

THE EVENKI MEMORIAL TREE AND TRAIL: NEGOTIATING WITH A MEMORIAL REGIME IN THE NORTH BAIKAL, SIBERIA

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ABSTRACT

Based upon the ethnography gathered among Evenkis living in Kholodnoye village in the northern coastal area of Lake Baikal in Siberia this article discusses relationships between local memorial practices and official memorial regimes. Although negotiation between authoritative and alternative memories and histories is typically portrayed in terms of resistance, in North Baikal it should be approached differently. Thus Evenkis in alliance with the Taiga creatively engage with official memorial regime in a way local practices of remembering serve positively for the local community. Remembering becomes a 'language' to interact with state powers and external audiences.

KEYWORDS: Evenki • North Baikal • the Taiga • Siberia • social memory • landscape of remembering

INTRODUCTION

This article is about how Evenkis together with the Taiga¹ incorporate official memorials and memorial regimes into their inter relationship. Evenki and the Taiga demonstrate clearly what should be remembered and the process of remembering.

Benedict Anderson (1983: 9, 10) convincingly argues that tombs of the 'Unknown Soldier' directly refer to national identity and the social imagination. As he points out, it is not necessary for people to know who is actually buried under these monuments since the general national idea unifies people who imagine themselves a part of a larger community. Anderson's interpretation maps well onto Soviet war monuments which are often communal graves inscribed with the names of buried soldiers, even though sometimes their bodies are not there. However, in Kholodnoye, his interpretation does not work so well. Kholodnoye residents do give their monuments unique meanings, but they have little to do with nationalism and imagined national identity. They also change the intended authoritative meanings in monuments. The fact that Kholodnoye residents engage specifically with the official memorial discourses allows them to anchor specific local experiences rather than travel the broad road of national and institutionalised identity construction (see, for example, Ignatieff 1984; Yates 1999; Bell 2006; Connerton 2009).

Local residents use official memorial patterns in order to deliver their version of history to a wider audience. James Scott (1985) argues that states attempt to simplify social life in order to make it more transparent. In this example, local elaborations on official simplified versions of history create even more sophisticated realities than the state had had to manage before. I learned from my field experience that the more attempts to simplify human life a state makes, the more complexity it creates.

Although speaking about relationship between official and local memories might seem similar to what Scott (1990) calls “hidden transcripts” and Caroline Humphrey (1994) in her polemics with Scott “evocative transcripts”, the ethnography upon which this article is based offers a different perspective. It proposes to look at ways local residents engage with memorial authoritative models in creative forms of making ‘language’ to be understood by external audiences. Thus local residents ‘train’ outsiders to recognise and respect local life via widely known and familiar memorial symbols. Further I argue that Kholodnoye memorial patterns are highly dependent on individual biographies.

This article discusses how Kholodnoye Evenkis create their own memorial realm by constructing and interpreting memorial sites both in the village and in the Taiga. Kholodnoye residents inscribe official monuments with their own meaning. This turns authoritative national memorials into humanised stones meaningful locally. As a result, emotional private life stories relocate, or rather, engage creatively with powerful ideas of national history.

Memorial regime here echoes Samuel P. Huntington’s (1996) idea of universalism.² Memorial regime here is officially distributed rituals, symbols, and practices of commemoration. It is a national scenario of memory-making that is universally promoted across Russia. Memorial universalism is an abstract version of the past to which citizens of a country are expected to be loyal. I approach memorial regime as a dominating way of past-making which allows individuals to feel their belonging to a larger structure which is national identity. ‘Dominating’ here has a neutral connotation. Memorial regime leave traces in the form of monuments and discourses of commemoration in Kholodnoye.

This article focuses upon how Kholodnoye Evenkis personify and relate to the Taiga and its agentive forces and turn a traditional Evenki path into a Memorial Trail of which the key element is the Memorial Tree. This is a tree where a reindeer herder had carved his *kleimo* (in Evenki ‘personal inscription’) before he went to war and did not come back. Kholodnoye residents memorialise their continuous engagement with the taiga environment and transmit knowledge about how Evenkis have been living there through the Memorial Tree and the Memorial Trail to a wider audience and younger taiga generation.

WAR MONUMENTS IN POST-SOVIET KHOLODNOYE

In Kholodnoye, as in other places across Russia, the role of war monuments built by the Soviet state was to represent national or Soviet identity and remind people about the great achievement of soldiers who gave their lives for land and people and contributed to the great victory over fascism. Similar to other war monuments in the region, war monuments in Kholodnoye are beautifully decorated with artificial flowers. Although

the war monuments are fenced, Kholodnoye residents may occasionally approach the centre of the monument. In fact, they usually do so on special days such as May 9, which is Victory Day, or February 23, which is the day of Fatherland's defenders. Usually people do not cross the fence on other days.

Although the official war monuments in Kholodnoye are a public space in the village aiming to alert people's attention toward national history, they are also incorporated into personal memories and are associated with individual experiences as well as Soviet ideology and images. They are represented in the private photo albums Kholodnoye residents fondly keep.

The first war monument was built in the 1960s, and the second one, which is in the centre of the village, was erected at the beginning of the millennium (see Photo 3). The second monument emerged really as a result of communal work since local residents built it themselves from beginning to end. Oleg Ganyugin told me that he was asked to make the star symbol (*orden*)³ for the monument, and he remembers the process of making as a social event in which many subscribed:

Well, some people began but got bored with the job and then others took over. We were paid for this work, but it is hard for some people to keep working on the same thing. So it was a collective work, really. I made the star symbol and inscriptions too.

Once, Oksana Starikova showed me her photo album containing some pictures with people smiling near the village war monuments (see Photos 1 and 2). In some pictures, people were smiling and displayed a similarly happy mood at monuments in Leningrad and Moscow.

Oksana told me that people in Kholodnoye like taking photos near war monuments especially during school graduation, birthday parties, state festivals (*natsionalnye prazdniki*), weddings, and just for the family albums. Oksana drew an analogy between the war monuments in the village and famous monuments across Russia: "Well, people need monuments, so they can have their pictures taken." This visual trope is typical for Kholodnoye residents, many of whom have similarly composed pictures in their family albums. Gradually, the official war monuments have changed their meaning: they became monuments of happy memories and rites of passage instead of tragic symbols.



Photo 1. The happiest days of my childhood. Photo from the private archive of Oksana Starikova, 1987.



Photo 2. Celebration of school graduation. Photo from the private archive of Oksana Starikova, 1995.



Photo 3. The war monument in the centre of Kholodnoye, 2007. Photo by Veronika Simonova.



Photo 4. Roma Chernykh and Vera Gorbunova have their photos taken for national festival in Ulan-Ude, 2008. Photo by Veronika Simonova.

Vera Gorbunova and Roma Chernykh were invited to take part in a national festival in Ulan-Ude in the spring of 2008. They had to bring 'memorial' pictures from their native place. Vera asked me to take their pictures in front of places they found important to show at the festival (see Photo 4):

We need to have pictures near memorial places. That is an obligation, as far as I understood. Well, we will definitely start with the war monuments, then go to the shore of Lake Baikal, then to the *yrty* at the Sober Spring,⁴ and where else can we go? [...] Ah, we'll go to the border between the village and the forest! We will welcome the public to Kholodnoye with that picture, what a good idea!

Another place where Kholodnoye residents enjoy having their pictures taken is a railway bridge across the Kholodnoye River. The bridge has become an attractive site for social gatherings during warm seasons. People gather for picnics under the bridge or close to it and enjoy having parties or just being there. The bridge became a popular place for taking commemorative pictures in situations analogous to those at war monuments: school graduations, family days, and the like.

Local interpretations of official war monuments are related to social memory. Catherine Merridale (1999: 61) argues that the history of World War II remains collective property. However, monuments are interpreted differently to what J. Scott (1985) referred to as everyday forms of resistance. The monuments devoted to the eternal memory of heroism in Kholodnoye are not experienced as symbols of violence or dominance that people must resist or obey. In their own unique way, Kholodnoye residents understand war monuments as artefacts harmoniously embedded in everyday life. Therefore, war

monuments are useful for the local community and not seen as either hostile or dominant symbols of an alienated and faceless state which people have to resist.

Michael Denison (2009: 1168) highlights commemoration of the great patriotic war during the post-Soviet era as an example of a rare site of genuine community sentiment in a state where civil society has been extremely circumscribed. In addition, we may agree that “‘memory’ [...] lies at the intersection of so many of our current concerns and organises many of our current projects” (Müller 2002: 1). That could also mean that the future is being created by ways we look at past events, judge them, perceive them as factual and, finally, apply them to our present needs. Of course, a governmental memorial regime dictates a certain model of interpretation and encourages Kholodnoye residents to follow particular memorial practices. However, that does not exclude local debate and peculiarities of the local life of war monuments as objects of individual interpretations.

Official landscapes, like those designated by preservation groups and local and federal governments, are developed to create a memory of a particular event. These landscapes help to promote and preserve the ideals of cultural leaders and authorities. They are often displayed to the public as though the past they represent is reality. They present the past as abstract and timeless and sacred, and they help to reduce competing interests. (Bodner 1992: 13 quoted in Shackel 2004: 4)

However, in Kholodnoye, this ‘official landscape’ has another life.

The following section will discuss the process of memorialisation in Kholodnoye, which does not follow the official memorial course but spreads its own vision of how social memorial patterns should be organised and operated. However, through staying loyal to the patterns of the dominant memorial discourse, Kholodnoye residents try to deliver a message about their life in the past and the present and relationships with the Taiga. The following section addresses the Memorial Tree, which is a deeply personified local monument. It opens a gate to the Kholodnoye past, as it was explained to me, when people were fully engaged in the Taiga and happy and proud of what they were doing. This might seem romantic, but memory-making has much to do with idealisation and there is nothing wrong or contradictory with it since taiga pedagogy, as will be evident below, first focuses on a positive image of the local taiga past before negative and dangerous experiences come out.

For Kholodnoye residents the past has human faces. Although the function of the Taiga war monument seems to be similar to that of official memorials, the Memorial Tree has a supplementary meaning related to a deeper understanding of memorialisation in Kholodnoye: local forms of relationships with the taiga landscapes.

THE MEMORIAL TREE: A LOCAL RESPONSE TO MEMORIAL POLITICS

The Memorial Tree (*derevo pamyati*) is a pine tree where local soldier Trofim Uronchin carved his initials.

Kholodnoye residents count the starting point of the history of the Memorial Tree from the year when Trofim Afanasyevich Uronchin, a reindeer herder, was summoned to the front in 1942. Before that date, he was working as a reindeer herder at Nyurundu-

kan reindeer farm, which was a part of local kolkhoz *Vtoraya Pyatiletka*. However, before leaving his native place, he carved his initials UTA on a tree (Photo 6). Two Kholodnoye residents, Gavril Ganyugin and Viktor Shangin, witnessed Trofim Uronchin carving his personal inscriptions onto the tree before he left the place of the Nyurundukan reindeer farm and later confirmed that the initials on the tree did indeed belong to him. Kholodnoye residents did not see his action as an individual one. They see this practice as common to local hunters and reindeer herders.

The monument is located fourteen kilometres from Kholodnoye, which is not perceived as a long distance by Kholodnoye residents and, basically, could be seen as an extension of the village (Photo 5). However, some like to take one or two days to visit the place in order to fully experience the taiga trail. Local residents usually stay for some time at hunting stops and overnight near the Memorial Tree or at other stages along the trail (which will be described in the following section) leading to the Memorial Tree. Hiking along the trail is more a reflection of what common taiga practitioners (*tayezhniki*) experience by covering enormous distances on foot. The experience of the trail is an initiation to the past; therefore, remembering and hiking are not separate.

The Memorial Tree is decorated with artificial flowers as are all other war monument in North Baikal. The flowers represent placing the Memorial Tree in the wider context of war monuments in the region and in the country. The process of laying flowers (*vozlozheniye tsvetov*) on war monuments is part of a festival of rituals that commemorate Victory Day in World War II. The flowers demonstrate the loyalty of local residents to the memorial mainstream. The end point of the Memorial Trail is not the Memorial Tree but the place of the former Nyurundukan reindeer pasture, which has an important historical link with contemporary Kholodnoye residents and especially those keeping reindeer in the area.

Kholodnoye residents recognise the tree to be an alternative memorial site, which recollects the horror of war endured by former local residents and their heroic participation in World War II. In contrast to the official war monuments discussed above, the Memorial Tree is a memorial designed entirely by local enthusiasts, according to their idea of how local taiga activities should be represented as a memorial inseparable from the landscape. The idea of the memorial originated from local residents, who also gave life to it. The Memorial Tree is a complex phenomenon. It is an attempt to memorise local practices belonging to different generations, emphasising symbolic communication with the past together with glorifying the political success of the country. Gradually, the Memorial Tree became a locally



Photo 5. The Memorial Tree near Kholodnoye, 2007. Photo by Veronika Simonova.



Photo 6. The personal inscriptions UTA at the Memorial Tree near Kholodnoye, 2007. Photo by Veronika Simonova.

valued place, but its Soviet aspects also remain. The Memorial Tree is a syncretic local monument aiming to tell the story of Evenki life in the Taiga via a common national memorial course elaborated by officials after World War II.

Gail Fondahl (2011, personal communication) describes her experience during a hike to the Memorial Tree together with her colleague Anna Sirina in 2005 as a landscape of resistance where local Evenkis reify their places by actually making places in a way they remember. She describes her hike as a journey into the history of the landscape. Her argument is very important for understanding my own ethnography gathered at the same place two years later. However, I propose to look at the Memorial Tree not only as the landscape of resistance, but also as a message enveloped in a 'language' outsiders might understand and accept.

The tree where the local hero carved his *kleimo* is located, according to Viktor Ganyugin, "at the midpoint in the road to the Nyurundukan Pass". He is certain that the Evenki of past times did not have the technical equipment to measure the distance. However, by intuition they knew when they were halfway there (*oni intuitivno chuvstvovali seredinu puti*) and made a stopping point on the way up and

down the mountains. 'Intuition' is understood widely by local residents as the skill earned through long-term relationships with the Taiga. Analogously, Trofim Uronchin chose the tree at the midpoint of the route for his personal inscription. He assumed that many people always stop at this place, which means they would recognise personal inscriptions of their fellow villager and remember him for a short while. Viktor Ganyugin thinks Trofim Uronchin "felt he was going to die" (*predchuvstvoval konchinu*) and this feeling prompted him to carve his personal inscriptions on the tree before leaving his native place to go to war.

Later on, a successful reindeer herder and a co-worker of Trofim Uronchin, Gavriyl Ganyugin, learned by heart the information sent from the front (*pokhoronka*) where Trofim Uronchin died in action. Therefore, local people, through oral history know where the grave of Trofim Uronchin is located. Since Trofim Uronchin defended Leningrad during the Blockade and died while withstanding the siege, he was buried together with other soldiers close to Shlisselburg (Schlüsselburg) town (Leningrad Oblast) in a communal grave (*bratskaya mogila*). Viktor Ganyugin, along with his companions, decided

to memorialise the tree where the hero fellow-villager carved his personal inscriptions. In order to make this place memorable, Viktor Ganyugin built a *zimovye* (winter cabin) close to the Memorial Tree to make a space where visitors can feel comfortable and relax. Once, when we were visiting the Memorial Tree, he told me the story about its restoration. This story is the background to the making of the Memorial Tree.

Viktor Ganyugin was very proud to have gathered the details of Trofim's carvings. By organising the memorial, Viktor Ganyugin and his companions became part of Trofim's story and the common story about Evenki taiga life during that epoch. He gladly shared the details of the process of making the Memorial Tree. Trofim's biography became a starting point for the process of making an alternative war memorial. The context behind Trofim's biography is an important local diary, which sheds light on what Evenkis used the forest for and how they related to it. Here is the story of how the Memorial Tree was created as it was told near the tree.

It was a frosty winter's day. Viktor Ganyugin made a bonfire, fed in a way similar to hunting ritual, and started talking very naturally and openly about how the tree emerged as a monument and a significant local site:

We cut a part of the tree off in around 1994 since the top part of the tree was falling down and could destroy the rest of the tree with Trofim Uronchin's marks. So, we decided to cut the top off the tree and covered it with dry oil. A bear was attracted by the smell of the oil and climbed on the tree, so he also left his tracks there. This place is, basically, a bear place. Bears like the smell of oil and, actually, are interested in us. Afterwards, we organised a fire place close to the tree, and built a *zimovye*. Now we can stay here for several days. We have a tradition. Every time we come here we make a bonfire. In summer, we can stay here for longer; we have prepared everything to protect the forest from the fire.

So, Trofim Uronchin was a reindeer herder, and his draft papers arrived by post to the Nyurundukan reindeer farm. When he was drafted he went to say goodbye to his friends and left his initials here on the tree. He was drafted along with two guys. Many young men were called up and never returned; only elderly people, teenagers, and women stayed to live and work in the farm. Trofim Uronchin died on February 10, 1943, withstanding the siege of Leningrad. Unfortunately, none of the men who were called up returned. Hence, when Trofim Uronchin was called up he understood he would probably die, and he left his traces in this particular way, for memory. Maybe, he intuitively felt that he would not come back. People in those times did not have a lot of methods to leave their traces in the world in order to be memorialised, so he decided to leave his initials. On the other side of the tree, someone also left signs, but it is hard to recognise them now because of pitch. The tree was green and it dried up quite a long time ago. I do not remember when exactly. Historically, Evenkis camped here. After that, they moved on through the hard mountain pass. For those who got used to walking in the mountainous Taiga, it is clear why people stopped here. Further into the mountains, there is no place to stop, only high rocks; therefore, this is the reason to have a rest here. Moreover, there was a lot of reindeer moss, which burned out later on: in 1993, there was a great fire here. Therefore, people lived in this place many years ago [*mesto davno obzhitoe*]. Earlier, people were hunting here and gathering berries. Indeed, even elderly women went to Nyurundukan Pass for berries; not now, unfortunately.

Well, I know only two girls who went there. I remember Olga Krasnogorova and the granddaughter of Arkadiy Lekarev, and that is all. I do not know any other woman who has been there. Many of children go there. It is very good for your health to do sport, especially in the high mountains.

Kholodnoye residents attempted to memorialise the marked tree and for that reason they organised the place around the tree identically to the so-called holy site (*svyatoe mesto*) of the region. Viktor Ganyugin told me how an attempt to memorialise the place around the tree was actually initiated by elders, and it is now held in respect.

We also leave coins, sweets, and other small gifts here whatever anyone wants [*kto vo chto gorazd*]; for example, even candles or cigarettes in order to emphasise the desire to come back here again later. By leaving presents and respect we made this place equal to our holy sites [*svyatye mesta*]. It is a memorial place because here are the traces of those who went to the front. We suspect that many other people left their signs but they faded as time went by. So, we consider this holy and elderly people said we should organise this place accordingly. We built the *ostov* [the *yurta*'s skeleton] in order to show that this is a camping place. It is comfortable, for example, if you need to stop in winter; you put synthetic material [*brezent*] quickly on the *ostov* and the *yurta* is done and people can stay overnight.

Finally, local enthusiasts turned the Memorial Tree into a monument whose height is about two metres and its diameter is around half of one metre. The tree is decorated identically to Soviet memorial sculptures and monuments in the region: a text providing information about either memorialised heroes or events and bright artificial flowers which keep a mood of pride and glory during all seasons.

Viktor Ganyugin and his students usually visit the Memorial Tree from time to time all year round, but they chose special days for compulsory visits, such as February 23, the day of the Fatherland's defenders (*den zashchitnika otechestva*) and May 9, which is Victory Day (*den pobedy*).

The epithet on the inscription marker at the Memorial Tree reads:

The Memorial Tree made in honour of the Evenki of Kindigir clan who were called for to serve in the Soviet Army during the period of the Second World War (1940–1944). We kindly ask passers by to remember that here we keep traces of those who were called up to the front to protect the Motherland. In particular, the initials UTA – Uronchin Trofim Afanasyevich, who went to the front in 1942 and died in 1943. The students of Kindigir High School.

The tree has become a site of apprenticeship where pupils learn to acknowledge that they share the landscape with other creatures in “an arena of intentional non-human actors” (Pedersen 2003: 244). The Memorial Tree curriculum is therefore a chance for local pupils to use their local environmental knowledge. According to Viktor Ganyugin:

Their grandfathers and grandmothers walked the same way and children are very interested to know more about their lives on the way to the tree. Besides, we prepare a bonfire and share food. There is nothing like eating in the Taiga! Sometimes we may see the marks of bears on the Memorial Tree and we guess the size of the bear and how many days ago he was there! We noticed that a bear visits our *zimovye* very often and, of course, we needed to chase him away. We put meat

inside the *zimovye* and in the middle of the meat we placed a flask with ammonia. The following day, when we were approaching the *zimovye*, we heard sounds of a bear. We saw the bear running down the hill and into the water! He never returned afterwards. There are new young bears this year that are roaming around the area; we should do the same thing in order to keep the *zimovye* safe from them. Probably, the bear wanted to mark the territory and let us know that this is his territory since he recognises people's presence.

Despite the moment of respect being ritualised analogously to Soviet discourse where the memory of the deceased soldiers was accompanied by a fire and a minute of silence (*minuta molchaniya*), Kholodnoye residents have their own way of remembering. The fire made near war monuments across the country is different to that near the Memorial Tree. The fire Viktor Ganyugin prepared near the Memorial Tree, was made according to Evenki methods relevant to the Taiga. Hence, the process of fire making near the Memorial Tree is ambivalent by nature. On the one hand, the fire-making process is a memorial realm reflecting the understanding of fire as a symbolic element of the World War II memorial ritual; on the other hand, it refers to an essential activity of central importance for Evenkis in the Taiga. The familiarity of Evenkis with fire is incorporated into the memorial mainstream. However, the accent is placed on local activity, vital for human experience in the forest. Using fire for memorialisation, apprenticeship, and pragmatic needs turns the memorial ceremony into a live memorialisation of Evenki taiga practices.

Therefore, for villagers it is important not only to have the heroic past, which is materially represented by the Soviet monuments, but also the personified heroic past expressed by personal inscriptions, such as Trofim Uronchin's initials. The past in Kholodnoye is inscribed into the landscape and must have human names and faces. As a result, the personification of the past has become local practise imbued into the routine in perpetuity. The sense of personification is of great importance to local residents. For example, Viktor Ganyugin showed a couple of initials carved by someone at the Memorial Tree several years ago:

Basically, I do not really understand whose these initials are. Maybe someone was very ambitious, or he thought by mistake that everyone can leave his marks here.



Photo 7. Viktor Ganyugin at the Memorial Tree, 2007. Photo by Veronika Simonova.



Photo 8. The 'Leningrad Memorial Tree', the communal grave where Trofim Uronchin was buried together with the other soldiers who withstood the Leningrad siege. St. Petersburg, 2009. Photo by Veronika Simonova.

birch upon which a red rifle rests. Later on, Oleg Ganyugin told me on the phone that he was happy because I remembered their fellow villager near the 'Leningrad Memorial Tree'.

The Memorial Tree is basically an attempt to make the past tangible and accessible for contemporary people. The local concept of the Memorial Tree as both a Soviet type of memorial and the way to speak widely about the local history of taiga life has yielded to harmonious relationships with the outsiders who understand the Memorial Tree as just an extra monument created by local people in honour of the Evenkis who took part in World War II. This dynamic represents the 'language' by which local people protect their history and memories. To put it another way, the Memorial Tree is simultaneously an image of loyalty to commonly shared national memorial patterns and a local voice coming out of that image.

The following section discusses the way an ancient path of reindeer herders and hunters became the Memorial Trail. The Memorial Tree and the Memorial Trail are multid-

Whatever intentions the person who carved his initials close to Trofim Uronchin's marks might have had, he wanted to leave his own traces in the same way in order to be eternally and symbolically remembered along with heroic Trofim Uronchin. Walking (*pokhod*) up to the Memorial Tree erases the borderline between past and present.

The Memorial Tree storyline is about local participation in World War II, which is of great importance for local people. Once, Viktor Ganyugin asked me to do him a favour:

The trail leading to the Memorial Tree finishes up where the real grave of Trofim Uronchin is located: somewhere in Leningrad. If you can find it and take a picture of it, the story would be completed. It is so interesting to know the place where our fellow villager hero was buried.

In the summer of 2009 I managed to fulfil the desire of Viktor Ganyugin and his companions: I visited the monument and sent a picture of the site where Trofim Uronchin was buried together with the other soldiers who withstood the Leningrad siege (Photo 8). The monument appeared to be designed as an aluminium

mensional. Undoubtedly, Kholodnoye residents are inspired by patriotic discourse and especially by World War II history. At the same time, the project of the Memorial Tree performed within the memorial mainstream demonstrates the sophisticated attempt to make local voices heard. The focus of attention is basically local taiga activities represented in routes, stages, and as carved personal inscriptions. The journey to the Memorial Tree reveals the Taiga of the past, or rather, is a form of recalling and interaction with the human-taiga alliance of the past.

HOW A PATH BECAME THE MEMORIAL TRAIL

The contemporary Memorial Trail (*tropa pamyati*) is an old path used by reindeer herders and hunters leading to the Nyurundukan Pass where a reindeer pasture was located during World War II. This old Evenki path has been made into the Memorial Trail to train pupils in the landscape where their ancestors used to live a nomadic life but also to create an explicit story about how Evenki dealt with the Taiga.

The daily use of the path has changed recently in the aftermath of new social conditions: today the old route leading up to the Nyurundukan Pass and reindeer pasture has become a monument and a part of the school curriculum. In addition, it serves as taiga memory, as a reconstructed landscape of past local practices, and of a lifestyle the flexible boundaries of which local people patrol as a part of their heritage.

When I arrived in Kholodnoye in 2007, the narrative devoted to the Memorial Trail was one of the first things I heard. It alerted me to how the Memorial Trail affects the local community. Kholodnoye inhabitants did not have identical opinions about the phenomenon. Some Kholodnoye residents referred to it rather sceptically and criticised it along with the Memorial Tree for just resembling 'childish taiga sports'. Sceptics thus seemed to believe that one would hardly gain a clear understanding of taiga life by participating in a hike along the trail. Other Kholodnoye residents, however, emphasised that the Memorial Trail was a good way to learn about the Taiga. They also saw the memorialisation of the trail as a potential source of attraction of tourists to the region.

As a matter of fact, both the Memorial Trail and the Memorial Tree are today recognised as historical artefacts. Gradually, Kholodnoye inhabitants incorporated the trail into their routine and started to perceive the Memorial Trail as a cultural artefact belonging to the Evenki. On one occasion, Lyubov Malafeyeva told me: "We have the Memorial Trail; you have to visit it! Ask Viktor to show it to you." I often heard this reference to 'we', which suggests that despite different (sometimes opposing) opinions, people of Kholodnoye perceive the trail as one of their communal possessions.

Initially, the words "the Memorial Trail" sounded rather mystical. Some of my consultants responded that it was just an old path and suggested that I should ask Viktor Ganyugin for a better explanation. He had undoubtedly been recognised by Kholodnoye residents as an expert on the matter. The fact that the Memorial Trail was recently created as well as historically rooted (*istoricheski ukorenennaya*) in the social life of the village reveals several dimensions.

The first time I met Viktor Ganyugin was in the autumn of 2007. He works as a teacher of mathematics at the local Kindigir High School, but he also runs supplementary ecology classes for the pupils at the elementary level. He has a large family: three children, five

grandchildren, seven siblings and many relatives living across the region. Kholodnoye residents sometimes call the family Ganyugin's clan (*klan Ganyuginykh*). When I asked Viktor about the trail, he enthusiastically replied that it was a long story and we should basically start with the project of the trail. He showed me a print out of the Memorial Trail and Memorial Tree project where the accent was placed on the historical and cultural value of the trail and its significance for the local community: "You know we needed to prove that the trail belonged to the Evenki and is still important to us."

The trail was shaped as a school project and styled for an administrative eye. It was inaugurated on the date of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II (*priurochena k date*). The path, which already existed, was then resurfaced and received government support. The project was the last one in a long process in restoration of the past, mixing individual experience, factual knowledge about the use of the trail based upon memories, and the relationships of Kholodnoye Evenkis with the Russian state.

Although the Memorial Trail became a symbol of local participation in World War II, local residents see its reconstruction mainly as the restoration of the old camps. In addition, trail activists emphasise that their ancestors made a series of stops along the valley. The process of recreation, or rather, the process of turning the reindeer herders' route into the Memorial Trail is based upon interpretation of these old Evenki stopping places.

The process of restoring the old Evenki route engaged elders who remember the time of its active life. For this reason, the enthusiasts of the reconstruction involved those who actually organised places in stages along the trail. However, reindeer herders had their own logic based on practical knowledge, and they basically called a stage *enkeunakit* in Evenki, which means 'the place of reindeer moss'. Every stop along the trail is thus technically (with some exceptions) *enkeunakit*. However, the stages of the Memorial Trail should not be seen merely as *enkeunakit* since every stage is also part of social memory, which is directed by particular conditions, history, and biography. There are eight stages in total along the trail, each one with its own peculiarity.

The old Evenki trail consists of stops that contemporary residents perceive as their heritage. Every stop accumulates knowledge based on long-lasting relationships with the landscape and the experience of being in the Taiga. Local residents keep this knowledge, transmit it via narrating, and address it every time they venture into the Taiga. Every stop is a unique landscape and context demanding specific attention and skills. By reconstructing and memorialising these stops, trail enthusiasts revitalise ways of interacting with the landscape relevant to their ancestors. Every reconstructed stop is an attempt to materialise and visualise memories, according to my interlocutors.

The first stop on the trail is called Yukta, which is the Evenki word for a spring. Yukta is the closest to the village pasture (*enkeunakit*), and every reindeer herder and his family or companions historically had their own place in Yukta marked by the *yurta* skeleton (Rus. *ostov*, Ev. *dukia*), which Evenkis turned into *yurta* when needed. During the entire year, *dukial* (plural form of *dukia*) stood in particular places; consequently, when reindeer herders came to Yukta, they approached their *dukia* and removed the snow from the place if it happened in winter, put their covering on the *dukia* frame (*natyagivali polog*) and lived there as much as required. Those were the regular stages of reindeer herders, and some of the local people still remember the place of *yurty* (plural form of *yurta*) and the marks made by *yurty*, which remain visible, thus recollecting the former life of Yukta Stan.

Arkadiy Lekarev, who is recognised by Kholodnoye inhabitants as an elder and one of the most experienced taiga practitioners, restored his *dukia* in 1991 mainly for symbolic reasons. He wanted to emphasise this place as a traditional stop for reindeer herders. The first stop, Yukta, has the additional name the Sober Spring (*trezvoyi klyuch*). Local people recognise this place as respected or highly valued. As mentioned above, local people put the *yurta* skeleton (*ostov yurty*) near the Sober Spring in order to emphasise its importance and ancient historical roots. A knife, which was found there, has become a necessary element of the Yukta Stan and proof of the historical presence of Evenkis in that place.

This fact triggered the process of memorialisation of the Sober Spring and its further ritualisation. The first stop is located near the Sober Spring where local enthusiasts have built a *zimovye*, two *yurty*, a fire place, and even a toilet. The contemporary memorialisation of the Sober Spring Viktor Ganyugin told me about is part of the revitalisation of the Memorial Trail. Indeed, every time someone passes the Sober Spring, they must leave coins in the water of the spring, sweets or cigarettes in the hollow of a tree near the spring or drink vodka there.

Although local people do not see such actions as an obligation, they would feel uncomfortable if they did not perform at least one of the rituals. Viktor Ganyugin told me near the spring that I was expected to leave something in this place. When I said that I did not have any coins on me but only chocolate, he advised to put chocolate in the tree hollow as a token of respect for the master of the place (*khozyain mesta*). If I had had coins, I would have been asked to throw them into the water of the spring, but leaving food in a tree hole is a must, as something must be left at the place of the first old stop.

Kholodnoye residents call the second stop Olum (Rus. *brod*), which in the Evenki language means 'the shallow of the river', i.e. the Kholodnoye. At this place, mainly in the artificial field around this place, reindeer herders would stop and wait for the level of the water in the river to decrease. According to Viktor Ganyugin, there were approximately ten *yurty* where reindeer herders spent time before crossing the river when it was sufficiently shallow.

Today, this place cannot be used in the same way any more due to natural changes in the river. However, an *olum* has appeared in another place along the river. The *zimovye* of the second stop is marked by two inscriptions: Kholodnoye and Kindigir. These inscriptions, according to local people, help identify the place as belonging to Kholodnoye residents and Evenki culture. In addition, these inscriptions personify the presence of local residents in the Taiga by identifying them with the place and the clan.

Local residents call the third stopping place Atog or sometimes Ancient Atog (Rus. *starinnyi atog*). In the Evenki language *atog* means a 'temporary camp' and the third stop is located rather far from the Kholodnoye River. The Evenki word *atog* is associated with a place of overnight stay (*mesto nochevki*), and this is what the third stop was for reindeer herders. It was not just reindeer herders who slept there but also hunters or fishermen who were fishing mainly for grayling. In addition, *atog* is a place of moss and larches, which rot and fall down and which people then use for their fires. Larch timber is especially valuable in the Taiga because it does not crackle while burning.⁵ Reindeer herders also built a *zimovye* at that place, but the *zimovye* is now destroyed. Kholodnoye residents see this place as advantageous for taiga travellers.

At the fourth stop, called the Memorial Tree, local residents built a *zimovye* in 1991. They decided to have the *zimovye* not near the Memorial Tree but several metres closer to a spring, which flows all year round, meaning there is a constant water source.

The fifth stop is basically a *zimovye*, which is the way local residents call it: the Zimovye. Higher in the mountains the Marikta spring flows parallel to the Zimovye. The top of Marikta holds the sixth stopping place, and the mouth of Marikta is the seventh. The last building in the mountains is a *zimovye* near the mouth of Marikta. Reindeer herders chose this place as the last stop because it was the place where the river forked. As a result, two springs appeared in local narratives: Marikta and Nyurundukan. These two springs originate from one a little higher, and the place around them is called Birakachakr (a place where a river forks) in Evenki.

Nyurundukan was the place closest to Kholodnoye village where local residents used to keep reindeer. This place is also for bears, since bears have always left tracks on trees, thus Birakachakr is also the place where local residents trapped bears. Bears usually leave marks on the same trees, and the first place where bears leave their signs of presence regularly is at the third stop. Local children learn to recognise the presence of bears by reading the bear marks on trees.

In the past, reindeer breeders used to make bear traps not in the middle of the reindeer pasture, but on the edges of the pasture. In addition, people hunt sables and tarbagans there, and some hunters still use the old cairns for tarbagan hunting left by their predecessors many years ago.

A total of eight stops or *stany* represent the factual knowledge of the old Evenki path and the premise for contemporary interpretations. The remaining three stops are basically *zimovya* (plural) organised similarly to the fifth stop described above. As contemporary Kholodnoye residents remember it, Evenkis used the trail, which served as a chain of stops during the migrations. The fact that contemporary Kholodnoye residents have a desire to restore the trail and its public representation as part of their heritage reveals another purpose of the old trail, namely to inspire a new meaning.

Indeed, today the old path has become the Memorial Trail, which adds another connotation and perspective to the same Evenki route. On the one hand, the trail has become an object of negotiation between local residents and patriotic national memorial regime since trail initiators had to prove to officials that the trail does not interfere with officially shared ideology of remembering and the school curriculum. On the other hand, it is also a tool Evenkis employ for negotiating with outsiders, making their taiga life visible for a more extended audience. In other words, Kholodnoye residents assume that the trail is an old Evenki route and therefore must be recognised as belonging to them and experienced by them through memorialisation and practice.

The project of the trail is attached to the political course of 'eternal memory' (*vechnaya pamyat*) based on the ritual commemoration of Victory Day. This demonstrates the loyalty to the dominant state and is not in disharmony with the memorial mainstream in the region. However, the loyalty in remembering has a practical dimension as well. Remembering how people used to survive in the Taiga can be handy in future. This wisdom I learned from a conversation with Viktor Ganyugin's youngest son Kolya, when we were sitting together around a bonfire:

If we are in the forest we use almost the same things as our grandfathers used to employ in World War II. I do not think that there is much difference between

their feet wraps [*portyanki*], shelters, and canned stewed meat, and ours. You feel that you have the same experience of campaign but without danger and enemies. I have heard if another war starts, that first of all, the system of communication will be attacked. Mobile phones, the Internet, satellites, and so on. The only thing we may rely on in such a situation is old radio communication. I mean, it is good to have everything modern, but it is not entirely reliable, and it is important to know how to survive without comfort, and this knowledge can help us, I mean can serve us better than anything else. That is why we must remember the past, really; this memory is our protection.

Kolya kept praising the simple set of tools that previous taiga dwellers used to employ in the forest. Oleg supported Kolya's words enthusiastically and added that since people do not really know what they may face in the Taiga it is good to be ready to stay there only with the help of one's bare hands. If a person is skilled in self-protection using few tools, he is more likely to survive in any dangerous situation. In this dialogue memory emerges as a taiga tool.

Schoolteachers have adapted the school curriculum to the seasonal conditions of the region since the experience of the Memorial Trail is highly dependent upon weather conditions, which vary from season to season. To exemplify, in summer and autumn, local children mainly go along the Memorial Trail to gather berries and medicinal plants (Photo 9). In winter, they learn how to read animal tracks, and in spring, they gather birch juice. Of course, in any season, children and teenagers go to the Memorial Tree for leisure. Marina Arpiulyeva remembers that when she was at school, she took part in a camping trip along the trail. The teenagers stayed overnight in the *zimovye* and they told each other scary stories all night long and scared each other: "That was good entertainment, although I was shaking with fear, how funny!"

The preparation for the journey is different from season to season. In a summer, the participants need to bring food and a *toiun*.⁶ So-called forest clothes are also brought (*lesnaya ekipirovka*), which protect people from blood-sucking insects and makes walking in the Taiga easier. In winter, the preparation for the journey takes more time since the participants of the trail tours (*pokhody*) depend largely on weather conditions. For example, when it is cold, Viktor Ganyugin cuts the ice with his axe in order to boil it in an iron pot for tea. Generally, Viktor Ganyugin and his students adapt to the weather conditions well. Once, Viktor Ganyugin told me while preparing one of his journeys:

We need to know the weather before heading out to the Memorial Tree. If heavy snow or low temperatures are forecast, we postpone our trip [*pokhod*].

Once on a winter day I joined Viktor Ganyugin and his students to see a taiga lesson. The students received the first lesson before the journey started. We were waiting for two boys to come, however they were delaying the departure. Viktor said that the majority of people should not wait and asked his students to write a message in the snow: an arrow indicating direction and a phrase "we are waiting near the First Stan". I had a task – to draw messages every fifty metres by *toiun*. The boys reached us quickly.

Near the First Stan Viktor gave the students a task: to document animal tracks left on the snow. He organised the journey because a day before he had seen fresh sable tracks and wanted students to distinguish them from other tracks and document them. For scale the students used a box of matches. After the tracks were recognised and



Photo 9. Pupils of the Kindigir High School at the Memorial Trail's First Stan, 2007. Photo by Veronika Simonova.

documented, students had to reconstruct the situation that led to some tracks being intermingled. The lesson was not very long – just a half of the day. Viktor decided that for some small children who were around eight years old it would be too harsh to stay longer in the forest.

Next day I joined Viktor, who was going to Memorial Tree. He wanted to check whether a bear had been visiting his hunting cabin. The Memorial Tree was the end point before a path to Nyurundukan began. We moved on and when we reached a big stone Viktor said to me that that was the last point I could change my mind and get back. If I made the decision to go on I would have to keep going even if I regretted the decision. We kept going and the steep route was getting harder and harder (Photo 10). Viktor told me that I was probably thinking how good going down would be, and this was true. However his second remark made a paradox as he assured me that when we go down I would wish to go up, and he was perfectly right. When we reached Nyurundukan, Viktor said that now I can imagine how it felt for people to walk that route and carry heavy cargo on their backs.

All in all, the Memorial Trail has become an important component of village daily life. The process of restoring the traditional Evenki route filled it with new meaning and new ideas. Basically, the Memorial Trail includes not only the factual knowledge of where Evenki hunters and reindeer herders previously stopped, but it also engages individual memories, taiga pedagogy, material artefacts, and human emotions. Hence, the old Evenki path has become a memorial not only in a formal manner, but has also become the experience of memory, life knowledge, and an understanding of what it means to engage with taiga life, which has lasted many generations. Through the expli-



Photo 10. Viktor Ganyugin near the Nyurundukan Pass (Nyurudukanskiy Pereval), 2008. Photo by Veronika Simonova.

cation of Evenki taiga occupation and by creatively including external memorial patterns, Kholodnoye Evenkis tell a story about their routine, which they carefully remember and actively experience in the present.

CONCLUSION

The phenomena of the Memorial Tree and the Memorial Trail illustrate how Evenkis use official memorials to articulate their own memories. However, not only do local residents employ this official image in order to tell their story about their past, but they also change the social role of official war monuments. Through this message (the Memorial Trail) Evenkis provide many links with different contexts, such as personal inscription, reindeer herding, and overt landscape knowledge. Furthermore, the Memorial Tree and the Memorial Trail demonstrate the importance of individual contributions to collective remembering.

The story gives not only the details of the famous biography of a local hero, but it also makes the whole community permanently glorified and remembered. Kholodnoye Evenkis memorialise common taiga practices that involve hard work, skill, and knowledge. All these factors of local memorialisation constitute vernacular memory that delivers a message about contemporary needs, interpretations of the past, and practices.

The overlap of an old Evenki path (which is one of many) with the Memorial Trail (which is unique) and a tree with carved initials (again, one of many) with the Memorial Tree (unique) represents an attempt to reform relationships with outsiders and official memorial regimes through common symbols (the Soviet style of patriotic memorialisation). Finally, the repetition of stops in practice (apprenticeship) and narration, judgments of local elders, and the collaboration of local enthusiasts with memories of those elders together constitute the social memory of Kholodnoye inhabitants.

This memory reproduces a dialogue between epochs and generations, dominant discourses and local practices. Social memory in Kholodnoye is personified, and life in the Taiga obtains new sites of human biographies and dreams of being remembered. The Memorial Tree has become a monument. To put it another way, the official monuments do not have 'human faces' and leave only a formal and general message about local war participants analogous to many others who died in other parts of the country. The official monuments do not touch the intimacy of biographies or any other memorable and important details, which charge the material of a monument with human emotions and memory.

In sum, the Memorial Trail and the Memorial Tree have three main dimensions: solidarity with the national memorial regime through the image of loyalty, humanisation of the past along with its engagement in contemporary village life, and local taiga apprenticeship. All these dimensions are the significant parts of the process of negotiation between Kholodnoye residents and the memorial regime where the message about local community is full of images grounded in biographies, individual memories, and experiences. Hence, rather formal memorial symbols obtain new perspectives when placed inside Kholodnoye: they have gradually become humanised and filled up with personal stories. Thus Evenkis in alliance with the Taiga successfully incorporate powers of memorial universalism. Finally, the Memorial Trail is not the landscape of resistance but a strategic diplomacy.

NOTES

1 I capitalise 'the Taiga' to indicate its agentive force in local life. In a broader sense, the Taiga is a partner in human-taiga alliance which engages with and creatively adapts external regimes and ideas of different kind to local contexts.

2 Huntington states western universalism is perceived as imperialism by 'the rest' and there is no other political strategy outside imperial ambitions and their promotions in universal values and norms. Universalism and attempts to create universal frames for views and practices in colonial contexts are always linked to imperial powers and therefore can be discussed as 'universal' and thus cross-culturally comparable. However, I argue that even if universalism might exist in many forms, memorial universalism is especially powerful as it tends to penetrate everyday basis and is typically accompanied by practices of sacralisation of 'one version of the past'. Being turned into something sacred, universal history producers try to make it shared as non-optional and absolutely trustable.

3 All words given here and below in italics refer to Russian vocabulary unless otherwise indicated.

4 The place Vera indicated will be described below.

5 Crackling is needed when one has to listen to the fire in order to make decision to stay or move away from the place. For that purpose the Evenki use other types of trees, for example birch or pine.

6 Evenki *toiun* is a forest stick with one forked end. Helping to keep balance in the forest and serves as a tool for making tea: put near a bonfire and hang a boiler on a forked end of the stick.

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