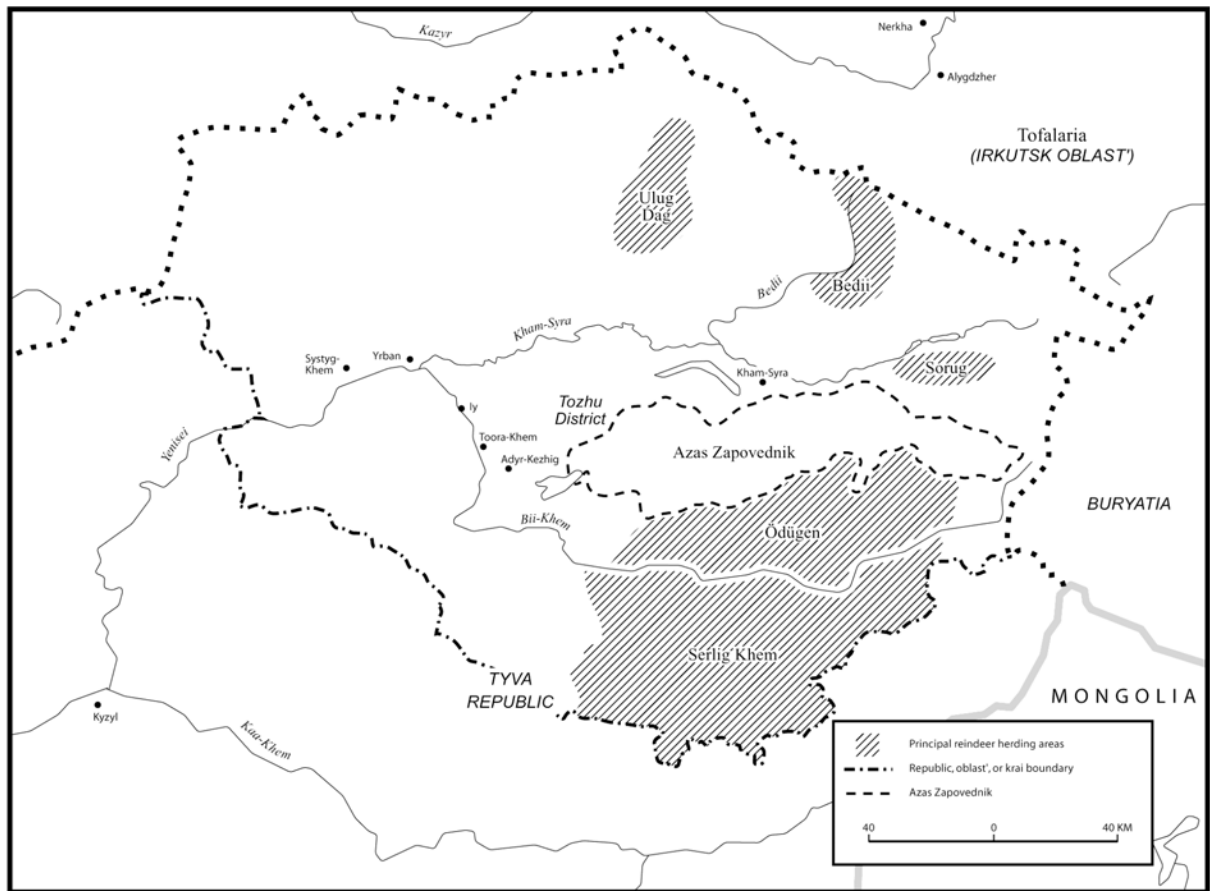
Map 2.



Reduction in Tofa territory, 1915-1927.

Source: Adapted from Petri 1927. (Map prepared by Indiana University Graphics Services.)

Map 3.



Principal reindeer herding areas, Tozhu District.

Source: Compiled from informants' hand-drawn maps and maps provided by the Land Committee, Tozhu District. (Map prepared by Indiana University Graphics Services)