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Lived displacement among the Evenki of Iyengra

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Abstract

This article studies the Evenki experiences and memories bound to past and present changes in their modes of living in Sakha-Yakutia. An endemic understanding of the community reflections on de-placing, or lived displacement, is advanced, both theoretically and empirically. The empirical part starts with a description of the Evenki traditions sustained in everyday life today. This is followed by a threefold reading of the Evenki reflections of displacement, focusing on (1) routines of brigades and obchinas, (2) transitions of traditions and place names, and (3) disturbances due to industrial land-use regime. The analysis is based on Evenki interviews in Iyengra between 2005–2020 and related empirical material gathered for the Evenki Atlas completed by the first of the authors of this article. A major result of the study is an in-depth Evenki view on the phases of displacement. In addition, the article demonstrates the value of endemic ethnography that favours research commitments that are both sensitive to epistemic differentiation and help in identifying the actual costs of forced and unruly de-placing.

Keywords

Evenki traditions, Indigenous earthviews, obshchina communities, forced displacement, socio-environmental adjustment, endemic ethnography

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Most of the ethnic, often Indigenous, communities of the Arctic and Boreal North are grounded in specific mobile routines and patterns of engaging with the local landscapes (Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018). This is due to (semi)nomadic traditions and the long histories of land settlement.¹ The northern communities can therefore be regarded as societies that have developed their own particular skills while advancing their livelihoods under the extreme and highly shifting conditions of the North. Moreover, the pressures of industrial-scale resource extraction have greatly affected the community conditions. The communities of the North have in general reacted to the expansive external impact according to learned and inherited patterns of action. Adjustment and resistance—that is, reactivity arising from within particular traditions—have thus kept the communities in movement (Bladh, 1995; Fryer & Lehtinen, 2013; Habeck, 2004; Karjalainen & Habeck 2004; Konstantinov, 2005; Mustonen, 2017; for the Evenki, see Evenki Atlas, 2020; Lavrillier, 2006, 2011; Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018).

Accordingly, when studying this type of mobility, it seems only natural and necessary to extend community studies to cover both the expressions of externally induced displacement and community-specific reactions affiliated to them. Hence, research has focused on the dialogue between the strains of displacement and acts of emplacement (Casey, 1997; K. Heikkilä, 2008, 2018; Johansson, 2008; Kuusisto-Arponen, 2009; Kymäläinen & Lehtinen, 2010; Mertens, 2015). Displacement, or de-placing (Casey, 1997, p. xii), as has been witnessed, often takes the shape of more or less forced or voluntary migration. However, it can also emerge in extensive changes in the daily conditions of living, in the form of socio-environmental changes in a settled community, without any signs of migration (Brubaker, 2005; Fryer & Lehtinen, 2013; Schwartz, 2006; Theodossopoulos, 2000).

It is often agreed in these types of studies that communities evolve reactively, through impulses emerging from within the more general changes in society and nature. Socio-environmental change is then arguably thought to be relational in character (see Massey, 2005). This approach guides toward identifying and documenting the signs of flexible adaptation to pressures of displacement. Lived displacement then takes the appearance of reactive acts characterised by defence, adaptation or migration—or, by varying combinations of these (e.g. see Bærenholdt, 2007; Taksami, 2017).

In those studies inspired by relational thinking, communities are often defined as intersections of the forces influencing them. Places are then regarded as meeting places of spatial strains (Brah, 1996; Massey, 2005; Ní Laoire, 2003). Community is accordingly seen, for example, as “a point of confluence” (Brah, 1996, p. 181) and it is pictured as a contingent outcome of those economic, political and cultural pressures surrounding it. The community serves as frontline evidence of “the multi-axiality of power relations” (Ní Laoire, 2003, p. 278).

However, what worries us here is that if communities are only regarded as end results of the multiple forces and objects of externally induced displacement, much of the community dynamics is in danger of being left unrecognised. For example, if local communities are seen as crossroad associations that evolve according to translocal impulses and attached reactions to them, a significant part of the endemic acts and potentials of the local community is at risk of being ignored. Therefore, accordingly, we treat communities in this article not only as reactive and adjusting targets but also as actors that make and commemorate histories of their own. They are thus identified as actors of change that evolve through concentric acts; that is, through a gradual renewing of collective traditions and shared memories that are grounded in the experience of community belongingness (Bawaka Country, including Wright, Suchet-Pearson, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, Ganambarr, Ganambarr-Stubbs, Ganambarr & Maymuru, 2020; Eriksen, Valkonen,

& Valkonen, 2018; Jürgenson, 2004; Knuuttila, 2005; Lehtinen, 2011; Lehtola, 2000; Mustonen, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017).

Consequently, we explore in this article the dynamics of displacement by positioning the academic research approach and related concepts into a dialogue with the community knowledge accumulated from within the experiences of living in a specific location in the southern Sakha-Yakutian taiga. Our case community, the Evenki of Iyengra, has faced a continuous, if in time varying, pressure of displacement since the days of first encounters with Russians in the early 17th century, including forced settlement in the 1920s. Under the Soviet regime and during the post-Soviet years, the Evenki lands and waters became a target of expansive industrial operations. Coal mining, gold digging,² hydropower construction, energy pipelines and many other infrastructure projects marked the landscape. This expansion widely and thoroughly altered the post-Ice Age landscapes of the southern Sakha-Yakutia. The Soviet Union also established the village of Iyengra on the catchment area of the river of the same name in 1926, along the traditional nomadic routes of the Evenki.

Evenki are settled over a vast geographical range in East Siberia, Far East of Russia, Northern China and Mongolia (Mertens, 2015). It is estimated that the entire Evenki community has today approximately 36,000 members, and ca. 7,000 speak the language. The traditional livelihoods have revolved around nomadic reindeer herding, hunting and fishing (see Evenki Atlas, 2020; and the maps in Figures 1 and 2).

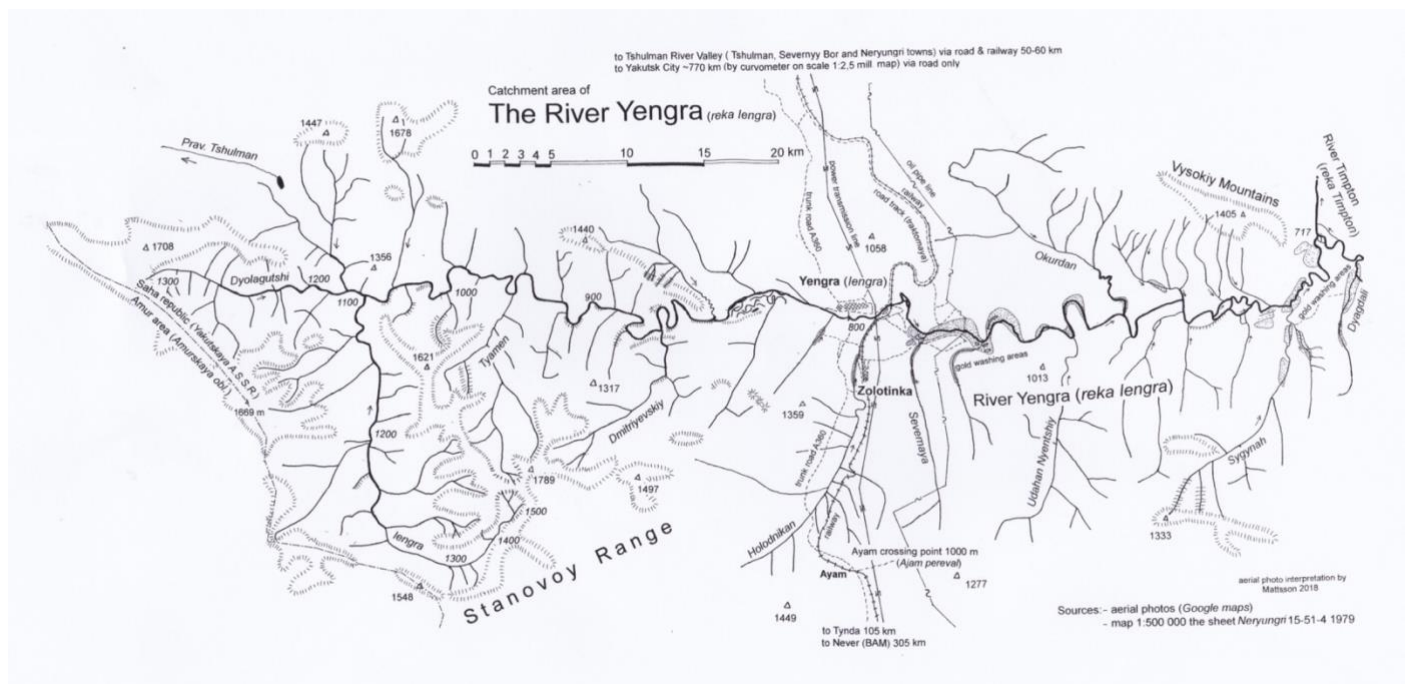


Figure 1. Map of Yengra – the river and the village (Evenki Atlas, 2020).

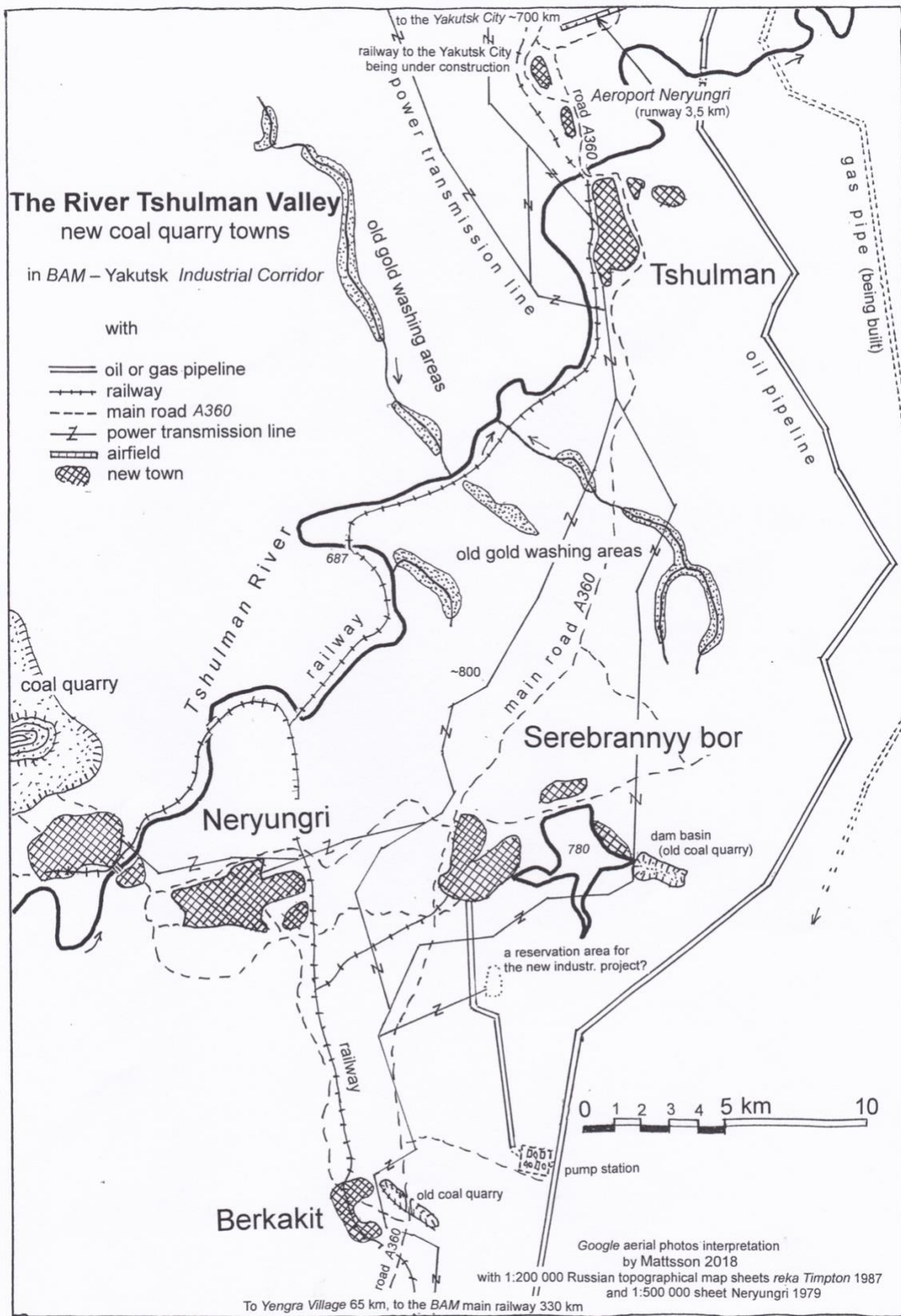


Figure 2. Map of the River Tshulman Valley (Evenki Atlas, 2020).

One of the first encounters with Russians took place in 1619 when Petr Albychev and Cherkas Rukin enslaved Evenki nobility Iltik. Since this event 400 years ago, the Evenki have interacted with the Indo-European peoples. Prior to contact with Russians, the Evenki had met with the Sakha (Yakut) people, with whom the relationship had ranged from trade to war. During those days, the Evenki were also aware of and had connections to a range of Siberian nations, such as the Chukchi, Even and Yukaghirs (Araseyenin, 2007). The place names surrounding Iyengra reflect in part the meshed landscape and influence of the Sakha on the Evenki homeland (Evenki Atlas, 2020).

Neriungri is a southern region of the Republic Sakha-Yakutia in the Russian Federation, located close to the Chinese border. The population of the district is about 75,000, most of it being urban. Neriungri, the capital city, is also the centre for coal-mining operations. The district produces 75% of the 10 million tons of coal that is produced in Sakha annually (Araseyenin, 2007; Newell, 2004).

Southern Sakha-Yakutia is part of the continental climatic zone. Siberian larch, other coniferous trees and birch cover much of the taiga. The village of Iyengra is located in the southern part of the Sakha. Mountains and large hills dominate the landscape, combined with shallow rivers flowing in the valleys. For example, the Aldan catchment area, a subcatchment of Lena River, flows through the district. Winters are usually very cold with small amounts of snowfall. Temperatures can plummet down to -50°C and below. Springtime is often short with snowmelt already well under way in April. Summers are continental and hot. Autumn brings the first frosts, often in September or October. Salmonid fish such as trout, grayling and whitefish occupy the lakes and rivers. This is reflected in many Evenki place names around Iyengra (Evenki Atlas, 2020; Lavrillier, 2006). The Evenki have used the salmonid fish also as cultural bioindicators to assess the degradation of river health and change over time (Evenki Atlas, 2020; Mustonen, 2009). They also place significant cultural value especially to local trout as a culturally relevant species.

Lived displacement: Two geographies, two arguments

The formulation of lived displacement in the introduction bears two arguments. The first one is grounded in the idea that a closer view on lived displacement is difficult, if not impossible, without sensitivity to community-specific thoughts and acts of concentric placing. Individual communities are then regarded not solely as particular products of general changes, but instead as associations enriched by chains of customs and memories that respect their shared and divided pasts (Anttonen, 1996; Arnold, 2018; Barth, 1969; Fryer, 2001; Mitchell, 2019).

This type of sensitivity favours research methods that help in identifying the signals of endemic renewal emerging from within those community practices that aim at conserving and developing the everyday conditions according to what is seen as necessary within the community (see a nuanced description of the Evenki landscape terminologies in Lavrillier, 2011; and Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018). Endemic initiatives are considered as crucial while advancing local livelihoods, as alternatives to the expressions of displacement of external origin (Baschmakoff, 2007; Gonzales, 2009; Knuutila, 2005; Jürgenson, 2004; Lehtola, 2000; Mustonen, 2014, 2017; Schwartz, 2006).

In research practices, however, identifying the tradition-bearing thoughts and acts from the tensions between impulses of trans-local displacement and acts of concentric emplacement is often highly challenging. Only by being aware of the particular community-specific configuration of these tensions can a reliable view on the significance of local traditions be traced. Within communities, this contestation tends to emerge in the form of disagreements between

traditionalists and reformers; or it can, for example, be noticed in the background of the occasional clashes between generations (Fryer & Lehtinen, 2013; Lehtinen, 2006). Often, as we have witnessed, the elderly of the communities serve as bearers of traditions; however, the appreciation of them varies from community to community. Hence, as we have learned, endemic research among the ethnic communities of the North usually proceeds with the kind help of the elderly and by observing their roles in community decision making (Mustonen, 2009, 2013). However, rapid environmental loss, as is the case for the Evenki, seems to also point to an awakening of values of traditional livelihoods and connections to the environment among younger members of a community (as seems also to be the case in a new type of co-researcher contexts; see Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018).

Moreover, as for our second argument, sensitivity to concentric spaces and endemic renewal also brings sensitivity to discontinuities in multi-axial contact. This side of human co-being is often undermined in those currently popular approaches that favour relational ontologies based on axioms of existential thrown-togetherness and imperial time-space compression (Baerenholdt, 2007; Exner, Lauk, & Zittel, 2015; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Harvey, 1989). Instead, the endemic approach, while appreciating concentric socio-environmental emplacing, guides toward careful documentation of the signs of dissonance in settings characterised by simultaneous acts of domination and experiences of loss. Constructions of hegemonic regimes as a rule shadow and are indifferent to the retreats of minorities (Exner et al., 2015). The steps of regime-building can, in our view, be identified and documented by paying careful attention to the details of non-resonance within multi-axial interfaces (Lehtinen, 2006, 2011). This type of divergence was discussed by Mustonen (2012) when he was focusing on the narratives of “critical infrastructure”—the state and the Evenki definitions of it were almost binarily opposed.

The progression of cross-cultural diverging and regime-building that followed can be recognised, for example, by analysing the events of non-communication at the cultural interfaces and in the transition zones between differing epistemic communities. One could, for example, examine communicative breaks in multilingual interaction. The breaks of communication can range from occasional features of unequal correspondence between ethnic groups to systematic programs of lingual annihilation, and even further, to topocide and community exits (K. Heikkilä, 2008; L. Heikkilä, 2006; Mustonen, 2012; Mustonen & Mustonen, 2011; Porteous, 1988; Tanner, 1929).

On the above foundation, our approach is to be summarised as follows: we, together with our co-researchers in Iyengra, analyse and present the Evenki of Iyengra in two parts. This selection has been chosen as a marker away from the Soviet and/or outside positioning of Evenki knowledge in the past (see Lavrillier, 2011). We first describe it as a distinct community and life mode that contains eminent values and potentials of its own. We accordingly concentrate on those inherent skills and drives that are not reducible to any general processes contributing to their existence. Second, we identify the multi-axial bonds that have exerted influence on the Iyengra Evenki. The Evenki community is seen as a point of confluence for translocal trajectories. These two folds are in our view simultaneous, but they cross-communicate only partially.

Moreover, to further summarise, the simultaneous and only partially resonating co-formation of relational and concentric spatialities is identified here as the moment of lived displacement. The differentiation between the two spaces is epistemological by nature. Endemic placing contains in our view highly valuable potentials for sound development. Consequently, endemic ethnography brings the researchers beyond the apparent aspects of community change. This is because the signals of emplacement are identified wherever and whenever “intrinsic alternatives” are sketched. These are initiatives that have lively connections to the basic ethical and spiritual preferences

shared by the community, that is, traditional earthviews.³ Emplacement hence addresses the place of one's own that bears continuities through its potential to enrich community life. Concretely, we lean on fieldwork results from 2004–2020, when the Evenki as co-researchers shared their oral histories, toponymic scholarship and other cultural and socio-environmental materials to provide means of measuring how displacement proceeds in their taiga homeland. More precisely, the primary oral history documentation work took place between 2005 and 2010. Methodologically, this was carried out through expeditions to Iyengra town as well as remote reindeer camps (primary visits were made to the reindeer brigades 4 and 5 and with members of the Gonam *obschina*). Additional members of the Evenki community were met in Yakutsk, the regional capital. Evenki leaders, such as Galina Varlamova and Tamara Andreeva, set the initial research topics of climate and ecological knowledge in 2004. Then, as the field periods intensified between 2005 and 2012, we asked the Evenki involved what should be the main topics of investigation. This gave rise to the Evenki oral history archive that covers a large range of topics in addition to the initial climate and environmental issues (e.g. over 200 original data entry themes covered, including traditional foods, navigation, star lore, place names, healing, shamanism, relations with Russia, gendered knowledge of the forest, Indigenous rights, social and cultural customary rules, reindeer qualities and issues, and fisheries).

Between 2010 and 2019, further documentation of oral histories, deep translations and analysis of the Evenki and Russian language materials was conducted in both Yakutsk and Finland. On each of these visits, Russian and sometimes Evenki summaries of research (and if needed, whole primary materials) were submitted to the review, and free, prior and informed approval and consent of the community members was obtained. If a person wished, his or her oral history and Indigenous knowledge was used anonymously and all co-researchers had a veto right to their materials. No co-researcher (between 2004–2020) has asked for their materials to be withdrawn. Anonymous options have been provided in summaries of the whole reindeer herding unit's (brigade) observations summarised in Mustonen (2009). Otherwise, the vast majority (95%) of the co-researching people decided to allow their names to be cited as a part of the work.

During 2004–2020, several co-researchers, such as prominent community members and knowledge holders Vladimir Kolesov, Kim Stepanovich Neustroyev, Oktyabrina Naumova and Savey, to name some, have unfortunately passed on. When this has happened we have maintained communications with their next of kin and families to respect their wishes on how the recorded materials have been used.

The emergence of the Evenki landscape studies (e.g. see Lavrillier, 2011; and Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018) was used for a comparative view and complementary place name and land use analysis. In 2007, a large international conference was organised in Iyengra to discuss the midpoint results and priorities of the larger cooperation. Between 2012 and 2019, the materials of the oral histories were summarised into an online Atlas (see Evenki Atlas, 2020) that has been made available, based on the wishes of our co-researchers, in Russian in January 2020 (an Evenki version may be a future option).

During the Russian and Soviet era, the Evenki were targets of scrutiny and ethnographic investigations that have provided a view (from the outside) on the transitions and changes of the Evenki societies across their vast home area. Authors such as Arkadii Anisimov, Sergei Shirokoroff, Anna Sirina and perhaps most importantly, Grafira Vasilevich (e.g. see summaries in Lavrillier, 2011), documented the Evenki customs and lifeways from between the late 1800s to the mid 1900s. Emerging from the 1990s, the concept of Indigenous communities of Northern Russia being in a position of co-interpreting and researching with outside scholars started to take foothold (Mustonen, 2009). We follow this positioning in our present work and have also included the

voices of the Evenki academic scholars, such as the late Galina Varlamova (2005) and Anna Myreeva, as well as our co-researcher Tamara Andreeva in Yakutsk.

We start the empirical section of the article with a description of the traditional earthview of the Evenki and thereafter on this ground focus on the memories and outcomes of the different phases and aspects of displacement.

Traces of the Evenki earthview

The Evenki have developed strict guidelines and Indigenous customary law systems for their relationship with the taiga and cosmos. These include rules on how to live with nature, how to travel on Evenki land (Lavrillier, 2006), and how hunters should behave when they are given certain animals (Lavrillier, 2011). In 2005,⁴ Vladimir Kolesov explained some of the Evenki principles on these issues:

We say: Earth mother. If we go past large rivers, we hang a piece of cloth there. Close to the mountains we do that too. We hang a piece of cloth there. You are not allowed to leave pieces of firewood lying around. It is not allowed to cut more wood than what is needed. When you are someplace, for example hunting, don't leave pieces of wood crosswise. Everything needs to be in order. Don't throw bones around. I make a shelter, and all bones are put there. So that nothing is out of order. It is also because the reindeer come and bite the bones and suffocate.

Clean and safe. To keep the reindeer from harm.

You fish only as much as you need. If the next day you need more, you go fishing again then.

If no one would buy the sable skins, it would not be hunted as much. If you need a hat, it is only then you're allowed to hunt. If there was no need, it would not be killed. This goes for all of the animals I think.

And trees too. If you need wood for sleds, then you take but otherwise no. If there is no need, nothing will be cut. (Mustonen, 2009)

Galina I. Varlamova, or "Keptuke" as she is known to the Evenki, was a daughter of a spiritual leader. Unfortunately, she passed from this world in 2019. All of her life she wrote and researched as well as practised the Evenki traditions related to nature. According to her (Varlamova, 2005), the functioning principles of Evenki civilization are based on enforcing the moral system of what the Evenki call *Ity* through *odjo*: a set of principles of taboos and rules of human behaviour:

In every part of life, be it material or cultural, there are reflections of relationship between the Evenki and nature. This relationship that was formed and reformed across centuries was a basis for general understanding for justice, traditions and moral guidelines. These are reflected in the system for ecological law, *Ity*. They are also reflected in the prohibition-taboos, named *Odjo*. Evenki oral tradition is not just folklore and traditional poetry but includes many other cultural texts that offer teachings for life in nature and in social family and tribal system. Traditions, fixed rituals and ancient rites that have survived to this time have all been subordinate to experience of living in nature, which is Evenki homeland and *Buga* – Mother god.⁵ Evenki place nature at the highest level. (Varlamova, 2005)

These rules and human lives operate in the universe of *Buga*, or God, Galina Varlamova explained further (see a larger treatment of her synthesis of the Evenki beliefs in English in Varlamova, 2005).

The most important role and significance in the Evenki universe is placed in nature. Evenki see nature as the highest god, Buga. Everything is created by Buga/nature.

Already in the 1990s, Anatoli Ivanovits Lasarev shared the teachings of his father with Galina Varlamova in Iyengra:

My father spoke like this, and I think like this and I tell you this now.

Buga gives life to all kinds of scraps on earth, including humans. Buga sees everything, warms everything with its inner warmth, makes us human.

Buga does not like badness. You should not be selfish and greedy, but share.

Buga gives it for everyone according to the *nimat* custom.⁶

Buga has prescribed this law for every living thing. (Varlamova, 2005)

Buga is celebrated, according to Varlamova (2005), in the seasonal rituals and festivities. In spring, the Ikenipke Festival, which is a celebration of renewing of life, Buga has to be remembered and respected through singing and dancing. While the Ikenipke Festival has been transformed into a summer festival and lost most of its original procedure (Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018), it is still an important marker event of the year for the Evenki.

According to Varlamova (2005), the Evenki think that a human is what whole nature is; more precisely, a small part of nature. In this respect, human is equal to a pine needle, with whatever little thing in nature, created by nature. Humans do not differ from other beings in nature, living or inanimate. In Evenki tradition, people are called *mugdeken ekhachi*, a tree stump that sees (literally a tree stump with eyes),⁷ and *mugdeken sechi*, a tree stump that hears (literally a treestump with ears).⁸

In the ecological thinking of the Evenki, people and animals are one united whole, and people understand animals. According to the traditional thinking all living beings have a spirit, *omi* (human spirit, sometimes also spelled *amit*).

Omi-bee indevunin.

Soul / Spirit is the tool for life. All living have omi-souls and everything else capable of moving and disintegrating have musun, motive energy / power of motion. (Varlamova 2005).

The late Oktyabrina Vladimirovna Naumova, a knowledge holder, recounted in 2006 a powerful reflection:

Amit [spellings vary—authors].

Human soul.

If it stops even for the littlest bit, a person dies, flies away.

Every human has a soul. (Mustonen, 2009).

Nature and its phenomena reflect this relationship based on oneness, unity. It is known that Evenki have kept their bear cult. Bear is the most sacred of animals. There are also sanctifying customs connected with other animals; for example, there are birds that are left untouched.

Terenti Semenov, an Elder from Iyengra, reported in 2005:

We have swan, then cuckoo, then woodpecker. Raven. There are four sacred animals. Then a white reindeer. Every white reindeer cannot be sacred. Grandmother shaman determines this. There is always one reindeer which leads the others. Yes. It has that [skill], other reindeer follow. There is only one like that. It can be caught but we won't use it for carrying anything. All reindeer follow. (Mustonen, 2009)

In spring 2006, the herders of the Reindeer Brigade 4⁹ mentioned that:

It is not allowed to kill a cuckoo. If you want to foresee the future, you kill a cuckoo, eat it and place the bones under your pillow for the night.

Marina Yegorovna Lehanova talked about birds in 2006:

There are some sacred birds, that you are not allowed to kill. Gull. Diver. I know about those. Others: cuckoo. They are not to be killed. My grandmother used to say so. If you kill a cuckoo, unintentionally or knowingly, it is said that you have to go and sleep under the tree where you killed it. You fall asleep and you see different kinds of dreams ... good dreams and bad dreams. Those dreams may come true. Can be good dreams, can be bad dreams. My grandmother, my mother used to say this. Shamans used to have birds. Boys tried to kill birds. There are also such birds, shaman birds. We tell boys not to kill any bird, not even an owl. There is a custom that no-one, not even an adult is allowed to kill an owl, because we used to say that that person will lose his mind. If he kills he will lose his mind. If you shoot a cuckoo, you need to spend three nights with that bird, then you see your whole life. (Mustonen, 2009).

In general, the forests and taiga lands and waters around Iyengra are not “wilderness” for the Evenki (Lavrillier, 2012). Rather they are a cultural landscape filled with history and presence. They are defined as the Evenki homeland. The forest contains “close proximity use areas”; for example, past and present camp sites and nomadic routes that are a transitional space between human and natural realms. This is clarified by Lavrillier (e.g. in 2006, 2011) and Mustonen (2009) in their studies of the spatial organisation of the taiga among the Evenki.

In contrast, the deep forest and remote hunting areas are “for the nature” (Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018), only to be visited by Elders who are aware of a proper behaviour and/or for occasional hunting trips. Mustonen (2009) explains how the time and dwelling in the village of Iyengra differs from the taiga memories and presence—many people in the settlement long for the freedom, self-autonomous organisational and spatial order of the deep forest and nomadic camps whereas the town is seen to be ordered and governed by Russian state norms.

Evenki navigation skills are rather well known. Lavrillier (2006) stresses the role of local streams and rivers for the Evenki navigation, especially during winter. Rivers emerge as “highways” on which connections can be made easily using reindeer travels. Lavrillier and Gabushev (2018) explore the Evenki landscape and terrain concepts in detail, demonstrating the close proximity of the language and landscape forms and details both for the Khabarovsk and Sakha Evenki.

One herder articulated the Evenki navigational skills in 2006:

While travelling on the land, it does not matter if it is day or night. Or for example the direction the river flows to. We know this ourselves. (Mustonen, 2009)

As is clear from the oral histories and literature described above, the Evenki have produced a dynamic, deep and traditional engagement with their lived landscapes and forests and rivers. Lavrillier and Gabushev (2018) have also demonstrated that the Evenki have been far from being a static people—active search for new pasture and hunting territories explains the vast

geographical range of their homeland, the larger “Evenkia” (Klokov, 2016). Place names close to Iyengra indicate layered histories, conflict and trade with the Sakha-Yakuts (Evenki Atlas, 2020). The Evenki could, to a certain extent, mitigate and address these relations during their “endemic times”, that is, until the time of the arrival of the Russians.

Increasingly from the early Soviet period and overwhelmingly so from 1970s onwards, the state-sponsored intrusion into Southern Sakha-Yakutia (Newell, 2004) has wrecked the intact nature of the taiga ecosystems of the Evenki, with the construction of mines, pipelines (Mustonen, 2009; Sidortsov, Ivanona, & Stammler, 2016; Yakovleva, 2011) and hydrostations, as well as road and railway lines that have altered permanently the status of the ecosystems.

The Evenki have responded in a number of ways that can be summarised as a mix of access, avoidance, withdrawal, confrontation and ultimately acceptance. This multifaceted transformation of the Iyengra Evenki cannot be summarised in one article, but we explore the narratives of oral histories and recalls from this transformation by using carefully selected examples from the co-researcher contributions to position and highlight the process of displacement through lived experiences.

Lived displacement 1: Brigades and obschinas

During the Soviet times, most of the Evenki in the area were officially relocated into the village of Iyengra, which was founded in 1926–1927. According to the 2018 census, the population of Iyengra is 918, of which the majority (over 800) is Evenki. Some of the Iyengra Evenki spend most of the year on the taiga but are registered in the village.¹⁰ Other nationalities in the village include, for example, Even, Karelian, Russian and Sakha-Yakut peoples.

Evenki children go to school in Iyengra, which functions as a residential school where the children of the reindeer herders spend the winter season while their parents are working in the taiga.

In 2006, Valentina Vladimirovna Gavrilova told about her arrival at the village of Iyengra:

We grew up in taiga. When we went to school we didn't speak any Russian. We never went into the village, only our father got supplies from there. We didn't even know what a car was. When I started preschool I didn't know how to speak Russian. We were taken to the residential school with a helicopter and we didn't even go outside, we were so afraid of getting lost. (Mustonen, 2009)

Today, the traditional Evenki way of life is grounded in reindeer herding and seasonal nomadism, hunting and fishing. However, many of the Evenki now work for the industries in the area as teachers and in other positions in the services sector; or, for example, as researchers.

Iconic Evenki trades over centuries have been hunting, fishing and reindeer herding. The Evenki use reindeer mainly for the transportation of goods and people (in hunting). Reindeer are rarely eaten; this mostly happens during rituals or other cultural events or in extreme need (Klokov, 2016; Lavrillier, 2006). Reindeer are rarely sold. Klokov (2016) argues that for the Evenki an “optimal” number of reindeer would be close to 50, to allow for hunting to remain the primary mainstay.

Sable and other fur-bearing animals in a hunting economy (Lavrillier, Gabushev, & Rojo, 2016) produce the financial flow into the communities. Differing from other Siberian nations, Evenki also often ride their reindeer. Viktoria Vladimirovna Vanchikova said in 2006:

My brother could ride reindeer already at the age of three. When it was needed to tame a wild reindeer my father would seat my brother on its back and he had to stay on it. (Mustonen, 2009)

Reindeer herding is conducted in brigades, which is a leftover concept from the command economy of the Soviet times. Then, all the herds were divided into brigades and allocated certain lands and pasture areas. Today the Evenki have a state reindeer herding enterprise and private communities, called *obschinas*, that are Indigenous communities conducting private reindeer herding. Many herders may belong to both a state enterprise and an Indigenous community.

Hunting is an important part of the Evenki subsistence lifestyle (Lavrillier et al., 2016). Wild reindeer and gallinaceous birds are important sources of food. Ermine used to be an important quarry, but nowadays the most precious species is sable, and the squirrel also has value as a fur animal. Fisheries are mostly on rivers and small lakes in the taiga. Fish supplements the traditional dishes and cuisine both in the camps and in Iyengra.

As an example of how the Evenki narrate their nomadic rounds, Vladimir Mihailovich Vasiliev, the leader of the Reindeer Brigade 5, described in 2007 the seasonal rounds of his herd:

In the springtime ... these rivers are called Amedichii and Aldan. We spend the spring at Amedichii. We spend the summer between Amedichii and Aldan. We spend the winter in the same direction, only downstream. The distances between the campsites are roughly 25 kilometres. In the winter it is good if there are trees, water and food for the working reindeer available nearby the camp site. In summer we choose a site that is as level as possible, a valley, next to a glacier when possible. (Mustonen, 2009)

The Evenki reindeer nomadism is decidedly small-scale, concentrated on seasonal uses of the taiga. Lavrillier (2006) stresses the uses of rivers in Evenki transportation. Lavrillier (2011) has discussed the layered and distanced understandings of the forest with human spaces closer to reindeer camps and then more “wild” parts where only Elders and hunters wander. Lavrillier and Gabushev (2018) explain in detail the landscape knowledge, weather observations and predictions and interconnected roles of the Evenki knowledge and taiga in their co-researched monograph. The Evenki have ordered the taiga into spatially and culturally relevant parts that are governed by access and avoidance according to cultural norms (Varlamova, 2005). In comparison, the Arctic reindeer nomadism—for example, by the Chukchi—can cover hundreds of kilometres due to the different structure of the pastures and landscapes.

Valentina Prokopyevna Lekhanova, an Evenki from the Nyurmagan Clan, explained in 2006 the nomadic reindeer year in the taiga based on her childhood experiences:

Calving takes place from April to the beginning or to the middle of June. We check how many calves were born. And in the fall, we have to feed the reindeer. They begin to move about everywhere. There is mushroom, of course. Reindeer look for mushrooms and the herders go after them until it is early winter. In winter they usually stop in one place because of snow conditions. Well, there they have a pasture. They find the place and stay there until spring. Calving begins again in spring time. Then there is the smoke burning in the summer. Reindeer usually return home by themselves from the beginning of June, this is because of the insects. They drive our reindeer home. Our reindeer. And they return for the smoke burning. And they spend the day with us, until it is five o'clock. Smoke burning begins in the morning and continues till five in the evening. (Mustonen, 2009)

Vladimir Kolesov from the reindeer *obschina* *Gonam* described in 2005 his seasonal calendar:

My year begins in the autumn. From fall till spring ... from October till March. I don't talk about November or December as last year but as this year. And when I talk about the spring, I say last year. In March I speak about November as this year and in September I say last year when I talk about March. When hunting season begins, new year begins. (Mustonen, 2009)

He continued to describe the decisions and mechanisms of reindeer cycle and year:

We move our reindeer camp according to the amount of lichen that is available for the reindeer. Half of a month is spent in one place, about half of a month. From autumn till mid-December is one period (season). That is when we hunt. Then in December we return to our reindeer. We collect the reindeer, and it is possible to go and visit the village or stay with the reindeer. It is not just my practice but I suppose many people do it like this. Working reindeer needs rest, so we let them go free.

Then, after they've had their rest, after a month or a month and a half, the spring hunt begins. In the winter time I leave my tent and reindeer here and go hunting by myself. It is here for a long time. For a month or even two. Sometimes until the new year. Then we move and again, two, three months while we are hunting.

New period begins for some in the beginning of February, and for some in the middle of January. We go hunting again. The reindeer rest for that period. Some you can leave or take new ones. In April-May the calving begins. Some gather their reindeer in fences for the calving period and in the fall. But usually the calving takes place in freedom. Some people fence their reindeer but we do not. Reindeer know good places where to calf. Reindeer, especially the older females move to these places by themselves. And that is where they calf. We observe the situation and protect our reindeer. In the springtime I spend longer, for a month or a month and a half in one place, that is when the reindeer calves are born.

In the autumn we stay in one place for a month when it is the rutting season for reindeer. You stay in one place for the rutting season. We only start to move it is over. In summer, we move more often, in every half month. (Mustonen, 2009)

While the traditional Evenki trades of hunting, fishing and herding resemble other similar cultures of Eurasia (Klokov, 2016), it is also distinct—reindeer are ridden and not eaten, nomadic routes are smaller in scale, traditional calendars are observed, taiga is ordered into a space containing “human” realms and natural, faraway zones to name some examples (Lavrillier, 2011). The Soviet government reorganised the spatial and social orders, but by maintaining culturally relevant practices, the Evenki have preserved many elements, a type of core knowledge, of how to maintain relations with the waters and forests of their homeland (Varlamova, 2005). Imposed displacements that intensified from the beginning in the 1970s in the form of simultaneous industrial intrusions (Mustonen, 2012) have broadly affected the traditional Evenki mind and memory, together with the whole reservoir of cultural ties to the lived landscape.

Lived displacement 2: De-remembering and toponym losses

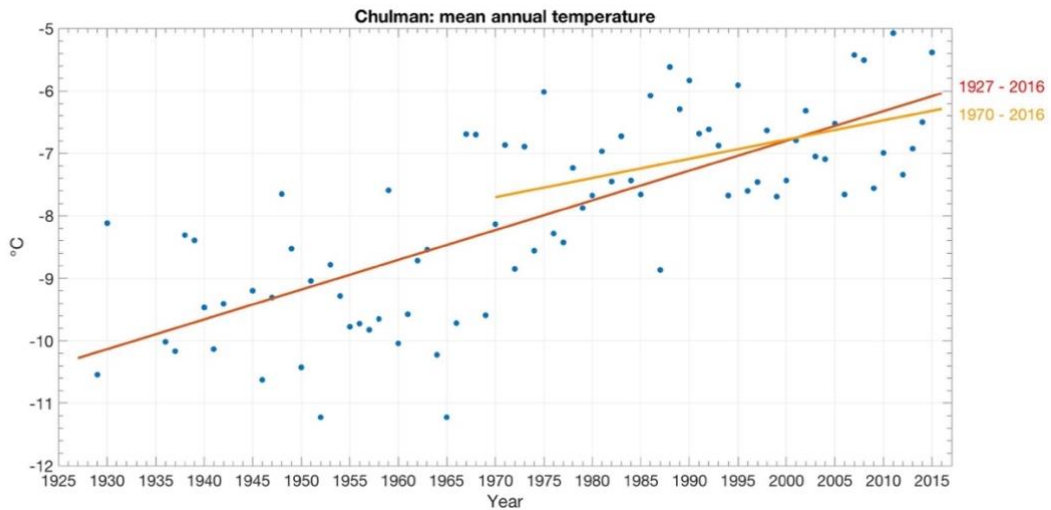
Reflective of loss, many locals still follow the traditional customs, but sometimes the reasons why these customs are followed has started to be forgotten. Vitali Maksimov, a hunter from Iyengra, talks about swan:

We were not allowed to kill anything if there was no need. When we hunted for swans, there was a rule that women and children were not allowed to eat it. I don't know why. There were customs connected to swans. I only remember that children were told not to eat it, or women. Only old men ate it. We also used the wings of swan. When there was a flow of blood, wings were burned and it was either with the smoke or the ash that was used in making it stop. Evenki

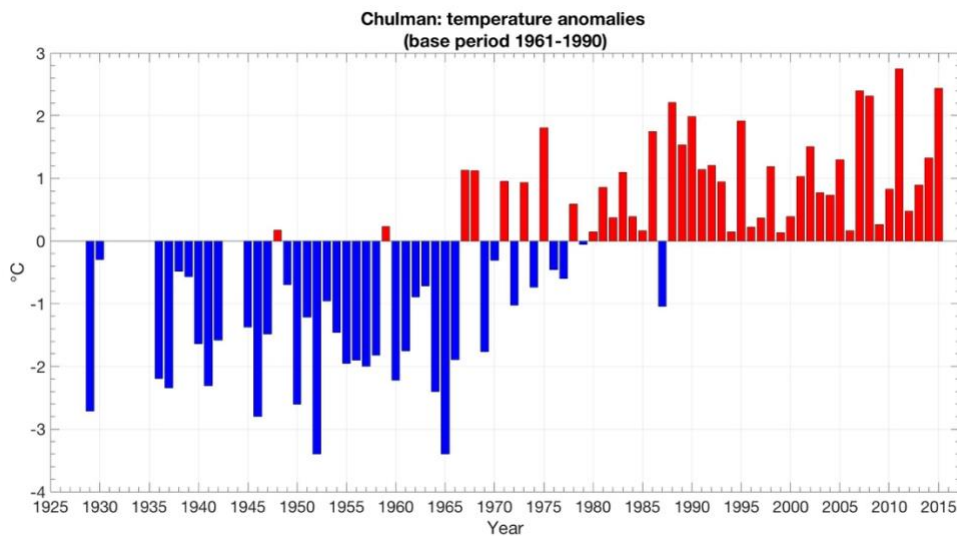
carry the wings with them all the time, my mother carries those still with her. It is a cure.
(Mustonen 2009)

Lavrillier (see Lavrillier, 2006, 2012; Lavrillier et al., 2016; Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018) has worked extensively with various Evenki groups since the 1990s. According to her, key rituals and ceremonial events of the year, such as the *Ikenipke*, have been lost or altered their meaning. The violent impositions have rendered some of the cultural memory and practice, as reflected in Maksimov's oral history, redundant.

Industrial pollution, especially from mining, has wrecked ecosystem health. In addition, climate change has already started to manifest both in the oral histories and the science data from the regions (see Figure 3a and 3b). Evenki views on climate change and oral histories have been explored elsewhere at length (Mustonen, 2009). For the displacement analysis it is sufficient to position the weather and climate change to be major drivers this century that are already affecting the traditional culture and livelihoods (Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018).



3a



3b

Figure 3a and 3b. Climate change summarised on the basis of regional weather station data. These data were derived from Russian Academy of Sciences ground temperature stations with subsequent statistical analysis by Brie Van Dam, PhD, Snowchange.

The Evenki have conducted their own observational assessment of change in comparing place names, especially for aquatic ecosystems. As one oral history example demonstrates, reindeer herder Vladimir Kolesov discussed the place names and recent changes:

We have two middle-sized rivers. It is enough for us. I cannot always even say why a river has the name it has.

Kenerkit. Kener is a fishtrap.

There are a lot of places in this river where one could place a fishtrap.

A river called Kenerkit.

Gonam is a long and meandering river. It was named Gonam. Or Takrekam, it is like this, twisting like a worm. It is like a lake, all shores are muddy.

There are a lot of small rivers.

My campsites are Kurekati-river, Kalbati, Turkit. There is Daban. Delinde refers to fishing, Nirunda. There is Davenda, from word dva – artificial. These exist.

Nirunda. It is a grayling river. There is Delinde. It is a river for trout. It used to be. These names are old. The names persist, but ... all that is left is the name [due to the pollution from the gold mining]. (Mustonen, 2009).

The Evenki place names in Iyengra and the surrounding Southern Sakha-Yakutia area are an important source that animates and enriches the cultural landscape of the Evenki (see Evenki Atlas, 2020). Many place names have been poorly marked on maps in the past, and sometimes even the Evenki themselves do not always remember the exact meaning. Russian collectors of place names, especially in the early contact era, made many mistakes and therefore large amounts of information have been lost. Many rivers and other place names can have multiple interpretations (see Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018).

We have summarised a set of place names both from oral history documentation as well as available literature to provide a non-exhaustive list demonstrating how place names reflect natural environments and Evenki histories, based in part on the *Yakut–Russian Dictionary* (Slepcev, 1972; see also Araseyenin, 2007; Lavrillier & Gabushev, 2018; Mustonen, 2009; Myreeva, 2004; Syulbe, 2004; Varlamova, 2005). These materials have been summarised into the recent Evenki Atlas (2020) available online.

In general it can be said that the Evenki have named different natural formations of their taiga very clearly. The oldest place names reflect, for example, rivers, important mountains, and other key sites for their culture. The oldest place names reflect the hunting lifestyle and later the nomadic herding.

What are known as “place names” today, important for cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, have been used for centuries as waypoints and ways of remembering the taiga and its features, including rivers and traditionally used territories. They form a cognitive map for the Evenki (Evenki Atlas, 2020).

Hydronyms, those place names that reflect water bodies or their attributes, such as lakes and rivers, contain descriptions of the different elements and characteristics of water flow, depth, meandering and safe crossing over rivers. Many Evenki campsites have traditionally been located at sites that do not freeze in the winter due to the quality and speed of water flow, to provide a source of freshwater for both people and reindeer. Lavrillier (2006) points to the central role of rivers as winter highways for reindeer travel to the extent that a location is narrated not using cardinal points but rather by river banks, streams and aquatic features of travelled terrains.

Some place names are also layered; they reflect the Sakha arrivals and mixing of toponyms with the original Evenki ones. Relations and conflicts between these peoples have been encoded in these toponyms. An example of Evenki place names demonstrates the ecological connection between the Evenki language and the landscape (see Appendix).

Lived displacement 3: Industrial land-use regime

Industrial land use in the surroundings of Iyengra have had a deep impact on the traditional land use, culture and economies of the Evenki. Railroads, hydroelectric stations, and coal and gold mines have gradually dominated the landscape. In addition, the construction of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean oil pipeline and Power of Siberia gas pipeline during the 2000s and 2010s (Mustonen, 2009; Sidortsov et al., 2016; Yakovleva, 2011) have largely modified the lands and lives of the people in the region. The first railroad, the Baikal-Amur tracks (or the BAM track), was already constructed across the taiga in the 1970s (see Figure 1). Mega changes in nature and society have affected all of the Evenkia—in 1927 they possessed approximately 49,000 reindeer, in 1968 up to 63,800, and in the 2010s, the numbers have fallen to 3,000 animals (Klokov, 2016).

The co-researchers repeatedly returned to the abrupt link between railroad construction and reindeer herding. When the first tracks were built, accounts of several young reindeer herders committing suicide were reported (Mustonen, 2010). It is believed that they could not come to terms with the imposed dramatic changes in their lands and lives. Such upheavals have produced contexts where traditional skills and values have lost meaning and their whole world was turned upside down.

The cumulative impacts of past land-use changes, and especially those associated with the industrial megaprojects of the 2000s and 2010s, are as immense as they are difficult to assess. In summary, mining, energy and infrastructure projects have thoroughly altered the Evenki land and lifescapes in the following ways (see Newell, 2004; Mustonen, 2009; Sidortsov et al., 2016; Yakovleva, 2011):

- Major hydrological regimes and aquatic ecosystems have been essentially transformed by mining extensions and the construction of hydropower.
- Smaller streams and old-growth (naturally developed) forests have been contaminated by oil pipelines, as well as mercury release and land churning by artisanal gold mining.
- Changes in forest cover, fish stocks, water colour and quality have in turn exhaustively affected fishing livelihoods and reindeer herding.
- Mammals, birds and other fauna that are dependent on post-Ice Age pristine old growth taiga forests have suffered and retreated elsewhere, making hunting and subsistence economies harder to maintain.
- Soviet introductions of sable, to name one example, are cases of biomanipulation that affected the region from early in Soviet times.
- Climate change-induced droughts and unsafe fire management have affected Evenki capacity to maintain seasonal rounds. Forest fires have also turned more frequent due to the increase of tourist hunters.
- Major transport corridors have sliced the taiga around Iyengra.
- The waste water releases from the city of Neriungri have been an additional source of alarm.

In general, the Evenki responses to the ecological change have varied considerably. Some obschinas have received financial compensation and material aid, and were satisfied with these decisions (Yakoleva, 2011). Others have maintained a rights-based discussion and resistance to industrial intrusions. Some herders have, for example, negotiated with artisanal gold diggers to divert them away from some key territories of Evenki taiga. In 2005, herder Vladimir Kolesov focused on the problems of reindeer herders and their access to their traditional herding areas in the post-Soviet age:

We have such land use right on paper. Every person in Russia is free. Everyone has the right to freely dispose of one's property and such. We have the same rights: we can move with our reindeer on our areas. But yet the state does exist, the state has its own interests. And it is written on paper now that everything that grows on the land, everything that is in the land – the state can determine what to do with it.

That is why I don't know, state can surely ask you whether you want it or not. But it has its own ideas and tasks. If we would be given such task as to preserve a part of the land. But a part cannot exist for long without entirety – the whole it belongs to. This part is by no means ... If you pick up some lichen from the ground, it dries up without the land. This will happen to us too. (Mustonen, 2009)

According to Vladimir Kolesov, hunting and fishing grounds have been affected too:

I hunt between Tipton and Gonam. In my area largest changes have taken place in the shoreline of large rivers. Along the shores of large rivers the changes have been bigger than for example on mountains. Gonam is a large river, and crossing it used to be very difficult, but now it is possible on many places. It is becoming more shallow. In my area it is like milk. Water is the same colour as tea with milk. Largest changes have taken place along the big rivers. Maybe this is because of gold digging. They dig for gold. I cannot say that this would have an impact on climate, but on reindeer yes. Local environment, yes, it impacts a lot. I remember when we used to be close to lakes, we used to eat ducks for the whole summer, different kinds. Completely white and then silvery. They flew past and nested here also. Incubated and geese incubated also. Now there are very few of those birds. There is no fish either, numbers have gone down also. Birds fly in some other places. There is no food and they change the place and the route. Well, where can you hide from civilisation? Nowhere. (Mustonen, 2009)

Conclusions

This case study, based on almost 15 years of co-researching (2005–2020) with the Evenki of Iyengra, demonstrates the lived drama of displacement. We have shown how institutional restructuring, identity transitions and industrial projects have proceeded over time and reorganised the Evenki lands and lives. We have especially focused on the socio-environmental changes in hunting and fisheries practices, and with reindeer herding.

As was witnessed, the Evenki have been thoroughly reflecting upon the invasion into their world and the following consequences in a number of ways. This reflection is grounded in the collectively perceived changes in the surrounding landscapes. For example, as it has been broadly observed by the Evenki, due to pollution the rivers do not carry the species and the diversity of life they used to. The reflection is also informed by recognised changes in the realm of toponymic identification: older place names are drawn out from the maps and minds of the locals and this is regarded as a symptom of deep cultural change. In addition, the form and focus of reflection has in places turned into cross-cultural negotiations, as was the case when the Evenki recommended alternative locations for gold digging to limit the damage to their reindeer pastures and rivers.

However, as became clear, perhaps the worst impact of the invasion is linked to the displacement of the mind. The Evenki is a typical Indigenous society in the Eurasian taiga that is highly dependent on healthy forests, rivers and lands. These ecosystems maintain and uphold the key traits of traditional economy, identity and mind. By wrecking rivers and altering landscapes, the contemporary industrial land-use regime seems to succeed where the Soviets failed—it has largely transformed the Evenki traditions by relegating them into oblivion. Central to this process has been the speed and extent of the industrial onslaught (see thresholds and capacity of small community responses in Huntington et al., 2017). However, on the other hand, the partial successes in the negotiations about the status and extensions of the prior home areas of the Evenki can be seen as signs of emplacement. The critical question is whether they can preserve safe havens of mind and memory deep in the taiga to defend and position their own time-spaces to withstand the ongoing assault.

This question points to the conclusion that traditional knowledge systems of humans are, just like nature, more durable than expected if there are sites of access and avoidance, as well as spaces to retreat to and adapt on the terms of the culture and community. This became in many ways clear in the above pages.

The major transformation of Iyengra and the Evenki lands and lives happened over a time span of 80 years. This seems to have been a long and slow enough process to leave room for the essentials to survive, if only in altered forms and attached to huge losses of both nature and human societies as valued from a traditional viewpoint. This type of endemic adaptation capacity, or resilience, cannot be regarded as justifying the externally induced acts of displacement. Rather, wounded and partly destroyed, these emplaced systems portray the potential of a *comeback* whenever it is permitted to take place—whenever endemic communities, including non-human members and their surroundings, are allowed to recover.

The Evenki taiga of Southern Sakha-Yakutia is now an altered ecosystem and society containing both intact and wrecked components. By accepting the continuity of externally induced displacement, the Evenki culture will become integrated in the new post-traditional era. However, alternatively, systematic advancement of endemic modes of living contain an imagined rebirth of the taiga that is shared by many, if not all, Evenki of Iyengra. This alternative is rich in potentials rooted in past community wisdom, both spiritual and practical, that is still remembered and commemorated among the Evenki. We should not forget what occurred in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet power—a return to traditional ways of life in the forest, fostered both by economic necessity and leadership of Evenki themselves, such as Keptuke and Matriona Kulbertinova.

If and when such conscious revival pathways emerge in the future, the Evenki may choose to join in the growing paradigm of rewilded and Indigenous-restored lands that are emerging in various forms of endemic emplacement. An online digital atlas, now available in Russian and English and potentially in Evenki in the future, may be a vehicle for addressing cultural knowledge and the potential for its revitalisation (Evenki Atlas, 2020).

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Appendix

Some of the place names were recorded during interviews by ear and require further verification. In the cases where several alternative place names and their meaning were identified we have written down several alternative names and their meanings both previously recorded in scientific documents and not recorded but used in oral tradition by Evenki in Iyengra This list is a starting point for further research.

Acchygyy-Melemken River that has a place of ice holes, or a place where water can be acquired (Evenki: <i>mulēkīt</i> , meaning “place of ice holes”)	Аччыгый-Мѐлемкен река, в которой есть место, где находится прорубь; место, где берут воду (эвенк. <i>мулекит</i> “место, где находится прорубь”)
Algama River on the south side of a slope. The river begins on the Stanovoy range	Алгاما река на южной стороне склона. Река берет свое начало в районе Станового хребта
Amnunakan (River) (Amnunaktachi, Amnunakta) Amnumnaktachi River of transparent ice (Evenki: <i>amnunna</i> , meaning “aufeis”)	Амнунакан (река) (Амнуннактачѹ, Амнуннакта) Амнумнактачѹ ручей с водой из прозрачного льда (эвенк. <i>амнунна</i> “наледь”)
Amnunakan (River, subcatchment area) (Amnunaktachi, Amnunakta) Amnumnaktachi River of transparent ice (Evenki: <i>amnunna</i> , meaning “aufeis”)	Амнунакан (река, водосборный бассейн) (Амнуннактачѹ, Амнуннакта) Амнумнактачѹ ручей с водой из прозрачного льда (эвенк. <i>амнунна</i> “наледь”)
Anamdyak Moose river (Evenki: <i>amandyak</i> , meaning “place of plenty of moose”)	Анамд'а́к река, где водятся лоси (эвенк. <i>анамд'а́к</i> “место, где водятся лоси”)
Arangas (1) Slowly flowing river, (2) “a storage for food on stilts”, (3) (old meaning) river that has a burial in a tree (Yakut: <i>arangas</i> , meaning “burial in a tree”)	Араҕас (1) медленно текущая река; (2) ‘лабаз, кладовая на столбах’; (3) (устар.) река, имеющая воздушное захоронение (як. <i>аранас</i> “могильный лабаз на дереве”)
Berkakit River where one hunts with crossbows (Evenki: <i>berken</i> , meaning “crossbow”)	Беркакѹт река, где охотятся с самострелом (эвенк. <i>бэркэн</i> “самострел”)
Birikyan, Small river (Evenki: <i>birakan</i> , meaning “small river”)	Бирикян речушка, реченька, речка (эвенк. <i>биракан</i> – “речушка”)
Changit An ancient vanished tribe that used to fight the Evenki and is often mentioned in traditional tales. (The place name requires verification)	Чангит древнее племя, нападавшее на эвенков и сохранившееся в преданиях. (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Cheréndoy (Cherendey) (1) Quiet river, (2) river with broad whitefish (Coregonus nasus) (The place name requires verification)	Чэрэндой (Чэрэндэй) (1) тихая река; (2) река, богатая рыбой чир (Coregonus nasus). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)

Chulman (Chulmakan) (1) Female sable river, (2) silicon, quartz, jade, emerald (Evenki: <i>chulba, chulma, chulman, chulban</i> , meaning “silicon, quartz, jade, emerald”)	Чульман (Чульмакан) (1) река - женский соболь; (2) кремьень, кварц, нефрит, изумруд (эвенк. чулба, чулма, чулман, чулбан “кремьень; кварц; нефрит; изумруд”)
Dekonda River rich in <i>yekéché</i> n fish, “yellow perch” or “ruffe” (Evenki: <i>ukhe, deke</i> (noun), meaning “yellow perch”, <i>dekende</i> (adj.), meaning “of yellow perch”)	Деконда река, богатая рыбой екэчэн “окунь”, “ерш”). (эвенк. ухэ, декэ “окунь”, декэндэ “окуневая”)
Delbe (1) Noisy river, makes a lot of noise, (2) river rich in trout (Evenki: <i>deli</i> , meaning “trout”). (The place name requires verification)	Дэлбэ (1) шумная река, делает много шума; (2) река богатая тайменем (эвенк. дели “таймень”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Delinde Trout river (Evenki: <i>deli</i> , meaning “trout”).	Делинде река, богатая тайменем (эвенк. дели “таймень”)
Derpukan A space between two rivers whose mouths are close to each other (Evenki: <i>derpukhe</i>)	Дерпукан пространство между двумя речками, впадающими недалеко друг от другу (эвенк. дэрпукхэ)
Devaskit Place of crossing the ridge or hill (possibly connected to Evenki word <i>dyugaskit</i> , meaning “a spring nomadic campsite location”) (The place name requires verification)	Дэваскит место пересечения хребта или холма (возможно, связано с эвенк. дюгаскит – место, где проводят весну). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Dykimdya (Dykimde) Big hiding place, cache site (Evenki: <i>dyke-mi</i> , meaning “to hide”, “to cover”) (The place name requires verification)	Дыкимд'а (Дыкимд'э) большой тайник (эвенк. дыкэ-ми “спрятаться”, “укрыться”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Dyugaskit Spring nomadic campsite location	Дюгаскит место, где проводят весну
Dukun (Dyukungre, Yukungra) River with otters (Evenki: <i>dyukungre</i> , meaning “river with otters”)	Дюкун (Дюкунгрэ, Юкунгра) река, где водятся выдры (эвенк. дюкунрэ “река, где водятся выдры”)
Dyagdag Pine tree river (Evenki: <i>dyagdag</i> , meaning “pine tree forest”)	Дягдаг река соснового леса (эвенк. дягдаг “сосновый лес”)
Elken (1) Wild ungulates river (wild reindeer, wild moose) (Evenki: <i>elken</i> , meaning “reindeer”), (2) a river on the banks of which trees have special cut marks <i>ilken</i> .	Элкэн (1) река северных оленей или лосей (эвенк. элкэн “олень”); (2) река, на берегах которой имеются деревья с зарубками илкэн.

<p>Elkon (1) Fish harpoon river (Evenki: <i>elgu</i>, <i>elge</i>, meaning “fish harpoon with a retractable point”), (2) cautious (Evenki: <i>elken</i>, meaning “cautious”).</p>	<p>Элькон (1) река-гарпун (эвенк. элгу, элгэ “острога-гарпун с соскакивающим наконечником”); (2) осторожный (эвенк. элкэн “осторожный”).</p>
<p>Geltomna (possibly Geltan) Transparent, clear water, “River of Light” (Evenki: <i>geltan</i>, meaning “transparent” [about river water]) (The place name requires verification)</p>	<p>Гелтомна (возможно, Гелтан) прозрачная вода, река света (эвенк. гелтан “прозрачный” (о речной воде). (Топоним нуждается в проверке).</p>
<p>Gorbylyah (Yakut Kharbalaakh) Shallow river (Evenki: <i>gorba</i>, meaning “shallow” (noun, adj.)</p>	<p>Горбылях (як. Харбалаах) мелкая река (эвенк. горба “мель” “мелкий”)</p>
<p>Gonam Long river, meandering across large marshlands, tributary of Uchur river. First reference to the river is from 1643 when the Russian explorer Vasilii Poyarkov arrived across the Stanovoy range to the shores of the Amur river.</p>	<p>Гонам река, извилисто текущая по болотам, приток реки Учур. Первое упоминание о реке сделано в 1643 году, когда русский землепроходец Василий Поярков прошел через Становой хребет к берегам Амура.</p>
<p>Guyankit A place near a river where one picks bog bilberries (<i>Vaccinium uliginosum</i>) with a birchbark harvester</p>	<p>Гуянкит место возле речки, где голубицу собирают берестяным битком.</p>
<p>Haiyypyt (1) A river that often dries up but in the spring is very turbulent during snow melt; (2) to split (Yakut: <i>khayyt</i>, meaning “to split”) (The place name requires verification)</p>	<p>Хайыппыт (1) река, которая часто высыхает, но весной очень бурная во время таяния снега; (2) колоть (як. хайыт “колоть”) (Топоним нуждается в проверке)</p>
<p>Iyengra River forking like antlers (Evenki: <i>yie</i>, meaning horn/ antler).</p>	<p>Иенгра (река) река разветвленная, как рога (эвенк. ийэ “рог”)</p>
<p>Kavali Place of ferns, used in traditional medicine (The place name requires verification)</p>	<p>Кавали место папоротников, используемых в народной медицине. (Топоним нуждается в проверке).</p>
<p>Kenerkit, Kènerkiit River, that has a fishtrap (Evenki: <i>kener</i>, meaning “fishtrap”)</p>	<p>Кэңэргит река, в которой есть рыбная ловушка (эвенк. кэнэр “рыболовная снасть, морда, верша”).</p>
<p>Khatymi, Hatym Muddy (possibly Bolshaya Khatyma) (1) Muddy, swampy river; (2) river that has a crossing to the other site, a ford; (3) birch river (<i>khatyn</i>, meaning “birch”)</p>	<p>Хатыми (Хатым Мудды) (возможно, Большая Хатыма) (1) болотистая река; (2) река, имеющая пешую тропу на другую территорию; (3) березовая река (хатын “береза”) (Топоним нуждается в проверке)</p>

Kuchchuguy Sugdu (Kuchchuguy Sugdzhu) Small river with lenok fish (Evenki: <i>sugdyanna</i> , meaning “lenok” (fish), “salmon”, and <i>kuchchugu</i> , meaning “small”)	Куччугуй Сугд’у (Куччугуй Сугджу) малая река, в которой водятся ленки (эвенк. сугдянна “ленок”, “лосось”; куччугу “маленький”)
Kumakha (possibly Kymakhy, Kumara) Sandy river (Yakut: <i>kumakh</i> , meaning “sand”)	Кумаха (возможно, Кумахы, Кумара) песчаная река (як. кумах “песок”)
Kuta Boggy river (Yakut: <i>kuta</i> , meaning “quagmire”)	Кута болотистая река (як. кута “трясина”, “болото”)
Malga-Kyuel (1) lake of hornless (Evenki: <i>malga</i> , meaning “hornless” and Yakut: <i>kyuel</i> , meaning “lake”); 2) lake of a rare wild deer	Малга-Кюель (Малга Күөл) (1) озеро безрогого (эвенк. малга “безрогий”; як. күөл “озеро”); (2) озеро редкого дикого оленя
Mayagastakh River that has whitefish (Yakut: <i>mayagas</i> , meaning a type of whitefish)	Маягастах река, имеющая сига (як. майаҕас “сиг”)
Markha Birch (bush) river (<i>markha</i> , meaning “bush”, the word is thought to be of Manchu-Tungus origin)	Марха березовая (кустарниковая) река (слово марха “кустарник”, возможно, тунгусо-маньчжурского происхождения)
Mukunda Musk deer river (Evenki: <i>muku</i> , meaning “musk deer”)	Мукунда река кабарги (эвенк. мукӯ “кабарга”)
Munduruchchu Minnow river, where you can catch minnows with your hands (Yakut: <i>mundu</i> , meaning “minnow” [Phoxinus percnurus])	Мундуруччу река гольяна, река, где можно поймать гольяна руками (як. мунду “гольян озерный” [Phoxinus percnurus])
Mundu-Kyuel Minnow lake (Yakut: <i>mundu</i> , meaning “minnow” [Phoxinus percnurus] and Yakut: <i>kyuel</i> , meaning lake).	Мунду-Кюель (Мунду Күөл) озеро гольяна (як. мунду “гольян озерный” [Phoxinus percnurus]; як. күөл “озеро”)
Amut Lake (Evenki: <i>amut</i> , meaning “lake”)	Амут озеро (эвенк. амут “озеро”)
Nalda Place where rivers join together (Evenki: <i>nāldyn</i> , meaning “place where two rivers or roads join”, “tributary”)	Налда место слияния рек (эвенк. нāлдын – “место слияние двух рек или дорог”; “приток”)
Namingan Between mountains a slow flowing river (The place name requires verification)	Наминган река, текущая медленно между горами. (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Naokandya (1) Pasture area of lichen and moss; (2) area with traditional storages for food (Evenki: <i>nekue</i> , meaning “having a large storage on stilts”) (The place name requires verification)	Наокандя (1) пастбища лишайников и мхов; (2) место, где находятся лабазы (эвенк. нэкуе “имеющая большой лабаз на сваях”) (Топоним нуждается в проверке)

Bolshaya Neakuya River that has traditional storages for food on stilts (Russian <i>bolshaya</i> , meaning “big” and Evenki: <i>nekue</i> , meaning “having a large storage on stilts”)	Большая Неакуя река, имеющая лабазы на сваях (русс. большая; эвенк. нэкуе “имеющая большой лабаз на сваях”)
Nirungra, Nirunda Grayling river (a name for rivers and lakes that are rich in grayling) (Evenki: <i>niru</i> , meaning “grayling”)	Нирунгра, Нирунда хариусовая (названия рек, озер, богатых хариусами) (эвенк. ниру “хариус”)
Nokhtusk, Noktuk Smelly, a site of fish death (The place name requires verification)	Нохтуск (Ноктук) вонючий, место гибели рыбы. (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Nukte Rowan (fruits) river, fir river (The place name requires verification)	Нуктэ “рябина” (ягода); “пихта” (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Olëkma (Olookuna) River of squirrels (Evenki: <i>uluki</i> , meaning “squirrel”)	Олёкма (Олоокуна) беличья река (эвенк. улуки “белка”)
Ollongro Fish river, fishing river (Evenki: <i>ollo</i> , meaning “fish” (noun), <i>ollongro</i> , meaning “fish” adj.)	Оллонгро рыбная река, река рыбалки (эвенк. олло “рыба”, оллонгро “рыбная”)
Okurdan Bird trapping river, a tributary of Yiengra river	Окурдан река – ловушка птиц, приток Иенгры
Sivekte River where horsetail grows, place where Yakutian horses can feed easily (Evenki: <i>sivekte</i> , meaning “horsetail”) (The place name requires verification)	Сивэктэ река, где растёт хвощ; место, где якутские лошади могут легко питаться (эвенк. сивэктэ “хвощ”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Sugdzhin Salmon river (Evenki: <i>sugdyanna</i> , meaning “lenok” [fish], “salmon”) (The place name requires verification)	Сугджин лососевая река (эвенк. сугдянна “ленок”, “лосось”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Sukdzhu-Haya Salmon mountain (Evenki: <i>sugdyanna</i> , meaning “lenok” [fish], “salmon”) (The place name requires verification)	Сукджу-Хая лососевая гора (эвенк. сугдянна “ленок”, “лосось”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Takrekam Meandering river (similar to Gonam) (Evenki: <i>tokorikan</i> , meaning “meandering”) (The place name requires verification)	Такрекам извилистая река (схоже с рекой Гонам) (эвенк. токорикан “изгиб”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Taluma Birch bark river (Evenki: <i>talu</i> , meaning “birch bark”)	Талума берестяная река (от эвенк. талу “береста”)
Timpton Frozen hollow (possibly from Sakha language)	Тимптон

	замерзшая лощина (возможно якутское происхождение)
Toko Moose river	Токо лосиная река
Tokorikan Meandering river (Evenki: <i>tokorikan</i> , meaning “meandering”)	Токорикан изгиб, поворот реки (эвенк. токорикан “изгиб”)
Turukan – bluff river (Yakut: <i>туруук</i> , meaning “bluff”, “vertical”)	Турукан отвесная река (як. туруук “отвесный”)
Tyingi Place of many squirrels (Yakut: <i>tiing</i> , meaning “squirrel”) (The place name requires verification)	Тыинги место, богатое белками (як. тиин “белка”) (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Tysani (Tutchahi, Tokhsahi) (possibly Tuksani) “Hare” river, path of a hare, river resembling a hare running away (The place name requires verification)	Тысани (Тутчахи, Тохсахи (возможно, Туксани) заячья река, путь зайца, река напоминает след, оставленный убегающим зайцем (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Ukulan River, with fish traps (Evenki: <i>ukulan</i> , meaning “the one that has a fish trap”)	Укулан река с рыболовной вершей (эвенк. укулан “имеющая рыболовную вершу”)
Ungyuele Slowly flowing river	Унгюэле (Үнүөлэ) медленно текущая река
Ungra A river resembling a mouth that has a bridle	Унгра река, напоминающая рот с уздечкой
Yakokit Place where the Yakuts reside, a river by which you can travel to the Yakut (Evenki: <i>yakokit</i> , meaning “a river-road by which you can travel to the Yakut”)	Якоцит место, где проживают якуты; дорога по реке, по которой ездят якуты (эвенк. якоцит “дорога по реке, по которой ездят к якутам”)
Yiengra (Town) From that name of the river Yiengra, river forking like antlers (Evenki: <i>yie</i> , meaning “horn/ antler”)	Иенгра (село) от названия реки Иенгра – река разветвленная, как рога (эвенк. ийэ “рог”)
Yiengra (River) River forking like antlers (Evenki: <i>yie</i> , meaning horn/ antler).	Иенгра (река) река разветвленная, как рога (эвенк. ийэ “рог”)
Ytydma (Ytymdya, Ytymdzha) (1) Frozen river (Evenki: <i>itmavun</i> , meaning “frozen water that expands outwards”) it’s a site that has salt in the water attracting moose and wild deer; (2) river with sacred places (Evenki: <i>ity</i> , meaning “law”, “commandment”), similar to Yukte river.	Ытымда (Ытымдыа, Ытымджа) (1) замерзшая вода (эвенк. итмавун “замерзшая вода, которая расширяется наружу”) это место, которое имеет соль в воде, что привлекает оленей и лосей; (2) заповедная река (эвенк. иты “закон, заповедь”) как и река Юктэ

Yukungra River of otters	Дюкун (Дюкунгрэ, Юкунгра) река, где водятся выдры (эвенк. дюкунгрэ “река, где водятся выдры”)
Ytten Spring, unfrozen water (Evenki: <i>yukte</i> , meaning “cold spring”) (The place name requires verification)	Ыттен родник, незамерзшая вода (эвенк. юктэ “холодный родник, источник”). (Топоним нуждается в проверке)
Davangra Place by a river where you can cross to the other bank (Evenki: <i>dav-mi</i> , meaning “to cross a river”)	Даваура место у реки, где переправляются на другой берег (эвенк. дав-ми “переправляться через реку”)
Kevekte River with swampy banks covered by moss	Кэвэктэ река, имеющая по берегам мари, покрытые МХОМ
Yukte Spring, unfrozen water (Evenki: <i>yukte</i> , meaning “cold spring”)	Юктэ родник, незамерзшая вода (эвенк. юктэ “холодный родник, источник”)

¹ Settlement should be understood here not as an aggressive land possession process but rather referring to occupancy and uses that have codeveloped over centuries with local ecosystems as opposed to “colonial” settlement in later historical periods.

² Gold mining is partially artisanal and therefore affects smaller streams and old growth forests of the taiga (Evenki Atlas, 2020) but has cumulative impacts on the main streams as well.

³ We have earlier defined “earthviews” as the ethical and spiritual knowledge and value systems from which our customary concepts and skills of coping with everyday life are constructed and informed. They also serve as community-specific attributes in continuous cosmological emplacement (Mustonen & Lehtinen, 2013, p. 42).

⁴ The oral history quotes in this article, approved by our co-researching Evenki, are housed in the Snowchange Oral History Archives as well as at the Institute of the Indigenous Peoples in Yakutsk. Translated versions of the interview summaries have been made available in Mustonen (2009; in Finnish), Mustonen and Lehtinen (2013) and in the *Evenki Atlas* (2020). Unless otherwise stated, the oral history quotes refer to these published sources. Individual tape codes and archival identification markers are available from Snowchange.

⁵ Literally: Universe, Sky-mother, World, according to Keptuke.

⁶ Sharing of quarry equally among everybody.

⁷ Literally a treestump with eyes.

⁸ Literally a treestump with ears.

⁹ The Soviet collective economy organised reindeer herding into state collective farms. The subunit of reindeer herding was a “brigade”, a stock of reindeer in a smaller herd using a certain territory for their economic seasonal cycle. Since 1991 the term “brigade” has stayed on for those herds that are still associated with a state herding cooperative in Iyengra. The reindeer herders of Brigade 4, led by Victor Semenov, took part in the oral history work in 2005–2010 as main co-researchers regarding climate change impacts.

¹⁰ Iyengra has the status of a село [selo] in Russian, referring to a village.